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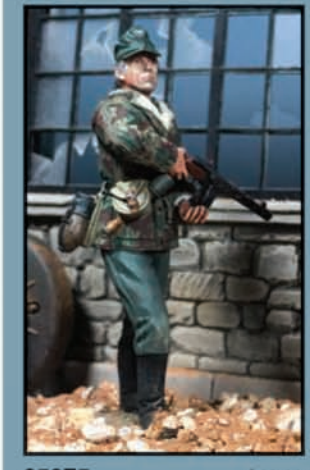

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Cover: Private L.C. Byrd of the 761st Tank Battalion mans a machine gun on the turret of his M4 Sherman tank near Nancy, France, November 5, 1944. He and the unit saw their first combat two days later.

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Ex-Nazis still being rounded up

There is no statute of limitations when it comes to the Holocaust.

In February 2021, a 95-year-old woman who was the secretary to Lt. Col. Paul-Werner Hoppe, the SS commandant of Stutthof, a brutal concentration camp near modern-day Gdansk, Poland, was charged with aiding and abetting mass murder. It is estimated that about 65,000 prisoners died there during World War II.

The woman, named in the media as Irmgard F., who lives in an elder-care facility near Hamburg, was charged in relation to "more than 10,000 cases."

Stutthof was established in 1939, and guards began using gas chambers there in June 1944. Soviet troops liberated it in May 1945, as the war was ending. According to the BBC, "about 100,000 inmates were kept at Stutthof in atrocious conditions; many died of disease and starvation, some were gassed and others were given lethal injections." The victims were Jews, non-Jewish Poles, and captured Soviet soldiers.

A juvenile court in Schleswig-Holstein is considering whether the ex-secretary's case should go to trial. At the time of the crimes she was under 21, so she was considered a minor.

Discovered by the Red Army on May 9, 1945, Stutthof (which I visited in 2016) was the last concentration camp to be liberated.

Also in February 2021, the U.S. sent back to Germany Friedrich Karl Berger, who had been living in Tennessee. He had been a guard at a Nuengamme sub-camp near Meppen, Germany, and was found guilty in a 2020 trial.

In the other case, in July 2020, Bruno Dey, a 93-year-old former guard at Stutthof, was found guilty of complicity in the murder of more than 5,000 prisoners. Dey, who had manned a guard tower, was tried in a juvenile court because he was 17 at the time the atrocities at the camp were carried out (between August 1944 and April 1945), according to the indictment.

During the trial, which lasted nine months, Dey listened to witness statements but maintained he had been forced into his role as a guard at the camp and had not been involved in the killings.

A historian testified that Dey had been sent to the camp initially as a Wehrmacht soldier but had joined the SS in September 1944.

Although Dey acknowledged knowing of the Stutthof gas chambers and admitted seeing "emaciated figures, people who had suffered," his defense team argued that he was a relatively unimportant figure at the camp and was not directly involved in the thousands of deaths.

But prosecutors argued that Dey had known what was happening, had had contact with the prisoners, and had actively prevented their escape. "When you are a part of mass-murder machinery, it is not enough to look away," prosecutor Lars Mahnke said in his closing arguments.

Dey was given a two-year suspended prison sentence.

Hundreds of thousands were involved in the various aspects of the Holocaust, but justice was uneven. Only a relative handful were ever caught, tried, and convicted. The overwhelming majority of those who played a part managed to live out long and full lives in freedom—something that was denied their victims.

WWII Memorial undergoing repairs

The National Park Service (NPS)—the caretakers of the WWII Memorial—currently has a $12 billion maintenance backlog of priority work nationwide, nearly $1 billion for the National Mall alone. NPS has asked Friends of the World War II Memorial to partner with them on a number of critical maintenance projects at the Memorial, including new lighting, repair of joint mortar, and the control of growth and calcification.

These repairs will be done with private dollars via the sale of commemorative coins.

—Flint Whitlock, Editor
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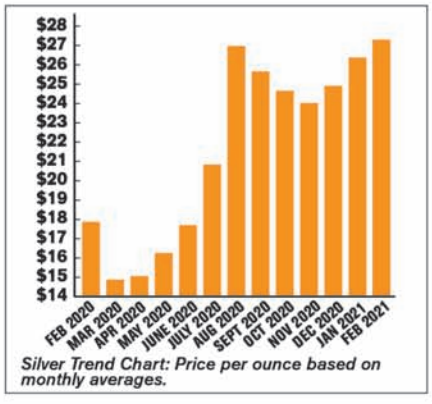
Silver Up 80% In Last Year

Take a look at this chart. Since the spring of 2020, silver has gone up more than 80%! And as recently as February 2021, silver has set a new eight-year high. This skyrocketing value has taken the precious metals world by storm. But what caused such a drastic increase in silver's value, and what does it mean for you?



Silver Trend Chart: Price per ounce based on monthly averages.

Uncertainty Drives Demand

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in the spring of 2020, the stock market crashed, then set new records; crypto-currencies became all the rage; and the U.S. national debt reached an all-time high.

To pay back that debt, some experts are warning that the U.S. Federal Reserve's policies may increase inflation—meaning your hard-earned dollars not go as far as they do right now. And in times of uncertainty, people often turn to precious metals to weather the storm.

Meanwhile, the U.S. Mint has also been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, and continues to struggle with producing enough pure, U.S. silver to satisfy demand. They've even had to strike multiple "Emergency Production" runs to keep up!

What This Means for You

Silver values are up, and silver is in high demand. In addition, many experts believe that the price of silver could continue to increase in the next 12 to 24 months. And while no one can accurately predict the future, there are two questions you should be asking yourself right now:

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To attack targets from a steep angle, Curtiss developed the SB2C Helldiver—"The Beast."

AT the beginning of WWII, the U.S. Navy needed a combat aircraft that could meet several requirements: it had to serve as an attack fighter that could conduct precision dive-bombing and ground-support (strafing) operations yet still be small enough to be delivered to battle zones by aircraft carrier.

The solution was the Curtiss SB2C Helldiver—nicknamed the "Beast." It was one of the United States' best aircraft of the war—but one that had its shortcomings.

For as long as there have been multiple military service branches, there has been the possibility that a piece of equipment would be pressed into duty for all of them. This puts additional pressure on designers and program managers.

Such was the case for the Curtiss SB2C "Helldiver" dive bomber: Both the U.S. Navy and U.S. Army Air Force (USAAF) wanted to employ it for dive bombing over sea and land, respectively, while the U.S Marine Corps' wanted it for close-air-support.

Previously, the USAAF had been convinced that level bombers, employing precision optical bombsights, could strike targets with impunity from high altitude. But after Brig. Gen. William "Billy" Mitchell, in charge of American air operations in France, observed British and French dive-bombing attacks, he advocated the U.S. adopt such tactics. What was needed was a plane that could perform these maneuvers.

Development

Initially, the Navy used existing scout and fighter aircraft as dive bombers without any of the features that purpose-built dive bombers would have, such as a stronger structure and dive brakes. To address the need for a dedicated dive bomber, in 1928 the Curtiss division of the Curtiss-Wright Corporation redesigned its F8C-1—the Marine version of the "Falcon" two-seat fighter-bomber.

To withstand the stresses of dive bombing, the new craft was given a more compact and strengthened airframe, as well as a 450-hp Pratt & Whitney R-1340 radial engine, which replaced the Falcon's Liberty inline engine. The new aircraft became known as the F8C-4 Helldiver, with 25 units being produced.

The first of the F8C-4s began serving

Naval History and Heritage Command

With both canopies pulled back, a SB2C-3 Helldiver makes a pass over its carrier, USS *Hornet* (CV-12) in the South China Sea, January 1945. SB2Cs accounted for more enemy ship tonnage sunk during the war than any other aircraft.

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USMC Ret. Master Gunnery Sergeant Bob Verell takes a moment to honor those commemorated on the replica Vietnam Memorial Wall.
Photo by Thomas Wells

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A Curtiss SBC-4 scout-bomber, the last biplane operated by the U.S. military, was also known as the Helldiver. It was obsolete even before the war began.

with Fighter Squadron VF-1B (Bombing) aboard the carrier *Saratoga* (CV-3) in 1930, but rapidly advancing fighter-aircraft technology made the F8C-4 slower than the fighters it would be accompanying on combat missions. Thus, the name Helldiver was out of the naval lexicon by the end of 1931.

On June 30, 1932, the Bureau of Aeronautics gave Curtiss a contract for their Design 73, a two-seat monoplane with a parasol wing and retractable landing gear. Power came from a prototype 625-hp Wright R-1510-92 twin-row, 14-cylinder, radial engine driving a two-blade propeller. Designed under the direction of Raymond C. Blaylock, it was designated XF12C-1.

Designed for aircraft-carrier deployment, the parasol wing could fold back for storage; a tail hook facilitated carrier landings. The first flight was in July 1933, and a maximum speed of 217.4 mph was eventually reached in the test program. But this was considered sluggish; the culprits were the long struts supporting the wing.

Curtiss renamed the aircraft the XS4C-1, and later the XSBC-1, as they hoped it might fulfill the role of a scout bomber. In a September 1934 dive-bombing test flight, the parasol-wing assembly failed. While the pilot survived, the prototype was heavily damaged.

Curtiss was contracted to rebuild the prototype as a biplane and did so without folding wings. It did have leading-edge slots, and the lower wing was equipped with full-span flaps to produce the XSBC-2, known to Curtiss as the Model 77.

It was all metal except for the fabric-covered control surfaces. The cockpit was lengthened, the rudder and vertical fin were increased, and a tail hook was included. Power was furnished by a 700-hp Wright XR-1510-12 air-cooled radial engine with 14 cylinders in two rows. It spun a constant-speed Curtiss Electric three-bladed propeller whose blade pitch could be changed electrically.

The Curtiss Electric three-bladed propeller was replaced by a Hamilton-Standard three-bladed prop. Curtiss gave the first SBC-3s the unofficial name of "Helldiver," and they began entering squadron service with VS-5 aboard the *Yorktown* (CV-5), VS-3 on *Saratoga* (CV-3), and VS-6 on *Enterprise* (CV-6) in late 1937.

The 76th SBC-3 produced was given a 950-hp, Wright Cyclone R-1820-34 nine-cylinder radial engine in 1938 and dubbed the SBC-4—known to Curtiss as the Model 77B.

The increase in horsepower translated into an increase in payload, as a 1,000-pound bomb could now be carried. The Navy procured 124 SBC-4s, with the first squadron to receive the SBC-4 being VS-2

on the USS *Lexington* (CV-2). The Curtiss SBC was the last biplane to see service with the U.S. military. The Navy ordered the first prototype of the SB2C monoplane on May 15, 1939—with expectations that it would be revolutionary.

Flight Testing

The Helldiver prototype XB2C-1 suffered problems with its Wright R-2600 engine and three-blade propeller. It flew for the first time at Curtiss' Buffalo, N.Y., plant, on December 18, 1940, with chief test pilot Henry Lloyd Child at the controls. It crashed on February 8, 1941, when its engine failed during a landing approach. The damage was repaired but it crashed again after a wing failed on a test flight on December 21, 1941. Fortunately, test pilot B.T. Hulse parachuted to safety. The second prototype version was also lost in December 1941 as it recovered from a dive, causing catastrophic failure of the starboard wing and horizontal stabilizer.

Even before the flight of its first prototype, production models were ordered in November 1940 that included over 800 design changes. Among them were 195 more pounds of armor, self-sealing fuel tanks with greater capacity, a larger tail, and four .50-caliber machine guns.

Under ordinary conditions, the Navy would probably have canceled the SB2C, as it was proving to be more work to salvage the program than to start all over again. Curtiss had built a factory in Columbus, Ohio, dedicated to manufacturing SB2Cs, complete with work force, raw materials, and subcontractors to produce dive bombers.

More design changes were made to convince the Navy to accept the design. Many of the revisions were a reaction to combat experience in the European theater, such as self-sealing fuel tanks and added pilot armor. Wanting greater firepower, the Navy also dictated that the two fuselage-mounted machine guns be replaced by a pair of wing-mounted 20 mm cannons.

The SB2C's short fuselage was necessary so the aircraft could fit on existing aircraft-carrier elevators. However, this created the instability called "close coupling," which could cause the aircraft to pitch up so

Wikimedia

Over 7,100 SB2Cs were built from 1943-45. This example, an SB2C-5 owned by the West Texas Wing of the Commemorative Air Force (CAF), is the only one still flying.

quickly and excessively that a stall could occur over the carrier deck. To solve the problem, the tail section was lengthened. Some observers said that the SB2C's rudder was big enough to steer a battleship.

The most unique feature that sets dive bombers apart from other aircraft is the dive brakes. These typically take the form of split flaps; one panel rises above the trailing edge of the wing while another panel extends below the trailing edge. The aircraft's speed is reduced, not only giving the pilot more time to aim but also preventing the aircraft from reaching a speed where it might experience structural problems or failure.

All SB2C models had these dive brakes, but, starting with the SB2C-3 version, the dive brakes were perforated. The perforations on these distinctive "Swiss cheese" dive brakes reduced buffeting in a dive and allowed the dive brakes to open wider, creating a greater braking effect. Optimal dive angle was an almost-vertical 80 degrees.

Prior to America's formal entry into World War II, an immense rearmament program began with dive bombers playing a significant role. Curtiss and the Navy were committed to the extensive manufacture of the SB2C to replace the obsolete Vought SB2U Vindicator, Douglas SBD Dauntless, and the venerable Curtiss SBC.

The SB2C's wing had an unsatisfactorily high stall speed, and the plane demonstrated serious handling problems in its low-speed and stall regimes. This is critical, as a carrier-based aircraft must display superior handling in these areas as it approaches and lands aboard a pitching ship in less-than-desirable weather conditions.

At high speeds, such as when diving, the ailerons became heavy, requiring brute force to move the controls, and excessive tail buffeting occurred when the dive brakes were extended. All this contributed to the SB2C earning various unflattering nicknames such as "The Big-Tailed Beast" or just "The Beast." Many pilots joked that SB2C stood for "Son-of-a-Bitch, 2nd Class."

The SB2C also needed to have a well-balanced load—as in the case of one pilot of VB-87 on the USS *Ticonderoga*, whose Helldiver was equipped with a 1,000-lb. bomb in its internal bomb bay and a 260-lb. fragmentation bomb on one wing to partly offset a 680-lb. drop tank on the other wing for a strike on the Japanese hybrid cruiser/aircraft carrier *Hyuga*.

Navy Cross recipient H. Paul Brehm was a pilot on the mission, and he saw the result of the unbalanced load, which the pilots had been cautioned was potentially problematic: "Lieutenant Al Matteson was first off. His plane got to the bow; his wing loading was unbalanced. He started going into a tight right turn and the cameras began rolling. Momentarily flight operations were secured; the semaphore on the bridge went

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Naval History and Heritage Command

A 2,000-lb. bomb released by a Helldiver falls toward its target: Japanese installations in Manila, November 1944.

to red. Matteson hit the water hard and the plane just disintegrated. I saw only one person getting out of the crash debris.

"The bridge ordered the Plane Guard Destroyer to pick up the survivor. The semaphore on the bridge went back to green and the order of 'launch aircraft' proceeded as if nothing had happened. Not more than 25 seconds had lapsed. All I could think of was, 'Hell, we've lost our first plane for today's strike and we haven't even completed the launch.'"

When Helldivers arrived on the new *Essex* class carriers in December 1942, they were deemed unfit for combat due to their poor handling. Then-Missouri Senator Harry Truman, head of the oversight committee investigating government fraud and mismanagement, was quoted as saying that Curtiss-Wright "had not succeeded in producing a single SB2C usable as a combat airplane." The SB2C looked to be the Edsel of its day.

The Helldiver first engaged in combat when Bombing Squadron VB-17 from the carrier *Bunker Hill* attacked Rabaul on November 11, 1943. VB-17's commander, Lt. Cmdr. James E. "Moe" Vose, declared that, apart from folding wings, "the SB2C offered little improvement on the SBD…. The SBD [Dauntless] would be my choice." Indeed, the numbers seem to prove him right.

The Helldiver hit rock bottom as it performed strikes against Vice Adm. Jisaburo Ozawa's carrier fleet on the second day of

the Battle of the Philippine Sea. Of the 51 SB2Cs in the June 20, 1944, sortie, 43 aircraft—84 percent—were lost, most due to fuel exhaustion or crashes. It was the highest percentage of losses for one U.S. Navy aircraft type during a single mission. On the same mission, in contrast, SBD losses were just 15 percent.

Employing different tactics and strategies, the Helldiver's combat record gradually improved. Flying alongside Avenger torpedo bombers, Helldivers played a critical role in the Battle of Leyte Gulf as they sank the 74,000-ton battleship *Musashi* on October 24, 1944. They then sank her sister ship, the 72,000-ton *Yamato*, on April 7, 1945, during the Okinawa campaign. Support of ground troops and Marines became another forte of the Helldiver as the Pacific island-hopping campaign unfolded.

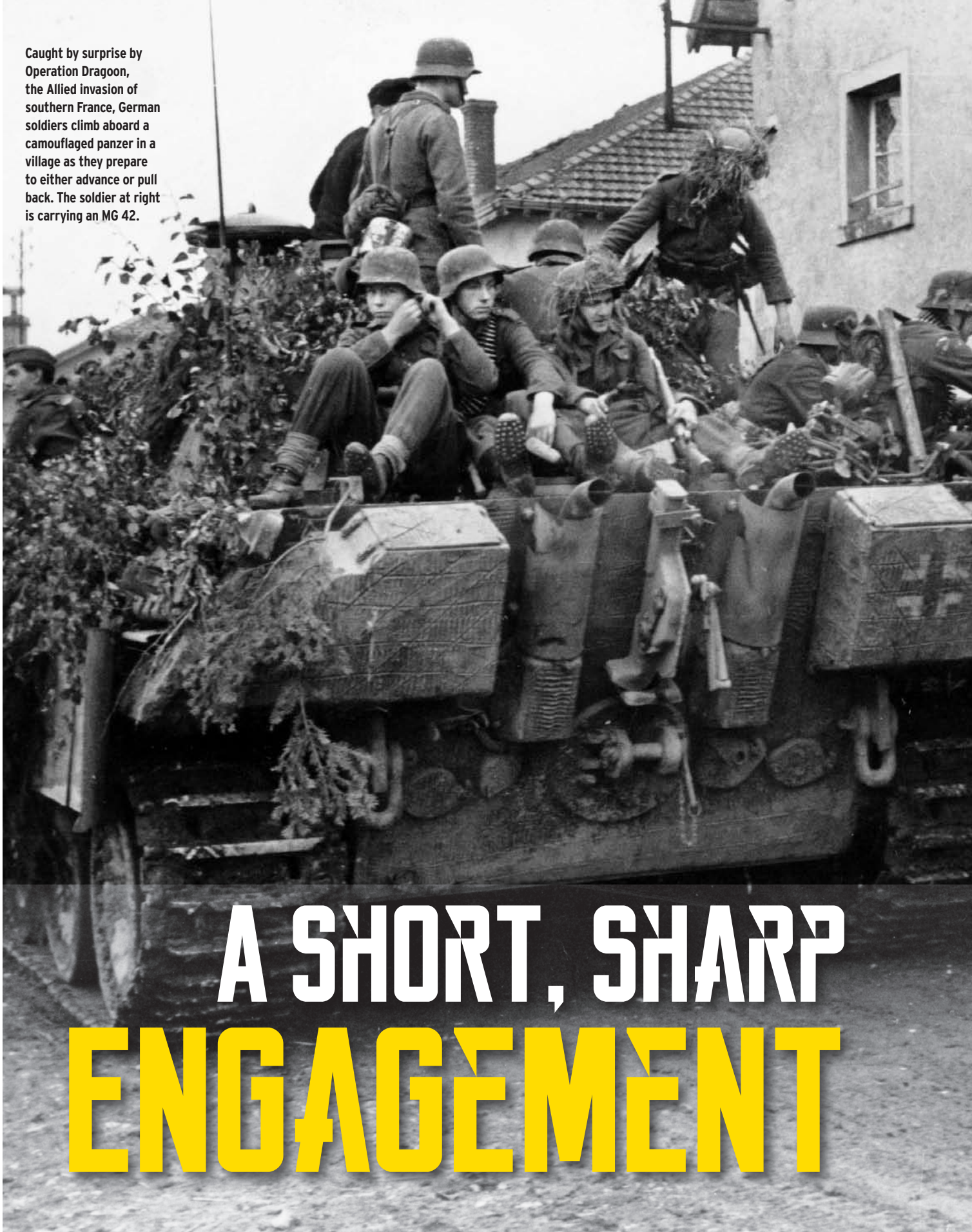
A great advance in the ground-support capability of the Helldiver was the employment of high-velocity air-to-ground rockets— an early stand-off weapon—that enabled pilots to hit surface targets accurately without the stress of a power dive. Beginning with the SB2C-4, eight 5-inch rockets were carried on underwing pylons. The SB2C-4E was equipped with the APS-4 search radar pod to aid in locating and targeting enemy surface vessels.

Over 20 years after Billy Mitchell saw the need for dive bombers, the desire for a dedicated land-based dive bomber prompted the USAAF to acquire some of the new Helldivers. It was apportioned 100 SB2C-1As, which were renamed the A-25A Shrike.

Near the end of World War II, the SB2C was fitted with the air-to-ground 11.75-inch "Tiny Tim" rocket. At 10 feet long and weighing 1,250 pounds, the Tiny Tim packed the punch of a 500-pound bomb. It was a forerunner of the ship-sinking Exocet missile of the Falklands War some 40 years into the future.

The U.S. military was aware of the ability of Japanese Mitsubishi F1M "Pete" and Nakajima A6M2-N "Rufe" floatplane fighters to operate far from land bases and beyond the range of carrier-dependent aircraft. To match this capability, the fifth SB2C-1 produced was fitted

Continued on page 98



Caught by surprise by Operation Dragoon, the Allied invasion of southern France, German soldiers climb aboard a camouflaged panzer in a village as they prepare to either advance or pull back. The soldier at right is carrying an MG 42.

A SHORT, SHARP ENGAGEMENT

Bundesarchiv Bild 101I-301-1955-15; Photo: Bernhard Kurth

BY FLINT WHITLOCK

Nineteen-year-old Private First Class Peter Gaidosh of East Rochester, NY, was enjoying that rarest of wartime treats—a hot breakfast of fresh eggs, coffee, and pancakes—on the front lines. A member of the 1st squad, 1st platoon, Able Company, 179th Infantry Regiment, 45th Infantry Division "Thunderbirds," Gaidosh was relaxing on the overcast morning of Fri-

For the men of the 179th Regiment of the 45th Infantry Division, the French Resistance fighters, and the townspeople who lived through it, the Battle of Meximieux will never be forgotten.

day, September 1, 1944, near the railroad station in the small French city of Meximieux, some 15 miles northeast of Lyon.

As far as Pete Gaidosh and the other men in his squad—young, battle-tested fellows by the names of Boven, Caverhlo, Comis, Cordova, Frisch, Klock, and Musira—were concerned, it was great to be young and in France, even if there was a war on. Around the kitchen truck the men were relaxing, drinking hot coffee, enjoying a leisurely cigarette, swapping war stories, and chatting about the pretty mademoiselles they had already met, or about the girls they had left behind. Adding to the pleasurable interlude were views of the spectacular Alps along the French-Swiss bor-

der a short distance to the east.

The men of the squad considered themselves very lucky. A mere two weeks earlier, on August 15, 1944, they and the rest of the 45th Infantry Division had fought their way ashore during the invasion of southern France along the sunny shores of the French Riviera in an operation called Dragoon.

The landing, by Lt. Gen. Alexander M. Patch's Seventh Army, was intended to complement Operation Overlord, launched two months earlier along the Normandy coast. In addition to the 45th Division, Operation Dragoon involved the participation of the U.S. 3rd and 36th Infantry Divisions, several French units, and the U.S. 1st Special Service Force, popularly known as the Devil's Brigade. With Allied forces in the north now driving eastward toward Paris, it was expected that Patch's army, coming up from the south, would squeeze the Germans in a gigantic pincer movement.

There had been intense, if brief, German resistance to Operation Dragoon, but once the Seventh Army had broken through the thin crust of defenses rimming the Riviera, the Americans had made good time. The Seventh Army roared northward, smashing through half-hearted resistance and liberating scores of towns and cities in its path. In the span of a fortnight, the American divisions, traveling in trucks and atop tanks, had traversed over 300 miles, all the while nipping at the heels of General Friedrich Wiese's retreating Nineteenth Army, which was heading for the Belfort Gap and, ultimately, Germany.

Like the 3rd and 36th Divisions, the 45th was a war-weary outfit. It had landed in North Africa in time to take part in the invasion of Sicily in July 1943, spent a month in combat on that rocky island, saved the Salerno beachhead from annihilation two months later, then anchored the center of the Allied line at Anzio, where the division had thrown back one furious, fanatical German counterattack after another. But, instead of being allowed to enjoy a long respite in the liberated city of Rome, the Thunderbirds, comprised primarily of the Oklahoma and Colorado

ABOVE: Men of the 45th "Thunderbird" Infantry Division march up a road shortly after landing in southern France, August 15, 1944. They will meet stiffening resistance the farther north they go. BELOW: Taking a brief break from battle, Thunderbirds relax and refresh at a village fountain after pursuing Germans non-stop for a week after the Operation Dragoon landings.

Photos: National Archives

National Guard units, were picked for their fourth and final amphibious-combat assault. And now they were spearheading the Seventh Army drive toward Germany.

On August 29, 1944, Maj. Gen. Lucien Truscott, commanding the U.S. VI Corps, had given Maj. Gen. John E. Dahlquist's 36th Infantry Division the task of securing Valence, Vienne, and Lyon while the 45th Infantry Division, under Maj. Gen. William Eagles, was to rush from Grenoble to Bourg-en-Bresse, some 35 miles northeast of Lyon, to maintain contact with the retreating enemy. Advance elements of the 45th soon discovered that most of the bridges over the Rhône River to the south of Meximieux already had been blown; however, one bridge, between Pont-de-Cheruy and Loyettes, was still intact and was in the hands of a company of French freedom fighters known as the FFI (French Forces of the Interior, or *maquis*). With no German resistance in the area immediately evident, the 45th's 179th Infantry Regiment, commanded by Colonel Henry Meyer, was given the assignment of moving swiftly forward to secure Meximieux and

supporting the advance of the 45th's 157th and 180th Regiments northward toward Bourg-en-Bresse.

Located in the Rhône-Alpes region of southeast France, Meximieux, with a wartime population of about 3,500, was a small, attractive, militarily insignificant town near the Ain and Rhône Rivers, about 50 miles west of the Swiss border. Southwest of Meximieux lies Lyon, France's third largest city and known then as the "Capital of the Resistance."

Since Germany could not spare the forces necessary to occupy all of France, which it had conquered in June 1940, Marshal Phillippe Pétain's collaborative puppet government at Vichy was more than willing to handle this task for Hitler. To make sure the French toed the mark, many cities in Vichy France were overseen by ruthless Nazi officers, and one of the most notorious was SS *Obersturmführer* (1st Lieutenant) Klaus Barbie who, since November 1942, had run the Gestapo operation in Lyon. Murder, torture, rape, and the deportation of Jews and other "undesirables" to death camps in the east were Barbie's stock in trade, and a strong underground movement had sprung up in the area, especially in Meximieux, to resist the Nazis.

After having governed the town with an iron fist for many months, the Germans began evacuating Meximieux on August 23 and heading north to form a line of resistance at the Vosges Mountains, much to the great relief of the Meximiards. Alive with resistance fighters, Meximieux had long been a thorn in the Germans' side, and the *Boche* were doubly glad to be leaving. A few days before the evacuation, posters printed by the Committee of the Liberation had appeared all over town, directing the Meximiards to strike back at their occupiers.

Indeed, on August 24, a group of 60 FFI commandos attacked a small German outpost and took the hated enemy soldiers prisoner; the German commander was shot trying to escape. The FFI, emboldened now that the Allies were approaching from the south, also did much to destroy German lines of communication, blow up locomotives and tracks, and generally make life miserable for the retreating enemy. As the Germans departed, their positions were taken over by companies of *maquisards* who planned to hold them until the Americans arrived.

On the day Paris was liberated, August 25, four or five American planes made a bombing run near Meximieux, a sign that the liberators were near. Soon, the church bells were ringing, forbidden French flags (and some home-made American flags as well) appeared in the windows of the town, and the townspeople flooded into the cafés to celebrate.

A jeep of the 45th Infantry Division splashes across a river on the way to Meximieux, August 1945. When a lone jeep from the 45th arrived in Meximieux on August 30, it was soon surrounded by excited civilians.

On August 30 an advance element from the 179th, consisting of one jeep, probed its way into Meximieux where it was immediately swarmed by residents overjoyed at their liberation. One of the Frenchmen recalled, "An American jeep pops out from the road to Charnoz with four men aboard…. The American scouts are surrounded by the crowd. The crowd keeps growing and wishes these soldiers welcome. Solid and smiling, they are perfectly reassuring. They announce the arrival of an American contingent, then they make a tour of the town and disappear. The Meximiards are so happy to welcome the liberators that they have no idea that soon they are going to be in the very heart of the battle."

The lone scout jeep was soon followed by Colonel Meyer and the 179th's 2nd Battalion. When they penetrated into the market square at about 1000 hours, the townspeople greeted them with cheers, hugs, and kisses. Marching proudly at the head of the column was a 10-year-old French lad carrying an American flag. The GIs continued through the town and headed up Highway 22 toward Chalamont when, suddenly, two Junkers Ju-87 Stuka dive-bombers appeared at treetop level and strafed the Yank column. The joy of liberation was quickly replaced by fear; the flags and posters came down. Was it just the random act of a desperate, fleeing foe, or could the Germans be returning?

With the 2nd Battalion now moving northward, the 179th's 1st Battalion, under Lt. Col. Michael Davison (who would later command NATO as well as serve as commandant of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point), was relieved of its job of guarding the Ain River bridge, set up its battalion headquarters at the Meximieux railroad station, and began establishing defensive positions in the

unlikely event the Germans returned. The 3rd Battalion would remain in the rear to bolster the *maquis* fighters guarding the bridge at Loyettes and secure the vital American supply lines.

Davison's battalion was drastically understrength—down to just A and D Companies, HQ Company, and two M-10 tank destroyers—having loaned out B Company to reinforce the 2nd Battalion's push to Chalamont and leaving C Company south of town, guarding the rear. No one thought it would be a problem, for the Germans seemed to be in full retreat and intelligence had not spotted any attempt by the enemy to mount a counteroffensive.

If any German threat existed, Colonel Preston J.C. Murphy, the regiment's executive officer, with his headquarters established in the seminary a block north of the railroad station, assumed it would come from the direction of Lyon, and he deployed F Company to cover that avenue of approach.

Unknown to the Americans or the French, a strong German rear guard was preparing to smash Allied positions in and around Meximieux and at Pont d'Ain. General Friedrich Wiese had ordered General Wend von Wietersheim's 11th Panzer Division—the fabled "Ghost Division"—to mount a major effort to dislodge the Americans from Meximieux and its environs. Prepared to launch the main attack was a *Kampfgruppe* (battle group) made up of elements of the 15th Panzer Regiment, 209th Panzer Regiment, and 111th Panzer Grenadier Regiment. This was no mere delaying action by a retreating enemy; a full-scale counterattack was in the works.

The first blow was struck on the afternoon of August 31. F Company, 179th, at a roadblock on Highway 84 about five miles west of Meximieux, now came under heavy assault by tanks and infantry. A hundred FFI men rushed to the aid of the Yanks but it was no contest; the Germans overran the position and captured most of the 300 defenders. The road to Meximieux was wide open.

By nightfall the Germans had almost completely encircled Meximieux; indeed,

ABOVE: Two German soldiers, walking casually as if on a stroll in the country, are part of the German exodus from Lyon as the Allies advance. OPPOSITE: After landing along the French Riviera near Cannes, Patch's Seventh U.S. Army, including the 45th Infantry Division, moves northward until facing a determined enemy in Meximieux, near the Swiss border.

before dawn on the morning of September 1, some enemy troops had already infiltrated into town and had taken up positions in preparation for the coming battle. As the day broke, the battle began.

Lieutenant Colonel Davison, commanding the 179th's 1st Battalion, recalled, "On 1 September, around 0900, the *Kampfgruppe* attacked Meximieux from the northeast and the south."

One of the men in Gaidosh's company, Uther Gruggett, a corporal and the platoon sergeant of the 3rd Platoon, recalled that he had piled his mess kit with hotcakes at the kitchen truck and "had just returned to my fart sack, sat down to begin eating and reading a letter from home, when all hell broke loose. I heard German machine guns open up. There was no mistake as to whether they were German, as they fired so fast it sounded like a GI with a good case of the GI's. They caught Company A with our pants down. There was no time for the squad leaders to gather the troops together—it was every man on his own."

German machine-gun fire swept the streets, mortar rounds fell from the sky, and the guns of the tanks belched fire, sending shrapnel and pieces of brick, stone, and glass

everywhere; the town was being torn apart. For hours, screams and yells in English, German, and French filled the air, and the panicked civilians burrowed deeply into the recesses of their homes and cellars. No one could tell who was winning the fight, how long it might last, or what would be left of their picturesque city once it ended. The tiny infirmary at the seminary where Colonel Murphy had established regimental headquarters was soon filled to overflowing with the wounded and dying.

Panzer grenadiers made their way through the storm of flying lead, heading for Davison's command post at the railroad station. As the enemy drew ever closer, Davison radioed Murphy for reinforcements; what few extra men he could spare—the cooks and clerks—Murphy sent to the station. The fighting was now hand-to-hand, with no quarter asked or given. With great effort the Yanks forced back the Germans, who retreated, leaving their dead and dying comrades sprawled on the cobblestones.

Robert Fitzpatrick, a platoon sergeant in D Company's mortar platoon, recalled that several members of the company kitchen staff were taken prisoner early in the fighting. One of them, Curtis Hill, had tried to avoid capture, but without success. After crawling into weeds, Fitzpatrick said, "he thought he was home free but when he raised his

Map © 2021 Philip Schwartzberg, Meridian Mapping, Minneapolis, MN

head, a group of German soldiers was standing there, watching him. He was put on a German tank that was later hit and put out of action. He was knocked off the tank and took refuge behind the concrete base of a porch." The Germans fired at Hill but he managed to crawl to the opposite side of the porch where the Americans, thinking he was a German, also began shooting at him. "Somebody saw he was a GI and called for him, so he made a break for it and rejoined our side."

Meanwhile, back in Meximieux, the battle was increasing in ferocity. A *maquis* officer known as Captain Clin reported to Colonel Murphy's headquarters in the seminary and offered his small band of fighters to help the Americans. Outnumbered by the Germans two to one, Murphy gratefully accepted all the help he could get. With the FFI at their side, the Thunderbirds would stand and fight.

Another German assault was building to the south of Meximieux, and Davison's men, carrying only bazookas and rifles, rushed to face this new danger. Fortunately, forward observers in the seminary's steeple had seen the threat and radioed the coordinates to the American howitzers at Charnoz, three miles southeast of Meximieux.

The guns unleashed a hellish barrage that broke up the combined infantry-armor attack, not only to the south of Meximieux, but all around it. The Morning Report of the 189th Field Artillery Battalion stated, "At approximately 1100, a strong force of enemy tanks and infantry attacked road blocks northeast, north, northwest, southwest, and south of the Battery A position [on the far side of the Ain River, where it was attached to Battery B of the 160th FA Battalion], thus forming almost a complete ring around a wide area on three sides of Meximieux, and at some points coming between the battery position and the infantry. The battery kept on firing until afternoon when a message was dropped from a liaison plane saying that enemy tanks were approaching little more than 1000 yards away.... The four guns of Battery A fired 223

ABOVE: After taking Meximieux, the 45th Infantry Division move into Alsace-Lorraine, where the German language was as common as French. Here, Thunderbirds, using a tank destroyer as a shield, move cautiously past a hair-dresser's shop on a street where snipers have been encountered. OPOSITE: Men of the 1st Squad, 1st Platoon, A Company, 179th Infantry Regiment include, standing left to right: Mike Comis, Pete Gaidosh, Eugene Boven, and Earle Klock. Kneeling, left to right, are Andrew Cordova, Stephen Musira, Jacquin Caverhlo, and Stephen Frisch.

rounds of HE [high explosive] and 20 smoke in meeting the attack.

"After the attack had begun, ammunition at the battery position was running low. The battery ammunition train, plus three trucks of Service Battery attached to Battery A, were dispatched down the only available highway, even though it was doubtful if the road was still in possession of our troops. The train got through. On the return trip, the train had to cross the bridge at Loyette, which was under heavy enemy rocket fire. An officer at the bridge stopped the convoy, inquired its destination, and upon learning that Battery A was near Meximieux, told the drivers there was nothing but enemy troops in that area since the enemy breakthrough. The train moved on regardless, and safely ran the gauntlet of enemy fire back to Battery A with the much-needed ammunition, arriving at the position at about the time when the enemy was closest. It was a trying time for Battery A, but every man responded superbly…."

One by one, the Tigers and Panthers and Mark IIIs erupted in flame; crew members who tried to escape were picked off by American sharpshooters. The accompanying panzer grenadiers were similarly gunned down; the survivors fled.

The battle for Meximieux now reached its critical phase. An observer in a church steeple warned that enemy tanks were approaching from east and west. With only two tank destroyers available to defend the town against dozens of panzers, Davison made a bold decision. He placed them in front of City Hall on Geneve Street, their muzzles pointing in opposite directions.

Davison recalled, "At midday, we observed six German tanks, each carrying some infantry soldiers, approaching the town…. I had two tank destroyers [TDs] attached to my battalion and had stationed them back to back in the center of town at the main road junction, prepared to deal with an enemy armor penetration from any direction, or to move to a specified point on the perimeter of town, as needed. The six German tanks did indeed penetrate. Our soldiers took care of most of the riflemen riding on the tanks as the tanks swept into town. But, as they approached the center of town, the TDs knocked out the first three tanks."

A 3-inch shell from one of the TDs blew the track off the first panzer, immobilizing it. A second tank, a Panther, fired a shell into the steeple of a church, killing the observer, and then was itself destroyed by a bazooka round. The burning tank continued on for a few more yards before crashing into the lobby of the Hotel Lion d'Or; a gasoline pump was crushed in the action and the whole block was set ablaze. Attempting to

escape their burning tank, the crewmen were shot down. The second TD spotted another Panther coming from the opposite direction, fired, and disabled it. The panzer spun 180 degrees and crushed a civilian.

Two more Panthers, plus two monstrous, self-propelled 150mm guns, approached the TDs. The Panthers accelerated down the street toward the TDs. Davison said, "Two of the remaining three tanks rushed by the TDs; one was knocked out by bazooka fire and the other took a direct hit on top of the turret from an 81mm mortar round fired by D Company. It set off the ammo in the tank. The sixth tank withdrew from town."

The tracked guns veered off to the south, evidently trying to outflank the TDs, but became lost in the maze of narrow streets until they, too, fell victim to American marksmanship, this time by bazookas.

45th Infantry Division Museum

HERE AND THERE, DEAD BODIES LITTERED THE RUBBLE-STREWN STREETS, AND BUILDINGS AND ARMORED VEHICLES CONTINUED TO BURN.

Lee Treft, the supply sergeant for A Company, 179th Infantry, along with a fellow soldier, witnessed the panzer-led assault. "Two tanks came out [of the woods near town] and opened fire. We took off running to a wall behind us. They fired and hit the wall and made a big hole in it. We went through the hole and over the wall on the other side. There was a railroad there and a small bridge. We got under there and not long after there were Germans all around us. They never did look under the bridge, and we were there 19 hours."

One soldier who did not miss the fighting was Pfc. Robert A. Schmuhl, A Company, 179th Infantry. Acting without orders, Schmuhl, his buddy Herb Mucklow, and three or four others marched to the sounds of the guns, which were not far off. "We were aware of the armor fighting in the center of the village. We had no anti-tank weapons with us. We had only rifles. Herb and I went back toward the center of town, on our side of the east-west street, in search of some weapons. We located a bazooka and two rounds as well as a rifle grenade launcher with an anti-tank grenade, then we headed back to our position. Someone asked us what we were doing and I, in my smart-mouth way, said we were going 'tiger hunting.'"

Pete Gaidosh also recalled the duel between panzers and tank destroyers near the center of town. "Six tanks with infantry aboard rumbled into town from the south, continued under heavy fire which dispersed their riders, and turned into the main street heading for city hall. The first tank was knocked out by our TD and burst into flames. Then the second was hit. The third and fourth got into high gear and charged the TD, scraping the paint as they went, but the other TD knocked out Number 3. Number 4 went by the TD; I'm not sure what happened to Number 5. Meanwhile, the TD reloaded and hit Number 4, and D Company destroyed Number 6 with a mortar. Another tank was coming from the east and was hit and retreated toward the others that stood guard but did not enter."

Sergeant Robert Fitzpatrick, D Company, also did his part to turn back the enemy tanks. He rushed to the top floor of a large house from where he could direct the fire of his four 81mm mortars. "I had my four 81s set up in the yard and at times we were firing in four different directions at the same time. At one time, a German tank was stopped next to a stone fence two or three blocks away and firing a machine gun down the street. I couldn't see it but could tell about where it was, so I directed several 'HE-Heavy' rounds toward it. Two or three sent up dust clouds around the tank and then we got a direct hit that put it out of action."

Robert B. Jackson, a jeep driver in D Company, had a ringside seat to the action; peering out a window near the panzer, he observed Fitzpatrick's kill. "The range was so short that we pulled all the increments and just lobbed the rounds. We were really excited when the kill was confirmed. It is not very often that an 81mm crew can know results for sure."

Schmuhl and Mucklow continued their tiger hunt. "As we approached the street on the eastern edge of town," Schmuhl recounted, "we heard armor coming down the main street. There was a small alley between two houses leading from the street we were on to the main street. It was about five feet wide. I knelt at the edge of the street with the bazooka while Herb loaded the rocket and affixed the wires. Just at that time some German tanks came by with soldiers riding. I fired the bazooka and hit the last tank as it passed. I don't know where the round hit, but the tank advanced a few yards and stopped out of our view."

Schmuhl and Mucklow beat a hasty retreat and rejoined the rest of their squad, but soon came upon another enemy tank. "It was snuggled next to a high stone wall which bounded a hilly field on the edge of town," Schmuhl said. "A farmer's barn opened up to the field. We entered the farmer's walled courtyard, which was on the street level. I looked through a crack in the courtyard's wooden equipment gate and saw an enemy tank to the left." The two GIs cautiously approached the stationary panzer and climbed atop a retaining wall. "Looking over the wall, I peered directly down into the tank turret. The tank com-

A German Panther tank, one of nine knocked out by soldiers of the 45th Infantry Division, lies abandoned in front of the Golden Lion Hotel in Meximieux on September 19, 1944.

mander was talking on the radio."

Mucklow again loaded the bazooka, and Schmuhl took aim and fired—nothing happened! "I knelt back down and picked up my rifle on which I had placed the grenade launcher, grenade, and blank shell casing. I pulled the pin, leaned over the parapet, and fired into the tank turret." Following the explosion, the two GIs high-tailed it back to the temporary safety of the barn.

During the armor battle in the center of town, panzer grenadiers infiltrated the northern part of town, only to be gunned down in the streets and yards by Americans and *maquisards*. A Frenchman described one incident. "A five-man German commando unit attempted to break through in the direction of Mr. Ramel's cellar, where 50 civilians, full of apprehension, had taken refuge. They are protected by one lone American soldier. This man displays an unbelievable amount of self-control and coolness…. Crouched behind a stack of wood in the courtyard which hides access to the cellar, this American soldier cuts down, one after another, these five Germans with his Thompson submachine gun."

Seeing that his armor attacks were ending in disaster, von Wietersheim called off the panzers and sent them heading northeast, in the direction of Pont-d'Ain. The German infantry, however, was making headway, first routing American and FFI fighters from an imposing chateau on the outskirts of town, then assaulting the seminary, where so many wounded troops—friend and foe alike—had been taken, and where Colonel Murphy and Captain Clin had their headquarters. A French account said that the Germans presented Murphy with an ultimatum—surrender or the seminary would be blown up. Although he knew that reinforcements were on their way, he had no idea when they would arrive.

Murphy rejected the surrender demand and stationed his 150 remaining men, along with Clin's equal number, at the doors and windows of the seminary in preparation for an all-out German assault. When the infantry did attempt to rush the building, the attack was greeted with a hailstorm of bullets, and the enemy backed off.

Lieutenant Colonel Davison said, "We identified four to six additional tanks, but they remained outside of town and our artillery damaged three of them. Sporadic fighting around the perimeter continued until nightfall, when the *Kampfgruppe* began to withdraw from the area. By daylight the next morning, Meximieux was again secure. The *Kampfgruppe* had failed in its mission to drive us back from our position holding the road on the flank of the retreating Nineteenth German Army, and enabling our forces to race north, maintaining pressure on them."

As a gray dawn lightened the sky, the Meximiards began to emerge from their hiding places and inspect their town, which had been left a shattered ruin. Here and there, dead bodies littered the rubble-strewn streets, and buildings and armored vehicles continued to burn. Hanging out of the turret of the panzer that crashed into the Hotel Lion d'Or was the charred skeleton of the tank commander. Robert Fitzpatrick also saw the panzer that his mortarmen had hit. "There was one dead German on the deck and one hanging halfway out the turret. There may have been others inside," he reported.

Almost as a way of asking forgiveness for the destruction that had come to Meximieux, the Americans came forth with food and water for the stunned, frightened residents.

Remarkably, American casualties had been light. The official Army history states that the 179th lost three killed, 27 wounded, and 185 missing, presumed captured, while the attacking Germans had suffered considerably heavier losses: 85 dead, many more wounded, and 41 POWs. In addition, eight medium and four light panzers, three self-propelled guns, and seven other vehicles had been knocked out, and four mortars and four machine guns were captured. Some 28 civilian Meximiards also perished, but the town was at last free; the enemy would never come this way again.

On the morning of September 2, when all was quiet, Lee Treft, still hiding beneath a railroad bridge, saw another GI from A Company, Andy Cordova, advancing down the railroad track, grenade in hand. "He had pulled the pin," said Treft, "and was ready to throw the grenade under the bridge when I called, 'Cordova!' He threw the grenade over the tracks and said, 'What are you doing here?'" Treft explained that he had been there for 19 hours. Cordova commented that Treft had missed all the fighting. "We got out from under the bridge and there were five German tanks smoking."

Davison had high praise for those who turned back the German assault. "All of this was accomplished by a battalion minus two rifle companies; a couple of TDs; the clerks, cooks, and drivers of regimental headquarters; and our supporting artillery. An important element in the successful defense of Meximieux was a group of about 150 French Forces of the Interior that joined with us in the fight and performed superbly."

Ignoring the body of a dead German soldier, American troops of the 45th Infantry Division don gear in front of a knocked-out enemy tank.

For the men of the 45th, the end of the battle did not mean the end of the war. There were still hundreds of miles to go, from Meximieux to the German-held Maginot Line and, across the border, the Westwall, or Siegfried Line, where terrible fighting would take place at the end of 1944. Once through the defensive strongholds, the 45th, along with the rest of Patch's Seventh Army and Lt. Gen. George S. Patton, Jr.'s Third Army, would race eastward through the heart of Germany, smashing through every roadblock and resistance point the Germans could throw in their way.

The Thunderbirds would not stop until they had liberated the Dachau concentration camp and helped take Munich at war's end.

Today, the town of Meximieux, population 7,000, has been restored and rebuilt to its prewar charm, with little hint of the terrible fighting that once swirled through its streets. Yet, here and there, plaques and markers commemorate the battle and pay homage to those who lost their lives on September 1-2, 1944. And, in one amazing piece of irony, when Michael Davison, in 1962, was promoted to four-star general and commander of NATO, the military attaché assigned to him from the West German *Bundeswehr* was one of the officers who had fought against him and his troops at Meximieux.

With 511 days of combat, the 45th Infantry Division's battle for Meximieux was just one small chapter in a very long history. For the men who fought there and survived, however, it remained permanently etched in their minds as an example of no matter how unfair the odds or dangerous the situation, the American fighting man in World War II was more than equal to the challenge. □

Flint Whitlock is the editor of WWII Quarterly *magazine as well as a number of books, including the acclaimed history of the 45th Division*, The Rock of Anzio. *For additional reading, he recommends* The Battle of Meximieux *(in French) by Dr. Victor Fol and Rene-Charles Rudigoz.*

Both: National Archives

TARGET: DAS REICH

American Bombers over Nazi Germany laid waste to the enemy homeland—but paid a heavy price.

BY MARK CARLSON

Aboard each of the hundreds of Liberators and Flying Fortresses that daily left the soil of England bound for targets in Germany were ten young men.

Outwardly they were no different from any late-teen or early-twenties boy one would meet anywhere in America. Same faces, same names, same youthful vigor and sense of invincibility.

On their shoulders rested the hopes of a nation, a world at war.

Bombardiers and navigators; pilots and co-pilots; radio operators; flight engineers; and ball, waist, and tail gunners. Some were officers, most were sergeants. They came from factories and farms, small towns and big cities, but they each ended up in a narrow aluminum tube with four roaring engines, a dozen machine guns, and four tons of high explosives.

THE CHALLENGE

In early 1943, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill wrote a letter to Air Marshal Sir Charles Portal regarding his concerns about the U.S. Army Air Force's ability to destroy Germany's war industry: "The real question is not whether the American heavy bombers can penetrate into Germany by day without prohibitive losses, but how often they can do it and what weight of bombs they can discharge for the vast mass of ground personnel and materiel involved."

In Churchill's mind, the effectiveness of U.S. daylight bombing came down to this simple equation. At this point in the war, the RAF was already putting up as many as a thousand bombers over Germany, while the new Eighth Air Force Bomber Command was hard-pressed to put up as few as fifty.

For the Yanks, the time between August 1942 and April 1943 had a very steep learning curve. For one thing, pre-war bomber theorists were convinced that the heavy bomber, bristling with .50-caliber machine guns and flying nearly as fast as fighters, would need no escorts.

Furthermore, they never considered that bombers would have to fly as high as

Photo 100th B.G. Foundation

Photo Courtesy Lynn Tipton

ABOVE: An olive-drab B-17G Flying Fortress of the 401st Bomb Squadron, 91st Bomb Group, flies over the English countryside on its way to hit targets in Germany. Later in the war, the bombers were left unpainted to save weight. The Eighth U.S. Air Force lost over 10,500 planes and 47,000 personnel killed and wounded in combat during the war.

TOP: Lieutenant John Gibbons (left), 100th Bomb Group, survived 49 missions; Lieutenant Lynn Tipton (right) at bombardier training in Childress, Texas, 1944.

LEFT: With its right wing on fire and breaking apart, a B-17 from the 483rd Bomb Group flying over rail yards is about to crash in the Yuogoslav city of Nis, April 25, 1944.

30,000 feet in order to avoid German anti-aircraft fire. Therefore, the bombers were unpressurized, unarmored, and woefully under-armed in the brutally Darwinian world of modern aerial combat. The first bomber groups to mount raids over occupied France, Belgium, and the Low Countries made scarcely a dent in the Axis's hold on the continent.

The Luftwaffe, already blooded by the Battle of Britain and the RAF's night bombing raids, were initially cautious when they encountered the massive B-17 Flying Fortresses and B-24 Liberators in the summer and fall of 1942. But they soon learned that even with as many as a dozen light and heavy machine guns spurting from each plane, there was little to fear from the American bombers.

Soon, American bomber losses had become so significant that the entire concept of daylight precision bombing was under constant attack on both sides of the Atlantic. This was when Churchill stepped into the ring with his letter to Portal. But General Ira Eaker, head of Eighth Bomber Command, countered the PM's concerns by stating that between the RAF and USAAF, Germany would be "bombed 'round the clock." This was just the kind of rhetoric Churchill loved, and he soon gave Eaker his cautious blessing.

During the first year of the air war over Europe, the USAAF bombers had not hit Germany with anything more than a few nuisance raids. The fighters and flak defenses over the occupied lands were relatively light compared to what awaited the Eighth and Fifteenth Air Forces bombers over the heart of the Third Reich.

"YOUR TARGET FOR TODAY, GENTLEMEN"

On dozens of dark airfields all over East Anglia on the southeast corner of England, neat rows of heavy bombers were being fueled and loaded with bombs and ammunition. A mission was set for that day. Overhead a solid cloud cover obscured the stars and moon. The air was drizzly and cold. But the meteorology wizards at

Photo Courtesy Lynn Tipton

Photo Courtesy Delton Reopelle

ABOVE: Lynn Tipton (left, back row), 493rd BG, poses with his smiling crew at RAF Debach before a bombing mission. BELOW: Co-pilot Lieutenant Delton "Rip" Reopelle (standing, back center), 379th Bomb Group, poses for a crew picture, October 28, 1944. He noted, "If anybody said they weren't scared of flak, they're lying."

"Pinetree" at Eighth Bomber Command HQ had predicted clear skies and fair conditions over the Channel and Germany.

The target, carefully selected from reconnaissance photos, intelligence analysis, and the current objectives of the high command, was already chosen. The bomb groups, wings, and divisions were alerted, and the mission operations order sent out by teletype.

Long before dawn lightened the cold sky, a lone man entered the Nissen huts where aircrews rested in uneasy slumber. Many were sleeping off the stress, fatigue, and leftover fear from the previous day's mission. At 3 AM, the CQ (Charge of Quarters) began waking up the crews. Holding a flashlight, he shook each man's shoulder and made sure he was awake. There was the usual grumbling and swearing. But the groggy airmen began to stir, reaching for their cigarettes and clothes.

Radio operator Sergeant Don Hammond, who flew 28 missions with the infamous 100th Bomb Group, recalls "The Charge of Quarters came in and said 'Hey, you're flying. Briefing at 4 AM, takeoff at 6:30.'"

At that moment, the bomber crews knew that they were facing another day of fighting for their lives in the air over enemy territory. The only question was, what target? A railroad yard, oil refinery, aircraft factory, or ball-bearing plant? Each one would be heavily defended by flak guns. And the moment they crossed the coast and headed over the continent, they would be set upon by hordes of Luftwaffe fighters. Just another day over the Third Reich.

Men pulled on long johns and flight suits. The veterans were used to the routine, making certain they carried nothing that would indicate their unit or any personal information, things that would be useful to the Germans. They wore dog tags and fleece-lined boots. A few put lucky charms into their pockets or bowed their heads in prayer.

Then, thinking about breakfast, they trudged out in the chilly darkness to walk to the mess hall. Some groups were lucky enough to have farmers nearby willing to sell produce to the Yanks. Hammond recalled, "We had fresh eggs, served to anyone who was flying." But things weren't the same all over.

Navigator Dick Tyhurst, a veteran of 35 missions with the 95th Bomb Group said, "At Horham we always had powdered eggs, toast, and coffee. Each squadron had 120 guys. Three squadrons, that's 360 hungry men. No way are you going to have fresh eggs."

The airmen then made their way over to the main Nissen hut for the mission briefing, conducted by the group commander and intelligence officer. Behind them was a large curtain covering a map of Europe.

"We went to the main hall with all the crews," continued Hammond. "Armed sentries stayed at the door so we couldn't get out. I thought that was kind of funny."

Pilot John Gibbons, who survived 49 missions with the 100th, related his memories of the briefings: "The group C.O. said, 'Gentlemen, your target for today is ...', then he pulled the curtain. We saw the blood-red ribbons stretch all the way from our bases across the Channel to Holland or Belgium and right into Germany. Those ribbons went right over all these fighter bases. Everybody in the room would just groan and sigh or mutter 'Oh, goddamn.'"

The group commander gave the details of the mission, the target, and the course they were to take. He listed what other groups, wings, and divisions were also on the mission, along with their places in the formation. Upon hearing that one or another group would be in the low slot in the low wing, more muttering was heard. "Poor bastard, better them than us."

National Archives

In the cold air high above Berlin, Eighth Air Force B-17s unleash their bombs on the capital of the Third Reich.

"Tail-end Charlie" often caught the brunt of German attacks, particularly the Luftwaffe's head-on attacks that had become a standard tactic by the spring of 1943.

Colonel Archie J. Old, Jr., of the 96th Bomb Group often took the low slots in a formation. "The low plane of the low squadron of the low group, that was the hot spot, often called 'Coffin Corner.' If you wanted to see a lot of fighters, that was where you would see them."

The next matter was fighter escort—what units would follow them across the Channel, who would escort them to the target—and what call signs and codes were to be used. The most important details were rendezvous times and recall codes.

The group intelligence officer then detailed what kind of fighter opposition they might encounter, and what flak was protecting the target. The briefing often ended with a pep talk about how important the target was, how it must be hit and totally destroyed, and that it was essential to the war effort.

"That sounded great," said Stephen King, a pilot of the 379th Group. "But we had heard it so many times it hardly registered. Besides, some of those places, like Regensburg, Bremen, Schweinfurt, and Frankfort had been hit more than once, and we kept having to go back and do it again. And every time cost us a lot of planes and crews."

Then everyone synchronized their watches. The pilots and gunners left, leaving only the navigators and bombardiers, who were given instructions about route and target information.

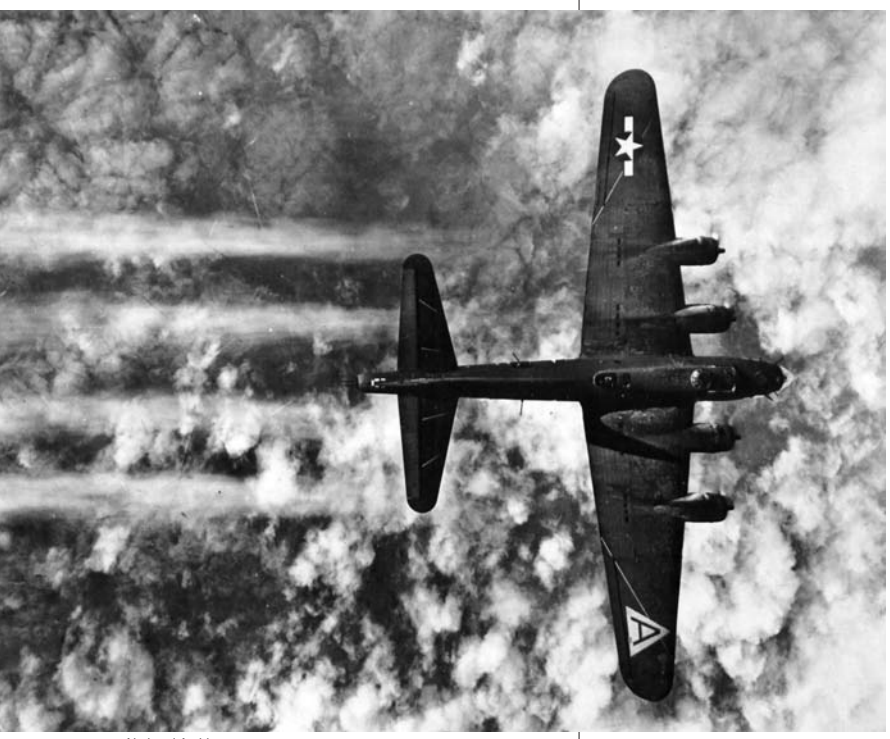
Lynn Tipton, a bombardier of the 493rd Bomb Group, said, "We were shown aerial photos and maps showing the bomb run and I.P., or Aiming Point. The group

armorer said what bomb load we'd have."

The radio operators were given the frequencies and codes and warned about radio silence.

"I got a sealed bag with my frequencies and information for the day," remembered Hammond. "I had an escape kit with medical kit, fishhooks and line, some fake I.D. and maps. I had about $50 in gold to bribe civilians [in case I was shot down]. After briefing we drew our oxygen masks, electrically heated flight suit, Mae West, parachute, pistol, and flak vest."

Sergeant Larry Goldstein, a radio operator in the 388th Bomb Group, had his first taste of combat in the dark days after the first Schweinfurt raid of August 1943:



National Archives

"We were rushed right into the 388th because of the heavy losses. Once we began missions, unless you were in the lead or deputy lead plane, the only thing we did was to listen for weather updates, fighter rendezvous information, or possible recall orders."

Radio operators were also responsible for throwing out the aluminized Mylar strips known as "window" or "chaff" to confuse and overwhelm German radar.

The sky slowly turned from deep violet to dusty pink in the east as the crews stubbed out final cigarettes and drove out to the bombers waiting on the hardstands. By early 1944, most heavy bomb groups fielded 21 planes for a mission, with four in reserve for aborts; 210 young men walked up to their planes. Some planes bore rows of bomb symbols to denote the number of missions that the plane had flown. A few had swastikas for air-to-air kills. Many had patches covering flak and bullet holes.

While Hollywood and popular culture supported the legend that every bomber had a nude girl painted on the nose, most nose art was whimsical, witty, or a double-entendre. Names like "Bad Check," "Jersey Bounce," "Witchcraft," "Old Flak Sack," "Worrywart," "Nine Yanks and a Little Jerk," and others predominated. But as the war dragged on and hundreds of bombers ended up as smoking wreckage on the ground, nose art became less common.

One pilot of the 96th Group, Ed Davidson, commented, "Each squadron was in its own line in the hardstands. We checked the bombs and fuel load and calculated the center of gravity."

"Our ground-crew chief went over the damage and repairs from the previous mission with Lieutenant Stan Cebuhar and me," said co-pilot Delton "Rip" Reopelle of the 379th.

Stanley Lawruk, a flight engineer with the 92nd said, "I walked with the ground-crew chief and inspected it to make sure everything was fine for flight."

For a takeoff of 6:30 AM hours, most crews were on board by 6:00. Every inch of the bombers' aluminum skin was icy cold to the touch. The radio operator and gunners stepped through the aft door, while the officers and flight engineer went up into the small nose hatch. The interior smelled of metal, oil, fuel, and the faint tang of cordite. It was a sharp reminder that their plane had "seen the elephant"—a Civil War phrase meaning that one had been in combat—and would do so again today.

"I crawled into the tail and checked my ammunition," Rich Tangradi, a 100th Group tail gunner, explained. "Two boxes, each with 600 rounds of one tracer, two armor piercing, and two incendiaries. I put the guns in their positions and lifted the receiver, put in the belt, then slammed it down and locked it. No one touched those guns but me."

The other gunners prepared their positions and weapons, making certain that the ammunition feed lines were clear. They each had about 7,000 rounds, enough for about three minutes of sustained firing.

While the gunners were confident of their ability to fight off the Luftwaffe, flak was another matter. Flak caused more wounds than bullets and cannon shells. Although the small bits of shrapnel from bursting 88mm shells lost much of their velocity as they cut through the aluminum skin of the plane, they could still be deadly.

Early on, gunners sometimes hauled a scrap piece of protective steel onboard to stand or sit on, but this could affect a bomber's critical center of gravity. The obvious answer was the flak vest and helmet, which arrived in the ETO (European Theater of Operations) by 1944. The helmet was based on the M1 infantry ballistic-steel helmet but had wide covers for earphones.

Materiel Command also devised a long vest with thin, overlapping plates of manganese steel sewn into the front and back that reduced flak wounds by almost 60 percent. But some men wanted more; a navigator with the 381st bomb Group persuaded

an armorer to make a steel-lined jock strap to protect the "family jewels."

Later, blankets lined with steel could be hung around crew positions without adding much weight.

The only thing left was the parachute, which crewmen kept nearby for quick retrieval.

THE SOUND OF FREEDOM

About 10 minutes before takeoff, pilots switched on the energizers, starting up the electrical system. Bombardiers fitted their Norden bombsights and warmed up the motors and gyros. Once the doors and hatches were closed and latched, the crews called the pilot and checked in. Then they settled in for takeoff. The tail gunner and ball-turret gunner moved to the center of the fuselage until after takeoff.

At exactly 6:30 AM, two yellow flares speared into the dawn sky over the control tower. No radio calls were made. All along the squadron lines, 84 huge radial engines roared into life, popping and banging as they warmed up. Gouts of blue flame spat from exhaust vents as the pilots adjusted throttles and mixture controls. The noise dominated the countryside as more groups started up at nearby airfields. Frightened birds took to the sky. Rudders, ailerons, and elevators moved, and flaps lowered. The bomb bay doors closed, hiding their deadly brood.

At 6:35 a yellow and a green flare were fired, and the planes moved out one by one onto the long airfield perimeter track to the end of the runway. At 7 AM, when all was ready, two green flares arced into the sky.

The first plane, flown by the group leader, advanced its engines to full power, released its brakes, and moved down the runway. With four tons of bombs, 2,500 gallons of fuel, belts of ammo, and 10 crewmen, the bomber had to claw its way into the morning sky. Crashes were common, even expected, so fire and emergency crews were on alert during takeoff.

Flight Engineer Lawruk described a takeoff in the B-17: "The co-pilot released the brakes, and the pilot advanced the throttles. I stood between the two seats and called out the airspeed and kept an eye on the instruments. In the tail, the gunner would have been using an Aldis lamp to give the following plane a visual reference, especially in thick fog or low cloud."

Co-pilot Ralph Golubock of the 44th Bomb Group recalled one takeoff during "Big Week," the massive effort in late February 1944 to destroy the Reich's aircraft and armaments industry. Leaving their field behind, Golubock's heavily loaded B-24 had to make a long, grinding climb through heavy overcast. With visibility at zero, the pilots waited to break out into clear skies. "To our horror, we saw a huge flash of light in the sky. We all knew that two planes had collided and exploded. Just like that, 20 men had been killed."

One by one the big planes lifted off. "Take-

Photo courtesy 100th Bomb Group Foundation

Tail gunner Bruce Richardson in his "office" at the end of a B-17. He survived 35 missions and recalled that Merseburg had over 1,000 AA guns. BELOW: Bill O'Leary (384th BG) and his crew. He said flak was so thick "You could walk on it." OPPOSITE: With white contrails streaming from its four engines, a Flying Fortress from the 91st Bomb Group makes its bombing run above Osnabrück, Germany.

"CREWS TALKED ABOUT FLAK SO THICK YOU COULD WALK ON IT. THE SKY OVER COLOGNE WAS ALMOST BLACK. I DON'T KNOW HOW ANY PLANES MADE IT THROUGH. WE CAME BACK WITH AN AWFUL LOT OF HOLES."

LEFT: Radio operation Don Hammond beside his B-27 "Our Gal." The swastikas painted below windows indicate the plane's gunners have shot down two enemy planes. RIGHT: German pilot Egon Mayer developed a tactic of attacking bombers with a head-on charge.

off was done by section and squadron," explained Ed Davidson. "We took off at 30-second intervals and climbed."

Navigator Dick Tyhurst recalled, "We had three groups in the 13th Combat Wing: the 100th at Thorpe-Abbots, we were in the middle at Horham, and the 390th was at Framlingham to the southeast."

Davidson said, "We used vertically-aimed radio beacons called 'Bunchers.' The airfields were roughly five miles apart. When we took off, we had to circle tightly over our beacon because five miles away were other groups within our combat wing. Sometimes we'd come up out of the clouds and five miles away we'd see another B-17 come out."

It usually took about an hour to form a full wing of three groups, totaling at least 60 planes. Air divisions of three or more groups took more time to form, until several hundred heavy bombers were circling over East Anglia, an area as large as Connecticut.

A later innovation was the "assembly plane," usually a retired B-24 with all its armament removed and painted garish colors to make it highly visible to the bombers. Using flares and other visual recognition signals, the yellow, orange, and red Liberators herded the groups into their position in the stream.

Yet, even with radio silence, the huge armada was no secret to the Germans. Radar had begun to pick them up as soon as the planes reached 10,000 feet. Radio calls went out among the Luftwaffe Defense Zones and possible targets.

Then the bombers turned southeast toward the Channel and the Reich.

GETTING TO WORK

With the English coast behind, the gunners and navigators went to work. Joe Armanini, a 100th Group bombardier, said, "I went back to the bomb bay and pulled the safety pins on the nose and tail of each bomb to arm them. The crew tested their guns when we reached the sea."

The First and Third Air Divisions were B-17 groups, while the Second Air Division consisted of the faster B-24. Most raids into Germany consisted of at least 300-400 bombers, but some of the larger raids mounted more than 800. The bomber stream ran for 50 miles from Anglia to the Dutch coast, the higher-flying Fortresses leaving long, lacy white contrails in the cerulean blue sky.

Above them flew the P-47 escorts in "S" curves to stay with the slower bombers. Far ahead, more fighters were moving over the enemy coast to suppress flak and German fighters.

Coordination between the fighter and bomber groups was one of the most difficult and often frustrating parts of a deep-penetration mission. Fog or bad weather over a fighter base might ground the fighters, but the bombers would not know of it. They expected to be met by the long-range P-51s as they moved deeper into Germany. But those fighters were not there to stay with the bombers; they were to find and destroy the Luftwaffe.

As they climbed ever higher, the crews hooked up their oxygen lines; there were emergency "walk-around" bottles if they had to leave their station. The air temperature at 30,000 feet often dropped to 40 or 50 degrees below zero.

Dick Tyhurst related how the crews endured the crippling, and even deadly, cold: "We had these heated flight suits, the F3. Regular flight suit first, then the blue, electrically heated long johns. They had a six-foot cord to plug into your station. The cuffs had cords to plug into boots and gloves. The leather pants were like overalls with a fleece-lined leather jacket."

It was dangerous to wet oneself in the suit, as the wires shorted out and caused severe burns.

"In the older B-17Fs, the waist windows were open," commented Rich Tangradi. "It got colder than hell in there."

Ball-turret gunner Bob Mathiasen, a veteran of 35 missions with the 100th, said, "I had my suit temperature turned up all the way to keep from freezing to death. I never touched anything with my bare fingers. My skin would freeze onto the metal."

National Archives

Photo courtesy Dick Tyhurst

Photo courtesy Ed Davidson

ABOVE: Bomber crews had no defense against anti-aircraft artillery fire. Here B-17s of the 381st Bomb Group fly through deadly bursts of flak over Schweinfurt, 1943. LEFT: 95th BG navigator Dick Tyhurst said, "Life got pretty serious all of a sudden." RIGHT: Pilot Ed Davidson, 96th Bomb Group, welcomed the whiskey at debriefing.

The navigators, following their notes from the briefing, checked their charts and took sightings on landmarks. Lieutenant Hal Turrell, navigator in the 445th Bomb Group said, "A navigator never knows where he is. He knows where he has been, and where he is going to be, but never where he is."

FLAK: THE BLACK DEATH

As the bombers crossed the North Sea, they entered the domain of German flak batteries that were often positioned on bomber routes. Fliegerabwehrkanone, meaning aircraft defense cannon, was one of the most feared and despised defenses the bomber crews faced. This Krupp-built 88mm gun could effectively reach up to 25,000 feet, causing the bombers to fly into a deadly umbrella of hot shrapnel.

When flak burst close by, the pilots' control wheels often shook with such violence it was difficult to hold them. Red-hot shrapnel tore through a bomber's thin skin, ripping apart control lines, hydraulics, instruments, and human flesh. The B-17 had a reputation for being able to survive heavy damage, but still, many of them were brought down with flak. The faster, longer-ranging Consolidated B-24 Liberators could not absorb as much damage. Being lower in the formation, they bore the brunt of the flak strikes.

Pilot Stephen King of the 379th Group recalled, "We were briefed that there were over 900 flak guns at Hamburg. I believe it." Sergeant Bruce Richardson, a 35-mission tail gunner with the 100th, commented, "Merseburg had about 1,100 guns, nearly all 88s."

"The Germans put 88s on railroad cars so they could move them to where they were most needed," said 384th group pilot Bill O'Leary. "Crews talked about flak so thick you could walk on it. The sky over Cologne was almost black. I don't know how any planes made it through. We came back with an awful lot of holes."

Rip Reopelle said laconically, "If anybody who went through flak said they weren't scared, they're a liar."

Dick Tyhurst recalled, "When I saw the flak over Munich, I thought 'Wow, unless we're lucky as hell, we're gonna get killed.' Life got pretty serious all of a sudden. The 88 had a range of over 25,000 feet. Fortunately, we flew above that. The gunners were so good that if you flew below 20,000 feet you were duck soup."

Waist gunner Frank Buschmeier of the 100th said, "The Germans fired volleys hoping we'd fly into it. It preyed on our mind more than fighters because there wasn't anything we could do about it."

During the period from fall 1943 to spring 1944, an average of 30 bombers were shot down on every mission over Germany. With each plane went 10 young men.

Joe Armanini related an encounter with flak: "Over Berlin the flak was fierce. If you saw the red ball in the center of the flak, that was really close. One exploded, couldn't have been more than 10 feet away, and it just shook the whole plane like hell. I said 'God, that was really close!'"

What flak could do to a plane was made clear to Don Hammond: "On one mission I was bent over getting a chaff roll to eject through the window chute. When I came back up and saw the fuselage, there was a huge hole right where my head had been."

"I lost my radio operator over Germany," John Gibbons said. "An 88 exploded in his compartment and blew him out, leaving only a six-by-eight-foot hole."

U.S. Air Force

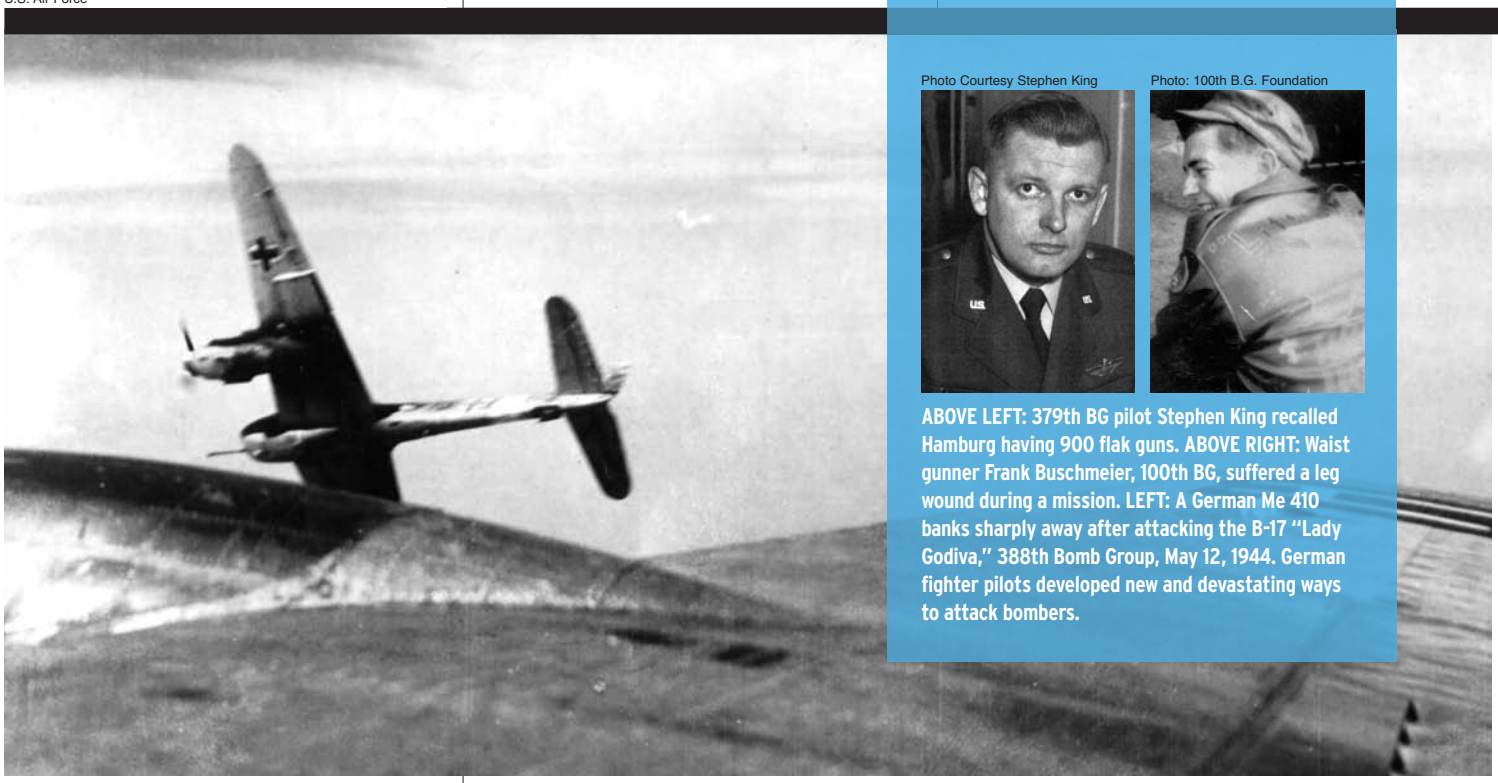


Photo Courtesy Stephen King

Photo: 100th B.G. Foundation

ABOVE LEFT: 379th BG pilot Stephen King recalled Hamburg having 900 flak guns. ABOVE RIGHT: Waist gunner Frank Buschmeier, 100th BG, suffered a leg wound during a mission. LEFT: A German Me 410 banks sharply away after attacking the B-17 "Lady Godiva," 388th Bomb Group, May 12, 1944. German fighter pilots developed new and devastating ways to attack bombers.

Bombers loaded with fuel, ammunition and four tons of high explosive often blew up from a direct hit to the bomb bay.

Lt. Col. Bierne Lay, Jr., who in 1948 would co-author the screenplay for "Twelve O'clock High," starring Gregory Peck, was an observer with the 100th on the August 17, 1943, mission to destroy a Messerschmitt factory at Regensburg. The appalling casualties of the Schweinfurt-Regensburg mission are well known, but Lay's accounts are worth noting: "A B-17 turned slowly to the right out of the formation, maintaining altitude. In a split second the B-17 completely disappeared in a brilliant explosion from which the only remains were four small balls of fire, the fuel tanks, which quickly consumed as they fell earthward.

"I saw one B-17 with its cockpit completely on fire. The co-pilot crawled out of his window, held on with one hand, reached back to buckle on his parachute, let go, and was whisked back into the horizontal stabilizer. I think the impact killed him. His chute did not open."

Far below, the green fields and forests of Germany bore dozens of black funeral pyres, the wreckage of the bombers brought down.

"BANDITS AT 12 O'CLOCK HIGH!"

By the end of the war, antiaircraft fire had brought down more than 5,400 bombers, compared to 4,300 claimed by fighters. But the Me 109 and Fw 190 were the deadly sharks in the aerial seas over Europe. Nevertheless, bomber crews preferred dealing with fighters because at least they could shoot back at their foe.

Early in the war, the Luftwaffe was cautious of the bristling guns of the B-17s and B-24s. But in time, they found chinks in the coverage of the machine guns. The weakest spot on both the B-17 and B-24 was the nose. The few flexible .30-caliber guns in the nose compartment—operated by the navigator and bombardier when they were not involved in their primary duties—were not able to do more than annoy the darting fighters. Along with the twin .50s in the top and ball turrets, they were the only guns that could be turned to face a head-on attack.

On November 23, 1942, an audacious and daring Luftwaffe pilot named Egon Mayer of III JG 2 Richthofen shot down two B-17s and one B-24. He developed the tactic of moving about five miles ahead of the bomber stream, approaching head-on at a combined speed of about 550 knots, and firing a three-second burst of cannon fire into the bomber's nose and flight deck. Mayer's success soon led to more head-on attacks, and by the spring of 1943, it was a standard tactic for the Luftwaffe.

The Luftwaffe's primary fighter weapon was the 20mm cannon, which was used on all its front-line fighters. While they had a slower rate of fire than machine guns, their explosive shells could do terrible damage to an unarmored bomber.

A 91st Bomb Group co-pilot watched as a B-17 was completely cut in two by intense 20mm shells: "The B-17 came apart at the radio room. The front half, wings and engines still running, seemed to rise, completely separated from the tail. Debris fell away, then the two halves twisted and tumbled down and away."

Unlike the flexible guns used by the waist and nose gunners, the top and belly turrets were physically mounted to the bomber's frame. When fired, they shook the entire plane with solid thumps.

Navigator Edwin Frost of the 381st Bomb Group said, "It was just pandemonium! It seemed that every gun on the ship was firing at once. The noise was terrific. The

Germans were just tear-assing right through us."

The B-24s of the 445th Bomb Group went on their first mission on December 13, 1943, to hit the submarine pens at Bremen and Kiel. By this time Bremen was protected by over 350 AAA guns and 100 fighters.

One of the B-24s was piloted by movie star and Captain Jimmy Stewart, who would fly at least 30 missions with the 445th. Navigator Hal Turrell recalls that mission and his first encounter with Hermann Göring's fighters: "We met up with German fighters over the North Sea.

"They came diving in on us from 12 o'clock high; our combined speed was 550 miles per hour. These Luftwaffe pilots were very aggressive and experienced. They came right through our formation, firing and rolling on their sides.

"I remember thinking, 'Lord, it isn't like the movies. Where is John Wayne?' Then a P-38 Lightning came diving through our formation, and I thought, 'Great! The cavalry's arrived!' Then I saw an Me 109 on its tail. Just about the time he came level with us, the P-38 exploded. So much for the cavalry.

"Bombers went down by falling out of the sky, either burning or spinning. When this happened, there were rarely any chutes. The poor guys were pinned against the walls by the centrifugal force and never got out. They rode those doomed planes right into the ground."

Lieutenant Ralph Golubock was a replacement co-pilot in the famous 44th Bomb Group, the "Eight Balls," which had flown the disastrous August 1, 1943, low-level raid on Ploesti, Romania. (See *WWII Quarterly*, Winter 2019.) With the group back in England by the fall of 1943, Golubock was on his first mission on December 30 to hit the I.G. Farben plant at Ludwigshaven, deep inside Germany. The German fighters attacked shortly after the Eight Balls crossed the coast.

"We could see them queueing up far ahead of us, and soon they started coming in directly ahead, slightly above our altitude," Golubock said. "They dived straight in at us, firing the whole time, until I thought they were going to ram us."

One of the co-pilot's duties was to call out the fighters, but Golubock found this to be nearly impossible. "I did my best, but they were coming in from all over and flashing past before I could even say anything. All of our guns were firing, and the smell of cordite permeated the plane."

AERIAL ARSENAL

The period between October 1943 and January 1944 was almost a respite for the Eighth Bomber Command. While they licked their wounds, new groups and replacement planes came in from the States. The big change came on January 6, when General Jimmy Doolittle replaced Ira Eaker as head of Bomber Command. The leader of the April 1942 raid on Tokyo had inherited a rapidly growing force that was both veteran and neophyte, with an expanding list of targets and objectives.

Operation Point Blank, the eradication of the Luftwaffe, which began in July 1943, was still in effect, but the looming invasion of Europe set for late spring 1944 was going to require a different set of priorities in Germany and France. Still, Doolittle's bombers went on missions, often suffering appalling losses from flak and fighters.

Rich Tangradi recalled, "I spotted an Fw 190 coming up out of the overcast inching in towards us. I thought, 'You sonofabitch, when you get to about 600 yards, I'm gonna get you!' He came in and I hit my triggers—and my guns didn't work. He got to about 200 yards and started shooting. The Focke-Wulf has guns in both wings and the shells were going by on each side of me. I got hit in both arms. It's a good thing it wasn't an Me 109 because they have a big 20mm in the nose. If he'd had that, he'd have blown me away."

Doolittle was planning on leading the first mission on "Big B," as Berlin was known. But his knowledge of the upcoming Normandy invasion and the cracking of the ULTRA encryption system made it too dangerous to allow him to fly over enemy territory.

Berlin was the target on March 4, with 500 B-17s from the First and Third Air Divisions sent aloft. This was to be a mission to hit the heart of the Reich, but false German radio signals caused much of the Allied force to be recalled. Somehow, though, two squadrons of the 95th Group

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Lt. Col. Jimmy Stewart, famous Hollywood film star turned air force officer with the 2nd Bombardment Wing, takes part in a post-mission briefing, July 23, 1944.

and one squadron of the 100th did not receive the recall order; even when they saw the rest of the force turning back, the 29 bombers flew on.

Lieutenant Bill Charles of the 95th saw that their combat box was in for a rough time. "We watched as vivid red flashes of AAA marked the Berlin defenses. Seconds later the heavy 88mm shells reached us, exploding among the bombers."

The only saving grace was the presence of P-51 Mustangs that had chosen to stay with the remaining bombers. In all, the first-ever USAAF bombing raid on Big B lost five B-17s and four Mustangs. But it was only the beginning.

Two days later, Doolittle put up 700 heavy bombers and 800 fighters to hit Berlin again. The bomber stream stretched for 60 miles, leaving long contrails behind them.

The Luftwaffe countered with 500 fighters. Doolittle's Thunderbolts and Mustangs brought down 87 German fighters, with 75 bombers lost. The Bloody Hundredth was savaged, losing 15 planes.

By spring 1944 the B-17G, with the new chin turret, was appearing in greater numbers. The chin turret, with twin remotely operated .50s, was the USAAF's answer to the head-on attack. Still, hitting a small fighter in the few seconds that it was visible coming head-on at 550 knots was almost impossible.

Bombardier Joe Armanini said, "I preferred the older F model with the two side and nose guns. That chin turret was kind of hard to aim. I really liked being able to see down the barrel to fire the guns."

SECRET WEAPONS

Despite the extended Point Blank offensive, the Luftwaffe was still receiving fighters from their factories, and they had about 2,500 fighters stationed in Western Germany to defend against the bombers. Forests of flak batteries lined the bomber routes. Raids from September 11 to 13 resulted in 125 bombers shot down, but by this time fuel shortages had drastically cut into the Luftwaffe's training of desperately needed pilots.

Their new crop of fighter pilots was going into battle with less than 100 hours of flight time, while they were up against veteran American and British pilots with more than 300 hours of training in addition to combat time.

A flight Engineer of the 381st Group recalled when four Focke-Wulf 190s came at his plane's tail, "so close together they looked like one airplane. The greenest German pilot should have known better. But they kept on coming. Every top, ball, and tail gun poured a heavy barrage into those fighters. The storm of machine gun bullets exploded the Fw 190s in four puffs of black smoke, and the sky was filled with debris."

National Archives

Photo Courtesy Dan McGuire

A B-17 (right) of the 486th Bomb Group drops its bombs over a synthetic oil plant at Merseburg, November 2, 1944, while another plane disintegrates in flames, a victim of flak. BELOW: Ball-turret gunner Dan McGuire of the 91st BG smiles after completing his 34th mission. He shot down two Me 109s in one aerial duel.

National Archives

Two P-47D Thunderbolt fighters off the wing of a B-17. With their limited range, the P-47s could not accompany the bombers to distant targets, but P-51s could.

Germany's desperation was apparent when it began using unguided air-to-air rockets in the late summer of 1944. Weighing about 500 pounds and seven feet long, the rockets packed a deadly punch when they hit a bomber. They were used in large numbers on the October 10 raid on Münster. More than 30 Me 110s lined up behind the trailing planes, the 390th Bomb Group, just beyond range of the .50s, and fired at least 70 rockets at the formation. Two B-17s exploded from direct hits and a third collided with the flaming wreckage.

The hard-pressed Luftwaffe had also introduced a variant of the Fw 190. Squadrons called *Sturmstaffeln* or "Assault Squadrons" used the Fw 190A8, specially designed to kill bombers. Armored with bulletproof canopies and protection around the engine, the fighter had twin 13mm machine guns and four 20mm cannon.

With Me 109s flying cover over their slower and less maneuverable comrades, the Sturmstaffeln pilots would move in on a bomber's tail, ride out the bullets coming from the tail gunner, then hammer the bomber at close range. If all else failed, the Sturmstaffeln pilots were told to ram. Some actually did.

By then, German fighters even flew among their own flak to reach the bombers. "German fighters would almost never attack in their own flak," said King, "but over Berlin they came right into the flak and hit the bombers. Most of the time we had either flak or fighters, but this time it was both at once.

"A fighter was approaching from 12 o'clock level and I didn't hear anything from my top turret gunner, Ray Wheeler. I got on the interphone and yelled 'Ray, why aren't you shooting?' He said, 'I'm waiting until I can get a good bead on him.' I yelled 'Goddamnit, scare him away!' Ray was credited with five enemy aircraft. He joked that if he'd been a fighter pilot, he'd be an ace."

"Over Berlin the fighters came into their own flak," said ball-turret gunner Bob Mathiasen. "I looked forward and saw at least 200 fighters coming at us. We lost lots of planes on that mission. I got a confirmed Fw 190. He was coming up and I zeroed in and got him in the cockpit."

Ball gunner of the 91st Group Dan McGuire said, "I got two Me 109s at once. I put about 200 rounds into one and finally he lost control. He plowed into another fighter and they both went down. I learned this after the mission when a waist gunner said, 'Hey you got two of them.' I wasn't credited with either, though."

Gunners' claims were often exaggerated but with good reason. Scores of gunners fired at each fighter and when one went down, several claimed it.

"Later we read in the papers that we'd shot down 400 German fighters," Armanini chuckled. "Crap, if we'd been that good there'd be no Luftwaffe left."

Friendly-fire losses were inevitable when hundreds of heavy machine guns filled the sky with hot lead as the gunners tried to track and intercept the wheeling fighters. It was often impossible to avoid hitting another bomber.

Sergeant Bill Fleming of the 303rd Group recalled a disturbing incident in the fall of 1943. "Lieutenant Stockton flew on every mission. Instead of taking passes, he flew." On Stockton's 24th mission, with only one to go to finish his tour, he was killed. The official report was that he had been killed by a German 20mm shell. But the truth, never made public, was that Stockton died from an American machine-gun bullet.

LITTLE FRIENDS

At last, the bombers were being escorted all the way to the targets by P-47s and P-51s. Doolittle still ordered that they make the destruction of the Luftwaffe on the ground and in the air their top priority, which secondarily made life easier on the bomber crews.

Bombardier Armanini related one encounter with a P-47 Thunderbolt: "We were supposed to bomb the Ruhr, but it was overcast, so I saw this factory with a tall smokestack, and I made a run at the target and we creamed it. I saw this Focke-Wulf coming at us and then this Thunderbolt was hammering at him and shot him down.

"Later on, I was at the Officers' Club having a drink and this guy comes in and asked, 'Hey who was the guy who bombed that factory?' I said, 'That was me.' The guy turns out to be Francis "Gabby" Gabreski, a top ace. He said 'Joe, I gotta tell you that was the best bombing I've ever seen.' Real nice guy. He saved our butts and he's congratulating *me*."

Ball gunner Bob Mathiasen also praised the fighter escort. "Those guys were absolutely great. If we were jumped by fighters and the 'Little Friends' came up, it only took one look and the Germans were gone."

In the summer of 1944, the new cannon-armed Me 262 jet fighter began tearing through bomber formations, attacking

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with near-impunity. But the Mustangs were still there.

"I happened to look out and saw three contrails," said Bill O'Leary. "One was horizontal and the other two were almost vertical. It was two P-51s diving to get a 262. They were never going to catch him. But I was glad they were there. He never came back."

"BOMBS AWAY!"

The heavy bombers' primary job was to carry four tons of high-explosive bombs to a target in Germany. While the gunners and pilots sweated out the German defenses, the bombardiers prepared to earn their pay. The role of the flight crew and ground personnel was to get the plane to where the bombardier leaned over his Norden bombsight.

One bombardier of the 493rd Group, Lynn Tipton, described his duties as the B-17 approached the target run: "At the Initial Point I had the Norden bombsight all warmed up. The pilot gave me control of the plane, and the Norden did the flying. If you got it all dialed in correctly, you were on the straight line of your course track. Then there's a line crossing that line. When the target passed under the second line, that was when you hit the bomb release."

ABOVE: Despite being on fire and surrounded by flak bursts, this B-17 stayed in formation to drop its bombs on Berlin. The bombers were most vulnerable on the bomb run, when they had to fly straight and level for several minutes to ensure accuracy. OPPOSITE: A B-24 Liberator bomber is fully engulfed in fire during an attack by Luftwaffe fighters over Austria, 1942.

Tipton continued, "We flew in 12-plane echelons. When the lead bombardier dropped, we all did."

Armanini also gave the Norden high marks. "If all the settings were done right and the course was correct, there was almost no way you could miss." On one mission, a flak shell burst nearby just as he was releasing his "eggs." "Once they were gone, they were out of my control. I closed the doors and the pilot took over."

Six miles below them, the 500-pound bombs slammed into their targets, blowing off factory roofs, turning walls and windows into deadly shrapnel. From 30,000 feet, the bombs were seen as long rows of white and yellow flashes and sprays of smoke and debris. The sound went unheard among the heavy drone of engines. But as careful as the raid had been planned and executed, most of the Eighth Air Force's tens of thousands of bombs missed their targets, exploding in streets, fields, forests, farms, and homes. Germany's war industry was far from being destroyed.

THE STORMY RETURN

As the shriek of the falling bombs diminished, the crews had done their job for Uncle Sam, as they said. "Then we were flying for us," said Tipton with a chuckle.

The route back to England was often different from the approach to the target, but it was no less hazardous, especially after a successful bombing. That was when the German fighters came for blood.

Waist gunner Frank Buschmeier remembered, "All of a sudden our tail gunner was firing. I looked and there was this Messerschmitt, and he was right behind the stabilizer. I couldn't get a shot. He hit us without anybody being able to shoot at him. The radio operator was right next to me, not 18 inches away. One shell hit me in the right leg, and one hit him in the jugular vein, and he dropped dead right there. A big pool of blood spilled and froze on the deck."

Tail gunner Tangradi talked about his last mission: "The fighter that hit my arms tore us up pretty good, and the engines were smoking. I crawled forward and called waist

gunner Willy Kemp and asked him to help me with my chute. The blood was running down my wrists and hands. I told the other waist gunner to go forward and find out what the hell was going on. He came back and said, 'The guys up front were all gone.'

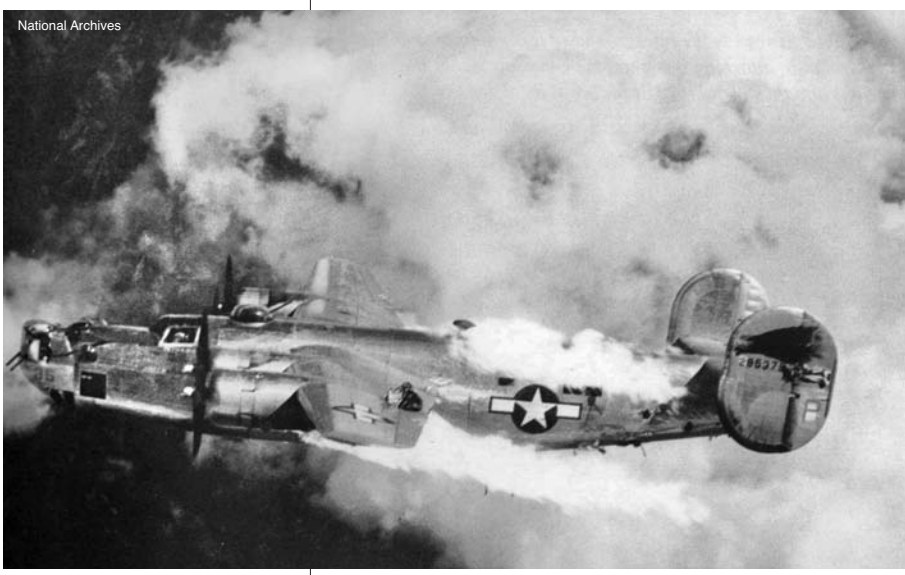
"I figured the plane was so shot up that the bailout bell didn't work. The radio gunner was hit, his face was all bloody, his fingers were frozen, God, like 10 white candles. The ball turret gunner's elbow was blown away. We kicked the door out and jumped. And Willy Kemp, the kid who helped me put the chute on, went down with the plane. It went into a spin and he got caught inside in the centrifugal force."

Bombers already damaged from flak and earlier attacks were enticing targets, and many fell from the skies to turn into flaming smears of debris.

Bombardier Lynn Tipton recalled of his last mission, "The plane was shot to pieces, all four engines were out. The co-pilot said, 'Bail out!' The pilot was dead. We just dove head-first through the nose hatch. The ball gunner was still in the plane and it suddenly exploded and he fell with all that debris, but he lived."

Pilot Stephen King had a similar experience: "On my last mission over Hamburg, we were at 29,000 feet when we were hit by an 88 in the nose. Suddenly we took another big hit on the right wing. The engineer said, 'Hey, the right wing's on fire!' I looked out past my co-pilot and the whole right wing was burning like mad. There was no way to stop it. I rang the bail-out bell and the navigator, bombardier, co-pilot, and flight engineer went out the nose hatch.

"I checked to see if the rest of the guys in the back were out. I put my chute on and looked back through the bomb bay. The radio operator was staring out the open bomb doors with a panicked look on his face. The gunners in the back were still in the plane. Just then the plane blew up around us. As far as I know, the only survivors of the explosion were me and the ball-turret gunner. The others were killed."


National Archives

Falling from over 29,000 feet, airmen were told not to pull the ripcord until they were at around 3,000 feet. German fighters sometimes shot at men hanging helplessly under parachutes.

The heavy drone of the bombers and the snarl of fighters, the chatter of machine guns, and the thump of AAA and cannon faded into the distance as men fell under silk parachutes onto a land populated by angered civilians and patrolling German soldiers.

The lucky ones who bailed out over Holland, Belgium, or France were often picked up by the Resistance or sympathetic civilians to be hidden from the Germans until they could be returned to England. But most ended up in POW camps to begin a new and bewildering time in their lives.

Bushmeier said, "I landed in a river and the Home Guard were taking me away, and this same fighter flew over and waggled his wings. I never figured out what he meant by that—if he was saluting another airman or he was just saying 'Hey, I got you.'"

For the bombers able to elude the maddened German fighters and coastal flak, the blue waters of the North Sea and English Channel were a beacon of hope.

"One thing we never did was to secure the guns until we were over the base," said Ed Davidson. "Some planes were hit by German fighters even when they were over the Channel. If a plane had wounded aboard, they fired a red flare and got priority for landing."

When the battle-scarred bombers reached their revetments and the propellers stopped, it was eerily silent. For the first time in nearly a dozen hours the noise of the engines and hammering guns was stilled. The tired, heartsick crews picked up their gear and gratefully stepped onto Allied soil. The grassy loam of the surrounding fields turned golden in the setting sun.

Many men watched as more planes landed, mentally counting, hoping all would return. But, for many crews, memories of burning planes and drifting parachutes told the hard truth. Cigarettes were lit by shaking fingers.

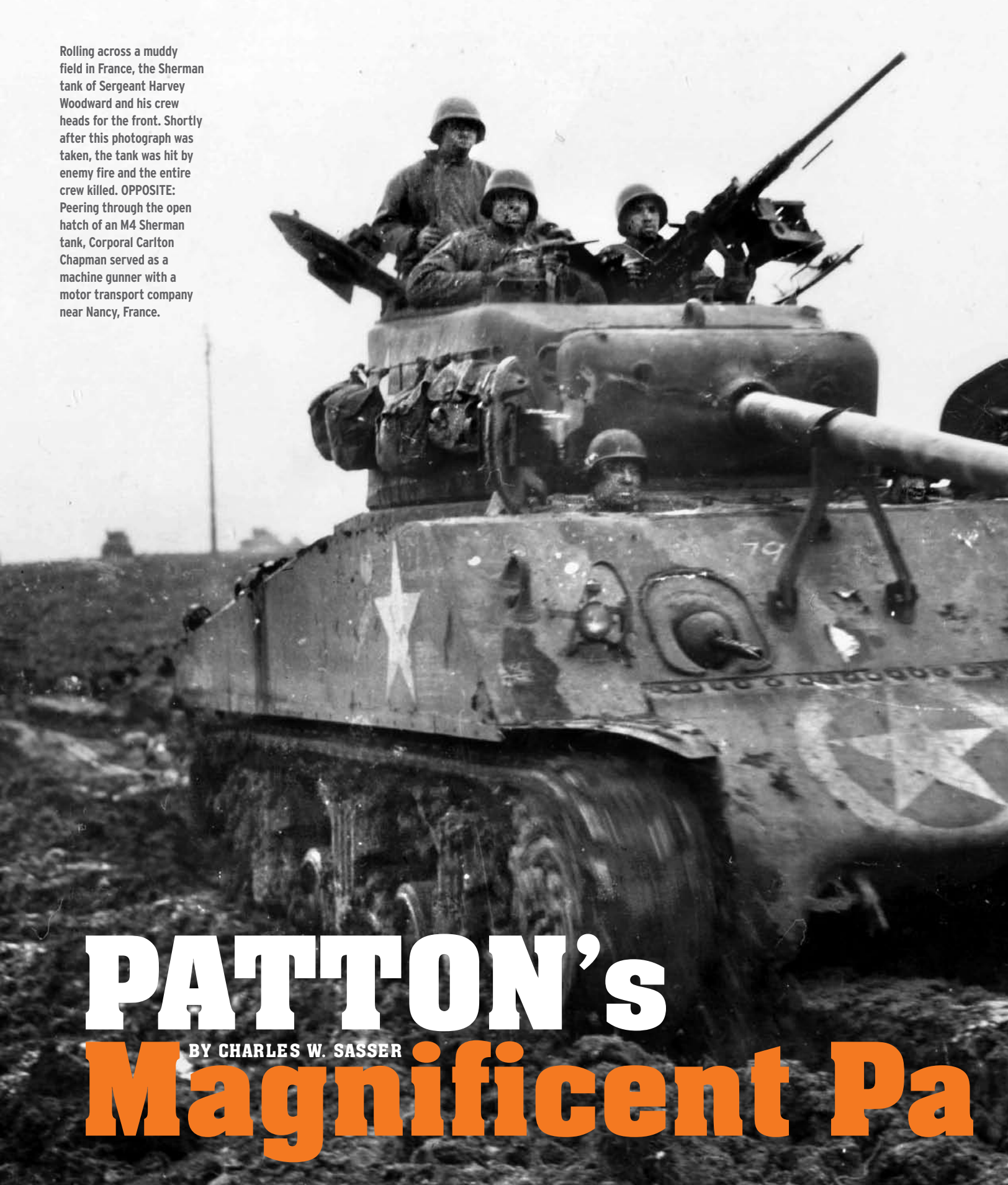
"We went to debriefing," Davidson explained. "Every man was taken aside to speak to an intelligence officer and tell what we saw. Everyone was given a shot of whiskey to loosen his tongue."

Rip Reopelle went one better. "We got brandy for our debriefing."

In the mess hall of a group that had a successful mission, talk was often spirited, but for a unit that had lost many planes and comrades, the clink of forks on metal trays was often the only sound. A few men could not eat at all and had to be urged by their buddies. Cigarettes and a walk in the evening was often the only way to cope. Some visited the infirmary to see wounded friends.

Stephen King said, "It was hard to see men wrapped in bandages or with arms and legs gone. But at least they were alive."

When the weary crews bedded down for the night, often with empty cots beside them, they knew it was not over. The next day or the day after that, they would once again be awakened to do it all again. □



Rolling across a muddy field in France, the Sherman tank of Sergeant Harvey Woodward and his crew heads for the front. Shortly after this photograph was taken, the tank was hit by enemy fire and the entire crew killed. OPPOSITE: Peering through the open hatch of an M4 Sherman tank, Corporal Carlton Chapman served as a machine gunner with a motor transport company near Nancy, France.

PATTON's Magnificent Pa

BY CHARLES W. SASSER

The 761st Tank Battalion, a black unit, fought with distinction and earned the praise of the flamboyant commander of Third Army.

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IN the Academy Award-winning film *Patton,* the setting was all wrong when actor George C. Scott delivered General George S. Patton Jr.'s famous speech about making the "other poor dumb bastard die for his country." The real Patton presented that speech on October 28, 1944, in France to the soldiers of the 761st Tank Battalion, the first Negro armored unit in the history of the U.S. Army to see combat.

The 761st had paused after a breathless dash most of the way across France for final checkups and repairs prior to battle when Patton's entourage roared up. The general, wearing his notable ivory-handled pistols, vaulted to the hood of an armored car and shouted, "Men, you are the first Negro tankers to ever fight in the American army. I have nothing but the best in my army. I don't care what color you are, so long as you go up there and kill the Kraut. Everyone has their eyes on you and is expecting great things from you. Most of all, your race is looking forward to your success. Don't let them down, and, damn you, don't let me down. They say it is patriotic to die for your country. Well, let's see how many patriots we can make out of those German SOBs."

Both: National Archives

Prior to 1940, assumptions about the inferiority of black soldiers as combat troops dominated military thinking. Blacks were segregated into support and service units to provide cooks, stevedores, truck drivers, orderlies, and other noncombat personnel. Only five black commissioned officers served in the Army in 1941, three of whom were chaplains.

"As fighting troops, the Negro must be rated as second-class material," declared Colonel James A. Moss, commander of the 367th Infantry Regiment, 92nd Division, "this primarily [due] to his inferior intelligence and lack of mental and moral qualities."

"In future war," said Colonel Percy L. Miles, "the main use of the Negro should be in labor organizations."

Patton shared this view in a letter he wrote to his wife, Beatrice: "A colored soldier cannot think fast enough to fight in armor."

Nonetheless, the Selective Training and Service Act of 1940 stated, "In the selection and training of men under this act, there shall be no discrimination against any person on account of race and color." The White House immediately issued a policy statement saying that, regardless of the act, segregation in the armed forces would continue.

As war loomed on the horizon, all-black units commanded by white officers were quickly formed. Among these units were the 5th Tank Group, composed of three battalions of armor—the 758th, 761st, and the

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LEFT: Field officers of the 761st Tank Battalion pause during preparations for upcoming action near Nancy, France, on November 5, 1944. BELOW: The officers are (left to right) Captain Ivan Harrison, Captain Irvin McHenry, and 2nd Lieutenant James Lightfoot.

784th. It was generally assumed that a white officer attached to a "colored" outfit was "safe" in that blacks would never be sent to war.

The 761st was activated at Camp Claiborne, Louisiana, on April 1, 1942. Major Paul Bates, who had received armor training under General Patton, assumed command of the battalion in May 1943. His ambition was to lead his battalion into battle.

Major Bates became visible. He was always out in front, training with his men—in the swamps and in the mud and in the steamy Louisiana drizzle that made a man feel like he was bathing in a pot of Cajun gumbo. Morale improved. The battalion developed an esprit de corps. Black men held their heads higher and affected a cocky tanker's walk with barracks cap tilted saucily to one side. Most still believed, however, that all the training was flash and polish toward no end.

"We ain't gonna see nothing but rattlesnakes in Louisiana until this war be over," said Private L.C. Byrd, whose comment was indicative of the sentiment that prevailed in the ranks of the black battalions.

Whites treated the black tankers with suspicion. The 761st tankers endured segregation down in "the swamp" where they were isolated from most facilities and had to walk a mile to the main gate and the bus station. Blacks waited until last to get on the buses when they received passes, and they always had to stand up at the back. Bus drivers wore pistols to enforce the rules and protect themselves from unruly blacks. If a black person failed to obey or committed some minor infraction, such as refusing to get up to let a white soldier take his seat, the driver stopped at the nearest MP station or law enforcement office where the offender was dragged away.

The 761st Tank Battalion trained for over two years at Camp Claiborne and at Camp Hood, Texas, before it finally received orders for overseas movement on June 9, 1944, only three days after the Allies made the D-Day landings in Normandy. Three months later, the battalion departed New York aboard the British troop transport *Esperance Bay,* coming ashore in Britain on September 8. Initially assigned to the Ninth Army, it was reassigned on October 2 to General Patton's Third Army.

According to a widely circulated story, Patton personally asked for the Black Panther Battalion, so-called because of the unit's shoulder patch showing a black panther and the motto "Come Out Fighting." Patton reportedly sent a message to the War Department requesting more tanks—the best available. The only tank unit left was made up of Negro troops.

"Who the … asked for color?" Patton shot back. "I asked for tankers."

Fully armed, the 800-man 761st was equipped with 54 M4 Sherman tanks in three companies and a "mosquito fleet" company consisting of 15 smaller M5 Stuart tanks.

The medium Sherman main battle tank was the primary U.S. and British weapon when it came to armor. It was equipped with a 75mm main cannon plus two .30-caliber machine guns and heavy .50-caliber machine gun mounted on top of the turret. The nimble Sherman's emphasis was on speed, mobility, and maneuverability. Powered by a 450 horsepower V-8 gasoline engine, it weighed 35 tons, including its five-man crew, and could reach speeds of nearly 30 miles per hour over a range of 100 to 150 miles.

Although the Sherman was faster, more reliable, and could fire at a faster rate than its enemy counterparts, the German Panther and Tiger tanks commanded greater accuracy

and range with their main 75mm and 88mm guns. German armor was thicker, the tanks had wider tracks, and they burned diesel rather than gasoline fuel, which made these tanks less likely to explode and burn when hit. The British nicknamed the Sherman "Ronson" after the American cigarette lighter, which advertisements had claimed, "Lights the first time every time." The Germans called the Shermans "Tommy Cookers."

The 761st landed in Normandy on October 20, 1944, and dashed 400 miles across France in six days to catch up with Patton at Nicolas de Port. The Black Panthers were detailed to link up with Maj. Gen. Willard S. Paul's 26th Infantry Division as the Allies continued to squeeze an iron ring around Germany from every direction. It was a week before the attack on the fortress city of Metz that General Patton delivered his famous pep talk to his newest tankers. As he finished and climbed down from the hood of the armored car, he noticed young Corporal E.G. McConnell standing at attention.

"Listen boy," Patton growled, "I want you to shoot every damn thing you see—church steeples, water towers, houses, old ladies, children, haystacks. Every damn thing you see. This is war. You hear me, boy?"

Corporal Howard Richardson turned to his company commander, Captain David Williams: "Sir, that old man is crazy as hell," he said. "Did you see the way his eyes roll around when he talks? That's no bullshit about him being a hornet. I'm more afraid of him than I be of them Krauts."

The rumored "big offensive" against entrenched German defenses kicked off at dawn on November 8. The 26th Infantry, with Patton's Panthers attached, would fight in the same sector where it had fought in 1918—on ground south of Chateau-Salins through Moncourt Woods to a hill northwest of Chateau-Salins. Opposing it were the German 11th and 13th Panzer Divisions.

Repeated Allied bombing had cracked the Dieuze Dam, flooding the valley of the Seille River and low-lying areas. The terrain was treacherous, and the area was a thoroughly miserable place for a battle. The duel began with the ear-piercing shriek of a German 88. Artillery explosions walked mushrooms of smoke across the lowlands as the Germans attempted by sheer weight of numbers and ferocity to knock off attacking American infantry and supporting tanks.

Captain Williams's cheery voice broke onto his company's radio band, speaking "Harlemese" although he, like most commanding officers at this time, was white: "Now, looky here, ya cats. We gotta hit it down the main drag and hep some of them unheped cats on the other side. So let's roll on down de Seventh Avenue and knock 'em, Jack."

An aid man with a medical detachment in the rear of the formation, rather than a tanker, became the battalion's first soldier killed in action. Private Clifford Adams was rendering aid to a wounded G.I. when a shell landed almost on top of him. No one expected him to be the battalion's first casualty.

Other events unfolding in the rear would affect the Black Panther Battalion as profoundly as anything the Germans threw at it on the assault line. While the fury of the opening battle rolled like thunder all along the length of the front line, a small enemy patrol crept through woodland thickets to where Colonel Paul Bates stood on the hood of his Jeep watching the fight. Submachine gun bullets splattered into the Jeep. A slug caught the colonel, knocking him, seriously wounded, to the ground. The commander the Panthers had trusted and depended on, who had developed their pride as a fighting unit, had fallen on the first day of battle.

A tanker called Smitty transported executive officer Major Charles Wingo to the front to assume command. Wingo did not last long. Smitty got out of his tank.

"Where's Major Wingo?" Corporal E.G. McConnell asked.

"He went nuts," was the response. "He might not be plumb chicken, but he sure got henhouse ways. He gets out and looks down there and starts shaking all over like a stray dog passing razor blades in the rain. He took off in a Jeep to the rear."

First, the colonel was seriously wounded. Now, the executive officer had deserted his men in combat, leaving the battalion without leadership when the men needed it the most. Although Wingo had not yet seen combat, he was evacuated for "combat fatigue" and never seen again. Lt. Col. Hollis E. Hunt transferred from another battalion to assume command.

National Archives

Following the closing of the Colmar Pocket, two smiling French soldiers fill the hands of American troops with candy at Roufflach, France, on February 5, 1945.

In spite of some of the detrimental assessments of black soldiers in combat, the Black Panthers distinguished themselves almost immediately, even though they were not expected to perform as valiantly as white soldiers. During the approach to Morville, Charlie Company's tanks got bogged down behind a cleverly concealed antitank ditch 15 feet wide, four feet deep, and studded at the bottom with steel spikes. It was snowing heavily, and devastating mortar and artillery fire rained down on the exposed assault force. Buried mines erupted in a broad, deep swath among the American tanks and soldiers. Tracers cracked and wove designs across the white field. A number of tanks were hit in the initial volley of enemy fire. Several blazed brightly.

Tankers abandoned broken mounts and headed toward the rear, helping each other, dragging or carrying wounded. Others scrambled into the freezing muddy water at the bottom of the antitank ditch, which was soon filled with marooned and wounded tankers and infantrymen.

First Sergeant Sam Turley's tank was one of the first hit. Realizing that the soldiers trapped in the ditch were doomed unless they escaped right away, Turley ran up and down the ditch shouting for soldiers to head uphill toward higher ground where they might find cover. The last anyone saw of Turley, he had jumped out of the ditch to provide covering fire for escaping soldiers. He stood straight and tall behind the ditch, snow swirling around him, ammo belts thrown over his shoulders, a spitting .50-caliber machine gun held close to his hip to absorb its recoil.

Turley continued to shoot until German counterfire ripped into his body. As he crumpled to earth, his finger froze to the trigger, and the gun continued to bang. A direct hit from an 88mm shell killed him outright.

Suffering heavy casualties, the men of the 761st drove on toward Metz, rough going against rain, mud, cold, snow, driving sleet, and a determined enemy. Sergeant Ruben Rivers, a farm boy from Oklahoma and now a tank commander, got out of his machine under heavy fire to attach a cable to a section of dragon's teeth obstacles and pull it out of the way so his platoon could proceed. A day or so later, a mine detonated underneath Rivers's tank and shredded the flesh of his leg. Medics cleaned and dressed the wound and attempted to administer morphine for pain. Rivers pushed them away and refused to be evacuated.

"Captain, you're going to need me," Rivers assured the Able Company commander, Captain David Williams. "We got a job to do."

Wounded though he was, Rivers led an echelon of tanks that blazed its way into a small village blocking the approach to the important rail and communications center of Guebling.

"Don't go into that town, Sergeant!" Rivers's platoon leader radioed. "It's too hot in there."

National Archives

National Archives

ABOVE: The commander of this Sherman sits in his open hatch, "somewhere in France," scanning the horizon for signs of the enemy, autumn 1944. OPPOSITE: An M4 Sherman of the 761st rolls across a Bailey bridge in the damaged village of Vic-sur-Seille in the Moselle department in northeast France, autumn 1944.

"Sorry, sir," Rivers responded. "I'm already through that town."

Rivers lost a second tank the next day. He commandeered another tank and remained in the fight. That night, a medic warned the sergeant that his wounds were getting gangrene. Rivers still refused evacuation.

"Tomorrow's going to be tough," he asserted. "Another day won't make any difference."

Fighting continued in and around Guebling. By dawn of the third day of battle, Rivers and his crew had destroyed at least two enemy tanks and killed over 300 Germans. Mark IV panzers and several German tank destroyers rumbled out of the fog.

"I see them!" Rivers radioed. "I'll fight them!"

Outnumbered and outgunned, Rivers and Technical Sergeant Walter James darted their two Shermans from cover and fought a delaying action that allowed Americans caught in the open to withdraw and regroup. A shell finally caught Rivers's tank and cracked it like an egg shell. A second armor-piercing shell finished the job. The tank commander who refused to withdraw was dead.

The enemy continued to bitterly contest every inch of ground. Third Army units spearheaded toward the Maginot Line and, beyond that, Germany's Siegfried Line. Black Panthers learned to live with war and its constant dangers. It was more terrible than anything they could have imagined.

Combat stripped away the everyday business of skin color, religion, and social class. White soldiers and black soldiers lived together, or at least side by side, in a common condition of discomfort and danger. Only in rear areas was race an issue.

After Corporal E.G. McConnell was wounded at Honskirch, he was evacuated to a field hospital where he was the only black man. One day, a major general paid a visit to cheer up the heroic wounded. He paused when he reached McConnell and asked in an attempt at humor, "What's wrong with you, boy? Got the claps?"

The remark, an echo of an old stereotype pertaining to supposed black promiscuity, cut McConnell like a rapier. He turned his head away and lay there in humiliation. He could hardly wait to get back to the front line. It may have been precisely because of such stereotypes and because of low expectations from white observers that Patton's Panthers became determined to prove they were warriors equal if not superior to their white comrades in arms.

Allied forces hit the French-built Maginot Line, now garrisoned by German troops, on December 9, 1944, and pushed through the defenses. The 761st rolled onto German soil. Sergeant Willie McCall got out of his tank and looked around. "So this," he said, spitting contemptuously, "is the home of superman?"

At precisely 5:30 AM on December 16, 1944, an American sentry in the quiet Ardennes Forest radioed headquarters to report innumerable "pinpoints of light" suddenly flickering all along the German line. The "pinpoints" were the muzzle flashes of hundreds of German artillery pieces. The ensuing roar and concussion of the German guns were the opening shots of Hitler's desperate Ardennes Offensive, which resulted in the Battle of the Bulge.

General Dwight D. Eisenhower, the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, ordered Patton to break off his advance in the Saar and turn northward to relieve the besieged town of Bastogne, which was astride a key crossroads. The 761st, now commanded by Major John F. George, received orders to dash to the Ardennes with the rest of the Third Army. The 761st was assigned to support elements of the 87th Infantry Division in the recapture of the village of Tillet, which was located some 15 miles west of Bastogne and less than three miles from the Marche-Bastogne Highway, a major German supply route.

Fighting along broken roads and trails, the 761st and the 87th plowed through heavy opposition to cover the 25 miles toward Tillet during six days of combat. The Germans fought savagely to hold their ground, exacting a high price in American casualties.

The elite Begleit Brigade of the 13th Panzer Division, whom the Black Panthers had fought earlier in the Saar Basin, waged a grueling defense in the dense pine woods south and east of Tillet. Enemy fortifications were carefully planned and backed by numerous machine gun nests, self-propelled guns, mortars, and armor. Allied

National Archives

Sitting atop their Stuart light tanks, soldiers of Company D, 761st wait in the town of Coburg, Germany, to clean out pockets of stubborn German resistance, in support of the 71st Infantry Division.

tanks, artillery, and infantry tried to take Tillet and end the seesaw battle to win the St. Hubert Road. All had failed, beaten back by stubborn German defenses.

On the night of January 4, 1945, Captain David Williams of Able Company sent a runner back to Major George with a message that he feared the Germans might have surmised that his men were short of supplies and that they could launch a counterattack. He was not sure that Able Company could hold on if attacked in force. Williams was to have been reinforced by airborne units that had not yet arrived. George responded for Able Company to hold its ground and then to launch an attack of his own to capture Tillet the following morning.

Williams gathered his platoon leaders and noncommissioned officers in a house in the village of Gerimont. "I'm not going to mince words," he said, looking as tired, ragged, filthy, and unshaved as the other men in the room. "If the Germans attack us, we can't hold them. I guarantee you that if we resist, they'll kill us all. I'm the company commander, but I'm going to bow out of this one. This is one decision you guys have got to make. Do you want me to wave my underwear or do you want to fight it out?"

For a long minute no sound came except the low moaning of the winter wind. Finally, Sergeant Walter Lewis slapped his coffee cup on the table and stood up. "We can't give up, captain," he said. "It wouldn't be right. I say we fight it out."

That broke the tension. Nervous laughter filled the cottage, and the vote was unanimous. "Done!" Captain Williams concluded. "If Walter wants to fight it out, then we'll fight it out."

To Williams's relief, the airborne reinforcements arrived overnight, pulling into Gerimont over snow so frozen it cracked and popped under the pressure of the vehicles. The German counterattack failed to materialize. The first action against Tillet was launched at dawn. As tankers crept through early morning fog and snow, Axis Sally jammed American radio transmissions with her propaganda.

"Good morning, Negro soldiers of the 761st," she crooned. "I am sorry that you will die today in Tillet. Our fight is not with the Negroes in America, and your fight is not with us. Your fellow Negroes are rioting in Cleveland. Your commander, Captain Williams, is leading you to death and destruction. He is white and not one of you. Your battalion commander, Major George, is also white and not one of you. Leave your tanks now and return home to Cleveland where you are needed and you will not be killed."

Axis Sally played Louis Armstrong's "I Can't Bring You Anything But Love, Baby" to accompany Patton's Panthers into combat. During the fighting, notable for its raw savagery, it was never clear at any moment to the men of the 761st whether they were winning or losing.

"They've hit me three times!" tank commander Frank Cochran responded to an

inquiry, "but I'm still giving 'em hell."

Crusty Captain Charles "Pop" Gates of the 761st personally led a successful 10-tank assault on a German-held hilltop outpost that proved to be the last obstacle to taking the town. Tillet finally fell on January 7, 1945. A German prisoner seemed stunned to see black men in uniform. "What are you doing here?" he asked Sergeant Johnny Holmes in English. "This is a white man's war."

Sergeant Holmes offered him a cigarette. "You ain't got no black or white when you're over here and the nation is in trouble," he replied. "You only got Americans."

Colonel Bates had promised to return after being wounded during the battalion's first day of combat. He kept that promise and resumed command of the 761st on January 17. The battle-hardened battalion had changed considerably during his absence. Many of the old timers from the days at Camp Claiborne and Camp Hood were gone, some of them dead and many of them wounded. Over 30 percent of the outfit had been replaced since November.

After the Battle of the Bulge, the Black Panthers received orders to proceed to Saverne, France, and temporarily attach to the Seventh Army to break through the Siegfried Line. That fight began on March 20, 1945, and was a slugfest all the way.

The Germans had placed pillboxes and camouflaged artillery and machine guns in the woods and in the fields on both sides of narrow roads leading to key towns. Sherman tanks confronted the enemy head-on, while soldiers hastily dismounted whenever the columns encountered opposition and moved up through the high ground to root out the enemy infantry.

The important town of Silz occupied a vital crossroads at the bottom of a gradual decline. Charlie and Baker Companies, led by Captain Gates and Captain Johnny Long, were assigned to support infantry in capturing it. Artillery fire touched off a German ammunition dump, which erupted in a spectacular explosion and set the town afire. Flames licked back at the darkness as tanks led the attack, sweeping in so fast that German antitank positions were caught by surprise and captured without firing a single shot.

As Americans stormed into one side of the blazing town, a German column of at least 100 trucks, horse-drawn artillery, and antitank guns fled out the other side. Hitler's armies were abandoning the Siegfried Line and running for their lives. This was a rare opportunity to trap significant numbers of enemy troops and capture or annihilate them. Blood lust boiled through the veins of the men whose only thought was to pay back those who had been killing and wounding their comrades for months.

National Archives

Joe Wilson

TOP: Lt. Gen. George S. Patton, U.S. Third Army commander, pins the Silver Star on Private Ernest A. Jenkins of New York City for his "conspicuous gallantry in the liberation of Chateaudun, France..." ABOVE: Sergeant Ruben Rivers, a soldier of the 761st Tank Battalion, displayed incredible courage and ultimately lost his life in combat. Decades later, he was awarded the Medal of Honor posthumously.

The tanks of the 761st caught up with the Germans where the road twisted into a series of S curves, devastating the enemy column. Debris, dead horses, shattered guns, artillery pieces, and vehicles were burning along the road, and dead enemy soldiers littered the scene. Bates ordered tank dozers forward to clear the road.

As part of Task Force Rhine, the 761st Tank Battalion crossed that great river in March. During the fight to the last great natural barrier on the German frontier, the tankers had destroyed 31 pillboxes, 49 machine gun emplacements, 29 antitank guns, and 11 ammunition trucks. Twenty antitank guns and seven towns had been captured, while 833 Germans had been killed and 3,210 taken prisoner. Five American tanks had been lost, and 300 tons of ammunition had been expended.

On March 30, 1945, the battalion arrived in Langenselbold, Germany. The end of the war seemed in sight. Patton's Panthers began a drive across the Reichland, cruising the Autobahn, overrunning airfields, and firing on enemy troops hidden along the highway. Refugees were always present, and the gaunt, gray-clad prisoners trudged toward the rear.

Charlie Company of the 761st captured Vehlenstein Castle in Neuhaus, Germany, reinforcing the G.I. belief that the war was nearly over. Hitler's Luftwaffe chief, Reichsmarshal Hermann Göring, had claimed the castle when the Nazis came to power and stored in it many priceless art objects that had been looted from occupied territories.

It was inevitable that advancing American troops should also begin encountering Nazi concentration camps during their rapid push across Germany in the spring of 1945. Most of the men of the 761st did not know the camps existed until one morning when elements of the battalion drew up before a labor camp surrounded

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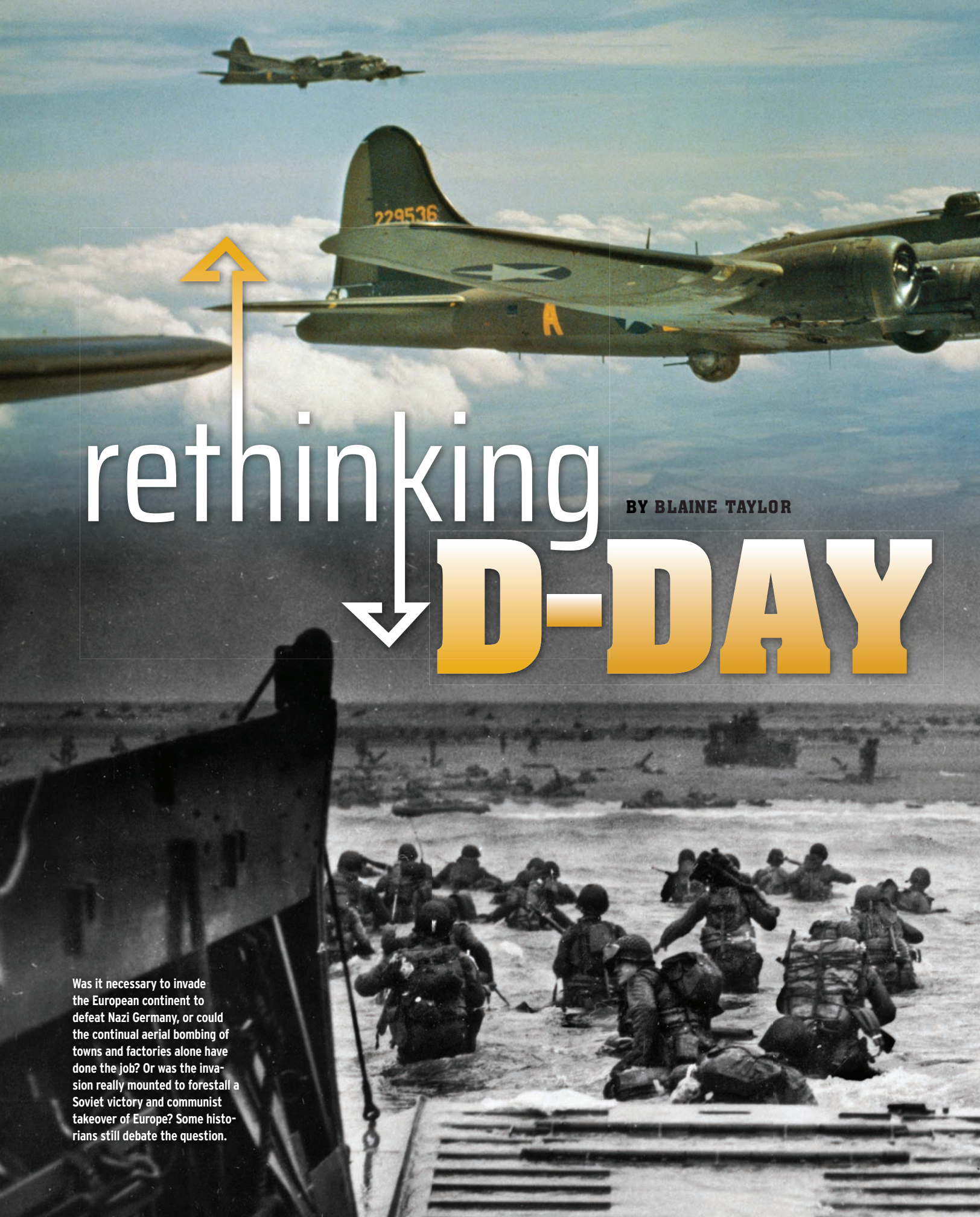


rethinking D-DAY

BY BLAINE TAYLOR

Was it necessary to invade the European continent to defeat Nazi Germany, or could the continual aerial bombing of towns and factories alone have done the job? Or was the invasion really mounted to forestall a Soviet victory and communist takeover of Europe? Some historians still debate the question.

Was Overlord necessary, could it have failed, and was it really launched to stop the Soviet Red Army—not beat the Nazis? Maybe so.

One query that was raised on the Allied side in 1942—two years before Operation Overlord—was if the cross-English Channel invasion of Northwest Europe via France was necessary at all in order to defeat the Third Reich.

Could Nazi Germany have been beaten by Allied air power alone, without the shedding of blood in costly ground-combat battle? Today—almost eight decades later—that cogent question persists.

One who thought so at the time was Sir Arthur "Bomber" Harris, chief of the British Royal Air Force's Bomber Command. On September 3, 1942, Harris sent a top-secret memo to Winston Churchill: "Prime Minister: It is urgently necessary that a decision should be arrived at as to the future main strategy of the war ...

"Both the future possibilities and the past results point to the inevitable conclusion that no matter what other operations are engaged upon, the final decision—if it is to be in our favor—must come through a direct air war between the United Nations and Germany."

He concluded, "Germany could be so devastated and dispirited by bombing," making an invasion "a mopping-up operation," and proposed the total destruction of "30 or 40" major German cities and industrial sites.

Was this a gross oversimplification of Allied air might? Let's take a closer look. Dudley Saward in *Bomber Harris* wrote, "The German Air Force was almost nonexistent as a weapon of defense or offense from April 1944 until the end of the war.... The indications are that Germany would have collapsed under bombing alone, which was what Harris always believed to be a certainty...."

Is it possible that the Combined Chiefs of Staff feared that a sudden collapse of Germany—brought about by bombing—would have resulted in the Russians sweeping across Germany with no opposition, and even occupying parts of France, Belgium, and Holland, before the British and American occupying forces could gain any worthwhile foothold on the Continent of Europe?

The man responsible for Germany's war production from early 1942 until the end of it was Dr. Albert Speer, who wrote in his 1976 memoir, *Spandau: The Secret Diaries*, "The real importance of the air war consisted in the fact that it opened a second front long before the invasion of Europe. That front was the skies over Germany. The fleets of bombers might appear at any time over any large German city or important factory....

"Defense against air attacks required the production of thousands of anti-aircraft guns, the stockpiling of tremendous quantities of ammunition all over the country, and holding in readiness thousands of soldiers, who in addition had to stay in position by their guns—totally inactive—for months at a time.

"As far as I can judge, no one has yet seen that *this* was the greatest lost battle on the German side. The losses from the retreats in Russia—or from the surrender at Stalingrad—were considerably less."

Added author Karl Roebling in his 1985 work, *Great Myths of World War II*, "Germany needed new models [of weaponry] but couldn't produce them due to the bombings; periodic follow-up raids after Schweinfurt [the major ball bearings production center] would have put Germany out of business....

"When the European war ended, Ger-

Both: National Archives

Imperial War Museum

ABOVE: Sir Arthur "Bomber" Harris (right) with members of his RAF Bomber Command staff. Harris believed strongly that aerial bombing alone would save Allied lives, make invasion unnecessary, and win the war. OPPOSITE: In this painting by Mitchell Jamieson, American landing craft are tossed about like toys during the violent English Channel storm that wrecked the Mulberry port at Omaha Beach two weeks after D-Day and nearly disprupted the flow of supplies to the Continent.

many lay in ruins—a ruination obvious to the eye. One source gives the following figures for Germany's destruction: Hamburg, 75 percent; Bremerhaven, 79 percent; Frankfurt, 52 percent; Dresden, 59 percent; Kassel, 69 percent; Dortmund, 54 percent, and so on."

Revisionists can speculate on "what might have been" (as I do here, granted) until the end of time, but in this case—and, indeed, in the same war—there is a concrete example to which one can point: the American war against Imperial Japan in the vast Pacific Ocean.

There, several enemy garrisons were simply bypassed, left on their island fortresses as the Allies leapfrogged over them to only those spots necessary as air bases from which to launch new and more costly offensives against the more important Japanese Home Islands.

Japan fell both as a result of the proposed two land invasions that never came as planned in Operations Coronet and Olympic, but instead via the dropping of the first two atomic bombs. The Americans had a third, and were prepared to drop as many as necessary (or available) in order to avoid any costly seaborne landings, of which bloody Okinawa had been the latest one.

We turn next to another question: could the D-Day invasion have failed?

Over the decades since the end of the War, there has come a certain feeling of the inevitability of the success of the epochal Allied invasion of Normandy that June 6, 1944— but it was by *no means* such a foregone conclusion at the time.

This was well realized by both the Allied Supreme Commander—General Dwight D. Eisenhower—and the German most involved in the plans to thwart it, Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, the "Desert Fox" of former Afrika Korps fame.

Despite the vast and growing Allied experience with amphibious landings by spring 1944 in both the Mediterranean and the Pacific, their attempt to invade Italy at Anzio just the previous January had bogged down badly, leading to the resumption of the trench-style warfare not seen on a Western battlefront since 1918.

Could their next invasion have also failed militarily? The answer again remains a resounding *yes*, and for a variety of reasons. Churchill—who had authored the disastrous Gallipoli invasion of Turkey in 1915—had dual nightmares.

The first was that the Allied armada might be sunk en route to Normandy, and that thousands of Allied soldiers and sailors would simply drown in the English Channel—the very same body of water that had deterred Adolf Hitler's projected 1940 Operation Sea Lion invasion of England.

From a naval standpoint, that armada could well have been wrecked in a storm like the one that later did strike, on June 19, 1944, and that destroyed or beached over 300 Allied vessels of all kinds, as noted postwar by General Dwight D. Eisenhower in his superb memoirs, *Crusade in Europe*.

Churchill's second fear was a war of annihilation by the Germans once the troops were ashore. In 1940, the British Expeditionary Force had been chased off the Continent by German tanks and Stuka dive bombers at Dunkirk, a port city that remained in Nazi hands until 1945, well after D-Day.

The Prime Minister was wary of a repetition. The fear was justified, for that was precisely Hitler's aim in both the German counterattack at Mortain in Normandy the prior August 1944 and then against the Americans in the Bulge, the largest single battle ever fought by the United States Army to this day.

Failing an outright second ejection from the Continent, Churchill—and most other top British commanders—had nightmarish visions of a costly war of attrition once ashore, and then inland, that would bleed the Allies white—just as had happened in the trenches of France on the Western Front in the Great War earlier.

That was as well not an unreasonable fear, either. The Germans had overrun France in 1940 in only six weeks, but it took the Allies four years later twice as long to cover the very same ground, despite the fact that Eisenhower—as a junior officer after World War

I—had toured France during his work on the American Battle Monuments Commission between the wars.

Indeed, the Norman hedgerows stopped the Allied advance dead in its tracks for many weeks, which had all along been the very strategy of the German Commander-in-Chief West—Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt, the Wehrmacht's senior ground leader—to beat the Allies with his armor inland, and then rout them back into the sea from whence they'd come.

Another factor uppermost in Ike's mind was what would happen when the expected German secret weapon offensive was launched—and would it include atomic bombs? No one knew for sure, and as far back as the parachute landing in Scotland of Nazi Deputy Führer Rudolf Hess on May 10, 1941, British intelligence had known that the Jerries were indeed working on just such a war-winning super weapon. Would they use it now?

Thus, a key component of Allied planning was to get ashore as soon as possible to foreclose that dire unknown option, as well as to seize the launching sites of the new Vengeance-1 and V-2 rocket sites. One of the war's most top-secret missions was that which cost the life of Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr., older brother of a later president of the United States in the postwar age. JPK Jr.'s bomber exploded mid-air while heading inland to knock out one of those deadly launch sites.

Later, Ike would breathe a sigh of relief that Hitler didn't assault with his rockets either the Normandy beaches themselves or the southern English ports of embarkation from which Operation Overlord was launched. The invasion might well have been defeated had that happened, he believed.

Since the war, some Western observers have felt that it was a cardinal error on Hitler's part not to have done so, asserting that yet another blitz on London and other

Churchill's ... fear was a war of annihilation by the Germans once the troops were ashore. In 1940, the British Expeditionary Force had been chased off the Continent by German tanks and Stuka dive bombers at Dunkirk.

Naval History and Heritage Command

British cities (as well as on Antwerp) instead was a mistake, but they fail to grasp his reasoning at the time.

Seen in this light, the renewed terror bombing of the British Empire's capital city was an attempt to force Great Britain out of the war altogether. The hope was that the Churchill coalition War Cabinet government might be toppled at last in the wake of the outcry over the renewed blitz using rockets instead of airplanes as in 1940—with more sophisticated types on the way (including the projected V-10, to bomb New York for the first time in any war.)

We must recall that the Prime Minister was, in fact, voted out of office by the British electorate at the end of the war in summer 1945, so this wasn't an entirely forlorn hope on the part of the politically savvy German Fuhrer, either.

In addition, the former Chamberlain Cabinet had fallen in May 1940 with the success of that German victory on the Continent.

Then there were the Americans to consider. The American Army commander at Normandy, General Omar Nelson Bradley, admitted after the war that he briefly considered evacuating the men from Omaha Beach on Normandy, those of the veteran US 1st Infantry Division (Regular Army) and also the-then green Maryland-Virginia 29th Infantry Division (National Guard), once it seemed clear that the assault had bogged down on the beaches.

Had Bradley done so—or had the men been massacred—another attempt would not have been possible for some weeks, because of the nature of the Channel tides. An outright defeat might also have had serious repercussions on the then-upcoming U.S. Presidential election that November.

Politician Hitler was also well aware of this additional factor, and, unlike Franklin Roosevelt, didn't have to stand for reelection in the Third Reich, no matter what happened. Washington insiders knew as well that FDR was already a very sick man who should not have run again in 1944, a medical fact known, too, by the then likely Republican Party nominee for President, New York Governor Thomas E. Dewey.

Moreover, FDR's top military adviser, General George C. Marshall, had already prevailed upon Dewey to exclude the Pearl Harbor disaster from the coming partisan political debate in the fall campaign. Dewey's attitude on this and other such questions might well have changed in the fact and face of an outright Allied disaster either off or on Normandy, however.

Could President Roosevelt have been defeated for reelection in November 1944, six months after a D-Day failure? The possibility exists, and one has only to look at Lyndon Johnson's withdrawal from the 1968 race in the wake of the Viet Cong Tet Offensive in South Vietnam for a parallel.

Interestingly enough, it was Dewey's later protégé, Richard M. Nixon, who was elected in the end in 1968.

With both Churchill and FDR out of office, and Eisenhower disgraced over a debacle at Normandy, what then might've happened? The Germans would still have occupied all of France, Belgium, Holland, Luxembourg, Denmark, Norway, and the Third Reich itself, with but a single enemy then to face—the resurgent Red Army in the East.

A second Allied invasion attempt would not have been politically feasible until the spring of 1945, with any element of surprise long gone. Could the Allies have invaded the Reich through the rugged Italian Alps instead?

Possibly, but the Germans had their superior Alpenkorps/Alpine Corps, the finest mountain troops on earth, while the U.S. had but a single such division, the still existing and celebrated 10th Mountain.

Churchill had all along opposed—right up until the actual landings of June 6, *1944—any* Allied invasion of France from the Channel, preferring instead an assault in the Balkans to forestall a Red Army occupation of Central Europe.

By spring 1945, this, too, would've been a moot point, as that is exactly where the Russians stood, anyway. Thus, the end of the decade of the 1940s might well have seen either a firm German occupation of Western Europe still in place, a victorious Red Army there instead, or a combination of the two—as, indeed, was the case with conquered Poland during 1939-41.

Today, therefore, the capital of the United States of Europe might still be Nazi Berlin

National Archives

GIs take cover behind anti-landing craft obstacles the Germans emplaced along the sands at Omaha Beach, June 6, 1944. Through sheer guts and good fortune, Hitler's Atlantic Wall was penetrated in less than a day.

Bundesarchiv Bild 101I-586-2215-25A; Photo: Reich

German Fallschirmjägers (paratroopers) ignore the body of a dead American and take cover behind a thick hedgerow in Germany. The hedgerows were unexpected obstacles faced by the invaders, bogged down the advance.

or Soviet Moscow, with either Hitler or Stalin ensconced in a magnificent tomb, celebrated as an enduring national hero.

That acclaim is already returning to Stalin in today's modern Russia, and who knows what honors may befall the late Führer a century from now? History has a way of reversing itself, with Napoleon I and maybe even Kaiser Wilhelm II coming to mind.

In 1944, the Germans themselves believed that it was possible to defeat the Allied invasion, and Hitler was actually glad when the landings began, since he needed a resounding victory in the West to offset the steady string of defeats on the Russian Front from early 1943 onward.

He and his subordinate German commanders disagreed on where it would come and how best to defeat it, with the Führer leaning towards Rommel's view that it must be beaten at the water's edge within the first 24 hours, or their game was up. They were right, as it transpired, for two reasons.

First, there was the complete Allied naval mastery of the choppy Channel, something that the Germans hadn't achieved in 1940. Second was the total Allied control of the air, with the formerly vaunted German Luftwaffe already beaten and relegated for all practical purposes to the annals of aviation history.

Rommel had personally experienced Allied air power for over two years in both North Africa and then Tunisia. He argued that Allied air power would prevent the daylight movement to the invasion beaches of the Germans' very best weapons—their superior new Panther and King Tiger tanks—and he was proven correct. In effect, Allied air power won the Normandy Campaign before it even began.

The bravery and tenacity of the men of the 1st and 29th Divisions and others at Omaha Beach—first in holding on, and then cracking it in a single day—Rommel's Atlantic Wall cannot be overestimated. They got ashore and stayed—and it was no cakewalk.

Now let us look to those *not* present in Normandy: The Soviet Red Army juggernaut, then rolling relentlessly over every German force in its path.

One of the most cherished tenets of the history of World War II in the West is that it was the success of Operation Overlord—the massive and unprecedented amphibious cross-Channel invasion of northwest Europe—that broke the back of Nazi Germany, thus ending the war in the still-celebrated Allied victory.

But is this really the case, in either a military or a political sense? Did the vast Allied armada really sail from England to defeat the German Army in Nazi-occupied Europe, or was it actually to keep Stalin's thundering Red Russian Army out of France and away from the Channel coast, where the Nazis had stood in 1940?

When Churchill congratulated the wily Soviet dictator at the 1945 Potsdam Conference for having taken Hitler's capital, Stalin grunted, huffing, "The Czar got to Paris!" He was referring to the 1814 entry into the French capital by his predecessor as ruler of All the Russias, Alexander I.

In fact, throughout the later stages of the war, from the Battle of Stalingrad on, Churchill feared just such a development taking place. That was one major reason why he opposed the Overlord gambit from its inception, reckoning that France and the rest would fall to the West in any event when Nazi Germany surrendered, just as it did in 1945: Denmark, Norway, and Crete all without a shot being fired.

Churchill preferred a Western Allied thrust instead into the Balkans, a link-up with Yugoslavian Partisan leader Josip Broz Tito's forces, and a drive on Bulgaria, Hungary, and Austria to keep the Red Army out of them all.

The American high command, however, refused to consider postwar grand politics until after its war was won militarily, and to it a cross-Channel invasion was the easiest and least expensive way to do that.

Thus, Stalin was handed politically intact the old Austro-Hungarian Empire of the fallen Habsburg dynasty; Poland, which Great Britain had gone to war to save in 1939; and half of the old Bismarckian Reich of the Hohenzollerns, an historic coup by any yardstick.

Stalin was well aware of Churchill's attempts to throttle the almost stillborn Russian Revolution a generation earlier, when Allied troops had been sent to northern Russia to aid the counterrevolutionary White forces in defeating the Red Bolsheviks and restoring the deposed Romanovs to their lost throne.

He was fully cognizant as well that Churchill would do so again if he could and believed firmly that the Western Allies wished for nothing more than that Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany would tear themselves apart while the West looked on impassively, without cost to themselves. Why should they intervene while their enemies were destroying each other?

Stalin pressed Churchill at their Moscow summit conference in August 1942 for a so-called Second Front Allied invasion of Western Europe for late 1942 or spring 1943 to relieve pressure in the East on the then-embattled Soviets. Instead—in part to placate him—North Africa was invaded, at a time when the British had already beaten Rommel's combined German-Italian forces at second El Alamein. Their test

At that point—a full year before the first Allied soldier stepped ashore at Normandy—the Soviets had won the Second World War militarily, unless and until the Nazis deployed the atomic bomb first.

Stalingrad War Museum

Library of Congress

ABOVE: The "Big Three"—Stalin, Roosevelt, Churchill—pose for cameras during their strategy meetings in Tehran, Iran, in 1943. Churchill feared that a U.S.-British defeat in Normandy would allow Stalin to dominate the Continent. OPPOSITE: Soviet soldiers and T-34 tanks rush across the frozen landscape to throw back the Germans threatening Stalingrad. The siege lasted five months, resulted in two million deaths, German Sixth Army defeat.

gambit at Dieppe had already flopped in 1942, moreover.

Still, the Western Allies did have in place a plan for an emergency French landing for 1943 should it become evident that the Red Army might be defeated, but this was scrapped after the stunning German debacle at Stalingrad in February 1943, followed by the even greater Soviet win in the greatest tank battle in history at Kursk the following July.

At that point—a full year before the first Allied soldier stepped ashore at Normandy—the Soviets had won the Second World War militarily, unless and until the Nazis deployed the atomic bomb first. New information has since revealed FDR wanted to drop an atomic bomb during the Bulge fighting if it had been ready. It wasn't.

Stalin knew this, and then—and only then—consented to leave Soviet soil for the first time to meet personally with Churchill and FDR at the Tehran Conference in November 1943. Having already won the tank war, he no longer needed the Western Allies as he had before: rather, *they* then needed *him* to help win their war against Japan in the Far East to save their men's lives.

Now the West definitely wanted to invade Western Europe, to prevent the coming Iron Curtain from extending to the shores of Normandy and Brittany, an actual possibility before the end of the decade of the Forties. In addition to that, Soviet battle fleets could be moved to the North Atlantic Ocean and English Channel.

Could Stalin have defeated the Nazis alone? All available evidence points to the affirmative at that late stage of the war. The Russians had taken Berlin in the days of Frederick the Great, and had no doubt that they would again, as in fact they did, along with Vienna, Budapest, Prague, Sofia, and Bucharest. Perhaps, then, both Brussels and Paris would also have fallen under their sway alone during 1945-46.

In addition, the Allies feared a second pact with Stalin that German Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop wanted to sign, yet again, with his Soviet opposite number, People's Foreign Commissar Vyacheslav M. Molotov, in 1943 as they had done in 1939; but an obstinate Hitler forbade it.

That, too, might have occurred had the Führer died in the bomb blasts of 1939-44, pushed by successor Reich Marshal Hermann Göring, always against all European wars because he had too much to lose.

The entire German High Command then believed that the war was lost, unless a political solution could be found whereby the Nazis would be allied either with the West against the East or vice versa—and there were rival factions within the top German leadership cadres, military and civilian, arguing both tacks. Hitler knew this.

At Tehran, Stalin foiled Churchill's Balkan plans by standing fast with FDR, not only for the Normandy invasion, but also for yet a second invasion of France—Operation Anvil-Dragoon—which took place on August 15, 1944, and tied down what available forces the West then had in Europe, and thus away from the Balkans yet again.

The Germans knew all too well of the political dissension in the Allied High Command and counted on a political change of fortunes.

What the Nazis simply could not fathom was that the West would prefer their complete destruction to an anti-Soviet new Grand Alliance to keep the Red Army out of Central Europe; but that is what actually occurred—how the Second World War concluded—and the Cold War that both Hitler and Churchill correctly foresaw from differing perspectives both began and, alas, remained for the next four decades-plus.

There was a positive side to this equation, however: Stalin never got to Paris, nor did the tank treads of the Red Army grind to a wet halt at the water's edge of the English Channel on the coast of Normandy, as Germany's had in 1940.

Within a year of the end of World War II, the Cold War began.

Frequent contributor Blaine Taylor's 23rd book is 2021's illustrated volume *Teutonic Titans: Hindenburg, Ludendorff, and the Kaiser's Marshals & Generals, 1847-1955*. In 1994, he published two completely different illustrated national magazines on the 50th anniversary of D-Day.

Desperate Jump IN THE ARDENNES

IN 1944, Germany's once victorious armies were in retreat on all fronts. Germany's borders were threatened, and the American Army already occupied the German city of Aachen, the ancient city of Charlemagne and one-time capital of the Holy Roman Empire.

The Western Front in December 1944 stretched for 450 miles. The *Wacht am Rhein* offensive was to take place on 85 miles of the weakest held sector from Monschau in the north to Echternach in the south,

defended by battle-weary U.S. troops carrying out rest and refitting on the "ghost front." The last thing they expected was a major German offensive. Experienced German units likewise were being rested, refitted, and reformed. Unknown to the Americans, a formidable force was being secretly assembled just behind the German front line.

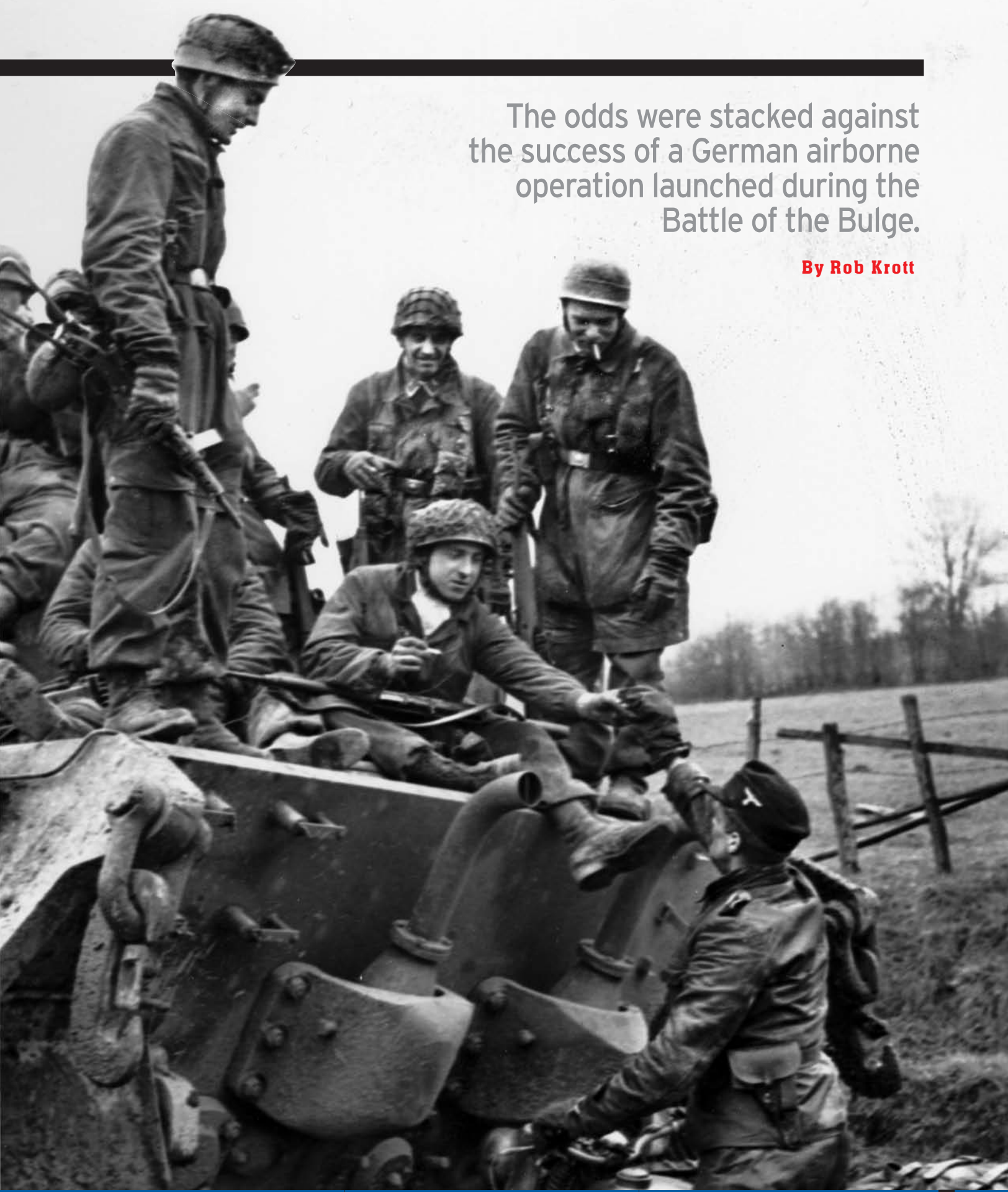
The front was fairly quiet, with Allied attacks into the Fatherland being contained, but back in Germany towns and cities were emptied of all available men to form the new *Volksgrenadier* divisions that would comprise the bulk of the forthcoming offensive. With the draft age lowered to 16 years and extended to include 50-year-olds, this was one of a series of drastic "Total War" measures designed to supply the German Wehrmacht with troops for a final counteroffensive. An additional 750,000 men were called up to form a new strategic reserve of 25 *Volksgrenadier* divisions and at least six panzer divisions.

These were not the soldiers of the victorious 1940 Wehrmacht. After five years of war on multiple fronts, the Germans were scraping the bottom of the barrel. The Waffen-SS already had units made up of Croats, Bosnian Muslims, and Cossacks, as well as *Freiwilligen* divisions of non-German European volunteers. Wehr- macht units composed of Soviet soldiers recruited from the POW camps had already seen combat in the Normandy campaign.

The *Volksgrenadier* divisions were largely staffed by noninfantry personnel including surplus Luftwaffe and Navy rear-echelon types. These levies were quickly trained in basic infantry tactics and issued Army uniforms. The 18th *Volksgrenadier* Division under the command of *Generalmajor* Gunther Hoffmann-Schonborn patrolled the Schnee Eifel area and was largely typical of these new polyglot and inexperienced divisions. Formed in Denmark in September 1944, from the remains of the 18th Luftwaffe Field Division (destroyed earlier in the Mons pocket fighting), it comprised 9,500 men, mostly untrained civilians, unassigned naval personnel, and Air Force ground crews, assigned in three grenadier regiments. Reconstructed from Luftwaffe and Navy units, plus a strong mixture of *Volksdeutsche* (persons of German descent) and civilian draftees drawn in by the new draft laws, the 18th *Volksgrenadier* Division lacked trained noncoms and officers, averaging only one officer and one noncommissioned officer per company.

Field Marshal Gerd von Runstedt, Commander in Chief West, would command *Wacht am Rhein*—also referred to as Operation *Herbstnebel* (Autumn Mist). He had three Army Groups—H, B, and G—to execute the offensive. Army Group B, under the command of Field Marshal Walther Model, would carry out the main attack, and the Sixth (later SS) Panzer Army would spearhead the offensive. The Sixth Panzer Army was strengthened with four SS panzer divisions, four of the new *Volksgrenadier* divisions, and the 3rd Parachute

Armed with a variety of German and captured weapons, a group of *Fallschirmjäger* roll through Liegneuville, Belgium to rejoin the main body of *Kampfgruppe* Peiper.



The odds were stacked against the success of a German airborne operation launched during the Battle of the Bulge.

By Rob Krott

Division, recently reconstituted after its severe losses in Normandy.

Parts of the 3rd Parachute Division had been fighting in the Düren forest in the south before being sent north to join the Sixth Panzer Army. The 3rd Parachute Division's 5th, 8th, and 9th Regiments would all take part in the offensive. They were to head west, clearing the way for the armored spearhead of the Sixth Panzer Army, a Panzer *Kampfgruppe* (battle group), *Kampfgruppe* Peiper, under the command of SS *Sturmbannführer* (Major) Joachim Peiper. The 3rd Parachute Division, part of the 1st SS Panzer Corps, and the 5th Parachute Division, which was part of the German 7th Army, were to be used as infantry, not airborne assault troops, in the operation.

The battle plan also called for a small parachute drop in the Ardennes. *Kampfgruppe* von der Heydte would make a parachute assault into the Ardennes to secure key terrain on December 17.

On December 8, *Generaloberst* (Colonel General) Kurt Student, commander of Army Group H and former commander of the German airborne forces, was given eight days' notice to launch an airborne attack in support of the Sixth Panzer Army. He immediately chose Oberstleutnant (Lieutenant Colonel) Friedrich-August Freiherr (Baron) von der Heydte, a Bavarian-born aristocrat, to organize a battalion-sized unit of *Fallschirmjäger* (paratroops) and lead the parachute assault codenamed Operation *Stoesser* (Falcon). *Oberstleutnant* von der Heydte would form a composite parachute battle group consisting of a hundred men from each battalion within the First Parachute Army under the command of Generaleutnant Eugen Meindl, which was subordinated to Army Group H. He would then organize these men into four infantry companies, a heavy weapons company, and a pioneer and signals platoon.

Student's choice was a good one. Von der Heydte, who began the war as an antitank company commander, had volunteered for the airborne in August 1940. By December 1944, he was a highly decorated former commander of the 1st Battalion, 3rd Parachute Regiment and 6th Parachute Regiment, and was the commander of the Battle School of the First Parachute Army in Aalten, Germany. *Kampfgruppe* von der Heydte would assemble in Aalten and then report to General Model's Army Group headquarters on December 15.

Von der Heydte would have to gather a force of over a thousand men, drop them deep behind American lines in the Germans' first and only operational night jump, and capture a series of important road junctions in the Hohes Venn leading from the Elsenborn-Malmedy area toward Eupen for the armored spearhead units. The German paratroopers would then block the enemy's reinforcement route through the Schnee Eifel south of the Elsenborn area.

National Archives

Major August von der Heydte led the Fallschirmjäger Lehr Battalion.

The drop zone was approximately 11 kilometers north of Malmedy in the Monte Rigi area of the Schnee. The objective was a main road junction that led to Verviers, Eupen, and Malmedy—the main route for any American reinforcements being rushed into the area. Von der Heydte was to hold the road junction until met by the 12th SS *Hitlerjugend* (Hitler Youth) Division, the lead element of the Sixth Panzer Army. If the mission was delayed by 24 hours their secondary objective was to secure the bridges crossing the Ambleve River until met by Sixth Panzer Army armored units. Von der Heydte was told that the German armor would reach him within 24 hours.

With only a week to prepare, Student ordered each of the battalion commanders of the First Parachute Army to send von der Heydte a hundred of their best men. Unfortunately for the Germans, the *Fallschirmjäger* of 1944 were not the highly trained soldiers who jumped onto Fort Eben Emael in 1940 or Crete in 1941. Many of them were not even parachute-qualified. On D-day there were 150,000 men in the *Fallschirmtruppen*, but only 30,000 were actually trained parachutists. And worse yet, some of the parachute regimental commanders dumped their undesirables, including some inexperienced soldiers fresh from basic training, on von der Heydte rather than sending him their best men.

Von der Heydte had to send 150 men back to their units as unsuitable candidates. He had only a few men with previous combat jump experience and only about 20 percent of his composite unit was qualified to jump with weapons, so containers had to be used. The operation would be a night jump.

After 1943, the requirements for the award of the paratrooper's insignia upon the completion of basic parachute training included at least one night jump. But this would be the first and only nighttime combat jump. They would also jump into the woods, something the Germans had practiced in training. The preparations for Operation *Stoesser* were rushed. The *Fallschirmjäger* were issued additional equipment, and some received hasty jump training. There was little time for any training or organization as a cohesive unit. To complicate matters, von der Heydte's transport of about a hundred Junkers Ju-52s were piloted by mostly young and inexperienced crews.

Von der Heydte was under the command of SS *Oberstgruppenführer* (General) Josef "Sepp" Dietrich, commander of the Sixth Panzer Army, which was to provide the main armored thrust in Operation *Wacht am Rhein*. Sepp Dietrich, the former butcher's apprentice and Nazi beer-hall putsch participant, came from a Bavarian peasant family and was a marked contrast to his fellow Bavarian, Baron von der Heydte. Dietrich, a close confidant of Hitler, had risen to high rank as a reward for leading the squad that assassinated Storm Trooper (SA) leader Ernst Rohm during the infamous Night of the Long Knives.

When von der Heydte conferred with his commander, Dietrich's headquarters could provide neither photographs nor reconnaissance of the drop zones. When asked if he could have carrier pigeons in case of radio problems, Dietrich, drunk at the time, replied, "This is an army not a zoo! If I can run a panzer army without pigeons then you should be able to lead a *kampfgruppe* without them." Operation *Stoesser* would get 300 straw-filled paratrooper dummies attached to old parachutes. They would be dropped along with the *Fallschirmjäger* to make the unit look bigger than it actually was.

Von der Heydte received his final briefing at Sixth Panzer Army headquarters on December 15. The time of the drop or P-hour (Parachute Hour) was set for 0200 on the 16th. He had only 12 hours to issue his orders for the jump. His composite unit of mostly inexperienced paratroopers would make a night combat jump behind enemy lines, without prior reconnaissance, under inclement weather conditions, and in high winds. Von der Heydte did not rate his chances of success as high. On the evening of December 15, he formed his unit to load on trucks for the move to the airfield. By midnight, only about a quarter of the paratroopers had reached the airfield at Paderborn due to lack of sufficient truck transport. Gasoline for the trucks to carry the paratroopers to the airfields was stolen by another division.

ABOVE: German paratroopers plummet from a Junkers Ju-52 transport plane. BELOW: American soldiers of the 1st Division move a German supply container dropped near Bullingen, Belgium, January 1945.

National Archives

Because von der Heydte was related to Colonel Klaus von Stauffenberg, the staff officer who had attempted to assassinate Hitler on July 20, 1944, the Sixth Panzer Army began a formal investigation, thinking von der Heydte had deliberately sabotaged the operation. The parachute operation was delayed, but *Wacht am Rhein* went ahead as planned. In the center and the south the Fifth and Seventh Armies made good progress, but in the north the Sixth Panzer Army's advance bogged down when its armored columns encountered heavier than expected resistance and became backed up on the narrow forest roads.

Regardless of the lack of progress, the parachute drop was still on. German radio intercepts confirmed that American reinforcements were being rushed to the front. Although delayed until 0300 on the 17th, von der Heydte's mission was still to secure the main road junction near Malmedy and stop the American reinforcements.

With *Kampfgruppe* von der Heydte finally assembled on the airfields, the *Fallschirmjäger* loaded 112 Ju-52s. The pilots and jumpmasters were given instructions for the drop, but had no joint training. Flown by an ill-assorted group of pilots, half of whom had never flown combat missions, the Ju-52 transports lifted off at midnight on December 16.

Several navigational aids were used to assist the inexperienced Ju-52 crews, including searchlights and tracer fire from antiaircraft guns. Once the transports

crossed over the Allied lines, they began to lose formation due to inexperience and partly due to a strong headwind, which many pilots did not take into account. Allied flak further dispersed the aircraft formations, throwing some pilots miles off course.

A Messerschmitt fighter dropped flares a few minutes before P-hour to mark the drop zone, but only a few of the pilots saw them. As von der Heydte later wrote: "Cooperation with pathfinders in night jumping requires the most accurate timing. Because of incorrect wind data, the pathfinders in the Ardennes operation arrived at the drop zone almost a quarter of an hour too early. In this way not only was the American air defense warned in advance, but the last transport planes were no longer guided and had to drop their men blindly."

The jump was a total disaster. The German paratroopers were scattered across the Belgian countryside. Many of them were dropped miles from the original drop zone, and some even landed in Holland. Only 10 of the transports, including von der Heydte's, actually made it to the drop zone. One rifle company was dropped behind the German lines 50 kilometers away from the drop zone. Most of the signal platoon with the unit's radios fell just in front of the German positions south of Monschau. With a drop zone in the woods and ground winds of 36 miles per hour (normally German paratroops were only able to jump with ground winds less than 14 miles per hour), the casualty rate on the drop was over 10 percent. Some of the *Fallschirmjäger* , killed on landing, were not found until the spring thaw months later. The survivors and other German parachute troops were so bitter over the lack of training and preparation and the high casualty rate that an article in the December 22, 1944, edition of *Nachrichten Fur Die Truppe* (the German equivalent of the *Stars and Stripes*) was entitled "Operation Mass Murder."

The German equipment was also largely at fault. They probably fielded the worst parachutes used in WWII. Because of the

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ABOVE: German parachutists ride aboard a massive Tiger II tank, one of hundreds used during the Battle of the Bulge. OPPOSITE: The *Fallschirmjäger* of Kampfgruppe von der Heydte dropped on the northern shoulder of the growing Bulge on December 16, 1944. Dummies filled with straw were also dropped.

German parachute design, the high ground winds were especially dangerous for the *Fallschirmjäger* . According to von der Heydte: "The German parachute fell short of requirements. It caused an excessive swinging motion in gusty weather, it was hard to control, and too much time was required to get out of the harness. Too much importance was probably attached to safety in jumping and too little to suitability for combat operations. The casualties which were sustained from enemy action because the soldier was unable to free himself from his harness quickly enough were far greater than the casualties which might have been caused by carelessness in opening the single-fastening harness release in the air."

The German RZ (*Ruckenpackung Zwangauslosung* "rucksack packed to open") series of parachutes (primarily the RZ-16 and the RZ-20) had a single strap between the back of the body harness and the chute. This resulted in a face-down position requiring knee and elbow pads and a forward roll upon landing and led to many landing injuries. To allow for proper deployment, the paratrooper had to leap forward in a swan dive or "crucifix position" when exiting an aircraft. Control during the descent was almost impossible except for a highly trained, physically adept paratrooper. Even then only a slight bit of control was possible.

The forward-roll landing also prevented the parachutist from carrying much equipment on his body. Except for pistols, grenades, and the occasional submachine gun, German paratroopers had to rely on containers for their main combat equipment and weapons. The parachute canopy was attached to the harness with four clips, one at each thigh and two on the left chest, that were difficult to undo when under fire or when the trooper was being dragged by the wind. Because of this, the Germans issued each *Fallschirmjäger* a gravity knife to cut the parachute risers in an emergency.

During Operation *Stoesser* it was snowing heavily, the winds were heavy, and many were dragged across the drop zone, causing injuries. Some of the injured would die of exposure in the harsh weather conditions. Because he was recovering from an accident, von der Heydte's left arm and shoulder were still in a splint, so he jumped wearing a captured Russian "triangular" parachute. It suffered less oscillation on descent than German designs and was steerable, so he could pick his landing site and avoid further

injury. He injured his right arm in the jump anyway.

Three hours after the drop only about a hundred *Fallschirmjäger* had linked up with their commander in the assembly area at the fork in the Eupen road north of Monte Rigi. By the morning of the 17th, von der Heydte had assembled only a company's worth of *Fallschirmjäger* , some of whom were injured. According to von der Heydte, "By dawn I had collected 125 soldiers—a little more than a tenth of the *Kampfgruppe*." With only a fraction of his unit available for action, von der Heydte formed a defensive perimeter in the woods and sent out small patrols to pick up information, ambush any American units they encountered, search for their missing weapons containers, and gather stragglers.

Because of the difficulty in jumping with weapons while using an RZ parachute, only a small percentage of the men had jumped with their weapons and most of the weapons containers were lost during the drop. Many of them had no rifles. The signals platoon with the unit's radios was still 50 kilometers away.

Von der Heydte was about eight miles from the German ground forces but had no way to contact them. Reconnaissance patrols were sent out to make contact with elements of the Sixth Panzer Army. Many never returned. Those who did return had been unsuccessful. By the evening of December 17, von der Heydte had made contact with another 150 scattered stragglers of his composite battalion, but he still did not have an effective fighting force. Although his patrols found more stragglers, with no more than 350 men, no support weapons, no fire support, and no radio communications, he spent the day lying low and continued sending out small patrols. It was now too late to carry out the planned operation of blocking American reinforcements, even if the operation had gone nearly according to plan.

The day after the drop, a group of *Fallschirmjaeger* had a very close call. They

THE JUMP WAS A TOTAL DISASTER.

The German paratroopers were scattered across the Belgian countryside.

were resting in a ditch when a very large convoy of American vehicles drove by. It was a column from the American 1st Infantry Division, the Big Red One, but the Americans, thinking that the Germans were other Americans, merely waved. The other German *Fallschirmjäger* hid in the woods and watched helplessly as the reinforcements they were supposed to stop rolled past.

German patrols captured a few prisoners, including a motorcycle dispatch rider carrying the operations orders for the U.S. Army's XVIII Airborne Corps, but had no way to process them to the German rear or keep them, so they were sent back to the American lines with the German wounded. Von der Heydte sent a personal note to the 101st Airborne Division commander, Maj. Gen. Maxwell Taylor, whom he knew by reputation from the fighting in Normandy, asking the paratrooper general to care for the wounded *Fallschirmjäger* .

The aristocratic von der Heydte could count on the Americans to care for his wounded. Earlier that year, on July 4, during the Normandy campaign, the 6th *Fallschirmjäger* Regiment commanded by von der Heydte (then a major) had halted an attack of the U.S. 83rd Infantry Division, inflicting very heavy casualties on its 331st Infantry Regiment. The division lost nearly 1,400 men during its attack south of Carentan toward Periers. Major von der Heydte returned captured American medics along with a note to Maj. Gen. Robert C. Macon, the division commander, saying that he thought Macon probably needed them.

In the note von der Heydte also requested that, if the situation were ever reversed, he hoped General Macon would "return the favor." A three-hour cease-fire was called during which 16 seriously wounded Americans were evacuated in addition to those recovered from German aid stations and wounded *Fallschirmjäger* in American aid stations were turned over to German medics. *Fallschirmjäger* located other wounded on the battlefield for the American medics. The chivalry of von der Heydte's *Fallschirmjäger* was

Belgium—Perfect Place for a Counterattack

Belgium was the perfect place to hide a counteroffensive against the Allies. It is a mountainous country where towns are squeezed close together. The hills are punctuated by forests and small farms. The forests are filled with small, thin trees while most farms are on slopes.

It was in this terrain that Hitler launched his final offensive in the West. Along with favorable terrain, the Führer had another advantage in the weather. The heavy fogs that haunt the Low Countries from November through December had rolled in, nullifying Allied air superiority. Even today Belgium's weather consists mainly of overcast skies. In fact, in the year 2000 Belgium saw only 25 days of sunlight.

In addition to a favorable landscape and weather, the Germans had one more advantage—the local populace spoke German, and a number of people in the towns considered themselves German.

When the offensive was launched, the residents of Merlscheid, which was once part of Germany, helped guide Tiger tanks through the town at night. In the town of Honsfeld, less identified with Germany, a family trying to hide their son from conscription offered their daughter as a guide. The bargain did not work out. Her raped body was found west of the town during the spring thaw.

Today the locations of the German offensive look much as they did in 1944, pretty impressive since Europe does not have the equivalent of a park service to keep its historic areas preserved. Honsfeld, famous (or infamous) for the German

Kevin Hymel

photo of soldiers trying on American boots with the previous owners' corpses in the foreground, remains much the same today. The water troughs for animals are still there, and the fork in the road is recognizable to any passing tourist familiar with the incident. American foxholes can still be found, though the thought of finding anything from the 1940s is quickly stifled when would-be treasure hunters realize the land has already been mined over and over again.

Belgium may have been an ideal place to hide a huge offensive, but the land did not favor such action once it began. Despite the superiority of Tiger and Panther tanks and the experience of the German Army, the numerous streams and hilly ground gave the Americans excellent defensive positions from which to slow the attack. In the end, the advantages of Belgium could not outweigh the disadvantages. A sustained offensive on such terrain could not be given the demands of a two-front war. The German plan, while excellent for providing a breakthrough, could not achieve a breakout.

- Kevin M. Hymel

National Archives

LEFT: In a famous photo, German soldiers try on the boots of the dead Americans lying in the intersection at Honsfeld. Note the red markings of an American censor who indicated that the signs and crucifix in the photo should be obliterated before publication.
TOP: The intersection at Honsfeld today.

National Archives

Investigating the wreckage of a Ju-52 shot down by antiaircraft fire, U.S. soldiers pause as they encounter the bodies of dead German paratroopers, December 17, 1944.

widely known since the American press published an account of the incident.

Without success, the Luftwaffe tried to re-supply the paratroopers, who were in desperate need of weapons, ammunition, food, warm clothes, and medical supplies. However, they received only one container filled with cheap brandy and damp cigarettes. Von der Heydte's situation was critical: He had no contact with the Sixth Panzer Army, he had many wounded, and the Americans were closing around them. With his unit nearly surrounded, he decided to send his wounded and unfit back to where he thought the German front line was.

The remaining paratroopers were organized into an assault group to break through the Allied encirclement. The breakout attempt failed, and the *Fallschirmtruppen* took heavy casualties. On December 21, von der Heydte organized the survivors into small groups of two to three men and ordered them to attempt to reach the German lines he believed to be at Monschau.

Von der Heydte, his adjutant, and his orderly moved out in the direction of Monschau, believing it to be in German hands since it was a first-day objective of Operation *Wacht am Rhein.* But Monschau was not in German hands. It was occupied by a U.S. Army engineer battalion. Von der Heydte was in bad shape. The pain from his shattered left forearm and the injury to his right arm suffered during the jump became unbearable. On December 23, he ordered his companions to leave him. Entering the outskirts of Monschau alone, he rested in a local house. He stayed there for a couple of days trying to recover before he asked a local resident to contact the Americans. Their headquarters were in a hotel in the town. Von der Heydte, commander of the only German night combat parachute jump in history, surrendered.

Kampfgruppe von der Heydte's mission failed to achieve its objective of seizing the key crossroads and delaying American reinforcements. But Operation *Stoesser*, the last large-scale German parachute drop of the war, should not be dismissed as a complete failure. The presence of German paratroopers behind the Allied lines caused alarm among the troops and the higher echelons. The dummy *Fall- schirmjaeger*—probably the most successful aspect of the entire operation—were dropped north of Camp Elsenborn and confused the Americans. Because the *Fallschirmjäger* were scattered over such a vast area in the drop and isolated units engaged the Allies, their number was greatly overestimated.

Initially it was thought that whole divisions were dropped instead of a scattered battalion. This, combined with the presence of SS Colonel Otto Skorzeny's English-speaking commandos driving American jeeps behind the lines while wearing American uniforms and the initial success of the offensive, had a tremendous psychological effect on the American units in the Ardennes. The reports of enemy paratroopers resulted in numerous alerts in the American rear areas. The *Fallschirmjäger* succeeded in altering the deployment of American troops from reinforcing the front, forcing them to search for German paratroopers. This helped to tie up the American reserve for a few days.

Von der Heydte summed it up best: "The airborne operations connected with the Ardennes offensive were definitely a failure. The force committed was far too small ... the training of parachute troops and troop-carrier squadrons was inadequate; the Allies had superiority in the air; the weather was unfavorable; preparations and instructions were deficient; the attack by ground forces miscarried. In short, almost every prerequisite of success was lacking.... At that time the *Wehrmacht* was so hopelessly inferior to the enemy in manpower and materiel that this operation can hardly be justified and is to be regarded only as a last desperate attempt to change the fortunes of war."

After the war, von der Heydte went on to become a general in the West German *Bundeswehr* before passing away on July 7, 1994. □

Rob Krott writes from his home in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

The Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands in October 1942 was a Japanese victory but virtually eliminated Japanese carrier air power from coming battles.

BY NATHAN N. PREFER

IT had been a difficult year for the United States Navy.

Beginning with the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, defeat after defeat had plagued the efforts of the American Navy to recover its balance and strike back against the rampaging Japanese. There had been the disastrous Battle of the Java Sea, then the near annihilation of the Navy's Asiatic Fleet, the loss of the Philippines, and the Japanese overrunning of Southeast Asia.

America's few efforts at striking back—naval raids on Wake Island and the Marshall Islands and the Doolittle Raid on Tokyo—had done nothing to alter the balance of power in the Pacific.

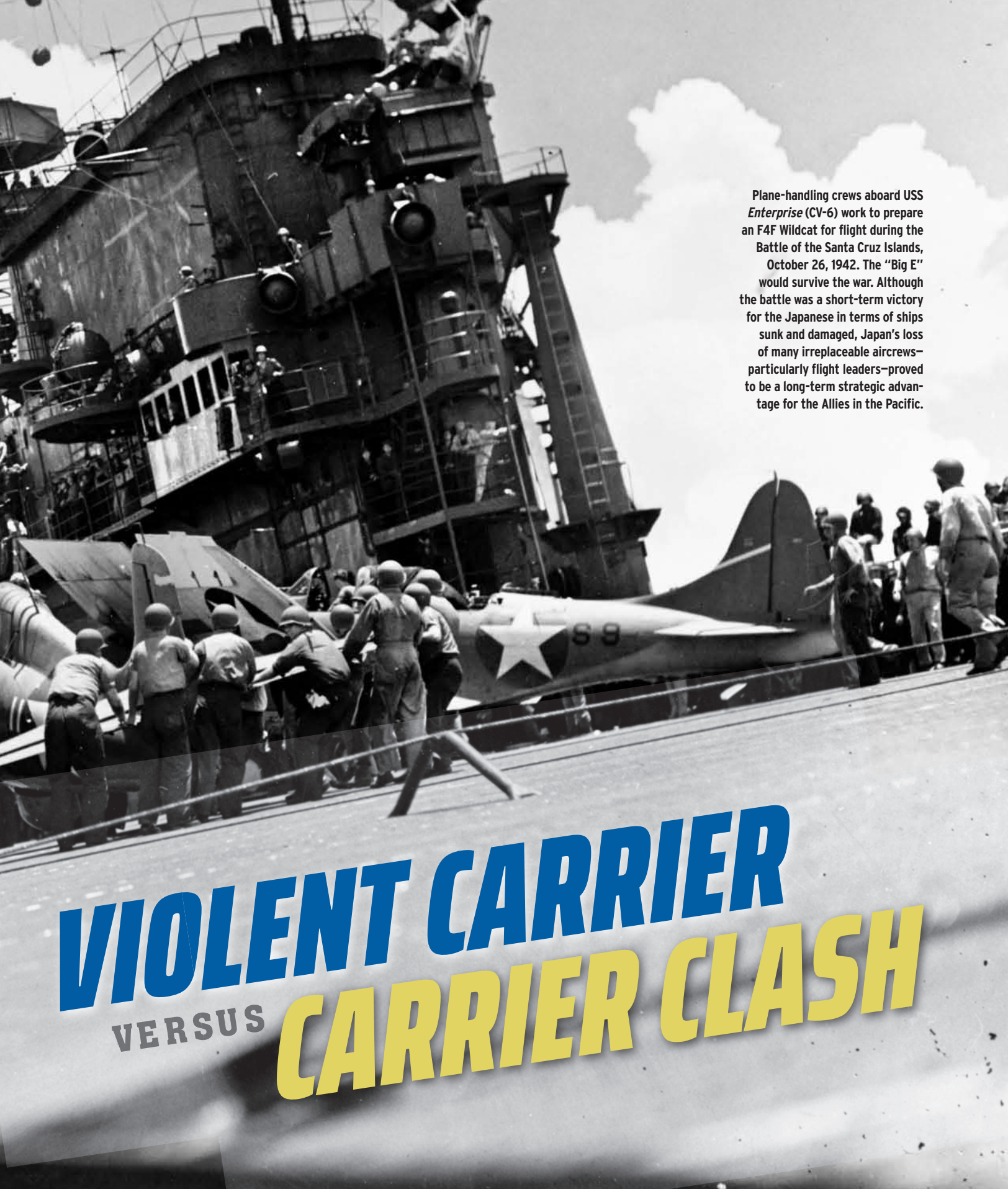
Nor were things any better in the Atlantic. Transatlantic convoys were regularly being attacked and sunk by German submarines; American citizens could watch the destruction of their own shipping just offshore along the eastern seaboard and in the Caribbean.

But by May 1942, things had begun to improve, largely the result of two separate developments: First, the Japanese were by now overconfident and decided to extend their original line of conquest even further, into the Coral Sea in the South Pacific, to further isolate Australia. Second, the U.S. Navy's intelligence and code-breaking organizations had made some important inroads in gathering and interpreting radio intercepts. As a result, Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, commanding the U.S. Navy's Pacific Fleet, decided to forcefully oppose the coming Japanese effort to seize Tulagi and Port Moresby in the Solomon Islands.

Nimitz sent what remained of the U. S. Pacific Fleet to intercept the new Japanese thrust in the Coral Sea. The resulting Battle of the Coral Sea (May 3-8, 1942) has been called a draw by some historians, but the fact remains that the Japanese advance was halted. Undeterred, the Japanese now decided to renew their advance by land in New Guinea and by seizing additional islands in the South Pacific.

The Japanese leadership, led by the famed Admiral Isokoru Yamamoto, architect of the Japanese success to date, also decided to force what they had sought since the war's beginning: what they called a "decisive battle." They would strike at Midway Island, hoping to draw the U.S. Pacific Fleet into a battle in which the Americans would be convincingly defeated.

But the Battle of Midway was an undeniable defeat for the Japanese, with a loss of four fleet aircraft carriers and many of the experienced pilots aboard those ships.



Plane-handling crews aboard USS *Enterprise* (CV-6) work to prepare an F4F Wildcat for flight during the Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands, October 26, 1942. The "Big E" would survive the war. Although the battle was a short-term victory for the Japanese in terms of ships sunk and damaged, Japan's loss of many irreplaceable aircrews—particularly flight leaders—proved to be a long-term strategic advantage for the Allies in the Pacific.

VIOLENT CARRIER VERSUS CARRIER CLASH

Concerned that enemy air bases on Tulagi and other southern Solomon Islands would threaten their lines of communication with Australia, the American Joint Chiefs of Staff authorized Admiral Nimitz to undertake an offensive in that area. Along with the defeat at Midway, they hoped that this would allow the U.S. to seize the initiative from the enemy. As a result, the 1st Marine Division landed on Tulagi and Guadalcanal on August 7, 1942.

The Guadalcanal Campaign lasted for more than six months and included no fewer than six named naval battles, along with innumerable naval skirmishes. One of the most important of these was known as the Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands, which took place October 26-27, 1942.

The cruiser USS *Boise* arrives at Philadelphia Navy Yard for repair of extensive damage suffered during the Battle of Cape Esperance, fought two weeks before the Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands.

Earlier major battles, at Savo Island (August 9, 1942), Eastern Solomons (August 24, 1942), and Cape Esperance (October 11-12, 1942), had either been defeats for the Americans or indecisive.

The next naval battle would take its name from the nearest land mass. The Santa Cruz Islands are just north of the New Hebrides and east of the southern Solomon Islands. They consist of four volcanic islands, heavily infested with malaria-carrying mosquitos. The natives were even more primitive than those of the Solomons.

Coincidentally, both sides were undergoing reorganizations at the time of the Santa Cruz battle. Admiral Nimitz had been unhappy with the performance of his commander in the South Pacific, Vice Adm. Robert Ghormley, and had only just replaced him with Vice Adm. William F. Halsey on October 18, 1942. Known for his aggressive nature, Admiral Halsey had frustratingly spent the last few months recuperating from an attack of dermatitis and had only recently returned to duty. He would later command the Third Fleet in the western Pacific.

Command of the carrier group had also recently changed, with Vice Adm. Frank "Jack" Fletcher rotating back to the United States and being replaced with Rear Adm. Thomas C. Kinkaid, a veteran of Coral Sea and Midway. Although himself a non-aviator, he had experience commanding carrier task forces and would later command the Seventh Fleet under General Douglas MacArthur.

The Japanese Navy was still under Yamamoto's command. For the coming battle he had assigned his most experienced commander, Vice Adm. Chuichi Nagumo. Although also a non-aviator, Nagumo had commanded the attack at Pearl Harbor, the Indian Ocean raids, and Midway, where he lost the four carriers under his command.

His chief of staff at the Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands was Rear Adm. Kusaka Ryunosuke, who had long experience in aviation but was also not an aviator himself.

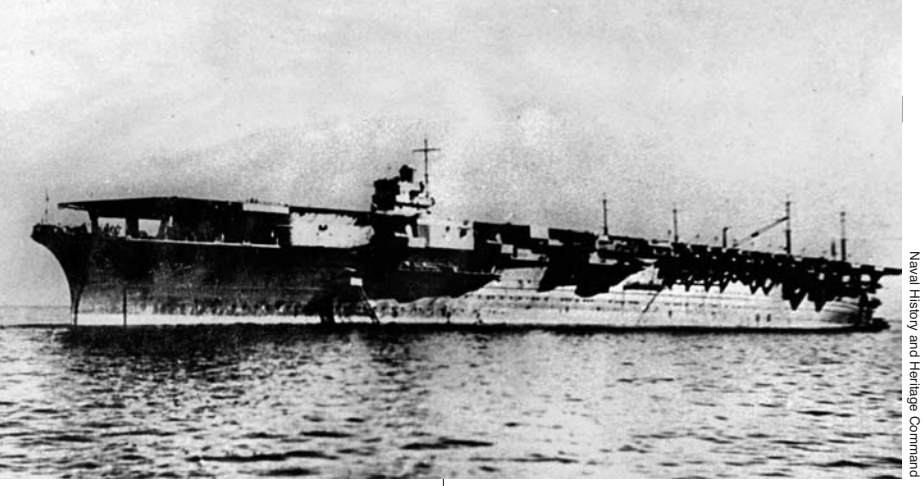
The Imperial Japanese Navy had begun the war with some of the best naval aviators of the day, with the aircraft and ships to match. In the early months of the war, losses had been negligible, and a wealth of experience was gained by the Japanese.

But, beginning with the Battle of the Coral Sea, losses began to mount. The loss of nearly the entire flight crews of the two large aircraft carriers in the Coral Sea rendered them unfit to participate in the Battle of Midway.

Then the Guadalcanal campaign had turned into one of attrition, forcing a reorganization. All the fleet carriers were now grouped into what was termed the Third Fleet; battleships, heavy cruisers, and destroyers were grouped as the Second Fleet. The Second Fleet would act as a vanguard for the Third Fleet, sailing at least 100 miles in advance to protect the essential Third Fleet carriers.

At the Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands, the Third Fleet consisted of two divisions—the First Carrier Division, directly under Admiral Nagumo, which included fleet carriers IJN *Shokaku* (flag) (Captain Masafumi Arima), the IJN *Zuikaku* (Captain Tameteru Notomo), and the light carrier *Zuiho* (Captain Sueo Obayashi). The group was protected by a heavy cruiser and eight destroyers.

Carrier Division Two was under the command of Rear Adm. Kakuji Kakuta, a veteran of the Aleutians invasion, aboard the IJN *Junyo* (flag) (Captain Tametsugu Okada) and included three battleships, four heavy cruisers, a light cruiser, and nine destroyers. A fifth



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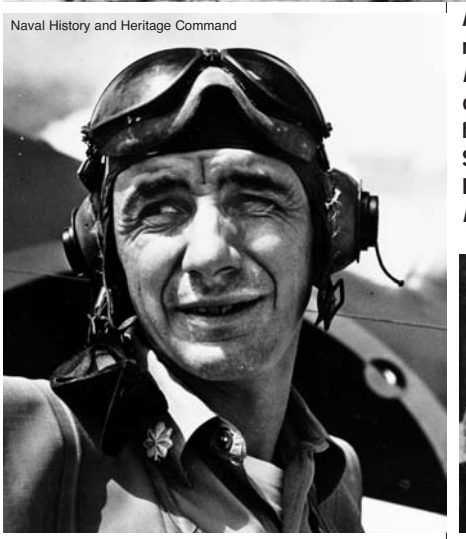

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ABOVE: Torpedo planes launched from Japanese carrier *Zuikaku*, shown here, tried but failed to hit *Enterprise*. LEFT: Commander Henry Sanchez, leader of USS *Hornet*'s VF-72, which attacked and damaged heavy cruiser *Chikuma*. BELOW: LEFT: Lt. Cmdr. Shigeharu Murata (left) led 64 planes against TF 61; Lieutenant Mamoru Seki (right) led the attack on *Enterprise*, and was shot down.

carrier had suffered mechanical troubles and had been detached from the attack force. Together the four Japanese aircraft carriers carried just under 200 attack aircraft.

The Americans also were altering their plans. Under Admiral Fletcher, the plans had been defensive. They were to prevent an attack on the Marines on Guadalcanal by Japanese naval forces. As such, Fletcher had kept his forces east of the Santa Cruz Islands.

But Admiral Halsey, as befitting his nickname "Bull," decided to go on the offensive. He and his staff developed a plan to use their two aircraft carriers and two battleships to search aggressively for the Japanese while remaining within range to protect the Guadalcanal beachhead.

The grouping was under the command of Rear Adm. Kinkaid and known as Task Force 61. It included the USS *Enterprise* (CV-6) (Captain Osborne B. Hardison) and escorts, known as Task Force 16, directly under Kinkaid's command, and Task Force 17 under the command of Rear Adm. George D. Murray, consisting of the USS *Hornet* (CV-8) (Captain Charles P. Mason) along with battleships USS *South Dakota* and USS *Washington*. There were also four heavy cruisers, five light cruisers, and 20 destroyers.

The two American carriers had about 140 attack aircraft between them. Halsey was taking a huge risk, since his two aircraft carriers were the only two American carriers left in the Pacific. Further, without knowing either how many enemy carriers were in the South Pacific or where they were located, he planned an aggressive sweep north of the Santa Cruz Islands to strike at Japanese-held islands in the Solomons.

Admiral Yamamoto had his own plans, which included a large naval sweep against Guadalcanal to eliminate the Marines holding the island. This was to be in support of the Japanese 17th Army's decisive attack against that beachhead. His task force then was to await word from the 17th Army that the airfield had been captured, after which it was to sweep into the area and destroy any American naval forces either supporting the Marines or trying to evacuate them.

While awaiting the news of the airfield's capture, the task force would sail north of Guadalcanal and west of the Santa Cruz Islands. But after two failed attempts, Yamamoto lost patience. Instead of waiting for the army to defeat the Marines, he decided instead to conduct a combined sea and air assault to weaken the Marines so that the Japanese army could overcome them.

First, on October 11, he sent off two seaplane tenders carrying heavy ground equipment. These were supported by three heavy cruisers and two destroyers, which were to bombard Henderson Field on Guadalcanal on October 12. He also ordered intensive air attacks on Guadalcanal beginning that day. Finally, the fleet would soon sail to Guadalcanal to add its weight to the bombardment.

But, once again, things did not go as planned. An American task force, TF 64, under the command of Rear Adm. Norman Scott, turned back the cruiser bombardment force at the Battle of Cape Esperance. The enemy commander, Rear Adm. Aritomo Goto, was killed, and the Japanese lost a heavy cruiser and a destroyer against the loss of the American destroyer USS *Duncan* (Lt. Cdr. Edmund B. Taylor). The only bright side for the Japanese was that the reinforcement convoy landed its reinforcements unscathed.

From that moment forward, the Battle for Guadalcanal intensified. The Americans landed the reinforcing U.S. Army's 164th Infantry Regiment, escorted by the *Hornet*, on October 13. The Japanese countered by bombarding the island with battleships on October 13-14.

A Japanese reinforcement convoy reached the island on the night of October 14-15, landing its troops successfully despite losing three transports to air attacks. Then two heavy Japanese cruisers again bombarded the island. Air attacks were constant by both sides. It was at this point that Ghormley advised Nimitz of his doubts about holding the island. Soon afterwards, Halsey and Kinkaid assumed their new commands.

The Japanese 17th Army launched its largest attack on October 24 and was soon

Both: Naval History and Heritage Command

TBF-1 Avenger torpedo bombers (ABOVE) and Grumman F4F Wildcat fighters (RIGHT) were the American workhorses during the battle.

reporting to Yamamoto that it had seized Henderson Field on Guadalcanal. In reality, however, it had not, and the Japanese Navy's attempt to fly over that airfield soon proved the fallacy of the initial report.

In the meantime, Nagumo's forces began moving towards Guadalcanal, still unsure of the enemy's position or strength. The news that the airfield was still in American hands caused them to reverse course.

American search planes soon located and reported on the Japanese forces; all three carriers had been spotted and reported to Admiral Kinkaid. A glance at the charts showed that the two groups were some 375 miles apart, out of range of American aircraft. As Kinkaid and his staff were deciding what to do, a message came from Halsey with orders to "Strike, Repeat, Strike."

Orders were one thing, but how to strike a force that is out of range is another. Not only were the Japanese out of range, but the winds were blowing against the Americans, making launching aircraft more difficult. To launch aircraft, Kinkaid would have to turn away from the enemy, increasing the distance.

Deciding to launch anyway, Kinkaid sent out a search group late in the afternoon with orders to go only 150 miles, then return to avoid a night landing. But the strike leader chose to go out to 200 miles and then extend another 80 miles, forcing a return in darkness and causing a loss of a fighter, four dive bombers, and three torpedo planes in landing accidents.

The night of October 24-25 was crucial for both sides and would result in the Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands the following day. Still under orders from Halsey to move north, Kinkaid sailed towards the Japanese fleet, dangerously close to Japanese island air bases.

Kinkaid designated the *Hornet*'s Air Group 8 (Commander Walter F. Rodee) as the attack force for the coming battle, while the *Enterprise*'s Air Group 10 (Commander Richard K. Gaines) would handle all search and combat air patrol duties. Patrol aircraft flying from Espiritu Santo also continued to search for the Japanese and report on their course, position, and speed.

Meanwhile, the Japanese marked time, with the Advance Force (Rear Adm. Hiroaki Abe) some 60 miles ahead of the main body. Finally, a frustrated Yamamoto gave up waiting for the Imperial Japanese Army to deliver Guadalcanal, and, since his ships had been at sea for some time and fuel was now becoming an issue, he ordered Nagumo to close the island and deliver a knockout punch once and for all with his aircraft and guns.

With his three carriers and 194 aircraft, Nagumo outnumbered Kinkaid in every important respect, but the Japanese still did not know how many American carriers were nearby or exactly where they were.

It was the patrol aircraft flying from Espiritu Santo that began the largest carrier battle of the Guadalcanal Campaign. These PBYs discovered Nagumo's fleet some 300 miles northwest of Task Force 61 shortly after midnight on October 25-26, 1942.

One PBY attacked a destroyer unsuccessfully, so Nagumo knew he had been spotted. Another PBY attacked the *Zuikaku* with bombs but also missed. Concerned about an American ambush, especially after his Midway experience, Nagumo then turned his fleet north and ordered that all aircraft be stripped of fuel and armament; 14 aircraft were sent out to search the area for American forces. Then the Japanese reversed course and turned south once again.

While the Japanese were searching for them, the Americans turned to the southeast to launch aircraft. A combat air patrol and several search planes went aloft. Unfortunately, it took nearly five hours before the report of the PBY sighting of the Japanese fleet reached Admiral Kinkaid. When the report finally reached him, Kinkaid had already dispatched 16 of his scout dive bombers on a search mission, which left him short of strike aircraft.

An hour later Air Group 10's search planes sighted the Japanese Advance Force 170 miles to the west and reported to Kinkaid. Admiral Abe immediately altered course to the northwest, but not before two of the dive bombers under Lieutenant Vivian W. Welch attacked the heavy cruiser *Tone* but missed. Other Dauntless dive bombers also attacked but scored no hits. Moments later other scouts reported on the three Japanese aircraft carriers, placing them 200 miles northwest of TF 61.

Kinkaid ordered an immediate strike from both of his carriers. They were at the edge of their strike range, and swift reaction was necessary to attack before they were out of reach. *Hornet* quickly launched dive bombers and torpedo planes, protected by seven fighters. Moments later a second strike of dive bombers and Avengers armed with bombs instead of torpedoes went aloft. *Enterprise* followed with eight torpedo planes, three dive bombers and eight fighters. Although Kinkaid had ordered that the three attack groups strike together, this was ignored, and each struck out on their own.

Admiral Nagumo had also been alerted to the Americans' location by one of his scout planes and ordered an immediate launch. Locating the enemy at 210 miles away to the east-southeast, he sent Lt. Cmdr. Shigeharu Murata of the *Shokaku* with four fighters, 21 bombers, and a scout to keep in contact with the Americans. IJN *Zuiho* added nine fighters and another scout to the attack force. In total, Murata led 21 fighters, 21 bombers, and 22 attack planes against Task Force 61.

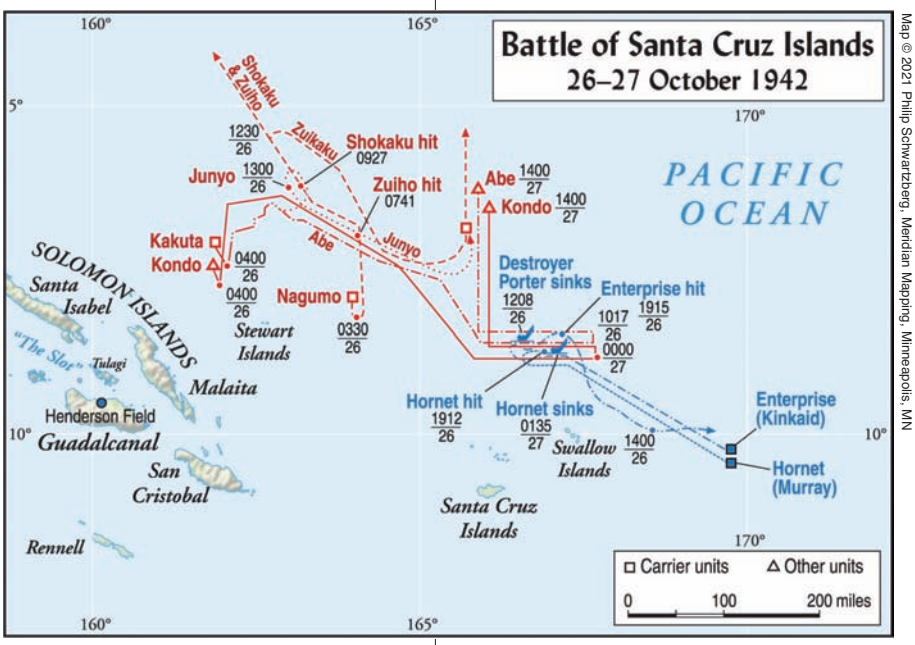
Barely had Nagumo's first attack wave cleared the decks than a second was brought up and prepared for launch. As the Japanese prepared the second launch, two Dauntless dive bombers from the original scouting group appeared undetected by Japanese radar or Combat Air Patrol and attacked the light carrier *Zuiho*, hitting her with a single 500-pound bomb aft and taking her out of the air battle.

Both American pilots, Lieutenant Stockton B. Strong and Ensign Charles B. Irvine, despite being chased for miles by the Combat Air Patrol, escaped unharmed. Nagumo was forced to detach the crippled *Zuiho* to the Japanese base at Truk for repairs.

This sudden unexpected and successful American attack further unnerved Nagumo, who ordered frenzied efforts to get the second strike launched before the Americans struck again. Both the *Shokaku* and *Zuikaku* launched independent attacks as soon as possible. Meanwhile, the Japanese command prepared for a possible surface engagement, ordering the Advance Force to increase speed and head for the American fleet.

In the air the two opposing attack groups passed each other on the way to their respective targets. *Hornet*'s fighters radioed a warning back to their carrier about the incoming Japanese attack force; Japanese fighters did the same. Then the fighters from the *Zuiho* decided to attack the Americans flying against their carrier.

Hitting the Americans from behind and from out of the sun, fighters from Air Group 10 shot down two Avengers. A fight between the Japanese Zeros and four F4F-4 Wildcats ensued. The fighting cost



Map © 2021 Philip Schwartzberg, Meridian Mapping, Minneapolis, MN

The Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands was the fourth major sea battle of Guadalcanal campaign.

four Zeros and three Wildcats, but the American strike force continued its mission. Other aircraft were damaged and had to return to base. The Japanese fighter commander's decision was soon to cost Commander Murata's strike force considerable losses.

The *Hornet*-launched Americans were spotted by Japanese radar at 78 miles distance. Immediately the 20 Japanese fighters on Combat Air Patrol were directed against this incoming threat.

Passing over the IJN's Advance Force and ignoring them, the leading bombing squadron continued. With his fighters stripped away by the Zeros, Lt. Cmdr. William J. "Gus" Widhelm (who had earned the Navy Cross during the Battle of Midway) led the remaining SBD-3 bombers of VS-8 into the attack.

After radioing the enemy's position (a transmission that was jammed), Widhelm was shot down (he and his rear gunner were rescued), and Lieutenant James E. Vose took command. Their target was the *Shokaku*, which was turning wildly below to avoid their attack. Although the first few 1,000-pound bombs missed, the next few, perhaps as many as six, struck the carrier. Instantly, bright gouts of fire and smoke began blossoming upward.

Hornet's VS-8 had hit the *Shokaku* near the island on the starboard side, with other bombs striking the center and aft elevators. The flight deck had buckled, and the elevators were destroyed, making flight operations impossible. A large fire began, which took five hours to extinguish. About 130 of the ship's personnel had been killed.

However, there was no damage to the hull, and the ship could still sail, if not launch or recover aircraft. Of the 15 Dauntlesses that made this attack, all but two returned to their carrier.

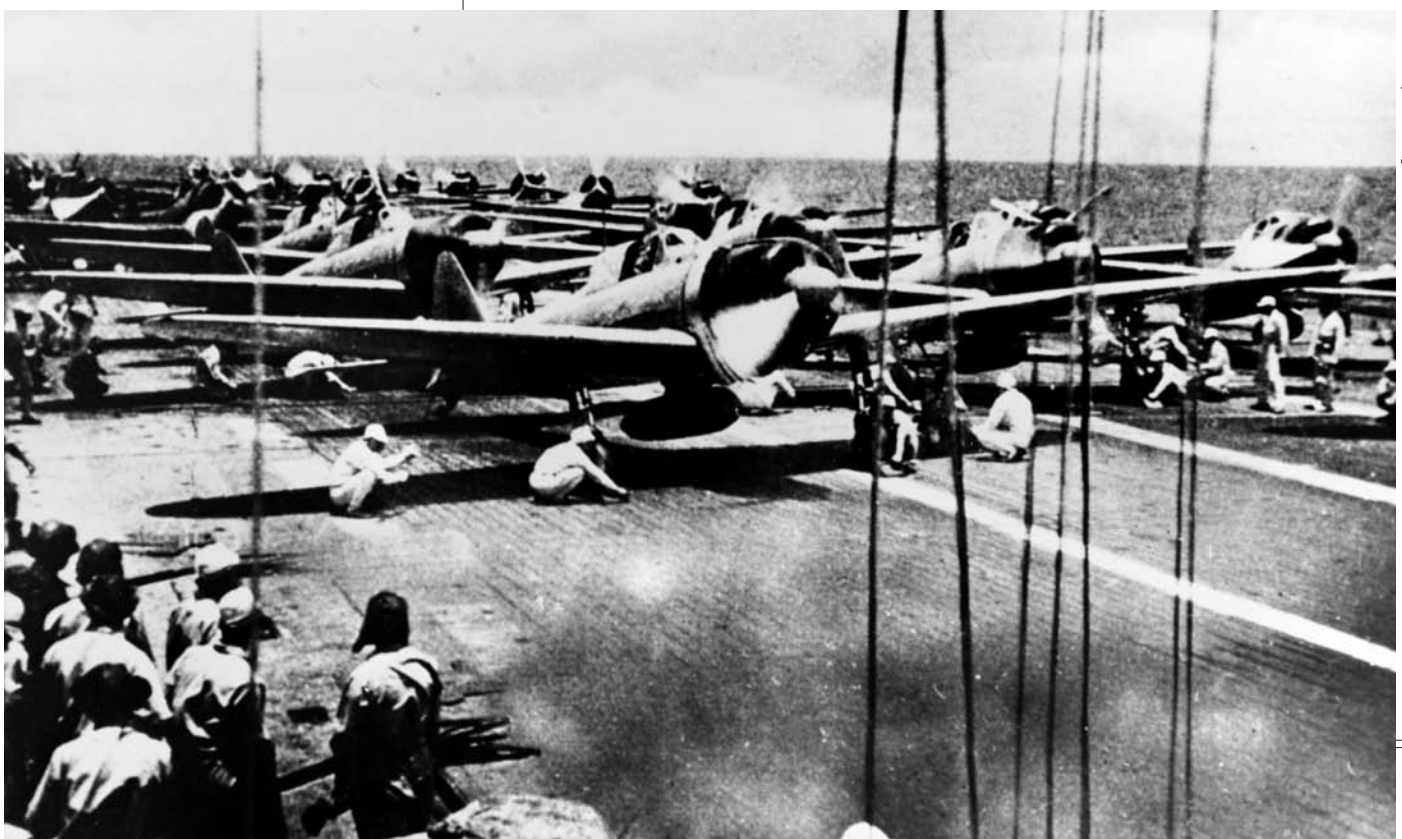
The other *Hornet*'s strike group missed the main Japanese force and attacked the Advance Force instead. Escorted by seven of Lt. Cmdr. Henry G. Sanchez's Fighter Squadron 72 (VF-72), they attacked the cruisers of the Advance Force and hit heavy cruiser *Chikuma* with two 1000-pound bombs, damaging her severely.

Hornet's second strike also missed the main body and hit the Advance Force, again selecting the unlucky *Chikuma* as the target, but only one 500-pound bomb hit was confirmed. The cruiser lost 192 killed and 95 wounded from all this unwanted attention. Two more American attack groups also failed to find the main body, and instead attacked the Advance Force, but caused no additional damage.

Out of the 75 American planes sent into the attack, not counting the scouts, only 10 managed to damage one Japanese carrier; the failure of the leaders to attack as a single group was largely responsible for this poor showing.

The Japanese did better. Lt. Cmdr. John Griffin commanded the fighter protection over Task Force 61 and had 37 fighters at his command. He placed them over each carrier at 10,000 feet, to conserve oxygen and fuel. This would later prove to be a serious error. The incoming strike was detected by the USS *Northampton*'s (Captain Willard A. Kitts, Jr.) radar at 70 miles distance and the report passed on to the carriers, but apparently never reached Commander Griffin on the *Enterprise*.

Commander Murata's strike first encountered *Hornet* and picked her as their target. At that moment, TF 16 and *Enterprise* were covered by a rain squall. Commander Murata had 12 Zeros and 41 attack aircraft which he directed against Murray's TF 17. By the time the American fighters were directed against the attacking Japanese and rose



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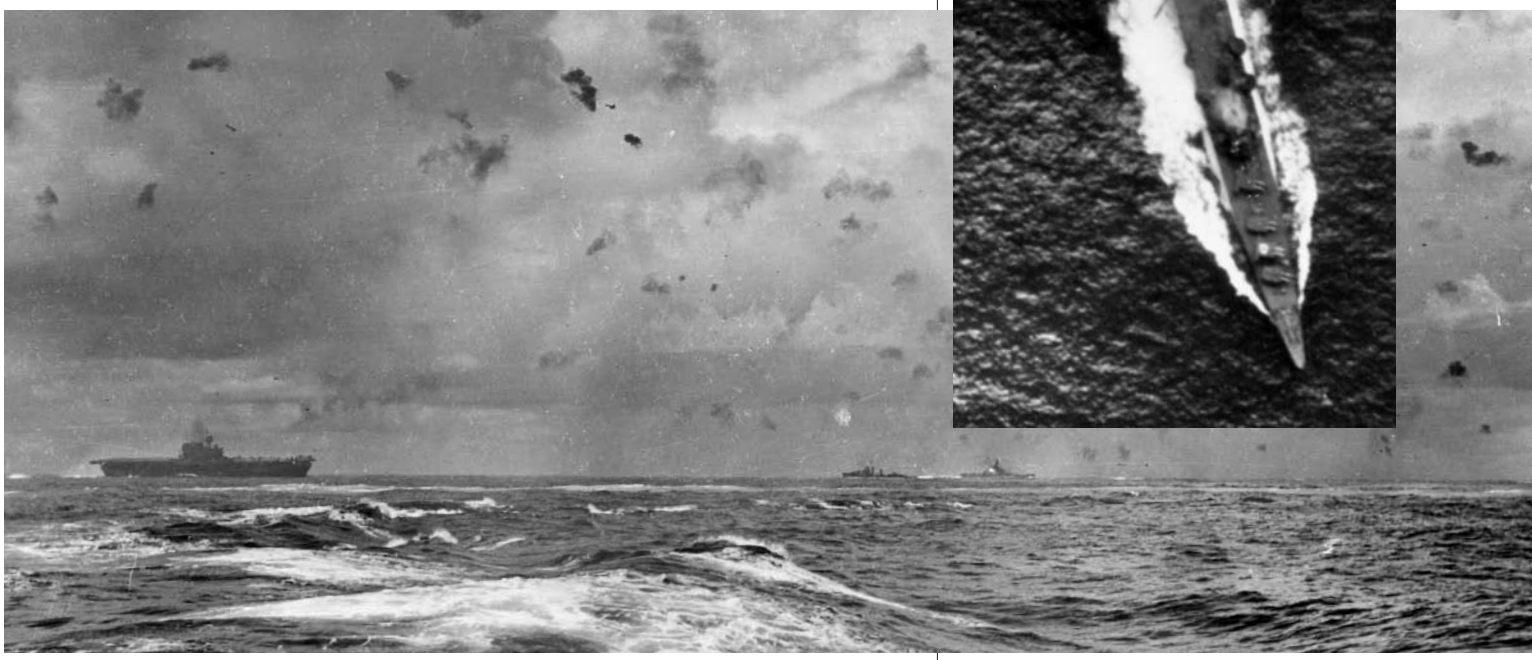
BELOW: Black puffs of exploding antiaircraft shells dot the sky above Kinkaid's TF 61 as U.S. Navy ships try to fend off swarms of attacking Japanese planes. USS *Enterprise* is at left with at least two enemy warplanes overhead. Ship second from right is USS *South Dakota*, firing her starboard 5/38 secondary battery, as marked by the bright flash amidships. RIGHT: Heavy cruiser *Chokuma* under air attack photographed by a plane from *Enterprise*. Note gray smoke streaming from her bridge area, which has been hit by a bomb. OPPOSITE: Crewmen, probably on *Shokaku*, ready a Mitsubishi A6M6 Model 21 (Allied codename "Zeke") for takeoff on the morning of October 26, 1942.



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to meet them, the enemy had already begun his attack.

Using the "anvil formation," in which the torpedo planes attacked from both sides of the target, making it difficult to avoid one without running into the other, Lieutenant Sadamu Takahashi began the attack on *Hornet*.

Meanwhile, IJN dive bombers drove through the clouds and placed a 500-pound bomb in the center of *Hornet*'s flight deck. Another bomb hit near the bridge and holed the flight deck. A third struck and exploded below deck, causing extensive casualties. Of the seven dive bombers that attacked, three hits were scored, and four planes survived the attack.

Lieutenant Takahashi's attack was upset when TF 17 changed course to the northeast. Now forced to make a difficult stern attack, the torpedo planes went in anyway. Commander Murata was shot down, and the first three aircraft missed. Then a torpedo hit *Hornet* just below the bridge. A second torpedo hit in the engineering spaces, knocking out the engine rooms and causing flooding. Power was quickly lost.

Hornet stopped dead in the water and began to list to starboard. Now three more torpedo planes came in; the first was shot down, the others missed. Five more came in, and the first three missed, while the final two decided to attack the cruiser *Pensacola* (Captain Frank L. Lowe) but missed. Of the 11 torpedo planes, only two had hit *Hornet*, and five had been shot down.

The next attack group was intercepted by fighters from Lt. Cmdr. James H. Flatley, Jr.'s Fighter Squadron 10 (VF-10) off the *Enterprise*. They disrupted the attack on *Hornet*, shooting down two, one of which performed a suicide dive onto *Hornet*, catching a wing on the ship's smokestack and bouncing through the flight deck. The resulting fire took two hours to extinguish.

A third attack group was turned away by the *Enterprise*'s fighters before they could close with TF 17. But two damaged Japanese aircraft remained on the scene. One, smoking, suddenly appeared and tried to bomb *Northampton*, but missed. He then turned to *Hornet*, intent on a suicide dive, and crashed into the ship's port side. Moments later a second Japanese plane tried a suicide dive but hit the water only feet from the hull.

Altogether *Hornet* had suffered two torpedo hits, three bomb hits, and two suicide crashes. She was powerless, unable to land or launch aircraft, and was listing to starboard. But the attack had cost Japan dearly; of the 53 attacking Japanese aircraft, only 15 survived to return to their carriers. The Americans lost six fighters, of which two pilots were rescued.

From radio intercepts, the Japanese knew that *Hornet* was severely damaged, and the *Enterprise*—America's last functioning carrier in the entire Pacific—was still in the area. The second attack was therefore directed against *Enterprise*.

Admiral Kinkaid sought the shelter of rain squalls, common in the area, but the 24 Japanese aircraft of the second strike found them anyway. The *South Dakota*'s

(Captain Thomas L. Gatch) radar picked up Lt. Cmdr. Mamoru Seki's approach at 55 miles distance. Spotting the wounded *Hornet* and quickly seeing that she was seriously damaged, he went on to spot TF 16 some 20 miles further. Admiral Kinkaid turned away, and planes about to be launched on deck were hurried into the air.

Seki's group attacked out of the sun, and only one was shot down by American fighters before they began their dives on *Enterprise*. American antiaircraft fire was more effective. Seki and three others were shot down, and only one 550-pound bomb penetrated the carrier in the middle of its flight deck. Damage was slight since the bomb went through the flight deck and exploded off the port bow.

A second bomb hit near the forward elevator, blowing one Dauntless overboard; six others were jettisoned to avoid a fire. A third bomb was a near miss that opened some underwater seams and caused additional planes to be towed overboard. Ten of the 19 attacking Japanese planes had been shot down. *Enterprise* had lost 44 men killed and 10 aircraft destroyed.

Lieutenant Shigeichiro Imajuku led the *Zuikaku*'s strike, leading his torpedo planes against *Enterprise* and being shot down for his efforts. None of his following planes hit *Enterprise* and two of them turned off to attack the battleship *South Dakota*. They missed, but one severely damaged aircraft made a suicide dive on the destroyer USS *Smith* (Lt. Cmdr. Hunter Wood, Jr.) and seriously damaged that ship.

With steering control lost, Wood raced to the aft steering room and conned his ship from there. He moved up to the bow of *South Dakota*, whose bow wave soon extinguished the flames aboard the *Smith*. The destroyer lost 28 dead and 23 wounded.

Just when Captain Hardison thought *Enterprise* was out of danger and began to recover planes, Lieutenant Maseo Yamaguchi and 18 strike aircraft from IJN *Junyo* arrived. Attacking unexpectedly out of the clouds, the strike managed only a near miss on *Enterprise*, losing eight of their own in the attack.

Stragglers from this group attacked *South Dakota*, landing one bomb on the armored cover of the number-one turret and wounding Captain Gatch slightly with a shell splinter. One man died and 50 others were wounded. Another straggler struck Captain James E. Maher's antiaircraft cruiser *San Juan*, which temporarily lost steering control and veered through the formation, guns still firing at the Japanese planes overhead. Steering control was resumed after a few discomfiting minutes.

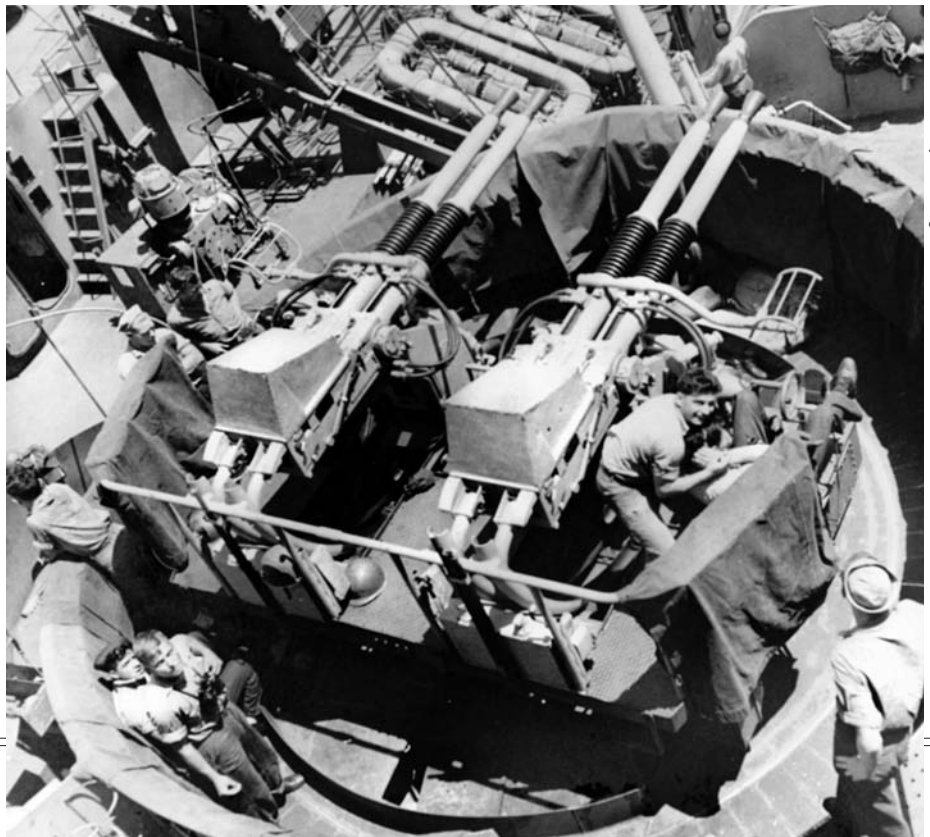
Enterprise recovered as many aircraft as she could, sending the surplus off to Espiritu Santo. Meanwhile, *Hornet* was fighting for her life. The *Northampton* tried to tow her to safety, but the tow rope repeatedly broke. Finally, at three knots, the cruiser managed to pull the carrier away from the battlefield; wounded were treated and gathered on the fantail. Captain Mason soon had all the wounded transferred to the destroyers USS *Russell* (Lt. Cmdr. Glenn R. Hartwig) and USS *Hughes* (Lt. Cmdr. Donald J. Ramsey).

But the Japanese were not yet finished. A mixed strike force from the *Junyo* and *Shokaku* arrived and attacked *Hornet* and *Northampton*. Casting off the tow, Captain Kitts dodged the torpedoes successfully, but Captain Mason had no propulsion and could not dodge incoming torpedoes. Strangely, only one struck the carrier. That one was enough, however, flooding her engine room and increasing her list to 14 degrees to starboard. Mason ordered his crew to abandon ship.

Even as the crew was in the process of abandoning ship, more enemy planes appeared. The machine guns from *Hornet* fired, the bombers missed, and no Japanese planes were shot down. And yet an additional small flight from *Junyo* came over the stricken ship, landing one bomb on the empty hanger deck and starting a small fire.

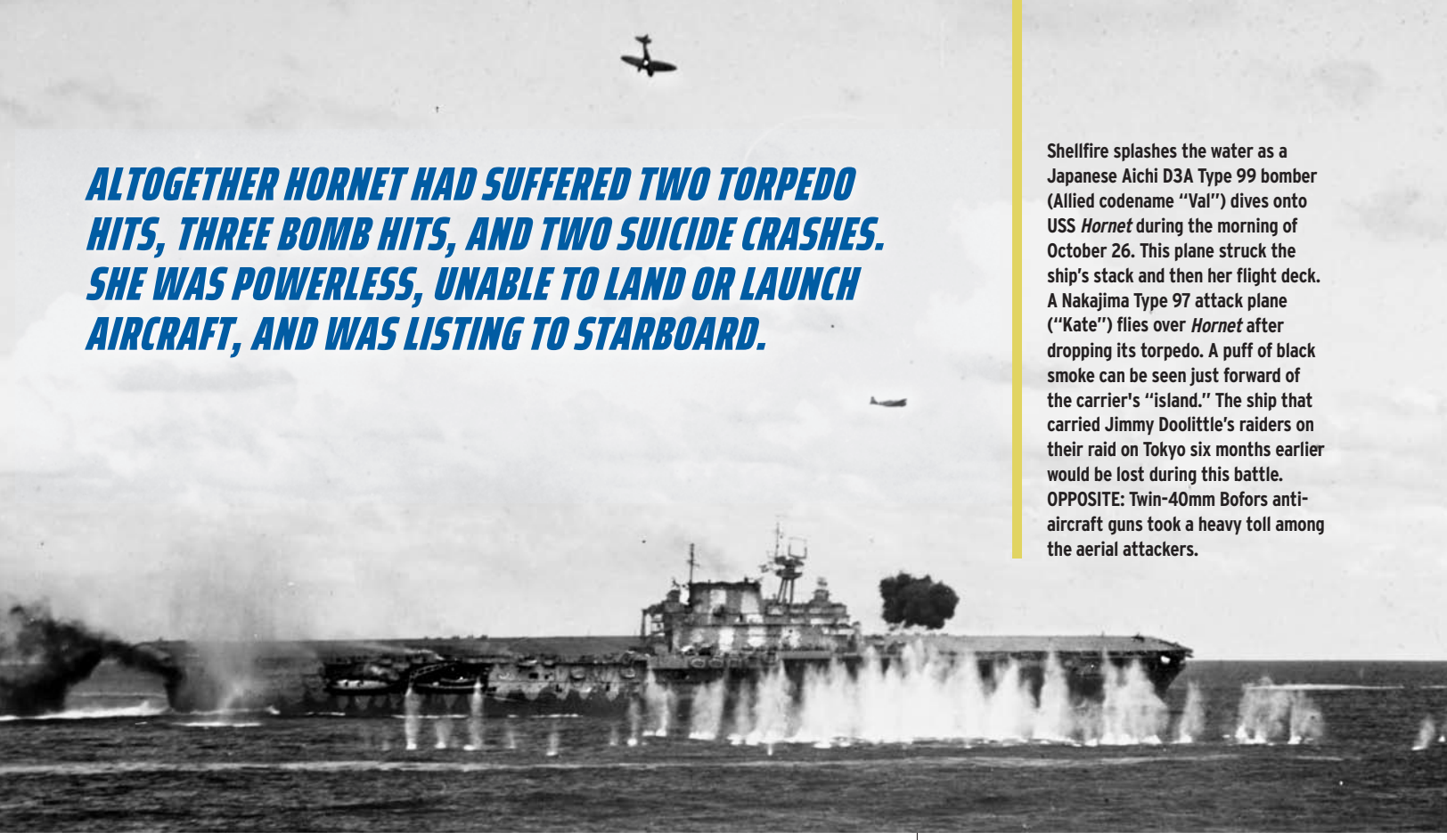
But by that time *Hornet* had been abandoned. Her losses were 111 killed and 108 wounded. While rescuing downed aircrew, the USS *Porter* (Lt. Cmdr. David G. Roberts) was hit by an errant torpedo jettisoned by an Avenger pilot trying to land. All but the 15 men killed in the blast were rescued by the USS *Shaw* (Lt. Cmdr. Wilbur G. Jones), which then sank the floundering *Porter* with gunfire.

Admiral Kinkaid had no choice but to scuttle *Hornet*. The famous ship that had brought Jimmy Doolittle's B-25 bombers to within 600 miles of Japan in April 1942 lay helpless in the sea, listing dangerously and with little hope of being towed out of



Naval History and Heritage Command

ALTOGETHER HORNET HAD SUFFERED TWO TORPEDO HITS, THREE BOMB HITS, AND TWO SUICIDE CRASHES. SHE WAS POWERLESS, UNABLE TO LAND OR LAUNCH AIRCRAFT, AND WAS LISTING TO STARBOARD.



Shellfire splashes the water as a Japanese Aichi D3A Type 99 bomber (Allied codename "Val") dives onto USS *Hornet* during the morning of October 26. This plane struck the ship's stack and then her flight deck. A Nakajima Type 97 attack plane ("Kate") flies over *Hornet* after dropping its torpedo. A puff of black smoke can be seen just forward of the carrier's "island." The ship that carried Jimmy Doolittle's raiders on their raid on Tokyo six months earlier would be lost during this battle. OPPOSITE: Twin-40mm Bofors anti-aircraft guns took a heavy toll among the aerial attackers.

the battle zone safely.

Kinkaid also had to be concerned with the rest of Task Force 64's safety, for the odds were now greater than when the battle had begun. The destroyer USS *Mustin* (Lt. Cmdr. Wallis F. Peterson) was ordered to sink the carrier. After firing eight torpedoes without an explosion—a sad comment on the state of American torpedo technology at this stage of the war—the USS *Anderson* (Lt. Cmdr. Richard A. Guthrie) took over, getting six hits our of eight torpedoes. Still, the valiant ship refused to sink.

Both destroyers fired over 400 rounds of 5-inch ammunition at the carrier, but still she floated, although now flames roared throughout the ship. By this time both *Mustin* and *Anderson* were receiving the unwanted attention of Japanese scout planes overhead. Convinced *Hornet* was finished, the two destroyers fled the scene, less than 40 minutes before the Japanese advance force arrived.

Part of the Advance Force chased the *Mustin* and *Anderson* away, while the Japanese destroyers *Makigumo* and *Akigumo* finished off *Hornet* with "Long Lance" torpedoes. At 1:35 AM, on October 27, *Hornet* finally plunged beneath the waves in 17,500 feet of water, carrying 140 of her 2,200 sailors with her. (*Hornet* was found by an expedition in January 2019.) The Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands was over.

The battle was counted as a Japanese victory, but only barely. The IJN lost the use of two carriers for the better part of the following year while *Shokaku* and *Zuiho*, as well as *Chikuma*, underwent extensive repairs. The *Zuikaku* was also returned to Japan to acquire and train replacements for her decimated air group. This virtually eliminated Japanese carrier air power from the coming major Battle of Guadalcanal (November 12-15, 1942).

More importantly, the loss of skilled and experienced flight leaders such as Lt. Cmdr. Murata, Lieutenants Maseo Yamaguchi, Shigeichiro Imajuku, Mamoru Seki, Sadamu Takahashi, and others, would, when taken with the losses suffered at Coral Sea and Midway, seriously damage the Japanese naval air force's ability to prosecute the war in the coming years.

The loss of 68 pilots and 77 aircrew—more than at Midway—would also have a negative impact on future operations. These losses included two of three dive-bomber leaders, three torpedo squadron leaders, and most section leaders.

The Japanese spent a great deal of time and effort in training aircrew, and these losses soon forced the reductions in training hours and experience that would result in the "Marianas Turkey Shoot" in June of 1944. Half of the aircraft (99 of 203) that attacked were destroyed, and these could be replaced, but only at the expense of other pressing military needs.

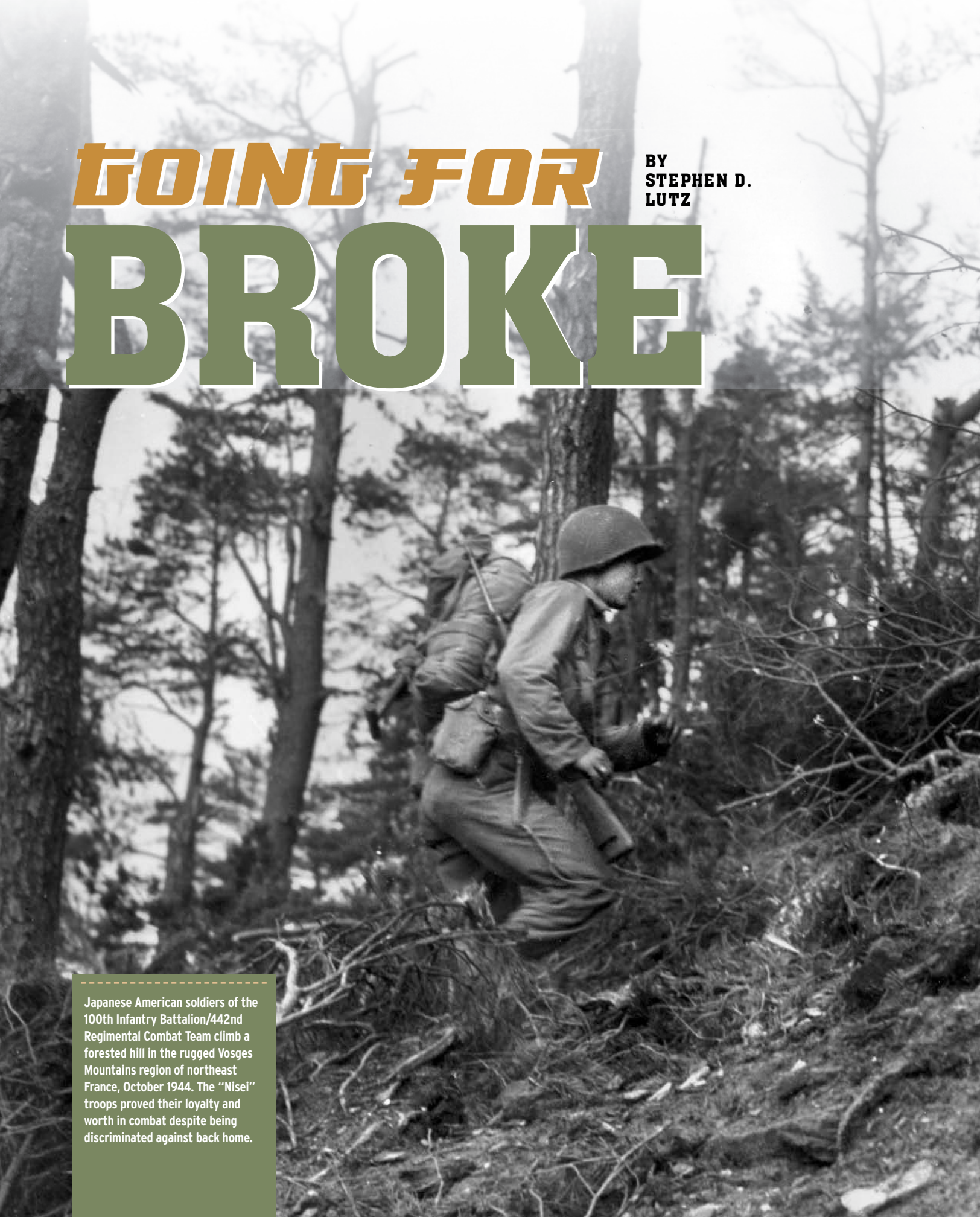
This battle was the fourth carrier-versus-carrier battle in four months. Besides the ship losses, the Americans lost 81 planes, but only 25 in combat; the others were aboard *Hornet* or were ditched operationally. Twenty aircrew had been lost, with another four captured. They still suffered from poor fighter direction, in part because of poor communications equipment. New VHF (Very High Frequency) radios that were about to appear would rectify that issue.

Attack coordination remained unsolved.

Continued on page 98

GOING FOR BROKE

BY STEPHEN D. LUTZ



Japanese American soldiers of the 100th Infantry Battalion/442nd Regimental Combat Team climb a forested hill in the rugged Vosges Mountains region of northeast France, October 1944. The "Nisei" troops proved their loyalty and worth in combat despite being discriminated against back home.

National Archives

Japanese American soldiers defied prejudice to become the most decorated unit in U.S. military history.

Thousands of Japanese American men demonstrated their loyalty to the U.S. by volunteering to serve in the 100th Infantry Battalion and the 442nd Infantry Regiment, to which the 100th would later be joined. Comprising almost entirely Asian Americans, the 442nd would become the most decorated group of its size in the history of the U.S. military.

For young American men of Japanese descent, getting into World War II was not easy. Distrust by whites of anyone who looked Asian was rife. And if war with Japan broke out, many government and military leaders wondered: On which side did the loyalties of these Asian Americans lie?

Among Japanese Americans, there were three classes: *Issei* (born in Japan but moved to the U.S. or its territories), *Nisei* (born to *Issei* in the U.S. or its territories), and *Kibei* (a person of Japanese descent, born in the U.S. but educated in Japan).

To prepare for a possible war, on October 15, 1940, the Territory of Hawaii (it would not become a state until August 21, 1959) established its 298th and 299th Infantry Regiment Territorial Guard units. Of approximately 3,000 members, about half were Hawaiian-born Nisei. Military induction and basic training were performed at Schofield Barracks on Oahu.

The Hawaiian Army Department commander, Lt. Gen. Charles Herron, was quoted in 1940 as saying, "The Army is not worried about the Japanese in Hawaii. Among them there may be a small hostile alien group, but we can handle the situation.

"It seems people who know least about Hawaii and live farthest away are most disturbed over this matter. People who know the Islands are not worried about possible sabotage. I say this sincerely after my years of service here. I am sold on the patriotism and Americanization of the Hawaiian people as a whole."

As Herron noted, those living the farthest away (i.e., the War Department in Washington, D.C.) were the most disturbed. Besides the issue of Asian Americans, the top brass of the armed forces did not want to upset the status quo with regard to African Americans, either, fearing that integrating the services would promote disharmony and light the fuse of a racial powder keg.

A major concern was that white troops would not obey the orders of an officer or NCO of color. Curtis Munson, President Franklin Roosevelt's personal advisor, felt the same as Herron and wrote, "The army officers confessed that they held their breath. Much to their surprise and relief, there was absolutely no reaction from the white troops, and they liked these officers very well…. The Army is going to try more."

Joining Up

The parents of Isaac Fuko Akinaka were born and raised in Japan but immigrated to America to become naturalized citizens; Isaac was born in Honolulu in 1911. In spite of his Japanese heritage, he was American enough to prefer the name "Isaac;" he joined the Hawaiian 298th Infantry Regiment Territorial Guard on December 9, 1940, at age 29.

A year later, Pearl Harbor changed everything, forcing many young men to make life-changing decisions. When Japan attacked Pearl Harbor the weekend before he was to be discharged, Isaac Akinaka said, "The war has come upon us." He extended his military service.

Honolulu resident Daniel K. Inouye, age 17, was getting ready for church that Sunday and heard the radio announcer frantically repeating that Pearl Harbor was under attack by the Japanese. Inouye and his father rushed outside. "We looked towards Pearl Harbor and puff! All the smoke. And you could see puffs of the anti-aircraft shells exploding. And then, all of the sudden, three aircraft flew right over us—green color with the red dot in the wing. I knew my life had changed." Inouye, a high school senior, rushed to a Red Cross aid station to help civilians and sailors wounded in the attack.

Robert Shimada and Jinichi Miyashiro, members of the 100th Infantry Battalion, set up a 60mm mortar during stateside training at Camp Shelby, Mississippi, in 1943.

Inouye tried to enlist after graduating from high school in 1942, but the U.S. had closed all new enlistments to men of Japanese descent. Thus barred, he enrolled at the University of Hawaii as a pre-med student. But he soon learned of the formation of the all-Japanese American 442nd Infantry Regiment; he quit school and volunteered, and was assigned to Company E, 2nd Battalion. He would become one of the most highly decorated members of the 442nd.

Despite personally feeling that Japanese Americans did not pose a security threat, Roosevelt was pressured by Lt. Gen. John L. DeWitt head of the Western Defense Command into issuing Executive Order 9066 on February 19, 1942—the order that established internment camps to which Japanese Americans, most of whom were full U.S. citizens, were sent for the duration of the war.

Some 110,000-120,000 people of Japanese ancestry, most of who lived along the Pacific Coast, were forcefully relocated to 10 detention camps farther inland, where they would live behind barbed wire and be watched over by armed guards. (Interestingly, because the Issei and Nisei were so numerous in Hawaii, and their removal would have created such severe hardships to the islands' economy, the government there chose not to relocate them.)

Frank Tadakazu Hachiya became Kibei in 1936. His Issei parents inherited a business in Japan, compelling him to travel there and oversee their affairs. He then attended a Japanese university for four years. Toward the end of his academic experience, a Japanese professor with high standing in the Japanese Army pressured him to stay in Japan, arguing that the Japanese Army was going far and Hachiya could advance with it.

Hachiya, however, saw great rifts between Japanese and American society, and he would always be American. When he died in action on January 3, 1945, it was with the U.S. Army's Military Intelligence Service in Leyte Gulf.

Whether these Nisei and Kibei were born in the continental United States (CONUS) or Hawaii would impact their perspectives upon entering the Army. Their life experiences differed. The Hawaiians were halfway closer to their Japanese heritage and culture than those growing up in CONUS. The islanders spoke English with a smattering of Japanese and Hawaiian mixed in, a sort of pidgin English. In CONUS, the Nisei generation spoke a more traditional, purer English.

When these two sets of the Nisei generation met in places like Camp Shelby, Mississippi, conflicts arose due to their differences. At their first meeting, the name-calling started with the CONUS men calling the islanders "Buddhaheads," due to their proximity to Japan and the heavier influence of Japanese culture in Hawaii.

The islanders retorted by calling the CONUS recruits "kotonk," mimicking the sound a of a coconut hitting the ground after falling out of a tree—or the hollow sound of a CONUS Nisei head hitting the ground. Throughout the war, both insulting names were regularly heard.

Once the U.S. became involved in a two-front war, these soldiers had no idea what to expect. Thomas Taro Higa, for example, was Kibei, having been born in Hawaii but having gone to Okinawa to visit extended family, and then on to Osaka to study electrical engineering. He spoke Japanese and also the common dialect of Okinawa, known as Uchinaguchi.

Unimpressed with the police state that Japan was then becoming, Higa returned to Hawaii and joined the 298th in June 1941. When Pearl Harbor occurred, he originally thought the attack was a combined Army-Navy-Air Corps drill. Later he would say, "All the [Nisei] troops were thinking about the high expectations set upon our shoulders."

Higa would serve with the 100th Battalion during combat in Italy and end up with two Purple Hearts; then it was back to CONUS for a speaking tour. From there, he

National Archives

Members of a 442nd RCT anti-tank company, while training at Camp Shelby, prepare to haul their gun across a stream on a raft suspended from steel cables and pulled by the men in the water, August 19, 1943.

ended up back in Okinawa with his trilingual skills, entering no fewer than a dozen caves alone to convince the island's residents that the war was over and they could come out. He certainly met those "high expectations set upon [his] shoulders."

STATESIDE TRAINING

After the great sea battle of Midway on June 4-5, 1942, a group of 1,432 Japanese American GIs of the 100th Battalion boarded the passenger ship SS *Maui*, destined for San Francisco Harbor and Oakland, California. The most entertaining aspect of the seven-day voyage was the rattling of dice in craps games, where the words "go for broke" were heard regularly. It would become the unit's battle cry.

Upon arrival in Oakland, the 100th was divided into three trainloads and immediately all headed to Camp McCoy in Sparta, Wisconsin.

Camp McCoy, halfway between Milwaukee and Minneapolis, was an unusual setting for the 100th, where they repeated the same 13-week basic training that they had already completed at Schofield Barracks. Within the 45,000-acre site was a corner for prisoners of war—Germans, Italians, and Japanese. In another corner was a relocation camp for West Coast Issei and Nisei.

All throughout World War II, this would be the only Army installation catering to all three segments of Japanese American citizens: civilian Issei, civilian Nisei, and GIs. On occasion, unfortunate events were bound to happen.

While at McCoy, Edward Mitsukado witnessed an event that had the potential of turning into a mass shooting. One day a member of the 100th stormed into the barracks in rage. This Nisei soldier had passed by the internment camp and seen his father inside, behind barbed wire and beneath guard towers, with guards' guns pointing inward, and not at port or shoulder position. Father and son were prohibited from speaking to one another through the wire enclosure, with the father never acknowledging his son's presence.

So, seething with rage was this soldier, Mitsukado believed him capable of acquiring a rifle to go on a shooting spree. Mitsukado consoled him at length, telling him that the best way to help his father, and himself, was to do his job as an American soldier with honor and prove to others that people like his father needn't be penned in. All that talking soaked in, and the soldier calmed down.

Sparta's populace of 6,000 was receptive to these neighbors. Lingering resentment about Pearl Harbor never fully dissipated, but the town was generally welcoming enough to overlook such sentiments. The Hawaiians saw their first snow and ice skates at a skating rink, where Army jealousies also arose.

According to Irving Akahoshi, the only real trouble at McCoy came when the 2nd "Indian Head" Infantry Division arrived from Texas. It seemed that the 2nd was "brainwashed … indoctrinated" to hate all things Japanese; Akahoski said that brawls with the Texans were frequent. Worse yet, the local ladies preferred the company of the Hawaiians more than that of the 2nd as social events like dances and skating parties became more common.

A nearly fatal event in the winter of 1943-44 particularly helped cement relations with the civilians. A small group of local residents fell through the thin ice covering a lake. A nearby gathering of 100th Battalion GIs rescued the victims, saving

them from drowning. Civilian-military relations could not have been better.

At McCoy, the 100th put together a traveling baseball team called the "Aloha Team," playing within Camp McCoy and then across Wisconsin against amateur and semi-professional teams.

The team's first baseman was Yoshinao "Turtle" Omiya of Hawaii, who got his nickname as his high school's catcher, covering home plate "like a turtle shell." (He would be blinded by a German mine while crossing the Volturno River in Italy.) By war's end, the Aloha Team had seen six players killed in action with just as many wounded.

The 100th lost 67 GIs when they were transferred to Camp Savage, Minnesota, for Military Intelligence Service training. Given their scores on the military aptitude tests, these men were selected for their excellent bilingual Japanese-English skills.

Among those transferred was Sergeant Edward Mitsukado. One day a team from Camp Savage came to Camp McCoy to administer language comprehension tests to his group. Mitsukado insisted that he comprehended very little Japanese, but he ended being picked anyway, much to his displeasure. When he asked about being selected despite his lack of knowledge of spoken Japanese, he was told that he was primarily chosen for his excellent English.

After six months at Camp Savage, Mitsukado ended up in the China-Burma-India Theater of Operations within the 5073rd Composite Infantry, more commonly known as Merrill's Marauders.

Of the 66 other Camp Savage men, some went ashore at Bougainville, New Guinea, Guam, and Okinawa as interpreters and interrogators of Japanese POWs. Some became decoders, not only in the Pacific Theater of War but also in China-Burma-India, Washington, D.C., and London.

One decoder was Harold Fudenna of Irvington, California. On April 16, 1943, Military Intelligence in Bougainville obtained a coded Japanese message that they knew included the words "Admiral Yamamoto." (Isoroku Yamamoto was the mastermind behind the Pearl Harbor strike.) Fudenna translated the coded message into English. Two days later, Admiral Yamamoto was shot down over Bougainville.

National Archives

ABOVE: Artillery observer Sergeant Arata Kimura (left) of the 442nd confers with pilot Lieutenant Joseph Polancil before taking off in a spotter plane east of Livorno, Italy, July 1944. OPPOSITE: Livorno citizens (right) applaud as a truckload of 100th Infantry Battalion soldiers rolls through the streets following a 16-day battle to retake the city from the Germans, July 15, 1944.

OFF TO THE DEEP SOUTH

For their departure from Camp McCoy, the 100th put together a traditional Hawaiian luau party for the residents of Sparta. Their next destination, Camp Shelby, in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, offered less reason to party. On January 6, 1943, they were off to the racist realities of America's Deep South.

When the 100th arrived at Camp Shelby, they entered a world they had never seen before. In terms of its military populace, Camp Shelby was among three of the largest bases in America. Like all things "Southern" in that era, it had its authority, rules, regulations, and traditions geared to a particular "Southern" orientation.

This entailed the old, unwritten code of a caste society, with racial prejudice and discrimination ingrained and unchallenged for centuries. The leader of this pack was that mythical figure known as "Jim Crow." For the first time in their lives, the men from McCoy saw signs at water fountains, restrooms, and restaurants stating, "Whites Only" or "Colored Only." Nobody knew which category "Nisei" fell under. Certainly, nothing existed as "Asian Only."

For much of the civilian populace of Hattiesburg, these were their first encounters with Japanese Americans or Asians in general.

In February 1943, an oddity showed up before 100th Battalion commander Lt. Col. Farrant Turner in the form of Young Oak Kim. Kim was born in a Los Angeles neighborhood with a mixture of Japanese, Chinese, Mexican, and Jewish residents, while Kim himself was Korean.

Enlisting in the Army in January 1941, Kim took the opportunity to attend officer candidate school. At Camp Shelby, Lt. Col. Turner tried to talk Kim into seeking a reassignment outside of the 100th for what he thought was an obvious reason: Japan had invaded Korea in 1910, and there, Japanese imperialism remained to dominate, murder, plunder, and rape in Korea until the war's end.

Turner thought that Kim would be uncomfortable in the 100th, but Kim said, "You're

wrong. They're Americans, I'm American, and we're going to fight for America." Turner kept this second lieutenant.

It took a while, with a few challenges and occasional head-butting, but the 100th eventually accepted Kim. He instituted training routines and tactics at Camp Shelby that would eventually be implemented Army-wide. In time, the 100th/442nd gave Lieutenant Kim the nickname "Samurai Kim."

Not all White Southerners treated the Japanese Americans poorly. After the 100th left Shelby for Camp Claiborne, Louisiana, the newly formed and enlarged 442nd Regimental Combat Team moved into Shelby in May 1943. On a weekend pass, four GIs of the 442nd stared longingly at the civilian clothes in the window of a clothing store owned by 27-year-old Earl Finch.

Finch befriended them and invited the group to come home with him so that his mother could prepare dinner. Finch had done this many times for Shelby GIs, the pattern being that a small number of GIs would take him up on the offer, show up, eat, leave, and then never be seen again. Such was life around Camp Shelby.

These Japanese American GIs from the 442nd, however, returned the very next day with flowers for Finch's mother. As Finch came to know these Hawaiians, his admiration grew, especially upon learning how many had voluntarily enlisted straight out of the internment camps, which few white Americans even knew existed.

Finch went so far out of his way for these men that he eventually purchased a 350-acre ranch and converted it into an improvised USO facility, organized swimming and baseball teams, and arranged for travel to and from games and swim events.

The new home of the 100th, Camp Claiborne, in Rapides Parish, Louisiana, had the primary task of providing conditions for supervised war games at division levels. The 100th slogged through terrain that was as bad as that of any upcoming battlefield in Europe or the Pacific. Units of all sizes were combined here and umpired and scored on the tactics imparted to them for 10 months. Once again, the 100th performed far above expectations.

By the beginning of June 1943, the 100th was back at Camp Shelby, where the 442nd was encamped. Among the 442nd was Norman Saburo Ikari, a late arrival. At the time, he had immediate and extended family members in the relocation camps of Colorado, Arizona, and eastern California. One brother, a long-time Colorado resident, had evaded such fate by not being a West Coast resident.

RIVALRIES

At Camp Shelby, Ikari saw the regional attitude differences between islanders and "kotonks." The slightest petty jealousies became full-blown shouting matches that could rapidly escalate into brawls and injuries. Ikari said that the situation dissolved into his Company E posting guards against Company M. Since live ammunition was out of reach, these guards stood by with fixed bayonets.

Battalion leadership finally attempted a resolution by inviting a convoy of soldiers from both factions on an outing. At first, the men thought it was another extended touristic trip. Instead, it was a five-hour ride north to the Rohwer Relocation Camp in Arkansas.

For those men who had never seen a relocation camp, both those from Hawaii and some "kotonks," it was a shock. They saw the flimsy, tar-papered, plywood makeshift housing in which their fellow Issei and Nisei American citizens were incarcerated. They entered through locked, monitored gates, with barbed-wire fences

National Archives

By personality, Dahlquist was such a hurried thinker that he rarely integrated military intelligence data into his far-fetched operational plans for his 141st, 142nd, and 143rd Infantry Regiments. His trend was to haphazardly rush into confrontations, never knowing who or what he faced or how many opposing soldiers might be present.

and towering guard posts with machine guns and rifles pointed inward.

As for the residents of the camp, the doors of their homes were as wide open as could be. Families struggled to serve as splendid a meal as they could on limited food rations. The camp, being a pseudo-military environment, some of the visitors dined in the community mess hall, where meals served were not nearly as good as what would be seen in a soldier's mess hall. Some of these soldiers were so ashamed and saddened that they described feeling as if they were stealing the meals doled out for someone else.

With a similar visit planned for the camp at Jerome, some GIs took up sleeping in the back of a deuce-and-a-half rather than intrude on the small quarters in which these families lived. Returning to Camp Shelby, a new attitude could be seen among the men of the 100th and 442nd. They became the unified fighting force that history would soon know them—fighting an American war to save those Americans who were locked away.

Then came the military custom of receiving one's "colors," or unit flag. Army officials had the audacity to suggest that the 100th's flag motto be "Be of Good Cheer." This was unfathomable to the 100th; it took perseverance, but they got the wording changed. Being mostly Hawaiian and witnesses to the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the three words "Remember Pearl Harbor" were inscribed upon the flag of the 100th.

A TIME FOR WAR

On August 21, 1943, the 100th boarded the transport ship SS *James Parker* out of New York Harbor for an 11-day voyage to an unknown destination. On September 2, the 100th stepped ashore at Oran, Algeria, the home of the 34th "Red Bull" Infantry Division, and became a battalion within the 133rd Infantry Regiment, destined for an assault upon Italy's Salerno beaches.

The first landings by the 34th commenced on September 19, with the 100th arriving once the beachhead was secured. The first job given to the 100th was to temporarily guard an airfield and a fuel storage depot. Four days later, they came to see the real meaning of war.

On September 23, the 100th began moving inland from Salerno along a windy, curvy road, going uphill into thickening woods. The twists and turns were so sharp that they could not see around bends to know what lay ahead, but they knew that the farther they proceeded, the more likely enemy contact was.

Coming around one such a bend, they came under enemy machine-gun fire, then mortar rounds and finally artillery. Recoiling from the initial incoming shots, Sergeant Shigeo "Joe" Takata announced: "It's the first time, so I'm going first." Going around the bend, he drew enemy fire, revealing the precise location of a German roadblock.

While his Company B outmaneuvered the enemy's position, Takata was hit and killed by shrapnel; he became the first of hundreds of Japanese Americans to be killed in action. By the end of that day, one more would be killed in action and seven wounded.

National Archives

In March 1944, the 34th (and 100th Battalion) arrived at Anzio. Weeks of being constantly shelled and attacked awaited them. In May, as plans to advance upon Rome, 40 miles away, were being finalized, Captain Young Oak Kim and Pfc. Irving Akahoshi volunteered to crawl out onto exposed ground before sunset to see if they could corral a German prisoner and obtain information about German positions and capabilities.

In fact, they brought back two Germans, one of whom was so informative that he revealed that no Panzer units existed where Clark wanted to penetrate the line going into Rome. With that knowledge, the planned assault on Rome was carried out unaltered, the city was captured, and Kim received the Distinguished Service Cross.

On May 28, 1944, the 442nd, minus its 1st Battalion—which remained at Camp Shelby as a cadre-training unit—arrived in Italy and was reunited with the 100th Battalion at Civitavecchia, north of Rome. On

National Archives

ABOVE: A Nisei soldier, protected from the foul weather with a raincoat, mans a .30-caliber air-cooled machine gun in the Ste. Die area of the front, November 1944. OPPOSITE: A soldier from the 100th Infantry Battalion fires his Browning Automatic Rifle to suppress German snipers near Montenero, Italy, August 7, 1944. The 100th/442nd would soon be headed for more combat in southern France.

June 11, the combined unit was assigned to support the 34th Division.

Two weeks later, the Nisei unit went into battle at Belvedere in Tuscany. In a fierce engagement, the 442nd made a good account of itself, with the 100th, as the 1st Battalion was now known, earning a Presidential Unit Citation.

The fighting—and heroism—continued. Starting on July 1 and lasting for the next three weeks, the 442nd, under Colonel Charles W. Pence, was in constant combat. Advancing toward the Arno River, the 442nd captured Cecina and moved on to Hill 140 and Castellina, where it engaged in more pitched battles. On July 25, when the 442nd reached the Arno, German resistance suddenly collapsed, and the men were given a brief respite. A new assignment was in their future.

In Italy, the 100th/442nd had suffered 1,272 casualties—239 killed, 972 wounded, 44 non-combat injuries, and 17 missing.

At the insistence of the 100th, and with the approval of the 442nd, their hybrid unit became the newly reorganized 100th/442nd Regimental Combat Team, effective August 14, 1944. Officially incorporated into the 34th "Red Bull" Infantry Division's 133rd Infantry Regiment, the 100th/442nd spent the rest of their time in Italy wearing the "Red Bull" division patch.

INVADING FRANCE

On August 15, 1944, Lt. Gen. Alexander Patch's Seventh U.S. Army invaded Southern France in Operation Dragoon. One of the participating divisions was the 36th "Texas" Infantry Division, under the command of Maj. Gen. John E. Dahlquist; in September 1944, the 100th/442nd was transferred to the 36th Division.

By personality, Dahlquist was such a hurried thinker that he rarely integrated military intelligence data into his far-fetched operational plans for his 141st, 142nd, and 143rd Infantry Regiments. His trend was to haphazardly rush into confrontations, never knowing who or what he faced or how many opposing soldiers might be present. Critics said that it was not unusual for him to show up in the middle of front-line action just to get in the way of everything and disrupt it all by demanding changes on the spot.

In late August, at the French town of Montélimar, 100 miles north of Marseilles, Dahlquist prematurely attacked without ever properly preparing the division for the assault. The situation stalled, and the battle for Montélimar shifted needlessly back and forth. At one point, the Americans had withdraw, allowing the Germans to find Dahlquist's battle plans—revealing the strengths, positions, and paths of other divisions. Only after great effort were Montélimar and the surrounding areas

cleared of the German presence.

In late October came the fight for Bruyères, surrounded by four hills in the Vosges Mountain region and 30 miles northwest of Colmar. Perhaps ignoring his intelligence sources, or perhaps being stubbornly opposed to the opinions of others, Dahlquist told the companies of the 100th that there were no Germans inside Bruyères.

Dahlquist's attack plan required the 100th to cover six miles uphill through a rain-slicked forest to reach their objective, mired in fog and mud. At some points, the fog dramatically hindered visibility. Proving Dahlquist wrong about the German presence, the 100th /442nd came upon acres of mine fields, which alerted the enemy to open up with mortar rounds, machine guns, artillery, and *Nebelwerfers* (six-barreled rocket launchers).

For Young Oak Kim, now the 100th's operations officer, the situation became so intolerable that he purposely cut communications with Dahlquist's radio headquarters. Kim found Dahlquist's orders based on "wrong information," calling them "crazy orders." Kim knew war far better than Dahlquist could imagine. Taking the initiative, Kim took one hill, coming down with 100 prisoners, and then a second hill, netting another 50 captives.

Holed up in a house in Bruyères, Kim was tracking enemy activity from a window when MG-42 rounds splattered the building, wounding him. When he regained consciousness, he was laid out on a litter carried by German prisoners under guard through a maze of trees, seemingly lost. A band of Germans emerged, surrounding the guards, medics, and wounded, who then became prisoners themselves.

Kim and a medic slipped into the woods unseen and eventually reached their own lines. In the end, Dahlquist withdrew everyone from Bruyères and the four higher hills, to which the Germans returned.

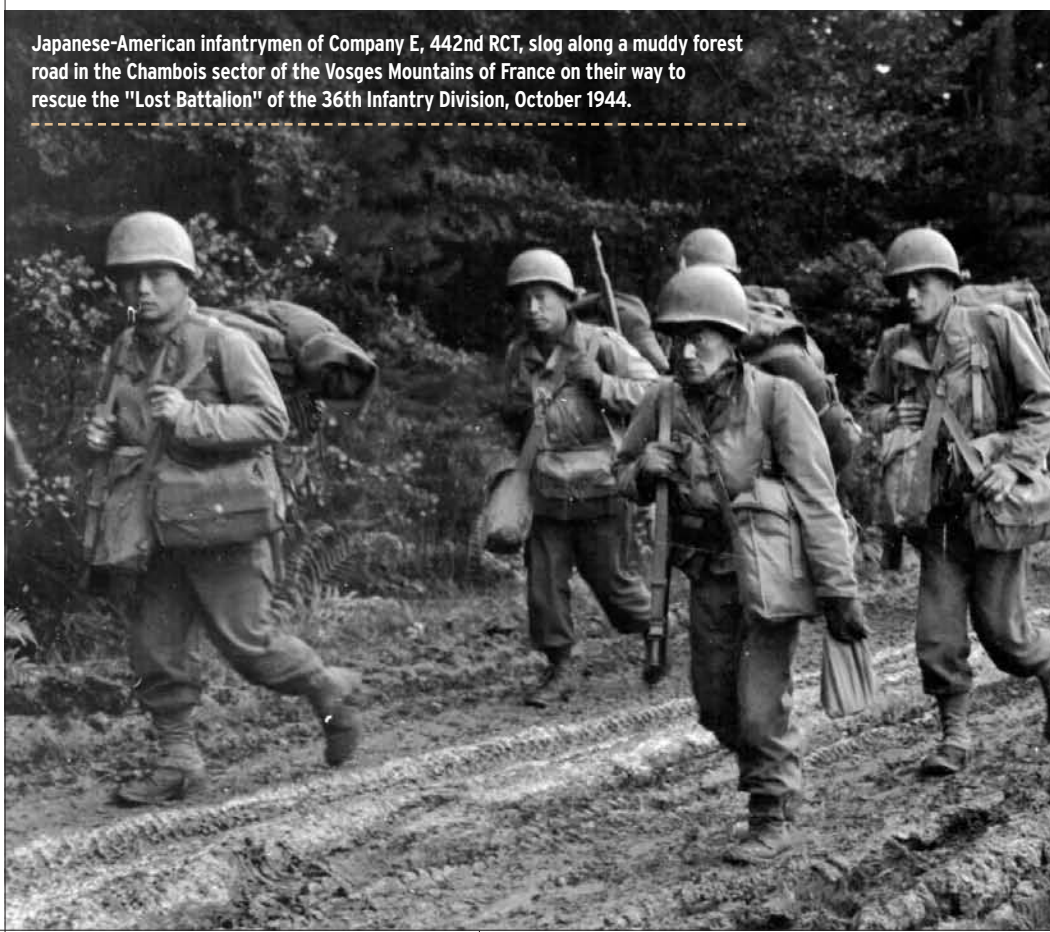
While Kim managed to slip out of this situation in Bruyères quickly, Jimmie Kanaya was not so lucky. Jimmie was a "kotonk," born and raised around Portland, Oregon. When America's conscription law went into effect on September 16, 1940, Kanaya saw a large number of his acquaintances being drafted. He decided to volunteer. At first Kanaya wanted to be a Marine, but they declined him. The Navy also said no but suggested that the Army took anyone. He never told anyone else what he was doing, so as not to become an embarrassment if not accepted anywhere.

Once in the Army, however, Kanaya was able to get into the Air Corps. Weeks after Pearl Harbor, he was abruptly reclassified as a medic without explanation. He was sent to an Army hospital, working alongside an Army nurse who taught him everything he needed to know about being a medic. He became capable enough to be acknowledged as the "ward master" in charge of the ward's assigned medics. Thus, all of Kanaya's medical training came via on-the-job-education. Twenty-five people within his hospital detachment of 300 were Nisei.

Having acquired immense knowledge and skills from the Army nurse with whom he had worked, he was promoted within the 442nd at Camp Shelby to second lieutenant in the Medical Service Corps. When he arrived overseas, the 100th/442nd was in France. Aligning with what Kim said of Dahlquist, Kanaya said that the difference in command lay in the personalities of each and their "theories" on how to conduct warfare.

No sooner had Bruyères been secured than Kanaya was called upon to send medics into Biffontaine, five miles east of Bruyères, to recover at least a dozen wounded GIs. Kanaya had no idea of how to proceed until a foot column lugging ammunition, rations, and supplies up to Biffontaine passed by. He followed them, which became an all-day trek across ridges and trees thick enough to be considered single-canopy jungle growth.

Upon reaching the injured with his three medics, he found seven litter-bound injured men and 10 walking wounded. A couple more were added by departure time at day-



Japanese-American infantrymen of Company E, 442nd RCT, slog along a muddy forest road in the Chambois sector of the Vosges Mountains of France on their way to rescue the "Lost Battalion" of the 36th Infantry Division, October 1944.

National Archives

light. Needing a solution to carry seven litters three miles downhill, the obvious answer was the 35 prisoners of war on hand. Kanaya and his medics also attended to the injuries of the Germans no differently than they would for any of their own fellow countrymen.

Kanaya also distributed rations to the Germans, who reciprocated by finding straw for bedding material. These simple courtesies would be remembered by both sides.

For the next day's journey downhill, the Germans helped carry litters as Kanaya's group traded off carrying loads from time to time. Kanaya's group of about 70 men included a few riflemen to guard the prisoners. On one of the stretchers lay Young Oak Kim.

There was no clearly marked path for the trek down, and the column was spread out nearly 200 yards along the line. At one point, the line halted and the straggling group bunched up at the front. Knowing the treacherous landscape and the roaming German patrols, Kanaya had his medics bring up the rear so that, if the front came under fire, they could flee into the trees with the wounded.

Those at the front then walked straight into a German patrol of 100 men who were as lost and adrift in the woods as the Americans. Luckily, the Red Cross flag carried by the point man prevented any firing. In fact, the first batch of Germans they crossed paths with initially wanted to surrender.

Their leader, a hard-core Nazi, interceded, and the tables were suddenly turned. The GIs at the end of the line could hear arguing: Who was surrendering to whom? Then the 35 Germans who had been escorted as prisoners began collecting weapons from those toward the rear of the column; GIs began giving up their weapons.

Just before that, however, two GIs bolted past Kanaya into the woods. They were Young Oak Kim and another medic making their successful escape. 2nd Lt. Jimmie Kanaya, however, became a prisoner of war. With everything reversed, the Nisei GIs now carried the occupied litters. As their former prisoners saw them tire, they switched off, relieving the Nisei.

Once in Biffontaine, the Nisei group was gathered together, and no one was robbed of any personal items such as watches, rings, or anything else of monetary value. That was how much respect these Germans had for Jimmie Kanaya and his crew. Any thefts or confiscation to occur would happen days later, further down the POW processing line, as Kanaya and others found themselves transferred to Oflag XIII-B at Hammelburg.

All in all, Kanaya tried to escape three times, being caught twice and giving up on the third as a useless attempt. Among his stories of POW experiences, he said that the first 100th officer to be taken as a POW was a second lieutenant in the very first weeks in Italy.

Once that man was delivered into the hands of the Germans, the Imperial Japanese Embassy in Berlin heard of a Japanese

Among the recollections of Biffontaine, S/Sgt. Kakuto Higuchi, 21 years old, remembered entering the small, rural village on October 16, 1944. *He said the nights were so dark within the Vosges Forest that men had to mark their sleeping areas foxholes and firing positions at night with toilet paper lest soldiers stumble into other soldiers positions.*

American being detained by the Germans. They arranged an interview with this lieutenant to hear how any Japanese individual, regardless of citizenship, could fight against the Axis. This required that the lieutenant be made presentable for propaganda purposes in the finest dress uniform on hand.

Prior to his departure, his prison mates offered up all the ribbons they had retained to decorate his uniform, and he showed up for his interview with a volume of service ribbons befitting a general.

In total, 17 Nisei would become POWs in Europe. Kanaya came out of the war with a Silver Star and Bronze Star, and he would acquire a second Bronze Star in the Korean War. Captain Kim also continued his Army career, serving in the Korean War as a lieutenant colonel.

Among the recollections of Biffontaine, S/Sgt. Kakuto Higuchi, 21 years old, remembered entering the small, rural village on October 16, 1944. He said that the nights were so dark within the Vosges Forest that men had to mark their sleeping areas, foxholes, and firing positions at night with toilet paper lest soldiers stumble into other soldiers' positions.

Early one morning, Higuchi's section of Company C of the 100th/442nd heard a noise of unknown source. It was nothing resembling a tracked vehicle, and no friendly tanks were in the immediate area. Whatever the noise, Higuchi's group emptied full magazines in its direction.

After dawn, they investigated and found only a bullet-splintered wooden cart and a dead horse. The driver was nowhere in sight, and there was no evidence of injuries. The cart was a breakfast wagon, delivering that morning's meal and five-gallon cans of milk to the Germans occupying Biffontaine. Higuchi's group returned to their positions to enjoy an unexpected warm breakfast and fresh milk for a change.

After breakfast, the battalion made a rushed march to Biffontaine. The three companies—A, B, and C—lined up a plan of assault against the German-held village. But the surprise attack was spoiled when a Company C machine-gun team spotted a German command car enter the village and fired on it. That alerted the Germans, and the element of surprise evaporated.

Dodging MG-42 machine gun fire, Higuchi's platoon reached a ditch with all men intact, and the platoon leader pointed out a white house across an exposed field, telling the unit to take it—and to expect "Jerry" to be inside.

The house was enclosed by an eight-foot-high steel fence. The six German soldiers that Higuchi and his colleagues found inside were all too willing to surrender. At first, they were corralled into a first-floor hallway, happily complying, and then shuttled upstairs.

From the upper floor, Higuchi saw a German at the far end of the house's yard digging a foxhole. His back was turned to the house; he never knew he was being watched.

U.S. Army

Armed with rifles and a bazooka, men of the 442nd stop German panzers during their successful effort to rescue the "Lost Battalion," October 1944. Painting by Charles McBarron.

National Archives

With snow covering the ground in the Vosges region, Bob Yorita, Shigeru Suekuni, Lefty Ichihara, Michio Takata, and Captain Joe Hill of Company F, 2nd Battalion, 442nd RCT, prepare to move to a new command post, November 14, 1944.

In a collaborative team agreement, it was decided that the BAR man would have the "honor" of dispensing with the shoveling figure. Once that was settled, a second figure replaced him, meriting again the same "honor."

Half an hour later the situation thickened when a Panzer IV rolled up to within 60 yards of the house. At first the tank swiveled its turret, trying to knock the steel fence apart for easier infantry access. That proved too time-consuming, so the panzer fired an 88-mm round into the house and rolled away.

Shortly thereafter, a German half-track replaced the tank and commenced firing at the house. The original hole became wider, growing to measure six feet by 10 feet. After that, the armored vehicle drove off.

A lull settled in within the house, which allowed Higuchi's Company C group to watch Company B rout an equivalent number of Germans back into the trees.

During this lull, two unexpected visitors materialized. Two families had hidden themselves in the cellar throughout the day. Now two women came up to cook a dinner to be taken back downstairs.

Throughout that process, Higuchi held a position by the back door. Soon he heard footsteps outside as a German tried to creep up to the back door. Higuchi shot blindly through the door, the visitor retraced his steps, and the two women continued cooking their "dried beef … cabbage soup," sharing a cup each with the GIs. When the women returned downstairs, the previously captured Germans went along and were secured there.

As the night wore on, Higuchi's men were subjected to probing assaults from the neighboring house. It was not until morning that Higuchi realized that the neighbor's house was the command post for the German battalion occupying the village. The probing and assaults were so persistent that Higuchi's group had to start using German stick grenades, known as *Stielhandgranate* or "potato mashers," to spare the use of their own grenades.

Their greatest shield against incoming ordnance were the heavy wooden shutters, which deflected incoming MG-42 bullets. The Germans kept yelling out in English the word "surrender," but after a long impasse the yelling faded away. With the intensifying silence outside, stillness crept in throughout the house until one of the GIs remembered the captured Germans downstairs.

Higuchi was sent down below to check on them and the civilians and to establish a proper guarding of them. He found the families huddled in one corner and the Germans sitting in a line in the opposite corner. One barely spoke English.

Higuchi did the most appropriate thing a GI could do—he shared his cigarettes. One German repaid that act of kindness and offered Higuchi one of his own cigarettes that tasted like dried grass. Once the prisoners were turned in, the 442nd was given a five-day rest (which would only actually last three days).

Meanwhile, Sergeant Isuzu Sasaoka was atop a Sherman tank, part of a convoy delivering supplies to the 100th/442nd prior to their attack on Biffontaine. Sasaoka manned a machine gun, firing upon the attackers until the column was overwhelmed.

Those escaping the melee stated that Sasaoka was severely wounded and quite probably captured, but that was never officially confirmed. The only suggestion of his fate came from another POW claiming

to have seen him in captivity. When the Russian Army liberated that camp, Sasaoka disappeared without a trace; it is speculated that this was directly due to his so-called liberators.

RESCUING THE LOST BATTALION

Beginning on October 25, 1944, the 100th/442nd RCT took part in their best-known action. Dahlquist's 36th Division was fighting in the Vosges Mountains when 270 men of the 1st Battalion, 141st Regiment, found themselves surrounded by 6,000 Germans.


National Archives

The Nisei troops returned to Italy in March 1945. Here, soldiers of the 442nd dash for cover during a German artillery attack on an Italian town, April 4, 1945.

In the legendary saga of the 442nd and the "Lost Battalion," the 1st Battalion men were stranded for two days on a ridge near St. Dié and were perilously low on food, water, and ammunition. Air-dropped supplies ended up in enemy hands. Dahlquist ordered the 442nd, which had just come off the line for a much-needed rest, to attempt a rescue of the surrounded battalion.

Marching four miles in darkness, up hills and through thick forests, the 442nd finally ran into the Germans surrounding the ridge. During 16 days of the most furious combat imaginable, the outnumbered Nisei soldiers proved to the Germans who the real "supermen" were.

Despite intense artillery barrages, sweeping machine-gun fire, fully manned entrenchments, and enemy snipers, the men of the 442nd—the 3rd and 100th Battalions—fought their way forward, taking heavy losses with each step.

One of the men, Sergeant Daniel Inouye, escaped death when a bullet struck him in the chest but was stopped by the lucky silver dollars he always carried in his breast pocket. In recognition of Inouye's courage and leadership during the battle, he received a rare battlefield commission to second lieutenant. Inouye also received the Bronze Star Medal for his heroism during the battle.

On October 30, just when further advance seemed impossible, the Nisei soldiers steeled their courage and decided to "go for broke." Yelling at the tops of their lungs, the men rushed uphill in what one historian described as a "banzai charge." The German lines crumbled, and the enemy fled into the woods; the "lost battalion" was saved.

It came at a terrible cost, however. According to the Go for Broke National Education Center, "On November 8, when the 442nd was finally relieved, the dead and the wounded outnumbered the living. The 442nd ended up at less than half its usual strength. K Company, which started out with 186 men, had only 17 riflemen and part of a weapons platoon left. I Company started out with 185; at the end, there were only eight riflemen." Recent research gives the 442nd casualties for the battle at 37 killed and over 400 wounded.

Decorations for valor were showered on the men of the 100th/442nd. Privates Barney Hajiro and George Sakato were both initially awarded the Distinguished Cross, while Tech 5 medic James Okubo received the Silver Star; in 2000, these awards were upgraded to the Medal of Honor.

On November 12, General Dahlquist ordered Lt. Col. Virgil Miller, commanding the 442nd, to have the entire regiment fall in to be recognized for their heroism. When only a small number of men appeared in formation, Dahlquist chewed out Miller for disobeying orders. "I told you to have the whole regiment," he snarled.

"General, this *is* the regiment," Miller replied. "The rest are either dead or in the hospital."

BACK TO ITALY

At the end of November, the Go for Broke boys relieved the 1st Special Service Force on the France-Italy border, where they rested and absorbed replacements until March 25, 1945, when they returned to Italy. There they were attached to the all-black 92nd Infantry Division and got back into the war. Heavy fighting in March and April along the Ligurian coastal sector brought more medals—and more casualties.

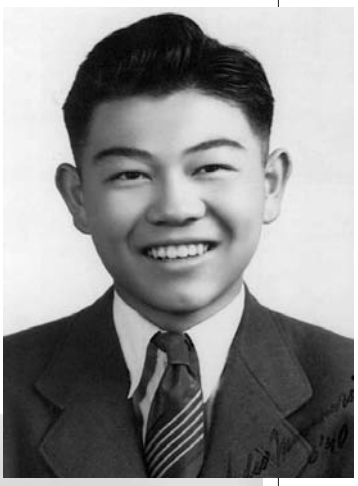
On the morning of April 21, 1945, 2nd Lt. Daniel Inouye was leading his platoon in an assault on a German-held ridge near the village of San Terenzo when he realized that he had lost his lucky, life-saving silver dollars. Three German machine guns opened fire. A bullet hit Inouye, but he continued to advance, throwing grenades and urging his men

onward. Crawling close to the enemy emplacement, he threw two more grenades, killing the gunners. He then killed the crew of a second machine gun with his Thompson submachine gun.

Inouye was about to lob another grenade at a third machine-gun nest when a German shot him in the right elbow with a rifle grenade that exploded. He said, "I looked at my dangling arm and saw my grenade still clenched in a fist that suddenly didn't belong to me anymore."

With his left hand, Inouye pried his live grenade from his now-useless right hand and hurled it at the enemy soldier. Despite his wounds, he continued advancing and firing his submachine gun with his uninjured left arm but then was struck down by a bullet to his leg.

As a historian wrote, "When Inouye regained consciousness, he refused to be evacuated until he was sure his platoon had secured its objective. He continued to direct his men as they deployed in a defensive position in case of an enemy counterattack. Inouye and his men killed a total of 25 enemy soldiers and captured eight others in the successful attack."



BELOW: Private Akira Miyamoto of the 100th Infantry Battalion, inspects the papers of a German prisoner at Brescia, Italy, at the end of the war, May 1945. The Germans were surprised to be fighting against soldiers of Japanese descent. RIGHT: Los Angeles-born Sadao Munimori, 100th Infantry Battalion, wiped out two German machine-gun nests at Seravezza, Italy, before falling on a grenade to save his comrades. His posthumous Medal of Honor was one of 22 awarded to Nisei soldiers.

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After being evacuated to a field hospital, doctors had to amputate his arm. He spent the next two years in army hospitals recuperating. He was honorably discharged from the U.S. Army in 1947 with the rank of captain. In 1963 he was elected a United States Senator from Hawaii, where he served until his death at age 88 in 2012. For his combat heroism, Inouye was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, the Bronze Star, Purple Heart with Cluster, and is the only member of Congress to be awarded the Medal of Honor.

These are just some of the stories of the 100th/442nd. In the course of the war, an estimated 18,000 Japanese-Americans rotated through the 100th/442nd and its support units. Among these men, nearly 15,500 military awards or decorations were given out, with a few thousand soldiers receiving awards or citations more than once. The 100th/442nd lost over 600 men killed and was awarded almost 9,500 Purple Hearts. The unit was awarded eight Presidential Unit Citations—five earned in one month.

While only one received the Medal of Honor during the war, another 21 were added upon a 1995 Congressional review of Distinguished Service Cross medals worthy of the nation's highest military award but which may have been denied due to racism. While these men had diverse experiences during the war and came from different backgrounds, as clearly exemplified by the conflicts between the islanders and the "kotonks" during training, their undeniable devotion to their country was the unifying thread running through their service in Europe.

Remembering the words of young Stanley Izumigawa: "We should never forget these Japanese Americans who so valiantly fought in Europe for their country and their families." □

The Red Army had saved Moscow, but a subsequent offensive near Kharkov ended in disaster in the spring of 1942.

Bare-headed or with their service caps on and sleeves rolled up, a large group of German soldiers advance past a knocked-out Soviet T-34 tank on their way to take part in their summer offensive at Izyum and Kharkov, May 1942.

BY PAT MCTAGGART

Bloody Clash at IZYUM

During the winter of 1941, both the Red Army and the German Wehrmacht experienced a terrifying bloodletting. Adolf Hitler's seemingly invincible armies, having advanced hundreds of miles inside the Soviet Union, were slowed by the October muddy season that had turned all but a few roads into almost impassible quagmires. Then came the snow and the cold—a paralyzing cold that was claimed as the worst in a hundred years.

On the night of December 5, STAVKA (the Soviet Supreme Command) launched a massive offensive that drove the Germans back from the gates of Moscow. By the end of March 1942, the Soviet offensive had run its course. Red Army forces had advanced almost 200 miles in some areas, at the cost of more than a half-million casualties. The Germans also suffered heavily. According to an entry in Army Chief of Staff *Generaloberst* Franz Halder's diary, the total of Germans killed, wounded, and sick between November 1, 1941, and April 1, 1942, was almost 900,000, with the majority being lost on the Eastern Front.

Although the main Soviet effort took place on the northern and central sectors of the front, Russian forces had also made gains in the south, especially in the area around the eastern Ukrainian city of Kharkov. In January 1942, four Soviet armies struck the boundary of the German 6th and 17th Armies in the area near Izyum, about 70 miles southeast of Kharkov. The Russian attack was aimed at creating a future jumping-off point from which they could strike at the main southern crossings of the Dnieper River. They would also be in a position to attack either north toward the key communication center of Kharkov or south into the rear of the 17th Army.

The German Army, trained as an offensive force from the beginning of its revival in 1933, was forced to improvise its defensive operations. The 6th (*Generaloberst* Friedrich Paulus) and 17th (*General der Infanterie* Hans von Salmuth) Armies were no exception. As the Russians struck the German front line, it was often up to the commander at the scene to make life or death decisions for his men. While tank-supported

Sueddeutsche Zeitung Photo / Alamy Stock Photo

ABOVE: On July 24, 1944, a contingent of Red Army Soldiers moves past a damaged farm and toward German positions under constant bombardment from well-placed artillery. The German 88mm canon was a multipurpose weapon, effective against aircraft, armor, and enemy troops. RIGHT TOP: Marshal Semen K. Timoshenko commanded the Soviet Southwest Theater and the Southwest Front in the summer of 1942. RIGHT CENTER: Field Marshal Fedor von Bock commanded German Army Group South and planned an offensive of his own in the summer of 1942. RIGHT BOTTOM: General Friedrich Paulus commanded the German 6th Army in the fighting around Izyum and then led it to oblivion in Stalingrad.

infantry units overran several German positions, others held out, creating breakwaters in the ocean of attacking Russians.

Some German commanders pulled their forces back in an orderly retreat until they found suitable terrain in which to make a stand. The small villages dotting the countryside gave concealment as well as protection from the harsh winter weather. Once such a village had been reached, the Germans wasted little time in creating an improvised defense, using wrecked vehicles, rock walls, and everything available to strengthen their position.

By the end of the second week of the offensive, these "hedgehog" defenses were beginning to take their toll on the advancing Soviets. If the first echelon of attacking Red Army troops bypassed a German strongpoint, the Germans would launch limited attacks on their rear, or at the second or third waves following the breakthrough forces. On the other hand, if breakthrough forces wanted to overcome the strongpoint, they would have to stop, deploy, and then fight a costly battle, which depleted men and equipment. Either way, the German "hedgehogs" remained a thorn in the side of the Red Army's offensive.

Eventually, German reinforcements arrived and finally stoppped the offensive. Once the spring mud brought all operations to a halt, both sides had time to reposition units and build up their depleted ranks. The Russians had stabilized their line after advancing almost 60 miles, creating a bulge south of Kharkov measuring about 60 by 45 miles.

The Izyum Bulge, as it was called, presented several options and challenges for both sides. For the Russians, the bulge could be used as a staging area and jumping-off point to retake Kharkov or to threaten the lines of communication of Germany's southern armies by striking at the key Dnieper River crossing points at Dnepropetrovsk and Zaporozhye. On the German side, the bulge represented a chance to destroy a large number of Soviet forces in a textbook pincer attack that would eliminate the Russian threat and straighten the front line.

Throughout the early spring of 1942, both the Soviet and German high commands worked on plans to utilize the bulge to their best advantage. Marshal Semen K. Timoshenko, commander of the Southwest Theater as well as the Southwest Front, political

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commissar Nikita S. Khrushchev, and Timoshenko's chief of staff, Marshal Ivan Bagramyan, went to Moscow in late March to present a proposal aimed at clearing the Germans east of the Dnieper from Gomel to Cherkassy.

After Timoshenko and the others met with Stalin and the STAVKA, a modified version of an initial plan, aimed at the liberation of Kharkov with a later thrust to Dnepropetrovsk, was approved. The attack would be augmented by an assault from the Volchansk salient, about 20 miles northeast of Kharkov. It was hoped that the two-pronged attack would encircle and destroy most of the German 6th Army. The attack was scheduled to begin on May 12.

Generalfeldmarschall Fedor von Bock, commander of Germany's *Heeresgruppe Süd* (Army Group South), was also planning a mid-spring offensive. His army group had been given the mission of clearing the Soviets from the Caucasus, taking the vital oil fields located there, and capturing the industrial city of Stalingrad, located more than 300 miles to the east of Izyum. To accomplish this daunting task, it was imperative that the Izyum Bulge be destroyed.

Due to the meandering Donets River, von Bock's plan, codenamed Fridericus, envisioned a two-pronged attack that would cut the base of the Soviet bulge by attacking along the west bank of the river. Paulus's 6th Army would strike from the north, while *General der Kavallerie* Eberhard von Mackensen's III Panzer Corps, part of Army Group von Kleist, would attack from the south.

When presented with the plan, Hitler and Halder wanted the attack to take place on the eastern bank of the Donets. While von Bock and Berlin worked out the details, both the Russians and the Germans beefed up their offensive forces with reinforcements. Because of delays caused by lack of transportation, the German operation, now codenamed Fridericus II, was set to begin on May 18.

Timoshenko had amassed a formidable amount of men and equipment for his offensive. His command, which included the Southwestern and South Fronts, consisted of approximately 640,000 men, 1,200 tanks, 13,000 mortars and guns, and 926 aircraft. With these forces, he outnumbered the Germans facing him by a ratio of 3-to-2 in men and 2-to-1 in tanks. At the breakthrough points, that ratio would be much greater.

Facing the Southwest Front was Paulus's 6th Army. Paulus had taken command of the Army on January 1, 1942, when the Soviet Winter Offensive was in full swing. Paulus had served in staff positions since the beginning of the war. Before becoming assistant chief of staff for operations in the general staff of the Army in May 1940, he was chief of staff of the 10th Army and the 6th Army, respectively.

Arriving at his headquarters in January, Paulus was faced with a fragmented command and a Russian attack that had torn a large gap in his line. Having never commanded so much as a division, the new Army commander seemed at a loss as to what to do. Luckily, his staff and his field commanders were already at work, eventually stopping the Soviet drive.

With impending May attacks on both sides, it might do well to look at the differences in command control as both forces prepared for their offensives. At this stage of the war, the Soviet system allowed for little or no deviation from the operational plan. Commanders were hamstrung by orders that came from Moscow. Those commanders who failed to follow the plan often found themselves relieved and standing before a tribunal that had the power to sentence the offender to death or service in a penal battalion—another form of death sentence. If a situation arose that made a change of plan impeative, the "suggestion" would have to be forwarded to Moscow for approval. Soviet commanders were also hampered by political commissars who had a say in military operations as they progressed.

On the German side, initiative was encouraged. General directives would be issued and, while his forces were still successful, Hitler would more often than not let the commander in the field implement the "nuts and bolts" of an operation. Hitler's winter "stand fast" order and the meddling in the Izyum operation were not the norm at this point of the war. After the Stalingrad fiasco, however, his interference, even at the lower levels of command, led to disastrous results.

With two armies preparing to attack each other in the same

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TIMOSHENKO WAS SLOW TO EXPLOIT HIS INITIAL SUCCESS. HE HAD A GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY TO SMASH THE GERMANS COMPLETELY ON THE 13TH, BUT HE LET IT PASS BY FAILING TO COMMIT HIS MOBILE RESERVES TO THE BATTLE.

spot at almost the same time, it is obvious that the plans of both sides would not survive the first stages of combat. Time would be of the utmost importance, and it would be up to the field commanders to make their own decisions on how the course of the battle would flow, regardless of the consequences.

According to the modified plan hammered out by Timoshenko and STAVKA, Lt. Gen. A.M. Gorodnyanskii's 6th Army (eight rifle divisions, four tank brigades, and 14 artillery regiments) and Maj. Gen. L.V. Bobkin's Mobile Operational Group (two rifle divisions, three cavalry divisions, and one tank brigade) would break through the German lines on a 15-mile front. Gorodnyanskii also had five tank brigades and two motorized rifle brigades slated as exploitation forces when Timoshenko felt the time was right.

On Gorodnyanskii's left flank, Lt. Gen. K.P. Podlas's 57th Army and Lt. Gen. F.M. Kharitonov's 9th Army were also poised for limited advances. These forces would be used to protect the southern flank and fend off any German counterattacks coming from that area. Between them the 57th and 9th Armies had 25 rifle and cavalry divisions, 11 tank brigades, and a motorized brigade.

In the Volchansk salient, Lt. Gen. D.I. Ryabyshev's 28th Army was to head due west, preventing reinforcements from the German 8th Army from helping Paulus. Ryabyshev had a total of 13 rifle and cavalry divisions, two tank brigades, and a motorized rifle brigade at his disposal and would also be supported on his flanks by units of the 38th and 21st Armies.

As a reserve force, the Southwest Front had a cavalry corps and a 100-strong tank brigade. If necessary, Timoshenko could also call on the neighboring South Front's reserve, which consisted of seven rifle divisions and a tank corps, for additional forces. The brunt of the Soviet attack would fall on the German VIII Army Corps, commanded by *General der Artillerie* Walter Heitz.

Heitz had one German infantry division (the 64th under *Generalleutnant* Rudolf Friedrich), the 108th Hungarian Light Division, and the 454th *Sicherungs* Division under *Generalleutnant* Arthur Schubert. The 454th was a security division originally tasked with guarding key installations and fighting partisans in the rear areas. Because of the losses suffered by the 6th Army during the Soviet Winter Offensive, the division was now serving as a front line unit, a task for which it was thoroughly unfit.

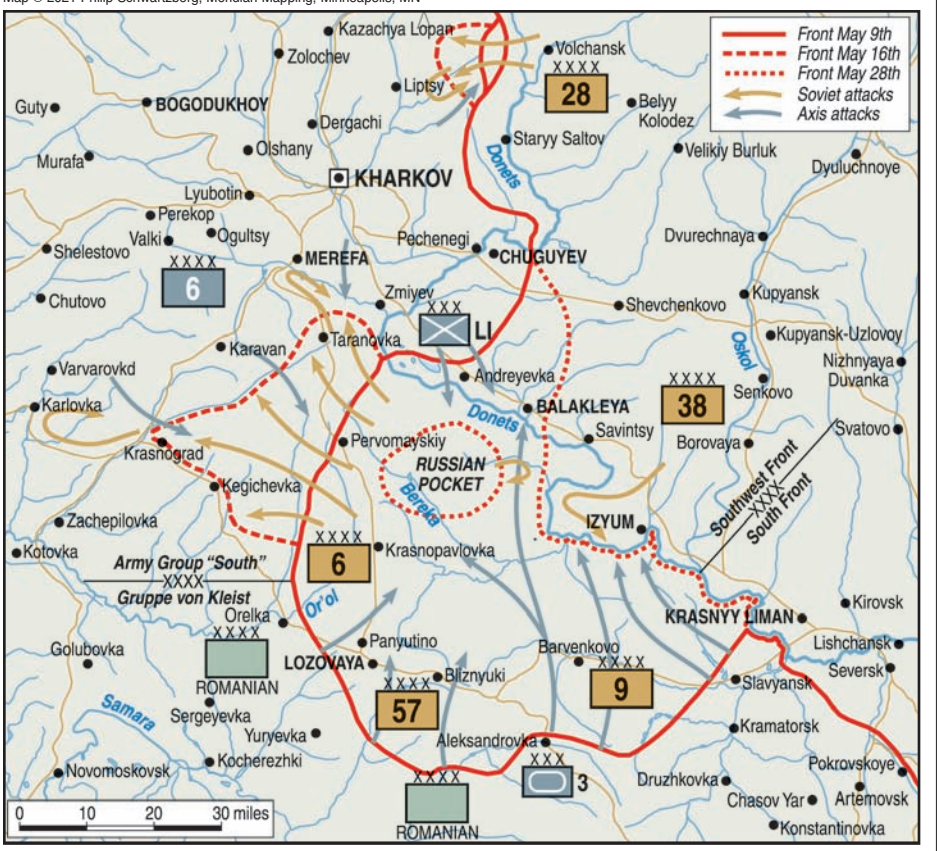
The 6th Army had three other corps holding the Izyum Bulge. *General der Infanterie* Karl Adolf Hollidt's XVII Army Corps had two infantry divisions, the 79th (*Oberst*

Richard von Schwerin) and the 294th (*Oberst* Johannes Block). *Generalleutnant* Walter von Seydlitz-Kurzbach commanded the LI Army Corps composed of the 44th (*Generalmajor* Heinrich Deboi), 71st (*Generalmajor* Alexander von Hartmann), and 297th (*Generalleutnant* Max Pfeffer) Infantry Divisions.

The XXIX Army Corps (*General der Infanterie* Hans von Obstfelder) consisted of three infantry divisions: the 57th (*Generalleutnant* Oskar Blümm), the 75th (*Generalleutnant* Ernst Hammer), and the 168th (*Generalmajor* Dietrich Kraiss). As a reserve force, Paulus had *Generalleutnant* Hans-Heinrich Sixt von Arnim's 113th Infantry Division as well as the 23rd Panzer Division (*Oberst* Heinz-Joachim Werner-Ehrenfeucht), which was refitting near Poltava after being transferred from France in March. Elements of *Generalmajor* Hermann Breith's 3rd Panzer Division were also arriving in the 6th Army sector, being transported by rail from Kursk to take part in the upcoming Fridericus operation.

With both sides amassing men and materiel for offensive operations, German and Soviet intelligence services proved to be woefully inadequate. In fact, neither side seemed to be aware of an impending attack from the other. Because of the German transportation problems, it was Timoshenko who was able to strike first and achieve surprise.

On May 12, Gorodnyanskii and Group Bobkin hit Heitz's VIII Army Corps with a vengeance. As Russian artillery shells slammed into enemy positions, the Red Army advanced. The German and Hungarian soldiers crouching in their foxholes heard the blood-curdling battle cry "*Urra!*" as the Soviets surged forward. Most of them had little time to man their weapons before the Russians were upon them.



ABOVE: Both Soviet and German commanders formulated summer offensive plans to take advantage of the large salient in the front line around Izyum, a short distance from the key city of Kharkov. OPPOSITE: A Red Army motorcycle unit advances across the Russian steppes in an attack on German positions. The Soviet commanders were unsparing of their soldiers' lives and engaged in costly human-wave attacks.

Those stunned Axis forces lucky enough to survive the initial assault were soon streaming back to secondary positions with Russian tanks and infantry hot on their heels. In the north, Ryabyshev's 28th Army also burst out of the Volchansk salient and was making good progress against Hollidt's XVII Army Corps.

At Paulus's headquarters, the situation was chaotic. Messages received from forward units spoke of hordes of enemy tanks and infantry shattering the German line. The Army's position was eerily similar to the events that had occurred just a few months earlier. Once again, some German units had disintegrated into a panicked mob as the Soviets overran their positions. Others fought an orderly withdrawal with Russian infantry and tanks swirling around their positions like wild dogs waiting for an opportunity to move in for the kill.

As the day progressed, Paulus's situation maps showed tremendous gaps in the German lines. Arrows marking the progress of Timoshenko's attack resembled skeletal fingers reaching out to grasp Kharkov. In a conversation between Paulus and von Bock, the 6th Army commander was urged not to counterattack too hastily and to wait until the situation further developed. Rain and overcast skies prevented aerial reconnaissance, and von Bock did not want Paulus to fritter away his reserves in uncoordinated attacks.

Paulus vacillated, but he was in no position to wait patiently. On the urging of his staff, the general scoured the rear areas for every available soldier to man blocking positions in front of the city. He also ordered retreating units to form strongpoints and attack the flanks of the Soviet thrust.

At higher headquarters, senior officers were taking note of the offensive, but on the opening day many viewed it as a strong local attack. In his diary, Halder wrote, "The enemy used 100 tanks in each attack (Izyum and Volchansk) and has scored considerable initial success." He also noted that air units from the Crimean sector would be diverted to the Kharkov sector and that the 23rd Panzer

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ABOVE: "Why walk when you can ride?" seems to be the collective thought of these German infantrymen hitching a ride on one of their tanks during a lull in the fighting around Izyum and Kharkov. OPPOSITE: A Red Army soldier crawls forward to deliver ammunition to comrades fighting to hold back a German counterattack on Soviet positions.

Division had been ordered to stop refitting and advance to the front.

Most eyes had been on Gorodnyanskii's assault during the opening hours of the offensive, with little attention being paid to what the Germans considered a spoiling attack from the Volchansk sector. It soon became apparent, however, that Paulus faced just as big a threat north of Kharkov, as Ryabyshev's 28th Army sliced through the 294th Infantry Division. On the 294th's left flank, von Schwerin's 79th Infantry Division reported, "The enemy hitting our right flank with new masses of tanks, especially T-34s and KV-Is, which our antitank units can do nothing against." By the end of the day, the 28th Army had advanced about 16 miles.

Von Bock had a rather cavalier attitude at first, advising patience and cautioning against uncoordinated counterattacks without air support. As more and more reports made their way to his Poltava headquarters, however, he and his staff came to the realization that the 6th Army was fighting for its life. The momentum of the Russian attacks from Izyum and Volchansk had carried the Soviets far behind the German main line of resistance, and the entire southern sector of the Eastern Front was in jeopardy.

Paulus was indeed in desperate straits, and his lack of experience in commanding front line troops began to show. As a staff officer, it had been his duty to point out the pros and cons of any given situation, laying all options on the table so that his commander could make a rational judgment. The Russian assault was an immediate threat that demanded decisive action, but Paulus seemed unsure as to what to do, now that he was in the position of commander.

While it is true that, with the urging of his staff, he had ordered counterattacks to slow the Russian advance, he seemed unsure of his next move. Should he hold Kharkov at all costs, or should he order a withdrawal to form a more stable line and protect his rear area and supply lines? If he stood fast, his entire army would be in danger of being encircled by the Russians. Pulling back would deny the Germans use of the Kharkov communications and supply hub, depriving the Wehrmacht of an important launching point for the upcoming Stalingrad offensive. Fortunately for Paulus, his opponent was also less than sure about how to continue.

Timoshenko was slow to exploit his initial success. He had a golden opportunity to smash the Germans completely on the 13th, but he let it pass by failing to commit his mobile reserves to the battle. The equivalent of 16 German battalions had already been destroyed, but faulty Soviet intelligence reports indicated that the Germans were massing a sizable force of tanks on the south flank of the Southwest Front. Therefore, throughout May 13 and 14, the mobile reserves, as well as available units from the South Front, remained in static positions waiting for an expected German attack.

Gorodnyanskii and Bobkin continued to urge their troops forward, hoping that Timoshenko would soon release his reserves. As in the winter campaign, many German hedgehog positions were bypassed as the assault troops pushed toward their objectives. Ryabyshev was also making good progress against the battered 294th Infantry Division, pushing the Germans back toward Kharkov.

The situation was now being monitored closely in Berlin. On May 13, Halder wrote, "In 6th Army's sector, heavy attacks south and northwest of Kharkov supported by several hundred tanks. Serious penetrations."

At von Bock's headquarters, the staff of *Heeresgruppe Süd* was trying to formulate a plan of action. The planned Fridericus operation was obviously unfeasible, as 6th Army was having a tough time just staying alive, let alone counterattacking, and *Generaloberst* Hans von Salmuth's 17th Army, which was to be the southern striking force of Fridericus, was not strong enough to attack the massed Soviet units in the bulge.

On the afternoon of the 14th, von Bock telephoned Berlin to explain his new plan. He told Halder and Hitler, "The situation on the right flank of 6th Army is bad. To the north (Volchansk), situation improved, largely because of the Luftwaffe." He then explained that he wanted to strengthen a proposed attacking force by moving *General der Kavallerie* Eberhard von Mackensen's III Panzer Corps and other elements of *Generaloberst*

Ewald von Kleist's 1st Panzer Army northward.

Hitler responded by telling von Bock that he "suggested the possibility of an attack in the direction of Izyum. Not just on Izyum: from the left flank one can attack and cave in the enemy…. [There are] great opportunities through an attack on the enemy rear." The outcome of the conversation was a revised Operation Fridericus that would deliver a strong blow on May 17 to the Soviet left flank, with the objective of cutting off the neck of the Izyum Bulge and trapping the Soviets inside.

On May 15, Soviet assault forces battered their way through the thin German defenses and took Krasnograd and Taranovka. Russian units from the 28th Army were within 12 miles of Kharkov before they were stopped by counterattacks by elements of the 3rd and 23rd Panzer Divisions. The following day Russian reconnaissance units came to within 25 miles of von Bock's headquarters at Poltava.

Unbelievably, Timoshenko still withheld his mobile reserves! Any German panzer commander worthy of the name would have seen the opportunities provided by the initial breakthrough and would have pushed his mobile forces into the fray on the 13th. Instead, Timoshenko still refused to commit. He would wait one more day before sending the second echelon into the battle, but by then it would be too late.

While Timoshenko vacillated, von Kleist's divisions streamed northward. In the vanguard were *Generalleutnant* Hans Valentin Hube's 16th and *Generalmajor* Friedrich Kühn's 14th Panzer Divisions. Close on their heels were *Oberst* Otto Kohlermann's 60th Motorized Infantry Division, *Generalmajor* Hubert Lanz's 1st *Gebirgs* (Mountain) Division, and *Generalleutnant* Werner Sanne's 100th *Leicht* (Light) Division. By the evening of the 16th, the panzer divisions had arrived on the left flank of the 17th Army, with the other divisions still moving up. In total, von Kleist would have a combined force of two panzer, one motorized, and eight infantry divisions to use in his attack.

Just before dawn on the 17th, the Germans struck the southern flank of the Soviet salient. With the 16th Panzer in the lead, the attack hit the infantry units of the 9th and 57th Armies. Brushing aside the Soviet infantry, the panzers moved forward to meet the Russian tank units. Many of the enemy tanks were lighter models, which soon fell victim to the German gunners. Although the guns and armor of the panzers were no match for the heavier Soviet T-34s and KV-Is, Hube's panzers managed to close quickly with the Russians and engaged them at close range, negating the Russian advantage.

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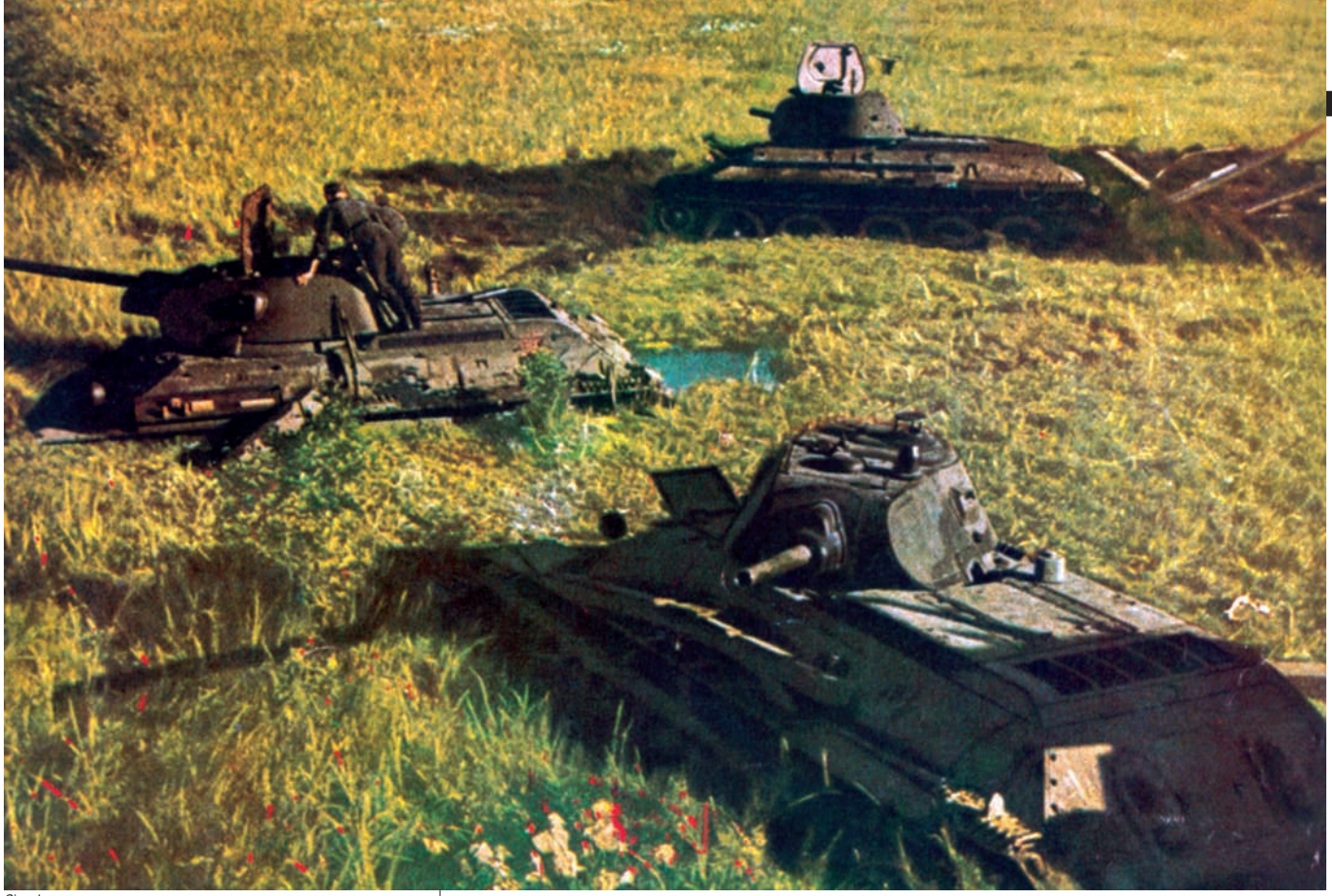
The Germans also used another advantage to their benefit. Only Soviet tank unit commanders had a radio in their vehicles to report the situation to higher commands and to receive orders. Other tanks in the unit communicated by hand signals or flags, which was next to impossible in combat situations. German tankers soon learned to recognize and destroy the command tank. Once eliminated, the other Russian tanks were left on their own, unable to transmit or receive orders.

While the panzers were wreaking havoc on the Russian tank formations, German infantry pushed through the remaining Soviet defenses. Lacking tanks, many of the attacking infantry units interspersed self-propelled 20mm antiaircraft guns among their platoons. As the 20mm shells swept their positions, the Soviets were also hit by artillery fire and aircraft bombs from the Luftwaffe's IV *Fliegerkorps*.

Although they defended themselves bravely, the Russians were no match for von Kleist's formations. By nightfall, German units were on the bank of the Donets, having advanced some 25 miles during the first day of the attack. North of Kharkov, the 3rd and 23rd Panzer Divisions, now up to strength, started to push back the 28th Army, encircling Soviet units and then destroying them with supporting infantry columns.

Timoshenko realized that he was in serious trouble. Even though his mobile reserves were finally being committed, they were deployed individually instead of in mass formations and were rudely handled by the German panzers roaming freely behind the Russian lines. Calling Moscow, Timoshenko frantically pleaded for reinforcements, but his request was denied. He was also told, in no uncertain terms, that withdrawal from the salient was not an option.

On May 18, the German attack continued in temperatures that approached 90 degrees F. Arriving from the Crimean Sector, Stuka dive-bombers and high-level bombers from *Generaloberst* Wolfram von



Signal

ABOVE: Soviet tanks founder in a marshy quagmire near Tolotshin on the Drut River. The armored force was attempting to break through enemy lines and envelop a large German force. OPPOSITE: A German machine gun squad, one soldier equipped with a pair of field glasses, surveys the steppes for enemy targets. German forces inflicted heavy casualties on attacking Red Army units during their 1942 summer offensive.

Richtofen's VIII *Fliegerkorps* began pounding the Soviets. By now, Timoshenko had committed his 21st and 23rd Tank Corps to the battle, but the Russian units took a terrific beating from the air as they attempted to reach the front. Von Richtofen, a cousin of the famous Red Baron, was known as an aggressive commander, and his men followed his example in their unrelenting attacks.

The 57th and 9th Armies continued to fall back, pursued by German panzer and motorized columns. Elements of von Hube's 16th Panzer Division broke off from the main attacking force. Blasting their way through startled Soviet units, by noon the combat group reached Donetskiy, the main crossing point in the area of the Donets River. A few hours later, the panzers were fighting in the suburbs of Izyum.

A huge gap had been torn in the southern flank of the Soviet salient. Timoshenko ordered his 5th Cavalry Corps and an infantry division to counterattack, but the Russian forces were decimated by artillery fire and the ever-present Luftwaffe. The counterattack did little to impede the German advance. By evening, the 17th Army's 101st *Leicht* Division (*Oberst* Friedrich Diestel) and 257th Infantry Division (*Oberst* Karl Püchler) had fought their way to the Donets, with some elements even crossing to the eastern bank.

Although there are conflicting accounts concerning Timoshenko's reaction to the day's events, Soviet sources agree that both Khrushchev and Bagramyan telephoned Stalin to ask him to halt the offensive and pull back. Stalin refused to talk to either of them, but through an intermediary from the State Defense Committee they were both told to "let everything remain as it is."

However, things did not remain as they were. The 28th Army, already mangled by the 3rd and 23rd Panzer Divisions, began to withdraw some of its battered units back to Volchansk. At the head of Ryabyshev's salient, the two panzer divisions and remnants of the 294th Infantry Division stood fast, repelling all attacks while the 79th and 297th Infantry Divisions harassed the flanks of the 28th Army.

About midday on the 19th, Stalin finally decided to call off the offensive. The strength of the German attack and conversations with his most trusted advisers persuaded him of the futility of continuing. Group Bobkin and the 6th Army were ordered to about-face and head back to the Donets, but it was already too late for most of the more than 250,000 Soviet soldiers inside the bulge.

Action slowed somewhat during the rest of the day, with the 16th Panzer sitting in Izyum and the 257th Infantry and 101st *Leicht* Divisions expanding their conquest of the eastern bank of the Donets. Most of the 57th Army was now trapped inside the bulge and the 9th Army had been totally defeated, many of its units being completely unfit for further combat. Von Kleist also committed Kühn's 14th Panzer Division to take the town of Petrovskoye, about 20 miles west of Izyum, which it successfully did.

With the 6th Army and Group Bobkin streaming back to the river, it was essential that the Germans close the neck of the Izyum bulge. On May 20, Kühn was ordered to take the river crossing at Protopopovka, about 10 miles north of Petrovskoye. Kühn accomplished his mission, reducing the distance between his division and Hollidt's LI Army Corps to a mere 12 miles. The 14th and 16th Panzer Divisions had done a remarkable job in creating a daggerlike bridgehead within the Soviet salient, but they needed infantry support to withstand the retreating Russian forces that were approaching from the west.

Now that Ryabyshev's 28th Army was in full retreat, von Bock planned to use part of the 6th Army to help close the gap between Protopovskoye and Balakleya, where Deboi's 44th Infantry Division was stationed. He ordered Paulus to shift the 3rd and 23rd Panzer Divisions to Balakleya, where they would join the 44th in a southerly attack. While Paulus's panzers moved into position, von Kleist brought up his infantry for a push to reinforce his panzer divisions inside the pocket.

On May 22 the fate of two Soviet armies and Motorized Group Bobkin was sealed when Kühn's 14th Panzer Division hooked up with elements of the 23rd Panzer and 44th Infantry Divisions. The neck of the Izyum bulge was now closed, with the 6th and 57th Armies and Group Bobkin trapped inside. The time for von Kleist to commit the rest of his infantry divisions was at hand.

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Von Kleist's infantry poured into the pocket on the 23rd to support the panzers and form a barrier to meet the retreating Russians. While the 14th and 16th Panzer Divisions, plus the 257th Infantry and 101st *Leicht* Divisions, stopped Timoshenko from bringing more troops into the salient from the east, the 60th Motorized, 100th *Leicht,* 1st *Gebirgs,* and the 389th (*Generalleutnant* Eccard von Gablenz) and 384th (*Generalleutnant* Erwin Jaenecke) Divisions formed a wall to the west.

With pressure on the 6th Army relieved, Paulus was ordered to push his divisions forward, compressing the Soviet pocket. As Paulus's divisions advanced, the Russians fought like demons as they threw themselves against the Germans blocking their retreat.

The next few days were a scene from hell. Wave after wave of Soviet infantry attacked the German line, only to be cut to pieces. The Luftwaffe added to the carnage, bombing and strafing Russian columns as they formed up to attack. Hundreds lay dead in front of von Kleist's infantry positions, but still they came, urged on by their commanders and commissars.

One Russian attack succeeded in breaching the line held by the 60th Motorized and 389th Infantry Divisions. As the Soviets forged ahead, making for the Donets, they ran headlong into the 1st *Gebirgs* Division, which had been kept in reserve to counter such a situation. Lanz's *Gebirgsjäger* met the enemy with a withering fire, slaughtering the Red Army soldiers.

By May 28, it was all over. Generals Gorodnyanskii, Bobkin, Podlas, and Kostenko, the deputy commander of the Southwest Front, lay dead with their men. Of the more than 250,000 Soviets inside the pocket, less than one in 10 escaped. Seven cavalry divisions, 27 rifle divisions, and 14 motorized and tank brigades were destroyed, and more than 200,000 prisoners were taken. Thousands more lay dead on the battlefield. The Germans counted over 1,200 tanks and 2,000 guns destroyed or captured. German casualties were placed at about 20,000 killed, wounded, or missing.

Postwar Soviet analysis of the battle blamed lack of cooperation and coordination between the Southwest and South Fronts, underestimating the problems of protecting the flanks of the salient, and tremendously defective command control of forces for the failure of the operation. In 1956, Khrushchev laid the blame for the debacle squarely on Stalin.

Perhaps the most extraordinary outcome of the battle was the way that Paulus was viewed in Berlin. Instead of being reprimanded or relieved for his indecision and his dismal lack of imagination during the opening phase of the battle, he was awarded the Knight's Cross by Hitler and hailed as a hero in the German press.

His actions during the course of the battle were but a precursor to what would happen at Stalingrad, when the victorious 6th Army was wiped out. Many of the generals and divisions that had fought in the Izyum bulge would have their fate sealed in Stalin's city. □

Pat McTaggart is an expert on World War II on the Eastern Front. He writes from his home in Elkader, Iowa.

Ordnance

Continued from page 15

with large Edo floats attached to the underside of the fuselage by four pairs of struts. A ventral fin was also added to offset the side area of the floats in wind conditions. It successfully passed initial sea trials on the Potomac as well as rough water trials off Hampton Roads, Virginia.

By the time this version (XB2C-2) was developed, however, the U.S. carrier fleet had rapidly expanded, as had the construction of airfields throughout the Pacific theater. Combined with the large mass of the XSB21C-2's floats—which made it sluggish to maneuver—this resulted in the entire order of 294 aircraft being cancelled on April 14, 1944.

The final version of the Helldiver was the SB2C-5, which debuted in 1945 and had a greater range. The end of the war saw the introduction of the first guided bombs, which reduced the necessity for dive bombing.

The constant efforts by Curtiss to address the aircraft's flaws paid off, as the SB2C had the best production run of any dive bomber in history. A total of 7,140 Helldivers were produced by Curtiss, with the Canadian firms of Fairchild Aircraft Ltd. building 300 units called the SBF and the Canadian Car and Foundry Co., Ltd., building 894 called the SBW.

The Cold War

The dissolution of the Axis powers left only the Soviet Union as a significant threat. Possessing only a few large capital ships, the Soviets largely lacked targets suitable for dive bombing; the Cold War era saw a greater emphasis on anti-submarine warfare (ASW). The Grumman TBF Avenger, with twice the internal bomb-bay capacity of the Helldiver, was regarded as a more potent carrier-based ASW aircraft.

As of October 2019, the Federal Aviation Administration listed only one airworthy SB2C, an SB2C-5 owned and operated by the Commemorative Air Force (West Texas Wing). □

Magnificent Panthers

Continued from page 47

by barbed wire. Stunned tankers climbed out of their vehicles and gazed at sights of unspeakable horror.

On April 28, 1945, Radio Milan announced that Italian Fascist Dictator Benito Mussolini had been executed by communist guerrillas. Two days later, Hitler and his mistress, Eva Braun, committed suicide in their Berlin bunker. The 761st Tank Battalion reached the city of Steyr, Austria, on the banks of the Enns River, on May 5, 1945. Over 100,000 German soldiers, fleeing the advancing Soviet Red Army, surrendered to American troops, who herded them into a large field that had become a makeshift holding facility.

By the end of the war, the 761st Tank Battalion had been in combat for 183 continuous days. During this time, it participated in four major Allied campaigns in six different countries and was attached to three separate American armies and seven different divisions. The Black Panthers had inflicted more than 130,000 casualties on the enemy. Eight black enlisted men received battlefield commissions, while 391 received decorations for heroism, including one Medal of Honor awarded posthumously to Sergeant Ruben Rivers, seven Silver Stars, three of them posthumous, 56 Bronze Stars, and 246 Purple Hearts. Three officers and 31 enlisted men had been killed in action, and 22 officers and 180 enlisted men had been wounded. In 1998, the 761st Tank Battalion received a much delayed Presidential Unit Citation.

On VE Day, tanks of the 761st lined up beside a small bridge along the Enns River. General George S. Patton Jr. stood up in a Jeep, tall and straight. The soldiers of the 761st saluted smartly. The general returned the salute and drove on. The great warrior wore a quiet, satisfied look on his face. He had asked for the best tankers, and he had gotten them. □

Charles W. Sasser is a veteran of the U.S. Navy and the U.S. Army Special Forces. He resides in Chouteau, Oklahoma.

Versus

Continued from page 73

The established procedure of each carrier being the center of its own task force, thus dividing up antiaircraft fire, was soon abandoned in favor of placing all carriers in the center of a massive task-force organization.

The new Bofors 40-mm antiaircraft gun proved its value at Santa Cruz. As Admiral Kinkaid later remarked, "There cannot be too many 40mm and 20mm guns on any type of ship. They knock down planes."

Improvement was still needed in torpedo attacks and long-range searches. Recommendations that the Combat Air Patrol be stationed at least 20 miles out from the carriers, and that they be placed above the incoming attackers, would soon be implemented.

The Japanese claimed that they had sunk three carriers, one battleship, one cruiser, one destroyer, and one unidentified warship. In fact, they had sunk only *Hornet* and *Porter* while damaging several others—mostly minor damage that was quickly repaired locally.

In turn, the Japanese had lost three ships heavily damaged, including the *Shokaku* and *Zuiho*, both of whom had to return to Japan for repairs, as did the cruiser *Chikuma*. These losses halved their naval air strength in the coming epic Battle of Guadalcanal.

They also lost Admiral Nagumo, who had disappointed Admiral Yamamoto for the last time. He was relieved and sent to a shore base for the duration of the war.

As mentioned, Admiral Kinkaid went on to liberate the Aleutian Islands seized by the Japanese during the Midway Operation, and then command the Seventh Fleet until the end of the war. Admiral Halsey rose to command the Third Fleet and became one of America's leading military figures. Rear Admiral Murray would become Vice Adm. Murray in command of Air Force, Pacific Fleet.

And Admiral Chester Nimitz, after receiving the reports of the battle, changed his outlook, remarking that, "The general situation at Guadalcanal is not unfavorable." □

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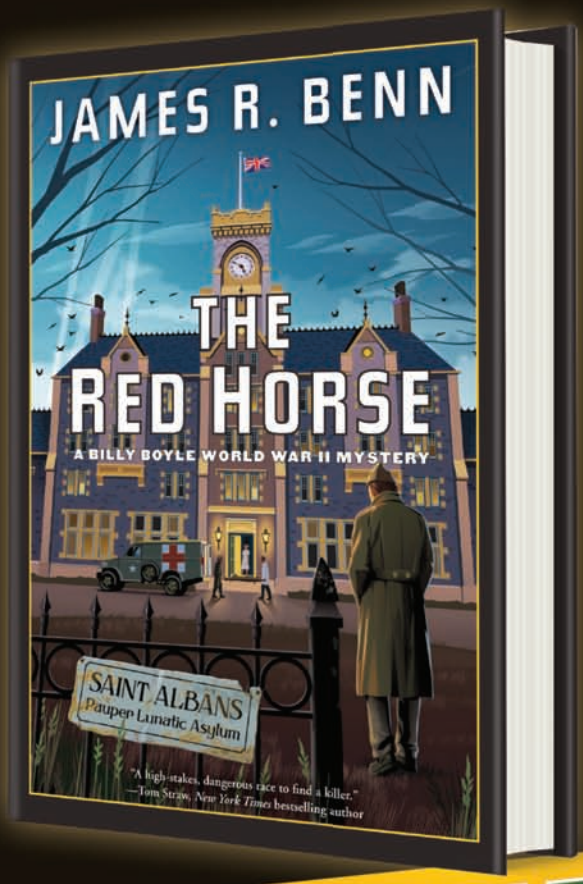

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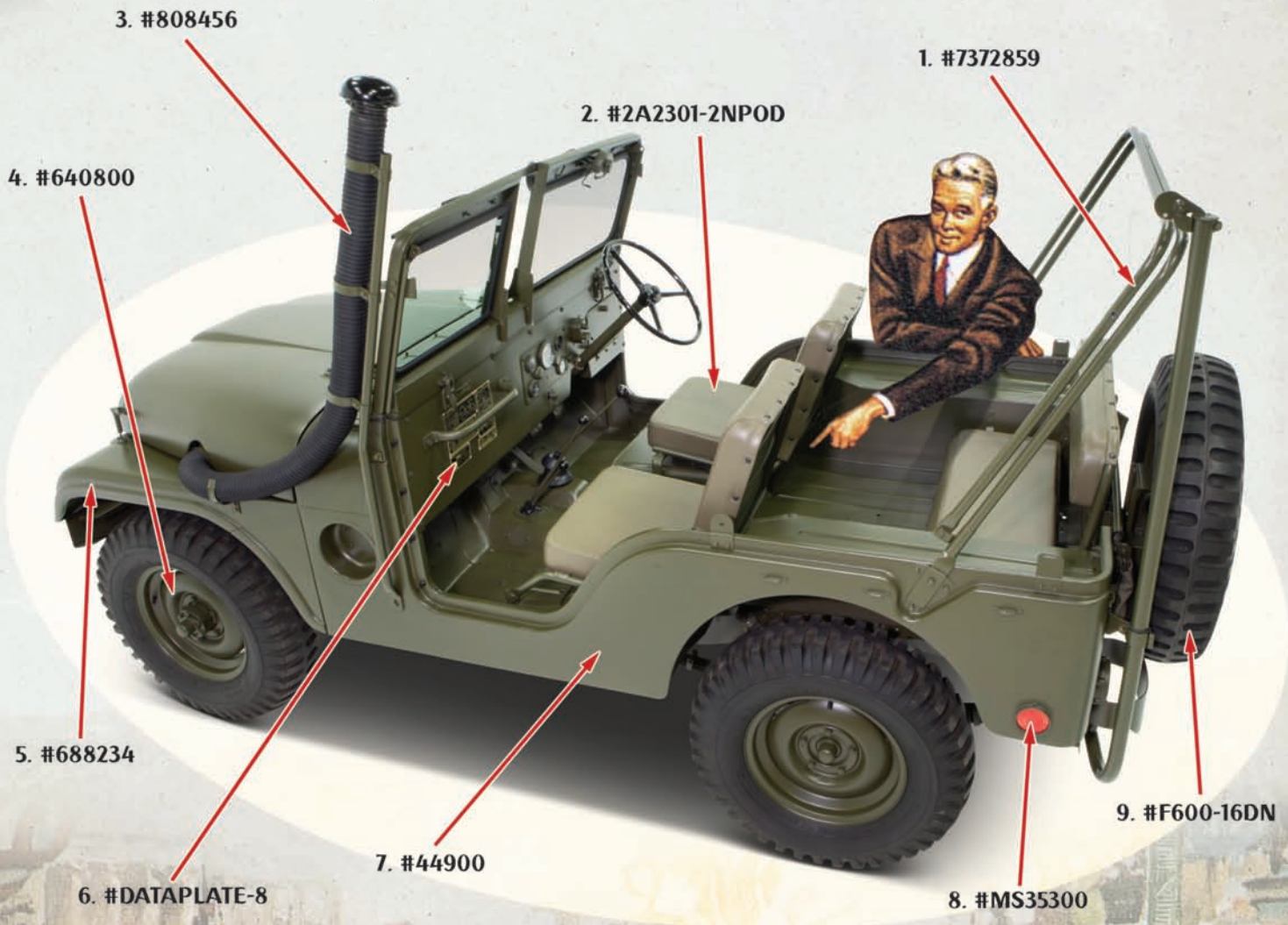

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