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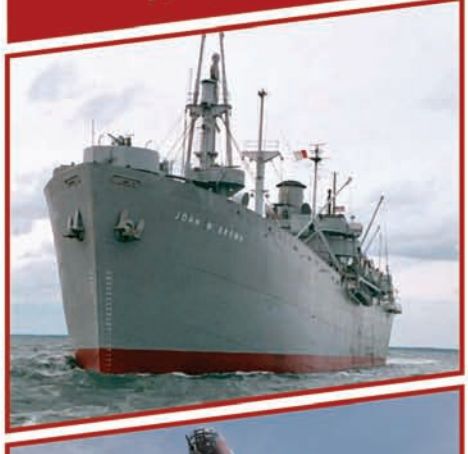

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## Features



COVER: A U.S. infantryman takes aim from a WWI style trench on the German border in October 1944, south of Aachen, Germany. See story page 84.
Photo: National Archives



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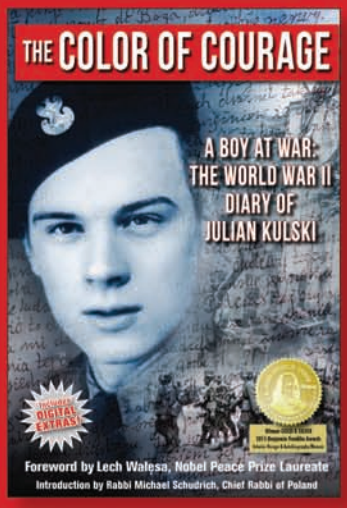


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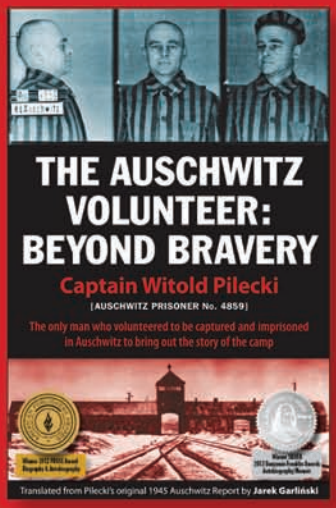


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# POLAND: The First to Fight Hitler

# Defusing World War II's dangerous legacy.

FOR THE MOST PART, World War II left the U.S. and Canadian homelands physically untouched. There were a few incidents of sabotage and a few small-scale attacks, such as a Japanese submarine's shelling of an oil refinery in southern California and balloon bombs launched from Japan that floated over the Pacific and set fires in the western United States and Canada.

But there was nothing to equal the millions of tons of bombs dropped on Britain, Europe, and Japan.

During the war, the United States and its allies dropped 2.7 million tons of bombs on European targets. Some bombs were armed with a delayed fuse so that they would explode hours or even days after they were dropped.

"It was a terror tactic," one news source said, "designed to hinder the cities' recovery. Half ended up in Germany, and what's left today buried in German soil makes up the roughly 10 percent of bombs that never went off."

This fact came to light with a recent news item from northern Germany that said the A-2 autobahn near Hannover had to be shut down while explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) crews blew up two bombs dropped more than 70 years ago and were discovered during a construction project.

As a major target for U.S. and RAF bombers, Hannover was hit hard; on one raid alone, more than a quarter-million bombs were dropped on the city.

Almost every year similar reports come out. This past July, a Berlin neighborhood had to be evacuated when a 500-pound American bomb was unearthed by construction workers.

In Wolfsburg, a city about 150 miles west of Berlin, a 550-pound bomb was found beneath the Volkswagen factory in July 2016. In 2011, a two-ton bomb was discovered in a riverbank in Koblenz; 45,000 people were temporarily evacuated. A year later, a 550-pound bomb was detonated in Munich after an EOD unit was unable to defuse it; windows for blocks around were blown out. It's estimated that another 2,500 bombs are still buried around Munich.

A news source says that every year at least one or two leftover bombs in Germany explode without warning. And farmers sometimes die when their plows strike buried bombs or artillery shells.

So commonplace are the incidents, in fact, that Germans are rarely surprised by the news. In fact, the KMBD (Kampfmittelbeseitigungsdienst, or War Ordnance Disposal Service, a division of the Brandenburg state government) estimates that more than 2,000 tons of unexploded bombs are uncovered each year.

Britain, too, has its own unexploded bomb problem. In the city of Bath, a 500-pound German bomb was found under a school playground this past May.

No one knows exactly how many bombs are still out there or where they may be lurking, and that's the problem. Any place that, during the war, was home to an armaments factory, transit hub, depot, or airport is likely to still be sitting on these rusting time bombs.

The deadly legacy of World War II goes on and on.

*Flint Whitlock, Editor*

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**UPDATE**

**In the editorial for the Fall 2016 issue, the conundrum of what to do with Hitler's birthplace in Braunau-am-Inn, Austria, was discussed. On October 17, 2016, the Austrian Interior Ministry announced its decision: demolish it to keep it from becoming even more of a neo-Nazi shrine. A new building will take its place.**

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**Health** | EXCLUSIVE

# Chicago Doctor Invents Affordable Hearing Aid

## New nearly invisible digital hearing aid breaks price barrier in affordability - 90% LESS

*Reported by J. Page*

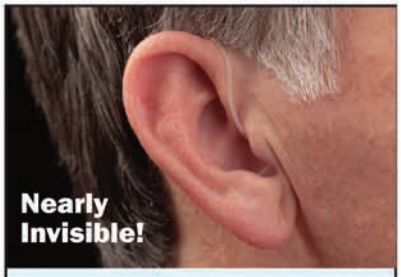
Chicago: Board-certified physician Dr. S. Cherukuri has done it once again with his newest invention of a medical-grade, **ALL-DIGITAL, affordable hearing aid.**

This new digital hearing aid is packed with all the features of $3,500 competitors at a mere fraction of the cost. Now, most people with hearing loss are able to enjoy crystal clear, natural sound—in a crowd, on the phone, in the wind—without suffering through "whistling" and annoying background noise.

### Digital Hearing Aid Outperforms Expensive Competitors

This sleek, fully programmed, light-weight, hearing aid is the outgrowth of the digital revolution that is changing our world. While demand for "all things digital" caused most prices to plunge (consider DVD players and computers, which originally sold for thousands of dollars and today can be purchased for less), the cost of a digital medical-grade hearing aid remains out of reach. Dr. Cherukuri knew that many of his patients would benefit but couldn't afford the expense of these new digital hearing aids. Generally they are *not* covered by Medicare and most private health insurance plans.

The doctor evaluated the high priced digital hearing aids on the market, broke them down to their base components, and then created his own affordable version - called the **MDHearingAid *AIR*®** for its virtually invisible, lightweight appearance.

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### Can a hearing aid delay or prevent dementia?

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***"Almost work too well. I am a teacher and hearing much better now."*** —Lillian B., California

***"I have used many expensive hearing aids, some over $5,000. The AIRs have greatly improved my enjoyment of life."*** —Sam Y., Michigan

***"I would definitely recommend them to my patients with hearing loss."*** —Amy S., Audiologist, Indiana

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# B-29s built in Georgia helped the United States win the war with Japan.

WHEN MAJ. GEN. CURTIS LEMAY, the hard-driving commander of the Twentieth U.S. Air Force based in Guam, decided to change tactics in early 1945 to boost the effectiveness of the B-29 Superfortress, it was the Bell Aircraft plant in Marietta, Georgia, that ultimately provided him with the stripped-down bombers that played such a key role in ending the war in the Pacific.

The Bell plant, usually referred to both then and now as The Bell Bomber Plant, had already churned out 357 "regular" model B-29s since the first one, assembled mostly by hand, rolled out of the plant's doors in November 1943.

Between January and September 1945, that plant produced all 311 of the B-29B models that shouldered much of the load after LeMay decided to switch from high-altitude bombing to low-altitude firebomb attacks. He also decided the planes could fly faster and have less trouble achieving takeoff speed if they weighed less.

Japanese fighter strength was in decline and their attacks tended to come from the rear, so LeMay's solution was to remove all defensive armament except for those in the tail. That saved the weight not just of the guns, ammo, and turrets, but also of their fire-control system (a then cutting-edge analog computer that corrected for distance, speed, temperature, gravity, barrel-wear, etc.). LeMay also decided that leaving the planes unpainted would save each one several thousand pounds of unneeded weight.

**Comedian Bob Hope and his troupe of performers entertain thousands of Bell Aircraft workers at the 3.2 million-square-foot Marietta, Georgia, B-29 factory.**

Bell Aircraft Georgia Division (Marietta) collection, Kennesaw State University Archives

**Spot welder Mary Withrow (top) and Aline Hobbs, a draftsperson were just two of the more 28,000 people employed at the Marietta plant, 37 percent of whom were women.**

Ground had been broken for the Marietta plant in March 1942 just three months after Bell Aircraft head Larry Bell chose the city as the site for a factory in which to assemble the mammoth new bombers under contract from Boeing.

Why Marietta? It was just a small town near Atlanta in the middle of the Cotton Belt with a prewar population of only 8,000—very few of whom had college degrees or experience in an industrial setting. It was best known, if known at all, for being in the shadow of Kennesaw Mountain of Civil War fame. Some in Washington initially resisted the idea of training farmers to assemble what was to be, up to that point, the biggest and most technologically advanced plane ever built.

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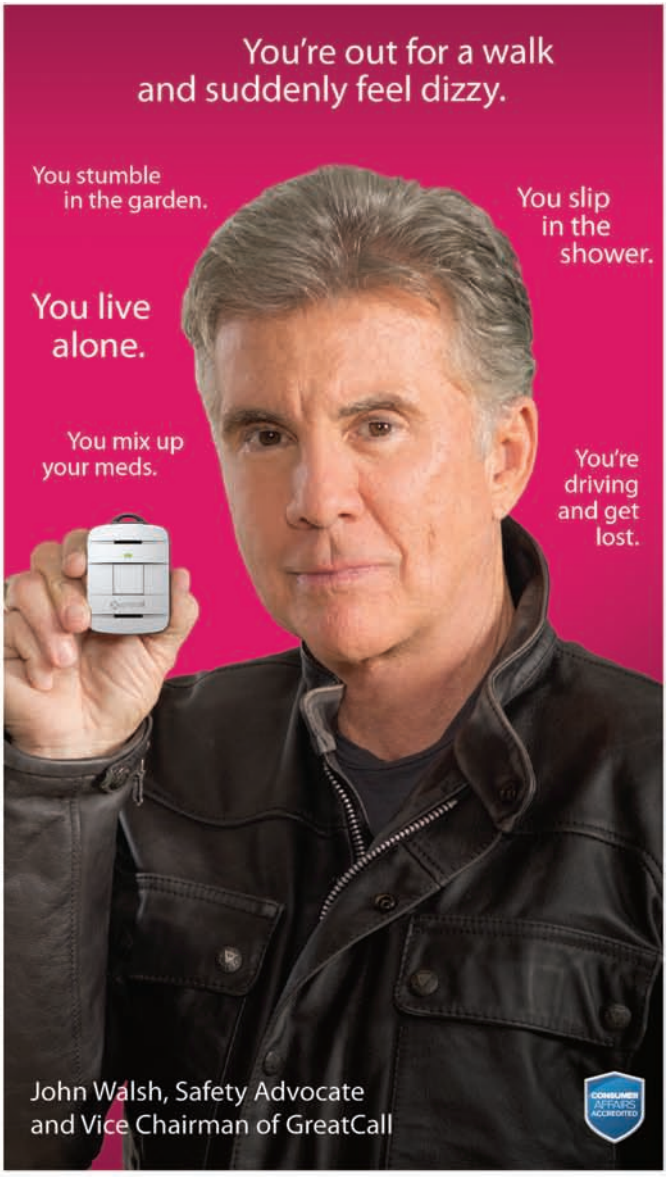


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**Employees inspect plexiglass "blister" dome windows. The B-29 was produced at four factories around the United States.**

But there were advantages to the Marietta site as well. It was only 15 miles from the large, untapped pool of labor in Atlanta, which lacked any other munitions plants. Those workers could commute via the Marietta-Atlanta trolley while components for the B-29 (such as the plane's 18-cylinder Curtiss-Wright R-3350 engines assembled elsewhere by Pratt and Whitney) could be delivered to the plant via the Nashville, Chattanooga and St. Louis Railway (today's CSX), whose tracks skirted the western edge of the chosen site.

In addition, the plant could make use of a runway that was already in the very early stages of development by the city and county governments as part of a deal with Eastern Airlines' President Eddie Rickenbacker of World War I fame to handle the overflow from Candler Field in Atlanta (today's Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport).

Marietta leaders had traveled to Washington, D.C., in the autumn of 1940 hoping to land federal funding for their airport and wound up hitting the jackpot, thanks in part to President Franklin Roosevelt's crash rearmament program—and also to a fortuitous coincidence.

In 1940 Congress was still under the sway of antiwar isolationists and was reluctant to fully fund FDR's plans, so he persuaded that body to pay for the construction of more than 450 civilian airports around the country. If war came, they could be converted to military airbases. And, as luck would have it, the Army officer in charge of developing those civilian bases was a native of Marietta.

The Marietta delegation was walking the halls of the Civil Aeronautics Administration when the city's mayor unexpectedly saw on an office door the name of his Marietta boyhood friend, Major Lucius D. Clay (West Point, 1918) of the Army Corps of Engineers. The mayor barged into the office—and soon learned that Clay was the de facto head of FDR's airport construction program, despite his comparatively minor rank.

Clay, the son of late U.S. Senator Alexander Stephens Clay of Marietta, had served as chief engineer under MacArthur (and his chief of staff Dwight D. Eisenhower) in the Philippines until 1937. Not long after Pearl Harbor Clay was promoted to director of material procurement for the Army. (After the war he would serve as the four-star military governor of the U.S. sector of Occupied West Germany and commanded the Berlin Airlift before retiring in 1949.)

But in 1940, Clay's title was secretary to the approval board for airport construction and assistant to the administrator of the CAA. He told the Marietta leaders standing in his office that he wanted to see his hometown do well and that, if they could procure the land for an airport, he would ensure they got federal funding for it.

Clay proved as good as his word, first getting the city the funding needed for the runway (which initially was christened "Rickenbacker Field" and today is the centerpiece of Dobbins Air Reserve Base), and then a year later helping persuade Larry Bell that Marietta and its new runway would be an excellent location for the B-29 plant he had just been tasked with building.

The government paid to build the plant but left it up to Bell to decide where it should go.

"The [Army] Air Force had to have a new plant—and a big plant," Clay told his biographer, Jean Edward Smith. "And they came to me to ask for a list of possible places where there was both a labor supply available and an existing airport. And I happened to remember Marietta, so I gave it to them as one of the names. It had tremendous labor potential—both from Atlanta and from the surrounding mountain area."

Robert Lovett, who, in 1941, was assistant secretary of war for air, later told Smith that the reason the Bell plant went to Marietta was, "It was an area with a large population of first-class Anglo-Saxon farmers with not much to do in the way of farming. They were men with a mediocre amount of education, but a good farm boy from that area could take any kind of machine apart and put it back together again. He had to in order to live on his farm. So you had a good basic labor force. And when they opened the doors, the plant was flooded with them.

Lovett also noted that Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Walter George was from Georgia, and the congressman who was approaching seniority on the House Military Affairs Committee, Carl Vinson, also was from Georgia.

The government spent $72 million to construct the plant—nearly as much ($83 million) as it spent on another major construction that got started in 1942: the Pentagon. The Bell plant was the largest industrial facility ever built south of the Mason-Dixon Line, a distinction it reportedly still holds.

After breaking ground on March 30,

# 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.

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### 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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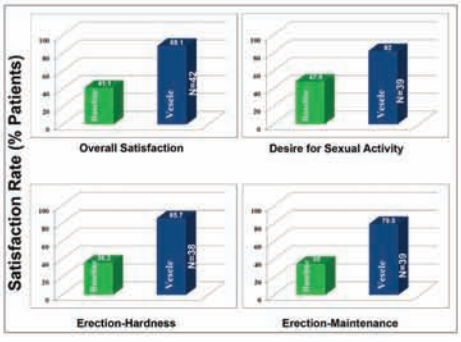


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**A crew of men and women work on the pressurized cockpit section of one of the big bombers in 1944. More than 600 of the 3,970 B-29s were produced at the Marietta factory which, now owned by Lockheed Martin, still produces aircraft for the U.S. Air Force.**

1942, the 3.2-million-square-foot plant was completed just 54 weeks later, even though there were severe war-related shortages of construction materials, such as the 32,000 tons of steel used for the main assembly building. That building was a half mile long and approximately a quarter mile wide (a size comparable to 63 football fields) and boasted enough space for a pair of parallel final assembly lines.

The facility's construction was an enormous investment in money and materials, especially when one realizes the prototype for the new bomber, the XB-29, did not make its maiden flight until September 21, 1942—nearly six months after the Marietta groundbreaking.

No attempt was ever made to camouflage the Bell plant, presumably because by the time it was coming on line in late summer 1943 the tide of the war had turned sufficiently that enemy air attacks were no longer a concern.

The plant had another notable distinction for that era—a feature usually limited to government buildings and large theaters in the prewar era. But, with the Allies struggling against the Axis in the first two years of the war, there were real fears that German bombs might at some point be raining down on the East Coast, so the plant was designed to meet blackout specifications so as not to emit any light at night, which in turn tended to rule out including windows. Yet a windowless building would be unbearably hot during a Georgia summer.

In addition, since the B-29 would be of all-metal construction, the plant would need to have a constant temperature to prevent metal aircraft components from expanding and contracting.

More than 100 contractors and their crews labored 24/7 to build the plant. They worked so quickly, in fact, that many concrete walls and support footings for the plant's basement and subbasement were complete before those basement areas had been completely excavated. Once those walls and footings were complete, the builders realized the doors to the basement were too narrow for them to get their mechanical excavators back in to finish the job. Yet there was far too much dirt still to be moved for a simple pick-and-shovel operation. The solution? Mule-drawn equipment was hired from nearby farmers.

Workers had started assembling components of the first B-29 even before construction of the main building was complete. Harold Mintz, a foreman in the plant at the time, recalled in a 2000 interview that assembly work was taking place even in areas where the roof was not yet complete.

"While we were starting off, the end of the shift didn't mean anything," he said. "If we had something going there we just stayed. [At night] I could look up and see the stars and everything with no roof.… It rained in [on us]."

Bell brought a cadre of experienced workers to Marietta from its plant in Buffalo, New York (where the company built the P-39 Airacobra and P-63 Kingcobra), but the bulk of the workforce hailed from the greater Atlanta area.

Thousands of others, drawn by the prospect of steady work at 60 cents an hour, flocked from the Southeast to Marietta (literally doubling its population in the process) to work at the plant. And even though special training schools were set up to teach the rudiments of riveting while the plant was being constructed, it was still slow going.

"The Marietta plant is probably the best illustration available of the difficulties we have had in production," wrote Brig. Gen. Bennett Meyers, assistant chief of air staff of the Army Air Forces, who was acting at the time as a trouble-shooter for General Henry "Hap" Arnold on the B-29 program. "Believe it or not, people who were employed to make aluminum planes had to be shown what a sheet of aluminum looked like."

Stinson Adams, Jr., of Marietta, who worked as an inspector in the plant, recalled that car mechanics had skills that could be put to good use. "If they were mechanically inclined and knew how to tighten a nut and were willing to work, we could make an aircraft mechanic out of them," he said.

Richard Croop, part of the cadre of Buffalo Bell workers who came South in 1942, recalled, "A lot of people didn't know what a drill or drill motor or rivet gun was. They'd never seen rivet guns."

Yet the Southerners were willing to learn—and few of them were strangers to hard work.

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Most of the plant's workers had not finished high school, and many of them had gone no farther than eighth grade. Most had never seen a time clock or a time card, and more than a few workers were illiterate and "signed" their card each week with an "X."

By 1944, the plant employed 28,000 people. Some 37 percent of the Bell plant's workforce was female, but contrary to the popular myth that has grown up around World War II defense plants, the majority were not "Rosie the Riveters." Rather, women staffed a wide array of positions.

In addition to the typical secretarial/cafeteria jobs, they also worked as engineers, tool designers, draftswomen, estimators, production illustrators, bicycle couriers, chauffeurs, inspectors, nurses, radio tower dispatchers, and gun-toting security guards. They also served as riveters (handling rivet guns that weighed as much as 15 pounds), die makers, sheet-metal fabricators, toolmakers, welders, and crane operators.

The Bell plant also opened new employment horizons for local black workers; it had more than 2,000 African Americans on its payroll in January 1945, although it unfortunately also seemed to have a quota system in place. No more than 800 blacks at one time were ever working in skilled-labor positions, according to research by Kennesaw State University History Professor Emeritus Dr. Tom Scott. And, while Bell was a Northern-owned company, it adhered to the South's "Jim Crow" laws at the plant, with separate restrooms and water fountains for blacks and whites.

Interestingly, the plant also employed a number of midgets and dwarfs, who could easily squeeze into tight spaces, such as the planes' nose cones, where normal-sized adults could not. And they could work standing up in such places and not become as fatigued as a full-sized person, who would have to kneel or crouch. There also were blind workers whose job it was to sort by hand the stray rivets swept up off the floor.

All told, the plant employed 1,750 disabled workers—no doubt at least in part a reflection on the plant's manager, James Carmichael, who had been left severely disabled by a motor vehicle accident as a teen.

**A tug tows the first completed B-29 out of the Marietta facility for its initial test flight, November 1943.**

With so many young men in uniform, the plant employed many older workers who under normal circumstances would never have been employed in a heavy industrial setting; the oldest of them was 81-year-old riveter Helen Dortch Longstreet, widow of late Confederate General James Longstreet (she married him in 1897 when he was 74).

One of the plant's most remarked on features by visitors of the day were the rows of thousands of fluorescent lights overhead from one end of the plant to the other. The plant had a crew that did nothing but change bulbs, starting at one end of the plant in the morning and working toward the other end; then reversing direction to swap out the bulbs that had burned out since its first pass earlier in the day.

Vintage photos of the sprawling factory give a good representation of what it looked like at full production but can't begin to convey what the plant sounded like: a cacophony of thousands of rivet guns, steel presses, drills, welding torches, and other machinery. Few, if any, workers wore ear protection.

Like many munitions plants, the Bell factory was visited by numerous celebrities promoting bond sales and the war effort. They included movie stars Bob Hope, Al Jolson (in one of his final public appearances), Mary Pickford, and Jane Withers, as well as General Dwight Eisenhower's wife Mamie and golf legend Bobby Jones. The plant also was visited in June 1945 by two of the "flag-raisers" from the just concluded battle of Iwo Jima in a war bond sales drive.

Still another visitor in the summer of 1945 was Lieutenant Mildred Dalton, one of 77 Army nurses christened "the angels of Bataan and Corregidor." They had been liberated that February from hellish captivity at Santo Tomas in Manila by General Douglas MacArthur's men. After a month or so of recuperation, she was sent on a war bond tour that brought her to Marietta.

The first 16 of the more than 600 Superfortresses built at the plant were assembled mostly by hand, and the very first of them rolled out the door in early November 1943; three more followed by year's end. Production slowly ramped up to a plane a day by the summer of 1944, then to two a day by May 1945. After test-firing the engines on the tarmac, the planes then were towed to another hangar in which their armaments, radios, and radar were installed.

It was a point of local pride that not a single Marietta-built bomber ever crashed on its ensuing test flight.

Those Superfortresses and the men who flew them were crucial cogs in LeMay's firebombing offensive against the Japanese homeland in the spring and summer of 1945. And though neither the *Enola Gay* nor *Bock's Car* were built by Bell, they were similar in most respects to those that were.

Within weeks of the war's end, the Pentagon canceled its contract with Bell, and the plant almost immediately began laying off its workers. They were all gone by January 1946 and the mammoth plant was used as a storage facility for aircraft manufacturing equipment shipped there from other plants. From a high of 28,000 workers during the war, the plant employed just 79 people in the late 1940s while operated by the Tumpane Corporation.

That changed in 1950 after the Korean War broke out. Most of the country's B-29 fleet had been mothballed at Pyote Air Force Base in the Texas desert. The Pentagon chose Lockheed to reopen the old Bell plant (officially known as Air Force Plant No. 6) with two purposes in mind: to recondition and upgrade 120 B-29s brought from Pyote, and to start assembling what ultimately were 394 copies of the country's first mass-production jet-powered bomber (under contract from Boeing): the B-47 Stratojet.

Lockheed (now Lockheed Martin) continues to operate the old Bell plant, which through the years produced 131 C-5 Galaxy cargojets, 285 C-141 StarLifter cargojets, 202 JetStar VIP Transport planes, and all 195 copies of the F-22 Raptor fighter jet.

The plant's flight line now is building part of the fuselage for the F-35 Lightning II fighter and updated versions of the revolutionary C-130 Hercules cargo plane (now designated the C-130J). Nearly 2,500 copies of the "Herk" have rolled out the plant's doors since 1955 (including 24 in 2015)—enough to make it the longest-continuously manufactured military aircraft in history.

And, fittingly, a sizable number of the people assembling those C-130s are the sons and daughters—and grandsons and granddaughters—of the workers who labored in the plant in 1943-1945 building Bell's B-29s. □

By failing to swiftly exploit their successes after seizing the vital port of Antwerp, Eisenhower and Montgomery lost the chance to end the war early.

A wartime painting depicts a Sherman tank of the British 11th Armoured Division crossing a small bridge on its way to Antwerp as a woman and children (right) greet their liberators. Although the Allies reached Antwerp in September 1944, they did not make the port operational until the end of November.

# THE ALLIES' BIG

Imperial War Museum

# GEST BLUNDER?

BY BRIG. GEN. (RET.) RAYMOND E. BELL, JR.

Before World War II, the Belgian port city of Antwerp was one of the world's great ports, ranking with those of Hamburg, Rotterdam, and New York. Antwerp is located some 55 miles up the Scheldt (Schelde) Estuary from the North Sea. Five hundred yards wide at its location on the estuary, the port's minimum depth along its quays is 27 feet, deep enough to handle the largest ships in the world—especially when it comes to maneuvering such vessels into place along the quays.

The port's capacity is prodigious; in 1944 alone there were nearly 26 miles of quays that were serviced by 600 hydraulic and electric cranes, in addition to numerous floating cranes, loading bridges, and floating grain elevators. Extensive storage accommodations around the port and excellent road and rail clearance facilities were available. And on September 4, 1944, although in German hands, the port's facilities were virtually undamaged and fully functioning.

For the Allies, after their breakout from Normandy, it was vitally important that Antwerp be captured and placed in operation as soon as possible. If the war in northwestern Europe was to be concluded expeditiously, the port would play a key role in supplying both British and American army groups.

Distance from the Normandy beaches alone made the seizure critical. To supply Allied forces advancing from Normandy, trucks had to travel 400 miles over roads. Most importantly, the Antwerp port was only 65 miles from the principal Allied army logistic depots at Liege, Belgium.

The distance was even shorter to service the U.S. Third Army depots at Nancy, France, from Antwerp (250 miles) than it was to do so from Cherbourg (400 miles), the latter having to use the "Red Ball Express" system on the overtaxed motor road network. (See *WWII Quarterly,* Summer 2010.)

In terms of logistical support, the use of Antwerp meant that 54 divisions could be supplied, as compared to only 21 using Cherbourg—while the ports along the English Channel coast were of only limited capacity.

The result was that the effort to support an Allied division by way of Antwerp was calculated to be only a third of that required to sustain one by way of Cherbourg. It is no wonder then that in a communication to British Field Marshal Sir Bernard L. Montgomery, General Dwight D. Eisenhower stated unequivocally, "Of course we need Antwerp." But there were problems.

On August 27, 1944, when the Germans were in full retreat from the Normandy battlefield, soon to be Field Marshal Montgomery ordered his XXX Corps to advance to the south bank of the Scheldt Estuary in Belgium. He did not specify that the corps was to stop there, but he made it known the key objective was the capture of Antwerp. The mission was given to British XXX Corps commander Lt. Gen. Brian Horrocks, who in turn gave it to Maj. Gen. George Philip Bradley "Pip" Roberts, commanding the British 11th Armoured Division.

After a tough beginning around the Norman city of Caen, where its combat with German armor had tended to make the division's tankers overly cautious, the 11th Armoured soon began to overcome any lethargy it had accrued in those battles. Reminiscent of its dynamic training during the first 18 months of its formation under

its first commanding general, Maj. Gen. Sir Percy Hobart, the division quickly moved into an overdrive mode, advancing northeastward through France into Belgium.

By September 1 the division had bounded forward 40 miles from the French city of Amiens. By 11:30 AM on September 2, the 11th had rolled into Lens in northern France and, after having pushed four miles farther on, the Second British Army ordered the division to "stand fast" for the rest of the day to resupply its elements. Then, on September 3, in Operation Sabot, the division struck out for Antwerp.

In the early afternoon of September 4, after a sprint of 100 miles, elements of the 11th British Armoured Division's 3rd Royal Tank Regiment (3 R Tanks) reached the outskirts of Antwerp. It found the way into the city blocked at its main bridge by mines and machine-gun positions.

Reacting swiftly under the cover of a smoke screen, the tankers circumvented the obstacle and an armored battalion, and along with a company of the Rifle Brigade infantry, sped into Antwerp with one of its tank squadrons reaching the port's vast harbor. There the British found that the entire dock area was in an undamaged condition and quickly took possession of it.

The swiftness of the division's advance had surprised the German commander, Generalmajor Graf Christoph Stolberg-zu-Stolberg, who, on being captured, confessed he had not expected the sudden British arrival and thus had been unable to demolish the port's facilities.

Stolberg's failure was enhanced by the actions of a Belgian reserve lieutenant—apparently his military affiliation was unknown to the Germans—employed in his civilian capacity in the port administration office. He was able to work out a scheme that would effectively neutralize the German demolition plans if Stolberg had ordered an attempt to execute them. Seizing the surprisingly undamaged port was a tremendous victory—or so it seemed.

But the 11th Armoured Division stopped in place in Antwerp and rested after its arduous advance. In its great leap forward, the division did not try either that day or the next to seize the bridges over the Albert Canal, which were key to any further advance.

On September 6, the 4th Battalion, King's Shropshire Light Infantry (4 KSLI), crossed the canal, but by then the Germans had blown the bridges. An enemy counterattack by infantry and five tanks isolated the 4 KSLI in a factory complex, and the British infantry, incapable of ferrying some antitank guns across the canal, was forced to withdraw; a temporary stalemate ensued.

The report that Antwerp had fallen on September 4 to the Allies caused great consternation in Hitler's headquarters in East Prussia. The Germans clearly recognized the importance of Antwerp in that it would solve the obvious logistic challenges the Allies were facing in their rapid advance north into Belgium and farther into Germany.

At the time, Field Marshal Walther Model, commanding Army Group B, believed that the fast-advancing British armor would further exploit the port's capture by moving along the Scheldt's northern bank, clean it up, and take over the entire South Beveland peninsula and Walcheren Island on the North Sea.

Also compounding the critical German situation at the beginning of the first week in September, only a few replacement and rear-area units defended the line along the whole Albert Canal from Antwerp in Belgium to Maastricht in Holland. It seemed that unless the Allies were blocked along that line the "door to northwestern Germany stood open."

Hitler's reaction to the news that Antwerp had been captured virtually intact was immediate. The Germans well knew that Antwerp's port capacity, if delivered to the Allies in its untouched condition, would be a major victory for them. While the local German commander, with few resources available, launched a counterattack to defeat the attempted British lodgment over the canal on September 6, Hitler also moved quickly.

Into the seam between the German Fifteenth Army withdrawing along the French and Belgian coast and that of Fifth Panzer and Seventh Armies retiring generally northeast, Hitler ordered the newly organized First Parachute Army, commanded by Gen-

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**ABOVE: A British soldier carrying a 22-pound Bren gun leads an 11th Armoured Division patrol of infantrymen and Universal carriers through Deurne, Belgium, in September 1944. OPPOSITE: British 11th Armoured Division commander Maj. Gen. G.P.B. "Pip" Roberts (left) with Brigadier Roscoe Harvey, 29th Armoured Brigade commander, confer in front of Harvey's command tank during the British advance through Belgium, September 1944.**

eraloberst Kurt Student, to move to the Netherlands and defend the canal lines running through Antwerp.

Generaloberst Gustav von Zangen was also recalled from Italy to take over the German Fifteenth Army; he received orders to defend the south bank of the Scheldt. In addition he saw that troops were moved into the fortified English Channel port cities of Dunkirk, Calais, and Boulogne. At the same time, Zangen initiated the transport of as many men as possible to the Scheldt's north banks so they could take up new positions elsewhere in front of the advancing Allies.

With the assistance of the German Navy, he succeeded in moving most of the army along with some 500 artillery pieces over the estuary to the north bank of the Scheldt, an important accomplishment that was soon to benefit the Germans, whose front elsewhere seemed to be collapsing.

The Germans also had an ace in the hole that was soon to play itself out. Before Antwerp's port facilities could be used, the 55 miles of the Scheldt Estuary waterway and its banks had to be cleared to allow ships to pass through from the North Sea.

As early as September 3, as the British raced into Belgium, the Allied Naval Commander-in-Chief, Expeditionary Force gave warning that both Antwerp and Rotterdam were highly vulnerable to blocking and mining. If the enemy succeeded in accomplishing these missions, he could not estimate how long before the port could be used.

Although Antwerp, with its considerable port capacity, had been captured on September 4 by the British Second Army's 11th Armoured Division, the 1st Canadian Army advancing along the French coast was making slower progress. German garrisons in the coastal port cities were holding out and, although being bypassed by the Canadians, were still impeding Allied forward progress.

These cities were not only thorns in the side of the Allies, as the Germans starting on September 6 were able to evacuate a large number of their troops from the Dutch south bank port of Breskins to Flushing on Walcheren Island.

Generalmajor Walter Poppe, commanding the splintered and weak German 59th Infantry Division, was astounded that, by using a couple of small Dutch vessels and several Rhine River barges as well as numerous boats and even rafts, it was possible to get not only the artillery and men, but vehicles and horses across the three-mile-wide Scheldt Estuary without Allied naval interference. With much of the evacuation occurring at night, the Germans were able to largely negate the impact of Allied air activity as well.

While German reinforcements were being rushed from the Netherlands and Germany, time was also being gained to strengthen German positions along the Scheldt. Retreating German Fifteenth Army troops were able to hold the Canadians south of the Leopold Canal in Belgium into October, which prevented the Canadians from reaching the south bank

of the Scheldt Estuary.

Although the Germans may not have had troops in position to block the move into Germany at that time, their situation at Antwerp was better than they probably realized. To prevent the port of Antwerp itself from being viable for logistics purposes, its capture was almost immaterial at the time because of the extensive estuary mining and fixed German defenses along the Scheldt's banks.

Initially, the Germans also had been more concerned about an assault from the North Sea so, at the time Antwerp was captured, their land defenses were pointing principally toward the sea. Once it was known that Antwerp had been captured, the Germans were able to take advantage of the slower progress of the Canadians and redirect those defenses on the south bank of the Scheldt, and repositioning them along the Leopold Canal.

The limited German counterattack on September 6 and the destruction of the canal bridges closed a narrow British window of opportunity to advance farther. While freeing the south bank of the Scheldt was, at the moment, out of the question because of German resistance to the south and along the Leopold Canal, between September 4 and 6 a determined push by the 11th Armoured Division to the north and west along the north bank of the Scheldt had remained an option open to the Allies.

A swift strike after seizing the Albert Canal bridges intact across the South Beveland isthmus on to Walcheren Island had the potential for isolating the Germans on the Scheldt's south bank and expediting the clearance of the estuary, resulting in the opening of the port.

Tactically, when the opportunity presents itself, forging a bridgehead over a waterway in the face of light resistance is a sound move. Halting short of such an obstacle allows the opponent time to strengthen and reinforce his position, thus making it harder and more expensive to cross and breach it in the long run.

On the afternoon of September 4, once the Antwerp port facilities were so quickly overrun, the question arises as the British didn't take the advantage to cross the bridges and continue the advance. German Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt, whom Hitler had dispatched to take over command of OB West (German West Front Command) from Field Marshal Model on September 4, for one, noted that for 36 hours the British did not move north of Antwerp. It appears that the basic military maxim—exploit success—had been violated by the Allies.

The men of the 11th Armoured Division were tired after their marathon run to Antwerp. Their tanks, of which only 90 Sherman medium and 15 Stuart light tanks were considered fit for combat out of an original strength of 200, were in need of maintenance. Fuel, food, and ammunition resupply, potentially hindered by a long logistics tail, were required. There were significant reasons, therefore, for a standdown by the division's armored troopers.

But the division was not on its last legs. It had the momentum behind it to keep moving and exploit its stunning success. The XXX Corps commander, Horrocks, was leading the charge toward Antwerp and Brussels. He reputedly "commanded the Corps from one tank with one staff officer and one A.D.C. [aide-de-camp]," and while doing so was

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**ABOVE: German prisoners are housed temporarily in a lion cage at the Antwerp Zoo, September 5, 1944. OPPOSITE: A Canadian II Corps jeep is backed into a landing craft prior to advancing across a waterway during the advance toward Antwerp.**

in position to positively influence his units' employment. The Albert Canal bridges, as a minimum, were for the taking by rapidly advancing British troops.

Instead, it appears that it was a matter of the mind and perceptions as to what the capture of the port city was to achieve. In *The Tanks,* author B. H. Liddell Hart explains: "When the 11th Armoured Division raced into Antwerp on the 4th, its commander's mind, following his instructions, was concentrated on the capture of the docks.… He did not try to seize the Albert Canal bridges on the northern edge of the city with a view to further advance.

"The divisional history says: 'Had any indication been given that a further north was envisaged, these might have been seized within a few hours of our entry into the city.' The Corps Commander's mind was likewise concentrated on the capture of the docks. Moreover he had been told not to advance any further than Antwerp for the moment, until supplies caught up—his orders were to 'refit, refuel, and rest.'

"That was a sound course if there had been any serious opposition ahead, but such did not exist at the moment—as was, in fact, correctly gauged by XXX Corps and the higher commands. Thus the omission to seize the Albert Canal bridges would seem to have been primarily due to concentration on the immediate objective and the dazzling effect of the triumphant race to gain it."

Obviously, the strategic logistic implications of the capture of Antwerp and the halt there were, at the moment, not realized by those on the ground in combat with the enemy.

But what about those at the highest command echelons? The matter appears to be more confused at those levels than it was at the 11th Armoured Division level, which had accomplished its mission of swiftly seizing the Antwerp dockyards.

There is no doubt that the capture of the Antwerp port facilities offered important potential solutions to the severe logistical situation, which was having a big impact on the Allies' sweep toward Germany. But there were other considerations, and they went all the way up to Eisenhower and Montgomery.

Montgomery may have been the master of the "set-piece battle," but he was also decisive when it came to making big decisions. For example, while the Allied high command was dilly-dallying around in North Africa about what the plan for assaulting the shores of Sicily in 1943 in Operation Husky should be, it was Montgomery who forced the decision as to how it was to be done.

Later, when planning to execute Operation Neptune/Overlord on June 6, 1944, Montgomery did not hesitate, as did others gathered around Eisenhower, to say "Go!" when the dicey weather situation was the primary factor in the launch of the Normandy invasion. Indeed, it was Montgomery who determined that five divisions instead of three would land over the beaches of Normandy on D-Day.

So it was that he was so insistent on a plan to strike northward into the heartland of Germany in a single 40-division-strong thrust once German resistance in France collapsed, which would thereby win the war.

On August 17, as the Americans and French in the south and the British, Canadians, and Poles in the north started to close the gap around Falaise and Argentan in Normandy, Montgomery at his command post at Le Beny Bocage near Caen announced his plan for continuing the advance toward Germany. He had concluded that 21 and 12 Army Groups should keep together and, as a solid entity, advance in such strength as to be "a force so strong that it need fear nothing."

In his memoirs he stated in the plan's Point 2 that "21 Group, on the western flank, [was] to clear the channel coast, the Pas de Calais, West Flanders, and secure Antwerp and South Holland."

It should be noted that the plan did not specify that the Scheldt Estuary had to be cleared of water obstacles to free Antwerp's port facilities as a major logistics node. That mission evidently would have been an implied part of his plan, but also by implication such responsibility would have been that of the Allied navy and not within his purview.

Also indicative of the ambiguous nature of the matter of opening the port, Montgomery, at this time the overall Allied ground force commander, went on to draw proposed boundary lines between the two army groups. Martin Blumenson, in *Breakout and Pursuit*, spelled them out: "Montgomery had drawn the boundary between army groups along a line from Mantes-Grassicourt to a point just east of Antwerp. The 21 Army Group thus had a zone that ended at the Scheldt—the Canadian and British armies at the conclusion of their advance would be facing the estuary." It clearly appears that Montgomery did not intend that both the banks of the estuary were to be cleared, at least not by forces under his command.

National Archives

**A massed battery of Allied 40mm Bofors guns fires in support of the Canadian advance into Belgium. The Swedish-made gun was primarily an antiaircraft weapon but was also effective as a direct-fire weapon.**

Three days later, on August 20, at Eisenhower's command post which had recently moved to the Continent, Ike held a strategy meeting that Montgomery did not attend. Instead, he sent his chief of staff, Maj. Gen. Sir Francis W. "Freddie" de Guingand, with a set of notes, the first of which was, "The quickest way to win this war is for the great mass of the Allied armies to advance northwards, clear the coast as far as Antwerp, establish a powerful air force in Belgium, and advance into the Ruhr."

There was no special emphasis on Antwerp, and Montgomery's ultimate goal was in the northeast completely beyond the environs of the port city. As for Antwerp, it appears that Montgomery may have felt just getting to the city and not beyond it was sufficient for his immediate purposes.

Just securing the port facilities and not the waterway from the North Sea to Antwerp was of present concern. Did he anticipate that just ordering clearing "the coast as far as Antwerp" would automatically allow for the immediate use of the port facilities?

At the time Montgomery set forth his plan and announced his views on continuing the advance into Germany through his chief of staff, he was deeply involved in crushing the encircled German Seventh Army in the Falaise Pocket. Although he held strong views on how to proceed when the gap beyond Falaise was closed, he undoubtedly was more interested in accomplishing that mission than becoming involved in precise details of his projected plan of a further advance toward Germany.

Indeed, at the time of his announcing his views on future plans and Eisenhower's meeting in August there was no indication that the Germans would soon be giving up eastern France and fleeing back to Germany. But Montgomery was soon to come to grips with the issue of how to proceed after the carnage in the German encirclement around and east of Falaise ended.

He claimed that on August 23, after the Poles and Americans had sealed the Falaise escape route, thereby trapping thousands of Germans who had not managed to get out in time, that he expressed to Eisenhower that Antwerp and the approaches to the port were a part of his request to receive a high priority in making the thrust on the Allies' left flank.

But it also appears that Montgomery's concern for capturing the port at the time was subordinate to his having "absolute" priority in his desire for an all-out concentrated advance northward toward the Rhine and Germany.

With his attempt to garner the majority of the means to support his plan, Montgomery now was also pushing for command of all the Allied ground forces; he wanted Eisenhower to relinquish such command and instead function as overall commander of air, land, and naval forces in operations in northwestern Europe. This point of contention served to distract such particulars as how to proceed in the face of swiftly collapsing German resistance.

Capturing the banks of the Scheldt Estuary and ensuring use of Antwerp's port facilities was hardly within the scope of immediate operations and military politics over points of command. It soon, however, changed as the swift Allied advance brought the matter to the fore.

On August 27, Montgomery—who was just four days from handing over command of the ground battle to Eisenhower, a move he was decidedly against—issued orders for XXX Corps of General Miles Dempsey's British Second Army to advance to the south bank of the Scheldt Estuary. The order, however, did not specify that once it was reached that the advance was to stop there. It was an order that appeared at the time to be ambitious but also realizable.

National Archives


**Daimler and Humber armored cars pass through the Belgian-Dutch border town of Putte during the Anglo-Canadian drive to cut off the German Fifteenth Army on the islands of the Scheldt Estuary, October 11, 1944.**

By August 30, the British Second Army had the Germans in full flight in front of it, and it was in the process of crossing the Seine River. The day before, the three armored divisions of the Second Army—the Guards Armoured, 7th, and 11th—had passed through the bridgeheads and were in full gallop northward.

On the 31st, the French city of Amiens was entered and a bridge over the Somme River was captured intact, thus expediting the advance. That day the commanding general of the German Seventh Army, General der Panzertruppen Heinrich Eberbach, and his tactical headquarters were captured, and the speed of Montgomery's armor picked up momentum.

Early on September 3, the Guards Armoured Division crossed the Belgian border, and by nightfall it had captured the Belgian capital of Brussels, which was hastily evacuated by its German occupiers. The same day, the 11th Armoured Division had set off on Operation Sabot and, as noted, was in Antwerp early on the afternoon of September 4.

While the British Second Army pressed forward swiftly, on its left flank the Canadian First Army's mission had more modest goals. On August 30 the Canadians entered the city of Rouen on the Seine River without opposition, but this was soon to change as they advanced. In accordance with Hitler's edict of not surrendering an inch of territory to the Allies, the Germans immediately to the front of First Army retreated into English Channel ports turned into fortresses to prevent their capture.

Enemy occupation of such fortress cities did not bode well for the Canadians trying to reach the south bank of the Scheldt Estuary. In fact, while the 11th Armoured Division was resting in Antwerp on September 4, the Canadian First Army was nowhere near its objective but was short of the Leopold Canal in Belgium. It was soon to engage in stiff fighting to get across that obstacle.

Still, on September 1, the port city of Dieppe was captured by the 2nd Canadian Division—the same unit that in August 1942 had suffered severe casualties in an abortive raid on that French port. Dieppe fell without resistance, and the Germans left without destroying the harbor facilities.

Two days later the Canadian II Corps was crossing the Somme River while the British I Corps under Canadian command was approaching the large Channel port city of Le Havre. The city, which now lay well behind the front lines, was, like the ports in Brittany—such as Brest and St. Nazaire—strongly fortified and manned by a garrison of 12,000 Germans.

In sum, with regard to the capture of Antwerp, Montgomery's troops had only partially satisfied their mandate. The port facilities at Antwerp had been captured by Roberts' 11th Armoured Division surprisingly without crippling destruction. On the other hand, the Canadians had not yet reached the south bank of the Scheldt Estuary. The mission of clearing the Scheldt and its banks to allow Antwerp to function as a logistics node appears not to have been a focus of Allied operations at the time.

That was to change, but not soon enough to improve the Allies' critical supply situation, which was exacerbated by the failure to take timely measures in opening the port for operations.

Eisenhower was not entirely unaware of the complexity of opening Antwerp for supplying Allied troops. In logistics planning, the seizure of ports was critical to any success in defeating the Germans.

The Allied planners had expected that Cherbourg's port facilities would be badly damaged. They had also hoped that the major port city of Brest in France's province of Brittany would become available, but no one was under the illusion that the Germans would give that port up easily.

So it was with the other Brittany ports. A chance to seize Brest was lost when the U.S. 6th Armored Division stopped just short of entering the major port city in August. German paratroopers and other units were able to defend the city, and when it was finally captured after hard fighting in September, it was in ruins. It never did serve a significant logistics purpose.

Eisenhower did not take over ground command on the European continent from newly promoted Field Marshal Montgomery until September 1, but he

was involved in planning well before. He was confronted with a situation that was not anticipated when the German opposition collapsed after the battle around Falaise ended.

His challenge was not only logistics, but dealing with Montgomery's concept of assembling a massive force under his command and pushing north into the industrial Ruhr region of Germany.

On August 24, Eisenhower expressed anxiety about being able conduct desirable operations such as the two-pronged assault north and south of the Ardennes in Luxembourg directed at getting to the Rhine River and beyond. On that date none of the Brittany ports had yet been captured and, while fighting raged in Normandy before the breakout, supplies only had to be carried forward less than 20 miles; after August 24—as a result of the rapid advance of the Allied forces—supplies had to be carried forward 300 miles.

On September 4, when Antwerp was captured unscathed but unusable, Eisenhower was under different pressures that tended to divert any primary focus on the port. First, he had to deal with Montgomery, who felt he should be the commander of ground operations and who had already been advancing his plan for attacking the Germans and going on to win the war in Europe.

Second, there was a large contingent of airborne troops in Great Britain cooling their heels and waiting for a piece of the action on the Continent. Ground movement was so swift that potential targets for the use of airborne units were being quickly overrun. The Allied high command wanted to use this potent force and was eagerly looking for opportunities to do so. With the help of Montgomery, the opportunity was soon in hand. It was an operation called Market Garden.

The forward elements of 21 Army Group rested to the east from just north of Antwerp, while the group's 1st Canadian Army sought to come abreast of the Second British Army in the west. Montgomery approached Eisenhower soon after September 4 with the idea of seizing a bridgehead over the lower Rhine River in Holland at the city of Arnhem with a swift, pencil-like thrust by an armored division linking up with three airborne divisions.

The parachute units would drop at vital points along a direct route to Arnhem, which would lead to the objective of gaining a bridgehead over the river at that city. The American 82nd and 101st and British 1st Airborne Divisions would pave the way for the British XXX Corps to capture a bridge in the vicinity of Arnhem. Montgomery's Operation Market-Garden plan, with the enthusiastic support of the Allied high command, was approved by Eisenhower, who put it into effect.

The logistic implications for Market Garden, however, were great. As noted, the Antwerp port was not yet open, the supply lines reached back some 300 miles to the Normandy beaches, and the likelihood of the use of the English Channel ports was slim. The "logistical margin" was at best thin for the launching of the operation.

For example, three U.S. Army divisions were temporarily left in Normandy and divested of their trucks to provide enough vehicles to move the advancing Market Garden troops forward. Their trucks were employed to rush some 500 tons of supplies a day to the British conducting the deep thrust.

Transport aircraft, which were being utilized in large numbers to deliver supplies to Bradley's 12th Army Group's Third Army (Patton) racing across France had to be diverted to carry the airborne troops into battle and supply them until the ground link-up was made.

After Market Garden failed to meet Allied expectations, Eisenhower finally had to turn his major attention back to logistical matters. An important question arose as to how to resolve the port situation—specifically, how to open Antwerp to the North Sea. After Antwerp was seized and Market Garden failed to gain the way over the Rhine, there was a great deal of discussion as to what course of action was now to be taken. It was obvious, however, there was not going to be a speedy entry via Holland into the German Ruhr.

The key to success in opening the Antwerp port in the narrow time window was the British getting across the Albert Canal and advancing west to seize German positions on the north bank of the Scheldt Estuary. The situation at that time all along the front was in great flux, with each key element influencing the situation in a different way.

National Archives

**British assault troops round up German soldiers after the Allied invasion of Walcheren Island at dawn on November 1, 1944. The objective of the landing was to silence German guns guarding the Scheldt passage to the port of Antwerp.**

National Archives

**A Canadian officer is shown with a Bren gun in a Humber Mk. I armored car. The Bren gun, the principle machine gun of British/Commonwealth infantry, fired .303-inch ammunition.**

The Germans had received a wake-up call with the British capture of Antwerp. Thus they moved swiftly to remedy the confusion that followed. The evacuation of the bulk of German troops from the south bank of the Scheldt Estuary had just begun, and there were some 80,000 German soldiers between the Canadians and the Scheldt. The defenses along the Scheldt, however, being oriented toward the sea, had yet to be fully completed or manned, especially along the north banks.

Field Marshal Model, still commanding Army Group B on September 4, had few troops other than heavy coast artillery guns on Walcheren Island at the mouth of the Scheldt Estuary and antiaircraft artillery emplaced along the Scheldt's northern banks.

Concern at the time, however, seemed to be more directed at filling the void in German lines created by the swift advance of Montgomery's and American Lt. Gen. Omar Bradley's army groups toward Germany than toward a threat to the water approaches to Antwerp from the sea or the Allies crossing the Scheldt. But time was on the Germans' side.

For the Canadian First Army during this period, the south bank of the Scheldt, where Montgomery had delineated an objective, was "a bank too far." The Canadians encountered more resistance in the form of German Fifteenth Army troops the farther north they struck and could not keep up with the British Second Army to their east. On September 4, advance Canadian elements were even short of the Leopold Canal, which had to be crossed before the Scheldt could be encountered.

The Americans wanted use of the port of Antwerp, but their interests at the moment rested elsewhere. Although Bradley's First Army was advancing steadily, his Third Army was stuck on the Moselle River around Nancy and Metz in France.

Logistics was of major concern, but the competition for resources between Patton and Montgomery hobbled Third Army's efforts to reduce the fortress city of Metz and advance into the German Saar. The beaches—and to a limited extent Cherbourg—and a few minor French Channel ports far from the combat had to be relied on for logistic support. At the time, Antwerp, when captured, was to be primarily used by the British.

Montgomery's armies were focused on getting to the Rhine, not exploiting the capture of Antwerp. The swift advance to Antwerp left its captors gasping for breath. The 11th Armoured Division's 100-mile rampage ending on September 4 at Antwerp's docks left a confused but still active enemy to its rear, which was susceptible to delaying supply convoys.

Yet, as the window of opportunity closed, an attempt to exploit beyond Antwerp to the west was not made. Instead, Montgomery and the airborne high command struck toward the Rhine in Holland with Operation Market Garden.

Only with a stalemated situation existing after the conclusion of the failed attempt to capture the bridge at Arnhem was British attention directed to defeating the German Fifteenth Army holding the banks of the Scheldt Estuary. Instead of a massive invasion of Germany, the first priority became freeing the port facilities at Antwerp for operation. There was considerable debate between Eisenhower and Montgomery as to what priority should have been given to making Antwerp a viable logistics node. It was now clear that, after the failure of Market Garden, the bottom line for success was that all future operations in northwestern Europe would depend on using the huge capacity of Antwerp's port facilities.

The Germans knew what to do in that narrow time window, and they did it. Zangen skillfully managed his evacuation from the south shore of the Scheldt. The British knew what to do, but they did not. Maj. Gen. Roberts later admitted he still had a day's supplies remaining, and his 11th Armoured Division could have advanced north a further 18 miles to cut off the German escape route on North Beveland.

Opening Antwerp's port was eventually accomplished, but not easily, and it required a great deal of time. Ships did not start unloading at the Antwerp docks until the end of November 1944—shortly before the Germans launched their "Battle of the Bulge" counteroffensive, the ultimate objective of which was to recapture Antwerp and drive a wedge between the British and Americans.

On October 8, Montgomery wrote that he was going to stop operations toward the Ruhr and concentrate on opening the approaches to Antwerp. He also noted, "Some have argued that I ignored Eisenhower's orders to give priority to opening up the port of Antwerp, and that I should

not have attempted the Arnhem operation until this had been done. This is not true. There were no such orders about Antwerp, and Eisenhower had agreed on Arnhem. Indeed, up to the 8th October 1944, inclusive my orders were to gain the line of the Rhine 'as quickly as possible.' On the 9th October, Antwerp was given priority for the first time—as will be seen from orders quoted above."

It took the Canadian 3rd Infantry Division until October 22 to clear the south bank of the Scheldt Estuary after crossing the Leopold Canal using the British Buffalos—the American Landing Vehicle Tracked (LVT). During the same time the Canadian 2nd Infantry Division, trying to attack across the South Beveland isthmus, was stopped short of its objective. The British 52nd Lowland Division then was landed at Baarland on the south shore of South Beveland almost unopposed. It took until the end of October before the entire isthmus was in Allied hands.

To completely clear the banks of the Scheldt required the taking of Walcheren Island, which was largely flooded and heavily fortified. It took the British 4 Commando Brigade on November 1 to cross the Scheldt to Walcheren by landing craft and land at Westkapelle with 41 Commando (an infantry battalion equivalent) being ferried across to Flushing and followed by the British 155th Infantry Brigade to tackle tough German resistance.

After capturing the town of Middleburg on Walcheren, a linkup was made with Canadian troops advancing across the land bridge from South Beveland, and by November 8 Walcheren Island was in Allied hands. Now clearing the channel for sea-going vessels to reach Antwerp could begin. (See *WWII Quarterly,* Winter 2016.)

In the U.S. Army's *Logistical Support of the Armies,* Volume II, the author noted, "Clearing the mines from the [Scheldt] proved a time-consuming task, and was not completed until 26 November. At that time much still remained to be done in the port itself, but of the 242 berths in the port 219 were completely cleared, all of the 600 cranes were in operating order, and all bridges needed for operations had been repaired."

Coincidently, the port and Antwerp itself became the target for a series of murderous attacks by German "vengeance" aerial weapons. In one particularly horrendous incident, a V2 rocket hit the Rex Cinema on December 16, 1944, killing 567 people, 296 of whom were American, British, and Canadian service personnel. But in spite of the bombardment, port operations went ahead full steam.

Major General "Pip" Roberts, following his instructions, was concentrated on the capture of Antwerp's docks; he did not try to seize the bridges over the Albert Canal north of the city with further advance in mind.

The 11th Armoured Division history states, "Had any indication been given that further north had been envisioned, these might have been seized within a few hours of our entry into the city." But the division did not envision that it would need to advance farther north to cut off the German retreat from Walcheren Island and clear the north bank of the Scheldt Estuary.

Lieutenant General Brian Horrocks, XXX Corps commander, had been instructed "not to advance any further than Antwerp for the moment, until supplies caught up—

Imperial War Museum

Imperial War Museum

**ABOVE: While the Antwerp port was taken in early September, it was not until late November that ships could unload. Here oil drums are offloaded from SS *Fort Cataraqui,* a British/Canadian variant of the American Liberty cargo ships, at Antwerp, November 30, 1944. This was the first ship to berth at the port following the long-delayed opening of the Scheldt Estuary. OPPOSITE: Canadians in rain capes glance at a knocked-out 105mm German Stug-III self-propelled gun during Operation Infatuate, the battle to secure Walcheren Island.**

his orders were to 'refit, refuel, and rest."

In his memoirs, Horrocks stated, "My excuse is that my eyes were fixed entirely on the Rhine and everything else seemed of subsidiary importance. It never entered my head that the [Scheldt] would be mined and that we would not be able to use Antwerp until the channel had been swept and the Germans cleared from the coastlines on either side."

Further, Horrocks admitted his troops could have advanced still farther north upon arriving in Antwerp and that his vehicles still had a hundred miles of fuel remaining in them and they had a day's supply "within reach."

Montgomery's primary focus was on the major thrust into Germany, but he recognized that capturing Antwerp and putting the port into operation was the key to a sustained drive. Nevertheless, he chose to subordinate operations clearing the Scheldt while concentrating on his major plan.

In *The Memoirs of Montgomery of Alamein,* he wrote, "And here I must admit a bad mistake on my part— underestimated the difficulties of opening up the approaches to Antwerp so that we could get the free use of that port. I reckoned that the Canadian Army could do it while we were going for the Ruhr."

Thus he had his excuse for not sending troops such as the 11th Armoured Division during the narrow time window to seize the north banks of the Scheldt and cut off the German retreat through Walcheren Island when he had a chance to do so.

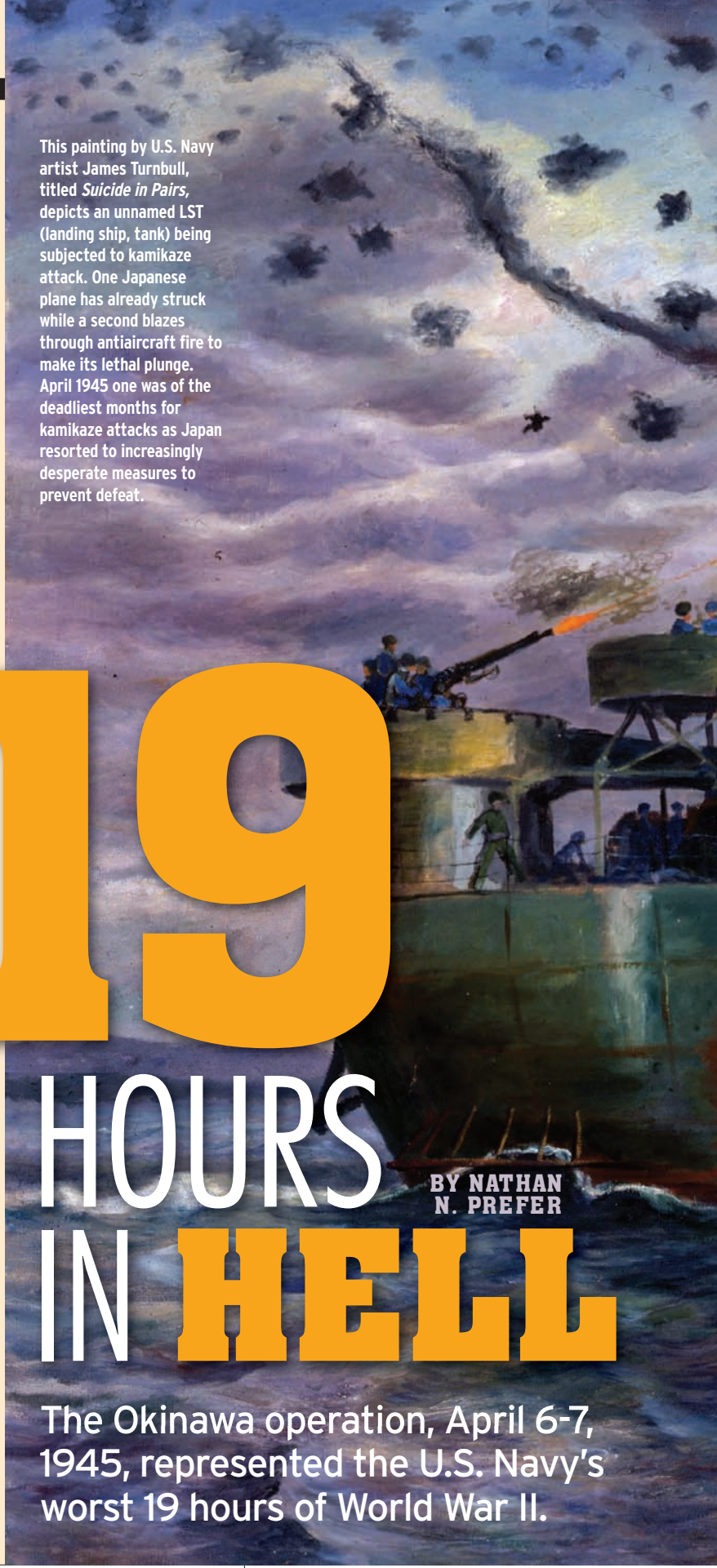
Eisenhower had his own excuse. In his *Report by The Supreme Commander to the CCofS on the Operation in Europe,* he reasoned with regard to Antwerp and Market Garden, "My decision to concentrate our efforts in this [Market Garden] attempt to thrust into the heart of Germany before the enemy could consolidate his defenses along the Rhine had resulted in a delay in opening Antwerp and in making the port available as our main supply base. I took full responsibility for this, and I believe that the possible and actual results warranted the calculated risk involved."

Thus he implicitly recognized that he had made a mistake by not insisting that the Scheldt Estuary be cleared and the port of Antwerp be made operational as a top priority before advancing farther northward. Ultimate results showed that it took almost three months before Antwerp became the principal Allied port for logistic purposes. The war in Europe lasted another eight months.

While the failure to open Antwerp for port operations promptly was one of the biggest mistakes from the Allies' top command to division level—if not the biggest in the war in northwestern Europe—it still begs the question: could the Allies have won the war earlier if Antwerp had been available at the end of September rather than at the end of November?

Market Garden, Montgomery's plan supported by the Allied high command to reach for the Ruhr and agreed to by Eisenhower, may not have been needed if priorities had been different, but with the failure to use that narrow September 4-6 time window the question is moot.

In any case, it appears that the basic military maxim of exploiting success when the opportunity presented itself—in this case in a short time window—was violated. That perhaps was the greatest mistake made by Eisenhower and Montgomery. Unfortunately, thousands more on both sides died because of the delay in ending the war. □



This painting by U.S. Navy artist James Turnbull, titled *Suicide in Pairs,* depicts an unnamed LST (landing ship, tank) being subjected to kamikaze attack. One Japanese plane has already struck while a second blazes through antiaircraft fire to make its lethal plunge. April 1945 one was of the deadliest months for kamikaze attacks as Japan resorted to increasingly desperate measures to prevent defeat.

# 19 HOURS IN HELL

BY NATHAN N. PREFER

**The Okinawa operation, April 6-7, 1945, represented the U.S. Navy's worst 19 hours of World War II.**

They knew they were coming. They had been waiting for days, expecting at any minute to be rushed to battle stations, but for days nothing much had happened. Veterans of naval battles at the Coral Sea, Guadalcanal, Leyte Gulf, and the Philippine Sea couldn't explain it. Where were the Japanese? Even ashore at the beachhead the Fifth U.S. fleet was protecting, the Japanese Army was nowhere to be found. The Tenth U.S. Army was seeking it, moving deeper into Okinawa.

True, there had been some evidence of the enemy. A few single planes had appeared over the fleet in recent days and struck hard. On the evening of the first landings on Okinawa a Japanese kamikaze had crashed into the transport *Alpine* and blown two huge holes in her side, killing 16 and wounding 27. Nearby, the *Achernar* was both crashed and bombed by conventional attackers, losing five killed and 41 wounded.

So keyed up were the Americans that a false alarm resulted in many of the ships firing wildly at imaginary aircraft in the darkness, smoke screens being ordered, and ships attempting to evade these imaginary attackers coming dangerously close to collision.

Yet, the massive enemy air attack expected by the Americans didn't develop. Despite American intelligence reports of thousands of Japanese aircraft being hoarded in Japan for a devastating air attack on any fleet invading Okinawa, no attack developed in the opening days of the Okinawa campaign. Small raids continued to come against the invasion forces, such as the one on April 2, which sank the destroyer-transport USS *Dickerson* (Lt. Cmdr. R. E. Lounsbury) and damaged several transports carrying troops of the 77th Infantry Division, killing a regimental commander and several others.

To provide early warning of the expected attacks, Admiral Raymond A. Spruance, commander of the Fifth U.S. Fleet, had established "radar picket" posts some distance from the main fleet's position. These posts, manned by one or two destroyers and/or destroyer escorts, were designed to provide early radar warnings of incoming enemy air raids against the fleet and beachhead. As the campaign developed, these radar pickets would instead become major targets for the incoming enemy attacks.

In the early days of the campaign, however, there was a weak spot in the defense in that no land-based aircraft had yet been established on Okinawa or the outlying islands of the Kerama Retto chain. This left the time just before dusk, when aircraft had to return to their carriers, with no protective air patrol over the fleet. With no night fighters yet available, the fleet was vulnerable during those final moments before full darkness.

The Japanese took advantage of this gap in the American


All Images: Naval History and Heritage Command

defenses. On April 3, for example, the escort aircraft carrier USS *Wake Island* (Captain A.V. Magly) was struck by a crashing kamikaze that ripped a hole in her side, forcing her to return to Guam for repairs.

The following day the weather turned bad, which provided better protection for the U.S. fleet because Japanese planes were unable to fly. Bombing of enemy airfields on the home island of Kyushu also contributed to a relatively quiet day on April 4. The bad weather continued until the next day, keeping the Japanese grounded and giving the fleet some respite. But it was short lived.

The weather of April 4-5 had postponed, but not cancelled, Admiral Soemu Toyoda's planned operations. A graduate of the Japanese Naval Academy, class of 1905, he had fought in the early war battles until November 1942, when he became a member of the Japanese Supreme War Council. By May 1943, Admiral Toyoda was commanding the huge Yokosuka Naval Base. Upon the death of Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, commander in chief of the Combined Fleet, Toyoda was appointed to that position. He held that post during the Battles of the Philippine Sea and Leyte Gulf, headquartered in Tokyo.

Despite these crushing defeats, Admiral Toyoda was promoted once again—to the post of Imperial Japanese Navy chief of staff. By this time, with no fleet left to speak of, Toyoda pinned his hopes on defeating the Americans with land-based air power. His plan was named Operation Ten-Go and involved concentrating Japanese air power on Kyushu and Formosa. Although his plan called for 4,500 aircraft, by April 6, 1945, he could only count on approximately 699 planes, about half of them kamikazes.

Kamikaze or shinbu ("Divine Wind" or "Spirit Wind") pilots were those who deliberately crashed their aircraft, often loaded with bombs and fuel, into their targets, usually American warships. The tactic had been used before, particularly during the Battle of Leyte Gulf. In the final defense of Japan itself, kamikaze planes and pilots were being held in reserve for that ultimate battle.

**The American destroyer USS *Leutze* plows through heavy seas. The ship would sustain heavy damage in her brief wartime service and was decommissioned in December 1945.**

There were a number of kamikazes besides pilots. One-man submarines, one-man glider bombs, explosive motor boats, and human torpedoes also willingly went on suicide missions, but by far the most death and destruction was delivered by the airborne kamikaze.

The weather on April 6, 1945, had improved. The wind was from the northeast, and while it was strong enough to raise whitecaps on the ocean it did little to interfere with the ships off Okinawa. With the temperature varying between 60°F to 65°F, the morning passed quietly. In mid-afternoon, Rear Admiral Morton L. Deyo's Task Force 54, the Gunfire and Covering Force, and Rear Admiral William H.P. Blandy's Task Force 52, the Amphibious Support Force, were ordered to form up early and perform tactical exercises until dusk and then retire together to their night positions.

As Admiral Deyo's ships sailed toward Okinawa, they observed a kamikaze being shot down by the Combat Air Patrol over Ie Shima. As they continued, they observed other air combat and attacks on minesweepers near the invasion beaches. Task Force 54's night position was a circle about 12,000 yards wide in which the battleships and cruisers sailed while 4,000 yards farther out a screen of destroyers patrolled. As they turned away from Ie Shima, the destroyer USS *Leutze* (Lieutenant Leon Grabowsky) reported an incoming aircraft about eight miles away and heading toward Task Force 54.

The *Leutze* was a veteran of several campaigns. Commissioned on March 4, 1944, the ship had fought as a part of Destroyer Squadron 54 during the Battle of Surigao Strait in the Philippines and had come under kamikaze attack while covering the Leyte invasion force as a part of Task Group 77.1 of the Seventh U.S. Fleet in November 1944.

At Iwo Jima, she had been a fire support ship for the minesweepers combing the waters off the eastern beaches of the island. While doing this job, she was struck by shells from a shore battery on Mount Suribachi, which hit the starboard side of the number one smoke stack.

Her commanding officer at the time, Commander B.A. Robbins, Jr., was seriously injured and a dangerous fire started in the 40mm ammunition handling room. The ship's executive officer, Lieutenant Grabowsky, took command and kept the supporting fire over the underwater demolition teams going, while Gunners Mates Eugene Balinski and Warren H. Gurwell fought the flames that threatened to destroy the ship. After remaining on duty the rest of the day, the ship returned to Ulithi for repairs.

*Leutze* returned to battle, still under Lieutenant Grabowsky's command. Now, on April 6, 1945, she saw additional aircraft coming against Task Force 54, and her guns opened fire. So swiftly did the Japanese planes arrive that many were spotted by ships' lookouts before they were reported on radar. All the ships in Task Force 54 opened fire, but the incoming aircraft concentrated their attention on the *Leutze* and the adjoining screening destroyer USS *Newcomb* (Commander I.E. McMillian).

As the battle raged, an enemy aircraft came skimming across the water. Despite hits knocking off pieces of the aircraft, the pilot slammed into the *Newcomb*'s rear stack, rupturing the ship's boilers. As the crew fought the fires and tried to repair the boilers a second plane came in off the starboard bow but was shot down at a distance of 6,000 yards.

A third plane followed and crashed into the destroyer amidships, near the torpedo workshop. This explosion stopped the destroyer dead in the water. Both engine rooms were destroyed, and the after (rear) fire room was wrecked. Even as the ship was erupting with fires and explosions, a fourth kamikaze hit the *Newcomb* at the forward stack, showering gasoline all over the already blazing ship. From the first hit to the last barely 11 minutes had elapsed.

The *Newcomb* was another veteran of the Pacific War. Under Commander L.B. Cook, she had fought in the Marianas Islands operation where, together with the destroyer USS *Chandler,* the destroyer was credited with the sinking of the Japanese submarine *I-185* in June 1944. She went on to fight during the Battle of Leyte Gulf as the flagship of Destroyer Squadron 56, which included the *Luetze*. There she pulled the badly damaged destroyer USS *Albert W. Grant* out of a barrage of friendly fire to safety. Later a kamikaze near-missed her, killing two and wounding 15. By the time she arrived at Okinawa, she had been awarded no less than five Navy Unit Commendations. Then came April 6, 1945.

Seeing the blazing destroyer, Grabowski's *Leutze* moved quickly to join her stricken sister ship, using her own antiaircraft guns to protect the now defenseless vessel. Boats were swung out to pick up survivors. Everyone assumed she was sinking—everyone, that is, except the captain and crew of the *Newcomb*. Seeing that the crewmen were fighting to save their ship, Grabowsky risked his own ship to render aid.

Even as he did so, a fifth plane appeared and headed straight for the *Newcomb*. The sole remaining operable gun aboard the destroyer—her 5-inch forward gun—fired and hit the plane, blasting it onto the fantail of the *Leutze,* where it exploded.

Now fires raged aboard the *Luetze* as well. The crew fought two fires, one aboard their own ship and the other aboard the *Newcomb*; both ships were in serious danger of sinking. Another destroyer, the USS *Beale* (Commander J.B. Cochran), came up with all its fire hoses streaming water on the two struggling ships.

**ABOVE: A smiling Japanese crewman ties a suicide pilot's hachimaki (head scarf) to his leather helmet. The symbolic hachimaki was thought to bring the wearer courage. LEFT: The badly damaged *Leutze* limps into port, April 9, 1945, after encountering a kamikaze off Iwo Jima. A plane hit the U.S. carrier *Hancock,* bounced off, and crashed into the *Leutze.***

Lieutenant Grabowsky signaled, "Am pulling away. In danger of sinking," as the *Beale* took over the job of helping the *Newcomb*. After obtaining permission, Grabowsky jettisoned his torpedoes and depth charges.

Then minesweeper USS *Defense* (Lt. Cmdr. Gordon Abbott), which had herself been struck by two suicide planes in the

bridge structure and a 40mm antiaircraft mount behind the smokestack, took the *Leutze* in tow to Kerama Retto for repairs. The USS *Defense* was back sweeping mines five days later, having suffered 19 sailors injured.

Aboard the *Newcomb*, the executive officer, Lieutenant A.G. Capps, found himself trapped under a wing of one of the kamikaze planes that had hit the ship. Pulled out by crewmen, he immediately set to work to save his ship. Gunners continued firing until they were blown overboard or killed. Damage control parties fought the fires until they were burned to death. Dozens of crewmen were later cited for bravery.

By the time the fleet tug USS *Tekesta* arrived to tow the *Newcomb* to Karema Retto, she was blasted, burned, and seriously damaged with the remains of one of the kamikazes on her fantail, but still afloat.

The total cost for this one kamikaze attack was seven killed and 34 wounded aboard the *Leutze* and 40 killed and 24 wounded aboard the *Newcomb*. The Japanese lost five planes and crews, not counting those shot down before impact. And April 6, 1945, was just beginning. There were still the radar pickets well outside the screen of the main American fleet.

The USS *Bush* (Commander R.E. Westholm) manned Radar Picket Station Number One with partner USS *Calhoun* (Commander G.R. Wilson) manning Picket Post Number Two nearby. Both ships were veterans and had fought off kamikaze attacks since April 1. During the morning of April 6, several attacks came in but were beaten off by the two ships.

**ABOVE: A crippled Zeke, with a torn-off horizontal stabilizer and a hole in its starboard wing, keels over before crashing. LEFT: Sailors in port get a close-up view of the destroyer USS *Newcomb*, badly damaged by four kamikaze hits off Okinawa, April 6, 1945. OPPOSITE: The American destroyer *Bush* furiously fought off a swarm of kamikazes at Kerama Retto before being sunk on June 6, 1945, with a loss of 87 lives.**

Shortly after noon, what was described as a "swarm" of Japanese planes directed their attacks on the two ships. A reported 40 to 60 enemy planes attacked both Radar Picket Station Number One and Radar Picket Station Number Three to the east, where the destroyer USS *Cassin Young* (Commander J.W. Artes, III) was stationed. Like her sister ships, the *Cassin Young* was a veteran, having already earned two Navy Unit Commendations and she was about to earn a third for her performance during the Okinawa campaign.

By 3 PM the USS *Bush* had shot down two planes and driven off two more that made runs at her. Then another plane came in low over the water. Commander Westholm opened fire with all guns, including the 5-inch main battery. The plane weaved and dodged, barely keeping above the water as it approached. It struck the *Bush* between the two smoke stacks amidships, and its bomb exploded in the forward engine room, killing every man there.

Two fire rooms suffered equally. A 4,000-pound engine room blower was hurled so high into the air that it knocked off the ship's radar antenna. Flooding quickly gave the Bush a 10-degree list, but steam escaping from the fire rooms put out the fires and power was regained using an auxiliary diesel generator.

The *Calhoun* immediately came up to render assistance, bringing along her own combat air patrol (CAP) for protection. But en route the CAP became heavily involved with many Japanese planes and soon ran out of fuel and ammunition. Although the *Bush* was dead in the water the crew expected to save her, as her wounds did not appear mortal. But the Japanese had other ideas.

Commander Wilson ordered a support vessel, the *LCS-64*, to close on the USS *Bush* and rescue injured and wounded crewmembers. As she did so, a flight of 15 enemy planes

appeared. Around 5 PM the enemy flight split up, going for both American ships. Westholm ordered about 150 of the *Bush*'s crew to go overboard for protection, trailing lines for them to hold on to as the battle began. All guns that were still able to fire opened up on the new attackers.

Meanwhile, the *Calhoun* opened fire and shot down one enemy plane. Another was set afire by the 5-inch main battery. A third went down to the same fire.

Then, seemingly out of nowhere, a fourth enemy plane was reported off the port bow. Commander Wilson ordered a hard turn to port, but it was too late. The aircraft, already burning, hit the main deck, wiping out two gun crews. The bomb exploded in the after fire room, killing everyone there. Despite the damage, the *Calhoun* could still steam at about 15 knots.

Just as Commander Wilson was getting the fires under control, three more enemy planes attacked. One was shot down. A second missed and was shot down by fire from the *Bush* and *LCS-84,* which had come near. But the third hit the *Calhoun* at the forward fire room. The bomb destroyed both of the ships' boilers. The destroyer was now dead in the water. A 4-by-20 foot hole had been blown below the waterline. The ship's keel was broken. All power and communications were lost.

Immediately the experienced and well-trained crew managed to get the fires under control. Several guns were connected to the gunnery officer using improvised communications. The wounded were treated, and the torpedoes and depth charges were being thrown overboard. Just as this last process started, the sixth attack on the *Calhoun* began.

Five enemy planes attacked the ship from three directions. With all guns locally trained because of lack of power, it took longer for the gunners to find and fire at their targets. After about two minutes of manual operation a gunner became exhausted from this stress, and relief had to be swift.

One plane was shot down. A second was hit badly but so close that it crashed onto the destroyer, spreading burning gasoline before falling overboard. Its bomb blew another hole in the ship below the waterline. A third plane was also hit and missed the *Calhoun* but went on toward the *Bush* and smashed her between the smoke stacks, nearly cutting the destroyer in two.

THE MEN OF THE *BUSH* IN THE WATER CAME BACK ABOARD SHIP AND TRIED TO SAVE HER. IT WAS HOPELESS. STILL, THE CREW FOUGHT THE FIRES UNTIL THE AMMUNITION BELOW BEGAN TO EXPLODE.

The men of the *Bush* in the water came back aboard ship and tried to save her. It was hopeless. A fourth enemy plane then hit her on the port side, starting yet another fire and killing many wounded that were being treated in the ship's wardroom. Still, the crew fought the fires until the ammunition below began to explode.

Commander Westholm hoped that the fires would burn themselves out, but soon the bow began to settle and there was no option left but to abandon ship, which was done shortly before the ship broke in two and sank at about 6:30 PM.

Eighty-seven officers and men died aboard the *Bush,* and another 42 were wounded. Landing craft support vessels rescued 246 men.

Meanwhile, Wilson's *Calhoun* was still afloat and fighting for her life. Another hit on the pilothouse and port side made little impression because of the serious damage that had already crippled the ship. The support ship, *LCS-64,* loaded with numerous survivors, had itself been hit and had to withdraw for its own safety.

With no hope of recovering control, Commander Wilson consulted his officers and decided to abandon ship. He requested that the *Cassin Young* and *LCS-84* search the area for *Bush* survivors. *LCS-87* came alongside and removed the survivors of the *Calhoun.* She was sunk by gunfire from the *Cassin Young*; lost with her were one officer and 34 men. The rest of her crew—295 men including 21 wounded—were rescued.

The agony of April 6 continued, seemingly without pause. Air strikes from both Japan- and Formosa-based planes came in all day long. The destroyer escort USS *Witter* (Lieutenant George Herrmann) was hit, losing six men. The destroyer-transport USS *Daniel T. Griffen* (Lt. Cmdr. J.A. Eastwood) was hit by a kamikaze between her two forward turrets and set ablaze. Hours of firefighting put out the blaze at a cost of 13 men killed and 45 wounded, but the ship was saved.

The destroyer USS *Howorth* (Commander E.S. Burns) was sailing off the north coast guarding the cruiser USS *St. Louis* (Captain J.B. Griggs) when both came under kamikaze attack. Several planes were shot down, one barely 25 yards astern of the cruiser.

Later, the *Howorth* was dispatched to the aid of another injured ship. Along the way she came under attack again by two groups of four planes each. Five were splashed by her gunners. The sixth crashed into the main battery director, killing nine men and wounding 14 more. Even as her damage control parties fought to get the fires under control, a seventh plane was shot down. The *Howarth* managed to make Kerama Retto unaided.

The ship that the *Howorth* was on its way to aid, the USS *Hyman* (Commander R.N. Norgaard), had been attacked by four planes while on her way to a picket station off the island of Ie Shima. She shot down three of her attackers, but the fourth crashed into the ship between the stacks at the torpedo tubes. A tremendous explosion, probably the result of torpedoes detonating, flooded the forward engine room, which had to be abandoned.

The destroyer was so severely damaged that the destroyer USS *Rooks* (Commander J.A. McGoldrick) was detailed to escort her to Kerama Retto. On the way, the ships were again attacked but not hit.

While on antisubmarine patrol, the USS *Purdy* (Commander Frank L. Johnson) was ordered to go to the assistance of the destroyer USS *Mullany,* which had been hit by a kamikaze. She arrived to find the *Mullany* dead in the water, on fire, and abandoned. Minesweepers were rescuing survivors.

Commander Johnson ordered the destroyer-minesweeper USS *Gherardi* to stand by then called for a tug. Despite a pessimistic report from the ship's captain, Johnson decided to save the stricken ship and began salvage operations. Eventually the crew of the *Mullany* reboarded their ship and managed to get her to Kerama Retto under her own power.

Not far away, a task group of six minesweepers under Lt. Cmdr. W.W. McMillen, covered by the destroyer-minesweepers USS *Rodman* (Commander W.H. Kirvan) and USS *Emmons* (Lt. Cmdr. Eugene N. Foss), were sweeping a channel between Iheya Retto and Okinawa when a large formation of Japanese planes appeared overhead.

The first plane dove out of the clouds before being detected and hit the *Rodman*'s forward deck. A bomb exploded under her superstructure, killing 16 men and wounding 20 more. Just as the crew was getting the *Rodman*'s fires under control, two more kamikazes smashed into her.

Meanwhile, the *Emmons* was on the way to aid the *Rodman* when she came under attack. She continued to circle the *Rodman,* protecting her as best she could with her own antiaircraft guns. The gunners aboard the *Emmons* were good at their jobs, and one after the other the six enemy planes fell to her fire. A combat air patrol of Marine Corps fighters appeared overhead and knocked down some 20 enemy aircraft, aided by the *Emmons*.

Despite the Marine pilots pressing their attacks even into the antiaircraft fire of the friendly ships, the *Emmons* was hit by five kamikazes in a row. Her fantail was blown off, taking her rudder with it. The forward gun was smashed, and a huge hole was blown in her forward deck. Another hit under the bridge on the port side knocked out her combat information center. Flames roared throughout the ship. Men jumped overboard to escape the flames. The last plane strafed the ship, killing crewmembers, then plunged into the already wrecked superstructure.

Fires were everywhere, ammunition was exploding, and *Emmons* developed a 10-degree list. It appeared to be settling aft. But the sprinkler system worked, as did the engines. A sixth kamikaze was shot down by the guns firing in local control. Some of the fires were brought under control. Then the port engine stopped. The senior surviving offi-

cer aboard, Lieutenant J.J. Griffin, the gunnery officer, took command.

Work continued until about 7:30 PM when a huge explosion rocked the ship from the ammunition handling room. Lieutenant Griffin ordered the *Emmons* abandoned.

Although under strafing fire from the surviving enemy planes, the minesweepers bravely went about the business of rescuing survivors. Attempts by other vessels to salvage her failed, and the *Emmons* went down under the gunfire of friendly ships.

Lieutenant Commander Foss, who had been burned and then blown overboard, spent more than an hour in the water before being rescued by one of the minesweepers. He was completely blind for two weeks but eventually recovered both sight and health. Eight officers and 53 enlisted sailors were killed or missing, and three more officers later died of wounds. Meanwhile the badly damaged USS *Rodman* managed to reach Kerama Retto under her own power.

And still the Japanese came. One target they could not ignore was the large accumulation of ammunition and fuel ships that were at anchor in the Kerama roadstead. A large group of enemy planes flew toward this tempting target late in the afternoon.

The attack began when *LST-447* (Landing Ship, Tank 447, under Lieutenant Paul J. Schmitz) was returning from delivering cargo to the Okinawa beachhead. As *LST-447* approached the roadstead, two enemy planes came at her low over the water. Immediately the LST opened fire and hit the leading enemy plane.

**BELOW: Sailors at their starboard aft battle stations aboard the USS *Missouri* brace for impact moments before a kamikaze slams into the ship at Okinawa, April 11, 1945. Nearly indestructible, the "Mighty Mo" nevertheless sustained damage and casualties, yet survived to host the surrender ceremonies on September 2, 1945. OPPOSITE: The destroyer escort USS *Witter*, shown damaged in port, was hit on June 6, 1945, by a suicide plane; deemed unrepairable, she was decommissioned.**

This pilot, evidently believing he had run out of luck, kept coming directly into the fire of the LST. Fire streamed from his tail, and more hits from the LST's machine guns could be seen ripping into the aircraft. Nevertheless, he managed to hit the ship about two feet above the waterline, and his bomb entered the ship and devastated its interior.

Within 10 minutes such fierce fires engulfed the craft that Lieutenant Schmitz passed the word to abandon ship. With a large amount of diesel oil still aboard, *LST-447* burned for 24 hours before she sank. Five men were missing and 17 wounded.

The rest of the Japanese aircraft continued on to the Kerama roadstead. An escort carrier (USS *Tulagi*) and three ammunition ships were moored just inside the southern entrance of the roadstead. The full attention of the Japanese fell upon these sitting ducks.

The first target was the *Tulagi*, but the pilot changed his mind and swerved to hit

the ammunition ship *Logan Victory.* Another ammunition ship, the *Hobbs Victory,* managed to get up steam and leave the harbor, but as she did so a kamikaze crashed the after part of her bridge. Both ships were soon abandoned by their merchant crews, although the naval armed guard remained aboard firing at the attackers.

A third ammunition ship, the Navy-manned *Las Vegas Victory* (Lt. Cmdr. W.F. Lally), was in the process of discharging ammunition from both sides into a landing craft, small (LCS), an LCT, and two landing craft, medium (LCM) when the Japanese appeared. The *Las Vegas Victory* managed to shoot down one plane that targeted her, and she was not hit. Abandoned by their crews, the other two ammunition ships were total losses. They drifted, burning and exploding, for more than 24 hours after the raid, when they were sunk by gunfire.

Shortly after 5 PM, a group of LSTs delivering supplies to the beachhead was anchored offshore awaiting its turn to land. This group, under Lt. Cmdr. J.R. Keeling, was spotted by the oncoming kamikazes and attacked. *LST-739* was the primary target, but she shot down the lead plane 200 yards from the group. In the next 90 minutes, five more were knocked out of the sky by the group and their escort of minesweepers.

Still more attacks came in during the afternoon. The destroyer escort USS *Witter,* on antisubmarine patrol, was hit at the waterline by a damaged Aichi D3A Type 99 carrier bomber, killing six and wounding another six. The ship made it back to the United States but was decommissioned as unrepairable.

The destroyer USS *Morris* (Lt. Cmdr. R.V. Wheeler) had stood by the *Witter* only to become a target herself. A Nakajima B5N Type 97 carrier attack bomber hit the ship high on the port side, blew a hole completely through her, and started fires that took more than two hours to control. Despite being repaired and sent home, the ship was declared "neither seaworthy nor habitable" and decommissioned. Thirteen of her crew had died, and another 45 were wounded in the attack.

The destroyer USS *Mullany* (Lt. Cmdr. A.R. Drea, USN) was hit by a damaged Nakajima Ki 43 Type 1 fighter plane, which crashed between gun mounts 52 and 53, started fires, and set off stored ammunition and depth charges. The ship was abandoned but assistance from a nearby destroyer and minesweeper brought the fires under control. The ship's crew reboarded and saved her. Another 30 sailors were dead and 36 wounded, and the *Mullany* could not be repaired before the war ended.

April 6, 1945, continued badly for the Americans. The *Rodman* was off the northwest coast of Okinawa when another Nakajima Ki 43 Type 1 fighter plane crashed into its port side. A conventional attack landed a bomb near the bridge. Her loss was 16 killed and 20 wounded. She could not be repaired in time to return to the war. Her partner on patrol, Foss's *Emmons,* moved to assist and came under attack.

Although Marine Corps fighter pilots knocked down most of the incoming Japanese planes, at least five enemy planes crashed into the *Emmons.* The ship was abandoned and later sunk by friendly gunfire. Sixty-four of her crew died, and another 71 were wounded. Other attacks damaged the USS *Haynsworth* (Commander S.N. Tackney)

and Royal Navy aircraft carrier HMS *Illustrious* (Captain C.E. Lambe).

Admiral Richmond Kelly Turner's staff later calculated that his Task Force 51 off the coast of Okinawa had been attacked by 182 Japanese planes during April 6, 1945. These planes had attacked in 12 distinct groups. Of this total, Admiral Turner credited 55 planes shot down to the combat air patrols, 35 to ships' antiaircraft fire, while another 24 crashed into U.S. ships. This total of 108 does not include enemy planes shot down by the aircraft and ships of Task Force 38, which was offshore protecting the beachhead at long range. Task Force 38 claimed to have shot down 249 enemy planes on April 6, 1945, including

**LEFT: The evening sky is peppered with a flurry of antiaircraft bursts from the U.S. fleet off Kerama Retto, April 6, 1945. The bright flash may be a plane exploding on the water. BELOW: Sixteen men aboard the battleship USS *Maryland* were killed and 37 were wounded during kamikaze attacks on April 6 off Kerama Retto.**

136 downed over Okinawa.

Although it was usual for each side to exaggerate the losses of the other, particularly in aerial combat, the numbers put forth by the Americans in this day's battle are not far off. The Japanese themselves admitted that 355 kamikaze planes and 341 conventional bombers were dispatched to Okinawa on April 6, 1945. Of these, none of the kamikazes returned home. There are no Japanese figures on losses for the conventional bombers.

American losses were totaled as three destroyers, an LST, and two ammunition ships sunk with cargos, while 10 other ships were damaged, including eight destroyers, a destroyer escort, and a minelayer. The total losses do not, of course, include ships like the *Witter,* which survived their attacks but were decommissioned as being unrepairable. The Japanese, on the other hand, reported kills of two battleships, three cruisers and another 50 ships sunk with a further 60 damaged.

The Japanese attacks of April 6 spilled over into the next day. A kamikaze crashed into the battleship USS *Maryland* (Captain J.D. Wilson), a Pearl Harbor survivor, killing 16 men and wounding 37. The radar picket destroyer USS *Bennett* (Commander J.N. McDonald) was hit by a kamikaze, killing three and wounding 18. She, too, wound up waiting for repairs at Kerama Retto.

That same morning the destroyer escort USS *Wesson* (Lt. Cmdr. H. Sears) was screening the fleet near Ie Shima when she was attacked by four enemy planes. The fourth came out of a cloud and exploded into her, starting the expected fires and flooding. Although the *Wesson* lost power for a while, she eventually made Kerama Retto under her own power. She lost eight killed and 25 wounded.

Although the kamikaze attacks would never completely stop during the Okinawa campaign, the 19 hours between noon of April 6, 1945, and the following morning worried the American naval commanders. Admiral Raymond A. Spruance, commanding U.S. naval forces, praised his men for their efforts at repelling the Japanese, and was quick to notify his commander in chief, Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, that he needed help. The losses in planes and pilots were disturbing, and Spruance was concerned that it could become critical if these attacks continued.

Spruance asked that replacement pilots and planes be expedited to his command even if other obligations in the Pacific had to be reduced accordingly. There was concern that the number of screening ships, destroyers, destroyer escorts, minesweepers, and others, would be dangerously reduced if the attacks continued in such strength. Losses such as those suffered on April 6, 1945, could not be sustained for long.

One aspect of Operation Ten-Go that did not particularly disturb the American command was the surface-based kamikaze operation launched in concert with the air

strikes. On April 6, the last remaining major warship of the Imperial Japanese Navy set sail for Okinawa. This was the *Yamato*, the largest battleship in the world at the time. Like her sister ship the *Musashi* she weighed 62,315 tons with standard load, 69,998 tons fully loaded. The battleship was 863 feet long and 127 feet wide with a draft of 32 feet. She could sail at a speed of 27.5 knots and had a range of over 7,000 nautical miles.

In 1945, the *Yamato* carried a crew of 3,300. Her greatest threat lay in her armament. She carried the largest weapons ever placed on a battleship, 18.1-inch guns weighing 162 tons and set in triple turrets weighing 2,774 tons. Each gun fired a projectile weighing 3,219 pounds. From these huge guns the *Yamato* could fire 1.5 rounds per minute.

The *Yamato* also carried four triple turrets containing 6.1-inch guns, which were intended to augment a weak antiaircraft defense. When these were proven inadequate, two of the turrets were removed. Antiaircraft protection was provided by a dozen 5-inch guns in six twin mounts. There were also two dozen 25mm guns in eight triple mounts and four 13mm machine guns mounted on the bridge tower.

Additional protection was provided by her 16.1-inch-thick vertical and 7.9-inch horizontal armor plate. Theoretically capable of outgunning any ship in the United States Navy, her career thus far had been unremarkable. The *Yamato* had fought in the Battle of Leyte Gulf, where the *Musashi* had been sunk by American aircraft. *Yamato* had sustained only minor damage and made no significant contribution to the battle. Despite taking on 3,000 tons of water and developing a five-degree list, she made it home without difficulty.

The *Yamato* remained in harbor for the rest of 1944 and into 1945. While in harbor at Kure, on March 19, 1945, she was hit by a single bomb dropped during an American air raid on Japan. Attacks such as this evidently convinced the Japanese that they could not protect the battleship much longer.

Combined with the major attack planned by the Army and Navy Air forces, the surface navy believed that they had to make some contribution to Operation Ten-Go. That contribution was the *Yamato* and a small fleet of supporting warships.

Grandly titled the Surface Special Attack Force and commanded by Vice Admiral Seiichi Ito, the *Yamato* (Rear Adm. Kosaku Ariga) set sail on April 6, accompanied by the light cruiser *Yahagi* (Captain Tameichi Hara) and eight destroyers

The plan was for the ships to attack the American fleet off Okinawa and then to beach themselves and act as an additional artillery battery for the Japanese Army troops on the island. All involved understood that this one-way mission was suicidal. The "fleet" had no air cover and was sailing against an American fleet with dozens of aircraft carriers.

The Japanese warships were quickly spotted by the submarine USS *Hackleback* (Lt. Cmdr. Frederick E. Janney) off the coast of Kyushu. Steering west-northwest, they left the lighthouse at the southernmost point of Kyushu intending to circle around Task Force 58 and strike Okinawa late on April 7. But with the early warnings of their submarines, the

**LEFT: Men aboard the escort carrier USS *Tulagi* watch as a kamikaze strikes *LST-447* near Okinawa, April 6, 1945. Fortunately, the LST was empty when attacked. BELOW: The Essex-class carrier USS *Hancock* burns after being struck by a Japanese suicide plane off Okinawa, April 7, 1945. A TBM Avenger is visible above the ship (arrow). The ship survived. OPPOSITE: The world's largest battleship at the time, the *Yamato*, explodes in a massive cloud after being savagely attacked by U.S. Navy carrier planes north of Okinawa, April 7, 1945.**

## THE *YAMATO* OPENED FIRE ON THEM SHORTLY AFTER NOON, BUT THE FRIST TWO AMERICAN BOMBS HIT THE GIANT BATTLESHIP AT 12:41 PM, AND FOUR MINUTES LATER THE FIRST TORPEDO SLAMMED INTO HER HULL.

Americans were ready and waiting.

Vice Admiral Marc A. Mitscher commanded Task Force 58's Fast Carrier Force. Flying his command flag on the carrier USS *Bunker Hill* (Captain G.A. Seitz), he had no intention of letting the Japanese get that close to either his fleet or the troops on Okinawa. After receiving two submarine contact reports, he ordered all four of his task groups to a launching position northeast of Okinawa. Search planes began scouring the sea for signs of the approaching Japanese.

Shortly after dawn on April 7, a search plane from the carrier USS *Essex* (Captain C.W. Wieber) found them southwest of Koshiki Retto. Admiral Spruance contacted Admiral Deyo and said that he could attack if he wished. Eager to be in at the kill, Deyo led a force of six battleships, seven cruisers and 21 destroyers toward the enemy, keeping his ships between the Japanese and Okinawa. As he took off to find the enemy, Deyo received word that the aircraft of Task Force 58 had found the enemy and were attacking.

Admiral Mitscher had not waited for Spruance or Deyo. As soon as he was satisfied that he had the position, speed, and course of the enemy, he began dispatching his aircraft to the enemy's location. Some 280 aircraft, including 98 torpedo bombers, raced north to strike the enemy.

The *Yamato* opened fire on them shortly after noon on April 7, but the first two American bombs hit the giant battleship at 12:41 PM, and four minutes later the first torpedo slammed into her hull. For the next two hours the Americans unceasingly attacked the dodging battleship and its consorts. The destroyer *Hamakaze* was hit early and sank first. Soon after, the light cruiser *Yahagi* was hit by both bombs and torpedoes and went dead in the water.

Five torpedo hits on the port side of the *Yamato* caused her to slow and begin flooding. More torpedoes hit, and at least 10 bombs blew apart the upper decks. Wireless signals were lost, and flags had to be used. By mid-afternoon she was reduced to a state of complete confusion with her huge guns inoperable because of the list and only a few antiaircraft guns still firing.

At 2 PM the final attack began. More bombs and torpedoes hit *Yamato*. The list increased to 35 degrees, and the ship could not maneuver. Twenty minutes later the deck was nearly vertical and the battle flag was touching the waves. A series of internal explosions began.

Finally, at 2:43 PM, the giant battleship *Yamato* slid beneath the waves. With her went the *Yahagi* and the destroyers *Isokaze, Hamakaze, Asashimo,* and *Kasumi*. Of the *Yamato*'s crew of 3,200 officers and men, only 23 officers and 246 men were rescued by the surviving destroyers. Another 446 men were lost aboard the *Yahagi*. Hundreds more perished aboard the destroyers. American losses were 10 planes and 12 men. It was one of the most lopsided victories in American military history.

In terms of permanent ship losses to the U.S. Navy, April 6-7, 1945, would stand as the worst day in its history. At Pearl Harbor the Navy had permanently lost two battleships (USS *Arizona* and USS *Oklahoma*), two destroyers (USS *Cassin* and *Downes*), and one auxiliary ship (USS *Utah*). At Okinawa on April 6-7, 1945, it permanently lost 10 warships. Six of these were sunk outright (*Bush, Calhoun, Emmons, LST-447, Hobbs Victory,* and *Logan Victory*). Four other ships (*Leutze, Morris, Newcomb,* and *Witter*) were so badly damaged that they could not be repaired and were scuttled or decommissioned. Eight ships, including the *Mullany* and the *Defense,* suffered major damage and casualties.

The kamikaze attacks would continue throughout the Battle of Okinawa. Even as the victorious pilots of Task Force 58 celebrated their victory, a kamikaze plane threw itself into the carrier USS *Hancock* (Captain R.F. Hickey), killing 72 men and wounding 82.

But the crisis had passed with the valiant 19 hours of April 6-7, 1945. The U.S. Navy had come to stay. □

A German soldier, killed during a firefight, lies dead and ignored as two 507th PIR paratroopers (with helmet covers made from parachute silk) talk with a trio of 90th Infantry Division soldiers on June 9, 1944. This is the only known photo of 507th paratroopers in Normandy.

All photos coutesy of the author.

THE D-DAY MURDERS OF SEVEN CAPTURED AMERICAN PARATROOPERS REMAINS A WAR CRIME THAT HAS YET TO BE SOLVED.

BY MARTIN K.A. MORGAN

# MASSACRE AT HÉMEVEZ

*When we remember the 13,000 paratroopers and glider infantrymen who contributed so significantly to the hard-won success of June 6, 1944, we tend to remember the stories that leave us with something to admire. Extreme heroism, decisive leadership, and noble self-sacrifice give us reasons to believe in the greatness of a generation who went to France that summer to be a part of its liberation.*

*It is also important to remember that the battle in Normandy could be brutal—that lives could be brought to an end by the kind of ferocity that is not always associated with the war in northern Europe. For some U.S. paratroopers, the bitter end was neither glorious nor redemptive. For some, June 6, 1944, brought a violent end in an action that few have ever heard of.*

*The following story relates what happened to eight U.S. paratroopers on June 6. This is the story of eight men who only lived through the opening hours of France's liberation. What happened to them simply slipped into obscurity. This is the story of the massacre at Hémevez.*

Shortly before 11 PM on Monday, June 5, 1944, C-47 #42-92382 took off from the airfield at Fullbeck, near Grantham in Lincolnshire, 109 miles north of London. It was but one of the 45 C-47s making up Serial 26 of Mission Boston, the airborne movement of the U.S. Army's 82nd Airborne Division to Normandy for D-Day.

Once all 45 aircraft had assembled after takeoff, the formation flew southwest over the city of Bristol and from there due south toward Weymouth and the isle of Portland. The C-47s of Serial 26 then flew into the gathering darkness over the English Channel. On board #42-92382 were four aircrewmen from the 303rd Troop Carrier Squadron, 442nd Troop Carrier Group, in addition to a "stick" of 15 paratroopers from the Headquarters Company of the 1st Battalion, 507th Parachute Infantry Regiment.

For the aircrew, the mission that night was simple: navigate to Normandy's Cotentin Peninsula and drop the 15 paratroopers over Drop Zone T—an open expanse of flat prairie three miles northeast of the town of Ste.-Mère-Église. But as C-47 #42-92382 droned across the Channel, the paratroopers on board the aircraft had no idea that they

were about to be misdropped.

At about 2 AM, the aircraft of Serial 26 turned southeast onto a heading that avoided enemy antiaircraft concentrations on the islands of Guernsey and Alderney. Fifteen minutes later, the formation crossed the Norman coast near Pointe Du Rozel north of Carteret and began the final approach to the drop zone.

Up to that point the weather conditions had been practically ideal, but then the C-47s entered a dense fog bank. So, during the last few minutes before the jump, right when the flight crew needed visibility the most, they lost it.

As C-47 #42-92382 pushed deeper into the obscuring cloud cover, it began to drift off course. But this was unknown to the stick's jumpmaster, 2nd Lt. Robert W. Shutt, as he had the men stand up, hook up, and complete a last-minute equipment check.

It was then that jumper #12, Private Tress B. Balch, inadvertently opened his reserve parachute inside the aircraft. Because of this, he would not be able to jump. At 2:44 AM, Lieutenant Shutt and the 13 other paratroopers on C-47 #42-92382 threw themselves out the jump door and into the predawn blackness of D-Day.

They came down, not on Drop Zone T, but on a field four miles to the northwest—a field just outside the village of Hémevez. Lieutenant Shutt quickly assessed the situation as soon as he was on the ground and recognized immediately that they were in the wrong place because, rather than having hundreds of other 1st Battalion/507th paratroopers around them, they were alone.

Making matters even more complicated, Shutt was made aware of the fact that not everyone from his stick made it through the jump unscathed: Corporal Fred G. Wondell and Private Robert G. Watson had both sustained injuries on landing. While Watson was able to limp on his lightly injured ankle, Wondell was in much worse shape.

He had landed in a tree, then fallen, broken his pelvis, and could be heard moaning in agony. Two of the other troopers from the stick helped him out of his parachute harness, removed his equipment, and administered morphine.

Lieutenant Shutt quickly decided to move the men into a nearby wooded area. It wasn't big, only 250 by 200 feet, but it was enough to get the men some cover and concealment. Once the move was complete, Shutt counted heads and confirmed that 12 of the 14 men who jumped were present. He ordered the men to spread out along the tree line to guard against being surprised by the enemy.

Shutt then picked three men—Private Ashton Landry, Pfc. Paul Moore, and Pfc. Charles Wright—and ordered them to go on a patrol to determine their location. A farmhouse could be seen 750 feet away to the northeast, so Shutt instructed the men to go there, make contact with the residents inside, and ask for directions.

The patrol left the wooded area shortly before daybreak, crossed a hedgerow-enclosed field, and, just after sunrise, reached the farm, which is called Le Castel. At the front door, 22-year-old Private Landry knocked while announcing that he was an American. A native of Westwego, Louisiana, Landry grew up speaking French first and English as his second language.

The lady of the house, Madame Brisset, and her daughters eventually came to the door and excitedly described that a German headquarters was only a kilometer away. They warned Landry that German foot patrols regularly passed and searched the farm and that they would be in great danger if they stayed.

Just then, the distinct sound of German hobnailed boots was heard approaching. Without hesitation, the youngest daughter motioned for the three paratroopers to follow and then led them into the barn where they quickly took up hiding places. The sound of the hobnails grew louder for a few more tense minutes but then began to fade as the enemy troops moved on.

After passing Le Castel, the 12-man German patrol proceeded another 150 meters south, left the road, and moved west down the length of the hedgerow leading to the woods. Lieutenant Shutt saw them coming, so he moved everyone (except, of course, the badly injured Corporal Wondell) into a creek ditch running along the western edge of the treeline and prepared for a fight.

The German patrol entered the woods from the east and walked up on Wondell almost immediately. They pointed their weapons at him, and their noncommissioned officer started asking questions. Although it was in German, Wondell could understand the basic gist of what he wanted to know: Are you wounded? Where are you wounded? Is there anyone else with you? Where are they?

As these questions were being asked, Shutt and the others opened fire. The Germans

**Left to right: Private Anthony J. Hitztaler was murdered at Hémevez on D-Day by a bullet to the nape of his neck. Elsworth M. Heck was captured after the brief firefight in the woods and was one of the men taken back to the woods and executed. Second Lt. Robert W. Shutt was not murdered at Hémevez but was killed while attempting to escape in Rennes on July 6, 1944.**

**ABOVE: 82nd Airborne Division paratroopers strap on their gear at an airfield in England before the Normandy jump. RIGHT: The barn at Le Castel where Private Ashton Landry, Pfc. Paul Moore, and Pfc. Charles Wright concealed themselves while the German patrol passed just minutes before the firefight in the woods on June 6.**

reacted quickly to contact by keeping up a steady fire as they began to spread out in the woods and move their submachine guns around the flank of the American paratroopers.

Bullets struck the ground around Wondell and zipped over his head in the trees. Then one of Shutt's men lobbed a hand grenade at the enemy, but it exploded in a tree close to Wondell and showered him with branches and leaves. German grenades were thrown in response, and as the Americans attempted to shield themselves from fragments and return fire, their opponents began to envelope them.

Within just a few minutes the German squad had worked its way around both of Shutt's flanks and overrun three of his men in brutal hand-to-hand combat. One of the three was the trooper with the injured ankle: 23-year-old Private Robert Watson. An attacking German soldier clubbed him with a rifle butt and knocked him to the ground. As he lay face down, he was apparently struck in the back of his head several more times with a rifle butt, crushing his skull.

A similar fate fell upon 24-year-old Pfc. Daniel B. Tillman—except that he fell on his back as the enemy clubbed him over and over again just above his right eye. The third man, 31-year-old Private Andrew W. Kling, was shot in the heart, bayoneted in the chest, and then struck in the head so many times by a rifle butt that the entire top of his skull collapsed.

Just as the firefight reached this grisly apex, the paratroopers stopped firing, and one of them waved a white handkerchief, marking the end of the battle.

Back at Le Castel, Landry, Moore, and Wright had just slipped away from their hiding place through a gate behind the barn, and they were about to continue their mission when they heard the gun battle erupting. Rifle fire, bursts from a submachine gun, and the reports of exploding hand grenades came from the direction of the woods.

The three men rushed down the narrow lane running from Le Castel to the farm at Le Val just as the guns quit firing, and from there they could see what was happening. From a distance of 100 meters, they looked on as the Germans rounded up, disarmed, and searched four of their squad mates. The men had their helmets off, and their field gear had been removed.

Landry, Moore, and Wright briefly discussed the possibility of firing on the Germans but could not do so out of the danger of hitting their comrades. They could see that the men were not being mishandled in any way and in fact the Germans actually returned their personal possessions—paybooks, money, letters from home, and even cigarettes. The trio then watched as Lieutenant Shutt and the others were led away, with four of the men carrying Corporal Wondell.

The prisoners were then marched a half mile to the Chateau d'Hémevez, where the Germans who captured them turned them over to a major by the name of Gustav Felix. As the officer in charge of the German 709th Static Division's supply depot, Major Felix began interrogating the U.S. prisoners inside an underground concrete bunker that had been built on the chateau's front lawn.

He started the questioning with Lieutenant Shutt, and then, after about an hour, the enlisted men were taken down into the bunker. Corporal Wondell had been laid down in the grass near the entrance to the dugout/bunker and remained conscious during part of this time. He remembered there being a large number of German officers around, none of whom spoke English.

One of them was obviously a medical officer because he conducted a cursory examination of Wondell's injuries and then gave him a cup of water so that he could swallow a morphine tablet. After that, the corporal's memory became foggy and imprecise.

At 7:30 AM, a German Schwimmwagen (amphibious vehicle) arrived and took Shutt and Wondell away. Wondell ended up in the German field hospital in nearby Orglandes, and Shutt ended up, for the time being, as a prisoner of war in Rennes.

Soon after they were gone, the four remaining enlisted men were marched down the length of the chateau's carriage road by four German guards. At the end of the driveway, their guards directed them to turn right and proceed north along the road leading to Le Castel.

By coincidence, 40-year-old Pierre Renault was on his way to work at Le Castel at the same time. He rolled up to the intersection of the Le Castel-Vaulaville roads on his bicycle just as the prisoners were marching by. As he passed them, Renault got a long look at the

faces of the American prisoners. He then pedaled onward another 100 meters, stopped, and looked back at the soldiers.

Renault then watched as the Germans marched the Americans through a cattle gate leading into the field immediately to the east of the wooded area where the firefight had unfolded only two hours earlier. As soon as the soldiers were out of sight, he continued on to Le Castel and went to work.

The time was 8 AM, Tuesday, June 6, 1944, and Renault had just begun chopping wood when he heard gunshots from the direction of the woods.

For reasons that remain unclear to this day, the Germans took the four enlisted paratroopers—Privates Robert E. Werner, Delmar C. McElhaney, and Anthony J. Hitztaler and Pfc. Elsworth M. Heck—to the spot where they had


**ABOVE: This aerial photograph shows locations critical to the story of what happened at Hémevez on D-Day, including the village itself, Le Castel, Le Val, and the woods where the paratroopers were murdered. LEFT: The bodies of Heck, Hitztaler, Kling, McElhaney, Tillman, Watson, and Werner have just been uncovered in this frame from Sergeant Thomas J. Maloney's motion picture footage of the U.S. First Army Inspector General's investigation at Hémevez on June 22, 1944.**

been captured earlier that morning and shot them all in the back of the head.

The Germans apparently intended to leave an impression that the four Americans had been killed with the others during the dawn gun battle because the bodies of the victims were dispersed in the woods near where they had all become prisoners.

That afternoon at 3, a Hémevez resident named Leon Lequartier entered the woods to collect kindling for a fire and quickly stumbled onto the bodies of the dead American paratroopers. He then rushed back into the village and reported what he had found to the mayor's assistant, M. Emile Lainé. Lequartier then escorted Lainé to the woods to show him the scene of the crime.

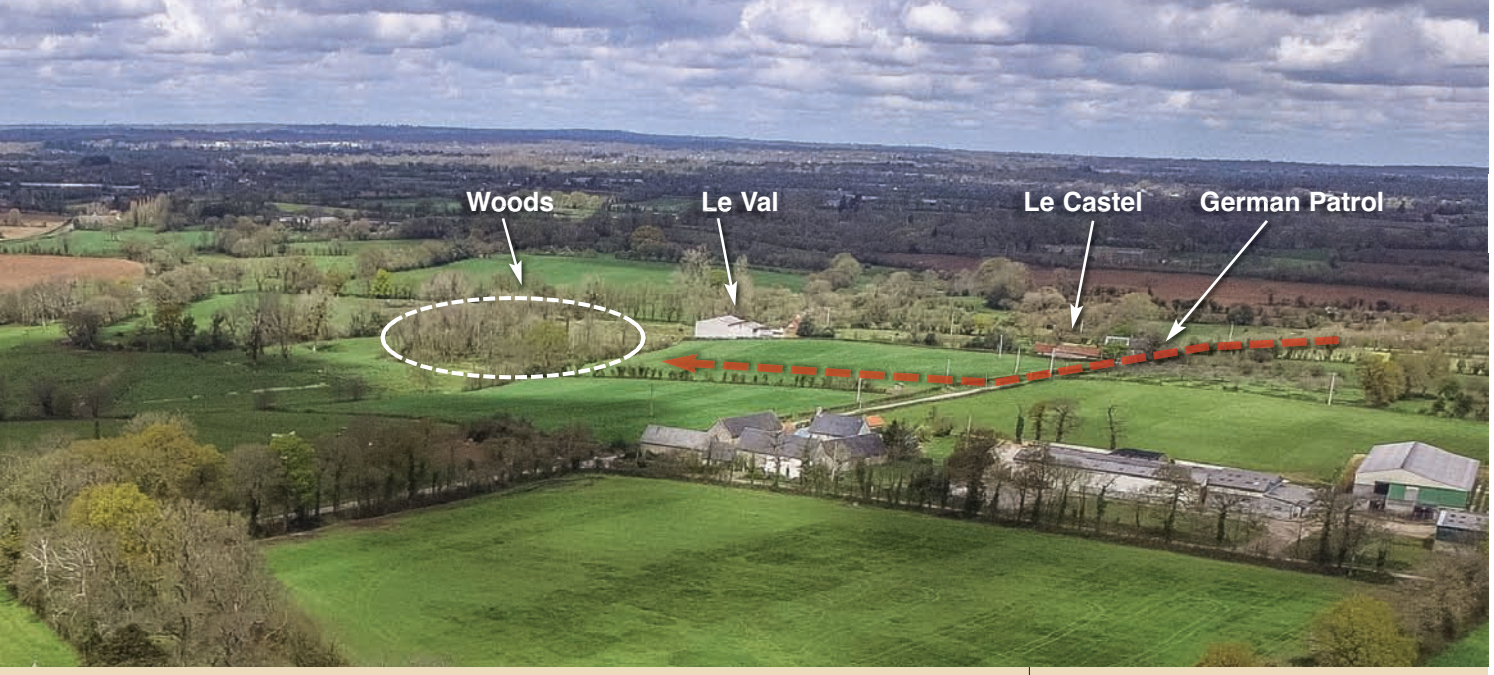
When the two men returned to the village, Lainé was given a message from Major Felix at the chateau instructing him to bury the bodies that evening. He decided that this would be done in the cemetery of the village's Église Notre-Dame and immediately set out to assemble as many of the men from the village as possible to carry out the task.

As soon as the village men had gathered, one team was put to work digging a common grave at the church, and one team went with M. Lainé down to the woods to recover the seven victims. He also sent for the Curé (parish priest) of nearby Urville so that a proper blessing could be offered during the burial. The bodies were soon delivered to the church cemetery in a wagon, at which time Lainé was careful to make sure that they could be identified.

Each American had two dogtags, one of which was left with the body tied to its left wrist. Lainé took the other dogtags back to his home and deposited them in a safe place. He also collected each man's personal effects. Then, shortly after 6 PM on D-Day, the seven paratroopers were buried together in a brief but dignified funeral service.

The following morning, Lainé was informed that another dead American paratrooper had been found. The body was at the end of the carriage road leading to the chateau, and it was under the guard of two German soldiers. Dogtags identified the man as Private John Katona—a rifleman from C Company, 507th Parachute Infantry.

Although Katona was from the same regiment and battalion as the seven paratroopers who had been killed the previous morning, he had not been in the woods with them; his death appeared to be the result of combat rather than murder. Since the mass grave




from the day before had already been sealed, workers dug a separate grave nearby, and Private Katona was buried alone in it.

During the next 10 days, Hémevez remained occupied by the Germans as the U.S. Army's VII Corps fought an intense maneuver battle to cut off the Cotentin Peninsula. Although located only 12 miles from Utah Beach, it wasn't until June 17, 1944, that U.S. forces reached the village.

When they did, M. Lainé turned over the dogtags and personal effects belonging to the eight Americans buried in the church cemetery. Furthermore, he told them that the paratroopers had been captured, disarmed, and executed. This revelation set in motion a process that ultimately resulted in this episode being documented in a unique way.

Just five days later, on Thursday, June 22, a team from the U.S. First Army's Inspector General Division came to Hémevez. It included personnel from VII Corps headquarters, the 603rd Quartermaster Graves Registration Company, a translator, and a pair of photographers from the 165th Signal Photographic Company: one shooting stills and the other shooting motion picture footage. Since a war crime had been reported, the photographers were there to document every step of the investigation.

They went first to the woods where the brief firefight and the executions took place during the morning of June 6. Once there, a thorough search was conducted of the entire area by soldiers from the Graves Registration Company—a search that quickly identified the exact spot where each of the seven paratroopers fell.

They then marked each spot—A, B, C, D, E, F, and G—with pages from a pocket notebook and the motion picture camera operator, Sergeant Thomas J. Maloney of the 165th Signal Photographic Company, filmed it all. Then, using soldiers from the First Army as stand-ins, they staged a reenactment of the scene that Pierre Renault witnessed shortly before 8 AM on D-Day when four German executioners marched Werner, McElhaney, Heck, and Hitztaler through the cattle gate and across the field to the woods where they would be murdered.

From there, the investigative team moved into the cemetery to recover the bodies, and Sergeant Maloney continued filming. The team started with the single grave of John Katona, the C Company 507th paratrooper who was killed in combat elsewhere and later brought to Hémevez. After uncovering his body, it was removed from the temporary grave that the French prepared for it on June 7. It was then placed on a stretcher so that it could be examined by Colonel Rosser L. Hunter, First Army Inspector General, and Captain Theodore F. Wright, U.S. Army Medical Corps.

After that the team excavated the mass grave containing the remains of the seven paratroopers from the Headquarters Company of the 1st Battalion/507th who were buried during the evening of June 6. Since there had been no time to build proper caskets, the French simply laid the bodies at the bottom of the hole, inserted three crossbeams, and then covered them over with wooden planks.

One by one, the bodies were exhumed, placed on stretchers, and closely examined by Captain Wright. Every man's wounds were then recorded in close detail: Pfc. Daniel Tillman's skull was crushed above the right eye, Private Robert Werner was shot in the right cheek by a bullet that produced a large exit wound in his forehead, and Private Anthony J. Hitztaler was shot in the nape of the neck.

The wound to Private Delmar McElhaney's head was so gruesome that the French covered his face with a handkerchief when they moved him from the woods to the church cemetery. That handkerchief was still present when his body was exhumed, and it covered a massive exit wound just above his left ear and the entry wound behind his right ear from the bullet that caused it.

Private Robert G. Watson, the paratrooper who injured his ankle during the jump on D-Day, was found to have a cranial crush wound behind his left ear from being beaten by his murderer's rifle butt while collapsed face down in the woods. Pfc. Elsworth Heck was shot behind the right ear as well, and the

wound was pointed out for the camera using an M3 trench knife.

The body of the final victim, Private Andrew Kling, was the focus of special interest because of the extensive wounds it received at the hands of the enemy. Pierre Renault provided an eyewitness description for Colonel Hunter through his translator. He was especially animated in his description of recovering Kling's body, which had suffered a gunshot wound under the left shoulder blade, a bayonet wound in the chest, and a devastating cranial wound.

With the work of examining the eight bodies at an end, they were carried out of the church cemetery on stretchers one after the other. Then they were placed on a truck and trailer belonging to the 603rd Quartermaster Graves Registration Company and driven 10 miles to the village of Ste-Mère-Église, where they were buried in the first of the two temporary U.S. military cemeteries located there.

**ABOVE: Pierre Renault (right), who saw the paratroopers being taken into the woods to be killed, talks with Colonel Rosser L. Hunter (standing, left), June 22, 1944. A portion of the church at Hémevez is visible behind the group. LEFT: The body of a murdered paratrooper is removed from the mass grave at Hémevez, June 22, 1944. The villagers buried the Americans as carefully as they could, believing they would be reinterred after American forces arrived in the area. OPPOSITE: The bodies of the eight slain paratroopers are placed in a weapons carrier and trailer belonging to the 603rd Quartermaster Graves Registration Company for the 10-mile journey to the village of Ste-Mère-Église, where they were buried in a temporary U.S. military cemetery.**

But the investigation into the Hémevez Massacre did not end with the exhumation and reburial of the eight 507th paratroopers on June 22. Six weeks later, Colonel Hunter was back in England, and he traveled to Kingston Lacy, near Wimborne in Dorset, to visit the 106th General Hospital.

Corporal Fred Wondell, the paratrooper who broke his pelvis during the jump on D-Day, was there recovering from his injuries. The Germans had taken him from Hémevez to a field hospital at Orglandes on June 6. From there they transported him to the city of Valognes, and eventually on to the hospital in Cherbourg, where he was when U.S. forces liberated the city at the end of June.

Colonel Hunter interviewed Wondell at length about what happened at Hémevez, and he described his treatment by the Germans as having been "extremely considerate." Wondell was not mistreated, and he did not see or hear anyone else being mistreated. Although it was unknown to Colonel Hunter at the time, Wondell was the sole survivor from the group of men taken prisoner because 2nd Lt. Shutt was shot and killed by the Germans while attempting to escape on July 6, 1944.

Nevertheless, all three of the men who were sent on the dawn patrol on June 6—Private Ashton Landry, Pfc. Paul Moore, and Pfc. Charles Wright—had survived the Normandy campaign and were therefore able to testify.

On November 1, 1944, an official court of inquiry was established. Six weeks later, on December 14, the court convened at the mayor's office in Hémevez. For two days, testimony was heard from Landry, Moore, and Wright, but the opening of the Battle of the Bulge on December 16 put the proceedings on pause.

When the court reconvened on Saturday, January 13, 1945, Pierre Renault and Emile Lainé testified. The court also interviewed Ashton Landry again on January 16 but then adjourned to review the evidence and prepare the final report.

When that document was published on March 7, 1945, it found that there was no evidence indicating that any of the dead paratroopers had done anything to deprive themselves of the privileges and immunities they were entitled to as prisoners of war.

The court also found that the killings at Hémevez violated the Geneva Conventions of 1929, and therefore constituted murder, but justice would not be forthcoming. As the war

approached its inevitable conclusion, no defendants could be found to stand trial for the crime and, for that reason, the case was closed.

Only the German officer who was in charge of the supply depot at the chateau was identified: Major Gustav Felix of the 709th Static Division. During interrogation he denied ordering the executions and blamed it on non-Germans from another unit. No one else was ever identified, and no one was ever placed on trial.

(Author's note: My suspicion is that Major Felix ordered the men shot under the authority of Hitler's so-called "Commando Order" of 1942. Since that was an illegal order, the shootings at Hémevez constitute murder. The First Army Inspector General could find no evidence that Major Felix ordered the executions, and Major Felix certainly did not confess, so the matter was closed with no charges being filed or convictions being ordered.)

The final report relating to the Hémevez Massacre, which included interview transcripts, maps, diagrams, and photographs, was eventually forwarded to the headquarters of General Bernard Law Montgomery's 21st Army Group. That is because, at the time the crime was committed, the U.S. 12th Army Group had not yet been established and so U.S. troops in Normandy were under Montgomery's command.

However, the motion picture footage that Sergeant Maloney had filmed of the exhumations on June 22, 1944, returned to the United States and eventually reached the National Archives and Records Administration. For over five decades that footage remained there but entirely out of context with the story associated with the village. In fact, the name "Hémevez" was not listed in either the finding aids or the reel of film itself.

The bodies of all eight 507th paratroopers who lost their lives at Hémevez on D-Day remained buried at the Ste-Mère-Église Number 1 temporary cemetery until 1948 when they were exhumed for a second time and moved to the U.S. Military Cemetery on the bluff above Omaha Beach near Colleville-sur-Mer.

Then, during the early 1950s, the U.S. government offered the families of the war dead from World War II the option of either leaving their loved ones buried in overseas cemeteries or having them returned to the United States at government expense.

During this time, Daniel Tillman's body returned to North Carolina, Elsworth Heck's body returned to West Virginia, Robert Watson's body returned to New York, and John Katona's body returned to Ohio.

The families of the other four Hémevez victims—Anthony Hitztaler, Robert Werner, Delmar McElhaney, and Andrew Kling—chose to have them buried in France, the country they came to liberate. Their temporary burials were thereafter converted into permanent ones in the new Normandy American Cemetery, which was dedicated in 1956. The four of them remain there to this day.

The village that honored the fallen U.S. soldiers with proper burials in June 1944 continues to honor their memory after more than seven decades. A sign on the cattle gate that leads down to the woods where the murders took place reads:

*Passant, souviens-toi ...*
*Le 6 juin 1944, 7 Parachutistes américains du 507e Régiment d'Infanterie, de la 82e Division airborne—fait prisonniers—furent conduits en cette endroit (bosquet de la Sauderaie), choisi par les allemands comme théâtre de leur barbarie.*
*Ils y furent fusillés!*
*Ces 7 martyrs sont morts pour la France. N'oublions jamais....*

("Incidentally, remember ... June 6, 1944, 7 U.S. Paratroopers of the 507th Infantry Regiment of the 82nd Airborne Division—captured—were taken in this place (grove of Sauderaie) and chosen by the Germans for an act of barbarism. They were shot there! These 7 martyrs died for France. Never forget....")

But the reason these U.S. paratroopers were "chosen by the Germans for an act of barbarism" remains a mystery. Why would they extend "extremely considerate" treatment to the seriously injured Corporal Wondell but then ruthlessly murder the lightly injured Private Watson?

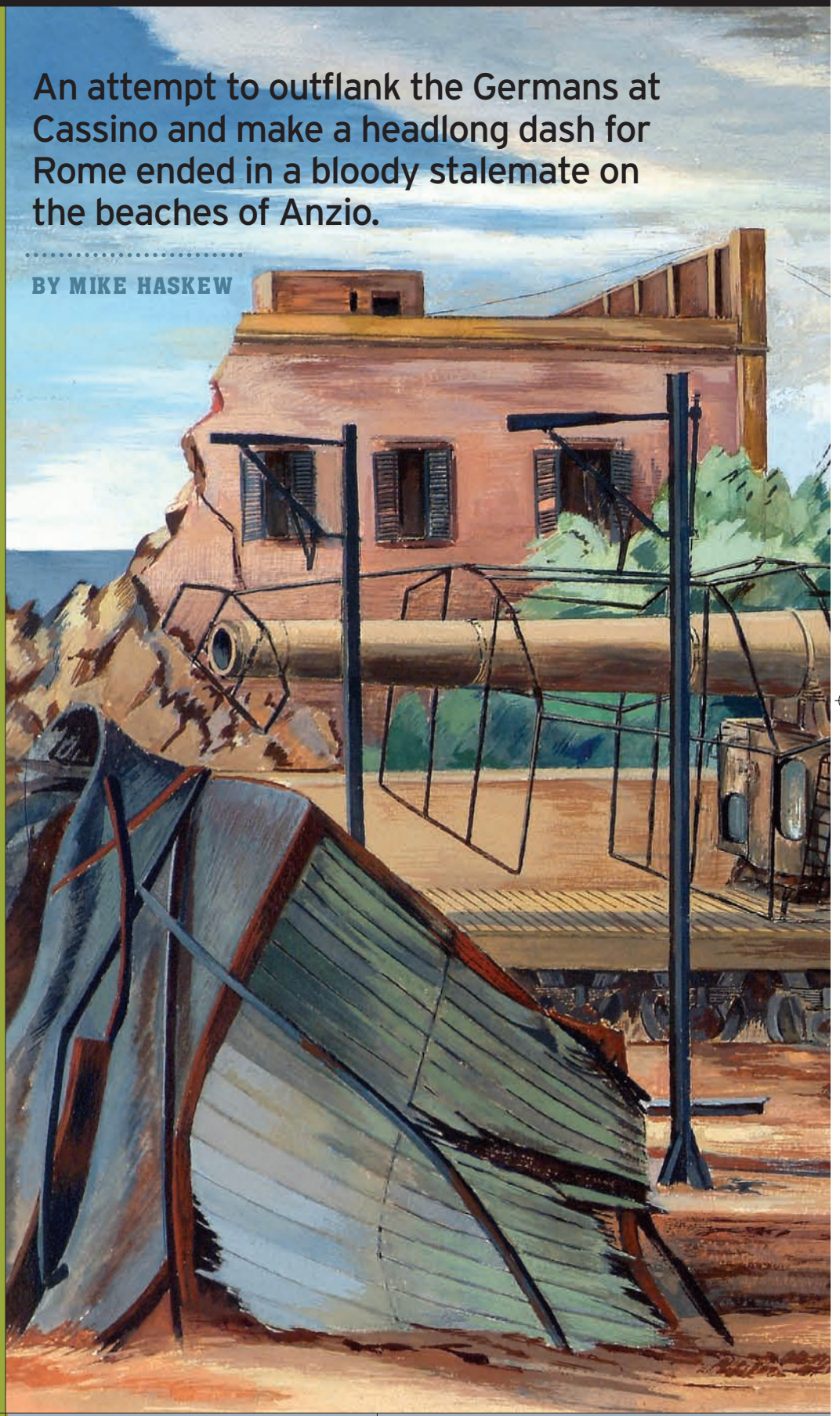
Why were Tillman and Kling savagely beaten to death when other men nearby were taken prisoner? Why would they take Lieutenant Shutt away for further interrogation but then execute Werner, McElhaney, Heck, and Hitztaler?

American paratroopers were being captured all around Hémevez on June

*Continued on page 98*

## An attempt to outflank the Germans at Cassino and make a headlong dash for Rome ended in a bloody stalemate on the beaches of Anzio.

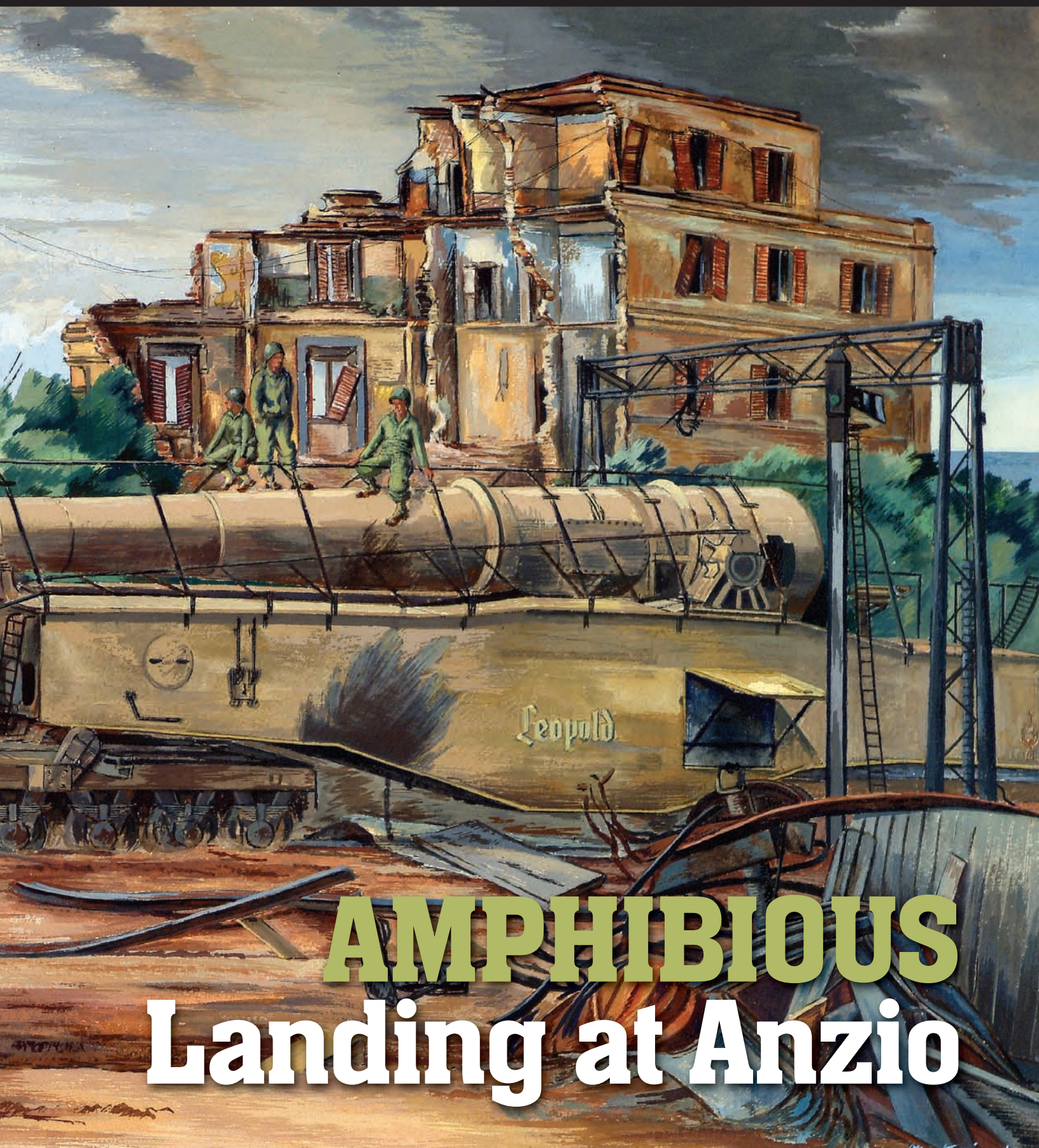
BY MIKE HASKEW



AS the last days of 1943 slipped away, World War II in Italy ground to a miserable stalemate. Below the eminence of Monte Sammucro, the town of San Pietro lay in ruins, its destruction so thorough that surviving civilians rebuilt their homes some distance away, leaving the heaps of rubble as mute testimony to the ravages of war. "For 17 days, we had existed on the peak," wrote one disheartened American soldier, "in freezing weather, constant rain, icy winds and inconceivable danger. In all that time we had never washed our hands or shaved, and had managed to get our boots off three times. Lice were eating the hide off our bodies and desperation was eating out our hearts."

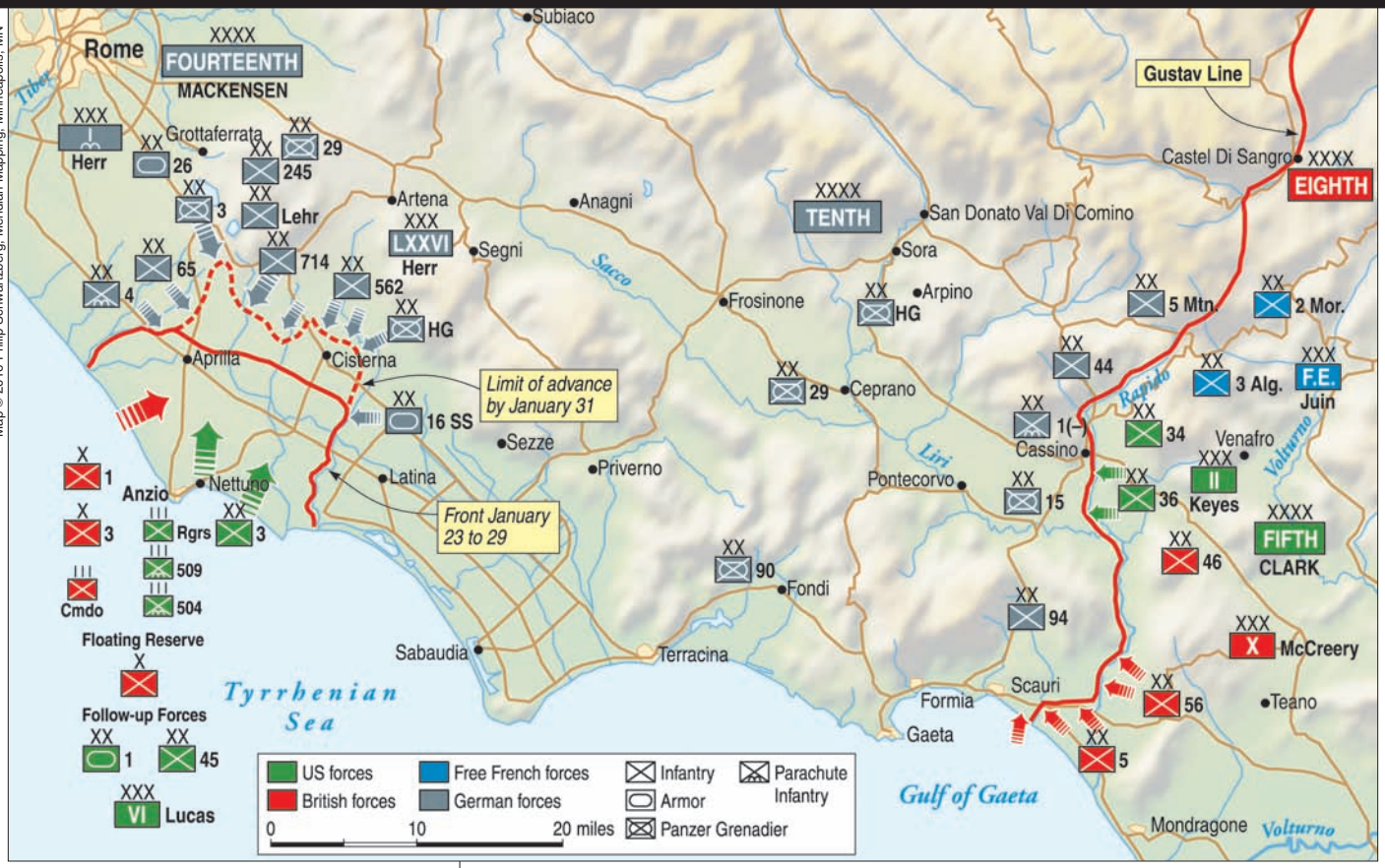
The desperation among the ranks was also being felt on a strategic scale as the agonizing Allied advance toward Rome proceeded at a snail's pace. The majority of Allied resources had been earmarked for England and eventually the Normandy invasion, while the Italian campaign was rapidly becoming a backwater. By mid-December, the offensive of General Mark Clark's Fifth Army had bogged down. The 36th Division had lost 150 dead, 800 wounded, and 250 missing during the fight for San Pietro, which commanded the approach to Rome along Highway 6. To the east, the British Eighth Army, under General Sir Bernard Montgomery, remained stalled before the Nazis' Gustav Line defenses north of the Sangro River around Ortona.

Taking full advantage of the rugged Italian terrain, Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, commanding German forces in the Mediterranean, had personally overseen the construction of three fortified defensive lines, which collectively came to be known as the Winter Line. The first two lines, named Barbara and Bernhard, were considered formidable enough for delaying actions only. But Kesselring, having convinced Adolf Hitler that a firm stand south of the Eternal City was preferable to a general withdrawal to the Alps and abandoning Rome to the Allies, intended to hold tight




# AMPHIBIOUS
# Landing at Anzio

U.S. Army Art




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

at the Gustav Line, 12 miles north of the Bernhard Line. General Hans Bessel, an engineer with great talent, had overseen the construction of bunkers, machine gun and artillery emplacements, and the location of minefields along the Gustav Line. A number of ingeniously devised mobile strongpoints, which could be occupied quickly to take on the advancing enemy and then towed to other danger points, had also been built.

Significant changes in the Allied command structure in the Mediterranean had taken place as 1943 waned. On November 18, General Geoffrey Keyes and the headquarters of the U.S. II Corps arrived from Tunisia. Keyes had taken tactical command of the 36th and 3rd Divisions, the former replacing the latter in the line. On January 8, 1944, General Dwight D. Eisenhower formally assumed his duties as Supreme Commander, Allied Expeditionary Force, and departed for England to direct Operation Overlord. General Sir Henry Maitland Wilson, a Briton, was elevated to Eisenhower's former post as Mediterranean Theater commander, while General Jacob L. Devers, an American, was to serve as his deputy. Montgomery also left the Mediterranean, taking command of the 21st Army Group in England, and was succeeded by General Sir Oliver Leese as commander of Eighth Army. British General Sir Harold R.L.G. Alexander remained in command of the Allied 15th Army Group in Italy, while Clark would continue to lead the Fifth Army.

Discussions concerning an amphibious landing to outflank the German Winter Line defenses had been ongoing, and as early as November, Eisenhower had considered sending troops ashore at the resort city of Anzio, 35 miles south of Rome. English Prime Minister Winston Churchill was in favor of such an undertaking, and its prospects for success were addressed during the high-level conferences at Cairo and Tehran. Eisenhower harbored lingering misgivings about the endeavor, however, and did not actively pursue its planning. "There was a lack of decisiveness in the preparatory work for the Anzio attack," Eisenhower wrote, "an attack which was to be executed after my own connection with the Mediterranean should be terminated. I learned that the individuals who would bear final responsibility felt some hesitancy in making decisions because my assignment had not yet been officially concluded. Therefore I instantly abandoned the plan for returning to Africa and recommended to General [George] Marshall that prompt action be taken to terminate my connection with the theater and to place all authority in the Mediterranean in the hands of General Wilson."

The British accession to command in the Mediterranean and the continued grinding pace of offensive action against the Winter Line revived the planning for the Anzio landing, code-named Operation Shingle. Subsequently, it was scheduled for January 1944. Although it had once appeared that an amphibious operation to outflank the Gustav Line and drive for Rome had been canceled for good, the stillborn Operation Shingle was rapidly revived as a result of the restructuring of command in the Mediterranean

with a distinctive British perspective. Well aware that the window of opportunity for a notable success in Italy was rapidly closing, Churchill departed the conferences at Cairo and Tehran decidedly pessimistic about the prosecution of the war on his favorite front.

Physically exhausted, the prime minister was diagnosed with pneumonia on December 11 while in Tunis to visit with Eisenhower. During a week in bed, Churchill worried that something must be done to energize the Mediterranean campaign. The solution, he reasoned, was the long-delayed amphibious operation. His sights set squarely on the capture of Rome, Churchill cabled his chiefs of staff on December 19 that "the stagnation of the whole campaign on the Italian Front is becoming scandalous."

The availability of landing craft was essential for the execution of an amphibious operation, and twice the deadline for the removal of these scarce vessels to England had been postponed. After lengthy discussions with senior commanders, Churchill sent a telegram to President Franklin D. Roosevelt requesting that the craft be made available in the Mediterranean until February 5. Without them, he warned, "the Italian battle will stagnate and fester on for another three months. If this opportunity is not grasped, we must expect the ruin of the Mediterranean campaign of 1944."

Roosevelt agreed to allow 56 transports to remain, partly due to the fact that Churchill admitted he had already set the plan for Anzio in motion. On Christmas Day, shortly after Churchill's conference with his generals concluded, Alexander contacted Clark and informed him that Operation Shingle was to proceed. Roosevelt's decision had been qualified with an insistence that other landing craft due to arrive in the Mediterranean via the Indian Ocean would instead be diverted directly to England and that a number of others should be released as scheduled. Churchill had agreed at Cairo and Tehran that nothing should be done to interfere with the timetable for the Normandy invasion and a complementary landing in southern France, and Roosevelt tersely reminded him of that agreement.

Clark reconsidered his opposition to Anzio and gave his support, while he also assumed command of Seventh Army from General George S. Patton, Jr., who was transferred to England. Clark was also responsible for the planning of the invasion of southern France, which was initially called Operation Anvil (later Operation Dragoon). The demands of planning two amphibious operations in the Mediterranean threatened once again to cause the cancellation of one or the other. However, Clark voiced no strong opposition and was willing to move ahead with both.

The risks of Operation Shingle were obvious. A force of approximately two divisions was to be landed at Anzio, 35 miles south of Rome. The last natural defensive barrier before Rome, the Alban Hills, was 20 miles inland. The hills would have to be seized either by the Anzio landing force or by the Fifth Army, which would be required to breach the Gustav Line at Cassino and drive northward to link up with the force at Anzio. Compounding the concern was the fact that the advance positions of the Fifth Army were 70 miles from the beaches at Anzio. Furthermore, each offensive thrust was dependent, it seemed, on the success of the other. Failure of one was likely to result in the failure of both.

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VI Corps headquarters, under General John P. Lucas, was to command Operation Shingle. The landing, scheduled for January 22, was to be undertaken by the U.S. 3rd Division, the British 1st Division, and detachments of U.S. Army Rangers, elements of the 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment, and British commandos. Altogether, the assault force would total 40,000 men. Some planners expressed concern that the force was too small to

**BELOW: American troops stream ashore from their landing craft to expand the beachhead at Anzio. RIGHT: Lieutenant General Lucian Truscott succeeded Mark Clark as commander of the U.S. Fifth Army. OPPOSITE: With Allied forces bogged down along the Gustav Line in Italy, an amphibious landing was mounted at Anzio, 35 miles south of Rome, to outflank the Nazi defenders.**

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succeed in its assigned task. Clark wrote in his diary, "We are supposed to go up there, dump two divisions ashore with what corps troops we can get in, and wait for the rest of the Army to join up. I am trying to find ways to do it, not ways in which we can not do it. I am convinced that we are going to do it, and that it is going to be a success."

The lure of Rome during the winter of 1943-1944 was intoxicating to Allied leaders, particularly Churchill and Clark. The liberation of the Eternal City might well strike a blow to Axis morale and provide a boost for the war-weary people on the home front. But at what cost? Although the Fifth Army had not reached Frosinone in the Liri Valley, the plan was ordered to proceed. Both the Rapido and the Garigliano Rivers would have to be crossed while soldiers on the heights of Monte Cassino and Sant'Ambrogio, which overlook the Liri Valley, would threaten any troops below. Still, Clark believed that his river crossings would force the Germans to send troops to the south and, at the very least, give the troops at Anzio an easier time.

When Lucas was informed that the Anzio operation was to proceed, he had immediate misgivings. "I felt like a lamb being led to the slaughter," he confided in the pages of his diary. "This whole affair has a strong odor of Gallipoli." He was referencing the disastrous World War I employment of Commonwealth forces against Ottoman Turkey in 1915, an operation ostensibly undertaken to relieve pressure on the faltering armed forces of czarist Russia. During months of protracted fighting along the coast of the Dardanelles, Allied troops had been cut to pieces before eventually being withdrawn. The champion of the Gallipoli offensive was none other than Winston Churchill, who at that time held the office of First Lord of the Admiralty. The debacle in the Dardanelles cost Churchill his job and eventually led to his ouster from the British government. He then spent the succeeding three decades painstakingly rehabilitating his political career with the baggage of Gallipoli ever present.

Eight days before Operation Shingle commenced, Lucas remained less than optimistic. On January 14, he wrote that the "Army has gone nuts again. The general idea seems to be that the Germans are licked and are fleeing in disorder and nothing remains but to mop up. The Hun has pulled back a bit but I haven't seen the desperate fighting I have during the last four months without learning something. We are not (repeat not) in Rome yet. They will end up putting me ashore with inadequate forces and get me in a serious jam. Then, who will take the blame?"

The Fifth Army's December effort to force the gateway to the Liri Valley and capture Frosinone continued in January. Clark devised a plan to accomplish his dual purposes of gaining ground and drawing forces south from the Anzio area. During the first three weeks of 1944, the British X Corps was ordered to capture Cedro Hill, which stood 500 feet high, cross the Garigliano, and secure a bridgehead at Sant'Ambrogio. General Alphonse Juin's French Expeditionary Corps replaced Lucas's VI Corps and was to attack the Cassino area from across the mountains. Success in these efforts would secure the north and south shoulders above the Liri Valley.

II Corps was to capture the towns of Cervaro and San Vittore, as well as the high ground at Monte Trocchio, Monte Porchia, Monte Majo, and La Chiaia. When these objectives had been reached, the 36th Infantry would cross the Rapido, allowing the 1st Armored Division to pass through and speed along the valley floor to Frosinone. It was hoped that the Fifth Army would achieve success rapidly enough to link up with VI Corps at Anzio.

When the British 5th and 56th Divisions launched an assault by boat and amphibious landing craft across the Garigliano on January 17, they were confronted only by the inexperienced German 94th Division, which was thinly stretched from the river to the town of Terracina, 30 miles to the north. German planners had hoped that the natural barrier of the river itself and 24,000 thickly sown mines might provide enough assistance to repulse a crossing. At 9 pm, the attack got under way, and combat engineers worked to clear the mines and mark exits on the far bank while German artillery came down steadily. It was virtually impossible to construct bridges during the first 24 hours. Nevertheless, 10 full battalions of infantry crossed the Garigliano and moved inland.

**"AN AUDACIOUS AND ENTERPRISING FORMATION OF ENEMY TROOPS COULD HAVE PENETRATED INTO THE CITY OF ROME ITSELF... BUT THE LANDED ENEMY FORCES LOST TIME AND HESITATED."**

General Fridolin von Senger und Etterlin, commanding the XIV Panzer Corps, began to realize the gravity of the situation. Bypassing Col. Gen. Heinrich von Vietinghoff gennant Scheel, Kesselring's deputy theater commander, Senger telephoned Kesselring, who immediately realized that a British breakthrough to the Liri Valley would outflank the defenses of Monte Cassino, unhinge the Gustav Line, and force a retreat of the entire XIV Panzer Corps toward Rome. Kesselring called Vietinghoff and barked, "I am convinced that we are now facing the greatest crisis yet encountered."At the risk of weakening the defenses of Rome unnecessarily, the field marshal transferred the 90th and 29th Panzergrenadier Divisions along with the I Parachute Corps to the threatened Garigliano area the next day. He acknowledged that the German 10th Army was "hanging by a slender thread."

As German reinforcements began to stream toward the threatened Garigliano area, the 5th Division had penetrated three miles beyond the river and captured the town of Minturno, while the 56th Division had consolidated a two-mile bridgehead and

advanced into the nearby hills. The initial promise, however, was soon tempered by a notable failure. On the night of January 19, the 46th Division attempted to seize the Sant'Ambrogio heights, but fierce German resistance and the swift current at the confluence of the Liri and Gari Rivers doomed the assault. Cables intended to hold rafts and ferries were swept away, and only a few British soldiers managed to reach the far side of the Garigliano. They were withdrawn the next morning.

Clark described the failure as "quite a blow," but deemed it necessary for the 36th Division crossing of the Rapido set for January 20 to go ahead as scheduled to assure that German troops were pinned down and could not disrupt the landings at Anzio two days later. The Rapido crossing, perilous due to the nature of the terrain and the certainty of heavy German resistance, was further endangered by the fact that neither of its flanks was secure. Although he had succeeded in drawing enemy troops away from Rome and Anzio, Clark was unable to fully grasp the situation. The result was tragic.

In hindsight, the disastrous attempt of the 141st and 143rd Infantry Regiments of the 36th Division to cross the Rapido appears doomed from the start. The attack began in darkness, with heavily laden troops obliged to carry unwieldy wooden boats weighing 400 pounds to the water's edge. Accurate German artillery fire took a tremendous toll, and efforts to bridge the swift current were inadequate. By daylight on January 21, only about 1,000 men of the 141st had reached the far side of the Rapido. These were soon ordered to retire. The 1st Battalion of the 143rd took nine hours to complete its crossing. By 6 PM, it was all over. A handful of those who had crossed the river managed to escape. The operation cost the 36th Division more than 2,000 casualties, with at least 450 dead. Survivors blamed Clark and labeled him incompetent. Ultimately, a congressional investigation cleared him of any charges.

On the heels of the Rapido debacle came the landing at Anzio. Operation Shingle was set in motion on January 21. Three days earlier, a rehearsal had gone badly awry, with the embarrassing result that more than 40 amphibious vessels had been lost along with 28 valuable artillery pieces and antitank weapons. It was a foreshadowing of the frustration to come. In his orders to Lucas, Clark had been deliberately vague, instructing the VI Corps commander to seize and secure a beachhead in the vicinity of Anzio and advance on the Alban Hills. On January 12, General Donald Brann, a Fifth Army staff officer, visited Lucas. Brann made it clear that Lucas's primary mission was to seize and secure a beachhead. This was the extent of Clark's expectations. Clark did not want to force Lucas into a risky advance that might lose the corps. If conditions at Anzio warranted a move to the hills, Lucas was free to do so, but Clark and the Fifth Army staff believed this to be a slim possibility.

**German soldiers man their positions on the Italian front. They were brutally effective defenders. From *Signal* magazine.**

Apparently, Churchill and Alexander believed that Operation Shingle was to be a major offensive in itself, while Clark and Lucas considered it a diversionary tactic that would cause the Germans to eventually weaken their defenses at the Gustav Line, where the Fifth Army would make the main effort to capture Rome. Regardless of the confusion, when American and British troops splashed ashore at Anzio behind a heavy naval bombardment, they achieved notable success almost immediately. Three battalions of Rangers captured the port city with hardly a shot fired, and paratroopers moved into the town of Nettuno, two miles down the coast. By the end of the first day, Allied troops had pene-

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**ABOVE: An American tank rolls uphill from the beach between Anzio and Nettuno. Allied landing craft lie offshore. The Fifth Army pushed inland to menace German supply and communications lines. OPPOSITE: A U.S. infantryman blasts away with a machine gun at German battalions trapped inside the Galleria di Monte Orso tunnel near Fondi. An American M-10 tank adds its firepower.**

trated up to three miles. Lucas bragged: "We achieved what is certainly one of the most complete surprises in history. The *Biscayne* [his headquarters ship] was anchored three and a half miles off shore, and I could not believe my eyes when I stood on the bridge and saw no machine gun or other fire on the beach."

Kesselring had been caught with his pants down. His reserves had been committed to the Garigliano, and there were practically no troops left to oppose a VI Corps advance to the Alban Hills and the gates of Rome. In the face of impending disaster, however, Kesselring did not lose his nerve. Urgently, the field marshal requested that Hitler authorize the transfer of troops from the Balkans and northern Italy to Rome. The 4th Parachute and Hermann Göring Divisions were ordered to contest any advance from Anzio toward the Alban Hills, while the 715th and 114th Divisions were coming from southern France and Yugoslavia, and the 92nd Division was activated. In addition, the Fourteenth Army in northern Italy was instructed to send elements of the 65th, 362nd, and the 16th SS Panzergrenadier Divisions to Anzio. Vietinghoff also sent the headquarters of the I Parachute Corps and elements of the 3rd Panzergrenadier, Hermann Göring, 26th Panzer, and 1st Parachute Divisions northward.

During an exhausting day, Kesselring believed he had accomplished a great deal, staving off a potential disaster and even concluding that he might contain the Anzio beachhead. Kesselring turned down a request from Vietinghoff to abandon the Gustav Line defenses since he believed that his depleted forces would have great difficulty maintaining their positions. The crisis had by no means passed entirely, and a purposeful advance by VI Corps could still have made huge gains. General Siegfried Westphal, Kesselring's chief of staff, wrote later, "On January 22 and even the following day, an audacious and enterprising formation of enemy troops could have penetrated into the city of Rome itself without having to overcome any serious opposition. But the landed enemy forces lost time and hesitated."

During the early phase of Operation Shingle, Lucas concentrated on accumulating supplies and consolidating his beachhead, which expanded to more than 10 miles. While nothing in the way of a major offensive was undertaken, it was still necessary to secure the hills just beyond Anzio. Kesselring, meanwhile, observed his forces growing in strength. Within three days, he had transferred the Fourteenth Army headquarters from Verona to take command of eight divisions assembled at Anzio, while elements of another five were en route. For Vietinghoff to regain his diverted strength, it became of paramount importance for the new commander in the area, General Eberhard von Mackensen, to launch a counterattack and eliminate the beachhead as soon as possible.

On the Fifth Army front, Clark renewed his effort to move into the Liri Valley after he received word that the VI Corps was firmly established at Anzio. Following the stinging reversal at the Rapido, Clark looked to the flanks of the valley entrance and decided to move the 34th Division across the Rapido north of Cassino and over the jagged peaks

of the Cassino Massif. With this accomplished, Allied troops would, at long last, be in the Liri Valley nearly four miles north of Monte Cassino and the Rapido.

After nearly a month of fighting, the Allied forces achieved limited gains but were unable to continue their advance. During the January battles, Keyes's II Corps sustained 12,000 casualties, while at the Garigliano bridgehead to the south, McCreery's X Corps took more than 1,000 prisoners but lost 4,152 killed, wounded, and captured in an unsuccessful two-week effort to secure an avenue into the Liri Valley from the south. Some of the support companies of the 34th and 36th Divisions—cooks, clerks, and truck drivers—had been given weapons and formed into provisional combat units.

The urgency of the situation was apparent to everyone in senior command. Although the landing at Anzio had been intended to facilitate a breakthrough and rapid movement toward Rome from the Cassino area, the Anzio beachhead itself had become imperiled. The troops fighting at Cassino could not afford to rest for long and allow the Germans to strike a decisive blow to VI Corps, a few miles to the north.

When VI Corps landed against little opposition at Anzio, Lucas faced a momentous decision. Swift movement might secure the Alban Hills and the road to Rome and bring to an end the bloody stalemate to the south. Failure in such a movement might mean the loss of the entire corps. Playing it safe might ensure that the beachhead threatened the Germans continually, and that option seemed infinitely more palatable. The ambiguity of Clark's orders was still on the commander's mind as he weighed his choices, but the clock was ticking. Lucas fatefully decided to wait nine days before launching any significant offensive against the Alban Hills, although possession of the hills was a key to sustaining the beachhead even in a defensive posture since the Germans who occupied these heights had full view of every major movement within the Allied perimeter.

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As it was, whatever opportunity may have been available was quickly extinguished by the swiftness of the German reaction to the Anzio threat. During the first three days of Operation Shingle, elements of the U.S. 3rd Division had moved to within four miles of the town of Cisterna to the northeast, while the British 1st Division captured the town of Aprilia and its cluster of abandoned collective farm buildings, which the troops had nicknamed "the Factory." Lucas believed that his consolidated beachhead was something of an accomplishment. Still, he did not rush to the Alban Hills, nor did he urge the 1st Division on toward the towns of Campoleone or Albano, which stood at the junction of the Albano-Anzio road and Highway 7, the nearest main artery into Rome. He wrote in his diary, "I must keep my feet on the ground and my forces in hand and do nothing foolish."

On January 30, Lucas finally set a coordinated offensive in motion. The British 1st Division, supported by tanks of the U.S. 1st Armored Division, quickly captured Campoleone. The armor, however, could not traverse the waterlogged ground efficiently, and the British gain was tempered by a frustrating inability to exploit it. At the same time, the 3rd Division, the 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment, and three Ranger battalions under Colonel William O. Darby were to take Cisterna and cut Highway 7. Truscott, commanding the 3rd Division, placed the Rangers at the point of his thrust, and all seemed to go well in the beginning. The Rangers crossed an arm of the Mussolini Canal at 1:30 AM, and crept along, apparently undetected, in a nearly dry irrigation ditch. As daylight approached, the Rangers had reached the outskirts of Cisterna.

When they emerged from the confines of the ditch, disaster struck. Veteran German troops of the Hermann Göring and 715th Divisions were waiting, supported by armor and well entrenched in advantageous positions. A total of 767 Rangers had set out for Cisterna. Only six returned. One battalion of the 3rd Division fought for 30 hours, reached Cisterna, and nearly cut Highway 7, but it suffered 650 casualties from an original strength of 800 in the process.

The buildup of German forces at Anzio had reached nearly 100,000 men at the beginning of February, and Mackensen initiated a week-long effort to position his forces for an offensive to eradicate the beachhead. Attacking the British at Campoleone, the Germans compelled Lucas to order a withdrawal, which was executed brilliantly although the 1st Division sustained 1,500 casualties in the process. The attackers retook Aprilia and "the Factory." Hitler railed that the "abscess" of the Anzio beachhead had to be eliminated, while Churchill was also distressed by the lack of

Allied progress. "I had hoped that we were hurling a wildcat onto the shore, but all we got was a stranded whale," he groused. Mackensen's preliminary objectives had been achieved, but his forces had taken substantial casualties and would require reinforcements before a decisive push.

At Cassino, the Fifth Army was proceeding with plans for another attempt to breach the Liri Valley defenses. This time, the New Zealand Corps, as the 2nd New Zealand and 4th Indian Divisions were collectively designated, would lead the effort. The New Zealand Corps commander, General Sir Bernard Freyberg, a combat veteran of World War I, intended to send the 4th Indian against forbidding Monte Cassino, crowned by its ancient Benedictine abbey, while the New Zealanders were to capture the town of Cassino. As a prelude to the movement of his troops, Freyberg considered it essential that the abbey be reduced by aerial bombardment. Freyberg's plan precipitated one of the most controversial decisions of World War II. Beginning at 9:45 AM on February 15, Allied planes began dropping a total of 600 tons of bombs on the abbey, inflicting some 300 civilian casualties. Elite German airborne troops took up strong defensive positions in the rubble and fought stubbornly for days before evacuating.

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While the drama at Monte Cassino unfolded, the Allied troops at Anzio were, as Lucas had predicted, fighting for their very lives. Both Allied forces, at Anzio and Cassino, had bogged down, and neither could offer much in the way of support for the other. Mackensen had gained favorable ground early in February to launch his major attack against the Anzio beachhead. On the 16th, he unleashed a powerful blow along the Albano-Anzio road, hitting the three regiments of the 45th Division, which had come ashore a few days earlier. The primary German thrust was to be carried out by the 3rd Panzergrenadier, the 114th, and the 715th Divisions along with the Infantry Lehr Regiment, a demonstration unit which had been used for instructional purposes in Germany but had never seen combat. A diversionary attack against the 3rd Division was stopped cold, but a second against the 56th Division penetrated the defensive line two miles before British reserves plugged the hole.

German artillery fire erupted all along the 45th Division's six-mile front. Those who dared to lift their heads above the rims of their foxholes were greeted by an astonishing sight: scores of Mark IV and Mark VI panzers, accompanied by thousands of men from the 3rd Panzer Grenadier and 715th Infantry Divisions, rushing at them in their ankle-length overcoats, spilling across Anzio's soggy, cratered landscape. Concentrated fire from more than 200 American and British artillery pieces joined the 45th Division infantrymen in the stand against the onrushing enemy. The German tanks were hampered, just as their Allied counterparts had been, by the seeming endless quagmire of mud. Still, the Germans pressed their attack. Some positions of the 157th Infantry were overrun, and the three regiments of German tanks and panzergrenadiers bowled into several companies of the 3rd Battalion, 179th Infantry. Casualties were staggering. Rifles, pistols, and automatic weapons added a staccato punctuation to the overall cacophony. Hand grenades exploded steadily with dull thuds, muffled by the mud. Positions were abandoned, then retaken, again and again.

For five days, combat ebbed and flowed along the 45th Division front, with the American veterans, sometimes surrounded in pockets, fighting like demons. The Allied line bent back one and one-half miles but did not crack, and the 45th Division saved the entire perimeter from collapse. Pfc. William Johnston was manning a machine gun on the 18th when about 80 Germans came straight for his position. He cut down 25 of the enemy and killed two others who crawled so close to his gun that he could not depress it to fire accurately. At dawn on the 22nd, 2nd Lt. Jack Montgomery, a Cherokee Indian from Oklahoma, knocked out several enemy machine gun nests, killed 11 Germans, and captured 32 more. Both men received the Medal of Honor for their feats.

On the first night, the untried Infantry Lehr Regiment had been chewed to pieces before fleeing the field in disarray. A number of its soldiers were among the nearly 20,000 dead and wounded the Germans had suffered in three weeks. The 45th Division had lost 400 dead, 2,000 wounded, and 1,000 missing, and another 2,500 were rendered combat ineffective due to illness or exposure.

On February 22, Clark came to VI Corps headquarters and replaced Lucas with Truscott, the former 3rd Division commander. "I thought I was winning something of

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**ABOVE: Eight-inch U.S. howitzers bombard German positions at Monte Cassino. The German position was tough to crack. OPPOSITE: An American tank crew looks over a knocked-out German armored vehicle near Itri, Italy, in May 1944.**

a victory," complained Lucas, refusing to be second-guessed about his decision at the beachhead, although the ranks of his detractors included Churchill, Alexander, and several American commanders. "Had I done so [advanced quickly] I would have lost my corps and nothing would have been accomplished except to raise the prestige and morale of the enemy," he wrote. "Besides, my orders didn't read that way."

The 3rd Division bore the brunt of the fighting during the last major German counterattack intended to dislodge the Anzio beachhead. On the night of February 29, from Ponte Rotto to the Fosso della Crocetta, the Germans attacked. Some of the heaviest blows overran a forward company of the 509th Parachute Infantry Regiment, with only one officer and 22 men able to fall back 700 yards to the main line. The positions of the 7th and 15th Regiments were assaulted by the 362nd, 26th Panzer, and Hermann Göring Divisions, supported by Mark VI Tiger tanks. Near Ponte Rotto, the 7th Regiment withstood heavy attacks, although at several points the Germans penetrated the lines and their tanks fired directly into the American foxholes. Thirty-five men of the 7th Regiment were killed on March 1 near Ponte Rotto.

The last major offensive against the Anzio beachhead cost the Germans 3,000 casualties and more than 30 precious tanks. Kesselring intended to contain the Anzio front to the best of his ability, and his artillery and Luftwaffe bombers harassed the Allied soldiers inside the battered perimeter day after day. A pair of gigantic 280mm railway guns, dubbed "Anzio Annie" and "the Anzio Express," were as psychologically demoralizing as they were physically damaging. Bloody February stretched into stalemated March along the wreckage-strewn beach at Anzio.

Alexander, for his part, had seen enough fighting on a relatively narrow front. When the weather improved, he intended to extend the pressure on the Germans with an offensive, code-named Operation Diadem, at four locations along the Gustav Line. With a breakthrough there, the Allied forces at Anzio would launch an effort to break out of the beachhead and trap the German forces. At 11 PM on May 11, Operation Diadem began with a thunderous artillery barrage. More than 1,600 guns of the Fifth and Eighth Armies barked. The entire offensive jumped off during the following two hours. Along the II Corps line, American gains were minimal. No significant breakthrough was achieved. Combined with the limited British gains on the Rapido, the first 24 hours of Operation Diadem appeared to have achieved little.

The French Expeditionary Corps, under General Juin, had fortuitously been tasked with the advance across the Aurunci Mountains. So confident were the Germans that the difficulty of the terrain would dissuade any assault rather easily that they had placed fewer troops in the area than other parts of the Gustav Line. The Algerian and Moroccan soldiers of Juin's command, however, were quite familiar with such rugged country. Within hours of their initial advance, the French troops occupied Monte Majo and raised the tricolor flag on its summit. The threat to the Germans at the Gustav Line was painfully obvious. The 71st Infantry Division had been cut in two, while the left wing of the XIV Panzer Corps was now open to attack. The potential existed for continued advance across ridges running to the northwest, and the French were positioned to attack the right flank of the German positions in the Liri Valley, giving a decisive boost to the Eighth Army just beyond the Rapido. The French might also knife into the Liri Valley and trap many of the Gustav Line defenders.

While Kesselring scrambled to reinforce the 71st Division, the British managed to throw a third bridge across the Rapido and expand their bridgehead up to 2,500 yards. Renewed attacks by elements of the American 85th and 88th Divisions were held up by entrenched defenders on high ground at Hill 109 and Hill 131, but after dark, the American troops were surprised when a subsequent advance encountered only sporadic small-arms fire. The Germans were pulling out.

On May 15, the Eighth Army succeeded in breaking through the Gustav Line in the Liri Valley. The Eighth Army advance of the 15th was followed with a joint attack against Cassino by the 78th Division and the Polish II Corps to cut Highway 6 and capture Monte Cassino. Swiftly, the German positions at Cassino became untenable, and the 1st Parachute Division was pulled out of the ruined abbey.

Hesitation on the part of the German high command, including Kesselring and Hitler in far-off Berlin, contributed to the

collapse of the Gustav Line. General Walter Hartmann, the acting commander of the XIV Panzer Corps, realized that substantial reinforcements would be necessary to contain the Allied breakthrough at three separate points. The failure of German intelligence to assess accurately the strength of the Allied armies confronting the Gustav Line defenses, coupled with the threat of another amphibious landing in the vicinity of Rome, kept Kesselring off balance. With such a slow response, it became increasingly unlikely that the Germans could maintain defensive positions south of Rome.

By May 20, the French Expeditionary Corps had punched a hole in the Hitler Line, a string of German fortifications 10 miles north of the Gustav Line. The advance of II Corps toward Anzio was proceeding at a reasonable pace, and on the 23rd the Canadian 1st Division breached the Hitler Line northeast of the town of Pontecorvo.

The situation in southern Italy was clear to the German commanders. II Corps was in position to advance smartly up Highway 7 to effect a junction with VI Corps at Anzio, while the Eighth Army was through the Hitler Line and well into the Liri Valley. The French Expeditionary Corps threatened to complete the encirclement of portions of two German armies, the Fourteenth and the Tenth, and its advance toward the town of Frosinone, astride Highway 6, might actually split the armies in two. Vietinghoff issued orders for a general withdrawal on the German southern front. The LI Mountain Corps vacated its positions opposite the Eighth Army, falling back to the north along several roads parallel to Highway 6. The XIV Panzer Corps withdrew to the Sacco River valley northeast of Pico.

During four months of agony, the VI Corps had languished within the perimeter of the Anzio beachhead. Its strength had grown from two divisions to seven. However, the beachhead was under the constant surveillance of Germans in the Alban Hills. Any appreciable movement during daylight was certain to bring down accurate artillery fire. Some Allied soldiers remember an absolute inability to move about during the day and the necessity of feeding the men under cover of darkness. Often the identities of replacements put into the line were known only vaguely to their noncommissioned officers.

Although the high hopes with which Operation Shingle had been launched in January were only a distant memory by the spring, a good measure of the scant resources available in the Mediterranean Theater had been allocated to the beachhead in preparation for the opportune time to launch a decisive effort to break out. With the forceful Truscott in command following the relief of Lucas, Alexander expected success. Clark had ordered Truscott to prepare for any of four eventual axes of attack. The one that aligned with Alexander's plan, Operation Buffalo, was to strike northeast through Cisterna to Valmontone, cutting Highway 6 and hopefully trapping a large number of German troops to the south. In this scenario, the capture of Rome would be a secondary consideration to the opportunity to deliver a crippling blow to enemy forces in Italy. Alexander had originally advocated a movement to the north, through the natural barrier of the Alban Hills, and on to Rome, but the prospect of cutting off large numbers of German troops appeared to be of greater benefit to the Allied cause. Since the two directions of attack were at least 20 miles apart, it appeared to Alexander that they could not be accomplished simultaneously.

Clark, however, had his eyes firmly fixed on Rome. He doubted that the seizure of Highway 6 would accomplish much in the way of deterring a German withdrawal over numerous secondary roads in the area of Valmontone. Clark maintained that moving on Valmontone was designed primarily to relieve pressure on the Eighth Army in the Liri Valley. Still, if Clark could make contact with VI Corps, Truscott might move rapidly northward through the Alban Hills and on to Rome. The Fifth Army commander desperately wanted American troops, not British, to capture the Eternal City. And time was of the essence. Rome had to fall before Operation Overlord, the invasion of Normandy, took place on June 6 and once and for all relegated the Mediterranean to a backwater.

Clark believed, not without reason, that an enemy force anchored on the Alban Hills posed a threat to any eastward movement by the Fifth Army. He stressed that the Alban Hills should be secured before a drive to Valmontone. Logically, it followed that if the Alban Hills, the last natural barrier south of Rome, could be taken, then Rome itself would follow. VI Corps would be the spearhead of Fifth Army's drive to take the Italian capital. Clark, like other Allied commanders and the British prime minister himself, regarded the city as the great prize of the Italian campaign. He told Truscott that it was the "only worthwhile objective" for VI Corps. Clark had only an incidental interest in the military value of the Italian capital—he wanted it because of the prestige associated with capturing it and because, in Clark's opinion, the Fifth Army had borne the brunt of the fighting and deserved the honor of capturing Rome.

On the night of May 22, the British 1st Division launched the breakout from the Anzio beachhead with a diversionary attack along the Anzio-Albano road. In the early morning hours of the 23rd, Combat Commands A and B of the U.S. 1st Armored Division launched the main attack. During the first day, the two commands crossed the railroad line to Rome and drove a mile into the defensive perimeter of the German 362nd Infantry Division. They had also reached their first primary objective, a low ridge situated north of the beachhead. The cost was 35 dead, 137 wounded, and one missing. Three soldiers, Technical Sergeant Ernest H. Dervishian, Staff Sergeant George J. Hall, and 2nd Lt. Thomas W. Fowler, received the Medal of Honor for gallantry on May 23.

The attack on Cisterna was launched by the 3rd Infantry Division at 6:30 AM. A task force led by Major Michael Paulick was assigned to cover a gap caused by necessary maneuvers between the 15th Infantry Regiment and the 1st Special Service Force. Paulick lost two tanks and a tank destroyer to German fire from a group of houses 600 yards

A GI cautiously examines a German trench along the Cisterna-Cori highway. Enemy ordnance lies scattered on either side.

beyond a bridge over the Cisterna canal. He directed three tanks on a wide arc into the enemy rear, and this concentrated fire routed the Germans. Moving ahead against light resistance, Paulick's task force advanced to within half a mile of Highway 7. After dark, a three-man regimental patrol detected the movement of about 60 German soldiers into a wooded area near a road junction. The Americans retired and passed the word up the line. An ambush was prepared, and the German force was decimated, with 20 killed and 37 taken prisoner.

Two battalions of the 15th Infantry Regiment worked their way toward the town of Cisterna. The 7th Infantry encountered difficulties with mines and stiff German resistance. The 30th Infantry also had trouble with mines, and progress was sluggish. The 3rd Division had lost 107 dead, 642 wounded, and 812 missing, and 65 had been taken prisoner. Although there had been no decisive breakthrough against German positions, Clark and Truscott were encouraged that the day's gains were significant and would lead shortly to the capture of Cisterna. Against strong opposition on the 24th, the 3rd Division surrounded Cisterna, but an attack against its north flank was unsuccessful. Supported by tanks, troops of the 7th Regiment managed to enter the town the following morning.

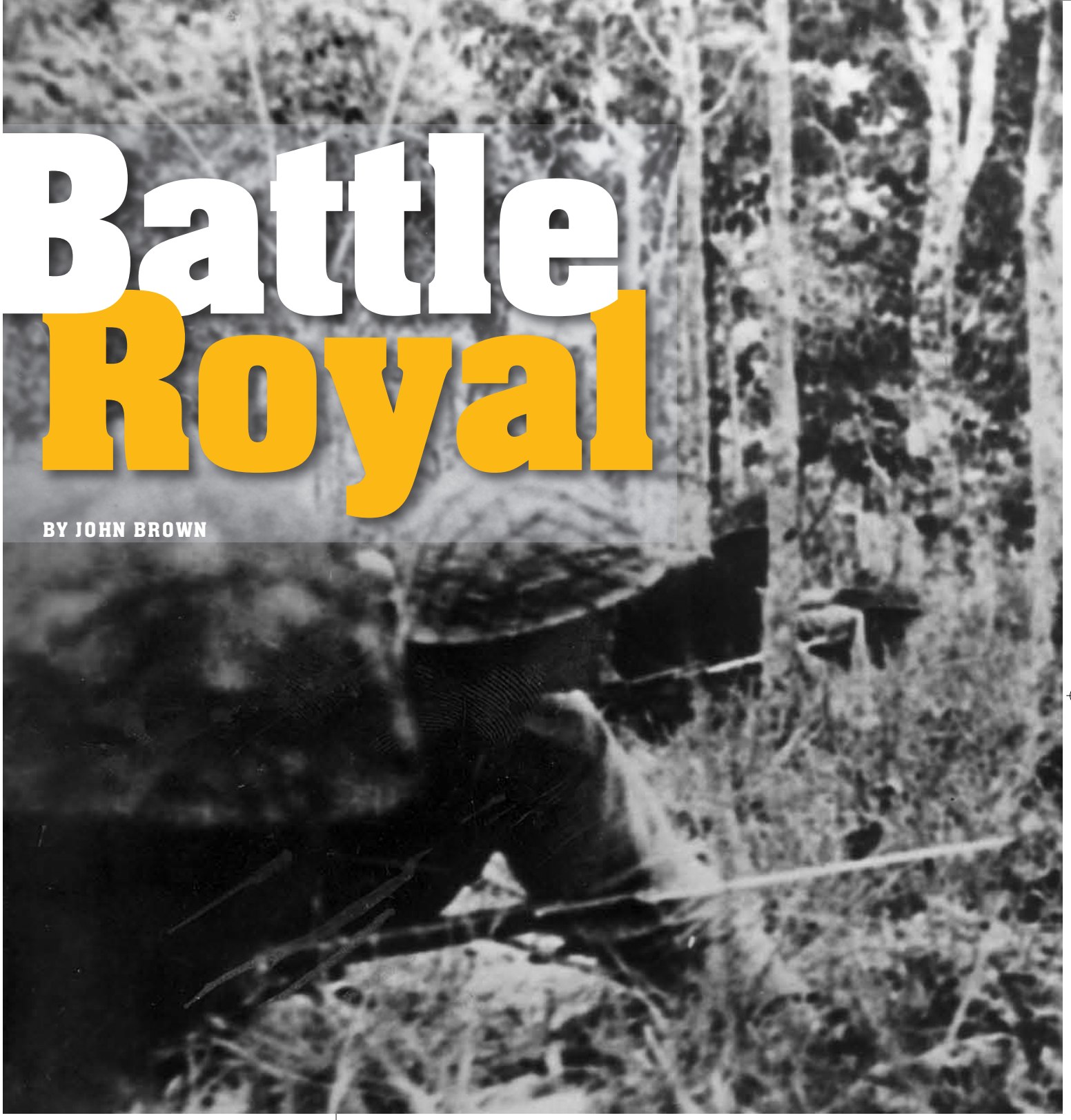
Near daybreak on May 25, combat engineers of the 36th Division, moving south from Anzio across the Mussolini Canal, made contact with an 85th Division task force. After 125 frustrating days, VI Corps was no longer isolated. Now, it was the left flank of the Fifth Army. On that same day, Clark issued a controversial order shifting the VI Corps axis of attack northwest toward Rome. While the 3rd Division and the 1st Special Service Force continued eastward toward Valmontone, the bulk of the Fifth Army—the 34th, 36th, 45th, 85th and 88th Divisions—was to drive for the Italian capital.

On the morning of June 3, Kesselring declared Rome an open city. A day later, elements of both II and VI Corps finally entered Rome, which became the first Axis capital city to fall to the Allies. Operation Diadem had succeeded in breaking the back of the stubborn German defenses in southern Italy. In a little more than three weeks, the Fifth and Eighth Armies had driven the Germans from the Gustav Line, linked up with the Anzio beachhead, and captured Rome. The price had been high. Allied casualties totaled nearly 44,000, while the Germans had suffered more than 38,000 plus 15,600 taken prisoner.

In a note of supreme irony, German forces were too weak to contest a drive to Valmontone by VI Corps, even by a secondary effort. Had Clark continued northeastward as Alexander had directed and cut Highway 6, his forces would probably have reached Rome more quickly than they did by hammering directly at the Caesar Line. As it was, German Army Group C had been battered and beaten, but it had not surrendered or been destroyed. The fighting in Italy would continue for several more months. However, after an initial splash of headlines celebrating the fall of Rome, the eyes of the world turned to Normandy. On June 6, the longest day of the war dawned on the coast of France, and the brutal if underpublicized campaign in Italy exited center stage for good. □

# Battle Royal

BY JOHN BROWN



*At the beginning of the battle for Imphal and Kohima, a Japanese Order of the Day instructed the troops: "You will fight to the death. When you are killed, you will fight on with your spirit."*

Toward the end of 1943, with the war turning against Japan in the air, at sea, and on the islands of the Pacific, the planners at Imperial GHQ in Tokyo looked for something that would give Japan a spectacular victory. They found it in a plan submitted by Lt. Gen. Renya Mutaguchi, "the victor of Singapore" and commander of the 15th Army in Burma. It was a plan for an assault on the British in northeast India.

Having recovered from their 900-mile retreat from Rangoon to the northeast border of India in the first half of 1942, the British were building up their forces west of the Chindwin River in the Indian state of Manipur for a counter-offensive to regain Burma.

## Soldiers of many nations bore four months of fierce combat at the Gateway to India.

In preparation, thousands of Indian laborers had been sent to the 600-square-mile Plain of Imphal, from which the offensive would be launched, to build roads, airfields, hospitals, and workshops. Huge amounts of weapons, munitions, and transport foodstuffs and all manner of supplies were being stockpiled.

General Mutaguchi, aware of what was going on, planned to forestall a British counter-offensive with an offensive of his own. He would launch his 15th Army across the Chindwin to seize all the transport, weapons, and supplies he needed from the British. This accomplished, he would then advance farther into India where, with the help of a division of the Indian National

**Japanese soldiers, bayonets at the ready, creep forward in their advance on Kohima. The 15th Army was meant to overrun the British supply stations and march into the heart of India.**

Army (INA), he would ignite a popular uprising against the British *raj*. Imperial GHQ approved the plan and gave it the code name *U-Go*. In addition, GHQ approved a diversionary attack on the British in the coastal Arakan region to the south of Imphal. Code-named *Ha-Go,* this attack would take place before *U-Go* and draw British reserves into the Arakan and away from Mutaguchi's crossing of the Chindwin.

West of the Chindwin, the commander of the British 14th Army, Lt. Gen. William "Bill" Slim, was aware that a Japanese offensive was in the wind. He knew from intercepted signals that the Japanese Burma Area Army was short of supplies, and references to the stockpiles on the Plain of Imphal implied that, in any attack, the objective would be his administrative installations and materiel. Owing to information gleaned from agents in Burma, aerial surveillance, and patrols, he was able to predict most of the moves of a Japanese offensive. Slim therefore decided against a counteroffensive into Burma, choosing instead to await the Japanese offensive and fight a decisive battle on the Plain of Imphal. There he would have his supplies readily available, plus room to use his superiority in armor and aircraft. The Japanese, on the other hand, being at the end of a long and insecure line of supply, would have no such advantage.

In the Arakan, *Ha-Go* came as a surprise to the two British divisions on that front, the 5th and 7th Indian Divisions. Early in the morning on February 4, 1944, Lt. Gen. Tadashi Hanaya's 55th Division, spearheaded by 6,000 elite troops of the division's Infantry Group, attacked the 7th Indian Division near the eastern end of the Ngakyedauk Pass. Hanaya's plan was to encircle the 7th, isolate it from the 5th and annihilate it, then proceed to annihilate the 5th. His first objective, however, was the capture of the "Admin Box" and its vital supplies and ammunition, located five miles north of the Ngakyedauk Pass at Sinzweya.

The Admin Box was a half square mile of dry rice fields with a central hillock about 150 feet high, surrounded by wire and mines, with bush, jungle, and hills beyond. On the morning of the attack, the only combat troops in the Box were the 2nd Battalion, West Yorkshire Regiment (most brigades in Indian Divisions included a battalion of British troops), a battalion of Gurkhas, and two tank squadrons of the 25th Dragoons. There were also six batteries of guns of various calibers. The majority of the 8,000 men in the Box were Indian laborers, administrative personnel, and others called "odds and sods" guarding the supplies.

The attack on the Box began with an unexpected bombardment from guns in the surrounding jungle and hills. Immediately following the bombardment, Japanese infantry launched a fanatical charge. Barbed wire entanglements and mines slowed the assault, while the "odds and sods" snatched up any weapons they could lay their hands on and joined the West Yorkshires and Gurkhas at the perimeter. The artillery, too, was quickly

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brought into action, firing over open sights. The attack was finally halted and the Japanese fell back into the jungle. This tactic of bombardment followed by frontal attack continued for the next 14 days and nights. Some of the attacks broke into the Box, resulting in hand-to-hand fighting. On one occasion hundreds of screaming Japanese soldiers penetrated the Box and fought their way into the hospital where they slaughtered the sick and wounded. They used the hospital staff and walking wounded as human shields, then shot them and continued fighting. Doctors were forced to attend to Japanese wounded and were then shot. Eventually all the Japanese who infiltrated the Box were killed, many by bayonets and the Gurkhas' *kukris* (small boomerang-shaped knives sharpened on the inside edge and used with devastating effect by the tough Nepalese soldiers).

No part of the Box was safe from direct or indirect fire. The wounded, lying on stretchers or waiting for attention, were often wounded again. During the night of February 9/10 a Japanese shell detonated the main ammunition dump. It went up in spectacular fashion, the light so intense it revealed the positions of many Japanese guns. These were quickly targeted and put out of action by counterfire. On February 18 the Japanese began to fade away as British reinforcements, the 26th and 36th Divisions, began moving in.

By now *Ha-Go* had fallen fatally behind schedule. General Hanaya, instead of continuing his attacks on the Admin Box, should have bypassed it and tried to capture supplies elsewhere. As it was, 5,000 of his troops lay dead in and around the Box with an unknown number in the surrounding jungle and hills. The aim of the diversion had been achieved—it drew six British reserve divisions into the Arakan. These reserves had come from India. General Slim had not been deceived by the feint and had not withdrawn any troops from the Chindwin River front.

Slim was assuming from his intelligence that the Japanese would not cross the Chindwin before mid-March, and so in February he began evacuating thousands of noncombatants—civilians, Indian laborers, and base personnel. Although his predictions of Japanese moves proved largely correct, he did not anticipate that their attack would come as early as it did.

The 200-mile Chindwin River front was covered by the IV Corps of Slim's 14th Army. The IV Corps comprised three divisions and was commanded by Lt. Gen. George Scoones, whose headquarters was at Imphal. This was a sprawl of houses, bazaars, and gilded temples with the maharajah's palace in the middle and the bungalows of the British Commissioner and the small European community on the outskirts. Most of the actual front was covered only by observation posts and patrols with two of the divisions deployed around the only two roads leading from the Chindwin to the Plain of Imphal.

The 17th Indian Division, commanded by Maj. Gen. "Punch" Cowan, was to the south around Tiddim at the beginning of a 120-mile fair-weather road leading north to Imphal. Another road ran east from Tiddim to Kalewa on the Chindwin. One hundred miles to the northeast of the 17th Indian Division was the 20th Indian Division commanded by Maj. Gen. Douglas Gracey, deployed between Sittaung on the Chindwin and Tamu toward the southern end of the Kabaw Valley, which guarded the only other road from the Chindwin to the Plain of Imphal. The third division of IV Corps, the 23rd Indian Division commanded by Maj. Gen. Ouvry Roberts, was in reserve at Imphal.

Intelligence believed that a Japanese assault across the Chindwin would concentrate on the two roads leading to Imphal. The commanders of both the 17th and 20th Indian Divisions were under orders to fall back to the Imphal plain when the direction and strength of the Japanese offensives were confirmed, thus drawing the Japanese onto the plain with them.

At his headquarters at Maymyo, a hill station 200 miles east of the Chindwin, General Mutaguchi ordered *U-Go* to begin on the night of March 7/8, some 10 days ahead of General Slim's calculated date for an offensive. That night Maj. Gen. Yanagida's 33rd Division crossed the 500-yard-wide Chindwin at Kalewa on the southern portion of the front using both crowded rafts pulled along rope lines tied to each bank and catwalks resting on small boats swung out in the current then fastened to trees on the far bank. The whole division crossed the river undetected, then split into three columns.

The first column, led by Maj. Gen. Yamamoto, with most of the 15th Army's armor and artillery, moved north up the Kabaw Valley until, on March 11, it

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**ABOVE: Two Sikhs, one with his rifle out in front of him, watch for Japanese infiltrators. OPPOSITE: Japanese infantry march past two British armored personnel carriers in their advance toward Kohima. They soon had the village cut off.**

reached Maw on the flank of the 20th Indian Division. The second column, farther south, headed for Yazagyo and Tongzang, while the third swung south and west over the mountains via Fort White. Half of this column then headed for Tiddim and Tongzang with the objective of joining the second column in blocking any retreat by the 17th Indian Division along the Tiddim-Imphal road. The other half of the third column made for Milestone 100, unobserved in the jungle-covered hills. Their mission was to block the road between the 17th Indian Division and Imphal, hold the road open for other columns that were leaving a containing force to hold the 17th in place, and then move with all speed on Imphal.

North of the 33rd Division's crossing point, Mutaguchi's 15th Division, led by Maj. Gen. Yamauchi, crossed the river a few miles north of Thaungdut on the night of March 15/16. The division then split into two columns, one swinging south to join Yamamoto's first column, which had the armor and artillery. Their mission was to contain Gracey's 20th Indian Division. The other column was to make its way on paths into the hills heading for Ukhrul with the objective of cutting the Kohima-Imphal road at Kanglatongbi.

On the same night the 15th Division crossed the Chindwin, Mutaguchi's 31st Division, commanded by Lt. Gen. Kotokui Sato, crossed upriver between the villages of Homalin and Tamanthi. It split into three columns to facilitate marching over the almost impossible razorback mountains before heading for Kohima. Beyond Kohima lay the railhead at Dimapur with its huge storage dumps through which flowed all British supplies and reinforcements from India. The country between the Chindwin and Kohima was so difficult that both Generals Slim and Scoones believed any Japanese attack in that direction could not be made with a force of more than brigade strength. Therefore, Dimapur was virtually undefended.

When Scoones heard that the Japanese attack had begun earlier than either he or Slim had expected and was proceeding much faster and in greater strength than anticipated, he immediately ordered his two forward division commanders—Cowan of the 17th Indian Division at Tiddim and Gracey of the 20th Indian around Tamu—to begin their withdrawals to the Plain of Imphal. At the same time he sent two brigades of his reserve 23rd Indian Division down the Imphal-Tiddim road with orders to keep the road open for the 17th.

Cowan, on receiving the order, delayed a day to wait for the return of some of his dispersed units. As darkness fell on March 14, he finally got the 17th on the road for Imphal. There were some 16,000 men, 2,500 vehicles, and 3,500 mules spread along several miles of road that ran through jungles and among hills rife with possible ambush positions. On March 18 the Japanese captured the supply depot at Milestone 109 not far from Tongzang and went on an orgy of drinking the British-issue rum, beer, and other liquor from the canteen stores and gorging themselves on the unfamiliar foodstuffs they found. This lack of discipline enabled the 17th Indian to get over the Manipur River and blow the bridge behind them.

The 17th Indian Division was largely composed of tough, well-trained Gurkhas. Assisted by Sherman and Grant medium tanks, they quickly smashed through three Japanese roadblocks and frustrated several ambush attempts. After a fourth roadblock had been shattered, the Japanese division commander, Yanagida, almost out of supplies and suffering heavy losses, became very depressed. He signaled Mutaguchi, implying that his position was hopeless. Mutaguchi replaced him as commander of the 33rd Division.

The 17th Indian Division's 120-mile withdrawal to Imphal, during which many actions were fought—some supported by artillery, tanks, and RAF fighters and fighter-bombers—lasted three weeks and cost the division 1,700 casualties. The two brigades of the 23rd Indian Division were sent down the road to assist them and take over the fight with the Japanese.

Northeast of the 17th Indian Division, Gracey got his 20th Indian Division on the move for the Plain of Imphal carrying all supplies possible. In danger of being encircled and cut off by Yamauchi's 15th Division column descending from the north and Yanagida's 33rd Division column circling from the south, the 20th Indian Division fought many vicious actions as it fell back toward Palel. At one point a strong detach-

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**ABOVE: Sappers clear obstructions from a barricaded bridge. The Japanese moved through back country to descend on roads and set up their blockades. OPPOSITE: Two men stand beside trenches of DIS Ridge near Kohima. In the distance is Naga Village. Intense fighting took place along this line.**

ment of Japanese troops tried to approach a crucial bridge at Sibong that was guarded by Gurkhas. The detachment had with it 40 soldiers, all over six feet tall and powerfully built, each carrying a load of 100 pounds of explosives intended to blow the bridge. The Gurkhas stopped them by setting the scrub alight around and among them with phosphorus mortar bombs. Only one or two of the detachment survived the Gurkhas' fire to disappear back into the jungle.

Gracey had no intention of allowing the Japanese within gun range of Palel where there was an important airfield on which RAF fighter and supply-drop squadrons were based. If the Japanese took Palel and its nearby supply dumps, they would have a prime starting point from which to overrun the Plain of Imphal. So Gracey fell back slowly, fighting all the way, to Shenam Hill 10 miles southeast of Palel. There the division took up positions on Shenam and the jungle-covered hills around it, which were referred to as "the Saddle." Running through the hills was a road and tracks that meandered down into the plain. At the Saddle, the 20th Indian Division would make its stand.

Perhaps the most dangerous of the three Japanese thrusts across the Chindwin was the one to the north, General Sato's 31st Division heading for Kohima and Dimapur. The division was one of the strongest in the Japanese Army with a "bayonet strength" of 20,000. The troops, who were from northern Japan, had the experience of six years of campaigning in China. They were highly motivated and aggressive, the spearhead of the "March on Delhi."

The country they moved across, however, was appalling. On the map the distance from the Chindwin to Kohima was 74 miles, but the terrain forced the division to march 200 miles. They brought with them their guns, some dragged by the crews, some slung on pack animals, including hundreds of oxen that would also serve as meat on the hoof for the troops.

At Kohima a collection of troops of various units—Assam Rifles, Burma Regiment, some Gurkhas and Nepalese—had assembled and were digging in. The only other British force in the area was the 50th Indian Parachute Brigade, composed of one British, one Gurkha, and one Indian Battalion. The brigade was commanded by 32-year-old Brigadier "Tim" Hope-Thomson, who had taken charge when it was formed two years earlier. The British battalion was later sent to the Middle East and replaced with an Indian infantry battalion. The widely dispersed brigade was on a training exercise in the Ukhrul area and unaware of the Japanese advance when Hope-Thomson received a warning that a strong Japanese force was only miles away and coming on fast.

Hope-Thompson managed to bring most of the brigade, along with two mountain artillery batteries and a field ambulance, together into a tight perimeter around the hill village of Sangshak. During the withdrawal to Sangshak one of his paratroop companies was surrounded and almost wiped out by overwhelming numbers of Japanese. The remaining paras, in an attempt to break out, made a final charge and Japanese observers saw the last man on his feet, a British officer, shoot himself in order to die with his soldiers.

Hope-Thomson radioed division and corps headquarters for defense stores, particularly barbed wire and mines, but did not receive anything. With no tools to dig trenches in the rocky ground and told to hold the position to the last man to buy time for the defense of Kohima, the 50th Indian Parachute Brigade prepared to withstand an assault as best it could. The Japanese quickly encircled them and for five days and nights the 2,000 soldiers

packed inside a 600-by-300-yard perimeter endured bombardment, continual probes, and suicidal charges from four times their number. Inside the perimeter conditions quickly became appalling. The dead—both men and pack animals—putrefied in the sun. Flies swarmed over everything and everyone, and there was little water. The staff of the 80th Indian Field Ambulance worked wonders, often shielding the wounded from further wounds with their own bodies.

By the fifth day, March 26, 18 of the brigade's 25 British officers were dead and five were wounded. The commanders of both artillery batteries were dead. Five hundred men were still alive, but only 300 were able to walk. At last light of day the brigade was ordered to fight its way out. That night, under cover of fire from artillery and machine guns, all the wounded except those on the verge of death were carried away into the hills and on to Imphal.

The southern column of Sato's 31st Division had been held up at Sangshak. The middle column made for Jessami, garrisoned by a battalion of the Assam Regiment, and the northern column made straight for Kohima. Once the Japanese intentions became clear, all outlying detachments were ordered to fall back to defend Kohima.

Kohima, a hill station on a ridge at about 5,000 feet, was the administrative center for Nagaland. There were barracks for a detachment of Assam Rifles, a jail, a hospital, and a reinforcement camp for soldiers returning from leave or on discharge from the hospital and awaiting their orders. The District Commissioner's residence, with its terraced gardens and a tennis court, had a commanding view of the road by which reinforcements and supplies reached Imphal from the railhead at Dimapur. At the north end of the ridge was a large Naga village. As the Japanese approached, the scratch defense force of the Assam Regiment, Assam Rifles, Burma Regiment, Gurkhas, and others were hastily preparing defenses, but there was no headquarters to coordinate them. There were also about 1,500 civilians, including Naga villagers, in and around the small town. (The Nagas proved to be a great help to the troops, as intelligence gatherers and as porters—men and women—carrying ammunition and other supplies up steep slopes to the troops and bringing down the wounded.)

Heading from Dimapur for Kohima to boost the defense was the 161st Indian Infantry Brigade, but it was held up by a roadblock at Zubza. Sato's troops had already reached far beyond the Dimapur side. On April 5, the British battalion of this brigade, the 4th Royal West Kents, broke through to Kohima before the Japanese cut the road closer to the town and occupied the northern portion. Their commanding officer, Colonel Hugh Richards, took overall command of Kohima's garrison. Next day a company of the 5/7 Rajputs got into Kohima, but the rest of the brigade was unable to break through and took up positions around Jotsoma three miles west. With them were three mountain batteries of 3.7-inch pack howitzers that would play an invaluable part in the battle.

When the leading Japanese troops reached Kohima on the morning of April 5, they swept around the Naga village to Jail Hill, and the siege began. The next night, strengthened as more of the division arrived, they fought their way inside the defense perimeter and captured two positions known as DIS (for Detail Issue Section) and FSD (for Field Supply Depot). The next morning the Royal West Kents counterattacked and annihilated the occupiers. More and more Japanese arrived in the following days and attacks on the defenses became almost continuous. It was then that the 3.7-inch howitzers at Jotsoma gave their invaluable help. At an average range of 3,700 yards, they broke up Japanese formations with astonishingly accurate fire. The fighting continued day and night. Lance Corp. John Harman of the Royal West Kents, with his section pinned down by heavy fire from a machine gun 50 yards away, sprinted forward and wiped out the gun crew with a grenade, then brought the machine gun back to his men. Shortly afterward he charged another machine-gun post and killed the crew with his rifle and bay-

**Soldiers of the West Yorkshire Regiment, along with Gurkhas, march on the Kohima-Imphal road.**

onet. As he was returning to his men he was mortally wounded by yet another machine gun. Just before he died, he said, "I got the lot; it was worth it."

The all-British 2nd Division of Lt. Gen. Montague Stopford's XXXIII Corps arrived at the railhead at Dimapur in early April from southern India and moved down the road to Kohima. Soon they came up against the Japanese roadblock at Zubza. Here 1st Battalion of the Cameron Highlanders attacked and smashed it with the help of guns and tanks that were winched up steep slopes. During the battle some of the Highlanders witnessed one of their sergeant majors and a Japanese officer engaged in one-on-one combat. The sergeant major won and returned with the Japanese officer's sword as a trophy.

Passing through Jotsoma, the 6th Brigade of the 2nd Division drove into Kohima. The 1st Battalion, Royal Berkshires then made contact with the Royal West Kents, relieving their positions. One of the newly arrived described the scene: "The dead lay unburied. Little squads of grimy and bearded riflemen stared blankly at the relieving troops, many too dazed to realize they were saved and too tired to believe their sleep-starved eyes." For two weeks the Royal West Kents had fought off regiment after regiment of almost a full Japanese division that had launched 25 full-scale infantry attacks supported by artillery and mortars. Thirteen of the battalion's officers and 201 men were dead, with most of the others wounded. More than 400 of the other defenders of the garrison were also dead, but the battle for Kohima was far from over.

With the road cut between Kohima and Imphal, Imphal was now also under siege. Its only link with the outside world was by air. Imphal lay near the middle of the 30-by-20-mile Plain of Imphal and was surrounded by high jungle-covered hills, their peaks providing excellent views of the plain below. From some of the summits it was only five miles to General Scoones' headquarters and about the same to the main all-weather airfield on the plain. From these peaks Japanese observers could direct artillery fire on both Imphal and the airfield. Two brigades of the 5th Indian Division now held the northern sector of the plain; in early April the RAF and USAAF had airlifted the division in from the Arakan to join IV Corps. The third brigade of 5th Indian Division had gone to the aid of Kohima.

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Northeast of Imphal the Japanese seized the commanding heights of Nungshigum, the highest peak of which stands 1,500 feet above the plain, and dug in. Several attacks were made up the only approach, a steep razorback leading to the ridge of the summit, but they all failed.

Early on the morning of April 13 artillery bombarded the Japanese positions and dive-bombers attacked. A battalion of Dogras, supported by Lee-Grant tanks of the Carabiniers (3rd Dragoon Guards), then moved slowly up the ridge on a very narrow front—one tank's width. As the tanks crawled up the crest they came under increasingly heavy fire. The tank commanders had to stand in the open hatches to guide the drivers and at the same time fight off Japanese carrying explosives who repeatedly threw themselves at the tanks or climbed on the engine decks in attempts to disable them or kill the crews. Well before the tanks approached the summit, all the tank commanders were dead. But others took their places and the attack continued.

When all the officers had been killed, Squadron Sgt. Maj. Walter Craddock took command of the tanks. Backed up by Subedar (Captain) Ranbir Singh and his Dogras, they moved on to Nungshigum summit and killed every Japanese on it and its slopes.

Troops of the 5th Indian then turned their attention to the other peaks and to the Mapao Spur, from which the Japanese could look down on the plain. They drove the Japanese off these summits in vicious, exhausting fighting. The Japanese, as always, were well dug in and fought to the death. Casualties on both sides were heavy.

Twenty-five miles to the southeast of Imphal, Gracey's 20th Indian Division was fighting its isolated battle on and around the Shenam Saddle. The battle raged over some 12 square miles of broken, hilly country crisscrossed by deep ravines and watercourses. The division held the road and tracks that led to the plain and kept the Japanese out of gun range of the air-

field and stores at Palel.

Early in April Maj. Gen. Yamamoto's Infantry Group of the 33rd Division, well supported by artillery, had made a determined attempt to smash through to Palel and for a week the battle was in the balance. But the 20th Indian yielded only a mile or so to another series of hilltops, and the battle swayed one way and another. Yamamoto hurled his battalions against British positions and hills were captured and recaptured, with shelling, bombing, and fires stripping the vegetation-covered hills bare. Higher peaks and ridges were held as observation points while fighting—large actions and small—continued on the slopes, in the ravines, and on the road and tracks between battalions, companies, and platoons.

In this sector the Japanese had with them the Gandhi Brigade of the Indian National Army, the "Jifs" (Japanese-Indian Forces), as they were called. On the night of May 2/3, a Jif battalion, which had been under observation, launched an attack that ran straight into an ambush set up by Indian and Gurkha troops. The Jifs suffered heavy casualties. Few prisoners were taken despite General Slim's order that Jifs should be treated more humanely—previously they had been shot as traitors.

In the middle of May, IV Corps commander Scoones decided that the 20th Indian, having been fighting nonstop for more than six weeks and suffering heavy casualties, could do with "a change of air." He sent in the 23rd Indian Division to relieve it. Two brigades of the 20th moved north to the Ukhrul road to take on the 15th Japanese Division while the third brigade went west to Bishenpur on the Tiddim-Imphal road. The relatively fresh 23rd Indian Division went straight into the attack, but it was well into June before Japanese pressure eased.

On the western side of the plain the two columns of General Yanagida's 33rd Division had pushed up the road from Tiddim toward Imphal. On the night of April 14/15 near Potsangbam just south of Bishenpur, one column peeled off and swung west, heading for the 300-foot-long suspension bridge over a deep gorge on the Silchar track, while the other column made a determined drive to take Bishenpur, where the Silchar track joined the road to Imphal. The Silchar track, which had a few months before been upgraded from a footpath to a jeep road, was—with the rail link at Dimapur—one of only two overland links with India. The Japanese were determined to cut it by destroying the suspension bridge. Three Japanese soldiers managed to reach the bridge and blow it up, killing themselves in the process.

Having recuperated after their long fighting withdrawal from Tiddim, the 17th Indian Division now came back to Bishenpur to take on the Japanese 33rd Division again. The foes met at the villages of Ningthoukhong and Potsangbam in a battle that quickly became a swirl of small local attacks and hand-to-hand fighting with bayonets and *kukris*. Casualties on both sides were heavy, particularly among British officers of Indian and Gurkha units (as they were in all actions) because these men were easily identified by the Japanese at close quarters.

To the north, at Kohima, two companies of the 2nd Battalion of the Durham Light Infantry joined the 1st Royal Berkshires on the slopes of Summerhouse Hill. Well dug in, they fended off Japanese attacks in what they described as a charnel house with hundreds of dead British, Indian, Gurkha, and Japanese lying around in advanced stages of decomposition. Dozens of bloated mule carcasses added to the horror. The British position on the hill was separated from a saddleback ridge by a gorge planted with panji stakes (very sharp bamboo stakes planted points up in the ground) and swept by enemy fire. It was also overlooked by a peak 100 yards away known as Kuki Picquet from which Japanese snipers operated.

On April 22, the 1st Battalion of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers joined the Berkshires and Durhams on Summerhouse Hill. They attacked Kuki Picquet, but were driven back with heavy losses. Early the next morning the Japanese attacked following a bombardment from artillery and grenade launchers. Advancing shoulder to shoulder, the first waves wore gas masks and threw phosphorus grenades. As they were shot down they were replaced by other waves throwing fragmentation grenades. The Japanese broke through the British line, but the British fell back, reformed around a company headquarters, and repulsed the attack. At 4 AM the British counterattacked, clearing the Japanese off the hill.

As more battalions of the British 2nd Division reached Kohima and more of Sato's 31st Division deployed around it, room for operating shrank. Both sides tried encircling moves in the very difficult terrain around the small township. The terrain was so difficult that the rate of movement unopposed was accepted as one mile per day, and the fighting dissolved into numerous little murderous battles. When the monsoon broke on April 27, movement became more difficult, but the fighting continued despite widespread suffering from diarrhea, dysentery, and beriberi.

Meanwhile, fighting continued day and night on the central Kohima ridge and on other ridges and peaks. On Garrison Hill the Durham Light Infantry fought off one night attack that caused such heavy losses to the Japanese that General Sato ordered a halt to any further night attacks.

At the end of April a battalion of the Dorset Regiment began fighting its way up to the District Commissioner's bungalow. The Japanese were strongly dug in at the bungalow, on surrounding terraces, and under a huge water tank. The Dorsets reached the edge of a tennis court where only 25 yards separated them from the Japanese.

To move anywhere in the vicinity in daylight meant instant death, so the fighting was conducted at night. For two weeks British soldiers of the Dorset Regiment in black gym shoes or bare feet fought in the dark using grenades and small arms, bayonets, *kukris,* and machetes in what became known as the "Battle of the Tennis Court." Then in the middle of May, a single British tank was winched up the spur at the back of the bungalow and began blasting the Japanese bunkers and defenses. More tanks and soldiers arrived and they began a fight for the ridge against the almost unbelievable bravery and

ferocity of the Japanese, who always fought to the death.

Kohima Ridge was finally cleared by a combination of troops, tanks, artillery, and air strikes, but fighting continued until the beginning of June when the tattered remnants of the once powerful 31st Division began to fall back northeast along jungle tracks toward Ukhrul. Of the "20,000 bayonets" that had crossed the Chindwin three months earlier, only two or three thousand would survive to recross the river. Thus the division's casualties were running to 90 percent. The mistake their commander General Sato had made was in laying siege to Kohima. Once he realized that he was facing a determined garrison he should have left a holding force and driven on for Dimapur. He could have easily taken it at the time, which would have been a catastrophe for the British.

To the southeast, on the road to Tiddim, the 23rd Indian Division mounted attack after attack on the Japanese 15th Division in appalling monsoon weather until well into June. The Japanese suffered cruelly and finally began retreating toward the Chindwin. One of their last acts was a raid by a small detachment that penetrated the defenses of Palel airfield and blew up a number of parked aircraft. It was a daring action, one that brought grudging admiration from their opponents, but it was a final gesture. The retreat was under way, with the Indian Division in pursuit, killing as many Japanese as they could.

On June 22, tanks of XXXIII Corps coming down from Kohima linked up with elements of the 5th Indian Division, lifting the siege of Imphal.

To the south, around Bishenpur and the Silchar track, some of the most vicious fighting of the campaign had taken place as the Japanese 33rd Division tried to break through to Imphal. The 33rd Division's losses were enormous, but its soldiers kept attacking until the monsoon completely halted their resupply. Mutaguchi then ordered the division to give up its attempt to break through and withdraw.

The remnants of the Japanese 15th and 31st Divisions regrouped in and around Ukhrul for a last offensive, but during the first days of July the 23rd Indian Division hit them hard and badly mauled them. The survivors began a retreat to the Chindwin, pursued by the 23rd as far as Tamu at the head of the Kabaw Valley. Here the newly arrived 11th East African Division took over the pursuit down the valley.

The retreat to the Chindwin was a nightmare for the Japanese troops, and little better for the British forces involved. Mists on the hillsides hindered or prevented air supply and the monsoon rains had washed out roads and turned tracks into mudslides. Rations often couldn't get through to the troops and they went hungry. Tropical diseases of all kinds were rampant, adding to the misery of the wounded. Stretcher-bearers carried them for days over awful terrain, each bearer carrying a spade to bury those who died on the journey. Elephants were used where possible to carry wounded, but at best they could move only three miles in 16 hours. As the retreat moved on at a snail's pace the pursuers saw more and more bodies of Japanese soldiers who had died of disease, starvation, or wounds. Still, many stood and fought, waiting in ambush with a grenade or a bullet to take one of their enemies with them when they died.

Some 85,000 to 90,000 Japanese had crossed the Chindwin River in March. Their casualties in the four-month battle were around 60,000, with perhaps another 20,000 dying during their retreat. Metaguchi's 15th Army was virtually destroyed. Indian-Gurkha-British losses were less than 20,000, low compared to those of the Japanese because of first-class medical services and air evacuation to hospitals.

Imperial War Museum

**Two men with a Bren gun cover a couple of buddies moving into elephant grass in search of Japanese.**

Air power had a great deal to do with the victory. The RAF and USAAF flew thousands of sorties in close support of the troops, brought in reinforcements, dropped supplies, and evacuated the sick and wounded. Tanks and artillery were also important factors. But the rockbed of success lay in the indomitable spirit and fighting qualities of the Indian and Gurkha battalions and their British officers and of their British regimental comrades. They fought and outlasted a formidable foe whose courage and endurance they would long remember and respect. □


# OFF DUTY, *German Style*

BY G. PAUL GARSON

## INFORMAL SNAPSHOTS PORTRAY GERMAN SOLDIERS AT PLAY—AND IN A VERY HUMAN LIGHT.

**TOP LEFT: Three Luftwaffe soldiers pose in Belgorod in front of one of many large directional signs that were commonplace in Russian cities. The city was recaptured by Soviet forces in August 1943, losing some 50,000 troops, while Germany lost some 20,000 men including 6,000 Hitler Youth. TOP RIGHT: A soldier has a high-end, advanced shortwave radio capable of tuning in the world, although certain stations were verboten. Nazi Germany had the densest "radio population" of any country. In great part this was spurred on by the State's program for the mass production of low-cost "peoples' radios." By 1942, of some 23 million German households, 16 million had radios, making Third Reich indoctrination by radio almost all pervasive. Hitler, rumored killed in the July 20, 1944, plot, dispelled that notion by speaking by radio to the nation. The German radio system functioned to the end when it announced Hitler's real death—the last broadcast of the Third Reich.**

War has been described as long periods of extreme boredom punctuated by brief moments of extreme terror. And, like they say, the waiting is the hardest part. The lulls in the bloodshed sometimes take on names of their own, for example, the "Sitzkrieg" or "Sitting War"—a sardonic play on Blitzkrieg, and used to describe the relatively calm interlude when the guns were silent between the end of Germany's invasion of Poland and the invasion of France.

Combatants on all sides have always found ways to enjoy, or at least cope with, the "time out" between the roller coaster of attack/defend as well as time away from the battlefront through furloughs. For the German soldier, whether posted locally to some training center or far from the Fatherland when serving at the front, he sought out and found a means for R&R of one kind or another.

From his vast collection of rare photographs, the author has pulled together a visual essay showing German soldiers candidly enjoying their brief moments of rest, relaxation, and horseplay before being thrust back into the deadly reality of combat.

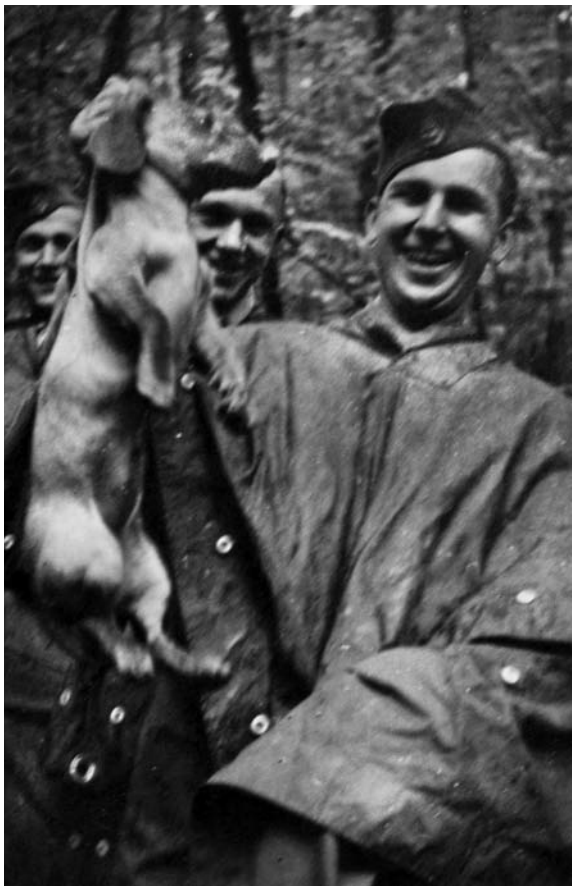
ABOVE: The Third Reich kept up a steady barrage of music of one style or another, from the constant thump of marching boots and military bands, to street recitals, to radio broadcasts of German classical music, to light romantic fare—all part of the "emotion over intellect" campaign that Nazi Party ideology promoted. A constant soundtrack engulfed citizens and soldiers with a litany of songs that also served to promote morale and military aggressiveness and whose lyrics sought to drum in Nazi political and racist propaganda. BELOW LEFT: After the 1940 invasion of Belgium, attentive German soldiers make the acquaintance of a Belgian woman in the doorway of a hotel on whose walls are posted the signs of various tourist and automobile organizations. Fraternizing with the local female population was naturally a major point of interest for young German men in uniform; however, the postwar repercussions for "collaborationist" women were often very harsh. BELOW RIGHT: A German NCO in Paris gets directions from a gendarme. German soldiers were ordered to be on their best behavior in Paris, the comfortable posting most sought after, especially after the war on the Eastern Front began. Many Germans had visited France prior to the Nazi era as welcomed tourists. As occupiers, they found the French, in great part, accommodating.



All Photos from the author's collection.

TOP LEFT: Important occasion? Although the identity of the subject is unknown because his back is toward the viewer, this German soldier is the object of attention for a photographer and an entourage of smiling friends. The formal garden setting and the dressed-up woman suggest this might have been a wedding photo and the man is the groom. TOP RIGHT: With pianos in short supply on the front line, the simple accordian—and a soldier who knew how to play it—provided musical interludes when the guns were silent and a few beers made the troops mellow and nostalgic for a "touch of home." BOTTOM LEFT: Although the faces of the soldiers appear less than festive, Father Christmas (standing, right) has brought his horse to a holiday dinner party, the table laden with bottles of wine, beer, and liquor, the walls decorated with the soldiers' artwork. Preparing for war in 1939 the German military counted some 2,740,000 men in uniform, 183,000 motor vehicles, 94,000 motorcycles, and 514,000 horses. BOTTOM RIGHT: Much to the amusement of his comrades, a soldier leaps over a bonfire while another soldier (second from left) snaps his photo. Another soldier in the background appears to be holding an accordion.


TOP LEFT: The headline for the day's issue of *Der Führer* proclaims "The Certainty of Our Victory." A wide spectrum of newspapers, tabloids, illustrated weeklies, and magazines were available to soldiers, millions of copies posted through the exceptionally efficient Feldpost service. RIGHT: During the prewar Nazi era years, German civilian consumption of beer, already one of the highest in Europe, rose by 25 percent. Beer was also a staple beverage of the German armed forces through the war years. Hitler abstained from alcohol and was known to drink distilled water. Himmler also frowned on drinking and made it a punishable offense within the ranks of the SS if taken to excess.



ABOVE: Appearing on the Eastern Front, a member of a traveling troupe of entertainers (the German version of the USO) performs on a makeshift, swastika-decorated stage. The performer is a male, not quite a female impersonator, but rather a staple of the humorous fare to which the troops were accustomed. LEFT: A soldier in a rain cape and his comrades enjoy a photo op with a Daschund who might not share their enthusiasm. Mascots were often found with field units, the animals serving to bring some emotional warmth to the brutal work at hand.

# A SCREAMING EAGLE IN BASTOGNE

A machine gunner in the 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment recalls how he and his buddies helped stop the counterattack of a desperate German Army. | BY KEVIN M. HYMEL

**"DON'T WORRY, GUYS**—the Airborne is here!" shouted Private Howard Buford to the worn-out GIs he and his fellow paratroopers passed on the snowy road through Bastogne in the early hours of December 19, 1944.

Buford, a paratrooper with the 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division, had never before been in combat, but he felt his unit was the toughest in the world and was about to teach the Germans a lesson.

The paratroopers halted at a building. "Why are we stopping?" a frustrated Buford asked his friends. They simply told him to wait. Buford and another man, who together manned a machine gun, found a foxhole and dropped in. As they set up their weapon, three German artillery rounds screamed in and exploded around them. Buford immediately lost his cockiness. When the dirt settled, he popped his head up and said, "I can go home right now!"

Home for Buford was East Los Angeles, California, where he lived in an apartment with his mother and younger sister. A high school graduate, Buford was working at the local Lockheed plant building P-38 airplane fuselages when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. He and a friend immediately tried joining the U.S. Army Air Corps, but Buford failed because he was color blind.

The Air Corps, however, was still interested in him. It wanted him to be a subject for tests to find a cure for color blindness; he submitted himself to months of tests while technicians in Santa Monica distorted his vision as they tried to cure him. Frustrated that almost all his buddies had entered the service while he served as a guinea pig, Buford left the program and tried to enlist, but his status as a defense industry worker gave him an unwanted exemption.

Buford learned that his only way into a

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Carrying blanket rolls, weapons, ammunition, and ration boxes, a group of 101st Airborne Division paratroopers return to Bastogne after a night skirmish against the Germans. Private Howard Buford received his baptism of fire helping to defend the Belgian town during the Battle of the Bulge, December 1944.

uniform was to quit his job and sign voluntary induction papers at his draft board. He did, but nothing came of it. After months of waiting, he went to the induction center and raised hell. "I used profanity," he recalled. A few days later, he arrived home to see that his mother had put his acceptance papers in front of his door. It was May 1943.

Buford volunteered for the infantry at the Arlington Reception Center, located at Camp Anza, California. "I figured it made sense," he said. "I had been hunting all my life." However, because he had scored well on the intelligence test, Buford found himself and six other inductees sent to the Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP), in Texas, where he spent three months.

The ASTP was established by the U.S. Army in December 1942 to identify, train, and educate academically talented enlisted men at colleges and universities across the country to become technically proficient officers. After basic training, Buford and his fellow ASTPers traveled to Iowa State College to study engineering. "No one ever told me I was smart," said Buford. "I just screwed off in high school." He spent his time taking test after test. "I was working so hard at it, but I was hanging on by my fingernails."

However, heavy casualties suffered in the winter of 1943-1944 caused a critical shortage of infantrymen and resulted in the ASTP program being terminated in February 1944. Anticipating much higher casualties following the planned Allied invasion of France, the War Department required more infantrymen, not engineers. In early 1944, the Army sent all ASTPers to combat units as replacements. Buford was sent to the 97th Infantry Division at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, which did not impress him. He considered the unit unfit for combat and wanted out.

Buford and some friends asked their first sergeant if they could join the Airborne. The sergeant tried to keep them from filling out their applications. Once they completed the paperwork he stalled them again from taking their physicals. They were eventually rejected because too much time had passed between the application and the physical.

Finally, when the 97th Division moved to California, Buford again asked his platoon sergeant, whom he had repeatedly pestered, if he could transfer out of the unit. "Goddammit, Howard!" the sergeant blurted out, "I'm tired of your bellyaching! I'll send you out with the next group of replacements."

The sergeant kept his word. Buford was soon sent as a replacement to New York City. After only one night there he boarded the HMS *Mauretania* for a trip across the Atlantic. The ship was so fast it did not need to travel in a convoy. Buford never saw any Allied ships close to the *Mauretania* until it neared port in Ireland in mid-September 1944, three months after D-Day. With its deep draft, the *Mauretania* could not land in France and had to dock at Liverpool in western England.

The men were then sent to a replacement depot where, the next morning, hundreds of GIs assembled before an outdoor stage. Several officers with 82nd and 101st Airborne Division shoulder patches took the stage and asked for volunteers.

"My two buddies and I rushed down there," said Buford, "and stood in line." Buford's two friends went to the 82nd Airborne, and he was assigned to the 101st—the "Screaming Eagles."

**ABOVE: Howard Buford, photographed in uniform during the war. TOP: Members of Private Buford's squad prepare for a practice jump in England prior to deploying to the Continent.**

The two American airborne divisions had distinguished themselves, albeit with heavy casualties, during the Normandy invasion on June 6, 1944, and then again during Operation Market Garden in September 1944, when they jumped behind German lines in Holland to capture key bridges over the Rhine River—an operation that ended in failure. Along with the U.S. Rangers, the airborne divisions were seen as America's elite combat troops, and Buford wanted to be a part of them.

Buford next traveled to Camp Hungerford near Reading in southern England for paratrooper training, which greatly differed from infantry training. "They're not trying to get you into shape," said Buford, "they're trying to make you quit." A cadre of six paratroopers, who seemed like body builders to Buford, pushed the men to their limit.

One of the paratroopers led the volunteers in jumping jacks. "You did jumping jacks till you thought you'd fall over," Buford recalled. Then another paratrooper would show up and put them through their next exercise. If a volunteer did not perform fast enough, the paratroopers would let him know. "Do you have shit for blood??!!" they would yell. "What's wrong with you??!!"

The volunteers went for runs on narrow paved roads for miles with a truck following. If anyone could not continue, into the truck they went. Some nights the cadre of

paratroopers would go out drinking, come back at midnight, wake the men up, and send them out running.

Sometimes an officer wearing no rank would show up and ask the volunteers a question. If anyone responded without saying "sir," the officer would shout, "Get down and give me 50 pushups!" Some men did not last long. If anyone said, "I want to quit," they were gone in less than an hour. "They got them right out of there," stated Buford.

After about a week of physical training, the men began parachute training. They started out learning how to pack their parachutes. After some jump training from platforms, it was time to leap out of real planes. A few soldiers quit during the first drop, but not Buford. "I wanted to be a paratrooper so badly, by the time I got in the plane, I wanted to go."

The jump drill was always the same: 18 men would sit in two rows of seats inside the C-47s while a sergeant stood in the open door. When the red light by the door lit up, the sergeant shouted, "Stand up and hook up!" The men stood up and hooked their static lines to an anchor line cable that ran the length of the fuselage.

Next, the sergeant yelled, "Equipment check!" and each man put his hand on the parachute pack of the man in front of him and made sure that it was packed tightly, then tapped him on the shoulder and told him it was okay. "I felt sorry for the officers," said Buford. "They were at the front."

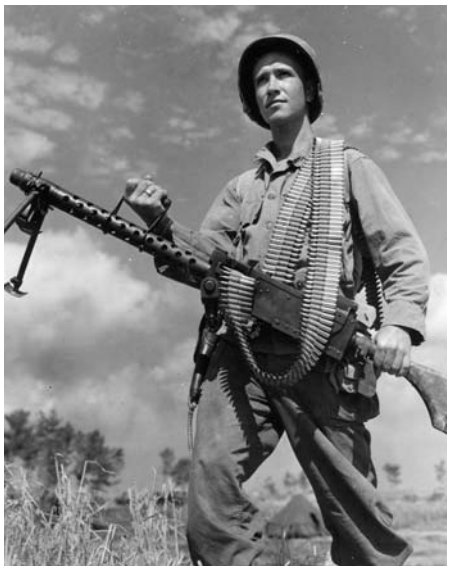
When the sergeant shouted, "Move up and stand in the door!" an officer put his hands on the outside of the doorway and looked down. "There had to be a certain trepidation," said Buford, who made the first two jumps without a problem. The third jump was the worst. "By then you had time to think about it."

Buford made his five jumps, qualified for his jump wings, and was assigned to 1st Platoon, Easy Company of Colonel Julian Ewell's 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment. He and other replacements flew to France and arrived at an old French barracks in the town of Mourmelon le Grand in late November. When the unit's veterans arrived from the fighting in Holland, Buford got along with them immediately.

Buford made friends with 34-year-old Ray Carangio, who had been a carnival boxer. Challengers could win five dollars if they could last three rounds with him.

Buford was assigned to be a crew member on a M1919A6 Browning machine gun, a belt-fed, .30-caliber light machine gun with a bipod attached to the end of the barrel and a removable rifle stock. He was teamed with a veteran of the Normandy and Holland campaigns.

On the frigid night of December 17, Buford was standing guard duty when the sergeant of the guard told him to go get



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**BELOW: A "stick" of 101st Airborne paratroopers prepares for a practice jump in England. Buford made his required five jumps before flying to France and joining Colonel Julian Ewell's 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment. RIGHT: A soldier holds a .30-caliber M1919A6 Browning light machine gun, the same type of weapon Buford was assigned to crew.**


National Archives

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**Three "Screaming Eagle" paratroopers pass a U.S. 75mm howitzer motor carriage that has been snow-camouflaged with white sheets. Once Lt. Gen. George S. Patton's Third Army reached Bastogne, Buford and his comrades received armor support.**

some sleep. Buford did, but someone woke him at 4:30 and told him to get his combat gear—they were going up to the front. Suddenly, everyone was up and scrambling for equipment. An hour later, flatbed trucks with side panels and removable tailgates rolled up to the barracks. Buford drew ammunition and climbed onto the back of a truck.

One of his friends returned from an all-night pass and climbed in wearing his class-A uniform. Another friend, from the regimental band, climbed in without a rifle. In combat, the band usually guarded the regiment's equipment, but this soldier did not want to be left behind. Men packed into the trucks until someone installed the tailgate to keep them from falling out. The trucks then took off, driving all day and into the night to reach the small Belgian town of Bastogne.

Two days earlier, three German armies had broken through the U.S. First Army lines in Belgium and Luxembourg. General Dwight D. Eisenhower, the Supreme Allied Commander, acted quickly, sending two armored divisions into the maw as well as his strategic reserve, the 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions. The 82nd would fight in the northern section of the bulge, while the 101st arrived outside Bastogne in the south.

The trucks drove the men in darkness through intermittent snow and rain, yet Buford could not recall being cold. He kept warm with long underwear, olive-drab wool pants and shirt, a winter overcoat, and jump boots. "Or maybe it was because there were so many of us in that truck," he said.

The trucks parked outside the village of Mande St. Etienne, west of Bastogne, and the men piled out. Colonel Ewell's 501st was the first element of the division to arrive, and the men headed northeast to engage the enemy while the other regiments spread out to man the perimeter.

A sergeant told the men to find a place to rest for a while. Buford lay against a tree and closed his eyes. When it got light, the men formed up and marched through Bastogne. "There were no other troops in front of us,' recalled Buford. "People were cheering and clapping as we marched through."

That's when Buford saw the worn-out infantrymen, probably from the 28th Infantry Division, who had been fighting the German juggernaut for four days straight, and he told them not to worry—the Airborne was here. Soon after, three enemy artillery rounds cured him of his overconfidence.

Buford's platoon reached the woods near the village of Bisory and pulled back to form a line in the middle of a sloped field. The two sides settled into static positions as the Germans now surrounded Bastogne. In the blinding fog and snow, the 501st paratroopers and the Germans patrolled each other's lines, probing for weaknesses. Buford and his fellow machine gunner dug their foxhole at the bottom of the slope. It was not long before the Germans tested the American line.

The Germans opened fire with small-arms weapons. Buford could not see anything at the base of the hill, but he could hear American and German machine guns firing. "American machine guns went 'put-put-put,' while German machine guns went 'fttttttt!'" he recalled. "The firefight atop the hill was only 200 to 300 feet away." The paratroopers repulsed the probe, but the Germans captured a paratrooper in a foxhole next to Buford's. "I don't know if he was killed or not."

Buford and the rest of Easy Company occupied a forested area with dirt roads. The restrictive terrain dissuaded the Germans from using tanks and armored vehicles. As a result, squad- and platoon-sized combat patrols clashed continuously in the woods.

For the next seven days, whenever the Germans probed the line the Americans greeted them with fire. At one point, Buford lost his machine-gun partner, possibly from frostbite, and had to operate the weapon by himself. When the Germans attacked, he fired where he saw flashes. "I seldom saw someone to aim at," explained Buford. "It was mass confusion; I didn't watch for detail."

The continuous German artillery and mortar shelling eventually took a toll on Buford's nerves. "When we would get a chance to eat, I would get away from my foxhole and throw up."

But the shelling was not always deadly. One day an artillery shell exploded over a field near Buford's platoon, and sheets of paper—German propaganda leaflets—fluttered to

the ground. Men broke cover and retrieved some of the sheets. They had a picture of a woman kissing a man in civilian clothes. The message: This is what's happening at home. "They didn't damage our morale at all," laughed Buford. "We loved them!"

Buford's platoon received some artillery support, but the American gunners had limited ammunition; the men relied on their mortars for immediate support. Fighter planes tried to fly under the low-hanging overcast but withheld their fire when they could not find the Germans.

When the fog and clouds finally cleared, the paratroopers laid out fluorescent orange panels to mark their forward positions and prevent being hit by friendly fire. American fighters and fighter bombers roared in, blasting away with machine guns and rockets as Buford and his friends, standing behind haystacks, watched the show.

"Thunderbolts came in so close you could throw a rock and it would hit them," he said. Although C-47 Skytrain transport planes parachuted supplies into Bastogne, Buford did not recall ever seeing them, only hearing about them from fellow paratroopers.

National Archives

German planes strafed Buford's platoon a few times, but the men simply ducked into their foxholes. "It was a reflex action," he recalled. "The safest place was on the ground." Despite the strafings and probes, the men never believed the Germans would overrun them. "There was nothing we were worried about."

Life in the cold and snow and ice proved miserable, though. One night, the men pulled back far enough to where they could build a bonfire. They stood with their backs to the fire, which melted the snow off their Army overcoats, soaking them in the process. When they turned around to warm their hands, their backs froze.

If the men had time to sleep, a truck would deliver their sleeping bags at night. In the darkness the men felt for their bags. Each would use a different kind of string or knot to recognize it by touch.

But the warmth of the sleeping bags brought a new problem. "My feet would hurt so bad as they thawed out," said Buford, who had to bang his feet against the side of his foxhole to relieve the pain. "I'd cry, it hurt so bad, then I'd say, 'Howard, you can't cry.'"

When the officers were issued their alcohol ration, Buford's lieutenant shared his with the men. Another lieutenant did not. One of Buford's friends, a known alcoholic, watched that lieutenant pack his bottle into his bag one morning. When the packs were delivered that night, the friend felt for the lieutenant's bag and stole his bottle. "This guy crawled in a hole and got drunk," recalled Buford. "We covered for him when the officer came around."

To eat in the pitch-black night, the men formed a line, putting a hand on the man in front before walking to the rear. Buford grew to hate the Army's K-rations, foods that did not require cooking. They included cheese, meat, crackers, chocolate, and cigarettes.

"The first time you ate them they weren't bad," he recalled, "but you couldn't eat them three or four days straight. They were terrible." Buford and his comrades eventually resorted to eating only the K-ration chocolate bars.

Buford and his friends picked out a house in which to keep warm. The family stayed in the basement, rarely coming up. When the paratroopers first arrived, Buford stuck his frozen boots into the kitchen oven, but as the boots dried they shriveled up, forcing him to walk with a limp. It was worth it. "You're so desperate to get warm," Buford recalled. "It just shows you what young guys can handle."

One day the paratroopers and the family made pancakes out of some flour, but the results were less than ideal. "They were not really pancakes," said Buford.

On December 22, Brig. Gen. Anthony McAuliffe, the 101st Airborne's acting commander during the defense of Bastogne, famously rejected a German sur-

Howard Buford

MIRROR – WISE

**A Precarious Story**

...s in her room and just about to change because she intended to go to the Cinema with Bob. She had done that quite often since John, her husband had left for the front. — Why shouldn't she? Bob is a good friend of John's and he certainly wouldn't object. Everybody understands that Joan cannot always sit at home alone for years, without any companionship. —

Yesterday Bob came a little earlier than usual and entered Joan's room just as she was adding the last touch of rouge. She didn't mind his staying for they were really good friends — and so accustomed to each other.

As she rolled on her stockings, Bob took all that he had done during business hours that day; and then noticed that the elbow of his jacket had a little grease spot; took it and cleaned it. — What could anybody think wrong among friends.

And then — — — Neither knew how it happened, she felt his strong body leaning gently against her — and then — they kissed — for a long — long while.

Joan was in a dream — — — she was feeling that marvellous something that she had missed for so long — it was so wonderful.

Then she opened her eyes — and there was that horror before her. Was it a dream — or was it reality?

She looked in the mirror and saw . . . . . John! John in the arms of another! In the arms of Death!

But no, it was not John embraced by Death — — — it was YOU — and it was not Joan looking in the mirror but YOUR wife.

Joan is still alone.
And so are all the millions of other wives and girls
But war goes on.

**ABOVE: One of the German propaganda leaflets that fluttered to the ground near Private Buford's foxhole. The paratroopers loved them. TOP: General George S. Patton (right) congratulates Brig. Gen. Anthony McAuliffe, the temporary commander of the 101st Airborne Division, and Lt. Col. Steve Chappius, the commander of 2nd Battalion, 502nd Parachute Infantry Regiment. General Patton gave them both Distinguished Service Crosses for successfully defending Bastogne.**

render demand with one word: "Nuts." Word quickly spread throughout the front lines. "Everyone laughed," quipped Buford. "We were a first-class combat unit. We never thought of surrendering."

Christmas came and went without notice. When German prisoners were captured, the men would pass them off to someone else. During one night probe, a paratrooper captured a German and brought him over to Buford and his fellow machine gunner's foxhole. The German sat in the snow with his arms raised as the four men waited for sunrise. Every time the German tried to put his hands in his pockets, his captor stopped him. Buford felt sorry for the German but the paratrooper would stick his rifle in his gut and say, "Hands up!"

When the sun rose, the paratrooper took the prisoner to the rear, and Buford noticed a German "potato masher" hand grenade where the German had been sitting. "He had been trying to get at it all night."

Before one patrol, a chaplain, possibly the 501st's Catholic regimental chaplain Francis Sampson, showed up to offer a prayer for the men. While the soldiers gathered around the chaplain in the cold and bowed their heads in prayer, Buford sat by himself under a tree. He had not liked his introduction to religion as a child, when his father took him to revival tent gatherings where "born again" people rolled around in the sawdust.

On December 26, Lt. Gen. George S. Patton's Third U.S. Army broke the German siege and the momentum swung to the Americans. A row of tanks rolled up to Buford's platoon, stopped in front of the forest, and fired into the tree line. With the Germans suppressed, Buford and his comrades advanced into the woods.

"We hit the Germans," said Buford, "and were pushing them back." Radio operators called in artillery 300 yards in front of the company and worked it back. The paratroopers hit the ground when the shells exploded in the trees above.

After advancing all day, Buford's unit pulled back. The fighting continued that way throughout the rest of the campaign.

Patton's arrival also meant hot chow. It was brought forward at night in insulated Mermite containers, but the servers had trouble seeing the men's mess kits in the darkness. "They would dump meat, potatoes, gravy, and Jello on top of each other," said Buford. "We were so tired, we were just happy to have food. No one complained."

Buford's company continued pressing forward. One day, they advanced on the Germans through neat rows of trees. Buford opened up with his machine gun, but it jammed. He tried loosening the barrel but nothing worked. Finally, he propped it up against a tree and grabbed a rifle.

As he stepped into the next row of trees, he saw a German soldier about 100 feet away. "We both hit the ground and commenced firing," he recalled. A buddy next to Buford screamed out, "I'm hit! I'm hit!" He had just taken a bullet in the leg. In the confusion Buford had no idea if they had killed or wounded the German.

Another time, Buford was speaking with a fellow paratrooper in the shelter of some woods. When they finished talking, Buford walked away. Suddenly, an enemy artillery shell exploded, tearing off the other soldier's leg. Buford escaped unharmed.

On January 3, 1945, Easy Company again attacked through a snowy wood, led by an aggressive platoon leader. "Some of the guys worried that he would get us in trouble," Buford recalled. Buford was moving up and back with his machine gun on the platoon's left flank when a Sherman tank clanked up a dirt road about 20 feet away and turned the corner at a crossroads.

Suddenly, Buford saw an explosion. "A bogie [tank] wheel came rolling back, then the guys came back. The tank sergeant was cursing mad."

Undeterred, Buford's lieutenant and about a dozen soldiers advanced through the trees and reached the crossroads where German vehicles were firing on the rest of the company. One of Buford's buddies, a bazookaman, was so afraid that he ducked his head into the snow.

The lieutenant grabbed his bazooka, took aim, and knocked out one vehicle. Then he reloaded, stood up, and knocked out the other. "There's a guy that should get a medal," said Buford.

The fight with the tanks, however, resulted in 23 Easy Company men being wounded; one later died from his wounds, and the brave lieutenant was later killed.

Like most soldiers, Buford was scared many times in combat. His worst experience came when crawling through a hole in the bottom of a wall near a pile of dead horses. The entire platoon had preceded him and his lieutenant. Suddenly, mortars came in.

"You knew when artillery came in by its sound and you could fall to the ground," he explained. "Mortars come in a steep angle and fall straight down with a little wispy sound."

The two men huddled by the dead horses until the mortars stopped, then they dove through the hole. Buford yanked his machine gun through, accidentally pulling back its firing bolt, cocking it. He then ran house to house through the town, spotting a dead German in the street when it happened.

"My hand was on the machine gun," said Buford. "I moved my finger, and it went off right in my ear." The accidental blast terrified him, and he froze momentarily out in the open before recovering his senses and headed for cover. Later, everyone ribbed him for the mistake.

After the month-long heroic stand against the Germans, the 101st was pulled off the line on January 17. Buford's platoon moved several times and ended up near the town of Dariendorf (renamed today as Dauendorf), France, in a small family farm. He thought it odd that the outhouse stood close to the well. "I would have just drunk wine instead of ever drinking out of that well," he said about the suspect water.

One day someone obtained a large cache of eggs and served them to the entire company. The men lined up for two eggs each. Buford and his buddies gobbled them down

and went for seconds. When the eggs were exhausted, the men ate bread pudding. Buford gorged himself on the dessert, and by the time he made it back to the barn he felt ill. "I was sick all night long," he said. "To this day I won't touch bread pudding."

In the last days of January 1945, the entire 101st Airborne was transferred to France's Alsace-Lorraine region to support Lt. Gen. Alexander "Sandy" Patch's Seventh U.S. Army. Buford and his comrades were billeted in a woman's house near the town of Minnersheim on the Moder River.

"The lady treated us nice," he recalled. One of the men gave her a crock of hog's blood, and she made blood sausage for the paratroopers, which did not prove popular. "We choked down some of it just to make her happy."

At the end of February, the 36th Infantry Division relieved the 101st, and the division returned to Mourmelon. While the men were happy to be back in a familiar area, Buford received an unenviable assignment: he had to search dead paratroopers' duffle bags and separate personal items from government-issue (GI) ones. Personal items were sent back to the families. The most bothersome part of the job was seeing pictures and letters of his dead comrades. "Something about those personal items bothered me," he admitted.

For fun, the men traveled to nearby Reims, the ancient seat of the French monarchy in whose cathedral its kings had been crowned. But the young men were not there for a history lesson. "They sold us rot-gut champagne," recalled Buford, but the men didn't care; they would drink and have fun. The next morning, after an hour of calisthenics and an hour's run, "we were ready to go [drinking] again."

On one sojourn, one of Buford's buddies asked him if he wanted to join the Pathfinders—the paratroopers who jumped before the rest of the regiment and set up guidance equipment to ensure an accurate drop. Buford agreed and signed up.

Buford, his friend, and eight other hopeful Pathfinders were sent to Chartres, France, southwest of Paris, for training. Along with a group of French paratroopers they worked for three weeks learning to operate various pieces of signal equipment. "They jumped more than we did," recalled Buford. While everyone else watched movies at night, the French jumped out of planes.

Buford and his comrades trained for a jump into Germany. "Our leaders were concerned about American prisoners of war," explained Buford, "and were considering a jump around German POW camps." But the call never came, so the men relaxed and enjoyed themselves. They spent their downtime playing volleyball and, whenever possible, escaping to the City of Light, where a pack of American cigarettes could net $20.

When Buford and his friends could not obtain a pass to Paris, they made their own. "I spent almost every weekend in Paris," he said. Between the cheap alcohol and the pretty girls speaking broken English, he enjoyed himself.

One night on the Paris Metro, Buford ran into a lieutenant from the Pathfinders, whom he considered an alcoholic. Buford asked him where he was going, and the lieutenant explained that the military police had threatened to arrest him if he didn't leave the city. He was complying.

While Buford trained, the war in Europe ended. He returned to the 501st, which had been driving into Germany. His friends told him about Germans who had thrown away their weapons and, not wanting to be captured by the Russians, happily surrendered to the Americans. The unit soon returned to Mourmelon but was almost immediately transferred to a remote area of Austria for occupation duty.

From there they went to Berchtesgaden in southern Germany, the site of Hitler's "Eagle's Nest," where Hitler, Hermann Göring, Martin Bormann, and many other Nazi bigwigs once had their mountain resort homes, for more occupation duty. The British Royal Air Force had leveled many of the Eagle's Nest structures, yet Buford managed to find a few souvenirs.

He spent the next couple of months traveling across Europe. First, the regiment returned to Mourmelon, from which "old-timer" paratroopers were sent home; low-

**Antiaircraft gun crewmen from the 6th Armored Division and paratroopers from the 101st Airborne warm themselves by a fire while pulling on new overshoes after the relief of Bastogne.**

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General Dwight D. Eisenhower inspects the 101st Airborne Division in France at war's end. Worried about troopers with plenty of booze and weapons, Buford said that Ike told the men to behave themselves.

point men like Buford were reassigned to the 357th Glider Infantry Regiment. Then the 357th returned to Austria for more occupation duty, and then back to France, but this time to the town of Sens, where there was little to do except drink, which led to fighting and gunfire.

"Some of the guys had shot French people," said Buford. General Eisenhower arrived and addressed the men. While he complimented them on their victory, the real purpose of his speech was weapons. "Ike asked us to behave ourselves." From now on, the U.S. Army would punish anyone found with personal firearms.

The Army had decided that if paratroopers still wanted to get their jump pay, they needed to make more jumps. "All you had to do was hop on a truck, go out to the airfield, pick up a parachute, and get on a plane," said Buford. He enjoyed the higher altitude jumps more than the low ones he had made in training. "We had time to enjoy the ride down." Buford and his friends went back again and again for more.

One gliderman asked if he could jump, too, so Buford and his friends sneaked him in. "He jumped like everyone else and eventually reenlisted as a paratrooper."

With the war over and thoughts of preparing for civilian life surfacing, Buford took Army-sponsored classes in Nice, France; Brussels, Belgium; and in England. He studied English, algebra, and surveying, respectively.

Once he was taking a ship to England and slept in the bow near the anchor chains. When the ship arrived, it dropped anchor with a great clanging noise, and Buford, thinking a torpedo had hit, jumped out of his bunk and charged out of his cabin. "I was already running when I woke up," he recalled. "It scared the hell out of me."

While Buford studied surveying in England in November 1945, the Army deactivated the 101st Airborne Division. He and his comrades were folded into the 82nd Airborne and returned home on the *Queen Mary.* The ship docked in New York harbor, and on January 12, 1946, Buford marched in a victory parade down Fifth Avenue—the "Canyon of Heroes"—with the rest of the 82nd.

"Smile!" the people along the route yelled to the marching paratroopers, but they held their straight faces. Despite the warm reception, Buford said, "We were unhappy. We wanted to go home."

Buford flew to Long Beach, California; he was discharged from the Army at Fort MacArthur in San Pedro but almost did not make it home. On the bus ride back to East L.A., the driver pulled the bus over and told Buford he had to pay again. The bus fares had changed.

"I told him to stick it," explained Buford. When the driver told him to get off the bus, Buford told him, "I think we're going to have a fight." Fortunately, another rider intervened and told the driver to let it go.

Buford made it back to his mother's apartment and immediately threw his uniform into a corner. "I couldn't believe I was free," he recalled. His mother picked up the uniform and kept it for him. He wanted to put the war behind him and get on with his life. Other friends returned from the war, and they would all hang out together, but they never talked about the war.

Shortly after his discharge, Buford visited an ice cream parlor in Whittier. He knew the girl behind the counter, Rita Lucille Davis, from before the war. Buford liked her but had no plans to settle down. However, he changed his mind and they married in 1947 and remained together for 50 years until Rita died in 1997. They had four sons, David, Russell, Thomas, and Scott. Buford remarried at age 80 to Betty Moss, who passed away in 2013.

Once Buford had settled back into civilian life, he took a highway engineer job with the California Department of Transportation and worked there for 32 years. He later owned four businesses, spent eight years as a drug and alcohol counselor, worked with the Cub Scouts, and served as the president of a local Little League baseball organization.

Today he enjoys his retired life in Ventura, California. Despite his eagerness to put the war behind him, Howard Buford now looks back fondly on his service. "The time at the front was not a bad time for me," he said, "I'm proud of the guys I fought with." □

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Having been driven to their borders, the Germans would stop and fight for this historic city.

# BLOODY AACHEN

BY RICHARD RULE

BY the time of the waning of the summer of 1944 in western Europe, General Dwight D. Eisenhower's victorious Allied armies had forged a battle line from the Dutch province of Maastricht in the north to Belfort near the Swiss border in the south. Germany's military reversals since the breakout from the Normandy beaches had been staggering. Her very borders were now threatened and her army was on the brink of collapse—the Germans faced a catastrophe that no amount of propaganda could disguise.

As August gave way to September, the 1st U.S. Army, commanded by Lt. Gen. Courtney H. Hodges, stood poised for the drive into Germany itself. Looming directly in the path of 1st Army lay the ancient German city of Aachen, nestled between two heavily fortified belts of the Siegfried Line near the Dutch and Belgian borders. Although of little military importance to either side, it was nonetheless a town of immense psychological value to the Germans. Aside from being the first major city in the Reich threatened by Allied ground troops, it was also the birthplace of Emperor Charlemagne and the seat of his Frankish Empire, which Hitler considered to have been the First Reich. Its importance to Hodges, however, lay in its significant historical role as the western gateway to greater Germany, a role he expected it to play once again.

In mid-September, elements of 1st Army tentatively probed the city's defenses. But lacking supplies and potency, they chose to withdraw when confronted with surprisingly stiff German resistance, little realizing how vulnerable the city really was. The mere

**ABOVE: Rolling past the "dragons' teeth" antitank barriers in part of the "West Wall" south of Aachen, American GIs make good time. But their good luck soon ended. OPPOSITE: Commander Gerhard Wilck (far right) of the 246th Volksgrenadier Division confers with Field Marshal Walther Model on the defense of Aachen.**

threat of an American attack had panicked Aachen's Nazi leadership into hastily commandeering a train for themselves and fleeing. Within hours the city's entire government had gone, shamefully leaving the people to fend for themselves. An outraged Hitler had Aachen's leaders swiftly arrested, stripped of their rank, and packed off to perish in the inferno of the Eastern Front.

Aachen's link to National Socialist ideology, coupled with Hitler's fanatical desire to hold the ancient city, ensured that it would not be given up without a fight. The unenviable task of defending the German frontier at Aachen fell to the 18,000 troops of General Friedrich Koechling's four understrength divisions comprising 7th Army's LXXXI Corps. With the 1st U.S. Army expected to return in strength any day, Koechling wasted no time deploying his forces in a defensive ring around the city. The 183rd Volksgrenadier and 49th Infantry Divisions took up positions in the north, the veteran 12th Infantry Division was placed along the southeastern outskirts, and the remains of the battered 246th Volksgrenadier Division would defend the city limits of Aachen itself.

Two veteran panzer divisions would provide further support during the first week of October, strengthening Koechling's positions with 24,000 additional troops and substantial armor. With such a force at his disposal the aggressive Koechling was confident he could hold the Americans; but where would his enemy strike?

At 57 years of age, 1st Army's commander Hodges was one of only a handful of U.S. generals to have seen war from the sharp end, having served as an infantryman in World War I. He was a tall, impressive-looking officer, known as a meticulous planner who stayed "right on top of the corps and divisions" to make sure they carried out his orders.

As anticipated, his September probes were to be followed up in early October with a more concerted offensive. Mindful of his diminishing logistical capability, Hodges planned to capitalize on the turmoil in the enemy camp by quickly breaking through the Siegfried Line along the narrow Aachen corridor, between the Ardennes and the Fens of Holland. Aachen, however, would not be the main objective. To avoid the snare of costly house-to-house combat, General Hodges would drive his forces through the Siegfried Line at points north and south of Aachen before linking both wings to the east, effectively encircling and isolating the town. The bulk of 1st Army would then press to the Rhine, leaving Aachen to wither. In one of the war's great ironies the invasion of Germany would, in fact, encompass all the hallmark characteristics of "Blitzkrieg" warfare: rupturing of the enemy's main line of resistance; bypassing a city considered an obstacle rather than an objective; and exploiting the enemy rear area.

The 1st Army's XIX Corps would lead the first set-piece attack against the vaunted Siegfried Line. The Corps' 30th Infantry Division, commanded by General Leyland Hobbs, would ford a small river nine miles north of the Imperial City, then storm the Siegfried Line along a one-mile front between Rimburg and Marienberg. Once Hobbs' infantry had cleared a path through the German line, the entire 2nd Armored Division would join the attack, creating an armored shield along Hobbs' northern flank as he advanced east of Aachen. With the aim of encircling the city, Hobbs planned to link up with VII Corps' 1st Infantry Division, which would breach the Siegfried Line below Aachen and push north. The ring would be cemented at the village of Wuerselen.

It was a simple plan and, after a number of postponements, H-hour was set for 11 in the morning of October 2. To soften the German defenses, as early as September 26 artillery batteries had begun to systematically pummel pillboxes along the 30th Division front, and a massive saturation airstrike was to follow.

But from the outset things did not go according to plan. With D-day fast approaching, ground observers were disappointed with the results of the elaborate artillery program. Other than to strip off camouflage, clear a few minefields, and blow away some of the wire obstacles, the shelling appeared to have had no appreciable effect on the pillboxes—most had survived the firestorm intact.

Then the pulverizing 450-plane air strike, for which there were high expectations, fared little better. Through a combination of poor navigation, low visibility, and inexperience, the 360 bomber crews located very few of their targets while the fighter-bombers did not register a direct hit on any of the pillboxes. It was a dismal performance compounded by an instance of gross navigational error: A Belgian mining town 28 miles from the target area was accidentally bombed, killing and wounding 90 civilians.

In spite of the avalanche of bombs (including the use of napalm for the first time) it became clear that, as had been demonstrated in Normandy, the margin for error in coordinating large-scale air and ground force attacks had proved too difficult to overcome.

Despite the failure of the preliminary bombardments, Hodges would not tolerate further postponement. With the 30th Infantry Division irrevocably committed to the assault, the troops braced themselves against the chill of an early winter, under no illusions about the grueling slog that awaited them now that the Germans were fighting on their own soil.

At 11AM on October 2, under leaden skies, the invasion began as 400 big guns and mortars commenced a rolling barrage that swept a curtain of high explosives ahead of the 30th Infantry Division. With .50-caliber machine guns firing tracer over their heads, Hobbs' troops stormed across the Wurm River into Germany, the first invaders to do so in over 300 years.

The German pillbox crews, demonstrating considerable fire discipline, quickly opened up an unrelenting volume of counterfire that took a steady toll on the advancing infantry. The defenders called down their own artillery to join the avalanche of American shells that screamed overhead like freight trains, transforming both banks into a seething mass of earth, water, and fire. Through a surreal world of smoke and shrapnel, men attacked, men defended, while many fell never to rise again.

Having run the gauntlet across the river, the GIs and combat engineers methodically set about the task of subduing the nearly 50 enemy strongholds in their path. During the Normandy landings the Americans found that the German pillbox crews fought well while the action was in front, but when attacked from the rear they would often surrender. Drawing on this experience, the troops made every effort to work their way behind the German installations to blow the rear doors with Bangalore torpedoes, satchel charges, or bazookas.

There was no respite in this bitter, frightful battle, but as the first harrowing day drew to a close, General Hobbs'

men had successfully pierced the first line of pillboxes, gaining a narrow bridgehead along the whole of their front. As dusk approached the exhausted troops dug in and waited apprehensively for what the coming night would bring.

The German commanders in the region, deceived by diversionary attacks 10 miles to the north, were slow to grasp that the 30th Division thrust across the Wurm was, in fact, the main effort. The subsequent German response amounted to a feeble half-hearted counterattack that was easily driven off. Thus on D+1 with the enemy in disarray, Hobbs had achieved a toehold into Germany itself. The following day he would exploit his gains, commencing his drive to Wuerselen.

Reports of the American attack sent shock waves through the German command. General Koechling had wrongly anticipated that the main attack would be directed southeast of Aachen; thus, his counterattack had neither the manpower nor the armaments for the job and it fell short. He then poured his entire corps' artillery onto the American positions to try to contain the bridgehead. This, too, failed. For the next three days American troops, now supported by the 2nd Armored Division, relentlessly battered their way through the German line.

By October 7, XIX Corps had chiseled a clean break through the Siegfried Line six miles wide and to a depth of nearly five miles. Having lost 1,800 men and 52 tanks, XIX Corps had established a line north of Aachen from Alsdorf through Beggensdorf to Geilenkirchen, bringing a successful conclusion to the first set-piece attack against the West Wall.

Thus the stage was set for the next round. General Clarence Huebner, commanding the 1st Infantry Division, planned to attack through the Siegfried Line southeast of Aachen one hour before dawn on October 8. With Hobbs making steady progress, Huebner was confident the "Big Red One," as the 1st Infantry Division was known, would not keep them waiting.

Wuerselen was only $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles from the 1st Infantry Division lines, but the men of the 18th Infantry Regiment spearheading the assault would be attacking over deadly ground. Intelligence reports indicated that the Americans would be up against a well-entrenched enemy fighting from within thoroughly prepared defensive positions. The regiment's first hurdle would be the village of Verlautenheide sited in the second belt of the Siegfried Line and bristling with pillboxes, interconnecting communication trenches, gun pits, and foxholes. The next objective, 1,000 yards northeast of Verlautenheide, was the well-defended crest summit known as Crucifix Hill (Hill 239), while the final goal was the well-fortified Ravels Hill (Hill 231).

By putting into practice lessons learned in earlier pillbox fighting, the division prepared itself by undertaking intense training to perfect the use of artillery and air support in combination with special assault teams equipped with flamethrowers, Bangalore torpedoes, and various pole and satchel charges. To take and hold these positions was a difficult prospect, but as events unfolded Huebner's thorough preattack planning and rigorous training paid off.

The linking of an uncustomary predawn attack with a massive preliminary artillery bombardment paved the way for the quick capture of Verlautenheide. Most of the German defenders, caught off guard by the night attack, were taken prisoner before they realized what had happened. The second objective, Crucifix Hill, was overrun in an hour, while the following night the 65-man garrison atop Ravels Hill was captured without a shot being fired. In a stunning operation, the division had captured all three primary objectives in less than 48 hours.

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**ABOVE: A line of M-10 tank destroyers prowls an Aachen neighborhood in search of blasting German observation posts. OPPOSITE: A Volksgrenadier, with Panzerfaust antitank weapon in hand, sprints for new cover past a Sturmgeschutz assault gun.**

In a customarily violent response, the Germans sent a massive artillery bombardment crashing down upon the exposed American troops grimly holding their new positions; veterans would later recall this as being the heaviest barrage they had ever endured. In spite of mounting casualties, Huebner was confident his men could hold on until the 30th Division arrived to seal the gap around Aachen. But in the bleak, urbanized, coal-mining country a few miles to the north, the pendulum had swung back in favor of the defenders. The Germans had dug in their heels and were making a stand.

The energetic Field Marshal Walther Model, who commanded Axis forces in the Ruhr pocket, arrived at General Koechling's headquarters to evaluate for himself the situation north of Wuerselen. Model, no stranger to a military crisis, could see that while Koechling's men had finally checked the 30th Infantry Division's drive to Wuerselen, their resolute defense could not hold indefinitely. In his characteristically blunt manner, he reported to Commander-in-Chief West Field Marshall Gerd von Rundstedt that unless reinforcements were sent, "continued reverses will be unavoidable." This was not an exaggeration—the only hope of breaking the noose tightening around Aachen rested with a series of quick, decisive, powerful counterattacks.

Von Rundstedt immediately dispatched the 116th Panzer and 3rd Panzer Grenadier divisions to Aachen. The situation around the city was in fact so serious that Model took the desperate measure of committing these panzer forces to battle piecemeal; the men were virtually proceeding straight into battle from the railway platform.

The mood in the 30th Infantry Division camp north of Aachen had grown similarly desperate. Their attack, which had started so promisingly two weeks earlier, was bogged down three miles short of their objective. In the face of fierce German counterattacks, Hobbs' drive had been ground to a halt—his troops had not advanced a single yard in five days.

An impatient General Hodges, who felt Hobbs was always "either bragging or complaining," made it clear he expected the 30th Infantry Division to broaden its effort with a general attack all along the line. It seemed clear to Hobbs that neither Hodges nor his staff fully appreciated the adverse nature of the country across which his men were fighting. The Germans were fully exploiting a hideous landscape honeycombed with mine shafts, slag piles, and small villages tailor-made for defense. Having already suffered over 3,000 casualties, mostly riflemen, Hobbs was reluctant to commit his exhausted troops to a frontal assault that would achieve little. Under enormous pressure to keep his job, he had to find another way to quickly close the gap with the 1st Division.

Although Hobbs and his staff bore the brunt of much criticism, the reality was that no one, least of all Hodges, had anticipated the *Wehrmacht*'s ability to recover its balance so quickly. The Germans were not only able to delay the American push to the Rhine, but were

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**American soldiers fire a 57mm antitank gun against a German strongpoint in the battle down an Aachen street.**

also siphoning off sorely needed troops and supplies that would have far-reaching consequences on Hodges' offensive capabilities in the weeks ahead.

A further frustration for Hodges lay with the substantial German force left bottled up in Aachen, which posed a threat to the supply lines of future Allied operations. Hodges had little choice but to hand the 1st Infantry Division the task of clearing them out. Even though the city was yet to be completely surrounded, Huebner wasted no time issuing an ultimatum giving the German commander 24 hours to surrender. But in accordance with Hitler's "last stand" orders, the demand was immediately rejected; if the Americans wanted Aachen, they would have to take it by force of arms.

Wresting the city from the Germans created some vexing problems for Huebner. Having been hit hard in his rifle companies—a 70 percent turnover since D-day on June 6—he was spread thinly along an elongated front and felt compelled to hoard his precious reserves in anticipation of a major German counterattack. Short of manpower, he was able to spare only two battalions of Colonel John F.R. Seitz's battle-hardened 26th Infantry Regiment for the assault on Aachen.

Although outnumbered by the enemy troops defending the city, the 26th fortunately would be vastly superior in armor, artillery, and air support. Even so, the regiment found itself in the unenviable position of taking on a very complicated assault with the very real possibility of having to disengage or hold in place at a moment's notice. As the regiment's G-3 recalled, they would be attacking with "one eye cocked over their right shoulder" in the likely direction of the German counterattack.

In one of the classic small-unit actions of the war in Europe, Seitz planned to concentrate his forces by attacking through the city from east to west with both battalions' lines abreast. His 2nd Battalion, commanded by Lt. Col. Derrill Daniel, would sweep through the heart of Aachen toward the west. The 3rd Battalion on the right, commanded by Lt.

Col. John T. Corley, would strike northwestward through a maze of factories and apartment buildings to seize Farwick Park and the three hills within that dominated the northern fringes of the city. The bulk of this hill mass known as the Lousberg (the Americans were to know it as Observatory Hill due to the observation tower on its peak) towered to a height of 862 feet, casting a shadow over almost the entire city. By seizing these heights, the Americans believed they could take the whole city under fire.

But the principles of village fighting would come as a shock to American troops who had just swept at breakneck speed across France. It was a fighting discipline in which they had very little practical experience. Daniel surmised that the Germans, being experienced house-to-house fighters, would exact a heavy toll for every building, house, and cellar if his planning was not thorough and his men not fully prepared. He firmly believed that sweat in preparation would save 2nd Battalion blood in combat.

With an attack frontage of approximately 2,000 yards, Daniel set about organizing his battalion into a series of combined-arms' company teams with each rifle company receiving three Shermans or Tank Destroyers and two antitank guns. Following his commander's lead, Daniel decided to put all his platoons forward and fight without a reserve. Companies and platoons were assigned specific missions to ensure they coordinated their actions and maintained contact by establishing checkpoints and phase lines based on streets and prominent buildings; no one advanced beyond a checkpoint until contact had been made with their neighboring unit. To further orchestrate his combat power, Daniel would have artillery and mortar fire striking deep across the front to isolate the battlefield, while heavy machine guns were trained down the main streets and intersections to hinder German lateral movement.

Supported by a mobile ammunition dump following close behind his front lines, Daniel encouraged the men to make use of their overwhelming firepower at all times, including demolitions, flamethrowers, and bazookas to overcome any German positions that

**"WE SHALL FIGHT TO THE LAST MAN, THE LAST SHELL, AND THE LAST BULLET, IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE FUEHER'S ORDERS."**

proved particularly difficult. This was the first major street-fighting battle the American army had undertaken in Europe and, in spite of heavy air-raid damage, the troops of the 2nd Battalion adopted the motto, "Knock 'em all down," highlighting their readiness to destroy what was left of Aachen if necessary.

When the surrender ultimatum expired on October 11, 300 P-38 and P-47 fighter-bombers from IX Tactical Air Command opened the attack, winging in from the east to plaster predetermined targets along the city perimeter. Soon afterward 12 battalions of VII Corps and 1st Division artillery further pounded the German defenders with a thunderous bombardment, sinking the city center beneath a shroud of choking black smoke and dust. As shells and bombs rained down, the 20,000 civilians who remained in the city cowered in their cellars and air-raid shelters fearful that their once-proud city, like so many others across Europe, would soon be little more than a smoldering skeletal ruin.

During the wet, cold night of October 12, a lone German staff car stole into the besieged city, delivering Colonel Gerhard Wilck to retake command of the 246th Volksgrenadier Division. The new battle commandant of "Fortress Aachen" was an experienced yet unremarkable 49-year-old officer who carried orders to hold the city to the last man. As further insurance Wilck had been forced to sign a formal document empowering the Gestapo to arrest and execute his wife and children if he surrendered.

Arriving at his command headquarters within the city's former luxury hotel, the Palast-Hotel Quellenhof, Wilck pored over a large-scale map of Aachen as his staff officers dutifully briefed him on the current situation. It wasn't encouraging. He had always known that the city would be very difficult to defend; the hills that surrounded it would allow his enemy to look down on him at all times, while their aircraft roamed the skies unmolested. Although his immediate threat came from Colonel Seitz's 26th Infantry Regiment, which stood poised to attack, Wilck was also very concerned by the U.S. 1st Infantry Division entrenched to the south and the 30th Infantry Division battling hard north of Wuerselen. The former tactics teacher could see that if these two divisions linked up, as was their intention, the garrison would be surrounded. Wilck and his men would be trapped.

The 246th Volksgrenadier Division under his command had already suffered horrendous casualties during the fighting of the preceding weeks. Those of its soldiers who were left to take on the onerous task of defending "Fortress Aachen" amounted to a grab bag of poorly trained ex-sailors, policemen, and *Luftwaffe* personnel, supplemented by an assortment of teenage paratroopers and *Wehrmacht* regulars. For fire support the garrison could muster only a handful of Mark IV tanks, armored personnel carriers, and assault guns complimented with a few batteries of artillery.

Clearly lacking the firepower to compete with the American artillery and armor, Wilck privately doubted he could hold if the Americans came in force, but nonetheless he set to work marshaling and deploying his forces as best he could. Just before dawn the following morning, an exhausted Wilck received a communiqué from 7th Army Headquarters: "Hold out. Large scale help on its way." Little did he know that for once the message was true.

With the onset of first light he waited for the coming onslaught, fearful that his first day in command might well be his last—it was Friday the 13th.

Colonel Daniel's 2nd Battalion finally received orders to move up to its jumpoff line along a high railroad embankment on the outskirts of the city. At 9:30 AM on October 13, every soldier in the battalion hurled a grenade into the German front line, then attacked after the explosions, shouting and firing as they came—the ground assault on Aachen was under way.

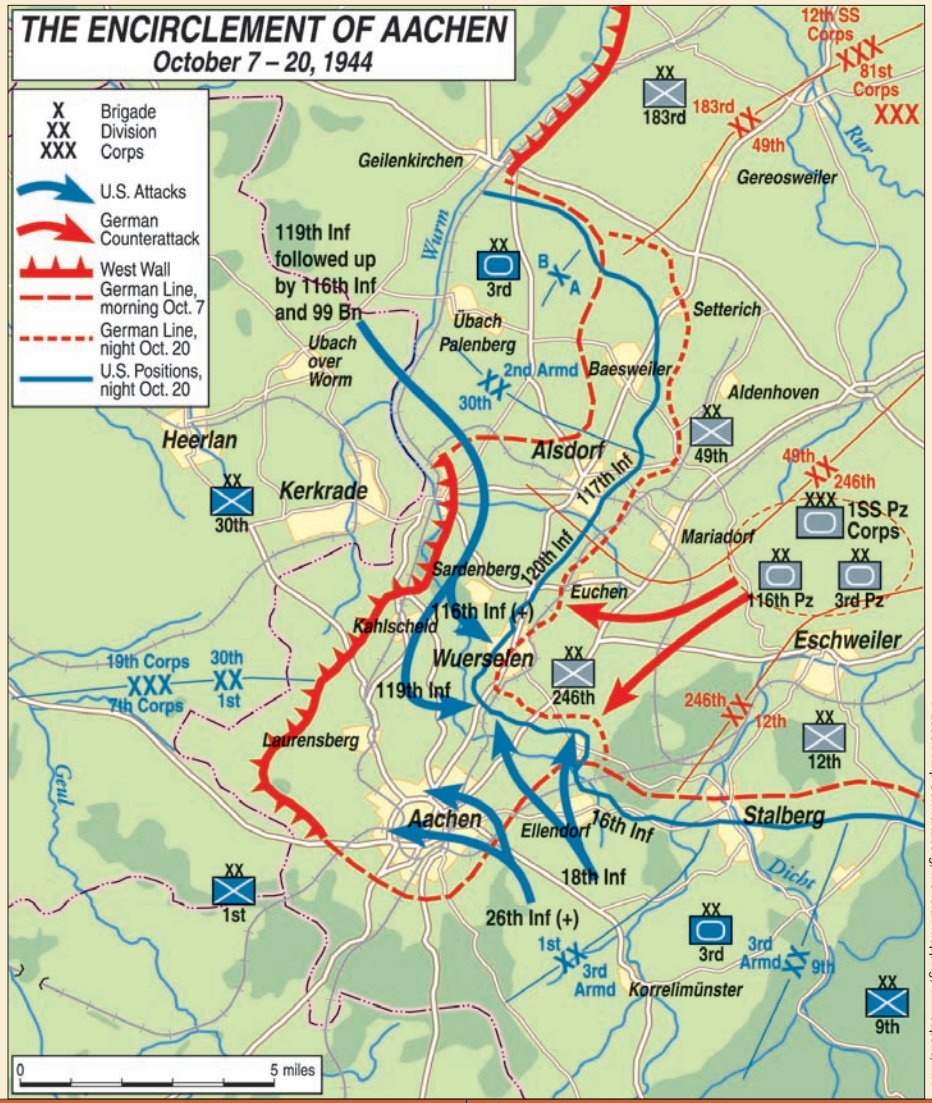
Resistance was initially light, but the crust of the German defenses became appreciably tougher the farther into Aachen the Americans moved. The fighting quickly fell into a pattern as the GIs set about the painstaking task of grinding down the enemy defenses—street by street, house by house, cellar by cellar. As they had rehearsed, tanks would keep each building under fire until the infantry moved in to engage the occupants. Tossing a grenade through a door or window, the troops would rush in after the explosion to spray the room and upper floors with automatic fire, then use grenades or verbal persuasion to induce the Germans in the cellars to surrender. The tanks, meanwhile, would shift their fire to the next building.

Through the bitter experience of taking casualties from the rear, the GIs quickly learned that it was best to do one building at a time, ensuring that every room, closet, and cellar had been checked for stragglers. They had learned the hard way that the key to street fighting lay in persistence, not speed. As Daniel had hoped, a coordinated German response was hamstrung by American big guns disrupting enemy communication lines inside the city, while light artillery and mortar shells pounded German positions several streets ahead of the Americans. It was, in fact, one of the few times in the European war that American artillery was in a position to fire parallel to the front, landing shells just ahead of the attacking infantry without danger from "drop-shorts." To maximize the damage, artillerists began using delayed fuses that allowed shells to crash through several floors before exploding among the Germans sheltering in the cellars.

In spite of these difficulties, the men of the 246th fought back with determination. The troops doggedly held onto virtually every stronghold until either killed or driven out. With marauding Allied fighters swooping on anything that moved above ground during daylight hours, Wilck began shuttling his men through the city sewer system to launch unexpected counterattacks in the American rear areas. The tactic proved so effective that the exasperated GIs were forced to go down into the sewers to root out the Germans, then seal every manhole along their line of advance to prevent further infiltration.

The fighting was reduced to a slogging, barricade-type warfare where opposing troops were often close enough to hurl verbal abuse at one another from across the street, or from floor to floor. The constant threat of snipers, coupled with the unrelenting nervous strain of close-quarter battle, ensured neither side would take any chances, choosing to shoot first and ask questions later.

But as the hours passed it was clear the American's potent mix of planning, tactics, and firepower were relentlessly forcing the Germans back toward the city center. As night descended on the first day, Colonel Daniel pivoted his 2nd Battalion to the left,



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Peter Newark's Military Pictures

**ABOVE LEFT: Maj. Gen. Clarence Huebner commanded the 1st Infantry Division. ABOVE RIGHT: A German defender of Aachen carries a MG34 machine gun and a stick grenade.**

perpendicular to his original starting position—his three companies on line would attack westward toward the city center.

Meanwhile Colonel John T. Corley's 3rd Battalion drive west toward Farwick Park and the high ground of the Lousberg was almost immediately blocked by German troops holed up inside the St. Elisabeth Hospital and Technical College in the Blucherplatz. The Germans had quickly knocked out two of the supporting Shermans with *Panzerfausts* and were raking the street with a 20mm antiaircraft cannon deployed in a ground-support role. With small-arms fire also pouring from nearby apartment blocks along the Julichstrasse, the 3rd Battalion found itself engaged in heavy fighting where gains were measured in "buildings, floors, and even rooms."

As the battle unfolded, Corley discovered that the sturdy, masonry apartment buildings sheltering many of the defenders were virtually impervious to tank shells. So to break the deadlock he brought up a self-propelled 155mm rifle to clear a path. Success was immediate as the big weapon's first shell sent one of the ancient, stone-walled buildings crashing to the ground. The vibrations from the thunderous explosions could be felt at Wilck's headquarters over half a mile away. The huge siege gun proved so successful that one was sent to support the 2nd Battalion.

Shell after shell pounded into the German strongpoints in the Blucherplatz until the dazed and shocked survivors finally stumbled out to surrender. With resistance broken, Corley's men once again continued toward their high-ground objective, where two companies combined to overrun a strongpoint at the St. Elizabeth Church. The momentum carried one of the companies a few hundred yards past the holy site and into Farwick Park itself, not far from the Germans' headquarters. Wilck, already shaken by the thunderous impact of the 155mm, was shocked by the sudden appearance of American troops so close to his command post. Fearing he was on the verge of being overrun, a distressed Wilck called his superiors for reinforcements. General Koechling immediately rushed a convoy of assault guns and a half-strength *Waffen* SS battalion to Wilck's position. Wilck, meanwhile, had hastily transferred his command post to a four-story air-raid shelter in a less threatened part of the city.

By noon the following day, Colonel Corley's forces in and around Farwick Park had silenced the enemy troops defending the park's outbuildings. The only obstacle between Corley's men and the key heights beyond was a band of German paratroopers stubbornly holding out behind the sturdy walls of Wilck's former headquarters at the Hotel Quellenhof. But then, while bringing up his 155mm rifle to blast the Germans into submission, Corley suddenly found himself thrown onto the defensive. A counterattack by the recently arrived SS troops, supported by assault guns, drove Corley's two companies back from the northern edge of Farwick Park. The situation could have been worse had it not been for a lone American mortar man with a radio, unseen by the Germans, who courageously remained behind to direct a heavy and accurate mortar barrage that blunted the attack. By late afternoon the German assault had run out of steam, but the aggressive blow had netted them 35 prisoners and given the Americans a serious setback.

Corley's plans to retrieve the lost ground with a counterattack of his own were thrown into confusion by the sound of big guns outside the city, quickly followed by frantic messages ordering him to hold in place. The SS attack on his men had been the first stage of General Koechling's two-pronged counterattack. The main effort to break the encirclement of the city rested with the 3rd Panzer Grenadier

Division's attack launched against the 1st Infantry Division's linear defense near Eilendorf. The fierce fighting that ensued "shattered nerves at more than one echelon of command" as grenadiers, supported by tanks, relentlessly hammered away at the American positions in an all-out attempt to break through to the city.

As the hours passed it became clear that the 1st Division line would hold—its artillery was blasting apart waves of German infantry surging forward. But the few lumbering Tiger tanks that managed to batter their way through were able to inflict casualties of their own, firing into the fox-hole lines at close range.

For two days the Germans pressed their attacks in the face of fierce artillery and fighter-bomber assault. Finally, late in the afternoon of October 16, with the ground in front of the American lines littered with hundreds of German dead and wounded, the 3rd Panzer Grenadier Division retired—they had lost over one third of their combatants and most of their tanks. Thus the abortive counterattack to relieve Aachen had been a costly failure.

As the sound of battle subsided near Eilendorf, a desperate General Hobbs was planning a daring maneuver to break the deadlock north of Wuerselen. With his career in the balance, Hobbs pinned everything on an operation that, if successful, would outflank the Germans and push through to 1st Division lines at Ravelsberg. Hobbs knew there could be no half-measures, it would be "root-hog or die!"

At 5 in the morning of October 16, two battalions of 30th Division infantry were sent across the Wurm River, one moving south along the west bank while the other crossed the Aachen-Wuerselen-Linnich highway northwest of Ravelsberg along the east bank. The hours passed slowly as the infantry edged toward their objective, fighting local German counterattacks nearly all the way. Hobbs could barely contain

**ABOVE: An aerial photograph of Aachen snapped during an overflight on October 24. Charlemagne was crowned in the domeless cathedral in the foreground. OPPOSITE: Germans were rooted out of defended buildings in small numbers. Here prisoners are led away on October 15.**

his anxiety as he waited for news of his soldiers. Finally, 1st Division troops at Ravelsberg reported spotting Hobbs' men moving near the southwestern fringe of Wuerselen, a mere 1,000 yards away.

Thus at 4:15 in the afternoon of October 16, the ring around Aachen was closed. The linkup was only tenuous, but Huebner nonetheless made preparations to quickly bring this long and costly battle to a close.

The Germans were not passive, however. Koechling was readying his 3rd Panzer Grenadier and 116th Panzer Divisions for a last-ditch attempt to break the Allied cordon in the area of Verlautenheide and Ravelsberg. If it failed, the city's fate and quite possibly his own were sealed. He hastily conceived his plans, which lacked coordination, and many of his staff believed the attack stood very little chance of breaking through.

Nevertheless, on October 18, Koechling sent his divisions toward Aachen. They fought heavy engagements, but they could not make progress against the well-entrenched Americans. By nightfall of October 19 the German commanders could see that a genuine breakthrough was unlikely and thus withdrew their mauled divisions—Wilck and his garrison had been effectively abandoned to their fate.

With the city now completely surrounded and American forces squeezing from all sides, even the most fanatical German defenders could see that all was lost. For the purpose of propaganda, the defense of Aachen had become a symbol of defiance, much the same as Stalingrad had been for the Russians, but many in command found Wilck's radioed messages of bravado unconvincing. Von Rundstedt, believing Wilck to be on the verge of capitulation, felt compelled to remind Aachen's commandant of his duty "once more and with the utmost emphasis to hold this venerable German city to the last man, and, if necessary, allow himself to be buried under its ruins."

So the fighting went on. With the end in sight, the tempo of the American attack rose as General Huebner reinforced the 26th Infantry with two battalions of tanks

and armored infantry from the 3rd Armored Division. These additional units were to join the fight on the northern flank of Colonel Corley's 3rd Battalion against the enemy troops holding out on the Lousberg Heights. With these reinforcements on line, the 26th Infantry renewed its assault to capture what was left of Aachen. In Farwick Park, Corley quickly reclaimed the ground lost in the SS counterattack three days earlier, then turned his attention to the paratroopers still defiantly holed up in the Hotel Quellenhof.

Preceded by a heavy artillery bombardment that had driven the Germans into the hotel's basement, a platoon stormed through the marble-floored lobby to clear them out. The paratroopers quickly rose from the basement to meet the threat, leading to a bitter struggle typified by close-quarter combat and running hand-grenade duels through the hallways and rooms. Relentlessly forced back, the desperate Germans began throwing empty champagne bottles when their grenades ran out, but with machine guns now pouring fire directly into the basement, the surviving paratroopers had finally had enough. With arms raised, the battle-worn youths filed out to surrender—the once resplendent Hotel Quellenhof had finally been captured.


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Against minimal resistance, Colonel Corley's forces quickly pushed on to overrun the heights of the Lousberg. With Farwick Park and its outbuildings now firmly in American hands, and Colonel Daniel's 2nd Battalion having secured all of the downtown area, the fall of the city would be only a question of time. Inside a perimeter reduced to less than a solitary square mile, German troops still grimly defended from among the ruins. After touring his front lines, Wilck radioed to his superiors that "the battle group is defending itself stubbornly around the Lousberg against an enemy who is attacking on all sides."

Wilck knew that, with the Americans now holding the commanding heights overlooking the city, the end would be swift. In total despair, he issued his final orders, "The defenders of Aachen will prepare for their last battle. Constricted to the smallest possible space, we shall fight to the last man, the last shell, and the last bullet, in accordance with the Fuehrer's orders."

His exhortations did little to forestall the end. During October 19 and 20 resistance inside the dying city rapidly crumbled. Many troops now cut off in isolated pockets without food or water began to lay down their arms. Others chose suicide. On October 20 the remaining Germans doggedly holding out around Wilck's command post braced themselves as Colonel Corley brought up his 155mm artillery piece. Firing from a point-blank range of less than 300 meters, the enormous shells systematically demolished the defenses surrounding the bunker at the northern end of Lousberg Strasse.

On October 21, following a harrowing night of close combat around his headquarters, Wilck radioed his superiors: "All ammo gone after severe house-to-house fighting. No water and no food. Enemy close to command post of the last defenders of the imperial city." A few minutes later the radio was destroyed; Aachen was now completely cut off.

With the shells of the 155mm now tearing into the bunker itself, Wilck finally dispatched two American prisoners to convey his willingness to capitulate.

Two hours later, on a bright, clear autumn morning, Colonel Wilck led 400 of his troops to Colonel Corley's battalion headquarters where he formally surrendered—at 12:05 in the afternoon of October 21 the 10-day battle for Aachen was over. By nightfall the remaining German troops scattered throughout the city had been rounded up.

Aachen was the first major German city of the Reich to fall, a prize that after the fighting lay buried beneath 4 million cubic meters of rubble. Having suffered over 6,000 casualties, 1st U.S. Army's experience on German soil hammered home the harsh fact that the Allied road to final victory would be long and miserable.

For their part, the German casualties were appalling. But many—including Allied commanders after the war—believed that their delaying action was something of a defensive victory. Not only had it bought valuable time to bolster their main belt of defenses beyond Aachen, but it had also served as a perfect screen for the massing of large German forces west of the Rhine. These forces would soon spearhead Hitler's Operation code-named "*Wach am Rhein,*" which set off the Battle of the Bulge. □

# The U.S. Army Heritage Museum covers more than a century of American military history.

IN THE HEART OF PENNSYLVANIA, not far from the Civil War battlefields of Gettysburg, stands the U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center (USAHEC) on the eastern part of historic Carlisle Barracks.

While it is perhaps best known for its U.S. Army War College Library, U.S. Army Military History Institute, and Historical Services Division—where many of the world's leading military historians and authors have spent countless hours poring through the Center's unparalleled holdings and collections consisting of many millions of personal papers, archival materials, photographs, maps, books including rare volumes, audio-visual, and digital materials—USAHEC also houses the 7,000-square-foot Army Heritage Museum.

Here the history of the U.S. Army, from its early days to current-day operations, comes alive with a number of interactive exhibits, as well as artifacts and photographs.

Visitors first stop by the information desk to pick up a "dog tag" representing one of six soldiers whose story is part of the USAHEC collections. Guests use the dog tag to experience Army life as a soldier does, learning about their soldier throughout the gallery.

Entering the Soldier Experience Gallery, visitors experience the U.S. Army through the eyes of the men and women who lived its history, in war and peace, from the Spanish-American War to recent operations in the Middle East.

The museum also features hundreds of artifacts, oral history recordings accessible from a smart phone, plus a movie theater, and the opportunity to write a letter to a currently serving soldier. In addition, guests may test their marksmanship on the digital shooting range, parachute into Normandy as part of the D-Day invasion, and experience a night attack during the Korean War.


Entering the WWII exhibit area, filled with carefully selected photographs and artifacts, visitors are immersed in the U.S. Army's efforts to achieve victory in both the European and Pacific Theaters.


ABOVE: Along the Army Heritage Trail, a variety of exhibits, such as these recreated WWII barracks, covers over 200 years of U.S. Army history. BELOW: The interior of a barracks has been authentically outfitted to demonstrate what garrison life was like.

USAHEC's events and programs include a lecture series, workshops, historical demonstrations, the Omar N. Bradley Memorial Art Gallery, and several special living-history events at the adjacent mile-long Army Heritage Trail—an outdoor museum that features artifacts ranging from the French and Indian War to Operation Iraqi Freedom, including military vehicles, World War II barracks, an obstacle course, a Normandy scene, a German pillbox and antitank gun, a Sherman tank and, on special weekends, uniformed re-enactors representing various eras in re-recreated encampments.

And, for those with an interest in the Civil War, USAHEC holds the nation's best collection of Civil War books, Civil War



**ABOVE: The impressive facade of the U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center (AHEC) hints at the historical treasures held within. BELOW: This Sherman tank is one of many vehicles on display that show the mobility of U.S. Army forces over the decades.**

photos, and Civil War soldiers' unpublished personal letters, diaries, and memoirs. Moreover, Gettysburg is just an hour's drive away, as is the National Civil War Museum in Harrisburg.

The museum, the research library, and all USAHEC-sponsored events are free and open to the public.

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Free admission
HOURS: Open Monday-Friday 10 AM-5 pm; Saturday 10 AM-5 pm for the museum and for limited service in the library reading room; Sunday Noon-5 PM for the museum. The library reading room is closed on Sunday. The library is closed on all Federal holidays but the museum is open. Check the website to verify which days USAHEC may be closed.

## Massacre

*Continued from page 47*

6 and 7, and the overwhelming majority of them were treated lawfully as prisoners of war. For some unknown reason, though, these seven paratroopers were murdered by men who attempted to hide their crime by making it look like their deaths happened in combat.

They are also remembered in the church cemetery with a memorial that, on one side, reads:

A LA MÉMOIRE DES 7
PARACHUTISTES AMÉRICAINS
DE LA 82eme DIVISION
AÉRO-PORTÉE EXÉCUTÉS
SUR LE TERRITOIRE
DE LA COMMUNE
LE 6 JUIN 1944

("To the memory of 7 American Parachutists of the 82nd Airborne Division executed in the commune's territory, 6 June 1944")

But the other side of this memorial lists only the seven names of the paratroopers from the Headquarters Company of the 1st Battalion, 507th who were murdered. John Katona of C Company, 507th is not listed, but his presence at Hémevez is a recent revelation and something might yet be done to acknowledge that his life ended there at about the same time as the others.

Katona was only 23 years old when he was killed in action on D-Day, and he left behind a young wife in Cleveland named Mary. Like the other seven 507th paratroopers who, for 16 days in June 1944, were temporarily buried there, Katona came to France that summer to advance the cause of liberation.

Although the story of what happened to him and the seven others has fallen outside of the popularized historical narrative of the Normandy invasion, the village of Hémevez refuses to let their contribution to that cause be forgotten.

The sign on the cattle gate through which the victims were marched admonishes us with the words "*N'oublions jamais*" ("Never forget")—and now that the full story is known, perhaps we never will. □

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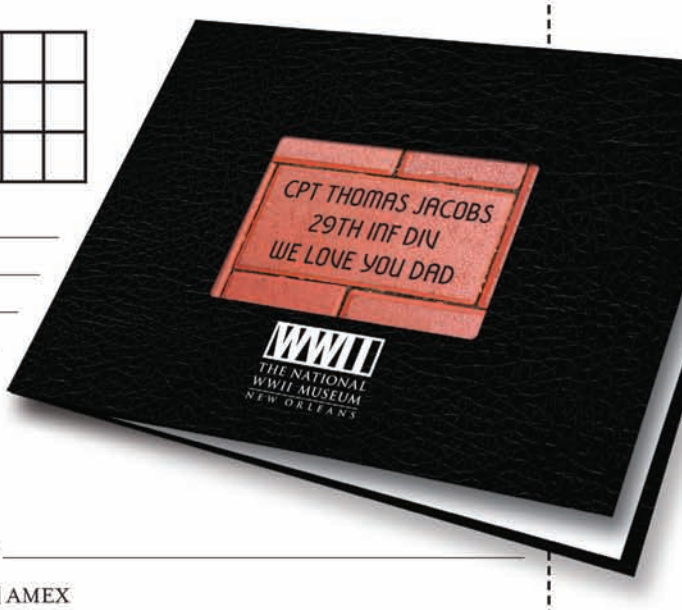


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