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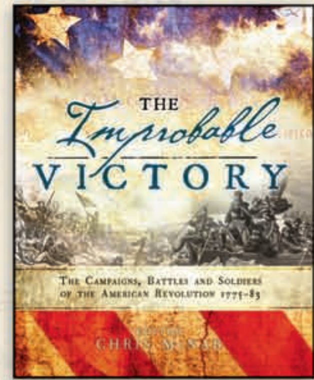

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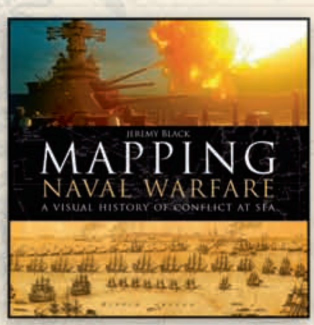

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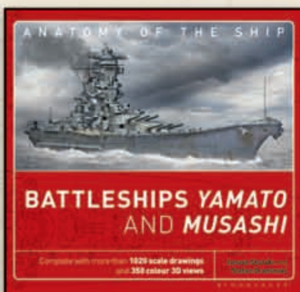

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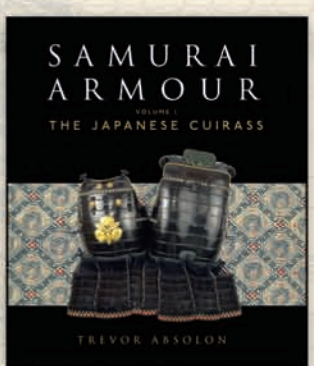

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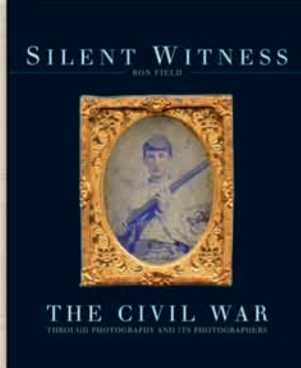

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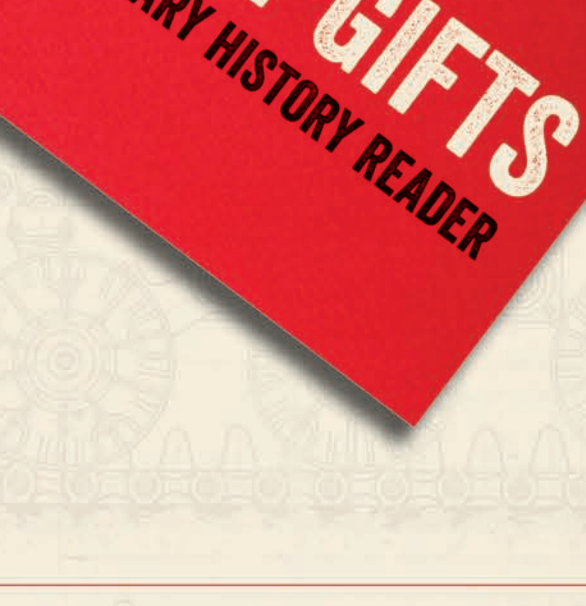

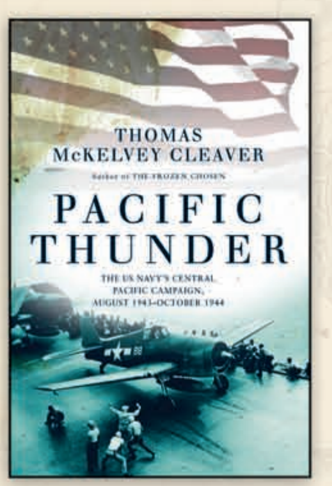

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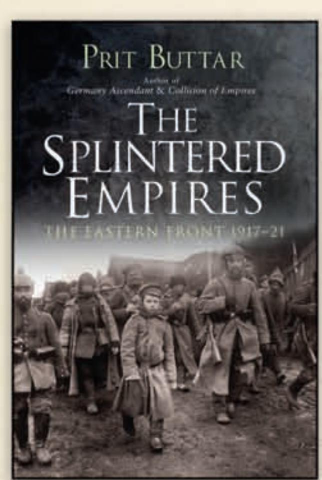

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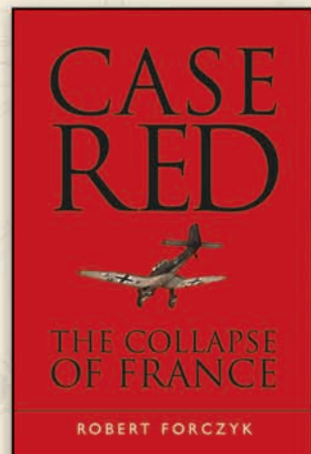

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COVER: An American M-5 light tank moves across the Arizona desert during training maneuvers in August, 1942.

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Photo: National Archives

WWII Quarterly (ISSN 2151-3678) is published four times yearly by Sovereign Media, 6731 Whittier Avenue, Suite A-100, McLean, VA 22101-4554. (703) 964-0361. *WWII Quarterly,* Volume 9, Number 1 © 2017 by Sovereign Media Company, Inc., all rights reserved. Copyrights to stories and illustrations are the property of their creators. The contents of this publication may not be reproduced in whole or in part without consent of the copyright owner. ***Subscription services, back issues, and information:*** **(800) 219-1187** *or* write to *WWII Quarterly* **Circulation, WWII Quarterly, P.O. Box 1644, Williamsport, PA 17703.** Hardbound single copies: $19.99, plus $3 for postage. Yearly subscription in U.S.A.: $39.95; Canada and Overseas: $79.95 (U.S.). Editorial Office: Send editorial mail to *WWII Quarterly,* 6731 Whittier Avenue, Suite A-100, McLean, VA 22101-4554. *WWII Quarterly* welcomes editorial submissions but assumes no responsibility for the loss or damage of unsolicited material. Material to be returned should be accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope. We suggest that you send a self-addressed, stamped envelope for a copy of our author's guidelines. **POSTMASTER: Send address changes to WWII Quarterly, P.O. Box 1644, Williamsport, PA 17703.**

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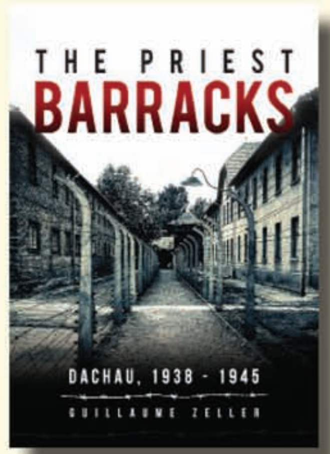

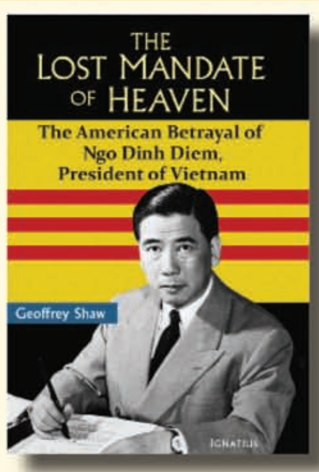

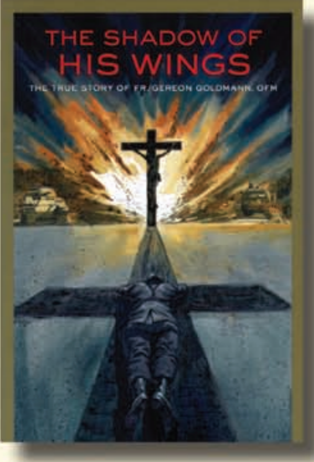

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Guillaume Zeller

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The Forgotten "Missing"

A few weeks ago I saw an article about American MIAs—those service members who went "missing in action" during World War II—and, frankly, was taken aback.

According to figures from the U.S. Department of Defense's POW/MIA Accounting Agency, more than 80,000 World War II soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines have never been found and fully accounted for.

Eighty thousand.

Let that sink in for a moment.

That's nearly six full infantry divisions.

Gone.

Vanished.

Without a trace.

And that is just for the United States. The total figure of all the World War II missing is staggering: four million Soviets, half a million Germans, and who knows how many others.

"Missing" is such a nebulous word. A word without finality. A sentence without a period. A word tinged with hope that almost implies that, one day, the "missing" person will suddenly and unexpectedly come up the sidewalk and walk through the door.

Except that we know they never will.

The reality is almost too painful to contemplate. The reality is that the remains of the missing are entombed in a ship or plane at the bottom of a sea or ocean. Or lost in impenetrable jungles. Or are buried in an unmarked grave. Vaporized by a direct hit from a shell or bomb. Lying under tons of dirt deep in a forest when an exploding bomb or shell buried them in a foxhole.

(An excellent book on this topic is *The Dead of Winter,* which explores the work of dedicated volunteers who go searching for human remains in places like the Hürtgen Forest and elsewhere.)

"Missing" does not apply only to World War II. During the Great War, some seven million on all sides are still listed as missing. (A sobering sight is the towering monument at Thiepval, France, on which are carved the names of 72,246 British and South African soldiers who went missing during the Battles of the Somme.)

More recently, some 1,681 of my fellow American service members remain missing from the Vietnam War (other figures put the number as high as 2,500). Hope is fading that any of them will ever be found.

As with every "Gold Star" family who mourned (and still mourns) the death of their loved one, the families of the missing are tormented by the thoughts that their service member will, in all likelihood, remain forever missing and unaccounted for—a silence at a roll call, a blank space on a unit roster, a hole in someone's heart.

Unfortunately, the government never came up with a flag or other visible symbol for the family of a missing soldier, sailor, Marine, or airman to hang in the front window. Memorial Day ceremonies usually pay homage to the dead, not the missing.

The recognition of families of the missing has gone missing, too.

—*Flint Whitlock, Editor*

WWII Quarterly Volume 9 • Number 1

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CURTIS CIRCULATION COMPANY
WORLDWIDE DISTRIBUTION

SOVEREIGN MEDIA COMPANY, INC.
6731 Whittier Ave., Suite A-100
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 JOSEPH FRANTISKA, JR.

Many nations perfected the art of disguising their ships and aircraft with disruptive or "dazzle" camouflage in both world wars.

What do Pablo Picasso, the U.S. Navy, the British Royal Navy, and the U.S. Army Air Forces (USAAF) have in common?

They were all users of rather distinctive—some would say garish—painting styles. In Picasso's case, it was to create art. In the military's case, it was to disguise ships and aircraft with what is known as disruptive or "dazzle" camouflage.

The word *camouflage* is derived from the French word *camoufler,* which means to disguise. Draping a white bedsheet over a tank or artillery piece in a snowy landscape is an obvious example of camouflage. So is clothing a soldier in a color-splotched uniform or affixing leaves to his body and helmet to help him blend in with his surroundings.

But painting a ship in contrasting colors, irregular geometric shapes, zigzag lines, and bold black and white stripes seems to go against common sense. This technique was not the brainchild of some naval strategist or a grizzled veteran of the seas but that of British artist Norman Wilkinson, who is credited with inventing dazzle camouflage in time for the Great War. Another artist, John Graham Kerr, also vied for the honor of being the father of the concept, but a court declared Wilkinson the true inventor.

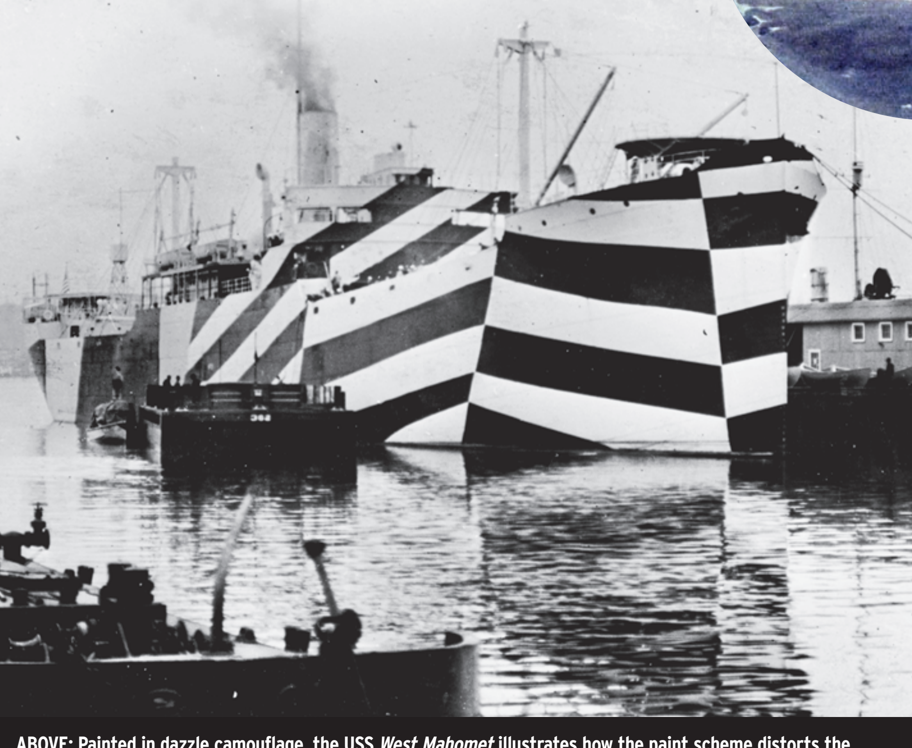
Separately, in the United States, two artists, Abbott Thayer and George de Forest Brush, conducted groundbreaking research into camouflage in the late 1800s, focusing on certain aspects of the protective coloration of plants and animals.

Mother Nature also uses various colors and patterns to make certain birds and animals appear differently and fool the predators that feed upon them. For example, a bird that with blue and yellow coloring—or even a parrot with red, green, and violet coloring—appears as dull gray at a distance of 100 feet. (One hundred feet is the range at which the human eye loses its ability to separate the three color cues.)

Exploring this principle, Thayer and Brush proposed using countershading to paint ships with patterns derived from this methodology. They found that a vessel could be painted in green wavy lines from the water line and running upward for about 20 feet; above that a combination of red, green, and violet covering upper portions of the hull—as well as the lifeboats, masts, and funnels—seemed to make the ship "disappear."

Thayer and Brush continued their camouflage experiments as a team and individually as World War I unfolded. Their proposal to the U.S. Navy to adopt their countershading methods to camouflage ships was approved for use on American vessels. A group of their followers recruited hundreds of artists to join the American Camouflage Corps, which had been formed in 1917.

Another major developer of U.S. ship camouflage during World War I was



ABOVE: Painted in dazzle camouflage, the USS *West Mahomet* illustrates how the paint scheme distorts the apparent aspect of the bow. The three-dimensional effect completely fools the eye of an observer, making the ship hard to identify. TOP: These color drawings show how the three-dimensional effect of the dazzle pattern completely fools the eye of an observer, making it difficult to comprehend the shape and direction of the ship.

William Andrew Mackay, head of the New York District of the Emergency Fleet Corporation's camouflage section. It was his responsibility to supervise the artists who applied camouflage patterns to merchant ships in that district's harbors.

Mackay's approach to camouflage was derived from the fact that what we see as white light is actually composed of many colors. School children in science class often experiment with clear prisms which, when held at the proper angle to a light source, expose the light's many colored elements. Of course, in nature the same phenomenon is seen when suspended water particles in the atmosphere create a rainbow.

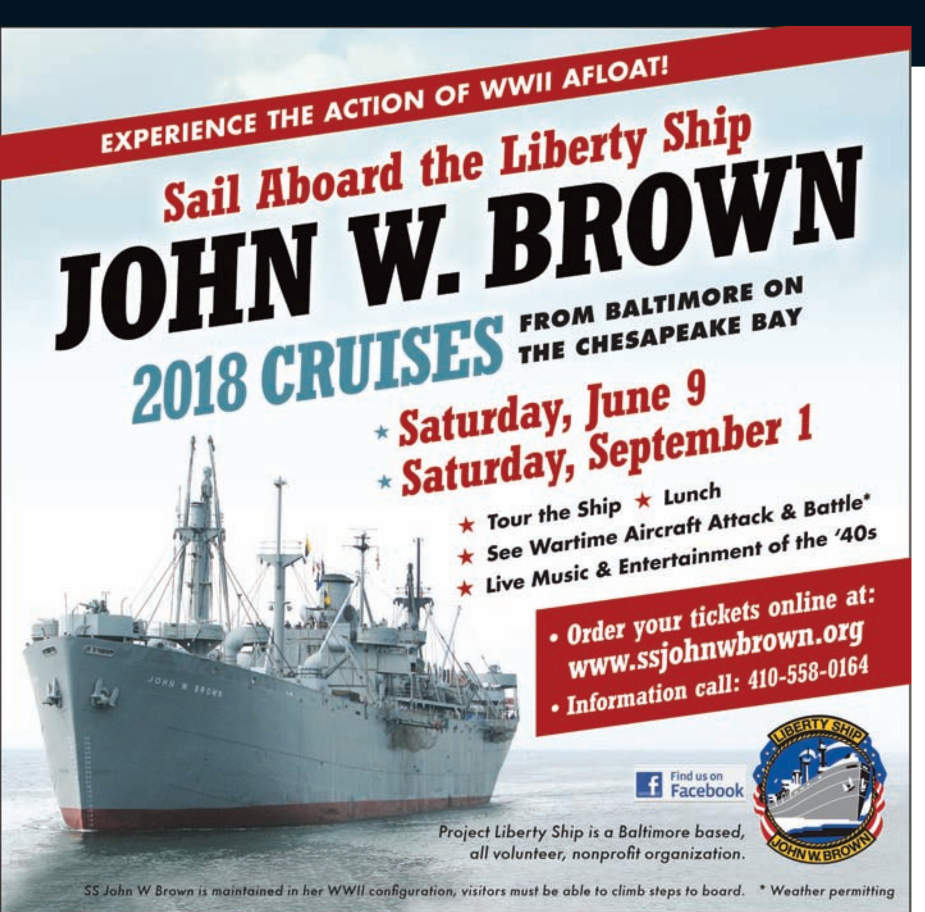
If the hull of a vessel at sea absorbs some portions of the color spectrum and therefore prevents them from reaching the eye of an observer, that hull or other object will not be sharply defined to the observer. Mackay discovered that red, green, and violet light rays are absorbed by a vessel's hull. When applied to the sides of a ship, these colors make the hull less visible than a similar one painted in a solid color.

A series of ship camouflage experiments based on Mackay's research were conducted by the Navy. In one scenario an appropriately camouflaged oil tanker, when seen from three miles away, was said to have "seemed to melt into the horizon."

Next came the concept of "dazzle." Although it seems beyond the realm of common sense, using what the British called "dazzle" camouflage—and the Americans called "razzle-dazzle"—was surprisingly effective.

One example of dazzle camouflage was the SS *Osterley*, a 12,129-ton British ship built in 1909. In June 1917 she was requisitioned as a troop transport and painted with zebra-like black and white stripes. Despite German U-boats, she came through the war unscathed and returned to commercial service in January 1919, leading a comparatively uneventful life until being scrapped in 1930.

The intent of dazzle was not to hide a ship or plane but rather to make it difficult for the enemy's rangefinders to determine with certainty its type, speed, and course.



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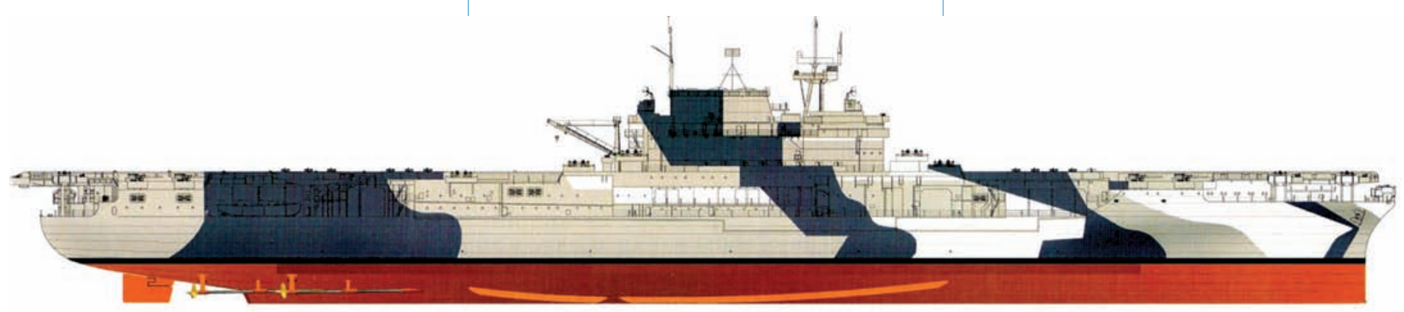
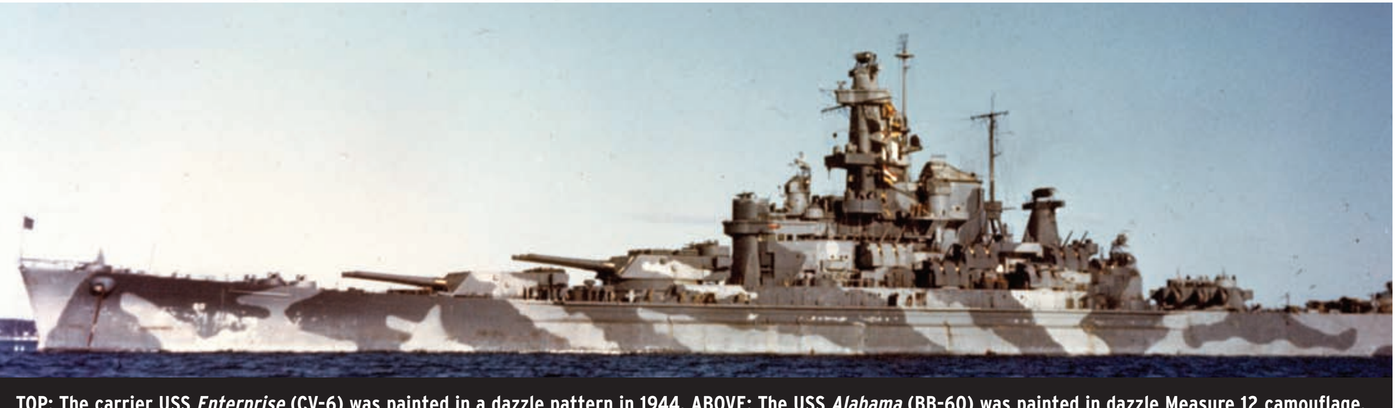




TOP: The carrier USS *Enterprise* (CV-6) was painted in a dazzle pattern in 1944. ABOVE: The USS *Alabama* (BB-60) was painted in dazzle Measure 12 camouflage.

The devices used to make this determination for the big guns of a shore battery or a battleship were visual rangefinders. An observer using a visual rangefinder needs to determine whether the target vessel is approaching or moving away, or whether the bow or stern is being viewed. The disruptive nature of dazzle made this difficult.

The most popular type of rangefinder used at the time was called a coincidence rangefinder. It was composed of a long horizontal tube on a stand with a prism at each end. One of the prisms was fixed at an angle of 45 degrees so that the light coming in would reflect into the device at 90 degrees while the other prism angle was adjustable.

After training the lenses on a potential target, the observer peered into a single eyepiece and saw two half images (upper half and lower half) of the target, with each prism contributing one of the half images. The observer manipulated controls so that the half-image from the adjustable prism lined up with the half-image from the fixed prism to form a complete picture.

The range to the target was then calculated by a trigonometric solution based on the prism angles and the length of the rangefinder known as the Pythagorean Theorem. As the technology improved, some rangefinders were of progressively larger size. Known as large base length rangefinders, they more precisely focused on distant targets.

Dazzle attempted to make this difficult since the wildly irregular patterns when seen in the two halves were hard to align precisely to give an accurate estimate. This also impacted submarine warfare as subs incorporated similar rangefinders into their periscopes. The addition of a waterline pattern made to resemble a false bow wave was intended to make the calculation of a ship's speed problematic.

While dazzle camouflage proved rather effective in World War I, this low-tech methodology became less useful as high-tech devices such as more complex, accurate rangefinders and eventually radar became increasingly effective as World War II approached.

Building on the World War I experience, navies continued to camouflage their vessels during World War II, which would see the most extensive usage of camouflage, dazzle and otherwise. With a degree of deception that could still confuse the less sophisticated periscopes of submarines, the U.S. Navy applied dazzle camouflage on all Tennessee-class battleships and some Essex-class aircraft carriers.

The designs were standardized in a highly structured process by which they were developed, reviewed, and then implemented throughout the fleet. These designs used color combinations called "measures." They were also meant for transport ships as the Navy sent dazzle plans to the U.S. Shipping Board, which was the precursor to the Merchant Marine.

For example, Measure 32 was a series of asymmetrical geometric patterns employing polygons and stripes of either Black and Ocean Gray, or Black, Ocean Gray, and Haze Gray. Horizontal surfaces were painted with patterns in Ocean Gray and Deck Blue on their upper sides with countershading on their undersides in Pale Gray or White to reduce shadowing. Patterns were also employed at the bow to disguise the bow wave and at the aft to blend in with the wake.

Another example is Measure 33, which was initially created for the carrier USS *Enterprise* (CV-6) in February 1944. The colors for vertical surfaces were Navy Blue, Haze Gray, and Pale Gray, with the color for the horizontal surfaces being Deck Blue.

As World War II wore on in the Pacific, Japanese air power had been largely eliminated, but the threat of enemy submarines remained. To confuse Japanese sub commanders peering at American ships through their periscopes, the U.S.

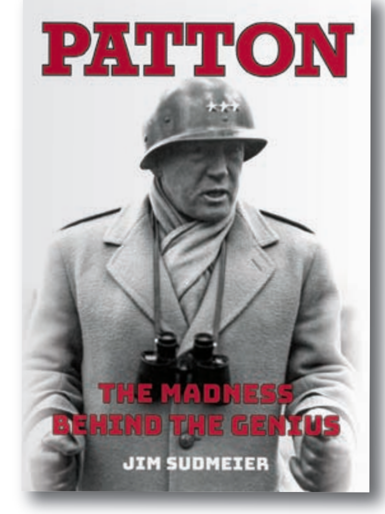
Navy reintroduced dazzle painting to protect the fleet.

However, technology gradually superseded the human eyeball as primitive radar and sonar sets became more capable. Ultimately, there was no need for submarine commanders to visually sight their targets. Thus, the primary purpose of dazzle camouflage was eliminated, and U.S. warships were given a Haze Gray color scheme.

Other nations also employed dazzle camouflage. A striking example of French dazzle camouflage was the *Gloire,* one of a class of six light cruisers that France completed before World War II. *Gloire* and two of her sisters were sent to Dakar to join the fleet assembled around the battleship *Richelieu*. *Gloire* served with Force L, based at Brest at the beginning of the war and afterward with Vichy French forces.

After the Vichy collapse, *Gloire* returned to the Mediterranean on the Allied side and participated in Operation Dragoon, the invasion of southern France, in August 1944. At war's end, she moved to the Far East in the reoccupation of French Indo-

TOP: William Andrew Mackay's drawing illustrates his "Disruptive Coloration" or low visibility dazzle system, developed in 1917. ABOVE: The USS *Indianapolis*, photographed in 1944 after an overhaul and a new dazzle paint scheme.



"A radical new biography that should interest historians, military strategists, and psychologists."
(Kirkus recommended reviews)

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See also: **www.jimsudmeier.com**

TOP: The USS *St. Louis* was painted in Measure 32 camouflage. ABOVE: French cruiser *Gloire* was photographed in 1943 with dazzle camouflage.

China. She was scrapped in 1958.

Japan also used dazzle camouflage in World War 1 to protect its ships. One vessel thus painted was the *Tottori Maru*, a 5,973-ton, 423-foot-long passenger-cargo ship. On October 15, 1918, it was fired upon by a German submarine, which unleashed two torpedoes at it that missed their target by a few feet ahead of the ship. The ship's captain strongly felt that the dazzle camouflage played a significant part in the saving of his ship.

What looked from a distance like the bow of the ship was actually part of the camouflage scheme, while the real bow was several feet ahead. Therefore, the actual and apparent courses of the ship appeared to be different. The captain concluded that the torpedoes were set to hit the ship on its apparent course and this is why they missed.

The saving of the *Tottori Maru* and its crew sealed the fate of many Americans in World War II as she was pressed into service as one of the infamous Japanese "hellships" in which prisoners of war were transported to prison camps.

Tottori Maru's luck finally ran out on May 15, 1945, when the U.S submarine *Hammerhead* (SS-364) sank her in the Gulf of Siam as she was bound for Singapore. Whether or not dazzle camouflage would have saved her is a moot point. Fortunately, no POWs were on board.

The use of dazzle camouflage for Japanese ships was the result of the experimentation and research by Lt. Cmdr. Shizuo Fukui, who developed the following ship camouflage principles:

1. To break up sharp angles, use black and white diagonal lines.
2. To keep the contrast of light and shadow at a minimum, apply dark gray to curved surfaces, since in shadow the gray appears very dark and in sunlight it does not reflect light.
3. Apply white to the entire bow area to conceal the bow wave, which will make it difficult to judge the ship's speed.
4. Apply white to the top of the funnel

to make it appear shorter.

5. Create converging lines on the funnel to make a raked funnel appear vertical.

6. Camouflage the after and forward sections of the bridge to make it appear as if it were in the same plane as the ship's hull, thus making it difficult to ascertain the ship's heading. Removing a definitive background increases the difficulty in judging the angle or planes of various ship sections.

7. The camouflage gives its best effect when seen at an angle of 30 to 60 degrees from the ship's bow.

The *Sagara Maru* was a 7,189-ton seaplane carrier/tender and former Nippon Yusen Kaisha type S high-speed cargo ship. Its captain requested that Lt. Cmdr. Fukui apply his dazzle camouflage techniques to the ship after it arrived in Singapore in February 1942. Intending to use black and white, Fukui was implored by the captain to substitute a light gray instead of white since white was the color of death. These colors were applied in the same pattern to both the port and starboard sides of the ship.

Orders were given to captains of all other ships to submit reports when sighting the *Sagara Maru*. The reports indicated that the camouflage scheme was the best seen up to that time, so other Japanese Army transports in the area soon copied it. But the *Sagara Maru*'s fate was soon to be sealed.

On the July 4, 1943, off Honshu, the *Sagara Maru* got into a duel with the submarine USS *Pompano* (SS-181), and the Japanese transport lost. *Sagara Maru* was abandoned as a total loss and stricken from the Japanese Navy list.

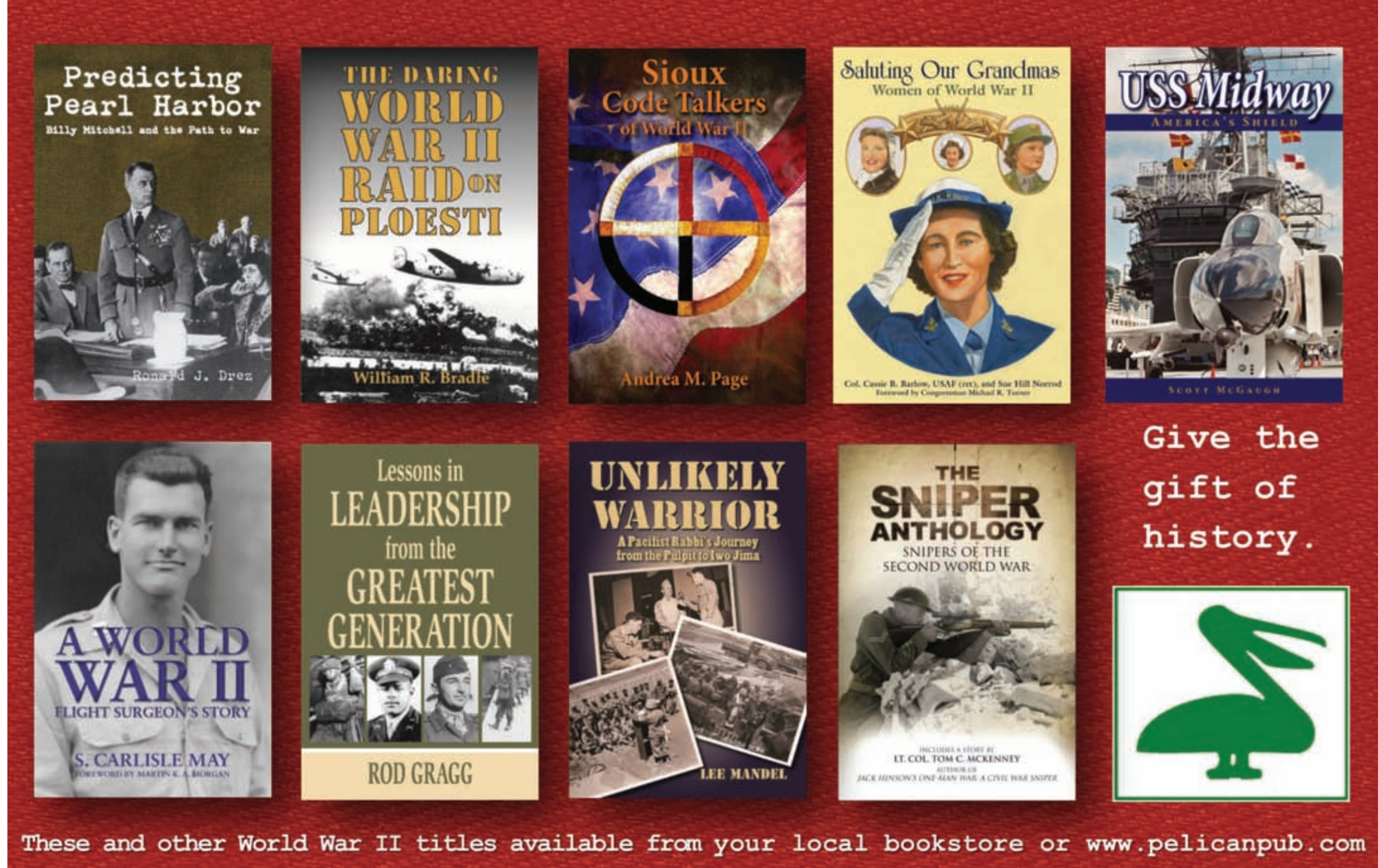
At the start of World War II, the German Navy (Kriegsmarine) became aware of the Allies' extensive usage of camouflage for their maritime fleet. It, too, began to use dazzle camouflage on some of its ships, starting with the 1940 Norway campaign.

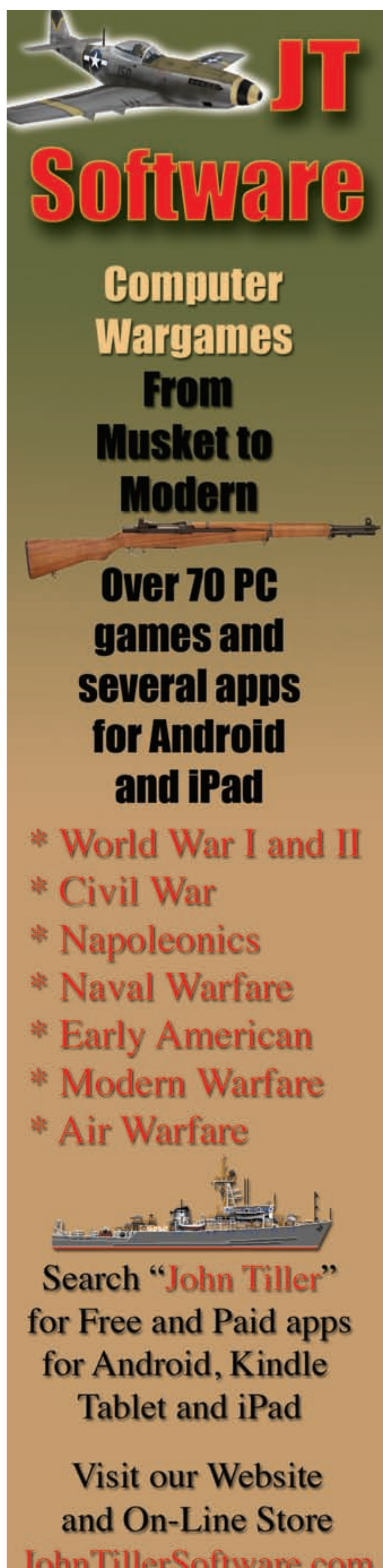
Instead of employing dazzle, the Kriegsmarine used the distinctive patterns to make the ships blend into the background of Norway's rocky and snow-covered cliffs. On January 14, 1942, the battleship *Tirpitz* set sail from Wilhelmshaven to Norway. She was to attack convoys bound for the Soviet Union, tie down British naval assets, and deter a major Allied invasion of Norway.

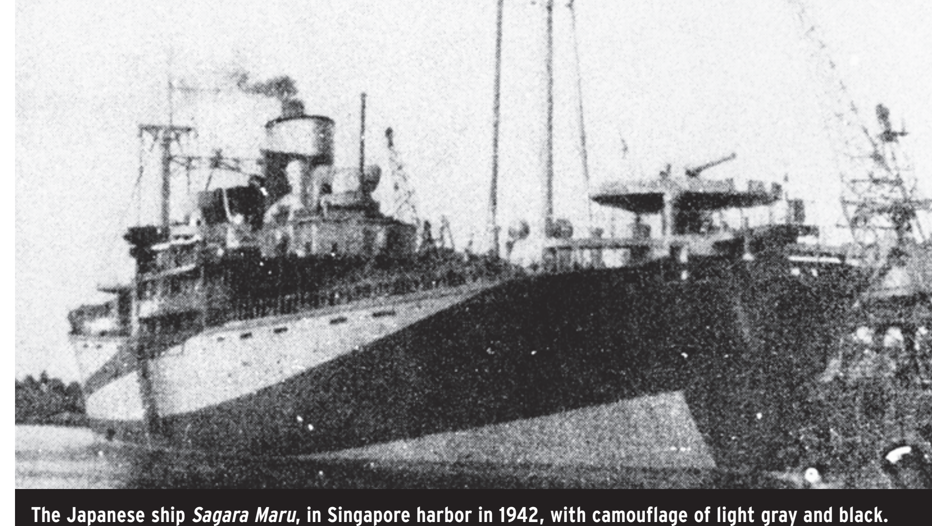
After a short stop at Trondheim, she moved north to the Faettenfjord. There she was moored close to a cliff to protect her from air attacks from the southwest.

Instead of sporting dazzle camouflage, however, *Tirpitz* operated in the Standard Light Gray 50 and Medium Gray 51 patterns with Dark Gray turret tops and gun barrels. To conceal her from air attacks, her crew cut down trees and branches and placed them on *Tirpitz*'s deck and superstructure and overlaid parts of the ship with canvas.

Moored at Faettenfjord for eight months (Hitler did not want his capital ships sailing the oceans for fear that they would meet the *Bismarck*'s fate—she was sunk on May 27, 1941), *Tirpitz*'s crew endured monotony and boredom as fuel shortages reduced training and kept her and her escorts in place behind their protective defenses. The crew was occupied with maintaining *Tir*–






The Japanese ship *Sagara Maru*, in Singapore harbor in 1942, with camouflage of light gray and black.

pitz and constantly manning the antiaircraft batteries.

Remaining at Faettenfjord until October 29, 1943, *Tirpitz* was attacked four times by the RAF with limited success. Due to the concentration of antiaircraft weaponry on the ship and the surrounding area, the RAF lost 12 bombers in the attacks. *Tirpitz* was finally sunk by British carrier aircraft on November 12, 1944.

In addition to using dazzle camouflage to deter the enemy from accurately tracking the Third Reich's capital assets, the German military forces used rangefinders to locate enemy forces. However, instead of the single eyepiece coincidence rangefinder, they largely employed the two-eyepiece stereoscopic rangefinder to determine the distance of a target.

The stereoscopic rangefinder utilized stereoscopic vision so that the user peered through the eyepieces that were fitted with special reticles. By superimposing the stereoscopic images formed by the pair of reticles over the images of the target seen in the eyepieces, the range was obtained when the reticle marks appeared to be suspended over the target and at the same apparent distance.

A stereoscopic range finder uses two eyepieces, as do binoculars, and relies on the visual portion of the operator's brain to merge the two images together. Each eyepiece contains a reference mark. The operator first centers the mark on the target, then rotates the prisms until the marks overlap into a combined image. The target's range is directly related to the amount of prism rotation.

Ships were not the only vehicles that were camouflaged with garish patterns in hopes of concealing their position or movement. Aircraft were also used as canvases for these designs.

The foremost practitioner of this craft in the United States was McClelland Barclay. Born in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1891, he received his education at several prestigious art schools.

How did one of America's finest illustrators become associated with the U.S. Navy? In 1917 Barclay won the Navy Poster Prize from the Committee on National Preparedness for his poster, "Fill the Breach." The following year, he worked on naval camouflage under William Andrew Mackay. After a 20-year absence, Barclay renewed his connection with the Navy in June 1938, when he was appointed assistant naval constructor with the rank of lieutenant in the Naval Reserve.

In 1940, Barclay created dazzle camouflage designs for various types of naval combat aircraft with hopes that he would replicate his success with ships. However, evaluation tests showed that dazzle camouflage was of little use for aircraft due to their greater speed and closer distance.

In a change of direction, Barclay offered his talents to the Navy's New York recruiting office in October 1940 and designed some of the most popular World War II naval recruiting posters over the next 2½ years. When the United States entered

World War II in 1941, he volunteered as a combat artist. Not accepted by the Combat Art Section, he returned to designing recruiting posters.

But not content to sit in a studio painting portraits and imaginary battle scenes, Lt. Cmdr. Barclay gained firsthand knowledge on short tours of duty in the Atlantic and the Pacific aboard the battleships USS *Arkansas, Pennsylvania* and *Maryland* and the light cruiser *Honolulu*.

In July 1943, Barclay was aboard *LST-342* off the Solomon Islands, sketching and taking photographs. At 1:30 AM on July 18, the craft was struck by a Japanese torpedo and blown in half, killing Barclay and several others. Barclay was posthumously awarded the Purple Heart and the Art Directors Club Medal in 1944,"in recognition of his long and distinguished record in editorial illustration and advertising art, and in honor of his devotion and meritorious service to his country as a commissioned officer of the United States Navy." He was inducted into the Society of Illustrators Hall of Fame in 1995.

A Brewster F2A-1 fighter painted with experimental dazzle camouflage designed by McClelland Barclay. Dazzle camouflage on warplanes did not work as well as it did on ships.

There has been something of a recent return to the angles, colors, and lines of dazzle camouflage. The USS *Freedom* (LCS-1) is the first of America's new littoral combat ships. Its mission is to engage the enemy in comparatively shallow areas that are close to shore as a fast, maneuverable, and relatively inexpensive vessel.

Freedom's commanding officer felt that a different scheme from the standard gray would help to make the ship's approach direction and angle more difficult for an enemy to judge. Dazzle Measure 32 was found to suit the task, and it was applied. In tests the ship's activities were difficult for others to ascertain under various conditions.

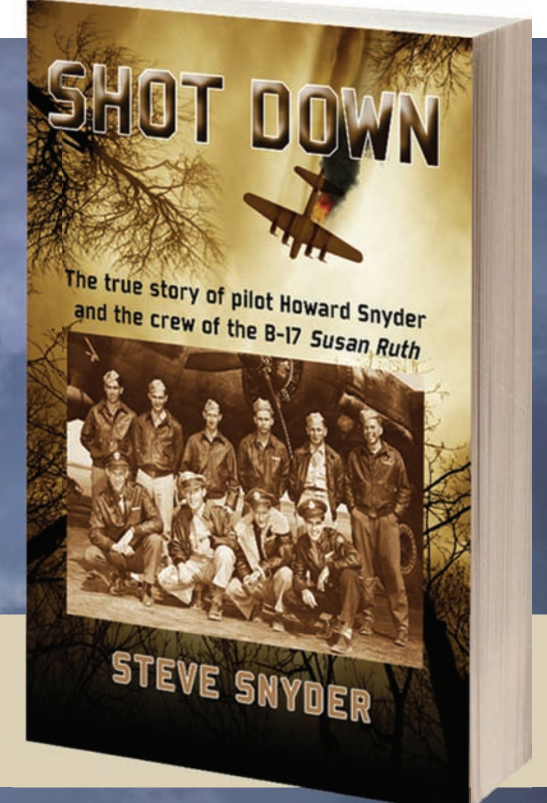
It seems that dazzle camouflage may live on after all. □

SHOT DOWN

By Steve Snyder

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

Some men died. Some were captured and became prisoners of war. Some men evaded capture and were missing in action for months before making it back to England. Their individual stories and those of the courageous Belgian people who risked their lives trying to help members of the crew are all different and are all remarkable.



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

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

amazon BARNES&NOBLE www.SteveSnyderAuthor.com

M3 Stuart tank crewmen fire at Douglas A-20 Havoc medium bombers during war games at the Desert Training Center in Southern California and Western Arizona. Lieutenant James Craig commanded Maj. Gen. George S. Patton, Jr.'s Provisional Tank Company there before shipping out to North Africa. Some of the tankers threw rocks at the low-flying bombers. INSET: Lieutenant James Craig of Shelbyville, Kentucky, commanded General Patton's headquarters tanks in North Africa and Sicily.

Commanding Patton's PERSONAL TANKS

From North Africa to Sicily, Lieutenant Jim Craig led General George S. Patton, Jr.'s Provisional Tank Company.

BY KEVIN M. HYMEL

Major General George S. Patton, Jr. had no patience for soldiers disobeying the rules of combat at his Desert Training Center in Southern California. During one maneuver, he spotted Lieutenant James Craig riding in a scout car with its side armor folded down. "Looootenant!" he bellowed out in his high-pitched voice, "Get that damn side armor up!"

Craig was not about to disobey the order. "So, of course, we closed that up," Craig recalled. It was the summer of 1942, and the U.S. Army was preparing to fight the Germans and Italians in North Africa.

James Craig

Patton's anger quickly subsided. Soon after, he put the "Looootenant" in command of 15 M5 Stuart light tanks to protect his I Armored Corps headquarters. "I didn't think he knew my name," said Craig. The tanks Craig would command each held a crew of five and sported a 37mm main gun and three .30-caliber machine guns. Craig named his new unit the Provisional Tank Company.

Two of the tanks were customized for the general. Both had their double-turret hatches replaced with a single large one to allow Patton easier access. "Their 37mm cannons were [also] replaced with similar looking wooden replicas," said Craig, "and the breeches were also removed." The accommodations would also give Patton more movement inside. Two metal flags were attached on the front of whichever tank he used: one with his two-star rank and the other with the I Armored Corps emblem. Whenever he was not using either tank, the flags were stored inside.

Lieutenant James Craig was one of Patton's better trained soldiers. A native of Shelbyville, Kentucky, he had been training with the U.S. military since he was 16, when he attended the Citizens' Military Training Corps (CMTC) at nearby Fort Benjamin Harrison, Indiana, in 1937. The CMTC was a summer training pro-

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gram that did not require enlistment. Although too young when he applied, Craig received a waiver and spent the next three summers learning how to be a soldier.

With training under his belt, Craig joined the Army at Fort Knox. His company commander made him a clerk, which he did not like. "I wanted to be in the tanks," he recalled. He got his tank when he transferred to Fort Bliss, Texas, as a tank driver, and went from private to staff sergeant in a few months. When the camp colonel saw him training a tank company, he told him, "I don't have any lieutenants who can train as well as you do. I'm going to send you to OCS [Officer Candidate School]."

Craig returned to Fort Knox and trained for three months to be an officer—one of the so-called "90-day wonders." On one of his leaves, his cousin took him to Owensboro and introduced him to a young girl named Geraldine Hayden. "She was 14 and she told me she was 16," said Craig. They spent a date sitting on a pier with their feet in the water. He saw her a few more times, and the two began writing letters.

Craig was visiting his parents when he heard over the radio that Pearl Harbor had been attacked. An announcement followed: "All military personnel report back to your duty stations." A month after Pearl Harbor, he graduated from OCS on January 22, 1942. When Lt. Col. Stovall, the OCS commander, pinned on Craig's gold second lieutenant bars, he told him, "I got you an assignment at Fort Benning, Georgia, with General Patton, with the I Armored Corps." Stovall had been Craig's company commander at Fort Knox and was looking out for him.

Craig arrived at Benning, where he became the corps' Headquarters Company motor officer, responsible for two scout cars, two 2 1/2-ton trucks, and two command cars. He met General Patton briefly but did not speak to him. He also met Captain Richard "Dick" Jensen, Patton's aide-de-camp and an avid motorcycle rider. Jensen often checked a motorcycle out of the motor pool and eventually talked Craig into riding with him. Craig had never ridden before, but Jensen showed him how. They spent their evenings riding all over the fort.

The joy riding did not last long. Patton was placed in command of the yet-to-be-established Desert Training Center, so Craig loaded his vehicles onto a train and headed west.

Both: National Archives

ABOVE: The faces of General Patton's Western Task Force: Colonel Hobart "Hap" Gay, Patton's chief of staff; Patton; Colonel Kent Lambert, chief of operations; Maj. Gen. Geoffrey Keyes, Patton's deputy commander; and Captain Richard Jensen, Patton's aide-de-camp. Gay reprimanded Craig for a vehicle breakdown, while Jensen befriended Craig. BELOW: Brigadier General Hugh Gaffey, one of Patton's chiefs of staff, made Craig his aide for the rest of the North African campaign but refused to award him a medal for shooting down two German fighter aircraft.

The center, Craig recalled, "was not much to look at." A circus-sized tent housed the officers' recreation hall, which included a bar where officers gathered to listen to Patton tell stories about World War I. "He was very genial and nice when he talked to us that way," recalled Craig.

Along with Patton were his chief of staff, Colonel Hobart "Hap" Gay, and one of Patton's operations officers, Colonel Hugh Gaffey. When Craig wasn't meeting new officers or training his men, he wrote to Geraldine. He even mailed her a promise ring, though he never spoke about marriage in his letters.

Soon after, Craig was given command of the tank company and ordered east. He loaded his tanks on a train and headed for Fort A.P. Hill in Virginia. Once there, he and his men waterproofed the tanks, including attaching large vents over the exhaust and intake pipes. Once the task was complete, the train headed to Norfolk, where the USS *Ancon,* an ocean liner now serving as a troop ship, waited at the pier.

The next morning, the ship's crew loaded the tanks into one of the holds. Craig slept in a stateroom with nine other officers in three triple-decker bunks. "I had the top bunk," he recalled. Most of the troops aboard were members of the 3rd Infantry Division. Once the ship set sail on October 24, the men learned they were heading for North Africa, which surprised Craig. "What the hell are we doing in Africa?" he asked his fellow soldiers. "The war's in Europe."

Craig was now part of Patton's Western Task Force for Operation Torch, the Allied landings in North Africa. Patton's mission was to capture Morocco, the only Atlantic-facing objective; the Eastern and Central Task Forces would assault Oran and Algiers on the Mediterranean coast. Patton's force would assault three areas: Port Lyautey in the north, Fadala Beach near Casablanca in the center, and the port of Safi in the south. They would not be fighting the Germans, but the Vichy

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A Stuart tank roars through Casablanca in French Morocco two days after its capture by Patton's Western Task Force. Some of the locals cheered Craig and his tank company when they entered Casablanca, while others cursed.

French, who had sworn allegiance to Nazi Germany after their defeat in 1940. Craig would be landing at Fadala Beach.

Every day, Craig went into the *Ancon*'s hold to check his tanks. During a storm, he noticed one of the tanks had broken loose from its cables and was sliding into another tank, then smashing into a stack of 105mm artillery shell crates. Shells rolled all over the deck. Craig ran up to the bridge and reported to the officer of the deck. "We'll take care of it," he said. But then Craig asked, "What about the 105 ammunition that's rolling around on the deck that's broken lose?" Everyone jumped into action. "They started screaming over the public address system," recalled Craig. "They had people running down there and tied it down."

On another day, Craig was again below deck inspecting his tanks when he felt the ship shudder. "What the heck is going on?" he asked himself and ran topside to see a destroyer dropping depth charges and foam rising to the surface. "I could feel the vibration," he said. He was curious but not scared. "We hadn't learned to be scared yet."

On November 8, Craig awoke before sunrise to the sounds of firing on Fadala Beach. To ward off the cold, he donned a wool uniform and a tanker's jacket. He armed himself with a Thompson submachine gun and a backpack filled with .45-caliber ammunition stick magazines. Reaching the top deck just as the sun cracked the horizon, he could see the 3rd Infantry troops in landing craft going ashore and hear the battle taking place on the beach. Knowing his tanks would be going in with the third wave, he was preparing to get his men into their tanks when he received a new order: Only one man would ride in each tank for the assault. The rest would go in on foot.

Instead of clambering into a tank, Craig climbed down a cargo net to a Landing Craft Vehicle Personnel (LCVP) bobbing in five-foot swells. Someone called out, "Step back!" and he jumped back just as the LCVP dropped. Craig's boots landed in the craft, but he fell back. Before he fell over the side, other soldiers grabbed him and pulled him in. The LCVP headed ashore but soon hit a sandbar. The front ramp dropped and everyone piled off. "The water was up to our necks," recalled Craig, whose backpack weighed him down as he waded through the cold water. "I was soaking wet with a chill."

As he reached the beach, an artillery round exploded about 40 yards away. "What the hell was that?" he asked the men around him. Soon, a French fighter plane dropped out of the sky and strafed the beach. Craig ducked. The drydocked French battleship *Jean Bart* fired more shells at the beach.

Directly in front of Craig stood the Miramar Hotel. He and several infantrymen entered and searched room by room for any hidden Vichy French. All they found were a few German uniforms hanging in closets, possibly belonging to the 10 members of a German armistice commission who had been captured in their pajamas.

In the basement, they discovered an unexploded shell fired from the *Jean Bart*. It had smashed between two windows and taken out a wall. "We could see the shell lying on the ground in the debris," said Craig. That night Patton made the hotel his headquarters.

While Craig awaited his tanks, he found a chair and sat down. A Moroccan approached him holding a bottle, and Craig gave him a dollar for it. He took a swig. "It was the hottest stuff I ever tasted," he recalled. "It must have been 100 percent alcohol." He offered it to his fellow soldiers, but they could only tolerate a sip. He

National Archives

threw it away.

Three hours later, Craig finally got his tanks. They were lowered into landing craft by the *Ancon*'s cranes for the trip ashore. After they roared up the beach, the men worked to remove the exhaust vents they had attached back in Virginia, but they wouldn't budge. "Someone had spot-welded them on," he said. Craig saw a nearby bulldozer and asked its driver to place his blade at the base of each vent and lift. One by one the driver tore off each vent. "None of them would come loose on their own," he explained.

Someone on the beach called out, "Look! There's a submarine!" Craig watched as a submarine surfaced and sank two ships. It was too close to the American ships for them to depress their guns. "He sat there and fired two torpedoes," Craig recalled. "I heard he got several other ships." While there is no record of submarines sinking American ships on November 8, a surfaced submarine was recorded sinking vessels three days later.

On November 11, Craig's unit received orders to move to Casablanca. Patton's forces had surrounded the capital and were preparing to attack when the Vichy French surrendered. A delegation later arrived at the Miramar Hotel and officially surrendered to Patton. Craig's tanks rolled into the city. "When we went in, there was nothing," he said. "The 3rd Infantry had already gone in. Nobody shot at us or anything."

Some people cheered Craig's tanks, while others cursed. "I didn't understand French," he explained, and could not understand the foreign remarks hurled at him. The tanks encamped at the city's central park, which would be Craig's home for the next four months.

The surrender ended the war in Morocco. "We sat around a lot," recalled Craig. He dined on C-rations for both Thanksgiving and Christmas and came to hate the canned cheese that came with the K-ration. One day he nabbed some sugar and cans of jam at the city's port. As he returned to the park with his booty, he came across a Frenchman selling pigs.

ABOVE: Patton heads to the Tunisian front in his scout car. Craig delivered the vehicle to Patton after driving it and three other needed vehicles across 1,500 miles of North African desert. OPPOSITE: A scout car rolls past a knocked-out German Mark IV medium tank. Brig. Gen. Gay reprimanded Craig and wrote him a poor efficiency report when one of the vehicles in Craig's caravan of two scout cars, a jeep, and a truck broke down.

Craig traded his goods for the pig, and later he and his men enjoyed a barbeque.

The Germans constantly reminded the Americans there was still a war on. On New Year's Eve 1942, the Luftwaffe raided Casablanca. Searchlights swept the skies as anti-aircraft crews fired wildly into the night. When a bomber flew over the park and dropped a bomb, Craig opened fire with a scout car-mounted .50-caliber machine gun. The bomb crashed into the park but did not explode. Then Craig noticed a light in the window of a nearby building, and he and his men fired at it until it went out. "We figured someone was making a signal," he said.

The next day Craig and his men found the unexploded bomb full of bullet holes and called for an ordnance bomb disposal crew; they told him that his bullets had disarmed it. Any relief he may have felt quickly ended when a superior officer chewed him out for firing into the building. "I got hell for that," he said.

Two weeks later, on January 14, 1943, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt came to Casablanca to meet with British Prime Minister Winston Churchill for a 10-day conference to determine the direction of the war. For extra security, soldiers set up a machine-gun nest atop Patton's Anfa District residence. Whenever Craig served as Officer of the Day in the building, he passed Patton's parlor on the way to the machine gun. One time he spotted Patton there, but the general was too busy to look up. Another time, an old man waved to him. Craig realized it was President Roosevelt, but he did not stop. When he returned, the parlor door was shut.

In late February, word reached the men that the Germans under General Erwin Rommel had launched an attack through the Kasserine Pass in Tunisia, smashing Maj. Gen. Lloyd Fredendall's II Corps. When it was over, Fredendall had lost 4,300 men killed and wounded to Rommel's 201, yet little official news came from the battlefront. "We didn't know much," said Craig. "We were told that Fredendall had been relieved of his command because of Kasserine Pass." To replace Fredendall, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, the commander of all troops in North Africa, selected Patton.

Patton flew out of Casablanca on March 5 and took command of II Corps. The next day he sent for his vehicles. Craig would lead a convoy consisting of two scout cars, a jeep, and a deuce-and-a-half truck filled with gasoline to Patton's new headquarters, more than 1,500 miles away. "We were given a time and date to cross the IP [initial point]," said Craig. Mechanics worked on the vehicles through the night to prepare them for the long journey.

The next morning, Craig crossed the IP on time but only drove about 100 yards before one of the scout cars tore a brake line. "We could see the fluid on the ground," he recalled. Craig had gone back to get a mechanic when he bumped into Hap Gay, now a brigadier general. An angry Gay held Craig personally responsible for not preparing his vehicle properly. Craig later found out that Gay had written a special efficiency report on him. "It was a terrible report," Craig said. "I didn't know what a brake line was at that time."

Once the vehicle was repaired, the convoy took off again and made it to Gafsa, which had been captured by the 1st Infantry Division on March 17. There Craig was greeted by Captain Jensen, whose sergeant took charge of Craig's soldiers while Jensen took him to a mess tent. They sat in a corner eating next to an open window flap. Someone walked by and asked, "Craig, what the hell are you doing here?" It was Brig. Gen. Hugh Gaffey, now Patton's II Corps chief of staff. Craig told Gaffey he had brought Patton's vehicles. "Good," said Gaffey. "I need an aide and you're it."

That night, Jensen brought Craig to Patton's residence to celebrate the general's promotion to lieutenant general. The men sat around a long line of fold-out tables with Patton at the center and dined on rations. Craig sat at the foot of the table, trying to keep his eyes off Patton. "He was smiling and had his third star on," recalled Craig, "I was afraid to look at him."

For the next two months Craig served under Gaffey, often riding with his new boss to division and regimental headquarters. "He loved to ride around in a jeep," recalled Craig, who manned the .50-caliber machine gun mounted in the back. On long rides, Craig would stare at the countryside until Gaffey looked back. "Craig, dammit!" he would shout. "The planes aren't out there," pointing at the horizon. "They're up there!" pointing up.

Craig accompanied Gaffey to Kasserine Pass, while Graves Registration troops cleared out the dead. Examining where the bodies lay, Craig concluded that the Americans had retreated into the pass before they were killed. "There were a whole bunch of bodies," he said. "I didn't look at them closely."

Craig proved he could deal with enemy planes. One day he was riding down a road in Gaffey's jeep between two marching columns of infantry when two German fighter planes roared straight up the road. As enemy fire stitched the ground, Gaffey's driver hit the brakes, and he and Gaffey bailed out. Everyone ducked for cover except Craig, who returned fire. "I was firing point blank at this thing coming right at me," he recalled. He could see the German tracers zipping at him and his own tracers hitting the plane. Suddenly, the first plane pulled up and crashed into a hillside.

The second fighter plane then closed in. "I started firing again, and before he got to us, he started smoking." The plane peeled off and, with smoke pouring out, flew over a hill and disappeared. The troops cheered Craig's marksmanship, and he heard a colonel tell Gaffey, "He shot down two planes, we oughta give him a medal." But Gaffey was unmoved. "He's just doing his job," he told the officer. No medals were

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forthcoming.

Craig was doing his job again when he and a driver headed to the front to deliver a message to a combat unit. They made a wrong turn and passed a lone trooper walking the other way. "I looked at him, and he looked at us, and we kept going," said Craig. When they topped a hill overlooking a creek bed with high banks and woods on the other side, Craig told the driver, "Let's park on top of this hill." Armed only with a .45-caliber pistol, Craig got out and dropped into the creek bed. As he was about to climb over the far bank he heard German voices. "I sneaked a peak and I saw coming out of the woods five or six Germans."

He ducked behind a bush and froze. The Germans sat down on either side of the bush and ate their lunch. "I could hear them talking." He thought of killing them with his pistol, but he knew he only had seven rounds, and the Germans were too spread out. When they finally left, Craig climbed back up the hill to find his ride gone. He walked back until he came to the trooper he had passed earlier. "Who the hell are you?" Craig asked. "I am the point," the man told him. Incredulous, Craig asked, "Why didn't you stop us?" The man responded, "You're an officer, you're supposed to know what you're doing!"

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A Stuart rolls off a train bed. When a French yardmaster in Bizerte told Craig he would have to wait to unload his tanks from a train, Craig opted to roll the tanks off, tilting the cars into the air and crashing them back down on the tracks.

Craig continued down the road until he spotted his vehicle and driver. Soldiers surrounded the driver as he explained Craig's disappearance. When Craig asked what had happened, the driver told him, "I saw those Germans come out of the woods, and I thought you had had it. I got out of there."

Serving with Gaffey, Craig got to see many important American leaders, including Maj. Gen. Terry Allen, the commander of the 1st Infantry Division, as well as Brig. Gen. Teddy Roosevelt, Jr., the son of the 26th president of the United States and cousin of the current president, but Craig never spoke with them. He also met Lieutenant Al Stiller, another member of Patton's staff whom Craig considered "very back-woodsy."

One day, Craig visited corps headquarters and spied the situation map. As he looked at it, Maj. Gen. Omar Bradley, Patton's deputy commander, entered the room. He was not angry with the curious lieutenant and instead explained the different markings on the map. "He was very friendly," said Craig. "I liked him very much."

And then there was Patton, whom Craig considered a sharp disciplinarian who took seriously the rules of war. Soldiers failing to buckle their helmet's chinstrap was one of his pet peeves. "He was mad about those chinstraps not being on," said Craig. "He would get you if you didn't. He would chew you out."

One day Craig watched four American soldiers march some German prisoners past Patton. Local Arabs rushed the Germans and began stealing their personal items. Patton stormed the Arabs. He kicked one in the rear and chased away the others. "These are prisoners of war!" he yelled at the Americans. "They are military people! They're honorable people! Don't let them pick on them like that!"

On March 26, General Eisenhower came to congratulate Patton for successfully defending El Guettar from a German attack three day earlier. That night Craig bedded down in a room with all the other generals' aides, each man on the floor in a sleeping bag. He was sleeping close to the door with his arm stretched out in the dark when somebody stepped on his finger.

Craig shouted, "Who is stepping on my…!" when he looked up to see General Eisenhower. "Sorry sir," he quickly apologized. "I'm sorry," said Eisenhower. "I'm looking for my aide." Craig reached over and gave Eisenhower's aide a yank. "He was sound asleep," Craig recalled.

Later, Patton and Eisenhower toured the front, walking by Craig's slit trench. "They didn't notice me," he remembered. But he did hear Patton tell Eisenhower, "I'm gonna drive right to the sea and we'll separate Rommel's forces, then we can mop him up between us and [British General Bernard Law] Montgomery." Eisenhower was having no part of it. "You move one step from this spot, and I'll relieve you." Eisenhower wanted Patton to keep pressure off Montgomery's front, not race to the coast. The two generals walked away. "I think Patton was dumbfounded," said Craig.

Craig was at the front when Captain Jensen was killed on April 1. Although Patton

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Vehicles land in Sicily. Although the fighting had already moved inland when Craig landed at Gela Beach, enemy artillery salvos still exploded around his tank.

and Bradley both recorded that Jensen was killed during a Luftwaffe raid, Craig recalled that enemy artillery killed his friend. "He was in a slit trench, and I was about four or five feet from him in a slit trench," he said. They could hear a radio operator talking inside a nearby half-track. A shell arced over, and Craig heard the operator say, "We're being shelled. That one just went over us." Jensen called over to Craig: "That guy's telling the Germans where the artillery's going!" Craig replied, "I'll shut him up!" He ran over to the operator and told him to be quiet, explaining that the Germans were monitoring his communications.

Just then a shell exploded right next to Jensen's slit trench, killing him. Craig watched as Jensen's body was put on a stretcher, but he could not stay long. Gaffey arrived and picked him up. "He was going somewhere, and I had to go with him," he said. Craig later served as a pallbearer at Jensen's funeral. "Jensen was the best friend I had," said Craig. "He was always helping me out." Craig looked back fondly on his motorcycle rides and their lunch together in Gafsa. "He was always saying 'hi' to me and going out of his way to speak to me."

Three days later, on April 3, three Allied air generals visited Patton. British Chief Air Marshal Arthur Tedder and Americans Lt. Gen. Carl "Tooey" Spaatz, commander of the Twelfth Air Force, and Maj. Gen. Laurence Kuter, deputy commander of the North African Tactical Air Force, were talking with Patton when Craig happened by the window and heard one of the generals telling Patton not to worry about air superiority, "We have it."

Just then, four German fighter planes flew down the street, bombing and strafing. "This German plane came over and dropped a bomb a little more than a block away from us," recalled Craig. "There was a terrific roar."

When it was over, Spaatz asked Patton, "Now how in the hell did you manage to stage that?" Patton cleverly answered, "I'll be damned if I know, but if I could find the sonsabitches who flew those planes, I'd mail them each a medal!" The airmen hurried out of the headquarters, yelling back to Patton, "We'll get some support for you right away!" Amused, Craig then heard Patton say, "I would have paid that pilot to drop that bomb closer to this building."

When Axis forces surrendered in Tunisia on May 13, 1943, Gaffey told Craig he would be taking over the 2nd Armored Division and asked if he wanted to come with him. Craig told him, "No sir, I want to go back to my tank company." To which Gaffey said, "So be it." A tank commander again, Craig flew back to Casablanca, where he loaded his 15 tanks, a truck, and a jeep onto a train—one tank per rail car—and brought them to Bizerte on Tunisia's northern coast.

Upon arrival, Craig told a French railroad yardmaster that he needed help getting to the loading docks to unload the tanks. The Frenchman said it would not be possible for a few days. One of Craig's noncommissioned officers suggested unhooking the cars and driving the tanks off the back, figuring that the weight of the tank would tilt the car down, allowing the tank to roll off. "Let's try it," said Craig.

The first tank rolled slowly off its car, causing the front to rise. As the tank rolled off, the front end banged down on railroad ties, missing the rails. As they prepared to release the next tank, the yardmaster ran out shouting, "You can't do that! You can't do that!" Craig told him he had to unload the tanks today. "I can do it my way or we can do it your way." The panicked Frenchmen told him, "I'll get a locomotive!" The tanks were all offloaded.

Craig led his tanks to a hilltop outside of Bizerte. One morning he and his men were shaving out of their helmets under some olive trees when a German airplane flew over and antiaircraft guns opened up. A new officer, a Lieutenant Anderson, looked up as he held his helmet and said, "You know, all that comes up is bound to go down."

Just then a dime-sized piece of metal tore through the tree leaves and gouged the top of Anderson's head. "We could hear it come down," said Craig. "It cut a nice gash in him." Anderson dropped to his knees as everyone slapped on their helmets. "I took him down to the aid station, and they evacuated him."

Soon Craig's unit began training for an amphibious landing, loading their tanks onto landing craft and practicing beach assaults. Once their training was complete, they loaded onto a Landing Ship Tank (LST) and set sail. While at sea they were

told two things: that they would be invading Sicily and that they were now part of Patton's Seventh Army, which had been approved after setting sail. "We expected we were going up to Europe," said Craig. They were going to Europe, just not the part he was thinking of.

Patton's new Seventh Army assaulted Sicily's southern shore on July 9. Airborne forces were dropped in first, followed by an amphibious assault. By the time Craig's LST landed on Gela Beach, the fighting had already moved inland, although enemy artillery occasionally exploded on the beach. "It came close enough to see, but it didn't hit any of us," he recalled.

The fighting around Gela was initially intense, but once Patton's army cracked the German and Italian lines, the Americans advanced quickly up the center of the island bound for Palermo on the north coast. Palermo contained a large harbor, where Patton could stage future operations. Patton's troops captured the city on July 22.

Craig's tanks entered Palermo at night. Not knowing where to go, he stopped his convoy at a large intersection outside the city. Suddenly, a rifle shot cracked the silence. A sniper was taking shots at him and his men. "We could see the flash of fire and see fellows go by us," recalled Craig. "I just turned one of the 37mm guns and fired a shot at the sniper." The sniping ended. An American soldier appeared and led Craig's company to a camp area.

With Palermo now in his possession, Patton turned east to pursue the enemy to Messina at the northeast corner of the island. He wanted to capture the city, not only defeating the enemy but beating Montgomery, proving American troops were as good as, if not better than, the British.

But the Germans and Italians blunted Patton's advance, fighting his troops to a stalemate. To break it, Patton launched three amphibious assaults to get behind the enemy, the first at Sant' Agata, the second at Brolo, and the third at Falcone, some 20 miles west of Messina. The first two assaults came close to routing the enemy, and Patton hoped the last one would succeed. Both Bradley and Maj. Gen. Lucian Truscott, the 3rd Infantry Division commander, begged him to cancel the landing, arguing that Truscott's troops had already passed the port town. Patton insisted it go forward.

ABOVE: Lieutenant Craig mans his tank. His company spearheaded Patton's final amphibious assault in Sicily, and, thanks to Craig's quick thinking, avoided coming under friendly fire. OPPOSITE: Lieutenant Craig commands the color guard in a 21-gun salute at the 2nd Armored Division cemetery on Armistice Day, November 11, 1943. Days after the ceremony, Craig would be sent home with torn knee ligaments.

Patton picked five of Craig's tanks for the Falcone attack. Craig loaded them onto five Landing Craft Tanks (LCTs) and headed out to sea. When the craft turned south for the run onto the beach, Craig noticed an American tank destroyer atop a hill. Worried that it would open fire on him, he radioed his tank crews, "Turn your turrets so they can see the star on the side!" Everyone turned their turrets. "They didn't fire at us," he said. Craig's tanks rolled off the landing craft and headed east but did not reach Messina. Truscott's troops had already captured the city, hours before the British.

With the campaign over, Craig welcomed a new commander, Captain Turner Max Smith from Spartanburg, South Carolina, who had previously commanded an airfield security force that had been disbanded. "Since he was an armored officer, Patton put him over me," he said. Craig also started hearing rumors that Patton had slapped two soldiers in different hospitals during the drive to Messina, but he did not believe them. He could not believe Patton was capable of such behavior. "Of course, I was wrong," said Craig. "He did it."

The Provisional Tank Company headed back to Patton's headquarters in Palermo. On the way, they passed tanks and troops heading east. They also passed a local Sicilian riding a horse pulling a cart with extended axles. One of the axles struck a tank's tread, and the cart and its horse flipped up in the air then smashed to the ground, killing the horse. Craig's tankers had to wait for the mess to be removed before they could go forward.

That night, Craig and Smith visited a restaurant they had passed earlier. When they read that steak was the special on the menu, Craig asked Smith, "Smitty, isn't this where we killed that horse today?" Smith agreed. The waiter came out and said, "Steak." Smith asked, "Horse?" and the waiter said, "Si, steak, steak." The two men looked at each other. "We got spaghetti," said Craig.

Craig spent most of the trip back locating and defusing mines and putting them in his jeep's trailer. Once in Palermo, he and Smith were watching a German air raid from an

archway over a road when Smith asked, "By the way, Jim, where's that trailer of yours?" When Craig said it was beneath them, Smith immediately shouted, "Get it the hell out of here!"

The company camped on a horse racing track near the harbor, and the officers occupied a jockey weigh station, a one-room cottage with no windows. One night German planes raided the harbor and hit an ammunition ship. "We could hear it going off, but then it went quiet," said Craig. He went to the door and looked out when something nearby exploded. "I turned around and ran over two officers."

Things quieted down again, and Craig looked out the doorway when a second explosion occurred. When he got up a third time, Smith said, "Jim, you just sit down. We'll go look."

Craig often reported to General Patton's office with the color guard to retrieve the Army flags for ceremonies. He always addressed Patton the same: "Sir, I've come to take the colors." Patton would get up from his desk and stand to one side to watch. Craig would take colors, one at a time, and put them in the color guards' hands, then they would march, single file, out of the room. "He would stand there and watch the whole thing," said Craig. Patton did the same thing when they returned the flags.

On Armistice Day (today's Veterans Day), November 11, 1943, which was also Patton's birthday, the general dedicated a cemetery for the dead of the 2nd Armored Division. Craig led the color guard, marching them out to the cemetery and delivering a 21-gun salute. It was one of his last actions in Sicily.

Soon after the ceremony, Craig stepped in a hole and tore his knee ligaments. Barely able to walk, he reported to an aid station where he was loaded onto a hospital ship headed to Tunisia. From there it would go to England and the United States. The ship stopped in England to pick up an important cargo: American Army nurses and Women's Army Corps members, all of whom were pregnant. Since the Army prohibited pregnant personnel, the women were being returned stateside to be discharged.

The ship continued west, and by the summer of 1944 docked in Boston, Massachusetts, but the men were not allowed to debark. An announcement went out that all troops would remain below decks until the female passengers were offloaded. As the women walked down the gangplank, the band on the dock struck up the song, "I Don't Want to Walk Without You, Baby." The men below decks went wild. "You should have heard the roar on that ship," said Craig.

Craig was transferred to the 3rd General Hospital in Nashville, Tennessee, where, after two weeks of convalescing, he could walk with a cane. He went on leave to visit his parents, who now lived at Fort Knox. Soon after, he traveled to Owensboro to see Geraldine. He found her at a party, and when she spotted him she ran over and grabbed him.

"She was so happy. I was happy," recalled Craig. They enjoyed being together again and were married on February 13, 1945. They eventually had five children: Judith Ann in 1946, Rick in 1947, Michael in 1949, Marie in 1954, and Penny in 1956.

Craig remained in the Army and went to Korea in charge of a Sherman tank company with the 1st Cavalry Division in the Pusan Perimeter. The North Korean Army had invaded South Korea on June 25, 1950, and had driven South Korean and American forces into the tight perimeter. Craig led his company across the Naktong River and parked on a ridge, where they came under enemy artillery fire. He was climbing onto his tank when he slipped and hurt his good knee. "It hurt like hell," he recalled. Again, unable to walk, he was put on an airplane to Japan to recover. He missed the rest of the war.

Both: James Craig

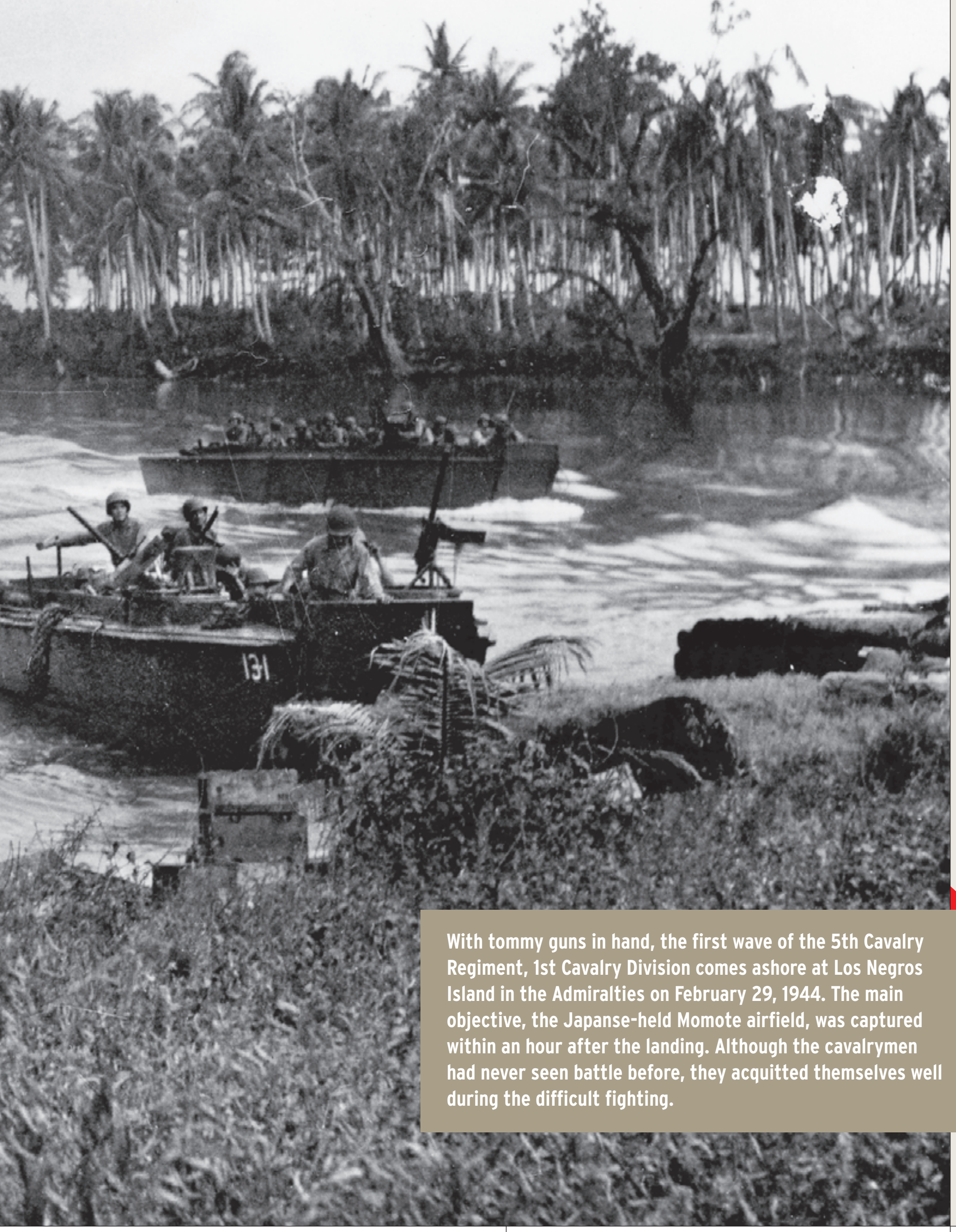
After 20 years in the Army, Craig retired from the service in 1960 and eventually worked for the Air Force Defense Supply Agency until his final retirement in 1983. As of 2017, he lives in Richmond, Virginia, with most of his children living close by.

Craig looked back fondly on his World War II service. Reflecting on his old boss, he praised Patton as a military commander: "I thought he was wonderful." And despite Patton's yelling at the young "loootenant" that day at the Desert Training Center, Craig still liked Patton the man. "He was very strong willed, but we all admired him." □

ACTION IN THE ADMIRALTIES

To isolate the huge Japanese naval base at Rabaul, the U.S. staged a major invasion of Los Negros Island in the Admiralties in February-March 1944.

BY EDWARD G. MILLER



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With tommy guns in hand, the first wave of the 5th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division comes ashore at Los Negros Island in the Admiralties on February 29, 1944. The main objective, the Japanse-held Momote airfield, was captured within an hour after the landing. Although the cavalrymen had never seen battle before, they acquitted themselves well during the difficult fighting.

AN AIR STRIKE intended to cover the landing of 1st Lt. John McGowan's team of six Alamo Scouts was late. The U.S. Navy Consolidated PBY Catalina flying boat carrying the team landed in broad daylight a half mile from shore instead of the planned quarter mile, and it was impossible to remove the fully inflated rubber landing boat from the plane.

The GIs had to deflate it before putting it into the water, then lost more time inflating it before paddling to shore on Los Negros Island, located about 250 miles north of Papua New Guinea. Somehow they made it without alerting the thousands of Japanese defenders who were within a few hundred yards of their landing site.

Hiding the boat was another matter: "The hiss of air as it escaped from the rubber boat sounded to them as if a thousand locomotives were letting off steam," stated Training Director Major Gibson Niles. Once in a hiding position on shore the scouts waited out the air strike—it finally occurred at 10 AM on February 27, three hours later than planned.

Clad in camouflage suits, faces streaked brown and green, the team edged into the overgrowth. They found newly dug trenches and machine-gun emplacements, clear evidence that the enemy, contrary to reports from air reconnaissance, was present in force. About 15 apparently well-conditioned enemy soldiers wearing new-looking uniforms walked by the team's hiding position. McGowan froze as one of them appeared to look him straight in the eye before turning away to join the others.

By 1 PM, it was clear that the team was in danger of detection. They were unable to cross a creek separating them from Momote airfield, which was the objective of their mission and any future American ground attack, so McGowan decided to return to the landing beach and radio for

pickup. They spent the night undetected, and at dawn on February 28, 1944, McGowan radioed his report to the PBY.

Los Negros was "lousy" with the enemy. They upset the U.S. Navy pilot, who only slowed his plane to pick up the Alamo Scouts. According to Niles, "he never stopped taxiing, and actually picked up the team on the run." The first mission of the famed Alamo Scouts was over.

McGowan and his team reached New Guinea before 10 AM the same morning, where he briefed the Sixth Army commander, Lt. Gen. Walter Krueger, and his G-2 (intelligence officer), Brig. Gen. Charles A. Willoughby.

Brigadier General William C. Chase, the commander of the 1st Cavalry Brigade (one of two brigades in the 1st Cavalry Division), realized the Scouts' report conflicted with another that had reached him and his division's G-2 a few days before: "Bomber crews say Los Negros and Manus are evacuated" (1st Cavalry Division G2 Journal entry for 11 PM, February 26, 1944).

This aerial reconnaissance of Los Negros and Manus detected only two dilapidated airfields. There were no active Japanese gun positions, aircraft, or troops visible to the airmen. Lt. Gen. George Kenney, commander of the Southwest Pacific Area (SWPA) air forces, took the information to his boss, General Douglas MacArthur. Kenney evidently accepted without question the air reconnaissance report, which clearly conflicted with that of Lieutenant McGowan.

Los Negros and Manus Islands are the two largest of the group called Admiralty. These islands helped link Japan's scattered island defenses and barred an Allied advance from the Southwest Pacific to the Philippines. The Admiralties also formed a valuable natural fleet anchorage, Seeadler Harbor.

They also offered the Japanese a base valuable in helping them concentrate the aircraft so vital to protecting their own naval bases. An Allied capture of the Admiralties would also help seal off the Bismarck-Solomon Islands area from reinforcement and isolate more than 100,000 enemy troops. Despite their expansive area of influence across the Pacific, the Japanese could not hold every mile of coastline or every island capable of basing aircraft.

The Allies in fact did not need to attack major concentrations of enemy troops in the southwest Pacific as long as they could find suitable locations for airfields on lightly defended islands in their general area of interest. Even the strongly defended Japanese fleet base at Rabaul was at the end of a long logistical line and thus inherently vulnerable to Allied air attack.

Nine months before John McGowan's Alamo Scout team landed on Los Negros, MacArthur's SWPA staff in May 1943 outlined a plan to neutralize Rabaul and take the Admiralty Islands. General Krueger received orders to that effect in November and again in mid-February 1944. The target date for the Admiralty Islands attack was April 1, but much depended on the capability of Japanese naval and air forces to counter the Allies.

Successful air attacks and naval surface raids in February, meanwhile, led SWPA planners to lower their estimate of Japanese capabilities for air operations. The aerial reconnaissance report appeared to corroborate the estimated impact of the Allied raids. This news, if confirmed by ground reconnaissance, might enable MacArthur to advance the April target for seizure of the Admiralties. Moving earlier would keep the enemy from reinforcing the islands and presumably save American lives.

Success might also help MacArthur advance his case for giving priority to his plan of liberating the Philippines instead of devoting scarce resources to targets favored by the Navy in its Central Pacific drive.

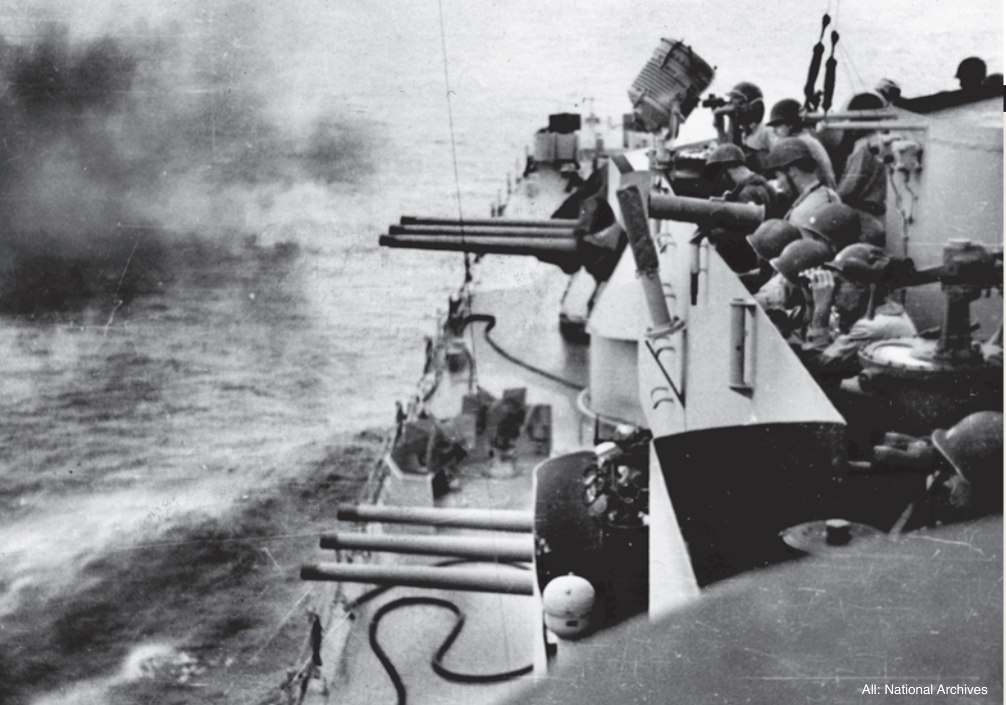
ABOVE: Members of the Alamo Scouts, a reconnaissance team, arrived at the southeast point of Los Negros two days before the invasion to report on Japanese defenses. OPPOSITE TOP: Six-inch guns of the cruiser USS *Phoenix* bombard Los Negros on the morning of February 29 as the cavalrymen prepare to land on the island. OPPOSITE BELOW: Using an SGR-193, 5th Cavalry radiomen call for supporting naval fire within 15 minutes of the first wave's landing.

MacArthur's G-2, General Willoughby, disagreed with Kenney's assessment and maintained that the importance of the islands as a link in the chain between Rabaul and Japan was the reason that the enemy would defend them strongly. Instead of the near absence of the enemy, his staff on February 23, the day of the aerial reconnaissance, calculated that there were likely as many as 4,000 defenders in the Admiralties.

However, his published estimate added "bureaucratic cover" in case Kenney was correct. That is, barge sightings at Los Negros might, according to a 1st Cavalry Division field order, "indicate that the Japanese had evacuated the place."

What was MacArthur to make of the conflicting estimates from two of his key subordinates? He approved advancing the date for the invasion of Los Negros but simultaneously hedged his bet by authorizing only a reconnaissance in force, not a full-scale attack, to begin on February 29.

Yet the 1st Cavalry Division's field order directing the attack maintained that "recent air reconnaissance ... results in no enemy action and discloses no sign of enemy occupation." Troop commanders thus entered the battle with radically different intelligence assessments.



All: National Archives

Krueger was certainly concerned. He did not like the idea of advancing the attack date, and he strengthened the initial troop list from the 800 authorized by SWPA to more than 1,000. Maj. Gen. Innis P. Swift, commander of the 1st Cavalry Division, recommended a force twice that size in part because the division was new to combat.

The cavalrymen and attached units would land near the Momote airstrip on Los Negros Island. A detachment from the Australian New Guinea Administration Unit (ANGAU) would accompany them, gathering intelligence and dealing with the civilian islander population as their villages were liberated.

After the Sixth Army staff received MacArthur's order, they immediately revised their working plans for the Admiralty operation, now codenamed Brewer. Krueger called General Swift to Army headquarters on February 24 and told him the operation would commence on the 29th and that it would be a reconnaissance in force, not a full-scale attack.

Because Swift's staff had already prepared a terrain study, logistical study, and an enemy order of battle for the Admiralty Islands, the major changes in the earlier plans involved landing on the southeastern coast of Los Negros instead of the northwestern coast, and the relatively small number of troops (Brewer Reconnaissance Force) involved.

Five days (February 24-29) did not give much time to assemble, load, and move the cavalrymen 500 miles from their bases to the landing beach. There would also not be enough time for air strikes on enemy targets that could support the defense of the Admiralties, nor for the Navy to make hydrographic surveys of Seeadler Harbor and the approaches to the landing beaches on both Los Negros and Manus, the follow-on target.

Naval gunfire support plans were essentially to be developed during the course of the attack based largely on the Alamo Scouts' report. The air plan called for heavy and medium bomber attacks beginning 28 minutes before landing and continuing until the first wave was ashore.

In fact, the operation began with German government maps and charts dated 1908 and supplemented with topographical maps based on aerial photos only. About the only thing planners knew with certainty was that aerial photos showed significant drawbacks in the landing area at Hyane Harbor on Los Negros. Troops would have to pass through a narrow (mile-wide) gap in the coast to gain the beachhead. Flanking fire was a danger. Once through this, only half the harbor had shores suitable for landing troops and equipment.

The planners understood from the locals that there were about 2,500 defenders on the island. Despite the aerial reports that Momote field appeared undefended, islanders reported through intelligence channels that its defenses were organized in depth. The constraint of time, however, had prevented the Alamo Scouts from landing near enough to the airstrip to verify these reports without potentially alerting the enemy to a specific objective.

The plan of attack was comparatively

simple because of the lack of detailed ground reconnaissance, detailed maps, and navigation aids. The Brewer Reconnaissance Force (under Brig. Gen. Chase) would land from destroyers and destroyer transports that could also cover a withdrawal if the defenders were present in strength.

The troops would take only the supplies they could hand carry from the landing craft. This included heavy weapons and ammunition. Medical support was limited to only the cavalry's organic elements and a portable surgical hospital. There would be no ambulances or field hospitals. Resupply would be by airdrop beginning on D+1—if the cavalry could remain ashore to begin with. If they were successful, they would secure the Momote airstrip and prepare it for improvement by succeeding waves of air force and naval engineers and combat troops. The remainder of Chase's brigade would land beginning on March 2 or as additional shipping became available.

The Brewer Reconnaissance Force began loading onto the destroyers at noon on February 27 and departed for a staging area that evening in fair weather under occasional light rains. Krueger called a last-minute planning conference before departure. Chase remembered Krueger was "rather pessimistic" and "far from encouraging, a fact which puzzled and worried me." He warned Chase that Los Negros was heavily defended despite reports to the contrary—presumably even the order directing the attack.

Three LSTs (Landing Ship, Tank) with bulk supplies, reinforcing artillery, medical, communications, antiaircraft guns, air forces personnel, and 1st Squadron, 5th Cavalry loaded out at the same time. The weather turned worse by the night of February 28-29. The reconnaissance force (under Chase) and the reinforcements departed the staging base for Los Negros at 4 AM on February 29 in heavy rain with about a mile visibility.

U.S. naval forces, in addition to the destroyers landing the cavalry, included two cruisers and four destroyers to provide gunfire support. Even MacArthur's naval commander, Rear Admiral Thomas C. Kincaid, appeared concerned enough about the plan to offer more support than the Army originally asked for.

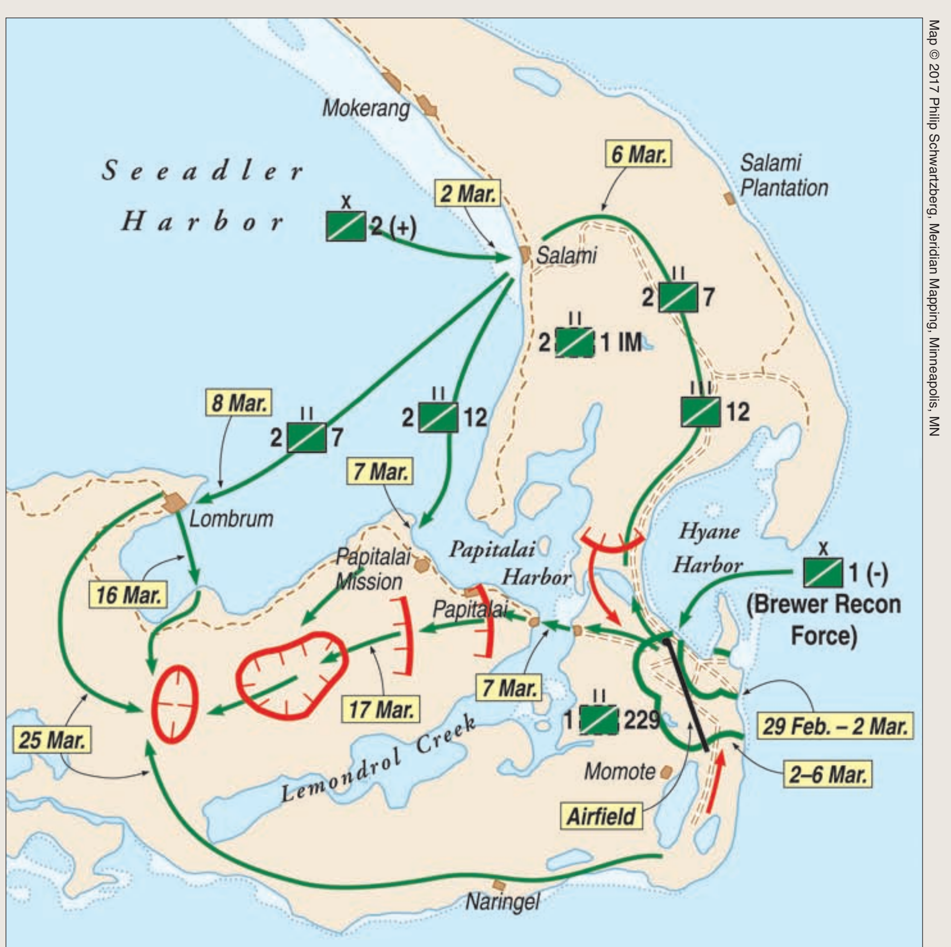
The landing force commander, Rear Admiral William M. Fechteler, ordered the supporting cruisers and destroyers to commence firing at 7:40 AM on February 29. The rain and overcast significantly limited the effectiveness of air support. Only three of the 40 Consolidated B-24 Liberator bombers scheduled to arrive during the naval bombardment appeared in time to bomb the landing area before the troops came ashore.

All the supporting North American B-25 Mitchell bombers were late in their strafing attack. Pilots saw several coconut "log bomb shelters or pill boxes" on Los Negros and "two serviceable barges" offshore. The Navy reported, "Assault ashore as scheduled. Momote strip and dispersal areas captured as of 0900. Resistance at harbor entrance. Heavy rain."

MacArthur and Admiral Kincaid watched the landing from the cruiser USS *Phoenix*; only 138 cavalrymen were in the first wave. Their four landing craft bulled their way through a calm sea almost exactly on schedule. Another wave followed five minutes later.

The enemy was waiting. Japanese 20mm fire slammed into some of the landing craft passing through the narrow entrance to Hyane Harbor, and larger caliber shore-based guns returned the naval salvos. The sailors quickly and accurately returned the fire, silencing several positions.

Second Lieutenant Marvin J. Henshaw of Haskell, Texas, was the first soldier ashore. He led his platoon of Troop G, 5th Cavalry to a coconut plantation where, according



Map © 2017 Philip Schwartzberg, Meridian Mapping, Minneapolis, MN

to his Distinguished Service Cross citation, he "led the way with great fortitude, determination and courage."

The enemy opened up with deadly accuracy on the second wave. One destroyer fired on the southern point of land that created Hyane Harbor, but the landing boats had to slow their approach in order for the naval fire to hit the northern point without endangering the assault troops. Wave three was ashore by 9 AM, but wave four suffered when the enemy renewed their fire. One of *Phoenix*'s observation planes strafed some enemy positions with little substantive effect.

A correspondent going ashore with the troops reported, "As we made the turn for the beach, something solid [hit] us. 'They got one of our guns or something,' one GI said. There was a splinter the size of a half dollar on the pack of the man in front of me. Up front a hole gaped in the middle of the landing ramp and there were no men where there had been four." A seaman plugged the hole with his hip, but two GIs and the coxswain died. Staff Sgt. Bobbie K. Horton (Troop H) left a covered position in his boat and manned a machine gun whose operator was dead.

A driving rain soaked the battleground until mid-day. The enemy situation was uncertain as the cavalrymen swept over the Momote airstrip. MacArthur came ashore in mid-afternoon, pinning the DSC on a poncho-clad, rain-soaked Marvin Henshaw and telling Chase to dig in and hang on. "Hold what you have taken, no matter against what odds. You have your teeth in him now don't let go."

General Chase had no other choice—if the enemy reacted in force within the next few hours, he could not evacuate his small force with several damaged landing craft. No reinforcements would arrive before March 2.

One report recorded in the 1st Cavalry Division's intelligence log no doubt concerned Chase, presuming he had the opportunity to see it. Sixth Army reported that same afternoon that "plane crews report slight AA fire" from a mission on nearby Manus Island. There were also flashes from heavy antiaircraft positions in the central coastline of that island.

It was not quite the situation Chase expected, and it may have contributed to his many subsequent and urgent requests for reinforcements, barbed wire, and medical supplies.

Troopers from Lt. Col. William E. Lobit's 2nd Squadron, 5th Cavalry (2/5), the core of Brewer Reconnaissance Force, confirmed the Alamo Scouts' reports. Captured documents indicated at least 200 enemy had been stationed near the airfield.

Concern about Japanese capability to counterattack the small force grew throughout the late afternoon. Lobit and Chase agreed to pull back the line, temporarily ceding the airfield to the enemy. There was no barbed wire, and the two puny 75mm pack howitzers ashore the first day could not safely fire inside the small perimeter.

On the Japanese side, Colonel Yoshio Ezaki, commander of the 51st Transport Regiment, in addition to his own soldiers, had two battalions of infantry (2nd Battalion, 1st Independent Mixed Regiment, and the 1st Battalion, 229th Infantry) at his disposal. He concentrated his forces to defend against an attack from the north and did not expect the Americans to land in the south in Hyane Harbor because the narrow entrance would subject an attacker to shore fire from both flanks.

When the Americans landed, Ezaki's superior, General Hitoshi Imamura, commander of the 8th Area Army, ordered an immediate counterattack with all his forces. Evidently concerned about security even at the time when the invading Americans were most vulnerable, he ordered his men "neither to fire nor move about in daylight." He directed only the 1st Battalion, 229th,

National Archives

ABOVE: Members of the 1st Cav's 5th Cavalry Regiment dig positions immediately after landing on February 29. Japanese resistance proved tougher than expected. OPPOSITE: After the Alamo Scouts performed their inconclusive recon mission, the main force landed at Momote airfield near the southeast point and fought its way inland over the next week.

commanded by a Captain Baba, to drive the Americans out.

Ezaki exhorted his men to "charge desperately into the enemy and by obtaining their provisions, continue fighting. When you suffer several losses or become isolated and enveloped by the enemy, in no case will you retreat without orders. No one will retreat of his own accord. Although to fight until the last man and to commit suicide are similar in form, they are entirely opposite in spirit. The officers and men of the Garrison Unit must fight with the intention that each one will kill 10 of the enemy."

Ezaki's report of the invasion to Imamura stated simply, "At 0430 the enemy began landing operations on the south shore of Hyane Airfield. Prior to this, they bombarded and strafed from warships. The Hyane Sector Unit (1st Battalion of the 229th Infantry Regiment) [is] now engaged in combat with them."

He added, "With the arrival of morning, the enemy naval bombardment continues. The officers and men will fight furiously against the enemy landing and destroy them. We are in the midst of preparing for future movement. We pray for a successful battle."

Ezaki ordered Captain Baba to counterattack the Americans that night. "Be resolute to sacrifice your life for the Emperor."

As night fell on February 29, small groups of Japanese tested the Americans by crawling in close enough to throw grenades. GIs could see the enemy only when a grenade exploded or when they got to within literally a yard or two of their foxholes.

Private Walter E. Hawks of Troop C killed several Japanese with his BAR, holding his fire until they were less than 20 feet from his foxhole. A few Japanese penetrated Troop E's line and isolated a platoon. Most of the wounded had to lie in their foxholes until daylight; a few bled to death. The handful of doctors with the 30th Portable Surgical Hospital worked under flashlights and lanterns on the wounded who could get back.

Several cavalrymen reported hearing the enemy talk and even sing as the GI fire literally cut them apart. Yet a few of the enemy managed to get through the foxhole line and cut telephone lines leading from the foxholes to the platoon and company command posts.

Chase's S-2, Major Julio Chiaramonte, cut down two of the enemy just yards from the headquarters. Pfc. Allan M. Holliday and Corporal James E. Stumfoll threw several grenades into a bunker, and the enemy threw two of them back. Other GIs killed a survivor and blew in the roof with TNT and grenades. As daylight on March 1 approached, the cavalrymen found 66 enemy dead inside the small perimeter. Seven Americans were dead and six were wounded.

Lobit's troops patrolled constantly that day until about 4 PM as enemy pressure increased by the hour. Chase ordered the perimeter tightened even more. Naval guns and cavalry mortars were busy all day, and another air strike came in as the patrolling ended. Ground troops suffered some friendly fire casualties.

Captain Baba led a group of infiltrators who were stopped about 30 yards from Chase's command post. Major Chiramonte led four men into the thick underbrush as the sounds of grenade explosions picked up—the enemy was committing hara kiri. Captain Baba was among the dead.

While there was no large-scale attack on the night of March 1-2, 50 enemy landed behind the Americans (whose backs were to Hyane Harbor) and had to be hunted down. By the morning of March 2, there were 147 known enemy dead inside the cavalry's line.

The division operations journal recorded the following message at 2:10 AM on

Australian War Memorial

and LSTs to put to sea for the night.

Chase went to Krueger directly the next morning asking for the immediate return of the LSTs and landing of the remainder of the 529th Engineer Boat and Shore Regiment. Krueger forwarded the message to MacArthur in the early afternoon.

Colonel Ezaki, meanwhile, either failed to understand the situation facing him or chose to misrepresent it to his higher headquarters. Throughout March 1 he thought his troops had halted American operations. He did not believe the situation around Hyane Harbor was serious, and he did not know the actual strength of his own 1st Battalion, 229th Infantry. His main concern was apparently the U.S. naval bombardment of his own headquarters at a plantation on Los Negros. It was

ABOVE: While on patrol through the thick jungle, an American unit reacts to contact with the enemy. RIGHT: Soldiers from the 99th Field Artillery Battalion inspect a Japanese naval gun emplacement guarding Momote airfield.

National Archives

March 1: "Need more Med supplies. Drop Plasma." Other messages reflected an air of urgency, though probably not desperation. The Sixth Army liaison officer reported on the afternoon of March 2, "Chase requests additional Regt to cope with increasing enemy resistance."

As evening fell, Chase reported increasing resistance. "Requests other Regt. Our losses light." General Swift, the commander of the 1st Cavalry Division, forwarded the request to Sixth Army. One officer reported, "[advanced] echelon beachhead still under mortar fire… . Rather warm here. Major King killed, Lt. Savage wounded." Reinforcements were already landing.

Thursday, March 2 saw the arrival of the LSTs carrying 1/5 Cavalry, the rest of the 9th Field Artillery Battalion, the 40th Naval Construction Battalion ("Seabees"), and the 592nd Engineer Boat and Shore Regiment. The Seabees brought a ditch digger to construct a 300-yard-long trench which they protected with automatic weapons and rifles. They also used their bulldozers to clear fields of fire. GIs recaptured the airfield that afternoon.

Intelligence reports indicated the Japanese had about 1,000 men in the airfield area, with reserves on Manus and elsewhere on Los Negros numbering about 2,000. As the Americans built up their small force, the Japanese still dictated the time and place of counterattacks.

The inexperienced Americans also failed to get all of their supplies ashore. They did not put enough men to the task of unloading before it was time for the landing boats

March 2 before he reported to 8th Area Army that the Americans had occupied the air strip.

He tried again to organize an attack on the night of March 2-3, and orders went out to the units in the vicinity to concentrate at the settlement of Lorengau. Plans were drawn up for the Iwakami Battalion

to hit the Americans from along the Salami-Hyane road, while a rifle company would cross the Porlaka Channel to hit the airstrip from the west.

But it was too difficult to coordinate the multiple troop movements, and Ezaki delayed the operation until the night of March 3-4. The Iwakami Battalion made the main effort, attacking south from the vicinity of a skidway north of the airfield used by locals to carry their boats across a narrow piece of land on Los Negros. Ezaki reported the breach of the American perimeter; he said his men "broke through the enemy's first line of defense but [were] unable to advance after attacking the second line. The Iwakami Battalion, which is the Salami Sector Unit, was led by the battalion commander in person and penetrated the northern sector of the airfield."

National Archives

ABOVE: General Douglas MacArthur congratulates poncho-clad Lieutenant Marvin J. Henshaw after awarding him the DSC for being the first man ashore on Los Negros on February 29. Unfortunately, Henshaw would die by drowning on April 6, 1944. OPPOSITE: Three KIAs from the 5th Cavalry Regiment lie on stretchers before being buried in a temporary cemetery on Los Negros. The 1st Cavalry Division lost 290 soldiers killed and nearly 1,000 wounded.

Probing attacks hit the American positions shortly before 8:30 PM. About 30 minutes later, two yellow flares shot up and a company-sized attack hit 1/5 Cavalry. Several hundred enemy also drove into 2/5, particularly against Troop G on the north side of the airstrip. They set off most of the American mines but despite the losses "kept on coming," according to a historian. They made no effort to infiltrate or use cover.

Several cavalrymen reported hearing the enemy talk and even sing as the GI fire literally cut them apart. Yet a few of the enemy managed to get through the foxhole line and cut telephone lines leading from the foxholes to the platoon and company command posts. The platoon leaders, Lieutenants Winn M. Jackson, Jack P. Callighan, Jr., and Marvin Henshaw, had no communications with the troop commander and told their men to stay put and "fire at anything that moved." This included Japanese soldiers armed only with knives and grenades.

Colonel Lobit organized a counterattack, restoring the line before daylight on March 4. Accurate artillery and mortar fire also played a decisive role in stopping the attack. The American casualty reports are telling, though, as the troop on March 2-3 lost one man killed, but 15 dead in the March 3-4 attack.

Troop G counted 168 enemy dead around its foxholes, most of whom were around the position of squad leader Sergeant Troy A. McGill, who received a Medal of Honor for ordering his surviving men to another position while he singlehandedly held off the enemy. Sergeant McGill's machine gun "became the object the most desperate enemy assaults." He stayed in action throughout the night, personally accounting for an undetermined number of enemy. He stayed in action throughout the night, personally accounting for 105 enemy dead, but lost his life in the process.

Corporal James M. Madden, Troop H, died while crawling through enemy fire to retrieve a machine gun and return it to action. Staff Sgt. Stephen A. Lowery ran through friendly and enemy fire to rescue a GI suffering from shock. It was clearly a small unit fight to the death.

Some attacks, however, were ineffective and uncoordinated. One group reportedly moved along a road while singing "Deep in the Heart of Texas" as the defenders' bullets tore into them. Shortly before daylight, a Japanese officer and about a dozen of his men walked into the open, where they killed themselves with their grenades. While the attacks against Troops E and F were not as powerful as the one that hit Troop G, the enemy infiltrated toward the CPs and mortar positions. Five enemy set up a mortar on the top of Lobit's CP.

Likely by tapping phone lines, the Japanese learned the names of some American officers. One mortar platoon leader received a message using his name and ordered his men to retreat from their firing positions. This took it out of action for hours.

Late on the night of March 3-4, another message believed to be false led an antiaircraft artillery battalion to move its CP. During the height of the enemy attack in the vicinity

of the skidway north of the airfield, English-speaking Japanese troops tapped the wire line of one battery to its forward observer and sent confusing orders. The Americans used their less reliable radios for the rest of the night.

The Seabees provided invaluable support by passing ammunition forward and, as daylight approached, by taking positions in foxholes when needed. One group kept infiltrators from overrunning a machine-gun position on the beach.

Chase had put every available man in the line, foregoing reserves to prevent infiltration. The 81mm mortars were massed near the center of the perimeter, while all the 60mm mortars were moved close to the front line. Destroyers took areas of likely enemy troop concentration under fire.

After a new line was established early on March 4, more than 750 enemy dead were recovered in front of the cavalry's positions and later buried. The Yanks took no prisoners.

American casualties on March 4 totaled 61 dead and 244 wounded, including nine Seabees killed and 38 wounded. The 2nd Squadron, 5th Cavalry received a unit citation for its performance.

Attacks continued, and Chase continued to make unsuccessful requests for barbed wire to help prevent infiltration. A March 5 airdrop brought 100 cases of carbine ammunition and 1,000 rounds of 90mm antiaircraft ammunition (also effective against ground targets).

On March 5, the Americans resupplied, distributed ammunition, and improved their defenses. Reinforcements continued to land. A letter written by a Japanese officer on March 6 revealed that animosities and lack of cooperation between units were partially responsible for the desperate situation in which Colonel Ezaki found himself.

This officer was "indignant about the enemy's arrogant attitude," but he also wrote, "The main force of the enemy which came to Hyane Harbor, north point area, landed successfully because [the] Iwakami Battalion commander employed such conservative measures," and the battalion commander and Captain Baba would not cooperate. The letter also suggests that Ezaki was either out of touch with the situation or incapable of coordinating the actions of his subordinates.

National Archives

If the attacks were not well coordinated or well planned, nonetheless the Japanese displayed a capability for hard fighting. Many service troops took part in the big night attack, using bayonets attached to five-foot poles. One American report noted that some enemy soldiers were found with makeshift tourniquets near pressure points, apparently positioned to be ready for use in case of a serious wound. The Americans assumed that the enemy would simply tighten the band and continue to fight until overcome by loss of blood.

The lessened intensity of the night attacks and the mounting toll of Japanese dead after March 4 indicated that the beachhead on Los Negros need not fear another coordinated Japanese counterattack.

On March 6, the 5th Cavalry was reinforced by the 12th Cavalry arriving from New Guinea, along with the 271st Field Artillery Battalion. On that same day, the first American plane landed on the Seabees-repaired Momote air field. Over the course of the next few days, more men and supplies arrived at Los Negros, ensuring the doom of the Japanese.

Much hard fighting took place until May 18, when several more islands (Manus, Hauwei, Korunist, Ndrilo, and Rambuto) were secured and the Admiralty Islands campaign was officially declared ended. The action had cost the 1st Cavalry Division 290 troopers dead and nearly 1,000 wounded.

But the Japanese had paid a heavier price: 3,317 dead and only a handful captured. More importantly, the seizure of the Admiralties opened the door for MacArthur's march northward. And the victory proved that the greenhorn cavalrymen were as tough and heroic as any veteran outfit, and were well prepared for the combat that still lay ahead: the invasion of Leyte. □

Bundesarchiv Bild 183-H26353, Photo: Erich Borchert

German troops rush past the burning village of Haugsbygd, 25 miles north of Oslo, in April 1940. Hitler launched Operation Weserübung, the invasion of Norway, to secure his shipping routes of Swedish iron ore needed by his war industries.

Overrun

In April 1940, the Nazi blitzkrieg slammed into Germany's northern neighbor despite British efforts to rescue the situation.

ning Norway

BY MARK SIMMONS

"*U-64* WAS SEEN ON THE SURFACE at the top of Herjansfjord near Bjrekvik. I selected the two anti-submarine bombs and put the Swordfish in a dive and released the bombs at 200 feet. I couldn't see the bombs fall as we pulled out but Pacey [Leading Airman Maurice Pacey] saw the starboard bomb fall close alongside and the port one hit just abaft the conning tower; the U-boat was already sinking when I could see her again."

So recorded Petty Officer Pilot F.C. Rice flying a float Fairey Swordfish from the battleship *Warspite*. *U-64*, a brand-new type IXB U-boat, was the first German submarine to be sunk by an aircraft in World War II, and it took place in Norwegian waters.

On September 3, 1939, the day Britain declared war on Germany after the invasion of Poland two days earlier, Winston Churchill was appointed First Lord of the Admiralty, returning to the old post he had left dejected after the ill-fated Gallipoli campaign of World War I; he joined the War Cabinet the next day.

Churchill had several pressing concerns before him, including the inadequate defenses of the Royal Navy's anchorage at Scapa Flow and the shortage of destroyers, but top of the list was Norway and how to stop the Germans from using its territorial waters to gain access to the Atlantic and the convoy routes.

Of equal importance was stopping the transportation of Swedish iron ore to Germany from the port of Narvik, which would begin as soon as ice formed in the Gulf of Bothnia.

On September 19, he brought to the attention of the War Cabinet the need to mine Norwegian territorial waters to stop this trade. In winter the main weight of the trade between Sweden and Germany was

The German ship *Altmark*, pictured in Jossingfjord, February 1940. Loaded with captured British sailors, she was boarded in Norwegian waters by the Royal Navy, touching off a diplomatic crisis between Britain and Norway.

via Narvik and then down through territorial waters. These sheltered waters are known as the Leads. Using this route, ships could make the whole voyage to Germany without leaving territorial waters until inside the Skagerrak.

Interrupting this supply route, which was used from October to the end of April, would severely restrict German industry. Ten days later, in a paper to the cabinet, Churchill again raised the issue, recommending "drastic action."

Days later Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, head of the Abwehr, German Military Intelligence, learned of "British intentions to violate the territorial integrity of Norway." Canaris wasted no time in personally taking the information to Grand Admiral Erich Raeder, commander in chief of the Kriegsmarine.

Raeder was startled by the visit—not only by the news, but that Canaris had brought it himself as the men held each other in contempt. He wrote in his memoirs, "The report of the Abwehr chief assigned greater significance by virtue of the fact that he deemed it necessary to present it in person, something he would do only on exceptional occasions."

In October 1939, Raeder twice raised the subject with Hitler; he argued the best way to secure the trade was to obtain bases in Norway, which would also enhance the Navy's ability to attack Britain's convoy routes. However, the Führer took little interest, being totally absorbed at the time in plans to invade the Low Countries and France.

In December, the situation was changed dramatically by the Russian attack on Finland. It raised the possibility of British and French troops being sent to Finland through Norway—even an Allied occupation of the country became a German fear. Raeder went as far as to suggest the loss of Norway might decide the outcome of the war.

At the same time, Churchill was still pressing the War Cabinet. His memorandum began, "The effectual stoppage of the Norwegian ore supplies to Germany ranks as a major offensive operation of the war. No other measure is open to us for many months to come which gives so good a chance of abridging the waste and destruction of the conflict, or of perhaps preventing the vast slaughter which will attend the grapple of the main armies."

The cabinet, however, would not approve the action, preferring diplomatic protests to Norway about the misuse of her territorial waters by Germany. However, the chiefs of staff were ordered to plan for action and intervention in Norway.

Raeder by now had brought an idea to Hitler that caught his attention. Alfred Rosenberg, head of the Nazi Foreign Policy Bureau, had put Raeder in touch with Vidkun Quisling and Albert Hagelin, the leaders of the small Norwegian Nazi party. They were eager to take over the country with German support.

Hitler met with Quisling three times in December, stating that he favored a coup d'état, but if this failed he was prepared to occupy the country by force. In January 1940, with the postponement of the offensive in the West until the spring, Hitler turned his attention to Norway. On January 27, the German High Command (OKW) started working on the details for the occupation of Denmark and Norway.

In early January, Lord Halifax, the British foreign secretary, told the Norwegian ambassador that Britain would act to prevent the misuse of neutral waters by German ships.

Yet the Norwegians remained unmoved in their neutrality. A week later the War Cabinet decided to begin to prepare for a high-level mission to Oslo and Stockholm to explain the Allied position. Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, with his chiefs of staff and Churchill, went to Paris to confer with the French, who largely agreed with the stance Britain had taken.

Shortly after the meeting, the British 42nd and 44th Divisions began to make preparations for operations in Norway. With the Baltic Sea routes due to open shortly, it would mean the latest the expeditionary force would need to start loading was early March.

However, the *Altmark* incident concentrated the collective minds of both sides. The ship, a 12,000-ton tanker, had been the pocket battleship *Admiral Graf Spee*'s supply ship. The *Graf Spee* had been raiding British commerce in the South Atlantic, and *Altmark* served as a prison ship, picking up survivors from British merchant ships sunk by *Graf Spee*.

After the *Graf Spee* was damaged in a running fight with British warships, her captain, Hans Langsdorff, scuttled her off the River Plate estuary at Montevideo, Uruguay, on December 13, 1939. The *Altmark* then sailed back across the Atlantic and headed for Norway with 299 British prisoners locked below decks.

The *Altmark,* having avoided capture, arrived in Norwegian waters nine weeks later.

The ship pretended to be Norwegian as she sailed south through territorial waters, but the British alerted the Norwegians to her presence in their waters. Norwegian patrol boats discovered her true identity, boarded her, and made a cursory search, but turned a blind eye for fear of provoking the Germans.

On February 15, a British aircraft spotted the ship off Egersund. The Fourth Destroyer Flotilla under Captain Philip Vian was in the area looking for iron ore carriers. The light cruiser *Arethusa* sighted the *Altmark* on the afternoon of the 16th, but two Norwegian patrol boats prevented Vian's destroyers from getting a boarding party on board.

That night the *Altmark* took shelter in Jossingfjord, a sheltered inlet between coastal cliffs south of Stavanger. Without consulting Admiral Charles Forbes, C-in-C of the Home Fleet, Vian, urged on directly by Churchill, violated Norwegian neutrality, blocking the exit of the fjord.

A boarding party from the destroyer HMS *Cossack* climbed aboard the *Altmark,* and a short, fierce fight took place in which seven German sailors were killed and 11 wounded. One of the released prisoners stated that the first they knew of the operation was when they heard a shout, "Any Englishmen here?" from the boarding party.

National Archives

ABOVE: HMS *Hood* and *Glowworm* at the Scapa Flow naval base in Scotland's Orkney Islands, March 1940, shortly before they engaged the Germans in battle. BELOW: An illustration of the heavy German cruiser *Admiral Hipper* in action against HMS *Glowworm.* The British destroyer managed to ram and damage the *Hipper* before she was sunk.

Naval History and Heritage Command

When they replied, "Yes, we are British," the reply was, "The Navy's here," which brought cheers. The *Altmark* was stripped of all weapons but left intact.

The *Altmark* incident infuriated Hitler; he resolved to invade Norway and demanded an immediate appointment of a commander for the operation codenamed Weserübung. The head of OKW, General Wilhelm Keitel, recommended General Nikolaus von Falkenhorst, who arrived in Berlin on February 20.

Hitler saw him only for a few minutes; most of the time he spent "marching up and down" explaining why "the occupation of Norway by the British would be a strategic turning movement which would lead them into the Baltic, where we have neither troops or coastal fortifications." It would put all they had won and were about to win at risk. Invading Norway would ensure Germany's iron ore supplies and give the fleet freedom of movement. Finally, he appointed Falkenhorst to command the expedition.

Operation Weserübung, scheduled to start on April 9, would consist of five main groups to invade Norway by sea and air. Ten destroyers of Group One would take three battalions of the 3rd Mountain Division to Narvik. Group Two—the heavy cruiser *Hipper* and four destroyers—would land the two remaining battalions at Trondheim. These groups would be the first to sail to the north of the country, covered by Vice Admiral Günther Lütjens with the battlecruisers *Gneisenau* and *Scharnhorst,* flying his flag in the former.

Group Three, with the light cruisers *Köln* and *Königsberg* supported by torpedo boats and other light craft, would land two battalions of the 69th Infantry Division at Bergen, while two more would be flown into Stavanger and another on D+1. The rest of the division would arrive overland from Oslo.

Group Four, with the cruiser *Karlsruhe* and a mixed force of light craft, would land a battalion at Kristiansand. Group Five—the cruisers *Blücher* and *Emden* and the

National Archives

German merchant ships, filled with supplies for the invading forces, burn in Ofotfjord near Narvik after a battle with the British Royal Navy and warplanes, April 1940.

pocket battleship *Lützow*—would deliver two battalions of the 163rd Infantry Division to Oslo, while the rest of the division would be flown in.

Supporting the Army and Navy would be the Luftwaffe's X Air Corps with about 1,000 aircraft. Made up of about 300 medium bombers (Heinkel He-111 and Junkers Ju-88 and Ju-87 Stuka dive bombers), three fighter wings with 90 Messerschmittt Me-110 aircraft, many of these were expected to be operating from Norway by D+2. Two medium bomber wings would be held in Germany for operations against the British Fleet. Five hundred transport Junkers Ju-52 aircraft were available to deliver troops and supplies.

In a largely separate operation, two infantry divisions and a motor rifle brigade would overrun Denmark on April 10.

Relations between the three German service branches during this planning stage were far from harmonious. OKW and the staff of XXI Corps were against the naval plan to take ships back to Germany as soon as the landings were complete. Hermann Göring, head of the Luftwaffe, came to support the Army view, feeling his aircraft would be able to protect the ships.

Hitler agreed with the Navy on Narvik but felt there was no need for a rapid return of ships farther south. Within the naval command there were doubts that the battle cruisers should be used so far north; yet, without their presence the Narvik and Trondheim groups would be at the mercy of the enemy.

Also, using the warships in this way might induce the enemy to think they were trying to break out into the North Atlantic, forcing the enemy to cover the Shetlands–Iceland line. With the *Lützow,* which was scheduled to deploy on an Atlantic sortie, Hitler insisted she should carry a battalion of mountain troops to Trondheim and then make her break from there. However, engine problems would rule out the Atlantic cruise, and she would return to the Baltic to join the Oslo invasion group.

On April 3, the British cabinet finally authorized the Admiralty to mine the Norwegian Leads on April 8—an operation called Wilfred. They expected a German response. Churchill wrote that it was "also agreed that a British brigade and a French contingent should be sent to Narvik to clear the port and advance to the Swedish frontier. Other forces should be dispatched to Stavanger, Bergen, and Trondheim, in order to deny these bases to the enemy."

The War Cabinet and Churchill believed the Germans could not reach the west coast of Norway in the face of British naval supremacy. Yet they had had plenty of warning about German preparations from SIS (Special Intelligence Service, later MI6) and diplomatic sources. There were reports of amphibious exercises in the western Baltic, and the assembly of troops and ships fitted to carry tanks. They were even warned from an Abwehr source that the attack would take place on April 9, but they failed to study these reports in detail, so the warnings went largely unheeded.

However, the first move was made by Britain when Wilfred got underway on April 5 and three groups of ships set off to mine the waters off southwest Norway.

One was to act as a lure off Kristiansand, one was withdrawn on the 8th, and the third force of four destroyers was tasked with laying a minefield in the approaches to Narvik. Vice Admiral W.J. Whitworth left Scapa Flow with the battlecruiser *Renown* and four destroyers to act as support for the Narvik group. They met off the Shetlands on the morning of April 6, planning to be off Vestfjord in the Lofoten Islands the next night, ready to begin minelaying the next morning at dawn.

One of the ships, the destroyer *Glowworm,* lost contact with the group led by the battlecruiser HMS *Renown.* Two days later the destroyer signaled Whitworth that she was

returning, as she was unsure of her position, being unable to obtain a fix in the heavy weather. Her next signal was that she was in action with enemy destroyers.

She had been some 200 miles northwest of Trondheim, and around 9 AM she reported another sighting—the new contact was the heavy cruiser *Hipper.* After being hit by several rounds from the German ship, the *Glowworm* rammed the cruiser at full speed, tearing a 120-foot gash in her side before the 1,350-ton destroyer was sunk with the loss of all hands.

By then almost the entire German fleet was at sea in their various groups; Operation Weserübung had begun. Whitworth, who was in a covering position off Vestfjord with *Renown* and one destroyer, turned southward and ordered his ships up to the best speed they could manage against a heavy head sea.

The British were ready to implement "Plan R4" to occupy four Norwegian west coast ports—Narvik, Trondheim, Bergen, and Stavanger—in the event of a German reaction to Wilfred. Assembled in the Clyde were transports and escorts for the first two ports while in the Firth of Forth was a force of four heavy cruisers with the Scots Guards embarked and six destroyers to take the two southerly ports.

Map © 2017 Philip Schwartzberg, Meridian Mapping, Minneapolis, MN

German Landings in Norway, 9 April, 1940

A 2,000 Troops, 1 Pocket Battleship 1 Heavy Cruiser, 1 Light Cruiser
B 1,100 Troops, 1 Light Cruiser, plus Auxiliaries
C Airborne landing, 2,500 Troops
D 1,900 Troops, 2 Light Cruisers plus Auxiliaries
E 1,700 Troops, 1 Heavy Cruisers, 4 Destroyers
F 2,000 Troops, 2 Battle Cruisers, 10 Destroyers

British Landings

A 15,000 Troops, initially push back Germans, evacuated when Germans invade France
B 30,000 Troops land at Namsos and Andalsnes,
C evacuated 1–3 May

The Home Fleet had put to sea at 8 PM on the 7th, with Admiral Forbes commanding the battleships *Rodney* and *Valiant,* the battlecruiser *Repulse,* two cruisers, and 10 destroyers. He sent *Repulse* with a cruiser and four destroyers ahead at full speed to the north to reinforce Whitworth while he headed for a position farther south closer to Trondheim, which he reached at 3:30 PM on the 8th.

The same day the Polish submarine *Orzel* sank a German troop transport heading for Bergen. Survivors were picked up by Norwegian ships, whose sailors told them they were on their way to "protect" Norway against an Anglo-French attack.

The 10 destroyers of Group One, led by Commodore Friedrich Bonte in the *Wilhelm Heidkamp,* reached the mouth of Vestfjord at 8 PM on the 8th. The soldiers of the 139th Mountain Regiment, crammed below decks, suffered from seasickness as the ships moved north, tossed about by mountainous seas.

Reaching sheltered waters came as a great relief. Bonte left one ship there as a picket and detached two more to capture the batteries at the entrance of Ofotfjord. Three more went on to capture the barracks at Elvegardsmoen in the Herjangsfjord 10 miles north of Narvik.

National Archives

A German Me-110 fighter streaks over a smoking German destroyer during the intense fighting in April 1940. LEFT: Operation Weserübung involved the landing of some 120,000 troops by sea and air along nearly the whole length of Norway's coast. The British then invaded in an unsuccessful attempt to evict the Germans.

The rest of Bonte's force arrived at Narvik at 4:15 AM on the 9th. There, two old coast defense ships fired warning shots at the Germans, refused to surrender, and both were sunk by gunfire and torpedoes. Ashore there was no further resistance as the Norwegian garrison commander surrendered. General Edouard Dietl of the Mountain Regiment established his headquarters in the Grand Hotel at 8:10 on the morning of April 9, reporting to high command that Narvik was in German hands.

Meanwhile, Whitworth received a warning from the Admiralty that Narvik might be under threat, so he altered course to cover the approaches to Vestfjord. Then, with visibility reducing, he turned back to the north to rendezvous with his destroyers. He was in a quandary over his options for he had no idea of enemy intentions.

However, in the bad weather that had reached storm force, he could not keep his large formation close to Vestfjord. At 10 PM he told *Repulse* that he was 40 miles southwest of the Skomvaer light and he intended to patrol the entrance to Vestfjord once the weather improved.

Imperial War Museum

German seaborne troops disembark without opposition in a Norwegian port on April 9, 1940. The small, unprepared Norwegian Army was rapidly overwhelmed by the German onslaught.

In the early hours of April 9, shortly after Whitworth's ships turned back toward land, they encountered the German battlecruisers which had released their destroyers near the unguarded approaches to Vestfjord and then were moving out to sea in a sweep.

It was around 3:30 AM in the twilight of an arctic dawn that Whitworth, aboard *Renown,* spotted *Scharnhorst.* Then a second large ship came into view, mistakenly thought to be the *Hipper* but actually the *Gneisenau.*

It was the destroyer HMS *Hardy* that first opened fire, and then *Renown* opened fire at extreme range. Petty Officer Neal in the *Hardy* watched the battle: "At 4:10 we engaged *Scharnhorst.* We played our part alongside *Renown.* We blazed away at both enemy ships in a sea that tossed us about savagely."

But the weather proved too much for the destroyers of the Second Destroyer Flotilla. Neal continued, "*Renown* kept firing away. It was possible to see her shells hitting *Gneisenau.* Every hit brought a cheer."

Tom Bailey, a telegraph operator aboard *Renown*, was in his first action. He said, "We were hit several times, one 11-inch entering the half-deck, but fortunately not exploding. Either due to a near-miss or an extra-big wave, I was thrown against the bulkhead, and the welded screws that held the channel plate for all the electrical cables pierced the back of my neck, but I still managed to shout encouragement to the gun's crews."

Renown had opened fire at 4:05 AM at a range of 18,600 yards; the leading enemy ship returned fire six minutes later; the action lasted six minutes. *Renown* took two hits but neither caused serious damage. However, she hit *Gneisenau* three times, destroying her fire control and her after triple turret. The enemy then turned away with *Scharnhorst* laying a smokescreen.

In the bad weather, *Renown* found it difficult to keep up. Around 5 AM the enemy ships disappeared into a snowstorm. After 20 minutes the weather cleared, and the German ships were spotted again to the north, but the range had opened. *Renown* fired again at extreme range but without effect; even at a full speed of 29 knots she could not close the gap, and at 6:15 contact was lost. Whitworth continued on the northerly heading until 8 AM but made no further contact.

By the early morning of April 10, reports were reaching a stunned British government that Oslo had fallen and German troops were swarming ashore in most of the key ports.

The Norwegians, heavily outgunned by the Germans, struck some heavy blows in their defense. At Bergen, coastal artillery damaged the *Bremse* and *Königsberg.* South of Oslo things went awry with the landings and coastal artillery and shore-based torpedo tubes badly damaged the Group Five leader, the heavy cruiser *Blücher* carrying the occupation government; she would later sink.

The assault was called off with command being transferred to *Lützow,* which had also been damaged in the narrows of Drobak Sound, leaving the capture of Oslo to paratroops that had landed 10 miles away and had to march on the capital. This gave the Norwegian royal family, government, and gold reserves time to escape.

The forts guarding the sea approaches to Oslo were finally taken after heavy raids by Stukas and infantry attacks by air-landed troops. It was only after this that the waterway was opened to traffic.

At Trondheim, Group Two, led by the damaged *Hipper,* rushed the forts at Brettingsnes at 25 knots and got through to sheltered waters where *Hipper* used her 8-inch guns to cover the passage of destroyers. Infantry were then landed to attack the forts. While the ships went on to Trondheim, the town offered no resistance and was occupied. By nightfall, however, the forts were still holding out and there was no sign of tankers or heavy weapons for the Army. Also, the vital airfield at Vaernes, 16 miles to the east, had not yet been taken.

Overall, the feeling within the German naval command on the first phase of Weserübung was one of relief—they had gotten away with it. However, the supply situation for the Army was alarming. The "Export Group" that was supposed to be controlling this had gone awry, and the Oslo supply route had come under increasing threat from British submarines. The Norwegian defiance had also come as an unexpected shock.

On Tuesday, April 10, the British chiefs of staff met at 6:30 AM, deciding the first priority was to prevent the enemy from cementing their gains in Bergen and Trondheim and sending a battalion to Narvik as a precautionary measure. The War Cabinet did not meet until two hours later, and General Sir Edmund Ironside, chief of the Imperial General Staff, fumed at the delay. Churchill reported on Whitworth's action and the reality that the Germans were ashore at Bergen and Trondheim. But the Home Fleet was in strength off Bergen, and destroyers were covering Vestfjord to the north.

Ironside emphasized the need to get troops ashore at Narvik and the need to prevent German reinforcements from reaching Bergen and Trondheim; with luck, the Norwegians might be able to retake these towns which the British could then reinforce. The cabinet authorized Churchill to clear the fjords of German vessels and for Ironside to prepare expeditions to Bergen, Trondheim, and Narvik, but to wait until the naval situation was in hand.

Admiral Forbes knew little of this. The Admiralty told him he was to assume that coastal batteries off Bergen and Trondheim were in Norwegian hands. He was to move into the fjords and destroy any German shipping found there, starting with Bergen and, if he had "sufficient means for both," Trondheim as well.

National Archives

Company 6, 11th Norwegian Infantry Regiment shoulders its skis and prepares to advance toward invading German airborne troops near Dombås.

Forbes gave the job to the 18th Cruiser Squadron with its four cruisers and seven destroyers; the fleet headed south that morning. However, the Admiralty at 11:32 ordered Forbes to postpone the Trondheim operation; at 2 PM it also called off the Bergen operation.

Admiral Sir Dudley Pound, chief of the Naval Staff, had cancelled the operations, feeling they were too risky and thinking better options were to be had. He had already scuppered Plan R4 by sending the cruisers and destroyers to sea to reinforce Forbes. After the midday Cabinet meeting, he told Churchill, who reluctantly agreed.

Forbes and Pound and the men of the Home Fleet were about to pay the price of having inadequate air defense. Although the Royal Navy had two aircraft carriers training in the Mediterranean, only the *Furious* was in home waters "working up" after a refit, with her air squadrons disembarked. Thus she put to sea from the Clyde without her fighter squadrons but with the battleship *Warspite* to reinforce Forbes, who was moving south, just as the Luftwaffe had moved into bases in southern Norway and prepared to attack.

Forbes' fleet had been found by Luftwaffe reconnaissance aircraft on the morning of Weserübung and that afternoon came under heavy air attack by X Air Corps aircraft flying from bases in Germany. The first attack struck the cruisers as they returned from the aborted Bergen raid. They suffered only minor damage, but the destroyer *Gurkha* was sunk.

At 3:30 PM, the main body of the fleet was attacked. Again, little damage was inflicted, althoughthe battleship *Rodney* was hit by a bomb that failed to penetrate her armored deck.

More alarmingly, the fleet had used up a large amount of antiaircraft ammunition but had only shot down one aircraft. In view of this, Forbes told the Admiralty he would concentrate his attack in the north, farther from German bases; the southern area would be left to the submarines.

That night Forbes sent the 2nd and 18th

Cruiser Squadrons on a sweep as far south as Stavanger, hoping to catch German reinforcements while he continued north to meet the *Furious* and mount an attack on Trondheim.

Meanwhile, the Admiralty, over the heads of Forbes and Whitworth and encouraged by Churchill, ordered Captain B.A. Warburton-Lee to take his second destroyer flotilla of five H-class destroyers into Vestfjord and attack the superior German Group One.

They achieved tactical surprise and sank the command ship, the destroyer *Wilhelm Heidkamp,* and one other, and damaged three more German destroyers; five merchantmen were also sent to the bottom. The five undamaged German destroyers counterattacked, sinking Warburton-Lee's *Hardy* and one other; a third was damaged. Warburton-Lee died in the action and was awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross.

Petty Officer Neal of the *Hardy* recalled the sinking of his ship: "She turns over at full speed and sinks.... It is 6:15 AM as we abandon ship, and I prepare to leave the wonderful little lady we all love so, love her even now, battered and broken. I am now pretty weak, but I shin down a rope over the side. The cold water revives me. I just make the beach."

Whitworth sent the light cruiser *Penelope* and his four remaining destroyers to support the second flotilla, but it was too late. The Admiralty continued bombarding Whitworth with direct orders to attack on April 12; however, the attack planned for that day was called off when *Penelope* ran aground.

Forbes now sent Whitworth, who had transferred his flag from *Renown* to the battleship *Warspite,* into Vestfjord with nine destroyers. It was during this action that Maurice Pacey, flying *Warspite*'s Swordfish floatplane, sank the *U-64*. In a fierce battle seven German destroyers were sunk while only two British were damaged.

The Admiralty urged Whitworth to make a landing, but the admiral concluded his handful of Royal Marines and sailors had little chance of dislodging 2,000 German mountain troops in the Lofotens.

Thus the first phase in the battle for Norway came to an end. The Germans had a powerful grip on southern Norway, but in the north their situation was precarious.

The Norwegian situation had started badly and gotten worse. First, the Norwegian government had ordered only a partial mobilization, believing it could negotiate with the Germans. Also, the commander of the Army, General Kristian Laake, tried to avoid confrontation.

On April 10, one of the final acts of the government was to oust Laake and appoint Maj. Gen. Otto Ruge to command the Army. By then, however, the Germans already controlled Norway's largest cities, ports, and airfields; Ruge could do little other than fight a delaying action until the Allies landed in strength. His main aim was to stop German forces in Oslo from linking up with their forces in Trondheim in the north.

In the south, much of the Norwegian Army had collapsed. Three thousand men of the 1st Division had crossed into neutral Sweden and were interned. At Königsberg and Setesdal large numbers surrendered to the invaders without a fight.

Colonel Thor Dahl, with a mixed group of Norwegian units, tried to hold the area west of Bergen. Ruge called on the troops in the Bergen area to assist Dahl, but they were unable to stop the relentless German advance.

The British, meanwhile, dominated by Churchill and the Admiralty, were patching together their Norwegian strategy as they went along, interfering directly in tactics in the field.

The first British convoy of troops put to sea from the Clyde on April 11; Royal Marines from the cruisers *Sheffield* and *Glasgow* were the first British troops ashore at Namsos.

National Archives

Imperial War Museum

ABOVE: French mountain troops, part of the 1ere Division Légère de Chasseurs Alpins, man a Chatellerault model 1924/29 light machine gun along the Norwegian coast. They would soon be called home to defend France against the German invasion. OPPOSITE: British landing craft with French and Norweigian soldiers aboard land north of Narvik.

Their task was to secure the road bridges and harbor in advance of the landing of Maj. Gen. Adrian Carton de Wiart's force, known as Operation Maurice. His 12,000 men of the 146th Infantry Brigade and three battalions of French Chasseurs were to attack Trondheim from the north.

The 59-year-old Carton de Wiart, of Belgian and Irish descent, was a heroic British officer, having lost his left eye and left arm during fighting on the Somme in World War I, earning the Victoria Cross, Britain's highest award for valor. Could his small force stem the German advance?

The advance troops of Carton de Wiart's force found the Norwegian 5th Division, tasked with defending the area, in a shambles. They had lost all their artillery, and the division amounted to barely 800 troops, having lost many men trying to defend Vaemes airfield.

The German march northward continued on April 14 along two routes—one via Tretten to the junction at Dambas, which would isolate Andaisnes and lead onto Støren and Trondheim. The second was east of the Gudbrondsdal Mountain Range, following the line of the Osterdal Mountains and the valley of Glomna to Roras and then passing through Støren.

Ruge reached his headquarters in the Glomna Valley about noon on April 11. North of Hønefoss the Germans began to meet stiffening Norwegian resistance. Four days later, near Haugsbyyd, the Norwegian 6th Regiment halted the German advance; the defenders were only dislodged with the use of panzers the next day. Maj. Gen. Jacob Hvinden-Haug's 2nd Field Brigade was deployed across the two routes, but he was unable to halt the Germans on the shores of Mjosa Lake. Elverum, the gateway to the Glomna Valley, fell on April 20.

Due to German air superiority, Carton de Wiart's troops had to be landed at night by destroyers; around midnight on April 16, a total of 1,000 men were ashore without loss. However, the landing of supplies and heavy equipment would be more difficult.

Troops continued landing the next night but were without transport, artillery, or AA guns. Some units were even short of rations, but they were well kitted out with winter clothing. Carton de Wiart watched his men struggling through the snow in fleece-lined coats and arctic boots, thinking they looked like "paralysed bears."

The men of the 148th Infantry Brigade, 1st/5th Leicesters had been ordered to Namsos on April 13; the unit had loaded onto the liner *Orion* at Rosyth when the order was cancelled. Brigadier H. de R. Morgan, the unit commander, received new orders on April 16 to land at Andalsnes instead.

However, the Admiralty had abandoned the use of large troopships that far south, so the infantrymen were loaded onto four cruisers and two destroyers; the force sailed the next morning. Morgan's new orders were to secure Dombas, then march north against the Germans in the Trondheim area and link up with the Norwegian forces.

The brigade reached Ramsdaisfjord by late evening of April 18, the landings taking place at the ports of Andalsnes and Molde. Morgan, to his surprise and delight, found Colonel H.W. Simpson and a detachment of Royal Marines from the battleships *Nelson* and *Barham and* battlecruiser *Hood* already there. With the three warships then refitting in home waters, the men had been transported in four sloops. Having covered the landing of the main force, the Marines were to hold the landing places and the railhead at Andalsnes. Simpson had a train waiting at two hours' notice to take some of the brigade to Dombas.

Early the next day, Morgan set off for Dombas with two infantry companies. There he learned the Norwegian cabinet was close to capitulation; the only thing keeping them in the fight was the prospect of British help. Ruge wanted Morgan to move south to Lillehammer to halt the German advance and lift the morale of his troops.

The British plan, Operation Hammer, called for Carton de Wiart's Maurice Force to move on Trondheim from the north and Morgan's Sickle Force from the south.

National Archives

Ruge was against the move on Trondheim, arguing that he needed the 148th Brigade to support his men to the south; Morgan reluctantly agreed.

On April 17, Maurice Force had moved inland to Follafoss and Steinkjer. However, on the 20th the Luftwaffe destroyed most of their supplies still stockpiled at Namsos and reduced the town to rubble. Carton de Wiart soon found his troop movements restricted because of aerial attack. The next day they were attacked by the German 181st Division from Trondheim and forced back to Steinkjer.

Sickle Force fared no better as two companies of the Sherwood Foresters took up positions in front of Lillehammer while, on the other side of Lake Mjosa, the Leicesters and the rest of the Foresters took up positions near Gjovik. On April 21, the 4,000-man German 345th Infantry Regiment, reinforced with a motor machine-gun battalion, resumed the advance through Hamar on the east side of the lake.

On the west side, the Allied troops were strafed by German aircraft, and a general retreat was ordered back through Lillehammer with the Leicesters forming the rear guard. They lost their supplies that had arrived at the railway station along with 30 men captured there.

At Faberg, near the mouth of the Gudbrandsdal Valley, Morgan's troops took up positions to try and keep a river bridge open for retreating troops. He had only four rifle companies available—half of the Foresters were missing. On the morning of the 22nd, they came under fire from artillery and mortars, but the Germans made no major ground attack.

However, in the afternoon, German mountain troops bypassed the position and appeared four miles behind the village, so Morgan had no choice but to order another retreat.

It was the same story at Tretten, where the rear guard was overrun. By the time Morgan's exhausted brigade retired through Norwegian positions on the night of April 23/24, it had been reduced to nine officers and 300 men.

Hitler was worried over the dangerous isolation of the Trondheim garrison, and he toyed with the idea of the Navy taking troops to reinforce them. He abandoned the idea when Raeder told him it would likely result in the "loss of the transports and the whole fleet."

Yet German Maj. Gen. Richard Pellengahr, head of the 196th Infantry Division, was well on his way to completing the conquest of central Norway. At Lillehammer, he now had seven infantry battalions, a machine-gun battalion, two artillery batteries, a platoon of tanks, plus two companies of mountain troops pushing forward against weakening resistance.

To his right, moving northward up the Glomna Valley, was a smaller force under Hermann Fischer. By the 25th they were within eight miles of Trondheim and 50 from the garrison perimeter, which, much to Hitler's relief, showed the end was in sight.

Meanwhile, the British had reinforced Sickle Force with the 15th Infantry Brigade that had landed at Andalsnes on April 23, but suffered the same disadvantages as the 148th Brigade: lack of transport, heavy weapons, and air cover.

The British had tried to redress the balance in the air battle. On April 11, RAF Bomber Command had launched daily attacks from Scottish air bases against the airfield near Stavanger. The day before, 15 Fleet Air Arm Blackburn Skua dive bombers, flying from air bases in the Orkney Islands, sank the damaged cruiser *Königsberg* off Bergen, the first warship sunk in the war by air attack. Squadrons based in East Anglia also raided the bases of Ålborg and Fornebu.

The RAF also decided to base Gloster Gladiators of No. 263 Squadron on a frozen

lake near Andalsnes. Eighteen fighters were embarked on the carrier *Glorious* and flown in on April 24, a party of ground staff having arrived the day before. Flying from a frozen lake, however, presented its own problems, such as taking two hours to defrost carburetors frozen overnight.

On its first operational day, 263 Squadron flew 40 sorties, reporting six kills. The Luftwaffe soon reacted and caught most of the Gladiators on the ground at night; only four survived, and the frozen lake began breaking up under the impact of bombs. In 48 hours the project was abandoned, and it was left to the carriers to try and combat the German air offensive.

On April 25, Royal Marine Norrie Martin, a flight commander with 810 Squadron, Fleet Air Arm, operating from the carrier *Ark Royal,* led his section of Swordfish biplanes—the famous "Stringbags"—in an attack on Trondheim airfield.

"On arrival over the airfield at about 6,000 feet," Martin said, "we could see many fires on the ground, which told us the other squadrons had been there already. We attacked in line astern and were met with fairly heavy and accurate flak." After dropping his bombs on the hangars, he lost sight of the rest of the squadron.

"I made my getaway and flew down the fjord and out to sea, when I became aware that we were short of fuel and hadn't enough to get back to the ship. I suppose I had been hit during the attack and the fuel had leaked. Mercifully, I saw a destroyer escorting a merchant ship about 10 miles to the north, so I decided to ditch alongside her.

"I ditched with the aircraft nose-up 70 degrees, and stalled in from about 10 feet. The dinghy came out at once and I stepped in without getting my feet wet. The Stringbag floated for about 40 seconds, and my observer and airgunner clambered over the centre section of the plane into the dinghy."

Martin and his crew were picked up by the destroyer *Maori* and taken to Scotland, where they were given a replacement aircraft and flew to the Orkneys to wait for the *Ark Royal* to return to Scapa Flow.

Once back on board, Martin and his crew were reunited with 810 Squadron, which gave them a "tumultuous welcome," as they had been "given up for dead." They were soon back in action, this time bombing the railway line running from Narvik to Sweden.

During the final week of April, the two British carriers, *Ark Royal* and *Glorious,* held position 120 miles off the Norwegian coast for five days trying to maintain fighter patrols over Namsos and Andalsnes and support for the ground forces. The Fleet Air Arm fighters shot down 20 enemy aircraft and lost 15 of their own, mainly through accidents. They raided Trondheim several times; however, their influence on the campaign in central Norway was slight at best.

Major General Bernard Paget was put in overall command of the expanded Sickle Force. By April 24, the same day that Paget arrived at Andalsnes, 15th Brigade had moved through Dombas toward Kvam when they ran into the advance elements of Pellengahr's force.

Rushing to the front, Paget found Ruge in his headquarters 10 miles south of Dombas; he was depressed with little left under his command. Paget was under no illusions over the seriousness of the military situation. Morgan's brigade was used up, and the Norwegian troops were reaching the end of their endurance. The 15th Brigade was already engaged with an enemy who held all the advantages in weapons and numbers.

His men dug in around Otta. However, by the 27th it was clear a further retreat was required. Paget was determined to keep the road open as long as possible for retreating troops to escape capture while he made plans to hold Dombas. The next morning, though, he received a telegram that the high command had decided on the evacuation of all British troops from Norway.

National Archives

ABOVE: A French Hotchkiss H39 light tank rolls through the nearly empty streets of Narvik, which was taken from the Germans on May 28. OPPOSITE: Crouching behind a Panzer I, German infantrymen advance during an assault on a Norweigan village, April 1940.

In the north, the British campaign was based on the capture of Narvik and stopping the Swedish iron ore supplies coming through Norway. Admiral William Boyle, the 12th Earl of Cork, was placed in command of this operation. The ground

forces—a mix of British, French, Norwegian, and Polish troops codenamed Avon Force—were commanded by Maj. Gen. Pierse Mackesy.

Mackesy's Avon Force consisted of the 24th Guards Brigade and French and Polish units. On April 14, Harstad, a town on the island of Hinnoy, had been taken as an advance base. More attention was given to air cover in the north with the deployment of two carrier-transported fighter squadrons that operated from Bardujoss air field.

Boyle and Mackesy met on April 15 when troop convoy NP 1 arrived off the Lofoten Islands, west of Narvik. Boyle wanted to attack straight away. However, Mackesy disagreed, pointing out the ships had not been combat loaded and needed to be reverse loaded so that equipment came off in the right order, something that had adversely affected the landings farther south.

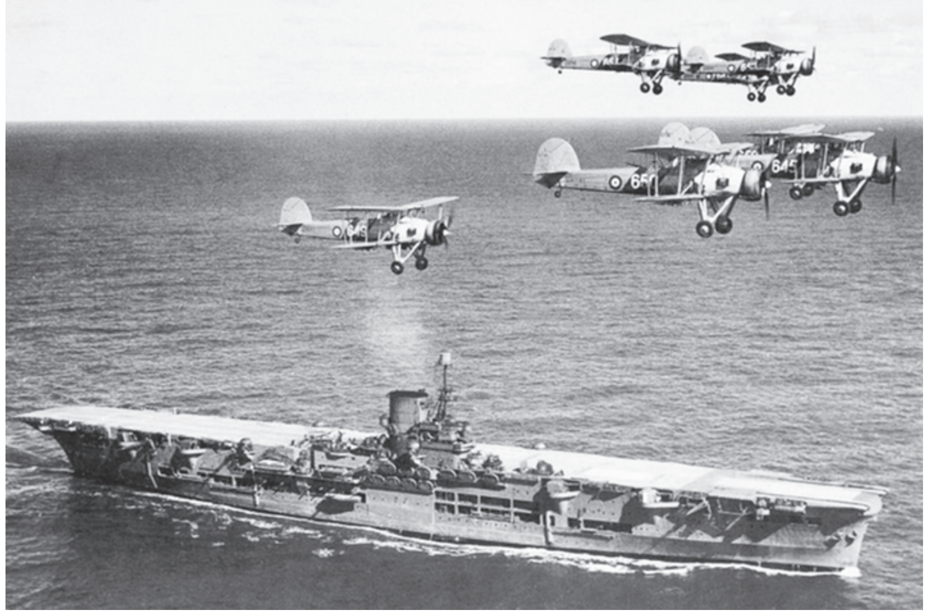
Meanwhile, the Allied retreat from southern and central Norway was proceeding, covered by Norwegian forces who were then demobilized in order to avoid becoming POWs. Sickle Force was evacuated through Andalsnes and was away by 2 AM on May 2.

Maurice Force left from Namsos the same day, although delays there meant some of the evacuation took place in daylight, resulting in the loss of two destroyers to Stukas. King Haakon VII and the Norwegian government were evacuated from Molde to Tromsø.

On May 2, Chamberlain announced the evacuation in the House of Commons and came under increasing pressure to stand down. On May 8, he asked for a vote of confidence. Chamberlain lost the vote with even some of his own Conservative Party MPs turning against him. A coalition government was then formed under the premiership of Winston Churchill, who had admitted that the Norway fiasco was his fault, too.

With British attention focused on Norway, on May 10 Hitler sent 136 divisions crashing into Belgium, Holland, and France, swiftly overrunning defensive positions.

But the effort to save Norway was not yet finished. During the night of May 10/11, French troops landed at Bjerkvik to capture



ABOVE: Obsolescent British Swordfish biplanes from HMS *Ark Royal*, above, flew missions against the Germans at Trondheim airfield and later provided air cover for the Allied embarkation. OPPOSITE: Looking like a scene from the Dunkirk evacuation, British troops take up positions on a Norwegian beach and prepare to defend against a possible German assault, May 1940. By May 25 Allied commanders received the order to evacuate from Norway.

the Oyjord peninsula to the north of Narvik on the northern shore of Rombaksfjord. Brig. Gen. Antoine Bethouart commanded the landing force of Legionnaires. The landing was opposed, but with the support of tanks landed from the battleship *Resolution* the village was soon cleared.

A mile to the east, the village of Meby fell quickly to a second French battalion, but the French troops had learned that their own country had just been invaded.

On the same day, Maj. Gen. Claude Auchinleck arrived at Harstad at about the time the base was heavily bombed by German aircraft. He was there to review the situation and take command if necessary. He found a lack of urgency within the British command and was unable to work with Mackesy, who was ordered back to Britain to report to the War Office.

Auchinleck soon found out the Germans were on the move from Namsos and were nearing Mosjoen. Only the lightly armed and heavily outnumbered Independent Companies under Colonel Colin Gubbins were barring their way. The Scots Guards were moved to Mo to block the advance, and the Irish Guards were ready to support them.

However, the Germans, using great ingenuity, were on the move again, landing 300 mountain troops on the Hemnes Peninsula 50 miles north of Mosjoen and 20 from Mo. The Norwegian force at Mosjøen pulled out. The Allied force at Narvik had to commit significant numbers of troops 200 miles to the south. On May 18, the Scots Guards, coming under increasing pressure, withdrew across Skjerstadfjord covered by the Irish Guards.

A sudden and unexpected Allied victory occurred three days later when French and Norwegian troops captured Narvik while Polish and Norwegian troops advanced to the east, pushing the Germans back to the Swedish border. But on May 25, with the deteriorating situation in France and the Low Countries, the Allied commanders received orders to evacuate from Norway.

Operation Alphabet, the withdrawal of the Allies, had been approved on May 24; the Norwegians were not informed until June 1. Most troops were brought off by destroyers to a safe inshore anchorage and transferred to troop transports. The embarkation was spread over five nights at a rate of 5,000 a night. By the morning of June 7, only 4,600 remained—French and Polish troops on the Narvik peninsula, a small party at Harstad,

and RAF ground crews at Bardufoss.

The cruiser *Devonshire* left Tromsø during the evening of June 7. On board were 461 passengers—mostly British, but also the king of Norway, the crown prince, and members of the government.

The Germans suspected little in the lead-up to the evacuation. Hitler had ordered Göring to make the 7th Air Division available by June 4 to land 2,000 men in the north, in two drops, to retrieve the situation. Admiral Raeder was willing to commit the Navy to the effort, covering the movement of troops to the Tromsø area 100 miles northeast of Narvik. This would include a sweep by the two battlecruisers. However, by June 8, after destroying rail lines and port installations, all Allied troops had been evacuated.

The two British carriers—*Glorious* and *Ark Royal*—had been operating off the Lofoten Islands since June 2. *Glorious* was tasked with embarking RAF aircraft while *Ark Royal* kept up an intensive flying program, protecting the embarkation and still raiding German positions. On June 7-8, *Glorious* successfully embarked Gladiators from 263 Squadron and Hawker Hurricane fighters from 46 Squadron. Then her captain, Guy D'Oyly-Hughes, asked permission of Admiral L.V. Wells on *Ark Royal* to proceed to Scapa Flow independently. *Glorious* left the coast of Norway in the early hours of June 8, escorted by two destroyers.

Admiral Wilhelm Marschall, commanding the German Fleet sweeping north with his two battlecruisers, the patched-up *Hipper,* and four destroyers, had sunk three British supply ships and concluded from radio traffic that an evacuation was in progress. *Hipper* and the destroyers went into Trondheim to refuel.

While he continued north with *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* on the afternoon of June 8, Marschall spotted *Glorious,* crowded with aircraft, and her escorts. The destroyers *Ardent* and *Acosta* valiantly tried to protect the carrier with suicidal torpedo attacks and laid smokescreens. *Ardent* was soon sunk, while *Acosta* managed to hit *Scharnhorst* in the stern with a torpedo before she, too, was sunk. By this time, *Glorious* was ablaze and sinking.

There were redeeming factors to this sorry affair. Shortly after *Glorious* went down, the British submarine HMS *Clyde* torpedoed *Gneisenau,* causing heavy damage. This action had also prevented an attack on Admiral Boyles' lightly escorted main evacuation convoy. On June 10/11, a Norwegian fishing vessel pulled 39 survivors from *Glorious* out of the water; three later died.

Norwegian forces capitulated to the Germans on June 10, bringing the 62-day campaign to an end. Norway would be subjected to brutal Nazi rule for more than four years. The country was not liberated until May 1945. However, a resistance movement began straight away and would remain active throughout the occupation.

The Norway campaign from the British view was a fiasco, having much in common with the Dardanelles of 1915-1916—hastily conceived and not pressed home with vigor against a ruthless enemy. On both occasions the man issuing the orders was Winston Churchill as First Sea Lord. However, this time, with a twist of fate, rather than going into the wilderness, he became prime minister.

As one historian wrote, the Admiralty lost a "bullying, demanding, impetuous, interfering and administratively incompetent chief; the country gained a defiant, irrepressible, energetic and inspiring leader." □

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BLOODLETTING IN THE HÜRTGEN FOREST

During repeated attempts to break through German defenses in an impenetrable German forest in November 1944, American forces suffered horrendous casualties but still prevailed.

BY NATHAN N. PREFER

At first, no one cared much about the forest. The objective of the First U.S. Army was the Siegfried Line, the much vaunted defensive line that protected Germany from invasion from the west.

The Hürtgen Forest was just one of several forests that lined what military planners called the Aachen Gap, a military pathway into the heart of Germany. Much of the surrounding area was impassable to military traffic because of dense pine forests in sharply compartmented terrain.

For almost 30 miles—from Verviers in Belgium to Düren in Germany on the Roer River a forest barrier running from six to 10 miles in depth bars military traffic in either direction. In Germany there were three distinct forests within this barrier, the Roetgen, the Wenau, and the Hürtgen. In this area there was only one military route east, running from Monschau to the northeast to the Roer River at Düren. To the First U.S. Army, this was known as the Monschau Corridor; a more open passage east of the German city of Aachen was known as the Stolberg Corridor.

First to approach was the VII Corps of Maj. Gen. J. Lawton Collins. Authorized to conduct only a reconnaissance-in-force to determine the strength of the German defenses, Collins sent forward elements of the 3rd Armored Division and 1st Infantry Division. He hoped to surprise the enemy and perhaps seize Aachen, the first major German city encountered by the Americans. But there was enough German opposition to halt the advances of both divisions. This advance, however, initiated the first battle in the Hürtgen Forest.

The American attack was conducted by Maj. Gen. Louis A. Craig's veteran 9th Infantry Division. But in a pattern that would be repeated time and again, the full division was not available for the attack into the Hürtgen Forest. In addition to securing the Hürtgen, General Craig also had to clear the Monschau Corridor and seize high ground between Lammersdorf and Rollesbroich. As a result, only Colonel Jesse L. Gibney's 60th Infantry Regiment was available to clear the Hürtgen Forest.

Defending the forest at this time, September 1944, was the German 353rd Infantry Division, which had been formed in October 1943 and had fought in Normandy, survivors who broke out of the Faliase Gap with the II Parachute Corps. About half of the division escaped and was immediately assigned to frontline duty in the Hürtgen Forest. To strengthen the weak division, five fortress battalions, an infantry replacement-training regiment, and a Luftwaffe field battalion were attached to the 353rd.

Colonel Gibney had only two battalions available for his attack, and opposition was difficult from the beginning. Every advance by the Americans was met with a rapid counterattack, and on September 20 the Germans were reinforced by an assault gun brigade. Much of the fighting centered on clusters of pillboxes that changed hands repeatedly. By September 20, Gibney saw no prospect of success with his understrength battalions. Two

Alamy

A silent, moss-covered German bunker in the Hürtgen Forest still looks menacing after more than seven decades. Six American divisions all suffered heavy casualties in the battle to break through German defenses in this hilly, heavily forested region southeast of Aachen.

fresh battalions, including one from the 39th Infantry Regiment, took over and made some progress.

The attack cut the Lammersdorf-Hürtgen Road, but it had taken time and significant losses to reach that position. By the end of the month neither the 60th Infantry nor the 39th Infantry were capable of renewing their attack. The 9th Infantry Division halted its attacks. The Hürtgen Forest had claimed its first victim.

The Americans were beginning to discover the secrets of the Hürtgen Forest. It would later be described by writer Ernest Hemingway as "Passchendaele with tree bursts," a reference to the bloody World War I battlefield. German artillery burst above the ground when it hit the tree tops, showering a deadly rain of shrapnel and splinters upon those below the burst. Visibility was poor, sometimes limited to a few yards.

The forest was constantly wet, either from current rains or moisture retained in the leaf-covered forest floor. Trails were invariably mined, blocked by felled trees, and often covered by enemy automatic weapons. The usual American reliance on armored vehicles was negated by the difficult terrain, mines, and poor visibility. The Germans sheltered in bunkers while the Americans had to advance exposed and with minimal cover from enemy fire. German counterattacks were a regular occurrence.

It was an infantry contest under the worst possible conditions. Even in reserve, one battalion of the 9th Infantry Division lost more than 100 men to German shellfire in a single day.

In early October the bulk of the 353rd Infantry Division was absorbed into Lt. Gen. Hans Schmidt's recently arrived 275th Infantry Division, although the353rd headquarters units were sent to the rear to reform the division. The 275th Infantry Division had been cobbled together in December 1943 from units destroyed on the Eastern Front. It then fought in Normandy and had been all but destroyed during the American breakout known as Operation Cobra. It fought at Aachen and by October had only 800 men under arms.

Reformed with the absorption of the 353rd Infantry Division's elements and local defense troops, the 275th numbered 5,000 men with 13 105mm howitzers, one 210mm howitzer, and six assault guns. But when the Americans renewed their attacks in early October, the corps commander, General Erich Straube, ordered the attachment of the artillery from the nearby 89th Infantry Division, an antiaircraft artillery regiment, and a corps artillery group. Two more fortress infantry battalions were also added.

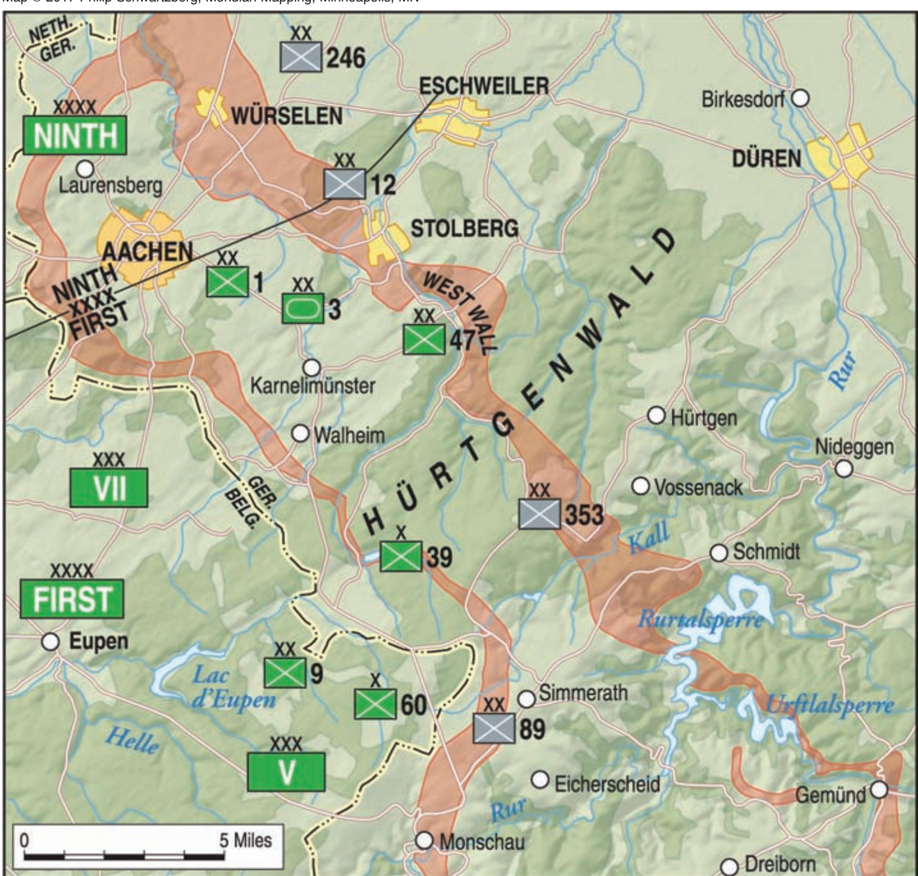
On October 11, 1944, a full-strength regiment, heavily armed with automatic weapons and staffed by officer candidates, arrived to strengthen the defense. General Schmidt planned a major counterattack for the following day. It was largely successful. The 9th Infantry Division's forward elements were overrun and outflanked, and several hard-won forward positions were lost.

However, communications failed within the German command, and some of the attacking units halted short of their objectives. It took three days for the 9th Division's 39th Infantry Regiment to recover the lost ground. Once again the battle was hard fought. In one American company, there were only two of four platoons left, one with 12 men and the other with 13.

In one instance, Pfc. James E. Mathews threw himself between his company commander and an ambush, losing his own life but saving his company commander, for which he received a posthumous Distinguished Service Cross.

By the end of October, the 9th Infantry Division's second attempt at clearing the Hürtgen had failed, although not for lack of trying. Casualties numbered in excess of 4,500 men. For this the division had advanced some 3,000 yards and captured 1,300 prisoners

Map © 2017 Philip Schwartzberg, Meridian Mapping, Minneapolis, MN



The Germans had constructed a "defense in depth" through the Hürtgen Forest in their attempts to stop the Allied invasion on the western border. It did much to slow down the American advance.

Soldiers of the U.S. 28th Infantry Division, nicknamed the "Bucket of Blood" because of their red keystone shoulder patch that identified them originally as a Pennsylvania National Guard division, advance warily through the dense Hürtgen Forest near the town of Voosenack.

with a further estimated 2,000 enemy killed.

Next into the meat grinder was the 28th Infantry Division. The story of the Pennsylvania National Guard's infantry division was much the same as that of the Regular Army's 9th Infantry Division, although on a larger scale. The price the forest exacted from the Pennsylvanians was 6,184 casualties, 16 M10 Tank Destroyers, 31 Sherman medium tanks, and scores of machine guns, antitank guns, mortars, and many other material losses. In exchange, the Germans lost 2,000 killed, 913 taken prisoner, and 15 tanks destroyed.

For reasons never fully explained, the Battle of the Hürtgen Forest continued.

Although there were ways around the forest, allowing it to be outflanked, this was never tried by First U.S. Army commander Lt. Gen. Courtney H. Hodges. Instead, division after division was fed into the furnace only to be wrecked and replaced. Only much later, after the battle, was it put forth that the objective was to reach the critical Roer River dams on the far side of the forest to prevent the Germans from flooding the Roer plain and delaying the planned American thrust to the Rhine River.

The problem with that explanation is simply that there is no mention of the Roer River dams before mid-November—well after the 9th and 28th Infantry Divisions had been through the "hell of the Hürtgen."

Next into the forest was a portion of the veteran 1st Infantry Division during its operations to seize Aachen. The division's 26th Infantry Regimental Combat Team entered the forest to clear four hills that dominated the division's route to Aachen.

Fighting was identical to that of the earlier battles. Trees and undergrowth limited visibility. Mud and inadequate trails slowed progress. Tree bursts were a constant evil. The forest made protecting the flanks of attacking units difficult, and so German counterattacks often hit the 1st with regrettable consequences.

The fighting was exemplified by Pfc. Francis X. McGraw of the 26th Infantry Regiment. A machine gunner, he held off a German counterattack until he ran out of ammunition, then raced back under enemy fire for more. When he returned to his gun, enemy artillery blew a tree down in front of him, blocking his field of fire. Undeterred, Pfc. McGraw left his foxhole and moved his weapon past the log, continuing to fire. A nearby shell burst tossed his gun into the air and knocked him aside. He retrieved the gun and continued to fire until he again ran out of ammunition.

Grabbing an abandoned M-1 carbine, McGraw continued his fight, killing several more Germans before he was himself cut down by an automatic weapon burst. The New Jersey soldier's Medal of Honor was awarded posthumously.

The next to test the forest was the veteran 4th Infantry Division. Since landing at Utah Beach on D-Day, the division had been in constant combat. Maj. Gen. Raymond O. Barton's division was to attack to protect the south wing of General Collins' VII Corps as it rolled toward the Roer River. Its mission was to clear the Hürtgen Forest between Schevenhuette and Hürtgen, then continue on to the Roer south of Düren.

Like the divisions that had preceded it, the 4th suffered heavily in the forest. In addition to the other known difficulties, the division had to absorb numerous replacements while still in combat. Often replacements didn't even know to which unit they belonged before they became casualties themselves.

In nine days, the 4th's 12th Infantry Regiment alone suffered 1,600 battle and nonbattle casualties. Companies attacking the enemy often found themselves surrounded

by other enemy forces that had infiltrated through the thick forest undetected. A regimental commander was relieved. They faced the same adversary—the 275th Infantry Division, now bolstered by some 37 different German units that had been added to the division.

In one instance a platoon leader, 1st Lt. Bernard J. Ray of Company F, 8th Infantry Regiment, had his platoon pinned down by machine-gun, mortar, and artillery fire. The Long Island, New York, officer could not move forward because of a concertina wire barrier placed across his path. The job of blowing up the obstacle seemed impossible due to the heavy and accurate enemy fire covering the wire.

Undaunted, Lieutenant Ray prepared to demolish the obstacle that was exposing his platoon to concentrated fire. He placed explosive caps in his pockets, carried several Bangalore torpedoes, and wrapped a length of highly explosive primer cord around his own body. Despite the intense enemy fire, he crawled forward and prepared the obstacle for demolition. As he did so, he was severely wounded by an enemy mortar round exploding nearby.

Realizing he had only moments to complete his self-imposed mission, Lieutenant Ray wired the explosives to the primer cord still around his own body and pushed down on the charger, destroying himself along with the obstacle that left his platoon exposed to enemy fire. His Medal of Honor was awarded posthumously.

The 4th Division's 22nd Infantry Regiment didn't fare any better. In three days of fighting, the regiment had taken 300 battle casualties, including all three battalion commanders, most key staff officers, and half of its company commanders. Forest fighting was hard on leaders who had to expose themselves to select objectives, organize their troops, and communicate with other units.

One such leader was Major George L. Mabry, Jr., a veteran of Utah Beach. He was commanding the 2nd Battalion, 8th Infantry Regiment, on November 20, 1944, when his leading elements were halted by an extensive minefield. Heavy enemy fire covered the minefield, preventing the mines from being lifted. Major Mabry went alone into the minefield and created a safe route through it, all the while under enemy automatic-weapons fire.

He then went ahead of the leading battalion scouts to disable a booby-trapped concertina wire obstacle. After cutting a path through the wire, he moved ahead and observed three enemy soldiers in nearby foxholes. He captured them at bayonet point.

Next, he led the assault against three successive log bunkers from which machine-gun

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LEFT: During early fighting in the Hürtgen Forest in November 1944, a German soldier quickly surrenders to troops of the U.S. 9th Infantry Division. RIGHT: U.S. Ninth Army commander Lt. Gen. William Simpson presents Major George Mabry with the Distinguished Service Cross for his exploits on D-Day. He would also be awarded the Medal of Honor for his courageous leadership during the Hürtgen fighting. BELOW: The entrance to another stout German bunker, part of the Siegfried Line, little changed since the fighting in late 1944.

Rurseekatze / Wikimedia

An 81mm mortar crew from the 22nd Infantry Regiment, 4th Infantry Division fires from the rubble of a village in support of rifle companies holding off a German counterattack at Grosshau, December 1, 1944.

fire was spewing. Then, again leading his battalion from the front, he raced up a hill ahead of the rest of his men to confront nine enemy soldiers who engaged him in hand-to-hand combat. He eliminated two of these before his leading scouts came to the rescue.

Still not done, Mabry led his riflemen in a charge on another bunker in which he captured six more enemy soldiers. After consolidating his gains, he led a renewed assault across 300 yards of fire-swept ground to establish a defensive position on the enemy's flanks. For his distinguished leadership and personal courage Major Mabry was promoted to lieutenant colonel and received the Medal of Honor.

By mid-November the German command was desperately seeking reinforcements for the seriously depleted 275th Infantry Division. Contingents of the battle-weary 116th Panzer Division were thrown into the fight, but these were too few to make much difference.

By stretching his lines in other sectors, the German Seventh Army's commander, General Erich Brandenberger, managed to rush the 344th Infantry Division into the forest; it was followed soon after by the 353rd Infantry Division. Neither was at full strength, and both were tired from earlier fighting, but it was all the Germans could provide. The forest ate up infantry equally on both sides.

The failure to clear the Hürtgen Forest worried General Hodges. He ordered his V Corps to move into the forest and take over the assignment while VII Corps moved north, reducing its zone of responsibility. It was hoped that this would bring more power to bear against the remaining enemy strongholds in the forest.

The V Corps commander, Maj. Gen. Leonard T. Gerow, a 1911 graduate of the Virginia Military Academy, had led his corps over Normandy's beaches, through Paris, and across France into Germany. He brought up the 8th Infantry Division to reduce the zone of the 4th Infantry Division. V Corps would now be responsible for seizing the town of Hürtgen and the Brandenberg-Bergstein ridge, which had stymied VII Corps.

Major General Donald A. Stroh commanded the 8th Infantry Division. He had been commissioned into the Cavalry branch after graduating from Michigan Agricultural College in 1915. He had earlier served with the 85th and 9th Infantry Divisions before receiving command of the 8th ("Golden Arrow") Infantry Division. The division itself had been fighting since Normandy and had participated in the conquest of the fortified cities of St. Malo and Brest in Brittany before moving east into Germany.

Yet again the forest controlled events. Because of the terrain and defensive responsibilities inherited from the 28th Infantry Division, General Stroh could only deploy one of his three regiments to the main axis of attack.

With two regiments committed to holding the gains made by earlier attacks, only General Stroh's last arriving regiment, Colonel John R. Jeter's 121st Infantry, was available to launch the main attack. Even then, the regiment was the last to arrive and had less than a day to prepare to launch the attack over ground they had never seen.

Despite this, Hodges and Gerow had high hopes that a fresh infantry regiment would break the deadlock in the forest and had placed a combat command of the 5th Armored Division in reserve to exploit the expected breakthrough.

The 121st Infantry Regiment launched its attack on November 21, 1944. Before the infantry stepped off, artillery from V Corps, VII Corps, Combat Command Reserve (CCR) of the 5th Armored Division, and the 8th Infantry Division's own organic artillery pounded the German front lines and villages beyond them. The 8th Infantry Division artillery alone fired some 9,289 shells into the forest, but an attempt to use air support had to be cancelled because of poor weather conditions.

Supported by the entire 12th Engineer (Combat) Battalion and all of the division artillery except the 43rd Field Artillery Battalion, the infantry pushed forward, aided by Company A, 644th Tank Destroyer Battalion and Companies B and C of the 86th Chemical Mortar Battalion. Behind them CCR stood poised to race forward once the infantry had reached the far end of the forest.

The 121st's three assault battalions immediately ran into strong resistance. Mortar and artillery fire, tree bursts, minefields, and automatic weapons fire from concealed log bunkers slowed the advance.

The first day saw minimal progress, and casualties from mines and shrapnel were unusually heavy. The following day, three separate assaults were made by the regiment. Again, progress was limited.

Nevertheless, Company I, 121st Infantry made some 500 yards largely due to the bravery of one of its own noncommissioned officers. Staff Sergeant John W. Minick enlisted from Carlisle, Pennsylvania, and by November 21, 1944, was leading a platoon in Company I. When his company was halted by mines, artillery, and mortar fire, Sergeant Minick led four men through a minefield covered with barbed wire. When he reached the end of the field, some 300 yards ahead of his company, enemy machine-gun fire swept his small group.

Ordering his men to seek cover, Minick edged his way to the flank of the enemy post and opened fire, killing two and capturing three. He continued moving forward and suddenly found himself facing an entire company of enemy infantry. He opened fire, killing 20 and capturing 20 more. His platoon, which had by now caught up, captured the rest of the enemy infantry company.

Sergeant Minick was only getting started. Again moving ahead of his platoon, he encountered another enemy machine gun. He crawled forward until he could knock out the gun and crew. Then his platoon encountered another minefield. Once again, Sergeant Minick led the way, clearing the mines as he went until he stepped on one and was instantly killed. He received a posthumous Medal of Honor.

The next day some light tanks from the 709th Tank Battalion supported the attack but the advance was slow. The aid men and litter bearers of the 8th Medical Battalion were kept busy day and night attending to casualties. Soon Colonel Jeter and one of his battalion commanders were transferred, joining a long list of competent men whose careers were wrecked in the Hürtgen Forest.

Under a new commander, Colonel Thomas J. Cross, the regiment renewed the attack with more tanks from the 709th Tank Battalion. Progress remained slow and deadly, but on November 24 one battalion managed to outflank enemy positions. The news had barely reached Colonel Cross when other reports arrived that the advance company had been hit by a heavy artillery and mortar barrage and been forced back. More commanding officers were relieved of their posts.

The frustratingly slow progress caused General Stroh to call a conference with the

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ABOVE: Young German defenders lie dead in the Hürtgen Forest. German casualty figures are hard to come by, but at least 28,000 Germans were killed, wounded, captured, or went missing. BELOW: Bomb and shell craters, left over from the fighting in 1944, can still be found among the trees of the Hürtgen Forest.

Rurseekatze / Wikimedia

National Archives

Men of the 13th Infantry Regiment, 8th Infantry Division advance along a muddy road through the dense forest. The 8th was brought in to relieve the hard-hit 4th Infantry Division, but it also was decimated by the tenacious German defense.

commander of CCR, still waiting behind the 8th Infantry Division. Stroh wanted CCR to move up the Germeter-Hürtgen Highway before daylight on November 25 and attack the village of Hürtgen; CCR's Colonel Glen N. Anderson had reservations.

Although one company of the 121st Infantry had reached the edge of the forest, the Germans still held several hundred yards of the woodline east of the highway. This was a logical hiding place for antitank guns. These would be deadly for the tankers.

Further, since the Germans still covered the road, American combat engineers could not sweep it for mines, including antitank mines. Finally, there was a large bomb crater near the southern edge of the woods that would have to be bridged before the tanks could begin to roll down the highway.

General Stroh ordered his 12th Engineer (Combat) Battalion to bridge the bomb crater. A smoke screen was also ordered to cover the advance of the tanks. As dawn broke on November 25, tanks of the 10th Tank Battalion rolled forward only to find there was no bridge over the bomb hole.

Undeterred, 1st Lt. J.A. Macaulay decided to try and "jump" his tank across the crater. He gathered speed and roared down the muddy road. But the tank fell short, slammed into the far wall of the crater, and fell over on its side, disabled.

Alerted by the sounds of the tanks, the Germans began to shell the road with artillery and mortars; heavy losses were inflicted on CCR's 47th Armored Infantry Battalion. Meanwhile, in the overturned tank, Lieutenant Macaulay and his gunner, Corporal William S. Hibler, continued firing their 75mm gun at the enemy as best they could.

Troops of the 22nd Armored Engineer Battalion were called up to bridge the crater. Captain Charles Perlman, commanding Company C, was wounded, but his men continued working on the crater. Captain Frank M. Pool, commander of Company B, 10th Tank Battalion took over directing the work but also was soon wounded by German automatic weapons fire. He climbed down from his tank and continued to direct the engineers until he was again wounded, this time by mortars; Lieutenant Lewis R. Rollins took over.

Finally, the crater was bridged. The first tank over the crater, commanded by Sergeant William Hurley, hit a mine and blocked the road. But Staff Sergeant (later Lieutenant) Lawrence Summerfield managed to maneuver his tank around the disabled vehicle and almost reached the bend in the road that led to Hürtgen village.

A German antitank gun opened fire but missed. Summerfield's gunner, Corporal Benny R. Majka, didn't, knocking out the gun with his first round. Before the tankers could congratulate themselves, a second German gun fired and knocked out Summerfield's tank.

The Americans poured more than 15,000 artillery shells into enemy lines, and in a brief break in the weather fighters of the 366th Fighter Group bombed and strafed suspected enemy positions. But CCR's effort was over. It had lost 150 men in the morning hours of November 25 and had not advanced at all; CCR withdrew to await more favorable circumstances. For the tired infantrymen of the 121st Infantry Regiment, it meant more days in the forbidding forest trying to clear out the stubborn enemy.

General Stroh was determined to finish

the job and understood after November 25 that it would have to be done by the foot soldiers; armor had no place in the deadly forest. The infantry would have to secure the Germeter-Hürtgen road before he would again commit his attached armor.

A look at the situation at the end of November 15, 1944, showed that in fact the 121st Infantry had made some good, if difficult, progress. Most of the best defensive lines in the forest had by now been overcome, leaving the Germans with less in the way of good positions from which to contest the American advance.

To the 8th Division's north, the 4th Division had made good progress as well and outflanked many of the German positions holding back the Golden Arrow boys.

General Stroh stretched his division's lines in order to release another battalion to add strength to his next attack. This freed up Lt. Col. Morris J. Keesee's 1st Battalion, 13th Infantry to be attached to Colonel Cross' 121st Infantry.

The new plan was for Colonel Keesee to circle around behind the German flank, passing through the zone of the 4th Infantry Division, and strike from the unexpected direction, perhaps unhinging the entire German defense. Once again the objective was the village of Hürtgen.

On November 26, while waiting for Colonel Keesee's battalion to get into position, the 121st Infantry renewed its attack. The results were astounding. Other than the expected mines, shelling, and the occasional straggler, opposition had disappeared. The Germans had withdrawn from this sector of the woods. Before noon that day the infantrymen were looking down on the village of Hürtgen.

Colonel Cross ordered an immediate attack on the village, a primary objective of the battle. Conflicting reports from patrols indicated either that the village was abandoned or that it was strongly held.

By dark, Company F, 121st Infantry had reached a position 300 yards southwest of the village. Here it was halted by heavy machine-gun fire and stopped for the night. The following day, Company F led the regimental attack. Protected by massive divisional artillery fire aided by the guns of Company C, 644th Tank Destroyer Battalion, Lt. Col. Roy Hogan's 3rd Battalion, 121st Infantry cleared the woods.

Alongside, the 2nd Battalion and tanks of the 709th Tank Battalion reached the southern edge of the village. Colonel Keesee's battalion moved northwest of the town under a heavy enemy artillery barrage. That evening patrols again reported the town as abandoned.

The morning of November 28 saw Companies A and B, 13th Infantry, supported by Company A, 644th Tank Destroyer Battalion, seized the Kleinhau-Germeter road. But once again reports that Hürtgen was abandoned proved inaccurate. As the 121st Infantry advanced on the town from the west and south, it was stopped by heavy machine-gun fire. Colonel Cross halted the attack, reorganized, and launched a new attack to address the strong defenses.

This new attack by the 2nd Battalion, 121st Infantry, and Company C, 13th Infantry, supported by the 709th Tank Battalion, finally overran Hürtgen. More than 350 prisoners were taken, and bodies of both American and German soldiers littered the streets of the much fought over town. The expected counterattack came late in the afternoon but was repulsed with heavy losses to the enemy.

General Stroh now alerted Colonel Glen Anderson at CCR. He was to move to Hürt-

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ABOVE: American M-10 tank destroyers crawl up a muddy road through the forest. The narrow, twisting roads and thick stands of trees made the use of armor all but impossible. OPPOSITE: Taking up defensive positions in a clearing in the Hürtgen Forest, soldiers of the 28th Infantry Division prepare to engage the Germans. At left, a two-man team has just fired a round from a mortar.

gen and be prepared to launch an attack on the town of Kleinhau and the high ground around around it. In the meantime, the 3rd Battalion, 121st Infantry would finish clearing the woods around Hürtgen. Coordination between CCR's attack on Kleinhau and an attack on Brandenberg by the 3rd Battalion, 28th Infantry and the 121st Infantry was also established.

Task Force Hamberg of CCR made the attack on Kleinhau. The task force, under the command of Lt. Col. William A. Hamberg, commanding officer of the 10th Tank Battalion, who led Company C of his battalion along with Company C of the 47th Armored Infantry Battalion forward early on November 29.

The leading platoon, under Lieutenant Robert C. Leas, moved off the road to provide flank protection and immediately had four tanks stuck in the mud. But the following platoons ran straight up the road to the village. Lieutenant T.A. McGuire and Lieutenant George Kleinsteiber's platoons had, by mid-morning, entered the village. Supported by the 95th Armored Field Artillery Battalion, the task force was soon fighting within the village. Additional tanks and infantry arrived from other task forces of CCR.

A single Mark IV German tank knocked out one American tank before it was itself destroyed. An antitank gun hidden in the woods outside the village was similarly disposed of by the Shermans of Task Force Hamberg. Outposts were established near, but not on, Hill 401.3.

By nightfall CCR was able to turn the town over to elements of the 8th Infantry Division. The cost was eight tanks destroyed, mostly due to mines, 13 half-tracks and a tank destroyer of the 628th Tank Destroyer Battalion badly damaged, and 60 armored infantry casualties. Overall, the fight for Hürtgen and Kleinhau had cost the 121st Infantry and 1st Battalion, 13th Infantry some 1,247 casualties. The Germans lost 882 men captured alone.

Behind the lines, command of the Golden Arrow Division changed hands. General Stroh had been overseas since the early days of North Africa in 1942. He had witnessed the death of his son who had been shot down while flying a fighter-bomber in direct support of his father's 8th Infantry Division. He was overdue for a rest. He was ordered to the United States for that rest under the condition that he return and command another division once he was sufficiently refreshed. The Golden Arrows' new commander was Brig. Gen. William G. Weaver.

Born in Louisville, Kentucky, General Weaver was commissioned into the infantry from West Point in 1912 and served in France during World War I. He had been the assistant division commander of the 90th Infantry Division before assuming command of the 8th. Among his decorations were three Distinguished Service Crosses and three Purple Hearts. Once in command, General Weaver quickly learned that despite all the earlier talk about Hürtgen, the seizure of that village was not the end of the battle. The forest was awaiting more victims.

General Hodges wanted possession of the Brandenberg-Berstein Ridge, for now First U.S. Army understood the importance of the Roer River dams and wanted a launching position for a direct attack on them. In turn, the Hürtgen-Kleinhau position was the best available for an attack on the ridge. A highway ran along the ridge between the woods on either side. Gerow ordered Weaver to use his 28th and 121st Infantry Regiments to clear the corridor while the 13th Infantry Regiment held the Hürtgen-Kleinhau area. CCR of the 5th Armored Division remained attached to Weaver's division.

It took until December 1 for the infantry to clear the approach for the armor to begin an attack along the highway. Once again the difficulties were the same: mines, log bunkers, barbed wire, automatic weapons, and artillery fire.

Finally, the way was clear for Task Force Hamberg to run down the road. Again,

lead tanks were knocked out by mines and antitank weapons. Automatic weapons and mortar fire halted the armored infantrymen. General Weaver sent his own men forward to clear some enemy-held areas that had remained hidden earlier, while the armored engineers cleared the road of mines.

By December 3, elements of the 28th Infantry and 121st Infantry, supported by tanks of the 709th Tank Battalion, had reached the ridge. On that day, the weather finally cleared and, with the welcome support of Republic P-47 Thunderbolt fighter bombers of the 366th Group, Task Force Hamberg once again rolled down the highway.

With this combination, American tanks advanced on Brandenberg shortly after breakfast. So strong was the attack that Lieutenant Kleinsteiber rolled past the town and halfway to Bergstein, where he knocked out two antitank guns, before Colonel Hamberg called him back. Although he planned to take both villages in one attack, the colonel realized he did not have sufficient strength to hold them both should the enemy inevitably counterattack.

As if to remind Colonel Hamberg of his weakness, American planes had to return to base due to weather conditions there, and about 60 German Messerschmitt Me-109 fighters arrived and began attacking his task force. Several were shot down by CCR and 8th Infantry Division antiaircraft units.

Another of Colonel Hamberg's worries was the German observation from Hill 400.5, known as Castle Hill to the Americans and the Burg-Burg to the Germans. Enemy shelling directed from there was causing considerable difficulties for Task Force Hamberg. With only 11 tanks, five tank destroyers, and 140 infantrymen left to him, Hamberg was anxious about his ability to hold his gains.

Meanwhile, General Weaver was anxious to attack Bergstein. He ordered a renewed attack, which Colonel Anderson launched with CCR on the afternoon of December 4. CCR secured the town by nightfall. Once there, guns on Castle Hill again threatened their safety. In addition to the observed artillery fire, the town itself was open to attack from all sides. Indeed, on December 5 the enemy launched three strong counterattacks that struck the 3rd Battalion, 28th Infantry, whose defensive stand earned it a Presidential Unit Citation.

ABOVE: Soldiers of the 2nd Ranger Battalion slog their way along a muddy road on their way to Hill 400, the scene of a fierce stand against repeated German attacks. OPPOSITE: American soldiers escort a group of Germans captured during the battle to a POW cage somewhere behind the lines.

Indeed, German commanders were concerned about CCR's penetration of the ridge; they brought up additional troops from the 47th and 272nd Volksgrenadier Divisions for a counterattack. Although neither unit was at full strength, they posed a significant force against a weakened CCR.

The first German reinforcements arrived on December 6, and the counterattacks began immediately, supported by five armored vehicles and dozens of antitank teams. But, despite a strong attack and a near German success, CCR and the 28th Infantry held Bergstein.

But Castle Hill still pounded the Americans in and around Bergstein. Two more German counterattacks were launched from its vicinity, supported by artillery fire controlled from its heights. CCR was becoming progressively weaker, and General Weaver had no more infantry left to strengthen it. He appealed to V Corps for assistance, specifically for the 2nd Ranger Battalion, which was nearby but under V Corps control.

Companies D, E, and F of the 2nd Ranger Battalion gained eternal fame when on D-Day they climbed the sheer cliffs of Pointe du Hoc to knock out German guns that threatened the Omaha Beach landings. The Rangers atop the cliffs fought off strong German counterattacks for two days before being relieved. Losses were heavy, and the battalion spent the next several weeks training replacements.

Next the battalion, under Lt. Col. James Rudder, was assigned to protect the flank of the 29th Infantry Division during the struggle for Brest in Brittany. The Rangers seized the Lochrist (Graf Spee) Battery position on September 8 and took 1,800 prisoners. The Rangers then moved east through Paris and camped for additional training in the Hürtgen Forest, where General Weaver found them on December 6, 1944.

The battalion was rushed forward on December 7 to the outskirts of Bergstein, arriving in the early morning hours. Just as the battalion left its bivouac area, Colonel Rudder departed to assume command of the 28th Division's 109th Infantry Regiment. Major

George S. Williams, the Ranger battalion's executive officer, assumed command of the battalion; the decision to relieve Rudder was not a popular move. One of the Ranger officers said, "It was something of a low blow to George because he knew it was going to be a bad fight and you don't always change command in the middle of an operation."

But the battalion had confidence in Williams, who had just been promoted to major, and he led it toward Castle Hill.

As they moved, the Rangers improved everyone's morale. One member of the 47th Armored Infantry Battalion later wrote, "About midnight a guy came down the road, then two others, each one five yards behind the other. They were three Ranger lieutenants. They asked for the enemy positions and the road to take; said they were ready to go. We talked the situation over with the officers. They stepped out and said, 'Let's go men.' We heard the tommy guns click and, without a word, the Rangers moved out. Our morale went up in a hurry."

National Archives

Major Williams had two assignments. He was to seize Castle Hill and strengthen the defense of Bergstein. To achieve the second, he established roadblocks to the west, east and south of Bergstein, strengthened by platoons of the 893rd Tank Destroyer Battalion.

Defending Castle Hill was Captain Adolf Thomae's 2nd Battalion, 980th Grenadier Regiment of the 272nd Volksgrenadier Division, with 36 pieces of artillery on call. Against this defense Major Williams sent D and F Companies.

The Ranger scouts moved forward, ignoring challenges they thought were in English, and suddenly found themselves in the German front lines. Behind them Captain Duke Slater formed D, E, and F Companies and launched the assault. Led by E Company, the Rangers caught the Germans by surprise as they thought the scouts who had pulled back were the only threat.

Artillery fire began to strike among the Rangers, but D and F Companies pushed past E Company and continued the attack. Below, outside Bergstein, Companies A, B, and C observed self-propelled German artillery moving forward. A call to CCR put an end to that threat.

Captain Mort McBride's D Company and Captain Otto Masny's F Company now faced an open field that they had to cross to reach the main German positions. Closely behind a rolling artillery barrage, the Rangers charged Castle Hill with fixed bayonets. Several machine guns and a bunker blocked the way.

Lieutenant Lem Lomell led the D Company assault, losing some men but gaining the top of the hill. So quickly did the Rangers move that some charged past the hill and were on their way to the Roer River before Lomell called them back.

Captain Thomae had planned for such an eventuality. Preplanned artillery now began to hit Castle Hill in increasing ferocity. Neither courage nor skill helped a soldier in such a situation. As Lieutenant Lomell commented, "It was a matter of luck."

The Rangers finished clearing the hill and took what cover they could find in the German fortifications. Casualties had been heavy, but the Rangers remained atop the hill for two more days, being attacked five times by strong German forces, including paratroopers. One Ranger company was commanded by a sergeant, as all officers and higher noncommissioned officers had become casualties.

Finally, late on December 8, the 1st Battalion, 13th Infantry relieved the Rangers. Only 22 Rangers were still able to walk off the hill under their own power. The Rangers had suffered 19 killed, 107 wounded, and four men missing—one of every four Rangers who made the initial attack. But from Castle Hill the Americans could see the town of Schmidt, the Roer River, and the Roer River Dams.

The Hürtgen Forest had finally claimed its last victims. □

MAYHEM IN BURMA'S

A legacy of courage was forged by Merrill's Marauders in the Battles of Walabum, Nhpum Ga, and Myitkyina—but at a terrible price.

National Archives

SPECIAL OPERATIONS SOLDIERS have existed since armed forces were first organized. Arguably, the hand-picked Greek warriors concealed inside the Trojan horse outside the gates of Troy 3,000 years ago were the first "special ops" troops.

During the French & Indian War in America, a unique band of frontiersmen, Rogers' Rangers, gained fame for their code of conduct and special skills that made them a valuable instrument of mid-18th century warfare. The legacy of the Rangers endures today in both the U.S. Army's Ranger Regiment and in the American special operations forces as they have developed over the past 60 years.

Undergoing jungle training near Deogarh, India, in November and December 1943, a band of nearly 3,000 American soldiers were gathered who would provide a unique World War II link between those early Rangers and the American special operations forces of today. This was the band of soldiers who volunteered for "Unit Galahad" in the China-Burma-India Theater and eventually became known as Merrill's Marauders.

Modeled after the Chindits, the British long-range penetration group that operated behind Japanese lines in 1943, the American volunteers, who had come from commands in the United States, the Caribbean, and the Pacific, trained alongside the core group of Chindits being readied for their next long-range insertion.

In asking for volunteers for a "dangerous and hazardous mission," the Army had made the promise that the extent of the mission would involve three months in combat and then the volunteers would be repatriated to the United States. This promise would be repeated often and finally become a source of contention for those who volunteered.

The unit consisted of three battalions that were further divided into six combat teams for tactical flexibility once in the jungle. The newly promoted Colonel Charles Hunter was their commander.

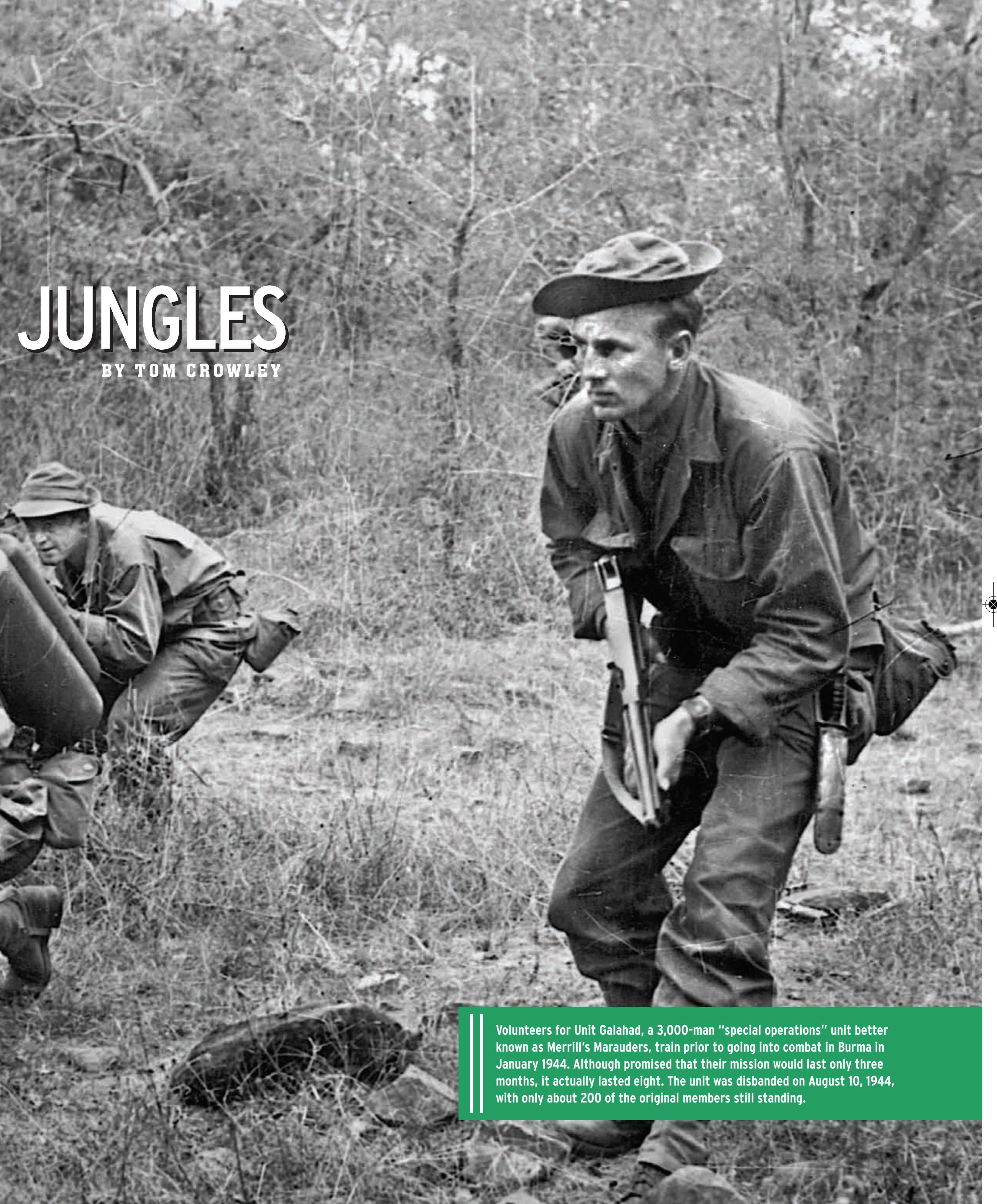
The 1st Battalion, under Lt. Col. William Osborne, was divided into the Red and White Combat Teams. The 2nd Battalion, under Lt. Col. George McGee, Jr., was divided into Blue and Green Teams, and Lt. Col. Charles Beach's 3rd Battalion was divided into Orange and Khaki Teams.

The unit received an important addition during the last weeks of 1943: 300 mules and 80 muleskinners from the 31st Quartermaster Pack Troop. Mules were absolutely necessary to carry the mortars and other heavy equipment needed to sustain combat capabilities once in the trackless jungle.

Although the initial plan was for the British Chindit leader, Brigadier Orde Wingate, to command the unit, the American leader in the China-Burma-India Theater, Lt. Gen.

JUNGLES

BY TOM CROWLEY



Volunteers for Unit Galahad, a 3,000-man "special operations" unit better known as Merrill's Marauders, train prior to going into combat in Burma in January 1944. Although promised that their mission would last only three months, it actually lasted eight. The unit was disbanded on August 10, 1944, with only about 200 of the original members still standing.

Joseph Stilwell, pushed for them to be assigned to his command; he prevailed. On January 1, 1944, the detachment was designated the 5307th Composite Unit (Provisional). One of Stilwell's long-time close aides, the bespectacled, pipe-smoking Brig. Gen. Frank Merrill, was appointed the new commanding officer with Colonel Hunter being "demoted" to serving as his deputy.

The men of the 5307th were both disappointed and puzzled. Colonel Hunter was liked and admired and had been the officer in charge of their unit from the very beginning. He had an excellent background both as a teacher of tactics and as a commander of infantry units prior to the war. Brig. Gen. Merrill, on the other hand, was an unknown quantity and primarily a staff officer filling the role of Stilwell's G-3 (plans and operations) officer.

Unknown to the men, Merrill had two qualities that Stilwell prized: he had been one of Stilwell's inner circle since 1942 and the long walk out of Burma, and he was a reliable yes-man. As senior generals often do, Stilwell had assembled family members on his staff, appointing his 32-year-old son Joe his G-2 and his son-in-law his adjutant.

Many of the men felt aggrieved by Merrill's appointment, especially Colonel Hunter, a former West Point classmate of Merrill, who had understood that the unit was to be under his command. This widespread feeling of discontent would grow stronger over the coming months and continue well after the war was over.

American reporters following Stilwell visited Deogarh to establish what this new unit was all about. They were greeted by Merrill, who told them "his boys" were the best in the CBI Theater. The reporters, searching for a catchier name than the 5307th Composite Unit (Provisional) or Unit Galahad, decided the tag for the unit would be Merrill's Marauders, the name under which it would become famous.

On January 27, the Marauders began their odyssey with a 1,200-mile train journey from the Deogarh camp to Margherita in Assam, arriving on February 6 near the Ledo Road jump-off point.

Instead of being lifted into Burma by air to strategic positions far behind the Allied lines, as the Chindits had planned, Merrill decided, with Stilwell concurring, that the Marauders would walk from India. This meant walking more than 100 miles along the Ledo Road and over the 3,727-foot-high Pangsau Pass through the Patkai Mountains to Stilwell's headquarters at Shingbiyang at the head of the Hukawng Valley.

The reason given for Merrill's decision to subject the Marauders to this marathon march, which eventually covered an estimated 140 miles, was to use it as a "shakedown" or a "toughening-up" exercise for the unit. It was not a popular decision with the Marauders. The dirt track was a clear trail forged by the Ledo Road construction crews, but it was subject to unseasonal rains.

They learned to march lightly packed in order to keep moving day after day and, as Merrill intended, a good deal of extra camp baggage, such as small cooking stoves, was abandoned along the way. In hindsight, this discipline really did prepare them well for their entry into the jungle proper.

National Archives

The Marauders' 1st Battalion set off on the march from Assam on February 7, with the other battalions following on consecutive days and marching at night to keep their movement secret. Two days later, when Tokyo Rose welcomed them to Burma on the radio, it was clear the secret was out, so they switched to day marches. On the 18th, the 1st Battalion reached Stilwell's former headquarters at Shingbiyang.

Following the forward movement of the Chinese divisions, Stilwell had moved his HQ 25 miles farther along the Ledo Road to Ningbyen. Prior to marching any farther on the 19th, Merrill had his troops shave and put on their steel helmets so they would make a good impression when they encountered Stilwell.

Stilwell, however, was busy that day and it was not until the 21st at Ningbyen that the Marauders encountered him. The 2nd Battalion had closed in on the position early in the day and the 3rd Battalion by its end. The I&R (Intelligence and Reconnaissance) Platoon of the 1st Battalion's Red Team, under Lieutenant Sam Wilson, picked a suitable drop site and laid out the panels for C-47 transport planes, enabling the first of many resupply drops to be successful.

The Marauders made a good impression on Stilwel,l but it seemed, as he didn't wear rank insignia or special uniform items, it was not entirely mutual. One Marauder, unaware it was Stilwell, was overheard referring to him as looking like a "duck hunter." To his credit, Stilwell just laughed.

February 22 was a welcome rest day for the Marauders at Ningbyen. The sound of Japanese artillery engaging the Chinese units could be heard in the distance. Equally noticeable to some of the unit was the stench wafting from unburied Japanese corpses nearby.

Lieutenant General Stilwell explained to Merrill that he wanted the Marauders to take to jungle paths going around the Japanese positions. The Marauders would then act as a maneuver element for the main Chinese attack on Maingkwan down the road through the Hukwang Valley and then farther along to Walabum to block the expected Japanese retreat. Merrill briefed his staff on the morning of the 23rd, and a final air resupply was received.

Early the next morning, led by their respective I&R platoons, the battalions moved out on the faint, occasionally undiscernible jungle paths that became their trails to battle in Burma. Stilwell's primary order to Merrill was that the road leading south out of Walabum—occupied by the Japanese 18th Division, the conquerors of Singapore—was to be cut by his troops by March 3.

The battalions left several hours apart on the primary trail, turning off at different points toward and beyond the flanks of the Japanese force occupying Walabum. The Chinese 38th Division, along with the 1st Provisional Tank Group advised by Americans, would attack the Japanese main force around Maingkwan. They would then move directly toward Walabum once roadblocks were established to the south along with positions to the east and west, thus forming a net in which Stilwell planned to snare the Japanese.

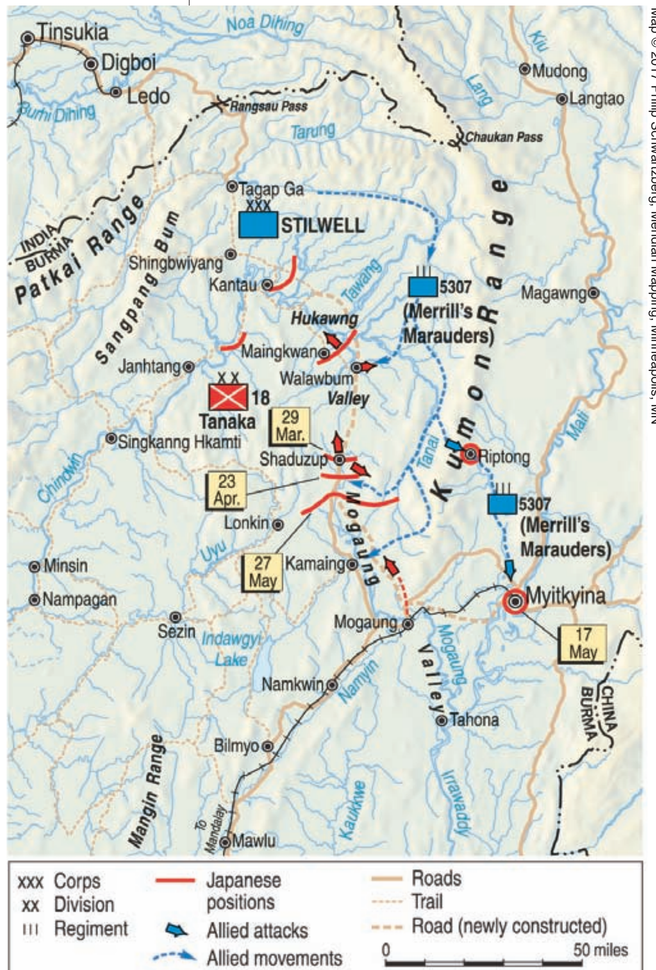
It is important to note that with the attack on Walabum and in successive actions by the Marauders, Stilwell's concept of a long-range penetration group differed significantly from that of Orde Wingate.

Major General Wingate planned for the various Chindit units to be dropped far behind enemy lines and operate independently. They would aid the main British units by attacking supply lines and disrupting communications, but essentially acting beyond the reach of their support. The Chindits' planned disruption of the Japanese rear would cause confusion and possible diversion of Japanese troops from the front lines, but there would be little tactical interplay between their efforts and the British units.

In Stilwell's eyes, the Marauders were to be used directly to optimize the attacks of the two Chinese divisions and the tank

LEFT: Brigadier General Frank Merrill (far left) watches as his Marauders lead their pack mules over Pangsan Pass along the Ledo Road as they enter Burma, February 1944. Colonel Charles Hunter (second from left), second in command, took charge of the unit after Merrill's heart attack on March 29, 1944. RIGHT: Rugged mountains, dense jungles, and fast-flowing rivers and streams were encountered as the Marauders and their Chinese allies struck the Japanese along the Burma-China border. BELOW: Lieutenant General Joe Stilwell (left), commander of U.S. and Nationalist Chinese forces in China and Burma, chats with Brig. Gen. Frank Merrill, commanding the 5307th Composite Unit (Provisional), nicknamed "Merrill's Marauders."

National Archives



Map © 2017 Philip Schwartzberg, Meridian Mapping, Minneapolis, MN

unit under his command. They were to maneuver through the jungle and around the Japanese forces occupying objectives targeted by the Chinese, and so disrupt any relief forces and the withdrawal of the Japanese.

Thus the positions taken by the Marauders and the timing of their attacks would be directly tied to the Chinese efforts. While the Marauders moved independently, their actions would be in concert with the Chinese, and the battalions could band together when necessary to reinforce each other.

The differing visions of the two commanders regarding long-range penetration would become critical to the Chindits at a later stage in the Allies' 1944 Burma offensive after Wingate was killed in a plane crash on March 24 and Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten handed command of the Chindits to Stilwell.

However, as the Marauders entered the Burmese jungle on the morning of February 24, the Chindits had not yet begun to fly in. Their entry on American C-47s and glider aircraft would not begin until March 5.

THE BATTLE OF WALABUM

The Marauders commenced their trek around the main Japanese positions. Communications were at times difficult. While tracking the progress of the Chinese units on a daily basis, Stilwell only mentions the Marauders sporadically in his diary. He still used the term "the 5307th" or just refers to Merrill as "M," and at one point, unsure of the Marauders' movements and Merrill's whereabouts, he wrote "?" Later in the campaign, communications would improve so the Marauders could clear rough airfields for single-engine L-4 liaison planes to fly in and pick up the wounded.

The first major enveloping movement by the Marauders would set the pattern for subsequent actions. Although there were skirmishes with the Japanese—basically squad and platoon actions along the way—the battalions kept moving.

In an early skirmish the Marauders suffered their first casualty, Private Robert Landis of Mahoning, Ohio, a veteran of fighting in the Solomon Islands, killed while walking point for an I&R platoon.

Their fitness and discipline enabled the Marauders to move quickly through the jungle, with the 3rd Battalion covering 18 miles in 11 hours early on March 2. On March 3, Merrill radioed Stilwell to say he would have units in place blocking the road south from Walabum at noon. The Marauders would attack Japanese units on March 4 as part of coordinated Chinese and American pressure on enemy positions north, east, and west of the town. As Stilwell noted in his diary, "The net is set."

Using the Marauders as a maneuver element quickly bore fruit for Stilwell. Once aware of the American unit to the rear of his forces at Maingkwan (north of Walabum), the commander of the Japanese 18th Division, General Shinichi Tanaka, ordered units of the 55th and 56th Regiments to move south and "destroy" the Americans threatening his flanks. Thus, as the net closed, the Marauders encountered Japanese units up to battalion strength, and skirmishes at times became pitched battles. However, the Marauders' training in unit maneuvers and their adaptation to local terrain gave them the advantage.

The I&R Platoon of the 3rd Battalion under Lieutenant Logan Weston had moved west across the Nambyu River toward Lagan Ga on the road north of Walabum late on March 3 and had spotted Japanese moving in the area. Early on the morning of the 4th, the platoon moved to high ground and dug in. Almost immediately, they received mortar fire and were attacked by a Japanese unit superior in size, sustaining several casualties.

Mortar support from the 3rd Battalion forces still on the other side of the river reduced the pressure of the Japanese attack, and Weston directed his platoon to cross back to the east bank. As the I&R Platoon initiated the crossing under fire, another 3rd Battalion platoon under Lieutenant Victor Weingartner took up position on the high ground above the east bank to provide cover, firing at the pursuing Japanese soldiers.

The Japanese troops plunged into the river to complete their pursuit, but the accurate fire of the Marauders above them killed many and forced them to abandon their chase. The I&R Platoon was able to cross without further casualties, though two of the wounded died later in the day while being evacuated by air.

National Archives

ABOVE: Men and mules from the 2nd Battalion use a sturdy bamboo bridge built by Kachin tribesmen to cross the Tanai River near the village of Ning Awng, March 18, 1944. OPPOSITE: Merrill's heavily laden men wade through a stream, March 23, 1944. The dense jungle, extreme heat and humidity, and numerous tropical diseases, not to mention the enemy, took their toll on the Marauders.

AP Photos

Quick support for the I&R Platoon by other Marauders had not only saved the situation that morning, but also set the stage for a mass killing of Japanese in the next days.

From the high ground east of the Nambyu River, the 3rd Battalion and its mortar crews under Lt. Col. Charles E. Beach had a commanding view of Walabum, the road north to Maingkwang (where the main Chinese assault was taking place), and the road south to Kamaing (the Japanese 18th Division HQ).

These routes were key for the enemy to either summon reinforcements for battles north of Walabum or for a possible retreat. Under mortar fire from the high ground, it became obvious to the Japanese command that they had to dislodge the occupiers. The following day, March 6, elements of the Japanese 56th Regiment attacked the 3rd Battalion's Orange Combat Team.

The Marauders were well dug in and expecting the attack. They had the advantage of higher ground, with the river to their front and an open field on the far side providing a clear firing view of the enemy advance. Nonetheless the Japanese commander followed orders to "destroy the enemy" and launched two attacks, the first early in the morning and the second late in the day. Both resulted in carnage.

The Marauders were amazed by courage of the Japanese troops amazed as they continuously ran to their deaths across the field and into the river. Hundreds of Japanese soldiers were killed (Merrill reported 300 to Stilwell though other reports cite 400). By sunset only seven Marauders had been wounded. The Japanese officers committed their troops to these suicidal frontal assaults with little attempt to maneuver around the Marauders' flanks.

In the quiet of the night, Merrill sent word for Beach's 3rd Battalion to withdraw. The Chinese, supported by a tank unit with American advisers, had broken through at Maingkwan and were approaching Walabum, which they would occupy the next day. The fighting wasn't over, but the battle for Walabum was decided and the Marauders had written the first chapter of a remarkable combat story.

Now it was time to move to the Mogaung Valley farther south along the road to Kamaing.

THE BATTLE OF SHADUZUP

Lieutenant Colonel William L. Osborne's 1st Battalion took the lead as the Marauders moved south toward Shaduzup, again acting as a maneuver force supporting the main Chinese attack. The Chinese force was to head south from Walabum and attack at Jambu Bun, 25 miles before Shaduzup on the Kamaing-Maingkwan road. The 2nd and 3rd Battalions were to swing farther south through the jungle, bypass the 1st Battalion, and set up roadblocks closer to Maingkwan.

The Marauders left the Walabum camp on March 12; the 1st Battalion aimed to be in position at Shaduzup on March 24. They had enjoyed five days of rest in the camp, but an occurrence there would cause the Marauders more casualties than all the combat with the Japanese put together.

They camped in the same area as the Chinese, who had no concept or training in the importance of field sanitation. To the disgust of the Marauders, the Chinese troops, peasants all, defecated whenever and wherever the spirit moved them, including the streams and river. Although the Marauders treated their water with halazone, it was insufficient to kill the microbes the Chinese soldiers were sharing with them.

Soon the first cases of amoebic dysentery appeared among the Marauders to complement the malaria they were already fighting. With time, this would permeate throughout the battalions with terrible effect.

The 1st Battalion made quick progress leading the way to Shaduzup for the first two days, but then started encountering Japanese ambushes. Enemy resistance continued to grow until Osborne realized his men would have to fight their way down the trail on a daily basis, and thus could neither reach their objective on time nor be in a condition to place an effective roadblock on the road south of Shaduzup. He decided the battalion had to push cross-country around the Japanese in an effort to achieve the target date of March 24.

A critical asset for the Marauders moving through jungle terrain with inadequate maps were the friendly Kachin tribespeople serving as scouts and guides. The Japanese troops had killed and tortured many Kachin people; consequently, the Kachins were highly motivated to help the Yanks.

The Marauders, and the OSS 101st

Detachment active in north Burma, praised them and recognized the importance of their service. Even so, progress through thick jungle and dense bamboo over rough, steeply undulating terrain was mercilessly difficult. Units were rotated to cut trails with machetes but still became exhausted and the Marauders fell behind schedule. Food and fresh water were in critically short supply.

On the 17th they received an airdrop of supplies and resumed the trek, but now dysentery was sweeping the unit. On March 22, Stilwell noted in his diary that he "waited for news of the 1st Bn ... off on a new trail."

In the original February movement and the subsequent battle for Walabum, the presence of the Marauders to their rear had surprised the Japanese. Now, Japanese commanders took measures to increase their flank security, and as the days passed and the battalion pushed farther southwest through the jungle toward the road south of Shaduzup, it encountered increasing numbers of enemy troops and engaged in short, fierce firefights.

Lieutenant Colonel Osborne devised a tactic to deceive the Japanese and take the pressure off the main battalion units as they advanced toward the road. He sent a platoon under Lieutenant John McElmurray to the northwest, away from the battalion, to fire on Japanese soldiers on the road above Shaduzup and draw their commander's attention away from the main thrust of the Marauders.

The plan worked, as McElmurray's platoon fired on and killed a Japanese soldier on the road and then drew mortar fire from enemy units in the area.

On March 27, Osborne had his 1st Battalion in place along the east bank of the Mogaung River, paralleling the road from Shaduzup to Kamaing that ran west of the river and was occupied by Japanese units.

Acting on a scouting report received from two brave I&R Platoon members, who had crossed the river late in the day to map enemy positions and then discovered a Japanese camp, Osborne drew up a plan for his White Combat Team to start crossing the river at 3 AM on the 28th and attack the camp. By 4:30 AM the unit was in position on the west side of the river.

The Marauders attacked the sleeping Japanese soldiers and completely routed them, killing many while the rest ran off into the jungle. At first light the Marauders set up their roadblock, effectively blocking any Japanese reinforcements from coming north up the road to Shaduzup, which was now under attack by the Chinese 22nd Division.

The Marauders who had established the roadblock were essentially trying to hold a fixed position of no tactical advantage and for which the Japanese artillery had clear coordinates. Artillery fire started falling at dawn and continued throughout the day. The Japanese had 75mm howitzers and 77mm mountain guns, and they continued to barrage both the roadblock and the rest of the 1st Battalion dug in on the east bank of the Mogaung River. The Marauders had no artillery with which to fire back. After enduring the barrage into the evening, the Marauders drew back later that night.

The next morning, March 29, the Chinese 113th Regiment, which had been following the Marauders as backup, appeared with four howitzers and put the Japanese under fire. Then the Chinese infantry attacked. The Japanese forces, from Jambu Bun to Shaduzup, were running. The battle for Shaduzup was over.

The 1st Battalion had given an excellent account of itself. Osborne estimated the number of Japanese troops his men had killed at around 300. Their own casualties were eight killed and 35 wounded. The 2nd and 3rd Battalions, much farther south on the road to Kamaing, were also actively engaged with the Japanese during this period.

THE BATTLE OF INKANGAHTAWNG

The Marauders' 2nd and 3rd Battalions had started out on March 12, the same day as the 1st Battalion, but had taken a wider arc, aiming to emerge from the jungle at the village of Inkangahtawng about 15 miles south of Shaduzup.

Merrill accompanied these units, which were guided not only by the Kachin scouts, but also by two Westerners who had lived in Burma for years and knew the jungle trails well—Jack Girsham, a British/Burmese hunter, and Fr. James Stuart, an Irish missionary. They moved along a well-defined ridgeline far enough from the road to avoid encountering Japanese troops.

The two battalions moved quickly, overtaking the impeded 1st Battalion, bypassing Shaduzup, and taking up position within a day's march of the road and Inkangahtawng by March 20. Here, Merrill decided to divide his force. He would remain behind at Janpan with the Orange Combat Team of the 3rd Battalion and the OSS 101st Detachment of 300 Kachins, who had been there on their arrival, while he sent McGee's 2nd Battalion and the Khaki Combat Team of the 3rd Battalion onward to set up a roadblock south of Inkangahtawng under the command of Colonel Hunter.

The diary note made by Stilwell on March 22 reflected Merrill's plan for the division of his forces: "M ... says his movements will look cock-eyed, but never mind. He's bluff-

MOMENTS LATER IN A DIFFERENT SECTOR OF THE PERIMETER ANOTHER BANZAI ATTACK WAS LAUNCHED—THIS TIME ACROSS AN OPEN FIELD. THIS ATTACK WAS ALSO MOWED DOWN, AND THE FRONT OF THE MARAUDERS' POSITION WAS NOW LITTERED WITH JAPANESE BODIES TO THE EXTENT THEY HAD TO BE MOVED ASIDE TO MAINTAIN FIELDS OF FIRE.

National Archives

Marauders move through a village along the Ledo Road while the natives look on. In truth, Burmese civilians welcomed the Americans as liberators from their brutal Japanese occupiers.

ing > Kamaing & going by at night." Whatever the plan, Merrill was definitely putting the Marauders' 2nd and 3rd Battalions farther out on a limb with this extended movement without backup while the 1st Battalion was completely engaged at Shaduzup. The Marauders were spread over a 30- to 40-mile loop well behind enemy lines.

Colonel Hunter moved his troops south that same day with the Blue Combat Team of the 2nd Battalion leading the way. They camped at the village of Nhpum Ga the first night. Moving through Auche the next day, the 21st, Hunter arranged a resupply and received radio orders from Merrill to move fast as the Japanese were withdrawing in front of the Chinese at Jambu Bun.

On the 22nd, Hunter's detachment of Marauders moved back into the valley toward the road used by the main Japanese units. They were forced to leave the ridgeline, trek down a steep jungle trail, and then move along a narrow river from one steep bank to the other in an exhausting exercise.

The troops eventually encountered flat land near the village of Manpin late in the day. Hunter organized a resupply drop then told McGee to take the 2nd Battalion together with the Khaki Combat Team and push five miles farther on to Sharaw. The Marauders walked until 11 PM and then camped. It was raining heavily.

The next morning, Hunter ordered McGee to continue forward to set up the roadblock six miles south of Inkangahtawng. He remained at Sharaw with the 3rd Battalion's Orange Combat Team in reserve.

With the Blue and Green I&R Platoons in the lead, the 2nd Battalion crossed to the west bank of the Mogaung River. The Khaki Combat Team, with the mortars and mules, kept position on the east bank of the river. The two I&R Platoons separately encountered Japanese units near the road, and both began firing between 4 PM and 5 PM.

The I&R teams then withdrew to join their combat teams dug in on the west bank of the Mogaung some 300 yards from the road. The 2nd Battalion was unexpectedly isolated in Stilwell's overall attack. The 1st Battalion had yet to launch its assault near Shaduzup to the north, leaving the 2nd Battalion as the only unit to occupy the attention of the Japanese command as a threat to their forces on the road above their headquarters at Kamaing.

In their night position near Inkangahtawng the Marauders could hear trucks pulling up on the road in front of them and Japanese troops noisily talking as they unloaded. They expected the Japanese to attack in the morning light of March 24.

However, when morning came and the Marauders sat in their positions enduring the continuing downpour, there was no attack. A platoon was sent forward under Lieutenant Ted McLogan that soon encountered a Japanese patrol and fired on it. After dispersing the first group of enemy soldiers, McLogan's men continued patrolling along the road where they found another group and took them under fire as well.

McGee called McLogan on the radio, received the situation report, and told him to return to the battalion position, which he did immediately.

Then the Japanese attacks started. First, a mortar barrage and then, from the elephant grass to the Marauders' front, Japanese soldiers rose screaming in a banzai charge. These soldiers were shot down with automatic weapons fire, and the attack failed. Moments later in a different sector of the perimeter another banzai attack was launched—this time across an

open field. This attack was also mowed down, and the front of the Marauders' position was now littered with Japanese bodies to the extent they had to be moved aside to maintain fields of fire.

Afterward the Marauders commented on the fanatical bravery and determination of the Japanese troops, but one Marauder also took into account the extensive use of amphetamines by the Japanese Imperial Army whenever they went into battle and noted, "They must have been doped up."

The mortar fire falling on the Marauders' position continued, though slackening at times. As the day wore on, the Japanese attacked repeatedly, shifting points of attack around the 2nd Battalion's perimeter and searching for a weak spot. For some reason, the Japanese only attacked in groups of 10 to 40 men at a time, never really massing their forces. The banzai attacks continued throughout the afternoon.

McGee, out of contact with Colonel Hunter who had radio problems, sent a message to Merrill telling him his unit was running low on ammo and was ordered to withdraw to the east bank of the Mogaung River and tie up with the Khaki Combat Team of the 3rd Battalion. Under cover of a P-51 air strike on the Japanese positions and then a mortar barrage from the Khaki Combat Team, the 2nd Battalion withdrew across the Mogaung in the late afternoon.

They had fought off 16 banzai attacks, killed an estimated 200 Japanese, and were completely exhausted, but they were able to rest for only a few hours. Brig. Gen. Merrill radioed McGee that more Japanese troops were on their way toward them and they should withdraw.

At 5 AM on March 25, they withdrew from the Mogaung River site, moving through a torrential rain back up the trail on which they had arrived, to the village of Sharaw where Hunter was camped. Hunter had been out of communication with McGee and was at first unaware of the extent of the 2nd Battalion's action. When he learned of Merrill's order for McGee to pull back, he took exception to it. At Sharaw he confronted McGee, who said he was going to continue drawing back according to Merrill's order.

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ABOVE: Air-dropped supplies were vital for the Marauders to carry out their missions. Here members of the unit retrieve supplies that have just arrived by parachute, March 1944. OPPOSITE: Tension is written on the faces of these Marauders as they wait to attack Japanese positions, March 1944.

Conscious that Japanese forces would be coming after them, on March 26 McGee led his men back toward Auche and the north-south ridgeline that the Marauders had traveled along a week earlier. Colonel Hunter, who still disagreed with the withdrawal but felt forced to accede to Merrill's orders, followed with the 3rd Battalion.

It was Hunter's opinion that the Marauders should have been attacking, not withdrawing. He doubted the presence of greater numbers of Japanese troops and felt they were missing an opportunity to strike at the weakened Japanese headquarters position farther south at Kamaing. He radioed Merrill requesting permission to attack with the 3rd Battalion but was ordered to withdraw.

Hunter was mistaken, and Merrill's caution in the matter was definitely correct. There were many more Japanese troops closing in on the Marauders than just the force following the 2nd Battalion up from Inkangahtawng.

The 3rd Battalion commander, Lt. Col. Beach, had earlier had the good judgment to dispatch two platoon patrols to set up blocks to protect the flanks of the 2nd Battalion as it withdrew to Sharaw and then Auche. The I&R Platoon of the Orange Combat Team under Lieutenant Logan Weston had set a block at Poakum seven miles north of Kamaing, and a rifle platoon of the Orange Combat Team under Lieutenant Warren Smith had set a block on the Warong road.

The I&R Platoon was in place on March 24 when a Japanese patrol appeared; the platoon opened fire and killed them all. Another Japanese patrol arrived with scout dogs; they, too, were wiped out. The Marauders received mortar fire but remained in position, blocking the trail throughout the night.

Receiving more intense mortar fire and signs of a flanking movement the next morning, Weston decided to pull his platoon back up the trail. He encountered Lieutenant Smith's platoon, which shared ammunition with them and, calling Merrill, received approval for both platoons to withdraw along the trail, exchanging positions to defend each other against Japanese flanking movements while delaying any movement by the Japanese against the 2nd and 3rd Battalion withdrawal.

On the following day, March 26, they withdrew in the dark, leaving some small campfires burning to fool the Japanese. A few hours later, dug in higher up on the trail, they heard the sound of shooting as the Japanese attacked the camp they had abandoned, firing into their own forces. The same morning Lieutenant Smith and his platoon ambushed another Japanese force advancing toward them, killing 28.

That afternoon Weston and Smith agreed on a full pullout to avoid encirclement by the Japanese, withdrawing all the way back to Auche, where they dug defensive positions

and waited for the 2nd and 3rd Battalions to arrive from Manpin.

The initiative of these junior officers and their brilliantly executed joint movements and tactics had delayed the large Japanese force intent on catching the Marauders' battalions on the trail and doubtless saved many lives.

However, for the Marauders, a unit that specialized in fire and maneuver, possibly the main encounter of their campaign, an epic defensive struggle, was now at hand.

THE BATTLE OF NHPUM GA

Ever since the Marauders entered the jungle from Stilwell's headquarters on February 24, Merrill had moved aggressively and spread his troops across a wide network of trails behind the Japanese lines, surprising and killing hundreds of enemy troops.

In response, the Japanese commander withdrew battalions from his front lines to counter the threat to the rear. The unsupported Marauder battalions, far to the south of the main Chinese attack and the 1st Battalion action at Shaduzup, were to be caught out now by superior numbers of Japanese and their artillery.

The village of Nhpum Ga lay four miles north along the trail from Auche. It was the site of Merrill's headquarters when Lt. Col. McGee's 2nd Battalion, followed within hours by Colonel Hunter and the 3rd Battalion, entered Auche on March 27. Merrill ordered the 3rd Battalion to push through Nhpum Ga, a high point on the trail, and continue another four miles to Hamshingyang, 1,500 feet lower in altitude. An open valley adjacent to Hamshingyang would serve well as an airstrip.

On the 28th, the 2nd Battalion started its move from Auche to Nhpum Ga with the Japanese harassing them close behind. Several machine-gun teams set up stay-behind positions on the trail, ambushing Japanese scouts and delaying the Japanese units. Later, the Japanese directed artillery fire on the 2nd Battalion's line of march. By the afternoon the battalion had closed on Nphum Ga and started to prepare defensive positions so they could hold the hilltop against attack.

But a major setback took place. Merrill was struck by a heart attack. He was moved with the 3rd Battalion to Hamshingyang and was evacuated the next day. Leadership of the Marauders now rested with Colonel Hunter.

Throughout the day and evening, Japanese units moved up and surrounded the positions of McGee's 2nd Battalion at Nphum Ga. The stage was now set for the most vicious fight the Marauders would endure in Burma.

The Marauders had the advantage of a plentiful supply of machine guns and automatic weapons (BARs, Thompson sub-machine guns, and M-1 carbines), exceeding the normal infantry unit allotment. They needed all their firepower in the next 12 days.

The 900 men of the 2nd Battalion, including muleskinners, medical, and communications teams, continued digging into the hilltop position on the 29th, preparing for the Japanese attack. The north-south perimeter was some 400 yards long with a shorter east-west axis. There was a water hole within the perimeter.

Hunter visited to observe the setup and arranged immediate airdrops of food and ammunition. Promising McGee there would be active patrols on the trails between the two villages to prevent Japanese flanking moves, he then left for Hamshingyang and the 3rd Battalion HQ. From there Hunter radioed the 1st Battalion, then pulling back from Shaduzup, and ordered Osborne to start moving toward Hamshingyang.

At dawn on March 30, the Japanese launched the first of many banzai attacks against the Marauders' positions at Nhpum Ga. This followed an artillery and mortar barrage and set the theme for the following 12 days.

The Japanese artillery pounded the Marauders' positions, pausing only occasionally. The mortar fire was constant. The horses and mules, out in the open, were

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early casualties, and their decomposing bodies would lie there throughout the siege. The men fought off banzai attacks on different points of the perimeter. In an early attack, the Japanese managed to capture the water hole.

Trapped in their foxholes, the men used their helmets to relieve themselves, throwing the contents outside when possible. Two Marauders scouting Japanese positions were killed by friendly fire while trying to return to the perimeter.

Attempts were made by 2nd Battalion patrols to attack north along the trail toward the 3rd Battalion, which also sent patrols south back toward Nhpum Ga. But both patrols were turned back by heavy Japanese fire from prepared positions.

The Marauders at Nhpum Ga were encircled. At the end of the day, McGee reported to Hunter that he had three dead and nine wounded.

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On April 1 it rained heavily, allowing the Marauders, now short on water, to catch some rainwater in their ponchos. There were no attacks on the village, and McGee received the good news from Hunter that two 75mm howitzers would be brought to Hamshingyang the next day to provide support for the troops at Nhpum Ga. The Orange Combat Team of the 3rd Battalion attacked up the trail toward the 2nd Battalion defensive positions but was beaten back by the Japanese.

On April 2, the Japanese renewed their attacks on Nhpum Ga. Again the pattern was a series of assaults supported by artillery and mortar fire on differing points on the perimeter. All were repulsed. In the middle of the day during a lull in the fighting, the 2nd Battalion received a necessary air resupply of ammo and rations but no water, which they needed desperately.

April 3 was a day of constant shelling by Japanese artillery. Any infantryman who has lived through such an experience can testify to the terror induced by the whistle of shells and their earthshaking explosions as he cowers in his inadequate foxhole. A medic and two doctors crawled from foxhole to foxhole to treat the wounded, exposing themselves to sniper fire. That day the 2nd Battalion had six men killed and a dozen wounded. They needed the 3rd Battalion to come to their rescue.

The next day the main fighting shifted to the 3rd Battalion, trying to fight its way up to the 2nd Battalion's position. In the afternoon, the two 3rd Battalion combat teams attempted to break through. The Orange Combat Team attacked straight up the trail with the two 75 mm howitzers, parachuted in earlier, firing point-blank in support. The Khaki Combat Team swung through the thick jungle trying to loop around the Japanese blocking force.

Because of the dense jungle and the camouflaged positions of the Japanese, the combatants were often less than 30 yards apart when firing at each other. The men of the 2nd Battalion, still under artillery fire, could hear the roar of the fighting along the trail and off to the sides in the jungle as both the Marauders and the Japanese tried to turn the flanks of the other. The 3rd Battalion moved closer but was still a mile away. Colonel Hunter radioed the 1st Battalion to move as quickly as possible to come to their aid.

At dusk the Japanese began another series of attacks on the 2nd Battalion positions, again shifting their attacks around the perimeter. Many of the Marauders were now so ill with dysentery or disease that they couldn't stand. The lines were so close that one of the Nisei interpreters with the 2nd Battalion, Staff Sgt. Roy Matsumoto, overheard the Japanese discussing their forthcoming attacks and was able to alert the targeted sector. The attacks were repulsed. The Marauders had survived the day, but McGee sent a message to Hunter, "Please hurry."

During this period of heavy engagement, there was no mention of the Marauders' efforts in Stilwell's diaries. Meetings in China and then India occupied Stilwell's time. He didn't return to his headquarters in Burma until late on April 3. His first diary note regarding the Marauders is for April 4, when he mentions a "disturbing msg. from Hunter" the previous night.

On April 5, the battle focused on the 3rd Battalion force attempting to relieve the Marauders at Nhpum Ga. They were in a reverse tactical position to their brothers of the 2nd Battalion in that the Japanese troops blocking their rescue attempt were dug in, and it was the 3rd Battalion troops who had to expose themselves in the attack.

In the thick jungle the fighting was at close range again, with only 20 to 30 yards separating the contending forces, and the firing was intense. By the end of the day the 3rd Battalion had advanced only 300 yards.

On the hilltop at Nhpum Ga, Staff Sgt. Roy Matsumoto again distinguished himself, crawling forward into the jungle from the defense perimeter and overhearing Japanese

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ABOVE: Operating behind enemy lines, Marauder patrols such as this one searched out and surprised the enemy, June 16, 1944. But the conditions took a heavy toll on the troops. OPPOSITE: With few roads in the nearly impassable mountainous jungle, troops had to rely on mule power for hauling supplies. Here a group of muleskinners clean their weapons while their animals take a break.

troops discussing the following morning's attack on his sector of the defense line. With this information Lt. Col. McGee was able to shift resources to that side of the perimeter, and when the attack came early on April 6 it was handily repulsed. The remainder of the day was quiet on Nhpum Ga, and the Marauders thankfully received a resupply drop that included their desperately needed water.

Following a barrage from their two supporting artillery pieces, the 3rd Battalion continued to attack up the hill toward the embattled 2nd Battalion on Nhpum Ga and by the end of the day had moved to within 500 meters of their perimeter.

The lines did not move on Good Friday, April 7, but something more important happened. By the day's close, after five days of forced march, the 1st Battalion arrived at Hamshingyang. They were 800 strong though in very poor condition, having had little to eat on their push to aid their brothers. Many were suffering from malaria and dysentery so severe they had cut holes in the seats of their pants so they could continue marching without stopping.

Plans were made to make a flanking attack on April 8 with a hand-picked team of more than 250 of their strongest survivors.

The frontal assault on the 8th was once again led by the I&R Platoon of the Khaki Combat Team. In slow going it suffered nine casualties. The two howitzers were moved up the trail on the backs of mules and reassembled within 700 meters of the Japanese, just a few hundred meters short of Nhpum Ga. The crews threw over a hundred rounds almost point blank into the enemy positions.

The 1st Battalion team undertook a long flanking movement around the west of the Japanese positions and turned toward the hill at sunset. They could hear gunfire from up above and smell the stench of the dead. Blocking positions were set up on several trails, including the one leading back to Kauri, the Japanese resupply base. The unit then camped for the night.

Even though the Japanese positions had been pounded hard, the 3rd Battalion had not broken through during the course of the day. However, the men of the 2nd Battalion were still dug in and holding on.

As dawn broke on Easter Sunday, the Japanese were not firing on the 2nd Battalion so Lt. Col. McGee decided to send out a patrol. They encountered one Japanese soldier and shot him.

Following behind a mortar and artillery barrage, a patrol from the 3rd Battalion moved up the hill through a shattered landscape littered with Japanese bodies, piles of which were "stacked like cordwood" according to one observer.

A patrol from the Orange Combat Team encountered a Japanese machine-gun position. One Marauder was killed before they moved on. At noon, Lt. Col. McGee was able to record in his diary that the relief troops from the 3rd Battalion had arrived. The surviving Japanese had withdrawn, probably due to the flanking movement by the 1st Battalion on top of the battering they had taken on previous days. The 12-day siege of Nhpum Ga was over.

The troops who had come to the aid of the 2nd Battalion were sickened by the carnage they encountered and the stench of the maggot and blowfly-encased bodies, including many horses and mules. The toll of Japanese amounted to 400. The Marauders lost 57 dead and 302 wounded, excluding those almost completely disabled by disease. Many of the 2nd Battalion survivors were shell-shock cases, still sitting in their foxholes in a daze.

The 2nd Battalion had buried their dead on the hilltop, but the bodies were exhumed and reinterred ceremonially in more fitting ground at Hamshingyang, alongside the respective burial plots for the 1st and 3rd Battalions.

All three Marauder battalions were exhausted and depleted of manpower. At Hamshingyang they finally had a period of rest. The improvised airstrip was busy,

Continued on page 98

Dusk came early as they boarded the convoy of trucks, their olive-drab forms softened by baggy trousers and heavy field jackets.

The 2nd Regiment, 1st Special Service Force (1st SSF) was leaving its barracks at Santa Maria, Italy, for the village of Presenzano, 37 miles north of Naples and currently the headquarters of the 36th Infantry Division.

The trucks slowly made their way down muddy roads using only the dim lights of their blackout drives; no one wanted enemy observers to spot the movement of these new troops to the front. It was December 1, 1943, and as the convoy proceeded a cold rain began to fall, drenching the canvas tarpaulins of the trucks and reducing visibility even further. All that could be seen in the distance were the stuttering flashes of artillery fire.

The trucks arrived in Presenzano at 9 PM. Guides from the 142nd Infantry Regiment met them and led them into the forested terrain beyond the village. Ahead of them lay the imposing bulk of Monte La Difensa, a well-fortified point key to the German defense of the Winter Line, a series of defensive positions designed to stop the Allied advance toward Rome.

It was dark, wet, and cold, but the regiment had to reach its staging area before dawn so the enemy would not know they were there. It was a 10-mile march, and some of the men carried close to their own weight in weapons and equipment. They were fit and tough and up to the task, however. They passed the bodies of Americans killed earlier in the battle and kept going.

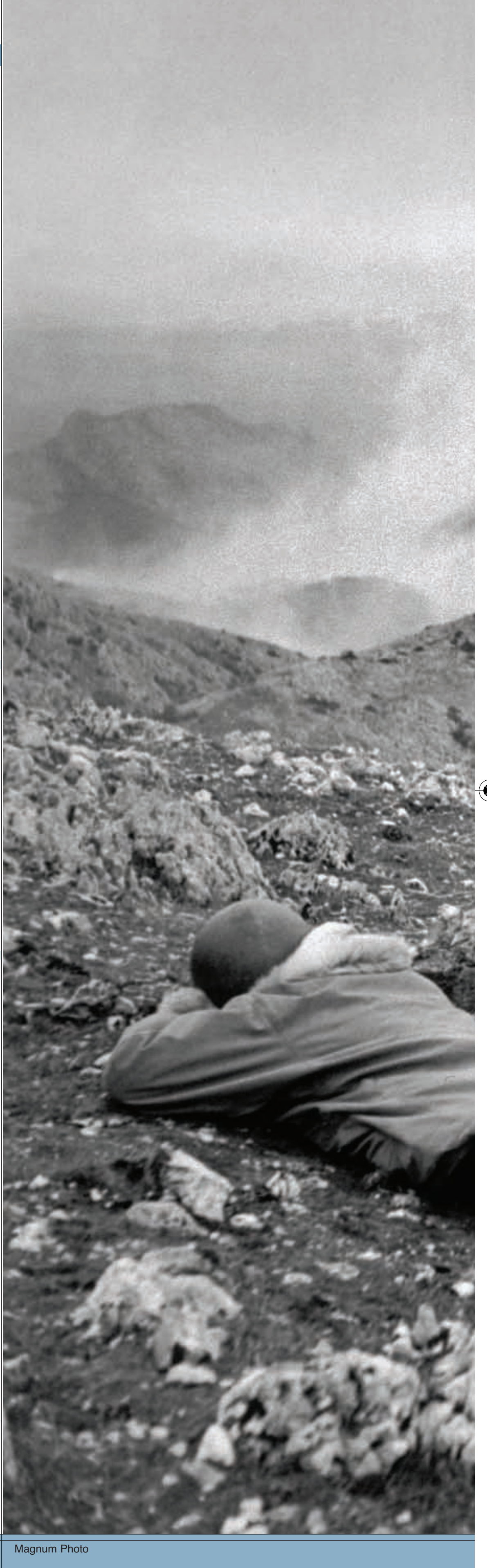
Sergeant Donald MacKinnon of the 2nd Regiment's 1st Company remembered, "There was a menacing feeling about the whole thing.… We were so exhausted with the effort to keep up, clawing [and] sliding our way in the very difficult conditions, that we thought, if we had to go into action when we arrived, we would be useless."

Finally, the head of the column arrived at the staging area, although the tail end would not arrive until nearly sunup. The men took cover in the trees and undergrowth, hiding themselves as best they could. The rain finally stopped. Behind them the rest of the force waited farther to the rear; the 2nd Regiment was the spearhead.

America's elite 1st Special Service Force gained everlasting fame in its first combat mission by storming Monte La Difensa in Italy and overwhelming the defenders in a brutal six-day battle.

It would be the unit's first time in combat, and it had been given a particularly hard task. The now hidden soldiers rested and waited through the day; to pass the time they cleaned their weapons, ate cold rations, and awaited the coming of nightfall so they could prove the trust placed in them was well deserved.

The 1st Special Service Force had its origins in early 1942. The Allies, searching for ways to strike at a Germany that dominated the European continent, were looking closely at commando forces. The British had experience in creating and employing such troops, and the newly arrived Americans were eager to incorporate similar units



One of the toughest outfits in World War II was the 1st Special Service Force, a combined U.S.-Canadian commando unit. In this photo by Robert Capa, members of the 1st SSF, nicknamed the "Devil's Brigade" by the Germans, man a mountaintop position near Cassino several weeks after the Battle of Monte La Difensa that took place in early December 1943.

Magnum Photo

Deadly Duel for an ITALIAN MOUNTAIN

BY CHRISTOPHER MISKIMON

National Archives

Medical personnel assigned to the 1st SSF practice parachuting from the door of a parked C-47 in Helena, Montana. The unit was trained for airborne and mountain operations in all types of weather.

of their own.

The British conceived of creating a commando-style force trained for winter warfare that would spearhead a planned invasion of Norway. They named the concept Operation Plough. Toward that end they researched a tracked vehicle capable of operating in snow that had been conceived by a civilian inventor, Geoffrey Pyke.

When they realized they lacked the ability to develop the vehicle, the British offered Pyke's concept to the Americans. U.S. Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall accepted it and sent the plan to American auto manufacturers for further development. Eventually this would result in the tracked T-15 (later the M-29) "Weasel" cargo carrier.

Meanwhile, Operation Plough was studied by Lt. Col. Robert T. Frederick, a West Pointer (class of 1928), then a staff officer at the War Department. It called for a multinational commando force made up of Americans, Canadians, and Norwegians, but Frederick was critical of Plough because it lacked a realistic withdrawal strategy for the troops.

Development continued nonetheless, with the initial idea to form the commando unit using American, Canadian, and Norwegian soldiers in equal numbers. The Norwegians proved unable to provide sufficient numbers of qualified troops, however, so the project went forward using Americans and Canadians.

Having already caught the eye of leaders such as General Dwight D. Eisenhower and Lord Louis Mountbatten, Frederick was given command of the new force, called the Plough Force. He put out a request for volunteers—men who were single, between 21 and 35, and who had had at least three years of grammar school. Further, they had to have had experience in the outdoors, so Frederick required recruits to have worked as game wardens, lumberjacks, hunters, prospectors, explorers, or similar jobs.

The Plough Force was soon renamed the 1st Special Service Force and was activated on July 20, 1942, at Fort William Henry Harrison near Helena, Montana—perfect country for such a force to train in.

That same month the Canadian Army detailed 697 officers and men to the force. Technically, they would remain part of the Canadian Army, but the cost of all clothing, equipment, and expenses would be assumed by the United States government. Frederick had the raw clay of his commando force and set about molding it into a unit worthy of its name.

The 1st SSF's training was among the most arduous given to any Allied soldiers during the war. Physical fitness took a high priority; only men in peak condition would be able to carry out the demanding task of fighting in the cold and snow.

Forced marches could span 36 miles with a full load of combat equipment. The men also received parachute training, though the compressed time available meant they only made two jumps rather than the normal five. This went on for several months; the result was a cohesive unit of tough, resourceful men able to work together under difficult conditions.

First Lieutenant Bill Story recalled, "We did calisthenics, extended calisthenics…. We had the usual pushups and running from place to place, but we also did a lot of walking, a lot of simply walking over the hills and climbing up the mountains. It was excellent conditioning. There was mountaineering, too."

There was also training in small-unit tactics, weapons to include enemy small arms, and survival. The demolitions training was so intense and frequent that several times the men blew up the wrong targets. Hand-to-hand combat training was provided by Ireland-born Captain Dermot Michael ("Pat") O'Neill, a martial arts expert and former international police chief in Shanghai. O'Neill showed the men how to kill using knives, garrotes, and just their hands and feet.

The 1st SSF was organized differently from standard infantry formations, closer to that of airborne or other specialized Allied formations, and reflected its binational origin.

The basic unit of the organization was the section, composed of 12 men led by a staff sergeant. The section included demolition specialists, a medic, and a radioman, not unlike modern Special Forces teams. There were two sections in a platoon, which also had a mortar team and was led by a lieutenant and platoon sergeant. Three platoons made up a company.

There were three regiments, but only two battalions per regiment, and a battalion consisted of three, instead of four, companies. The 1st SSF also had a headquarters that included service, maintenance, medical, and communications outfits of various sizes. At full strength there were nearly 2,800 men in the 1st SSF, a robust size for a commando-style establishment.

The service debut of the 1st SSF came in the Aleutian Islands on August 15, 1943, during the invasion of Kiska. The 1st Regiment (Lt. Col. Alfred Marshall) led the assault in rubber boats while the 3rd Regiment (Lt. Col. Edward Walker) came ashore the next day; the 2nd Regiment (Lt. Col. D.D. Williamson) waited offshore as a reserve. The attack proved to be anticlimactic as the Japanese had evacuated three days before, leaving no one to fight.

The event proved no more than a realistic training exercise, though the men were praised for their professionalism by the invasion's commander for landing in darkness and achieving all their objectives on schedule despite the harsh weather and difficult terrain. Colonel Frederick was also singled out for praise.

To make use of the 1st SSF's talents, the unit was quickly brought back to the United States and, by September 1943, was training again at Fort Ethan Allen in Vermont. No one told them where their next assignment would be, but they began to receive lessons on Italy and its people, so it was not hard to guess. They soon departed for Hampton Roads, Virginia, where they boarded transports and departed for the Mediterranean on October 28, 1943. Ahead of them lay the Winter Line, a hell of cold weather and close combat.

From September to the winter of 1943, the Allies struggled to move up the mountainous boot of Italy toward Rome and points north. The Allies made progress, but it was tough going. The German commander, Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, was determined to make the advancing Anglo-American force pay for every inch of Italian soil it seized.

The restricted and rugged terrain gave advantage to the defense. Kesselring chose to form a main line of resistance called the Gustav Line that ran from one coast to the other through Monte Cassino, but he needed time to construct its defenses.

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The 1st SSF was part of a 35,000-man combined U.S.-Canadian operation to evict a Japanese force from Kiska Island in the Aleutian chain, but the enemy withdrew just days before Operation Cottage began in August 1943. Here 1st SSF troops service their weapons after a fruitless patrol.

In front of the Gustav Line another defensive work called the Bernhardt Line was quickly formed; along with delaying actions along the Volturno River, this promised to delay the Allied advance until the Germans were ready for them. Together all these fortifications would be known as the Winter Line.

The Bernhardt Line was partly composed of several mountains that overlooked the Mignano Gap—a route that led into the Liri Valley and Rome beyond. Several mountain masses sat on each side of the gap; on one side was Monte Lungo, while the other side was covered by Montes Maggiore, La Remetanea, La Difensa, and Camino.

These mountains made excellent defensive positions and provided observation of the entire area. At 1,900 feet high, Monte La Difensa and its companion peaks formed the key to holding the area; without them the German defense would eventually crumble. Capturing them would be no easy task, however.

A postwar U.S. Army study of the battle stated, "The Winter Line as an entity was thus a formidable barrier to operations of the Allied Armies. There was no single key, no opportunity for a brilliant stroke that could break it. Each mountain had to be taken, each valley cleared, and then there were still more mountains ahead and still another line to be broken by dogged infantry attacks."

Various Allied units had tried to take these mountains, but a combination of the stiff defense, bad weather, and exhaustion from previous fighting left them unable to do so. Lt. Gen. Mark Clark, commanding the U.S. Fifth Army, needed a force that could break open this mountainous defense and get the stalled Allied drive moving again. The 1st SSF was selected for the task and arrived in the area on November 22.

The force was attached to the 36th Infantry Division, which had recently relieved the 3rd Infantry Division along the Winter Line. The men were assigned to take 1,900-foot-high Monte La Difensa

and move on to seize the adjoining Monte La Remetanea. Frederick and his men began preparing for the difficult task ahead.

To defend the Winter Line, Kesselring assigned General Fridolin von Senger und Etterlin's XIV Panzer Corps. This formation contained five divisions with different levels of combat experience; as Monte La Difensa was a key point, the veteran 15th Panzergrenadier Division was assigned to hold it.

They were arrayed in depth with good artillery support and numerous mortars that could drop rapid and accurate fire all along the front. The German observers quickly registered their guns and mortars on likely avenues of advance and established supply and casualty evacuation routes. Many positions were formed using local rock to make bulletproof machine-gun nests with interlocking fields of fire.

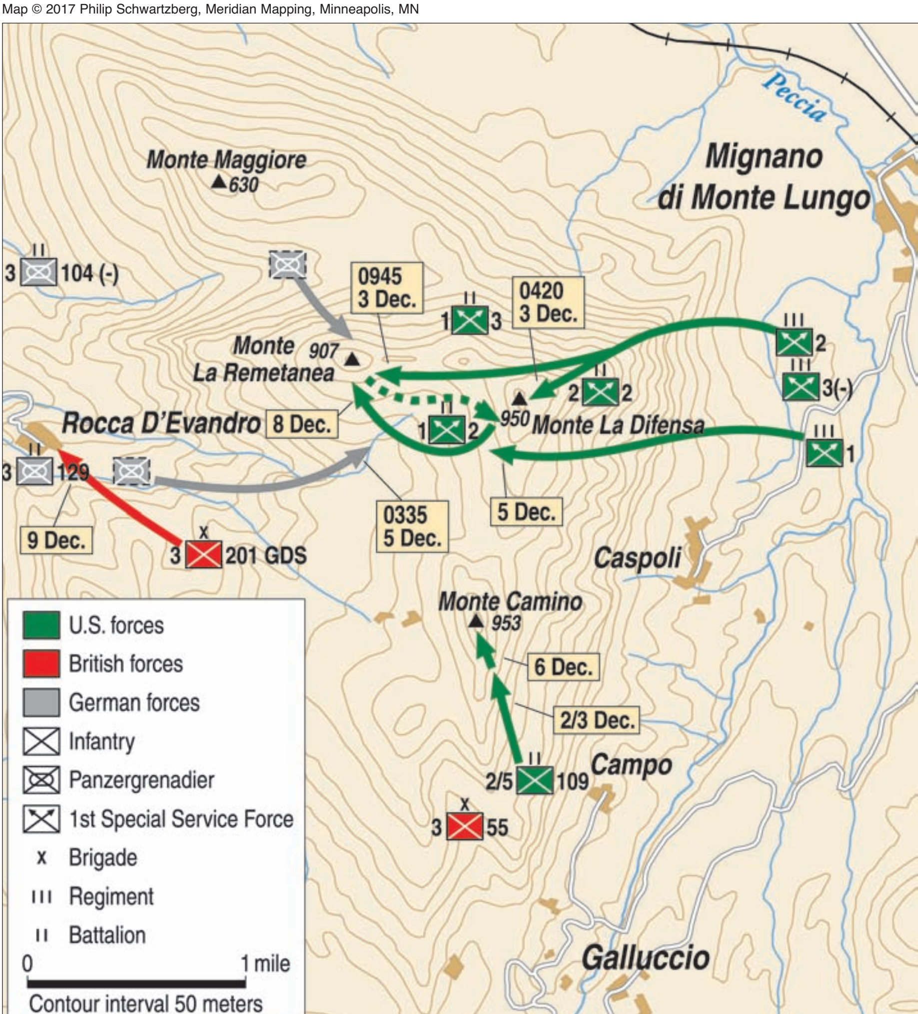
The objective the 1st SSF was assigned to attack was specifically defended by about 250 men of the 3rd Battalion, 104th Panzergrenadier Regiment. Next to them, about half of the 3rd Battalion, 129th Panzergrenadiers was also in the 1st SSF zone; the other half was spread into the zone of the neighboring British 56th Division. The local reserve for these units was the 115th Reconnaissance Battalion.

One report put the total number of Germans defending the mountain at about 340. They were well supported by artillery, but Allied air strikes and artillery fire made it difficult for them to get supplies forward. By the time of the 1st SSF attack, they had already held off Allied attacks despite being understrength.

Monte La Difensa is a steep mountain overall. Its lower slopes are covered in scrub pine and dotted with boulders, neither of which provided much cover or concealment. The upper slopes held almost no vegetation, and the summit was a shallow depression. One side contained sheer cliffs that could not be climbed without specialized equipment and training.

There were many trails that were too steep even for mules, thus requiring men to be the pack animals. Numerous deep

Map © 2017 Philip Schwartzberg, Meridian Mapping, Minneapolis, MN



ABOVE: The 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 1st SSF climbed Monte La Difensa's steep eastern slopes, located within the Winter Line, then attacked German positions atop Monte La Remetanea. INSET: The Germans contructed several fortified defensive lines, some of which stretched across the width of Italy. OPPOSITE: After battling for weeks on the Winter Line, the 1st SSF was moved to bolster the Anzio beachhead. A night patrol, with soldiers' faces blackened, is being briefed behind an Italian haystack before moving out, April 20, 1944.

ravines abounded, making any ascent even more difficult. Overall, Monte La Difensa appeared to be a natural fortress, almost impregnable as it towered over the Allied lines.

Colonel Frederick conducted personal reconnaissance of the mountain and sent 1st SSF scouts to reconnoiter it as well. They discovered that the position, although formidable, was not without its weaknesses. Frederick flew a number of aerial reconnaissance missions around the mountain and noticed many of the fighting positions were completely focused on the most likely direction of attack and were not situated or constructed to easily defend against an assault from their flanks or rear.

The Germans themselves later noted this, blaming a shortage of experienced officers and engineers for the shortcoming. Frederick noticed that the sheer cliffs on the mountain's northeast side were a difficult obstacle, but one that his men were trained and equipped to overcome.

One scouting party was formed by Major Ed Thomas, the executive officer of the 1st Battalion, 2nd Regiment. He took two lead scouts from the 1st Company—Staff Sgt. Howard Van Ausdale and Canadian Sergeant Tom Fenton.

Van Ausdale soon found a way to reach the base of the cliffs. Private Joseph Dauphinais

of the 1st Company recalled, “Van was a king among scouts. He was a real mountain man; he could read terrain as you could read a book. He found an excellent route for us to reach the front of the cliff without being detected by the Germans.”

Frederick assigned Lt. Col. D.D. Williamson’s 2nd Regiment to lead the attack; they would have to scale the mountain, surprise the Germans, and then continue through to Monte La Remetanea. The 1st Regiment, under Lt. Col. Alfred Marshall, would wait at the base of the mountain as part of the division reserve.

Lieutenant Colonel Edwin Walker’s 3rd Regiment was assigned separate tasks for its battalions; one would wait at the base of the mountain in support of the 2nd Regiment while the other would act as supply carriers and stretcher bearers. Supporting them would be 14 battalions of divisional and corps artillery, including two battalions of 8-inch guns. Additionally, two battalions of tank destroyers would lend the weight of their guns to the fight.

It was a tremendous massing of firepower, all available in support of Frederick and his men. The mountainous terrain required the artillery to fire at high angles, however, somewhat blunting its effect against bunkers.

The men of the 1st SSF had trained long and hard for their part in the war. They had been disappointed in the Aleutians but now had the chance to prove their unit and themselves worthy of the effort that had gone into creating it. Frederick was determined not to let the opportunity slip through his hands.

As dusk settled over the Winter Line on December 2, it was now time for the 1st SSF to make its attack. A heavy barrage started at 4:30 PM, with some 925 Allied guns saturating German positions all along the front line. Thousands of high-explosive shells slammed into the mountain defenses, joined by the bursting of white phosphorous rounds, which sent burning plumes of white smoke in all directions.

As the artillery crashed and thundered above, the men of the 2nd Regiment slowly made their way up the mountain, trailing each other in single-file columns along the trails discovered earlier by the scouts. Some of them looked up at the barrage and nicknamed Monte La Difensa the “Million Dollar Mountain,” estimating the cost of the ammunition being expended upon it.

In reply, the German artillery opened fire, using its preplanned targeting to hit the various trails they suspected the Allied troops might take, as well as the existing defensive positions of the 36th Division.

As a result, the force’s command post, aid station, and supply points all took fire to varying degrees. This artillery duel, daunting and spectacular as it was, caused little mayhem on either side; the 1st SSF was on the move, and the Germans were well dug in.

Williamson’s 2nd Regiment reached the base of the cliffs on the northeastern side of Monte La Difensa by 10:30 PM; now it was time to begin climbing. Two pairs of men were selected to take the ropes up the cliffs. The lead pair—Staff Sgt. Ausdale and Canadian Sergeant Fenton again—went first, using the best climbing route to the top of the mountain that they had already scouted.

Stealthily the two men picked their way up the 70-degree slope of the cliff using only their hands and feet for purchase. Upon reaching the summit, they had to dodge a nearby German sentry but succeeded in tying off their ropes.

The second pair of men, Private Joseph Dauphinais and Sergeant John Walter, followed behind the two lead scouts and tied their own ropes to the ones already set. The three companies of the regiment’s 1st Battalion (Lt. Col. Thomas MacWilliam) were now set to ascend the cliffs and enter combat for the first time. They carried only their weapons, ammunition, and musette bags, as light a burden as possible to speed their rise.

Canadian War Memorial

Behind them, Moore’s 2nd Battalion waited for its turn to climb, carrying with them more weapons and ammunition along with water. Farther down the slope, part of Walker’s 3rd Regiment prepared to carry out its supply runs, loaded down with food, more water, medical supplies, and ever more ammunition. It was a tense time; if any unit were spotted, surprise would be lost and the whole force exposed to German fire.

Finally, at 1 AM, Frederick gave the order for the 1st Battalion to begin its ascent. Two at a time, the soldiers made their way up the cliff. The tension grew even worse; each tiny sound of the ascent seemed to

echo loudly, causing the men to wonder if the Germans had heard them. A cold rain was falling, making the rocks slick but likely masking what little noise they were making. The artillery had shifted fire, but this was actually good. The rounds striking the new target, Monte Remetanea, caused echoes that further stifled the noise of the Allied climbers.

Two hours later, the 1st Company had scaled the mountain and all stood at the top, formed into a rough skirmish line, creeping carefully to their left. The 2nd Company was entirely at the summit at 4:30 AM and took its place in the center.

Finally, the men of 3rd Company made their way up the ropes and occupied the right flank. In their first combat action, the 1st SSF had achieved complete surprise—the Germans were unaware of an enemy battalion in their rear, as they had not guarded it sufficiently due to the cliffs they thought unassailable. Now it was time to attack.

The 1st Company's 3rd Platoon was at the front of that attack, and scout Howard Van Ausdale was in the lead. Suddenly, as he crept forward, a German sentry appeared and saw Van Ausdale. The American quickly drew his Fairbairn-Sykes fighting knife and stabbed his opponent quietly enough so that it did not alert any others.

Not yet dead, the German rolled down the slope and landed near a sergeant named Waling, who watched the enemy soldier gasping for air. Moments later, Waling continued forward with the rest of the men, now only yards away from their foes.

Suddenly, a German voice called out in the darkness. Stories vary as to what alerted the German; one version points to some loose rocks, kicked as the men covered the last few feet. Another story points to a helmet falling off a man's head. Whatever the case, just after the German called out he was answered with gunfire.

Sergeant Donald MacKinnon recalled, "That's when machine-gun fire opened up all around us." It was about 5:30 AM; flares soared into the sky, shedding stark illumination across the rocky landscape. Mortar rounds flew through the air to land among the men, who replied with grenades and fixed bayonets.

National Archives

After the 1st SSF was disbanded in December 1944, Maj. Gen. Robert T. Frederick (left) became CG of the 45th Infantry Division. Canadian Lieutenant J. Kostelec (center) wears the red spearhead patch on his field jacket. Sergeant Cyril V. Krotzer of Scranton, Pennsylvania, is well armed with grenade and tommy gun.

The top of Monte La Difensa erupted into a hell of hand-to-hand combat, explosions, and screams of pain and rage. Sergeant Joe Glass of 1st Company later remembered, "We got into it right away.… We had fixed our bayonets because we anticipated hand-to-hand combat, and thank God we did, because we were working real close.… I'm not sure what happened those first few seconds. But in no time at all, I didn't have a grenade left."

Glass described how he used one of those grenades: "There was a Kraut down below me over a ledge shooting tracers straight up in the air. I just dropped one right down on his head. They're good weapons, if you know how to use them."

The Germans had been taken by surprise, but they were reacting quickly; they had no choice if they wanted to survive. The 2nd Regiment men were attacking just as savagely, though, pouring fire into the enemy positions. Private Kenneth Betts helped man a machine gun, firing on any German he could see. Soon the gun was empty, so Betts picked up a rifle from a dead comrade and went forward. The Germans turned their own machine guns around so they could engage this threat from their rear.

Private Joseph Dauphinais found himself close to an MG-42, its crews firing burst after burst at him. He had little cover and could only watch the muzzle flashes as the bullets sought him out. Finally, one struck him, and he passed out.

The courageous Sergeant Van Ausdale continued to make a difference wherever he went that morning. The last German positions atop the mountain were several machine-gun nests, and the crews of the MG-42s within them were pouring a murderous fire into the Allied ranks.

A sergeant named McGinty was leading his section in an attack on one of the machine-gun nests but had become pinned down. Van Ausdale and his fellow scout Sergeant Fenton laid down fire on the enemy until McGinty could evacuate his wounded. Van Ausdale then rounded up eight men, called for three rounds from the company 60mm mortar, and directed a machine-gun team to lay down its own fire onto the Germans, who were inside a cave.

The incoming fire worked, and Van Ausdale led his section over the ledge and into the cave, using bayonets and grenades to eliminate the defenders. Another MG-42 farther up the mountainside soon fell victim to the same tactics.

Lieutenant Colonel Thomas MacWilliam, the 1st Battalion commander, now sent his 1st Company, under Lieutenant C.W. Rothlin, and Captain Stan Waters' 2nd Company to take out the remaining nests. They ordered the 3rd Platoon of 1st Company to lay down fire while the rest of the two companies outflanked the machine guns. A

National Archives

The 1st SSF was one of the first Allied units to enter the Imperial City on June 4, 1944. Here the unit's command post is set up in the rugged mountains north of Rome.

platoon under a lieutenant named Kaasch formed a skirmish line while the officer went ahead with two men.

They succeeded in flanking the first gun, causing its entire crew to surrender. The men then advanced on the second gun, but that crew kept firing; a storm of grenades settled the issue, leaving most of the Germans dead around their weapon.

With two more machine guns out of action, most of the remaining panzergrenadiers decided they'd had enough. Many began retreating across the narrow saddle that separates Monte La Difensa from nearby Monte Remetanea. Those who couldn't get away surrendered; for a few minutes the mountainside was dotted with white flags and Germans with their hands held high.

A few panzergrenadiers were still fighting, however, and this led to tragedy. The 1st Company commander, Lieutenant Rothlin, was dealing with a group of surrendering enemy when he was shot in the face. Accounts vary; some say he raised his head or left a position of cover to check on some Germans who had raised their hands. Others claim he was escorting some men who had already surrendered. Another story stated the Germans would feign surrender with submachine guns concealed behind their backs. Whatever the cause, Rothlin was killed in the chaos of the moment.

In response, several men adopted a "take no prisoners" attitude. The company was now led by 1st Lt. Larry Piette, who spread his men out to make them less vulnerable to incoming mortar and sniper fire. "The Krauts fought like they didn't have any intention of losing the war," remembered another lieutenant. "We didn't take any prisoners. Fighting like that, you don't look for any." Another soldier was told to escort a captured officer back down the mountain. He returned just a few minutes later, reporting, "The son of a bitch died of pneumonia."

By 7 AM, Lt. Col. MacWilliam had deployed his 1st Battalion in defensive positions, ready to repel an expected German counterattack. The men were positioned to defend the south and west faces of the mountain; Monte Remetanea lay to the west and was still held by the Germans.

The 2nd Regiment's 2nd Battalion, under Lt. Col. Bob Moore, had just begun to arrive on the mountaintop. The fresh troops began replacing the 1st Battalion men so they could prepare to push on toward Monte Remetanea; MacWilliam wanted to move on Remetanea before the Germans could regain their balance. The Allied commander also realized the American 36th Division's 142nd Regiment was attacking adjacent to them and would be hard pressed to hold their gains unless the Germans were pushed back farther.

The 1st Battalion formed up to advance, and true to form MacWilliam and his staff took position at the front, ready to lead their men forward. German mortar and artillery fire began landing among them, and enemy snipers fired at whatever target appeared in their sights. MacWilliam, at the head of the 1st Company, had just given the order to move out. In the very next moment a mortar round exploded in their midst, killing the commander and two others.

One soldier recalled, "I looked back just in time to see them disappear—it was just a red mist." The rest of the staff was wounded, blast and shrapnel pelting the entire group.

The much-needed assault, necessary to prevent the Germans from regaining their balance, was momentarily stopped in its

tracks. Taking MacWilliam's place was Major Ed Thomas, the executive officer of 1st Battalion, 2nd Regiment.

Colonel Frederick soon arrived as well and told Thomas to wait until more men and ammunition could be brought up. The colonel had made his headquarters at the base of the mountain but climbed the ropes to personally see what was happening.

Frederick moved among the troops, sending out patrols and slowly expanding the patch of rocky ground the 1st SSF held and constantly exposing himself to enemy fire to lead the men forward. One captain recalled, "His indifference to enemy fire was hard to explain, as there were times when a heavy barrage of mortar fire would send us scurrying for cover only to come back and find him smoking a cigarette—in the same position and place we had vacated in a hurry."

The 1st SSF men grimly held on; a lieutenant remembered sharing his foxhole with an enemy soldier. "He didn't bum any cigarettes or anything, because he was dead."

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A heavily laden Force man and his buddy take a break during a march near Cevaro, east of Cassino, January 1944. Within a month they would be fighting at Anzio.

At about 8:35 AM, Frederick was given a message from a British liaison officer stating that the adjacent British 169th Brigade had taken several hills including Monte Camino. Unfortunately, the Germans actually still had a presence on the northwestern side of Camino and were using it to direct fire on the 1st SSF. They were also reinforcing the saddle between Difensa and Camino. The U.S. 142nd Infantry Regiment was also pushing forward to its objectives, unwilling to wait for Monte Remetanea to be taken.

The resupply efforts were taking time, so Frederick decided to wait until dawn the next morning for 2nd Regiment's attack. He told the unit's leaders to use artillery fire overnight against the German positions and to send out patrols to eliminate any Germans to their south. Later, as Walker's 3rd Regiment began arriving with fresh supplies, word came that the British had lost Camino to a German counterattack.

That resupply effort was almost as miraculous as the successful ascent of the mountain by the attacking 1st SSF men. Each man carried a packboard on his back, loaded with jerrycans of water, packages of rations, and heavy burdens of ammunition. Blankets and medical supplies added more weight. It took eight hours to get up the mountain with such a load, and snipers shot at them the entire way.

Once at the summit, their supplies unloaded, they now had to return to the bottom, usually carrying a wounded man using a complex arrangement of ropes to lower him to the bottom. It took 10 hours and eight men to get one casualty down Monte La Difensa and to a waiting ambulance.

At first, some of the men grumbled that acting as supply troops was beneath their training and skills. Such talk stopped once they realized that no ordinary medics, stretcher bearers, or quartermaster men could possibly have gotten either up or down the mountain. They were saving lives no one else could have saved.

Colonel Frederick requested additional supplies, causing raised eyebrows among the supporting logistics officers. He wanted whiskey and condoms sent to the top of Monte La Difensa, reportedly causing some to wonder what kind of party was happening far above them. Frederick's intentions were much less sordid, however; the whiskey was to warm the men, who were suffering in the cold and damp weather. The condoms were to be placed over the muzzles of their weapons to keep them dry, a trick the 1st SSF picked up in the frozen Aleutians. The unusual request got as far as Mark Clark, who approved it, saying something like, "They took the mountain, give them what they want."

The Germans continued to do all they could to prevent the Allied troops from reaching the top or getting back down again. Snipers used tracer rounds to direct mortar and artillery fire. They knew where the trails were and swept fire back and forth along them, concentrating on each end of the paths to prevent easy escape. Many 1st SSF men were wounded and the rest exhausted in this deadly and dangerous work.

National Archives

Besides parachute training, the 1st SSF also became proficient at mountain operations. Here Force men climb a Rocky Mountain peak at Fort William Henry Harrison, Montana.

As the resupply effort went on, Frederick's intelligence officer, Lieutenant Finn Roll, interrogated 43 Germans taken prisoner atop La Difensa. He learned their enemy was the 15th Panzergrenadier Division, at least a battalion of which was still dug in at the top. Roll also knew about 75 enemy dead had been counted from the morning's assault; the 1st SSF had lost about 20 killed and 160 wounded in the same period.

Several men remembered one German medic who had declined to be evacuated with his fellow prisoners. Instead, he stayed at the summit, tending to the injured there. One soldier suffered from a sucking chest wound, a serious and often fatal condition that the Allied medics had been unable to remedy. The experienced German medic treated the man successfully; the wounded he treated hoped to thank him later, but his eventual fate is unknown.

After nightfall, rain added to the 1st SSF's plight. The tired men atop La Difensa peered into the dark and fog, tensely awaiting a German counterattack. Patrols groped around, trying to determine the enemy positions and strengths.

While the 2nd Regiment endured, down below the 1st Regiment was released from the divisional reserve, and its commander, Lt. Col. Marshall, moved them to reinforce their fellow troops on La Difensa. Not long after they started along the route they were spotted by alert German observers, who fell back on their proven tactic of marking the Allied position with tracer rounds. The luminescent bullets were soon followed by a heavy barrage of cannon fire that last 20 minutes. In that brief time, the regiment's strength was reduced by 40 percent—a horrible number of casualties. The remainder quickly regrouped, however, and moved up the trail to join their comrades.

At dawn on December 4, the situation was still far from clear. There were reports of strong German positions south of Remetanea, and Frederick still worried about a counterattack. He decided to postpone his attack another day, until dawn on the 5th. Throughout the day more patrols went out; often the 1st SSF men coming down the slope from La Difensa met German patrols coming up from Remetanea.

It was foggy, and the rain continued; sometimes the mist would clear suddenly, exposing men to snipers. Men shot at each other through the fog; if it cleared, all would take cover and wait for the patrol leader to decide whether to attack or disengage. Accurate mortar fire made the situation even worse. A German specialty was a six-round volley with an adjustment afterward. Major Ed Thomas, who had taken command of the 1st Battalion after MacWilliam was killed, became a casualty when he jumped into a foxhole during a bombardment and landed on a soldier's bayonet; Major Walter Gray assumed command.

In the afternoon a pair of prisoners was brought in by a patrol. In return for a few boxes of K-rations, these POWs revealed an impending counterattack planned for 3 the next morning. A nearby artillery observer confirmed the information when he saw about 400 Germans gathering nearby. Artillery was called in to break up the concentration, and the men on the front lines were told to stay alert throughout the night.

A small comfort was gained when the prisoners also revealed the Germans were in a poor state of supply as well. The rain was flooding their routes, and many of their mules had been lost to Allied artillery fire. Eventually the rain ceased but it was another cold night on the mountain, bolstered only by the few sips of whiskey each man received, compliments of Colonel Frederick. The expected enemy attack never came.

The next morning, the 1st SSF's attack was again delayed, but a trio of patrols

A 1st SSF man armed with a bazooka (3.5-inch rocket launcher) fires at a farmhouse near Anzio where German snipers are holed up.

went out to gain more information in the hopes the attack could proceed that afternoon. One patrol sought to find the enemy on Monte Remetanea but found no activity. The second pushed out toward the 142nd Infantry, but no contact was made with them or the enemy. The last patrol likewise went to find the British 169th Brigade but could not make contact either. Despite not being able to find the flanking units, Frederick was encouraged that the enemy had not been contacted either, and so he prepared to attack.

At 1 PM, Major Gray moved out with all three companies of 1st Battalion, 2nd Regiment, bolstered by one company from 3rd Regiment. They moved on Remetanea, the bulk of the troops along the northern slope of the ridge with patrols using the southern slope. The patrols soon came under mortar and machine-gun fire, which soon spread to the entire attacking force, causing it to stop halfway to the objective and dig in. More patrols went out while most of the troops waited until dark.

Moore's 2nd Battalion, 2nd Regiment, reinforced by a company from 1st Regiment, moved toward the saddle between Monte Camino and La Difensa at about 4:30 PM, hoping to crack the German defenses there. Under cover of smoke, the 5th Company, under a Captain Hubbard, led the assault.

When they approached the first of the German positions at a pair of knobs they called "warts," the Germans opened fire. The 1st SSF men lacked cover and had no choice but to push on or be destroyed by mortar fire. They reached the enemy bunkers and dropped grenades into the firing embrasures. Lieutenant Wayne Boyce, leading the 1st Platoon of 5th Company, led his men to flank the enemy on three sides, drawing their full attention in a battle for survival. The first wart was soon in Allied hands.

Boyce regrouped his platoon and led them on an attack on the second wart. He was hit during this attack but stayed in the fight, refusing to stop or be evacuated. The lieutenant leapt into a German machine-gun nest, using his knife to kill several Germans until he was caught by a burst from a submachine gun. Still, he stayed in command of his men despite serious wounds. Before long the second wart was in their hands, but tragically Boyce died just as his men completed the task.

The 2nd Battalion, 2nd Regiment occupied the warts and dug in for the night. More reinforcements came up, but the night passed without a German counterattack. Some of the men were able to watch the British artillery pounding a German-occupied monastery on nearby Hill 963.

The next morning at 10, the 1st Battalion, led by Major Gray, attacked Monte Remetanea. They took the now ubiquitous machine-gun and mortar fire from nearby hills, but there was little direct opposition. The Germans were retreating and had left only a token force as a rear guard. The 1st SSF's attack came so quickly that it took many Germans by surprise, in particular a bivouac area where the enemy still had tents pitched.

A number of Germans were killed when they came running out of their tents, firing wildly. Many more were captured; one 1st SSF captain personally took 19 prisoners. By

noon Monte Remetanea was at last in Allied hands.

With that objective secured, the unit pushed down toward the valley below, realizing that the enemy was in retreat. Frederick wanted to capitalize on the situation but knew his men were suffering from exhaustion and the cold weather. Snipers were still a problem, and the men noticed every time they were using their radios German mortar fire soon fell on the radio's location.

Frederick saw a group of Germans coming up a draw southwest on Monte Camino, and he told the 36th Division commander that, unless the British could take Camino by nightfall, he should let the 1st SSF attack it instead. No such order came, and the men dug in for another night, enduring more sniper and mortar fire and awaiting a counterattack that thankfully never came.

Finally, on the morning of December 7, the Force men linked up with British patrols on their flank. A near-tragedy occurred when a British patrol fired on some 1st SSF men in a dense fog. The situation was cleared up before anyone was hit. Another British patrol arrived at the 2nd Regiment headquarters and was surprised by how many majors and colonels were present at the front lines. Lt. Col. Williamson told them that the unit believed leaders should lead from the front—so that's where they were.

The battle was winding down, but there was still fighting to be done. A platoon-sized patrol from 1st Battalion, 2nd Regiment was sent to link up with the British. It instead came across a strong enemy position defended by 50 Germans. The patrol leader realized he was ill equipped to take on such a large force of well-armed enemy and wisely pulled back.

Elsewhere, 1st SSF men hunted for the few remaining snipers who still plagued them; most of the snipers were lone soldiers cut off from their comrades. Other Force men struggled to bring the last of the wounded down the mountain.

Overhead, the weather cleared and Army Air Forces transports tried to drop additional supplies, but most fell out of reach. The next day, December 8, Major Gray sent his entire battalion to take out the German outpost his patrol had found the day before. Plenty of artillery was laid on, and the clear weather aided in coordinating the attack.

The 1st SSF men advanced under the cover of a rolling barrage. Fully half the German force was killed, and seven were captured. It was the last fighting the 1st SSF would do on the mountain. The German troops were found to be part of the Hermann Göring Division, sent in to bolster the rear guard.

That night two battalions of the 142nd Infantry arrived to take over the Monte La Difensa area. The 1st SSF was relieved and slowly made its way back down the mountain. Later, in daylight, some were amazed to look at the terrain they had climbed and attacked through.

Their replacements were similarly amazed at the state of the men; many stared at the bloody, filthy, exhausted men who had accomplished in a few days what the regular infantrymen had been unable to in weeks. The next day, they boarded trucks for a journey back to where they had started, the barracks at Santa Maria.

On December 10, Colonel Frederick received a pair of messages. The first was from the II Corps commander, Maj. Gen. Geoffrey Keyes. It acknowledged the difficult conditions under which the unit fought and congratulated them on a mission well accomplished. The second message was from Lt. Gen. Mark Clark, commanding the Fifth Army. It further noted the difficulty of making a successful night attack in mountainous terrain against a tenacious enemy. Clark also praised the 1st SSF for doing so well in its first combat action.

In six days of combat, the unit had suffered about 25 percent casualties, including 73 dead, nine missing, 313 wounded, and 116 suffering from exhaustion. The casualty lists showed the dreadful causes: gunshots, mortar fragments, grenade lacerations, concussions, and fractures, even amputations. It was withdrawn from the line for 11 days of rest and reconstitution.

Afterward, the 1st SSF went back into the fight, tasked with taking more mountaintops that other units had been unable to seize. On one of them, Monte Majo, Marshall's 1st Regiment ran so low on ammunition that it had to use captured weapons. Despite this, it repulsed more than 40 counterattacks.

In February 1944, the unit was sent into the Anzio beachhead, the Allied attempt to outflank the Winter Line and expose Rome to capture. There, remnants of the decimated Darby's Rangers were sent to the 1st SSF as replacements. The unit held a place in the line and took part in leading the eventual breakout in May.

Later that summer, the 1st SSF would be incorporated into the First Airborne Task Force for the invasion of Southern France. Afterward, however, the unit, which had accomplished so many arduous missions at long odds, was simply disbanded. It was a common fate for many such units during the war. Many senior leaders lacked familiarity with relatively small, specialized organizations that did not easily fit into a conventional order of battle.

In its relatively short life, the 1st Special Service Force proved what a well-trained, motivated and disciplined group of soldiers could accomplish when they were well led and given tasks within their broad capabilities. Frederick was, in time, promoted to major general and later commanded the 45th Infantry Division. He was one of the youngest generals of the war, retiring in 1952.

The exploits of the 1st SSF would be celebrated in the 1968 war movie *The Devil's Brigade,* starring William Holden as Colonel Frederick. A number of books have also been written on the unit, and a website honoring the 1st SSF men (www.firstspecialserviceforce.net) is full of personal photographs of the men and the locations they served in. Both the modern-day Canadian and American Special Forces draw important parts of their heritage from the 1st SSF, which both still honor today. □

DEADLY DUEL Above Berlin

"Our mission was Berlin. We flew in that dreaded position—last and lowest in the squadron."

Archie Mathosian, B-17 Radio Operator, A/C #521 (*Skyway Chariot*), 100th Bomb Group (H), USAAF

Last and lowest in the squadron. These words may not mean much to most readers, but to the crew of a Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress flying over enemy territory during World War II, they meant almost certain death at 20,000 feet above the ground. Flying in the dreaded "Tail-End Charlie" position meant your bomber was at the end and bottom of the heavy bomber formation and extremely vulnerable to attacks by swift enemy fighters bearing down for a kill.

During the last great air raid over Berlin in March 1945, it was Me-262 jet fighters vs. B-17s. Survivors tell the story of the loss of *Skyway Chariot.*

BY MARK MATHOSIAN

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Approaching their target in Germany, B-17 Flying Fortresses are attacked by Me-262 jet fighters from JG 7. In this painting by Robert Taylor, the jets attack from behind just as the B-17s begin their bombing runs. One B-17 crew, having lost part of their tail assembly, desperately defends their bomber by laying a wall of .50-caliber bullets in the path of the high-speed jets.

The German Luftwaffe anticipated when and where strategic bombers would drop explosives and anxiously planned for their arrival. Odds were good that they would destroy at least a few B-17s even though they would also suffer injuries and death.

On Sunday morning, March 18, 1945, under an unusually clear sky, the U.S. Eighth Air Force mounted one of its largest air raids against Adolf Hitler's Third Reich. The target was Berlin, capital of the Nazi regime. More than 1,300 heavy bombers from the

Author's Collection

Archie Mathosian, right, and his brother George (Service Company, 749th Tank Battalion), the author's father, pose for a photographer somewhere in England.

Eighth Air Force, escorted by more than 600 fighter planes, departed their bases in East Anglia and flew eastward over the English Channel toward Germany. The payload that morning was more than 650 tons of 1,000-pound bombs.

Major Marvin Bowman commanded the 351sr Bomb Squadron, 100th Bomb Group, on its final mission to Berlin.

In one of those 72 B-17s, named *Skyway Chariot*, was my uncle, Archie Mathosian. Archie had volunteered for the U.S. Army Air Forces (USAAF) in January 1943. The next month he received basic training in Miami, Florida, followed by radio operator school in South Dakota and gunnery school in Yuma, Arizona.

As a radio operator, Archie sat just behind the B-17's bomb bay and in front of the waist section of the Flying Fortress. He was primarily responsible for assisting the navigator and communicating with other planes in the formation.

Radio operators on B-17s also managed cameras and sometimes manned a .50-caliber machine gun located in a turret above their heads during periods of combat. They were isolated from the rest of the crew in the midsection of the plane and had restricted views when battles raged outside.

After gunnery school, Archie was assigned to a B-17 stationed at the RAF base Thorpe Abbotts in Norfolk County, eastern England. Construction of the airfield had begun in 1942 for the Royal Air Force; however, when America entered the war, the base quickly filled up with heavy bombers from the USAAF. The 100th Bombardment Group (Heavy) arrived at RAF Thorpe Abbotts on June 9, 1943, from Kearney Army Airfield, Nebraska, as part of the Eighth Air Force's strategic bombing campaign.

From RAF Thorpe Abbotts, Archie and the rest of the crew flew 13 to 17 missions without an incident, mostly in a B-17 named *Heavenly Days*. During their last fateful mission on March 18, 1945, they were manning a B-17G named *Skyway Chariot* (aircraft number 43-37521) because *Heavenly Days* had been damaged and was under repair.

The crew of *Skyway Chariot* that day had been together for many months and were "old hands" at the aerial warfare game. In addition to Archie, the crew consisted of pilot 1st Lt. Rollie C. King; co-pilot Lieutenant John S. "Jack" Williams; navigator Lieutenant John Spencer; nose gunner and bombardier Frank Gordon; flight engineer Ray E. Wilding; ball turret gunner Robert G. Mitchell; waist gunner Meyer Gitlin; and tail gunner James D. Baker. (A B-17 normally had two waist gunners, but on the March 18 mission, only one was assigned to *Skyway Chariot*.)

On strategic bombing missions over enemy territory, Allied bombers flew in large, orderly groups for better protection from flak and enemy fighter planes. A formation called a "combat box" or "staggered formation" was designed for this purpose, and it served two functions: offense and defense.

When on the offensive, the purpose of the combat box was simply the massed release of bombs over a target. The defensive posture involved the use of firepower from the bombers' array of .50-caliber machine guns to ward off enemy fighter planes. Combat boxes typically consisted of 18, 27, 36, or 54 heavy bombers.

Three boxes completed a basic combat box group, although there were several variations used during the war. The basic formation consisted of a lead element, high element, and low element.

The theory behind the box formation concept was logical. B-17s would be protected by "interlocking" .50-caliber machine-gun fire, thereby allowing the Flying Fortresses to defend against enemy planes during daylight raids without the necessity of being escorted by Allied fighters. The combat box formation was used until the end of the war, even though this type of formation did have some disadvantages.

A serious shortcoming was that the lowermost and uppermost bombers had the least protection; they had the fewest number of bombers and machine guns covering them. Enemy fighters easily recognized their vulnerability and attacked the highest and lowest bombers first. "Tail-End Charlies" were picked off, and then the main body of the formation was attacked.

With the low element there was also the unfortunate possibility that bombs dropped from above would hit your plane below because formations always started out orderly but sometimes in the heat of combat became disarrayed.

On other occasions, simple human error could cause a bomber to move out of the formation and into harm's way. One famous example that was caught on camera involved a B-17 on a bombing run on May 19, 1944, over Berlin. The mishap occurred when a bomber from above dropped a bomb onto a B-17 flying below and damaged one of its stabilizers, causing it to crash. Interestingly, the enemy is also known to have

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North American P-51 Mustang fighters escorting the Flying Fortresses. This would be the largest attack by Me-262 jets and piston-engine fighter planes against Allied bombers during the entire war.

Just before reaching Berlin, the B-17s of the 100th BG encountered heavy bursts of flak from German 88mm and 105mm antiaircraft guns. *Skyway Chariot* took enemy fire shortly after turning on the mission's initial point (IP)—the last leg of a bomb run when planes turn in a direction that takes them over their target. The IP was typically about 10 miles from the target over a highly visible landmark so navigators could get a fix on their positions.

Then the antiaircraft guns went silent to allow swarms of deadly Luftwaffe fighter planes to do their work from close range.

100th Bomb Group Foundation; www.100thbg.com

ABOVE: Even dropping bombs was dangerous. Here a B-17 has its left horizontal stabilizer sheared off by a bomb dropped from a plane above, May 19, 1944. The damaged B-17 plunged to earth killing all aboard. RIGHT: A ground crewman poses under the nose of *Skyway Chariot* with a "putt-putt" used to start engines.

dropped bombs onto the orderly and predictable B-17 combat box formations.

Just after 5 AM on March 18, 1945, the large formation of 1,327 B-17s and Consolidated B-24 Liberators was assembling over London for Mission 282. At its base in Germany, fighter wing Jagdgeschwader 7 (JG 7) Nowotny (later renumbered III./JG 7) went on alert, preparing for the onslaught. This wing was equipped with 50 Me-262 fighters. The probable target, the wing commander was informed, was Berlin.

Bombing runs deep into Germany's heartland could last eight hours or more and were typically met by heavy resistance from fighter planes and flak. Germany's military pilots flew against the invading force in Messerschmitt Bf-109s, Focke-Wulf FW-190s and the new jet-powered Messerschmitt Me-262s.

Entering service near the end of the war, the faster and more powerful Me-262 *Schwalbe* ("Swallow"), was the most advanced fighter plane of World War II. It has been suggested that if the Me-262 had been introduced in greater numbers earlier in the war, it may have decisively impacted the outcome of many air battles in favor of Germany.

Twenty-four deadly R4M (*Rakete, 4 kilogramm, Minenkopf*) missiles were attached beneath the wings of each Me-262 on specially designed wooden racks fitted with sliding lugs to hang freely from guided rails. When fired, these missiles traveled up to 1,700 feet per second and packed a 1.1-pound, impact-fused warhead. The missiles could easily vaporize a bomber. To some military historians, the use of the R4M missiles, nicknamed *Orkan* (Hurricane), was simply overkill.

As one would expect, the Me-262 was highly regarded by Germany's Luftwaffe aces because it outclassed all other fighters of the period. It had a speed advantage, an excellent climb rate, and firepower consisting of four 30mm cannons in the nose.

By March 1945, almost all Allied air raids included at least 1,000 heavy bombers. During the March 18 bombing raid, a fierce defense was exhibited to protect Berlin, where Adolf Hitler and other Nazi elite were hunkered down.

Before the bombers reached Berlin, Me-262s were scrambled to attack the B-17s and

Thirty-seven fighter planes, including Me-262s, engaged the massive force of Flying Fortresses and escorting fighters. Luftwaffe pilots were determined to protect their capital from the enemy bombers.

The attack began at about 11:09 AM with seven Me-262s firing 30mm Mk 108 cannons at the invading force. A private company in Germany specifically designed these cannons for use against heavy aircraft, and they were installed on a variety of German fighter planes. The cannons were well suited

ARCHIE'S DIARY:
Blitzed by the Luftwaffe, Captured by German Citizens

Many years after the end of the war, Archie penned his memoirs about the aerial battle that fateful morning and his confinement at Stalag Luft I, a prisoner of war camp for captured Allied airmen near Barth, Germany:

I'll try to briefly relate my experience on that unfortunate day exactly 46 years ago on March 18, 1945 and following incidents prior to internment in Stalag Luft I (Barth on the Baltic).

Our mission was Berlin. We flew in that dreaded position—last and lowest position in the squadron. On the bombing run two jets attacked us. From the right waist gun position, which I had manned, I did not see any enemy jets. The dialogue from Mitchell and Baker (ball turret and rear gunner, respectively) related the fact that it was jets they were firing at. They came at us from behind and below. The damage inflicted bore this out.

It seemed all hell broke loose. I was thrown to the opposite side of the plane (left). When I finally was aware of what had happened, I noticed my gun was hanging askew from the shattered Plexiglas and intense fire, and heat was entering the plane.

A large hole in the wing adjacent to the body of the plane was fueling the flame. The din from the air rushing in and the roaring flame was deafening. Our plane (fortunately) was in a slow spin. I glanced back at [Meyer] Gitlin (left waist gunner). He appeared pale and motionless. We waited for what seemed a very long time for a bell to ring—the signal to bail out. I never did hear the bell.

Since Gitlin was in a shocked state, I took the initiative and headed toward the back of the ship to the exit door. There was a large cannon hole close to Gitlin. I jumped across. I pulled the tab that is supposed to free the door from the plane. I considered myself as being a strong person.

However, as hard as I tried, I couldn't release the pin holding the door. In frustration I glanced back to Gitlin. He apparently realized my inability to release the door. He looked down at the hole, which fortunately was large enough for him to exit. This was the only way out.

Gitlin put his hand on the rip cord [handle] and disappeared down the hole. I followed suit. This was the first and only time I used a chute. The danger of [it] not opening never entered my mind--it was do or die! Apparently Gitlin was not as fortunate. We never heard from or about him ever.

Author's Collection

Colorized photo of Archie Mathosian.

I don't remember pulling the rip cord or how far I had fallen. An excruciating pain in my crotch, where the chute straps had crossed, brought me to the realization of where I was. Looking down I saw my flight boots had fallen off my feet. That made me nervous about landing.

What I thought to be a river below turned out to be an extremely cold stream. I was closer to the ground than I thought. Before I landed in the stream I noticed many people running in my direction. As I came out of the stream, still intact, the crowd circled me and began punching me. I was too numb from the cold stream to feel anything at the time.

Fortunately, a [German] soldier with raised pistol was shouting at the civilians to stop the beating. I got a few words such as "*Soldat*." The beating stopped and I was marched toward the town. On route I was joined by Gordon. After a time he realized I was trying to converse with him. He had a bruise on the side of his face, which I assumed was perhaps due to his landing. We were brought to a barn-like structure where we were joined by King, Spencer, Williams, and Wilding.

I had to discard my wet clothes. I was given pants and a sweater from the crew to wear. I noticed some wounds on my legs. I was too numb to be concerned. It turned out to be a combination of metal splinters and bits of Plexiglas. My flak suit saved my life.

After a time we were loaded onto a "wood-burning" truck. At the outskirts of the town they removed us from the truck and [we were] made to walk. On route three burly men approached us shouting. One of the men withdrew a bullwhip and began beating me while shouting "*Jude*." Later I was told by one of the crew that *Jude* means Jewish. This explains why I was the only one getting the brunt of his wrath. He thought I was Jewish, not that I was the smallest.

After beating me several minutes, he managed a sharp, painful welt across the left side of my face. The pain overcame my senses. I grabbed his arm and shoved him away from me forcefully. The whipping ceased abruptly to my surprise and joy. Later I was told that a rifle was aimed at the back of my head. Apparently the burly man didn't want to be killed by a stray bullet. My luck was still holding up.

We travelled for four days and nights. Our mode of transportation was in a dirty hay-laden cattle car, truck, train and open metal boxcar. The last mentioned is where I thought my luck had run out. The donated

garment I [wore] was far from ample to fend off the brutal cold. My body shook all night. I tried to isolate my body from the metal car with my fingers underneath me but to no avail. After what I thought was eternity, the sun shown its beautiful face, bringing a little warmth.

My feet were clad only in the felt heat boots. I developed blisters as large as old silver dollars. At times, in order to keep pace with the rest of the group, I had to be supported by two men of my crew. Finally we arrived at our destination––Staling Luft I. A German doctor looked us over. A bandage was placed on my knee. We were then given an ugly-looking bowl of mush. As hungry as I was, I couldn't bring myself to eat. I gave it to an eager P.O.W.; he devoured it ravenously. Little did I know that was the best gourmet meal I was to receive.

Thereafter we were fed cruddy looking potatoes, dried grass, and imitation coffee. My hunger never abated. The bed in our quarters was a panel borrowed from the ceiling, and a thin blanket. Besides hunger, we were always cold. Incidentally, the panel (bed) was shared by another.

In April we heard about the passing away of our beloved President F.D.R. A sad blow to me. He was the only President I knew as a growing child.

End of April we heard a lot of activity in the air. The Luftwaffe was fleeing to the northwest. Russians were approaching Berlin. Staling Luft I was deserted by the Germans.

One day a Russian colonel on horseback arrived on the scene. He saw that we were still confined and he didn't understand why the fence was still standing. That's all we needed. The fences came down.

I walked to a little brook close by. I lay back on a patch of grass and watched white puffs of clouds float slowly amid the blue sky. I drew in clean, clear FREE air. It was exhilarating. I was free! Shortly thereafter we were flown to a waiting area in France and finally sent to the "good old U.S.A."

It saddened me to hear that, besides losing Gitlin, Mitchell, and Baker that King and Gordon have also passed away.

— Archie Mathosian, March 18, 1991

Author's Collection

The crew that rode *Skyway Chariot* on its fateful day. Front Row (L to R): John Spencer, pilot Rollie King, Jack Williams, Ray Wilding. Back Row: Robert G. Mitchell, Francis Gordon, James Baker, Meyer Gitlin, Archie Mathosian.

for the role, firing high-explosive ammunition that could bring down a B-17 or B-24 with four to five shots.

Tragically for the B-17s that day, this was also the first time in aerial combat that the Messerschmitts were also armed with the deadly R4M air-to-air missiles. According to eyewitnesses, the effect of the R4M rockets was devastating. Massive amounts of broken B-17 aircraft parts filled the crowded, smoky sky that day, creating havoc for the B-17s, as well as for the attacking German planes.

Years later, a Luftwaffe pilot still vividly recalled the scene: "Shattered fuselages, broken-off wings, ripped-out engines, shards of aluminum and fragments of every size whirled through the air."

Skyway Chariot's navigator Jack Spencer recalled that shortly after 11 AM all hell broke loose. He remembered, "Everything went well" until just after they turned on the IP when an Me-262 "got practically all of the left horizontal stabilizer."

A second attack was fought off "halfway down the bomb run with no damage done. Since being hit, we were gradually trailing the formation and by the time we were over the target area, the rest of the formation was approximately one-half mile away."

Spencer said that the bombardier toggled the bomb load over a "built-up" area of Berlin at about 11:25 AM, and approximately 15 to 30 seconds later "there was a terrific burst that seemed to come from the rear of the plane. From where I was, in the nose, I could see smoke boiling up from under the pilot's seat.

"The condition of the plane then was that the controls had been shot out, as had the intercom system, and the right wing was on fire. Up until we received this last attack, everyone in the ship reported they were all right. As soon as we were hit—since there was no communication—I looked through the astrodome into the cockpit and I handed my toggalier his chute and then put on my own but still wasn't sure to bail out, so I looked through the astrodome again and saw both the pilot and co-pilot preparing to abandon ship. Then looking at the right wing, which was burning pretty badly, I decided it was time to leave. I bailed out, floated to the ground, and was picked up [captured] immediately."

Spencer talked to fellow crew members when he ran into them two or three days later in a POW camp. He learned that the

tail gunner, James D. Baker, was hit badly in the last attack—or may even have been killed and never left the ship. Later on, his unopened, bloody chute was shown to the enlisted men of the crew, and they recognized the number on it.

As for Mitchell, the ball turret gunner, his fate remains unknown. Waist gunner Meyer Gitlin, who was to assist him out of the ball turret in case of emergency, was also missing. Although Gitlin was known to have bailed out, he was not seen again. Spencer said that his suspicion was "that if [Gitlin's] chute did open, he may have been killed by Germans, for he was a Jew, had it on his dog tags, and didn't seem to care who knew it. That may or may not have happened." Radio operator Archie Mathosian recalled that Gitlin bailed out ahead of him through a hole in the fuselage made by cannon shells from the Me-262.

First Lieutenant Rollie King, the pilot of *Skyway Chariot*, also reported on the plane's last few minutes: "After bombs away on the target, we received numerous fighter passes. The first fighter pass knocked out our vertical stabilizer and the tail turret, killing the tail gunner. On the next fighter pass we received a great deal of damage to the plane and practically all of the controls were knocked out.

"I called back and had the radio operator check the crew members, however I did not receive a reply as to their condition. On the third fighter pass we received a burst near the front which knocked out all of our controls and put the plane into a violent spin. I ascertained that I was going to be unable to get the plane out of the said spin due to the lack of control, and I told everybody to bail out.

"I saw Sergeant Gitlin going out by himself and, inasmuch as Staff Sgt. Robert G. Mitchell was a very close friend of his, I do not believe he would have bailed out if he could have in any way helped Sergeant Mitchell. As soon as I bailed out, the ship exploded."

The 100th's intelligence narrative indicated enemy aircraft attacks were concentrated on the low squadron, with one pass being made at the high squadron. Six to 10 Me-262s and possibly two twin-engined Me-410s concentrated their attack. Colonel Cruver reported that most attacks came from 5 to 7 o'clock low using contrails and cloud banks as cover. Four Me-262s made the first attack from 5 o'clock, slightly low, and out of contrails. Three were on the right and others were slightly ahead and below this element.

First Lieutenant Alfonso Guardino, the pilot of *Patriotic Patty*, was an eyewitness that day. He saw *Skyway Chariot* first being attacked by an Me-262 at approximately 11 AM, noting that the stabilizer of Rollie King's B-17 broke off and the bomber was observed going down "under control," with enemy aircraft making further attacks. Sadly, Guardino, along with his entire crew, would be killed by a flak burst five days later during a bombing mission over Marburg, Germany.

Research reveals that *Skyway Chariot* was likely shot down by Oberleutnant (1st Lt.) Günther Wegmann flying an Me-262 from Jagdgeschwader 7 (JG7) Nowotny. Wegmann was an experienced Luftwaffe pilot credited with many aerial victories, including eight while flying his Me-262. Some of those kills included B-17s and P-51 Mustangs.

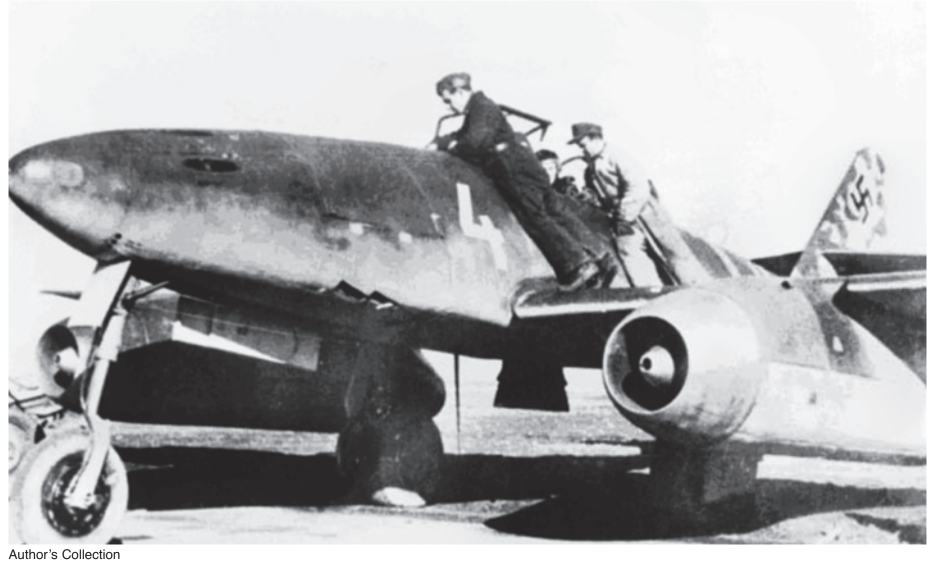
Wegmann was well suited for the task that morning. He was involved in the early experimental stages of the Me-262 with missiles as armament. Because of his flying expertise, he was assigned as adjutant to Major Walter Nowotny, the first commander of JG7. On March 18, 1945, Wegmann's squadron of seven jets was the first to make contact with the bomber formation. Wegmann's Me-262 was being repaired that day, so he was flying a substitute machine.

Wegmann picked out a formation of about 60 B-17s and signaled to begin the attack. To his right was Oberleutnant Karl-Heinz Seeler (killed in action at a later date), and on his left was Leutnant Karl "Quax" Schnorrer with Leutnant Oberfahnrich Gunter Schrey (killed in action that same day) on the outside.

All told, they fired nearly 100 rockets into the midst of the bomber formation. Wegmann and Schnorrer each claimed two B-17s, and Seeler claimed one. According to documented reports, Wegmann claimed his kills had occurred at approximately 11:20 AM.

After firing their missiles, the Me-262s dodged flying debris and lost sight of each other as they nosed down to dive away from pursuing P-51 Mustangs. In after-action

BELOW: An Me-262 being prepped by its ground crew. The jet fighter had a top speed of 540 miles per hour and took great skill to fly. OPPOSITE: Bombs away over Germany. Flying in tight formations enabled the Flying Fortresses to defend themselves against fighters but also made them inviting targets for German pilots and flak gunners.



Author's Collection

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reports, many JG7 pilots reported making direct contact with the formation, claiming 10 bombers and one P-51.

After the attack on *Skyway Chariot*, Oberleutnant Wegmann observed bits of aircraft, smoke, and flames. He started heading for home when he saw another bomber formation in his path, so he opened fire on it with his Mk 108 cannon. He was just over Glowen, Germany, when his jet fighter was hit by defensive fire from a B-17. His windshield and dashboard were badly smashed and after feeling a hard blow to his right leg he realized he had been shot; the wound was large enough for him to put his whole fist in. Oddly, he felt no pain.

His jet was still airworthy despite the damage, but soon flames erupted from one of his turbine engines, and he decided to bail out. He guided his Me-262 toward the town of Wittenberge, northwest of Berlin, which he recognized from the air, having flown over it many times. When the time felt right, he bailed out and engaged his parachute. He drifted past the town and landed in a meadow near a stand of pine trees.

An elderly German woman was the first to spot him, and he quickly identified himself as a German pilot. He was nervous because he was wearing a leather flight jacket obtained from a downed American flyer. If the villagers thought he was an American pilot, he might have been beaten or possibly killed. Instead, Wegmann was rushed away for medical treatment, and about four hours later his right leg was amputated.

On that March 18 air raid, the Eighth Air Force lost eight bombers to enemy fighters, 16 more to flak, and 16 others that were damaged and forced to land in Russian-held territory. According to Archie Mathosian, during the mission his squadron lost four planes, including *Skyway Chariot*.

After parachuting to earth, Archie and the five other surviving airmen were captured and imprisoned. He and the other crew members were transported to Stalag Luft I, a POW camp for American and British airmen at Barth in northeastern Germany.

The air war over Germany was incredibly costly. Casualties for the 100th Bomb Group are a perfect example. The "Bloody 100th," so nicknamed because of the large number of losses it suffered, flew 306 missions during the war and lost 177 B-17 bombers to antiaircraft guns and Luftwaffe fighters; 765 airmen were killed while 903 were captured and interned at POW camps behind enemy lines or in neutral countries.

Figures differ, but one authoritative source says that the Eighth and Ninth U.S. Air Forces in Europe had a combined death toll of 24,963, including 510 who died of wounds and 537 declared dead. Inscribed on the Wall of the Missing at the American Military Cemetery, Cambridge, UK, are 5,127 names. More than 500 Eighth Air Force bombers and fighters were lost to antiaircraft fire, enemy aircraft, and "other causes." It was a heavy price to pay for victory. □

The author extends thanks to the 100th Bomb Group Foundation (100thbg.com) for its assistance with this article.

Fast, small, and reliable, messenger pigeons were the unsung heroes of World War II—to both sides.

Battlefield communications are often a matter of life and death to individual soldiers and serve to determine not only the outcome of battles but entire wars. Lowly pigeons have played an intrinsic part in world conflicts, filling the gap when modern technology failed, but their story has literally remained, in great part, unsung.

In the millennia prior to the advent of the telegraph, radio, and telephone, the transmission of information—military, economic, and civilian—relied on horse-mounted or fleet-footed human couriers (such as Phidippides, the Greek courier who ran 26 miles from Marathon to Athens, then died while proclaiming victory over the Persians in 490 BC), but a faster method was needed.

In the 5th century BC, ancient Persia and Syria developed an advanced network of messenger pigeons for their communications. The Romans also relied on trained pigeons (including those announcing the ancient Olympics) and thus the release of white doves seen today at the modern Games.

In more recent times, beginning in 1850, the famous news agency Reuters relied on 45 birds to transmit the latest news and stock prices between Germany and Belgium, finding them more reliable than the new telegraph and faster than the railway.

After using the birds extensively during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1871, by 1872 Germany had established a pigeon messenger network headquartered in Berlin. Russia implemented its system in 1874, and the Italians incorporated pigeons into their military in 1878.

British soldiers release a pigeon with a message capsule attached to its leg, August 1940. Thought to be more secure than radio or telephone communications, the birds could deliver written messages quickly, but sometimes were captured or shot down by the enemy.

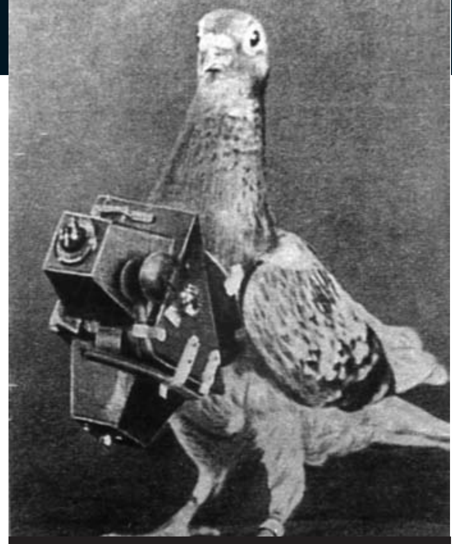
Birds have been used by armies for centuries. Here, a pigeon is tossed from the open cockpit of a plane in World War I.

By 1890 Canada relied in part on pigeons for civilian communications, with the U.S. Signal Corps establishing a "loft" in Key West, Florida, around the same time. The United States also often relied on pigeons prior to the laying of the transatlantic cable. France led the way in acclimating pigeons to naval gunfire, soon employing the birds on its warships by the end of the 19th century, with the British following suit.

The Germans called their courier birds *Brief Taube* (literally "letter pigeon") while the French, Italians, and Portuguese called them "Messenger Pigeons." The Belgians called their winged servants "pigeon voyageurs," the English preferring the term "homers" because of their uncanny ability to find their way home, often from great distances.

All such "messenger pigeons" traced their lineage to the *Columba livia,* commonly known as the Blue Rock Pigeon or Rock Dove, although they were the product of much selective breeding and training. They should not be confused with the native North American "passenger pigeon" that numbered 3 to 5 billion and which, 300 years after European arrival in the New World, had been hunted to extinction by the outbreak of World War I in 1914.

The use of trained birds continued in both World War I and World War II when normal lines of communication were unavailable to military forces or clandestine groups. Their importance to the war effort is evidenced by the U.S. Army Signal Corps establishment



ABOVE: A feathered drone? This pigeon was trained to fly over enemy lines with an aerial reconnaissance camera to snap images before returning home with the intelligence. RIGHT: German soldiers place a pigeon in a wicker cage carried by the dog for transport to a new location. Both sides in the war effectively employed birds to deliver messages.

of a "pigeons service" in 1917, the motivation supplied by the General of the Armies, John "Blackjack" Pershing.

The pigeons carried small messages initially in tubes attached to their feet but larger documents were later transported via a cigar-shaped tube attached to their backs. Most often, because of the accuracy of the pigeon's skill in finding its correct destination and the difficulty in intercepting them, the messages were not even encoded, although the birds flew as far as 200 miles and often through hostile territory, including poison gas attacks during World War I.

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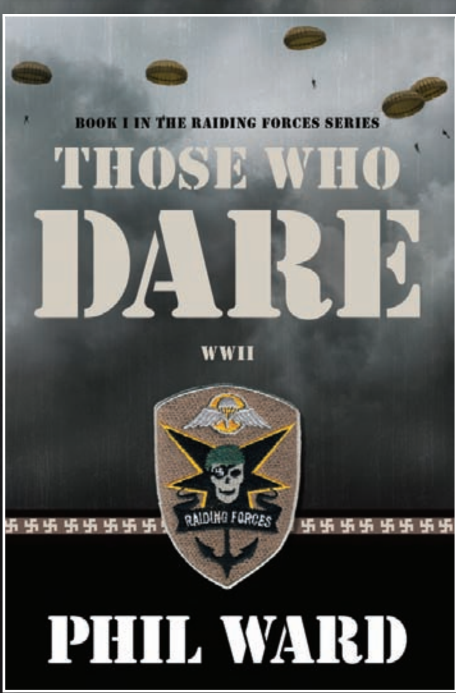

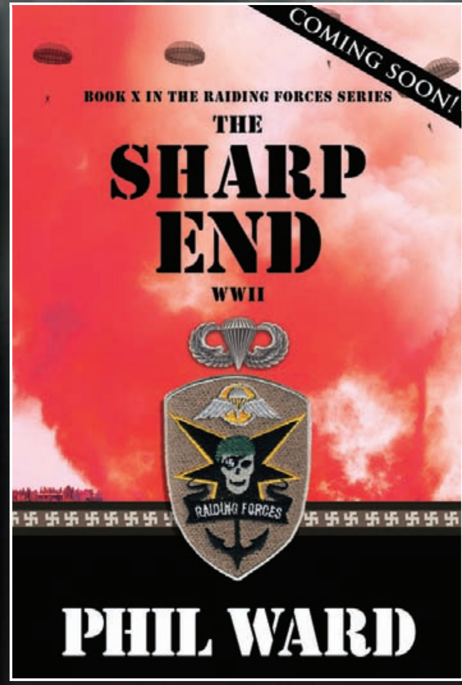

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ABOVE: During World War II, the famous behavioral scientist B.F. Skinner studied the intelligence and trainability of pigeons in his Harvard laboratory, but his findings (birds could be used as suicide bombers) were not accepted. BELOW LEFT: Enclosed in a wood and canvas crate, two birds are taken aloft in a blimp's gondola. A number of WAVES serving at air stations throughout the U.S. trained pigeons for "air duty." BELOW RIGHT: A paratrooper prepares to release a homing pigeon while on maneuvers during the U.S. Second Army's Tennessee maneuvers, November 24, 1943.

Due to attrition, estimates of messenger pigeon survival rates on some World War I missions were as little as 10 percent, although, all told, 100,000 were pressed into service, achieving an overall success rate of 95 percent. They were also carried on ships so that in the event of a sinking by enemy submarines, the pigeons could be released to carry the location of the sinking to rescuers.

A bird called Cher Ami ("Dear Friend") delivered a dozen vital messages at Verdun and was thus awarded the famous French Croix de Guerre. Later she delivered a message that saved the lives of many soldiers in the "Lost Battalion" of the U.S. 77th Division. Though shot in the chest and having lost most of one leg, the bird delivered its message ("We are along the road parallel to 276.4. Our own artillery is dropping a barrage directly on us. For heaven's sake, stop it."). After she died in 1919, her body was stuffed and mounted, sent to the United States, and put on display at the Smithsonian Institution.

Following the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, and its forces reaching the Ukrainian city of Kiev, SS police authorities, using the rationale of communication with the enemy, rounded up all the area's several hundred pigeon keepers and had them executed along with their birds.

Shortly after U.S. entry into World War II, new recruits were culled for pigeon experts, while civilian pigeon fanciers were asked to either sell or "volunteer" their birds. When a general call went out on January 9, 1942, it resulted in enthusiastic support, one shipment from New York City consisting of some 52,000 birds.

Joining the war effort was the American Racing Pigeon Union and the International Federation of American Homing Pigeon Fanciers. Many prize-winning and very valuable racing birds were turned over to the U.S. Signal Corps.

The department was eventually manned by 150 officers and 3,000 enlisted personnel, many of them pigeon experts in civilian life. The soldiers responsible for their care and training were dubbed "pigeoneers." Credited with bringing the American messenger pigeon up to modern military speed was Colonel Clifford A. Poutre, Chief Pigeoneer of the U.S. Army Signal Corps Pigeon Service (1936-1943). Colonel Poutre rejected the pattern of training by starvation used in World War I to one focused on kindness. His pigeons responded with significant improvements in speed, accuracy, and performance.

Pigeon breeding and training bases were set up in Georgia, Missouri, New Jersey, and Texas. The search was on for the fastest birds for the job at hand, the new crop of birds doubling the World War I distance, often traveling 400, sometimes 600, miles to accomplish their mission, and at times reaching 60 mph in short sprints. While some 50,000 birds were employed in military service during World War II, half that of World War I because of advances in electronic communication, they still played a significant role.

In the late 1930s, prior to World War II, Lieutenant Claire Lee Chennault (of "Flying Tigers" fame) brought with him to China several hundred messenger pigeons along with his group of intrepid volunteer American flyers and planes in aid of China's battle against the Japanese. At war's end he would leave them behind, the birds remanded into the Chinese military and the foundation for that country's still active military messenger pigeon program.

Additionally, many a British Royal Air

Force crewman owed his life to a pigeon as one in every seven who had crashed landed or parachuted into the sea was rescued, thanks to a message delivered by one of the birds, which were often carried as standard passengers on English bombers.

The U.S. Army Air Forces followed suit on some missions. It was soon learned that the birds could with withstand temperatures of -35 degrees and could be dropped from a plane at 375 MPH without injury. In addition, a special pigeon-carrying sling was adopted by airborne troops that, once on the ground, converted into a backpack.

Moreover, thousands of specially constructed carriers were parachuted into France during the Normandy D-Day invasion with instructions requesting that their French finders send back intelligence about German defenses.

In *The Longest Day,* author Cornelius Ryan noted, "Correspondents on Juno [Beach] had no communications until Ronald Clark of United Press came ashore with two baskets of carrier pigeons. The correspondents quickly wrote brief stories, placed them in the plastic capsules attached to the pigeons' legs, and released the birds.

"Unfortunately, the pigeons were so overloaded that most of them fell back to earth. Some, however, circled overhead for a few moments—and then headed toward the German lines. Charles Lynch of Reuters stood on the beach, waved his fist at the pigeons, and roared 'Traitors! Damned traitors!'" (This scene was included in the 1962 Hollywood version of the book.)

Said Ryan, "Four pigeons proved loyal. They actually got to the Ministry of Information within a few hours."

An American pigeon was cited for bravery during World War II when its message was delivered at great speed, thus averting an Allied bombing of 1,000 British troops who had just occupied an Italian town scheduled for attack just five minutes after the bird's timely and preemptive arrival.

The bird personally received from the Lord Mayor of London the Dickin Medal for Gallantry, Britain's highest animal award. By the end of the war, some 30,000 messages had been transmitted by pigeon, with an estimated 96 percent success rate.

In this wartime illustration, a German "pigeon soldier" watches the return of his squadron to a mobile coop.

The English effort to utilize messenger pigeons during both world wars is credited to efforts of the British Pigeoneers, Lt. Col.

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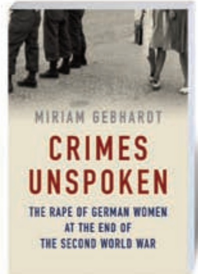

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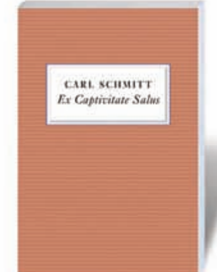

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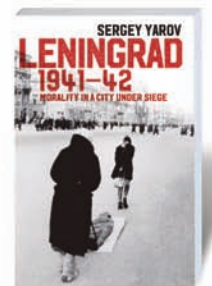

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A.H. Osman and Mr. J.W. Logan, Esq. During the war a very sizable fine of 100 pounds Sterling and a six-month prison term awaited any person found in the United Kingdom to have harmed a carrier pigeon.

Both the British and French governments recognized the pigeons' contributions through the bestowing of medals, and many were heralded in the public press as "heroes."

The means by which the messenger pigeon travels its course so accurately is attributed to a variety of reasons: that it sees both in color and ultra violet, that it can "read" landmarks such as roadways and intersections, and also that it responds to the electromagnetic field of the earth.

One factor that seems to determine their speed when returning to the home loft is jealousy. The males who mate for life seem to fly faster when they notice a new male has been added to their nesting loft just prior to their departure.

Despite the impression left by their bobbing heads, the motion required to gauge their earthbound position while walking due to their lack of stereoscopic vision, pigeons are quite bright. They are one of only six species, and the only nonmammal, with the ability to recognize itself in a mirror. Tests have also shown that pigeons can distinguish the 26 letters of the English alphabet.

Famous American behavioral scientist B.F. Skinner, known for his work in behavioral conditioning, was contacted during the war by the U.S. Navy seeking a new weapon against the German Navy's Bismarck-class battleships; thus was born Project Pigeon.

It turned out that one of Skinner's favorite research animals was the pigeon, and thus the idea was born to produce a very small missile divided into three sections, a pigeon encased in each. Projected on a tiny screen was a view of whatever was in front of the missile, the pigeons trained to peck toward the image and thereby working as the guidance system. Skinner was convinced a pigeon-guided missile would work, but apparently no one took him seriously and the plan was scrapped.

The deliberate targeting of messenger pigeons by all combatants was seen as a legitimate means of disrupting enemy communications. Pigeons were machine gunned out of the sky in World War I or fired upon from the trenches by individual soldiers taking potshots.

During World War II, both German and Japanese troops fired on the birds with specially supplied shotguns while natural predators, such as hawks, also took their toll, as did an unlucky intersection with bursts of flak directed at other airborne targets. Both the Germans and British released their own hunting falcons which, however, they found could not distinguish between enemy and friendly pigeons.

Birds occasionally became disoriented, injured, or captured as "POWs." One World War II report states that a homing pigeon released by its American handlers ended up in German hands during the winter 1944 campaign in Italy. It eventually reappeared at its American loft with its message capsule intact but, once opened, the note read: "To the American Troops: Herewith we return a pigeon to you. We have enough to eat. —The German Troops."

When the U.S. military disbanded its messenger pigeon operations in 1957, Colonel Poutre, then 103, was honored for his contributions by his release of the last of the country's military homing pigeons.

Food shortages during and after World War II's end brought about the disappearance of untold numbers of pigeons from the streets and plazas of Europe; however, their numbers have long since recovered and flourished.

Moreover; the interest in homing and racing pigeons has also skyrocketed. In early 2011 during an auction in Kermt, Belgium, a rare Belgian racing pigeon brought a record-breaking bid of 156,000 Euros ($208,000), the bird going to China, where the sport has become a phenomenon with some 30,000,000 registered racing pigeons.

In late 2010 China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) initiated a program to train 10,000 pigeons for a "reserve pigeon army" that would provide back-up in case its high-tech electronic communications systems were put out of action. While history seems to be repeating itself, some wags would warn that the United States is now facing a "Messenger Pigeon Gap." □

Mayhem

Continued from page 73

the wounded and sick were flown out, and resupplies of new uniforms, food, ammo, medical supplies, and mail were flown in.

Of the original 2,600 men who had marched into Burma on the Ledo Road in February only some 1,600 were still available for duty. The Marauders had been victorious on every occasion but had paid a steep price with many dead, wounded, or debilitated by disease.

Stilwell's limited acknowledgement was a diary entry on Monday, April 10: "Npum (sic) has been cleaned up." On April 11 he upgraded his comments to: "Hard fight at Npum (sic). Cleaned out japs & hooked up.—good job." Amazingly faint praise indeed.

Though physically and emotionally depleted the Marauders rested, confident they had fulfilled their mission. The previous promises of 90 days of "dangerous and hazardous" combat duty followed by return to the United States were very much on the minds of most Marauders.

To a man they thought the time of their relief had come. So they were deeply disappointed and angry when word arrived that there would be no relief from combat, but rather they were to march on to Myitkyina. They correctly blamed Stilwell, and the hatred many of the Marauders held for him at war's end started then.

Their final challenge, Myitkyina, awaited them. It was a bloodbath. In their final mission against the Japanese base at Myitkyina, the Marauders suffered 272 killed, 955 wounded, and 980 evacuated for illness and disease.

By the time Myitkyina fell, only about 200 surviving members of the original 2,600 Marauders answered the roll call. On August 10, 1944, a week after the town was secured by U.S. and Chinese forces, the 5307th was disbanded, with only 130 weary combat-effective officers and men left.

Merrill's Marauders have gone down in history as an outstanding combat unit, but rarely has the price of fame and glory been so high. □

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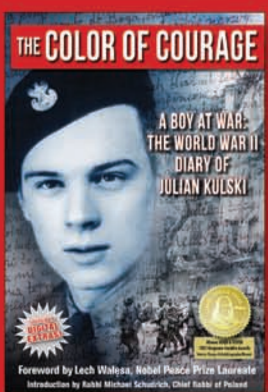

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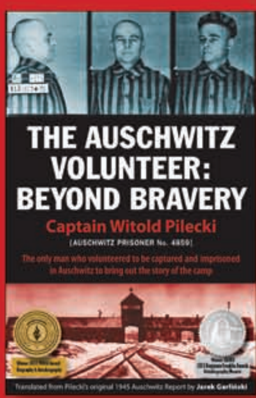

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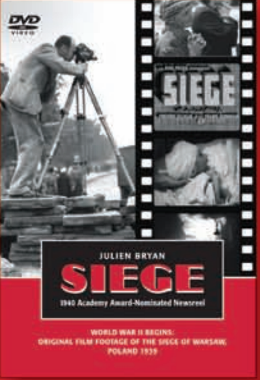

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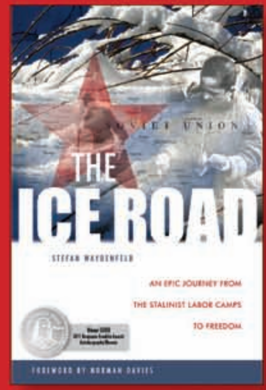

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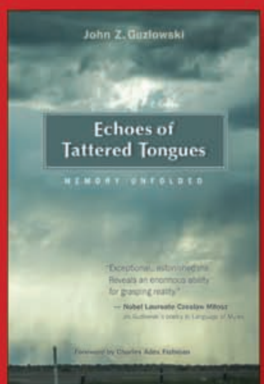

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