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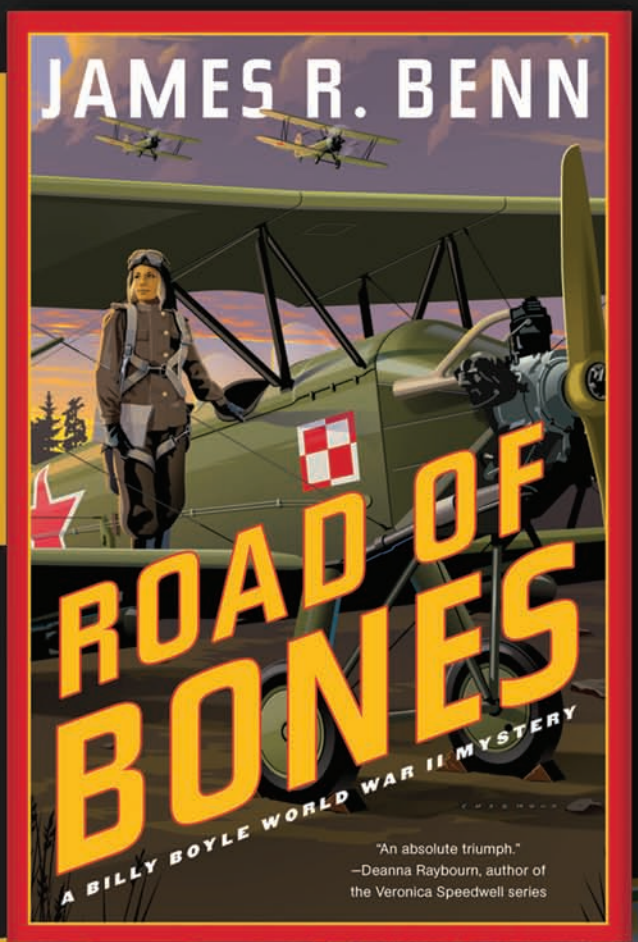

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Requiem for a prince and a sergeant

The number of World War II survivors continues to grow smaller. This spring, two of them made the news.

The first, of course, was Prince Philip, husband of the United Kingdom's Queen Elizabeth, who died on April 9, 2021. His state funeral was a solemn, magisterial affair, complete with all the pomp and ceremony that the British do so well.

After training as an officer at the Royal Naval College in Dartmouth, Devon, he was given his first posting in January 1940 as a midshipman on the battleship HMS *Ramillies* that was tasked with protecting convoys of the Australian Expeditionary Force in the Indian Ocean.

In October 1940, he was transferred to the Mediterranean Fleet, where he served aboard HMS *Valiant* and was involved in the battle of Crete. Then, in July 1943, Philip was credited with saving HMS *Wallace*, which came under heavy bombardment during Operation Husky, the invasion of Sicily. To confuse German bombers that were attacking the ship at night, he devised a plan to launch a raft with smoke floats that successfully distracted them.

The other death on April 9 was that of an American staff sergeant from Alabama named Arnold "Ray" Lambert, Sr., whose death was not as extensively reported as the Prince's, nor his funeral as elaborate.

Lambert had taken part in the invasions of North Africa and Sicily, and he'd already earned three Purple Hearts and two Silver Stars. On June 6, 1944, Lambert was leading a unit of medics from the 2nd Battalion, 16th Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division, landing on Omaha Beach, Normandy. As troops stormed ashore, many were cut down by enemy fire and land mines. It was bloody chaos; only seven of the 31 soldiers on Lambert's landing craft survived.

In the pounding surf, Lambert was helping a wounded soldier when an LCVP's ramp dropped on him, breaking his back and pushing him to the bottom, nearly drowning him. Despite his pain, he was somehow able to drag injured men from the water to a protected area behind a large concrete block, where they could be assisted by other medics. Although severely wounded himself, he was credited with saving at least 15 lives that day, including that of his brother Bill, also a medic.

In June 2019, Lambert was later honored, along with about 100 other American D-Day veterans, at a ceremony marking the 75th anniversary of D-Day at the Omaha Beach cemetery.

President Donald Trump, in perhaps his finest speech, praised Lambert's courage and service: "Again and again, Ray ran back into the water. He dragged out one man after another. He was shot through the arm. His leg was ripped open by shrapnel. His back was broken. He nearly drowned."

As Mr. Trump spoke, Mr. Lambert sat behind him wearing a "D-Day Survivor" cap. At the end of his speech, the president turned to him and said, "Ray, the free world salutes you."

I happened to have been present at that ceremony; the standing ovation given to those veterans was the longest and loudest I have ever heard.

The concrete block he used to shelter the injured is still on the beach and was named "Ray's Rock." It has a plaque affixed to it, honoring Lambert and his men.

In 2019, at age 98, Lambert published his best-selling memoir, *Every Man a Hero*. The title referred to his belief that he shouldn't be singled out—every man in his unit was a hero of the war.

"The way I'd like to be remembered is as a guy who was willing to die for my family and for my country, and a good soldier and a good person," he said.

He is buried at Arlington National Cemetery in the company of thousands of other heroes.

—Flint Whitlock, Editor
www.wwiiquarterly@gmail.com

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CARL A. GNAM, JR.
Editorial Director,
Founder

FLINT WHITLOCK
Editor
WWIIQuarterly@gmail.com

MICHAEL FOWLER
Managing Editor

SAMANTHA DETULLEO
Art Director

KEVIN M. HYMEL
Research Director

CONTRIBUTORS:
Matthew J. Benedetti, Dante Brizill, Dan Champagne, Alan Davidge, Christopher Miskimon, Pat McTaggart, Allyn Vannoy, Mason Webb

ADVERTISING OFFICE:
BEN BOYLES, Advertising Manager
(570) 322-7848, ext. 110
benjaminb@sovhomestead.com

LINDA GALLIHER, Ad Coordinator
570-322-7848, ext. 160
lgalliher@sovmedia.com

BUSINESS OFFICE:
MARK HINTZ
Vice President & Publisher

STEPHFANIE RUPP
Subscription Customer Services
customerservice@sovhomestead.com

PUBLISHERS SERVICE ASSOCIATES
Circulation Fulfillment

COMAG MARKETING GROUP
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SOVEREIGN MEDIA COMPANY, INC.
6731 Whittier Ave., Suite C-100
McLean, VA 22101-4554

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Though obsolescent at the beginning of World War II, the M-3 Stuart light tank series would soldier on until war's end.

Thirteen Panzerkampfwagen IV tanks advanced down the Chouigui-Mateur road in an attack against the newly arrived American First Armored Division. It was November 25, 1942, near the Tire River Valley in Tunisia.

Three American halftracks mounting 75mm pack howitzers engaged the German advance but withdrew upon realizing their fire was ineffective. Companies A and B of the 1st Battalion, 1st Armored Regiment went into action. Support was provided by B Company, while A Company's 12 M-3 Stuart light tanks attacked the larger German panzers.

Company A quickly found itself in trouble. The thicker frontal armor of the panzers could not be penetrated by the M-3's small 37mm gun. One by one, the American tanks fell prey to the long-barreled 75mm cannon of the enemy. One German tank, keeping its frontal armor pointed at an M-3 it had targeted, closed to some 30 yards before firing a shot that destroyed the American tank as it tried to retreat, killing or wounding most of its crew. The American tankers fired 18 rounds at their foe during the Germans' approach, only to watch hits spark as they bounced away harmlessly. Still, the fight with A Company caused the Germans to turn their more vulnerable rear armor to B Company in its supporting positions. The B company gunners were able to knock out nine of the panzers.

The dual problems of weak firepower and light armor cursed the Stuart tank throughout its service life. Mechanically reliable, Stuarts were quickly relegated to secondary roles in the European theater, though the tank found more use in the Pacific. Nevertheless, the Stuart, in both its M-3 and M-5 models, was not withdrawn until after the war. It was widely used by several of America's allies, including France and Britain. The Stuart name, in fact, was a British contribution, as it was their practice to name U.S. tanks in their service after American Civil War generals, in this case it was Confederate cavalry General Jeb Stuart.

The Stuart's origin can be directly traced to American tank development of the 1930s. A number of M-3 ancestors were designed as either light tanks for the infantry or "combat cars" for the cavalry. At the time, only the infantry branch was allowed to possess tanks, so vehicles for the cavalry were called combat cars to avoid violating the regulation. Both vehicles were very similar in design, however.

Practicing combat maneuvers, M-3 Stuart light tanks and supporting infantry advance on mock enemy positions.

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ABOVE: A Stuart participates in a demonstration at Camp Chorrera in the Republic of Panama. Stuarts were produced in large numbers during WWII but were limited in their ability to engage enemy armor. BELOW: A Stuart tank of the 1st Armored Division traverses a rubble-strewn street in Italy while probing for enemy positions.

These vehicles went through a number of design stages, particularly as the lessons of tank use in the Spanish Civil War were digested. The fighting there showed the need for increased armor protection against anti-tank weapons like the German 37mm cannon as well as the need to mount a cannon of at least 37mm on U.S. tanks. At that time, American tanks mounted no heavier weapon than a .50 caliber machine gun.

The beginning of World War II further highlighted the importance of heavier armor and weapons. Unfortunately, American designers clung to the concept of light tank use while future opponents like Germany looked harder at medium and heavy tanks.

Work on an improved light tank began in July 1940. This tank was designated the M-3 and mounted a 37mm cannon as well as 38mm of armor in front. That thickness of armor was still not enough to stop even 37mm rounds, but the new design was not considered able to carry armor of greater thickness, even with improvements to the chassis suspension.

Besides the cannon, the M-3 mounted five .30-caliber machine guns—one on the turret roof, one coaxial beside the cannon, and three in the hull. The first M-3s had riveted turrets, which were quickly replaced with stronger welded turrets. This reduced the danger to the crew from rivet heads bouncing around the interior if the tank was hit. The new turret was used from April 1941 until the end of the war. Accepted into service, production of the M-3 had begun in earnest the month before.

The production version of the M-3 weighed in at 13.7 tons when loaded for combat. It was 14 feet, 10 inches long with a width of seven feet, four inches, and a height of eight feet, three inches. The crew comprised four men: a driver, co-driver, loader, and the commander who had to double as a gunner. M-3s could make 36 miles per hour on roads and 20 cross-country. The tank's maximum range was about 75 miles on solid ground.

Through Lend-Lease, the British Army began to acquire the M-3. While it was not the ideal, it was still a tank and the British needed all they could get for the fighting in North Africa. Still, the M-3 offered some advantages. It was mechanically reliable compared to British designs, and its 37mm gun could fire a high-explosive round against unarmored targets, something the two-pounder gun on the British tanks lacked. To customize the tanks for their use, the British added such features as extra external stowage, removal of two of the hull-mounted machine guns, and various internal details. The first eighty-four tanks were shipped to Egypt in July 1941, where British troops gave it the additional nickname "Honey" for its reliability.

The Stuart's baptism of fire came on November 19, 1941, during Operation Crusader. The 8th King's Royal Irish Hussars fought elements of the 21st Panzer Division near Gabr Saleh, losing 20 Stuarts to three panzers. By the end of the battle, many more Stuarts had been lost to German armor and antitank guns, though losses were due more to German tactical proficiency than any particular deficiency of the Stuart. In fact, the bulk of German armor, mostly Panzer Mark III and IV tanks, were not markedly superior to the M-3 in terms of armor or firepower. Indeed, the Germans used a number of

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captured Stuarts in North Africa. As M-3 light and M-4 medium tanks began to reach British hands in the spring and summer of 1942, the Stuarts were gradually shifted from frontline service to reconnaissance.

About the same time the Stuart was deployed in the desert, the U.S. Army was fielding it in the Pacific. Two battalions equipped with the M-3 were sent to the Philippines to reinforce the American garrison in September 1941. When the Japanese attacked in December, both units took part in the fighting. Japanese tanks of the day were by no means superior to the Stuart, so American crews fared better than their comrades in North Africa.

During this initial period of service, the M-3 underwent a number of changes, including several additional turret designs. A number of production models were fitted with diesel engines due to a shortage of the continental gasoline engine normally fitted. To simplify logistics, diesel tanks were generally kept in the United States, the exception being tanks issued to the Marine Corps, which could get diesel fuel from Navy sources. Subsequent models of the M-3 included the M-3A1, which had a gun gyrostabilizer, powered turret traverse, and a vehicle intercom, and the M-3A3, with a welded hull and changes in the interior layout. A total of 5,811 M-3s were produced, as well as 9,031 M-3A1s and 3,427 M-3A3s.

The final upgraded version of the Stuart was the M-5 model. In its M-5A1 configuration, it was basically an M-3 powered by twin Cadillac engines and a Hydramatic transmission, as well as the latest improvements of the M3A3. Range was increased to 100 miles, and combat weight went up to 16.5 tons. Ultimately, however, the Stuart, whether an M-3 or M-5, was still undergunned and underarmored for the role assigned it.

Frontline users recommended discontinuing the design. By the end of 1942, though, over 13,000 Stuarts had been produced, and the production lines were in full swing. Coupled with the fact that no suitable replacement was available, it was clear the design would have to soldier on. A total of 10,958 M-5 Stuarts rolled off the lines by

the time production ceased in 1944.

Some changes would occur, however. A reorganization of armored units eliminated light tank battalions and resulted in combined regular tank battalions with three medium tank companies and one light company. The concept was to use the light tanks for reconnaissance and security missions. Some independent units such as cavalry squadrons also used Stuarts, and they were in widespread use during and after the Normandy landings. Against the Germans in Europe, the Stuart was vulnerable to the myriad of antitank weapons they used, from the handheld panzerfaust to the dreaded 88mm gun. Despite the cautious employment of the Stuarts by many commanders, 1,200 were lost in Europe and Italy.

Comparatively, the Stuart provided yeoman service in the Pacific theater, where enemy weapons did not outmatch its weaknesses. There was relatively little tank-to-tank fighting in the Pacific, but the tank found plenty of use in support of infantry. Though armored vehicles often had trouble traversing jungle terrain, the Stuart's light weight and small size actually mitigated this disadvantage.

The crew of a Stuart tank fires on snipers in the woods near Dessau, Germany.

M-3s went ashore at Guadalcanal in August 1942, and in September they were used by Australian troops in New Guinea. They rendered valuable service in defensive fighting, both from their machine guns and their cannon, which fired canister

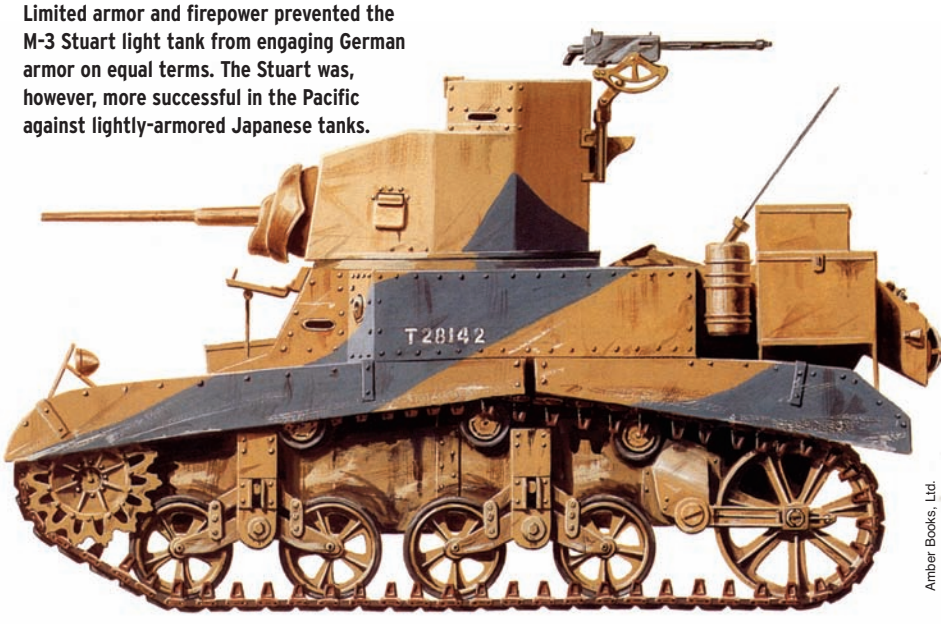
rounds (a cannon shell filled with small projectiles, akin to a giant shotgun shell). This firepower was also quite useful when the enemy attacked the tanks themselves. Japanese infantry had nothing like the bazooka or panzerfaust, and antitank guns were often difficult to employ well in Pacific terrain.

More personal tactics were required. Groups of infantry would charge a tank, attempting to swarm over it. Explosive charges would then be set to destroy the tank or be thrown inside if the attackers could get a hatch open. This tactic, while foolish in open terrain, could to work in close-in jungle terrain, though often at a high cost in lives. To counter this tactic, tankers would operate in groups. If enemy infantry attempted to swarm the tanks, they could literally hose each other down with machine gun fire to ward them off. On Guadalcanal, General Alexander Vandegrift stated that the tanks resembled "meat grinders" due to the covering of blood they were coated with.

The inadequacies of the Stuart did come to light even in the Pacific, though. When the 2nd Marine Tank Battalion went ashore at Tarawa, it confronted a network of well-built Japanese bunkers. The 37mm guns of its M-3s did little damage to them. Tank crews resorted to driving directly up to the bunkers and firing right into the embrasures. In fairness, it must be said that even larger tank guns were of limited effect against such structures.

One solution to the problem of destroying bunkers was the flamethrower tank. To this end, 20 Stuarts were equipped with the Satan flamethrower. This weapon had a range of up to 60 yards and was fitted in place of the 37mm gun. In practice, gun-equipped Stuarts would accompany flamethrower tanks in case enemy tanks appeared. Flamethrower tanks played a part in the invasion of Saipan during summer 1944.

Though its value as a frontline tank was quickly over, the Stuart chassis was used successfully for a number of variants. Perhaps the best known of these was the M-8 howitzer motor carriage. Mounting a 75mm M-1A1 pack howitzer in an open-topped turret, it was originally intended to



Limited armor and firepower prevented the M-3 Stuart light tank from engaging German armor on equal terms. The Stuart was, however, more successful in the Pacific against lightly-armored Japanese tanks.

Amber Books, Ltd.

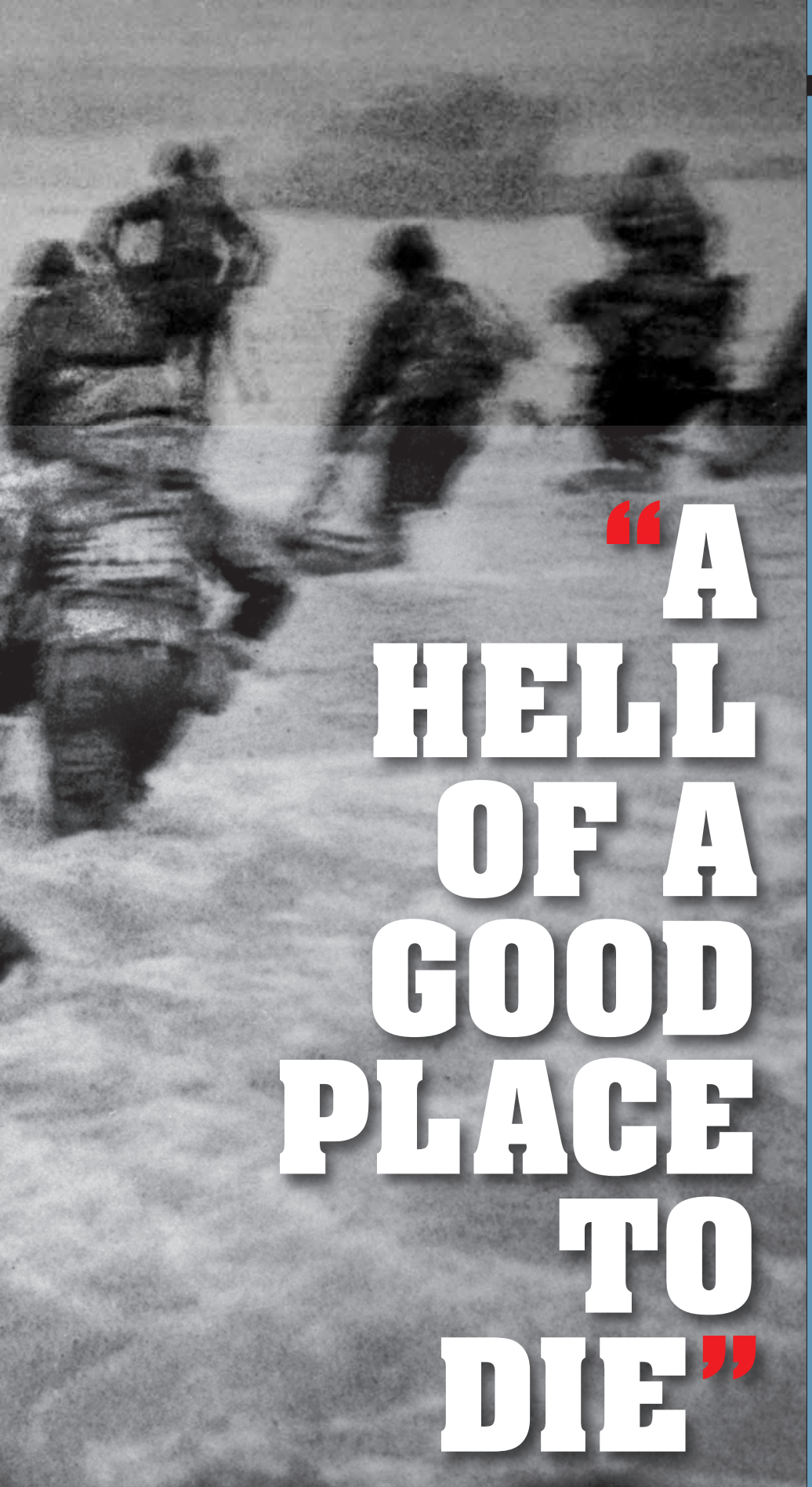
provide support for light tank battalions. The diminutive but nevertheless effective pack howitzer could send high explosive or smoke rounds over 9,000 yards. Once light tank battalions were replaced, it was instead issued to cavalry reconnaissance units. The M-8 first saw action in Normandy and served for the rest of the war. A total of 1,778 were built, with some 174 being given to the French forces, which also used over 500 M-3s and M-5s.

Though never an official variant, British units adapted the Stuart by removing its turret and using it in a variety of roles. A personnel carrier known as the Stuart Kangaroo was created by fitting the turretless chassis with seating for infantry, and a similar reconnaissance version, fitted with a machine gun mounting, also appeared late in the war. Another notable variant was a command vehicle used by high-ranking officers. Again, the turret was removed, and a ring of steel plating was inserted to create a small superstructure around the turret ring.

The Stuart tank was a decent 1930s-era design that simply found itself outclassed by most of its wartime counterparts. Its successful use depended on the prudence and ingenuity of its crews. When kept to missions that did not unduly test their weaknesses, Stuarts could and did provide useful service. Even when used outside their limits, they plugged gaps in Allied tank forces until heavier medium tanks arrived.

Author Christopher Miskimon is a regular contributor to WWII Quarterly. *He also writes book reviews for* WWII History *magazine and is a retired Colorado National Guard Officer.*

Robert Capa's famous blurry image of the 1st Infantry Division's amphibious landings at the Easy Red/Fox Green sectors of Omaha Beach indelibly captures the fear and chaos of the D-Day invasion. Four rolls of Capa's film were rushed back to *LIFE* magazine's London office, where a darkroom mistake ruined all but 11 images.



"A HELL OF A GOOD PLACE TO DIE"

The GIs of the 1st Infantry Division paid a heavy price on D-Day, June 6, 1944, but broke through Hitler's vaunted "Atlantic Wall" at Omaha Beach in just hours.

BY CHRISTOPHER MISKIMON

Corporal Michael Kurtz stood on the deck of an attack transport ship sitting off the Normandy coast. Gazing out over the ship's railing in the predawn hours, he could see the ship's crew working the davits and ropes for the landing craft. Within minutes, his squad of riflemen, part of the 16th Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division, would climb aboard one of those small boats and head toward their objective, a strip of beach code-named Omaha.

As their turn neared, Kurtz gathered his squad around him. "I want all of you Joes to keep your heads down," he said. "As soon as we're spotted, we'll catch enemy fire. If you make it, okay. If you don't, it's a hell of a good place to die. Now let's go."

Minutes later they were climbing over the rail into their assigned landing craft. Just then, the davits supporting a nearby boat broke. The entire thing flipped and tumbled into the sea, dumping all 30 men aboard into the cold waters.

Kurtz's landing craft reached the water without trouble, bobbing next to the transport. The men who were dumped into the sea from the other craft were all around, swimming to stay close to their ship and await rescue.

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As the sailors manning Kurtz's boat started moving it slowly toward shore, one of the GIs in the water called out, "So long, suckers!" Looking around at his men, he noticed all of them held blank expressions on their faces, their thoughts betrayed only by the look of tension simmering beneath each visage. The landing craft picked up speed, heading toward Omaha Beach.

Cracking the shell of Fortress Europe meant someone had to be the tip of the spear. On June 6, 1944, the 1st Infantry Division filled that role, alongside several other American, British, French, and Canadian units assigned to be the first ashore. They were reinforced by follow-on divisions and enjoyed the support of a vast air and sea armada, the biggest yet seen in history.

Still, until the troops got ashore in force and secured their initial objectives, the success of the whole endeavor was in doubt. Every detail of the operation, code-named Overlord, had received years of meticulous attention from planners and staff officers to give it the best chance of success. In the end, whether Overlord succeeded came down to the courage and actions of the few thousand men who had to hit the beaches first.

The 1st Infantry Division bore the nickname "Big Red One" after its distinctive shoulder patch: a large red numeral one on a green background. The unit contained three infantry regiments: the 16th, 18th and 26th. Each regiment had three battalions, each with three rifle companies, a weapons company, and a headquarters company.

Engineers, tanks, and naval shore parties would accompany the infantry ashore to help them break through the solid German defenses and move inland. For the assault on Omaha Beach, the Big Red One was joined by the 29th Infantry Division, a National Guard unit originating in Maryland and Virginia.

The landing plan called for different, complementary units to arrive at the shore in a coordinated sequence. A fixed schedule determined when each unit would arrive, ideally allowing time for that unit to complete its mission and move inland to make room for the next wave.

The first Americans to hit Omaha were supposed to be the crews of 32 Sherman Duplex Drive (DD) tanks, timed to arrive at 6:20 AM. These DD tanks from the 741st and 743rd Tank Battalions were to reduce the beach defenses with cannon and machine-gun fire for 10 minutes.

At H-Hour (6:30 AM), another 32 tanks and 16 tankdozers from the same unit should arrive and add their firepower to the melee. The tankdozers would use their specially fitted bulldozer blades to clear the obstacles laid across the beach. The schedule called for the 2nd Ranger Battalion to land with the second group of tanks.

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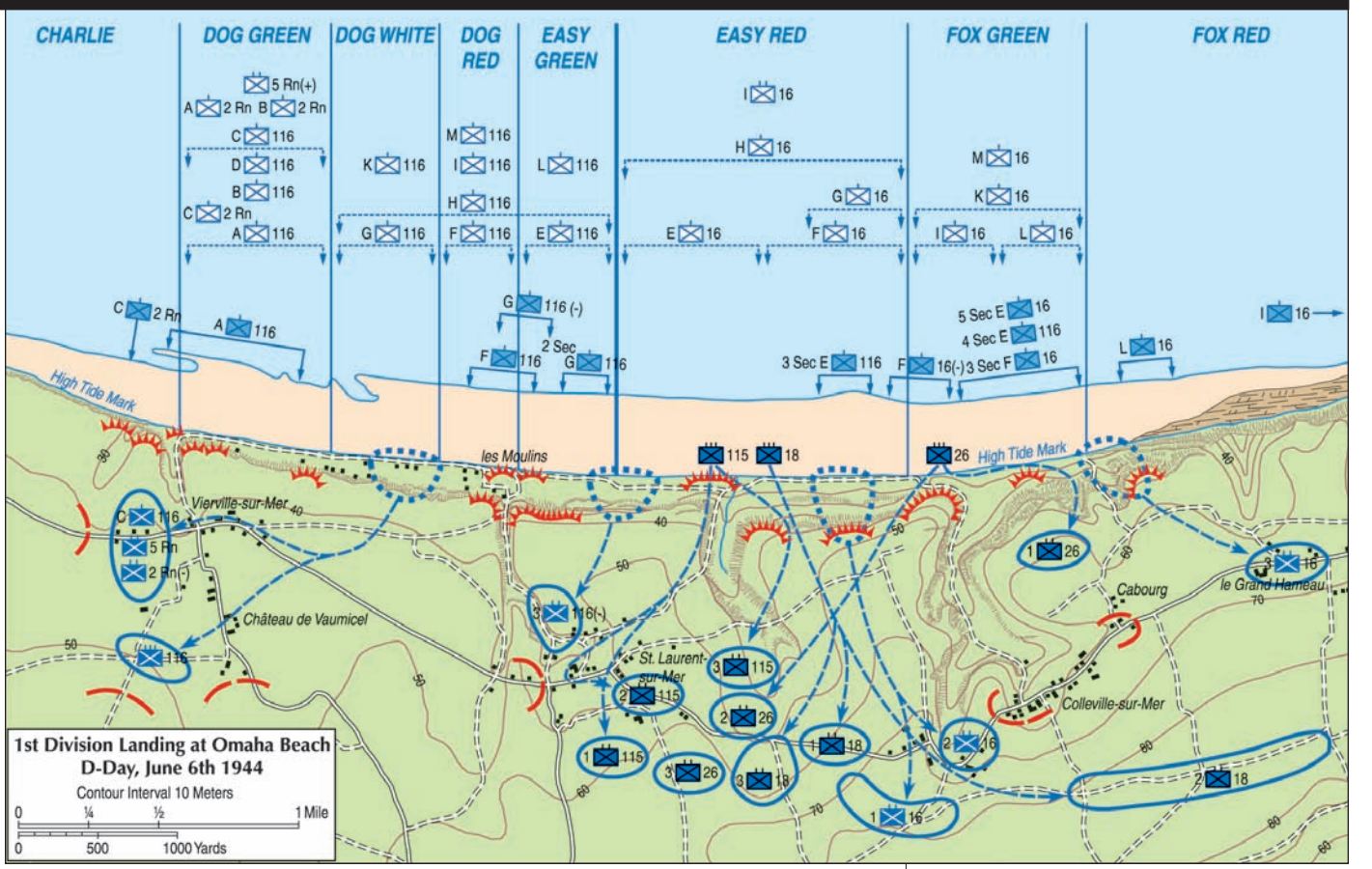
ABOVE: The muzzle of a German 88mm gun (left foreground) points eastward along Omaha Beach from Exit D-1, Vierville, showing how exposed to enemy fire the landing area was. BELOW: Men of the 16th Infantry Regiment peer over the sides of their LCVP toward smoky Omaha Beach and nervously await the moment when the ramp will drop and they will wade into hell. OPPOSITE: 1st Division units were assigned specific sectors along Omaha Beach, but a strong west-to-east current pulled many landing craft far from their intended objectives.

Naval History and Heritage Command



Planners selected the 16th Infantry Regiment to act as the division's spearhead at Omaha. Their plan called for the 2nd and 3rd Battalions of the 16th (2/16 and 3/16, respectively) to hit the western end of the beach in designated sectors one minute after the second group of tanks. Companies E and F of 2/16 would land at Easy Red sector, while Companies I and L of 3/16 would hit Fox Green sector.

G and H Companies of 2/16 and K and M Companies of 3/16 were to land right behind the other companies of their battalions, about a half hour later. 1st Battalion (1/16) would come ashore at H+70, just over an hour later. At H+90 the division headquarters would join the 16th, followed by the 18th Regiment spaced out between H+195 and H+210. The 26th Regiment would arrive in the early afternoon, with many thinking the 26th would only have to mop up behind the other two regiments. Accompanying the first assault waves were combat engineers trained to clear obstacles.

While these assault waves received the best planning and support the Allies could provide, there was no way to foresee every possibility. When two groups of skilled and implacable enemies meet, success depends upon determination, courage, and ingenuity. Even luck becomes a factor. It is a military cliché, though a true one, that "no battle plan survives contact with the enemy." The plan for Omaha Beach would not survive contact between the Americans and Germans, either. When that plan failed, as they always do, the soldiers of the Big Red One still had to accomplish their mission, take the beach, and move inland.

The journey into the beach was a harrowing experience itself, though nothing compared to what followed. The water seemed against the GIs that morning, rough seas rocking the landing craft with waves depositing water over the sides, drenching the soldiers and making the boats harder to manage.

Before long, men started to throw up their breakfasts, quickly filling the one seasickness bag they were issued. Lt. James Watts, A Company, 81st Chemical Mortar Battalion, recalled, "I was fighting desperately to avoid being seasick in front of the men. Somebody said we were eight or 10 miles out. That's a long, long way to go."

As the leading waves of assault craft neared shore, they encountered enemy fire. Corporal Jess Weiss of 2/16 recalled the experience. "As we neared shore, 155mm howitzer shells began to rain on us from above. I could hear crossing bands of intense and accurate machine-gun and mortar fire hitting the water and the heavy metal hull of the LCT [Landing Craft, Tank], from stern to bow."

Weiss had seen combat in North Africa and Sicily, where he'd learned how to react to artillery fire: "I crouched down and hugged the bottom of the LCT, seeking whatever protection its metal hull could provide."

Nearby, several men who had not yet seen action were excited by the explosions and noise. To get a better view, they climbed on top of several jeeps strapped down in the center of the LCT. Weiss saw them and shouted a warning. "I screamed to them,

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'Hit the deck!' But it was too late. German artillery decapitated two of them, and several others were severely wounded."

Behind the GIs, Allied warships fired salvos of high-explosive shells at the shoreline. Overhead, hundreds of bombers flew over the beach to drop their ordnance on the waiting Germans. Landing craft converted into rocket launchers disgorged their weapons onto the beach. All of this was to pave the way for the DD tanks to get ashore and demolish the remaining defenses as the infantry arrived at the shoreline.

Unfortunately, none of it went as planned. The naval gunfire and air strikes landed inland, over the heads of the Germans in their bunkers and strongpoints. The rockets were likewise ineffective. Most of the DD tanks assigned to the division's sector sank in the Channel when the heavy waves overcame their flotation screens; only six of the 32 tanks made it to shore.

The bombardment plan called for the gunfire to tear gaps in the beach obstacles and blow craters in the ground to provide cover for the troops as they advanced. A few sailors and Army engineers formed into underwater demolition teams managed to blow a few lanes in the obstacles, but in the chaos the buoys used to mark the lanes were lost.

The division artillery even mounted howitzers on DUKW amphibious trucks, but most of the guns were knocked out by enemy fire or the rough seas. The failure of the fire-support plan meant the German defenses sat intact and waiting for the Americans as they neared the beach. There were not even any craters the GIs could use for shelter.

Lt. Col. William Gara commanded the 1st Engineer Combat Battalion. As his landing craft churned toward shore, he spent the two-and-a-half-hour journey worrying whether his boats would find their assigned landing sectors. The din of gunfire rang through the early-morning air as they arrived about 300 yards offshore. He recalled, "We could see that things weren't going well … the paths and gaps between the underwater obstacles had not been opened, and so we recognized we were very likely going to get blown up."

The overcast skies prevented the warships from realizing their fire was going long. At the same time, the current and the wind forced most of the boats off course, so most of them landed east of their assigned area.

Steve Kellman, L Company, 3/16, was supposed to land on Fox Green but wound up east of Easy Red. When the ramp on his boat dropped, the men aboard raced for shore as German fire struck all around them. Kellman was assigned as a rifle-grenade man, but he also carried an aluminum ladder broken into two sections, so it was easier to carry. The ladder was for crossing a tank trap at Fox Green. As soon as Kellman realized he was on the wrong beach, he threw the ladder away.

German machine guns raked the GIs as they struggled to get ashore; artillery and mortars blasted them while they moved among the intact beach obstacles carrying heavy burdens of weapons and equipment.

Captain Ed Wozenski commanded E Company, 2/16. As his boat neared the beach, machine-gun bullets started bouncing off the ramp. When the boat hit bottom, the ramp refused to fall. A team of soldiers knocked it open and fell with it. The rest of the men hurried out into shoulder-deep water. After the boat emptied, several hits set it afire. Wozenski's men strode slowly toward the beach on the seabed; the current and their burdens made it impossible to do more than walk.

"It was just a slow, methodical march with absolutely no cover up to the enemy's commanding positions," Wozenski noted. "Many fell left and right, and the water reddened

with their blood. A few men hit underwater mines of some sort and were blown out of the sea. The others staggered on to the obstacle-covered, yet completely exposed beach … The survivors still moved forward and eventually worked up to a pile of shale at the high-water mark. This offered momentary protection against the murderous fire of the close-in enemy guns, but his mortars were still raising hell."

F Company, under Captain John Finke, came ashore next to E Company. They landed at 6:40 AM under the same deadly fire as their comrades. Finke noted, "The assault teams had to wade across 30 yards of water under fire and cross a beach of approximately 130 yards under the same fire. The cost in casualties was six officers and 80% of the company."

Amid this confusion, two boat sections from the 29th Division's 116th Infantry, badly off course, landed among the men of the 1st Division. Part of F Company, spread out across a thousand yards, managed to get close to the E-3 draw, an exit point from the beach, but it was heavily defended, and the company suffered over 50% casualties within minutes.

Some soldiers made it to the shingle, also called the seawall—a small rise composed of small stones gathered by centuries of tidal activity; it provided a tiny amount of cover. From their *widerstandnest* ("resistance nest") strongpoints, the Germans threw grenades down on the GIs, hoping shrapnel would reach where their bullets could not.

Meanwhile, the boats carrying I and L Companies, 3/16, had strayed more than a mile off course, almost to the British sector. The crews struggled to get back to their original landing areas, but Captain John Armellino's L Company wound up coming ashore a half hour late at the eastern edge of Fox Green near some low cliffs extending almost to the waterline. These provided the weary GIs some cover.

Steve Kellman was one of those men. His boat managed to get close to shore, so the GIs could run through knee-deep water to the seawall. He and his comrades flopped down, exhausted, and watched another boat's men struggle to the beach and take cover behind the obstacles. Their boat did not get as close to shore. L Company suffered 50% casualties but had landed as a unit. This allowed Armellino to start organizing an attack to get off the beach through a draw labeled "F-1" on the map. Before they could move out, however, the captain was wounded.

"It was like all hell had broken loose," Kellman recalled. "There was noise and smoke and dead bodies all over the place." The GIs knew they were in the wrong place and started moving toward their assigned beach. As they went, an enemy shell exploded in front of Kellman and another man, knocking them both backwards. Kellman crawled to the seawall, but when he tried to get up and move further, he fell back down. After falling again, he checked his legs and found one bloody and numb.

He poured a sulfa packet on the wound and bandaged it. Unable to continue, he gave his rifle and grenades to other soldiers and lay there talking to the other man, also wounded by the same shell. A lieutenant came by and promised to send an aid man, but hours went by, with artillery fire landing the whole time. After a particularly close explosion, Kellman asked the other wounded man how he was doing, but the man was dead.

Lieutenant Robert Cutler assumed command of L Company for the wounded Armellino. He could see two enemy strongpoints, WN 59 and 60, preventing his company from exiting the beach using the E-1 draw. He ordered Lieutenant Jimmie Monteith to assault WN 59 and Lieutenant Kenneth Klenk to attack WN 60. Each officer rounded up what remained of their platoons and moved out.

The boats carrying Captain Kimball Richmond's I Company finally returned to Omaha Beach and came in under heavy fire. Gunfire hit Richmond's landing craft and it began to sink. He dove overboard and waded ashore with his company. On the beach he quickly assembled what he could find of his men, along with whatever stragglers he came across. Together, they moved toward a beach exit and ran into an enemy strongpoint. Rather than getting

BELOW: Having made it to the water's edge, Capa turned and snapped this photo of a GI crawling behind him through the surf, hoping to find a place of safety. The soldier has been identified as either Huston Riley or Edeward Regan. OPPOSITE: Another Robert Capa photo, taken as he departed his landing craft with the combat troops, shows men wading inland while others take shelter behind beach obstacles or three of the six DD tanks that made it to shore.

pinned down, they attacked and wiped out the German position, the first success of the morning.

As the leading assault waved floundered on the beach, behind them troops from their regimental headquarters and supporting artillery began to land. One of the artillerymen, Eldon Wiehe, immediately got separated from his unit and was then almost killed by a German shell. "I guess I panicked," he later said. "I started crying."

Some GIs grabbed him and pulled him behind a landing craft that had run aground. "I cried for what seemed like hours. I cried until tears would no longer come. Suddenly, I felt something. I can't explain it, but a feeling went through my body, and I stopped crying and came to my senses." Able to think once again, Wiehe grabbed a rifle and moved forward.

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K Company also came ashore; intended as a reserve company, they joined the fight as soon as they landed. Pfc. Roger Brugger remembered running straight off his landing craft onto the beach, where bullets kicked up sand to either side of him. He ran to the seawall and took cover. When he looked back, he saw his landing craft take a hit and explode. Another boatload of men ran onto the beach and toward Brugger.

The K Company commander, Captain Anthony Prucnal, died from an artillery shell as he tried to help his wounded executive officer, Lieutenant Frederick Brandt. Two other lieutenants were killed or wounded trying to rally the company. Finally, Lieutenant Leo Strumbaugh put together a group and led them against a German position through heavy fire, forcing the German defenders to retreat. It was another small victory, paling in comparison to the heavy casualties the GIs were taking, but each such triumph helped get them closer to the beach exits.

The GIs pinned along the seawall stayed as low as possible to avoid the enemy gunfire, though the artillery and mortars, with their plunging trajectories, could still get them. A few men peered over the wall toward the next impediment to their advance, a thick layer of concertina wire, beyond which lay minefields.

The troops could use Bangalore torpedoes, a pole-like explosive charge assembled into long sections and pushed into the mass of wire, to blast holes through the obstacle. They could probe the minefields and push their way across. To do so meant braving the heavy fire already landing around them. Only a few intrepid soldiers had tried; getting off the beach required a concerted effort by well-led groups. So far, the efforts of a brave few proved insufficient.

As more soldiers piled up behind the seawall, landing craft carrying 3/16's Headquarters Company approached the beach. Among them was Lieutenant Karl Wolf, who suffered seasickness on the trip in. A soldier gave him Dramamine tablets to help, but Wolf did not know how many to take, so he swallowed three of them.

When his boat reached the beach, he ran out into the maelstrom. The battalion adjutant, Captain Al Moorehouse, died just a few feet behind Wolf, struck by a machine-gun burst. The young lieutenant took cover behind a beach obstacle, next to two other soldiers. He tried to locate the source of the machine-gun fire to give him an idea of which way to move up; just then a burst stitched a line in the water, killing the other two soldiers, who floated away with the tide.

Wolf ran for the shore. He did not know where he was; none of the beach features looked like those in the invasion briefings. Suddenly, Wolf noticed the patches on the men around him were for the 29th Division. Like so many others that morning, he had landed on the wrong spot. Wolf watched men get hit all around him as he reached the cover of the seawall. On the water, a Landing Craft, Infantry (LCI), a larger vessel, stopped too far out. Wolf watched at least 10 men drown before the craft's captain realized the situation.

With Captain Moorehouse dead, Wolf realized he had to take charge of the men from his boat. He gathered the 12 survivors he could find and started down the beach to rejoin his battalion. As they made their way, enemy fire forced them to occasionally lie flat on the beach and wait until it lifted.

Meanwhile, men began trying to get Bangalore torpedoes and wire cutters up to the concertina wire beyond the seawall. A few men tried, but all were quickly killed. Finally, Sergeant Phillip Streczyk of E Company decided to try. He sprinted for the wire with machine-gun fire hounding him. Despite this, he reached the concertina, cut a hole through it, waved for the men at the seawall to follow him. He later received a Distin-

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ABOVE: As the tide rises, the beach becomes narrower. Here a heavy machine-gun team makes its way toward to its assigned position along the equipment-littered shingle. OPPOSITE: A soldier's smoke grenade, apparently struck by a German bullet, explodes inside an LCVP, as the boat driver makes haste for the shore.

guished Service Cross for his bravery.

Another man who got things moving that morning was Lieutenant John Spaulding of Kentucky. E Company had already lost 100 of 183 men, but Spaulding gathered the rest and set off through the gap Sergeant Streczyk had created, intent on taking the enemy strongpoint east of exit E-1; Captain Joe Dawson's G Company laid down covering fire for E Company's move.

Spaulding's GIs crawled forward under heavy fire to reach the gap in the wire. Getting through it, the lieutenant led them against the strongpoint, which poured machine-gun fire at them. The Americans crept under the bullets snapping past mere inches above them until they were close enough to throw hand grenades at the Germans, who threw back some of their own. A sergeant tried to hit a machine-gun nest with a bazooka but missed and was wounded in return. Finally, the GIs got close enough to one of the machine guns and that crew surrendered.

One of Spaulding's men, a sergeant carrying a BAR he found on the beach, went through 20-round magazines so quickly a soldier had to follow him carrying spare ammunition. Medic George Bowen and his fellow aid men moved constantly, providing help to the many wounded.

"No man waited more than five minutes for first aid," recalled Spaulding. He credited Bowen with helping keep up morale. Finally, 1st Platoon cornered 20 Germans and their officer, who wisely chose to surrender. Spaulding earned a DSC for his leadership in taking the strongpoint.

Captain Dawson brought G Company through the gap next. He knew minefields lay in front of his position, but spotted a narrow path leading up to an opening at the top of the bluff above. "I felt the obligation to lead my men off, because the only way they were going to get off was to follow me," Dawson said. He started up the path with a sergeant named Cleff and Pfc. Frank Baldridge.

Partway up, he ran into Lieutenant Spaulding, who had about two squads left. At the time, Dawson thought they were the only survivors of E Company. The rest of G Company still sheltered behind the seawall, so Dawson sent Baldridge back to bring them up. Near the crest of the bluff Dawson found a log and took cover behind it to see if he could spot his men coming up.

Sure enough, he saw a line of GIs start to come forward, but suddenly a machine gun fired on them. The captain realized the gun was emplaced just above him on the bluff, so he started crawling toward it. He got to within a few yards and pulled a few grenades off his belt. He threw them one after another and the gun went silent. His brave act allowed his men to continue up the path.

As the scattered actions of junior officers and NCOs began to make a difference, the 16th's next wave approached the beach. Tragically, as 1/16's landing craft arrived, most of the previous wave's survivors still lay pinned along the shingle seawall or huddled behind obstacles. The newly arriving GIs had nowhere to go but to crowd Omaha further, providing more tightly packed targets for the veritable murder machine of German machine guns, mortars, and cannon.

Sergeant Harley Reynolds of B Company remembered waiting in his landing craft as it neared the shoreline. "There wasn't much conversation. We were listening to all that small-arms fire and swapping glances. We knew we were in for a hot reception."

Reynolds noted his boat's crew had to steer around and between the wrecks of other craft. He saw bodies floating in the water and bobbing in the surf. Despite the heavy fire snapping past, he was surprised by how few bullets actually hit his landing craft. Some soldiers stayed in the water, only their heads above the surface, unable or unwilling to move up.

Unarmed, Reynolds thought of them as

useless, doing nothing but getting in the way. As his boat's ramp dropped, he told his squad leaders to fan out and head in. Reynolds went first, off the ramp and dodging to the right with his radioman, Private Tony Galenti following. A burst of machine-gun fire struck home and Galenti fell, his radio shattered. He never made it off the ramp. Reynolds took cover behind an obstacle.

"I knelt by the obstacle to look around … While crossing the beach, I felt tugs at my pants legs, several times. Later, I found too many rips and tears to identify any as bullet holes," Reynolds said. He saw bullets impacting all around him. "I believe the bullets were coming from a long distance, as they seemed to have lost some of their energy and I could hardly hear their hissing sounds."

John Bistrica of C Company took cover behind the shingle as well. He felt as if "the whole world was coming in on me." A soldier next to him called out, "I'm hit. I can't breathe." Bistrica realized the man's life preserver had tightened on him and cut off his air. "So, I got out my knife and jabbed a hole in it. He was okay after that."

The 1st Battalion men soon mixed in with the rest of the regiment on the beach, huddled together in the scant cover of the shingle. Corporal William Lynn threw himself in with them. Next to him lay a decapitated GI, his dogtags missing. Lynn took his shelter half from his pack and covered the body before moving on.

At 8:30 AM, a Navy beachmaster managed to get a message to the fleet warning them to send no more landing craft to Omaha Beach. It was simply too crowded with wrecked vessels and the beach too packed with trapped soldiers; there was no more room for the following waves of men.

The Navy command also realized their shore bombardment had been ineffective, but it was still desperately needed to help turn the tide against the Germans. The battleship *Arkansas* stood offshore, ready to deliver lethal broadsides of 900-pound 12-inch shells, but she was too large to get close to shore for pinpoint accuracy. Instead, eight destroyers moved in as close as 700 yards from Omaha—point-blank range for a warship. They aimed their 5-inch guns at the bunkers and pillboxes overlooking the beach and opened fire.

Several soldiers remembered the effect this had for the soldiers. Major Kenneth Lord recalled, "Their keels must have hit bottom. It was the greatest help that we had the entire day. They were instrumental in breaking through the beach defenses."

Lt. Col. William Gara, 1st Engineer Combat Battalion, described the action: "There were naval gunfire teams on shore; by radio they directed the ships to come closer to fire at the pillboxes … They lowered their 5-inch guns and began shooting … They were our only supply of artillery for the first four hours on Omaha Beach." Other senior officers credited the Navy with enabling the division to get off the beaches that morning.

Don Whitehead served as a correspondent at Omaha Beach. He spent much of the morning worrying the Germans would counterattack the beach and drive the beleaguered Americans back into the sea. Despite the carnage all around him, he realized the time for such a move had passed. He wrote, "Our Navy was pouring a murderous fire into the enemy positions. From the beach, too, disorganized as it was, there was a steady stream of small-arms and machine-gun fire … and the thumping of mortars lobbing shells onto the bluff."

As the junior leaders acted to get their men moving, a senior leader got the beach organized. Brig. Gen. Willard Wyman, the assistant division commander, landed on the beach both to get the 1st Division assault troops moving inland and to coordinate with the neighboring 29th Division.

With almost suicidal bravery, Wyman disregarded enemy fire and calmly walked around the beach, assigning missions to groups of soldiers, and moving units to their assigned positions for the push inland. He sent messengers up and down the narrow strip of beach the Americans held to get his troops coordinated.

The 16th Regiment's commander, Colonel George Taylor, did likewise, bringing order from chaos and getting his troops moving, in part because he was angry so many of them were doing little other than taking cover. In his efforts to get them moving, he uttered one of the most famous phrases of the war: "There are two kinds of people who are staying on this beach—those who are dead and those who are going to die! Now let's get the hell out of here!"

More lanes had to be opened through the wire. Sergeant Harley Reynolds saw a small man creep up to one section of wire with a Bangalore torpedo, assemble it, and light the fuse. It sputtered, so the man calmly replaced it and lit another. As the man crawled backwards, he suddenly flinched, looked directly at Reynolds, and died. The torpedo exploded a moment later, blowing a large gap which Reynolds and several other men dashed through.

Reynolds moved so fast he dove through an unbroken section of wire without a scratch, then came to a water obstacle which he swam across. In other places, men found the small paths which wound around the ponds and minefields and went up toward the top of the bluffs.

Platoon Sergeant John Ellery of the 16th watched a captain and two lieutenants lead groups of men up a narrow path, even though one of them had a broken arm. Two of the officers were soon hit. Reflecting on those men, Ellery later said, "When you talk about combat leadership at Normandy, I don't see how the credit can go to anyone other than the company-grade officers and senior NCOs who lead the way. We sometimes forget that you can manufacture weapons and you can buy ammunition, but you can't buy valor and you can't pull heroes off an assembly line."

More heroes arrived on the beach in the form of bulldozer operators. Sixteen of the heavy engineer vehicles were sent to Omaha to assist with clearing obstacles and making a path for tanks and other vehicles to get onto the high ground beyond the shoreline. Only six made it to shore, and three were soon knocked out.

Reporter Whitehead watched Private Vincent Dove calmly use his bulldozer to start

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A later wave of infantrymen moves along the rocky shingle as other troops unload supplies and stretchers from an amphibious DUKW.

making the first path off the beach for the tanks, despite a complete lack of protection from enemy fire. Dove drove a bulldozer for 15 years before joining the Army and deftly used it to clear a lane.

Corporal William Lane saw a bulldozer driver raise the blade to protect himself from enemy fire and move forward. However, this kept the driver from seeing a wounded soldier in the way of the vehicle. Lynn was about to dash out to help the wounded man when Lynn's lieutenant shouted, "You go for him and I'll have you court-martialed!"

Lynn replied, "Court-martial me when I get back!" and took off at a run for the stricken man. He waved off the bulldozer operator and then applied a tourniquet and used a rifle to splint the wounded man's leg. Lynn paused to give the casualty a syrette of morphine before picking him up and carrying him toward the surf, hoping to put him on a departing boat.

The boat's crew refused to help, leaving Lynn in neck-deep water with the casualty draped over his shoulders. Another landing craft did help—coincidentally the same one Lynn arrived on! They took the wounded man and Lynn went back to the beach. The lieutenant declined to court-martial him.

Lt. Col. Gara's men worked steadily to clear gaps in the minefields, and by 9:00 had blown several gaps, marking them with tape, and in some cases toilet paper. A few precious tanks arrived with the bulldozers, and their commander tried to get them off the beach to support the infantry, who were finally getting to the top of the bluff to reduce the enemy defenses. Gara wanted all of them off the beach so his men could start eliminating the minefields and filling in the anti-tank ditches.

As Gara and his men kept working, the landing craft carrying the next wave of troops, the 18th Infantry, appeared behind him, coming out of the smoke and mist hanging over the water. Most of the first waves were still stuck on the beach, however. The 18th landed amidst the twisted wrecks of destroyed landing craft, knocked-out tanks, the dead and the dying.

Pfc. Ralph Anderson served as a BAR gunner in E Company. He lost his weapon in the surf but went back to retrieve it under fire. He had to clean it three times to get it working. Afterwards, Anderson and another man crawled up the slope past a German pillbox. They got past the strongpoint just before a destroyer blasted it with several rounds. The destroyer *Franklin* pelted a strongpoint above Exit E-1, breaking the morale of the Germans inside.

Captain Oren Rosenburg's F Company, supported by a single tank, moved up the slope and captured 20 enemy troops as they staggered out of the ruined bunker. G Com-

pany secured the entrance to E-1 while H Company moved up the path without taking a single casualty. Soon all of 2/18 had moved to the top of E-1. General Wyman ordered them to advance on the village of Colleville, a mission originally assigned to the now decimated 16th Regiment.

The opening of E-1 proved a critical moment for the 1st Division. Troops could now flow off the beach onto the heights above and start pushing inland. Engineers bulldozed a path alongside to allow the tanks, halftracks, and trucks to accompany the infantry. It was approaching noon, and, while the Americans were finally making some progress, their commanders waiting offshore knew nothing of it due to the continuing communications problems.

Lt. Gen. Omar Bradley worried all morning about the fate of the Omaha Beach assault. The other Allied operations had their own problems but overall were progressing well. Finally, he sent Major Chet Hansen ashore to find out what was happening. Hansen went most of the way on a PT boat before transferring to a landing craft 2,000 yards offshore. He got off in four feet of water and waded in.

Wreckage from the assault lay all around, mixed with the bodies of the fallen. The wounded were being tended to, but artillery fire still fell on the beach. Hansen watched one shell blow up a truck and send a GI's lifeless body 30 feet into the air. Another soldier was thrown upward as well but recovered and kept moving. Hansen returned to Bradley and informed him of the tough fighting.

Despite the limited success in getting off the beach, Private Carlton Barrett of the 18th's Intelligence and Reconnaissance Platoon landed among a storm of small-arms and mortar fire. He stepped off the landing craft into neck-deep water but pressed forward. After he got to shore, he went back into the surf to rescue wounded and drowning men, pulling them to relative safety.

Ignoring the deluge of incoming fire, Barrett carried the casualties to an evacuation boat before returning to help other wounded men, reviving those in shock and inspiring them to return to the fight. He

National Archives

ABOVE: Having just survived the hellish boat ride into shore, a group of wounded 1st Division soldiers take shelter along a cliff face at Colleville-sur-Mer to await evacuation to a hospital ship. OPPOSITE: Low tide reveals the detritus of war strewn across the Easy Red sector of Omaha Beach, but the battle, although costly, has been won. Hitler's supposedly impregnable "Atlantic Wall" is breached within the span of a morning.

carried messages up and down the beach for leaders trying to coordinate their attacks. His selfless and courageous actions resulted in the award of the Medal of Honor.

Other 18th Regiment men began moving off the beach through the lanes marked by engineers. "We didn't stay on the beach too long," said Ray Klawiter of D Company. "The engineers had cleared a path and marked it with toilet paper. If you stepped just a little off that path, you would get it."

Mortarman Eddie Steeg focused on the man in front of him, ignoring the carnage on the beach as best he could. As they went up the cleared lane, two lieutenants veered off the path and stepped on mines. One died and the other lost a leg. Steeg paused only to pick up an abandoned Thompson submachine gun. "Not that I needed any more weight to carry," he recalled; Steeg already hefted the bipod of an 81mm mortar. "I just couldn't resist being the possessor of a real Tommy gun … Maybe I could now copy Jimmy Cagney and use the weapon to eliminate those 'dirty rats,' the Jerries."

Even sailors joined the infantry on June 6. Robert Giguere served on a Landing Craft, Infantry (LCI) that made it to the beach but sank from enemy fire. He went ashore with the rest of the crew, getting a flesh wound in his shoulder along the way; he dressed the wound while hiding behind a beach obstacle. Making his way ashore, he spent some time helping wounded men get out of the water.

Giguere noted, "I have never seen so many wounded, dying, and dead. I never saw such a mess—trucks, jeeps, tanks, halftracks burning everywhere." He crawled through a gap in the wire and ran into an Army lieutenant who gave him two hand grenades, perhaps mistaking him for an unarmed soldier.

Giguere crawled a hundred feet to a German bunker pouring machine gun fire down onto the beach and threw both grenades into the embrasure. Nearby GIs tossed him more grenades, so he pulled the pins and threw them in, too. "I must have thrown six to eight grenades and got the hell out of there in a hurry because a destroyer was coming in to start shelling the gun emplacement."

The mines and the wire still impeded the masses of troops from exiting the beach. Ted

Aufort of 1/16's Headquarters Company was stuck behind a thick stretch of wire with other troops. They assembled a long Bangalore torpedo and got it under all four or five rows of it before detonating the weapon, blowing the wire apart. They ran through, but mines awaited them on the other side.

"Sergeant Ford stepped on one," Aufort said. "It blew the flesh off his legs and just the bones were exposed." A friend serving as a stretcher-bearer was also wounded. "I heard a voice call out to me … He was laying there with a tourniquet on his arm, where his left arm was blown off and just a bloody stump was sticking out."

Despite the heavy cost in men, each gap opened allowed more soldiers to get off the beach. L and M Companies of the 16th cleared out a German nest with help from I Company and a Sherman tank.

Harley Reynolds arrived at a German trench line and led a group of GIs to clear them. Boot prints lined the bottom, so Reynolds figured they were safe to walk through. He flipped off the safety on his rifle, which had a rifle grenade over the muzzle; he did not think there was time to take it off. He moved down the trench with the rifle grenade jutting out ahead of him. Luckily, there were no Germans around.

From this position, Reynolds saw Germans in another trench some 400 yards away, carrying something, perhaps ammunition. The GIs started firing at them with a machine gun, and Reynolds finally took off the rifle grenade so he could shoot as well. Several Germans were hit and fell; another fled into a bunker. As Reynolds watched, some GIs got to the bunker and threw grenades. A white flag appeared, and the Germans came out with their hands up. As the GIs dealt with their prisoners, Reynolds saw another group of enemy soldiers sneaking up on the distant Americans. Reynolds directed fire at this new group, which quickly surrendered as well.

As Lieutenant William Dillon of A/16th led his men uphill, he saw Sergeant Pat Ford step on a mine. It blew his leg off and threw him into the air. Ford landed on another mine which injured his arm and tossed him onto yet a third mine. Looking around for a way out of the mines, Dillon spotted a small, faint path. He cautiously went up, found it clear, and went back to show his men the way.

The fighting stayed grim and close as the GIs slowly ground forward. 1st Lt. Jimmie Montieith charged through enemy fire to get help from a pair of tanks before leading a patrol up the slope. Stopped by a German strongpoint, three of his men crawled through wire and minefields to destroy one enemy position. Monteith led the rest of his men through another minefield, marking it as they went, and reached the top of the bluff, where they joined some other GIs and dug in.

A sergeant sent a patrol toward the

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Naval History and Heritage Command

BACKGROUND: *When the German army burst through Belgium's Ardennes Forest in May 1940, it cut the Allies' front line in half, then turned northwards through France towards the Channel coast. This* Sichelschnit *or "sickle cut" squeezed the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) on its right flank into a shrinking mass of men and machines that eventually found its way to the port of Dunkirk in search of a possible escape route to England. In doing so, the BEF gained itself a place in history—the "Miracle of Dunkirk."*

By slashing the Allied line, the fast-moving German divisions had also effectively divided the British and French troops into those who could make it to the coast and those who had many more battles to fight before they could catch a glimpse of the iconic White Cliffs of Dover on the other side of the English Channel.

Still Fighting After Dunkirk

BY ALAN DAVIDGE

When the Dunkirk evacuation ended on June 4, 1940, there were still over 100,000 British soldiers south of the River Somme, a number that was soon to increase as Britain attempted to create a second BEF. They were outnumbered by better-equipped German troops, caught up in a web of Anglo-French politics, and completely unaware that 250,000 of their comrades were now back in England.

For the next two weeks they would have to fight for their lives with a French army, which was becoming equally uncertain about its own future, as their only support. They had begun fighting the Germans to push them out of France, but very soon all of their battles were defensive ones, with survival and evacuation as their only immediate reward.

The gods had smiled at Dunkirk, but for those soldiers still in France, it was back to

While over 300,00 British and French soldiers were evacuated from Dunkirk, thousands more were left behind to fight or die.

Forced south along the coast after their sterling performance at the Battle of Abbeville, the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, part of the 51st Highland Division, hold the line at the River Bresle.

Imperial War Museum

relying on the laws of chance. Foremost among them was the 51st Highland Division, otherwise known to the Germans as "The Ladies from Hell," after their deadly encounters with the kilted warriors in World War I as they cleaned up the slaughterhouse that was the Somme battlefield in the fall of 1916, storming through the notorious defenses at Beaumont-Hamel, where the Kaiser's men had wiped out the Newfoundland Regiment on the first day of the battle.

As part of the 1940 BEF, the Highlanders had arrived in France with a reputation to uphold and an expectation that they would be able to make a fearsome contribution to the current conflict.

In April 1940, this all-star division (which included the Black Watch, the Gordon Highlanders, the Seaforth Highlanders and the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, plus the First Royal Horse Artillery) was moved to guard the famously impenetrable Maginot Line on the border between eastern France and Germany. The division was commanded by the improbably named Maj. Gen. Victor Fortune, a Black Watch veteran of the Great War. But in order to demonstrate Britain's commitment to the defense of France, they were placed under French control.

The Battle of France began with significant tension between French Prime Minister Paul Reynaud and Winston Churchill, who had only become prime minister on May 10, when the main German assault was launched.

Churchill was anxious to pledge Britain's support in order to keep France fighting because, if they signed an armistice with Germany, it brought the possibility of a German invasion of Britain even closer, especially if the Germans got hold of France's navy.

The decision to evacuate at Dunkirk was seen as disloyalty by many in France, however, with Britain's politicians saying one thing and doing another.

Meanwhile, at the military level, General Lord John Gort, who was in charge of the BEF, was ostensibly following the direction of the French commander, Maxime Weygand, although with a proviso that he could choose otherwise if he felt that any proposal would have serious consequences for Britain.

This made the French command feel uneasy. At the level of the foot soldier, there was an increasing concern that the French troops had become defeatist—which was not unexpected, as their leaders were appearing indecisive. The men of the 51st Highland Division had typically thrown themselves into the fray, but many of them felt that they were being sacrificed by Britain for the sake of the Anglo-French relationship. When things went awry, many believed that they were the ones who would be in the front line.

Many regiments that were recruited from Britain's tough urban neighborhoods in the belief that their hard upbringing would give them the upper hand in combat, but the Highlanders were the real McCoy, literally. A childhood and youth spent in the mountains, enduring some of the worst weather in Britain, learning to live off the land, and spending most of the day engaged in hard manual labor certainly prepared them for the forthcoming action—especially when it became hand-to-hand, which was just as well because, like most troops sent to France in the early months of the war, they were singularly ill-equipped with the weapons of war.

On the Maginot Line, they discovered that the Phony War was anything but phony: digging defensive positions, learning how to survive on night patrols, and taking casualties alongside their French brothers-in-arms.

Things got considerably worse after May 10, when the Battle of France began in earnest. Hitler's Blitzkrieg had caught the Netherlands, Luxembourg, and Belgium on the wrong foot, and, before long, the Germans had Paris in their sights.

The 51st Division was pulled out of the line on May 24 and moved to the French Reserve, which meant they could be sent anywhere they were required to arrest the speed of the Blitzkrieg. They soon found themselves journeying northwestwards, following the River Somme to Abbeville, a large riverside town not far from the coast of the English Channel; they arrived there on June 1.

North of Abbeville was the German Army, and north of them was the remainder of the British Expeditionary Force, which had been making a bid for freedom across the Channel at Dunkirk since May 26. The Highlanders, together with the British 1st Armoured

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With toothy grins and high morale, these men from the 7th battalion Argyll and Scottish Regiment share a relaxing moment away from the firing line on June 7 1940. At this point they have been fronting the BEF's campaign for the previous week. OPPOSITE: German infantry and Panzers move across open fields in France, following their breakthrough in the Ardennes.

Bundesarchiv Bild 101I-769-0228-22; Photo: Erich Borchert

Division, a selection of lines-of-communication regiments, and the remains of the French Army did not know it at the time, but the Dunkirk evacuation was only to last another three days. Then, after June 4, they would have the German Army to themselves.

From June 1-3 the 51st Highland Division played a key role at the Battle of Abbeville, taking over from French troops. Positioning themselves along the Somme, two Highland brigades, supported by French tanks, on June 4 launched an attack on the Germans' main bridgehead. This was effectively the last real Allied attack after Dunkirk and, despite their best efforts, their initial strike failed with one brigade losing 600 men.

The Scots fought hand-to-hand and charged with bayonets with a ferocity that drove the enemy back at a number of points. Ominously, the French tanks, whose armor was never in the same league as the machines that their German neighbors had been building across the border during the 1930s, were easily picked off by anti-tank gunners.

The French military commander General Maxime Weygand assessed the situation and declared that the Somme should be the final line, to be held at all costs, and asked Churchill for further support from the RAF. This drove a further wedge between the leaders, as Churchill had his eye on conserving his air force against a possible future air attack, which was to become the Battle of Britain, that would attempt to disable the country and soften it up for an invasion.

Not surprisingly, he refused. However, attempts were being made at this time to assemble a "Second BEF" to bolster the Allied response to the German penetration. The proposal was made on June 2 and, within a week, the first troops from Scotland's 52nd Lowland Division and the 1st Canadian Division began arriving in France. It was seen by many as nothing more than a political gesture; by the end of the month, following the signing of an armistice between France and Germany, they had been forced to return to Britain.

The day after their main initiative at Abbeville, June 5 (which was also the day after the last troops were evacuated from Dunkirk), the Highlanders discovered what it was like to be on the receiving end of an enemy attack. It began with exploratory enemy patrols and continued with artillery and a new terror, the Ju-87 Stuka dive bombers, whose deadly whine they soon learned to recognize as the harbinger of doom when they dropped their loads with deadly accuracy.

The 7th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders suffered particularly badly, losing 23 officers and 500 other ranks. This was not just a counterattack but the start of *Fall Rot* or "Case Red," the second phase of Hitler's plan to push the offensive deeper into France and involving over a hundred divisions.

British and French troops were spread along the Somme and the neighboring Aisne River, with the 51st Highland being required to cover over 19 miles of the front; it had become clear that to continue trying to hold a line along the rivers was pointless. They could not push the Germans back, they were stretched too thinly to hold the bridges, their communications were poor, and the enemy was finding routes across the river further upstream that could soon result in their encirclement.

The Highlanders were forced to retreat south and west, albeit a fighting retreat, and establish a new line along the River Bresle, which ran parallel to the Somme, a distance of about 30 kilometers. Their jour-

Bundesarchiv Bild 146-1998-043-20A; Photo: Unknown

General Erwin Rommel, with portfolio and binoculars, looks for the enemy during the German advance, while an armored column waits for the command to proceed.

ney began in the dark, and they were eventually joined by A Brigade, consisting of the 4th Border Regiment, the 1/5th Sherwood Foresters, and the 4th East Kent Regiment ("The Buffs"), who had been sent north from Rouen on the Seine with nearly 1,000 infantrymen to help hold the new line.

Similar problems were being faced along other rivers in the area such as the Andelle and Béthune parallel to the Bresle, which were being held by an improvised group of battalions known collectively as the Beauman Division that was forced to withdraw westwards on June 8.

The new line on the Bresle didn't last long. By June 7 the Highlanders were again at the mercy of German troops who had broken through further upstream and cut off their supply base at Rouen.

The following morning, an intervention by the Royal Navy suggested the possibility of an evacuation from the port of Le Havre, further west along the French coast. This seemed a viable option for the Highlanders but, at 150 kilometers from the mouth of the Bresle, it was going to be a tough challenge. Maj. Gen. Fortune accepted the withdrawal as inevitable for his beloved division, but his old-school, and very worthy, sense of honor dictated that his men should make the journey side-by-side with their French allies, with whom they had been fighting and dying for weeks. The division had been assigned to a French corps, and they would stay together.

Addressing his brigadiers and senior officers he said, "Gentlemen, I know you would not want us to desert our French comrades. We could be back in Le Havre in two bounds but they have no transport. We shall fight our way back with them, step by step."

The French actually did have transport, but it was horse-drawn rather than mechanized and could not travel at more than 15 miles per day; this exemplified the lack of preparation that had made France so vulnerable to begin with. The journey was going to be a real race against time.

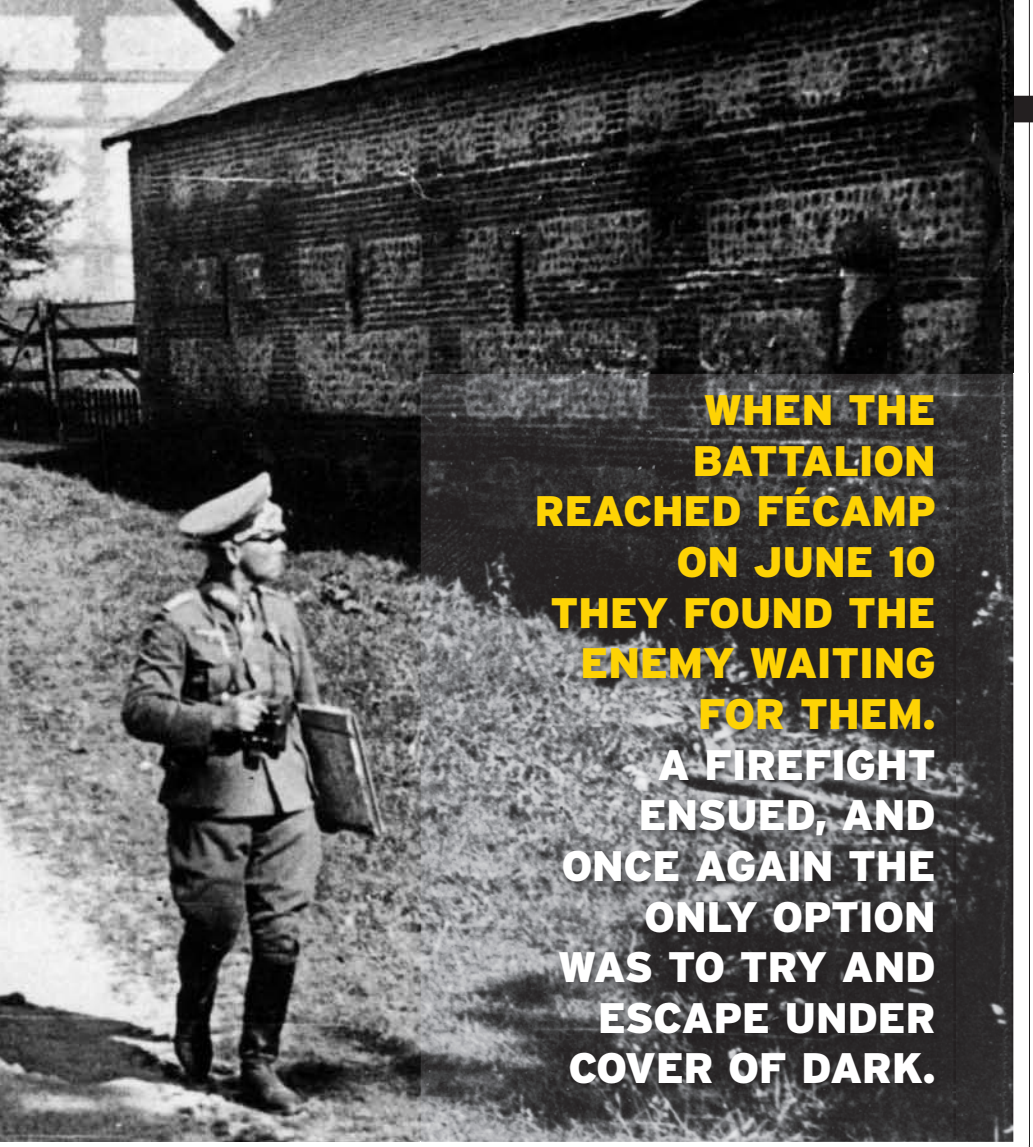
The efforts of the 51st Highland had been very much appreciated on the ground by their French allies, even if Weygand appeared to want more from Britain. A certain Colonel Charles de Gaulle, who was soon to become the new leader of the French people, commanded one of the French armored divisions at Abbeville and, in sharing the heat of battle, gained a huge respect for the division.

In a speech in Scotland in 1942, he said, "I can tell you that the comradeship in arms experienced on the battlefield of Abbeville in May and June 1940 between the French armored division which I had the honor to command, and the 51st Highland Division under General Fortune, played its part in the decision which I took to continue fighting on the side of the Allies to the end, whatever the course of events."

The earlier retreat to Dunkirk would not have been possible without a valiant rearguard action, largely performed by French troops, many of whom paid the price for being at the end of the queue for salvation. General Fortune, too, had his band of guardian angels, in the form of the recently constituted A Brigade, which had just arrived from Rouen as support. They were to stay on the line along the Bresle and play their part in slowing down their pursuit by the enemy while Fortune and the Highlanders withdrew westwards.

Lance Corporal Fred Scholes was one of this band of angels. A medic with the 4th Borders, he was amply qualified in looking after others. Scholes joined the regiment in 1931, and his genealogy on one side of the family tree included the Ross clan from the mountains of Scotland, so he was happy to be of service to his kith and kin.

His regiment had been based in Brittany until the recent action started but was moved across to the Somme just before the Dunkirk withdrawal to attack German positions and



WHEN THE BATTALION REACHED FÉCAMP ON JUNE 10 THEY FOUND THE ENEMY WAITING FOR THEM. A FIREFIGHT ENSUED, AND ONCE AGAIN THE ONLY OPTION WAS TO TRY AND ESCAPE UNDER COVER OF DARK.

destroy bridges across the river, a task they performed with precision. On June 4 they were attached to the 51st Highland Division and two days later received orders to clear enemy troops from the Forest of Eu, south of the town of Incheville on the Bresle.

The Sherwood Foresters were sent up as replacements the following day and then, on June 8, came the orders that were to define the reputation of The Border Regiment in this campaign.

German forces had been using the bridge north of Incheville at night to bring up reinforcements, and the 4th Borders were to defend the little town at all costs. The orders were delivered by their CO, Lt. Col. T.W.A. Tomlinson, himself: "For God's sake, see that no one comes over that bridge."

With A, B, and C Companies engaged in trying to clear the Germans out of the forest further to the south, the task fell upon D Company to hold the line. By the end of the day, it was clear from the war diary that the battalion was under such heavy fire that it had to move out. Ordnance was raining down from all directions, leaving the men in no doubt that although they still held the Incheville bridge, the Germans had crossed the Bresle elsewhere and they were, in effect, surrounded.

Orders were issued to withdraw to the coast near Dieppe. D company's commander, Major Hopkinson, had been wounded and brought back from Incheville, and despite the best efforts of Lieutenant Williamson—who was now in charge—contact between his company and the rest of the battalion was becoming increasingly fragile. Ominous references in the war diary stated: "1300 (June 8): Communication with D Coy difficult due to road leading to Incheville being under MG fire. 2030: No further messages from D Coy. Unable to get through to them. 2230: Attempt to get through to D Coy to tell them to withdraw under cover of darkness. 0001 (June 9): No further word received from D Coy. 0600: Unable to get through to D Coy."

Companies A, B, and C left for Fécamp on the coast near Dieppe, a town recognizable to most as the base for the Radio Normandie transmitter, with heavy hearts and no alternative but to hope D Company would be able to follow. Some wounded from D company were taken with them, including Major Hopkinson, their company commander.

Despite these communication difficulties, D Company was still performing the tasks assigned to it under the leadership of their new commander, Lieutenant Williamson, whilst under heavy fire. When the Sherwoods had joined them earlier in the day, an artillery barrage aimed at the Germans struck too close, causing serious casualties. Williamson allowed a lorry loaded with wounded to withdraw further south, but they ran into a German convoy and were captured.

Much of the time was spent fortifying houses, building barricades, and training anti-tank and Bren guns onto any roadblocks placed in the path of the enemy. If they had possessed radios, they would have received the orders to withdraw that would have saved many lives. Three messengers were sent out, but they never returned; a decision was made to continue fighting until relieved or fresh orders arrived.

They held on until June 14 under intolerable conditions. D Company could only hope that their valiant rearguard action had enabled the 51st Highland to escape to safety. On the morning of June 14, a captured British officer who was sent into the village by the Germans to make Williamson consider his situation told him that the Highlanders had made their escape, although to where was not clear. At this point, surrender seemed the most realistic option.

The remainder of the 4th Battalion Border Regiment had not found the journey to Fécamp an easy one. They had held their positions till dark to slip away under cover

Imperial War Museum

of night. Motor transport traveling in the dark without lights was no picnic at the best of times, but their convoys were competing for space down narrow lanes with French troops.

Among them were pathetic groups of fleeing refugees trying to salvage what was left of their lives in handcarts. The dignity of these innocent bystanders had been the first casualty of the war, and now they were losing their homes, as well. Traveling by night, however, meant they were less likely to be strafed by trigger-happy Luftwaffe pilots.

Major Gubbins of B Company had as his first objective the crossing of the River Béthune via the Archelles Bridge, which was due to be blown at midnight to hamper pursuit by the Germans. By 11:45 PM the bridge had still not been reached when fellow officer Robert Hind of A Company arrived on a motorcycle from the rear.

Gubbins sent him off at full speed to find the bridge and prevent its destruction. By some miracle this was achieved and disaster averted. The convoy reached the bridge, crossed it, and minutes later it was a pile of stones in the river. In his account after the war, he described the event: "When the last vehicle had crossed the bridge, up she went, a terrific explosion."

When the battalion reached Fécamp on June 10 they found the enemy waiting for them. A firefight ensued, and once again the only option was to try and escape under cover of dark. They had fought off an air attack during the day, and at night they were fired on again, which killed the driver of the lead truck in the convoy.

Major Gubbins climbed on to the back of his truck to man a Bren gun and Boyes antitank rifle in preparation for further trouble. Le Havre would soon be in reach. However, they soon came under fire again, and Gubbins realized that he had run into a German convoy and was surrounded. With no alternative, he and the remainder of his company surrendered.

On the morning of June 11 the remainder of the Border Regiment were still under attack while fighting their way to Le Havre. There was a major encounter with the enemy at Le Chesnay to the southwest of the town and, sadly, this was where medic Fred Scholes lost his life—at Saint-Leonard on the Route du Havre, only 25 miles from the port where the rest of his battalion were to be evacuated that evening.

Records show that he was buried beside the road to Le Havre with Thomas Kelly of the Royal Army Service Corps, probably his driver (in 1942, his body was transferred to the Fécamp Communal Cemetery by the local French authorities). Ships took his surviving comrades to Cherbourg, from where half of them were evacuated, arriving at Poole in Dorset on June 17. The remainder traveled inland and sailed to England from Brest on the SS *Yorktown*, arriving in Portsmouth two days later.

The purpose of the Border Regiment D Company's sacrifice had been to buy enough time for General Fortune and the 51st Highland to reach a point on the coast where they could be evacuated. Fortune was planning to head for Le Havre, following the best intelligence available at the time. Aware of the speed at which the German Army was moving, Fortune collected the remaining units of A Brigade, plus battalions of the Black Watch, Argyll and Sutherlands, and Royal Scots Fusiliers and sent them on ahead to secure his line of retreat to the port. This group became known as "Ark Force." It was

this action that saved the Border Regiment.

Unfortunately, it was not just the German army that threatened Fortune's chances of evacuation. Ever since withdrawing from the Somme against Weygand's instructions to hold the line and then making a tactical retreat from the Bresle, his actions were criticized by the French high command, one of whom nicknamed him "General Misfortune."

He was, however, fully supported by Lt. Gen. James Marshall-Cornwall, the liaison officer between the French Tenth Army and the War Office, who bluntly told Weygand that the 51st deserved to be relieved after so many weeks of conflict. If they wanted a British presence on the front line, they should be replaced by two fresh divisions.

Weygand's actions were becoming increasingly erratic. At one point, he threatened to request an armistice to end the war if German troops managed to cross the River Seine, which would put them in striking distance of Paris—in other words, if Britain did not make an even bigger commitment to a conflict that was becoming more one-sided by the day.

Marshall-Cornwall's persistence eventually paid off, and Fortune was allowed to withdraw—but to Rouen and to more combat, rather than to the coast for evacuation. Before a move could be made, the 7th Panzer Division, led by Erwin Rommel, who had been at the front of the Blitzkrieg since it started, had sped to within striking distance of Rouen. Weygand then proposed that they shift their axis further north to the town of Caudebec.

Fortune's one ally was Admiral William Melbourne James of the Royal Navy, who surveyed the Channel in a motor boat on June 10 and, upon seeing the Germans advancing on Le Havre, suggested the small town of St Valery-en-Caux would be a safer evacuation point and began to prepare a flotilla of ships.

The War Office, still fearful of France capitulating, forbade James from carrying out an evacuation and proposed that Fortune should withdraw to the Seine. One port that he was never allowed to consider was Dieppe, which was much closer than Le Havre. Although it had sustained some damage, on June 9 the British Naval Liaison Officer in Paris sent a signal to the admiralty in London to say it was sufficiently clear for an evacuation. If the British government had been serious about getting Fortune and his men back to England, Dieppe would have been the best option.

ABOVE: German armor moves toward St Valery-en-Caux to tighten the net around retreating British troops. OPPOSITE: Already seasoned warriors, men of the 51HD pass through a village near Abbeville to hold the line further south.

The situation was becoming farcical and causing irreversible delays at a time when the pace of the 51st Highland Division was being dictated by French horse-drawn transport and Rommel's panzers were in overdrive.

The irony for Fortune was that he had only just sent Ark Force off to secure the line of retreat to Le Havre so that the 51st Highland would have a better chance of escape. Very soon, they would be lining up for evacuation while he was holding back the might of the panzers thanks to last-minute changes and the lack of agreement between the French and British leaders.

His division set off for St. Valery late on June 10, leaving behind everything but essential items in order to speed up their journey. Even the artillery was rationed to 100 rounds per gun. Another night drive along narrow lanes added further tension, but they arrived at St. Valery the following morning.

A small coastal town with a fishing harbor surrounded by quaint, colorful houses, St. Valery would have been a pleasant sojourn for troops on leave, but there was no time for sightseeing or relaxing. On arrival, Fortune set his infantry battalion commanders to work, hastily creating a box-shaped defense around the town but having no time to actually dig in defenses to protect themselves.

They would hold these positions during the day and then descend to the port and beach as soon as it got dark, hoping that Admiral James would arrive with his flotilla to rescue them. All the division's motor vehicles were then put out of action, except for the Bren gun carriers, which could still be useful if they had to fight a rear-guard action.

Unfortunately, by the end of the morning, their party had been unceremoniously gatecrashed. Rommel's panzers arrived at a spot to the west of St. Valery and seized the high ground, which allowed his gunners a perfect view of the town.

To make matters worse, Rommel had brought the Luftwaffe with him. Artillery

shells and bombs rained down on the town and its harbor, reducing much of it to rubble and setting it alight within minutes. Next, the panzers arrived, but Fortune's men were ready and beat off the attack.

The tanks were followed by infantry, who were given the same treatment by the Highlanders. Some penetrated further into St. Valery and were driven out by house-to-house, hand-to-hand fighting with a ferocity that was tearing this sleepy seaside town apart. The Scots were fighting for their lives; why waste a valuable bullet when a bayonet would suffice? This was a full division, with drivers and cooks as well as trained infantrymen who would use every weapon at their disposal to survive.

Despite the Highlanders' best efforts, the Germans continued to advance and, late in the afternoon of June 11, they made a full-blown attack on the defenses, employing 400 tanks and 1,000 field guns as well as the Stuka dive-bombers of the Luftwaffe.

A thousand prisoners were taken, and by 7:00 PM that evening Fortune had received Rommel's surrender ultimatum. Following Fortune's refusal, another ferocious attack was launched on the town, which continued all night.

Having fired over 2,500 shells, the Germans launched another tank assault to try and penetrate the defenses. Once darkness fell, and with the infantry still holding the box around the town, the remaining Highlanders moved down to the beaches and harbor as planned in the hope that the Royal Navy would be waiting.

Admiral James was indeed offshore, with 207 vessels of various sizes. During the day they had been fired upon by the German guns and had to withdraw till they were out of range, intending to return after nightfall, but with the night came dense fog. Tragically, since only 11 ships had radios and the others could only communicate by signal lamps, there was no way that an evacuation could be organized safely.

At 3:00 AM on June 12, Fortune ordered his men back to the town, hoping to launch an attack at first light that would hold the Germans back till they could make their escape the following night. When they took stock of the weapons and ammunition available, however, it was clear that they would have very little chance of success, especially since they had neutralized a number of their own guns the day before so they would be of no use to the enemy.

They were incapable of holding back the Germans, who eventually occupied the cliff-top area. In an attempt to escape and get back to the beach, many soldiers tried to climb

Bundesarchiv Bild 101I-126-0338-17A; Photo: Heinz Boesig

ABOVE: "For you the war is over" Highland troops of the 51st Division line up to accept their fate as prisoners of war. OPPOSITE: The bay at St Valery-en-Caux: Rommel's tanks complete the encirclement. In the background are the cliffs down which troops tried to escape using rifle slings as ropes. Many didn't make it.

down the cliffs using rifle slings tied together. A number fell to their deaths in the process.

At 8:15 on the morning of June 12, a white flag was seen flying just 100 meters from Fortune's headquarters in the town. He immediately asked for it to be taken down but discovered that the French had raised it in order to surrender.

Fortune issued orders to fight on, but two hours later, in order to avoid the mass slaughter of his men, he decided that there was no option but to finally surrender to Rommel, whose 7th Panzer Division now occupied the town. Eleven thousand Highlanders were taken prisoner; 1,000 men had been killed in the action.

A number of Highlanders did manage to escape, however. As part of Operation Cycle, which was the plan that had favored Le Havre as the main port of evacuation, a series of fishing ports and seaside towns on the south coast of England, including communities at Eastbourne, Newhaven, and other towns, rallied together, as had happened at Dunkirk, and produced another flotilla that included more "Small Ships," piloted by civilians ready to risk their lives to bring the troops home.

This "Haven Blue Flotilla," which included nine motor yachts and three fishing boats towed by a coastal collier, sailed from Newhaven and approached St. Valery en Caux during the afternoon of June 11, but without encountering Admiral James' vessels. They returned home empty and came back to St. Valery after dark, witnessing a town both *on* fire and *under* fire, and sailed four miles along the coast to the smaller port of Veules les Roses at 1:00 AM on the morning of June 12. They were joined by other, larger ships, including the *Goldfinch*, commanded by Lieutenant Thompson of the Royal Navy. By 2:30 AM, the lifeboats from the *Goldfinch* were collecting the first lucky survivors off the beach.

The defensive perimeter established around St. Valery extended as far as Veules les Roses, with the Seaforth Highlanders holding the line down to the beach. There were also others who had moved out of the town along the coastline while it was under heavy shell and machine-gun fire.

One of them was Captain Derek Lang, who later described his two-hour, exhausting hike along the beach to Veules, where he found two vessels, one French and one English, loaded with men. They were so overcrowded that they had to wait for the tide to float them off. He and his men returned to the shore and tried to fend off with a pair of Lewis guns the German tanks that were closing in on the scene. The tanks won the contest, sinking the ships and wounding Lang, who was subsequently captured.

Off St. Valery, further to their west, Admiral James had been praying for the fog to lift, while General Fortune was losing faith and bringing his dispirited troops back off the beach to the town. The fog and rain actually assisted the men at Veules les Roses because the bad weather was hindering Rommel's troops. They were aware of activity on the beach but had nothing visible to aim at during the night. However, at 8:30 AM an artillery bombardment opened up from both sides of the bay. Some of the small ships had ex-World War I Lewis Guns fixed to their decks, but they were little more than psychological support against the artillery.

There were French troops now on the beach, and also a French ship, the *Cerons*, which sailed close enough to the shore for large numbers to clamber aboard. But as the tide receded, tragedy struck. The additional weight of its passengers caused the ship to become stuck fast on a sandbank, making it a sitting duck for the German gunners. Those troops who did not become victims of the first salvoes jumped back into the water and waded ashore to certain captivity before the ship was destroyed.

A total of 3,200 men from the 51st Highland Division were rescued from the beach of Veules les Roses on the morning of June 12, along with 300 French troops, but the remainder suffered the same fate as their comrades at St. Valery. The arrival of good weather, daylight, a low tide and further incursions by the Germans meant that nothing could approach the beach without being blown to bits.

Unknown to Fortune at the time, over 11,000 troops from Ark Force and Le Havre itself were evacuated from the port over the period June 10-13. He had been instrumental in getting them there ahead of his division to pave the way but had been unable to follow.

There were a handful of men who even-

tually found their way back to Britain using the sort of initiative that would make them heroes in *Boys' Own* comics. Captain Derek Lang was one of them. After being incarcerated in a POW camp in Belgium, he escaped and found his way to Corsica and traveled from there to Beirut before finally rejoining the British Army.

In June 1944, he joined the liberating armies as a lieutenant colonel of the 5th Cameron Highlanders. As St. Valery en Caux was about to be liberated at the start of September, Field Marshal Bernard L. Montgomery proposed that the 51st Highland Division should be the troops to take charge of the operation, and Lang found himself back where he was captured.

Imperial War Museum

His final visit, as retired General Sir Derek Lang, was in 2000 at the age of 86, when he was a guest of honor at the 60th anniversary celebrations. His name lives on through the footpath up the cliffs, *Sentier Derek Lang*, which was the route up which he was marched as a German prisoner.

Operation Aerial was launched on June 15 to evacuate remaining Allied forces and some civilians from ports in western France that were still free from German occupation. Led by the Royal Navy and supported by the RAF, it continued till June 25, when France signed the armistice with Germany. The main ports involved were Brest, Saint Nazaire, Nantes, St. Malo, and Cherbourg.

Troops from the 52nd Lowland and the First Armoured Divisions embarked from Cherbourg as part of Aerial from June 15-17. Following them came remnants of smaller units, plus numbers of civilians and soldiers from the Polish army, who became a significant "army in exile" that trained in Britain before returning to fight overseas. Some Czech and Belgian soldiers also managed to escape in this way. Overall, Operation Aerial accounted for the evacuation of over 190,000 Allied service personnel and civilians.

The operation did not proceed without tragedy, however. On June 17 the *Lancastria*, awaiting departure with more than 6,000 passengers on board, became a casualty of German bombing and sank with the loss of over 3,500 lives. This event, like the loss of the 51st Division, was not publicized at the time because of its possible effect on public morale.

For most of the Scots, the outcome of their surrender was five years of captivity and an uncertain future when they arrived home. In 1940 the newspapers had been full of the Dunkirk rescue, but the story of the capture of the 51st Highland would do nothing for the morale of the nation, so it had been kept quiet.

When they arrived home in 1945, they did not take their place as conquering heroes like many of their comrades, yet the value of their contributions to the war effort during the short time they were in action was as praiseworthy as that of any returning soldier.

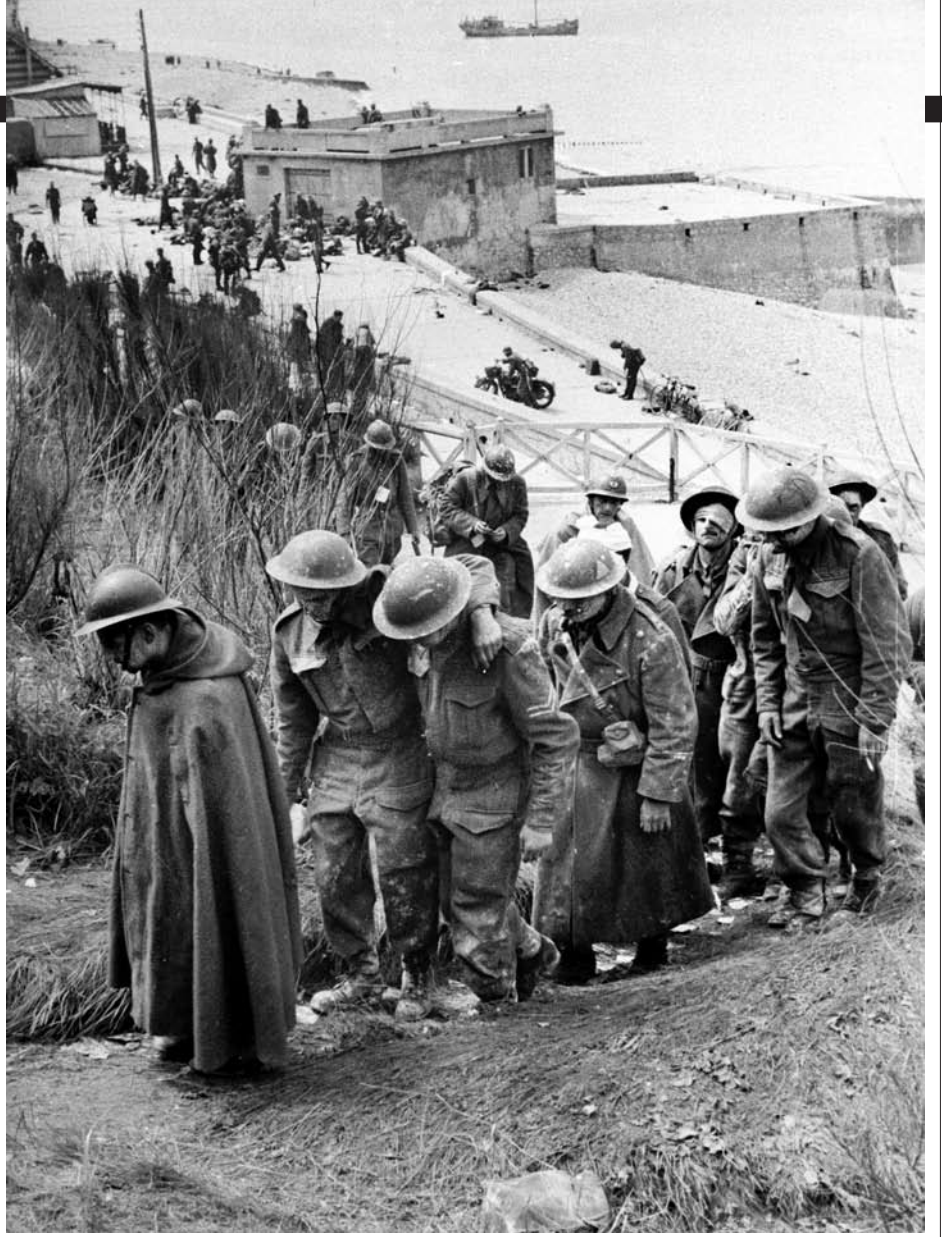
In seeking to analyze what went wrong after Dunkirk, it is easy to apportion blame. Churchill saw the French as responsible because of their defeatist attitude, while some of the French were quick to point the finger at "Perfidious Albion," the title that had been attached to Britain on several occasions in history when their relationship had run aground.

The military situation had been changing so rapidly from day to day, however, that there had been little time to develop a workable plan, and much had depended on luck. Dunkirk went very well. Churchill was lucky, and the fact that it coincided with his arrival as prime minister meant that the British public felt that they now had a savior.

However, his persistence in keeping the 51st Highland in the front line as a gesture to prevent the French from surrendering was only ever going to result in them being sacrificed for short-term political gain. The fact that they lasted as long as they did and never gave up till they faced annihilation is testimony to their caliber. They should have been given the credit they deserved rather than the ignominy that comes when the leadership has made a catastrophic mistake and seeks to hide the evidence.

It is only in recent years, as historians have reviewed the information, collected the accounts of survivors, and rewritten the story, that the heroism of the 51st Highland has been recognized. It should be remembered that without the force of their aggression at Abbeville during the period of the Dunkirk evacuation, Hitler would have surely felt he could have committed more divisions to destroying those troops trying to escape.

Furthermore, the impression the Highlanders made on de Gaulle convinced him that if other British troops could menace the enemy in the same way, there was hope that together they could eventually overcome their invaders.



Bundesarchiv Bild 101I-126-0339-19A

ABOVE: Their heads bowed, British and French prisoners are led up the track from the beach at Veules-les-Roses. The British soldier to the right of head-bandaged Colin Hunter is Captain Derek Lang who eventually escaped back to England. In 2000, aged 86, as General Sir Derek Lang, he revisited the spot as part of the 60th anniversary celebrations, and the path is now Le Sentier (footpath) Derek Lang. OPPOSITE: The port of St. Valery after the surrender. Erwin Rommel at the start of his distinguished war career and Major-General Fortune at the end of his.

But they were not the only heroes. The support received from the units in A Brigade, for example, especially D Company of The Border Regiment who held out for seven days at Incheville, has must be recognized. The only real attempt to take on Hitler's army proactively was at Abbeville, and when German might prevailed here, the other actions were essentially defensive, albeit heroically defensive. But the game was up for France and the BEF.

To continue fighting the war for France, de Gaulle had to escape to England, and the remaining British troops had to do the same, lick their wounds, and acknowledge that they had totally underestimated the capability of the German war machine.

Fortunately, the English Channel and the RAF gave them the breathing space they needed and, together with the distractions of the Russian front and elsewhere, ensured that they did not suffer the same fate as France.

As well as the historical accounts, the story of the Highlanders has been commemorated in other ways. The Scottish singer songwriter Davey Steele wrote a song for The Battlefield Band entitled `The Beaches of St. Valery`, which contains some powerful and perceptive lyrics.

Davy Steele's uncle and father served with the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders who were at the heart of most of the action, especially the Battle of Abbeville.

In 2012 a formal twinning relationship was established between Veules les Roses and Alfriston, just inland of Newhaven on the English south coast, where the flotilla set sail to rescue survivors on the morning of June 12. There are now regular annual events involving local schoolchildren and visits from uniformed servicemen to commemorate and remember the actions of the men of the 51st Highland Division.

A memorial now stands on the clifftops, together with a gun retrieved from the French ship *Cerons,* which ran aground during the rescue. As recently as 2018, with the support of 101-year-old Dame Vera Lynn, a local author, Dr. June Goodfield, was able to collect personal recollections from local families to write *Glory from Defeat: Our Second Dunkirk* as a tribute to the Newhaven flotilla and the men they rescued, bringing a hitherto little known and poignant epic to the notice of Britain's national media.

In June 2013, Fred Scholes' niece and her husband tracked down his grave in the communal cemetery at Fécamp, the first family members from their home in Manchester to ever visit and pay their respects. As they laid a wreath with the words "From the Family that you never met," they disturbed a butterfly, which took to the air and lingered as if to show its appreciation, returning to settle on their floral gift.

British servicemen, like Fred, who became casualties in the actions following the Dunkirk evacuation lie in cemeteries dotted across northern France. They were interred by the French after their comrades had escaped across the Channel as an act of brotherhood. Their graves were subsequently recognized by the British authorities and allocated a special plot and headstone by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. □

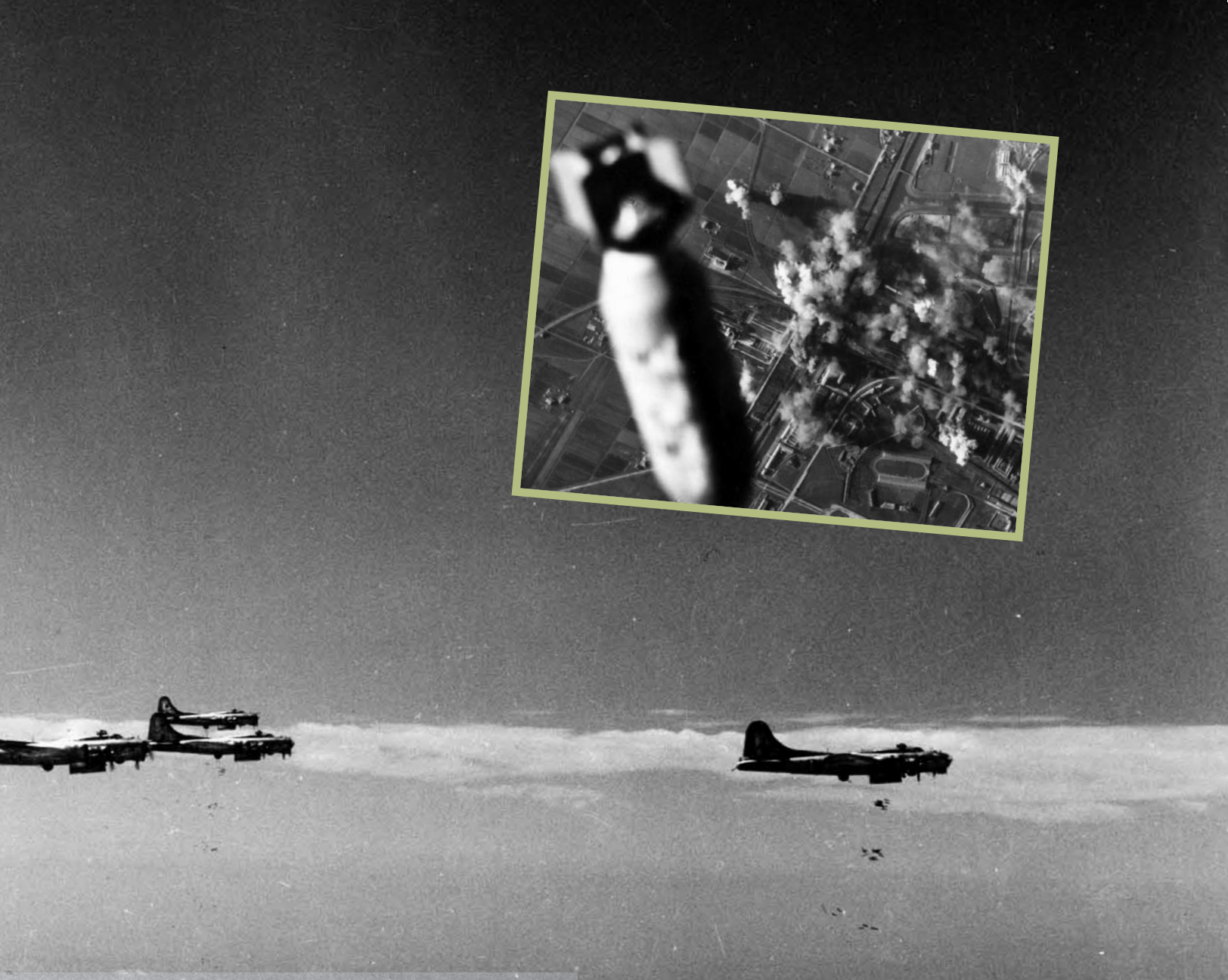
BY ALLYN VANNOY

From Pilot to

Six B-17G's of the 416th Bombardment Squadron of the 99th Bomb Group, 15th Air Force, led by Captain B.E. Shaw, departed for Regensburg, Germany, on February 22, 1944. According to the 416th's war diary, "Three aircraft returned early and three went over the target. No bombs were dropped due to bad weather over the target. The formation was attacked by approximately 10 enemy aircraft. One of our aircraft, #439 piloted by Lt. McGee, was hit and exploded over Augsburg, Germany. #522 piloted by Lt. Perry is missing."

In the summer of 1941, George F. Perry returned home to St. Helens, Oregon, from his third year at Oregon State College's School of Engineering. He had already been accepted into the Army Air Corps for pilot training as a flying cadet. He was inducted in Portland on his 22nd birthday, September 18, 1941.

Perry was born in 1919, in St. Helens. His father was a police officer who was killed in the line of duty in November 1924. George and his brother Robert were then raised by their widowed mother.



POW

His B-17 bomber crippled, and knowing he was running out of time, Lieutenant George F. Perry's only thought was how to get his crew safely back to their base in Italy.

Perry's first roommate at Oregon State, was Andy Andrews, later to be his roommate again while at Stalag Luft 1.

Immediately upon induction, Perry and a dozen others boarded a train for California; Perry had never been further than 60 miles from home before. They arrived in Visalia, California, then were bussed to nearby Sequoia Field. The base was still a work-in-progress. Ten weeks of training—half of each day in the classroom and half on the flight line, with 90 minutes in the air.

Perry recalled that with the coming of Sunday, December 7, and the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Japanese Americans living near Visalia and Lemoore in the San Joaquin

ABOVE: B-17G bombers release their ordnance over German-occupied Czechslovakia late in the war. 1st. Lt. George Perry, a pilot assigned to the 416th Bomb Squadron, 99th Bomb Group, 5th Bomb Wing, 15th U.S. Army Air Force, was shot down over Yugoslavia and taken prisoner on February 22, 1944. INSET: Explosions erupt in an Italian rail yard as another 500-lb. bomb drops toward its target.

Both: National Archives

Valley became more visible, and, although good, patriotic citizens, a paranoia developed, fostered by the federal government and the press.

Upon completion of training at Visalia, Perry was sent just a few miles west to Lemoore, where a new air base was being established and where he received instruction in a Basic Trainer, the BT-15. Next was Advanced Training at Mather Field, Sacramento.

Perry was then assigned to fly the AT-9, a twin-engine aircraft intended to prepare pilots to fly the Douglas B-26 bomber (later the A-26 Invader). While at Mather Field, Perry frequently encountered the movie star Jimmy Stewart, who was also taking flight training. On April 24, 1942, Perry graduated with Pilot Class #42D and was commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant.

Perry was surprised when his first assignment was as an instructor in basic training of new cadets back at Lemoore. He responded by requesting a reassignment due to his inability to fly the BT-15 well from the back seat, and also because he had just completed multi-engine training. His request was granted, and he was assigned to Navigation School at Mather.

Next, Perry was sent to Hobbs, New Mexico, for four-engine training, then to Pyote, Texas, as a pilot, to pick up a crew. The first assigned to the crew was Bernard C. Kyrouac, co-pilot. Called "BC" or "Bernie," he stood six-foot-two and weighed about 200 pounds; he had recently graduated from advanced training. Bernie and Perry hit it off from their first meeting; Bernie's father was the Chief of Police in Harvey, Illinois.

Next was diminutive Joseph M. Joffrion, bombardier, a Louisiana Cajun, just five-foot-four and 110 pounds. He had a great sense of humor and was skilled in his job.

Then there was Armando Ruiz, from El Paso, Texas. He was the flight engineer and top-turret gunner. During flight he stood behind and between the pilot and co-pilot, monitoring the instruments and listening to the engines when not manning the top turret's twin .50-caliber machine guns.

The individual assigned as radio operator, however, did not exude confidence as Perry assessed him. He seemed to know little about his equipment or how to use it. As other crews were forming up at the same time, Perry overheard another pilot complaining about his radio operator. The other pilot was a tall, blue-eyed individual who Perry thought looked and sounded like he should have been in the Luftwaffe, and his complaint about his radio operator, Hyman Koffler, was that he was a Jew. They agreed to the trade, Perry acquiring a competent operator and a life-long friend.

Next, Dudley R. Segars and Ernest Hettinger were assigned as waist gunners. Donald (Don) Gregory, at five-foot-eight, joined the crew as the ball-turret gunner.

The crew was shipped to Dyersburg, Tennessee, for further training. There they were joined by their navigator, Howard L. Bauman, and their tail-gunner. However, the gunner was reassigned and replaced by Eddie P. Goldstein of the Bronx. This completed their crew of ten.

They finally arrived near Tunis during the last week of October 1943. Their air base was at Dudna, about 13 miles southwest of the city, where they were housed in a small tent village beside a desert runway, spending the first week making orientation flights.

They were assigned to the 416th Bombardment Squadron of the 99th Bomb Group, which also included the 346th, 347th, and 348th Squadrons. The 99th was part of the 5th Bomb Wing.

The crew's first mission came at the end of the first week with the 416th. The 99th was assigned with striking the railroad marshaling yards at Bolzano, Italy, in the Alps. Flight time was five-and-a-half to six hours; 300 bombers were dispatched. Since this

National Archives

Evergreen Aviation and Space Museum, McMinnville, Oregon

ABOVE: George Perry's crew included, front row: George Perry; Howard Baumann; Bernard Kyrouac; Joseph Joffrion. Standing: Armando Ruiz; Dudley Segars; Ernest Hettinger; Don Gregory; Hyman Koffler; (Ed Goldstein, absent.) OPPOSITE: A B-17 from an unidentified squadron raises a cloud of dust as it prepares to take off from an airfield in North Africa on a bomb run over Italy, 1943. Lt. Perry and his crew arrived in North Africa in October 1943.

was the crew's first mission, a combat-experienced pilot was assigned to the crew, Perry taking the co-pilot's seat, as Bernie flew in another plane.

Taking off in the early morning hours of October 30, the flight leader kept the bombers well off the west coast of Italy in order to avoid anti-aircraft fire. As they climbed through 10,000 feet, the crew donned oxygen masks and the air temperature fell. Segars and Hettinger were the most exposed in their open waist windows; however, the others also felt the bite of the frigid air. They reached 24,000 feet, bombing altitude, about 30 minutes before arriving at the IP (Initial Point), from where they would start the bombing run.

Perry recalled, "We entered a layer of air just right for the formation of contrails. Each of the 300 planes put out four white streams, all of which melted together to form one huge, white, banner. It wouldn't be hard for the anti-aircraft gunners to spot us even though we were five miles above their heads.

"Since each squadron in succession flew behind and below the preceding squadron, no one had to fly in the cloud, so there was a clear view of the target. Also clear was our first look at the explosions of anti-aircraft shells from the 88mm guns on the ground.

"Fortunately, for the most part, they were exploding below our flight path, with only a few at our altitude. As each squadron passed over the target in turn, we would drop our bombs in unison to effect a strike pattern that was concentrated on the target and large enough to cover considerable territory. This was the reason for flying in close formation."

Coming off the target after shedding their bomb load, they picked up an extra 15-20 miles per hour—helpful in getting out of range of the flak guns.

Nine days later, Perry and his crew flew their second mission, this time to strike a ball-bearing plant at Turin, Italy. During the remainder of November they flew three more missions—striking the Bolzano marshaling yards a second time, military targets at Foggia, and an ammunition depot at Fiano Romano.

On November 2, 1943, the four B-17 groups of the 5th Wing, as well as two B-24 groups of the Ninth Air Force, were combined with two fighter groups to form the Fifteenth Air Force.

With the Allied ground advance in Italy, it was decided to relocate the 5th Wing in December of 1943, in order to bring more targets within reach. Each group of the Wing was assigned a base on the Foggia plains, southwest of the spur on the east coast of the Italian boot—the 99th going to Tortorella.

Perry: "Foggia in December was a wet, cold, inhospitable place. I was not feeling well, and my skin was turning yellow. Bernie, Joe, Howard, and I hired some Italian laborers to dig a tent-size hole about four feet deep over which we pitched our tent.

"Lined with slate and tile … heated by a contraption that burned aviation gasoline, we were quite comfortable … except for my extreme gastric distress which was diagnosed as yellow jaundice precipitated by the Atabrine tablets we had been taking to ward off malaria. I was sidelined for a couple of weeks while the crew continued to fly as fill-ins for other crews."

Royal Air Force units shared the field, flying night missions. Perry said, "Their missions were far more dangerous than ours for several reasons … the first of which was their aircraft. I was amazed and horrified when I climbed into one of their [Vickers] Wellington bombers, which we called 'Whimpies' after a Popeye [cartoon] character. It was literally of match-stick construction covered with fabric. It could carry a blockbuster 2000-pound bomb if the bomb bay doors were left off.

"One night we were awakened about one o'clock by a monstrous explosion on the flight line. It was reported that a Whimpy had returned with a bomb hung up and tried to land gently. Many of our planes were put out of commission for the

National Archives

next few days.… Our planes were unable to fly for a while anyway because of the huge hole blown in our runway.

"Another evening just after supper we heard the Whimpies taking off and one flew over our tent area…. We were looking up as one passed overhead, and we noticed a small flame on one wing. The fabric took no time to burn away…. The plane came down about a football field away from our tent. Our 1st Sergeant, Peter B. Hurey, was closest to the crash scene and, seeing the tail turret gunner was still alive, made a dash to extricate him…. He was almost to the plane when a 500-pound bomb exploded. He and all crew members of the plane perished."

Perry's next 11 missions with the 99th, from December 1943 to early February 1944, included strikes on marshaling yards at Innsbruck, Austria (December 19); Udine, Italy (December 20); and Prato, Italy (January 17); aircraft factories at Maribor, Yugoslavia (January 7) and Reggio Emilia, Italy (January 8); the submarine base at Pola Harbor, Italy (January 9); enemy troop concentrations and headquarters at Sofia, Bulgaria (January 4); Cassino Monastery (February 15); the Anzio area (February 17); factories at Sofia (February 10); and the airdrome at Compiano, Italy (February 15). Perry considered the Cassino and Anzio missions "milk-runs," since no enemy aircraft were encountered.

He also felt that the unsung heroes of the operations were the ground crews, who worked day and night to keep the planes flying.

On the morning of February 22, crews were awakened at 4:30 AM. After gathering their flight gear and having breakfast, they attended flight briefings. The Fifteenth Air Force was to launch approximately 300 aircraft for the day's mission, part of Operation Argument—a planned series of coordinated attacks by the Fifteenth and the Britain-based Eighth Air Forces, supported by RAF night raids, targeting the German aircraft industry. It was all part of what became known as "Big Week" by the bomber crews, which began on February 20, 1944. The 416th Squadron was to put up six B-17s, the other three squadrons at least six each, as well.

The 99th's briefing officer filled the crews in on the opposition they could expect to encounter. Flak was anticipated to be heavy and accurate, with enemy fighters providing maximum opposition.

Perry's crew for the mission included Lieutenant Bigley, navigator, and Lieutenant Andrezjewski, bombardier—Joe Joffrion had been reassigned to the 416th's squadron leader Captain Burnham E. Shaw's aircraft. Bigley had just arrived with a replacement crew and not yet flown a mission, while Andrezjewski had been on just three missions.

The day's mission was to be carried out at maximum range to strike the Messerschmitt assembly plants and marshaling yards at Regensburg, Germany. The Eighth Air Force, flying from England, was to bomb the same area.

Perry's aircraft that day was Number 42-31522, named "Spoofer," a B-17G with a chin-gun turret; all of Perry's previous missions had been in older "F" models. The chin turret had been added when it was found that German fighter pilots preferred to attack head on, allowing them to target the cockpit of the bomber with minimum time of exposure.

While Bigley and Andrezjewski had both been trained to use the chin turret—the bombardier usually operated it while the navigator worked the .50s on either side of the nose (the cheek guns)—on this mission, the chin turret would freeze up during the heat of battle.

While the lead squadrons started their engines, Perry waited another 10 minutes, since his aircraft was in the last squadron to take off—"Tail-End Charlie"—last in the formation of some 300 planes. Therefore, it would be the last over the target—the most vulnerable and least-desirable position in the formation.

With 300 B-17s in the air trying to form-up, the 416th squadron leader, Captain Shaw, was challenged to organize his formation. Visibility was good at 4,000 feet with a few clouds. Shaw found himself heading for one of the clouds but was able to skirt it. He cleared the cloud with his lead element—his and two other B-17s, which included Perry's "Spoofer."

Both: National Archives

ABOVE: Another B-17 from the 99th Bomb Group releases its 500-lb. bombs high above a target. A B-17G could carry 8,000 lbs. of bombs on short missions, 4,000 lbs. on long ones. TOP: A B-17G of the 99th Bomb Group flies over the Alps on its way to hit targets in southern Europe. Perry's crew struck railroad marshaling yards in the Italian Alps on their first mission. OPPOSITE: Perry felt that the unsung heroes of air operations were the ground crews, who worked day and night, frequently in harsh conditions, to keep the planes flying.

But the second element, behind and below, were unable to avoid the cloud. Taking evasive action to avoid colliding within the cloud, these three planes became separated from the formation and returned to base. The rest of the Fifteenth Air Force was able to complete its formation over the Adriatic Sea, climbing as it headed north. At an airspeed of 135 mph, climbing 150 feet a minute, they would reach the northern end of the Adriatic in about two hours at an altitude of 20,000 feet.

It was extremely cold and uncomfortable in an unpressurized B-17 at high altitude. Some crewmen had electrically heated suits, but not the pilot or co-pilot. The waist gunners were standing before three-by-five-foot openings, and when the temperature in the cockpit fell to 52 degrees below zero, the windchill for Segars and Hettinger, in the open air, could result in frostbite in minutes for any exposed flesh. Don Gregory, in the ball turret, could barely move, while Eddie Goldstein, in the tail, was squatting on a bicycle seat with no room to maneuver.

As the bombers approached land at the northern end of the Adriatic, a few puffs of black smoke appeared. Passing over San Dona, they were greeted by fire from 88mm anti-aircraft guns. Still climbing, crews took a moment to be dazzled by the splendor of the Italian-Austrian Alps in winter. Reaching 22,000 feet, bombing altitude, they leveled off. The target was just an hour away, about 20 miles northeast of Regensburg.

Perry recalled, "As we approached the initial point from the south, we could see several formations making the bomb run and a cloud of black smoke at our altitude over the target. The cloud resulted from the heavy and accurate anti-aircraft fire directed at planes over the target."

The aircraft intercom came alive with reports from tail gunner Goldstein that bandits (enemy fighters) were approaching from below.

Gregory, in the ball turret, confirmed, "Lots of 'em."

Bigley, in the nose: "Fighters at 12 o'clock high."

Perry said, "I was busy holding formation in our turn at the IP and noted that it seemed Shaw had dropped back a bit more at the rear of the pack; close formation was very important now for a bombing pattern and protection. My right wing tip needed to be even with Shaw's left wing tip and back just far enough to line up with his tail."

Reports of enemy fighters were coming in from everywhere, but for some reason they had not spotted the three bombers bringing up the rear of the formation. Suddenly, the wing of a B-17 in the formation ahead of Perry's seemed to explode and drop off while the plane started a flat spin.

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ABOVE: A B-17 from the 15th Air Force is hit and catches fire during a raid on oil refineries near Budepest, Hungary. OPPOSITE: An anti-aircraft shell bursts between two B-17Gs in formation as they prepare to release their bombs. When on their final approach to the target, the B-17s had to fly straight and level, increasing the danger from flak. Perry saw another B-17 take a direct hit in the plane's bomb bay and disappear over Regensburg.

Bombardier Joe Joffrion announced, "Bomb Bay doors open."

Perry: "We would drop our bombs at the same time as Joe Joffrion triggered those in Shaw's lead plane. The flak got thicker. The appearance of a flak burst was first a small, intense, red ball of flame followed by thick black smoke that resembled the unfolding of a kernel of black popcorn. The 88mm guns on the ground were in batteries of four and, with the help of overhead observers, were timing their fuses very accurately.

"We counted a string of fiery, black bursts ahead and to our right, another not quite as far ahead and 100 feet left and below. One, two, three, four … too close. There was one out ahead and 50 feet below us, two was closer, three was closer yet, and the fourth we did not see.

"We did feel number four lift the plane and saw several blossoms out on the wings as shrapnel came up through, leaving the kind of mark a .22-caliber bullet would make passing through a tin can. As the same time, I noticed a jagged piece of metal, roughly the size and shape of my little finger, lodged in the nacelle of number two engine just outside my window."

Though hit, "Spoofer" continued to operate normally.

The three aircraft did not release their bomb loads, as the target area was obscured by either fog or smoke. Noting that the bomb bay doors were closed on the lead plane, Perry's plane did the same. They flew out of the flak as the formation turned east toward the alternate target, but then the lead planes circled back towards the original IP.

Perry: "Shaw closed up a bit as we turned on the IP for the second time. [There was] a horrendous explosion ahead and to our right as a B-17 took a direct hit in the bomb bay and 10 500-pound bombs exploded. The plane disappeared and several other planes near it went down in flames. Bomb bay doors were opened but, again, the target was [still] obscured, so there was no drop, and the doors were closed [again]. The flak repeated, heavy and accurately. Individual planes dropped out of formation and headed for the ground directly, some in flames, others were crippled."

In a post-mission report by Maj. Gen. Nathan Twining, American Bomber Command, Italy: "Over Regensburg in February 1944, we suffered the greatest losses ever inflicted on an American Air Force…. From the Alps to Regensburg and back, the bombers battled 300 German fighters. We lost 52 bombers in 100 minutes; 390 American airmen were lost; 190 bailed out onto German soil."

Perry's crew next witnessed a series of green and red colored airbursts—a signal to the enemy fighters that they could take on the bombers. "And come they did," he said, "12 o'clock high, six o'clock low; everywhere."

The fighters flew ahead and above the bombers. At 12 o'clock high they turned to dive head-on through the bomber formations. There were Bf 109s and F 190s, and even twin-engine Me 210s. Ruiz, standing in the top turret directly behind and above the pilots, exchanged fire with them.

Kyrouac cried out, "They got McGee!"

Perry remembered, "I saw the left wing of McGee's plane burning fiercely…. The wing quickly melted away to the nacelle of the number one engine. The flames died out, but the plane could not fly on half a wing; he spiraled down to the right. Our number one engine was hit and lost power, but the propeller did not feather to reduce the drag. The number two engine was hit and lost power. This time the propeller did feather, and we dropped back rapidly. The formation turned east toward the alternate target, but we

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turned south to get out of the action.

"As we turned, I told the crew to prepare to bail out. We took another raking from a fighter plane that was coming in head-on until we turned. Now he was coming in from the left side; when Segars reached for his parachute, he found it was shredded by shells from his ammo feed belt, which had been hit by a German round.

"Other rounds came through the radio room, and Hy Koffler took several fragments in various parts of his body; one in his forehead, which caused considerable bleeding but did put him out of action."

With Segars' chute destroyed, Perry told the crew and Segars that they should stay with the plane, but they were free to jump if they wished. They all decided to stay. They next had to lighten the aircraft, tossing out the guns, ammunition, anything not essential to keep the plane in the air. Andrezjewski salvoed the bombload.

They found themselves approaching the Alps at a much lower altitude than when they had crossed earlier.

After successfully crossing the Alps, fuel became an issue. There was plenty in the left wing with the two dead engines, but the live engines had just about consumed their share of fuel. Perry directed Ruiz, the flight engineer, to transfer fuel from the left to right wing, but the damaged inflicted by enemy fighters was too extensive, preventing the transfer. Given this, it was obvious that they would not be able to return to Foggia.

When they were able to reach the Adriatic, the crew faced a choice. Turning east, they could hope to crash-land in Yugoslavia, where partisans were known to aid Allied crews. Or, turning west and landing in German-occupied Italy, they could expect to spend the rest of the war as POWs. Kyrouac and Perry discussed their choices and decided east and Yugoslavia was their best option.

After sighting land on the horizon ahead of them, they determined that their altitude would not permit them to reach land, so the crew was ordered to prepare to ditch.

Perry: "Our objective was to fly as close to land as possible and set the plane down in the water. There were several unknown factors in this operation. First, we did not realize we were approaching the entrance to the busy harbor of Pola, Italy (present day Pula, Croatia), a facility guarded by German guns because of their submarine base there.

"The crew, except for Bernie [co-pilot Kyrouac] and me, were in the radio room, ready for ditching; we approached the water at a reduced speed, cut the two engines that so faithfully had kept us in the air for the last six hours, and glided in for a water landing. We held the plane up till the last possible moment so we wouldn't stall too high above the water.

"We were below flying speed, and the belly of the plane made contact with the water. A moment later we were decelerating very rapidly. The plane seemed to bob completely under water and returned to the surface to float like a rubber duck."

Wounded radioman Hy Koffler remembered, "As water poured into the radio room from the open hatch, we were all huddled on the floor and thought we were going to drown."

The crew pulled themselves out through the side windows or out of the top hatch of the radio room after releasing the life rafts and crawled onto the wings.

Since Hy and Ernie were bleeding badly, they were the first into the partially inflated life rafts. Each raft was designed to hold five men when fully inflated.

The plane quickly filled with water, and in moments the tail rose in the air and then disappeared below the surface. The crewmembers inflated their "Mae West" life vests.

It was suddenly, eerily quiet, after some six hours of droning engines, flak, and gun fire. But then came machine-gun fire from the shore. It seemed that the Germans thought that the B-17 had been part of a raid intending to strike the nearby subma-

rine pens. Lucky, no one was hit.

After almost an hour in the water, a well-armed German "reception committee" approached in a fishing boat. Perry and his crew were on the verge of hypothermia.

Once ashore, one of the German soldiers pointed to Hy Koffler and Eddie Goldstein and said, "*Juden*" ["Jews"]. With as stern a look as he could muster, Perry shook his head and responded, "American!" There was no further reference to the subject.

Once at dockside, Perry's soggy crew was trucked to an imposing, gray stone building that turned out to have been an ancient dungeon.

Perry described the scene: "A crowd of peasant women and children were in front of the large gate that appeared to be the only break in the wall. We learned they were not a welcoming committee but were family members of prisoners incarcerated there. They had come with food to augment the miserable fare provided in the lockup.

"The wing of the prison had a large, open, center area, six-stories high, surrounded by balconies where there was access to the cells. All 10 of us were put into one large cell on the sixth tier. We immediately noticed that the cell didn't appear to be too secure. The ceiling, roof, and top corner of the cell were missing, allowing the sky to show through. There was no glass in the windows, but there were bars.

"During our stay at Pola we were fed once a day. Each man received about a pint of vegetable soup, the main vegetable being cabbage, and a small loaf of bread which might have weighed in at four to the pound. Through a small hole in the wall between our cell and the next, our Italian neighbors learned who we were and shared some of their better food with us."

After a week, Perry and his crew were placed aboard a train headed north. Perry said, "We were escorted to the local train station by those soldiers, veterans of the Afrika Korps, whose *Hauptmann* (captain) in charge was a doctor. I believe they knew the war had been lost and, therefore, treated us in a more kindly manner.

"They did keep an eye on us most of the time, but there were times when their weapons were within our reach and their attention was elsewhere. We discussed the situation among us and decided not to try anything foolhardy. As we traveled, we saw telephone poles along the tracks decorated with the bodies of resistance fighters who had been caught and strung up on the spot."

They reached Verona, Italy, about March 1, where they underwent interrogations. Perry noted, "My interrogator knew more about the 99th Bomb Group than I did and told me many accurate things about my own 416th Squadron, indicating that he had inside information. I don't know how he knew we were in the 416th."

A week later they were placed aboard another train routed through the Brenner Pass, between Italy and Austria. Again, they witnessed bodies hanging from telephone poles along the tracks. Along the way they made many stops and occasionally changed trains.

Their next stop was Frankfurt, Germany, the location of Dulag Luft Interrogation Center and the distribution point for downed airmen. The crew's six sergeants—Ruiz, Koffler, Segars, Hettinger, Gregory, and Goldstein—were sent to Stalag Luft IV at Keifheide, Pomerania, in northeast Germany. Lieutenants Perry, Kyrouac, Bigley, and Andrzejewski were placed aboard a train bound for the town of Barth and Stalag Luft I, in northern Germany near the Baltic coast.

Perry recalled the train trip: "In the car with us were several injured flyers. I remember most clearly Lieutenant R.D. Vollmer. He was badly burned about the face and had been hospitalized in Germany long enough for some healing to take place. We did what we could to make him comfortable, such as keeping a damp handkerchief over his eyes and mouth while he tried to sleep.

"Later, on a wrapper from a cigarette package, I recorded, 'The first time I saw Pop Vollmer, he was a pathetic sight. He had a badly wrenched knee and was burned so severely about the face that his mother could not have recognized him. A loose bandage was wound around parts of his face, but his lips and eyes were left uncovered. They showed raw flesh around his eyes and scars around his lips which were extremely hard for us to look at."

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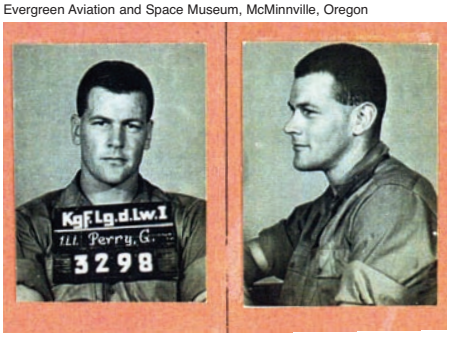
United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Evergreen Aviation and Space Museum, McMinnville, Oregon



ABOVE: Three empty guard towers are shown along the barbed-wire enclosure of Stalag Luft 1 after the guards abandoned the camp. The many circular holes are for personal protection in the event of an air raid. RIGHT: Lt. Perry's POW identification photos. OPPOSITE: Barbed wire surrounds a barracks building at Stalag Luft I, the POW camp in northern Germany where Perry and some of his crew were imprisoned from March 1944 until the end of the war.

The POWs arrived at Barth on March 13, in snowy weather. The camp was imposing, surrounded by a double barbed-wire fence, 10 to 12 feet high, separated by eight feet, the space between filled with a tangle of barbed wire. At each corner of the prison compound, and also at intervals along the fence, were guard towers equipped with spotlights. The buildings were weathered with gray clapboard siding.

Perry quickly discovered that the camp had an active military organization among the prisoners under the direction of a senior Allied officer, a colonel. Perry: "We were still at war and soon learned that our part was not over. Our job was to occupy as much German manpower and equipment as possible and to do whatever we could to destroy their morale."

The prisoners in the camp included a few British airmen, but mainly American officers. There were a few fighter pilots, the rest bomber crewmen. Before the war ended, 14 months later, there were more than 8,000 men in the camp.

The prisoners were assembled at least twice a day for roll call, regardless of rain, shine, or snow. On occasion, they were held in ranks for prolonged periods. There were times when the prisoners intentionally caused miscounts to annoy their captors.

Perry remembered the roll call on Easter Sunday, 1944: "After the count was completed, we remained in formation for the Easter service. I don't recall any grumbling in the ranks, even though we were standing in mud and it was snowing gently from a heavy, gray sky. About halfway through the service we heard the unmistakable thunder of many aircraft.

"From that moment on we just stood and cheered as wave after wave of what we knew to be B-17s and B-24s passed overhead. They were under attack from German fighters because we could hear the chatter of machine guns and a few shell casings fell into the compound. After that, we were required to be in our dorms [barracks] with the shutters closed whenever Allied aircraft were in the vicinity."

Each barracks was a long building with a door at each end and a hallway down the middle. On either side of the hall were four rooms that each housed 16 to 20 men.

One of the main considerations of the prisoners was food. The Red Cross provided some food parcels that contained canned meat, margarine, a pound of sugar cubes, powdered milk, cheese, a D-ration (chocolate) bar, crackers, or cigarettes. The American cigarettes became barter material, a sort of currency within the camp.

It was intended that each POW to receive one food parcel per week. In reality, at best, there was just one parcel per

week for every four men, and later down to one parcel per 16 men.

Each barracks room prepared its own food, with the cooking duties shared. A heavy black bread was supplied on a regular basis. It was soggy and sour, made from rye flour and ground straw. Potatoes, though not abundant, were supplied along with carrots, cabbage, and a large quantity of rutabagas.

The POWs posted men at each end of the building to warn of the approach of German snoops or goons. The goons presented a friendly manner, but their intent was to check on prisoner activity—looking for evidence of tunneling, radios, or other clandestine activity. Some of the guards spoke English while others pretended not to understand it. Daily activities became a contest between the guards and the POWs.

"There were bad times and there were worse times," Perry said, "or there were good times and better times; it all depended on one's attitude. All in all, the morale was quite good. After all, this was only temporary; we knew who was winning the war. Our captors supplied us with daily news broadcasts which were primarily propaganda with fictionalized news being fed to the German population.

"We knew how far off this news was because we had the straight scoop from the BBC. The guards knew we had a radio, and there were many times we were ordered out for roll call and then locked out while a thorough search was conducted of the entire compound. Our radio was never found."

Information from the BBC was used to produce a daily camp newspaper. The paper was carried from room to room, read, and then destroyed.

Shortly after the D-Day invasion, an ambitious individual painted a large map of Europe on the end of one of the barracks. A rope was then strung around nails used to indicate the battle lines according to the German news reports. One day, another rope appeared that showed where the front lines actually were, according to the BBC.

Tunneling was the chief pastime of the POWs. Perry: "I don't know of any that were successful in providing an escape passage, but they did provide a break from boredom and kept our guards busy. One of the problems we encountered was dirt disposal. After all, a pile of dirt outside a barrack would be a dead giveaway. We had three main methods of disposal. Dumping it into the latrines was the easiest but caused sanitation problems.

"Another disposal method was the distribution of dirt by exercises as they [the prisoners] walked around the compound dropping a handful at a time from loaded pockets. However, the most creative method was to start a raised garden bed in full view of the guard towers."

Perry recalled one tunneling effort. The tunnel had progressed beyond the wire, and a group of 12 POWs were readying their escape. Perry said, "In the middle of the night

AP Photo

ABOVE: After being liberated by the Red Army in May 1945, American prisoners at Stalag Luft I relax with cigarettes and rations. Perry and the other POWs spurned Soviet evacuation plans, headed for the west on their own. BELOW: POWs line up for roll call at Stalag Luft I. Life in the camps was safe but dreary. Many prisoners kept busy trying to implement escape plans.

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

National Archives

Tents at Camp Lucky Strike—one of the so-called "cigarette camps"—the largest of several temporary U.S. Army "tent cities," named after American cigarette brands, located near the French ports of Le Havre and Marseilles, where liberated U.S. personnel such as Perry waited to return home.

they made their way to the end of the runway tunnel and, as planned, carefully cut out a circle of sod through which they would make their escape.

"As the sod was cautiously moved to the side and the lead man slowly inched his head out into the darkness of the night, he looked directly into the barrels of three rifles pointed at his head. We decided that the Germans were aware of the tunnel and thought the activity was a fine way to keep a good number of men busy."

During late July 1944, Perry encountered Andy Andrews at the camp. Andy had been his roommate during his sophomore year of college at Oregon State. Perry said, "It was like a letter from home." They arranged to be roommates again while in the camp.

(Interestingly, in 1992, 48 years later, they were able to locate 10 of their prison roommates and held a reunion with seven of them. "Our ages were nearly tripled, and our looks had changed, but the bond was stronger than it had been those many years ago.")

In the spring of 1945, the camp commandant told the Senior Officer, Colonel Gabreski, to prepare the prisoners for evacuation, as they would be marched east. Gabreski convinced the commandant that his manpower was inadequate to supervise such a march.

By May 1, 1945, the prisoners could hear the sound of artillery in the distance. One morning they discovered that the camp guards were gone. Opening the gate and cautiously venturing from the camp, they came across Russian soldiers. Perry noted, "The Russians we saw were primarily Oriental-looking Mongolians." The German civilians they encountered were fearful of these Russians.

"The day before our fences came down," recalled Perry, "some women walked by about 100 yards from the compound. They were pushing two baby buggies. We later heard five shots ring out. Two babies, two mothers, and a grandmother had decided to die rather than to be subjected to the barbaric treatment being handed out by the Mongolian horde."

The prisoners were informed that the Russian plan to repatriate them was to ship them by train to the port of Odessa on the Black Sea and then embark them for Western Europe. But the senior American officers, Colonels Zemke and Gabreski, were adamant in their opposition to this plan.

In the days after liberation, the prisoners became restless, but the Russians held fast to their evacuation plan. Perry and nine others decided to head west on foot, to travel light, since they had no idea how far it was to Allied lines. Before setting out, they sewed American flag patches on the shoulder of their uniforms.

As they traveled, they were amazed at the number of vehicles strewn alongside the roadways. Some were military vehicles, but many were farm wagons with dead horses still in the traces. They found the Russian Army drivers they encountered to be very erratic and so, for safety reasons, made an effort to keep off the main roads.

Perry said, "Towards evening, we came to a farmhouse with a large barn. The German family was still there and welcomed us with open arms because they felt safer with us than with the Russians. The Russian troops were bivouacked in the barn; the family had been allowed to stay in the house and we joined them for the night. The Russians were friendly but cool and drew us a map with a suggested safe route to follow."

Perry and his companions moved through a war-ravaged country. "We often saw bodies, mainly soldiers, beside the road and in the fields as we walked along. As we passed villages, we saw several scaffolds with bodies hanging from them. These we assumed were village leaders rather than soldiers because they wore no uniforms."

On the third day of their trek, as they passed a German airfield, a young man, seeing their American flag patches, greeted them and then persuaded them to stop. He called to his friends in a nearby barracks. Some 20 men and women swarmed excitedly out to meet them. They turned out to be newly freed slave laborers.

The Americans continued to walk or hitch rides on carts and wagons, always westward. At one point they came upon a large crowd of people gathered by an open field where a single strand of barbed wire had been strung across the field as a line of demarcation. Perry and his compatriots were told that the Russians had strung the wire and had forbidden anyone to cross it on pain of being shot. They were also informed that Allied troops were on the

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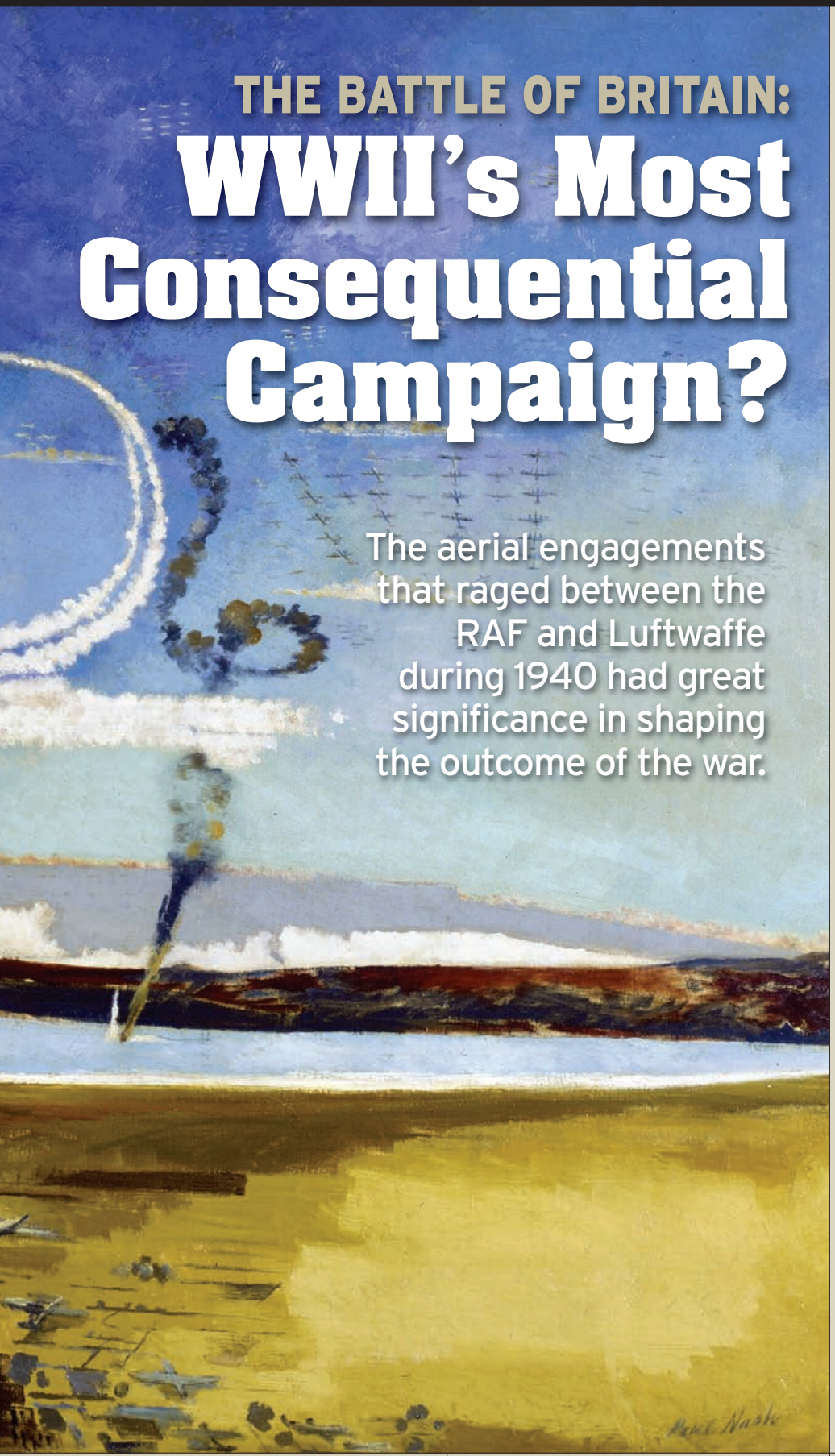
In this 1941 portrayal of the Battle of Britain, artist Paul Nash said his painting was "an attempt to give the sense of an aerial battle in operation over a wide area, and thus summarizes England's great aerial victory over Germany." It symbolically depicts the aerial conflict that lasted from July 10, 1940 to October 31, 1940, with outnumbered, free-flying British fighters battling the orderly ranks of German aircraft.

Imperial War Museum



THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN: WWII's Most Consequential Campaign?

The aerial engagements that raged between the RAF and Luftwaffe during 1940 had great significance in shaping the outcome of the war.

BY MATTHEW J. BENEDETTI

Two decades after the carnage of the Great War, the world was again plunged into the cauldron of armed conflict.

During a six-year span (1939-1945), another catastrophic war shook humanity to its foundation, and the staggering losses suffered in World War II are difficult to conceptualize. The appalling casualties sustained by all of the combatants during this conflict eclipsed 55-60 million dead by conservative estimates (the Soviet Union alone suffered approximately 20 million dead).

Distinct in myriad ways beyond the astronomical body count, few would find respite from the maelstrom of death and misery in this truly global war.

No corner of the world was spared. Even the remote Pacific islands of Tarawa and Guadalcanal experienced intensive fighting between U.S. and Imperial Japanese forces. Previously uninhabited rain forests of Burma would see troops of the British and Japanese Empires fight starvation as well as one another for years. Both forces would suffer more casualties to the common enemy of malaria and other tropical diseases than actual combat in this theater.

Australian soldiers watched in awe as bombs from supporting American bombers failed to register little more than muted thumps under the triple-canopied jungles of New Guinea.

Inhabitants of disparate locations like Norway, Tunisia, Albania, and Hawaii witnessed war in ways they could never have imagined.

Even Attu and Kiska, the sparsely populated Aleutian Islands off the Alaskan coast, have cemeteries honoring fallen U.S., Canadian, and Japanese serviceman.

It is true, of course, that several campaigns could reasonably be argued to have been the most important engagements of World War II.

Without question, the naval battle of Midway between the U.S. and Japanese

Navies irrevocably altered the course of the Pacific War.

In June 1942, Japanese Fleet Commander Admiral Yamamoto was poised to immobilize the remaining U.S. aircraft carriers that had escaped the Pearl Harbor attack six months earlier. Seizing the initiative, Yamamoto hoped to follow traditional Japanese naval doctrine by drawing his quarry from nearby Hawaii into a decisive Japanese victory. Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, commander of Task Force 17, turned the tables on Yamamoto, resulting in a decisive victory for the U.S.

Due to the breaking of the Japanese naval code by the Office of Naval Intelligence at Pearl Harbor, U.S. Pacific Fleet Commander Admiral Nimitz was well positioned to preempt the Japanese attack. The Combined Japanese Fleet lost four carriers—the entire strength of the task force—*Akagi, Kaga, Soryu*, and *Hiryu*, with 322 aircraft and over 5,000 sailors. The heavy cruiser *Mikuma* was also sunk. American losses included 147 aircraft and more than 300 sailors.

The Battle of Midway was decisive. The outcome rendered Japan incapable of advancing further east for the remainder of the war. Undoubtedly, Midway was a critical victory, allowing the United States to take the offensive.

Stalingrad is, by any measure, the pivotal battle on the Eastern Front. The Soviet Red Army and German Wehrmacht engaged in a pitiless fight of attrition in this industrial city named in honor of Soviet leader Marshal Josef Stalin. The city's name fueled a personal vendetta within Adolf Hitler, who devoted the majority of Army Group South and significant elements of Army Group Centre to destroy the vital manufacturing center along the banks of the Volga River.

The vaunted German Sixth Army, commanded by Field Marshal Friedrich Paulus, fought tenaciously for this symbolic rather than strategic objective. Faced with operating in appalling conditions against an unyielding enemy, German troops managed to occupy 90 percent of Stalingrad in what would ultimately prove to be a pyrrhic victory.

Anticipating a swift victory in the east, optimistic OKW planners had failed to equip "Ostfront" troops with winter clothing and other essential materials. Indeed, premature reports of German victory belied the ongoing close-quarter fighting taking place among starving soldiers amid the snow, rats and rubble.

When Red Army General Georgi Zhukov launched a massive Soviet counteroffensive, he mirrored the tactics of his German adversary. During the June 1941 invasion of the Soviet Union, German armies successfully isolated entire Red Armies by encircling units from their logistical base. These *Kesselschlact*, or "cauldron battles," were replicated throughout the German offensive, resulting in staggering Russian casualties. Now, by smashing the Hungarian, Italian, Rumanian, and Bulgarian Axis armies in Operation Uranus in a massive pincer movement, Zhukov severed Paulus' flank while isolating the Sixth Army in Stalingrad.

The Wehrmacht's defeat at Stalingrad inexorably shifted the balance of power in the Great Patriotic War in favor of the Red Army.

Operation Overlord, or "D-Day," is universally recognized even by individuals unfamiliar with World War II. It's been chronicled in popular culture by the brilliant Cornelius Ryan book and in Hollywood movies such as *The Longest Day* as well as the epochal Steven Spielberg film *Saving Private Ryan*. To many historians, the scaling of Point De Hoc by elements of the 2nd and 5th Ranger Battalions is considered to be the gold standard of military courage and tactical skill. A reference to the terrible sacrifices made by soldiers on Omaha, Juno and Gold Beaches on June 6, 1944, never fails to summon pride in most Americans.

Even the remarkable deception employed by the Allies to divert mechanized SS divisions to the Pas de Calais, away from Normandy, is viewed as incredible feat of tactical daring. Many could convincingly argue that if this largest amphibious invasion in military history had failed, then subsequent Allied invasion plans would certainly have been modified and perhaps delayed indefinitely.

Both: Imperial War Museum

ABOVE: Great Britain's stalwart Winston S. Churchill became Prime Minister in May 1940 after Chamberlain resigned following Nazi Germany's invasion of Western Europe. LEFT: Prime minister of a country still recovering from the Great War, Neville Chamberlain (left, with Adolf Hitler) did everything he could do to avoid a new conflict with Germany. Many labeled the PM an "appeaser" after Britain and France allowed Germany to take over much of Czechoslovakia—and emboldened Hitler.

A costly assault on the Gustav Line, running the width of Italy, may have been revisited. German positions were well entrenched, and progress was measured in yards by Allied soldiers. Unlike the wide expanse of French fields conducive to air power and mechanized units, the Italian Alps favored defense, and the human toll was heavy.

The success of the Normandy invasion, although costly, had achieved the desired outcome. Within a year, the war in Europe would be over. Field Marshal Gerd von Runstedt understood, as did most senior German military leaders, that breaching the Atlantic Wall would ultimately lead to capitulation. Certainly D-Day was the most important land battle of the Western European campaign.

It is beyond debate that Midway turned the tide of war in the Pacific, that Stalingrad inexorably shifted the balance of power in the east, and that D-Day opened the second front and tightened the vise on Hitler and his Third Reich.

However, these momentous engagements would have never taken place if not for the Battle of Britain in 1940.

In the summer of 1940, the British Royal Air Force and German Luftwaffe engaged in the largest aerial battle in history fought exclusively by two opposing air forces. Of course, the British defied the odds and prevailed in a conflict that has been a source of English pride for decades. However, if the RAF, led by the intrepid Spitfire and Hurricane pilots, had not prevailed, the outcome of the war would likely have shifted in favor of the Axis.

After swiftly defeating France and the rest of Europe, the German Blitzkrieg showed no signs of abating, and, notwithstanding Prime Minister Winston Churchill's spirited rallying of the populace, many harbored doubts as to whether the beleaguered British Army and Royal Air Force could withstand the expected German seaborne assault (Operation Sea Lion).

The Luftwaffe had a significant advantage in aircraft and had pioneered advanced tactical concepts. Its coordination of air strikes on enemy formations via radio communications was unprecedented and devastatingly effective in both the Polish and French campaigns. A Luftwaffe tactical control officer would be embedded with forward army units and relay the positions of enemy units to airborne Stuka dive bombers, who would promptly attack with their signature wailing Jericho sirens. The stunned enemy would often surrender and, more importantly, morale would be sharply corroded.

The British Expeditionary Force (BEF) had been forced to abandon the majority of their artillery and vehicles on the beaches of Dunkirk earlier in the spring. Few felt confident that the underequipped British Tommies could thwart a coordinated German attack.

The stage appeared set for another German triumph.

Due to extraordinary courage demon-

The outright rejection of the offer to negotiate summoned a dormant ministerial vigor within the cabinet while simultaneously evoking a latent pugnacity in Britons long inured to military reversals.

strated by the RAF and an even more impressive deployment of previously unknown technologies like the Chain Home Radar defenses, this outcome was avoided. If the British had lost or struck a Vichy-like deal—which was suggested by many in the aristocracy—the fate of Europe and the world would have been entirely altered. The U.S. likely would have had neither the political will nor the staging area in the UK to contest Axis supremacy in Europe. Undoubtedly, German power would have grown with the additional resources, and a stalemate may have been the least terrible option.

And the RAF victory in the Battle of Britain exposed vulnerabilities, however small, in the previously unbeatable German war machine.

Here are key components of the battle as seen from the political, strategic/tactical, and possible-outcome perspectives.

Political

Prime Minister Winston Churchill is one of the most recognized and lauded figures of the twentieth century. It is with good reason that this cherubic, middle-aged and somewhat eccentric figure is widely considered the example of stalwart leadership.

Blessed with a stubborn will, a gift for oration, and keen judgment, Churchill charted the course for victory in the Battle of Britain and the subsequent hard-earned victories to follow.

In retrospect, it seems natural for the British Parliament to have selected such a pugnacious and gifted prime minister. However, it was luck as much as savvy political acumen that prompted Churchill to remark that he felt as if he were "walking with destiny." In many ways, he was a compromise candidate, and the post had been offered to Lord Halifax, a well-known appeaser, who had demurred. The previous prime minister, Neville Chamberlain, practically groveled to Herr Hitler during negotiations in 1938 and held the misguided belief that he could reason with the Nazi dictator.

In contrast to the supplicant Chamberlain, known in some circles as 'the Undertaker' due to his dour demeanor, Churchill had long been a vocal opponent of Hitler, accurately assessing his vile ambitions even while in the political wilderness. Much can be learned about the mood of England during this period. In many ways, the fate of the West was decided in a smoky room within the Halls of Parliament in May 1940. Seven members of the War Cabinet had convened to discuss the next course of action.

Churchill chaired the meeting, surrounded by political opponents. Among them was Neville Chamberlain, the ex-prime minister he had recently supplanted as prime minis-

ter. Lord Halifax, the foreign secretary, and Archibald Sinclair, the leader of the Liberal Party that Churchill had recently cashiered, were the primary voices.

The question to be answered on that day was straightforward. Should Britain fight? Was it reasonable for young British troops to die in a war that showed every sign of being lost? Or should the British broker an arrangement that might potentially save hundreds of thousands of lives?

In fairness, there was little room for optimism given the grim circumstances. Driven from the continent, the BEF had limped back to the UK without its equipment or confidence. France, boasting a large and modern continental army, had capitulated to the blitzing German Army in a shocking six weeks. Norway, Denmark, and the Low Countries, along with Poland and Czechoslovakia, were also firmly under the Nazi heel.

As well, the Battle of the Somme and the horror of the Great War 20 years earlier were burned into the collective English memory. World War I had proven to be a hollow victory, leaving hundreds of thousands of a generation dead as well as hundreds of thousands of wounded veterans and orphans in its wake.

Wary of further continental entanglements, the English public offered Chamberlain the commensurate political cover to negotiate away sovereign central European countries (Austria and Czechoslovakia) in a desperate hope of appeasing Berlin. Naturally, Chamberlain's detached stance only emboldened Hitler and other bullies everywhere, encouraging further aggression.

As well, many among the English upper classes were primarily interested in preserving their collective wealth and property. Though unsympathetic toward the ascendant Nazis, many elites as well as Whitehall ministers feared the prospect of losing a war (and their holdings) in a futile struggle. Why not negotiate now and avoid a costly war of attrition?

Several respectable Britons publicly preferred fascism to communism and the Bolshevik concept of "wealth redistribution." Lady Nelly Cecil noted that nearly all of her relatives were "tender to the Nazis." Former Prime Minister and hero of the Great War David Lloyd George declared that Hitler was a "born leader" and compared him to George Washington.

King Edward Vlll's dubious Nazi ties and his widely publicized accompanied visits to Germany with his wife Wallis Simpson not only raised eyebrows but also reflected a small but strong pro-Axis sentiment within elite circles of the United Kingdom. The brutish Nazis at least respected property rights, unlike the commissars in Moscow, they argued.

The Italian Embassy had signaled interest in establishing a backchannel between London and Rome. It was Halifax who introduced the idea of negotiating with Italy.

Churchill, to his enduring credit, dismissed the overture in front of the larger cabinet, which had convened later in the day. During this gathering, Churchill summoned his trademark gift for oratory and his uncanny ability to stir the emotions of men.

By appealing to their better angels, he convincingly argued that accepting the offer to negotiate even surreptitiously would be perceived as a step to surrender. After delivering a compelling address peppered with Shakespearean references, he managed to persuade the larger cabinet to his view. While the positions of Halifax and Chamberlain mirrored the anxious mood of the British people, Churchill recognized a false flag when he saw one.

The outright rejection of the offer to negotiate summoned a dormant ministerial vigor within the cabinet while simultaneously evoking a latent pugnacity in Britons long inured to military reversals.

The escape at Dunkirk allowed over 300,000 BEF and French troops to serve again but also sparked debate. Why did the Germans stop? Were the fatigued soldiers recovering from the copious amounts of the stimulant Pervutin? Did Reichsmarschal Hermann Göring really demand the glory and convince Hitler to attack from the air? Was Hitler leaving open the

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ABOVE: One of the many Chain Home Radar towers that stood guard along England's southern coast. Radar was then known as "Radio Direction Finding"—an early warning system that was simple but effective in detecting the approach of Luftwaffe formations over the English Channel. OPPOSITE: Flying wingtip-to-wingtip, a formation of RAF Hawker Hurricanes from No. 111 Squadron glides above the English countryside. While the Spitfire is more famous today, the Hurricane was the first monoplane fighter to exceed 300 miles per hour and accounted for many "kills" against the Luftwaffe.

Bundesarchiv Bild 146-1969-094-18; Photo Speer

possibility of détente with the British, whom he viewed as a Teutonic equal race?

That mystery remains.

Though an inspirational wartime leader, Churchill was not without faults. Moody, capricious and sometimes drunk, he did possess, however, the stalwart character to stand his ground when in the right. His adroit political maneuvering and outward confidence buoyed an apprehensive populace.

Strategic/Tactical

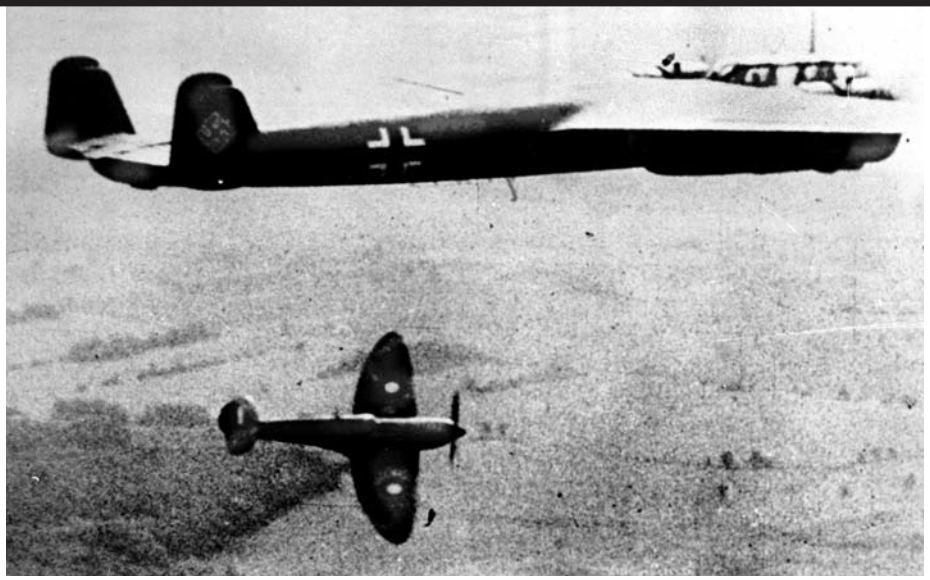
Operation Sea Lion, the German codename of the plan to invade the United Kingdom, was a multifaceted assault that would have deployed all available aircraft, landing craft, airborne troops and personnel.

In the spring of 1940, planning meetings were taking place but stalled due to a number of factors. A historically continental power, the German leadership as well as Hitler himself were apprehensive regarding a seaborne invasion, especially on such a broad scale. Norway was one thing, but Great Britain another matter altogether.

Admiral Erich Raeder, the Kriegsmarine Commander in Chief, could not reasonably provide adequate protection for a sizeable landing force. Though the British Army was battered, the Royal Navy still boasted the strongest fleet in the world, and the RAF was small but proficient. Joint military planners concluded that the prospects of a successful amphibious invasion of England were limited and feasible only if the Luftwaffe could secure total control of the air over the battle space.

Unphased by this sobering assessment, Göring assured Hitler that he could do so within weeks. Göring is often portrayed as a bit of a dolt. This characterization is unfair. The rotund Luftwaffe chief was often the subject of enemy propaganda and was arguably the most recognized Nazi leader other than Hitler. Though vain and arrogant, he was also a visionary and master organizer. Göring amassed breathtaking power and wealth in an arena full of cunning men.

The consummate diplomat, he charmed both Lord Halifax and Chamberlain on their visits to Germany in 1938. A World War I fighter ace and recipient of the Pour Le Merite, he covertly engineered the development of the most innovative and modern air force in the world, the Luftwaffe. The Messerschmitt 109 fighter and Junkers dive bomber revolutionized the rules of aerial warfare.



ABOVE: A Supermarine Spitfire pilot engages a Dornier Do 17 bomber over southern England. The slower bombers made for easy targets. OPPOSITE: London, especially the East End, took a severe pounding from multiple Luftwaffe raids during the Blitz. Here, smoke rises above the Surrey Docks after a bombing raid on September 7, 1940—the first day of the Blitz. Tower Bridge is visible at right.

Imperial War Museum

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(Left) Hermann Goring was confident his Luftwaffe would destroy the RAF, thus opening up Britain for an invasion. (Right) Air Chief Marshal Hugh Dowding, commander of RAF Fighter Command, devised tactics that successfully defended the British Isles.

In early engagements, his Luftwaffe overwhelmed opponents with dash and elan. From the Legion Condor in the Spanish Civil War to the routing of Armee de l'Air and the RAF in the Battle of France, Göring could justifiably point to his air arm with pride.

He astutely expended his subsequent political capital to garner additional resources for his beloved Luftwaffe. While the Heer (Army) and Kriegsmarine (Navy) competed for the Führer's influence, Göring, secure in his lofty perch, enjoyed casual hunting

excursions at Carinhall, his sprawling country estate.

But, despite the impressive string of victories, Göring made two critical mistakes in the air battle with Britain. Both errors pertained to planning: one strategic and the other operational.

Delighted with the success of the dive bomber, Göring failed to plan and invest in a heavy strategic bomber that could travel a great distance and damage large targets.

The Stuka, while extremely lethal in supporting ground troops, was plainly vulnerable in contested skies. The Me 110 *Zestorer* (Destroyer) proved to be an unwieldy hybrid. Not fast or maneuverable enough to be a fighter, the 110 also lacked the torque to be a reliable dive bomber. Spitfire and Hurricane pilots would enhance their kill ratios against the Stukas and Destroyers during the battle over southeast England and the Channel.

Göring's growing hubris and unwillingness to accept unpleasant facts regarding the air campaign further eroded prospects for a German victory. Confronted with reports of heavy Luftwaffe losses, he deflected blame for the mounting setbacks by pointing to a lack of resolve on the part of his airmen rather than flawed strategy or leadership.

By adamantly refusing to consider the possibility that the RAF had employed a sophisticated warning system, Göring sacrificed countless Luftwaffe airmen by ignoring sound advice. The failure to target coastal radar stations proved to be a fatal error. This omission allowed RAF interceptors to scramble squadrons from the multiple sector stations along the coast. This intelligence provided fighter pilots with an invaluable weapon: timely knowledge of the location and number of approaching enemy aircraft

No army, navy, or air force is ever fully prepared for war. Too many variables and contingencies can alter planning and doctrine. RAF Fighter Command in 1940, however, had achieved as sound a readiness posture as any unit in the modern era.

A brilliant visionary, Air Chief Marshal Sir Hugh Dowding, served as the Commander-in-Chief of RAF Fighter Command during the Battle of Britain, and his contributions are indelibly etched into aerial warfare doctrine.

During the 1930s, in his capacity as the Air Member for Supply and Research at the Air Ministry, he oversaw two vital developments in the preparation for war. The first was the development of fast fighter aircraft, the Supermarine Spitfire and the Hawker Hurricane. The second was to provide funding for the first experimental RADAR (then known as RDF) stations on the coast. Both investments in technological development were integral to victory in the Battle of Britain.

Dowding created the world's first integrated system of air defense, which became known as the "Dowding System." The Chain Home High and Low radar network provided the RAF with accurate, timely intelligence relative to German objectives and force structure. This coordinated intelligence system enabled analysts to detect German aircraft up to 120 miles away. After crossing the coast, the aircraft's height and course were confirmed by the Observer Corps and relayed to sector stations.

Information from these coastal radar stations was processed in the squadron fil-

Imperial War Museum

ter rooms and sent to Bentley Priory, RAF headquarters. Orders were issued to the four regional Group Headquarters and their respective Sector Headquarters.

A complex web of telephone communications operated by the General Post Office served all elements of the Dowding System.

A headstrong leader, Dowding often clashed with Churchill. He strongly advocated keeping fighters in England rather than deploying squadrons in support of an indifferent French defensive effort—a view validated by subsequent events.

Even with this distinct intelligence advantage, the task of defeating the Luftwaffe was daunting. The Germans enjoyed a significant numerical advantage of 2,600 operational planes to just 600 at the outset for RAF Fighter Command.

The Battle of Britain raged over the skies of England from July 10 until October 31, 1940. German air units traveled from bases in France, Holland, and Norway. Flying these great distances took a toll on pilots, and many succumbed to fatigue, causing appalling casualties. As well, each pilot became keenly aware of his fuel gauge due to the fear of running out of petrol over the Channel. German aircraft needed to be precise, as they could only fly approximately 20 minutes over land before returning to base. To add to the frustration, Me 109s were required to escort not only the Stuka dive bombers but the Zestorer 110s, limiting their tactical flexibility.

Though pushed to its operational limit, the RAF inflicted enough damage on the Luftwaffe to at least postpone Operation Sea Lion.

The British suffered 1,542 aircrew killed, 422 aircrew wounded, and 1,744 aircraft destroyed. German losses were 2,585 aircrew killed or missing, 925 captured, 735 wounded, and 1,977 aircraft destroyed.

The Battle of Britain represented the first setback of the previously invincible Nazi juggernaut. Directive 17, the seaborne invasion of England, was never attempted, though aerial bombardment, including the introduction of the horrific V-1 and V-2 rockets, continued throughout the war.

Possible Outcomes

If Lord Halifax or another minister other than Churchill had become prime minister, what would have transpired? Certainly, the British response would have looked much different. In addition, popular opinion in the U.S. was overwhelmingly opposed to involvement in the latest European war. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's fireside chats and behind the scenes machinations notwithstanding, could Americans again be convinced that a European conflict was in the national interest?

Though a popular president, the wily Democrat was seeking an unprecedented third term in 1940, and election year realpolitik would have required a cautious platform relative to international affairs.

Indeed, Roosevelt's ethnic, working-class voting base was largely comprised of Italian, German, and Irish surnames. It stands to reason that the first two groups would balk at fighting their kin, and the latter would celebrate an English defeat. (Despite tremendous diplomatic pressure from both London and Washington, Ireland remained neutral during World War II.)

Pragmatic realpolitik of another kind would compel FDR or another president to tolerate such a strong European power: the moribund state of the U.S. military at the time.

On December 11, 1941, four days after the Pearl Harbor attack, Germany declared war on the U.S.—a curious decision, given that the once-mighty Wehrmacht was mired in the vastness of Soviet Russia and already gravely overextended. Many historians believe that Hitler hoped his declaration of war on the U.S. would encourage his Axis ally Japan to follow suit against the Soviet Union in the Far East, thus relieving pressure

Digital Collections and Archives, Tufts University

ABOVE: Vividly bringing the war home to America with their eyewitness accounts of the Battle of Britain and the Blitz were famed CBS broadcasters Edward R. Murrow (left) and William L. Shirer, shown here in their London studio. Their sympathetic accounts caused many Americans to rethink their stance of strict U.S. neutrality. OPPOSITE: Two British soliders stand guard over a downed Heinkel He 111 bomber in August 1940. The failure of Germany's air campaign against Britain caused Hitler to shift his focus to the East and embark on a disastrous campaign against the Soviet Union. While the RAF suffered heavy losses, the Luftwaffe suffered even more.

Imperial War Museum

on his beleaguered German armies on the eastern front.

Ultimately, Japan's mounting military commitments throughout Asia made such a course of action imprudent.

Would Hitler have aggravated tensions with the U.S. if Great Britain had capitulated and come to terms? Would Japan have attacked Pearl Harbor to expand the "East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere" if European hostilities had ended? Given the growing bellicosity between Washington and Tokyo over a host of seemingly intractable issues, it is probable.

The Pearl Harbor attack caused substantial damage to the U.S. Navy but, more significantly, enraged an American public conditioned to looking inward. Without such a provocative attack it is doubtful that American leaders could have summoned this resolve organically without a looming enemy threat. However, it is likely that American energy would have been focused on Imperial Japan. Absent a German declaration of war against the U.S., American military involvement in Europe would be untenable.

Undoubtedly, the attack on Pearl Harbor was a major event in history, rivaling the Battle of Britain in consequence. However, without the steadfast and courageous stand by the RAF in the Battle of Britain, World War II may have been solely a Pacific War.

Roosevelt's sympathies clearly lay with the UK. Despite Ambassador Joseph P. Kennedy's dour assessment of England's chances against Germany, FDR found ways to provide tacit and material support, including the Lend-Lease initiative.

The efforts of the office of the British Security Coordination in Rockefeller Center cannot be ignored, either. These analysts conducted a determined and ultimately successful campaign to influence American public opinion through various means.

In the East, Hitler would likely have pursued his *Lebensraum* ("Living Space") campaign well into Soviet territory. But the losses in the Battle of Britain would pale in comparison to casualty numbers in the East, and replacing skilled pilots was difficult.

Moreover, the timetable for Operation Barbarossa may have begun in 1940 or, at the latest, early 1941, potentially avoiding the disastrous consequences of the Russian winter. Without the distraction of a western campaign, the Germans may have well captured Moscow, the Soviet nerve center, leaving Stalin in a precarious political position.

North Africa, the Mediterranean, and the important sea lanes of the Suez Canal and Gibraltar would have fallen to the Germans. A push towards Iraq and Persia would have been feasible.

The Battle of Britain allowed the American public to see and hear the drama unfolding among their English-speaking cousins. Edward R. Murrow's regular broadcasts brought the devastation and hardship to life for those perched around their radios. The barbarity of bombing civilian targets was not only featured under the "International Situation" in the *New York Times* but also in their own living rooms.

The victory reinforced the "special relationship" shared by the two countries. It allowed the U.S. time to mobilize its small and antiquated army, which only equaled Portugal's in manpower in 1940. Later i n the war, England would provide a staging area for not only the D-Day invasion but also sustained strategic-bombing campaigns conducted by the U.S. Eighth Air Force.

Without the Battle of Britain, there may never have been a world war at all. In a case of tragic irony, despite the staggering human cost, the absence of World War II may have made the world a more dangerous place. □

IN a message to the Red Ball Express in October of 1944, Supreme Commander Dwight D. Eisenhower wrote, "To it falls the tremendous task of getting vital supplies from ports and depots to combat troops, when and where such supplies are needed, material which without armies might fail. To you drivers and mechanics and your officers, who keep the Red Ball vehicles constantly moving, I wish to express my deep appreciation. You are doing an excellent job."

This was high praise coming from Eisenhower, who knew how important logistics was to the success of his armies in Europe and to the eventual defeat of Nazi Germany. He had seen first-hand over the previous two months how the Red Ball Express had prevented a logistical nightmare in the Allies' thrust across France.

Judging from these remarks, Ike recognized that no matter how well-trained or numerically superior his forces were, they would be helpless unless they could be adequately supplied with food, fuel, and ammunition.

Conceived in an emergency, the Red Ball Express was an express trucking-supply service that allowed Eisenhower's armies to keep their foot on the gas at a crucial point during World War II. It is no overstatement that these unsung heroes helped to win the war.

As the theater commander, Eisenhower had some unique, first-hand experiences with army logistics and movement in his years rising up the ranks. His first occurred in 1919, when the young officer was part of a logistical effort to cross the United States in a military convoy.

That year, the U.S. Army Motor Transport Corps embarked on an ambitious project that had two main objectives: to encourage the construction of highways and to demonstrate to the American public the efficiency (or lack thereof) of military vehicles and their performance. It took almost two full months for the convoy to reach San Francisco from Washington D.C.

Along the way, as an observer, Ike noticed numerous breakdowns in discipline, training, and usage of the vehicles. That experience, and the myriad problems he observed, stayed with him even into his presidency over three decades later, when he conceived the idea of an interstate highway system.

The second logistical experience that shaped Eisenhower's thinking was his participation in the 1941 Louisiana Maneuvers prior to America's entry into World War II. (Ike was Chief of Staff to General Walker Krueger during the maneuvers.) These exercises were designed to weed out ineffective leadership, evaluate training, and rate commanders and logistics in the Army.

In his wartime memoirs, *Crusade in Europe*, Eisenhower noted "the efficiency of American trucks and the movement of troops and supply, demonstrated so magnificently three years later in the race across France."

After the success of the Normandy landings, the Allies had a rough two months battling the Germans in the French hedgerows and *bocage* country. After being caught by surprise on D-Day, June 6, 1944, the Germans put up strong resistance for the rest of June and most of July in a deadly game of attrition that threatened to parallel the bloody stalemate of the Western Front in World War I.

By late July, with the assistance of massive carpet bombing by Allied airpower, the American and British armies were finally able to break out and pursue the Germans eastward across France. By the beginning of August, Lt. Gen. Omar Bradley turned George Patton's Third Army loose on the Germans—thus allowing Patton to use his armor, artillery, and airpower in open warfare to devastating effect, employing the same tactics that the Germans had used to conquer most of Western Europe in 1940.

But Patton soon faced a problem: His Third Army was outrunning its supply lines. Enter the Red Ball Express.

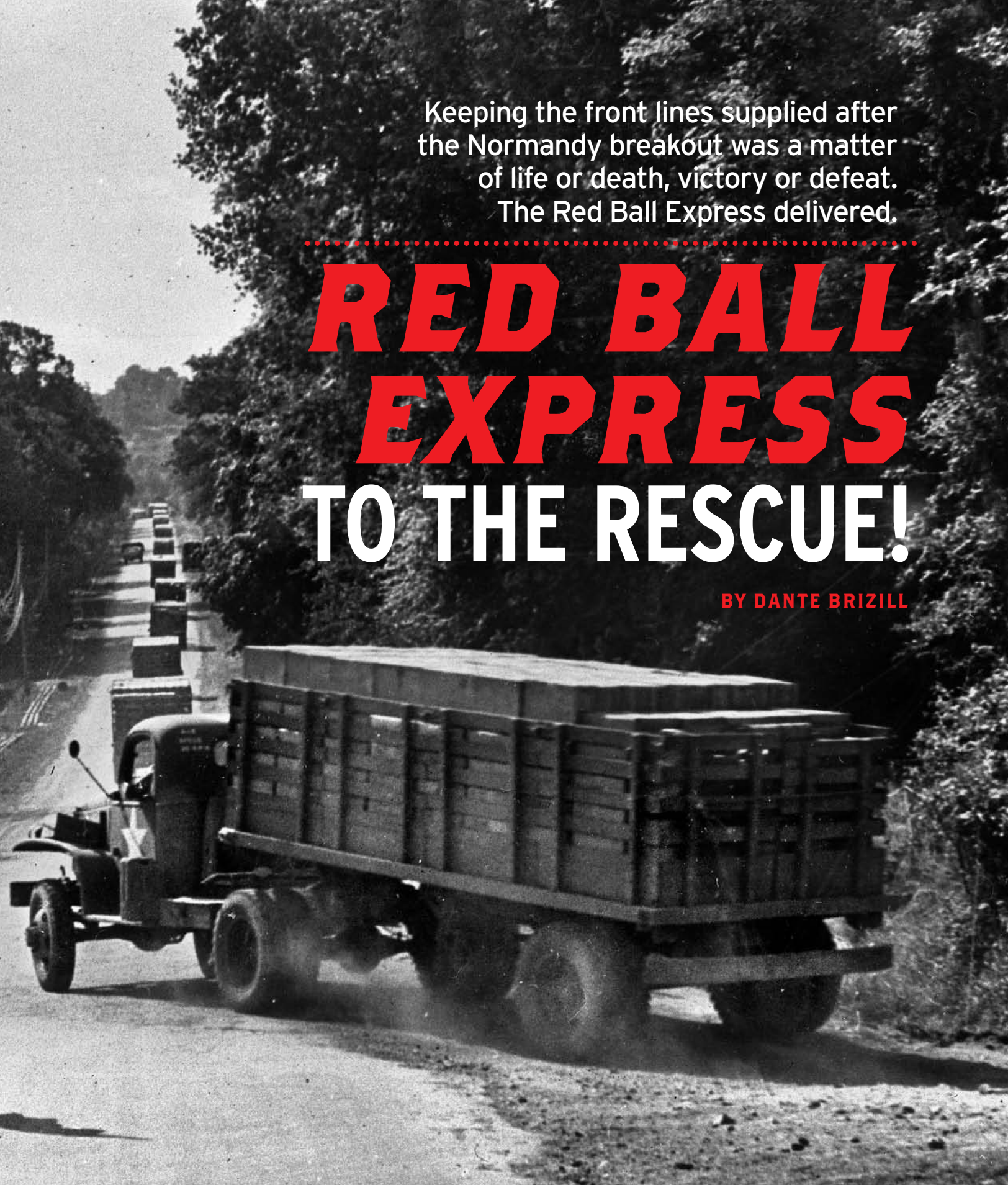
The logistical challenge that Patton faced in late August 1944 was due to the Transportation Program implemented prior to

The road to victory: A military policeman waves through another truck rushing cargo on a one-way highway to the fast-moving front lines in Normandy, France, August 1944. The mostly African American drivers of the Red Ball Express realized that without a steady stream of food, fuel, ammunition, medical equipment, troops, and other critical supplies, the Allied advance would grind to a halt. INSET LEFT: Rudolph Koller started off driving trucks after D-Day and later served as a truck dispatcher with the 3594th Quartermaster Truck Company. INSET RIGHT: Sergeant Lavada Hall was one of over 20,000 drivers who often risked their lives to "deliver the goods."

Keeping the front lines supplied after the Normandy breakout was a matter of life or death, victory or defeat. The Red Ball Express delivered.

RED BALL EXPRESS TO THE RESCUE!

BY DANTE BRIZILL



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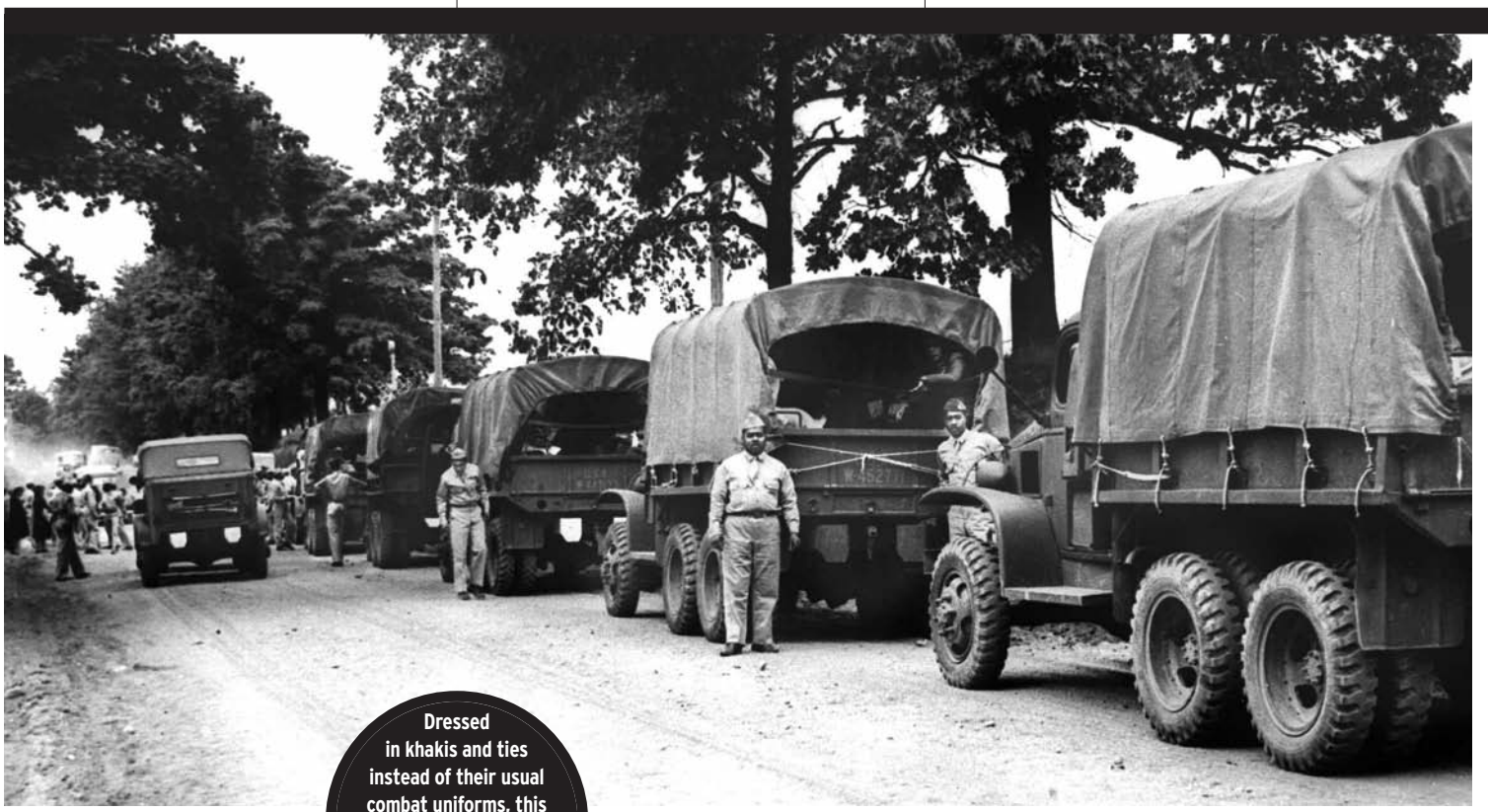


National Archives

Dressed in khakis and ties instead of their usual combat uniforms, this group of drivers appears to be headed for some well-deserved rest and recuperation.

D-Day. The crux of this plan was to destroy and disable the French rail, road, and bridge network in northern France in the weeks prior to the D-Day landings.

Without question, the debacles at Dunkirk and Dieppe, as well as the intense German resistance to the landings at Salerno, Italy, still had to be fresh in the minds of the Allied leadership. No repeat of those would be allowed at Normandy.

As Supreme Allied Commander, Eisenhower demanded control—on threat of resignation—over Allied airpower in Europe before the landings. It was essential, he argued, that the Germans—who were masters of the counterattack—not be allowed to rush reinforcements to the Normandy beachhead and interfere with the landings and buildup of the bridgehead.

By May 1944, so much damage had been done by Allied tactical airpower to the lines of communication, particularly the railroads, that movement was almost at a standstill in France. The plan had worked; the Germans could never move enough of their troops to Normandy to seriously threaten to push the Allied Armies back into the English Channel.

But by late August, with the German Army in full retreat eastward across France and the Allies hot on their heels, logistics had become a serious problem for the Allies. The Germans were still holding the major ports at Calais, Le Havre, Brest, and Dunkirk with orders from Hitler to fight to the last man. Cherbourg was in Allied hands, but heavily damaged and in need of time-consuming repair.

There was a critical shortage of supplies, particularly gasoline. First and Third Armies both consumed as much as 400,000 gallons of gasoline a day, and almost all of the supplies were based in Normandy, with just a few supply dumps nearer the forward areas, which were still several hundred miles away.

It was decided that an emergency trucking system was needed to keep the advancing armies supplied with the essentials. The planners of Operation Overlord did not foresee the front lines moving so fast and so far and had initially planned for a buildup using captured ports and pipelines in the Normandy area. By August, this was no longer a workable plan.

The Red Ball Express was created under these dire circumstances. The term "Red Ball" had origins that harkened back to the 19th century to indicate express rail cargo. Allied commanders put their heads together and in 36 hours created this quick delivery system on August 25, 1944.

This massive new operation would be supervised by Lt. Col. Loren Ayers of COMZ (Communications Zone). Known as "Little Patton," his job was to gather vehicles and drivers. At first there were not enough trucks, but Ayers scoured units for vehicles and formed provisional truck units for the Red Ball. Then came the matter of drivers. At Ayres's request, the Army ordered units to turn over soldiers whose duties were not critical to the war effort so they could be trained as drivers—23,000 of them. The majority of these were young African Americans.

Existing Quartermaster units would operate this transport service. The route would start from supply depots in St. Lô and end in the LaCoupe area outside of Paris. Since the French roads, clogged by civilian and military vehicles, were inadequate to support

two-way traffic, a one-way loop was set up, with the northern half reserved for the loaded vehicles heading east. Two parallel highways between the Normandy beachhead and the city of Chartres were set aside exclusively for Red Ball Express use.

According to the U.S. Army Transportation Corps Museum, "The rules were clear: Trucks were to travel only in convoys. Each convoy was to have no fewer than five trucks each. Each truck was marked with a number showing its position in the convoy, and the trucks were to stay 60 feet apart and travel at 35 m.p.h." (This speed limit was regularly ignored.)

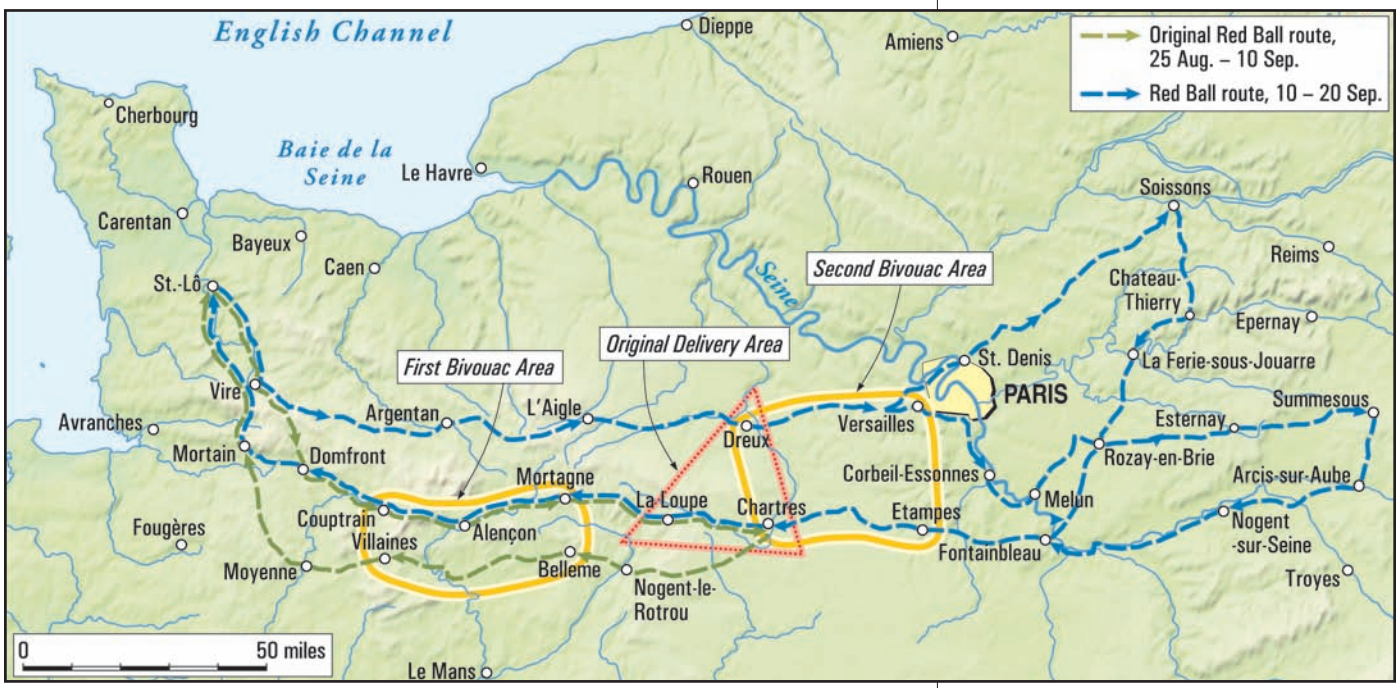
The Express initially started with 67 truck companies, which ballooned four days later into 132 companies with 23,000 drivers and mechanics. This easy transition to truck transport was due in part to the industrial might of the United States, which produced over two million of the heavy haulers during the war.

Although the Transportation and Quartermaster Corps ran the operation, many branches were needed to make the operation run effectively. Military police played the role of traffic cops, engineers helped to maintain the roads and bridges, and ordnance teams repaired disabled vehicles. Army tactics and doctrine prior to the war emphasized mobility and maneuver, which were put to effective at a time when the German army still relied on horse-drawn transport to ferry some of its equipment.

Three out of four of the men of the Red Ball Express were African American. This was no accident and reflected the deliberate effort by the military during World War II—with a few notable exceptions—to keep African Americans in non-combat and service-related roles.

The second-class citizenship assigned to African Americans in civilian life was reflected in the military, whose leadership did not want to be involved in any "social experiments." This meant that blacks—serving in mess halls, laundry facilities, janitorial positions, maintenance units, motor pools, and the like—were not to be entrusted with combat.

THE PLANNERS OF OPERATION OVERLORD DID NOT FORESEE THE FRONT LINES MOVING SO FAST AND SO FAR AND HAD INITIALLY PLANNED FOR A BUILDUP USING CAPTURED PORTS AND PIPELINES IN THE NORMANDY AREA.



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

A loop across France stretched for hundreds of miles, with eastbound convoys taking the northern route to the front lines and other trucks returning empty or with Germans POWs, taking the southern route. The Red Ball Express operated for 82 days with nearly 6,000 trucks and trailers.

Assumptions about the mental inability of African Americans to perform effectively in combat predominated among the military brass. Apparently, the honorable service of African Americans in every war since the American Revolution did not amount to much.

The Marines and Army Air Corps refused to admit African Americans until later in the war. The increasingly vocal black press and civil-rights leadership in America persistently

pressed President Roosevelt, and the military soon opened more doors to blacks and to provided them opportunities to fight.

Labor leader and civil-rights activist A. Phillip Randolph threatened a march on Washington if defense jobs continued to be inaccessible to blacks, prompting Roosevelt to sign an executive order banning racial discrimination in American war industries.

Segregation was not to be tampered with too much, but the war planted the seeds for its eventual dismantlement within the military after the war. The late Stephen Ambrose, one of the leading historians of World War II, identified the irony of America's fighting Nazi Germany while maintaining a segregated military when he stated in *Citizen Soldiers* how "the world's greatest democracy fought the world's greatest racist with a segregated army."

On the home front in 1942, the legendary *Pittsburgh Courier* initiated the "Double V" campaign in response to a letter it received from a 26-year-old African American cafeteria worker in Kansas, who asked the question, "Should I sacrifice my life to live half American? Will things be better for the next generation to follow?"

The "Double V" campaign represented two battles that had to be fought: racism at home, and fascism abroad. Despite the obstacles, though, by 1943 African Americans were serving in all branches of the military—albeit, in many cases, in supporting roles.

Over 2.5 million blacks registered for the draft, and one million black men and women served in uniform. In the Red Ball Express, they especially shined. The story of the Red Ball Express is one of those underreported gems of World War II that needs to be taken out and polished.

The prejudice that African American troops fought against at home followed them to England, the staging ground for the Allied assault on Nazi-occupied Europe. Interestingly, black soldiers were welcomed by the British population, in many cases with open arms. This brought scorn from many of their white officers and fellow soldiers. British pub owners resisted the Jim Crow customs that some attempted to be imposed on them. Numerous clashes between black and white soldiers occurred around bases in Britain in 1943-44.

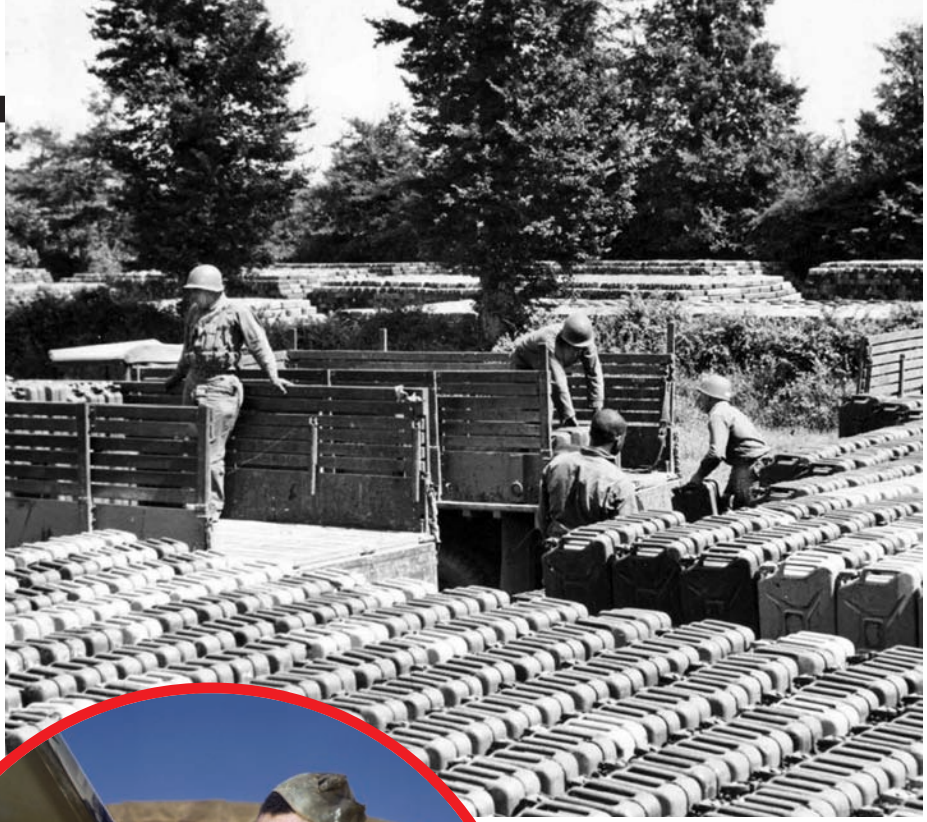
Once in France, where the sounds of the guns and bombs could be heard, it was all business for black and white soldiers alike. As a result of the need for drivers for the Red Ball Express, the manpower was there, ready and waiting to be called upon. Many of the men who became drivers had never operated a car before in civilian life and had to be trained quickly to become proficient at their new roles.

The truck most commonly used by the Red Ball Express was the "Jimmy" or "deuce and a half." This two-and-a-half-ton behemoth with a five-ton cargo capacity was the mainstay cargo transport vehicle of the war and, later, in Korea and Vietnam.

The drivers routinely ignored regulations about maintenance schedules in order to keep the trucks moving and meet deadlines. A common saying was, "Red Ball trucks break, but don't brake."

A Diamond T M20 12-ton truck and M9 trailer loaded with ammunition roars through a destroyed French town as part of a Red Ball Express convoy, France, 1944.

National Archives



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ABOVE: Trucks from different units draw cans of gasoline from a quartermaster depot "somewhere in France." After the five-gallon "jerrycans" were empty, they were refueled from tankers on the beachheads and returned to quartermaster depots. LEFT: A Black soldier, who is both driver and mechanic, performs maintenance in the field. The constant hard usage quickly wore out the trucks.

The mechanics often altered the carburetors to make the trucks go past the 50-m.p.h. factory limit. British soldiers joked about quickly scrambling to get off the road when Red Ball trucks approached, and French pedestrians and cyclists also knew to get out of the way of approaching convoys.

Along the journey, the trucks passed the devastation of war: dead and decaying livestock, bombed-out villages, fallen enemy soldiers, burned-out vehicles, and occasionally hungry civilians begging for food. At night, the drivers had to drive slowly using dim lights known as "cat eyes" to avoid being spotted by the enemy.

The men of the Red Ball Express operated with a sense of urgency, knowing how badly their cargoes of ammunition, rations, clothing, spare parts, and medical supplies were needed at the front. According to the Transportation Corps Museum, "An American infantry division required 150 tons of gasoline per day, and an armored division 350 tons per day."

At its peak, the Red Ball Express operated nearly 6,000 vehicles that carried over 12,300 tons of supplies a day.

Race was generally forgotten by front-line troops in combat. A tank commander whose Sherman was operating on fumes, or a machine gunner who was down to his last belt of ammunition, could not have cared less about the color of the skin of the men who were bringing his precious supplies to him.

As Patton's army advanced rapidly across France, the drivers often made their own roads so they could unload the supplies his men would need when they got there. Patton's military police were under orders to make sure that the Red Ball Express drivers were clear to go over roads and not to be stopped.

There could be real danger driving for the Red Ball Express. Karl Koller spoke to the author about his grandfather Rudolph Koller's service. This Philadelphia native started off driving trucks just after D-Day and later served as a truck dispatcher as part of the 3594th Quartermaster Truck Company.

He recounted a scene that he witnessed: "A column of trucks delivering supplies in Belgium reached a bend in the road. The first two trucks cleared the bend only to be destroyed by a German 88. When the rest of the column stopped, a captain ordered them to continue. The drivers responded that they would only proceed if he led them in his jeep. After pondering their request, the captain decided to find a more secure route."

African American Cleveland native Lavada Hall served as a first sergeant in the 3715 Quartermaster Truck Company. His grandson Benjamin Hall recounted to the author a story his grandfather told of how "on more than one occasion commanding officers had sent them into areas that were suspected to have enemy soldiers in them, to sort of check and see, because the lives of Black soldiers were not considered as important."

Mines could be a problem, as well. Sergeant Hall witnessed their devastating effects as recounted by his grandson: "His unit was taking a break to use the bathroom and have lunch. They were pulled over on the side of the road. He went and got his K-ration and returned to his Jimmie. While he was sitting on the bumper eating, one of his soldiers was walking past him. The soldier stepped on a land mine and blew up within feet of where he was sitting."

Due to the danger from mines, trucks were required to steer to the middle of the highway in areas that had not yet been cleared by mines by the engineers. Drivers

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often packed sandbags on the trucks' floors to absorb blasts.

As the armies and the Red Ball Express advanced closer to Germany, the truckers sometimes had to deal with the threat from the air from the Luftwaffe. Even though by this point in the war the German air force was a shadow of what it had been, the Luftwaffe could still be a deadly menace to the Red Ball Express. The planes would appear suddenly and strafe the convoys, forcing the men to quickly exit their trucks and leap into ditches alongside the roads and into the fields.

By the fall of 1944, the Germans had been defeated in France and were pushed out of the Low Countries that they had conquered in 1940. By now, the Allies had seized and repaired the channel ports they needed to bring in supplies to the continent, and the French rail system had been repaired. The opening of the strategic port of Antwerp also greatly increased the flow of Allied supplies in Europe.

Vast convoys of trucks were no longer needed as they once were, and the Red Ball Express no longer had to make the long journey from the Normandy beaches. The Express became a victim of its own success and was officially ended in November 1944. But it would soon face another crucial test that it would pass with flying colors.

On December 16, 1944, Hitler launched one last, desperate operation to win the war in the West—or at least give the Americans and British such a bloody nose that they would agree to a separate armistice.

His armies delivered a surprise attack against American forces in the thinly held Ardennes Forest in Belgium, catching the Allies off guard. In the first few days of the battle, the German forces were able to push themselves deeply into the American lines, creating a "bulge" on the situation maps. Henceforth, the name of the battle would forever be known as the "Battle of the Bulge."

ABOVE: Red Ball Express drivers never let a little thing like rain and mud or a broken windshield slow them down. LEFT: Members of the all-Black 452nd Anti-Aircraft Artillery Battalion stand watch for enemy planes while a convoy takes a short break.

Because the Red Ball Express had delivered huge quantities of supplies to forward supply dumps in the months before the battle, these were now available to the American soldiers under attack. Another contribution to the victory by the Red Ball Express was the evacuation of thousands of gallons of fuel away from the forward areas. This evacuation successfully kept the fuel out of the hands of the attacking Germans, whose thirsty, gas-guzzling tanks could have used it to exploit their initial breakthroughs.

Early on in the battle, Eisenhower decided to deploy the 101st and 82nd Airborne Divisions around Bastogne, Belgium, and, once again, the Red Ball Express came to the rescue by transporting thousands of troops into the battle, including the above-mentioned paratroops.

The speed with which these men were moved into the fighting proved to be decisive. The quick action, availability, and speed of the Red Ball Express was a powerful tool that helped to turn the tide of battle.

After the Bulge, the services of the Red Ball Express were no longer required. The U.S. Army Transportation Corps' *Pictorial Handbook of Military Transportation*, published in August 1945, contains scores of photos but none of black soldiers; the contribution of blacks is not even mentioned. Given the attitudes of segregation during that era, this is sad but not surprising.

The Red Ball Express might had faded into obscurity had it not been for Hollywood. The movie capital of the world took a stab at telling the Red Ball Express story in 1952. The movie *Red Ball Express*, starring Jeff Chandler, features an early on-screen appearance by the now-legendary actor Sidney Poitier. The Defense Department, which provided Maj. Gen. Frank S. Ross, Chief of Transportation in the European Theater, as technical advisor to the production, advised the studio that the film should emphasize positive race relations. But the film's director, Budd Boetticher, claimed that "the Army wouldn't let us tell the truth about the black troops, because the government figured they were expendable."

From 1973-1974, a short-lived TV series entitled *Roll Out*, which was based on the Red Ball Express and starred black actors Garrett Morris, Stu Gilliam, and Hilly Hicks, aired on CBS. The series highlighted the daily grind and adventures of the fictitious 5050th Quartermaster Truck Company of the U.S. Third Army. Intending to capitalize on the success of *M*A*S*H*, the series was designed to be a commentary on race relations during World War II, but only 12 episodes were broadcast.

Nothing was more essential in the summer and fall of 1944 than the pursuit and destruction of Nazi Germany's military machine. How ironic that a group of men—who could not be served a hamburger or a cup of coffee in some of their hometowns—supplied our armies in Europe with the essentials in the pursuit of victory.

What the Red Ball Express achieved was nothing short of a landmark in the history of military logistics. Initially scheduled to have lasted only two weeks, the service they provided was so crucial to Allied success that it went on for 82 days and delivered over 400,000 tons of gas, oil, lubricants, ammunition, food, medical supplies, and other necessities to supply points near the front lines.

These achievements, of course, came at significant human cost. Scores of black drivers and assistant drivers were killed or injured by enemy fire, land mines, aerial attack, and accidents.

As Eisenhower wrote to the Red Ball Express in October 1944, "The struggle is not yet won. So the Red Ball Line must continue the battle it is waging so well, with the knowledge that each truckload which goes through to the combat forces cannot help but bring victory closer."

The men of the Red Ball Express helped to win the war, and they remembered their service with pride. These unsung heroes of World War II deserve the gratitude of our nation.

Adapted from the author's book, Red Ball Express: Greatness Under Fire, *published through Amazon KDP in 2020.*

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A convoy makes a refueling stop and a change of drivers at a makeshift service station near St. Denis, France, September 7, 1944.

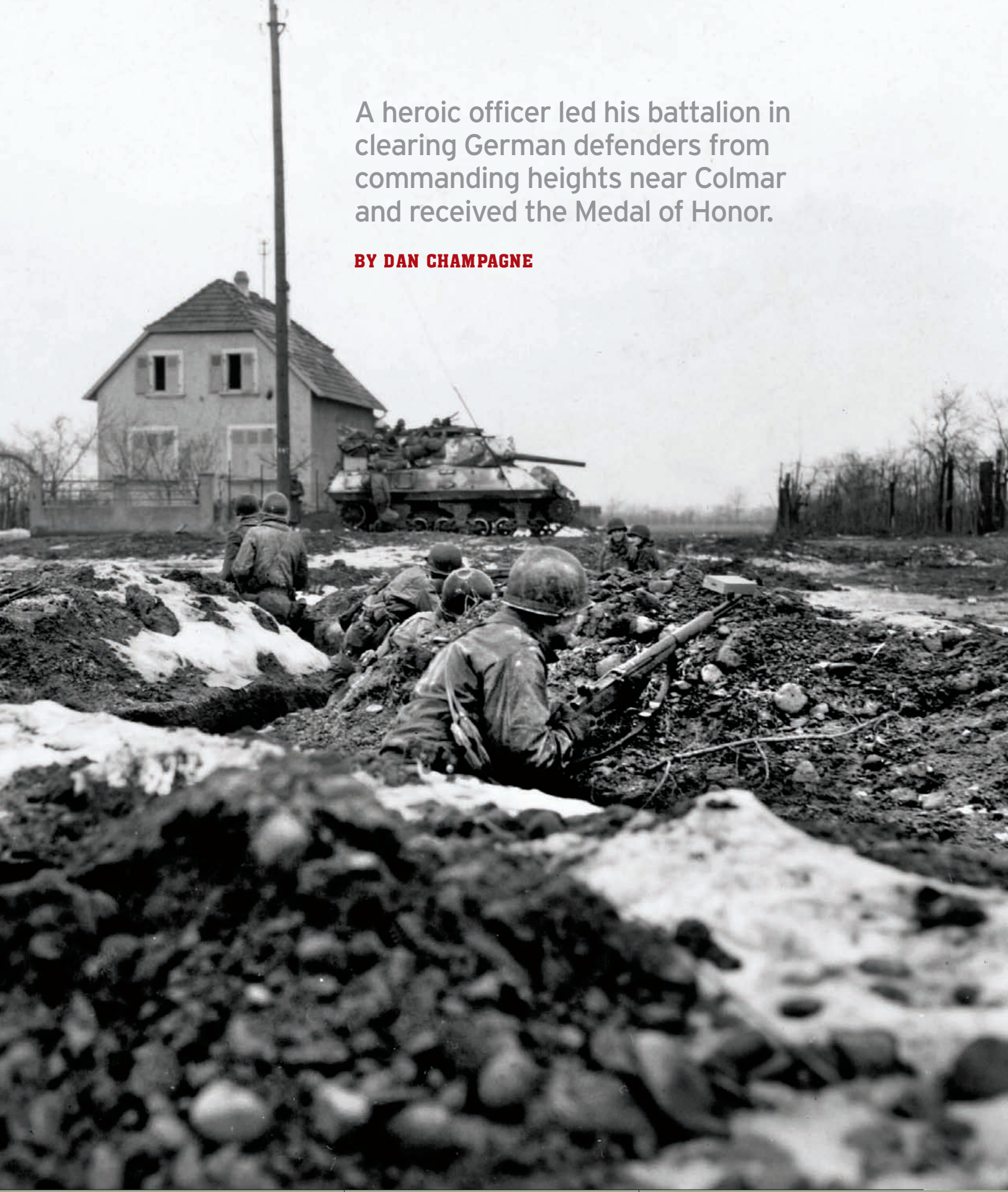
WHAT THE RED BALL EXPRESS ACHIEVED WAS NOTHING SHORT OF A LANDMARK IN THE HISTORY OF MILITARY LOGISTICS.

Bloody Fight *for* Hill 351

A machine gunner of the 3rd Battalion, 141st Infantry Regiment transports a heavy machine gun across a snow-covered trail in the Damengstat area of France on November 13, 1944. OPPOSITE: With a Sherman tank manned by French soldiers nearby and ready to provide fire support, American troops of the 28th Division occupy shallow trenches on the outskirts of the besieged town of Colmar, France.

ON a cold, dark December morning in 1944, B Company, 1st Battalion, 15th Regiment began the slow ascent up Hill 351. Coming under heavy machine-gun and artillery fire from a well-entrenched enemy, these soldiers of the U.S. 3rd Infantry Division were forced to dig in.

First Lieutenant George W. Mohr, commander of B Company, remembered the struggle: "We were pinned down by snipers and heavy machine gun fire; if you dared to lift your head up, you were dead." Mindful that the hill had to be taken at all costs, Lt. Col. Keith L. Ware, the battalion commander, decided to take matters into his own hands. Shouting words of encouragement as he strode up and down the firing line, Ware steadied his weary men, invigorating them to fight on despite continuing artillery fire. His bold leadership and icy courage were pivotal in clearing the enemy and securing the hill.



A heroic officer led his battalion in clearing German defenders from commanding heights near Colmar and received the Medal of Honor.

BY DAN CHAMPAGNE

ABOVE: Carrying their weapons and heavy equipment, American soldiers trudge up a steep, snowy incline toward frontline positions. Although it has been overshadowed by the fighting in the Bulge, the combat in Southern France was nevertheless ferocious and earned the name "the Southern Bulge." OPPOSITE: From the vantage point of an American roadblock, this view looks down a deserted road and into the French town of Sigolsheim. When this photo was taken on January 2, 1945, the vineyard in the distance was a no-man's-land between the German and American lines.

The story of the hill's capture had begun a week earlier, on December 17, 1944. The 3rd Infantry Division, which consisted of the 7th, 15th, and 30th Regiments, started its move south from Strasbourg, France, to relieve the 36th Infantry Division in the Colmar region. The 3rd Division's first objective was to secure the towns of Bennwihr and Sigolsheim. These were the last two significant towns between the American lines and the key city of Colmar. Both towns were located at the extreme western edge of the Alsace Plain and just east of the last high slopes of the formidable Vosges Mountains. Securing the towns would prove to be a difficult challenge because the Germans had heavily fortified the entire area, including the high ground surrounding the settlements. One of the obstacles to the Allied advance was a German bastion called Hill 351, a steep mound that would bear witness to some of the most courageous fighting of the Colmar campaign.

The 1st Battalion, 15th Regiment drew the unenviable assignment of capturing the town of Sigolsheim, a key German stronghold that had to be taken at all costs. Sigolsheim was an anchor of the enemy line on the northern perimeter of the Colmar bridgehead. Even though the town had been battered by artillery fire, the Germans had burrowed deeply into the rubble and continued their fanatical resistance.

At 7:30 AM on December 23, the 1st Battalion attacked Sigolsheim in the east, from the direction of Kientzheim, and met stiff resistance. Machine-gun and small-arms fire were encountered just before entering the town. A Company fought its way into Sigolsheim but took heavy fire from buildings and foxholes. A German counterattack from Hill 351 to the north stymied the Americans, who realized that holding the town would be a difficult proposition.

The Americans determined that the enemy defenses were not only in the towns, but also on the northern and eastern slopes of Hill 351. Thus, the position was deemed untenable, and the 1st Battalion was forced to withdraw. William Weinberg, a sergeant in B Company, remembered the terrific fighting: "The 1st Battalion suffered terrible losses at Sigolsheim. We were repulsed from the town a couple of times, the ground was muddy, and our tanks got bogged down; it was a terrible mess. We had to pull back to Riquewihr where we dug in for the night."

It was now apparent that before any position in Sigolsheim could be held, the enemy had to be cleared from Hill 351. Positioned between the towns of Bennwihr and Sigolsheim, the hill was a bare, irregular mass of rock that sloped gradually to the northwest toward the town of Riquewihr. Rising above the Alsace Plain, Hill 351 dominated the countryside and the cluster of towns on its flanks. The hill provided the Germans with excellent observation for control and accuracy of mortar and artillery fire. Captain Vernon L. Rankin, commander of D Company, remembered, "They used the hill to direct murderous fire on anything that moved for miles around the plain."

Lieutenant Mohr summed up the predicament: "To have taken Sigolsheim without first taking Hill 351 would have been suicidal."

The hill was the key that unlocked the entire enemy defensive system. Lt. Col. Hallett D. Edson, commander of the 15th Regiment, recognized the daunting task that lay before the men of the 1st Battalion. "This miniature Cassino was defended by 200 crack SS troops under orders to hold their positions to the last," he explained. "These men were stalwart, fanatical, and determined. With six machine guns covering the slopes and abundant artillery and mortar fire, they constituted an extremely formidable force."

Intent on eliminating the harassing interference from Hill 351, A and C Companies attacked up the northwestern slope of the hill on the morning of December 24. A Company, commanded by Captain Elmo F. Tefanelli, reached the top twice but was badly disorganized by concentrated mortar and artillery fire. The Germans counterattacked, forcing the Americans to withdraw to the base of the hill. C Company, under the command of Captain Samuel H. Roberts, took up the fight and succeeded in reaching the northeast slope of the hill by noon. Both companies were compelled to dig in and consolidate their limited gains.

The men of the 1st Battalion fought in the snow for possession of the rocky hill throughout Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, suffering heavy casualties. As Christmas night came to an end, Hill 351 still remained in German hands. However, the "Can Do"

Regiment was not about to concede the hill to the enemy so easily. Early that Christmas morning, Lt. Col. Ware had ordered B Company into position for an attack on Hill 351, to commence at 5 AM the following day.

Mohr recalled that memorable Christmas Day: "On the morning of December 25, Ware ordered B Company out of Sigolsheim to attack Hill 351. He wanted us to attack the hill from the direction of Riquewihr so we could join up with Company C on the northeast slope. I told him that it was too dangerous to withdraw from Sigolsheim during daylight hours, so we moved into position near Riquewihr after dark."

On the morning of December 26, B Company began an agonizingly slow advance up the hill and began taking heavy artillery and mortar fire almost immediately. Soon the attackers were engaged in a terrific firefight with a well-entrenched enemy. Throughout the morning, Mohr and his weary men inched slowly up the hill. Shortly before noon, B Company approached the crest of the Hill 351 but encountered fierce and accurate artillery and mortar fire once again.

Mohr recalled, "We had already made several unsuccessful attempts to advance up Hill 351. We were going one foot at a time. Each time we moved, a rain of accurately directed artillery and mortar fire fell on the men. As we pressed forward, we encountered fire from half a dozen machine guns, which had excellent fields of fire; they dominated our approach to the crest. All of a sudden, one of my officers got a wound in the chest. I knew then that we were in for one hell of a battle. The fighting was so bad that Company B was eventually forced to dig in."

Donald Eckman, a private in B Company, added, "We started up the hill and came upon a machine gun nest. We were tired and had suffered heavy casualties. I tried to get around and behind the grape vineyards. All of a sudden, I got hit twice in the leg with a pistol. Needless to say, the battle was over for me."

Aware that his understrength company desperately needed reinforcements, Mohr sent Pfc. Dominick Trepasso and Sergeant William Weinberg back to battalion headquarters to get help. "When we got there, I showed Lt. Col. Ware our position on the map," said Weinberg. "I told him there were not many survivors left, and the ones who were alive were centered around Company B on the northeast slope. Ware immediately put together a task force of about 25 men. I led them up a road and through a vineyard back to Company B."

For the better part of two hours, Lt. Col. Ware reconnoitered the enemy positions. With the aid of his field glasses, Lieutenant Mohr watched the events unfold. "Lieutenant Colonel Ware moved up the hill, exploring the enemy positions, feeling out possible approaches to the heart of the German stronghold," Mohr marveled. "He deliberately drew fire on himself to locate enemy automatic weapons."

At approximately 2 PM, Ware decided that a vigorous display of leadership was required. "After Lieutenant Colonel Ware returned to the battalion, he went from foxhole to foxhole trying to inspire us to attack. He then armed himself with an automatic rifle and led a handful of men and a tank in a daring assault on six enemy machine gun positions at the top of the hill. It was the most incredible thing I ever saw," Weinberg later recalled.

Captain Rankin, who accompanied Ware in his daring action, agreed. "Seeing that the men, who had suffered heavy casualties in previous unsuccessful attacks were reluctant to move, Lieutenant Colonel Ware shouted, 'One platoon follow me!' and, seizing a BAR (Browning Automatic Rifle) from a soldier, took off toward the crest. Nine enlisted men, a tank, and myself [sic] followed him."

As soon as Ware and his men headed up the hill, enemy machine-gun fire converged on them from hidden positions. With bullets ricocheting off the rocks beside him, Ware boldly moved forward ahead of his men. Advancing calmly under fire, he approached to within 20 yards of the first enemy machine gun and shot two German riflemen. He then indicated its position to his tank by firing tracer rounds into the emplacement, enabling the tank to promptly knock the gun out of action. Turning his attention to a second machine gun, Ware advanced 50 more yards through furious fire and killed two of its supporting riflemen. Again, his tank silenced the gun. Having expended the rounds for the BAR, Ware took up an M1 rifle, killed another German soldier, and fired upon a third machine gun nearly 50 yards away. Once his tank destroyed the position, he charged toward a fourth machine gun and fearlessly engaged it, forcing German soldiers in supporting trenches nearby to surrender.

During this action, Ware's small assault group was fully engaged in attacking enemy positions. Five of the 11 men became casualties. Ware was wounded in the hand but refused medical attention. For his actions on Hill 351, Ware later received the Medal of Honor.

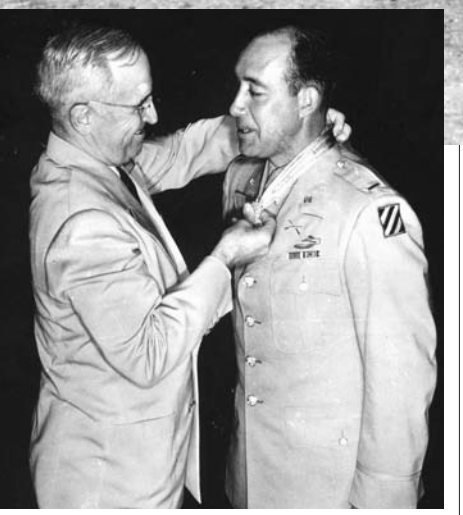
Captain Merlin C. Stoker, a member of the group that went with Ware, said, "It is my opinion that Colonel Ware's display of icy courage was an act, not only of heroism, but of necessity. It was essential that the deadlock in the Sigolsheim sector be broken and that the discouraged troops be given an injection of the offensive spirit."

Captain Rankin, who had also directed mortar on the hill during the assault, added, "Colonel Ware personally killed five Germans and captured about 20 others. Tank fire, which the colonel directed, accounted for four of the six machine guns that comprised the hard core of the German position."

ABOVE: Near St. Helene, France, a heavy machine-gun section of the 1st Battalion, 30th Regiment, 3rd Infantry Division moves forward along a stream under the watchful eye of a covering rifleman. TOP: U.S. infantrymen of the Ninth Army accept the surrender of a German soldier on November 18, 1944. This enemy combatant was one of 20 to give up that day.

Although the German defensive positions were significantly compromised, they still controlled the hill. When Ware got back to battalion headquarters, he called Lieutenant Mohr and ordered him to organize his company in preparation for the final assault.

"It was just about that time that I got hit in the hip," Mohr vividly recalled. "I immediately asked a private to come up and cut open my canteen so I could put ice on the wound. It was so cold that day that my drinking water was frozen. Then the scariest



ABOVE: The shoulder patch of the 3rd Infantry Division prominently visible on his uniform, First Lieutenant Eli Whiteley receives the Medal of Honor for his heroism on Hill 351. President Harry S. Truman presents the medal on August 23, 1945. TOP: Dozens of hungry and freezing German soldiers in the Colmar Pocket were eager to lay down their arms and surrender after the battle of Hill 351.

thing happened," Mohr said. "Suddenly, a shell came into our foxhole and hit the private right in the chest. I looked down on my leg and there were parts of his brains sitting there. We lost a lot of good men that day; it was one hell of a fight."

Meanwhile, the 2nd Battalion coordinated its fires with the attack of the 1st Battalion in the final clearing of Hill 351. Their position shattered, dozens of Germans were frantically running from the crest of the hill. Mortar fire from D Company spread over the forward slope, inflicting heavy casualties on the panic stricken enemy. Private Richard Byham, who followed Ware up the hill, commented, "I was ordered to the top to take prisoners if possible…. Thirty-seven of the enemy surrendered…. I was told later that many of the Germans occupying the trenches at the top escaped to Sigolsheim below the hill."

Hill 351, the towns of Bennwihr and Sigols-heim, and a large number of prisoners constituted the holiday gift that Brig. Gen. Robert N. Young, acting 3rd Division commander, received from the 15th Regiment. However, the price of the victory was high. Weinberg remembered, "We called Hill 351 'Christmas Hill,' and the Germans called it 'Bloody Hill.' Both names were fitting."

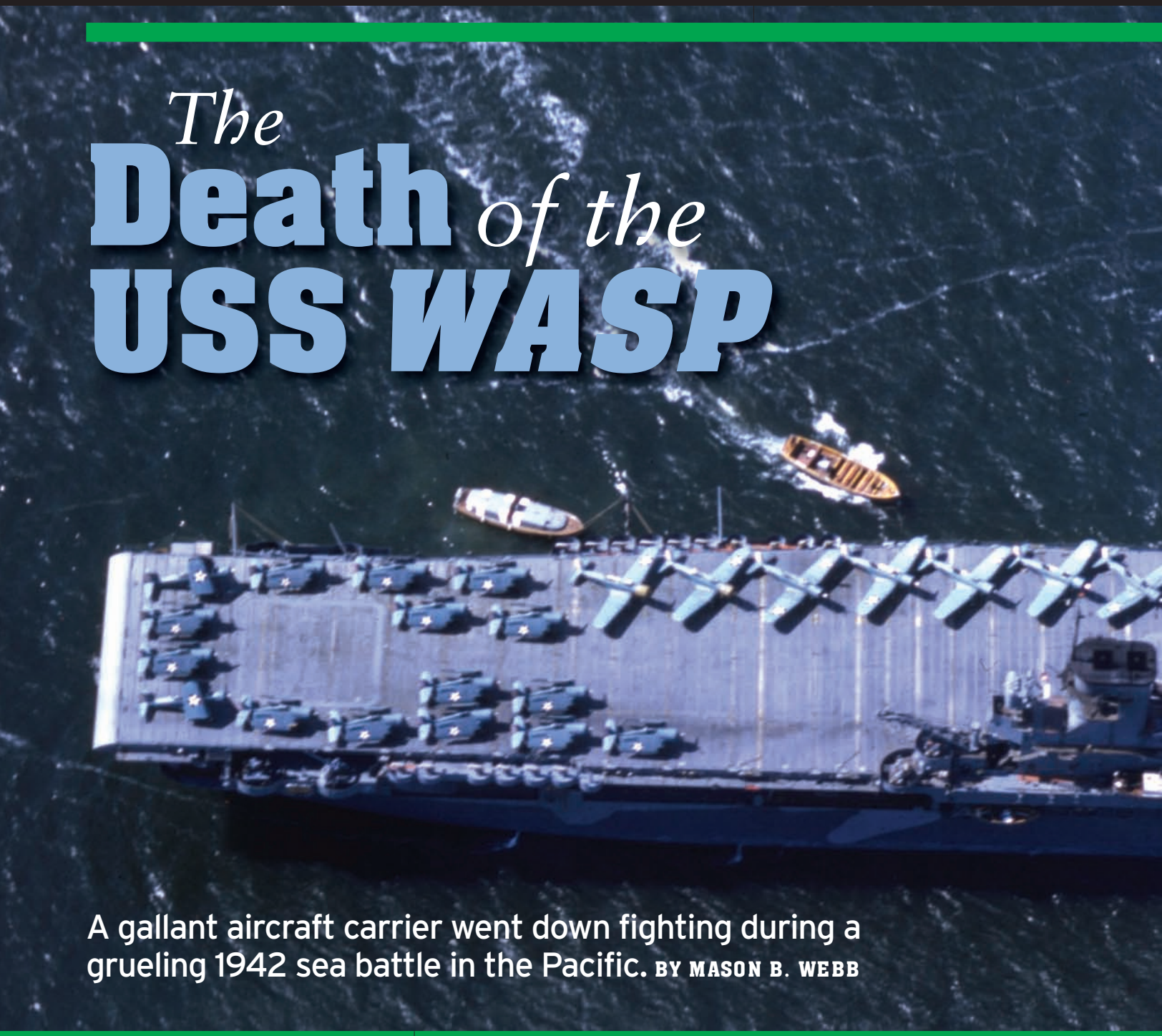
Mohr summed up the sacrifice: "B Company had the largest casualties that day. We lost all our officers and over forty percent of the company."

The Official History of the U.S. Army in World War II describes the action at Hill 351 as one of several "unheralded skirmishes." To the men of the 15th Regiment, the fight was a life and death struggle. They had fought valiantly to dislodge a well-entrenched force of 200 battle-hardened German troops. In the end, the regiment seized a position that the enemy had been ordered to hold to the death. First Lieutenant Eli Whiteley of L Company received the second 1st Battalion Medal of Honor for heroism on December 26, 1944.

Lieutenant Colonel Keith L. Ware eventually was promoted to the rank of major general. He was killed in action 25 years later, while commanding the 1st Infantry Division in Vietnam.

Dan Champagne has taught U.S. history and American government in the public school system for 10 years. He is the author of the book Dogface Soldiers: The Story of B Company, 15th Regiment, 3rd Infantry Division, *published in 2003. He resides in Williamsburg, Virginia.*

The Death of the USS WASP



A gallant aircraft carrier went down fighting during a grueling 1942 sea battle in the Pacific. BY MASON B. WEBB

After the debacle at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, the United States realized that it had its hands full. Suddenly, America found itself faced with the worst of all military contingencies: a two-front war.

With many of its Pacific Fleet warships sunk or badly damaged, the U.S. Navy scrambled to find enough assets to take the war to the Japanese, who had been bounding from one conquest to another in the Pacific Rim since invading Manchuria in 1931.

Then in late 1941 and early 1942 came more victories: the British crown colony of Hong Kong, British Malaya, Thailand, French Indochina, Singapore, the Philippines, and key oil-rich areas such as Central Java, Malang, Cepu, Sumatra, Dutch Borneo, and Dutch New Guinea in the Dutch East Indies. Soldiers who had surrendered were mercilessly executed.

A series of islands—Guam, Labuan, Wake—also fell to the Japanese. Everywhere the Imperial Japanese Army attacked seemed to crumble with great ease. But the string of unbridled successes caused Emperor Hirohito to say, "The fruits of victory are tumbling into our mouths too quickly."

It didn't take a strategic genius to look at a map of the Pacific and see where the Japan-

Aerial view of the USS *Wasp* (CV-7) near San Diego, California, in June 1942, shows 38 Hellcats and Dauntlesses, some with their wings folded, arrayed on the flight deck.

ese invasions were heading: Australia.

A series of events then took place that shook the Japanese's belief that they were unstoppable, invulnerable, invincible. It began with Jimmy Doolittle's attack on Tokyo and environs, followed by the Battle of the Coral Sea (May 4-8, 1942) and the Battle of Midway (June 4-7, 1942).

Doolittle's raid by 16 B-25 bombers on April 18, 1942, was made possible because the American aircraft carrier USS *Hornet* had not been present at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941; in fact, no American carriers were at Pearl on that fateful day, thus sparing them from destruction and a possible even greater Japanese victory.

Next, in May 1942, the Japanese, despite numerical superiority, failed to defeat the Allies at the Battle of the Coral Sea. Third, in June 1942, they lost a four-carrier task force at the Battle of Midway, which proved to be the turning point of the war in the Pacific.

But Midway did not end Japanese dreams of further conquest. They knew that if they could hold the British Solomon Islands (which they had invaded in early 1942) lying off the eastern tip of New Guinea, they stood a good chance of invading the British colony of Australia and perhaps even knocking it out of the

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war. At the very least, Japanese control of the area would threaten the lines of communication between the U.S. and the east coast of Australia.

In the spring and summer of 1942, therefore, the Solomons became the next big test of wills between the United States and the Empire of Japan as each side poured resources into the area.

From August 7, 1942, until February 7, 1943, the Solomons, including the islands of Guadalcanal and Tulagi, became the scene of massive air, land, and sea battles between the two warring nations.

One of the American aircraft carriers sent to the region to replace U.S. Navy losses at Midway was the USS *Wasp* (CV-7)—a big, hulking, behemoth of a floating island 688 feet long, with a deck that was 109 feet wide. She displaced over 19,000 long tons fully loaded, had a range of 12,000 nautical miles, and had a modest top speed of 15 knots (destroyers were twice as fast).

Her ship's wartime complement was 2,167 officers, sailors, and Marines.

There have been seven other ships named *Wasp*, starting with the original, built in 1814. Except for *Hornet* (CV-8), she is the only ship named for an insect.

The seventh *Wasp*'s keel had been laid down on April 1, 1936, at the Fore River Shipyard in Quincy, Massachusetts. She was launched on April 4, 1939, and was commissioned a year later, ready to set out on whatever the gods of war had fated for her.

Like most warships, her sailors loved her, even though she had some serious flaws in the event of war, such as virtually no hull armor that might have protected her from torpedoes.

In May 1942, Captain Forrest Sherman, who had graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1917, assumed command of the *Wasp*.

When war broke out, *Wasp* was part of the Atlantic Fleet supporting the American wartime occupation of Iceland. She then joined with the British Home Fleet in April 1942 and ferried British fighter aircraft to Malta during the battles in the Mediterranean.

In June 1942, *Wasp* was transferred to the Pacific, where the Pacific Fleet had been reduced to three carriers (*Hornet*, *Saratoga*, and *Enterprise*), and prepared to provide air support for the U.S. landings on Guadalcanal.

Marine Captain Ron Van Stockum recalled, "When I was detached from *Wasp* at San Diego on June 25, 1942, Marine Captain John W. Kennedy Jr. relieved me as commanding officer of the Marine Detachment. In a letter to me, dated September 6, 1942, he wrote: 'We are still afloat, and I hope we stay that way.' His hopes were not fulfilled. Just nine days later, *Wasp* had disappeared beneath the sea, taking him, along with many of my former shipmates, to 'Davy Jones' Locker.'"

Arriving on station in the South Pacific, *Wasp* joined with *Saratoga* and *Enterprise*, part of the Guadalcanal invasion support force under Vice Adm. Frank Jack Fletcher. D-day was set for August 1, but the late arrival of some of the Marine transports pushed the date of invasion back to August 7, 1942.

When the battle opened, *Wasp* and the other carriers launched their Wildcats and Dauntlesses against Japanese targets on Tulagi, Gavutu, Tanambogo, and other islands while 10,000 Marines came ashore. Japanese aircraft that tried to intervene in the invasion were shot out of the sky. On August 7 and 8, *Wasp* pilots were credited with down-

ing 15 enemy flying boats, eight floatplane fighters, and one Zero; *Wasp* aircraft lost totaled three Wildcats and one Dauntless scout bomber.

On August 24, *Wasp* was away refueling when the Battle of the Eastern Solomons broke out; she hurriedly rejoined the fleet, and her planes engaged in aerial battles. During the fighting, both *Enterprise* and *Saratoga* were damaged and had to retire for repairs, leaving *Wasp* and *Hornet* the only two carriers in the area.

On Tuesday, September 15, 1942, the carriers *Wasp* and *Hornet* and battleship *North Carolina*, along with 10 other warships, were escorting the transports carrying the 7th Marine Regiment to Guadalcanal as reinforcements. *Wasp* was operating some 150 nautical miles southeast of San Cristobal Island, and her aircraft were being refueled and rearmed for anti-submarine patrol missions.

ABOVE: F4F Wildcats from Fighting Squadron 71 (VF-71) are lined up on *Wasp*'s deck, April 1942. The next month *Wasp* would ferry Spitfires from Glasgow, Scotland, to Malta in the Mediterranean, where she participated in a joint operation with Britain's Royal Navy to resupply aircraft to that island nation. BELOW: An SBD Dauntless scout bomber from *Wasp* flies patrol near Guadalcanal during the invasion there, August 1942. OPPOSITE: Lieutenant David T. McCampbell, USN, Landing Signal Officer, brings in planes, circa late 1941 or early 1942. Note F4F Wildcats flying overhead. McCampbell would become the Navy's highest-scoring ace in World War II.

Both: Naval History and Heritage Command

Wasp had been at general quarters from an hour before sunrise until 10:00 AM, the time when the morning search party returned to the ship. Thereafter, the ship was in Condition 2, with the air department at flight quarters. The only contact with the Japanese that day had been a four-engine flying boat that was shot down by one of *Wasp*'s Wildcats at 12:15 PM.

At about 2:20 PM, the carrier turned into the wind to launch eight Wildcats and 18 Dauntlesses and to recover eight Wildcats and three Dauntlesses that had been airborne since before noon.

In the September 1944 issue of *Flying* magazine, war correspondent Spencer Held interviewed Lt. (j.g.) Millard "Redbird" Thrash, a Wildcat pilot previously assigned to *Wasp*.

"The 25-year-old aviator said, 'It was a typical South Pacific day, with brilliant sunshine and a few scattered cumulous cloud puffs. Along about mid-afternoon my flight of Grumman Wildcats took off for combat patrol over the carrier. It was an extra job for me, and my roommate was taking a nap in our stateroom when I left.'"

The eight patrolling Wildcats and three Dauntlesses had just returned to the ship before she began turning to starboard. At 2:44 PM a lookout reported "three torpedoes ... three points forward of the starboard beam."

At that moment, a spread of six Type 95 "Long Lance" torpedoes was fired at *Wasp* from the tubes of the B1 Type submarine *I-19*. *Wasp* put over her rudder hard to starboard to avoid the salvo, but it was too late. Three torpedoes struck in quick succession at about 2:45; one actually broached, left the water, and struck the ship slightly above the waterline. All hit in the vicinity of the ship's gasoline tanks and magazines.

Held wrote, "Circling above the *Wasp* at 3,000 feet, Millard Thrash looked down on the flat-top just in time to see two enormous white spouts of water leap into the air, high above the superstructure, followed by belches of red and black flames and smoke blossoming up from amidships.

"'Torpedoes!' Thrash told himself, swallowing hard. "One torpedo, I learned later, hit near my stateroom, killing my roommate and about 20 others in the vicinity. I circled down with the other planes, in the hope of getting a crack at the Japs. I came down as low as 100 feet, peering vainly into the sea for just one glimpse of a sinister shadow that spelled submarine."

Two of the spread of torpedoes passed ahead of *Wasp* and were observed passing astern of the cruiser *Helena* before the destroyer *O'Brien* was hit by one while maneuvering to avoid the other (structural damage from this torpedo hit would eventually lead to *O'Brien*'s sinking a month later).

The sixth torpedo passed either astern or under *Wasp*, narrowly missed the destroyer *Lansdowne* in *Wasp*'s screen at about 2:48 PM, and struck *North Carolina* at 2:52.

Captain Sherman slowed *Wasp* to 10 knots, ordering the rudder put to port to try to get the wind on the starboard bow; then, in an attempt to keep the fire forward, he went astern with right rudder until the wind was on the starboard quarter. At that point, flames made the central station unusable, and communication circuits went dead.

Held: "Lieutenant Thrash had some measure of relief when he saw the carrier make a hard left turn, and it looked as if the fires were subsiding and that the worst was over. But then another huge blast billowed up from the ship's starboard side. I figured it was another torpedo hit but learned later that it probably was one of our own bombs, set off by blazing aviation gasoline ignited by the tin fish."

Thrash was correct. A serious gasoline fire had broken out in the forward portion of the hangar; within 24 minutes of the initial attack, there were three additional major gasoline vapor explosions.

Aviator Mike Kernodle was at his battle station in air plot, where he directed the ship's air operations. He heard a warning, followed immediately by a series of explosions. In his report, he wrote:

"Fixtures and equipment were torn loose and heaped on the deck, all instruments to lighting were blasted out of commission and all personnel thrown about, but no serious injuries to personnel resulted."

After checking the ready rooms to see if all aviation personnel had moved out onto the flight deck or had gone aft, he saw a damage-control party trying to douse the fires but having no foam or water.

"Having expended all the CO2, they ran over to the port walkway just forward of

Both: Naval History and Heritage Command

ABOVE: *Wasp*'s commander Captain Forrest P. Sherman and Marine Captain Ron Van Stockum inspect the Marine detachment aboard ship, June 1942. BELOW: Scene on *Wasp*'s port bridge wing during operations off Guadalcanal on August 7, 1942. Shown are (from left to right) Commander D.F. Smith (hatless); Captain Forrest P. Sherman, Commanding Officer (wearing helmet); Rear Adm. Leigh Noyes, Commander Task Group 61.1 (facing camera); and Lt. Cmdr. Wallace M. Beakley, Commander Wasp Air Group, who is making his report to Rear Admiral Noyes. OPPOSITE: With a destroyer escort and her flight deck devoid of planes, *Wasp* enters Hampton Roads, Virginia, May 26, 1942. She was returning from her Mediterranean duty.

number two elevator and were leading out another hose when a terrific explosion occurred apparently almost exactly underneath the midship elevator. All steel plating, expansion joint covers, barrier stanchions and plating about No. 2 elevator was blown high into the air, possibly 150 feet.

"Some of the men were also blown into the air and I did not see them again. I was thrown back from the walkway into the island doorway and landed on deck in a squatting position, for that is the position and place I found myself in after the explosion."

Circling above, Lieutenant Thrash watched in horror the disaster unfolding below him. Held wrote, "As *Wasp* circled to her left, bombs deep within her continued to go off, throwing flight-deck planks, jagged chunks of steel, and sailors into the air and overboard. Thrash was greeted with an aerial view of 'clouds of bright red fire erupting from both sides below the flight deck, billowing out 200 yards, leaving black smoke streamers and scattering little pools of fire on the water. Sprays of red, yellow, and green lights shot out like Roman candles.'"

Held also noted, "According to his shipmates, Ensign John J. Mitchell established a new world's record for an involuntary high jump by getting himself blown 30 feet high and 60 feet away. He had been standing at a gun station about 25 to 35 feet below and 60 feet from the bridge when he spotted a white wake heading for the *Wasp*. A tremendous explosion, sounding to Mitchell like 'a railroad train going up a flight of stairs,' catapulted him into the air.

"He landed hard on his back on a platform around the bridge and broke his leg; the rest of his gun crew had been killed. 'I guess God had his hand on my shoulder at that time. I started for the Pearly Gates, but He stopped me in midair,' he said days later from a hospital bed."

His boss, Lieutenant Courtney Shands, commander of *Wasp*'s air group, came to Mitchell's aid and strapped the unconscious officer to a stretcher. Then Shands raced down below the flight deck to the carrier's smoke-filled hangar, frantically digging out a life raft from one of the Wildcats; airplanes and ammunition were exploding. Shands and another officer, Lieutenant Robert Slye, placed Mitchell into the raft and carefully lowered it into the sea, where it promptly capsized.

"The sea was full of sharks which were attracted by the bloody gruel of bodies,

and everybody in it was under great temptation to make tracks away from there. But Slye struggled with the raft until he righted it, pausing every now and then to thrash at the sharks with his feet."

Held: "While this action was taking place, the rest of the escorting ships were not sitting idly by; cruisers and destroyers were lobbing out depth charges in a furious attempt to cripple whatever enemy subs had dared to inflict the damage on *Wasp*."

Thrash recalled, "When a pattern of charges exploded beneath the water, the surface quivered violently, and a few seconds later several geysers rose high in the air. I saw another warship take a hit from a Jap torpedo. She shuddered but changed neither course nor speed. Another ship survived the effects of a torpedo hit without the loss of a single man and steamed cockily away for repairs so she could fight another day."

Looking down on the *Wasp* from his Wildcat, Thrash estimated that about two-thirds of her crew were lined up on the flight deck, ready to abandon ship or undertake whatever other duties might be assigned. He even saw "men pushing some of our $75,000 Grummans over the side in order to localize the fire and better distribute the ship's weight."

Within the smoking *Wasp*, crewmen were doing their best to save their fellow sailors, listening for men banging on watertight doors and carrying burned and coughing men up ladders to reach fresh air.

Great, fiery blasts continued to rip through the forward part of the ship. The switchboard in the forward engine room was knocked down, the two forward auxiliary diesel generators were knocked loose from their foundations, and the forward turbo generator failed, leaving the forward part of the ship without light or power.

Aircraft on the flight and hangar decks were thrown about as if they were toys and dropped on the deck with such force that landing gears snapped. Planes in the hangar overheads fell and landed upon those on the hangar deck; fires broke out almost simultaneously in the hangar and below decks.

The water mains in the forward part of *Wasp* had been rendered inoperable, meaning that no water was available to fight the fire forward, and the flames continued to set off ammunition, bombs, and gasoline. The ready ammunition at the forward antiaircraft guns on the starboard side was exploding, and fragments showered the forward part of *Wasp*. The number-two 1.1-inch mount was blown overboard, and the corpse of the gun captain was thrown onto the bridge, where it landed next to Captain Sherman.

As the ship listed 10–15 degrees to starboard, oil and gasoline, released from the tanks by the torpedo hit, caught fire on the water.

With the damage-control teams unable to stop the spreading flames and after consulting with his executive officer—Commander Fred C. Dickey—and Rear Adm. Leigh Noyes, commander of Task Group 61.1, who had made *Wasp* his flagship, Captain Sherman ordered "abandon ship" at 3:20 PM.

Many unwounded men had to abandon ship from aft because the forward fires were burning with such intensity. The departure, according to Sherman, looked "orderly," and there was no panic. The only delays occurred when many men showed reluctance to leave until all the wounded had been taken off.

The abandonment took nearly 40 minutes, and at 4:00 PM Sherman, Dickey, and Noyes—satisfied that no one was left on deck, in the galleries, or in the hangar aft—swung over the lifeline on the fantail and slid into the sea.

Held wrote, "After two hours, with all hope gone, Captain Sherman gave the order to abandon ship, and the men, wearing life vests, either slid down lines or leaped 70 feet from the listing flight deck into the sea. Several failed to remove their steel helmets and, when they hit the water feet first, the fastened chinstraps jerked their heads backward, breaking their necks.

"Soon there were hundreds of faces dotting the ocean's surface," Thrash recalled see-

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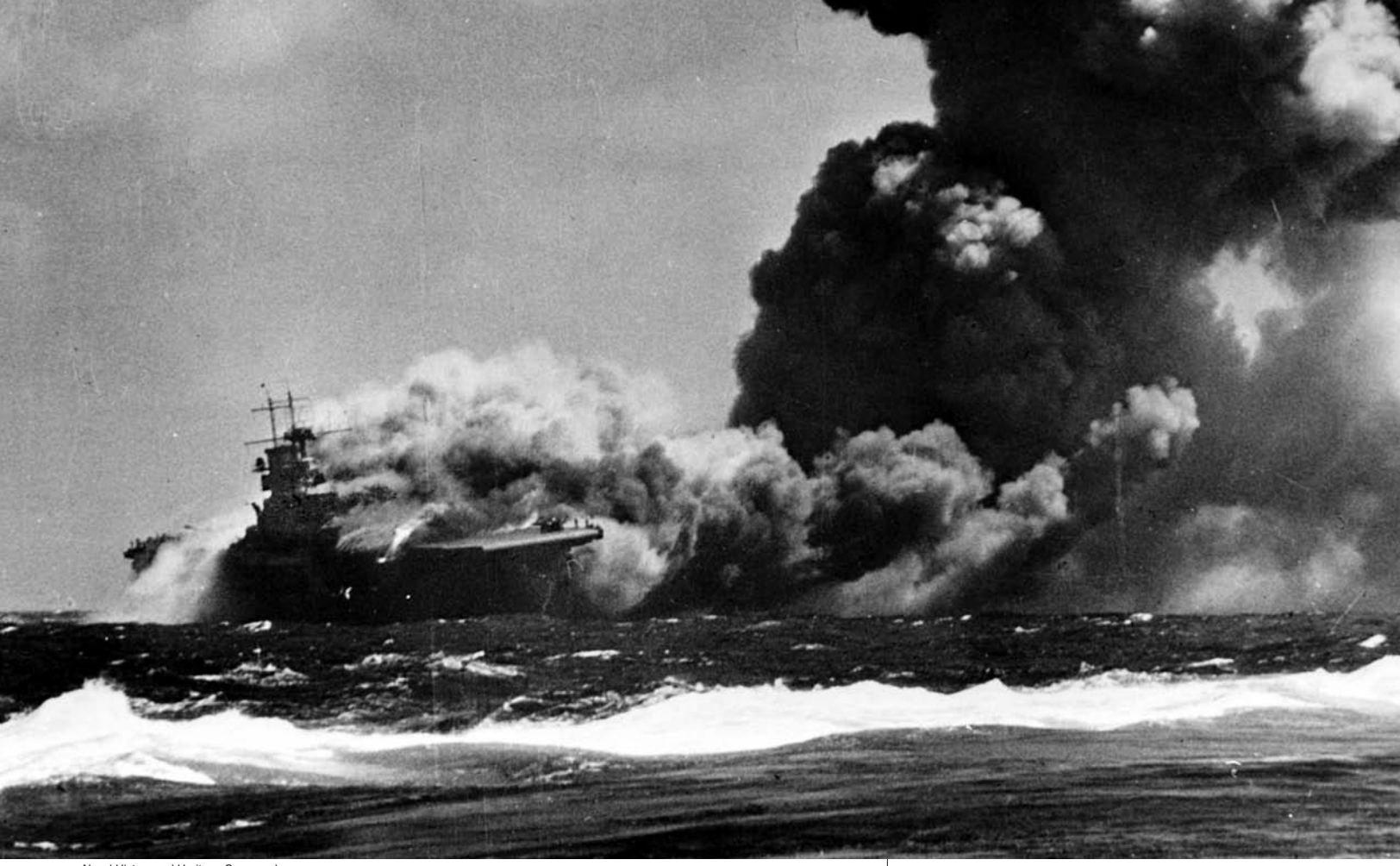
ABOVE: Explosions rip through *Wasp* after she was struck by torpedoes from the IJN submarine *I-19* on September 15, 1942. Later, torpedoes from the destroyer USS *Lansdowne* (DD-486) scuttled her. OPPOSITE: Engulfed in smoke and listing to starboard, the doomed *Wasp* resists all efforts at firefighting south of San Cristobal Island.



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ing while circling over the ship. "They were swimming in a lake of aviation gasoline and diesel oil. As the carrier burned more fiercely … the fuel caught fire, and the inferno threatened to engulf the helpless men. It looked like half the life rafts bobbing in the water were rings of fire offering no haven to the swimmers. I feared they were doomed.'

Fortunately, the flames did not spread far from the glowing, red-hot hull, which was turned into a giant furnace by the fires raging inside.

Held wrote, "Lieutenant Courtney Shands, commander of *Wasp*'s air group, was floating in the water in his 'Mae West' life preserver and holding on to an injured man when he saw Lieutenant Ray 'Tubby' Conklin helping a wounded sailor down one of the lines and into the ocean. While towing a wounded man toward one of the life rafts, Shands was amazed that Conklin towed his casualty past him 'on the double.'

The reason for Conklin's Olympic speed? A shark was following him; the beasts had already devoured at least one man and were hunting for more.

"For more than two hours, *Wasp*, dead in the water, continued to burn while smaller ships moved in close to rescue the survivors. Shands recalled learning later that one badly burned officer had swum to the closest destroyer but died as soon as he was pulled aboard.

"With his carrier listing heavily to port and covered by a shroud of thick, black smoke, Thrash—and the other aviators aloft—searched for another ship on which to land. They managed to find *Hornet* and landed safely.

"My last view of the flat-top was blurred with tears," Thrash admitted. "She had been my home for eight months, and I was strongly attached to her. Scores of the boys aboard were my pals."

Despite the ever-present danger of submarines, the cruisers *Helena* and *Salt Lake City* and the destroyers *Lansdowne*, *Laffey*, *Farenholt*, *Lardner*, and *Duncan* patrolled through the flaming waters around *Wasp* and picked up 1,946 survivors.

As night began to fall, the fires worked their way aft, consuming the flight deck and bridge; four more violent explosions boomed. Of her ship's company, a Marine detachment and an embarked air group—25 officers and 150 men—were killed or missing, and 366 were wounded. In addition, 28-year-old Jack Singer, an International News Service war correspondent, also died in the disaster. A Liberty ship was later named in his honor.

When he learned of Singer's death, Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox paid tribute to the gallantry and perseverance of the American war correspondent. "I think we all feel a great sense of pride at the long chance men are taking to get the news," Knox stated. "It is very admirable and creditable to the profession."

All but one of *Wasp*'s 26 airborne aircraft were able to land safely on the carrier *Hornet* nearby before *Wasp* sank, but 45 aircraft went down with the ship.

Captain Sherman wrote: "By about 1515 [3:15 PM] the fire had spread through the forward half of the ship and was burn-

ing fiercely. It had become necessary to evacuate the interior of the island. Numerous casualties were being inflicted by exploding ammunition and by the fire.

"The reports received from below and the results witnessed on deck showed that efforts to combat the fire were futile due to lack of water. Efforts to couple hoses together and get water from aft had not been effective because lack of water pressure. The main engines had been able to meet the initial demands made upon them and the stern was still tenable except for the hazards from flying fragments.

"The fire was completely out of control and was working steadily aft. After receiving reports from both the Air Officer [Kernodle] and the Air Group Commander who had just returned from the hangar deck, and after consultation with the Executive Officer, I reluctantly decided that the ship could not be saved and that men must be gotten off promptly if unnecessarily heavy loss of life were not to be incurred. After consulting with the Task Force Commander [Noyes], and with his approval, about 1520 [3:20 PM] I issued orders to abandon ship."

At the fantail, a small group of about seven or eight officers and men gathered around Captain Sherman. Chaplain Williams recalled, "We reported to the Captain that the wounded were evacuated and the men over the side."

Sherman calmly replied, 'Thank you. Well, gentlemen, it is time to leave.'"

Sherman's own after-action report says, "All injured men were gotten onto rafts or rubber boats. All the occupants of the sick bay were cared for and all were rescued. Rafts and float nets were used as far as possible, but the fire in the ship and on the water forward required most men to leave from aft with life preservers only, or with mattresses or other substitutes …

"About 1600 [4:00 PM] I lowered myself into the water. At this time the list to starboard was increasing steadily. While swimming away from the ship I observed the fire working aft in the hangar and on deck, the list increasing, and continued explosions."

Wasp was still burning fiercely and dead in the water. She could not be left in that state, so the decision was made to scuttle her. *Lansdowne* was selected to administer the *coup de grace* and fired five torpedoes into the dying ship's gutted hull. The first two torpedoes were fired perfectly, but did not explode, leaving *Lansdowne* with only three more.

The magnetic-influence detonators on these were disabled and the depth set at 10 feet. These next three tin fish exploded, but *Wasp* remained defiantly afloat. By now, the orange flames had enveloped the stern, and the carrier floated in a burning pool of gasoline and oil. She sank by the bow at 9:00 PM.

In Pulitzer Prize-winning war correspondent Ira Wolfert's words, "The *Wasp* died a lingering death, burning for hours with vast, blazing spewings that looked like the mouth

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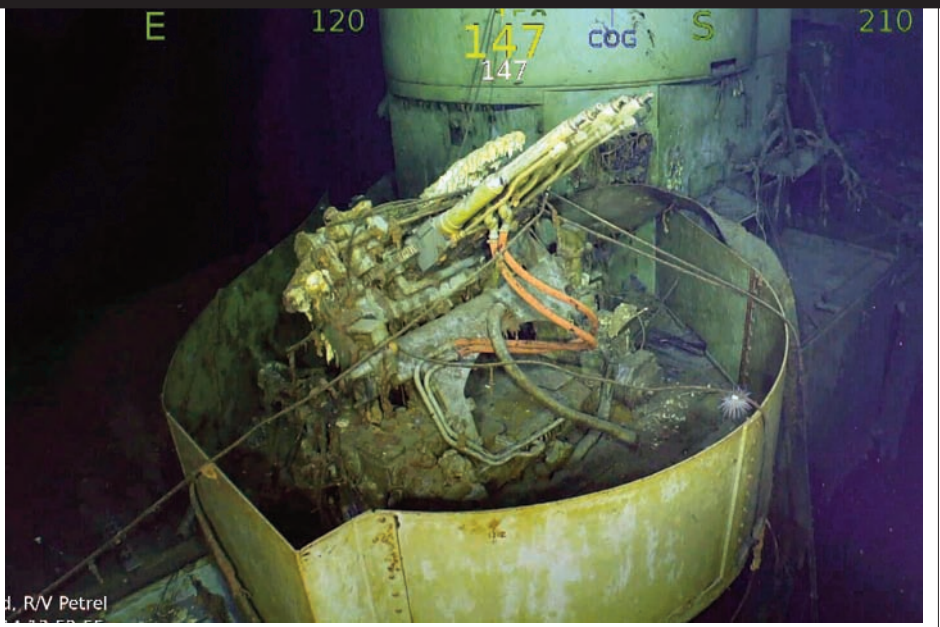
Both: Paul Allen's *R/V Petrel*



A search party financed by Paul Allen photographed an antiaircraft gun tub (top) aboard *Wasp* after she was located in January 2019. A silent witness to the ferocity of the battle, a badly mangled Dauntless (bottom) rests near *Wasp* at a depth of 14,255 feet. OPPOSITE: Sailors can be seen preparing to abandon ship at the bow of *Wasp* as she burns fiercely on September 15, 1942. A total of 171 officers and 1,798 enlisted men survived, while 25 officers and 150 men lost their lives.

of war itself opened wide … In the end, United States destroyers reluctantly had to give the *coup de grace* with torpedoes."

In the wake of *Wasp*'s loss, Captain Sherman praised the commanding officers of the five destroyers that rescued his men. "Their task," Sherman wrote, "required the nicest judgment in seamanship and required that their ships be stopped for considerable periods while many seriously wounded casualties were laboriously taken aboard. The limited facilities of the *Duncan* and *Lansdowne* in particular were stretched almost to the breaking point in an attempt to support life in the gravely wounded and to make all others as comfortable as possible during the passage to port."

The loss of *Wasp* left *Hornet* the only U.S. aircraft carrier in the Pacific; *Hornet* was herself sunk during the Battle of Santa Cruz on October 26, 1942. Fortunately, American shipyards, working around the clock, were already turning out more carriers that would take the place of those that had gone to the ocean's floor in a blaze of glory.

Epilogue

In 1949, Admiral Forrest P. Sherman became Chief of Naval Operations, at that time the youngest man to serve as head of the Navy. Nearly two years later, while on a military and diplomatic trip to Europe, he died in Naples, Italy, of a heart attack at age 54.

For 77 years the burned and blasted hulk of the *Wasp* lay undisturbed in her watery grave 350 miles southeast of Guadalcanal. Then, in the early morning hours of January 14, 2019, researchers laid eyes on her.

According to the *New York Times*, "Aboard a 250-foot-long research vessel called the *Petrel*, originally built for servicing oil fields, a group of explorers, historians, divers and submersible pilots have been combing the South Pacific for the graves of American warships like the *Wasp* since 2017.

"Funded by Paul Allen, a co-founder of Microsoft who died in October 2018 and who wanted to find these ships as a way to honor his father's military service in World War II, the ship's state-of-the-art technology allows for faster and more efficient searches than were possible even a decade ago."

The Navy has no intention to touch the wreck at all. Its interest is in studying the *Wasp* and other wrecks the *Petrel* has found, in part to assess the damage the ships suffered and to see what lessons can be applied to how the service builds ships in the future.

"The *Wasp* is sitting upright on the bottom of the Pacific, in pretty deep mud," says Sam Cox, a retired admiral who heads the Navy's historical department. "The mud actually comes up to about where the water line was, so you can't see where the actual torpedoes hit."

[Allen's crew also found the carrier *Hornet* while on the same trip, resting on the bottom about 400 miles northeast of Guadalcanal, and the USS *Indianapolis* in August 2017.] □

Hitler's refusal to abandon hopeless positions resulted in the sacrifice of troops Germany could ill afford to lose.

BY PAT McTAGGART

ON July 4, 1942, the men of newly promoted Field Marshal Erich von Manstein's Eleventh Army celebrated the capture of the last Soviet bastion in the Crimea.

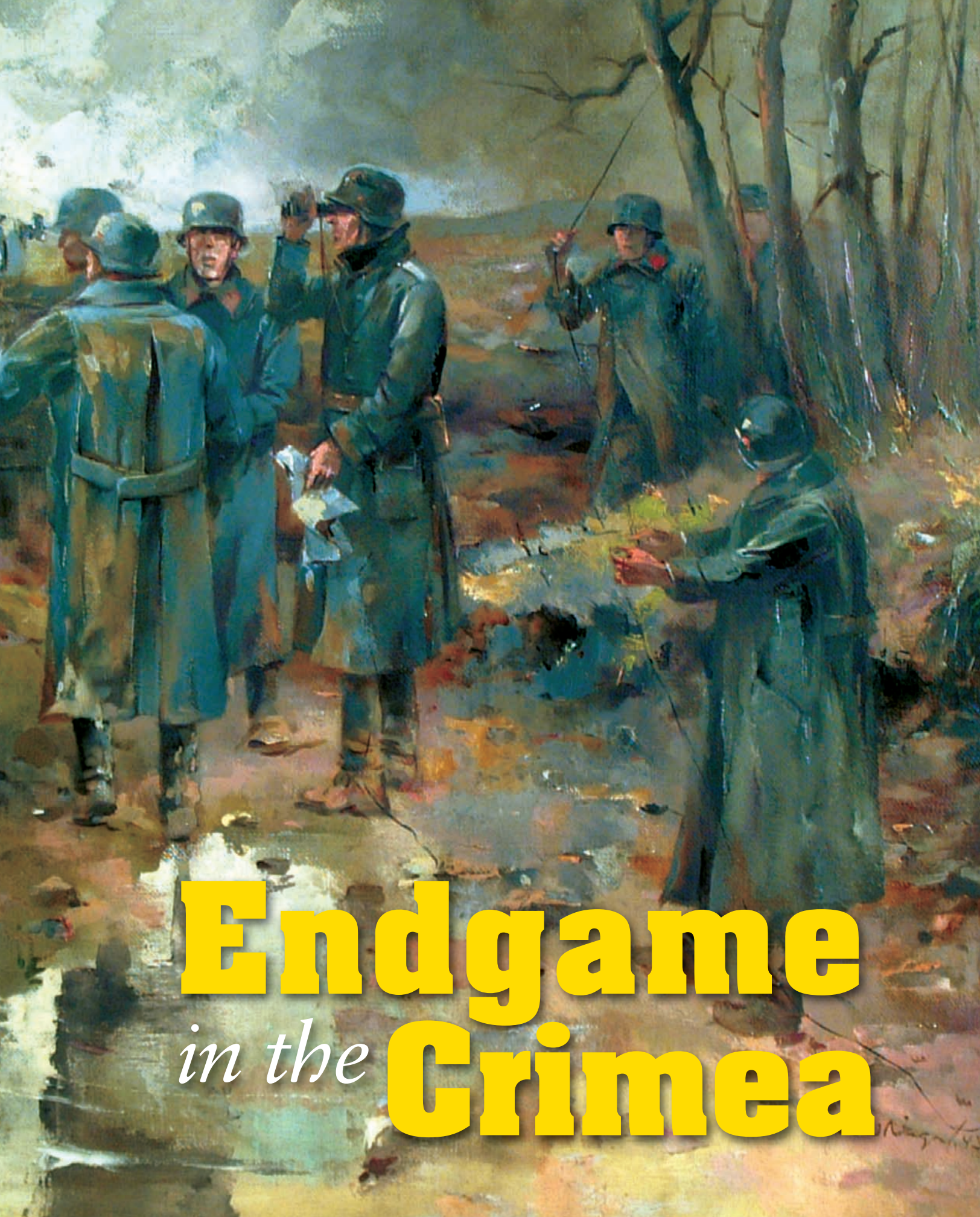
Since September 24 of the previous year, von Manstein's German and Romanian battalions had fought a stubborn Russian opponent for control of the peninsula. The forts surrounding the port of Sevastopol had fallen only after costly frontal attacks by German assault troops.

Von Manstein had little time to celebrate with his men. His headquarters was soon moved, first to Leningrad, then disbanded and von Manstein was assigned to the Stalingrad sector, where he was charged with stopping the Soviet attack that threatened to shatter the German front in southern Russia.

Newspaper headlines and German radio were already declaring victory in southern Russia, and the Crimean garrison had little doubt that victory was close at hand.Although the peninsula seemed to have been relegated to the backwaters of the war, there was still work to be done by the Germans and their Romanian allies. Airfields had to be guarded against sporadic attacks from partisan groups, and the ports along the Black Sea had to be maintained to support the troops advancing toward the Eurasian border.

The tide of battle suddenly changed when the Soviets launched their own Stalingrad offensive on November 19, 1942.

Battered by extended periods of bitter fighting, German soldiers take advantage of a brief respite on the Eastern Front and await the renewal of a Red Army onslaught.



Endgame *in the* Crimea

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

ABOVE: Soviet forces launched an offensive from the north and east against once-victorious German troops now trapped on the Crimean Peninsula. ABOVE LEFT: The Red Army lost 90,000 prisoners of war when Sevastopol fell to the Germans in the summer of 1942. However, the Black Sea became a prison for its German garrison. OPPOSITE: Covered by two comrades, a nurse tends to one of many Soviet casualties amid the ruins of a shattered house.

Within months, the mighty Sixth Army of Field Marshal Friedrich Paulus was destroyed, sacrificed by Hitler in a futile attempt to hold the city. South of Stalingrad, three Soviet fronts (army groups) battered the First Panzer Army and the Seventeenth Army that comprised Field Marshal Ewald von Kleist's *Heeresgruppe A* (Army Group A), which had been advancing on the Caucasian oil fields at Grozny and Baku.

While the Battle of Stalingrad was in full swing, *Heeresgruppe A* fought for its life. The Soviets gradually pushed von Kleist's two armies back toward the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov, threatening to cut off the *Heeresgruppe* by advancing on Rostov. Von Manstein, now in command of *Heeresgruppe Don*, later renamed *Heeresgruppe Süd* (South), put up a desperate fight to keep the city from falling into Soviet hands.

General Eberhard von Mackensen's First Panzer Army managed to fight its way north and was able to escape through the narrow corridor still under German control. It was a different story for Col. Gen. Richard Ruoff's Seventeenth Army. Both von Manstein and von Kleist argued for the evacuation, by sea if necessary, of all of the forces of *Heeresgruppe A*, but Hitler refused to give up the bridgehead that the Seventeenth Army occupied on the Taman Peninsula.

Even after Stalingrad, Hitler still thought that the bridgehead could be used as a point for a future drive on the southern oil fields. Thanks to his stubbornness, the First Panzer Army's 50th Infantry Division was forced to move south and attach itself to the Seventeenth Army, which gave Ruoff needed infantry reinforcements. By the end of March 1943, Ruoff had established a defensive line that stretched from east of Novorossiysk north to the Sea of Azov.

The Germans on the Taman Peninsula held their positions throughout the summer and early fall of 1943. Although Ruoff's men did tie down a considerable number of Soviet forces, the divisions of the Seventeenth Army could have been better used in the critical battles in the Donets Basin that raged during the first half of the year.

On June 25, General Erwin Jaenecke assumed command of the Seventeenth Army. He arrived at a critical time for both German and Russian forces on the Eastern Front.

The great German offensive at Kursk, which began on July 5, occupied the Red Army for the first half of the month. When Hitler, nervous about the Allied landings in Sicily, called off the attack, the Soviets gained some much-needed time to replenish their depleted armies before beginning their own offensive in the area.

The German failure at Kursk gave the Red Army the opportunity to take the offensive on the Eastern Front once and for all. Recovering quickly from the huge losses of men and materiel suffered in July, the Soviets prepared to launch a series of attacks designed to batter the German lines from Smolensk to Rostov. The offensive began in the last week of August with a series of staggered attacks across the front. The German High Command was kept off balance as Russian forces struck toward Smolensk and Briansk in the north, Kiev in the center, and Dnepropetrovsk and Kherson in the south.

While Jaenecke's Seventeenth Army sat impotently in the Taman, General R.I. Malinovsky's Southwest Front struck the First Panzer Army near Izyum, while General F.I. Tolbukhin's South Front hit the newly reconstituted Sixth Army, commanded by Col. Gen. Karl Hollidt, along the Mius River. Within days, calls for reinforcements were coming in from all sectors of the front, but there were few to be had. In turn, von Manstein went to Hitler's headquarters and bluntly told the Führer that the Donets

Basin could not be held unless reinforcements totaling at least 12 divisions were immediately sent to the *Heeresgruppe*.

Hitler said that he would find the divisions, but von Manstein had heard those empty promises before. When the Soviet 2nd Guards Mechanized Corps broke through the lines of the Sixth Army on August 31, von Manstein ordered a general withdrawal of the Sixth Army to new lines that had been established in the west. Logically, the next defensive stand in the south could be made only at the Dneper River. Hitler, however, refused to allow a withdrawal of that magnitude, citing severe political and economic repercussions if the entire Donets Basin was lost. Because of his stubbornness, the Germans faced Malinovsky and Tolbukhin in a poor defensive position east of the Dneper and were forced to fight a war of attrition that they could not possibly win.

On the Taman Peninsula, the Seventeenth Army finally was given permission to begin its own withdrawal. There was now no hope of using the Taman as a springboard to the Caucasian oil fields, so Jaenecke was ordered to start ferrying his men across the Kerch Straits to the relative safety of the Crimea.

Meanwhile, the Soviet offensive to the north gathered steam. By the end of September, Tolbukhin's 4th Ukrainian Front had reached the outskirts of Melitopol, about a hundred miles northeast of the Perekop Isthmus, the gateway to the Crimea. Soviet armies were also within reach of Dnepropetrovsk, Kiev, Gomel, and Vitebsk, and had already liberated Smolensk.

With the Seventeenth Army released from the senseless occupation of the Taman Peninsula, von Manstein now had a fairly potent pool of reserves. He asked Hitler for use of most of Jaenecke's divisions to shore up the front, but his request was steadfastly refused. The Seventeenth Army would stay where it was to prevent the fall of the Crimea.

Since the opening stages of the Russo-German conflict, Hitler had been obsessed with the Crimea. The Romanian oil fields, on which the Wehrmacht depended to fuel its divisions, were within range of Crimean air bases. Hitler often referred to the Crimea as an "unsinkable aircraft carrier," and once it was in his hands, he would not let it go.

Once it was clear that the Seventeenth Army was not going anywhere, Jaenecke put his men to work. The Crimea presented formidable obstacles to an invader, as was borne out in the German conquest of 1941-1942. An attack from the mainland had three possible avenues of advance. The Perekop Isthmus, only four

to five miles wide, was the most likely approach. It still contained Soviet defensive works that had been overrun in 1941, and Jaenecke wasted little time in sending engineering units to make them battleworthy again.

The other two routes crossed a saline marsh east of Perekop known as the Sivash. Neither had been particularly useful during the 1941 German advance, and Jaenecke doubted that they would be of much use to the Soviets. Even so, the German general sent construction units to erect barricades and strongpoints in the area. The old Soviet forts that had been destroyed during the siege of Sevastopol had lain deserted for more than a year, but Jaenecke also saw to it that work began on repairing those structures.

On the mainland, things became progressively worse for the Germans. By mid-October the Soviets had occupied virtually all of the Donets Basin. This gave them an economic boost with the grain and cattle that were recovered in the area. It also gave the Red Army a new source of replacements for its depleted divisions.

As soon as a town or city was reoccupied, the civilian men were immediately given a uniform and a rifle and were sent to the front, where they were expected to quickly master the art of war or die. This method of conscription replaced tens of thousands of casualties that had been suffered in the previous fighting. With that extra force, the Red Army was able to push the Germans west, across the Dneper River.

The Dneper, the second largest river in the Soviet Union, offered one of the best natural defensive positions in European Russia, especially for a defender dug in on the western bank, which was higher than the eastern bank. If the western bank had been adequately fortified, as von Manstein had suggested, the river would have presented a formidable barrier for the attacking Soviets.

Hitler had refused to fortify the area, stating that a strong defensive line in the rear would only give his soldiers a reason not to fight for every inch of the Donets Basin. This peculiar logic spelled disaster for the German forces in southern Russia, just as it would for other German armies all along the Eastern Front.

During the first week of October, while Soviet forces were regrouping for an assault across the Dneper, Malinovsky's Southwest Front and Tolbukhin's South Front became the 3rd and 4th Ukrainian Fronts. Malinovsky's 3rd Ukrainian Front was charged with crossing the Dneper in the First Panzer Army's sector, while Tolbukhin's 4th Ukrainian Front would hit Hollidt's Sixth Army (now under control of von Kleist's *Heeresgruppe A*), which was anchored on the coast of the Sea of Azov.

The Sixth Army did not have the benefit of the Dneper barrier, the great river angles to the southwest just below Zaporozhye, which was in the sector held by the First Panzer Army. To keep the front straight, and to protect the Crimea, Hollidt was forced to hold an area that was nothing more than a desolate steppe with little in the way of cover or natural defenses.

The storm broke on October 9, when more than 400 Soviet artillery batteries brought a rain of deadly steel down upon Hollidt's Sixth Army. The front was held by 13 German divisions (including two Panzer and two rather unreliable Luftwaffe Field Divisions) and two Romanian divisions. To break the Sixth Army's back, Tolbukhin had a total of 45 rifle divisions, three tank corps, two guards mechanized corps, and two guards cavalry corps. His 800 tanks outnumbered Hollidt's 83 panzers and 98 *Sturmgeschütze*

(assault guns) by a ratio of more than four to one.

Taking Melitopol was Tolbukhin's first order of business. His 51st Army, supported by the 28th Army, attacked on a 20-mile front. In savage hand-to-hand fighting, the 51st gained a foothold on the southern edge of the city on October 12. Hollidt, knowing the importance of the city, ordered that Melitopol be held at all costs, and it was not until October 23 that the area was cleared of German troops.

ABOVE LEFT: Field Marshal Erich von Manstein won what became a costly German victory in the Crimea during 1942. ABOVE RIGHT: General R.I. Malinovsky commanded the Soviet Southwest Front. TOP: A group of Red Army infantrymen advances past an abandoned German assault vehicle on a dirt road in the Crimea.

Since the middle of October, von Kleist and Jaenecke had watched the Soviet offensive with growing apprehension. In messages to the *Oberkommando des Heeres* (OKH—Army High Command), von Kleist had bluntly warned that the Seventeenth Army was in danger of being cut off and that it was time to evacuate the entire Crimean Peninsula. The replies that he received from Army Chief of Staff Col. Gen. Kurt Zeitzler showed von Kleist the irrational atmosphere that had permeated to the highest levels of the German Army. Simply put, Zeitzler said that evacuation was impossible because Hitler "would not allow the word 'Crimea' to be mentioned in his presence."

On October 25, the 51st and 28th Armies burst out of Melitopol, scattering German and Romanian forces before them. Their objective was twofold: split the Sixth Army in half and cut off the Seventeenth Army in the Crimea. The Soviets moved purposefully, brushing aside the enemy and driving relentlessly toward their goals.

Von Kleist sent another brutally honest message to OKH on October 26. He told Zeitzler that the situation in the Sixth Army's sector could not be rectified and that he was going to start evacuating units on the Kerch Peninsula that very evening, in preparation for a general withdrawal from the Crimea. This time, he was expressly forbidden to make any such move by Hitler himself, which seemed to make a serious impression on the general.

Von Kleist was not the only person pleading for the evacuation of the Crimea. Marshal Ion Antonescu, the leader of Romania, told Hitler that the loss of the seven Romanian divisions stationed there might have serious repercussions within his country. Hitler brushed Antonescu's concerns aside, falling back on his old arguments about the Crimea being used by the Red Air Force to bomb Romanian oil wells, and the Red Army using the peninsula as a staging area for amphibious landings along the southern coasts of Bulgaria and Romania.

Meanwhile, the Soviet offensive continued unabated. Jaenecke made a final attempt to save his army on the night of October 28. The telephone conversation between Jaenecke and von Kleist reveals the conflict of emotions that tore at the two men in this time of crisis.

Von Kleist: You are to defend the Crimea!

Jaenecke: I cannot execute that order. No one else will execute it either. The corps commanders believe the same as I do.

K: So, collusion, conspiracy to disobey

an order! If you cannot, someone else will command the army!

J: I report again that in the light of my responsibility for the army I cannot execute the order.

K: … This attitude only undermines the confidence of the troops. If I get one more division [for you] everything will be all right.

J: That is building castles in the air. One must deal with realities here.

K: The [Seventeenth] Army has not yet been attacked. A little reinforcement on the [Perekop] isthmus, and everything will be in order….

J: The Crimea must be defended on its entire perimeter. If the Russians attack, the catastrophe is at hand. I must recall once more the example of *Generalfeldmarschall* Paulus at Stalingrad.

K: The details of events there are not known…. If the commanding general, *17th Armée*, does not execute the order [to defend the Crimea] he will break every rule of soldierly deportment. Will you execute the order or not?

Jaenecke then asked for time to think about what von Kleist had said. After considering the options, especially of turning over his army to someone who was not fully aware of his troop dispositions and their strengths and weaknesses, Jaenecke gave in. He would try to defend the Crimea as best he could, but in any case, it was already too late for the Seventeenth Army. By the end of the month, Tolbukhin's armies had already achieved their objective. The Crimea was now cut off from the German forces on the mainland.

When the gate to the Perekop Isthmus was slammed shut by the 4th Ukrainian Front, the Seventeenth Army consisted of three regular German Infantry Divisions (50th, 98th, 336th) and the 153rd Training Division. There were also three Romanian mountain divisions (1st, 2nd, 3rd), two Romanian cavalry divisions (6th and 9th), two Romanian infantry divisions (6th and 19th) and the 1st Slovakian Division. The mix of divisions would change somewhat during the next few months, but it would always be an

ABOVE: Retreating toward the Dneper River and fearful of being cut off, German soldiers ride in a half-track through a flaming Russian village. OPPOSITE: A Red Army unit takes the offensive against the oncoming Germans on the Crimean Peninsula.

army dominated by Romanian divisions.

There was no doubt that the Romanian soldier was a brave fighter, as was shown during the 1942 conquest of the Crimea. The problem lay in leadership, class distinction, and equipment. Many of the officers, some of whom performed very well, came from nobility, while most of the soldiers were peasants or workers from the cities. Officers ate better than their subordinates, and an enlisted man was constantly reminded of his "place" in the army pecking order.

Rifles and machine guns were outdated, and most artillery units were based around the 75mm gun or howitzer, although some units had a few 100mm and 105mm weapons. The Romanian Army might have been able to hold its own against the Red Army of 1941, but against Soviet forces in late 1943 it was hopelessly outmatched.

Even though the Seventeenth Army was cut off from the mainland, the *Kriegsmarine* (German Navy) kept the Crimea supplied. Grand Admiral Karl Dönitz guaranteed that his forces in the Black Sea would deliver at least 50,000 tons of supplies a month. Supply convoys made the trip on a regular basis, escorted by German E-boats and Romanian destroyers. The Soviet Black Sea Fleet was nowhere to be seen, its heavy ships being kept safely in Caucasian ports for fear of being attacked by the Stuka dive-bombers of Lt. Gen. Paul Deichmann's I *Fliegerkorps*. Without control of the air over the Crimea, the Soviets were virtually helpless in interdicting the naval lifeline of the Seventeenth Army.

As the war on the mainland moved steadily westward, Tolbukhin was forced to leave two armies to keep the Crimea sealed. Another Soviet army was also stationed on the Taman Peninsula. In November, the Soviets attacked German and Romanian positions at Perekop, while the army in the Taman made a sea landing in the Kerch area. Although advances were made in the Sivash and a beachhead was established in the Kerch area, both penetrations were sealed off by Jaenecke's divisions.

Supplies continued to arrive from the port of Odessa and, to a lesser extent, from the Romanian port of Constanta, and the Luftwaffe was able to bring in reinforcements and

evacuate the wounded by using the huge six-engined Me-323 Gigant transport planes. These aircraft could carry 60-80 troops or 39,600 pounds of supplies. For the time being, the Crimea would remain safely in German hands.

While the rest of *Heeresgruppe A* fought for its life during the winter of 1943, the men of the Seventeenth Army were, for the most part, left in peace. A sense of false security gradually spread through the ranks, and the rebuilding of destroyed Soviet fortifications slowed to a crawl as engineer units were ordered to other duties.

The men of the infantry divisions found themselves with little to do except combat the boredom of their daily routines. At Jaenecke's headquarters, various plans were worked out for the evacuation order that must surely come, but the malaise that affected the junior officers and men was already spreading to higher headquarters as weeks of inactivity turned to months. The Luftwaffe and *Kriegsmarine* were both active in ferrying supplies and keeping the Black Sea Fleet bottled up, but for the army, there was little to do but wait.

In January and February 1944, the Soviets launched a major offensive against the Sixth Army at Nikopol and Krivoi Rog. After these successful operations, Malinovsky's 3rd Ukrainian Front continued to hammer the Sixth Army, taking Kherson and forcing Hollidt's men back to a line on the Bug River. The Bug position did not last long, and by the end of March Soviet forces were already crossing the river and heading for Odessa.

Hollidt was ordered to hold the city at all costs. The remnants of a few battered German and Romanian divisions attempted to form a ring around the city, but the Soviets were already knocking at the door. Hitler, furious about the collapse in southern Russia, had already sacked von Manstein on March 30. Von Kleist went the following day, replaced by Col. Gen. Ferdinand Schörner (Hitler also renamed *Heeresgruppen Süd* and *A*, changing them to *Heeresgruppen Nordukraine* and *Südukraine*). Hollidt was the next to go, replaced "for reasons of health" during the first week of April by General Maximilian de Angelis.

Jaenecke had escaped Hitler's wrath for the moment. Thanks to a steady flow of supplies and reinforcements, his Seventeenth Army now had five German infantry divisions (50th, 73rd, 98th, 111th, and 336th) and two assault gun brigades in addition to the seven Romanian divisions that were still on the peninsula. On April 7 Schörner paid a visit to the Crimea, inspecting Jaenecke's defenses and declaring that the peninsula could be held "for a long time," before flying off to his own headquarters. That same afternoon, the Soviets attacked.

General Y.G. Kreizer's 51st Army hit the 10th Romanian Infantry Division in several areas, probing for weak points in the front facing the Sivash. Brigadier General Constantin Testioreance's men barely held

on to their positions during the night. The following morning, the full weight of the 51st Army fell upon the terrified Romanians and their German neighbors.

The Perekop Isthmus was held by General Rudolf Konrad's IL Mountain Corps (50th, 111th, and 336th Infantry Divisions, 10th and 19th Romanian Infantry Divisions, and the 9th Romanian Cavalry Division). At about 9 AM on April 8, Konrad's line was rocked by a heavy artillery barrage. Immediately following the bombardment, Kreizer's III Corps (1st Guards Rifle, 10th and 63rd Rifle) stormed the German and Romanian positions. At the same time, General G.F. Zakharov's 2nd Guards Army (13th Guards Rifle Corps, 54th and 55th Rifle Corps) hit Konrad's Perekop positions. The two armies had a combined total of 278,000 men, supported by 347 tanks and 1,785 guns and mortars.

German and Romanian defenses were anchored in a position known as the Tartar Ditch, but the area was no longer tenable due to the overwhelming Soviet superiority. Konrad received the code word *Adler* (Eagle) late on the night of April 9, ordering him to withdraw. The general immediately began pulling his battered divisions out of the line and started a headlong retreat toward the Gneisenau Line, which was a blocking position that arced around the city of Simferopol and covered the main roads to Sevastopol.

At the Kerch bridgehead, the Independent Coastal Army (formerly the North Caucasus Front) under General A.I. Yeremenko had also started probing attacks. Yeremenko had two corps (11th Rifle and 16th Guards Rifle) with 12 rifle divisions, two rifle brigades, and one independent tank brigade (135,562 men, 212 tanks, and 961 artillery pieces). He faced General Karl Allmendinger's V Army Corps (73rd and 98th Infantry Divisions, 6th Romanian Cavalry, and 3rd Romanian Mountain divisions). When Allmendinger received the *Adler* message, his divisions began a 150-mile race to the Gneisenau Line, with Yeremenko's army in hot pursuit.

The first stage of the retreat took Allmendinger's divisions back to the Parpach Line, which stretched across the narrowest part of the Kerch Peninsula. Although suffering considerable losses from Soviet mechanized and armored units, his men made a good fight of it. German artillery, employed in the main line of resistance, caused heavy casualties among the advancing Russian men and machines, but the Parpach Line soon became untenable. With Tolbukhin's armies advancing from the north, threatening the rear of the V Army Corps, Allmendinger had no choice but to abandon his positions and try to make it to the Gneisenau Line.

Yeremenko's pursuit was held up by strategically placed antitank and infantry units that occupied mountain passes and important crossroads until the last minute before retreating to new positions farther west. Unfortunately for the Germans, the passes of the Yalta Mountains proved too much for their horse-drawn artillery and the big guns had to be blown up, depriving the V Army Corps of vital artillery support.

When Allmendinger reached the Gneisenau Line, he learned that the position had already been breached in the north by Tolbukhin's troops. His men, on the brink of col-

lapse, would have to continue retreating to the fortified area around Sevastopol. Along with this news came the ominous report that Odessa had fallen, cutting Jaenecke's main supply link.

Allmendinger's units entered the main Sevastopol defense line on April 16, joining Konrad's IL Mountain Corps, which had occupied the northern part of the line on the 14th. During the first eight days of the Soviet offensive, the Seventeenth Army had lost 13,131 German and 17,652 Romanian soldiers. The condition of the Romanian units made them both unfit and unreliable in further combat situations, and Jaenecke recommended that they be evacuated as soon as possible.

His five German divisions were also battered. Already understrength when the Soviet offensive began, they were now little more than reinforced regiments. Jaenecke organized them into five combat groups and supported them with the assault guns, artillery, and antiaircraft guns that had survived the retreat. Meanwhile, three Soviet armies prepared for the final assault.

It was now up to the German commanders to make another case for the evacuation of the Crimea. Since the Seventeenth Army held only a small portion of the peninsula, both Schörner and Jaenecke argued that it was useless to sacrifice even five understrength divisions in a futile effort to remain there.

OKH had already agreed that transport units, prisoners of war, and other nonessential personnel could be ferried across the Black Sea to Romania, and more than 67,000 had already made the trip. The Luftwaffe still kept the Red Air Force and Black Sea Fleet at bay, but the Soviets were becoming bolder.

On April 19, Schörner repeated his demand for evacuation. He told Zeitzler that Luftwaffe and *Kriegsmarine* losses were starting to mount, and that the Romanian units, which were useless, were already waiting to embark. His warning went unheeded. Even a personal visit to Hitler at the Berghof failed to sway the Führer. After listening to Schörner, Hitler promised reinforcements for the Crimea (a promise unkept), but ordered that no German combat troops were to be evacuated from the peninsula.

Tolbukhin was in no rush to storm the German defenses. His armies were strung out along the few usable roads on the peninsula, and there was little chance that the Germans would, or could, launch an attack from the Sevastopol line. While more divisions made their way toward the besieged port, the Soviet general and his staff worked on the plan for the final assault.

ABOVE: A dead German soldier lies amid lost and destroyed equipment, mute testimony of the intense struggle at Sevastopol in May 1944. OPPOSITE: Racing up the steps of a building in the Crimean port city of Sevastopol, Soviet troops anticipate a death struggle with Germans fighting to the last man.

As for Jaenecke's "Army," the inactivity and boredom that had set in during the past year now had to be paid for. The main defensive line was in relatively good shape, but positions behind the main line of resistance were almost laughable. German doctrine called for a second and, if possible, a third line to be constructed and manned behind the main line, but they did not exist at Sevastopol. Even if there were such defenses, there were no troops to occupy them.

The German units were not in much better shape than their defenses. Allmendinger's V Army Corps had lost all of its heavy artillery and some units, such as the 98th Infantry Division, had no entrenching tools. Thoroughly despondent, Jaenecke sent a message to Hitler's headquarters demanding freedom of action—three words that Hitler could not stand. It was the last straw for the Führer.

In the final days of April Jaenecke was relieved, replaced by Allmendinger. Allmendinger's replacement was Lt. Gen. Friedrich-Wilhelm Müller. Konrad soon followed, replaced by the one-armed, one-legged General Walter Hartmann, who wore the coveted Oak Leaves to the Knight's Cross. Changes in command, however, did little to affect the overall situation. It may have been more helpful if Hitler had kept his promise and sent reinforcements instead.

By the beginning of May, after receiving replacements and reinforcements, Tolbukhin was ready. The Independent Coastal Army had also been placed under his command, and the Soviet general now had about 470,000 men, 600 tanks, and 6,000 guns and mortars to assault the Sevastopol fortified area. The attack would be two-pronged, with the 2nd Guards Army mounting a feint assault on the northern perimeter, and the 51st Army, assisted by the Independent Coastal Army, striking the main blow in the east and southeast.

At 9:30 AM on May 5, Tolbukhin began the attack with a massive artillery bombardment. About 300 guns and mortars were used to blast each kilometer of the

German front. While the 2nd Guards Army kept German forces in the north pinned down, Kreizer's 51st Army launched an attack against enemy positions in the Sapun Hills.

The 63rd Rifle Corps spearheaded the attack, supported by the 1st Guards Rifle Corps. As soon as the two corps punched a hole in the German line, the breach was to be exploited by the 10th Rifle Corps. The Red Air Force now made an appearance in force, strafing and bombing German positions and successfully challenging an overstretched Luftwaffe for temporary air superiority over the Crimea.

Allmendinger ordered his men to hold their ground, but it was asking too much for the battered troops. By 6 PM, the Germans had sustained about 5,000 casualties, and the line was threatening to crack in several places. On the Soviet side, Tolbukhin pressed his commanders to keep up the attack throughout the night, hoping for a decisive breakthrough.

Heavy fighting continued throughout the 7th, with German forces desperately trying to hang on to the all-important Sapun Hills, the gateway to Sevastopol from the south. It was no use. On May 8, the 63rd Rifle Corps succeeded in dislodging the last German defenders. The 10th Rifle Corps then moved forward, splitting the enemy line wide open and driving toward Sevastopol. A German counterattack failed to stop the Soviet exploitation. Schörner, knowing that all was lost, sent another signal to Hitler's headquarters—"Request evacuation since further defense of Sevastopol no longer possible."

Finally, in the early hours of May 9, Hitler agreed. Allmendinger immediately began the evacuation of Sevastopol, which was under heavy artillery fire, and retreated to his last bastion, Cape Kherson, on the southwest tip of the peninsula. By 4 PM, the last German units had left Sevastopol, and Soviet forces began a cautious move into the city.

The German fortifications around Cape Kherson were considerably better than previous positions. Deep trenches and concrete strongpoints gave the troops a sense of safety that had been lacking in other areas of the Crimea. The narrow front also hindered the mass divisional attacks by the Soviets, who could concentrate only a few units for each assault.

On May 10, the Soviets attacked German positions seven times without success. Artillery fire pounded the remnants of the Seventeenth Army without mercy, but the strong fortifications held up under the heavy bombardment.

May 11 saw renewed Soviet attacks. Knowing that the end was near, Allmendinger had already contacted Admiral Otto Schulz, the German naval commander, telling him to send all available ships to evacuate his men. A German flotilla was due to arrive after nightfall to embark the remaining troops. At 11 PM, the signal was given for all units to fall back to the coast and dig in around predesignated landing points to await the arrival of the German ships. That was when things began to go terribly wrong.

Allmendinger's men had successfully disengaged from the main line and had made it to the beach, but the German ships were not there. Schulz had indeed arrived with his flotilla, but the radio channel that he had planned to use to guide individual ships to their loading points was being jammed. The frustrated admiral then ordered a signal sent on another channel to all ships, ordering them to gather near the mouth of Kamyshevaya Bay, just off Cape Kherson, so that they could be piloted to the embarkation points. That message, too, was lost in the airwaves.

To compound matters, smoke drums, which were set around installations in case of air attacks, were set off by the Soviet artillery pounding the area. Others were purposely set ablaze by German units to give them more cover while they were waiting to embark. The result was a massive smokescreen that obscured docks and landing areas, making it next to impossible for the German ships to see their designated destinations.

Many of the more intrepid German skippers made it to shore despite the difficulties. Ferries, motor-torpedo boats, and some transport ships groped their way through the dense smoke to find Allmendinger's troops and bring them to safety. In all, 31,708 of the remaining men eventually made their way safely back to Romania.

In some places, however, luck was against the Germans. Major General Erich Gruner's 111th Infantry Division, which had arrived in the Crimea only two months earlier, did not have one major ship make it to the division's embarkation point. As dawn broke on May 12, most of the division was still on shore, an inviting target for the Soviets.

Furious that so many Germans had gotten away, the Soviets attacked the near-helpless division with tanks and infantry. When Gruner fell victim to a Russian tank shell, resistance soon ceased. Eyewitness accounts speak of German officers and Russian auxiliaries being lined up and shot after the division had surrendered, a bitter end to Hitler's Crimean venture.

Since the Soviet offensive began in April, 31,700 Germans and 25,800 Romanians had been killed or wounded. Another 20,000 were missing in action, and several thousand more were captured. The Soviets put their losses of killed and wounded at 84,331.

The losses incurred in the Crimea can be blamed directly on Hitler's mania for holding every inch of ground, even when that ground was no longer strategically important. Soviet troops had long ago passed the peninsula as they pushed steadily westward, and even Soviet intelligence officers were surprised, and somewhat amused, at how the Seventeenth Army had been used.

One Soviet officer, interrogating a German officer who had been captured during the fighting, made this observation: "We were in no hurry to take the Crimea. After all, it was our biggest POW cage. The Germans were virtually prisoners on the peninsula since November 1943. They guarded themselves. They supplied themselves. They went on leave and even returned by their own account."

Author Pat McTaggart is an expert on World War II on the Eastern Front. He writes from his home in Elkader, Iowa.

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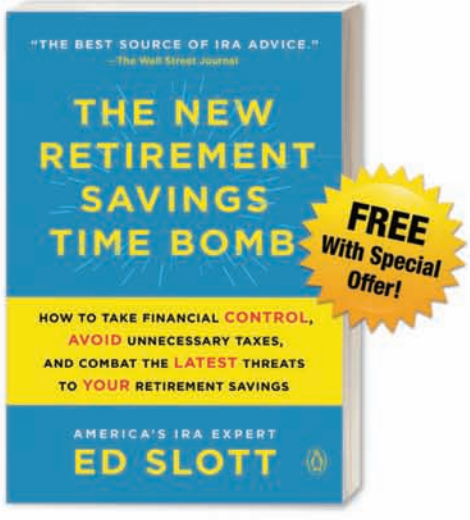

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Omaha

Continued from page 27

village of Le Grande Hameau, but it was forced back by heavy fire. Another patrol sent toward Cabourg was captured, but the two Americans convinced the Germans that resistance was pointless, and so the Germans surrendered to their own captives!

Meanwhile, the Germans counterattacked Monteith's perimeter repeatedly, firing at him as he moved along his line filling gaps and directing his men. Soon the Germans surrounded them, so the Americans tried to break out. During that fight Monteith was hit and killed, but his bravery and leadership earned a posthumous Medal of Honor for the young officer.

Despite this setback, the men of the 1st Infantry Division were now getting off the beaches. At 1:30 PM General Bradley, waiting offshore for word of either success or failure, got encouraging news: "Troops formerly pinned down on beaches Easy Red, Easy Green, Fox Red advancing up heights behind beaches." Omaha was still within German artillery range, but rifle companies were finally getting consolidated and moving off toward the villages a short distance inland from the beach.

Lieutenant Nelson Park's troops reached the top and opened fire on a group of Germans, forcing them to retreat. Parks saw another lieutenant get hit while chasing the fleeing enemy, the round coming out his back. "I said, 'don't worry, Ben, we'll get you out of here!' I will never forget telling him that." Parks said. "The truth, Ben was probably already nearly dead. I couldn't do anything more because all hell broke loose and we had to charge ahead and just leave him there."

The now-accurate naval gunfire battered the remaining German strongpoints, causing their fire to slacken. GIs got up and went at them, throwing grenades at machine-gun nests and following the explosions to mop-up. German troops tried to run out the back of their shell-blasted bunkers straight into the waiting American infantry. Some were killed, others taken prisoner.

The 16th's G Company, under Captain Joe Dawson, set out for the village of Colleville-sur-Mer. A French woman came out to greet them, saying 'Welcome to France.' Dawson led his men into the village, attacking a church steeple the Germans used for artillery observation. He lost a man during the fight but killed the enemy observers. A few minutes later a sniper's bullet hit the stock of his carbine, sending a wood fragment into his leg. He ignored the painful wound and stayed with his men. To cap off the day, at 4:00 PM a U.S. Navy barrage hit the village, unaware that the American had occupied it.

At the same time, German artillery fire evaporated. The enemy had finally run low on ammunition, through their own logistical caution. Weeks earlier, half their supply was moved back to keep it safer. Now there was no way to bring it back; any trucks on the road fell easy prey to roaming Allied fighter-bombers. Even small-arms ammunition began to run out. Orders from the German high command to counterattack went unheeded just as the local defender's begged for reinforcements. With the weather clearing, Allied planes made their presence felt and little help arrived for the Germans.

In the late afternoon, the division headquarters and the 26th Regiment landed. The beach still received fire from a handful of undestroyed strongpoints and the odd round of artillery; even a few snipers lurked, firing occasional shots at the newly landed troops. It remained dangerous, as many men found to their sorrow, but the troops got ashore with much lighter casualties and were able to get off the beach quickly.

There remained the tasks of supplying the troops ashore, digging in for the night, and reorganizing from the chaos of the day.

As the sun set over Omaha Beach and the new battlegrounds above, GIs crouched in their foxholes, served as sentries, and tried to prepare for another grim day ahead. There would be many more days and months of fighting for the Big Red One before the war ended. At high cost, they had punched through the walls of Hitler's "Atlantic Fortress" and paved the way for hundreds of thousands of Allied troops to follow in the coming weeks. □

POW

Continued from page 51

other side of the field.

After spending a night waiting for some direction or action, they found that the waiting crowd had grown in size. There was no hint of Russian guards or movement, but there was fear among the people of what the Russians might do, despite a desire to reach the Allied positions.

Perry: "I was becoming frustrated, hungry, and tired of waiting. The crowd seemed to be looking to the Americans for leadership. About mid-morning I decided to test the water and stepped over the barbed wire with one foot. Getting no response, I put over the other foot. It became very quiet in my vicinity while people watched. Still no response. Looking up and down the wire and seeing no sign of Russian uniforms, I decided to walk toward the Allied lines.

"About 100 yards out into the field, I turned to see the crowd still lined up behind the wire barrier. I waved my arm in a manner to indicate 'come on,' and the tide let loose! Hundreds of people had just been waiting for one stupid fool to stick his neck out, and they came like a wave. No shots were fired … no opposition appeared."

Once across the field, Perry met a Canadian soldier who took him to his unit's headquarters. The next morning, he was taken to a nearby airport and put aboard a DC-3 headed for Le Havre, France. Processed at Camp Lucky Strike, his next stop was New York and then home.

In time, Perry was able to locate all of his former crewmembers except for Armando Ruiz, meeting them at reunions of the 99th Bomb Group.

George's brother, Robert, had followed him into the service. Both men were commissioned as officers. Robert served in the Pacific, where he saved the lives of countless airmen as a member of an air-sea rescue unit. After the war, they both returned stateside and became schoolteachers. George passed away in 2006 and Robert in 2007, proud of their wartime service to the end. □

HONORING
OUR HEROES

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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