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A DEFINING MOMENT IN MY LIFE

I traveled from the site of the Allied invasion at Normandy to the horror of Jewish extermination camps in Poland.

It was a beautiful morning...bright blue skies, mid 70s, with a light breeze. As our tour group walked the red-brick path along the top of the cliff overlooking Omaha Beach I thought I knew what to expect. But as we passed a crop of trees and row after row of shining white crosses came into view, the sight took my breath away. Many of the soldiers buried at the Normandy American Cemetery died while landing at either Omaha or Utah Beach on D-Day. As I stared at the crosses planted in the perfectly manicured lawn, I realized I was experiencing a defining moment in my life.

My family has a long, proud history of serving in the military. I was blessed to have served in the Air Force for 20 years. My dad's three brothers served in the European and Pacific theaters during World War II. My dad was too young to enlist, but while I was growing up he made sure his brothers told me all about their service during the war. One uncle landed on the beaches of Normandy and went on to fight in the Battle of the Bulge. Another one was a B-24 engine mechanic in England. And the third was a combat medic who fought on Okinawa.

Procom's tours have given me the amazing opportunity to visit some of the places where my uncles fought and sacrificed. I visited World War II sites in France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Germany, Austria, Hungary, Slovakia, and Poland. I traveled from the site of the Allied invasion at Normandy to the horror of Jewish extermination camps in Poland. As we visited the various battle sites I recalled my Uncle Norm talking about his WWII experiences. He often mentioned how "lucky" he was to have survived the D-Day invasion and later the Battle of the Bulge, while his buddies died around him.

I have taken part in four different tours offered by Procom: the Beyond Band of Brothers Tour, the Third Reich Tour, the Central Europe Remembrance Tour and the War in Poland Tour. Their staff is exceptional: the tour managers have been extremely knowledgeable; the in-country tour guides make you feel like you were there when it happened. The amazing travel consultants who work in Lexington, KY do a great job answering all my questions (no matter how silly) and preparing me for each trip. Nothing less than five star service all the way. I look forward to taking two tours in 2017: the Eastern Front Tour to Russia and the American Civil War Tour with my grandson. In 2018 I plan to take the Patriot Tour.

TIMOTHY MILLER Phoenix, AZ

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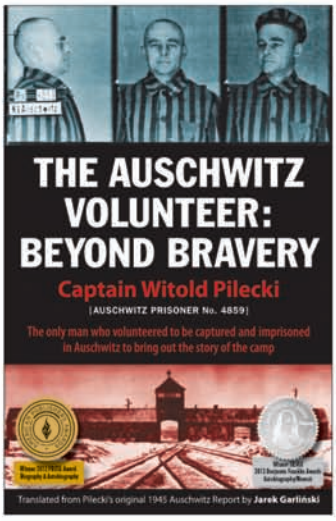

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Anyone with an interest in World War II aviation knows the name *Memphis Belle,* which, along with the B-29 *Enola Gay,* is inarguably one of the two most famous planes of that era. It first gained fame as the subject of William Wyler's 1944 documentary, *Memphis Belle: A Story of a Flying Fortress.*

You may have also seen the 1990 Hollywood film, *Memphis Belle,* starring Matthew Modine, John Lithgow, and David Strathairn, which was a fictionalized (and seriously inaccurate) version of the plane and crew's actual exploits.

The crew of Memphis Belle return from their 25th mission in May 1943.

Built by Boeing in 1942, the real *Memphis Belle* (USAAF serial number 41-24485), a B-17F model, was piloted by Captain Robert K. Morgan on her 25th combat mission (May 17, 1943, to Lorient, France, her fifth mission to bomb German U-boat pens.) The plane actually had a 26th mission, two days later, to Kiel, Germany, piloted by a Lieutenant Anderson.

At the time, if a bomber crew survived 25 combat missions, they were eligible for stateside rotation. (And who didn't want to go home? Two-thirds of Eighth Air Force bomber crews never lived to see 25 missions.)

Contrary to popular belief, the *Memphis Belle* was not the first B-17 to complete 25 missions. That honor belongs to *Hell's Angels,* of the 303rd Bomb Group, which accomplished that goal a week before *Memphis Belle* did.

Once back in the United States in the summer of 1943, the plane (named for Morgan's 20-year-old girlfriend at the time, Margaret Polk, a resident of Memphis, Tennessee) and its crew were sent by the Army's public relations people on a 32-city war-bond-selling tour across the country.

Found in an Oklahoma scrapyard at the end of the war, the bomber was destined for the smelter but was purchased by the mayor of Memphis for $350, brought to its eponymous city, and put on display.

From 1949 through the 1980s, however, the plane sat outdoors in Memphis, where it was ravaged by the elements and vandals. The beat-up shell was later moved to Mud Island and protected by a large pavilion, but the plane still suffered from exposure to the elements.

A couple of efforts at restoration failed and in 2004 the *Belle* was finally claimed by the National Museum of the U.S. Air Force at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio, so that it could be properly restored and lovingly placed on permanent display.

After more than a decade (and millions of dollars of donated funds), the *Belle*'s restoration was complete and she was once more unveiled to the public in the museum's World War II Gallery on May 17, 2018—the 75th anniversary of her 25th mission. Long live the *Belle*!

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Of the 39 Marines aboard the USS *Indianapolis* when it was sunk, only nine were rescued.

Lieutenant Commander Mochitsura Hashimoto, Imperial Japanese Navy, stared intently through *I-58*'s periscope. Visibility was poor until the moon peeked through the clouds and he spotted a dark silhouette on the horizon.

"We waited until it got close enough to see what it was," he said, thinking the shape indicated an Idaho-class battleship. "She had two turrets aft and a large tower mast. The crew were all agog, awaiting the order to fire the torpedoes. All was quiet … the favorable moment for firing was approaching. He ordered all firing tubes to be ready and announced, "Set depth of the torpedoes at six yards and speed at 42 knots. Firing at two-second intervals fanwise. I aimed my torpedoes."

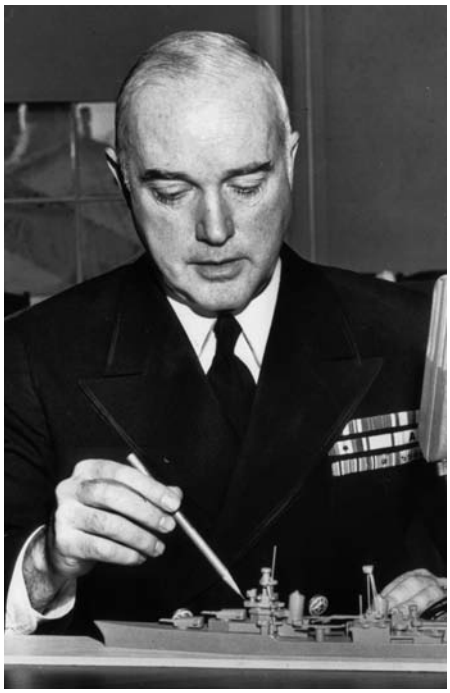
The torpedoes were the Type 95—an improvement over the Type 93 "Long Lance" torpedo that Japan had used so successfully in the early years of the war. The Type 95 was a real ship killer: more than 23 feet long, 3,600 pounds, with a warhead ranging from 890 to 1,200 pounds, a speed of 49-51 knots, and an effective range of up to 13,000 yards (over seven miles). The U.S. Navy had no torpedo as good—and nothing that could stop it.

The unidentified warship steamed closer, straight at the submerged submarine. At 1,640 yards, practically point-blank range, Hashimoto gave the order: "Stand by—fire!"

The submarine, longer than a football field, shuddered as a half dozen Type 95 torpedoes belched from the tubes and sped toward the unknown target. Until this moment shortly before midnight on July 29, 1945, some 250 miles north of Palau, Hashimoto had never before fired at an enemy ship.

"We waited anxiously," he said. "Every minute seemed an age. The signalman was standing by and counting aloud. At 60 seconds the torpedoes would miss the target. Five seconds … 10 seconds … 30 seconds … 50 … 51! Then on the starboard side of the enemy by the forward turret, and then the after-turret there rose columns of water to be followed immediately by flashes of bright red flame. Then another column of water arose from alongside the Number 2 turret and seemed to envelop the whole ship—'A hit, a hit!' I shouted as each torpedo struck home, and the crew danced for joy."

Hashimoto sent out a coded message stating that a ship had been sunk. The dark silhouette that the torpedoes struck was not a battleship but rather the heavy cruiser USS *Indianapolis*.



Both: Naval History & Heritage Command

ABOVE: The *Indy*'s Marine Guard under No. 1 turret, photographed shortly before the sinking. TOP: The *Indy*'s captain, Charles B. McCoy III, shown at his court-martial with a model of his ship, was the only ship commander court-martialed for losing a vessel to enemy action in wartime.

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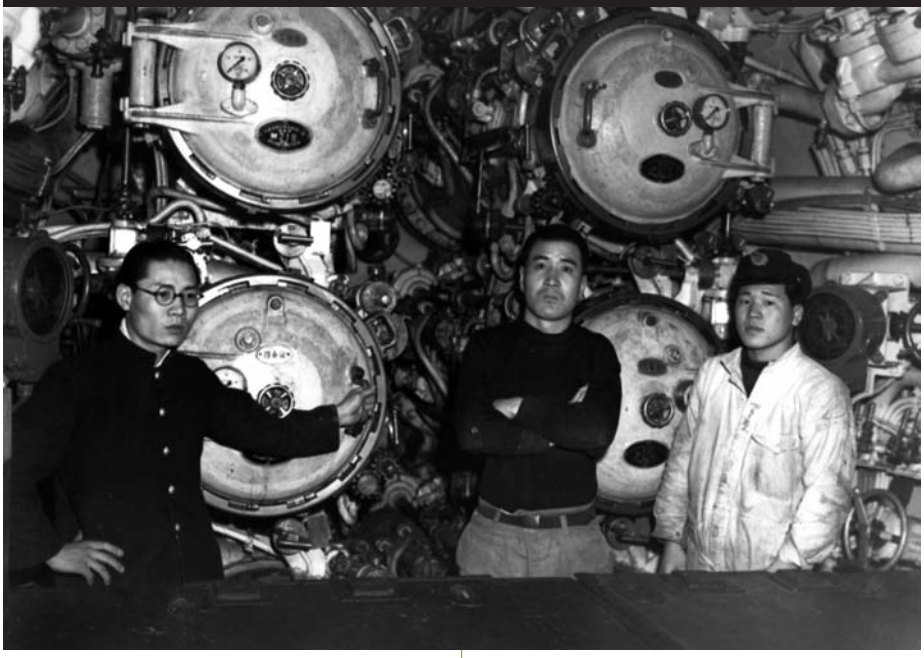
Captain Charles B. McVay III, the *Indy*'s commanding officer, was the son of an admiral and a Naval Academy graduate (class of 1920). He had led the ship during the invasion of Iwo Jima in February 1945, followed by the *Indy*'s bombardment of Okinawa, where her gunners shot down seven enemy planes before a kamikaze pilot slammed into her on March 31. Despite the heavy damage and the loss of 13 crewmen, McVay guided the crippled ship back to Mare Island, California, for repairs.

On July 16, *Indianapolis* returned to the combat zone, sailing for Tinian Island in the Marianas with top-secret components for the atomic bomb that would be dropped on Hiroshima. From Tinian, the *Indy* headed for Guam, with its ultimate destination being Leyte Gulf in the Philippines.

Shortly after noon on the 29th, during its voyage from Guam to Leyte, the *Indy* exchanged signals with the nearby LST-779, which was conducting antiaircraft drills while traversing the same route on the way to Leyte Gulf. Presumably, LST-779 was the last American ship to sight the *Indy*.

Both: Naval History & Heritage Command



ABOVE: The USS *Indianapolis* (CA-35) sailing in 1943 or 1944. After the incident, only 317 men out of a total crew of 1,196 survived, making the incident the worst naval disaster in U.S. Navy history. BELOW: View of the I-*58*'s forward torpedo room, photographed at Sasebo, Japan, six months after it sank the Indianapolis.

McVay had not been alerted to the possible presence of any enemy submarines along his route, and his request for a destroyer escort from Guam to Leyte Gulf had been turned down. Nor was the *Indy* equipped with devices that could have detected the presence of submarines.

"At approximately five minutes after midnight," Captain McVay said later, "I was thrown from my emergency cabin bunk on the bridge by a very violent explosion, followed shortly thereafter by another explosion."

The first torpedo blew an estimated 65 feet of the bow off. The second torpedo struck on the starboard side in the machinery spaces, near a powder magazine and a high-octane gasoline tank, igniting the fuel in a white-hot surge of death. The terrific explosion lifted the 10,000-ton cruiser out of the water and knocked out all electric power aboard the ship.

"We had no communications whatsoever … sound powered phones out, all communications forward were out," McVay said. Despite the loss of shipboard power, Chief Radio Electrician L.T. Woods in Radio Two told McVay that he "was sure they were getting out an S.O.S. with auxiliary power."

Indy's Marine detachment of two officers and 37 enlisted men was scattered throughout the ship; some were on watch (manning weapons stations/guns) but most were sleeping on deck because of the 120-degree heat below decks. Pfc. Melvin C. Jacob remembered, "It's so hot in the South Pacific, nobody slept below unless they really had to."

Corporal Edgar A. Harrell added, "We were given permission to sleep topside on the open deck. Each of us found our own open space to spread out our blankets so we could enjoy our designated four hours of sleep."

The crew was on a "Condition Able" alert status, which meant that the men were on duty four hours on, four hours off. Captain McVay had set condition of readiness Three, material condition "Yoke-Modified," which allowed hatches to be open, breaching watertight integrity.

Corporal Harrell was sleeping "under

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U.S. Navy corpsmen treat an *Indy* survivor. Many who were pulled from the water were covered with oil and had shark bites and infected saltwater ulcers.

the barrels of Number 1 turret" when the first torpedo hit: "I knew that the bow was cut off. I could hear all the water coming in down below."

Private First Class Jacob was also sleeping on the forecastle: "The first torpedo hit just the opposite of where I was sleeping. Sort of picked me up and threw me against the railing. I had a big cut on my chin and a little piece of shrapnel in my knee. I went to the Marine compartment but the flames had set everything on fire … all the bunks and so forth were just burning or smoldering … so I went to my gun station."

Private Earl Riggins was sleeping in the main forward turret: "I climbed out of the turret and was disoriented. Everyone was gone. I almost walked into the sea. Thirty feet of the bow was gone…. I knew I had to get off or go down with it."

Private First Class Giles McCoy was assigned to guard prisoners in the brig located in the fantail of the ship. After the two explosions, he worried about being trapped below decks. The two prisoners screamed to be released. "I still remember hearing the guys hollering in there that they couldn't get out," he recalled. He quickly used his keys to open the cell doors, and the three of them made their way topside through the jumbled mass of lockers and debris that had been hurled around by the explosions. McCoy was the last man out before the hatch was closed, trapping several men in the rising waters.

First Sergeant Jacob H. Greenwald was knocked out of his bed: "By the time I found a life jacket and put it on, the bow was under water. I made my way to the fantail and took up my battle station as directing officer of the 40mm guns. In a few minutes the ship had a 90-degree list to the starboard and I had no alternative but to walk right off the deck into the water. Almost as soon as I hit the water, I grabbed hold of an empty ammunition casing.

"Some 200 yards away there were three rafts tied together on which huddled the survivors. I managed to make my way through the water toward the rafts and was pulled aboard. The rafts were so overloaded with about 150 men aboard, that they were frequently submerged as much as three feet."

Indianapolis was listing to starboard when the ship's executive officer reported to Captain McVay on the bridge. "The damage is serious, we are sinking rapidly. I recommend that we abandon ship," he reported.

The captain accepted his recommendation: "Pass the word to abandon ship." The order had to be relayed by mouth—"All hands topside to abandon ship"—because the communications system was knocked out. However, many of the men did not get the word or they were in a situation where there was no other choice but to go into the water.

Jacob and the Marine detachment's executive officer, 1st Lt. Edward H. Stauffer, were clinging to the rail on the port side. "I think this thing is going to roll over," the officer said because the ship was listing heavily to starboard. "So we slid on our butts down to the bottom and then jumped into the water," Jacob recalled. "Stauffer jumped first and then I jumped after him, but when I came up, I couldn't find him."

The ship was still underway, leaving a trail of hundreds of men struggling in the oily water along a roughly three-mile-long line. "Currents carried people and groups over 50 miles," Private Earl Riggins explained.

Most of the Marines were on the quarterdeck standing by to abandon ship. Harrell said, "Word finally trickled down like an echo to abandon ship, and everyone then on the quarterdeck rushed to the high side. I went over and hung onto that rail."

Greenwald recalled, "When the time came, we all jumped off, congregating into five groups." There were three other Marines in his group: Sergeants Richard I. Tracy Jr., Charles J. Cromling, Jr., and Pfc. George H. Reinhold. "There were very few men in this group, which made it hard to survive, and there was only one man that did; he drifted into another group and was finally picked up with them." The last man Greewald saw alive was Platoon Sergeant Cromling. Tracy and Reinhold passed away on the second or third day.

Private Robert F. Redd had previously broken the bones in his foot and was wearing a walking cast. When the ship was hit and began listing, he and several other injured were swept off into the water. Redd flailed his arms to stay afloat, but the heavy cast pulled him under.

Private Riggins was struggling in the oily water when *Indianapolis* plunged into the deep. "The moon came out, and I saw the ship standing straight up in the water," he recalled. "The propellers were still turning. Then it went straight down."

Indianapolis sank in 12 minutes. The ship's suction pulled McCoy down, and he thought it was all over. Suddenly, the ship let go a huge pocket of air, propelling him to a surface that was covered with slimy, choking fuel oil from the ship's ruptured tanks. The ship continued its downward plunge, hitting the ocean floor three miles below the waves.

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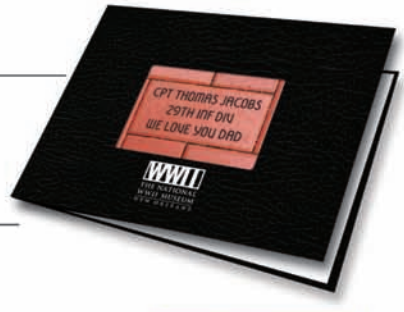

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WWII
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When dawn arrived, the survivors were confident they would be rescued soon. "The next morning we all thought they would be looking for us," Riggins explained. "We thought we possibly got off an S.O.S.—the radioman thought so, but nobody knew for sure."

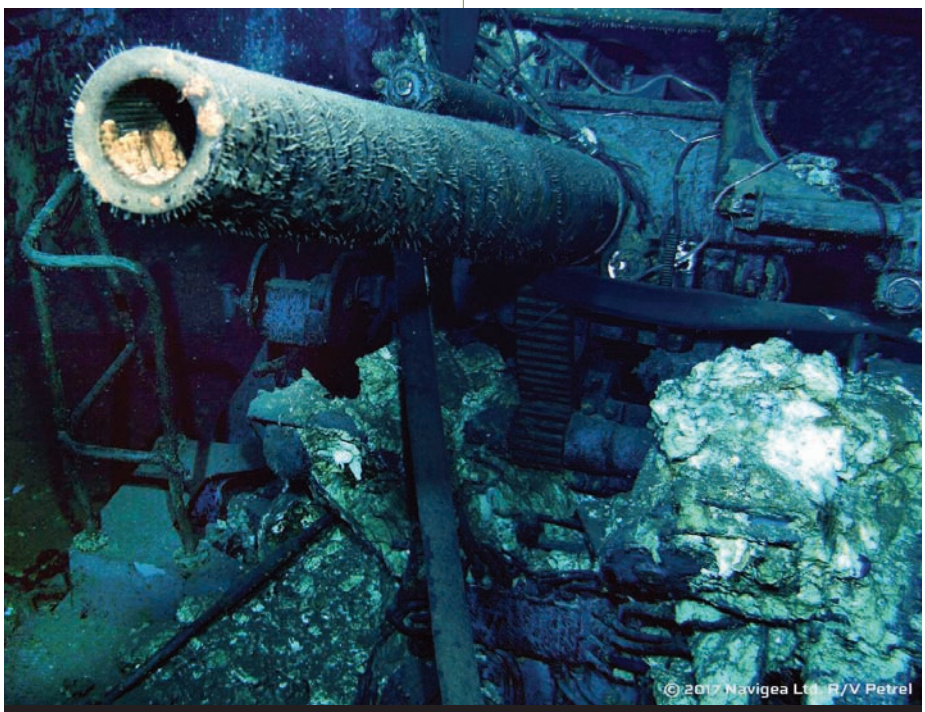
At eight minutes after midnight, July 30, McVay scribbled out a note and instructed the navigator to deliver it to Radio One for transmission. It stated, "We have been hit by two torpedoes, Latitude ____N, Longitude ____E. [McVay, who probably did not know exactly where the ship was at that time, left the coordinates blank, leaving it up to the navigator and radio operators to fill in the missing information.] We are sinking rapidly and need immediate assistance."

Radio Two also transmitted an S.O.S. call on 500 K.C., but again no one aboard the *Indy* knew if anyone received the signals.

However, contemporary accounts claim that the signals were, in fact, picked up in the Philippines and by several Navy and Coast Guard ships, but the cruiser's S.O.S. messages were disregarded as likely hoaxes, and no rescue was launched. The U.S. Navy's protocol was to treat messages that could not be confirmed as pranks, and it was a pro forma procedure by late-July 1945, because the Japanese often tried to confuse and expose the Navy in many locations. The fact remains that approximately 800 sailors and Marines survived the sinking and were adrift at sea with no food or fresh water.

As it turned out, MAGIC, the Navy's top-secret system of decoding Japanese signals, had decrypted what had transpired. On August 3, 1945, the commander in chief of the Navy Department in Washington, D.C., was informed by memorandum that, according to the MAGIC intercepts, the Japanese had organized a suicide squadron of four submarines (*I-47, I-53, I-58,* and *I-367*) that was assigned to patrol areas in the Philippine Sea.

Shortly before midnight on the 29th, the subs were ordered to shift their patrol areas in order to attack any ships along the American supply convoy route between Okinawa and Leyte Gulf. The memo also said that MAGIC picked up *I-58*'s transmission that she had attacked and sunk one ship, which turned out to be the *Indianapolis*.



One of the *Indianapolis*'s antiaircraft deck guns. This photo was taken after the shipwreck was located in August 2017 by an expedition financed by Paul G. Allen.

The lack of fresh water caused many of the floating men to break down and drink the salt water; delirium soon followed. "We had a lot of fellows drink the water and they'd hallucinate," Riggins explained. "My best friend said, 'Earl, the *Indy*'s just underwater and the scuttlebutts [water fountains] are still working. Come go with me.' 'Bob, stay here' I said. 'I'm going,' he said. I reached out to grab him and he was gone and it wasn't long before I heard screams." Greenwald said, "Those who swam away were eaten."

Hundreds of sharks, attracted by the smell of blood, started picking off the men on the outer perimeter of the clustered groups. "The worst part was the people getting bitten by sharks, the screams, the high-pitched screams," Jacob recalled.

The terrifying ordeal went on and on. "There wasn't much you could do about it," Riggins said. "We took the life jackets off the bodies of the dead [and] there would be just half a body. We were saving life jackets because some people didn't have them ... the jackets were giving out. Mine was [saturated] and the water was up to my neck but it was still holding me [out of the water]."

Captain Edward L. Parke, commander of the Marine detachment, gave up his life jacket on numerous occasions to others and worked to keep his men together and focused on surviving. Jacob said that Parke was "one of the heroes." He died on the second day. Captain McVay recommended Parke for the Navy Cross. The citation read: "For extraordinary heroism in rescuing and organizing a large group of men … finally collapsing himself from exhaustion. His unselfish conduct in the face of the greatest personal danger was outstanding and in keeping with the highest tradition of the United States Naval Service and the Marine Corps."

By the third day, less than half the crew was still alive, and they were rapidly giving up hope. Lack of fresh water, shark attacks, and injuries, McCoy said, made it "easier to die than to stay alive."

Oddly enough, when the *Indy* failed to arrive at Leyte on Tuesday, July 31, no one raised the alarm. As the ship's website says, "A series of blunders ensued. First, there was confusion as to which area the *Indianapolis* was to report to when it arrived. Second, there was no directive to report the

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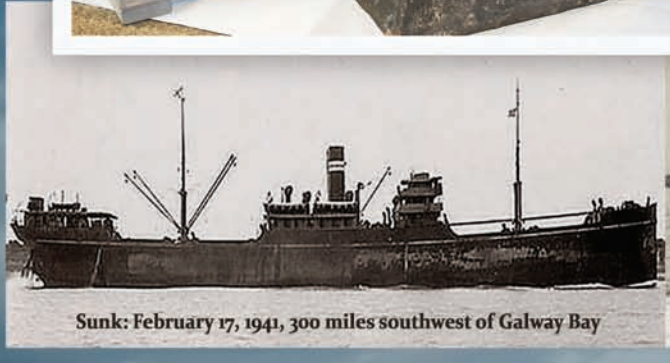
Sunk: February 17, 1941, 300 miles southwest of Galway Bay


German Submarine U-5

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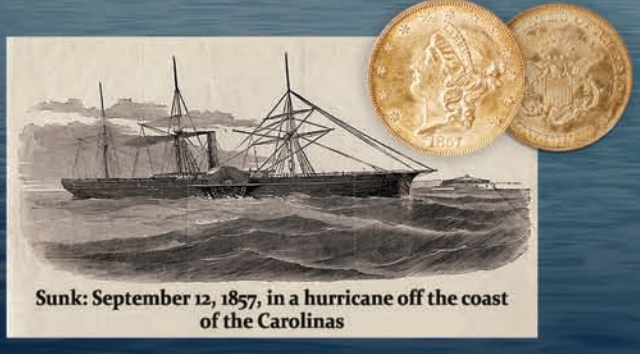
Sunk: September 12, 1857, in a hurricane off the coast of the Carolinas

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non-arrival of a combatant ship. And, third, there was no request to retransmit a garbled message which would have clarified the *Indianapolis*'s arrival time."

Shortly after 11 AM on the fourth day, August 2, Lieutenant Wilbur C. Gwinn, the pilot of a Lockheed PV-1 Ventura aircraft searching for Japanese submarines, by chance saw a huge oil slick. Thinking it was evidence of a damaged enemy sub, he prepared for a low-level depth-charge run, but just as he was about to release the depth charges he saw dozens of men frantically waving to get his attention. He regained altitude and sent a message, "Sighted 30 survivors 11° 30' North, 133° 30' East. Dropped transmitter and life boat. Emergency IFF on."

It took three hours before a Consolidated PBY Catalina flying boat named *Playmate 2,* flown by Lieutenant R. Adrian Marks, was dispatched. Arriving at the scene, the crew dropped rafts and supplies, but when a crewman spotted the survivors being attacked by sharks Marks decided to make an open sea landing—despite orders to the contrary.

His crew agreed, and he landed the big four-engine aircraft between swells in a power-on stall, tail-low, nose-high attitude. Two hull rivets popped out and a seam started leaking from the force of the landing. The crew plugged the rivet holes with pencils and stuffed cotton in the seam to keep the Catalina afloat while survivors were pulled from the water.

The number of men to be rescued far exceeded the aircraft's capability, so Marks made the decision to pick up individuals rather than groups: "I decided that the men in groups stood the best chance of survival. They could look after one another, could splash and scare away the sharks, and could lend one another moral support and encouragement." After filling the interior of the plane, others were lashed to the wing with parachute cord, for a total of 56 men.

A little after midnight on August 3, the destroyer escort USS *Cecil J. Doyle* (DE 368) arrived—the first of seven rescue ships—and used one of its searchlights to locate survivors and another to act as a beacon to instill hope for those still in the water.

Private McCoy was one of the last men to be rescued. "We couldn't have lasted another day," he said. The skipper of the USS *Ringness* said, "McCoy, a typical Marine, refused help in climbing aboard ship. However, once on deck, he fell flat on his face—but was quickly revived in sick bay."

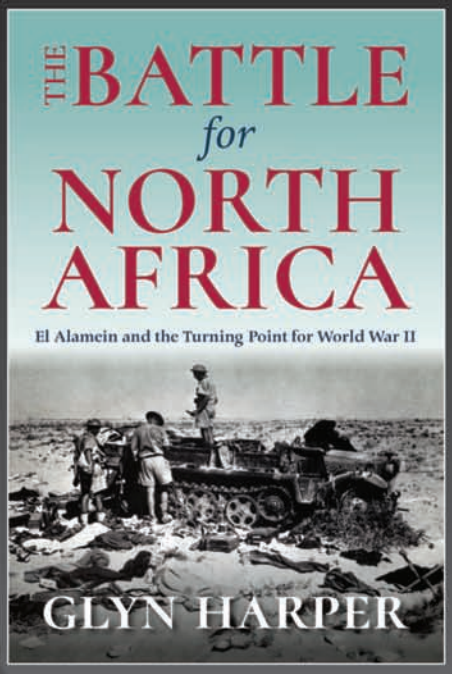
By noon the following day, after an exhaustive search, the ships departed the area with a total of 317 survivors, including nine Marines. Marks's Catalina was so badly damaged—from not only the landing but the constant pounding from the motor-whaleboat during the shuttle of survivors—that it was sunk by machine-gun fire.

In December 1945, at the Washington Navy Yard, Captain McVay was brought up on charges and convicted by a court-martial of "hazarding his ship by failing to zigzag" prior to the *I-58*'s attack. During the court-martial proceedings, many of *Indianapolis*'s crewmen and the *I-58*'s commander, Mochitsura Hashimoto, testified on his behalf.

Despite their testimony, the court decreed that McVay lose 100 numbers in his temporary grade of captain and 100 numbers in his permanent grade of commander, which effectively ended his career. He was the only ship commander in U.S. Navy history to be court-martialed for losing a ship to enemy action during time of war.

However, Navy Secretary James Forrestal, at the behest of Admiral Chester Nimitz, overturned the sentence and restored him to duty; McVay was promoted to rear admiral upon retirement.

Thirty-two years later, a high school project for National History Day pressured Congress into passing a resolution that exonerated him for the loss of the *Indianapolis*—a resolution that was signed by President Bill Clinton. A year later, the Secretary of the Navy ordered McVay's official Navy records purged of all wrongdoing. But it was all too late. In 1968, McVay, who never fully mentally recovered from the sinking and, badgered by letters from parents who accused him of killing their sons, had committed suicide, adding another tragedy to an already tragic tale. □



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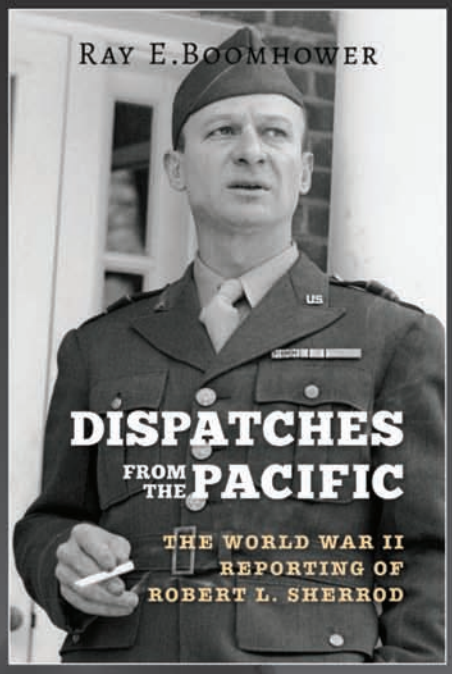

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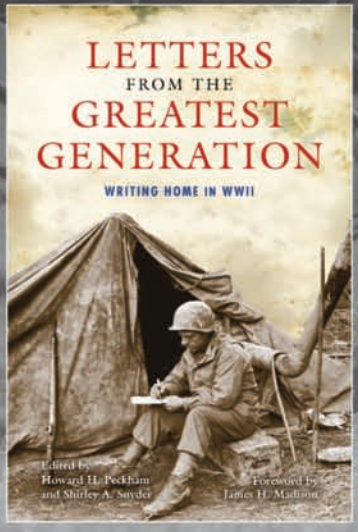

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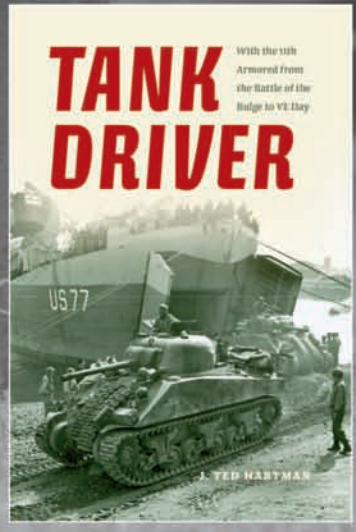

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BRITAIN'S DECISIVE AERIAL VICTORY

One of the most crucial battles of the war was fought, not on the ground, but in the skies above England on September 15, 1940.

BY DAVID ALAN JOHNSON

"I say, better wake up."

Red Tobin opened one eye, rolled over, and found his squadron mate, Pilot Officer John Dundas, shaking him by the shoulder and staring into his face.

Eugene Quimby "Red" Tobin had spent the best part of the previous night in a pub with his fellow American, Vernon "Shorty" Keough, and did not feel very much like waking up. The hut was dim and cold, his bed was warm, and he was still half asleep. He groggily demanded why the hell he should get out of bed at that exact moment, when the world was still dark and he could not even get his eyes to open.

Imperial War Museum

ABOVE: Americans in the RAF No. 71 "Eagle" Squadron (left to right): Andrew Mamedoff, Charles "Shorty" Keogh, and Eugene "Red" Tobin. All three would die fighting for Britain. OPPOSITE: In this digitized depiction of a pilot's-eye view of what an aerial skirmish probably looked like, a pair of RAF Spitfires begin their approach to intercept a Luftwaffe formation over England. The inability of the Luftwaffe to defeat the RAF and pave the way for an amphibious invasion of the British Isles caused Hitler to look to the East and attack the Soviet Union instead.

"I'm not quite sure, old boy," Dundas calmly replied. "They say there's an invasion on or something."

This struck Red as an excellent reason, although he was as impressed by the coolness of Dundas's reply, even in his semi-conscious state, as he was by the news of an impending invasion of England. He got out of bed and looked out the Nissen hut's window for any sign of life or activity. Through the dawn's early gloom, he could barely make out the silhouettes of 609 Squadron's Spitfires against the brightening sky, along with a few other huts scattered around the station at Warmwell, in Dorset, northeast of Weymouth on England's southern coast. There was certainly no sign of anything as dramatic as a German invasion.

Actually, Red Tobin had a good reason for complaining about being rousted out of bed at the crack of dawn. The Germans did not have anything in the air at that time of day. Except for a few early reconnaissance flights, the Luftwaffe did not even begin to stir until late that morning, Sunday, September 15, 1940. The American volunteer could have safely gone back to bed for a few more hours and would not have missed a thing.

Gary Eason / Flight Artworks / Alamy

Both: Imperial War Museum

ABOVE: "Ring the bell and run like hell." Two pilots sprint to their awaiting Hurricanes as ground crew members prepare their planes for flight—and another fight with the German "bandits." INSET: "Chain Home" radar masts, such as these on the coast at RAF Poling, Bawdsey Manor, Suffolk, could detect Luftwaffe bombers assembling 200 miles away in France and give Fighter Command warning of an attack.

British intelligence had intercepted heavy radio traffic from Luftwaffe aerodromes, which alerted RAF Fighter Command that they could expect a maximum effort later in the day. But radar stations along the Channel coast did not begin to plot formations of German aircraft until 11 AM, 40-plus aircraft followed shortly afterward by a smaller formation, then another 40-plus. At about 11:30, the formations joined up and began heading north toward the south coast of England.

The warning gave 11 Group, which defended the approaches to London and the southeast coast of England, about 30 minutes to get ready. By the time the Luftwaffe had formed up and began making its way toward the Channel coast, 17 RAF fighter squadrons were in position—including five squadrons from 12 Group, bordering 11 Group on the north, which were led by the well-known Squadron Leader Douglas Bader.

At 11 Group Headquarters in Uxbridge, Middlesex, the excitement had begun at around 10:30, an hour before the first warning, when Prime Minister Winston Churchill dropped in for an unannounced visit. The PM went down to 11 Group's bomb-proof operations room, nicknamed "the Hole," to see if anything was happening. The Hole was situated 50 feet below ground, just off Hillingdon golf course. At 10:30, no one was exactly sure what was going to take place that day—it was too early to tell. But by noon the Luftwaffe had finally shown its hand.

The first group of enemy aircraft, about 200 planes, began crossing the south coast of England just before noon. Churchill watched the incoming raid being plotted on the great table map of England and said to Air Vice Marshal Sir Keith Park, commander of 11 Group, "There appears to be a great many aircraft coming in."

Park had a quick answer: "There'll be someone there to meet them."

There certainly was someone there to meet them—five squadrons of Spitfires and Hurricanes, including 609 Squadron from RAF Warmwell. Red Tobin heard the voice of Squadron Leader Horace Darley over his headset: "Many, many bandits at 7 o'clock."

Tobin glanced that way and saw about 50 Messerschmitt Me-109 fighters several thousand feet above and 25 Dornier Do-17 bombers about 1,000 feet below. Tobin's flight, Red Section, was preparing to attack the Dorniers in spite of the Messerschmitts overhead.

Tobin was assigned the unenviable position of "Ass-End Charlie." In the three-man Spitfire formation, Ass-End Charlie's job was to weave and turn behind the section and his wingman, protecting them from attack from behind. The only problem was that there was no one to warn if enemy fighters were attacking his tail, which is why Ass-End Charlie did not enjoy a long life expectancy (and which is why the three-man formation was later abandoned in favor of the much more practical "finger four" formation).

Before diving on the Dorniers, the leader called Tobin: "OK, Charlie, come on in." But before joining up with the other two Spitfires, Red executed one more weave. As he swung his Spitfire around, he caught sight of three yellow-nosed Me-109s closing in fast from astern.

"Danger, Red Section! Danger! Danger! Danger!" Tobin shouted into his microphone—loud enough, he thought, to be heard back in Kansas. His leader peeled off to starboard, his wingman climbed to port, and Red threw his Spitfire into a 360-degree turn, exerting heavy G forces on his body. He knew that the German pilots would never be able to pull out of their dive in time to shoot him; they would not get him if he kept turning.

The Messerschmitts shot past in their dive, just as Red had calculated. As the last one passed him, he was able to get his gunsight on it long enough to fire a burst. As the three Me-109s disappeared, he saw smoke trailing from the one he had shot at. Red felt his blood pounding—it has been a close call.

The Luftwaffe bomber formation, escorted by Me-109s and Me-110 twin-engine fighters, made its way steadily toward London. To some onlookers on the ground, the approaching aircraft resembled swarms of insects. Pilots of the RAF squadrons had a completely different impression of the enemy aircraft—they were overwhelmed by the sheer number of them. Red Tobin could see about 100 German planes. Within minutes of the first interceptions, the sky over Kent was filled with individual fights, smoking aircraft, and parachutes.

Number 609 Squadron had its hands more than full. John Dundas, who had shaken Red Tobin awake a few hours earlier, shot down a bomber over Kent, made another attack on a Dornier, and managed to evade several Me-109s—all within a few minutes.

Imperial War Museum

A squadron of Messerschmitt Me-109 fighters, escorting the bombers, heads across the English Channel, September 1940. A pilot has named his plane *Schnauzl.*

Andy Mamedoff and Shorty Keough, Red Tobin's fellow American volunteers, shot up a Dornier along with four other Spitfires. Each claimed one-sixth of a bomber.

Red Tobin's morning had not ended after his altercation with the three yellow-nosed Messerschmitts. In fact, it was just beginning. After pulling out of his 360-degree turn, Red caught sight of a Dornier making a shallow dive; the pilot had escaped several other British fighters and was headed for the safety of cloud cover. Red pushed the stick forward and dove after the bomber. He knew he would never be able to find it once it reached the clouds.

He pulled out of his dive and lined up the bomber in his gunsight. Immediately after pressing the firing button on the Spitfire's control column, Red saw the Dornier's port engine take hits from his six .303 machine guns. White smoke began pouring from the stricken engine. Either the radiator or the glycol tank had been punctured.

Red lost the bomber momentarily and had to come around again. On this run, he approached the Dornier from the starboard side. He held the gunsight on the starboard wing, pressed the firing button down for several seconds, and watched as bits of aileron and wing blew off.

The stricken bomber dove into the clouds while Tobin chased it through the overcast and saw it crash-land in a field. It hit the ground, ploughed its way across the grass, and came to rest with a bone-jarring stop. As Red circled the wreck, three crew members made their way out of the fuselage and sprawled across the still-intact starboard wing.

But Red was not absolutely certain that this was the Dornier he had brought down. He had lost sight of his victim as it passed through the clouds, and he could see another Dornier in another field about a quarter mile away. He could also see the wreckage of a Spitfire, a Hurricane, and an Me-109. Beyond these, he could see other wrecks from other combats.

There were certainly enough individual fights going on at the same time as Red Tobin's. The entire southern route to London, from the Channel coast to the city's

A squadron of Supermarine Spitfires scrambles into the sky after receiving an alert of approaching enemy aircraft. Many RAF fields were unpaved fields of grass, like this one.

southern boundaries, was one continuous battleground. While white contrails criss-crossed the blue sky in a mad pattern of brush strokes, civilians on the ground stopped what they were doing and gaped at the aerial jousting taking place overhead, looking in wonder at the profusion of descending parachutes and falling airplanes.

Most of the bombers reached London, as they had been doing since they began the Blitz on that city on September 7, and unloaded their bombs. Explosions could be heard throughout the city. One bomb damaged the queen's apartments at Buckingham Palace; neither Queen Elizabeth nor King George VI were in residence at the time.

By this time, the Messerschmitts were beginning to run low on fuel; the red warning lights started coming on, telling the pilots that it was time to turn back toward their bases in France. As the fighters turned toward the south, they left the bombers very much on their own.

For the crews of the Heinkel He-111s and the Dorniers, the timing could not have been worse. At about the same time that the Me-109s began breaking for home, Douglas Bader's "Big Wing" from 12 Group arrived on the scene: five squadrons, 59 fighters. They arrived later than expected as getting five squadrons into position required a lot of time. Keith Park had been insisting that Bader's Big Wing was not really a practical way to employ a fighter defense. Bader responded that he was late because he had not been given enough warning.

Not every Messerschmitt had departed for France when Bader and his Big Wing reached Kent. Squadron leader Jack Satchell of 302 (Polish) Squadron observed that "a number of 109s" were still with the bombers and that they "attacked us as soon as we arrived." But they soon had to turn back, allowing Bader's wing to pounce.

One of the most famous air combats of the day, as well as one of the most publicized by the Ministry of Information, was led by one of the Big Wing's squadrons. Flight Lieutenant Jessard Jefferies of 310 (Czech) Squadron attacked a Dornier over London along with three other Hurricanes. Jefferies set the bomber's port engine on fire. His three squadron mates followed close behind, chopping away at the Dornier with bursts of machine-gun fire.

With one of its engines shot away, the Dornier, piloted by Oberleutnent Robert Zehbe, was now an easy target. Two Spitfires from 609 Squadron, flown by Pilot Officer Keith Ogilvie and his wingman, also went after the bomber. At this time the bomber's two surviving crew members wisely decided to abandon the stricken plane.

Only the gunner, who was either dead or badly wounded, remained on board. Zehbe was still at the controls when Sergeant Ray Holmes of 504 Squadron came across the smoking airplane and attacked. Zehbe bailed out during Holmes' attack.

Almost immediately after Zehbe jumped, the now abandoned Dornier (except for the presumably dead gunner) went into a violent spin and broke into two sections. The tail section fell on a building on Vauxhall Bridge Road in Westminster. The forward half, minus the outboard segments of both wings, crashed into the forecourt of the huge Victoria Railway Station in the heart of London.

Holmes' Hurricane also went into a spin immediately after he fired his burst at the Dornier. He bailed out, landing either in a garbage can in Ebury Bridge Road, Pimlico, or on a rooftop in Chelsea, depending upon which source is consulted. Oberleutnant

Zehbe parachuted into the London district of Kensington, where he had to be rescued from a crowd of outraged civilians. He later died of the injuries he received during the battle.

The press gave full coverage of the incident, with the assistance of the Ministry of Information. The story printed in the newspapers was that Oberleutnant Zehbe's Dornier was the airplane that had bombed Buckingham Palace. Pilot Officer Keith Ogilvie was given a personal commendation by Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands, who had been a guest at the palace. She thanked Ogilvie for his courage.

A photo of the crashing Dornier appeared in newspapers and magazines throughout Britain and the United States. It was a particularly dramatic picture, taken as the bomber, its tail section and the outboard sections of both wings clearly missing, plunged toward Victoria Station. One of the American releases identified the wrecked bomber as "believed to be the plane that bombed Buckingham Palace on the 15th."

By this time the Spitfire and Hurricane squadrons were returning to base for refueling and rearming, although four squadrons still had enough fuel and ammunition left to harass the retiring German bombers all the way to the Channel coast. As the fighters touched down, the "At Readiness" lights on the tote board of 11 Group Headquarters began to go out.

Prime Minister Churchill, who had been watching the battle on the operations room map of England, asked Air Vice Marshal Park, "What reserves have we?"

Park replied, "There are none."

If the Luftwaffe high command had sent another strike at that particular moment, while the RAF fighters were still on the ground, the Germans would have had the upper hand. The bombers would have left their French bases before the Spitfires and Hurricanes were ready and would have been halfway to their targets before the British fighters could have been scrambled. But the Luftwaffe would not have another attack ready until the afternoon, and the opportunity disappeared.

Red Tobin approached the grassy runway at RAF Warmwell with a destroyed Dornier to his credit and about seven gallons of gasoline left in his tank. He made a good approach but did not see the crash wagon charge out from behind a hangar and into his path. One of his wheels hit the top of the wagon, snapping it back into the well of the fuselage.

The landing wheel was jammed in the "up" position. Red had no choice but to land on one wheel—he did not have enough fuel to do anything else. The one-legged landing badly damaged the Spitfire. It would eventually fly again, but not before some extensive repairs. But the accident meant that Red was grounded, at least for the rest of the day. RAF Warmwell was only a satellite field; there was no extra Spitfire on the base for him to fly.

At bases throughout 11 Group, as well as at Debden in 12 Group, the pilots straggled in. After touching down, they returned to their dispersal huts, where they reported to their intelligence officers and filled out combat reports.

While this was going on, the Spitfires and Hurricanes were checked over by their riggers, fitters, and armorers. Fuel tanks were refilled by squat tank trucks called "petrol bowsers," and armorers replenished the .303 Brownings with long belts of ammunition. The fighters were also checked for bullet holes and battle damage.

Everyone was certain that the Luftwaffe would be back that day. Pilots tried to relax by reading, kicking a football around, or

Imperial War Museum

Unknown

Wikimedia

TOP: Hawker Hurricanes take off on a mission. Although overshadowed by the faster Spitfire, the more maneuverable Hurricane accounted for 60 percent of German losses during the Battle of Britain. ABOVE LEFT: 504 Squadron's Sergeant Ray Holmes shot down a Dornier Do-17 that may have bombed Buckingham Palace. Seconds later, Holmes had to bail out of his damaged Hurricane. ABOVE RIGHT: Squadron Leader Douglas Bader, center, with fellow pilots of No. 242 Squadron. Bader lost both legs in a flying accident in 1931 and flew with two artificial legs. The nose art shows Hitler being kicked in the rump.

trying to get some sleep. But when the Tannoy loudspeaker made its first metallic click, even before any announcement was made, the pilots' overstretched nerves jarred them to full alertness.

About an hour after the last of the Luftwaffe raiders landed back at their French bases, radar stations on the south coast of England began plotting another German buildup over the Continent. The announcement to scramble came at about 1:45 PM for a dozen fighter squadrons, sending the exhausted pilots scrambling once more for their Spitfires or Hurricanes.

The usual scramble took only a couple of minutes from the first terse announcement to actual takeoff. A group of high-ranking American officers had been at RAF Hendon that morning specifically to see how long a scramble actually did take. They used stopwatches to time 504 Squadron's Hurricane pilots in their rush to intercept. The 12 Hurricanes got away in four minutes and 50 seconds.

The Luftwaffe formations began crossing the English coast at about 2:15 PM. Each formation consisted of between 30 and 40 bombers and twice as many fighters—both Me-109s and twin-engine Me-110s. In spite of the fighter escort, or maybe because so many of the escorting fighters were the lumbering Me-110s, the Spits and Hurricanes managed to break through to the bombers.

The Hurricane pilots of 605 Squadron closed with a formation of Dornier medium bombers over Maidstone, Kent. Pilot Officer Michael Cooper-Slipper felt his Hurricane shudder when a German gunner hit its fuselage. He reached the conclusion that his fighter had been fatally damaged and decided to attack the bombers by ramming.

Calmly and deliberately, Cooper-Slipper aimed his Hurricane at the middle aircraft of a three-Dornier formation. He flew straight into the bomber and was surprised by the easiness of the crash—not a violent collision at all, just a dull thud. The Hurricane's port wing broke off, and Cooper-Slipper miraculously bailed out. As he jumped from the cockpit, he had a fleeting impression of the Dornier falling away.

It took more than 20 minutes for him to descend 20,000 feet by parachute. He came down in a hop field and was nearly lynched by farm hands who thought he was German. When the police eventually arrived, the field hands fought to keep Cooper-Slipper in their own custody. By that time, they had discovered that he was an RAF pilot and did not want to give him up.

Eventually, Cooper-Slipper did arrive back at Croydon. The driver who had been assigned to take him back to base stopped at every pub along the way. At every pub, the patrons bought him drinks—it was not every day that they had the chance to drink with a real, live RAF fighter pilot. By the time Cooper-Slipper reached Croydon, he was so drunk that he could hardly walk.

A second wave of German aircraft reached the coast at about 2:30; a third wave arrived about 10 minutes later. Each wave was made up of about 60 aircraft, and each formation headed directly for London.

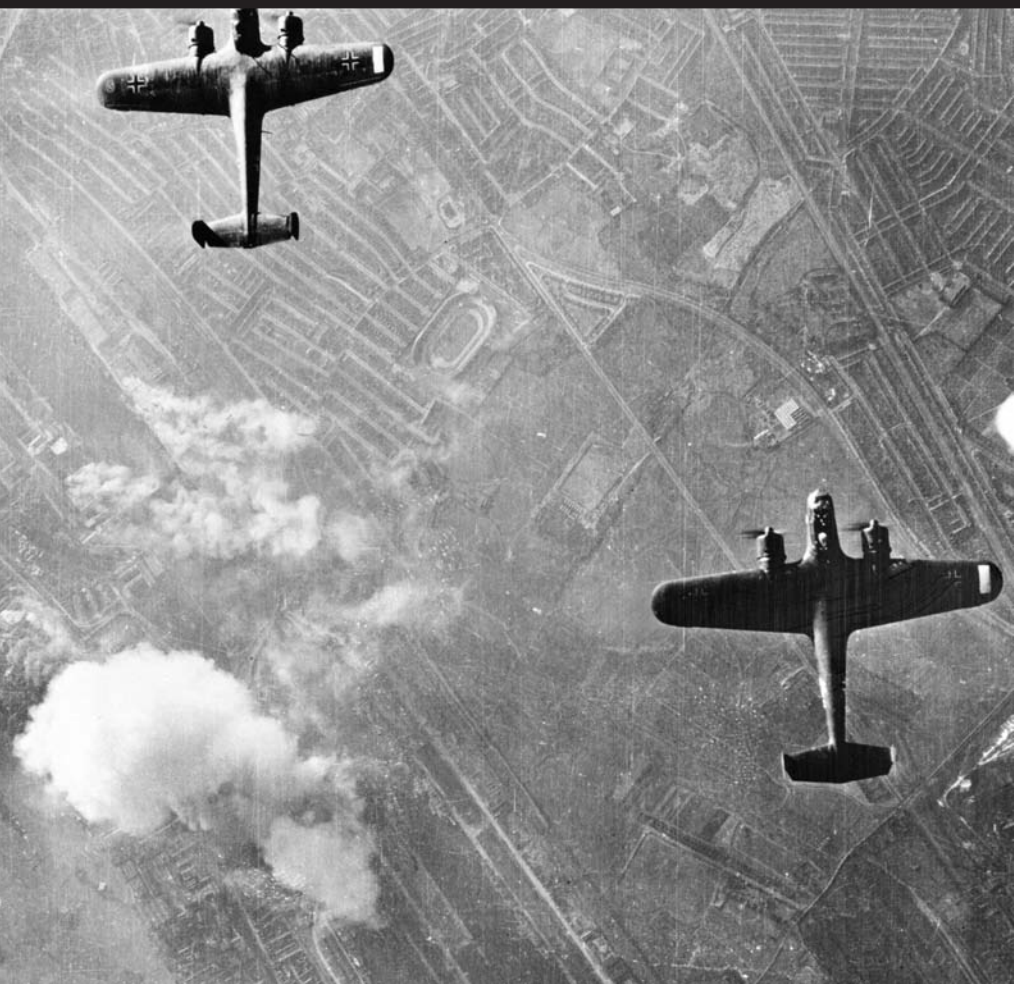
This time the intercepting Spitfire and Hurricane pilots found that the bombers were being protected by a very determined escort of Me-109s. The RAF pilots tried their best to press through the screening Messerschmitts, but the German fighter pilots would not allow them anywhere near the bomber formations. Within five minutes, 303 (Polish) Squadron lost two of its Hurricanes along with five more damaged. By the end of the

Imperial War Museum

National Archives

ABOVE: Group Captain Stanley Vincent broke up a formation of eight bombers by attacking them head on, chasing them away. RIGHT: A Spitfire, trailing smoke, peels away after having engaged a Heinkel He-111 over the Channel.

National Archives



Two Dornier-217s on a bombing run over the Silvertown area of east London's Docklands, September 7, 1940.

day, only four of the squadron's 12 fighters would still be serviceable.

But many of the bombers had missed their rendezvous with their fighter escort and began circling in the vicinity of Maidstone. Apparently, they were waiting for the Messerschmitts to appear—which gave the RAF squadrons time to form up and move into position. By the time the Me-109s arrived, an estimated 170 Spitfires and Hurricanes were ready to make their attacks. Another 60 fighters, Douglas Bader's Big Wing, reached the formations just before the red warning lights began to appear on German instrument panels, indicating that only 15 minutes of fuel remained.

A good many of the bombers made their way to London, as they always did, and bombs fell into districts throughout the city. Specific targets were not pinpointed; bomb aimers released their loads at random. Train service in and out of London was reduced to a near crawl; telephone and telegraph lines were damaged; hundreds more Londoners were made homeless.

But the Luftwaffe formations were being shot to pieces by the RAF pilots. One bombing unit, Kampfgeschwader 53, had six of its Heinkels shot down and two more damaged; one badly damaged Heinkel crash-landed at the RAF airfield at West Malling. Kampfgeschwader 2 lost eight Dorniers with four more damaged. Group Captain Stanley Vincent, a veteran of World War I who was now station commander of RAF Northolt, broke up a formation of eight Dorniers by attacking them head on. The eight bombers turned and headed for France, shaken by the unexpected attack.

Spitfire and Hurricane squadrons attacked the bombers over London and harried them when they scattered and broke for the Channel. The pursuit of the enemy went on until after 4 PM, when the last of the German bombers reached the safety of France. Many of them landed with dead and wounded aboard. Some of the planes would never fly again.

But the day was not quite over. At just about 6 PM, about 20 Me-110 fighter bombers of Erprobungsgruppe 210, an elite, special-purpose unit commanded by Walter Rubensdörffer, attacked the Supermarine aircraft plant at Southampton. The pilots of the big, twin-engine German aircraft showed grit and determination, diving straight through a murderous antiaircraft barrage. They came down in fast, shallow dives in two waves of 10 planes each. After they dropped their bombs, they sped off, reformed, and disappeared.

Eyewitnesses on the ground were impressed by the flying skill of the German pilots. They had obviously been well trained and flew as a highly disciplined and coordinated team. Their flying ability was a lot more impressive than their bombing accuracy, however. None of their bombs landed anywhere near the Southampton factory.

Every one of Erpro 210's twin-engine Messerschmitts returned to their French bases without any damage. But, in spite of their fancy flying and their unquestioned bravery, the men had not accomplished a thing. Production and delivery of Supermarine Spitfires suffered no interruption except for a few minutes when the factory workers took cover in air raid shelters.

Erpro 210's departure for France marked the end of fighting on September 15. The battle between RAF Fighter Command and the Luftwaffe had been hard and intense, but not as intense as it had been in late August and early September, when the RAF lost 26 fighters and 13 pilots. In fact, RAF squadrons were losing 20 or more aircraft nearly every day. It was beginning to look as though the British were losing the war of attrition.

But after the actual battle had ended, the propaganda battle of September 15 began. The Luftwaffe claimed 78 RAF fighters destroyed, a number that Propaganda Minister Josef Göbbels broadcast throughout Germany and its occupied territories.

Actual RAF losses that day amounted to 29 fighters.

Britain's Ministry of Information also threw itself into high gear. The RAF officially claimed 185 German aircraft shot down on September 15. The MOI announced this number to all the news services in the British Isles and throughout the Commonwealth and also made certain that the American press received it.

As it turned out, this claim was just as inflated as the Luftwaffe's. Postwar British records gave the total as 60 German aircraft destroyed; German sources show the Luftwaffe lost 56 airplanes, with two missing.

Imperial War Museum

Two German airmen, who parachuted from their shot-down Heinkel He-111 bomber (burning in the background) are marched off by the Home Guard in Goodwood, Sussex.

But in wartime, the truth is usually either overlooked or totally ignored. The number 185 sounded a lot more impressive than either 56 or 60. Newspapers on both sides of the Atlantic published the story that 185 German attackers had been shot down. Even members of the British War Cabinet were officially informed that 186 enemy aircraft had been shot down. No one ever explained where the additional German aircraft came from. The MOI's figures did not have to be accurate, just dramatic.

Prime Minister Churchill had seen the movement of both British and German aircraft—the "shifting of the discs"—throughout the day, as well as the "continuous eastward movement of German bombers and fighters" after the day's action had ended, from the control center at Uxbridge. When the control center's map was clear of all aircraft, the prime minister and his party, which included Mrs. Churchill, were driven back to the PM's residence at Chequers.

That evening, Churchill sent a message to Air Chief Marshal Hugh Dowding, the commander of RAF Fighter Command—a message of praise about the air battle: "Aided by Czech and Polish squadrons and using only a small proportion of its total strength, the Royal Air Force cut to rags and tatters separate waves of murderous assault upon the civil population of their native homeland."

The message was sent for propaganda purposes as much as it was to inform Air Chief Marshal Dowding. In his memoirs, Churchill gave a more reflective assessment of the battle. "We must take September 15 as the culminating date," he wrote. "It was one of the decisive battles of the war, and, like the Battle of Waterloo, it was on a Sunday."

In the British Isles, September 15 would become celebrated as Battle of Britain Day, acknowledging the day as the turning point of the battle and as one of the turning points of the war. But no one realized this at the time.

During the evening of September 15, the leading topic of conversation was still the possibility of a German invasion of England. In his broadcast to the United States, CBS reporter Edward R. Murrow mentioned that "much of the talk" he had heard throughout London concerned the threatened invasion. The Germans would continue to cross the Channel in seemingly endless waves until Hitler decided that the Soviet Union would be an easier opponent than Britain and began to husband his resources for an invasion of that communist nation.

As for the 24-year-old Red Tobin, he became one of the first three members of the No. 71 "Eagle" Squadron—an all-American unit made up of pilots from the United States that was established by the RAF in September 1940, prior to America's entry into the war. Unfortunately, he would lose his life on September 7, 1941, while tangling with German planes over Boulogne-sur-Mer in northern France.

The other two pilots who were part of the trio who first volunteered for the Eagle Squadron—Vernon "Shorty" Keough and Andrew "Andy" Mamedoff—also died.

Of the 28 Yanks who joined the Eagle Squadron, 25 would lose their lives—an 89 percent death rate. Tobin and many other Yank pilots made the supreme sacrifice in the defense of Great Britain and the cause of liberty. □

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During savage fighting on Okinawa in April 1945, a U.S. tank battalion suffered the greatest single combat loss of tanks in the entire Pacific War.

BY NATHAN N. PREFER

They weren't originally supposed to be there. In the early planning for the invasion of the island of Okinawa, the 27th Infantry Division was to be held in reserve as the eventual garrison force after the defeat of the Japanese 32nd Army. It had not been beefed up with attached units such as added artillery and supporting formations.

But the plans soon changed when the Tenth U.S. Army, under the command of Lt. Gen. Simon Bolivar Buckner, decided to expand the number of islands needed to establish offshore naval and supply bases for the final American push against Japan's home islands. To accomplish these added tasks, the Tenth Army's reserve divisions, the 27th Infantry, 77th Infantry, and 2nd Marine Divisions, would be assigned immediate active roles in the campaign.

While the 77th Infantry Division seized the offshore islands, and the 2nd Marine Division feinted a landing at the other end of the island, the 27th Infantry Division would be landed on southern Okinawa as the immediate reserve combat unit. The 81st Infantry ("Wildcat") Division was now designated as the new distant reserve for Tenth Army.

The 27th, commanded by Maj. Gen.

National Archives

George Wesley Griner, Jr., already had seen quite a bit of this war. It had been inducted from the New York State National Guard on October 15, 1940, and trained in Alabama and Tennessee before sailing for Hawaii in March 1942, one of the first U.S. Army divisions to go overseas. There it defended the islands against a feared Japanese landing until November 1942, when, all threats of a Japanese landing having passed, the division entered a series of training cycles.

These lasted for another year before its 165th Infantry Regiment, reinforced with elements of the 105th Infantry Regiment, seized Makin Atoll in the Gilbert Islands. In January 1944, another regiment, the 106th, participated in the Marshall Islands operation, seizing Majuro and Eniwetok as part of a Navy-Marine Corps task force.

The division was next selected to act as a reserve force for the V Amphibious Corps, a Navy-Marine Corps command ordered to seize the Mariana Islands of Saipan and Tinian. As would happen the following year at Okinawa, the division was rushed ashore when the Japanese threatened the supporting American fleet.

In order to rush the transport, support, and supply ships out of harm's way, the

A group of American tankers of the 193rd Tank Battalion take a break on and around their M4 Shermans before returning to combat on Okinawa, April 1945. Note that the white stars on the sides of the tanks have been painted out to reduce their visibility to the enemy. Nevertheless, exceptionally strong Japanese resistance took a heavy toll on American tanks and tankers.

DEATH RIDE *of* THE SHERMANS

27th Division was landed and immediately put into the front lines on Saipan between the 2nd and 4th Marine Divisions. The infantrymen then fought through Nafutan Point, Death Valley, Purple Heart Ridge, Hara-kiri Gulch, and Hell's Pocket before two of its battalions were overrun and nearly wiped out by the final desperate, massive Japanese banzai charge on Tanapag Plain.

The 27th's losses for the campaign came to nearly 4,000 officers and men. The survivors were sent to Espiritu Santo and spent the next six months recuperating and training before departing for Okinawa on March 25, 1945. The New Yorkers came ashore on Okinawa on April 9, 1945.

With their backs against the wall, the Japanese knew that their last hope of preventing an invasion of their island nation lay on Okinawa. As a consequence, they had ringed the southern portion of the island with a stunning array of concrete pillboxes, gun emplacements, tank traps, and networks of caves that they called the Shuri Line. When the Tenth Army landed, it was up against the main Japanese defenses, arguably the most formidable ever encountered by the Americans on any of the Pacific islands. Named after a prominent castle located in the center of the line of hills, ridges, and other terrain obstacles, the Shuri Line was the main defensive position of the 32nd Army.

Needing fresh troops to crack the Shuri Line, General Buckner assigned the 27th Infantry Division to his XXIV Corps, commanded by Maj. Gen. John R. Hodges, a Pacific veteran. The 27th relieved part of the tired 96th Infantry Division on the right of the Tenth Army's front line.

General Griner was, like his troops, a veteran. A Georgian by birth, he had fought in World War I in a machine-gun battalion at St. Mihiel and the Meuse-Argonne offensives. Between wars he had taught military science and tactics, and served in the Philippines and at the War Department. After the war began, he served in Europe before receiving a promotion to brigadier general and becoming the assistant division commander of the 77th Infantry Division.

Both: National Archives

ABOVE: Members of the 27th Infantry Division, a New York State National Guard unit, come ashore on Makin Island, November 1943, to experience their baptism of fire. BELOW: An M3 Stuart light tank of the 193rd Tank Battalion has bogged down in a shell crater on Makin Island while supporting the 27th Infantry Division. The 193rd traded their Stuarts for Shermans before they reached Okinawa.

In September 1943, he was promoted to major general and assumed command of the 13th Airborne Division, then the 98th Infantry Division, before being ordered to the Pacific to take command of the 27th Division, whose previous commander, General Ralph Smith, had been relieved due to the perceived poor performance of the division on Saipan.

At Okinawa in mid-April, the Japanese knew the Americans would continue their attack, for there was little option available to them. They also knew that their main threat was from American firepower—artillery, tanks, flamethrowers, and aircraft. One Japanese warning to the troops stated, "The enemy is now preparing to advance on all fronts. Our front lines will necessarily be subjected to fierce bombardments."

The Japanese soldiers were instructed to "secure their weapons by placing them under cover or in a position of readiness, so that they will not be prematurely destroyed." One Japanese unit, the 44th Independent Mixed Brigade, was particularly concerned about

American flame-throwing tanks and "yellow phosphorus incendiary shells." Another unit, the 22nd Infantry Regiment, emphasized the importance of careful selection of points from which to make close-quarter attacks on American tanks.

Holding the right of the XXIV Corps line, Griner's 27th Division faced some unique problems. Part of the front line faced the Machinato Inlet, a small body of water intruding into the coastline of Okinawa and providing the Japanese with excellent observation over much of the division's front lines. Seeking a way to eliminate this danger to his operations, Griner noticed a captured document from the 62nd Division, which stated that the Americans "generally fire during the night, but very seldom take offensive action."

Since his division had done some night attack training before arriving on Okinawa, Griner decided to put it to use. Noting that his front covered some 1,000 yards of open ground facing the Japanese main line, he realized that a night attack would prevent enemy observation and allow his troops a good chance to cross much, if not all, of the ground undetected. He might even catch the enemy off guard.

General Griner planned for Colonel Albert K. Stebbins' 106th Infantry Regiment to cross the lightly held Machinato Inlet during the night of April 18-19 while Colonel W.S. Winn's 105th Infantry Regiment undertook a daylight push to attract Japanese attention and reach the main enemy defenses. The latter was also to take Kakazu Village and seize the critical Urasoe-Mura Escarpment where it was to connect with the 106th Regiment.

With the ridge barring the way for armored support, part of the division's tank battalion would sweep around the left (east) flank of Winn's 105th Regiment and join forces with it south of Kakazu Ridge at Kakazu Village. Once joined, the combined force would move on to attack the Urasoe-Mura Escarpment.

During the night of April 18-19, 1945, the men of Lt. Col. Harold F. Gormsen's 102nd Engineer (Combat) Battalion planned to place four bridges across Machinato Inlet. One footbridge for the soldiers, two Bailey bridges for supporting weapons, and a rubber pontoon bridge able to carry 2½-ton trucks loaded with supplies.

The combat engineers had no experience with installing Bailey bridges, but fortune smiled upon them when 1st Lt. Irving S. Golden, who had only recently joined the division after graduating from the Army Engineer School at Fort Belvoir, Virginia, mentioned he had worked on Bailey bridges while in Tunisia. They had managed to get in a few days of training before the night of April 18-19.

Associated Press

Sherman tanks emerge from shallow water and climb onto the sand of Okinawa, April 6, 1945. Ahead of them would be two weeks of hard fighting for the enemy's stoutly defended Shuri Line.

The engineers also practiced some deception to prepare the bridge site. A road would be needed to carry bridge equipment and the heavily loaded armored vehicles and trucks, but there was only a rough trail leading to the site, and it was under constant enemy observation. Not only that, but the road ended in a marsh 250 yards short of the bridging site.

So, for several days before the planned attack a lone bulldozer worked lazily around the trail area, seemingly clearing bogged-down jeeps and pushing rocks and dirt off to the side. All the while under direct Japanese observation, the bulldozer often halted in place, the driver seemingly resting, until the next call for his services came. But what the Japanese could not see was that at night the bulldozer worked feverishly to clear a road from the division rear to the planned bridge site. By the date of the attack, the road was complete, including a path over the marsh blocking the bridge site.

General Griner was determined to make progress. He ordered his commanders, "No matter what else happens, we must advance. We do not have time to wait for units on our flanks. If they cannot move, we will push forward, anyway. I do not want to hear any unit commander calling me and telling me that he cannot advance because the unit on his flank cannot advance." Looking directly at Colonel Winn, commander of the 105th Infantry Regiment, he said, "Of course, we will take heavy casualties. Some of us here will possibly be killed, but that is the cost of war and there is no help for it."

Griner also ordered his division engineer, Colonel Gormsen, to be prepared to replace the bridges over the inlet when, as he fully expected, they were destroyed by enemy artillery. To strengthen the attack

and protect the flanks, the 27th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron was attached to the 106th Infantry Regiment to guard the beach portion of the planned route.

On the left of the attack, the 102nd Engineers had another task. There was no road to the only bridge site in the path of the 105th Infantry Regiment, which lay in the adjoining divisional sector. So an agreement was reached with the 96th Infantry Division that the 27th Division engineers would replace the bridge there, along what was termed the Kakazu Road. Captain Robert Crimmins, the assistant division engineer, assumed responsibility for this task. Tanks

National Archives

ABOVE: Men of the 102nd Engineer Battalion prepare to build the pontoon bridge that the 27th Infantry Division will use to get tanks and supplies across the Machinato Inlet to attack Kakazu Ridge. OPPOSITE: Men of the 27th Infantry Division's Company A, 106th Infantry Regiment, cross a footbridge on their way to attack the Japanese in Machinato Village on April 18, 1945.

from the division's organic 193rd Tank Battalion would support both attacks.

Unlike the rest of the division, the 193rd Tank Battalion was not originally from New York. It was one of the handful of tank battalions organized within the National Guard before the war. Since the expense of organizing and maintaining such equipment was prohibitive in a Depression-era nation, these battalions were spread out among several states. The 193rd Tank Battalion (Light) hailed from Georgia, Alabama, Texas, and Colorado. It was inducted into federal service on September 1, 1940, and sent to Fort Benning, Georgia, for training. Here it was first assigned to the new 2nd Armored Division.

In December 1940, the battalion boarded a ship and set sail for the Philippines to reinforce the Philippine-American garrison there. When the Japanese attacked the Philippines, the battalion was diverted to Hawaii, arriving there on January 7, 1941. Its individual companies were parceled out to the 24th and 25th Infantry Divisions, then preparing to defend Hawaii against a Japanese landing. When the 27th Infantry Division arrived in Hawaii and prepared to move to the attack in the Gilbert Islands, the battalion was assigned as its support, remaining with it for the much of the war.

The battalion had fought at Makin Atoll. After that battle it had been converted into a medium tank battalion, trading in its light tanks for the newer and larger M4 medium tank, referred to as the "Sherman." Transferred to Espiritu Santo, the battalion rejoined the 27th Infantry Division and began a comprehensive training program, concentrating on tank-infantry cooperation.

The tankers carried 28 AN/VRC-3 radios specifically to communicate with the accompanying infantrymen. The leaders' tanks, those of the platoon commander and platoon sergeant, were also equipped with sound-powered phones so that the infantry could talk to them during operations even if the tankers remained sealed in their vehicles.

To improve their chances of survival, the tankers had also installed what they termed "back-scratchers," consisting of four electronically detonated antipersonnel mines mounted around the tanks' turret that the crew could trigger to ward off close assaults by enemy infantrymen. Another "improvement" was the welding of extra armor plate over the critical sponson wheels.

Lieutenant Colonel Walter F. Anderson's 193rd Tank Battalion was, as were most tank battalions at this stage of the war, outfitted with the M4A3 Sherman, armed with a 76mm main gun (some units retained the older 75mm main gun), and powered by a 500-horsepower Ford V-8 gasoline engine specifically designed for tanks; it carried a normal crew of five soldiers. Additional armaments were two machine guns, one hull mounted and one turret mounted. It weighed 71,188 pounds when combat loaded. One of its chief advantages was its top speed, which approached 30 miles per hour. Another advantage was its mechanical reliability, better than most enemy tanks then fighting against them.

But it had disadvantages as well. The gasoline-powered engine caught fire fairly readily, and its high silhouette (10 feet) made it a tempting target for enemy antitank gunners.

Although rarely at full strength, the American tank battalion of late World War II consisted of 39 officers, two warrant officers, and 709 enlisted men. The tank battalion was equipped with 53 medium tanks, six howitzer-equipped tanks, and 17 light tanks, the latter usually grouped in Company D.

National Archives

Numerous other vehicles and equipment were also a part of the battalion, but the tanks and assault guns were the primary weapons. During the Okinawa operation, the 193rd Tank Battalion was known by the radio call sign "Cowboy."

Wednesday, April 18, 1945, dawned clear and bright. High towering cumulus clouds drifted lazily overhead, pushed by a faint breeze. The breeze was particularly important to General Griner. Since it blew in from the sea, it would cover the movements of his troops once the planned smoke screen was launched.

The morning passed quietly, other than an airstrike against the Japanese across Machinato Inlet. Occasional naval gunfire added to the noise and dust. In hundreds of foxholes along the American front line, soldiers were cleaning weapons or equipment and writing letters home. By mid-afternoon, many officers at the headquarters of the 27th Infantry Division were strapping on their equipment and preparing to go forward to observe the coming attack. No vehicles were allowed to move to the front unless they belonged to "Peace Pipe," the 102nd Engineer (Combat) Battalion, or "Cowboy."

Shortly before 4 PM, the men of Company G, 106th Infantry, rose from their foxholes laden with belts, harnesses, ammunition bandoliers, and weapons and began the attack purposely designed not to look like an attack. Like the deceptions before them, it was not an attack out of a movie, but rather a slow, steady gathering of small groups of men who seemingly had no interest in moving too far forward but were simply gathering to talk or exchange goods. Many wore no jacket or helmet. Machine guns were seemingly casually laid down on the ground without obvious efforts to sight them on the enemy. Even a motion picture cameraman appeared and began filming and adjusting his camera.

One of these groups was under the command of 1st Lt. Clarence F. Stoeckley, commander of Company G. He was accompanied by 1st Lt. Spencer M. Pitts of Company L and his platoon. These men were actually positioning themselves for their attack once the smoke screen appeared, which it did shortly after 4 PM. Even the smokescreen arrived slowly and gradually, with long pauses between shells.

But soon the screen enlarged and expanded. Guided by 1st Lt. John R. Minett, who had led a patrol over the stream days earlier, the group under Lieutenants Stoeckley and Pitts crossed the water. Their objective was to clear the village of Machinato and provide protection to the bridge builders about to begin their critical work. All this subterfuge worked, and the Japanese did not become aware of what was happening until all of Company G was across the inlet.

As the Japanese opened fire, Company B, 88th Chemical Mortar Battalion ceased its smoke operations. When the smoke cleared, there were no Americans in sight; Company G had crossed without the loss of a man.

The battle then returned to the usual type of fighting on Okinawa. Americans attacked the Japanese, who were well hidden in caves, crevices, and tombs. The Americans battled from rock to rock, from hill to hill, and from cliff to cliff—all the while taking and inflicting casualties.

One of these casualties was Lieutenant Pitts, who fell seriously wounded by machine-gun fire. The battle continued into the night. But well before midnight, Machinato was in American hands and the road for the engineers open.

Lieutenant Golden, advising Company A, 102nd Engineer (Combat) Battalion, completed the first of the Bailey bridges by 10 PM. Ironically, Company B of the engineers had trouble with the pontoon bridge when the tide carried away the anchor line. Nevertheless, vehicles of the 193rd Tank Battalion and others immediately began crossing the Bailey bridges. Carefully rolling along paths still being cleared by mine detector teams, the movement forward was necessarily slow.

Things were made slower when the Japanese opened fire on the bridges as daylight brightened up the area. One of the first Japanese targets was the reconstructed pontoon bridge, just completed, which they knocked out.

The 106th Infantry now took part in the general attack on the Shuri Line by the XXIV Corps. Reinforced with the 1st Battalion, 105th Infantry Regiment, the attack on Kakazu Ridge succeeded in bypassing the Japanese main defenses. Despite heavy machine-gun and mortar fire, the battalions pushed ahead, but many units became pinned down by Japanese fire.

Then, shortly after 8:30 AM, Sherman tanks began to appear in small groups as they cleared the minefields along the inlet behind the infantry. Three tanks had already been lost to mines, and now Company A, 193rd Tank Battalion lost four more to a Japanese 47mm antitank gun. Nevertheless, some 30 tanks, self-propelled guns, and armored flamethrowers came forward, most of them from Company A, 193rd Tank Battalion. The tank column hurried south, looking for a reported route into the enemy's rear.

So far the plan had gone well, and by the next day some 1,600 yards of enemy territory had been seized. But this advance only brought more difficulties, as was common on Okinawa. The 27th Infantry Division now found itself facing what became known as "Item Pocket" and "Pinnacle Ridge," both facing the 106th Infantry Regiment. Once again, all moves were easily seen by the Japanese observers.

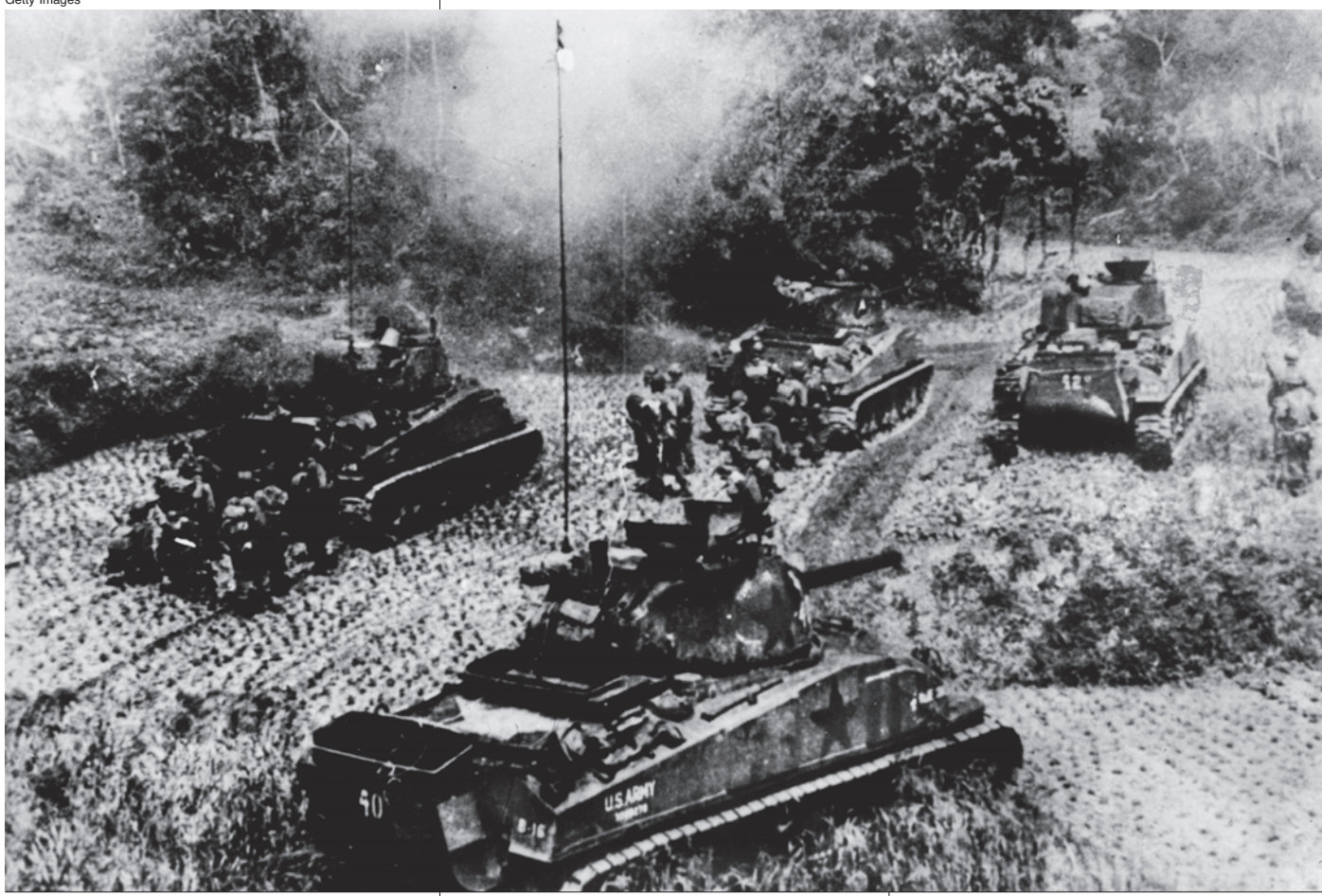
This observation enabled them to blow up the critical bridges over the Machinato Inlet almost as fast as the Americans could rebuild them. Finally, after all supplies were exhausted, Company B of the engineers pushed out a coral causeway from both ends, joining them at the middle with the last three pontoons remaining to the division.

But still the Japanese tried to destroy the bridges. Even as late as the morning of April 22, two Japanese soldiers, one with demolitions and a grenade strapped to his body, came down from the Pinnacle in an attempt to blow up the bridges. But the engineers had established a guard for just such an event as this, and an engineer opened fire, hitting the grenade and setting off the demolition charge prematurely.

Determined that enough was enough, one unnamed engineer put up a sign over the bodies of the Japanese soldiers that read, "Warning! Don't nobody else [expletive deleted] around with this bridge no more. Signed, 102nd Engineer Battalion." Whether or not the sign was responsible, there were no more attempts to destroy the Machinato Inlet bridges.

Meanwhile, the battle for Item Pocket continued. As the infantry battalions advanced, a call for tank support came as well. Enemy fire was heavy and accurate, forcing the infantry to seek cover. Lacking armor support, they could not advance

Getty Images



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ABOVE: Stubborn Japanese defenders often had to be burned out of their positions. Here, an armored flame-throwing Sherman "hoses down" a Japanese position. OPPPOSITE: A quartet of American tanks, accompanied by infantrymen, advance against Japanese positions.

without taking unacceptable casualties. The problem for the tanks was a small stream that blocked their advance.

Anxious to maintain his momentum, General Griner gave Anderson a direct order to push a bypass through the area. With only one bulldozer-equipped tank left to his battalion, Colonel Anderson protested, arguing the division could not afford to lose its last remaining bulldozer, but was again ordered to force a bypass.

With Griner's order ringing in his ears, Anderson went forward, climbed into the driver's seat of the bulldozer, and proceeded alone to construct the needed bypass. Once completed, the colonel jumped down and took over the lead tank, moving forward onto the new route. As he did so, an enemy 47mm antitank gun, which all this time had remained silent, opened fire and scored a direct hit on Anderson's tank, killing both him and an infantry guide directing him. The bypass was now blocked by the derelict tank. Lt. Col. John Behrens replaced Colonel Anderson.

Nearby, Company A, 193rd Tank Battalion had tried to bypass Kakuzu Ridge and meet the advancing infantry behind the village as planned. Reinforced with armored flamethrower tanks of Company B, 713th Tank Battalion in its first combat, the tanks moved off late on April 19. But Lt. Col. Rayburn H. Miller's 1st Battalion, 105th Infantry was stopped by strong enemy resistance along Kakazu Ridge, and the tankers soon found themselves on a death ride.

Moving according to the plan, Company A and its attachments encountered light opposition to Route 5. There remained some 30 tanks, assault guns, and flamethrower tanks. Originally, the column was to move along Route 5, the Kakazu Road, and into Kakazu Village where they would meet the infantry.

As the tank commanders looked over the terrain they would have to pass, it quickly became obvious that they could not use the road for any distance. Instead, from earlier reconnaissance photos they decided to go down Route 5 until they came to an unimproved road that would allow them to turn right and into the village.

Having plowed through the initial enemy defenses, the tanks began looking for the unimproved road. The leading tanks missed it completely, the road actually being only a narrow trail, and continued on south, deeper into enemy territory. They were soon taken under antitank fire from the zone of the 96th Infantry Division, which had not advanced that far. In moments, five tanks were knocked out. The rest turned back on Route 5 toward Rotation Ridge, firing at enemy positions as they passed.

After a while they came to a road branching off to the west, and the company commander, Captain Harry B. McAmick, led his vehicles onto this road, thinking it was the one he had been seeking. For the next hour the tanks roamed around the enemy rear areas at will, firing into any enemy positions found. But after thoroughly searching, Captain McAmick realized that he could not get into Kakuzu Village on this path. The command turned back to Route 5 and searched once again until they finally found the unimproved road they had been seeking all along.

The road led Company A directly into Kakazu Village, where for nearly five hours the Americans ranged up and down the narrow streets blasting and burning everything in sight. Captain McAmick was waiting for American infantry, but none could reach him, pinned down as they were before Kakazu Ridge, which protected the village. But the tanks destroyed Kakazu Village and drove out what Japanese troops they didn't kill.

Still, the battle was not one sided. Eight tanks were lost to enemy action in the melee, most hitting mines the Japanese sprinkled liberally throughout the area.

In fact, the Japanese had expected something of the sort from the Americans. Later prisoner interrogations revealed that the Japanese had planned to separate the tanks and their protecting infantry, and to this end the 272nd Independent Infantry Battalion, the 22nd Independent Antitank Gun Battalion, the 2nd Light Machine Gun Battalion, and 2nd Mortar Battalion had positioned their guns, mortars, and machine guns to cover the likely routes of approach by the infantry to halt their advance and pin them down so that the American tanks would be without their vital infantry support. Then suicide squads and 47mm antitank guns would ambush the exposed American tanks. In this they had clearly succeeded, claiming truthfully, "Not an infantryman got through."

The Americans had learned through hard experience in previous Pacific battles that the best way to use tanks against the entrenched Japanese was with the tank-infantry team. Much time and effort had been placed in training the combat units to use this technique. In the field, it was usually the infantrymen who spotted the hid-

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den antitank guns in caves or behind some camouflage and then reported to the tankers who, peering through small vision slots in the vehicles, could not otherwise see the danger. It was then left to the tank to destroy the gun and crew—something that would otherwise cost the infantry numerous casualties. In return, the tanks would knock out threats to the infantrymen such as machine guns and snipers.

Often, the more powerful tank radios would maintain communication with supporting artillery when the infantry radios failed. The infantry would also ride on the tanks to ward off Japanese suicide squads who tried to rush up and place demolitions on the tanks. In cases where the Japanese were so well dug in that tank or artillery fire could not neutralize them, the tank-infantry team would coordinate their actions to do the job.

While the infantry moved against the enemy position, the tanks would provide covering fire with their cannons, flamethrowers, and machine guns. The tanks would also suppress adjoining enemy positions that were designed for mutual support, enabling the infantry to approach with less enemy fire from those other strongpoints. But the planned infantry support for Company A, 193rd Tank Battalion in Kakazu Village, never appeared.

The battle raged for hours. A medium tank and a flamethrower tank hit horned mines and exploded. As another tank advanced, it was knocked out by a 47mm antitank gun. Before this gun could be found and destroyed, two more flamethrower tanks and three medium tanks were also struck. Japanese accounts claim that suicide squads under the cover of smoke destroyed six American tanks by immobilizing them and then prying open the turret hatches and dropping in grenades, destroying tank and crew.

A post-battle search of the battlefield by Tenth Army analysts reported that one tank had been disabled by a box mine. One of the assault guns foundered in a bog, and the crew was forced to abandon the vehicle on foot.

At one point, a tank platoon commander could see infantry of the 1st Battalion, 105th Infantry atop Kakazu Ridge, but enemy artillery fire soon drove them back. Despite communications with the infantry, no direct help could be provided. Four more tanks fell to Japanese artillery or mortar fire.

Finally, after nearly nine hours of intense, nonstop fighting, the battalion's operations officer convinced the commander of the 105th Infantry Regiment that the tanks needed to withdraw, that they could not continue without infantry support. He received permission to withdraw Company A from Kakazu Village.

Because so many command tanks had been knocked out, the operations officer went forward in his own tank to ensure that all the survivors got the word to withdraw. As he was doing this, his own tank hit a mine and was disabled, forcing him to return to American lines on foot.

Of the 30 tanks that had entered the fight that morning, only eight were able to return from the front on their own power. Of the 22 tanks left behind, 17 were later salvaged and returned to battle. It was the greatest single battle loss of American tanks in the entire Pacific War. And, as the Army's official history of the Okinawa campaign says, "The big attack of 19 April had failed. At no point had there been a breakthrough. Everywhere the Japanese had held and turned back the American attack."

The 7th Infantry Division attacking formidable defenses at Skyline Ridge on Ouki Hill also had been stopped by the vastly outnumbered 11th Independent Infantry Battalion, veterans of the fighting in China.

Because success had not been achieved, General Hodges was determined to force the issue until it was. He directed the 193rd Tank Battalion to try again. On April 21, 1945, a platoon of tanks from Company C and a platoon from the 713th Armored

Flamethrower Battalion passed a blown bridge in support of Company K, 105th Infantry. To proceed, the group had to build a bypass at the bridge site. Colonel Behrns and seven tankers climbed down and, with hand tools, built a new bypass while under enemy fire.

Once again the Japanese waited patiently, and when the column about 100 yards past the bridge site the lead tank was hit by a 47mm antitank gun, followed by six more shots in quick succession. Every man in the tank was killed or wounded.

The Company C platoon leader took command of the column and continued forward until they again came to a blown bridge. As they pondered what to do next, the deadly, ubiquitous 47mm guns struck again, killing the platoon commander and crippling his tank. Although the other tanks spotted and eliminated the enemy antitank gun, the advance was stopped and nothing further could be done without an infantry advance. The "death ride" of the tanks on Okinawa was over.

Kakazu Village continued to plague the 27th Infantry Division for several more days. The 105th Infantry Regiment managed to bypass the main enemy resistance atop the ridge and soon had patrols in the village. But, although these patrols found no Japanese, any attempt to enter in force brought down enemy fire. Three times Captain Louis F. Ackerman, commander of Company A, 105th Infantry and a veteran of Saipan, led patrols down to and into Kakazu Village, and three times he saw no enemy and received no Japanese fire. Each time he reported to Colonel Winn, who sent larger units toward the village, only to have them turned back by strong enemy small-arms and automatic weapons fire.

Still not convinced, Winn ordered Ackerman to make another patrol run. Once again, as Ackerman led his men down to the village, there was no opposition. But at almost the moment he set foot in the village he was shot in the back and killed. Four others were killed at his side. The rest of the patrol scattered. Most hid until darkness when they returned to American lines.

The last three survivors of the Ackerman patrol did not return until April 24, three days later, along with some surviving crewmen of Company A, 193rd Tank Battalion, who had spent four days hiding behind enemy lines in rubble, caves, tombs, or even under their destroyed tanks, playing dead whenever the enemy came near.

BELOW: Men of the 106th Infantry Regiment view the bodies of two dead Japanese snipers during the advance on April 19 and reduction of the Kakazu Pocket. The 27th Infantry Division would continue to battle for Okinawa until September 7, 1945. OPPOSITE: Crewmen and infantry pose for a photo during a lull in the fighting for Kakazu Ridge. On April 19, the 193rd lost a record 22 tanks, but many of them were quickly repaired and put back into operation.

National Archives

Meanwhile, the Japanese left on top of the ridge continued to bring down fire on the neighboring 96th Infantry Division, whose commander, Maj. Gen. James L. Bradley, complained bitterly to General Griner. Yet, in fact, the 27th Infantry Division had moved ahead of its neighbor, creating a gap through which Japanese continued to infiltrate. There were also Japanese behind its lines, still on Kakazu Ridge. The division had no reserves left to commit to the battle.

To eliminate the threat, the 2nd battalion, 105th Infantry fought to clear the Pinnacle—a task that cost the battalion significant casualties, the senior surviving officer being a captain. The 27th Cavalry Reconnaissance Troop, with some tanks from the 193rd Tank Battalion, tried again to subdue Kakazu Village, but after a day of fighting had gained only 50 yards and had to be pulled back to keep from being annihilated. A massive artillery barrage saturated the village, but when American forces again tried to enter, they were stopped by "a wall of fire."

To coordinate the operations in the pocket—which now involved two of his corps' divisions—General Hodges placed Brig. Gen. William B. Bradford, the assistant commander of the 27th Infantry Division, in charge of all units involved in reducing the Kakazu Pocket. That evening the Japanese launched a counterattack against the 105th Infantry Regiment. Supported by a heavy artillery barrage, the attack was broken up by naval artillery called down by Colonel Winn's regiment.

The next morning, April 22, 1945, General Griner requested help from XXIV Corps in reducing the pocket; the 3rd Battalion, 17th Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division was brought up. To increase his chance of success, Griner also ordered his own 102nd Engineer (Combat) Battalion to assemble near the Machinato Inlet and to be prepared to fight as infantry. By nightfall on April 22, every infantry battalion of the division was committed—the only reserve was the division's engineers.

Yet it was not until that same night that

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FOREST of DEATH

BY NATHAN N. PREFER

"Passchendaele with tree bursts" was how war correspondent Ernest Hemingway described it. The three-month slugfest that became known as the Battle the Hürtgen Forest was that and much more. It was one of the costliest and most frustrating battles fought by the U.S. Army in Europe during World War II.

Before the war, there was no specific area known as the Hürtgen Forest. The wooded area that received that name on American maps was actually a plot of forested land 20 miles long and 10 miles wide that was the northernmost tip of the Ardennes region of Germany. A plateau of volcanic origin, it appeared to be a region of hills because of the many streams that have gouged their way through the area.

Roads were few and poor, and scattered villages within the forest provided the only shelter and road nets in the area. One such village was Hürtgen itself, from which the forest got its name. Another was Schmidt, which was the key to the entire three-month-long campaign.

The forest seemed to be taken straight from Gothic tales of frightening places. Until the 20th century, most travelers went around the forest, avoiding its dark and forbidding interior. The dark green fir trees, rising to heights of 75 to 100 feet, were thick and intertwined. Most days, the sun's rays never penetrated to the floor of the forest, which was constantly wet, a result of all the streams flowing throughout the area and the lack of sun.

It was not until World War I that the Imperial German Army discovered that the forest could be used as a gateway into France. The French, knowing the difficulties of moving large military forces through such a dense wood, guarded it lightly. But the Germans, using the nearby Aachen Gap in the Ardennes, managed to push strong forces through the area to stunning effect. Some 25 years later, the forces of Nazi Germany repeated the feat, in both cases to France's sorrow.

One of the most important watercourses through the forest is the Roer River. This river runs along the southern and eastern edge of the forest, past the town of Monschau, 16 miles south of Aachen. Beyond the Roer the land flattens out, leaving an open plain that leads directly to the Rhine River, Germany's traditional natural barrier to the west. The Roer River was to become a significant factor in the Allied advance to Germany in 1944.

Winter weather, difficult terrain, and stiff German resistance in the Hürtgen Forest devoured U.S. divisions during the Battle for Schmidt.

When the Allies reached the Aachen Gap, they had little fear of a major obstacle to their increasingly rapid advance to the German border. After a brutal struggle in northern France, they had broken out of the Normandy beachhead and surged across France, chasing after a defeated and demoralized German Army. Objective lines drawn up months before were taken and passed weeks—even months—earlier than originally planned. There seemed little in the way to slow down the Allied gallop across France and into Germany itself.

But that very confidence was already causing problems. The highly motorized Allied forces needed supplies to keep moving east. Those supplies had to come into a major port before they could be distributed. But as yet no such port had been seized. True, the ports of Cherbourg and Brest had been taken at considerable cost, but neither could accept the volume of supplies the Allies needed to keep moving. And the Allies kept moving farther and farther away from the ports, stretching the supply line to the breaking point.

Two medics who have worked unsuccessfully to save an American soldier killed during the Battle of the Hürtgen Forest check his tags for identification, October 1944. The battle, one of the most difficult ever fought by the U.S. Army, resulted in the decimation of several divisions and heavy American casualties.

All photos: National Archives

The First Canadian Army had seized the city of Antwerp but had yet to clear the approaches to that major port. By September 1944, the Allied armies were having severe supply problems, needed more ground forces, and were about to face Germany's major defensive line, known to them as the Siegfried Line.

General Dwight D. Eisenhower, Supreme Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Forces, had decreed a broad-front policy. He had, in fact, allowed Field Marshal Bernard L. Montgomery, commanding the 21st Army Group, to try a single powerful thrust to speed the Allied advance to Germany—a massive ground and airborne operation known as Operation Market Garden—but this had failed at Arnhem.

Eisenhower now returned to his broad-front strategy, which required that the Allied armies pierce the Siegfried Line, cross the Roer and Rhine Rivers, and enter Germany. Yet there were problems.

It was winter, and the rains and snows had produced significant runoff to the many streams and rivers in the area. The runoff, in turn, had filled the lakes behind the dams along the Roer River to near capacity. Those dams were in German hands and could easily be used to flood the area over which the American armies of General Omar N. Bradley's 12th Army Group would have to pass.

Any Allied force that crossed the river before the dams were in American hands risked being isolated on the far bank by flooding and defeated in detail. Bradley, therefore, assigned the task of seizing the Roer River dams to the First U.S. Army under the command of Lt. Gen. Courtney H. Hodges.

Hodges was 57 years old and a veteran of World War I, where he had earned a Distinguished Service Cross in the Meuse-Argonne Campaign. He, unlike most of his contemporaries, was not a graduate of West Point, having failed in his plebe year. Determined to make the military a career, he had enlisted and gained his commission from the ranks.

He later came to the attention of the U.S. Army's Chief of Staff, General George C. Marshall, who monitored his career and placed him in command of the First U. S. Army. In September 1944, Hodges' army had three corps with eight experienced combat divisions and three mechanized cavalry groups. The usual attached armor, tank destroyer, engineer, and artillery battalions were distributed among the combat units.

ABOVE: An American soldier watches torrents of water from the River Rur flow around the Heimbach hydro electric plant after the Schwammenauel Dam was breached in February 1945. OPPOSITE: A line of American troops crosses a bridge and marches through one of the many small villages that dot the Hürtgen region. The difficult hilly and forested terrain is very obvious in this photo, taken November 16, 1944.

Having pierced the Siegfried Line in several places, First U.S. Army now had to move east into Germany. That required securing the Roer River dams and crossing the Roer and the Rhine. The only way to accomplish that, believed General Hodges, was to attack through the Hürtgen Forest. He understood that he could have bypassed the forest and found some way around to the dams, but both the supply issue and his lack of any reserve force raised the fear of a flank attack from the forest should he try to bypass it. So it would have to be a frontal attack. Maj. Gen. J. Lawton "Lightning Joe" Collins' VII Corps was assigned the task.

Sent first into the forest was the veteran 9th Infantry Division. Almost immediately the unique characteristics of fighting within the forest were realized. On the first day, the 60th Infantry Regiment had to fight to clear the supply route of the leading 47th Infantry Regiment. Then German counterattacks began. Concerned about the American attacks in the forest, General Erich Brandenberger, commanding the German Seventh Army, ordered more troops into the woods.

It soon became clear that the village of Schmidt, which sits atop one of the highest ridges west of the Roer and is only two miles from the Roer River dams, was a key objective. To get to Schmidt, an attacking American force would need to secure the Hürtgen-Kleinhau road net and the villages of Germeter and Vossenack. Once these were secured, a crossing of the Kall River would lead directly to Schmidt and the edge of the forest overlooking the dams.

With his first attack stalled by enemy defenses and counterattacks, General Collins ordered Maj. Gen. Louis A. Craig, commanding the 9th Infantry Division, to concentrate his full division for the next attack. But the 9th was thinly stretched, holding a nine-mile front. In order to gather just two of his three regiments for an attack, Craig had to leave

his 47th Infantry behind and use the attached 298th Engineer (Combat) Battalion and 4th Cavalry Group to cover his front.

The 9th Division's 39th and 60th Infantry Regiments would be facing a hastily thrown together grouping of miscellaneous German units under the umbrella command of the 275th and 353rd Infantry Divisions, part of Lt. Gen. Hans Schmidt's LXXIV Corps.

The tired, understrength veterans and inexperienced replacements who fought the first battle for Schmidt were unaware that the German appreciation of them was far different than reality. German reports described the American infantrymen as "top-notch, rested, and well-equipped combat troops." Apparently unknown to the Germans, American infantry companies were down to 80 men or fewer—less than half their authorized strength.

Fighting soon developed into a pattern. While artillery and mortars, or tanks and tank destroyers, fired to keep the Germans away from firing positions, small groups of six to eight American soldiers inched their way toward the enemy posts. When close enough, the firing would be stopped and the infantry charged the enemy, tossing grenades and firing hand weapons.

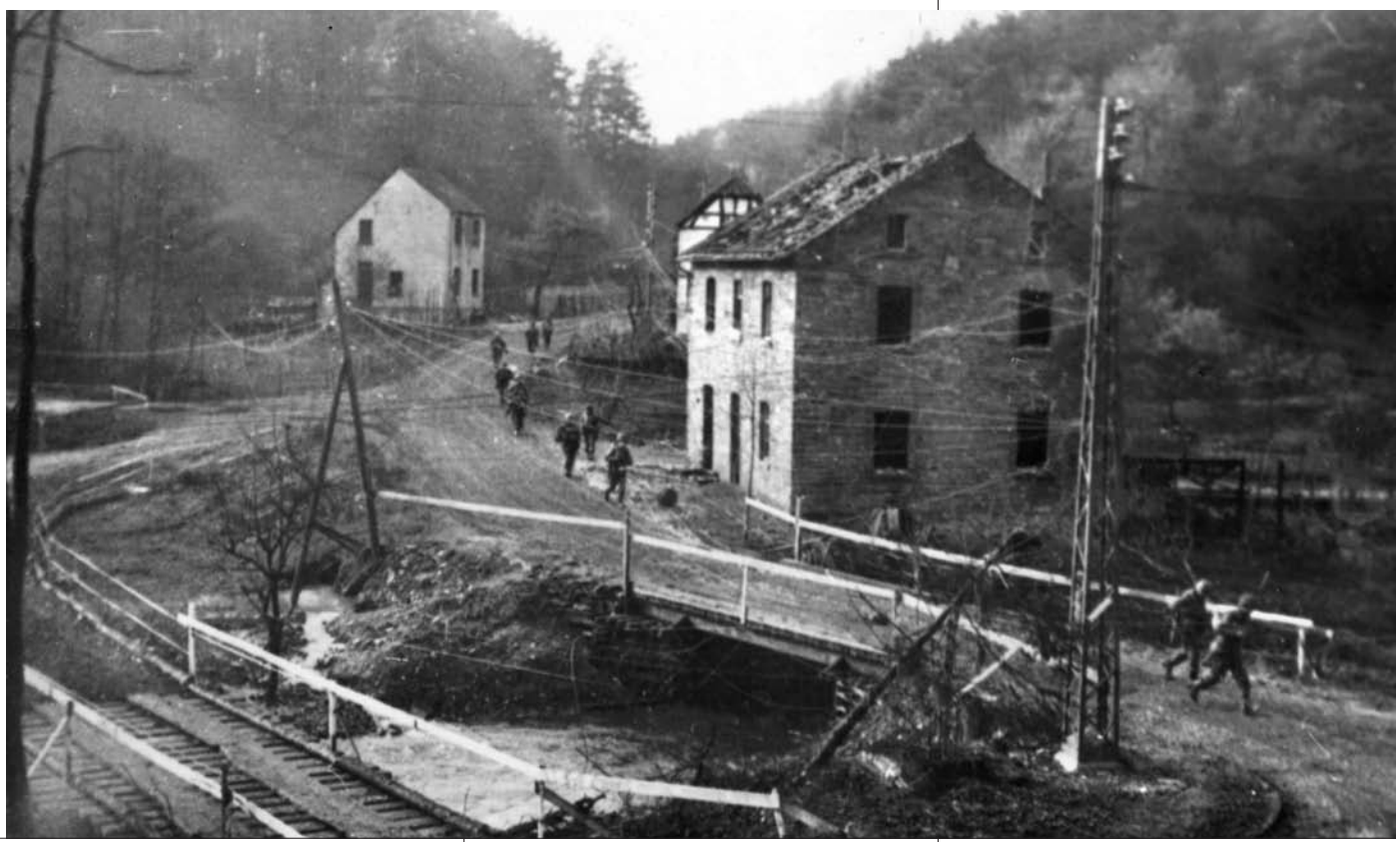
Charges of TNT were used to blow up pillboxes. Antitank weapons, such as the bazooka, fired rockets into stubborn holdout pillboxes or trenches. White phosphorus grenades also prompted surrender when dropped down the ventilation shafts. Rooting out the enemy remained a slow, costly, and painful process.

The battle was not one-sided. In the 39th Infantry Regiment sector one company had but two platoons left, one with 12 men and the other with 13. One entire company was lost to an ambush. Private James E. Mathews earned a posthumous Distinguished Service Cross by saving the life of his company commander at the cost of his own.

Yet, by October 15, the 9th Infantry Division had possession of the towns of Wittscheidt and Germeter. General Craig created forces from scratch by pulling individual companies, supply platoons, and others to add what he could to the attack. A tank company loaned from the 3rd Armored Division joined the battle.

Even as the 9th continued with its attack, events at higher headquarters changed the situation. Because Hodges wanted Collins' VII Corps to move its main attack toward the Roer, he adjusted boundaries to give responsibility for the Hürtgen Forest, including Schmidt, to Maj. Gen. Leonard T. Gerow's V Corps. The 9th Infantry Division, which had cleared some 3,000 yards of the forest at a cost of more than one casualty per yard, would be relieved and sent to the rear for rest and replenishment. Its place in the forest would be taken by the 28th Infantry Division.

Major General Norman D. "Dutch" Cota's 28th Infantry Division—known as the "Bloody Bucket"—was drawn from the Pennsylvania National Guard. It had come ashore in Normandy in July and fought at St. Lô before moving into northern France. It had some early difficulties, and its first commander, Lloyd Brown, was relieved of command, and the second, James E. Wharton, was killed by a sniper on August 12; Cota had com-



manded the division since that incident.

The division had paraded through Paris on August 29, 1944, before moving up into Belgium and then Germany. It had fought along the Siegfried Line near Grosskampenberg but had been halted by strong German resistance. After defeating heavy German counterattacks in the Wallendorf bridgehead area, the division returned to the Siegfried Line near Aachen before relieving the 9th Infantry Division in the Hürtgen Forest on October 25, 1944.

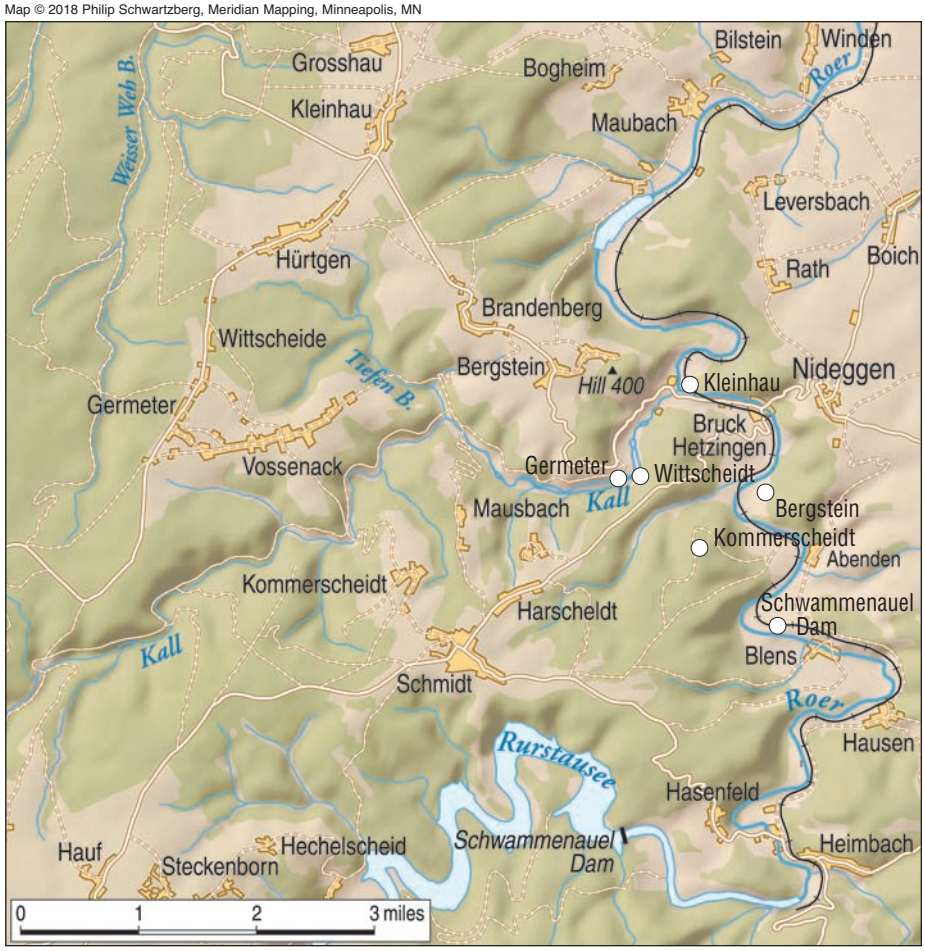
General Gerow directed Cota to launch a second attack on Schmidt. Largely because V Corps also had orders to support the VII Corps attack toward the Roer River, Gerow's other divisions were unavailable. After reviewing the problem, however, he ordered Maj. Gen. Lunsford E. Oliver's 5th Armored Division to assist the 28th by clearing the adjacent Monschau Corridor.

In effect, this was to be a double-pronged attack against the stubborn Siegfried Line positions that were delaying the V Corps' advance. Here the importance of the Roer River dams was first made a part of the objective when the V Corps engineers warned that any advance over the river was subject to the status of the dams. But those dams were not an objective of either VII Corps or V Corps. First, however, Schmidt would need to be taken.

In addition to putting a combat command of Oliver's division alongside the infantry, Gerow reinforced the 28th Division with what he had available. The 1171st Engineer Combat Group and the 86th Chemical Mortar Battalion were attached, as were the 630th Tank Destroyer Battalion (Towed), the 707th Tank Battalion, and the 893rd Tank Destroyer Battalion (Self-Propelled).

While strengthening the division, Gerow then weakened its offensive power by ordering that one regiment secure the line of departure to guard against the kind of counterattacks that had slowed the 9th Infantry Division's attack.

Gerow also ordered that a second regiment secure a road net leading into the Monschau Corridor, leaving only one



V and VIII Corps of the U.S. First Army faced a variety of obstacles during their penetration of the Roer Valley: hills, rivers, bad weather, a nearly impenetrable forest, and the bunkers of the Siegfried Line, or Westwall.

infantry regiment to make the actual attack to seize Schmidt. By the time his division entered the forest, Dutch Cota felt that his division had only "a gambler's chance of succeeding."

The 28th had been fighting since Normandy. One of its acknowledged weaknesses was a lack of training for the steady stream of fresh replacements arriving from the United States. In one month, the division had absorbed 1,465 replacements—nearly all in the infantry. No training program, however realistic, can prepare a soldier for actual combat. These men had a difficult introduction into their new unit. Their initial reaction was "bewilderment, dismay, confusion, isolation."

The time when these men needed moral support was when they joined their new unit. But the veterans were reluctant to offer support because they had already suffered enough seeing friends killed or wounded and did not want to expose themselves to more tragedies. Those replacements who survived became good soldiers with experience and were eventually accepted into the veteran community.

Cota selected the 112th Infantry as his assault regiment. It was to seize the village of Kommerscheidt and then Schmidt. Each village was just uphill of the last. The 112th also had to protect its own north flank by capturing Vossenack.

Supported by tanks of the 707th Tank Battalion, the attack began from Germeter into a heavy German artillery barrage on November 2, 1944. Using the church spire in Vossenack as a landmark, the infantry followed the tanks forward. The lead tank soon entered a minefield and a track was blown off. A second tank became mired in deep mud.

The tank company commander, Captain George S. West, Jr., came up and led the attack

forward. In one infantry platoon that walked into a booby-trapped field, 12 men out of 27 were killed, others wounded. Platoon leaders fell as they led from the front. One machine-gun platoon was led by a corporal, all senior leaders having become casualties.

Nevertheless, the 112th Infantry gained its objective. They were soon digging in on Vossenack Ridge, preparing to fight off any counterattacks. Company F set up in the village with its command post in the last house on Vossenack's main street.

Meanwhile, to the north the 109th Infantry Regiment had begun its attack to obtain a line of departure overlooking the village of Hürtgen itself. By early afternoon, the initial objectives had been reached and the regiment held a line along the Germeter-Hürtgen road. Stopped by a wide enemy minefield, the regiment halted for the night. South of the 112th Infantry, the 110th Infantry Regiment launched an attack to the southeast to knock out a group of pillboxes that would soon be known as the Raffelsbrand Strongpoint. Heavy resistance limited the gains made by the 110th Infantry on the first day.

ABOVE: A .30-caliber machine-gun crew of Company D, 39th Regiment, 9th Infantry Division, fires a stream of bullets into the forest. BELOW: Vehicles from the 893rd Tank Destroyer Battlion roll down a logging trail through the Hürtgen Forest on their way to support the 28th Infantry Division at Schmidt, November 4, 1944.

Across the front lines senior German officers of Army Group B had been conducting a map exercise in which they anticipated an attack in the Hürtgen Forest on the boundary between the Fifth Panzer Army and the Seventh Army. Soon reports were received that exactly that type of attack was in progress.

The commander of Army Group B, Field Marshal Walter Model, immediately ordered a battle group of the 116th Panzer Division to counterattack against the advancing 109th Infantry Regiment. The rest of the division was to follow as soon as available. The attack was designed to clear the Vossenack Ridge of Americans and cut off the advance of the 112th Infantry Regiment.

Unaware of the coming counterattack, the 112th Infantry resumed its attack on November 3. Lt. Col. Albert C. Flood's 3rd Battalion began the descent from Vossenack Ridge down the steep, wooded slope toward the Kall River. There was little opposition other than that of German artillery, and the Yanks soon reached and crossed the Kall; Kommerscheidt was in sight. Only a small group of the enemy opposed their advance.

Company K's scouts were soon inside the village, followed by the rest of the company. Captain Eugene W. O'Malley, Company K's commander, could see Schmidt from the edge of Kommerscheidt and was in the process of organizing an attack on Schmidt when suddenly a short but intense artillery barrage hit Kommerscheidt.

Undeterred, O'Malley waited out the barrage and then started his company for Schmidt. Enemy opposition remained slight. The lead elements of Company K

reached the outskirts of Schmidt, and O'Malley split his force, sending half into Schmidt and the other to a small sector of the town along the Schmidt-Strauch road.

Enemy resistance in Schmidt was minimal; many Germans had been eating and several were drunk, and the town was soon secured. Company K, 112th Infantry had secured the division's objective in less than two days of fighting.

Nearby, Captain Jack W. Walker's Company L had advanced alongside, also against minimal opposition. It entered Schmidt, taking 30 enemy prisoners, shortly before darkness fell. By nightfall only a few houses along the Hasenfeld road offered sniper and machine-gun opposition.

Soon thereafter, the reserve company, Company I, also entered Schmidt followed by Captain Guy T. Piercey's heavy weapons Company M. But the closest American tanks could get to Schmidt was 1,500 yards because of unsuitable terrain and minefields. Behind them Major Robert T. Hazlett's 1st Battalion, 112th Infantry moved into Kommerscheidt; the 2nd Battalion remained in Vossenack. The situation was looking good.

With night covering everything, the mopping-up operations in Schmidt came to a halt as the 3rd Battalion, 112th Infantry dug in for the night. Sniper fire continued to harass the battalion, and Company L was still receiving machine-gun fire from the houses along the Hasenfeld road. Nevertheless, the night was relatively quiet and the soldiers felt satisfied that they had achieved their objective with relative ease. Stray Germans, unaware that Schmidt was now in American hands, wandered into the American perimeter during the night.

To the northwest, the 109th Infantry had been about to launch its attack to seize Hürtgen when it was struck by two counterattacks, each numbering about 200 enemy troops. Although both attacks were beaten off, the American attack was delayed.

To the south, the 110th Infantry also made little progress against the Raffelsbrand Strongpoint. General Cota authorized releasing the regiment's 1st Battalion, which had been the division reserve, for a new attack on November 4.

Across the lines the German commanders, meeting at the Schlenderhan Castle west of Cologne, decided to bring up the entire 116th Panzer Division for a counterattack that would push the Americans back.

From the German viewpoint, holding the Hürtgen Forest was necessary for two reasons. First, it protected the flank of the coming major counteroffensive—soon to be known in the West as the Battle of the Bulge. Second, a battle in the forest would protect the Siegfried Line defenses and the Roer River dams, as well as being easier than fighting in the open with the depleted forces available to the Germans.

The next day, November 4, the Germans struck in force. After a heavy artillery barrage on Schmidt, German infantry with tank support attacked from the southeast. The panzers quickly got into the village and began to knock out the American defenses. With only a few antitank weapons available, the Americans were soon overwhelmed.

Then another battalion of the 1055th Infantry Regiment struck from the west. The two-pronged attack routed the Americans. With no adequate antitank defense, the battle quickly went against them. About 100 men were cut off in Schmidt and either killed or captured—the rest withdrew. Without tank support and with their flanks left open because of the inability of their sister regiments to close up, the 3rd Battalion, 112th Infantry was left with no options.

As the Schmidt survivors reached Kommerscheidt, the men of the 1st Battalion grabbed them and placed them in defensive positions—positions that were surrounded by dense woods on three sides. Only three tanks from the 707th Tank Battalion were available.

ABOVE: Members of the 28th Infantry Division escort a group of German prisoners captured in Schmidt to the rear, November 3, 1944. The Germans retook the town the next day. OPPOSITE: The heavily wooded terrain restricted visibility and mobility. Here a squad of 28th Infantry Division men advances cautiously through the Hürtgen Forest near Vossenack during the attack on Schmidt, November 3.

The battalion's call for more tanks brought instead the assistant division commander, Brig. Gen. George A. Davis, and the regimental commander, Colonel Carl L. Peterson.

Before they could reach Kommerscheidt, however, the Germans launched their next attack out of Schmidt with five tanks and a battalion of infantry. The panzers stayed just beyond the range of the American bazookas and pounded the town at will. Friendly artillery failed to discourage the German tanks. More enemy tanks opened fire from other directions. The three 707th Tank Battalion tanks moved forward and opened fire. They claimed three panzers knocked out while others were hit by supporting fighter bombers of the 397th Squadron, 368th Fighter Group.

At this point Colonel Peterson arrived and assisted in the defense, organizing stragglers and leading them back into the fight. General Davis reviewed the situation along with Peterson and the battalion commanders and radioed a situation report back to Cota. Captain Marion C. Pugh's Company C, 893rd Tank Destroyer Battalion was ordered up to the town, but the blocked supply route halted their efforts.

Finally, nightfall brought an end to the day's battle. An order from division headquarters to attack and retake Schmidt was ignored. The 112th Infantry would have all it could do just to hold Kommerscheidt.

The Germans had brought up reserves to continue their attacks. In addition to the 116th Panzer Division, major elements of the 89th Infantry Division provided additional infantry for the attack; elements of the 347th Infantry Division also took part. The 272nd Volksgrenadier Division also contributed battalions as it arrived in the area. Seventh Army sent several additional artillery, assault gun, antitank, and mortar battalions to reinforce the attack.

Dawn on November 5 brought another German attack. With supporting artillery and the tanks of the 707th Tank Battalion in Kommerscheidt, the morning's attack was beaten off. By mid-day, two platoons of Company C, 893rd Tank Destroyer Battalion had managed to squeeze up the supply trail and reach Kommerscheidt.

Another attack hit the town just as General Cota ordered a renewal of the attack to take Schmidt. Once again, Colonel Peterson had no choice but to ignore the order. Undeterred, Cota formed Task Force Ripple, led by Lt. Col. Richard W. Ripple, commander of the 707th Tank Battalion. Leading the 3rd Battalion, 110th Infantry and two of his own tank companies, with tank destroyers from Kommerscheidt, Ripple was ordered not to reinforce Kommerscheidt but to pass through it and seize Schmidt.

Meanwhile, along the Vossenack Ridge, the 2nd Battalion, 112th Infantry had spent three days and four nights under constant enemy shelling. Reinforced with a platoon of Company C, 707th Tank Battalion and a platoon of Company B, 893rd Tank Destroyer Battalion, they anxiously awaited the inevitable enemy attack.

Instead, November 6 dawned with complete silence. Some men in outlying foxholes began to panic and started to withdraw into the town. Then, suddenly, strong German artillery and small-arms fire began to hit the American positions. Rumors that the Germans were attacking spread panic among the infantrymen. As each company retreated, the next company was pulled into the maelstrom. Officers who retained control of their units soon had no choice but to withdraw as well rather than be left stranded and without support. Vossenack was soon abandoned.

Meanwhile, Task Force Ripple fought its way along the supply trail against enemy infiltrators. Lt. Col. William Tait's 3rd Battalion, 110th Infantry lost 17 men in these engagements.

But in Kommerscheidt the sounds of the battle going on behind them convinced many of the Yanks that they were surrounded. Enemy observation from Schmidt increased the accuracy of the German shelling. The arrival of Task Force Ripple late in the day prevented any attack against Schmidt from being launched on Kommerscheidt.

But at Vossenack, General Davis ordered a new defense line just south of the town and strengthened it with tanks from the 707th Tank Battalion and all of Company B, 893rd Tank Destroyer Battalion. Companies of the 1171st Engineer Combat Group were also alerted for duty as riflemen.

The 109th Infantry Regiment attempted to renew its attack on November 7 but made no progress. That same day came

word that they would be relieved by the 12th Infantry Regiment of Maj. Gen. Raymond O. Barton's 4th Infantry Division. Meanwhile, at Kommerscheidt the Germans attacked again, getting a panzer into the town and another so close that it rolled up to Colonel Ripple's command post dugout.

As the Germans continued to move into the town, more and more Americans left their positions and pulled back. Colonel Peterson called up his sole remaining reserve, Company C, 112th Infantry. At this time, Peterson, at his CP in Kommerscheidt, received a message recalling him to division headquarters. The message gave no reason and only ordered him to report immediately. Although he was aware of a rumor that he was about to be relieved of command, he left the town and started back.

In town, with German tanks roaming the streets at will, the 112th Infantry survivors were left with no recourse but to abandon the village. Colonel Ripple and other officers managed to establish a weak defense in a wooded line north of the village.

Colonel Peterson's trip to division headquarters was a nightmare. With two enlisted men, he started out along the supply trail. Almost immediately they had to abandon their jeep when enemy machine-gun fire blocked the trail. Moving back, they came across several ambushed parties and helped move the casualties from the supply trail. Blocked again by small-arms fire, they took to the woods with enemy mortar fire following them.

A brief firefight with a party of Germans brought down more mortar fire on the group, and Peterson was wounded in his left leg. One enlisted man went ahead for help while the colonel and the remaining man struggled forward.

As they moved, they were again ambushed by a German patrol and Pfc. Gus Seiler, the enlisted man, was killed. Enemy mortar fire again wounded Colonel Peterson in the left leg. He dragged himself back over the Kall River where three Germans approached him. Firing at them, Peterson drove them off. He crossed the river yet again, crawling through the muddy woods until finally he heard American voices. After yet more crawling and river crossings, he was finally rescued by a two-man patrol. Colonel Gustav M. Nelson of the 5th Armored Division assumed command of the 112th Infantry later that day.

ABOVE: Men of the 121st Infantry Regiment, 8th Infantry Division, head out of the destroyed town of Hürtgen and advance toward Kleinau and the start of the attack to capture the Brandenberg-Bergstein Ridge. BELOW: German positions were so close to this 8th Infantry Division artillery battery that the gunners had to fire their 105mm howitzer at maximum elevation. OPPOSITE: American troops and armored vehicles pause in their advance as a German Hanomag Sk.Kfz/251 (right) burns.

The 28th Infantry Division did not capture Schmidt. Despite the attachments of the 12th Infantry Regiment and the 2nd Ranger Battalion, no advance could be accomplished.

The 112th Infantry Regiment suffered 232 men captured, 431 missing, 719 wounded, 167 killed, and 544 nonbattle casualties, mostly trench foot, illness, and combat fatigue.

The 707th Tank Battalion lost 31 of its 50 medium tanks, while the 893rd Tank

Destroyer Battalion lost 16 of 24 vehicles. In total, the 28th Infantry Division, not including attached units, lost 6,184 men during the November battles in the Hürtgen Forest.

Major General Donald A. Stroh's 8th Infantry Division, which had been resting in a quiet sector along the Our River, moved up on November 19 and took over the exhausted 28th's positions. It was the first rest the 8th had had for quite some time. After landing in France, the 8th had fought in Normandy, Brittany, and along the Siegfried Line before entering the Hürtgen Forest. Now it was time for a new test.

The division planned to attack through the 4th Division's 12th Infantry Regiment using its 121st Infantry Regiment. They were to be supported by the 12th Engineer (Combat) Battalion and Combat Command R of the 5th Armored Division. Units of the 644th Tank Destroyer Battalion and 86th Chemical Mortar Battalion were also attached. The attack began on November 21.

Enemy artillery, mortars, and mines slowed the attack considerably, and casualties grew numerous. Three times the regiment attacked in one day, each time achieving only limited gains. The 709th Tank Battalion's tanks made little difference, and the Hürtgen Forest ruined the career of yet another regimental commander.

Two battalion commanders fell to wounds or sickness. A third was relieved of command. The division's chief of staff took command of the 121st Regiment personally. Another major attack on November 24 fared no better.

Off to the east, Barton's 4th Infantry Division was making some progress, but increased German reinforcements slowed all attacks. To strike before more German reinforcements arrived, 5th Armored's Combat Command R was committed with General Hodges' approval. Despite a heavy smoke screen and artillery preparation, the tanks were halted before they got far. Four destroyed Shermans blocked the only access into the village of Hürtgen.

Still, the 4th and 8th Infantry Divisions continued with the attack. On November 26, the 121st Infantry actually put a small patrol into Hürtgen, and Company F moved to within 300 yards of the village before being stopped by enemy fire.

The next day saw greater progress. Lt. Col. Roy Hogan's 3rd Battalion, 121st Infantry, aided by 709th Tank Battalion Shermans, reached the southern edge of Hürtgen. On the opposite side, the 1st Battalion, 13th Infantry approached the northeast side of the village. Then came startling news—the regiments reported the town abandoned.

Unfortunately, as the men of the 13th and 121st Infantry Regiments soon found out, the report of a German withdrawal from Hürtgen was unfounded. In the morning, elements of the 13th Regiment and the 644th Tank Destroyer Battalion set up defensive positions on the Kleinhau-Brandenberg road. Nevertheless, the 121st Infantry had to fight its way into the village proper and met with success; 350 prisoners were taken. Combat Command R was alerted to prepare to attack Kleinhau, supported by the 28th and 121st Infantry Regiments.

Kleinhau fell to Combat Command R on November 29. Remaining enemy pockets

A group of tired and dirty 4th Infantry Division GIs gazes at the town of Schmidt from their hillside positions and ponder the effort that will be needed to take it, November 18, 1944.

were cleaned out by the 13th and 121st Infantry Regiments. A renewal of the attack on November 30 saw the 8th Division's 28th Infantry Regiment reaching Vossenack. But the next day strong enemy counterattacks turned the 8th Division onto the defensive.

Once again, the 1171st Engineer Combat Group was alerted to act as infantry, and the 2nd Ranger Battalion was trucked forward as a reserve. Brig. Gen. William G. Weaver, newly assigned commander of the 8th Division, ordered his division back into the attack; Brandenburg fell to the 28th Infantry Division and Combat Command A of the 5th Armored Division.

To the north, the 4th Infantry Division, exhausted and severely understrength, was relieved by the 83rd Infantry Division. The "Ivy" Division retired to a quiet area along the Our River for some R&R, but both it and the 28th Infantry Division would soon find themselves fighting for their lives against the massive German winter offensive out of the Ardennes Forest.

The Germans wanted Bergstein back. Three times they attacked the 3rd Battalion, 28th Infantry, being supported by Combat Command R. Most of the German 980th Infantry Regiment attacked without success. For its gallant stand at Bergstein the 3rd Battalion, 28th Infantry Regiment, 8th Infantry Division,was awarded a Presidential Unit Citation.

Other Presidential Unit Citations, one for the 1st Battalion, 13th Infantry Regiment and one for the entire 121st Infantry Regiment, were also earned in the fighting within the Hürtgen Forest. The 22nd Infantry Regiment of the 4th Infantry Division received the same honor, attesting to the fierceness of the fighting in the forest.

There were individual awards as well. The 4th Infantry Division faced what the infantrymen called "The Thing." This was a pyramid of three concertinas of wire 10 feet high supported by rows of railroad ties embedded in the ground. First Lt. Bernard J. Ray, a 23-year-old platoon leader in Company F, 8th Infantry Regiment, from Baldwin, New York, was sent to knock it out. The Yanks could not bypass it, for the road had to be cleared for tanks, without which the infantry could not advance.

Even though his platoon sergeant told him he was crazy, Lieutenant Ray loaded himself up with grenades, percussion caps, and a 20-foot length of primer cord wrapped around his waist. His plan was to crawl out and blow up "The Thing." Crawling forward under heavy German fire, Ray miraculously reached the obstacle unhurt and set about planting his explosives.

As he did so, he had to get up on his knees and was immediately struck by enemy mortar fragments. Seriously wounded, he managed to complete the preparation and then, clearly knowing what he was doing, pushed the plunger down. "The Thing" and Lieutenant Ray were gone. The 8th Infantry Regiment moved on. For his actions, Lieutenant Ray received a posthumous Medal of Honor.

Ray's commanding officer was Lt. Col. George L. Mabry from South Carolina, a veteran of the Utah Beach D-Day landings. Commanding the 2nd Battalion, 8th Infantry, he found his men stalled by a minefield and heavy German resistance on November 20.

Knowing that he needed to set an example, Mabry went to the front and personally cleared a path through the mines. He then moved ahead of the lead scouts until faced with a barbed-wire obstacle. This he destroyed with explosives and wire cutters.

Then he personally led his three rifle companies forward. Leading the men through the thick forest, he came upon and captured three enemy soldiers. Moments later he charged up a hill against three German bunkers and engaged the occupants in hand-to-hand combat. He immobilized two of these before his men raced up and captured the remainder. He then attacked a third bunker and knocked it out with small-arms fire.

Inspired by his courage, Mabry's battalion surged through the forest, captured its objective, and held it against repeated counterattacks. For his leadership and personal courage, Colonel Mabry received the Medal of Honor.

At the nearby town of Bergel, the Germans launched a strong attack led by a heavy tank against the 329th Infantry Regiment, 83rd Infantry Division on December 14. In their way stood an Iowa farm boy named Ralph G. Neppel. With most of the regiment concentrated in the town and unprepared for the attack, the Germans were about to overrun the regiment when Sergeant Neppel intervened.

From his machine-gun position the sergeant opened fire on the advancing Germans. Many fell to his fire while the others scattered. His supporting riflemen kept the Germans pinned down, but the tank rolled to within 30 yards of Neppel's machine gun and blasted away with its cannon.

Sergeant Neppel later said he barely remembered the tank firing: "There was a tremendous roar, a blinding flash. The next thing I knew I was lying 10 yards behind my gun. My gun crew was sprawled all over the road."

Sergeant Neppel, minus his right leg and with his left leg smashed, painfully pulled himself back to his gun on his elbows and resumed firing. The Germans, expecting that opposition had been eliminated, were surprised and caught out in the open. Every one of them fell to the sergeant's fire. The panzer, without infantry support, retreated. Sergeant Neppel would spend nine months in the hospital and learn how to walk again with his prosthesis before he was summoned to the White House to receive his Medal of Honor.

Two days after Sergeant Neppel's gallant stand at Bergel, all offensive action in the Hürtgen Forest came to an end. The huge German counteroffensive, known later as the Battle of the Bulge, began to the south, and most Allied resources were directed there.

Schmidt would not fall in 1944. In fact, it did not fall until February 1945, when Maj. Gen. Edwin P. Parker, Jr.'s 78th Infantry ("Lightning") Division took it.

Once again, the V corps, now under the command of Maj. Gen. Clarence Huebner, former commander of the 1st Infantry Division, was the attacking force. General Parker's division had joined the front lines in November, and one of its regiments, the 311th Infantry, had been attached to the 8th Infantry Division during that units' fight in the Hürtgen Forest in November. Since then, they had been guarding the Monschau Corridor on the northern flank of the Ardennes penetration into American lines.

Under the Ninth Army of Lt. Gen. William H. Simpson, the Lightning Division had prepared defenses and was ready to advance once the enemy counteroffensive was defeated. That time came early in February 1945.

The division occupied a two-mile-deep salient into the Siegfried Line on the German border between Aachen and St. Vith, Belgium. Since November they had been facing the same enemy, the 272nd Volksgrenadier Division. Under General Simpson the 78th Infantry Division had begun a series of limited-objective attacks to place it on the north bank of the Roer River. On November 2, it was transferred to the V Corps, First Army, and ordered to continue the attack. The objectives now were Schmidt and the Schwammenauel Dam. Until the dam was secured, Ninth Army could not cross the Roer.

Following the crest of the Schmidt Ridge and a small trail north of the Kall River, the 78th's advance succeeded in reaching the town on February 7. The German defensive position was weakly manned. When obstacles barred the way, General Parker ordered Colonel Thomas H. Hayes' 310th Infantry Regiment to go cross-country to the objectives.

Small firefights occurred as the regiment moved forward, but none were determined enough to stop the 310th's advance although, when Company A was ambushed, the unit was erroneously reported as "cut to pieces."

The advance of the 311th Infantry received less opposition. Crossing difficult terrain, climbing through woods and ravines, the infantry pushed forward. Facing strong forces, and with no reserves, the 272nd Volksgrenadiers fell back slowly. Soon the Americans, some riding the tanks of the 744th Tank Battalion, were moving steadily up the ridge.

By the morning of February 7, the 3rd Battalion, 311th Infantry was at the outskirts of Schmidt. Enemy artillery fire knocked out a tank, so Company I advanced without the armor. Firing as they moved, they entered the northern sector of Schmidt. German resistance was strong, but Company I advanced.

Company K approached Schmidt from the south, firing their machine guns from the hip to suppress enemy fire. They walked into a minefield but pressed on, forcing the enemy to slowly give ground. The two assault companies then cleared the town in house-to-house fighting. The shattered town was soon in American hands.

After more than three months of furious fighting in the green hell of the Hürtgen—and the attempts of five American combat divisions and an armored combat command—the tiny hamlet of Schmidt had finally fallen; the Lightning Division went on to secure the dams to prevent their destruction by the enemy.

The danger was past. The Americans soon crossed the Roer River and began their race to the Rhine. In three more months, Nazi Germany would surrender. But the surviving veterans would always remember the hell of the Hürtgen and the brutal fight for Schmidt. □

A "Light-Hearted"

BY MARK SIMMONS

IAN FLEMING DID MORE THAN CREATE THE JAMES BOND SPY NOVELS; HE ALSO HELPED CREATE 30AU, ONE OF BRITAIN'S MOST DARING AND SUCCESSFUL COMMANDO UNITS.

Vice Admiral Norman Denning said of Ian Fleming, the "ideas man" who worked at British Naval Intelligence, that a lot of his proposals "were just plain crazy." Yet "a lot of his far-fetched ideas had just the glimmer of possibility in them that made you think twice before you threw them in the wastepaper basket." One that was not thrown out was the creation of what became known as 30 Assault Unit, or 30AU.

Director of Naval Intelligence Admiral John Godfrey and his assistant Commander Ian Fleming had been impressed by the exploits of Germany's Abwehrkommando—a specialist unit formed mainly from the Brandenburg Lehr Regiment that moved with the advance of German troops using their linguistic skills. Many had lived abroad before the war, and they were able to seize anything of use in the intelligence field. They had achieved good results in the Balkans, Greece, and Crete.

The idea to form a similar, if expanded, specialist unit of Royal Marine Commandos was put before the Joint Intelligence Board in 1942, which agreed to the formation of the unit. Initially, it was to be divided into four troops of Royal Marines, Army, Royal Air Force, and Royal Navy (the RAF troop was never formed).

The Royal Marine 33 Troop of the yet to be designated 30AU took part in the ill-fated Dieppe raid in August 1942, as a clandestine part of 40RM Commando. Their goal was to obtain a cipher machine and documents from the German naval headquarters housed in a quayside hotel.

Ian Fleming had wanted to go in with them but was deemed too much of a security risk if captured, so he watched the landings from the deck of the destroyer HMS *Fernie,* a mile off shore. The RM troop consisted of two officers, two sergeants, three corporals, and 21 Marines. For this operation the unit was designated 10 Platoon, X Company, 40 Commando, which was transported to Dieppe on the old, flat-bottomed Yangtze River gunboat HMS Locust.

The *Locust* was captained by Commander Robert E.D. "Red" Ryder, a former polar explorer, who had won the Victoria Cross during the raid on Germany's naval base at St. Nazaire, France, five months earlier to prevent the drydocks there from being used by German battleships.

The *Locust* came in toward the shore at 15 knots heading for the mole to land the Marines, but it was shrouded by thick, black smoke, and the gunboat was met with a blizzard of shellfire. One Marine, "Ginger" Northern, was killed before the men could get off *Locust*. Paul McGrath, 19 at the time and

Eschewing steel helmets for berets, a group of British Commandos who have just landed at Juno Beach on D-Day, June 6, 1944, heads past the city hall ("Mairie") of a deserted French town. Correspondent John Steinbeck considered the Commandos "very strange men."

War”

Imperial War Museum

Imperial War Museum

ABOVE: British Commandos, survivors of the disastrous Dieppe raid and looking the worse for wear, gather aboard boats taking them back to Britain, August 1942. OPPOSITE: Royal Navy Commander Ian Fleming, creator of the 30 Assault Unit. Many of its adventures found their way into his James Bond novels.

another Marine seeing his first action, recalled, "The noise of the explosion was gigantic. The shock of it blew all the fuses in my nervous system. I was petrified with such terror; it stunned my mind."

In the face of such heavy fire, Ryder abandoned the run-in toward the mole; the Marine Commandos went over the side, down scrambling nets into landing craft, and a flotilla of them headed for the shore through a smoke screen. They emerged running onto the beach where the Canadians had landed and were stranded. Some of the landing craft got the message to abort the landing, shouted and waved by Lt. Col. J.P. Phillips, wearing a pair of white signaling gloves to be seen better.

The craft carrying 10 Platoon grounded on the beach and was immediately caught in a crossfire. Lieutenant Herbert Huntington-Whiteley, the platoon commander, ordered his men to abandon their kit and swim for it back to the ships.

Thus Fleming's first experiment with this specialized unit ended with the men swimming away from the burning landing craft and the carnage on Dieppe beach. Sergeant John Kruthoffer swam for more than two miles before being picked up. Paul McGrath thought he was going to drown after his life jacket deflated; he wrestled to get his trousers off, often going under. Luckily, he was dragged into a small boat.

Of the 5,000 Canadian troops that landed at Dieppe that day, only 2,200 came back. Along with Marine Northern killed on *Locust,* Marine John Alexander from 10 Platoon lost his life. Their parent unit, 40 Commando, suffered a total of 99 officers and 23 men killed at Dieppe, the rest wounded or captured.

In his report, Fleming found it difficult "to add up the pros and cons of a bloody gallant affair," but he thought the "machinery for producing further raids is thus tried and found good."

The 30 Assault Unit then settled down to a period of training, including house clearing using the bombed houses at Battersea plus lessons on explosives, bomb making, and safe blowing. Marine McGrath recalled, "Lieutenant Curtis, who spoke perfect French, gave us some interesting French lessons." The buzz was maybe they were going to France.

Admiral Godfrey had decided that a small section would take part in Operation Torch, the upcoming Allied invasion of North Africa. Commander Ryder had been appointed CO of the unit, which had now been given the cover name "Special Engineering Unit."

Lieutenant Dunstan Curtis, Royal Navy, would command the first assignment; his detachment joined the cruiser HMS *Sheffield* on the Clyde. Also on board were 600 American troops. Training on the journey south—weapon handling, physical conditioning, and French lessons—continued.

After arriving at Gibraltar, the destination was revealed: Algiers in French North Africa. Once ashore, Curtis and his small team's mission was to locate the French naval headquarters and grab whatever they could. For the landing, along with the American troops, they transferred to two destroyers, the Assault unit on HMS *Malcolm*.

In the early, moonless hours of November 8, 1942, both Royal Navy ships flew the Stars and Stripes as they headed toward the Bay of Algiers, hoping the French would not fire on them.

The plan soon went awry in the darkness. The ships could not find the narrow harbor entrance, and then the French woke up. The intruders were lit up by searchlights and came under fire from the shore batteries. *Malcolm* was closer in at that time, and her

crowded decks were swept by shells and shrapnel; 10 men were killed and 25 wounded. McGrath had the feeling of "here we go again" but kept his head down, for on a ship "there is no hiding place." The damaged ship headed out to sea.

The HMS *Broke,* the second destroyer, did at last find the boom, slipped into the harbor, and landed her embarked American troops. However, *Broke* also came under heavy fire and had to leave her moorings twice. Eventually, she left the harbor. Barely passing the boom, she was hit twice and was badly damaged; she would later sink.

The American troops, cut off and coming under increasing pressure, had to surrender. The members of 30AU transferred from the damaged *Malcolm* to HMS *Bulolo,* a converted liner and the command ship of the task force from which more American troops landed some 12 miles west of Algiers.

Imperial War Museum

Having landed, they set off toward a secondary objective: the Italian Armistice Commission headquarters at Cheragard, seven kilometers away, where they took the headquarters housed in a villa and captured seven Italians. Later, in Algiers, Lieutenant Curtis found an Abwehr Enigma coding machine in the German Armistice Commission; it was hurried back to Bletchley Park, Britain's top-secret decoding facility.

In addition, about two tons of documents were scooped up and flown to Gibraltar and then on to England. These finds completely justified 30AU—and Godfrey's and Fleming's faith in the unit.

The men returned from North Africa to find they had now been designated 30 Commando, and they had a new headquarters at Amersham, Buckinghamshire. They were reorganized into three troops: Naval, Military, and Technical—the later composed of RNVR officers, specialists in mines and torpedoes, submarines, radar, and secret documents.

The next big mission for 30AU was Operation Husky—the invasion of Sicily. On July 9-10, 1943, they landed on the island near Cape Passero along with the British Eighth Army's XXX Corps, under General Bernard L. Montgomery. One of their first objectives was the German coastal radar.

After overcoming the German machine-gun positions guarding the coastwatcher installation, and assisted by 20mm Oerlikons firing from their LST plus their own small arms, they found no wounded or any survivors. But many of the station's Kriegsmarine crew had been killed. Unfortunately, the radar set had also been destroyed. However, radar manuals were found on the body of a German naval lieutenant.

Lieutenant Commander Jim "Sancho" Glanville recalled, "We also found a copy of the handbook of the Telefunken T39 series of radar sets, designated the 'Würzburg,' and including the 'firebowl' for fighter and anti-aircraft gun control."

Farther along the coast, another section captured an Italian RDF station where ciphers used by the Italian Air Force homing beacons were obtained. These and other documents were hurried back to Malta where the RAF started using the homing beacons themselves.

In Augusta, Sicily, another Enigma machine and acoustic instruments were grabbed along with Italian naval documents hidden in the caves at Melilli, where a cache of sea mines was also discovered. The 30AU had become a law unto themselves and, after some Marines took a fire engine and converted it for their own use, Major Humphrey Quill, Royal Marines, who commanded a detachment on Sicily, was summoned to Malta to explain their actions to Admiral Andrew Cunningham, the commander-in-chief.

However, the unit kept securing important finds. In the naval base at Trapani, Glanville and his Marines captured the stores and maintenance departments intact. Marine K.A. "Jock" Finlayson helped Lt. Cmdr. Lincoln defuse dozens of sea mines. "All afternoon I was assisting him getting bits off, and quite petrified, my vivid imagination expecting booby-traps or time pencils blowing us and Trapani sky high," Finlayson said.

After Sicily came the invasion of mainland Italy. The 30AU landed at Salerno on September 9, but by the time they reached the enemy's naval headquarters they found it had already been destroyed along with all the documents. Three days later, after receiving reports of enemy radio signals coming from Capri, a section landed on the island. They were met by the town band at Marina Grande playing "It's a Long Way to Tipperary."

Lieutenant Commander Quintin T.P.M. Riley led this detachment; Glanville was his second in command, and there were 15 other ranks. They found out from the mayor (who wore "a grey top hat" and Glanville thought looked like "a character in Alice in Wonderland") that there was a force of 36 Italian soldiers holding a fort in the central town of Anacapri. Commandeering a truck the next day, the commandos made their way to the town early in the morning and took the garrison by surprise; again a wealth of material was obtained.

The unit was also engaged in various operations around the Bay of Naples. In a night raid right under the noses of the Germans, they removed the Italian Admiral Eugenio Minisini and his wife from the torpedo works on the Baia Peninsula and took

the couple to Capri. There the admiral was interrogated and supplied a great deal of information on the whereabouts of documents on torpedo and submarine research.

John Steinbeck, then a war correspondent for the *New York Herald Tribune,* sent a dispatch dated October 15, 1943, titled "The Lady Packs," recording his impressions of the "celebrated commandos"

"Suddenly, there was an explosion like a bomb-blast immediately above us," Dalzel-Job said, "followed by a peculiar fluttering noise in the air. For a while nothing else happened; then the whole field was lit by sharp flashes and explosions, like heavy machine cannons firing sporadically around us. The explosions did not last more than half a minute. In that time, the unit lost 30 percent of its strength in killed and wounded."

whom he found to be "very strange men." Wearing boots "with thick rubber soles, which looked far too large for them. They were dressed in faded shorts and open shirts, and their arms were an old-fashioned revolver, and a long wicked knife each."

It seems Steinbeck got mixed up between operations, for the rescue of Admiral Minisini took place with a LCI (Landing Craft, Infantry) towing a whaler to ensure a silent landing, whereas he cites an MTB (motor torpedo boat). And the commandos had no trouble that night but he indicates they disposed of eight guards with their wicked "long, thin knifes."

Another sub unit, 34 Army Troop, took part in the ill-fated Leros campaign in the eatern Mediterranean. On October 5, 1943, Captain Tom Belcher of the Staffordshire Regiment and four other men were killed when they were bombed by enemy aircraft. By now the focus had shifted to France and the expected invasion, but 30AU would maintain a small unit in Italy as the Allies advanced north.

There was a power struggle now over who should control the unit and what it should become. Colonel Robert Neville of Combined Operations had gone to Italy to inspect 30AU and expressed the opinion the unit should become part of the Royal Marines. Fleming argued it never was or had been intended to be a commando unit. It was too small, rarely exceeding 120 men, whereas a commando unit was around 600 men. Its task was intelligence gathering in which it had excelled and should be part of the Naval Intelligence Division.

Fleming won the argument. It was reorganized into three troops and redesignated A, B, and X, with its new base at Littlehampton on the south coast. All the fighting men were now Royal Marines, and the new commander was Lt. Col. Arthur Woolley, RM; the intelligence gatherers were mainly RNVR officers.

The 30AU became part of Naval Intelligence as NID30, with its own office at the Admiralty. After his return from Italy, Lt. Cmdr. Glanville recalled being told by Fleming that the unit needed to shape up: "You can't behave like 'Red Indians' anymore. You have to learn to be a respected and disciplined unit." But the desk-bound Fleming liked to hear the stories of their adventures—some of which would find their way into the James Bond books.

The Channel-crossing phase of the Normandy invasion, code named "Neptune," was a huge undertaking, with 30AU, which was split into three sections, playing only a tiny part. The first 30AU group to land on Juno Beach was X Troop led by Captain Geoff Pike, RM, with their target the radar station at Douvres-la-Delivrande. Second to land was "Curtforce," led by Dunstan Curtis with 21 men; they landed on Gold Beach on D+1. The main body, under Lt. Col. Woolley, landed on Utah Beach on D+4, their target being Cherbourg.

At 8:35 AM on June 6, X Troop was ashore on the Nan Red sector of Juno Beach. On the run-in to the beach, Captain Pike wondered about his "capacity to take it, knowing half my troops had been under fire and I had not." Jim Glanville was beside him, and Pike was heartened by his cool demeanor: "He never seemed to be frightened—just interested in what was going on."

Their landing went well, with water only coming up to their knees as they raced through the surf to the nearest cover under the promenade along the front. The unit next to them on the left, 48 Commando, was attracting all the fire.

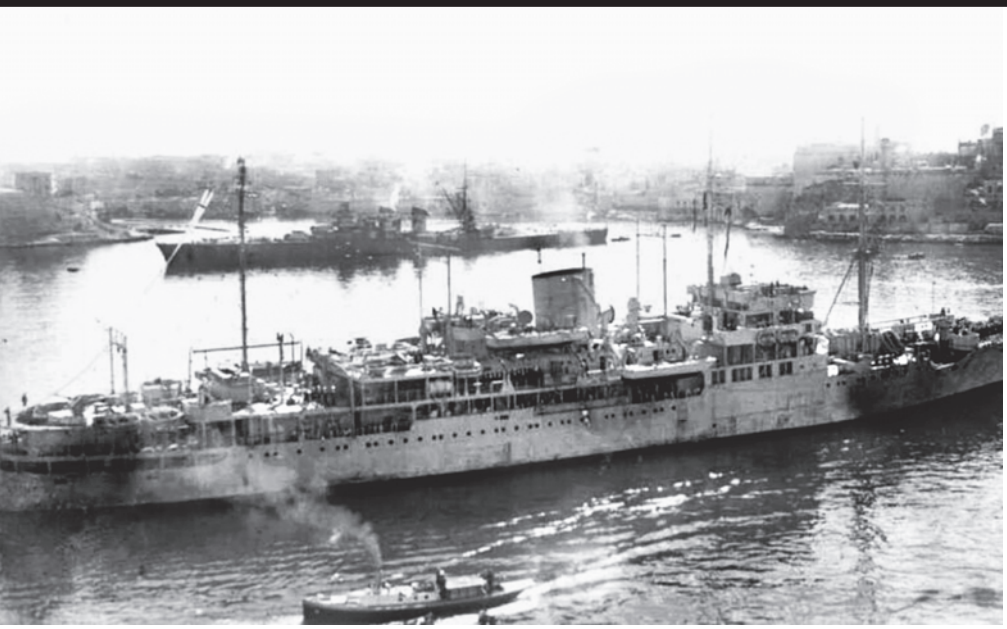
The 30AU moved off the beach at 9:45 AM without losing a man. X Troop spent most of that first night in some German trenches before they arrived at the radar station; its 130-foot tower had been damaged by the naval bombardment, but much of the station was underground and protected by barbed wire and minefields. It was too hard a nut for the unit to crack alone.

Four days later, Lt. Cmdr. Patrick Dalzel-Job landed at Utah Beach with the main body. They found it difficult to move inland with their own vehicles past the masses of American troops, so an hour after dark they halted near Ste.-Mère-église for the night. There were no orders to dig in, but some men did. Almost all the aircraft they had seen that day were Allied, so they paid little attention when they heard aircraft low overhead.

"Suddenly, there was an explosion like a bomb-blast immediately above us," Dalzel-Job said, "followed by a peculiar fluttering noise in the air. For a while nothing else happened; then the whole field was lit by sharp flashes and explosions, like heavy machine cannons firing sporadically around us. The explosions did not last more than half a minute. In that time, the unit lost 30 percent of its strength in killed and wounded."

They had been hit by an early type of cluster bomb called a "butterfly bomb" because

Both: Imperial War Museum



ABOVE: Accompanied by U.S. troops, 30 AU arrived at Algiers in North Africa aboard HMS *Bulolo*, a converted passenger liner, as part of Operation Torch, November 9, 1942. BELOW: Royal Marine Commandos, some with blackened faces, pose with a captured German soldier who appears glad to be out of the fighting in Italy.

the grenade-size bombs fluttered down to land before exploding. The 30AU suffered three men killed and 21 wounded, some seriously.

Paul McGrath, now a sergeant, led a section that pushed 15 miles beyond the American bridgehead at Omaha Beach, looking for possible V-1 rocket launch sites; Flight Lieutenant David Nutting was the air technical officer who went with them. They found one site near Neuilly-la-Fôret. Dalzel-Job described it as having a "'J' concrete runway, and all around were scattered hurriedly abandoned German equipment and belongings." The next day, the first of over 8,000 V-1 flying bombs that were launched before the end of the war were fired at London.

There were hundreds of German troops inside the Douvres-la-Delivrande radar station, and the siege lasted a week. They had been bombarded by naval guns and aircraft and field artillery, and the station finally fell after a textbook attack by 41 Commando.

By then there were only a handful of men from 30AU there under Lt. Cmdr. Glanville; most of X Troop had rejoined the main body. When he got into the station, Glanville was exasperated at the amount of looting that had gone on, with many of the culprits being officers. The haul was small—only some wheels from an Enigma machine and a used cryptographer's pad.

Part of Curtforce—with Lieutenants Guy Postlethwait and Tony Hugill (both RNVR) and 19 Marines—had better luck. They had landed at D+2 at Arromanches before moving west toward Port-en-Bessin. On the way they overran a radar station and hit the jackpot. It was taken intact, with a top-secret listing of all German radar installations in northwestern Europe, along with all the technical data on wavelengths, polarization, pulse repetition frequency, and aerial display. Once back with the Admiralty, this trove was regarded as the most important radar intelligence seized during the war, and within 36 hours all German radar in that group had been jammed.

The 30AU were often right up with the forward troops in the advance, and for

such a small unit they often achieved startling results by bluff and guile.

Such was the case with the radar station near Saint Pabu. French civilians told Tony Hugill that 1,500 Germans were there. After they went to take a look, Hugill decided to try and bluff them into surrendering by pretending that his was a bigger force. Given that the Germans were surrounded by a hostile population bent on revenge, they might be inclined to surrender to regular Allied troops.

Hugill, Sergeant McGrath, and Marine Sandy Powell went forward under a white flag; it was a 300-yard nervous walk out in the open to the station's gates. The guards called for the commandant, a Luftwaffe officer, who was found after five minutes; he was accompanied by 10 armed guards and four officers. Hugill asked him in good German to surrender. He refused, not wanting to surrender to such a small force. Hugill shrugged his shoulders, saying he represented a larger force of Americans—not that it mattered much, as they would be calling for an air bombardment in less than half an hour.

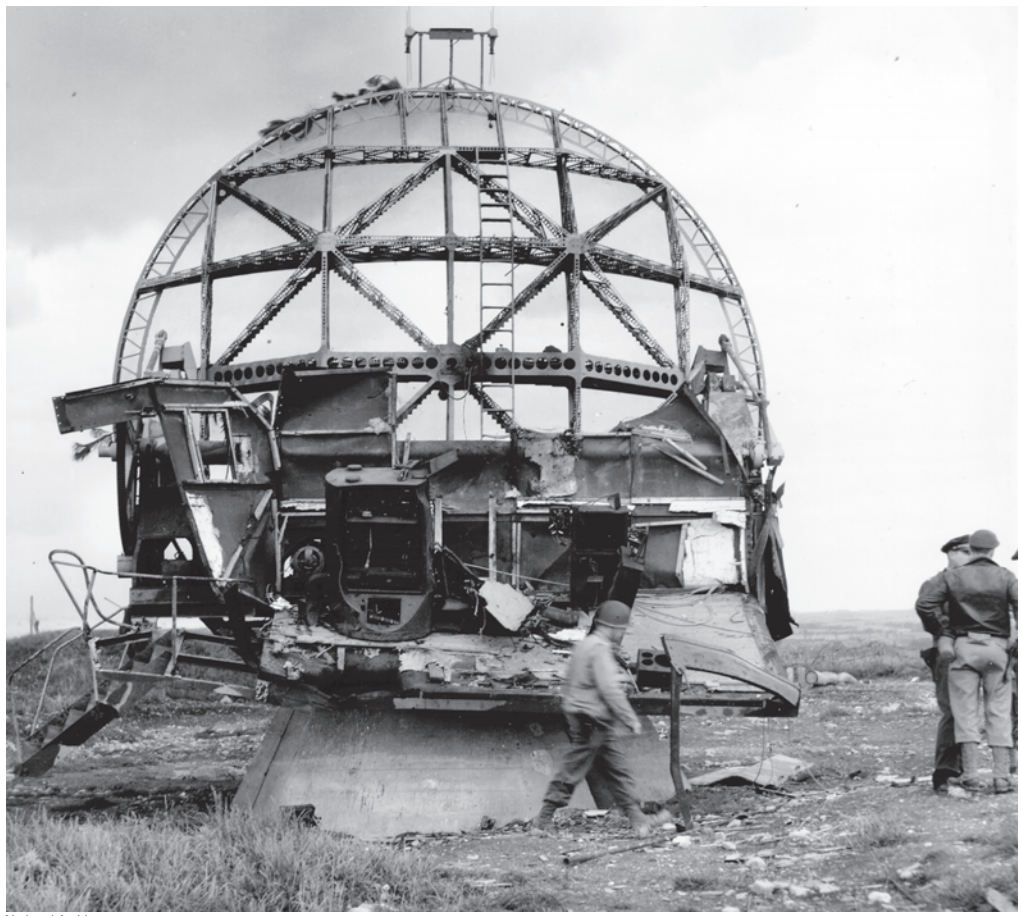
Some firing started then. To stop it, McGrath climbed on top of a blockhouse, signaling a cease-fire. By the time the Americans arrived, the Germans had surrendered. Hugill was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross and McGrath and Powell Distinguished Service Medals.

While bold, this approach was risky. On September 12, Herbert Huntington-Whiteley RM, by then a captain, was killed at Le Havre while trying to talk the Germans into surrendering under a white flag. Along with the German officers, he was gunned down by some hard-line Nazis. He was 24 and had led the first AU troop at Dieppe, and in May 1944 he had received a mention in dispatches for "good services in the Mediterranean."

By the time of the final push into Germany, 30AU had grown to 25 officers—half of whom were Royal Navy—and up to 300 men, mostly Royal Marines. They worked largely in teams of 30 with eight vehicles. They were among the first Allied troops to cross the Rhine. Colonel

Imperial War Museum

ABOVE: Follow-on troops of the Royal Marine Commandos, lugging their equipment, come ashore at Juno Beach, Normandy. BELOW: Americans inspect the damaged German radar facility at Douvres-la-Delivrande that was captured by British Commandos, including men from 30 AU.



National Archives

Humphrey Quill now commanded the unit.

Ian Fleming had drawn up a list of objectives, one of the main ones being the advanced U-boats built and designed at Kiel; 30AU were the first Allied troops to enter the port city. Much evidence was found about the fast type XVII U-boats known as "Walterboats," named after the hydrogen peroxide drive system designed by Dr. Hellmuth Walter.

In Hamburg, I.G. Aulen, known as "Jan"—then a commander serving with 30AU—came across two of the "Walterboats" that had been heavily damaged by bombs lying on the jetty. They resembled "a gigantic fish rather than a conventional submarine … an immediate clue to unusual speed." However, on closer inspection it was found that many of the more vital parts had been removed.

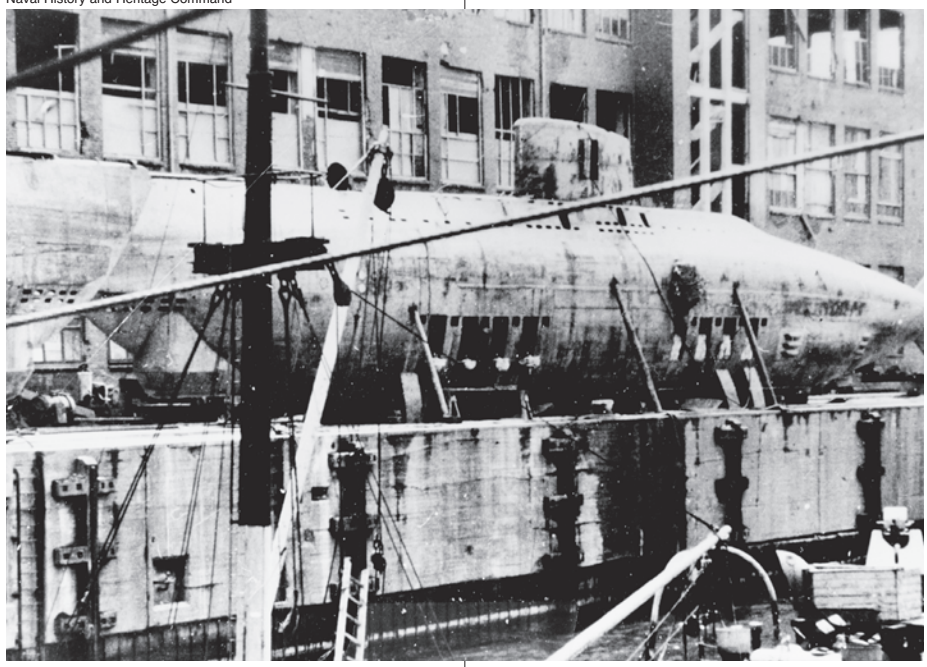
In Kiel, Dr. Walter was captured. He would reveal nothing and confessed to being a loyal Nazi. Colonel Quill rushed off to Admiral Karl Dönitz's headquarters, where he obtained written orders from the admiral, the last leader of the Third Reich, that nothing was to be withheld from 30AU. Walter then cooperated fully, getting submarine tests, various torpedoes, aircraft jet engines, and -1 launch ramps ready to demonstrate for Allied VIPs.

Also on Fleming's list was the German one-man submarine. Admiral Bertram Ramsay, who by then had 30AU within his overall command, doubted such a vessel existed. Commander Ralph Izzard found one washed up near Walcheren. He put it on a tank transporter and took it to Ramsay's headquarters.

Upon seeing it, the admiral still had reservations that it would ever be used, dismissing it as just "a toy." Izzard suggested he look down the periscope, which he did, only to be met by the gaze of a dead German's eyes in his bloated corpse at the other end, encased in his steel tomb.

With the items on Fleming's black list nearly fulfilled, he got in on the hunt himself. Jim Glanville had come across evidence of the German Naval Intelligence archives that were located in the Tambach castle in the Bavarian Alps and, with a small team, he set out to find them.

Naval History and Heritage Command



Near Walcheren, Holland, the men of 30 AU discovered this German "Walterboat"—a submarine powered by Dr. Hellmuth Walter's hydrogen peroxide drive system.

The journey was difficult because of damaged bridges and wrecked roads. "The whole area was in a state of chaos," Fleming wrote, "with SS units fighting it out, Wehrmacht fighting or surrendering, and with bands of escaped POWs, mainly Russians and Poles, roaming the countryside, or deserters from the German Army."

Reaching the castle they were confronted by a German sailor who surrendered when challenged by a Marine's tommy gun. World War I veteran Admiral Walter Gladisch commanded the post, and he was delighted to see Glanville and his men. He had been ordered by Dönitz to hand over the archives to the Allies. He had doubted his ability to comply because of SS bands nearby and even some of his own staff who wanted to destroy the records.

Concerned about the fate of the records, Fleming arrived at the castle, which he described as "Cold. Dismal. Comfortless. Ghastly. Count Dracula stuff," although he found the old admiral "quite helpful."

The entire archives were brought in a convoy of three-ton trucks to Hamburg, from where they were loaded onto a fishery protection trawler for the voyage to London. Later, Fleming admitted he enjoyed his trip to Germany. With the war almost over, he felt that his creation, 30AU, when compared to others serving at the front, had "enjoyed a far more light-hearted war," although the unit in its "sharper moments had lost too many men," which he bitterly regretted.

In 1946, 30AU was disbanded. In 2010, the Royal Marines formed "30 Commando Information Exploitation Group," which carries the history of 30 Assault Unit. Three years later, 30 Commando IEX was granted the "Freedom of Littlehampton" in honor of the original unit being based in the town. Such a distinction is an ancient honor granted to military organizations that allows them the privilege of marching into a city "with drums beating, colors flying, and bayonets fixed."

Many of the exploits and adventures of 30AU would find their way into Fleming's 007 books, starting with the first, *Casino Royale,* in 1953. □

JAPAN'S HELLISH UNIT 731

BY DAVID D. BARRETT

THE FINAL MONTHS of World War II saw the liberation of hundreds of ghastly concentration camps and the awful reality of Nazi racism. For more than seven decades those atrocities, including the use of human beings for medical experiments, have been common knowledge. Far less known is the wholesale slaughter of hundreds of thousands of Chinese by a Japanese organization known as Unit 731.

Established for the purpose of developing biological and chemical weapons, Unit 731 exceeded by a year the duration of the Third Reich. While biological and chemical weapons were not new to warfare, Japanese testing on human subjects was unparalleled even by the Nazis.

What makes this descent into barbarity all the more stunning was the Japanese contribution to medical science just three decades earlier. A U.S. Army doctor named Lewis Livingston Seaman observed colleagues who were attending to the Imperial Japanese Army (IJA) during the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905).

Dr. Seaman came away from his experience profoundly impressed with his medical brethren, stating, "The history of warfare for centuries has proven that in prolonged campaigns the first, or actual enemy, kills 20 percent of the total mortality in the conflict, whilst the second, or silent enemy (disease), kills 80 percent.

"I unhesitatingly assert that the greatest conquest of Japan has been in the humanities of war, in the stopping of the needless sacrifice of life through preventable disease. Japan is the first country in the world to recognize that the greatest enemy in war is not the opposing army, but a foe more treacherous and dangerous—preventable disease, as found lurking in every camp—whose fatalities in every great war of history have numbered from four to twenty times as many as those of mines, bullets, and shells.

"It is against this enemy that Japan, with triumphant exaltation, may cry Banzai. For it is against this enemy that she has attained her most signal victories…."

Twenty years later, Japan signed the Geneva Convention, which prohibited biological and chemical warfare. But where other men reasoned with justification that these kinds of weapons should be banned by civilized nations, another man, a specialist in bacteria and related fields, Dr. (Colonel) Shiro Ishii, saw the prohibition as an opportunity.

He reasoned that if something were bad enough to be outlawed, then it must certainly be effective, and he began a sustained effort to establish a military arm within the Japanese Army whose aim would be the development of weapons based on biology. Ishii was highly intelligent but arrogant, merciless, and immoral.

He thought of himself beyond reproach and as a visionary. He was driven to break new scientific ground and to help Japan defeat its foes. In his quest to contribute to that effort, Ishii in time exhorted his team of physicians to violate the physicians' ethical code: "A doctor's God-given mission is to challenge all varieties of disease-causing micro-organisms; to block all roads of intrusion into the human body; to annihilate all foreign matter resident in our bodies; and to devise the most expeditious treatment possible....

"However, the research we are now about to embark is the complete opposite of these principles, and may cause us some anguish as doctors. We pursue this research for the double medical thrill; as a scientist ... probing to discover the truth in natural science; and as a military person, to build a powerful military weapon against the enemy."

To convince the senior levels of the Imperial Army to back his efforts, Ishii built his case around financial considerations, completely skirting either Japan's obligation to the world community as a signatory of the aforementioned 1925 Geneva Convention or the morality of using such weapons. Ishii argued that compared with the costs of building, manning, and maintaining huge conventional forces, bacteria and gas were a far less expensive alternative.

By 1930, nationalism burned hotter than ever in Japan and created a climate receptive to Ishii's ideas of developing biological weapons. In September 1931, Japanese forces instigated the "Mukden Incident." The pitched battle between Japanese and Chinese forces was actually no more than a Japanese ruse used to justify a complete takeover of Manchuria.

Moreover, the area became the perfect place to develop and test Ishii's new biological and chemical weapons, a place where he would be free to conduct any kind of experiment he deemed beneficial.

The following year, under the cover of the euphemistically named Epidemic Prevention Research Laboratory, Ishii set up shop in the Army's hospital in Tokyo. The location was only temporary because, to accomplish his objectives, he would need access to far greater resources; Japanese ascendancy in Manchuria provided its medical community unprecedented opportunities for research (much as the Germans used concentration camps and their prisoners for their own medical and pseudo-scientific research).

Ishii's goal of turning bacteria and gas into weapons for the Imperial Japanese Army required comprehensive study, and he believed animals could not supply usable data. Japan's control over Manchuria delivered research materials in the form of people who

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In conquered Manchuria, ghastly experiments were fiendishly conducted on human guinea pigs.

Unit 731 was created to develop chemical and biological weapons. Here, members of the unit conduct an experiment on a helpless prisoner in conquered Manchuria. The brutality of Unit 731 equaled the crimes against humanity committed by the Nazis.

were plucked from the streets and locked into black vans known as *voronki* (ravens), to be carried off to the waiting prison cells of Unit 731.

Japan's Kempeitai, the military police arm of the IJA from 1881 to 1945, was tasked with these kidnappings. The Kempeitai was less a conventional military police body than a secret police force akin to the Gestapo. Headed in Manchuria by Hideki Tojo, from 1935 to 1937, the Kempeitai's cruelty was notorious in occupied territories. (See *WWII Quarterly,* Fall 2011). After the war, the U.S. Army estimated it numbered 36,000 regular members.

Anxious to take operations to the next level, in 1932 Dr. Ishii chose the city of Harbin, capital of Heilongjiang Province in southwest Manchuria, as the site of Unit 731's first biological and chemical weapons facility. The original buildout covered a 500-square-meter area and was designated a restricted military zone. A tract of land to the south of the sector was appropriated and made into an airport. It and a nearby rail line were also used to move victims to Unit 731 and transport results and specimens back to Japan's medical community.

Japan's medical institutions enabled the work of Unit 731 by supplying Dr. Ishii with top Japanese scientists and physicians who would be labeled *Hikokumin* (traitors) if they refused to take part. Most medical professionals saw their work as noble service to the Emperor; the fact that they were killing non-Japanese meant nothing to them.

Unit 731 received state-of-the-art equipment and a nearly unlimited supply of funds from the Japanese government. Even for reluctant researchers Ishii's factories were luxurious. The annual budget for Unit 731 was ten million yen (about nine billion yen in the modern currency, or about $86 million). Salaries were very generous, and the food was exceptional.

Precipitated by an escape attempt by 40 prisoners, all of whom were captured and killed, the Harbin operation was closed and moved to the Harbin suburb of Ping Fang in 1936. This complex was a sprawling walled city of more than 70 buildings that dwarfed its predecessor in Harbin. The perimeter at Ping Fang incorporated more than six square kilometers and rivaled Auschwitz-Birkenau in size. Tucked away inside the administration building was a prison that housed 500 men, women, and children selected for vivisection.

As immense as Ping Fang was, Unit 731 also had affiliated locations in Nanking (Unit 1644), Beijing (Unit 1855), and Changchun (Unit 100). Altogether there were 26 known killing laboratories, experimental detachments, and battalions of the Army spread across occupied lands in Asia. The total number of personnel involved reached some 20,000. All units and facilities were coordinated by the Epidemic Prevention Research Laboratory under the control of Colonel Ishii.

The research was made available not just to the Army hospital in Manchuria, but to doctors and educators throughout Japan. In this way, Unit 731 was performing the service of human experimentation for the entire Japanese medical community, in an ongoing feedback loop. "Medicine itself must become a weapon," said Nakagawa Yonezo, Professor Emeritus at Osaka University.

The gruesome professionalism of Unit 731 included a touch of sardonic humor. The construction of the Ping Fang installation prompted locals to ask what it was. The answer was a "lumber mill." Regarding this reply, one of the researchers joked privately, "and the people are the logs."

From then on, the Japanese term for log, *Maruta,* was used to speak of the prisoners whose last days were spent being infected with lethal pathogens, torn apart, frozen, or gassed by Japanese researchers. The expression indicates a degree of racism far beyond disdain; it is evidence of a belief that torturing the Chinese was of no more consequence than squashing a bug.

As noted earlier, the primary objective of Ishii and Unit 731 was the creation of biological and chemical weapons. To facilitate that end, wholesale human experimentation was utilized, including the vivisection of thousands of people. The justification for performing all these surgeries came from the expectation that human tests would create better weapons.

Doctors in Unit 731 examined the first stages of disease on organs. A former member of Unit 731 described the process: "As soon as symptoms were observed, the prisoners were taken from their cells and into the dissection room, he was stripped and

Bundesarchiv Bild

Alamy

placed on a table, screaming, trying to fight back. He was strapped down, still screaming frightfully. One of the doctors stuffed a towel into his mouth, then with one quick slice of the scalpel he was opened up." Witnesses reported that, without anesthesia, the victims let out horrible screams when the first cut was made and that the cries stopped soon thereafter.

A doctor at Ping Fang testified to a time when he was working on a pregnant female victim who awoke from anesthesia while being vivisected. The woman said, "It's all right to kill me, but please spare my child's life." It is likely that more than one mother voiced, as a last wish on the vivisection table, the wish to let her child live. None ever did. The researchers wanted their data.

As ghastly as these procedures were, vivisections were not limited to weapons development, but fell into four categories: (1) intentional infection of diseases, (2) training newly employed army surgeons, (3) trials of nonstandardized treatments, and (4) discovering the limits of human tolerance to pain and stress.

Under the auspices of weapons development and intentional infection of diseases, prisoners were injected with various biological agents including plague, typhus, cholera, anthrax, and syphilis.

To test the effectiveness of dispersion methods for military purposes, victims were staked to crosses with their vital organs and heads protected. Various types of bombs and agents were then dropped or sprayed from specially modified planes to test the survivability of the agents and their ability to infect the subjects. Community water and food sources were also contaminated. To determine the results, mobile vivisection units were set up in the field near the infected communities.

AKG Images

ABOVE: Chinese children were subjected to plaque-prevention experiments by Unit 731. Other experiments involved typhus, anthrax, cholera, TB, encephalitis, and more. LEFT: Japanese microbiologist Dr. Shiro Ishii, head of Unit 731. OPPOSITE: Japanese soldiers guard Chinese prisoners during the invasion of Manchuria, September 1931. Many prisoners of war, as well as civilians, were used as subjects in the horrific experiments.

The Imperial Japanese Army also allowed its physicians to perform vivisections on living subjects to train them in the treatment of battle wounds—procedures that are too gruesome to describe in detail.

Tests that could have real medical value were also conducted, such as finding the best method to deal with frostbite. But even here Japanese doctors chose to perform the experiments in the most merciless ways possible.

Conventional weapons tests were also carried out. Victims were tied to stakes and used to determine the operational range of flamethrowers, grenades, and various kinds of shells and bombs.

But this was hardly the extent of the tests to which the prisoners were subjected. Sheldon Harris, author of *Factories of Death*, stated, "They just killed people with no inherent purpose other than to see how they reacted to being killed." People were locked into high-pressure chambers until their eyes popped out, or they were put into centrifuges and spun to death.

Other experiments involved hanging prisoners upside down to discover how long it took for them to choke to death or injecting air into their arteries to test for the onset of embolisms. Another test consisted of taking blood samples, at least 500 cm^3 (slightly more than a pint) at two- to three-day intervals. Some victims became debilitated; still, the blood drainage continued.

When the human guinea pigs could no longer serve as lab material, they were abused in various manners: injected with poison, killed for their vital organs (brains, lungs, or liver), subjected to violent surgeries (e.g., amputation and reattachment of the limbs to the opposite sides of the body, resection of the stomach to attach the esophagus to the intestines). Electrical shocks were administered until the person slowly roasted to death.

Some experiments had no medical purpose whatsoever except the administering of indescribable pain, such as injecting horse urine into prisoners' kidneys. The doctors of Unit 731, like the Nazi doctors

at Dachau and Buchenwald, indulged any perversion they could imagine.

In 1938 and 1939, the Soviet and Japanese Armies clashed in two encounters near the border of Mongolia and Manchuria. The 1939 summer battle, known as the Nomonhan Incident and the Battle of Kalhin Gol by the Soviets, resulted in the overwhelming defeat of the Japanese Kwantung Army by Stalin's Red Army.

The clash saw the first field operation of Japan's biological warfare unit; it occurred in a desert region where water was scarce. To disable their Russian foes, the Japanese dumped large quantities of intestinal typhoid bacteria into the river.

Fortunately for the Russians, this type of typhoid germ became ineffective almost immediately after hitting the water. The contamination was probably initiated more for the publicity than anything else, as Ishii likely knew it would not work.

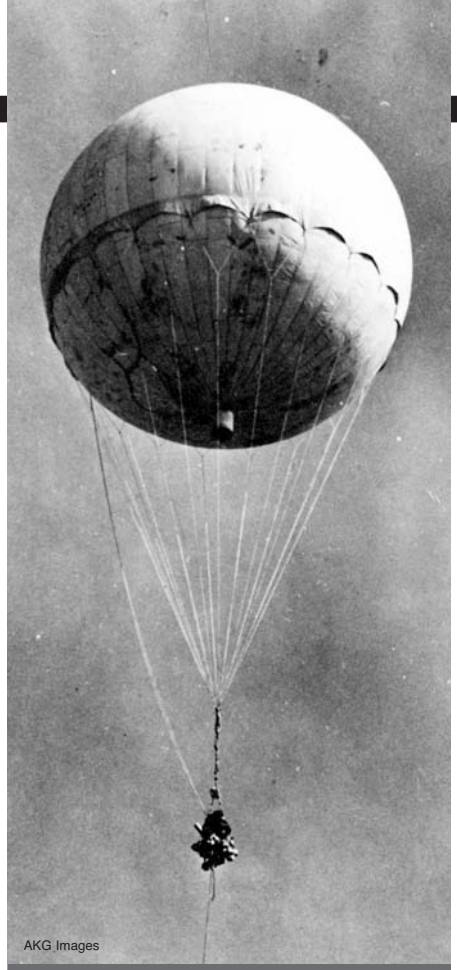
In 1940, Japanese planes dropped wheat, corn, rags, and cotton infested with bubonic plague on the unarmed village of Ningbo, China. More than 100 people died within a few days of the attack.

Two years later, the Japanese conducted a second attack in the same area. Japanese researchers took over a house on top of a hill about a kilometer away from the infected zone to use as a vivisection laboratory. As a result of the attacks, the Ningbo region remained sealed off until the 1960s.

During the siege of Bataan in the Philippines in March 1942, the Japanese planned to release 200 pounds of plague-carrying fleas—about 150 million insects—in each of 10 separate attacks. However, by the time the assault was ready the battle had already ended.

In June-July 1944, during the Battle of Saipan, plague-infested fleas were again to be used against U.S. forces. Fortuitously for the Americans, by this stage in the war it had become almost impossible for the Japanese to get any reinforcements and or matériel to its island bastions, and the Japanese submarine carrying the fleas was sunk en route.

For the Battle of Iwo Jima, February-March 1945, another biological attack was to be carried out against the invading Americans. Two gliders loaded with pathogens were to be towed over the battlefield and released. The gliders never reached their destination.



AKG Images

Japan employed 9,000 incendiary balloon bombs, known as *fugo,* in an attempt to bombard North America. Biological attacks on California were planned but never carried out. OPPOSITE: A recent photo of fog-shrouded building on the site of the Unit 731 bioweapon facility at Ping Fang. Today it is part of a museum and memorial to the victims.

One of the least known Japanese efforts to attack Canada and the continental United States occurred in late 1944 and the spring of 1945. Records uncovered in Japan after the war indicated that about 9,000 balloon bombs, known as *fugo,* and carrying incendiary bombs, were launched into the jet stream during this period. More than 200 ultimately reached the United States. Six people were killed in Oregon when a bomb detonated on discovery. Before Japan surrendered, Ishii and Army leaders proposed using balloon bombs filled with cattle plague and anthrax.

As part of Japan's defense of Okinawa in the spring of 1945, Unit 731 had developed plans to meet the American invaders with plague bacteria. The attacks were never carried out because once again fleas carrying the plague could not be delivered to the island. The native Okinawan population only learned of this plan in 1994.

Operation PX, aka Cherry Blossoms at Night, were the codenames for the Japanese plan for a biological attack on cities in southern California. The plan was completed March 26, 1945, and scheduled for September 22, 1945, but was abandoned due to the strong opposition of Army Chief of Staff General Yoshijiro Umezu, who was also a member of Prime Minister Suzuki's war cabinet.

The plan involved the use of five I-400 submarine aircraft carriers, each carrying three Aichi M6A Seiran floatplanes launched against San Diego, Los Angeles, and/or San Francisco. The aircraft were to spread bubonic plague, cholera, typhus, and dengue fever over the city, while the submarine crews infected themselves and ran ashore in a vast suicide mission.

Even after surrender, the Japanese considered a final use of biological weapons. Ishii wanted to stage suicide germ attacks against occupying U.S. troops in Japan. This planned attack never took place, once again due to opposition from General Umezu and Vice Chief of the Imperial Japanese Army General Staff, General Torashiro Kawabe, who claimed that he did not want Ishii to die in a suicide attack.

Almost as soon at World War II ended, a new Cold War began between the United States and the Soviet Union. In this atmosphere, Lt. Col. Murray Sanders of the United States Army recommended to General Douglas MacArthur and President Harry Truman in the fall of 1945 that Ishii and his subordinates be given immunity from prosecution as war criminals in return for Unit 731's research.

MacArthur and Truman approved the deal, and Japan's biological and chemical weapons program remained largely a secret until the 1990s.

EPILOGUE

From start to finish, the highest levels of the Japanese government and military were involved in Unit 731. Hideki Tojo, head of the Kempeitai in Manchuria from 1935 to 1937, became Japan's longest serving prime minister in World War II, from October 18, 1941, to July 22, 1944. Tojo approved the attack on Pearl Harbor and was tried as a Class A war criminal and hanged in 1948.

General Yoshijiro Umezu, who served as the Army's chief of staff, was a member of the elite war cabinet that held the reins of power in Japan from April 1945 until it surrendered to Allied forces on September 2, 1945. According to Lt. Gen. Kajitsuka Ryuji of the Japanese Medical Service and former Chief of the Medical Administration for the massive Kwantung Army (located in Manchuria), Ishii was given permission to begin the Ping Fang experiment in 1936 by "command of the Emperor."

At some point in 1939-1940, Hirohito issued still another decree recognizing Ishii's unit for its service. Moreover, the Emperor's younger brother toured Unit 731's facilities during its time of operation.

Unit 731 was extremely well funded, with state-of-the-art facilities, generously staffed with the cream of Japan's medical community, and routinely communicated with the medical establishment back in Japan—which even provided suggestions for experiments and regularly received human samples.

The vast majority of Ishii's staff walked away from their wartime service scot free. Information turned over to the United States proved worthless to the American biological weapons program, as the vivisection of human beings did not yield better scientific data.

Immune from prosecution as war criminals, many of Unit 731's doctors went on to prominent careers in universities, hospitals, and industry, rising to positions that included governor of Tokyo, president of the Japanese Medical Association, and head of the Japanese Olympic Committee. The ringleader, Dr. Shiro Ishii, quietly returned to private practice and died in 1959 of throat cancer at the age of 67.

The Soviet Union was the only government to bring anyone associated with Unit 731 to trial. In late December 1949, in Khabarovsk, Russia, 12 former physicians, officers, and staff were accused of manufacturing biological and chemical weapons. While there was some coverage in the American press, the United States government, keen on protecting its secret deal, labeled the proceedings just another Soviet show trial.

It would take nearly 50 years before the infamy of Unit 731 came to light in the United States. Unlike the Nuremberg and Tokyo trials, in which high-ranking German and Japanese officials were hanged or sentenced to life in prison, the Khabarovsk trials saw no sentence exceed 25 years—with some as short as two. All of the defendants were quietly freed and slipped back to Japan by 1956.

In 1998, more than 100 Chinese plaintiffs filed suit in Japan in an effort to get the Japanese government to acknowledge the crimes of Unit 731 and to obtain reparations for the victims and their families. Mere months before the trial began, the Japanese Education Ministry approved a textbook glossing over the Imperial Japanese Army's culpability.

The Tokyo District Court's ruling, coming on August 28, 2002, accepted that Unit 731 had waged germ warfare in China and caused harm to residents but dismissed the Chinese plaintiffs' claim for compensation. Nevertheless, it was the first time a Japanese court admitted that the Imperial Army had used biological weapons during its war with China from 1932-1945.

Judge Iwata said in handing down the ruling, "The evidence shows that Japanese troops, including those from Unit 731, used bacteriological weapons under the

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JUDGE IWATA SAID IN HANDING DOWN THE RULING, "THE EVIDENCE SHOWS THAT JAPANESE TROOPS, INCLUDING THOSE FROM UNIT 731, USED BACTERIOLOGICAL WEAPONS UNDER THE ORDER OF THE IMPERIAL JAPANESE ARMY'S HEADQUARTERS AND THAT MANY LOCAL RESIDENTS DIED."

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Clarence M. "Monty" Rincker was born in Cheyenne, Wyoming, on September 8, 1922. When he was a year old, his parents bought a farm in eastern Wyoming and the family moved there. When World War II broke out, Monty Rincker enlisted in the U.S. Army Reserve while attending the University of Wyoming. He was called to active duty and reported to Fort Benning, Georgia, to attend OCS (Officer Candidate School) for 13 weeks. Unfortunately, Rincker washed out and did not receive a commission. He was then assigned to Company H (Heavy Weapons), 397th Infantry Regiment, 100th Infantry Division, which was then in training at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. This is his story.

TOO MANY CLOSE CALLS

A mortarman with the 100th Infantry Division describes life—and death—on the front lines in France and Germany. BY FLINT WHITLOCK

"On May 11, 1944, I started taking basic training all over again," Monty Rincker grumbled. "I had had over a year of infantry training with every weapon they used, not counting the three years of ROTC training. But many of the new fellows in Company H had received little, if any, infantry training, thus they had to be trained."

He also soon discovered to his dismay that there was little opportunity for advancement because "all the officers and noncommissioned officers were longtime members of the 100th Division" and there were no open slots.

For the next several weeks, it was all hard work: 25-mile marches, endless calisthenics, long days on the rifle range or training with 81mm mortars; Rincker became a mortarman, 1st Class. He was proud that he and a buddy, Ernest Miller, were rated the most accurate gunners of the six mortar squads in Company H.

In August 1944, the "Century Division" received orders for overseas movement. Rincker, now a private first class, felt that he was one of the best-trained soldiers in the division: "I had three years ROTC training, followed by 17 weeks of basic training, then 13 weeks of infantry OCS, and finally four months of training at Fort Bragg. I had fired for score almost every weapon to be found in an infantry division, and worked with mines, booby traps, and general explosives."

On September 25, 1944, the division, after having been issued all new clothing and equipment, boarded troop trains that took them to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, where they remained for a few weeks before shipping out on the SS *George Washington,* a former German luxury liner that had been converted into a U.S. troopship.

"There were 11 ships in our convoy," Rincker remembered, "plus Navy destroyers and destroyer escorts to protect us from German submarines. There were also some small aircraft carriers. Our ship was the biggest by far, nearly 1,000 feet long and 26,000 tons."

Six days out of New York, the convoy ran into a hurricane that sent waves 40-50 feet high crashing over the decks and restricting all Army personnel to below decks, where half the men were seasick. Somehow Rincker was not afflicted.

On the 12th day, land was sighted: North Africa. The convoy sailed past the ancient city of Tangiers, Morocco, and into the narrow waters of the Strait of Gibraltar. Rincker said, "Word soon spread that we would reach Marseilles, France, the next morning—October 20. The port facilities had been completely destroyed. There were numerous capsized ships in the wrecked harbor."

The troops disembarked into LCIs (Landing Craft, Infantry) and were trucked about 12 miles inland to a staging area where, late in the afternoon, the regiment began setting

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Men of the 100th ("Century") Infantry Division watch a tank rumble by as they wait in a shallow zig-zag trench for the order to advance near Bitche, France, December 18, 1944. Pfc. Clarence "Monty" Rincker, a mortarman with the division, recalled his six months of combat in France and Germany—and his gratitude for surviving the war without a scratch.

up tents. A heavy rain that night nearly flooded the staging area.

The 14,000-man 100th Division, made up of the 397th, 398th, and 399th Infantry Regiments, was under the command of 49-year-old Maj. Gen. Withers A. "Pinky" Burress, who had been with the division since its activation in November 1942. A 1914 graduate of the Virginia Military Institute, he saw action with the 2nd Infantry Division in France in World War I. A competent, well-liked commander, he would remain in charge of the division throughout the war.

The 100th was attached to Lt. Gen. Alexander Patch's Seventh Army and received its orders to head north out of Marseilles. Ahead of the 100th were the U.S. 3rd and 45th Infantry Divisions, which had taken part in Operation Dragoon—the invasion of southern France—on August 15, 1944. The 100th Division was on the move up to the Vosges Mountains, 450 miles from Marseilles.

"We passed hundreds of German vehicles riddled with bullet holes or burned," Rincker recalled. "Sometimes there were wagons with dead horses attached to them. We were told that the U.S. Air Force had inflicted this tremendous damage as the Germans were fleeing from the attacking Seventh Army. The weather had been rainy and dismal during the three-day trip north. We were cold and cramped from the long [truck] ride, but it sure beat marching!"

On November 1, the weather cleared and the 100th arrived at the town of Sainte-Hélène in Alsace-Lorraine. "We were only six miles from the enemy and could hear the booming noise of 'friendly' artillery going outbound into enemy territory," Rincker recalled.

"One of the first tasks was to remove all division patches and all stripes denoting our rank—the very things we had spent numerous hours sewing onto our new uniforms just before leaving Fort Bragg! Officers and NCOs were now indistinguishable from the enlisted men. This was done to prevent enemy snipers from picking off our leaders and from the enemy being able to identify our unit if we should be captured."

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ABOVE: Two men from the 397th Infantry Regiment, 100th Division, fire a 60mm M2 mortar during training at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, in April 1943. The division—and Rincker—would be deployed to Europe in late September 1944. OPPOSITE: Working their way up a steep, snowy hill in the Vosges Mountains region of Alsace-Lorraine, men of the 45th Infantry Division prepare to attack the enemy. The 100th Division relieved the 45th in this area. Fighting in heavily wooded areas like this proved problematic.

On the afternoon of November 5, Rincker's regiment mounted 2½-ton trucks that would take them to the front lines to relieve elements of the 45th Division, which had been at the front for 80 days. Rincker and his "foxhole buddy" George Wild soon found themselves on the banks of the Meurthe River across from the village of Baccarat.

"For the next couple of days, the situation was static," said Rincker. "We did not have actual contact with the enemy and thus we didn't know just where they were. We were also experiencing the most inclement weather imaginable. It would rain and then snow. We were miserable from the cold, wet, soggy weather and at the same time scared stiff. We would jump at the least little sound made near us, expecting to be ambushed by some hidden enemy."

On November 7, Rincker's regiment moved forward and made contact with the Germans, suffering its first casualties. The division was ordered to prepare to attack Raon l'Étape, a heavily fortified town on the high ground above the Meurthe River. On November 11, the attack began.

"As we moved forward," Rincker said, "we came under small-arms fire, as well as mortar and artillery fire. Casualties began to pile up. Our mortar platoon escaped having any casualties the first day but, on the 13th, Lieutenant Nelson was wounded and removed from battle. Within the next several days we had two men killed and five men wounded. You never knew if you might be next.

"We were scared to death but we had a job to do and orders to follow. On November 16, our regimental commander, Colonel William Ellis, was ambushed on his way to a battalion command post (CP) and machine-gunned to death."

Rincker never forgot the first dead German he saw. "We were advancing through some thin woods with the riflemen out in front of us, perhaps 200 yards. There had

been some firing, but we continued moving forward. I saw this body lying right ahead of me and I knew from his uniform that it was a German.

"He was lying on his back, and as I passed I could see that he was a young fellow about my age and of similar build, looking straight up toward the sky. I couldn't help but wonder about his background, his aspirations, his family, and maybe what his last thoughts had been. It put a real chill up my back, and I have never been able to dismiss the sight of him.

"As time went on, I saw hundreds of dead Germans, but they did not have the same effect on me. Perhaps it was because he was the first dead human being that I had ever seen. Or perhaps it was because I realized that, at any particular moment, I, too, might be stretched out, dead."

On November 18, the 100th Division took Raon-l'Étape. "Just as we reached the edge of town," Rincker remembered, "some Frenchmen were passing out drinks in appreciation for being liberated from the Germans. They were so happy!" Rincker took a big swig that burned all the way down and nearly knocked him off his feet. "I had expected some good wine, but that old Frenchman had given me a shot of his best cognac. I never again accepted a drink from an appreciative Frenchman."

The division resumed the attack on November 19 and, by a series of quick moves, caught the Germans off guard and took the towns of Moyenmoutier, Senones, La Petit Raon, and Vieux Moulin. "We had covered 35 miles in 15 days," Rincker said. "We had suffered casualties all the way and had been scared all the time."

He also noted, "We began encountering situations that were not at all like we had in training. We had gone into combat with full field packs, which we discovered were impossible to carry while fighting in the wooded Vosges Mountains. We also discarded our shelter halves, blankets, and mess kits; we were eating nothing but K-rations, anyway. We kept our canteens, canteen cups, raincoats, and some personal items like writing paper.

"The next big problem for our mortars was that we were setting up in the woods and had to cut down some trees to get a clear field of fire overhead. We had no way to cut the trees at first, but soon we had some full-sized axes and shovels brought up from our rear. We had to hand carry our ammunition because the supply jeeps couldn't get up to us in the mountains where there were few roads.

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"Of all the fellows from the Eastern states where the woods abound, not one man in my squad knew how to cut a tree down! Therefore, I soon became the woodsman while George dug a foxhole for the two of us. Many days we cut down trees and dug foxholes three or four times a day after each advance.

"Then we were soon subjected to a new danger not covered in training. Incoming 88mm shells or mortar shells were hitting the trees and bursting in the air over our heads, throwing shrapnel down into our open foxholes. To gain protection from tree bursts, we started throwing logs from our cut-down trees over our foxholes; at night, we would cover the logs with dirt for added protection."

Rincker noted that fighting in a forest was especially difficult because the sight distance was extremely limited, and it was easy for the Germans to mount ambushes: "There was at least one instance when a German climbed a tree and waited for us while we set up our mortars. This sniper suddenly opened up on us, throwing us into a frenzy until we discovered him in the tree over us. That sniper didn't have a chance once we located him. He had tied himself to the tree so his body didn't fall out; we just let him hang there."

By some miracle, the sniper had not hit any of the mortar crew, but from then on Rincker and his squad checked every tree before setting up their mortar.

On Thanksgiving Day, 1944, the 397th Regiment was advancing through more of the dense woods that covered the Vosges Mountains. It was cold and raining hard; the men were miserable. "We were told that a hot Thanksgiving dinner was being brought up to us," said Rincker.

"We were moved to an area where we were to receive our hot dinner, but by the time I got to the food area all that was left was crushed pineapple. I got my canteen

cup filled about three-quarters full but, with all the rain, it was thin enough to drink. That was my hot Thanksgiving Day dinner!"

Later that day, Rincker's battalion was ordered to move out and continue the march, carefully avoiding mines that had been planted in the tree-lined road. That evening, as Rincker related it, "There was a quick burst of small-arms fire up ahead and the whole column stopped and ran into the edge of the woods." The column had run into a German roadblock constructed of fallen timber.

Skirting the roadblock, the battalion continued on until it was again halted by more roadblocks and harassing rifle and machine-gun fire. "It became pretty apparent that we were penetrating the German lines and going deep behind them. We learned later that we were 17 miles behind German lines!

"We soon were in control of the town of Saint-Blaise. The rest of the night and all the next day we captured more Germans as they came into the town, not knowing we were there. There was little or no shooting as we stayed in the buildings and just allowed the Germans to walk into our waiting guns. As soon as they were captured, we put them in a basement under guard and waited for more to show up."

The Yanks also discovered a wine cellar. "There were some very high-quality French wines and champagnes liberated that day," Rincker recalled. "I shared a five-star bottle of champagne with several others in the mortar group."

Rincker said that his unit had been in combat for 2½ weeks and had not been able to shave, wash their hands, or change clothes. While at Saint-Blaise, he said, "Some general showed up and raised hell with us because we had not shaved. The truth of the matter was that we couldn't shave because none of us had razors.

"Before nightfall, a truckload of Red Cross supplies arrived in which there were little O.D.-green cloth bags containing toothbrushes, toothpaste, plastic razors, and a pack of five razor blades. Our steel helmets became washbasins into which we scooped cold water out of a nearby stream. We used up most of our razor blades trying to scrape off nearly three weeks of beard growth. Our faces seemed bare and cold after the beards were removed."

With the capture of Roan-l'Étape and Saint-Blaise, the Century Division had successfully cracked the German Winter Line in the Vosges Mountains. Rincker reflected, "We were no longer 'green' troops. We were now veterans who had achieved an important Seventh Army objective. We had met the Germans on terrain which had never before been invaded successfully and had emerged victorious. But we had paid a price for our victory. The 397th Regiment had lost 167 men killed and 511 men wounded."

And, unknown to Rincker, much sterner tests were still ahead.

In late November the division fought a number of skirmishes in Alsace-Lorraine. As Rincker and his unit were preparing to attack Ingwiller, they encountered Germans that fought with "suicidal ferocity. They used small arms, automatic weapons, mortars, 20mm flak guns, and the most-feared of all: the 88s.

"If we got caught in a mortar barrage, the mortar shells dropped quietly from the sky with little, if any, sound," Rincker said. "But when we got caught in a barrage of 88mm artillery fire, the sound of the shells screaming toward us scared the hell out of us. The

Century Division men pass through a demolished German roadblock during the Seventh Army's advance, November 19, 1944—successfully cracking the Germans' Winter Line in the Vosges Mountains.

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ABOVE: Men of Company C, 397th Regiment, move through the partially demolished town of Raon L'Étape, October 18, 1944. Rincker said his regiment lost 167 men killed and 511 men wounded during the Vosges campaign. BELOW: 397th Regiment soldiers dash across a deserted intersection in Raon L'Étape; German resistance had not yet been overcome.

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psychological effect was as bad as the actual shells bursting all around us. I am not sure you would hear the shell that was headed right at you, but the shells going over or to either side made a terrible screaming sound due to the high velocity at which they were fired. You just knew that one was going right up your back."

One night, Rincker's unit was the recipient of a particularly nasty mortar barrage; luckily, the men were in their covered foxholes. "There were the usual flashes as each shell went off, followed by the roar of the explosion. Sometimes, if the shell hit fairly close, dust would sift down from between the logs over our heads. This particular night, a shell burst on the ground right beside our hole and our whole area really shook, and dirt fell on us from all around.

"There was a moment of deathly silence, followed by the noise of each of us feeling our arms, legs, and body to see if we were all in one piece. We were all unhurt but had dirt all over us. The next morning, we got out of our hole and saw that the shell had hit about two feet from the edge of our hole. Our mortar was not hurt, but some mortar ammunition was messed up so badly that we couldn't use it."

And so it went, with the division trying to move forward and the Germans doing everything in their power to stop it.

In December, due to casualties in his platoon, Rincker was promoted to acting squad leader. Attacks against the villages of Rothbach, Reipertsviller, and Wingen were launched but without much success. The 1st Battalion of the 398th Regiment, about five miles from Rincker's 397th, tried to take Wingen, but most of Company A was captured by the Germans.

The men continued to suffer from endless rain, mud, snow, and sub-freezing cold. Food was scarce, and water could only be obtained by filling canteens in a stream or melting the snow; Halazone tablets were used to purify the water.

"We had gone nearly a month without anything but our blankets to wrap up in at night," Rincker recalled. "There were some nights I was so cold that sleep was just impossible."

Finally, the unit got some relief. Truckloads of mummy-type sleeping bags reached the front. "Even though these new sleeping bags were pretty thin," Rincker said, "They were a great help, especially with our raincoats over them."

The 397th was attacking Hill 335 near Mouterhouse. Rincker recalled, "Death in combat usually came in a burst of machine-gun fire or an artillery barrage. It normally came when the individual knew he was in danger. But Lloyd Neseth's death on Hill 335 stunned us all.

"We apparently had not been detected as we came up in the dark, and the next morning that condition seemed to still exist. We were ready to begin the battle for Mouterhouse but were waiting for the assigned time of the attack. Thus, we were just waiting in the woods above the town.

"Lloyd had sat down and leaned up against a tree and several fellows were sitting on the ground visiting with him. With-

out even a grunt, Lloyd keeled over and was dead! No one heard a sound from a sniper's rifle or any other weapon. Yet Lloyd had died from a single rifle bullet in the middle of his forehead!

"Needless to say, we searched the area for a sniper but found nothing. We never knew where the bullet came from."

The December 7-10 battle for Mouterhouse was difficult. The Germans resisted with great determination because they were fighting on their border, but eventually the Americans prevailed.

Company H was in bad shape, though; two machine-gun crews had been captured by the Germans, and a platoon leader had been seriously wounded. Many other men in the company were also either dead or wounded. Moving forward was slow and painful, with the 397th absorbing everything the Germans could throw at it.

Thoughts turned to home in the middle of December when Christmas packages began arriving. Rincker received a pair of woolen mittens that he wore through the rest of the war.

"My folks sent food items, too," he said, "and it didn't really matter what, because anything different from a K-ration was a most welcome change. Another big treat came my way about this same time. They started taking a few of us out of the line and sending us back for showers. I had not had a shower since I left the ship!"

Soon it was time for another attack—this time against Germans holed up in the town of Bitche. "Also about this time we were beginning to come up against the fortifications of the Maginot Line," Rincker said. The Maginot Line had been built by the French in the 1930s to forestall another German invasion.

"These fortifications ranged from concrete-reinforced pillboxes from which well-protected machine guns could fire, to huge bunkers that housed not only machine guns but had ports from which various sized cannons were fired. Some of the bigger fortifications were five to seven stories deep, had barracks, mess halls, hospitals, ammunition reloading facilities, and an underground electric railroad to connect the bigger bunkers with one another."

The attack on Bitche and Camp de Bitche, a military cantonment, was scheduled for December 17. It began with hundreds of American dive-bombers swooping down on Camp de Bitche and blasting everything in sight; artillery and mortars pounded the installation, too. Rincker's battalion launched a diversionary attack that enabled the other units to catch the Germans unawares.

Just as it appeared the Americans were on the verge of driving the Germans out and capturing Bitche, word came down that farther north in Belgium the Germans had launched a tremendous counterattack that would become known as the Battle of the Bulge.

Rincker said, "The situation in the Belgium Bulge grew worse each day," resulting in General George Patton's Third Army being rushed northward and Seventh Army moving in to fill in the gap that the departure of Third Army had created. "We were ordered to discontinue our attack on Bitche and take up defensive positions farther north."

Rincker's unit broke off contact and loaded into trucks that hauled it to Petit Rederching to relieve the 1st Battalion of the 114th Regiment, 44th Infantry Division, about 10 miles directly west of Bitche. "This was the second time in as many months that we were hauled from one front and immediately committed to another," Rincker said.

"By the evening of December 24, two rifle companies of our 2nd Battalion were dug in on the outpost line just north of Rimling. On Christmas morning 1944, our division was on the defense for the first time since we had entered combat. Each battalion was now covering as much of the front as an entire regiment normally would. We were spread thinly!"

Shortly before noon on Christmas Day, a strong German attack developed—or so the Americans believed. What appeared to be a mob of charging Germans coming over the hill turned out to be a mob of panicked, retreating GIs.

According to Rincker, "A panic situation had developed and we were running and not even being fired upon. There was no semblance of a controlled retrograde movement as I had been taught in OCS. There was so much confusion that we didn't know whether we were retreating because of the danger of being encircled or if the enemy forces in front of us were too powerful to be stopped by our thinly placed rifle companies.

"I don't know who made the decision or how they managed to bring this rout to a halt, but when we did stop, we had retreated six miles from our former positions! At any rate, the 1st and 3rd Battalions were moved into the area of Rimling and Urabach

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ABOVE: Mortarmen from the 44th Infantry Division, positioned near the 397th Regiment outside Rimling, fire their tubes—including a captured German mortar—on New Year's Day 1945. Although the 44th's front crumbled, allowing the enemy to flank the 397th, the regiment refused to yield. OPPOSITE: These two machine gunners from Company M, 397th Regiment, helped repel German attacks at Rimling, reportedly killing at least 100 of the enemy on Christmas Day, 1944.

and cut off two enemy attacks aimed for our sector."

Before being pushed back, the German attackers had managed to steal Company F's Christmas dinner along with 25 new fleece-lined parkas.

As the weary GIs settled in for a long, cold night, an engineer company was brought in with jackhammers to break the frozen ground so the soldiers in the 2nd Battalion could dig foxholes.

A few days later, while still in their defensive positions, the 397th Regimental command post was bombed by American P-47 fighter-bombers, killing six and wounding eight. It was later learned that the planes had actually been captured by the Germans and, with German pilots, were targeting the American positions.

The 100th Division received reports that the situation in Belgium was deteriorating, so the men were put on alert that a strong German attack might be headed their way. This second German counterattack, against American forces in the Alsace-Lorraine region, was code named Operation Nordwind (North Wind).

On New Year's Eve day, a heavy snowfall blanketed the area. Shortly after midnight on January 1, 1945, as Rincker put it, "All hell broke loose. This was the expected attack. It was made without any artillery preparation to gain surprise. There were four or five German companies attacking against our 3rd Battalion in Rimling. The whole Seventh Army front was under attack.

"Each enemy drive was made by numerically superior forces, with tanks, self-propelled guns, and limitless amounts of artillery and mortar barrages that eventually reduced the town of Rimling to ruin."

The strongest enemy drive was made against the 397th's 3rd Battalion to the left (west) of the 2nd Battalion and against the 44th Division to the left of the 3rd Battalion. The 3rd Battalion managed to hold, but the 44th's front crumbled, allowing the Germans to attack 3rd Battalion's flank. It was touch and go for a while, but 3rd Battalion was able to fight off repeated attempts at penetration.

On the 100th Division's right flank, the situation was also becoming precarious. The Germans launched an attack from Bitche against the 117th Cavalry Recon Squadron on the 399th Regiment's right flank and drove them back, thus exposing the 399th's eastern flank. If the Germans could get around both flanks, they would have the division surrounded. Fortunately, that did not happen.

With their ground attacks having failed, the Germans were content to simply shell the 100th Division for the next two days. Rincker and the 2nd Battalion, 397th Regiment, were moved into Rimling in anticipation of the next enemy assault.

Rincker recalled, "We knew another big attack was imminent as our observers in a church steeple had seen the big buildup of enemy forces directly in front of us. At 3 AM on January 8, the enemy laid down a tremendous concentration of artillery and rocket fire on Rimling, Hill 375, and the entire area around the town. Exactly one hour later the attack came.

"An estimated 200 German infantry, supported by 10 to 14 tanks, attacked in the first wave, with self-propelled guns and engineers with flamethrowers hitting Companies E and F in a two-pronged attack. The Germans charged our positions standing upright, firing their weapons, and shouting madly. They overran both companies but took terrific casualties. We could stop the infantry but had no way to stop the Tiger tanks. Bitter and bloody fighting continued until daylight.

"When the first attack came, our heavy machine guns raked the advancing Germans with deadly fire. They had to fire between the tanks, around the tanks, and

behind them to get the charging infantry. We on the 81mm mortars began firing into our predetermined fields of fire as fast as we could. But when the Germans got on top of our rifle and machine-gun positions we had to cease fire to keep from hitting our own men.

"By dawn the Germans had worn out their efforts and fell back to regroup. The number of dead Germans in front of our positions was almost unbelievable. By comparison, our losses were surprisingly few."

Although the Germans had fallen back on January 8, they nevertheless kept up the pressure with artillery, mortar, rocket, and tank fire. They had cut the Rimling-Guising road, occupied Hill 370 south of Rimling, and were occupying the western portion of the town. American tanks tried to push German armor off Hill 370 without result.

On the 8th, Tech. Sgt. Charles F. Carey, Jr., 397th Regiment, distinguished himself in battle. As a member of an antitank platoon, he saw the wave of Germans and panzers heading his unit's way but was powerless to do anything about it, as the Germans had destroyed his antitank guns. Carey quickly organized a patrol to prevent two of his squads from being overrun.

Sueddeutsche Zeitung Photo / Alamy

He then took a second patrol to attack a house that was occupied by enemy snipers. Covered by the patrol, he ran to the house, killed two snipers, threw in a grenade, and then went in and came out with 16 Germans. He organized another patrol and damaged a panzer with a bazooka; as the crew emerged, he shot them down with his rifle.

The next day, Carey discovered that Germans had entered Rimling and chased four of his men to the attic of a building. Disregarding his own safety, he maneuvered an old staircase to an outer wall of the building so his men could escape. Later that day, while attempting to reach an outpost, he was shot and killed by a sniper. For his courageous actions, he was awarded the Medal of Honor posthumously.

The final assault by the Germans came on January 9. Rincker said, "The best-trained SS troops with huge amounts of supporting weapons were thrown at us for this final drive. Our riflemen were so dazed, shocked, and exhausted that they couldn't hold out much longer. They just couldn't keep the holes plugged, and more Germans were getting through the gaps."

But the Germans in front of Rincker's position were just as dazed, shocked, and exhausted as the GIs, and some began to surrender. Eventually Rincker's unit took 32 prisoners. "I got a German sub-machine gun from a German who surrendered to me. I also got two spare magazines of ammunition. I carried this gun with me for quite a few days until it got too heavy and I didn't really need it anymore."

After a few hours, the situation in front of the 397th had stabilized. "We left 26 Germans laying in the snow," Rincker said. "Of the prisoners, many were wounded. Our medical aid man did all he could for the wounded before we gathered them together and marched them toward our rear. One of the SS officers that we captured was furious that a measly mortar crew with only about 20 men had wiped out his company of 58 men. They were all that was left of an entire German rifle company that had attacked in the Rimling area a few days before."

The 397th had suffered, too. During the Battle of Rimling, the regiment lost about 350 men, of whom 79 were killed. As a tribute to their courageous stand, Rincker's Company H received a Presidential Unit Citation.

On the night of the 9th, the 397th was ordered to pull back about a mile to straighten the front line. Rincker reflected, "The thing that the Rimling defense taught us was that when we were in a defensive position the enemy could hardly blast us out of the position without tremendous cost in personnel and material. That memory clung with us as we eventually returned to the attack status and fought our way into Germany."

And fight they did. Once the German attacks of Operation Nordwind died away and it became clear that the enemy had gone back to defending their homeland, plans for offensive action to cross into Germany were drawn up by the Americans.

The rest of January, February, and the first half of March passed with little but probing enemy patrols and occasional shelling to deal with. At 5 AM on March 15, Seventh Army began its spring offensive.

"The enemy threw in heavy artillery and 'Screaming Meemie' [multi-barrel Nebel-

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ABOVE: GIs examine a German horse-drawn ammunition wagon. Rincker was disturbed by the plight of animals he saw during the advance into Germany. BELOW: Clarence "Monty" Rincker (lower right, circled) and his 81mm mortar squad, photographed in February 1945 near the Maginot Line. OPPOSITE: A German artillery observer in the Vosges Mountains calls in a fire mission to his battery. The 88mm guns of the Luftwaffe were used not only for air and antitank defense, but also as conventional artillery.

Courtesy of Clarence Rincker

werfer] rocket fire at us in Hottviller," Rincker said. "The 'Screaming Meemies' usually came in salvos of six with a screaming noise that scared the hell out of you. When they hit, there was lots of concussion but not much shrapnel. The riflemen were suffering casualties from stepping on wooden 'schu' mines buried just under the soil surface that couldn't be detected by mine detectors; those unlucky enough to step on one lost a foot or part of a leg."

As a rocket barrage began, Rincker ducked into a stone building. "One of the rockets hit the building I was in and blew a bunch of broken stones down on top of me. Fortunately, none of the stones was big enough to hurt me, but one piece hit my wristwatch and broke the crystal. This was the watch my parents had given me as a college graduation present and which I had lost and found twice before while being on marches in France. The minute hand was jarred loose so that it didn't keep time with that hand anymore; I could still tell time by the hour hand."

The American attack had caught the Germans by surprise and rolled forward for two days, overcoming all opposition as it went. American warplanes also softened up the enemy for the infantry.

"Our spring offensive was now well underway," Rincker said. "We had suffered casualties, and we had taken prisoners. The regiment accounted for 36 prisoners on the first day, and more were picked up each day we advanced.

"Most of the 397th was standing on the border of Germany itself. During the night of March 19 and the next day, the Germans heavily shelled three towns in the northern part of our sector. All of a sudden, we were being relieved by elements of the 66th Regiment of the 71st Infantry Division. We couldn't believe our eyes when we saw the men of the 71st coming in carrying full field packs and wearing their division patches and neckties! Man, were they green! We may have carried full packs into combat but we sure didn't wear neckties!"

The 100th Division was pulled back and given a brief rest prior to the coming attack. "Word went around that our next push would take us across the German border and into the Siegfried Line. Having experienced battle trying to take the Maginot Line, we had considerable concern about trying to penetrate the Siegfried Line," Rincker noted. "We had come up on the back side of the Maginot Line, but the Siegfried Line would be a frontal assault."

March 21 was spent making final preparations for the assault, and all men in the division were briefed on what the rest of Seventh Army and Patton's nearby Third Army would be doing.

On the 22nd, the 2nd Battalion was ordered to move out. "Why was it always 2nd Battalion," Rincker wondered. Nevertheless, the men climbed onto and into vehicles of all sorts and began moving. "We didn't know if we were going in for more bitter fighting or what to expect. We were told that we were destined to make history, but we didn't know whether we really wanted such an honor," Rincker mused.

"Our operations were to be coordinated with the Seventh Army as a whole and the

Third Army farther north to break the German resistance in the Rhineland south of the Moselle River. At 9:30 AM on March 22, our completely motorized column measuring close to two miles in length rolled out of our assembly area at Schweyen, and we were on our way. We crossed the German border at 10 AM and sped unresisted through the Siegfried Line. What a relief, except our mission was far from over."

During the day's drive, the 397th Regiment liberated 30 Allied prisoners and captured dozens of German soldiers. That night the column stopped and rested in an abandoned German caserne in the town of Pirmasens. The next day the drive continued at such a fast pace that it was difficult for supporting units to keep up. From windows in village after village white bed sheets were draped, denoting that the town had given up.

Hundreds of German soldiers, knowing that the war was lost, were also giving up, approaching the American column with arms raised. Rincker said, "We had cleared out the city of Neustadt and moved on to Assenheim for the night. There was no organized resistance now, but there were an ample number of snipers that had to be eliminated. We now knew that the final goal of this motorized task force was to take Ludwigshafen, a big industrial city on the Rhine River." The regiment was told that if they found any bridges over the Rhine still intact, they were also to take those.

They found no intact bridges, but they did find tremendous death and destruction between Neustadt and Ludwigshafen caused by the U.S. Army Air Forces. "Side roads and adjacent fields were strewn with material, dead horses, and German corpses," Rincker recalled. "Mile after mile of this devastation lined the sides of the roads and impressed us once again with the might of air power. This destruction relieved us of the burden of fighting against all that had been destroyed in just the last day or two."

The swift arrival of Third Army to the north of the 100th Division had prevented many fleeing German units from crossing the wide river, and so they were squeezed between Patton's forces and the Century Division, where they became easy targets.

"Even though we had been exposed to a lot of these scenes before," Rincker said, "it was a pitiful sight to see a shell-shocked horse standing with dazed eyes and wobbling on its legs. It was a shame that it was left to suffer.

"Ludwigshafen was in ruins, either from bombs or fire. The 2nd Battalion took up positions in Oggersheim, just outside of Ludwigshafen. The 3rd Battalion and the rest of the division moved up from France and began taking up positions around Ludwigshafen. After the 3rd Battalion took up positions on the banks of the Rhine, they immediately came under mortar and artillery fire from the opposite shore."

After clearing out snipers in the area, 2nd Battalion was given a break to clean up, take showers, and change into fresh uniforms. A USO show in Neustadt starring Marlene Dietrich was also made available to the men, who found it entertaining and relaxing.

The rest quickly ended on March 31, when the division mounted up and was trucked to a pontoon bridge that Army engineers had built to cross the Rhine between Ludwigshafen and Mannheim.

"We were moving out onto this long bridge. Each pontoon sank lower in the great river as each vehicle passed over it," Rincker recalled. "The Rhine seemed very wide and we were anxious to reach the other side. On the far side, we passed through the bombed-out city of Mannheim and fanned out to the south along the east bank of the river."

After pausing to catch its breath, the 100th Division moved out in attack formation toward Heidelberg, 10 miles away. On April 1, the 397th Regiment captured 337 German soldiers, bringing the total to 1,359 since they entered combat. An occasional roadblock was encountered, but these were quickly dealt with and the eastward drive continued.

Rincker recounted an incident that nearly cost him his life the next day. A German 88

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ABOVE: Century Division men run for cover in the ruins of Heilbronn, Germany, on the Neckar River as enemy artillery and Nebelwerfer shells begin to land. It was in Heilbronn that Rincker came closest to being killed. OPPOSITE: As men of the 397th Regiment look on, an M-18 tank destroyer fires in support of the assault on Wiesloch, Germany, April 1, 1945.

vehicles and dove into roadside ditches. After destroying several jeeps, the Germans switched to firing air bursts over the cowering troops.

He said, "Under that type of fire, the ditch offered no protection. I was looking for some place to get under cover when I saw several GIs running and diving into a culvert about 100 feet from me. I decided to do the same, but by the time I got there it was already full of men."

He dashed across the road to see if the other end of the culvert was less crowded. "I jumped up and started across the road when suddenly a shell burst about 20 feet in front of me, right at the edge of the road. Another guy between me and the shell burst crumpled and fell, but I hadn't felt anything and continued running."

Luckily, Rincker found that there was room for him at the other end of the culvert. In the confined space, with dozens of other scared soldiers pressing around him, Rincker's claustrophobia got the better of him and he left the safety of the pipe. He decided to see if he could help the soldier who had gone down while they were crossing the road, but Rincker discovered he was dead.

"The whole upper part of his body was riddled with shrapnel wounds instead of one or two fragments," he said. "I have never been able to forget the sight of that guy laying there in the road. What really got to me was how this guy got hit so bad and I didn't get a scratch, even though I was only about three steps behind him. It could have been me just as well as him."

The drive continued, with the 2nd Battalion taking four towns before April 2 was over. In the attack on one of the towns, Rincker recalled, they dashed through a heavy barrage to reach the relative safety of the buildings. It seemed the deeper the Americans penetrated into Germany, the stiffer the resistance became.

The division bypassed Heidelberg, which had been declared an "open city" to spare it from destruction. At about this time the First French Army had crossed the Rhine at Speyer south of the 100th and made contact with the division's right flank.

Rincker remembered a moment when his battalion entered a small German town and caught 300 enemy soldiers still asleep; they were all taken prisoner. "The German SS major in command was so upset over his capture that before anyone could stop him he pulled his Luger from its holster and shot himself in the right temple. It seemed unbelievable that anyone would kill himself when the war was nearly over. But it was apparently a great disgrace for an SS officer to be captured so easily."

When the 2nd Battalion's POWs were added to the rest of the regiment's, the day's total was 1,080—almost as many as the regiment had taken in the previous six months.

At one point during the division's drive, a rest was ordered. Rincker was taking a break in a barn and watching a German woman milking a dairy cow. It reminded him of his younger days on the family's Wyoming farm, so he approached the woman and through sign language let it be known that he wanted to help.

"The German woman was absolutely amazed, as German men evidently do not milk cows. And I am sure the idea of an enemy soldier wanting to milk a cow was hard for her to imagine. But I got a lot of satisfaction in doing something I hadn't done for a long, long time. It removed me from the war for a few precious moments."

The 100th Division was now bearing down on Heilbronn, an important rail and communications center on the Neckar River, following in the wake of the 10th Armored Division. Although some resistance was expected, no one thought it would be as determined as it turned out to be.

After his unit reached the river and found all the bridges destroyed, Rincker's Company H was attached to Company E; he was assigned to be a forward mortar observer and, accompanying platoon leader Lieutenant Peter P. Petracco, carry an SCR-300 radio on his back to relay fire missions. The attackers crossed the river in small boats to assault a group of factory buildings.

Rincker stayed close to Petracco, following the leading riflemen. "The factory buildings were surrounded by a stone wall about five feet high," Rincker said, "that gave our men both shelter and trouble

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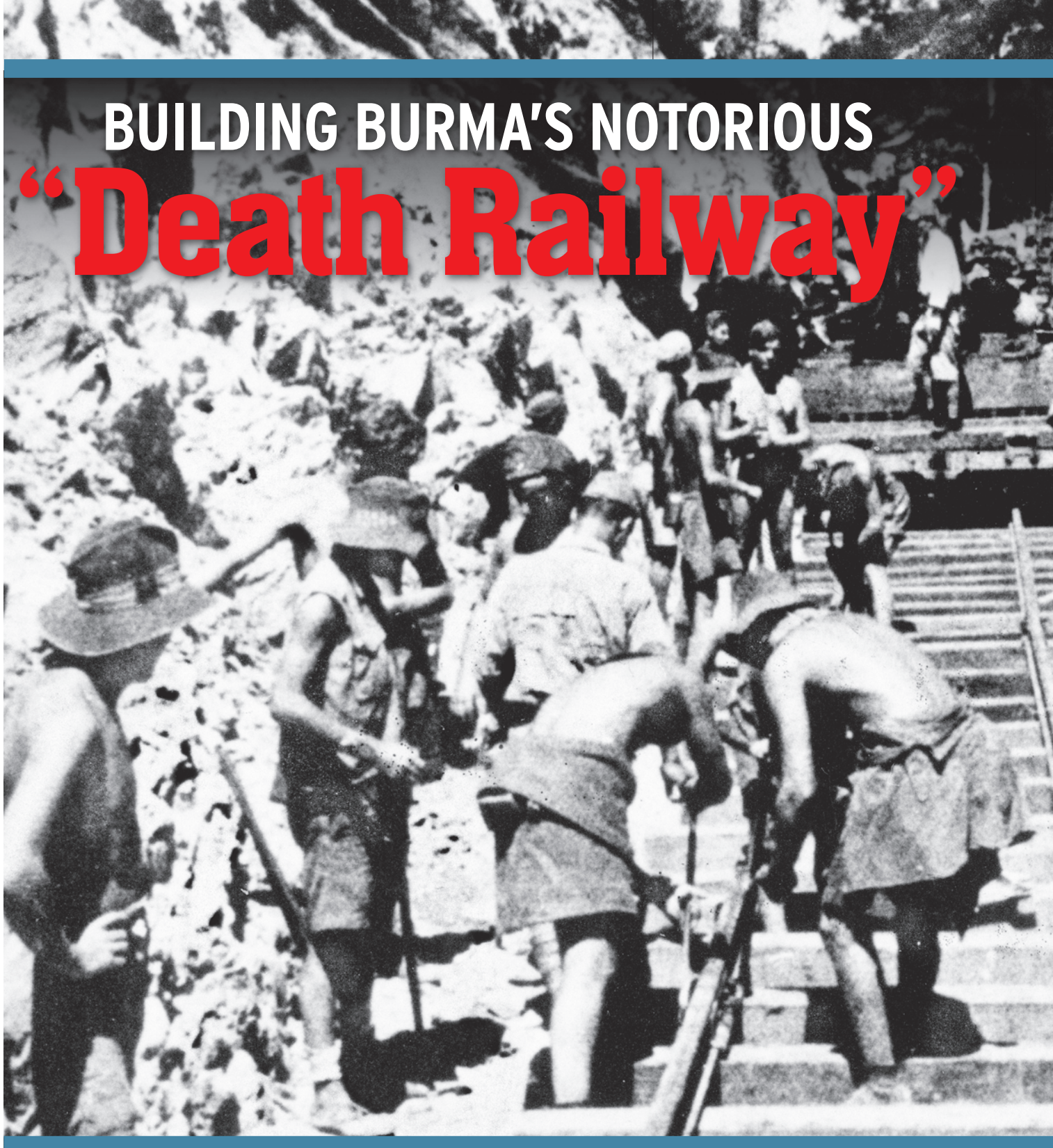
BUILDING BURMA'S NOTORIOUS "Death Railway"



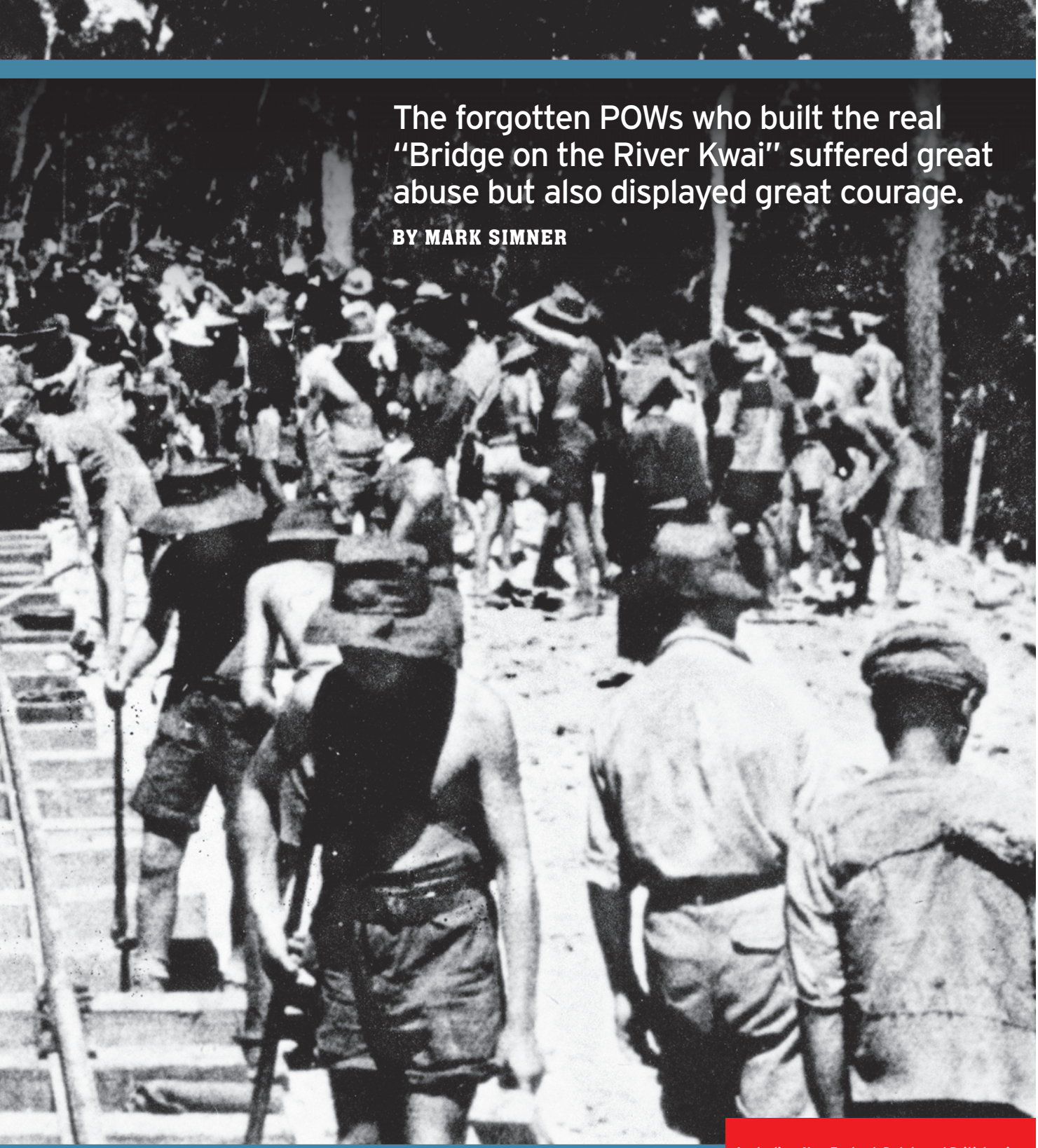
"**Your heart stops.** You feel dizzy and sick. You think you're going to piss yourself and then you feel the pain. Something hit me in the spine and I knew it was a rifle butt. I weighed about seven stone [98 pounds] by this time and my bones were jutting just below my skin. Then there was a second thud as my legs gave way, a rifle butt to my head."

So said Private Reginald Twigg, Leicestershire Regiment—one of thousands of British prisoners of war who were forced to build a railroad bridge through the dense Thai-Burmese jungle.

Captain Reginald Burton, Norfolk Regiment, recalled, "Tears streamed down my

The forgotten POWs who built the real "Bridge on the River Kwai" suffered great abuse but also displayed great courage.

BY MARK SIMNER



Australian, New Zealand, Dutch, and British prisoners of war lay track on the Burma-Thailand "Death Railway" near Ronsi, Burma, 1943. More than 12,000 Allied POWs and tens of thousands of Asian civilian workers died while working on the line. The Japanese needed the railway to supply Japanese forces in occupied Burma and exploit that country's natural resources.

face as the Jap sentry came up to me, his face contorted with rage. After barking incomprehensible orders, he kicked me, then beat me with a bamboo cane until I was semi-conscious. I honestly thought he was going to kill me, but eventually he left after giving me a few farewell kicks in the groin. This resulted in permanent injury, which I have to this day, to my scrotum and testicles."

These are the horrifying words of two British soldiers held prisoner by the Japanese

All photos and art: Australian War Memorial

during World War II and forced to work on the infamous Thai-Burma "Death Railway." Although their words can only hint at the brutality and abuse they endured while in captivity, they were, in fact, in some ways lucky. They survived the tortures of their captors, the back-breaking work constructing the railway on a minimum of rations, and the dangerous conditions of the equally savage and inhospitable jungle.

Many others were not so fortunate, dying of starvation, disease, or arbitrary execution. In total, more than 12,000 Allied prisoners of war died constructing the railway, along with tens of thousands of Asian civilian laborers known as romusha.

But why did the Japanese construct this railway of death, and what was it really like for those forced to build it?

The Japanese Invasion of Burma

Spurred on by their incredible success during the 1941 Malaysian campaign, the Japanese soon turned their attention to Burma. Under British rule, Burma possessed a number of valuable natural resources, including oil and minerals, which Japan hoped to exploit. Seizing Burma would also help guard against potential Allied interference with their planned attack on Singapore, which eventually fell to the Japanese in mid-February 1942.

In addition, the occupation of Burma would sever the recently constructed Burma Road—a route that acted as a vital Allied supply link to Chiang Kai-shek's nationalist forces. The capture of Burma, therefore, was of great importance to Japanese strategy in Southeast Asia.

British forces in Burma at this time were painfully weak, with only the 17th Indian Infantry and 1st Burma Divisions available to oppose the inevitable Japanese onslaught. In command of these forces was Lt. Gen. Thomas Hutton, who was acutely aware of how vulnerable the city of Rangoon, then capital of the country, was. It would not be long before it became apparent how impossible his task of defending Burma would be.

On December 14, 1941, leading elements of the Japanese invasion force crossed the Kra Isthmus from Chumphon in Thailand, quickly capturing the southern town of Victoria Point and a nearby airfield two days later. Other Japanese units then pushed on along the coast, driving through Tenasserim and Tavoy on January 9.

The following day the Japanese 55th Division commenced its westerly move from Raheng in Thailand, crossed the border, and on the 22nd pushed back the British 16th Indian Infantry Brigade at Kawkareik.

By the 30th, the Japanese had reached Moulmein, quickly dislodging the 2nd Burma Infantry Brigade, which was desperately attempting to defend the city in the face of overwhelming odds.

Japanese forces would clash with the British 17th Division, under the command of Brig. Gen. Sir John Smyth, VC, at the Battle of Bilin River on February 14-18, which resulted in heavy losses for the British, who again were forced to withdraw some 20 miles under constant pressure from the Japanese both on land and from the air.

Although the British rear guard managed to keep the Japanese 33rd Division at bay, the British were increasingly being outflanked by their determined adversary, and a fran-

tic race toward the Sittang River Bridge commenced.

Reaching the bridge, Smyth immediately ordered his division across, while three battalions of Gurkhas were instructed to hold off the Japanese. On the 23rd, mistakenly believing the Gurkhas had been encircled, Smyth issued orders for the bridge to be blown, stranding the three embattled battalions on the wrong side of the river. Many survivors of the rear guard, however, did manage to swim across the river, although they were forced to leave behind most of their equipment and the wounded, who were mercilessly finished off by the Japanese at the points of bayonets.

Despite the arrival of the 7th Armoured Brigade as reinforcements, the situation for the British in Burma was by now incredibly desperate, and when General Sir Harold Alexander arrived in Rangoon he made the sensible decision to evacuate the city.

As the withdrawal of all British forces and civilians got underway, orders were also issued to destroy the numerous oil installations, docks, and factories to deny their use by the Japanese. By March 7, Rangoon was seen to be on fire as the last British units departed.

Nevertheless, the Japanese pursued the British, again clashing with the 17th Division,

ABOVE: The route of the Burma-Thailand railway and location of the infamous bridge. The total length of the line was 258 miles through impassable terrain and an inhospitable climate, and took eight months for the POWs to build. OPPOSITE: While Japanese guards beat a sick or reluctant prisoner, other POWs climb into cattle cars that will take them to the worksite—a five-day journey. Sketch by POW Jack Chalker.

which was now under the command of Lt. Gen. William Slim. However, their advance began to slow in the face of stubborn British resistance, and at Toungoo they ran into the Chinese 200th Division, slowing them even further.

Eventually, however, the Japanese began to push the Chinese back, so Slim ordered his 17th Division to mount a counterattack. Although the British enjoyed some initial success, they once again became outflanked and had little choice but to withdraw toward Prome (today Pyay) on the Irawaddy River, about 210 miles northwest of Rangoon (today Yangon).

The British and Chinese continued to resist the Japanese advance, but eventually the order was given for a complete withdrawal to India. Again, the Japanese pursued the British, but thanks to a heavy monsoon on May 12, they stopped, leaving the British to retreat soaked to the skin in thick mud.

Fearing their enemy would soon be hot on their heels, when the British reached Chittagong they adopted a "scorched earth" policy to again deny the Japanese any material help. As it turned out, the Japanese ended their advance short of the Indian border, and such a desperate course of action proved unnecessary. Burma was now completely in Japanese hands, and it had cost the British a sobering 1,499 men killed and 11,964 wounded.

Constructing the Railway

Although the British had been driven out of Burma, the fighting continued with the Allies conducting several operations against the Japanese in 1942 and 1943. These included a small-scale offensive into Arakan, but following a number of attacks the British conceded defeat after again suffering heavy casualties.

Undeterred, a second offensive was carried out by Brig. Gen. Orde Wingate, employing the now-revered Chindits, who operated deep behind Japanese lines. Yet again, the British suffered appalling casualties, and the operation, perhaps, had more propaganda than military value.

Nevertheless, the tide eventually turned

Working under a broiling sun, Australian POWs labor to lay track. Disease and dreadful working conditions—not to mention the brutality of their guards—caused thousands of deaths. Allied warplanes frequently bombed the line, causing further deaths and injuries.

against the Japanese as Allied forces grew in strength and slowly began to achieve air superiority. However, the biggest problem faced by the Japanese was their lines of supply, with almost all the war material and reinforcements they needed in Burma being brought up via the sea routes around the Malay Peninsula.

This fact was not lost on the Allies, who dispatched submarines to prey on Japanese shipping. Following the Battles of the Coral Sea (May 4-8, 1942) and Midway (June 3-6, 1942), Tokyo could no longer protect nor rely upon the sea lanes between Japan and Burma.

Profoundly aware that their lines of supply were vulnerable, which in turn would make their occupation of Burma in the face of persistent Allied pressure equally vulnerable, an alternative route was quickly needed. This alternative would be an overland railway.

The notion of such a railway was not new, the British having considered it in the late Victorian period. However, the considerable problems of traversing thick jungle terrain had rendered the project as unfeasible and too expensive. Yet this did not deter the Japanese who, as early as mid-June 1942, commenced construction on the line. Unlike the Victorian British, they had no reservations about employing forced labor to do the majority of the dangerous and dirty work.

Once built, the railway would form a connection from Ban Pong in Thailand, some 45 miles west of Bangkok, to Thanbyuzayat in Burma, approximately 35 miles south of Mawlamyine, the line crossing the border between the two countries at a point known as Three Pagodas Pass. In total, about 258 miles of track had to be laid to connect the two.

Approximately 189 miles of the line would, in fact, be built in Thailand, and the remaining 69 miles were in Burma. Along the route there would be over 60 stations located at varying intervals as well as a number of bridges.

Perhaps the most infamous of these bridges was the so-called "Bridge on the River Kwai," but others included those built over the Songkalia, Mekaza, Zamithi, Apalong, and Anakui Rivers. Most were constructed of wood while others were of iron or concrete.

The physical construction of the railway was extremely arduous and deadly. The route passed through long stretches of mosquito-infested jungle, and frequent monsoons greatly hampered the work. The terrain was often uneven and, in addition to the construction of bridges across rivers and canyons, large sections of mountains had to be cut through in order to lay the narrow-gage track on level ground.

Recalling his work building the Burma Railway, John Swan, a British prisoner, said, "We were given a basket between two men, and two handles. We were in a chain gang and carrying soil and depositing it to make a base for the railway lines. Food was rice three times a day, and vegetable so-called 'stew' in the evenings, after a hot day in the sun.

"The Bridge on the River Kwai was built by sheer brute force. Trees were sawn at the bottom or dug out, and a rope was attached to the tree top and pulled down by sheer weight of numbers. In fact, one tree prodded a school friend, Ernie Outlaw, and he was

blinded in one eye. Then the trees were shaped for a bridge and knocked into the ground by again pulling on a rope with a sort of weight on the top."

The Bridge on the "River Kwai"

Formally known as Bridge 277, the Bridge on the River Kwai was later made immortal by the 1957 movie of the same name. Interestingly, the bridge was not technically built on a river called Kwai, but rather it was built over a stretch of river called Mae Klong. However, following the release of the movie, tourists came flocking to Thailand in search of what they only knew to be "the Bridge on the River Kwai."

And so in 1960, the nearby town of Kanchanaburi changed the name of the Mae Klong River in the vicinity of the bridge to Kwae Yai. Today it remains a major tourist attraction, but for those who built it the bridge is a symbol of pain, suffering, and death.

Most of the other bridges built along the Burma Railway route were made of wood, but the actual Kwai bridge was constructed using 11 curved steel spans supported on concrete pillars, the materials being mainly sourced from Java. The movie bridge is built of logs.

During its construction, a wooden bridge was also built about 328 feet further downstream which, although made of wood and only able to carry lighter loads, facilitated the transportation of materials across the river on trucks for use in building the main railway bridge.

To service the Allied prisoners of war forced to construct the bridge, a camp was built at nearby Tha Markam. Alistair Urquhart of the Gordon Highlanders recalled, "The bridge stood encased in a great bamboo cage of scaffolding and hundreds of prisoners teemed all over it like ants. It was astonishing to think that this had been built with little more than bare hands and primitive technology. The general opinion among us men had been that the undertaking was impossible."

In contrast to Swann's account, Urquhart also remembered, "Building the bridge was probably the easiest time I experienced on the railway. The work was more about craft and guile than brute strength and physical labour. But it never stopped the guards from making us work at double time or administering beatings for little or no reason whatsoever. On one occasion, I received a severe beating after failing to drill a half-inch hole through a 12-inch-diameter log."

POWs line up for a meal at one of the camps along the Burma-Thailand railway. Each prisoner was supposed to receive 680 grams of rice, 520 grams of vegetables, and 110 grams of meat or fish daily—portions that were rarely reached.

Although the Japanese had attempted to keep the building of the railway a secret, it would not take long for the Allies to discover the construction effort. The sheer importance of the railway, too, was not lost on the British, who mounted a number of air raids in an attempt to disrupt the work of the Japanese.

On February 13, 1945, the RAF conducted a bombing raid on the two Kwai bridges, causing damage to both. However, the Japanese were quick to use forced labor to effect repairs, and by April the wooden bridge was again usable. Another raid took place on April 3, this time by the U.S. Army Air Forces, and further damage was inflicted on the wooden bridge.

Nevertheless, the Japanese were able to get both bridges back in operation by May. On June 24 the RAF was finally able to inflict serious damage to both bridges, putting the railway out of action for the remainder of the war.

Hellfire Pass

Another notorious section of the Burma Railway is Hellfire Pass, located in the Tenasserim Hills. Also known as the Konyu Cutting, it was the deepest and longest cutting of the entire railway and, just as the Bridge on the River Kwai has come to symbolize British suffering, Hellfire Pass is similarly often associated with the Australians' misery.

The pass itself is some 246 feet long and 82 deep. Much of the work was carried out by hand, with few tools available, making the cutting process particularly difficult. It is said that prisoners would drill a number of holes in the rock, with one man holding a metal drill bit while another hit it on the head with a hammer.

Once this task was complete, the resulting holes were filled with explosives and the rock blasted away. The men would then return to pick up the loose rocks by hand and put them into baskets or sacks, carrying the heavy rubble away in what was tiring and back-breaking work.

Initially, the work on Hellfire Pass was done by some 1,500 British and 2,000 Tamil workers beginning in November 1942. By April the following year, around 400 Australian prisoners from T Battalion of D Force were sent to work on the cutting, and by June a further 600 British and Australian prisoners of H Force were brought up after work had fallen behind schedule. In addition, some 1,000 romusha were also employed in the vicinity.

The Konyu Cutting earned the name "Hellfire Pass" due to the dreadful conditions the prisoners had to endure while working on it. During the infamous period of "Speedo," the prisoners working on this section of the railway were made to work long hours with little rest or food. Work would carry on late into the evening with oil lamps and bamboo fires lighting the night sky.

To make matters worse, the monsoon rains turned the work camps into little more than swamps full of deep, thick mud, while the steep hill faces became treacherously slippery under foot. Blasting also continued into the night, and the whole scene was a "living hell" to those who experienced it.

One survivor of Hellfire Pass was Alistair Urquhart: "Another squad were tasked with removing the rocks, trees, and debris, another separated the roots to dry them out and later burn them. Meanwhile, on the pickaxe party, some men were going hammer and tong. I said to one chap near me who was slugging his pick as if in a race, 'Slow down mate, you'll burn yourself out.' 'If we get finished early,' he said, puffing, 'maybe we'll get back to camp early.' But the soldiers would only find something else for us to do. And then the next day Japanese expectations would be higher.

"Personally, I tried to work as slowly as possible. The others would learn eventually, but I soon discovered ways to conserve energy. If I swung the pick quickly, allowing it to drop alongside an area I had just cleared, the earth came away easier. It also meant that while it looked as if I were swinging the pick like the Emperor's favourite son, the effort was minimal.

"Nevertheless, under the scorching Thai sun and without a shirt or hat for protection, or shade from the nearby jungle canopy, the work soon became exhausting. Minute after minute, hour after hour, I wondered when the sun would drop and we could go back to camp."

Besides the punishing working conditions, some 69 men are said to have been mercilessly beaten to death by their sadistic Japanese guards in Hellfire Pass during the 12 weeks it took to complete the work. Many more are known to have died of disease, but it remains uncertain exactly how many prisoners and romusha perished while working on the Konyu Cutting. The site of Hellfire Pass was lost after the war but was found again in 1980, and since 1990 an ANZAC Day ceremony is held there every year.

The "Speedo" Period

Despite the considerable achievements of the Japanese engineers and their reluctant forced laborers, progress on the Burma Railway soon fell behind schedule. In response, the infamous "Speedo" period took place between July and October 1943, during which the conditions of the workers rapidly deteriorated even further.

The Allied prisoners were forced to work around the clock in a desperate attempt to make up time and get the railway back on schedule, with 18-hour shifts becoming common practice. Hardly a day would pass during the Speedo period without the death of a prisoner, with casualty rates climbing sharply. The Japanese guards would be heard aggressively screaming "Speedo! Speedo!" at the prisoners, coercing them to work ever harder and faster.

John Leslie Graham, another British Army POW, recalled the increased brutality of the Speedo period: "All the time that we were working on the track, the Japanese were

ABOVE: Eight Australian POWs pay their last respects at the burial of a comrade who died during construction of the railroad, 1943. RIGHT: Australian and Dutch POWs, photgraphed in 1943 at Tarsau, Thailand, show the results of malnution and beriberi. OPPOSITE: Prisoners move heavy logs during the construction of one of the many bridges built over several rivers. Virtually all the work was labor intensive and performed by hand.

always shouting 'speedo.' We nicknamed one of the guards 'Speedo.' They would beat up any prisoner if they thought he wasn't working hard enough. Another ploy was to make us hold a heavy rock above our head."

The increased number of deaths saw the need for each of the worker camps to establish a rough cemetery for the burials of those who perished. The Japanese allowed the prisoners to bury their dead, and some even attended their funerals. Bizarrely, although the Japanese behaved indifferently to the suffering of their prisoners during life, they showed them deep respect following their deaths.

Medical care had been limited from the start and became even more so during the Speedo period. The Allied doctors and medics did what they could to relieve the suffering of the sick and injured, coming up with somewhat ingenious methods to help their desperate patients.

Ulcers were a particular problem, often resulting from a small cut on bare feet or legs and becoming infected. Little could be done but to cut away the dead flesh—usually agonizingly scraped away using a teaspoon or similar object—in the hope of preventing the infection from spreading further.

In the worst of cases, amputations without anesthetic would be made using makeshift surgical tools. Nevertheless, the Japanese, demanding better results, forced even the sick to carry on with their work, even though many could hardly walk, let alone perform the back-breaking tasks expected of them.

Other diseases among the Allied prisoners also became prevalent, with dysentery and diarrhea accounting for around a third of all deaths. Poor diet also led to conditions such as beriberi and pellagra, caused by the lack of vitamin B1 and niacin, since the Japanese predominately fed the prisoners on rice alone. Mosquitoes carried malaria, which caused around two percent of all deaths, while cholera was also a serious menace, causing around 12 percent of deaths.

One prisoner working on the railway was an Australian doctor named Rowley Richards, who years later recalled how many sick fellow prisoners would often appear to make a recovery only to lose the will to live: "I had always believed that there was a will to live and if that will to live disappeared, well, you died. There's much more to it than that, I'm sure of that. It's a bit like bone pointing. You point the bone at yourself, I guess.

"I've seen many cases of fellows who have been nigh unto death for maybe a couple of weeks, semiconscious most of the time, being hand fed by their mates, managing to still stay alive. And then when they recover from that and they're starting to be getting better, or think they're getting better, they just up and die on you. And I think what happened to them was that they would look around and see fellows dying around them and think, 'Oh, it's too hard, no, let me go.'"

As the prisoners increasingly suffered, the Japanese Speedo policy seemed to achieve its goal, since the Burma Railway was ultimately completed ahead of schedule in October 1943. For the Allied prisoners, however, the completion of the project was not the end of their torment. Those who survived until liberation had to endure a further two years in brutal captivity, and many were retained to conduct repairs to the railway as the Allied bombers began to take their toll.

The Workforce: Allied Prisoners of War

Although they formed only a relatively small percentage of the workforce employed constructing the Burma Railway, the Allied prisoners are foremost in the minds of most people when thinking about the forced labor used to build it.

Following the fall of Singapore, the Japanese had taken 127,000 British and British Commonwealth troops prisoner. Another 8,500 were taken prisoner in Java and Sumatra, and to these numbers others

can be added, including survivors of Allied ships sunk by the Japanese, aircrew who were shot down and associated ground crews who were left behind when their airfields were overrun, Dutch prisoners seized in Java and Sumatra, and even a number of Americans. In short, the Japanese had access to considerable numbers of men to be used as slave laborers.

Not all these POWs, of course, would ultimately be employed building the railway, although a substantial number of them would be. It is believed that more than 60,000 were involved in some way or other in the construction by the height of activity in mid-1943.

The earliest Allied prisoners to be assigned to the project were about 3,000 Australians who had been captured at Singapore and imprisoned at Changi prison. In May 1942, these men were shipped to Thanbyuzayat in Burma and set to work building the initial infrastructure that would later facilitate the actual work on the railway.

A month later another 3,000 British prisoners were similarly shipped out of captivity at Changi and sent to Ban Pong—the opposite end of the railway from Thanbyuzayat—to perform similar work. Over the coming months, an increasing number of Allied prisoners were transported to Burma to contribute to the work.

The men were forced to work in horrendous conditions, using primitive tools and often resorting to sheer brute force. Embankments were raised, cuttings hacked, and bridges built using materials sourced from local forests.

Although the Japanese fed their workers, the diet of the Allied prisoners was poor, usually consisting of rice and little, if anything, else. The hard physical labor combined with malnutrition soon took its toll on the weakened men, who were particularly susceptible to disease and other dangers of the jungle.

During their time building the railway, they were squeezed into primitive camps that were also not conducive to good health, having basic or no sanitary arrangements and poor to nonexistent medical facilities. Added to this was their brutal mistreatment by the Japanese and their Korean allies, who regularly beat and abused their captives, often in extreme fits of unrestrained violence.

Nevertheless, the prisoners did their best to keep their morale up by employing what forms of entertainment they could when in the camps and not working on the railway. Singing, telling jokes, or even playing music was a common way of relaxing, although they surely never felt truly relaxed during their time in captivity.

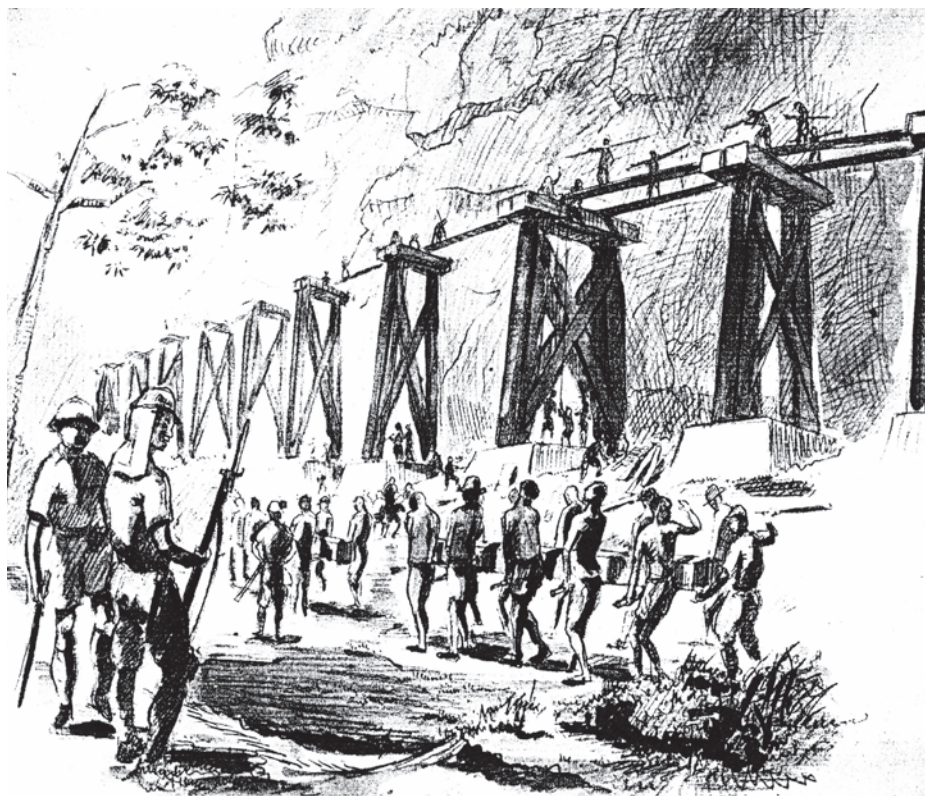
E. Samuel, another British prisoner, recalled some of this dubious entertainment: "Entertainment—usually too tired. Permission for concert on half-day rest. Gunner W., an ex-ballet dancer—marvellous morale booster, complete with chorus line dancing, mosquito net tu-tus, and coconut shells. We finished with the National Anthem, all stood to attention, including guards.

"Japs decided they could do as well—we all had to attend—orations, singing—one Korean guard played a mouth organ and finished with 'a popular English tune,' the National Anthem."

Of the more than 60,000 prisoners of war forced to work on the railway, it is believed that around 12,000 died as a result. Many of those who survived would later find themselves in prison camps in Japan, where their treatment was little better, again forced to work in aid of the Japanese war effort. Others were even set to work building other, albeit far less ambitious, railways, such as the Sumatra and Kra Isthmus Railways.

The Workforce: Romusha

Although largely and unfairly forgotten today, the vast majority of workers employed on the construction of the Burma Railway were in fact Southeast Asian civilians, said to have numbered up to 190,000, most originating from British territories overrun by the Japanese.



A prisoner named W.C. Wilder made this sketch in 1943 of a work gang constructing the Wampo Viaduct, a major engineering project. This structure is the only one of the wooden bridges still standing.

ABOVE: Malaysian natives known as Tamils were also conscripted by the Japanese to construct the railway. RIGHT: Native laborers building a bridge. Photographed in 1943 at either Songkurai in Thailand or Ronsi in Burma.

These civilians included Burmese, Chinese, Javanese, Malays, and Thais, among others, who were initially tricked by the Japanese to work on the railway in return for promises of a better life for them and their families. Such promises, of course, were lies and many disappeared as a result. Unable to lure more workers, the Japanese turned to coercive methods, forcing them to undertake their labors.

Romusha is the Japanese word for laborer, and millions of them would be utilized by the Japanese in support of their war effort. Of those who worked on the Burma Railway, it has been estimated that 80,000 to 100,000 perished, figures painstakingly determined from numerous postwar eyewitness statements.

The conditions under which they worked were no better than those suffered by the Allied prisoners, if not actually worse. Although some work has been done by academics on the awful plight of the romusha, very little remains known about their experiences in comparison to the Allied servicemen.

Among some of the most graphic accounts of the Japanese mistreatment of the romusha is that by Robert Hardie, a British doctor who was himself a prisoner of the Japanese: "A lot of Tamil, Chinese, and Malay labourers from Malaya have been brought up forcibly to work on the railway. They were told that they were going to Alor Star in northern Malaya; that conditions would be good—light work, good food and good quarters.

"Once on the train, however, they were kept under guard and brought right up to Siam and marched in droves up to the camps on the river. There must be many thousands of these unfortunates all along the railway course. There is a big camp a few kilometres below here, and another two or three kilometres up.

"We hear of the frightful casualties from cholera and other diseases among these people and of the brutality with which they are treated by the Japanese. People who have been near the camps speak with bated breath of the state of affairs—corpses rotting unburied in the jungle, almost complete lack of sanitation, frightful stench, overcrowding, swarms of flies. There is no medical attention in these camps, and the wretched natives are of course unable to organise any communal sanitation."

The Workforce: The Japanese and Their Korean Allies

Others who worked on the Burma Railway who are also often overlooked are the Japanese themselves and their Korean allies. Around 12,000 troops of the Imperial Japanese Army and 800 Koreans were employed on the railway, many of them acting as guards for the Allied prisoners of war or otherwise coercing the romusha.

Others were, of course, military engineers and those with the technical knowledge and expertise to design and build the railway. Some of these men were organized into railway regiments—the 5th and 9th Regiments—that worked directly on the railway. Others of the 2nd Railway Administering Department were tasked with the organization of the prisoner work force, ensuring they did the work and preventing any from escaping.

Conditions for the Japanese, naturally, were somewhat better than those endured by the Allied prisoners and civilian laborers. Food rations were far superior, and medical attention was usually on hand, but they were still exposed to the dangers of working in the jungle and often at risk from disease.

For many, the fact they were assigned to building the railway or guarding the prisoners was felt to be second-class work. Serving on the front lines fighting against the enemy was where the prideful majority wanted to be. Around 1,000 Japanese died working on the Burma Railway, mostly from disease.

There were also a number of inadvertent combat casualties. Housed in huts at the Tamarkan POW camp, the prisoners were caught in air raids against the bridges. The worst took place on November 29, 1944, when an Allied air raid struck the bridge and a nearby antiaircraft battery. Some of the bombs overshot the target and

DAVID LEAN'S OSCAR-WINNING *THE BRIDGE ON THE RIVER KWAI*

In 1952, French author Pierre Boulle published his novel, *Le Pont de la Rivière Kwai,* a fictional story set against the historical backdrop of the construction of the Burma-Thai Railway. In his story, the author attempts to show the sufferings of British prisoners of war as they are forced to work on the railway while being subjected to the constant brutality of their Japanese captors.

Boulle himself had a remarkable wartime career, serving with the French Army in Indochina and the Free French Mission in Singapore. Later, he worked as a secret agent in support of the resistance in Burma, China, and Indochina, but he was eventually captured by the Vichy French and made to perform forced labor. These experiences led him to write his book, which won the Prix Sainte-Beuve literary prize in its year of publication.

It would not be long before Boulle's book caught the attention of filmmakers. A screenplay was written by Carl Foreman and, later, Michael Wilson, and the subsequent movie was directed by David Lean and produced by Sam Spiegel.

Starring were such well-known actors as William Holden, who played Commander Shears; Alec Guinness, who portrayed Lt. Col. Nicholson; Jack Hawkins as Major Warden; and Sessue Hayakawa, a Japanese actor portraying Colonel Saito. In 1957, *The Bridge on the River Kwai,* as the movie was titled, hit cinema screens. It became the highest grossing movie of 1958.

The film was nominated for eight Academy Awards, winning seven of them, including Best Picture, Best Director, Best Actor (Guinness), and Best Supporting Actor (Hayakawa). The music, which included Kenneth Alford's 1914 "Colonel Bogey March," won the Oscar for Best Musical Score for Malcolm Arnold and became a hit recording.

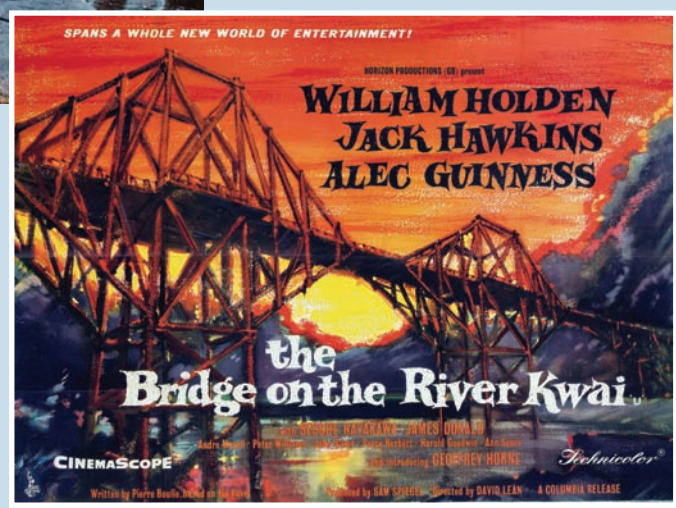
In spite of its popularity and success, the movie was later criticized for its historical inaccuracies, even though it was based on a fictional novel. In particular, the character of Lt. Col. Nicholson caused some offense due to his portrayal of collaborating with the Japanese.

The real-life senior British officer who worked on the bridge was Lt. Col. Philip Toosey, who was remembered by his comrades as a man who did all he could to delay the work. The Japanese, too, felt the movie portrayed them as inferior to the British, even though their military engineers had displayed great skill constructing the railway despite the huge challenges they faced.

Also, the bridge was never destroyed by a small group of commandos, as shown in the movie. Both the steel and wooden bridges were repeatedly bombed by Allied air forces in February, April, and June 1945.

Still, *The Bridge on the River Kwai,* is considered a classic and one of the most popular war films of all time.

In the climactic scene in the movie *The Bridge on the River Kwai,* British officer Colonel Nicholson (Alec Guinness, left) leads Japanese Colonel Saito (Sessue Hayakawa) to the detonator primed by the commando team by following the wire that has been exposed by the low water level.



ABOVE: The largely intact Kwai Bridge as it appears today. As there was no actual "River Kwai," this stretch of the Mae Klong River was renamed Kwae Yai, and is today a popular tourist destination. RIGHT: Japanese prisoners under guard outside the war crimes tribunal on Labuan Island, Borneo, December 1945. All four were sentenced to death by firing squad for their ill treatment of POWs during the war.

exploded in the camp, killing 19 POWs and wounding 68 others.

Another raid took place of February 5, 1945, in which 15 POWs were wounded; the Japanese then moved the rest of the prisoners to a less vulnerable camp site.

It took eight months for the bridge to be completed, and it remained in operation shuttling troops and supplies back and forth for two years. When completed, the Burma-Thai Railway Line, as it came to be known, stretched 260 miles.

War Crimes

Following the announcement of Japan's unconditional surrender on August 15, 1945, the Allies rounded up thousands of Japanese soldiers and conducted a number of war crimes trials, including against those who had been responsible for work on the Burma Railway. The collecting of evidence had, in fact, begun long before the cessation of hostilities, and there were many clear cases of murder and brutality against Allied POWs.

These trials, conducted from 1945 to 1951, were categorized into three classes. Class A, which included the charges of conspiracy to wage and start war, were aimed at high-level Japanese politicians and military officers, while Classes B and C were concerned with violations of the laws and customs of war and crimes against humanity. The actual trials were set up and conducted by the various national governments of the Allied nations seeking to bring to justice those who had committed war crimes against their citizens.

Trials of Japanese and Korean personnel who worked on the Burma Railway were carried out in Singapore in 1946 and 1947. Of the 111 convicted, some 32 were given death sentences, while the others received terms of imprisonment or other forms of punishment.

One Japanese NCO who was tried was a sadistic Sergeant Seiichi Okada, who had earned the nickname "Doctor Death." Okada was a medical orderly stationed successively at Kanu, Hintock, and Kinsayok POW camps in Thailand. He was charged with the inhumane treatment of prisoners, which contributed to a number of deaths and the great physical suffering of others.

Two witnesses, Privates Purdy and Wetherilt, testified against Okada, stating that while they were suffering from dysentery and diarrhea both men were forced to continue their work on the railway despite their acute illnesses. The NCO was found guilty and sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment.

Another case was that of Major Totaro Mizutani, who was accused of three separate crimes. First, inhumane treatment of prisoners of war who were working on the Burma Railway, forcing sick prisoners to march more than 200 miles to work while failing to provide adequate food and medical supplies for them. Of roughly 2,000 prisoners in his charge, it was alleged that 570 died. Second, Mizutani was accused of ill treatment of a Burmese civilian who had begged him for food; the Japanese major allegedly burned the victim with a flaming piece of wood. Third, Mizutani was charged with shooting and killing

Fusilier L.W. Wanty, a British prisoner, when he was caught wandering outside his sleeping quarters after lights out. Mizutani was sentenced to death by hanging.

It remains unclear exactly how many such trials for war crimes were conducted by the Allies against former Japanese soldiers. However, according to the Singapore War Crimes Trials Web Portal, "Some latest estimates of the number of war crimes trials held by different national authorities in Asia are as follows: China (605 trials), the U.S. (456 trials), the Netherlands (448 trials), Britain (330 trials), Australia (294 trials), the Philippines (72 trials), and France (39 trials).

"In 1956, China prosecuted another four cases involving 1,062 defendants, out of which 45 were sentenced and the rest acquitted. The Allies conducted these trials before military courts pursuant to national laws of the Allied Power concerned.

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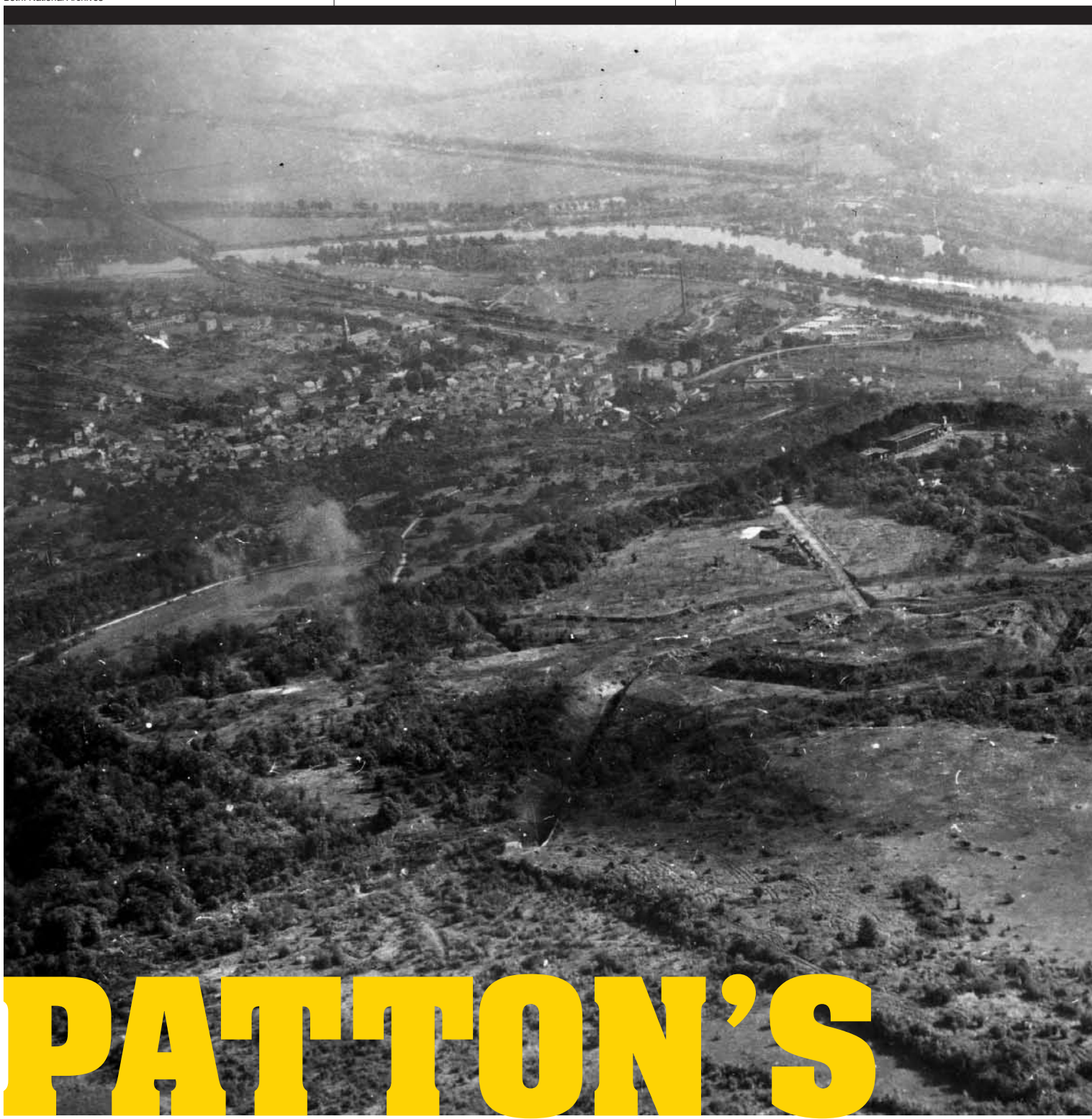

PATTON'S Lost Battle

BY DUANE E. SHAFFER

The firebrand American general suffered his only military defeat during the fighting at Fort Driant in the fall of 1944.

The road to Fort Driant began for the United States Third Army when it landed on Utah Beach at 3 PM on August 5, 1944. The Third Army had been activated four days earlier in England under the command of Lt. Gen. George S. Patton Jr.

The four corps that made up the Third Army were VIII Corps under Maj. Gen. Troy H. Middleton, XII Corps under Maj. Gen. Gilbert R. Cook (later replaced by Maj. Gen. Manton S. Eddy), XV Corps under Maj. Gen. Wade H. Haislip, and XX Corps under Maj. Gen. Walton H. Walker. Walker was one of Patton's personal favorites, and he once said of Walker, "He will apparently fight anytime, anywhere, and with anything that I will give him." That opinion would be put to the test during the Lorraine Campaign that autumn.

Once the army became operational, it did not take Patton long to engage in the hard-driving cavalry tactics that he loved best. The Third Army was able to break out of the French hedgerow country and by August 20 had entered Argentan just southeast of Falaise. The only part of Third Army that was tied down was the XV Corps fighting against the tough German defensive positions in Brittany.

On August 25, the 80th Division began its move to eastern France with an advance of 280 miles in one day. The division then concentrated around Collemieres and two days later crossed the Seine, Aube, and Marne Rivers. By the end of August, the XII Corps had advanced to the high ground east of the Meuse River near St. Mihiel. This place had special significance for Patton because he had been wounded there during World War I. Problems began for the Third Army when Patton was informed by General Omar Bradley, who commanded 12th Army Group, that there would be no more gasoline shipments until September 3. For a highly mobile army like Patton's, this became a problem of catastrophic proportions. A total of 400,000 gallons of gasoline had been requested and only 32,000 delivered. This shortage alone was enough to bring Patton's eastward advance toward the frontier of the Third Reich to a standstill.

Combined with the increasingly bad weather in early September, the gasoline shortage allowed the Germans time to build their defenses in front of the Third Army. As Patton's offensive operations gradually slowed, German counterattacks on Third Army's flanks increased. It was apparent that the Germans were in a full fighting withdrawal. Their operations focused on defending and delaying actions while units of all types were massing in

ABOVE: German-held Fort Driant, built in 1902 and located five miles southwest of Metz, France, was a strategic nemesis impeding Patton's drive into Germany in late 1944. Perched high on a hill, and with a 300-man garrison, the fort was well sited to prevent crossings of the nearby Moselle River, visible in the background. RIGHT: The battered entrance to Fort Driant after its capture.

their rear. Remnants of the German Army were now engaged in delaying actions east of the Moselle River and concentrated armored counterattacks against Third Army's bridgeheads.

After these attacks were blunted by the Third Army, Hitler replaced Col. Gen. Johannes Blaskowitz as commander of Army Group G with the tough campaigner from the Eastern Front, General Hermann Balck. Hitler had considered Blaskowitz too passive and favored Balck, who, having many of the same characteristics as his adversary Patton, would conduct an aggressive and ruthless campaign against the Americans. Balck, as an ardent Nazi, was more than willing to carry out his Führer's directives. Instead of fleeing to the West Wall (Siegfried Line), he dug in around Metz and the Moselle and Seille Rivers. He was prepared to make the Americans pay for every yard.

Third Army's intelligence section had already determined that the Germans intended to make the most of the ring of forts around Metz, the ancient gateway city through which so many invading armies had passed. Metz was to be the linchpin in the Germans' defensive strategy. An army had not directly taken Metz since 1552. It had been captured after a 54-day siege during the Franco-Prussian War and had been fortified by the Germans in World War I. However, after the Great War the string of fortresses were left in ruins.

When it became apparent that the Allies were going to plunge through France, the fortresses were reoccupied and slightly renovated. They would provide security for the retreating German armies and the advance of the Allies. Metz was to be Balck's anchor for the German Line of defense that paralleled the Siegfried line to the west.

With the Allied advance literally stopped cold, Patton decided, against his own better judgment, to test the defensive qualities of the German positions around the southern half of Metz. It became clear that any gains made along the Moselle near Metz could not be exploited without doing something about the German defensive positions in the forts.

Fort Driant, in particular, with its

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An American P-47 Thunderbolt (upper left) comes in for a dive-bombing run against the fort's defenders at the start of the operation. Patton was disappointed with the results of aerial bombing.

150mm guns, could bring down flanking fire and was already producing casualties among XX Corps personnel as Walker's men tried to throw bridges across the Moselle. Patton decided that while it might not be able to continue an offensive posture, Third Army was not going to remain idle during the lull. Third Army would conduct a reconnaissance in force, and if anything broke open the gains would be exploited.

It became the task of Patton's XX Corps, and its commander, Maj. Gen. Walker, to take Metz and its fortification system. It was quickly ascertained that the key to Metz was Fort Driant, and on September 17 an excited Walker came up with a plan for its capture, code-named Operation Thunderbolt. This was to be a combined air and ground assault against Fort Driant.

Operation Thunderbolt called for close support from the XIX Tactical Air Command and the use of massed formations of medium bombers. The air attack would then be followed by an intense artillery barrage and a combined assault by armor and infantry. Ground attack aircraft would provide close support as needed. Walker advocated this plan to Patton partially because he did not want Eddy and the XII Corps to get all the glory with their operations outside Nancy. Operation Thunderbolt was conceived when Colonel Charles W. Yuill of the 11th Infantry Regiment in Maj. Gen. S. Leroy Irwin's 5th Division suggested that Fort Driant could be taken by storm with only a few regiments.

The key to the success of the attack on Fort Driant was to be massed attacks from the air. Patton had high hopes that the bombing would work but probably underestimated the defensive edge afforded by tons of well-placed concrete. Two events that occurred before the attack threw a shadow of doubt upon the success of the operation. The 12th Army Group placed the use of its bombers on a day to day basis and could not commit them long-term to a protracted operation, but far worse, the weather became cold and rainy. Mobility was hampered, and air support would be limited.

Patton later became disappointed with the results obtained from the use of air power.

He should have seen this going into the operation because of the ineffective results of massed bombing on the German heavy defenses in Brittany. Operation Thunderbolt was slated for anytime after September 19. The 2nd Battalion, 11th Infantry was kept on alert and told that it might be called upon to go in at a moment's notice. Because of a lack of ammunition of all types, the concept of a massed attack on the fort was abandoned and air power would be parceled out to different areas of the front on a daily basis.

Named after a French officer who had died at Verdun in 1916, Fort Driant sat atop a 360-meter hill, facing southwest. Known originally as Feste Kronprinz, the French changed the name in 1918 to Groupe Fortifie Driant. With a frontage of 1,000 yards, it contained four artillery casemates and five bunkers that could each hold 300 men. The Allies had little more intelligence about the fort other than it covered all the approaches to the Moselle and probably had a small garrison of poorly supplied second-line troops.

Detailed maps and plans of the fort were provided by a French officer who hid them in Nancy during the 1940 German attack. The fort was surrounded by a belt of thick forest, which is where the American attack would begin. The fort itself was 700 yards deep, and each of the casemates contained a three-gun battery of 100mm or 150mm guns. Sprinkled throughout were armored observation posts and pillboxes that were all connected by a maze of underground tunnels. The entire fort was surrounded by a 60-foot dry moat with a further 60 feet covered by an interwoven mass of barbed wire. The Germans made sure that the fort was well supplied with adequate amounts of food, water, and ammunition.

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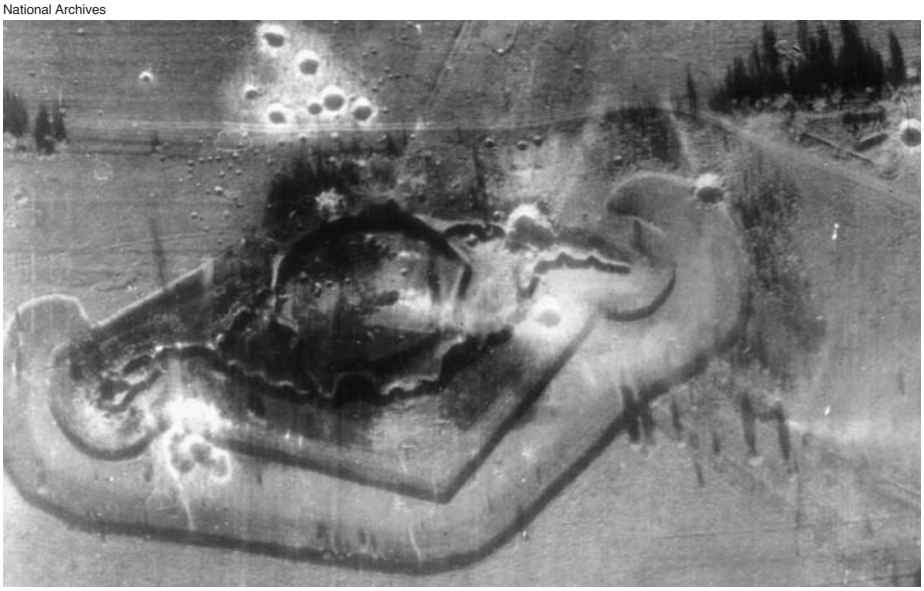

ABOVE: Although the bomb craters look impressive, the walls of Fort Driant were barely dented by American air power. BELOW: After the battle, the reinforced concrete walls of Fort Driant show the effects of shells and bombs but have not been breached. The fort did not fall until December 8, 1944.

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The air attacks against Fort Driant began on September 15 but provided only minimal results. The XIX Tactical Air Command (TAC) scored several direct hits with 1,000-pound bombs against the fort, but inflicted little damage. The Allies brought up several heavy 240mm artillery pieces and fired on Fort Driant, but also produced little damage.

September 27, 1944, was a clear and dry day. At 2:15 PM P-47 Thunderbolt fighter-bombers dropped napalm and high explosives. Some of the fighter-bombers ran the gauntlet of the intense flak curtain thrown up by the Germans and dropped as low as 50 feet to ensure the accuracy of their hits. No appreciable damage was observed, and another wave of fighter-bombers dropped bombs into trenches and on top of the fort. Next, 155mm howitzers opened up on the fort with their massive shells. Explosions were seen directly on pillboxes and the front slope of the fort. It was literally like throwing tennis balls against a wall. None of the artillery or air bombardment had inflicted significant damage.

Next, two companies of infantry from the 11th Regiment and a company of tank destroyers moved out under a smoke screen. The force soon encountered the dry moat and the heavy concentration of barbed wire. The Germans held their fire until the Americans drew close then unleashed a storm of machine-gun fire and mortar rounds. The tank destroyers drove forward and engaged the pillboxes one on one with no effect.

Several platoons of infantry succeeded in getting through the wire and around to the west side of the fort. Here they were met with a barrage of small arms and machine-gun fire causing them to withdraw. Finally realizing that the fort was far more complex and dangerous than previously assumed, General Irwin gave Colonel Yuill permission to withdraw his force at 6:00 PM. The American attack had been stopped cold, and the Allies were forced to rethink how they would take the fort.

National Archives

Kevin Hymel

ABOVE: The steel cupolas of Fort Driant as they appear today. Although derelict, the fort is still used by the French army for training purposes.
TOP: A Third Army soldier carrying a machine gun heads for his position while American planes bomb Fort Driant, October 6, 1944.

Patton, Irwin, and Walker met on September 28, but there was no mention of abandoning the attack—only that a new approach was necessary and the 4th Armored Division needed to rest and regroup. In fact, Walker remembered Patton saying at the time, "We have put our hands to the plow; we must finish the job." Several of Patton's aides recommended breaking off the attack and commencing a double envelopment of Metz. The suggestion was overruled by Patton's desire to continue fighting during the lull and Walker's determination that the fort would eventually be carried.

The next attack on the fort would feature a larger role for the combat engineers. It was scheduled for October 3, and in that time the army would receive as much training as possible in attacking fortifications. On the morning of October 3, the weather was rainy and miserable. The promised air support did not materialize, and Irwin, not wishing to wait any longer, ordered the attack to commence. The tanks moved forward and attacked the fort with high explosive, concrete-penetrating shells. The engineers went into action with satchel charges, pole charges, and bangalore torpedoes. Specially designated tanks called tank-dozers pushed forward long pipes filled with explosives known as snakes.

The attack began to unravel almost immediately. The snakes broke apart and could not be properly placed. Accurate German artillery and machine-gun fire ripped large holes in the American infantry lines. The engineers got through the entangling barbed wire and tried repeatedly to place their charges but could not blast through the concrete. Roving German patrols that popped out of the fort's tunnels mowed down many of the engineers. Company B was able to work its way around the obstructions and create a gap for other troops to pass through. By nightfall, infantry and tank reinforcements began coming through. The attack then quickly developed into a confusing mass of small unit actions with Germans appearing from nowhere and destroying American tanks and infantry with panzerfaust antitank weapons and machine-gun fire. Company B did manage to reach its objective and had a tentative hold on its position in the southwest corner of the fort by 2 PM.

Captain Harry Anderson of Company B assisted his radioman by clearing one of the bunkers with several hand grenades. The two men entered after the explosions and, instead of finding dead Germans, they found that the enemy had escaped down one of the many interconnecting tunnels. Anderson ran back to bring more men forward in order to exploit their gains. Coming upon another bunker, Anderson tossed in more grenades that were followed by explosions. This time six stunned Germans tumbled out the blast door waving small pieces of white cloth in surrender.

The American attacks stalled briefly but were reenergized by an enlisted man. Private First Class Robert W. Holmlund climbed on top of one of the barracks, kicked off one of the ventilator shafts, and then shoved a bangalore torpedo down into the room. The thunderous explosion caused the Germans to evacuate the building quickly. Holmlund said he "could hear 'em swearing and trampling over one another trying to get out. " Holmlund was killed later that night and received a posthumous Distinguished Service

Cross. All through the night, the scattered American forces took more casualties and became more disorganized.

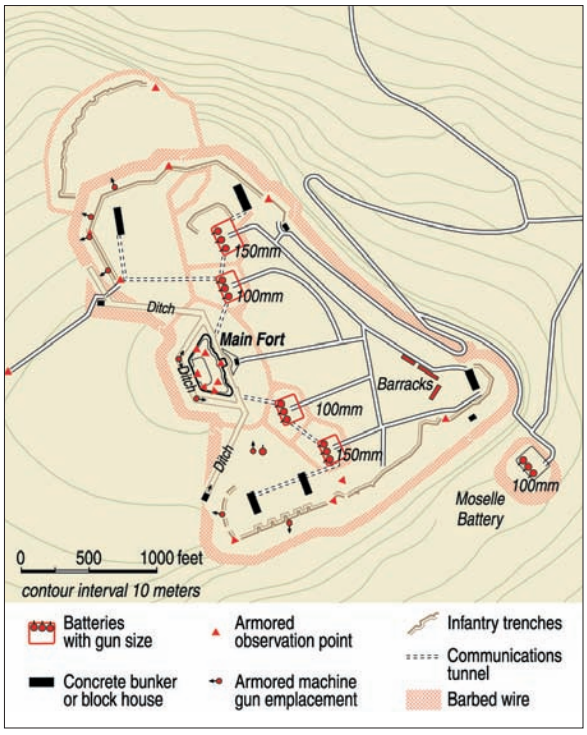
At dawn, Irwin told Yuill to hang on and wait for reinforcements. He then sent in Company K, 2nd Infantry to hold the line and replace the 110 men lost during the first day of the attack. Throughout the day, American soldiers tried in vain to enter the fort but were stopped by machine-gun and sniper fire. Special flamethrower and engineer units were cut down before they could get near the central core of the fort.

It had long become clear to the Americans that the defenders of the fort were not the old men and boys that they had been told manned the defenses. Instead, among the defenders was a unit from a nearby officer candidate school comprised of fanatical Nazis. The rest of the garrison was made up of ex-Navy and Air Force men.

By nightfall on October 4, an attempt was made to reorganize the American troops that were badly scattered throughout the area. Again, teams of German soldiers emerged from the fort to disrupt any units that tried to regroup. Some of the fighting had moved underground, removing the American tanks from the tactical picture.

At dawn on October 5, the German-held forts that surrounded Driant all opened fire on Driant itself, catching many American units on the surface and producing more casualties. Irwin decided to send in more reinforcements. This probably was done on the advice contained in a message from Captain Jack Gerrie of the 11th Regiment. Gerrie stated, "The situation is critical—a couple more barrages and another counterattack and we are sunk. We have no men, our equipment is shot and we just can't go … enemy has infiltrated and pinned what is here down. We cannot advance … the enemy arty is butchering these tr [sic] until we have nothing left to hold with."

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



A map of Fort Driant reveals the complex system of gun batteries, casemates, tunnels, moats, ditches, and other impediments that thwarted attackers.

By the afternoon of the 5th, Companies B and G were reduced to less than 100 men. Irwin decided it was time for decisive action and formed what was called Task Force Warnock. This force was composed of the 10th Infantry Regiment minus Company A. The task force was committed on the night of October 5-6 and relieved the badly mauled troops on top of the fort. Many of the wounded were evacuated since the German fire had decreased in intensity.

By October 6, Patton's enthusiasm for the operation was beginning to wane. He said, "Things are going very badly at Fort Driant; we may have to abandon the attack since it is not worth the cost. " Still, he balked at the idea of canceling the attack since he did not want to lose any perceived momentum in the area. The First Battlion of the 10th Infantry was committed at 10 AM hours on October 7. One of the rifle companies was able to take four pillboxes but was unable to hold its position. A German counterattack at 4:15 PM cut the men off, and the survivors withdrew. A single platoon made it into an underground tunnel with a long and narrow passage. Engineers were brought forward to blow open a large iron door. Having accomplished this, the exhausted soldiers found that the Germans had piled old machinery and other wreckage in their path.

Orders were sent back to bring up cutting torches, and these were delivered the next morning. Cutting through the debris and pushing it aside, the men moved forward to find yet another door. Hearing the sounds of digging nearby, the Americans feared that the Germans were undermining the tunnel in order to collapse it on them.

A large 60-pound charge was quickly placed at the far end of the tunnel to discourage the German effort. The explosion's only result was to release deadly fumes into the room and cause the soldiers to scurry for their gas masks.

The men could hear the approaching Germans and could do little more than pile up some sandbags and wait. Sergeant Dale H. Klakamp of the 7th Engineer Battalion, 5th Infantry Division was later awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for his heroic actions in the tunnel. While his comrades were in a panicked confusion, Klakamp started erecting the sandbags that would save many of his fellow soldiers, lives.

The Germans soon arrived and peppered the men with machine-gun and small arms fire. Engineers on the German side were passed to the front with satchel charges of their own. One of these charges went off near Klakamp's platoon and produced more American casualties. Many of the Americans in the tunnel were sickened by the fumes or wounded and needed to be evacuated. Once again, the tactical situation had disintegrated into uncoordinated attacks and general confusion.

Corporal C. F. Wilkinson, a messenger for the 284th Field Artillery, having become completely lost in the maze of tunnels, blundered directly into the main German command post. He was able to beat a hasty retreat before the Germans

Continued on page 96

Historic aircraft live again at the National Museum of World War II Aviation in Colorado Springs.

Colorado Springs, Colorado—at the foot of majestic Pikes Peak—has long been a favorite vacation destination. And now there's another reason to head for the Rockies: the National Museum of World War II Aviation.

Anyone with an interest in piston- and propeller-driven warplanes will get their heart beating a little faster when they enter the facility, located on the northwest corner of the Colorado Springs Airport.

Unlike many other aviation museums, virtually all of the 25 aircraft on display have been painstakingly brought back to pristine flying condition. These include a prewar Navy Grumman F3F-2 biplane (one of only three flying in world); an L-19 artillery spotting plane; a B-25 Mitchell bomber that has appeared in many war films, including *Pearl Harbor*; an SBD-4 Dauntless; two F7F Tigercats; a Catalina flying boat and its successor, an HU-16 Albatross, to name just a few. (Call ahead to see if your favorite aircraft is at the museum before you visit, as they routinely fly to events.)

ABOVE: The National Museum of World War II Aviation is home to an extensive collection that includes more than 3,000 artifacts and historical documents from one of the most crucial periods in America's history. BELOW: This pristine Lockheed P-38, "White 33," was buried in a pit in the New Guinea jungle for decades before being retrieved and restored to better-than-new condition at the WestPac Restoration facility.

One of the museum's most popular attractions is the P-38 "White 33" of the 39th Fighter Squadron, which was retrieved in wrecked condition from the New Guinea jungles and restored to immaculate flying condition. Its pilot, Lieutenant Ken Sparks, used it to ram a Japanese Zero in flight.

Also on display are three P-47 Thunderbolts, two TBM Avengers, a T-6G Texan, and the world's only fully functioning Link Trainer (a second one is being restored).

A number of exhibits showcase the Tuskegee Airman, life on the U.S. home front, uniforms and equipment, military vehicles, and much more. A well-stocked gift shop also caters to the aviation enthusiast.

The admission price includes either a self- or docent-guided tour. Guided tours (at no extra cost) to the adjacent WestPac Restorations Inc. facility are also conducted. There visitors can see historic aircraft being brought back to life.

To accommodate future additions to the collection, construction has begun on a new 40,000-square-foot hangar and a world-class 86,000-square-foot exhibit hall.

Plans are being finalized now for the 2019 Air Show at the Colorado Springs Airport, when many of these rare and beautiful warbirds will again take to the sky. ☐

The National Museum of World War II Aviation

755 Aviation Way
Colorado Springs, CO

Hours: Tuesdays, Thursdays, Fridays, and Saturdays. Tours start at 10 AM

Ticket prices: $12 for adults, $6 for ages 12 and younger.

Ticket discounts and tour reservations are available online at worldwariiaviation.org.

ABOVE: This North American B-25 Mitchell bomber, dubbed *In the Mood,* has appeared in many war films, including *Pearl Harbor.* In the background is *Old Crow,* a North American P-51 Mustang. BELOW: This sleek Grumman F7F Tigercat, which served with the Navy and Marines from late war until 1954, presages the coming of jet fighters.

ABOVE: An 18-cylinder, Chevrolet-built Pratt & Whitney R-2800 radial engine regarded by some as the best piston aircraft engine ever made. LEFT: The Grumman TBM Avenger was one of the Navy's workhorses of American carrier-based fleets.

Fort Driant

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could capture him.

Warnock had planned an additional attack against two of the southern casemates for the next day but canceled it because of the lack of success already experienced. The entire operation gradually settled into a stalemate with the Americans unable to achieve any further gains and the men hanging on desperately to what had been won in the hard fighting. Food, water, and ammunition were running out, and the men holding positions underground were exposed to the dust and fumes of the tunnels.

By October 9, Patton's attitude about the attack on Fort Driant had changed completely. He said, "The show is going sour. We will have to pull out. " It had quickly become a no-win situation for the Americans because both daylight and nocturnal assaults had failed. Daytime attacks were vulnerable to the deadly fire that rained down on Fort Driant from the adjacent forts. At night, assaults were quickly broken up and driven into confusion when the German squads emerged from their underground tunnels.

German resistance stiffened even more on October 11, when the defenders began converting knocked-out tanks into makeshift pillboxes. German self-propelled assault guns appeared to lay down harassing fire on the Americans. On the night of October 12-13, the remaining American forces were withdrawn from Fort Driant. The casualties in the operation had been inordinately high and can be blamed on the Americans' complete lack of training for such operations. The Third Army suffered 64 men killed, 547 wounded, and 187 missing, assumed captured.

The attack on Fort Driant was the only battle ever lost by General George Patton. Questions linger as to why the fort was attacked when the Third Army had little or no gasoline and could have been spending the time resting, regrouping, and preparing for the coming invasion of Germany. The XX Corps had failed to take Fort Driant, but Patton's XII Corps enjoyed some success south of Metz in its line-correcting operations along the Seille River.

Attacking the fort may have appeared to be a costly blunder, but Patton could not resist the temptation to try out the defenses. If he had done otherwise, he would have surrendered the valuable momentum his army had gained in its drive across France. The cost of the operation must be measured against the gains of keeping the army at a high level of combat readiness and giving the soldiers valuable on-the-job training against fixed fortifications. The cost to the Germans was far higher, with Balck suffering the loss of 43,200 men during the October fighting. Furthermore, the Germans lost valuable tanks and other equipment that could not be easily replaced.

By the end of November, all the forts had capitulated except Fort Driant. It eventually fell on December 8 after the Third Army had completely enveloped Metz. Although the attack on Fort Driant was a tactical loss for Patton, the overall strategic picture favored Third Army.

Compared with the Third Army drive in previous months, Patton advanced only a short distance in the foul weather, crossing swollen rivers. However, he succeeded in his goal of an offensive-defense and inflicted massive casualties on the German Army.

It became evident that Patton's role in the European Theater of Operations was far from over when on December 16 he received a frantic call from Bradley informing him that the Germans had mounted a major offensive in the Ardennes. This was a role that Patton savored; the Third Army would be the cavalry and come to the aid of the besieged 101st Airborne in the city of Bastogne. Finally, George S. Patton Jr. and his army could move again.

Duane E. Shaffer is a library director and a graduate of Duquesne University. He dedicates this story to the memory of his uncle, Pfc. William Paul Kennedy, who was killed in action outside Les Quatre Fers on October 8, 1944.

Mortarman

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trying to scale it in the face of enemy fire. About 100 feet from the wall I found a pile of gravel about three feet high. The SCR-300 radio was heavy, and I stopped behind the gravel to get my breath before going over the wall.

"I had been there about a minute when a sniper's bullet snapped past my head with such a loud crack that I just about jerked my head off in reflex. The bullet must have just missed my helmet. I took off immediately and had no trouble clearing that stone wall in one big jump."

Rincker dashed for a large, red brick building that was a sugar warehouse, leaping over the body of a dead GI in the doorway, and followed by Petracco. Once inside, the two men could hear a German machine gun firing from outside the other end of the cavernous building. Taking Rincker and another soldier with a bazooka with him, Lieutenant Petracco climbed a ladder to a metal catwalk that ringed the interior.

Reaching the other end, the men looked out the window. "From this window," Rincker said, "we could look down and see a small, one-story building about 50 feet from the end of the warehouse. Periodically a machine gun fired from this building toward our men who were trying to advance down the street."

Petracco directed the bazooka man to fire at the building; he did, but it failed to put the machine gunner out of action. Instead, a German ran out of that building and into the warehouse, where he sprayed the catwalk with automatic weapons fire. Luckily, no one was hit. Rincker radioed for mortar fire on the small building and, after a couple of rounds to register the weapon, nine rounds were dropped on the building, silencing the gun. Lieutenant Petracco was killed later that day.

After this action, with the day growing dark, the exhausted Rincker was resting in another building in the factory area when a tremendous firefight broke out around the building, setting it ablaze.

"In the light of the fire," Rincker said, "I could see that there were Germans all around our building, so escape seemed impossible. I didn't relish being burned to death, but it seemed that all the GIs around me were either dead or knocked out by the terrible concussions. At this point I decided I'd rather die in a hail of bullets than be burned up, so I made my way to a doorway."

He ran out and dashed into another building in which there happened to be about a dozen Company E men. The Germans surrounded the building and then entered, chasing the GIs to an upper story. Rincker was unable to raise anyone on his radio, but he heard a voice calling for an artillery strike on the building he was in!

Within minutes the area erupted in huge explosions. Rincker said, "I was on the second floor in a central hallway when a brilliant flash and deafening blast took place right over my head. I was knocked down, stunned, and maybe knocked out momentarily. I remember getting up and being covered with whitish dust. My head hurt, and I felt quite dizzy. About then the artillery fire ceased, and it was rather quiet till daylight."

That morning Rincker and the other survivors were found by their buddies and evacuated to an aid station; he was soon back with his company.

For the next two weeks, more battles were in Clarence Rincker's future. Somehow, though, the end of the war came, and he was still alive. The 100th Division had endured 175 days of sustained combat, during which time they lost 916 men killed, 3,656 wounded, and 180 missing in action.

Rincker happily recalled, "The war in Europe was over! I had walked through the Valley of Death and had come out the other side unscathed! There was no question that the Lord had been looking after me."

After the war, Clarence Rincker became an agronomist with the Agricultural Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, in Prosser, Washington. He allowed the author to quote extensively from his memoirs. □

Shermans

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General Hodges decided to intervene personally and created the Bradford Task Force. Brig. Gen. Bradford assembled a task force that was made up of battalions from the 7th, 27th, and 96th Infantry Divisions supported by tanks, armored flamethrowers, self-propelled assault guns, and 4.2-inch chemical mortars. This force was to secure Kakazu the following day.

April 24 dawned dark and rainy. Heavy clouds obscured the sky. Despite intermittent enemy artillery, the Bradford Task Force attacked behind a thundering 13-minute barrage of its own. To their immense relief, there was no resistance. The Japanese, having been outflanked, had evacuated the Kakazu Pocket during the night under the cover of their artillery. By afternoon, the area had been cleared, and the junction of the 27th and 96th Infantry Divisions was secured along the Urasoe-Mura Escarpment.

Over the next few days, more than 600 Japanese bodies would be counted in the area. Many more were buried in sealed caves and mass graves dug by the Japanese. It had been a costly battle, but the first of the defensive circles protecting the Shuri Line had been pierced. Much hard fighting lay ahead, as the Japanese did not surrender or voluntarily yield a single foot of ground; the Japanese soldier fought until he was killed.

What had been most impressive about the Japanese resistance was their strength in artillery. Never before had the Americans encountered such a large quantity of artillery (mortars, too) and the ability to use it effectively, especially while supporting infantry attacks.

The battle for the First Shuri Line finally came to a close at the end of April, when the 27th Division's 165th Regiment secured the Machinato airfield. It now became time for the rest of the American Tenth Army to begin chipping away at the Second Shuri Line. It would be a long, hard, and deadly struggle that would not end until June 30, 1945. □

Unit 731

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order of the Imperial Japanese Army's headquarters and that many local residents died." Noteworthy in the judge's declaration was his understatement that "many local residents died."

The judge's comment was, however, consistent with much of the narrative written about Unit 731 after the war, which generally characterizes the group's activities as "experimental," a seeming reference to the vivisections conducted by the Japanese doctors.

Most accounts reckon the loss of life caused by vivisection to be around 3,000 to 10,000 individuals. These figures neglect the field tests of pathogens conducted against Chinese civilians and the subsequent losses of life from bubonic plague after the war.

Such minimization constitutes a miscarriage of justice for the hundreds of thousands who were murdered as a result of these attacks, and potentially the tens of thousands more Americans who could have died if the Japanese plans had been carried out on numerous Pacific battlefields, or if they had been successful in their attempts to deliver biological agents to the U.S. mainland in the latter stages of the war.

As it stands, Sheldon Harris's *Factories of Death* (1994) estimates the loss of life at 200,000, with Daniel Barenblatt's *A Plague Upon Humanity* (2008) putting it as high as 580,000.

At what point is Unit 731 indicted for mass murder? While some Japanese scholars have been rigorous in documenting Japan's war crimes, their own government has been unwilling to acknowledge the atrocities it perpetrated against China.

Unit 731's legacy is one of a useless, fanciful, extravagant, and sadistic indulgence that accomplished nothing politically or militarily for Japan, and, in terms of its research, nothing for the United States.

One can only hope that the perpetrators, who escaped prosecution as war criminals, achieved something positive in their postwar careers because the victims are still crying out for justice. □

Death Railway

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Altogether 2,244 war crimes prosecutions were conducted in Asia; 5,700 defendants were prosecuted; 984 defendants were executed; 3,419 were sentenced to imprisonment; and 1,018 were acquitted."

The River Kwai Bridge Today

Today the Bridge on the River Kwai, which still stands largely intact but with some postwar repairs, is a major tourist attraction in Thailand. The track over the bridge has been modified to make a walkway for visitors to cross the bridge on foot, as well as offer viewpoints of the incredible scenery. However, a small train does travel back and forth over the bridge carrying tourists who prefer to experience it via rail. Each year a River Kwai Bridge festival is held to remember the Allied bombing raid of November 28, 1944.

Also of importance to the potential visitor are the three nearby war cemeteries where the bodies of the majority of Allied prisoners of war who perished building the Burma Railway rest. These include the Kanchanaburi War Cemetery near the town of Kanchanaburi itself, which has 6,858 identified casualties. The second is the Thanbyuzayat War Cemetery, containing 3,626 identified remains. Finally, there is the Chungkai War Cemetery, containing a further 1,692 casualties. All three are maintained by Britain's Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

After film director David Lean's *The Bridge on the River Kwai* came out in 1958, many of the actual survivors were less than pleased to see that some of the British troops who worked on the bridge were portrayed as collaborating with the enemy to finish the structure on time.

One man, Ernest Gordon, said, "In justice to these men—living and dead—who worked on that bridge, I must make it clear that we never did so willingly. We worked at bayonet point and under bamboo lash, taking any risk to sabotage the operation whenever the opportunity arose." □

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