D-DAY: Fight for Omaha Beach

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WWII QUARTERLY

JOURNAL OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR

WWII QUARTERLY ▪ SUMMER 2018 Volume 9, No. 4

Bloody Battle for Sicily

Savage Struggle for Leningrad

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COVER: Men from the 18th Infantry Regiment, 1st Division, head in to Omaha Beach as D-Day begins. See story page 16. Photo: National Archives

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World War II in the news ... again

World War II-related items have continued to appear in the news over the last few months. In case you missed them, here are a few:

UXB Closes London Airport. An unexploded German bomb left over from WWII was found by construction crews in the Thames River in February, necessitating the temporary closure of nearby London City Airport while it was defused. More than 20,000 tons of explosives fell on the UK during the war, killing 40,000 people. At least 20 percent of the bombs are believed to have not exploded. In Britain, Germany, and wherever heavy bombing attacks took place, UXBs continue to be discovered.

Two UXBs Unearthed in Hong Kong. Two WWII-era 1,000-pound bombs were discovered in late January by construction crews in Hong Kong, forcing the evacuation of thousands of people from the area while demolition experts defused the munitions. The bombs were determined to be U.S.-made. The U.S. bombed the British Crown Colony in 1942 while it was under Japanese occupation.

Super Bowl Coin Toss. Seventy-three years after tossing grenades on Iwo Jima, Hershel Woodrow "Woody" Williams, 95, made another toss—the coin prior to Super Bowl LII at U.S. Bank Stadium in Minneapolis on February 4, 2018. The Marine veteran, a West Virginia native, earned the nation's highest honor on February 23, 1945, when he repeatedly risked his life to destroy several Japanese pillboxes with demolition charges and a flamethrower while being subjected to intense enemy fire. During the battle, 27 Medals of Honor were awarded—14 of them posthumously. Williams, who served with the 21st Marine Regiment, 3rd Marine Division, was one of 15 Medal of Honor recipients recognized in a ceremony before the Super Bowl coin toss. He is the only living Medal of Honor recipient from the Battle of Iwo Jima. The New England Patriots won the coin toss but lost the game to the Philadelphia Eagles.

American War Dog Awarded Dickin Medal. A U.S. Army dog that attacked a machine-gun nest during World War II was posthumously awarded Britain's highest honor for animal bravery on Monday, January 15, 2018. Chips, a German Shepherd-Husky mix, was awarded the Dickin Medal for actions during the 1943 Allied invasion of Sicily. According to American soldiers, Chips raced into an Italian machine-gun nest, attacked an enemy soldier and pulled the gun from its mount.

The medal was awarded in a ceremony by the British veterinary charity PDSA (People's Dispensary for Sick Animals). The honor was accepted by 76-year-old John Wren of Southold, New York, whose father donated Chips to the war effort in 1942. Chips was wounded in the battle but survived the war, returning to his owners in New York. He was recommended for the Distinguished Service Cross, Silver Star, and Purple Heart, but the awards were later rescinded because Army policy didn't allow animals to receive medals.

The Dickin Medal was awarded on the 75th anniversary of the Casablanca Conference, at which British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt discussed wartime strategy. Chips served as a sentry at the conference and met both leaders.

"It has taken over seven decades, but Chips can now finally take his place in the history books as one of the most heroic dogs to serve with the U.S. Army," PDSA director general Jan McLoughlin said.

Since 1943, the Dickin Medal has recognized gallantry by animals serving with the military, police, or rescue services. Recipients include 33 dogs, 32 messenger pigeons, four horses, and a cat.

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The V1 and V2 rockets and the Me-262 jet fighter were just the tip of Germany's scientific iceberg.

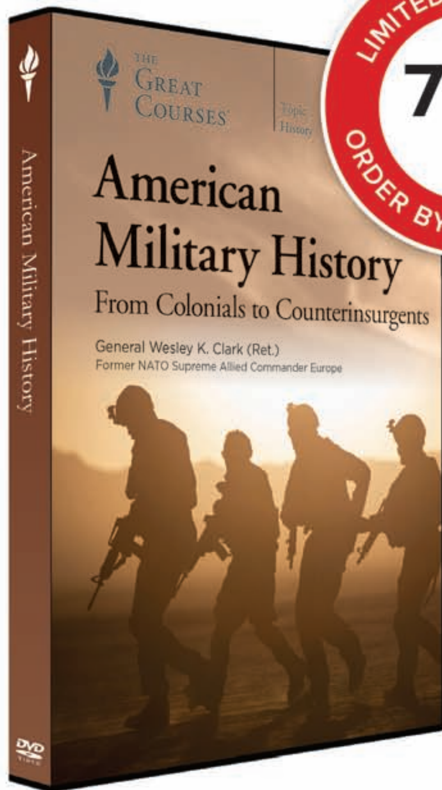
Imagine that you are an Allied soldier in the ETO. You are in your foxhole on the front line, looking and listening for any sign that the Germans are about to attack your position.

Then you see it—a small, funny-looking tracked vehicle heading your way. It looks like a toy—a miniature tank without a turret or a gun. "What the hell is this?" you ask yourself. You call out to your buddy in the foxhole next to you and direct his attention to this little interloper. You might even smile and laugh a little at the contraption. But the next minute your laughter is cut short when it explodes, killing you.

You have just been killed by what the Germans called the Leichter Ladungsträger Goliath—a remote-controlled tracked device packed with up to 220 pounds of explosive. Based on a French design, the Goliath was the product of the Carl F.W. Borgward automobile company of Bremen, Germany.

The vehicle was steered remotely by a joystick control box that was connected to the Goliath by a 2,130-foot-long, triple-strand cable attached to the rear of the vehicle, which was also used for transmitting power to the electric driven version (a later model was powered by a gasoline engine). Two of the strands were used to control

ABOVE: Curious German soldiers in Warsaw study a remote-controlled Goliath explosive vehicle. BELOW: The Me-262 was the world's first operational jet fighter. Here, ground crewmen prepare a camouflage net-shrouded Me-262 for takeoff at an unnamed German air base.



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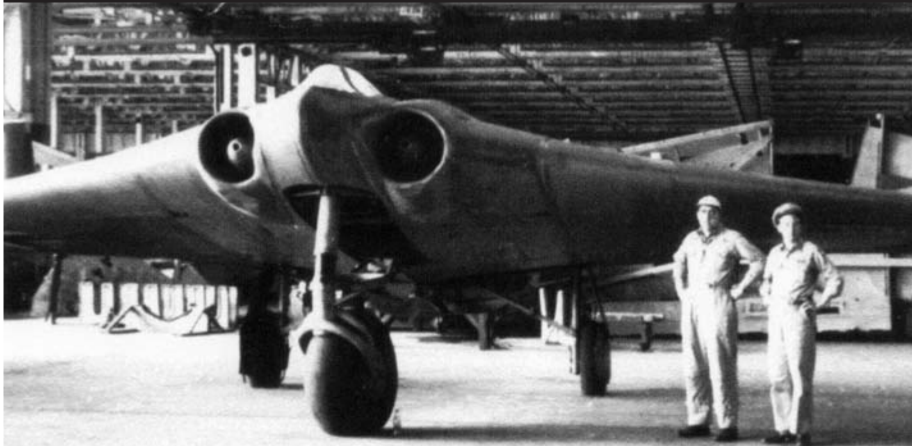
ABOVE: The exotic (and ultimately impractical) jet-powered Horten Ho-229 "flying wing" bomber takes a test flight over Germany, 1943. BELOW: Two U.S. Air Force airmen pose in front of an Ho-229 that was captured by the Americans at the end of the war.



BELOW: Luftwaffe test pilot Hans Fey defected to the Allies on March 31, 1945, when he flew this Messerschmitt Me-262 from Schwabisch-Hall to Frankfurt's Rhein Main airport.

the Goliath, while the third was used to detonate it.

The Goliath was just one of a host of unusual, exotic Wunderwaffe, or "Wonder Weapons," that Hitler's scientists and engineers devised before and during the course of World War II. In many respects Germany was far and away the most technologically advanced combatant nation, and her opponents worked hard to try and catch up; some never did.

Aircraft

One area in which Germany excelled was aircraft. The world's first true jet—the single-engine Heinkel He-178—took to the air in August 1939, one week before Germany invaded Poland. The German Air Ministry was not impressed by the prototype's performance, however, and the program was ended. This was followed by the He-280, which first flew in March 1941, but also never gained the Luftwaffe's acceptance; only nine He-280s were built before the contract was cancelled.

But it is probably the Messerschmitt Me-262 A-1a Schwalbe ("Swallow") that most people today regard as the world's first successful jet fighter. Small by the standards of today's fighters (length less than 35 feet, wingspan 41 feet), the Schwalbe had a range of 650 miles, a ceiling of 37,500 feet, and a maximum speed of 541 miles per hour. (In comparison, the North American P-51D Mustang powered by the Rolls-Royce Merlin engine had a range of 950 miles, a ceiling of 41,900 feet, and a top speed of 437 mph, Nearly 8,000 of the P-51D model were produced.)

Powered by two Junkers Jumo 004B-1 turbojet engines, the Schwalbe could zoom through American bomber formations, blasting the bombers with its four 30mm Mk 108 cannons and R4M rockets and departing before the pilots and aerial gunners knew what hit them.

But production problems plagued the Me-262 program. The scarcity of special high-temperature resistant alloys required by the engines was a major problem, as were the continual changes in design—and interference and changes in operational philosophy by German government and military officials who could not make up their minds as to whether the aircraft should be strictly a fighter or a fighter-bomber. A fighter bomber variant, the Me-262 A-2a Sturmvogel ("Stormbird"), was developed at Hitler's insistence.

The first Schwalbe prototype flew on April 18, 1941, with a nose-mounted piston engine powering a propeller. As both

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New Arthritis Painkiller Works on Contact and Numbs the Pain in Minutes

New cream works faster and is more targeted than oral medications. Key ingredients penetrate the skin within minutes to relieve joint arthritis pain. Users report significant immediate relief.

By Robert Ward
Associated Health Press

BOSTON – Innovus Pharmaceuticals has introduced a new arthritis pain relief treatment that works in minutes.

Sold under the brand name *Apeaz™*, the new pain relief cream numbs the nerves right below the skin.

When applied to an arthritic joint, or a painful area on the body, it delivers immediate relief that lasts for hours and hours.

The powerful painkilling effect is created by the creams active ingredients, three special medical compounds.

Anesthetics are used in hospitals during surgery. They block nerve signals from the brain so that patients don't feel pain and they work fast.

The anesthetic found in *Apeaz™* is the strongest available without a prescription.

The cream form allows users to directly target their area of pain. It works where it is applied. The company says this is why the product is so effective and fast acting.

"Users can expect to start feeling relief immediately after applying," explains Dr. Bassam Damaj, President of Innovus Pharmaceuticals.

"There will be a pleasant warming sensation that is followed by a cool, soothing one. This is how you know that the active ingredients have reached the affected joint and tissue."

Works In Minutes

For arthritis suffers, *Apeaz™* offers impressive advantages over traditional medications. The most obvious is how quickly it relieves pain discomfort.

The cream contains the maximum approved OTC dose of a top anesthetic, which penetrates the skin in a matter of minutes to numb the area that's in pain. This relief lasts for several hours.

Published pre-clinical animal studies have shown that the ingredients in *Apeaz™* can also prevent further bone and cartilage destruction.

There are also no negative side effects like from oral medication. *Apeaz™* delivers its ingredients through the skin. Oral medications are absorbed in the digestive tract. Overtime, the chemicals in pills can tear the delicate lining of the stomach, causing ulcers and bleeding.

When compared to other arthritis medications, *Apeaz™* is a fraction of the cost. At less than $2 a day, the cream quickly is becoming a household name.

Those with terrible arthritis in their hands and fingers, love how easy Apeaz™ is to open. The jar fits in the palm of the hand, which makes it much easier to use.

Instant Pain Relief Without a Prescription

Many *Apeaz™* users report significant improvements in daily aches and pain. Many more report increased flexibility and less stiffness. They are moving with less pain for the first time in years, like Henry Esber, an early user of *Apeaz™*.

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"This is why *Apeaz™* is so effective for people with arthritis pain. It reduces pain while adding an additional potential layer of joint support," explains Damaj.

A New Way to Treat Pain

Although Dr. Damaj and his team say that their cream is the fastest and most effective way to relieve arthritis pain, they believe there is still a reason to take joint pills. **The most effective are those which help to further lubricate, strengthen and support the joints.**

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Apeaz™: Quick Acting Pain and Arthritis Cream is Now Available Without a Prescription

ArthriVarx™ works on your joints, making it the perfect companion to *Apeaz™*.

"ArthriVarx™ contains special compounds published to lubricate the joints and connective tissues that surrounds them. With daily use, they improve joint health and can give an extra cushion," explains Dr. Damaj.

"When combined with *Apeaz™*, it becomes the perfect system to tackle arthritis. While the anesthetic component of *Apeaz™* is working on the outside, relieving pain on contact, ArthriVarx™ is working on the inside, adding cushioning to the joints"'

A Powerful Combination For Arthritis and Joint Pain

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A special phone hotline has been set up to take advantage of deep discounts during this ordering opportunity. The discounts will automatically be applied to all callers.

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ABOVE: Porsche's 68-ton "Elefant" tank destroyer, with 88mm gun, was powerful but mechanically unreliable. BELOW: The Panzer VIII "Maus" weighed in at 188 tons but never made it to the battlefield; the two prototypes were captured by the Soviets.

jet engines failed during the test, it was fortunate that the pilot had an alternate power source to bring the plane safely back to earth. It was not until July 18, 1942, that Prototype V3 flew and satisfied all the requirements placed upon the program. The test flight preceded the introduction of Britain's jet fighter, the Gloster Meteor, by nine months.

But the small number of trained jet pilots (a few hundred), fighters produced (1,400, with only less than 250 ever arriving at front-line squadrons due to shortages of pilots, jet fuel, and spare parts), and their limited flight time (about 60 minutes) made the jets' contribution to Germany's war effort less than the game-changer that Hitler hoped they would be. The Luftwaffe claimed 509 Allied aircraft downed at a cost of about 100 Me-262s—nearly half the planes sent up to stop the bombers.

After the war, the Allies, having captured hundreds of 262s, reverse engineered them and used many of the ideas in the development of the Lockheed P-80 Shooting Star, North American F-86 Sabre jet, and the Soviet MiG-15.

Other German aircraft that never got far beyond the drawing board were the Messerschmitt Me-329 Zerstorer heavy fighter; the Gotha Go P.60A day fighter/interceptor "flying wing;" the stubby, swept-wing, tailless Blohm und Voss Bv P.210 fighter bomber; the Focke-Wulf Triebflügel vertical takeoff and landing (VTOL) fighter, and the company's Ta 283 interceptor.

One exotic aircraft that was produced and made it to prototype stage was the Horten Ho-229 "flying wing" fighter-bomber. The Ho-229 was a response to Luftwaffe chief Hermann Göring's call for a light, jet-powered bomber capable of carrying a payload of 2,200 tons. Only 20 of this radical plane were ever made—and a model under restoration can be seen today at the Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center in Chantilly, Virginia.

Another aircraft at the same museum is the only surviving two-engine Arado Ar-234 B-2 "Blitz"—the world's first jet-powered bomber—built in 1944.

Tanks

Germany arguably had the best armored fighting vehicles of World War II. The Panther tank, once it overcame its mechanical difficulties, was tough for American Shermans, British Churchills, and Soviet T-34s to beat on the battlefield. The 57-ton Tiger I tank (of which there were several models) was also a formidable opponent.

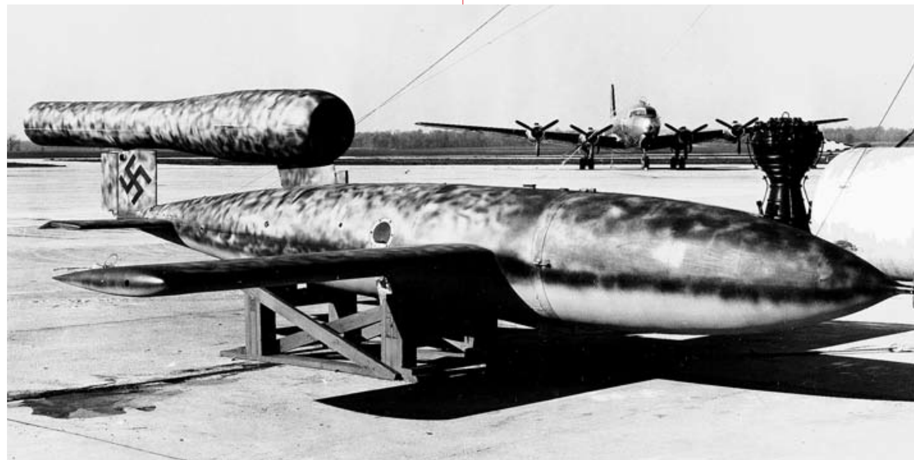
But instead of making more of the Tigers, the Germans went on to waste time and energy in designing a wide variety of tanks, tank killers, and self-propelled artillery that often were never produced. One example was the 188-ton Panzer VIII Maus, of which only two were built; both were captured by the Soviets.

Continuing to think that bigger would be better, the Germans went on to develop several super-heavy machines, such as the King Tiger (72.8 tons) and the 68-ton Porsche-created "Ferdinand" (later renamed "Elefant") tank destroyer in 1943 with a powerful 88mm antitank gun. Three other tank destroyers—the "Rhinoceros" (12 tons), Jagdpanzer IV (27.6 tons), and Jagdtiger (35 tons), were mechanically unreliable, not to mention being manufactured in too few numbers. The StuG III was an excellent but heavy (26.8 tons) assault gun. The Sturmmorser 38 Self-Propelled Rocket Launcher weighed in at 72.8 tons. The largest class of self-propelled guns were the "Karls" (123 tons).

Several vehicles never made it from the drawing board to the battlefield. These included the Landkreuzer P.1000 "Ratte"

(1,000 tons) and Landkreuzer P.1500 "Monster" (1,500 tons).

The Germans discovered, however, that the enormous weight of all these vehicles put a tremendous strain on the engines, transmissions, and suspension systems—not to mention their unquenchable thirst for increasingly scarce fuel—causing fatal breakdowns in combat. Often too heavy to move long distances under their own power, these behemoths had to be transported on reinforced railcars—and were thus at the mercy of Allied air power.



Nicknamed the "buzz bomb" and "doodlebug," the V1 flying bomb had a jet-pulse engine. Thousands were employed against Britain, causing many casualties.

Missilery

The Germans were experimenting with other types of airborne weapons, specifically the V1 and V2 rockets. The V1 flying bomb—whose official name was the Fieseler FZG-76 Vergeltungswaffe 1 (Vengeance Weapon 1) but was nicknamed the "buzz bomb" and "doodlebug" by the Allies and the Kirschkern (Cherrystone) or Maikäfer (Maybug) by the Germans—was developed in 1941 by Robert Lisserr.

Relying on a liquid-fueled, pulse-jet engine, thousands of 29-foot-long V1s, carrying 2,000 pounds of explosives, were launched against southern England beginning on June 12, 1943, from sites in northern Europe. There were an average of 190 launches per day, or more than 10,000 in total.

Although the missile traveled at a maximum speed of 340-400 mph, it was relatively vulnerable to antiaircraft fire and could also be intercepted and shot down by British Spitfires. Another anti-V1 technique was devised—flying alongside the V1 and flipping it over with a wingtip.

A far more formidable weapon against which there was no defense was the V2 (Vergeltungswaffe 2, or Vengeance Weapon 2), which was the brainchild of Wernher von Braun. The V2 production took place at a secret laboratory in Peenemünde until an air raid by the Royal Air

One Bomber, Ten Men, and Their Harrowing Escape from Nazi-Occupied France

COFFIN CORNER BOYS

CAROLE ENGLE AVRIETT
with CAPT. GEORGE W. STARKS
WWII B-17 Pilot, The Mighty Eighth
Foreword by LT. GEN. E.G. "BUCK" SHULER, JR.
Former Commander Eighth Air Force

THEY SURVIVED AGAINST ALL ODDS

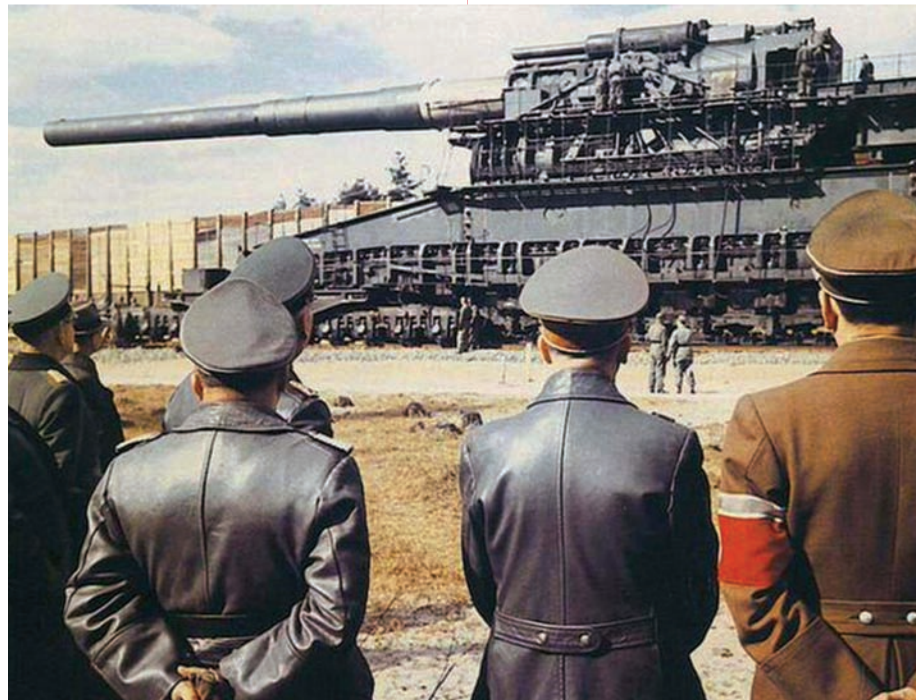
March 16, 1944. 20-year-old George Starks is shot down over Nazi-occupied France. He's injured and alone, separated from the nine other "Coffin Corner Boys" who were also shot down. The Swiss border is 300 miles away.

Now, 74 years later, WWII veteran George Starks tells the incredible true story of the Coffin Corner Boys' miraculous escape from Nazi France.

Now available at Amazon, Barnes and Noble, and everywhere else books are sold.

REGNERY HISTORY
www.RegneryHistory.com

A formidable V2 ballistic missile on display at the Peenemünde Historical Technical Museum. Slave laborers from concentration camps were used to build the weapons.



Hitler (second from right) views the huge "Heavy Gustav" railway gun in 1942. The seven-ton projectile could be fired a maximum distance of 51,000 yards (30 miles) in 1942. It was first used in the siege of Sevastopol.

Force destroyed most of it on August 17-18, 1943 (Operation Hydra). Production was switched to a factory inside a mountain near Nordhausen; both plants used thousands of concentration camp prisoners as workers.

Beginning in September 1944, the Germans sent over 1,760 V2s toward a variety of targets. Although wildly inaccurate, the V1s and V2s were effective at terrorizing the civilian populations in cities such as Antwerp (against which nearly 12,000 V1s were fired), Belgium, and London.

After the war, the United States and the Soviet Union scooped up as many German rocket scientists as they could find in order to begin developing their own ballistic missile and space programs. Despite his less-than-honorable past (i.e., the use of slave laborers in the V2 factories where thousands died), von Braun was brought to the United States and headed government programs to create missile systems. He was also the driving force behind the American space program that put a man on the moon in 1969.

Long-Range Artillery

During World War I, the Germans were preeminent in the development of especially powerful pieces of artillery. The first was dubbed "Big Bertha" (in German, Dicke Bertha, or "Fat Bertha")—a 420mm (16.5 inch) Krupp-manufactured howitzer capable of firing a 1,785-pound shell designed to penetrate the thick concrete of French and Belgian forts. The gun and its carriage weighed about 47 tons and were serviced by a crew of 240 men. An even larger gun, with a caliber of 520mm, was also developed.

The other weapons were known as the Paris Guns, with their 112-foot-long barrels. While the Big Berthas had a range of only six miles, the 240mm Paris Guns, also built by Krupp and transported on railroad carriages, could fire a shell a then-unheard-of distance of 75 miles. Both the Big Berthas and the Paris Guns were extremely successful in fulfilling their roles.

When World War II broke out, the Germans again looked to large-caliber, long-range artillery pieces. Two 11-inch K5 railroad guns dubbed "Anzio Annie" and the "Anzio Express" by the Allies (and "Robert" and "Leopold" by the Germans) were hauled to Italy and used to bombard Allied forces pinned down on the Anzio beachhead from January to May 1944. Similar guns were emplaced in France along the English Channel to shell southern England.

The Germans also installed at a secret location at Mimoyecques along the upper Normandy coast near the Pas de Calais a Krupp "super gun" called the V3 cannon or London Gun. Its purpose was to shell London and its environs with 300 shells per hour. It operated on a multi-charge principle whereby, once the 310-pound shell was fired, a series of solid-fuel secondary propellant charges placed in symmetrical pairs along its 300-foot-long barrel would give it an extra boost to achieve a range of just over 100 miles. Construction began in September 1943.

Built inside a hill with miles of support tunnels, the London Gun—fortunately for the British—never became operational; on July 6, 1944, Lancaster bombers of RAF 617 Squadron, the famous "Dambusters," knocked it out using 12,000-pound "Tallboy" deep-penetration bombs.

Some sources say that the U.S. Navy also got in on the act in August and decided to hit the site with a drone version of the B-24 Liberator bomber loaded with 21,170

pounds of Torpex explosives. One of the two pilots aboard the B-24 was Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr.—the son of the former U.S. ambassador to Britain and the older brother of future President John F. Kennedy. The plan was for the American airmen to take off in the bomber and then bail out; it would then be remotely guided to its target by a following plane.

But a malfunction occurred shortly after takeoff and the plane exploded over Blythburgh, England, killing both Kennedy and the other pilot, Wilford J. Willy. Other sources say that the target was either a V2 launching site or U-boat pens at Heligoland in the North Sea.

Today tours are offered at the Mimoyecques site.

Two other V3s were installed at Hermeskeil-Lampaden, near Trier, Germany, in order to bombard Luxembourg City—27 miles away—which had been liberated by the Allies in September 1944. A total of 190 rounds were fired before the site was abandoned on February 22, 1945, as U.S. Army units closed in.

American and British soldiers and scientists work to dismantle an experimental German nuclear pile at Haigerloch, 30 miles southwest of Stuttgart, April 1945.

Atomic Bomb

No doubt the most formidable of all the German wonder weapon projects would have been an atomic bomb.

In January 1939, two German chemists, Otto Hahn and Fritz Strassmann, published the results of their experiment in which they were able to split the uranium nucleus—a feat that touched off a frenzy of scientific work on fission around the world. That autumn, the German "uranium project" was given the green light by Hitler's regime.

German Army Ordnance then established a research program led by physicist Kurt Diebner to investigate the possible military applications of fission. By the end of 1939, physicist Werner Heisenberg determined that achieving a nuclear fission chain reaction was possible. According to one historian, "When slowed down and controlled in a 'uranium machine' (nuclear reactor), these chain reactions could generate energy; when uncontrolled, they would be a 'nuclear explosive' many times more powerful than conventional explosives."

Heisenberg and a colleague, Carl Friedrich Weizsäcker, began using rare uranium 235 as an explosive. After reading various international scientific journals, the two concluded that, if a nuclear reactor could sustain a chain reaction, some of the more common uranium 238 would be converted into "element 94," or plutonium. Work went ahead in developing the complex techniques required to create the amount of fissionable material needed to create a weapon.

One of the components the scientists focused on was "heavy water" (deuterium oxide), which was then being manufactured by the Norsk Hydro plant in Nazi-occupied Norway. When the American and British Allies (who were already well along in their own joint program to build a nuclear weapon) learned what the Germans were up to, they employed Norwegian resistance members to sabotage the Norsk Hydro plant. Their heroic efforts were dramatized in the 1965 Hollywood film, *The Heroes of Telemark*.

The German a-bomb project failed for several reasons. One, the Nazi government, under increasing pressure from the Allied aerial bombing program and losses on the battlefield, could not devote the tremendous financial resources necessary to build a practical bomb.

Two, many of the top physicists—such as Albert Einstein, Edward Teller, Otto R. Frisch, Hans Bethe, Rudolf E. Peierls, John von Neumann, and the turncoat Klaus Fuchs—escaped from Germany, Austria, and other Eastern European countries in the 1930s and took their knowledge to the U.S., thus giving a boost to the American and British atomic bomb program known as the Manhattan Project.

And, three, men such as Heisenberg and his colleagues may have realized the awesome destructive potential of the project on which they were working and made a conscious (or unconscious) decision to not put their maximum effort into helping their homeland win the war.

Although Nazi Germany was far ahead of the U.S., Britain, and the Soviet Union in terms of creating technologically advanced weapons of war, in the end those weapons failed to give Hitler the edge he needed to defeat his enemies.

Perhaps, given more time, the Nazis could have prevailed. But, thankfully for civilization, that is a "what if" that has no answer. □

THE BATTLE FOR Easy Red & Fox Green

Amid bullets and shells, blood and death, the men of the 1st Infantry Division helped turn the tide at Normandy.

BY FLINT WHITLOCK

National Archives

Forming the very tip of the Allied spearhead that thrust onto the heavily fortified Omaha beachhead at Normandy was the U.S. 1st Infantry Division's 16th Infantry Regiment. On D-day, the men proved that, when everything began to go terribly wrong, there was no substitute for the courage of the individual combat soldier.

It seemed almost too much to ask of a mortal man.

In addition to his weapon, ammunition, grenades, rations, and 50 pounds of equipment, each man carried a small flyer signed by the Supreme Commander reiterating the importance of his mission: "You are about to embark upon the Great Crusade, toward which we have striven these many months. The eyes of the world are upon you. The hopes and prayers of liberty-loving people everywhere march with you."

A pitiful, ragged line of tiny landing craft, each crammed to the gunwales with some 30 to 40 seasick, shivering, soaking-wet soldiers, was heading toward one of the most heavily defended coastlines on earth.

They were riding into hell, their mission to crack Hitler's vaunted "Atlantic Wall," reputed to be impenetrable, along the northern coast of France. Nazi Germany had held a tight grip on the Continent ever since France fell in June 1940, and the British Expeditionary Force subsequently was pushed into the English Channel at the French port of Dunkirk. It was June 6, 1944, and it was payback time.

The troops in this first wave, known as Force O, were the 16th Infantry Regimental Combat Team of Maj. Gen. Clarence R. Huebner's 1st Infantry Division—the Big Red One—which had already seen plenty of combat in North Africa and on Sicily. Attached to the 1st for most of the first day of this operation, known as "Overlord," was the 116th Infantry Regimental Combat Team of Maj. Gen. Charles Gerhardt's 29th Infantry Division—a well-trained division that had not yet experienced combat. The 16th, com-

National Archives

manded by Colonel George A. Taylor, was scheduled to land on "Easy Red" and "Fox Green" beaches, two sections of a five-mile-long beachhead code-named "Omaha"; the 116th's assigned sectors, just to the west of the 16th's, were designated "Dog Green," "Dog White," and "Dog Red."

Four attack transports—the USS *Samuel Chase*, USS *Henrico*, USS *Dorothea M. Dix,* and HMS *Empire Anvil*—had carried the 1st Infantry Division to a rendezvous point (dubbed "Piccadilly Circus") in the middle of the English Channel. From there the assault troops transferred into smaller landing craft for the long run into shore. Companies E and F of the 16th Regiment's 2nd Battalion were scheduled to hit Easy Red Beach a minute after the 32 amphibious Sherman tanks from A Company, 741st Tank Battalion reached shore at H-hour, 0630 hours. At the same moment, on Fox Green, the easternmost sector of Omaha Beach, Companies I and L would swarm ashore. The troops on Easy Red would be reinforced a half-hour later by the arrival of Companies G and H, while Fox Green would be backed up by Companies K and M. About an hour later, Lt. Col. Herbert C. Hicks, Jr.'s2 2nd Battalion would hit the shore, followed by the four companies of Lt. Col. Edmund F. Driscoll's 1st Battalion and the guns of Lt. Col. George W. Gibbs' 7th Field Artillery Battalion. Next would come Force B, Colonel George A. Smith, Jr.'s 18th Infantry Regiment and the attached 115th RCT from the 29th. In the early afternoon, Colonel John F.R. Seitz's 26th Infantry Regiment would come ashore at Easy Red and Fox Green. That was the precisely timed, well-rehearsed plan but, as anyone who has ever been in combat will testify, the battle rarely sticks to the script.

In the predawn darkness aboard HMS *Empire Anvil*, 21-year-old Private Steve Kellman, a rifleman in L Company, 16th Infantry, felt the crushing weight of the moment: "In the hours before the invasion, while we were below decks, a buddy of mine, Bill Lanaghan—he was as young as I was—said to me, 'Steve, I'm scared.' And I said, 'I'm scared, too.'"

ABOVE: To stop any Allied invasion at the water's edge, the Germans constructed hundreds of concrete bunkers, pillboxes, and fighting positions along the Normandy coast. Here, a German sentry looks for any sign of the invasion. OPPOSITE: The Omaha Beach sectors. Although carefully planned, the landings were a confused affair; strong currents and navigational errors created problems for the 1st and 29th Infantry Divisions, but the men of the Big Red One managed to push inland by early afternoon.

Then, at about 3 or 3:30 that morning, an officer gave the order and Kellman and Lanaghan and the nearly 200 men in L Company began to climb awkwardly over the gunwales of their transport and descend the unsteady "scramble nets," just as they had done in training so many times before. "The nets were flapping against the side of the vessel, and the little landing craft were bouncing up and down," said Kellman. "It was critical that you tried to get into the landing craft when it was on the rise because there was a gap—the nets didn't quite reach and you had to jump down. That was something we hadn't practiced before. We had practiced going down the nets, but the sea was calm. This was a whole new experience."

Staff Sergeant Harley A. Reynolds was on USS *Samuel Chase* with the rest of B Company, 16th Infantry. "When it came time to load into assault boats," he noted, "we had to climb down cargo nets and drop into the boat. The water was rough from a storm; some men were injured when they dropped in.... We left the *Chase* for the last time and went in single file to our rendezvous area, following the little light on the stern of the craft ahead of us. The light would disappear, then reappear as we rose and fell with the waves. I thought several times we would crash into the craft ahead as we came up on them and would have to back off. I could see the trail of phosphorus the craft was leaving behind and I thought that the Germans must be able to see it, too, and pinpoint us...."

The heavy-set, bearded Ernest Hemingway, writing an article on the invasion for *Collier's* magazine, was in an LCVP with members of a company of the 16th Infantry. He wrote, "As the boat rose to a sea, the green water turned white and came slamming in over the men, the guns, and the cases of explosives. Ahead you could see the coast of France. The gray booms and derrick-forested bulks of the attack transports were behind now, and, over all the sea, boats were crawling forward toward France. As the LCVP rose to the crest of a wave, you saw the line of low, silhouetted cruisers and

the two big battlewagons [the battleships *Texas* and *Arkansas*] lying broadside to the shore. You saw the heat-bright flashes of their guns and the brown smoke that pushed out against the wind and then blew away."

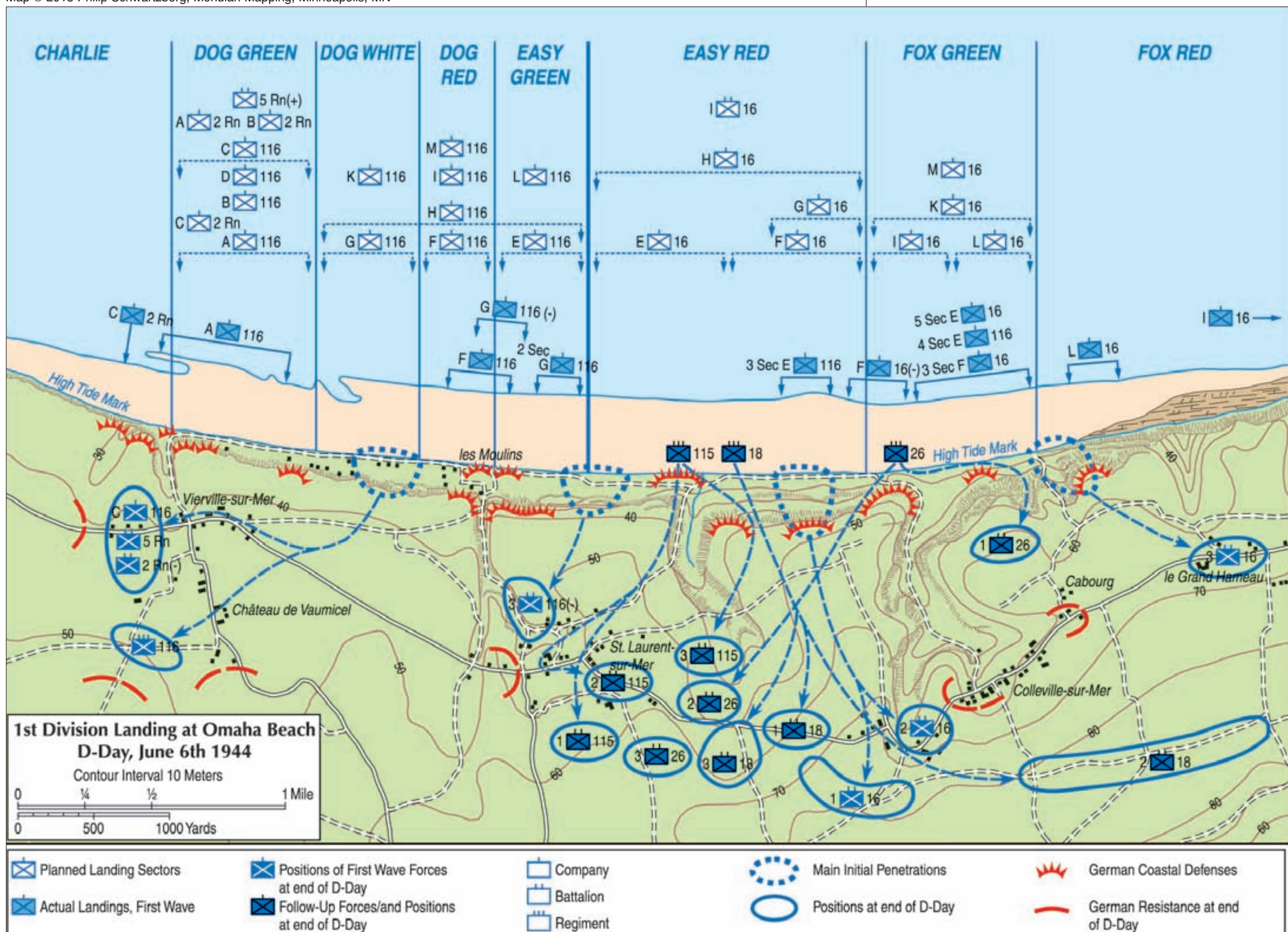
"We circled in our landing craft for what seemed like an eternity," recalled Kellman. "The battleships opened up, and the bombers were going over. Every once in a while, I looked over the side, and I could see the smoke and the fire, and I thought to myself, 'We're pounding the hell out of them and there isn't going to be much opposition.' As we got in closer, we passed some yellow life rafts and I had the impression that they must have been from a plane that went down, or maybe they were from the amphibious tanks that might have sunk; I don't know. These guys were floating in these rafts and, as we went by, they gave us the 'thumbs up' sign. We thought, '*they* don't seem very worried—what the hell do *we* have to be worried about?' But, as we got in closer, we could hear the machine-gun bullets hitting the sides of the vessel and the ramp in front."

"While in training, we were told of all the things that would be done in order," recalled Harley Reynolds. "But to see it all come together was mind-boggling. The size of it all was stunning. We were trained to keep our heads down until time to unload but, … I felt it better to know what was going on around us. I looked over and ahead many times and what I saw was terrifying."

What Reynolds saw was a heavily fortified, enemy-held beachhead that had barely been touched by Allied bombs and shells. The tremendous air and naval bombardment ("drenching fire," the Allied planners had called it) that the troops had been assured of in their briefings and rehearsals would blow gaps in the minefields and beach obstacles, turn the pillboxes and casemates into dust, and annihilate the defenders who were thought to be only low-grade troops unfit for duty on more active fronts had not materialized.

The bombers, flying above low overcast, had released their bombs too far inland, causing casualties only among Norman cows. The Navy, fearful of hitting the disembarking infantry, also overshot the target. Underwater demolition experts had gone in early to blow gaps in the obstacles and mark safe paths to the beach, but most of them were either dead, wounded, or had lost all their specialized equipment in the rough surf. All but five of the 32 amphibious Sherman tanks, which were supposed to have reached Easy Red and Fox Green before the infantry, had sunk, carrying

Map © 2018 Philip Schwartzberg, Meridian Mapping, Minneapolis, MN



their crewmen to their deaths. Even specially fitted landing craft carrying an arsenal of rockets close to shore missed everything. There was not so much as a single bomb crater on the beach in which to hide, and the German gunners were all alert and zeroed in on the narrow strip of beach. The largest and most carefully planned and rehearsed invasion in the history of warfare was on the verge of disaster—and the troops had not even reached land.

Even if a hot reception awaited them, the men in the small landing craft known as LCVPs or Higgins boats could not wait to reach the shore. Most of the men had been unable to sleep all night, June 5-6, 1944, thanks to preinvasion jitters. The troops in the first wave had eaten breakfast shortly after midnight, then were loaded from their transports in the middle of the English Channel into the pitching craft. The last vestiges of a storm that had delayed the invasion by a day were still passing through the assembly area, and the sea was extremely rough. The run-in to shore was a long one; it would take most of the boats three to four hours. Those three to four hours were unremitting misery to the troops on whom the success of the greatest amphibious assault ever mounted depended. Not only were the little boats rocked up and down on the big waves, but they were also pitched side to side. It was, one of the men commented, "like being trapped on a never-ending roller-coaster ride." Another described it as "like being inside a washing machine."

The heavily laden men tried to maintain their balance on the slick decks, only to be thrown into the men in front, back, or on either side of them. Great waves came out of the predawn darkness and smashed into the flat bows of the boats, sending cascades of icy sea water onto the helpless soldiers, who were now wading in their own vomit as well as that of their comrades. "We had been issued a puke bag for seasickness but, as it turned out, one wasn't enough," remembered Pfc. Roger Brugger, K Company, 16th Infantry. "After the LCVPs were lowered, we kept going around in circles, rendezvousing. By this time, everyone in the boat had used their bag and were throwing up on the deck of the boat."

For many of the men in the rocking, bouncing, jolting boats, seasickness overrode their fear of death or injury. Signal Corps cinematographer Walter Halloran recalled, "I don't think that fear was a recognizable element. We were so seasick, our only thought was, 'We've got to get off this boat.'"

"It was literally a choice between the devil and the deep blue sea," said one 1st Engineer Combat Battalion officer. "We all agreed we'd rather face the devil."

The Germans had done an outstanding job of fortifying the northern coast of France from enemy attack. From Cherbourg to Calais, the entire coastline was a gigantic steel-and-concrete nightmare for the attackers. Virtually every foot of ground was covered by direct- and indirect-fire weapons—rifles, machine guns, mortars, 105mm guns, and the dreaded 88s. Likely invasion beaches were studded with underwater and beach obstacles designed to rip the bellies out of landing craft or blow them to bits with mines.

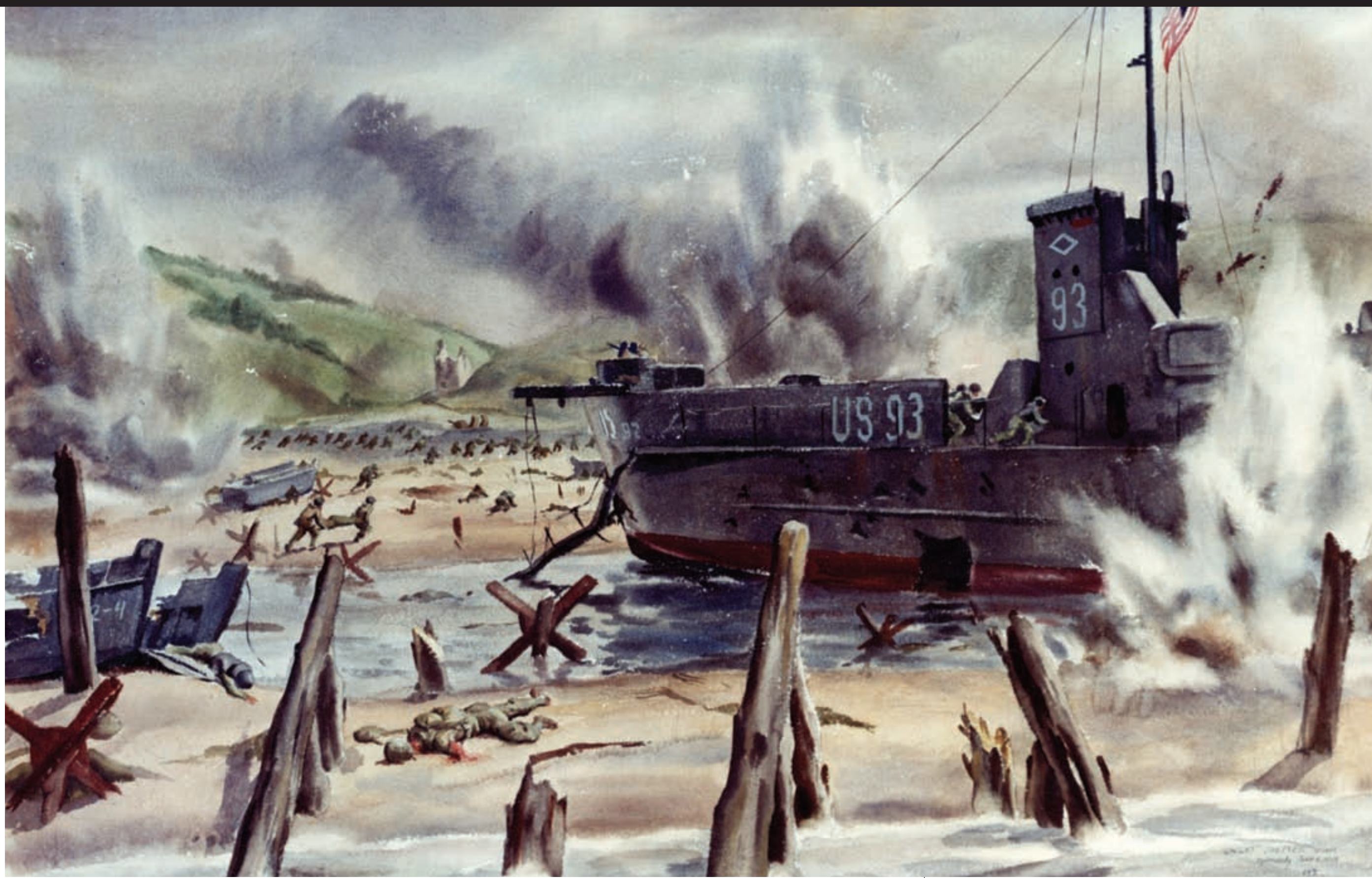
Mines, too, were profligate under the beach sands and backed by thickets of barbed wire. Beyond the wire were concrete foxholes, elaborate trench systems, and concrete bunkers and gun emplacements sited to scythe down any invaders with enfilading crossfire. And all that was before the tall bluffs that rose above the beachhead and had their own interconnected series of defensive positions and strongpoints. The entire enterprise was under one of Germany's most able commanders, Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, who, above almost everyone else in the German High Command, was a genius at waging successful war even when outnumbered.

On January 15, 1944, Rommel had become commander of Army Group B, whose area of responsibility included the coast of northern France. In this role, he was also commander of the 7th and 15th Armies, but with severe limitations on his operational capabilities. Rommel had been working the troops to exhaustion for five months to improve on Hitler's Atlantic Wall—including the installation of over four million mines between Cherbourg and Calais—for he sensed the great invasion was imminent. Despite the improvements, Rommel feared it would not be enough.

While the physical aspect of the defense was impressive, the manpower was lacking. Many of Germany's finest soldiers were no longer available for the defense of the Reich; they had been killed or maimed during nearly five years of fighting at such places as El Alamein, Sicily, Monte Cassino, Crete, Leningrad, Stalingrad, and a thousand other battlefields. With the Soviets pressing the Germans hard on the Eastern Front, what was left to defend Normandy were a few understrength, over-age, static regiments and battalions with only bicycles and horses for transport. Unknown to most of the Allied planners, a reconstituted motorized infantry division, the 352nd, had been brought up to reinforce the thinly spread 716th Coastal Defense Division in the Omaha Beach area. Marginally better manned and equipped than the 716th, the 352nd, recently mauled on the Eastern Front, was not considered a first-class fighting force; still it gave the Germans 10,000 more men at Normandy than the Allies thought were there.

Only the panzer divisions could be considered a real threat to the invasion, and these were kept well back from the coast by 67-year-old Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt, Commander-in-Chief, West, to prevent their being destroyed by Allied air superiority. Worse, Rommel did not have operational control of these panzer units; they could only be released for action upon personal authorization of Adolf Hitler, and Hitler was convinced the real invasion would come at Calais, not at Normandy. To compound the problems of the German units in Normandy, many of their commanders were absent from their posts on the crucial night of June 5-6, away at a map exercise in Rennes, 90 miles to the southwest or, in Rommel's case, off in Germany to plead directly with Hitler for more authority to conduct the defense of the coast in the manner he saw fit, and to visit his wife on her 50th birthday.

The first wave of landing craft—transporting the 2nd Battalion of the 16th Infantry



The chaos, carnage, and confusion at Omaha Beach were captured by Navy combat artist Dwight Shepler. General Omar Bradley feared that the landings would fail and survivors would have to be evacuated.

Regiment—somehow managed to slip through most of the falling shells and sea obstacles to deposit the men close to shore, but the initial landing at Easy Red Beach was anything but easy. Because of a strong west-to-east current, nearly every boat was landed a half-mile or more east of where it was supposed to be. Men who had been carefully trained for months to recognize landmarks on shore now had no idea where they were. Officers and NCOs leading their men out of the boats were among the first hit; units were scrambled, cut off, lost. Leaderless, and being subjected to a tremendous pounding, the seasick, shaken survivors waded ashore and headed for a thin strip of small, rounded rocks, known as "shingle," at the high-tide mark and huddled together, waiting to die.

On Fox Green Beach, things were as bad as on Easy Red. Five boat sections of F Company, 16th Infantry were scattered across a thousand yards of sand. Two sections of the company did manage to land close together in front of enemy positions, but were decimated by machine guns and mortars as they departed from their LCVPs. Six officers and half of the company became casualties in a matter of minutes. The remaining boat section of E Company, 16th Infantry reached the shore where water and sand were spouting in an endless flurry of artillery and mortar explosions.

Four boat sections of E Company, 116th Infantry also drifted into the area and experienced the same, terrible greeting. Men discarded their equipment in the water and scrambled for the safety of the shore, but it was no better than the sea. Minefields and machine guns were in front of the invaders, and a steadily encroaching tide was behind them. All around was death, destruction, carnage, and chaos. Among those who had somehow made it to the beach, there was a very real sense that no one was going to come out of this debacle alive.

Captain Ed Wozenski, commanding E Company, 16th Infantry, one of the first elements to land on Omaha Beach, recalled his unit's experiences: "MG [machine-gun] fire was rattling against the ramp as the boat grounded. For some reason, the ramp was not latched during any part of our trip, but the ramp would not go down. Four or five men battered at the ramp until it fell, and the men with it. The boats were hurriedly emptied—the men jumping into water shoulder deep, under intense MG and AT [antitank] fire. No sooner was the last man out than the boat received two direct hits from an AT gun, and was believed to have burned and blown up.

"Now all the men in the company could be seen wading ashore into the field of intense fire from the MGs, rifles, AT guns, and mortars. Due to the heavy sea, the strong cross current, and the loads that the men were carrying, no one could run. It was just a slow, methodical march with absolutely no cover up to the enemy's commanding positions. Many fell left and

right, and the water reddened with their blood. A few men hit underwater mines of some sort and were blown out of the sea. The others staggered onto the obstacle-covered, yet completely exposed, beach. Here men, in sheer exhaustion, hit the beach only to rise and move forward through a tide runlet that threatened to sweep them off their feet. Men were falling on all sides, but the survivors still moved forward and eventually worked up to a pile of shale at the high-water mark. This offered momentary protection against the murderous fire of the close-in enemy guns, but his mortars were still raising hell."

Captain Joe Dawson's G Company, 16th Infantry approached Easy Red at about 0700. "When we landed, it was total chaos, because the first wave from … E Company and F Company had been virtually decimated. That was due to circumstances over which they had no control. In the first place, they were badly disorganized when they landed, whereas I was privileged to land intact with all of my men and my LCVP in the very point that I was supposed to land in…. I was the first man off my boat, or off of *all* our boats, followed by my communications sergeant and my company clerk. Unfortunately, my boat was hit with a direct hit, so the rest of my headquarters company was wiped out, as well as the [fire] control officer from the Navy, which was our communication, to give us support fire that was supposed to [neutralize] the village of Colleville, which was the objective that I was given…."

The situation was no better on the 116th Infantry's portion of Omaha Beach. In fact, it was, if anything, even worse. On Dog Green Beach, A Company of the 116th Infantry was being systematically slaughtered even before it reached shore. One LCA took four direct hits and blew apart. Men coming off LCVPs were torn to bits; others, leaping over the gunwales of their landing craft, were pulled under water by the weight of their packs and equipment, and drowned. Every officer in A Company, and most of the NCOs, became casualties. A small, 64-man company of Rangers, following A Company, was similarly decimated. They lost half their men; A Company lost two-thirds. And they had yet to fire a shot.

Farther west, Rangers (also attached to the 1st Division) were attempting to climb the sheer cliffs to get at the casemated battery of 155mm guns at Pointe du Hoc and were taking heavy casualties in the process. The Rangers would soon discover that the guns had been removed farther inland. However, they accomplished their mission and destroyed the guns.

Some of the soldiers could not handle the horror of the beachhead. One young 16th RCT soldier barely survived a near-miss from a German shell. "When that shell burst," he recalled, "I guess I panicked. I started crying. There was a ship to our right that had [run aground], and my buddies got me behind that ship, where I cried for what seemed like hours. I cried until tears would no longer come. Suddenly, I felt something. I can't explain it, but a feeling went through my body and I stopped crying and came to my senses." The soldier picked up his rifle and got back in the war.

At Easy Red and Fox Green, the leading companies of the 16th RCT were trapped on the beach. The only way to break out of the trap was for one man, or several, to risk their lives by crawling forward, armed with little more than wire cutters or Bangalore torpedoes—20-pound tubes packed with explosives—and expose themselves to enemy fire while they attempted to cut through the wire. Several brave men tried it; all were

National Archives

ABOVE: The desperation of the landings is evident in this famous, blurry photograph taken by Robert Capa. The soldier struggling in the surf is believed to be Pfc. Huston S. Riley, Company F, 16th RCT, 1st Infantry Division. OPPOSITE: After the beachhead was secured, an aerial reconnaissance plane took this image of Omaha Beach with thousands of men and scores of amphibious DUKWs delivering supplies to the invaders.

killed. Despite witnessing the suicidal nature of the mission, another soldier, Sergeant Phillip Streczyk of Wozenski's E Company, attempted the impossible. With practically every German weapon within range zeroing in on him, Streczyk made a mad dash for the wire through a hail of bullets, snipped it, then waved for the rest of the troops to follow him.

Although E Company had taken a tremendous pounding, one of its surviving platoon commanders, Lieutenant John N. Spaulding, a Kentuckian, gathered what few men he could find. Faced with furious rifle, machine-gun, mortar, and artillery fire, and confronted by profuse minefields, Spaulding set off through the slim gap made by Streczyk in an attempt to crack the enemy positions to the east of a heavily defended exit off the beach designated "E-1." It was a pitiful, foolhardy attempt, a handful of sick, soaked, and scared soldiers throwing themselves at one of the most heavily defended places on earth. There was no way it could succeed. But somehow, incredibly, it did.

With Dawson's Company G providing covering fire, Spaulding and his men crept forward, leaving a path of death and destruction in their wake. As the regimental report said, "Of the 183 men [in E Company] that landed, 100 were dead, wounded, or missing." But the survivors, led by Spaulding, "reduced the strongpoint at [map coordinates] 678897, consisting of an anti-aircraft gun, four concrete shelters, two pillboxes, five machine guns, pillbox by pillbox to wipe out the strongpoint covering the east side of Exit E-1. Extremely stubborn resistance was encountered in this strongpoint with its maze of underground shelter trenches and dugouts. A close exchange of hand grenades and small-arms fire ensued until the 1st Platoon cornered approximately twenty Germans and an officer who, overpowered, surrendered…."

Now it was Dawson's turn to move out. "I felt the obligation to lead my men off, because the only way they were going to get off was to follow me; they wouldn't get off by themselves … We dropped over [the shingle] and got into this minefield. There was a body of a boy who had found the minefield and unfortunately also found the mine and destroyed himself, but he pointed the way for us to go across him, which we did. Sergeant Cleff and myself, and Pfc. Baldridge, another man in my company, started up the hill…. There was a path and it seemed to generally go in the right direction toward the crest of the hill, so I started up that way. About halfway there, I encountered Lieutenant Spaulding with a remnant of his platoon. I think he had two squads and a person in a third squad, and they were the only survivors that I knew of at that time in E Company. He joined us at that time and became part of us; my men were still back on the beach.

"I told Baldridge to go back and bring the men up. I said, 'They've got to get off the beach. Tell them to come up here with me.' Well, they started up, but I had gone on ahead. Just before you reach the crest of the ridge, it becomes almost vertical for about a 10-foot drop. There was a log there and I got behind the log to see if I could see my men coming up… . I could see a single file beginning to develop off of the beach coming on up when I heard a great deal of noise just above me and, sure enough, there was a machine-gun nest up there and they were giving us a lot of trouble. I was able to get within a few yards of them.... I lobbed a couple of grenades in there and silenced them and that opened the beach up. It was a miracle. It doesn't mean anything on my part. It was just one of those wacky things that happen, that I was on the right spot…."

While the boats in the initial waves drifted several thousand yards off course, the boats carrying I and L Companies, which were supposed to land on Fox Green at the same time E and F Companies were hitting Easy Red, were pulled more than a mile off course, almost landing on Gold Beach at Arromanches, in the British 50th Infantry Division sector. By the time the error could be corrected, Captain John R. Armellino's L Company had lost a boat that capsized two miles off shore and was more than a half-hour late; it would take over an hour more for Captain Kimball Richmond's I Company to reach land.

Originally scheduled to land in front of the E-3 draw, the L Company boats beached beyond the extreme eastern boundary of Fox Green, near the shelter of low cliffs that came down nearly to the water's edge. Organizing his company in the relative safety of the cliffs, Captain Armellino

saw that his unit, although it had already lost nearly half its strength, was basically intact—the only one of eight companies in this initial wave able to operate as a unit.

One of those in Armellino's company was Private Steve Kellman: "We were trained, when you hit the beach, to never run in a straight line—you were supposed to zig-zag. When the ramp went down, some of the fellows just went straight as an arrow, and a lot of them were cut down that way. The coxswain on our boat got us right up on the beach—I don't think the water was as high as our knees. We had a tremendous advantage—we didn't have to wade; we could run. We just ran like hell to get up against that little sea wall. Once we got there, we were exhausted. Some of the guys in the boats behind us, where the coxswains didn't get them close enough, they had to hide behind those obstacles that were in the water, thinking that they were going to provide them with some cover, but that was deadly."

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Cold, wet, and wounded, members of Company L, 16th Infantry Regiment, as well as the 29th Infantry Division pause to catch their breath and have their wounds treated under the protection of a cliff at the far eastern end of the Fox Green sector.

Armellino decided to push inland, toward the village of Le Grand Hameau. The only way up to the heights was a draw labeled on maps as "F-1," which was guarded by not one but two strongpoints, numbers 60 and 61.

But Kellman would not make it up the draw. "On the beach, it was like all hell had broken loose," said Kellman. "There was noise and smoke and dead bodies all over the place. We found we were not on the right beach…. As we were working our way to the right beach, an artillery or mortar round must have landed 15 feet away and the fellow that was in front of me and I both got flipped over backwards by the concussion. Then I started to crawl, and I got against the sea wall. I knew we had to move, and I used my rifle like a crutch to stand up. I got to a standing position and then fell down. I didn't know what was wrong—I didn't feel any pain; it was like a numbness. I tried standing again, and I fell down again. I pulled up my trouser leg, and I could see blood. I was so scared. I took off my leggings and sprinkled sulfa powder on the wound and wrapped a bandage around it.

"As the succeeding waves came in, I gave my rifle to one fellow and gave my grenades to another, so I was without anything. Then our company executive officer, Lieutenant [Robert] Cutler, came along and said, 'Come on—we're moving out.' I said, 'I can't.' He looked at me and said, 'Kellman, I didn't think I was going to have any trouble with you.' I said, 'I can't walk, sir.' He said, 'What's the matter?' I showed him my leg, and he said, 'Oh, okay. I'll have an aid man come by.'

"The guy who had been flipped over in front of me by the shell had also been hit in the leg, and we laid there and talked while we waited for the aid man. The shells kept coming in. After the concussion of one of them, I kind of sat up and asked him, 'How're you doing?' But he had been hit again and was dead."

Now it was the turn of Captain Anthony Prucnal's K Company to arrive at Fox Green Beach. Originally intended to be the 2nd Battalion's reserve company at Fox Green, they were thrust into an assault role after I Company had drifted too far east. A member of the company, Pfc. Roger Brugger, recalled, "As we approached the beach, the shells were dropping in the water and machine-gun bullets were whizzing over our heads. Sergeant Robey [the squad leader] told the coxswain to run our boat right up on the beach and not let us off in four or five feet of water. He did, and we got off on dry land. I remember thinking as I ran from the boat with the bullets tearing up the sand on either side of me, 'This is like a war movie.' After we got to the shale wall, I looked back at the boat we had just left when an 88mm artillery shell hit it in the engine compartment and it blew up. I watched another boat come in and, as the guys came running to the wall, one guy got a direct hit with a mortar shell, and all I could see of him were three hunks of his body flying through the air. We were all sick and scared from the pounding and the ride. When we tried to throw up, there wasn't anything left. The tide was coming in and the beach was getting smaller."

K Company's six boats came under heavy enemy fire, and two were blown up by mines. The officer corps was decimated in minutes. As Prucnal and his XO, First Lt. Frederick L. Brandt, were attempting to organize the remnants of the company, a shell screamed in and mortally wounded Brandt. Coming to his aid, Prucnal was killed by another shell. A platoon commander, Lieutenant James L. Robinson, attempted to rally

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McCormick Research Center

Courtesy Harley Reynolds

McCormick Research Center

ABOVE: Three heroes on D-Day: Colonel George A. Taylor (left), CO of the 16th RCT; Sergeant Harley Reynolds, Company B, 16th RCT, the "first man to the top"; Captain Joe Dawson (receiving the DSO from General Eisenhower). TOP: A German shell explodes on the sand as troops move in from their landing craft.

the company only to fall dead at the hands of a sniper. Another lieutenant, Alexander H. Zbylut, was wounded while struggling ashore. Taking command of the rapidly dwindling unit, Lieutenant Leo A. Stumbaugh organized a patrol of what was left of the first and second assault sections, dashed through a blaze of enemy fire, and forced Germans holding a defensive position to withdraw. The right flank of the German line holding Omaha Beach was slowly, almost imperceptibly, beginning to crumble.

First Lieutenant Karl E. Wolf, a West Point graduate from Wethersfield, Connecticut, assigned to Headquarters Company, 3rd Battalion, 16th Infantry, recalled, "For a while, we had to dig in or lay on the beach because of enemy fire. The beach was fairly steep for about 20 to 30 yards, and at the top there was a little berm that afforded us a little protection." Although somewhat sheltered, Wolf found that he had crawled into a nightmare. "While laying there, I noticed the soldier near me was lying on his back, and his whole leg was split open to the bone. He was in shock, but there was nothing I could do except keep pulling him up as the water rose. Nearby was half a body, the lower half having been blown away."

More units piled up on shore. Radioman Al Alvarez, with the 7th Field Artillery Battalion supporting the 16th RCT, recalled, "After what seemed like hours, we finally left the comparative safety of these beach obstacles. Then, crawling and dragging, we emerged and hid behind a mounded row of pebbles, sort of a berm lined with hundreds of soldiers. Eddie King went back into the surf to pull in wounded, drowning soldiers, and then pointed to his head where blood trickled down his face. There in the center of his helmet was a bullet hole where a round had gone through his helmet, dead center! I had the task of sticking my hand in his helmet and feeling mush, but it was only his hair soaked in blood. It turned out to be only a crease. But then a medic was called over and sat down with his back to the enemy and bandaged Eddie, but was struck in the back. Both of us tried bandaging him and called other medics, but he died."

It seemed that every German gun within range of Omaha Beach was firing as fast and as furiously as it could at the incoming landing craft, at the men struggling to get ashore, and at those who had already found a temporary respite on the round rocks of the shingle behind the low sea wall. Boats were torn apart by direct hits; those men too badly wounded to extricate themselves from the surf were drowned by the rising tide; and those taking cover behind obstacles were slaughtered by the unceasing storm of artillery shells and mortar bombs.

The cries of the wounded rose above the awful din, and men who tried to assist the dying and injured were themselves killed or wounded. Some of the best-trained soldiers in the world became casualties before they could even get a glimpse of the enemy. As the German fire reached a thundering crescendo, there seemed to be no possible hope for the 1st Infantry Division to establish a beachhead, let alone move inland and take its objectives. The 16th Infantry Regiment, like the 116th to its right, had been halted dead in its tracks, and annihilation seemed to be the inevitable outcome.

War correspondent Don Whitehead noted, "The invasion on Omaha Beach was a dead standstill! The battle was being

fought at the water's edge! I lay on the beach wanting to burrow into the gravel. And I thought: 'This time we have failed! God, we have failed! Nothing has moved from this beach and soon, over that bluff, will come the Germans. They'll come swarming down on us….'"

But the Germans did not come swarming down. The 16th's firebrand commander, Colonel George A. Taylor, was now ashore and began inspiring and rallying the troops. Seeing men huddled where they could find the barest shred of safety, Taylor was filled with rage, both at the enemy and at his own cowering men. Technician John E. Bistrica, a member of C Company, 16th Infantry, clearly remembered one of the most heralded moments of World War II, perhaps the single moment that turned the tide for the American assault on Omaha Beach: "Colonel Taylor came in after the assault waves. He was roaming up and down along the beach. He yelled, 'There are two kinds of people who are staying on this beach—those who are dead and those who are going to die! Now let's get the hell out of here!'

"I says, 'Well, somebody finally got this thing organized. I guess we're going to move out now.' So we started up the draw."

From their places of safety, men who had been paralyzed with fear slowly began to emerge. Many of them, to be sure, were killed or wounded the moment they showed themselves to the enemy. But a handful of courageous captains and lieutenants and sergeants and corporals turned to the frightened men next to them and issued a brief, no-nonsense order: "Follow me." And the men followed.

Don Whitehead wrote, "There were many heroes on Omaha Beach that bloody day, but none of greater stature than [Assistant 1st Division Commander Willard G.] Wyman and Taylor. They formed the core of the steadying influence that slowly began to weld the 1st Division's broken spearhead into a fighting force under the muzzles of enemy guns. It's one thing to organize an attack while safely behind the lines—and quite another to do the same job under the direct fire of the enemy."

John B. Ellery, a platoon sergeant in the 16th RCT, witnessed firsthand several examples of leadership. "I [saw] a captain and two lieutenants who demonstrated courage beyond belief as they struggled to bring order to the chaos around them; they managed to get some of the men organized and moving forward up the hill. One of the lieutenants was hit and seemed to have a broken arm … but he led a small group of six or seven to the top. It looked as though he got hit again on the way. Another lieutenant carried one of his wounded men about 30 meters before getting hit himself. When you talk about combat leadership at Normandy, I don't see how the credit can go to anyone other than the company-grade officers and senior NCOs who led the way. We sometimes forget that you can manufacture weapons and you can purchase ammunition, but you can't buy valor, and you can't pull heroes off an assembly line."

While a seemingly unending deluge of bullets and red-hot, jagged shell fragments continued to rain down on the men lying on the beach, Sergeant Harley Reynolds, in B Company's sector, looked up. "I could see a narrow pond ahead with marsh grass. Between us and the pond was the wire strung on the roadbed and beyond that a three-strand wire fence with a trip wire only on the front of it."

A soldier with a bangalore torpedo managed to slip it under the barbed wire and blew a gap, then was shot and killed. Without hesitating, Reynolds and his men flew through the break in the wire and into a flooded antitank ditch beyond. "I was the first across the pond and, as I paused to take off the life preserver, I looked back to see how the men were doing. I heard my name called and looked to see Dale Heap, about halfway across the pond. Dale was gunner on one of the machine guns and the platoon comedian. He had been shot through his upper arm—a good flesh wound. He was holding his one arm above his head and pointing his gun tripod at it, saying, 'See, I didn't drop the tripod.' Always the comedian, he was actually laughing. He kept yelling, 'Stateside! Stateside!' He handed the tripod to his assistant gunner, the first ammo carrier took the gun, and we had a battlefield promotion right there in the middle of the pond. Dale waved goodbye and headed back to the beach. He made it stateside, and that was the last we heard from him."

At 0830 hours, a Navy beachmaster managed to signal the fleet that no more landing craft were to come ashore—there simply was no room for them, and no room for the

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ABOVE: By the afternoon of June 6, the fighting for Easy Red and Fox Green sectors had ended, leaving the sands covered with the detritus of war. OPPOSITE: Wounded men of the 16th RCT await evacuation back to England. Many men had been hurt or killed before even firing a shot at the enemy.

men and vehicles they carried. At this time, there were some 50 LCTs and LCIs circling offshore, looking in vain for some place to deposit their cargo. Their skippers could see landing craft from the previous waves foundering, sinking, burning, or hung up on obstacles, with the sea around them being ripped by tremendous explosions. There appeared to be no safe passages.

The situation would remain almost unchanged for two more hours. Seeing the infantry being subjected to continual pounding, the Navy determined that its firepower, which had been less than effective thus far, must be brought to bear at close range against enemy targets, even if it meant risking the ships and their crews. A flotilla of destroyers moved close to shore and began hammering German positions.

Almost imperceptibly, and despite the best efforts of the German gunners, the thickets of barbed wire, and the innumerable minefields, the surviving invaders gradually began to chip small fissures in Hitler's Atlantic Wall. Pillboxes and trenches were being swept away by the hot breath of the Navy's guns. The pinned-down American infantrymen were pinned down no longer. As German fire slackened, through the barbed wire and minefields the Yanks slithered, like an inexorable, olive-drab swarm of angry, heavily armed insects, bent on overcoming all obstacles in their path.

The Germans manning the fortifications, their ears and noses bleeding from the concussions of the direct hits and near misses, and their throats choking from concrete dust and cordite, began scrambling out the steel rear doors in hopes of making it to the top of the bluffs and safety, only to be cut down in the midst of their escape attempts. The tide of battle had turned.

June 6, 1944, especially at Omaha Beach, had been a bloody affair—worse than even the most pessimistic soldiers had feared. The human cost of the operation was very high, although the exact number of casualties may never be known. Some 291 landing craft had been lost on D-day, and numerous destroyers, LCTs, LCIs, and amphibious DUKWs had been sunk.

In the 1st Infantry Division, it is estimated that 18 officers and 168 enlisted men had been killed or died of wounds on D-day; 7 officers and 351 men were missing; and 45 officers and 575 men were wounded in action. Elements of the 29th Infantry Division, attached to the 1st, had also suffered grievously, with 328 men killed or dead of wounds, 281 wounded, and 134 listed as missing in action.

Yet, many thousands more had stormed ashore over the bodies of their fallen comrades, braved the intense fire, crawled through the minefields, lobbed grenades into pillbox embrasures, battled with defenders in their trenches, and reached the top of the bluffs by early afternoon. Those who were killed on Normandy's chilly shore had not died in vain; Hitler's vaunted Atlantic Wall, a defensive fortification that had taken Germany years and many billions of Reichsmarks to construct, had been cracked wide open by the invaders in the span of a morning.

The first day of the Battle of Normandy had gone to the Allies, due in large measure to the selfless courage of the men of the 1st Infantry Division and the attached 29th. Nearly a year of hard fighting still lay ahead, and many of the men who survived D-day would not live to celebrate the victory. But the Allies were back on the Continent to stay, and there would be no turning back now. □

For 872 days, the German Army laid siege to Communism's "Holy City," only to be defeated in the end. | BY BLAINE TAYLOR

SAVAGE STRUGGLE FOR LENINGRAD

Leningrad was the sacred city of Soviet Communism. The port city on the Neva River, 400 miles northwest of Moscow, began life in 1703 as Petrograd, or St. Petersburg, after its founder, Czar Peter the Great. For two centuries (1712-1918) it was the capital of the Russian Empire—a place of stunning architectural beauty and historical significance, a city of czars and czarinas, of gold-domed cathedrals, breathtaking Baroque palaces, and rich political intrigue.

Petrograd was also the scene of a major history-changing event: the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution that overthrew the old order and ushered in a radical new style of government and economy ruled by a group of some of the most evil, power-hungry cutthroats who ever wrapped themselves in the blood-red banner of Communism.

The chief architect of the revolution was the leader of the Bolshevik Party, Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, who changed his name to Vladimir Lenin. With his followers murdering their way to power, Lenin surrounded himself with brutal henchmen, such as Josef Stalin, Leon Trotsky, Grigory Zinoviev, and others.

Five days after Lenin's death on January 26, 1924, Petrograd's name was changed to "Leningrad" to honor the late Marxist leader.

Because of his fear and hatred of Communism, Nazi Germany's leader (Führer) Adolf Hitler decided that, when he

A long line of German infantrymen, accompanied by a Sd.Kfz. 221 armored vehicle, march through an unidentified village on their way to invade the Soviet Union in June 1941, an invasion codenamed Operation Barbarossa. During the 872-day siege of Leningrad, a million and a half citizens died, but Soviet Premier Josef Stalin refused to allow the Germans to take the city.

Bundesarchiv Bild 101I-208-0027-04A; Photo: Nägele

invaded the Soviet Union, one of his first orders of business would be to wipe Leningrad off the face of the Earth. And Hitler was confident he would do just that.

After all, the Soviet Red Army had suffered a humiliating defeat (not to mention a million casualties) when it invaded its northwestern neighbor Finland in December 1939. This defeat, along with the fact that Stalin had gutted his officer corps in the 1930s, led Hitler to believe that the Soviets would be unable to stand up to his own invasion force of three million men.

onslaught—codenamed Operation Barbarossa (after the red-bearded Frederick I, the king of Germany and emperor of the Holy Roman Empire)—would begin. Leningrad was AG North's assigned objective.

The man Hitler had handpicked to take the former czarist capital was one of his most illustrious warlords, the 65-year-old, slim, bald, ascetic-looking Bavarian Army Field Marshal Wilhelm Josef Franz Ritter (Knight) von Leeb.

Leeb joined the Imperial Army in 1895. During World War I, he was awarded the Austrian Order of Max Josef that brought with it the automatic ennobling title of "von," making him Wilhelm Ritter von Leeb. He rose quickly through the ranks, even during the interwar period.

In 1940, during Hitler's invasion of France, it had been Leeb's men who had pierced the vaunted Maginot Line. For this, Hitler personally handed him a jewel-encrusted Army field marshal's baton on July 19, 1940, plus the prized Ritterkreuz (Knight's Cross) of the Iron Cross.

SA-Kuva

MANNERHEIM WOULD HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH RAZING MOTHER RUSSIA'S HOLY CITY, MUCH LESS WITH EXTERMINATING ITS POPULATION VIA NAZI STARVATION PLANS.

In addition to the symbolism of the city's name, by 1939 Leningrad was also an important Soviet industrial center, responsible for 11 percent of the USSR's industrial production. Thus, Leningrad became German Army Group North's major objective from the start of the massive surprise Nazi sneak attack on June 22, 1941. In fact, Leningrad's fall was the key to all of Nazidom's vast, projected Northern Theater of Operations' goals during August 1941-January 1944.

Poised to attack was Germany's Army Group North. On June 22, the German

Under Leeb's command this June day were two armies (the 16th, with eight divisions, and the 18th, with seven) and one panzer group (the 4th, with eight divisions). Additional divisions were held in reserve. Leeb's orders were to advance from East Prussia through Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, destroy Soviet forces in the Baltic area as it went, and capture Leningrad from the south.

The city's leaders felt that Leningrad was about as prepared as it could be. Encompassed in the overall defensive area was the mega-command of the Leningrad Fortified Region, the municipal garrison, the Baltic Fleet, the Koporye, Southern, and Slutsk-Kolpino Groups, and the Mga Position as well.

In addition, the 23rd Red Army was stationed in the north between the Gulf of Finland and Lake Ladoga, the 48th Red Army was deployed in the west, the 67th Army in the eastern sector, and the 55th in the southern sector, the Volkhov "Front" being commanded by Lt. Gen. Kyril Meretskov, recently released from an NKVD (secret police) prison. (A "Front" is the Russian equivalent of a U.S. Army Group.)

On June 27, 1941, just days after Barbarossa began, first-response civilian groups were established within Leningrad, with over one million people building fortifications on the city's northern and southern perimeters that they fervently hoped would halt the Germans.

Red Army Col. Gen. Georgi K. Zhukov recalled 30 years after the war, "Leningrad is a large industrial center and seaport.... Before the war, Leningrad had a population of 3,103,000—3,385,000 counting the suburbs.... Had Leningrad fallen, the Red Army would have had to establish a new Northern Front to protect Moscow, and it would have meant the loss of our strong Baltic Fleet. Ten volunteer divisions were formed in Leningrad during June-August 1941, as well as 16 separate artillery and volunteer machine-gun battalions."

The Southern Luga River Line of June 1941 connected that waterway with the Chudovo-Gatchina-Uritsk-Pulkovo posts, extending to the Neva River. Another linked the Peterhof-Gatchina-Koltuszk positions. The Northern Defense Line existed pre-1941 against the Finns in the Karelian Fortified Region.

Statistically, 190 miles of wooden barricades made from sawn timber joined 395 miles of barbed wire, 430 miles of antitank ditches, more than 5,000 mud and timber emplacements, weapons bunkers built of reinforced concrete, and 25,000 miles of entrenchments, all either built or dug by civilians. But could it hold against the mighty, seemingly unstoppable Germans?

Assisting Army Group North in this endeavor were the Finns. After the Winter War of 1939-1940 between Finland and the USSR (in which the Red Army was thoroughly embarassed by itsr small neighbor) ended with an armistice, Hitler made a pact with Finland; if the small, Nordic nation would join with the German Army in his invasion of the Soviet Union, he would provide the Finnish Army with modern weapons to defend against any future Soviet attacks. Finland, caught between the proverbial rock and a hard place, made a bargain with the devil.

Another figure the Führer expected to be present in fallen Leningrad was the legendary commander in chief of the hardy Finnish Army, Field Marshal Carl Baron Gustav Emil Mannerheim, whom he venerated.

On June 22—under the austere baron's patriotic leadership—Finland joined the march on Leningrad. From June to September 1941, the Finnish Army actually outnumbered the Germans in the Northern Theater by 530,000 to 220,000, fielding 475,000 combat-effective troops—more than it had during the Winter War. The Finnish force included a strong artillery segment but only a sole tank battalion and little motorization for its infantry in contrast to the highly armored and motorized German forces.

Leeb's next martial goal was to link up with the combat forces of the Finnish Army on the Svir River east of Leningrad. The German high command's earnest expectation was that their Finnish allies would march around Lake Ladoga to effect juncture with the Nazis, but that was never to be.

There lurked a hidden trait in Mannerheim's character—one that would prove fatal to the grim desires of Hitler and Leeb. Mannerheim, who had fought in the Russian Army during the 1905 war against Japan, remained to the end loyal to the Russian people and their culture, no matter how much and how often he might war against their Red leaders and politics.

Hitler's campaign Directive #21 sought to delineate Finland's projected role in Operation Barbarossa thus: "The mass of the Finnish Army will have the task—in accordance with the advance made by the Northern wing of the German armies—of tying up maximum Russian strength by attacking to the West, or, on both sides of Lake Ladoga."

But Mannerheim would have nothing to do with razing Mother Russia's holy city, much less with exterminating its population via Nazi starvation plans. Finnish President Risto Ryti agreed with the baron that Finland would not attack the city directly, no matter what the Germans demanded or offered.

From the very outset of their tenuous alliance, Mannerheim refused Hitler's offer of command of an 80,000-man German corps. He also would not cooperate fully in the encirclement of the city. Thus, he

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ABOVE: All able-bodied Leningrad citizens were expected to aid in the defense of their city. Here Russian women work on a huge tank trap to prevent German panzers from entering the city. OPPOSITE: Finland was allied with Nazi Germany during Hitler's invasion of the USSR. Here Finnish troops, some wearing WWI-vintage German helmets, prepare to attack a Soviet position in what was called the "Continuation War," which followed Finland's holding off the USSR in 1940.

stopped Hitler cold in his tracks, a hindrance that Leeb could never get around.

Early on June 22, the signal to begin Barbarossa was given. Leeb had designated as his spearhead the 4th Panzer Corps, led by 55-year-old Col. Gen. Erich Hoepner, a veteran of the Great War. In a message to his troops at the start of the operation, Hoepner said, "The war with Russia is a vital part of the German people's fight for existence. It is the old fight of German against Slav, the defense of German culture against the Muscovite-Asiatic flood, and the repulse of Jewish Bolshevism. This war must have as its goal the destruction of today's Russia—and for this reason it must be conducted with unheard-of harshness.... There is to be no mercy...."

Hoepner's 4th Panzer Group consisted of two panzer corps—the XXXXI, commanded by General Georg-Hans Reinhardt, who had breached Warsaw's defenses in 1939, and the LVI, under the famed cavalryman, General Erich von Manstein, whose panzers had burst out of the Ardennes to overrun Belgium and northern France in 1940. Few other armored forces had commanders who were more capable than Reinhardt and Manstein.

Bundesarchiv Bild 101I-009-0882-04; Photo: Schröter

ABOVE: To reach the Soviet border, Germany's Army Group North first had to push through Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. Here infantrymen and the crewmen of Sturmgeschütz III armored vehicles take a brief rest in Latvia before continuing their march in early July. OPPOSITE: Undeterred by a bridge that had been destroyed by the retreating Red Army, a German Panzer IV, with a 54mm short-barrel main gun, fords a stream near the Baltic coast, July 1941.

At dawn, Hoepner's group slammed into the 8th Red Army guarding the border, sending the Russians reeling. At first, the operation went spectacularly well. Soviet units that stood in Leeb's way were pushed aside, overrun, turned into a bloody mash. Army Group North continued rolling, overcoming whatever obstacles the Soviets were foolish enough to place in their way.

Trailing in AG North's wake were the murderous killing squads of the dreaded SS Einsatzgruppen (Special Purpose Groups), whose mission was to rid whole villages of their Jewish inhabitants. Leeb's men also committed war crimes of their own against the rival populations.

In Moscow, Minister of Foreign Affairs Vyacheslav Molotov announced over the state-run radio, "Today at 4 AM, without any declaration of war, German troops attacked our country ... and bombed Zhitomir, Kiev, Sevastopol, Kaunas, and others from the air. The government calls upon you, citizens of the Soviet Union, to rally still more closely around our glorious Bolshevist party, around our Soviet government, around our great leader and comrade Stalin. Ours is a righteous cause. The enemy will be defeated. Victory will be ours."

On its bloody way to Leningrad, the 4th Panzer Group won the Battle of Raseiniai (June 23-27) in Lithuania against Soviet armor, inflicting a reported 90,000 casualties on the Red Army. Before reaching the breached defensive Stalin Line, Hoepner had allegedly destroyed a thousand Soviet tanks.

As it powered its way forward, the 4th Panzer Group came to a major natural barrier, the Dvina River, which flowed into the Gulf of Riga. German engineers overcame this obstacle by quickly installing bridges across the water.

The Soviet 3rd Mechanized Corps was moved up to try and stop Manstein's drive, but it was futile; the 3rd ended up losing 70 tanks, and survivors were sent fleeing from the battlefield.

The two panzer corps continued roaring toward Leningrad at breakneck speed, and the excitement of being part of such a momentous event buoyed the spirits of every German soldier. On June 24, General Christian Hansen's X Corps took Kaunas and fought off counterattacks by the 23rd Rifle Division.

Meanwhile, the 18th Army, headed by General Georg von Küchler, was advancing along the coast while the 16th Army, under General Ernst Busch, was heading for the Memet River and driving a wedge between the Soviet 8th and 11th Armies. Luftwaffe planes were bombing enemy formations.

Everywhere the news was bad for the Red Army. On the 25th, the 21st Mechanized Corps attempted to block LVI Panzer Corps west of the Dvina River but failed. The 12th Mechanized Corps sent KV-1 and T-34 tanks against XXXXI Corps at Rasainiai, but these attacks, too, failed to halt the German drive, and the 12th Mechanized Corps was destroyed.

While the 16th Army was mopping up behind the 4th Panzer Group, Semyon Timoshenko, chairman of Stavka, the Soviet Armed Forces Supreme Command, ordered all available forces to the Dvina River in an attempt to seal off the XXXXI and LVI Corps bridgehead. Farther to the north, Küchler's 18th Army was hit by strong counterattacks.

A hundred miles southeast of Riga, Latvia, on June 28, German troops entered Daugavpils and began clearing out the city's Jewish ghetto, assisted by a segment of the pop-

bundesarchiv bild 1011-209-0052-35A; Photo: Koch

ulation; more than 1,000 Jews would die during the first week of the German occupation.

On the same day, the Soviet Air Force unsuccessfully attacked the German bridgehead over the Dvina, and much of Leeb's army group continued to pour through. It seemed as though the German juggernaut was unstoppable.

On July 1, the city of Riga, Latvia, fell to General Albert Wodrig's German XXVI Corps, while farther to the north Finnish Army units made good progress against their Russian foes. Three days later, Manstein's LVI Panzer Corps was at the Latvian-Russian border, while Reinhardt's men had taken Ostrov. When the Soviets brought up tanks to halt Reinhardt, the Germans responded by destroying 140 of them with heavy artillery.

Hitler's propaganda minister, Joseph Goebbels, was ecstatic when he got the news. "No one now doubts that we shall be victorious in Russia," he said. "Of Bolshevism, nothing will be allowed to remain."

As so it went, with one city, town, and village after another captured, and one Red Army counterattack after another thrown back with devastating losses. By July 6, German forces had occupied all of Lithuania and Latvia and were moving against Estonia.

The German high command, on July 8, sent a new order to Leeb. AG North was now to move XXXXI Panzer Corps to the Luga River before mounting an assault on Leningrad while LVI Panzer Corp was to make an attack toward Lake Il'men, more than 140 miles south-southeast of the city. On the 10th, Manstein's corps captured the town of Porkhov, but Reinhardt's XXXXI Corps had failed to take its objective at the Luga. It was the first time the German thrust had been blunted since Barbarossa began, and suddenly the Germans began to get worried.

The Soviet 8th Army brought Hoepner's 4th Panzer Group nearly to a halt, so Hoepner formed a kampfgruppe (battle group) from the 6th Panzer Division in XXXXI Corps and sent it north, hoping to find a way around the resistance. What it found, instead, were poor roads, soft sand, swamps, swarms of mosquitoes, numerous streams and rivers, and old wooden bridges that collapsed under the weight of the tanks and had to be repaired before the column could continue.

Whenever a tank or half-track got stuck in the mud or deep sand, the whole column halted and waited for recovery vehicles to come to the front to haul out the immobilized vehicle. The going was slow and exhausting, and after several days on the march, the battle group had gone only a few miles; at this rate, they would never get to Leningrad before winter.

As the column pushed ahead, the troops saw plumes of black smoke on the horizon; the Soviets were burning farms and villages so that the Germans would find nothing of value.

As if that weren't bad enough, the clouds of dust raised by the tracks and wheels and boots of the kampfgruppe were a red flag to Soviet airmen who, thus alerted to their presence, swooped down with bullets and bombs flying.

In mid-July, food rationing was instituted in Leningrad, and prices skyrocketed as supplies dwindled. The priceless paintings in the Hermitage were crated up and trucked out of the city or hidden in deep cellars. Plans to evacuate 400,000 women and children were drawn up. German reconnaissance flights over the city increased, but there was no bombing—yet. Sandbags and protective scaffolding started to go up around monuments and public buildings.

On July 19, Hitler issued Directive #33 to all his invading forces, giving them specific orders as to what they must accomplish. To AG North, he said, "The advance on Leningrad will be resumed only when 18th Army has made contact with 4th Panzer Group and the extensive flank in the east is adequately protected by 16th Army.

"At the same time, Army Group North must endeavor to prevent Russian forces still in action in Estonia from withdrawing to Leningrad." The directive also noted that Leeb's army group was to advance to Lake Ladoga, north of Leningrad.

In Lithuania, meanwhile, the local militia, with German encouragement, murdered some 3,800 Jews. German soldiers—whether in the Einsatzgruppen or not—were also encouraged to engage in "ethnic cleansing" as they moved forward, wiping out Jews, Soviet commissars, prominent businessmen, and the Russian intelligensia.

At the end of July, an angry Hitler flew to his commander's field headquarters, demanding that Leningrad must fall by December 1941, before the Russian winter set in. Leeb brought in more men, tanks, artillery, and aircraft for his next attempt. Surely now the city must fall.

On July 31, the Finnish Southeastern Army continued advancing toward Leningrad, giving the Soviet 23rd Army a bloody nose. The Finns also enjoyed having air superiority. On that day, Hansen's X Corps reached the southern shore of huge Lake Ladoga. The German advance had come at a tremendous cost; at the end of July, the total of all German casualties since Barbarossa began stood at 213,000 men.

The Finns deployed north of Leningrad with the Germans holding down the southern approaches. It was the Finnish Army that severed the last Russian railway connection north of the city and at several spots in Lapland.

German Army elite Alpenkorps troops moved down from German-occupied Norway but obeyed the baron's dictum that no attacks were to be made by German soldiers operating on Finnish soil. By August 31, his soldiers were a mere 20 kilometers from the city's northern suburbs, at the 1939 Finnish-Russian frontier posts to Leningrad's north, advancing also via Eastern Karelia.

After having taken Red Army salients at both Beloostrov and Kirjasalo on the Karelian Isthmus, the Finns deployed along the length of the former frontier on the shores of Lake Ladoga and the Gulf of Finland.

On August 6, Hitler announced his triad of main Russian campaign goals: "Leningrad first, Donetz Basin second, Moscow third." Hitler was certain that he would take Leningrad within six weeks, and then Moscow. In eight weeks, Stalin would sue for peace and the Eastern Front war would be over by Christmas 1941.

Then the excitable Führer suddenly appeared to change his mind regarding the taking of Moscow, according to his own chief of the German general staff during 1938-1942, Col. Gen. Franz Halder: "When Army Group Central had reached its first objective, Hitler

ulstein bild/The Granger Collection, New York

ABOVE: Wehrmacht troops warily advance on Luga, a town 80 miles south of Leningrad, in September 1941. Here Red Army resistance stiffened, causing the German advance to grind to a halt and delaying the siege of Leningrad by a month. OPPOSITE: Sovet artillerymen load their gun as they wait for the advancing Germans. Once the Soviets stopped retreating, drawing the Germans ever deeper into the vast country, they became a formidable foe.

"IT WAS AN ABSURD IDEA TO THINK OF WHEELING AROUND A MILLION OR SO MEN—AND COUNTLESS VEHICLES—IN ALMOST TRACKLESS COUNTRY, JUST AS THOUGH THEY WERE A BATTALION ON THE PARADE GROUND! IT WAS AN IDEA THAT DIDN'T DERIVE FROM HITLER'S MILITARY THINKING, BUT FROM HIS POLITICAL FANATICISM THAT HAD SET ITSELF ON THE DESTRUCTION OF LENINGRAD!

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wanted it reduced to a weak holding force, and the bulk of its troops diverted to the north, so as to hasten the capture of Leningrad.

"It was an absurd idea to think of wheeling around a million or so men—and countless vehicles—in almost trackless country, just as though they were a battalion on the parade ground! It was an idea that didn't derive from Hitler's military thinking, but from his political fanaticism that had set itself on the destruction of Leningrad!

"When Army Group North—without any reinforcement from the Center—had approached Leningrad so closely that it was ready to move forward to its capture, it was Hitler himself who'd intervened, and forbade the attack! Now, he was suddenly disposed to content himself with [just] surrounding the city!"

SA-Kuva

After the Finns defeated the Soviet 23rd Army in the Battle of Porlampi, September 1, 1941, all that was left were destroyed and abandoned Red Army vehicles ... and hundreds of corpses.

On August 21, Hitler's Directive #34 ordered Leeb to continue to press his attack between Lake Il'men and the town of Narva to link up with Finnish forces in order to encircle Leningrad. He also insisted that only after Estonia had been cleared of all Soviet forces was the final advance on Leningrad to be attempted. He projected the "encirclement of Leningrad in conjunction with the Finns," followed during the next week by the blockage of railway evacuation of the city's civilian population through the use of Luftwaffe bombings as well as via artillery bombardment of other exit points. There would be no escape or mercy for the city's inhabitants.

The bloodbath ran into August, with the Germans continuing to decimate Red Army formations sent against them while, at the same time, losing more men than they could afford.

By August 16, Hoepner and his 4th Panzer Group had reached Soviet Novgorod, blitzing down the road to Leningrad's Luga River Line. This established the Germans' initial, future siege locations extending from the Gulf of Finland to Lake Ladoga, the ultimate goal being to encircle the city.

Like his superior Leeb, Hoepner also practiced a scorched-earth advance against the hated Bolsheviks, fully implementing Hitler's illegal and criminal shoot-on-sight "Kommissar Order." Hoepner cooperated well with the murderous SS Einsatzgruppen in the killing of Jews, too.

Hoepner was the very man whom Adolf Hitler expected to lead his victory parade down the boulevards of subjugated Leningrad, making his boss, Field Marshal von Leeb, its celebrated conqueror as well.

Finland's Marshal Mannerheim, with no desire to attack Leningrad, shocked the Germans by declaring on August 27 that his Finns would no longer act in direct cooperation with Leeb's AG North; he was only interested in reclaiming for Finland the territory lost to the Soviets in 1940. Two days later, after realizing the Finns would not be helping him capture Leningrad, Leeb reorganized his AG North and prepared for a siege of the city without their aid.

On August 30, Army Group North's advance into the Soviet Union reached Leningrad's suburbs and severed Russia's last railway connection at the Neva River. Now the encircled city was in a near vise-like death grip on both land and water. A German victory was at hand.

Finally, on September 1, German units came within artillery range of Leningrad, and the Krupp guns fired on the city for the first time. A few days later, Hitler, looking at the mounting casualty lists, decided that sending his troops into the city would be too costly and demanded that, instead, the city be starved into submission.

Also on that day, Mannerheim's IV Corps defeated everything the Soviet 23rd Army troops could throw at him in the Battle of Porlampi. On the 7th, the victorious baron established his new, occupied Eastern Karelian Svir River field headquarters, and there he remained for most of the rest of the war. The Finnish Army had become, therefore, Germany's ally in place only.

On September 8, Leeb's forces took the Red Army position with the Germanic name of Mga-Schlissel'burg 10 miles to the east, cutting the last of its overland roadway communication lines.

That evening, the first major air attack on Leningrad was made with two waves of bombers hitting the city. They were aiming for the city's food warehouses. One resident, Elena Skrjabina, watched the buildings go up in flames. "The Badaev warehouses are completely destroyed," she wrote. "All the supplies of the city were

concentrated there.... The destruction of the storehouse threatens Leningrad with inevitable starvation."

The city was, in effect, almost totally blockaded. Thereafter would come the historic, protracted siege of 872 days and nights.

For the Soviet supreme command—Stavka—it was imperative that Lenin's city not fall under any circumstances. The Soviet 54th Army tried to relieve the pressure on the city, and intense fighting took place at Sinyavino, about 10 miles east of Leningrad on the southwestern shore of Lake Ladoga.

Heavy fighting for the southern suburbs of Krasnoye Selo and Pushkin, the location of the Catherine Summer Palace where the priceless Amber Room was installed, also broke out. The palace was badly damaged in the fighting, and the panels that made up the Amber Room were removed and hauled back to Königsburg in East Prussia.

With the Finns declining to participate in the attack on Leningrad, Maj. Gen. Augustin Grandes' 250th "Blue" Division, made up of Spanish volunteers, arrived and was thrown into battle against the Red Army in the sector between Lake Il'men and the west bank of the Volkhov. Elements of the XXXIV Panzer and XXXVIII Corps were added to bolster the Blue Division's attacks.

On September 17, the Leningrad fighting reached its peak with six AG North divisions advancing from the south. To stop them, "The guns of the Baltic Fleet rained down shells," Zhukov recalled, joined by both Soviet naval and air force squadrons. "Much depended on the Navy and its coastal artillery, that became more and more relevant as the battlefield moved closer to the seashore."

Also participating in the shelling of the Germans were the guns of the historic 1917 Russian Revolution cruiser *Aurora*. Her big guns had been removed, transported inland, and repositioned south on the city's Pulkovo Heights.

The Soviet Navy helped to supervise the city's massive civilian evacuation efforts, the fleet commanded by Admiral Vladimir Tributs with Admiral Ivan S. Isikov activating six separate Marine and sailor brigades. Despite heavy losses, they attacked again and again, their commander himself being slain, and the Germans repulsing them repeatedly.

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ABOVE: A Russian burial crew looks at a pile of wrapped bodies inside Leningrad. Citizens were so weak from starvation that many lacked the strength even to remove the dead. Many of the citizens resorted to cannibalism. OPPOSITE: With a knocked-out Soviet T-34 tank behind them at Demyansk, a German machine-gun crew huddles in a cold and wet foxhole, January 1942. The brutal Russian winter would play a great part in defeating Hitler's forces.

On October 16 came an ominous harbinger of winter—snowflakes. As the snowfall became heavier and the termperatures dropped, the German soldiers at the front realized that they had only their summer uniforms. No plans had been made to properly equip them because Hitler and the high command had made the catastrophic miscalculation that the war would be won before winter.

The Russians knew that they'd won the battle when field reports arrived stating that Leeb's forces were "building dugouts, fitting out bunkers and pillboxes…and laying mines and other obstacles to protect their battlefields," Zhukov remembered. "The enemy was preparing for winter, and prisoners confirmed this."

Now returning to the fore was an issue that Hitler had earlier foolishly pushed into the background, winter clothing for his overextended armies in Russia. Recalled Col. Gen. Halder in 1949, "When the Army Commander-in-Chief [Field Marshal Walther von Brauchitsch] asked for immediate preparations to be made for the provision of specialized winter clothing, he received a curt refusal, with the remark that, by the beginning of winter, the fighting would have long since been over.

"For the German troops who'd still have to remain in the East as an occupying force, the Army's normal winter equipment would suffice and that, of course, would be available." It wasn't, and the men froze, many to death.

The Soviets attempted to break the encirclement of Leningrad on October 20, when they prepared to launch the "Second Sinyavino Offensive"—63,000 troops, 97 tanks, and 474 artillery pieces against the Germans' 54,000 soldiers.

As temperatures dropped, the battle around Leningrad continued to heat up. In Moscow, Marshal Zhukov studied the casualty figures for the front and was shocked to see that these troops, which had numbered a million men on October 1, were now down to 250,000. To the south, the Soviet leadership noted with alarm that the Germans were now just 30 miles north of Moscow.

To the west, in German-occupied Lithuania, the commander of Einsatzkommando 3 reported, "I can confirm today that Einsatzkommando 3 has achieved the goal of solving the Jewish problem in Lithuania. There are no more Jews in Lithuania." He was overstating the situation, but the message was clear. Wherever the German troops advanced, they left thousands of dead Jews in their wake.

Winter now came on with a vengeance. The Germans' motorized vehicles stopped running, guns froze, draft horses went to sleep and never awoke. Neither did many men. The Soviets, better equipped with proper winter gear, thanked their faithful comrade, General Winter. He had stopped Napoleon over a century earlier; perhaps he would do the same now.

Corporal Wilhelm Lubbeck, an artillery forward observer in the 58th Division, recalled, "We began to confront bitterly freezing temperatures of minus 40 degrees Fahrenheit. This was far colder than any conditions we had ever experienced in Germany. In the harsh months that followed, the wounded on both sides sometimes froze to death where they fell before they could be transported back behind the lines for medical care.

"The temperatures dropped so low that it actually caused the grease in our weapons to freeze unless we fired them regularly or took measures to protect them from the cold. Other soldiers told me that they witnessed entire steam engines that had been frozen solid down to the grease in their wheels."

On November 27, Hitler dangled a carrot in front of Finnish Foreign Minister Rolf Witting. He promised that Leningrad would, indeed, be razed and then handed over to Finland, with the new, postwar Finnish-German frontier demarcation line being the Neva River. Despite the offer of this gift, the Finns would stay put into summer 1944.

Leeb now found himself in a martial quandary, as his own forces could not attack the Red stronghold from the north.

Still, the restored current Finnish frontier was but a mere 22 miles northeast of downtown Leningrad, with the threat of a possible future attack from the Finns being a military factor that any defending Soviet commander from then on had to take into account.

Commanding both the 7th Red Army and Leningrad's Volkhov Front during the siege was Kyril Meretskov. He was named commander of the Leningrad Military District and assigned to the Leningrad Front to command the 4th Red Army at the Battle of Tikhvin. After prolonged heavy fighting in deep snow at Tikhvin, 110 miles east of Leningrad, the Red Army finally defeated Georg von Küchler's 18th Army on December 9, throwing the frozen survivors back westward to the Volkhov River. Meretskov's victory at Tikhvin was hailed as the first large-scale, successful Soviet counterattack of World War II.

On December 20, in response to requests by his field commanders to pull their men back when success was hopeless, Hitler issued his "no retreat" order: "The will to hold out," he told Franz Halder, "must be brought home to every unit. The troops are to be forced to put up fanatical resistance in their lines, regardless of any enemy breakthrough on their flanks or rear. Only this kind of fighting will win the time we need to move up the reinforcements I have ordered from the home country and the west."

National Archives

Starvation was beginning to grip the citizens of Leningrad. The average daily death toll was 1,500, but on Christmas Day 1941 3,700 people starved to death. With the supply of bread completely inadequate to keep the population alive, people ate anything they could find. Some gnawed wood, dug up and ate tulip bulbs, or downed wallpaper paste. Dogs and cats disappeared. Soon cannibalism would become commonplace.

A woman recalled with horror seeing the partially eaten body of a young girl half hidden under an apartment stairwell. A city official admitted that Leningrad was a city "overrun with cannibals."

Resident Alexander Boldyrev wrote in early January, "The death rate is astronomical.... I saw with my own eyes a caravan of sledges, loaded with coffins, boxes, or simply corpses in sacks, making its way to the cemetery. There I saw corpses left just as they were, dumped at the entrance, turning black in the snow.... Are we nearing the end? We are a city of the dead, shrouded in snow."

Adding to the citizenry's misery was the fact that the city's central heating system was shut down due to a lack of fuel.

With all roads and railroads in and out of the city cut off by the siege, there was only one way to bring vital supplies into it and take starving civilians out—the "Road of Life." Lake Ladoga, the huge body of water north of Leningrad, freezes solidly in the winter, so a plan was devised to bring long convoys of trucks full of foodstuffs over the ice.

The Luftwaffe tried bombing and strafing the convoys—sometimes seven or eight air raids a day—and was to some degree successful. Yet, despite the danger, the trucks continued to run night and day. And people in the city continued to die; in February 1942 an assessment reported that at least 8,000 died every day.

On January 8, 1942, a week into the new year, Meretskov's Volkhov Front opened the Demyansk Offensive (sometimes called the Lyuban Offensive) with the 2nd Shock and 59th Armies in their white camouflage smocks violently attacking the German I and XXXVIII Corps but without accomplishing much. The Northwestern Front, on the other hand, attacked the SS Totenkopf, 30th, and 299th Infantry Divisions south of Lake Il'men, inflicting heavy casualties. Combat around Leningrad continued to be savage. Never before or since had such huge numbers of soldiers fought with such ferocity.

Throughout the month, the Soviets battered away at their enemy, making only slight dents. For the next few weeks, the exhausted Red Army paused, using that time to gather reinforcements, replenish its stocks of ammunition and artillery shells, and plan for a new offensive.

In the Demyansk Pocket, 90,000 German soldiers representing five divisions were trapped; only air drops of food and ammunition enabled them to keep fighting. In March, relief columns would try to break through the Soviet encirclement to free their comrades.

For the soldiers in the pocket, life was terrible. Personal hygiene was almost impossible; baths and showers were a dim memory, and shaving was done every couple of weeks, if at all. Lice invaded every seam of every piece of uniform. Dysentery and frostbite were rampant.

March 19 saw Küchler's 18th Army attack the 2nd Shock Army on the Volkhov River and inflict heavy casualties while surrounding 130,000 Red Army soldiers. A five-division relief force then prepared to come to the rescue of their comrades who had been trapped in the Demyansk Pocket.

Wilhelm Lubbeck, 58th Division, recalled his days fighting at the Volkhov: "When the spring thaw arrived in early April, it swiftly turned the Volkhov battlefield into a muddy bog. The warmer weather was initially welcomed, but we would soon discover that conducting combat operations in the steamy heat of a swamp was even worse."

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ABOVE: German artillery zeroes in on Nevsky Prospect, Leningrad's main boulevard. Despite the constant shelling and aerial bombardments, the shortage of fresh water and food, and the horrendous casualty rates, Stalin and his commanders and troops refused to surrender the city. OPPOSITE: Red Army soldiers fire a mortar round as others lay low. Soviet infantry, which many Germans regarded with disdain early in the war, grudgingly gained their respect during the winter offensive of 1941-1942.

One day, Red Army troops charged Lubbeck's position that he was sharing with a machine gunner. Firing furiously, the MG-42 gunner frequently had to change barrels, tossing the red-hot ones into a puddle of water to cool them. Lubbeck had an MP-40 machine pistol, and he, too, was going through ammunition at a fast rate. As he bent down to load another magazine, he noticed that the machine gun beside him had gone silent, so he "assumed that the gunner was also reloading or again switching the barrel of his weapon.

"A glance to my right revealed the gunner crumpled on the ground beside me. A second later I spotted blood running from a hole in his temple just under the rim of his helmet. The shot that killed him had not been audible in the din of combat, but its precision made it instantly obvious to me that it came from a sniper's rifle."

He chillingly realized that, had he not bent down to reload his weapon when he did, the bullet might have been meant for him.

In April 1942, Hitler issued another directive, this one ordering AG North to once again capture Leningrad and link up with the Finns.

On April 20, perhaps as a birthday present to their Führer, the German relief force finally cracked through the Soviet ring around the Demyansk Pocket and linked up with the SS Totenkopf Division on the Lovat River.

Ten days later, the Soviets called off their disastrous Demyansk/Lyuban Offensive, which had cost them more than 95,000 men killed and missing and more than 213,000 wounded. On May 30, a German counterattack encircled and destroyed the 2nd Shock Army in a series of attacks lasting until June 25. Meanwhile, in Leningrad as many as 100,000 people a month were now dying of starvation.

Fighting in the north reached a stalemate over the summer with both sides too exhausted to defeat the other, while Germany's Army Group Centerl and Army Group South continued to battle as desperately as ever.

In Leningrad on August 9, 1942, a special concert was held at the Philharmonic Hall. The orchestra was to perform Dmitry Shostakovich's Seventh Symphony, which the composer, who had remained in the city throughout its siege, had written for the occasion. It would also be broadcast over the radio.

The hall was packed with people—gaunt, starving people and wounded soldiers who needed something uplifting for their souls. The conductor, Karl Eliasberg, announced, "Comrades, a great event in the cultural history of our city is about the take place. In a few minutes, you will hear for the first time from our fellow citizen, Dmitry Shostakovich. He began his great composition here in Leningrad, when the enemy—insane with hatred—first tried to break into our city. When the fascist swine were bombing and shelling us, everyone believed that the days of Leningrad were over. But this performance is proof of our spirit, courage, and readiness to resist!"

When the concert was concluded, many left the hall with tears in their eyes—but a new spirit in their hearts. They would need it, for the siege of their beautiful city would go on for many more months. The Sinyavino Offensive was launched on August 27 in another attempt to break the encirclement; like the others, it too failed.

On January 12, 1943, the resurgent Red Army struck again with 12 divisions, reestablishing at last the resupply road to the besieged metropolis that still remained under continuous German bombardment.

Two days later, the Soviets made one of the most important technological finds of the war, between two Red Army frontline posts, with Zhukov himself present. "Our gunners had hit a panzer that looked different from the types of tanks we knew," he said. "The Nazis ... were trying very hard to drag it away.... We had a special group formed of an infantry platoon and four tanks to capture the enemy tank, and tow it to our positions ... supported by a powerful gun and mortar shelling.

National Archives

"It was the first experimental specimen of a new, heavy panzer called Tiger, that the Nazi command was testing on the Volkhov Front.... [Our] experiments revealed its most vulnerable points .... at once circulated among all Soviet troops. That is why our tank men and gunners didn't falter when the Germans first used the Tigers en masse in the Stalingrad and Kursk battles later."

Another attempt to break the siege was made on that same day—January 12, 1943—called Operation Iskra (Spark). This was more successful, and a land corridor was forced open, allowing supplies to be brought in and civilians to be evacuated.

It took another year—until January 27, 1944—before the Leningrad-Novgorod Strategic Offensive finally ended the Germans' iron grip on the city. Some estimates say that as many as 1,500,000 citizens of Leningrad died of starvation, disease, and German bombardment during the 872 days of siege.

Boasted Marshal Zhukov proudly 30 years after the battle, "Leningraders, soldiers, and seamen preferred to die rather than surrender their city. Between July 1941 and the end of the year, the factories produced 713 tanks, 480 armored vehicles, 59 armored trains, and more than 3,000 regimental and antitank guns; nearly 10,000 mortars, over three million shells and mines, and more than 80,000 rocket projectiles and bombs. The munitions output increased 10 times over in the latter half of 1941, as compared with the first six months" of peace.

In all, 725,000 troops of Nazi Germany, Finland, Fascist Spain, Romania, Hungary, and Italy confronted 930,000 Reds. By siege's end in 1944, the Axis had lost 579,985 men killed, wounded, and missing in action.

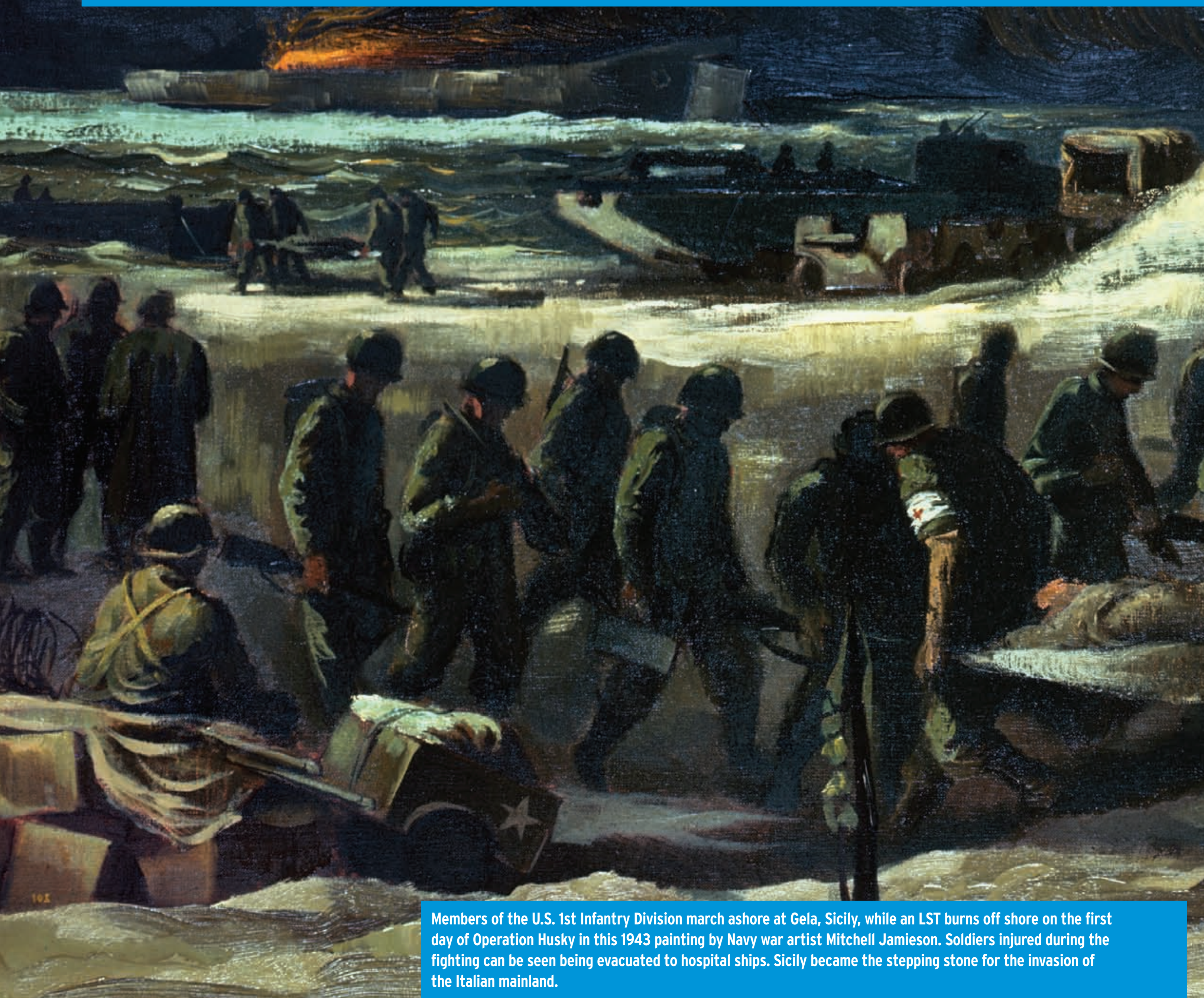
Soviet Northern Front losses comprised 1,017,881 killed, captured, or missing, or 3,436,066 including wounded and sick, with 400,000 more perishing during the evacuations.

Still, Marshal Zhukov had reason to remain jubilant in 1974: "For the first time in the history of modern wars, the besieger who'd blockaded a large city for a long time was routed by a simultaneous strike from outside and inside the beleaguered region.… The enemy had failed to dampen the fighting spirit of the city's inhabitants or paralyze the work of its industries!"

When one visits the renamed St. Petersburg today, one finds the city completely rebuilt and restored to its prewar glory, with monuments and museums dedicated to the sacrifice and heroism of the city's residents and defenders. But any traces of the terrible damage are long gone. It is once again beautiful. □

SICILIAN SLUGFEST

The island of Sicily, lying in the Mediterranean Sea between Tunisia and the toe of the Italian peninsula, is no stranger to war and conquest. Over the centuries, because of its strategic location, Sicily has been invaded, fought over, occupied, and ruled by the ancient Greeks, Romans, Carthaginians, Vandals, Ostrogoths, Byzantines, Saracens, Normans, Germans, French, Spanish, Austrians, and the Bourbon Kingdom of the two Sicilies.



Members of the U.S. 1st Infantry Division march ashore at Gela, Sicily, while an LST burns off shore on the first day of Operation Husky in this 1943 painting by Navy war artist Mitchell Jamieson. Soldiers injured during the fighting can be seen being evacuated to hospital ships. Sicily became the stepping stone for the invasion of the Italian mainland.

In July 1943, U.S. and British troops staged a huge combined Allied airborne and amphibious operation to secure the island of Sicily. Although controversial, it was the first step toward victory.

BY FLINT WHITLOCK

The most recent conflict took place in the summer of 1943. The island was home to some 365,000 heavily armed Italian and German soldiers who were anticipating that the Americans and British, who had just been victorious in North Africa, were about to invade. They were right.

Both the Italian and German forces on Sicily were commanded by General Alfredo Guzzoni and consisted of the Italian Sixth Army and the German Hermann Göring Panzer Division and 15th Panzergrenadier Division.

The Allied high command had determined that keeping a sizable number of enemy troops tied up in the Mediterranean was important because preparations were being made to invade northern France in an operation called Overlord, and the farther these enemy troops were from France, the better.

Therefore, it was decided to mount a major airborne and amphibious invasion of the 9,926-square-mile island with both American and British troops. For this operation, code named Husky, the Allies would employ 181,000 men, 3,200 ships, and 4,000 aircraft. Named to command the entire operation was Lt. Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower, who had also been in charge of the successful Operation Torch landings

in North Africa the previous November. Ike's deputy commander was British General Sir Harold Alexander.

The British contingent was made up of General Sir Bernard Law Montgomery's Eighth Army and included the 5th, 50th, 51st, and 1st Canadian Infantry Divisions, plus the 1st Airborne Division, 1st Air Landing Brigade, and a detachment of Commandos. The British force was split between Lt. Gen. Sir Miles Dempsey's XIII Corps and Lt. Gen. Sir Oliver Leese's XXX Corps.

The American Seventh Army was commanded by Lt. Gen. George S. Patton, Jr., and comprised the 1st, 3rd, and 45th Infantry Divisions, along with a regiment of the 82nd Airborne Division under the operational control of Maj. Gen. Geoffrey Keyes's II Corps. The 2nd Armored Division was the "floating reserve," and the 9th Infantry Division would remain in North Africa and be brought in if needed.

Two naval task forces, under the command of Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham, supported the invasion. The Eastern Naval Task Force was made up of assets from Admiral Bertram Ramsey's British Mediterranean Fleet, while the Western Task Force, with ships of the U.S. Eighth Fleet, was commanded by Admiral Henry Kent Hewitt.

Montgomery's forces would land on the southeast corner of the triangle-shaped island, with Patton's men hitting the beaches to the west, in the Gulf of Gela. Initial intelligence said that the island was garrisoned by eight or 10 divisions of the Italian Sixth Army—half of which were rated as second-class troops—and some 40,000 Germans positioned mostly around Palermo in the north and the major airfields.

Montgomery, the hero of Alamein, was worried about the coming invasion. The night before it began, he wrote in his diary, "I am under no illusions as to the stern fight that lies ahead." He had reason to worry.

Before embarking from North African ports, Patton sent an inspirational message to the men of his new Seventh Army: "When we land, we will meet German and Italian soldiers whom it is our honor and privilege to attack and destroy.... The glory of American arms, the honor of our country, the future of the whole world rests in your individual hands. See to it that you are worthy of this great trust. God is with us. We shall win."

Naval History and Heritage Command

ABOVE: With an LST behind them, U.S. and British officers assess the situation at Gela on July 9. Enemy opposition was relatively light on the invasion beaches but stiffened inland. BELOW: Members of the U.S. 45th Infantry Division march into the town of Scoglitti on their way to the northern coast.

National Archives

Colonel James Gavin, the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment's commander, also sent a message to his troops that read in part, "The term 'American Parachutist' has become synonymous with courage of a high order. Let us carry the fight to the enemy and make the American Parachutist feared and respected through all his ranks. Attack violently. Destroy him wherever found. I know you will do your job. Good landings,

good fight, and good luck."

Husky began inauspiciously at midnight on July 9/10 with a disastrous British glider assault on Syracuse. The plans had called for 128 men of the 1st Air Landing Brigade to land in six Horsa gliders, grab the Ponte Grande bridge that crossed the Anapo River southwest of Syracuse, and hold it until relieved by the 5th Infantry Division, coming ashore by boat at Cassibile, seven miles to the south.

Before dawn, 137 CG-4A Waco gliders carrying a total of nearly 1,800 men were on their way to Syracuse. Unfortunately, many of the pilots of the C-47 tow-planes and gliders were barely trained, and the heavy winds that morning were wreaking havoc on formation flying. To make matters worse, antiaircraft gunners were on the alert and began peppering the incoming aircraft with flak.

The result was chaos. Some gliders were shot out of the sky, while others, frantically maneuvering to avoid the flak, smashed into other gliders. At least 69 Wacos crashed into the sea, drowning more than 250 men. Most of the gliders that actually landed were scattered over 25 miles; only 12 of the 147 CG-4As landed anywhere near their assigned landing zones.

The plan called for the glidermen to be quickly reinforced by troops coming overland. A platoon from the South Staffordshire's 2nd Battalion managed to reach the Ponte Grande and held off several enemy counterattacks before additional Italian troops arrived and attacked the invaders. Low on ammunition, most of the British troops were forced to surrender. Luckily, the rest of the British seaborne invasion went much more smoothly and the troops began overcoming resistance around Syracuse.

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An Italian-speaking GI speaks with Italian prisoners who seem happy to be out of the war.

The U.S. 1st Infantry Division, riding in landing craft through a pounding surf, hit the beaches at Gela in the dark. Fortunately, the coastal defenses were manned by less than stalwart Italian forces, and so the Big Red One's landings went relatively easily. The Italians put up only token resistance before either surrendering or retreating.

Lieutenant Leonard E. Jones of Company C, 18th Infantry Regiment laughed: "Italians are the worst soldiers on the face of the earth—they love to be captured."

Major General Lucian Truscott's 3rd Infantry Division came ashore before dawn in rough seas around the coastal town of Licata. As the landing craft bounced in the swells toward shore, powerful searchlights from land lit up the darkness. For unknown reasons, the enemy did not fire and the lights were switched off.

The worrying silence was soon broken by scattered fire, but it was not terribly heavy or effective, and the 3rd Division, attached Ranger battalions, and supporting tanks were all ashore before 5 AM. Seven hours later, the airfield, town of Licata, and port were in American hands.

Truscott later wrote, "All beach resistance had been smothered by the speed and violence of the assault and more than 2,000 prisoners were taken. Our casualties were little more than a hundred."

During its first-ever combat action, Maj. Gen. Troy Middleton's 45th Division (the Oklahoma and Colorado National Guard, nicknamed the "Thunderbirds") was finding success elusive at the Scoglitti beachhead; on the run in, two landing craft crashed into each other, capsized, and 38 men drowned. At 4:30 AM, enemy aircraft tried attacking the seaborne troops, but a flight of British Spitfires chased them off.

Other landing craft struck rocks or sandbars or their troops were released in too-deep water, and the men drowned without ever having fired a shot. Once on shore, the men of the 45th moved swiftly inland, overran Italian defensive positions, and took their first prisoners.

The 1st and 4th Ranger Battalions were attached to the 1st Infantry Division, while the 3rd Ranger Battalion was attached to the 3rd Infantry Division. Watching the LCIs carrying his men toward the shore at Gela, Lt. Col. William Orlando Darby, the founder and commanding officer of the Rangers, remarked, "Two of them hit the sandbar and stuck, but the center boat leaped over the bar and closed on the beach. A man aboard had been shot and fell off the bridge, hitting the telegraph key. The accidental signal sounded like 'full speed ahead,' and the boat got the extra surge of power needed to hurdle the sandbar."

By late afternoon on the 10th, working methodically through town, the Rangers had subdued all resistance in Gela, even beating off an attack by Italian tanks at one point. Omar Bradley, Patton's deputy commander, wrote that Darby had personally "commandeered a 37mm AT gun, hoisted it into the jeep, and sped back into town. With this makeshift 'tank destroyer,' he engaged the Italian force. Several tanks were soon knocked out and the rest fled in alarm." For his actions, Darby was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.

By the evening of D-day, Allied commanders were cautiously optimistic that the invasion had been a success. Three American, three British, and one Canadian division were ashore, and the ports at Licata and Syracuse had been captured. Now came the next phase: moving inland and securing the entire island. Controlling ports and airfields for a continued buildup of supplies and reinforcements was essential, so Montgomery was given the task of taking all airfields in Eighth Army's sector

Bundesarchiv Bild 183-J14874; Photo: Dohm

ABOVE: Using cacti to conceal their position on Bloody Ridge (Hill 335), German machine gunners prepare to slow the American drive across the island's northern coast. BELOW LEFT: Lieutenant Colonel Charles W. Kouns, commander of 3rd Battalion, 504th PIR, 82nd Airborne Division, "psyches up" his men prior to their first combat jump. The 82nd took heavy casualties from "friendly" fire. BELOW RIGHT: Generals Keyes, Montgomery, and Patton study a large situation map of Sicily to plot their next moves. OPPOSITE: After landing by sea and air on Sicily's southeast coast, the British and Americans needed a month before the island was declared secure.

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while Patton's army was to take the airfields at Ponte Olivo, Biscari, and Comiso.

On July 11, Patton called for elements of Matthew Ridgway's American 82nd Airborne Division to be dropped over southeast Sicily. Colonel Gavin, commanding the 505th PIR (and augmented by a battalion from the 504th PIR) in its first-ever combat drop, ran into problems—not from the enemy, but from the U.S. Navy.

While flying over the invasion fleet on the way to their drop zones, the C-47s carrying the paratroopers were hit by antiaircraft fire from nervous gunners who thought the planes were another wave of enemy bombers (minutes before, the Navy had been hit by a 30-plane Luftwaffe raid).

As a result, 23 of the 144 C-47s were shot down, and more than 400 paratroopers became casualties (81 were killed, including the division's assistant commander, Brig. Gen. Charles Keerans).

The chaos actually aided those paratroopers who made it safely to the ground. Although scattered over a wide area far from their objectives, the men improvised their assignments—cutting enemy communications, destroying bridges, setting up roadblocks, and conducting ambushes against German and Italian motorized columns. The result was that the enemy thought there were 10 times as many parachutists as there actually were.

Radio Rome broadcast that five or 10 American airborne divisions had landed in Sicily—60,000 to 120,000 men. The actual number was 3,405.

Also on the 11th, the Germans, disdainful of the Italians' stomach for a fight, staged a counterattack against Terry Allen's 1st Infantry Division at the Ponte Olivo airfield north of Gela. But no matter how many tanks and truckloads of infantry the Germans employed, they could not stop the Yanks or Brits.

In the British sector, the infantry moved swiftly toward their assigned objectives and ran into more trouble trying to corral the hordes of surrendering Italians than they did trying to fight them. Also, as the Canadians were moving to capture the airfield at Pachino, a Canadian soldier fired a shot toward an Italian gun battery north of the town. Without firing back, 38 Italians came out of their positions with their hands up.

Approaching the airfield itself, the Canadians engaged in a brief firefight with an Italian unit. After one of the Italians was killed, the rest of the unit—12 men— quickly surrendered.

On July 12, General Montgomery pulled a "power play" that rankled nearly everyone in the U.S. 45th Division and caused some serious problems between the American and British high commands. Monty had been forced to abandon his costly attempts to break through the tough German defenses on the eastern coastal highway and unilaterally decided to skirt Catania by moving inland around Mount Etna's volcanic cone.

Highway 124, which ran northwest from Vizzini to Caltagirone and then to Enna, was in the 45th's sector, and the division needed it to continue its push. Without waiting for approval from higher headquarters, and without informing Patton, Bradley, or Mid-

dleton, Monty decided to cut across the 45th's front and appropriate Highway 124 for use by his Eighth Army troops.

Just after 5 PM on the 13th, with the 157th Regiment preparing to assault Vizzini, the regimental commander was more than a little surprised to find the British 51st Highland Division moving up the highway, clearly in the American sector, also on its way to attack the town. He asked for a clarification.

Alexander, Ike's deputy, informed Patton that Highway 124, the Vizzini-Caltagirone road, now belonged to the British and was off limits to the Americans. The next day Patton gave Bradley the bad news: "We've received a directive from Army Group, Brad. Monty's to get the Vizzini-Caltagirone road in his drive to flank Catania and Mount Etna by going up through Enna. This means you'll have to sideslip to the west with your 45th Division."

Shocked, Bradley responded, "This will raise hell with us. I had counted heavily on that road. Now, if we've got to shift over, it'll slow up our entire advance. May we at least use that road to shift Middleton over to left of Terry Allen?"

Patton vetoed the request, which set Bradley's blood to boiling. Montgomery's move meant that the 45th would have to pull all the way back to the beaches, go around the rear of the 1st Division, and restart its advance northward. Thus was born Patton's and Bradley's antipathy toward Montgomery.

The Canadian division passed by the 157th on its way to Vizzini, but the fight for the town bogged down, and the Canadians asked the 157th's commander for assistance. Ignoring the orders to let the Eighth Army stew in their own juices, the 157th came to the aid of their northern brethren, taking the high ground west of Vizzini and smashing resistance until the Canadians could enter and secure the town. After the action, the 157th climbed into trucks and was taken back to the beachhead, where they could start their advance anew.

The Americans blasted every position they could find. "One of my men had a scare," said Whitman. "He pulled the door open on a plane and was confronted with a dead German in a sitting position pointing a burp gun at him. He riddled the Kraut before he found out that he was already dead. The men kidded him about it for days."

Map © 2018 Philip Schwartzberg, Meridian Mapping, Minneapolis, MN

Omar Bradley noted, "By midnight of July 16, the 45th Division had completed its roundabout move from the Vizzini road into position on Allen's left. Middleton lost no time in getting started; he attacked at dawn the next morning. For six days and nights the 45th Division advanced across the center of the island in one of the most persistent nonstop battles of the Mediterranean war. Confined to a single northbound road, Middleton leapfrogged his regiments one through another to attack both day and night."

July 13 saw the arrival of two additional British combat units: Lt. Col. John Durnford-Slater's No. 3 Commandos and Lt. Col. Alistair Pearson's 1st Parachute Battalion of Brigadier Gerald Lathbury's 1st Parachute Brigade. The latter unit was dropped south of Catania with orders to secure the 400-foot-long Primosole Bridge over the Simeto River, while the Commandos, landing from the sea, were to seize the 750-foot-long Ponte dei Malati Bridge over the Leonardo River, five miles away. With the two bridges under British control, Montgomery would be able to quickly reach Catania from Syracuse.

As No. 3 Commando approached the coastline, the enemy opened fire, but Slater's men managed to get ashore and take out two pillboxes on the beach. By dawn, as many as 300 Commandos were in place, guarding both ends of the bridge.

Near the Primosole Bridge, the British paras were also moving into position, but they had had a rough ride. Like the American paratroopers, Lathbury's men had been scattered, and only about 20 percent of the brigade had been dropped in the correct location. Nevertheless, the few paras set about in the dark trying to secure their objective.

Lieutenant Colonel John Frost, who would later distinguish himself at the

"bridge too far" at Arnhem, Holland, was in command of the 2nd Battalion, which counted just 50 men. As Frost was heading for the bridge, he ran into Lathbury's group. Together, the two forces made their way to the bridge only to discover that 1st Battalion had beaten them to it.

Before dawn, additional men straggled in. Machine guns and antitank weapons that the Italians had abandoned were now in their hands. More than 200 men now faced off against Group Schmalz, which contained the 115th Panzergrenadier Regiment and the German 4th Parachute Regiment, which had been dropped near the bridge shortly before the British arrived.

During the morning, at the Malati Bridge the Commandos were coming under increasing pressure. German and Italian tanks, backed by three battalions of a panzergrenadier regiment plus Italian infantry, had arrived and were hammering the Brits. The 50th Division, which was supposed to have reinforced the Commandos, was nowhere to be seen; the division had been delayed fighting its way northward.

The paratroopers at the Primosole Bridge were also under increasingly heavy assault. The Germans mounted attack after attack against the Brits with tanks, infantry charges, mortar and artillery barrages, and even FW-190 fighter bombers.

The coastal city of Augusta, north of Syracuse, fell to the British on July 13 after heavy fighting. As the 50th Division pushed northward, it was also pushing German and Italian units in front of it—directly toward the two bridges. The fighting became desperate and was relieved only by the timely arrival of the cruiser HMS *Mauritius* and her six-inch guns, which, as an officer said, "made a hell of a difference."

Although the naval shelling brought a halt to the enemy attacks, orders were given for the paratroops at Primosole Bridge to pull out. Late on the 14th, the timely arrival of the 4th Armoured Brigade and Durham Light Infantry prevented the Germans from blowing the bridge. A day later, the Durhams crossed the bridge but were sent to ground by intense enemy fire. Not long after, the British forces were withdrawn back to Syracuse. Montgomery would have to find another way to get his army north to Messina. (See *WWII Quarterly,* Spring 2013.)

The 45th was heading for the Biscari airfield on the 13th when two companies of Tiger tanks from the Hermann Göring Panzer Division appeared and a full-scale battle broke out. Scattered and outnumbered, the 1st Battalion of the 180th found itself in an untenable position, hammered by machine guns, tanks, mortars, and artillery, and strafed by German aircraft. The battalion commander, who had preached in training about never being captured, was taken prisoner.

On the 14th, the 45th's 180th Infantry Regiment was maneuvering to reach the Biscari airfield when Captain Ellis Ritchie of Company E was spotted by the crew of a German Mark IV tank. Firing at him from point-blank range, the panzer crew blew a tree behind him in half. Ritchie coolly directed his men to take out the tank with rifle grenades; they did.

First Lieutenant Bill Whitman, Company B, 180th, recalled his company's attack on the airfield: "Individual fights broke out all over the slopes leading up to the airfield, and it was all hand-to-hand in the semi-dark with the gun crews. One of my men beat a German officer to death with his helmet."

After digging up a minefield with their bare hands, Whitman and his men finally made it to the airfield. Ordered to sweep the supposedly deserted airfield for the enemy, Lieutenant Whitman was shocked to find the place crawling with Germans. "The planes contained snipers and the buildings concealed machine guns," he said. "Turrets on the planes swung around, opening fire with machine guns."

The Americans blasted every position they could find. "One of my men had a scare,"

BELOW: A British patrol takes up a position in a street in Acireale, northeast of Catania, near Mt. Etna. The British faced stubborn opposition during their drive to Messina. OPPOSITE: An American DUKW (amphibious vehicle) squeezes past a disabled German Tiger tank that blocks the road to Sicily's northern coast.

National Archives

National Archives

said Whitman. "He pulled the door open on a plane and was confronted with a dead German in a sitting position pointing a burp gun at him. He riddled the Kraut before he found out that he was already dead. The men kidded him about it for days."

It was shortly after the airfield was captured that the reputation of the 45th Division suffered a serious blow. On the 14th, after a fierce firefight, Captain John T. Compton's Company C, 180th Infantry Regiment rounded up a group of 36 Italian snipers, some dressed in civilian clothing. Apparently remembering a speech Patton had given the previous month in which he had said that if the enemy fired on medics or wounded soldiers or were dressed as civilians they should be executed. Compton had the entire group of prisoners shot.

In another incident on the same day at the same airfield, Sergeant Horace West of Company A, 180th was escorting 45 Italian prisoners to the rear for interrogation when, for unknown reasons, he halted the group and shot them all with his submachine gun. Both Compton and West were court-martialed and convicted. West was reduced to private but later returned to duty. Compton was reassigned to the 45th's 179th Regiment; he was killed in action in Italy in November 1943.

In the 3rd Infantry Division's sector on July 13, at a town called Campobello, General Truscott moved forward to observe a firefight taking place. After the enemy resistance had ended, Truscott said, "I went over to look at the scene of action. A dozen or so Germans lay dead, a number of wounded were being cared for by American aid men, and several prisoners were being marched off. It was the first time I had seen Germans killed by infantry fire in front-line action."

Four days later, 1st. Lt. David C. Waybur was leading a three-jeep patrol near Agrigento in search of an isolated Ranger unit. Truscott related that Waybur "was seeking a way across the Drago River, had come upon a destroyed bridge almost under the northern walls of [Agrigento]. There the patrol was attacked by four Italian tanks and most of its members wounded. Waybur, although himself wounded, stood with his tommy gun on the road immediately in front of the leading tank and killed two of its crew by firing through the ports, whereupon the driverless tank plunged into the chasm beneath the destroyed bridge.

"There, Waybur and his gallant patrol held off the remaining tanks until elements of the 3rd Reconnaissance Troop arrived some hours later. For this heroic action, Waybur received the Medal of Honor. Besides heavy casualties, inflicted upon the enemy in killed and wounded and in destroyed vehicles and equipment, the reconnaissance in force yielded more than 6,000 prisoners, more than a hundred vehicles and tanks, and more than 50 pieces of artillery…."

The distance between the Allies' landing beaches and Messina, in the northeast corner of the triangle-shaped island, is not great, but most of Sicily's terrain is extremely rough and mountainous with few good roads. Additionally, the operation was taking place in the middle of summer, and Sicily's summers are scorching hot; soldiers trying to scale the rocky crags began suffering from heat exhaustion at an alarming rate.

On July 18, Middleton's 45th Division wearily trudged into Caltanissetta, a railroad junction city of 60,000 people and a former hotbed of Fascism. On the outskirts, Brig. Gen. Raymond McLain, the division's artillery commander, saw an old man "carrying the mangled form of a boy about ten. The boy was still conscious…. A doctor came by and I sent him to do what he could, but the boy was dying then. Later I learned the child had picked up a German grenade left alongside the road and it had exploded. They left many little red grenades along the road. The Division chaplain said he had found two corpses with these grenades, with the pin pulled, pushed in the dead man's pocket so that, when removed, they exploded."

The next day, July 19, Truscott's 3rd Infantry Division and Hugh Gaffey's 2nd Armored Division, nicknamed "Hell on Wheels," began their drive toward Palermo in the northwest part of the island. The 3rd Division commander recalled standing by the side of the dusty road as his soldiers went marching and driving by: "In blistering heat and stifling dust, these soldiers plowed their way forward like waves beating on an ocean beach and at a rate which Roman legions never excelled." As each battalion went by, Truscott asked how many men had fallen out. The answer was none.

But the 3rd Infantry-2nd Armor column was held back from entering Palermo until Seventh Army gave permission. Troops on

the surrounding hills could see explosions coming from the city, a sign that the Germans, like angry tenants on the eve of eviction, were doing their best to wreck the place before they moved out.

Finally, after hitting the city with aerial bombardment and an artillery barrage, the Americans entered Palermo on July 22 with surprisingly little resistance. Italian soldiers were giving up en masse and at a rate that Truscott thought was "embarrassing." The Palermitans rushed into the streets at the first sign of the dust-covered Yanks, showering them with flowers and kisses and glasses of vino. Also aiding in the capture of the city was Maj. Gen. Manton Eddy's U.S. 9th Infantry Division, brought in by sea.

Patton was immensely pleased with his army's performance. After he drove past a column of 2nd Armored Division tanks and vehicles on the road into Palermo, he wrote, "I received a very warm reception from the 2nd Armored, all of whom seemed to know me [he had commanded the division for a year in 1941-1942] and all of whom first saluted and then waved." As he approached the city he noted, "The street was full of people shouting, 'Down with Mussolini!' and 'Long live America!'"

Patton also said, "I believe that this operation will go down in history.... I also believe that historical research will reveal that General Keyes's II Corps moved faster against heavier resistance and over worse roads than did the Germans during their famous Blitz."

In a letter to his wife shortly after the keys of the city were turned over to the Americans, Truscott wrote about his impressions of Sicily: "This is a most interesting island.... I have never seen so much poverty and filth." He also noted, "The censor will permit me to say that I am now in Sicily, and you will guess that the division has been in the forefront. It has done well. I do not believe that the equal of these men has ever existed in our Army—though I will admit that I may be somewhat prejudiced!"

On July 23, before he had time to savor the capture of Palermo, Patton was ordered by Alexander to proceed eastward to Messina. Hearing that both Alexander and Montgomery—still under the impression after the Kasserine Pass debacle in Tunisia that the Americans were inferior soldiers—had maligned his Seventh Army, he decided to beat Monty to Messina as a way of proving the superiority of American troops.

Having reached the northern coast of the island, the 45th Division was given its marching orders: head to Messina with all possible speed. It was an order easier given than obeyed. The coast was incredibly mountainous with but a single highway permitting movement. The Germans could slow or even stop the Thunderbirds' progress by blowing a bridge or setting ambushes anywhere along the 100-mile route.

With most of Guzzoni's troops having been captured or deserted, the Italian contribution to the defense had melted away, so German General Hans Valentin Hube became the de facto officer in charge. The Germans had established an "Etna Line" beginning from an area north of Catania, encircling Mount Etna, and then extending northward across the Nebrodi Mountains to the sea. It was through this line that both the Seventh and Eighth Armies were trying to penetrate on their way to Messina.

As the Allies were clawing and scratching their way across Sicily, important developments were taking place in Rome. After American bombs fell on two railroad marshaling yards and an airbase in the Eternal City and Palermo fell to American troops, a political crisis boiled up and an anti-Mussolini backlash erupted.

On July 25, a vote of no confidence by the Fascist state's Grand Council shocked the dictator, and he appealed to King Victor Emmanuel III for support. The king expressed

Patton also said, "I believe that this operation will go down in history.... I also believe that historical research will reveal that General Keyes's II Corps moved faster against heavier resistance and over worse roads than did the Germans during their famous Blitz."

his displeasure with Benito Mussolini's conduct of the war and the affairs of state. Stunned and humiliated, Mussolini had no choice but to resign—and was promptly arrested.

In his place, a caretaker government under the aging, anti-Fascist Field Marshal Pietro Bodoglio was installed and immediately proclaimed that the war, and Italy's role in it, would continue—while simultaneously holding secret talks with the Allies that would lead to Italy's capitulation.

The Romans, who once lustily cheered Mussolini, marked the fall of the Fascist government with wild revelry. In Sicily, more than 120,000 Italian troops celebrated the news by deserting or surrendering, although some continued to fight alongside German units.

Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, commander in chief of German troops in southern Italy, told Hitler on July 29 that he was making plans to evacuate the bulk of his troops from Messina to Reggio di Calabria on the Italian mainland; Hitler, who hated giving up any territory without a fight and feeling he had been stabbed in the back by the Italians, reluctantly approved the evacuation from Sicily of as many German units as possible.

The steady withdrawal of German troops across Sicily toward the city of Messina—only a mile from the Italian mainland—turned into a raging river of gray-uniformed humanity.

At the hilltop town of Troina, the 1st Division faced its toughest challenge to date.

Both: National Archives

ABOVE: Sherman tanks raise dust on their way to Palermo, rolling past an abandoned Italian 149/19 field piece. The Italians had little stomach for the fight, leaving much of the defense of Sicily to the Germans. BELOW: A civilian raises his hands as GIs enter the mountain town of Troina after six days of some of the toughest fighting the 1st infantry Division would experience in the war.

The town was built atop a ridge that dominated Highway 120 and the surrounding barren countryside. Considered a natural strongpoint, Troina and its environs are extremely steep with little room for an attacking force to maneuver.

Troina had seen plenty of warfare over the eons; in the 11th century, the last battles between the Normans and Saracens were fought there. The modern battle, which began on July 31, did not go well from the start. For openers, both II Corps and Division Intelligence had failed to detect the presence of four enemy divisions—all of them seasoned fighters—firmly entrenched inside the town's stone buildings and surrounding mountain and determined to keep open the German escape route to Messina.

Terry Allen's Big Red One was worn out from three weeks of nearly continuous, uphill fighting in stifling heat. The division was below strength, too, due to malaria and the heavy casualties suffered since the landings.

The unsuspecting Americans, advancing from Cerami, were a mile west of Troina when the Germans unleashed a storm of artillery shells that brought the advance to a halt. Three days later, the 1st had advanced only a few hundred yards, all the while taking a severe pounding from the German guns that not even aircraft could knock out.

On August 3, Allen's men launched a night attack by the entire division that very nearly succeeded. The Germans struck back with a fierce counterattack, however, and there the matter stalemated. The fifth day of the battle, August 4, began with an air and artillery bombardment of German positions, but still the enemy refused to be dislodged.

So furious was the fighting that Private James M. Reese of the 1st Division's 26th Infantry Regiment was awarded the Medal of Honor, posthumously, for breaking up a German counterattack with his mortar.

The German defenders had done their job well, delaying the Americans for nearly a week to allow their comrades to escape across the Strait of Messina—units that would live to fight another day on the mainland. Under the cover of darkness on August 5/6, the enemy began slipping quietly out of Troina and the neighboring mountains. On the morning of August 6, Allen's men entered the shattered town to find the enemy gone.

The 1st Division had taken heavy casualties, but none was greater than the loss of its beloved commander, Terry Allen, and his assistant, Teddy Roosevelt, Jr.—son of the famed Rough Rider and U.S. president—who were both relieved of command. There is still some question as to who actually ordered the firings. Some say it was Patton, while others blamed Walter Bedell Smith, Patton's chief of staff. In his autobiography, Bradley took responsibility.

The reasons are equally hazy; some thought it was because the division had taken an inordinate amount of time to subdue Troina. But, according to Bradley, it was something deeper: "Under Allen, the 1st Division had become increasingly temperamental, disdainful of both regulations and senior commands. It thought itself

exempted from the need for discipline by virtue of its months on the line. And it believed itself to be the only division carrying its fair share of the war."

Another source quipped, "The trouble with the Big Red One is that it thinks the U.S. Army consists of the 1st Infantry Division and 10 million replacements."

The division's simmering anger at the firing of Allen and Roosevelt, however, was directed at Patton, whom they thought was behind the move. These feelings became more intense after it was discovered that "Old Blood and Guts" had slapped two enlisted men (one of whom was a 1st Division soldier) who had been admitted to field hospitals on Sicily for "battle fatigue," but which Patton thought was malingering and cowardice. Once the story broke in the American press, Eisenhower ordered Patton to personally apologize the all of the units of Seventh Army. He would relieve Patton of command of Seventh Army after the Sicily campaign was over.

Much to the anger and dismay of the 1st Division soldiers, most of whom truly loved Allen and Roosevelt, their two popular commanders were given the boot and a new boss, a strict disciplinarian named Clarence Huebner—who had served with the division as a private in the previous world war—was brought in.

At first the men loathed Huebner, who would later command them at Omaha Beach during the Normandy invasion, but in time he would earn their grudging respect and even affection. As one old soldier later said, "He was the greatest soldier there ever was. He was a wonderful division commander."

But that was in the future. The Sicily campaign was not yet over. The Germans thought they still might be able to stop the Allies—or at least inflict such heavy casualties that the British and American publics would demand that their leaders consider a negotiated peace. Therefore, considerable Axis reinforcements had poured back into Sicily. These were elements of the 1st Parachute Division, 29th Panzergrenadier Division, and the headquarters of the XIV Panzer Corps—a total of about 70,000 men.

The fighting, which had been difficult, now became intense. While the British were battling for their lives at every little village and trying to maneuver around the heavily fortified slopes of Mount Etna, the 45th Division was on Highway 113 and battling its way across the northern coast of the island.

Bundesarchiv Bild 101I-634-3899-02A; Photo: Nowak

Members of the German 1st Parachute Division dash to a new position during the battle for Sicily. Unlike the Italians, the Germans did not give up ground easily.

As with the rest of Sicily that had already been conquered, it seemed that a raging battle had to be fought at every hamlet, every bridge, every intersection. On the night of July 26/27, the 157th Regiment passed through the 180th at Castel di Tusa and headed for the village of Motta D'Afformo where, at a high, rocky ridge west of San Stefano, the Thunderbirds met their greatest challenge on Sicily.

Called "Bloody Ridge" by the Yanks, the rocky, cactus-covered area, also known on military maps as "Hill 335," bristled with strong fortifications, pillboxes, minefields, and other defensive works. The jagged coastline, intercut with deep gorges and dry streambeds, offered little room for maneuver. It was here that the Germans were determined to stop the American drive long enough for the rest of the defenders to escape across the Strait of Messina.

As the 157th Regiment tried scrambling up the steep slopes, the Germans unleashed torrents of mortar, artillery, and machine-gun fire down upon them. Sergeant Henry Havlat, Company B, 157th recalled, "We had tough going on Bloody Ridge. One of my men, about 10 feet from me, hit a trip wire. The last word he said was my name. Then a mine blew up and his head came off. That's when the artillery came in. The first shell got me. I got hit in the right lung, and got half my right shoe shot off, and another chunk got me in the back."

The battle for Bloody Ridge lasted all of July 28, with untold stories of heroism written in blood for every yard taken. As the sun went down, grenades flew back and forth and the artillery continued to pump out shell after shell; the German barrage never slackened. "The next day," recalled Sergeant Vere Williams, 157th, "the Navy came into the bay and a few salvos made the Germans move on."

On July 31, the exhausted 45th Division was relieved at Cefalu by the 3rd Division, which continued battling toward Messina. From August 1-10, the Germans performed

National Archives

Medics of the 3rd Infantry Division attend to the wounded at an aid station in the town of Sant'Agata, between Palermo and Messina, August 9, 1943.

their own Sicilian version of the "Miracle of Dunkirk." During that period, General Hube managed to evacuate his XIV Panzer Corps to the Italian mainland—more than 12,000 men, 4,500 vehicles, and 5,000 tons of equipment. Allied efforts to interdict the evacuation by aerial bombing were, at best, ineffective.

By August 18, the numbers would grow to 60,000 German soldiers, plus 14,000 vehicles, 47 tanks, 92 guns, and more than 21,000 tons of ammunition and other supplies. The Italians, too, removed anywhere from 62,00 to 75,000 men. The Allies would see them again in September, when the Americans and British invaded southern Italy.

While Patton was trying to make a point by beating Montgomery to Messina, Monty would not make a race of it. He wanted only to keep the Germans from escaping and realized Patton was in the best position to accomplish that. In fact, he urged Patton to use roads assigned to the Eighth Army.

At 4:30 AM on August 17, once the 45th had caught its breath, a patrol from Company B, 1st Battalion, 157th became the first Allied unit to enter the city. The enemy had fled. The streets were quiet. The Thunderbirds were followed by British Commandos and Truscott's 3rd Division. The citizens were grateful that at last the war had ended in Sicily.

The Allies had suffered heavy casualties during the month-long battle for the island. Patton's Seventh Army lost almost 9,000 men (including more than 2,200 killed), while Monty's Eighth Army lost nearly 12,000 (including just over 2,000 killed). Combined losses for the British and American air forces and navies came to 886.

The Germans and Italians came out worse. While figures are imprecise, it is estimated that the Germans lost in killed, wounded, captured, or missing, from 20,000 to 28,000 men, while the Italian numbers have been estimated at between 147,000 and 190,000—most of whom were happily in prison camps.

The question has often been asked: How did the Allies allow so many enemy troops to escape to continue the fight on the Italian mainland, given the superiority of the Allies' ground troops, naval, and aerial assets? Several answers have been offered. First, the Strait of Messina was protected by more than 230 antiaircraft guns. The Allied fleet was kept at bay by strong coastal defenses and a swift current, and intelligence had learned that the Italian Navy might attack any Allied ships in the Strait with suicide runs. The answers seem unsatisfactory.

Some historians have written that the decision to invade Sicily in the first place was a huge mistake, that the resources employed to conquer the island could have been better used to invade France in 1943 instead of 1944. It is an argument that will never rest. But, if nothing else, the seizure of the strategic island opened the sea lanes in the Mediterranean to Allied shipping, especially the shipments of Middle East oil that Britain relied upon—sea lanes that had been closed since 1941.

Just as important, the "lessons learned" at Sicily, especially how to conduct a combined air and sea invasion of a hostile shore, were used by Eisenhower and his staff as they prepared to mount the biggest air and sea invasion in history at Normandy.

Despite the criticism, a victory is a victory, even if the enemy has been allowed to slip away to fight another day. Mussolini was finished, and Italy was out of the war as an Axis partner; Hitler was forced to expend scarce resources in a theater he could no longer win, and certainly that contributed to the Allied cause and ultimate victory.

In a message to his Seventh Army troops on August 22, Patton wrote: "Born at sea, baptized in blood, and crowned with victory, in the course of 38 days of incessant battle and unceasing labor you have added a glorious chapter to the history of war.

"Pitted against the best the Germans and Italians could offer, you have been unfailingly successful. The rapidity of your dash, which culminated in the capture of Palermo, was equaled by the dogged tenacity with which you stormed Troina and captured Messina. Every man in the army deserves equal credit....

"But your victory has a significance above and beyond its physical aspect—you have destroyed the prestige of the enemy.... Your fame shall never die." □

DESPERATE RESC

BY CHRISTOPHER MISKIMON

A daring and well-executed raid at a prison camp in the Philippines saved the lives of more than 2,100 American men, women, and children.

Henry Muller had an important job. He was the intelligence officer of the 11th Airborne Division, known in military parlance as the G-2. As 1944 ended, his unit was engaged in heavy fighting on the Philippine island of Luzon. His mission was to gather the intelligence needed to keep the division informed about the Japanese forces it faced.

One day he sat down with a Filipino plantation owner who had recently traveled the length of Luzon to get medicine from Manila for his sick wife. It was a good chance to learn what the enemy was up to and where they were gathering.

The interview began with Muller asking a few questions he knew the answers to so he could verify if the man was honest; the Japanese had collaborators among the island nation's populace. Soon he was satisfied and began asking the farmer new questions, starting with what route the man took during his journey. Within a few minutes the farmer mentioned, "I went by that big POW camp."

Muller was surprised; he knew of no such camp in the area. "What camp?" he asked.

"The one at the old Los Baños agricultural college." The farmer explained it was full of American civilians, including women and children. It wasn't far south of Manila. Muller asked how many prisoners were at the camp. The Filipino replied, "I'd say about two thousand."

Muller's shock deepened. He had no idea so many civilians were being held so close to the fighting. He extracted all the information he could about the camp's location and circumstances. Afterward, he prepared a report for his division commander, Lt. Gen. Joseph M. Swing. His superior wasn't surprised at the revelation, saying it wasn't near their area of operations and not to worry about it beyond reporting the information up the chain of command.

Muller did as he was told but didn't stop there. The Filipino reported the civilians were in bad shape; a liberation mission might be needed, and paratroopers were almost ideal for such an action. Quietly, he began gathering whatever he could find on the camp, it surroundings, and its defenses. If the opportunity arose to go to the rescue like the cavalry in a Western

This illustration by Johnny Shumate depicts the liberation of the Los Baños internment camp by American paratroopers and Filipino guerrillas on February 23, 1945. In the background, C-47s can be seen dropping supplies. The camp held more than 2,000 prisoners, most of whom had been held by the Japanese for over three years.

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UE at LOS BAÑOS

movie, the 11th Airborne would be ready.

The small Filipino town of Los Baños lies 40 miles southeast of Manila. At the edge of town sat the former grounds of the Agricultural College of the Philippines. On these grounds in February 1945 more than 2,000 American civilians were starving to death. They were desperate for help, but the advancing American army seemed far away.

The camp opened in 1943, constructed in an environment of contaminated water, malaria-ridden swamps and rice paddies, and a nonexistent sewage system. Lice and bedbugs infested the area, spreading disease. Water had to be brought from distant wells and boiled to make it potable. There was no electricity. The camp was built by 800 male internees selected mostly by lottery.

The bulk of the residents were moved there through 1943 and 1944 from other camps such as Santo Tomas. The Japanese wanted the Americans away from the Filipino populace at large. They encouraged the Filipino people to hate the Americans as deposed imperialist overseers, but the lesson hadn't taken; the locals persistently aided the internees with food and clothing and occasionally helped them escape.

Aside from Los Baños, two other small villages sat nearby: Mayondon and San Antonio. An enormous freshwater lake, Laguna de Bay, sat to the north of the villages; the Americans held the opposite shore. Mayondon Point stood out on the lake, providing a vantage point to observe the area. National Highway 1 wound its way west to east, going through the villages alongside a rail line.

The camp was built on the grounds of the college's athletic fields. The area around the camp was level, broken by a few streams and ravines. Vegetation covered the area. An inactive volcano, 3,576-foot-high Mount Makiling, sat to the southwest. The camp was 60 acres, roughly 600 by 800 yards. It was surrounded by a double fence of barbed wire; the outer fence was six feet tall and the inner four feet.

Segments of the fence were covered in mats called sawali. These gave concealment but not cover from gunfire or shrapnel. The main gate was on the northeast side with a smaller one on the southwest. The perimeter fence was dotted with nine guard posts made of logs and dirt. A tenth was outside the camp to the southeast. The barracks, arms room, and commandant's offices were just inside the main gate.

There were 26 barracks buildings made of wood frames with nipa palm roofs; the walls were sawali mats. Each was 30 by 198 feet and sat on a concrete slab. The southwest portion of the camp was the "Holy City," where the various priests, nuns, and missionaries were housed. The rest of the inmates lived in "Hell's Half Acre" on the northern end.

The two zones were separated by a sawali fence. Outside the camp were the college's concrete buildings and cottages, used as quarters for transiting Japanese units. They were unoccupied when the rescue occurred.

The first Japanese commandant of the camp, Major Tanaka, had actually been reasonably fair in his treatment. He was of a Samurai family and also a Buddhist priest.

Both: National Archives

ABOVE: Smoke rises from a Los Baños camp building in this image from a documentary film shot by a U.S. Army Signal Corps film crew during the rescue. BELOW: With no love for their Japanese occupiers, Filippino guerrillas enthusiastically took part in gathering intelligence and the rescue mission itself.

National Archives

In early February 1945, three weeks before the Los Baños raid, a group of U.S. Army nurses and other prisoners, interned at Santo Tomas University near Manila, were freed by American troops of the 1st Cavalry Division.

He showed concern for the welfare of his charges and even allowed them to undertake occasional trips to Manila to purchase food with their limited funds. Eventually he was replaced, but the new man, Major Urabe, was also relatively humane. Conditions were crowded and difficult, but the camp leadership did not seem inclined to add to their misery unnecessarily.

This all ended in July 1944 when the third commandant, Major T. Iwanaka, took command. Cruelty replaced humanity, and conditions deteriorated rapidly.

To the internees, Iwanaka appeared afflicted with what would today be called dementia. He left the day-to-day operations of Los Baños to a subordinate, Warrant Officer Sadaaki Konishi. Both seemed inclined to inflict as much suffering upon the internees as possible.

Still, the prisoners retained some hope. The Americans had landed in the Philippines in October 1944 and were fighting their way toward the camp. They saw air battles in the skies overhead, and bombers flew past on their way to Manila. Friendly Filipinos smuggled in food, and with it came news of the campaign. A few internees managed to acquire radios, carefully hidden and even more carefully listened to, away from the ears of the guards.

On the final day of 1944, a number of U.S. Navy fighters roared over the camp; the prisoners showed no outward display of elation for fear of reprisals from the guards, but inside they were ecstatic to see American aircraft.

A week later the Japanese guards burned the camp records. The next day the guards suddenly turned the camp over to the prisoners' executive committee. Shocked by this development, the prisoners wisely chose to remain in camp, fearing the result if they ran into a roving Japanese Army unit or Filipino collaborators. In any event, they were too weak to get far. Later in the day a small number of Kempetai, the dreaded Japanese military police, arrived but did nothing more than close the main gate.

On January 9, 1945, another American landing took place in Lingayen Gulf, 160 miles north of the camp. The civilians were desperate for salvation, and the Japanese were equally desperate in their resistance.

Five days later the guards returned looking much the worse for wear. Major Iwanaka immediately imposed a strict curfew, reduced rations, and began unannounced searches. Tyrannical Warrant Officer Konishi denied food and medical supplies with increasing regularity. The internees grew steadily weaker, awaiting a rescue they feared would not come in time. Each day one or two more prisoners died.

Soon after the American troops came ashore, they began operations to rescue the thousands of civilians and POWs held in camps around the island. Many had been taken to Japan as slave labor, and there was growing fear those remaining in the Philippines would be murdered by the retreating Japanese.

Two successful rescue missions occurred in January and early February. The first involved a small force of Rangers working with Filipino guerrillas to liberate POWs at the Cabanatuan camp on the night of January 30. Some 522 were rescued—and the Japanese suffered heavy casualties—in what has become known as The Great Raid.

On February 1, another mission set out to free the Santo Tomas camp at Manila. With infantry riding tanks in a flying column, troops of the 1st Cavalry Division drove 100 miles in 66 hours, ranging far ahead of the main American advance. Aided by guerillas, they reached the camp and negotiated the withdrawal of the guard force, who soon became prisoners themselves. The column saved 3,700 internees.

Now the focus became the Los Baños camp. It was still deep behind the front lines, with thousands of Japanese troops in the area. The 11th Airborne Division was in the area, having made a seaborne landing in January soon followed by a parachute assault designed to trap local Japanese forces. This operation allowed the division to reach the southern outskirts of Manila by early February.

There, the Americans ran into the Genko Line, a Japanese defensive belt bristling with machine guns, bunkers, and cannons. It took weeks of hard fighting to secure the area, ending with the capture of the Cavite Naval Ammunition Depot on February 21.

While the 11th Airborne was fighting

the Japanese, it also gathered the intelligence needed to plan a rescue operation at Los Baños. Their best estimate numbered the prisoners at 2,130. They assumed half were too weak to travel any distance and perhaps 250 were bedridden. The only military personnel present were a dozen Navy nurses. Fortunately, more information became available through the efforts of the prisoners themselves.

Each night a few prisoners would carefully sneak out of the camp to search for food and supplies. While foraging, they sought news of the American advance; usually there were more rumors available than food. Filipinos told them the U.S. Army was getting closer and Manila was close to falling.

A prisoner named Freddy Zervoulakos went out on February 12 and managed to contact Colonel Gustavo Ingles, a Filipino guerrilla leader. Ingles was scouting the area in preparation for the rescue mission. Zervoulakos gave the guerrilla officer information about the camp conditions and returned to inform the executive committee.

The committee debated what to do but feared Japanese reprisals. It ordered the prisoners not to contact Ingles again. Nevertheless, on February 18, Zervoulakos and three others—Pete Miles, Jack Connors, and Ben Edwards—snuck out of camp and rendezvoused with the guerrillas at a pre-arranged point. They aimed to get to American lines and ask for rescue.

The guerrillas took Miles across the lake in a banca, a canoe-like boat with outriggers. The next day Miles arrived at the 11th Airborne's command post. He told them the location of the camp's machine guns and their fields of fire, guard posts, and the routines of the sentries. Some of the guns were camouflaged and had not been detected by aerial reconnaissance. Significantly, most of them were sited to fire on the prisoners rather than defend against external attack.

The next step was a thorough reconnaissance of the area to verify the escapee's reports and gain information. The leader of the divisional reconnaissance platoon paired up with an engineer platoon leader and the pair crossed the lake on February 20.

Their mission was complex but vital to the success of the rescue. They had to locate a drop zone (DZ) where the paratroopers could land. The DZ needed a route the Americans could follow to the camp for the attack. The two officers were also to determine the extent and locations of the camp's defenses, including the guard posts.

Once across the lake, the lieutenants joined two of the American prisoners and some Filipino guerrillas. Silently they crept around the perimeter of the camp noting the defenses. They found two possible drop zones. One was south of the camp, but there was a creek barring easy approach to Los Baños. The other was northeast of the camp and easily large enough at 1,500 by 3,200 feet. At most a paratrooper would have to cover a few hundred yards to reach the camp.

There were also a few dry streambeds and ditches to provide cover fgor the attackers. This DZ had a railroad track along the northeast side and a set of power lines along the north corner, though power to the area was out. This would provide a boundary for pathfinders and aircrew to see the DZ during the drop. The American officers returned across the lake the next day and reported their findings, allowing the division staff to make detailed plans.

The actual plan for the rescue was both imaginative and daring. There were risks as well, but there was no way to know how long the prisoners had before the Japanese might execute them.

At the same time, the 11th Airborne was still actively engaging the enemy in hard fighting 20 miles west of Los Baños. Still, planning went ahead, and a coherent operation rapidly emerged. The rescue force would be divided into three elements, each with its own critical role.

The first was a company of paratroopers that would land on the camp and seize it from the Japanese guards. They would be assisted by men from the divisional reconnaissance platoon and local Filipino guerrillas. The recon men would cross the lake before the raid using bancas. They would kill or drive off the guards, collect the prisoners, and get them moving toward the lakeshore.

The second group would be a battalion of infantry riding in DUKWs—amphibious trucks. They would cross the lake, pull up onto the beach, and move to the camp to pick up the civilians, sparing the weakened prisoners a long trek before they returned across the lake to American lines. The DUKWs were later replaced with amphibian tractors, known as amtracs.

The third group was a battalion-sized task force that would approach the area overland as a diversion, drawing Japanese attention away from the rescue.

These three groups would carry out the plan in five phases, some of which would occur simultaneously. The first phase was the reconnaissance of the camp and planning of the mission, which was already happening. In Phase II, the reconnaissance platoon would link up with the guerrillas and secure the landing beach and drop zone. They would also kill the sentries.

Phase III would be the airborne drop and attack on Los Baños, including the preparation of the prisoners for evacuation. The evacuation of the civilians to American-held territory constituted Phase IV. While all this was going on, Phase V was the diversionary attack from the west, which would hopefully pull any Japanese reinforcements away from the camp.

There were a number of contingencies as well. There were hasty plans for an attack on the camp by the guerrillas if it appeared the Japanese were about to slaughter the prisoners. Another option was to evacuate the internees via the diversionary force in case an evacuation across the lake became unworkable.

The time for the attack was originally scheduled for late afternoon, but fears of the

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Men of the 511th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 11th Airborne Division, strap on their battle gear prior to a jump on February 3, 1945, near Manila. The regiment would jump again in the raid on Los Baños.

impending executions caused the attack to be moved to 7 AM. This was also when the off-duty guards did their morning calisthenics. While exercising, they would lock their weapons in the camp arms room. Changes came rapidly due to the ever-evolving intelligence picture. Still, the 11th Airborne was able to smoothly adapt to changing circumstances.

The units selected as the mission parachute infantry were augmented by attached units of various sorts. B Company of the 1st Battalion, 511th Parachute Infantry Regiment (1/511) was selected to make the parachute drop and assault the camp. Commanded by 1st Lt. John M. Ringler, it was a typical airborne infantry company with a headquarters and three rifle platoons. Each platoon had two 12-man rifle squads and a mortar section. The company was understrength at 73 percent with 93 men available.

B Company was actually the strongest unit in the regiment, despite its numbers. The company was reinforced with a nine-man engineer squad to set up roadblocks and the battalion's machine-gun platoon, which had 28 men at the time. A trio of Filipino guerrillas volunteered to make the jump as well, and one war correspondent is known to have accompanied the mission, for a total of 134 men.

During the attack, the company would make its parachute landing and proceed by platoon to attack the camp rather than wait to assemble as a company. After eliminating any resistance, they would gather and organize the prisoners for evacuation.

The reconnaissance platoon would infiltrate the area by crossing the lake in bancas and take positions around the camp. They would mark the drop zones and landing beaches and assist in the assault. With them would be guerrillas from several different groups. Weapons, ammunition, and supplies were funneled to the guerrillas to aid in their efforts.

Lieutenant Colonel Gustavo Ingles of the Hunter's ROTC guerrilla group was in charge of planning. Ingles had the respect of local guerrilla leaders, so he could work through any difficulties. On February 10, a meeting was called with the guerrillas to discuss whether they could take the camp and liberate the internees without American troops. They were not sure if the paratroopers could be withdrawn from the front quickly enough before the rumored executions took place.

While the guerrillas believed they might be able to take the camp themselves, they had no solution for evacuating the internees, who would be too weak to walk to the American lines. The guerrillas had no trucks and were unsure whether they could hold the camp against counterattacks until the Americans arrived. It was decided to try and wait for the U.S. assault with one caveat: if the guerrillas

observed the Japanese killing prisoners, they would attack immediately to save as many as they could.

The guerrilla leaders had one other concern. Even if the prisoners were successfully rescued, the Filipino people living in the area would then be at risk; the Japanese often retaliated against local civilians wherever a guerrilla attack took place.

It was unknown when the American advance would seize the area, which troubled most of the guerrilla leadership. Colonel Ingles finally calmed their fears by saying he would recommend attacks against the nearby Japanese units after the raid to keep them pinned and unable to carry out reprisals.

On February 13, Ingles went to the camp to observe it. He also met with George Gray, a recent escapee and the former secretary of the camp's committee. They discussed the guard posts, the routines of the guards, and the deteriorating situation inside the camp. Ingles received orders the next day to send a patrol to the lakeshore and check the ground to be sure it would support the weight of motor vehicles. They would also check the road from the shore to the camp. This patrol took place on the night of February 16.

Ingles returned to the American lines and met with the 11th Airborne staff. He reported the guerrillas could seize the camp but probably could not hold it against a Japanese counterattack. The 11th Airborne was part of the U.S. Eighth Army under the command of Lt. Gen. Robert Eichelberger, who discussed the plan with intelligence officer Major Day Vanderpool. There were doubts as to whether the guerrilla forces could assemble and move through the area without being spotted or betrayed. They decided to cancel the unilateral guerrilla mission and focus on the combined airborne and amphibious assault with the Filipino forces in support.

At some point during the later planning stage, amtracs were substituted for the amphibious trucks, though it is unknown exactly why. In any event, the amtracs had deeper cargo compartments and somewhat better protection. They were also armed with more .50-caliber machine guns than DUKW units generally carried.

It was a risky decision; amtracs broke down more often, and the loss of even a few might leave the mission without enough vehicles to carry everyone. The unit selected was the 672nd Amphibian Tractor Battalion, which had been in combat since Bougainville in September 1944. It was equipped with the LVT(4), a 24-foot-long tracked vehicle with a 250-horsepower gasoline engine and a crew of three. The LVT(4) also had a rear ramp that would make it much easier for the weak internees to get aboard.

The battalion had 54 amtracs available for the operation. The other two rifle companies of 1/511 would ride in the amtracs and help secure the area.

The diversionary force was under the command of Lt. Col. Robert Soule and hence became known as Task Force Soule. It was composed of the 188th Glider Infantry Regiment, minus its 2nd Battalion. The 2nd Battalion of the 511th Parachute Infantry Regiment was also committed as the task force reserve. A pair of artillery battalions, the 472nd and the 675th (Glider), both equipped with 105mm howitzers, would provide fire support.

Company B of the 637th Tank Destroyer Battalion was attached, adding mobile firepower to the column. The American force was rounded out with a company of combat engineers and a detachment of bridging engineers. A large number of Filipino guerrillas from the Hunter's ROTC group also accompanied Soule's unit.

Japanese troops were scattered throughout the area. Many of their positions posed a threat to the rescue, although American intelligence efforts revealed them so planners could deal with them. There were an estimated 150 to 250 troops in the camp's guard force; even the prisoners were unsure of the exact numbers. While the American planners had to assume they were seasoned veterans, most of them were older men past their prime or recuperating sick and wounded. The guards would change shifts in the morning when the men not going on duty would report for calisthenics.

There were many more Japanese troops in the surrounding area. The lake was covered

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Paratroopers of the 511th PIR advance toward an objective immediately upon landing. This photo was taken on Luzon four months after the Los Baños raid.

Map © 2018 Philip Schwartzberg, Meridian Mapping, Minneapolis, MN

ABOVE: While Task Force Seule approached Los Baños from the west, the airborne and amphibious forces came across Laguna de Bay, directly for the camp. RIGHT: Lieutenant General Robert Eichelberger (left), commander of the U.S. Eighth Army, and the 11th Airborne's CO, Maj. Gen. Joseph Swing (right), view a map two weeks before the rescue operation.

by a detachment of 20 men on the Los Baños wharf with a pair of 70mm cannons just west of Mayondon Point. These guns could endanger the amtracs as they crossed the lake.

There was a rock quarry about 3,000 yards west of the camp. A company-strength force was stationed there with four machine guns and a pair of howitzers. Over six miles to the west was a detachment of 80 troops and two 75mm guns set up as a roadblock along National Highway 1. This force was in the path of the Soule Task Force. A number of Japanese patrol boats cruised the lake, but they were not considered a real threat to the amtracs.

By far the largest threat to the rescue force was the Japanese 8th Infantry Division, between 8,000 and 10,000 strong. This unit served in Manchuria from 1939-1944 and was an experienced formation consisting of two infantry and one artillery regiments. While it would take hours for the 8th to move to Los Baños, one of its battalions was able to move to the camp in 90 minutes once it learned of the situation and received orders. If the rescue was delayed, the 8th Division could endanger the success of the entire operation.

Despite the risks, the operation began on February 19 when B Company was pulled from the line and taken by truck to New Bilibid Prison, also located on the shoreline of Laguna de Bay. The men rested for a day and were then briefed on the rescue mission. Their reactions were mixed; while most understood how important this was for the prisoners and were honored to be selected for the effort, a few thought it was a suicide mission and did not mind saying so.

The company had three Filipino guerrillas who were "adopted" during the fighting in Manila and were assigned one per platoon. A sergeant asked 1st Lt. Ringler if the guerrillas could go on the raid. Ringler agreed, so the three Filipinos were given three hours of parachute training. The battalion machine-gun platoon, commanded by 2nd Lt. Walter Hettinger, arrived the next day.

While the company prepared for its new mission, planning went ahead. Changes came quickly so that few written orders were even prepared; the actual written orders for the mission were created afterward purely for historical documentation. While the risks were still considerable, the division staff and command personnel thought the goal was still worthy. On the 20th, the 65th Troop Carrier Squadron was assigned to carry the paratroopers for the drop.

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Commanded by Captain Donald Anderson, the squadron was equipped with Douglas C-47 Dakota transports based at nearby Nichols Field. It had last dropped paratroopers during training exercises at Fort Benning, Georgia, before it went overseas but was still considered capable of performing the mission.

During the late afternoon of the 22nd, B Company was trucked to the airfield and issued parachutes and assigned to the planes in 15-man sticks. A few of the men carried extra ammunition and submachine guns to arm the local guerrillas. Each man was given a map of the camp and briefed on the latest updates.

The attached engineers also arrived and were ordered to establish roadblocks near the camp to delay any fast-arriving Japanese. The men were also informed they would jump at a much lower altitude than the normal 1,000-1,200 feet. Instead, they would jump at 400-500 feet; this would get them on the ground more quickly and closer together. From this height, the time in the air would be only about 25 seconds.

Meanwhile, on the night of the 21st, the reconnaissance platoon, under the com-

mand of 1st Lt. George Skau, began infiltrating into the Los Baños area. Skau led one group with three of his scouts and a trio of war correspondents in bancas; Sergeant Martin Squires took charge of another group of five scouts the same way for the three-hour trip across the lake. A large banca rigged with sails carrying the remaining 23 men of the platoon left two hours later. This vessel also carried the unit's machine guns and heavy equipment.

The winds blew against them that night, however. It took Skau's group eight hours and Squires' men 10 hours to get across the lake, arriving only shortly before sunrise. They rendezvoused with the local guerrillas at a schoolhouse and prepared for their mission. The large banca still had not arrived.

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ABOVE: In another image taken from the film documentary, guerrilla move through the Los Baños camp. To hasten the departure of the evacuees who were taking too much time gathering their meager possessions, the Americans set fire to some of the buildings. OPPOSITE: Loaded with happy evacuees, amtracs leave the camp and head for Laguna de Bay.

The plan was for the platoon to divide into six teams, each of which would have six to eight guerrillas attached. The team under Sergeant Turner would mark the drop zone with green smoke just before the planes arrived overhead. Sergeant Leonard Hahn's team would secure the landing beach for the amtracs and mark it with green smoke.

Skau and three sergeants, Robert Angus, Vinson Call, and Cliff Town, would all lead teams that would eliminate the guard posts on the north and west sides of the camp. Skau's team would personally attack the guard post at the main gate. Another would cut through the fence and seize the arms room.

Another team led by Sergeant Squires was bolstered with 20 guerrillas and assigned to hit the guard posts on the southwest side, while another led by a radioman would cover the south. Even a few escaped prisoners were located and added to the teams.

Finally, on the evening of the 22nd, the large banca carrying the rest of the platoon arrived; it had been stuck in the middle of the lake, becalmed. Luckily, no enemy patrol boats had spotted them. After dark, the soldiers left the boat and were quickly briefed on the plan before setting out for their assignments.

Silence was imperative. If the American troops were discovered, the Japanese might start executing the prisoners. Skau even told them not to return fire if they were shot at in the darkness. It wasn't unusual for sentries to shoot at noises in the nighttime jungle.

As the scouts moved into position, Task Force Soule was also preparing for its mission. The attached engineers were busied repairing or replacing bridges. The Hunter's ROTC guerrillas arrived and were assigned to guard Soule's flank. The 672nd Amphibian Tractor Battalion also assembled on the American side of the lake.

As the combat soldiers waited, the division staff kept gathering information through the night. Around midnight a Northrop P-61 Black Widow night fighter overflew the area and reported "hundreds of truck headlights" moving toward the Los Baños area from the east and then returning.

The staff also received a report from some guerrillas that 3,000 Japanese had arrived as reinforcements. General Swing considered these developments but decided to continue as planned; changing the operation would upset the carefully constructed timeline and lead to the separate units arriving at varying times, unable to support each other. It was later learned the reports were overblown.

On the Japanese side, many of the American movements had been detected but the wrong conclusions were drawn. Task Force Soule was observed, and the Japanese took it to be the main attack. They dug in to await it. The amtrac battalion was also reported but assessed to be tanks supporting Soule's advance. It did not seem the Japanese considered so much effort might be put into rescuing internees. The guards at the camp passed the night with no idea what was coming.

The attack actually began at 4 AM on February 23, when the troops assigned to the amtracs loaded into the vehicles. Aboard one was Major Henry Burgess, the parachute battalion commander who was in charge of the entire operation. Lt. Col. Joseph Gibbs, the amtrac battalion commander, was also aboard.

At 5:15 the entire force of 54 amtracs formed into three columns of 18 vehicles

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each and moved into the lake. At 5:50 they turned south using handheld compasses and estimates of the distance travelled at their speed. This was risky since the crews had no experience at navigating long distances; they were used to moving supplies and troops ashore from transports.

The plan worked, and at 6:20 they made a small correction that put them on course for the beach at San Antonio. The rising sun gave them a first view of their objective. Suddenly, the nine C-47s carrying B Company raced overhead, causing the paratroopers in the amtracs to note how low the planes were flying.

The dawn brought enough light for the pilots to easily spot the terrain features around the camp. Below, Sergeant Turner's scouts lit off their green smoke grenades, marking the drop zone for the pilots above. Lieutenant Ringler stood in the door of the lead plane.

At the landing beach two miles from the camp, Sergeant Hahn's team also lit their green smoke for the approaching amtracs that had navigated nearly perfectly. The unit divided into nine columns of six vehicles; not a single amtrac broke down during the 74-minute trip. Scouts and guerrillas ran up to direct the vehicles to the road.

One platoon from A Company jumped off to secure the beach along with two jeep-drawn 75mm pack howitzers loaded on the amtracs. The Japanese guns on Mayondon Point began firing at the unit, and the American artillery quickly went into action while the rest of the amphibious assault advanced toward Los Baños.

As the amtracs rolled ashore, B Company got the green light to jump at 6:58. Ringler leapt from the doorway, and his men followed, one every second. Due to the low altitude, the trip to the ground was short. As they landed, the paratroopers shed their jump harnesses, gathered their crew-served weapons from the drop bundles, and formed up for the attack on the prison guards and the liberation of the camp.

The scouts had struggled through dense jungle and across deep creeks to get into position on time; several arrived with just minutes to spare. Squires' team had gotten separated from its accompanying guerrillas in the darkness. With 15 minutes to go until the attack, one of the guerrillas was attacked by a villager's dog. He drew his pistol and shot the animal down, causing the entire team to stop motionless, awaiting the response of the Japanese. Inexplicably, none came, so the team finished moving into position.

Nearby, Sergeant Town's team was also just arriving in position as the attack began. One of the guerrillas was hit, but his life was saved by his belt buckle, which shattered the bullet. They heard some gunfire from the other side of the camp and immediately saw four Japanese soldiers running across a field in front of them. Pfc. Robert Carroll opened fire on them with his BAR, emptying the magazine in one long burst. All four enemy troops were cut down in the fusillade.

Continuing their attack, the team found another Japanese crawling through a ditch and shot him as he tried to escape. Most of the guerrillas ran off to chase down fleeing Japanese while the Americans starting cutting the wire to get into the camp.

A few other teams were late but quickly got involved. Lieutenant Skau's team was still several hundred yards from the front gate when the shooting started. Carrying the platoon's only machine gun, they rushed through the gate without suffering any casualties; the team kept going to the arms room and took control of it. Along the way, they shot down a number of guards.

Incredibly, the Japanese soldier in charge of the off-duty guards, who had just assembled for their morning calisthenics, ordered them to their barracks to put on uniforms rather than straight to the armory for their weapons. It was a fatal mistake.

The rest of the reconnaissance platoon was quickly engaged with the Japanese guards while B Company was still landing nearby. Sergeant Call's team came under machine-gun fire from a position north of the main gate. They were also pelted with grenades, one of the fragments hitting a man in the nose.

Call was hit in the shoulder by the machine gun, but the team kept moving forward, shooting at guards within the camp. When the sergeant noticed some guards taking cover in a bunker near the main gate, he called B Company to put some 60mm mortar rounds on it. The team also hit the bunker with grenades.

The rest of the teams got into the camp and started shooting the guards, many of whom were running around seemingly without direction. Some hid in prisoner barracks, while others scrambled into ditches or tried for their own barracks. Some went for the arms room, but Skau's team cut them down, including an officer who tried to jump through a window into

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On their way to safety and freedom, amtracs cross the lake, February 23, 1945.

the camp headquarters.

Many of the Japanese, particularly the unarmed, fled into the jungle or nearby buildings. Most of the Filipino guerrillas broke from the American scouts to chase down the fleeing men, often hacking them to death with bolo knives or machetes. The Filipinos were taking revenge on the hated Japanese for all they had done to their country.

When the attack began, most of the internees were assembling for the morning roll call. It took a short time for them to realize what was happening. When they saw the parachutes start disgorging from the C-47s, many thought it was a food drop. A few claimed to see a Lockheed P-38 Lightning fighter fly over with the word RESCUE painted on its side.

The scene quickly became chaotic. Nuns began praying; people started shouting, while others returned to their barracks to gather belongings. When the bullets began flying, most took cover in ditches or the barracks; a few just dropped to the ground and lay prone. One woman spotted paratroopers at the wire cutting their way in. Thinking quickly, she grabbed a pair of wirecutters, ran over, and gave them to the soldiers.

B Company burst in on the fighting and began to do its part. The jump had gone well, and the company had amazing luck. Only one man suffered an injury from the landing, but it was not serious enough to stop him from joining his comrades. The entire unit landed together, even the Filipinos, who had never jumped before.

Within 15 minutes, the lead paratroopers entered the camp. Only a few shots were fired at them, and the offenders were quickly dealt with. The Japanese resistance, never truly organized, was nearly over, and the Americans started mopping up the remainder. Most of them consisted of guards who would pop up here and there among the 2,100 civilians, but only a few fought. Most were simply trying to escape, but the paratroopers shot them as they ran. The Americans were there to rescue the internees and get away as quickly as possible. They took no chances by sparing the enemy.

With the main fighting over, most of the paratroopers set about organizing the civilians for the evacuation. The attached engineers ran down the road to their roadblock positions. They laid mines, prepared satchel charges, and blew down trees to block the roads the amtracs didn't need to use. Each roadblock was covered with a machine gun in case the Japanese arrived quickly.

Soon rumbling noises were heard from the direction of the lake. Some of the prisoners became frightened, thinking the noise came from Japanese tanks. Instead, a long column of amtracs appeared and drove through the main gate. None of the internees had ever heard of such a vehicle but were glad to see they were American.

The two infantry companies aboard the vehicles dismounted and secured the area as best they could. The 50 men of A Company stayed in the camp, while C Company set up more roadblocks. Only six amtracs would fit in the camp entrance, so the rest parked on a baseball field and some open spaces outside the main gate.

As the paratroopers deployed, a strange event took place. A colonel from MacArthur's staff, Courtney Whitney, emerged from an amtrac with an interpreter and two of the amtrac's crew. They went to the camp's headquarters building and returned shortly with boxes of documents. Whitney stated he was along only to observe the operation. He was, in fact, the man in charge of that section of MacArthur's staff responsible for liaison with Filipino guerrilla groups. They returned on the same amtrac, and the significance of the documents is unknown to this day.

The civilians had not seen an American soldier in three years and were amazed at their appearance. Some didn't recognize them at first. They wore strange helmets, different from the World War I-style headgear in use at the war's beginning. Their uniforms were dark green, closer to the Japanese uniforms rather than the khaki they were used to. Many of the paratroopers had yellowish skin from the Atabrine they took to ward off malaria.

The rifles, submachine guns, and bazookas they carried were likewise unfamiliar to the prisoners. The paratroopers looked like giants. The civilians were all starving, many weighing under 100 pounds. The paratroopers were all in good health and physical condition. They towered over the civilians.

The American soldiers were similarly shocked by the internees, who appeared no more than skin and bones. Many were ill, wore little more than rags, and some were so frail the paratroopers were afraid to pick them up for fear of injuring them. Some were so hungry they ran to the kitchens and storerooms to eat. Others were disappointed to

learn their liberators were soldiers; they'd dreamed of being rescued by Marines.

There was a wide range of emotions. Some cried, while others were euphoric. A few hid or even refused to cooperate, perhaps afraid the Japanese would return. It was obvious they could not make the 2½ miles to the beach.

On a happy note, one of the accompanying war correspondents came along because his brother and sister were internees in the Philippines. He found them almost as soon as he entered the camp.

The problem became organizing the civilians and getting them aboard the amtracs. Most were milling around, and no one was in control. Major Burgess got them under control and made sure his men were all accounted for. At 07:45, Lieutenant Skau reported his men were all present, but most of the guerrillas were gone hunting Japanese. They would be of no use if the Japanese appeared.

Ringler knew where most of his men were and was tracking down the last few. Burgess was also unable to contact either Task Force Soule or division headquarters by radio. They could hear firing in the direction of Soule's unit, but it didn't seem to be getting any closer. Lt. Col. Gibbs wanted to be released to take his amtracs back across the lake and leave the internees and paratroopers to join up with Soule.

Burgess refused this request; he would have to evacuate all the internees by amtracs across the lake as planned. Unfortunately, the 54 amtracs could not carry all the civilians and soldiers in one trip; he would send as many as possible in one lift. The rest of the internees would have to wait for the second lift, protected by a perimeter of paratroopers arrayed around the beach.

This would be difficult as the beach was on low ground and hard to defend against a concerted attack; it might take two or three hours for the amtracs to return. Still, the paratroopers had plenty of ammunition and their two howitzers. It could be done, and there was no other choice.

The task of getting the civilians into the amtracs was made easier by a fire that started in the headquarters building. The internees were naturally moving away from it and toward the parked vehicles. Burgess ordered Ringler and the machine-gun platoon leader to set fire to the barracks and force the prisoners away from them. This had the desired effect, and soon the paratroopers were helping the frail civilians aboard the transports. A few men searched the camp to ensure none were left behind.

As the remaining internees entered the amtracs, the rest of the B Company men were accounted for with only two casualties, both minor wounds. The convoy moved out, heading back to the lakeshore, each vehicle packed with liberated civilians while paratroopers marched alongside, escorting them toward freedom.

Along the route, Filipinos gathered from the villages, passing water and bananas to the Americans. The camp was empty and burning to the ground. The B Company men were the last out after a final sweep. A few stragglers were with them, and many of the soldiers carried babies. They trod past the corpses of Japanese guards and went down the road.

While the paratroopers made their stunningly successful raid on Los Baños, Task Force Soule was equally busy diverting Japanese attention. The task force began its mission with its artillery, raining shells on the Japanese in the nearby hills and the rock quarry. The infantry advanced, purposely making noise. The tank destroyers moved constantly to make it seem there were more of them. The trucks dragged logs behind them to raise dust and make the battalion appear to be a division.

Lieutenant Colonel Soule was methodical, clearing the nearby hills and repairing bridges to ensure the task force could withdraw easily. At this point he assumed the amtracs would withdraw with his force after they rendezvoused. Some of his troops supported an attack by the guerrillas on a nearby hill with their machine guns and mortars. A number of Filipino bodies were found with their hands tied, but the Americans didn't know if they were collaborators executed

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Chief nurse Laura Cobb speaks with Vice Admiral Thomas Kincaid after the Los Baños rescue. The nurses were part of the "Angels of Bataan" group who spent three years in Japanese internment camps in the Philippines.

GERMAN SOLDIER'S SKETCHBOOK

The talented Ernst Eigener captured war scenes with pencil and paintbrush until his battlefield death in 1942.

BY FLINT WHITLOCK

It's called *Mein Skizzenbuch* (*My Sketchbook*)—a 72-page booklet of pencil drawings and watercolors by noted German war artist Ernst Eigener, a soldier with Propaganda Co. 637, created during the conquest of France in 1940 and published in 1941.

PK 637 was formed in 1939 in Breslau and was attached to the German 6th Army that fought in Belgium and France before turning east and documenting war scenes during Operation Barbarossa, the invasion of the Soviet Union.

Many of the pieces in *Mein Skizzenbuch* were undoubtedly preliminary studies done in the field for larger paintings that Eigener probably hoped to finish later in a studio.

Little is known about Eigener, but his work exhibits professional training and an outstanding, vigorous talent that has often been compared to that of another German war artist, Hans Liska, and the American combat artists Howard Brodie and Kerr Eby.

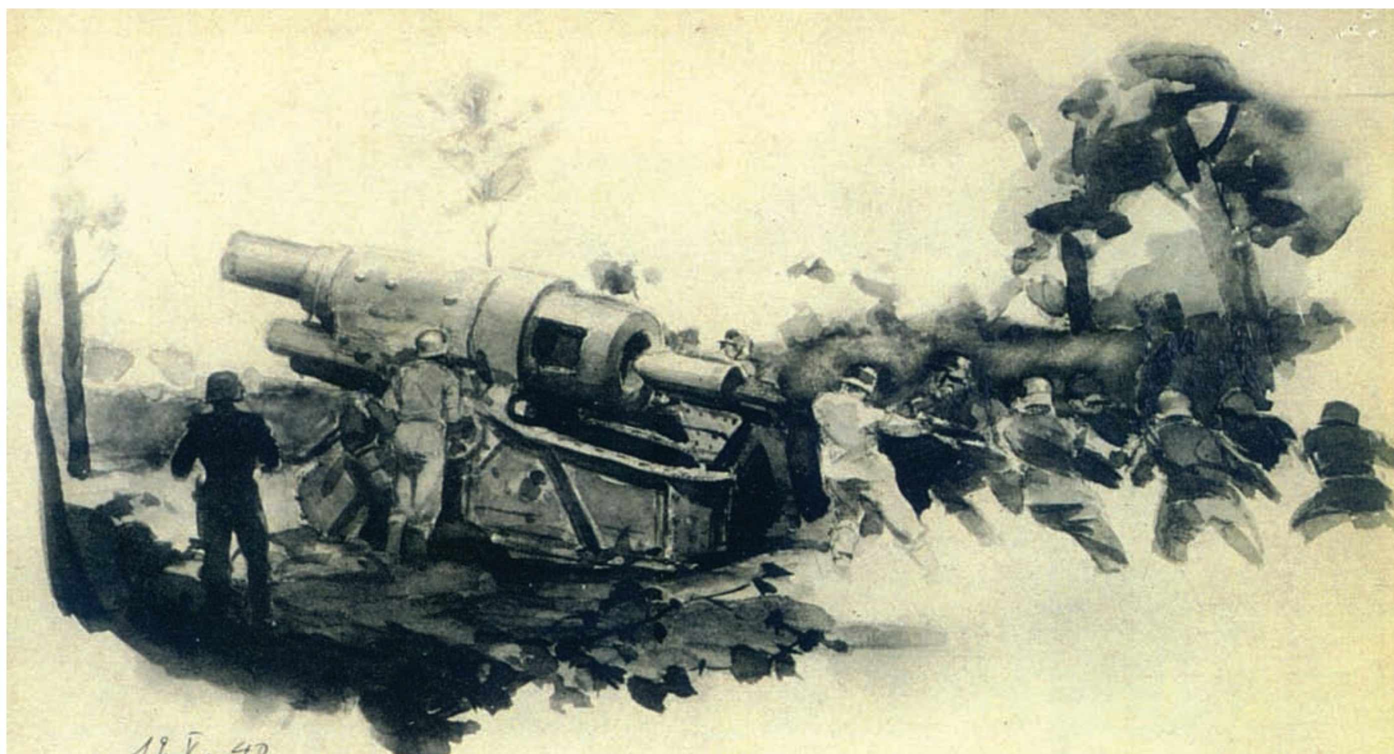
On November 20, 1942, the 37-year-old Ernst Eigener, a soldier with a sketchbook instead of a rifle, died during a Soviet assault near Kalach on the Don River. □

ABOVE: Using black ink and crayon, Eigener drew German tanks advancing across a stark landscape during a Wehrmacht advance. He titled this sketch "Panzer Angriff," or "Tank Attack."

RIGHT: Eigener's watercolor of a mortar crew firing their weapon.

RIGHT TOP: Using watercolors, Eigener portrayed the detritus of a battle: wrecked vehicles, a disabled artilley piece, barren trees, the shell of a building, even a piece of furniture.

ABOVE: Eigener sketched a motorcyclist with a few quick, deft strokes of his pencil, yet captured consierable detail. RIGHT: A soldier carrying an ammunition box and a weapon leaps into a postion occupied by two of his comrades. By showing the men from the back, almost as silhouettes, Eigener obscures their humanity and reduces them to anonymous cogs in the Third Reich's war machine. BELOW: Members of a 305mm gun crew were pictured loading their weapon in this watercolor dated May 19, 1940. The location where this action took place was not indicated by Eigener, but was probably in Belgium.



LEFT: A captured British soldier. Apparently, Eigener's subjects were willing to allow themselves to be drawn or painted. FAR LEFT: Getting close to the action, the artist captured two soldiers tossing grenades at the enemy. Unfortunately, Eigener did not always note when and where the scenes were that he depicted. TOP RIGHT: A portrait of a Landser. With his fine eye for detail, Eigener has added a pair of binoculars, entrenching tool, and a grenade tucked into the soldier's boot. TOP LEFT: Two camouflaged soldiers in their protective holes behind a wire fence keep watch for the enemy.

A member of an ordnance battalion in Patton's Third Army saw firsthand the devastation of war.

My Odyssey ACROSS EUROPE

BY ROY ALTENBACH

Roy Altenbach, a soldier from a German-speaking family in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, was assigned to the 47th Medium Maintenance Company, 22nd Ordnance Battalion. After several months of training in the States, his unit shipped out for Northern Ireland, then headed for Scotland, England, and France, arriving in Normandy in July 1944. Prior to going overseas, he was married to Ethel Scott, a librarian in Sheboygan, and they exchanged hundreds of letters until his return. His memoir is based on their correspondence.

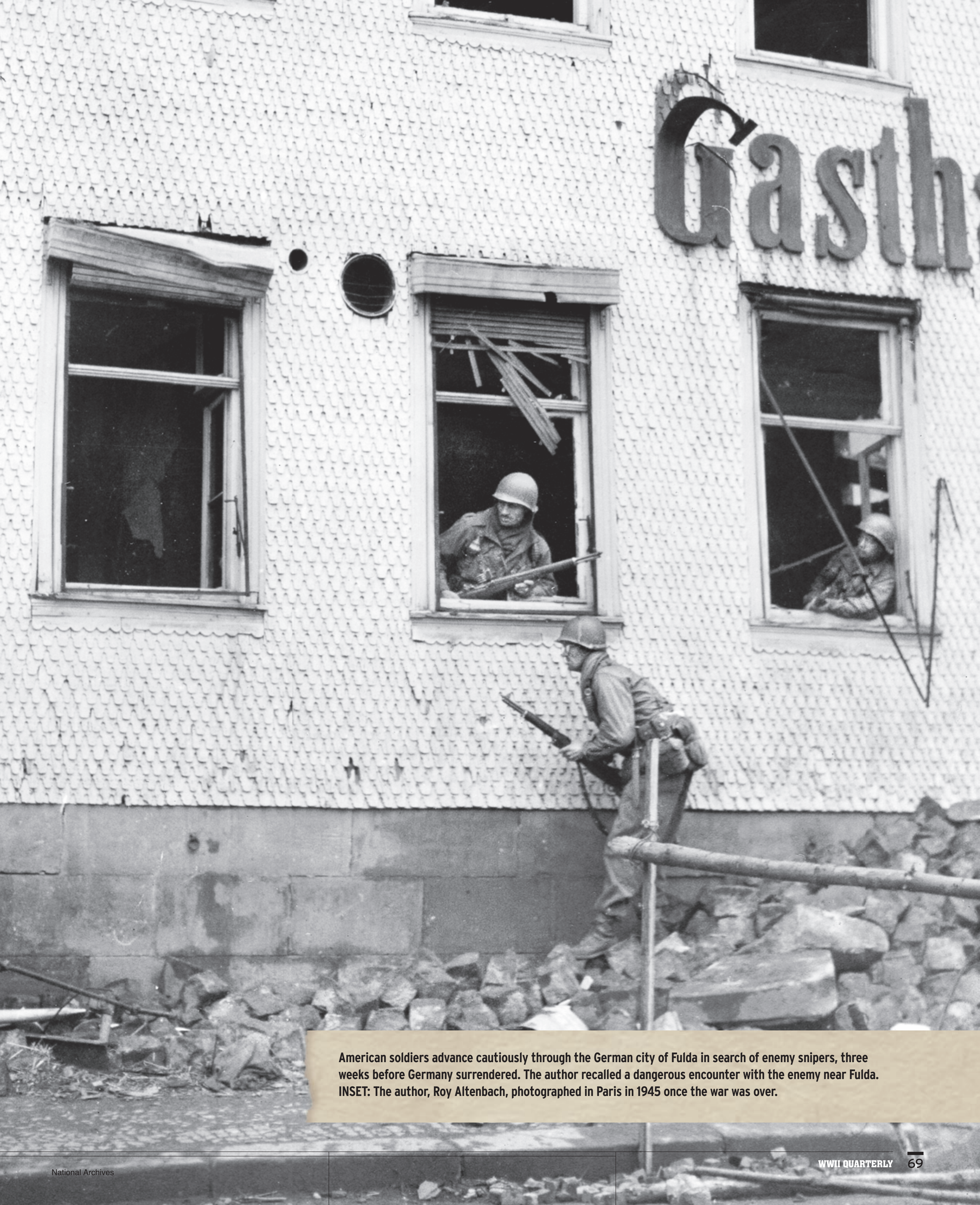
When I went into the Army, I was 23 years old, and it was the first time I'd really been away from home and family. Naturally, I was somewhat scared and apprehensive as to what would happen. By the time I went in, just about everybody I knew was in the service, so I was looking forward to getting in. I made up my mind that I was going to experience as much as possible. I did my share of bitching and complaining but took every advantage of seeing and doing interesting things.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 1943. After crossing the Atlantic, we arrived in Larne, Northern Ireland, were fed, then boarded a train for Belfast. We changed trains and ended up in Lisburn and were trucked to Camp Knockmore, our final destination. I was assigned to the 22nd Ordnance Battalion. Our shops were much more elaborate than we ever had in the States. I went to work in the paint shop and, because I was a pretty good artist, was made battalion sign painter. I really enjoyed the job and was kept plenty busy.

J. Scott Altenbach

Movement of units to the southern part of England was taking place in preparation for the Normandy invasion. On May 22, Altenbach's unit was moved from its camp on the English-Scottish border to Camp Water Eaton in Staffordshire, West Midlands, near the site of an ancient Roman fort.

TUESDAY, JUNE 6. D-DAY. The day that we had all been waiting for. I sure hoped that this was the beginning of the end and that soon the war would be over. We spent most of today listening to the radio and thinking about the fellows who went in. The heavy bombers flew over, going and coming from missions by the hundreds. Often we saw them with engines that were



American soldiers advance cautiously through the German city of Fulda in search of enemy snipers, three weeks before Germany surrendered. The author recalled a dangerous encounter with the enemy near Fulda. INSET: The author, Roy Altenbach, photographed in Paris in 1945 once the war was over.

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not working, and we could often see damage on some of the planes. A lot of times we saw small rockets fired from planes. We were told that it meant they were in trouble and needed to land first, or that they had injured on board. It sure gives you a weird feeling to know that something is wrong.

In late afternoon of the 6th, we saw a formation of planes that were towing gliders go over heading south. The sky was thick with them. There must have been 200 or 300 of each. They kept going over for a half hour at least.

Naval History and Heritage Command

While waiting to head for France, Altenbach received a cablegram from his wife Ethel informing him that their son, Joe Scott Altenbach, had been born. On July 10, 1944, a month after Operation Overlord began, Altenbach's unit departed Water Eaton for Weymouth on England's southern coast.

MONDAY, JULY 10. We left Water Eaton by convoy. I was assistant driver of a 2½-ton GMC 6x6 truck with a trailer. We had to travel with the tops down, and it rained a good deal of the time. I drove about half of the trip but enjoyed the sights more when I was not driving.

It was interesting, when we got close to the coast, to see all of the equipment that was waiting to be moved over to the Continent. All the fields were full. Endless stacks of wooden boxes piled high. Other fields of trucks, jeeps, tanks, and artillery, etc. They stretched as far as the eye could see. It was almost unbelievable. We arrived at the marshaling area near Weymouth at about 8 PM.

THURSDAY, JULY 13. Yesterday and today we kept busy working on our equipment, such as camouflage nets, etc. We had our money changed to French invasion money. We were issued rations and a lot of things we would be able to use later. We also loaded our truck and trailer with five-gallon cans full of gas. The company also drew a lot of extra vehicles. At 8 PM, we got orders to move out at 11 PM. We had to put on our impregnated clothing for protection against a gas attack; it sure is stiff and it stinks.

We moved out and went several miles to a place where we were lined up to board an LST (Landing Ship, Tank). While there, we were given a hot meal. We boarded LST No. 497; it was a real nice, clean ship. It had been used in the invasion on June 6. There were nice quarters for us; each of us had a bunk and white blankets. It sure was good to sleep in a warm, dry place after having spent more than two months sleeping in tents and on the ground. There was plenty of hot water and showers, which was a real treat for us.

SUNDAY, JULY 15. We took off at 5 AM in a big convoy of LSTs; later, a lot of freighters joined the convoy. Several of the ships had barrage balloons to keep aircraft from strafing. We sighted the coast of France at about 6 PM.

As we got near the beach and waited, the Navy made ice cream for us. That was quite a treat because we had not had any since we went overseas. We also saw all the wrecked ships and equipment in the water and on the beach. It was unbelievable to see all the destruction.

A short time before midnight, we got orders to start the engines and prepare to move off the ship; I drove the truck off the ship onto the beach. By this time it was dark, and the MPs were directing us. As we left the ship, a German plane showed up. The antiaircraft guns lit up the sky. A little later on the road, we came to a stop and another plane flew over and the AA opened up again.

I sat on top of the load of gas cans and watched the fireworks. We heard some voices off to the side of the road but did not pay much attention to them. It was a heavy AA gun, and suddenly they fired. What a jolt! The truck shook like the dickens.

We drove several miles inland to a collecting point near Isigny. We got there at about 2 AM and bedded down for the rest of the night. We attached to the 35th Infantry Division in Patton's Third Army.

MONDAY, JULY 17. We moved to an area about six miles north of St. Lô and about two miles east of Ariel. We were about three miles behind the lines. The fighting was really bitter at the time. Every evening about dark we would watch the American fighter planes head back to England. A short time later, the Germans would show up and, of course, AA would light up the sky. It was better than any fireworks I have ever seen!

One day a German plane flew over our area, very low. We could see the pilot, and the plane was smoking; we saw it crash several miles away. I later talked to a fellow who said the pilot bailed out and came down near First Army headquarters. As he came down, all the headquarters clerks and messengers shot at him, but nobody hit him. He hoped the pilot did not get back to Germany until the war was over because his report would have been great for the Germans to hear what lousy shots the American GIs were.

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TOP: A convoy of U.S. Army vehicles works its way through the rubble-strewn streets of Saint-Lô, one of the hardest-hit cities in France. ABOVE: An American patrol glances at the bodies of dead Germans outside Saint-Lô. Altenbach said such scenes made him realize how terrible war is. OPPOSITE: In a southern England port, a Dodge VC-5 truck loaded with supplies backs into the hold of a Normandy-bound LST (Landing Ship, Tank). Altenbach arrived in France on just such a ship early on July 16, 1944.

FRIDAY, JULY 21. We went within one kilometer of St. Lô, and it was a sight I will never forget. The city had been occupied only the day before, and we were almost at the front at that time. There were wrecked vehicles everywhere and a lot of dead cattle and horses, which were all bloated. There were dead American and German soldiers, too, mostly in the ditches. They were also bloated, and it was terrible to see them.

At the time, they were not picking up dead GIs because so many of them had been booby-trapped. Of course, the smell was overpowering. It made me realize how awful war really is.

While I was in the area, a 6x6 truck came by with a full load of something. As it passed, I saw it was stacked full of dead American soldiers!

There was a crossroad at the edge of St. Lô where MPs were directing traffic. We stopped to talk with them, and they gave us information on the area. While we were there, a command car drove up with several colonels in it. They talked to the MPs and learned how close they were to the front. Immediately, they had the driver make a fast U-turn and drove as fast as hell to get out of there. That day we also drove through Ariel; the town was a complete wreck—there was not a building standing.

TUESDAY, JULY 25. This is a day I will never forget. At about 10 AM a big flight of B-24 bombers came right over us, opening their bomb bay doors. When they got over St. Lô, they started dropping their bombs, and we could see them falling. Of course, the German AA opened up, and we saw three planes go down.

There were little artillery spotting planes flying below the bombers, which would radio to the heavy artillery the locations of the German AA guns. There were some big guns close to us, and they, along with the artillery all along the line, opened up. After a short time, there were no more puffs of smoke from the AA, and the rest of the planes had no problems from the ground.

After the heavy bombers had flown over, there were several hundred dive bombers, then hundreds of medium and attack bombers came through. They just kept coming. It was quite a sight to see. All the while they were bombing, the ground shook under us.

One of the first formations that went over had a plane fall out of the formation and at the same time dropped its bombs fairly close to us. Some time later, I noticed another plane drop something. A few seconds later, there was a terrific whistling and explosion. The plane had dropped its bombs, no doubt by accident. They hit only two fields away from us! We all made a dive when we heard that whistling.

I was on guard duty later when the AA opened up, and the shrapnel hit my helmet and shoulders. I crawled under a truck and could hear it hitting the vehicles and the ground all around me.

Later we read in the *Stars and Stripes* (our Army newspaper) that there were 3,500 planes in that raid and that it was the biggest air raid in history. It blasted open the way for General Patton and the

Third Army to start the drive across France. Also on that day, our own planes dropped bombs in the wrong place and killed General Leslie McNair, head of Army ground forces, and quite a few American GIs.

At the beginning of August, we had moved south of St. Lô near the Vire River. Destruction was everywhere. I did not see how the French could stay so cheerful. Many of them were living in homes that had very little of the roof left, and often whole walls were missing, with very few panes of glass left intact. Yet on every windowsill of the house they had flowerpots with flowers blooming. You would have thought there was not a thing wrong anywhere around them.

In general, the French people treated us very well. The farmers would trade fresh eggs for candy, cigarettes, soap, and anything like that. The women washed our uniforms for us, too. They also brought plenty of wine, cognac, cider, etc., and dished it out freely. Drinking sure is the national custom here.

Another custom was handshaking, and every Frenchman who came along shook hands with everyone he saw. Lots of times he would have his whole family along, and by the time you shook hands with all of them, your arm ached.

Somewhere in this period of time, near Le Mans, we were going down the road with hundreds of vehicles in a convoy; there was a dead German soldier lying with the upper half of his body on the shoulder of the road and his legs and lower body on the road. The vehicles kept driving over him, and he was flattened from the waist down.

One day we got word that Third Army had liberated a big warehouse full of liquor, and each of us would get two bottles of champagne and one bottle of cognac. Boy, talk about a bunch of drunks! It sure was fun while it lasted.

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 2. We were about 10 miles east of Sens and were having lots of rain, making things miserable. The days were getting shorter now; soon it would be winter again.

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ABOVE: Corporal Altenbach was pleased to receive a friendly reception from the French, who seemed happy to provide the Americans with plenty of free alcohol. Here a Frenchman pours wine for a group of American GIs who had just liberated his village. OPPOSITE: Free French leader General Charles DeGaulle is greeted by costumed women and children in Nancy, where Altenbach saw him enthusiastically greeted by the citizens.

The battle plan had called for the Third Army to get to the area of Nancy, France, by May 1945. Patton surprised everyone by getting there by early September 1944—a little more than a month. (Third Army started out on August 1 from the St. Lô breakout.) Patton's run across France was the most territory captured in the shortest time in history.

About this time the Army started the Red Ball Express. The Third Army had gone across France so fast that supplies just couldn't get to the front, so they got all the available trucks and set up a 24-hour daily run. They made some roads one way east and others west.

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 27. We moved to the Chateau du Monet near Nancy, which overlooked the city. Here we lived indoors for the first time since Ireland. It rained a good deal of the time we were there and everything was mud.

One day when we were in Nancy, there were mobs of people in town. We were told that General Charles de Gaulle was coming, and we got to see him arrive in a big, open car. Then he got up on a balcony and spoke to the crowd. They sure gave him a rousing reception.

Another time we were in Nancy on a pass. A buddy and I were walking down the street and heard sirens. Coming our way were two motorcycles with red lights and sirens, driven by MPs. Behind them was General Patton in his olive-drab Cadillac. Naturally, we saluted, but he was just a blur.

Also in Nancy there was an area of brothels. It was interesting to see the GIs lined up out in the street, waiting to get in. In a lot of the other towns, the brothel area was off limits. I heard later that Patton said the GIs should have them available and that the Army could check them for health reasons.

We were in Nancy for what seemed like a long time. The reason was that we did not have gasoline. General Dwight Eisenhower, Supreme Allied commander, decided to give

the gas to Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery, and he got bogged down in the Low Countries. Eventually, the Americans had to rescue the British up there. Patton wanted to be in Berlin by Christmas, and I am sure we would have been—if we had had the gas. I spent a lot of time buying souvenirs and postcards. I also began to acquire a lot of German stuff—hats, helmets, swords, daggers, belts, pistols, etc.—and sent them home whenever I could.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 15. The weather had been terrible. It was raining all the time and, of course, the mud was always getting worse. I thought I had seen mud before, but nothing like this! It had been getting pretty cold, and the leaves were falling off the trees. I hated to think of winter coming.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 30. This evening I saw Marlene Dietrich, the actress, in a USO show. It was quite a way from here, so we went in the back of a truck. With everything else she did, she played a musical saw. She was the first celebrity I had seen since I had been in France.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 23—THANKSGIVING. We got orders that we would move on Thanksgiving Day. We were going to a little town, Achain (past Chateau Salins) in northeast France. At about 10 AM the convoy turned off the highway, and I was dropped off at the top of a hill to direct our vehicles to the town. The last vehicle was supposed to pick me up, but it didn't, so I had to walk to town. It was rainy and windy and I was awfully cold.

There must have been some action up at the front because there was a steady stream of ambulances going back the way we had come. A jeep finally came and took me down to my group, which had moved into an undamaged house. All the civilians were gone and we were the only troops in town. Part of the town was in ruins, but our end was not damaged.

The town church was in the square across from our house. Apparently, German troops had been staying in the church, and they must have left in a hurry because there was equipment all over the pews. There was a shed at the west side of town with a dead German in it. At least it was cold, so he wasn't bloated and smelling.

I was walking across a street and looked up to where I had been up on the hill. There was a jeep there, and suddenly there was an explosion. One of our men in a jeep went to investigate and came back and said that the jeep up on the hill had pulled over onto the shoulder and the passenger had stepped out—right onto a mine—and was killed. I don't know how I had missed stepping on that mine because I had walked all over that area.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 12. We had passes, so we did a little sight seeing. We drove in a 6x6 truck through Metz, Verdun, Chalons, and Paris. We went through Lisieux and Caen, which was in terrible shape. We arrived in Cherbourg in midafternoon on the 15th and went to an Army transient camp, which was all pyramidal tents. In the evening we went to the Red Cross club and drank coffee and ate doughnuts.

One day we got word that Third Army had liberated a big warehouse full of liquor, and each of us would get two bottles of champagne and one bottle of cognac. Boy, talk about a bunch of drunks! It sure was fun while it lasted.

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On Sunday the 17th we drove all day in a heavy rain and windstorm and passed through the Falaise Gap, which was really in bad shape. In August the Germans had been trapped there, and for miles their burned and blown-up vehicles and equipment were still stacked up on both sides of the road. There were also hundreds of dead horses. It was a scene of utter destruction.

We went back through Paris and stayed at a big department store that the Army had taken over for the billeting of troops. In Paris, everything was Army spit-and-polish; shoes were shined and uniforms were pressed. It sure was different from what we were used to at the time. It was interesting because we were in dirty fatigues and looked rough as hell. We were treated like heroes, and the big hit was our Third Army patch.

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At this time, the Germans launched their counteroffensive into Belgium and Luxembourg that came to be known as the Battle of the Bulge.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 22. The big news was the German breakout. We got orders to move north, through Metz. We left at 7:30 PM. It was cold and snowing, and the road was slick. I think we drove with headlights on; I guess Patton figured the Germans couldn't see us, and it sped up the move. The whole Third Army (about 250,000 men) was in Belgium in about 48 hours.

At the time of the Bulge, most of the troops up there did not have overshoes, and there was an awful lot of frostbite. Luckily, we hadn't turned in our overshoes when we left for the Continent, so our feet stayed dry. The Army had figured that the war would be over by Christmas and didn't ship much winter clothing. That sure backfired, and a lot of troops were miserable.

We drove next to a river. It was about 2 AM, and there were floodlights, and troops were doing welding on several bridges. Suddenly all of the lights went out and the welding stopped. A German plane flew over, strafing. Of course, the antiaircraft opened up, but I don't think he got hit; we could still hear the plane. All the lights came on and the welding started again. The whole incident took about a minute.

We continued on, driving through a part of Luxembourg. At about 10:30 PM on Christmas Day, we arrived in a woods at Guirisch, near Arlon in southeast Belgium. It was clear and the moon was real bright. There was snow on the ground and it was bitterly cold. I was on guard duty and about froze stiff.

On another night on guard duty, I saw a big explosion and fire south of us, about 10 or 15 miles away. We later heard that a trainload of ammunition had been sabotaged. We were told that the train was stopped when suddenly an engine came down the track at full speed and hit the ammunition train. It totally destroyed the town where it happened.

I never got up to Bastogne, but our contact parties did. They told of the destruction and the dead. Some corpses were leaning against buildings, and all of them were frozen in place. The bodies were not picked up until things settled down.

There was some concern at this time because we heard that, when the Germans broke out, they captured a lot of GIs and their equipment. They were dressing as GIs and driving our jeeps, etc. One night the mess sergeant asked me if I would go after a tank of water, so I got a ¾-ton weapons carrier and hooked up the water tank. As I started out, I realized I wasn't sure about the password and countersign. I knew it was "Lincoln" and "Abraham," but I wasn't sure which was first. I got to the water point, got the water, and headed back, thanking my lucky stars that I made it that night.

One day, two of our fellows were on guard duty in the woods on the east side of town when they saw two fellows in American uniforms and no helmets. They said they had been in a convoy and had been left behind. The guards took them prisoner, took them to Arlon, and turned them over to the MPs.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 20, 1945. We left Belgium and went south to Metz, where we lived in a schoolhouse that had steam heat. That felt really good because it was very cold. Here we were assigned to the 26th "Yankee" Division and were with them for the rest of the war. We were now known as the 47th Medium Maintenance Company, a part of the 14th Ordnance Battalion.

MONDAY, JANUARY 29. After almost three weeks I finally got some mail from home. There was a Christmas package that was postmarked in October, letters and pictures from my wife Ethel, letters from my mom, and a letter from family friends who wrote

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ABOVE: A German soldier, taken prisoner by the Americans, is ordered to remove American boots that he probably took off a dead GI. Altenbach learned that some Germans were using captured American uniforms and vehicles to infiltrate behind U.S. lines during the Battle of the Bulge. OPPOSITE: American soldiers relax at a Parisian cafe following the city's liberation. Altenbach said that his fellow GIs in Paris were "spit-and-polished" compared to his combat-worn field uniform.

that their son, a friend of mine who was in the Navy, had been killed in the Pacific. They were taking it very well and wrote that it was one of those things that could be expected in times like these.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 30. We moved to Gueling, a place about 30 miles east of Thionville. It was a German ammunition renovation plant. There were an awful lot of old bombs, shells, etc. lying around everywhere.

The next day I was on guard duty at the gate area. At about 10 AM there was a loud explosion, and I saw one of our automotive shops blow up. The debris went way up in the air. The building had been in good shape when we moved in, but after the explosion it was pretty well wrecked.

What happened was, there was a booby trap in a stovepipe. The fellows had built a fire in the big stove to stay warm. Suddenly the fire flared up and they all ran out. Before they all got out, the bomb went off. It sure did a good job—two of our trucks in the building were badly wrecked, and four of our fellows were injured by fragments. None of them were hurt seriously, which was fortunate.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 15. I received a new jeep and lettered it "Scotty," both for my son and for Ethel, whose maiden name is Scott.

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 18. We were in the town of Wadgassen, northwest of Saarbrucken, Germany. Ted Leszkowicz and I had received permission to look for our buddy, Lou Kolnicki, who had been transferred to the infantry at the time of the Bulge. We had been told where his company was located, but when we got into the town we were surprised that there wasn't anyone around.

We drove down one street, and there was a big tree blocking the road, a streetcar in the middle of the block, and the overhead wires were down. There were several undamaged autos on the street. The tree blocked our way, so we went back and took another street.

We got to a big intersection and stopped in the middle; suddenly, an American GI yelled at us to get the hell out of there and get behind the building where he was. He said that there was a German machine gun down the street that shot at anything that moved in that intersection.

We went inside with him, and there were a bunch of infantrymen sitting around, most of them asleep in chairs or on the floor. They said that the Germans must have been eating or something because any time anything moved in that intersection, they fired. I guess we were just lucky.

The group was Lou Kolnicki's outfit, but he was out on guard duty in a foxhole. All at once there was a burst of machine-gun fire, and all of them jumped up and had their rifles ready. It sure was interesting to see the tension they were under.

We visited for a little while and then took off after they told us how to get out of town. They pointed up a hill and said, when you start up, go like hell, weave back and forth, and be sure not to stop because the Germans could see the whole hill.

After we got over the top of the hill, we saw some GIs in a foxhole. We stopped and talked with them and could see the way they were living; the hole was all muddy and so were they. After we left, we kept thinking how lucky we were that we could go back and have a dry bunk. Of course, our area was a sea of mud; the snow was melting and it sure was a mess. We never did find Lew Kolnicki. (He did visit our outfit on March 4, though.)

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 24. I was transferred from being the battalion sign painter and put back into the automotive section as a mechanic. But I griped so much that they transferred me back to the service section a week later.

THURSDAY, MARCH 8. The company moved to Beurig, near Saarburg. Here we lived in

a big hospital. On the trip we passed some of the "dragon's teeth" on the Siegfried Line, along with a lot of abandoned German pillboxes and defensive positions.

The past few days were very nice. When it was nice here, the country was beautiful, but when it was miserable, it really was awful. We moved into some houses in a deserted town. We had a nice place to live in, but I didn't like living in these towns. They were all smelly, dirty places, and now that it was getting warmer, it would get so much worse. For the next few days we were constantly on the move, staying in one town after another.

TUESDAY, MARCH 27. Ethel's and my third wedding anniversary. Near Alzey, we left the area and were close to the Rhine. As we drove down the road, there were a lot of big boats off on the sides of the road. They were on big truck trailers, and there were a lot of U.S. Navy sailors with them.

For a long time we looked forward to seeing and crossing the Rhine, but all we saw was smoke because there were barrels everywhere spewing out white smoke screens that hid everything, This was to protect the pontoon bridge from German strafing. At Oppenheim, we crossed the river at about 11 AM, and all we saw was the back of the vehicle ahead of us and the water between the pontoons.

After we crossed the Rhine, we continued on to Darmstadt, arriving about noon. We stayed in the Darmstadt Locomotive Works and slept in the office building. There were locomotives in the shop, and most of them were shot up. At the railyard, hundreds of civilians were looting boxcars on the tracks; I don't know what they were taking, but they looked like a bunch of ants moving all over the place.

SATURDAY, MARCH 31. I wrote a letter to Ethel's mother and said that I was glad the war was over here and not back in the U.S. because so many cities were absolutely leveled. A person could see what our air force had been doing for the past couple years.

We were now located at the airport north of Hanau, which was about 12 miles east of Frankfurt-am-Main, but got orders that we would soon be moving to a new location southwest of Fulda.

An ordnance officer in our battalion, 1st Lt. Thomas Creswell, wrote the following account of our convoy's road march to Fulda:

"At 1830 hours, Lieutenant Keifriter, who had gone ahead to recon the route, returned and informed us that he had run into a German pocket approximately 35 miles to the north and that they were being engaged by the 818th Tank Destroyer Battalion.

"An hour or so later, Lt. Col. Johnson, commanding the 14th Ordnance Battalion, informed us that a strong force of Germans had overrun an ASP [ammunition supply point] a few miles to the north and for us to strengthen our guard and not leave until morning.

"At 0700 hours, 2 April 1945, our convoy cleared the airport at Hanau and headed northeast on Route 40. We turned north at junction L-549 and moved on to Budigen. Here my vehicle, which was leading the convoy, had a flat tire, and Lt. Keifriter took the convoy on. I fell back into the middle of the convoy.

"At approximately 0830 hours, we passed through the small town of Wolfborn. Our last vehicle had just cleared the town when a 2½-ton truck from a combat engineer battalion containing two enlisted men overtook us and informed us that they had just outrun German personnel in American vehicles on road L-514, between Lissenwald and Wolfborn.

"He could offer no other information other than the Germans seemed to be in strength and had vehicles and weapons. At that time, a field artillery observation plane circled, then came in and dropped a message stating that strong forces of enemy personnel and vehicles were in the surrounding woods.

"The leading vehicle of the column was at the outskirts of Kefenrod. Looking into the town to a 'T' crossroad, we could see six American vehicles strewn about the center of the road, with tires deflated, windshields full of holes, and hoods raised. It gave all indications that the occupants of those trucks had run into trouble recently."

Lieutenant Keifriter quickly organized a squad of men, supported by a bazooka, and advanced into the town. A German soldier was seen driving a jeep but escaped.

Creswell continued, "Further on, Lt. Keifriter and his squad encountered some enemy troops and opened fire. They fought from street to street, finally clearing the town. It was quite evident that the town had been headquarters for those enemy forces in the surrounding woods. Results of action were one enemy killed, one wounded, and two captured, one of which was an officer.... All evidence indicated that we were completely encircled by the enemy. A perimeter defense was established.

"Within the town was a German field hospital with three medical officers, six nurses, and approximately 150 enemy wounded soldiers. One nurse spoke English and, on questioning, told us that the Germans had re-entered the town during the night and taken the American soldiers that had been there.

The big find was a big photo album. It showed the major as a boy in a Hitler Youth group carrying shovels with swastikas on their shirts and armbands. We looked at the album and then threw it in the stove; I've been sorry ever since—it was the perfect example of a persons life under Hitler.

Both: National Archives

ABOVE: Near Schwarzenfeld, Altenbach saw German atrocities, including 40 slave laborers who had been starved, killed, and buried in a mass grave. Later German soldiers dug up the bodies and local civilians were ordered to make coffins and rebury the bodies. RIGHT: While searching for a new place to billet the unit, Altenbach and his platoon leader, Lieutenant William Kelleher, came across and liberated slave laborers who had been locked in a building in the town of Kemnath.

"All the civilians in the town were gathered up and assembled in the town square. They were informed [by the Germans] that the homes of those harboring enemy military personnel would be destroyed. That threat netted six more [American] prisoners."

Creswell then wrote that the company was being harassed by Germans hiding in the woods around the town but that return fire from our .50-caliber machine guns killed a few, wounded others, and caused several to surrender. Interrogations of the prisoners revealed that the German strength was anywhere from a company to a regiment.

At 11:30 AM, a half-track from a tank destroyer battalion arrived from the north, and the driver reported that he had seen some enemy in the fields but had only been fired on once. Because our ammunition was running low, our officers decided that it would be unhealthy to stay overnight in the town, and so the decision was made to make a run for it, heading north out of town with the half-track leading the way.

At noon we began our departure, with the half-track firing bursts into the wooded areas around the road. A column of M-8 armored cars was encountered going south, and we made it out of the area without further incident.

Somehow, several of us got separated from our convoy. We stopped before dark in the town of Herbstein. We spent the night with a medical outfit and got to sleep with sheets on the bed. What a treat!

TUESDAY, APRIL 3. We got back to our outfit about noon. They were in a field outside the town of Unterluder. The company was sure glad to see us. They were afraid we had been caught in one of the many counterattacks the day before.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 4. We moved to Hunfeld, north of Fulda. I was put on guard duty at a big German hospital. When we arrived, I was the interpreter with the nurses. We told them we wanted beds. They opened a big ward, and we all had

beds with sheets. The head nurse complimented me on my German and asked where I had learned it. I told her, "in school;" I didn't want her to know that I had learned it at home.

The next morning an Army outfit came and took all the patients who could walk to a POW camp.

FRIDAY, APRIL 6. We moved to Wasungen, where we lived in the railroad station. My group lived upstairs in the stationmaster's quarters. It was a regular home, and there was a big closet with a lot of German officers' uniforms. Of course, we looted the closet. I found a major's silver saber with a gold handle in a cloth holder, which I still have. I also found a shoulder holster.

The big find was a big photo album. It showed the major as a boy in a Hitler Youth group carrying shovels with swastikas on their shirts and armbands. We looked at the album and then threw it in the stove; I've been sorry ever since—it was the perfect example of a person's life under Hitler.

THURSDAY, APRIL 13. We were in Suhl, where we were billeted and worked in the Gustloff-Werk, which was a gun factory. We helped ourselves to many rifles and pistols, Nazi flags and banners. I mailed a Nazi flag and banner home. Our small arms section had a field day with all the pistol parts. Here we learned that President Franklin Roosevelt had died.

MONDAY, APRIL 16. We moved to the town of Helmsbrechts, where we lived in a small textile mill. In the owner's house, there was a bathtub and an electric water heater. That tub was used 24 hours a day while we were there.

During this period, I would usually go as an interpreter with the advance parties looking for new locations for billets. We would go up to a house and knock. When someone answered—almost always a woman because the men were all in the service—I'd hand them a paper and tell them they had 20 minutes to get out and could only take the things listed on the paper.

They never objected, and when we came back they were gone. One woman asked me if there'd be any more shelling or bombing, and I told her no. She was so relieved and said, sure, we could have the place. We never knew where the people went and at that time we didn't care.

FRIDAY, APRIL 20. Hitler's birthday. We went on a reconnaissance with Lieutenant Kelleher, looking for a new area. We were with a group from the battalion, and a major was in charge. There were six jeeps and a command car. One jeep had a .50-caliber machine gun.

We got to the town of Kemnath at about 11 AM and stopped outside the town and waited. The orders we had were that the Infantry would take the town at 11:20 AM. At about that time a convoy of 6x6 trucks came along. They stopped and all the GIs piled out and headed into town. Later, we saw civilians using pitchforks to bring German soldiers to the GIs to turn them in.

At the time, the Americans had spread the word with leaflets that if any shots came from the town the place would be destroyed, so the civilians weren't taking any chances. After that, we went through the town, and all the people were waving white handkerchiefs at us.

Later that day, I was riding with Lieutenant Kelleher, and we were approaching the town of Waldeck when shots started whistling over our heads from the town up ahead. We all pulled over, ran to a field, and got behind a ditch bank. The jeep with the .50-caliber started firing at some motorcycles on a road up behind the town. The .50-caliber knocked one German off his motorcycle, but then the machine gun jammed.

All we had were carbines and they were useless at that distance. The Germans kept firing every once in a while to keep us down.

As we lay there, I looked behind us and saw dirt kicking up. Apparently, someone was firing at us from a woods up a hill to our right. I yelled to the major and, when he saw it, he yelled to head back to the vehicles. As we started to run, they opened fire on us. I jumped in my jeep and started it; about that time the lieutenant jumped in. I made a fast U-turn and started to weave down the road. We all drove like hell until we were out of range.

When we stopped to check on everyone, we discovered that when we had first stopped a bullet had come through one of the windshields just as the officer had jumped out—it would have gotten him in the throat if he'd been there—then it went into the spare tire. One of the jeeps had a front tire hit and, of course, he drove on the flat.

We went back to Kemnath and learned that the infantry had gone north and south, and we were on our own. We went into a building; I think it was the town hall or a school. It was two stories, and another fellow and I were sent to check upstairs. We went room to room looking for anyone hiding.

If a door was closed, we'd turn the knob, then kick it in, with our carbines at the ready. In one room we heard some noise. I had a pistol so I drew it, gave the door a good kick, and we headed in. There were a bunch of slave laborers in there who were more scared than we were, but happy to see us.

TUESDAY, APRIL 24. We moved south to Schwarzenfeld (approximately 30 miles north of Regensburg) in Bavaria, where we saw some of the German atrocities. We saw 40 slave laborers who had been starved, killed, and then buried in a big trench. The military government had German prisoners dig them up. Then they had the civilians in the town build coffins to rebury them. The next day we saw the reburial of 120 slave laborers who had been killed by the Germans.

As thin as those corpses were, they probably were better off dead. The thing is, they were mistreated to start with and then starved to death. It sure ends any positive feelings a person might have had for the Germans.

THURSDAY, APRIL 26. While moving to a new location, we saw hundreds of slave laborers along the road. Apparently, the Germans left them behind and didn't have time to kill them. They were really a pathetic looking lot and an awful sight to see. They were in striped outfits and were just skeletons. They just stared at us and didn't even wave.

U.S. Army

With the war over, German soldiers gave up in droves and turned in their weapons. By that time, Altenbach said he was "sick of war."

We threw some of our rations to them because we were moving and couldn't stop. One old man (at least he looked old) was sitting on a stump or a rock right next to the road. I threw something to him, and it landed right at his feet. He leaned forward a little, but he couldn't pick it up. The picture of that is still clear to me and has always bothered me.

I'm sure some unit got to them and took care of them. We also saw quite a few who had died and were lying along the road.

FRIDAY, MAY 4. The news here keeps looking good, but still some of these crazy Germans fight on as if they had a chance. The war is winding down, and Germans are giving up by the thousands. We moved to the town of Untergresbach, 15 miles east of Passau. When I'd go on runs with the jeeps, I'd see German soldiers lined up on side roads waiting to give up. They were all on horse-drawn wagons.

Early one morning, I was on guard duty along the road into town. About 6 AM, a German truck came up the road heading into town. The truck was an open flatbed with removable side gates. It was packed with German soldiers, and they were all waving white handkerchiefs.

The truck stopped. They wanted to surrender to me, but I wasn't about to take 30 or 40 prisoners, so I sent them into town because I knew there were MPs who could handle them.

A day or so later, we got word that a German division had surrendered and they'd be moving into the field across from us. When they arrived, they only had horses and wagons, and most of them were walking. Some of our guys took the horses and used them for horseback riding.

The Germans had their rifles and carried them on guard duty, just like we did. We walked up and down on our side of the road, and they walked on their side with their rifles. After a few days, they started piling up rifles at the edge of the field right across from us. There were thousands of them, and it was one heck of a pile.

TUESDAY, MAY 8. We had moved from the location at Untergresbach, but I don't remember where we were. We were called out in formation in late afternoon, and the company commander made the official announcement that Germany had surrendered. While we were in formation, a German plane came over real low, had his landing gear down, and was tipping his wings from side to side. He was surrendering to the U.S. rather than to the Russians. We heard that there were lots of pilots that did that.

There wasn't much celebrating, except that we were glad it was over. The word was that we were going to the Pacific, and we weren't happy about that. Later, when the atomic bombs were dropped, everyone was relieved, but there never was any real celebrating, even when Japan surrendered.

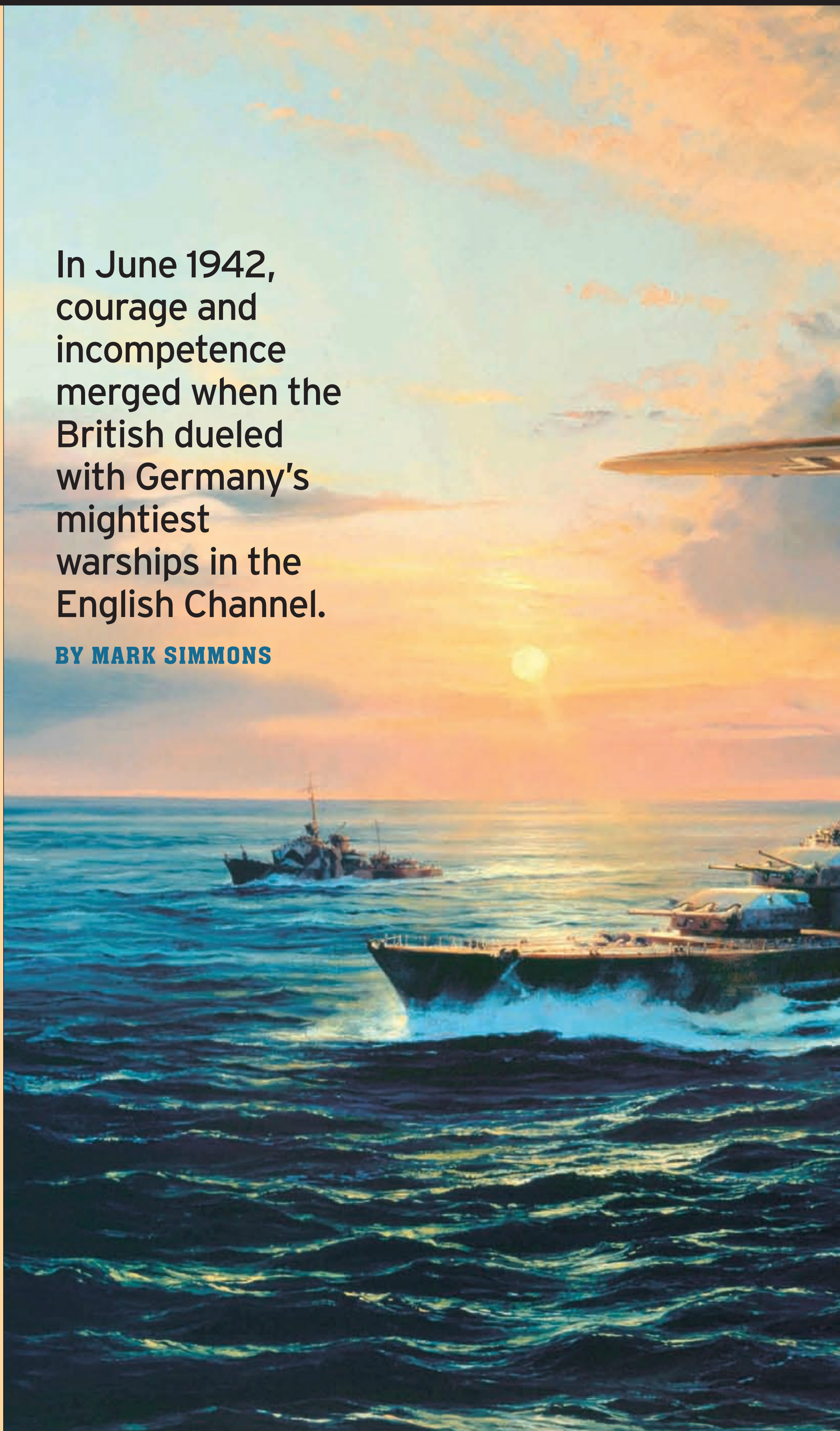
WEDNESDAY, MAY 16. I had really been covering a lot of miles lately in my jeep, "Scotty." Almost every day I drove along the Danube River, and it was really beautiful along there.

I sure hoped that my son Scotty would never have to see or go through a war. I never really had it tough like the infantry, but I was scared a lot of the time and had it a lot tougher than a lot of service troops. I had seen enough to make me sick of war and everything about it. The only thing I missed about it was all the good friends I made.

In late May, Altenbach and some of his buddies had passes to head back to Paris, Belgium, and Luxembourg to see the sights, buy a few souvenirs, and enjoy the end of the war. In June the company was transferred to a new battalion and sent to Pilzen, Czechoslovakia. Then it was back to Germany where he received orders that he was finally going home. It was not until October 22, 1945, that he boarded a Liberty ship with a few thousand other GIs and headed west across the Atlantic toward Ethel, Scotty, and home. □

"To cap it all, down came the fog, the sort you sometimes get at sea—one minute clear, the next in a fog bank—so we relied on our radar a lot. We carried on and suddenly the mist lifted and I saw them, and my heart stopped. They looked like the Houses of Parliament. Then they started firing their 11-inch guns against our 4-inch."

—Dennis Bond, torpedoman, HMS *Whitshed*



In June 1942, courage and incompetence merged when the British dueled with Germany's mightiest warships in the English Channel.

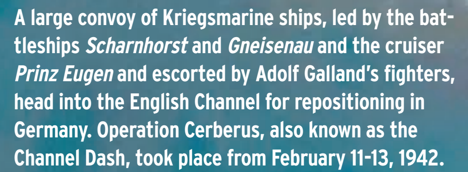
BY MARK SIMMONS

Almost a year before these words were written, the old World War I-vintage V-and-W-class destroyer HMS *Whitshed* had encountered the German battle fleet in the English Channel. The enemy fleet's main component—the two 32,000-ton battlecruisers *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau*—had embarked in January 1941 on a cruise to attack British merchant shipping in the North Atlantic.

Within two months, the raiders had sunk 22 ships totaling almost 116,000 tons. Yet both ships were in need of repairs; *Scharnhorst* in particular had serious boiler problems. Thus, on March 22 both ships entered Brest on the northwest coast of occupied France.

The former French naval base and dockyard with excellent facilities had been taken over by the Kriegsmarine in 1940. Work began immediately on the two ships, but their presence was soon discovered by the Royal Air Force and French Resistance. Ten days after they arrived, 109 Bomber Command aircraft attacked the harbor, dropping 132 tons of bombs. The ships were undamaged, although some of the ships' companies living ashore were killed. The RAF continued its attacks over the next five days.

German engineers estimated it would take 10 weeks to repair *Scharnhorst,* while *Gneisenau* needed only minor work—work that was only entrusted to



A large convoy of Kriegsmarine ships, led by the battleships *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* and the cruiser *Prinz Eugen* and escorted by Adolf Galland's fighters, head into the English Channel for repositioning in Germany. Operation Cerberus, also known as the Channel Dash, took place from February 11-13, 1942.

The Channel DASH

The Channel Dash by Robert Taylor © The Military Gallery, CA

German dockyard personnel. On April 5 *Gneisenau* moved out of drydock to a sheltered mooring. It would prove an unlucky move.

Four Bristol Beaufort torpedo bombers were sent from St. Eval in Cornwall to attack the enemy ships. Three failed to find a target. But Flying Officer Kenneth Campbell, flying at only 50 feet above the sea, found *Gneisenau* moored close to the mole in Brest's inner harbor. There were numerous antiaircraft batteries close by and three antiaircraft ships moored close to the battlecruiser, but in he went.

Part of the citation for Campbell's Victoria Cross reads, "Even if the aircraft succeeded in penetrating these formidable defenses, it would be almost impossible, after delivering a low level attack, to avoid crashing into the rising ground beyond."

Campbell's torpedo hit the stern of *Gneisenau,* the explosion wrecking the starboard propeller shaft. After delivering his torpedo, Campbell had to make a steep banking turn, exposing his aircraft to heavy concentrated flak that brought the Beaufort crashing down into the harbor; Campbell and his three crewmembers were killed. The Germans buried all four men with full military honors.

The battlecruiser had to be pumped out to prevent it sinking. The next day it was back in drydock; inspections revealed *Gneisenau* would take six months to repair.

The RAF continued to raid Brest. On April 10, *Gneisenau* was hit again by bombs, resulting in more flooding. The Germans increased the port's antiaircraft defenses, and more Luftwaffe fighter squadrons were deployed to the area.

On May 20, the battleship *Bismarck* and the heavy cruiser *Prinz Eugen* sailed from Bergen, Norway, for the North Atlantic. Admiral Erich Raeder had hoped to send *Bismarck* and the two battlecruisers out against the convoy routes at the same time, but that was now impossible.

The British soon found the German ships, and on May 24 they confronted them with the battlecruiser *Hood* and battleship *Prince of Wales*. In the resulting exchange of fire, *Hood* blew up and sank, and *Prince of Wales* was damaged, although she managed to hit *Bismarck* and holed one of her forward oil fuel tanks. *Prince of Wales* and two cruisers continued to shadow the German ships.

Meanwhile, other British ships were closing in. Fairey Swordfish biplane torpedo bombers, nicknamed "Stringbags," from the aircraft carrier *Victorious,* led by Lt. Cmdr. Eugene Esmonde, attacked *Bismarck* on the night of the 24th after a 120-mile flight in atrocious weather. One torpedo hit the battleship amidships with little effect. Esmonde was awarded the DSO for leading the flight.

Early the next day, *Bismarck* and *Prinz Eugen* parted company. Due to fuel loss and damage, the battleship was turning east for St. Nazaire while the cruiser would steer south. *Bismarck* then turned back against her pursuers. Fritz-Otto Busch on *Prinz Eugen* watched the battleship: "Gradually it became clear to the men assembled that they were seeing the flagship for the last time. Encircled by a halo from the salvoes of her own heavy turrets, militant and proud she disappeared, firing beyond the clear horizon."

Over the next three days, *Bismarck* was attacked by more Stringbags, this time from the carrier *Ark Royal,* which slowed her down with a torpedo hit that jammed her rudders, making it difficult to maintain her course to the east. Two British battleships caught up with her and pounded her into a flaming wreck. The cruiser *Dorsetshire* finished her off with torpedoes; at 10:39 AM on May 27, the mighty *Bismarck* sank.

Two days later, *Prinz Eugen* developed engine problems that could only be investigated properly in dock. Her captain skilfully avoided all the British ships and aircraft hunting her, and by June 1 she was close enough to France to be covered by German aircraft. At 3:59 PM, she anchored in the Brest roadstead and was quickly brought into the dockyard.

By the end of the month, the cruiser's repairs were almost complete and she was hidden under extensive camouflage netting in a dock now filled with water. However, on July 1, an RAF raid hit the cruiser with an armor-piercing bomb. Busch recorded near misses with water spouting "mast high" and stones flying from the dockside striking the "mast and guard rail."

When the damage reports came in, the forward control center was silent. It was soon revealed that a bomb had hit the port side of the ship below the bridge and penetrated

The 32,000-ton battleship *Scharnhorst,* shown shortly after being completed in January 1939. She would hit a mine and be temporarily disabled during the Channel Dash.

Naval History and Heritage Command

the armored deck, exploding in the forward control compartment where the main armament was directed. Forty-seven of the crew were killed. It would take another three months to repair the ship.

By now *Scharnhorst* was almost ready for sea and went out on a short cruise to test all her systems and guns. The RAF spotted the movement and attacked the battlecruiser near La Pallice three times over a 24-hour period, hitting her several times. The ship began taking in water, but the crew was able to patch up the damage, and *Scharnhorst* limped back to Brest.

Hitler was becoming increasingly exasperated at the cost of maintaining the three ships in Brest for, as he saw it, dubious strategic reasons. He was also concerned that the British might try to invade Norway, so he reasoned the ships would be better deployed there. He ordered Raeder to draw up plans for the battle fleet at Brest to return to home waters.

Raeder tried to oppose Hitler, arguing the ships were better off at Brest to sortie out into the Atlantic; with *Bismarck*'s sister ship *Tirpitz* in Norway, they could sail out at the same time and really stretch the Royal Navy, which would have to disperse its capital ships to protect the convoys. If they returned to Germany, Raeder reasoned, it would be much easier for the British to bottle them up.

And the question was: how were they to return? The route via Iceland and through the North Sea was fraught with danger. To pass through the English Channel was lunacy, a suicide mission. But Hitler, characteristically, would not listen and ordered Raeder to get on with it. The naval planners vacillated, annoying Hitler, who finally made the decision on the Channel: surprise and a blanket of heavy air cover would see them through. It was left to Admiral Otto Ciliax, who commanded the ships at Brest, to come up with the operational details.

Ciliax's plan called for the ships to leave Brest under the cover of darkness, but they would pass through the Straits of Dover in daylight. He warned that the air cover must be comprehensive or the fleet could face disaster. Hitler agreed to the plan and promised him the necessary aircraft to cover the fleet. He was confident it would work, doubting the British ability "to make lightning decisions" or to concentrate enough aircraft in southeast England.

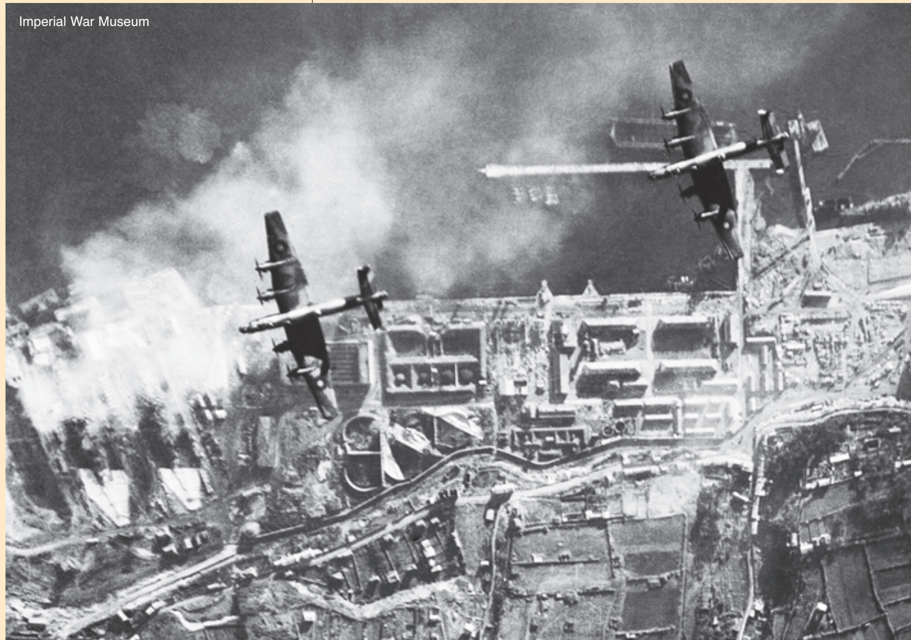
Thanks to the Enigma codebreakers at Bletchley Park, the British were well aware of the situation the Germans faced. During the preparations for Operation Cerberus, as the maneuver was code named, the British knew that *Scharnhorst*'s gun crews, who had been aboard *Prinz Eugen,* were moving back to the flagship in preparation for sailing.

Although they evaded air reconnaissance, the capital ships, according to the decoded Enigma messages, were slipping their berths at night to give the crews some degree of training and checking systems and returning by dawn. Also, the concentration and increase of German fighter aircraft in northwest France was noted.

All this went to the Admiralty and Air Ministry although there was no direct mention of "Cerberus" or a mention of the "Channel." The staff of the RAF and Royal Navy failed to pick up on this, however, so their advantage through decoded Enigma mesages know as Ultra was largely wasted.

The main concern of the Royal Navy was the threat posed to the Atlantic shipping by the German surface raiders. Thus, many of the Home Fleet's heavy units were committed to convoy duties. The First Sea Lord, Admiral Sir Dudley Pound, was unwilling to commit his battleships to operations close to the enemy-controlled coastlines.

He was heavily influenced in this by the loss of *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* off Malaya on December 10, 1941. However, it seemed to elude him (he was suffering ill health and in less than two years would die of a brain tumor) and his staff that these



Imperial War Museum

Handley Page Halifaxes of RAF Squadron No. 34 bomb the *Scharnhorst* and *Gneiesenau* in drydock at Brest, France, December 18, 1941. Such raids prompted Hitler to order them back to home waters.

ships had been sunk by land-based Japanese naval aircraft highly trained in attacking ships and that the British ships had no air cover, whereas the Luftwaffe was never able to sink any British capital ships.

To have brought some heavy units to an east coast port within striking distance would have seemed the logical thing for the Royal Navy to do. However, the main role to prevent the German passage went to the light forces, motor torpedo boats (MTBs), destroyers, and minelayers, and attack from the air by torpedo bombers of the Fleet Air Arm and RAF Coastal Command and bombers from Bomber Command.

In Operation Fuller, it was expected that these forces would coordinate and overwhelm the German ships, but just how this was to be done with no joint command structure was a major flaw. They also assumed they would receive early warning of German movements.

This was partly based on the notion that the German ships would pass through the Dover narrows in darkness or just before dawn, which meant they would have to leave Brest in daylight. There, weather permitting—or so the thinking went—they would be spotted by standing air and sea patrols, giving the British time to assemble their forces.

The first alert line would be the seven submarines that had been patrolling off Brest and covering the Bay of Biscay since December 1941. These were old craft normally used for training; this soon had a detrimental effect on the supply of new submariners, so in January 1942 it was cut down to two submarines.

At night, RAF Coastal Command, flying Lockheed Hudsons, took up the main scouting role. These aircraft were equipped with shipping radar with a range of 30 miles. They flew patrols over three lines: "Stopper," from Brest to Ushant; "Line South East," from Ushant to Brehat; and "Habo," from Le Havre to Boulogne. In daylight, Fighter Command would take over the "Habo" patrol.

Also, there was a string of radar stations along the south coast of England with longer range radar that could pick up shipping in the Channel—even close to the French coast.

The Germans brought in considerable forces to escort the three heavy ships. Close escort would be provided by the 5th Destroyer Flotilla. There were also three flotillas of E-boats—fast motor torpedo boats. These, in turn, would meet the fleet as it moved north from their bases at Cherbourg, Le Havre, and Cap Gris Nez.

Operation Thunderbolt was the code name of the Luftwaffe task to supply air cover for the German battle fleet in the Channel and on into the North Sea; Maj. Gen. Adolf Galland, the celebrated air ace, was given command of the operation. In January he had been awarded the swords and diamonds to his Knights Cross by Hitler. Galland was given a free hand. Later he would admit that this was because other more senior commanders thought it would end in disaster and were distancing themselves from the operation.

Fritz-Otto Busch aboard *Prinz Eugen* said the night was black and the destroyers and E-boats were in position. "Now and again their shadows could be seen gliding past like ghosts. There was not much to be seen of the battleships; they were sailing on ahead, swallowed by the darkness which lay somberly upon the sea."

German escort planes and motor torpedo boats in the English Channel, photographed from the bridge of *Prinz Eugen.*

Galland would have 252 aircraft—mainly Me-109s and FW-190s—under his command, plus a further 30 Me-110s for patrols. During daylight hours it was planned to have 16 fighters over the fleet continually. They would be there for 35 minutes, while relief patrols would engage 10 minutes before the previous patrol was due to leave, so for 20 minutes in every 70, a total of 32 aircraft would be over the ships.

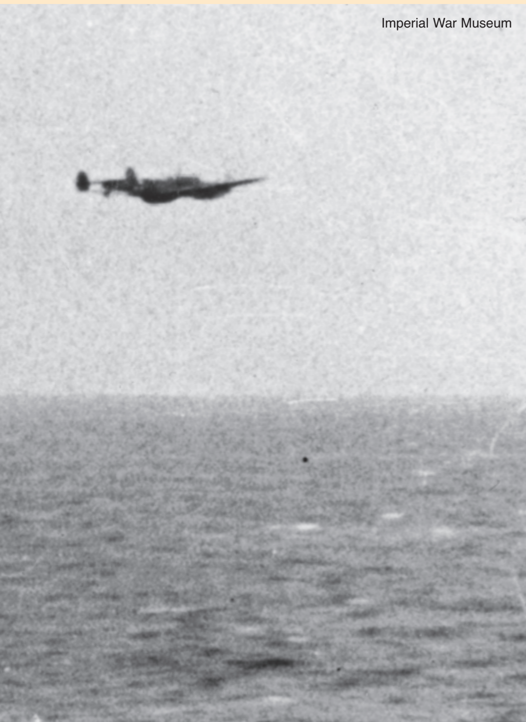
To achieve this, ground crews had to turn the fighters around in no more than 30

minutes. Galland set up four sectors—JA covered Cherbourg and Le Havre; Sector 1 covered the area south of Abbeville to just north of Dunkirk; Sector II covered the Belgian and Dutch coasts up to the Rhine; and Sector III spanned from Amsterdam back to Wilhelmshaven. He also placed handpicked airmen on each of the capital ships through whom he could communicate.

On January 4, the Admiralty warned that *Scharnhorst* and *Prinz Eugen* would be ready to sail from Brest by the 24th and *Gneisenau* by early February. Their destination could be the Atlantic, the Channel, or even the Mediterranean. If the latter, the RAF's Force H at Gibraltar would be ready.

Another worry for the Royal Navy was a large troop convoy due to leave for Africa on February 14. It already had the old battleship *Malaya* as escort, but the battleship *Rodney* was ordered from Gibraltar to assist. On February 5, the modern submarine *Sealion* was sent to reinforce the Royal Navy patrol off Brest.

On February 11, Admiral Ciliax called his senior officers together on the flagship *Scharnhorst* to tell them they would set off that night. All was ready: escorts and fighter cover were on alert, and minefields had been swept. They would leave harbor at 7:30 PM as they had been doing for several days during working-up exercises. That night, just as they were casting off, the RAF turned up on a bombing raid. Ciliax cancelled the sailing and waited; 90 minutes later the bombers had gone and again he ordered the cast off. Clear of the breakwater, the destroyers took station; *Scharnhorst* led, followed by *Gneisenau* and *Prinz Eugen*. It was 9:30 PM.


Imperial War Museum

The submarine *Sealion* was near the Whistle Buoy that night, five miles from Brest harbor, waiting on the surface. Lt. Cmdr. George R. Colvin had tried the same tactic the night before but had been forced under by patrol boats that depth charged him. The conning-tower party soon heard the drone of bombers overhead making for Brest. The black sky was soon lit up by the flashes of explosions. Bomber Command had arrived. An hour later, *Sealion* withdrew to charge her batteries. Britain's first patrol line had gone. The other two submarines were 40 miles to the south.

A Hudson patrol aircraft from 224 Squadron took off from St. Eval at 6:27 PM, but during an encounter with a Ju-88 the pilot had to take evasive action. He ordered the radar switched off to reduce the light being shown. As soon as he had shaken off the enemy plane, the navigator switched the set back on, but it was dead. He advised flight control that they were returning to base at about 7:30 PM. St. Eval had failed to pick up the message until the aircraft was 10 minutes from base.

On arrival, the crew changed to a spare Hudson but were not back on patrol until 10:40 PM, by which time the German ships had passed through the "stopper line" undetected. A second Hudson had taken off not long after the first patrol to take up its sweep over the Line South East, arriving over the area at 7:36 PM. A few minutes later, that aircraft's radar also failed. After reporting the problem, the aircraft broke off the patrol at 9:39 PM and returned to base. At that time the German ships were leaving Brest.

Around midnight, Ciliax's ships were off Ushant, making 27 knots, and had already made up some of the lost time due to the air raid at Brest. Fritz-Otto Busch aboard *Prinz Eugen* said the night was black and the destroyers and E-boats were in position. "Now and again their shadows could be seen gliding past like ghosts. There was not much to be seen of the battleships; they were sailing on ahead, swallowed by the darkness which lay somberly upon the sea."

The crew was closed up to "action stations" with antiaircraft guns manned. By 5 AM the ships were passing the German-occupied Channel Islands and were nearing the English Channel proper. Then there would no way back. The next stop must be home waters.

The first British "Habo" patrol, with the Hudson from 223 Squadron, had set off a half hour after midnight from Thorney Island near Portsmouth. Its route—Boulogne to Le Havre and the mouth of the Seine River—shadowed the French coast 12 miles out. It took two hours to complete two circuits. Nothing was seen, so at 3:55 PM it returned to base. A second Hudson was in position by 4:30; it covered the same route twice and returned to base at 7:15 AM, having seen nothing. By then the German fleet was northeast of Cherbourg—the area the Hudson had flown over an hour earlier.

Dawn broke at about 7:45 AM as signal lamps flashed between the German ships. Five minutes later, right on time, coming in from astern roared Galland's fighters dropping recognition flares. They then climbed to operational altitude, where they began flying a circular pattern over the fleet.

At 8:35 AM, at his Dover headquarters, Admiral Bertram Ramsay, as nothing had been reported, ordered his units to stand down to four hours readiness until the next night.

At 8:45 AM, two Spitfires of No. 91 Squadron at Hawkinge took off to cover the "Habo Line" and beyond—from Le Havre to Cap Gris Nez. The Spitfire on the northerly leg saw nothing. The other one

Imperial War Museum

A long line of German ships is led through the Channel by the *Scharnhorst, Gneisenau,* and *Prinz Eugen.* The British were unable to prevent the enemy ships from reaching port.

saw some E-boats leaving Boulogne heading southwest but nothing else and at 9:04 turned for home. Without realizing it, that pilot had seen E-boats going to join the battle fleet; a little farther to the southwest he would have spotted the German ships.

The radar station at Beachy Head changed shifts at 8 AM. The fresh operators became suspicious as there seemed to be enemy aircraft flying in circles off the French coast. They reported this to Fighter Command. An hour later, they were blind again with interference. Galland and Luftwaffe General Wolfgang Martini had devised a primitive form of radar jamming that appeared on the receiving set as atmospheric interference. This was coupled that morning with two Heinkel He-111s flying parallel to the English coast with radar distortion equipment that gave false echoes to the British radar stations.

An hour later, the interference cleared again and it seemed there were ships on the plot below the aircraft. They plotted the range as 44-46 miles. The station passed this information to RN Dover Command. By now, other stations were picking up and reporting the circling aircraft. Squadron Leader Davis at Fighter Command HQ Uxbridge took it higher to Air Commodore Ernest Norton; it was decided more than likely to be a German air-sea rescue operation.

Davis was far from satisfied as reports continued to come in picking up large vessels with an air umbrella over them moving northeast at 30 knots. At 10:10 AM, he ordered No. 11 Group to send another flight over the area; that flight was in the air 10 minutes later. By now the weather had closed in, but seven miles off Boulogne they spotted nine E-boats in two lines. The British pilots followed them and located a great number of ships.

Unknown to them, another flight of two Spitfires from RAF Kenley, piloted by Group Captain Victor Beamish and Wing Commander Boyd, were out on a training flight "keeping their hands in" over the same area. They almost bumped into the two aircraft from Hawkinge.

Beamish described what they came across: "We were about five miles off the French coast near Le Touquet. I saw two ships roughly in line astern, surrounded by about 12 destroyers, circled again by an outer ring of E-boats. When we arrived over the ships, we saw in the air around nine to 12 Me-109s. They immediately attacked us."

Beamish and Boyd both took evasive action, turning away sharply, which drew anti-aircraft fire from the ships below. However, both pilots managed to open fire on the E-boats before diving into cloud cover. This was the first action taken against the German fleet since it left Brest.

The planes raced home in complete radio silence. They were obeying RAF standing orders but in doing so lost a valuable half hour. In a later report, the RAF argued the pilots had done the right thing as the "object of the fighter is to get the report back to headquarters without the enemy realizing they had been seen." But in this case they had been seen and this would not have altered the German objective. Radio silence, therefore, should have been broken. Operation Fuller was at last activated.

Ramsay had two weapons systems equipped with torpedoes that could be sent against the enemy relatively quickly, MTBs at Dover and Ramsgate and the slow Swordfish torpedo bombers based at Manston. None of the RAF Beaufort torpedo bombers were in position; they had to get to Kent first. Ramsay had little choice but to strike with

what he had, although both options were better suited to night actions. At one point there had been 32 MTBs allotted to the task, but only a few days before many had been stood down as the Admiralty felt the crisis had passed.

The old shore batteries at Dover engaged the German ships at 12:19 PM, but only the four 9.2-inch guns at South Foreland had the effective range. They continued firing until 12:36 PM, but no shot fell within a mile of the enemy. The gunnery commander on *Prinz Eugen* was heard to remark, "Well, that wasn't much, was it?"

Lieutenant Commander Edward Pumphrey, head of a motor torpedo boat squadron, got the call from headquarters high in the cliffs: "The battlecruisers are out; how soon can you be ready for sea?" Within 25 minutes Pumphrey, in MTB 221, was leading his five serviceable craft out to sea, working up to 36 knots. Two MGBs (motor gun boats) were supposed to accompany the MTBs, but their commanders were ashore. Pumphrey left orders for them to catch up as soon as they could.

At 12:23, he reported "Enemy in sight." With the range down to about 1,000 yards from the E-boat screen, the MTBs opened fire. The flotilla had spread out; the MTBs were now about 5,000 yards from the capital ships. Ideally they needed to be within 2,000 yards of their target before firing the torpedoes.

At this point Pumphrey's boat developed engine trouble and started dropping behind, but he signalled the others to continue the attack. He fired his torpedoes in the general direction of the leading battlecruiser, hoping they would hit something.

The MTBs tried to break through the E-boat screen, which brought them under intensive fire. Unengaged German fighters dropped down to sea level to strafe the boats. Trying to attack independently, most MTBs released their torpedoes at a similar long range to Pumphrey's. MTB 44, commanded by Lieutenant Saunders, an Australian, had also suffered engine problems and dropped astern. He cleared the trouble and in the confusion got inside the E-boat screen, firing his torpedoes at about 3,000 yards at *Prinz Eugen*. A large spout of water was seen to rise from the cruiser. Saunders thought it might have been a hit, but this was not the case.

Three more MTBs from Ramsgate, under Lieutenant Long, started out at 12:25 but they failed to make contact with the enemy's heavy units, only coming across the tail end E-boats of the fleet disappearing to the northeast in misty weather.

The British sent a small flotilla of Royal Navy MTBs (motor torpedo boats), similar to the U.S. PT-boat and German E-boat, to intercept the German ships. Note the two twin Lewis machine guns.

Imperial War Museum

During the attack by the Dover MTBs, the German defenders on the ships and in the air were distracted by the arrival of Swordfish from the 825 Squadron Fleet Air Arm, based at RAF Manston in Kent and covering Spitfires at 12:50.

This squadron had performed well in the *Bismarck* chase; Eugene Esmonde, its commander, had been awarded the DSO for his leadership in finding the battleship in heavy weather. However, 825 Squadron was now understrength with only six aircraft, and in the Fuller plan the Swordfish, like the MTBs, were expected to attack at night.

The Swordfish, although an outdated, slow biplane, was an excellent, stable aircraft for the torpedo-bomber role and could endure heavy punishment. Believing the Stringbags had little chance of success, Admiral Ramsay contacted Pound asking to stand 825 Squadron down, but the First Sea Lord would not countenance not attacking the enemy "whenever and wherever he is to be found."

Ramsay was still not happy, although he gave the order for 825 to attack. He asked the RAF liaison officer, Group Captain Constable-Roberts, to advise Esmonde that the final decision was his. This did not really help, putting Esmonde in an impossible position. He came from a southern Irish family and his father had espoused the nationalist cause before the creation of the Irish Republic. Yet, an earlier relative, Colonel Thomas Esmonde, had been one of the first recipients of the Victoria Cross for his actions in the Crimean War, and Eugene's half brother Geoffrey had died at Ypres serving in the British Army in World War I. Honor and duty were strong traditions in the family, and he was well aware his aircrews were on a suicide mission, but he did what was expected of him and asked Constable-Roberts to let Ramsay know the attack would be made.

At the same time, Fighter Command was trying to scramble its squadrons to support the MTBs and the Swordfish. No. 11 Group was ordered to provide cover for 825 Squadron and contacted Esmonde

direct by telephone, outlining their plan to send three squadrons to Manston that would rendezvous with the Swordfish that were due to set off at 12:25 PM. Two further squadrons of Spitfires were coming from Hornchurch to provide close support. With so many fighters in support, 825 might stand something of a chance against the German fleet's antiaircraft guns.

However, the plan soon began to unravel as the first fighters to arrive were seven minutes late and they had flown from Gravesend, the nearest fighter base to Manston. Esmonde waited until 12:34, but no more fighters had turned up. With the enemy off Calais maintaining 30 knots, he could wait no longer. The fighters would have to catch up.

Two squadrons from Biggin Hill arrived at 12:36, but finding nothing waiting over Manston, they set off to the northeast and soon began tangling with enemy fighters. The two squadrons from Hornchurch failed to find the enemy fleet and were soon engaged by the Luftwaffe.

Galland had managed to increase the fighter cover for the ships as the fleet got closer to the Luftwaffe airfields. There were now 40 Me-109s on duty. As 825 approached, they only had 10 Spitfires with them instead of the expected 50 but gamely tried to drive off the enemy.

The first flight of three Swordfish in arrowhead formation was led in by Esmonde. Flying at a steady 80 knots, he crossed the destroyer screen through a hail of antiaircraft fire, but his aircraft began trailing smoke. He picked out *Scharnhorst* as his target.

The battlecruiser's main 11-inch guns opened up, laying a thick carpet barrage ahead of the Swordfish, but like a charging cavalryman Esmonde flew straight on through. The aircraft was hit again, wounding Esmonde. The port lower wing was shot away, and the aircraft started to wobble as he wrestled with the controls. His two crewmen were already dead. Reports vary, but it must have been under 2,000 yards that he released his torpedo. Moments later the Swordfish crashed into the sea.

The observer in the Swordfish that followed Esmonde, Sub-Lieutenant Edgar Lee, was shouting at brian Rose, his wounded pilot, to "keep the nose up" as the aircraft was leaking fuel from a damaged tank. A thousand yards out, Rose released the torpedo. As they turned away, Lee saw his torpedo bounce on the water and head for *Prinz Eugen.*

Sub-Lieutenant Kingsmill's Swordfish, third in the flight, had taken tremendous punishment. His engine had been blown apart and he and his two crewmen were wounded. Yet, he kept the nose up and released his torpedo at 2,000 yards, again at *Prinz Eugen*. The crippled Swordfish then seemed to give up and flopped into the sea. Although wounded, all three men managed to escape before the aircraft sank. It was a miracle that of the nine men in the first flight five survived.

Of the five survivors, only Edgar Lee was in any condition to make a report. After seeing him, Admiral Ramsay signaled the Admiralty, "In my opinion the gallant sortie of these six Swordfish constitutes one of the finest exhibitions of self-sacrifice and devo-

Fairey Swordfish biplanes from 825 Squadron, known as "Stringbags," attack the German ships. Despite this fanciful painting, the brave pilots achieved little in the way of results.

Fleet Air Arm Museum

tion to duty that the war has yet witnessed."

The fate of the second flight led by Lieutenant Thompson is not as well known, as none survived to give their reports. Some of the Spitfire pilots and MTB crews bore witness to the determination in their attack, flying through a wall of heavy flak barely 50 feet above the waves.

The Luftwaffe battle diary for that day paid tribute to the Fleet Air Arm Swordfish that were "piloted by men whose bravery surpasses any other action by either side that day."

The role of Bomber and Coastal Commands was marked by incompetence and, from the former, little idea of attacking ships at sea. The Beauforts of Coastal Command had been warned that the Germans were likely to try and force the Channel after February 10.

In view of this, Air Chief Marshal Philip Joubert ordered the Beaufort squadrons to move to airfields closer to the Channel. This concerned two squadrons, 42 at Leuchars in Scotland and 86 at St. Eval in Cornwall. A third squadron, 217, was already at Thorney Island.

The seven Beauforts at Thorney Island were ordered to rendezvous with fighter cover over Manston at 1:30 PM, but from the start things began to go wrong. The force was soon down to four aircraft as two had been armed with bombs by mistake and one had broken down. The four aircraft set off for Manston late, while the two remaining had the bombs changed to torpedoes and would make their way independently.

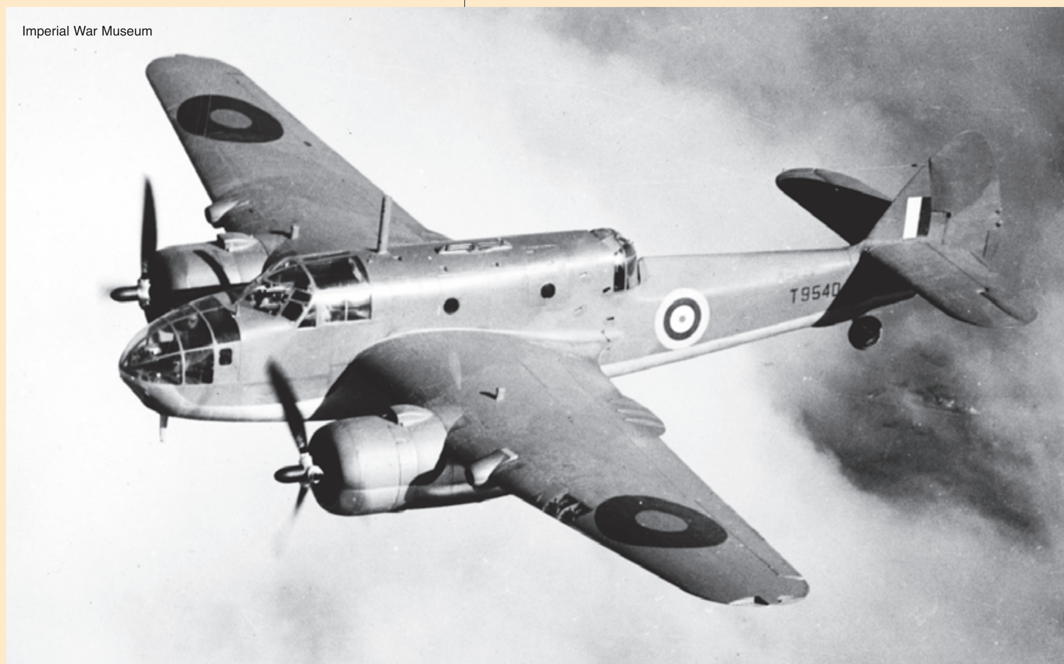
Finding no Beauforts waiting for them over Manston, the fighters carried on into the Channel. When 217 arrived, they began circling and waiting for the fighters. Confusion reigned until at last they set off alone. Eventually two aircraft found the target. At 3:45 PM they attacked through heavy flak, but no hits were made.

The Beauforts in Scotland were there to cover the *Tirpitz* should she sortie from Norway. They were ordered south to Coltishall in East Anglia, but bad weather delayed their departure until February 12, when the German ships were already in the Channel. They left at 9 AM with 14 aircraft; one was lost over the Humber.

Upon arrival at Coltishall, it was found that three had no torpedoes and there were none at the airfield. The Beauforts were supposed to rendezvous with some Hudson bombers and fighters over Manston at 2:50 PM, but by that time the battlecruisers were well clear of the narrows. For once all the aircraft arrived on time, but during the flight out over the sea cohesion was lost due to bad visibility, and the aircraft had to make their own way. Six of the Beauforts managed to attack *Gneisenau* but recorded no hits. The Hudsons, using their radar, found the enemy earlier and pressed home their attack, but two were shot down.

From St. Eval, 12 Beauforts of 86 Squadron arrived at 2:15 PM AT Thorney Island, where they refuelled. They were then ordered to fly onto Coltishall to meet their fighter escort and head out to the Dutch coast, where the enemy ships were expected at about 5:45 PM. Again, all went awry; no fighters turned up. As the light was fading, Wing Commander Flood decided to carry on alone. They failed to find the enemy ships even when dispersed; two aircraft failed to return.

During the disjointed Beaufort attacks and attempts to find the enemy, at 2:30 PM *Scharnhorst* fell afoul of the one effective British weapon in Operation Fuller. Leaving the narrows, the german ships had increased speed, but off the mouth of the River Scheldt *Scharnhorst* shuddered as the violent explosion of a mine shook her and the engines were suddenly silent.



A Bristol Beaufort of the RAF's Bomber and Coastal Command. The torpedo-bomber was an excellent aircraft but the RAF's attempts to sink the German ships in the Channel were an utter failure.

Gneisenau and *Prinz Eugen*, moving to port, passed the stricken flagship, thus obeying the operational orders to keep going even if one of their number was damaged. The RAF and the fast minelayer *Welshman* had been hard at work sowing mines faster than the German minesweepers could clear them.

Scharnhorst was dead in the water, holed on the starboard side with two compartments flooded. Admiral Ciliax, hearing the damage reports, immediately ordered the destroyer *Z-29* to take him off, as he could not control the operation from a damaged ship; four torpedo boats remained behind to render assistance to

But the Nazis were quick to take advantage of the remarkable victory, their propaganda machine going into overdrive. Hitler basked in the glory of being proved right.

Imperial War Museum

In a still from a German newsreel, the *Scharnhorst*'s commander, Captain Kurt-Caesar Hoffmann, scans the horizon, looking for targets.

the battlecruiser. Chief Engineer Kretschmer and his men set to work to get the ship, which was then a sitting duck, moving again. Luckily, no RAF bombers found her. By 2:50 PM, steam was being raised, and 10 minutes later she was underway again, soon building her speed up to 27 knots and chasing the fleet.

Bomber Command had some 100 aircraft, mostly Vickers Wellington and Bristol Blenheim bombers, on four hours' notice. They arrived over the enemy fleet about the time *Scharnhorst* hit the mine. But clouds were obscuring the targets; they had to come down to sea level to find anything. None of the returning aircraft claimed to have found the enemy, but five aircraft were lost—likely flying too low and crashing into the sea.

A second wave of 100 aircraft fared no better; nine aircraft were lost over the target area at 4:30 PM. A third wave of 41 mostly four-engine heavy bombers failed again to find anything, and one aircraft was lost. The attacks by Bomber Command achieved nothing and underlined the ineffectiveness of high-level bombers in anything but ideal conditions.

Sending the aircraft out in low cloud when the armor-piercing bombs they carried needed to be dropped from 7,000 feet to be effective is questionable in view of the 17 aircraft lost. Even the Bomber Command view that they might "distract the enemy" for the torpedo bombers and destroyers is hardly credible.

The destroyers of the Harwich-based 21st Flotilla, under Captain Charles Pizey of the *Campbell,* received the news at 11:56 AM from Dover that the enemy ships were in the Channel. They had already been stood down and were dispersed, carrying out independent exercises.

Pizey signalled his ships to gather near Buoy 53 of Harwich; by 1:18 PM, all ships were closed up as they increased speed to 28 knots. It was clear by now the destroyers could not cut the enemy off by heading southeast, so Pizey's only option was to head east to catch them somewhere near the River Mass. The only drawback to this plan was a minefield that lay across the route; he decided to discount this and sail through the mines. Not long after the increase in speed, Walpole's engines began giving trouble and forced the ship to drop out of line.

Dennis Bond and his shipmates onboard *Whitshed* worked on their skills with the torpedo tubes: "We did several exercises to see how fast we could turn the tubes from port to starboard." The torpedomen were then ordered to strap themselves to the tubes. They would soon find out why.

Campbell's radar picked up the enemy ships at 9.5 miles, passing from right to left across their course. Mist and rain had cut visibility at sea level to four miles. Pizey planned to try and get some leeway on the enemy before turning to starboard to launch torpedoes. The attack would be made in two divisions: *Campbell, Vivacious,* and *Worcester* in the first with *Mackay* and *Whitshed* in the second.

As they closed on the enemy, they spotted several aircraft flying low: Beauforts and Wellingtons and Me-109s and Ju-88s. Some of the British aircraft tried to bomb them. They could now see the enemy's gun flashes. The destroyers turned to attack. They had been spotted. Pizey ordered his ships to zigzag as the enemy guns found the range. The destroyers replied with their 4-inch guns.

As *Whitshed* heeled over at full speed, Dennis Bond said, "The racing water came up to my knees, and I knew what the lashings were for. Without them we would have been washed away."

Pizey described the attack: "At 3,500 yards I felt our luck could not hold much longer. Ships were being straddled and we were closing fast, gradually losing our bearing. At 3,300 yards I saw a large shell which failed to explode or ricochet, dive under the ship like a porpoise and I felt this was the time to turn and fire our torpedoes."

Campbell and *Vivacious* launched their torpedoes about the same time and turned away. *Worcester,* lagging behind, fired her torpedoes at about 4,000 yards. By then the enemy ships were taking evasive action and turning away. All the torpedoes missed.

Up to this point, the three destroyers had ridden their luck; other than shell splinters striking the ships, they had suffered no heavy damage. However, as *Worcester* began to turn away she was struck by a salvo of heavy shells that damaged the boiler room. As she came to a stop and took a heavy pounding, the ship began flooding. The captain gave orders to prepare to abandon ship. *Worcester* was left on fire as the German fleet continued on its way.

Campbell and *Vivacious* soon found the stricken *Worcester*; the wounded were taken off and fires brought under control. Pizey offered to take her in tow, but by now *Worcester,* her boilers back on line, began to limp along. The rest of the flotilla was ordered

back to Harwich at all speed to rearm the torpedo tubes in case another opportunity should present itself. *Worcester* made her own way back, at times reduced to three knots. She arrived back in Harwich the next day.

Enemy attention now switched to the approaching *Mackay* and *Whitshed,* which were surging toward *Prinz Eugen.* They both fired their torpedoes between 4,000 and 3,000 yards, and all torpedoes were seen to be running. Fate was kind to the two German ships as they turned toward a bank of mist.

The 21st Flotilla had pressed home its attack with great dash and courage but was totally inadequate for the task it had been given.

Having taken evasive action during the destroyer attack, *Gneisenau* and *Prinz Eugen* lost contact with each other in the poor visibility. *Z-29,* with Admiral Ciliax on board, broke down when a shell misfire ruptured an oil line. Ciliax transferred his flag to the destroyer *Hermann Schoemann.* He was on board at 6:16 PM when *Scharnhorst*, looming out of the mist, almost hit the destroyer. The fleet was now spread over several miles around the Frisian Islands, preparing to turn northeast around the coast of Holland and then home. But itvwas not yet out of danger.

At 7:55 PM, off the island of Terschelling, *Gneisenau* was rocked by an exploding mine; the ship had a gaping hole on her starboard side. She came to a stop as engineers surveyed the damage; within 30 minutes, after some makeshift repairs, she was underway again. At 9:35, *Scharnhorst,* still some way off the same island, struck her second mine. This time it was more serious, and she took in thousands of tons of water. One engine was badly damaged, and electrical power was gone. She was dead in the water unable even to operate her guns.

One British sailor on a ship sent to intercept the *Scharnhorst, Gneisenau,* and *Prinz Eugen* said, "They looked like the Houses of Parliament."

Naval History and Heritage Command

However, *Scharnhorst* did have the genius of Chief Engineer Kretschmer and his men. After 35 minutes, he reported to Kapitan Kurt-Caesar Hoffmann that he had one screw operating and enough power to make 14 knots. Electrical power was restored by 10:15 PM, and the ship was moving again.

By dawn on February 13, *Gneisenau* and *Prinz Eugen* had made contact off the port of Brunsbuttel. Shockingly, there were no tugs waiting to assist them. Approaching the port, *Gneisenau* hit a submerged wreck, causing more damage to the wounds the mine had already inflicted. *Scharnhorst* limped into Wilhelmshaven later that morning.

The Channel Dash had cost the Germans 17 aircraft shot down, while the Luftwaffe lost 11 men and the Kriegsmarine two. Additionally, two torpedo boats were damaged, and the two battlecruisers had suffered damage below the waterline.

But the Nazis were quick to take advantage of the remarkable victory, their propaganda machine going into overdrive. Hitler basked in the glory of being proved right. Admiral Ciliax and Kapitan Hoffmann each received the Knights Cross.

In Britain, there was a national outcry at the perceived incompetence. The *Times* lambasted the inept performance of the armed forces, saying that Admiral Ciliax had "succeeded where the Duke of Medina-Sidonia failed." The duke had commanded the Spanish Armada in 1588. "Nothing more mortifying to the pride of our sea power had happened since the seventeenth century."

This embarrassment was quickly followed on February 15 when Singapore fell and Prime Minister Winston Churchill and his government came under scathing attack from all sides. Against his better judgment, Churchill ordered an inquiry into what became known as The Battle of the Narrow Seas, which he considered of "minor importance." The findings of the inquiry were handed into the prime minister in early March, but for security reasons they were not published until after the war.

The Bucknell Report, named after the president of the three-man board of

inquiry, was released in 1946. It concluded, "Apart from the weakness of our forces, the main reason for our failure to do more damage to the enemy was the fact that his presence was not detected earlier, and this again was due to the breakdown of night patrols and omission to send out a strong morning reconnaissance."

Naval History and Heritage Command

A few months after the Channel Dash, *Scharnhorst* (circled) was photographed undergoing repairs at the Kiel navy yard. She was finally sunk off Norway in December 1943.

The blame was laid squarely on the RAF. Yet the Admiralty's reluctance to move a capital ship nearer to the action was a complete misreading of the abilities of air power. The battleships *Rodney* or *King George V* and some cruisers within striking distance might have made all the difference.

Bitter recriminations continued in some cases for years between some of the commanders. Although Admiral Ramsay blamed himself for not anticipating German moves better, he turned his venom on Fighter Command for not supporting Esmonde properly and Coastal Command's failure to sight the enemy. No mention was made of Ramsay's report in the inquiry; it was likely suppressed in the interests of unity.

Home waters proved no safe haven for the German ships, however. Ten days later, off Norway, *Prinz Eugen* was torpedoed by the submarine HMS *Trident*; hit in the stern, she limped back to port and was out of action for months. Later in the war, she did take part in actions against Russian forces as they advanced into East Prussia.

At the end of February 1942, the RAF bombed *Gneisenau* on three consecutive nights. She was badly damaged and never went to sea again; she finally was used as a block ship and her heavy guns removed for coastal defenses. *Scharnhorst* did fight again but was sunk on December 26, 1943, in the Battle of the North Cape off Norway by the British Home Fleet, after she had tried to attack convoys bound for Russia. Out of her crew of 1,970 only 36 survived.

In the end, the "Channel Dash" proved a setback for the German Navy and relieved the Royal Navy of the necessity of covering Brest. Admiral Raeder considered the affair "a tactical success but a strategic defeat."

What of the men? King George VI awarded the Victoria Cross posthumously to Eugene Esmonde. The citation began, "Lieutenant-Commander Esmonde knew well his enterprise was desperate...." He had "serenely challenged hopeless odds" and ended: "His high courage and splendid resolution will live in the tradition of the Royal Navy and remain for many generations a fine and stirring memory."

Eugene's invalid mother Eiley, his brothers, and sister went to Buckingham Palace. There the monarch presented the elderly lady in a wheelchair with the medal. The king expressed his sorrow at the death of her son and recalled that only recently he had invested him with the DSO. Esmonde had said of the DSO on that occasion that it was for all those who had attacked the *Bismarck* in May 1941. His posthumous VC was surely in recognition for all those who had tried to stop the German fleet in February 1942 and paid with their lives.

The story of Eugene Esmonde did not end there. As if wanting to bring some succor to the grieving family, the sea returned his body. It washed ashore in the Thames Estuary on the Kent coast on April 30, 1942. The dead man wore the uniform of a lieutenant commander in the Royal Navy; his body had been kept afloat by a semi-inflated life belt. He wore an identifying signet ring on the little finger of his right hand. The body was taken to Chatham, where it was soon positively identified. He had suffered grievous wounds down his back from neck to waist. His remains were buried at Woodlands Cemetery, Gillingham, Kent.

On May 13, 1945, Winston Churchill broadcast his famous "Five Years of War" speech, in which he paid tribute to Irish heroes who had fought for Britain. "When I think of these days, I think also of other episodes and personalities. I do not forget Lieutenant-Commander Esmonde ... and other Irish heroes that I could easily recite, and all bitterness by Britain for the Irish race dies in my heart. I can only pray that in years which I shall not see, the shame will be forgotten and the glories will endure, and that the peoples of the British Isles and of the British Commonwealth of Nations will walk together in mutual comprehension and forgiveness." □

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How Manila's Mata Hari, actress and spy Claire Phillips, saved American prisoners on war in the Philippines.

It is a usual evening at Club Tsubaki, wartime Manila's most exclusive nightspot. On stage, a statuesque brunette in a clinging white dress, olive skin, and raven hair illuminated by a spotlight, is singing a "torch" song in a low, seductive voice, dark eyes flashing. Around the room Japanese Imperial Army staff officers in dress uniform listen intently.

To her admiring audience, the chanteuse is Madame Tsubaki, an exotic performer whose club provides atmosphere and entertainment. To her Filipino employees she is Dorothy Clara Fuentes—a daring, charismatic resistance leader.

Claire Phillips, nightclub performer and spy.

One of the club's regulars, Colonel Akira Nagahama, commandant of the notorious Kempei-Tai field office, beckons her to his table. Conversation there centers on the execution of retired American Colonel Hugh Straughn, turned guerrilla leader, at the Chinese cemetery. Straughn had shared intelligence with the club's proprietress and was known to her.

Making conversation, the singer casually asks the colonel if he had ever seen Straughn. Nagahama grins, describing how he personally blew the condemned man's brains out with a single, perfectly placed shot. Stifling shock and anger, she pretends to laugh. Excusing herself, she walks to the ladies' room and is violently ill.

The flamboyant singer and spy who has thus far managed to keep her true identity

Uncensored TRUE Story of America's "Mata Hari" of the South Pacific!

"I was an American Spy"

From the Startling Story IN READER'S DIGEST

AN Allied Artists PICTURE starring ANN DVORAK GENE EVANS with Douglas Kennedy · Richard Loo · Lisa Ferraday · Philp Ahn

Produced by DAVID DIAMOND Directed by Lesley Selander Screenplay by Sam Roeca

Movie theater poster for the 1951 Allied Artists film based on the amazing life of Claire Phillips, starring Ann Dvorak. Phillips was a consultant on the production.

from the secret police chief, is a former stage actress whose presence in Manila is an accident of fate.

Born Mabel Clara Dela Taste on December 2, 1907, in Michigan, she came west to Portland, Oregon, with her family. Her stepfather Jess worked as a ship's engineer; mother Mable was a midwife. Early on, Clara (the name she preferred) showed a knack for performing, competing for Liberty Bonds in a patriotic pageant at age 11. A born show-off, she had a gutsy, impulsive streak. A "dare-devil," Clara recalled, "a fighter from the word go."

Clara entered Portland's Franklin High School in 1922. But classes and student activities held little interest. Craving adventure, she ran away to join a traveling circus. She sold tickets to a snake charmer's show and, when the performer fell ill, replaced him. The job was short-lived; Clara ended up back home when her mom caught up with the show.

But smitten by show business, Clara overcame parental objections and was allowed to try out for live theater. She cut her teeth with a Portland stock company, then toured. A "natural," she could sing, dance, and act. During the Great Depression, she sailed with a musical stock unit on a tour of the Far East, ending up in the Philippines.

In Manila, the archipelago's capital, she was performing at a nightclub when she met Filipino sailor Manuel Fuentes. They married and had a daughter, Dian, but the marriage ended and the couple divorced. Clara, now calling herself Claire, briefly returned to Portland but, before war broke out, returned to Manila and found work as a singer in a Manila casino.

Manila had been administered by the United States since the Spanish-American War but retained its colonial charm. In the summer of 1941 the Japanese Imperial Army invaded French Indo-China and prepared to move on Hong Kong, Singapore, and the Dutch East Indies. Only the Philippines—the most strategic American outpost in Asia—stood in the way.

Claire was on stage singing one evening when a tall, handsome sergeant named John V. "Phil" Phillips walked in with his buddies from the 31st Infantry Regiment. As the men slaked their thirst with cold beer, Claire delivered a sultry version of "I don't Want to Set the World on Fire," focusing on Phillips. "The soldier looked at me in the manner that a women longs to be gazed at earnestly ... ours was a case of true love at first sight," she recalled.

Retired U.S. Army Colonel Hugh Straughn, a guerrilla leader and friend of Phillips, was captured, tortured, and executed by the Japanese.

Through the fall of 1941 the new couple lived "fleeting, glorious days" in the sun-drenched city, oblivious to air raid drills, blackouts, and other war preparations. Phil proposed marriage and a Christmas wedding was planned.

The storybook romance changed forever on December 8, 1941. Soon after the Pearl Harbor attack, Imperial Japanese Navy planes hit the Philippines' Clark Field and Cavite Naval Yard, crippling American air and sea power in the Far East with a one-two punch. Claire fled the capital with Phil and her adopted daughter, Dian.

General Douglas MacArthur, knowing that Manila was not defensible, ordered his Filipino-American forces (USAFFE) to conduct a strategic retreat into the rugged Bataan peninsula across the bay, where the combined armies would hold out until hoped-for relief could come from the States.

Claire, Phil, and Dian joined the exodus of soldiers and refugees. But the danger didn't deter the wedding. On Christmas Eve, in a makeshift chapel in the Bataan jungle, the soldier and the singer-actress became man and wife.

The Filipino-American army, weakened by disease and starvation, was struggling to hold a main line of resistance across the peninsula, so Phil told Claire to hide and wait for him. She fled to a remote mountain hideout and there met John Boone, a hard-bitten corporal who was forming a guerilla outfit. Boone asked her to go to Manila to establish a source of supplies.

Claire's resolve stiffened when she watched 78, 000 American and Filipino prisoners shuffle by on the Bataan Death March after General Edward King surrendered USAFFE forces on the peninsula on April 9, 1942. The column of gaunt, exhausted men stretched as far as the eye could see. If a prisoner tried to get a drink or fell, a Japanese infantryman administered a head shot or bayonet thrust.

Hearing that her husband had been captured and sent to Manila, Claire slipped into the occupied city. Using forged documents and acting ability, she created a new identity: a Filipino-Italian mestiza named

Dorothy Fuentes. As "Dorothy," she volunteered as a nurse at a hospital in Malate Church, rubbing shoulders with resistance members who were smuggling aid into military prisons.

Cabanatuan was the largest camp for American prisoners in the Pacific. Conditions were appalling. Food was dirty rice slop, sanitation nonexistent, dysentery and other diseases rampant. Men did forced labor under the blazing equatorial sun. Rule violations meant beatings, torture, or execution. In this environment, even small amounts of food or medicine meant a chance to live.

Claire found work at a nightclub catering to Japanese military personnel. One night, as the club's owner looked on, she was beaten by a customer who felt she had failed to show him due deference. As her bruises healed, she plotted revenge.

Hocking her wedding ring and American dollars, Claire leased a nearby dance studio, furnishing it and hiring her boss's best employees to staff it. Her experience with stage sets and costumes came in handy as she transformed the space into a glamorous nightspot.

On October 15, 1942, the exclusive "Tsubaki Club" opened its doors to the cream of the occupation intelligentsia, including her ex-employer's clients. The club featured a floor show of Asian dance routines, steamy "torch" numbers sung by Claire, and a temple dance inspired by Hedy Lamarr in *Lady of the Tropics.* Guests were attended to by beautiful hostesses and white-jacketed waiters.

The grand opening was a hit and subsequent shows quickly sold out. Patrons were delighted with the entertainment, personal service, and atmosphere. The outrageous prices they paid meant huge profits—which were used to buy food and medicine on the black market. This contraband was smuggled to imprisoned Americans and to Boone's guerrilla band on Bataan.

Claire and her hostesses coquettishly coaxed information on troop strengths and sailing schedules from boozy army staff officers and navy captains. They would sit, light their cigarettes, stroke their hair and gently encourage them to pour their hearts out. Information gathered was sent by runner to Boone, then radioed to MacArthur's headquarters in Australia.

Phillips receives a bouquet of flowers and a warm greeting from Major Kenneth Boggs, who survived Japanese imprisonment with her help.

One day, word came that Phil had died in Cabanatuan. The devastating news incapacitated Claire. Only after a plea from a chaplain to remember Phil's comrades who were "dying by the hundreds" was she able to continue.

The Manila underground was a diverse group: expatriates, socialites, priests, doctors, students, street vendors, and executives. Risking torture and execution at the hands of the Gestapo-like Kempei-Tai, they played a shadowy game, using code names. Claire, with a quirky habit of carrying messages in her bra, went by "High-Pockets."

The guerillas used creative means to funnel medicine, money and messages into prisons. In the case of Cabanatuan, runners took supplies by train to a nearby town. There a sweet-faced Filipina disguised as a ragged street peddler sold bags of fruit to prisoners who were allowed into town under guard. They paid a few centavos for a bag containing several hundred pesos hidden in a false bottom. Bananas were stuffed with messages, money, or medicine. There was a separate channel for morale-building news sheets.

Once inside, contraband was distributed by trustworthy chaplains. By 1943, 30,000 to 40,000 pesos and large quantities of medicine were going into the camps every week. One grateful prisoner sent a note out to High-Pockets that read: "You deserve more gold medals than all of us in here together."

Japanese counterintelligence, meanwhile, was tracking the guerrillas, using rewards, double agents, and torture. The most dangerous adversary was a Colonel Nagahama. An Imperial War College graduate, the bespectacled officer was brilliant and ruthless. When not enjoying floor shows at the club, Nagahama ran a relentless hunt for spies, including the elusive High-Pockets.

The strain of running a business while coordinating dangerous, complicated operations took a toll on Claire. One day she was rushed to a hospital and underwent emergency surgery. She resumed her activities, but the net was tightening. In early 1944, letters going into Cabanatuan were intercepted that incriminated American officers and resistance members. On May 23, four armed Kempei-Tai men barged into the club and arrested Claire.

Five months of brutalization in Fort Santiago followed. Claire was strapped down and water forced into her throat until she passed out. She was "revived" with burning cigarettes ground into her flesh. In another session, a nail was slowly driven under one of her fingernails.

Claire and fellow inmates were forced to kneel silently all day in cramped, filthy cells. The women endured endless nights hearing the screams of others being tortured. Two cups of rice slop a day kept them barely alive.

By fall, with her will to live ebbing, Claire pleaded with a Japanese officer to finish her investigation. He was glad to oblige. Claire was interrogated about news sheets smuggled into Cabanatuan. She denied it, even after being beaten bloody.

Soon afterward, she was given a court-martial. Charges were read before a tribunal, a plea entered, and a "guilty" verdict read. Her sentence: death by firing squad. As days dragged by, her heart pounded each time a prisoner was called. Then she was told she would have a second trial. Claire went through the motions again, bowing and pleading guilty.

General Mark Clark awards Phillips the Medal of Freedom, 1951.

Before dawn one morning, Claire was shoved into a car and driven out by the Chinese Cemetery. Convinced she was about to die, she invoked a higher power: "My thoughts jumped to my family in the States. As I prayed, a profound feeling of peace and quiet descended on me."

The car stopped. Claire looked up. A sign loomed over a gate: "Women's Correctional Institution." Inside its forbidding walls a guard read her sentence: 12 years at hard labor or death if she attempted to escape.

The regimen in the Institution was extreme: forced labor on a starvation diet of rice and boiled weeds. Claire, now weighing 85 pounds, doubted whether she would see the liberation she believed was coming.

General MacArthur had promised to return to the Philippines and was making good his pledge. As the U.S. Army advanced during the autumn of 1944, word came that Japanese soldiers were executing prisoners before Americans could reach them. From her cell Claire could see vast columns of smoke and hear the sounds of combat. As the battle drew closer, tension rose. Early on February 10, 1945, a warning cry sounded. Claire dived under her bed and huddled there. Suddenly a shout rang out: "Viva Los Americanos!"

"I made a dash for the courtyard," Claire recalled. "There stood 10 of the tallest Yanks I had ever seen. I rushed up to the nearest soldier and timidly touched his arm. 'Yes, I'm real, sister,' he asserted, with an assuring grin." The GI was one of Colonel Charles Young's 1st Cavalry Texas Rangers.

Claire and the others climbed into the colonel's vehicles. They passed through raging firefights, inhaling the sickening stench of death. Manila suffered the worst battle destruction of any city in World War II except Warsaw as Rear Admiral Sanji Iwabuchi's marines fought almost to the last man, shooting, burning, and raping thousands of civilians.

Returning to Portland that spring, Claire was warmly welcomed by her family. Her extraordinary story soon appeared in *Reader's Digest* and later was published as a book, *Manila Espionage,* bringing her national recognition.

In 1948 at Fort Lewis, Washington, Claire was personally decorated by General Mark Clark with the Medal of Freedom, America's highest civilian honor. The written citation praised her "inspiring bravery and devotion to the cause of freedom."

A few years later a movie—released as *I Was an American Spy*—based on Claire's memoir, was produced by United Artists; classic film star Ann Dvorak played the "Manila Mata Hari." Dvorak had also been under fire (during the London Blitz) and the two women became friends. Claire toured the country, promoting the film. She also visited hospitalized veterans and served in the Barbed Wire Club, an advocacy organization that became the American Ex-Prisoners of War.

Claire gradually found herself living a double life: public personality and working mother by day, self-medicating with liquor after hours. Post-traumatic stress and the lingering effects of torture compromised her health. She was admitted to a hospital and died unexpectedly from meningitis on May 22, 1960. She was just 52.

Today no plaque or monument honors the actress who gave her greatest performances so that others might live, but in the U.S. Embassy in Manila, a portrait of High-Pockets adorns the Claire Phillips Room, a meeting place for dignitaries. Perhaps fittingly, the portrait adjoins the chamber where Generals Homma and Yamashita were convicted of war crimes—a fate shared by her nemesis, Colonel Akira Nagahama, who was tried and hanged as a war criminal. □

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Los Banos

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by the guerrillas or victims of those collaborators themselves. Three Americans were killed during the task force's diversionary attack.

At the lakeshore, the paratroopers formed a perimeter around the beach as the internee-filled amtracs arrived. Major Burgess still wasn't sure the Soule Force was on its way, but it was time to move the civilians across the lake. It was 11 AM, and the round trip would take at least two hours; the paratroopers dug in while 1,500 of the internees were loaded aboard the amtracs. The remainder waited.

The vehicles formed into three columns and began their journey. An occasional bullet snapped past from the shoreline, and the amtrac crewmen responded with machine-gun fire, drenching the beach and nearby jungle in a torrent of lead.

The paratroopers from the blocking positions collapsed in on the perimeter. There were a few contacts with Japanese troops, but they amounted to little. About noon, General Swing flew overhead in an L-4 liaison plane and established radio contact through a forward observer.

Burgess told Swing the prisoners were moving over the lake. Swing was happy the operation had gone so well with so few casualties. The division commander then suggested to Burgess that once the last internees were gone, he should take the rest of his troops and link up with Soule's task force.

Burgess realized this was a bad idea and did the only thing he could to avoid being ordered to do it. He turned off his radio and continued with his plan. Luckily, Swing never made an issue of it later, likely realizing his error.

Just after 1 PM, the amtracs returned and loaded the rest of the civilians, followed by the paratroopers. The artillerymen hurried their pack howitzers to the beach. The jeeps and guns were loaded on separate vehicles, with one cannon laid across a pile of baggage. Japanese fire from Mayondon Point and the rock quarry grew heavier.

The crew of the baggage-mounted cannon aimed their gun at the point and fired. The recoil of the 75mm shell nearly swamped the amtrac, and the angry driver threatened to shoot them if they tried to fire again.

The diversionary force saw the prisoners evacuating across the lake, so Soule decided to withdraw to the San Juan River, staying on the near side in case he had to advance again. There was a small counterattack by 50 Japanese troops, but it was easily defeated.

While the amtracs ferried the second group, the first group was taken by trucks and ambulances to nearby New Bilibid Prison. The ex-prisoners were taken aback to be quartered in cells, but nevertheless it was a happy time. Doctors and medics examined the civilians, and new clothing was given to them. A chow line was opened, and some went through it four times. To help their sensitive stomachs, the food consisted of fresh bread with butter and bean soup.

Newsmen walked among them, taking photos, interviewing, and filming the joyous occasion. The second group arrived safely, and by 4 PM all the civilians were together. An hour later, the rescuing paratroopers reached the prison/hospital to the cheers and applause of the rescued. They all shared a meal, and the airborne men were allowed to stay the night, spending it celebrating with the now free civilians.

The next morning, they ate breakfast and boarded trucks; it was time to go back to the war. The 1/511 soon relieved Task Force Soule. A few days later, they advanced and discovered the Japanese had massacred 1,500 Filipino civilians as a reprisal for the raid. Warrant Officer Konishi was found months later and hanged in 1947 for his war crimes. Major Iwanaka escaped.

B Company received a Distinguished Unit Citation for its role in the rescue. The camp site is now part of the University of the Philippines; the grounds are a park containing a massive rain tree called the Fertility Tree, where young couples meet. ☐

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