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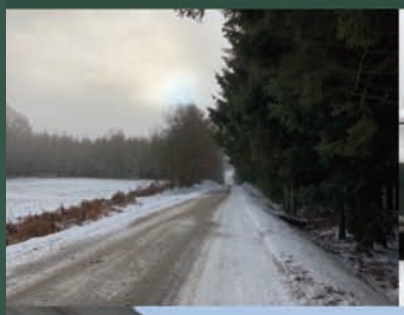


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COVER: German soldiers carrying wire cutters and machine guns make their way through a trench somewhere in Russia. See story on page 50.
Photo: ullstein bild



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# Death of a Nazi Princess.

It seems that every month there is a news item that relates to World War II. Here's one you may have missed:

Gudrun Margarete Elfriede Emma Anna Himmler Burwitz, the true-believing daughter of Heinrich Himmler, head of the dreaded SS and one of Adolf Hitler's closest henchmen, died in or near Munich last year.

When Gudrun was born in 1929, her father was consolidating power as leader of the elite Nazi paramilitary corps known as the SS.

Himmler also commanded the German secret police—the Gestapo—and helped establish the system of prison and concentration camps in which more than six million people—primarily Jews but also Roma (or Gypsies), homosexuals, and others—would perish.

Gudrun, who was Himmler's oldest child and only legitimate daughter, was exceptionally devoted to her father. (Himmler and his wife Margarete later adopted a son, and he had two other children with his mistress, Hedwig Potthast.)

Throughout the 1930s and early 1940s, the bespectacled, meek-looking Himmler enjoyed having Gudrun at his side, as a blond, blue-eyed symbol of Aryan youth. She attended Christmas parties with Hitler, who fawned over her and gave her dolls and chocolates.

Although she had visited a concentration camp as a 12-year-old child, she steadfastly denied the existence of the Holocaust. Gudrun recalled the visit in her diary: "Today we went to the SS concentration camp at Dachau. We saw everything we could. We saw the gardening work. We saw the pear trees. We saw all the pictures painted by the prisoners. Marvelous. And afterward we had a lot to eat. It was very nice."

As the Third Reich was collapsing in May 1945, 15-year-old Gudrun and her mother fled to northern Italy, where they were arrested by American troops and held by the Allies for four years.

Himmler, meanwhile, was seized by Russian forces on May 20, 1945, and transferred to British custody. Three days later, he committed suicide with a concealed cyanide capsule.

Burwitz, who was sometimes called a "Nazi princess" by supporters and detractors alike, remained unrepentantly loyal to her father to the end.

In 1961, using an assumed name, she joined the West German intelligence service as a secretary at the agency's headquarters. She was dismissed in 1963 when authorities discovered her true identity.

In the late 1960s, she married Wulf-Dieter Burwitz, a writer who was active in a right-wing political group, and settled in a Munich suburb. They had two children.

In later years, Gudrun actively supported a group called Stille Hilfe, or Silent Help, that was formed after the war to help Nazi fugitives—such as Klaus Barbie and Anton Malloth—flee Germany, particularly to

Gudrun Himmler with her father Heinrich at a Nazi sports festival, 1938.

South America, and to support their families. The organization is closely linked to a number of outlawed neo-Nazi movements that contend the Holocaust never happened.

Another unrepentant Nazi gone; how many are left?

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DICK CAMP
(COLONEL, USMC, RET.)

# At war's end, the Japanese killed their prisoners at Palawan, a POW camp in the Philippines, but one brave Marine survived to tell the story.

Superior Private Tomisaburo Sawa of the Imperial Japanese Army fixed the bayonet on his Type 99 Arisaka rifle and carefully checked to make sure the weapon was loaded. From his position on the veranda of the prison guard barracks, he watched as members of his platoon advanced across the courtyard.

U.S. Marine Corps Pfc. Glenn "Mac" McDole saw them coming from the entranceway of his trench air raid shelter and knew instinctively that something was terribly wrong.

The Japanese guards were in full combat gear, with bayonets fixed. There was a guttural order, the line stopped, and the Japanese quickly formed a semi-circle around the trenches filled with American POWs.

"I saw five [Japanese] soldiers go up to one of the air raid shelters and throw buckets of gasoline into the entrance," Private Sawa stated. "This was followed by two men, who threw lighted torches into the opening."

McDole watched horrorstruck as flames engulfed the trapped Americans. He saw one human torch climb out of the trench and run screaming toward the enemy. They shot him down, unintentionally putting the man out of his misery.

Others were not so lucky. The guards watched them burn to death in agony. McDole ducked down, terrified at what he had seen. "My God," he thought, "the Japanese are going to kill us all."

With the surrender of U.S. forces in the Philippines in 1942, American prisoners of war were immediately confined in filthy, overcrowded POW camps near Manila. McDole was sent to the infamous Cabanatuan No. 1, where he quickly decided that it was nothing but a death camp. Ten to 15 men died every day of malnutrition, vitamin deficiency, and a variety of contagious diseases. "I never saw so many fellows dying each day," McDole recalled. "No medicines or anything."

In addition, many prisoners were executed by their brutal, sadistic guards for a variety of trumped-up charges. McDole knew that it was only a matter of time until the same thing happened to him, and he

ABOVE: Survivors Joe Barta, Mac McDole, and Doug Bogue confer with an intelligence officer after their return to the United States in 1945. LEFT: An aerial view of the Palawan camp after the war. Today the site at Plaza Cuartel at Puerto Princesa is a memorial to those who died at the hands of their captors.

searched for a way to get out of the camp. It finally came in the form of a large working party. "Want men, want men," the guards shouted out. "Three hundred go to Manila." Envisioning better conditions, McDole quickly raised his hand despite the old Corps adage ("Never volunteer").

On August 12, 1942, he was taken to Palawan, one of the largest islands in the Philippines—270 miles long and 15 miles wide, located on the western perimeter of the Sulu Sea—and marched to an old, dilapidated Filipino Constabulary barracks, his home for the next two-and-a-half years. He passed through the stone entranceway, along a dirt road lined with a dozen coconut trees to a courtyard in front of a U-shaped barracks building.

The prisoners were met by the commander of the 131st Airfield Battalion, Captain Nagayoshi Kojima, nicknamed "the Weasel" by the POWs.

"Kojima stood on a little pedestal so he could look down on us," McDole remembered. "In a squeaky voice, he would say, 'Americans—' and then pause.

'Today we build roads.' It wasn't long before we knew it was a lie … we were to build an airstrip." McDole was incredulous. There was nothing around the camp but thick jungle.

The prisoners started to work almost immediately, felling trees, hauling and crushing coral gravel, and pouring concrete, day after day without adequate rest or food. "It was all hand labor," McDole emphasized, "with only a level mess kit of rice and an occasional bowl of mongo bean soup to keep us going."

Food became an obsession; the prisoners thought of it night and day. McDole dreamed of angel food cake and ice cream. Others made up elaborate menus they intended to eat upon liberation. In the meantime, they had to do with what they could scrounge: lizards, birds, monkeys, snakes. In fact, McDole rather took a fancy to roasted snake. "Tastes just like chicken," he claimed.

Many of the prisoners became sick and unable to work, while others suffered from Japanese brutality. "We had so many fellows sick and beat up," McDole recalled, "that they filled one wing of the barracks, which we called sick bay."

The term "sick bay" was a misnomer, because there were no medicines, and the men were put on half rations if they did not work. "The Japanese carried a short club a bit thicker than an officer's woven leather 'swagger stick,'" McDole recalled. "The guards were expert at applying it to the kidneys or the back of the head. They could drop a man with one blow."

One guard caught two prisoners taking green papayas from a tree in the compound and punished them by breaking their left arms with an iron bar. One day at work, McDole was doping off and got caught. A guard hit him on the head, dropping him to his knees. Foolishly, McDole got up, looked him in the eyes and said, "Ya didn't hurt me, you SOB!" The guard hit him—and down he went again.

**Their Japanese guards allowed prisoners to construct trenches like these in the event of U.S. air raids. After sounding a false alarm on December 14, 1944, the guards poured gasoline on the prisoners in the trenches and burned them alive. Those who tried to escape were gunned down, but 11 managed to survive.**

Furious, McDole got up and yelled, "Ya still didn't hurt me!" Other prisoners looked on, knowing that the guard could easily kill him for insubordination. Instead, the Japanese soldier just shook his head and said, "Ya baka (You're crazy)!" and walked away.

Other prisoners were not as lucky as McDole. The Japanese learned that several POWs had made contact with the local Filipinos, who gave them information and food. The men were tied to the courtyard coconut trees and beaten in front of the rest of the prisoners. One of the men was thrashed with a wire whip, which tore his flesh to the bone. When one guard tired, another took his place. The men were beaten unconscious, dragged to a cell and put on a ration of half a mess kit of rice every three days.

Even with the close supervision and threat of dire punishment, several prisoners managed to escape—but not all of them made it to freedom. Two POWs who had made it through the wire managed to elude capture for six days before being dragged back to the camp. They were severely beaten before the assembled prisoners until unconscious and then loaded on a truck and taken away. Filipinos said they were shot and buried in unmarked graves.

There was one American doctor in the camp, but the Japanese would not give him any medicine, so he relied on his own remedies, which, fortunately for McDole, were good enough.

On March 14, 1943, McDole desperately needed the doctor's expertise. "I was busting rock when I suddenly broke out in a cold sweat. I grabbed my side and down on my knees I went. The next thing I knew a guard was beating the heck out of me, telling me to get back to work." The American doctor convinced the guard that McDole was really sick and got him back to camp.

He was diagnosed with acute appendicitis and told he would die without an immediate operation. The catch was, there was no anesthetic. McDole responded bravely, "If I'm going to die, let's die trying." He was held down on a table by five guards, who made fun of his screams as the doctor operated.

"It took him two hours and fifty minutes to get the appendix out and suture me back together," McDole recalled. Unfortunately, infection set in and he was close to death. One night his abdomen ruptured, spewing a noxious mixture of pus and blood on the deck. The doctor tried sewing the wound shut but the thread would not hold in the mutilated skin. When that failed, the doctor took shirt buttons, lined them up along-

side the incision and sewed it up, which left a rather unique scar. After weeks of recovery, McDole was finally well enough to go back to work.

By mid-October 1944, the prisoners were startled by the appearance of American B-24s overhead, which began to systematically bomb the airfield. In one memorable raid, they destroyed 60 Japanese planes on the ground. Their arrival verified the rumors that an American invasion force was approaching the Philippines.

The POWs were overjoyed, but at the same time worried. They had heard that the guards were under orders to kill all the prisoners if the Americans invaded the island. The camp commander decreed that the POWs had to dig trenches roofed with logs and dirt to serve as air raid shelters.

Three large and several smaller two- and three-man shelters were scattered around the prison compound. Shelter A held 50 men, Shelter B held 35, and Shelter C had room for 25 to 30 prisoners. The large shelters were five feet deep, four feet wide, and up to 150 feet long. In accordance with Japanese orders, there was to be only one entrance, small enough to admit only one man at a time. The prisoners were instructed to get in the shelters when the air raid alarm sounded.

**After the camp's liberation, a detail of Marines exhumes the remains of prisoners who were killed and buried; 159 Americans were killed at Palawan.**

On December 14, 1944, the prisoners unexpectedly returned to camp after spending the morning filling bomb craters on the runway. One of McDole's friends whispered to him, "Something's going on, Dole. What the hell do you think is happening?"

The camp commander appeared and announced, "Americans, your working days are over." At this pronouncement, most of the men believed that the invasion was coming, and they would soon be free. Suddenly, the air raid siren wailed and the guards started screaming to get into the bomb shelters, their shouts punctuated by rifle butts and clubs.

McDole made a beeline for Shelter C, which was located on the edge of a 60-foot cliff. After some time, with no sign of planes, McDole was encouraged to look out "and see if you can see anything going on."

Lieutenant Sho Yoshiwara ordered the men of his company into formation and told them to load five rounds of ammunition and fix bayonets. Superior Private Sawa remembered that, "Captain Kojima appeared and announced that it was necessary to kill all the POWs."

The company formation marched into the camp where "Lieutenant Yoshiwara personally directed the placement of indi-

The charred remains of prisoners who were buried in Puerto Princesa's former air raid shelters. The camp's administrators were ordered kill all the prisoners and not leave any traces

viduals and issued the necessary objectives and methods of killing," Sawa stated. "He ordered those with rifles and machine guns to kill any POW who came out of the air raid shelters."

As McDole peered out of the entranceway, he saw several guards carrying buckets of liquid. Others carried lighted torches. He watched as they poured the contents of the buckets into Shelter B and threw in the torches. There was a muffled "WHUMP!" and a burst of flame. Horrorstruck, McDole heard agonized screams as the men inside burned. He ducked back inside the trench and screamed, "They're murdering the men in the B Company pit! Finish digging the tunnel!"

Unbeknownst to the Japanese, the inhabitants of Shelter C had dug it to extend beyond the barbed-wire fence, with only a six-inch plug of earth in place to conceal an emergency exit. McDole took another quick look to see if the Japanese were getting close. He was horrified by the carnage—men engulfed in flames, guards bayoneting, shooting, and clubbing the helpless Americans. The scene was almost beyond comprehension.

McDole's buddy, Marine Sergeant Douglas W. Bogue, who was also in Shelter C, "saw several Americans, while still burning or wounded, rush the Japs and fight them hand to hand. One American, whom I could not recognize in the confusion, succeeded in tearing a rifle from one Jap and shooting him before being bayoneted to death."

Sawa admitted at the war-crimes trial that "seven or eight POWs came running out of one of the shelters. Lieutenant Yoshiwara yelled out, 'Shoot them. Shoot them!' The light machine gun on the veranda near

my post went into action and leveled these POWs to the ground, killing each one of them. I opened fire with my rifle and believe I dropped three of them. After that, Yoshiwara and another soldier threw two hand grenades into a trench. I also saw two or three POWs bayoneted and one killed by a sword."

As McDole kept watch, the prisoner at the end of Shelter C clawed the earth in a frenzy, quickly breaking through and widening the hole. One by one the men pulled themselves out of the opening and tumbled down the cliff to the beach. Suddenly burning gasoline splashed on the floor of the trench, setting one man on fire.

It was now or never for McDole. He shoved the last man out and jumped. The screaming of the burning man stayed with him as he stumbled and fell to the beach.

Bogue was also lucky to escape the trench, but he had to tear through a barbed-wire fence with his bare hands to reach the cliff. There McDole ran into his best friend. "This is it, buddy, isn't it?" McDole gasped.

Suddenly, rifle fire erupted from the top of the cliff. The two men ran; bullets impacted all around them as they desperately sprinted for a hiding place. McDole spotted the camp's garbage dump and dove into the rotting mass. The smell was overpowering, but he pushed deeper and deeper until he was completely covered. He ignored its loathsome inhabitants—worms and maggots—and forced himself to remain still. Within minutes, two other escapees burrowed into the mound.

Muffled shots penetrated the garbage pile. One of the buried men panicked, jumped up, and ran for the water. He was immediately gunned down. Another just stood up and shouted, "All right, here I am and don't miss me, you SOBs!" A volley of shots ended his shout.

McDole gutted it out until morning when he was almost discovered; a guard was almost close enough to touch. Suddenly, another escapee was discovered and the guard ran off. Taking advantage of the distraction, McDole fled the dump and took refuge in a sewer outlet where he found a badly wounded prisoner. The two tried to swim across the bay but the man was too weak. McDole stayed with him until he succumbed to his wounds.

Bogue, meanwhile, escaped the guards' attention and found a small crack in the rocks to hide in, "all the time hearing the butchery going on above. The stench of burning flesh was strong." The incoming tide forced him to move.

"While crawling about, I found four others," he recalled. "We decided our only chance was to swim across the bay." Bogue became separated from the others and spent the next five days wandering around the jungle without food or water. He was finally rescued by prisoners from, of all things, the Iwahig Penal Colony, a jail for locals convicted of low-level crimes. The prisoners fed and clothed him—and contacted the local guerrilla organization, which took him under their control.

On the evening of December 18, three days after the massacre, a badly weakened McDole slipped into the water and began the five-mile swim. He was in the water all night—arms and legs numb and almost useless—until he collapsed on the beach shortly before dawn. He found a coconut, cracked it open, and drank the milk, which helped him regain some of his strength.

As daylight emerged, he saw huts across the bay and decided to swim to them, praying it was a friendly village. Halfway across, just before his strength gave out, he spotted a wooden fishing trap, climbed aboard, and passed out. He awoke the next morning to the smell of food being cooked in the village—and the sight of a native fishing boat approaching the trap. He half rose and they spotted him.

"Hey Joe," a Filipino called out, "you a POW?" McDole responded weakly, "I was, but no longer."

McDole was so feeble that the natives had to carry him to shore and into a hut, where they cleaned him up and fed him "the most wonderful fish and rice bread I had ever tasted." Shortly thereafter, he was happily reunited with Bogue.

The two rested one day and then were forced to flee after word was received that a Japanese patrol was headed their way. On Christmas Eve, they were on a hill overlooking a Filipino village, just as the sun was setting. Their escorts stopped and, in almost

perfect English, sang, "God Bless America." Both Americans broke down in tears when one of the natives said, "My friends, you are now in the free Philippines!"

Marine Private First Class Glenn McDole was evacuated from the Philippines on January 21, 1945. He was one of only 11 survivors of the 159 American POWs that were massacred at Palawan. An Army mortuary unit excavated the burned and destroyed dugouts after the war. The unit reported 79 individual burials and many more partial burials; the skeletons either had bullet holes or had been crushed by blunt instruments.

Most of the remains were found huddled together at a spot farthest away from the entranceway, in an attempt to escape the fire. In two dugouts, remains were found in a prone position, arms extended, with small conical holes at their fingertips, showing they were trying to dig their way to freedom. In 1952, the remains of 123 victims were interned at the Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery, near St. Louis, Missouri.

The Japanese fared considerably better then their prisoners after the war. The senior Japanese officer was tried and sentenced to hang but the sentence was reduced to 30 years imprisonment. Only 14 Japanese guards were brought to trial. The others could not be found. Six were acquitted, and the others received prison sentences ranging from two to 12 years.

Superior Private Sawa appeared at the trial somewhat the worse for wear. One of his guards, the indomitable Sergeant Bogue, admitted to beating the hell out him. Sawa received a five-year sentence despite Bogue's request to have him hanged.

After discharge, Glenn McDole became an Iowa highway patrolman for 29 years and a Polk County sheriff. He was called up for the Korean War and served one year at Camp Pendleton, California, before hanging up his Marine uniform for good.

After retirement, he shared his story about his experiences on Palawan in presentations at schools, church meetings, and community organizations so that the men who died there will not be forgotten. Glenn McDole's memoir, *Last Man Out,* published in 2004, is an account of his POW experiences. He died in 2009. □

## With its unique folding wings and pugnacious personality, the Grumman F4F Wildcat became one of the most successful early fighters of the Pacific War.

From the time of the Wright brothers, the vast majority of aircraft were biplanes with two wings stacked one above the other. The low-powered engines of the day dictated that the structure be as strong but also as light as possible in order to be able to absorb the stresses associated with flight.

The stress and structural integrity would be accommodated by a series of struts and wires. Aerodynamic drag is defined in the Merriam-Webster dictionary as "the retarding force acting on a body moving through a fluid parallel and opposite to the direction of motion." With a virtual forest of struts and wires, the biplane was subjected to a lot of drag.

The design that seemed to make the most sense was a single-wing or monoplane configuration. This was made possible by more powerful engines, as heavier structures could

be supported. But how to create a strong, monoplane structure?

The answer was the cantilevered or self-supporting wing. A cantilevered wing has all of the supporting members within itself to take the place of the struts and wires of the biplane configuration.

Aeronautical engineers developed a single large structural element called the main spar that runs through the entire wing span. As the wings generate lift in flight and create an upward force, the main spar is designed to handle this stress by spreading it through the fuselage from one wing tip to the other. To resist these forces, a secondary smaller member called a drag spar is located at a distance behind the main spar.

All of these technological advances seemed to bring the day of the carrier biplane fighter to an end. In 1935, the Navy issued a request for proposals to design and build a monoplane fighter that would replace the Grumman F3F biplane fighter.

However, with a long and storied past with the biplane, the Navy was still not quite sure of the advent of the monoplane. It requested that Grumman submit a new biplane design, just in case monoplanes did not live up to their expectations. In response, Grumman proposed an upgraded version of the F3F called the XF4F-1.

Originally designed as a biplane, the XF4F-1 was the last of the Grumman series of biplane fighters. However, data from the Brewster F2A Buffalo monoplane fighter demonstrated that biplanes woefully underperformed compared to monoplanes. The XF4F-1 design never got off the drawing board, and it was ultimately scrapped in favor of a monoplane design designated the XF4F-2.

The XF4F-2 was an all-metal monoplane with a cantilever mid-wing weighing 5,535 pounds. Cutting-edge technologies included the NACA 230 airfoil with a maximum speed of 290 mph, a 1,050-horsepower Pratt & Whitney R-1830-66 Twin Wasp radial engine with a single-stage supercharger and a Hamilton Standard constant-speed propeller.

Not all aspects of the new fighter were state of the art, though. The landing gear, for example, had to be lowered or raised by 30 turns of a hand crank; a significant amount of pressure and torque could cause a serious hand injury if one was not careful.

Armament was two .30-caliber machine guns in the fuselage and provisions for two .50-caliber guns in the wings, or one 100-pound bomb under each wing. The XF4F-2's first flight took place on September 2, 1937, with Grumman test pilot Robert Hall at the controls. In April 1938, it was flown to the Naval Air Factory in Philadelphia for evaluation.

On April 11, 1938, the XF4F-2 was undergoing a simulated carrier deck landing when engine failure caused the pilot to make a forced landing in a farm field, which flipped the aircraft onto its back. The pilot was not seriously hurt, but the aircraft had extensive damage and was sent back to the factory for repairs.

The XF4F-2 had showed enough promise not to be rejected completely. Grumman used the same fuselage form and landing gear for its new prototype, which

was designated the XF4F-3. The fuselage was lengthened, as were the wings, which received squared-off tips that would aid in maneuverability.

The wing area was increased, the tail section was redesigned, and the gross weight increased by 600 pounds. It was powered by a 1,200 hp Pratt & Whitney XR-1830-76 radial engine with a two-stage, two-speed supercharger driving a Curtiss Electric propeller.

The first flight was on February 12, 1939, and the plane achieved a speed of 333.5 mph at 21,300 feet. Thus, the Navy's primary requirement of a maximum speed of 300 mph was accomplished. The Navy awarded Grumman a production contract on August 8, 1939, for 54 F4Fs, dubbed the "Wildcat," with the first to be delivered the following February.

Several test pilots who had flown the Wildcat found it to be a formidable aircraft despite criticism of its small size and lack of agility. British test pilot Eric "Winkle" Brown and U.S. Navy/Grumman test pilot Corwin "Corky" Meyer weighed in on the Wildcat's personality in the air.

Brown said, "The design of any combat aircraft involves a measure of compromise, and that of the shipboard single-seat fighter perhaps more than most, as its success depends particularly heavily on the right balance being struck between the demands of combat and the dictates of the venue in which it is to spend its entire working life…. A masterpiece in coalescence of the contradictory factors called for in a fighter suited to the naval environment was, in my view, the corpulent but rugged and pugnacious little warplane … which was to establish Grumman's famed genus Felis."

On the manual landing gear retraction system, Corky Meyer said, "It was simple in design, but its operation left a lot to be desired. The crank handle was located on the right side of the cockpit. Thus, the pilot had to remove his left hand from the throttle (and sincerely hope that he had tightened the throttle friction knob before takeoff), grab the control stick, and use his now free right hand to actuate the landing gear lever to the 'retract' position, and then

**ABOVE: XF4F-3 prototype, photographed during flight testing, July 21, 1939. It was one of the most successful fighters of its era. BELOW: With its unique Sto-Wings folded, a F4F-4 Wildcat is hoisted aboard the USS *Long Island* (ACV-1) at Fila Harbor, New Hebrides, August 28, 1942. OPPOSITE: A U.S. Navy Grumman F4F-3 photographed in 1942. The rugged plane was was renowned for its ability to "take it and dish it out."**

complete the strenuous cranking task of 31 turns to raise the gear."

Production F4F-3s removed the .30-caliber fuselage guns, replacing them with four .50-caliber machine guns in the wings with the horizontal stabilizer set higher on the tail. The third and fourth production F4F-3s were fitted with 1,200 hp Wright Cyclone R-1820-40 engines and redesignated the XF4F-5. The fifth and eighth production F4F-3s were given armor protection and reinforced landing gear.

Some early F4F-3s were fitted with automatically deployed flotation bags on the wings in case of a ditching. The idea worked when on May 17, 1941, Ensign H.E. Tennes of the USS Enterprise's VF-6 ditched his F4F-3 into San Diego Bay due to landing gear failure. Shortly thereafter, the flotation system was deleted to save weight; it was thought that a floating aircraft in a combat area could just as easily be recovered by the enemy.

The Navy was concerned that there might not be enough carriers or land bases from which to operate its aircraft in the

Pacific Theater, so one F4F-3 was fitted with twin Edo floats and called the F4F-3S "Wildcatfish." Its first flight took place on February 28, 1943, piloted by Grumman test pilot F.T. Kurt.

But as the war progressed, American industry could more than keep up with the need for carriers, and the Navy Seabee construction battalions could transform jungles into airstrips at a rapid pace. The purpose for the F4F-3S vanished, and with it so did any further development beyond the prototype.

The advances made on the F4F-3 made it attractive to America's allies, so in 1939 France placed an order for 81 export versions of a model designated the G-36A. It differed from the standard F4F-3 in that it was powered by a 1,200 hp Wright R-1820-G205A-2 Cyclone engine with a single-speed, two-stage supercharger.

The French G-36A version required six wing-mounted 7.5mm Darne machine guns with an OPL 38 gunsight, Radio-Industrie-537 communication equipment, instrumentation based on the metric system, and a throttle that operated in reverse to that of U.S. aircraft.

Folding wings were necessary to stow as many aircraft as possible in the limited hanger deck space on a carrier. The F4F-4 was the first Wildcat to feature a Grumman folding wing innovation known as the Sto-Wing. Most folding-wing naval aircraft of the time were able to fold their wings upward via a simple hinge point outboard of the landing gear.

However, the Sto-Wing used a compound angle approach that was unique to Grumman aircraft. The brilliant Leroy Grumman developed the idea by experimenting with a rubber eraser in place of a fuselage and a paperclip in the place of a wing. Attaching the paperclip into side of the eraser as a wing attached to a fuselage, through trial and error he found the angle where the wing would fold flat against the fuselage. It was so successful that it was later used on Grumman's F6F Hellcat fighters and TBF Avenger torpedo bombers.

The Sto-Wing approach depended on a concept called a skewed axis. This axis was a pivot point—not vertically or horizontally but diagonally in the wing root.

**ABOVE: During a prewar (October 1941) training mission, an F4F-3 of Fighting Squadron 3 prepares to take off from the USS *Saratoga*. BELOW: Armorers aboard the USS *Enterprise* (CV-6) service and test the six wing-mounted .50 caliber machine guns of this F4F-4 Wildcat, assigned to Fighting Squadron 6 (VF-6), April 10, 1942.**

This allowed the wing to simultaneously swing outward and backward at a specific angle against the fuselage. This design also allowed the Wildcat's 38-foot wingspan to be reduced to 14 feet 4 inches, thus allowing almost twice as many planes to be stored.

In 1942, Grumman was a busy place, as it was building not only the Wildcat but the TBF Avenger torpedo bomber, as well as the J2F Duck and J4F Widgeon amphibians. The production facilities came to a tipping point when Grumman decided to focus its fighter efforts on the Wildcat's successor: the more powerful and lethal F6F Hellcat. Wildcat production was transferred under contract to General Motors' Eastern Aircraft Division in Linden, New Jersey.

The contract called for 1,800 F4F-4s, which were designated the FM-1 (F = fighter, M = General Motors). Of the entire production order, 311 aircraft were delivered to Britain as the Martlet V. In comparison to the F4F-4, the FM-1 had four .50-caliber wing-mounted guns with 430 rounds per gun. A total of 839 FM-1s were delivered to the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps by late 1943 before production was halted in favor of the lighter FM-2.

The F4F-7 was a long-range photo-

graphic reconnaissance version with a total fuel capacity of 695 U.S. gallons, with 555 gallons in nonfolding wings filled with fuel tanks. This gave it the highest loaded weight of all Wildcats at 10,328 pounds. Missions as long as 25 hours with a maximum range of 3,700 miles were possible.

Such long flights could be taxing on the pilot, so a Sperry Mark IV automatic pilot was installed. To aid in pilot visibility, the plane was fitted with a rounded plexiglass windscreen. It was put to good use shortly after the F4F-7's initial flight on December 30, 1941, when the Bureau of Aeronautics' Lt. Cmdr. Andy Jackson flew across the country in 11 hours at an average speed of 165 mph.

A Fairchild F-56 reconnaissance camera replaced the reserve tank and was placed just behind the main fuel tank. The camera was the only item that the pilot could "shoot" targets with, as there was no armament installed to save weight. Pilot armor was also not added as an additional weight-saving effort. However, such a large amount of fuel could pose a problem in a variety of situations, so two emergency fuel dump tubes were located under the rudder.

While orders for this type exceeded 100, only 20 were built, and these aircraft were converted to F4F-3s. Two F4F-7s were used by the 1st Marine Air Wing at Henderson Field on Guadalcanal. After being destroyed in Japanese air raids, they were replaced by aircraft from Marine Observation Squadron 251 (VMO-251).

Total production of the Wildcat, excluding prototypes, was 7,898 aircraft, with 5,927 produced by General Motors. Production ended in August 1945 with the conclusion of the war in the Pacific.

The Wildcat's first combat experience in the Pacific came on December 8, 1941—the day after the Pearl Harbor attack, when Japanese forces attacked Wake Island. A squadron of 12 Wildcats from Marine Corps squadron VMF-211 were based on Wake, with four airborne on patrol duty. Due to poor weather, they failed to intercept 36 Mitsubishi G3M bombers that attacked the airfield on Wake, destroying seven of the eight Wildcats on the ground.

The Wildcat had its revenge three days later when Japanese ground troops disembarked from ships to invade Wake. Four Wildcats attacked the invasion fleet and aided in sinking a destroyer and forcing the fleet back to sea. When the Japanese force returned on December 22, only two Wildcats were still flying. Wake fell to the Japanese the next day.

**Two Wildcats piloted by Lt. Cmdr. John S. Thach (front) and Lieutenant Edward "Butch" O'Hare fly over Oahu, Hawaii, April 10, 1942. Two days later, O'Hare became the Navy's first ace and also earned the Medal of Honor. Thach is credited with developing the combat maneuver dubbed the "Thach Weave" for use against the more agile Japanese Zero fighter.**

The Battle of Midway would be a somewhat more impressive experience for the Wildcat, as its lack of maneuverability against the agile Japanese aircraft was countered by employing an innovative aerial combat tactic called the "Thach Weave."

The Thach Weave was developed by U.S. Navy pilot John S. "Jimmy" Thach and named by fellow aviator James H. Flatley soon after the United States entered World War II.

Thach had heard from an intelligence report published in the September 22, 1941, Fleet Air Tactical Unit Intelligence Bulletin, about the Japanese Zero's amazing agility and climb rate. He began to develop tactics to give the slower and less agile Wildcats an advantage in combat. He developed what he called "beam defense position," which would become known as the Thach Weave. It was executed either by two fighter aircraft or by two pairs of fighters in formation.

When an enemy selected one fighter as his target (the "bait"), the two elements turned in toward one another. With one aircraft crossing behind the other, they waited to have adequate distance from one another and repeated the crossing maneuver in a weaving fashion. This would bring the enemy aircraft in front of the other element called the "hook," which would then fire on the enemy. Positioning was valued over maneuverability. Thach asked Ensign Edward "Butch" O'Hare, the leader of the second section in Thach's division, to test the idea.

In the test, Wildcats were used as both the enemy aircraft and pairs of "bait" and "hook" aircraft. Thach took off with three other Wildcats as the bait/hook aircraft while O'Hare led four Wildcats in the role of "enemy" aircraft. The bait/hook aircraft had their throttles' travel restricted to reduce their performance while the "enemy" aircraft had their throttles unrestricted to create superior performance as in the Zero fighters. After a series of attacks, in every situation Thach's fighters had either thwarted the attack or gotten into a position to return fire.

O'Hare excitedly commended Thach:

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BY KEVIN M. HYMEL

# A Tanker's Tale

## Sergeant Joe Cotten of the 14th Armored Division commanded tanks across Europe, liberated POW camps as he went, and faced death many times.

All Photos: National Archives

**"OH MY GOD!" thought tanker Joe Cotten.** "We're shooting machine guns at a Tiger Royal!"

It was late December 1944 in the Alsace-Lorraine region of France, near the German border. From inside his M5 Stuart light tank, Cotten had spotted the enemy heavy tank at the bottom of a ridge and had fired at it with his machine gun when he made his realization. The German panzer was stuck on some train lines and had thrown a track. The driver inside was gunning the engine and rocking forward and back, trying to free the behemoth from its trap. Cotten had already fired on a few soldiers escaping the tank, but its crew was obviously still intact.

Cotten knew the tank below possessed an 88mm cannon that fired high-velocity shells, while his Stuart tank had a 37mm cannon and three machine guns—no match for the enemy. An M4 Sherman pulled up beside Cotten and fired a 75mm round at the heavy tank but it ricocheted off. Cotten knew he was in trouble. Then the enemy turret moved in Cotten's direction and its cannon elevated like an elephant's snout sniffing the wind. The gunner was looking for him.

Cotten, a platoon leader in Company D, 47th Tank Battalion, 14th Armored Division—the "Liberators"—would have to rely on his training to get out of this tight spot. He had been drafted into the U.S. Army on November 17, 1942. Back then, he was a new father, his baby girl Marty having been born only 17 days earlier. He left his wife, new daughter, and his low-paying job at a railroad shop in Waco, Texas, to train as a tanker.

After induction at Mineral Wells, Texas, Cotten went to Camp Chaffee, Arkansas, and joined Maj. Gen. Vernon Prichard's 14th Armored Division. Major James W. Lann, who had come up through the ranks of the National Guard and had served as the range officer, commanded the division's 47th Tank Battalion. Cotten served in the battalion's Company D under Captain Henry P. Tilden, and he learned how to march and to be a soldier from Staff Sgt. Pennington P. Smith.

"I followed him around," Cotton said of Smith. "We became good friends."

Cotten's M5 Stuart held a crew of four. In the front sat his driver, also named Smith, and the bow gunner, George Raymond. Deward Key shared the turret with Cotten and served as the 37mm cannon's gunner. "We called it a pop gun," Cotten recalled, because it was so inefficient. The M5 was so small that the driver and bow gunner had to close their hatches whenever the turret spun, lest the cannon knock them shut.

Promoted to staff sergeant during training, Cotten was placed in charge of a pla-

Two tank crewmen with the 14th Armored Division stand ready to return to combat in France in their M4A3E8 HVSS (Easy Eight) Sherman tank, while another works on the tank's bogey wheels. The "scaffolding" on the side of the tank held either sandbags or logs to neutralize German Pazerfaust antitank warheads, although this added defense slowed the tank considerably. Joe Cotten, who went on to command a platoon in the 14th, upgraded from an M5 Stuart light tank to an Easy Eight while fighting from southern France into the heart of Germany, dueling with enemy tanks, infantry, and even a train along the way.

**BELOW: Technical Sergeant Tony Sorgent (left) relaxes with First Sergeant Joe Cotten. Sorgent constantly scrounged for food and made meals for the men in Cotten's company. RIGHT: Tankers in an M5 Stuart tank roll through a smashed French town. The tank's turret could not traverse whenever the driver and bow gunner's hatches were open. Joe Cotten had an extra machine gun attached to his Stuart's turret for added firepower.**

toon of five light tanks. In his position, he could talk over the radio with all the tankers in his platoon, as well as his company commander, but he could only listen to the battalion commander.

Once training finished, the whole division transferred to Fort Campbell, Kentucky, to hone its battle skills. It then shipped out for Camp Shanks, New York, where Cotten and his fellow tankers were bussed to the wharf at the Hudson River's mouth and loaded onto three ships for the trip across the Atlantic Ocean. Their destination: southern France.

After an uneventful ocean journey, Cotten's ship pulled into the wrecked port of Marseille in southern France on October 28, 1944. His ship had to weave around the partially sunken ships in the harbor.

Once on land, the tankers were driven to a large tank pool outside Marseille to pick out their new vehicles. They then drove them to a range to test-fire the weapons and make any needed repairs. "We had our tanks in good shape," said Cotten, but he wanted more firepower, so an ordnance crew added a third .30-caliber machine gun to his turret near his hatch. "I used it a lot," he added.

For extra protection, Cotten and the other tankers stacked sandbags on their tanks to stop Panzerfausts and other antitank weapons.

The 14th Armored joined Lt. Gen. Alexander "Sandy" Patch's Seventh Army, which had landed in southern France two months earlier on August 14 and had chased the German Nineteenth Army back to the German border where resistance then stiffened. Low on fuel and supplies, Patch's army halted in the Vosges Mountains to slug it out with the enemy.

Major Lann's battalion headed east along the Riviera, passing through the ritzy towns of Nice, Cannes, and Monte Carlo—the playgrounds of the rich and famous. The Germans were retreating east and, from time to time, the tankers caught up with rear guards and engaged in fierce firefights.

One day, Cotten and his tankers were driving in a convoy when they caught up with a freight train filled with German soldiers. The tankers turned their turrets and opened fire. From about 300 yards, Cotten poured fire from his mounted machine gun while other tanks did the same. Some Germans fired back from the train cars' windows while others jumped out the other side. Cotten could hear the enemy bullets pinging off his tank. "We had a ball firing on them," he remarked.

During the drive, the tankers sustained themselves mostly on C-rations (canned food) and K-rations (dry food), which were delivered by trucks to the front. Often, the tankers received only hash. "We blamed the drivers for changing out good rations for bad," Cotten said. He mostly hated the "unmeltable" chocolate bars, known as D-bars. They were hard and rarely softened in coffee. "It was supposed to melt in your mouth … or someplace," he mused.

Fortunately, one of Cotton's tankers, Tony Sorgent, loved to cook and created palatable meals for the men on his government-issued portable stove. As the tanks drove across Europe, Sorgent would pick up potatoes, vegetables, and even chickens. Once he had gathered enough ingredients, he broke out the stove and cooked everything in his helmet. In one instance, when he was cooking and the platoon was ordered to move out, Sorgent called to the bow gunner, "Lend me your helmet, mine's hot!"

While the men rarely went into homes to sleep, they often did enter to dine. In one house, tanker Lowell Carlson found a dining table and adorned it with a tablecloth, fine

china, and glassware. Sorgent brought in the food, and the men dined like aristocrats. Once finished, Carlson gathered the four corners of the tablecloth, lifted it into a ball, and tossed it out the window.

To wash down their meals, Cotten and his men sought out alcohol, which was easy to find. "We were in hog heaven!" he recalled. In France, liberated civilians usually handed out bottles of champagne, wine, or cognac. "Champagne was what we were all looking for," he admitted. The tankers stuffed their bottles in easy access places in their tanks, often under their seats. The men also raided French and German breweries they liberated along the way.

The 14th headed north, then turned east into the Alsace-Lorraine region of France on the German border. Farther north, the Germans had broken through the American lines in Belgium and Luxembourg on December 16—and the "Battle of the Bulge" was on.

**ABOVE: Cotton (second from left) served with the 14th Armored Division's 47th Tank Battalion. The man on the left holds a red-and-white artillery aiming stick, sometimes called a "barber pole." BELOW: A Stuart tank rolls by a knocked-out German heavy Panther V tank, which easily outgunned the light Stuart. Cotten, in a Stuart, dueled with a Panther, but needed two tank destroyers to knock it out.**

Pushing forward, Cotten's tank headed up a hill and when it crested, he found himself looking down at the German heavy tank rocking back and forth on the train track. He saw several Germans charge out of its hatches and right into the line of fire of his mounted machine gun. That was when he misidentified the tank as a Tiger, and his Sherman tank futilely fired on it.

The tank was not a Tiger but probably a heavy Panzer V Panther, since no Tiger units were identified south of the Bulge. The Panther was still a formidable heavy tank, with thick sloping armor and a powerful 75mm high-velocity cannon. During the war, American soldiers often mistook Panthers (and sometimes Mark IV tanks) for Tigers. Cotten simply remembered it as "large, imposing, and unlike any of ours."

Thinking quickly, Cotten called Captain Tilden, who ordered up two tank destroyers. The tank destroyers roared up, fired two rounds each, and knocked out the enemy tank. Cotten felt a surge of pride later when he drove by the smoldering wreck.

As the 14th Armored approached the French city of Haguenau, the Germans fought back hard to hold the city's last remaining bridge over the Moder River. Although firing from well-covered positions, the German infantry was no match for American tanks. "It was a turkey shoot!" recalled Cotten.

Major Lann did not think so, calling over the radio, "Let's get our act together." Then, suddenly, the bridge exploded, shaking Cotten's tank. "We could see the damn thing blow," he recalled. The Germans stuck on the west side of the river began standing up and surrendering. Many simply raised their arms and put their hands behind their necks. It took three trucks to haul away all the Germans.

Once the fighting died down, Cotten came across Staff Sgt. Pennington P. Smith, the soldier he admired so much, lying wounded behind a tank. A bullet had

entered his head below one of his ears and exited the other side; he drifted in and out of consciousness. Thinking Smith was going to die, Cotten gave him his crucifix, put him on his tank, and drove him to an aid station.

In late December, the division closed in on the German border, with Lann's battalion supporting the 103rd Infantry Division. The tankers came across concrete pylons blocking their advance—the Dragon's Teeth, part of Adolf Hitler's homeland defense. The tanks stopped while engineers figured out the best way to defeat the obstacles.

As they waited, a tanker approached

**Cotton's fellow D Company tankers take a break from the action. Cotten would later upgrade from his light Stuart tank to an M4A3E8 HVSS tank, an Easy Eight, a much more powerful and deadly machine.**

Cotten, concerned about attacking through the Dragon's Teeth. Cotten knew the man, because he was constantly saying, "Let me at 'em!" and boasting of his military prowess. This time, the man looked pale and worried. He told Cotten, "I can't do it. I can't do it," then fell to the ground and started shaking uncontrollably.

Cotten called for a medic, who exclaimed, "Oh my God! He's cracked up totally!" The medic gave him several shots of morphine, but as some men took him he away, he still shook, groaned, hollered, and roared. "He was not someone you wanted to be around or depend on," Cotten explained. The man never returned to the unit.

As it turned out, the tankers did not go through the Dragon's Teeth at all. The engineers blew them up and cleared two paths through the remaining pylons. When they detonated the explosives attached to the obstacles, Cotten and his men were close enough to feel the impact. "Stuff blew all over," he said, "concrete was flying around." One piece smacked him in the head but did no damage.

Christmas Day passed uneventfully, but for New Year's the men parked their tanks near a Catholic church and attended a midnight Mass with a German woman. "She was a nice lady," remembered Cotten. After the short break from war, everyone manned their tanks and headed east for the French city of Hatten, on the German border, which had been evacuated in 1939 for the building of the Maginot Line. After Germany's 1940 invasion of France, the 1,500 inhabitants returned.

As the division closed on Hatten on January 9, 1945, the Germans ambushed two jeep-bound scouts with the 94th Reconnaissance Squadron. Stanley Spalding was driving the jeep ahead of Cotten's tanks, clearing the way for the armor, when the Germans opened fire on him and his companion. Spalding kicked the other man out of the jeep, saving his life, but the German fire killed Spalding. Cotten did not know Spalding at the time, but he would know of him later.

With the Battle of the Bulge turning in the Allies' favor, the Germans had launched Operation North Wind (Nordwind) on December 31, 1944, attacking into Alsace-Lorraine and other northeastern regions of France, with the goal of wrecking Patch's Seventh Army and retaking the French city of Strasbourg.

The city of Hatten stood between the Germans and the 14th Armored Division. "That was the first time we looked them in the eye," recalled Cotten. Despite 14 inches of snow on the ground, the Germans struck on January 13. Cotten and his men were ordered to hold static positions and stop any enemy movement south. "We could only move a few feet and empty a few rounds," he explained. "We always had gunfire going on."

The Germans attacked night and day, and one night assaulted through the town's cemetery as flares lit the darkness. Cotten commanded only three tanks, his other two having been loaned to another unit. He kept two on the line while the third brought up ammunition and supplies, since the tanks burned through their ammunition so quickly.

While Cotton's 37mm cannon could not penetrate thick enemy armor, it worked against trucks and half-tracks. "We shot at everything that moved," he said. He spent his mornings on foot, visiting his tankers, setting their positions, and making sure they were in the fight. To keep warm, he wore two pairs of socks under his wet boots.

During the fighting, Cotten stopped his tank and leaped off the front to go check with his company commander. As he eyed where he was about to land, he heard the distinct "flip-flip-flip" sound of an incoming 81mm mortar round. It landed in front of him as he hit the ground but, luckily for him, failed to explode. He immediately jumped back into his tank. "That was the most scared I ever was," he said. "I thought I was dead."

**An American soldier hunts for snipers from behind a knocked-out tank in Lohr, Germany. Another destroyed tank smolders in the background. Cotten lost one of his fellow platoon sergeants in Lohr to a sniper's bullet.**

Cotten was not so lucky on the second day of the battle, January 14. He was standing between two tanks when an enemy shell exploded, tearing shrapnel into his left knee and right arm. He went down, bleeding badly, but a medic showed up, bandaged his knee and arm, and gave him a shot of morphine. The medic then had Cotten remove his boots, revealing two frozen feet, with white and dark spots, and his toenails falling off. He was immediately evacuated to the 136th General Hospital in Dijon, France.

From the moment Cotten was put on a stretcher, his feet didn't touch the ground for 14 days. In the hospital, doctors kept his feet elevated and outside the covers. They did not try to rub any ointments or lotions on them. An orderly stood by his bed, Cotten recalled, "to keep me from moving around or going to the bathroom, or eating, or crying."

He eventually lost toenails from his right foot, and his left foot turned dark when the blood stopped flowing. The doctors talked about amputating his right foot. "I was scared to death," he admitted, but the operation never happened. They did, however, sew up his shrapnel wounds.

The doctors also discussed sending Cotten back to the States, but one day they allowed him to walk. "I could go eat and go to the bathroom," he recalled. He improved well enough after six weeks to return to his unit. "I can't say enough about how they treated frostbite," he said. "They took such good care of me."

By the time Cotten returned to the 14th Armored, its tanks were roaring toward the Rhine River. The river had already been crossed by elements of Lt. Gen. Courtney Hodges' First Army when they captured the Ludendorff Bridge at Remagen on March 7; the bridge collapsed 10 days later, but not before thousands of Americans and their equipment made it across.

Upon his return, Cotten received an M4A3E8 W HVSS Sherman tank—better known as an "Easy Eight"—with a wide-track horizontal volute spring suspension and a high-velocity 76mm cannon—quite an upgrade from the old Stuart 37mm "pop gun." Also, the Sherman fired high-explosive (HE) and armor-piercing (AP) rounds.

"The Stuart had armor piecing [rounds], but it was small," said Cotten. "In the Sherman, we used a little HE if we were shooting at troops, and we used machine guns." To protect the tank from antitank weapons, ordnance men welded scaffolding on the tank's sides on which to stack sandbags.

With the Ludendorff Bridge down, the 14th raced night and day to reach Worms to cross a repaired bridge over the Rhine, constructed for Lt. Gen. George S. Patton Jr.'s Third Army.

One night, Cotten's tanks were moving in a convoy through the pitch darkness when he leaned out of his turret, trying to keep an eye on the tank in front of him. Suddenly, the lead tank stopped and Cotten's tank slammed into it, throwing him down the front of his tank and knocking him against the equipment strapped to the hull.

"I bled like a stuck pig," said Cotten. "It tore up my clothes." He climbed back into the turret and acted more cautiously for the rest of the trip.

The division reached the crossing site at Worms at the end of March and vehicles began crossing a repaired railroad bridge. Cotten got three of his tanks across the bridge before it collapsed. Combat engineers, however, were building a pontoon bridge upriver. Cotten watched as they stretched cables across the river, put pontoons into the water, and treads across the pontoons. "They did a tremendous job," he recalled.

On April 1, Cotten crossed the river, but the tanks could only cross one at a time. Cotten led the way, walking out front, guiding the driver. Each pontoon sank a few inches as the tank slowly rolled over it.

"I was so happy when we got all five tanks to the other side," he said. Once on the east bank, Cotten found himself under fire. The war was back on—but there were

**With a little more than a month left in the war, armored infantry soldiers with the 14th Armored Division pass a knocked-out Stuart tank on their way to liberate a POW camp in Hammelburg, Germany. Cotten lost a number of men during the fight to the camp.**

signs that it might be over soon.

While the tankers bypassed cities like Mannheim, they drove through small towns where white sheets billowed from second-story homes and civilians readily surrendered.

As Company D headed into the town of Lohr the next day, the Germans knocked out several American tanks with Panzerfausts. A German also shot one of Cotten's fellow platoon sergeants, Willie Duffett, in the head while he stood in his turret. "I had to look at him with his brain hanging out. It bothered me," he said with considerable understatement.

While a company was authorized to have five noncommissioned officers, Duffet's death brought Company D's down to two. Lieutenant Travis Coxe, who had taken over command of D Company, promoted Cotten to company first sergeant.

Cotten reported to his company commander and asked, "Where do I put my gear?" Coxe asked him where his equipment was, and Cotten told him it was still in his tank. "That's where you'll keep it. Get back in your tank. You're the platoon leader, we don't have any officers." Nothing had changed for Cotten, except he received a bit more money.

The promotion did not start off well. When the company crossed its initial point (IP), P-47 Thunderbolt fighter-bombers peeled out the sky and opened fire on the advancing tanks. "We jumped the gun and got ahead of the IP," said Cotten. He watched the aircraft attack, then ordered his driver to pull off to the right while he reported that the Air Force was attacking his men.

Later, Cotten was standing outside his tank when he came under enemy fire. He dove into a ditch and looked over to see Major Lann next to him. "We meet again," Cotten told him, adding that he was getting ready to move out. Lann simply replied, "I'm going!" and charged out. "He was a tough guy," admitted Cotten.

After the fight, Cotton saw the effects of German fire, and possible divine intervention, on one of his men. Tanker Lloyd Burnett caught a bullet in the chest, but fortunately his pocket Bible stopped it, but left Burnett's entire chest bruised black and blue.

As the tankers continued pushing east, Cotten received a strange call from the ordnance department. "Hey," a man said into Cotten's headset as men laughed in the background, "we got one of your tanks back here." One of his less aggressive tank commanders had gotten lost and conveniently ended up in the rear. The ordnance men quickly sent the stray back to Cotten.

While Cotten got that tanker back, one of his sergeants deserted. "He was a softy," Cotten recalled, "a mama's boy." Military policemen found the sergeant and brought him back to the company where he was charged with desertion in the face of the enemy and court-martialed.

As the Third Reich crumbled, the 14th Armored Division approached Fürth, a suburb of Nuremburg, which the Germans still held. As the company approached the town, an American tank from the 10th Armored Division fired on them. Word quickly spread that it had been captured by the Germans, so the tankers brought it under fire and destroyed it.

The company occupied Fürth and the men bedded down. That night, retreating Germans attacked Cotten's men. By morning they had disengaged, but nine of his men were reported missing. Cotten hopped in a jeep to find them. First, he came across a tanker walking, falling, and getting back up with a large hole in his chest. He recognized him as Oscar Mauser, who had caught a hand grenade in the chest. "He was breathing through

the chest and making bad sounds," Cotten remembered. He quickly wrapped Mauser in a raincoat, carefully loaded him onto the jeep, and rushed him to an aid station.

Returning to the area, Cotten spotted a German boy who led him to a fresh grave in a ditch with an American helmet perched on a rifle. Cotten removed the helmet and found the soldier's name and serial number in the liner. It belonged to Steve Gavurnik. Cotten reported the name of his dead friend.

Next, the boy led Cotten to a barn. Cotten entered and climbed a ladder to the loft, where he found another tanker, John Healy. His abdomen had been opened by a glancing bullet and his intestines exposed.

"He was bleeding like crazy and crying," remembered Cotten, but Healy said he was happy to see him. The Germans had captured Healy after he was wounded, placed him on a stretcher, and had other prisoners carry him. When American fighter planes strafed their column, everyone scattered, except Healy, who was left in the middle of the road. The Germans, considering him a liability, stuck him in the loft.

Cotten quickly gave Healy a shot of morphine in each arm, but he could not safely get him out of the loft. He raced from the barn and returned with stretcher bearers, who carefully strapped Healy onto a stretcher and lowered him with ropes and placed him into a jeep, while Healy shouted, "Hurry!"

Cotten kept his distance while the stretcher bearers did their job. "I couldn't stand it," he said about seeing his friend in so much pain, but before the jeep pulled away, he went over to say goodbye. Healy told him the last six missing men had all been taken prisoner. Then the jeep departed. "I didn't think I would ever see him alive again."

With his nine missing men accounted for—one dead, two wounded, and six captured—Cotten got back in his tank, but the killing wasn't over. Another tanker, Mike Rusnak, was driving his tank along the edge of some woods when a German antitank gun took off his head and ripped off his gunner's legs. The next morning Cotten located Rusnak's tank and pulled the body out. "He was the best tank driver," Cotten recalled. "He was the most liked guy in the company."

On April 6, 1945, the 14th Armored arrived at the Hammelburg POW camp, officially known as Stalag XIII-C. General Patton had tried to liberate it in late March, in part to rescue his son-in-law, Lt. Col. John Waters, but the mission had failed.

There was no failure for the 14th. At the approach of the Sherman tanks, German sentries quickly abandoned their posts and surrendered. Tankers either barreled through the camp's gates or yanked them down using ropes attached to their tanks. Ecstatic American, French, and British soldiers, as well as imprisoned civilians, swarmed the tankers in celebration.

One of the first people to greet Cotten was Steve Gavurnik, the soldier he had reported as dead in Fürth. He hugged a shocked Cotten and told him he was happy to see him. "Hell, I'm doubly glad to see you," Cotten responded, "because you've been killed in action!"

Gavurnik explained that the man in the grave was actually Lowell Dean Carlson, whom he last saw standing in the street, firing an M-3 submachine gun—a "grease gun"—before he went down fighting. Cotten reported Gavurnik's survival to Coxe.

Cotten's tank soon pulled onto the autobahn, Germany's superhighway, and cruised unimpeded. "It had lanes all over the place with walls and cuts in the road," he said. It led east through the mountains and across the Danube River. No more ambushes awaited the Americans; the war was at last winding down.

When Cotten's tanks ran low on gas, he pulled them into some woods to await refueling. As he and his men waited, Cotten spotted a jeep with large metal flags headed his way. A tall general got out of the jeep wearing a leather jacket, baggy horse-riding pants tucked into his boots, and an ivory-handled pistol on his hip. Cotten was looking at General George S. Patton, Jr.

**To the cheers of prisoners, a 14th Armored tank crashes the gate at the Stalag XIII-C POW camp in Hammelburg. One of the first prisoners to greet Cotten was a tanker from his unit who he thought was dead. Cotten was happy to see the man.**

"Patton was not an attractive man," recalled Cotten. His mouth was filled with big, wide, stained teeth, and his lips and face were splotched and cracked. Cotten snapped a salute.

"What the hell are you doing stopped?" Patton demanded of Cotten. "Why aren't you moving?"

Cotten explained that two of his tanks

were out of fuel. "Why don't you get the other two moving?" Patton shouted. "Get moving as soon as you can," the general added, "and take off those sandbags." A few curse words emphasized Patton's sense of urgency. Cotten saluted again and the general departed.

After Patton left, Lieutenant Coxe asked over the radio who had spoken to Patton. Cotten admitted it was him. "You did pretty good," Coxe told him, "I think he sanctioned the sandbags, but he wanted you to move out." "Well, we ran out of gas," Cotten responded.

Once refueled, Cotten and his comrades pushed east. They knew there was another camp down the road. On April 29, the tankers reached Moosburg prison camp (Stalag VII-A) and tore down the camp's fences. Again, a captured tanker from Cotten's company, Tom Manley from Chicago, ran up and greeted him.

All the other missing 14th Armored tankers were also in the camp. They were told to either get back to their units or to the hospital. Medical personnel soon arrived to take care of the worst off. The division continued east to Austria, where the locals acted friendly toward the Americans. For liberating the two camps, and numerous others, the division adopted the title "Liberators." Approximately 200,000 Allied prisoners of war were liberated by the 14th Armored Division.

Cotten and his men continued their charge east. In early May they occupied a German kaserne along the Inn River near the Czech border. As Cotten and his comrades enjoyed the time off the line, two MPs showed up with the sergeant who had deserted and turned him over to the company. Cotten put a guard on the man and put him to work digging foxholes.

One day, Cotten was working on a firing pin inside his turret when Lann, now a lieutenant colonel, poked his head in and told him, "The war's over." Cotten jumped out of his hatch and hugged his commander. It was May 8, 1945. Germany had surrendered.

With the war in Europe finally over but still raging in the Pacific, the division's

**ABOVE: Engineers with the 14th Armored Division construct a pontoon bridge over the Isar River outside of Moosburg. Cotten always felt better once his unit had reached the far bank on the unsteady bridge. BELOW: Former prisoners at Stalag VII-A swarm a liberating Sherman tank, whose only discerning mark is the sandbags at the bottom left corner of the photograph. Many of the men lost to the 14th Armored Division were found in the camp. Like the POW camp in Hammelburg, one of Cotten's tankers greeted him upon liberation.**

longest serving men were allowed to return to the United States for Pacific training. Cotten was part of the first contingent to go home.

He and two other soldiers took a jeep to Linz, where they packed with nine other soldiers onto a train with 30-and-8 boxcars that had no seats or windows. "We thought we were going to fly to France," said Cotten. The slow-moving train took five days to reach Le Havre, France.

Cotten and the other men marched off the train at Camp Lucky Strike, one of the departure camps, where they waited for transport home.

A tanker named Delgardo offered to take Cotten into Paris to sell booty and war trophies that he had collected. The two took a half-track into the City of Lights where Delgardo sold everything and split the profits with Cotten. They made it back to camp in time for Cotten to board a Liberty ship headed for Boston, Massachusetts.

A Liberty Ship could carry 400 men. "It was not the *Queen Mary,*" said Cotten. Cots

were stacked six high. The same meal—stew—was served twice a day. Halfway through the journey, the propeller lost a blade and the ship circled for three days before a repair ship arrived.

Many men got seasick on the voyage. "Usually the guy who got sick was on the top bunk," recalled Cotten. "We had one man detailed to clean up the mess every day."

While in transit, the war in the Pacific ended. Cotten's Liberty ship finally arrived in Boston, and the men debarked to Camp Devens. There, Cotten ate his best meal of the war: "Steak, ice cream, and milk. I hadn't had ice cream in two years."

From Devens, Cotton was put in charge of soldiers on a train bound for Fort Sam Houston, Texas. During the slow trip south, the train's kitchen ran out of bread. Cotten paid for bread for everyone out of his own pocket at towns along the way. As the train neared its destination, two men asked Cotten if they could hop off to visit their nearby homes. Cotten agreed but took down their names, telling them to be at the fort when the train arrived. When the train pulled into the fort, the two men were the first to greet Cotten. "They were glad to be off that list," he said, for they could have been charged with being AWOL.

There were also recruiters, telling the men they would get 90 days leave if they reenlisted. "However, if you'd like to sign up now, you can." Cotten wasn't sure if he wanted to stay in the Army, so he decided to go home to return to his railroad job.

Cotten bought a car and headed to Waco. He went to his sister's place and kissed his now three-year-old daughter, Marty. He discovered that his wife had strayed while he was at war and his oldest sister Ethel had taken custody of Marty.

Cotten also discovered that his old railroad job had moved to Kansas, so he reenlisted and soon shipped out to South Korea where he worked for a year at the port of Inchon. While there, he divorced his wife, but when his mother died, he took emergency leave and returned to the United States, where he became an ROTC Master Sergeant at Bowling Green State University in Kentucky.

When the Korean War broke out on June 25, 1950, he returned to the country to fight as an officer. In 1959, he was assigned to Fort Knox. There Cotten met Mary Ann Bewley and married her. They had two children, Cynthia in 1965 and Eric in 1967.

He remained in the Army and retired with the rank of major on January 31, 1963. He then worked for 24 years at the Texas Department of Transportation, serving in several positions and retiring as an internal review auditor.

The war never left Cotten. When stationed in Stuttgart, Germany, in 1965, he took Mary Ann to Hagenau, where they saw a knocked-out tank from his unit. "Twenty years later, and it was still there!" he recalled. Mary Ann also told him that her uncle, Stanley Spalding, had been killed while serving as a reconnaissance scout leading Cotten's tanks to Hatten. They visited his grave at Epinal, France.

Cotten eventually connected with his fellow tankers. At a division reunion, he hugged John Healy, the wounded tanker in the barn loft, who told Cotten that he had saved his life. Cotten also learned that his mentor, Staff Sgt. Pennington P. Smith, had survived his head wound, was promoted to lieutenant, and had the honor of returning the division's colors and records back to the United States. Cotton caught up with him at a reunion, and as he remembered it, "We had a nice L-O-N-G, friendly conversation."

Cotten also met with Mike Rusnak's family at another reunion. "That was a sad day." He learned that Oscar Mauser, the soldier with the chest wound, made it home to Louisville, Kentucky, but had later died in an automobile accident.

Like many men of his generation, Cotton credited his comrades for his unit's success. He always worked with other tankers and armored infantrymen in accomplishing their missions. (He was also uncomfortable with his name appearing so often in this article, wanting to give more credit to his men.)

**General George S. Patton, Jr. marches away from a Sherman tank after reprimanding the crew for covering it with sandbags. Patton did the same the thing to Cotten while Cotten was waiting in a wooded area to be refueled.**

Looking back at his service in 2019, Cotten had no regrets, although the war sometimes came back to him in his dreams. He started off poor, but the Army gave him a vocation and a career. At 95 years of age, he and Mary Ann are back in Waco, Texas, where their children often visit. "I lived a good life before," he reminisced, "and I've had a hell of a great life." □

# SPANIARDS AGAINST ST

# ALIN

## Fighting alongside their German allies during the invasion of the USSR, the Spanish Blue Division racked up impressive victories despite overwhelming odds.

**BY BLAINE TAYLOR**

THE Russian winter of 1941-1942 hit with terrible ferocity. Battling the deadly, numbing cold as well as the massive numbers of Red Army troops were soldiers from sunny Spain. Yet the men, who were more accustomed to sipping sangria on a Mediterranean beach than trying to survive in a white, sub-zero arctic hell, were giving as good as they got.

They were the men—volunteers all—of the Division Azul, or Blue Division, led by 45-year-old Maj. Gen. Agustin Muñoz-Grandes, himself one of the heroes of the Spanish Civil War.

In a battle on December 4, 1941, in which Soviet troops outnumbered the Spaniards 2-to-1, the temperatures plunged to -40 degrees Centigrade, the Blue Division fought bravely and regained some lost territory. When the fight was over, the Spaniards discovered a grotesque pile of snow-covered bodies—hundreds of their comrades who had been taken prisoner by the Soviets and tortured to death.

Resolving to avenge their comrades' death, some members of the Blue Division found a Red Army infantry battalion trying to cross a frozen river and unleashed a fusillade of machine-gun fire against them, killing them all.

**Wearing German-patterned uniforms and helmets and using German weapons, the all-volunteer Spanish Blue Division takes part in a winter battle against the Soviet Red Army near Leningrad. Spanish leader Francisco Franco's fear and hatred of communism made the volunteers eager to side with Nazi Germany and fight against the common foe. More than 20,000 Spaniards served in the fight against the Soviet Union, but few came home alive.**

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**With April snow still covering the ground on the Eastern Front in 1942, Blue Division soldiers are instructed in the operation of German machine guns.**

When surrounded or cornered, the Spanish GIs, known as *guripas,* fought to the death as the Russians did: "The only thing left for us is to die in the best possible style," said one. Rarely did either side take prisoners, and death often came in a gruesome manner. On December 27, 1941, it was reported, "The Spanish dead lay nailed to the ground with Soviet ice picks. The wounded had been finished off. An ice pick gleamed in the center of a fallen *guripa*'s forehead."

During that first winter of 1941-1942 in Russia, some German units virtually ceased to exist in the subfreezing cold, with whole regiments covered in ice and frost and looking like ghosts. Vehicles froze, horses died. Some men even died when the cerebral fluid in their brains froze solid under their steel helmets.

The brutal winter war went on. In January 1942, with the temperature down to -55 degrees Centigrade, a German infantry division found itself trapped near Lake Ilmen, and General Muñoz-Grandes received orders to send in the Blue Division to rescue the unit. Employing a task force of 370 men on skis, a Latvian platoon of 40 men, and horse-drawn sleds manned by 70 anti-Soviet Russian helpers, the force made an 11-day march, crossed the frozen lake and attacked the enemy. By the time the two-day battle ended, only 14 Spaniards were still alive, but the Soviets had been decimated.

Muñoz-Grandes praised his sturdy troops fulsomely and often: "Hard is the enemy and harder the Russian winter—even harder are my men.… You are the pride of our race. Trust in God and attack like Spaniards!" Spanish garrisons rarely surrendered, but died fighting with their weapons in their hands, a la the Imperial Japanese Army in the Pacific.

More than that, however, the fighting style of the Africanistas—the Moroccan veterans in the Blue Division—unnerved the soldiers of the Red Army. The Moroccans would send dead Russians back to their lines missing ears, noses, and fingers.

They were brutal, ruthless soldiers—"Bridegrooms of Death" as Muñoz-Grandes called them—and they forced Red Army surrenders time and again in the assault and defense, sometimes armed only with knives, bayonets, entrenching tools, and rifle butts. "Where does the road lead?" the men asked themselves, and would provide their own answer: "To glory!"

So how did Spain come to play a role in Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union?

It was a complex situation that all began in April 1931 when Spain's king, Alfonso XIII, went into exile after an election that brought to power a government run by communists and socialists who called themselves "Republicans." The electorate had been angry with the king and his dictatorial prime minister, Miguel Primo de Rivera, who had gotten the country involved in an unpopular war in Morocco, and thus voted them out of office, overturning centuries of tradition.

Fast forward to early 1936, when Generalissimo Francisco Franco, supremely unhappy about the direction his country had taken, led a military coup against Spain's leftist government, which touched off the bloody Spanish Civil War.

At first, Franco's "Nationalists" made surprisingly easy gains against their Republican foes in the north and west, but the resistance hardened in such urban areas as Madrid, Barcelona, and Toledo. To help break the resistance, Franco pleaded with Nazi Germany's Adolf Hitler and Fascist Italy's Benito Mussolini to come to his assistance.

Seeing a chance to add Spain to their sphere of influence (Japan would join the Axis in September 1940) and thus bolster fascist power in Europe, the two leaders agreed. Both nations sent in squadrons of warplanes and ground troops, including tanks.

In August 1937, Germany's "Condor Legion"—a combined, 19,000-man army-air force task force composed of more than 100 bomber and fighter aircraft under Hugo Sperrle and a small armored force under Wilhelm Ritter von Thoma—was formed and deployed to Spain. Mussolini also sent the Aviazione Legionaria, an aviation unit with more than 700 planes of all types and more than 6,000 men, along with the 78,500-man Corpo Truppe Volontarie ("Corps of Volunteer Troops").

Hitler, interested in seeing how air power could be used to destroy cities, gave Sperrle a free hand to bomb Spanish cities, including the Basque town of Guernica, on April 26, 1937. In addition, large quantities of arms and ammunition were also supplied by Germany and Italy to the Nationalists. In response, the Republican side requested and received aircraft and tanks from the Soviet Union.

The Spanish Civil War raged on until March 1939, with Franco's Nationalists finally declaring victory. Six months later, Germany went to war with France and Britain, and Hitler called in his markers. Because he had come to Franco's aid, he now wanted Franco's army on his side in the war against France and Britain, but Franco demurred.

His attitude changed somewhat when Hitler invaded the USSR in the summer of 1941. Franco had fought against the ruling communist government in Spain, and now, here was his ally Germany fighting against the birthplace of communism and home to the champions of atheism and the arch-enemy of the Catholic Church—how could he not reciprocate?

Instead of sending standing units from his army, however, Franco called for volunteers. Enough signed up that Spain was able to offer a complete 18,700-man division called the Blue Division (blue was the color adopted by Franco's Nationalist army, and the men wore blue shirts under their German uniforms); to the Germans, it was designated the 250th Infantry Division. Five fighter squadrons were also formed that would fly with the Luftwaffe.

Selected to command the Blue Division was Madrid-born General Agustin Muñoz-Grandes. He was a veteran of the Spanish Civil War and had led the Spanish Legionnaires in defeating Republican forces at the Battle of Malaga in February 1937.

Who was this man who would live to be named Captain General of All Spain and who led the Spanish Blue Division, which was highly respected by its German allies and feared by its Red Army foes?

An English volunteer who served under him in Spain during the Civil War called Muñoz-Grandes "a magnificent soldier, and incidentally a man of great charm." Moreover, British military intelligence rated him as "one of their best and most resolute generals."

Muñoz-Grandes was born in 1896 in the Madrid working-class district of Carabranchel Bajo and graduated from the Infantry Academy at Toledo in 1913 on the eve of World War I, during which the Kingdom of Spain prudently remained neutral. Volunteering for duty in Spanish Morocco, he won promotions commanding native forces called *regulares,* and even formed an elite unit, or *harka*, that carried his own name.

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**Spanish soldiers take cover in a ditch while under fire, temporarily abandoning their antiaircraft gun. Most of the Blue Division's combat took place during the seige of Leningrad, in the far northeastern region of the USSR.**

When the Spanish Republic was established in 1931, Muñoz-Grandes was named to head the Assault Guards, "a paramilitary force that was designed to counterbalance the traditionalist, and therefore suspect, Guardia Civil (National Police)," according to two historians.

He was dismissed from this post following the victory of the leftist Popular Front in the 1936 election. On July 18, 1936, the day the civil war broke out, Muñoz-Grandes was in hostile Madrid and might have been massacred by either the Red mob or the militia, but was rescued by members of the Assault Guards and Republican General Vicente Rojo. He was jailed by the left-wing Republican government, but escaped to Franco's right-wing Nationalist lines.

During the Civil War, Muñoz-Grandes commanded a Nationalist army corps and served as General Secretary of the Movement and Chief of the Falangist Militia in Franco's first cabinet after the victory of March 1939. This was the Falange de las JONS, or Spanish Phalanx of the Committees of National Syndicalist Action. The color of the Falange was blue, hence the later color of the Blue Division (the Republicans' color, by contrast, was the same as the communist flag: red).

Wounded nine times and considered by all Nationalist Spaniards as one of Spain's foremost soldiers, this intrepid warrior was known for his courage and fearlessness in battle.

His hated rival within the Falangist movement was Spain's foreign minister (and Franco's own brother-in-law), Ramon Serrano Suñer, who on the very day that Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union—June 22, 1941—offered Hitler a volunteer Spanish division to fight in the USSR. Although the Führer would have preferred a Spanish declaration of war on England

Both: Alamy

**Truth be told, the disciplined Germans were initially horrified at their Spanish partners, who one historian described as being "an undisciplined bunch of macho men who refused to practice drills, march in formation, salute, wear military uniform, or obey orders…. Their main activity in Russia seemed to be to chase local women and have a good time."**

along with a joint occupation of Gibraltar, the offer was accepted as a means of drawing the two fascist states closer.

The new Blue Division would comprise both regular army and Falangist militia elements, with a composite of 18,000 officers and men—all volunteers. In fact, 40,000 men would eventually serve in this division.

Franco's first choice to command the new Blue Division was Muñoz-Grandes, primarily as a means of removing a dangerous domestic rival for political power within Spain; Suñer accepted the nomination for the same reason.

"We pay the Russians a return visit!" became the cheerful slogan of the volunteers, and their new uniforms included a cross-section of colorful haberdashery from Spanish politics: the blue shirt of the Falangists, the red berets of the Carlists, the khaki trousers of the Spanish Foreign Legion, and black boots for enlisted men, the *guripas*.

Each officer was similarly attired in a red beret, khaki tunic with blue collar and cuffs, a leather harness belt, khaki trousers, and high black boots. It was the predominance of the color blue that prompted almost everyone to call this new force the Division Azul, or Blue Division.

The division's first day of formation was July 4, 1941—less than a month after Hitler's invasion of the USSR—and the men sang the Falangist hymn, "Cara al Sol/Face to the Sun." They also sang of being "the Bridegrooms of Death."

On July 13—a mere 20 days after the war had started in the East—the crowds in Madrid came out to cheer the departure of 19 trains filled with 17,924 troops as they started their trip toward Germany, while Muñoz-Grandes himself flew ahead in a Lufthansa Focke-Wulf Condor 200.

On a gray morning that threatened rain at the Grafenwöhr training grounds in southeastern Germany on July 31, 1941, the Spanish Blue Division that had volunteered to fight the communists alongside the Germans on the Soviet front stood in ranks, ready to take their oath of allegiance to Adolf Hitler and the Third Reich.

After a Catholic mass was celebrated, Muñoz-Grandes drew his sword as the oath was administered: "Do you swear before God and on your honor as Spaniards," another officer conducting the ceremony said, "absolute obedience to the Supreme Commander of the German Army, Adolf Hitler, in the fight against communism, and do you swear to fight as valiant soldiers, ready at any time to sacrifice your lives in fulfillment of this oath?" The Spanish soldiers—their right arms raised in the Fascist salute—roared, "Yes, I swear." It seemed to be a scene right out of the 1960s-era film El Cid, a heroic role to which Franco fancied himself a successor.

The 250th Infantry Division was now officially accepted into the German armed forces. General Muñoz-Grandes stepped up to the microphone to proclaim, "Spanish volunteers! Soldiers of honor of my motherland! Before the glorious flags of Germany and Spain, you have sworn to die before allowing barbarous Bolshevism to continue its work of hatred and destruction which has already bloodied our motherland, and which today criminally attempts to impose itself on all of Europe.... You only wish to destroy this monster—this lash of humanity—in its own lair.... Tell the Führer that we are ready and at his orders. Tell him that we have sworn the oath, and tell him that my people fulfills what it swears."

Muñoz-Grandes was to be as good as his word—and then some. Indeed, during one of their later meetings, Hitler told Muñoz-Grandes that the Blue Division was the "only virile Latin race, equal to the best German divisions," a pointed barb at Mussolini's Fascist Italians.

A few weeks later, in the autumn of 1941, the Spaniards arrived on the Eastern Front, where German forces were pushing back the Bolshevik foe and inflicting heavy casualties. Originally, the Blue Division was assigned to Army Group Center for the assault on Moscow, but was reassigned to Army Group North, which was closing in on Leningrad.

Truth be told, the disciplined Germans were initially horrified at their Spanish partners, who one historian described as being "an undisciplined bunch of macho men who refused to practice drills, march in formation, salute, wear military uniform, or obey orders…. Their main activity in Russia seemed to be to chase local women and have a good time."

It was true. In what little free time the Blue Division had, the Spanish *guripas* disobeyed German rules and engaged in sexual intimacies with known Russian Jewesses, leading German Army Field Marshal Hans Günther von Kluge to retort, "Are they soldiers or gypsies?"

**ABOVE: Spanish artillerymen, dressed in camouflaged rain capes, man a 15-centimeter heavy howitzer somewhere on the Eastern Front in 1942. OPPOSITE: Men of a Spanish Panzerjägerabteilung (tank-hunter unit) sprint across a field during an attack on Soviet positions outside Leningrad. Although considered undisciplined by some German commanders, few other German allies could match their bravado.**

They also made it clear that they were in the Soviet Union to fight communists, not to help the Germans.

Once at the front, though, Muñoz-Grandes proved to Hitler straightaway that he was his kind of field commander, an Andrew Jackson of the Eastern Front. "We will recuperate in the line. My soldiers will fight to the death!" he declared. In fact, the division was renowned for shouting "Long live death!" as they charged fearlessly into battle.

In October 1941, shortly before the Russian winter hit with a vengeance, the Blue Division had marched to the front lines, holding a 30-mile front along the Volkhov River from the southern shore of Lake Ladoga to Lake Ilmen in the Novgorod Oblast south of Leningrad.

The Blue Division was first launched into battle on October 12 and swiftly scored a victory. This was followed by a two-day advance southward to attack the city of Dubrovka, 100 miles southwest of Moscow. Muñoz-Grandes' men took the city but then had to spend three weeks fighting off Red Army counterattacks.

In the territory between Moscow and Leningrad (today St. Petersburg), the Spaniards fought with such ferocity that they gained the respect of the Germans and became feared by the Russians, who soon came to dread going up against them in battle. One German general said that the Spaniards fought with such wild abandon, it was as if the Russians had stolen their wives.

The year 1942 opened with renewed bitter fighting in the unrelenting cold. On January 21, an 800-man Blue Division battalion was practically destroyed by a Soviet assault; only 42 men survived. The next month the division was in the center of a Red Army attempt to split the Axis line that pushed battalions to the rear in a blinding blizzard; only the timely intervention of a combined German-Walloon (Belgian)-Lat-

vian counterattack saved them from annihilation. As the defeated "Russkies" retreated, the *guripas* would taunt after them, "Otro toro! Otro toro!" ("Send in another bull!"). Stripping dead Russians of their warm clothing, they would also pry from their frozen fingers weapons with which to continue the fight.

The air force squadrons also gave a good account of themselves. Twenty-two Spanish pilots shot down 156 Soviet warplanes.

Reich Chancellor Hitler was so impressed with the Blue Division that in his April 26 speech in the German Reichstag in Berlin's Kroll Opera House he asserted, "The Spaniards have done all that we ask of our own soldiers.… They and their general [Muñoz-Grandes] know the meaning of loyalty and bravery unto death."

Bundesarchiv

**Hitler receives Agustín Muñoz-Grandes (left), commander of the Blue Division, at his Eastern Front headquarters to present him with the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves.**

To reward General Muñoz-Grandes for his leadership and assistance in the war against the Soviet Union, Hitler personally presented him with the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves.

When the spring thaw arrived, the Germans renewed their offensive. Thrown into battle at Bolshoye Shamoshe east of the Keresti River, the depleted Blue Division fought valiantly. At nearby Maloye Shamoshe, the division killed or captured more than 5,000 Russians while losing only 274 of their own.

Muñoz-Grandes was replaced as commander of the Blue Division by Brig. Gen. Emilio Esteban Infantes (who would also be awarded the Knight's Cross on October 5, 1943). His successor was already planning a second Spanish division of volunteers to fight alongside the Germans in the USSR, but it was not to be, for Franco had decided to shift his political gears in the light of the German defeats at Stalingrad and Kursk.

Franco had already replaced Suñer, his pro-Axis foreign minister—brother-in-law or no—in September 1942 with a pro-Allied Spanish general as a sign of his hardening policy of official neutrality, and when Muñoz-Grandes returned home to a hero's welcome at Madrid on May 24, 1942, Franco promoted his paladin to the rank of lieutenant general in the Spanish Army, but was also keenly aware that both the Germans and the general saw the latter as the eventual successor—or perhaps sooner replacement—to the wily Caudillo (leader.)

Indeed, if Spain formally entered the war on the side of the Axis, it was agreed that Muñoz-Grandes would have the post of minister of the interior—akin to the role played by Hitler's police chief, Heinrich Himmler, head of the Gestapo and SS in the Third Reich.

More than that, the Germans saw Muñoz-Grandes as part of a Spanish military junta that would force Franco to join the Axis and also ask for German arms. To somewhat co-opt him, the Caudillo offered Muñoz-Grandes the options of taking a new cabinet post or becoming the Spanish ambassador in Berlin, but the general refused both so as not to be a tool of those he considered to be reactionaries.

In 1942, with the Blue Division having suffered heavy casualties from battle and frostbite, Franco decided that the unit and Muñoz-Grandes had had enough and brought them home. However, thousands of die-hard volunteers, along with recently arrived replacements, refused to leave, choosing instead to stay in the fight until the very end despite having to give up their Spanish citizenship to do so. This reconstituted, 3,000-man force became known as the Legion Azul, or Blue Legion, commanded by Miguel Ezquerra.

Upon returning home to a hero's welcome, Muñoz-Grandes was awarded the highest Falangist award as well. There were other honors but also great suspicion: someone as accomplished as Muñoz-Grandes could very well lead a coup to topple Franco. A close eye would have to be kept on him.

In August 1942, the Blue Legion was moved north to man the southeastern flank of the Leningrad siege, just south of the Neva River near Pushkin near the Izhora River. The German southern front at Leningrad was crumbling in the face of ferocious Red Army attacks and the Legion was under heavy pressure from the 55th Soviet Army in February 1943 when that Soviet force attacked Spanish positions at the Battle of Krasny Bor near the main Moscow-Leningrad road.

Despite suffering heavy casualties, the Spaniards held their ground against a Russian

National Archives

**Spanish soldiers—now known as the Blue Legion—dash forward during an assault against Soviet positions defending Leningrad during the summer of 1943. The Spaniards' eagerness for battle cost them heavy casualties.**

force seven times larger. The assault was contained and the siege of Leningrad went on for another year. To bolster the Legion's declining numbers, Franco dispatched more reinforcements, including conscripts as well as volunteers. Throughout the summer of 1943, the depleted Blue Legion continued to hold its positions while reinforcements from Spain trickled in.

As Legion ranks became depleted, the Germans attached its remaining units to such Waffen-SS units as the Panzer Grenadier Nordland Division and Storm Brigade Wallonien. The Spaniards were also called up to bolster Germany's fighting retreat throughout Russia in 1943 and 1944. A historian noted that they also "proved merciless in destroying anti-German resistance in Yugoslavia, Romania (in Bukovina), and France. Some of them also took part in the Ardennes offensive."

Meeting with Franco and Muñoz-Grandes on August 20, 1943, British Ambassador to Madrid Sir Samuel Hoare demanded the withdrawal of the Blue Legion from Russia. Six weeks later, on October 1, Franco declared Spain's official neutrality in the European war.

The Blue Legion was now in for bad times. In December 1943, the Germans ordered the legion to the front where they were told to hold a line of six and a half miles at Kostovo. So widely spaced were legion ranks that two tanks abreast could have passed between each infantryman. On Christmas day, the Soviet assault began, but the Spanish legionnaires refused to yield, picking off advancing troops for days and then weeks.

As for their own dead, when they were surrounded and the Red Army would taunt, "Kill your officers and join us," the Legion's last truck in retreat would remove all the crosses from their cemeteries so that their comrades' bodies could not be dug up and desecrated by the Reds.

Finally ordered to abandon their positions during a blizzard, the survivors pulled back and made it to Estonia on January 7, 1944. There the frozen, numbed Spanish soldiers were assigned the duty of guarding the Baltic Sea coast.

On February 20, 1944, Hitler informed Franco that the Legion had performed its duty and was sending it back, and on March 6, many of the *guripas* assembled for the final trip home. As one officer said, "This is a bitter moment.… The Legion must return to Spain!... Return home with the proud feeling that you have done your duty.… On this day of sorrow, you will carry your rifle barrels down, as in a funeral, or in Holy Week. Long live the Legion! Franco! Franco! Franco!"

The survivors were back in Spain by the end of April 1944, although some elected to stay and fight, and thus were incorporated as such into the German forces. With the war in Europe coming to a close, many of the Blue Legion survivors ended up in Berlin, fighting alongside the Wallonians and the Nordland Division outside of Hitler's bunker. But resistance was futile and those defenders who weren't killed were captured by the Red Army and sent to POW camps inside the USSR, where many died.

The Spaniards left an unparalleled combat legacy on the Eastern Front, but it came at a heavy price. By war's end, some 22,000 volunteers had become casualties—5,000 dead, 8,000 wounded, and hundreds missing or taken prisoner. A decade after the war, 300 captured Spanish survivors were released from their Siberian prison camps and finally allowed to return home.

And what of their first commander, Agustin Muñoz-Grandes himself? As Franco suspected, he returned home wanting to cleanse his country of military cabals, Falangist intriguers like Suñer, and even Franco. Instead, once more Generalissimo Franco slyly co-opted his military fame, in 1953 making Muñoz-Grandes Madrid's negotiator with the United States with fellow general and now president Dwight D. Eisenhower to permit American air bases in Spain that paved the way for Franco's return to the European community after his long honeymoon with fascism.

Muñoz-Grandes retired from the Army in 1966 at age 70, but retained the rank of chief of staff, as well as remaining as first vice president, a post he had assumed in 1962. Franco abruptly removed him from that position too in July 1967. Muñoz-Grandes died at age 74 on July 12, 1970, and Franco followed him in death on November 20, 1975.

In February 2015, a group of left-wing, antifascist radicals rampaged in Madrid and destroyed Muñoz-Grandes' tomb. □

# PEARL HARBOR PAYBACK

Just four months after Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor, the United States mounted an audacious air raid on the enemy capital, signaling a portent of things to come.

BY NATHAN N. PREFER

**President Franklin D. Roosevelt** was deeply concerned. Ever since December 7, 1941, when the Japanese had attacked American military facilities at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, the United States had suffered one defeat after another.

In addition to the near destruction of the Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor, American outposts at Wake Island and Guam had fallen to the enemy, the gallant American-Filipino defense of the Philippines was crumbling fast, and there seemed no way to stop the Japanese juggernaut advancing toward America's west coast.

America's allies were impotent, the British and Dutch military forces having been either annihilated or pushed aside throughout the Far East. Nowhere was there a success to present to the frightened American people.

President Roosevelt had a special pride in the United States Navy, having once been an assistant secretary of the Navy, and ever since then had considered himself a "Navy man"—much to the chagrin of his Army Chief of Staff, General George C. Marshall. The president was worried that "his" Navy was not doing anything about these steady enemy advances.

During a visit by British Prime Minister Winston S. Churchill to the White House, FDR complained that the Navy had gone out with orders to fight the Japanese but had turned back after only a few hours of searching for the enemy.

Roosevelt's dissatisfaction resulted in a shakeup of the Navy high command, placing Admiral Ernest J. King in overall command and Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz in command of the Pacific Fleet. Yet even then, the Navy was able to launch only a few hit-and-run raids on Japanese outposts in the central Pacific.

**USS *Hornet* (CV-8) crewmen (right) watch anxiously from the signal lamp platform as one of the 16 heavily laden North American B-25B Mitchell bombers lifts off from the flight deck, April 18, 1942. The risky, audacious raid was intended to exact a measure of revenge for Pearl Harbor, prove to the Japanese that they were not invulnerable, and boost U.S. home front morale. It proved successful on all counts.**

Naval History and Heritage Command

These would not suffice. There was a growing feeling within the Roosevelt administration that the American people needed something more, something dramatic—a strike at the enemy that would bring the scent of victory, even if the strategic value was nil.

Roosevelt had been seeking such a strike ever since Pearl Harbor. Shortly after Japan's surprise raid, he had asked the Army Air Force Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Henry H. ("Hap") Arnold if there was any possibility of launching a bombing raid on the Japanese homeland. General Arnold was tasked to investigate the possibilities and to come up with some way to make such a raid happen.

But the rapid advance of the Japanese soon eliminated any Pacific bases from which American planes could launch such a raid. The president continued to seek out possibilities. He asked Admiral King if it was possible for American Army Air Forces bombers to take off from aircraft carriers. Admiral King's operations officer, Captain Francis C. Low, believed it was possible, and was he ordered to test his theory. Thus was born the First Special Aviation Project—popularly known today as the Doolittle Raid.

Captain Low had recently visited the Norfolk Naval Base in Virginia. While there, he had seen something that intrigued him. There were Army pilots practicing bombing runs on an outline of an aircraft carrier's deck that was painted on the ground. The idea, of course, was for Army pilots to be prepared to attack enemy aircraft carriers. The outline was also used to train Navy pilots for carrier landings and takeoffs.

But Captain Low saw something else. He wondered, "If the Army has some twin-engine bombers with a range greater than our [Navy] fighters, it seems to me a few of them could be loaded on a carrier and used to bomb Japan."

Captain Low, a submarine officer and not a pilot, waited with trepidation as his commander, not known for his mild temper, thought it over. But to his surprise, Admiral King replied, "You may have something there, Low. Talk to Duncan about it in the morning. And don't tell anyone else about this." "Duncan" was Captain Donald B. Duncan, Admiral King's air operations officer and a veteran pilot.

The next day, January 11, 1942, Low and Duncan discussed the idea. They determined that there were two main questions to be answered: could an Army Air Forces medium bomber land on an aircraft carrier, and could it take off with a heavy load of fuel and bombs?

Donald B. Duncan, a 1917 Naval Academy graduate, knew immediately that there was no way an Army bomber could land on an aircraft carrier. The deck was simply too short to land such a large plane and, even if it could be landed, the carrier's elevators were too small to lower the plane below decks. Nor were the tails of the Army aircraft strong enough to take the shock of the aircraft carrier's arresting gear. But whether those bombers could take off from a carrier, Duncan was not sure.

Duncan immediately began to research the answer. He studied Army aircraft manuals, checked records to see if Army planes had ever taken off from an aircraft carrier, and sought historical records for any information. Five days later he produced a handwritten, 30-page report that concluded that there was only one bomber aircraft that might possibly take off from an aircraft carrier: the North American B-25 "Mitchell" medium bomber.

Named for Army Air Service Brig. Gen. William Lendrum "Billy" Mitchell, who upset military doctrine and tradition by insisting that aircraft could and should be used to attack enemy battleships, and that the Navy should invest in aircraft carriers, not capital ships

**ABOVE: Doolittle hand-picked the crew members for the top-secret raid and left no detail untouched. Here a B-25 Mitchell flies one of the innumerable training runs somewhere over the southeastern U.S. LEFT: James "Jimmy" Doolittle, promoted to lieutenant general in March 1944, was a lieutenant colonel when he led the Raiders on their historic mission. For his courage and leadership, he was awarded the Medal of Honor.**

Both: National Archives

National Archives

**ABOVE: There was no margin for error in training for the mission. This B-25 crashed at Ellington Field, Texas, March 10, 1942. BELOW: B-25 crews were given intensive training in taking off on a very short runway at Eglin Field, Florida, March 1942.**

(he was court-martialed in 1925 for his insubordination), the B-25 was considered the easiest bomber to fly and land. It was stable but maneuverable, allowing the pilot to pay attention to what was going on beyond the aircraft during combat. It had entered Army Air Forces service in 1940, and during the war would go through eight official and several "unofficial" adaptations.

Powered by two Wright R-2600-29 Double Cyclone 14-cylinder radial 1,850 horsepower engines, the B-25 had a maximum speed of 275 miles per hour and a service ceiling of 24,000 feet. It also had a range of 1,500 miles, and during the war it became increasingly armed with additional machine guns, and briefly even a 75mm gun placed in the forward nose to strafe enemy bases. Smaller than the B-17 "Flying Fortress" and B-24 "Liberator," it carried a crew of five.

Captain Low worked with General Arnold, who was as anxious to respond to the president's request as Admiral King. With the aircraft question settled, the next step was to find a commanding officer for the First Special Aviation Project. The man selected was short, balding James Harold Doolittle. He was born in Alameda, California, on December 14, 1896. While attending the University of California, he enlisted in the Army Reserve and by 1920 had earned a commission in the aviation section of the Signal Corps.

During World War I, Lieutenant Doolittle was a flight instructor. After the war, in 1922, he made the first transcontinental flight in under 24 hours, earning him a reputation as a distinguished flyer. By 1930, he had become bored with military flying and left the service to enter private industry.

As a civilian, Doolittle won the coveted Thompson Racing Trophy and worked as a test pilot, during which he experienced several crashes and parachute jumps from various aircraft. But Doolittle was not just a daredevil; in between air races and crashes, he was one of the first to earn a doctorate in aeronautical sciences from the prestigious Massachusetts Institute of Technology. This led him to the development of high-octane fuel, which was to prove of critical importance in the coming war.

But after a decade with Shell Oil Company, the approach of a new world war prompted him to return to the Army Air Forces in July 1940. By the following year he was a lieutenant colonel on General Arnold's staff.

One January morning in 1942, Doolittle was called into the general's office and briefed on the possibilities of Army bombers flying off Navy carriers to bomb Japan. Asking for time to consider the possibility, Lt. Col. Doolittle went to his office and studied the question. He too decided that the only viable aircraft was the B-25 medium bomber, properly modified.

Upon return to General Arnold's office, he presented his findings. Arnold then asked if he knew someone who could organize such an operation, and Doolittle volunteered.

The Navy was also preparing to implement the plan. It had been decided that the USS *Hornet* would be the best aircraft carrier to launch the raid. Since the *Hornet* was about to arrive on the East Coast after operations in the Pacific, it was hoped that some experimental flights of B-25s from her decks could be conducted. Meanwhile, Captain Duncan flew out to Hawaii to organize the task force that would carry the First Special Aviation Project to war.

The thorny problem of landing returning bombers on aircraft carriers could not be resolved. But then a solution appeared: Doolittle's B-25s would not have to return if, after bombing Japan, they could continue on and land in China. This solved another issue: the Navy's task force would be dangerously exposed while approaching Japan

to launch the bombers, and they would have to return as quickly as possible, representing as they did the only remaining U.S. naval presence in the Pacific at the time.

So strict was the secrecy shielding the mission to bomb Japan that in a meeting with the president on January 28, 1942, the Chiefs of Staff, not all of whom knew of the project, did not mention it at all, referring only to bombing Japan from Chinese bases. Roosevelt was not informed of the plan until later in the year, even though he continued to push for an immediate bombing of Japan proper.

Meanwhile, Lt. Col. Doolittle set out for Wright Field in Ohio to begin preparing for his new command. At the same time, Captain Duncan flew to Norfolk, Virginia, to tell Captain Marc A. Mitscher, commanding the USS *Hornet,* that he was going to have three B-25s brought aboard to do trial takeoffs from the carrier. Captain Mitscher, a future admiral, knew better than to ask questions.

The three B-25s to be placed aboard the Hornet were led by 1st Lt. John F. Fitzgerald. Each plane had only a two-man crew—a pilot and co-pilot—who had spent some days practicing on that same mock field at Norfolk that had been observed by Captain Low weeks earlier.

One of these B-25s fell out with engine failure before the trials. The other two were hoisted aboard the *Hornet,* and Captain Duncan discussed details of the trial, without revealing the mission itself, with Captain Mitscher. Mitscher, himself a naval pilot, understood the risks involved.

The following day, February 2, the carrier sailed from Norfolk out of sight of land. The crew of two B-25s, piloted by Lieutenants Fitzgerald and James F. McCarthy, were ordered to man their planes. Fitzgerald later remembered that he was surprised to find that he had about 500 feet of usable deck space available and that his plane's airspeed indicator, revved up and with the brakes full on, needed only a score more miles of airspeed to take off.

The takeoff went surprisingly well, and Fitzgerald was airborne with room to spare; McCarthy followed without complications. Both pilots flew back to Norfolk without knowing why they had just risked their lives.




**Task Force 16.2 had to steam halfway between Midway Island and the Japanese home islands before being launched.**

The flight trial had been successful, but questions remained. Both planes had light fuel loads, only two rather than five crewmembers, and carried no bombs or extra fuel tanks. Yet Captain Duncan was satisfied that a fully crewed and loaded B-25 could take off from an aircraft carrier at sea.

Doolittle agreed with Duncan, provided that the carrier was headed into the wind at a speed above 20 knots. There was some doubt, however, if while carrying 20 B-25s the carrier would have enough deck space left to safely launch those same bombers.

Doolittle was kept busy determining which modifications would be necessary to enable the bombers to reach Japan from the carriers and then fly on to China. He made drawings of those modifications for the engineers at Wright Field and plotted the size and number of additional fuel tanks that would need to be installed in each bomber.

He then met with Brig. Gen. George C. Kenney, later to lead the Fifth Army Air Force in the southwest Pacific, to explain what he needed for what he termed "the special B-25B project" without telling him the reasons behind his demands. Much in the way of new equipment was necessary, including new plumbing to implement the additional fuel tanks, and new bomb shackles for the modified bomb load.

The fuel tanks proved the biggest problem. Eventually, a 265-gallon steel tank was specially manufactured by the McQuay Company, but this proved problematic and was soon replaced by a 225-gallon tank manufactured by the United States Rubber Company of Mishawaka, Indiana.

Still, problems remained. The tanks leaked, usually at the connections between tanks and lines. Repairs solved most but not all these problems. A second tank of 160-gallon capacity was installed above the bomb bay. Again, leaks were a problem, increasing the fire hazard, but modifications and repairs reduced the risk to acceptable levels.

The lower gun turret was removed and replaced with a 60-gallon tank that was to be refueled during flight by a gunner from 10 five-gallon fuel tanks carried in the rear compartment. Altogether, the planes would carry 1,141 gallons (9,527 pounds) of fuel per

aircraft, of which 1,100 would be available. Under severe time constraints, the planes were accepted with these remaining difficulties and flown off to Florida.

Next, Doolittle needed targets. For this, he approached Brig. Gen. Carl ("Tooey") Spaatz, General Arnold's deputy for intelligence. He asked for the target folders on the most important industrial targets in Japan. Again, he did not reveal why he wanted these, and General Spaatz, who later commanded the U.S. Strategic Air Forces in Europe, did not ask.

Ten such targets were offered. These included the cities of Tokyo, Yokohama, Kobe, Nagoya, and six smaller cities. The actual targets included iron, steel, magnesium, and aluminum plants, petroleum refineries, and shipbuilding facilities.

**ABOVE: The *Hornet*'s flight deck filled with B-25B bombers sails from Alameda Naval Air Station near San Francisco, escorted by the destroyer USS *Gwin* (DD-433) and the cruiser *Nashville* (CL-43) in the distance. BELOW: Before the take off, Doolittle (left front) and Captain Marc A. Mitscher, *Hornet*'s commanding officer, posed for photos during a ceremony with the B-25 flight crews.**

Both: Naval History and Heritage Command

In Washington, the president was still pressing for some action against Japan itself. He constantly inquired of General Arnold and Admiral King about a plan to strike at the heart of Japan. He was interested at this time in an idea to strike Japan with heavy bombers flying from Mongolia.

General Arnold explained that there was no way heavy bombers could operate from Mongolia without the permission of the Soviet Union, which was then a neutral in the Pacific War. Arnold also explained that the best alternative was basing bombers in China and striking Japan from there, making no mention of the Doolittle project.

That project was gaining momentum. Having worked out to the best of his ability the mechanics of the project, Doolittle now addressed the matter of personnel. He needed trained crews by April 1, 1942, his deadline for the operation.

As was his practice, he sat down and wrote a memorandum to himself in which he outlined what he needed for the coming attack. In this memorandum, titled "B-25 Special Project," he outlined his objectives and requirements for success. The "purpose of this special project is to bomb and fire the industrial center of Japan," he wrote.

The method was "to bring carrier-borne bombers to within 400 to 500 miles of the coast of Japan, preferably to the southeast." The planes were to fly to their targets by following rivers or other landmarks. Bombing was to be simultaneous. After bombing, the planes were to fly to Chinese airfields at Chuchow, Lishui, Yushan or Chienou—fields that were inland of the Chinese coast and not under Japanese occupation.

After refueling, the aircraft were to proceed to the major Chinese airfield at Chungking, 800 miles inland. From there, they would go on to whatever destination had been ordered. The greatest nonstop distance any plane would have to fly was 2,000 miles. Twenty-four B-25s would be included, six of them being "spares" in the event another plane malfunctioned. Each bomber carried two 500-pound bombs and up to 1,000 pounds of incendiaries.

Crews would be standard: pilot, co-pilot, bombardier-navigator, radio operator, and gunner-mechanic. Only volunteers with experience flying in the B-25B would be accepted. One crew member would be a competent meteorologist and another an experienced navigator. Chinese-speaking volunteers were eagerly sought.

Doolittle asked which Army Air Forces units were already flying the B-25B bomber. He learned that the 17th Bombardment Group, consisting of the 34th, 37th, and 95th Squadrons, was already flying this version at Pendleton, Oregon. So too was the 89th Reconnaissance Squadron. He had orders issued to transfer all planes and crews of these squadrons from Pendleton to Columbia Army Air Base in Columbia, North Carolina.

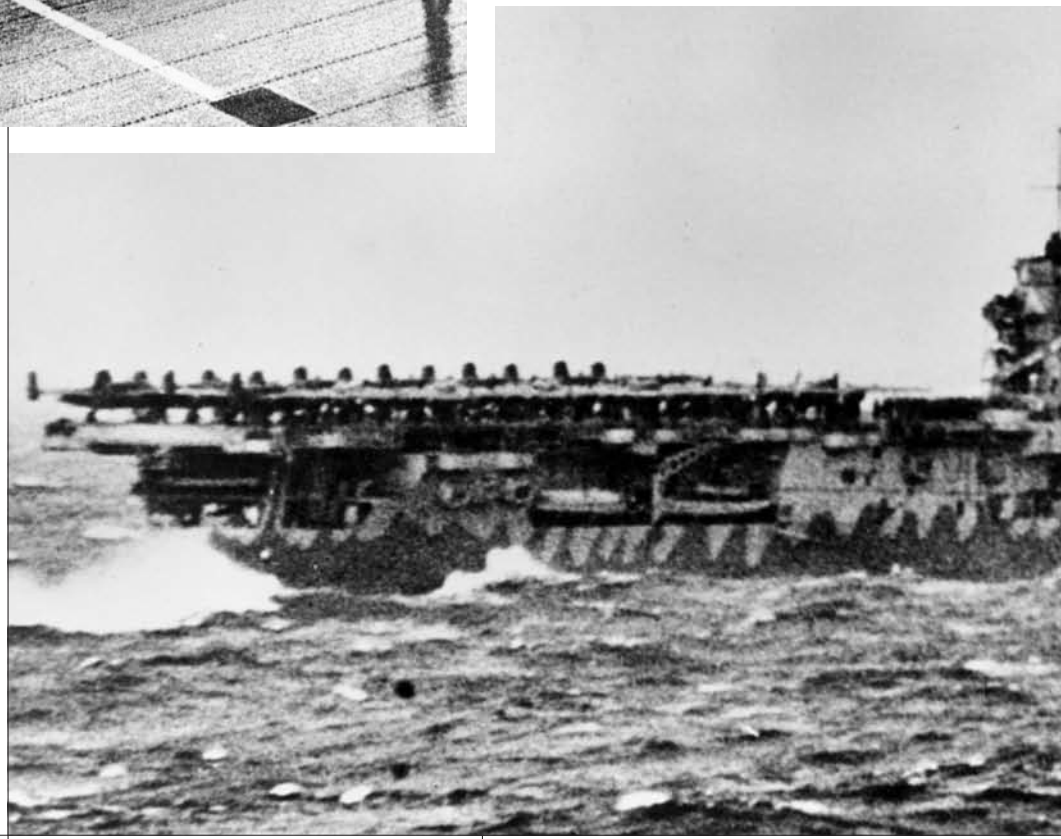
Word was passed that volunteers were needed for an extremely hazardous mission without giving details. En route to Columbia, the B-25Bs had the fuel tanks installed as designed by Doolittle.

Like the project itself, training needed to be kept secret. Eglin Airfield in the Florida panhandle was selected. Besides seclusion, Eglin was close to the Gulf of Mexico, which would provide the volunteers with practice in over-water navigation, an essential part of the coming project.

With his time divided between Wright Field, Washington D.C., and Eglin Field, Doolittle needed a good executive officer. He selected Major John A. "Jack" Hilger, commander of the 89th Reconnaissance Squadron. Hilger would set up the training protocols at Eglin Field, assemble the aircraft, and train the team for the mission.

All three of the squadron commanders of the 17th Bombardment Group volunteered, but the commander, Lt. Col. William C. Mills, could not release them all, and only Captain Edward J. "Ski" York was transferred. The same spirit prevailed among the flight crews, and nearly all volunteered. The decision was left up to the three squadron commanders as to who was accepted. Soon, 24 crews were named, as well as sufficient ground crews, mechanics, armorers, and radio operators. These men were ordered to report to Eglin Field.

Lieutenant Colonel Doolittle was about to lead a flight of B-25B bombers to Japan, but he himself had never qualified to fly a medium bomber. He addressed this problem by giving up, albeit temporarily, his P-40 fighter aircraft to qualify on the B-25B. With crews and planes selected and finally assembled at Eglin Field, Doolittle confided in Major Hilger the mission's objective and



**ABOVE: The *Hornet*'s flight deck officer (right) prepares to signal one of the 16 B-25s to begin its launch, April 18, 1942. Never before had bombers taken off from a carrier. RIGHT: A bomber launches from the Hornet in heavy seas to begin the first U.S. air raid on the Japanese home islands. More B-25s can be seen lined up on the flight deck, awaiting their turn to go.**

Both: Naval History and Heritage Command

methods, to allow him to understand the nature and importance of the training he was about to oversee. Hilger suggested assigning a Navy flight officer to the training program, since the Army Air Forces had little understanding of the ways of the U.S. Navy. Captain Duncan had similar thoughts and had assigned a young Navy pilot, Lieutenant (later Rear Admiral) Henry L. "Hank" Miller. His participation in the mission would prove greatly valuable.

Lieutenant Miller's arrival confused the crews even more. When asked why he was there, he replied that his mission was to teach them how to take off from an aircraft carrier. They were even more surprised when he added that he had never flown a B-25B before. This he rectified quickly by making several flights in the bomber.

Once familiar with the aircraft, Miller used a small auxiliary field to instruct the squadron leaders in carrier takeoffs. The Army pilots were skeptical but willing to learn. Soon, they were taking off within 350 feet into a 40-knot wind with a load of 31,000 pounds—2,000 pounds over the aircraft's official load limitations.

Doolittle soon had his squadron organized. His executive officer was Major Hilger, Major Henry Johnson was the adjutant, and Captain "Ski" York the operations officer.

Gradually, as things began to come together, the staff was let in on the plans, objectives, and methods of the operation for which they were training. Secrecy remained a top priority.

Determined to lead the operation he had done so much to organize, Doolittle submitted himself to Miller's training course. Army pilots, trained to use as much takeoff ground as they wanted, were shocked to learn that they had only about a football field's length to gain airspeed, which in the Navy's language was a mere 50 miles per hour! But they learned and soon achieved takeoffs at the required runway length and speed.

Doolittle wanted his pilots to familiarize themselves with their aircraft and with flying during daytime and nighttime, as well as flying over water and land. He set 50 hours flying time as his goal, but continued modifications and repairs to the planes made this goal rarely achievable.

It was then that another problem arose. With the aircraft already carrying more than their official loads, some guns aboard the planes had to be removed. But that only invited attack. Captain C. Ross Greening, the squadron's gunnery officer, came up with the solution. Broomsticks painted black would replace the guns in the tail section in hopes the sight of the dummy barrels would chase away Japanese fighters.

The next problem was the top-secret Norden bombsight used by American bombers. This highly secret bomb sight could not fall into enemy hands. But since the bombers were going to fly low over Japan to avoid detection and would be bombing by sight, they had no use for it, and they were removed from all the aircraft.

A makeshift bombsight, made of two pieces of aluminum and costing about 20 cents, replaced it. The bombardiers found that it actually worked much better at low altitudes than the Norden sight. Captain Greening also suggested removing the lower gun turrets, which were worked electronically and gave constant problems. Doolittle agreed, and the turrets were removed.

Then it was revealed that almost none of the gunners had ever fired a machine gun from an aircraft. Worse, most of the machine guns provided to the squadron were inoperable. It turned out that the guns had not been fully assembled before they were issued to the squadron. An ordnance expert from Wright Field had to be called in to fix that problem. But the delay prevented the gunners from practicing in the air, limiting practice to ground firing.

Doolittle had requested incendiary bombs for his upcoming mission. Edgewood Arsenal in Maryland provided him with 500-pound clusters of incendiaries that would scatter while falling, thereby covering a wider area. But the demolition bombs provided would not release from the bomb racks aboard the aircraft. This problem was eventually resolved, but it cost time in training and practice.

One thing the squadron did not have yet was a doctor. This matter resolved itself when Dr. (1st Lt.) Thomas R. White, a

physician assigned to the 89th Reconnaissance Squadron, volunteered for the assignment. But there was no room for a doctor in the planes.

To provide a physician while not taking any non-flying personnel, White volunteered to qualify as a gunner aboard one of the bombers. In fact, he not only qualified but scored second highest of all the gunners on the firing range. He was assigned to a crew.

Doolittle now had to resolve a personal issue. He had missed combat in World War I and had made no secret of the fact that he was determined to get into the fight in the present war. In March, he visited with General Arnold and updated him on the project's progress. With the briefing over, he asked permission to command and lead the squadron into the raid on Japan. Arnold refused, citing his need for Doolittle on his staff in Washington.

Naval History and Heritage Command

**The cruiser *Nashville* fires her 6-inch main guns at a Japanese picket boat encountered by the task force on April 18. Before sinking, the picket boat alerted Japan to the task force's presence, causing the Raiders to take off 150 miles farther from Japan than originally planned.**

The determined lieutenant colonel refused to accept "no" for an answer and launched into a diatribe to gain command of the project he had spent three months developing. His argument was eventually successful, and he received command of what would soon be known as "Doolittle's Raiders."

Racing back to Eglin Field to prevent General Arnold changing his mind, Doolittle got back to training. After one of the pilots became ill, Doolittle assigned himself as that pilot's replacement. His crew would be co-pilot 1st Lt. Richard E. Cole, navigator 1st Lt. Henry A. Potler, bombardier Sergeant Fred A. Braemer, and engineer-gunner Sergeant Paul J. Leonard.

Training and repairs continued until the third week of March, when Admiral King sent a message to General Arnold, which read, "TELL JIMMY TO GET ON HIS HORSE." Arnold called Doolittle with the message, which meant that the USS *Hornet* was ready to receive the planes and pilots for the mission. Ironically, planes and pilots were ordered to report to Alameda, California, Doolittle's hometown, preparatory to boarding the *Hornet*. By this time there were only 22 planes left to depart, the others having become casualties of practice takeoffs.

Even now, at the moment of departure, problems continued to arise. While the aircraft waited to be loaded at McClellan Army Air Field, California, they were to be tested to ensure that all planes functioned correctly.

Doolittle personally advised the base commander that certain tests were not to be conducted, and that the carburetors were not to be adjusted, since that had been done at Eglin Field to Doolittle's satisfaction. But the staff at McClellan Field was still on "peacetime" routine, and the repairs and tests were delayed.

One of the pilots, Captain Ted W. Lawson, remembered, "I had to stand by and watch one of the mechanics rev up my engines so fast that the new blades picked up dirt which pockmarked their tips. I caught another one trying to sandpaper the imperfections away and yelled at him until he got some oil and rubbed it on the places he had just sandpapered." It would take another phone call to General Arnold to straighten out these latest difficulties.

The aircraft, many of which still had unresolved problems, were then flown to Alameda Naval Air Station on San Francisco Bay, California. They were met by Doolittle and Captain York, who inquired of each crew if there had been any problems on the flight from McClellan. Any crew that reported problems was ordered to park their aircraft in a designated area. Those aircraft would be left behind. Doolittle then ordered those crews to board the *Hornet*, where they would serve as alternate crewmembers. The "good" aircraft were loaded aboard the carrier on April 1, 1942, precisely on schedule.

The next issue to confront Doolittle was space aboard the carrier. He had originally planned for 18 B-25Bs to be hoisted aboard but, after discussion with Navy officers, it was learned that only 15 would fit and still allow sufficient deck space for takeoff.

Nevertheless, 16 B-25s were loaded aboard. Concerned that some of his men were still apprehensive about flying off a carrier, Doolittle said the 16th bomber would be flown off after the Hornet departed the naval station and sailed about 100 miles out to sea, to demonstrate once again the feasibility of the plan. This 16th B-25B would be flown off by two "spare" pilots aided by Lieutenant Hank Wilson.

Launched in 1940 as the second ship of the Enterprise-class of aircraft carriers, the USS *Hornet* displaced 20,000 tons, had space for up to 100 fighters, dive bombers, and torpedo bombers, and had of crew of slightly more than 2,000 officers and men. Normally the ship's power lay in the average 80-85 planes it carried. But now, with all its own

Both: National Archives

**ABOVE: Without knowing if they would return, Jimmy Doolittle and the crew of Plane 1 pose prior to take-off on the famed raid. Left to right: navigator Lieutenant A. Potter, pilot Doolittle, bombardier Sergeant Fred A. Braemer, co-pilot Richard E. Cole, and gunner Paul J. Leonard. BELOW: Out of fuel, the crew of Plane 6 (*The Green Hornet*) ditched in the ocean just off the coast of China. 1st Lt. Dean Hallmark (second from left), slightly injured, swam to shore and joined two other survivors. The next day, they buried the bodies of Corporal William Dieter and Sergeant Donald Fitzmaurice who drowned in the landing. All three survivors were captured and held as POWs. Of the five-man crew, only Lieutenant Chase Nielsen (left) survived the war.**

aircraft stowed away below decks and its deck crammed with Army bombers, the *Hornet* was defenseless. To protect the mission and the carrier, it would sail as a part of Task Force 16.2 under the command of Vice Admiral William F. "Bull" Halsey, Jr.

Task Force 16.2 included the carrier USS *Enterprise* (commanded by Captain George D. Murray, USN), a group of four cruisers under the command of Rear Admiral Raymond A. Spruance, and two destroyer divisions under the command of Captain Richard L. Connolly, commander of Destroyer Squadron 6 (Desron 6). Two Navy oilers under Commander Houston L. Maples would accompany the task force part of the way to provide sufficient fuel for the return journey. The *Hornet* joined with Task Force 16.2 between Midway and the Aleutians on the morning of April 16.

By the next day, TF 16.2 had sailed to within a thousand miles of Tokyo and refueled from the two oilers before leaving the oilers and destroyers behind and racing toward Japan. Unknown to Doolittle, bad weather in China had prevented the fields in China, on which he expected to land and refuel, from being readied for his arrival.

It had already been calculated that to reach the Chinese airfields after the bombing of Japan, the B-25Bs would have to take off from the *Hornet* within 500 miles of the Japanese coast. Admiral Halsey had planned to launch a night attack at that distance on April 18. Thirteen planes would strike Tokyo, three others Nagoya, Osaka, and Kobe. Doolittle's plane would lead and drop incendiaries on Tokyo to light the way for the following planes.

Most of the planes carried a small payload: three 500-pound bombs and one incendiary; Doolittle's plane carried four of the firebombs. Even if they reached and successfully bombed their targets, the expected damage would be minimal. But the morale boost it would give the American people—and the shock to the Japanese who thought they were invulnerable—would be enormous.

The Japanese, however, had thrown a monkey wrench into the works. Unknown to the Americans, they had established a picket line of small craft well east of their own coastline. In the darkness of the morning of April 18, the radar aboard the leading ships indicated contacts ahead, some 700 miles from the enemy coast. TF 16.2 altered course to avoid the contact.

As dawn broke, the *Enterprise* launched scout planes to search ahead of the task force. Shortly before 6 AM, they spotted a picket boat and reported that they thought they had also been seen by the Japanese. Soon after, another vessel was sighted, and Japanese radio signals were picked up, indicating that the task force's presence was being reported to Japan.

The USS *Nashville,* one of the cruisers, sank the picket boat (and picked up survivors), but the cat was out of the bag. With

surprise lost, Admiral Halsey had two choices. He could launch the planes knowing that they were 150 miles short of gaining the Chinese airfields, or he could turn back. After conferring with Doolittle, the decision was made to launch the Army bombers then and there.

He sent a message to Doolittle: "Launch planes. To Col. Doolittle and gallant command, good luck and God bless you."

At 8:03 AM, the *Hornet*'s skipper swung her into the wind and the first plane, piloted by Doolittle, took off some 623 miles from the Japanese coast and 668 miles from Tokyo. There was a strong wind and the sea was rough, causing many observers to fear that the planes would never make the takeoff. It was a close call but all 16 aircraft did make successful liftoffs, at three-minute intervals, helped by the *Hornet*'s 20-knot speed and headwinds blowing at another 30 knots.

What was supposed to be a clandestine night strike made within a specified flight distance was now a daylight strike against an alerted enemy with little hope of landing safely at the end of the mission. The last aircraft lifted off at 8:54 AM, and a moment later, Mitscher changed the *Hornet*'s course for home. The 80 Doolittle Raiders were on their own.

As planned, the aircraft flew low over the Pacific, averaging barely 200 feet above the waves. The pilots and co-pilots took turns at the controls while the gunners closely watched the fuel gauges, filling up the third tank as necessary. Fuel consumption was on everyone's mind, as they understood they did not have enough to reach the designated Chinese airfields. Ditching at sea or crash landing were the only available options.

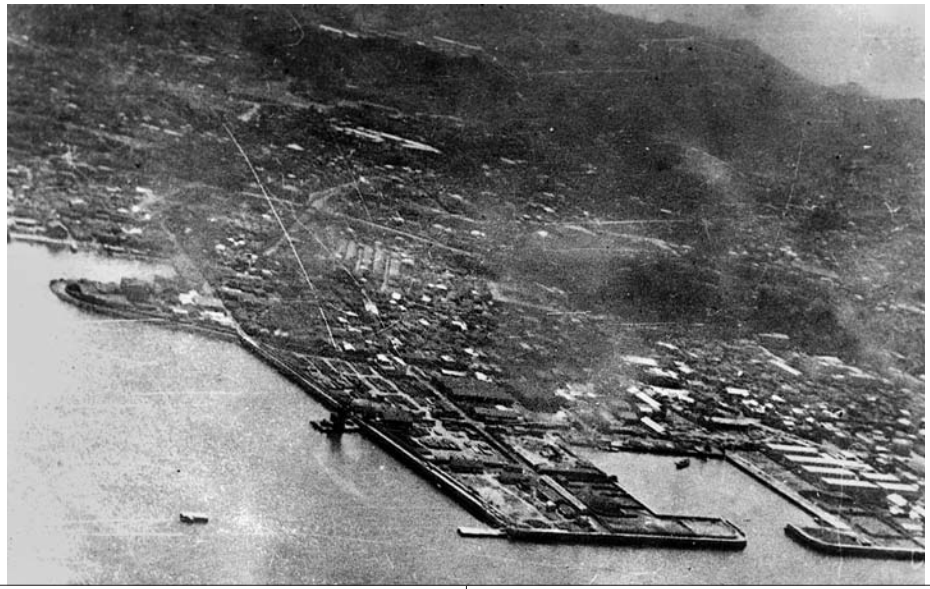
During the flight, some of the crews flew over or near Japanese warships and Doolittle's plane "flew directly under an enemy flying boat that just loomed at us suddenly out of the mist." None of the Japanese encountered seemed to take any notice.

Once across the enemy coast, the pilots turned toward their individual targets. Again, many enemy aircraft were sighted, but none seemed to spot them. Nor was there any antiaircraft fire against the intruders. One reason was because Tokyo was, fortuitously, in the midst of an air-raid drill, and both civilians and the military believed the American aircraft were Japanese and part of the drill.

The other reason was the supreme confidence of the Japanese military hierarchy, which simply could not conceive of the despised Americans daring to attack Japan itself. Still, with the warnings provided by the picket boats, the Japanese 26th Air Flotilla, charged with guarding the eastern air and sea approaches to the home islands, was on full alert. Warships were also manned and prepared for any attack. Oddly, though, Tokyo did not alert the eight million residents that an attacking force was on its way.

The Tokyo-bound flight was roaring over the landscape at treetop level. Several Japanese warplanes flew by in the opposite direction, never breaking formation or giving any indication they knew the Americans were there. Dick Cole, Doolittle's co-pilot, later wrote, "The people on the ground waved to us and it seemed everyone was playing baseball."

As he approached his target from the north, Doolittle lifted his plane to 1,200 feet and prepared to drop his bombs. Doolittle's incendiaries, probably the first ever dropped on



**ABOVE: Anti-aircraft shells explode behind a B-25 as it streaks over Tokyo. Remarkably, no Raiders were shot down. BELOW: View of the Yokosuka Naval Base south of Tokyo and Yokohama, probably taken from a window in Plane 13.**

Both: National Archives

National Archives

**The wreckage of Doolittle's shattered Plane 1 is strewn across a hillside in China. Doolittle and other crew members (circled) are seated behind the wreckage.**

Tokyo, struck at 12:30 PM, Tokyo time. Each bomb held 128 four-pound bomblets that were designed to spread out over a wide area.

Once his bombs were away, Doolittle descended again to minimum height and headed for the sea. Despite the desires of his men, Doolittle had strictly forbidden any bombing of the Imperial Palace and any strafing with machine guns, fearing the repercussions should any of his men be captured.

As bombing raids go, this one was negligible in terms of death and destruction. Only about 50 homes and stores (as well as two schools and a hospital) were set on fire by the bombs from Doolittle's plane. Two civilians died and 19 were wounded. Thirty-one unexploded bomblets were later found and recovered.

As Doolittle headed west and then south, away from the flaming structures below, antiaircraft fire rose up to pepper the sky; the planes in Doolittle's wake had to brave the munitions coming up at them.

The high-explosive bombs the other Raiders dropped did far more damage than did Doolittle's incendiaries. More buildings—including several steelworks—were hit and more civilians died. Japanese fighters were now up and chasing the later bombers, which barely escaped getting shot down.

The escape was much more difficult than the attack had been. Some planes, including Doolittle's, ran into strong headwinds that further reduced the range of the planes and their limited gasoline supply. Others hit bad weather, which had the same consequences. But all 16 aircraft successfully bombed their targets and left Japanese air space, some with opposition from antiaircraft guns and fighters, others without any opposition at all.

The planes flew toward China. Each was searching for some signal that there was a field prepared for them to land. None found any. Eventually 15 of the planes were forced to crash land; other crews had to parachute to safety.

Doolittle's plane (40-2344) flew on until it was flying on fumes. Rather than crash land in the darkness in unfamiliar terrain, Doolittle and the crew decided to parachute to safety. They had been flying for 13 hours and had no idea of where they were or if the territory below was in friendly or enemy hands.

Doolittle remembered, "This was my third parachute jump to save my hide. It was impossible to see anything below, so all I could do was wait until I hit the ground. My concern as I floated down was about my ankles, which had been broken in South America in 1926. Anticipating a sudden encounter with the ground, I bent my knees to take the shock. When I hit, there wasn't much impact. I had landed in a rice paddy and fallen into a sitting position in a not-too-fragrant mixture of water and 'night soil.'"

After landing near Quzhou, he tried to contact friendly Chinese civilians, and after a few misadventures did find some who directed him to nearby Chinese military forces. First Lt. Travis Hoover led his crew (40-2292) in Doolittle's wake most of the flight. He elected for a belly landing in a Chinese rice paddy near Ningbo, which caused no injuries. The men were rescued by friendly guerrillas who passed them on to safety.

Crew number three (in *Whiskey Pete,* number 40-2270) was under 1st Lt. Robert M. "Bob" Gray. After bombing dockyards, they flew into some antiaircraft fire but were not hit. Arriving over China, they bailed out southeast of Quzhou. The jump killed the gunner, Corporal Leland D. Faktor, and injured Lieutenant Charles J. Ozuk, the navigator. Friendly Chinese smuggled the other four survivors to safety.

First Lieutenant Everett W. "Brick" Holstrom led crew number four (40-2282) to Tokyo but they were attacked by enemy fighter planes and, with only one machine gun operable, were forced to dump their bombs into Tokyo Bay. They escaped the fighters and bailed out over Shangrao, where civilians led them to safety.

The fifth bomber (40-2283) was led by Captain David M. "Davy" Jones. This crew had problems from the takeoff when an attempt to top off the gas tanks had failed because the carrier was in "battle condition" and shut off all fuel lines. After bombing an oil storage tank, a power plant, and a manufacturing facility, they bailed out over Quzhou and were rescued.

One crew with the worst luck was in plane number six (*The Green Hornet,* number 40-2298) piloted by 1st Lt. Dean E. Hallmark. After bombing a steel mill in northeast Tokyo, they headed for China, where they ran out of gas; Hallmark decided to ditch his plane on the beach near Wenzhou. The landing was a hard one and Sergeant Donald E. Fitzmaurice and Corporal William J. Dieter drowned.

The three survivors—Hallmark, co-pilot Lieutenant Robert J. Meder, and Lieutenant Chase J. Nielsen, the navigator—were all injured. Friendly Chinese helped bury the casualties, but the survivors were later caught by the Japanese and became prisoners of war, suffering years of constant torture and beatings.

Bomber number seven (*Ruptured Duck*, number 40-2261) was piloted by Captain Ted W. Lawson, who wrote of his experiences in a best-selling book titled *Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo*. This crew also bombed factories in Tokyo and ditched on the Chinese coast, suffering severe injuries. Thanks to Chinese civilians, all returned safely to the United States. Interestingly, Lieutenant White, the doctor-turned-gunner who flew in plane 15, was instrumental in saving Captain Lawson's life by amputating his infected leg.

Plane number eight (40-2242), flown by Captain Edward J. "Ski" York, the squadron's operations officer, experienced engine trouble that burned more fuel than was planned. Once his bomb load was gone, he had to make a decision. He could not make the Chinese coast, and a landing in Japan was unthinkable. Despite orders to the contrary, York headed for the Soviet Union, landing at a field near Vladivostok. Crew and plane were interned for 14 months before they "escaped" to Iran.

First Lieutenant Harold F. "Doc" Watson's plane nine (*Whirling Dervis*h, number 40-2303) bombed the Tokyo Gas and Electric Company and then bailed out over Nanchang where they were rescued.

The tenth plane (40-2250) was commanded by 1st Lt. Richard O. "Dick" Joyce, who bombed the Japan Special Steel Company and a precision-instrument factory. Despite antiaircraft fire, they escaped unscathed and bailed out safely near Quzhou.

The squadron's gunnery officer, Captain C. Ross Greening, led crew number 11 (*Hari Kari-er*, number 40-2249). After bombing docks, oil refineries, and warehouses they were attacked by enemy fighter planes. The gunner believed that he shot down one of the aerial pursuers. They also

Both: National Archives

**ABOVE: The crew of Lieutenant Travis Hoover's Plane 2 pose with Tung-Sheng Liu (white jacket), who helped the crew escape capture. Liu later immigrated to the U.S. and was named an honorary member of Doolittle's Raiders. BELOW: Blindfolded Lieutenant Robert L. Hite, co-pilot of Plane 16, is escorted by Japanese guards to a POW camp in occupied Chna. The pilot, Lieutenant William Farrow, was executed by the Japanese.**

escaped and bailed out over Quzhou where they were rescued.

Plane number 12 (*Fickle Finger of Fate*, 40-2278) was under 1st Lt. William M. "Bill" Bower. It first flew near a group of enemy fighters but was not attacked. Next, the crew found their primary target, the Yokohama Dock Yards, protected by barrage balloons. They dropped bombs on the Ogura refinery, two more on factories, and a large warehouse. They also reached China and bailed out near Quzhou.

One of Bowers' crewmen, bombardier Sergeant Waldo J. Bither, had a close call. As he was preparing to bail out, his parachute caught on something and opened inside the plane. Of all the men on the Doolittle Raid, it turned out that Sergeant Bither was

the only one who had training in packing a parachute. This he did quickly and made a successful jump.

Being number 13 (*The Avenger,* number 40-2247) didn't bother 1st Lt. Edgar E. McElroy, the pilot. After bombing Yokohama dry docks and shipping in the harbor, this crew flew on to China and bailed out near Nanchang. Chinese civilians took them to the city of Poyang, where the population of 30,000 feted them as heroes.

The squadron's executive officer, Major John A. "Jack" Hilger, flew plane number 14 (40-2297), which bombed the Mitsubishi aircraft plant in Nagoya. Like the others, they bailed out over China (near Shangrao) and were brought safely to join several other crews.

First Lieutenant Donald G. Smith piloted plane number 15 (*TNT,* number 40-2267), whose gunner was Lieutenant ("Doc") Thomas R. White. This crew decided to ditch in the ocean, but all survived unhurt. The major loss was Doctor White's medical kit when the raft overturned. They were picked up by a Chinese boat ("junk"), and after evading Japanese patrols, arrived at Chuchow, where Dr. White learned of Captain Lawson's plight and went to his aid.

Plane number 16 (*Bat Out of Hell,* number 40-2268) was another unlucky ship. Piloted by 1st Lt. William G. "Bill" Farrow, it had injured a sailor aboard the *Hornet* during takeoff when he slipped under a propeller and had an arm sheared off. Farrow's target was Nagoya, where the plane was attacked by enemy fighters. They reached the Chinese coast in darkness and fought a weather front. A break in the clouds revealed a city below, which they identified as Nanchang, known to be in enemy hands. But with no gas left, they had no option.

After bailing out near Ningbo, they were quickly captured, and like the crew of plane six, suffered constant torture at the hands of the Japanese until the end of the war. Of the eight men captured in planes six and 16, all suffered torture, starvation, solitary confinement, and constant beatings.

Three of the prisoners, Lieutenants Dean E. Hallmark, William G. "Bill" Farrow, and Sergeant Harold A. Spatz, the latter the gunner on *Bat out of Hell*, were executed by the Japanese for "war crimes." The remaining four, starved, malnourished, and near death, were rescued at the war's end.

Critics of the raid have said that it achieved nothing of military value; the bomb damage was easily and quickly repaired. But what they miss is the fact that the United States had struck a blow at the very heart of Japan itself, something that Japanese military leaders believed could never happen, and had raised American military and civilian morale. The string of unbroken victories by the Japanese appeared broken, even if only temporarily.

An important result of the raid was the embarrassment it caused the senior Japanese military leadership. It was unthinkable for them that Tokyo, the home of their honored emperor, was bombed by an enemy most of them despised. They went to great lengths to minimize the raid to their civilian population.

But the most important result was that the raid settled a dispute within the Japanese high command. The Japanese Naval General Staff wanted to wage their war in the South Pacific, attacking Australia and cutting its communications with the United States. Admiral Isoruku Yamamoto, leader of the Japanese Combined Fleet, wanted a decisive naval battle to knock the American Navy out of the war once and for all.

A successful battle would destroy the offensive power of the U.S. Navy, permit more conquests, and secure those already in Japan's possession. He was convinced that his plan to trap the American fleet near Midway would accomplish this. He argued, correctly, that the Doolittle Raid could only have come through what he termed the "keyhole" at Midway, and that more such attacks could be expected.

His plan to capture Midway and destroy the U.S Pacific Fleet, then, was the only sensible option for Japan. The Doolittle Raid won over the opposing Japanese military leaders, and the Midway operation took top priority from that point on.

But at Midway, less than two months later, it was the Japanese fleet, not the American fleet, that was nearly destroyed, thanks in no little part to the gallant fliers of the First Special Aviation Project, proudly known after April 1942 as "Doolittle's Raiders." □

U.S. Air Force

**A surviving veteran of the raid, Lt. Col. Robert Cole, Doolittle's co-pilot, at the controls of a B-25 over Eglin Air Force Base, Florida, during a 2008 USAF reenactment of the Doolittle Raiders' training.**

# TITANIC STRUGGLE FOR MOSCOW

When German armies invaded the USSR in 1941, Hitler thought victory would be quick and easy. It was neither.

BY JEFF CHRISMAN

Many consider the battle for Moscow in late 1941 to be the first turning point of World War II on the Eastern Front. Some even consider the battle for Moscow as the only opportunity for the Germans to prevail in the East. By the middle of 1942, the Soviets had organized enough troops under arms that the Germans could not hope for anything better than a negotiated peace.

Even if the Soviet recapture of Stalingrad in 1942 had never happened and the battle at Kursk in 1943 had been a German victory, Hitler still could not have won a total victory against the Soviets' overwhelming numbers.

But, had the Germans been able to take Moscow, or isolated it very early, they might have dropped the Soviets to their knees and forced them to negotiate a cease-fire or perhaps even concede defeat.

After the war, German Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, commander of the Luftwaffe units assigned to Army Group Center, wrote: "The capture of Moscow would have been decisive in that the whole of European Russia would have been cut off from its Asiatic potential and the seizure of the vital economic centers of Leningrad, the Donets Basin, and the Maykop oil fields in

**Confident of victory, a group of panzergrenadiers advance through the snow toward a smoldering village north of Moscow, autumn 1941. Paralyzing cold weather and stiffening Soviet resistance would combine to halt the German advance.**

1942 would have been no insoluble task."

Moscow was the center of the Soviet empire. All government offices were there, and it was the main logistics hub and heart of communication and command for all the armed forces. Moscow was at the center of everything, and the Soviets would have been hard pressed without it. Fortunately for them, it never came to that, but it was close—very close.

On June 22, 1941, the German Army attacked the Soviet Union with three army groups on a Continent-wide front from the Baltic coast in northern Lithuania south

**A farmhouse goes up in flames as German troops move past. The soldier in the foreground is carrying a flamethrower. Although the Germans often torched villages, many were destroyed by their citizens following Stalin's "scorched-earth" order to leave nothing of value for the invaders.**

some 900 miles to the Black Sea coast in southern Romania. German Army Group Center was situated between Army Group North and Army Group South and, at that time, was the strongest of the three. In the first four weeks of the war, Army Group Center surged eastward some 400 miles through Belorussia and then captured Smolensk, a regional administrative city in western Russia only 234 miles from Moscow.

At that point Hitler wasn't really sure what to do next, but General Franz Halder, chief of staff of the Army High Command (OKH), and Field Marshal Walter von Brauchitsch, commander of the German Army, knew just what to do: take Moscow! However, Hitler, calling Moscow "merely a mark on a map," demurred. Instead, he ordered Army Group Center (AGC) to send half of its armored forces, Panzer Group 2, south to help Army Group South (AGS) capture the Ukraine, and the other half of its armored forces, Panzer Group 3, north to help Army Group North (AGN) take Leningrad.

The leaders of AGC were aghast. Army Group commander Field Marshal Fedor von Bock and his armored commanders, General Heinz Guderian of Panzer Group 2 and General Hermann Hoth of Panzer Group 3, protested loudly.

All had envisioned Moscow as their ultimate goal from the beginning and were stunned to find that Hitler didn't agree. They all lobbied Hitler at every chance, individually and in groups, but to no avail. Once Hitler had made up his mind about something, he seldom, if ever, changed it, and so it was this time as the panzer groups were sent on their divergent ways on August 23.

On September 6, Hitler released Directive #35 for the continuation of the war in the East: "In the sector of Army Group Center. Prepare an operation against Army Group Timoshenko (Soviet West Theater) as quickly as possible so that we can go on the offensive in the general direction of Vyazma and destroy the enemy located in the region east of Smolensk by a double envelopment by powerful panzer forces concentrated on the flanks."

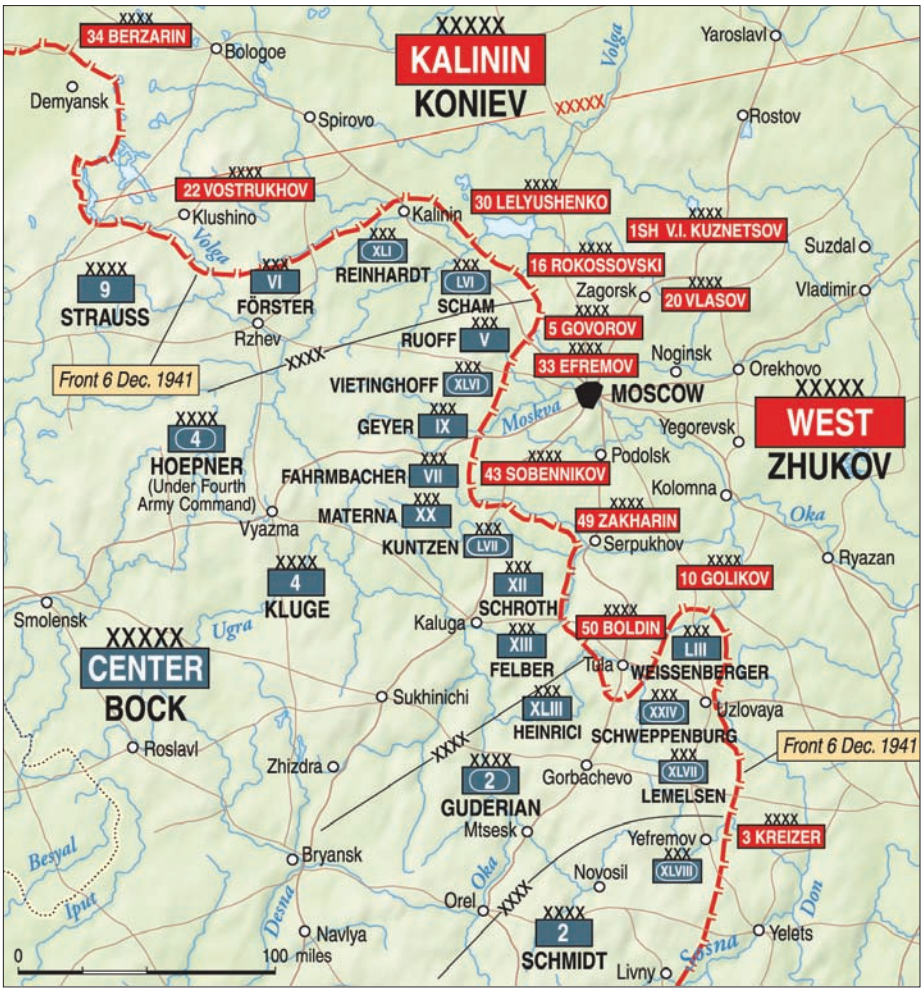
Still no mention of an attack on Moscow but at least it wasn't precluded. AGC commander Bock and Army Chief of Staff Halder agreed that even though Moscow had not been mentioned, it was, in fact, the objective.

Ten days later, having received news of 2nd Panzer Army's successful operations in Ukraine, Bock enlarged his army group's mission. In addition to the encirclement east of Smolensk, Bock added another encirclement, this one in the area of Bryansk, to the south.

By the fourth week of September, all the operations on the flanks had run their course, and the armored units were returned to AGC command to begin realigning for the continuation of the attack eastward. Panzer Group 3's attack to the north had been only marginally successful, and AGN never did capture Leningrad. But Panzer Group 2 became an integral part of the AGS's swift capture of the Ukraine, destroying six Soviet armies and eliminating 665,000 enemy troops.

Up to this point, the Germans had been dominant; they had overrun or encircled nearly all the enemy they engaged. But the troops were becoming exhausted, and the equipment was badly in need of repair or replacement. Some of the panzer divisions did receive a few replacement tanks, but most other equipment was nearly worn out.

For the continuation of the attack, Army Group Center deployed a total of six




**ABOVE: Marshal Georgi Zhukov's forces were responsible for preventing Bock's Army Group Center from taking Moscow. Zhukov succeeded and was hailed four times as a Hero of the Soviet Union. TOP: A German panzer unit rolls rapidly eastward. The USSR's primitive road network would nearly halt the German invasion as the roads turned into quagmires from heavy autumn rains.**

armies—9th, 4th, and 2nd, as well as Panzer Groups 2, 3, and 4. All three panzer groups were the size of an army and would be renamed as panzer armies over the next three months, so for clarity here they will all be referred to as panzer armies. AGC had a total of 1,929,406 men in 49 infantry divisions, 14 panzer divisions, eight motorized divisions, and one cavalry division, with more than 1,000 tanks, 14,000 artillery pieces, and 1,390 combat aircraft.

AGC held a 450-mile-long north-south front about 200 miles west of Moscow. The 9th Army was deployed on the northern flank of the army group from Andreapol on the Daugava River northeast of Toropets, south to Berezhok on the Dnieper River 23 miles east of Smolensk.

The 3rd Panzer Army was deployed near the center of 9th Army, east of Velizh. South of 9th Army and in the center of the AGC front was 4th Army; its front ran south from Berezhok to Yekimovichi on the Desna River northeast of Roslavl.

The 4th Panzer Army was on the 4th Army's southern flank; its front ran from Yekimovichi south along the Desna to near Zhukovka, while 2nd Army held the front south from Zhukovka to Pochep on the Sudost River southwest of Bryansk. The 2nd Panzer Army front ran south to the Army Group South front near Romny.

Facing the AGC attack and defending the western approaches to Moscow was the West Theater, commanded by Marshal Semen Timoshenko, composed of three Soviet fronts, a Soviet front being equivalent to a German army group. Combined, the three fronts had 1,250,000 men in 85 rifle divisions, eight cavalry divisions, four mechanized divisions, one tank division, and 14 tank brigades. Combined they had 7,600 artillery pieces, almost 1,000 tanks, and more than 360 aircraft.

On the northern flank, facing 9th Army and 3rd Panzer Army was the Soviets' Western Front with six armies: 22nd, 29th, 30th, 19th, 16th, and 20th. The Reserve Front had two Armies in the front line: 24th and 43rd south of the Western Front, facing the German 4th Army and 4th

Panzer Army, and four Armies: 31st, 49th, 32nd, and 33rd lined up behind the Western Front in reserve. The southern end of the Soviet line was held by the Bryansk Front with three Armies (50th, 3rd, and 13th) facing the German 2nd Army and 2nd Panzer Army.

At the southern end of the attack front, 2nd Panzer Army was the farthest from Moscow at just over 300 miles, and it began the attack on the Soviet capital, Operation Typhoon, on September 30, two days earlier than the rest of the army group. In the center of the 2nd Panzer Army attack, XXIV Panzer Corps, at Glukhov, stepped off at first light on the 30th. All of the German panzer corps started the war as motorized corps, but all were eventually renamed as panzer corps, so for clarity here all will be referred to as panzer corps.

The corps' lead element, 3rd Panzer Division, quickly became the first unit to encounter two of the Soviets' new weapons of war. The division's tanks were maneuvering across an open field when several dogs were spotted running loose. Closer inspection through field glasses revealed something strange; all the dogs had small sticks sticking up from their backs. One of the nearby dogs was shot and exploded! Exploding dogs?

The Russians had strapped TNT to the dogs' backs with triggers attached to the sticks and had trained the dogs to run underneath a tank to find their food. When they did, the sticks were pushed back and tripped the explosives. The tankers had no choice but to shoot all the dogs.

As the dogs were being dealt with, their Russian handlers fled and called in another new Russian innovation. Suddenly, an eerie howling sound filled the air and the entire field erupted in a series of explosions—Katyusha rockets. This was Russia's first use of the multiple-launch rockets, which were launched from racks on the back of an ordinary truck. Each truck could launch as many as 16 rockets at a time, and each rocket delivered 11 pounds of high explosive.

The "mine dogs" had little future as word of their dangerous mission quickly spread. The Katyusha rockets, on the other hand, became quite useful, and their numbers multiplied rapidly. The Germans even deployed their own multiple rocket system, the Panzerwerfer, a year and a half later. The first day of Operation Typhoon had demonstrated two innovative new ways for the Russians to kill an enemy. The Germans could only guess what surprises succeeding days might bring.

The 3rd Panzer Division quickly recovered and captured Sevsk on October 1, while its running mate, 4th Panzer Division, surged 130 miles and got its own surprise as it reached Orel on October 3. The public transportation trams were still running—and full of commuters, as if it were peacetime!

They also found great stocks of machinery on pallets along the roadside, waiting for relocation to the east and out of harm's way. The division's advance had been so rapid that it had outrun its own supply and had to wait in Orel for fuel to be airlifted in.

Soviet Bryansk Front commander General Andrei Eremenko thought that this attack on his southern flank was nothing but a diversion by a single corps, that the German main attack would come farther north near Bryansk. Consequently, he sent no forces south to reinforce the failing defenses there. Unfortunately for Eremenko, Guderian's XXXXVII Panzer Corps, following behind XXIV Panzer Corps, abruptly wheeled north at Sevsk and surged toward Bryansk from the south.

As 2nd Panzer Army units surged through the Bryansk Front lines, Soviet Premier Josef Stalin became alarmed. He summoned one of the few armored leaders available, Maj. Gen. Dmitri Leliushenko, and sent him to Mtsensk on the Orel-Tula-Moscow road with orders to stop Guderian and push 2nd Panzer Army back. He sent a motorcycle

**ABOVE: A salvo of Katyusha rockets is launched from truck-mounted rails toward Army Group Center's lines west of Moscow. The rockets had a range of four miles and were accompanied by a nerve-shattering screaming noise and devasting impact. OPPOSITE: More than 100,000 Muscovites worked from mid-October to late November 1941 to dig trenches and huge tank traps around the city to keep out the Germans.**

regiment, the only troops at hand, with Leliushenko and told him that more troops would meet him at Mtsensk.

As he moved through the industrial city of Tula, Leliushenko commandeered all the guns at the artillery school there, but there were no tractors to tow the guns, so he also commandeered sufficient buses from the Tula Municipal Bus Line to tow them.

Stalin dispatched the 1st Tank Brigade to Leliushenko in Mtsensk the next day, and on the evening of October 6 it smashed into XXIV Panzer Corps units still awaiting fuel in Orel and dealt them significant losses.

The rest of Army Group Center joined the attack on October 2 with the 3rd and 4th Panzer Armies leading the way. Late on October 3, 3rd Panzer Army's LVI Panzer Corps captured Kholm-Zirkovski and two undamaged bridges over the Dnieper River. The next day, 4th Panzer Army's XXXXVI Panzer Corps captured Spas-Demensk, and then on October 5 its XXXX Panzer Corps captured Yukhnov, just 110 miles from Moscow. The Soviets moved mostly by foot and simply couldn't keep pace with the panzers. Then it started to rain.

On October 6, XXXXVII Panzer Corps' 17th Panzer Division captured Bryansk and two undamaged bridges over the Desna River, as well as the headquarters of the Soviet Bryansk Front. Fortunately for the Soviets, most of the front's command staff and its commander escaped.

Even greater satisfaction was gained that day by 3rd Panzer Army and 4th Panzer Army when their units converged on Vyazma and completed the encirclement of four Soviet Armies: 16th, 19th, 20th, and 32nd.

The 3rd Panzer Army was now operating with a new commander. Col. Gen. Hermann Hoth was transferred to Poltava on October 5 to take over the 17th Army of Army Group South. General of Panzer Troops Georg-Hans Reinhardt replaced Hoth at 3rd Panzer Army and the commander of the 3rd Panzer Division, while General of Panzer Troops Walter Model replaced Reinhardt at XXXXI Panzer Corps.

Much of the southern half of the attack front had been suffering through intermittent rain for the past few days, but that changed to snow, the first snow the Germans experienced in Russia. But that didn't mean an improvement in the ground conditions, where the mud grew deeper with each passing vehicle.

The 2nd Army infantry units began catching up with the armored advance by October 6, as its XXXXIII Corps captured Zhizdra on the Moscow highway northeast of Bryansk. Two days later units from 2nd Panzer Army's XXXXVII Panzer Corps to the south contacted the 112th Infantry Division in Zhizdra, encircling the Soviet 50th Army. The remainder of the Soviet Bryansk Front, 3rd Army and 13th Army, were simultaneously being encircled at Trubchevsk, southwest of Bryansk.

Barely a week into their offensive the Germans were halfway to Moscow, having eliminated seven enemy armies in three great encirclements. Many Soviet troops were able to find their way out of the encirclements, but it is estimated that the Soviets lost close to a million men.

Now the snow had turned back into rain and sometimes came down in sheets, producing torrents of mud. German wheeled vehicles had to be abandoned, horses sank up to their bellies in the muck. All units began building corduroy roads, laying cut-down tree trunks side by side in a laborious process. The movement of supplies, including gasoline and ammunition, became difficult.

The weather was not as bad on the northern flank, but the ground conditions there were more difficult. Dense forest surrounds primordial swamps for miles on end, constricting traffic to major chokepoints. On October 8, the 9th Army's VI Corps and 3rd Panzer Army's XXXXI Panzer Corps were directed to turn north to assist the infantry units trying to advance there.

On the 10th they captured Sychevka, a railroad center on a main north-south line. One of the biggest problems they dealt with was abandoned Soviet cars and trucks blocking the few roads for miles; the rail line gave them a chance to work around that problem.

The BBC, on their October 10 evening newscast, announced the German victory at Vyazma, calling it Hitler's most successful victory of the war and stating, "It had always been believed that the door to

Moscow had been firmly barred. That obviously, is not the case!"

Leaders in Moscow had no clue what was happening on their Western Front; unlike the Bryansk Front, there had been no reports of the attack from either the Western Front or the Reserve Front. When stragglers from the Reserve Front reached Maloyaroslavets and reported on the situation, their information was discredited and they were jailed as panic mongers.

Unknown to Moscow, all long-distance telephone facilities in the West had been disrupted. The Soviet command relied heavily on telephone communication, and most higher headquarters had no long-range radios because of a widespread fear of German signal intercept capabilities.

When the Soviet monitoring service reported on Hitler's radio address to the German people about the attack, the Soviet leaders were incredulous. Aerial reconnaissance planes returned with word of massive German tank columns surging past Spa-Demensk and Yukhnov. Marshal Boris Shaposhnikov, chief of the general staff, still didn't believe it, so more flights were sent to verify the reports. Finally, although he was still confused and doubtful, Shaposhnikov went to Stalin with the news.

Later that day, phone communications with the Reserve Front were temporarily restored, and Stalin got through to the front headquarters. General Semyon Budenny, the front commander, was missing in action, but his chief of staff confirmed Stalin's worst fears. The next day Stalin ordered General Georgi Zhukov, who had been commander in chief of the Leningrad Front for less than a month, to Mozhaisk to get a clear picture of the situation.

After reporting his findings to Stalin by phone, Zhukov learned that he had been made the new commander of the Western Front and that the surviving Reserve Front forces would be incorporated into the Western Front. Stalin ordered Zhukov to establish a defensive line at Volokolamsk-Mozhaisk-Maloyaroslavets and hold it.

Stalin started gathering forces from all over the USSR for the defense of Moscow and quickly ordered 14 new rifle divisions,

**Two Soviet soldiers, one holding a DP-28 Degtyaryov light machine gun, wait quietly in a forest outside Moscow for the expected German onslaught, October 1941.**

14 new tank brigades, and 40 new artillery regiments dispatched to hold the Mozhaisk defensive zone. He also mobilized the civilian population of Moscow; some quarter of a million civilians, most of them women, commenced digging trenches and antitank ditches for the Moscow Defensive Zone.

Fuel was still a problem for the Germans and became so bad that 3rd Panzer Army's XXXXI Panzer Corps consolidated all of its fuel and formed a special motorized Kampfgruppe with infantry, tanks, and artillery. The Kampfgruppe's mission was to capture Kalinin, 90 miles to the northeast, and its bridge over the Upper Volga River. Making excellent progress it approached the great bridge in the early morning darkness of the 13th. The dispirited Soviet guards unit didn't even put up a fight, leaving guns, equipment, and supplies, as it fled.

But now the poor weather spread over the northern flank, too. The rain changed to sleet, then snow, then back to rain, incessantly for days. The fall muddy season, or the "Rasputitsa," as it is known in Russia, began in mid-October and quickly became more severe than any other in memory. Armored and motorized units couldn't move; the infantry units slowly began to overtake the stranded mobile formations, but even walking was difficult.

On the south flank, XXIV Panzer Corps' 4th Panzer Division was still struggling against the same problems: mud and lack of fuel. A small amount of fuel had been flown to them in Orel, allowing them to push up the road toward Mtsensk, but the armored units that Stalin had sent to block their advance did just that. The Soviet 1st Tank Brigade's T-34 tanks, with their wider tracks, were able to maneuver in the mud while the German tanks couldn't, and they would hit the 4th hard from one direction, then move to another angle and hit them again.

On October 12, XXIV Panzer Corps commander General Leo Geyr von Schweppenburg requested permission to pull his few remaining 4th Panzer Division tanks out of the Mtsensk battle, turn it over to his panzergrenadiers, and await reinforcements and supplies. With his units spread all over sealing pockets and held up by the mud and the lack of supplies, General Guderian agreed.

In the center of the army group attack front, 4th Army continued struggling through the mud eastward. The XIII Army Corps captured a bridge over the Ugra River just west

of Kaluga on the 10th, then captured Kaluga and its bridges over the Oka River two days later. On October 14, the LVII Panzer Corps' 3rd Motorized Division captured Borovsk, barely 52 miles from Moscow.

But the mud ground all operations to a halt. The only things still mobile were the small local "panje" carts, with their two big wooden wheels pulled by a small native pony. Robbed of their mobility, German units were strung out over hundreds of miles of sodden, soupy landscape with troops from different units mixed together.

Mother Nature had accomplished what the Soviets couldn't: bring the German advance to a halt. Only when the ground had frozen completely could the assault be resumed in earnest. Unfortunately for the Germans, the soggy ground was not their only problem as the weather grew colder. Not only were their uniforms in tatters, they were summer uniforms. There was no winter clothing. They resorted to stripping the enemy of their heavy coats and hats. Hitler had expected that Operation Barbarossa would be successfully wrapped up in just a few months, so no preparations for dealing with cold weather were made.

Another growing problem was the flood of Soviet troops without organization or guidance across the landscape. Having individually escaped encirclement or just gotten separated from their units, they were still armed, and most knew the lay of the land better than the Germans. They struggled to reach their own lines that they only knew were somewhere to the east and were a constant threat, moving behind the Germans who faced their known enemy in the east.

After a bitter two-day battle, troops of the SS Division "Das Reich" of the 4th Panzer Army captured Borodino on October 15, just 66 miles west of Moscow. Borodino was famous as the site of Napoleon's pyrrhic victory on the way to defeat at Moscow in 1812. The division commander, SS Obergruppenführer Paul Hausser, known as "Papa Hausser" as the founder of the Waffen SS, was badly wounded in the head and lost his left eye.

On October 17, panic spread through Moscow as the Soviet government offices begin to evacuate to Kuybyshev, widespread looting took place, party members were attacked in the street, and civilians begin to flee the city. The government quickly declared marshal law.

**Waffen SS troops slog down a muddy road toward Moscow. Heavy autumn rains turned the unpaved roads into bogs that would not support trucks or panzers; only after sub-freezing temperatures arrived did the roads harden and become passable.**

Also on the 17th, Stalin created a new front, the Kalinin Front, intended to force the Germans out of its namesake city and hold the vital northwestern corner of the Moscow defense line. The front was to be made up of four of the Soviet armies that had escaped encirclement and were commanded by the former commander of the West Front, General Ivan Konev.

By the third week in October, many of the pockets of encircled Soviet troops behind German lines had surrendered, freeing German troops to move up to the front. Of course, they still had to deal with their most vexing problems: the shortage of fuel, food, and ammunition, not to mention the Soviet defensive front, which was growing stronger by the day.

The center of the German attack still advanced, but only slowly as the mud became deeper and enemy defenses stronger. On the 18th, the German 4th Army came up against the still-forming "Mozhaisk Defensive Zone" when they took Maloyaroslavets and the next day when 4th Panzer Army captured Mozhaisk. On the 22nd, the 4th Army captured a bridgehead over the Nara River at Tashirovo, only 38 miles from Moscow. These fierce battles decimated both sides. Regiments were reduced to the size of companies with fewer than 200 men each. But the Germans moved inexorably forward, closing in on Moscow from three sides.

It was a violent days-long struggle for each of these places, where the Germans managed to bring more forces to bear more quickly and ensure victory at that spot. But the Soviets were moving all the forces they could to the Volokolamsk, Mozhaisk, Maloyaroslavets, and Kaluga axes, as these were the main access points west of Moscow.

On the southern flank of the attack, units of 2nd Panzer Army were still able to advance slowly in fits and starts, but they still had the farthest to go. General Guderian had taken all the tank forces of his XXIV Panzer Corps—panzer regiments from its 3rd and 4th Panzer Divisions, as well as a battalion of tanks from the 18th

Panzer Division—and combined them with the elite Grossdeutschland Panzergrenadier Regiment and an artillery regiment into a single attack force, all under the command of Colonel Heinrich Eberbach, panzer brigade commander of the 4th Panzer Division. With Kampfgruppe Eberbach, they could pool the paltry supplies of the corps and remain in action.

Once the combat bridging equipment had finally slogged forward through the mud, the engineers were able to construct a bridge over the Susha River just north of Mtsensk; Kampfgruppe Eberbach was able to cross on the 23rd. This flanking movement prompted the Soviet 1st Tank Brigade to pull its heavy tanks out of Mtsensk.

The next day Kampfgruppe Eberbach, bypassing Mtsensk, seized Chern, 159 miles from Moscow. This left the large blocking force that the Soviets had installed in Mtsensk with nothing to block.

Pushing up the Tula highway and pursuing the troops retreating from Mtsensk, Eberbach seized Yasnaya Polyana on the 28th—only 111 miles south of Moscow. The only reason that they were able to advance at all is that they could use the hard-surface Kharkov-Orel-Tula-Moscow highway as well as the railroad tracks, which paralleled the highway for much of its run.

In the middle of the 20th century, parts of Russia were still fairly primitive. Most roads were nothing more than dirt pathways, the main roads between towns being hard, compacted earth. Hard-surface macadam roads were limited to those routes connecting Moscow to a handful of large cities.

On October 28, the 9th Army was ordered to go on the defense along the northern flank of the advance. It was to tie in with 3rd Panzer Army at Kalinin and AGN to the west near Ostashkov and protect the army group's advance from the north.

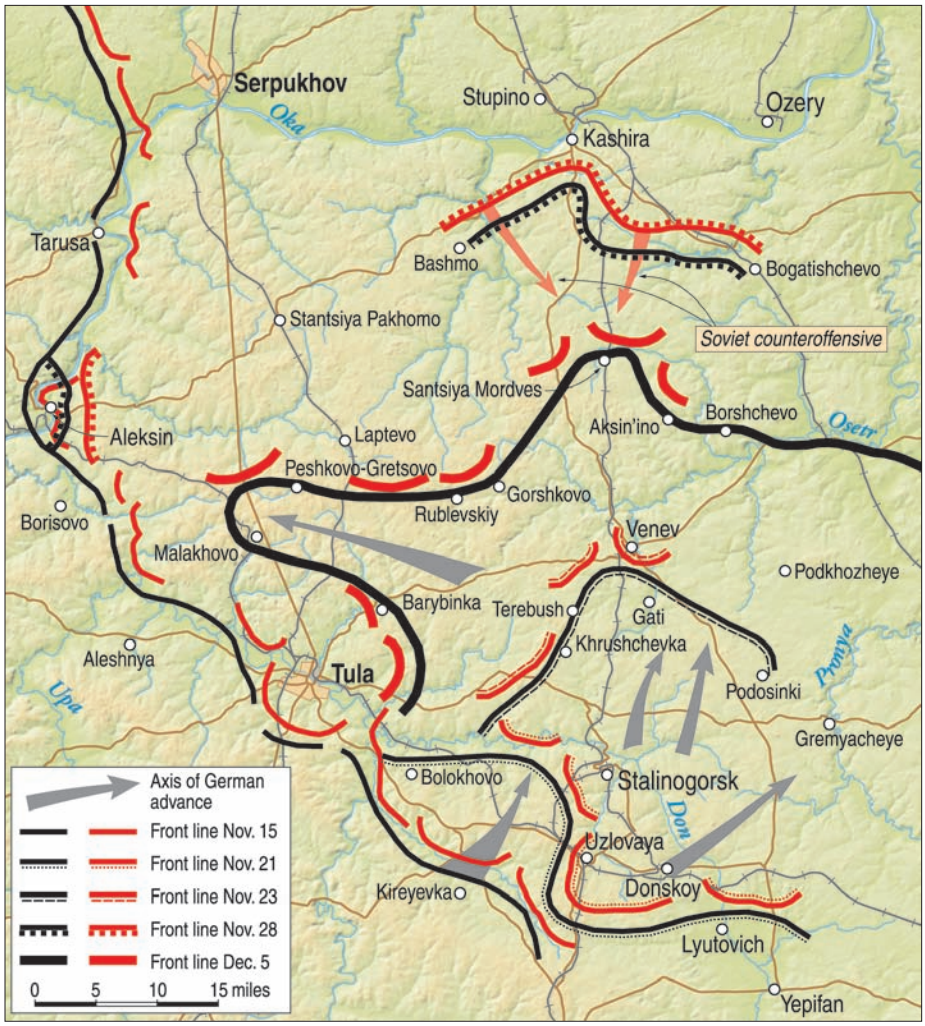
In the last week of October, the 2nd Army was transferred to the southern flank of the army group, taking command of the XXXIV and XXXV Army Corps and the XXXXVIII Panzer Corps that were already there. This allowed the 2nd Panzer Army to concentrate on the Moscow offensive while 2nd Army concentrated on clearing the southern flank of the army group and maintaining contact with Army Group South.

Although the XXXIV and XXXV Army Corps, as well as the XXXXVIII Panzer, were mostly immobilized by the mud in the wide-open spaces between Orel and Kursk, they devised a plan to utilize a captured Soviet armored train to attack Kursk and secure the Orel-Kursk rail line. Colonel Carl Andre, with two reinforced battalions from his 521st Infantry Regiment, was placed in command of the captured train while other troops from the 296th Infantry Division manned the train's guns.

On November 2, while the armored train successfully secured the rail line, XXXXVIII Panzer Corps troops approached Kursk slowly from the northwest. To everyone's surprise, most of the Soviet troops in Kursk had already withdrawn, and the remaining troops did so as the Germans arrived. This was fully a year and a half before that name would be written near the top of the list of great battles in the war.

The 4th Army attack, in the middle of the army group, slowed to positional warfare by the end of October. The combination of the mud, dwindling supplies, and stiffening enemy resistance left the commander, Field Marshal Gunther von Kluge, with no choice.

The 4th Panzer Army was similarly affected as its advance slowly ground to a halt. The




**ABOVE: German thrusts toward Moscow were jeopardized and ultimately thwarted in part by the heroic stand of the defenders of Tula, located about 100 miles south of the Soviet capital. OPPOSITE: Two Red Army soldiers huddle together as German artillery shells burst near them.**

slow but steady German advance against determined resistance was a war of attrition. The troops were just about spent. Just moving around in the knee-deep mud was exhausting.

During the second week of November, with most of their forces stuck in the mud, the German generals were making plans for the continuation of the attack once the ground froze. Halder, after a conference with principle staff officers of the army group, realized that it was weaker than he had thought and that it would not be able to take Moscow in 1941.

But now Hitler was adamant. Moscow must be taken! He saw that the morale of the German public was waning because earlier pronouncements had raised expectations that weren't being met. Moscow must be taken or at least isolated to reassure the German public of Hitler's strength and resolve. Hitler finally came around to the need of taking Moscow just as his leading generals were having second thoughts.

The Continuation Plan called for two mobile groups to strike at the Soviet flanks and encircle Moscow, 3rd Panzer Army on the north and 2nd Panzer Army on the south, meeting in the Orekhova-Zueva area east of Moscow. The 4th Army and 4th Panzer Army were to assault Moscow frontally from the west, drawing any enemy reinforcements away from the flanks while 9th Army and 2nd Army would cover the north and south flanks, respectively.

After a few days' rest, the troops were refreshed. They had their first hot meal in days and had been resupplied with ammunition and other essentials. They were as ready as they could be.

The ground was beginning to firm up, thanks to continuing cold weather, making movement more possible by the day. But the Germans were also beginning to confront a new obstacle. Fresh Soviet troops from as far away as Siberia had begun manning the defenses around Moscow—well-trained, experienced troops that didn't panic at the first sight of a German tank.

By the middle of November, the Soviets had an impressive array of 12 armies facing Bock's troops. The Western Front had the 5th, 16th, 33rd, 43rd, 49th, and 50th Armies lined up from Volokolamsk south to Tula. The Kalinin Front had the 22nd, 29th, 30th, and 31st Armies on the north flank from Volokolamsk north to Kalinin then west to Ostashkov. The newly constituted Southwest Front held the southern approaches from Efremov and Yelets with the 3rd and 13th Armies. These don't include the 59 rifle divisions, 13 cavalry divisions, 75 rifle brigades, and 20 tank brigades held in reserve, nor the 65,000-man Peoples Militia manning the complex series of barricades and strongpoints ringing Moscow.

The ground became frozen, but the temperature kept right on dropping; -15°C on November 12, -8°C on the 13th, and -13°C on the 14th, making the winter of 1941-1942 one of the most severe on record. The first week of December the low temperature in the western approaches to Moscow dropped 28°C, down to -33°C on December 7.

Engines of all types had to be left running lest they freeze, making gasoline all the more vital, and the mechanisms of guns of all calibers did freeze. Then there was the problem that replaced the mud more directly—snow, and lots of it.

In addition to their growing manpower pool, the Soviets had two major advantages: they fought from well-prepared defensive positions from Kalinin in the north all the way south to Tula while the Germans only dug holes in the snow. And they were supplied through short "inside" lines. They were backed right up to Moscow, from where their supplies came. The Germans were hundreds of miles from their main supply depots and were now depending on air dropped supplies to survive.

To disrupt German efforts to resume the attack, Stalin ordered Zhukov to launch a series of spoiling attacks at the major access points west of Moscow. Zhukov thought that it was too late for that, but he complied. He ordered the 16th Army to attack the north flank of the 4th Panzer Army above Volokolamsk, the 49th Army to attack 4th Army's southern flank west of Serpukhov, and the 49th and 50th Armies to attack 2nd Panzer Army's spearheads north and south of Tula.

The 16th Army's spoiling attack on the 4th Panzer Army included the 3rd Cavalry Corps, which was made up of newly arrived forces from the Far East. On November 17, following up on the slightly successful initial attack, the Corps' 44th Mongolian Cavalry Division was ordered to exploit that success with an attack on the German 106th Infantry Division near Musino.

Bent low in the saddle, their sabers thrust high, the division's 1st Mounted Regiment charged across the fields toward the German position—a scene from the 1800s. Suddenly, the field erupted with explosion after explosion. The 106th's artillery regiment had the field completely zeroed in; it was only a matter of pulling the lanyards. Men, horses, and pieces of flesh flew through the air in sickening repetition, until there was no longer any movement.

Then, incredibly, the Division's 2nd Mounted Regiment formed up and charged across the very same field—with the very same result: 2,000 horsemen and their mounts obliterated in a little over a quarter of an hour. The Soviet attack collapsed. The defending 106th suffered no casualties.

The Soviet spoiling attack against 4th Army's southern flank at Serpukhov fared somewhat better. The XIII Army Corps held the longest front in the 4th Army—nearly 50 miles from Dubrovka on the Nara River east of Maloyaroslavets south to Petrovka on the Oka River southwest of Aleksin—with only three divisions.

The initial attack on November 15 came as a complete surprise. The 5th Guards Division led the attack with its tank battalion and made several penetrations along the northern half of the corps front near Voronina.

Field Marshal von Kluge dispatched parts of several units that had been set aside for the renewal of the offensive to shore up the XIII Corps defense. After three days of desperate combat, they began to push the enemy back. At that point Zhukov sent in a follow-up attack by newly arrived units that once again had the Germans struggling. Fortunately for them, the Soviet attack subsided on the 19th as Zhukov was forced to move units to face the renewed 4th Panzer Army attack against his right flank.

**On November 27, Bock ordered Guderian to forget about striking northeast for the moment and concentrate on taking Tula, the long festering sore that was the anchor for the Soviets on the southern flank of Moscow. The Soviet 50th Army had been holding Tula since the beginning of the German attack and had launched almost daily attacks against the 2nd Panzer Army as it closed in.**

Farther south, Zhukov's spoiling attack on 2nd Panzer Army bore some fruit on the 17th when elements of the German 112th Infantry Division of the LIII Corps, which had no effective antitank weapons, broke and ran when attacked by T-34 tanks south of Uslovia. Guderian later pointed out that the division had already lost more than 1,000 men to frostbite and that its automatic weapons were inoperable due to the subzero temperatures.

In spite of the spoiling attacks, Army Group Center resumed its attack toward Moscow on the morning of November 15. The XXVII Army Corps, on the right wing of 9th Army, surged southeast from Kalinin along the southern bank of the Volga River to its confluence with the Lama River near Redkino.

The 3rd Panzer Army also attacked that day when the LVI Panzer Corps troops struck out from their positions north of Volokolamsk near Lotoshino, eastward toward the Kalinin-Moscow highway. The 6th Panzer Division pushed ahead of the others and crossed the Lama River the next day. On the 17th, the 6th Panzer contacted XXVII Army Corps units on the Kalinin-Moscow highway near Savidovo.

The 4th Panzer Army was not able to resume the attack on the 15th as it was still busy trying to handle the Soviet spoiling attack on its northern flank. It was the same in the 4th Army sector, where they were trying to keep enemy attacks from overwhelming their southern flank.

In the panzer army zone, most of its units were unable to resume the assault on the 15th because they, too, were still under attack; XXXXIII Army Corps had been under intense attack just south of Aleksin by the Soviet 49th and 50th Armies since November 11, and LIII Army Corps was still dealing with the enemy spoiling attack. On the 18th, the XXIV Panzer Corps was finally able to resume its attack south of Tula toward Venev. In a surprise move, panzer corps units quickly captured Dedilovo and the only intact bridge over the Upa River.

On the far southern flank of the army group, 2nd Army's XXXIV Army Corps also

resumed the advance on the 15th against light opposition, quickly occupying Ponyri in the afternoon. The XXXV Army Corps joined the attack on the 18th, pushing eastward from Novosil against only moderate resistance.

Although the ground was frozen and motorized traffic was once again able to move, the supply situation was still critical, and units were stranded for lack of gasoline. Then there was the continuing problem of the weather. Fresh snow fell virtually every day, quite often in blizzard conditions, and snow depths of one to two feet were not uncommon.

The 4th Panzer Army was finally able to resume its attack on the 18th, at least with its three left flank corps—XXXX and XXXXVI Panzer Corps and V Army Corps—but ran into a very stubborn enemy entrenched in deep, fortified emplacements. After three days of slugging in brutal weather conditions, they had gained only four miles on average.

Frustrated, General Hoepner threw in his last reserves, and in two days they surged 14 miles through the seam between 16th Army and 30th Army. When they could not be contained, Zhukov had no reserves on hand to throw at them because he had used them all in the Stalin-ordered spoiling attacks.

General Halder called Bock on the 18th wanting to know why 4th Army had not resumed the attack. Bock told him that 4th Army was still fending off the strong Russian attacks on its southern flank and that von Kluge had sent his only reserves there. Bock counseled patience and told Halder that von Kluge would resume the offensive just as soon as he could. Bock and Halder agreed that both combatants were near the end of their strength and that victory would go to the side with the strongest will.

The 9th Army, on the AGC northern flank, went over to the defense on the 19th. The 9th was holding a northeast-facing front along the Volga River from Savidovo northwest to Kalinin then west about 100 miles and connecting with Army Group North near Ostashkov. There was little offensive action on that front; they were just guarding the back of the army group units attacking toward Moscow.

By November 20, the remainder of 3rd Panzer Army's LVI Panzer Corps had closed up with the 6th Panzer Division on the Kalinin-Moscow highway and turned south. Two days later they captured Klin, 47 miles north of Moscow.

If LVI Panzer Corps could continue south, it could possibly slice in behind the Soviet 16th Army troops fighting 4th Panzer Army troops to the southwest. This wasn't lost on the Soviets, who quietly began looking over their shoulder.

Not surprisingly, the 4th Panzer Army began pushing steadily forward. On the 18th, XXXX Panzer Corps units captured Mozhaisk, and on the 21st, XXXXVI Panzer Corps units captured Novopetrovskoye, only 42 miles from Moscow.

It was on the army's northern flank, farthest from Moscow, where the V Army Corps was able to move forward the most quickly. It reached the Kalinin-Moscow highway about 10 miles south of Klin on the 21st, turned south, and on the 23rd captured Solnechnogorsk, just 32 miles from Moscow. That same unit, 2nd Panzer Division, captured Krasnaya Polyana two days later and stood only 15 miles north of Moscow.

With the 4th Panzer Army units moving south on the Kalinin-Moscow highway, Bock changed the orders for 3rd Panzer Army. Rather than continue south on the highway behind 4th Panzer Army, they were now to turn east and push as far as

**A German panzer division, with infantrymen riding atop the tanks, heads for Moscow. Elements of the 2nd Panzer Division got within six miles of the capital and could see the gold domes of the city's churches, but got no closer.**

possible while still covering the 4th Panzer Army's left flank.

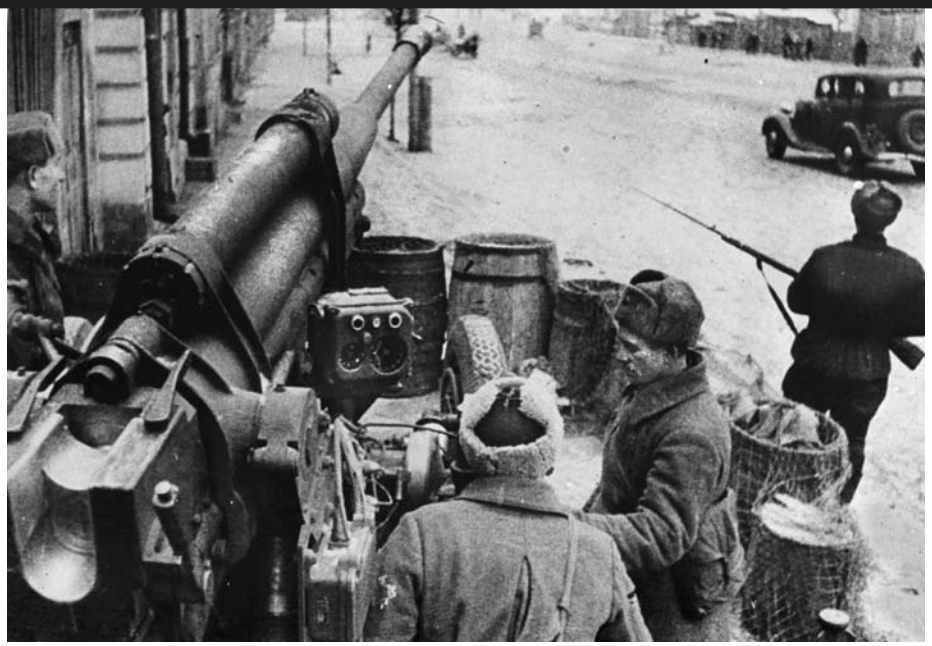
The southern half of the encirclement attack was also picking up speed. The 2nd Panzer Army's XXIV Panzer Corps, after a vicious fight, captured Uslovia on the 20th, then Novomoskvosk on the 22nd and Venev on the 24th. Likewise with the XXXXVII Panzer Corps on their right, which captured Efremov on November 20 and Michailov on the 24th. But Guderian told Bock that fresh, well-armed Siberian troops "keen for battle" were flooding in on his eastern flank.

On November 27, Bock ordered Guderian to forget about striking northeast for the moment and concentrate on taking Tula, the long festering sore that was the anchor for the Soviets on the southern flank of Moscow. The Soviet 50th Army had been holding Tula since the beginning of the German attack and had launched almost daily attacks against the 2nd Panzer Army as it closed in.

Tula was not encircled, but the 2nd Panzer Army held three sides around it with a 30-mile-wide opening on the north. The current plan was for 2nd Panzer Army's XXXXIII Corps to attack toward the east from Aleksin and meet XXIV Panzer Corps units attacking from the east, closing the encirclement.

The Luftwaffe also played a significant part in German operations in Russia. Air Fleet 2, commanded by Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, was attached to Army Group Center from the beginning, and his Junkers Ju-87 Stuka ground attack aircraft led almost every large assault that the Germans undertook. In addition to leading the ground assault, by the end of November Air Fleet 2 had destroyed 6,670 Russian aircraft, 1,900 tanks, 26,000 motor vehicles, and 2,800 trains.

Surprisingly, at the end of November, Air Fleet 2 was transferred to Italy to help the flagging Axis effort in the Mediterranean. This, of course, left AGC drastically short of combat aircraft. Consequently, the Red Air Force immediately claimed air superiority and would hold it for the foreseeable future.



**ABOVE: Civilians in Tula take up arms and prepare for a German assault. Many of the defenders were factory workers who, just hours earlier, had been making weapons for the Red Army. OPPOSITE: German medics provide aid to to a wounded comrade as other troops head toward a burning village on the outskirts of Moscow. Army Group Center suffered more than 300,000 casualties.**

While 4th Panzer Army's V Army Corps moved south on the Kalinin-Moscow highway, 3rd Panzer Army pushed east behind it. That was when something unusual happened, something that no one could recall ever happening during this campaign. As German units neared, the Soviets withdrew without putting up a fight, and they didn't burn down the villages as they left. Some thought that they must be expecting to return soon; others thought they were becoming disillusioned and were just in a hurry to get out. Units of the LVI Panzer Corps soon reached the Volga-Moscow canal near Dmitrov, 37 miles due north of Moscow.

With 4th Panzer Army having opened a gap between the Soviet 16th and 30th Armies and 3rd Panzer Army quickly moving eastward through the gap, a crisis erupted in Moscow. The 3rd Panzer Army's move pushed the Soviet 30th Army into the corner between the Volga River on the north and the Volga-Moscow canal on the east—thus opening a 27-mile gap in Russian lines between 3rd Panzer Army at Dmitrov on the canal and 4th Panzer Army at Krasnaya Polyana.

It is not clear whether the Germans realized their opportunity, but LVI Panzer Corps' 7th Panzer Division quickly grabbed a bridgehead over the canal at Jakhroma, four miles south of Dmitrov. Army Commander Reinhardt wanted to attack eastward, but Bock ordered him to continue south, west of the canal, covering 4th Panzer Army's left flank.

On the 28th, the 4th Panzer Army's XXXX Panzer Corps, closing in from the northwest, captured Lenino, 18 miles from Moscow. Two days later, XXXXVI Panzer Corps' 11th Panzer Division captured Kryukovo, just 16 miles from Moscow.

That same day a combat group from V Army Corps' 2nd Panzer Division, fighting its way south on the Kalinin-Moscow highway, reached Ozeretskoye, the terminus of the Moscow tram system, and Lobnja, where they blew up railroad tracks just 13 miles from Moscow. Late in the day a motorcycle patrol from the division reached Khimki, barely six miles from Moscow. If the troops could continue the pressure, Moscow could be theirs.

Not only that, but 4th Army finally joined the attack on December 1, and on the 2nd XX Army Corps units captured Yushkovo, 23 miles southwest of Moscow. That prompted Bock to tell his army commanders that the enemy was close to breaking. With all his

armies on the attack and closing in on Moscow, Bock had every reason to be optimistic.

Stalin then released two new armies: the 20th Army and the 1st Shock Army, to Zhukov to fill the gap between the 16th and 30th Armies north of Moscow. They would fill in along the entire front from north of Dmitrov south along the canal to the Lobnja area, then in an arc to the west and southwest to the Smolensk highway near Kubinka.

The 2nd Army, on the far south flank of the army group, went over to defense on December 1. The army was in only sporadic contact with the enemy and holding a front from Volovo south to Efremov then Yelets, then southwest to Tim, where it contacted Army Group South.

On the 2nd, the 1st Shock Army's first action came against 3rd Panzer Army units on the Volga-Moscow canal. The area west of the canal was swampy, and the only parallel road was heavily mined. So, when the Soviets brought together enough strength, they were able to stop the advance cold.

That evening Bock told Halder, "Doubts of success are beginning to take definite form." But, "an enemy attack is unlikely as the enemy does not have enough forces!"

That same day, 4th Panzer Army's 78th Infantry Division reached Zvenigorod, just 24 miles from Moscow, but it could go no farther due to the cold, snow, the enemy, and exhaustion. It was the same story with the 252nd Infantry Division on its left, which reached Pokrovskoye, 26 miles from Moscow, but could go no farther. The next day, General Hoepner, on his own authority, called a halt and ordered his units over to the defensive. He later reported that his units' offensive strength was completely exhausted.

Ironically, on December 3, the 258th Infantry Division that had captured Yushkovo on the 2nd and brought momentary optimism to Bock was itself encircled and forced to break out westward.

That evening, in a call from Berlin, Bock told German Army Commander Brauchitsch that his troops were exhausted and that fighting over the last 14 days had shown that the notion that the enemy in front of AGC was about to collapse was fantasy.

The next day, with his XX Army Corps in danger of being cut off, von Kluge ordered the 4th Army attacking units, LVII Panzer Corps and XX Army Corps, to withdraw behind the Nara River and take up defensive positions.

Units of 2nd Panzer Army's XXIV Panzer Corps, fighting through a blizzard, managed to claw their way across much of the 30-mile neck of the pocket around Tula and blocked the Tula-Moscow highway, but they could go no farther.

XXXXIII Army Corps units had taken Aleksin in equally appalling conditions but were unable to meet the XXIV Panzer Corps. Consequently, on December 4 Guderian called off the attack and ordered his units over to the defense, too.

The 3rd Panzer Army units attacking at the Volga-Moscow canal north of Moscow were the only units still attacking. They had been in near constant action for a week against 1st Shock Army units that were being constantly reinforced. Obviously, they couldn't last much longer either.

Every German involved in the battle for Moscow, from the highest field marshal to the lowest private, knew that their attack was stumbling to a halt. But few of them realized that they had just lost the battle for Moscow.

This was what the Soviets had been waiting for. They knew that the moment the Germans stopped advancing was the moment that they must take the offensive. They could not let the Germans prepare positions or bring forward units to hold the line—they must strike whether their assault units were in position or not.

That is exactly what they did; the order for the counteroffensive went out on the night of the 4th—attack!

During Operation Typhoon, Army Group Center pushed the Soviets back some 200 miles, to the very gates of Moscow. During the offensive, AGC lost 305,338 men killed, wounded, and missing in action. On the other side, the Soviet West Theater lost 422,161 men killed and missing in action.

Since the beginning of Operation Barbarossa, the Soviet West Theater had received 75 divisions from the Stavka reserve. During that same time period, AGC received no units from the German high command reserve.

In little over two months, the Soviets would push Army Group Center back anywhere from 50 to 200 miles. They would not achieve their stated goal of encircling and destroying AGC, but the Germans would never again threaten Moscow. □

# Destroying DRESDEN

## Was Operation Thunderclap—the 1945 air raid on the German city—a military necessity or an Allied war crime? The question is still debated.

BY MASON B. WEBB

It was February 1945, and the citizens of Dresden, the capital of the German state of Saxony, were beginning to think that they were living a charmed life. After all, they knew that every other major German city except theirs had been flattened by countless Allied air raids since 1940.

And yet here they were, virtually untouched. (Dresden had, in fact, been first bombed by the U.S. Eighth Air Force on October 7, 1944, and again on January 16, 1945, but the damage and casualties were minimal.)

Perhaps the Dresdeners felt lucky because the city on the Elbe River, 120 miles south of Berlin, was well known as a cultural treasure—the "Florence on the Elbe" and the "Jewel Box"—and was regarded as one the world's most beautiful cities for its architecture and museums, with few industrial or military sites worth bombing.

Among its treasures were the baroque Zwinger Palace, the State Opera House known as the Semper Oper, and the Frauenkirche, the latter built in the 1700s. Here too, the world-famous Dresden china and porcelain had been made for decades. There seemed no good reason for the status quo to change.

But Dresden's luck was about to run out.

Air Chief Marshal Arthur "Bomber" Harris, head of Britain's Royal Air Force Bomber Command, had a special desire to wipe every major German city off the map, even though it was plainly obvious that targets were becoming fewer, and the end of the war was just weeks away.

Early in the war, British Chief of the Air Staff Charles Portal had calculated that a concerted program to bomb the Third Reich's cities could kill 900,000 people in 18 months, seriously injure a million more, destroy six million homes, and leave 25 million Germans homeless, thus creating a humanitarian crisis that, he believed, would lead to the collapse of the Nazi government.

In 1941, Harris had said that he had been intentionally bombing civilians for a year. "I mention this," he said, "because, for a long time, the Government, for excellent reasons, has preferred the world to think

akg images

In one of the best-known images from World War II, a statue atop Dresden's city hall appears to be looking down on the destroyed old city and asking "Why?" But, far from being an innocent cultural city, Dresden was, in fact, a legitimate military target full of war industries, an important communications hub, and a transportation center from which troops and war matériel were being sent to the Eastern Front; it was the Soviets who requested that the city be put out of action. Today the raids that destroyed Dresden are still being debated as being either a war crime or military necessity.

that we still held some scruples and attacked only what the humanitarians are pleased to call 'military targets.' I can assure you, gentlemen, that we tolerate no scruples."

Harris was no doubt remembering that the German Luftwaffe had first engaged in "area bombing tactics" when it helped Francisco Franco in his civil war to topple the Spanish government in 1937, and then again when it bombed Polish cities during Germany's invasion of Poland in September 1939. Still in the forefront of his mind was the Luftwaffe's indiscriminate bombing of London and other British cities during the Battle of Britain in 1940.

Albert Speer, Nazi Germany's Minister of Armaments, recalled a meeting in 1940 when Adolf Hitler endorsed Luftwaffe chief Hermann Göring's proposal to hit London with a massive number of incendiary bombs: "Göring wants to use innumerable incendiary bombs of an altogether new type to create fires in all parts of London. Fires everywhere. Thousands of them. Then they'll unite in one giant area conflagration."

"Göring has the right idea," said Hitler. "Explosive bombs don't work, but it can be done with incendiary bombs—total destruction of London. Of what use will their fire department be once that really starts?"

Out to avenge the bombings of London, Coventry, Plymouth, Portsmouth, Southampton, Bath, Bristol, Birmingham, Sheffield, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Glasgow, Newcastle, and other cities, the Royal Air Force struck back hard at German population centers. In 1942, the U.S. Eighth Air Force set up shop in Britain and in 1943 began bombing Germany in earnest along with its British counterparts.

To retaliate, German rocket scientists (such as Werner von Braun) developed the world's first long-range offensive missile in 1944. Hitler named it the V-1, for "Vergeltung"—the German word for "vengeance"—and ordered the Luftwaffe to step up attacks against Great Britain.

Dresden had a population of 630,000, making it Germany's seventh largest city. But a flood of refugees fleeing the Soviet advance in the East had swelled the population to over a million by early February 1945.

And the city was woefully unprepared for any sort of major aerial attack. Most of the antiaircraft batteries that ringed it had been removed to protect other cities.

In early 1945, the handwriting was on the wall: Nazi Germany was doomed. In January, the advancing Soviets had uncovered the death factory at Auschwitz in Poland. This exposed the Nazis' crimes for all to see, further hardening Allied resolve to totally destroy the Third Reich—to drive a silver stake into its heart so that it could never rise again.

In northeastern Germany, the Red Army had captured East Prussia and reached the Oder River, less than 50 miles from Berlin, and was bulldozing its way toward the German capital.

From February 4 to February 11, the "Big Three" Allied leaders—U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, and Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin—met at Yalta in the Soviet Crimea (the Argonaut Conference) and hammered out their visions of the postwar world.

Other than deciding on how German territory would be carved up and administered

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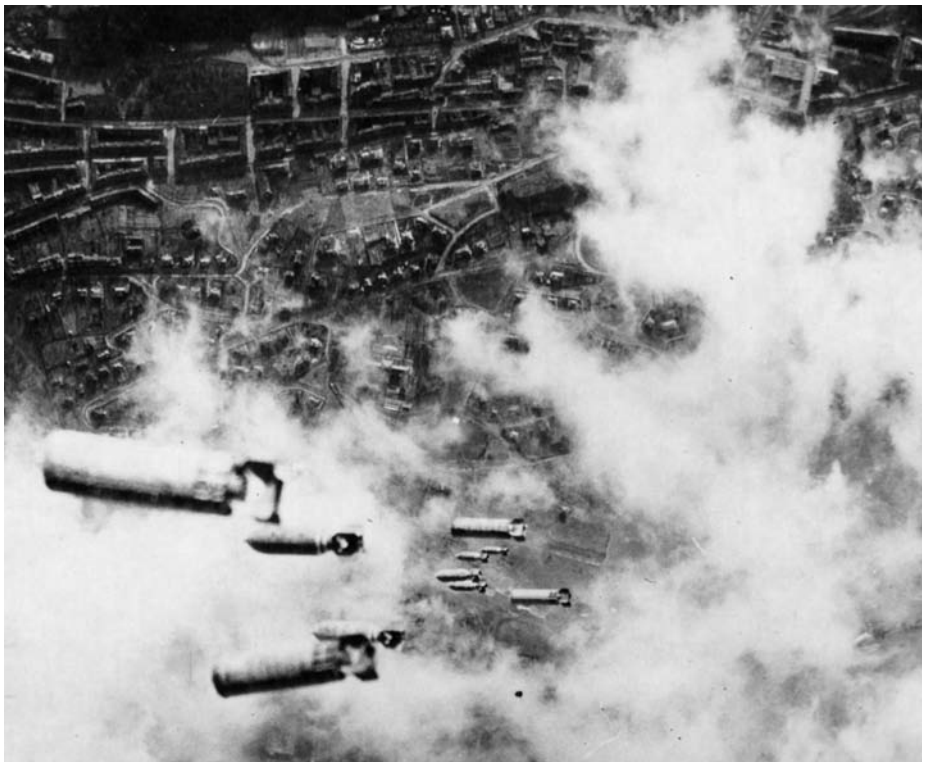

**ABOVE: British Air Chief Marshall Arthur "Bomber" Harris, head of the RAF's Bomber Command, was a strong proponent of taking the war to Germany's civilian populace. RIGHT: American bombs cascade down on Dresden, February 14, 1945. More than 3,900 tons of high-explosive and incendiary bombs would be dropped on the city in the two-day raid.**

Imperial War Museum

**An aerial bomb damage assessment photo shows Dresden still smoldering after the February 13–14, 1945, attacks. A number of fires are still burning fiercely in the vicinity of the central goods depot and railroad marshalling yards south of the Elbe River.**

by which power, there was little discussion about how the final military operations would be conducted. However, after General Aleksei Antonov, deputy chief of the Soviet General Staff, requested that the Allies apply some of their aerial firepower in the East, Churchill and Roosevelt promised Stalin that they would continue their bombing campaign against Germany to aid the advance of Soviet forces.

Dresden, therefore, became a target in early 1945. Allied intelligence revealed that, far from being an inoffensive center of culture, Dresden and the surrounding area was home to 127 factories that manufactured everything from rifles and machine guns to artillery pieces, aircraft components, precision optical devices, and poison gas (the latter manufactured by Chemische Fabrik Goye, GmbH).

Dresden was also a key rail hub, with lines running to Berlin, Prague, Vienna, Munich, Breslau, Leipzig, and Hamburg. The Wehrmacht's headquarters had also been relocated from Berlin to the Taschenbergpalais in Dresden, and there were at least one ammunition depot and several military hospitals.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff of both the United States and Britain had earlier in the war authorized the aerial attacks on German cities to accomplish "the progressive destruction and dislocation of the German military, industrial, and economic system, and the undermining of the morale of the German people to a point where their capacity for armed resistance is fatally weakened."

Colonel Harold E. Cook, an American prisoner of the Germans in Dresden, stated after the war, "I saw with my own eyes that Dresden was an armed camp: thousands of German troops, tanks, and artillery, and miles of freight cars loaded with supplies supporting and transporting German logistics toward the east to meet the Russians."

Thus, RAF Bomber Command and the U.S. Army Air Forces (USAAF) determined that Dresden was a legitimate military target and decided to mount a joint attack on the city at the direct request of the Soviet government. There would be four separate raids commencing on February 13. Seven hundred and twenty-two heavy bombers of the British Royal Air Force and 527 of the USAAF would drop more than 3,900 tons of high-explosive bombs and incendiary devices on Dresden.

The U.S. Eighth Air Force was scheduled to fly the initial strikes against Dresden on February 13 but they were canceled because of poor weather. The weather did not stop Bomber Command, however. A historian wrote, "To support the attack, Bomber Command dispatched several diversionary raids designed to confuse the German air defenses.

"These struck targets in Bonn, Magdeburg, Nuremberg, Böhlen, and Misburg, near Hannover. For Dresden, the attack was to come in two waves, with the second coming three hours after the first. This approach was designed to catch German emergency response teams exposed and increase casualties."

The first wave was a flight of Avro Lancaster bombers from 83 Squadron, No. 5 Group, based at RAF Coningsby. They would be the pathfinders and would light up the target area with incendiaries.

Close on their tails was a group of DeHavilland Mosquitoes that dropped 1,000-pound bombs to mark the aiming points for the rest of the raiders. The main bomber force, consisting of 254 Lancasters, would arrive next with a mixed load of 500 tons of high-explosive bombs and 375 tons of incendiaries.

As the RAF bombers approached, air raid sirens began wailing across Dresden at 9:51 PM. Because the city lacked adequate bomb shelters, many civilians took to their basements. Thirteen minutes later the incendiary bombs began falling on Dresden, setting whole blocks ablaze.

Fire brigades rushed into the heart of the burning city, working without success to contain the fires that were now devouring block after block of apartments, shops, churches, and historic structures. The firemen were fighting a losing battle, struggling with broken water mains and having to run lines to the Elbe River.

Soon Dresden was engulfed in the kind of hellish firestorm that had destroyed Hamburg in July 1943 and killed 41,800 people. Tornado-like winds roared through the city, sucking up oxygen and feeding the inferno.

A British paratrooper, Victor Gregg, who had been taken prisoner at Arnhem, Holland, was a POW at Dresden, and he said, "The people of Dresden believed that as long as the Luftwaffe kept away from

Oxford, Dresden would be spared."

Such was not the case, however. Gregg said that about 10:30 PM on the night of February 13, "The air raid sirens started their mournful wailing and because this happened every night, no notice was taken. The sirens stopped and, after a short period of silence, the first wave of pathfinders was over the city, dropping its target flares.

"As the incendiaries fell, the phosphorus clung to the bodies of those below, turning them into human torches. The screaming of those who were being burned alive was added to the cries of those not yet hit. There was no need for flares to lead the second wave of bombers to their target, as the whole city had become a gigantic torch. It must have been visible to the pilots from a hundred miles away. Dresden had no defenses, no antiaircraft guns, no searchlights, nothing."

Imperial War Museum

**The burned-out remains of the heart of Dresden, 1945. Some 78,000 buildings were destroyed and tens of thousands more damaged.**

In a 2014 BBC interview, Gregg further recalled that the POWs were sent into the city on a detail to search for survivors. In one incident, it took his team seven hours just to get into a 1,000-person air raid shelter where they found no survivors or corpses—just a green-brown liquid with bones sticking out of it; what had once been a group of human beings had all been melted by the intense heat. He also noted that, in areas farther from the town center, he and his team found adults shriveled to three feet in length. (Gregg wrote a book about his experiences titled *Dresden: A Survivor's Story*.)

A civilian survivor, Lothar Metzger, and his mother, wife, and twin children had taken refuge in a cellar with many others. He recalled that it was "not possible to describe! Explosion after explosion. It was beyond belief, worse than the blackest nightmare. So many people were horribly burnt and injured. It became more and more difficult to breathe. It was dark, and all of us tried to leave this cellar with inconceivable panic.

"Dead and dying people were trampled upon, luggage was left or snatched up out of our hands by rescuers. The basket with our twins covered with wet cloths was snatched up out of my mother's hands, and we were pushed upstairs by the people behind us. We saw the burning street, the falling ruins, and the terrible firestorm. My mother covered us with wet blankets and coats she found in a water tub."

Metzger continued: "We saw terrible things: cremated adults shrunk to the size of small children, pieces of arms and legs, dead people, whole families burnt to death. Burning people ran to and fro, burnt coaches filled with civilian refugees, dead rescuers and soldiers, many were calling and looking for their children and families, and fire everywhere, everywhere fire, and all the time the hot wind of the firestorm threw people back into the burning houses they were trying to escape from."

Another Dresdener, Margeret Freyer, also never forgot the horror she witnessed. "To my left I suddenly see a woman. I can see her to this day and shall never forget it. She carries a bundle in her arms. It is a baby. She runs, she falls, and the child flies in an arc into the fire. Suddenly, I saw people again, right in front of me. They scream and gesticulate with their hands, and then—to my utter horror and amazement—I see how one after the other they simply seem to let themselves drop to the ground. Today I know that these unfortunate people were the victims of a lack of oxygen. They fainted and then burnt to cinders.

"Insane fear grips me and from then on I repeat one simple sentence to myself continuously: 'I don't want to burn to death.' I do not know how many people I fell over. I know only one thing: that I must not burn."

Other Germans who survived had vivid, horrible memories that stayed with them for the rest of their lives. Nora Lang was 13 years old when the bombers struck and set fire to her family's apartment building. The family ran to the neighborhood air raid shelter, and when the "all clear" sounded, they emerged to a vision of Hell. "Behind us everything was burning," she recalled, "[and] in front of us everything was burning."

Anita John, 12 in 1945, said that when she and her parents rushed to the cellar of their apartment building with 13 neighbors during the first raid, her mother covered her with her body to protect her. Once the bombing stopped, Anita emerged from the cellar after but could not find her parents. She only realized that they were dead when she saw their bodies laid out in the street in front of the rubble of the building; all the other people in

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**LEFT: Recovered bodies from the firestorm that consumed Dresden; many suffocated in air raid shelters. Initial German estimates put the number of dead at around 200,000; postwar analysis lowered the numbers to around 25,000. BELOW: Horrific photo of a German corpse found in the ruins still wearing a Nazi armband.**

National Archives

the cellar, including her parents, had suffocated due to the firestorm that sucked almost all the oxygen out of the basement. How she survived she did not know.

Thirteen-year-old Karl-Heinrich Fiebiger was home alone when the attacks began. He ran for safety through the burning city to no place in particular. He remembered a sticky substance released by the bombs raining down and getting in his hair. After he ran from his family's apartment building, it was destroyed by a bomb; his older sister and her two small children died. It took three weeks before he was reunited with his mother.

Another survivor, Hanns Voight, said later, "Never had I expected to see people interred in that state: burnt, cremated, torn and crushed to death. Sometimes the victims looked like ordinary people apparently peacefully sleeping. The faces of others were wracked with pain, the bodies stripped almost naked by the [fire] tornado…. Here the victim was a shapeless slab, there a layer of ashes shoveled into a zinc tub."

About a half hour after the first wave struck, a group of Messerschmitt Me-110 night fighters lifted off from the Luftwaffe's Klotzsche airfield, five miles north of Dresden, but they were too late to intercept the first bombers; due to the shortage of aviation fuel, the planes had not been allowed to take off until receiving specific authorization from higher headquarters. And, with most of its antiaircraft guns having been removed to defend elsewhere, Dresden was essentially undefended as the bombers struck—a sitting duck.

Three hours after the first strike, while the firefighters were still struggling to put out the inferno, the main force of 529 bombers came over and added to the destruction with more bombs. By dawn on the 14th, hundreds of British bombers had swept over Dresden and dropped more than 1,400 tons of high-explosive bombs and more than 1,100 tons of incendiaries.

On the morning of February 14, Dresden was a dying, burning city, its own funeral pyre. But its agony was not yet over.

The next day it was the U.S. Eighth Air Force's turn. A force of 316 Boeing B-17s arrived and bombed through cloud cover using H2X—a new ground-scanning radar developed for bombing when the target could not be visually sighted. Some of the bombers flew off course, and instead of bombing Dresden, hit Prague in Czechoslovakia, 120 miles to the south-southeast. The "Mighty Eighth" dropped more than 950 tons of high-explosive bombs and more than 290 tons of incendiaries on Dresden that day.

The cloud cover was still thick, so the bombs were dropped again using H2X radar. The southeastern suburbs and two nearby towns were hit this time, along with bridges, train stations, depots, warehouses, and railroad marshaling yards.

Kurt Vonnegut, a private serving in the 423rd Infantry Regiment, 106th Infantry Division, was one of thousands of Americans captured by the Germans in December 1944 during the Battle of the Bulge. Transported to Dresden, Vonnegut was housed, not in a regular POW camp, but in a large building used as a slaughterhouse.

Luckily, Vonnegut and the other POWs with him survived the bombings and firestorm. (He would use his experiences in Dresden as the basis for his 1969 semi-autobiographical historical novel, *Slaughterhouse Five*.)

After the second raid, his captors put him and the other prisoners to work retrieving bodies for mass burial. "But there were too many corpses to bury," he said. "So instead the Nazis sent in troops with flamethrowers. All these civilians' remains were burned to ashes."

In a new introduction to the 1976 reprint of the novel, Vonnegut wrote, "The Dresden atrocity, tremendously expensive and meticulously planned, was so meaningless, finally, that only one person on the entire planet got any benefit from it. I am that

Both: National Archives

**ABOVE: To prevent the spread of disease, the Germans set piles of corpses on fire. OPPOSITE: Survivors of the bombing and firestorm remove rubble from the streets of Dresden in March 1946; by then the city was under Soviet occupation and more hardships lay ahead.**

person. I wrote this book, which earned a lot of money for me and made my reputation, such as it is. One way or another, I got two or three dollars for every person killed. Some business I'm in."

*Life* magazine also noted, "Dresden's authorities finally cordoned off the center of the city and set up 25-foot-long grills where thousands of the victims were cremated."

In the aftermath of the attacks, Nazi propaganda minister Joseph Göbbels, attempting to gain sympathy from the international community, stated that Dresden was only a historic city of culture and that it held no war industries. The Third Reich also inflated the number of casualties, claiming that more than 200,000 civilians had been killed. (That figure has been repeated for decades, but in 2008 an independent historical commission formed by the city of Dresden concluded that approximately 25,000 persons died in Dresden and another 30,000 were injured—still a tremendous number.)

The city itself was a silent, dead, burned-out shell. Thousands of structures had been destroyed in a 15-square-mile radius. There was no electricity or water. No vehicles moved. The stench of burned wood and human flesh hung over the city like a shroud, and Dresden's architectural treasures lay in ruins. A handful of stunned survivors picked their way through the still-burning rubble, searching for relatives or anything of value.

The RAF reported that 78,000 dwellings had been totally destroyed, with another 27,700 left uninhabitable and a further 64,500 damaged but repairable.

In March and April, nearly 1,000 U.S. Eighth Air Force planes would return and drop more than 2,700 tons of bombs on Dresden before Germany surrendered.

Within days after the February attacks, the claimed necessity of bombing Dresden came under scrutiny. A number of critics have questioned the tactics used and have even accused the British and Americans of "indiscriminate terror bombing"—a phrase that had been used to condemn the Germans' use of saturation bombing of civilians in cities in Poland, Britain, Belgium, and elsewhere.

In March 1945, Churchill himself sent a memo intended for the British Chiefs of Staff and the Chief of the Air Staff: "It seems to me that the moment has come when the question of bombing of German cities simply for the sake of increasing the terror, though under other pretexts, should be reviewed. Otherwise we shall come into control of an utterly ruined land....

"The destruction of Dresden remains a serious query against the conduct of Allied bombing. I am of the opinion that military objectives must henceforward be more strictly studied in our own interests than that of the enemy. The Foreign Secretary has spoken to me on this subject, and I feel the need for more precise concentration upon military objectives such as oil and communications behind the immediate battle-zone, rather than on mere acts of terror and wanton destruction, however impressive."

In response, Chief Air Marshal Arthur Harris wrote, "I assume that the view under consideration is something like this: no doubt in the past we were justified in attacking German cities. But to do so was always repugnant and now that the Germans are beaten anyway, we can properly abstain from proceeding with these attacks.

"This is a doctrine to which I could never subscribe. Attacks on cities, like any other act of war, are intolerable unless they are strategically justified. But they are strategically justified in so far as they tend to shorten the war and preserve the lives of Allied soldiers. To my mind we have absolutely no right to give them up unless it is certain that they will not have this effect. I do not personally regard the whole of the remaining cities of Germany as worth the bones of one British Grenadier….

"Actually Dresden was a mass of munitions works, an intact government centre, and a key transportation point to the East. It is now none of these things."

In the United States, U.S. Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall, who also felt the heat from the destruction of Dresden, authorized an inquiry that came to the conclusion that the raid, based on the intelligence available, was fully justified because Dresden was a place through which German forces could be moved to reinforce their lines on the Eastern Front.

Some historians also believe that Roosevelt and Churchill worried that after the war

their ally Stalin and the USSR might become a threat and wanted the obliteration of Dresden to serve as a demonstration of Allied military power—and a warning to Stalin to not challenge the West.

For his part, Air Chief Marshal Harris never softened or wavered from his view that conducting saturation bombings of German cities was completely necessary. "The Germans started the war," was his firm conviction until the day he died in 1984.

(Unfortunately, the historical record shows that the first intentional "area bombing" of civilians in World War II was conducted by the RAF against Mönchengladbach, Germany, on May 11, 1940, on Churchill's orders the day after he became prime minister, and four months before the Luftwaffe began its Blitz of British cities.)

Harris continued, "The Nazis entered this war under the rather childish delusion that they were going to bomb everyone else, and nobody was going to bomb them. At Rotterdam, London, Warsaw, and half a hundred other places, they put their rather naive theory into operation. They sowed the wind, and now they are going to reap the whirlwind."

In his postwar memoir, *Bomber Command*, Harris wrote, "I know that the destruction of so large and splendid a city at this late stage of the war was considered unnecessary even by a good many people who admit that our earlier attacks were as fully justified as any other operation of war. Here I will only say that the attack on Dresden was at the time considered a military necessity by much more important people than myself."

A historian wrote, "Few mourned the destruction of German cities that built the weapons and bred the soldiers that by 1945 had killed more than 10 million Allied soldiers and even more civilians. The firebombing of Dresden would prove the exception to this rule," and many of the generals and airmen of Britain and the United States have since been criticized by some as being no better than the Nazi war criminals.

At the end of the war, Dresden was so badly damaged and beyond repair that much the city was basically leveled by dynamite and bulldozers. However, a handful of ruined historic buildings—the Frauenkirche, Zwinger Palace, State Opera House, and several others—were carefully reconstructed to their former glory out of the rubble, but the rest of the city was rebuilt in the ugly "socialist modern" style.

Today Dresden has experienced a renaissance and returned to life as one of Germany's most important cities—a center of education and technological advancement.

Regardless, the debate over the attacks of February 13 and 15, 1945, continues to this day and those attacks remain as one of the more controversial actions of World War II.

Perhaps the last word should go to British historian Frederick Taylor, who wrote, "The destruction of Dresden has an epically tragic quality to it. It was a wonderfully beautiful city and a symbol of baroque humanism and all that was best in Germany. It also contained all of the worst from Germany during the Nazi period. In that sense it is an absolutely exemplary tragedy for the horrors of 20th century warfare and a symbol of destruction." □

BACKSTORY: *Dan Dougherty graduated from Central High School in Austin, Minnesota in June 1943 and was immediately activated from the Army Reserve. After four months of infantry basic training at Fort McClellan and five months in the Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP) at St. Louis University, he was assigned to the 44th Infantry Division.*

*When the ASTP folded in March 1944, he completed precombat training at Camp Phillips near Salina, Kansas, and sailed for Cherbourg from the Boston POE on September 5, 1944. The 44th started fighting in the Seventh Army sector near Luneville, France, on October 18, 1944, with Pfc. Dougherty serving as BAR gunner in the 2nd Platoon, K Company, 324th Regiment.*

# MY LAST DAYS OF WAR

## A member of the 45th Division vividly recalls April 29, 1945, the day he took part in the liberation of the Nazis' notorious concentration camp at Dachau, and the occupation of Munich.

**BY DAN DOUGHERTY**

*When six companies of the 157th Regiment of the 45th Infantry Division were captured in Alsace (Operation Nordwind) in January 1945, 180 sergeants from other Seventh Army divisions were immediately transferred to the 157th to help reform those units; Dan and Leonard Parker were two of the 12 sergeants from the 44th Division who joined C Company at that time. On March 18, 1945, Dan was wounded during fighting on the Siegfried Line; he returned to the unit from the hospital on April 2 and thus missed the Rhine crossing and much of the Aschaffenburg battle, but still saw plenty of action. This is his story.*

We were with the tanks when C Company hit the Siegfried Line on the morning of March 18, 1945. They had to stop at the huge tank ditch but kept blasting away at any bunkers they could see. We climbed in and out of the ditch, crawled under barbed wire, walked through the cement dragon's teeth (perhaps this before the ditch, I don't remember), and then proceeded toward the bunkers.

We would put a hand grenade through the gun slits of the bunkers and keep going. Every now and then, we entered a bunker from the back door. We did use the German hand grenades we found, but I never saw a live German sol-

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Soldiers of the U.S. 45th Infantry Division (whose division insignia have been obscured by an Army censor) observe the shelling of the Siegfried Line, Hitler's barrier on the border before France and Germany. The author joined the division at about this time (March 1945) and served with the 45th until the liberation of Dachau and the end of the war.

dier. We made very good progress for maybe 45-60 minutes, and then came the mother of all artillery barrages. We were in heavy woods, and there were many, many tree bursts. The morning reports for March 18-20 list 35 casualties for C Company, including five KIA.

I was walking when I felt a light thud in my left foot. This was probably about the time the barrage ended. There was no pain or blood, but I sat down in the middle of the Siegfried Line and took off my shoe and found a slit in the tread near the ball of my foot. I was wearing two pairs of socks and there was about a ¾-inch slit through each.

It's difficult to see the bottom of your foot, but I could make out a small wound that looked black and blue with no pain or bleeding. I don't remember, but I probably took my sulfa pills. When you get shrapnel in the ball of your foot while walking, I always assumed it had to come from a very low-grade mortar that had landed nearby. I can't even find the scar today.

Before heading back, I tried to assist a GI who was down and moaning. I asked him if he'd taken his sulfa pills, and he said no. I was about to help him do that when I had the presence of mind to ask him where he was hit. It turned out to be a nasty wound in the middle of his back so we skipped the pills. I don't remember who he was and would be surprised if he survived.

While walking back to the battalion aid station, I hitched a ride in a jeep. I was in the front next to the driver, and a GI in the back seat was crying very hard with no apparent wound. It turned out to be Private Floyd Bonner from another platoon who had become very distraught when his identical twin brother Lloyd was severely wounded.

Floyd probably returned to the unit that day or the next because there's no mention in the morning report of his absence. Floyd and Lloyd had joined C Company in the fall of 1944 and missed being captured at Reipertswiller, France, because both were out with trench foot. (Floyd was killed at Aschaffenburg on March 29, 1945, and is buried at the U.S. cemetery at St. Avold, France. Lloyd died in 1988.)

National Archives

**ABOVE: Men of the 45th's 157th Infantry Regiment climb a snowy hill during winter fighting in Vosges Mountains of northeastern France, December 1944. BELOW: The author, Dan Dougherty, left; German-born Fred Abraham acted as a translator for C Company, 157th.**

Both: Author's photos.

My experience in the field hospital was hilarious. When the nurse came to administer the anesthetic, I told her I really wanted the shrapnel as a souvenir. "Sure, soldier," she replied. No shrapnel was saved. When they gave me the Purple Heart, I wrapped my two socks with the slits around it and went to the Red Cross tent to mail it home. "I want these socks as a souvenir." "Sure, soldier." But they were never sent.

To give you an idea of how seriously I was wounded, I played ping-pong two days after having surgery on my left foot. Someone with authority must have seen me, because the next day I was heading back to the replacement depot. Of all the C Company casualties in the Siegfried Line, I was the first one back to the unit. We'd been at full strength on March 18. On April 2, I brought the second platoon number up to

13 (a platoon was normally about 40 men). Ben Ewing was the only sergeant not hit, and he was now platoon sergeant.

On April 15, 1945, in the closing days of World War II in Europe, Seventh Army troops (the 3rd, 42nd, and 45th Infantry Divisions) had surrounded Nuremberg, and if anyone but Hitler had been in charge, the city would have been surrendered. It was defended, and so the first day, we (C Company, 157th Regiment, 45th Division) sat on the bluffs and watched planes of the Army Air Forces repeatedly dive-bomb the city with no opposition.

Four days later, the three divisions converged in the center of Nuremberg, and that night C Company hiked back to the suburbs to find a standing building in which we could sleep.

Author photo

**ABOVE: The author took this photo of his platoon in a small German village near Nuremberg, spring 1945. At the top in the center is Corporal Edwin Wilkin, who would be awarded the Medal of Honor, posthumously, while trying to take Nuremberg eight days later. BELOW: Soldiers from the 157th Regiment practice crossing a river in a DUKW during training. While crossing the Danube in a DUKW, the engine died and Dougherty and his squad found themselves drifting into enemy territory.**

National Archives

A big problem for infantry troops in Nuremberg was snipers, and one victim was Corporal Edwin G. Wilkin of our platoon, who was killed in action. He posthumously received the Medal of Honor for his actions earlier in the battle of the Siegfried Line.

In 1948, when Wilkin's remains were returned to his home town of Longmeadow, Massachusetts, his mother called to invite me to attend the Memorial Day service, but I was in the middle of college finals in Minnesota and couldn't go. Army Chief of Staff General Omar N. Bradley spoke, and John Scherer and James Crane represented our platoon as honorary pallbearers.

The 45th ("Thunderbird") and 42nd ("Rainbow") Infantry Divisions left Nuremberg on April 22 and were heading for Munich with the goal of getting there as soon as possible so as to deny the Germans time to organize a defense as they had at Nuremberg. The German military effort was collapsing, and we often rode tanks or tank destroyers just to keep up.

Privates Virgil S. Kay and Joseph Marshall were two of 12 replacements who joined C Company on April 20, and they were both wounded on the 25th; Kay died in the hospital on May 6. He had served just five days in C Company and was our last fatality of the war.

We arrived at the Danube on the morning of the 26th. The bridges in our area were blown, and while we waited for "ducks" (DUKW was the Army's designation) to take us across, I wrote to my parents, "Well, here I am humming the Blue Danube Waltz while looking at the Danube River. Not supposed to tell you where I am, but our lieutenant never reads the mail so I'm not limited much." (One duty of platoon leaders was to censor the outgoing mail, but by that time it was obvious that the war was ending and our lieutenant had me, the platoon guide, signing off for him on the envelopes.)

While crossing the river that morning, the engine conked out in the duck in which my group was riding, and we quite literally became a sitting duck as we floated deeper

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**The eyes on some of the bodies were open and they stared right back at us. No one had anything profound to say, just an occasional "My God!" Turned out there were 39 cars with 2,310 corpses.**

into possibly hostile territory on the swiftly flowing Danube.

The engineer eventually restarted the engine and got us across, but we had traveled quite a ways downstream and felt lucky not to have been shot at. There were about seven or eight of us GIs, and we didn't locate the 45th Division until the afternoon of the next day. I never felt good about the fact that, hungry and without food, we stole K-rations from another division that day.

By April 28, we were nearing Munich and that night we slept in some woods, which was unusual because by that time we were almost insisting on sleeping in homes. When we assembled in the morning to get our rations, our commanding officer, 1st Lt. Bert V. Edmunds, said, "Gather around, guys. I have to give you special orders."

Nothing like that had ever happened before, and I remember his telling us the division was in the vicinity of a concentration camp and it was important that witnesses be kept alive.

This meant nothing to us. We didn't know what a concentration camp was, and besides, C Company was in reserve that day. We had an easy stop-and-go morning but about 1:00, our company runner came to our platoon. I was standing by him when he told us, "We're going into a concentration camp to relieve I Company because I Company's gone berserk!"

*[Editor's note: I Company, 157th, had been the first unit to stumble onto the Dachau camp, 10 miles northwest of Munich, that day, and had been shocked by the scenes of death all around. Unprepared for such an encounter, they rounded up a group of SS soldiers who were guarding the camp after the regular guards fled and lined them up in the camp's coal yard. A trigger-happy GI opened fire on the SS men, followed by volleys of fire from some of the other I Company troops. Within seconds, 17 SS men were dead and others wounded.]*

So, we had to hike over to the 3rd Battalion sector. My recollection is that we arrived at the Dachau concentration camp between 3 and 4 PM, but others remember it as earlier. We didn't know the name of the place, and even if we'd been told, it would not have meant anything. None of us had ever heard of Dachau.

On Sunday, April 29, 1945, we approached the Dachau concentration camp on a road from the southwest. Up ahead we saw boxcars and gondola cars on the railroad track that paralleled the road on our left. When we reached the cars, the doors were open, and we made the horrifying discovery that they contained the most emaciated corpses imaginable. The bodies were nothing but skin and bones, still mostly in the remnants of their striped uniforms. There's no way to prepare for such an experience. We would stare and then walk to the next car and stare some more.

The eyes on some of the bodies were open and they stared right back at us. No one

had anything profound to say, just an occasional "My God!" Turned out there were 39 cars with 2,310 corpses. That's an average of almost 60 bodies per car.

At the time, of course, we knew nothing about the origins of the train or what had happened, but we now know the whole story and that train belonged as much to the history of Buchenwald as Dachau.

In brief, the train had left Buchenwald near Weimar on April 7 with 4,500 prisoners jammed into 55 cars headed for Flossenbürg (a large slave-labor camp where noted pastor and theologian Dietrich Bonhöffer and the head of German military intelligence, Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, were executed on April 9), but during the trip the train was rerouted to Dachau where, after a three-week journey, it arrived on the 28th, the day before we arrived. It is now referred to as the Buchenwald-Dachau Death Train. The Dachau commandant's journal for April 28 listed 816 survivors. They must have crawled out of the boxcars.

**ABOVE: Members of a Hitler Youth group are forced to view the bodies in the train as a way of telling them, "This is what your countrymen did." BELOW: The bodies of SS guards at the camp are laid out along the moat surrounding the prisoner enclosure. Some of these may have been killed by the prisoners themselves when they heard the Americans coming. OPPOSITE: Following railroad tracks into the Dachau concentration camp, members of the 3rd Battalion, 157th Infantry Regiment came across a trainload of more than 2,000 corpses who had died en route from Buchenwald.**

Both: National Archives

Once inside the camp, our platoon leader, James Penny, said, "Okay, guys, fan out and look for guards." Some went right, some straight ahead, and I went to the left with Jim Killingbeck and others.

*(Editor's note: Shortly after I Company arrived at the railroad gate where the train and 2,310 corpses were, advance elements of the 42nd Division reached the camp's main gate—neither organization knew the other was there—and took the surrender of the camp from an SS officer who had been left in charge.)*

In the course of rounding up several hundred guards, some of the 45th and 42nd Division troops—officers and GIs alike—had a breakdown in discipline that day in different unrelated incidents, but there was a lot of provocation. I've never seen evidence that more than about 30 guards were killed without benefit of a trial.

There was an investigation of the killing of the guards but no charges were ever filed. There's a strong presumption that the report was quashed by General George Patton when he commanded the Army of Occupation of Bavaria after the war. At a different time in a different war, there might have been a prosecution but at the conclusion of World War II in Europe, during which the evils of the Nazi tyranny had been laid bare, there was no interest in pursuing the matter.

We soon came to another amazing sight—about a dozen reporters in civilian clothes milling around SS corpses in what turned out to be the camp's coal yard. In anticipation of the liberation, the Army had assembled this media group behind the lines and had brought them in even before all the guards had been rounded up.

While we were there, a corporal in our group crawled over the corpses and cut off a finger from one. He wanted an SS ring for a souvenir!

"Hey, you can't do that," a reporter yelled, but the deed was done. Later, there was an investigation of the shooting of the Dachau guards and an excerpt from the report on the coal yard reads, "I found 17 bodies … a finger had been completely severed from one body; from another body a finger had been severed at the second joint." Maybe our corporal got two rings!

(Author's note: Concentration camps were run and staffed by SS troops. SS is short for Schutzstaffel, which translates as protection squad. It was originally formed in the 1920s to protect Hitler at Nazi rallies, but after Heinrich Himmler was appointed Reichsführer SS in 1929, the goals and functions were constantly expanded to the point that the SS became one of the most evil and efficient killing machines the world has ever known. Concentration camp guards were originally organized as SS-Death's Head units, and we had fought against Waffen-SS infantry troops in France and Germany.]

Private Fred Abraham was a C Company runner and interpreter for our commander, Bert Edmunds. Fred had been born and raised in Fulda, Germany. He said, "I had complete mastery of the German language, and I was able to read and translate the German paybooks (Soldbuch) which were written in the Gothic script and listed all units they had belonged to then and in the past." Edmunds gave Fred a camera at Dachau and told him to take pictures.

Leonard Parker, a squad leader in our 3rd Platoon, wrote to his family: "We came upon the camp enclosure, and out of the gate came three prisoners…. The first one yelled at me, 'Boy are we glad to see you,' and you could have knocked me over with a feather because I hadn't expected anyone to yell at me in English. He was a U.S. Army officer who had parachuted into France three months before D-Day on a secret mission and had been captured by the Gestapo and sent to Dachau." (This

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**ABOVE: Two Dachau prisoners exact their revenge on an SS camp guard after knocking him to the ground. Visible in the background are the bodies of dead and wounded guards shot by the members of the 45th Division, enraged by what they saw after they entered the camp. OPPOSITE: Thousands of joyous prisoners cheer after being liberated by U.S. troops at the Dachau sub-camp at Allach.**

was Lieutenant Rene J. Guiraud, a member of the Office of Strategic Services, who had been arrested as a spy, and who was one of six Americans liberated at Dachau.)

Leonard continued: "I guess the rest of the prisoners were waiting to see if we were all right, because then came a flood of human skeletons…. They fell on the ground at our feet and kissed our boots and grabbed for our hands and kissed them."

Later, "A Jewish prisoner came up to me and asked me if it were true that there were Jewish soldiers in the American Army. When I told him I was a Jewish 'unteroffizier,' he nearly went mad. Soon, I had about 50 Jewish men and women around me hugging and kissing me."

I should mention that, after the war, Leonard was one of C Company's most distinguished alums. He finished his education at the University of Minnesota and M.I.T., and became an important architect in Minneapolis. Leonard Parker Associates designed buildings all over the world, and Leonard was professor emeritus at the university. He died in 2011. (He was originally Staff Sergeant Leonard S. Popuch in C Company, but after the war he changed his name to Parker.)

I spent the rest of our daylight hours at Dachau maintaining a post on the west side of this huge camp, and during that time, I saw our men take only two guards to the rear. One building just over the wall from the coal yard had a large red cross painted on its roof. This was the hospital for the SS troops, and when I walked through it, there were no patients or medical personnel present. (Killingbeck found a Nazi flag in the hospital.)

I never did see the confinement area where the prisoners were held, the crematorium, or the mounds of naked corpses, which the soldiers found more horrifying than the boxcars.

Altogether at Dachau, 31,432 prisoners (3,918 of whom were French) were liberated

alive in various stages of ill health, and thousands of emaciated corpses were found. The largest group of survivors was 9,082 Polish prisoners, including 96 women and 830 Catholic priests.

Many prisoners were so far gone they didn't last long. The day after liberation, the Army conscripted adults in the town of Dachau, trucked them to the camp, and made them handle the bodies for burial. Lieutenant Marcus J. Smith, the Army doctor in charge of post-liberation Dachau, reported that after May 5, more than 3,000 bodies were cremated or buried.

In an aside, in the 1990s I developed a warm friendship with Professor John M. Steiner at Sonoma State University. As a teenage prisoner from Prague, he had survived Theresienstadt, Auschwitz (where he lost his mother), and Dachau, and after the war he became a renowned Holocaust scholar. His Aus chwitz number 168904 was tattooed on his left arm and he had worn his Dachau number 142095 on his uniform. After terrible experiences in various locations where he lost several toes, John had arrived at Dachau in a boxcar in January 1945, and speaking for the few survivors, brazenly told the SS to "either give us food or shoot us," and they received some rations.

Steiner spent his four months at Dachau in the infirmary where more toes were amputated without anesthesia by fellow Czech prisoner Dr. Franz Blaha, who later testified at the Nuremberg Trials. (John told me he is the 19-year-old prisoner, who spoke Czech, German, and English, in the photo of the Dachau crematorium with Maj. Gen. Robert T. Frederick, commanding officer of the 45th Division. John died in 2014.)

For decades, I wondered why we never did guard duty that night at Dachau. I eventually learned that in the evening we who had relieved I Company in the afternoon were in turn relieved by them, and it seems the other platoons of C Company had hiked back to the town of Dachau and slept in homes. My platoon slept in the camp in a single-family home that had housed a senior SS officer's family. Outside were flowerbeds and inside were upholstered furniture and framed pictures on the walls.

National Archives

Most of us were about 19 years of age and knew we'd had a mind-boggling experience. We couldn't get over the contrast between our quarters and the total depravity outside, and we talked until midnight.

Platoon Sergeant Ben Ewing remembered going upstairs in the home and finding a children's nursery with toys on the floor and a crucifix on the wall. It was a tough day. That night I learned from the other guys that there was much of the camp I hadn't seen, and I was determined to have a look around in the morning, but the opportunity never came. They wanted C Company back with the 1st Battalion, and we were out of there before dawn the next day to resume the attack on Munich.

We left the Dachau concentration camp before dawn on Monday, April 30, heading for Munich, and were hiking briskly when later that morning we came to a tall, picket fence. This turned out to be the perimeter of the Dachau satellite camp at Allach where the guards had fled. (Allach was seven miles from Dachau and was the largest of Dachau's 94 subcamps located throughout Bavaria and down into Austria. Other parts of Allach were liberated that morning by 42nd Division troops.)

When the prisoners realized that we were the U.S. Army, the celebration began. We promptly gave them all of our K-rations, candy, and cigarettes. One GI threw a cigar over the fence and when the fight for it ended, the cigar was in shreds. We also retrieved potatoes from a nearby cellar and threw them over the fence to the prisoners. I spoke with an older prisoner from Warsaw who told me that he was a doctor. He said the guards had treated him deferentially, and he was not worked as hard.

Both Allach prisoners and conscripted laborers had worked in the nearby BMW plant, which had assembled Stuka engines for the Luftwaffe. In recent years, I met Peter Van Sehaik, who was from Rotterdam, and I learned that during the war he was a conscripted worker at this BMW plant. Peter told me that one day a prisoner asked him for food, and at great risk to himself and the prisoner, he left bread


National Archives

**A small group of German soldiers is led through the streets of Munich. Note the white surrender flags hanging from many of the windows.**

where he knew the prisoner would find it.

A great human interest story began at Allach with the liberation of Andor Deszöfe, a Jewish prisoner from Budapest, Hungary. He was befriended by Staff Sergeant William F. Sutton, a squad leader in our 3rd Platoon, and Bill talked for an hour that day with Andor, who spoke English well.

A few days later, Andor walked away from Allach and showed up at C Company in Munich, wanting to join the American Army and fight the Germans! Bill put a uniform on "Andy" who "served" four months in C Company until the day the regiment boarded the ship at Le Havre for the trip home. Bill considered smuggling him aboard but thought better of it.

Andor eventually emigrated to New York City where, aided by Paul Rodda (who had served as a private in Bill's squad), he found and reconciled with his father (who had abandoned the family in Hungary). Andor married, raised a family, and had a successful business in New York City. He also reunited with Bill on many occasions there and in Georgia. Paul Rodda attended Andor's wedding and remembered this from the reception: "I talked to a fellow who turned out to be an ex-SS trooper who had befriended Andy at Allach. Andy had kept in touch and had sent him airline tickets to come to the wedding. Go figure!"

(Author's note: In 2009, I came across an Oregon woman on the Internet who was searching for her Jewish roots. She was looking for her father's cousin, and the International Red Cross had tracked him from Hungary to Dachau, where he was known to have been liberated, but then the trail grew cold. The cousin's name? Andor Deszöfe! By that time, Andor had died, but I put her in touch with Bill Sutton so she could contact the family.)

That afternoon at Allach, C Company was relieved by K Company, and we resumed the advance on Munich, which we approached with great apprehension. It was assumed Munich would be another Nuremberg, so we were delighted to learn the early units of the 45th and 42nd Divisions had met only scattered resistance that morning.

Later, I wrote to my folks, "We walked 18 kilometers from outside of Dachau to the middle of town, and I never took the gun off my shoulder."

At one point in Munich, we were walking on a boulevard that had a wide median strip that was strewn with German military paraphernalia. It seems that when the Wehrmacht and SS troops learned they would not have to defend the city, they changed into civvies and threw their uniforms and gear into the streets.

I remember April 30 as an exciting but easy day, and to my surprise I found in the morning report that Pfc. John W. Idol, Jr. was wounded. That would have been somewhere between Dachau and Munich (unless there'd been a delay in reporting). Like many of us, he had joined C Company in the last week of January 1945 when it was reformed (after losing so many members in Alsace in France), and he had gone unscathed through the Siegfried Line, Aschaffenburg, and Nuremberg. On what was effectively our final day in combat, Idol was C Company's last casualty of World War II.

The next day, May 1, it was announced that the 45th Division would occupy Munich and our celebration began. On May 2, I wrote to my parents, "A guy just came in and said Generals Patch (Seventh Army) and Patton (Third Army) are about six blocks from here and are throwing the wildest party."

On May 8, World War II in Europe officially ended. We occupied Munich for six weeks, and then after moving to the Augsburg area and Camp St. Louis near Reims, France, we sailed from Le Havre for the USA in early September.

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*The author was discharged from the Army on November 10, 1945. After the war, he attended Carleton College (BA) and Case Western Reserve University (MSSA) and had a career in insurance sales.*

*Between 1996 and 2003, Dan Dougherty published 23 issues of* Second Platoon *for veterans of C Company. Many issues contain articles and photos by soldiers, prisoners, and historians on the liberation of Dachau and Allach. Dan and his wife Norma have been married for 66 years and reside in Fairfield, California. They have three children and seven grandchildren.*

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IT BEGAN WITH what a German colonel called "a dull, continuous roar of thunder from the east." The Soviet bombardment was so immense in Berlin's eastern suburbs, houses shook, pictures fell from walls, and telephones rang. Berlin civilians heard the rumbling, saw the shaking buildings, and knew the hour had come. On ration queues, women and girls listened "in dread to the distant sounds of the front," and asked each other if the Americans would get to Berlin ahead of the Soviets.

It was April 16, 1945. The rumbling was the sound of 8,983 Soviet artillery pieces, up to 270 guns every kilometer, hurling a stockpile of seven million shells (1.2 million on the first day alone) at the German defenses on the Oder-Neisse River line. The last and most consequential battle of World War II in Europe was starting—the battle for Berlin.

After a breather to finish off the "Oder balcony" in East Prussia and to bring up supplies, the Soviet Army was finally ready to attack Berlin and end the war. To Russia's tyrannical and paranoid ruler, Josef Stalin, nothing mattered more than beating the British

This panoramic Soviet painting of the Battle of Berlin portrays the brutality and destruction of the fight for the Nazi capital. The Red Army lost thousands of killed and wounded in the struggle, and the German forces defending the city were virtually wiped out while civilians suffered terribly.

# THIRD REICH
# DEATH KNELL

and American forces to Berlin. Not only did his prestige demand it, so did vengeance for the bloody trail of atrocities and destruction sown by the Germans all the way to Moscow and Stalingrad.

"Who will take Berlin? Us or the Allies?" Stalin asked his two top commanders, Marshal Georgi K. Zhukov, commander of the 1st Belorussian Front, and Marshal Ivan Koniev, head of the 1st Ukrainian Front, who faced Berlin, in a Moscow conference on April 1.

"We will, and before the Allies," answered Koniev.

"So that's the sort of men you are," responded Stalin, who promptly gave them their orders—Zhukov would drive on Berlin from the center and north, while Koniev hit Berlin from the south, enveloping the immense German capital in a gigantic pincer movement. To achieve this victory, Stalin was massing 2.5 million men, 41,600 guns, 6,250 tanks, and 7,500 aircraft.

The Soviet Army was by 1945 a well-oiled war machine, lavishly equipped

## The fall of Berlin signaled the end of Nazi Germany and its reign of terror in occupied Europe.

**BY DAVID H. LIPPMAN**

ullstein bild / The Granger Collection, NY

National Archives

**During their long trek toward the German capital of Berlin, a column of Soviet tanks and infantrymen advances through the streets of a shattered town in East Prussia.**

with powerful T-34 and JS tanks, superior to most of their German counterparts and fairly easy for the mechanically challenged Soviet tank crews to operate and maintain. Artillery was still Russia's "God of War." Infantry and tanks cooperated with skill, resolution, and aggressiveness. The Soviets understood the importance of surprise, maneuver, and commitment of reserves. They did not rely on numbers alone to win battles.

But the Soviets had weaknesses. While ammunition was plentiful, food, spare parts, and even uniforms were in short supply. Soviet troops were often lean and hungry, expected to live off the land. Much of their rations and transport were American Lend-Lease.

Most importantly, the Army was poorly disciplined. Despite the toughness of Soviet political officers, Soviet troops in all echelons had a fondness for theft and rape, which was inspired by the harsh propaganda of Stalin's political writers, who hammered down the idea that the invasion of Germany would be the wreaking of Soviet vengeance—Germany was not to be defeated, but despoiled.

Zhukov's assault on Berlin was the centerpiece of the attack, and the general who "never lost a battle" planned this one poorly. He showed little of his usual verve and flexibility. Facing German troops dug in against him on the Seelow Heights, he deployed 143 searchlights to blind the defenders, one every 200 meters. When the searchlights snapped on, the Germans shelled them, killing many of the lights' female operators.

The German defense was headed by one of that nation's sharpest minds, Col. Gen. Gotthard Heinrici, son of a Lutheran pastor, married to a "mischlinge," a half-Jew. Only Heinrici's ability as a defensive specialist kept him on the Wehrmacht's payroll, as boss of Army Group Vistula, which was actually defending the Oder.

Heinrici planned his defense with great care. He had close to a million men to defend against the Soviets, counting training units, Hitler Youth, police, and Volkssturm, equipped with 10,400 tanks, 1,500 guns, and 3,300 aircraft. The Soviets outnumbered him badly. Worse, the German war machine had been ground down by years of defeat and retreat. Tanks were short of fuel, artillery short of shells, and many soldiers had gone unpaid for months. Their morale was worn out by the stream of defeats, refugees clogging roads, letters (when mail came) from home that their houses had been destroyed or hometowns occupied by Allied forces.

Yet they fought on. Some did so with the courage of desperate and fanatical men who believed in Hitler. Others were members of SS foreign contingents, like the tough Nordland Division, made up of Scandinavian Nazis—Swedes, Danes, and Norwegian renegades—who had thrown in their lot with Hitler. Another such outfit was the SS Charlemagne Division, composed of Frenchmen. They fought with the courage of men who had nothing left to lose. Capture meant a treason trial back in their homeland, and escape was impossible. So these mercenaries and opportunists—including a scattering of renegade Britons from the 50-strong British Free Corps—also fought on.

The Germans also had some of their usual strengths: mobility, quick-thinking field commanders, an astonishing ability to regroup under pressure, and immense Tiger tanks that hurled 88mm shells and could withstand heavy bombardment.

There were other incentives for Germans to fight this last battle with determination. Josef Goebbels's propaganda continued to promise miracle weapons to turn the tide of battle. German troops feared the destruction that would rain down upon their homes if the Soviets conquered their Fatherland. SS flying "courts-martial" and the military police effectively patrolled the rear areas. Anyone suspected of being a deserter would get a quick drumhead court-martial, inevitably followed by a hanging.

The picture was bleak. The German divisions that stood on Heinrici's main line of resistance on the Neisse River and the Seelow Heights were not the goose-stepping legions

that had terrorized Europe in 1940. There were contingents of German naval personnel drawn from immobile surface ships and bases, Luftwaffe ground crews and pilots without planes, personnel from Army training schools, and the scores of poorly equipped Volkssturm units, made up of locally drawn old men and Hitler Youth, often armed only with one-shot disposable Panzerfaust antitank rocket launchers instead of rifles. Many had no uniforms and no weapons, and less training.

With this, Gotthard Heinrici faced Zhukov's attack. At first, things went well for the Germans. Beyond shooting the lights out, the searchlights themselves were ineffective because their dazzle reflected back off the smoke and dust of the Soviet bombardment. Order and counterorder to turn them on and off soon followed. Overcast skies and rain hampered both sides.

Even so, the bombardment was horrific. The Hitler Youth and trainee youngsters at first thought it was a typical "Morning Concert," but the old hands soon recognized that this was the long-awaited big offensive. Gerd Wagner of the 27th Parachute Regiment said, "In a few seconds, all my 10 comrades were dead." Wagner himself regained consciousness in a smoking shell crater and was barely able to escape. Farther back, an SS panzer battalion commander peered through his pericscope and saw "in the field of view the eastern sky was in flames."

The Soviet bombardment churned up the Seelow Heights, leaving both physical and moral destruction in its wake. An SS war correspondent found a dazed soldier wandering in a wood, having tossed his rifle. This was his first experience of the Eastern Front, he said. He had spent the war as a barber in an officers' hotel in Paris.

Still, Zhukov had trouble. He sent his men storming across the Oder in American amphibious DUKWs, driven by female soldiers. Behind the Lend-Lease vehicles came all kinds of ordinary boats, many of which leaked. Under heavy fire, the boats came ashore and the Soviets advanced through minefields, making little progress. By midday, the troops were wallowing in heavy mud and German shelling.

National Archives

**Germans troops, ready to attempt to stem the tide of the Red Army advance into their Fatherland, man an MG-42 machine gun along the western bank of the Oder River. By the spring of 1945, many German units were reduced to less than a quarter of their original strength.**

The Germans were not doing well either. Joseph Goebbels made a passionate speech on the German radio that the new storm of Mongols would break itself against the Oder walls, but Berliners, who could read maps, got into longer lines at food shops to fill their larders as quickly as possible. Heinrici wanted to counterattack, but Adolf Hitler, in a typically loony decision, had taken away three of his panzer divisions and sent them to Czechoslovakia. At the German Army's "holy of holies," the command bunkers at Zossen, Chief of Staff General Hans Krebs kept going on shots of vermouth from a bottle he kept in his office safe, struggling with broken communications to the front and desperate requests for information from the rear.

At noon, a frustrated Zhukov sent his tanks in, but they struggled against the deadly Panzerfausts, the muddy ground, and the chaotic bridgehead, a nightmare for traffic control.

At 3 PM, Zhukov reported to Stalin. "So you've underestimated the enemy on the approaches to Berlin, but you're still on the Seelow Heights. Things have started more successfully for Koniev," Stalin said. Zhukov bellowed at his Army commanders, who bellowed up the line and down the chain of command, calling for more attacks.

Koniev's assault had indeed been more successful. His plan was to rely on artillery—249 guns per kilometer—and the 2nd Air Army to batter the German defenses for 145 minutes, twice as long as Zhukov's bombardment. Instead of searchlights, a smokescreen would blind the German defenses.

"We had nowhere to hide," said Corporal Karl Pafflik, a German who was captured after the assault. "The air was full of whistling and explosions. We suffered unimaginable losses. Those who survived were rushing around in trenches and bunkers trying to save themselves. We were speechless with terror."

"The god of war is thundering very nicely today," said a Soviet battery commander.

The Neisse River was shallower than the Oder, and Koniev's men were able to cross simply by swimming the river or wading across fords, weapons over their heads. As soon as the Soviets hit the far bank, they brought up 85mm antitank guns for immediate fire support.

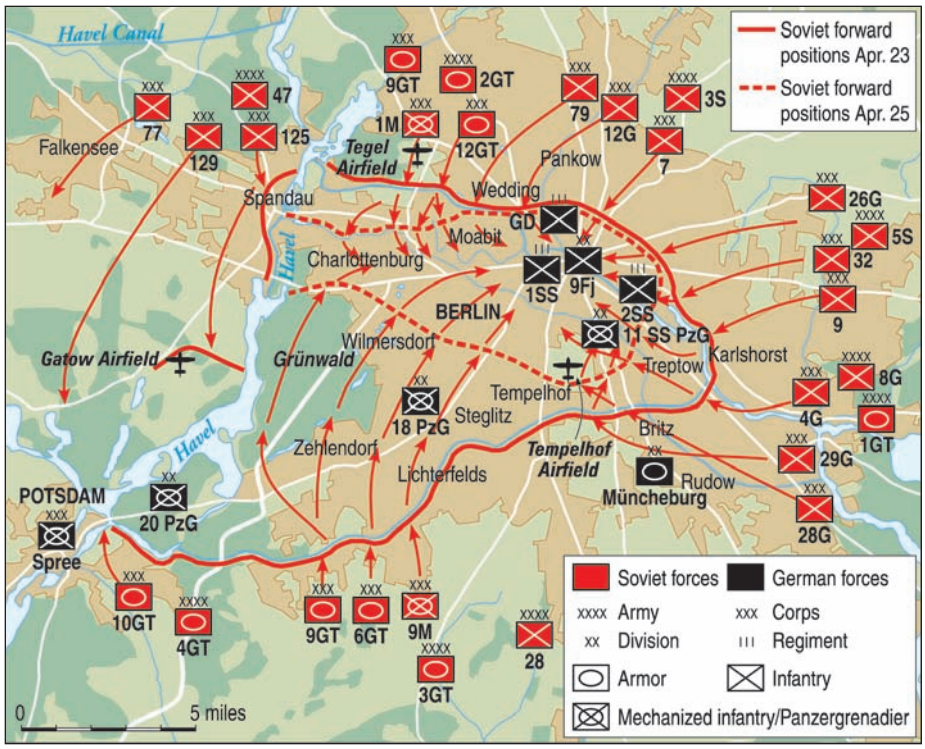
Once Koniev's men secured cables over the river, they ferried over T-34 tanks armed with 85mm guns to support the infantry. The 1st Ukrainian Front picked out some 133 crossing points in the main attack sectors. By the end of the first day, Koniev would be pleased, while his rival Zhukov was furious. Koniev's only complaint was that evacuating wounded was "unbearably slow."

That evening at 9 PM, Stalin cut more orders, setting the border between Koniev and Zhukov. The line on the chinagraph map shot out from the Neisse River from Guben to the town of Lubben, and then stopped. It was clear that Stalin was setting up Koniev and Zhukov to race for Berlin, and the winner would get the spoils.

So a race was on between two rivals. Zhukov was the better known of the two, having won victories over the Japanese at Khalkin-Gol in 1939, the Germans at Moscow in 1941, and Stalingrad in 1942. The former furrier's apprentice and cavalryman had masterminded these triumphs and been celebrated for them. Koniev, by comparison, had not commanded troops in the defense of Moscow or Stalingrad, but served well in relatively obscure assignments, rising to take command of the 1st Ukrainian Front and gaining a reputation among Soviet leadership as a hard charger.

Next morning saw overcast skies and drizzle give way to clearer weather on the Seelow Heights, and the Soviets brought down artillery and airpower again. The Germans took heavy casualties, which overwhelmed their medical stations. Their triage policy was to care for those most likely to return to combat first. A stomach wound meant death—surgery required far too much time. Officers wandered through medical areas, sending walking wounded back to the front.

At checkpoints, German military police,




**ABOVE: By completely encircling Berlin and attacking from all sides, several Soviet armies allowed no one out and no reinforcements in. OPPOSITE: The body of a German soldier killed in furious fighting on the outskirts of Berlin lies in the foreground of this photo as Soviet tanks and troops prepare to continue the fight for the German capital. Casualties on both sides were horrific during the battles in the vicinity of Berlin.**

known as chain-dogs, or *kettenhunden,* for the gorgets they wore, searched columns of refugees for stragglers and deserters, sending them back to the front, often to stiffen newly deployed groups of Hitler Youth, some of them as young as 15.

Meanwhile, Zhukov and his troops pressed on. German 88mm antiaircraft guns and tank-hunting infantry with Panzerfausts caused more Soviet losses, but through determination, the Soviets surrounded Seelow. Key to the German defense was the 9th Parachute Division under General Bruno Brauer, a Crete veteran who smoked cigarettes through a holder. Some of the 9th Division's men included veterans from Otto Skorzeny's legendary commando units, but others, mostly replacements, were Luftwaffe ground crews.

The 9th had a rough day on the 17th. A regimental commander was killed, the bombardment and assault panicked many of the men, and the Luftwaffe airmen, most of whom had never seen action, fled the battlefield. Brauer himself suffered a nervous collapse and had to be relieved of what was left of his command.

Still, the Germans tried to counterattack—the 101st Corps, a collection of young trainees and officer candidates, went in, but the Soviets had placed wire-sprung mattresses from nearby houses on the sides of their tanks. The panzerfaust shells simply bounced off. The Germans took fearful casualties. The Potsdam Regiment found that there were only 34 boys left on their feet after its battle.

Buoyed by a false report of peace negotiations with the British from Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop, 9th Army commander General Theodor Busse told his men, "Hold on for two more days, then everything will be sorted out."

But the reality was a slowly disintegrating German defense. The Luftwaffe sent in Focke Wulf FW-190 fighter-bombers to attack pontoon bridges across the Oder, claiming that two of the pilots destroyed a bridge by diving their damaged planes into the

pontoons. In actuality, these desperate tactics achieved nothing. The Soviets had 32 bridges across the Oder.

In Berlin itself, the offensive was greeted with a flurry of stirring exhortations from Goebbels, who called for resistance to the last and warned, "Any German who offends against this self-evident duty to the nation will lose his life as well as his honor."

In reality, Heinrici faced more attacks with tanks lacking fuel, guns lacking shells, and troops lacking food. Dawn on the 18th saw a red sky on the eastern horizon as the day began with massive Soviet air attacks and artillery barrages. Zhukov was furious, knowing that his rival Koniev had orders to advance on Berlin.

Zhukov's armor resumed the offensive and ran back into the usual German ferocity and Panzerfausts until 9:40 AM, when the Soviet bludgeon finally broke through, sending the remains of the 7th Panzer Division, Field Marshal Erwin Rommel's old command, scattering. By mid-afternoon, the defending 9th Army was about to be split in two. Zhukov had the Seelow Heights at a cost of 30,000 dead, for a German loss of 12,000.

To the south, Koniev's armor fended off a counterattack on its left flank but kept pushing on against declining resistance.

The situation was increasingly desperate for the Germans, and they began taking even more desperate measures. First, Hitler ordered all Volkssturm units in Berlin to join the 9th Army to form a new defensive line. Only 10 battalions and some antiaircraft guns could actually be sent, but that left the city with only its immobile flak guns for defense.

Next, Artur Axmann, head of the Hitler Youth, offered his 15-year-old boys to General Hellmuth Weidling and the 56th Panzer Corps, to fight with Panzerfausts. Weidling exploded at the idea of committing 15-year-olds and even younger boys to the battle, and Axmann agreed to retract the order. Even so, Nazi bloodlust rolled on. At Plotzensee Prison, the Gestapo executed 30 political prisoners.

ullstein bild / The Granger Collection, NY

With the Soviets on the offensive, the 9th Army split into three directions. The 9th Parachute Division tried to regroup but failed. The paratroopers fled the scene, giving their ammunition to the arriving SS Nordland Division troopers.

On Reichstrasse 1, the main highway leading east from Berlin, refugees piled west, as the Nordland Division headed east. "Ivan is right behind us!" the refugees and fleeing troops yelled. SS troops and military police manned roadblocks to search for deserters, shooting and hanging them on the spot. To add to the hypocrisy, while SS men hanged deserters the SS formations were told to be ready to fall back to Schleswig-Holstein, near the Danish border, where they could escape the advancing Soviets.

All along the highways on April 19, Soviet aircraft pummeled anything German that moved, civilian or military. German troops from the 101st Corps fled through Mecklenburg, leaving behind all their equipment. The corps, made up of units from trainee and officer candidate battalions, was stunned by the sheer ferocity of the Soviet offensive. Stragglers formed into ad hoc battlegroups to fight briefly for a crossroads or village, then fled again.

All these disasters had little impact on Adolf Hitler, now directing the war from his bunker in the Reich Chancellery grounds, surrounded by flunky generals and obedient secretaries. On April 20, the Führer marked his 56th birthday amid sunny skies and the next-to-last American air raid on Berlin.

The party was a grim one. Except for Propaganda Minister Goebbels and Hitler's personal secretary Martin Bormann, all the Nazi elite were planning escapes. Göring was headed for Bavaria, SS Reichsführer Heinrich Himmler for Schleswig-Holstein, technocrat Albert Speer to the German Alps. Hitler accepted a sack of money from the German Army's ordinary soldiers and only noted that it was not as heavy as in years past.

At the daily staff conference, the big issue was what to do with a Germany about to

be split in two. Hitler announced he would stay in Berlin. After the meeting, the leadership came up with excuses to flee Berlin, while Hitler was recorded on his last newsreel, inspecting a detachment of Hitler Youth, who had received Iron Crosses for knocking out Soviet tanks. The ailing Führer, holding his shaking left arm behind his back, walked down the flanks, patting boys on the cheeks while his aides presented the medals. That evening, Hitler's mistress, Eva Braun, presided over a champagne party to celebrate Hitler's birthday in the bunker.

At the front, Zhukov's gunners finally had the range of Berlin and opened fire on the already bomb-blasted city. He gave his 1st and 2nd Guards Tank Armies an order: "Break in to Berlin first and raise the banner of victory." He wanted to be there by dawn on the 21st. His tanks did not get there until the afternoon.

Meanwhile, Koniev continued a steady advance, hurling his armies across the Spreewald, but not fast enough for Koniev. "You are again moving like a hose," Koniev signaled one commander.

By now there was no front line. Ninth Army's men were holding various points to slow or stop Soviet advances. At Werneuchen Airfield, the flak battery had to depress its fixed 88mm guns to take on the ground targets, to little avail. All roads heading west were blocked by panic-stricken refugees. Weidling ordered his Nordland Division, now mingling with Hitler Youth and 18th Panzergrenadier assets, to counterattack, but the Germans were badly mauled. The Hitler Youth were trapped in a forest that caught fire. The Germans retreated.

At one point, a solitary King Tiger tank stabilized the situation by blasting open two T-34s, halting the Soviet advance. The Nordland Division's Scandinavian nurses were caught in the retreat with their men. One nurse found her Waffen SS lover among the badly wounded and held his head in her lap until he died from his wounds.

German discipline broke down in the retreat. Troops that had not been fed for days broke into abandoned houses and

**During one of his last public appearances before committing suicide in the Führerbunker, Adolf Hitler pats a young member of the Hitler Youth on the cheek after awarding him the Iron Cross.**

gorged themselves on whatever they could find. Others collapsed into beds in farmhouses, exhausted, in boots and muddy uniforms, to get their first sleep in days. One Hitler Youth slept through a pitched battle. Officers had to restore order at pistol point. With the disintegration, even the SS flying court-martial teams were overwhelmed. Some execution teams themselves deserted. A prisoner told his Russian interrogators that there were about 40,000 deserters hiding in Berlin even before the Soviet advance.

The 56th Panzer Corps regrouped and retreated again, this time to Berlin's western suburbs, hooking up with the remains of 101st Corps, holding the city's northern side. At Bernau, the Soviet 47th Army hit the last line before Berlin and found the defenders unable to cope. After firing off a victory salute at the city, the 47th Army and 2nd Guards Tank Army pushed inside the autobahn ring, winning the race for Berlin.

On the 21st, Berlin's defense headquarters was besieged by big shots, all demanding authorization to leave Berlin before it became surrounded. Goebbels had ordered that "no man capable of bearing arms may leave Berlin" without a permit, and all the "Golden Pheasants" who ran the Reich or lived its high life were fleeing. Lt. Gen. Hellmuth Reymann, who commanded Berlin, signed more than 2,000 such passes, quite happy to be rid of the useless mouths and armchair warriors.

That morning saw the final Allied air raid of the war and its replacement with the first heavy Soviet shelling of the city. Hitler was astonished that the Soviets could be close enough to bombard central Berlin with guns.

Casualties were heavy as Berliners were queuing up for crisis rations or water at pumps. Crossing a street now turned into a life-threatening ordeal. German families buried their valuables in yards and basements. The German Trans-Ocean News Agency and the Reichssender Berlin both shut down. So did the telegraph office, for the first time in its 100-year history. The last message was from Tokyo, reading, "Good luck to you all."

The last plane left Tempelhof Airport, carrying nine passengers to Stockholm. Berlin's 1,400 fire companies were ordered to the west to sit out the battle and survive. Gas, water, and electrical delivery broke down. Two operations continued: the meteorological station in Potsdam did not miss a day during 1945, and 11 of the city's 17 breweries, engaged by government decree in "essential" production, went on making beer.

Ignoring realities, Hitler ordered the 9th Army to hold a line that was disintegrating.

The 56th Panzer Corps continued to retreat along roads lined with corpses left from Soviet strafing attacks.

Now the Soviets moved to encircle Berlin, determined to crush it before the Americans—who had stopped on the Elbe River—could arrive. Stalinist paranoia was such that even though the American offensive had stopped at the Elbe, he was convinced the Americans were about to enter beleaguered Berlin.

On Berlin's eastern side, Zhukov's troops lined up to attack south toward the Spree River. On the southern side, Koniev's tanks clattered into one of the most sacred places in the German Army, the Oberkommando Wehrmacht's headquarters at Zossen. They found the two complexes, Maybach I and Maybach II, almost completely intact, with three sober and one drunken caretaker there to give a guided tour. The leading Soviet soldiers inspected the mass of bunkers, generators, plotting maps, ringing telephones, and clacking teleprinters, which had given orders to the German Army when it stood triumphant from the Pyrenees to the North Cape. When a phone rang, a German officer at the other end asked, "What is happening?"

"Ivan is here," the Russian retorted. "Go to hell."

Back in Berlin, Hitler studied his maps and ordered the 3rd SS Panzer Corps to counterattack, ignoring the fact that it consisted of a few battalions and some tanks, all already allocated to the 9th Army. On paper, 3rd SS Panzer Corps was three elite divisions, and paper was what Hitler cared about, not reality. "Whoever throws his last battalion into the struggle will be the winner," Hitler said, quoting Frederick the Great.

General Kurt Steiner, who commanded the corps, was dumbfounded by the order, particularly that the penalty for failure to attack was execution. His total forces consisted of six battalions, some from the 4th SS Police Division, the 5th Panzer Division, and the 3rd Navy Division. "The Navy men I can forget about," Steiner told Heinrici. "I bet they're great on ships, but they've never been trained for this kind of fighting. I have hardly any artillery, very few panzers, and only a few antiaircraft guns. I'll tell you what I have: a completely mixed-up heap." He could not attack anyway, being hard pressed by Soviet forces.

That evening, Hitler fired Reymann as commander of Berlin, then appointed an obscure Colonel Ernst Kaether, promoting him straight to the rank of lieutenant general. The next day the appointment was cancelled. Berlin did not have a commander as the Soviets arrived in the suburbs.

Zhukov's forces arrived early on the 22nd, the original target date to capture Berlin. They did liberate hordes of French prisoners at Oranienburg, who waved tri-colored flags and set off through the lines to return home. Koniev's men continued to seal up the ring around southern Berlin, reaching the Teltow Canal, the southern rim of the defense line. A huge Wehrmacht ration store stood on the north bank of the canal, but the administrator refused to pass out the food to the exhausted troops because "a regulation issue certificate had not been filled out." He set fire to the food instead.

As Koniev's men advanced, they searched through civilians, often finding them to be German soldiers who had concealed their uniforms. They also began the ugly process of raping women and looting homes, carrying off furniture, bedding, and even light bulbs.

That same day, two councils of war were held on the German side. First, Weidling polled his commanders and all wanted to withdraw, either south to hook up with what was left of the 9th Army, or in the Nordland Division's case, north to Steiner's 3rd Corps. But there was no way out of defending Berlin. Weidling's troops were exhausted—filthy, bearded, bloodshot-eyed men who had not even seen their iron rations of processed cheese and hard bread in a week. They were living on tins of pork they found in abandoned houses.

The 9th Army was in little better shape, with men moving singly or in small groups, no organized formations, vehicles all out of gas. German communications were so bad that Army Group Vistula knew nothing of the Soviet advance.

**A battery of Soviet artillery maintains a steady stream of fire on German positions ringing the capital of Berlin. Massive Soviet firepower eventually overwhelmed the Berlin defenses.**

The second major council of war took place in Hitler's bunker that day, with the Führer demanding news of Steiner's counterattack. At noon he was told that no counterattack had taken place. Hitler was furious and went into a massive tantrum. The war was lost, he told his terrified staff. It was the worst such display the staff had yet seen, and it ended with Hitler saying he

would stay in Berlin to the end and then kill himself. The aides tried to buck up their leader's spirits and sent for Goebbels. He emerged from the discussion to announce that he was moving his wife and six children into the bunker to stay with Hitler to the end.

Later, Hitler cooled down and came up with yet another solution—Lt. Gen. Walter Wenck's 12th Army, standing on the Elbe against the Americans. With the Yanks no longer moving, it would be disengaged and head northeast to hook up with the 9th Army's fleeing remnants and save Berlin. Hitler gave written orders to his top flunkies, who took advantage of the orders and the situation to leave Berlin for good.

Operation Seraglio began immediately, with secretaries, doctors, and other aides fleeing to Berchtesgaden by air, while other members of Hitler's inner circle began burning his papers. Despite the destruction and shellfire raging in the streets above, the bunker was not short of good food and alcohol. Those still trapped in the bunker by duty or choice soon saw discipline get replaced by drunkenness, dejection, and self-pity, from Hitler on down. Everyone was just waiting for Hitler to kill himself.

On the 23rd, the Soviets ramped up their bombardment of Berlin by hauling in 600mm siege guns. Their targets were the three massive armored flak towers in downtown Berlin, which were also being used as shelters for thousands of people who had lost their homes to earlier bombardments. A woman diarist noted reports of a deserter being hanged at the other end of a U-Bahn tunnel and young boys amusing themselves by twisting the corpse round and making it spin back.

Meanwhile, Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel, cut loose from the Führerbunker, hand delivered Hitler's written order to Wenck for the big attack to liberate Berlin. Wenck knew the order was idiotic but saw an opportunity to help the 9th Army flee the Soviets. If he attacked east and hooked up with Busse's 9th Army, Wenck might be able to bring both over to the Elbe and the safer captivity of the Americans. Wenck drove around in a Kubelwagen staff car to

**ABOVE: Soviet soldiers proceed with caution through the rubble of a destroyed Berlin street. Constantly on the lookout for German snipers and strongpoints, the Red Army troops were often required to fight house to house to secure portions of the capital city. OPPOSITE: An officer directs German soldiers as they construct a barricade across a Berlin thoroughfare.**

his various scattered commands, telling them, "It's not about Berlin any more, it's not about the Reich any more." It was about saving lives.

Back in Berlin, Weidling, now commanding a corps nearly surrounded in Berlin, phoned the bunker to report. Weidling was told he had been condemned to death in absentia in a court-martial for cowardice for not holding the line. Enraged, he drove over to the bunker to defend his honor. Hitler was so impressed by Weidling's determination that he appointed him head of Berlin's defense.

The 56th Panzer Corps did not have much to defend Berlin with. The 9th Parachute Division was cut to pieces. The Muncheberg Panzer Division, freshly put together from training schools, was in little better shape. The 20th Panzergrenadiers were not much better, either. The Nordland Division and the 18th Panzergrenadiers were in better condition. They added up to 45,000 troops. Weidling found he had other odd assets at hand: 40,000 Volkssturm, a collection of Navy midshipmen flown in at Grand Admiral Karl Dönitz's orders, the flak bunkers with their ample supplies of ammunition, SS General Wilhelm Mohnke's 2,000 tough SS Liebstandarte men protecting the Reich Chancellery and the Führerbunker.

Weidling had other advantages. A city of two million offered unlimited supplies of hard buildings, ruins, cellars, and other natural blockhouses for defense. Three years of constant bombing resulted in flak positions with machine guns and heavier cannon throughout the city. Three concentric lines of defensive positions had been built. They just lacked well-trained and well-armed soldiers to man them.

However, the overall picture was disastrous. Two whole Soviet Army Groups were falling on Berlin. The only help at hand was the SS Charlemagne Division, which consisted of renegade Frenchmen. None were eager to surrender, as they would be returned to France to face treason trials. All fought with the courage of doomed men.

The division managed to reach the Olympic Stadium in Spandau, where they found a

Luftwaffe supply store complete with benzedrine-laced cocoa, which kept the exhausted Frenchmen going.

Meanwhile, Koniev's troops struggled across the Teltow Canal. Unlike the British and American Armies, the Soviets lacked bridging engineers, so they rounded up anything that could float to cross the canal, even rowing sculls. On the 24th, Zhukov's 5th Shock Army crossed the Spree farther north to Treptow Park.

Weidling wasted no time. He refueled his tanks from Luftwaffe aviation gasoline stores at Tempelhof Airport and counterattacked. The remaining King Tigers of Nordland Division clattered into the attack and punched out several heavy JS tanks.

"In the course of three hours, the SS made six attacks but were forced to retreat each time," wrote a 5th Shock Army divisional commander, "leaving the ground littered with corpses in black uniforms. Panthers and Ferdinands (self-propelled guns) were burning. By midday, our division was able to advance again. They secured the whole of Treptow Park and in the dusk we reached the S-Bahn ring railroad."

All day on the 24th, the Soviets pressured the defenders, pushing hard against the encircled garrison. As the Soviets advanced, they captured scores of civilians and promptly began an orgy of looting and rape that would become one of the best known and most horrific features of the Berlin battle.

The Germans tried a counterattack with three assault guns, but a reconnaissance soldier named Shulzhenok stopped them with three captured Panzerfausts, destroying the first, damaging the second, and forcing the third to withdraw. Shulzhenok was named a "Hero of the Soviet Union" for his feat but was killed the next day by a "terrorist in civilian clothes," most likely a poorly dressed Volkssturm member.

April 25 dawned cold and clear. The Germans were barely holding on, but the Soviets


needed a break to bring up supplies. They turned the battlefield over to the air force, which spent the day strafing the defenders. The Germans abandoned their last bridgehead south of the Teltow Canal. Soviet tanks slugged it out with the Muncheberg Panzer Division at Tempelhof Airport amid the carcasses of wrecked FW-190 fighters.

The Nordland Division was now barely a regiment in size, but it and the Charlemagne Division fought on. That evening, the French SS men, with 100 Hitler Youth assigned to them, faced a night Soviet tank attack. With determination, Panzerfausts, and a three-man machine-gun team from the Reich Labor Service, the French held the Halensee Bridge against all comers for 48 hours.

But the big news on the 25th was a climax to the war—the meeting of Soviet and American troops at Torgau on the Elbe River. Germany was now divided in two. Unable to hold on to the Oder much longer, Heinrici ordered his men to start retreating to the west. For doing so, Hitler ordered Heinrici fired. By the time a replacement commander could be found, Army Group Vistula had disintegrated.

On the 26th, the Soviets resumed their offensive, and Weidling's weary men continued to fire and fall back. General Gustav Krukenberg, commanding the Nordland Division, set up his tactical headquarters in the Kroll Opera House, using a throne-like armchair from the former royal box as a bed to grab a couple of hours of sleep.

The early hours of the 26th saw a thunderstorm and heavy rain, which put out some of the fires raging in Berlin. Civilians lined up for food, resuming their places or taking those of dead ones after a burst of shellfire shredded the ranks. Citizens greeted each other by saying, "Survive" instead of "Sieg Heil." German troops were impressed by the courage with which women lined up for water at pumps and carried buckets through shell and sniper fire back to their homes. A working radio station called for women to pick up weapons and join the men at the barricades, but few actually did, beyond some SS auxiliaries.

Looting was rampant, both Soviet and German. Law abiding citizens, all desperate, stormed into abandoned shops, seizing goods, which they then traded for food. Those trapped behind Soviet lines found themselves victims of robbery and rape by advancing Russians. Some of the worst rapists and plunderers were second-wave Russians, often freshly released POWs. Women as young as 14 and as old as 60 were savagely victimized. Ilse Antz and her family, hiding in their cellar, suffered repeated brutal rapes at Soviet hands and stayed in their cellar from April 24 to May 4, afraid to emerge.

The Waffen SS did not rely on makeshift barricades to halt the attackers but put riflemen in buildings' upper floors, higher than the Soviet tanks could raise their turrets. Panzerfaust crews deployed in cellars and rubble to knock out Soviet tanks. The Russian solution was to mass machine gunners on the sides of their tanks to pour automatic fire into open windows or to cover tank treads with bedsprings and other metal so that the Panzerfaust shells would bounce off.

Soviet urban fighting tactics were highly developed, based on their experience at Stalingrad. With satchel charges, submachine guns, and even pick-axes, the Soviets fought from house to house and room to room, hurling grenades through holes in walls to silence defenders. Flamethrowers and dynamite aided the Soviet advance.

Even so, the Soviets had trouble—many officers were inexperienced. The relentless advance wore troops down and made them exhausted and sloppy. Mortar fuses were set incorrectly and blew up in the tubes. Soviet troops who tried to hurl German potato masher grenades at their previous owners sometimes disabled themselves instead.

The morning of the 26th began with a massive bombardment. The Muncheberg Division's battle for Tempelhof finally ended with the Germans withdrawing to the Tiergarten.

General Vasily Chuikov massed his 8th Guards Army on the Belle Alliance Platz, named for the Anglo-Prussian alliance that defeated Napoleon in 1815. Ironically, the defenders this day were French SS. Chuikov was determined to beat Koniev's other armies to downtown Berlin, and his men stormed toward the Tiergarten, a park now churned up by shellfire. Chuikov hurled Katyusha rockets at the German defenders. Weidling and his staff, exhausted and sore, kept going on coffee and cigarettes, deep in the Bendlerblock, the Wehrmacht's Berlin headquarters bunkers, not knowing if it was day or night.

In the evening, Weidling presented to Hitler his recommendation: break out of the city, and avoid further destruction and loss of life. Hitler vetoed it. "Your proposal is perfectly all right. But what is the point of it all? I have no intention of wandering around in the woods. I am staying here and I will fall at the head of my troops. You, for your part, will carry on with the defense."

**ABOVE: A wounded member of the Hitler Youth receives instruction from an officer in Berlin. OPPOSITE: Armed with the hollow-charge antitank panzerfaust weapon, a boy and an older man of the Volkssturm take cover in a trench and await the inevitable arrival of Soviet tanks in Berlin.**

To that end, SS men scrawled new graffiti on walls, reading, "Berlin remains German." A Soviet soldier saw one such artwork, and added, "But I'm already here in Berlin, signed Sidorov."

By now, the Russians were using heavy force against the slightest resistance. When a Panzerfaust took out a Soviet tank, the local Soviet commander would retaliate with a massive bombardment against the cellar or house. That could lead to odd consequences. The Soviets captured a small Panzerfaust group of French SS, and the Frenchmen convinced the Soviets they were not SS, but merely laborers called up into uniform. The Soviets did not know about SS blood tattoos, so they let the Frenchmen go.

Some Germans simply gave up. Volkssturm battalion leader Karl Ritter von Halt called together the last of his men in the Olympic Stadium and told them to go home. Half of the men were useless anyway—they had been issued Italian bullets for German rifles. "Letting them return home was about all there was left to do," von Halt said. "It was either that or throw stones at the Russians." Others simply deserted, shucking off their Volkssturm armbands and hiding in cellars to avoid both Russians and marauding gangs of SS fanatics, who shot suspected deserters.

That evening came one of the most grotesque moments of the battle. Hitler had received on the 23rd a telegram from Göring, off in Bavaria, asking if the Luftwaffe chief should take over leadership of the Reich. Hitler flew into a rage, seeing treason. He fired Göring and summoned General Robert Ritter von Greim to Berlin to be appointed field marshal and boss of what was left of the Luftwaffe. Greim flew to Staaken Airfield on Berlin's edge, then transferred to a Fieseler Storch, flown by aviatrix Hanna Reitsch. The two tree-hopped to the small airstrip by the Brandenburg Gate, where Greim was wounded. He hobbled to the bunker to become Hitler's last field marshal, ready to die in defense of Berlin.

Incredibly, Hitler sent Greim back to Bavaria with orders to mass the surviving Luftwaffe aircraft to fly back to Berlin. After the usual vegetarian dinner with Hitler, the crippled Greim and Reitsch flew back to Staaken and safety. Everyone in the Führerbunker, where the only conversation topic was how to commit suicide, was amazed by Reitsch's feat. "Miracles can still happen," Goebbels told everyone.

Next day, the 27th, the German self-deceptions continued. General Hans Krebs, the chief of staff, who had served as military attaché to Moscow before the war, told Weidling and others that the Americans had only to cross 90 kilometers to Berlin to break up the Russian attack. Incredibly, senior and junior Germans still believed that the alliance between the Soviets and the West would crumble before Nazism fell.

The Germans now prepared to defend the Citadel, the center of Berlin, with its massive government buildings. The 503rd SS Heavy Panzer Battalion's King Tiger tanks, some fresh from Berlin factories, dug in amid Walther Mohnke's SS Liebstandarte infantry. Other defenders included some Latvian SS. Krukenberg set up his division headquarters in a subway train at U-Bahn station Stadtmitte. The train was stuck due to the lack of electrical power and had no telephone.

Grand Admiral Dönitz's birthday present to the Führer had arrived in the form of a company of sailors and midshipmen, flown in earlier. Now they dug in around the Foreign Ministry, tearing up its gardens.

The German ammunition supply was now reduced to an improvised arsenal in the Reich Chancellery, mostly of Panzerfausts and weapons captured back in the glory days—French, Russian, Czech, Belgian, Yugoslav, even some British rifles and armored cars bagged at Dunkirk in 1940.

As the 12th and 9th Armies struggled to hook up and retreat to the Americans, the defenses of Berlin continued to crumble steadily. SS squads entered buildings flying white flags and shot down any men that could be found. On the other hand, General Werner Mummert, commander of the Muncheberg Panzer Division, ordered the SS death squads out of his division's area and threatened to shoot executioners on the spot.

Exhausted German troops, unable to line up at water pumps, drank water directly from canals and tossed civilians out of air raid shelters and bunkers. Many of the civilians so displaced wound up in U-Bahn and S-Bahn tunnels.

On the 28th, the 3rd Shock Army advanced from the east on the north side of the Anhalter Canal, moving into sight of the famous Victory Column in the Tiergarten. The German defenders were now holding a strip less than five kilometers in width and 15 in length. Hitler Youth defenders clung to the Havel bridges. Colonel Hans-Oscar Wohlermann, Weidling's artillery chief, stood in a gun platform atop the vast concrete flak tower at the Berlin Zoo. "One had a panoramic view of the burning, smoldering and smoking great city, a scene which again and again shook one to the core," he wrote.

Now came a new problem for the Soviets—their two armies would collide with each other in the Tiergarten. It was critical to avoid a friendly-fire incident. Stalin solved it by assigning the Reichstag and the Reich Chancellery to Zhukov's armies, much to Koniev's chagrin.

Back in the Führerbunker came the latest soap opera. American radio announced that Himmler was negotiating with the Swedes to save concentration camp prisoners and possibly to surrender the German forces in the West. Hitler blamed his mistress's brother-in-law, SS Brigadier Hermann Fegelein, and devoted much of the 28th to having him found, hauled to the bunker, court-martialed, and shot.

Late that same evening, Hitler summoned a local city council member, Walter Wagner, from his post as a Volkssturm

man, to conduct a wedding ceremony, uniting Hitler with Eva Braun. After the near midnight ceremony, Hitler dictated his lengthy last will and testament to his secretaries, blaming the Jews for the failure of his historic mission. The will made Dönitz Germany's Führer after Hitler's death and Goebbels the new chancellor. Goebbels wrote out his own will, saying he and his entire family would commit suicide out of loyalty to the Führer. Half an hour after leaving the bunker, while returning to his post, Wagner was killed by Soviet shellfire.

Meanwhile, the battle raged on upstairs, with the city turning into a scene of horror. As Soviet troops took over vast sections of Berlin, they broke into liquor stocks and raped any women at hand. Some women conceded themselves to Russian soldiers, hoping that by giving in to one man, he would protect them against other rapists. In areas still held by German troops, SS and Hitler Youth members would open fire on any house showing a white flag. Everywhere were the smells of decomposing corpses, charred flesh, and blasted buildings.

Now the 3rd Shock Army angled its drive on Moabit to seize the prison there and liberate the last few political prisoners. The Germans surrendered quickly, fearing retribution. Sappers searched through the prison for explosives and mines. From there, it was only 800 meters down to the Moltke Bridge over the Spree, and the 150th and 171st Rifle Divisions got the orders: seize the Reichstag and Reich Chancellery by May 1, communism's sacred day.

The attack went in on the afternoon of the 28th. The bridge was barricaded on both sides, mined, protected with barbed wire, and covered with machine guns and artillery. At 6 PM, the Germans blew up the bridge. The explosives failed. The bridge sagged, but was passable to infantry.

The Soviets stormed across, with artillery firing shells at the Germans at point-blank range. By midnight, as Hitler was marrying Eva Braun, the Soviets had a bridgehead across the Spree.

During the early hours of the 29th, the 150th Division stormed the Ministry of the Interior, known as "Himmler's House," battling the SS Reichsführer's personal escort battalion. The immense building was a tough fortress to storm, and the Soviets, for once, seemed lethargic in advance—nobody wanted to be the last man to die in the last battle.

"Sunday April 29," wrote Martin Bormann in his diary. "The second day which has started with a hurricane of fire." Everyone was waiting for Hitler to commit suicide.

Outside, the Soviets resumed their assault on the Citadel, bringing up heavy howitzers to blast holes in "Himmler's House" at close range, and doing so at Gestapo headquarters on Prinz Albrecht Strasse. German troops were told lies to keep them fighting—that the Führer was negotiating a cease-fire with the British and Americans and that Wenck's army was coming. Krukenberg also gained reinforcements—100 elderly police officials.

Chuikov's 8th Guards Army attacked northward across the Landwehr Canal into the Tiergarten. Some men swam the canal, while others used sewer entrances to outflank the defenders. They took the Potsdamer Bridge through a ruse, attaching oil soaked rags and smoke canisters to a T-34 tank. As it crossed the bridge, the Germans thought they had

**ABOVE: Fleeing the fighting in Berlin, German refugees and Allied soldiers freed from prisoner of war camps plod westward toward an uncertain future. Soviet tanks line the side of the road. OPPOSITE: A Soviet armored vehicle speeds past a building with the slogan "Berlin will remain German" scrawled on one of its exterior walls.**

hit it and ceased fire. By the time the Germans knew what was going on, the Soviets were on top of them.

The Germans were nearly at their last gasp. Weidling summoned his staff to discuss a breakout on the night of the 30th.

At dawn that day, the Soviets had begun a major attack on the Reichstag, the chosen symbol of Nazi Berlin. The 150th Rifle Division was tabbed for the job. On the first floor of "Himmler's House," a battalion commander, Captain Neustroev, tried to orient himself, saying to his regimental commander, "There's a gray building in the way."

"Neustroev," the regimental commander said, exasperated, "That building is the Reichstag!" Neustroev did not realize he was now only 400 meters from the primary Soviet objective of the entire war.

The German defenders of the Reichstag included the SS Leibstandarte, and they had turned the battered building into a fortress. Directly in front of it lay a tunnel that had collapsed from bombing and had been turned into an antitank ditch, a formidable water obstacle.

After breakfast, the first Soviet company charged out at 6 AM. They were immediately cut down by a "hurricane of fire from the enemy" from both the Reichstag and Kroll Opera House. The 207th Division stormed across the Moltke Bridge to attack the Opera House, and Soviet guns opened fire. More self-propelled guns and tanks clattered across the Moltke Bridge.

With heavy artillery and tank fire supporting them, the 150th Rifle Division reached the water-filled tunnel just after 11 AM. But when they tried to get over the ditch, they came under more heavy fire from Berlin Zoo flak bunkers and their heavy guns. The Soviets had the 171st Rifle Division clean out the buildings on the left along the Spree, while some 90 guns, including 203mm howitzers, blasted away at the Reichstag, which somehow survived all the shelling.

Soviet shells rained down on the government district, defended by about 10,000 men, including a large number of foreign SS. They were trapped, with Koniev's tanks to the south and Zhukov's men all around them, and fought with the courage of despair. Without much food, when someone brought in a frightened Ukrainian POW, the French SS grabbed his little canvas ration bag and devoured its contents.

As the battle raged into the afternoon, the long trail came to an end for Adolf Hitler. In an early morning briefing, Mohnke told the Führer that the situation was hopeless and the Citadel would fall in two days. With that information in hand, Hitler summoned his staff and gave orders for the disposal of his corpse and that of his wife. Sometime after 3 PM, he and Eva Braun shot themselves and took poison in the bunker. Their remains were carried up to the surface and cremated with little ceremony.

With that done, Goebbels summoned Weidling to the Chancellery to tell him to arrange an armistice—but not to tell anyone that Hitler was dead. "I was deeply shocked," Weidling wrote. "So this was the end."

Meanwhile, the battle went on. A Soviet NKVD (Intelligence Agency) team driving through the city found it could not work through the shelled streets and got lost. The secret policemen had to ask passing civilians the directions to the Citadel. The German women answered, "When will this nightmare end?" Women in apartments, fearing Soviet retribution, tore up photographs of husbands, brothers, or fiancés in military uniform, as well as the ubiquitous photographs of Hitler and the top Nazis.

At the Reichstag, the heavy guns thundered away, and Neustroev continued to attack. Everyone wanted to raise the Red flag over the Reichstag, and the battle was fiercely fought, going from room to room. The German defenders, armed with Panzerfausts, fired them from stone balconies over the Russians' heads. Casualties were terrible, but the Soviets, with their usual combination of grenades and submachine guns, fought their way in, gunning down sailors, SS, and Hitler Youth. The battle degenerated into a rugby match style of fighting, with loose scrums of men slugging it out in halls.

A Soviet group with a banner slipped past, struggling to race for the Reichstag's roof. They were pinned down by machine-gun fire and tried again, supposedly unfurling the flag from a Reichstag cupola at 10:50 PM. Even so, the fighting raged on for the battered building. Junior Sergeant S. Scherbina was named as the man who raised the Red flag over the Reichstag, but a number of Soviet soldiers did the same thing.

That night Berlin was lit only by the flames of burning buildings. A group of SS soldiers tried to hide in the Hotel Continental, but the women and children already there gave the foreign SS men hard looks. For once, fighting soldiers were pariahs. They were no longer defenders of the homeland, but a danger to civilians in hiding. When wounded men reached field hospitals, nurses confiscated weapons so that Soviets coming in right behind them would have no excuse to shoot up a hospital.

At 10 PM, General Krebs contacted General Chuikov to arrange a cease-fire. At 4 AM, Krebs was ushered into Chuikov's tactical headquarters, a semi-suburban house on the west side of Tempelhof.

"What I am about to say," Krebs began, "is absolutely secret. You are the first foreigner to know that on April 30, Adolf Hitler committed suicide."

"We know that," Chuikov replied in a straight lie, seeking to disconcert his opponent.

Krebs read out Hitler's political testament and Goebbels's request for "a satisfactory way out for the nations who have suffered most from the war."

Chuikov then rang Zhukov, who called Stalin, waking him up.

"Now he's had it," Stalin commented on hearing of Hitler's death. "Pity we couldn't take him alive. Where's Hitler's corpse?"

"According to General Krebs, his body was burned," came the reply.

"No negotiations except for unconditional capitulation, with either Krebs or any others of Hitler's lot. And don't ring me until the morning if there is nothing urgent. I want to have some rest before the parade," grumbled Stalin.

Zhukov had forgotten that the next day was May 1, and Moscow would stage a huge May Day parade.

Back in Berlin, Chuikov, joined by Zhukov's deputy, General Vasily D. Sokolovsky, tried to squeeze an unconditional surrender out of Krebs. But Krebs was wheedling, trying to get the Soviets to recognize the new government under Dönitz. Chuikov saw this as the Germans playing tricks to avoid the inevitable.

Sokolovsky rang Zhukov and said the Germans were being very tricky. "Krebs declares that he is not empowered to make decisions concerning unconditional surrender. According to him, only the new government headed by Dönitz can. I think we should send them to the devil's grandmother if they don't agree to unconditional surrender immediately."

"You're right," Zhukov answered. "Tell him that if Goebbels and Bormann do not agree to unconditional surrender, we'll blast Berlin into ruins." He set a deadline of 10:15 AM.

No answer was received. At 10:35 AM on May 1, the 1st Belorussian Front unleashed "a hurricane of fire" on what was left of the city center, breaking the uneasy truce and quiet.

As the battle resumed, Mohnke told Krukenberg that he was worried that Soviet troops might enter the U-Bahn tunnels and pop up behind the Reich Chancellery. To forestall that, he sent a group of Nordland sappers to blow up the S-Bahn tunnel under the Landwehr Canal. This explosion set off an incident that remains contentious to this day—a flood in the U-Bahn tunnels that killed anywhere between 50 and 15,000 Berliners and wounded soldiers in hiding. Most estimates are that 100 died, but its a certainty the flooding caused fear and consternation among already weary and shocked people. Some of the bodies that washed up and were buried in the old Jewish cemetery in the Gross Hamburger Strasse included a number of SS men.

The firing did not die down until late afternoon, when Germans still in the building's cellars asked to negotiate with a senior officer. Neustroev pulled on a colonel's sheepskin coat and went into the basement, and that did it. Some 300 ragged, dirty, unshaven Germans began to pile out of the cellar, hands in the air. Nearly 200 had been killed, and 500 lay wounded in the nearby dressing station.

Next up, the vast Zoo flak tower. The 1st Guards Tank Army and Chuikov's 8th Guards Tank Army clanked toward the tower, with the 79th Guards Rifle Division leading the way. The fortress was too tough to storm, so the Russians sent in German POWs with a pencil-written ultimatum, saying, "We propose that you surrender the fortress without further fighting. We guarantee that no troops, including SS and SA men, will be executed."

A POW returned with a note saying the bunker would surrender at midnight.

Other fortresses were still holding out—the Citadel of Spandau was one, surrounded by bridges over the Havel. Again the Russians sent in a delegation. After climbing a rope ladder, lengthy negotiations, threats, and cajoling, the SS defenders surrendered at 3 PM on the dot, yielding up the German Army's gas warfare center and its secrets of Tabun and other poison weapons, which Stalin very much wanted.

On May 1, the 9th Army made one final effort to break through Koniev's last barrier, where 12th Army had also managed to hold on to an escape hatch to the Elbe. The last four Panther tanks of the Kurmark Division turned up just in time to force the Soviets to retreat, and 25,000 men of the 9th Army (out of its original complement of 200,000), some near collapse, were able to cross the Elbe to American captivity, .

In Berlin, the fighting continued. Mohnke was down to his last Tiger tank. At the Führerbunker, where everyone was planning their escape, Goebbels's wife poisoned all six of her children. After that, Joseph and Magda Goebbels also shot themselves. Their remains were cremated on the spot.

At 9:30 that evening, Hamburg radio announced what had been kept secret for a day and a half, that Hitler was dead, having fallen fighting "at the head of his troops." Very few people in Berlin heard this news, as there was no electricity in the capital city.

Now the battle for Berlin degenerated into a fight to enable Martin Bormann and the other bunker inhabitants to attempt the great escape. Very few made it out. Most, including Mohnke, were caught by the Soviets, and Bormann appears to have been killed in a skirmish with Russian troops.

Zhukov, on hearing of breakout attempts, ordered a maximum alert. Even so, shortly before midnight, the remaining vehicles of the Muncheberg and 18th Panzergrenadier


**German panzergrenadiers lie where they fell in battle next to a disabled half-track of the 5th SS Panzer Division Wiking. The German forces defending Berlin were nearly annihilated during combat in the streets of the capital.**

Divisions began their breakout from the Tiergarten westward, heading through the Olympic Stadium and Spandau. They rolled over the Charlottenbrucke, the Havel bridge held by Hitler Youth detachments, in heavy rain and under heavy artillery fire, which killed many people, including Himmler's younger brother Ernst, a radio technician. The bridge massacre was horrific, but the Germans had enough troops to push the Soviets aside and break through. The Soviets continued to hammer at the breakout force, and only a few vehicles reached the Elbe and relative safety. Most of the rest were wiped out.

At 1 AM on May 2, staff officers woke Chuikov up to tell him that 56th Panzer Corps was again requesting a cease-fire. Weidling was told to come under a white flag to the Potsdamer bridge. He arrived there at 6 AM and was taken to Chuikov's headquarters to prepare an order to his men to capitulate.

In the Führerbunker, Krebs and another key Hitler satrap, General Wilhelm Burgdorf, committed suicide with their Luger pistols, sitting side by side. So did the commander of the Leibstandarte guard in the bunker, Captain Franz Schaedle. As the Soviet troops reached the Reich Chancellery, they found it a deserted wreck. Russian troops scrawled their names on the concrete walls.

An estimated 100,000 civilians perished in the battle, 20,000 of them to heart attacks, 6,000 in suicides. Rape estimates range anywhere from 20,000 to 100,000. Abortions, normally illegal in Germany, were allowed for months after the war, but there is no figure on how many were performed. The Soviets reported having smashed 90 divisions, taking 480,000 POWs, and capturing 1,500 tanks and self-propelled guns, 4,500 aircraft, and about 11,000 guns and mortars. The Soviets also reported at least 100,000 killed in the drive from the Oder to Berlin, 2,000 tanks lost, and 500 aircraft.

At the Zoo flak tower, the deadline to surrender had come and gone, but the Soviets still waited. Now that Weidling had made it official, the Zoo tower's defenders emerged from their lairs, as did thousands of Berliners, who had been hiding from the horrors.

With the battle over, the rape and looting died down. Soviet troops carried off everything they could, but the NKVD teams began to restore order among the troops, who turned to clearing streets, restoring sewer lines, and scrawling their names on the wrecked Reich Chancellery. In July they were joined by American, British, and French occupation forces, who took over their zones of Berlin, ending the Third Reich and beginning the Cold War.

Ilse Antz emerged two days after the surrender, on May 4, into a deathly quiet Berlin. "At first, unaccustomed to the brightness, I saw nothing but black circles before my eyes," she said later. "But then I looked around. The sun was shining, and spring had come. The trees were blooming; the air was soft. Even in this tortured and dying town nature was bringing back life. Up to now nothing had touched me; all emotions were dead. But as I looked over at the park, where spring had come, I could not control myself any longer. For the first time since it had all started, I cried." □

*Continued from page 17*

"Skipper, it really worked. I couldn't make any attack without seeing the nose of one of your airplanes pointed at me."

The first combat test of the tactic was during the Battle of Midway in June 1942, when a squadron of Zeros attacked Thach's flight of four Wildcats. Thach's wingman, Ensign R. Dibb, was the "bait" and when he was attacked, he turned toward Thach who, in turn, dove under Dibb and fired at the incoming Zero's underside until its engine was ablaze.

The maneuver soon found its way into the repertoire of U.S. Navy and Army Air Corps pilots. Marine Wildcat pilots flying out of Henderson Field on Guadalcanal also adopted the tactic. Celebrated Japanese ace Saburo Sakai described his reaction and that of his fellow pilots when they encountered the Guadalcanal Wildcats using it: "For the first time, Lt. Cmdr. Tadashi Nakajima encountered what was to become a famous double-team maneuver on the part of the enemy. Two Wildcats jumped on the commander's plane. He had no trouble in getting on the tail of an enemy fighter, but never had a chance to fire before the Grumman's teammate roared at him from the side. Nakajima was raging when he got back to Rabaul; he had been forced to dive and run for safety."

Some people look at the Wildcat and see more of a kitten; the barrel-shaped (some may say pudgy) short fuselage, the hand-cranked landing gear, and a comparatively slow speed. However, in the hands of a competent pilot, it could be an effective killing machine—a kitten with very sharp claws.

While many U.S. Navy and Marine Corps pilots became aces in the Wildcat—and they all deserve respect for their gallantry and service—the exploits of four earned them America's highest award for valor, the Medal of Honor (MOH). The experience of one is recounted here.

Being a one-man air force was a trait common to a number of pilots who received the MOH and Wildcat pilot James Elms Swett was one of them. His early interest in aviation resulted in a private pilot's license prior to joining the U.S.

**Marine Wildcat pilot James Swett, 22, became an ace on his first combat mission in 1943 and also received the Medal of Honor.**

Naval Reserve as a seaman second class in 1941. Once he was commissioned as an officer, he began flight training and was eventually assigned to VMF-221, flying missions in support of operations around Guadalcanal.

His first combat mission was as leader of a formation of four Wildcats on a combat air patrol over the Russell Islands northwest of Guadalcanal on April 7, 1943, in anticipation of a major air attack. The formation was scrambled as 150 Japanese aircraft were reported approaching Ironbottom Sound. Sighting a large formation of Aichi D3A "Val" dive bombers attacking Tulagi harbor, Swett's fight began.

Swett pounced on three Vals who were diving on the harbor and shot down two. As he was evading the fire of the third Val's rear gunner, his Wildcat's left wing was hit by friendly ground fire. He persevered and downed the third Val as he turned toward a second formation of six more Vals.

He repeatedly dove on the formation, downing one Val in each attack with short bursts of his machine guns. After downing four enemy planes, he began attacking a fifth when he discovered that his ammunition was exhausted. Wounded after being hit by the Vals, he ditched his damaged fighter off Florida Island and was rescued in Tulagi harbor. The 22-year-old Marine pilot had performed the extremely rare feat of becoming an ace on his first combat mission—and earning the Medal of Honor.

His Medal of Honor citation told the story of his heroics:

"In a daring flight to intercept a wave of 150 Japanese planes, 1st Lt. Swett unhesitatingly hurled his four-plane division into action against a formation of 15 enemy bombers and, during his dive, personally exploded three hostile planes in mid-air with accurate and deadly fire. Although separated from his division while clearing the heavy concentration of antiaircraft fire, he boldly attacked six enemy bombers, engaged the first four in turn, and unaided, shot them down in flames.

"Exhausting his ammunition as he closed the fifth Japanese bomber, he relentlessly drove his attack against terrific opposition which partially disabled his engine, shattered the windscreen and slashed his face. In spite of this, he brought his battered plane down with skillful precision in the water off Tulagi without further injury.

"The superb airmanship and tenacious fighting spirit which enabled 1st Lt. Swett to destroy eight enemy bombers in a single flight were in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service."

A final tribute to the ruggedness of the Wildcat came from Saburo Sakai, who recalled an encounter: "I had full confidence in my ability to destroy the Grumman and decided to finish off the enemy fighter with only my 7.7mm machine guns. I turned the 20mm cannon switch to the 'off' position, and closed in. For some strange reason, even after I had poured about 500 or 600 rounds of ammunition directly into the Grumman, the airplane did not fall, but kept on flying.

"I thought this very odd—it had never happened before—and closed the distance between the two airplanes until I could almost reach out and touch the Grumman. To my surprise, the Grumman's rudder and tail were torn to shreds, looking like an old torn piece of rag. With his plane in such condition, no wonder the pilot was unable to continue fighting! A Zero which had taken that many bullets would have been a ball of fire by now."

Tough and rugged, the Wildcat could give a punch as well as take one—the kitten had claws. □

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