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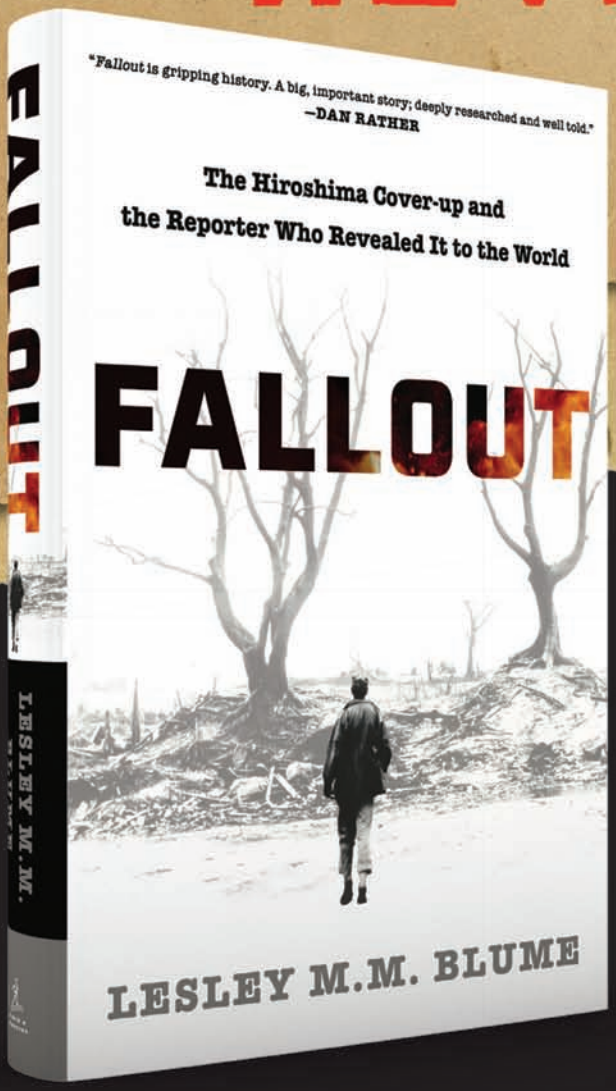

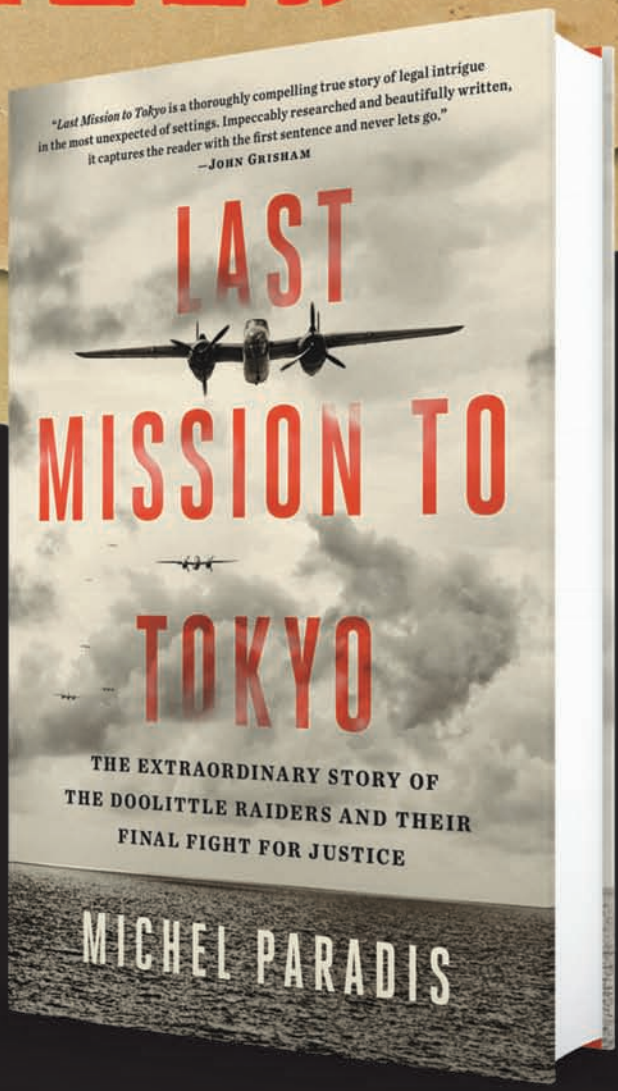

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

WWII QUARTERLY

Page 16

Departments

Features

Cover: A German Panzer VI Tiger Tank, part of Erwin Rommel's Afrika Korps, photographed in North Africa. See story page 30.

Photo: Bundesarchiv Bild Bild 1011-787-0510-09A; Photo: Troschke

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FIGHTING A NEW WORLD WAR

Yes, the world is at war. A surprise attack we didn't see coming: germ warfare on a worldwide scale by an enemy we can't see. But we all see its devastating effects.

Unfortunately, our ability to fight back is limited. We can't send Doolittle's Raiders to drop 500-lb. bombs, or assemble an invasion force to storm the beaches.

For five months, the enemy has been hitting us hard. Fear is palpable and deaths are mounting. Instead of "Remember Pearl Harbor," our battle cry is "Social distancing!" We can't rush to the recruiting offices or into the factories to begin churning out the instruments of war. Instead of tanks, General Motors was ordered to build respirators.

Much like World War II, many unsung heroes today are saving countless lives.

And, irony of ironies, this new war broke out during the same year we were supposed to be commemorating the 75th anniversary of the end of World War II. At the Broomfield (Colorado) Veterans Museum, where I am on the board of directors, we were planning a major exhibit and celebrations this summer to honor all who sacrificed to bring about an Allied victory and free the world from darkness. But now, with a new war on our hands, we don't know when we will be able to reopen to celebrate that earlier victory.

In the 1940s, the U.S. was lucky: Two oceans prevented the enemy from getting too close. We could strike out, but the enemy had a hard time striking back. But this new enemy is right here—at home, next door, and sweeping across the globe.

There are some real parallels to World War II—and some stark differences. During the first five months after Pearl Harbor, the national mood was one of doom and gloom, lifted only by Jimmy Doolittle's raid on Tokyo.

During the first few months of this pandemic, the national mood has also been dark. Instead of marching off to meet the foe, we're ordered to stay home. Shun contact. Don't recreate. Don't go to school or church or work or theaters or concerts or sporting events. Close up shop. Avoid friends and associates. Hunker down. Turn a cloth mask into a bomb shelter.

But, just as during WWII, the general sentiment is that "we are all in this together" and "we must all sacrifice and do our part" to arrive at a successful conclusion. And, as during WWII, there is some grumbling about the sacrifices we're ordered to make, but the general consensus is that it's for our own good.

Americans have been taken by surprise many times in the past century. The Spanish Influenza. The Great Depression. Pearl Harbor. The Kennedy assassination. The oil crisis. The dot-com collapse. Nine-eleven.

But, in the end, I am confident that we will prevail. The war will be won. The republic will stand, perhaps even stronger than before.

And just like World War II changed the arc of world history, so too will this crisis change everyone and everything in ways we cannot yet foresee.

— Flint Whitlock

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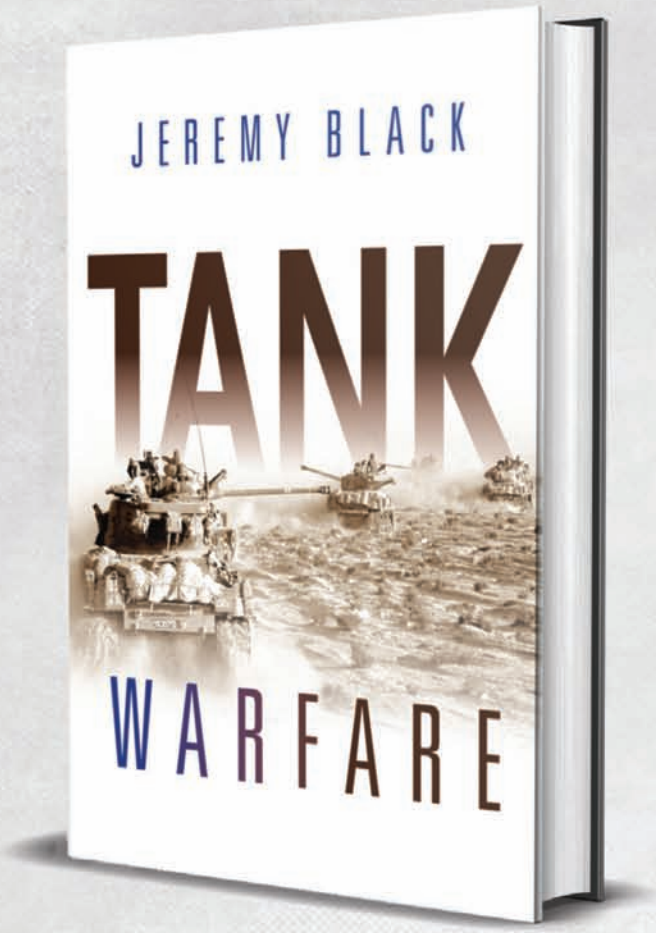

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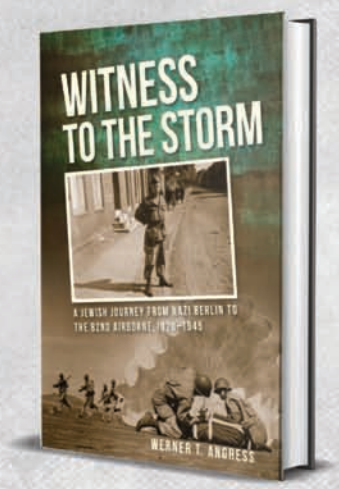

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Japanese-American interpreters serving in the U.S. Army provided valuable service to the Allies in the Pacific.

American soldiers of Japanese ancestry made remarkable contributions to the Allied victory during World War II. The best known of their exploits was the outstanding fighting record compiled by the 100th Infantry Battalion and later the 442nd Regimental Combat Team during the European campaigns. The soldiers of the 442nd received more decorations than those of any unit in U.S. military history for its size and length of service.

Less well known were the World War II contributions made by Nisei (American-born children of Japanese immigrants) troops on the other side of the globe in the Pacific and the China-Burma-India Theaters. The U.S. Army kept their service classified as secret until 1973 when the Freedom of Information Act finally provided the vehicle for the public release of this fascinating story. What were the reasons for this delay? Certainly, the story of the hazardous and valuable contributions of this group of soldiers merited the attention of the American public much sooner than 28 years from the war's end to the ultimate release of the information.

During the course of the war, some 6,000 AJAs (Americans of Japanese Ancestry) provided valuable language and information skills for Allied military and naval personnel throughout the Asian and Pacific areas. Their efforts proved to be doubly dangerous since, because of their racial identity, they could be mistaken for enemy soldiers by their own forces. In many cases, the linguists had to be provided with heavily armed bodyguards to keep them out of harm's way. On several occasions, Nisei soldiers were taken captive by their own comrades in arms who were unaware of the role played by the AJAs in defeating the enemy. It is believed also that in more than one situation the Japanese Americans involved in frontline action were killed accidentally by friendly fire because of mistaken identity.

Prior to the commencement of World War II itself, the U.S. War Department recognized the need for developing a facility capable of translating the Japanese language—to monitor broadcasts, translate

Lieutenant Pat Neishi discusses surrender terms with a Japanese lieutenant general on the outskirts of Manila in 1945. Japanese-American linguists provided outstanding service to U.S. and Allied forces in Asia and the Pacific.

All photos courtesy the author

New Bladder Control Pill Sales May Surpass Adult Diapers By 2021

Drug-free discovery works, say doctors. Many adults ditching diapers and pads for clinical strength pill that triggers day and night bladder support.

By T.J. Roberts
Interactive News Media

INM — Over 150,000 doses have shipped to bladder sufferers so far, and sales continue to climb every day for the 'diaper replacing' new pill called BladderMax.

"We knew we had a great product, but it's even exceeded our expectations," said Keith Graham, Manager of Call Center Operations for BladderMax.

"People just keep placing orders, it's pretty amazing," he said.

But a closer look at this new bladder control sensation suggests that maybe the company shouldn't have been caught off guard by its success.

There are very good reasons for BladderMax's surging popularity.

To begin with, clinical studies show BladderMax not only reduces embarrassing bladder leakages quickly, but also works to strengthen and calm the bladder for lasting relief.

Plus, at just $2 per daily dose, it's very affordable.

This may be another reason why American diaper companies are starting to panic over its' release.

"With daily use, BladderMax offers day and night bladder control relief without side effects," says Diane Lewis, Chief Researcher for BladderMax.

"And seniors in clinical studies reported a higher quality of life in just days as a result of needing less diapers. That's why so many doctors nationwide are now recommending it to patients," added Lewis.

WHAT SCIENTISTS DISCOVERED

BladderMax contains a proprietary compound with a known ability to reduce stress, urgency, and overflow leakages in seniors suffering from overactive bladder.

This compound is not a drug. It is the active ingredient in BladderMax.

Studies show it naturally strengthens the bladder's muscle tone while relaxing the urination muscles resulting in a decrease in sudden urgency.

Many sufferers enjoy a reduction in bathroom trips both day and night. Others are able to get back to doing the things they love without worrying about embarrassing leakages.

"I couldn't sit through a movie without having to go to the bathroom 3-4 times," says Theresa Johnson of Deluth, GA. "but since using BladderMax I can not only sit through a movie, but I can drive on the freeway to another city without having to immediately go to the bathroom."

With so much positive feedback, it's easy to see why sales for this newly approved bladder pill continue to climb every day.

SLASHES EMBARRASSING LEAKAGES BY 79%

The 6 week clinical study was carried out by scientists in Japan. The results were published in the *Journal of Medicine and Pharmaceutical Science* in 2001.

The study involved seniors who suffered from frequent and embarrassing bladder leakages. They were not instructed to change their daily routines. They were only told to take BladderMax's active ingredient every day.

The results were incredible.

Taking BladderMax's active ingredient significantly reduced both sudden urges to go and embarrassing urine leakages compared to the placebo.

In fact, many experienced a 79% reduction in embarrassing accidents when coughing, sneezing, laughing or physical activity at 6 weeks.

They also enjoyed a 39% decrease in daytime trips to the bathroom, and a 68% decrease in nighttime trips.

With these studies medical doctors and researchers have now proven BladderMax to be a clinically effective treatment for reducing embarrassing bladder leakages and incontinence.

The findings are impressive, no doubt, but results will vary.

But with results like these it's easy to see why thousands of callers are jamming the phone lines trying to get their hands on BladderMax.

HOW IT WORKS IS INCREDIBLE

Studies show that as many as one in six adults over age 40 suffers from an overactive bladder and embarrassing leakages.

"Losing control of when and how we go to the bathroom is just an indication of a weakening of the pelvic muscles caused by age-related hormonal changes," says Lewis.

"It happens in both men and women, and it is actually quite common."

The natural compound found in BladderMax contains the necessary ingredients needed to help strengthen bladder muscles to relieve urgency, while reducing frequency.

Plus, it helps relax bladder muscles allowing for complete emptying of the bladder.

This proprietary compound is known as 'EFLA940'®.

And with over 17 years of medical use there have been no adverse side effects reported.

This is a bonus for incontinence sufferers who have been taking prescription and over the counter medications that can cause dry mouth and constipation.

This seems to be another reason why BladderMax's release has triggered such a frenzy of sales.

As new pill gains popularity, products like these will become unnecessary.

RECOMMENDED BY U.S. MEDICAL DOCTORS

"Many of my patients used to complain that coughing, sneezing or even getting up quickly from a chair results in wetting themselves and they fear becoming a social outcast," reports Dr. Clifford James M.D. "But BladderMax changes all that."

"BladderMax effectively treats urinary disorders, specifically overactive bladder," said Dr. Christie Wilkins, board certified doctor of natural medicine.

"I use BladderMax everyday for my overactive bladder. I also have my sister and mother taking it regularly as well," said Dr. Jennifer Freeman, G.P. from NY.

DOUBLE YOUR MONEY BACK GUARANTEE

Users of BladderMax report incredible results. That's why it comes with an equally incredible guarantee.

"There's only one reason why we can offer such a guarantee," said Kyle Harris, Founder of BladderMax. "It works for those who use it. It's as simple as that," he added.

Here's how it works: Take the pill exactly as directed. Then follow the simple instructions. You must be thrilled and amazed as your bladder control greatly improves.

Otherwise, return the product as directed and you'll receive double your money back!

READERS GET SPECIAL DISCOUNT SUPPLY

This is the official release of BladderMax and so for a limited time, the company is offering a special discount supply to our readers. An Order Hotline has been set up for our readers to call, but don't wait. The special offer will not last forever. All you have to do is call TOLL FREE 1-800-614-4873. The company will do the rest.

ABOVE: Kenji Yasui and Kari Yoneda, members of the War Information psychological team in Burma, pose with a pair of U.S. soldiers and Japanese battle flags which they have recently captured in combat. RIGHT: Known as MISers, a group of Military Information Specialists poses during a rare period of free time in the China-Burma-India Theater.

documents, and to communicate, if necessary, with the Japanese. One of the world's most difficult tongues to master, Japanese was known and understood by few Americans. However, there were 200,000 American-born Japanese and their parents living in the United States. Unless born in the United States, Asians, by law, were excluded from citizenship, so most of the Issei, the foreign-born parents of the Nisei, could not change their legal status.

It was from the pool of Nisei that the War Department planned to recruit Japanese language experts. It ordered the testing of the nearly 4,000 AJAs serving in the Army at that time to determine their competency in Japanese. As it turned out, few of the young soldiers could read, write, or speak that language with any fluency. Most had made, to a greater or lesser degree, the transition to "the American way of life." English had now become their principal language. The U.S. Army, depending on two Caucasian officers who knew Japanese, Lt. Col. John Weckerling and Captain Kai Rasmussen, established what came to be called the Military Intelligence Service Language School (MISLS) at Crissey Field, on San Francisco's Presidio Army base.

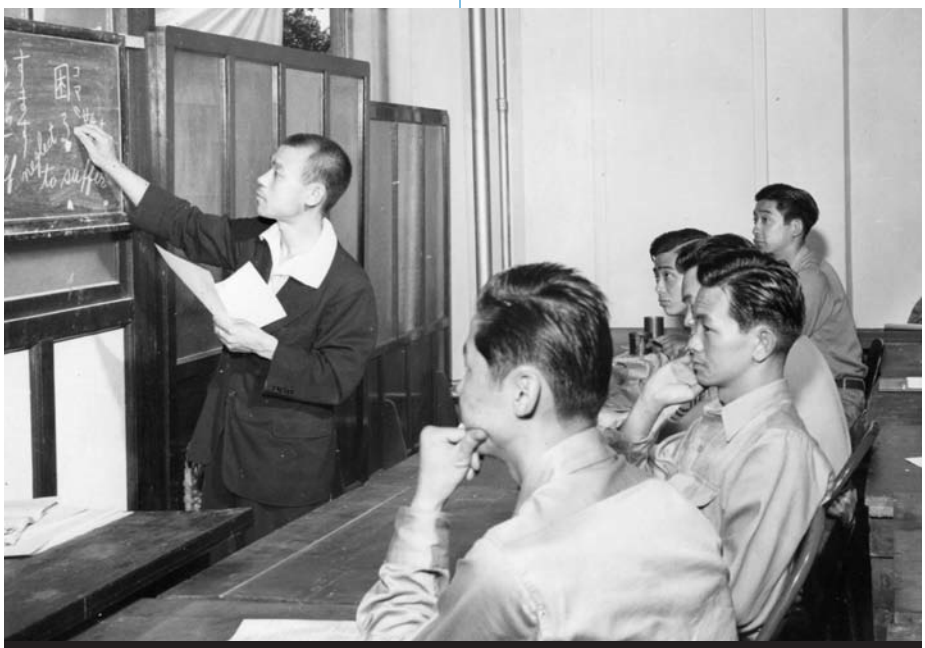
Weckerling and Rasmussen, in turn, began to recruit Nisei instructors to lead the classes. John Aiso, of Burbank, California, and a Harvard Law School graduate, became the school's chief instructor. He was followed by Akira Oshida, Arthur Kaneko, and Shigeya Kihara, who managed to locate the necessary written materials for class use. In the short span of six weeks, the team assembled a staff, an initial class of students, and the buildings and supplies needed to begin the project.

The first class of 60 students at the Presidio commenced its studies on November 1, 1941. Fifty-eight members of the initial group were Japanese Americans. Two Caucasians with previous language training completed the first cadre. Five weeks later, the Japanese Navy attacked Pearl Harbor and other U.S. military installations on Oahu. Military authorities seemed confused as to the future of the new language school. The Army pulled both Weckerling and Rasmussen from the project and assigned them to other jobs. Fortunately, some Army officers realized the importance of the work that had begun and ordered Rasmussen back to the Presidio. The Danish-born immigrant with a native ability for learning foreign tongues remained head of the language training program thereafter.

The curriculum was designed to improve the students' ability to communicate verbally, to read and understand Japanese military terminology and documentation, to translate intercepted radio messages, to read maps, and to understand the basics of cryptography. Later in the war, the school's graduates proved effective in what came to be called "cave flushing," the persuading of Japanese soldiers and civilians hiding in caves in combat areas to surrender rather than resist or commit suicide.

After the Pearl Harbor attack, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, requiring all Japanese Americans, whether foreign born or American citizens, to vacate the coastal areas of the western states and enter some 10 relocation facilities, dubbed by some critics of the program as concentration camps. In accordance with this policy, the Army established a new facility for the language school at Camp Savage, Minnesota. Rasmussen began a desperate campaign to find Nisei with sufficient knowledge of the Japanese language to undergo the planned intensive training. Soon the demands for the expansion of the program resulted in its being moved to more adequate headquarters at nearby Fort Snelling, a permanent Army installation.

Rasmussen shouldered the task of sell-



Attending a class in legal terminology as part of a training program to improve their knowledge of the Japanese language, Nisei soldiers serving as interpreters of the linguist section or the translator and interpreter section pay attention to an instructor. This photo was taken in September 1946, at General Headquarters, Allied Powers in the Pacific, Tokyo.

ing recruits on the importance of the mission. His candidates often had whole families confined to the relocation facilities, living under extremely trying conditions. Nevertheless, he managed to acquire recruits for a variety of reasons. Some candidates felt that participating in the program would demonstrate their loyalty to the United States. Others felt that the language program would at least get them out of the relocation camps and could possibly open up other opportunities. By the fall of 1944, almost 1,800 students had completed extensive training in a variety of courses that would prove useful to the American military.

As the graduates streamed out of the Minnesota facility, they received assignments throughout the Pacific, from the Aleutian Islands campaign in the far north to General Douglas MacArthur's headquarters in Brisbane, Australia, which became the center for the ATIS (Allied Translator and Interpreter Service). At its peak the facility had over 3,000 AJAs serving at that location. The other two major centers for the assignment of the Nisei language specialists were JICPOA (Joint Intelligence Center, Pacific Ocean Area) in Hawaii and SATIC (Southeast Asia Translation and Interrogation Center) in New Delhi, India. From these key facilities the AJAs were sent to various subordinate units and on special missions.

The need for language school graduates far exceeded the supply, and Rasmussen became increasingly desperate to find candidates. He turned to the Japanese Hawaiians, for this group contained a far larger number of Kibei, American citizens who had been sent by their families to study in Japan, than the AJAs living on the mainland. The Kibei could be expected to quickly learn the curriculum developed at the Minnesota facility. The Hawaiians proved to be a hard sell. Many of them preferred to serve with the 100th Infantry Battalion, consisting of Nisei from their home territory.

General MacArthur, commander of U.S. forces in the South Pacific, had a great deal of respect for and confidence in the language specialists. He counted on them heavily to interpret all Japanese military documents that fell into Army hands. The translation of these often critical documents aided in the planning of future campaigns.

Ultimately, the AJAs would serve in every major area in the Pacific and the

On September 12, 1943, at Vella Lave, New Caledonia, Major John Burden and Nisei soldiers of the 25th Division Language Section, attached to G2 (Military Intelligence), interrogate a Japanese prisoner of war in a temporary stockade.

China-Burma-India Theaters throughout the war and act as language experts for Australian, British, Indian, and Chinese troops, as well as for their fellow Americans. The Commonwealth troops and the Chinese had no Japanese language specialists of their own.

The Military Information Specialists, MISers as they came to be called, all served in the Army. The Navy, clinging to archaic patterns of racial discrimination, refused to allow Nisei to enlist in its branch of the service. The same practice existed for the Marines as well. As a result, those two branches later came to depend on borrowed MISers from the Army on a temporary basis whenever the need arose. More than 100 were assigned to the Marines during land campaigns under such an arrangement. Yet. the role that the MISers played in the battles never appeared in Marine dispatches.

Initial attempts to draw information from Japanese prisoners of war proved difficult. Capturing them alive was a major problem itself, for the Japanese soldier had been programmed to fight to the death. The Army managed to take only 28 prisoners, about 1 percent of the defenders, when the Japanese were driven from the Aleutian island of Attu. The ferocious fighting that took place on Iwo Jima resulted in only 38 prisoners. Having once secured a prisoner, however, the interrogators quickly learned that he would respond to kind and courteous treatment. Often the simple act of offering a cigarette, some medicine, a glass of water, or a small bandage for a wound would establish a mood of cooperation during the captor's search for critical military information.

As the war progressed, the language specialists became increasingly effective in the art of persuading Japanese soldiers both to surrender and to divulge vital military information. The Japanese Army had apparently never taught its soldiers how to conduct themselves as prisoners of war since their military ideology stressed either victory or death in battle.

Nisei translators accompanied the Army throughout the campaign in the South Pacific. They served at Guadalcanal, the Solomons, the Carolines, New Guinea, and the Philippines, as well as in smaller and more limited engagements. MISers also accompanied the fabled Merrill's Marauders during their raids behind Japanese lines

in Burma. They performed the same service for the British Chindit guerrillas as well. A specially trained group of Nisei language experts joined OSS (Office of Strategic Services) commandos who worked with the Kachins, native Burmese fighters from the country's northern hills. These guerrillas aided the Allies in their mission to open the Burma Road to resupply China with critical war materiel.

Possibly the most outstanding performance by the Nisei in the Pacific Theater took place during the struggle for Okinawa. This central island of the Ryukyus, some 350 miles south of the Japanese Home Island of Kyushu, represented the key to the southern defenses of the Japanese empire. To the advancing Allied forces its capture would provide an ideal staging area for the invasion of Japan itself. The fight for the island would prove to be the greatest battle of the Pacific War.

The Japanese 32nd Army defended Okinawa. Its commander, Lt. Gen. Mitsuru Ushijima, led a force of some 75,000 Japanese soldiers plus an additional 25,000 or so Okinawans organized into a Boetai or Home Guard. These defenders were situated in an extensive system of fortified caves and underground tunnels, awaiting the arrival of the invading American Tenth Army, commanded by Lt. Gen. Simon Bolivar Buckner. The total American force—ships, men, and equipment— numbered over 500,000 men, of which 180,000 assault troops (five Army and three Marine divisions) would actually go ashore.

The MISers' contribution to the invading army's ultimate success in capturing Okinawa was substantial. A copy of the Japanese Army's final defense plan was captured early in the fighting. Also discovered was a contour map of the island, which was found on the body of an enemy artillery observation officer. The translation and reproduction of these critical documents by the language specialists proved to be of immense value to the American forces.

Okinawa presented a unique challenge to the language specialists. The island's native inhabitants spoke a local dialect unfamiliar to the ears of most of the MISers unless their parents were originally from the island. The 450,000 Okinawans

had also been warned by Japanese Army personnel that they would be raped, tortured, and killed by the invaders. In many cases, the civilians followed the Japanese as they began their retreat in the face of the powerful offensive launched against them by the Americans. Many chose to hide in caves and the tunnels. The job of the MISers consisted of trying to talk both the Japanese soldiers and the Okinawan civilians into surrendering.

Most Japanese soldiers chose to commit suicide rather than surrender, and they had urged the island's civilians to do likewise. During fighting on the island of Saipan in the Marianas, many of the island's civilians had committed suicide by hurling themselves off 800-foot cliffs into the sea. More than 50,000 Japanese soldiers and civilians died as the U.S. Army seized control of Saipan.

For the Okinawa campaign, the Army followed the suggestion of a MISer whose parents were Okinawan and set up a special unit proficient in that dialect. As the invasion progressed, the group worked to get the island's civilians away from the fighting. They also quickly identified any Japanese Army personnel who sought to escape capture by trying to blend in with the Okinawan civilians.

Some of the Okinawan language specialists became "cave flushers." One heroic member of this group entered a cave and convinced its inhabitants, 350 Japanese officers and men, to surrender. Another MISer entered a total of 12 different caves and persuaded the holdouts in 11 of them to surrender.

Without question, the work of these Nisei translators saved thousands of lives, among both the Okinawan civilian population and the Japanese military. By the time the Americans secured the island, some 10,000 soldiers had given up in the only meaningful mass capitulation by the Japanese military of the entire Pacific War. About 300,000 civilians, approximately two-thirds of the island's population, also survived the holocaust. While it was true that many Japanese soldiers and some Okinawan civilians still chose to commit suicide rather than surrender to the American forces, there is no doubt that the toll

Technician Third Grade Ben Oahita (left) translates as staff attorney Captain Arthur Sanlusky (second from right) questions a potential prosecution witness for the International Military Tribunal for the Far East, September 9th, 1946.

would have been much higher were it not for MISer efforts.

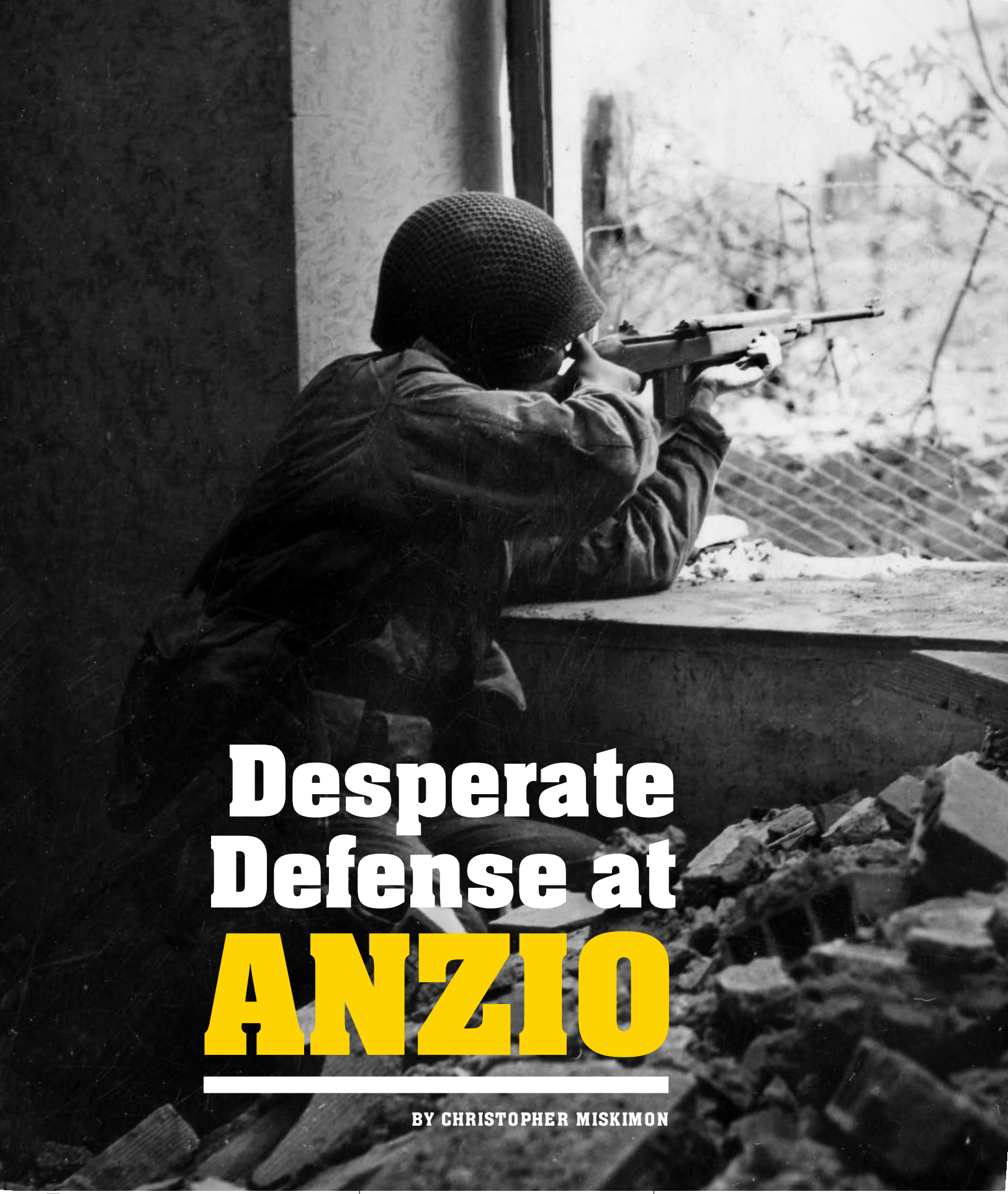
The work of the Nisei translators was not concluded at war's end. They traveled throughout the Pacific, participating in the surrender of Japanese troops on small islands and in major cities. They moved quickly to POW camps as well to ensure the safety of Allied troops in Japanese hands. They also acted as interpreters during the war crimes trials of Japanese soldiers that followed in the Philippines and Japan. Their postwar contributions proved equally as important as their wartime efforts.

The Army sought to hold on to as many AJAs with Japanese language skills as possible following the war because the United States needed their skills during the occupation of Japan. Many Nisei chose to make a career in the Army, receiving advancement in the officer structure as time passed, before eventually retiring.

The MIS linguists earned three Distinguished Service Crosses, five Legion of Merit medals, and five Silver Stars. They also received numerous Bronze Stars, Soldier's Medals, and Purple Hearts. In total, 39 MIS personnel gave their lives in the service of their country.

During the war and for many years thereafter, the American public knew little about the service provided by the MIS linguists to the Allied forces. During the war, many MISers had relatives still in Japan, some even in the Japanese Army. The U.S. Army sought to protect the identity of the translators, so as not to bring harm to these family members. There has also been a natural reticence on the part of the Nisei themselves to discuss their accomplishments while in the service. However, General George Willoughby, MacArthur's chief of intelligence, estimated that the work of the MISers shortened the war in the Pacific by two years.

The MISLS was moved to Monterey, California, after the war, and the language center has grown significantly since it began in 1941. It has remained the major U.S. facility for the instruction of foreign languages for military purposes. More than 100,000 students have passed through the school to date. It currently offers instruction in 50 different languages and has a library of 20,000 volumes on site. In January 2000, the Allied Translator and Interpreter Service finally received a Presidential Unit Citation from the secretary of the Army. □



Desperate Defense at ANZIO

BY CHRISTOPHER MISKIMON

National Archives

The sunrise on February 16, 1944, dawned foggy over the Via Anziate—the only highway between Anzio and Rome. Overnight, the 45th Infantry Division's 2nd Battalion, 157th Infantry Regiment (2/157), had advanced to take positions on the west side of the roadway, assuming its place on the front lines.

Company E, commanded by Captain Felix Sparks, sat at the right flank of the battalion's line, where it bordered the division's 179th Regiment. Looking out across the muddy ground in front of his position, Sparks saw overcoat-clad figures moving, but could not tell who they were. He called his higher headquarters and asked if the soldiers of the 179th were wearing overcoats. They weren't, a voice on the radio replied.

"Those are Krauts coming after us," Sparks told his men. Behind the enemy infantry, the sound of tank engines echoed through the chill morning air. It wasn't long before enemy artillery began pounding Company E's foxholes. Shells landed for 10 solid minutes, but the troops were so well dug in that casualties were light.

When the barrage lifted, three German panzers, unsupported by infantry, came forward and attacked. "They made a mistake," Sparks said. Company E had the support of an antitank gun and two M10 tank destroyers (TDs). Sparks yelled to the TD commander, "Get 'em!"

For a moment, the M10's commander sat confused. "Are those British tanks?" he asked. A British division was dug in a few miles east.

"Hell, no—they're German tanks!" Sparks shouted, and the TDs wasted no more time. They opened fire and quickly knocked out two of the panzers. Both exploded

THE COLORADO NATIONAL GUARD'S 157TH REGIMENT WAS NEARLY WIPED OUT WHILE STOPPING A GERMAN COUNTERATTACK AT ANZIO IN FEBRUARY 1944.

under the concentrated American fire, pieces of them flying across the battlefield; the third made a fast retreat. One of the M10s moved just then; Sparks figured the crew wanted a better field of fire. The movement exposed it to enemy view, however, and a German armor-piercing round crashed into the thinly armored TD. It burst into fast-spreading flame, forcing Sparks to abandon his foxhole and find another.

Almost immediately, German infantry attacked. Sparks' men mowed them down. "We killed every damn on of them," he later recalled. He thought the Germans might be drunk; they shouted as they ran awkwardly across the muddy ground. A few made it to E Company's foxholes but were quickly cut down, tumbling into the mud in their gray overcoats. The sound of firing could be heard coming from the 179th's lines; the enemy was attacking there as well.

Only half an hour passed before the third German wave attacked E Company. This time, the infantry came with armored support. "That's what killed us," Sparks said, referring to the mutual support of tanks and infantry. The panzers moved up to point-blank range and opened fire, blasting the American foxholes.

As E Company fought to hold back the enemy assault, Sparks saw a crewman from one of the tank destroyers climb atop the vehicle and man its .50-caliber

From urban combat to fighting in flat, open fields, from tank-vs.-tank duels, to aerial bombardments to ceaseless artillery barrages, the action at Anzio took on every dimension. Here an American GI uses his carbine to keep German forces at bay during the battle for Anzio that lasted from January to May 1944.

National Archives

ABOVE: An M-18 Hellcat tank destroyer rolls forward to duel with German armor at Anzio. Captain Felix Sparks had just such a TD save his position from being overrun. BELOW: GIs of the 45th Infantry Division use an Italian hayrack as an observation post in a farm field near Anzio. OPPOSITE: Soldiers of the Hermann Göring Fallschirm-Panzer Division, on their way to the Anzio front lines, march past a disabled SdKfz 184 "Elefant" tank destroyer, February 17, 1944—the second day of the German counteroffensive.

Author's Collection

machine gun, exposing himself to enemy fire. This sergeant even tied himself to the gun using a leather strap the crews used to lean against when firing at enemy aircraft. The machine gun roared, sending long bursts of the heavy .50-caliber bullets into the enemy ranks.

As Sparks watched, a burst from a submachine gun struck the man down; spurts of dust flew from the man's jacket as the bullets went through him. "He was killed, but he stopped the Germans right at the edge of my foxhole." Sparks didn't even know the soldier's name.

At midday, as the fight raged on, Sparks sent away his sole remaining tank destroyer, its ammunition depleted. It left at full speed with the Germans firing at it the entire way; Sparks watched rounds impact just behind it as it moved.

Shortly afterward, another wave of Germans attacked, several battalions directing their strength at E Company. This time, Sparks saw only one way to stop the assault: he called in artillery on his own position, a tactic only used as a last resort to avoid being overrun and defeated. E Company's troops were still in their foxholes, while the Germans advanced in the open. The attack was finally stopped, broken up by the deadly, explosive power of the artillery, but the fight was far from over.

E Company fought for its life that morning because it sat at the boundary between the 157th and 179th Infantry Regiments' segments of the line. Such boundaries were vulnerable spots an attacker could exploit. On February 16, 1944, the Germans launched a major counterattack designed to pierce Allied lines and drive them back into the sea. That attack's point of focus was Company E's position.

The Anzio landings were less than a month old when this counterattack—dubbed Operation *Fischfang* by the Germans—occurred. The Allied Fifth and Eighth Armies had earlier hoped to outflank the well-emplaced Germans in the Gustav Line to the south, either forcing them to withdraw or pinning them between two Allied forces. In the event, the Anzio invasion failed; the Allied VI Corps commander, American Maj. Gen. John P. Lucas, didn't move his forces fast enough to get inland to the high ground where he could block Axis movements.

Even if he had, it was doubtful whether the landing force could have been reinforced and supplied sufficiently to prevent its destruction by German counterattacks. Whatever the case, several American and British divisions were ashore at Anzio, and they were as determined to hold their beachhead as the Germans were to push them out. The stage was set for a struggle of wills between the two sides, and the 157th Infantry Regiment sat in the center of the cauldron.

The 157th Infantry was part of the 45th Infantry Division, known as the "Thunderbirds" for the Native American Thunderbird design on their shoulder patch. This

National Guard division drew units from Oklahoma, Colorado, and New Mexico, and contained large numbers of Native American troops.

Activated in 1940, by early 1944 the 45th had participated in the invasions of Sicily and Salerno, and then fought in the mountains at Venafro, near Cassino, before being pulled from the front line for transfer to Anzio in January 1944.

The 157th formed the division's Colorado component. Commanded by Colonel John H. Church, the regiment was organized along standard U.S. infantry lines, with three battalions reinforced by a few organic units, such as an anti-tank and a cannon company. The regiment regularly received support from divisional artillery and attachments from tank, tank-destroyer and engineer units. The M10s supporting Sparks' E Company on the morning of February 16 came from the 645th Tank Destroyer Battalion.

While the regiment was well-supported and supplied, it faced the combined might of several German divisions with their own tank, artillery, and air support. Since arriving at Anzio, the 157th had fought several small battles against Wehrmacht forces, but now it stood directly in the path of an onslaught designed to wipe out the Anzio beachhead completely.

Bundesarchiv Bild 101I-311-0940-35; Photo: Koch

The Germans gathered three corps containing eight divisions and numerous supporting regiments and battalions for their counterattack. The main attack concentrated along the Via Anziate road, closely coinciding with the six-mile section of front defended by the 45th Division. The German 715th Infantry and 3rd Panzergrenadier Divisions spearheaded the attack, focusing on the 45th Division's 157th and 179th Regiments, giving the Germans a 3-to-1 advantage at their point of attack.

Diversionary attacks took place on both flanks of the main attack, striking the British 56th and U.S. 3rd Infantry Divisions. German armor used the small village of Aprilia as a base; they would sortie from there and make their attacks before returning to replenish their ammunition and fuel. Aprilia was known to the Allies as "The Factory" because the church's bell tower and a matching tower at city hall looked like industrial smokestacks.

As the attack pushed down the Via Anziate, it would reach a prominent feature known as the Overpass. This was in fact an actual highway overpass for an unfinished road that went over the Via Anziate and the railroad tracks that paralleled it. The Overpass had no real tactical value other than as an easily recognizable landmark on the mostly flat terrain. If the Germans could punch through along this axis and reach the coast a few miles beyond, they would cut Allied forces in half and could defeat each part in detail.

The German counterattack began at dawn on February 16, 1944—a cold morning with a misty fog lying across the battlefield. The usual harassing fire from artillery and mortars had punctuated the night and then suddenly stopped, leaving a silence that seemed almost as deafening as the bark and crash of shells.

The quiet lasted only a few minutes—the German gunners were preparing for their new fire missions—before the GIs, huddled in their foxholes, heard it. In the distance, cannon fired, mortars launched their bombs into the air, and the dreaded *Nebelwerfers* fired their rockets, which shrieked through the sky with a terrifying noise.

A barrage was coming—the Americans crouched deep into their foxholes or dove into dugouts, pressing into the mud as the incoming fire rushed down on them. Explosions ripped the landscape, sending hot shards of jagged shrapnel in all directions. The blasts shook the ground; if a round landed directly in a foxhole, the occupants were almost certainly killed.

The German artillery pounded the Americans all along the line and behind, aiming for headquarters and assembly areas. While E Company got a shelling of about 10 minutes, in some places the bombardment went on for over an hour.

Lt. Col. Ralph Krieger, commanding the 1st Battalion, 157th Infantry (1/157), recalled the barrage: "It was hell, I'll tell you for sure. I lost quite a few people, including my orderly. We were in an advanced CP [Command Post] in a ditch, and the Germans started shelling us. He got hit by a direct hit on his foxhole; I was right alongside him. How I missed getting

hit, I don't know. My S-2 [Intelligence Officer] was wounded at the same time." Krieger's battalion was behind the lines, however, and was spared the worst of it.

The 2nd Battalion, led by Lt. Col. Lawrence Brown, had moved into the front line the night before and was barely in position when the attack came. It was astride the Via Anziate, with G Company on the left on the Buon Riposo Ridge, in reality just a slightly elevated point in the otherwise-flat terrain. F Company was in the center, with E Company on the right. H Company, the battalion weapons company, sat in reserve.

This was when Captain Sparks' E Company was hit head-on by the attack. The neighboring 179th Infantry also bore the brunt of German tanks and artillery, with its forward companies battered and in one case surrounded. They fought back, however, with observers directing heavy artillery fire at the attackers.

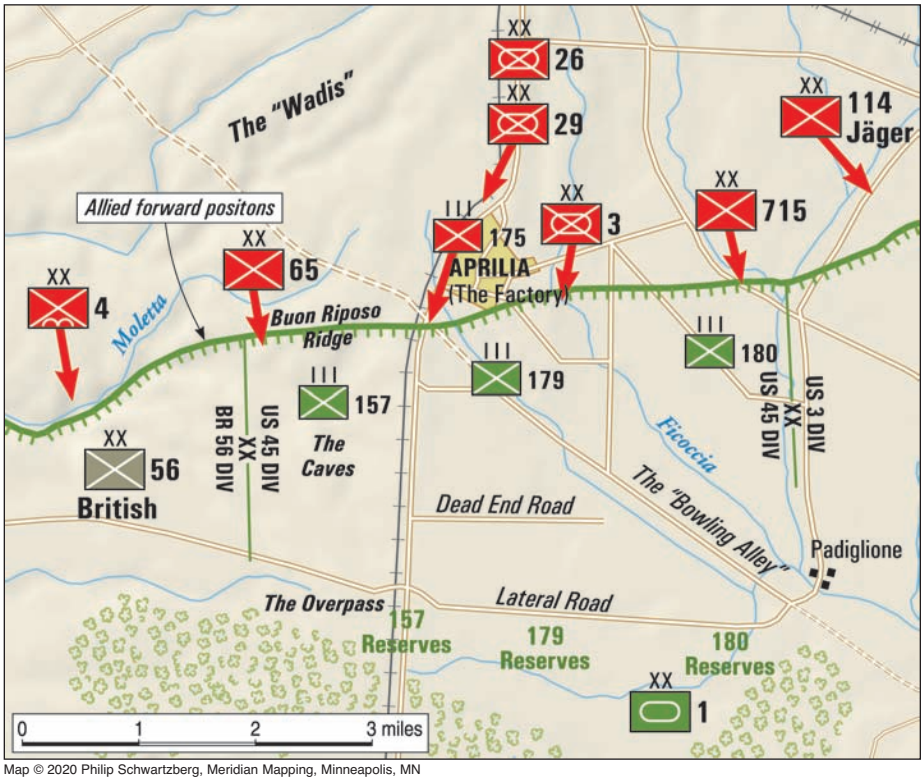
On the 157th's left, the British 56th Division suffered a two-division assault from the German 4th *Fallschirmjäger* (Parachute) and 65th Infantry Divisions. The British section of the line contained wadis (dry creek beds) that the Germans used as a route of infiltration. During the confused fighting, the British pulled back, leaving the left flank of the 157th exposed. Meanwhile, the German attack on the 157th overran F and G companies, leaving E Company similarly exposed.

Sparks had one platoon on the west side of the Via Anziate, and it was practically wiped out. "The damn fool Germans finally discovered we had nobody on our flank," Sparks stated. "I don't know why they didn't figure it out earlier, but they didn't. The Germans would fight like hell but sometimes they were utterly stupid."

The rest of the battalion also fought for its life. Pete Conde served in the 157th's Anti-tank company, equipped with 57mm guns only marginally effective against the armor of German tanks and assault guns. "After the British withdrew, our flank was open," he said. "The Germans came in and really surprised the mortars [mortar platoon] behind the hill, where I was.

National Archives

ABOVE: The flat terrain of the Anzio battlefield provided no cover and little concealment. Here GIs burrow into their water-filled foxholes and wait for the next German assault. BELOW: Men of the 157th Infantry Regiment were pushed by attacking German forces into a series of caves southwest of Aprilia, near the highway from Anzio to Rome. OPPOSITE: German infantrymen take cover from Allied shelling in a creekbed near Anzio. The Americans wondered if the German infantrymen were drunk when they attacked across the open ground.



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

Many of our fellows were captured."

The 3rd Battalion, 157th (3/157) sat in positions about two kilometers behind 2/157. The men in 3/157 saw the Germans overrun their GI brethren and continue attacking southward toward the coast. K Company's Bud McMillan endured the barrage with his platoon and watched as the Germans started across the open ground right in front of them. Bud carried a sniper rifle and put his marksmanship to deadly use.

"I was able to shoot the ones I thought were officers or NCOs," he recalled. "You pretty well had your choice of what you were going to shoot at. Up to 400 or 500 yards, you could really pick 'em off."

The Germans kept coming in rushes—advancing a short distance before dropping to

the ground, rolling sideways so they wouldn't rise again in the same spot, and then dashing ahead once more. Their own machine guns and mortars fired to cover them. McMillan continued, "I was in the slit trench, just shootin' at them, and a piece of shrapnel came down and hit me in the right thigh.

"I took off my belt and tied a tourniquet around my leg and I kept on fightin'. There really wasn't but about nine or 10 of us doin' any shootin'—the rest were either gone or in hidin'. Just to our immediate front there must have been a hundred or more Germans running right at us."

The early-morning darkness may have helped Don Amzibel, from L Company. On outpost duty when the attack began, he watched as flares lit the early-morning sky and panzers clanked toward him. He remembered, "German soldiers were running by us as if we weren't there. Of course, it was dark, and maybe they were doped up."

Amzibel and his fellow soldier in the outpost snuck back to the company's main position, shouting the password to avoid being shot by the sentries. In danger of being surrounded, L Company fell back. It was the first time Don had been in a retreat.

When 1/157 moved into the fight they also ran into the German advance. Like Sparks, Captain Kenneth Stemmons, commanding B Company, had to call in artillery on his own foxholes. He said, "When the Germans finally broke through … with infantry and tanks and a little bit of mechanized stuff, it got so bad that I had to call for artillery on our position. I had asked for quite a bit of it and they replied, 'Let us give you a little bit to see if that's what you really want.' But we were in our holes and the Germans were running around in the open. We got the artillery and the Germans suffered terrible casualties."

Infantry firepower also came into play that morning. 1st Sgt. Daniel Ficco of C Company told his men to hold fire until a few hundred Germans crowded an open area in front of them. "Then I gave the order and we fired. We had some mortars, and the ground was almost black with Germans coming at us. I was firing an M-1 and it got so hot, I could hardly touch it; I don't know how many rounds I put through it."

Still, artillery played the decisive role on the 16th. The 45th's artillery poured fire into the waves of German attackers. Mel Craven of A Battery, 158th Field Artillery Battalion, recalled being taught in basic training the maximum rate of fire for a 105mm howitzer was four rounds per minute. "When the attack came, I and another man were on a two-man gun watch; the rest of the crew was asleep. When the Germans hit, we didn't have enough time to call and wake them.

"By the time the rest of the crew got out of their foxholes and down into the gun pit, we had almost expended 30 rounds of ammunition." He estimated their rate at 10-12 rounds per minute. "After a captured German soldier came back through our lines, he had one request—he wanted to see our 'automatic artillery.' That gave us an indication what rate of fire we were putting out."

Felix Sparks still fought for the life of his company. At midday, a German halftrack appeared with a white flag. A German officer got out and asked for a 30-minute truce to evacuate the wounded on both sides. Sparks agreed, loaded his own casualties in his last running truck, and sent them back. Afterward, the fighting resumed, and the young captain once again called in artillery on his own position, stopping the attack for the moment.

Nearby, G Company's commander, 1st Lt. Joe Robertson, also became desperate. Two hundred dead Germans and several knocked-out tanks littered the ground in front of his men, but one platoon was lost, and the enemy was closing in. Robertson,

Bundesarchiv Bild 101I-716-0010-14; Photo: Dreyer

too, called in the guns on his own position, but the Germans kept coming, leaping into the American foxholes and engaging in hand-to-hand combat. The Americans fell back as enemy tanks arrived, blasting the foxholes with direct cannon fire.

A few miles back, 3/157 took up positions around the Overpass and immediately came under intense artillery fire. They knew the German attack was aimed at reaching the beaches and cutting the Allied position in two. They had to hold. The incoming fire forced the battalion CP to move back 600 yards, and the aid station was hit several times. Despite everything, they held.

Nightfall brought only slight respite. 1st Sgt. Ficco took two Native American soldiers on a patrol to capture a prisoner. They snuck across a canal amidst a large number of German troops and found tanks and armored vehicles preparing for an attack. They continued on until they spotted a lone German sentry guarding a bridge over the canal. Ficco told his men to wait there while he snuck down the road to approach the sentry from the other side.

Flint Whitlock

The battered "Overpass" over the Anzio-Rome highway was the scene of much hard fighting; the Germans had to break through this position to have any hope of pushing the Allies back into the sea.

He walked straight down the road so the guard would challenge him. When that happened, the two GIs rushed out and took the sentry unawares. Ficco's patrol made it back to friendly lines. They then called in artillery on the enemy armor preparing to attack. The Germans did attempt a night assault on G Company, using the wadis to its left, but the Americans perceived their enemy in the dark and set up machine guns and BARs on the ridge. Thousands of .30-caliber bullets rained down on the area, breaking up the attack and filling the wadis with dead Germans.

Bud McMillan remained at his post despite his wounds, firing his sniper rifle. He recalled that at dusk, a group of British soldiers appeared. They promptly fixed bayonets and, at the blast of a whistle, charged the Germans. McMillan decided it was time to go, fearing the activity would bring down mortar fire on the position. He got near the Overpass, where a British tank was firing into the darkness. Some British troops found him and filled his canteen cup with tea. Shortly after the tank was hit, a truck appeared, and McMillan was put in it next to a wounded British tanker. They were evacuated to a hospital near Anzio.

Felix Sparks used the darkness to get help for E Company. He was supposed to meet a platoon of five M4 Sherman tanks, but he got only two. He took them anyway and placed them where the tank destroyers had been earlier; they would prove useful the next day. That night a company of Germans from the 715th Division crept into E Company's outpost line and killed or captured all the sentries. As the sun rose on February 17, there were now fewer than 50 men left in the company.

The new day brought a renewed effort from the Germans. They'd suffered heavier-than-expected casualties the day before—1,700 men—and expended more ammunition than planned. Success would have to come quickly, before the attack ran out of men and materiel. Despite their slow progress, the Germans did manage to force a gap between the 157th and 179th and became determined to exploit it.

That morning, Luftwaffe aircraft roared in, strafing and bombing to further soften the Americans. Before their arrival, the German artillery had used up a significant portion of their remaining ammunition. This bombardment forced the defenders to take cover while 14 German infantry battalions from various units moved into the assault.

American artillery replied, joined by two Navy cruisers, each of their six-inch shells equivalent to a 155mm howitzer round. U.S. troops often complained that the U.S. Army Air Force was rarely present over the battlefield; a common joke among the soldiers in the Anzio beachhead described the 36 hours a day of air cover they got—12 from their own air forces and 24 from the enemy's.

This morning, for once, the Allied air power arrived ahead of the Luftwaffe. Hundreds of bombers appeared overhead, dropping 1,100 tons of bombs on the Germans—to that date, the highest tonnage of bombs dropped in a ground-support mission. As soon as the Allied planes left, however, 45 Stukas appeared, bombing and strafing as German ground troops tore at the gap between the 157th and 179th regiments, determined to make a hole through which they could pour to the coast.

U.S. Army Art Collection

Atop Buon Riposo Ridge, Corporal Henry Kaufman lay in his slit trench, enduring the bombardment. When it ended, he crept out, determined to find better cover. Dead Americans—sometimes only pieces of them—dotted the landscape. He found a friend, Pfc. Fred White, and they set off together.

Suddenly an enemy tank appeared; the two men took cover near a 10-foot-high cliff as the tank fired several rounds. Explosions crashed around them as they tried to dig in with their entrenching tools. After a few minutes, the tank left. Kaufman discovered that the small cliffside had collapsed, burying White. He quickly dug the man out, finding him miraculously unhurt.

The remnants of 2/157 grimly held despite the battering of artillery, tanks, and infantry. As it was pushed back, the battalion occupied an area known as the Caves, a series of tunnels carved into a hill. Built during World War I, likely to store gunpowder, the sandstone walls were hardened by years of exposure to air. A number of chambers made up the interior of each tunnel. At least 50 women and children, refugees from Aprilia, were sheltering in the Caves when the American arrived.

The battalion CP set up in one cave, and men from the companies straggled in as the day continued, though E and G Companies were virtually cut off by this time. German tanks roamed the field behind G Company, firing on any target they found. Two tanks even penetrated through the American lines, moving toward the Overpass. American gunners knocked out one tank just short of the feature, but the other tank drove right through it, only to be destroyed on the other side by focused gunfire.

Sparks' E Company, also cut off, suffered heavily from relentless attacks by the 725th Grenadier Regiment. The M4 Sherman tanks he'd received the night before turned the tide, keeping the enemy at bay with cannon and machine-gun fire.

Sparks had only 28 men left now, and they were almost out of ammunition. Finally, orders came to fall back to the Caves. He waited until full daylight that morning, fearful of losing men in the dark, before moving his shattered company to a small hill near the Caves and overlooking the road. The artillery dropped smoke to cover their movement.

"We were the right flank of the battalion," he recalled. "We had excellent observation and dug in a circle. The Germans went by us and left us alone. But what the damn fools didn't know was that I had an artillery radio, and every time I saw a group, I brought in artillery fire on them." The Sherman tanks moved back, but not before knocking out two panzers.

Now a portion of the battalion occupied the Caves, with the rest in fighting positions just outside, where they could continue the battle. Captain Peter Graffagnino, battalion surgeon, set up an aid station in the Caves; captured German medics and doctors helped tend the wounded from both sides. Pete Conde spent the day carrying water cans into the Caves; he recalled seeing one German doctor with a pistol still on his belt as he tended the injured. No one had thought to take it from him.

One E Company man, separated from his unit, found his way to the Caves just ahead of a hundred Germans. He warned the men inside of the impending attack. Rifle fire and grenades forced the enemy back, but another company-sized attack came at dusk, getting close enough for hand grenades to fly back and forth again.

National Archives

Flint Whitlock

LEFT: Captain Felix Sparks's E Company, 157th, was the salient of the defense. RIGHT: Captain Kenneth Stemmons, B Company, called artillery onto his own positions to stop a German attack. FAR LEFT: Combat artist Robert Benney painted his impression of the desperate fighting that took place in the Caves.

G and H Companies fired on the enemy from their position on the ridgeline just above the Caves while, inside, Captain George Hubbert, the battalion's artillery-liaison officer from the 158th Field Artillery, called in fire missions. U.S. artillery rained down for two hours until the surviving enemy fled.

The fighting continued all night. Henry Kaufman remembered the close combat: "We were trapped by the Germans and unable to move more than 15 or 20 feet outside of the cave…very close hand-to-hand combat, with fixed bayonets, right outside the entrance to our cave…We somehow managed to kill several Germans outside the cave; in the ensuing battle, we captured an entire German machine-gun

nest consisting of three Germans and their machine gun." The captured men and weapon were pulled into the cave.

This went on for the next several nights. Water and food ran out; men became desperate to quench their thirst. The 157th's official history stated, "Near one company sector trickled a stream in which lay several dead Germans, who had been cut down by machine gun fire. The water ran blood red but the thirsty men filled their canteens, boiled it, and drank it."

The Executive Officer of B Company, Philip Burke, stated, "We were hit by a German attack, but they couldn't get us because the apertures and openings to the Caves were easily defended…The part of the Caves I was in had two or three openings from which we were defending. We couldn't move out except at night, when we'd go down to the creek to get the dirtiest water I ever drank. It was drainage from the farms in the area."

The Germans slowly continued to gain the upper hand, but they suffered, too. The Allied artillery proved relentless and never seemed to run out of ammunition; the air strikes also made their mark, and even battle-hardened German troops grudgingly admitted the Americans' doggedness.

A letter written by a German soldier revealed the strain: "The 45th American Division have had us in an uncomfortable spot. These damned American dogs are bombing us more and more every day. For a few days, a damned American with a Browning automatic has been shooting at us. He has already killed five of our men. If we ever get hold of this pig we will tear him to pieces."

Another soldier from the 715th Division wrote: "It's really a wonder I am still alive. What I have seen is probably more than many saw in Russia. I've been lying day and night under artillery barrages like the world has never seen."

Hans Schule, of the 7th Company, Lehr Regiment, recalled the relentless shelling and bombing during his unit's attack. "The terrible fire had already completely demolished us before the attack and our morale was destroyed. With guns we were threatened by our officers and non-commissioned officers and forced to leave our shelters and go into the attack.

"The enemy artillery became even stronger and we could find shelter only in the shell holes…I found myself with an American in the same hole…We stared into each other's eyes, neither of us reacting. I then understood that the American infantry were under the fire of their own artillery."

Afterward Schule took the American prisoner and marched him back to his own lines, disregarding an order from an officer to kill the GI. The next day, Schule realized his regiment "did not exist anymore." This was the Lehr Regiment's first time in battle; even Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, the German commander in Italy, later acknowledged the unit should never have led such an assault. Pulled off the line, the remnants of the Lehr spent the next two days carrying dead Germans back to casualty-collection points.

With 2/157 cut off at the Caves, the rest of the regiment deployed to bolster the line and defend the Via Anziate route near the Overpass. Its embankment ran 100 yards to either side, making it easiest to simply stick to the road on the way to the sea. At the moment, only I Company protected it, formed in a semicircle in front of the concrete edifice. The division commander ordered K and L to join them; there could be no retreat from this position. Behind them, hasty defensive lines were filled with cooks, clerks, and mechanics from the 45th's rear echelons.

1st Sgt. William Pullum of K Company remembered going to the Overpass: "We were on one side of the road and I Company was on the other. We were in front of the Overpass and were in a very tenuous position. We had an awful lot of folks wounded there. We were actually supposed to attack and relieve the men at the Caves, then realized we couldn't. Daylight caught us and we started to get casualties like it was going out of style." The intense enemy fire soon killed or wounded all the officers in K Company, so Pullum took command.

BELOW: An A-4 Sherman medium tank burns after being hit by German fire during the battle for Anzio. Muddy fields confined most armor to the roads, making them easy targets. OPPOSITE: A line of German troops and armor await orders to drive against Allied forces at Anzio. Although the Germans committed their men and tanks in wave after wave, they were unable to break the Allied line.

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A large German unit charged I Company's lines, only to be trapped in the curling loops of concertina wire the Americans had strung in front of their positions. GI machine guns chattered, cutting down the Germans as they struggled to get free. On the night of the 17th, the Germans tried infiltrating, using tank and artillery fire as cover, but I Company held on, receiving a resupply of ammunition but no food or water.

A few tanks from the 191st Tank Battalion reinforced the infantry, using the firepower of their cannon and machine guns to keep the Germans at bay. Sergeant Phil Miller drove one of the M4s at the Overpass: "It looked like the whole German army had risen up out of the ground and came charging at us. We hit them with everything we had and still they kept coming. I lost another tank from a direct hit from a German 88. My assistant gunner and I were the only two that got out; the three men in the turret were killed in the blast and fire."

As badly as the attack smashed the American lines, the Germans suffered as well. War Correspondent Reynolds Packard watched the battle through binoculars. He later wrote he saw "tank battle and infantry fighting all along the skyline. German wounded and dead are so numerous as to actually hamper their attacks as advancing waves of Nazi infantry walk over a gruesome carpet of their own dead and dying."

Later that night K and L Companies joined other British and American troops in a counterattack, aimed at reaching the Caves and restoring the front lines. The confused night operation went badly. At first, the Americans advanced 1,000 yards through artillery fire with lightning flashing overhead.

Jack McMillion of L Company recalled arriving at the end of the advance and hearing friendly fire on both sides of his unit. "This was supposed to be a small gap, but it must have been a half mile wide and there were just a few of us."

A patrol went out but never returned. As the men waited in the dark, the officers deciding their next step, a panzer appeared with a long line of German troops advancing behind it. A Nebelwerfer crew also set up nearby.

GIs took cover in a drainage ditch as their enemy marched past, and McMillion watched the screaming rockets fly directly overhead toward the Overpass. The officers decided to fall back using the ditch, which angled away from the German column. They reached the Overpass just at dawn.

As they passed a farmhouse, some men in overcoats called out in English, "What outfit is this?" Somebody answered, and the men opened fire. They were Germans! Bullets struck the side of the house as the Americans dashed by. Luck was with them; all of them made it to the Overpass, with just one man wounded by a bullet to the buttocks.

The German plan for the 18th was for more of the same; five full regiments attacked with tank support and artillery—at least while the ammunition lasted. Just before noon, Captain William McKay, flying a Piper Cub artillery-spotting plane, saw at least 2,500 Germans advancing with tanks. He quickly called in the fire missions, and 224 Allied guns joined the bombardment, hurling thousands of shells at the attackers. Despite the devastation, the Germans kept advancing, determined to reach the Overpass and beyond.

Awaiting them, Companies I, L, and M endured the shelling. It was a rainy day, but GIs later recalled that the artillery was so intense that a wet haystack nearby was

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ABOVE: During a night attack, these German soldiers lost their lives in the muddy, water-filled creeks and ditches that made up the Anzio battlefield. OPPOSITE: As part of U.S. VI Corps' Operation Shingle, 45th Infantry Division replacement troops, the invasion's second wave, march through the deserted streets of Anzio on their way to the front lines, 10 miles to the north.

set alight. Jack McMillion recalled a stiff firefight: "Behind us, we had tank destroyers that had their noses over the embankment and were firing at the Germans, and the Germans were firing at them, and we infantry were hugging the mud in between."

L Company's mortar section went forward, trying to get within range of the Germans attacking the Caves; none of them returned.

Don Amzibel was in McMillion's platoon. "We were spotted by the Germans," he recalled. "I guess we interrupted their breakfast, because they started hollering at us and chasing us, waving their mess kits. Our top sergeant, Jack McMillion, fired a few shots…they retreated back to their line…The shelling was awful. Tanks fired a few feet over our heads, trying to knock the Overpass out of commission. Every time a mortar shell landed near us, we were buried with dirt and mud. If the Germans had broken through, they'd have cut the beachhead in two."

A few men in I Company paid the Germans back. Jackson "Cowboy" Wisecarver used his light machine gun to kill 30 of the enemy in one day. Medic Joe Franklin recalled Wisecarver was also a deadly shot with a .45 pistol. "I couldn't hit a wall with a .45," Franklin stated.

The medic also remembered Kenneth Kindig, who carried a brand-new sniper rifle at the Overpass. As Germans tried to get through the wire in front of the company, he shot them down. "I was on the outskirts with that sniper rifle and they were coming up through some drainage ditches at us," Kindig said. "I picked them off before they could get around to us."

Some 25 enemy soldiers fell to Kindig's fire, but he soon ran into bad luck. During a lull in the fighting, he had paused to eat some cheese and crackers when a mortar round exploded nearby. "A piece of shrapnel went through the front of my helmet and lodged in the back, between the helmet and helmet liner. I guess it knocked me out for a little bit. When I woke up, I was still sitting up and my can of cheese was running over with blood. The shell also blew the stock and telescopic sight off my brand-new sniper rifle."

Kindig was evacuated after dark, the only time casualties could be moved without drawing fire. He spent a month in the hospital and later received a Bronze Star for his actions.

3/157 stayed in that precarious position, 100-150 yards in front of the Overpass, for three days and nights, fighting off repeated attacks. While 2/157 remained encircled at the Caves, Maj. Gen. William Eagles, the 45th's commander, attached part of 1/157 to the neighboring 179th Regiment, which was also in bad shape after days of non-stop fighting.

The move allowed the 179th to shorten its lines while the 157th received American armored infantry from the 1st Armored Division as well as British troops to shore up the holes in its own lines. Further German attacks were repulsed with help of the division artillery, which fired 12,557 rounds on February 18 alone.

The fighting went on, but the tide had turned. The German offensive gradually ran out of energy; too many men lay dead and wounded, and there wasn't enough artillery ammunition to match the Allies' superior logistical ability.

February 19 and 20 were marked by German barrages and attacks all along the salient, but responding Allied artillery proved too heavy and accurate. All of this made little difference to the infantrymen of the 157th, still in their foxholes and CPs, enduring the enemy's last attempts to break through. The battle transitioned to a test of willpower between two armies unwilling to concede.

The Germans deployed fresh troops to finish 2/157 in the Caves. H Company's commander, Kenneth Kerfoot, recalled a harrowing enemy attack on the night of February 19: "We tried to get out that night…We had 70 or 80 men left out of a hundred, but 40 or 50 were walking wounded. German machine guns pinned us down. We would have been slaughtered, so we surrendered at the crack of dawn."

As the enemy marched their new prisoners to the rear, Kerfoot saw immense stacks of dead Germans, awaiting burial, in piles chest-high going the length of a city block.

In the Caves on the 20th, Henry Kaufman watched as a German armored vehicle

rolled up to the entrance of his cave. It carried a flamethrower and loosed a stream of fire into the cave, burning Kaufman's right arm. The GIs threw hand grenades and fired armor-piercing bullets, driving the vehicle away.

Two days later, the Germans attacked again, this time using tear gas. Coughing, eyes burning, six H Company men, including Kaufman, surrendered. The machine-gun crew the GIs captured days earlier was liberated. When the Italian women came out, several Germans called them collaborators and started shooting them, until an officer appeared and ordered them to stop.

Kaufman saw 25-30 German bodies outside the cave's entrance. One German ordered Kaufman and another GI to carry one of the dead to a collection point nearby. The German who gave the order said the dead man was his brother.

Felix Sparks and his last 16 men still sat in their isolated position on February 21. He received word that the battalion would be relieved by a British battalion, at which point the Americans would consolidate and withdraw after the British troops took over their positions. The British attempt met with heavy resistance; they reached Sparks' position but had lost 76 men and most of their ammunition and heavy weapons along the way.

"He didn't even have a machine gun, so I gave him ours," Sparks said of the officer who commanded the group. The Americans fell back to the Caves and spent the night there. The Germans attacked again, and artillery was brought down, almost to the cave entrances. It stopped them that night, but on the 22nd a group of Germans got into one cave, captured a platoon of GIs, and freed a large number of prisoners.

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An American lieutenant volunteered to go out and zero in the artillery. Armed only with a trench knife, he found a foxhole atop the Caves and called in fire missions for over an hour; he made it back inside afterward. Minutes later, orders came to evacuate the Caves—it was time to go. A man went to wake up the heroic lieutenant, who sat with a cigarette perched between his lips. The young officer was dead.

Lt. Col. Brown issued a timetable, hoping to keep the withdrawal orderly and prevent further losses. First spot went to G Company, followed by F Company, Battalion Headquarters, H Company, E Company, and finally the walking wounded.

At 1:30 AM, the first troops went out in single file. Sparks went back to his old position to retrieve the loaned machine gun, but the gun—and all the British—were gone. He went back to the withdrawing column and took the lead, guiding the survivors to a small bridge over a ravine; Sparks stood by until all of them were over it. After the last man crossed, Sparks stumbled over a dropped tin of British ration biscuits and ate them quickly before moving to catch up with the column.

Suddenly, a German machine gun opened up, long bursts flashing out into the night, seeking Americans to kill. "The Germans had established a line and we had wandered into it," Sparks recalled. "The firing didn't break out until about half our column had passed through their outpost.

"The bullets were really flying, and I was yelling, 'Fire back, fire back!' Then I yelled, 'Everybody follow me!" Sparks ran to a nearby canal and fell eight feet to the bottom. He took a head count; only a dozen men had followed him. He decided to move out with the small band he had, warning them not to fire even if the Germans fired at them. Concealment in the dark was their best hope.

As they infiltrated, German voices called out to them, trying to determine who they were. The enemy troops threw a few grenades but did nothing more. They went on for another half mile and came across a British artillery position. Sparks shouted, "We're Americans!" at the surprised British gunners, hoping they wouldn't shoot.

The front half of the column got back to American lines; the rest were killed or captured, along with the unmovable wounded back at the Caves. Captain Graffagnino, the surgeon, had insisted on staying with them and also became a prisoner.

Lieutenant Philip Burke shot his way to freedom. As he moved through the ravines, he recalled, "The Germans were up above, firing down on us. I happened to have a submachine gun with me and managed to take care of a couple of them up on the high walls." Though wounded, he made it back and was evacuated to a hospital, rejoining the battalion a month later.

Operation Fischfang ended in defeat for the Germans. While the casualties they suffered fighting the 157th in particular are

Continued on page 98

Faces of Battle

BY KEVIN M. HYMEL

Soldiers of the 69th Infantry Division describe what it was like for them to come under fire for the first time.

"I was scared to death."
—Private Raymond L. Roth

What was it like to come to grips with the enemy, to fight and survive combat? For each men, the experience was different; for many, it was almost impossible to relate to those behind the lines or an ocean away. In an effort to better understand the human condition in combat, the U.S. Army asked a few soldiers who had just experienced their baptisms by fire against the Germans to offer a few words about their ordeal.

On March 3, 1944, several soldiers of the 69th Infantry Division, who had just dueled with the Germans on the Siegfried Line, were asked to explain what they thought of their first time under fire. Their answers were varied and insightful; but despite their best efforts, these men could not completely convey the essence of the combat experience to those who had not been there.

"I didn't have much time to think; being a squad leader kept me busy."
—S.Sgt Alexander Walegir

"It was different from anything I ever saw."
—Private Fred I. Green

"I was pretty busy. I hate those screaming meemies."
—Pfc. Robert M. Sokoloff

"Didn't mind the small arms fire, but damn that mortar and artillery fire."
—S.Sgt Aloysius Ruthoviski

"I prayed like I never prayed before."
—Pfc. Willey E. Thompson

"Hell."
—Private Harold R. Sprang

"Cold weather was the worst part of it all."
—Private James B. Gray

"The weather really was the worst part."
—Private Charles D. Doriocourt

"I just thought of my wife and kid through it all."
—Pfc. Earl W. Higgins

Free French Stand at BIR HACHEIM

German commander Erwin Rommel was pushing hard toward Cairo, but a remote desert outpost upset his plans. **BY EDWARD L. BIMBERG**

When Brig. Gen. Joseph-Pierre Koenig, commander of the 1st Free French Brigade, surveyed the area he had just been ordered to defend, he must have been mightily discouraged. It was at the end (and most desolate part) of the so-called Gazala Line, a yet to be completed series of British Eighth Army defensive positions that were strung out through the Libyan desert, from Ain-el-Gazala on the Mediterranean coast to Bir Hacheim some 40 miles inland.

At first glance the Bir Hacheim position appeared almost indefensible. The terrain was sandy desert, open and flat, without natural cover or concealment. Atmospheric conditions were as bad as any in the Sahara—burning sun by day, frigid cold at night, plus sandstorms, mirages, and flies. It was arid with no water.

In Arabic "bir" means "well," but the wells at Bir Hacheim had been dry for a long time. All that remained were some broken-down concrete cisterns and the ruins of a tiny Italian fort that had been the headquarters of a company of *meharisti*, the Italian-led

native camel corps. After a long abandonment, it became the temporary home of the Eighth Army's 150th Indian Brigade, which Koenig's French had come to relieve.

Beyond the crumpled ruins was sheer desolation, seemingly endless sand, rock, and gravel with an occasional stretch of camel thorn scrub to break the monotony.

It may have seemed to the French that they were getting the dirty end of the stick when they were assigned to this outlying and apparently unimportant section of the line. Perhaps they were, for the British officers of the Middle East Command in Cairo were inclined to look down on French soldiery in general; the French surrender of 1940 still loomed large in their minds. Until now most of the duties of the small Free French

Wearing their familiar kepis, Legionnaires of the 1st Free French Brigade advance across a barren desert at Bir Hacheim, Libya, to stem the tide of German General Erwin Rommel's Panzerarmee Afrika in May 1942. By stalling the Axis drive on Tobruk, the Bir Hacheim defenders bought time for the British to fortify Tobruk and prevent an attack on Alexandria and Cairo.

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force serving in North Africa had, with a few exceptions, been minor and subordinate to the British presence. The British brass seemed to think that the main effort against the Gazala Line would be farther north than Bir Hacheim, and that is where they had planned their stronger defenses.

The British themselves never seemed able to keep their act together after their brilliant victories against the Italians almost two years before. Ever since German General Erwin Rommel and his *Deutches Afrika Korps* (DAK) had been sent to North Africa in early 1941 to bolster the sagging Italians, the lines of battle had been swaying back and forth across the area known as the Western Desert. This battleground was comprised of the western part of Egypt and most of neighboring Cyrenaica, the eastern province of Italian Libya.

Recently the British had had the upper hand when their Operation Crusader had driven Rommel's German and Italian divisions all the way back to El Agheila in western Cyrenaica, but the reinforced Axis troops, now dubbed *Panzer Armee Afrika*, were making a comeback. By the end of 1941, they were beginning to slowly but surely push the British back toward Egypt once again.

The British were now in a bad way. The Western Desert Force, renamed the Eighth Army, had been stripped of manpower, first to reinforce the Allied contingent in Greece and then to prop up the forces in the Far East when Japan declared war. It was also short of supplies due to recent naval reverses in the Mediterranean. To add to its difficulties, the Army had a new commander, Maj. Gen. Neil Ritchie, a staff officer without much field experience. As a result, Rommel managed to push the Eighth Army back to the defense line that was being prepared from Ain-el-Gazala to Bir Hacheim. There he halted west of the line to reorganize and prepare for an overpowering spring drive.

Actually, the Gazala Line was not an uninterrupted line of World War I-style trenches, but rather a series of strongpoints called "boxes" that wound southward across the desert for some 40 miles, from the coast to

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ABOVE: Concealed by a low ridge, a German artillery crew services its wheeled cannon, providing support for attacking infantry. BELOW: A Free French soldier scans the distant horizon for targets as others prepare an artillery piece for action. The bastion of Bir Hacheim was isolated in the face of superior German firepower.

the French-held Bir Hacheim box and then northeast again for another 20 miles.

Since January 1942, when he had first seen the barren expanse of desert he was expected to make into a fortress, General Koenig had kept busy. He was a typical French colonial soldier—44 years of age and an officer since he was 19, a decorated veteran of World War I and a Foreign Legion fighter in World War II. Tall, fair, blue-eyed, with a thin military mustache, he was a distinguished figure in his British-issue khakis and black, gold-trimmed French kepi—and he was tough as nails.

Koenig had assembled under him in the 1st *Brigade de Française Libre* (BFL) as varied a force of fighting men as could be found anywhere in the multicultured, polyglot Free French army. The core of Koenig's force was two battalions of the 13th Demi-brigade of the French Foreign Legion (DBLE). This band of exiles was now more cos-

mopolitan than ever, the prewar colonial veterans from North Africa having been reinforced by defeated Spanish Republicans and refugee Jews, Poles, and other Europeans driven from their homes by Adolf Hitler.

The 13th DBLE was raised at the very beginning of the war. It fought in Norway and was one of the few French units to rally to de Gaulle en masse when the call came. Now its commanding officer was Lt. Col. Dmitri Amilakvari, a Georgian prince who had made service in the Foreign Legion his life's work. But unlike most mercenaries who give little thought to the nationality of their employer, Amilakvari actually loved France and told his men that dying for their adopted country was a great privilege. How seriously they took this advice is not known, but apparently they were willing to give their lives for Amilakvari and the Legion, if not for France. The history of the 13th DBLE will attest to that, for even before Bir Hacheim the Legionnaires had fought not only in Norway, but in Eritrea and Syria as well, and several of them had died.

Second to the Legion in World War II battle experience were the two companies of the 1st *Bataillon d'Infanterie de la Marine* (BIM), French Marines who considered themselves just as tough as the Legionnaires. It might seem strange that men who were recruited largely from among Breton fishermen and others of a very salty background would find themselves at Bir Hacheim in the waterless Sahara, but the Marines had a long tradition of overseas service. In fact, those infantry regiments of the French Army designated "colonial" were originally recruited from the Marines.

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Another oddity of this particular unit was that their leader, Commandant Savey, was actually a Catholic priest who had commanded them while they were attached to the British in much of the previous desert fighting. Perhaps his religious vocation was not so odd after all, since on the other side of the line Major "Papa Willi" Bach, the German artillery officer whose defense of Halfaya Pass had won him fame, was also a clergyman—an Episcopalian priest.

Even stranger was the 2nd *Demi-brigade Senegalaise*, commanded by Lt. Col. de Roux, whose two battalions were drawn together from opposite ends of the earth. The 2nd *Bataillon de Marche de l'Oubangui* (BM2) was made up of proud black soldiers recruited from the Oubangui-Shari province of French Equatorial Africa. They were largely illiterate, and many of them had never worn shoes before their induction into the French Army, but they learned fast and made excellent soldiers.

The other battalion of the so-called "Senegalese" Demi-brigade had its origins far from the Dark Continent. The 1st *Bataillon Pacifique* (BP1) came from that fabled tourist paradise, the scattered islands of the French South Pacific. Bir Hacheim must have been a terrible shock to them, but they too, learned to adapt in a hurry.

LEFT: French General Pierre Koenig commanded a hodgepodge but tenacious group of defenders at the embattled fortress of Bir Hacheim. BELOW: Its commander peering from the turret, a German PzkPfw IV leaves an abandoned British Bren gun carrier in a cloud of desert dust in January 1944.

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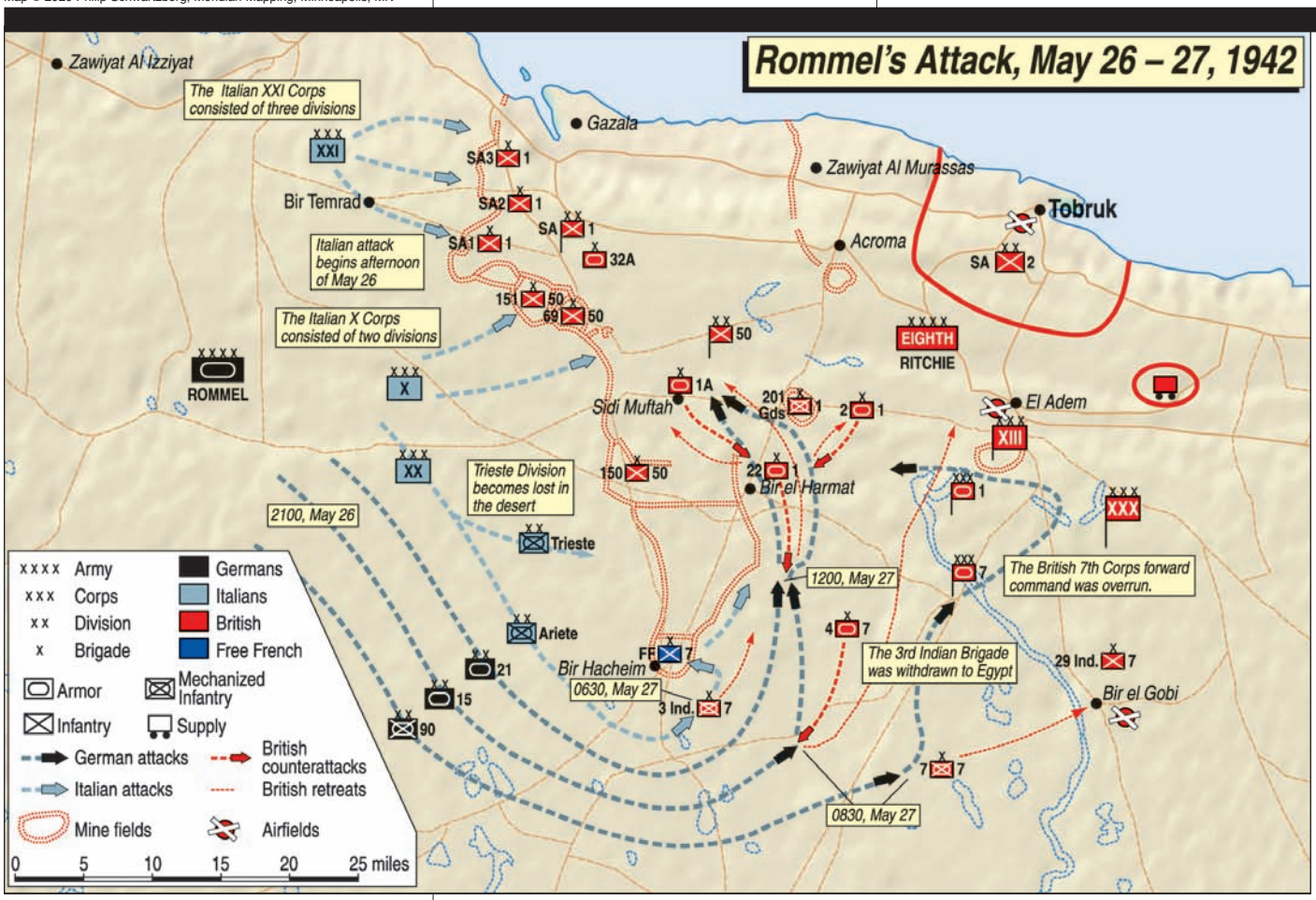

The main artillery support was supplied by a regiment of 75mm field guns under the command of Lt. Col. Laurent-Champrosay, supplemented by a company of antitank guns. Although far outweighed in number and caliber by the German guns, the accuracy of the French artillery would come as a nasty surprise to the attackers.

The antiaircraft defenses at Bir Hacheim were assigned to the 12 Bofors 40mm cannon and the machine guns of another complement of Marines, the 1st *Bataillon de Fusiliers Marins* (BFM), under command of *Capitaine de Corvette* Amyot d'Anville. An additional six Bofors were manned by British gunners. Engineering know-how was furnished by the 1st *Compagnie de Sapeurs-Mineurs*, while administrative chores were taken over by Koenig's staff. Later, some of the Marines were transferred to a commando outfit and were replaced at Bir Hacheim by a company of North Africans, adding to the cosmopolitan nature of the garrison.

As they faced each other across the desert, both sides were gearing up for an assault. By this time Rommel had built himself such a reputation that the Allies feared he would strike first, and Koenig knew he had little time to get his defenses in order. However, he had the skill of his engineers to plan the field fortifications—and the Legion to build them. In prewar North Africa, the French Foreign Legion was known for its great civilian construction projects throughout that part of the French Empire. Roads, bridges, tunnels, forts, all had been built by Legionnaires, most of the time using only pick and shovel and their own sweat.

The Legionnaires hated those jobs. They thought they were beneath the dignity of warriors, but they were ordered to do them, and they learned how to do them well. That on-the-job education came in handy as they dug trench systems, built pillboxes, and fortified command posts, strung miles of wire, and laid thousands of mines. This time they did not mind the labor, for they knew that the enemy was at the gates.

The others were also working. The field artillerymen were registering their pieces, the ack-ack gunners sandbagging revetments for their Bofors, the infantry positioning their machine-gun nests. All were constantly digging under the most miserable of desert conditions.

North Africa is said to be a cold land with a hot sun, and during the daylight hours the temperature was usually over 100 degrees. When night fell and the curtain dropped suddenly in the Sahara, the air did not just cool off, it became frigid, and men were shivering from the cold a very short time after suffering the torment of a blazing sun. To make matters worse, the *ghibli*, the constant, annoying desert wind, could turn without warning into a roaring, stinging sandstorm that might last for hours or even days. When the sky clouded over and day turned into night, the wind reached almost hurricane force, work ceased, and men sought shelter in gun pits or trenches.

At last, in spite of all the difficulties, General Koenig felt that the Bir Hacheim forti-

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fications were complete and its garrison, some 3,700 strong, ready for anything. In addition to its defensive strength, the 1st Free French Brigade had the offensive capabilities of its "Jock columns," heavily armed mobile units that patrolled between the widely spread out boxes of the Gazala Line. British Jock columns (named after Brig. Gen. "Jocki" Campbell, who developed the technique) used their newly acquired American 18-ton Grant tank with its powerful 75mm gun as the principal patrol weapon.

The French Jock columns, lacking tanks, were quite different. They usually relied on truck-borne infantry with a few light AA guns, plus a towed 75mm or antitank gun to protect against the panzers. They might also use the lightly armored tracked vehicles called Bren gun carriers supplied to them by the Eighth Army. The British themselves did not care too much for the sometimes mechanically unreliable and undergunned carriers, but to the equipment-starved French they were luxury itself, and they were delighted to have them.

Within the Bir Hacheim perimeter, which was roughly triangular in shape and more than 16 kilometers around, the troops were positioned so that the Senegalese manned the northwest corner, with the Pacific Battalion in the southwest. One of the Legion battalions (BLE 2) was located at the point of the triangle, while the other (BLE 3) was in the center along with Brigade Headquarters and the artillery. BLE 1 was not in the game, since there had not been enough materiel available to the Free French to properly equip it for the Bir Hacheim defense. The ancillary troops, including the North Africans, were spread throughout the encampment. None of the garrison was entirely static, however, but were kept busy operating the Jock columns that continued to patrol the desert tracks.

By the end of May, General Ritchie was finally in a position to launch his Eighth Army offensive from behind the Gazala Line. But Rommel, reorganized and resupplied, beat him to the punch. On May 26, while Ritchie was still thinking about it, *Panzer Armee Afrika* attacked.

The Axis troops first struck the Gazala Line in the north, but this was just a feint. The next day Rommel led the bulk of his mobile forces south in a wide sweep around the Bir Hacheim position to attack the strongly held British "Knightsbridge" box, halfway back to the coast. On the way his powerful forces smashed several isolated British brigades before he hit the main British force.

Apparently the Desert Fox had purposely avoided the Bir Hacheim box by swinging wide around it, figuring that these weak Frenchmen stuck out at the end of the Gazala Line could easily be taken care of later, after he had defeated the British. He merely sent a few light armored units to probe the French position.

ABOVE: Except for his weapon, this French Colonial African soldier looks ready for battle. BELOW: French defenders at Bir Hacheim level their gun to fire point-blank against encroaching German targets. OPPOSITE: After feinting at the northern part of the Gazala Line, German and Italian forces attacked from the west and south, hitting Free French positions at Bir Hacheim and British units at Tobruk.

The probe discovered that Bir Hacheim was not the pushover that Rommel thought it would be. It was, in fact, a hornets' nest.

When these ill tidings were reported to *Panzer Armee* headquarters, Rommel immediately ordered two Italian divisions, the Trieste Mechanized and the Ariete Armored, to attack, fully expecting the Frenchmen to surrender within 24 hours. He was in for a nasty surprise.

According to some reports, the Trieste was a bit hesitant in its approach, but the tanks of the Ariete charged in with a will. Soon the smell of cordite filled the air, and clouds of smoke blended with the desert dust of Bir Hacheim as the crash of artillery, the thunk of mortars, and the rattle of machine guns announced the opening of a real battle.

First blood in the siege of Bir Hacheim went to the French. When the smoke cleared, 32 Italian tanks were smoldering ruins, the victims of Laurent-Champrosay's artillery and antitank guns and more than a few of the 50,000 perimeter mines. The Italians withdrew, leaving behind their wounded, including the colonel of the Ariete's 132nd Armored Regiment who was pulled from his wrecked tank by his captors. In addition, Koenig ordered his Jock columns out to prey on the nearest Axis supply lines.

Rommel was furious. He had counted on speed and surprise to carry him through the Gazala Line, and now these impertinent Frenchmen were standing in his way. Nor on this same day were things going well with the Axis forces north of Bir Hacheim, where they had run into the tough British defenses of the Knightsbridge box with their new Grant tanks. To make matters worse, the Allied mines were taking a toll of the Axis supply vehicles, and the tank and artillery ammunition was not getting through.

This should have been a time for the British to counterattack, but Ritchie hesitated. It was a big mistake. While the British general conferred with his staff, Rommel reorganized his forces and demonstrated his tactical genius by battering a hole through the British lines north of Bir Hacheim. In doing so he not only opened a path for his supplies, but smashed a British infantry brigade, destroyed more than 100 tanks, and took some 3,000 prisoners. He now had the upper hand again.

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ABOVE: Trenches and abandoned equipment were all that greeted the Germans after the French evacuated Bir Hacheim following 17 days of a heroic defensive stand that inflicted heavy casualties on the Axis forces. RIGHT: Where possible at Bir Hacheim, Free French soldiers made use of a fighting vehicle designed by commanding general Pierre Koenig. Mounting a light cannon and machine guns, the vehicle was built on a Dodge chassis. Although many were destroyed during fighting in Syria, a few were available for the desert battle.

The German general, always ambitious, was looking beyond the Gazala Line toward the fortress city of Tobruk, which he had tried to conquer three times before but was still in British hands. Intelligence reports indicated that the garrison at Tobruk had recently been substantially weakened—and beyond Tobruk lay Alexandria, Cairo, and the Suez Canal!

Such was Rommel's self-confidence that he thought he could push right on to Suez once he had neutralized Tobruk. He knew that the British were building a last-ditch defensive line at El Alamein, just 50 miles from Alexandria, and if he ever expected to reach Suez he had to attack those defenses before they became too strong. Time was of the essence. To clear the way east he had to take Tobruk in a hurry. But first he had to pierce the Gazala Line.

Rommel now turned his attention to Bir Hacheim. Due to his successes in the north, he now had it surrounded. He first sent a delegation of Italian officers under a white flag to Koenig's headquarters to demand the surrender of the Bir Hacheim box. With exaggerated politeness the Italians reminded the French general of the hopelessness of his position, encircled as he was by superior forces. Equally punctilious, Koenig replied

that surrender was out of the question. In a flurry of saluting, the Italians departed. The date was June 2.

Soon thereafter shells began to fall onto the fortifications of Bir Hacheim, and for the next few days a heavy bombardment was maintained. It was returned by the accurate counterbattery fire of Laurent-Champrosay's 75s, but French ammunition was limited, and resupply was eventually cut off by the ever-tightening ring of Axis troops.

Rommel also called in the Luftwaffe, and the daytime skies over the French stronghold were filled with Junkers Ju-87 Stuka dive-bombers, Heinkel He-111 bombers, and Messerschmitt Me-109 fighters. D'Inville's Bofors fired away, but there was a limit to what the few guns could do against such massive attacks. Altogether, the Luftwaffe flew 1,300 sorties against the French positions.

Later there would be some recriminations against the Allied high command for not supplying more protection against the aerial assault, but the RAF did what it could, arriving daily over the battlefield to challenge the Germans. However, the Hawker Hurricanes and Curtiss P-40s were no match for the concentrated numbers of German planes, and they brought little relief from the constant bombardment. In spite of this, the French were appreciative of their help, and Koenig was said to have sent a message to the British, "*Merci pour la RAF*." To which the RAF replied, "*Merci pour le sport!*"

The constant aerial attacks and artillery bombardment were a cover for continuing attempts by the Germans to infiltrate the French positions. They used both tanks and infantry, but the French troops fought them off. The engineers' planning and the Legion's expertise in the initial construction of the field fortifications kept the defenders' casualties low and their morale high. But it did not help the supply situation, which was rapidly becoming critical. Then, from June 2-5, there was a bit of relief from the Axis pressure when Ritchie finally launched a counterattack in that area north of Bir Hacheim that came to be known as "the cauldron." The fighting there was bitter, and Rommel had to pull troops from the Bir Hacheim siege to meet the challenge. As usual, the German general outmaneuvered the Britisher and scored a telling victory, destroying more enemy tanks and taking more POWs.

Now Rommel again put the squeeze on Bir Hacheim, this time with heavy attacks by the Trieste Division and the German 90th Light Division. Of interest is that the 90th Light had in its ranks two battalions of German soldiers who, in the not too distant past, had either resigned or deserted from the Foreign Legion and were now fighting against their former comrades-in-arms. Once again the French fought off these attacks, but the crushing air and artillery bombardments continued. Food and water were now running out.

The RAF made attempts to supply the beleaguered garrison by parachute, but the targets were too small and the unpredictable desert winds blew most of the drops into the Axis lines. There was no more ammunition for the 75s.

At this point General Koenig knew he must try to lead his troops out of this death trap, break through the German lines, and join the British who were rallying at El Alamein. When his plans were communicated to Allied headquarters in Cairo, he was asked to hold on just a little longer. The British needed time to put the finishing touches on their El Alamein defenses and reorganize the troops who would man them. Like the good soldier he was, Koenig replied that he would, and went back to fighting his war.

The next few days at Bir Hacheim were hell itself. Rommel, frustrated, ordered even heavier assaults and bombardments. The French troops, exhausted and virtually without food or water and with little ammunition left, fought on. Rommel sent another white flag party to demand surrender or face annihilation, but Koenig refused even to see them. There was no military courtesy this time.

More than seven decades after the battle, French defensive positions, as well as mines, grenades, and other battle debris remain in the Libyan desert.

Finally, on June 10, as small groups of Axis troops began to infiltrate the French lines, Koenig decided it was time to break out. He waited for the cover of darkness and then gave the order.

At first the movement was orderly, as the Legion, the Marines, the Senegalese, and the rest of the polyglot garrison filed

Roger-Viollet

In a painting commissioned by a French magazine, artist Roaul Auger captures the intensity of the battle at Bir Hacheim. The Free French defenders endured tremendous hardships before they were overwhelmed by superior German forces.

silently through gaps in the minefields in disciplined squads and platoons, undiscovered by the enemy. But there were just too many troops in motion for it to remain that way.

When the Germans found out what was going on, the shooting started and all hell broke loose. As tracers streaked through the night and undisclosed mines exploded under vehicles, the soldierly files of the 1st Free French Brigade disintegrated into small groups and individuals. Soon they were no longer a cohesive military force, but a band of desperate escapees.

It was every man for himself.

The French soldiers were still armed and dangerous, and as they stumbled through the desert night, their pursuers were still wary of attacking them. Small firefights broke out everywhere as Koenig's men fought their way northeast toward the British lines and safety.

General Koenig and Colonel Amilakvari escaped in the general's car, driven by Susan Travers, an English volunteer assigned to the Free French ambulance section. (Travers is the only woman who could ever be considered a member of the French Foreign Legion, in spite of what has been written in several lurid works of fiction.) They wandered around in the desert most of the night, more than once just missing capture, until they finally made it to safety.

It seemed a miracle, but most of the rest of the garrison of Bir Hacheim also escaped and lived to fight another day. Rommel finally crashed through the Gazala Line and invested Tobruk. His intelligence had been correct; the city's defenses had been considerably weakened so that more vital areas might be reinforced. After a one-sided fight, the Tobruk garrison surrendered. The Germans occupied the fortress city, and Rommel's eye turned hungrily toward Alexandria.

He never got there. He had worn himself out on the Gazala Line, and his time table had been seriously upset by the stubborn heroes of Bir Hacheim. The Desert Fox met his ultimate defeat months later at the hands of a cocky new commander of the Eighth Army, Field Marshal Bernard Law Montgomery, known to his troops as "Monty." But Rommel never forgot Bir Hacheim. He later wrote about the siege: "Seldom in Africa was I given such a hard fought struggle."

Nor will the French nation ever forget those desert soldiers, for they will live on in the history books. Although to some it may seem a strange sort of memorial, there is today a Metro station in Paris named "Bir Hacheim." □

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HOUSE TO HOUSE in the German Heartland

Sensing victory at last, American GIs battled exhausted but determined German defenders in the strategic town of Heilbronn in the final days of World War II.

BY ALLYN VANNOY

Following its swift advance to the Rhine, the American 100th (Century) Infantry Division resumed its pursuit of retreating German forces. On the morning of March 31, 1945, elements of the division crossed the Rhine between Ludwigshafen and Mannheim and headed straight into the heart of Germany. The war in Europe was in its last throes, but there was still plenty of action to come.

After passing through Mannheim, the division fanned out to the south. The 399th Infantry Regiment, on the right flank, headed toward Hockenheim to establish contact with the II French Corps. On the left was the 397th Infantry, with the 398th Infantry in reserve. The 10th Armored was out in front of the division, with the French coming up on the right. The units moved with all possible speed to prevent German forces from reorganizing. Roadblocks and blown bridges formed the only appreciable German resistance.

The advance continued on April 2, rolling toward Heilbronn, a city with a pre-war population of 100,000. Located at the head of the Neckar valley, Heilbronn was well situated, with roads leading south to Stuttgart and east toward Ulm, the much-vaunted German "National Redoubt." On April 3, the Germans relinquished the town of Neckargartach, on the west bank of the Neckar River just north of Heilbronn, to the 10th Armored after a stiff rearguard action. The Germans withdrew across the river into the city's factory district, blowing the bridge over the river after them. Since the French advance was lagging behind, the 399th was detailed

Located on the Neckar River, between Heidelberg and Stuttgart, Heilbronn was a strategic rail and communications hub. As a consequence, German defense of the city in the closing days of the war was fanatical. Here, two American soldiers provide cover for fellow infantrymen of the 397th Infantry Regiment, 100th Infantry Division, who are searching for snipers. The "Century Division" was charged with taking the city.

All Photos: National Archives

ABOVE: A four-man patrol from the 398th Infantry Regiment, 100th Infantry Division, in a forest near Bitche, in northeastern France, prepares to move out to penetrate the long-dormant Maginot Line, which had been occupied by the Germans. OPPOSITE: Ten men of the 399th Infantry Regiment, 100th Infantry Division, ride atop a Sherman tank on their way to cross a bridge over the Rhine River, March 31, 1945.

to guard against a possible counterattack on the exposed right flank and rear.

The city of Heilbronn, on the east bank of the Neckar River, now lay open to the American 100th division. As a key rail and communications center, the Germans could be expected to defend Heilbronn to the end. The city was an ideal spot for a last-ditch defense. The deep, swift-flowing Neckar River was a formidable barrier. The three road bridges and one railroad bridge leading into the city had been blown. Forming a semi-circle behind the city was a group of easily defended hills with thick woods that afforded excellent concealment for German artillery and an unbroken line of observation to the river. Despite several previous bombings, the city was relatively intact. The thick stone walls of the numerous factory buildings functioned as miniature fortresses. Beneath the buildings was a labyrinth of tunnels. The city was a focal point for many battered *Wehrmacht* units that were regrouping, as well as numerous local *Volksturm* units.

A quick study of the ground convinced the 100th Division commander, General Withers A. Burress, that Heilbronn was pivotal if the Germans hoped to stop the American advance toward their strongholds in the mountains of southern Germany. With the division's right flank still seriously exposed due to the lagging French, Burress decided against encircling Heilbronn from the north and south. Instead, he chose to throw the main strength of the 100th across the Neckar near Bad Wimpen, north of the city, swing south across the Kocher, and come at Heilbronn from the rear with the 397th and 398th Regimental Combat Teams. The 399th was to move directly toward Heilbronn and hold the enemy in place while protecting the division against attacks from the south.

The plan started coming apart almost as soon as it was created. On the afternoon of April 3, while the division was still about 24 kilometers from the Neckar River, Burress was forced to detach one infantry battalion and rush it forward to join the 10th Armored Regiment, already near Heilbronn, to assist in establishing a bridgehead. Accordingly, the 3rd Battalion, 398th Infantry, advanced into Neckargartach and took up positions along the river 300 yards north of a blown bridge. To avoid alerting the Germans, the crossing was to be made without artillery preparation. At 3 AM on April 4, Company K crawled into assault boats and made the crossing without firing a shot.

The infantry swiftly fanned out and formed a bridgehead. Before them loomed the silhouette of an enormous power plant. Members of the battalion's Raider platoon, leading the advance, began drawing sniper fire. Taking cover along the river bank, they returned fire and waited for Company K. The entire force then advanced into the deserted power plant. Despite the fact that the Germans had been alerted, Company L successfully made the crossing, followed by Company I. Within an hour, the entire battalion had navigated the river and assembled in and around the plant.

At dawn, Companies K and L, each supported by a platoon of heavy machine guns from Company M, moved toward their objectives. Company L was to branch out to the north and occupy a group of lumberyards situated along a rail line, while Company K was to advance south about 300 yards to the edge of the factory district and then turn east along the Neckargartach Bridge road and advance into the hills southeast of the town. The 1st Platoon was assigned the mission of taking Tower Hill, a height whose steep, barren slope, devoid of cover, was topped by the skeleton of an old tower. The 3rd Platoon was to take Cloverleaf Hill, directly south of Tower Hill, while the 2nd Platoon was to clean out a glassworks just south of the crossing site. Company I, meanwhile, was to dig in on a line parallel to the river about 300 yards in front of the power plant.

By 9 AM, the advance was well under way. Company L moved forward some 500 yards to the northeast, skirted a large, water-filled ditch about halfway to the lumberyards, and reached the railroad and the highway that ran alongside it at the junction with the Neckargartach road. On Company L's right, the 1st Platoon, Company K, began to climb Tower Hill. At the same time, the 2nd Platoon entered the factory district to the south, and the 3rd Platoon advanced to the south along the road paralleling the river on the far side of the factory district.

While all the troops of the battalion were in motion, the Germans suddenly launched a counterattack along the entire battalion front with a force of between 500 and 1,000

men. The Germans, having infiltrated the American lines through underground passageways, appeared in a building on the northern edge of the factory district behind the 2nd Platoon. Another force appeared east of the highway and cut off the platoon struggling up Tower Hill. A third group attacked Company L and the 3rd Platoon along the highway. From the lumberyards to the north, a fourth German force caught the men in the center of the 3rd Battalion front in a withering crossfire with the force in the factory buildings to the south.

Lieutenant Almon Brunkow, commanding a section of heavy machine guns attached to the 3rd Platoon, was hit when he walked out onto the road to reconnoiter a new position for his guns. As Brunkow lay helpless in the open, Private Leland L. Zeiter and other members of his machine-gun squad made an effort to reach the fallen officer, but enemy fire was too intense. The platoon was forced withdraw north to the railroad bridge at the junction of the Neckargartach road. There, together with the elements from Company L, the Americans made a gallant attempt to hold out against attacks from three sides. Outnumbered and facing the possibility of being surrounded, the GIs were forced to withdraw in small groups to Company I's position in front of the power plant. The 1st Platoon on Tower Hill and the 2nd Platoon in the factory district were now isolated.

American mortars and artillery, which had been unable to provide fire support due to the close proximity of friendly forces to the enemy, now began shelling the Germans. With the help of this support, the battalion regrouped and succeeded in regaining some of the lost ground, advancing across the open field to its front. Company L was on the left rear of Company I, and Company K, now numbering only 20 men, protected the right flank. Intense fire continued to blanket the field that the battalion was advancing across, but with effective artillery and mortar support, the battalion managed to push forward.

As a result of the attack, 3rd Battalion found itself on a line along the far edge of the water-filled ditch that Company L had passed earlier in the morning. There the battalion prepared to make a stand. By now, it was evident that the German forces in Heilbronn were far stronger than anyone had anticipated. From the lumberyards to the north and the factories to the south, German reinforcements were pouring into the area. Their artillery, emplaced on hills to the east, poured intense fire onto the Americans below. To make matters worse, the 10th Armored Regiment had failed to construct a promised pontoon bridge behind the 3rd Battalion, and the accurate German artillery fire made forward movement dangerous, if not suicidal.

Despite the enemy fire, the 1st Platoon advanced to the top of Tower Hill before daybreak, surprising and capturing several Germans. In the fierce fight that followed, the outnumbered platoon was cut off. Despite a shortage of ammunition, Lieutenant Alfred J. Rizzo radioed that he was confident they would be able to hold out and work their way back to the battalion after nightfall. The last word from the platoon was a request for fire on an enemy gun to the east that was giving them trouble. A group of Raiders tried to reach the platoon after dark, but was unable to cross the highway. Meanwhile, the platoon, although outnumbered and surrounded, fought fiercely until its ammunition was expended, throwing hand grenades at the Germans as they closed within a few yards. A German officer said later that it took all 90 men of his

company to subdue the Americans.

To add to the division's problems, word was received that the 10th Armored had been relieved and was being shifted to the north flank of VI Corps, presumably to take advantage of a gap there that would allow them to approach Heilbronn from the rear. This left Burress with a staggering tactical problem—one of his battalions was on the east side of the Neckar, under attack by a superior German force. Any attempt to withdraw the battalion would be disastrous. Burress, therefore, abandoned his original plan of attack and began rushing the 397th Infantry across the Neckar. At 2 PM on April 4, the 2nd Battalion, 397th Infantry, began crossing

Pressured by the U.S. Seventh Army's advance northward through southern France, German forces, such as these two men in Lyon, France, head north to defend their homeland.

the Neckar. By 5:40 PM, the battalion was on the right bank, having negotiated the crossing without casualties.

Immediately after landing on the east bank, Company E pushed toward the factory district. The company advanced through a breach in the concrete wall along the factory district's northern perimeter and headed for the first factory, a red-brick building 200 yards away across an open loading yard. The advance was made in the face of heavy crossfire from the factory and a building to its left. Once at the factory doors, the men in Company E had little difficulty convincing the few Germans who had remained inside the structure to surrender. The factory building to the left, a former glassworks, where a considerable size force of Germans was holed up, was more troublesome. Hugging the perimeter wall, the 3rd Platoon crawled toward the sturdy, red-brick building. Despite heavy machine-gun fire, one squad battled its way into the structure, but the rest of the platoon was unable to move forward. The squad inside the factory slowly fought its way through the building until just before nightfall, when they were joined by Company F.

Having cleared out the first two factory buildings, the GIs turned their attention to two shell-pocked houses on the right and slightly behind the first factory building. Unable to approach the nearest house directly because of intense enemy fire, members of the 3rd Platoon crawled along a catwalk to the rear of the house. From there, with fire support from the 1st Platoon, who had remained behind the concrete wall, they cleared the structure. Darkness halted further operations. Company F remained in the factory next to the wall in the northeast corner of the factory district, and Company E bedded down in the battered house they had just captured. Their situation remained precarious since the Germans were still in the second house across the courtyard.

During the night, the two companies came under attack. Company E was forced to attempt a withdrawal. The 2nd and 3rd platoons managed to get back over the catwalk to the factory, where they joined Company F. The 1st Platoon, together with the mortar men of the Weapons Platoon who had joined the company earlier, was less fortunate. Sergeant Thomas Convery, in command of the 1st Platoon, although wounded, ordered his men to withdraw as best they could to the Company E command post across the loading yard. Most of the men were wounded, but somehow they managed to fight their way across the Neckargartach road to the command post. In all, Company E suffered 54 casualties that night.

Meanwhile, a large German force attacked the 2nd Battalion in the glassworks. Armed with a considerable number of *panzerfausts*, the Germans took a heavy toll. Lieutenant Carl Bradshaw, Company F commander, decided to call on the big guns for help. Waiting until all elements, with the exception of Company F, had withdrawn, Bradshaw called for artillery support. He directed the fire of 8-inch guns so effectively that the German were thrown into confusion and broke off their assault.

To the north, the 3rd Battalion was having its own difficulties. Attacked by a determined force along its 500-yard front, the battalion beat back repeated assaults. Several of the German attacks were led by panzers, but with the support of two tank destroyers and two Shermans tanks, which fired from the west bank of the Neckar, the battalion fought off every effort to drive them back. The 3rd Battalion was also assisted by accurate fire from the 374th and 242nd Field Artillery Battalions. Performing yeoman service was the Raider Platoon—nine men armed with machine guns—which held the battalion front north and east from the water-filled ditch.

After dark, Company A, 31st Engineers, attempted to complete a treadway bridge and assemble rafts capable of carrying tanks and tank destroyers to the east bank. German artillery concentrations on the bridge site were so accurate that the project had to be abandoned, but the engineers grimly continued efforts to assemble pontoons. Silhouetted by fires in Neckargartach and the factory district, 14 engineers were hit by shellfire. Each attempt to launch pontoon floats was met with uncannily accurate artillery fire that punctured the floats and caused additional casualties. Because of the continued German shelling of the river bank, no attempt at building a bridge was made the next day. Fog oil was used as a smoke screen over the river, providing sufficient cover to allow a trickle of supplies to be ferried across in small boats.

Companies F and G attacked again before dawn, moving south. Company F, surging out of the factory building in which it had spent the night, took over the factory between

ABOVE: Heavily shelled and bombed, Heilbronn was softened up for the American ground assault. The Kilianskirche steeple, a key landmark, is visible at upper left. BELOW: An M-18 Hellcat of the 824th Tank Destroyer Battalion fires a round into Heilbronn along the Neckar River.

it and the building that Company E had taken the previous day. While reconnoitering for a suitable way out of the first factory building, Lt. Bradshaw, Company F commander, was killed by a sniper. The company, having found an easier way, left the building, moving to the in-between factory and later to Company E's factory, where they waited for Company G to move up from their positions beyond the concrete perimeter wall to join the drive.

Throughout the morning, Company F engaged in a firefight with the Germans in the loading yard north of the buildings. The shacks and loading platforms provided excellent cover for the Germans in the yard, and it was difficult to fire on them, because their comrades covered them from the two neighboring houses Company E had occupied the night before. Company G, advancing with the 2nd Platoon, did not know that there were Germans in the loading yard. As they ran across the field in front of the concrete wall, a burst of machine gun fire wounded one man. Gaining the protection of the wall, the platoon lay behind the bank on which the wall was built and formed a skirmish line, preparing to attack through the railroad gate at the northern end of the loading yard.

Sergeant Dalton Yates was surprised to see a German stick a gun barrel through a hole in the wall. That was their first indication that there were Germans on the other side. The platoon began to toss grenades over the wall into the enemy's laps. The Germans returned the compliment with potato-masher grenades of their own. For the next few minutes a lively game of catch ensued over the six-foot-high wall. Some of the Company G men moved to fire at the Germans through holes in the wall. One man opened a gap in the wall with a grenade, and another helped enlarge it with his rifle butt. Looking through the hole, they saw some 40 Germans well dug-in in the loading yard, some 15 yards away. By this time, six men of the 2nd Platoon lay dead, and Lieutenant John Slade, seeing that something drastic had to be done, called for mortar fire on the Germans in the yard despite their proximity to his own troops. The 60- and 81-mm mortars opened up, while the men of the 2nd Platoon hugged the earth in a shallow depression just behind the wall.

After several minutes of bombardment, the Germans lost interest in continuing the fight. Leaving their holes, they ran toward Slade's men with their hands in the air, crying, "*Komerad!*" Six of the Germans were shot by their own officers as they attempted to give up, but another 37 poured through the railroad gate into the hands of the 2nd Platoon, weeping, bleeding, and screaming hysterically.

The loading yard cleared, the 2nd Platoon prepared to attack its original objectives, the two houses just to the right of the factory where Company F was waiting. Meanwhile, efforts were being made to bring reinforcements into the bridgehead. With artillery fire all along the river still too intense to build a bridge or construct a large raft or ferry, the only way across the river was by assault boat and small

rafts. In the absence of tanks, Lt. Col. Gordon Singles, commanding the forces in the bridgehead, called for artillery fire. Particularly bothersome to the men crossing the loading yard were two long warehouses that ran north and south along a lagoon on the western edge of the factory area. Accordingly, 155-mm guns of the 373rd Field Artillery blasted the entire length of the warehouses. The two houses which had caused so much trouble for Slade's platoon were reduced to shambles, and the two huge warehouses were set afire.

Although German artillery still commanded the city and both banks of the Neckar, the American artillery countered using excellent observation points on the ridge along the western bank of the river, supplemented by artillery observation aircraft. At 11 AM on April 5, Companies I and L crossed the river without casualties and prepared to join the fight. Following an artillery and mortar preparation on the loading yards that blasted out the diehard Germans entrenched there, the assault was resumed at 2:45. Company F moved through the factories the 2nd Battalion had reduced in the previous day's action and made contact with Company G and the remaining men of Company E. Moving cautiously ahead, Company G pressed on to the two burning warehouses. In the warehouses the men found 100 Germans still dazed from the artillery fire. The enemy surrendered without a fight.

Company G waited in position until Companies I and L caught up with them. Meanwhile, Company F mopped up the few remaining buildings in the glassworks and advanced to a small grove of trees at the southern tip of the works. Company I, on the left, pushed to the Fiat automobile plant on the eastern edge of the glassworks and cleared the building in the face of intense machine gun and panzerfaust fire. Company L guarded the left rear of the advance, extending the line of the 3rd Battalion south from the Neckargartach road to the Fiat plant. Company K, having crossed the river in the meantime, stood in reserve.

Blocking the advance to the south was a large open area that provided the Germans with a clear field of fire. In the center of the area, approximately 200 yards south of the grove of trees held by Company F, was a gray stone-and-concrete house, situated at the junction of the railroad spur connecting the glassworks to the city. A key spot, the junction was a natural defense point. Waiting until dark, four riflemen and a medic from Company F crept out from the grove and made their way along the railroad track toward the stone house. After the first group had advanced some 20 yards, a second squad followed. Suddenly, a German machine gun opened up from a window of the house, killing all five men in the lead squad. Realizing that the building was too strongly defended for a frontal assault across open ground, the second group withdrew to the grove. It was decided to put off the advance until the next day.

While the 2nd and 3rd Battalions were battling the Germans, Company G moved north to cross the Neckar at Neckarelz, where the 63rd Division had thrown a bridge across the river. Late on the afternoon of April 5, the 1st Battalion prepared to cross the Neckar and establish a second bridgehead in the center of the city. Using assault boats, Company C was put across at 6:30 PM. While the crossing operations were being conducted, German artillery hit the west bank, and snipers fired from the buildings north and south of the crossing site. On the east bank, however, German opposition was negligible as the boats swung north to land near a large brewery. Advancing toward the brewery after landing, the 2nd and 3rd platoons drew increasing fire from the structure but had little difficulty in taking the building and the 40 young Germans defending it.

At dusk, Company A made the crossing and joined Company C in the brewery for

ABOVE: After passing through Mannheim, the U.S. 100th Infantry Division fanned out to the south. On April 2, they would reach Heilbronn, situated on the eastern bank of the Neckar River. OPPOSITE: GIs sprint for cover as they come under sniper fire in the rubble of Heilbronn.

the night. At about 4:30 AM, Company B crossed, and by daylight the battalion was ready to fan out and expand its bridgehead. Company A was given the mission of moving north to relieve the original bridgehead. Companies B and C were to fan out and protect the right and rear of Company A and widen the bridgehead sufficiently for the engineers to throw a span across the Neckar. Company A advanced through two dense city blocks to *Kaiserstrasse*, the street leading to the center bridge of the three over the Neckar that had been blown by the Germans. Now in the heart of the city, they began running into the core of the German resistance.

The American strategy was to expand the second bridgehead and form a pincer with the northern bridgehead on the center of Heilbronn. Company C, guarding Company A's right and rear, pushed two blocks east of the Flein road, running south from the center of Heilbronn. Company B, on the right, advanced east to the road and took the sugar refinery south of the brewery, as well as a few apartment houses, meeting only scattered sniper fire. But the right flank of Company B, along the line of the sugar refinery and the Knorr works southeast of the refinery, was dangerously exposed. In the afternoon, a patrol from Company B was forced to re-enter the sugar refinery and clear it of infiltrating Germans while the rest of the company prepared to clean out the Knorr works.

Before they could launch their assault, however, the Germans counterattacked. Swarming through narrow alleys between the houses, German infantry supported by four panzers charged the American positions. Company A, which had been trying to extend its right flank beyond *Kilianskirche*, a large church two blocks east of the river, was forced back to its original positions. Company C, fighting along the Flein road, came under savage attack but managed to hold its positions despite having two panzers assault its right flank. Sergeant Pittman Hall was on the second floor of an apartment house on the corner when the German panzers struck the company's positions. Firing a bazooka, he disabled the main gun of one panzer. Meanwhile, an artillery forward observer zeroed in 8-inch guns on the panzers, causing both to beat a hasty retreat.

Company B was the hardest hit by the German counterattack. The GIs had set up a strongpoint in an apartment house on the west side of the Flein road, across the street from the Knorr works. Two panzers, together with two platoons of infantry, came up the Flein road from the south. Private B.R. Smith fired on the enemy force with a light machine gun, killing or wounding some 20 to 30 of the infantrymen. The German Tiger tanks kept coming, but by the time they had gotten to within 150 yards of the Company B position, 8-inch shells were falling around them. The American line, however, was not strong enough to withstand the fire of the Tigers, and Lieutenant Owen Kirkland, company commander, ordered a withdrawal. Shortly after he gave the order, he was killed by a sniper.

The company withdrew to a line along the northern edge of the sugar refinery. The two Tigers came after them, but as they moved into the open field before the refinery, American artillery began to find the range, forcing them to leave. In the interim, a liaison plane took off to overfly the area and direct artillery fire. The plane, with Lieutenant R.W. Sands serving as pilot and Sergeant Richard Hemmerly serving as observer, chased the Tigers. A direct hit was scored on one with an 8-inch shell, and a near-miss caused a brick wall to collapse on the other, damaging it heavily.

Meanwhile, the 2nd and 3rd Battalions, finding that they could not attack the gray stone house frontally, initiated a four-

pronged drive to link up with the 1st Battalion. Sergeant Harold Kavarsky led the attack with his squad from Company I. They made it to the first row of warehouses without drawing fire, but when the artillery was shifted, the Germans fired on them from the cellar of the westernmost warehouse and from foxholes in front of the house. Kavarsky withdrew his men and called for renewed artillery. For 30 minutes, shells fell on the warehouse in front of the gray house, killing 15 Germans as they tried to escape. Kavarsky then set up two light machine guns on the second floor of the warehouse and sprayed

ABOVE: From his observation post, a GI looks toward the factory area, scene of much hard fighting. OPPOSITE: GIs pour out of a destroyed building in the heart of Heilbronn during the nine-day battle.

the windows of the warehouses in the second row and the enemy foxholes.

Kavarsky and his men ran the 50 yards to the middle building, reached the ramp leading up into the first floor, and fired a machine-gun burst into the windows of the building before entering the structure. As they waited, a round of their own artillery struck the building, hitting Kavarsky in the leg. Four men led by Sergeant John P. Keelen went down into the cellar and captured five prisoners. In the cellar they found a tunnel leading from their warehouse to the westernmost warehouse in the row—the one nearest the gray house. The group proceeded through the tunnel to the next warehouse and found it deserted. From the upstairs window they could see the cement bunker between them and the house. They fired four bazooka rounds into the bunker, killing two Germans and causing those in the foxholes to retire into the house.

Early in the afternoon, Company F came down into the last warehouse to finish the job of taking the gray house. Sergeant Joseph A. Snyder leaned out of the window and fired two rifle grenades into the window of the house at the same moment that some Germans were putting out a white flag. Meanwhile, the GIs worked through the buildings around the house, taking 20 prisoners from the house itself and 53 from the factory across the street. With the second German strongpoint in American hands, Companies I and F found comparatively easy going. They advanced four companies abreast, Company G on the right, next to the river, Companies F and I in the center, and Company L on the left. Company K covered the left and rear of the advance. That night, they cleared the block below the gray house.

On the following day, they worked down 550 yards of the next block. Company L continued down the block into a group of shell-torn apartment houses, but as they entered the buildings they were met by a heavy burst of machine-gun fire from across the railroad tracks 100 yards to the east. As the 1st Platoon moved into the southeasternmost building, they were attacked from the east by a small force, but the platoon held its ground. Although it was growing dark, the Germans continued to fire into the corner apartment house. From the roofless top floor of the building, Private Arthur Nimrod fired his BAR down on the railroad tracks, keeping the Germans from crossing the tracks and attacking the apartment houses in force.

The intensity of the American assault on Heilbronn continued to increase. During the night of April 6-7, Company C of the 399th Regiment crossed the river and was attached to the 1st Battalion, 397th. The members of the 399th spent the night in the sugar refinery, waiting for dawn, when they would attack the Knorr works, which had been recaptured by the Germans. At 8:30 AM, however, the Germans struck first with more than 100 infantry supported by three panzers and a flak wagon. The attack came from the south, moving around the Knorr works toward the southern flank of Company B. One of the panzers rolled up to the crossroads directly between the sugar refinery and the Knorr works and fired a few rounds before being driven off by artillery.

The counterattack threatened to cut off the men of Company C. The Germans had infiltrated along the east side of the sugar refinery in which Company C was battling and around the rear of the building to the river. If the German force was there in strength, Company C would effectively be isolated from the rest of the troops at the bridgehead. Sergeant James Harte, using an eight-man patrol, eliminated the threat. In the meantime, Company C suffered two more counterattacks, one at noon and another shortly afterwards, but beat them back. The two companies then moved out to attack. Company C captured the Knorr works for the second time with little difficulty, and Company B, also facing negligible opposition, reestablished positions on the Flein road that it had been forced to abandon earlier.

The bridgehead was now secure, but the purpose of the crossing—to relieve the northern bridgehead—had not yet been accomplished. Company A found that it could not move north from *Kilianskirche* without armored support. Assault boats continued to operate on the Neckar River throughout the day and night. On the morning of April 6, the boats were moved north 400 yards to a new site at the ruins of a foot bridge where Company A, 397th, had cleared the east bank. However, the Germans infiltrated behind the company's lines and fired on the engineers and on the landing site, harassing operations to such an extent that tanks from Company C, 781st Tank Battalion, and tank destroyers from Company B, 824th Tank Destroyer Battalion, were brought down to the river bank to fire on the houses the Germans were using. This did not stop the enemy artillery, however, which kept finding the engineers and forcing them to move their site.

Under cover of darkness, the indefatigable engineers of Company C, 31st Engineers, began to build a treadway bridge 100 yards south of the demolished span. At daylight, smoke generators were put to use screening the engineers. As part of the plan, three small generators were ferried across the river to the east bank so that if the wind shifted to the west, the crossing would still have cover. The generators, skillfully concealed in rubble or placed deep in cellars, produced smoke in puffs that diffused quickly, leaving no telltale sign of the source. By evening the treadway bridge was nearly completed, and tanks and tank destroyers lined the bank ready to roll across. Then, at 5:30 PM, German artillery thundered ominously, and five floats were knocked from under the bridge.

That night, as fewer German shells fell along the river banks, the engineers were able to rebuild the bridge, completing it by daybreak. Before 8 AM on April 8, 24 tanks from Company C, 781st Tank Battalion, and nine tank destroyers from Company B, 824th Tank Destroyer Battalion, crossed over to the east bank and joined the infantry. Traffic was still pouring across the bridge when the wind fishtailed, leaving the bridge perfectly visible. At 11:30 AM, German shells knocked out two floats, reducing the carrying capacity of the bridge to 10 tons. Two hours later, the bridge was underwater again. The division went back to supplying the troops in the bridgehead via assault boats.

On the morning of the eighth, Companies G, F and L, 397th, had to hold up their advance while Company I cleared a group of Germans from an orchard in their sector. From a small brick house in the southeast corner of the orchard the Germans could fire on the factory in which Company F was preparing to conduct attacks on the southern part of the factory district. Along the east side of the orchard was a long factory, with all but half of its first floor blown away. In the center of the orchard, a German machine gun was emplaced in a dugout where the trees were sparse enough to afford good lanes of fire.

Sergeant Richard C. Olson led his squad of the 2nd Platoon, Company I, across the road into the factory. From there they planned to work along the walls on the inside of the battered building to a point opposite a red-brick house. They had to keep low behind the walls of the factory because the machine guns in the house would fire on them every time they raised their heads. The first scout, Private James Van Danne, climbed over a sheltering wall and made it into the next room. Private Henry P. Perkins didn't make it. As he followed Van Danne over the wall, a sniper from the brick house killed him. At the same time, machine guns in the orchard opened up on the Company I men, forcing them to rush for cover.

Olsen got two bazookas into firing position. Sergeant Edward Eylander, leader of the 2nd Platoon, placed two light machine guns in windows in the factory across the road and opened fire. Several bazooka rounds and an anti-tank grenade quieted the fire from the house, and a smoke round from one of the bazookas forced the machine gunner from the center of the orchard. After a heavy preparation burst of machine-gun fire from positions across the road, Sergeant Thomas E. Cooper led four men across the orchard and up to the front door of the house. Private Arthur Hare smashed the front door with the butt of his rifle, and seven Germans rushed out and surrendered.

After Company I had cleared the orchard, Company L advanced into the block of factory buildings to the left of the orchard. The company moved through the block with little difficulty until reaching an office building at the southern end of the block next to the junction of two rail lines. From the railroad station at the junction, the Germans zeroed in their machine guns, pinning down the company. American artillery registered 12 direct hits on the

building, silencing the enemy machine guns and enabling Company L to continue into the next block of factories.

By noon on April 9, the American forces in the north bridgehead were ready to cross the railroad tracks, move into the heart of Heilbronn, and hook up with the troops pushing up from the south. Only 1,000 yards away, the tall spire of *Kilianskirche* could be seen rising out of the smoke. That night, the bridging engineers constructed a motor-powered pontoon assault ferry capable of transporting tanks. Assembling five floats, they loaded them onto trucks, transported them to the river bank, and by 6:30 AM had the ferry in the water. For once, the German artillery did not bother them, and by 11:30, 13 tanks and tank destroyers, in addition to the 81-mm mortar platoon of Company D, 399th Regiment, had been carried across the river.

While the first pontoon bridge had been coming under artillery shelling, the 1st Battalion, 399th, was moving across the river to take positions in the southern bridgehead facing south and east. Company C was already across and helping the 1st Battalion, 397th, protect and expand the bridgehead. Company B crossed the river on the pontoon bridge and took positions on the right of the 397th. The remainder of the company negotiated the crossing in assault boats, digging in on the right flank of Company B.

At the southern bridgehead, Company A, 397th, had been stopped on the afternoon of April 6 along the east-west road running along the north side of *Kilianskirche*. There the Germans put up the most furious defense during the entire battle for the city. Company A had been advancing with its 2nd Platoon on the left next to the river, and 3rd Platoon on the right. Sergeant Bennie Ray was able to get two of his squads across the road that evening, but he withdrew them upon hearing that Lieutenant John H. Strom, leader of the 3rd Platoon, had also gotten men across the road.

Early in the evening, the 1st Platoon, led by Lieutenant Walter Vaughan, was sent to clear the city block directly behind *Kilianskirche*, which had been bypassed by the 3rd Platoon. Sergeant Edward Borboa's 3rd Squad went through the center of this block. As they rounded a corner, they came upon a group of seven men talking together near a pile of rubble. Thinking they were men from Company C, Borboa called to them. As the men looked around, Borboa saw that they were Germans. The squad's BAR man, Private Paul Guzlides, and Private Laurence Mills opened fire, killing them all. The platoon went on through the western half of the block, but as darkness fell, they met heavier sniper and machine gun fire, and stopped their advance for the night.

ABOVE: An American Sherman tank sits disabled next to a destroyed building. The battle for Heilbronn represented some of the most difficult urban combat of the entire war. OPPOSITE: Concerned Heilbronners look on as American troops occupy their city after resistance ended on April 12, 1945.

The following morning, Vaughan, from his position near *Kilianskirche*, sent Sergeant Carl Cornelius with five men across the street into a large building, diagonally northeast from *Kilianskirche*, to establish an outpost and prepare for the attack that was planned for the afternoon. With the 19 men he had left, Vaughan waited in the building directly across the street from *Kilianskirche*. About 2:30 PM he saw a platoon of Germans coming down the road from the north and another platoon coming along the road from the east. Their movements threatened to cut off Cornelius and his five men in the outpost across the street. Both his platoon and Strom's platoon in *Kilianskirche* opened up on the two German columns.

The German columns withdrew but were soon back again, this time more cautiously, hugging the building walls and using the rubble piles and doorways for protection. They squeezed off Cornelius and his five men in their corner building and drove a wedge between *Kilianskirche* and Vaughan's platoon. At the same time, another German counterattack was launched on the southern end of the triangular block, and the right rear of Vaughan's platoon was forced to withdraw, breaking contact with Company C on the right. Now completely cut off, the platoon was forced to withdraw altogether from the triangular block and form a line along the road leading southwest from *Kilianskirche*. There they held, driving out the Germans south of *Kilianskirche*.

Another German counterattack came from the north as well as from the east. *Kilianskirche* was pounded all afternoon by a heavy German self-propelled gun that would roll up near the church, fire, withdraw, and then return from a different direction. Strom's platoon, in the church, fired constantly at the attackers and dropped grenades out the window to halt the infiltrating Germans. The 2nd Platoon, next to

the river, had already begun to attack northward when the counterattack hit. Five men led by Sergeant Max Dow crossed the road and set up an outpost, joining in firing on the Germans advancing from the open square north of the road, diagonally across the road from *Kilianskirche*.

Vaughan, with three men, tried to reach Cornelius and his squad holding out across the street from the church. They got as far as the building on the apex of the triangular block, where they ran into a German patrol. After a short grenade fight, the GIs were forced to withdraw. Soon, however, the short-lived pontoon bridge was completed and the tanks and TDs crossed into the bridgehead. One tank, commanded by Corporal Vincent J. Neratka, immediately raced to the aid of Company A. As the Sherman came up the road leading toward *Kilianskirche* from the southwest, it was hit by a *panzerfaust*. The crew bailed out and ran for cover as a German machine gun began to fire down the road from the north. Another Sherman and a TD were dispatched to help Company A. Approaching up a different road, the two vehicles reached *Kilianskirche* safely. After several exchanges, the Germans ceased firing from behind the square, but it took three hours of steady shelling before the machine guns, firing into the intersection from the north and east, were silenced.

The way was clear for Strom's and Ray's platoons, which had been stymied along the river road. In short dashes, one man at a time, Strom's platoon crossed the road and took up positions in the open square amid the rubble of the wrecked buildings. By dark, a line had been established on the far side. Ray's platoon had it easier. The roads in their sector were clear, and they were able to advance faster, with the support of two tanks and a TD, through the sniper-infested rubble along the river. Vaughan's platoon, to the right and rear, was still unable to secure Company A's right flank. Armor was brought up to stabilize the situation. On the afternoon of April 8, two Shermans were thrown into the struggle for the triangular block of houses. By the end of the afternoon, the Germans had withdrawn all along the line, and the three platoons of Company A, 397th, were able to establish contact with each other.

Throughout the night, artillery and *nebelwerfer* rocket fire harassed the Americans. The Germans also infiltrated through tunnels to take up sniping positions to fire on the GIs from the rear. Early the following morning, Hall was back in line with his platoon. Together with the tanks, the platoon pushed eastward along the road to the south of the triangular block, concentrating fire to the north and down the road to the east, where they had been receiving heavy *panzerfaust* and machine-gun fire. The tank fire, together with that of Hall's and Vaughan's platoons, drove the Germans out of the triangular block. In the afternoon, a squad from Vaughan's platoon entered the house where Cornelius' patrol had been surrounded. Six gas masks and a bazooka were all that was found. The most serious German resistance in Heilbronn was over.

Fighting would continue for another four days against light resistance as the GIs cleared the rest of the city. The operation effectively ended with the capture of the 1,000-year-old castle atop Tower Hill.

The battle for Heilbronn had raged for nine days before the American armor and infantry closed their pincers on the city. The 100th's losses were comparatively light, given the intensity of the battle: 60 killed, 250 wounded, and 112 missing. It was impossible to determine the number of German dead and wounded, but it was believed to be considerable. The German heartland now lay open to the onrushing Americans. The end of the war was near. □

Third Reich Women at War

During the 12 years of the highly militarized society of the Third Reich, some 20 million Germans—men and women as well as children—donned a uniform of one kind or another.

Although Hitler was diametrically opposed to women serving in the military—and even in the heavy machine industries—the female members of the population, especially those residing in the cities, had already become an established part of the German work force after the horrendous losses during the First World War. That level of integration and participation rapidly increased during World War II as manpower shortages mounted due to battlefield attrition.

ABOVE: Singing as they march, BdM girls are joined by one seemingly out of uniform member. OPPOSITE: The brown "climbing jacket" or Kletterjacke was a popular BdM wardrobe item, along with the standard white shirt and black scarf. INSET: Third Reich commercial postcard extolling the role of girls.

Vintage photographs show German women and girls playing key roles throughout the 12 years of Hitler's reign.

BY PAUL GARSON

ABOVE: As the men were sent off to war, more women began serving in communications and logistics and as clerical workers. As the Allied aerial bombardment of Germany intensified, women and girls increasingly entered the war effort. By late 1944, the Luftwaffe flak artillery corps listed 160,000 female personnel.
RIGHT: German women were encouraged, even rewarded, for giving birth to large numbers of children to replace the combat losses on the battlefields.

The Pivotal Role of German Women

Under control of the Nazi party, intellect was subsumed by an emphasis on emotion, a tie-in to the "blood and soil" precept that mandated that all Germans were one spiritual community and should act as such, rather than as individuals.

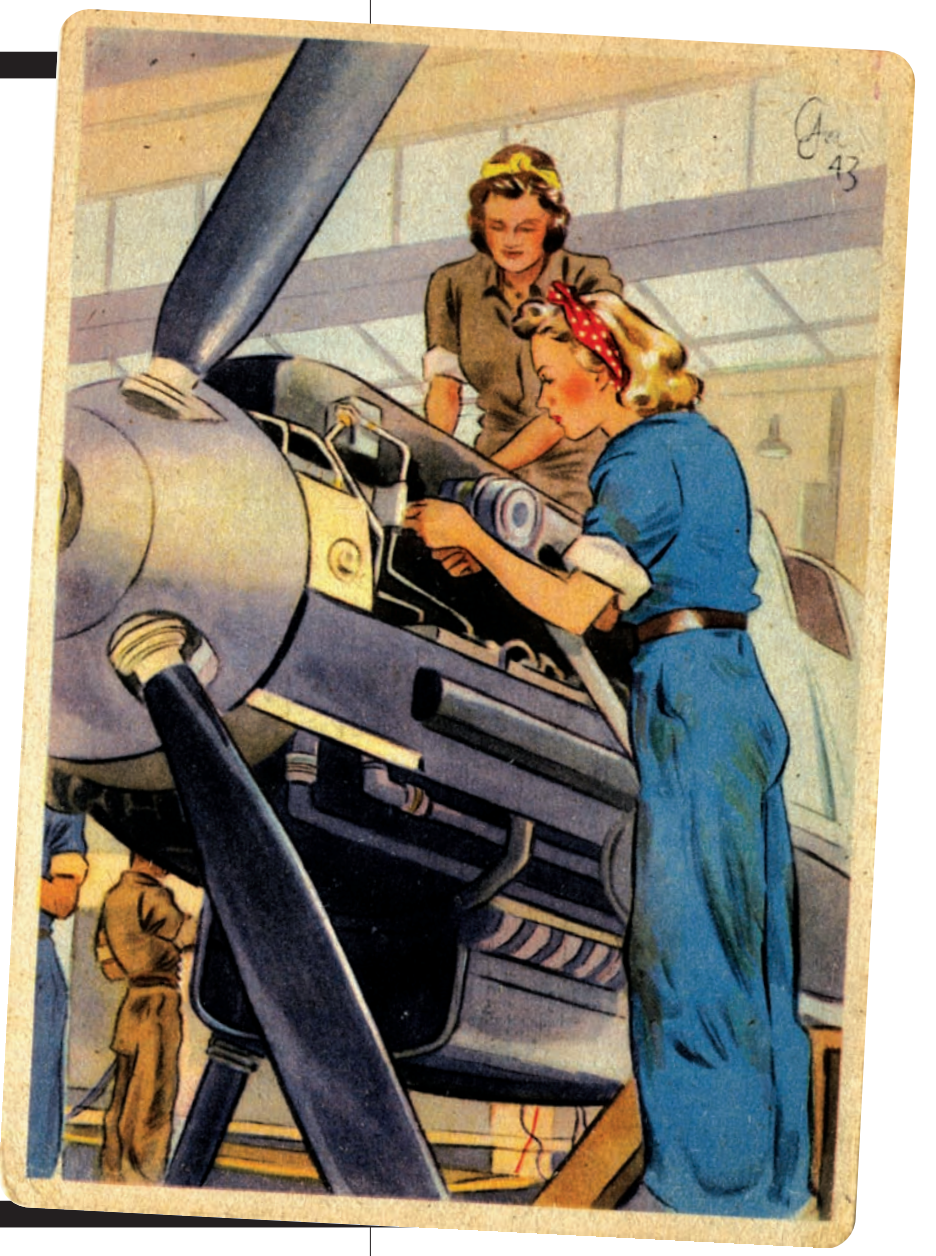
Females were seen as "the incubators of new German soldiers," as housekeepers and child rearers. This mindset extended to a restriction on the number of females allowed to attend university, specifically concerning the areas of law and medicine. The Nazi state imposed a quota for females of 10 percent of the total university medical students, but eventually removed that restriction as the war increased the need for medical professionals. By 1944 one of eight doctors was a woman, while the number of nurses increased from 18 to 20 per 10,000 of population.

Italian journalist Filippo Bojano, who spent years living in Nazi Germany, commented on Hitler's effect on women after attending an early campaign speech: "I could see the seething masses of women who were becoming ever more and more mesmerized by him as they listened to every word he uttered, and who kept up a prolonged orgy of cheering when he had finished.

"Strange to say, Hitler's first supporters came from the masses of the female electorate. His first and most enthusiastic audiences were women, and I am firmly convinced that the German women will be the last to admit that Hitler's political career has been disastrous to Germany."

Hitler, however, was strongly opposed to women in the military—or even in industry for that matter, regarding them as the "incubators" for Germany's future soldiers. As a result, motherhood was sacrosanct in Nazi Germany, with mothers ranked with the same status of frontline troops. A popular slogan was, "I have given a soldier to the Fuhrer." In effect, these women were the breeding ground for the replenishment of the fallen warriors of the Fatherland.

In consideration of their contribution to the Nazi state, prolific childbearers were awarded special medals: the Honor Cross of the German Mother with Bronze for more than four chil-



dren, Silver for more than six, and Gold for eight or more. Between December 1939, four months into the war, and May 1940—at the invasion of France—some 121,853 Honor Cross Gold medals were awarded during the annual Mothering Sunday, celebrated on the second Sunday of May (celebrated in many other countries as Mothers' Day).

Adolph Hitler once wrote, "I want a brutal, domineering, fearless, cruel youth. Youth must be all that. It must bear pain. There must be nothing weak and gentle about it. The free, splendid beast of prey must once again flash from its eyes. That is how I will eradicate thousands of years of human domestication. That is how I will create the New Order."

Breeding for the New Order

Germany needed to accelerate the production of military personnel, just as its assembly lines were turning out greater numbers of guns and tanks and warplanes; Nazi programs sought to remove the stigma of children born out of wedlock and, in fact, encouraged it with financial stipends and state care facilities.

SS men—the elite of the elite—were particularly encouraged to take part in the so-called *Lebensborn* ("Fount of Life") repopulation efforts, in which females were gathered at facilities specifically established to encourage the propagation of *der Übermensch* ("the Overman;" a superior people).

ABOVE RIGHT: **A popular 1943 postcard of the era portrays German women working on a fighter plane, the image similar to the American's iconic Norman Rockwell image of Rosie the Riveter.**

LEFT TOP: **The female guard identified as Erika Buckener poses with her uniformed companion. Nazi Germany trained some 200,000 war dogs as sentries, guards, messengers, and scouts, the largest number serving with SS units at concentration and POW camps. Erika Buckener survived the war and lived to a comfortable old age.**

LEFT BOTTOM: **Ravensbrück SS Identification Card—Fraulein Erika Buckener**

ABOVE: **The cover of the official magazine for the Federation of German Girls (BdM) of the Hitler youth shows a young girl bringing flowers to a a bedridden soldier. The text of the insert reads: "With song and play, young women and young girls carry the glad tidings of Christmas eve to our wounded in military hospitals."**
RIGHT TOP: **The lightning flash insignia worn on their uniform indicate that this group of young female auxiliary workers served in a Luftwaffe communications detachment (*Nachrichtenhelferinnen*). Other less-complimentary monikers, created by their male colleagues, included *Blitzmaus* (lightning mouse) and *Blitznutte* (lightning prostitute).**
RIGHT: **A lone male Army officer is surrounded by a sea of less stern-looking young women.**

Nazi Germany's social engineers sought the most exceptional women ro serve as breeders, particularly those trained and graduated as *Hohen Frauen* ("High Women") from the *Glaube und Schönheit* ("Faith and Beauty") program.

Its organizers sought out the most attractive girls of the highest intelligence, especially those who were instructed in gymnastics, horseback riding, pistol shooting, fencing, and automobile driving. The concept was formulated by no less than the Third Reich's chief architect, Albert Speer, in collaboration with Youth Leader Baldur von Schirach and famous filmmaker Leni Riefenstahl—three of the Third Reich's "beautiful people."

Youth for Hitler

The term "Hitler Youth" (*Hitler Jugend*) came into effect in July 1926, when German youth groups were placed under the control of the SA (*Sturmabteilung*, or "Storm Division") and divided into several *Obergebiete*, or geographic areas: *Nord*, *Süd*, *Ost*, *West*, *Mitte*, and *Südost* (North, South, East, West, Middle, and Southeast).

The female section of the Hitler Youth was called the *Bund Deutscher Madchen* (BdM), or League of German Girls. By 1936, the Hitler Youth had 5.4 million members aged 10-18. Almost all pre-Third Reich youth groups, both boys and girls, were assimilated into the Nazi collective organizations.

Some groups, particularly the religiously affiliated, balked, but all eventually fell under the thrall of the Nazi state, to whom control and conditioning of Germany's children was a top priority. The state would now supplant the traditional family as the controlling force in rearing the nation's youth.

While German females were deemed "wombs for the Third Reich," any sense of sexuality was downplayed. Conservative clothing and hairstyles were *de rigueur*, and the wearing of pants, lipstick, make-up, high heels, and silk stockings—as well as smoking—were all frowned upon to the point of penalty.

ABOVE: Red Cross officers, male and female, in their well-tailored uniforms. The single gold pip on the woman's collars indicates that she holds the rank of *DRK-Feldfuherein*. She also wears the standard DRK armband and grey fedora hat worn by female leadership members.
RIGHT: A magazine called *Die Woche* (*The Week*) featured a smiling German Red Cross worker on the cover of one of its issues.

Working with one's hands was considered mandatory for true German girls and evidence that she understood the "blood and soil" philosophy of the Nazi Party. Hundreds of thousands of young girls toiled on farms or provided household aid, often 13 hours a day, six days a week, as part of the mandatory RAD (*Reichsarbeitsdienst*) youth labor service.

They were also charged with collecting medicinal herbs and teas (some 6.5 million hours were invested by a million BdM girls in that endeavor). Later, they found themselves laboring in war-industry factories, often under Allied bombing.

German Red Cross

The *Deutsches Rotes Kreuz* (DRK) comprised both nursing and career-administrative personnel. In addition to its civilian volunteer work, the German Red Cross supplied the nursing staffs to all branches of the Wehrmacht.

Extensive recruitment efforts called for women of 16-21 years to come to the aid of the country's soldiers by serving as nursing auxiliaries (*Schwesternhelferin*), the training beginning with rudimentary first aid via the BdM. All DRK personnel, including its nurses, swore an oath of allegiance to Hitler.

The DRK provided nurses for all branches of the German military, from city hospitals to frontline field units, who often found themselves in harm's way. Red Cross female volunteers were not all necessarily certified medical nurses, and many dispensed food and water, aided regular medical staff, helped during bombing raids, and gave what medical assistance they could.

DRK nurses were often in the thick of battle serving in field hospitals behind the front lines. Several were awarded commendations for their valor in attending the wounded under fire, including Elfriede Wunk, the second woman after test pilot Hanna Reitsch to earn the Iron Cross.

She also was wounded several times.

Another recipient was Countess Nina von Stauffenberg, a volunteer nurse and also a

pilot. Her husband, Claus, would later find his place in history as the staff officer who placed the bomb in Hitler's command post in the abortive assassination plot. He was executed by the authorities, and she was arrested and sent to prison; their five children were placed in an orphanage.

A large percentage of German Red Cross-affiliated nurses and hospital personal were affiliated with the Catholic religion and not prone to participating in certain Nazi "racial cleansing" activities. To fill those needs, specially indoctrinated trainees, the so-called "brown sisters," took part in the sterilization, euthanasia programs, and concentration-camp medical experiments. Some were still carrying out the murder of "undesirables" in the last days of the war, and even beyond, until intervention by Allied authorities.

A reported 30 percent of German nurses had been members of the Nazi Party. Beginning in October 1945, German nurses were tried in U.S. military courts for their participation in killing more than 5,000 German children and another 70,000 disabled adults in hospitals. One captured German nurse admitted that she had personally poisoned between 1,000 and 1,500 people as part of the Nazi euthanasia program, targeting mentally ill patients.

Guarding the Skies

By the summer of 1940, over half a million men were involved in antiaircraft defense alone; by autumn 1944 the number stood at over a million. Another 65,000 women and thousands more young boys and girls served flak duty as well. These figures indicate that half the total Luftwaffe manpower was invested in air defense.

As the Allies' aerial bombardment of Germany intensified, women and girls increasingly manned flak teams where they took part in the operation of weapons as well as guidance systems, searchlights, and acoustical warning devices.

In September 1942, Hitler authorized the drafting of schoolboys born in 1926-29 (ages 13-16) to join flak units. Girls of the BdM also joined in the task. While the boys and girls

ABOVE: SS Policemen and Wives Attend Social Gathering—Friednau, Berlin Neighborhood, 1939

OPPOSITE: Typical German housewives pose for the camera during one of the endless celebrations staged across Germany. The conservative, somewhat dowdy styles reflected the austere attitude of Hitler and National Socialism's worldview as well as its view of womanhood.

BELOW: Many women worked on buses and trains like the girl seen here in a photo sent to her by a friend who addressed her as Ursa. The book she carries indicates the location is Cologne while the script sewn on her sleeve relates to her war service—one of the many *Helferin* or female volunteers who increasingly provided Germany's infrastructure with its workforce.

were referred to as "flak helpers" and even "flak babies," they fought with determination and remained at their posts often to their deaths. An estimated 100,000 Hitler youth perished in the last months of the war.

The Dark Side

There was also a much darker side to the role played by German women in the Nazi era. For example, the wives and girlfriends of police death squads roving through Eastern Europe occasionally would visit them in the field and were sometimes invited to witness mass executions. At times, the women would provide refreshments during breaks in the shooting.

Ravensbrück was established by Himmler in May 1939, the camp located near scenic Fürstenberg, some 50 miles north of Berlin. It was the only major Nazi concentration camp designed specifically to imprison women. Between 1942-43, it was also the center for the training of 3,500 female SS guards in methods of torture and murder prior to their employment in other camps. Of the 132,000 women and children who were interned at Ravensbrück, an estimated 92,000 died of various causes, including murder. □

Facing the Female Enemey

A female Russian POW glares at her German captor's camera. During movie theater newsreels showing Soviet women military, the German women in the audience often angrily shouted for their deaths.

Soviet women took on full combat roles, with over 800,000 in uniform and 200,000 receiving commendations while serving as pilots, tank crew, medics, partisans, and snipers. (See *WWII Quarterly*, Fall 2019.) Among the female snipers, the highest-rated was Lyudmila Pavichencho, with 309 confirmed German kills, including 36 enemy snipers. Of the total of 2,000 Red Army women snipers, she was one of only 500 who survived the war.

Crisis at Biak

General MacArthur and his military planners thought the fighting would last a week. They were wrong.

BY DAVID ALAN JOHNSON

"All I knew about Biak was that it was an island a degree south of the equator, one of the Schouten group lying north of Geelvink Bay toward the western end of New Guinea."

Colonel Harold Riegelman made this admission of ignorance toward the middle of June 1944, shortly after coming ashore on the island. By that time, the U.S. Army's 41st Division had been fighting its way inland from Biak's southern landing beaches for nearly three weeks. In the coming weeks and months, Colonel Riegelman would learn more about Biak than he ever could have bargained for.

The landings took place on May 27, 1944, near the town of Bosnik. Opposition from the Japanese troops occupying the island is usually described as "light," something of an understatement. Resistance was so insignificant that some senior officers speculated that the Japanese had evacuated the island. Actually, the defending Japanese troops had been caught off guard by the landings and were not prepared to make any sort of counterattack. They held their fire, reorganized, and waited for the following day to begin their resistance.

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Soldiers asked why this Godforsaken heap of jungle rot, coral, and caves had to be occupied. Soldiers in every army, in every era, have asked this question, but senior planners had an answer this time: Strategically, Biak had to be taken. The Japanese had built three airfields on the island—at Mokmer, Sorido, and Borokoe. Capturing these air bases would not only deprive the enemy of their use, but would also put American bombers within 800 miles of the Philippine Islands, where American troops were to land in October 1944.

But the high-level planners underestimated Japanese resistance on Biak. Enemy troop strength was thought to be about 4,400, but actually more than 11,400 Japanese were on the island—well over twice as many as estimated. Planners also thought the occu-

American infantrymen escort a Sherman tank through the dense jungle of Biak during the two-month-long battle for a small island that held more than 11,400 Japanese fighters ready to die for their emperor. Taking Biak and its three airfields was deemed crucial by General Douglas MacArthur before the U.S. could invade the Philippines, 800 miles away.

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ABOVE: With obvious worry on their faces, U.S. infantrymen ride amphibious vehicles, popularly called "Ducks," from their troopship to the Biak beachhead. BELOW: Under covering fire from guns on a Landing Craft Infantry (right), American infantrymen head for shore on a makeshift wharf, May 27, 1944. Some of the toughest fighting in the Pacific awaited them. OPPOSITE: Men of the 41st Infantry Division move inland on Biak, May 28, 1944. The American commander briefly considered using captured poison gas to flush the enemy out of their caves.

Naval History and Heritage Command

pation of Biak would take about a week. They were wrong about that, as well.

A coral reef just off the beaches created a problem that ruled out using conventional landing craft. Instead, amphibious LVTs and DUKWs were employed. Both of these were able to cross the reef, land the troops, and return to LSTs (Landing Ship, Tank) offshore for more troops and supplies. All 12,000 troops—the 41st Division along with the 162nd Regiment—as well as artillery and 12 Sherman tanks were put ashore on May 27. The landings went much easier than expected. But, as one officer put it, "the worst was yet to come."

The troops began moving toward the airfields the following morning. Patrols from the 162nd Regiment had advanced to within about 200 yards of Mokmer airstrip when defending Japanese opened fire with machine guns and mortars. Limestone caves about 1,200 yards north of Mokmer airstrip constituted the key to the defense of Mokmer village. Another line of caves formed natural defenses north of the village, and a third section of caves to the west of the landing beaches, in an area known as the Parai defile, was fortified with pillboxes. These caves gave the Japanese a great advantage, allowing them to hold up the American advance toward the airfields for nearly a month.

The destroyers USS *Wilkes* and USS πππ came as close to shore as their captains thought prudent, firing 5-inch shells into the Japanese positions near Mokmer, but the Japanese relocated to the Parai defile, where they held their ground and opened a withering fire against the advancing 162nd Infantry. The destroyers came under fire from shore batteries, which damaged at least one of the ships.

"Artillery, machine-gun fire, and mortars plastered our troops," remembered Colonel Riegelman. "The forward battalion was cut off by an invisible, deadly wall of steel and lead." The advance of the 162nd had been stopped dead.

By this time, it had become clear that the airfields would not be taken until the Japanese were driven out of the caves that dominated the landing area. Dense jungle vegetation, the closeness of American troops to the target area, and especially the cover being given by the caves made it impossible for naval gunfire to root out the enemy. The 162nd Infantry was hemmed in on three sides and under constant fire from concealed Japanese positions. The men would have to be evacuated from their position if they were not to be annihilated, and there was only one way out—the same amphibious landing craft that brought the troops ashore would have to take them off the beaches.

All available amphibious craft were pressed into service. Under cover of artillery,

naval gunfire, and air support, the men were taken off the beaches during the afternoon of May 29. By nightfall, the regiment had been evacuated from Parai and landed about 500 yards away to set up a new position. It had been a near-disaster, but the evacuation had succeeded.

The Japanese launched a counterattack the next morning with infantry supported by six light tanks, but Sherman medium tanks from the 603rd Tank Company were on hand to face the attack, having moved up from Bosnik to support the infantry. One soldier compared the appearance of the tanks with a scene from a Hollywood film, with the Shermans coming to the rescue of "the surrounded dogfaces" just in the nick of time.

The Japanese Type 95 tanks, equipped with 37mm cannon, could not do much damage to the Shermans, but the 75mm guns of the Shermans punched holes right through the sides of the Japanese tanks. A 37mm shell hit the turret of one of the Shermans, locking its gun in place. The driver backed into a shell hole, which elevated the front end of the tank along with its gun and allowed the gunner to bring his 75mm to bear on a Japanese tank. The Sherman knocked out the Type 95 in spite of the damage to its turret.

Stopping the Japanese tanks provided a reprieve for the 162nd Infantry. The men were having enough problems with the island itself. Jungle trails slowed forward movement to a snail's pace, while equatorial heat slowed the men just as effectively, and fresh water was scarce. The men were limited to one canteen of water per day, which everyone soon discovered was ridiculously inadequate.

The caves gave the Japanese a system of natural defenses that was much more effective than anything they could have built themselves. They allowed Japanese troops to pop out into the open, fire on unsuspecting Americans, and disappear again. Mortars and artillery were also brought into the caves, both to protect them and to keep them out of sight. The "cave defense" was brilliantly effective, much to the frustration of the men of the 41st Division. It quickly became evident that taking Biak would be a long and grim business.

The caves were not just holes in the sides of mountains. Some of them were equipped with electric lights, wooden floors, and kitchens. Some were two and three levels deep. A series of tunnels connected the caves and led to hidden exits. The Japanese "laid ambush after ambush," one soldier remembered.

The 163rd Regiment arrived on June 1 to reinforce the 41st's drive toward the airfields. The Mokmer aerodrome was captured on June 7, but the airfield was still of no use to American aircraft. Japanese troops in nearby caves kept the Army engineers from making the field operational with steady mortar and artillery fire.

Some of the smaller caves were sealed by a sort of skip-bombing technique by Curtiss P-40 Tomahawk fighter-bombers. Closing others was going to be a long, slow process for the infantry.

The capture of Biak was progressing too

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slowly for General Douglas MacArthur, who had expected to have at least one of the airfields operational by this time. He decided to relieve General Horace H. Fuller of task force command. General Fuller was also commander of the 41st Division and was originally to have stayed on. However, he refused to stay since he felt that he had lost the confidence of General MacArthur. Fuller was reassigned outside the Southwest Pacific Area on June 15. The division was taken over by Brig. Gen. Jens A. Doe, who had commanded the 163rd Regiment.

Soldiers went about the business of clearing the caves with grim determination. Some used flamethrowers, crawling to within point-blank range of the entrances under the cover of rifle fire and burning out the cave interiors with long streams of fire. Sometimes the flames would hit one of the cave walls and bounce back at the Americans.

Flamethrowers were unable to reach far enough inside some of the larger caves. Satchel charges, hand grenades, and gasoline were usually employed for these. Gasoline was sometimes poured into one of the openings and then set on fire. After a few minutes, dull thuds and rumblings could be heard coming from the cave's interior—ammunition supplies were exploding, destroying the cave along with everyone inside it.

The effect of satchel charges was every bit as horrific as that of gasoline. After one cave was blown apart, a private went inside to see what was left. He came out a few minutes later, nauseated and vomiting. "My God, it looks like a scene from hell," he said. "Pieces of men all over the tunnel floor! Bodies with bellies blown open by concussion! Blood running from the ears, noses, mouths, and eyes of dead Japs! It's awful!"

In late June the Americans attacked the West Caves, north and west of Mokmer. The infantrymen used gasoline, hand grenades, and explosives to neutralize them one at a time. The deadly work took nearly 10 days and sometimes required the support of Sherman tanks. The caves were finally cleared by the end of the month. Now that they were no longer being harassed by enemy fire, the engineers were able to make Mokmer drome operational. On June 22, the airfield began landing fighters.

Colonel Riegelman had the chance to take a look around the vicinity of the West Caves and spoke with some of the men who had been engaged in the heavy fighting. He was matter-of-fact in his evaluation. "I saw the disabled Jap tanks, inspected a nearby mortar platoon, talked to the men, noted their drawn, bearded faces and eyes, red from lack of sleep. They did not complain."

Riegelman also made a study of the caves on Biak and divided them into four types. Type One consisted of a "cavern in a cliff" from three to five feet in depth, which was used either for a machine-gun emplacement or a storage area for food and ammunition. Type Two was larger, 20 to 30 feet high, facing the sea, with a rear opening from the landward side for access. The cave's forward opening was "usually improved" by a "concrete machine-gun port" that served to make the already formidable position even more formidable. Type Three was made up of "a series of connected open cavities four to eight feet in height and three to six feet in depth." Type Four caves were

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ABOVE: In one of the few tank-vs.-tank encounters during the Pacific War, a Japanese light tank smolders after being knocked out by an American Sherman tank. Although the Japanese tanks only mounted 37mm guns, they could still inflict serious casualties on troops in the open. BELOW: By attacking at numerous beachheads around Biak from May 27 to July 25, 1944, when Biak was declared secure, U.S. forces finally overcame defenders holed up in a labyrinth of caves. OPPOSITE: An American Sherman M4 medium tank blasts an enemy stronghold with its 75mm main gun. Although superior to their Japanese counterparts, the Shermans were susceptible to artillery and anti-tank weapons.

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

the largest, "more or less circular in shape, up to 50 yards in diameter, 15 to 60 feet deep, with sheer or steeply sloping sides." The Type Four cave might also be "the entrance to a succession of chambers and interconnecting galleries," actually a cave network with multiple entrances as much as 100 yards apart. The caves were defensive marvels, but the Americans were becoming experts at improvising methods for neutralizing them.

An artilleryman remembered that one cave was "impervious to all calibers we could bring to bear. Its entrance defied demolition." This was clearly a job for the engineers.

A party of engineers arrived at the cave with what was described as "a quarter-ton trailer" carrying 850 pounds of TNT. A winch was set up, and the TNT was lowered into the cave. "I had no idea what 850 pounds of TNT would do," an observing officer admitted. "I only knew it was a lot of TNT."

Nobody else knew what the TNT would do either, but nobody was taking any chances. All troops were ordered back 100 yards from the cave entrance, and nearby Shermans were pulled back to safer ground. Everyone got down on their stomachs, flat on the ground, and waited for the explosion.

When the TNT went off, a cloud of dust and smoke billowed out of the cave, followed by the thud of hundreds of falling rocks. After the smoke cleared, the men and the Shermans were ordered back into position. The men advanced toward the cave's gaping mouth and stared into the blackness.

"The blackness stared back," said one observer. The troops sent into the cave were ordered to bayonet every Japanese soldier they could find, whether they were breathing or not.

On June 20, both Borokoe and Sorido airstrips were taken by American troops. The major objectives on Biak—the three airfields—had been captured, but there was still a sizable Japanese force on the island.

About 1,000 Japanese troops occupied the East Caves, situated close to the origi-

nal landing beaches. They kept up sporadic artillery fire directed at the three air bases. Initially, the fire from these caves had been considered a nuisance. After the West Caves were cleared, the East Caves became the primary objective.

Artillery began firing at the caves shortly after Borokoe and Sorido were safely in American hands. Engineers and infantry from Mokmer moved into the area under the cover of 75mm fire from the Shermans and began clearing the caves using the same methods that had been successful against the West Caves.

Most of the caves had been neutralized by July 5. Their occupants had either been killed or had slipped away into the jungle.

Not all Japanese troops took cover in the caves and waited for the enemy to attack. On the night of June 21-22, a counterattack was attempted against the American positions near the West Caves. According to Lt. Gen. Robert Eichelberger, who had been sent to Biak to appraise the situation for General MacArthur, an attack was made by 109 Japanese officers and men against one of the 186th Regiment's outposts.

"What a racket," Eichelberger reported. "They came crowding down the moonlit trail in a mass, shouting their banzais." The 186th's position was occupied by 12 men who held their fire until the charging enemy was only a few yards away. Machine-gun fire killed many attackers. One Japanese soldier was shot trying to bayonet an American sergeant. Another jumped into a foxhole with one of the Americans and pulled the pin on a hand grenade. The grenade exploded, killing both men. Every one of the attacking Japanese was killed.

"Score 109 to 1," General Eichelberger said.

Other attacks were made all along the line that night. Each had the same result. Machine-gun fire shredded the Japanese.

"It was mass execution," one American remembered, "mass suicide of men who wanted to die." Stories began to circulate about a single squad of Americans killing nearly 200 Japanese. None of them would surrender. They would rather die than give up. One American said, "Usually a sure sign that the Japanese knew that they were licked."

If the Japanese knew they were beaten, they were not letting it show. The next objective for the American troops, specifically the 163rd Regiment, was the Ibdi Pocket, about 4,000 yards east of Parai. The attack began in mid-June and continued until the end of July. Over 40,000 mortar and artillery shells were fired into Japanese positions during the first two weeks, but the enemy managed to put up stubborn resistance.

By July 10, American patrols reported that the constant shelling had considerably weakened the enemy. The pocket had been methodically blasted away. This was encouraging news for the men of the 163rd as they renewed their attack on July 11. Backed up by artillery, aircraft, and Sherman tanks, infantrymen used flamethrowers and bazookas against the weakened enemy positions.

Progress was slow and costly in human terms. Besides losing more killed and wounded, the Americans were coming down with debilitating illnesses such as typhus and "fevers of unknown origin."

Senior officers began looking for a way to end the fighting as quickly as possible. Poison gas was considered and discounted. "We captured a lot of it," one man said, "just the thing for these caves."

Colonel Riegelman was asked, "How about it, Chemical Officer? What do you do with those caves?" Riegelman answered, "We got a lot of Jap gas that isn't being used, sir." The conversation stopped for a moment. Nobody was sure whether the exchange was supposed to be funny, but it resumed a short while later as if nothing had happened. The joke, if it was a joke, had been dropped.

Sometime after this, the subject of the captured gas came up again. This time, there

ABOVE: A Japanese Zero fighter lies damaged on the Mokmer airstrip where is was forced to make a belly landing, June 1944. The Japanese fiercely defended the three airstrips on Biak. OPPOSITE: After retreating from a barrage of Japanese hand grenades, American combat engineers return to the mouth of a fortified Japanese cave on Biak. Often the engineers used satchel charges to seal the entrances to the many caves on the island, trapping the enemy occupants inside.

Both: National Archives

was no levity. Colonel Riegelman's commanding officer asked him, "How much Jap gas do you have?"

"Plenty, sir," the colonel replied. "We have taken great quantities, mostly poison smoke."

The officer asked Riegelman if the gas could be used against the Japanese and explained that his staff disagreed with his intent to do so if possible.

Riegelman responded, "Sir, in my opinion the staff is right, and I believe you'd be relieved in 24 hours after you used gas. In the end that would cost us more in time and casualties than if we keep on as we are."

Riegelman did not explain exactly what he meant by "casualties." He was probably referring to the officers who would face punishment if they elected to use poison gas. He returned to his tent and went to bed. "I never thought I should see the day when I would oppose the use of gas against the Jap, especially his own gas," he reflected. "Yet I could not think I had been wrong in this."

The American forces on Biak kept up their offensive through the month of July, in spite of the heat and the jungle diseases. All organized resistance on Biak ended in mid-July, although mopping-up operations continued until July 25. The island was declared secure on August 20.

Nearly 500 Americans were killed on Biak and more than 2,400 wounded, while another 1,000 were incapacitated by diseases. Japanese casualties were up to 6,100 killed, 450 captured, and an unknown number wounded.

Among the dead was Colonel Naoyuki Kuzume, the Japanese commander. No one is exactly certain what happened to Colonel Kuzume. Some reports claim that he committed ritual suicide after the failed counterattack on June 21-22. Others say that he was killed in action afterward or that he committed suicide toward the end of the campaign.

In his narrative of the Biak campaign, naval historian Admiral Samuel Eliot Morison had nothing but praise for Colonel Kuzume and his defense of the island. "Realizing the hopelessness of his position, this brave and resourceful officer caused his regimental colors to be burned during the night of 21-22 June. Whether he then took his own life or was killed in action is not known, but his death marked the end of a well-directed and stubborn defense."

Not everyone agreed that the defense of Biak was admirable, no matter how stubborn it might have been. "Biak was a battle that gave a terrifying glimpse into the soul of mankind," wrote another observer. "For all man's vaunted civilization and culture, he still retreats into the caves when deadly danger threatens. Under the thin veneer of civilization lurks the caveman—a human animal at bay."

The Biak operation was a success, which was all that mattered to the military planners. Morison wrote, "MacArthur's prompt and vigorous invasion of Biak proved to be a serious embarrassment to the enemy on the eve of the Battle of the Philippine Sea. That alone made the operation worthwhile; but, in addition, Biak became an important Allied air base for the subsequent liberation of the Philippines." □

Polish Army's Heroic Stand AT FALAISE

For German troops trying to escape the Falaise Pocket massacre, one final obstacle stood in their way: the Polish 1st Armoured Division. **BY ALAN DAVIDGE**

Poland does not always get the recognition it deserves for helping to defeat Nazi Germany and end the war in Europe. Yet it was servicemen from Poland who tipped the balance in some of the most crucial encounters of the war.

During the Battle of Britain in 1940, Polish fighter pilots, flying alongside the young lions of the RAF, displayed remarkable aggression, bravery, and skill, and helped force Hitler to shelve his plans for adding the invasion of Britain to his list of lightning conquests.

At Monte Cassino in May 1944, when Monastery Hill lay piled high with the bodies of American, British, New Zealand, and Indian troops after four months of bloody fighting, it was the Poles who finally made it to the top, opening up the route to Rome.

Similarly, in Normandy, after 10 weeks of battle when the remains of the German army were frantically trying to escape through the Falaise Pocket, it was the Poles who stood and blocked their way at a geographical feature known as Mont Ormel. And leading the Poles was 52-year-old Maj. Gen. Stanislaw Maczek, commander of the Polish 1st Armoured Division.

In 1937, as a colonel, he had been given the task of organizing Poland's first fully mechanized unit, the 10th Mechanized Cavalry. In September 1939, he was commanding this unit near Krakow in southern Poland when the Germans invaded, and he led his brigade in screening the retreat of Army Krakow, distinguishing itself in numerous actions.

Following the collapse of the "Rumanian Bridgehead" in the wake of the Soviets' invasion that began on September 17, 1939, Maczek and the remnants of his

Two crewmen of the Polish 1st Armoured Division—part of an army in exile—prepare for battle in their British-made Cromwell tank, summer 1944. Known as the "Armoured Hussars," the Polish armoured forces were equipped with an assortment of British Cromwells, Valentines, and Vickers tanks, plus Polish 7TP and French Renault tanks.

Imperial War Museum


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After German forces overran their country in September 1939, tenacious Poles, such as these shown in Hungary, escaped the continent to reconstitute their forces in Britain and prepare for the day they could strike back at the Nazis.

command retreated into Hungary, where they were interned.

After escaping from Hungary, Maczek made his way to France, where he was charged with rebuilding a Polish mechanized force and was promoted to the rank of brigadier general. In May 1940, this new unit—the 10th Armoured Cavalry, made up of many veterans of the Polish 10th Mechanized Cavalry who had followed their commander to France—saw action again during Germany's invasion of France.

According to one historian, Maczek's unit "again found itself screening a retreat, this time of the French Fourth Army. Maczek's men distinguished themselves at the battle of Montbard on June 16, 1940, but once again the fortunes of war left Maczek and his command fugitives and refugees. Although some Polish soldiers were prevented from escaping by unsympathetic French authorities, General Maczek and many of his men managed to escape to England."

Maczek and the other Polish survivors offered their services to the Allies and were sent to Scotland in February 1942 to form a new unit—the 1st Polish Armoured Division, which was equipped with British uniforms and vehicles. For over two years, Maczek trained and molded a diverse group of recruits into an effective fighting force. A month after the D-Day invasion of France, Maczek's men were ready for combat, and after the breakout from the Normandy beachhead, the division was shipped to France in July 1944, where it became a part of the Canadian I Corps.

As the Poles were finding their feet in Normandy, their allies were watching Operation Cobra unfold. Troops had broken out of the beachhead at the end of July, and Lt. Gen. George S. Patton, Jr., who had been waiting like a coiled spring to make his mark on the battlefield, had pushed his U.S. Third Army as far as Le Mans, arriving there on August 8.

Conversations were taking place between Lt. Gen. Omar Bradley, commanding 12th Army Group, and General (soon to become Field Marshal) Bernard Montgomery, commanding 21st Army Group, about the next stage. It was decided that Maj. Gen. Wade Haislip's XV Corps from Third Army would swing north in the direction of Argentan, with a view towards encircling the German Army. For extra support, Patton would utilize French General Jacques-Philippe Leclerc's 2nd Armoured Division, which had landed at Utah Beach just a week earlier after years of fighting in exile.

At the same time, Hitler was demanding a major counterattack westwards in the direction of Avranches at the base of the Cotentin Peninsula. This, Hitler believed, would drive the advancing American divisions into the sea and cut off other units of the Third Army that had begun to liberate Brittany. Operation *Lüttich*, as this counterattack was known, was launched on August 4 and proved to be his undoing.

American troops were initially caught wrong-footed by the German counterattack, and the town of Mortain, which had just been captured by the 30th Infantry Division, was quickly reoccupied by the Germans. A heroic action by an American battalion stationed on Hill 314 above Mortain checked the German advance, and they held out for six days

until relieved on August 12. By concentrating their efforts on trying to capture this strategic piece of high ground, the German army lost valuable time and considerable resources.

It was becoming clear to both Montgomery and Bradley, after their initial discussions on August 8, that there was a real opportunity now to capitalize on this German weakness. Every day that the Germans spent trying to advance west, spreading themselves ever more thinly in the process, gave the Allies time to move eastwards, north, and south of the counterattack like pincers until they reached the point where they could join up behind them and surround the whole German army.

Bradley famously announced at the time, "This is an opportunity that comes to a commander not more than once in a century. We're about to destroy an entire hostile army and go all the way from here to the German border."

Despite Bradley's apparent adrenaline rush about the possibilities of encirclement, he did not feel confident that Haislip's XV Corps had the strength to advance beyond the town of Argentan, and he ordered Patton not to take the final step and join up with the Canadians when they arrived at Falaise.

There were heated exchanges between Bradley, Patton, and Montgomery, and their lack of agreement on a way forward has been fastened upon by historians ever since as a missed opportunity to complete the encirclement. The eventual result of this delay and indecision was that the action to close the pocket took place between the small towns of Trun and Chambois, to the east of Falaise and Argentan—where it had originally been intended to happen. It also allowed 116th Panzer Division to strengthen a position in the southern part of the pocket that enabled more of their comrades to escape.

While Bradley was contemplating maneuvers on the southern side of the German retreat, 21st Army Group was focusing on the other half of the encirclement plan from the north. Initially II Canadian Corps under Lt. Gen. Guy Granville Simonds mounted a series of attacks from the direction of Caen toward Falaise from August 7-11, starting with Operation Totalise. Two key units in this plan were the armored divisions: the 4th Canadian under George Kitching and Maczek's 1st Polish.

During his time in Britain, Maczek had built up a formidable fighting force containing many of his former officers. His division's 10th Armoured Brigade was led by Colonel Tadeusz Majewski and included the 1st and 2nd Armoured Regiments under Lt. Col. Aleksander Stefanowicz and Lt. Col. Stanislaw Koszutski, the 24th (Lancer) Armoured Regiment led by Lt. Col. Jan Kanski, and the 10th Dragoon Regiment (Motor) under Lt. Col. Wladyslaw Zgrzelski.

The 3rd Infantry Brigade came under the control of Colonel Marian Wieronski and comprised Lt. Col. Karol Complak's Polish Highland Battalion and the 8th and 9th Infantry Battalions under Lt. Cols. Aleksander Nowaczynski and Zdzislaw Szydlowski.

These were supported by further divisional units that included an anti-tank regiment, two field-artillery regiments, and the celebrated 10th Mounted Rifle Regiment, or PSK, under Major Jan Maciejowski. Shortly after they arrived in Normandy, Maczek signalled their priorities: "The Polish soldier fights for the freedom of other nations but only dies for Poland."

Operation Totalise unfortunately got off to a bad start on August 8 as some of the bombs intended for the enemy fell short, and Polish troops were among the casualties. The First Canadian Army's initial advance was successful, however, catching the Germans by surprise. But then a counterattack was launched by Kurt Meyer, the 116th Panzer Division commander.

Imperial War Museum

Imperial War Museum

ABOVE: Maj. Gen. Stanislaw Maczek, brilliant commander of the Polish 1st Armoured Division, remained in the UK after the war, an almost-forgotten figure. LEFT: British Valentine tanks of the 66th Tank Battalion, 16th Armoured Brigade, I Polish Corps, line a road in Scotland, where many of the Polish troops trained, November 1941.

One of the men he sent forward to engage the Allied tanks driving south to Falaise was Michael Wittman, the legendary tank commander they called "The Black Baron," who had the destruction of 168 tanks to his credit.

However, a 17-pounder shell from a Canadian Firefly tank belonging to the Sherbrook Fusiliers put an end to Wittman's Tiger tank from across the Caen-Falaise road near Gaumesnil, killing Wittmann and all the crew.

After four days, Totalise was terminated, despite the 1st Polish Armoured having given a good account of themselves. The Poles especially showed their mettle on the night of August 10 by attempting to outflank German units installed on the high ground of Hill 195 overlooking their route and by breaking through the Waffen-SS lines.

When Totalise was called off, the Poles had advanced eight miles along the road to Falaise. At this point, Simonds reviewed his plans, updating them to take account of the U.S. Third Army's progress on the south side of the German retreat and Montgomery's directive to First Canadian Army, which would involve II Canadian Corps taking Falaise. This next phase, Operation Tractable, began on August 14.

On August 15, the second day of Tractable, Simonds ordered the Polish 1st Armoured eastwards, giving it a separate role from the remainder of the corps, a degree of independence that was relished by Maczek. The division divided into two groups, which headed for the small towns of Vendeuvre and Jort to find a means of crossing the River Dives.

By the end of the following day, they had managed to shrug off resistance from two German divisions, and Maczek's engineers had established a bridgehead at Jort, the more southerly of the two towns. Having crossed into open country, he was able to drive southeastward and catch up with groups of retreating German troops and destroy them.

The next day, two Polish battlegroups were moved south of the Jort bridgehead. The first group reached a location close to Morteaux-Coliboeuf, four miles south on the Dives; the second stopped near Baron-en-Auge, which was a little to the east.

On the 17th came Montgomery's order for the Canadian and Polish armored divisions to accelerate at all costs southeast in the direction of Trun and thence to Chambois to join up with Patton's Third Army, thereby enclosing the retreating German Army—now under the command of one of Hitler's seasoned favorites, Walter Model.

Unfortunately, during the night of the 17th/18th, the Polish 1st Armoured made one of its rare mistakes. Using a guide to get to Chambois in the dark, the tactical group Koszutski accidentally arrived in Champeux, running directly into the 2nd SS Panzers. The Koszutski group was saved by a fierce attack by its own 8th Infantry Rifles, although the group did not completely disentangle itself until midday.

By the morning of the 18th, it became clear that there were still a few small gaps between Trun and Chambois through which the German Army could escape. The 10th Canadian Infantry Brigade had liberated Trun fairly early in the day and, to the south, elements of the 359th U.S. Infantry regiment, 90th Division, held Chambois.

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SZ Photo

ABOVE: Heavily camouflaged to protect against Allied air attacks, a convoy of German panzers hit the road during the time of the Falaise battle. OPPOSITE: A Cromwell tank of the Polish 1st Armoured Division rolls through a French village on its way to Mont Ormel, where the unit would make its courageous, storied stand.

Between these settlements, however, escape routes were being forged north-eastwards, passing on either side of Mont Ormel, a twin-peaked hill rising to 262 meters, the top of which provided an excellent strategic view of the Dives valley and which, in Allied hands, could target anyone trying to escape this way.

Toward the end of the day, a group led by Major David Currie consisting of C Squadron, South Albertas (Canadian 29th Armoured), and elements of infantry from the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders of Canada tried and failed to capture St. Lambert, located in the middle of the gap between Trun and Chambois.

Next morning, the 19th, their second attempt succeeded. It looked like the village of St. Lambert, with its little bridges across the Dives, was becoming the focus of the German retreat. Soon, A and B Squadrons of the South Albertas were set up close by in positions that could further frustrate any attempts to cross the river.

Fighting remained fierce for the next couple of days, and the best that the Albertas could do was to try and hold on to St. Lambert. It had been hoped that they would be able to join up with the Americans at Chambois, but the tide of German troops was almost impossible to contain, and they could not afford to lose their grip.

August 20 saw the Canadians fighting for their lives in St. Lambert, trying to hold back the 353rd Infantry Division and elements of four panzer divisions. For his actions in keeping St. Lambert in Canadian hands, Major Currie was awarded the Victoria Cross.

While the Canadians had been planning to attack St. Lambert, Maczek was preparing to move his men from the Trun area, still under instruction to head in the direction of Chambois. Once underway, he directed a third of his division to Chambois and led the remainder in the direction of Mont Ormel, the twin-peaked hill to the east, which he nicknamed The Mace (or *maczuga* in Polish) because of its resemblance in profile to a medieval weapon.

On the map, there were two high points on the north and south of its western flank, both registering 262 meters. As a mountain infantryman in his earlier life, Maczek fully understood the positional advantage of the maczuga. It was an ideal place where he could dig in and follow the German retreat as it unfolded along the low ground beneath.

Unfortunately, his division, which was now only two-thirds of its original size, was cut off from the Allied Trun-Chambois axis, where every bullet and shell had to be used against the huge numbers of Germans moving eastwards. Those who successfully ran the gauntlet, and initially there were plenty of them, would be heading straight towards Mont Ormel.

To defend this feature, Maczek had the 1st and 2nd Polish Armoured Regiments, the 8th and 9th Polish Infantry Battalions, and the Polish Highland Battalion, plus anti-tank and anti-aircraft support. However, they were out on a limb and running short of supplies and ammunition. Their precarious location also now meant that the chances of re-supply were minimal.

The remainder of Maczek's division under Loszutski were at last able to close the pocket down in Chambois later in the afternoon of August 19, when they met up with the 359th U.S. Infantry from the 90th Division. Their battlegroup consisted of troops from the 24th Armoured Regiment, infantry from the 10th Dragoon Regiment, the 10th Mounted Rifle Regiment, plus an anti-tank group. Every German soldier that they could hold back was one less to cause problems for their comrades on Mont Ormel.

Maczek used his previous experience fighting in the mountains to choose the most effective positions for his troops and tanks to inflict the maximum damage on the enemy if and when it broke through the pocket.

Now that he had been able to take a close look at the maczuga, his plan was to deploy troops along the north-south ridge that overlooked the Dives Valley and also block the key exit roads (now the D16 and D242). The two high spots, Hill 262 North and Hill 262 South, would provide maximum strategic advantage.

Early in the day Maczek headed southward with the 1st Polish Armoured Regiment and two infantry companies of his Highland Battalion, initially bypassing the most northerly of the two hills to get to 262 South, which overlooked a route out of the pocket that ran eastwards.

SZ Photo

A German Panther blasts an enemy position during combat in Normandy, August 1944.

When he got about halfway between the twin peaks, he encountered a slow-moving convoy including Panther tanks and other armor that had escaped the pocket and was heading towards Vimoutiers. They were a sitting target, and the Shermans of the 1st Armoured Regiment wasted no time in tearing them apart.

Such was the damage, congestion and smoke that the Poles could proceed no further, so they headed back northwards, taking some of the German wounded with them to the Boisjos manor house first-aid station near Hill 262 North. Their lack of a presence on the southerly peak would, however, prove costly as other groups managed to find an escape route out of Chambois.

Throughout the day the Polish position was consolidated on the northern half of Mont Ormel, joined by the second battlegroup comprising the 2nd Polish Armoured Regiment, 8th and 9th Polish Infantry Battalions, and more of the Highland Regiment, plus anti-tank and anti-aircraft guns. With a diverse area to manage, and with a justifiable confidence in his officers, Maczek felt he could apply a decentralized approach, with each unit taking charge of its own area.

Both sides were now poised for an explosive confrontation that would occupy them for most of the next day, August 20. Taking advantage of the darkness, small Allied groups tried during the night to get across the Dives at the bridge in St. Lambert, and others made attempts to reach Polish positions on Hill 262, but they were quickly cut down.

There was also a pre-dawn attack that took place in the north of the maczuga that was repelled by Polish Podhale riflemen using just their bayonets, since ammunition was in short supply, setting the standard for the brutality that was to follow.

The pocket was, in theory, sealed, so any Germans trying to break through would have to apply a momentum that the Poles would be hard-pressed to contain. Those who succeeded in getting through would be heading towards The Mace, a weapon that the Poles would wield confidently as long as their ammunition supplies held out. Maczek had a couple of thousand men beside him to stop tens of thousands of the enemy exiting the pocket below.

At dusk, a supply convoy that would have made a huge a difference to the Poles' fighting potential was lost in a German ambush.

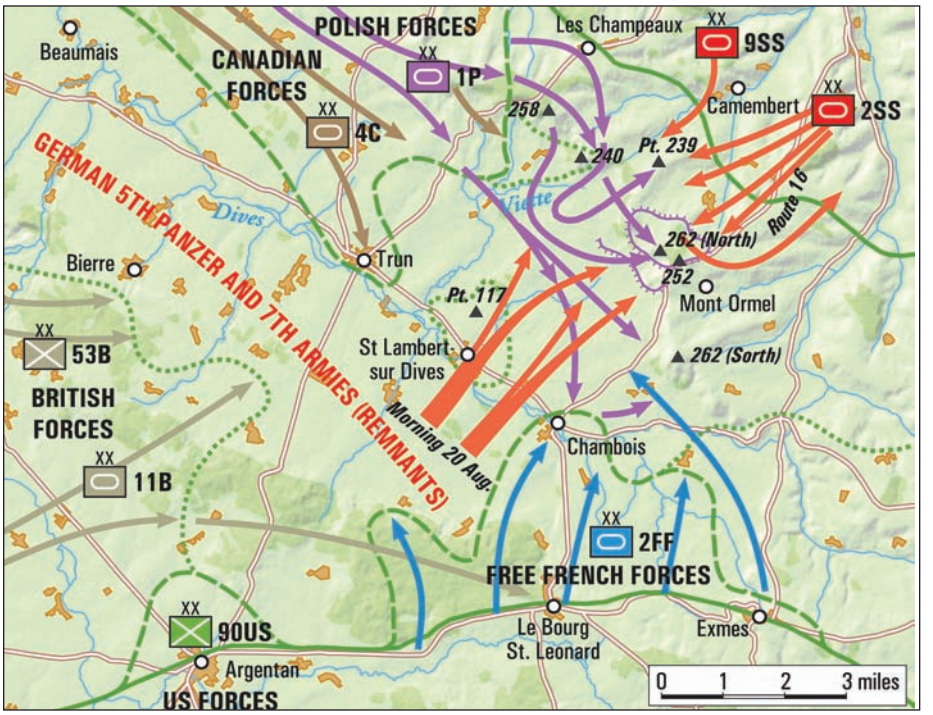
When news arrived of the *Résistance* uprising in Paris on the 19th, de Gaulle and Leclerc were immediately concerned that it could be crushed the same way as the resistance in Warsaw, something that Maczek would understand. SHAEF commander General Dwight D. Eisenhower sympathized, and off went most of the French 2nd Armoured, taking the U.S. 4th Infantry Division with it, to liberate the capital, leaving a small group behind to provide support in the southern part of the pocket.

When the fighting started on The Mace the next day, the Poles found they had to watch their backs. They were vulnerable to counterattack from the east, a tactic that would also divert attention from the German troops escaping from the pocket to the west of the hill.

The first major attack came not from St. Lambert or Chambois but from the northeast

National Archives

ABOVE: Equipped with British uniforms and weapons, the Poles were eager to exact revenge against the invaders of their country. BELOW: Trying to flee eastward from the killing zone (the "Corridor of Death") between Trun and Chambois, remnants of two German armies found their way blocked by Polish troops on Mont Ormel.



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

at around 9 AM, and it involved infantry from the SS Panzer Division "Das Reich." Combat was at close quarters, but the enemy was pushed back within two hours by the 2nd Armoured Regiment and the 8th Infantry Battalion.

Next came an attack from the north by a group from the Germans' 3rd Paratroop Division with assault guns, and they met a similar fate. There were also signs of a threat from the east. The Mace was beginning to feel like a miniature version of the Ypres Salient in World War I, where troops could never be sure whence the next incursion was coming. It was actually worse than a salient because, until the Canadians could move up from the Trun-Chambois area, they were effectively surrounded.

When they were not spending time defending their positions on the hill, their elevation provided the Poles some excellent opportunities for strategic attacks.

Between St. Lambert and Chambois is the village of Moissy, where the Dives could be crossed via a ford. This route was used by thousands of Germans as an escape route—especially as it led to a track that could take them to Coudehard, just north of Hill 262 North. They were easy targets for the Polish 10th Mounted Rifles (PSK), however, who had occupied a piece of ground known as Hill 113 that afforded a wide field of fire below. History has christened the Germans' attempted exit routes Couloir du Mort—"The Corridor of Death."

In addition to looking after a growing number of their own casualties, the Poles on their maczuga found themselves having to supervise more and more prisoners, which amounted to around 800 by the afternoon. An open area, or *polana*, was allocated for this purpose, but its openness made it vulnerable, and more casualties resulted.

The counterattacks then started to grow in intensity, and at 2 PM, the 8th Battalion was hit from the northeast by a group of infantry supported by panzers; but the attackers were repelled and more prisoners were taken.

The worst assault began from the east at 3 PM, also involving infantry and panzers, and within a couple of hours, it had developed into a ferocious close-quarter battle for the 2nd Armoured Regiment. The intensity was so great that one first-hand account describes every machine gun in the regiment firing at the same time.

In some instances, the hull machine guns of Polish Shermans and their main turret guns were both firing simultaneously but in opposite directions as the enemy was appearing from all angles. Three panzers penetrated as far as the polana, causing panic among the prisoners and resulting in a face-off with Polish Shermans at point-blank range. The attack was eventually beaten off by 7 PM.

Author's Photo

The day's events represented a remarkable achievement for the Poles, as the troops they were taking on were the remnants of Germany's strongest divisions such as Das Reich and the deadly paratroops.

However, in their subsequent analysis, the Polish 1st Armoured was quick to acknowledge the importance of the artillery support provided by their brothers-in-arms in the Canadian army. Polish forward-observation officers had been registering enemy positions with the Canadians and calling down fire missions throughout the day, which had resulted in the expenditure of around 7,000 shells. This had undoubtedly helped them to hold on to their positions. It also enabled them to continue the operation when their own ammunition stores were approaching exhaustion.

In the early evening, a 20-minute truce was agreed upon to allow the Germans to evacuate a large number of Red Cross vehicles, but immediately afterwards the fighting resumed at the same level of ferocity.

The night of August 20 was a quiet one, the result of exhaustion on both sides. There was, inevitably, among the Poles a feeling that they had been stretched to their limits and beyond. The hoped-for supplies and support from the Canadian Armoured had not arrived, and indeed the slowness of their commander, Kitching, in responding resulted in Simonds relieving him of his command.

The absence of more infantry support in critical spots also meant that some groups of Germans were still getting through, and only the Poles stood in their way. Lt. Col. Aleksander Stefanowicz, a wounded battle-group commander on The Mace, called his officers together in the evening and told them "Gentlemen, everything is lost. I do not believe the Canadians will come to help us. We have only 110 men left, with 50 rounds per gun and five rounds per tank. Fight to the end! To surrender to the SS is senseless—you know it well. Gentlemen, good luck! Tonight we will die for Poland and civilization. We will fight to the last platoon, to the last tank, to the last man!"

At 7 AM on the 21st it all began again with an attack by German infantry and tanks on a vulnerable area in the north, close to Boisjos, where the local manor house served as an aid station. A number of casualties were sustained among those in no position to fight back, including the padre, who was killed in the attack.

The panzers were eliminated but the shelling continued. During the morning a number of C-47 Dakotas attempted to drop ammunition supplies for Polish troops, but most missed their mark and the crates fell among the Canadians.

Then, at 11 AM, soldiers of 12th SS Panzer division made an assault up the steep slope near the church at Coudehard, only to be cut down by the guns of the anti-aircraft unit. Finally, an hour later, the Canadian 4th Armoured Brigade appeared just below Boisjos in the north and found German troops barring the way.

Polish riflemen took charge of the situation once again by charging with fixed bayonets, allowing the Canadian tanks to finally break through and relieve the Polish 1st Armoured Division after their three days of hell.

The statistics speak for themselves. By August 23, over 5,000 prisoners were taken, and, during the period August 18-21, the division had captured or destroyed 55 tanks and armored vehicles, 14 armored cars, 44 guns, 38 armored tracked vehicles for troop transport, 207 motor vehicles, and 152 horse-drawn vehicles. Polish casualties were posted as 325 killed, 1,002 wounded, and 114 missing.

The visible evidence left no doubt as to the scale of the carnage. In Eisenhower's words: "The battlefield at Falaise was unquestionably one of the greatest killing fields

of any of the war areas. Forty-eight hours after the closing of the gap I was conducted through the pocket on foot to witness scenes that could only be described by Dante. It was literally possible to walk for hundreds of yards at a time, stepping on nothing but dead and decaying flesh."

Maczek's material losses would soon be made good and, although the casualties of an army in exile are by definition difficult to replace, the Polish 1st Armoured Division continued to distinguish itself till the end of the war. It could be said that the action of the Poles at Mont Ormel had opened up the route to Paris just as their comrades who took the hill at Monte Cassino three months earlier opened up the route to Rome.

The events involving the closing of the Falaise Pocket have attracted their fair share of controversies, principally those that focus on why it was not closed sooner and the allocation of responsibilities for allowing a significant number of Germans to escape.

The familiar accusations arise about leaders' egos, personality clashes, and the pursuit of national rather than Allied priorities, often forgetting that a highly mechanized and experienced enemy fighting for survival and surrounded on all sides is likely to be harder to stop than an army in a standard battlefield engagement.

Then there are the differences of opinion on how many actually escaped, usually agreed to be somewhere between 20,000 and 50,000, although one estimate puts the figure nearer 100,000. In contrast, the reader would find great difficulty in finding any variation of opinion regarding the way that the Polish 1st Armoured Division conducted itself.

Following the division's success on The Mace and its contribution to the virtual destruction of the German Seventh Army and a large proportion of the 5th Panzers, it pursued German forces northwards following the coastline and liberated several large towns, including St. Omer, before continuing into Belgium and driving the Germans out of Ypres, Ghent, and other towns and cities.

On October 29, during Operation Pheasant, Maczek performed an outflanking maneuver to liberate the town of Breda without any civilian casualties. Subsequently a petition signed by 40,000 of the civilians gave him honorary citizenship of the town.

National Archives

ABOVE: Polish soldiers inspect destroyed German vehicles near Mont Ormel after the battle. Often working with Canadian forces, the Poles proved to be some of the toughest fighters of the war. OPPOSITE: Although perfectly serene today, this view from Point 262 atop Mont Ormel toward St. Lambert and Moissy was a bloody battlefield in August 1944. The Germans who had escaped encirclement at Falaise were hit with heavy artillery barrages directed by the Poles.

Next, Maczek's division crossed into The Netherlands and eventually entered Germany in April 1945. On May 6, they seized the Kriegsmarine naval base in Wilhelmshaven, where Maczek received the surrender of the base, the East Frisian fleet, and 10 infantry divisions.

Immediately after Germany capitulated, Maczek was given charge of Polish I Corps and responsibility for all Polish forces in Britain; the Corps was disbanded in 1947.

Sadly, when the war in Europe came to a close and millions of civilians from several nations were celebrating the end of Nazi occupation, the Poles found themselves under the boot of another power. Many of those who had escaped to fight on the Allied side chose a life in exile rather than a return to the homeland they had risked their lives for and that had been turned into a Soviet satellite state. Not surprisingly, in 1989 it was Poland that eventually led the way out of Soviet control, displaying all the tenacity that had been its trademark 50 years earlier.

But, to add insult to injury, and despite all that they had done for Britain, the Poles were not invited to the huge 1946 London Victory Parade—a controversial move which was seen at the time as an appeasement of the Soviets.

Maczek chose to remain in the U.K. and made his home in Edinburgh, Scotland, where he worked as a waiter and bartender in a pub, a nearly forgotten figure. Since he had not fought in the British army, he was not entitled to a military pension. But in 1985, Maczek was invited to return to the city of Breda for the anniversary of its liberation and given a hero's welcome.

He passed away in 1994 at the satisfying age of 102 and was buried in the Polish military cemetery in Breda alongside his men who had fallen in the fight to free the city. He had lived long enough to witness the raising of the Iron Curtain and the true liberation of his homeland, almost 45 years after the end of the war. □

PARTNERS FOR VICTORY

The XIX Tactical Air Command supported Patton's Third Army during its campaign in Western Europe.

BY SAM McGOWAN

IN the summer of 1944, the Third United States Army under Lt. Gen. George S. Patton made a spectacular dash across France, a daring advance that ranks high on the list of great military endeavors. To a large extent, the gains made by Third Army were possible only because of the cooperation between the ground units and air units of the XIX Tactical Air Command (TAC).

More so perhaps than anyone else, Patton knew how important the young fighter-bomber pilots and their Republic P-47 Thunderbolts and North American P-51 Mustangs were to the success of the operations he planned for his army. Few, except perhaps the young men in the tanks and those fighting alongside them on the ground, realized just how detrimental bad weather that kept the fighter bombers on the ground could be. But the Germans knew and they planned their movements to avoid the deadly "Jabos," as they called the Allied fighter bombers.

Third Army had learned how air and fast-moving armor could complement each other and allow a particularly audacious army to quickly overwhelm and defeat superior forces. During the Louisiana Maneuvers of 1941, Third Army demonstrated just how effective the combination could be as armored forces supported by air moved so fast and occupied so much territory that umpires were called to question the legitimacy of the tactics.

North American P-51D Mustangs roar over the shattered remains of a retreating German armored division caught on the road to Bad Durkheim, Germany. While braving intense ground fire, they developed the close coordination with advancing ground units that hastened the war's inevitable outcome. Painting by Randy Green.

All photos: National Archives

Third Army's success enhanced the reputation of its commander, a German immigrant named Walter Krueger. Krueger's "sledgehammer" in the campaign that drove his Second Army adversaries all the way to Arkansas was the 2nd Armored Division, which would later earn fame as the "Hell on Wheels" division. The division's success in the maneuvers was largely due to the leadership of its commander, a man whose basic philosophy was to always be audacious, Maj. Gen. George Smith Patton. Three years later Patton became Third Army's commander when it arrived in England. He brought with him his tremendous respect for air support and plans to use it to enhance the power of his new army.

Marshall and other senior Army officers were well aware that, in spite of his faults, the flamboyant and often outspoken officer was the most effective ground commander in Europe, and probably in the entire U.S. Army. Once Allied troops had secured a beachhead in Normandy and managed to make their way off of the beaches, there would be a need for a hard-driving army led by a particularly dynamic commander who knew how to exploit the military advantage and defeat the enemy.

Third Army had remained in the United States during the early years of the war as many of its commanders and key staff officers went overseas with other units. Walter Krueger went to the Pacific, by personal request of General Douglas MacArthur. Krueger's replacement proved far less effective, perhaps due to his policy of delegating too much authority to his chief of staff, leading Marshall to decide that he was not the man to lead Third Army in combat. When Third Army arrived in England, the troops were unexpectedly greeted by Patton, their new commander. Patton immediately initiated a shakeup in the command structure and began emphasizing his thoughts on tactics, including his belief in the importance of air support. The air unit responsible for support of Third Army was to be the XIX Tactical Air Command.

The XIX Tactical Air Command was one of two special commands that were planned for the Ninth Air Force, an air unit that was organizing in England in early 1944 to provide support to the ground forces during and after the Normandy landings. In addition to the typical fighter, bomber, and troop carrier commands, Ninth Air Force was to include two tactical commands, the IX and XIX, each of which was to be dedicated to an army. The IX TAC was assigned to support First Army, while XIX TAC was dedicated to the support of Third Army. Both commands were equipped with several combat groups flying single-engine fighter bombers and reconnaissance aircraft. The mission of the fighter bombers was to maintain air superiority over their respective ground force and to provide close air support for the armored and infantry divisions.

The close air support mission was not new in 1944, but the Ninth Air Force and the Royal Air Force II Tactical Air Force would refine it to a high state of the art. Luftwaffe dive-bombers and light bombers had played a major role in the German blitzkrieg strategy in the early years of the war, and Allied commanders had taken note of their employment.

U.S. Army pilots became proficient in ground attack in New Guinea in the summer of 1942 and Army and Marine fighter pilots adopted the tactic in the struggle for Guadalcanal. The British Western Desert Air Force made ground cooperation a major RAF mis-

sion in North Africa, then taught the tactics to the American fighter pilots who joined them. Patton himself had become familiar with the possibilities afforded by air power in support of ground units in North Africa and Sicily. Perhaps no other commander was better acquainted and more appreciative of air power than Patton.

Planning for the Normandy landings called for the creation of two tactical air forces to support the invasion and to provide air support for the ground forces once they were ashore. The RAF established the II Tactical Air Force from its Ground Cooperation Command and the U.S. Army Air Forces established the Ninth Air Force in England as a tactical unit. The Ninth had formerly served in North Africa primarily as a heavy bomber force, operating long-range Consolidated B-24 Liberators on missions against targets in North Africa and the Mediterranean. Under the Overlord plan, the II Tactical Air Force would provide support for Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery's Twenty-First Army Group, while the U.S. Ninth Air Force would be responsible for supporting Lt. Gen.l Omar Bradley's First Army Group.

Overlord called for First Army to hit the beaches at Normandy along with the British II Army, with both armies under Montgomery's overall command. Third Army would initially remain in England, then would begin moving to Normandy between D+15 and D+30. Third Army, code-named Lucky, began moving to the Normandy beaches on D+29, July 6, 1944. Patton set up his command post near the Norman town of Nehou, about 15 miles south of Cherbourg and just inland from Utah Beach. Brig. Gen. Otto P. "Opie" Weyland, commander of XIX TAC, set up his command post adjacent to the Lucky command post. The Third Army staff also included its own air intelligence and planning sections.

ABOVE: Pilots of the Ninth Air Force fighter group relax outside of the officer's club at a captured airfield in France. OPPOSITE : U.S. forces move down a French road littered with German vehicles. The Third Army would advance some 97 miles in the first 10 days of the breakout from St. Lo.

Lucky's initial mission was to break out of the Normandy beachhead and capture Brittany, the French region south of Normandy, and to open its seaports to Allied shipping. Once Brittany had been liberated, Third Army was to either drive east toward Metz and the Saar or make a sweep south of the Loire River. Third Army was set to become operational on August 1, as was XIX TAC. Even though Third Army headquarters was in Normandy, all of its assigned units were not. Some units were being held in England awaiting equipment while others were making the move to France. The XIX TAC's combat groups were also still in England, although IX TAC had moved most of its fighter bombers to Normandy.

Initially, XIX TAC included three fighter bomber groups, two equipped with Republic P-47 Thunderbolts and one with North American P-51 Mustangs, but the number of assigned groups varied due to the dictates of the military situation. Immediately after the Third Army breakout from Avranches, the number of groups assigned to the XIX TAC increased to nine, mostly with P-47s. Although the P-51 is often touted as the best Allied fighter of World War II, in reality the P-47 was the best-suited for the fighter bomber role. The P-51 was equipped with an in-line liquid-cooled engine that could be put out of action by a single round, but the P-47s air-cooled radial engine could absorb a lot of punishment and keep running long enough to bring the pilot back home.

The Thunderbolt was also the better armed of the two, featuring four .50-caliber machine guns in each wing compared to the Mustang's three. Eight streams of .50-caliber bullets threw a lot more weight than six, which made the P-47 the more effective strafer. Consequently, P-51s were often used to provide an air umbrella over the battlefield to keep German fighters at bay as the P-47s went in low to attack German armored columns with rockets and bombs.

In mid-July, Patton's intelligence staff reported that German opposition in Brittany was far less than expected, while the armored strength opposing the invading forces was almost 900 less than previously estimated. Furthermore, most of the German armor was concentrated in the Bocage-Caen sector opposing Montgomery's Twenty-First Army Group. Patton proposed to Bradley that he be allowed to mount an attack with two armored divisions and two of infantry even while his army was still assembling in France. Bradley began working on a plan of his own to initiate a breakout from the beachhead.

On July 22, Patton was called to confer with Bradley at the headquarters of the newly formed Twelfth Army Group, which had replaced the former First Army Group as part of a deception plan to keep the German 15th Army in the Pas de Calais. Bradley gave Patton the outline of his plan to break out from the beaches. British and Canadian forces under Montgomery would attack to the east and south around Caen, while First Army would launch Cobra, an attack to the south around St. Lo.

The VIII Corps, which was actually part of Patton's command, was to drive south down the coast to open a window for Third Army to launch an attack into Brittany. In advance of the attack, a massive aerial and artillery bombardment would pound German positions around St. Lo. Some 3,000 heavy bombers, medium bombers, and fighter bombers were involved in the attack, which was successful in that it paved the way for First Army's breakout. Unfortunately, the bomb line was compromised by "creep back" as the impact points for the falling bombs moved northward into the American lines. Hundreds of GIs were killed by bombs dropped

by friendly planes, including Lt. Gen. Leslie McNair, commander of the U.S. Army Combat Command and the senior U.S. Army officer in France.

On July 28, Bradley made Patton personally operational by declaring that he was now deputy commander of Twelfth Army Group. Patton was instructed to take command of VIII Group's sector and to set his breakthrough plan into action. The position allowed Patton to put his plan in motion so that Third Army would be on the move the instant it received operational status.

On July 31, the day before Third Army was to become operational, Patton met with his staff and key commanders just before their departure for a new command post close to the lines. At the conclusion of the daily briefing, the Third Army commander admonished his officers regarding two of his dearest principles: that the way to reduce casualties was to constantly push the enemy and that worrying about protecting flanks was a waste of time. This was a refrain Patton had maintained with his staff since taking command of Third Army. He frequently reinforced his lecturing on the futility of worrying about protection of flanks by pointing out that the XIX TAC would protect them. It was a belief he took to heart.

That evening VIII Corps broke through at Avranches. When the commanding general notified Patton that his men were on the banks of the Selune River, Patton ordered him to establish a bridgehead immediately. He then launched a two-pronged Third Army attack into Brittany—one aimed at the provincial capital of Rennes and the other at the coastal city of Brest. He set up Task Force A to mop up along the north coast of the peninsula.

The XIX TAC role in the Third Army breakout was limited during the first hours because of bad weather in England that kept the fighter bombers on the ground until noon. Although the IX TAC's fighter bomber groups had made the move to France, no airfields had yet become available for Weyland's command. Once the fog lifted and the fighter bombers were able to take to the air and arrive over the battlefield, they were in sunny skies and able to make a difference by bombing and strafing German positions and columns. The fighter bombers also provided air cover and often tangled with German planes in the air.

Third Army itself was not immune to air attack. During the first few days of operations, the Luftwaffe was very active in the Third Army area. One German attack was aimed at a bridge near Avranches and a nearby dam, but antiaircraft fire managed to prevent a successful attack. Many of the attacks came at night, which prompted the assignment of a squadron of Northrup P-61 Black Widow night fighters to XIX TAC for night patrols. The P-61s were also adapted to use their radar for the night interdic-

ABOVE: A group of fighter pilots are briefed on German infantry positions before embarking on a mission in France. RIGHT: Brig. Gen. Otto P. Weyland commanded XIX TAC. OPPOSITE: At least 16 German vehicles and their occupants lie charred and destroyed near a farmhouse in Normandy, the victims of XIX TAC.

tion role. Third Army captured most of Brittany within three days, and Patton turned his eyes toward the rest of France. The XIX TAC P-47s and P-51s struck at pockets of German resistance.

Patton benefited from a bit of timely intelligence provided by a XIX TAC pilot, who was shot down near Angers, a village on the Loire River some 55 miles south of Laval, which at the time marked the limit of the Third Army advance. He was picked up by French guerrillas and transported over back roads to Third Army lines. During his debriefing, the pilot reported seeing few Germans, and those were signal troops pulling down communication lines, then moving to the east. This was solid intelligence that the Germans were retreating. He also reported an intact bridge over the Loire River just south of Angers.

Patton immediately dispatched a 5th Infantry combat team to capture Angers and secure the bridge. The team surprised the German garrison at Angers and captured them before they could organize a defense, but the bridge had been mined and was blown before it could be seized. Nevertheless, the seizure of Angers was a great opportunity. Patton immediately ordered XX Corps, which had been standing by awaiting commitment, to move to Angers, then advance eastward along the north bank of the Loire to secure Third Army's south flank. This move set the stage for the operation that doomed German hopes in Normandy.

On August 7, the Germans counterattacked. Luftwaffe bombers hit Patton's command post on the night of the 6th, but failed to do significant damage. A more serious attack struck an ammunition dump a few miles away; the fires burned for two days. The counterattack was aimed at the 2nd Armored Division at Mortain, on the demarcation line between the First and Third Armies. It was a powerful attack, involving 23 divisions, five panzer and 17 panzergrenadier. Some of the German divisions had been shifted south from in front of the British and Canadians, who had only managed to advance a few miles due to strong opposition.

The German attack ran smack into the fighter bombers of the IX and XIX Tactical Air Commands. The dreaded "Jabos" ranged far and wide over the battlefield, literally attacking anything that moved—motorized vehicles, tanks, locomotives, horse-drawn carts, individual soldiers on bicycles and on foot. By the time the Germans began their withdrawal, all but two of the bridges over the Seine north of Paris had been knocked down and rail and road traffic was practically at a standstill.

On August 8, the XIX TAC launched 717 sorties. The fighter bomber pilots put in claims for three bridges, 29 locomotives, 137 freight cars, 505 motor vehicles, 93 horse-drawn vehicles, and 29 tanks. The P-47s and P-51s also cut 11 railroads and flew three strafing raids on German airfields around Paris. Hundreds of sorties were flown in support of attacks by Third Army armored columns. The carnage on August 9 was even greater as the XIX TAC flew 780 sorties that were as destructive as those the day before. This time the fighter pilots included 16 claims for aircraft destroyed in addition to scores of German vehicles and locomotives. The XIX TAC losses amounted to 13 pilots, four on the first day and nine on the second.

Just how effective the fighter bomber attacks were is evidenced by the reports in the German war diaries. One panzer commander told how his division advanced more than 10 miles with only three losses, then all of a sudden the Jabos dropped out of the sky firing deadly rockets and strafing, spreading terror throughout the ranks. The panzers were helpless under the onslaught. Tanks and trucks were quickly turned into smoldering wrecks, and the previously rapid advance turned into debacle as the roads became blocked by burning vehicles.

The German Seventh Army diary

recorded how the counterattack came to a standstill under the deadly attacks. The Germans were further frustrated by the absence of the Luftwaffe, which was prevented from providing air support to the panzers by the umbrella of XIX TAC P-51s that covered the battlefield. By August 11, the German attack had been broken and the outcome of the war in Europe had all but been decided.

The capture of Angers put Third Army into position to attack northward at the back of the German 7th Army and completely envelope the entire German force in Normandy. On August 11, elements of Third Army captured Alençon, cutting the highway leading north to Argentan. With Alençon in Allied hands, the Germans realized they were in danger of being completely cut off and began milling around. A XIX TAC P-47 squadron spotted 800 to 1,000 motor vehicles driving aimlessly around just west of Argentan and went in for the attack with bombs and guns, firing until exhausting all of their ammunition. The XIX TAC pilots claimed an estimated 400 to 500 vehicles burned out or blown up during the action. After dropping all of his bombs and exhausting all of his ammunition, one fighter pilot dropped down low and jettisoned his gasoline-filled belly tank on a line of 12 trucks. He saw them go up in flames in the exploding gasoline.

Elements of Third Army had advanced to within a few miles of the town of Falaise, which lay some 18 miles northwest of Argentan. The Germans had been routed, and XV Corps had the tanks and troops to seal off their escape route. At this point military politics reared its ugly head. SHAEF—meaning Eisenhower—ordered Patton to halt his forces at Argentan. Field Marshal Montgomery's British and Canadian forces would advance and take Falaise. Patton was told to set down the American 90th Division and 2nd French Armored Division in the vicinity of Argentan and to send the bulk of XV Corps some 50 miles eastward toward Paris to capture the town of Dreux and the nearby airfield.

Eisenhower's explanation for the halt was that the British had sewn the area around Falaise with time bombs. This, however, was a ruse. The real reason for the halt was that Montgomery had insisted on capturing Falaise himself and put pressure on Ike to halt Patton's forces at Argentan. Montgomery took his time moving forward, and it was not until August 19 that the Falaise Gap was finally closed. Meanwhile, what was left of the German 7th Army escaped.

The Germans suffered horribly during their retreat through the Falaise Gap, but they managed to move the bulk of their panzer divisions out of harm's way intact. They took advantage of darkness to avoid the Jabos and moved the panzers through the gap, while replacing them with lesser troops brought in from the east. Most of the German losses fell to the fighter bombers, as XIX TAC squadrons shot up everything that moved by day. They were joined by the IX TAC, as well as British Typhoons and Spitfires from II Tactical Air Force.

So many fighter bombers were thrown into the fray that they had to queue up and wait their turn. One flight of P-47s from the 405th Fighter Bomber Group captured some 400 German POWs. They attacked the column so relentlessly that the survivors began waving their handkerchiefs in surrender. The fighter pilots herded the Germans toward some nearby tanks, whose crews took possession of the POWs.

One of the most amazing encounters saw the loss of two German fighters to a flight of P-47s that had already run out of ammunition.

Although Third Army was halted at Argentan, its direction of attack merely changed. Patton's line of advance was already some 60 miles west of the Falaise Pocket, stretching along a 60-mile line running south from Dreux to Orleans. Paris lay barely 30 miles to the east. The close proximity of Third Army forces to Paris put XIX TAC fighter bombers into frequent contact with the Luftwaffe, which maintained several airfields in the vicinity of the French capital. Fighter bomber missions by the tactical commands were officially classified as armed reconnaissance or armored column cover, but they frequently were aimed at German airfields. During a two-week period commencing in early August, XIX TAC fighter bombers engaged in aerial combat every single day but one, in spite of bad weather on five of the affected days. The fighter bomber pilots were just as aggressive—perhaps more so—as their peers flying P-51s in the escort squadrons of the VIII Fighter Command.

On one occasion, when a squadron of P-47s from the 405th Fighter Bomber Group encountered a formation of Germans, they tore into them using the rockets mounted on pylons beneath their wings for ground attack. The Germans were caught by surprise by the unorthodox tactic and broke up their formation. When four 405th Group P-47s were jumped by 16 Germans, all four P-47s were shot down, but they accounted for three of the enemy. An eight-plane flight of P-51s from the 354th Group attacked a huge formation of 70 Focke Wulf FW-190 fighter bombers on their way to attack Third Army columns. The P-51s only accounted for two German fighters, but they broke up the formation and kept them from carrying out their mission.

Another flight of P-51s engaged in a similar encounter when they spotted a flight of 20 Germans. The P-51s climbed above the German formation, but they were coming down to attack, some 60 German fighters bounced them. Over the next 15 minutes, the battle ranged from 11,000 feet down to the deck. Eleven Germans went down while the XIX TAC lost two.

One of the most amazing encounters saw the loss of two German fighters to a flight of P-47s that had already run out of ammunition! The unarmed P-47s went down on the deck and began maneuvering, causing two Germans to fly into the ground. On August 20, eight P-47s from the 362nd Fighter Bomber Group took on four times their number and came out of the scrap with a score of 6-2, in the Americans' favor. Four of the six kills were credited to one U.S. pilot.

While the glamour of air-to-air combat captures the imagination, the destruction of enemy aircraft on the ground is also effective. This was a lesson American airmen learned in the Southwest Pacific in mid-1942, and it was taken to heart by the Ninth Air Force fighter bomber groups. Despite the oft-repeated assertion that the air war had been won before D-day, the Luftwaffe was still a major threat to the ground forces in the summer of 1944, and the fighter bomber pilots fought to keep the Germans off of the infantry's back.

As Third Army dashed across France, XIX TAC fighter bombers endeavored to keep their way clear of the threat of air attack. Most of the German fighter bombers were based on airfields around Paris, and these airfields became targets for XIX TAC rocket and strafing attacks. On August 25, the two tactical air commands, IX and XIX, teamed up for a coordinated attack on German airfields at Beauvais and Reims.

Fighter bombers from the two TAC were credited with the destruction of 127 German aircraft, 77 in the air and 50 on the ground, along with 11 probables and 33 damaged. Some of the day's battles saw the Germans with superior odds, but the more experienced and aggressive American pilots usually gained the upper hand. One dogfight saw 12 P-51s battling some 45 FW-190s and Me-109s; 13 Germans went down while one U.S. fighter bomber was lost. Total losses for the IX and XIX TAC on August 25 were 27 fighter bombers and 19 pilots. The Allied successes led the Luftwaffe to withdraw from France entirely.

The destruction of the Luftwaffe in France coincided with a new and frustrating threat to Third Army. Patton's armored columns had moved so far and so rapidly that they had outrun their lines of supply. Fortunately, captured German airfields afforded landing strips for Allied transports loaded with gasoline for the ground forces. Initial supply flights were made by C-47s from IX Troop Carrier Command (TCC), but in early August General Carl Spaatz took the TCC away from Ninth Air Force and put it directly under his own headquarters.

Spaatz justified the decision by pointing to the August 1 creation of the First Allied Airborne Army and the need for the Troop

A P-47 Thunderbolt roars over a column of American tanks on a French road in a show of inter-service support during the Patton's drive across France in the summer of 1944.

Carrier Command transports to be available to support any airborne operation that might suddenly arise. To compensate for the withdrawal of the some 1,400 TCC C-47s from support of the rapidly advancing ground forces, Spaatz set up the 302nd Air Transport Wing under the control of the Air Services Command of the U.S. Strategic Air Forces, Europe. Still, without the TCC transports, there was not enough air transportation to go around and the assignment of the transports became a political issue at SHAEF.

One of the steps initially taken to keep Third Army moving was the temporary transfer of a number of VIII Bomber Command B-24 Liberators to IX Troop Carrier Command for "trucking" duty flying gasoline to France. The four-engine Liberators operated into recently captured German airfields as close to Third Army's forward positions as possible. When the TCC C-47s were withdrawn from support of the ground forces, a contingent of 100 Air Transport Command C-47s was transferred from the United States to Europe for assignment to the 302nd Air Transport Wing. Still, there was not enough airlift to keep the motorized columns moving, and Spaatz's headquarters shifted the transports around.

After the liberation of Paris, transports that had been supporting Third Army were shifted to flying supplies into Paris, leaving Patton's armored forces literally out of fuel. Third Army would remain in a defensive position for more than six weeks.

Third Army's rapid advance led the American chiefs in Washington to conclude that the war in Europe could be over by November, but the failure of Field Marshal Montgomery's ambitious Operation Market Garden in Holland and Eisenhower's subsequent decision to halt the Allied advance west of the Rhine prolonged the war, nearly leading to disaster. During the six-week halt, Patton was given authority to carry out limited offensive operations to exploit the Third Army bridgehead across the Moselle River. The XIX TAC fighter bombers were particularly busy along the Third Army front

ABOVE: A gun-camera view of a German convoy being attacked in France. Thousands of German vehicles, planes, and railroad rolling stock were destroyed by XIX TAC pilots. OPPOSITE: An American P-47 fighter in hot pursuit of an enemy aircraft over France. XIX TAC supported Patton's Third Army until the end of the war.

since Patton's role at the time was to draw as many enemy forces as possible to his front.

In the month of October, the XIX TAC flew 4,790 sorties in support of Third Army units, attacking German troop concentrations, gun positions, armor, command posts, and airfields. On October 20, P-47s from the 362nd Fighter Group breached the Etang-de-Lindre dam at Dieuze with 1,000-pound bombs in preparation for an upcoming Third Army advance.

Interdiction of German lines of communication was a major mission of the Ninth Air Force fighter bombers. While the Allied armies remained in check at the Rhine, the XIX TAC was assigned to keep watch on eight railroad lines leading to Coblenz, which lay in Third Army's front. Prior to October, railroad bridges were left intact, but as it became apparent that the Allied advance was coming to a halt, the restriction was lifted. Rail-cutting missions consisted of attempting to interrupt rail traffic by knocking rails out of the track. Such attacks were temporary interruptions, but they halted rail traffic until the damage was repaired. The XIX TAC missions attacked 33 bridges during the month of October, and pilots put in claims for 17 destroyed.

In early November, Patton's Third Army began a new offensive by striking against the German flanks around Metz. In preparation for the assault, some 1,000 fighter bomber sorties struck supply dumps and ordnance. Other strikes were aimed at airfields and railroad bridges. November signaled the approach of late fall and winter weather over Western Europe, and as Third Army continued its advance the ground troops were often deprived of fighter bomber support. For 12 days between November 10 and December 15 air operations were totally restricted.

When weather permitted, XIX TAC fighter bombers wreaked havoc among the Germans. During three days in mid-November, more than 1,000 sorties were flown, all against enemy transportation. Claims for the period amounted to 842 motor transport vehicles, 60 armored vehicles, 162 locomotives, 1,096 railroad cars, and 113 guns. Attacks against German positions at Merzig on November 19 led to a commendation from General Patton. In spite of frequent bad weather, the XIX TAC flew 5,195 fighter bomber sorties between November 1 and December 15, while their night fighters

accounted for 99 sorties and reconnaissance aircraft went out 563 times.

On December 16, German troops launched their massive attack, starting the Battle of the Bulge, along the lightly defended First Army sector in the Ardennes and commenced an offensive that shook the Allied command to its roots. Although the troops in the sector and the high Allied commanders were taken by surprise, there had been numerous indications in preceding weeks that the Germans were building up their forces in the west. Not the least of these intelligence warnings came from tactical reconnaissance aircraft, including the 10th Tactical Reconnaissance Group from the XIX TAC. Additional information came from fighter bomber pilots operating in front of the Allied lines. But Eisenhower and his headquarters did not believe that Germany had the ability to mount a counteroffensive in the west.

The German commanders took advantage of worsening weather conditions to launch their offensive, knowing that the Allied Jabos would be unable to operate under the low ceilings in the rain, snow, and fog that characterize European winter storms. When the attacks came, Patton's Third Army was making preparations to move against the Siegfried Line. The German offensive was well to the north of Patton's area, and he and the air commanders—Spaatz, Ninth Air Force commander Hoyt Vandenberg, and Weyland—hoped that his attack would be allowed to continue.

A worsening tactical situation in the Ardennes and a lack of First Army reserves led Eisenhower to order Patton to break off his attack and send forces northward more than 100 miles to relieve the embattled 101st Airborne Division at the town of Bastogne. To reinforce Weyland's XIX TAC, three fighter bomber groups were transferred from IX TAC; a few days later each of the tactical air commands received a P-51-equipped fighter group from the Eighth Air Force.

For the first three days of the offensive, weather conditions were marginal and the fighter bombers were able to operate, especially those of the XIX TAC, since weather conditions to the south were better. They met with intense enemy air opposition as the Luftwaffe came out in strength. Encounters with German aircraft often forced the fighter bombers to jettison their bombs so they could engage in air-to-air combat. Beginning on December 19, a severe winter storm enveloped the region, grounding the fighter bombers.

One XIX TAC mission on December 23 was providing escort for IX Troop Carrier Command C-47s dropping supplies to the men of the 101st Airborne at Bastogne. Other missions escorted medium bombers while two groups supported Patton's advancing troops. Ninth Air Force fighter bombers encountered heavy enemy air opposition, claiming no less than 91 German aircraft destroyed against a loss of 19 of their own. Ground claims were for some 230 motorized and armored vehicles, along with enemy troop concentrations and gun positions.

Favorable weather continued for several days, allowing the fighter bombers to continue their devastating attacks on the German forces, which were beginning to run out of fuel and had failed to capture the Allied fuel dumps they were depending on to maintain their advance. Over the five-day period from December 23-28, XIX TAC aircraft claimed 3,200 vehicles, 293 tanks and armored vehicles, 57 guns, 42 locomotives, 1,800 railroad cars, 11 bridges, five ammunition dumps, 234 buildings, 52 German planes destroyed or damaged and, 106 rail lines cut.

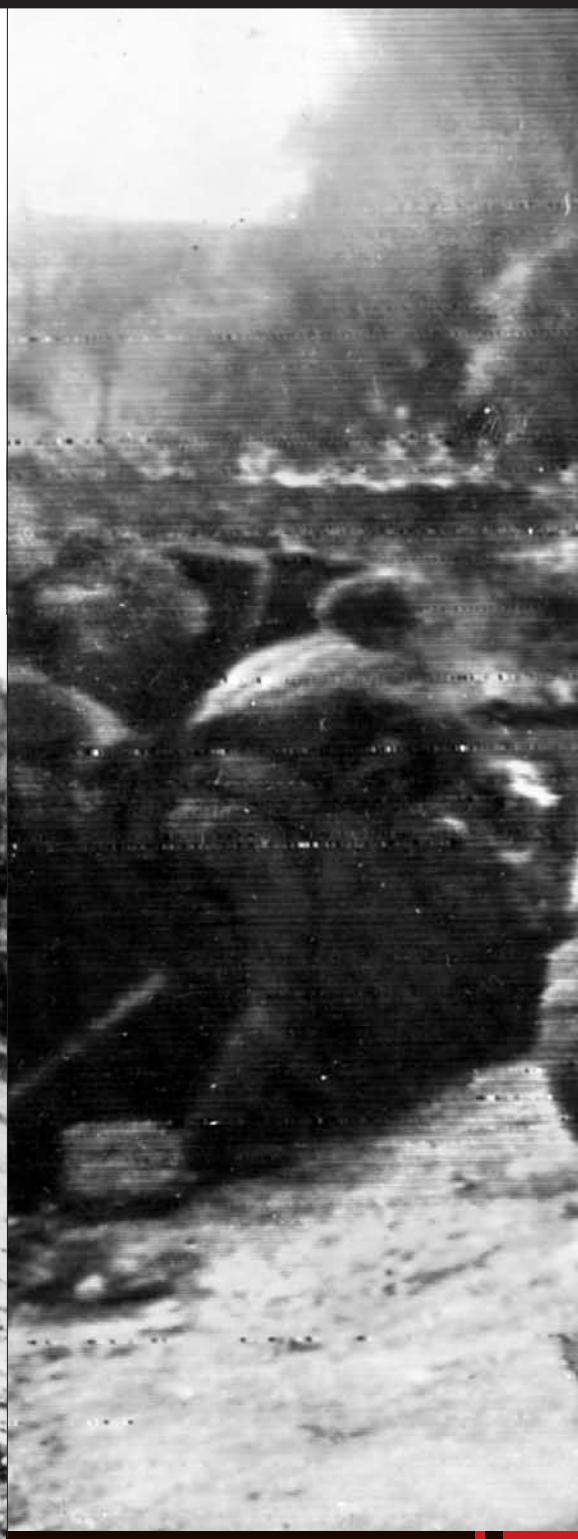
The New Year dawned with a devastating attack on the fighter bomber airfields in Holland and Belgium by Luftwaffe planes. The Germans took advantage of

Continued on page 98

By the end of 1944, the Soviet Red Army had surrounded the Hungarian capital of Budapest and established strong defensive positions running from Esztergom on the Danube to Lake Balaton. On the last day of the year, the provisional government set up by the Soviets in those parts of Hungary occupied by the Red Army threw in its lot with the Allies and declared war on Germany.

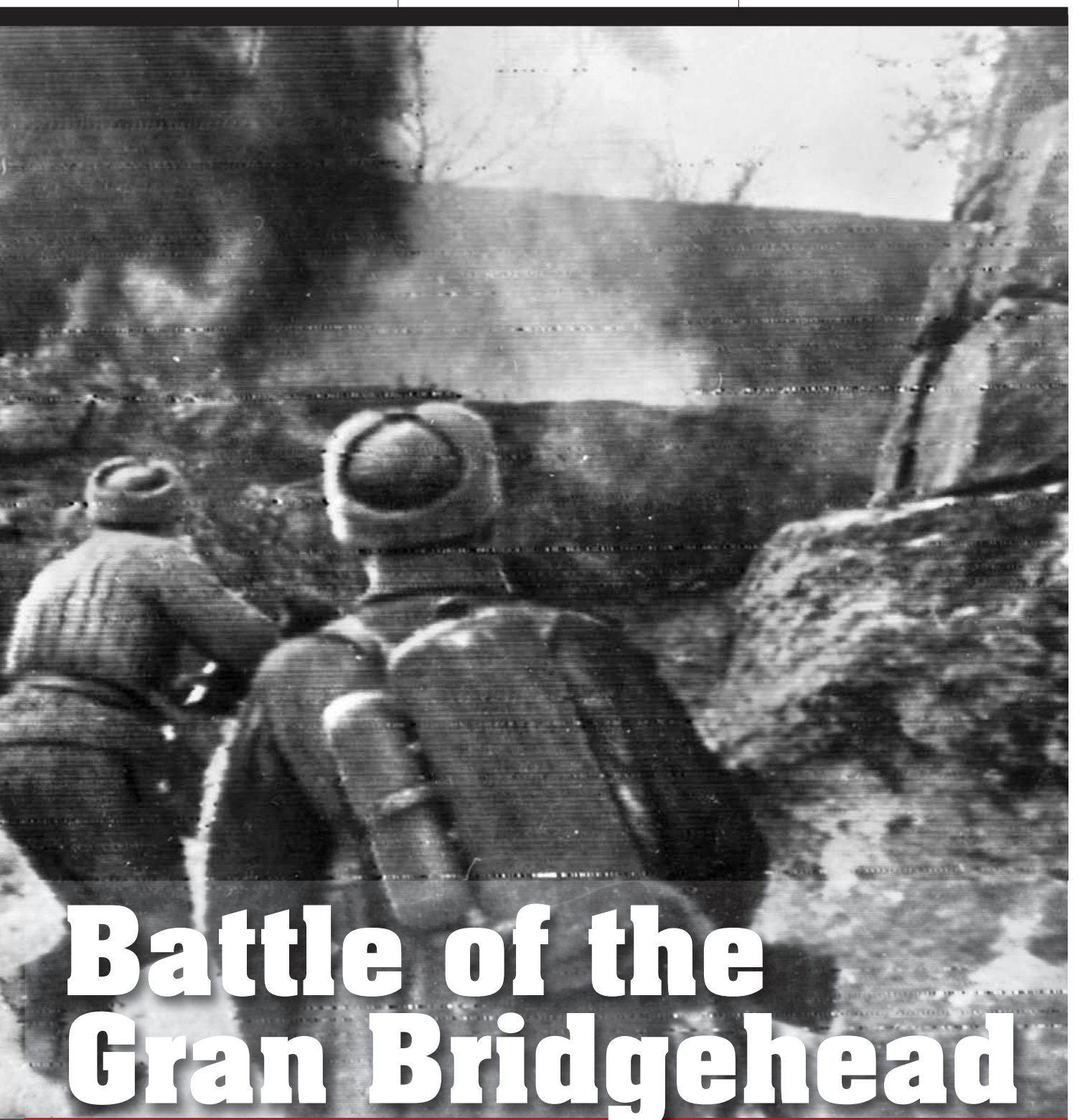
Hungary, the last of Hitler's partners in his European Axis, had deserted him—but not the Hungarian Army. In order to protect the country from the Bolsheviks, whom they feared and hated, what was left of the Hungarian Army continued to fight alongside the Germans.

On New Year's Day 1945, the only sizable German reserves on the Eastern Front launched an offensive, code-named Konrad, to relieve Budapest and secure the southern Hungarian oil reserves. By January 6, General Herbert Otto Gille's IV SS Panzer Corps had come within 25 kilometers of the Hungarian capital, but then, in the face of rapidly redeployed Soviet units, the attack stalled. On the same day, the Russians launched an attack across the Gran River, north of the Danube, with the equivalent of two tank divisions and four infantry divisions. Designed to disrupt the German offen-



ABOVE: Red Army troops advance toward Budapest, the capitol of Hungary, in an effort to halt the February 1945 German offensive known as South Wind, an operation designed to block the Soviet advance toward Vienna. LEFT: During the winter of 1945, heavy rains on the Eastern Front turned dirt roads into seas of thick mud. Here, SS soldiers struggle to free a motorcycle.

Both: National Archives



Battle of the Gran Bridgehead

On the Hungarian front in February 1945, elite SS units of the German armed forces spearheaded an operation that recaptured a vast amount of territory and inflicted heavy losses on the Soviet Red Army. BY MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL REYNOLDS

sive, the attack was successful and had advanced some 50 kilometers by the 8th.

German countermeasures succeeded in halting the attack, and by the 14th the Russians had lost half their gains and some 200 tanks; nevertheless, they still held a sizable bridgehead west of the Gran River.

In the meantime, Gille's IV SS Panzer Corps had renewed its attack on January 10, and, after taking the Soviets completely by surprise, had advanced to within 21 kilometers of Budapest by the 13th. Then, despite Gille's assurance that he was on the verge of a breakthrough, Headquarters Army Group South inexplicably called a halt.

SS Lieutenant Colonel Fritz Darges, commanding the 5th SS Panzer Division's Panzer Regiment said later, "The head of our assault unit could see the panorama of the city in their binoculars. We were disappointed and we could not believe the attack was stopped. Our morale was excellent and we knew we could free our comrades the next day."

Be that as it may, Hitler and the high command had other plans. On January 16, Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt, commander of German forces more than 1,000 kilometers away on the Western Front, received the following order: "CinC West is to withdraw the following formations from operations immediately and refit them: I SS Panzer Corps with 1st SS Panzer Division LAH [Liebstandarte Adolf Hitler] and 12th SS Panzer Division HJ [Hitler Youth]; II SS Panzer Corps with 2nd SS Panzer Division DR [Das Reich] and 9th SS Panzer Division. Last day of refitting is 30th January."

Also at this time Hitler sent his personal adjutant, SS Major Otto Günsche, to warn the Sixth Panzer Army Corps commander, SS General Sepp Dietrich, that within a month he would be required to move his army to the Eastern Front to launch a new offensive designed to secure the vital oil deposits in southern Hungary and perhaps even regain the oil of Rumania. Both Dietrich and General Heinz Guderian, the army group chief of staff, had wanted the Sixth Panzer Army deployed behind the Oder River to protect Berlin and northern Germany, but Hitler would have none of it. The only natural oil deposits in German-controlled territory were those around Nagykanizsa in southern Hungary, and, with Allied air attacks disrupting and often neutralizing the synthetic gasoline production sites for long periods, it was essential to protect them. Without this crude oil, the battle could not be continued. Dietrich and the trusted divisions of the Waffen SS were to be given responsibility for this new offensive, code-named Spring Awakening.

All: Author's Collection

General Hermann Priess commanded the 1st SS Panzer Division in the Ardennes and Hungary.

In view of the time needed to refit and move the Sixth Panzer Army to the Eastern Front and secure the ground west of the Danube for the new offensive, Hitler ordered a third attack in Hungary on January 18, using much- larger forces. This was designed primarily to cut off and destroy all Soviet troops north of a line drawn from Lake Balaton, through Székesfehérvar, to Budapest, and secondarily to liberate that city. The Pest garrison had in fact withdrawn across the Danube to the hills of Buda the night before.

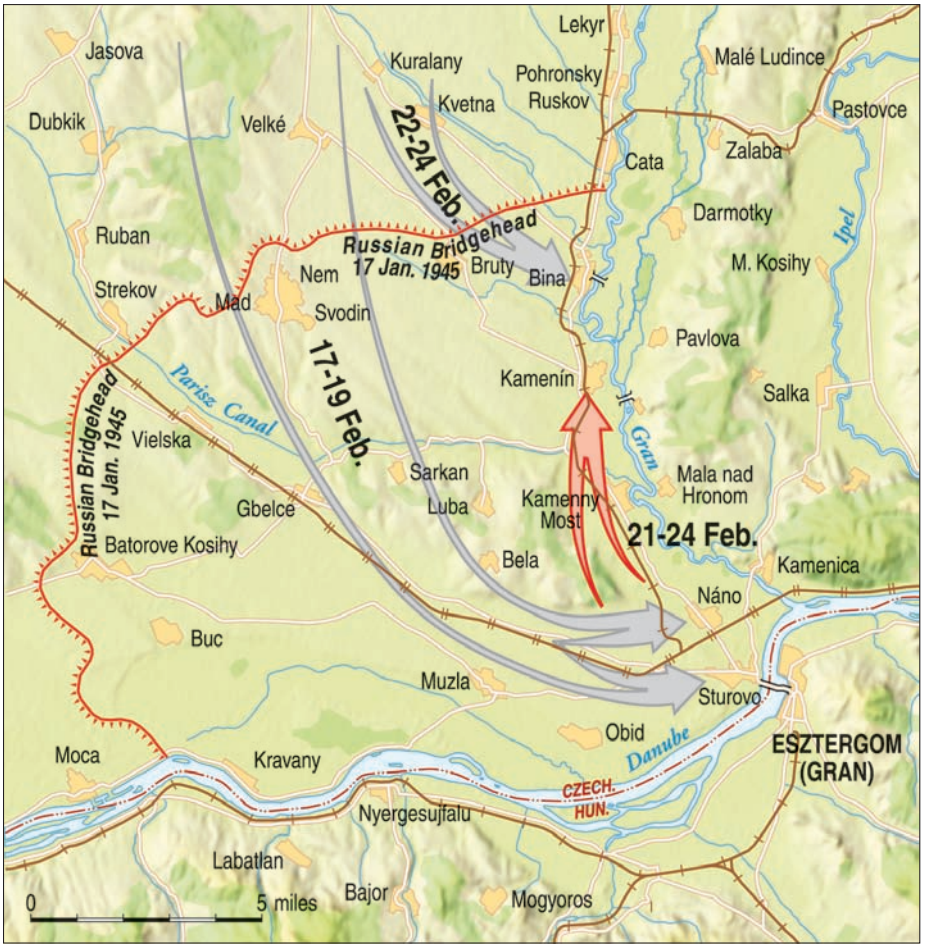
Since the Russians had depleted their defenses in this area to meet the previous German attacks in the north, the new offensive was initially very successful. Within three days a large section of the west bank of the Danube had been secured 35 kilometers south of Budapest, and the Germans then turned north and northwest, threatening to link up with other forces attacking in the north and cut off an entire Soviet Front.

By the 26th, however, with their forces in the south only 20 kilometers from Buda and in the north half that distance, the Germans were exhausted, and this was the moment when Marshal Rodion Y. Malinovsky went over to the attack. Although the Germans continued to hold Székesfehérvar and the ground between it and Lake Balaton, by February 3 they were more or less back to their original positions. Buda fell finally on Feb-

All: Author's Collection

ABOVE: Martin Gross (right), commander of the 12th SS Panzer Division Hitlerjugend, discusses tactics with 1st SS Panzer Regiment commander Joachim Peiper. RIGHT: Members of the 12th SS Panzer Division hitch a ride on a tank as they move through a village on the Eastern Front.

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



During the winter of 1945, SS units inflicted heavy losses on the Red Army and took back large amounts of territory near the vicinity of the Gran Bridgehead.

ruary 14. The siege had lasted 51 days and had cost the Axis over 70,000 men.

Meanwhile, Marshal Georgi Zhukov's and Marshal Ivan Konev's offensives in the north had advanced over 150 kilometers; Warsaw, Lodz, and Cracow had fallen, and a Soviet Army had entered East Prussia. The Red Army was now a mere 200 kilometers from Prague and, worst of all for the German people, it had crossed the Oder River and was only 70 kilometers from Berlin.

The Germans saw the Soviet bridgehead over the Gran River north of Esztergom as a potential assembly area for a major Red Army thrust toward Vienna, and as such it had to be eliminated before they could launch their own Operation Spring Awakening. Therefore, on February 13, Headquarters Army Group South ordered the commander of the German Eighth Army "to attack, concentrating all available infantry and armored forces, and accepting the consequent weakening of other front sectors, with the newly arrived I SS Panzer Corps…after a short artillery preparation, to thrust from the north, to destroy the enemy in the Gran bridgehead."

The operation was given the code-name South Wind.

Although the bridgehead had existed for over a month, the Germans had no detailed intelligence of Soviet strength or dispositions within it. The operation order issued on February 13 merely stated that aerial photography and ground observation indicated that the Soviets were in a defensive posture. It also noted that a mechanized division was positioned in the center of the bridgehead, a guards mechanized corps and a guards tank corps "with the attached Sixth Guards Tank Army are probably located in the refitting area east of the Gran." These units could be expected to reinforce the bridgehead if necessary.

The order added that there were known to be antitank blocking positions, supported by mortars to the west of Bruty, a continuous "fighting trench" running from Obid in the south through Muzla and Gbelce to just south of Bruty. The Parizs canal formed a considerable obstacle due to flooding, and although the roads and tracks were beginning to thaw out, they were not yet soft. Single bridges across the Gran existed at Bina and Kamenin, and there were two more near Nana.

In fact, the Soviets were much stronger than the Germans realized. In addition to the guards mechanized corps already mentioned, which provided a centrally located mobile reserve, there were two guards rifle corps in the bridgehead with a total of seven rifle divisions. Five of the rifle divisions were in perimeter defense, while the other two provided second echelon defense in depth. Even if these divisions were below strength, this would still mean that the Germans were up against well over 60,000 men with 100 to 230 tanks and self-propelled tank destroyers, over 100 antitank guns, some 200 heavy mortars, and over 200 guns and howitzers.

Containing the Soviet bridgehead before the opening of the German offensive were three German infantry divisions with one Hungarian infantry division and parts of another, supported by elements of a German panzer division.

The Germans were correct in their appreciation that the Soviet forces were in a defensive posture. Although a new offensive was being planned, this would not take place until mid-March, and in the meantime the troops west of the Gran were clearly vulnerable. The bridgehead was only 20 kilometers deep and 20 kilometers wide and, with a 30 to 40-meter-wide river behind them, it was clearly going to be difficult to reinforce the Soviet troops in the bridgehead or, in the worse case, withdraw them.

From the German point of view, the forthcoming battle was not without its

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ABOVE: Driving American halftracks and armed with U.S. American machine guns, Soviet troops roll toward the front, January 1945. RIGHT: Men of the Waffen SS pick their way through the underbrush of a Hungarian hillside during their winter 1945 offensive. OPPOSITE: The German tracked howitzer "Hummel" opens fire on attacking Soviet forces near Budapest.

problems. Mounting the main attack from the south across the Danube was obviously out of the question, and an attack from the west would run against the grain of the country. The Germans therefore chose to attack from the north. Even this had its difficulties. The Parizs Canal was a major obstacle due to the early thawing of the winter snows, and in the final stages of the advance the assault force would be compressed into a narrow corridor, less than 10 kilometers wide, by a ridge to the south of Luba and the Danube River.

Operation South Wind was to be led by Panzer Corps Feldherrnhalle. This corps consisted of three infantry divisions and an armored group of some 25 tanks. Its initial task was to seize the high ground, particularly Point 190, to the south of Svodin, but the villages of Svodin and Bruty were to be taken from the rear and any fighting there was not to be allowed to interfere with the general advance south. SS General Hermann Priess's I SS Panzer Corps was to follow closely behind the Feldherrnhalle and, after crossing the Parizs Canal, was to capture the ridge running east from Gbelce before pushing on toward the Danube at Sturovo. A reinforced regimental group from the Sixth Army south of the Danube, known as the Hupe Regimental Group, was to establish a bridgehead across the river near Obid in the early phases of the offensive and cooperate with Priess's men attacking from the north.

The Luftwaffe was tasked with supporting South Wind by attacking known antitank defenses south of Svodin and Bruty and in the Muzla-Luba sector, as well as delaying and destroying any Soviet reinforcements attempting to cross the Gran River.

From February 12-15, I SS Panzer Corps moved to a staging area around Nové-Zamky. Tracked vehicles moved by rail and those with wheels by road. A platoon commander in the 9th SS Panzer Pioneer Company recalled, "Rations were excellent. We learned from the civilian population the various uses of paprika. The people were very friendly. They recounted to us the good old days—Germany, Austria, Hungary. During the evenings we drove to see films in Nové-Zamky."

Then, on the night of the 16th, the 1st SS Panzer Division Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler (LAH) and the 12th SS Panzer Division Hitlerjugend (HJ) moved again into a final assembly area behind the Feldherrnhalle. The latter's infantry divisions were located in and around the villages of Ruban, Dubnik, Velk, and Kvetna, and the armored group near Farna. This was an ideal place to assemble with rolling hills and plenty of cover.

In readiness for the attack, SS Maj. Gen. Otto Kumm, who had only assumed command of the LAH on February 15, divided the available parts of his division into a Panzergrenadier Group under the command of SS Lt. Col. Max Hansen, Kampfgruppe (KG) Hansen, and a Panzer KG under SS Lt. Col. Jochen Peiper—soon to become infamous for his part in the "Malmedy Massacre."

The former consisted of parts of the 1st and 2nd SS Panzergrenadier Regiments, a detachment from the 1st SS Reconnaissance Battalion, the 1st Company of the 1st SS Panzerjäger Battalion, and two 37mm flak batteries. Kampfgruppe Peiper was made up of 25 Panther and 21 Mk IV medium tanks in one panzer battalion under SS Major Werner Poetschke, 19 Tiger IIs of SS Lt. Col. Hein von Westernhagen's 501st SS Heavy Panzer Battalion, the 3rd SS Mechanized Panzergrenadier Battalion, and part of the 1st SS Panzer

Artillery Battalion. According to the divisional chief of staff, Ralf Tiemann, the rest of the division was still in transit to the new battle area when the offensive began.

Hubert Meyer, the chief of staff of the HJ, has stated that the 12th SS Panzer Division was more or less complete for South Wind and fought in its conventional groupings. He claims 38 Mk IVs, 44 Panthers, and 13 Jagdpanzer IVs were operational just before the attack. The only combat unit not mentioned in his account of the Gran bridgehead fighting is the 560th Heavy Panzerjäger Battalion. If, therefore, we exclude this latter unit, we have a figure of 160 operational tanks and Jagdpanzers in I SS Panzer Corps at the beginning of Operation South Wind, only 66 percent of its authorized holdings.

Despite the widespread flooding and poor road conditions caused by the early thaw, Operation South Wind began at 0500 hours on February 17. Leaving high ground on their right flank and with the Gran River on their left, the Germans attacked across open, rolling, agricultural land with few villages and no serious obstacles.

The artillery of I SS Panzer Corps joined in an opening barrage by the guns of Panzer Corps Feldherrnhalle, and in the most critical area of the attack, the center, the Russians were taken by surprise. By 0900 hours the leading elements of the 46th Infantry Division were near Point 190, having penetrated the Soviet defenses between Svodin and Bruty, but there they ran into an antitank screen and a few individual T-34 tanks. After calling for support from the LAH, a successful attack was launched at 1140 hours, and by 1700 hours elements of both the LAH and 46th Infantry Divisions had reached the Parizs Canal in the area of Sarkan only to find the bridges there destroyed.

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A loader in one of Peiper's tanks later remembered, "Peiper ordered five King Tigers to drive over the hill. What a sight! As on a silver platter, they appeared on the hill and immediately began taking fire from the Russian antitank guns. We saw the shells bounce off the front of the Tigers. That must have been a shock for the Russians, especially since the Tigers destroyed one antitank gun after another.… Peiper immediately gave the order: 'Panzers—march!' A hurricane of fire was released as the KG drove over the hill in formation.… The tanks and APCs drove at full speed, firing all barrels.… There was only one thing for the Russians to do—clear out.… KG Peiper suffered no losses."

During the early part of the night, a small infantry bridgehead was established by KG Hansen, but no vehicles could cross. Nevertheless, it had been a good day for the LAH and its associated 46th Infantry Division. They had broken through the Soviet defenses and advanced nearly 10 kilometers.

On the left flank things did not go nearly so well, and the 211th Infantry Division of the Feldherrnhalle was stopped in front of Bruty by a guards rifle division in fortified positions supported by antitank guns, mortars and artillery.

Similarly on the right flank, the 44th Infantry Division of the Feldherrnhalle ran into strong opposition from the 6th Guards Airborne Division between Strekov and Svodin, and it was only after tanks joined in the attack that further progress could be made. By 1700 hours, Svodin had been captured and the advance continued toward the canal and Vieska.

What of the Hitlerjugend Division? It had followed behind the LAH, and during the afternoon the 26th SS Panzergrenadier Regiment was committed on the right flank of its sister division to secure a crossing of the Parizs Canal. The 1st Battalion of the 26th Regiment managed to make a crossing just to the north of the large village of Gbelce by about 2100 hours, and the 2nd Battalion followed into the shallow bridgehead. Soon after midnight, the 2nd Battalion had reached the road junction 1,500 meters northeast of Gbelce, and both battalions then went firm. A small canal crossing, capable of taking wheeled vehicles, was discovered in the same area. During the night the Russians counterattacked with a battalion of infantry and at least two T-34s, but were beaten off.

The commander of Army Group South, General Otto Wöhler, was anxious that the Soviets should not be allowed to recover their balance and build up a second defensive line to the south of the canal. To prevent this from happening, the Hupe Regimental Group from south of the Danube was ordered to cross the river that same night. This was achieved without opposition.

In the early hours of the 18th, KG Hansen expanded its small bridgehead, and Leibstandarte Pioneers (engineers) were able to bridge the Parizs Canal. Four T-34s were claimed by Hansen's 6th SS Panzergrenadier Company during this fighting. Mines caused some further delay, but soon after midday the first of Poetschke's Mk IVs and Panthers crossed the canal, and, despite an air attack by Soviet fighter bombers, by early evening KG Peiper had reached the Gbelce-Nana railway line, 3 kilometers north of Muzla.

Meanwhile, to the west of the LAH, the Feldherrnhalle's 44th Infantry Division had forced a passage over the Parizs Canal near Vieska, and in the early afternoon its tanks were able cross. Then, in conjunction with the 26th SS Panzergrenadier Regiment, a joint attack was launched on Gbelce. The Feldherrnhalle Group was joined by SS Major Hermann Brand's 3rd SS Mechanized Panzergrenadier Battalion, and they took the western part of the town. The 1st Battalion captured the eastern sector, and the 2nd Battalion went on to secure the high ground 2 kilometers further east. By evening, infantry and armor of the Feldherrnhalle were in possession of Point 129, 3 kilometers south of Gbelce, and in contact with the Leibstandarte.

On the 19th, the weather improved, and at 0530 hours I SS Panzer Corps resumed its attack. KG Hansen of the Leibstandarte was given the task of clearing the enemy from the vine-covered ridge south of Point 250, while KG Peiper resumed its advance on the north side of the Gbelce-Nana railway. It was by no means an easy advance.

SS Lieutenant Rolf Reiser later described the action: "In the early morning our assembly was considerably delayed by a Russian fighter bomber attack; we suffered the loss of several tanks and wounded.…We set out astride the road with seven tanks of the 1st Company. I advanced … between the road and railway line with the three Panthers of my Platoon.… Ivan attacked our open right flank at short range with tanks from behind the cover of the railway embankment. One of the Panthers … was hit and stalled.… SS Senior Sergeant Strelow, the 3rd Platoon leader, set up to the right of me. Then there was a detonation a short distance away and his tank was ablaze. I drove behind a shed and slowly probed the other side until I had the T-34 broad-side in front of me—no more than 50 meters away.…He burst into flames on the first shot, the turret flew off after the second! Then the Tigers and Panthers of the 2nd Company caught up and joined in the armored battle. Two more enemy tanks were destroyed."

Farther to the west, SS Captain Hans Siegel's 2nd SS Panzer Battalion of the Hitlerjugend, with Brand's 3rd Mechanized SS Panzergrenadier Battalion attached, had formed up during the night to the south of Gbelce protected by the 25th and 26th SS Panzergrenadier Regiments. It too advanced at 0530 hours with grenadiers leading the way on both sides of the Sturovo road in case of mines and the tanks on the road itself. Shortly before daybreak, KG Siegel came under artillery and antitank gunfire from Muzla, but a quick attack, led by SS Lieutenant Helmut Gaede's 1st SS Panzer Company, took the village, and the surrounding area was soon cleared by the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 26th Regiment.

While the HJ was preparing to resume its advance on Sturovo on the south side of the Muzla-Sturovo road by way of Obid, the division suffered a serious loss. SS Lt. Col. Bernhard "Papa" Krause was killed in a surprise rocket attack. He had been a stalwart of the HJ since its foundation and was revered by all its members.

The advance began again soon after midday, with the HJ moving on Sturovo from the southwest and KG Peiper of the Leibstandarte from the northwest. At about 1300 hours, when they were some 3 kilometers short of Sturovo, the infantry element of KG Peiper, the 3rd SS Mechanized Panzergrenadier Battalion, swung northeast to attack Nana. Poetschke's Mk IVs and Panthers and von Westernhagen's Tiger IIs were joined by 20 Sturmgeschutze armored vehicles and infantry of the Hupe Regimental Group from the Obid area for the assault on Sturovo.

In his citation for the oakleaves to Poetschke's Knight's Cross, Peiper wrote, "Rushing headlong and firing wildly, his tanks overran the antitank nets in front of Muzla and Sturovo, and after making contact with the Southern Group [Hupe], which had been ferried over the Danube in assault boats … pushed through to Esztergom."

At the same time, an assault group from an infantry division holding Esztergom crossed the Danube and joined in the attack. The Russians had no chance in this vulnerable cor-

A squad of Red Army machine gunners leap from tanks in an effort to halt the German advance. Soviet losses were heavy but Hitler soon called a halt to the successful Operation South Wind to mount another—Operation Spring Awakening—an attempt to secure vital oil reserves in Hungary that proved to be a failure.

National Archives

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A Panzer VI "Tiger II" (King Tiger) takes up position on a cobbled street corner "somewhere in Hungary" during Operation South Wind. The Germans deployed hundreds of tanks, as did the Red Army.

ner of their bridgehead, and before last light the men of I SS Panzer Corps were gazing at Esztergom cathedral, standing like a sentinel above the far bank of the mighty Danube. They knew they had completed the hardest part of their task. Nana and Sturovo were in the hands of the Leibstandarte and Hitlerjugend.

In other relevant actions on February 19, Batorove Kosihy and Buc were occupied by a KG of Army Group South following their evacuation by the Russians, and the 44th Infantry Division of the Feldherrnhalle captured Kravany on the Danube and the forest to its east. In the eastern part of the bridgehead, the 46th Infantry Division, with armored support, had cleared the wooded, hilly area just to the west of Kamenny Most, but, north of the Parizs Canal other elements of the division were repulsed by a Soviet counterattack 2 kilometers short of Kamenin. In the north, Bruty remained firmly in Russian hands.

From the outset of Operation South Wind, the Germans had been worried that the Soviets would attempt to reinforce their bridgehead. They had correctly identified parts of the IV Guards Mechanized Corp in the northern part of the bridgehead, but they were particularly worried about the whereabouts of the Sixth Guards Tank Army, and when aerial reconnaissance reported 3,000 vehicles moving north from the Budapest area, they became alarmed. Orders were issued for immediate night attacks on Kamenny Most and Kamenin. Leaving the bulk of the LAH armored group in Sturovo to replenish ammunition and supplies, the Mk IVs of KG Peiper, with part of the 46th Division, attacked from Nana along the Kamenny Most road. Another part of the 46th Division advanced north of the Parizs Canal on Kamenin. Both attacks failed, and Soviet air superiority and artillery fire from east of the Gran precluded any further attempts during daylight on the 20th.

A two-phase operation was then ordered. In the first phase, the LAH and 46th Infantry Division were to take Kamenny Most in the south of the remaining bridgehead, while the HJ, with support from the 211th Volksgrenadier Division (VGD), was to secure Bruty in the north. In a second and final phase, the twin divisions of I SS Panzer Corps would clear Kamenin and Bina, respectively.

Parts of KGs Peiper and Hansen, with support from the 46th Division, successfully entered Kamenny Most during the night of the 21st, but soon after dawn they were forced on to the defensive by Soviet artillery fire and continuous air attacks.

Rolf Reiser recalled, "Peiper had decided upon a night attack because we were covered by massive fire during the daytime from enemy artillery positions on the raised eastern bank of the Gran.…We rapidly crossed the softly rolling terrain directly under the chain of hills that ran west of the road and railway line.…We turned east … in order to penetrate frontally. Then massive Russian artillery fire was initiated. A curtain of iron and fire hung before us. Flares and tracers illuminated the night and showed us the way to the enemy positions.… We rattled across the railway—then there was a crack and flash of light. We were hit!… We caught fire immediately.… My gunner followed

me as the last one out of the turret. We landed in a trench with Ivan, who was as surprised as we were. Armed only with pistols and bare fists, we defended ourselves…. We finished off the Soviets in the cover of the burning tank and the exploding ammunition."

The assault was resumed with the coming of darkness, and by 2100 hours the last Russians had withdrawn from Kamenny Most.

Meanwhile, during the 20th and 21st, the Hitlerjugend was relieved by the 44th Infantry Division and moved to a new assembly area southeast of Farna in readiness for its assault on Bruty. The I SS Panzer Corps was thus poised for its final battles west of the Gran River. With aerial reconnaissance and other intelligence sources confirming that the IV Guards Mechanized Corps had withdrawn across the Gran and other troop movements toward the river had apparently halted, Hermann Priess and his men had every reason to be confident of success.

Headquarters Army Group South concluded that the Soviets must be expecting a German assault across the Gran. Therefore, defensive positions on the east bank were being prepared with all available reinforcements. In fact, Hitler had forbidden any such assault and demanded that his Leibstandarte Corps be freed as soon as possible for his new offensive, Spring Awakening, in the Lake Balaton area.

In preparation for its attack on Bruty, the HJ had to rely mainly on aerial reconnaissance and on information provided by the 211th VGD, which had already failed to take the village. This revealed that the area was heavily fortified, with minefields backed by large numbers of machine guns, mortars, and antitank guns in considerable depth. Since the ground was completely open, the decision was made to undertake a night operation.

The preliminary phases of the attack were marred by a number of unfortunate incidents. The 25th SS Panzergrenadier Regiment, on the right flank, failed to reach its starting line in time for the assault, and, in the darkness, some of Siegel's tanks failed to recognize the Panzergrenadiers who were leading the attack on the left and opened fire on them. Five men were killed, including a company commander, and another eight wounded. This second disaster alerted the Russians, who opened fire with machine guns and mortars.

Despite these problems, Siegel's tanks began their attack at about 0445 hours in the wake of a bombardment by artillery, mortars, and rocket launchers. Within minutes, however, the leading tanks ran into a minefield, and several, including Siegel's, were immobilized. These were repaired under fire, and the tanks then withdrew behind a reverse slope from where they supported the attack of the 9th Mechanized Panzergrenadier Company, led by SS Lieutenant Dieter Schmidt. This company was on the left flank of the attack and outside the minefield. Although some of its APCs floundered in the soft ground of a streambed, the rest managed to break through the defenders and reach the southern edge of the village.

In the meantime, the 25th Regiment had joined in the attack, and together with the other two battalions of Braun's 26th Regiment took the western and lower sectors of the village.

An SS Sergeant Burdack of the mechanized battalion later described the scene: "The village was choked with enemy vehicles.…Several T-34s and T-43s [light tanks], still inside the village, forced the APCs to take cover.…The Russian tanks, without the protection of infantry, left…in the direction of Bina."

An SS officer remembered: "Fire from our heavy weapons had badly damaged most of the buildings. Roofs had been stripped off; walls had crumbled. During the pitched battle, civilians came out of the ruins of their houses…unconcerned with what was going on around them…They were obviously happy beyond measure to be liberated again from their 'liberators.'"

Later that morning, Bruty was finally cleared by the 25th Regiment in conjunction with troops of the 211th VGD who had advanced on the right flank of the HJ and entered the village from the south. Eighty prisoners were taken and a large number of antitank guns and mortars, two undamaged T-34s, and six large caliber howitzers were found in the area. Bruty was in German hands, but the cost had been high—particularly in the 25th Regiment.

In the meantime, in preparation for the assault on Kamenin, elements of KG Peiper had secured the road junction immediately north of Kamenny Most.

The I SS Panzer Corps spent February 23 preparing for its final assaults on Kamenin and Bina. The Leibstandarte, with elements of the 46th Infantry Division, was to attack the former, and the Hitlerjugend, still with support from the 211th VGD, was to secure Bina and its bridge across the Gran. Intelligence sources indicated that there were elements of two motorized mechanized brigades still in the bridgehead. H-hour was set for 0200 hours on the 24th.

In the HJ sector the most bitter fighting occurred in the area of the railway line which runs north-south just to the west of Bina. This had been heavily fortified, as had some of the flood dikes, but by using the main Kvetna-Bina road as their axis and taking advantage of the gently sloping ground, which dropped some 30 meters down to the village, the tanks and SS Panzergrenadiers soon overcame all resistance. By 0830 hours the village had fallen. The last Russians blew the Gran bridge as they withdrew.

In the southern part of the bridgehead, elements of the 46th Infantry Division moved on Kamenin from the west, while the LAH attacked from due south. The Mk IVs, Panthers, and Tigers of KG Peiper used the main road as their axis and soon encountered a screen of 37 antitank guns sited on the dominating ground to the south of the village. Nevertheless, the attack was pressed home without regard to possible casualties, and the sheer power of the armored assault was too much for the Russians, who abandoned their guns and fled. Panzergrenadiers followed up, and after some bitter house-to-house fight-

National Archives

German infantry and armored vehicles move through the countryside of Hungary as they attempt to stem the tide of the Russian advance toward their own borders. .

ing the defense was broken. By late afternoon, the Gran bridgehead had been eliminated.

The Germans claimed 71 tanks; 179 guns, howitzers, and antitank guns; 537 prisoners; and 2,069 Russian dead in the fighting upto February 22. Of these, Peiper credits Werner Poetschke's mixed SS Panzer Battalion with 23 T-34s destroyed; 30 Hungarian, Italian-, British-, and German-built tanks captured, and 280 enemy killed. According to a return signed by Fritz Kraemer, the chief of staff of the Sixth Panzer Army, I SS Panzer Corps suffered 2,989 casualties, including 413 killed in the same period and, rather surprisingly, only three Mk IVs, six Panthers, and two Tigers lost or in need of long-term repair. Figures quoted in the histories of the LAH and HJ would indicate that this is a major understatement.

Operation South Wind was, without doubt, a brilliant success. In eight days, I SS Panzer Corps, admittedly with valuable assistance from Panzer Corps Feldherrnhalle, had recaptured over 400 square kilometers of territory, inflicted 8,800 casualties on the Red Army, and cleared seven infantry divisions and a guards mechanized corps from west of the Gran. It is remarkable that such an effective fighting machine could have been produced within a month of the Battle of the Bulge disaster, and it is even more so when one takes into account that many of men involved had received only minimal training.

As Otto Kumm described the Leibstandarte, "The Division was in miserable shape, only a shadow of its former self. After the heavy losses in Normandy and during the Ardennes offensive, it had only recently been refitted with personnel who were poorly trained former members of the Army, Navy, Air Force, labor service and police."

The performance of both the LAH and the HJ in South Wind can be explained only by superb leadership, high morale and fighting spirit, and a brilliant reinforcement and replacement system. That said, the question arises as to whether this elite SS panzer corps should have been used in this operation at all.

Despite all the measures taken to disguise the arrival of the Sixth Panzer Army on the Hungarian front, units of I SS Panzer Corps were soon detected in the Gran bridgehead operation. Its commitment there, rather than in the northern part of the Eastern Front, and the knowledge that a second SS Panzer Corps had arrived in Hungary, immediately alerted the Soviets to the possibility of a German offensive. It is also obvious that the premature use of the corps interrupted the proper refitting of the two SS panzer divisions and, indeed, actually ensured that their effectiveness in Operation Spring Awakening would be reduced.

Taken together, these facts indicate that the use of I SS Panzer Corps in Operation South Wind was a serious mistake. The chief operations officer of the Sixth Panzer Army, SS Lt. Col. Georg Maier, expressed similar thoughts in his book *Drama Between Budapest and Vienna*, published in 1975. □

ANZIO BATTLE

Continued from page 27

unknowable, their total recorded losses for the operation were 5,389, including 609 captured. Some of the German units suffered so badly they never completed their casualty reports, so the actual number is higher, but also unknowable.

The 157th, however, paid a high cost for its part in stopping the German counterattack of February 16–20. Total casualties for the 45th Division during that period totaled 3,400, with another 2,500 evacuated for medical causes such as trench foot and exposure in the frigid weather.

Among the hardest hit was 2/157. When the Battle of the Caves began, the unit had 751 men; after the smoke cleared, it had 177. Some newspapers in America even referred to them as the "Lost Battalion of World War II." Felix Sparks received 150 replacements when he got back to the beach, along with orders to reconstitute E Company; he was the only man left from his original company.

A few days later, another man, Sergeant Leon Siehr, made it back to American lines after evading the Germans; Siehr would die in action three months later. Air attacks continued to cause casualties in Sparks' new company for days.

Despite all this death and suffering, the 157th held throughout the German attack. The regiment did its duty, though at a terrible price, and had to be rebuilt before it could return to the front lines. The focus of a four-day, six-division attack came right at it, even went through it and over it; but while the 157th bent, was bloodied and battered, it never broke.

The regiment continued to fight, landing in southern France in August 1944 (Operation Anvil), liberating the Dachau concentration camp, and ending the war in Munich on May 8, 1945. In all, it spent 511 days in combat with the 45th Division, more than any other recorded by an American combat unit. The seven days from February 16-22 ranked among the worst of them. □

3RD ARMY

Continued from page 87

expected New Years Eve celebrations by the Allied pilots, an expectation that was not entirely misplaced. A XIX TAC airfield near Metz suffered losses of 20 P-47s, with 17 others damaged. However, of the 25-plane attacking force, 16 were shot down by antiaircraft fire. Later in the day, XIX TAC pilots reportedly shot down 47 more.

An innovation in the war in Europe was the use of night fighters both to provide protection against air attack and to interdict German supply lines at night. The XIX TAC included the 425th Night Fighter Squadron, an organization equipped with P-61 Black Widow twin-engine fighters that had been armed and equipped for night combat. A few modified Douglas A-20s were also assigned to the night-fighter role. The radar-equipped night fighters patrolled the Third Army area looking for enemy aircraft and for signs of vehicles and movement on the ground.

Another innovation was the use of fighter bombers to drop supplies to ground troops in forward areas. The first for the XIX TAC was the delivery of rations to elements of the 80th Division spearheading the bridgehead at the Sauer River. The first drop mission was carried out in spite of heavy German ground fire, and the experiment was repeated at other Third Army points. Early in the European campaign, light liaison aircraft from Third Army's own aviation detachment dropped ammunition to a surrounded company.

Bad winter weather often kept the XIX TAC fighter bombers on the ground in the first weeks of 1945. Fortunately, the decline of the German Wermacht after the Battle of the Bulge allowed the armored and infantry forces to prevail without air support, although the ground troops certainly appreciated the contribution of the fighter bombers when the weather cleared. As Third Army made its way slowly forward through melting snow and mud in the Eifel, the XIX TAC struck at the railroads and roads the Germans were depending on to move their troops and supplies.

On March 14, Third Army crossed the Moselle River. The next day was a good one for the XIX TAC as the command flew 643 sorties. The following day Patton began the encirclement of German Army Group G. The devastating attacks by the Jabos not only destroyed hundreds of vehicles and unknown numbers of troops, but they also made German morale a casualty, preventing the enemy from taking advantage of the highly favorable defensive terrain. On March 24, Field Marshal Montgomery launched his epic crossing of the Rhine, which had already been crossed by American troops. Third Army had crossed at Oppenheim two days earlier.

After the Rhine crossing, the Allied armies rushed toward their objectives, which in the case of the American Twelfth Army Group was the river Elbe, where SHAEF had determined they would link up with advancing Soviet troops. Third Army was turned south, into Czechoslovakia and southern Germany. The XIX TAC continued to support the advancing Third Army, right up to May 7, 1945, when hostilities came to an end. The record of the partnership speaks for itself. During 281 days of combat and 74,447 sorties, XIX TAC pilots were credited with 2,340 German planes, 38,541 motor vehicles, 3,888 tanks and armored cars, 3,237 locomotives, 18,437 freight cars, 364 factories, 2,809 gun installations, 1,730 military installations, 285 bridges, and 220 supply dumps.

The XIX TAC losses were 582 aircraft to all causes. Third Army tank destroyers knocked out 648 tanks and 211 self-propelled guns, 349 antitank guns, 175 artillery pieces, 519 machine guns, and 1,556 vehicles.

Third Army antiaircraft fire claimed 1,084 destroyed and 564 probables out of 6,192 German planes that were engaged in Third Army zones. The partnership between the Third Army and the XIX TAC had proven to be one of the most effective in the history of warfare. □

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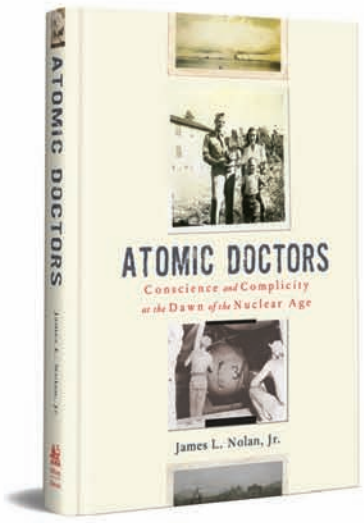

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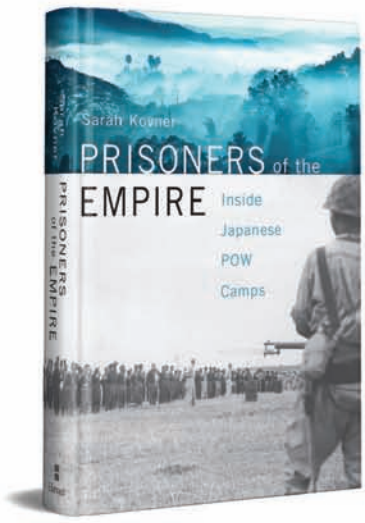

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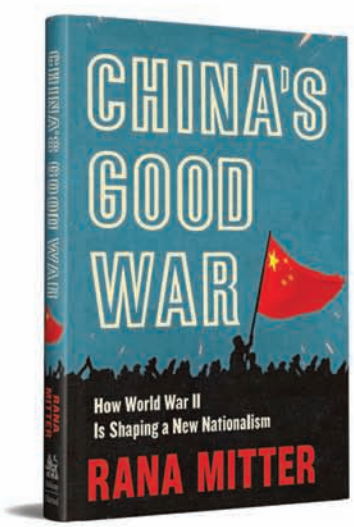

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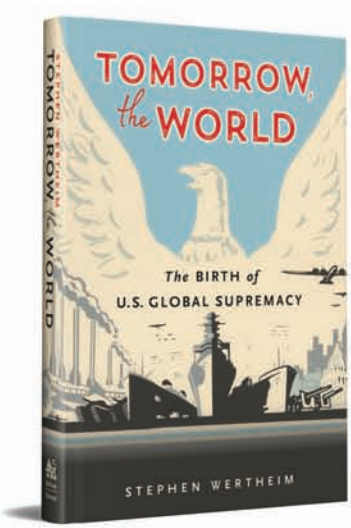

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