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WWII QUARTERLY - SUMMER 2020 Volume 11, No. 4

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Cover: British Corporal M. Smith poses with a tommy gun in Italy. Smith was involved in the fighting near Monte Cassino. See story page 86. Photo courtesy of the Imperial War Museum.

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Commemorating the End of the World's Worst War

IT is an intriguing truism of history that those who start wars inevitably end up losing them. A few examples spring to mind: Napoleon vs. Russia; Germany in World War I; Japan vs. China; Italy vs. Ethiopia; Italy vs. Greece; Hitler's invasions of Europe, and the U.S.S.R.; the Arab nations vs. Israel in 1967; Saddam Hussein vs. Kuwait, etc.

There are exceptions: North Vietnam over France and the U.S., and Communist China over Nationalist China. (North Korea's unprovoked invasion of South Korea is still considered unresolved.)

But here we're talking about Japan's audacious decision to attack—to wake a sleeping giant and fill him with a terrible resolve, as Admiral Isoruku Yamamoto supposedly wrote in his diary—the United States and its naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.

Photographed at ground zero in Hiroshima after the atomic bombing, the remains of the Prefectural Industry Promotion Building, which was later preserved as a monument.

Japan's war with America began with a surprise aerial attack and ended with an even bigger aerial attack—two atomic bombs—one on Hiroshima and the other on Nagasaki. Ever since those two days in August 1945, the debate has raged on: Was the United States morally justified in using these terrible new weapons to end a war that had already claimed some 80 million lives worldwide?

Some people—especially those who weren't around during the war—have accused the U.S. of committing a war crime by dropping the bombs on two nearly defenseless cities, killing more than 226,000 people (mostly civilians), and at a time when Japan was already on the brink of defeat.

Many of those who were alive 75 years ago (especially the veterans) say that the war-weary U.S. was right to do what it did. Estimates of the number of dead and wounded Americans by the planners of Operation Downfall, the full-scale invasion of the Japanese Home Islands, were pegged at least half a million. The cost to the Japanese would be even greater, the planners estimated.

Before the bombings, General George C. Marshall, the Army Chief of Staff, gave his opinion to General Douglas MacArthur about the necessity of invading Japan: "General Marshall [told me] that it was his personal view that the operation against Kyushu was the only course to pursue. He felt that air power alone was not sufficient to put the Japanese out of the war.

"Against the Japanese, scattered throughout mountainous country, the problem would be much more difficult than it had been in Germany. [Marshall] felt that this plan offered the only way the Japanese could be forced into a feeling of utter helplessness."

It is, of course, impossible to say with certainty what the casualties would have been had Downfall proceeded.

Today, 75 years later, we can mourn the dead. And still celebrate the victory that brought an end the costliest, most destructive war of all time.

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One double-blind, placebo-controlled study (the "gold-standard" of research) involved a group of 70-year-old-men.

They didn't exercise. They didn't eat healthy. And researchers reported their "nitric oxide availability was almost totally compromised," resulting in blood flow less than HALF of a man in peak sexual health.

But only five minutes after the first dose their blood flow increased 275%, back to levels of a perfectly healthy 31-year-old man! "It's amazing," remarks nitric oxide expert Dr. Al Sears. "That's like giving 70-year-old men the sexual power of 30-year-olds."

WHY SO MUCH EXCITEMENT?

Despite the billions men spend annually on older nitric oxide therapies, there's one well-known problem with them.

They don't always work.

Dr. Joseph Loscalzo explains why. He's studied nitric oxide for over 43 years. He is the physician-in-chief at Brigham and Women's Hospital. He says a "deficiency of bioactive nitric oxide… leads to impaired endothelium-dependent vasorelaxation."

In plain English, these older products may increase levels of nitric oxide. But that's only half the battle. If it's not bioactively available then your body can't absorb it to produce an erection.

Experts simply call it the nitric oxide "glitch." And until now, there's never been a solution.

NEXT GENERATION NITRIC OXIDE FORMULA FLYING OFF SHELVES

Upon further research, America's No. 1 men's health expert Dr. Al Sears discovered certain nutrients fix this "glitch" resulting in 275% better blood flow.

He's combined those nutrients with proven nitric oxide boosters in a new formula called *Primal Max Red*. In clinical trials, 5,000 mg is required for satisfying sexual performance. *Primal Max Red* contains a bigger, 9,000 mg per serving dose. It's become so popular, he's having trouble keeping it in stock.

Dr. Sears is the author of more than 500 scientific papers. Thousands of people listened to him speak at the recent Palm Beach Health & Wellness Festival featuring Dr. Oz. NFL Hall of Fame quarterback Joe Namath recently visited his clinic, the **Sears Institute for Anti-Aging Medicine.**

Primal Max Red has only been available for a few months — but everyone who takes it reports a big difference. *"I have the energy to have sex three times in one day, WOW! That has not happened in years. Oh, by the way I am 62,"* says Jonathan K. from Birmingham, AL.

HOW IT WORKS

Loss of erection power starts with your blood vessels. Specifically, the inside layer called the endothelium where nitric oxide is made.

The problem is various factors THICKEN your blood vessels as you age. This blocks availability causing the nitric oxide "glitch." The result is difficulty in getting and sustaining a healthy erection.

How bad is the problem?

Researcher shows the typical 40-year-old man absorbs 50% less nitric oxide. At 50, that drops to 25%. And once you pass 60 just a measly 15% gets through.

To make matters worse, nitric oxide levels start declining in your 30's. And by 70, nitric oxide production is down an alarming 75%.

Primal Max Red is the first formula to tackle both problems. Combining powerful nitric oxide boosters and a proven delivery mechanism that defeats the nitric oxide "glitch" resulting in 275% better blood flow and stronger erections. There's not enough space here to fully explain how it works, so Dr. Sears will send anyone who orders *Primal Max Red* a free special report that explains everything.

MORE CLINICAL RESULTS

Nutrients in *Primal Max Red* have logged impressive results.

In a *Journal of Applied Physiology* study, one resulted in a 30 times MORE nitric oxide. And these increased levels lasted up to 12 hours.

"I measured my nitric oxide levels, you can buy a test kit from Amazon," reports 48-year-old Jeff O. "Monday night I showed depleted."

A new discovery that increases nitric oxide availability was recently proven in a clinical trial to boost blood flow 275% resulting in even quicker, stronger and longer-lasting erections.

Then he used ingredients in *Primal Max Red* and, "The results were off the charts. I first woke around 3 a.m. on Tuesday with a throbbing boner. My nitric oxide levels measured at the top end of the range."

FREE BONUS TESTOSTERONE BOOSTER

Every order also gets Dr. Sears testosterone boosting formula *Primal Max Black* for free.

"If you want passionate 'rip your clothes off' sex you had in your younger days, you need nitric oxide to get your erection going. And testosterone for energy and drive," says Dr. Sears. "You get both with *Primal Max Red* and *Primal Max Black*."

HOW TO GET PRIMAL MAX

To secure free bottles of *Primal Max Black* and get the hot, new *Primal Max Red* formula, buyers should contact the Sears Health Hotline at 1-800-236-3049. "It's not available in drug stores yet," says Dr. Sears. "The Hotline allows us to ship directly to the customer."

Dr. Sears feels so strongly about Primal Max, all orders are backed by a 100% money-back guarantee. "Just send me back the bottle and any unused product within 90 days from purchase date, and I'll send you all your money back," he says.

Call 1-800-236-3049 to secure your limited supply of *Primal Max Red* and free bottles of *Primal Max Black*. You don't need a prescription, so call now to qualify for a significant discount. Use Promo Code WWQ0720PMAX when you call in. Lines are frequently busy, but all calls will be answered.

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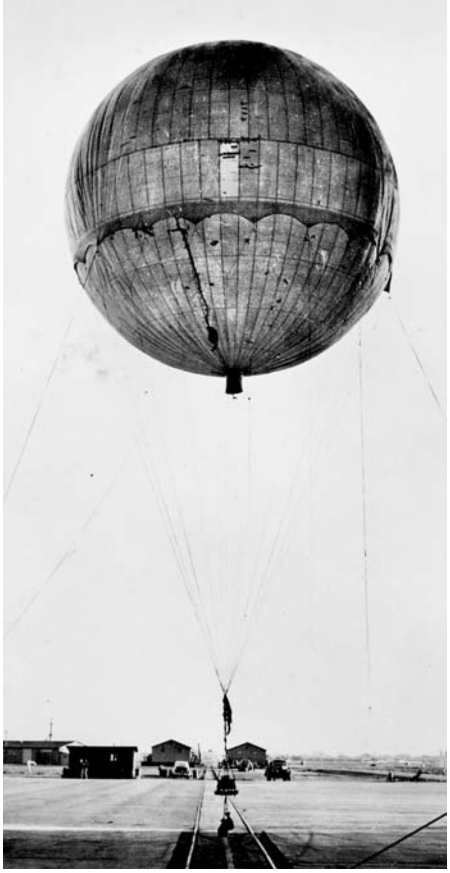
Japan retaliated for the Doolittle Raid by sending intercontinental balloon bombs to attack the U.S., Canada, and Mexico.



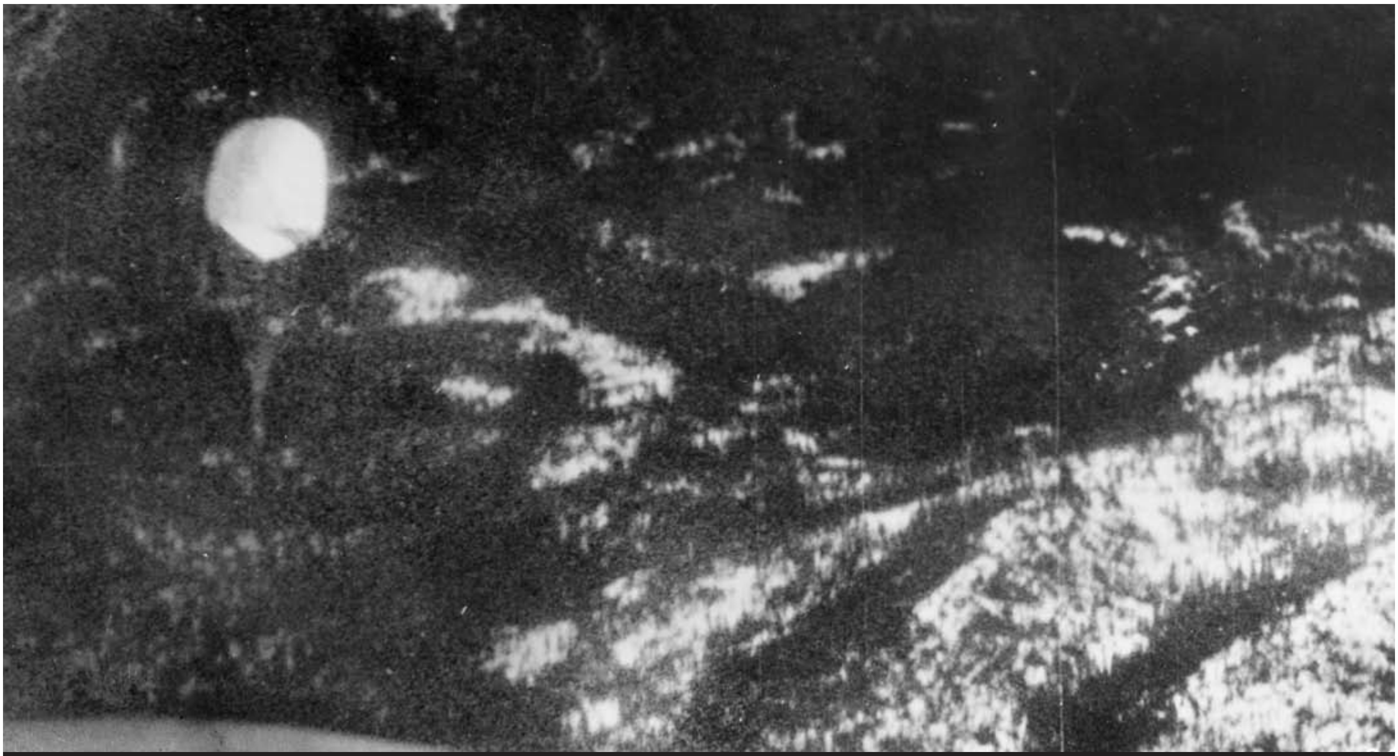
By 1944, the Japanese still had no long-range bombers to match the Boeing B-29 Superfortress. And a great many of Dai Nippon's warplanes and aircraft carriers were lying at the bottom of the Pacific Ocean. The few submarines that were still operating had long since been scared away from the West Coast of the United States.

Earlier, the Japanese had tried a few conventional attacks using long-range I-class submarines, but without much success. On the night of February 21, 1942, the *I-17* shelled the California coast at Santa Barbara, where the Ellwood Oil facility stood. At least a dozen shells were fired from the sub's 5.5-inch deck gun, damaging a storage tank and destroying a derrick and pump house. Although damage was minimal, the lone raider struck fear in the hearts of area residents and authorities, who thought it was the prelude to an invasion.

So panicky were the residents of Los Angeles that on the night of February 23-24, people claimed to have seen enemy planes over the city (it was actually just a weather balloon). The coastal defense batteries in the area began blasting the skies, but no enemy planes were within thousands of miles of the city.

The Japanese continued their submarine attacks, targeting merchant ships along America's West Coast, but with little effect. In June 1942, two I-class subs prowled off the Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia coasts. On the 20th, the *I-26* shelled the Estevan Point lighthouse on Canada's Vancouver Island, and the *I-25* shelled and tor-

National Archives



ABOVE: Photo taken by an American reconnaissance plane shows a Japan-launched balloon bomb floating over forested terrain in the Pacific Northwest. Many of these weapons were tracked by American and Canadian fighter aircraft. TOP: A captured Japanese Fu-Go bomb photographed during post-war testing to evaluate its potential desctructive capabilities.

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Throughout the ages, there have been many important advances in mobility. Canes, walkers, rollators, and scooters were created to help people with mobility issues get around and retain their independence. Lately, however, there haven't been any new improvements to these existing products or developments in this field. Until now. Recently, an innovative design engineer who's developed one of the world's most popular products created a completely new breakthrough... a personal electric vehicle. It's called the ***Zinger***, and there is nothing out there quite like it.

> ***"I can now go places and do things that I wasn't able to go or do before. It has given me a new lease on life and I am so happy I found it!"***
>
> ***–Dana S., Texas***

The first thing you'll notice about the ***Zinger*** is its unique look. It doesn't look like a scooter. Its sleek, lightweight yet durable frame is made with aircraft grade aluminum. It weighs only 47.2 lbs but can handle a passenger that's up to 275 lbs! It features one-touch folding and unfolding– when folded it can be wheeled around like a suitcase and fits easily into a backseat or trunk. Then, there are the steering levers. They enable the ***Zinger*** to move forward, backward, turn on a dime and even pull right up to a table or desk. With its compact yet powerful motor it can go up to 6 miles an hour and its rechargeable battery can go up to 8 miles on a single charge. With its low center of gravity and inflatable tires it can handle rugged terrain and is virtually tip-proof. Think about it, you can take your ***Zinger*** almost anywhere, so you don't have to let mobility issues rule your life.

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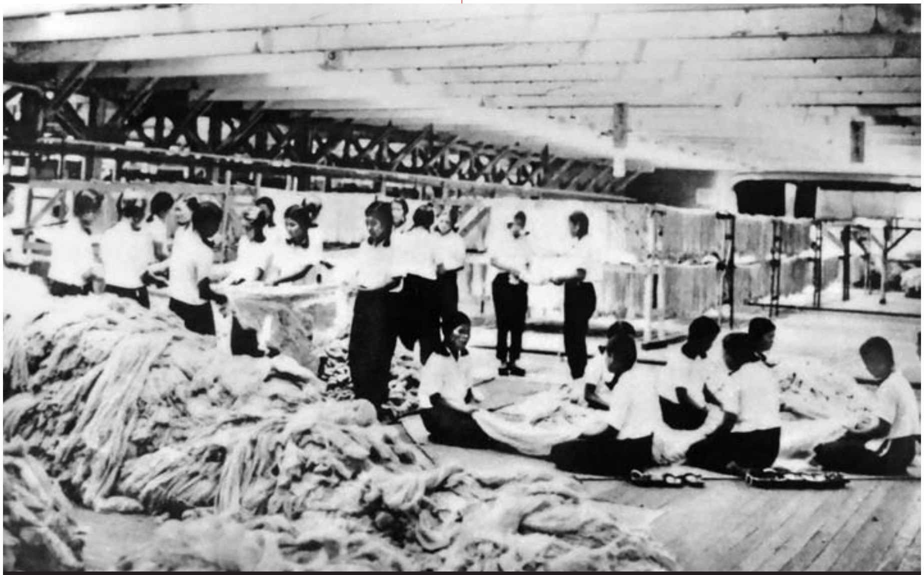

ABOVE: Due to Japan's shortage of rubber, Japanese schoolgirls assemble sheets of paper made from the kozo bush that were used to contruct the balloons. BELOW: Japanese schoolgirls push one of the giant balloons across a factory floor during final inspection.

pedoed—but did not sink—a freighter off Cape Flattery, Washington. On September 9, a small plane catapulted from the deck of the *I-25* and dropped an incendiary bomb in the thick forest of southern Oregon in hopes of starting a conflagration. All the bomb did was create a crater one foot deep and three feet in diameter.

The next night, the *I-25* came in close to Fort Stevens, near Astoria, Oregon, at the mouth of the Columbia River. There, it began shelling the fort but did little damage; one baseball backstop on post was the sole casualty. The fort's commander had his gunners withhold fire so as not to give their positions away.

As one historian put it, "It was the only hostile shelling of a military base on the U.S. mainland during World War II and the first since the War of 1812."

Japan's leaders were in a quandary. What could they do in order to strike back at the American homeland? The Doolittle Raid on Tokyo and other Japanese cities had taken place on April 18, 1942, prompting the Japanese to begin investigating novel ways they could retaliate.

Eventually someone came up with the idea of attaching bombs to balloons and allowing the recently discovered jet stream to carry them across the Pacific where they would explode over the United States.

It was an ingenious idea, but many engineering obstacles had to be overcome. Among them were the types of materials needed to make such devices. The first balloon bag was made from rubberized silk, but due to wartime shortages of rubber, this was replaced by paper made from the fibers of the kozo bush, a member of the mulberry tree family.

These fibers were glued together with potato flour that made for a tough, canvas-like material. Schoolgirls were drafted to construct the balloons in seven factories (usually in theaters or large arenas) around Tokyo. Three industrial firms were contracted for the project: the Mitsubishi Saishi Paper Factory, Nippon Kakokin Company, and the Kokuka Rubber Company.

When inflated with hydrogen, the balloons grew to 33 feet in diameter. Hanging below the balloon from 19 50-foot-long shroud lines was an aluminum ring, or "chandelier," to which was attached a control and ballast system consisting of 32 sandbags, as well as a payload: either a 32-pound anti-personnel device or two 24-pound thermite incendiary bombs.

The main problem was how to keep such a heavy balloon aloft for at least 70 hours over 6,000 miles of ocean. Scientists decided to employ an altimeter that would automatically respond to changes in air pressure.

A gas-discharge valve and ballast-release system were also integrated to maintain altitude during the long voyage. As hydrogen was depleted, the balloons would lose altitude, so the devices were rigged with barometers and timers to drop sandbags as necessary to keep the balloons aloft at 30,000 feet, within the flow of the jet stream.

The goal was to produce 10,000 balloon bombs, known as Fu-Go—or "wind-ship weapon"—that would be released, carried across the Pacific, and dropped into the United States with the hope of triggering massive forest fires and even, if they got lucky, starting fires in towns and cities, causing massive panic. The program was put into operation in time to catch the strong winter winds of 1944-1945.

Tom Crouch, chairman of the Smithsonian Institution's Department of Aeronautics in Washington, D.C., said, "[The

Japanese] wanted to set the Northwest on fire. It was a desperation move. They wanted to strike back at us for our aerial bombing raids."

Eventually about 9,000 balloons would be launched by personnel of the Special Balloon Regiment from three sites on the lower half of the main home island of Honshu, some 5,000 miles from the California coast. If the weather was good and the winds favorable, 200 to 300 balloons could be launched each day. The first Fu-Go balloon launch took place in November 1944, and the devices took three or four days to make the trans-Pacific flight.

The majority of the balloons, however, would malfunction and land harmlessly in the ocean. On November 4, 1944, a U.S. Navy patrol boat spotted a mysterious object floating on the sea 66 miles southwest of San Pedro, California. When sailors hauled the object on board, they didn't immediately recognize it as a weapon, despite the rising sun painted on the bag and Japanese markings elsewhere.

After the San Pedro discovery, balloon bombs began turning up in many places. On December 6, 1944, an explosion was heard near Thermopolis, Wyoming, and a bomb crater was later discovered. On December 11, an intact Fu-Go balloon was found near Kalispell, Montana. On the last day of the year, another balloon was discovered near Estacada, Oregon.

California was the landing place for at least a dozen balloon bombs. A 1994 *Los Angeles Times* story said that a "Fu-Go balloon bomb created a crater in the dry bed of the Santa Clara River near Saticoy on January 15, 1945. Two days later, an entire balloon was found in Moorpark, containing unexploded incendiary bombs but missing the 33-pound anti-personnel bomb carried by the balloons. Remnants of a third balloon bomb were found February 21 in Oxnard."

On January 4, 1945, the Office of Censorship requested that publishers and radio broadcasters say nothing about the balloon incidents, hoping that the lack of news would cause the enemy to give up the Fu-Go campaign. As one historian wrote, "This voluntary censorship was adhered to from coast to coast, a remarkable self-

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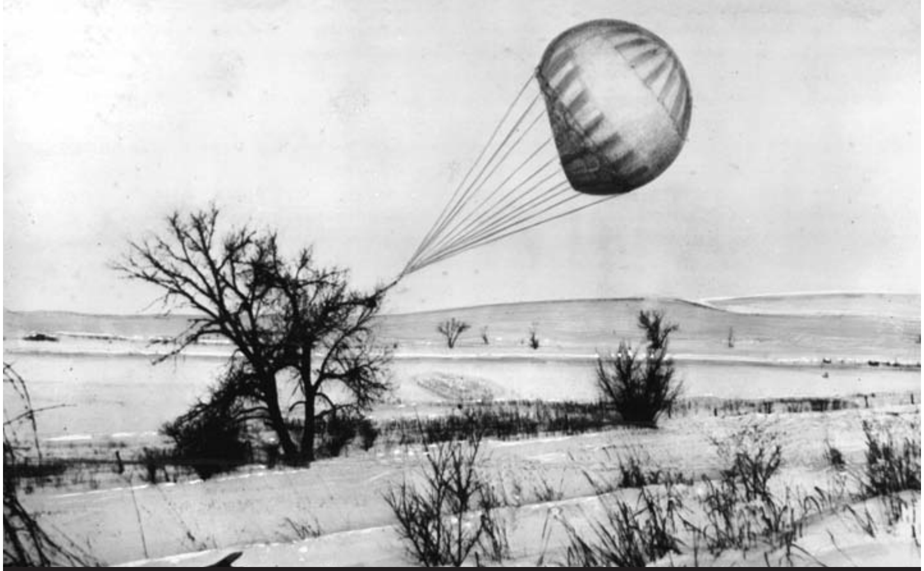
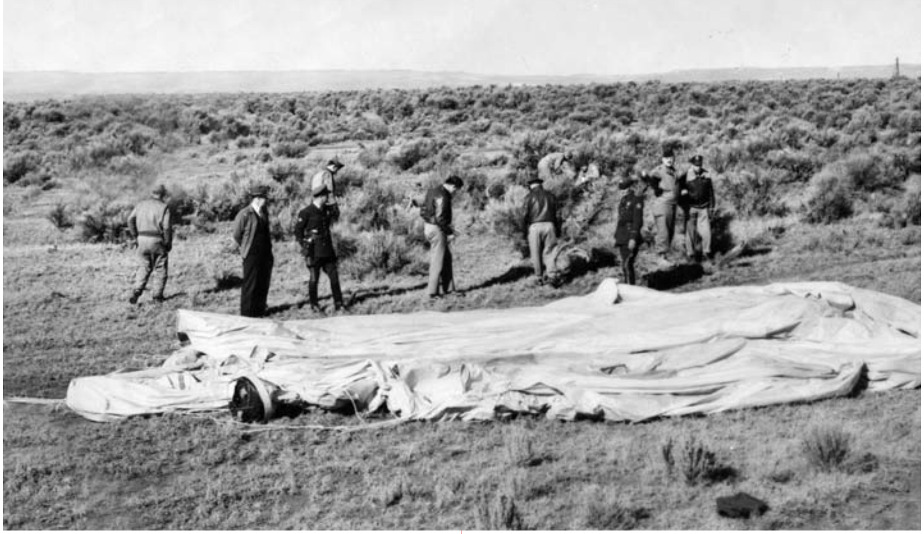


ABOVE: A Fu-Go bomb snagged on a tree in Kansas, February 23, 1945. Approximately 9,000 balloons were launched, but only about 900 made it across the Pacific; several landed in the Midwest. BELOW: Looking like a beached whale, a Fu-Go weapon lies deflated in an Oregon field, February 1945. The vast percentage of balloon bombs caused little or no damage and a total news blackout made the Japanese think the weapon was a failure.



restraint in a free-press-conscious country."

Only about 10 percent of the 9,000 balloon bombs released successfully reached North America. Where they might land no one could say—or control. Some landed on the Aleutian island of Attu, while others dropped into northern Mexico. Canada also saw its share of the uninvited visitors.

On January 12, 1945, a 15-year-old boy in rural Milton, Saskatchewan, found an odd-looking object. He called his father and uncle over to check it out. They poked and prodded it, even kicked it. Luckily, it did not explode and was turned over to the authorities for safe disposal.

In January 1945, a balloon bomb exploded near Medford, Oregon, denting the ground with a shallow crater and shooting flames 20 feet into the air.

It wasn't just the West Coast that was experiencing the attacks; twenty-six states would report balloons making landfall. In February 1945, a Fu-Go was found at Bigelow, Kansas. That same month, a balloon came down in a pasture near the small town of Laurens, north of Des Moines, Iowa. The farmer who found it tied it to the bumper of his car and dragged it into town, where curious locals cut off pieces as souvenirs. Seven balloons were reported to have come down in Nebraska, including one that exploded in Omaha on April 18, 1945, but caused no damage.

The balloon that is recorded to have travelled the farthest came to earth near Detroit, Michigan, but, like most of the others, did no damage. Another landed at Dorr, Michigan, a small town south of Grand Rapids. On February 23, 1945, three young boys—Larry Bailey and Ken and Robert Fein—saw something strange floating down from the sky. When it landed in a farm field, they raced over to see what it was.

Having no idea, they tried dragging it home but it was much too heavy. Along came neighbor Joe Wolf in his pickup truck. Wolf immediately sensed something was wrong and called the sheriff, who looked at it and then called the FBI, who took it away.

In March 1945 two balloon bombs came down in South Hill, Washington, near Tacoma. The first one landed on March 1 in a tree near today's Pope Elementary School. The farmer who found it cut the balloon into strips and gave them to his children for keepsakes.

A second Fu-Go bomb landed in South Hill, Washington, on March 5 and exploded just south of the present-day intersection of 94th Avenue and 128th Street, near the current location of the Mormon Church and Rogers High School, causing no injuries or damage. Fragments of the bomb were retrieved by Army personnel from Fort Lewis, who came to secure the area.

On March 10, 1945, the Fu-Go campaign scored a "near success." A power line at the top-secret atomic bomb production plant at Hanford, Washington, 210 miles southeast of Seattle, was struck by a Fu-Go bomb. The balloon destroyed a power line that supplied electricity to the building containing the reactor that was producing plutonium destined for the Nagasaki atomic bomb. The reactor was briefly shut down, but backup generators came online and restored power.

Thirteen days later, Desdemona, Texas, in rural Brown County, was the scene of another balloon discovery. Fourteen-year-old C.M. "Pug" Guthery was getting off his school bus when he saw a large object descending to earth. Chasing it for almost two miles, he finally caught up with it—along with several classmates.

Repelled by the contraption's foul, creosote smell, Pug stood back while he watched the others vandalize it and remove pieces. The next day government officials arrived to look it over. They then went to the school to request that the students who took "souvenirs" return them. "The pieces were needed to reconstruct it," Guthery said.

The next day, the rural town of Woodson, 60 miles northwest of Desdemona, was also "bombed" by a Fu-Go balloon. Ivan Miller, a cowboy on a ranch, was watching his cattle when he found a strange object in a field; the deflated bag had a large rising sun painted on its top. Within hours, school children arrived to gawk at the unidentified object and remove pieces as souvenirs. And, as at Desdemona, government officials showed up at school and requested the pieces be returned.

On March 19, 1945, the Swets family, farmers in Timnath, Colorado, 57 miles north of Denver, found themselves under attack by a Fu-Go bomb. Eight-year-old Jack Swets was in the corral near the family home when he heard a loud buzzing noise, followed by a ball of fire that hit close to where he stood, shooting flames 10 or 15 feet high into the air and damaging the family tractor.

He ran into the house to tell his father, John, what he had seen. John Swets then called the sheriff, who called in the FBI and the Army. A 2014 newspaper article said, "The Swets family was warned not to discuss anything about the incident, and newspaper reporters agreed not to run the story. One radio reporter was cut off in mid-sentence when he tried to broadcast from the farm.

"After the war ended, John Swets discovered a second bomb buried deep in a field on his farm, unearthed as he was plowing. Luckily, this bomb had exploded underground."

The military had no idea from where these devices were coming, but quickly instituted air defense plans. Despite hundreds of planes on the lookout for balloons, only two balloons were ever shot down

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over continental North America; several were shot down over the Aleutian Islands.

To determine the location of the balloon launch sites, sand used as ballast was gathered from the downed balloons and analyzed by the U.S. Geological Survey. According to Dr. Clarence S. Ross, the sand in one sample was determined to be beach sand that came from the vicinity of Shiogama on the east coast of Honshu.

Other samples, Ross said, were likely to have come from Ichinomiya, about 40 miles southeast of Tokyo. However, before air raids against the probable launch sites could be mounted, the program came to an abrupt and unexpected end.

The termination of the Fu-Go campaign was not the result of military action but rather of censorship and silence. In an age when the U.S. government maintained tight control of war news, information regarding Fu-Go balloon activity in the U.S. was kept under wraps, giving the Japanese no indication that any of their balloons were hitting United States territory.

Operating with little hard information to go on, the Japanese claimed in propaganda radio broadcasts that the Fu-Go program was wildly successful—that the devices had started major fires in the U.S. and killed or injured 500 Americans. The broadcasts even fantastically threatened that soon millions of balloon-borne Japanese soldiers would invade the United States.

Realizing that the enemy was probably waiting to hear about the effects of the Fu-Go campaign, American officials hoped that their imposition of a total news blackout surrounding the balloon bombardment would cause the Japanese to stop releasing them.

The strategy apparently worked, because the last balloon launch took place on April 20, 1945.

But there was still time for one more tragedy.

The only known case of a Fu-Go balloon causing fatalities occurred on May 5, 1945, near the small lumber-milling community of Bly, Oregon. The Reverend Archie and Elsye Mitchell had taken a group of children on a Sunday school picnic to Gearhart Mountain, where the chil-

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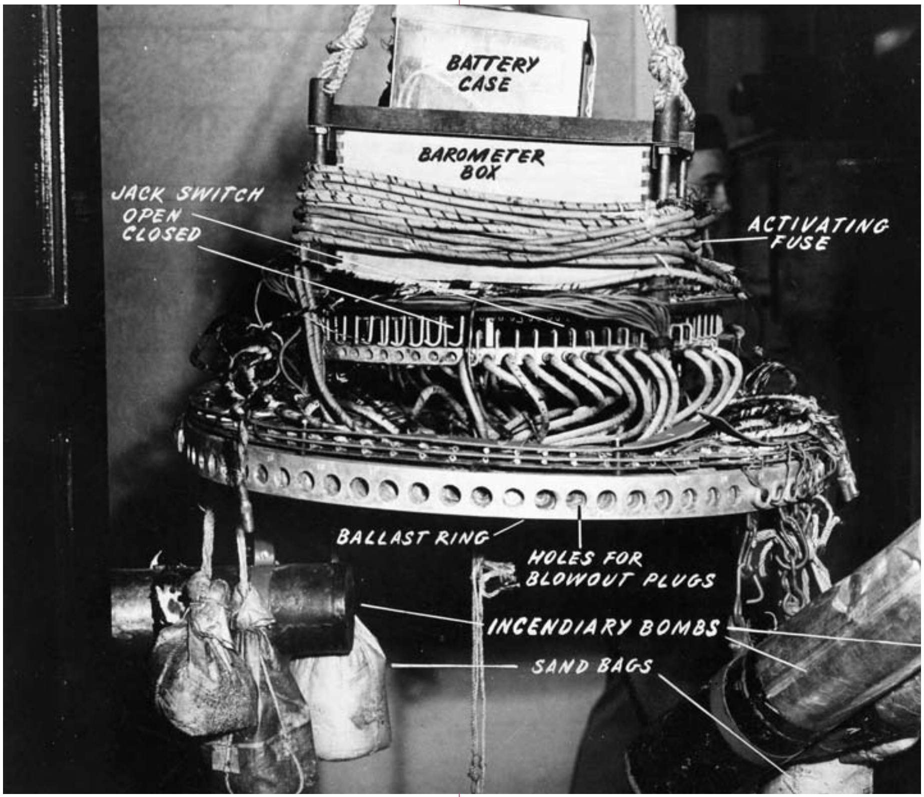

ABOVE: The automatic altitude control device allowed the balloon to travel up to 30,000 feet during the three-to-four-day trip across the Pacific. LEFT: Wedding photo of Reverend Archie Mitchell and his wife, Elsye. She and five children on a church outing in Bly, Oregon, were killed by a Fu-Go bomb on May 5, 1945.

dren found an object amongst the trees. Without knowing what it was, the children began playing with it. Reverend Mitchell recalled, "I hurriedly called a warning to them, but it was too late. Just then there was a big explosion. I ran up—and they were all lying there, dead."

Killed were Mitchell's pregnant wife Elsye, 26, along with Sherman Shoemaker, 11, Eddie Engen, 13, Jay Gifford, 13, Joan Patzke, 13, and Dick Patzke, 14. They were the only civilians to die by enemy weapons on the United States mainland during World War II.

Decades after the war, Fu-Go balloons were still being found. In 1992, a balloon bomb was recovered in Jackson County, Oregon, about 100 miles west of Bly. And in 2014, loggers discovered an unexploded balloon bomb in Lumby, British Columbia, 200 miles northeast of Vancouver. A Royal Canadian Navy bomb-disposal team safely detonated it.

Bert Webber, an Oregon-based historian, noted, "There's evidence indicating that [the Japanese] were ready to launch even larger balloons with larger bomb loads." Attaching chemical and biological weapons to the balloons was also considered.

A report on the Fu-Go campaign by Robert C. Mikesh in the 1972 *Smithsonian Annals of Flight* concluded, "The greatest weakness of the free balloon as a military weapon is that it cannot be controlled. The balloon campaign was an interesting experiment, but it was a military failure." ☐

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King Company at BLOODY LINDERN

A .30-caliber machine-gun crew from the 84th Infantry Division set up their weapon on a ridge during fighting in Germany in November 1944. During Operation Clipper, the 84th "Railsplitters" Division was loaned to the British Second Army's XXX Corps for the purpose of taking Geilenkirchen, near Aachen. Nearby Lindern would be a tough test for the 84th Division.

National Archives

In their first combat experience, a handful of American soldiers accomplished its objective and held against powerful German counter-attacks.

BY FRANK CHADWICK

IN November 1944, an American infantry division underwent its baptism of fire in the worst conditions imaginable and acquitted itself with honor beyond anyone's expectation. The final outcome of the campaign, however, was determined by the heroic action of only 100 men who found themselves in a hopeless situation and simply would not give up.

The men of the 84th Division—the Railsplitters—were, to use the GIs' own language, "green as grass," fresh off the boat from the States, and they were not going to a quiet sector to get combat experience on the cheap. Their first combat mission was to assault and reduce the Geilenkirchen Salient, a chunk of the German Siegfried Line that featured dragon's teeth, minefields, and layer after layer of concrete pillboxes surrounded by trenches, foxholes, and barbed wire, which Lt. Gen. Brian Horrocks, commander of British XXX Corps, described as the most formidable fortifications on the entire German front.

The area around Geilenkirchen, the flood plain of the Wurm and Roer Rivers, was depressingly drab, worn, and ugly. Nondescript shabby little villages and gray industrial towns dotted a landscape unbroken by any terrain features likely to catch the eye. There were a few scattered woods and orchards, but the ground was mostly cabbage and sugar beet fields now turned to sticky brown mud by the autumn rains.

The flood plain boasted no major hills or ridges, but a series of rises on the south bank of the Wurm gradually joined to form a low plateau farther to the northeast. The low hills and rises were not obstacles to movement but did provide excellent observation posts for German artillery.

The 84th Division would not be going into action under U.S. command. Its first offensive would be fought under British XXX Corps. Geilenkirchen was at the far northern end of the U.S. 9th Army's area of responsibility and the far southern end of the British 2nd Army's. The Wurm River formed the rough boundary line between U.S. General Omar Bradley's 12th Army Group and British Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery's 21st. Despite that, cooperation between General William Simpson of the 9th Army and Horrocks of XXX Corps was good. Geilenkirchen needed taking, but XXX Corps did not have the strength on the ground to take it. So Simpson loaned Horrocks a U.S. division to get the job done. The operation would be called Clipper.

The plan for Operation Clipper was simple. On November 18, the British 43rd Wessex Division would drive in the northern side of the salient, and the U.S. 334th Infantry Regiment, 84th Division would drive in the south, leaving Geilenkirchen exposed and cut off. The 333rd Infantry would then hit Geilenkirchen itself the next day.

The 334th attacked on the morning of the 18th with two battalions up, the key attack being by the 1st Battalion on the right through a heavily mined orchard and entrenched rail embankment, then two clusters of concrete pillboxes, and finally across 2,000 yards of open fields to seize the fortified village of Prummern. The attack bogged down almost at once under artillery and small arms fire at the rail embankment, but the battalion commander, Lt. Col. Lloyd H. Gomes, moved up and led the forward rifle companies and platoons himself.

This got the attack moving again, and it rolled forward, overwhelming all German resistance. The battalion paused to reorganize before attacking Prummern and then swept in and cleared the village house by house. The regiment's 2nd Battalion made similar progress on its left, but against lighter resistance.

Casualties in the two attacking battalions were moderate, 10 killed and 180 wounded, but by the end of the day the 334th had destroyed a battalion of the defending 183rd Volksgrenadier Division, inflicting 450 casualties, of which 330 were prisoners. Among the dazed German POWs was a veteran officer, stunned by what had happened. "We knew we were facing new troops and expected it to be easy," he said, "but these men fight better than any troops I saw in Africa, Russia and France."

The next day, the 333rd attacked and cleared Geilenkirchen with light casualties, and another battalion of the 183rd Volksgrenadiers was kaput. In the early morning hours of the same day, however, a new enemy appeared near Prummern—the veteran 9th Panzer Division. On the 19th it launched a counterattack, with the 1st Battalion, 10th Panzergrenadier Regiment and six tanks of the 2nd Battalion, 33rd Panzer Regiment, and retook much of the town.

The 1st Battalion, 333rd Infantry still held the surrounding orchards, and regimental committed its reserve battalion along with the M4 Sherman tanks of the attached British Sherwood Rangers Yeomanry. There followed several days of tough back-and-forth fighting for Prummern and the wooded hill behind it—dubbed Mahogany Hill—but Prummern was secure by the 20th and Mahogany Hill by the 22nd.

The division pressed forward to the northeast, closing on the villages of Muellendorf and Beeck, but the advance slowed to a crawl, in part because the Germans threw in more troops to halt the division. Both the 15th Panzergrenadier Division and elite 10th SS Panzer Division "Frundsberg," fresh from its fight at Arnhem during Operation Market-Garden, were committed to stop the Railsplitters and absorbed the remnants of the 183rd Volksgrenadier Division.

The SS division, which began entering the lines on November 23, relieved the battered 9th Panzer Division, which was pulled back to refit for the upcoming Ardennes Offensive. Neither German division was up to full strength, but they were on the defensive, held excellent positions, and had strong cadres of seasoned veterans.

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ABOVE: A Sturmgeschutz III self-propelled assault gun, well-camouflaged from aerial attack, prowls the ruins of Geilenkirchen. OPPOSITE: A British-operated M4 Sherman tank, accompanied by a group of American infantrymen, unleashes a torrent of machine-gun fire to suppress a German sniper's nest inside a building in Geilenkirchen.

National Archives

And then there was the mud.

The floodplains of the Wurm and Roer were usually wet this time of year, but in November 1944 the region received over twice as much rain as the average, and it became a vast sea of mud. Foxholes dug in the low-lying beet fields became waterlogged, and soldiers slept on the ground beside them instead of in the water. Some foxholes filled up to the very top, and to keep under cover when shells hit nearby, riflemen had to hold their breath and duck their heads under water.

Weapons became coated with mud and jammed. Trench foot reached epidemic proportions. Tracked vehicles could not leave the roads, wheeled vehicles often could not move even on the roads. Hot chow was a distant memory. By November 28, the advance ground to a halt. It was time to try something different.

All of the advances of the 84th Division to date had been made by only two of its three infantry regiments. The third regiment, the 335th, had been detached to support another U.S. division farther south. Now it rejoined the Railsplitters and was available to get things moving again.

The main front had stalled in the face of strong German positions in Muellendorf and Beeck, and on Schlachen Hill. In addition, there was a fortified backstop position on Toad Hill and in the village of Lindern—held by the 1st Battalion, 21st SS Panzergrenadier Regiment, 10th SS Panzer Division, giving the entire position depth. The attacks by the 84th Division's main body, however, had drawn the bulk of the German troops into this position, and its left, or southeastern, flank was open, covered only by miles of muddy fields and a long antitank ditch. Behind the antitank ditch was the town of Lindern, and it sat astride the main German supply route. If the Railsplitters could get a firm hold on Lindern, the rest of the position would fall easily. Getting a hold on Lindern would be the job of the 335th Infantry.

The original plan was for the regiment to throw all three battalions at Lindern, one behind the other, but that was reduced to a two-battalion attack when the regiment's 2nd Battalion was switched west for an attack on Toad Hill. Then 1st Battalion was held back as a reserve, and the Lindern attack came down to a single infantry battalion.

Major Robert W. Wallace's 3rd Battalion, 335th Infantry would attack with two companies, Item and King, forward and one, Love, in reserve. They would make a long approach march at night and jump off before dawn. The approach march was from the southwest and would require a gentle left turn to make a head-on approach to the target. Navigating at night and in extended assault formation would be tricky, so a landmark was picked out. As the troops reached the north-south highway from Gereonsweiler to Lindern, they would wheel left and advance along its axis, with the highway becoming the boundary between the two assault companies. If they became disoriented, they could orient at first light on a tall church steeple in Lindern, or the brickyard on the southwest side of town.

After the wheel, the assault companies would cross the antitank ditch and press forward, ignoring any pockets of resistance, until they had crossed the railroad behind Lindern. They would dig in on the far side and await the inevitable German counterattacks. The reserve company would follow them and clear Lindern of any pockets of resistance and then reinforce them. The regiment's 1st Battalion in reserve would be available for additional strength as needed.

The attack was also to be supported by the 40th Tank Battalion, which was now attached to the division, but the tanks would not go in with the first wave. Surprise was believed to be more important, and so the tanks would wait for word from the infantry as to when they should advance. In order to communicate with the tanks, each of the leading rifle companies was given one heavy SCR 509 radio in addition to two SCR 300 backpack radios for communication with battalion and regiment. The SCR 509, with its longer range, was only barely man-portable, and in fact was carried in two loads: one man carried the radio itself, and the other the heavy battery pack that powered it, with a power cable connecting them.

Company K, which played such a remarkable role in the coming battle, was an unlikely candidate for the history books. It had not yet been in serious combat, but had already lost half of its officers—including its commander—in a jeep accident nine days earlier. First Lieutenant Leonard Carpenter, its unpopular executive officer, seen by the men as stuffy and distant, had assumed command, and three of the four platoon leaders were replacement officers who had arrived in the last few days. They hardly knew their men's names, let alone strengths and weaknesses. Morale was shaky, and the men had little confidence in their company commander or new platoon leaders.

Most rifle companies have one or two key noncommissioned officers to whom others look for leadership. In King Company, that man was Technical Sergeant George O. Prewitt, the platoon sergeant for 1st Platoon. One of his comrades remembered him as "a football hillbilly out of North Carolina with little learning, [but] he was a Phi Beta Kappa of soldiering." Almost alone among the soldiers of King Company, Prewitt accepted and worked with Lieutenant Carpenter, the new company commander, without reservation. Perhaps he saw something in Carpenter the other men had not yet noticed, but soon would.

The Attack 0630, 29 November

At 6:30 AM, still pitch black on November 29, both assault companies crossed the line of departure in the same formation, two rifle platoons up, one in reserve, and the weapons platoon split up to give support to the rifle companies. Each platoon advanced with two squads up and one back, and Staff Sergeant Jeff Parker, who led King Company's third squad of 1st Platoon, recalled, "We went out in a column of twos. The columns were about 25 yards apart with three yards between men because it was still dark and we wanted to stay pretty close."

King Company attacked with Lieutenant Pozyck's 3rd Platoon on the left, Lieutenant Romersberger's 1st Platoon on the right, and Lieutenant Smith's 2nd Platoon in support.

Lieutenant Lockard's 4th (weapons) Platoon gave up one 60mm mortar squad to each of the three rifle platoons, and its two .30-caliber light machine gun squads to 3rd Platoon on the battalion's open left flank. Lockard, with his weapons platoon headquarters party and the company's spare SCR 300 radio, brought up the rear behind 2nd Platoon. Each man carried only the essentials: rifle, gas mask, three chocolate D-ration bars, one canteen of water, and two bandoliers of ammunition. The men left their overshoes behind. Speed meant more than keeping dry.

Lieutenant Carpenter and his small command group advanced with the two lead platoons. A rear company command group, led by the executive officer, Lieutenant Johns, and the company first sergeant, Julius Phagan, moved with the supporting platoon. Carpenter was up front to ensure that the lead platoons got their navigation right and pushed on, regardless of what they ran into. Johns and Phagan would do the same for the support elements.

Shortly after they crossed the line of departure, several German flares erupted in the night sky, illuminating King Company. Every man froze in place, as trained to do. As the flares drifted down on their parachutes and burned out, every man waited for the tearing sound of German MG-42 machine guns, but there was no German fire. They had not been spotted. As soon as the light flickered out, the advance resumed.

The plan started going wrong as soon as the attacking companies came to the "highway" to Lindern at 6:45. It was actually no more than a narrow dirt road. Fortunately, the men of King Company's 1st Platoon recognized it immediately as their landmark and alerted Carpenter, who ran over to 3rd Platoon to tell them to wheel. King Company's two assault platoons came on line with the road to their right and headed toward Lindern.

They crossed the antitank ditch with difficulty. It was partly flooded, and the soft banks collapsed in sheets of mud as the men tried to climb out, but 1st Platoon and most of 3rd stayed together as units. Then they encountered flanking fire from German machine guns, and a few mortar rounds landed among the soldiers of 3rd Platoon but, remarkably, caused no casualties. The troops went to ground, but Lieutenants Carpenter and Romersberger and several NCOs encouraged the men to crawl out from under the tracers of the blind grazing fire and keep advancing.

First Platoon's Sergeant George Prewitt recalled, "There were four machine guns firing at us. I began to yank the men up, and I kicked one in the ass. Sergeant Matuska did the same."

"They can't hit you if they can't see you," Lieutenant Carpenter shouted over and over, and the men followed him forward.

About this time, a German round clipped off the antenna of the SCR 300 radio carried by Private Paul North, Carpenter's radio man. A runner was sent back to 4th (weapons) Platoon to get the spare antenna from the company's other SCR 300, but the advance continued.

The two assault platoons sprinted forward and in moments were in Lindern, the outlines of the buildings growing visible as the sun rose. At first Carpenter was unsure they were in the right place, there was no church steeple visible anywhere, but then he caught sight of the brickyard and knew they were on the objective. Contrary to the pre-attack briefing, Lindern was one of the only towns in the area that did not have a standing church steeple, a mistake that would cost the battalion dearly in the next hour.

The assault platoons ran through Lindern, firing from the hip and throwing grenades at any sign of resistance, but never slowing up. They came out on the far side and sprinted across the open ground to the 20-foot-deep rail cut. Carpenter later reported, "We hit the railroad north side of Lindern. We went down a bank about 20 feet high and ran up the other side. We saw some long buildings that looked like barracks and turned out to be a German rest camp. Some men threw grenades into the buildings. Nothing happened. Fifty yards in front of the barracks we found a fence. There we started digging in—two-man foxholes. We stopped there because we knew we were going to dig in 50-100 yards the other side of Lindern. A long, sloping hill was in front of us. We dug in on the reverse slope of a very slight rise in the ground, the crest of which was 250 yards in front of us."

The 84th Division's history describes the rail line as sitting on top of a 20-foot-tall embankment, and the U.S. Army's official history, *The Siegfried Line Campaign,* also refers to the rail embankment. The eyewitness accounts from King Company, however, make it clear the railroad ran through a deep cut, not along the top of an embankment. Carpenter specifically mentions sliding down into the cut, then scrambling up the other side, while another soldier talks of tanks coming into the area across a highway overpass—not through an underpass tunnel. Equally telling, however, King Company continued to take scattered small arms fire from Lindern throughout the day, which would have been unlikely if there was a 20-foot-tall earthen berm between them and the enemy.

King Company began digging in at 7:45. Lieutenant Carpenter remembered someone had asked the time. Now there was nothing to do but report their success and wait for the rest of the company to show up. Unfortunately, it was going to be difficult to contact battalion headquarters that day.

German small arms fire had taken off the antenna of the company's forward SCR 300 radio, and the antenna of the big SCR 509 had been damaged as well. The heavy

BELOW: 84th Division soldiers climb a muddy ridge prior to jumping off to assault a German town near Aachen in November 1944. Heavier-than-usual rains during the autumn of 1944 added to the burdens of the troops on both sides. OPPOSITE: A GI of the 334th Regiment, 84th Infantry Division, attaches a wire to the leg of a dead German in order to remove for burial. The body is lying dangerously close to an active anti-tank Teller mine.

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two-part radio had been abandoned at the base of the rail embankment so the two-man team could keep up with the advance. A runner had been sent back for a spare SCR 300 antenna, but he never returned and, as the sun rose, there was no sign of the rest of the company.

Carpenter conferred with Item Company to his right, and discovered a full company was not present there either—only 35 men of its 3rd Platoon, and a five-man mortar squad, all under Lieutenant Creswell Garlington. They did not have a working radio.

Carpenter had only 60 of his own men under his direct command, the four men of his forward company command group, 32 men of 1st Platoon under Lieutenant Romersberger and Technical Sergeant Prewitt, the 1st Platoon's attached 60mm mortar squad with six men, but only 18 men from Lieutenant Pozyck's 3rd Platoon.

Romersberger and Pozyck were both new replacements. Romersberger, even though he had been with the company only four days, had already displayed excellent leadership under fire during the advance and would continue to play a key role in the company's survival. Less is recorded of Pozyck's contribution, except for a report by one of his NCOs that a piece of shrapnel "went right through Lt. Pozyck's helmet," perhaps leaving him temporarily stunned or disoriented. It is more likely Pozyck's contributions were tangible and considerable, but simply never written down. Pozyck received one of the first Bronze Stars for the action afterward and was soon promoted to first lieutenant.

The only senior NCO who had made it forward was George Prewitt. Carpenter co-located his foxhole with Pruitt, who effectively became the company first sergeant for the balance of the action.

Pozyck's 3rd Platoon had a harder time moving forward than 1st Platoon, as it had been closer to the enfilading fire of the German machine guns on the left and had lost time engaging them. The artillery prep on the brickyard, through which they had to advance, had been late and so had delayed them another five minutes. The follow-on rifle squad remained pinned down near the antitank ditch for too long. When the sun rose they were still in the open in front of Lindern and the now alert SS defenders and were forced to surrender.

The left wing of 3rd Platoon's forward echelon, over 20 men, including the light machine gun section attached from weapons platoon, 3rd Platoon's attached 60mm mortar squad, one complete rifle squad and four men from another, became separated from the rest of the company around 7:30 and crossed the railroad farther to the left. Although the company's main body could see them, they were too far away for Carpenter to control, and it is unclear who actually stepped up and assumed command of this group.

They started to dig in on a low hill, but then were hit by U.S. artillery fire, including white phosphorus rounds, and pulled back into an apple orchard. At about 9 or 10 AM, they were hit again by friendly artillery fire. Two men were killed and at least one wounded, and they withdrew across the rail line, carrying their wounded but leaving behind one light machine gun and the mortar. Shortly after noon the 18 or 20 survivors, of whom six were wounded, encountered a dug-in German infantry force that took them prisoner. Carpenter later sent runners over to the abandoned position in the apple orchard and recovered the light machine gun.

But what had happened to the rest of King and Item Companies?

The rear element of King Company, 2nd Platoon, the rear headquarters party, and the weapons platoon headquarters failed to keep closed up behind the lead platoons and lost contact in the dark. When they crossed the Lindern road, the officers did not recognize it as such, perhaps being confused by the reference to a "highway." The 2nd Platoon's senior NCO realized the mistake but was unable to convince his platoon leader of the error. The group was being led by Lieutenant Johns, the company executive officer. The company first sergeant was also with this group and had been ordered by Carpenter to maintain contact between the assault platoons and the follow-on echelon,; he failed to do so. The group continued north, well off its intended path, until it encountered entrenched German infantry, was pinned down by fire in the open, and forced to surrender at daybreak.

Nearly the same thing happened to the bulk of Item Company. It had farther to go than King Company (being on the outer arc of the wheeling maneuver), and had navigation problems of its own. Not only was there confusion at the road crossing, but the church steeple in a village to the north, combined with the absence of a steeple in Lindern, further slowed and misdirected the advance. Most of Item was caught in the open fields around Lindern at daybreak and either driven back or forced to surrender.

> **The Railsplitters had taken everything four German divisions could throw at them ... in the worst physical conditions imaginable, and triumphed.**

By 8 AM, the two assault companies of 3rd Battalion, 335th Infantry had effectively ceased to exist. There were only 100 men on the far side of the rail embankment, and they had no means of communicating their position to the rear. From the point of view of battalion headquarters, they had marched into the darkness and vanished in a storm of small arms and mortar fire.

As Love Company, the battalion follow-on echelon, tried to move forward to clear Lindern it was pinned down by heavy fire short of the line of the antitank ditch and forced to dig in. Elements of the 21st SS Panzergrenadiers in the entrenchments in front of Lindern were alert, full of fight, and not going anywhere. German artillery fire on the

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A GI from the 334th Regiment takes cover (left) as a Teller mine is detonated by engineers. A British-operated M4 Sherman tank with an anti-mine flail attached to its front waits before proceeding.

area forward of Lindern was accurate and intense. As far as 335th Regiment could tell, the attack had been a total disaster and both rifle companies had been wiped out.

For the men under Carpenter's command, the first real action after crossing the rail line came on King Company's left. About 20 minutes after they began digging in, three German medium tanks appeared on the road from Lindern, crossing the railroad at the single overpass in the area, and driving north almost through 3rd Platoon's position. Private First Class Morton Reuben remembered, "I grabbed a bazooka round and put it in Wolfenberger's bazooka. He fired and hit the middle of the tank but it bounced off…. The second round hit a tree and tore it up. The tanks passed out of sight."

Bazooka and small arms fire, while causing no visible damage, had nevertheless encouraged the tanks to leave the area, which is not surprising since they had no close infantry support and could not know how weak the U.S. position was.

Between 9 and 10 AM, the company began taking friendly artillery fire on the far left. This would eventually drive the isolated left wing of 3rd Platoon back. At about the same time, however, three different German tanks appeared from the north. Carpenter remembers them as Tigers, and the U.S. official history concurs. The majority of "Tiger tank" reports turned out to be Panthers or Panzer IVs, but elements of the 506th Schwere Panzer Abteilung (Heavy Tank Battalion) were in the area and were certainly committed against Lindern in the following days, so it is not improbable that three Tigers were present that morning. King Company had already identified the first group of three tanks as "mediums," so they knew the difference, and they would get a very close look at these new ones.

Two of the German Tigers halted about 300 yards away while the third continued to advance directly into the American position. There were several German-held pillboxes about 500 yards away in the same direction, and Carpenter could also see four more German tanks moving about 800 yards away. That made 10 German tanks sighted in quick succession, but the most immediate problem was the lead tank moving into 3rd Platoon's positions on the left.

Even though 1st Platoon still had a few bazooka rounds left, the U.S. infantry was nearly defenseless against heavy armor, and Carpenter had to make a quick decision: should they remain in place and risk getting overrun, or should they try to infiltrate back to their own lines through Lindern? He took a moment to confer with his senior NCO, Technical Sergeant Prewitt, "and we decided to hold our ground at all costs."

And they did hold—in part because of the cool-headed marksmanship of 3rd Platoon's Private Robert Nordli. He told the story a few days later without dramatics, as if it was just another day at the office. "The tank came up to our front right in our lines. The tank commander stood up from the turret to observe. We moved back about 100 yards to get a better defilade position as the tanks came up. Unfortunately we had run out of bazooka ammunition. I hit the tank commander with an M1. He slumped over. The tank continued past us into Lindern for about another 100 yards, then backed up and returned to the vicinity of the pillbox."

The death of the commander of the leading German tank—probably the platoon leader—deprived the German armor of leadership at a critical time and caused the tanks to pull off to a safer distance. Nevertheless, it now appeared the Germans were alert to the presence of the Americans in their rear. More German infantry began assembling around the pillboxes, and tanks moved back and forth along the road to the front.

One hundred infantry with a handful of 60mm mortar rounds and two or three bazooka rockets could not possibly hold out against the force assembling unless they got help, and getting help meant getting word back to battalion or regiment. Carpenter sent a party of four volunteers back to retrieve the abandoned SCR 509 radio set, but, although they recovered it and got it working, its antenna was sufficiently damaged that it could only receive faintly and not transmit.

The only other option was to send runners to try to get through. The odds of success did not seem high. In Carpenter's deceptively casual words, "We knew there were Germans in and around Lindern in back of us because we were always getting fire from our rear." Four soldiers volunteered anyway. They did not make it. One was killed and the other three captured.

By 1 PM, the situation was clearly desperate, but suddenly one of King Company's men had an inspiration. After working with the two disabled radios for several hours, Carpenter's radio man, Private Paul North, realized one antenna is pretty much like any other.

The company still had several small SCR 536 "handy talkies," although they did not have the range to carry back to battalion. North, however, unscrewed an antenna from a 536 set, tied it to a fence post to get maximum elevation, and jury-rigged a connection to the big SCR 509 using a length of signal corps telephone wire. At about 1 PM, Private James Calhoun of Love Company, the battalion reserve, heard his own SCR 509 come to life. The message was from King Company, and it was, "We made a Touchdown at 0745." Touchdown was the coded signal for King Company on its objective.

Two companies of M4 Shermans of the 40th Tank Battalion had been waiting to advance in support of the infantry but had never gotten word there was actually infantry left to support. As soon as the radio message was relayed to the commander of 40th Tank Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel John Brown, he ordered his Company A to "forget about bad roads, mine obstacles, and infantry support and get out to Lindern."

The tanks moved forward, passing south of Lindern, but lost one Sherman to German fire and stalled short of the rail cut. Lieutenant Romersberger of 1st Platoon and his runner, Private Howerton, volunteered to go back, find the tanks, and guide them to King Company's positions. Although Howerton is officially credited with volunteering, he does not remember doing so and believes Romersberger volunteered, and he simply accompanied him as his runner. Howerton had developed enormous respect for his new platoon leader during the hours of the Lindern battle, and in his own

A Rifle Company's Radios

The United States Army had many more radios available than did any other army in World War II. They did not work all the time, but they were an invaluable supplement to runners and field telephones, the traditional means of communication in the infantry.

Each rifle company was authorized six SCR 536 radios. These were the small box-like radios with built-in earpiece and microphone, held like an oversized telephone receiver. Today we almost universally call this sort of radio a "walkie-talkie," but at the time they were called "handy-talkies." The six SCR 536 handy-talkies, when all were available, were nominally assigned to the six officers in the company: commander, executive officer, three rifle platoon leaders, and weapons platoon leader. In fact, they could be moved around at will to give, for example, a radio to a forward outpost.

The true "walkie-talkies" were the backpack-mounted SCR 300 radios officially held at battalion, but almost universally doled out one per rifle company. This was the radio the company commander used to communicate with battalion, regiment, and sometimes to attached artillery units. The normal allocation of one SCR 300 per company was doubled for the attack on Lindern.

With all the small radios at platoon level, there was the potential of local chatter interfering with radio communication between company and higher levels. This was avoided by making the small SCR 536 radios AM, while all other signal corps radios were FM. The disadvantage of this, of course, was that the 536 handy-talkies could not be used to contact any other network, even if it was within their limited range.

An American soldier operates a variety of radio/telephone sets from his foxhole.

American M4 Sherman tanks, supported by infantrymen of the 335th Regiment, advance toward SS troops manning pillboxes and machine-gun positions on November 29, 1944. The battle for Lindern cost King Company, 335th, half its authorized strength.

words, "I would have followed him anywhere."

The two men found six of the Shermans buttoned up on the outskirts of the village and had a hard time getting their attention. The field phones on the back decks were not working, and so Romersberger and Howerton were reduced to banging on the side of the hulls with their rifle butts. "If there had been any German snipers nearby we would have most certainly drawn their fire," Howerton recalled years later, "but nothing happened. Eventually we roused the tank commander, crawled on his tank and rode back through Lindern like Hannibal crossing the Alps."

At 2 PM, the six tanks crossed the overpass and deployed in support of King Company. The sense of elation among Carpenter's men was indescribable. One of the soldiers in King Company later remembered, "When we saw those tanks, we figured the whole German Army couldn't drive us out of there."

The fight was far from over, but from that point on the Railsplitters definitely had the upper hand and did not let it go. Throughout the night of November 29, Love Company, all of 1st Battalion, and most of the 40th Tank Battalion moved forward, cleared Lindern, and formed a perimeter defense. No counterattacks came that evening, but German shelling became heavy.

On the evening of the 30th, and again on the night of December 1, the Germans launched a series of strong counterattacks using battle groups formed from 10th SS Panzer Division and 506th Schwere Panzer Abteilung, as well as the 9th Panzer Division, hastily pulled back out of its rest and refit encampment. It was too little, too late, however. The 335th had paid a very high price for Lindern, and no one was ready to give it up. Within days the main German position began to crumble and the balance of the Railsplitters moved forward and secured the plateau overlooking the Wurm and Roer Rivers. After a week or so to rest and reorganize, the Railsplitters would conduct an assault crossing of the Roer.

That, at least, was the plan, and the Railsplitters would indeed force the Roer River against tough German resistance, but they would not get around to it until the end of February 1945. Days before they were to hit the Roer in December, Hitler's Ardennes offensive, popularly known as the Battle of the Bulge, kicked off, and the 84th Division was shifted south. It played a key role in blunting the German northern offensive arm in the Ardennes.

What was important now was that the Railsplitters had taken everything four German divisions could throw at them, advanced through the strongest fixed defenses the Germans had anywhere, in the worst physical conditions imaginable, and triumphed. And in the end it was not numbers or firepower that made the difference; it was the courage and determination of just 100 infantrymen at Lindern.

After it was pulled out of the line, King Company received enough replacements to bring it close to full strength for the Ardennes. It needed quite a few. Of the 174 officers and enlisted men of King Company who crossed the line of departure at 6:30 AM, November 29, 1944, a total of 88 men were killed, wounded, or captured, almost exactly half the company's strength. The influx of new men, however, did not change the essential character of the company. No matter how hard things got in the Bulge, the solid cadre of "Lindern men" always held the company together and kept it going.

There were some new officers. George Prewitt moved up to command a platoon, receiving his field commission on December 19. He refused to let any of his men salute him or call him sir, though. He still worked for a living.

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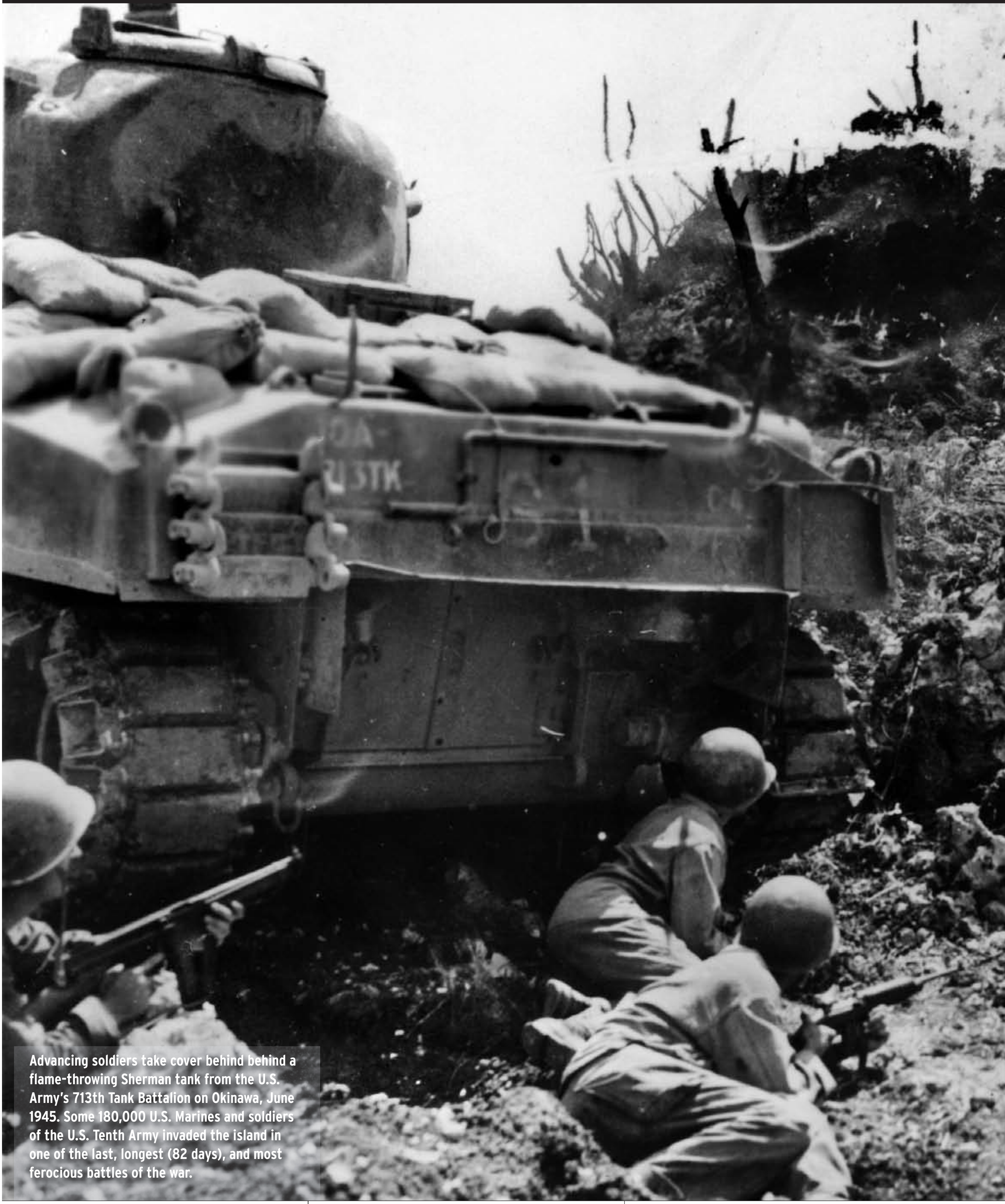
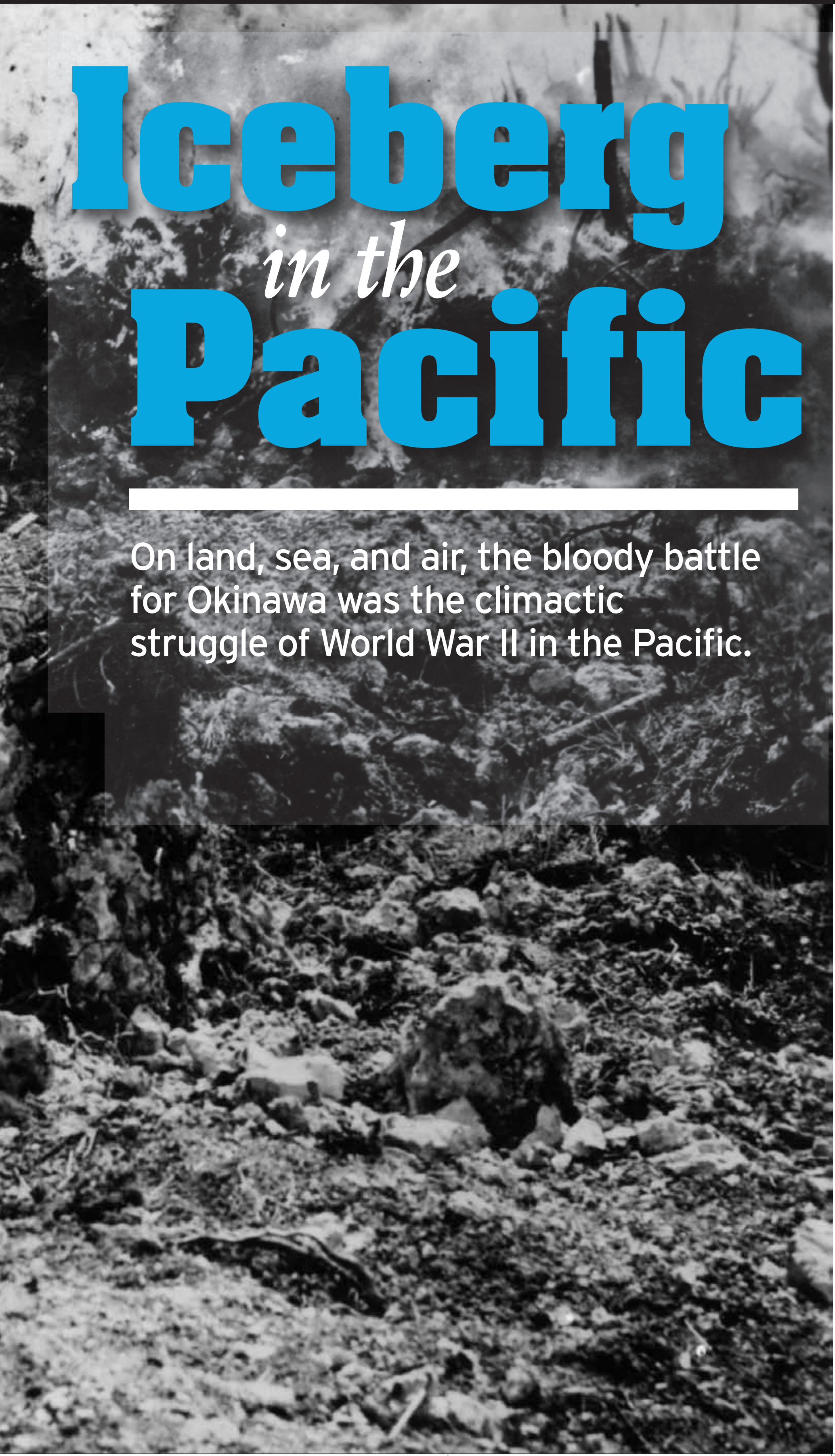


Advancing soldiers take cover behind behind a flame-throwing Sherman tank from the U.S. Army's 713th Tank Battalion on Okinawa, June 1945. Some 180,000 U.S. Marines and soldiers of the U.S. Tenth Army invaded the island in one of the last, longest (82 days), and most ferocious battles of the war.



Iceberg *in the* Pacific

On land, sea, and air, the bloody battle for Okinawa was the climactic struggle of World War II in the Pacific.

BY MICHAEL E. HASKEW

The curious coincidence was obvious to everyone. April 1, 1945, was both Easter Sunday and April Fool's Day.

The immediate gravity of the date was also readily apparent. Designated Love-Day (L-Day) to prevent confusion with the D-Day landings in Normandy in 1944, it meant the commencement of Operation Iceberg, the Allied invasion of Okinawa. The preparations for the Okinawa operation were actually larger than those for D-Day, as the U.S. and British Royal navies marshaled 1,300 warships and 750,000 tons of materiel off the island's coast.

Only 340 miles from the Japanese home island of Kyushu, Okinawa in the Ryukyu archipelago was the last objective of the American military surge across the Pacific during World War II, with the exception of the daunting prospect of an invasion of Japan itself.

By the spring of 1945, senior U.S. commanders respected the tenacity of the Japanese defenders who had opposed their trans-Pacific offensive on land, sea, and air. The cost in lives and treasure thus far had been substantial, but they were resigned to the belief that the bloodletting would continue until American fighting men occupied the Japanese Home Islands. Okinawa was simply another agonizing island fight, the penultimate precursor to the invasion of Japan. Its harbors, airfields, and proximity to Kyushu would facilitate future operations.

At the direction of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Chester Nimitz was charged with the seizure of Okinawa, and, as he had done in earlier operations, the Commander in Chief Pacific turned to the familiar team that included Admirals Raymond Spruance, commander of the Fifth Fleet, and Richmond Kelly Turner, commander of the amphibious forces in the Pacific, along with a corps of

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planners who, after months of on-the-job training, knew their functions in detail.

The looming battle for Okinawa would provide the sternest test of the war for the XXIV Corps of the U.S. Army and the Marines of the III Amphibious Corps, together constituting the U.S. Tenth Army under the unified command of Lt. Gen. Simon Bolivar Buckner, a veteran Army officer and the son of a Confederate general of the American Civil War.

Buckner's powerful Tenth Army comprised more than 180,000 Marine and Army fighting men, and the commanding general took great pains to be inclusive with his staff structure. He brought 34 Marine staff officers of the Tenth Army to the shores of Okinawa, including Deputy Chief of Staff Brig. Gen. Oliver P. Smith.

The III Amphibious Corps was led by Marine Maj. Gen. Roy S. Geiger, an aviator who had led the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing at Guadalcanal. Under Maj. Gen. John R. Hodge, the XXIV Army Corps included the 7th, 77th, and 96th Infantry Divisions, with the 27th Infantry Division in reserve.

The 1st Marine Division, which had participated in the campaigns on Guadalcanal, Cape Gloucester, and Peleliu, was commanded by Maj. Gen. Pedro A. del Valle. Formed on Guadalcanal in September 1944, the 6th Marine Division, commander, Maj. Gen. Lemuel C. Shepherd, Jr., was the only Marine unit of its size that was formed outside the United States during World War II.

Operation Iceberg included the capture of numerous small islands off the southwest coast of Okinawa prior to the main landings. Kerama Retto and seven surrounding spits of land would serve as a principal supply and refueling point and a safe anchorage for ships damaged while supporting the landings.

Heavy naval bombardment and preliminary air strikes were to soften up the Okinawan defenses. During the week prior to L-Day, Navy guns fired 13,000 rounds of heavy caliber ammunition, and carrier-based aircraft flew 3,095 missions. Underwater Demolition Teams (UDT) swam stealthily ashore, checking the depth of the water at various times of day and attaching explosives to mines and beach obstacles to clear the way for the landing craft.

Despite recent experience at Iwo Jima, where the defenders had allowed the beaches to become crowded with men and equipment before opening fire, the Americans expected the beaches to be hotly contested from the beginning.

The L-Day assault plan involved landings on the Hagushi beaches along the southwestern shore of Okinawa. In the north, the Marines of the 6th Division were to land, with the 1st and 2nd Battalions of Colonel Merlin F. Schneider's 22nd Marines hitting Green Beaches 1 and 2. The 1st and 3rd Battalions of Colonel Alan Shapley's 4th Marines were to come ashore at Red Beaches 1, 2, and 3. To the south in the 1st Marine Division's sector, the 1st and 2nd Battalions of Colonel Edward W. Snedeker's 7th Marines were to land at Blue Beaches 1 and 2, while the 1st and 2nd Battalions of Colonel John H. Griebel's 5th Marines were to land on Yellow Beaches 1, 2, and 3.

Further south, elements of the Army's 7th and 96th Divisions, under Generals Archibald V. Arnold and James L. Bradley respectively, were to come ashore on beaches designated Purple, Orange, White, and Brown. Once ashore, the Marines and Army troops were to strike eastward across the Ishikawa Isthmus, capture two key airfields (Yontan and Kadena) to bisect the island, and then turn north and south to secure the length of Okinawa.

ABOVE: A line of Marine LVTs (Landing Vehicle Tracked) with their short-barrelled howitzers and cargo of Marines plunges through the surf on the way to their assigned beachhead. TOP: A panoramic color photo showing scores of landing craft and LTVs during Operation Iceberg—the invasion of Okinawa on L-Day, April 1, 1945.

While the actual landings were taking place, the 2nd Marine Division was to execute a feint similar to a diversion performed off Tinian in the Marianas the previous year. The complex movement involved loading the Marines aboard landing craft and approaching the Minatoga beaches on Okinawa's southeast coast simultaneously with the landings at the Hagushi beaches to distract the Japanese before turning away.

American planners were under no illusions and expected heavy casualties. From the senior commanders down to the sailors aboard each ship in the Navy there was concern for the fleet that would be obliged to lie off Okinawa's shores for an indeterminate period of time. The anxiety arose from the prospect that Japanese suicide aircraft, the dreaded Kamikaze, would assail the fleet in tremendous numbers.

The battle for Okinawa lasted 82 agonizing days and yielded an immense harvest of death and destruction. American combat casualties on Okinawa totaled 7,374 killed, 31,807 wounded, and 239 missing. At sea, the U.S. Navy endured the most harrowing chapter in its combat history, with 4,907 killed or missing, 29 ships sunk, and 120 damaged. Twenty-three Medals of Honor were earned on Okinawa, 11 of which were posthumous. When victory was won, the Marine Corps, Army, and Navy justifiably shared in the praise that followed. And despite the inevitable conflict from time to time, Okinawa was a model of inter-service cooperation.

The Japanese garrison, numbering more than 100,000 including Okinawan conscripts, was decimated; only about 11,000 prisoners were taken. The others perished along with more than 1,000 Kamikaze pilots and thousands of sailors who died during the last combat convulsion of the Imperial Navy, many of them aboard the super battleship *Yamato*. The death toll among Okinawan civilians was staggering—roughly 150,000 men, women, and children.

Under a heavy canopy of air cover and shelling, the invasion of Okinawa began on the morning of April 1 with landing-craft engines roaring, churning a virtually unbroken stretch of white wakes eight miles wide. Eerily, resistance was almost nonexistent; American troops flooded the beaches. At the end of the day, 60,000 men were ashore. Only 28 were killed, 104 wounded, and 27 missing. The beachhead was rapidly expanded to 15,000 yards wide and 5,000 yards deep.

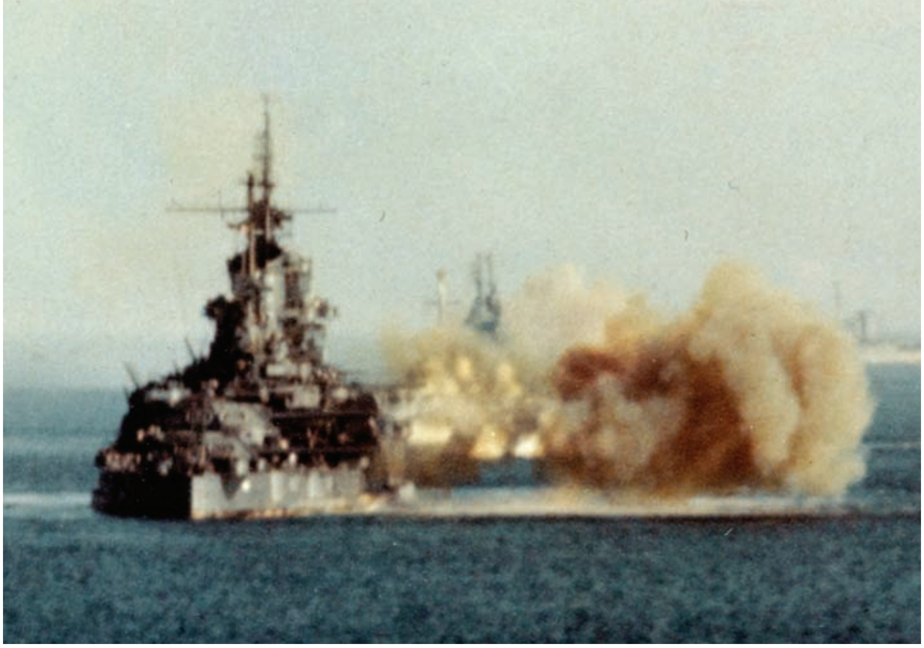
Famed war correspondent Ernie Pyle wrote, "Never before had I seen an invasion beach like Okinawa. There wasn't a dead or wounded man in our whole sector of it. Medical corpsmen were sitting among their sacks of bandages and plasma with nothing to do. There wasn't a single burning vehicle, nor a single boat lying wrecked on the reef or shoreline. The carnage that is almost inevitable on an invasion was wonderfully and beautifully not there."

It was the proverbial calm before the storm. From his command post at Shuri Castle, Lt. Gen. Mitsuru Ushijima, commander of the Japanese 32nd Army, watched the Americans deposit 16,000 combat troops ashore in an hour. The sight was awe inspiring and undoubtedly disconcerting, but it played into his defensive plan.

Ushijima had arrived on Okinawa in August 1944, accepting the burden of leading his command in a fight to the death. He understood the concept of defense in depth. While he would concede the Kadena and Yontan airfields and allow the Americans to establish themselves ashore, he would concentrate his resources in the rugged terrain of southwestern Okinawa, command a ferocious defense, and bleed the enemy white.

Waves of Kamikaze pilots would simultaneously crash their bomb-laden planes into the ships of the Fifth Fleet. The combined effort would buy precious time for Imperial General Headquarters in Tokyo to continue feverish preparations for the defense of the home islands.

Ushijima's forces included three infantry divisions: the veteran 9th, the 24th—well-equipped but inexperienced—and the 62nd. The 44th Independent Mixed Brigade had lost 5,600 of its combat troops on June 29, 1944, when the transport *Toyama Maru* was torpedoed and sunk by the submarine USS *Sturgeon* en route to Okinawa. The 44th was later combined with the 15th Independent Mixed Regiment. An array of artillery, mortar, engineer, and naval troops rounded out the sizable Japanese contingent allocated to Okinawa.



The battleship USS *Idaho* (BB-42) blasts Japanese positions with her 14-inch guns on L-Day. Some 1,300 warships, landings craft, and support ships were involved in Operation Iceberg.

While the Americans were fighting their way across the Pacific, becoming accustomed to savage assaults and difficult island campaigning, Ushijima utilized his time well, fortifying the ridges, draws, hills, and ravines of southeastern Okinawa. The high ground was honeycombed with tunnels, bunkers, pillboxes, artillery emplacements, and machine-gun nests with interlocking fields of fire. Some positions were located in the mouths of caves connected by a labyrinth of subterranean passages. The defenders even mounted weapons in the stone tombs of long-deceased Okinawans.

Ushijima's three defensive lines presented formidable obstacles, and breaching them would prove to be agonizingly slow and costly for the Americans. The first line extended just below the Ishikawa Isthmus from Skyline Ridge in the east to Kakazu Ridge in the west; three weeks of fighting were required to break through it. The second line stretched from Yonabaru near the east coast across Shuri Ridge and Shuri Castle, the ancient abode of the kings who once ruled the Ryukyu Islands, to the port of Naha in the east. Ushijima decided to make his final stand at the third defensive line, strung along an arc of fortified hills that dominated the slope of extreme southern Okinawa to the shores of the East China Sea.

Ushijima's troops were armed with a large number of heavy weapons, from the proven 47mm anti-tank gun that could penetrate the armor of the American M4 Sherman medium tank, to 150mm howitzers and massive 320mm spigot mortars, which pitched high-arcing shells so huge that the Americans nicknamed them "ashcans." Ushijima chose to bide his time, allowing the Marines and Army troops to overwhelm the token forces he had committed to northern Okinawa. The death drama would play out in the south.

The ease of the landings brought exhilaration for the American ground troops on Okinawa. Their progress was stunningly swift. In just four days, the invaders captured objectives that senior commanders had expected to require three weeks and hundreds of casualties. By 10:30AM on L-Day, the 7th Infantry Division had captured Kadena airfield and continued advancing east and south with the 96th Division on its right. By 1 PM, the 6th Marine Division had taken Yontan airfield. And by dusk on April 3, the 1st Marine Division had crossed the Ishikawa Isthmus and occupied the Katchin Peninsula. Okinawa was swiftly cut in half. The Marines of the 1st and 6th Divisions fanned out to the north and

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LEFT: Having landed against no enemy opposition, Marines seem relaxed. But rather than trying to repulse the landings, the Japanese allowed the Americans to advance inland before counterattacking. BELOW: Lt. Gen. Mitsuru Ushijima, commander of the Japanese 32nd Army, had a deadly surprise waiting for the invaders.

west, with the biggest challenge being the lengthening supply lines as logistics personnel struggled to keep pace with the advance.

Within 72 hours, the two airfields were operational. Marine Air Groups 31 and 33 flew in from escort carriers offshore. Their Vought F4U Corsairs served as interdiction fighters, flying combat air patrols (CAP) above the fleet, and as ground-support aircraft until that responsibility switched to carrier-based Grumman F6F Hellcat fighters. More tactical air power reached Yontan and Kadena within days: Night fighters, torpedo bombers, and observation planes arrived, along with an Army Air Forces fighter wing.

The few Japanese troops detailed to defend central Okinawa were hunted down by 1st Marine Division patrols that subdued pockets of resistance. Meanwhile, the 6th Marine Division raced northward, seizing the village of Nago, the largest town in northern Okinawa, by April 7. In 13 days, the division advanced 55 miles. The 22nd Marines then occupied the thumb-shaped Hedo Misaki Peninsula at the extreme northern tip of the island.

Soon, however, the window of rapid movement began to close. Rising 1,200 feet above sea level near Hedo Misaki, Mount Yae Taki offered extremely favorable defensive ground. Colonel Takesiko Udo and elements of the 44th Independent Mixed Brigade, known as the Udo Force, occupied prepared defenses in an area of six square miles and made a tough stand. Two Japanese infantry battalions, an artillery company, and an antitank company, roughly 2,000 troops, stymied the Marines for five days.

Five battalions of the 4th and 29th Marines attacked Mount Yae Taki repeatedly from east and west, transiting minefields swept by enemy gunfire preregistered to contest the approaches. The 14-inch guns of the battleship USS *Tennessee* and low-level bombing runs by Corsairs of Marine Fighter Squadron 322 (VMF-322) helped crack the tough nut of Mount Yae Take. The Udo Force was annihilated. The Marines lost 207 killed and 757 wounded before the Motobu Peninsula was cleared on April 20.

While the brisk northward advance on Okinawa was in progress, the troops received news that President Franklin D. Roosevelt had died suddenly on April 12. A Japanese propaganda leaflet crudely attempted to link the president's death with the ongoing battle for Okinawa. It warned, "…The dreadful loss that led your late leader to death will make you orphans on this island..."

Along with the swift conquest of northern Okinawa, Army and Marine fighting men occupied several small islands nearby. Under the command of Major James L. Jones, the Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, Force Reconnaissance Battalion executed several landings in advance of Army assaults to seize these islands. On April 16, the Marines took Minna Shima, hauling ashore a battery of 105mm howitzers to support the 77th Infantry Division assault on Ie Shima, only 6,000 yards away.

The immediate objective of the Ie Shima landing was the capture of its airfield, but the 77th Infantry Division confronted 5,000 defenders. After six days of fighting, Ie Shima was secured, but the 77th Division sustained 1,100 casualties.

Correspondent Ernie Pyle was one of those killed, fatally wounded in the head by Japanese machine-gun fire. Pyle's eloquent and sometimes heart-wrenching dispatches from combat zones in North Africa, Europe, and the Pacific had brought the experience of the common fighting man home to millions of Americans. After the battle, the soldiers of the 77th Division erected a monument to Pyle on Ie Shima. It read simply that the soldiers had lost "a buddy."

The Army troops of the 7th and 96th Divisions were the first to probe Ushijima's prepared defensive lines in southern Okinawa. General Buckner came ashore on

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April 14 and soon committed the reserve 27th Infantry Division to the effort to breach Ushijima's first line. A major attack was launched on April 19, but initial gains could not be held, and the attack was repulsed. Advancing Sherman tanks near Kakazu became separated from their infantry support, and Japanese anti-tank guns destroyed or disabled 22 of the 30 Shermans committed to the attack.

With offensive momentum slowed, Buckner rejected a suggestion from General Andrew Bruce, commander of the 77th Infantry Division, that a second amphibious landing could be mounted on the beaches of southern Okinawa to outflank the Japanese. Buckner considered the operation too risky and the beaches unfavorable landing sites due to high cliffs, while it would also stretch a supply effort that was already under duress. Buckner chose instead to bludgeon his way directly through the stout defenses.

On April 23, Admiral Nimitz arrived at Yontan airfield, toured the occupied territory on Okinawa, and met with Buckner to urge a redoubling of the offensive effort. Nimitz was worried about the Fifth Fleet offshore, as the savage Kamikaze attacks were taking a fearful toll. He admonished Buckner to crank the offensive into high gear within five days. Otherwise, he rasped, "We'll get someone here to move it…I'm losing a ship and a half each day out here. You've got to get this thing moving."

General Alexander A. Vandegrift, the victor at Guadalcanal and current Commandant of the Marine Corps, was a member of Nimitz's entourage. Like General Bruce, Vandegrift raised the prospect of a second amphibious assault, offering the 2nd Marine Division for the job. He explained that the division could depart Saipan within six hours. Again, Buckner declined.

Nimitz was uncharacteristically forceful in his demand of Buckner, and his concerns were well-founded. While fighting raged on Okinawa, the surrounding waters of the Pacific Ocean and the East China Sea were roiling in the throes of Operation Ten Go, the gigantic series of Kamikaze onslaughts that called for as many as 4,500 aircraft to be hurled against the American ships.

Ten Go, or Heavenly Operation, included 10 massed Kamikaze sorties, known as Kikusui, or Floating Chrysanthemums, and each Kikusui might include more than 350 planes, virtually anything in the Japanese arsenal that could fly. One of the most terrifying aerial weapons was a flying bomb called the Ohka, or Cherry Blossom, packed with more than 2,600 pounds of explosives. A forerunner of the modern cruise missile, the Ohka was slung beneath a bomber, carried within range of the American fleet, and jettisoned. The pilot then engaged three solid-fuel rockets and streaked toward his target at 650 miles per hour. The Americans nicknamed the flying bomb "Baka," Japanese for "Fool."

The relentless strain on the American sailors took its toll, both physically and psychologically. Moments after a particularly vicious Kamikaze attack, one sailor stood up at his shipboard gun mount, declared, "It's hot today!" and jumped over the side, never to be seen again.

The Fifth Fleet remained on station, suffering terribly. When a pair of Kamikazes struck the USS *Bunker Hill* on May 11, the aircraft carrier had been in the combat zone for 58 days.

Army, Navy, and Marine pilots defended the fleet with tremendous valor and devotion to duty. During an engagement on April 22, for example, three Marine Corsairs of VMF-323 shot down 16 enemy planes in just 20 minutes. Squadron commander Major George C. Axtell accounted for five of these.

Still, the Kamikazes were relentless. Inevitably, some suicide pilots managed to get through the curtain of CAP fighters and antiaircraft fire. However, during one of the U.S. Navy's finest hours, the Fifth Fleet, which was redesignated the Third Fleet when Admiral William F. "Bull" Halsey relieved Admiral Spruance on May 27, became known as "the fleet that came to stay."

The gains made by the 7th and 96th Infantry Divisions and the grind of sustained combat prompted Ushijima to withdraw from his first line of defense under the cover of thick fog and an artillery barrage. The Japanese withdrawal was accomplished hours after Admiral Nimitz had departed Okinawa. The 27th Infantry Division took the lead in the effort to clear the Japanese rear guard from the rough terrain between the forward fortifications and the Shuri Line.

In early May, General Buckner ordered the 1st Marine Division to relieve the battered 27th Infantry Division on the right, and soon the 6th Marine Division was ordered to come up on the far right flank near the sea. General del Valle took charge in the western area on May 1, and the 77th Infantry Division redeployed from Ie Shima, taking over for the 96th Division in the center.

The 96th Division was ordered to rest for 10 days and then relieve the bloodied and fatigued 7th Infantry Division in the east. With these moves, the Tenth Army front stood four divisions abreast, ready to assault the Shuri Line defenses along a compact front extending only about 9,000 yards from east to west.

General del Valle ordered the 1st Marine Division to attack the Awacha Pocket on the morning of May 2. Moving forward in a steady rain, the 5th Marines captured high ground to their front but came under immediate fire from Japanese gunners to their left in the zone of the 77th Infantry Division. The high ground was a warren of draws and ravines that naturally channeled attacking Marines into deadly killing zones, and the day's progress was disappointing.

That night, the Marines spent exhausting hours fending off Japanese infiltrators, often fighting hand-to-hand. Unrelenting rain hampered the renewal of the attack on May 3, and it took another week of hard fighting to clear the Awacha Pocket.

Just as Buckner's realignment maneuvers were being completed, the Japanese briefly assumed the offensive. Ushijima was an approachable commander and valued the perspectives of his staff officers. He often allowed them to speak freely, and on the evening of May 2, the conversation became heated during a war council at his headquarters in Shuri Castle.

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ABOVE: Sailors in their antiaircraft gun tub aboard the USS *Missouri* brace for the impact of a kamikaze suicide pilot, April 11, 1945. OPPOSITE: Smoke from a naval bombardment rises as American infantrymen press inland from the invasion beaches against only light opposition for the first several days of the campaign.

The 51-year-old Chief of Staff of the 32nd Army, Lt. Gen. Isamu Cho, was a nationalistic zealot. He had been involved in a conspiracy to establish a military dictatorship in Japan as early as 1931 and was actually a war criminal, having issued a shocking order to execute prisoners during the infamous Rape of Nanking in 1937. Cho refused to accept the concept of a defense in depth. He demanded a swift counterattack to throw back the Americans.

Countering Cho's position was 42-year-old Colonel Hiromichi Yahara, the 32nd Army senior staff officer responsible for planning. Yahara believed that a counterattack would include a suicidal banzai charge, resulting in high casualties and only weakening the Japanese defenses. He offered, "The army must continue its current operations, calmly recognizing its final destiny. Annihilation is inevitable no matter what is done."

Ushijima and every other staff officer present sided with Cho. The counterattack was set for the night of May 3, with a two-pronged amphibious assault and the main thrust overland. The attack would be supported by artillery, exposing the guns to American counter-battery fire, their bombardment beginning at 10PM and ceasing at 4:30AM on May 4. The 26th Shipping Engineer Regiment was one of the leading units in the counterattack, boarding barges and heading toward the beaches on the east coast of Okinawa near Skyline Ridge to the rear of the forward American positions.

Minutes after the Japanese troops shoved off, U.S. Navy warships began to shadow them. The patrolling craft then pounced with fury, blasting many of the barges to bits. Those Japanese troops that reached the shore were mowed down by concentrated fire from forward positions of the 7th Infantry Division and annihilated.

The second amphibious landing occurred at Kusan, on Okinawa's west coast, where the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines and the LVT-As of the 3rd Armored Amphibian Battalion shredded 700 Japanese troops with rifles, machine guns, and 75mm artillery. The 1st Reconnaissance Company and a War Dog platoon killed another 75, hunting down the last 65 holdouts by daybreak.

On the morning of May 4, Ushijima ordered two battalions of the 24th Division to begin the land phase of the counterattack at 5AM; however, these troops failed to reach their start line at the scheduled time and were caught in the open. American artillery and mortar fire slashed through their ranks. Then, after dark on the 4th, the last of the abortive Japanese thrusts began. Two infantry battalions assaulted 7th Division positions around the Tanaburu escarpment. Some slight penetrations were gained, but these were isolated and destroyed throughout the next day. Only a few Japanese survivors returned to their lines as darkness fell on May 5.

The Japanese 32nd Army lost 6,000 troops and 59 precious artillery pieces during the disastrous counterattack. When an enraged group of junior officers drew their swords, surrounding Cho and demanding an explanation for the debacle, he was unable to speak. The only senior Japanese officer to survive the battle for Okinawa, Colonel Yahara later described the devastated assaults as "the decisive action of the campaign." On the mournful night of May 5, a tearful Ushijima summoned Yahara to his private quarters, apologized profusely, and swore that he would never again disregard the colonel's advice.

When the Tenth Army realignment was completed during the first week of May, the 1st Marine Division had already taken 1,400 casualties in six days of fighting north of the Shuri Line. On May 7, Private Dale M. Hansen of the 2nd Battalion, 1st Marines, earned the Medal of Honor when he destroyed a Japanese pillbox, picked up a rifle to replace his own that had been shattered, and dashed to the crest of a nearby ridge. Six enemy soldiers confronted Hansen, and he shot four of them dead before his rifle jammed. The other two Japanese soldiers jumped him, but Hansen fought them off with the rifle's butt and scrambled for cover.

Re-armed with yet another rifle and a few grenades, Hansen, a 22-year-old farmboy from Nebraska, went after the enemy again, killing eight more and destroying a heavy mortar position. His one-man assault jolted the Marines to action, claiming an entire embattled ridgeline. Hansen was killed by a Japanese sniper four days later, and his parents accepted his posthumous Medal of Honor during ceremonies in 1946.

In early May, the 22nd Marines relieved the 7th Marines as the 6th Marine Division anchored its right flank against the East China Sea on the far right of the Tenth Army line. On May 9, the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines attacked Hill 60. Its commander, Lt. Col. James C. Murray, Jr., was wounded by a sniper. During the night, the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines fought hand-to-hand with scores of Japanese infiltrators.

On May 11, Buckner ordered a general attack along the length of the Shuri Line. With Nimitz's words still ringing in his ears, Buckner was doing his best to speed the battle along, but the Japanese had apparently fortified every cave and crevice on Okinawa. Progress was painfully slow.

"We will take our time and kill the Japanese gradually," a determined Buckner barked to a group of reporters who had gathered around. Although progress was virtual nonexistent at times, the killing went on without respite.

After two days of difficult combat, the 1st and 2nd Battalions, 7th Marines took

BELOW: An American soldier checks a surrendering Japanese soldier for hidden weapons. Only about 11,000 Japanese out of a garrison of over 100,000 were taken prisoner by the Americans.
RIGHT: Troops of the 96th Infantry Division, accompanied by tanks, advance across Okinawa. The tanks often became targets of anti-tank weapons and suicide attacks.

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U.S. Army soldiers cautiously approach the mouths of two hillside caves with explosives in hand in order to kill enemy soldiers who refused to surrender.

Dakeshi Ridge. The battle was reminiscent of the terrible fighting in the Umurbrogol on Peleliu; each battalion commander in the 7th Marines was a veteran of that bloody engagement. The U-shaped ridge was studded with machine-gun and mortar emplacements. The Japanese often fired from the reverse slopes, using the cover of the crest as protection from Marine return fire.

The 1st Battalion reached the top of Dakeshi Ridge at two points on May 11 but fell back under a hail of Japanese shells. One Marine remembered, "We did damned little attacking. Every time a man raised his head he was hit." The next morning, three Sherman tanks—one armed with a 75mm cannon and the others with flamethrowers—began creeping their way up the slope. The .30- and .50-cal. machine guns aboard the tanks chattered, and the flamethrowers spewed streams of jellied gasoline. The 2nd Battalion riflemen followed closely behind, shooting enemy soldiers that broke under the strain and ran along the reverse slope.

Ushijima realized that Dakeshi Ridge had fallen in the coordinated assault due to the firepower of the armored vehicles. He acknowledged, "The enemy's power lies in his tanks. It has become obvious that our battle against the Americans is a battle against their tanks." The Marine and Army armored units took heavy losses on Okinawa, but they were instrumental in dealing with enemy strongpoints and achieving the eventual victory.

Dakeshi Ridge was only the first of many fortified positions that studded the Shuri Line north of Ushijima's headquarters. The high ground of Wana Ridge and craggy Wana Draw lay beyond, stretching southward from Dakeshi Ridge. Wana Draw was a labyrinth of caves, rocky outcroppings, and high cliffs; the troops of the Japanese 62nd Infantry Division were well entrenched in defense. Beginning on May 12, the 1st Marine Division assaulted Wana Ridge and Wana Draw for nearly three weeks in the most difficult 1,200-yard advance the "Old Breed" encountered during the entire Pacific War.

During earlier operations, the troops and tanks of the 1st Marine Division had perfected the cooperative combat tactics of infantry and armor. Tanks blasted away with their 75mm guns and belched flame, while riflemen sheltered in the cover of their armor and dispatched any Japanese soldiers that ventured forward with satchel charges strapped to their bodies, willing to commit suicide by throwing themselves against the 33-ton Shermans.

During a single day of fighting on May 16, Marine Shermans and Army flamethrower tanks attached to the 1st Marine Division effort fired 5,000 75mm shells and 175,000 rounds of .30-cal. ammunition while expending 600 gallons of searing napalm at Japanese strongpoints. On May 17, tanks working with the 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines took fire from twin 47mm anti-tank guns. Map coordinates were relayed to the battleship USS *Colorado*, and its heavy 16-inch guns destroyed the enemy weapons with a well-placed salvo.

The combat in Wana Draw was so desperate that the 7th Marines lost 500 men in five days after the regiment had suffered 700 casualties in the battle at Dakeshi Ridge. In three days, from May 16-19, the 3rd Battalion, 7th Marines also lost a dozen officers.

Wana Draw was 400 yards wide, spreading southward from Wana Ridge. It narrowed precipitously in its approach to Shuri Ridge and the town of Shuri. Marines were naturally funneled into killing zones covered by interlocking fields of machine-gun fire and preregistered mortars, which the Japanese had entrenched in concealed emplacements.

After absorbing 500 replacements, the 1st Marines stepped up their attacks on May 20, relieving the exhausted 7th Marines. Meanwhile, the 5th Marines claimed Hill 55 on the western approaches to Wana Draw, finally knocking out several Japanese guns that had harassed the Americans for days.

Through 19 days of horrific combat, progress was measured in yards and in the number of casualties taken. The Marines lost an average of 200 dead and wounded for every 100 yards gained. Much of the fighting took place in steady, sometimes torrential rain, compounding the misery. By the end of May, the 1st Marine Division had ground to a halt on a single ridgeline short of Shuri.

On the morning of May 10, the 6th Marine Division prepared to move forward, crossing the Asa River near the western coast of Okinawa on a Baily bridge thrown across by Marine engineers. During the next 36 hours, the Marines advanced roughly 1,000 yards. Early on May 12, they had drawn up before a small hill rising sharply about 230 feet above them. Surveying their surroundings, the Marines quickly settled on a nickname for this high ground, Sugar Loaf.

Otherwise unimpressive, Sugar Loaf was flanked to the southeast and southwest by two more small hills. These were soon named Half Moon and Horseshoe. One Marine described Sugar Loaf as “a pimple of a hill.” It was obvious to every Marine in the vicinity, particularly the riflemen of the 22nd Marines, that the Japanese would defend these mutually supporting positions tenaciously.

Nevertheless, the Marines did not immediately realize that the complex of small hills was the western command and control hub of the Shuri Line. Japanese troops on Sugar Loaf maintained vigil at the northern apex, and 2,000 Japanese soldiers of the 15th Independent Mixed Regiment, under Colonel Seiko Mita, were ordered to prevent an American breakthrough between the towns of Shuri and Naha. Three thousand more Japanese troops defended Half Moon and Horseshoe.

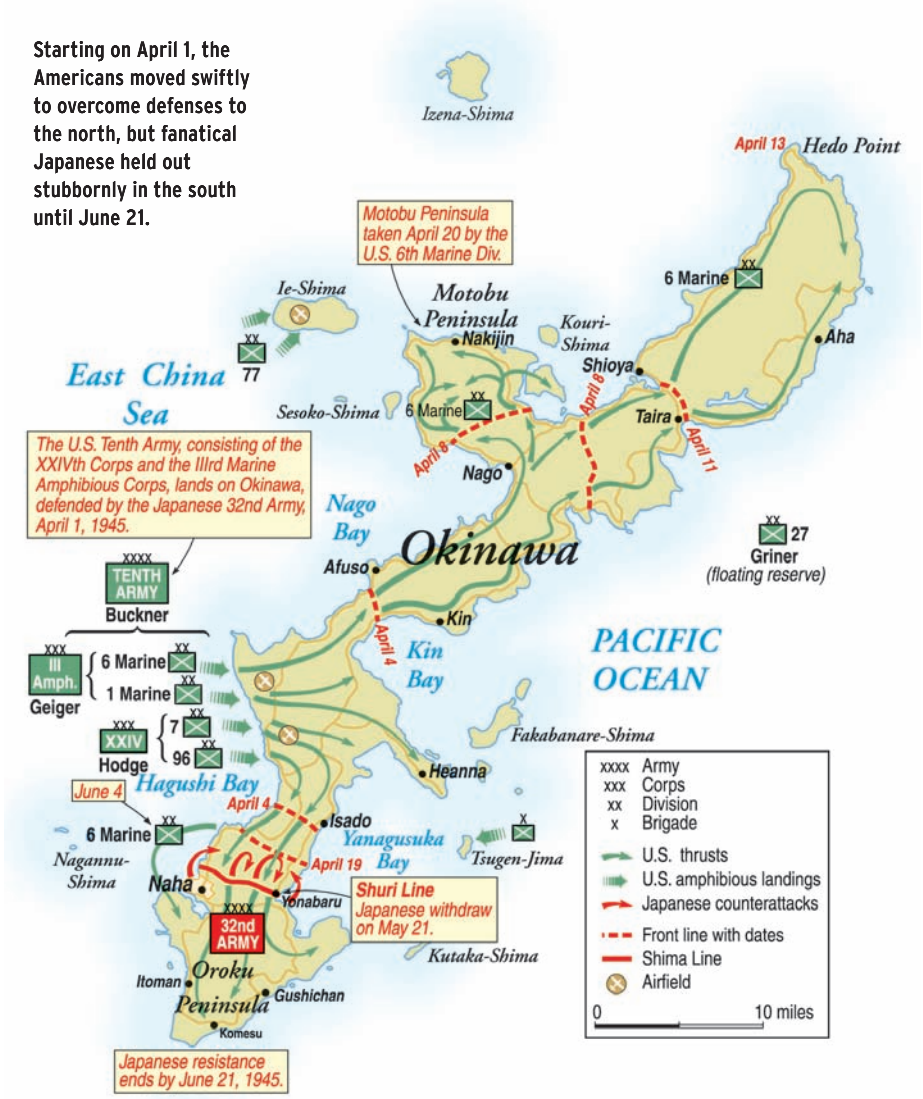
The agonizing 10-day battle for Sugar Loaf, Half Moon, and Horseshoe was a bloody affair of attrition, and the ordeal of Captain Owen G. Stebbins’ Company G, 2nd Battalion, 22nd Marines was indicative of the struggle. Stebbins led a combined assault of infantry and tanks against Sugar Loaf. In a matter of minutes, two of his three platoons were pinned down by machine-gun and anti-tank fire. Stebbins and his executive officer, Lieutenant Dale W. Bair, charged forward, leading the third platoon into a firestorm. Forty men dashed ahead, and 28 were killed or wounded covering the initial 100 yards. Machine-gun bullets slammed into both of Stebbins’ legs.

A Japanese bullet wounded Bair in the left arm. It flopped uselessly against his side. Maintaining his focus, the lieutenant scraped together 25 Marines, some of them wounded, and charged back to the top of Sugar Loaf. A handful of Marines ran the gauntlet to the crest, but they could not hold. Bair ordered the survivors to fall back, dragging wounded men to safety as they were able. At dusk, smoke billowed from the charred hulks of three Sherman tanks. Only 75 of the original 200 Marines in Company G were unhurt, and five assaults had failed to seize Sugar Loaf.

Elements of the 29th Marines were committed to the fight as the carnage continued into the evening of May 14. The two depleted companies of the 22nd Marines remained in the line, contributing as they could. Forty-four Marines were marooned on the slope of Sugar Loaf, pinned down with more than 100 of their original number lying dead or wounded around them.

Major Henry A. Courtney, Jr., executive officer of the 2nd Battalion, 22nd Marines, concluded that his command could not defend its position indefinitely. He roused the riflemen of Companies F and G to action. Withdrawal, he concluded, would expose them further to murderous fire. The best option was to attack.

“Men, if we don’t take the top of this hill tonight, the Japs will be down here to drive


Starting on April 1, the Americans moved swiftly to overcome defenses to the north, but fanatical Japanese held out stubbornly in the south until June 21.

Motobu Peninsula taken April 20 by the U.S. 6th Marine Div.

The U.S. Tenth Army, consisting of the XXIVth Corps and the IIIrd Marine Amphibious Corps, lands on Okinawa, defended by the Japanese 32nd Army, April 1, 1945.

Shuri Line Japanese withdraw on May 21.

Japanese resistance ends by June 21, 1945.

Izena-Shima
April 13
Hedo Point
Motobu Peninsula
Nakijin
Kouri-Shima
6 Marine
Aha
Ie-Shima
77
East China Sea
Shioya
Sesoko-Shima
6 Marine
April 8
Taira
April 8
April 11
Nago
Nago Bay
27
Griner
(floating reserve)
Okinawa
Afuso
TENTH ARMY
Buckner
Kin
April 4
Kin Bay
PACIFIC OCEAN
III Amph.
Geiger
6 Marine
1 Marine
XXIV
Hodge
7
96
Fakabanare-Shima
Heanna
Hagushi Bay
June 4
April 4
6 Marine
Isado
Yanagusuku Bay
Tsugen-Jima
Nagannu-Shima
April 19
Naha
Yonabaru
32nd ARMY
Kutaka-Shima
Itoman
Oroku Peninsula
Gushichan
Komesu
XXXX Army
XXX Corps
XX Division
X Brigade
U.S. thrusts
U.S. amphibious landings
Japanese counterattacks
Front line with dates
Shima Line
Airfield
0
10 miles

Map © 2020 Philip Schwartzberg, Meridian Mapping, Minneapolis, MN

Both: National Archives

ABOVE: A Marine with a 3.5-inch rocket launcher ("bazooka") sights a target as his fellow Marines prepare to assault a Japanese position north of Naha, May 1945. RIGHT: Lt. Gen. Simon Bolivar Buckner (left), commander of the Tenth Army, surveys the battlefield with Maj. Gen. Lemuel Shepherd (left), 6th Marine Division commander, and Brig. Gen. William Clement (right), his assistant commander, May 22, 1945.

us away in the morning," Courtney bellowed. "When we go up there, some of us are never going to come down again. You all know what hell it is on the top, but that hill's got to be taken, and we're going to do it. I'm going up to the top of Sugar Loaf Hill. Who's coming along?"

To a man, the 44 Marines rose to Courtney's call for volunteers. The courageous officer led his men to the crest of Sugar Loaf, and the Marines held until after dark, when incessant mortar and small-arms fire had taken a fearful toll. Fifteen surviving Marines filtered back down the hill as daylight approached. Courtney suffered a fatal wound when a mortar fragment slashed into his neck. He received a posthumous Medal of Honor.

Among the intrepid Marines who followed Courtney were the seven riflemen of Corporal James L. Day's squad from Company F, 2nd Battalion, 22nd Marines. Five squad members were quickly lost to enemy fire, while Day and Pfc. Dale Bertoli became isolated on the western slope of Sugar Loaf. During a harrowing four-day, three-night ordeal, Day and Bertoli tossed grenades and emptied clips from their M1s into clusters of Japanese soldiers attempting to fight off successive Marine assaults against the little hill. Finally, the two were ordered to withdraw on May 17. Bertoli was killed a few days later, and Day was wounded. Forty years after the battle, Maj. Gen. James L. Day returned to Okinawa to take command of Marine installations on the island.

In three days of intense combat, the 22nd Marines lost 400 killed and wounded—nearly 50 percent casualties. A Japanese artillery shell hit the command post of the 1st Battalion, 22nd Marines on May 15, killing Major Thomas Myers, the battalion commander, and wounding the commander and executive officer of the tank company supporting the attacks on Sugar Loaf. In response, General Shepherd warned other officers not to expose themselves to enemy fire. It was, however, an impractical admonition. The officers were compelled to lead from the front and face the real prospect of becoming casualties.

On May 16, the 29th Marines took the lead in the attacks against the potent defenses of the Sugar Loaf-Horseshoe-Half Moon complex. Company E, 2nd Battalion, 29th Marines charged Sugar Loaf four times the next day and lost 160 men while inflicting heavy casualties on the enemy. These Marines held the summit of Sugar Loaf for several hours before withdrawing after dark.

Company D, 2nd Battalion, 29th Marines took up the effort on May 18 as Captain Howard L. Mabie, the company commander, led the attack on Sugar Loaf while the Japanese defenders on Half

National Archives

Moon and Horseshoe were blanketed with a barrage of heavy suppressing fire from other units of the 29th Marines. Supporting tanks circled around both flanks of Sugar Loaf, rumbled south through minefields in the valley that had been so difficult to traverse, and raked the Japanese troops who emerged from their hiding places on the reverse slope of Sugar Loaf. Company D held Sugar Loaf through the night and never relinquished the crest.

General Shepherd ordered the 4th Marines into the line to relieve the 29th, and by late afternoon on May 20, its 1st and 3rd Battalions had made substantial gains on both flanks of the 6th Division front. The 3rd Battalion occupied most of Horseshoe, and the 2nd Battalion captured the bulk of Half Moon.

Gunnery Sergeant Mike Goracoff of the 4th Marines assessed the long battle for Sugar Loaf and the surrounding area: "We made 11 thrusts at that hill and fell back each time with most of our boys dead or missing. It wasn't uncommon to see a Pfc. commanding the platoon as it fell back from a push at the hill. It seemed that the lieutenants fell first, then the sergeants."

The bloody fight for Sugar Loaf had left the 6th Marine Division with nearly 2,700 killed and wounded. Another 1,300 Marines were lost due to combat fatigue, a common phenomenon amid such dreadful carnage.

While the Marines continued fighting in western Okinawa, the 96th Infantry Division captured Conical Hill and the 7th Infantry Division took Yonabaru. Both Japanese flanks were endangered, and Ushijima decided reluctantly to abandon his positions at Shuri Ridge and Shuri Castle. Colonel Yahara advised a withdrawal to the third and final defensive line across the Kiyamu Peninsula. Ushijima issued the order, taking advantage of the concealment offered by foul weather. Under steady rain and cloaking fog, the Japanese fell back under the Americans' noses without attracting more than casual curiosity.

The rain, torrential at times, slowed the ensuing American advance, turning roads into seas of mud and making the going tough for even tracked vehicles. Still, 6th Marine Division tanks clattered toward the outskirts of Naha and probed into the village on May 28. Marine patrols encountered only light resistance, and by the next morning, Company A, 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, under Captain Julian D. Dusenbury, advanced to attack Shuri Ridge. Expecting a fight, the Marines reached the crest virtually without firing a shot.

The surprising success of Company A led Marine officers to conclude that Shuri Castle lay tantalizingly close. However, the long-sought prize was in the zone of operations of the Army's neighboring 77th Infantry Division. Nevertheless, the opportunity to seize the objective was at hand. General del Valle weighed the decision and concluded that antagonizing his Army counterpart, General Bruce, was worth risking in return for the swift capture of Shuri Castle.

Company A crossed quickly into the 77th Division zone and claimed Shuri Castle just after 10AM. Dusenbury was from South Carolina and ordered a Confederate flag that he carried in his helmet liner run up the nearest pole. The senior commanders at Tenth Army headquarters were perturbed when they spotted the Stars and Bars flying above Shuri Castle; two days later, the Stars and Stripes was raised in its place. Marines of the 1st Division had raised the same flag on Peleliu months earlier.

General del Valle actually reached out to the 77th Division commander and the rest of his Army command cadre in an attempt to smooth over this most contentious instance of inter-service rivalry during the fight for Okinawa. "I don't think a single Army division commander would talk to me after that," he remembered. Still, the hard feelings took a back seat to the business at hand.

About eight square miles of southern Okinawa still belonged to the Japanese. Despite heavy American shelling and air attacks, the remnants of the 32nd Army remained defiant. The Japanese front stretched four miles across Kunishi Ridge in the west to Hill 89, where Ushijima's final command post was established, and then to Hill 95 on the east coast.

For several days General Buckner remained unconvinced that the Japanese were withdrawing from the Shuri Line, but when he realized that there was another enemy defensive line to be reduced, he once again realigned the Tenth Army front. From west to east, the 1st Marine Division, 96th Infantry Division, and 7th Infantry Division would continue to fight and die, advancing slowly. The slog southward began again in heavy rain.

The 6th Marine Division was tasked with taking Naha airfield, requiring control of the Oroku Peninsula as a prerequisite. Rather than a protracted overland assault, General Shepherd requested permission for an amphibious landing across the Kokuba estuary to hit the Japanese flank. After scraping together enough operational LVTs during a narrow 36-hour window to plan and execute the maneuver, Colonel Shapley's 4th Marines came ashore on the Oroku Peninsula early on June 4. Elements of the 29th Marines followed, while the 22nd Marines hammered the enemy from the landward side.

Amid nine more days of fighting, the Marines took on roughly 5,000 Japanese troops willing to die for the emperor under the command of Rear Admiral Minoru Ota, one of the few senior officers of the once-powerful Special Naval Landing Force left alive. Ota's ad hoc force fought desperately from the cave entrances, the hulks of wrecked planes at the edge of Naha airfield, and machine-gun nests. When the Marines prevailed, only 200 surrendered.

Ota's last message to Imperial Navy headquarters was resolute, and then he committed suicide along with his staff officers. "The troops under my command have fought gallantly, in the finest tradition of the Japanese Navy," he wrote. "Fierce bombardment may deform the mountains of Okinawa but cannot alter the loyal spirit of our men."

The Marines lost 1,608 killed and wounded during the capture of the Oroku Peninsula and Naha airfield.

The 7th Infantry Division's 32nd Regiment and supporting Sherman tanks seized Hill 95 on June 12. That same day, the 17th Regiment occupied the eastern end of the Yuza Dake escarpment, unhinging the right flank of Ushijima's defensive line. In the center, the 96th Division claimed the rest of the Yuza Dake by dusk on the 13th.

BELOW: War dogs accompany their handlers in a search for enemy holdouts, June 1945. With their excellent hearing and sense of smell, the dogs performed admirably. OPPOSITE: View from destroyed Japanese positions atop 75-foot-high Sugar Loaf, scene of the bloodiest fighting on Okinawa, where a single regiment inflicted over 2,600 casualties on attacking Marines.

National Archives

Coordinating with the Army attacks, the 1st Marine Division assaulted the western anchor of the Japanese line. With Colonel Snedeker's 7th Marines leading the way, the attack's objective was Kunishi Ridge. The prelude to that assault concluded when Hill 69 fell to the 2nd Battalion on June 10. Kunishi Ridge itself lay across open fields and rice paddies; it rose to a more imposing height than the stubborn Sugar Loaf. Although it lacked the concentrated covering firepower of the Sugar Loaf-Horseshoe-Half Moon complex, Japanese artillery, mortars, and machine guns were trained on the approaches from neighboring high ground.

The 7th Marines stepped off against Kunishi Ridge on June 11, and the initial assaults were repulsed with heavy losses. Snedeker ordered a night attack, and by 5AM on the 12th, two Marine companies were on the crest. They wiped out surprised Japanese troops who were cooking breakfast. Soon enough, the Japanese responded, mounting heavy counterattacks against the two Marine companies. Three attempts to reinforce the Marines atop Kunishi Ridge were turned away.

Finally, Snedeker sent nine Sherman tanks across the valley, each of them loaded with six Marine riflemen. Once atop Kunishi Ridge, each tank disgorged its cargo through the hatch in the bottom of its hull. Twenty-two wounded men were then loaded aboard the tanks and evacuated.

By the time the 7th Marines were relieved on June 18, the 1st Tank Battalion had evacuated 1,150 wounded men while bringing 90 tons of supplies and 550 reinforcing riflemen up the embattled slope. In five days of fighting, the last heavily defended ridgeline on Okinawa was captured.

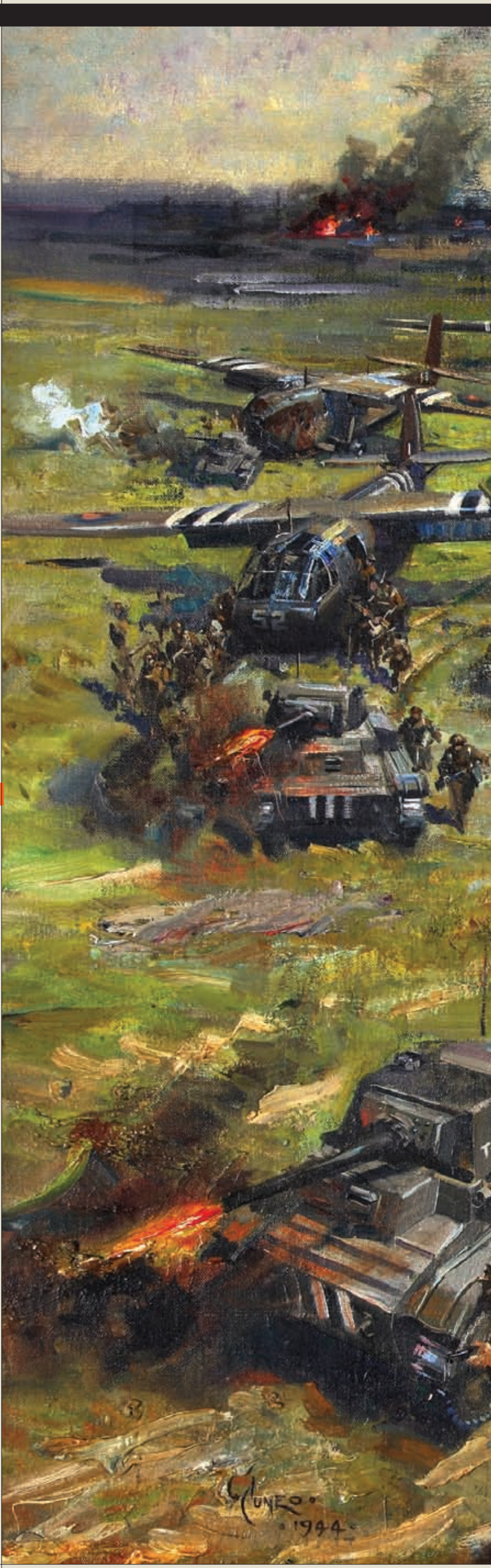
As the Marine reinforcements went into the line on the 18th, General Buckner climbed the high ground of Mezado Ridge to observe the deployment. Japanese

Continued on page 98

PEGASUS BRIDGE:
D-DAY'S Textbook Mission

In the early morning hours of June 6, 1944, 170 daring British soldiers arrived in six gliders to capture two key bridges in Normandy. It was about as perfect a mission as there ever has been.

BY FLINT WHITLOCK



The National Archives, Kew, Richmond, UK

Late on the night of June 5, 1944, while American paratroopers were on their way to drop behind Utah Beach, another, smaller air armada carrying 170 British airborne troops was also dashing headlong into battle like an aerial cavalry charge towards the far eastern flank of the Normandy invasion site.

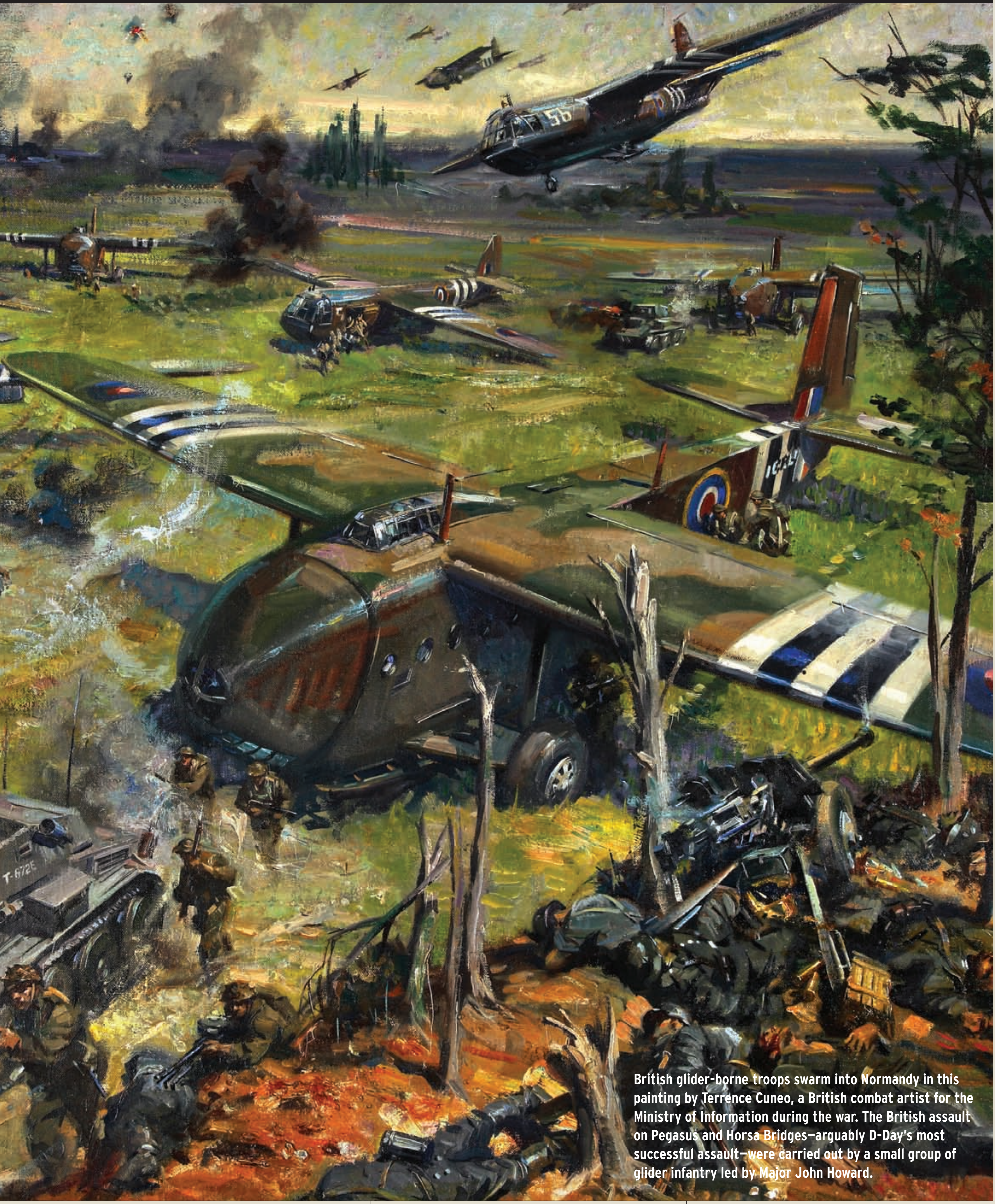
Only six British Halifax bombers were involved in this phase of Operation Overlord: three from 644 Squadron and three from 298 Squadron. And each was towing a Horsa glider filled with up to 28 superbly trained soldiers.

The six bombers and gliders had taken off from their field at RAF Tarrant Rushton at 10:45 PM on June 5, and now were homing in on their objective in France.

In one of the bombers, navigator Walter Russell Wright recalled, "It was well towards midnight on 5th June. We were flying over the English Channel towards France at about 7,000 feet. Although we could not see them, we knew we were accompanied by five other Halifax bombers, each towing a Horsa. Every so often we felt the drag of the glider as it bumped around in our slipstreams, each time pulling us a little way off course.

"Although we had completed about a dozen operations previously—dropping supplies, weapons and ammunition, and sometimes agents, to the Resistance Movement, mainly in France—we knew this flight to be something special and that the price of failure would be very high. Our task was to deliver six gliders to the vicinity of the bridges spanning the River Orne and the canal running parallel to it."

Wright knew that the six gliders held 170 officers and men of the 2nd Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry commanded by 32-year-old Major John Howard. "Their task was to capture and hold those bridges," Wright said, "to keep them open for the invading British land forces and to deny the Germans their use in any subsequent counterattack. It is said that, at a minimum, failure at what was to become known as Pegasus Bridge, could



British glider-borne troops swarm into Normandy in this painting by Terrence Cuneo, a British combat artist for the Ministry of Information during the war. The British assault on Pegasus and Horsa Bridges—arguably D-Day's most successful assault—were carried out by a small group of glider infantry led by Major John Howard.

Both: Imperial War Museum

ABOVE: British paratroops synchronize their watches before taking off on their airborne assault mission. LEFT: Major John Howard commanded the mission to seize both the Orne River and Canal bridges.

have made D-Day much more costly to the Allies, and the Airborne Division whose emblem was Pegasus." At a maximum, failure at the bridge might have meant failure for the invasion as a whole.

For the ten thousandth time, British Army Major John Howard, commanding D Company, 2nd Battalion, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry, ran over his unit's role in the operation: land in the first of three Horsa gliders as close as possible to the bascule bridge over the Orne Canal, rush the guards, capture the bridge, and hold it against enemy counterattacks until Lord Lovat's force, the 6th Commandos, landing by sea at Ouistreham, could reach him.

For months Howard and his men had rehearsed every phase of the assault, but he knew that even the best training and best-laid plans rarely survived the first shot being fired.

Three additional gliders carrying the other half of D Company, the Ox and Bucks, under Howard's second-in-command Captain Brian Priday, would simultaneously be landing 400 yards to the east at the so-called Ranville Bridge over the Orne River in an attempt to grab it also. At this bridge, a Horsa containing Priday and Lieutenant Tony Hooper's No. 22 Platoon was scheduled to land first, followed seconds later by Lieutenant Tod Sweeney's No. 23 Platoon and then Lieutenant Dennis Fox's No. 17 Platoon. Once the two spans were seized, Howard's men were to send out the coded success signal: "Ham and jam."

Unlike the paratroops who would be coming in at just a few hundred feet, the first three gliders that were carrying the Orne Canal bridge assault force would detach from their tow planes at 6,000 feet and make a 180-degree circle to approach the landing zones from the south. The other three gliders, assigned to the Ranville bridge, would make a north-south landing.

Lieutenant Tod Sweeney recalled, "As we crossed the coast of France I was leaning in at the door of the [glider] cockpit when the pilot shouted, 'There you are!' and in the spotty moonlight I could just see the thin stream of the silver river—and then the two bridges!"

It came time to remove the glider's door. Sweeney said, "As we went down, my batman got hold of my belt and I got hold of the door and tugged. We'd never done this before in the air because it was a rather dangerous operation. So it took quite a bit of effort to pull the door back and open up. As that happened the glider leaned over, so I found myself looking down on the fields of Normandy at cows munching grass!"

In Sweeney's number-five glider, pilot Stanley Pearson was doing his best to bring it in on-target close to the Ranville Bridge. "Strange how quiet it all was," recalled Pearson, "yet the Germans guarding the area must by now have been on the alert. We had glided down to 1,000 feet when the four men in the back started to open the Horsa doors. But they must have slid the doors all the way up, and the glider took a rush of air in the port side door and out the starboard side door, causing the Horsa to swing badly. Speed was still too high. We were now down to 200 feet and opted for the field immediately ahead."

Major Howard, on the other hand, was right on target: He looked down to see the Orne Canal bridge dead ahead. The anxiety level in his glider was almost thick enough to slice with a bayonet but, as Howard put it, "our enthusiasm to get the job done overcame fear. The landing drill was to link arms with the man on either side of you, then butcher's grip your fingers, lift your feet and pray that your number wasn't up."

Piloting his glider was Manchester-born Staff Sergeant James H. Wallwork, a veteran of the glider assault on Sicily. He recalled, "It was as smooth a flight as any. The troops, encouraged by Howard, sang and, thank goodness, none were airsick, as the design of the Horsa seemed to generate air currents from the back straight to the cockpit, where it seemed to linger."

Wallwork and his co-pilot, Johnnie Ainsworth, were speeding toward the coast of France, attached to a long rope that connected their Horsa glider, named *Lady Irene*, to the tail of a Halifax bomber. Six miles from the coast, and at 6,000 feet altitude, Wallwork pulled the lever that cut the glider loose and aimed toward their objective: the cantilevered bridge over the Orne River Canal.

"Thanks to our tug crew," said Wallwork, "we were dead on time and dead on target, and saw the French coast in plenty of time to get set. Five, four, three, two, one, Cheers! Cast off! Up with the nose to reduce speed whilst turning on to Course One. That was when the singing stopped and the silent flight started. And that was when six Horsas tiptoed quietly into two little fields in Normandy, releasing 180 fighting men in full battle order to give the German garrison the surprise of their lives and a lesson in taking a bridge."

Imperial War Museum

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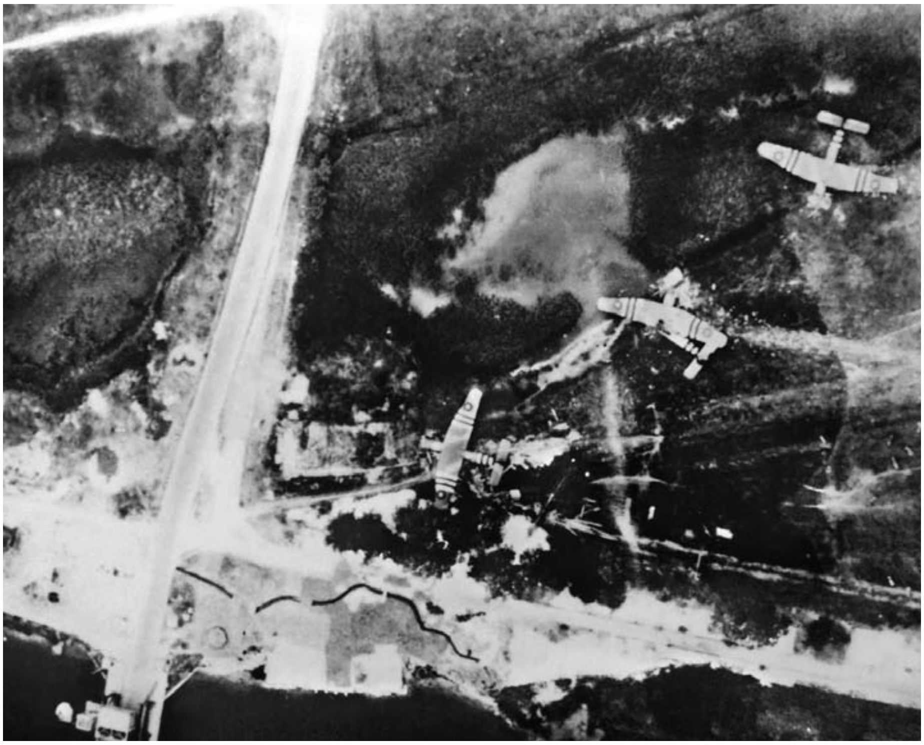

ABOVE: Howard's three gliders spread out in a field a few yards south of the Orne Canal bridge (lower left) at Bénouville. It would soon be known as "Pegasus Bridge." TOP: British glider troops shown inside a Horsa glider during training. The Horsa could hold 28 soldiers.

For three minutes the six gliders swooped down silently on their unsuspecting targets; Wallwork's glider and the two behind it would land at the canal bridge; the other three would come down 400 yards away at the Orne River Bridge.

Wallwork said, "We could see the twin waterways of the river and canal like silver in the moonlight—which was a little better than half, and more than we had hoped for—and the bridges now showed clearly. It was tempting to fly the rest by the proverbial seat-of-pants, but we resisted and flew the courses and times meticulously. The last leg brought us directly in line with the canal and, behold, the bridge! We were a little high, so half flap and steady in at 90 miles per hour.

"Hold tight!" Wallwork shouted to his passengers as the ground rushed up to meet them. The platoon linked arms, raised their feet off the deck, and waited for impact. Wallwork noted later, and probably somewhat more lightheartedly than he likely felt at the time, "Full flap and touchdown. We streamed the chute, jettisoned it after two seconds, and Ainsworth and I in the nose were now ploughing the field, headed for the embankment. We removed a couple of fences and arrived as required at, or3rather2in, the embankment. Although we made an awful noise, we seemed not to have bothered the German sentries, who thought perhaps that part of a shot-down bomber had landed."

The glider touched down and slid at a high rate of speed toward the bridge structure, scraping brush aside and chopping down small trees with a noise that the men feared surely must have been heard in Paris. Finally, the shattered craft stopped with a jolt.

Wallwork noted, "I had taken a header through the Perspex nose and was bleeding from a head cut. It had congealed quickly in my right eye socket, and I thought all night I had only one good eye left. With a black eyepatch, would I look like Errol Flynn? Johnnie was stunned and pinned under the collapsed cockpit, but the troops had traveled fairly well and got on with it. Exactly one minute later, No. 2 arrived and joined in, followed by No. 3, justifying all those 'Deadstick' training flights.

"Johnnie revived in a few minutes, and with the aid of a medic I managed to crawl free of the debris, but it required two of us to drag Ainsworth out. Nothing was broken except for one ankle and a badly sprained pair of knees for Johnnie…But I could walk."

Right behind Wallwork and Ainsworth came glider number two. Riding in it was Birmingham-born Stanley Evans, a 20-year-old corporal in No. 14 Platoon, B Company. "I landed up to my waist in mud," he recalled, "but we were only about 50 yards from the bridge and we ran straight across."

As a section commander, Evans' role was to cover the Café Gondrée, on the western side of the canal, and the area around it. "I could have died loads of times, but Him up above was looking after me. It's not a question of bravery. In those circumstances, you just do things that you are trained for." The café would become the company's aid station.

The rest of Lieutenant Richard "Sandy" Smith's No. 14 Platoon, 2nd Ox and Bucks, was in the last of the three Horsas to arrive near Pegasus Bridge, slamming to earth at 18 minutes past midnight. The right side of the glider, piloted by Staff Sergeants Boland and Hobbs, was peeled away and several men were thrown from it, one of whom drowned when he was violently ejected and pitched into a nearby pond.

Lieutenant Smith had a particularly harrowing ordeal when he was catapulted from his seat in the fuselage and out through the cockpit windshield. "I went shooting straight past those two pilots, through the whole bloody lot, shot out like a bullet and landed in front of the glider," he recalled. "I was covered in mud, I had lost my Sten gun, and I didn't really know what I was bloody doing. Corporal Madge, one of my section commanders, brought me to my senses. He said, 'Well, what are you waiting for, sir?'"

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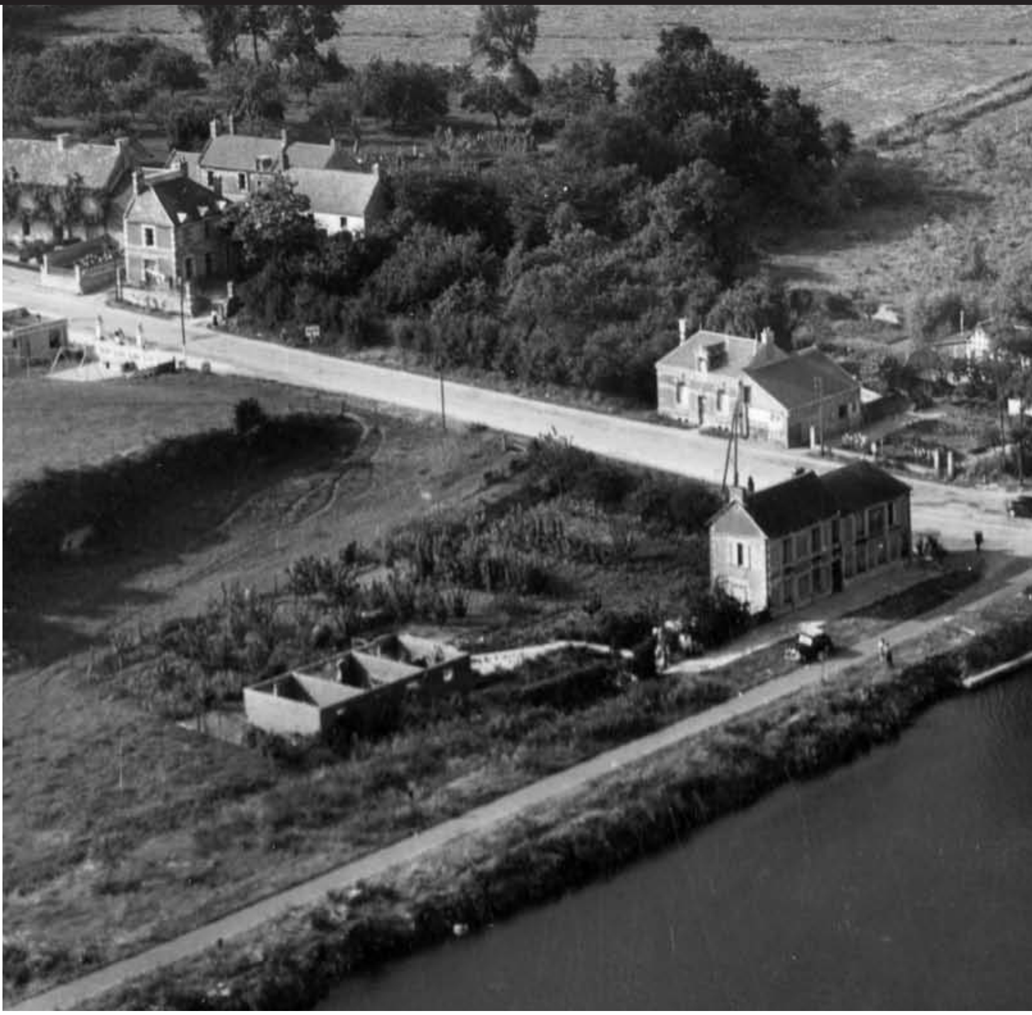


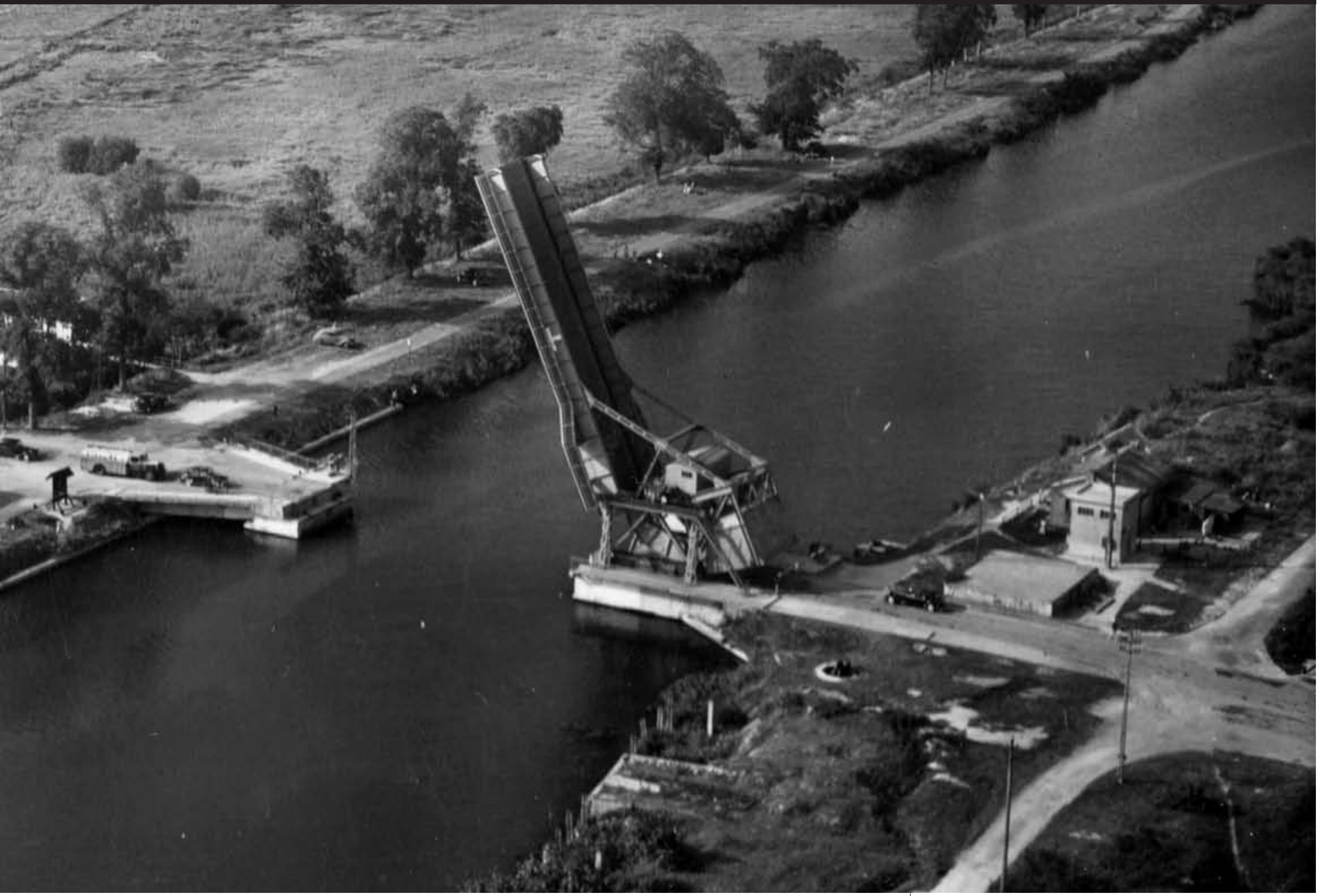
Taken shortly after the war, this photograph depicts the bascule bridge raised over the Orne Canal. The village of Bénouville is at left, with the Café Gondrée closest to the water. The café was turned into an aid station once the bridge was taken.

After shaking the stars from his eyes, Smith found his weapon and, hobbling on an injured knee, led his men to the western end of the bridge where Lieutenant Brotheridge's No. 1 Platoon was already fighting; German and British bodies littered the bridge, some dead, some wounded. Smith and his men advanced upon a concrete enemy bunker.

"The poor buggers in the bunkers didn't have much of a chance and we were not taking any prisoners or messing around; we just threw phosphorus grenades down into the dugouts there and anything that moved we shot, said Smith.

Advancing to the west side of the bridge (which would soon acquire the moniker "Pegasus Bridge"), Smith saw a German soldier about to throw a stick grenade in his direction. Smith immediately riddled him with his Sten gun, but the already-primed grenade exploded, a piece of metal hitting the lieutenant in the wrist; although painful, the wound did not prevent him from carrying out his duties or firing his weapon.

Lieutenant Denham Brotheridge's No. 1 Platoon had been the first to reach the lifting bridge and had overwhelmed the German guards there. They pushed on to the western bank where the Café Gondrée stood; Brotheridge had planned on making it his platoon command post but he never made it that far. Something—a bullet or a shell frag-



ment—ripped into his neck, severing an artery. He fell to the ground outside the café, his life spurting out of the gash.

One of his men, Wally Parr, saw his lieutenant lying in the roadway and went to his aid. Cradling Brotheridge's head in his hands, all Parr could think was, "What a waste! All the years of training we put in to do this job—it lasted only seconds and he lay there and I thought, 'My God, what a waste.'" Lieutenant David Woods was also down, three bullets in his leg.

Word quickly spread about Brotheridge's mortal wound. Major Howard directed Smith to take command of No. 1 Platoon in addition to his own No. 14, and hold the bridge.

Smith continued to lead his men for as long as he could, but with his swollen wrist and bunged-up knee, he eventually had to leave to receive medical treatment.

With bullets still flying, Howard established his command post in the machine-gun bunker at the east end of the bridge. While the battle for Pegasus Bridge was raging, the other half of Howard's company was coming in for a landing to assault the Ranville bridge over the Orne River; it was a less precise landing than Howard's.

The lead glider, carrying Captain Priday, was far off course. The tug pilots had somehow overshot the Orne completely and missed the release point and ended up five miles to the east, heading toward Periers-en-Auge and the Dives River. With no one aware of the error, the glider began its descent on the wrong bridge over the wrong waterway.

The second glider, carrying Lieutenant Tod Sweeney and his platoon, came down 500 yards north of the bridge, while the third glider, with Lieutenant Fox and his men on board, landed 900 yards north of the objective. Luckily, their landings were without incident and the men began double-timing south between the canal and river to reach the bridge.

Private Eric Woods of No. 17 Platoon, B Company, recalled, "Our platoon, commanded by Lieutenant Fox, quickly made our way across the fields to our target, a bridge that crossed the river Orne. It was, fortunately, very lightly defended, the main episode being when a phosphorous bomb was hurled at German defenders who were attempting to man a gun position."

The fight for the Ranville bridge [which would later become known as "Horsa Bridge"] was over almost before it began; what few German guards were there were either quickly killed or run off. With the span now in British hands, the decision was made for Sweeney's platoon to remain there while Fox and his men continued west to Pegasus Bridge, where the sounds of battle were still ringing, to reinforce

Howard and, it was assumed, Brotheridge.

Howard's men were now in complete control and were rounding up German prisoners and tending to the wounded of both sides. Lieutenants Brotheridge and Wood were carried to a trench that served as an aid station about 75 yards east of the bridge (near where the Pegasus Bridge Museum is today). But there was no one to administer proper care; Captain John Vaughn, the doctor who had accompanied the glider force, was lying unconscious in the mud beside one of the gliders, having been knocked cold during the landing.

Brotheridge soon died from loss of blood. Howard said, "It really shook me, because it was Den and how much of a friend he was, and because my leading platoon was now without an officer. At the top of my mind was the fact that I knew Margaret, his wife, was expecting a baby almost any time."

But there was no time to grieve; there were two bridges to be held against the expected enemy counterattacks and a battle to be fought and won. Howard's wireless operator, Corporal Ted Tappenden, was at the radio set, sending out the code words—"ham and jam, ham and jam"—the announcement that both bridges had been seized. But Tappenden had no idea if anyone was getting the message.

Tappenden's son recalled years later that his father had told him, "The Major was pleased with the result and, remembering his orders, 'Hold until relieved,' at this point turned to my father and ordered him to send the code to the paratroopers that the bridges were captured intact. The code was 'ham and jam,' and dad sent the message: 'Hello Four Dog, ham and jam, ham and jam.'

"He transmitted for some considerable time, unaware that the radio operator he was sending to had been killed when his 'chute failed to open. After much frustration of not receiving a reply, dad is well remembered for: 'Hello Four Dog, Hello Four Dog, ham and jam, ham and bloody jam, where the hell are you?'"

There was also a bit of good news. The Royal Engineers sappers under Captain Jock Neilson had crawled under the bridge to check for the demolitions they assumed the Germans had installed to blow the structure sky-high in the event of an attack; no explosives were found.

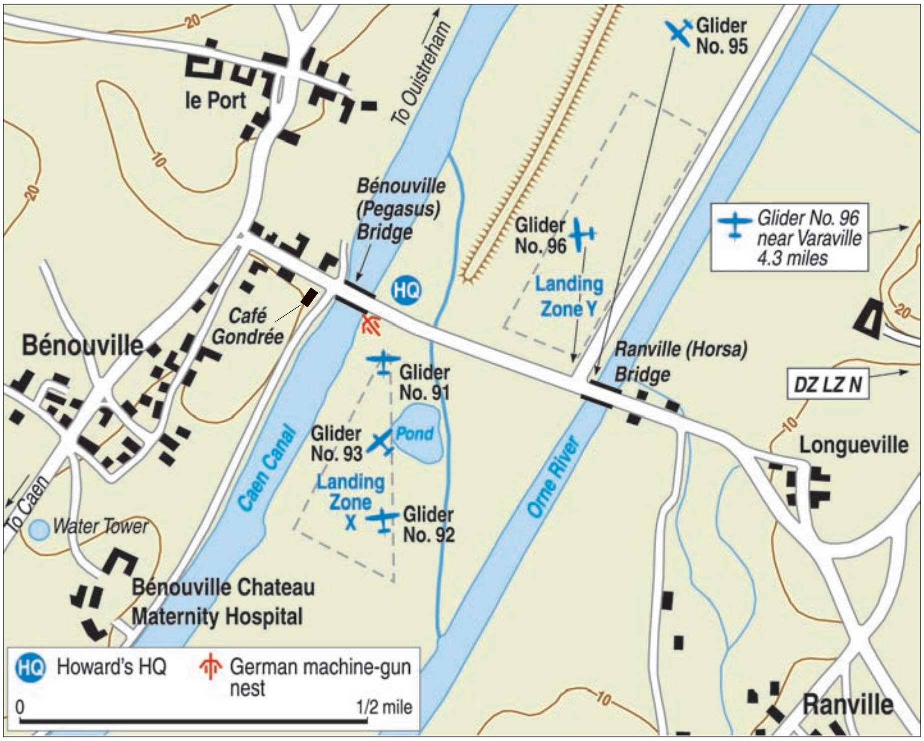
It didn't take long for other German units in the area to learn of the British assault on the two bridges and begin preparing to take them back, and soon mortar and artillery rounds began splattering the ground; the paras took cover. At any moment, Howard thought, the Germans would launch their counterattack. Could he hold? And where were the reinforcements he had been promised?

While he waited impatiently for the rest of Brigadier Nigel Poett's 5th Parachute Brigade and Lt. Col. Richard Geoffrey Pine-Coffin's 7th Parachute Battalion to arrive by air, Howard set up his defenses around the two Orne bridges. The area east of the Ranville Bridge did not greatly concern him; Poett and Pine-Coffin's men would soon be dropping there and could set up a stout defense against any incursions coming from the direction of Ranville.

What he worried most about was a counterattack coming from west of the canal. The entire 50-mile stretch, from the Orne Canal to the American airborne area west of the Vire River, was one giant German stronghold. Untold hundreds of German armor and infantry units, plus scores of artillery batteries, were out there in the dark, perhaps even now mounting up and heading toward his tenuous claw-hold on the two bridges. It

Imperial War Museum

Map © 2020 Philip Schwartzberg, Meridian Mapping, Minneapolis, MN



ABOVE: Superb skills on the part of the pilots resulted in a precise glider landing practically at the doorstep to their objectives. OPPOSITE: After landing with pinpoint accuracy, the three Horsa gliders that transported Howard's men to the Orne Canal bridge lie broken and abandoned in the field adjacent to the bridge. The roof of Café Gondrée is visible above the wing of the center glider.

wouldn't take much for a superior force to wipe out his tiny, poorly armed group. Howard glanced at the luminous dials of his watch—0026 hours.

Off in the night, Howard's fears were being realized. In Le Port, just a mile up the road from Bénouville, panzers crews were scrambling to their tanks, starting them, and getting underway. Howard and his men at Pegasus Bridge could hear the sound of engines growing louder, and they expected at any moment to see the steel monsters making a left turn at the T-junction and rumbling toward the bridge.

But the panzers went past the junction and straight into Bénouville. They'll be back, Howard said to himself, and ordered his men to bring up what few PIAT (small antitank) weapons and Gammon bombs (a type of hand grenade) they had.

Jim Wallwork, his face bloody from his damaged eye, was one of those hauling ammunition and weapons from the shattered gliders. Although injured and half blind, he remembered, "I made myself useful carting ammunition from the glider to the troops, for which effort John Howard thanked me. Politely at first. Then we heard the tank."

It was true. Fortunately, Fox and his platoon were now arriving at Pegasus Bridge—and not a moment too soon, for the tanks that had passed the T-junction at Bénouville were now on their way back. Howard sent Fox's men forward then directed Wallwork to go back and retrieve the anti-tank Gammon bombs from Glider No. 1—something the injured pilot was unable to do: "I did not have much joy pottering about in the dark in a damaged glider looking for ammo, and I just could not find those bloody bombs. So I took a case of 0-303 [ammunition] instead, which made [Howard] rather cross.

"'Get the bloody Gammons!' he hollered, all politeness now gone. So back I went again. This time I was using my flashlight to be sure they were either there or not when I heard a sharp rapid tapping on the wooden fuselage just above me. Woodpeckers? At night? In a battle? No. It was a German Schmeisser following the stupid clot who's using a flashlight! So to hell with Howard and his Gammons. I had had enough, and told him so. It turned out they had been part of the discarded equipment back at Tarrant."

The German tanks came on. Private Eric Woods noted, "One of my most vivid memories on reaching [Pegasus] bridge was finding myself lying alongside Sergeant [Charles] Thornton, who was armed with an anti-tank weapon. On the road on the opposite side of the bridge was a junction and from there emerged three French tanks which had been commandeered by the Germans."

From a range of about 30 yards, Thornton sighted the PIAT and fired, "hitting the foremost tank broadside on. It must have been a direct hit on the tank's magazine, for there was an almighty explosion and ammunition continued to explode for more than an hour afterwards. The two remaining tanks quickly retreated from whence they came."

A German staff car and motorcycle then came barreling up the road and ran into a British ambush. Woods vividly recalled seeing "a German motorcyclist…blown off his machine during the fight; his legs were severely injured. A German officer was also at the scene and immediately surrendered to me, passing over his revolver.

"He was most concerned about his wounded colleague and in very good English, asked for medical assistance, saying, 'I don't think you would want to leave one of your mates in this condition, would you?' I assured him that I would return to his comrade with medical assistance as soon as he had accompanied me to surrender himself to a British officer, which he did. I returned and a corporal helped me to get the wretched man to the medics."

With Howard's men having killed, captured, or run off the German guards, and with the two other panzers unwilling to charge the bridge in the dark, the British were in complete control of the lifting bridge and the immediate area, and the situation at Pegasus Bridge had become stabilized, at least for the moment; the probing German tank commanders at the T-junction in Bénouville, not knowing the size of the

British force, pulled back, leaving their lead tank to burn and explode and sizzle.

From near the burning tank there came the moaning sounds of someone in agony. Fox said that one of his men, Tommy Klare, "couldn't stand it any longer and he went straight out up to the tank and it was blazing away and he found the driver had got out of the tank still conscious, was laying beside it, but both legs were gone."

An extremely strong soldier, Klare picked up the wounded German, threw him over his shoulder, and carried him back to the aid station. "I thought it was useless, of course," said Fox, "but, in fact, I believe the man lived." The German, the commander of the 1st Panzer Engineering Company, however, died a few hours later.

At about ten minutes till one, the low, droning sound of a large number of aircraft engines mingled with the crump and crash of mortars and artillery, and Major John Howard knew that the airplane noise signaled the imminent arrival of more paratroops—elements of Brigadier Nigel Poett's 5th Parachute Brigade and Lt. Col. Richard Geoffrey Pine-Coffin's 7th Parachute Battalion, getting set to jump over DZ "N," just east of the Ranville Bridge. It was one of the day's more accurate drops, although not without mishap.

Major Bill Collingwood, the jumpmaster in his plane, was standing over the exit hole of the Albemarle waiting for the green light when suddenly the plane was rocked by a German shell. Collingwood fell out the hole and his static line became wrapped around his leg, dangling him beneath the craft like a fish on a line and slamming him around violently in the hundred-miles-per-hour slipstream. Someone at the back of the stick yelled, "Cut the bugger loose," but the number-two man, Private Dan Collis, threatened to shoot anyone who tried. Eventually, the men of the stick managed to pull the shaken major back into the plane. The men jumped but Collingwood and the crew flew back to RAF Odiham, where he immediately found a ride in the next wave of paratroops leaving for France.

There were also lighter moments. Lieutenant Nick Archdale of the 7th Parachute Battalion recalled, "We weren't over the coast a minute or two. Just before I jumped I threw out a stuffed moose head which we'd purloined from a pub in Exeter and was planned to put the fear of God into any German it hit! Then out we went."

A publicity photo from the Hollywood film *The Longest Day* shows Peter Lawford (left) with his character, the real-life Lord Lovat, and Richard Todd (who was an actual veteran of the Normandy fighting) and his character Major John Howard. Both Lovat and Howard were technical advisors on the film.

Brigadier James Hill, commander of the 3rd Parachute Brigade, was jumping with his brigade and also had an odd gift for the Germans. "In camp, to keep the Canadians amused, I'd had a football with Hitler's face on it in luminous paint. Everyone knew I was proposing to drop this, along with three bricks, which they gave me with some rather vulgar wording painted on them, onto the beach to astonish the enemy. So there I was, as brigade commander, standing in the door of the aeroplane with a football and three bricks! As we got over the beaches, out went the football and the bricks and myself."

Hill landed in one of the flooded areas. "I had tea-bags sewn into the top of my battledress trousers, so while I was trying to get out of this lake I was just making cold tea! The way we got out was that we each had six-foot ropes with a wooden handle at each end for tying things up. As we met up with others, we linked up with these toggle ropes because if you went into a deep ditch and you weren't tied to someone, you drowned, and there were many drowned that night. After a four-hour struggle we got out, more or less on the edge of our DZ."

Bricks, soccer balls, and moose heads weren't the only unusual things that were dropping into Normandy on D-Day. A number of "para-dogs" were also making the trip. Trained to jump from aircraft with their handlers, these animals were called upon to undertake guard, mine-detecting, and patrol duties once on the ground. Their acute hearing and sense of smell provided an "early-warning system" that undoubtedly saved many lives. While a number of the dogs were used by SAS teams, several also accompanied 6th Airborne forces.

One of the most well known of the para-dogs was Bing, a German Shepherd, assigned to the Scout Platoon of Lt. Col. Peter J. Luard's 13th Parachute Battalion, which used several dogs—Bing, Flash, Monty, Ranee, and Bob, the latter a captured German dog. It is not known how much, if at all, the dogs enjoyed parachuting. Some seemed enthusiastic, but Bing sometimes had to be encouraged to jump with a helpful nudge to his rear. Several of the dogs were dropped into Normandy in June 1944, and later over the Rhine in March 1945. Bing landed in a tree in Normandy and remained hung up there all night. The animal was a pitiful sight, badly wounded in the neck and eyes. But once he was released from his parachute, he stood guard uncomplainingly at a vital section of the battalion's front.

The Canadians also had a para-dog, one named Johnny that jumped into Normandy with his handler Peter Kawalski. Otway's 9th Para also had a para-trained German Shepherd—Glen. He and his handler, nineteen-year-old Private Emile Servais Corteil of Watford, Hertfordshire, A Company, 9th Para, took part in the Normandy landings. Sadly, both Corteil and Glen were killed on D-Day. (Corteil is buried at the Ranville British War Cemetery, with Glen at his side. Bing was awarded the Dickin Medal for his service—the animal equivalent to the Victoria Cross—an award that provided recognition for the animal's gallantry and devotion to duty.)

At the Orne bridges, as Howard and his men listened to the growing roar of airplane engines overhead, they smiled at the thought that soon reinforcements would be reaching them. An impressive number of British troops—over 2,000 of them—would soon arrive in the eastern invasion area.

The 7th Para jumped. Captain Richard Todd recalled, "Although I had 40 jumps under my belt, I had no experience of dropping under fire. But I remember looking out and seeing the tracer bullets zipping past us. I thought what a pretty sight it was with all the coloured lights. I didn't think about the risk to my life—I just jumped."

Alamy

Captain Brian Priday and two other glidermen from Company D, "Oxs and Bucks" Light Infantry used Sten and Bren guns, as well as hand grenades and PIAT antitank weapons, to wrestle two bridges from the Germans in Normandy.

A few seconds later, he crashed down in a cornfield a half mile from the bridge with German gunfire ripping the air around him. "As soon as we were on the ground our dropping zone was covered with enemy fire. Being first out of the first plane wasn't my idea, I assure you, but immediately I could see I was lucky. My plane had benefited from the element of surprise.

"We'd come under a lot of enemy fire but nothing compared to the flak the other planes behind were getting. Looking up I saw whole planes full of paratroopers being brought down. We lost a lot of men that way. One, Tony Bowler, was one of my closest friends. Tony's plane was one of those that came down, complete with all its 20 paratroopers."

Todd decided that hanging around on the DZ was definitely unhealthy, and so he started off. "Luckily I dropped right by a track that led straight to our rendezvous," he said. (Interestingly, Todd became an actor and played the part of Major Howard in the 1962 film, *The Longest Day*.)

Gathering the just-arrived paras into some semblance of a fighting organization was now the next problem for unit commanders. To solve it, many of them had brought with them English hunting horns—little brass instruments traditionally used by the gentry on their horse-mounted fox hunts to rally the hounds and excite them for the chase. Now these same bleating horns were used to rally the troops and excite them for battle.

As Cornelius Ryan noted in *The Longest Day*, "Across the moonlit fields of Normandy rolled the hoarse haunting notes of an English hunting horn. The sound hung in the air, lonely, incongruous. Again and again the horn sounded." The camouflaged paratroops rallied to the sound and prepared to march into battle.

The roar of the planes faded off into the dark as the plaintive calls of the hunting horns rang faintly in the damp air. At the Ranville bridge, Major Howard breathed a sign of relief when he saw Brigadier Poett's tall figure striding toward him out of the dark with one man; the rest of Lt. Col. Richard Geoffrey Pine-Coffin's 7th Para was some distance behind, the victims of an inaccurate drop.

Pine-Coffin had made it to the rendezvous point, only to find but a portion of his battalion assembled there. Realizing that half a battalion was better than none, Pine-Coffin set off with the force for the bridges; the 7th would arrive at about 1:40 AM. The battalion commander noted, "Many of the Battalion got their first sight of a dead German on that bit of road and few will forget it in a hurry, particularly the one who had been hit with a tank-busting bomb whilst riding a bicycle. He was not a pretty sight."

There were more gruesome scenes along the way. Richard Todd recalled seeing the corpse of a German officer torn in half near his staff car, along with his driver. "It was the first time I'd seen a shattered dead body like that," admitted Todd. "I remember thinking, 'Poor sod.' It meant no more than that."

The medical officer caught up to Todd on the march and asked, "Can I come with you? You see, I'm not used to this sort of thing." Todd noted that the doctor was a bit unnerved after having seen "a German with his head shot off, but his arms and legs were still waving about and strange noises were coming out of him."

With bullets and shells whizzing over the battalion as it double-timed down the road, Major Nigel Taylor, commanding 7th Para's lead company, was as relieved to arrive at the bridge as Howard was to see him. After Howard briefed Taylor on the situation, the latter deployed half of his company into Bénouville while Todd took his platoon to Le Port to block the road from Ouistreham.

"It was a rough night," recalled injured glider pilot Jim Wallwork. "We pilots did what little we could, and although we were not normally chummy with the Parachute Brigade, we made them very welcome about 0300 hours that night. We did mention their rather late arrival and said that the battle was won, though neither was true."

Imperial War Museum

Photographed not long after landing on D-Day, these Royal Marine Commandos march through the town of Colleville-sur-Orne en route to the bridge and the relief of the lightly armed airborne soldiers.

By 3 AM, the expected German counterattack still had not materialized. Except for the tank at the T–junction that was still cooking off, everything was relatively quiet. Then Howard received a radio message from Tod Sweeney that Pine-Coffin and his advance party were approaching the Ranville bridge from LZ "W." Howard went out to meet him and brief him on the situation.

Pine-Coffin then moved into Bénouville and set up his headquarters at the Café Gondrée; an aid station was also established there. Howard pulled D Company back from the perimeter and assembled the men between the two bridges where they could serve as a reserve company if needed.

The German counterattack that the British kept anticipating did not occur, although harassing mortar and sniper fire regularly kept the paras' heads down. In the meantime, some of the paras had figured out how to fire the anti-tank gun in a concrete pit next to the bridge, and launched a few shots at a nearby concrete water tower from which sniper fire was coming.

During the morning a flight of Spitfires flew over the bridges and, noting that recognition panels had been spread out on the ground to indicate that the area was in British hands, did a few victory rolls. One of the planes made a pass and the paras saw some sort of object dropped from it.

After going out to retrieve it, they discovered it was a bundle of that morning's London newspapers. Hoping that the papers would be full of detailed news about the invasion and the decisive roll played by D Company, 2nd Ox and Bucks, the men groaned with disappointment that the invasion was not even mentioned.

A number of other gliders had been coming into Normandy in the darkness to deliver

Imperial War Museum

Hamilcar gliders of the British 6th Airborne Division land near the town of Ranville, France, on June 6, 1944. These gliders are carrying Tetrarch light tanks to support the offensive operations of the airborne troops.

supplies, weapons, vehicles, and additional troops. The largest lift consisted of 68 Horsas carrying elements of the 6th Airborne, along with four Hamilcars packed with heavy equipment; 47 of the Horsas and two of the Hamilcars eventually landed in France.

One of the Horsas held General Richard Gale, commanding officer of the 6th British Parachute Division. His glider made a safe, if bumpy, landing and collided with a hedgerow. There were no injuries, but Gale's jeep could not be extracted, so he and his staff began walking to the Château du Heaume at Le Bas de Ranville, where he had chosen to establish division headquarters.

Along the way, Gale found transportation: a horse grazing in an open field. It was on horseback that he encountered Brigadier Poett, who informed him that 5th Brigade had achieved all its early objectives. D-Day in the British sector was apparently off to a fine start.

An even larger lift took place during daylight on D-Day, when 250 gliders carrying 7,000 men of Hugh Kindersley's 6th Air-Landing Brigade were towed to Normandy. Any German soldiers viewing this aerial spectacle must have been in awe while shaking in their hob-nailed boots.

It was now 7 AM, June 6—the time that the paratroops had been told the seaborne forces would begin attacking Gold, Juno, and Sword beaches, but no battle sounds could be heard from the coast, three miles to the north.

Pine-Coffin noted, "We had overlooked the fact that H-Hour, 7:00 AM, was the time at which the guns would be fired and not the moment when we would hear the explosion of shells. Actually, the ships were some distance out in the Channel and the shells took a measurable time themselves to reach their targets and the sound of the explosions took further time to travel the three odd miles to battle position. It was a full minute after seven when the sound was heard.

"The noise, when it came, far exceeded all expectations and was quite indescribable both in intensity and duration, but it was music to the battalion, and spirits rose with the rumbling of it. The sense of fighting a lone battle passed completely; even fatigue was forgotten. The big show had begun and now it would only be a matter of time before the seaborne troops arrived on the scene and the battle for the bridge could be regarded as completely won."

To show his gratitude for the liberation of his home and homeland, Georges Gondrée went out into the garden behind his café on D-Day and dug up 98 bottles of champagne that he had buried in June 1940 to keep them from the Germans. Very soon the scene at the café was one of great celebration as Monsieur Gondrée began pouring free champagne for all the Brit paras.

Upon hearing of this, Howard ordered all of D Company to report sick at the aid station in the café so that they could get their well-deserved reward. Georges continued to serve complimentary drinks to the British troops throughout the day until the bottles ran dry.

Private Corteil and his dog Glen, both killed on D-Day during the Merville Battery assault.

Bing the para-dog of the 13th Parachute Battalion receives a medal for his D-Day heroics.

German snipers remained a constant menace throughout D-Day, especially once daylight came and made it easier for the marksmen to see their targets. Pine-Coffin

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noted, "The part of Le Port nearest the canal was never completely cleared of snipers who made life a precarious affair in the area of Battalion Headquarters. As soon as one was cleared from one place, others would appear elsewhere, even to return to the same place.

"They were not very original although their courage could not be denied. The church tower was a particularly popular spot and was undoubtedly a first-class choice, if rather an obvious one on the part of the sniper to use it. No sooner had one been silenced, usually with a Bren gun, than another would start from the same place."

There was more good news as morning turned to afternoon. Private Eric Woods was on guard near Pegasus Bridge when, from off in the distance, came the faint skirl of bagpipes. He turned to a fellow soldier. "Do the Germans play the bagpipes?" he asked.

"I don't think so," said his mate.

The sound of the pipes grew louder as the Green Berets of Lord Lovat's force, advancing from Sword Beach, neared Pegasus Bridge at about 1 PM. The pipes were being played by Bill Millin, and he had played them off and on ever since their landing craft came ashore at Ouistreham, even while under enemy fire.

The story of the Commandos' and Lord Lovat's arrival at Pegasus has been surrounded in myth, probably perpetuated by the movie, *The Longest Day*. Historian Neil Barber, author of *The Day the Devils Dropped In*, noted, "Lovat [AKA Simon Christopher Joseph Fraser] did not lead the first Commandos to link up with the Airborne Forces in Le Port [north of Bénouville]. This honour fell to No. 3 Troop of 6 Commando, led by Captain Alan Pyman."

Barber said that many accounts of Lovat's arrival have him apologizing for being two minutes late. In correcting this bit of mis-history, he said, "Pyman met Brigadier Poett and Colonel Pine-Coffin, and it was Pyman that made the statement about being two minutes late…The statement is clearly documented in the No. 6 Commando War Diary, and I have spoken to members of the Troop who were actually there, who confirmed it. The Commando veterans have always known that Lovat was not the first to get there, and not the first across the bridge."

Millin said, "We got to Bénouville. I had to stop again because we were under fire there and we couldn't get down the main street. We were taking shelter behind the low wall to the right of the entrance to the village, and [Lieutenant]Colonel [Derek] Mills-Roberts of No. 6 Commando [part of Lord Lovat's 1st Special Service Brigade]—he was across the road looking round his side of the wall—came dashing across to me and said, 'Right, Piper, play us down the main street.' He wanted me to run. I said, 'No, I won't be running. I will just play them as usual.' So I piped them in, and they all followed behind me and through the village."

At about this time, with snipers still active, a Corporal Killean, a 7th Battalion PIAT gunner, received permission from Pine-Coffin to take a shot at the Bénouville church steeple, from which sniper fire had been coming. A single missile blew away 12 snipers who had been in there.

Millen was piping *Blue Bonnets Over The Borde*r. He said, "Then I continued along the road and there was a lot of white dust with the noise and the explosions and everything. So at the end of the village, I stopped there and then Lovat came up to me and he said, 'Well, we are almost at the bridges. About another half a mile. So start your pipes here and continue along this road and then swing round to your left. Then it's a straight road down to the bridges.' "

Millin started piping again and continued along the road, his eyes looking nervously for any sign of snipers. "I had begun to become conscious of snipers by this time… Turned round left and then I could see the bridges about 200 yards down the road and a pall of black smoke over the bridges and the sound of mortars bursting. So I kept piping down the road."

Millen said, "Lovat passed and this Airborne officer approached us and Lovat and the officer shook hands and started to discuss the situation. Then Lovat came to me and said, 'Right, piper, we're crossing over.'

"So I start walking, put the pipes up. We can hear the shrapnel, whatever it was, hitting the metal sides of the bridge. Well, when we got almost to the other side, I started up the pipes. Coming off the bridge, I stopped again because Lovat put his hand up—the indication was to stop. Lovat said, 'Another 200 yards along this road, piper, there is another bridge but we won't have the protection that we have here because it's not a metal-sided bridge, it's railings,' as he called them, 'and when you get there, no matter what the situation, just continue over. Don't stop.'

"So I struck up the pipes and marched merrily along the road, and he was walking behind me and others strung out behind. I was still playing *Blue Bonnets Over The Border* and we came to the [Ranville] bridge. I could see across the bridge, and there were two Airborne chaps dug in on the other side and they were frantically pointing out to the sides of the river that it was under fire, sniper fire, and whatever. So I then looked round at Lovat and he indicated to me by his hand, carry on across.

So I kept piping, but it was the longest bridge I ever piped across! I got safely over and shook hands with the two Airborne chaps in the slit trench." As Lovat and Piper Millin continued on to the east, the unit came under mortar fire.

"We all jumped into a ditch," Millin said, "and we could hear the shrapnel coming through the hedge, and this is the spot where the pipes were injured. Not seriously, though; they could still be played."

With 7th Para now at the bridges in force and the situation seemingly under control, Lovat and his Commandos marched off to the northeast to see if they could be of assistance at the Merville battery, not knowing if the British troops that had attacked it early that morning had succeeded in neutralizing it. (They had.)

Except for sporadic sniper fire and occasional mortar rounds, the British troops at the two Orne bridges spent the rest of D-Day without being seriously harassed. As evening fell, the 2nd Royal Warwickshires that had waded in at Sword Beach reached the bridges. Howard briefed their commander and handed over control of the bridges to them, then marched D Company off to Ranville to rejoin the rest of the 2nd Ox and Bucks that were now there; Pine-Coffin's 7th Battalion would follow.

Pine-Coffin noted, "Thus ended the first day of action for the Battalion. It had been a particularly full day and had cost much blood and sweat, but the objective had been achieved and it was a comforting thought to reflect that, during the whole 23 hours of operation, not a single German other than prisoners had set foot on the bridge. With the arrival of the seaborne forces, the west side of the Divisional bridgehead was secured firmly and the whole Battalion was freed to face the other way and re-join the rest of the Division."

And even though D Company had not yet made the newspapers, Howard and his men were justifiably very proud of what they had accomplished. Their *coup de main* operation had come off in textbook fashion with minimal casualties to their own forces. They just hoped that the rest of the invasion had gone so well.

Imperial War Museum

ABOVE: A heavily laden British Universal Carrier heads east across the Bénouville Orne Canal bridge, now known as Pegasus Bridge in honor of the Pegasus insignia worn by British airborne troops. OPPOSITE: British airborne troops, probably brought to France by the Horsa gliders behind them, prepare defensive positions in anticipation of German counterattacks near Ranville.

This article is adapted from the author's book, If Chaos Reigns: The Near-Disaster and Ultimate Triumph of Allied Airborne Forces on D-Day. *(Casemate, 2011)*

A combined effort by German and Finnish troops failed to wrest the strategically vital Russian port city of Murmansk from the Red Army in 1941.

An Opportunity LOST

PAT TAGGART

As Adolf Hitler began to formulate his grandiose plans for the conquest of the Soviet Union, he considered the far northern operation area little more than a sideshow. Neither he nor his general staff realized the importance of the harsh, unforgiving tundra that contained a rail line connecting the port of Murmansk to the rest of Russia. It would prove to be a considerable miscalculation.

Located about 150 miles above the Arctic Circle, Murmansk was the only northern Soviet port that was ice-free year round. Thanks to the Gulf Stream, Kola Bay, the gateway to Murmansk, could handle shipping when the larger northern port of Archangel was frozen solid.

None of this mattered to Hitler in April 1941 as he met with *General der Gebirgstruppe* (General of Mountain Troops) Eduard Dietl to discuss the mission of Dietl's *Gebirgskorps "Norwegen."* The Führer was concerned about the safety of the nickel mines in Finland at Petsamo (now Pechenga) and with the vulnerability of the ore-rich area around Narvik, Norway, once the Reich and the Soviet Union were at war. To Hitler, the Murmansk rail line was only a means for Stalin to quickly move troops to the northern regions

Waffen-SS troops in their dot-camouflage uniforms await orders to advance against the Soviets near Murmansk, August 1941. Hitler launched his far-north offensive, code-named Operation Silver Fox, to prevent the Red Army from using the Murmansk highway to endanger the vital mineral resources in Finland and Norway.

for an offensive against these vital areas.

The 50-year-old Dietl and some trusted staff members had been working on the planned Arctic attack for more than three months. Known as the "Hero of Narvik" for his daring seizure of the port during the 1940 invasion of Norway, the Bavarian general had already served Germany for more than 30 years. Joining the Army in 1909, Dietl saw some of the fiercest fighting of World War I, including several battles along the Somme, in Flanders, and at Arras. He had earned both classes of the Iron Cross and had the Wound Badge in silver before the war ended.

Remaining in the *Reichswehr* (the 100,000-man postwar German Army), Dietl rose through the ranks and was given command of the 3rd *Gebirgs* (Mountain) Division in

Bundesarchiv Bild 101III-Pollack-002-11A; Photo: Pollack

1937. In 1940 his division helped overrun Norway, and by June of that year he had been given command of the newly formed *Gebirgskorps Norwegen.* Now, as he waited to meet the Führer, Dietl was prepared to brief Hitler about the tremendous obstacles that lay ahead for his men.

Soviet maps showed few roads in the desolate tundra, which was covered with snow and ice during the long winter. In the summer, the land became a gigantic swamp that was crisscrossed with untamed rivers, streams, and lakes. Some areas were also covered by dense forest. Moving men, supplies, and pack animals through such terrain would require superhuman effort.

As Hitler strode into the room, the general stood at attention. With a brief gesture toward a map table, the leader of Germany began to give his own assessment of the situation in the Murmansk sector. He pointed out that the airfields in and around the city of 100,000 posed a serious threat to German forces in the Far North, and that Luftwaffe aerial reconnaissance photos showed that Murmansk had a huge rail yard that could receive thousands of troops daily.

Hitler also worried about the vulnerability of the ore-rich regions that could be lost if the Russians managed to launch an offensive strike in the area. "It could be disastrous," he said. "We must eliminate this danger at the very beginning of our Eastern campaign. Not by waiting, but by attacking. You've got to manage those ridiculous 60 miles from Petsamo to Murmansk with your *Gebirgsjäger,* and thus put an end to the threat."

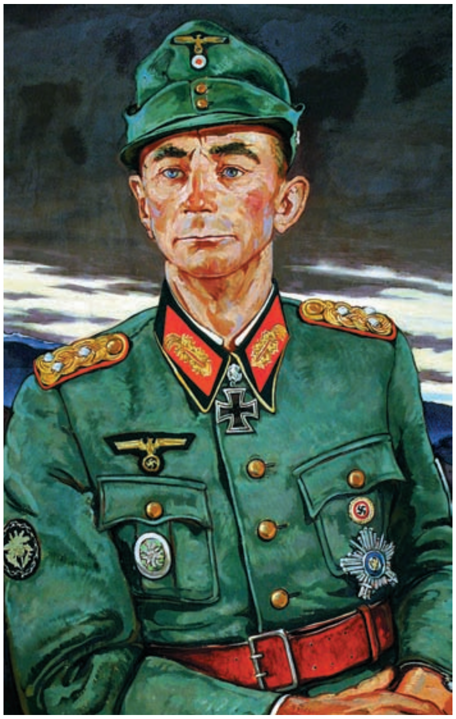
Somewhat taken aback by the phrase "ridiculous 60 miles," Dietl began to detail the logistical problems that his divisions would face. He hoped to dissuade Hitler about directly attacking Murmansk, arguing that the severing of the port's rail line would serve the same purpose and would have more chance of success. "If the rail line is interdicted," he said, "the port and its defenses will eventually wither on the vine."

Hitler listened patiently, asking questions and studying the map that lay before him. When the general finished, Hitler told him to leave his plans for him to study, which Deitl took as a good sign. By the first week of May, Hitler had made his decision. The operational plan that he sent to *Generaloberst* (Col. Gen.) Nikolaus von Falkenhorst, commander of *Armee Norwegen* and overall commander of the far northern sector, was a typical Hitler compromise.

Code-named *Silberfuchs* (Silver Fox), the final plan called for a three-pronged attack against Murmansk and its vital railway link. Dietl's *Gebirgskorps Norwegen* was given a threefold mission—one defensive and two offensive. The defensive mission was to guard the Norwegian sector north of Narvik against a possible Soviet invasion. For this purpose, he had the 199th *Infanterie* Division (made up of older soldiers who were fit mostly for garrison duty); a police battalion and three machine-gun battalions; the 9th SS *Infanterie* Brigade; and a hodgepodge of naval and coastal artillery units.

The first of his offensive missions involved seizing the area around Petsamo and advancing to Polyarny and Port Vladimir, closing the Kola Bay north of Murmansk. His second objective was the city of Mur-

RIGHT: General Dietl's mountain troops (Gebirgsjägers) prepare to engage the enemy with a small, horse-drawn howitzer. Usually, the lightly armed mountain troops depended on artillery of this type, mostly 75mm, for firepower in rugged terrain. BELOW: Despite having reservations, 30-year veteran General Eduard Dietl was a key planner of Operation Silver Fox. (Painting by Emil Rizek.) BOTTOM: Col.-Gen. von Falkenhorst (left), commander of AOK Norway, meets with Finnish General Hjalmar Siilasvuo prior to the June 1941 offensive.



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mansk itself. For these tasks, Dietl had the 2nd and 3rd *Gebirgs* Divisions, a *Bau* (construction) battalion, a communications battalion, two batteries of 105mm guns, a *Nebelwerfer* (rocket launcher) battalion, and a reduced-strength antiaircraft gun battalion.

A second thrust would be made in the Salla area, about 190 miles south of Petsamo, by *General der Infanterie* Hans Feige's XXXVI *Armeekorps* (redesignated a *Gebirgskorps* in October 1941). Feige's *Korps* consisted of the 169th *Infanterie* Division, SS Division "Nord," and the 6th Finnish Infantry Division. It also included two battalions each of tanks and motorized artillery, a heavy-weapons battalion, communication and bridge construction battalions, two antiaircraft and two *Nebelwerfer* battalions, and two *Bau* battalions.

Feige's task was to smash the Soviet positions at Salla and then advance to the rail line north of the White Sea. When he reached the railroad town of Kandalaksha, he would then turn north to participate in the attack on Murmansk. Part of his force would also set up blocking positions along the rail line to prevent Soviet reinforcements from strengthening the Murmansk defenses.

About 90 miles south of Salla, Maj. Gen. Hjalmar Siilasvuo's III Finnish Corps (Group J and Group F—the equivalent of two brigades) was charged with taking the railhead at Kesten'ga. After Kesten'ga was secured, the Finns would then seize the towns of Loukhi and Kem, severing the Murmansk rail line in two more areas to make it even more difficult for any Soviet relief effort.

Unlike other areas at the beginning of the Russian campaign, the German forces of the Northern Theater could not count on much support from the Luftwaffe. *Generaloberst* Hans-Jürgen Stumpff's *Luftflotte 5* was the poor relation of *Reichsmarshal* Hermann Göring's air force. With little more than 250 aircraft to accomplish his primary mission of defending the skies over Norway, Stumpff could provide little in the way of air support for ground operations. For *Silberfuchs, Luftflotte 5* could only contribute three long-range reconnaissance aircraft, a group of 30 bombers, and another squadron of 10 fighters. There were also seven short-range reconnaissance aircraft attached to *Armeekorps Norwegen.*

Hitler's plans were based on Finnish cooperation, but the Finns were also considered the wild card of *Silberfuchs* because the Helsinki government was not yet fully committed to joining the German attack. As the date for the invasion, June 22, grew closer, German-Finnish negotiations were ongoing. Finland demanded and received assurances that all Finnish troops would be under the command of Field Marshal Gustaf Mannerheim, commander of the Finnish Army. This resulted in a dual-command system, which meant that there would be two independent commanders, von Falkenhorst and Mannerheim, in the same theater of operations—a certain recipe for confusion on the battlefield.

Operations in the far north were set to commence one week after the June 22 invasion. This gave von Falkenhorst more time to get his troops to their jump-off points, and it also gave the Germans a few more days to continue to negotiate with the Finns. As German artillery began blasting

Soviet forward positions in the early hours of the 22nd, talks between Berlin and Helsinki were still in progress.

When Operation Barbarossa began, Finnish Premier Johann Rangell let the world know that his country would maintain a strict neutrality for as long as possible. The neutrality statement also warned that Finland would not hesitate to defend itself in case of an unprovoked attack, a phrase clearly directed against the Soviet Union.

The Soviets received the Finnish declaration with great skepticism. They knew that there were already German forces on Finnish soil, and Luftwaffe high-level reconnaissance flights had been observed flying over Russian air space for some time. They also knew that Dietl's *Gebirgskorps* was poised on the Norwegian-Finnish border near the Norwegian town of Kirkenes.

In the chaotic first day of Barbarossa, the Soviets struck back wherever they could, and the Red Air Force hit several Finnish border communities before night had fallen. Three days later, on June 25, larger formations appeared over southern Finland, laying waste to several towns and causing many casualties.

The Finns claimed that their Air Force shot down 26 Russian aircraft during the raids of the 25th. Although neither side had made a formal declaration, the two countries were, for all practical purposes, at war. The air raids, coupled with Soviet artillery attacks on more border communities, resulted in a secret meeting of the Finnish Parliament. Putting the facts and casualty figures before the legislators, Rangell received a unanimous declaration to use whatever means necessary to defend the country. On June 28th, reconnaissance units were sent across the Soviet border to identify Red Army positions and supply routes. The following day, *Silberfuchs* began.

The Murmansk attack plan called for the assaults to be staggered, with Dietl's two divisions jumping off on June 29, followed by attacks from Feige's and Siilasvuo's corps on July 1. Dietl's assault force numbered about 27,500 men. Besides the two 105mm batteries attached to the *Gebirgskorps,* each division was supported by its own regimental artillery consisting of 75mm mountain guns and 100mm mountain howitzers. Moments after the assault began, the *Gebirgsjäger* cheered as Luftwaffe bombers and fighters flew overhead on their way to blast the airfields at Murmansk.

SA-Kuva

ABOVE: German troops ride down a dusty Finnish road atop a Panzerkampfwagen III (PzKpfw III) Ausf. F with 50mm cannon at the start of the campaign, July 1, 1941. OPPOSITE: Silver Fox was a multi-pronged German-Finnish operation against Murmansk—an offensive that failed to deprive Stalin of his vital Arctic port and supply lifeline.

Although few in number, the German aircraft wreaked havoc on the Red Air Force. The air crews were amazed to see Soviet fighters sitting unprotected at their airfields, lined up as if on parade. Most of the hundred or so Soviet fighters stationed at the airfields were destroyed by the bombing and strafing and, as the German planes made their return trip to the west, vast clouds of smoke were already rising from the battered Russian facilities.

Although the Red Air Force was caught unprepared, even though Russia and Germany had been at war for a week, it was a different matter on the ground. On June 21, the day before Barbarossa began, General V.A. Frolov, commander of the 14th Army, asked for permission to deploy some of his units into their forward positions. The request was denied by the Defense Commissariat, but the Soviet general took it upon himself to order the deployment. It was a daring decision, since the Red Army was still reeling from the Stalinist purges that had decimated its ranks. A more cautious commander would never have taken such a risk in the face of a denial from higher authorities.

Recognizing the importance of the Murmansk area and its vital rail link to the rest of the Soviet Union, Frolov ordered his 52nd Rifle Division to take up defensive positions guarding the port. His 42nd Rifle Corps, based at Kandalaksha on the White Sea, was also alerted to be ready to move at a moment's notice. These precautions, coupled with the fact that *Silberfuchs* was scheduled to begin a week after Barbarossa, would make it even more difficult for the German-Finnish forces to complete their mission.

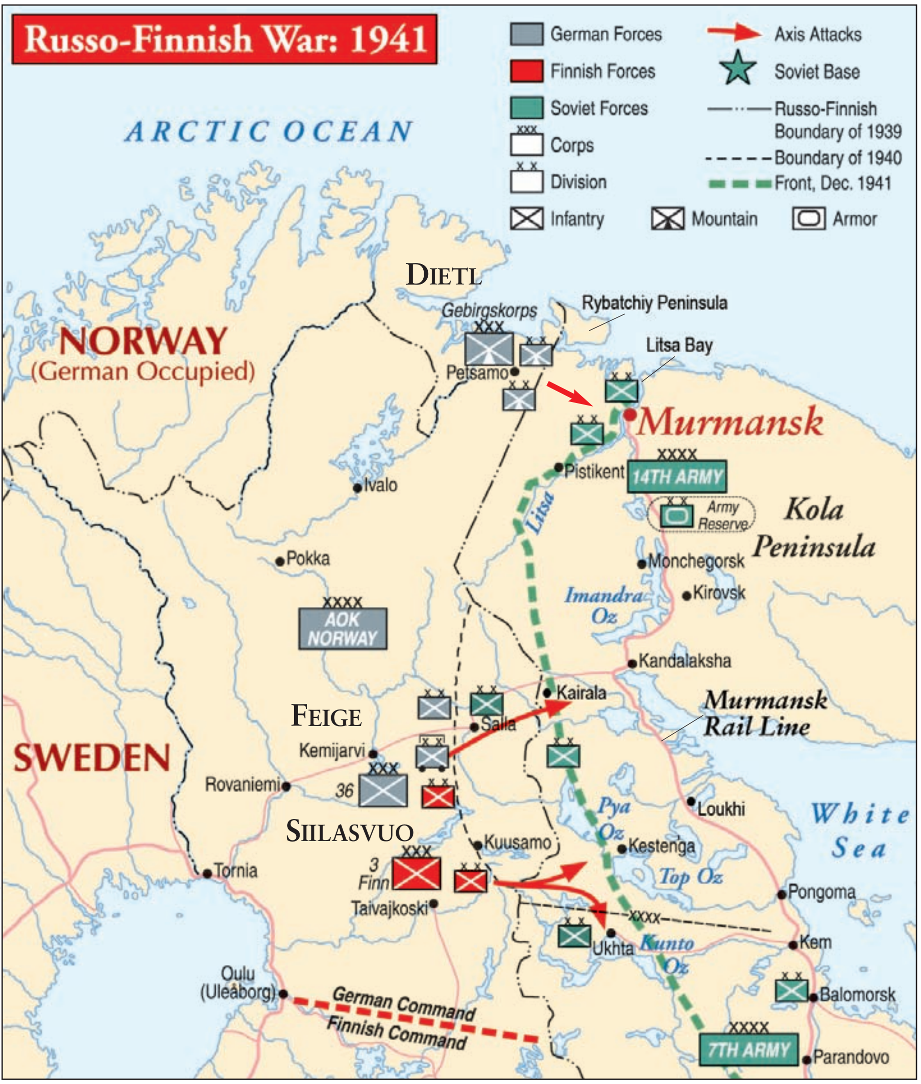
On June 29, Dietl's *Gebirgskorps* attacked with *Generalmajor* Ernst Schlemmer's 2nd *Gebirgs* Division advancing on the left, while *Generalmajor* Hans Kreysing's 3rd *Gebirgs* advanced on the right. Schlemmer's first concern was the Rybachiy Peninsula, which stuck out into the Barents Sea. Due to the lack of reconnaissance, Schlemmer knew little about the Soviet defenses that may or may not have been guarding the neck of the peninsula. The men of the division came mostly from the Tyrolean Alps area of Austria, and the forbidding tundra that lay before them did little to remind them of their homeland.

Schlemmer's 136th *Gebirgs* Regiment advanced through a heavy fog. As it neared the Rybachiy Peninsula, there was no sign of enemy activity. By the end of the 29th, a screen-ing force was left to cover the neck of the peninsula while a stronger force headed to Titovko to capture a strategic bridge in the town. It was hard going, especially when the Germans found that the roads shown on their maps simply did not exist.

On the right flank, the 137th *Gebirgs* Regiment had a more difficult time. Advancing through the fog, the Germans ran into a strong Soviet defensive line consisting of pillboxes and fortified strongpoints. The troops manning the positions were Siberians and Mongolians who refused to surrender even after being wounded or surrounded, and the *Gebirgsjäger* soon learned that the war with the Soviets would not be a walkover. Because of the fog, air and artillery support were useless; however, the fog also made it possible for the main regimental force to infiltrate past the enemy positions, which would subsequently be destroyed by air attacks and direct fire from antiaircraft guns.

Meanwhile, Kreysing's division had made good progress, advancing to the Titovko River and beyond. Once across the river, the division was supposed to advance southeast about 19 miles to the Litsa River and the town of Motovka. When the *Gebirgsjäger* began their march on the town, they too discovered that their maps were useless. What they had assumed were road markings were actually Soviet indications of telegraph lines, and they soon realized that there was not even a track or crude trail leading from the Titovka to the Litsa.

When Dietl learned that there was no way that Kreysing's division could advance through the swamps and tangled brush that lay between the two rivers, he ordered it to pull back across the Titovka and head northeast to assemble behind the 2nd *Gebirgs* Division. The combination of piecemeal reconnaissance, bad maps, and even worse terrain had forced the German commander to revise his planning even before the first day of *Silberfuchs* had ended.


Russo-Finnish War: 1941
German Forces
Finnish Forces
Soviet Forces
XXX Corps
XX Division
Infantry
Mountain
Armor
Axis Attacks
Soviet Base
Russo-Finnish Boundary of 1939
Boundary of 1940
Front, Dec. 1941
ARCTIC OCEAN
DIETL
Gebirgskorps
Rybatchiy Peninsula
Litsa Bay
Petsamo
Murmansk
NORWAY
(German Occupied)
Pistikent
XXXX
14TH ARMY
Army Reserve
Kola Peninsula
Litsa
Ivalo
Pokka
Monchegorsk
XXXX
AOK NORWAY
Imandra Oz
Kirovsk
Kandalaksha
Kairala
FEIGE
Salla
Murmansk Rail Line
SWEDEN
Kemijarvi
XXX
36
Rovaniemi
SIILASVUO
Pya Oz
Loukhi
White Sea
Kuusamo
Kestenga
XXX
3 Finn
Top Oz
Tornia
Pongoma
Taivajkoski
XXXX
Ukhta
Kuito Oz
Kem
Oulu (Uleåborg)
German Command
Finnish Command
Balomorsk
XXXX
7TH ARMY
Parandovo
Map © 2020 Philip Schwartzberg, Meridian Mapping, Minneapolis, MN

On June 30, the attack resumed. Schlemmer's 136th *Gebirgs* Regiment was forced to use two of its battalions to hold the neck of the Rybachiy Peninsula, which had been found to contain at least one Soviet infantry regiment and some artillery. The Russians had also landed reinforcements in the Kutovaya area. Titovka was taken by the 136th's remaining battalion, while the 137th finally found a track that allowed it to push forward to the Litsa River.

The following day, units of both divisions reached the Litsa after marching through some of the worst terrain they had ever seen. Most units only managed to move about one kilometer per hour. Upon reaching the river, Dietl's men found that they faced two Russian rifle divisions (14th and 52nd) that already had a couple of regiments digging in to defend the river line. Frolov's bold move of June 21 was about to pay off.

In total, the 14th Army had about six divisions in the area from Murmansk to Kem. They were not, as the Germans had originally assumed, second-rate or mediocre troops. Motivated by political commissars, they were prepared to fight to the death, showing courage, skill, and determination in battle and using every available defensive position to defeat the invaders.

Dietl now faced the challenge of establishing a bridgehead on the eastern bank of the Litsa quickly, so that the Russian defenses could not be consolidated. The Rybatchiy Peninsula was finally sealed off on July 4, but with the influx of Soviet reinforcements into the area it took two full battalions to hold the line instead of one, forcing Dietl to further change his operational plan. The Red Air Force was also showing itself over the Litsa while the Luftwaffe was stretched to the limit, having to also support the attacks of Feige and Siilasvuo in the south.

On July 3, *Gebirgsjäger* of the 137th crossed the Litsa just above the river's estuary. Fanning out on the eastern shore, they moved forward until they ran into scattered Soviet defensive positions. With no follow-up troops to support them, they were forced to halt their advance and establish a perimeter to protect the small bridgehead. Meanwhile, Schlemmer and Kreysing struggled to get the bulk of their divisions forward for a major attack across the river. With few roads to use, the draft animals used to haul the mountain artillery guns found the going particularly hard. Ammunition and other supplies were also lacking at the front because of the terrain.

The attack on the Litsa line began on July 6, even though the 3rd *Gebirgs* Division had only a few units in position. It was delayed by several hours because of Soviet artillery strikes in the assembly areas, but by the end of the day three battalions were across the river, establishing a bridgehead about two miles wide. During the attack, the Red Navy landed troops on both shores of Litsa Bay, forcing the 2nd *Gebirgs* Division to detach another battalion to screen its left flank.

Dietl's *Gebirgskorps* was further depleted when, on July 7, he received an order to strengthen defenses around Petsamo because Hitler feared a British amphibious landing in the area. Hitler continuously tied down several divisions in Norway during the war because of his "Norwegian phobia." Because of the order, Dietl lost another battalion plus three much-needed artillery batteries.

Faced with the landings on Litsa Bay and Hitler's order to strengthen the Petsamo area, Dietl had no choice but to pull his men back to the west bank of the Litsa after heavy Soviet attacks on the bridgehead. He angrily sent a message to von Falkenhorst demanding more air support, and said that ground reinforcements were also needed before the attack on Murmansk could continue. Although von Falkenhorst was unable to promise air support, he did manage to convince Mannerheim to send the understrength 14th Finnish Infantry Regiment to the Petsamo sector. The German commander also sent a motorized machine-gun battalion from *Armee Norwegen* to help alleviate Dietl's manpower problems.

It took a week before Dietl felt strong enough to renew his attack on the Litsa line. The problems caused by terrain in the region were still hampering the movement of supplies to the front, and the pack animals used for transport were falling dead from sheer exhaustion. Deploying troops in the main areas of attack was also difficult because of the lack of roads and trails leading to the river jump-off points.

Meanwhile, the attack of *General der Infanterie* Feige's XXXVI *Armeekorps* was also in trouble. Feige had intended to use a double envelopment to capture Salla and then push forward to Kandalaksha, cutting the Murmansk rail line. His 169th *Infanterie* Division (*Generalmajor* Kurt Dittmar) and the SS Division "Nord" (*Brigadeführer* Karl Demelhuber) were poised near the Finnish border just west of Salla, while Colonel Verner Viikla's 6th Finnish Division was positioned about 45 miles south of Salla, ready to advance to the northeast and cut deep into the Soviet rear.

Feige planned to use the 169th as a battering ram to smash the Soviet defenses in front of Salla, while Nord would cross the border and envelop the town from the rear. Once again, however, Frolov's disregard of orders upset the German plans. The 42nd Rifle Corps had already arrived in the Salla area, and its two divisions (104th and 122nd Rifle) were dug in behind strongly fortified positions. The corps was also supported by about 50 tanks, as well as by numerous artillery batteries that were cleverly concealed in the thick forest.

Thanks to the 24 hours of summer daylight, the Germans did not begin their attack until 4 PM on July 1. This gave the attacking forces the added advantage of having the sun at their backs. Supported by Junkers Ju-87 Stuka dive-bombers and artillery, the German forces crossed the border and headed for Salla, less than four miles away. The temperature was in the high 80s, and the swamps and stagnant pools of water swarmed with mosquitoes. Smoke from the bombardment obscured vision, and in several areas the for-

National Archives

Russian troops move equipment along the banks of a river on the Karelian Isthmus. Fighting both the Germans and the Finns, the Red Army was successful in keeping the vital Murmansk supply route open.

SA-Kuva

A Finnish soldier attacks a Red Army bunker with a flamethrower, July 5, 1941. The Finns' helmets were patterned after the Germans'.

est had been set on fire by bombs and artillery.

About 500 yards inside the Soviet border, Dittmar's right flank was stopped cold by strong Soviet positions. Although his center and left flank were able to advance a couple of miles against fierce Soviet opposition, plans for a quick capture of Salla had already been upset.

Things were worse for the Nord Division. Most of its officers had very little military training, and the divisional artillery had fired its guns only once since the unit had been organized. The division had shown such poor march discipline on its trek from Norway to Finland that its previous commander, *Brigadeführer* Richard Herrmann, had been relieved. Coupled with the difficulties that the other seasoned German divisions faced, it is little wonder that Nord's first combat experience proved to be a disaster.

Nord's frontal attack against the heavily fortified Soviet positions was thrown back with heavy losses. Artillery coordination was almost nonexistent, and by the middle of the second day of battle Demelhuber reported to Feige that his men were unable to carry out further operations. The stunned *Korps* commander then ordered Demelhuber to take his division back to its border defensive positions in Finland.

On July 4, the division was sent into a panic when sentries thought they heard Russian tank engines in the distance. The roads were soon clogged with men and vehicles as the SS men streamed deeper into Finland. Roadblocks were set up to stop the retreat, and the fleeing troops were eventually diverted to new assembly areas, but the division was rendered virtually useless for the next few days.

To make up for the loss of the SS division, Feige asked for a regiment of *Generalleutnant* Erwin Englebrecht's 163rd *Infanterie* Division, which had recently moved through Sweden to support Finnish operations. On July 6, the attack on Salla continued with assault troops of the 169th crossing the Kola River and Viikla's Finns striking from the south. Supported by Stukas and artillery, the attack made good progress against stiff Soviet resistance.

Salla was taken on July 8 as the Russians fell back to new positions to the east. The pursuing Germans and Finns soon ran into another strong defensive belt near the village of Kairala, about 10 miles east of Salla. There they were stopped cold.

Once again, the inhospitable terrain had served the Russians well. Although the forward German assault companies could keep up with the enemy retreat, the cumbersome supply and artillery units could not. As Soviet reinforcements streamed toward the Kairala position, the lead German units were forced to wait impotently while a new road was painstakingly cut through the forest for their support units.

It was not until July 28 that Feige ordered the attack to continue. By that time, the Soviet positions had been further strengthened with men and materiel. The assault was hopelessly bogged down by the following day and was called off on the 30th. Feige's corps had advanced about 13 miles in one month and had suffered around 5,500 casualties. It was becoming increasingly clear to the German commanders in the Northern Theater that without more men and equipment the taking of Murmansk was doomed.

Dietl's attack on the Litsa had fared little better. Although the 2nd *Gebirgs* Division had pushed seven battalions across the river on July 13, Schlemmer's men had only gained about two miles. On the 14th, the Germans ran into a strong enemy defensive line, which stalled the attack. Frolov also sent reinforcements by sea to land along the Litsa and Motovskiy Bays. Two days later, the Russians launched a series of counterattacks against the German bridgehead. Soviet forces on the Rybatchiy Peninsula, strengthened by reinforcements, also launched attacks on the battalions covering that sector.

By July 18, Dietl was forced to reduce the Litsa bridgehead to meet new Soviet attacks in the Litsa Bay area. Although most of the 3rd *Gebirgs* Division had come into the line, his corps was still stretched to the limit, holding a 36-mile front. The situation worsened during the next few days as the Soviets continued to pressure the Germans. Red Air Force bombers came over the front daily, blasting Dietl's positions, and the Russian ground attacks continued to whittle away the strength of the German front-line units.

Dietl was doing all he could to hold the lengthy front, and he told von Falkenhorst that, if reinforcements were not sent, the Murmansk operation was finished. Von Falkenhorst, impeded by Hitler's order to keep Norway strongly garrisoned, managed to scrape together four battalions, which arrived at the front at the end of July.

On August 2, bolstered by the fresh reinforcements, an attack to eliminate the Soviet forces in the Litsa Bay area was initiated. After some heavy fighting, the Germans wiped out one Russian battalion and forced a second one to be evacuated by sea, eliminating the Soviet threat to the *Gebirgskorps'* left flank. The *Korps* was still not strong enough to continue the attack across the Litsa River, but after some pleading with Berlin, *Armee Norwegen* managed to get the 388th *Infanterie* Regiment and the 9th SS *Infanterie* Regiment released from Norway. Hitler also promised the 6th *Gebirgs* Division, which was currently stationed in Greece.

Winter was only about 10 weeks away, and it would take almost a month for the regiments stationed in Norway to redeploy to the front. The troops from Greece would take longer. Russian forces on the Litsa River had gone into a defensive posture after the August 2 attack on the Litsa Bay sector, and the front would remain stagnant until September, when Dietl planned to renew the offensive against Murmansk.

National Archives

ABOVE: In what is likely a staged, or manipulated, propaganda photo, Russian troops are shown advancing on Germans near Murmansk. BELOW: Moving up to reinforce their comrades engaged in a battle across the river, Finnish troops cross a makeshift bridge still under construction.

SA-Kuva

The only real success in July came from Siilasvuo's III Finnish Corps. Siilasvuo had made good progress after crossing the border. Against relatively weak resistance from the Soviet 54th Rifle Division, Group J had taken the town of Makarley, 17 miles inside Russian territory, by July 5, while Group F had advanced 28 miles, capturing the village of Pon'ga Guba.

Siilasvuo continued his advance—his troops using the so-called "motti" tactic of breaking through the enemy flanks and rear in rapid thrusts, encircling relatively small groups of Russians, and destroying them before moving on. It was a tactic that had served the

Finns well during the 1939-1940 war with the Soviet Union, and it worked better in the heavy forests than the sweeping encirclements that were practiced by the Germans. By July 18, the Finns had advanced almost 40 miles.

Armee Norwegen was so impressed by the Finns' progress that it sent the Nord's 6th SS *Infanterie* Regiment and the division's *Artillerie* Regiment to reinforce Group J's attack. Their movement to the front was facilitated by a road the Finns had built during their advance.

Meanwhile, the Finns continued their drive toward the rail spur at Kesten'ga. During the remaining days of July, Siilasvuo's men overcame stiff Soviet resistance and advanced to within about 12 miles of Ukhta, where Group J ran into another powerful defensive network that was anchored on the Sof'yanga River. It took the Finns three days of heavy fighting to breach the Soviet defenses, but by August 3 they were on the march again.

Kesten'ga was taken on August 7, followed by an advance along the rail spur line that allowed the Finns and their SS reinforcements to come within 20 miles of Loukhi. Although the 54th Rifle Division had suffered heavy casualties, it was being reinforced by the 88th Rifle Division, which had been on the move for the past few days. With Loukhi almost within his grasp, Siilasvuo was forced to call a halt in the face of stiffening Soviet resistance. On August 23, he informed von Falkenhorst that his exhausted men could go no farther without reinforcements.

Feige's attack in the Salla area was also stalled by the end of August. Reinforced by Nord's *Infanterie* Regiment 7 and the *Aufklärungs* (reconnaissance) Batallion Nord, XXXVI *Armeekorps* had taken more than two weeks to redeploy for a new attack. On August 19, the 169th *Infanterie* and the SS regiment opened their assault on the Soviet positions about 15 miles northeast of Salla, while the 6th Finnish Division and the SS reconnaissance battalion Nord struck the Russians from the south.

By the end of September, Russian action along his front had been reduced to half-hearted probing attacks, and Soviet prisoners reported that morale was falling because of the losses suffered during the month.

Overcoming heavy Soviet resistance from the 104th and 122nd Rifle Divisions, German and Finnish combat groups drove deep into the enemy's rear, hoping to encircle the two units. By August 22, the Soviets were in headlong retreat, abandoning equipment and vehicles in a mad dash to escape. The German-Finnish pincers were supposed to meet at Nurmi Lake, some 10 miles behind the Russian frontal positions, but the terrain prevented this from happening until the 27th, which gave many of the fleeing Soviets the opportunity to escape.

Still in hot pursuit, the Germans and Finns were brought to a halt at the Vayta River. The pre-1940 Russian fortifications along the river now held the remnants of the two divisions that had escaped encirclement, as well as a fresh motorized regiment from the 1st Tank Division. Once again, the attempt to cut the Murmansk rail line had been thwarted.

With winter approaching, the situation in the Northern Theater became increasingly frustrating for the forces trying to cut the Murmansk supply route. British convoys had already started the "Murmansk Run" in August, and the port was bustling with activity as newly arrived British tanks and aircraft were loaded on trains and sent south to try to stem the German tide. Both German and Finnish commanders knew that time was running out for them to complete their task as the first days of September passed. If Murmansk was to be taken, and its rail line severed, it must be done soon.

Each of the three commanders, Dietl, Feige, and Siilasvuo, now vied with each other for reinforcements and Luftwaffe support to complete their missions. The 6th *Gebirgs* was still on its way, and some of its units had already been lost when a convoy carrying men and artillery was attacked by a Soviet submarine, followed by an attack by the Royal Navy near the North Cape. The few reinforcements still available to *Armee Norwegen* were doled out carefully to its various commands.

In Dietl's sector, *Gebirgskorps Norwegen* made one final attempt to breach the Litsa River. Jumping off on September 8, the 2nd *Gebirgs* broke out of its small bridgehead near Litsa Bay, clearing out Soviet positions on the south shore of the bay on its left flank and engaging in heavy fighting against the entrenched Russians on its center and right flank. The 3rd *Gebirgs* Division attacked about seven miles to the south and also made good initial progress.

It was not, however, a one-sided affair. Dietl's reinforcements had not yet been through the rigors of forest warfare, and both the 388th *Infanterie* and the 9th SS *Infanterie* suffered severe casualties as they were attacked from the rear by Soviet positions that had been bypassed in the heavily wooded region. The 388th had been hit so hard that it was forced to withdraw across the Litsa, while the 9th SS broke and ran under the pressure of a Soviet artillery bombardment and ground counterattack.

September 9 found the 2nd *Gebirgs* Division about three miles inside the Russian line, while the 3rd *Gebirgs* had gone about four miles. Recovering from the initial assault, the Soviet commanders of the 14th and 52nd Rifle Divisions, and the ad hoc division "Polyarny" (later renamed the 186th Rifle Division) each mounted counterattacks against the advancing Germans. The dense brush and thick forest soon became an area for a deadly game of hide and seek as opponents searched for targets in the eerie, primordial landscape.

By the 10th, both German divisions were brought to a halt by lack of supplies and the stubbornness of the Red Army. It took two days for the 2nd *Gebirgs* Division to get going again, and another two days before the 3rd *Gebirgs* could resume the attack. Still plagued by ammunition shortages, the two divisions continued to press on. On the 17th, new Soviet regiments were reported in front of the exhausted *Gebirgsjäger.* For the next few days the Russians mounted counterattacks against Schlemmer's and Kreysing's flanks so that more troops had to be siphoned from the front to prevent the divisions from being cut off.

It was now clear to Dietl that his bid to take Murmansk was at an end. With the increasing Soviet pressure, he ordered Kreysing to withdraw his division to the west bank of the Litsa. *Armee Norwegen* agreed and canceled the offensive in the northern sector on September 21. The 2nd *Gebirgs* Division was also ordered to halt and pull back to its bridgehead positions, holding the area as a possible jump-off point for future operations.

In *Armee Norwegen*'s central sector, the XXXVI *Armeekorps* opened its renewed offensive on September 6. Once again, the 169th *Infanterie* Division was used to batter the Soviet defenses with a frontal attack on the Voyta River line, while the Finns made a frontal assault on Russian positions to the south.

The Finns and two regiments of the 169th made little headway, but *Oberst* (Colonel) Friedrich-August Schack's 392nd *Infanterie* Regiment managed to sweep around the Russian defenses and advance to a strategic position known as Hill 366, about five miles behind the main line. He had a chance to cut the main road from the Voyta to Kandalaksha, if only he could overcome the heavily fortified enemy positions on the hill before Frolov sent more reinforcements to the area.

Schack pushed his men forward and captured Hill 366 on September 7 after a bitter fight. The exhausted infantrymen were entirely spent after the action, and Schack angrily radioed the divisional and corps commanders for more men to help complete his success. Another regiment was promised, but Schack refused to wait. After a night's rest, he ordered his men to attack Hill 386, about a mile south of his present position. It took two days of heavy fighting to capture the Russian positions there, but the Germans managed to accomplish the feat without the aid of the reinforcing regiment, which was still on its way.

National Archives

ABOVE: Weary from days of combat, German infantrymen dig into an embankment during a lull in the Murmansk fighting. The Germans and Finns were nearly successful in taking the city, but dogged Red Army resistance and the harsh climate took their toll. OPPOSITE: A Lend-Lease tank is delivered to the Red Army in late 1942. The program, which supplied staggering amounts of war materiel to the Soviets via the ports of Murmansk and Archangel, kept the beleaguered Stalinist forces fighting.

Now that the Voyta Line was threatened from the rear, Frolov ordered a retreat to a new set of prepared positions about five miles to the rear along the Verman River. Leaving a strong rear guard to slow the pursuing Germans and Finns, the men of the 104th and 122nd Rifle Divisions made it back to the Verman Line, where they were reinforced with 5,000 replacements.

When the XXXVI *Armeekorps* finally reached the Verman Line in mid-September, it was no longer capable of carrying out further offensive operations. Promised reinforcements had not arrived, and the front-line battalions were grossly understrength. Feige's salient stretched about 50 miles from the Finnish border to the Verman River after two-and-a-half months of battle. He had suffered 9,463 casualties. Basically, XXXVI *Armeekorps* was worn out. On September 17, Feige received an order from *Armee Norwegen* to go into defensive mode, effectively ending the drive to Kandalaksha.

While Feige and Dietl were making their final attempts to cut the Murmansk rail line, General Siilasvuo had been left to fend for himself. Under constant pressure from Soviet attacks, the Finns were forced to abandon their forward positions and occupy a new line eight miles east of Kesten'ga. When the offensives in the center and the north ran out of steam, Siilasvuo finally began to get reinforcements in mid-September when two more SS battalions and the Nord reconnaissance battalion were shifted to his sector. More units of the Nord Division, as well as an artillery regiment, were also on the way.

With these new forces, Siilasvuo was able to hold his new line and beat off further Soviet attacks. By the end of September, Russian action along his front had been reduced to half-hearted probing attacks, and Soviet prisoners reported that morale was falling because of the losses suffered during the month. Acting on this news, Siilasvuo and von

Falkenhorst decided to make one more attempt to take Loukhi.

By the time the necessary supplies and reinforcements were in position for the final push, the Arctic winter had set in. At 0600 on November 1, the attack began. The temperature was minus 4 degrees Fahrenheit as German and Finnish artillery pounded the Russian positions. Groups J and F, which had been upgraded to divisional status, hit the Soviet front while the Nord Division engaged in a sweeping maneuver around the enemy flank.

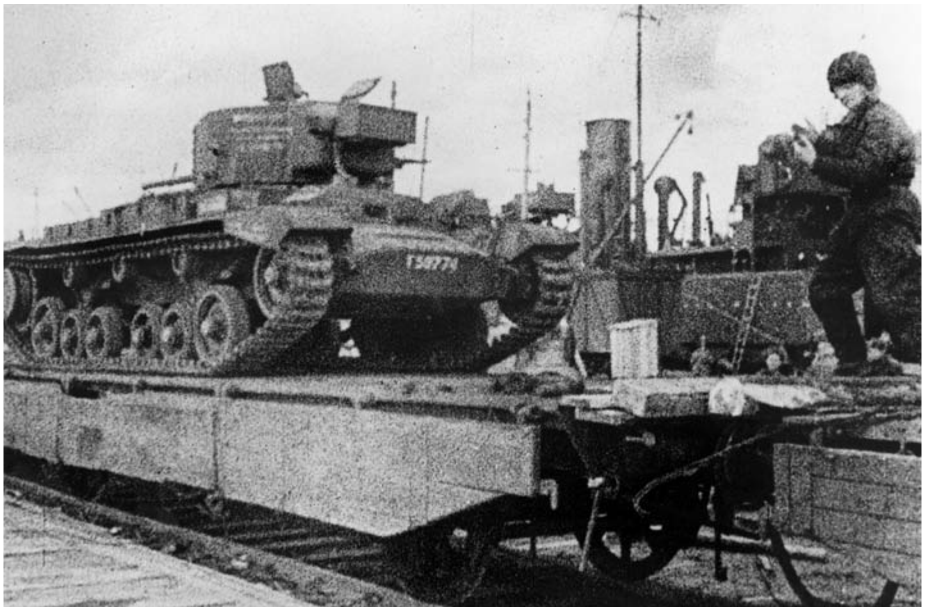
Using their battle-tested “motti” tactics, the Finns were able to infiltrate the Russian line and decimate two regiments of the 88th Rifle Division during the first week of the attack. The Soviets left about 3,000 dead on the field, with another 2,600 taken prisoner. Nord also did well, advancing about five miles before being slowed by another line of enemy defenses.

Heavy fighting took place during the second week of November in steadily falling temperatures. The attack was slowing, but it seemed as if Loukhi was within Siilasvuo’s grasp as the Finns and Germans continued to push forward. Suddenly, however, the Finnish corps commander halted his troops on the pretext of regrouping and mopping up bypassed pockets of resistance, even though his subordinates thought that they were fully capable of fulfilling their primary task.

Von Falkenhorst began to grow increasingly suspicious of the Finns’ reasoning as the month progressed, and grew more so when Mannerheim began pressing him to return all Finnish units under German command to Finnish control. The German general had a right to be leery.

A message from the still-neutral United States government had reached Helsinki on October 27. It demanded, in no uncertain terms, “Finland should stop all offensive operations and withdraw to the 1939 border.” The note went on to say, “that should material of war sent by the United States to Soviet territory in the north by way of the Arctic Ocean be attacked en route either presumably or allegedly from territory under Finnish control, in the present state of opinion in the United States, such an incident must be expected to bring about an instant crisis between Finland and the United States.”

There was little doubt in Helsinki that the threat was real. Finland, already at war with the Soviet Union, could not afford to antagonize the United States. After a show of public outrage over the note, orders were quietly given and Finnish units either started pulling back or halted in their present positions. Helsinki, through Mannerheim, also demanded that the Finns regain control of their own troops. Without their help, the German dream of cutting the Murmansk supply route was over.


National Archives

The importance of Murmansk cannot be overlooked, especially during the first year of the Russo-German war. Although the Far East port of Vladivostok and the ports in the Persian Gulf would overshadow Murmansk as the war progressed, it was the Arctic port that was most vital to the Soviet Union in 1941-1942.

From October 1941 to June 1942, 1,285 aircraft, 2,749 tanks, 81,287 machine guns, and 59,455,620 pounds of explosives came through Murmansk. Tons of food from the West also helped feed the Soviet military and civilian populations during the bitter winter of 1941. The failure of the Germans to take the port, a “ridiculous 60 miles” from the Finnish border, meant that British Valentine and Matilda tanks would fight side by side with Russian T-34s and KV 1s during the Moscow counteroffensive. It meant that Red Army troops would go into battle with their stomachs full of Spam and tinned beef, wearing boots and clothing made in England and the United States.

The failure of Hitler and the German High Command to recognize the importance of Murmansk had dramatic consequences during the initial period of the war. Another two or three German divisions could have tipped the scales in 1941, depriving the Russians of their precious supply route. Instead, the Northern Theater was relegated to the backwater of war after the initial assault failed.

The sector remained fairly stagnant until the Soviet summer offensive in 1944, when the Red Army pushed the Germans back into Finland and retook the territory it had lost in 1941. Finland soon sued for peace, forcing the German troops to continue their retreat into Norway or across the Baltic Sea. Murmansk, one of the most valuable pieces of real estate in the Soviet Union, was finally safe. □

Pat McTaggart resides in Elkader, Iowa. He is an expert on the bitter fighting between Germany and the Soviet Union during World War II.

Divine Wind: DEATH FROM THE SKIES

BY NATHAN N. PREFER

In early 1945 the Japanese tried to stave off defeat by employing swarms of suicide pilots, but their expensive gambit failed.

All: Naval History and Heritage Command

A kamikaze pilot salutes as he receives his orders for a "divine wind" mission. It is estimated that over 1,200 pilots (out of 2,314) lost their lives on such missions. OPPOSITE: Despite a broken elevator and wings riddled with bullet holes, a Mitsubishi A6M "Zeke" Kamikaze plane makes its death plunge toward the carrier USS *Essex* off Okinawa, May 14, 1945. Japan's efforts to cripple the American invasion of Okinawa brought about the mass employment of suicide missions.

The nation of Japan was hopeless before the invading force.

They were outnumbered, and the enemy was about to land on the shores of the Imperial Home Islands. There was nothing left but to fight to the death against the savage invaders. But then, suddenly and without warning, a great wind came and destroyed the enemy fleet. The enemy, Mongols under Kublai Khan, had been destroyed by a sudden typhoon, a "Divine Wind" or "Kamikaze," as it came to be known in Japanese history. In the year 1281, Japan had been saved by this help from above.

Nearly 700 years later, in 1944, the same situation faced Japan. It was not Mongols this time, but an enormous military force led by the United States that was threatening to invade Japan. The Western Allies had begun their inexorable advance against Japan three years earlier at New Guinea and Guadalcanal, and they were now more than halfway across the vast Pacific, aiming directly for Japan itself.

In desperation, some Japanese leaders looked to another "Divine Wind" again to save them. This time, the Kamikaze would not be a typhoon, but swarms of suicide planes that were to be unleashed at the advancing allies.

The concept of individual suicide was accepted within Japanese society, particularly among those descended from the warrior, or Samurai, class. Suicide was generally accepted as the way to atone for failure, and ritual suicide, also known as seppuku and harakiri, was common among the military of Japan. It would appear repeatedly during the Pacific war, beginning at Guadalcanal and lasting to, and even after, Japan's surrender.

But mass suicide was something else. Throughout the war, individual Japanese, particularly pilots whose planes were too badly damaged to return to base and being culturally unable to accept a surrender to the enemy, would fly their damaged aircraft into some enemy target, be it a ship or a ground target. These men were presumed to have been granted a direct passage to an honored place in heaven for their actions. Suicide as a doctrinal military tactic, however, did not enter Japanese military policy until October 1944. By then, the Americans were invading the Philippines and the Palau Islands, threatening to cut off Japanese lines of supply from the Far East. Without those supplies, Japan could not sustain its war effort much longer. All attempts to stop the American advance had so far failed, and, as in 1281, Japan was growing increasingly desperate. Once again, the accepted solution was the Kamikaze.

ABOVE: Admiral Takijiro Ohnishi (right), commander of the Kamikaze Special Attack Force, dispenses ceremonial cups of sake to suicide pilots about to take off. LEFT: Admiral Ohnishi committed suicide after Japan's surrender.

The origins of the modern Kamikaze are traced to Luzon, in the Philippines, in October 1944. The Americans were about to invade those islands, and the Japanese were preparing to meet that invasion. Captain Rikihei Inoguchi of the Imperial Japanese Navy Air Forces was at Clark Field discussing attack plans against the approaching American invasion force. As a senior staff officer of the 1st Air Fleet, he had been assigned the job of organizing the air defenses of the Philippines.

While speaking with Commander Asaichi Tamai, commanding the 201st Air Group, he was joined suddenly by Vice Adm. Takijiro Ohnishi, the recently appointed commander of Japanese Naval Air Forces in the Philippines. Joined by some squadron leaders, the group sat down to listen to Admiral Ohnishi's instructions.

Admiral Ohnishi was himself a pilot and a long-time advocate of naval aviation in Japan. He had helped plan the Pearl Harbor attack and had been a protégé of Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto. As a staff officer, Ohnishi had long been involved in discussions in Tokyo over the use of suicide operations, arguing against them. But the continued defeats in the Pacific and the loss of vital resource territory seemed to have changed his opinion by the time he was appointed to command the 1st Air Fleet in the Philippines.

Admiral Ohnishi began by stating the obvious: Japan's situation was critical. He then explained that the Imperial Japanese Navy was about to launch an all-out attack on the American fleet off Leyte. But the Japanese fleet had no air cover of its own; the 1st Air Fleet on Luzon would have to provide that air cover. He had orders to protect the fleet

Crewmen aboard the carrier USS *Belleau Wood* off the Philippines pour water on aircraft and burning flight deck after a Kamikaze strike, October 30, 1944. The carrier USS *Franklin*, also hit by a suicide plane, burns in the distance.

for at least one week, keeping the American aircraft carriers from launching strikes that would cripple or destroy the oncoming Japanese fleet.

The problem was that the 1st Air Fleet had only 30 serviceable aircraft on Luzon. How could such a small force hold back the hundreds, perhaps thousands, of American planes coming to Leyte Gulf?

Admiral Ohnishi presented his solution. He told the assembled pilots and staff officers, “In my opinion, there is only one way of assuring that our meager strength will be effective to a maximum degree. That is to organize suicide attack units composed of Zero fighters armed with 250-kilogram bombs, with each plane to crash-dive into an enemy carrier...What do you think?”

Silence initially replied to the admiral’s proposal. Captain Inoguchi remembered, “No one spoke for a time, but Admiral Ohnishi’s words struck a spark in each of us. Indeed, ‘body-crashing’ [taiatari] tactics had already been used by Navy pilots in air-to-air combat against big enemy bombers, and there were many fliers in the combat air units who had urged that the same tactics be employed against enemy carriers.”

The group then discussed whether a fighter plane armed with a 250-kilogram bomb would be enough to disable or even sink an American aircraft carrier. They acknowledged that accuracy would be greater with a pilot guiding the weapon, including his own plane, to the target. Commander Tamai, the senior flying officer present, agreed that the plane and bomb together would be enough to at least disable any American aircraft carrier it hit.

Commander Tamai then held a meeting with his pilots, and came back to say, “The 201st Air Group will carry out his proposal. May I ask that you leave to us the organization of our crash-dive unit?” The Japanese Kamikaze program of 1944 had begun.

Commander Tamai assembled his enlisted pilots and explained the new proposal to them. Every one of the 23 pilots joyfully agreed to participate in the Kamikaze program. Returning to his staff, Commander Tanai and Captain Inoguchi discussed how best to organize the unit. They wanted an officer, preferably a graduate of the Japanese Naval Academy at Etajima, to lead the first attack.

After some discussion, Lieutenant Yukio Seki was selected as the attack leader. When approached by Inoguchi and Tamai, Lieutenant Seki responded, “You absolutely must let me do it.”

Discussions followed regarding the force’s organization. A name was suggested, and soon the new unit was called Shimpu, another Japanese word for Kamikaze. Admiral Ohnishi approved the plans, organization, and men for the new unit.

On the morning of October 20, 1944, the Shimpu attack group ate breakfast and then assembled for their final instructions. Admiral Ohnishi gave them a speech encouraging them to succeed, and the 24 pilots were prepared to go. But that was easier said than done.

The initial missions had to be aborted: mechanical failure grounded aircraft, enemy combat air patrols kept the Japanese grounded, and bad weather prevented takeoff. It wasn’t until the morning of October 25 that Lieutenant Seki and his group finally launched their mission.

The Shimpu encountered a support carrier group known to the Americans as “Taffy 3.” These Americans had already been attacked by Imperial Japanese Navy surface forces days earlier in Leyte Gulf. Now, one of the Shimpu group dove out of the sky at the escort aircraft carrier USS *Kitkun Bay* (CVE-71).

Sailor Ron Vaughn, an 18-year-old lookout on *Kitkun Bay*, spotted the plane as it climbed, rolled, and plunged down on his ship, aiming for its flight deck. The ship’s antiaircraft guns opened fire and damaged the plane as it dove. One round crumpled the tail section, causing it to veer off course. But the plane hit the water close aboard, damaging the ship and causing scores of casualties.

Another Shimpu pilot dove on the USS *Kalinin Bay* (CVE-68) and hit the deck of the carrier; two others were driven off by the antiaircraft fire.

American fighter pilots immediately raced to the scene to defend their home carriers. Despite their efforts, three more

Shimpu planes attacked the escort carrier USS *St. Lo* (CVE-63) from above; the first Japanese plane was shot down by fire from the *St. Lo*.

The second suffered the same fate, but this aircraft drew the American's attention away from the third aircraft, which was following the ship and simply pulled up, nosed over, and crashed into the vessel. Witnesses remembered that the plane sliced through the flight deck, igniting fuel and ammunition in the hanger area below that deck. One sailor insisted that he saw a bomb drop from the aircraft an instant before the plane crashed into the ship.

The impact doomed the *St. Lo*. Explosions rocked the ship from bow to stern. Damage-control sailors raced around to save their ship, but it was no use. Thirty minutes after she was hit, the *St. Lo* sank. With her went 140 American sailors. She was the first "official" kill of the Kamikaze attack force.

Meanwhile, the *Kalinin Bay* was hit again and severely damaged; the USS *White Plains* (CVE-66) and USS *Kitkun Bay* were both narrowly missed. Although all these three ships were damaged, casualties remained few.

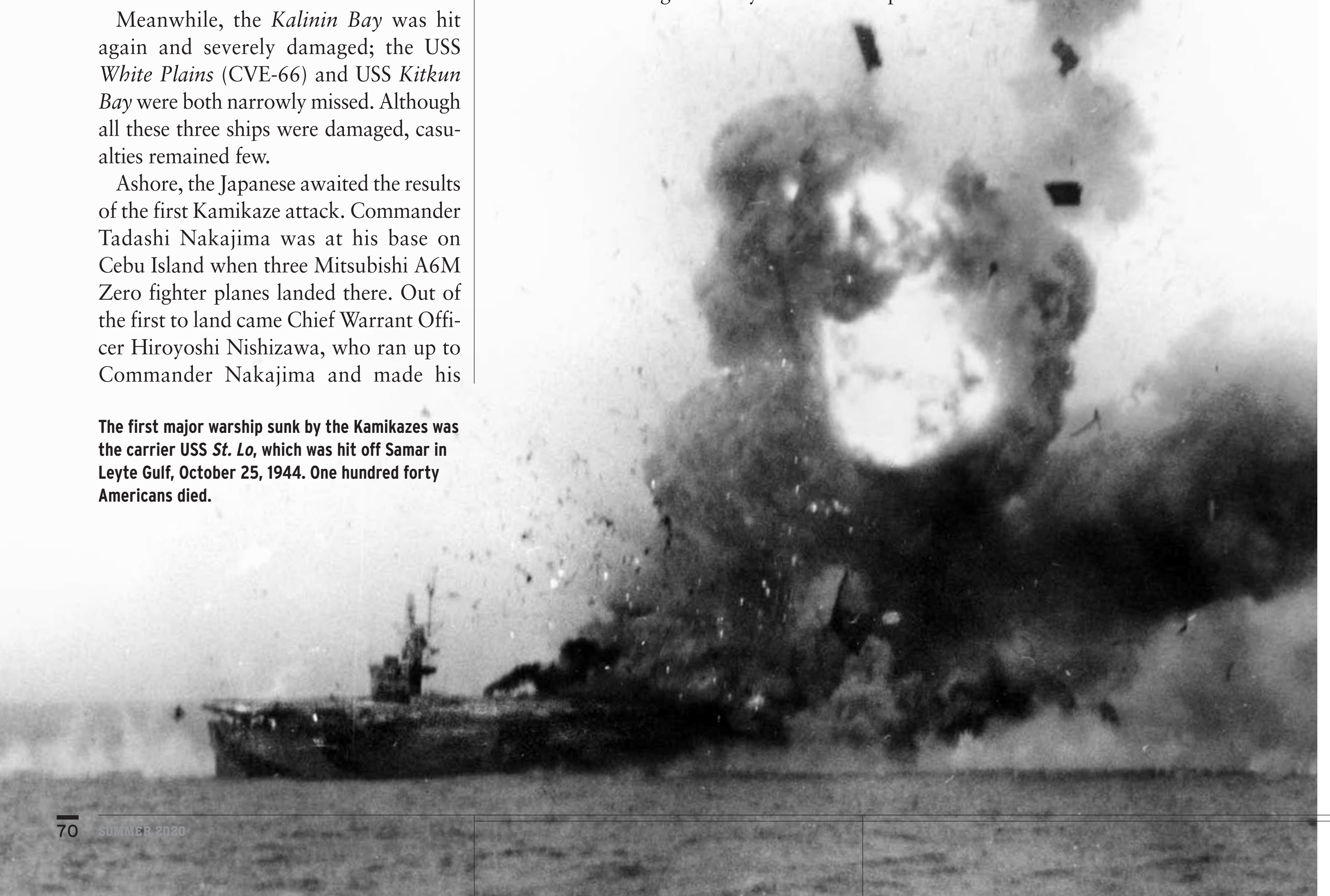
Ashore, the Japanese awaited the results of the first Kamikaze attack. Commander Tadashi Nakajima was at his base on Cebu Island when three Mitsubishi A6M Zero fighter planes landed there. Out of the first to land came Chief Warrant Officer Hiroyoshi Nishizawa, who ran up to Commander Nakajima and made his report: Of the five Kamikazes and four escorts, he reported, Lieutenant Seki had hit a carrier, and a second Kamikaze hit the same ship, which soon sank. The third Kamikaze struck another carrier, setting it afire. The fourth plane crashed into a light cruiser which "sank instantly." The fifth Kamikaze disappeared. Three of the four escorts managed to return to Cebu.

The report was a fiction. In fact, only the USS *St. Lo* was sunk, with the *Kitkun Bay* and *White Plains* damaged. No light cruiser was struck on October 25. This report, inaccurate as it was, was forwarded to Tokyo, which accepted it at face value and broadcast it to the Japanese nation as a great victory by the newly established Kamikaze Corps.

Believing a great success had been achieved from a small group of aircraft, the Kamikaze program continued on October 26. For the expenditure of five Kamikazes and two escorts, the light carrier USS *Suwannee* (CVE-27) was slightly damaged. Earlier, the USS *Santee* (CVE-29) had been damaged by a Kamikaze that approached so swiftly that no guns had been able to fire before it slammed into the ship.

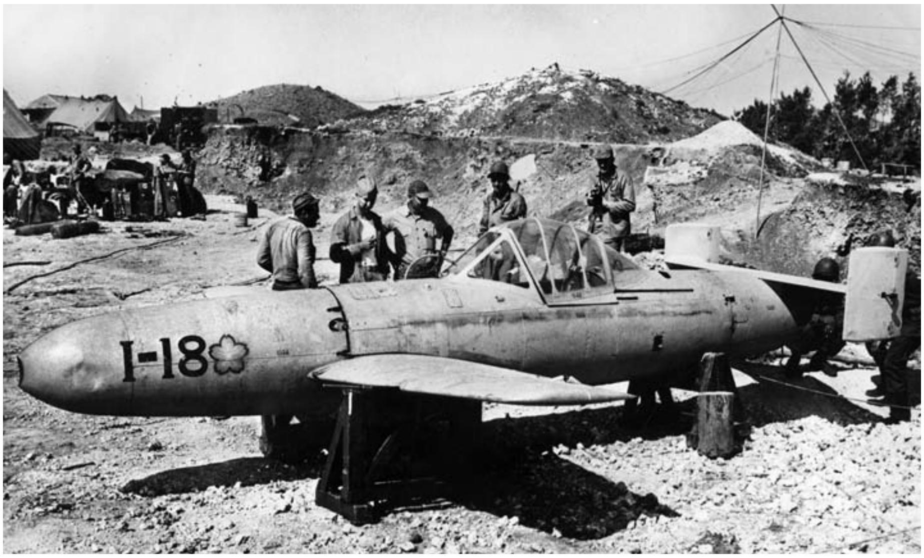
By now, the standard operating procedure for the launching of Kamikazes had been established. First, they would await a report from a search plane that would locate, identify, and report on an American carrier group. Often, these reports were inaccurate, and a mission would have to be aborted when no ships were found by the Kamikaze pilots. Each Kamikaze flight had at least two escorting fighters to assist them in getting past the American combat air patrols that protected the American carrier battle groups.

Weather was, of course, always a factor. How many Kamikazes were assigned to any one mission depended



The first major warship sunk by the Kamikazes was the carrier USS *St. Lo*, which was hit off Samar in Leyte Gulf, October 25, 1944. One hundred forty Americans died.

ABOVE: A solemn Kamikaze pilot has his hachimaki headband, symbolizing manly courage, attached by a smiling comrade. Ancient Samuri warriors wore a folded white cloth when going into battle to keep their long hair and sweat out of their eyes. BELOW: Marines examine a captured Yokosuka MXY-7 Ohka rocket-propelled suicide flying bomb found at the Yontan airfield.



upon the conditions reported by the scouts. Approaching their targets, the Kamikazes would increase their speed to make their approaches while the escorting fighters protected them from the combat air patrol. The signal, "All Planes Attack!" was given by the flight leader's raised arm, and each pilot picked his own target, then plunged down toward it.

The deeds of the "Kamikaze Special Attack Corps," one of the names for the new Kamikaze force, had by now reached Tokyo. Emperor Hirohito had responded to this new tactic with a message to his naval aviators through Admiral Ohnishi. The message read, "Was it necessary to go to this extreme? They certainly did a magnificent job."

Captain Inoguchi, who was with Admiral Ohnishi in Manila, felt that the first sentence of the Emperor's words were something of a criticism of Ohnishi's new project, and Ohnishi appeared quite upset upon reading this message. But he remained determined to gain the Emperor's favor by increasing his success.

Kamikaze strikes continued against American ships throughout the Philippine Campaign, including the invasion of Luzon and the clearing of the southern Philippines.

Meanwhile, the idea spread throughout the Imperial Japanese Navy and was taken up by the Imperial Japanese Army, as well. One of the chief reasons for this was the lack of skilled pilots. At the outbreak of the war, Japanese pilots had been the best of the best. But over the three years that the war had thus far progressed, attrition had whittled down those expert pilots to a precious few, many of whom where now busy training their replacements.

But the training of new pilots took time and fuel, neither of which the Japanese had in abundance. A Kamikaze pilot, though, did not need the in-depth training that a pre-war fighter pilot needed. He only needed to be able to take off, fly a distance, and crash into an enemy ship. Even formation flying was optional, although helpful.

As one historian has written, "Loss of aircraft and veteran pilots and shortages of fuel led to a reliance on suicidal Kamikaze units by 1944, made up of largely green, ill-trained aviators and a mélange of planes."

The Kamikaze idea had by now spread far and wide among the Japanese military. Soon Kamikaze Corps were being established in Japan itself. Those forward bases under attack by the advancing Americans were often provided with some "Special Attack Units." Soon this title was expanded to other suicidal methods of defeating the enemy.

One such method was known as the "Kaiten"—a manned suicide torpedo that was intended to sneak into American-held harbors and sink enemy ships at anchor. Then came the "Ohka" (Cherry Blossom)—a human-piloted bomb released from a carrying aircraft over the target and flown into that target by the pilot.

There were also suicide explosive speedboats ("Shin'yo" or Sea Quake)—small plywood craft filled with explosives and driven by a crew of one or two into enemy ships as they approached the shore of a Japanese base. Hundreds of these were later captured unused in the Philippines and Okinawa.

At the war's end, near Okinawa, even the

Imperial Japanese Navy's super-battleship, the IJN *Yamato*, was turned into a form of Kamikaze. (See *WWII Quarterly*, Spring 2020.) But none of these other efforts achieved either the fame or the success of the Imperial Japanese Navy's "Kamikaze Special Attack Corps."

Some ships just seemed to draw the attention of the Kamikazes. One such ship was the Australian heavy cruiser HMAS *Australia*. Perhaps because her appearance different from that of American ships, she was hit repeatedly, although her near-identical sister ship, HMAS *Shropshire*, who often sailed alongside her, was never hit. Some called her "the Kamikaze Magnet."

HMAS *Australia* had been in the war since the early days of 1939 and had earned herself an enviable battle record. But she just couldn't seem to shake the Kamikazes. She was first targeted in Leyte Gulf on October 21, 1944, leading some Australians to claim that she was the first victim of the Kamikazes, and not the USS *St. Lo*.

That day, the attacking aircraft was seen to be hit by antiaircraft fire and almost crashed into the water. But the plane recovered, and despite further heavy antiaircraft fire, punched into the port side of the heavy cruiser. This sounds more like a "body-crashing" (Taiatari) tactic than a Kamikaze attack, but the strike cost the ship her captain, Captain Emile F. V. Dechaineux, along with five officers and 23 enlisted sailors. Scores of others were wounded.

The ship returned to the war after repairs in November, well after the Kamikaze had begun in earnest. In early January 1945, the HMAS *Australia* was attacked no less than five times by Kamikazes. On January 5, she was struck by a Zero, which hit her amidships; 25 men on the gun crews died and another 30 were wounded. Damage was slight, and she remained on station with a gunfire support group off Leyte.

The next day she was hit again, at the middle smokestack on the starboard side, killing 14 and wounding 26. Damage was minimal, and she remained on station. January 7 was a quiet day, but January 8 was not.

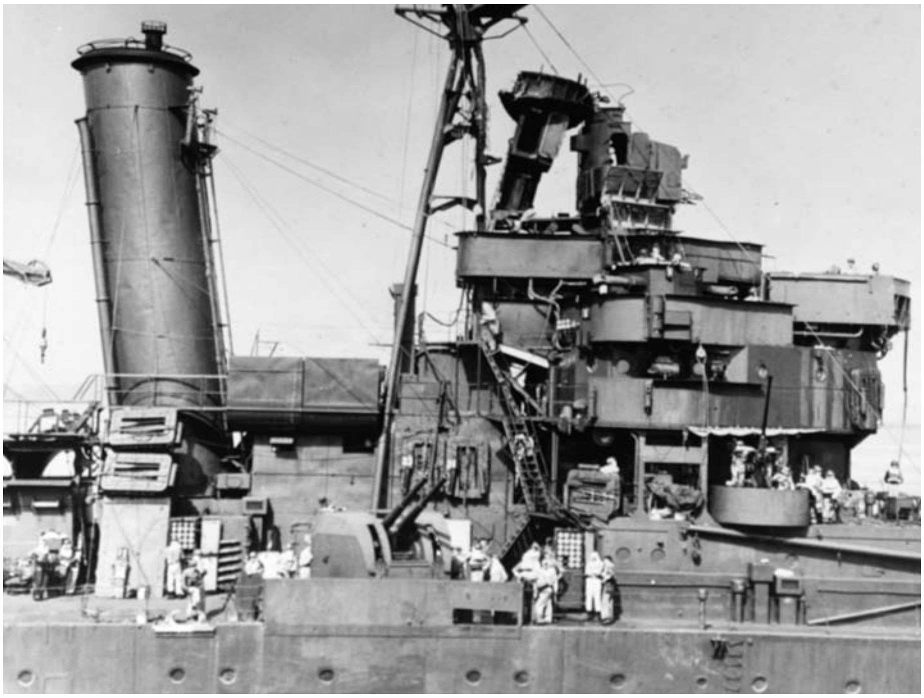
A Japanese bomber came in, chased by four fighters of the combat air patrol. The enemy went down barely 20 meters off the HMAS *Australia*'s port side. It skidded into the cruiser's hull, but caused no damage or casualties. Less than 20 minutes later, another Japanese bomber appeared and repeated the same events. But this time, the bomb that the plane was carrying went off and ripped a large hole in the cruiser's port side, flooding two compartments. Once again, there were no casualties. Asked if he wanted to withdraw for repairs, Captain J.M. Armstrong refused and remained on station.

By January 9, the Sixth U S. Army was wading ashore on the main Philippine Island of Luzon, and HMAS *Australia* was offshore in support. Eight Kamikazes came in searching for the invasion fleet, and two headed for the *Australia*. One of these hit the USS *Mississippi* (BB-41) and the other hit the *Australia* at her foremast, crushing her forward smokestack and rendering the forward fire room inoperable. With a hole in her side, her forward fire room out of action, and her speed reduced, the *Australia* had had enough. This time she accepted the offer to retire for repairs, once again with no additional casualties.

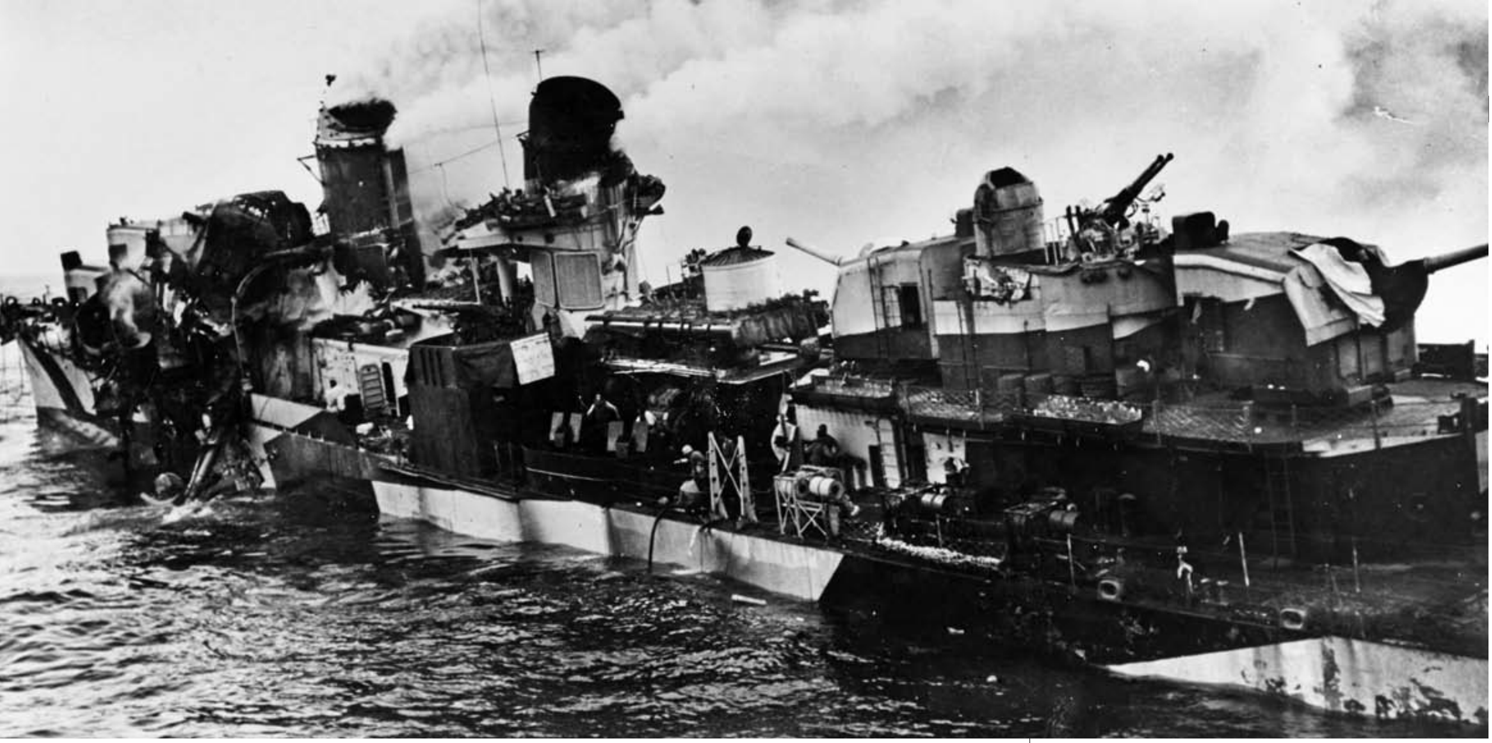
Kamikazes appeared in almost every battle after Leyte. But by far their most successful and deadly campaign came against the American invasion of Okinawa. Here, Marines and the soldiers of the Tenth U. S. Army faced a determined defense, one of whose primary objectives was to draw the American fleet into a position that would make it vulnerable for attacks from nearby Japan.

One of the negative by-products of rushing pilots through an abbreviated training program to qualify them as Kamikazes was that they had poor ship identification skills. This error was felt most by the "small boys"—the auxiliary ships that often accompanied the major fleet units to supply, fuel, and otherwise provide succor to them when needed.

These included some described by their titles, including LCS(L)3, or Landing Craft Support (Large) Mark 3. Developed from the original Landing Craft Infantry, or LCI,



ABOVE: The Australian heavy cruiser HMAS *Australia*, showing damage incurred on October 21, 1944, was struck so many times by suicide pilots that she earned the nickname "the Kamikaze magnet." She was never sunk, however. OPPOSITE: The destroyer USS *Hazelwood* smoulders after being hit by a Kamikaze attacker off Okinawa, April 29, 1945. Ten officers and 67 men were killed, including the commanding officer; 36 were missing, presumed dead.



some had been modified with rockets, machine guns, 20mm and 40mm guns, and other assorted armament which, to the untrained Japanese pilot desperately trying to find a target while avoiding the combat air patrol and antiaircraft fire, were often mistaken for combat vessels such as destroyers and even cruisers. As a result, these flat-bottomed, diesel-powered, 160-foot-long ships often became the targets these Japanese pilots were seeking.

The U.S. Navy's Fifth Fleet, under Admiral Raymond Spruance, was the largest in the world (535 warships), but its position at Okinawa was exposed. It was committed to the island for all manner of support and supply duties, which made its ships stationary targets for the Japanese, who no longer had to guess where the American fleet could be found.

To protect the fleet, the Americans had established a series of "radar picket" posts around the island to give early warning of the Japanese approach. Instead, these soon presented to the Japanese aviators' lonely targets, ripe for attack. The radar-picket destroyers and destroyer escorts were supported by various "little boys," which were known at these posts as "pall bearers," since they spent so much time picking up survivors out of the water, making them an inviting target for the Japanese.

The Japanese reaction began slowly. On March 20, 1945, the Japanese Imperial General Headquarters came up with a major offensive involving Kamikaze pilots called Ten-Go ("Heavenly Operation"). Tasked with leading this operation was Vice Adm. Matome Ugaki, commander of the IJN Fifth Air Fleet.

After gathering every flyable plane he could find, no matter its obsolescence or original purpose, Ugaki assembled 3,000 of them at bases across Kyushu. The plan, dubbed Operation Kikusui, was simple: guided by the few experienced pilots Japan had left, the suicide pilots would be sent out in waves to find the American ships and destroy them. The veteran pilots would then return to their bases to pick up another group and repeat the process.

On April 6, 1945, the Japanese struck in force with Kikusui No. 1 against the U.S. Navy's Task Force 58 and the British Royal Navy's Task Force 57, the latter operating between Formosa and Okinawa. Some 700 planes—half of them suicide planes—took off and went hunting for the Allied fleets.

The first to be attacked at Okinawa were the destroyers USS *Bush* (DD-529) at picket station number 1, the *Colhoun* (DD-801) at picket station number 2, and the *Cassin Young* (DD-793) at picket station number 3. Although the three destroyers put up a deadly screen of antiaircraft fire, enough enemy planes got through to sink both the *Bush* and *Colhoun*; the *Cassin Young* barely escaped the same fate—for now.

Elsewhere, the destroyers USS *Howorth* (DD-592) and *Hyman* (DD-732) were severely damaged, while the destroyers USS *Leutze* (DD-481) and *Morris* (DD-417) were knocked out of the war. Destroyer USS *Mullany* (DD-528) was so badly damaged that she had to be scrapped. Destroyer USS *Newcomb* (DD-586) was also sent home for good, as was the USS *Rodman* (DD-456).

The list of sunken ships included LST-447 and support ships *Logan Victory* and *Hobbs Victory*. The minesweeper USS *Defense* (AM-317) went down as well. The USS *Haynsworth* (DD-700) was damaged, as was the USS *Feiberling* (DE-640). And this was only one day's success for the Kamikazes.

The suicide pilots also tried attacking two American carriers, the *Bennington* (CV-20) and *Belleau Wood* (CV-24), but both ships escaped with minimal damage.

Both sides suffered badly during Kikusui No. 1. The Japanese had hit 17 American ships, sunk or knocked 11 out of the war, and killed over 360 sailors. The Japanese, in turn, had lost over 350 planes and pilots—planes and pilots that could not be replaced.

The next day the massive battleship IJN *Yamato* steamed toward Okinawa and her doom at the hands of the American pilots from Task Force 58.

The loss of *Yamato* did not stop the

Japanese from continuing their suicide attacks on the Allied fleets. After suspending operations for a few days due to bad weather, on April 11, Kikusui No. 2 was launched—a two-day assault by 185 suicide planes accompanied by 150 escorts. The carrier USS *Enterprise* (CV-6) was the first to feel the enemy's sting, which knocked it out of action for two days while repairs were made. The carrier *Essex* (CV-9), too, was hit but not sunk.

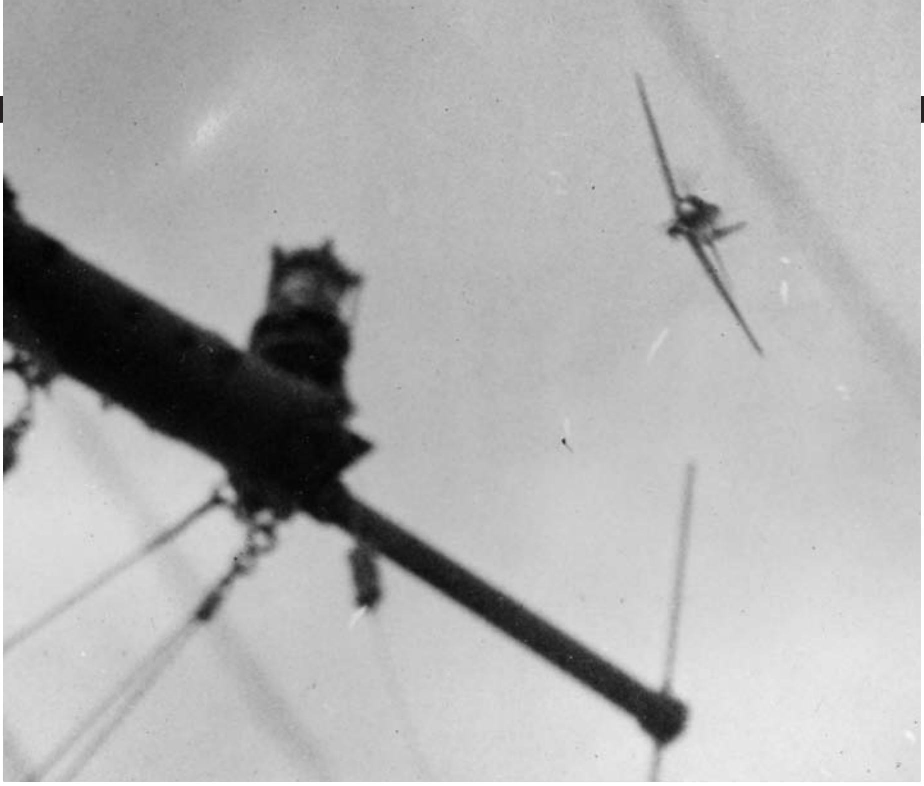
On April 12, another dozen ships were hit, with the destroyer USS *Mannert L. Abele* (DD-733) and LCS(L)-33 going down. On that same day, the *Cassin Young* was in the middle of the fight for her life, as she was targeted during a heavy Kamikaze raid. Her gunners shot down five aircraft, but a sixth crashed into her foremast, exploding in midair only 50 feet above the ship.

Surprisingly, only one man was killed, but 58 were wounded, many seriously. Although badly damaged, *Cassin Young* made it to Keramo Retto under her own power and would return to Okinawa in May after repairs. She would be attacked again in July, suffering major damage and loss of life, but she refused to be sunk. (The ship is today on display at the Charleston Navy Yard in Boston, Massachusetts.)

Each day, one or more ships were being hit and disabled, if not sunk. The radar picket posts were the most vulnerable, set far from other support and usually exposed to the incoming enemy air raids before anyone else. The raids went on daily throughout April, May, and June, and ship after ship was lost to the incessant aerial attacks.

CinCPac Admiral Chester W. Nimitz grew increasingly concerned and pushed Lt. Gen. Simon B. Buckner, commanding the Tenth U. S. Army, to move quickly to clear Okinawa of enemy resistance so that he could withdraw his ships from Japanese target practice. But the Japanese ashore were as determined as those in the air, and the battle continued well into June.

One the worst attacks by the Kamikazes was that suffered by the USS *Laffey* (DD-724), stationed at radar picket post number 1 on April 16. The first USS *Laffey* had been sunk during the naval battles for Guadalcanal. The current USS *Laffey*, laid down in 1942, had already established herself as a worthy successor to her namesake and had participated in the naval support during the landings in Normandy. On April 16, 1945, she would prove her worth once again.



ABOVE: A suicide pilot homes in on the carrier USS *Enterprise* during the battle for Okinawa, May 14, 1945. The pilot destroyed Big E's forward elevator, killed 14, injured 32. OPPOSITE: The shattered 3.5" gun mount aboard the USS *Laffey*. The ship was attacked by 22 Japanese planes on April 16, 1945, and struck by four bombs and five suicide planes. Thirty-one sailors were killed, 72 wounded.

Soon after dawn, 50 enemy planes were closing in on the fleet, and *Laffey*'s radar picked up four enemy planes approaching her. Three were shot down by *Laffey*'s antiaircraft fire, and the fourth was shot down by the guns on board Lieutenant Howell Chickering's nearby LCS(L)-51. Carrier-borne Corsairs were slicing through the enemy formation, downing as many planes as they could.

A fifth plane attacked *Laffey*, only to be shot down as well. Then a sixth streaked in, strafing the ship as it approached. Several casualties resulted from the strafing before this plane crashed into the ship at the after funnel, jamming the fire-control radar.

A seventh aircraft smashed into the forward gun mount and then ricocheted off the ship, leaving no serious damage. An eighth plane was shot down as it attacked. But a ninth Zero used that attack to approach undetected and crashed into the starboard 20mm battery, damaging nearby 40mm batteries, starting a gasoline fire, and setting off the ammunition.

Almost immediately, a tenth plane hit the ship's fantail, knocked out the aft 5-inch gun, and damaged three 20mm antiaircraft guns there. Plane number 11 dropped its bomb first near the depth-charge rails before crashing into the aft 5-inch gun mount, already damaged by a previous plane.

Plane number 12 dropped its bomb close aboard, jamming the rudder to a hard-left position. The *Laffey* now had no operable guns in the rear of the ship. The captain, Lt. Cmdr. Frederick J. Becton, now had a ship on fire and with no guns protecting her stern. The Japanese quickly took advantage of this weakness, and two more planes came in from astern, crashing again into the 5-inch mount number 53 and killing several of the crew who were fighting fires there.

Plane number 15 was shot out of the sky as it approached from the port quarter. A pursuing combat air patrol Corsair was so close on his heels that he hit the ship's mast and ditched nearby. But this attack knocked out the ship's radar.

Plane number 16 was next in line and was shot down over the ship by the combat air patrol, but not before its bomb shredded the ship's bow with shrapnel, knocking out power to 5-inch mount 52, which continued to operate manually.

Plane number 17 was shot down, and plane number 18 was disintegrated by a shell from mount 52. Plane number 19 was also shot down, by mount number 51. A twentieth plane came in through the smoke off the *Laffey* and dropped its bomb on mount number 53 before breaking off the ship's yardarm. It was then splashed by the combat air patrol.

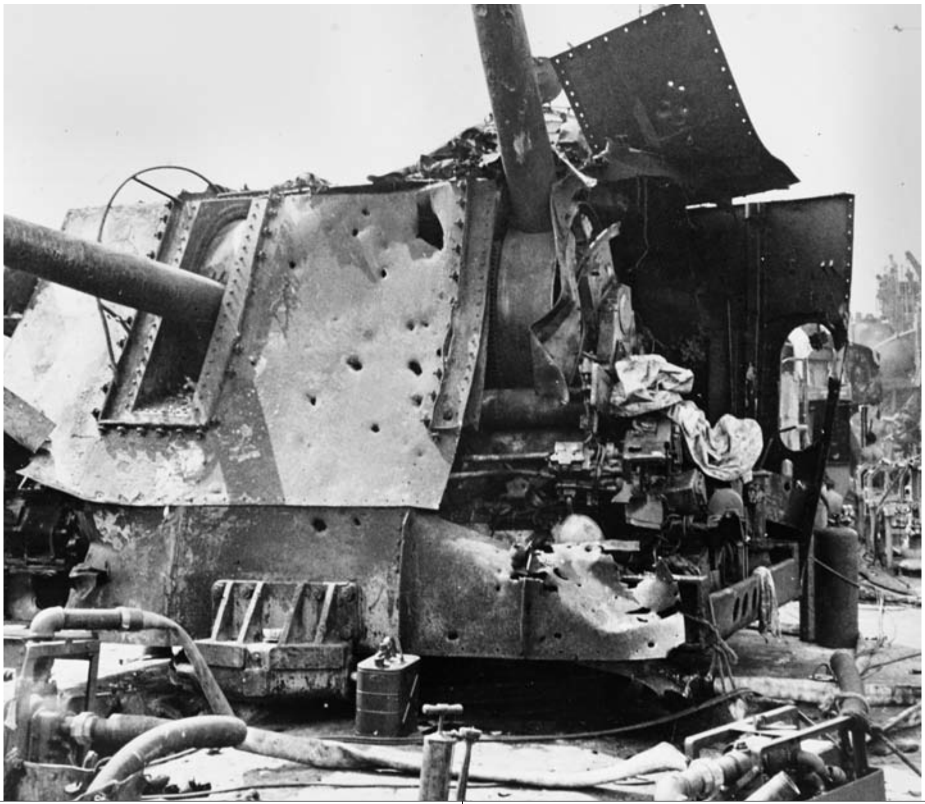
Plane number 21 also dropped its bomb, knocking out two 20mm antiaircraft mounts before being shot down by the combat air patrol. A final attacker was also taken out by the combat air patrol.

The USS *Laffey* was miraculously still afloat but in serious trouble. It was down at the stern, the rudder was jammed, and most of its guns were disabled. Fortunately, the hull and engines had not been damaged. She had been hit by six Kamikazes, damaged by two other near misses, struck by three bombs, and had other close calls. She lost 31 killed and 72 wounded, but the fires were soon under control and the flooding stopped. She was towed to a repair base off Okinawa and, after service during the Korean War, would eventually end up as a memorial at Patriot's Point, Charleston, South Carolina. Both LCS(L)s supporting her also survived, although with significant casualties.

But, like a swarm of angry wasps, the Kamikazes kept coming. As the battle progressed, their attacks and numbers began to thin out. Since Okinawa was lost and the next invasion would no doubt be at Japan itself, the Japanese decided to hoard their remaining Kamikaze planes and pilots for the final battle.

One of the greatest tragedies to befall the American fleet was that of the carrier USS *Bunker Hill* (CV-17), the flagship of Vice Adm. Marc A. Mitscher's Task Force 58. On May 11, the carrier was on station 76 miles east of Okinawa when a Japanese "Zeke" fighter suddenly appeared out of the cloud cover.

Having just been refueled with nearly two million gallons of high-octane aviation fuel, the *Bunker Hill* was a floating Molotov cocktail waiting for a spark. The Zeke crashed into the flight deck, which was brimming with 30 planes waiting to take off; in the hangar deck below were 48 more that had been fueled and armed.



While the planes on deck exploded and burned, another Kamikaze dashed in and slammed into the ship's control center, known as "the island." Crewmen sprang into action in a valiant, but ultimately futile, effort to contain the blaze. Other ships pulled alongside to aid in the effort but they, too, stood no chance against the roaring inferno.

In the end, 346 officers and men out of the ship's complement of 3,000 lost their lives, 43 were missing, and another 264 were injured. The charred wreck of the carrier managed to return for repairs to Bremerton, Washington, via Pearl Harbor, but it would never fight again.

At the end of the war, the Japanese themselves compiled a recapitulation of the record of the "Kamikaze Special Attack Corps." They recorded that, of the 2,314 planes dispatched (including escorts), 1,086 returned. For the 1,228 planes "expended," they claimed 81 ships sunk and 195 damaged, for a total of 276 ships.

Postwar records indicate that the correct figures are 34 ships sunk, including three light carriers and 13 destroyers. Of the 195 ships the Japanese claimed as damaged, they had actually damaged 288 ships, including 16 fleet aircraft carriers, three light carriers, and 17 escort carriers. It should be noted that several ships, like the HMAS *Australia* and USS *Laffey*, were hit repeatedly but not sunk. So, the Japanese claim of a total of 276 enemy ships sunk or damaged by Kamikazes is understated. In fact, they hit 322 allied ships, sinking 34. It was not the "Divine Wind" of 1281, but it was a respectable effort, nevertheless.

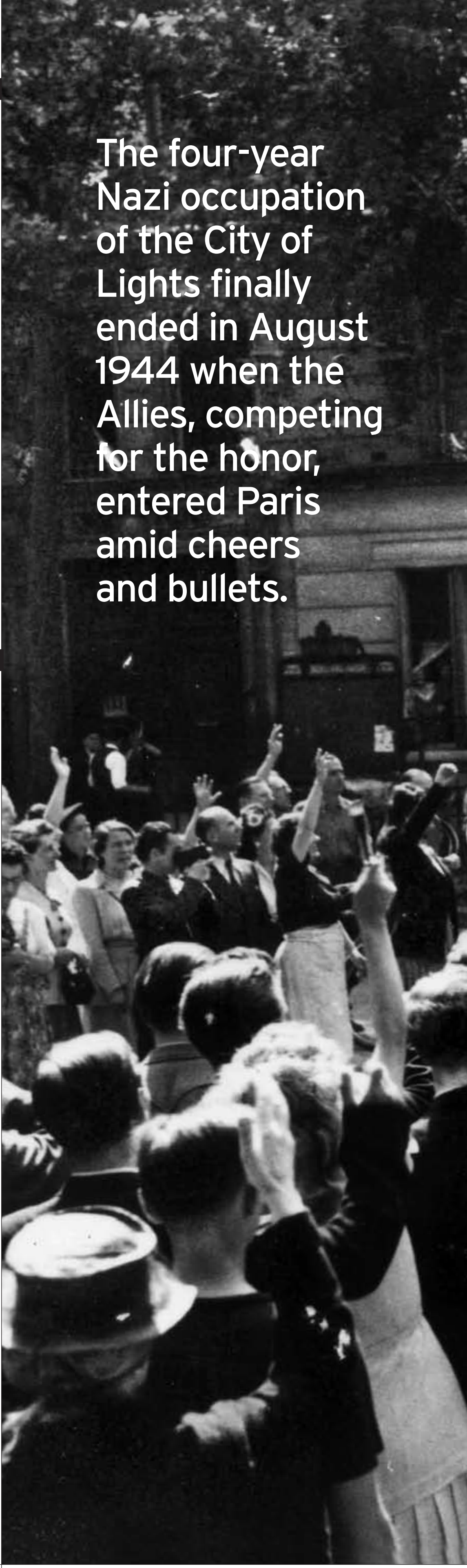
But, despite all her efforts to halt the American invasion of Okinawa, Japan had shot her bolt. Once Okinawa fell, she had very little chance of preventing a full-scale invasion of the Home Islands.

As the intelligence officer of the Fifth Fleet put it, "The Japanese are defeated, but we have not yet won the victory." □

The Liberation of Paris

BY JOHN E. SPINDLER

The four-year Nazi occupation of the City of Lights finally ended in August 1944 when the Allies, competing for the honor, entered Paris amid cheers and bullets.



At dusk on August 24, 1944, south of Paris, about half a mile from Croix de Berny crossroads, stood a tall, lanky man tapping a malacca cane. Maj. Gen. Philippe Leclerc, commander of the French 2nd Armored Division, or 2eme Division Blindée (2e DB) in French, had expected to have his division in Paris by now.

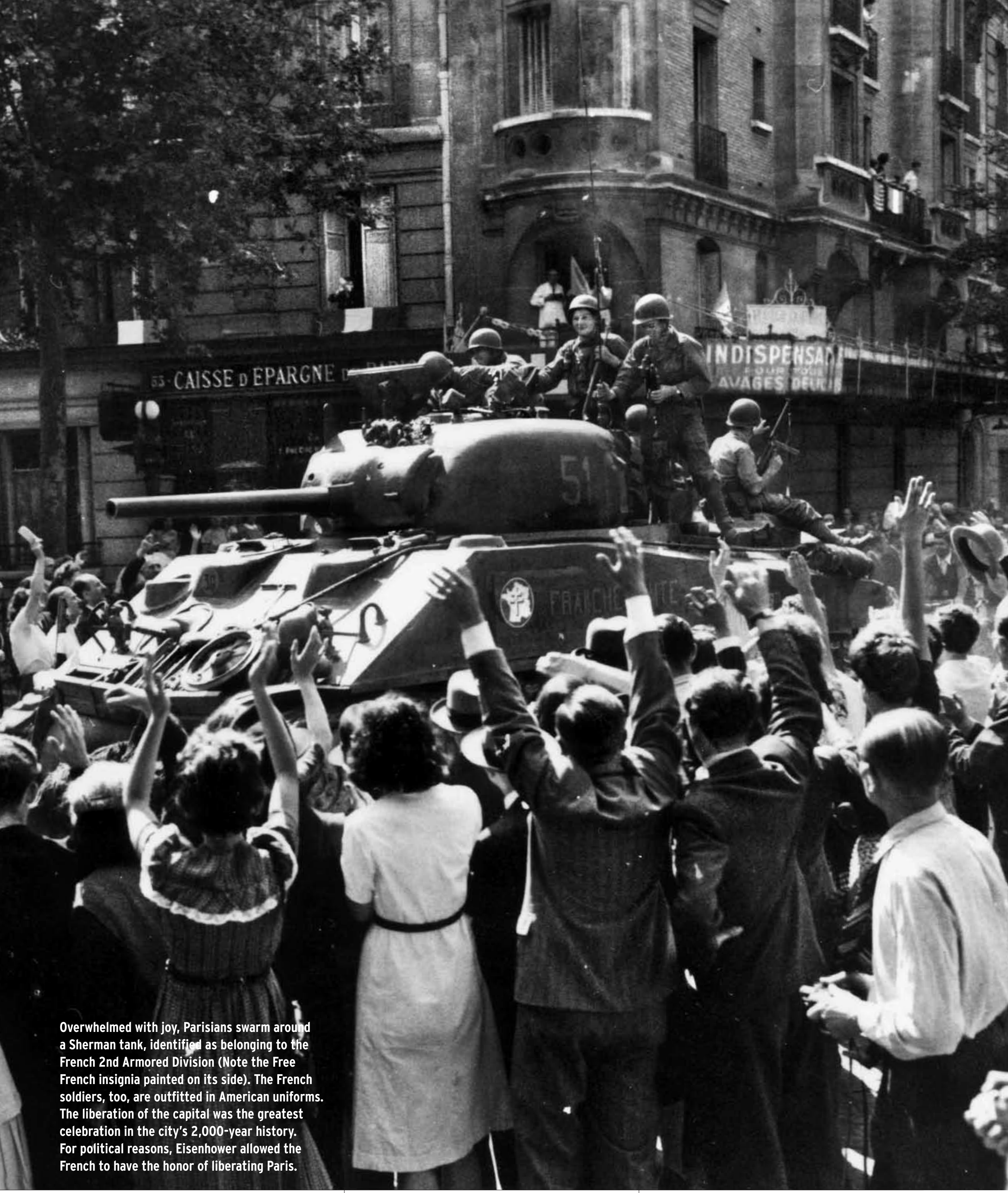
However, the Germans had not cooperated, and he had lost precious time fighting through their defenses. The strongpoints centered around a flak battery employing the deadly German 88mm antiaircraft/antiarmor gun. Situated at Croix de Berny, this German strongpoint was part of a defensive area guarding the primary route into southern Paris. As a result, units of the 2e DB were over 10 miles from their ultimate objective—the liberation of Paris.

Leclerc resigned himself to the fact the 2e DB would not be celebrating the night in the capital. Not only had his men fought for hours, but they had spent the previous day in a mad dash to Rambouillet, 22 miles from the southwestern edge of Paris. Around 7:30PM, the general spotted Captain Raymond Dronne.

A veteran who had served Leclerc since the Free French was formed in 1940, Dronne was also frustrated. He firmly believed the road to Paris was within reach via lesser paths. Failing to convince his immediate superior of this, he had been ordered back to the main effort. Summoned by Leclerc, he explained his situation, to which the general replied, "Dronne, don't you know enough not to obey stupid orders?"

Leclerc told him to find a way into Paris, take whatever he could get his hands on, and avoid confrontations. Dronne had two platoons of infantry with him, but knew stronger support was needed; with a little persuasion he soon had three Sherman tanks and a platoon of engineers join his impromptu detachment. Twenty minutes later Dronne's force, consisting of the three Shermans and 150 men in 15 half-tracks, was on its way.

With the assistance of a guide, Dronne's group took back roads and made their way for Port d'Italie. Upon entering the city, this force was mistaken first for Germans, then for Americans by civilians and resistance fighters of the French Forces of the Interior (FFI). When the Parisians learned these men were French, they went crazy. After a brief stop to assess the situation, Dronne drove to the Hôtel de Ville—city hall—which was headquarters for the French Resistance forces.



Overwhelmed with joy, Parisians swarm around a Sherman tank, identified as belonging to the French 2nd Armored Division (Note the Free French insignia painted on its side). The French soldiers, too, are outfitted in American uniforms. The liberation of the capital was the greatest celebration in the city's 2,000-year history. For political reasons, Eisenhower allowed the French to have the honor of liberating Paris.

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At 9:22PM, the group arrived outside the Hôtel de Ville, slowed only by jubilant crowds. Announcing that the rest of the division would be in Paris tomorrow, he set up a defensive perimeter. Feeling their ordeal was at an end, Parisians began to sing France's anthem, "Les Marseillaise."

Recently liberated French Radio announced the Leclerc Division had entered Paris. Power was turned back on to allow everyone to know freedom was at hand.

Shortly after the news of Dronne's arrival spread, church bells rang across the city, beginning with Notre-Dame Cathedral. For the first time since the black day of June 14, 1940, when the Germans entered their city did Parisians hear this sound.

The downfall of France's Third Republic had begun with Germany's invasion of the Low Countries on May 10, 1940. Despite warnings from Polish soldiers-in-exile, the German blitzkrieg tactic took the French and British by surprise. Although there were islands of resistance, Paris was declared an open city on June 12. Ten days later the new French leader, Marshal Philippe Petain, surrendered and signed the armistice. He became the head of Germany's puppet government in Vichy, France.

It was during May 1940 that an obscure officer named Colonel Charles de Gaulle, commanding a tank regiment in Alsace-Lorraine, became an inspiring leader. When Germany invaded, de Gaulle, in under two weeks, earned a battlefield promotion to brigadier general. Shortly after the Dunkirk evacuations, he was appointed to a position in the French cabinet by Prime Minister Paul Reynaud.

Sensing France's imminent defeat on the battlefield, Reynaud sent de Gaulle to London to obtain assistance from Prime Minister Winston Churchill for the relocation of the French government to French North Africa. Churchill recognized de Gaulle as leader of the Free French, and within weeks an agreement was reached between the two. However, U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt felt Petain and the Vichy represented the future of France, and only grudgingly accepted de Gaulle in the summer of 1944.

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ABOVE: Maj. Gen. Philippe Leclerc chats with members of his 2eme Division Blindée at Leuré shortly after arriving at Utah Beach in Normandy on August 1, 1944. OPPOSITE: With a line of tanks and trucks stretching as far as the eye can see, men of the 2nd Squadron, 12 Regiment de Chasseurs d'Afrique, of LeClerc's 2eme Division Blindée, await their orders to begin long-awaited combat operations.

Among those who supported de Gaulle was Captain Philippe de Hauteclocque. After escaping to Britain in 1940, he adopted a nom de guerre to protect his family back home. Choosing "Leclerc," his personal traits and colonial experience resulted in rapid promotions. Soon Leclerc was on his way to Equatorial Africa and achieved miracles, considering the number of troops and materials available to him.

Over the next few years, Leclerc's forces made major raids into Italian-controlled Libya. He wore the rank of two-star general when his forces linked up with the British Eighth Army in January 1943. Assisting in the Allied victory in Africa, Leclerc's "L Force" remained and grew to division size.

In August 1943, it became the 2eme Division Blindée—fully outfitted and equipped by the United States, with the provision that it be organized according to American armored division standards. General de Gaulle's desire to have at least one French division for future operations in northern France ensured the division would be shipped to Britain in April 1944 for the planned liberation of Europe.

While de Gaulle and Leclerc were fighting to free France from the outside, bands of resistance opposed to the Germans and their Vichy underlings formed as early as fall 1940. Throughout 1942 and 1943 de Gaulle attempted to bring the numerous resistance groups into a unified command answering to him with limited success. He feared the communist resistance movements as much as he feared the Germans.

In Paris, communist Henri Tanguay became the leader of the resistance movement under the code name "Colonel Rol." He believed that it was crucial for Parisians to liberate their city and was ready to ignore de Gaulle's demand of no insurrection. There were an estimated 35,000 FFI members but only 570 rifles and 820 revolvers, which limited the possibilities for revolt.

Due to his fear of the communists, de Gaulle dispatched his own men—General Jacques Delmas (codename "Chaban") as military representative and Alexandre Parodi as political representative—to Paris to counter Rol's influence. De Gaulle was keen to prevent an early uprising, as he feared it would not be successful.

In terms of German governors, Paris had been generally better off than many other occupied areas. Commander of the Paris region, General Hans von Boineburg-Lengsfeld, had one of the easiest administration assignments. Though the Parisians had to deal with fuel shortages and a worsening scarcity of food, he rarely employed the strict occupation measures found in many areas the Germans controlled.

Boineburg's tolerant administration was interrupted in March 1944, when the German defense plans, in effect since the 1942 Dieppe raid, were examined and found inadequate. He was ordered to revise them with the inclusion of a scorched-earth policy for Paris in case of an enemy attack. The situation unraveled further for Boineburg on June 6, 1944, when the Allies' Normandy landings changed everything.

Return to France

Leclerc's division was assigned to U.S. Third Army under Lt. Gen. George Patton. Landing after the rest of the Third Army, the 2e DB arrived on French soil the first week of August 1944. Patton's divisions had already overrun Brittany and then turned eastward.

Leclerc's division of 14,500 was an amalgamation of forces he'd led across Africa— veterans, escapees from France, North Africans, Christian Arabs, and Spanish Republicans. The power of the division was its three armored regiments—the 501eme Regiment de Chars de Combat, the 12eme Regiment de Chasseurs d'Afrique, and the 12eme Regiment de Cuirassiers. All regiments used American-built M4A2 Sherman medium tanks.

Supplementing the armor was the infantry, the Regiment de Marche du Tchad, consisting of three battalions. The division's tank-destroyer regiment, the Regiment Blindée de Fusiliers-Marins, used American M10 tank destroyers in which the standard optical range finders had been replaced with superior naval optics. Rounding out the division was a reconnaissance regiment, three artillery groups, engineers, anti-aircraft, supply, signals, motor transport, and three medical companies.

Soon after arrival, Leclerc was assigned to the U.S. XV Corps. Leclerc organized his division into three tactical groups (*GT*, from *Groupement Tactique*): GT D (Dio), GT L (Langlade), and GT V (Billotte). Each GT was made up of an armored regiment supported by infantry, artillery, reconnaissance, and tank-destroyer elements.

From August 8 to 12, the 2e DB saw its first major action in liberating Alençon, then helped close the Falaise Gap in a drive to Argentan. Leclerc demonstrated that he would do anything to attain his goals, even if it meant going against orders from his superiors.

At Argentan, Leclerc, de Gaulle, and Haislip appealed to Eisenhower to allow the 2e DB to drive on Paris; Ike had promised that the French division was going to be the first into the capital. However, the situation had changed along the Seine, leading Eisenhower to decide that Paris would be bypassed in pursuit of the Germans.

In early August General Dietrich von Choltitz was called to Hitler's headquarters as Boineburg's replacement. At the time he was commanding the German LXXXIV Army Corps in Normandy. During Operation Barbarossa, he led a unit in the German Eleventh Army that fought in the siege of Sevastopol. By the time the battle was concluded, his unit had less than 10 percent of its men left. As the war progressed, Choltitz rose in rank and received larger units to command. On August 1, he was promoted to General of the Infantry. Six days later he was named Befehlshaber—

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MAURIENNE

National Archives

fortress commander—of Greater Paris, with even more powers than Boineburg had possessed.

On his way to meet Hitler at Rastenburg, East Prussia, on August 8, 1944, Choltitz heard of a new law enacted in the Reich—Sippenhaft. Surrendering or unable to attain assigned objectives needed to be punished. In order to maintain faithfulness, under Sippenhaft the families of high-ranking officers would be held responsible for the failures of said officers.

Choltitz's morale was suffering from the string of German defeats, and he left the meeting believing that Hitler was delusional and a shell of the man he had met in 1943. He was told to be ruthless and stamp out any acts of aggression against German forces in Paris.

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Armed with an odd assortment of weapons, members of a Free French partisan unit man a sandbag barricade on a Parisian street in case the Germans attack.

Thoroughly demoralized, Choltitz was convinced Hitler and his staff had no grasp of the military situation in France. After the meeting, Hitler's chief of the General Staff handed Choltitz his orders and range of powers, which, in addition to control of the armed forces, included the police and many German government departments. Spending the night with his family, he proceeded to his new appointment, arriving on August 9.

Choltitz spent the next few days with Boineburg, going over the defensive plans the latter had created and begun to put into effect. Boineburg had General Humbertus von Aulock establish a defensive perimeter outside city limits covering the western to southern approaches. Choltitz and Boineburg agreed that there was no military value in defending the capital. Notes taken during the meeting indicate that Choltitz had made up his mind not to turn the city into rubble.

Soon after taking command, he held a military parade to show Parisians that the city was still under German control and that minor acts of sabotage and civil unrest would cease. He issued orders to have the city's police force disarmed as a precautionary measure. After Patton's Third Army's breakout, Choltitz reviewed the defensive resources he had at his disposal and ordered the administrative personnel to evacuate the city.

About 20,000 troops garrisoned the greater Paris area, spanning a wide range of military quality. The heart of the defense was the 325th Sicherungs Division (325th Security Division). Due to the Allied drive, two of its four regiments had been dispatched to Chartres on August 15, which left 5,000 soldiers in the city.

Some veteran units existed, but the majority of Aulock's soldiers were mere teenagers, drafted to perform garrison duty or man the flak guns. Choltitz kept his predecessor's plan of the defensive line guarding the western and southern approaches. Paris had never been bombed by the Allies; thus, the anti-aircraft artillery of the Luftwaffe's 1st Flak Brigade would best be used as ground support and became the core of the Boineburg Line. Apart from the flak guns, little artillery was available to the German defenders. In terms of armor, the situation was dire. A panzer company was formed from 13 obsolete tanks, the majority of which were French-built. Only three PanzerkampfwagenV, better known as the Panther, were in the city. The Luftwaffe was also nonexistent, especially after August 17, when the two remaining fighter groups were withdrawn.

Another crucial figure during this period was Swedish Consul Raoul Nordling. Nordling was aware of atrocities in French cities that had been lost by the Germans. Having heard the Germans were emptying the Paris detention facilities and loading the prisoners on trains bound for Germany, Nordling, along with a German intelligence officer named Emil "Bobby" Bender, visited Choltitz at his headquarters in the Hotel Meurice. Nordling requested that, since the Germans were evacuating the city, as a gesture Choltitz should allow the release of all political prisoners. Choltitz agreed, and numerous lives were saved by not being sent to Germany.

During this same period, an outline for a limited scorched-earth policy was presented to Choltitz. The systematic destruction of the utilities, including water, gas, electrical, and telephone,was to be implemented in conjunction with the demolition of select industrial complexes. A team of engineers arrived with orders to bring down all the Seine River bridges.

Though Choltitz accepted the plans, he objected to their timing. He told his superiors that it was not just the French who needed water, but also the thousands of remain-

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ABOVE: Expecting the Allies to arrive at any moment, German soldiers man a 37mm anti-tank weapon at a barricade on a suburban Paris street. Note the concrete obstacles in the background. BELOW: A vehicle torched by partisans burns near the Pont Saint-Michel and Notre Dame Cathedral during the civilian uprising on August 23, 1944.

National Archives

ing Germans. And, as the Parisian bridges were the only ones that had not been destroyed by the Allies, they were needed to move troops to and from the battlefront.

On August 15, the same day that Allied forces landed in southern France (Operation *Dragoon*), the Paris police went on strike but kept their weapons. This would be crucial for the future of the uprising due to the acute shortage of firearms in the Resistance.

Choltitz took no further action. He reasoned it was better to have the police politically neutral rather than pushed into the Resistance. He also met with Germany's new Commander-in-Chief for the West, Field Marshal Walter Model, who relayed orders that Paris and the Seine River must be held at all costs.

The next day, employees of the telephone and telegraph company, Paris Metro (the subway), and railroads went on strike, followed by a postal strike on August 17. Momentum gathered when workers from various occupations across Paris brought about a general strike the next day.

Due to his not-entirely-baseless fears of the communists taking control, de Gaulle sent Charles Luizet to take command of the Paris police. Luizet arrived on August 17, with the police already on strike. He met with Parodi and Chaban to discuss the situation and Parodi told the others of the communist plan to initiate a revolt. Action needed to be taken or else Rol and non-Gaullists would gain control of the insurrection.

The Battles Begin

Early on the morning of August 19, hundreds of policemen answered a call issued by Parodi and marched on the Prefecture of Police building across from Notre-Dame Cathedral. Encountering little resistance, they secured it. For the first time in four years, two months, and four days, the French Tricolor officially flew from a public building.

In an emergency meeting of the CNR to discuss plans, the Resistance leaders were presented with a fait accompli by the Gaullists. The FFI moved to take over other key public buildings throughout the Paris metropolitan area, including the Grand Palais and the Hôtel de Ville, which was given to the leadership of the CNR.

Choltitz and his staff were caught completely off guard, as intel had not suggested an imminent, large-scale insurrection. By mid-day, he had ordered the forceful retaking of the Prefecture. The infantry would be supported by an obsolete French-built R-35 tank and a pair of Panthers.

A fierce battle for the Prefecture began. Although the defenders were able to destroy one of the tanks via Molotov cocktail, it became apparent there simply was insufficient ammunition and other supplies to withstand the siege.

Consul Nordling hurriedly met with General Choltitz and suggested a temporary cease-fire for both sides to collect their dead and wounded. After thinking it over, Choltitz agreed, but stipulated that his name was not used in enacting the cease-fire. He did not want word to get back to Germany, fearing the Sippenhaft would be used to punish his family.

General Leclerc's division was transferred to Lt. Gen. Courtney Hodges' U.S. First Army and placed into the U.S. V Corps under Maj. Gen. Leonard Gerow. After learning of the start of the insurrection, Leclerc requested that his division be sent to Paris but was rebuffed by Gerow. He told Leclerc that the destruction of the German armed forces' ability to wage war was more critical than liberating Paris.

In Paris the next day, August 20, the tenuous cease-fire went into effect. It only lasted a couple of days, during which there were incidents initiated by both French and Germans who preferred to ignore it. While police at the Prefecture were able to enjoy a respite, Colonel Rol dispatched his chief of staff, Roger Gallois, to take a message to the Americans requesting arms and ammunition for the Paris Resistance.

In the Allied camp, de Gaulle arrived in France and met with Eisenhower. De Gaulle presented his case that he and the 2e DB needed to be in Paris. Though Eisenhower had high regard for de Gaulle's judgment, he stated the Allied plans could not be altered; De Gaulle said that he would simply take his division back. Ike replied that the division relied on U.S. supplies, which would cease if de Gaulle acted on his threat.

Unbeknownst to the Americans, Leclerc had been under-reporting his losses; therefore, the 2e DB continued to receive supplies, especially ammunition and fuel, for a greater number of men and vehicles than it actually had.

German engineers began preparing certain structures for demolition, as Choltitz continued to procrastinate in obeying the order. He even refused to see the captain in charge of the engineers—the first time in his 29-year military career that he was insubordinate.

On the Paris streets, Germans used human shields on their vehicles to counter the Molotov cocktails. The crude explosive had already knocked out a number of German vehicles.

Though Parodi reluctantly voted to end the cease-fire, he had used the time to ensure that the Gaullists gained power in the liberation of Paris. Colonel Rol tried to reassert the communists by using the Paris tradition of constructing barricades at key places throughout the city. Suddenly, barricades made of felled trees, damaged automobiles, and cobblestones began to appear.

Both: National Archives

ABOVE: American GIs, on the lookout for snipers, follow a tank destoyer down a road near Fontainebleau, August 23, 1944. BELOW: Determined to be the first into Paris, General Leclerc, standing in his halftrack, arrives after an all-out dash into the city.

Colonel Rol's chief of staff, Roger Gallois, managed to reach the American line and met with General Patton, who was not in favor of an Allied drive on Paris but sent the Frenchman to see his superiors.

Leclerc, on orders from de Gaulle, sent a reconnaissance in force towards Paris. The lieutenant commanding the force was under orders to "avoid Americans." Ready to follow were another 2,000 vehicles and 14,000 men. De Gaulle drafted a pair of letters, one to Eisenhower asking permission to move on Paris and one to Leclerc to be ready to advance.

Liberation

August 22 turned out to be a pivotal day for Parisians. The city saw the heaviest fighting since the onset of the insurrection. General Eisenhower drafted a letter to the U.S. Combined Chiefs of Staff justifying a military move into Paris by stressing that the city had the potential to become "a constant menace in our flank." Bradley set off to inform Hodges of the new plans to take Paris, after which he flew to the city of Laval and met with Leclerc.

Leclerc was on his way to plead with Bradley regarding his confrontation with Gerow. Gerow had learned of Leclerc's force sent to Paris and ordered the French general to recall it to the Argentan area. Bradley informed Leclerc of the new plan, and that his division was to lead the charge with the only stipulation being no heavy fighting in the city.

That night Leclerc returned to Argentan and informed his group commanders of the good news. Although ordered by Gerow to start that night, Leclerc decided to set off the next morning. He calculated it would take two days to cover the 122 miles to the French capital. What Bradley chose not to share with Leclerc at that time was that he was also sending the veteran U.S. 4th Infantry Division.

At the Hotel Meurice, Choltitz and Nordling met again. When the German told Nordling the ceasefire was not working, Nordling replied the FFI would only listen to one person—Charles de Gaulle. Choltitz suggested that Nordling cross lines and meet with him to explain the situation in Paris. He provided the Swedish consul with a pass to get through German lines. Unfortunately, the frantic situation of the past few days caused Nordling a mild heart attack, which forced the consul to send his brother Rolf on his behalf.

National Archives

LEFT: French women, shamed for being collaborators by having their heads shaved, are marched through Paris. RIGHT: German general Dietrich von Choltitz spared Paris from destruction.

At dawn on August 23, the two 13-mile-long columns of the 2e DB began their drive on Paris. Meanwhile, after sniper fire came from somewhere near the Grand Palais, German return fire set hay for a circus inside the building ablaze, causing serious damage. The Germans also killed small groups of Resistance fighters as they encountered them throughout the city.

At midday, the telephone exchange for the Western Front was blown up. The engineers had finished setting charges on the Seine bridges, as well as at monuments and municipal buildings. All that was needed was for Choltitz to give the order.

Rolf Nordling met with Bradley and informed him that Choltitz had orders from Hitler to destroy the capital. Bradley was doing his best to delay that outcome, but was getting backed into a corner. The Swede pleaded that the Americans must liberate Paris before Choltitz was forced to carry out Hitler's insane orders.

Leclerc's division was only able to travel as far as the town of Rambouillet, 27 miles southwest of Paris. His exhausted men needed rest if they were to fulfill the promise Leclerc had made while in the Libyan desert to free Paris. De Gaulle then arrived and met with him.

With de Gaulle's approval, Leclerc decided to enter Paris from two directions: GT L was to enter from Porte St. Cloud on the southwest edge, while GT V would enter from the south via Porte d'Orleans. Once in the city, the goal was to drive to the heart of Paris. The situation became complicated when that night the BBC announced that Paris had been liberated.

After getting a few hours of much-needed rest, the 2e DB commenced its drive on Paris at 6:30AM on a rainy August 24. In addition to the main battle group assignments, GT D was to advance behind GT V, while a small diversionary force took the road via Versailles with orders to make as much commotion as possible to deceive the Germans into believing this was going to be the main axis of assault.

In English ports, tons of medical supplies and thousands of tons of food were being assembled for delivery to Paris. To the dismay of both the American 12th and British 21st Army Groups, they were required to relinquish much-needed trucks to help with hauling the emergency supplies.

In contrast to the all-out drive on the previous day, the men of 2e DB made significantly less progress as they entered an urbanized area covered by the dreaded 88mm cannons. Additionally, spontaneous celebrations of newly liberated French citizens caused delays.

GT L, under Colonel Paul de Langlade, entered the city from the southwest via Villacoublay and its nearby airbase. At first, progress went well, and GT L divided into two sub-groups as planned. Suddenly, they struck the Boineburg Line, and the defenders knocked out the lead Shermans. Throughout the day, the two sub-groups struggled to fight their way through the tough defenses.

The Regiment de Marche du Tchad had been divided between the three task forces, which meant there was a scarcity of infantry for overcoming the defensive positions. Suppressing them required time to outmaneuver and attack from the flanks or rear. By nightfall, the diversionary group rejoined Langlade's men, who had secured the Sevres Bridge over the Seine. However, they were still a couple of miles from Porte Saint-Cloud.

To the south, Colonel Paul Billotte's GT V also had smooth advance until it struck the Boineburg Line. As with GT L, Billotte divided his force into two sub-groups while driving north. They spent the majority of the day eliminating the aforementioned strongpoint centered around the Fresnes Prison and Croix de Berny crossroads, where they stopped for the night, 13 miles from Porte d'Orleans.

In the afternoon, Leclerc dispatched a

Piper Cub that flew over Paris and dropped a message to the population that read Tenez bon. Nous arrivons. ("Hang on. We're coming.")

Leclerc was not the only one frustrated when his division was unable to advance into Paris; so was Gerow. He was unaware that Aulock's defensive barrier was stronger than originally thought and complained to Bradley about the French division's slow progress. Bradley had Gerow order the U.S. 4th Infantry Division to outflank the French and enter Paris.

That evening Leclerc sent Captain Dronne on his celebrated dash into the heart of Paris. After 1,532 days, the French Army had returned to the French capital.

The next day, August 25, which was the Feast of Saint-Louis, patron saint of France, saw Paris liberated. Aulock had his surviving troops join Model's units east of the capital. Choltitz still had a considerable number of troops inside Paris, but ordered them to remain at their strongpoints.

A note demanding surrender was sent to Choltitz. Saying it was too soon, he refused it. Around 1:00PM, the coordinated assault for the final push commenced. Its goal was to capture Choltitz and eliminate the German strongpoints. To capture the Hotel Meurice, a detachment of Shermans from the 501eme Regiment de Chars de Combat, accompanied by some infantry, was dispatched.

Back at his headquarters, Hitler heard of the French attack on Paris and went into a rant. According to some sources, he bellowed his famous line, "Brennt Paris?" ("Is Paris Burning?")

The armor and infantry detachments fought their way into the Hotel Meurice and, shortly after 2:00PM, a small squad went up to General Choltitz's floor. The group's leader asked if the general spoke French, to which Choltitz replied, "Probably better than you do." Moments later, the lead officer for the operation arrived and asked if Choltitz would now surrender. Having fought his symbolic battle, he and his staff surrendered.

After arriving at Leclerc's headquarters, the two generals discussed surrender terms. As part of the agreement, all German strongpoints were to surrender. To each of these locations, representatives were sent bearing a copy of Choltitz's surrender order. At 4:15PM, de Gaulle arrived in Paris from Rambouillet and made his way to the Hôtel de Ville. On the way, he was greeted by Parodi. During this time, the remaining strongpoints obeyed the orders from Choltitz and gave up their arms. The SS garrison at the Palais du Luxembourg was the last to surrender at 7:35PM, and only after the soldiers had expended all of their ammunition. Paris was finally free.

In the streets, French and American soldiers handed out whatever food they had to the population. That night, the first since France declared war on Germany on September 3, 1939, the lights of Paris were turned on to their full extent.

De Gaulle arranged for a parade at 3:00PM the next day down the Champs-Élysées

Both: National Archives

ABOVE: Joy turns to panic: Parisians scatter for cover as sniper fire is heard along the parade route. TOP: General Charles de Gaulle and his entourage march triumphantly down the Champs-Élysées. He refused to duck or flinch when snipers' bullets were aimed his way. OPPOSITE: The Americans arrive: Four days after the liberation, the 28th Infantry Division, Pennsylvania National Guard, marches down the Champs-Élysées accompanied by cheers from the Parisians.

starting at the Arc d'Triomphe, to end with mass at Notre-Dame Cathedral. Proceeded by four of Leclerc's Shermans, de Gaulle marched down the Champs-Élysées, followed by his leading generals, leaders of the Paris Resistance, and members of his government. In his memoirs, de Gaulle estimated that almost two million people turned out to watch a parade that was not without a potential for disaster. Snipers remained, and an air raid could inflict a significant number of casualties.

All went well as de Gaulle was cheered by jubilant Parisians until the group passed by the Place de la Concorde. Suddenly, shots rang out. Everyone took cover except the 6'4" de Gaulle. The celebration continued until reaching the steps of Notre-Dame, when more shots occurred and, once again, de Gaulle remained standing. Inside Notre-Dame, more shots were fired, and the mass was ended prematurely.

To this day, the identity of the persons who fired the shots has never been determined, though speculation has ranged from German snipers to communist supporters, a theory held by de Gaulle. In the end, de Gaulle's courage in the face of gunfire earned him the respect and control of France from that day forward.

Aftermath

The liberation of Paris came at a cost to both sides. Almost 15,000 Germans became prisoners of war, while in the two-day battle with the 2e DB, between 2,800 to 3,200 Germans were killed, most from Aulock's units in the Boineburg Line. It is calculated another 1,000 Germans were killed in the week-long fighting against the FFI. The final figures for Leclerc's division ended with around 630 dead and wounded. Only a few tanks were damaged, on August 25.

For the citizens of Paris, who had started fighting with the takeover of the Prefecture on August 19, casualty figures were high. One source listed 901 FFI members dead, with an additional 1,455 wounded. Civilian casualties were put at 582 killed and 2,012 wounded.

After the liberation, the more aggressive Parisians brutally rounded up collaborators. Those French women who had sexual relationships with their occupiers were publicly humiliated by having their heads shaved.

On August 27, General Eisenhower arrived in Paris to congratulate de Gaulle. During the meeting Eisenhower agreed to have two divisions march through Paris on their way to the front. Two days later the U.S. 28th Infantry and 5th Armored Divisions paraded down the Champs-Élysées for de Gaulle to review, then went into combat. This gesture cemented Franco-American relations. That same day, de Gaulle dissolved the upper command levels of the FFI in Paris.

The 2e DB remained in Paris for a couple more weeks before rejoining the war effort. Leclerc's men would go on to surprise the Germans again in a lighting drive through enemy lines to capture Strasbourg. As a result of his determination, courage, and leadership skills, De Gaulle firmly entrenched himself as leader of France for years to come.

A miraculous sequence of events—and having the right people in right places—led to the liberation of the French capital without its destruction. Generals Eisenhower and Bradley understood the importance of Paris to the Allies in political terms as well as its positive psychological effect on the French.

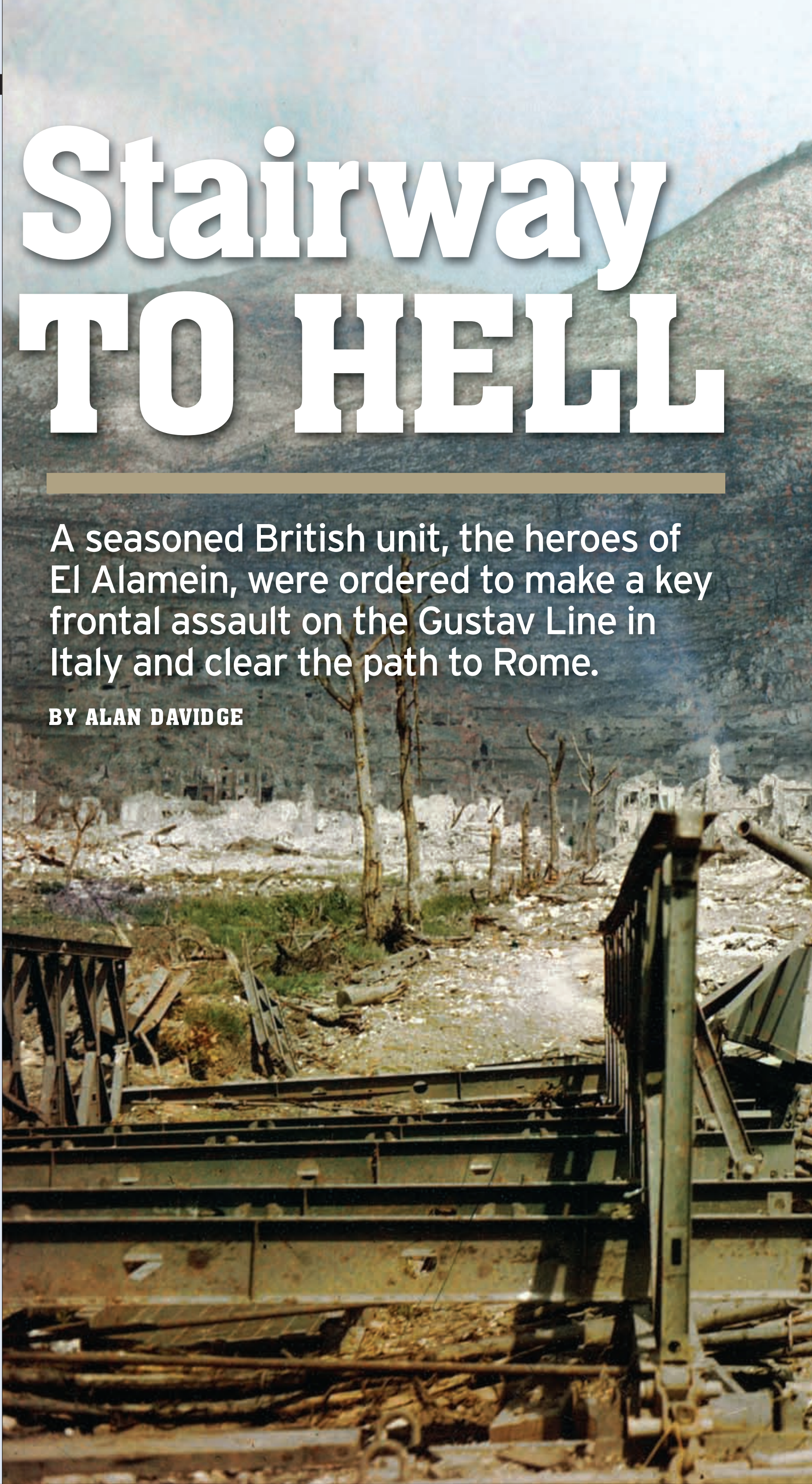
Others played major roles, as well: General von Choltitz, who risked not only his life but that of his family when he disobeyed Hitler's order to destroy the city; the leaders of the Resistance in Paris, who forced Eisenhower's hand to have the city liberated instead of bypassed; General Charles de Gaulle, who had the strength to keep the French Republic alive after its defeat and unite its population; and General Philippe Leclerc, who often disobeyed orders from his superiors to insure the liberation of Paris in August 1944. □

National Archives

Stairway TO HELL

A seasoned British unit, the heroes of El Alamein, were ordered to make a key frontal assault on the Gustav Line in Italy and clear the path to Rome.

BY ALAN DAVIDGE



When visiting battlefields, it sometimes takes time to recognize the salient features and to deduce where the action actually took place. The traveler arrives at El Alamein, Egypt, and sees a world of sand. The sign in a little Belgian village says “Passchendaele,” but where exactly is the ridge? For anyone who approaches Monte Cassino, however, there is no doubt of its identity. Towering above its town is a hill strapped across by hairpin bends that look challenging to a modern-day motorist. For an army under fire in the depths of winter, this is clearly not an objective that would have been conquered easily.

It was March 14, 1944, and Private Albert “Albie” Duddy of D Company, 1st/4th Battalion Essex Regiment, was staring up at the monastery on top of the hill at Monte Cassino from a location north of the town of Cassino. A coded order had been given: “Bradman bats tomorrow.” To those unfamiliar with Anglo-Australian cricket, this meant that his battalion would be leading the frontal attack that would finally dislodge the Germans from the Gustav Line and open up the route to Rome.

The Allies had been trying since January, and many of those unlucky enough to fall victim to enemy fire during that cold, bleak winter still lay on the slopes of the hill. There were high hopes that this third battle of Monte Cassino would be the decisive one.

“I’d just had enough, I didn't think I could go any further,” Albie told the author 40 years later. The strain of the war had finally gotten to him. A chirpy East Ender, Albie had served at both battles of El Alamein and fought his way around much of the Mediterranean with the British Eighth Army before landing in Italy and preparing for the final push.

As Albie was taking stock of what fate had in store for him that morning, his lieutenant quartermaster appeared. “I’ve asked for a man to stay behind tomorrow to help me. D’you fancy it?” The reply was immediate and affirmative, but for the remainder of D Company, and

Both: Imperial War Museum

Riflemen believed to be from B Company, 1st/4th Battalion, Essex Regiment, pose for a photo in a defensive position during a lull in the fighting for Monastery Hill, at Point 175, March 16, 1944. The 1st/4th Essex were ordinary "Tommies" who had been fighting since North Africa in 1941 but would face their sternest test in the Third Battle of Monte Cassino.

indeed the whole battalion, Fate was busy preparing a very different set of cards.

It would be difficult to find a more typical set of "Tommies" than the 1st/4th Essex. Although B Company was largely recruited from the flat, marshy areas of the Essex countryside, the majority of the battalion came from London's East End, Cockney boys whose childhood in streets of terraced houses where little was owned and much was shared had taught them to be resourceful and self-reliant, giving them a loyalty to their families and their neighborhoods.

As news filtered through of Hitler's Blitz steadily demolishing those streets and the docks and the places they called home, they became even more protective and keen to deal with the perpetrators. D Company came largely from East Ham, close to the docks and the recipient of many a stray bomb.

Some would have grown up as neighbors to singer Vera Lynn, "The Forces' Sweetheart," another East Ham local whose contribution to the morale of Allied troops was incalculable and who, at age 103, is still held in the highest esteem across the globe.

Together the Essex were a formidable fighting force, with a camaraderie and sense of humor that melted the resolve of many an officer, and who could be excused the occasional misdemeanor because, when there was a difficult job to be done, their track record was one of giving their all.

Previous attempts to deal with the German troops who were dug in on Monastery Hill had been messy, controversial, and very expensive in terms of casualties sustained.

It hadn't been easy for the Germans, either. Apparently Hitler had wanted to move all of his men and resources to the north of Italy once the country had been invaded in the south in September 1943. However, Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, whom he had placed in command of the Italian theater of operations, convinced him otherwise with a plan that put as many obstacles in the way of the advancing allies as possible, slowing them down and sapping their resources and willpower, especially during that awful winter of 1943-1944.

Imperial War Museum

ABOVE: British mortarmen of the 1st/4th Essex training at the Orford Battle Training Area in Suffolk, the county in eastern England just north of Essex. OPPOSITE: A weary but happy Bren Gun team of the 1st/4th Essex smiles while relaxing after the battle of Ed Duda, Libya, December 1941.

The Gustav Line, 100 miles south of Rome, followed a series of natural barriers across the country, crowned by the heights of Monte Cassino with its 1,400-year-old Benedictine monastery.

"Get though the Gustav Line and Rome is yours," taunted the elite 1st Paratrooper Division through their strongpoints on the hill, knowing that, in addition to their own formidable reputation, they also had the weather and the topography on their side.

The British Eighth Army under General Bernard Law Montgomery and the U.S. Fifth Army under Lt. Gen. Mark Clark had landed in Italy in September 1943, the month that Italy capitulated. With the Italians now their allies, they headed north for Rome via Highway 6 but ground to a halt in the Liri Valley near Cassino in December as the winter closed in.

On January 17, 1944, the first battle of Monte Cassino was initiated with British XX Corps in the lead, assisted by U.S. and French troops. American and British soldiers of the U.S. 6th Corps were scheduled to land at Anzio on January 22, and it was felt that this battle could have the additional advantage of diverting German resources at a crucial time.

By February 7, Point 445, directly below the monastery at Monte Cassino, had been taken by the Germans. The monastery itself was kept off-limits on the orders of Kesselring, although German troops were occasionally reported using it for observation purposes.

February 11 saw a major U.S. assault on Monastery Hill and the town of Cassino that lasted three days, but this resulted in 80 per cent infantry casualties, and the survivors had to be withdrawn. On the German side, General Fridolin von Senger und Etterlin saw the slopes of the hill as a killing field comparable to the Somme, and suggested creating a new line of defense; but this was turned down by Kesselring.

The arrival of the New Zealand 2nd Division and 4th Indian Division (which included the 1st/4th Essex) at this point gave fresh hope of a breakthrough, but this time a different strategy was proposed. Maj. Gen. Bernard C. Freyberg, the New Zealand commander, began in earnest to help take pressure off Anzio by continuing the attack along the ridges close to the monastery and also launched an attack along the railway line south of Cassino town to gain control of the station.

New Zealand troops paid a heavy price for trying to forge a way through the town to support their Allied comrades. Everard Otto reported on the 28th Maori attack on the station, "One hundred-and-twenty-eight were killed and many wounded. It was gruesome."

The main change to the previous strategy, however, involved the monastery, whose neutrality was continuing to be a great source of debate. Maj. Gen. Geoffrey Keyes of the U.S. II Corps flew over several times and observed no Germans, so he did not consider it a threat.

However, Maj. Gen. Howard Kippenburger, in charge of the New Zealanders, and Maj. Gen. Francis I.S. Tuker, commanding the 4th Indian Division, saw it as more of a danger if left intact. Mark Clark, U.S. Fifth Army commander, was against bombing the monastery and referred the decision to the British General Harold Alexander. Alexander's final decision cast the die, and preparations were made for one of the most controversial acts of the entire war.

On February 15, a total of 142 B-17 Flying Fortresses, 47 B-25 Mitchells, and 40 B-26 Marauders unleashed 1,150 tons of high explosives and incendiaries on the monastery. Between bombing runs it was smothered by artillery; the following day more shells and more bombs rained down on the ruins.

There was no evidence of German casualties being sustained either in the monastery or at the strongpoint outside near Snakeshead Ridge (Point 593). However, around 250 civilians sheltering in the building were killed. Seizing the opportunity, the German 1st Paratrooper Division immediately occupied the ruins and turned them into a fortress.

The first attack of what became known as the Second Battle of Monte Cassino took place the night after the bombing. From the 4th Indian Division, the Royal Sussex attacked Point 593 from Snakeshead Ridge, losing 50 per cent of their men. Another regiment then tried, suffering a similar fate.

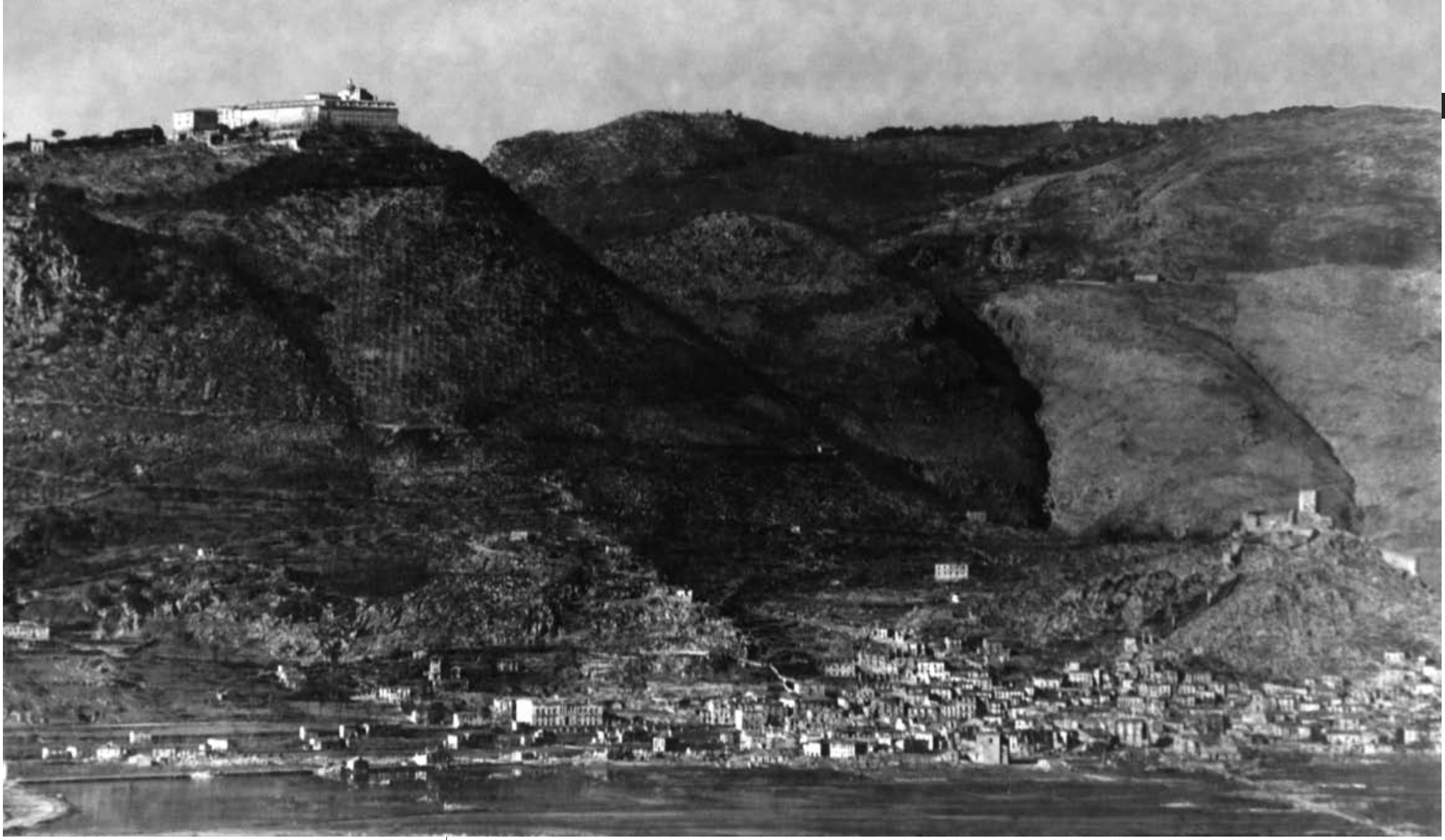
The following night, February 17, saw the 4th Indian in action again: 4/6 Rajputana Rifles attacked Point 593, 1/9 Gurkhas hit Point 444, and 1/2 Gurkhas tried a frontal assault, all sustaining heavy casualties. The hill was eating soldiers like the Flanders mud had 27 years earlier.

The persistent wet weather slowed down further attempts to break through the Gustav Line, but a plan was being developed that combined a powerful surge by the New Zealanders into the town of Cassino together with a frontal attack on Monastery Hill by the 5th Indian Brigade, consisting of the 1/9 Gurkhas, 1/6 Rajputana Rifles, and the 1/4 Essex as lead battalion.

It would be ignited by a bombing raid on Cassino town which, unfortunately, would require three consecutive days of good weather; it took until March 15 before this became possible. This was the start of the Third Battle of Monte Cassino.

The bombing of the town had a devastating effect on the Germans stationed there. It lasted three-and-a-half hours and involved 775 bombers unloading 1,000 tons of high explosive on roughly one square mile.

Imperial War Museum



Alamy

The raid represented nearly the same tonnage of bombs that had destroyed the monastery the previous month. Even those able to shelter in the cellars took a long time to recover their senses. It was, however, so effective that the resulting damage and rubble in the streets made it very difficult for New Zealand tanks to occupy or pass through the town, which delayed this new plan right from the start.

The Essex were less than enthusiastic when they received their orders. A Major Beazley, commanding B Company, explained that it would be a frontal attack. The previous attempts had involved maneuvers around the massif, but this one, Beazley said, would have surprise value. Private Tom Stringer expressed the misgivings of the attack: “When we saw what was in front of us, we thought it would be a hopeless task.”

The first step up the hill was an imposing piece of rock with a medieval castle perched on top of it containing a keep and courtyard, which became known as Castle Hill. It had successfully been taken by D Company of the 25th New Zealand Battalion in late afternoon of March 15 after the bombing of the town.

The role of the Essex would be to lead the 5th Indian Brigade attack, relieve the New Zealanders, and, together with the Gurkhas and Rajputanas, climb Monastery Hill to a feature 300 yards from the top that they called Hangman’s Hill. It was so named because of the pylon on top of it, which bore a resemblance to a gallows.

This would require the brigade to systematically take each of the hairpin bends on the route to the summit and silence those that were occupied, while other battalions could pass through and repeat the exercise further up the slope. Once assembled in force on Hangman’s Hill, they would storm the monastery and take Highway 6 into Rome—a straightforward plan on paper, and easier said than done.

Once again the weather, abetted by the delays caused by the bombing that had created enormous access problems in the town, took its toll. The start time for the Essex, sheltering in the rocky outcrops of Wadi Villa, was delayed by two hours, and they did not begin until 7 p.m., by which time it was already dark.

The Essex struggled up Caruso Road in the wet, and the darkness brought no relief from the shelling they had been experiencing most of the day. They followed tapes left behind by the New Zealanders, but frequently found these had been blasted away by shellfire.

With hindsight, it would perhaps have been more effective for the Gurkhas to take the lead. The Essex boys had great strengths, but climbing was not one of them. Essex is one of the flattest counties in England, but the Gurkhas were brought up in Nepal, and their families regularly acted as sherpas on expeditions in the Himalayas. Their direction-finding and ability to pass swiftly and deftly over uncertain terrain were to become apparent later on in the assault.

Essex A Company began the climb to Castle Hill, followed by C Company. Major Dennis Beckett, commander of C Company, went on ahead to determine the actual entrance to the castle. He was greeted by a New Zealand officer who asked him: “What took you so long, Cobber? Here's your castle, don't lose it.”

Beckett later gave a detailed description of the operation: “To begin with [on March 18], I completed the relief of Point 165 with the 1/6th [Rajputana Rifles] at 0330 and concentrated my company in the Castle. Frank [Major Frank Ketteley, commanding A Company, 1/4th Essex] and I were to leave two hours later than B and D, as our preparations were not so well advanced owing to the change of plan.

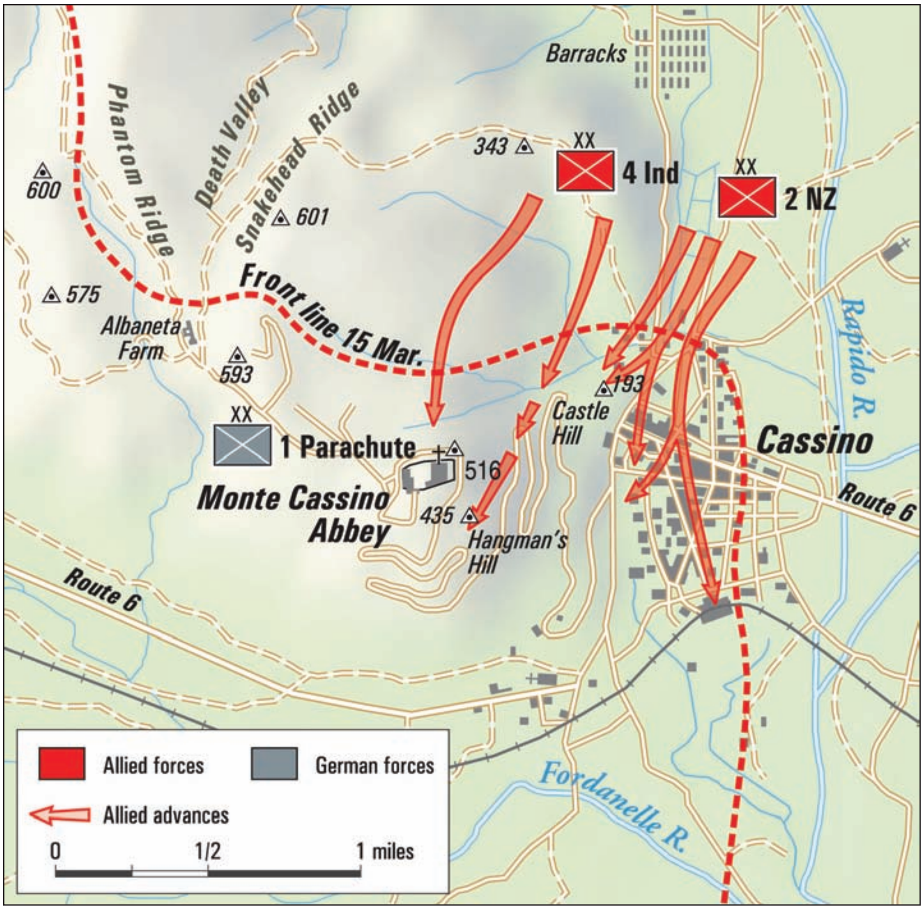
"At 0400, B and D moved from the Castle, and a little before 0500 Command Sergeant Major Cox and about six men from B Company came running back to say that a very large number of Germans, whom they had first thought to be an Indian carrying party until noticing their helmets, were advancing on the Castle. We were in a pretty fair state of chaos. The 1/6th were supposed to have taken over the defenses, but in fact most of our men were still in the breastworks, and we were trying to issue rations and ammo, and sort out weapons which had been buried among the debris during the tank shoot the previous day.

"However, Frank gave the order 'stand-to,' and everyone ran to their posts. The Indians did not quite know what to do, naturally, and eventually gathered in a herd at the back of the Castle, although a few fought very bravely in the courtyard and some did magnificent work as snipers. I do not make this criticism of the Indians unkindly as there was really nowhere for them to go as we had already occupied the defenses and there was very little room for anyone else on the perimeter.

"The situation was now 1/6th in possession of Point 165, and 1/4 and elements of 1/6th Point 193. The enemy counterattack opened with intense machine-gun fire sweeping the Castle. I have never known anything like it. It came from every angle. This lasted for about 10 minutes, then they were on us."

Beckett continued, "We could not use artillery D.F. [defensive fire] because we did not know how the Raj Rif or our own people were faring out in front. Our mortars had not then been registered. It had to be fought out with infantry weapons man to man. Frank went on the blower to tell Battalion whilst I did the best I could to organize the defenses.

Map © 2020 Philip Schwartzberg, Meridian Mapping, Minneapolis, MN



ABOVE: The combined operation by the 4th Indian and 2nd New Zealand Divisions tried attacking the monastery and castle uphill from the northeast, but met heavy resistance. OPPOSITE: Monastery of Monte Cassino, upper left, looks down upon the town of Cassino spread out below. The castle for which the 1st/4th Essex fought in March 1944 is at right.

"The men were a bit shaken by the intensity of the fire, so, more to encourage them than anything else, I got a man to spot and fired about a dozen 2-inch mortar bombs at a wave advancing under the castle wall. The first attack very nearly succeeded. One or two tried to penetrate the courtyard, and many were stopped only a few yards from the walls. We broke them up with Mills grenades, Tommy guns and Brens.

"Frank now became eager to take a more active part in the battle and crawled forward to pick off a machine gunner who had been giving us trouble. He was the fellow who had wounded me twice slightly in the arm and neck a little earlier. Unfortunately, the Boche got Frank first, straight through the head and he died not long after.

"We threw a number of Mills grenades in the direction of the machine gunner and had no trouble after this so I presume we must have got him. Soon afterwards we saw a white Verey light [flare] go up and the small-arms fire was replaced by artillery and mortar fire so we assumed the first counterattack had been driven off.

"I took stock of the situation. It was not pretty. We had about eight 2-inch mortar HE [high explosive] bombs left, 12 grenades, a fair amount of Tommy guns, and by good luck a lot of .303 [ammunition]. We had lost a few good chaps in the first machine gunning, among them, I think, Pat Coghlan, and a number were wounded trying to take up fire positions on the walls.

"The lull did not last long. The enemy had taken advantage of his first push to occupy very favorable ground, and this time began with a shower of stick grenades. But we too were more prepared, and I had been on to Battalion to arrange for our Vickers guns to bring enfilade fire on the western end of the Castle. The 3-inch mortars, too, were used with telling effect, though the problem here was to find a place to observe from.

"Eventually I climbed on top of a wall exposing head and shoulders. I was a complete bloody fool to do this. Everything I had been taught since O.T.C. days ought to have warned me against it but I could see no alternative. Anyway, a little runt of a Boche chucked a grenade at me and I was lucky not to get it on the head.

"By sheer luck we got the correction through before this happened, so it was with some thrill that we heard Hugo's boys crumping down on the wicket and the tapping of their Vickers guns. I think this pinned the Boche for a bit because we were able to reorganize a bit. Just afterwards I got a message from Robin Oswald, B.C. of 52 Battery (lst Fd RA) to say they were dreadfully thin on the ground in the courtyard and short of ammo. They had suffered heavily from Boche grenades and were in a bad way. A force was organized under Doug Beech consisting of Ronnie Ulph and about 12 men of A Company carrying bags of ammo to go and help out.

"To get these across, we lined up the Brens on the inner wall and blazed away at the openings while the leading members of the party also shot their way across with Tommy guns. They got across without casualty as far as I can remember. The courtyard had been the scene of the toughest fighting. Three times the Boche had penetrated. Several times they had climbed the walls only to be driven off.

"On the Cassino side, Corporal Parker, fighting his post with inspiring coolness, broke up a wave on his own, firing the Bren until the enemy were within a few yards and then finally smashing the attack with Mills grenades.

"Around the tower were some old arrow slits. These were manned by Bren gunners to cover the gaps in the walls. The Boche very quickly realized the nuisance value of these. I saw three of our chaps go down in succession, shot through the head, and a little fellow from B Company pick up a rifle and say quietly 'I'll get him, Sir.' He waited till the man's shadow appeared on the wall and shot him dead. A German prisoner, who had been wounded, now came in and on cross-examination said 200 of them formed up for the first counterattack and 40 for the second. He said they came from the Monastery.

"Battalion now warned us to expect a third counterattack and asked if we could state whether Point 165 was clear of our own troops. Capt. Jenkins (1/6th) said he had not been in touch with his men for two hours and would assume they had been overrun. Heavy fire was therefore laid on very close in, and as soon as the attack commenced a full blunderbuss of arty., mortars, mmg's and small arms was brought to bear.

"This counterattack was supported by a tank from the road bend above Point 165, and a systematic shoot aimed at the destruction of our west wall commenced. As a result, the wall collapsed, burying about 10 of our men, including Capt. Beech and Lieut. Ulph. However, the attack was not pressed home due, l think, to the effectiveness of our supporting fire, which continued in the face of heavy enemy artillery fire on our mmg's, a fact which gave great heart to the defenders. Once again the enemy withdrew under a concentration of arty and mortars, and no fresh counterattacks developed."

By midnight the handover had finally taken place, but the misfortunes continued. The last two companies of the 1/6 Rajputana Rifles who followed the Essex were decimated by an artillery barrage and took no effective part in the battle from then on.

Imperial War Museum

ABOVE: From their commanding position high atop Monte Cassino, German paratroopers can see any attack forming up in the Garigliano River Valley below. The Allied decision to destroy the monastery remains controversial to this day. OPPOSITE: A Vickers machine-gun crew of the 2nd New Zealand Division in action on Monte Cassino. The soldier in the foreground is using a rangefinder to adjust fire onto the target.

Essex C Company, still in the pitch dark, then took Point 165, one of the crucial hairpins, from the Germans; two companies, A and B, of the 1st Rajputana passed through them, hoping to take Point 236, a major German strongpoint and observation post. It was now 4:30 a.m. They were spotted as they prepared to attack, and the fierceness of the machine gun and artillery barrage forced them to retreat to the Castle.

The third battalion of the brigade, 1/9 Gurkha Rifles, following behind, had been tasked with leapfrogging the Rajputanas once they had taken Point 236 and carrying on to Hangman's Hill. Their commander, Lt. Col. Nangle, was now faced with a difficult decision and eventually decided to deploy Companies A and B by the Castle and send C and D forward to accomplish as much as they could.

Not only was the brigade a sitting target for the Germans, but the whole route upwards was becoming incredibly congested. C and D Companies moved up, avoiding the main track, and when their path split, they separated. The route followed by D led them into a hail of Spandau fire, costing them 15 of their men within a minute. Contact was later lost with Company C, and the brigade could only assume they had met a similar fate.

During the course of the next day, the Rajputanas made further attempts to take Point 236, gaining it and then losing it to a counterattack. Then at 2:00 p.m. came the first piece of encouraging news. The missing Gurkha company had arrived at Hangman's Hill, kicked out the Germans who were occupying it, and were only 300 yards from the gates of the monastery. They had achieved what no other battalion had done on the hill—to find a route off the beaten track, slip past the Germans, and take a major strongpoint by surprise.

All efforts were now concentrated on getting the remaining Gurkhas up to join them; the climb started at 8:00 p.m. By the early morning of the 18th, the Gurkhas were established together on Hangman's Hill. They were not planning a long stay and, although well equipped as regards ammunition, they had sacrificed rations and clothing to facilitate their swift movement up the hill. This was to prove costly.

The Germans now knew they had to do everything possible to keep control of the strongpoint at Point 236, and they also realized that a significant force was in position to take the monastery. If they could isolate the Gurkhas and frustrate any attempts to supply them, the third battle of Monte Cassino could go the same way as the first two.

Back at the Castle, the 1/4 Essex war diary reported significant problems with snipers, so the battalion called upon their New Zealand comrades for help. However, their next orders would take them out of the Castle and into a new kind of danger.

It was decided that the whole battalion was to be relieved by the 4/6 Rajputanas and make its way to Hangman's Hill to join the Gurkhas and storm the monastery. B and D Companies now had to make the night climb up to the castle in driving rain.

Ken Bond recalled the horrors: "We were slipping and sliding everywhere and were being attacked by machine guns. Men were falling over rocks. We never saw them again." Ken and his mates arrived in the early hours of the 19th and continued on towards Hangman's Hill, to be followed by A and C Companies as soon as the relief by the Rajputanas was complete.

Then something happened to stop everyone dead in their tracks. It was just before 6:00 a.m., and a group of about six men from B Company, who had set off to join the Gurkhas, suddenly arrived breathless back at the castle gates, having observed a large German force heading for the castle from the monastery.

In his account after the war, Tom Stringer said they heard voices in the dark. "Someone fired a Verey light and we saw them coming down the hill." The German commander had realized the crucial strategic position of the castle and felt it was time for a change of ownership.

The men of B and D Company who witnessed this potential counterattack had to decide whether to advance as planned to Hangman's Hill or go back and seek refuge in the castle; only about 70 made it through to join the Gurkhas. Tom Stringer was among these but was badly wounded. His rifle jammed as he tried to fight off the Germans, and he was then hit by several fragments of a grenade. He played dead till some German stretcher bearers came along and then asked for help. Wounded in three places and lucky to be alive, he resigned himself to what he called "The end of my time with the 4th Essex."

Major Kettley of A Company, the senior officer on Castle Hill, rushed the Essex men into defensive positions with not a moment to spare as they were deluged by coordinated fire in support of the German 1st Parachute Division, who were planning to storm the castle wall. It came from the monastery, Cassino town, and points in between, pinning down the Essex troops for about 10 minutes.

Then 200 paratroopers tore down the hill from Point 236, through the hapless defenders at Point 165, tossed grenades over the walls, and prepared to take the castle. Major Beckett, organizing the defense while Kettley contacted headquarters, could only rely on grenades and small-arms fire to break up the attack, as calling in artillery could cause casualties amongst his own men, who were also out there somewhere on the hill.

The Essex defenders broke up the attack, but only just. In all of their military training, they would never have expected to take part in a pseudo-medieval siege, firing from the battlements and arrow slits of a castle. Those who survived to raise families and take their children to watch *The Alamo* in the 1960s must have also sensed a form of dejà vu as they watched William Travis, James Bowie, Davy Crockett, and their small band of men try to hold back Santa Anna's Mexican army.

The Germans withdrew, but not before killing Kettley and twice wounding Beckett. The next few hours were to become a defining period for the 24-year-old major. He summed up the situation, organized enfilading fire from Vickers machine guns on the other side of the ravine from the castle, and registered his mortars for the inevitable second wave. He then occupied a risky and exposed position on top of a wall to make the necessary adjustments once the firing commenced.

The paratroopers penetrated the courtyard three times, and fighting was hand-to-hand. One of the most unnerving experiences was the raining-down of stick grenades or "potato mashers," which were returned by those brave enough to pick them up before they exploded.

While Beckett was taking charge and directing fire, other ranks were showing defiance in different ways. No Essex reunion in the post-war years was complete without a reminder of the tale of Sergeant "Rocker" Rose, who strolled along the battlements beating his chest and performing the famous Tarzan call.

At 7:50 that morning, the 1/4 Essex war diary records, "Brigade command sent personal message to A and C companies. You have done very well." An understatement!

Beckett could not escape the feeling of being caught up in some bizarre piece of theater. The previous day, he had made up a white flag and ventured outside the walls with another man to bring in a wounded comrade without being shot at. Moved by this act of chivalry amidst so much carnage, he stopped and saluted his enemy before closing the gate. This may have generated a mutual sense of trust among the belligerents, as the termination of the second wave brought forth a white flag from the attackers.

Beckett then called an astonished headquarters to say there were German stretcher bearers outside the walls asking for a ceasefire to pick up their wounded, and he requested their approval. They were given 30 minutes, an act of compassion that was brought to a conclusion by a 25-pounder shell that sent everyone heading for cover and subsequently

Imperial War Museum

ABOVE: Turbaned soldiers from the 4th Indian Division advancing through Cassino town illustrate the truly multi-national nature of the force attacking the monastery—fighting alongside the Essex men and Gurkhas from Nepal, and supported by New Zealanders in the town. OPPOSITE: British troops move up the rocky slopes of Monte Cassino. The terrain was difficult in daylight but deadly in darkness, as the 5th Indian Brigade quickly discovered.

to take up their positions as enemies once again.

During that half hour, some remarkable events took place. Stretchers were shared, blankets were exchanged, and enemies sat down together and traded cigarettes. It was the 1914 Christmas Truce all over again.

Major Beckett then received the news that the 2/7 Gurkhas were below him and ready to push through to Hangman's Hill to reinforce their comrades who were holding the hill with the men from B and D Companies of the Essex, who had set off earlier and joined the 1/9 Gurkhas and survived being swept up in the counterattack.

With this new input from 2/7 Gurkhas, there was a sizeable force with which to attack the monastery, but Beckett felt differently. The situation was close to stalemate, but the one thing in the Essex's favor was that it held the castle, without which no progress could be made. He convinced his brigadier that this fresh Gurkha battalion should be kept back to help defend the castle rather than be sent up the hill and be rendered an ineffective fighting force before reaching its objective, like others before them.

Before long, there was yet another attack on the castle. A small party had crept forward and placed an explosive charge under a buttress, which blew open a hole large enough for a group of German paratroopers to gain access, as well as burying 20 of the Essex defenders, including Captain Beech. The Germans were brought down in a hail of bullets, and prisoners were taken, one of whom volunteered the information that 160 of the original 200 who had tried to storm the castle in the morning were now casualties.

Of the men from B and D Companies of the Essex who set off before the German counterattack, only 70 made it to Hangman's Hill—and 30 of those had been wounded. Among them was Ted "Nutty" Hazle, who found he was the only medic in the group; he dutifully set up a Regimental Aid Post on the side of the hill.

At 4:30 p.m., the attack on the monastery was postponed yet again, and orders were given for the relief of A and C Companies in the castle and B and D at Hangmans's Hill. The men in the castle were relieved by the British 78th Division and made their way back to Wadi Villa, from whence they had started four-and-a-half days before.

Only 21 men returned from A Company and 13 from C Company. For B and D companies, the journey was much more difficult, but a few struggled back. Next morning, March 20, 1/9 Gurkhas reported that 25 Essex men were still with them, and the C.O. ordered that they should remain and come under Gurkha command for the moment. Also in the early hours of the 20th, the officer commanding D Company arrived at Battalion HQ. He had started with 38 men and arrived back with four.

Imperial War Museum

The most remarkable event of the Third Battle of Monte Cassino must surely be the Essex's defense of the castle. Without the leadership skills and personal bravery of Major Dennis Beckett, it could have been a very different story. For his efforts, he was nominated for a Victoria Cross, the highest award for bravery in the British Army. However, he eventually received the Distinguished Service Order.

Band of Brothers aficionados could perhaps draw a comparison with Lieutenant Dick Winters' leadership in the attack on the guns at Brécourt Manor, for which he was awarded a Distinguished Service Cross rather than the Medal of Honor, but this in no way diminishes the stature of the men concerned, who continued to gain the respect of everyone who served under them. Both of them returned home and lived into their 90s, with Beckett finally retiring as a major general.

Meanwhile, the 1/9 Gurkhas and the survivors from Essex B and D companies were still clinging onto Hangman's Hill. They were perilously short of food and water, and Ken Hazle had the most meager of medical supplies. Parachute airdrops of food were organized, but many of them landed among the Germans.

Given the multi-national nature of the brigade, some soldiers found themselves very disappointed when the food they risked their lives to collect proved unsuitable for their needs; Essex men in 1944 had no use for chapati (an unleavened flatbread originating from India). Canteens were filled from a shell hole under cover of darkness to provide a water supply for three nights until the level fell and revealed a dead mule.

On the March 24, Hangman's Hill was finally evacuated, and the remainder of D and B Companies rejoined their surviving comrades in Wadi Villa. Ted Hazle was awarded a bar to his Distinguished Conduct medal for his remarkable and tenacious work as the single medic available. Together with the remains of his battalion, he was moved out to Venafro, a town a little to the east, for their first proper meal in a couple of weeks.

Everyone knew it would take a long time to bring the battalion up to full strength, and it would never be the same again. Many of those who fought at Monte Cassino had joined up together when the war started and had become a closely knit family. They had served together throughout the Middle East, given Rommel a bloody nose at El Alamein, and made their mark on Italy.

Imperial War Museum

Riding in a jeep and a Sherman tank, New Zealand troops attempt to traverse the ruins of Cassino, destroyed by Allied shelling and air raids. The monastery is visible in the distance.

The best that Major Dennis Beckett could say was that they had held on to the Castle. He knew, however, that this was no mean feat. If the Essex were to be judged by the Battle of Castle Hill, they were victorious. Brilliantly led, brave in the execution of their tasks, they had overcome overwhelming odds and could retire with pride. However, the Germans were still at the top of the hill, and Rome wasn't any closer.

The Allies had to find another way to break the stalemate, which they eventually did. Alexander put forward a plan, *Operation Diadem*, that was inspired by the French General Alphonse Juin and that was as deceptive as it was bold. It involved stealthily moving troops from the Adriatic side of Italy to the west coast and attacking the Gustav Line along a 20-mile front—from Cassino to the Tyrrhenian Sea.

Diadem would involve the British Eighth Army, the U.S. Fifth Army, and, importantly, the Polish II Corps under General Wladyslaw Anders, which would follow the line that was pioneered by the Essex. The Canadian 1st Corps stood in reserve.

The troops took two months to deploy, and this was done gradually to keep the Germans guessing and maximize the element of surprise. The oncoming spring weather would provide an additional advantage. Once the enemy had been pushed back, U.S. VI Corps would break out of Anzio and cut off the Germans fleeing from the Gustav Line.

Diadem began on May 11 with a huge artillery bombardment from the Eighth and Fifth Armies, and the plan began to work, but the taking and then re-taking of the aptly named Mount Calvary at Point 593 on Snakeshead Ridge was horrendously costly for the Poles, whose casualties amounted to 3,800.

By May 13, the Germans gave way to the Fifth Army, and two days later the British 78th Division joined the line to isolate Cassino town, thus allowing the Poles to launch the long-awaited attack on Monastery Hill. The Germans retreated north to their pre-determined Hitler Line, and the Poles eventually raised the flag in the ruins of the monastery on May 18.

The night before this final battle, a Polish musician from the garrison at Campobasso, which stood in the shadow of the hill, composed a song which he called "*The Red Poppies of Monte Cassino*" as a tribute to his comrades. Although it became a Polish anthem, it reflected the sacrifices of all the nations that took part. The battles of Monte Cassino had cost the Allies 55,000 casualties and the Germans 20,000.

General Mark Clark pushed forward and arrived in Rome on June 5, seeking to stake his claim before the British and adding yet another controversy to the Monte Cassino story. But events on France's Normandy coast the following day were to capture all the headlines and continued to do so for weeks. Dogged by controversy, Cassino was in danger of becoming a forgotten campaign.

The ridiculous story of the "D-Day Dodgers" didn't help. Shortly after troops landed on the Normandy beaches, a rumor began circulating that Lady Astor, who is probably most famous for her duels with Churchill ("Sir, if you were my husband I would give you poison." "Madam, if I were your husband I would take it.") had labeled the men who had fought at Cassino as "D-Day Dodgers." The truth behind the remark will never be known, but its very suggestion seriously undermined the sacrifices of the previous five

Imperial War Museum

ABOVE: Castle Hill shrouded in smoke in the heat of battle as Major Beckett and his men from C Company fought for their lives. BELOW: The restored castle as it appears today.

months. The British troops, never known to miss the opportunity for some sarcastic humor, turned it on its head and composed a song that began:

"*We are the D-Day Dodgers, in sunny Italy—Always on the vino, always on the spree...*"

For the men of the 1/4 Essex, the campaign would never be forgotten, and the best they could do to give it some sort of closure was to come back and bury their dead. Later in May, the whole 4th Indian Division was given permission to return and perform a final act of respect to those comrades who had been like brothers to them for nearly five years. They lie now in the Commonwealth War Graves cemetery at Cassino.

The battles of Monte Cassino have become four of the most talked-about battles of the Second World War. The pendulum of successes and failures, the astonishing acts of bravery and defiance against all odds by both sides, the mutual respect and acts of compassion, and the ferocity of combat will continue to attract the interest of many a historian.

There much to discuss regarding the advantages and disadvantages of a multinational force. Germany fought the campaign on its own, except for the limited help of Mussolini's stragglers, who now called themselves the Italian Social Republic. The Allies included Brits, Americans, New Zealanders, Poles, Indians, South Africans, Canadians, Free French, Nepalese, and those Italian partisans who could at last say what they really thought about Il Duce.

Undoubtedly, there were advantages of sharing resources and combining the varied skills and expertise available—the kinds of attributes that are usually put forward by modern-day CEOs justifying a major merger. However, the delays in decision making when commanders could not agree, the egos involved at the top level, and the communication difficulties between different languages and cultures presented a variety of challenges and lessons to be learned.

Essex boys have eventually learned to love their chapattis, however. Walk into an Indian restaurant after the pubs have closed on a Saturday night in the county of Essex or London's East End and there they are, using them to mop up their curry sauce like any seasoned Rajputana.

Albert Duddy rejoined the few mates who remained from D Company after they limped down exhausted from Hangman's Hill. His battalion was joined by replacements from home, eager to do their bit and finish off the war. Together they fought on, initially up in the hills with the Italian partisans, until the war came to a close.

When he returned to East Ham, he began looking up old friends, some of whom had been captured earlier in the war and had now been brought home and demobilized. Unknown to him, his best mate, Joe Davidge, who had been captured by the Italians at Mersah Matruh when the battalion was surrounded and had to break out in the middle of the night, was also looking for him.

One night, in the *Central Arms*, Albie's local pub in East Ham, Joe heard Albie's familiar voice. Reunited after three hard years, they had plenty of stories to tell and at the end of the evening, Albie said to Joe, "Why don't you come home and meet my sister; she was at school with Vera Lynn, you know." Joe accepted his invitation, and that is how Joe Davidge's best mate Albie became this authors' Uncle Albie. The rest, as they say, is history. ☐

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BLOODY LINDERN

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There were medals, as well. A total of 21 Bronze Stars were awarded to King Company men for the action at Lindern. Lieutenants Romersberger and Pozyck both received the medal, as did Sergeants Prewitt, Matuska, and Humphrey. So did Private Robert Nordli, who stopped a Tiger tank with an M1. Two of the Bronze Stars were awarded posthumously.

Another posthumous Bronze Star went to First Lieutenant Garlington, who had brought forward the only platoon of Item Company to get through. He made it through the initial advance, and showed both courage and initiative in his actions covering King's right flank, but he was mortally wounded by German artillery fire the following day. Garlington was a graduate of The Citadel, had in fact been the class valedictorian, and great things were expected of him. He did not have long to make good on those expectations, but he made the most of the time he had.

First Lieutenant Leonard Reed Carpenter, the man who led King Company forward and held them together all through that long day, was awarded the Silver Star. He continued to lead King Company during the Bulge, the assault crossing of the Roer, and on into Germany, right up through March 1945, when he was rotated out for 30 days of R&R. The war ended before he returned. Some of the men felt the R&R saved his life; he continued to lead from the front, and, by March, many felt his luck had about run out.

They were wrong, however, and it was not the first time they had been wrong about him. A junior merchandizing executive before the war, a white-gloved, spit-and-polish martinet of an executive officer in stateside training, Carpenter had emerged as a calm, courageous, and resourceful leader in the crucible of combat. There had been a time when no one in the company—except perhaps George Prewitt—would have thought it possible. □

OKINAWA

Continued from page 39

artillery spotters watched the cluster of officers gathered in an exposed position, and guns on a nearby ridge opened fire. Five shells slammed into the ground near Buckner's party, fracturing coral formations in a shower of rock shards and shrapnel. Buckner was hit in the chest by a splinter roughly the size of a dime. He died 10 minutes later, one of the highest-ranking American military officers killed in action in World War II.

General Geiger took temporary command of the Tenth Army after Buckner's death, and with the fall of Kunishi Ridge, only a few pockets of resistance remained. Five days later, Army General Joseph Stilwell arrived to take command of Tenth Army.

On June 22, General Geiger at long last declared Okinawa secure. That same day, while the soldiers of the 7th Infantry Division swarmed above the entrance to his headquarters cave on Hill 89, General Ushijima committed ritual suicide alongside General Cho. Before he died, Cho scribbled on a slip of paper, "Our strategy, tactics, and techniques were all used to the utmost. We fought valiantly, but it was as nothing before the material strength of the enemy."

Ushijima ordered Yahara to surrender to the Americans, making himself a prisoner of war. "If you die there will be no one left who knows the truth about the battle of Okinawa," he told the loyal colonel. "Bear the temporary shame, but endure it. This is an order from your Army commander."

The great battle of Okinawa, the climactic engagement of World War II in the Pacific, ended after nearly three months of harrowing combat. Up to that time, death and suffering on such a scale had seemed impossible. □

Michael E. Haskew is the editor of WWII History Magazine *and is the author of numerous books and articles on history-related topics. He resides in Chattanooga, Tennessee.*

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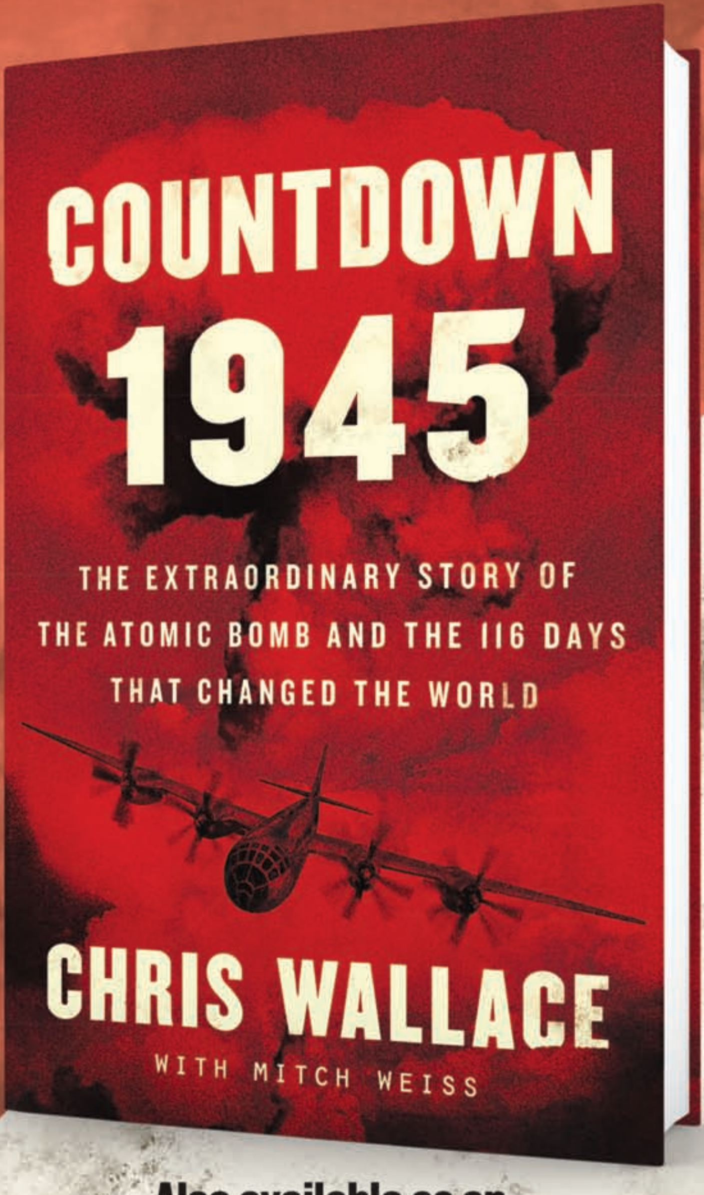
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