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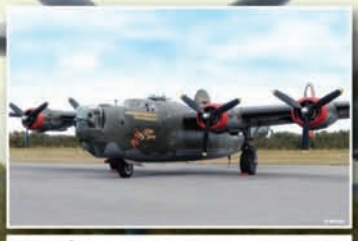

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Features

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Throwing heroes under the bus

Here at *WWII Quarterly*, and in all my book writing, I spend a lot of time advancing my deeply held belief that military heroes—men and women who, over the decades, have put their lives on the line (and sometimes gave their lives in the process) to serve their country for a higher ideal and the causes for which they fought—deserve our enduring praise.

Unfortunately, a university professor—Elizabeth D. Samet—whose new book, *Looking for the Good War: American Amnesia and the Violent Pursuit of Happiness*, attempts to tear down all that I (and perhaps you) hold dear. The *New York Times* named it one of the best books of 2021.

As anyone who has ever served their country during war knows, war *is* a terrible thing. No one I know ever enjoyed the killing, the destruction, the waste. War can bring out the worst in men, and women. But it can also bring out the best.

Ms. Samet's book would be akin to a professor at Yeshiva University claiming that the Holocaust never happened. Or a professor at Howard University preaching that slavery was actually a good thing. Or an instructor at the New York City Police Academy positing that violent criminals should not be arrested because they might come from impoverished backgrounds.

It's all well and good that conventional wisdom sometimes be scrutinized. General Patton once said, "If everyone is thinking alike, then somebody isn't thinking." And universities traditionally have been places where students are taught to challenge conventional wisdom—an important thing.

But to throw whole generations of American military men and women under the bus is nothing but historical revisionism of the worst kind—and can be as dangerous to our future national survival as Dr. Samet says American military hagiography is.

She sees our heroes as "victims" of American hubris and hegemony, and has especially harsh words for Spielberg and Ambrose for their glorifying of American fighting men in their films and writings.

The *Times*' reviewer, evidently enthralled by Dr. Samet's prose, wrote: "Her book is … a work of unsparing demystification—and there is something hopeful and even inspiring in this… Civilians would do well to see World War II as something other than a buoyant tale of American goodness trouncing Nazi evil. Yes, she says up front, American involvement in the war was necessary. But she maintains that it's been a national fantasy to presume that 'necessary' has to mean the same thing as 'good.'"

Dr. Samet says that our determination to defeat Japan was a result of a thirst for "revenge" fueled by that hoary shibboleth: "anti-Asian racism"—forgetting, of course, that the equally vicious battle on the other side of the world was fought against White European Germans and Italians.

Dr. Samet posits that the sacrosanct, post-war American belief that our military was an invincible force for good—a belief that led us into costly misadventures in Korea, Vietnam, and, most recently, the Middle East—was dangerously wrong.

But I wonder: Were those Americans who confronted and fought Communism or Islamic jihad in later conflicts fooled into thinking, as Dr. Samet implies, that they were sacrificial pawns and American foreign policy was wrong?

And where does Ms. Samet teach? If you guessed Brown or Berkeley, those bastions of left-wing learning, you'd be wrong. She teaches English at West Point. And has since 1997—25 years.

When we denigrate our heroes, we do so at our own peril.

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

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Sergeant Dean Kenney was a TD commander in support of the 78th Infantry Division in February 1945 during the drive into Germany.

The tank-destroyer branch of the U.S. Army was possibly the shortest-lived of all the Army's branches in World War II. By the end of the conflict, the War Department had decided that the tank could take over the mission of defeating enemy armor and that there was no future need for the tank destroyer or any other combat-arms branch.

The demise of the TDs did not come easily, but they were partly doomed by the fact that the development of the tank as tank killer during the war—arguably beginning with the heavier Pershing and its 90mm gun—made the future of the tank destroyer superfluous.

But during the war, the U.S. Army tank destroyer did yeoman service. It was effective not only as a killer of enemy armor but as a source of indirect artillery fire, especially when German tank formations became too few to be encountered. This was especially true in the Italian campaign, where there were no massive tank-versus-tank battles as there were between the Soviets and Germans on the Eastern front.

The concept of a tank-destroyer branch was first tested by the Army during the Louisiana war games in September 1941. One historian wrote, "Tank destroyers performed extremely well against tanks—perhaps because, as the Armor branch alleged, the 'umpire rules' were unfairly tilted in their favor. Tanks could only take out anti-tank units by overrunning them, rather than with direct fire."

Despite this "unfair tilt," Lt. Gen. Leslie McNair, the chief of Army Ground Forces, authorized the creation of a special tank-destroyer branch, and a tank-destroyer center was established at Fort Hood, Texas. Fifty-three battalions of 842 men each were initially formed, with plans to grow the force to 220 battalions—a plan that was never realized. Eventually the Army fielded 63 TD battalions during the war, 10 of which were deployed to the Pacific Theater.

Dean Kenney, a young man from southern California, became one of the first recruits to this new branch of the Army.

National Archives

Constructed on the platform of the M4 Sherman tank, the M10 "Wolverine" tank destroyer sported a 76mm high-velocity gun that had better armor-piercing capability than the Sherman's standard 75mm gun, but a fatal flaw was the slow, hand-cranked turret. Here an M10 crosses a stream somewhere on the Belgium-German border, March 1945.

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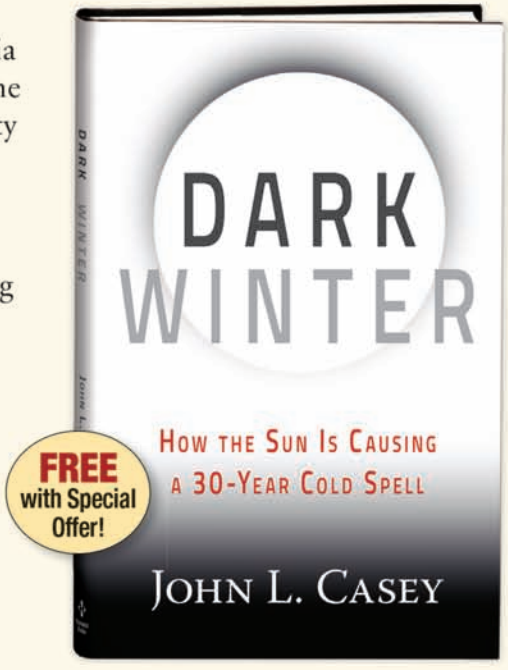

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His wartime service as a crewmember of the M10 tank destroyer was perhaps typical of some of the battle trials and tribulations encountered by troopers who manned those armored fighting vehicles in combat.

At the age of 16, Kenney was already in the Junior Reserve Officer's Training Corps at Franklin High School in Highland Park and the Los Angeles City High School District. As a cadet in the corps' Company B, he not only quickly grasped the essentials of being a soldier but also demonstrated leadership abilities.

On June 4, 1938, he was promoted to the rank of cadet corporal and rapidly advanced to the rank of cadet sergeant, to which he was appointed on October 31. On April 25, 1939, just as he was about to leave school during his junior year, Kenney was again appointed to cadet sergeant after having shown proficiency as a cadet non-commissioned officer.

The scent of war for the United States was in the air when Kenney lived in Hollywood. He had taken a job in a metal-fabrication business while keeping an eye on world developments; he saw the Germans invade Poland on September 1, 1939, followed by the defeat of France in 1940. Great Britain stood alone but defiant while desperately holding off an expected invasion of the British Isles.

When the U.S. was attacked by Japan on December 7, 1941, Dean was working in a defense-industry plant, which precluded his immediate conscription into the armed services. Finally, on February 27, 1943, "Uncle Sam" came calling. Just a few days later, on March 7, he entered active military service.

At age 22, Kenney was a bit older than many of the other young men called to the colors, and his age, previous cadet experience, and maturity soon began to count. He reported for duty and basic training at Camp Hood in Texas (today's Fort Hood), the home of the Army's newly constituted tank-destroyer combat-arms branch.

The Tank Destroyer Branch

Shortly after the U.S. went to war against the Axis powers in December 1941, the War Department established tables of organization and equipment (TO&E) for three different types of tank- destroyer units, designated as Tank Destroyer Battalion (Heavy), Tank Destroyer Battalion Light (Self-Propelled), and Tank Destroyer Battalion Light (Towed).

Initially, the heavy tank-destroyer battalion, which was intended to support armored divisions, consisted of three gun companies that were to be equipped with 37mm or 57mm and 3-inch self-propelled (SP) anti-tank guns.

The light, self-propelled-gun battalion, designed to support cavalry and motorized infantry divisions, also had three gun companies, armed with M6 wheeled tank destroyers. The towed tank-destroyer battalion was to have three 37mm anti-tank gun companies.

The anti-tank weapons and vehicles with which these organizations were first armed and equipped were considered expedients. Initially, it was thought that cannon mounted on wheels and drawn by truck were sufficient to engage and destroy enemy armored vehicles. However, the 37mm and 57mm anti-tank guns, either towed or mounted on a 4x4 ¾-ton truck (designated the M6), was to prove completely inadequate in defeating German armored fighting vehicles, which, by the time the U.S. entered the conflict, were becoming heavier, better armor-protected, and more lethally armed.

National Archives

Before the M10 could be produced in numbers, the Army relied on the M3 Motor Gun Carriage, shown here in North Africa, April 1943. It was basically a French 75mm howitzer mounted on a half-track. The M3 was extremely vulnerable to enemy fire.

It soon became apparent that an upgraded anti-tank gun mounted on a protected tracked vehicle with its armament and mobility would be more effective in engaging and defeating enemy tanks. Therefore, gradually throughout the war, the cannon mounted on a self-propelled (SP) tank-like armored body replaced, in many battalions, the more vulnerable and less-mobile towed gun.

The first solution was the M3 Gun Motor Carriage, or GMC, an overloaded M3 halftrack—a vehicle with wheels in the front and tracks in the rear—mounting a French 75mm howitzer on top. Both the M3 and later M6 were lightly armored and lacked turrets.

The M3 was completely unprotected and was not to survive in combat. A Model 1897 75mm cannon was mounted on a standard, unarmored halftrack, the combination seeing its virtual demise in battle in Tunisia early in 1943.

As historian Sebastien Roblin noted, "Though some M3 GMCs resisted the Japanese invasion of the Philippines, tank-destroyer battalions first saw action in the deserts of North Africa starting in 1942."

The M3s met their demise in the March

23, 1943, battle of El Guettar in Tunisia when the 601st TD Battalion's 31 half-track-mounted guns, reinforced by two companies of the 899th TD Battalion (driving the new M10 "Wolverine" TDs), faced off against the entire 10th Panzer Division. When the smoke cleared, 38 panzers had been knocked out, but the 601st had lost 21 of its M3s and the 899th seven of its M10s.

El Guettar was the only battle in which U.S. tank destroyers were used in the manner intended—deployed as an entire battalion to stop a German armored breakthrough concentrated on a narrow front.

At about this time, tank-destroyer unit organization was changing. The heavy tank-destroyer battalion became equipped exclusively with self-propelled tracked vehicles, with the M6 being dropped from the force inventory.

The light, self-propelled anti-tank battalions in cavalry and motorized infantry divisions were moved in the force structure to be grouped at echelons above division, while the cavalry and motorized infantry divisions were being transformed into standard infantry formations.

The towed tank-destroyer battalion was to have its primary weapon upgraded from 37mm or 57mm to the more-powerful 3-inch cannon.

Enter the Wolverine

The successor to the M3 and M6 TDs was the M10 Wolverine, which combined the hull of the M4 Sherman tank and a new, open-top pentagonal turret; General Motors and Ford received contracts to produce 6,400 M10s.

The Wolverine mounted a long-barrel, high-velocity 76mm gun that had better armor-piercing performance than the Sherman's 75mm gun. But the M10's hand-cranked turret was slow—it took 80 seconds to complete a rotation—a slow speed that could prove fatal in combat.

And, although the M10's armor was thinner than the Sherman's, the M10 was lighter and used less fuel. The open turret, despite being vulnerable to air bursts, also gave the crew a better chance of spotting enemy tanks first.

Combat experience showed that the

M10's 76mm gun was incapable of penetrating the frontal armor of Germany's heavy tanks at ranges over 400 meters. The gun's inability to disable and destroy the enemy's best tanks heightened the generally negative reputation of the TDs.

To solve the armor-piercing problem, in September 1944, newly developed high-velocity, tungsten-core ammunition began to arrive for the 76mm guns that did a better job of destroying German armor at range. Although each Wolverine received only a few rounds of the rare ammunition, they now had a fighting chance against Germany's heaviest panzers.

As one historian wrote, "In 1944, two additional tank-destroyer types entered service. Buick designed the M18 Hellcat for pure speed. Lightweight and powered by a radial aircraft engine, it could zoom along at 50 miles per hour in an era that tanks rarely exceeded 35 miles per hour.

"However, it had only an inch of armor and was armed with a 76mm M1 gun that was little more effective than that on the M10. Several units in Italy refused the upgrade to the M18—armor was more important than speed in the cramped mountainous terrain.

"But the M18 was popular in Patton's hard-charging Third Army. While speed is useful for getting armored vehicles where they're needed, accounts differ as to whether it provided the M18 much benefit at the tactical level. An Army study concluded it was unimportant in tactical combat. Other sources maintain the Hellcat's speed enabled it in using hit-and-run tactics."

Late in the war, another TD made its appearance—the M36 Jackson. The "Slugger," as it was nicknamed, had the hull of the M10 with additional armor and a heavy 90-millimeter gun that was an effective Tiger- and Panther-killer at long ranges (up to four kilometers) and were significantly more effective against infantry. (The Jackson would also see combat during the Korean War.)

Dean Kenney's initial service was as a crewmember of a tracked tank destroyer, where he became competent at all aspects of operating and "fighting" the vehicle. In June 1943, he was assigned to Company A, 605th Tank Destroyer Battalion (SP), which had been issued the M10 Wolverine. Its 3-inch gun had a 2,800-feet-per-second muzzle velocity and a maximum range of 16,000 yards.

National Archives

Looking down into the open turret of an M10, a crew is observed practice-loading the 3-inch gun.

The Sherman M4 tank, on the other hand, armed with a 75mm cannon (many later up-gunned to a 76mm gun) had the primary role of accompanying the foot soldier and giving him a measure of heightened fire support rather than going head-to-head with German armored fighting vehicles. The tank in the armored divisions also served in highly mobile exploitation operations.

Both the M4 tank and M10 TD had the same track configuration. Their shapes were similar, with the primary design difference being that the top of the tank destroyer's turret was open while the turret of the tank was completely enclosed.

The TD was not intended to engage in close combat but to fight enemy tanks at some distance. This greater distance was also supposed to reduce the tank destroyer's risk of being hit by overhead or direct enemy fire.

With their different roles, tank and tank-destroyer units were also organized differently. The smallest integral tank unit was a platoon consisting of five armored fighting vehicles, with each tank having a crew of five men. In the M4 tank platoon were 24 enlisted men and one officer, a lieutenant. Tank commanders were sergeants, with the platoon-leader officer also commanding a tank.

The smallest self-propelled tank-destroyer unit was a four-vehicle platoon, each with a five-man crew; the 19 enlisted-man platoon was led by a lieutenant, and each vehicle was commanded, like a tank, by a sergeant or the lieutenant. Three platoons made up a company in both the tank and TD organizations, and the battalions of both had three "line" (M4 tank or SP tank-destroyer) companies.

The tank battalion also had a light tank (M3 or M5) company, while the TD battalion had a reconnaissance company. The battalion of either category was the largest completely self-contained tank or tank-destroyer organization, with its own administrative, logistical, and fighting components.

At the time Kenney was inducted into the Army, it was still in the process of rapid expansion. The new tank-destroyer

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M10 Wolverines from the 893rd TD Battalion roll through the Hürtgen Forest on their way to the battle at Schmidt, Germany. Dean Kenney was a member of this unit.

branch was no exception, and it was looking for men with any kind of experience who could be placed in positions of responsibility. He was quickly recognized as being non-commissioned-officer material, and by the end of August 1943, he had attained the rank of Technician 4th Class—an enlisted grade commensurate with that of corporal.

Those soldiers holding the designation of "technician" were assigned military occupation specialties such as vehicle driver, radio operator, or clerk, which did not entail command responsibilities. In a tank-destroyer crew, the vehicle commander would be a sergeant while the driver might be a technician. Kenney at the time, however, was not quite yet a non-commissioned officer (NCO).

Kenney finished his basic military training at Camp Hood and was then posted to Fort Jackson, South Carolina, located outside the city of Columbia, the state's capital. There he joined the 605th Tank Destroyer Battalion (SP). Now no longer a technician but a sergeant in a command position, he was awarded the Good Conduct Medal on June 3, 1944.

Kenney's time at Fort Jackson was a busy one. His battalion was armed with the M-10 tank destroyer until March 1944, when the unit was reorganized as a 3-inch towed tank-destroyer battalion and gave up its self-propelled guns. He thus had to transfer his expertise with the more-mobile self-propelled weapons platform to a truck-towed anti-tank gun. Operating and firing the gun, however, were essentially the same for both weapons, so he was easily able to transfer his marksmanship skills to the differently mounted gun.

With the Allied invasion of Northwest Europe in France on June 6, 1944, his days in the United States were numbered. Having advanced to the rank of sergeant and with experience in the employment of both types of anti-tank weapons, his training was about to be put to good use.

Dean Kenney departed the United States on December 10, 1944, as an individual replacement, not as a member of the 605th Tank Destroyer Battalion with its towed anti-tank guns. He arrived in France on December 19, 1944, at a most auspicious moment, as the Germans had just launched their Ardennes Offensive and the Battle of the Bulge, that was fought in Luxembourg and Belgium.

Was he to find himself right in the middle of a major retreat by American troops reeling in the wake of a massive enemy advance? He was soon to find out.

Kenney's prior training on the Wolverine made him a prime candidate for joining a self-propelled M10 TD battalion that had been badly hurt the previous November while fighting in a dense forest on the Belgian-German border.

The 893rd Tank Destroyer Battalion (SP) had fought a major battle supporting the U.S. Army's 28th Infantry Division. After losing 16 of 36 M10 TDs, it was in great need of not only replacement vehicles but crews to man them, as well.

Kenney was soon on his way to the 893rd, where he became the vehicle commander of an M10 in Company B. He found the unit conducting minor operations while trying to recover from the hard times it had experienced the previous

November. He soon made his mark and, with it, an increase in rank.

When he joined the battalion in December 1944, it had been detached from the 28th Infantry Division and was assigned to support the newly arrived 78th Infantry Division, which had deployed to the Hürtgen Forest battle sector. The American troops in this area at the time were in a defense posture, while, further to the south, hard fighting between the Americans and Germans would take place from December 1944 into February 1945.

The tank destroyers of the 893rd in January and February 1945 had no direct contact with the enemy. Instead, they were employed as if they were artillery howitzers, providing indirect fire support to infantry units heavily engaged in bitter close-in fighting in the dense, forbidding forest.

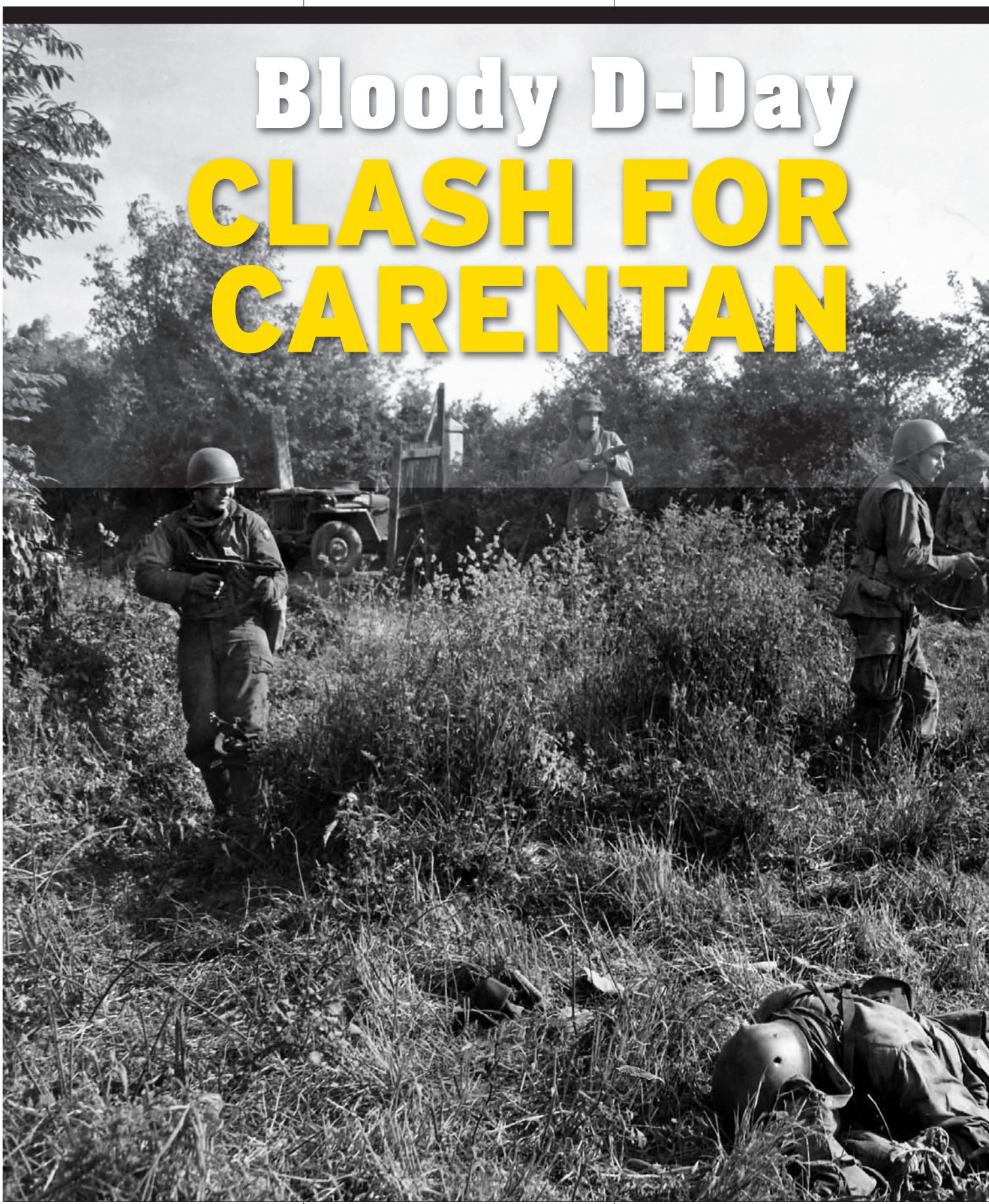
The Germans were fighting from cleverly concealed concrete bunkers and had to be defeated using special combat techniques. Tank destroyers were ill-designed to engage the enemy under those battle circumstances but they were nevertheless employed to add their direct and indirect fire capability to the artillery-support effort.

Of the subordinate tank-destroyer companies in the battalion, however, Company B was the most active, in spite of problems keeping the vehicles in operating order. For example, it was reported on February 11, 1945, that of the 12 Company B TDs, only nine were combat- ready. The 1st Platoon, to which Kenney was assigned, was short one vehicle, while the 2nd Platoon had only two in working order. Of the other two, one was inoperable because of a malfunctioning radiator and another with its internal wiring burned out.

Company B's battle sector during this time was centered on the Hürtgen Forest town of Schmidt, the scene of heavy fighting and great American losses the previous fall. It was from that location that the TDs acted as artillery, giving the fire support requested by infantrymen of the 78th Infantry Division. There were, however, few German tanks to be engaged in the area since most were fighting in the Ardennes.

Continued on page 96

Bloody D-Day
CLASH FOR CARENTAN



American paratroopers battled German defenders for one of Normandy's strategic towns.

BY MITCH YOCKELSON

On Tuesday, June 6, 1944, at nearly three in the morning, Chicago-native Lieutenant John E. Peters safely landed *Snooty*, his Douglas C-47 Skytrain, on the massive 5,800-foot runway at Greenham Common airfield in southern England.

A few hours earlier, around 10 p.m., Peters had taken off from there with a stick (an Army Air Corps designation for a planeload of paratroopers) of 18 heavily armed paratroopers from 3rd Battalion, 502nd Parachute Infantry Regiment, 101st "Screaming Eagles" Airborne Division—a unit that had yet to see battle. They were led by Lt. Col. Robert G. Cole from San Antonio, Texas, the senior officer aboard—and future Medal of Honor recipient.

Upon *Snooty*'s return to Greenham Common, the plane was empty of paratroopers. Cole and his men had jumped into a pre-assigned Normandy drop zone (DZ). Wright Bryan was the lone passenger on Peters' C-47.

A civilian war correspondent who reported on the European Theater for both the *Atlanta Constitution* and NBC Radio, Bryan was invited to fly with Cole's men and witness their jump into Normandy. Then he would fly back to England and, after Prime Minister Winston Churchill, General Dwight Eisenhower, and the King of England officially announced the commencement of D-Day, Bryan would broadcast a report on his observations of the paratrooper drops.

Before *Snooty* left for Normandy, Bryan watched Cole's paratroopers adjust their packs, put on their Mae Wests (B-4 life jackets nicknamed for the Hollywood starlet inflated with compressed air, giving them an impressive torso profile) and chutes, and climb into the planes. Each man was so heavily loaded that he had to be pushed from

American paratroopers, with their weapons at the ready, advance cautiously through a field near Carentan littered with the bodies of their comrades, picked off by German sharpshooters, June 14, 1944.

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behind and pulled from above to mount the steps into the plane.

Bryan boarded *Snooty* last and spoke with some of the men, scribbling down their comments with pencil on sheets of paper or in his small pocket diary. Private Robert G. Hillman of Manchester, Connecticut, sitting farthest forward on the port side, proudly told the war correspondent, "I know my chute's okay because my mother checked it. She works in the Pioneer Parachute Company in our town and her job is giving the final once-over to all the chutes they manufacture." Before joining the Army, the blond, blue-eyed paratrooper had also worked for a time at Pioneer. (Private Hillman was wounded on June 8, but quickly recovered, and fought with the 502nd PIR until the war ended and he returned home.)

On D-Day, Cole's battalion had been placed in reserve, but a couple of days later they would take part in the division's first and most significant operation—the capture of Carentan, a vital crossroads town of about 5,000 people located on the Douve River, between the two American invasion beaches, code-named Utah and Omaha.

On the morning of June 7, 1944 (D-Day+1), Colonel Robert Sink, commanding the 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment, spearheaded the day's attack. The 506th's 1st Battalion would strike at the railroad bridges across the Douve River to keep German armor from passing over them and threatening the American flank. This operation prepared the 101st for an assault on Carentan.

Reuters correspondent Bob Reuben remembered how much in awe the Screaming Eagles were of the battle for Carentan. Before D-Day, in the marshaling area back in England, staff officers stressed that the town "was the channel through which Germany could pour its hordes upon our landing forces while they struggled through the water and sought a shaky foothold on the beaches."

Before the war, Carentan had thrived on dairy farming. On the out skirts of town, cows grazed on the lush greenery. Now, American forces needed to take the town in order to consolidate the beachheads at Omaha and Utah. Although only a small city of 4,100 civilians, Carentan was larger than any other community in the lower Cotentin Peninsula. Straddling the main highway from Cherbourg to Caen and St. Lô, the double-tracked railroad from Paris to Cherbourg cut through the center of town, making it strategically important for German communications.

Between his 1st Battalion (under Lt. Col. William L. Turner) and the 2nd Battalion (Lt. Col. Robert L. Strayer), Sink had roughly 525 men for the operation. Sink also had about 40 men from the 82nd Airborne Division, some 326th Engineers, and a battery from the 81st Airborne Anti-Aircraft Battalion carrying eight six-pound antitank guns.

This was a far greater concentration than other Screaming Eagle regiments. Many of the 101st paratroopers, such as division commander Maj. Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor, had landed far from their DZs. A number of Sink's paratroopers had missed the first day's fighting, trickling into regimental headquarters on D-Day afternoon, later that night, and

Bundesarchiv Bild 101I-586-2208-33A, Photo: Appe

ABOVE: German paratroopers in Normandy consult a map and plan a strategy to try and halt the American advance. BELOW: Glider-borne troops suffered especially high casualties. Here an American glider-infantryman lies sprawled in the wreckage of his Waco CG-4 glider. The serial number of a jeep, painted on its hood, is also visible. OPPOSITE: This aerial photo of Carentan, a strategically important location, taken three weeks after the fighting ended, shows little apparent damage.

National Archives

well into the predawn hours of June 7.

Master Sgt. Lloyd E. Willis, from Sink's regiment, was among the cluster of latecomers. Willis dropped into an orchard and didn't realize that beyond the tall, thick hedgerows looming all around him, the 506th PIR's assembly away was only 400 yards away. Willis stripped off his parachute harness and set out in the dark to find other paratroopers. He wandered aimlessly for several hours, becoming trapped within the maze of tall vegetation, seldom seeing "more than one hundred yards in any direction."

Eventually, Willis stumbled upon a group of 25 men, including some from his regiment's Headquarters Company. The others belonged to various 82nd Airborne units. This mixed bag of lost paratroopers was drawn into a couple of small skirmishes.

"You go along and join a group," Wills wrote. "The group goes along and is fired upon. Then you engage. Everybody has to wait until the road is clear again. The larger the group, the harder it is to get by without fighting." Willis eventually reached Culoville at 10:30 a.m. on June 7.

Captain Laurence Critchell sympathized with the plight of Willis and other paratroopers lost in the dense landscape of Normandy. In his history of the 506th, Critchell wrote, "for a man to crawl through the hedgerows was almost impossible." The "twisted roots," Critchell recalled, "were close together and immovable." A soldier could try and climb over the hedgerows, but, if he did, "it was unlikely that he would be alive to reach the ground on the other side."

At 4:30 a.m., Sink's paratroopers started their advance toward the railroad bridge. As Critchell noted, this attack would be the first attempt by the 101st "to act with forces in excess of the scattered Indian bands" that had done the fighting on D-Day. Sink accompanied his regiment's 1st Battalion down the road from Culoville to Vierville. Right from the start, German snipers harassed the men, firing at them from the front and flanks.

Sink made a brief stop at Vierville to

clear the houses of enemy troops. General Taylor arrived in the town, and while he conferred with Sink, they could see several hundred troops, thought to be German, about 2,000 yards to the southeast.

Bunched together, they would make an easy target, Sink thought, but he hesitated to fire on them until he was certain they were enemy. He sent out a patrol to get a better read on the soldiers, but before the patrol came back, the column of supposed enemy troops was out of sight.

Before departing Vierville, Sink split his regiment so that the 1st Battalion headed toward Beaumont and the 2nd veered left in the direction of Angoville-au-Plain. Neither battalion got very far. German machine-gun and small-arms fire put a halt to the advances.

A platoon of Sherman medium tanks from Company A, 746th Tank Battalion, which had come ashore at Utah Beach right before noon the previous day, came to their aid. Still, 1st Battalion continued to take enemy fire on its right flank from German soldiers who hid behind trees and hedges on a ridge that paralleled the road. Eventually, 1st Battalion made its way into Beaumont, but two enemy counterattacks stalled any further advance.

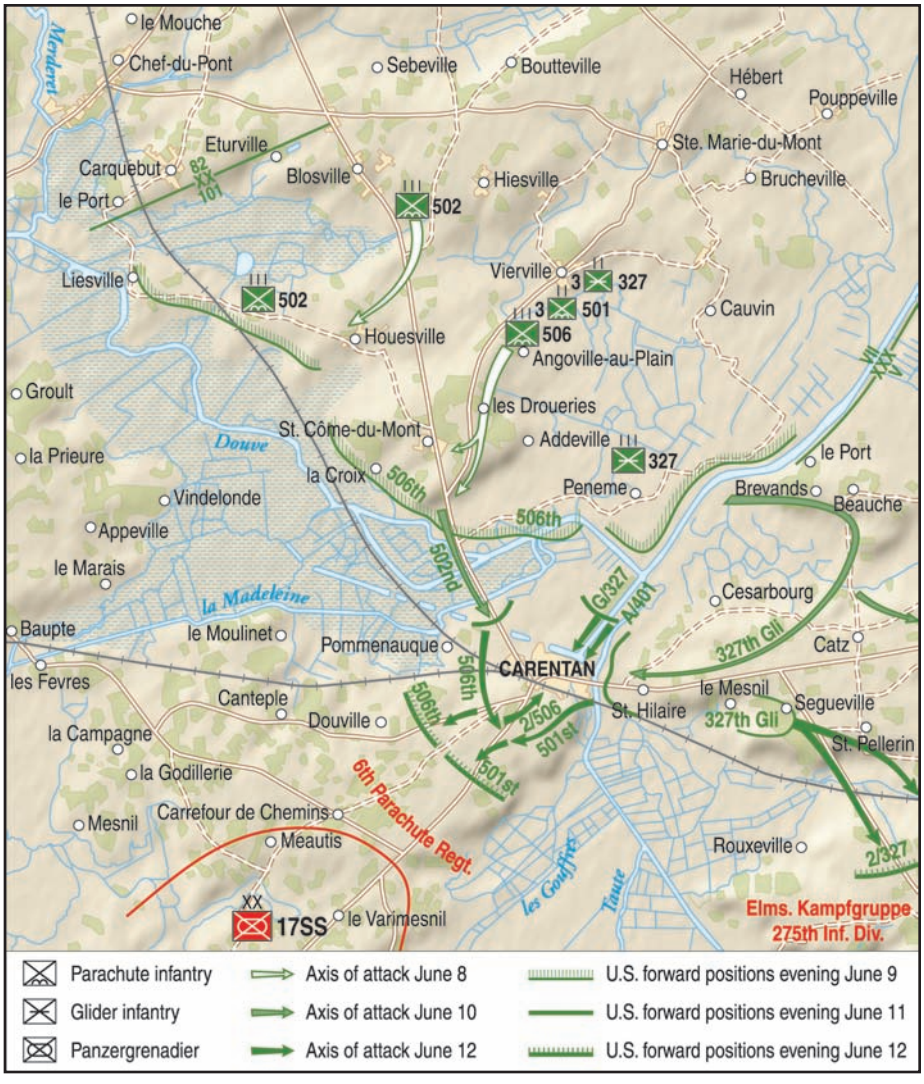
Support from a company of paratroopers from 2nd Battalion and a platoon of M5 Stuart light tanks from Company D, 70th Tank Battalion, freed 1st Battalion to push ahead to a crossroads about 500 yards east of Saint-Côme-du-Mont. After firing at the Germans, one of the tanks ran out of ammunition and its commander, Lieutenant Walter T. Anderson, ordered it back to the rear to reload.

Instead of returning by the same route, which was through the hedges and into a field, the tanker took the road and rolled up in front of a house being used as a German aid station. An enemy antitank crew was on the property: one blast placed an armor-piercing shell through the tank's turret.

Private Donald Burgett, a paratrooper with the 506th PIR, watched in horror as "the small tank erupted in a violent explosion and started to burn." The tank crew died instantly. "We could smell their flesh cooking in the flames," Burgett later wrote, "along with the heavy, oily smoke." In the explosion, [a crewman's] body was thrown half out of the tank's turret. For several days, the tank with the corpse in full view remained on the road. Soldiers who passed by this intersection referred to it as "Dead Man's Corner." (For many years it was believed that Lieutenant Walter T. Anderson was the dead tanker; an investigative story published in *WWII Quarterly*, Spring 2020, identified him as either Aaron D. Curry or Anthony I. Tomasheski.)

It being too dangerous to remain in the open, 1st Battalion moved to higher ground east of the town, but the nearby enemy strength made this position equally treacherous. Sink ordered 1st Battalion to withdraw back to Beaumont, and he would make another stab at Saint-Côme-du-Mont the next morning.

At dawn on June 8, the new attack on Saint-Côme-du-Mont strengthened to four battalions. On the right, Sink's 1st and 2nd Battalions headed directly from Beaumont to the town. The 3rd Battalion, 501st PIR, advanced from the southeast at les Droueries to the main highway south of Saint-Côme-du-Mont. To the left, 1st Battalion, 401st Glider Infantry, headed from the east of les Droueries. As the entire force of paratroopers



ABOVE: Having been dropped by parachute or landed by glider, American airborne forces swarmed to secure Carentan, a key crossroads town. OPPOSITE: Striding through undamaged Ste. Marie-du-Mont like tourists, members of a 101st Airnborne unit advance southward toward Carentan, June 9, 1944.

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descended upon Saint-Côme-du-Mont, the glider men would slant off to the south, head down the highway, and blow up the causeway bridge to prevent German reinforcements.

Lt. Col. Julian Ewell's 3rd Battalion, 501st PIR, easily cleared les Droueries and moved quickly toward an intersection east of Saint-Côme-du-Mont. Ewell thought he saw German troops withdrawing from Saint-Côme-du-Mont and took his men south along the Carentan Highway to capture the causeway and the bridges. Just when the men moved on to the highway, they were hit by small-arms, machine- gun, and antitank fire coming from buildings near the first bridge and 88mm shelling being lobbed in from Carentan.

Just as Ewell pulled the battalion back to the highway, a German counterattack hit him. Ewell's men drove back the enemy, but the Germans were still in force on a small hill to the west. Ewell dug his men in on an east/west line facing north. The Germans attacked the position five times, almost piercing the American line on each occasion, but Ewell's men hung tough and never wavered. The enemy withdrew, leaving a clear route into Saint-Côme-du-Mont.

Now General Taylor's 101st could concentrate on destroying the causeway bridges that led to Carentan.

Taylor ordered the main attack on Carentan to commence on June 10, 1944, with two crossings over the Douve River. His left wing would start at 1 a.m. and cross in the vicinity of Brevands. A detachment from this force would link up near the Vire River Bridge southwest of Isigny with V Corps coming from the direction of Omaha Beach. The 101st's right wing would cross the causeway northwest of Carentan, bypass the city, and attempt to seize Hill 30 to the southwest.

By taking Hill 30, the American paratroopers would have a clear view of the main German escape route from Carentan. As the operation unfolded, the left and right wings would coordinate and form a ring around the city and then press into the city itself.

Now, with Saint-Côme-du-Mont no longer a threat, the 101st's right wing was ready to attack with Lt. Col. Cole's 3rd Battalion, 501st PIR. His force would approach Carentan over a four-and-a-half-mile asphalt causeway, about 40 feet wide with dirt shoulders, that elevated from six to nine feet above the marshes and crossed over the Douve and Madeleine rivers, as well as two Douve canals. Cole would have no protection should his men take fire from the front or flanks.

Shortly after midnight, Cole's battalion started out but was soon ordered to halt as engineers—deployed to repair Bridge 2—came under heavy fire. A patrol sent to investigate determined that a stronger-than-expected German force with mortars and machine guns was positioned on the highway and on higher ground directly south and west of the highway.

Cole would now have to attack in the afternoon with artillery support from two field-artillery battalions. At noon on June 9, the engineers had still not finished repairing a 12-foot gap on Bridge 2. Cole and three of his men improvised a footbridge to allow his battalion to start crossing single-file in the middle of the afternoon. Cole's force was then repeatedly hit by the projectiles of an 88mm gun fired

Both: National Archives

from Carentan, but there were no casualties, and the battalion continued along at a steady pace by keeping low and crawling along an embankment.

Three hours down the highway, when the last of Cole's battalion had crossed three of the bridges and most of his men were over Bridge 2, the Germans opened fire from two directions—the hedgerows and a large farmhouse to their right front. Cole's men on point tried ducking in the ditches, but as they attempted to advance, an enemy machine gun perched behind a hedgerow only 100 yards away blasted into the ditches and struck three men, forcing the group to withdraw.

Now the entire battalion was under small-arms fire and couldn't maneuver to either flank. They were a totally exposed, long, thin column. The only way to advance was to send one man at a time through the heavy steel fence, known as a "Belgian Gate," at Bridge 2. It stretched almost completely across the bridge, and the men would have to slip under an opening that was only about 18 inches wide. This would be attempted, of course, under heavy enemy fire.

American artillery from the 377th Field Artillery Battalion (with two captured German guns); the 907th Glider Field Artillery Battalion, armed with 12 pack-howitzer 75mms; and the 65th Armored Field Artillery, with its 18 self-propelled 105mm guns, helped neutralize the German guns. A portion of Company G, which led Cole's battalion, deployed to the left of the bridge and provided cover fire while the remainder of the unit tried squeezing through the narrow gate opening. Only six men got through; the seventh was wounded.

The company temporarily ceased its attempt to cross and instead set up a fire position with mortars, but the small bombs made little impact. German fire kept coming, and casualties mounted within the American ranks as the men had nowhere to take cover on the bare ground.

Now, at 4 a.m. on June 11, Cole ordered the 3rd Battalion to attack, using the darkness as cover. His plan worked. Three companies made it across Bridge 4, and the

ABOVE: One Panzerfaust-carrying Fallschirmjäger (left) and two SS men dash through the rubble of Carentan's train station. A small number of M5 Stuart light tanks had penetrated the city limits. BELOW: An American soldier with a Thompson sub-machine gun stands next to what appears to be a destroyed German Kettenkraftrad near Carentan. An American glider is visible through the trees. OPPOSITE: Four American paratroopers use a glider-borne 57mm anti-tank gun fitted with a muzzle brake to guard one of the routes into Carentan.

battalion deployed on both sides of the highway. Because there were so many casualties along the causeway that day, the Americans named it "Purple Heart Lane."

Scouts were sent out to determine the main source of enemy strength. It was the large farmhouse beyond Bridge 2, well defended by mortars, machine guns, and rifles. American artillery concentrated on the building, to little effect. Cole decided that his only

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option was to rush the house, so he ordered a bayonet charge. Cole called to his second-in-command across the road, executive officer Major John P. Stopka, to have the order passed along.

Even though it was still dark, Cole ordered artillery units to put down smoke in a wide arc around the farmhouse to conceal the attack. "What made the job so difficult, I believe," Cole explained afterward, "was that hedges were filled with snipers … Artillery was not heavy enough to knock them out unless you got a direct hit … The shells burst above them." The Germans also made practical use of an orchard behind the house by using woodpiles to climb up into the trees and hide themselves in the branches.

At 6:15 a.m. on June 11, as the artillery laid down fire, Cole blew his whistle, drew his Colt .45 pistol from its holster, and charged forward. But he was practically by himself. Instead of the 250 men who should have been right behind him, only 20 left cover to follow him; another 10 were behind Major Stopka. The other 200 men, spread all around, had not heard the order for a bayonet charge.

Some troops from Company G ignored Cole and Stopka for good reason: they were busy tangling with enemy soldiers in a meadow east of the highway. Some of the men in Company G didn't hear Cole's whistle, but when they realized what was happening, they took off to catch up with the others.

None of them had charged an enemy position before, and their inexperience showed. They bunched up while running across a ditch into a field raked with fire to the east of the farmhouse. Several times Cole had to stop, "waving both arms at them," trying to "get them to fan out." He fired his Colt .45 "wildly" in the general direction of the farmhouse, while at the same time wondering, "Goddam, I don't know what I am shooting at, but I gotta keep on."

The first men to reach the farmhouse found it abandoned. The German soldiers had withdrawn to the west on higher ground and were entrenched in rifle pits and concrete machine-gun emplacements strategically placed along a hedgerow and pointed at right angles toward the road.

Cole's men refused to be deterred. With sheer momentum, they charged the Germans and wiped out their position with bayonets and grenades. Cole had hoped to keep the initiative going and take advantage of the enemy's disorganization, but this was asking too much of his men. All the paratroopers in his battalion had found their way across the causeway and assembled in a field near the farmhouse.

For his bravery that day in leading the bayonet charge, fully exposed to enemy fire, Cole would later be awarded the Medal of Honor in October 1944, the only soldier with the 101st Airborne to receive such acclaim. (Unfortunately, Cole would be killed on September 18, 1944, by an enemy sniper in Operation Market Garden, so his mother accepted the medal on his behalf on the Fort Sam Houston parade ground where he had played as a child.)

The companies and platoons were mixed, and many of the soldiers had been torn up by artillery and small-arms fire. Cole sent a runner to Lt. Col. Patrick J. Cassidy's 1st Battalion, 502nd PIR, with a message requesting he come up, pass through his battalion, and continue attack-

ing south from Hill 30 through the hamlet of la Billonerie.

Cassidy's battalion was north of Bridge 4 when Cole's message arrived. Crossing the bridge under heavy fire, Cassidy deployed the men across the field toward the farmhouse, but his men were in just as bad shape as Cole's.

So, instead of relieving 3rd Battalion, Cassidy stayed put and placed his men to the right of Cole's battalion. More men arrived to defend the right flank, where a few German troops had remained. Another small group appeared and set up a machine-gun position behind the farmhouse that covered all directions.

Even with the ground heavily defended by a mix of paratroopers, Cole remained concerned. He was unaware of the situation on his flanks: his communications had failed, and he didn't trust the artillery support. The men had their backs to the Douve River and had no rear area and no reserves close by. The artillery observers couldn't see where their shells were landing because of the dense hedgerows and had to adjust their fire unreliably by sound.

Cole's worries turned out to be justified. In the middle of the morning, the Germans counterattacked. A large enemy force rushed through the orchard and placed American paratroopers south and east of the farmhouse in peril, but the machine guns that were placed south of the house repelled the assault. There was still sporadic firing throughout the morning, but around noon regimental headquarters sent a message that the enemy had requested a truce. In reality, that message had been misunderstood.

Brig. Gen. Anthony McAuliffe, who had been directing the operations for the 101st, had requested the truce for his own men so that casualties could be removed. The 502nd regimental surgeon, Major Douglas T. Davidson, escorted by two Germans, had walked through enemy lines to ask the military commander in Carentan to allow a brief lull in the fighting to evacuate the wounded.

But Davidson wasn't allowed to speak to the German commander, and as he returned to Bridge 4, the enemy launched an all-out assault with what seemed like every gun in its arsenal—small arms, machine guns, mortars, and artillery.

Cole asked regimental headquarters for permission to return fire but was told to wait until definitive word was received from Davidson. Cole's men took matters into their own

American paratroopers ride a captured Kubelwagen at the crossroads of the Rue Holgate and RN 13 in Carentan, June 12, 1944.

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hands, however, and retaliated with their arsenal. They were certain, having observed movement by the Germans during the truce, as well as the accuracy of the enemy guns, that the interlude had been used to strengthen German positions for an attack.

Cole's men were at a breaking point. German fire kept coming and became more intense the longer the attack continued. Observing the battle from a second-floor window in the farmhouse, Cole told regimental headquarters that his only option was to withdraw, and he requested cover fire and smoke when the time came to vacate the positions. His artillery observer, Captain Julian Rosemond, tried to send the message, but his radio was out of order.

American soldiers taking cover in doorways yelled and waved for the party to quickly get out, but they refused. Maginnis asked an officer what was going on.

"The krauts have counterattacked," he warned, "and things don't look good."

Throughout the day, the battle see-sawed. Just when the exhausted Americans believed the Germans were finished, they would counterattack. By afternoon, what remained of Cole's battalion was barely holding on in and around the farmhouse. Cole stood near a window and observed the fighting. Without artillery support, there was little chance of driving off the enemy.

But that changed when Rosemond finally reached the artillery command post and, a brief time later, the German fire subsided. The 506th PIR had increased its artillery fire, lobbing shells over the farmhouse into a field where the enemy had been positioned. American patrols determined that the enemy had fled, likely to Carentan. Around eight that evening, 2nd Battalion arrived and relieved the 1st and 3rd Battalions.

Enemy defenders blocking the road to Carentan from the north were no longer a threat, but the 502nd was too exhausted to continue the attack. Carentan would have to wait another day.

Taking the city of Carentan was Maj. Gen. Maxwell Taylor's last major objective in the Normandy Campaign, and his most important. The only sound approach to Carentan was down the slope from Saint-Côme-du-Mont and along an exposed causeway supporting the main road. Carentan was mostly defended by Oberst (Colonel) Friedrich von der Heydte's veteran German 6th Parachute Regiment, which had arrived in Normandy about a week before D-Day.

Taylor's men launched the attack on Carentan in the early morning hours of June 10 from two directions. The 502nd PIR advanced from the south along the Cherbourg Road, while the 327th Glider Regiment crossed the Taute River to strike from the northeast.

At 1:45 a.m., a brief artillery and mortar bombardment preceded the advance of the 1st Battalion, 327th, across the Taute. Soon after, the glider troops tangled with Germans trying to block their advance. The 3rd Battalion of the 502nd PIR had commenced its southeast movement along the causeway road toward Carentan until it met heavy resistance from the 6th Parachute Regiment, firing from behind hedgerows and farm buildings.

At 6 p.m., German bombers struck one American company of the 502nd, killing and wounding scores of Taylor's men. By nightfall, two more glider battalions were across the Taute River. The next morning, the glider soldiers renewed their attack southwestward but were stopped cold on the northern outskirts of Carentan.

Early the next morning, June 11, a battalion of the 502nd renewed its attack under cover of a smokescreen. Reinforced by another of the regiment's battalions, hand-to-hand fighting ensued for almost six hours. Because the casualties began piling up, Taylor had his officers in the field negotiate a truce at noon to collect the dead and wounded. Taylor exploited the opportunity to send a message to Colonel von der Heydte to offer him a chance to surrender. Strict orders from Hitler to hold Carentan at all costs meant that Heydte couldn't even consider Taylor's offer.

Immediately after the truce expired, the Germans repeatedly counterattacked until 10:30 p.m., forcing all three battalions of the 502nd PIR to withdraw under cover of artillery and mortar fire. By late afternoon on the next day, June 12, the Germans had run out of ammunition, so von der Heydte ordered his troops to abandon Carentan under the cover of darkness.

Around midnight on June 11, however, as the Germans began pulling out of Carentan, Brig. Gen. McAuliffe's men pelted the enemy with large artillery, naval gunfire, and air power. Six hours later, McAuliffe's firepower had cleared the town of Germans. Snipers continued firing, but the jubilant French citizens came out of hiding to greet the American liberators, skillfully uncorking the hidden bottles of wine that hadn't fallen into enemy hands.

Two days later, on June 13, Major John J. Maginnis, a 50-year-old World War I veteran and coal dealer from Worcester, Massachusetts, led Civil Affairs Detachment C2B1 into Carentan. Civil Affairs detachments were charged with keeping order in the occupied towns and cities. Their interactions with civilians could be friendly one day, hostile the next.

One of 50 Civil Affairs detachments assigned to the various corps and divisions under General Omar Bradley's First Army, Maginnis' detachment was the first to operate in France after the War Department assigned it to the 101st Airborne. Colonel David Marcus joined Maginnis as an observer. His job was not to assist or interfere with Maginnis but to serve as the Pentagon's keen eyes and ears in order to report back to Washington on the effec-

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ABOVE: With Carentan secured, an M7 "Priest" self-propelled gun of the 14th Armored Field Artillery Battalion, 2nd Armored Division, rolls through the intersection of Holgate Street near the train station on June 18, 1944. OPPOSITE: Stiff enemy opposition having finally been overcome, troops and vehicles, including a medical jeep, roll through Carentan.

tiveness of managing civil affairs.

Maginnis and Marcus entered Carentan on June 13 at 11:00 a.m., where the situation was still hostile. The German 17th SS Panzergrenadier Division mounted a heavy assault to overtake the 101st by way of the Carentan-Baupte-Périers Road. The Americans were overrun by German infantry armed with self-propelled guns, but Colonel Robert Sink's 506th PIR managed to hold on until relief came from tanks, halftracks, and heavy guns manned by an element of the 2nd Armored Division.

Even though Carentan was a war zone, Maginnis and Marcus drove near the cattle market, where they heard rifle, machine-gun, and mortar fire. American soldiers taking cover in doorways yelled and waved for the party to quickly get out, but they refused. Maginnis asked an officer what was going on. "The krauts have counterattacked," he warned, "and things don't look good."

The two men made it through the rubble to the damaged Hôtel de Ville—city hall. The town looked every bit a war zone: German bodies, destroyed equipment, and rubble clogged the streets. The civilians who remained during the fighting were left with no water or electricity, rotting garbage, and decaying animals that filled the air with a nauseous stench. Despite Carentan barely being habitable, the Germans wanted to reoccupy it.

Maginnis and Marcus remained for several hours until a shell hit the middle of the road they were on. One of Taylor's staff officers, Colonel Bryant Moore, ordered them to withdraw to Sainte-Marie-du-Mont, about a mile to the rear. Moore explained, "I want to recheck the situation. You're no good to me dead and I certainly don't want to have to run Carentan myself."

On their return to Carentan, Maginnis and Marcus stopped at the crossroads by Saint-Côme-du-Mont, the crossroads known as Dead Man's Corner. Because of the constant shelling, they agreed to walk the several miles back, but a jeep carrying Maxwell Taylor approached and slowed down. The two men saluted the general. Marcus, who had been at West Point at the same time as Taylor, turned to Maginnis and said, "If he lives long enough, there goes a future Chief of Staff." (He was prophetic; after the war Taylor became the fifth Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.)

On June 14, the 101st drove off the final German counterattack—Carentan and the link between Omaha and Utah were now secure.

No longer worried about German shelling, the Civil Affairs detachment set up its headquarters on the second floor of the Hôtel de Ville. The building had a long history, including as an Augustinian nuns' convent before being taken over by the local government. The detachment's temporary office had an American flag on an end wall and was furnished with, according to McGinnis, "captured German stuff and not too good."

Through three windows, each missing its glass, the crew could look out into what was once a small garden but was "now a jumble of trenches and shell holes." Artillery shelling had destroyed much of the building, although the southwest section containing the public offices was useable. Curfew hours were set from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m.

That afternoon, Maginnis and Taylor met for about 20 minutes. The 101st commander "cross-examined" him with "impressive, probing questions" on how Civil Affairs planned to work his troops. Maginnis responded that his immediate concerns were disposing of the dead cattle and other animals, preventing contamination of the water supply, and keeping the narrow and crowded roads open for military traffic.

On June 15, as the 506th PIR's 3rd Battalion left Carentan, Private Harold Stedman, one of the "Filthy Thirteen," took special notice of the Carnation milk factory that lay in ruins. First led by Lieutenant Charles Mellen, Stedman's unit had been trained as a demolition team tasked blowing up bridges over the Douve. After Mellen was killed on D-Day, Sergeant Jake McNiece took command of the unit. McNiece, who was half Choctaw Indian, encouraged the other paratroopers in the unit to wear war paint and cut their hair Mohawk-style.

Stedman stepped out of the column and plucked some labels with the Carnation logo and placed them in his pack to give to his parents; before the war, Stedman had worked at the Carnation plant in Massachusetts. Taylor concluded the meeting by telling Maginnis, "I am satisfied that you know what you are doing and have the situation under control."

Taylor and Maginnis convened a meeting with city officials and the new mayor, M. Joret, an "old, crippled man" with a white beard who dressed in black and walked hunched over with help from a cane. Joret had replaced the previous mayor, Dr. Caillard, who was killed by a bomb dropped by an American plane (Joret's Christian name and that of his predecessor are lost to history).

Speaking perfect French in his clipped bass, Taylor apologized to the group for the damage and mortality that war brings to local places and asked the officials to give all possible assistance and cooperation to the division. Peace and order returned to Carentan.

National Archives

Maginnis and Marcus quartered in the eastern section of the city in a building owned by a brick manufacturer "of some substance in the community." They shared the same room, sleeping on ancient cots. They drew water from a public hand pump and used a latrine in a palm garden to the rear of the building.

On June 19, no longer worried about a counterattack, the paratroopers were treated to their first movie since arriving in France. *Andy Hardy's Blonde Trouble*, starring Mickey Rooney, was shown at the Jeanne d' Arc Theatre, which had been run by German soldiers during their occupation of Carentan. Just released, the film provided comic relief for the battle-weary soldiers as clueless Andy was alternately flirted with or slapped by a blonde (Bonita Granville) on a train.

That evening, a brawl broke out between some of the Screaming Eagles and First Army military police. Shooting, fighting, and destroying property were fueled by large amounts of wine and Calvados, the local spiced brandy made from apples. Resentment had been building among Taylor's men toward the constabulary, and now it boiled over. Their thinking, according to McGinnis, was "It's our town, and no outsiders are going to tell us how to act here."

Some of Taylor's staff stepped in to prevent serious injuries or even deaths. The general took a hard line to prevent further outbreaks: he established curfew at 11 p.m. and limited the sale of alcohol.

At the end of June, General Lawton Collins withdrew Maxwell Taylor and the 101st from Carentan and removed the forces north to Cherbourg for occupation duty. The Screaming Eagles had done their part—and more—to ensure the D-Day victory. Soon returned to England to rest and refit, they would not be called upon again for combat until September—and the ill-fated Operation Market Garden.

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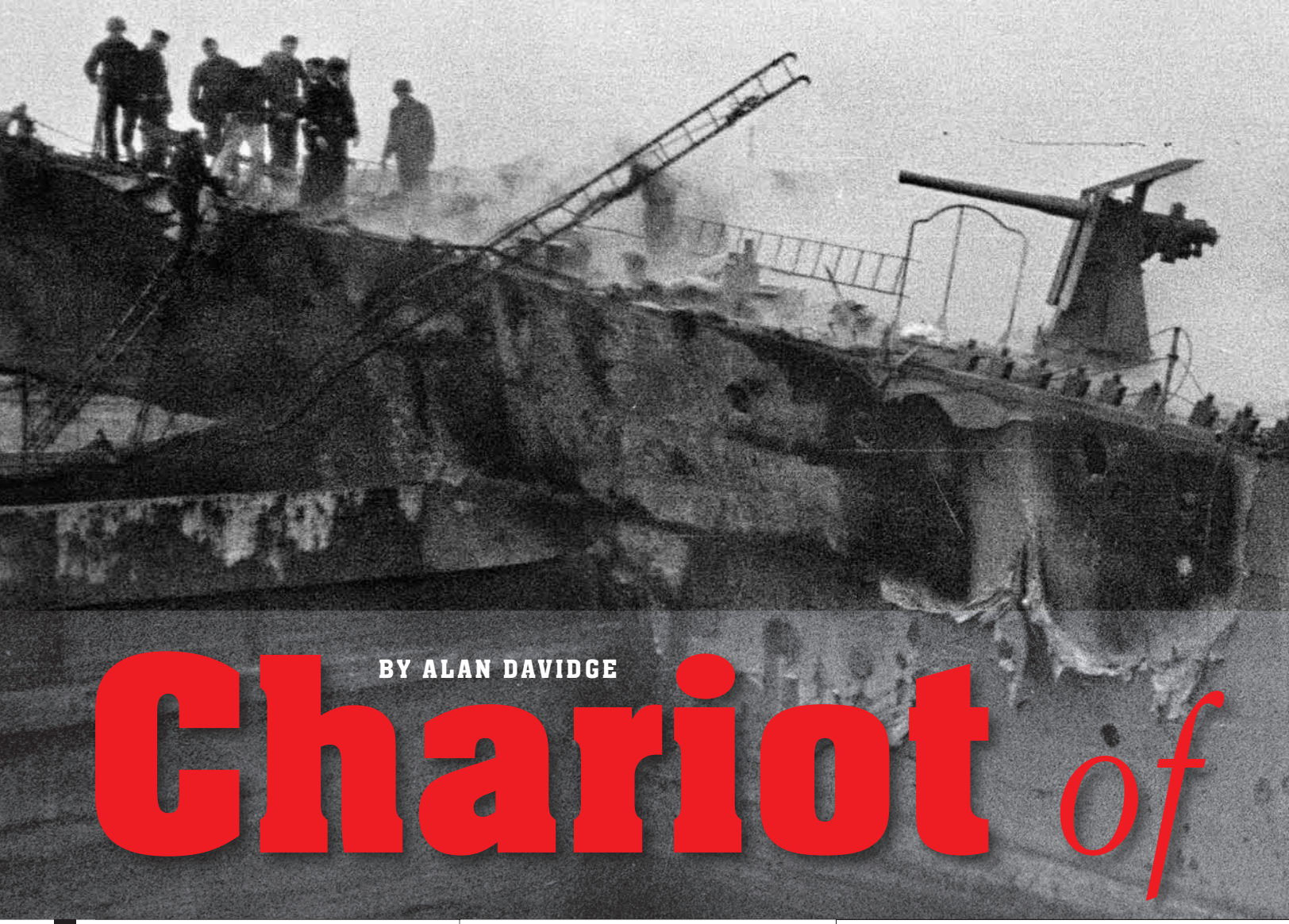
The year 1942 started disastrously for Britain, just as 1941 had ended badly for the United States. Japan's entry into the war not only devastated the U.S. Navy at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, but threatened the future of British territories in Asia. Malaya was the first to fall and, by February, the Japanese had taken Singapore and now had their eyes on Burma. As well as lowering morale at home, this committed Britain's sparse military resources to a war on a distant front.

The battleship HMS *Prince of Wales* and battlecruiser HMS *Repulse* were also lost during an early Japanese encounter in the Gulf of Siam, weakening Britain's sea power significantly. But it was in the waters of the Atlantic that the greatest threats lay for the nation.

After losing the Battle of Britain, Hitler shelved his invasion plans and decided to starve Britain into submission instead. German U-boats began tearing the heart out of British merchant fleets as soon as they left the safety of American harbors, and when joined by warships such as the *Bismarck*, the situation became even more desperate.

Fortunately, the *Bismarck* was eliminated in May 1941, but by early 1942, the heavily armored German battleship *Tirpitz* was completing trials off Norway; the prospect of an enhanced enemy presence on the surface as well as below the waves to destroy merchant shipping was driving even Prime Minister Winston Churchill into the depths of despair.



BY ALAN DAVIDGE

Chariot of

Added to this was the news that the formidable Kriegsmarine battlecruisers *Scharnhorst*, *Gneisenau*, and *Prinz Eugen* had managed to slip out of the harbor at Brest in northwest France, where they had been confined by the British Royal Navy, and sail up the English Channel to join the *Tirpitz* off the Norwegian coast.

The *Bismarck* had been destroyed while aiming for the safety of St. Nazaire and its Normandie dock, constructed in the 1930s for the huge French liner of the same name. If the *Tirpitz* were to sail into the Atlantic, this would also be the only dock large enough to accommodate her.

On January 25, 1942, Churchill wrote, "The destruction or even crippling of this ship is the greatest event at sea at the present time. No other target is comparable to it." Two thousand tons heavier than the *Bismarck*, and packing

German troops inspect HMS *Campbeltown*, which has imbedded itself in the lock gate of the dry dock at St. Nazaire during Operation Chariot. Many of these troops would be killed when the ship, a floating time-bomb, exploded a few hours after the raid on March 28, 1942.

Bundesarchiv Bild

Fire

British Commandos launched Operation Chariot—the most daring raid of the war—to put the enemy naval base at St. Nazaire out of action.

Royal Navy Museum

A view of HMS *Campbeltown* (formerly the USS *Buchanan*) shortly before leaving Devonport for the raid. The ship has been modified to look like a German *Möwe*-class torpedo boat in order to fool the enemy. Besides carrying scores of Commandos, the ship was packed with 9,600 pounds of explosives and delayed-action fuses.

eight 15-inch guns, she was the largest warship ever to be built in Europe. The presence of this huge beast off the Norwegian coast was also tying up Allied resources that could have been used to guard the Atlantic convoys.

The first proposal to attack St. Nazaire came from the Admiralty in August 1941, when the *Tirpitz* was located in the waters of northeastern Europe and was seen more as a threat to the Soviet Baltic fleet rather than Atlantic shipping.

It found its way to Combined Operations, which was at the time engaged in small-scale raids on selected targets in Nazi-occupied Europe—most of which only served to irritate the Führer. But some, such as Operation Claymore in the Norwegian Lofoten Islands in March 1941, did considerable damage and took hundreds of German prisoners. These Norwegian raids caused Hitler to believe that Britain would invade Europe through Norway. By tying up key German strategic resources along the European coastlines, these raids weakened the German defense.

The key threat of St. Nazaire at the time was its U-boat base and its access to Atlantic shipping. Proposals to mount a raid on the port were considered in detail, but the practical and navigational problems that would be involved caused them to be shelved.

Fast-forward to January 1942. Churchill had appointed Lord Louis Mountbatten three months earlier as Chief of Combined Ops, with instructions to increase the number of offensive raids. The Admiralty subsequently asked him to reconsider an attack on St. Nazaire. The previous plan had been set aside largely because the only entry into the Loire Estuary was a deep-water channel on the north side under the noses of German gun emplacements. It had since been discovered that a ship of modest draft should be able to negotiate the shallows in the center of the river at high tide.

Mountbatten knew that a successful raid on St. Nazaire could be of huge strategic importance to Britain; it equally appealed to his sense of high adventure. The file was reopened, and Combined Ops was now center stage. The key players were John Hughes-Hallett, the Navy adviser, Brigadier Charles Haydon representing the Army and Commando units, and RAF Group Captain Alfred Willets. Their partnership would require a unity of purpose that took precedence over their individual branches of the armed services.

It is important to note that the decision to mount the St. Nazaire raid—dubbed Operation Chariot—was not only about the exclusion of the *Tirpitz* from the Normandie Dock, although for years this has been the popular view, repeated by many historians. In April 1942, two weeks after the raid, General Sir Alan Brooke informed U.S. Army Chief of Staff General George Marshall: "We were executing a number of raids on the enemy-occupied coastline from Norway to the Bay of Biscay in order to force on the enemy a feeling of insecurity and uncertainty."

This gives a more likely explanation, and as Mountbatten was determined that a raid should take place, the Admiralty's (and Churchill's) *Tirpitz*-phobia provided an excellent opportunity to obtain support.

Intelligence had come from aerial reconnaissance, local French sources (at great personal risk), and some via the diplomatic bag from the American embassy in Paris, and it showed that St. Nazaire was a place where raiding parties could do some serious damage. The U-boat pens would provide a choice victim.

Gun positions and bridges also invited destruction to ensure that the enemy did not gatecrash this orgy of vandalism, but it was the Normandie dock that captured most attention as the top prize for the raiders.

Built for a ship of 85,000 tons, its concrete, sliding-lock gates, or caissons, were 35 feet thick; if they could be destroyed, thousands of gallons of water would come flooding in and essentially make the dock tidal. The demolition of its associated pumping house and winding gear would cause further havoc. A successful raid would put it out of action for a very long time.

Captain Bill Pritchard from the planning team came up with an idea to ram a ship full

of explosives containing delayed-action fuses into the dock's southern caisson. It would, however, need to have a sufficiently shallow draft to negotiate the route identified through the middle of the estuary but be strong enough to strike a heavy blow at the caisson. If an old destroyer could be found, it would be worth the sacrifice. A second destroyer would give support to the raiders and transport them home afterwards.

So far so good on paper, but the enemy needed to be caught unawares. To achieve an element of surprise, a synchronized bombing raid was suggested. Guns and searchlights would be pointed skywards while the real danger to the Germans would be sailing up the river.

The St. Nazaire planners now had something to capture their imagination, but the Admiralty, on receipt of the plans, began to lose enthusiasm. Sacrificing an old destroyer might be bearable, but releasing a second one was out of the question.

This was where the concept of *Combined* Ops started to break down, and even the diplomatic skills of Mountbatten, a naval man himself, failed to convince them otherwise. The function of the second destroyer, they suggested, could be fulfilled by a fleet of the armed Fairmile motor launches currently operating around the British coast.

The Fairmiles were made of mahogany and ran on petrol. Their range was limited, requiring additional petrol tanks to be strapped to their decks. If this little fleet lost the element of surprise—and at some point it had to—the raid could end up looking like the 4th of July.

Their armaments consisted of twin WWI-vintage light Lewis machine guns for protection against air attacks and a Hotchkiss three-pounder gun dating from the Boer War to take on the shoreline and riverside batteries. The weakness of their firepower was noted and a concession was made: the Hotchkiss would be replaced by two Oerlikon guns, effective against air and coastal attacks and firing 20mm half-pound explosive rounds at 470 per minute.

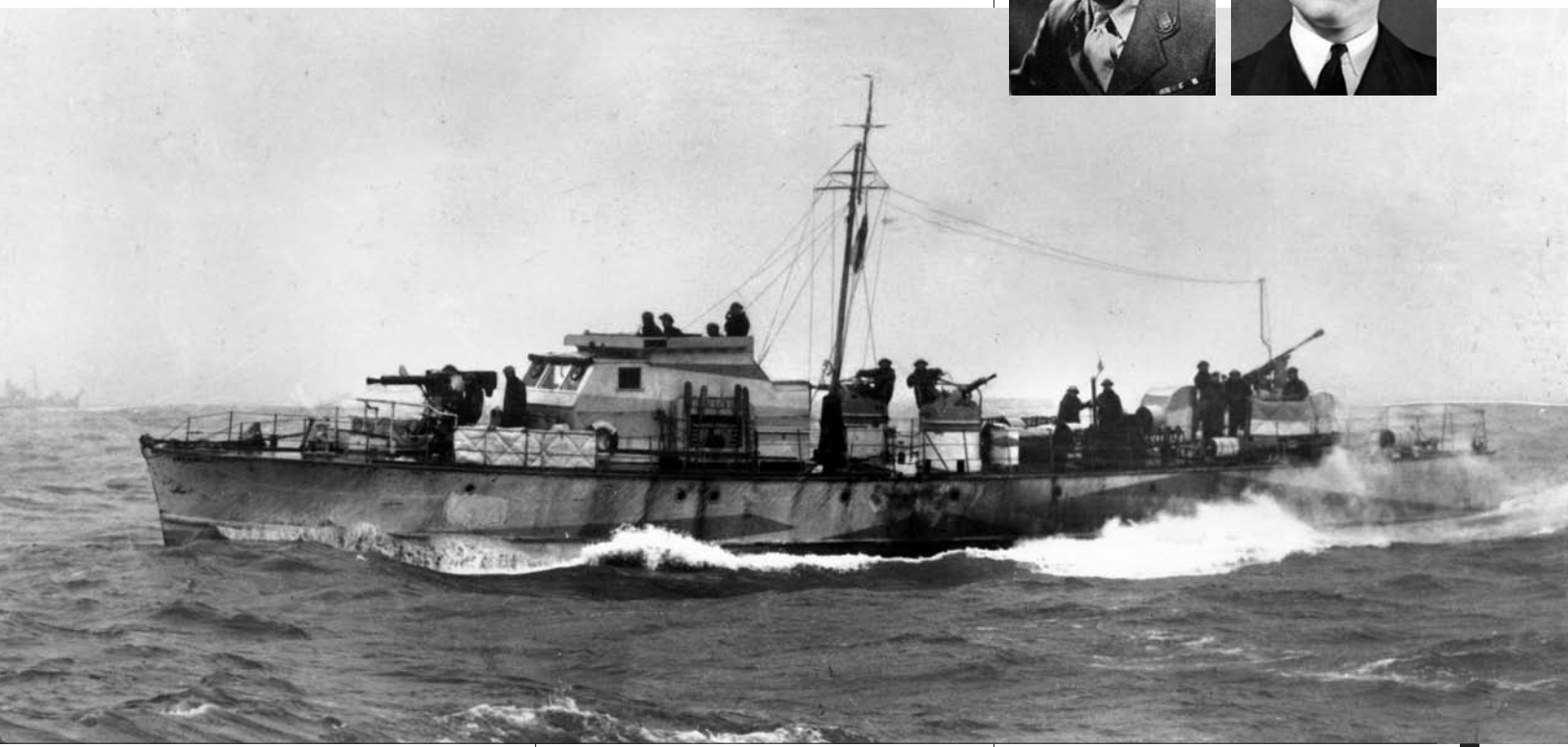
These guns would be all that the Fairmiles had to counter the batteries on the way back out the mouth of the river. Hughes-Hallett, the naval adviser, foresaw the dangers and remarked to Mountbatten, "We may lose every man." Mountbatten replied, "I'm afraid you're right, but if they do the job, we've got to accept that."

The vulnerability of the flotilla meant that the diversion plan involving the RAF for bomber support had to be super-effective. A force of around 350 bombers was requested, initially to target the docks and then the town while the troops were ashore.

The chiefs of staff approved this audacious plan, and so did Churchill. He and Mountbatten had both enjoyed a privileged, aristocratic upbringing and were expected to follow in the footsteps of their heroic ancestors. Churchill's exploits in the Boer War showed he could live up to these high standards. Mountbatten's track record was not as illustrious, but his per-

Both: Imperial War Museum

Lt. Col. Charles Newman (left), commander of the Commando force, and Commander Robert E. D. Ryder (right), in command of the raid's naval elements. BELOW: Motor gunboat *MGB 314*, headquarters ship for Commander Ryder and Lt. Col. Newman, was badly damaged by shore batteries and had to be scuttled.



Imperial War Museum

sonal charm and family connections would keep him afloat even after his disastrous management of the Dieppe Raid six months later.

For the ordinary men who were about to find themselves on this highly hazardous adventure, however, there would be no portraits on the walls of stately homes or verses by the poets of the day. If things went wrong for them, there would be a small concession for war widows and little else for the families of single men. Fortunately, Churchill and Mountbatten were to find a group of willing combatants, thirsting for action and prepared to stare death in the face in order to give Hitler a bloody nose.

Leading Chariot required a remarkable sailor and an experienced Commando. Robert Ryder was the Navy's choice. Awarded the Polar Medal for pioneering work in the Antarctic, he had also survived a U-boat attack in the Atlantic, which left him clinging to a piece of debris for four days before being rescued. He sounded like someone who could be relied upon when the going got tough.

Lt. Col. Charles Newman, from the Essex Regiment and now responsible for No. 2 Commando, was chosen to lead the Commandos. Educated at an independent school and a civil engineer by profession, he joined the territorial army and as a young man gained honors as a boxing champion. He had also distinguished himself in a raid in Norway in 1941.

Newman was physically as tough as his men and a good leader who could not only demonstrate coolness under fire, but humanity and humor when the situation allowed. To his men, out of earshot at least, he was always "Charlie." (This assessment of him can be confirmed by the author, whose father served with Newman in the Essex Territorials.)

With the raid scheduled for March 28, Newman and Ryder had to get acquainted fast and synchronize their planning. Hand-picked groups of Commandos, including kilted Scotsmen (the "Ladies from Hell" were not going to be left out of this job) who began specialist demolition training, which was an area of expertise that they enjoyed adding to their repertoire; but when they received special training in hand-to-hand night-time street fighting, they realized they were being prepared for a very special mission.

Newman's deputy was Major Bill Copeland, a works manager from a factory in northern England. This mixture of social classes defined the Commandos. They were selected for their personal qualities and toughness, not their backgrounds, unlike the British officer class. A troop could contain factory workers, journalists, coal miners, engineers, and city bankers who collectively gave the appearance of smart, regular soldiers, but their methods and tactics were those of ruthless guerrillas. Much of their personal discipline was self-imposed and there was great mutual respect between officers and men.

A demolitions expert from the Royal Navy, Lieutenant Nigel Tibbetts, was identified to work with Pritchard, and by an enormous piece of luck it was discovered that the King George V dock in Southampton was built to the same plan as St. Nazaire, so the troops trained there and became so familiar with their demolition targets that they could lay their charges in the dark.

The planners continued to pursue the Admiralty for a destroyer and the RAF for a guarantee of bombing support, but they were told that instead of the 350 bombers requested, they would have to make do with 60, organized into two separate groups that would first bomb the docks and then the town.

On March 2, it was announced that the sacrificial destroyer would be HMS *Campbeltown*, formerly USS *Buchanan*, a WWI American destroyer transferred to the Royal Navy in return for allowing the U.S. to set up bases on British Caribbean islands under the "Destroyers for Bases Agreement" in September 1940—a deal that had taken place in Britain's darkest hour. President Roosevelt went as far as he could to support Britain without breaking his promise not to involve his country in another European war.

By March 13, most of the raiders were ready to sail from the port of Falmouth, but full details would not be revealed until the last moment. The number of vessels provided for the raid had also increased. In addition to the original motor launches, there was now a motor gunboat for an HQ ship, four more launches for additional Commandos, and four launches equipped with 18-inch torpedoes to play an offensive role. Two destroyers would also accompany the flotilla for protection en route to the mouth of the Loire and stay in the Atlantic to accompany them home.

The motor launches would carry 15 Commandos and a crew of 12. The HQ ship was Newman's and Ryder's base for them to lead from the front. It was equipped with radar and depth-sounding equipment; amongst its crew were a navigation expert and someone who could signal in German. It also boasted a Vickers pom-pom gun for protection.

This ship, to be known as *MGB 314*, did not have the capacity to complete the full trip and would have to be towed from the start of the journey. The final ship in the pack was Sub-lieutenant Micky Wynn's *MTB 74*, a faster vessel containing two torpedo tubes mounted high on deck where they could be fired over torpedo netting if necessary.

On the evening of March 18, Newman briefed his 39 officers on the raid with a map and scale model, but St. Nazaire was still not mentioned by name. The next morning, the remainder of his commandos were put in the picture.

The plan was to sail up the river with two columns of Motor Launches (MLs) following the *Campbeltown*, one on either side. The Commandos were divided into three groups: *One* would travel in the MLs on the port side and land on a jetty known as the Old Mole; *Two* would travel in the starboard column and land a little further along at the dock's Old Entrance; and *Three* would travel on the destroyer itself and exit via the dock gate (caisson) as soon as it had been rammed by the ship.

They would then begin destroying the pumping house, winding gear and other mechanisms that allowed the dock to function. The caisson was the raiders' primary objective, but the three groups would try to destroy a total of 24 targets before heading home. The delay fuses on the *Campbeltown* were designed to go off when everyone was out

National Maritime Museum

Artist's conception of the raid: German spotlights illuminate the sky, and shells churn the water as HMS *Campbeltown* makes her high-speed dash in the Loire estuary toward the lock gates of the huge Normandie dock.

of the area. The depth charges concreted under her bows would make a very big bang!

Each group was given detailed instructions on the actual demolitions. With so much equipment to carry, their only weapon was their Colt pistol, so they were each assigned a protection team, armed with "Tommy guns" to keep the enemy at bay while the charges were being laid.

Newman was to set up his HQ near the Old Entrance, where the demolition teams would report back as soon as their tasks had been completed, then get down to the Old Mole and board the MLs waiting to take them home. Lt. Col. Newman had been beaming with excitement when he described the mission, referring to it as the biggest job yet done by the Commandos, but he ended the lecture on a much more serious note.

Before leaving London, he had been briefed by Mountbatten on the likelihood of returning from the raid. He was confident of its success, but the chances of getting out of the estuary once all the German defenses had been awakened was anyone's guess. At this late stage, any man who wanted to step down would be allowed to do so without Mountbatten or Newman thinking the worst of him. This was greeted with a stunned silence, a pause for it to sink in, then a spontaneous cheer which meant that everyone was on board. The die was cast.

In contrast, Ryder's briefing was very simple, involving only the two senior officers of each vessel who in turn would inform their men, but only after setting sail. Their role involved finding their way to the destinations where the Commandos would disembark and then bringing them home afterwards. They knew they could expect a hostile reception with searchlights and shore batteries. Two destroyers, HMS *Atherstone* and HMS *Tynedale*, would escort them to the Loire Estuary, but the raiders would be on their own till the return journey.

In the days that followed, further attention was given to the bombing support; the number of planes was increased to 62, but restrictions were placed on the pilots, who were given no flexibility in their method of attack. Crucially, for reasons of security, they were only provided with the briefest details of the raid, so effectively the coordination was minimal.

Campbeltown sailed into Falmouth harbor on March 25, with Ryder's former colleague Lt. Cmdr. Sam Beattie at the helm. Her original four funnels had been reduced to two, cut back in the style of the German *Möwe*-class destroyer—a deception aimed to buy valuable time in the journey up the Loire. Less noticeable in the dark would be the armor plating around the bridge, wheelhouse, and the fences to protect the Commandos on the decks against enemy fire.

Her original guns were replaced by a 12-pounder and eight Oerlikons. Below the bow and totally invisible were 24 400-lb. depth charges, cemented into the structure of the ship, whose delayed action fuses would not be activated till 11 p.m. and should not be affected by the ramming of the dock at 1:30 a.m. They were timed to explode after the Commandos' demolition work was completed at 3 a.m. If these failed, a second set was timed for 8:30 a.m. The ship would also be scuttled after ram-

ming to ensure it stayed in position.

At 2 p.m. on the afternoon of March 26, the little armada set sail. It comprised 345 naval officers and ratings, 166 in the fighting parties from No. 2 Commando, and 91 in the demolition parties from the combined Commandos plus medics, liaison officers, and two journalists. They totaled 611, ominously replicating the 600 men who rode "Into the jaws of death, into the mouth of hell" in Tennyson's celebrated description of *The Charge of the Light Brigade*. Once again, there would be "*Cannons to left of them, cannons to right of them*…."

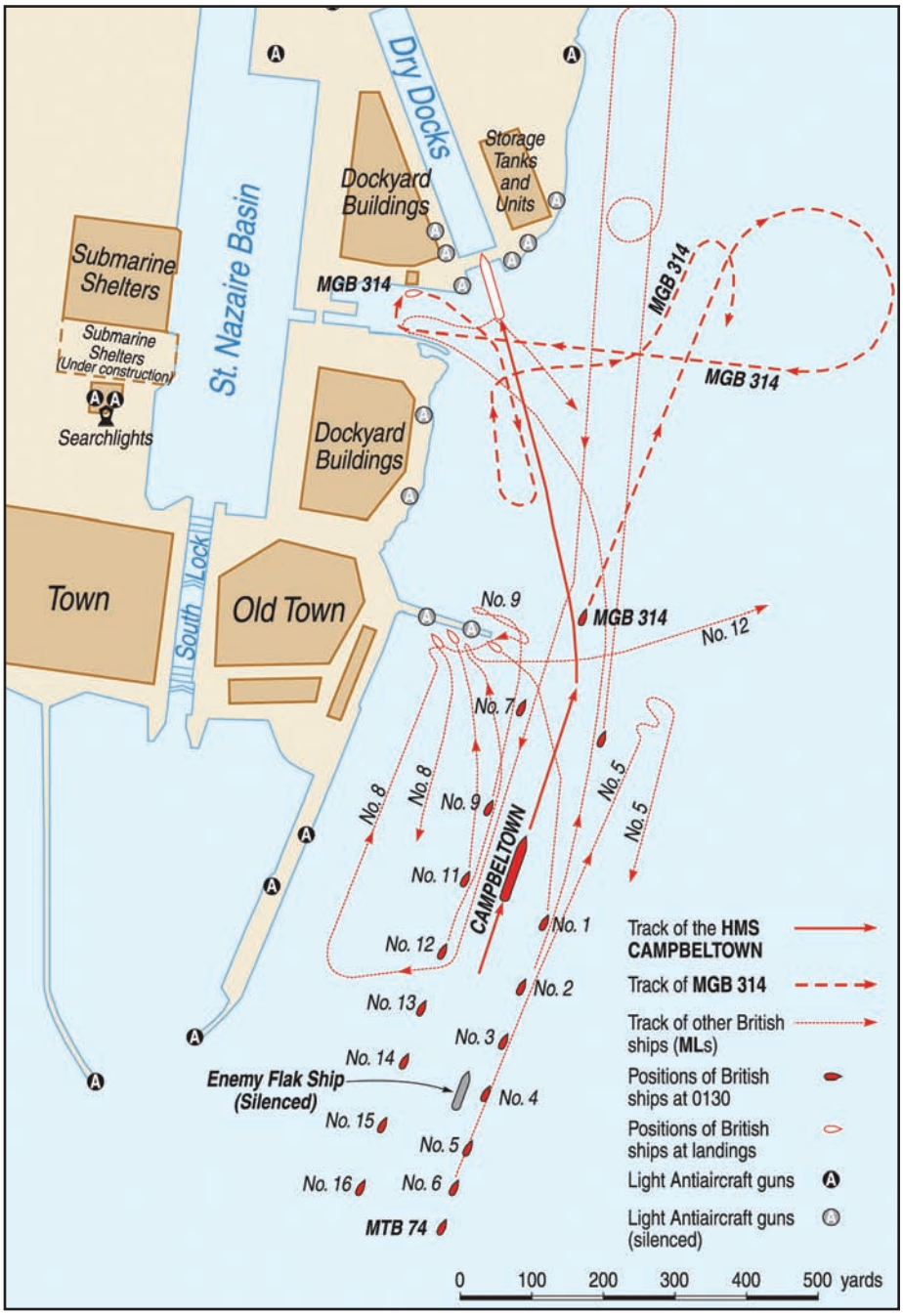
Out in the Atlantic the force adopted an arrowhead formation traditionally used in a submarine sweep as a subterfuge. The HQ launch *MGB 314* and Wynn's Motor Torpedo Boat, *MTB 74*, were towed behind the destroyers to save on fuel. At 7 a.m. on the 27th, the *Tynedale*, which was flying German colors as part of the deception plan, spotted a U-boat, which subsequently sent up a recognition signal.

The destroyer attempted a reply but still continued towards it and opened fire. The submarine dived but was soon depth charged, causing it to surface. This time the guns hit their target and she dived again. Unsure of whether the sub was badly hit and hoping she had not seen the motor launches, Ryder sent the destroyers off in a different direction. This ruse paid off, as records show that the Germans concluded that the destroyers were sailing home after laying mines and no further action was taken.

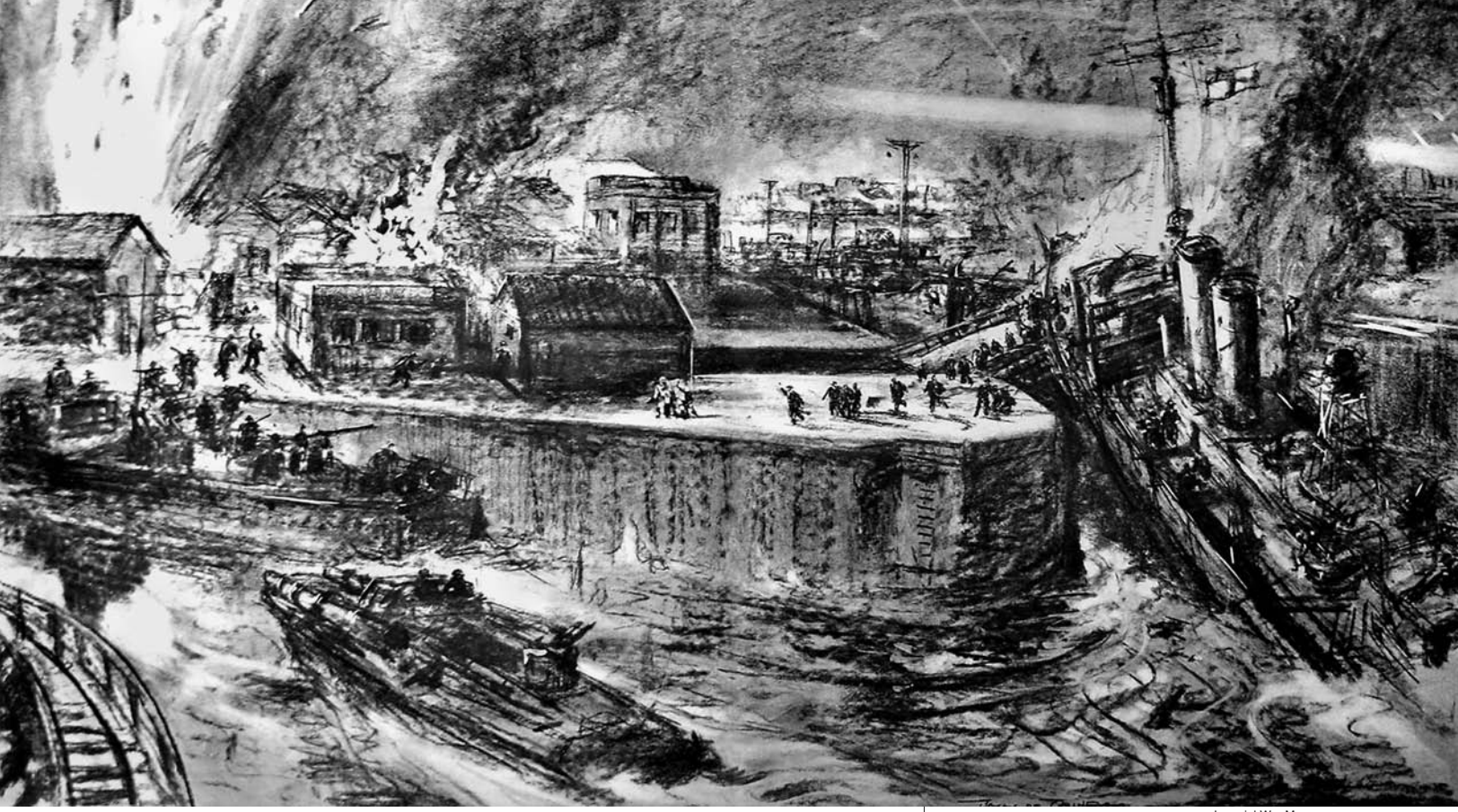
After the destroyers rejoined the flotilla, it encountered a fleet of French fishing trawlers. Knowing that some French vessels had been infiltrated by Germans with radio transmitters, Ryder decided to sink two of them. Their French crews were brought on board and displayed some unexpected enthusiasm at their "liberation." None of the trawler fleet carried German spies, so it was allowed to sail on unhindered. The French fishermen remained on the destroyers, and most took the opportunity to join de Gaulle's Free French Forces in England.

At this time, in St. Nazaire's docks and unknown to Ryder's men, Admiral Karl Dönitz, Commander-in-Chief of the German submarine forces, was inspecting the U-boat pens and asking the flotilla commander how he would deal with an allied attack. He was informed that such an event was very unlikely, but Dönitz issued a warning to be vigilant.

The raiders sailed on a course that appeared to be taking them past the Loire but then turned back at 8 p.m. in the dark and headed for the estuary. They stopped and formed up in the order planned for the attack, with Ryder and Newman transferring to *MGB 314*. This launch led the column, with two torpedo-carrying MLs close behind. Then



ABOVE: Schematic view of the St. Nazaire dock area showing the routes of the various British ships that took part in the raid. OPPOSITE: Sketch of the St. Nazaire raid; HMS *Campbeltown* (right) has just rammed the Normandie lock gate, and Commandos are sprinting off the ship to attack German installations.



Imperial War Museum

came the *Campbeltown*, followed by the columns of MLs on the port and starboard sides carrying Commandos. Bringing up the rear was Micky Wynn's speedy little *MTB 74*, its torpedoes at the ready.

There was one more navigation check, a rendezvous with a British submarine, *Sturgeon*, waiting in the Loire to give a pinpoint chart position for the route up the center of the estuary. Sure enough, there she was, blinking away! The plan appeared to be working.

Although the *Sturgeon*'s signal was visible, the sky was murky. Just the weather for concealment, thought Ryder, forgetting that it would hinder the bombers. At 11 p.m., Nigel Tibbits on the *Campbeltown* activated the eight-hour pencil delay fuses. At 11:30 they heard the bombers approaching, as did the German antiaircraft teams. Searchlights! Gun flashes! Tracers! Shells! Bombs!

The sky was alight and the aerial diversion was beginning. However, by 12:30, as the ships entered the estuary, the bombing raid appeared to be petering out. In the dim light they could also see the grim remains of the *Lancastrian*, the ill-fated ship that was destroyed by dive bombers in June 1940 as it attempted to transport troops and French civilians to England as part of Operation Aerial, the post-Dunkirk evacuation.

Within 15 minutes, the *Campbeltown* entered the deadly shoals. Ryder used his echo sounder to check depth and radar to measure distances to the shore. She grounded twice in the mud and silt, slowed, but finally broke through into deeper water. Next to race the pulses was the sight of a small German patrol vessel, which fortunately had no radio to inform anyone who could query their passage.

The tension returned when it was realized that the bombing had stopped and the searchlights had been turned off. It was very quiet and dark. Unknown to the raiders, low cloud had caused visibility problems, and the proposed bombing of the town had been called off because of the likelihood of civilian casualties. (Churchill told Newman when they met after the war that *he* accepted responsibility for the shortcomings of the bombing raid.)

Everyone on board the ships was asking the same question: "Will we get away with it?" The answer from the men on the shores of the river was to be a firm "Nein!" Captain Mecke, in charge of the antiaircraft brigade, had noticed the odd behavior of the British bombers, taking their time, dropping single bombs, and flying in an unusual pattern. Suspecting parachute activity, he signaled all the command posts. By 1:15 a.m., separate observers had picked up the fleet in the middle of the river, and urgent messages were sent to the harbor commander to check if anything was expected.

At 1:22, a huge searchlight was switched on, revealing the flotilla in all its glory, but the *Campbeltown* was flying the *Reichskriegsflagge* and looked like a *Möwe*-class destroyer. German signal stations opened up their lamps to ask questions, and a Bofors gun opened up with some warning shots, revealing what was in store if the *Campbeltown* gave the wrong answers.

It was now time for Leading Seaman Pike to step forward. He had been handpicked for the mission because he could signal in German and had memorized a German code book seized by No. 3 Commando on the Vaagso raid in Norway three months previously.

His reply was a little long-winded, playing for time, and mentioned the name of a

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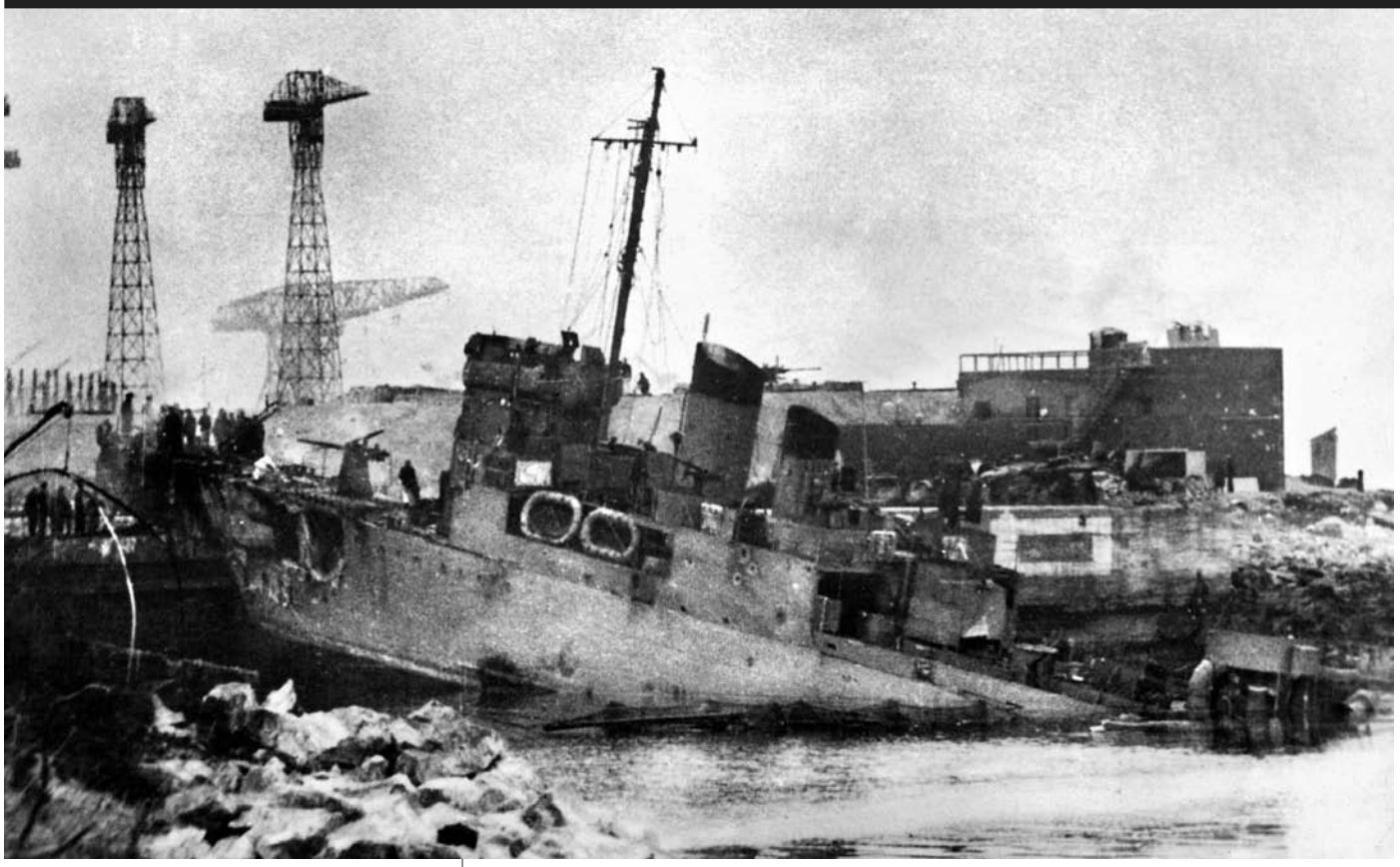


known German torpedo boat. He then sent the message in German: "Proceeding up harbor in accordance with orders."

For a moment, some searchlights were switched off, but then the Bofors started up again. Ryder asked for another signal to be sent: "Ship being fired on by friendly forces," and the Bofors stopped. In an attempt to reinforce their identity, Ryder then fired a flare from a Verey pistol, but it was not the color that was currently being used. This tipped the scales. Only a couple of minutes from zero hour and it was *game on!*

Down came the German flag, up went the white ensign, and all hell broke loose. The Germans were taken aback by the ferocity of the little fleet's response, although all they had to aim at were the searchlights, gun flashes, and the sources of the multi-coloured tracers.

In the estuary, a German *Speerbreche* guard ship was taken by surprise, and Able Seaman Bill Savage on *MGB 314* managed to knock out its deadly 88mm gun with 20 shells from his Vickers pom-pom before it could respond.

Both sides knew that for the next few minutes it would be all about the *Campbeltown*. She was peppered by every kind of German round and shell ("*Stormed at with shot and shell, boldly they rode and well, into the jaws of death rode the six hundred….*").

For the moment, this drew the fire from the vulnerable MLs as Beattie raced her towards the gates of the Normandie dock. He almost ran into the South Entrance by mistake but corrected his course at the last moment and, when a searchlight showed up the lighthouse at the Old Mole, he realized his target was just a little further along the dock landscape he had studied so thoroughly.

At 20 knots there was no stopping her, and all on board braced themselves for what was to come. Such was the force of the impact with the lock gates that the front of the ship crumpled back 36 feet, with its bow angled high upon the caisson. They had missed zero hour by only four minutes.

The assault teams with their Tommy guns and Brens scurried down their ladders as fast as possible. One of the first was Newman's Essex Regiment comrade John Roderick. His group took their first objective, a light-gun position, in their stride, then launched a successful grenade attack to neutralize a bunker containing a 37mm gun before arriving at their third target, a Bofors that had already been knocked out by a ship's gunner. Only its crew remained, but not for long. Within a few minutes another gun and searchlight were out of commission. Their orders now were to protect the perimeter, which they did against huge odds till it was time to withdraw.

Captain Donald Roy's Scottish Commando group went kilted into battle off the port side of the ship, straight to their first objective: a rooftop gun position, which was swiftly neutralized. From there they raced to the bridge over the Old Entrance to the dock, a strategic point that they had to hold, under fire, for the demolition teams to cross when they had done their damage. There they were to hold fast, poorly protected and taking casualties.

The early success of the assault teams had paved the way for the demolition gangs.

On the shoulders of these men rested the neutralization of the mechanisms that controlled the Normandie Dock. At the southern end were the pump house and the winding house containing the machinery to move the lock gate. Charges were to be laid on the caisson itself in case the *Campbeltown* failed to deliver. The caisson at the northern end and its winding house would also be destroyed. These five targets were under the control of Pritchard's close friend Captain Robert Montgomery.

Lieutenant Stuart Chant led the pumping-house party despite a leg wound. His team blew open the steel doors and descended 40 feet in the dark, leaving 150 lbs. of explosive attached to the pumps. Fortunately, the layout was identical to the Southampton docks where they had trained. Chant had barely limped back up the stairs when the charge went off, a satisfying roar heard by all the other teams and crewmen.

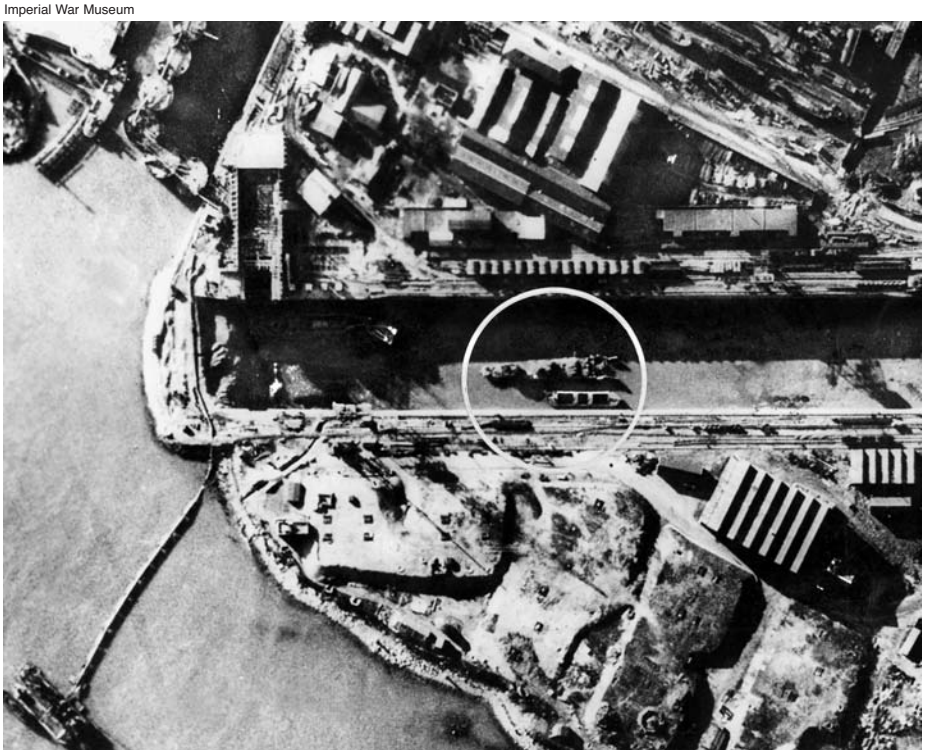
Their next objectives were the electric motors on the ground floor, which the previous explosion had severely damaged, so they simply smashed the oil pipes and set everything on fire.

Lieutenant Chris Smalley led the attack on the nearby winding house. Plastic explosives and cordtex were placed in position and the igniters were pulled, resulting in another huge explosion and fire. Task completed, the team withdrew and jumped into a launch that had just arrived at the Old Entrance, hoping to make an early exit, but Smalley was killed in the process.

The team tasked with destroying the main caisson if the *Campbeltown* had failed were now redundant, so they were sent to reinforce the demolition teams at the northern end of the dock. All of them came under heavy fire, but they managed to place a dozen underwater charges on ropes from the handrail.

A further attack, causing serious casualties, prevented more charges being laid, but the ones already placed were enough to blow a huge hole and send water gushing through.

Imperial War Museum



ABOVE: Aerial photo taken months after the raid shows the stern half of HMS *Campbeltown* (circled) lying on the bottom of the drained Normandie dry dock. Although the lock gate was repaired, the dry dock remained useless for the rest of the war, preventing its use by Germany's largest warships. OPPOSITE: HMS *Campbeltown* photographed shortly before she exploded at 10:30 a.m. on March 28, wrecking much of the port area and killing many Germans and French civilians.

All the teams, except for Smalley's, withdrew to the bridge held by Roy's men, which protected the route leading out of the dock and down to the Old Mole, where they expected to embark the launches that were due to rendezvous there. The bridge was swept by fire, but some managed to cross it via the structure below.

The men of Group Three had been lucky to travel by destroyer; for the two columns of launches following the *Campbeltown*, it was a different story. Group Two (starboard) were directed to land at the Old Entrance for more demolition. Group One (port) was to land and secure the Old Mole projecting into the river and neutralize the opposition that the men would face both during the completion of their tasks and, more importantly, when they tried to leave.

The Old Entrance presented challenges, but it was the 86 Commandos in Group One who had drawn the short straw. The Old Mole was only accessible by a flight of 25 stone steps unless the Commandos could scale it with their ladders. It was also much more exposed and heavily fortified with guns that needed silencing before landing became possible.

Just before the *Campbeltown* had hit the caisson, Ryder's gunboat and the leading torpedo launch on the port side veered off to provide covering fire for the Commandos. By this time, the leading boat on the starboard side (Stephens' *ML192*) had already been hit. All but five of the assault party were killed and four crew lost. Ironically one of the Commandos, Michael Burn, got ashore and reached his target nearly a mile away but had insufficient equipment to destroy it.

The next two starboard launches were hit, but one—Burt's *ML 2620*—managed to land its party; unfortunately, they had to re-embark due to the intensity of the fire. Forced downstream, Burt reached the Old Mole, stopping to assist his friend Lieutenant Collier, whose port-side launch was ablaze. Collier, alone and seriously wounded on the bridge, shouted, "I've had it, Ted," and told Burt to save himself. This delay gave the enemy time to finish off Burt's vessel as well; the best he could do

Both: Bundesarchiv Bild

ABOVE: The shattered remains of the winding shed. Not only did the exploding HMS *Campbeltown* cause immense damage, the Commando teams also added to the destruction by demolishing other key targets in the dock area. BELOW: German soldiers looking for British commandos pass the lifeless body of one St. Nazaire raider who did not return home.

was to get the wounded onto a raft.

The same sorry fate greeted the rest of the starboard-side launches, until the final one, Rodier's *ML 177*, managed to get into the Old Entrance at 1:40 a.m., where Troop Sergeant Major's Haines' assault party of 14 were able to disembark. Beattie then hailed Rodier to take on board 30 of the *Campbeltown*'s crew.

Full to the gunnels, Rodier could now take no further part in the evacuation and made haste to get home. By this time, Newman and his team had left the HQ ship to set up a working HQ on land. Ryder stayed behind, checking the *Campbeltown*'s scuttling was underway (it was going nowhere now!) and that Micky Wynn's launch had arrived to fire his torpedoes at the outer lock gates of the Old Entrance. Wynn then filled up with the remaining *Campbeltown* crew and was ordered to head home.

At the head of the port column was Lieutenant Irwin's torpedo launch. Six minutes after the *Campbeltown* struck, the launch received a direct hit and withdrew out to sea. Lieutenant Platt's launch behind him, containing assault troops, was hit several times. Survivors tried to beat the strong current and swim for the shore while the wounded were put on rafts. Lieutenant Boyd's torpedo boat came up after engaging rooftop positions and picked up some survivors. Sixteen men on Platt's launch were killed or drowned. Boyd's launch also started getting hit and was forced to retreat home on just one engine.

Next behind Platt had been the ill-fated Lieutenant Collier's *ML457*, containing Pritchard and a demolition team tasked with destroying a bridge and lock gates at the far end of the South Entrance, plus young "Tiger" Watson's protection squad.

Collier's *ML457* was hit soon after depositing the troops successfully at the Old Mole. Collier lost a leg in the explosion, the launch caught fire, and drifted into the river. It was at this point that Burt caught up with the mortally wounded Collier, who later died along with eight of his crew. The following four launches tried to land at the Mole, but the steps were out of reach and there was no way of throwing out a scaling ladder. They were hit, guns were put out of action, and they had no alternative but to limp off downstream.

While these tragic events were unfolding, Ryder's gunboat had gained the shelter of the Old Entrance. As soon as he had seen Wynn discharge his torpedoes, Ryder set off down to the Mole to check on the others. What he saw filled him with horror. Five launches were ablaze, and the river was covered in burning petrol. Men who had an hour before prepared themselves to die with their boots on if necessary, taking the enemy with them, were burning in the water or drowning without having fired a shot.

Ryder also tried to support Burt and Collier and came under fire but gained temporary salvation from Able Seaman Savage who, although completely exposed on the

deck, successfully silenced a large concrete gun emplacement.

Back Ryder went to report the situation to Newman but was fired on from all sides. With Savage still firing and putting his life on the line, he too had no alternative but to leave and try to get his passengers to safety. Savage's ferocity with his Vickers pom-pom gun was exemplary, but he eventually succumbed to multiple wounds; he was subsequently awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross. Without his gallant efforts, Ryder's chances of survival would have been slim.

This was all happening while Newman was setting up HQ at the Old Entrance; he was soon joined by TSM Haines and his team, who had disembarked from Rodier's boat. Coming under attack, Haines struck the opposition with first a two-inch mortar and then a Bren gun.

Firing to their left announced the arrival of the group that Collier had landed at the Old Mole. This included Philip Walton's team to demolish Bridge D at the southern end of the submarine basin, supported by Tiger Watson's minders and Pritchard to oversee the demolitions.

On the way to their objective, Pritchard found two small ships and took the opportunity, with his corporal, to put them out of action with plastic explosives. As they rejoined the others, Pritchard was killed and it was discovered that Walton, the team leader, had also been lost. Watson made two attempts to gain the bridge and demolish it himself but was recalled by Newman, who had assessed the impossibility of the task and wanted no more lives lost.

Encouraging for Newman, however, were the explosions from the pumping and winding houses, and the teams who had joined his HQ to report successful demolition. It was time to bring everyone back, which meant sending a runner across Roy's bridge under intense fire.

Heading out towards the Old Mole, Newman and his men came face to face with the same inferno that greeted Ryder and realized they would not be sailing back to Falmouth. The contingency plan was to fight their way out of town, split into pairs, and try to get home via Spain and Gibraltar, a journey of over a thousand miles. A tall order, but it was later proven not to be impossible.

Initially, they would divide up into groups of around 20, but first they had to get out of the dock area and into the town—which involved crossing Bridge D, which fortunately had been spared demolition. Somehow the majority managed to run the gauntlet with small-arms fire spitting off its girders, but taking casualties all the way. After crossing the bridge, the survivors divided up and took their chances.

Newman and 15 commandos found a cellar for shelter, but only he and three others were not wounded. The sound of Germans outside meant he had to make a painful decision as a couple of grenades tossed down the stairs would have finished off the lot of them. He ran up the steps and surrendered.

Among the wounded in the cellar was 22-year-old Lance Corporal Harold Roberts—"Aggs" to his mates. A promising professional soccer player from Liverpool, he had joined the Liverpool Scottish at the start of the war before being accepted as a Commando and joining Captain Donald Roy's troop. He was on the port side of the *Campbeltown* when it hit the dock and had raced off with his kilted comrades, taken on the guns on a warehouse roof, and held the crucial bridge with Roy and the others for more than an hour under fire.

Roberts now had wounds in both his legs and was staring at the certainty of capture or worse. The chances of ever being able to play soccer again were a distant fantasy.

As the remaining Commandos were being taken prisoner ashore, some of their comrades and naval crew were making a break for freedom down the estuary. Seven launches had been set alight or sunk, but the 10 that survived had hopes for their planned rendezvous with the two escort destroyers 25 miles out to sea.

Rodier's craft, with Beattie, Tibbits, and a large number of wounded on board, initially avoided the coastal guns before the engine room took a 75mm shell, which killed Rodier and Tibbits and also started a major fire. Some escaped by raft, the remainder were thrown into the water, and a few clung on to the wreck of the *Lancastria* in the estuary, to be picked up by a German patrol boat in the morning.

Micky Wynn in his MTB, capable of 40 knots, was hopeful of a smart getaway and was approaching the open sea when he saw two men on a raft and stopped. A searchlight picked them out and they were immediately hit by a shell. Wynn was knocked unconscious but saved by his chief mechanic, Bill Lovegrove, who went back to search for him, lashed him to a raft, and supported him for 12 hours. Other crew members swam alongside but most succumbed to the icy waters. Late the following morning they were picked up by a German gunboat. Only four of the 36 on board had survived.

Both: Imperial War Museum

Seaman William Savage (left) knocked out German gun emplacements, earning a posthumous Victoria Cross. Captain William Pritchard (right), who conceived the raid, led men in the battle.

Lieutenant Ian Henderson's *ML 306* was one of the boats that failed to land at the Old Mole. It was returning with a full complement of 28 men on board when they ran into a pack of five German destroyers. They took on one of them, *Jaguar*, for an hour—a fight that was to be remembered for the courage of Sergeant Tom Durrant.

When his Bren gun, equipped for the raid with massive 100-round magazines, ran out of ammunition, Durrant took charge of the ship's twin Lewis guns, hav-

Bundesarchiv Bild

ing just seen their operator fall, and stuck to them despite being progressively riddled with bullets.

Surrender came inevitably, but honorably, and the survivors were treated with great respect for their courage. A week later, Charles Newman was contacted in a German POW camp by *Jaguar*'s captain, who told him about Durrant and suggested he be recommended for a bravery medal. After the war, Newman followed up the story, and Durrant was awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross.

Of the remaining small ships, three actually made it home to Falmouth, shooting down a German Heinkel 111 en route. Ryder's gunboat was badly damaged but managed to rendezvous with the destroyers as planned, together with three other launches. All of these were in such a bad state, however, that it was decided to scuttle them.

Back in St. Nazaire, after the apparent end of Operation Chariot, the Germans were still trying to piece together the precise rationale behind the night's events. Sporadic gunfire continued until daybreak—either pockets of Commando resistance or opportunistic Frenchmen trying to settle scores using hidden weapons.

The early morning saw British survivors being interrogated in several locations around the town. At about 10:30, Beattie was being lectured by an intelligence officer on the futility of his attempt to destroy the dock by simply ramming it. Then, with perfect timing, it happened: *KABOOM!!!*

Even the wounded managed a wry smile as they realized that the delayed-action fuses on the *Campbeltown* had at last done their job. The amount of debris that fell all over the dock reinforced the decibel count. The 160-ton caisson had folded, and in rushed the waters of the Atlantic to reclaim a piece of French coastline, causing further damage to anything in their path.

Unfortunately, the *Campbeltown* had attracted the curiosity not only of the German military but also a few French civilians who had slipped past the guards around it. Estimates of how many people were aboard when it exploded varied from 150 to 350, many of them seeking souvenirs as well as military intelligence. Such was the blast that pieces of these unintended victims stuck to walls and hung from cables for days till the area was finally cleared.

Why the fuses detonated later than planned will remain a mystery. One story that circulated, without any real confirmation, told of one or more British officers being seen on board shortly beforehand—and even that Pritchard had only been wounded, not killed, the night before and had slipped aboard to strike a final blow before he expired.

The destruction of the docks did not end with the elimination of the perpetrators. Two days afterwards, the outer gate of the Old Entrance was blown up, causing complete mayhem and prompting more searches and street patrols. Then another explosion an hour later confirmed that both Wynn's time-delayed torpedoes had made their mark.

Commando raids were indeed unnerving the enemy and making it wonder what would happen next, and where. Unfortunately for the local French civilians, the trembling finger of suspicion pointed at them. Panicked by an unseen enemy, many German troops exacted revenge among the innocent. Senior officers then threatened the mayor with the summary execution of 10 percent of his citizens if the attacks continued. Fortunately, there were no charges left to explode and no acts of revenge.

At the top of the chain of command, the Führer was incandescent, something that

Churchill could only have dreamed of. Plans were shelved for weeks while enquiries were conducted for recrimination and to tighten up security for the future. As Hitler's Atlantic Wall stretched from Norway to Spain, resources would now have to be spread even more thinly.

The remaining Commandos who were rounded up were sent after interrogation to German POW camps. In total, the number of men taken prisoner was 215 (another 228 successfully returned home). The wounded had a hard time in makeshift hospitals with few anesthetics, but Harold Roberts was lucky enough to find a German doctor who saved his legs from further damage, and he was then taken to Rennes in Brittany to be treated by sympathetic French surgeons. After the war he returned home and resumed his soccer career, playing for Birmingham City in the First Division of the football league.

Five Commandos, unknown to Newman when he optimistically suggested they return home via Gibraltar, followed his orders to the letter and, after a series of incredible adventures, rejoined their units back in England to continue and survive the war.

In his masterful account of *The Greatest Raid of All* (1958), Brigadier C. Lucas Phillips concludes with the story of Micky Wynn, who was repatriated from a POW hospital after losing an eye when his launch was blown up. As the war was ending in April 1945, he persuaded the Admiralty to sanction his involvement in the liberation of naval POWs, with some help from a Canadian tank commander, who allowed him to fly a white ensign from the lead tank. He rumbled into the camp at Marlag-Milag to free Bill Lovegrove, who had saved his life over three years earlier in the icy waters of the Loire.

In analyzing the outcome of the raid, one heart-wrenching statistic is the number of men who were tragically prevented from fulfilling their promise. The losses on that night amounted to 64 Commandos and 105 naval men. Around 75 percent of these deaths occurred in the naval battle, the majority of them on the two crowded launches of Rodier and Wynn during their withdrawal.

Apart from the *Campbeltown* explosion, the most obvious successes were achieved by those Commandos who had leapt off the ship and reduced key installations to rubble within half an hour. Groups Two and Three on the Fairmile launches should have been able to do the same, but their vulnerability meant that very few got off the starting blocks. If they also had enjoyed the protection of an armor-plated second destroyer, the results could have been very different. Once the element of surprise was lost, they were sitting ducks.

Imperial War Museum

ABOVE: German troops use heavy weapons to try and flush out Commandos believed to be hiding in a house opposite the waterfront. Some 64 Commandos and 105 Royal Navy men died in the costly but successful raid. OPPOSITE: A German soldier inspects debris and British corpses along one of the docks at St. Nazaire.

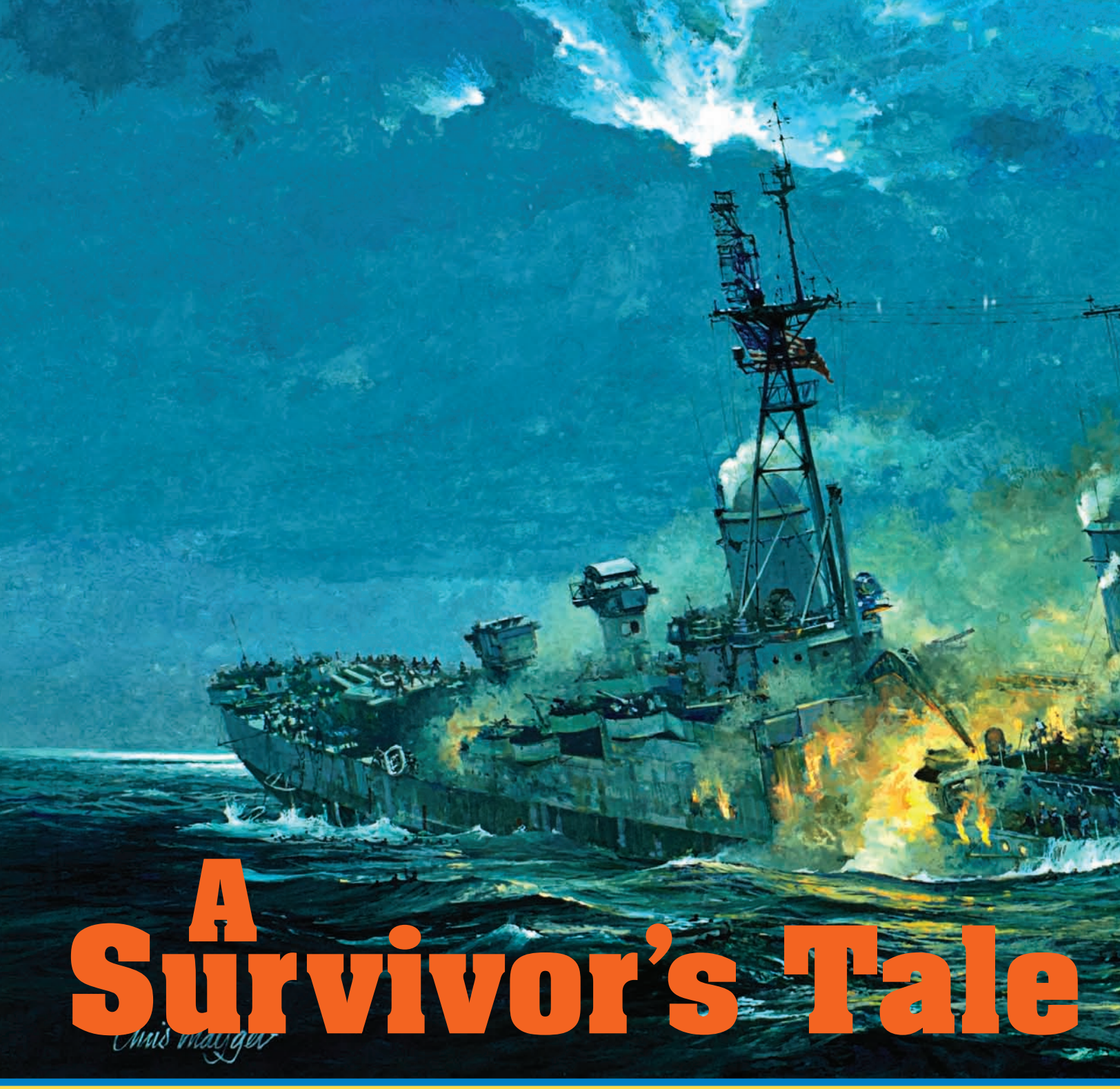
The heroics they displayed in just trying to stay alive and supporting their comrades, however, provide an indication of how successful they could have been if they had been able to land. Mountbatten's callous predictions for the fate of these men had been very accurate. It may be seen as ironical by some that he met his own end in an explosion on a small boat at the hands of the Irish Republican Army in 1979.

Questions will always be raised about the diversion plan. Bad weather, especially low cloud, is so frequently a barrier to effective bombing operations that it should have been factored into the planning and a more flexible strategy prepared. By preventing the aircrews from using their initiative or detailing them of the operation taking place below for security reasons, Bomber Command ultimately diminished the element of surprise that the raiders relied upon.

But overall, the raid will always occupy a rightful place among the greatest battles of all time, with perhaps the one consideration so frequently applied that, "At St. Nazaire, there were no failures, only impossibilities."

After the war, the people of St. Nazaire warmly welcomed back the survivors of the night raid for a series of commemoration events. The first of these was August 2, 1947. Despite the fact that much of the port and its town were still showing the scars of Allied shells and bombs, the party of 150 Charioteers, who may have been personally responsible for some of the damage, were generously addressed by Paul Ramadier, the French Prime Minister, with the words, "You were the first to bring us hope."

A frequent contributor to WWII Quarterly, *the British author lives in the Normandy region of France.*



A Survivor's Tale

The mission was top secret. The heavy cruiser USS Indianapolis *(CA-35) had just delivered the last parts of the atomic bomb from California to the island of Tinian and was heading, unescorted, to Guam when it was intercepted by a Japanese submarine, the* I-58, *and torpedoed on July 30, 1945.*

The Indy *sank within 12 minutes. Out of 1,197 men aboard her, about 900 either jumped or were blown overboard. Over the next four-and-a-half days, a combination of hypothermia, dehydration, lack of food and water, and attacks by sharks depleted this number to just 316 men, who survived to be miraculously rescued.*

Twenty-one-year-old Paul J. Murphy was born in Chillicothe, Missouri, in 1924 and graduated from high school in 1943; two weeks later he was drafted. He was one of those 316 who survived one of the worst disasters in U.S. naval history. This is his story.

Of joining the Navy, Paul Murphy said, "I was drafted into the Navy. I felt very fortunate, as it was one of the few times that the Navy did any drafting. I went to boot camp

Indiana Historical Society

An artist's depiction of the USS *Indianapolis* disaster. The cruiser, with nearly 1,200 men aboard, sank within 12 minutes of being torpedoed by the Japanese submarine *I-58* on July 30, 1945; only 316 men survived after several days in the shark-infested waters. (Painting by maritime artist Chris Mayger)

Seaman Paul Murphy lived through the sinking of the USS *Indianapolis*—one of the worst naval disasters in history.

BY FLINT WHITLOCK

at Farragut, Idaho, and after boot camp I was selected to go to a fire-control school at Treasure Island, California, for four months. After I completed that school, I attended Advanced Fire Control School at San Diego, which was another three months. So, I had seven months of training before I was assigned to the USS *Indianapolis*. [In the Navy, fire controlmen operate weapons systems aboard surface-combatant ships.]

The *Indy* was a heavy cruiser that before the war had been the ship of state for President Franklin D. Roosevelt. He made two trips on it to New York, a couple down to South America, and one to the Aleutian Islands during the peacetime period.

The *Indianapolis* had not been at Pearl Harbor during the attack on December 7, 1941; it had been at Johnston Island, southwest of Hawaii, for gunnery practice. The ship participated in 10 campaigns during the entire war, and I was involved in the last five.

At that time, Admiral Raymond Spruance commanded the Fifth Fleet, and so the *Indy* became Spruance's flagship; he was in charge of most of the Pacific operations while I was aboard.

Naval History and Heritage Command

Left: *Indy* crewman Seaman Paul Murphy (courtesy Murphy family). Right: Admiral Raymond Spruance, Fifth Fleet commander, used the *Indy* as his flagship. TOP: The heavy cruiser USS *Indianapolis* (CA-35), photographed during the war, was launched in 1931 and earned 10 battle stars before her tragic sinking.

I always felt that being in the Navy was a lot better than being in the trenches over in Europe. Those guys had frozen feet, and the mud and the stuff they had to go through—it would have been terrible. It's pretty hard to comprehend.

If you're going to be on a ship, it's best to be on one in wartime. It's a little more lax than it would be in peacetime—not so much spit and polish. We had all the accommodations anybody could ever want. We had two doctors—MDs—and a dentist. We had a "gedunk stand," which is an ice cream stand, and we had ship's service, and a barber. We had good dining facilities and had a laundry we could use. In our off-hours, many of the boys would play cards. Always on Wednesday mornings and Saturday mornings, we had navy beans for breakfast.

I was in charge of the after-control tower; that was my cleaning station, and I also had to calibrate everything. I had a young crew—I was young myself—but I had newcomers on there. They saw me cleaning up around there, and they sat around on the deck reading comic books. One day I got fed up and I said, "Hey, if anybody's gonna sit down and read, it's gonna be *me*; you guys get this cleaning done."

The ship was 610 feet long, so it was quite large. Whenever Admiral Spruance was aboard, we could see him walking the foc'sle for exercise, talking with somebody from his staff all the time. Admiral Spruance was a fantastic individual. He was probably one of the best admirals in the Pacific. He was also from the city of Indianapolis.

Out in the Pacific, the tropical temperature was quite hot, and we had no air conditioning. Many of the boys who worked in the engine rooms, or slept near those engine rooms at night, would take advantage of sleeping on the upper deck, where the cool breeze could blow over them. On the night we got hit, many of those guys were sleeping in skivvies on the deck to keep cool. I was just one deck below the main deck, and it wasn't too bad in my quarters. I don't remember ever sleeping away from my bunk. My friend who was in the after-control tower slept in there because it was cooler than where his bunk was.

I was working with the 8-inch guns; you never fired at airplanes with 8-inch guns. You fired them at surface targets or bombardment. So, I was an observer for most of the time when we were under air attack. I could look out the porthole of my control tower and see what was going on, but many of the guys in my division were in charge of the computers and so forth on the 20mm and 40mm and 5-inch guns. They would be more exposed in the area of an easy attack. I was sheltered by my control tower.

We were involved in the June 1944 Battle of the Philippine Sea, where the carriers again were in operation. They shot down 412 Japanese planes—to this day, the largest number of enemy aircraft shot down in one day.

Most of the combat that I was involved in were the bombardments prior to invasions. And we had the flag—the fleet commander—to protect.

In the Marianas operation [June-November 1944], we would go in during the daytime to bombard, but we would leave the area at night to protect the flag, and we would go out to the fresh air and the fresh seas.

There was a terrible smell. We never knew what the stench was until we started to come back in closer to shore, and you'd see the green flies and the Japanese bodies floating on the water—the stench was something terrible. The next evening we'd go back out and get that fresh air again.

I think in the Marianas was the first time that the Navy ever took prisoners and interrogated them. The Japanese wouldn't give up, but the Navy or Marines brought some prisoners aboard our ship. They were deloused and interrogated there.

After we completed the Marianas operation, our next tour was Iwo Jima [February-March 1945], and in between times the flag would go with the aircraft carriers that made the first carrier raids on Japan.

Naval History and Heritage Command

The *Indy* fires a broadside with her 8-inch guns at Japanese positions on Saipan as landing craft (foreground) head for the invasion beaches, July 1944.

Iwo Jima was the first time I was made the "pointer" on 8-inch guns. That's the guy that, after the crosshairs are marked on the target, pulls the trigger, and the computers do all the rest of the work. It was the first time in the entire war that we fired a nine-gun salvo, broadside, at one time. We had three turrets, and each turret had three 8-inch guns. When you fired those shots, you could see the shells go over towards the target, and the roll and pitch of that ship was terrific; we had gyroscopes on board to compensate for that.

I could look through a telescope and watch the shells going over and see them hit a building and blow it up. Fortunately, I had a stool to sit on, and I was looking through the telescope. If I hadn't had that, my knees were shaking so much that I don't think I would have done a good job.

The Japanese Navy at that time was pretty short on ships. The only ones out there were fishing boats or scouts that would see you. But we went in there at night, and we didn't have any losses. I know the *Franklin* got hit later when we were coming back out. It was hit by a kamikaze, and we could see it burning up.

The *Indy* then took part in the Iwo Jima operation [February 1945], followed by the Okinawa operation. D-Day for Okinawa was Easter Sunday, April 1, 1945; the day before, March 31, we were attacked by kamikaze planes. We shot down six of them, but the seventh one got through and exploded on the after part of the ship, back toward the fantail. The plane's engine and the bomb went through the deck and exploded under the ship and blew a large hole in the hull. We lost nine men, and 27 were injured.

After Iwo Jima, we were part of Admiral Marc Mitscher's Task Force 58 that attacked Tokyo and the Japanese Home Islands. We were only within 10 miles of Tokyo when the Navy made the first carrier raids on that city. We saw the planes fly over; they went in there almost undetected and really bombed the hell out of the place.

The Japanese Navy at that time were throwing everything that could fly at the fleet. There were 151 destroyers involved in that operation, and 121 of them were hit by kamikazes; they were either sunk, or damaged but could be repaired. There were 10 cruisers and 10 battleships also hit; we were one of the cruisers.

We were towed over to an island called Kerama Retto, southwest of Okinawa. During a 24-hour period, working straight through, the Navy put a temporary concrete bottom in the ship, and then we limped back to the States and went into drydock at Mare Island near San Francisco.

In the meantime, Admiral Spruance transferred his flag to the battleship *New Mexico*; it later got hit by a kamikaze. He then went back to Guam to prepare for the invasion of Japan, and Admiral William 'Bull' Halsey took over.

In June 1945, while we were in drydock for repairs, I went home to see my folks. My mother was sitting on the edge of the bed, and she looked like death warmed over. She had a goiter that was sapping all her strength. I scolded dad and asked him why she wasn't in the hospital. He said, "She won't go to the hospital until you boys come home." She had four boys in the service.

So, before my leave was up, my dad and I took her in an ambulance to St. Louis, Missouri, which was 250 miles away. The only reason she wanted to go to St. Louis was because her brothers and sisters were all liv-

ing there, and she wanted to be near them.

We got her admitted to Barnes Hospital, and I asked the Red Cross for emergency leave so I could be there when she was operated on. But the doctors' report came back that her metabolism was so bad that they didn't know when they could operate on her. So, I had to leave her there in the hospital and went back to the ship. I had no communication or correspondence to know how she was doing.

The *Indy* was in drydock for eight weeks. We finally got our ship repaired, got new equipment like radar and gunnery, and before we had a shakedown, we were called upon to make a speed run out to the Pacific Ocean. Before we left California, a large crate was loaded onto the quarterdeck, where it was bolted down and guarded by Marines. We heard that it was some kind of a new, secret weapon, but we didn't know what it was; neither did the captain, Charles B. McVay III. We left on July 16, 1945.

We didn't find out until much later that the cargo we were carrying were the components for the atomic bomb "Little Boy," which was to be dropped on Hiroshima.

The reason we were selected for this mission was because we were fast, and we were large enough that we could travel alone across the Pacific to the Hawaiian Islands and then from there to the big B-29 base on Tinian Island in the Marianas.

The Indianapolis *set a speed record of 71½ hours from San Francisco to Pearl Harbor, at an average speed of 29 knots (33 mph).*

We had been told that every day we could shorten that trip would end the war that much earlier. So, we knew we had something on board that was very important. The Navy of course is notorious for scuttlebutt; when you don't know what's going on, you make up something. The best thing somebody said about that crate that we were taking to Tinian was that it was 50,000 rolls of scented toilet paper for [General Douglas] MacArthur. But, of course, it was just the atomic bomb.

We reached Hawaii and got refueled and took on supplies and then proceeded on to

ABOVE: Japanese corpses line the shore at Saipan. The smell of death was something Paul Murphy never forgot. OPPOSITE: A U.S. Navy patrol boat cruises near the shore as naval gunfire explodes along the base of Iwo Jima's Mount Suribachi on D-Day-minus-two, February 17, 1945. The *Indianapolis* supported the operation.

Tinian, where our cargo was off-loaded. We left Tinian on July 26, 1945. We then proceeded to Guam to get further instructions and supplies. Our instructions when we left Guam were to proceed to Leyte in the Philippine Islands, where we would be met by planes towing sleeves for target practice and be met by the USS *Idaho* for surface [gunnery] practice. We had about 25 percent new crewmembers, and for at least 250 of them, this was the first time they had ever been to sea, so they needed the practice.

We were told we would not need an escort, because it was safe water there, between Guam and Leyte. At that time, everybody the size of a cruiser, battleship, or carrier was supposed to have a destroyer escort because destroyers had sonar devices and could detect if there were submarines in the area; ships like ours did not have sonar. We left Guam on July 28 and were scheduled to arrive at Leyte on the first of August.

The other instruction we got was that we could zigzag at our own discretion. Zigzagging was supposed to make it harder for a submarine to figure out your course, and harder for them to hit you.

Later we found out that the Navy knew there were enemy submarines in the area, and they also knew the ship USS *Underhill* had been sunk four days before we got there, on the exact path that we would be taking. But they never told us this because, basically, they didn't want the enemy to know that we were breaking their code and knew what the Japanese Navy was doing all the time.

On July 29—it was a Sunday—Captain McVay went to the officer of the deck at 10:30 that evening. The moon was hidden by clouds, and it was so dark you could barely see the bow of the ship. So he told the officer of the deck, "You may cease zigzagging. Call me if there are any changes; I'm going to retire."

He retired to his quarters and shortly after midnight—incidentally, I was on the watch from 8 p.m. until midnight—and I went back to my quarters, which were in the after part of the ship below on the fantail. I went sound asleep.

As I was later told, at about 10 minutes after midnight, a Japanese submarine [*I-58*] was surfaced, charging his batteries, and observing. Off in the distance, he saw a little black spot and he submerged, raised his periscope, turned 360 degrees, and saw this

ship—the *Indy*—coming towards him; it was not escorted. So, all he did was wait until we passed.

He fired six torpedoes, and two of them hit us. I found out later that the first one blew off about 40 feet of the bow; the second one exploded under the ammunition magazines for the 8-inch guns. Our power was knocked out, so the bridge was not able to contact the engine room to stop the engines. While we were underway with no bow, we took on water rapidly, and that's what caused the ship to sink so quickly.

When the ship was hit, I rushed to my General Quarters station until the ship started to turn over. When I arrived at the control tower and undogged the door, lying on the deck in there was one of my best friends—a guy by the name of Paul Mitchell; he had slept through the whole thing. I had an extra life jacket and gave it to him and told him to go to his General Quarters station. I later found out that he was able to get off the ship, but he only lived for two or three days in the water.

I was also told later that, after the explosion, they sent one of the officers down to see if he could get the engines turned off, but he got severely burned and never returned topside.

As the ship started rolling to the starboard side, and after about 30 degrees, and quickly going to 45 degrees, the 5-inch guns, which were on the deck below me, were covered with oily water, and all I had to do was step off without jumping off; I swam away as fast as I could. I swallowed a lot of oil and salt water.

Those of us in the water spent most of the night vomiting and throwing up this oil and stuff. The ship went down in about 12 minutes. That's very fast for a ship that size.

The next morning, when the sun came up, we found two floater nets that had floated off the ship, and we also found two life rafts. We got no lifeboats or anything else off the ship because she went down too fast. In the group that I was with, there were approximately 250 to 300 men. We all tried to stay together. We tied the two floater nets together, and we used the two rafts for those who were most severely hurt and put the injured on there. It wasn't much better than what we were in, because half of their body was in the water.

Captain McVay had been blown off the deck where he was standing. Ironically, he was one of the guys that found a raft when he got in the water. While he was on there, I think he eventually got as many as seven on the raft. He thought there were no other survivors; he couldn't see anyone else in the dark until we all started drifting together. You can imagine the thoughts that went through his mind: "I should have gone down with the ship."

We were in the water for four-and-a-half days without food or [drinking] water. Many of the boys hallucinated and thought that they could see islands and could swim to the shore. Those who went off by themselves were the ones that were most susceptible to sharks. The rest of us tried to take care of each other, but many of the boys hallucinated and, because of dehydration and lack of food, felt that the ship was just below the surface of the water—that they could just swim down and get a cool drink of water.

Many of them took their life jackets off and went down and swallowed salt water, and when they came back up—you can't

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A TRAGIC END FOR *INDY*'S CAPTAIN

Although the U.S. Navy lost nearly 400 ships due to enemy action in World War II, only Captain Charles B. McVay III was court-martialed for losing his.

McVay III came from a Navy family. His father once served as Commander-in-Chief of the Asiatic Fleet in the early 1930s, and he himself was a Naval Academy graduate, class of 1920.

A June 6, 2021, *Washington Post* story by Daryl Austin said, "The Navy had bungled many things regarding the *Indianapolis* and knew it: it denied McVay the escort he'd requested for protection while traveling through enemy waters; it did not respond to any of the distress signals sent from the *Indy* that listed her coordinates in the final moments of her sinking (the Navy has since disputed receiving any distress signals, though multiple servicemen claimed to have received them); it did not recognize or report that the *Indy* had not arrived at Leyte when she was scheduled to; and it had provided McVay with an incomplete intelligence report in the first place—withholding the vital information it had come by through a top-secret code-breaking program that confirmed enemy submarine activity along the route the *Indy* would be taking to Leyte."

Using a model of his ship during his November 1945 court-martial, Captain Charles Butler McVay III points to where he was standing when two Japanese torpedoes tore into the *Indy*.

After the war, Admiral Chester Nimitz requested that a court of inquiry into the sinking of the *Indianapolis* be held in Washington D.C. McVay was initially charged with two counts of negligence: "failure to abandon ship in a timely manner" and "hazarding his ship" by failing to steer her in a defensive maneuver known as zigzagging.

But because the ship sank so quickly and made the abandon-ship order impossible, the Navy prosecutors decided to try and prove the second charge.

A surprise witness for the prosecution was Mochitsura Hashimoto, the Japanese commander of *I-58* who sank the *Indy*. Hashimoto testified that the *Indy* had not been zigzagging at the time he spotted her but stated that zigzagging would not have prevented him from sinking the cruiser anyway. Nevertheless, McVay was still convicted of hazarding his ship by failing to zigzag.

McVay was stripped of some seniority, although Navy Secretary James Forrestal lifted the sentence because of McVay's bravery earlier in the war. He was promoted to rear admiral upon his retirement in 1949, but he never really recovered from his ordeal. Until 1968, McVay continued to receive hate mail and vitriolic phone calls from the parents of sons who had died during the tragedy. After his wife died, a despondent McVay committed suicide at his home in Litchfield, Connecticut, on November 6, 1968, at age 70.

Austin wrote, "For more than 50 years, the survivors [including Paul Murphy, who never blamed McVay for the disaster] tried in vain to get the Navy to reverse the court-martial and to clear their captain's name. At last, they decided to try another way: by making his exoneration a matter of law by appealing directly to Congress.

"At first their appeals and petitions went nowhere, but Commander Hashimoto took up their cause. He magnanimously told Senator John Warner, the chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee and former Secretary of the Navy, "Our peoples have forgiven each other for that terrible war and its consequences. Perhaps it is time your peoples forgave Captain McVay for the humiliation of his unjust conviction."

On October 12, 2000, following a campaign by Hunter Scott, a 12-year-old student from Pensacola, Florida, who interviewed nearly 150 survivors of the *Indianapolis* and reviewed 800 documents, Congress voted to posthumously exonerate McVay.

Postscript: On August 19, 2017, an underwater search team financed by Paul Allen, the co-founder of Microsoft, located the wreckage of the *Indianapolis* in the Philippine Sea lying at a depth of approximately 18,000 feet of water.

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After delivering her cargo of secret components to Tinian Island for the atomic bomb that would be used on Hiroshima, the *Indianapolis* (center) departs for her trip to Guam—a voyage that was never completed.

imagine what it's like to see somebody who's swallowed a lot of salt water. They're worse than the worst alcoholic drunk you've ever seen. They came up and they were wild, and you couldn't stand to be around them. It was only a short time later—an hour or two hours at the most—that they just went berserk and died. That was the worst tragedy of the whole thing.

The sun was blistering in the daytime. We were getting sunburned from the reflection [off the water] and were praying for the night cool air. At night it was very cold, and we could hear our teeth chattering, and we prayed for the daylight and sunshine. This was repeated.

Probably after the second day, I cut off my shirttail and put it over my head to protect my face and eyes and nose and lips, which were becoming quite festered. I probably didn't see some of the things that might have been going on during the daytime. A lot of the boys saw sharks' dorsal fins and so forth. Because I'm from Missouri, I didn't know a shark from a catfish.

We did have schools of sharks come into our area. We would splash and holler and they seemed to let us alone. I know the sharks or some kind of fish were bumping our legs, and we'd pull our legs up because they were dangling. I also think sharks don't like Irishmen, because I never had a bite; I was pretty fortunate.

On the fourth day, in mid-afternoon, we saw a plane flying in towards us, making circles, and we thought, "Well, they must be looking for us," but the funny part was, they were out looking for Japanese submarines, and the pilot was testing a new device, a radio antenna that dropped out of the bottom of his plane to give him longer distance of communication.

Just before he got to our area, the pilot had a problem with the cable that was holding that antenna, and the antenna was flopping around. The pilot, so I've learned, got down on his belly in the plane and looked around to fish up this antenna when he saw an oil slick in the water; we had drifted back into our oil slick.

He started to fish up his antenna and quickly went back to his pilot seat and his crew said, "What's matter?" He said, "Look down and you'll see." He immediately opened his bomb bay doors and started to make a bombing run, thinking it was a Japanese submarine and, as he went down to about 2,000 feet, he started seeing heads bobbing in the water scattered over several miles.

The pilot's name was Chuck Gwinn, and he was flying a PV-1 Lockheed Ventura. We always call him "our angel." He immediately wired back to his base in Peleliu and told the officer in charge there, who was second in command: "There's an emergency; send out all possible help."

They sent one PBY out with supplies; it was another two hours or so before he reached us. He got out there and started dropping supplies and life rafts, water, and food; the water [containers] broke when they hit the surface. His crew saw that there were men scattered over 25 miles. He immediately wired back to the base, and the base commander was in charge then; he had not received the previous message.

He sent one PBY out; the pilot was Adrian Marks of Frankfort, Indiana; he decided to break Navy regulations and attempt to make an open-sea landing because he and his crew saw that the stragglers that had gotten away from groups were more susceptible to shark attacks.

He immediately landed in the water in 8-12-foot swells that popped a few rivets. He could have been court-martialed for that, had the situation not been so serious. He started picking up men. When the other pilot was flying around, he would direct

him where to taxi to get the stragglers. Before that evening, when darkness fell, he had picked up dozens of men, piled them in the aisles of his plane like cordwood, and tied the rest onto the wings with parachute shrouds. Of course, he couldn't take off.

His crew gave each of the survivors half an ounce of water. Then the plane taxied past our group, and we made sure that those who most needed to get out of the water were the first ones to get on.

That was the first time that anybody knew that the USS *Indianapolis* had sunk. The pilot immediately radioed again, breaking regulations, telling his location and asking all ships in the area to converge on his location. Five ships started coming in to rescue us. The first one that got to us probably got there about two or three in the morning.

As he was approaching our area, knowing that there was the possibility of running over some of the men in the water, he shined his 24-inch searchlight up against the clouds to let all the other ships know where he was, and also to let the survivors know that help was on the way. There's a debate about whether or not that was a good idea, because many of the men exhausted themselves trying to swim to that ship. I'm sure that some of them succumbed before they could be picked up. That ship took off the 56 men from the PBY and picked up 36 more and proceeded back to the Philippines.

Another ship, a fast-attack transport, was the one that picked me up. They had landing craft on the ship, so they dropped these landing craft off that went around like a lifeboat and picked up survivors and took them alongside the ship. When they picked me up, they took me alongside the ship, and they had a rope ladder down.

I thought that I was capable of climbing up that ladder, but I got up two or three rungs and fell off, so they put me—like they did everybody else—in a wire basket and hauled me up to the deck, cut off our clothes, which were black from the oil, and put our oil-soaked bodies on the shower floor. The crew tried to wash off the diesel oil and then they gave up their white bunks for us survivors. That ship picked up 151 men. We left that ship in a mess.

We headed immediately for Samar in the Philippines. When we arrived there, they trucked us over to the hospital. I remember that I was lying on a rubber-sheeted bed, and they poured liquid penicillin over my entire body to heal the salt-water ulcers and sunburns.

I don't know to this day how long I was there [in the hospital], but I think it was close to 10 days. Then we were all flown from there to Guam in a cargo plane, set on the floor.

Both: Naval History and Heritage Command

ABOVE: Rescued *Indy* survivors in clean clothes crowd the deck of the high-speed transport USS *Bassett*. The Navy kept the lid on news of the sinking until after the war. TOP: The Japanese submarine *I-58*, the killer of the *Indy*, photographed in her berth at Sasebo.

Naval History and Heritage Command

ABOVE: Paul Murphy, photographed ca. 2010. (Courtesy Broomfield Veterans Museum) LEFT: Paul Murphy was one of the injured and dehydrated survivors of the sinking. Here survivors are being brought ashore on Guam from the hospital ship USS *Tranquility*. Ambulances are standing by to transport them to local hospitals.

When we got to Guam, we entered a submarine rest camp, which was just ideal. Those who were still in pretty bad shape went to a hospital. The rest of us recuperated in the rest camp. We had steak every night, beer if we wanted it (I never liked beer), and they served gallon buckets of ice cream—every night.

Eventually, we all gathered, and the USS *Hollandia*, which was a small carrier, took the whole entire group to San Diego. We arrived at the end of September—remember that we were sunk on July 30. We disembarked there and were given 30 days' survivors' leave.

Hiroshima was bombed on the 6th of August, Nagasaki on the 9th of August, and the Japanese surrendered on August the 15th. That was the first time the newspapers announced that the Japanese had surrendered, and that the USS *Indianapolis* had been sunk with 100 percent casualties.

You can imagine what it was like for those parents to hear that. My dad received a telegram that said I was wounded but that I was recovering. The Navy kept it quiet until such time as they could put out that, more importantly, the war had ended.

On the *Indy*, 880 had lost their lives. Of that 880, probably near 300 died when the ship went down, and the rest died in the water because of the delay in rescue and so forth.

When I left San Diego to come home, I went back to Missouri on a train. Trains back then were the filthiest and the slowest. The windows had to be open, so all the coal smoke from the engine came in. But we got home okay.

I hadn't told anybody that I was coming home, but when we got to Kansas City, I figured I'd better call home; I didn't know what condition my mother was in, or anything. A gal who was taking care of the house while dad was working answered the phone. I asked if he was there and she said, no, he's working. I said that this is Paul and I'm on my way home and will be in Chillicothe in an hour or two and just let him know that everything's okay and he doesn't have to meet me. So I get to Chillicothe and he's there. It was quite a reunion. My mom had made a full recovery, too.

I don't ever want to hear anybody condemn the U.S. for dropping those atomic bombs—they saved many American lives *and* Japanese lives, because if we had had to invade, the Japanese would not have given up.

After his honorable discharge in 1946, Paul Murphy attended the University of Missouri School of Mines and Metallurgy and graduated with a mechanical engineering degree. In 1951, he met JoAnne Simons and moved to Chaska, Minnesota, where they had five children and where he managed the Simons Lumber Company for a number of years.

Shortly after his divorce in 1975, he moved to Broomfield, Colorado, to join his brother's engineering firm, W.M. Murphy & Company. In 1987 he married Mary Lou Walz and became very active in his community, becoming a co-founder of the Broomfield Veterans Museum and the Colorado chapter of the USS Indianapolis *Survivors Association, which he served as treasurer, vice-chairman, and chairman for a period of over 20 years. With a commitment to tell the story about the sinking of the* Indy*, he presented to hundreds of school and service organizations over the years.*

Paul died peacefully at age 91 on February 21, 2016, at the Colorado State Veterans Home in Aurora. He is buried in the military section at the Broomfield Commons Cemetery.

In an interview with Gunther Vogel, a teen-aged former member of an 88mm anti-aircraft battery, he recalls harrowing moments in combat.

INTERVIEW BY ALLYN R. VANNOY

An estimated 1.2 million people were employed by the German ground-based air-defense system by the end of the war in Europe. In April 1945, 44 percent of those serving with the flak arm were either civilians or auxiliaries, including factory workers, prisoners of war, foreign nationals, and high-school students.

At 16, Gunther Vogel was a member of the Luftwaffe's air-defense forces, a gunner assigned to an 88-mm anti-aircraft gun. His life would take a number of twists and turns, both during and after the war. Before the war ended, he would be working for the British Army. Years after the war, he would have a chance encounter with the family of the pilot of the first aircraft he disabled.

What's the story behind your journey to being born in Germany?

My mother and father met at a newspaper office in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in the twenties. With my mother pregnant, they took a ship to England, their favorite country, for me to be born there. But there were great storms in the Bay of Biscay and, with her almost giving birth, they got off in Cherbourg and traveled to Berlin, where I was born on June 17, 1928.

A crew of Hitler Youth "flak helpers" man a captured Russian 8.5mm flak gun in Germering, near Munich, in 1944. Gunther Vogel became a member of the Luftwaffe's anti-aircraft service at the age of 16.

Flak Gunner *for the* Luftwaffe

Sueddeutsche Zeitung Photo / Alamy Stock Photo

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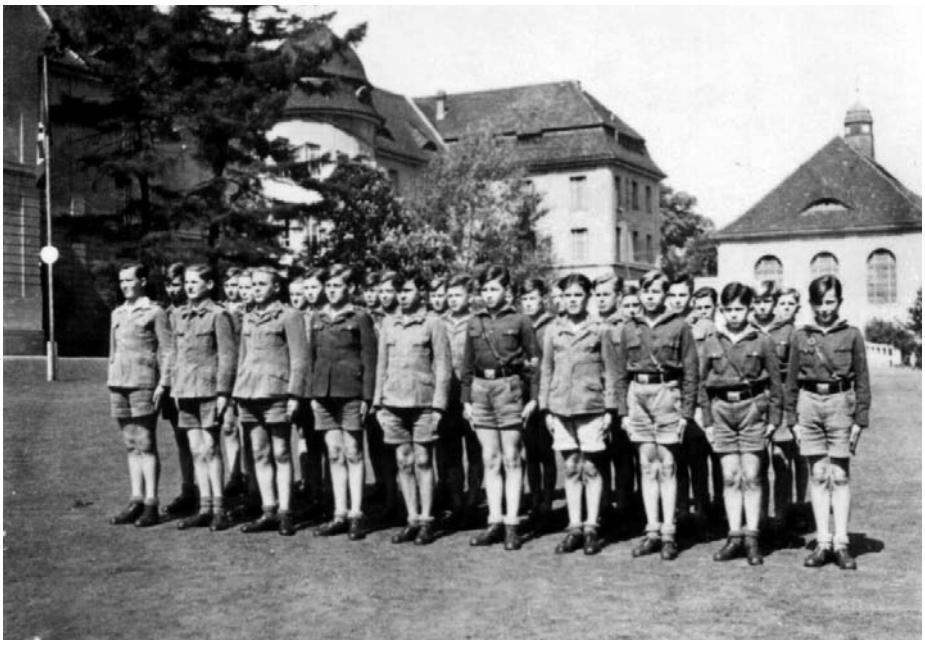

National Archives

ABOVE: Eleven-year-old boys receive instruction on target shooting as part of Hitler Youth activities. Vogel credits being selected to join a flak crew with being a good shot with a .22 rifle. TOP: Gunther Vogel at age 12 as a cadet at a military school in Potsdam. Boys were required to join the HJ, or Hitlerjungend (Hitler Youth), at age 10. OPPOSITE: Gunther and fellow cadets form up for morning parade at the Potsdam Military Institute. He did not like the school's overly strict discipline.

Where did you live in Germany?

Berlin-Charlottenburg [a district in the heart of the city], then from 1939 till 1943 at the Potsdam Institute as a cadet at a military college.

Did you have any brothers or sisters?

A half-sister and two half-brothers and a full sister, Ruth Judith, whose Jewish-sounding name made my parents subject of Nazi Party attention. My father, Papito, disarmed the suspicions by becoming a member of the Party, which also allowed him to work in Germany without hindrance.

Were you a member of the Hitler Youth?

Every German [male] child had to join the Hitler Youth at age 10, girls later. We had duty every Thursday afternoon, and our duties were much aligned with those of the international Boy Scouts. There were no acts of cruelty, and political influence was minimal—other than wearing a swastika on the black/brown uniforms that we wore on that day. Singing while marching was our best-liked activity. Until 14, we were known as the Young Folk. A change in duties and activities did not happen until we were known as the Hitler Youth, but that was spared me by way of college.

It was said that my father spoke nine languages, which is probably the reason that he spent most years away as a German government representative of agriculture and industries. English was my first love in middle school, and, by age 14, I had devoured T.E. Lawrence [of Arabia] and his *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, with some wonderment that Germans were the bad guys [in it].

In stage plays, l was always a British officer, naturally on the losing side. My favorite teacher had taught German in London and "Cockney speak" became my favorite communication with him. Our exchange students were from Britain and Finland. We grieved over every [Luftwaffe] bombing raid on people we had great admiration for. Thus, the bombing of Coventry [November 14-15, 1940] was a sad day for us.

I understand that your father's death was somewhat of a mystery. Can you say what were the circumstances?

That is something wrapped in secrecy. It was 1943. We [the family] were summoned to a huge farewell parade. We were never told how and under what circumstances he died. But the last address was, by coincidence, a place known as being a concentration camp just outside Berlin. I forget what the name was. [It was Sachsenhausen, in the northern Berlin suburb of Oranienburg.] They said he did not die in the concentration camp, but in a hospital adjacent to it. So that is all we knew. We were not allowed to view an open casket. I was just a kid and didn't even know what it meant.

When did you join the Luftwaffe?

After the death of my father in 1943, his brother, Helmut, was listening to my complaints of overly strict discipline of the military life at the Potsdam Institute. He found

a similar, but much more likable, college in the occupied area of Poland, where I was accepted in late 1943.

In February 1944, there was a visit from a Luftwaffe recruiter with orders to enlist all 15- and 16-year-olds. Most of us were shipped off to the state of Schleswig-Holstein, in the northernmost part of Germany, and to a boot camp of the Luftwaffe, where I was trained as gunner on a 20mm light anti-aircraft gun.

How were you selected for the 20mm gun crew?

Because I was a good shot with a .22 rifle. That was a helluva a recommendation.

How long was your training?

We were conscripted in February 1944. Graduation was, by sheer coincidence, on D-Day [June 6, 1944], which we kids were not aware of, as we were busy setting up our 1937 model 20mm cannon in Neugraben-Fischbek, in the Elbe River area south of Blankenese [near Hamburg].

What units did you serve with?

We kids were never told the numbers or designations of the units we served in. Flak auxiliaries were drawn from high schools and then split up according to specialties—radar, communications, or weapons. My specialty was gunner on a 20mm model 1937, and as such I was subject to being assigned to different batteries of 88s. Boot camp was named *Büsum*, in the state of Schleswig-Holstein.

You were reassigned from a 20mm anti-aircraft unit to an 88mm AA unit?

Yes. In August 1944. We hit and damaged a P-51 Mustang.

How did that happen?

That happened on August 4, 1944. I was stationed in Hamburg during some big attacks, but a 20mm gun [fires] only so far. They decided that we were better used to protect an airfield near Hannover … so we were moved near the village of Barrl.

We arrived there August 2. On the 4th, we were playing around on the gun, pretending to be shooting at planes. We had all those training planes—German Focke-Wulfs. We would take aim at the training planes, as they landed, as targets, yelling "tac-tac-tac," mimicking the sound of a gun shooting.

There were five of us. I was sitting in the chair of the gun doing the play thing of shooting at ghost planes, when, suddenly, there was gunfire and an explosion. It was only a second and a half, and my buddy helped me turn the gun and I just fired at the sound of an aircraft coming in from three o'clock [to the east]. All the training planes took off and landed to the west, nine o'clock. This Mustang came from three o'clock and flew over a little woods adjacent to our gun.

I was able to turn the gun and follow him as he disappeared at nine o'clock, directly over us. He had his machine guns blazing—the rounds stitched the sand, like in a movie, to the left and right of us. Nobody got hit. I noticed that one of my rounds took off a piece of wing on the right-hand side of the plane. Then he zoomed up—he wasn't shot down—and took off and disappeared.

The commandant of the airfield later congratulated us, and we were told we had

National Archives

shot him down. We [the gun crew] were promoted to other anti-aircraft batteries. After a short home leave, we were given orders and rail tickets to report to various Luftwaffe batteries nationwide. Mine was located in what then was called the Polish Protectorate near Odertal-Blechhammer in Upper Silesia. But no light AA gun was available. So, I was re-trained as a lateral gunner on an 88.

The location of the AA gun was at a village called Mecnica, not far from the only still-functioning refineries in the Blechhammer district.

[The Blechhammer area was the location of German chemical plants, POW camps, and forced-labor camps, not far from Kattowitz and Breslau (now Wroclaw, Poland). The Blechhammer synthetic-oil production facility began operations on April 1, 1944. In June 1944, the U.S. Army Air Forces considered Blechhammer one of the four principal synthetic-oil plants in Germany, and the U.S. Fifteenth Air Force, operating from southern Italy, dropped 7,082 tons of bombs on Blechhammer.]

At the beginning of the Soviet surge in January/February 1945, l was issued a Skoda double-barrel machine gun, 1918 vintage, packed for 25 years in the wooden crate and still stinking of industrial oils. It took me a week to figure out that two barrels demanded at least three hands. Those were provided by a gray-haired lieutenant, formerly a major in the 1915 Austrian army.

We fought side-by-side during the long nights in February 1945 until all youngsters were withdrawn by unexpected orders from Hermann Göring when it became known that the Soviets executed all under-age enemies found with weapons as not covered by the Geneva Convention—something known as *franc tireur* [a civilian sniper or partisan]. I had four months left to become "of age."

Do you recall any other specific actions or events while with your unit?

I was on duty with an 88mm flak unit during an American raid on the industrial area on August 22, 1944. As the combined dozens of batteries of 88s, 105s, and 128s along the [bomber] route from Italy defended the approaches, a B-24 crashed near our battery. We young guys all volunteered, and I was allowed to participate in the honor salute to the fallen U.S. airmen on August 24.

You mentioned being a "lateral gunner" on an 88. What is that?

I never found the actual term, but that's one who turns the gun in a lateral manner by hand. The 88 is a big gun, very heavy. I was 16 then, so I had a hard time turning the damn thing. It's the side gunner, turning it in the horizontal, side-by-side with another gunner who operated the gun in the vertical. He was usually a big, burly fellow; I was not a big, burly fellow. I could not have managed that. There was no machinery to help. When I turned that gun, it was like turning the world. That's how hard it was.

I was designated Gunner Number Two, and I think he [the vertical gunner] was Gunner Number Three, Gunner Number One being the loader. Direction came from the command post. You had a large dial, like a clock, which provided the commands to you. You had to respond to a little hand on the dial that moved from number to number that corresponded to the horizontal directions. I had to follow the command as it came and counter the command on my end. In other words, I had to follow an indicator that was at eye level, turning left and right. We called it, "to cover the numbers."

How many people were there on an 88mm gun crew?

Eleven. One or two of them were trusted prisoners of war, Soviet soldiers. Having been taken in the Ukraine, many were anti-communists and so were employed as "*Hiwi's*," [*Hilfswillige*], meaning "willing to help." *[Non-German Luftwaffe volunteers included Walloons, Croats, and Russian POWs, who served as ammunition carriers and loaders.]*

They were trusted with ammo. Usually, on every large gun, we had at least one of them. They were given some freedom; they were trusted, but of course they knew if Germany lost the war they would be sent back [to Russia] and executed as traitors.

The 88 had a high rate of fire, keeping the crew very busy, right?

They said it was one every 10 seconds. But I am not quite sure for the simple reason that after the first shot you were deaf. It was also very smoky [this from the propellant

Sueddeutsche Zeitung Photo / Alamy Stock Photo

ABOVE: Smiling Hitler Youth members, one still in civilian coat and tie, are issued their equipment from an NCO in the Luftwaffe. OPPOSITE: Young crewmen train on a camouflaged, four-barrel 2cm Flakvierling 38. The gun had a combined firing rate of 1,400 rounds per minute.

Sueddeutsche Zeitung Photo / Alamy Stock Photo

used in the ammunition], but this stopped after a while. We were told that it was special ammo. They had scientifically figured out how to prevent much of the smoke coming out of the barrel [smokeless powder]. We did not have masks. We also did not have gear to protect the ears.

The 88s were deployed in batteries. How many guns in a battery?

I don't know if we had six or nine guns. We might have even had twelve. I was on "Dora Two." Each of the guns had names. They were always arranged in a circle, so we were protected from enemy fire or raids from all directions. But the main direction of our gun was between three and six o'clock [given the battery's layout], raids coming from the south. I think the first attacks from Italy started in July of '44; I did not get to the battery until August. By then we were regularly being raided, probably at least once a week.

Could you actually see the bomber formations?

They came in fairly high. But we were not privy to seeing them because our eyes were on the dials, indicators [directional instruments]. Our eyes were nailed to that. So, you couldn't look up to find where they were coming from. Most of the attacks came from the south. And then we followed them.

We were at the foot of a mountain range [the Sudeten Mountains, on the Czech-German border]. Blechhammer was a death trap for American bombers because there were literally hundreds of guns, dozens and dozens of batteries along that whole range. Usually, when they approached, like little silver arrows on the horizon, is how they came. We knew they were not coming for us; we were probably about three or four miles from the target. They never bombed us.

As members of the gun crew, did you feel you were making a difference?

No, that never came up. At that age you have a Boy Scout attitude. It's for your own good. Because you get a good education. To many of us it was a lark. Until the first grenade [mortar shell fragment] hits you. Which happened after the American bombers stopped coming and the Russians hit us with mortar fire.

American raids stopped on December 28. That's when we were told that they, the American air forces, didn't want to risk the Russians being bombed. So, on the 28th of December 1944, all the attacks stopped, and that's when we were attacked by Russians who had come in over the night, killing the four German observers; we then knew our ground war with the Russians had started.

So, you were close to the approaching Russian Army?

Absolutely. They occupied a village, a church belfry that had been occupied by a panzer unit with forward observers. The Russians eliminated a guard of four and then directed mortar fire on our position. One round landed right over me when I was bending down to pull a box of hand grenades. I was bending down while standing in the mud, to pull the box to my position where I was defending with a machine gun. Just as I stood back up, a round exploded on the berm above me. I got hit by a piece of mortar shell on the rim of my

helmet. I didn't even know that I was hit.

The day after the church incident, I had gone to the village where I had been persuaded to help a German-Polish widow—her husband had been killed at Stalingrad—with her chores between my guard and gun duties. As I came near the house, there were groups of black-uniformed German tank crews getting a stub-nosed gun vehicle aimed at a two-story house.

Shots came out of two of the cellar windows, but the windows were too low for the vehicle's gun. Two of the tankers managed to creep close and, using their hand grenades, silenced the rifle fire.

I was dressed in my basic Luftwaffe gray uniform—no belt, side arm or steel helmet, obviously off duty. An officer ordered me to creep through a jagged hole that used to be a side entrance to the basement. It was obvious that a grown man with equipment would not have cleared the broken beams.

I didn't know if l had more to fear from that tank commander or some still-alive Russian shooter, but a quick glance showed nobody alive. As l came back to the mangled wooden staircase, l stepped on a man's arm, covered with watches to above his gray, ashen elbow.

Seconds later, in hysterics, l raced across the street till l was caught by a tank guy who managed to get me to tell him that l had only seen one body.

You were still assigned to the anti-aircraft unit?

Oh yes, we were with the anti-aircraft throughout. We could have been taken over by ground forces, but there weren't any to go around. There was only one small panzer group that had advanced into our area, near the border with Poland, to ward off the Russians after they had taken Breslau. When they took Breslau, we knew our days were numbered.

Was your unit withdrawn?

The night before the big Russian attack—we didn't know that at the time, we youngsters, everybody who was a Luftwaffe auxiliary, high schoolers—we were all withdrawn without being given the reasons. They put us on a big panzer, a tank, that carried a whole bunch of us to the rear

Bundesarchiv Bild 101I-635-3999-24; Photo: Walther

ABOVE: In a field bristling with anti-aircraft weapons, a German gun crew practices loading an 88mm gun. As the war went badly for Germany and air raids became more frequent, experienced gunners such as Gunther became more in demand. OPPOSITE: Young Luftwaffe gunners somewhere in Germany strap on their helmets as they rush to their guns at the start of an Allied air raid. Many years later, Gunther met with the family of an American fighter pilot he believes he had shot down in 1944.

in the middle of the night. It was the oddest thing. We were all withdrawn, and only our elders remained behind. I turned my double-barreled Skoda machine gun over to a sergeant. We were told to mount a Tiger tank that was waiting. We were driven [while sitting] on the top of the tank.

The Russians found out about it and peppered us with machine-gun fire, but there were no casualties. We reported to a little village west of Mecnica, two or three kilometers away. There we stayed the night. The next day we were picked up by trucks and later marched. We ended up near Prague, to be demobilized. I think that sometime in February of '45, we were sent home.

Why were you demobilized?

We had been conscripted; everyone who was a full 15 years of age by the middle of the year—that means in June. I should not have been conscripted because my birthday is June 17. It was found out that we had been inducted illegally because we were not the proper age to be soldiers. So, we were demobilized with orders in our hands to

report to the military office in our home town on our 17th birthday, and I was not yet seventeen. None of us were seventeen.

So, that's why they withdrew us, and also because of the Russians. Stalin had passed an edict that anybody who was not of soldier's age would be executed. They had taken whole groups of us, auxiliaries, who were caught on the ground by the Russians as they advanced, and they were executed forthwith.

So Hitler, for some reason, was advised by somebody that children should not be put in danger. That was the reason given to my battery and my buddies and buddies from other batteries that took part in the exodus. The railhead to send us back from the Russian Front was near Prague—a place called Brüx, now called Most. That's where we were demobilized, with orders to report on our 17th birthday, which would have been June 17, 1945. By then, I was in the British army.

What happened to your family during the war?

They were bombed out by the RAF in Berlin, two years in a row, but were able to find places to live out of harm's way. The RAF bombed our house in 1942 with incendiaries, and in September of '43 they used the big bombs, "Blockbusters," I think we called them. And that's when we lost our house again. The first time the Nazi Party repaired it in a week, gave us new furniture. We were made whole after the first attack.

In the second attack in September of '43, we were the only house in Charlottenburg, a rich borough of Berlin, the only house in the neighborhood that got hit. It was completely destroyed.

It took me about a month after being demobilized to find my family. I went from one place to another that I knew of, and finally found them with the help of the Red Cross. When I went to Hamburg, they [the government] were so well organized that when I mentioned the name, they opened the book at the "V's" and found me in 20 seconds, and then found my family.

I went to the village where they were supposed to live and found that they lived in a chicken coop on a farm. It was a nice chicken coop, as far as chickens are concerned—and for people who don't have a place to stay.

How did you end up working for the British?

One morning—I remember that it was the 20th of April, because that was Hitler's birthday—the Brits rolled in with half-tracks and trucks and not a steel helmet in sight—it was impressive. The mass of people suddenly rolling down the country road into the village was something to see. They were all smiling, and they were throwing things from the trucks and throwing things into our front yard.

My mother was very anxious that they were poisoned. She came out screaming—I had four little brothers and sisters. Everybody was running out there, picking up packages with strange writing on it. They all said "Cadbury." Of course, Cadbury is the biggest British candy maker. When we found out that it wasn't poison, we felt comfortable with being occupied. It was such a change, psychologically, to suddenly know that the war seemed to be

akg-images / Sammlung Berliner Verlag / Archiv

over. But the war was still going on—it was April 1945.

The following day an officer in a jeep came to inspect the house on the farm. We met him at the door. As he left—I don't know what possessed me—I ran after him, stood at attention, clicked my heels, and said to him, in my best English, "Is there anything I can do for you, sir?"

He turned around and grabbed me and swung me around as his corporal, the jeep driver, who had a Sten gun and he [looked like he] was going to shoot somebody. The officer put me down and said to the driver, the first English words I had heard, "You blithering idiot, stop it!" [Gunther had studied English for three years and had also learned Spanish at home from his parents.]

He then put me down and asked if I would like to work for them. I was speechless. I said, "Work for you? What does that mean?" He replied, "You will join us. And travel with us as an interpreter." And that's what I did. There were still two weeks to go in the war.

They asked me if I had any connection with a foreign country that was not at war with the Allies. I said, "Yes, my mother was Argentine." A company tailor made an epaulet [for my jacket] that said, "Republic of Argentina." I then helped procure food for the Brits and billets because they were living in tents.

I stayed with them for a couple of years. I was paid. I lived in the castle where the Royal Armoured Corps (RAC) had its headquarters, in Belsen. At the time, I didn't know that Belsen was such a devilish place. The castle was beautiful, from old German nobility. Living in the castle with the Royal Armoured Corps, I never suffered any shortages.

So when you hear about how the poor Germans were treated and lived because there was nothing—there was no food, there was no water—there was just no life for those people, I never felt anything of it. I didn't get starved. I got fed because I had British food. When I went on leave, once a month, to where my family lived, I was able to take food and cigarettes that they could use to barter with farmers. So, my family lived okay because of my job.

Later, I stayed with the Lancashire Regiment, a unit of the REME, Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers. Then l was ordered to report to the headquarters of the Royal Armoured Corps at Bredebeck Castle near Bergen. Not until l arrived there did l hear of Belsen and its connotation.

(Bergen-Belsen, or Belsen, was a Nazi concentration camp in northern Germany, southwest of the town of Bergen. Originally established as a prisoner-of-war camp, in 1943 parts of it became a concentration camp. Initially, this was an "exchange camp," where Jewish hostages were held with the intention of exchanging them for German prisoners-of-war held overseas. The camp was later expanded to accommodate Jews from other concentration camps. After 1945, a displaced persons (DP) camp was set up nearby. From 1941 to 1945, almost 20,000 Soviet POWs and a further 50,000 inmates died there.)

What were some of your duties?

My commanding officer was a Major Goldsmith. My job was liaison with the German staff working for the British officers who came from different units of the British occupation forces. I had a room upstairs in the headquarters looking out over a reflection pool in the center of the drive area of the main entrance.

I accompanied British officers and officials to find billets for the arriving troops, and I later attended court hearings in disputes between occupiers and, ironically, women impregnated by soldiers of the occupying forces.

In my spare time, on weekends, l served as barkeeper and learned all about some of the officers' predilections. They came from many different units, including the tank corps.

When did you emigrate from Germany?

That was on Christmas Day 1947, with exit papers issued by my commanding officer in Belsen in recognition of my services to the occupation forces. We—my sister, Judy, and I—took a train from our village to Hamburg to catch *The International*—a train from Copenhagen to Paris or Amsterdam. We went to Holland.

Germans were not allowed to leave Germany, but my mother had married again—he

Author's Collection

As the war was winding down, Gunther, who was fluent in English, went to work as a translator for the British occupation forces. Here he (left) directs the loading of German children into British Bren carriers at Soltau during "Fraternization Day" with members of the Hampshire Regiment.

National Archives

In his new role, Gunther was billeted in the headquarters of the Royal Armoured Corps at Bredebeck Castle in Bergen, near the near Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. He recalls that he could look out his upstairs window at the reflecting pool, but had not known about the concentration camp and its horrors.

was American, and he allowed us to emigrate to Holland. We stayed there, my sister and I, in Amsterdam, for a couple of weeks until a ship arrived to take refugees from Europe. Arriving in Hamburg, it took DPs to South America and places in between.

We were, I guess, the only Germans on board. We went from Amsterdam to Hamburg and, ironically, my aunt—my mother's sister—and her husband were aboard. She was born in Chile and worked as the Chilean proconsul, and she was allowed to go on that refugee ship with her husband, but not in the hold [steerage] with the other poor European refugees, but in First Class. My sister and I were in the hold, down below. We made it to Argentina in February 1948 and stayed for 10 years.

[My family] arrived in the United States in September 1958, in Miami from Buenos Aires. Now married, with two little children, I went from Miami to Los Angeles, where I worked for 20 years as an architectural designer; I designed offices. Later, I visited Oregon, looked around, and liked it. I retired in 1977 and moved to Oregon.

Epilogue

Some 12 years ago, Gunther came across an article in the local newspaper in Oregon that told of a Lieutenant Roland Strong, of the USAAF 505th Fighter Squadron, a Mustang fighter pilot who had been shot down over Germany, on August 4, 1944. In his post-war memoirs, Strong described his P-51 being hit by enemy fire in the right wing and the engine while flying a mission near Hamburg, Germany, and that he was able to fly for about 80 miles before the engine gave out, just short of the North Sea coast. Strong was able to bail out, was captured, and spent the rest of the war as a POW.

Incredibly, Gunther discovered that Roland Strong lived in nearby Bandon, Oregon. He was able to get a phone number for the Strong family and decided to call, but with some trepidation. Gunther said, "When I called them, how do you approach somebody on the phone and say, 'I shot down one of your family members. Can you tell me about him?' How do you handle that? I fought with myself. How could I possibly approach that family and tell them about their loved one? Because I thought he was dead."

Referring to the newspaper article, the woman who answered his call said that she was not only the editor of the newspaper, but also the daughter-in-law of Roland Strong. She told Gunther that Roland Strong had made it home after the war, had married and raised a family, and that he had worked as a longshoreman in Coos Bay, Oregon. He had died in 1992 at the age of 74.

She said that they knew he was shot down over Germany, but they didn't know any of the details. He had three sons and they all lived nearby. Gunther later found out that he had even worked with one of the sons. They invited Gunther to a family gathering and allowed him to read Roland's personal papers—notes he had written while in the POW camp.

Gunther said, "For years I had been wondering if I would ever find out what happened to the plane and the pilot we shot down. What a relief that Roland got away and was not lost to his family."

Today, at age 93, Gunther Vogel lives a quiet life in Langlois, on the Oregon coast.

Allyn R. Vannoy is the co-author of Against the Panzers: United States Infantry vs. German Tanks, 1944-1945: A History of Eight Battles Told Through Diaries, Unit Histories, and Interviews. *He lives in Oregon.*

A PERSONAL MEMOIR FROM P-47 PILOT 2ND LT. EDWIN COTTRELL, WHO FLEW 65 MISSIONS IN EUROPE.

BY JANIS ALLEN

Flying "The Jug"

BACKSTORY: *2nd Lt. Edwin Cottrell served in the U.S. Army Air Forces from August 1942 through 1945, then enlisted in the Air Force Reserves in 1950 and completed 28 years in uniform, retiring as a colonel in the Air Force. His father, Dr. Elmer Cottrell, served in the U.S. Army in World War I, and his father-in-law, Dr. Paul Weed, was wounded and* received *two Purple Hearts while serving in the U.S. Army in World War I. On April 3, 2020, at age 98, Ed Cottrell told his story:*

I was born in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, on January 17, 1922. When I was six months old, my father and mother moved the family to Slippery Rock, Pennsylvania, where my father was a teacher at Slippery Rock Normal School, which later became Slippery Rock Teachers College, which later became Slippery Rock University. I attended elementary school, junior high school, high school, and college in Slippery Rock.

While I was in college, I met my future wife, Millie, while we were freshmen. We went together all through college. After I joined the Air Force, and before I went overseas, we got married.

My military career actually started in the summer of my sophomore year. The government offered any students interested in getting a pilot's license to enroll in their CPT [College Pilot Training] program, which I did. I went to Sharon, Pennsylvania, and got 30 hours in a Piper Cub. I got my pilot's license during the summer between my sophomore and junior year.

Pearl Harbor then took place, and, in August 1942, I got my draft notice that said I was going to be called up very shortly. I decided I wanted to be a pilot, so I went to Pittsburgh, 52 miles south of Slippery Rock. I took the Navy test and passed it, and the

Photo by Eric Salard

A restored P-47D named "Nellie," owned by Fighter Aviation Engineering, Ltd. and based at RAF Duxford in England, takes to the sky. It is painted in the colors of the 493rd Fighter Squadron, part of the 48th Fighter Group—the same unit in which Ed Cottrell flew.

Photo courtesy Ed Cottrell

Lieutenant Ed Cottrell smiles from the cockpit of a fighter in 1944. He completed 65 combat missions.

Army Air Corps test and passed it. The Navy said, "If you join us, you'll leave tomorrow." The Army Air Corps said, "We're not ready for you yet. If you join us, go back to school and we'll call you." So, with that being a no-brainer, I decided to go with the Army Air Corps.

I went back to school in the fall of '42. In February of '43, I got a notice that I was to report to Miami Beach. I boarded a train in Pittsburgh with maybe 300 to 400 other potential cadets and we arrived in Miami Beach where we did a month of basic training.

From there I was sent to a college in

Beloit, Wisconsin, for two more months of sort of basic training—a lot of physical training and radio work. Since I had just about graduated with a degree in physical education, they said, "Why don't you run our physical training program?" which I did.

When we left Beloit, we were assigned to Santa Ana, California, where there were maybe 30 or 40 squadrons with over 100 people in each squadron. We did lots of drills and lots of PT. I was assigned to flight school at Visalia, California, where I went to train in a PT-19. During that time, they taught us lots of discipline, lots of flying, and lots of marching—PT and marching. During that time, you learned basically what the Army expected of you.

I finished flight school primary training and was then sent to Chico, California—north of Sacramento—for basic. There I flew the Vultee Vibrator, the PT-13, which was really a good airplane to get basic training in. It had wide landing gears and it shook all over, but it was a very reliable plane. From there we started to do aerobatics, and we did a lot of landings and takeoffs on short landing strips. We also did some radio work.

While we were at Chico, we were told to choose the area of the Army Air Corps we wanted to expand our training, whether it be bombers or fighters. So, I chose to go to fighters and was assigned to Luke Field in Phoenix, Arizona, for my advanced training. I flew the AT-6, the "Texan," which is a great little aircraft still used today as a starter plane for Air Force pilots going into their flight school.

At the end of my training at Luke Field, the last two weeks we had five hours of flying in the P-40 Warhawk fighter. That's the fighter that we thought we were all going to be assigned to overseas. Upon graduation as a second lieutenant, I went back to Slippery Rock on leave. There, Millie and I got married and spent two weeks together before I was to report to Wendover Field in Utah.

Then I went to Wendover for my indoctrination to the plane I was going to fly overseas. There I found the most beautiful

Both: National Archives

ABOVE: Used as both a high-altitude escort fighter and a low-level fighter-bomber, the P-47 quickly gained a reputation for ruggedness. Its sturdy construction and air-cooled radial engine enabled the Thunderbolt to absorb severe battle damage and keep flying. TOP: An unidentified pilot stands in front of a PT-19, one of the most popular primary trainers of the war, and the type which Ed Cottrell flew at Visalia, California. OPPOSITE: With machine guns blazing, a P-47 takes part in night gunnery practice. Ed Cottrell took his P-47 training at Wendover Field, Utah.

aircraft I'd seen—a brand-new P-47 Thunderbolt, which some people called "the Jug."

When I saw that P-47, I knew pretty much that we were going to the European theater of operations, where we'd be working with the Army in close support. And that's exactly what happened. At Wendover, we got a lot of aerial gunnery experience, we did a lot of night flying, we did a lot of formation flying, did a lot of dive-bombing and strafing runs—just as if we were in actual combat.

After six weeks, I was assigned to go to Baton Rouge, Louisiana, on the way to New York to embark to Europe. In August 1944, I was put aboard a beautiful cruise ship called the *Isle de France*, which had been converted into a troop ship. We were assigned two people to a room, which meant that one slept during the day, and one slept at

night till we got to England.

We were in England for about a week when, in September 1944, I was assigned to the 48th Fighter Group, 493rd Fighter Squadron, along with a lot of my friends who I trained with at Wendover. We were sent to an airfield called Cambrai, located outside of Paris, where we got our induction to become members of the 493rd. The second day we were there, we were taken up to formation with one of the pilots who was a veteran. We flew formation and did some simulated dive-bombing attacks and strafing attacks without firing guns—just so we got an idea of what we were going to be doing in combat.

While at Cambrai we started to fly our missions and then, in late September, we moved to St. Trond, Belgium. It was a beautiful airfield. There were 10,000-foot runways, and there were three squadrons of the 48th Fighter Group based around the airfield. We were on one side, and the 492nd and the 494th were on the other side. We stayed there from September until the middle of January 1945.

There were three incidents I recall that happened while we were at St. Trond. The first was on December 6, 1944; the weather was very bad. The U.S. Ninth Army was in close pursuit of the German army. We were called on a very rainy, cloudy day with no more than 200 feet visibility, to go skip-bomb a soccer field where the Americans were on one side and the Germans were on the other side. It was pretty much a stalemate.

I flew wing man to our squadron commander, Major Stanley P. Latiolais, that day. He led 12 of us on this mission, where we were no more than 200 feet above the ground, flying at over 300 miles an hour, until we came to the little town of Jülich, Germany. We were required to come in over the American troops, maybe 30 or 40 yards across the field, to skip-bomb the Germans on the other side. We made two or three passes, got a lot of ground fire, and were successful in dropping our bombs. The Americans were able to move forward and push the Germans back.

Upon returning to our base, we found out that almost every plane had a lot of bullet holes in it where the small-arms ground fire had hit the planes. The P-47 was such a good plane that didn't faze it at all. Our 493rd Fighter Squadron got the Distinguished Unit Citation for that operation. Major Latiolais did a tremendous job of leading us on that mission, where some of the time we were flying on instruments and some of the time actually at treetop level.

On December 17, we were on a mission to locate some German Tiger tanks that were just east of Cologne in a wooded area and were on their way to Bastogne. We found out the Germans had broken through, and the Battle of the Bulge was taking place. Our airfield was the closest to Bastogne, Belgium, during the Battle of the Bulge.

Again, I was flying wing to our commander. We located the Tiger tanks in the woods and went down on a dive-bombing mission. Major Latiolais was the first plane down; I was the second plane down. We dropped our bombs. As we pulled up, we ran into a group of Me 109 German Luftwaffe fighter planes.

On our pullout, on our way up, I noticed an Me 109 coming down at one o'clock toward my squadron commander. I called to him that there was a "bandit" [enemy plane] at one o'clock. The 109 shifted a little bit and the next thing I knew I felt this big blast as a 20mm cannon shell apparently hit my plane. All of a sudden, there was oil all over the windshield and I couldn't see anything. I was on an upward slope.

I opened the canopy, got on the radio to my commander and said I'd been hit and was heading west and going to fly the plane as far as I could. The plane sort of

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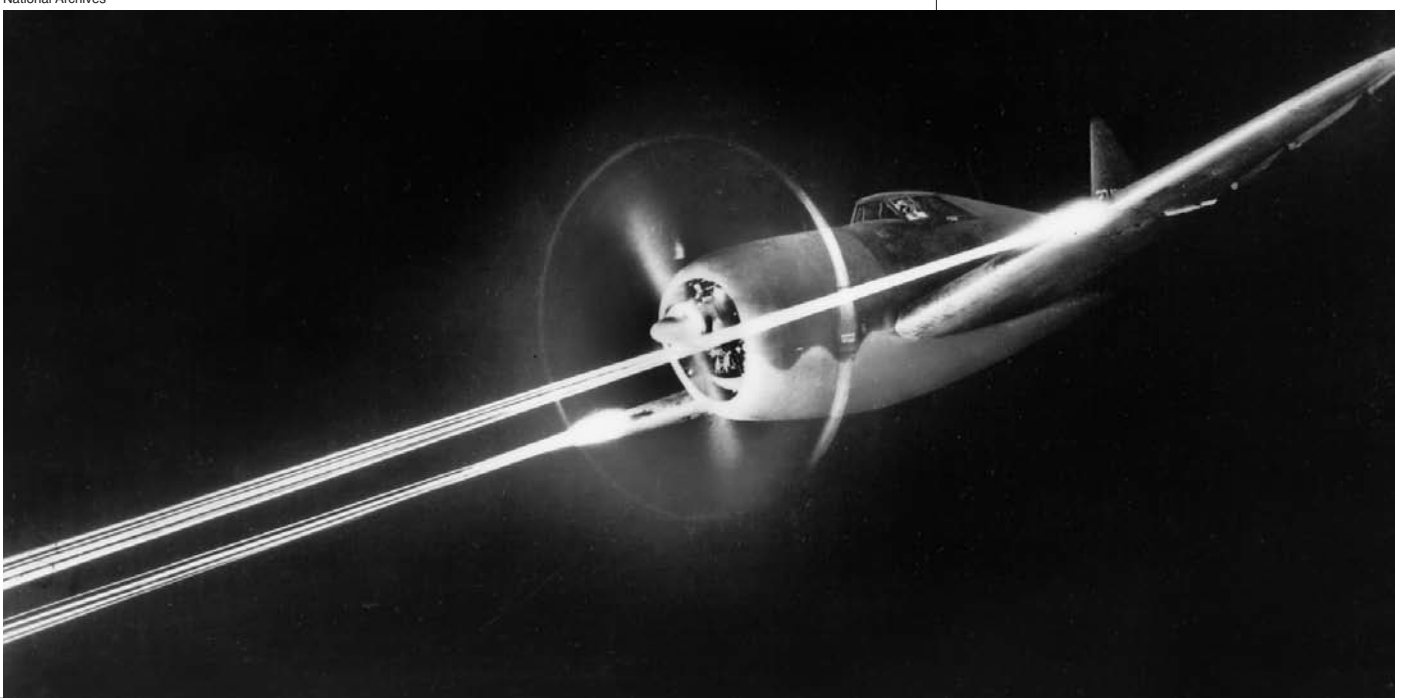

kicked out but it chugged along at about 120 miles an hour with oil flying out all over my windshield.

I looked out on one side, and there was an Me 109. I looked out on the other side and there was another 109. They crisscrossed behind me, and I thought I was going to be shot down. But they came up and pulled in right next to me. They flew with me back to the bomb line, where they used their thumbs and first fingers to make a little circle and peeled off. That was the signal they were leaving me, "Good luck and God bless," without shooting me down.

I kept going. I had no idea where I was. My radio still worked. I asked anybody that could hear if they knew where A-92 Field was. A voice on the radio said, "You're not very far from it. Turn 90 degrees and you should run into it."

I found out I was south of the airfield. It was strange territory because we had never landed at A-92 before, except when we came in from the north. Just as my plane was ready to touch down at the airfield, the engine froze up. I had to make a dead-stick landing and rolled to a stop.

When I got out of that plane, I kissed the ground because I knew I was a very fortunate person—I could've been shot down, the engine could've quit—a lot of things could've happened. But I came out the best that anyone could have in that situation.

I did lose one of my roommates that day, 2nd Lt. Art Sommers. He was a graduate of the University of Southern California. He got shot down. I didn't see him go down, but he didn't come back from the mission. We learned later that they found his plane and he had been killed.

On New Year's Day, 1945, during the Battle of the Bulge, the Germans had surrounded Bastogne. We were 17 miles away from there. We had been told that if the Germans broke through, we would probably be prisoners of war.

The day before New Year's Day, we had been told that all but 12 of the planes would be flown out to another airfield; they were going to leave 12 planes with 12 pilots. The 12 pilots were going to be the least-experienced ones. So, on New Year's Eve, we were told to get rid of all our personal items—burn them and keep only what we needed—our dog tags. No pictures.

We went to bed. At four o'clock in the morning I was told to get up; I was going to be the lead pilot on "runway alert." Runway alert is nothing more than four planes at the end of the runway, engines running. If the radar picked up any incoming, we were able to take off and go intercept them.

On that day when I was on runway alert, our squadron went on a mission. Another of my best friends and roommates was shot down and killed—2nd Lt. Ted Smith, from Wenatchee, Washington.

Without warning, eight Focke-Wulf 190s came in at ground level, below the radar, and came right over where we were sitting, to the middle of our airfield. There was a

Both: National Archives

ABOVE: A P-47 is silhouetted against an exploding German ammunition truck. The P-47s were outstanding in the ground-support role. TOP: After a week in England, Ed's squadron was relocated to France in September 1944. Here a couple of P-47s of the 48th Fighter Group are being refueled by a Ninth Air Force ground crew at an airfield in France. OPPOSITE: P-47s of the 48th Fighter Group prepare to take off from a French field in 1944, taxiing on metal Marston Mats that were moved with the unit as it advanced toward Germany.

National Archives

B-17 and a B-24 that were burned out, sitting there waiting to be scrapped. The Germans didn't know that, of course. The Germans hated B-17s and B-24s because those were the planes that were bombing all their cities and factories.

The FW 190s went right to the B-24 and B-17 with their machine guns going. But they didn't drop their belly tanks. As they came to the end of the field and pulled up to make another pass, our antiaircraft guns hit most of them. Two of them were not hit, and they came around to make another pass. The first of the 190s was on his dive down. He kept going down and down. He didn't pull out and he crashed at the end of the runway. The other plane kept going and shooting at the B-24 and the B-17.

We went out to where the German pilot was lying with his plane in flames and found out that he had a bullet in the middle of his forehead. He didn't look to be any more than 17 years old. We found out later that all the American airfields up and down the bomb line were hit at the same time that day. But the German Luftwaffe took a tremendous loss in their raids.

From January 1 on, our biggest concern in any missions that we had was the flak that came from the antiaircraft guns and the small-arms fire from the people that we were dive-bombing and strafing. The German air force, or what was left of it, was primarily used to attack our bombers, which were bombing the factories all over Germany.

The Americans broke through the German encirclement at Bastogne then and finally forced the Germans to retreat. Starting in the middle of January, the Ninth Army, which we supported, was in the north. They started pushing the Germans back. Every mission we flew was in support of the Ninth Army—either dive-bombing or strafing, whatever they needed.

As the Ninth Army moved, we moved from then until May. We took off and landed on metal strips [Marston Mat, or PSP—Pierced Steel Planking] that the engineers put down in farm fields that were level. When we landed, the mud would come up between the metal strips. We had very short runways. When we were ready to move to the next base, the engineers took those metal strips and moved them up to the next area.

We lived in houses right near the airfield, wherever there was anything available for sleeping. They were empty either because people had fled from the Germans, or the Germans had lived in them and had left. A lot of Jewish people were herded away and killed, as you know. There were a lot of empty houses. Some of them had holes in the roofs. Some had no damage. But wherever we could find an empty house, that's where we bedded down.

We never did establish a [permanent] base from January until May 1945. Then, in May, the 48th was stationed south of Munich. I flew my last mission, my 65th, out of Nuremberg. Then the war was over. The people who had 65 or more missions, if they wanted to, could go home. If not, they would be going with the 48th Fighter Group, which was alerted that they would be going to Japan for the invasion. I chose to go home because I had a little daughter that I hadn't yet seen.

A couple of my buddies and I came home together; the other pilots left on a boat out of Antwerp to get ready to go to Japan. On their way, the war with Japan ended. I got home on the 1st of July and had time at home before I went to San Antonio to be discharged on July 24, 1945.

Ed Cottrell returned to Pennsylvania to build a civilian career in teaching and coaching: health and physical education, football, basketball, and baseball. He also taught driver training, painted the school buildings, pumped gas, and delivered mail during the summers—anything to support his growing family (he and Millie would have two daughters, Carol, and Susan).

Continued on page 98

Defensive Stand *on the* Eastern Front

May 1, 1944. Marshal of the Soviet Union Ivan Stepanovich Konev had a right to be pleased with himself and his men as he gazed at the maps spread before him.

Born in a small village in the province of Northern Dvina, Konev was conscripted into the Tsarist Imperial Russian Army in April 1916, but saw little action during World War I. During the Russian Civil War he served with distinction, becoming a political commissar. Graduating from the prestigious Frunze Military Academy in 1926, Konev served as a divisional and corps commander, escaping the massive purges that decimated the Red Army during the 1930s.

Soon after the German invasion of the Soviet Union, Konev took command of the Western Front (the approximate equivalent of a German Army Group, containing anywhere from five to 12 armies). For the next two and a half years, he led various fronts in the war against Hitler, participating in the gigantic battle at Kursk and liberating the cities of Belograd and Kharkov. For his part in the encirclement and destruction of German forces in the Korsun-Cherkassy Pocket in February 1944, he was promoted to the

Retreating Germans turned on their Soviet pursuers at Targul Frumos, inflicting heavy losses on Red Army tanks and buying valuable time.

BY PAT MCTAGGART

rank of Marshal of the Soviet Union. Now, after years of bitter fighting, his 2nd Ukrainian Front stood poised in the Western Ukraine, ready to strike what was hoped to be a knockout blow against German forces in Southeastern Europe.

Konev had 10 armies—the 27th, 40th, 52nd, 53rd, 4th Guards, 5th Guards, 7th Guards, 2nd Tank, 6th Tank and 5th Guards Tank—at his disposal. His armored forces numbered 650 tanks and self-propelled guns. On March 5, 1944, the 2nd Ukrainian Front launched an offensive against the German 8th Army northeast of Uman. The massed tanks and infantry of the 4th Guards, 5th Guards Tank and 2nd Tank Armies had little difficulty in slicing through the thinly held German line. Other armies soon

ABOVE: Lt. Gen. Hasso von Manteuffel, commander of the Panzergrenadier Division Grossdeutschland. TOP: A column of Panzer V "Panther" tanks of the "Grossdeutschland" Panzer Division rolls across Romania near Jassy, spring 1944. The division's armored regiment, which was one of Germany's finest remaining combat formations, distinguished itself in the early days of the fighting, and fought tenaciously against often overwhelming Soviet strength. Keeping control of Romania's oil fields was essential to Hitler.

Bundesarchiv Bild 183-J24359; Photo: Heinrich von der Becke

Bridgeman Art Library

ABOVE: In a painting by Yuri Ivanovitch, a Soviet convoy rolls steadily down a muddy road in pursuit of the Wehrmacht. OPPOSITE: In the first photo taken of Red Army soldiers in Romania, Soviet troops cross the Pruth River.

followed, flooding through the breached German defenses.

When Uman fell on March 9, Konev ordered his forces to keep going toward the Bug River, giving the retreating Germans little chance to organize a defensive river line. His armies kept up the pressure, severing the 8th Army's tenuous connection with the 1st Panzer Army. Other units, composed of mixed groups of tanks, infantry, and engineers, kept up their advance toward the Bug.

On March 11, elements of General S.I. Bogdanov's 2nd Tank Army's 16th Tank Corps (Maj. Gen. Dubovoi) reached Dzuhlinka and crossed the river, dashing any German hopes of holding the southern bank. A few hours later, the 29th Tank Corps (Lt. Gen. Kirichenko) of General A.G. Kravchenko's 6th Tank Army took the river crossing at Gayvoron. With the main crossing clogged with armored vehicles and trucks, following Soviet infantry units confiscated boats or built rafts to get to the opposite shore. Once across, they spread out behind the mobile forces that were already heading for the next objective—the Dniester River.

By March 15, Dubovoi's corps had severed the Zhmerinka-Odessa rail line at Vapnyarka, a mere 30 miles from the Dniester. Two days later, Kirichenko's corps reached the river and immediately established a bridgehead on the other side. Other units soon followed, and by March 21 the Soviets had firm control of the western bank.

For the next two days, Konev's forces spread out through the Romanian countryside, meeting little opposition. As April approached, however, heavy rains began to fall, turning the ground and dirt roads into a brown quagmire that virtually stopped the Soviet mobile units dead in their tracks.

For Adolf Hitler, the "muddy season" meant that he would have time to stabilize his forces in Southeastern Europe. He was concerned about his wavering allies, Bulgaria, Romania, and Hungary, which watched the Soviet advance with growing apprehension. On March 18, Admiral Miklós Horthy, the Regent of Hungary, succumbed to pressure from Hitler and allowed German troops to pour across the German-Hungarian border in what was essentially an invasion. Hungary's oil fields were now under German control, but a larger prize lay in Romania.

The Ploesti oil fields, located about 30 miles north of Bucharest on the Wallachian Plain, were the center of Romania's oil-refining industry. Without the fields, Germany would be hard pressed to find an alternative petroleum source for her industry and her military. Marshal Ion Antonescu, the head of Romania's government, sent Hitler a pledge of loyalty on the day that German forces invaded Hungary. Some of Romania's military

leaders, however, were already in contact with the Soviets, hoping to negotiate a separate peace. The stalled Soviet offensive meant that more German troops could be sent to bolster Romania's wavering military and to preempt any planned coup.

Hitler also planned to put a new, more loyal core of commanders in charge of his southeast flank. His personal airplane arrived at Field Marshal Ewald von Kleist's *Heeresgruppe A* (Army Group A) headquarters on March 30. With von Kleist on board, the Focke-Wulf Condor aircraft then flew on to the city of L'vov to pick up Field Marshal Erich von Manstein, commander of *Heeresgruppe Süd*. The two men had borne the brunt of the Soviet assault in the Ukraine and Romania, and Hitler was furious that so much territory had fallen into Soviet hands.

Arriving at Hitler's retreat in the Obersalzburg, von Manstein and von Kleist were brought before the Führer, who awarded both men the swords to the Knight's Cross. He then relieved them of their commands. Newly appointed Field Marshal Walter Model replaced von Manstein, while Ferdinand Schörner, who would be promoted to colonel general on April 1, took command of *Heeresgruppe A*.

Before dismissing von Kleist, Hitler told him that the Soviet offensive had run its course and that he was certain the Red Army was exhausted. The Führer also said that after his forces in France threw the expected Allied invasion back into the sea, those divisions stationed in France would be sent to the East to reclaim the territory that had been lost during the previous year. In return, von Kleist simply told Hitler that the time had come to make peace with Stalin before the Eastern armies were totally destroyed.

When the new commanders arrived at their headquarters, the following order from Hitler, dated April 2, awaited them. "The Russian offensive in the south of the Eastern Front has passed its climax. The Russians have exhausted and divided their forces. The time has now come to bring the Russian advance to a standstill.

"For this reason, I have introduced measures of a most varied kind. It is now imperative, while holding firm in the Crimea [where the 17th Army had been isolated by the 4th Ukrainian Front], to hold or win back the following line:

"Dniester to northeast of Kishinev-Jassy-Targul Neamt—the Eastern exit from the Carpathians between Targul Neamt-Ternopol-Brody-Kovel."

It was a tall order for the Germans and Romanians who had been so severely mauled by the Soviets only a few weeks before. Schörner's command, which had been renamed *Heeresgruppe Süd Ukraine* on April 5, stretched from the Central Carpathian Mountains to the Black Sea in a line that was almost 300 miles long. His mixed bag of troops consisted of two Romanian armies (3rd and 4th) and two German armies (6th and 8th).

Schörner was aware of the disparity in the armaments and fighting abilities of the German and Romanian troops under him, as was Hitler. In his April 2 order, Hitler said, "Romanian forces will be disposed in accordance with the terrain so that chiefly German troops occupy the sectors in danger of enemy tank attack." He also ordered that German gun crews man the heavy antitank guns that were to be distributed to Romanian forces.

"Thank God for the mud," was the phrase that passed the lips of generals and

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privates alike as they struggled to form a cohesive line. What the field commanders did not know was that Hitler had been partially right in his assessment of the Soviets' offensive capabilities.

The problem was one of logistics. In a three-month period, Soviet forces had liberated most of the Ukraine, pushing the Germans back 250 to 300 miles in the process. Konev and the other commanders on the Southern sector had simply outrun their supply lines. There was also the matter of replacing the heavy troop losses that had been incurred during the offensive. This was partially overcome by simply drafting the male peasants in the liberated areas, but it would take time to turn them into soldiers.

With the onset of the muddy season, Stavka (the Soviet High Command) ordered all front commanders to go over to the defensive. This would have the twofold effect of allowing time to train replacements and supply depots to move closer to the front. Stavka was also using this time to build up forces for a new attack—one designed to crush the center of the German line on the Eastern Front—in a huge summer offensive.

To keep German intelligence off guard, Konev and the other front commanders in the South were ordered to keep their armored forces highly visible as part of a subterfuge that the Soviets called "*aktivnost*." Basically, the activities of the tank armies and mechanized units, coupled with increased radio transmissions, were designed to fool the Germans into believing that those forces would remain adjacent to Schörner's *Heeresgruppe Süd Ukraine* and Model's *Heeresgruppe Nord Ukraine* (formerly *Heeresgruppe Süd*).

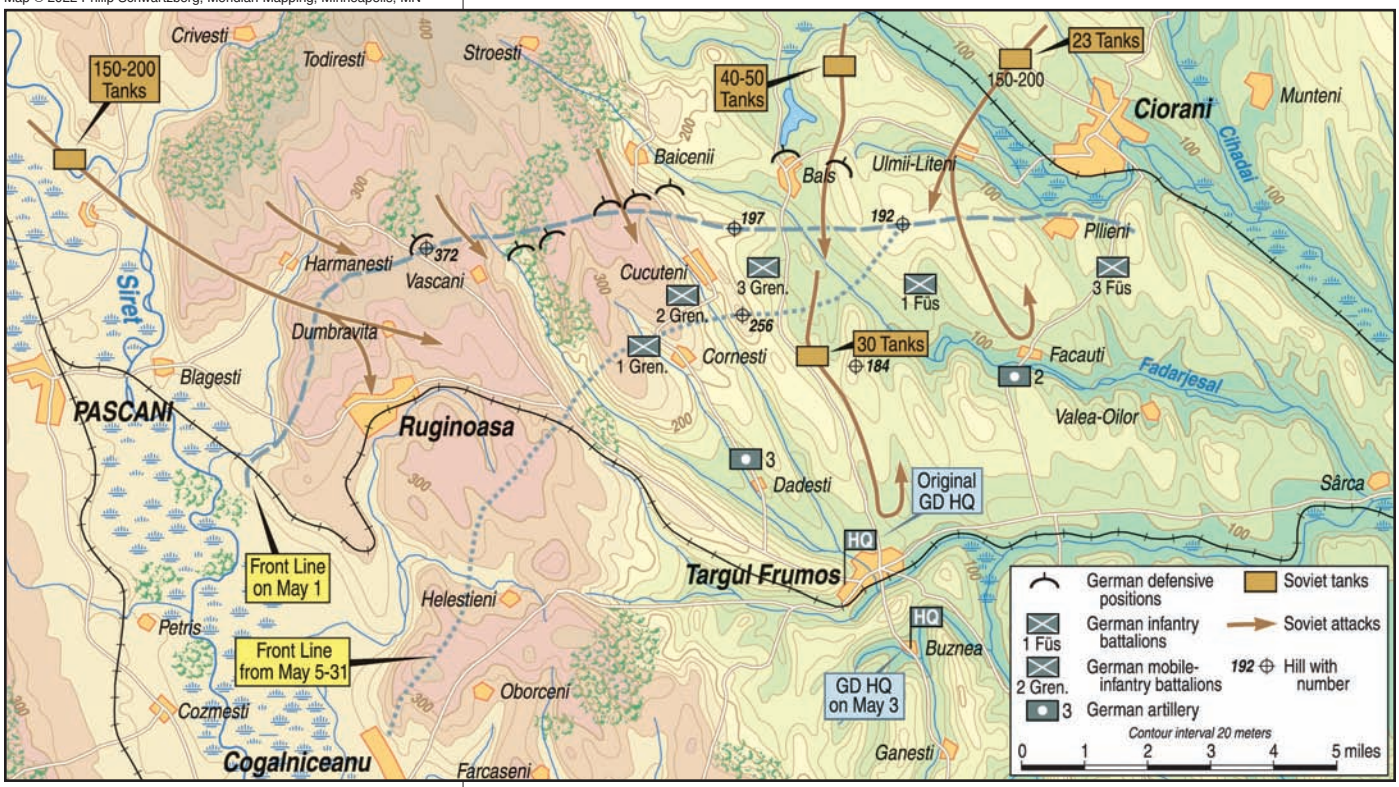
The plan also called for the Russian commanders to make a series of limited attacks with their armored forces, which would reinforce the German notion that new major offensives would take place in the south. One of those so-called limited attacks would take place around the Romanian town of Targul Frumos.

While Konev waited for the ground to dry out enough to start his limited operations, the Germans used the respite to reorganize. Schörner was a tough, no-nonsense commander who was born in Munich in 1892. He had served with distinction in World War I, winning Germany's highest decoration (the Pour le Mérite, popularly known as the "Blue Max") on the Italian Front in 1917. During the same battle, another young officer by the name of Erwin Rommel also won the coveted award.

Schörner fought in the *Freikorps* in Upper Silesia after the war, rejoining the Wehrmacht in 1937. His promotions during the war resulted from his tactical abilities in tough situations. It also helped that he had Hitler's confidence, being a loyal Nazi Party member from the early days of the movement.

Schörner tolerated no excuses from his commanders. His orders to General Maximilian de Angelis (6th Army) and General Otto Wöhler (8th Army) were simple and to the point: "The front will be held in accordance with the Führer's wishes."

Wöhler's 8th Army occupied a pivotal area, guarding the Carpathian passes and providing a link with the 1st Panzer Army of *Heeresgruppe Nord Ukraine*. The 49-year-old Wöhler had served in staff positions during the war until he was given the command of the 1st Army Corps in 1943. He led the unit well on the northern sector of the East-



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ABOVE: With armor support, Red Army soldiers advance toward a burning farmhouse in the rugged Carpathian Mountain region. Hitler thought that the Soviet counteroffensive had run out of steam—but he was wrong. OPPOSITE: At Targul Frumos, German forces fought a textbook defensive action against the Soviets.

ern Front, where his skill and initiative earned him the Knight's Cross. On August 15, 1943, he was given command of the 8th Army and continued to lead it through the bloody retreat from the Ukraine to the Romanian border.

In mid-April, the general's command consisted of an integrated force of German and Romanian units combined under the designation of Army Group Wöhler. On paper, the Army Group was 30 divisions strong, but 17 of those divisions were Romanian. The quality of the Romanian units ranged from good to poor, while the remaining German divisions were, in some cases, little more than battle groups. Wöhler's main striking power lay in his panzer divisions, the 23rd, 24th, and 3rd SS "Totenkopf" (Death's Head), and in the Panzergrenadier Division "Grossdeutschland" (Greater Germany or GD).

Faced with the task of defending a broad area against probable Soviet armored attacks, Wöhler used his mobile forces as "fire brigades," keeping them on the few good roads in the area to counter any Soviet moves that threatened his line. The GD was no stranger to such actions.

Arguably the premier division of the German Army, the GD's origins lay in the prewar *Wachttruppe Berlin* and elements of the *Infanterie-Lehr-Regiment*, which were formed into the *Infanterie-Regiment-Grossdeutschland* in 1939. Eventually becoming a Panzergrenadier division in April 1943, the GD differed from other German divisions in that its personnel came from all parts of the Greater German Reich rather than from a particular state or district.

From January-March 1944, the GD had fought several battles around the Ukrainian city of Kirovograd before retreating west toward the Romanian border. Reaching the border at the end of March, it continued westward, thwarting a Soviet attack designed to cut the Jassy-Kishinev rail line during the first week of April, destroying 89 tanks and 10 antitank guns and inflicting heavy losses on Soviet infantry units. By mid-April, the division had taken up a defensive position that stretched from Ruginoasa, about 12 miles northwest of Targul Frumos, to the Siret River, about 12 miles northeast of the city.

Grossdeutschland was still a superbly equipped unit, and morale was still very high as the troops went about constructing their defenses. Each of the division's two infantry regiments consisted of three battalions, each with four companies of 100 men, and one heavy weapons battalion per regiment. There was also a *Sturmgeschütz* (self-propelled assault gun) battalion with 35 to 40 weapons, a *Pionier* (Combat Engineer) battalion and an understrength *Aufklärungs* (reconnaissance) battalion.

The powerful armored fist of the division was made up of the four battalions of the Panzer Regiment GD. Each battalion had approximately 40 tanks. The Panzer Regiment GD had one battalion of medium Panzer IVs, two battalions of Panzer V "Panther" tanks, and one battalion of heavy Panzer VI "Tiger" tanks. The regiment's massive firepower was backed up by an armored artillery regiment and three batteries of deadly, dual-purpose 88mm guns.

Commanding this magnificent division was Lt. Gen. Hasso Eccard von Manteuffel, known throughout the Wehrmacht as the "Panzer Baron." Von Manteuffel was

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small in stature, about 5 feet, 2 inches and 120 pounds, but he had gained the reputation of being one of the best panzer commanders in the German Army. Born in Potsdam in 1897, von Manteuffel had served in World War I and the postwar *Reichswehr*. General Heinz Guderian, the "father" of the panzer divisions, saw his potential as a tank commander before the outbreak of the war. Von Manteuffel honed his wartime skills, commanding a motorcycle battalion, motorized and Panzergrenadier regiments, and the famous 7th Panzer Division—Rommel's old unit. He took command of GD on February 1, 1944, just as the battles raging around Kirovograd were in full swing.

Soviet forces facing GD had not been sitting idle while the spring rains fell. Along with training replacements and replenishing supplies, Konev launched a series of attacks designed to keep the Germans off balance. On April 16, Soviet forces launched a surprise attack on a GD company stationed in the town of Bals, about nine miles northwest of Targul Frumos. The Soviets succeeded in taking the town, but were soon driven back by a swift counterattack.

The continuing Soviet probing attacks convinced von Manteuffel that a major enemy effort would take place in the Targul Frumos sector. His scouting patrols reported a heavy Red Army buildup directly behind the front line, and further patrols confirmed that something was in the wind.

To forestall the inevitable, von Manteuffel ordered a limited attack of his own. On April 25, two Panzergrenadier battalions attacked Soviet positions near Hill 372. Supported by artillery and *Sturmgeschütze*, the Panzergrenadiers surged forward, driving the Russians from their positions and destroying several antitank guns and three tanks. Two days later, another German attack uncovered a very unpleasant surprise. Some of the knocked out Soviet armor was the new type JS III "Josef Stalin" tank armed with a powerful 122mm gun. The discovery served to hasten German efforts to construct the strongest defenses possible.

ABOVE: With the Carpathian Mountains towering in the distance, a formation of Romanian troops, allies of Nazi Germany, march beside a rail line toward the front. Seventeen Romanian divisions fought on the German side. OPPOSITE: Using a leafy Romanian forest as camouflage, a German tank—one of hundreds—awaits the Soviet onslaught.

Von Manteuffel's troops had laid out their defensive positions well. Although the Soviets occupied the high ground north of the Germans, most of the enemy-held hills that could be used for observation were about six miles away—too far to properly discern the German defenses. The wily panzer commander knew good tank ground when he saw it, and the terrain the Soviets would have to cross on their way to Targul Frumos was excellent for swift armored movement. However, the ground was also open for the most part, giving the Germans an excellent field of fire.

GD's Panzergrenadier and fusilier regiments would bear the brunt of the attack. Now that the ground had dried, Konev planned to send his tanks straight at the Germans, hoping to slice through the grenadiers and fusiliers and speed across the valley in a fast-moving assault. The German entrenchments were well fortified, covered by antitank guns and dug-in *Sturmgeschütze*. Hills 192 and 197, located west of the town of Polieni, gave the Germans excellent observation points from which to call in artillery fire on the Soviet avenues of approach. Hills 254 and 372 gave the Germans the same advantage to observe any Soviet forces attacking farther to the west. A second line of defense, also bristling with antitank weapons and infantry, was constructed about a mile behind the main line of resistance.

Most of the powerful Panzer Regiment GD was kept in reserve near Targul Frumos, ready to counterattack any Soviet forces that breached the German line. Von Manteuffel placed his headquarters on a hill behind Targul Frumos that had a perfect view of the entire sector. From this vantage point, the Panzer Baron and his staff would fight the battle with the skill of a maestro conducting a philharmonic orchestra.

The Germans expected the offensive against Targul Frumos to begin on May 1, the hol-

iday of the proletariat. Air reconnaissance reported that tank and infantry concentrations were continuing to build up in front of the German lines, but the expected attack failed to materialize. Waiting is the worst part for any soldier, and the front-line troops nervously scanned the horizon until the sun set. Some breathed a sigh of relief as they lay in their trenches, trying to catch a few hours of sleep before the new day dawned. For others, the night was spent trying to control the tension that had built up during the day.

Dawn broke on May 2 at about 4 am. A few minutes after the first rays of light began to show, all hell broke loose as the Soviets unleashed a fierce artillery barrage. As the shells began striking the German positions, the infantry clawed deeper into the earth, hoping that death would pass them by. Some Germans were wounded, and their cries for help were heard despite the thunder of bursting shells; however, most of the entrenchments received little damage.

At around 5:20 a.m., the roar of tank engines signaled the start of the ground assault as armor from Bogdanov's 2nd Tank Army, supported by infantry from General S.G. Trofimenko's 27th Army, rumbled forward. The Panzergrenadiers gazed anxiously from their firing positions, waiting for the first shadowy appearance of the enemy through the smoke and dust that had been churned up by the bombardment.

Bogdanov's plan of attack called for an armored assault of 200 to 250 tanks against Colonel Karl Lorenz's Panzergrenadier Regiment GD. To keep the Germans off guard, other armored-infantry attacks hit the junctions of Lorenz's regiment and Colonel Horst Niemack's Fusilier Regiment GD, which was defending the German right.

The T-34 medium tanks and JS IIIs fired point blank at Lorenz's Panzergrenadier positions as they thundered forward. Advancing through a valley between Ruginoasa and Hill 372, they hit the German line at full speed. The Germans fired with everything they had, but they were no match for the steel monsters racing toward them.

Most of the "old hands" had seen this repeated over and over again as Soviet materiel superiority increased in the East. When the Russian tanks were almost upon them, the men in the front-line positions crouched deeper into their foxholes, letting the Soviet armor roll over their positions. It took a brave man to let a 57-ton monster like the JS III run over his foxhole, and some of the Panzergrenadiers lost their nerve and broke. As they jumped up and ran, some were cut down by machine-gun fire, while others were crushed to death by the steel treads of the Russian tanks.

The 1st Battalion, Panzergrenadier Regiment, was particularly hard hit. As the Soviet tanks passed, the Panzergrenadiers struggled to get their firing positions back in order, but the Red Army infantry was already upon them. It was time to disengage, and several units were already moving back to secondary defensive positions. Many of them made it, but the 1st Company, commanded by Lieutenant Bernhagen, had waited too long.

"Move back, boys," the lieutenant cried as wave after wave of Soviet infantry appeared out of the smoke. Many of the men, seeing that it was already too late, turned to face the Soviets. Most of them fired at the advancing enemy until they were cut down. Others raised their hands in a futile attempt at surrender, but to no avail. War on the Eastern Front had been a brutal affair since the early days of Operation Barbarossa, and prisoners were not at the top of either side's priorities during battle. The surrendering men of the 1st Company soon joined their comrades, staring at the sky through unseeing eyes.

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Keeping in constant contact with Lorenz's command post, the battalion commander pulled the rest of his men back to the secondary line. Meanwhile, the Soviet tanks soon outpaced their infantry support. Infantrymen who had been riding on the backs of the tanks were swept off by machine-gun and rifle fire, and now the advancing armor was on its own.

Suddenly, concealed German antitank guns opened fire. Tank after tank exploded as the murderous 75mm and 88mm shells struck home. The tanks continued to roll toward Targul Frumos, despite the casualties they were suffering. German *Sturmgeschütze* now joined the battle, also firing from concealed positions. The 1st Company, commanded by 1st Lt. Diddo Diddens, particularly distinguished itself against the advancing tanks, knocking out several of the lumbering giants as they made their desperate thrust toward their objective.

After running the gauntlet of antitank and assault-gun fire, 10 of the Russian T-34s ran straight into the assembly area of Colonel Willi Langkeit's panzer regiment. Both sides were taken by surprise, but the German gunners reacted faster. Within a few seconds, the 10 tanks were blazing steel infernos. There were no German losses.

Seeing the plight of their comrades, several of the slower JS IIIs stopped and began firing at the panzers at distances of up to a mile and a half. Von Manteuffel happened to be at Langkeit's headquarters when the shelling started. At first, both commanders thought that they had come under friendly fire, but they quickly realized that they were up against the new Soviet heavy tanks.

Von Manteuffel immediately sent word to Major Herbert Gomille's 3rd (Tiger) Battalion, ordering a company of the heavy German tanks to engage the enemy. While the Tigers and JS IIIs fired at long range, a company of the faster, more maneuverable Panzer IVs used the limited cover in the area to advance to within 3,000 feet of the Soviets. As shells from their 75mm guns began to hit home, the remaining Soviet tanks retreated, leaving several burned-out hulls in their wake.

Approximately 250 Soviet tanks had been destroyed in the area between Targul Frumos and the front line of the Panzergrenadier Regiment GD for the loss of a mere handful of German tanks. It was an outstanding victory, but the battle was not over yet.

In Colonel Niemack's sector, the Soviets were also in the midst of a combined attack. Niemack's fusiliers, like the Panzergrenadiers on their left, let the Russian tanks roll over them before popping up to engage the accompanying infantry. The Soviet armor continued to advance without its infantry support and soon reached Niemack's headquarters. Gathering his staff around him, Niemack ordered an attack at close quarters. With hollow charges, "sticky mines," and bundles of grenades, the Germans knocked out tank after tank, destroying 24 of the enemy vehicles.

A second Soviet attack at about 11 a.m. succeeded in breaching the fusiliers' line in several places, but once again the Soviet infantry was prevented from following its armor. Seeing the danger from the advancing Soviet tanks, Colonel Langkeit ordered most of the regiment to turn and attack the marauding Soviets. By noon, another 30 enemy armored vehicles lay burning on the Romanian countryside.

German bombers and Colonel Hans-Ulrich Rudel's famous "tank busting" Ju-87 Stuka dive-bombers also joined in the carnage. Thoroughly disoriented, the few remaining mobile Soviet tanks fled, leaving the battlefield to the Germans. The bombers also hit several Soviet artillery positions, destroying guns that had pounded the Germans only a few hours earlier.

During the night of May 2, Langkeit moved some companies of Panthers and Tigers

closer to the front line where they could directly support the entrenched infantry. Antitank guns were also redeployed so that the Soviet artillery could not immediately zero in on them the following day.

May 3 saw a renewed Soviet attack on both the Panzergrenadiers and the fusiliers. This time, as the Soviet tanks breached the infantry positions they were met with a hail of steel from the recently deployed Tigers, Panthers, and antitank weapons. German gunners fired round after round at the advancing Soviets, halting the attack and forcing the surviving tanks to once again beat a hasty retreat.

Try as they may, the tankers of the 2nd Tank Army and the infantry of the 35th Rifle Corps could not break through to Targul Frumos. Although they had pushed the German line back in some places, the toll taken by two days of continuous battle began to show.

It was the same for the Germans. As night fell on May 3, the exhausted infantry fell back into their foxholes, wondering how much longer they could hold out against the seemingly endless number of tanks and men that the Soviets were throwing against them. Some of the companies were down to platoon size, and although the Panzer Regiment had barely been touched, it was up to the worn out infantry to keep the line stable.

On May 4, the Soviets changed their tactics. Instead of advancing on a broad front, they concentrated their forces on a few select points. After blasting the breakthrough sectors with everything from mortars to rockets, they moved forward, hoping to obliterate everything in their path.

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ABOVE: In a narrow trench, German infantrymen wait for Soviet tanks to pass over their positions. Some men lost their nerve and were either shot down or crushed by the tanks as they tried to escape. OPPOSITE: Red Army infantrymen, supported by T-34 tanks, rush to attack German forces around the town of Jassy in May 1944. The attacks were turned back and the Germans continued to hold the region for several more months.

The fighting was particularly fierce around Hill 256, just southeast of Cucuteni, where Soviet and German infantry fought for control of an excellent observation point that commanded the entire sector. Hand grenades, flamethrowers, and razor-sharp entrenching tools were the weapons of the day as each side fought to eject the other from the strategic position.

In another sector, Captain Mayer, commanding the 2nd Battalion of the Panzergrenadier regiment, led a counterattack aimed at retaking the village of Giurgesti, which had fallen to the Soviets on May 2. In the hand to hand fighting that followed, Mayer was wounded, but his ad hoc assault group succeeded in driving the Soviets out of the village.

Except for the battle for Hill 256, the German line had been fairly well stabilized by the evening of May 4. A counterattack by Niemack's fusiliers, supported by Panthers and assault guns, finally drove the Soviets off the hill on May 7. The Soviets had given their all, but the path to Targul Frumos and the Ploesti oil fields beyond had not been opened. For the next few months at least, the Red Army threat in Romania was over.

Von Manteuffel and his division had won a great defensive victory. During the first three days of battle, more than 350 Soviet tanks had been destroyed, with another 200 damaged. The GD lost a total of 10 tanks permanently destroyed. Although Soviet postwar accounts barely mention the battle, Targul Frumos was still being studied by NATO commanders well into the 1980s as a textbook example of how a combined arms defense could stop a massive Soviet attack. Perhaps the best reason for the German success was given by von Manteuffel years after the war: "In spite of the most careful preparations, the decisive factor in defense was the combat potential of the troops. It was this which allowed the defense to achieve the results it did—a huge fiasco for the Russians."

Author Pat McTaggart is an expert on World War II on the Eastern Front. He writes from his home in Elkader, Iowa.

Normandy BREAKOUT

THE COST OF USING HEAVY BOMBERS WAS HIGH, BUT SO WAS THE PRIZE. By Brian Todd Carey

Concentrated against the beaches of Normandy on June 6, Operation Overlord landed 9 army divisions plus support troops on five beaches in anticipation of a breakout across France and toward Berlin. American forces landed on the two western beaches, Utah and Omaha, while British and Canadian troops landed farther east on beaches designated Gold, Juno, and Sword. Overall command of Allied ground forces was assigned to Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery, while Lt. Gen. Omar Bradley commanded the American Twelfth Army.

Although Allied air forces controlled the skies over the 50-mile front, bombing and strafing could not silence the well-entrenched German guns, especially on Omaha Beach, where casualties numbered more than 2,300 in contrast to 197 on Utah. Farther east, British and Canadian troops met with less resistance and suffered fewer casualties than the Americans. By day's end, close to 150,000 Allied troops and their accompanying vehicles, equipment, munitions, and provisions were unloaded. Within a week the troop buildup numbered half a million men. By June 10, the separate beachheads had been consolidated into a single front; the Americans were making ground inland and toward the city of Cherbourg on the Cotentin Peninsula. Montgomery's forces, having beaten off panzer counterattacks, pushed toward the city of Caen. By late July, two million men and 250,000 vehicles were ashore in Normandy.

Despite the infusion of massive amounts of men and materiel, the planned Allied breakout across France bogged down in Normandy, where the thickly banked hedgerows or *bocages* provided the German defenders with excellent antitank positions. This slowing of Allied momentum helped the Germans reinforce Normandy with infantry divisions from the Wehrmacht's First and Nineteenth Armies. Cherbourg surrendered to the Americans on June 27, but the British assault on Caen (Operation Epsom, June 21-July 1), despite heavy RAF bombardment, was halted by the German Army.

Advancing past a knocked-out Mk IV panzer, an American infantry patrol picks its way through the rubble of a Normandy village, wrecked during the Operation Cobra bombings. Cobra was launched to break through the second line of German defenses and regain the momentum lost after the initial Operation Overlord landings.

In an attempt to break German resistance around the city of Caen, Montgomery ordered 457 Halifax and Lancaster bombers to carpet bomb the area. The July 7 air operation against Caen dropped three thousand tons of high explosives in front of the British Army still on the outskirts of Caen. Because the bombs were mainly 1,100-pounders, they created craters 20 feet across and filled the streets of the city with the wreckage of stone buildings. The British were able to fight into the city, but were blocked from moving beyond it by craters and rubble.

On July 18 the British, this time aided by planes from the U.S. Eighth Air Force, tried carpet bombing again, this time with 1,676 heavy and 343 medium and light bombers. The goal was to blow a hole in the German defenses so that Montgomery could push

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ABOVE: American Martin B-26 Marauder medium bombers head across the English Channel to drop their payloads on German positions. BELOW: An aerial photograph of the territory after the Cobra bombings showing the immense and concentrated destruction. OPPOSITE: The carpet bombing of Operation Cobra broke the stubborn German line in Normandy. Once through, the Americans were able to make large territorial gains relatively quickly.

700 tanks through and onto the Falaise Plain (Operation Goodwood, July 18-20), thence to secure an opening toward Paris. But the German defenders again rode out the bombardment and stopped the British offensive, destroying half the British tanks in the process.

Meanwhile, Bradley's Twelfth Army pushed south to the crucial crossroads town of St. Lô where the German Panzer Lehr Division blocked the Americans' path out of the Cotentin Peninsula. With the failure of Goodwood and the tenacious stand of the Panzer Lehr Division came the real possibility that the intended Allied breakout of Normandy would never be realized.To break the stalemate on the battleground outside St. Lô, General Bradley proposed using American heavy bombers to blow the Germans out of the way. Operation Cobra was Bradley's third attempt to escape from the constricted neck of the Cotentin Peninsula. The first attempt,

begun on July 3, had been checked by the hard fighting of the enemy's infantry along the floodline of the Douvre River. The second, begun on July 13, had after five days resulted in the capture of the crucial crossroad town of St. Lô, but at the cost of 11,000 casualties. Operation Cobra would utilize the might of the American heavy bomber fleet to assist the Twelfth Army in breaking out of the peninsula.

General Bradley, the chief architect of Cobra, had decided on the plan's outline by July 10 and presented it to his corps commanders two days later. Set for July 21, Operation Cobra would carpet bomb a rectangular area approximately four miles long and $1\frac{3}{4}$ miles deep (7,000 yards by 2,500 yards), or the entire front of Bradley's initial attack.

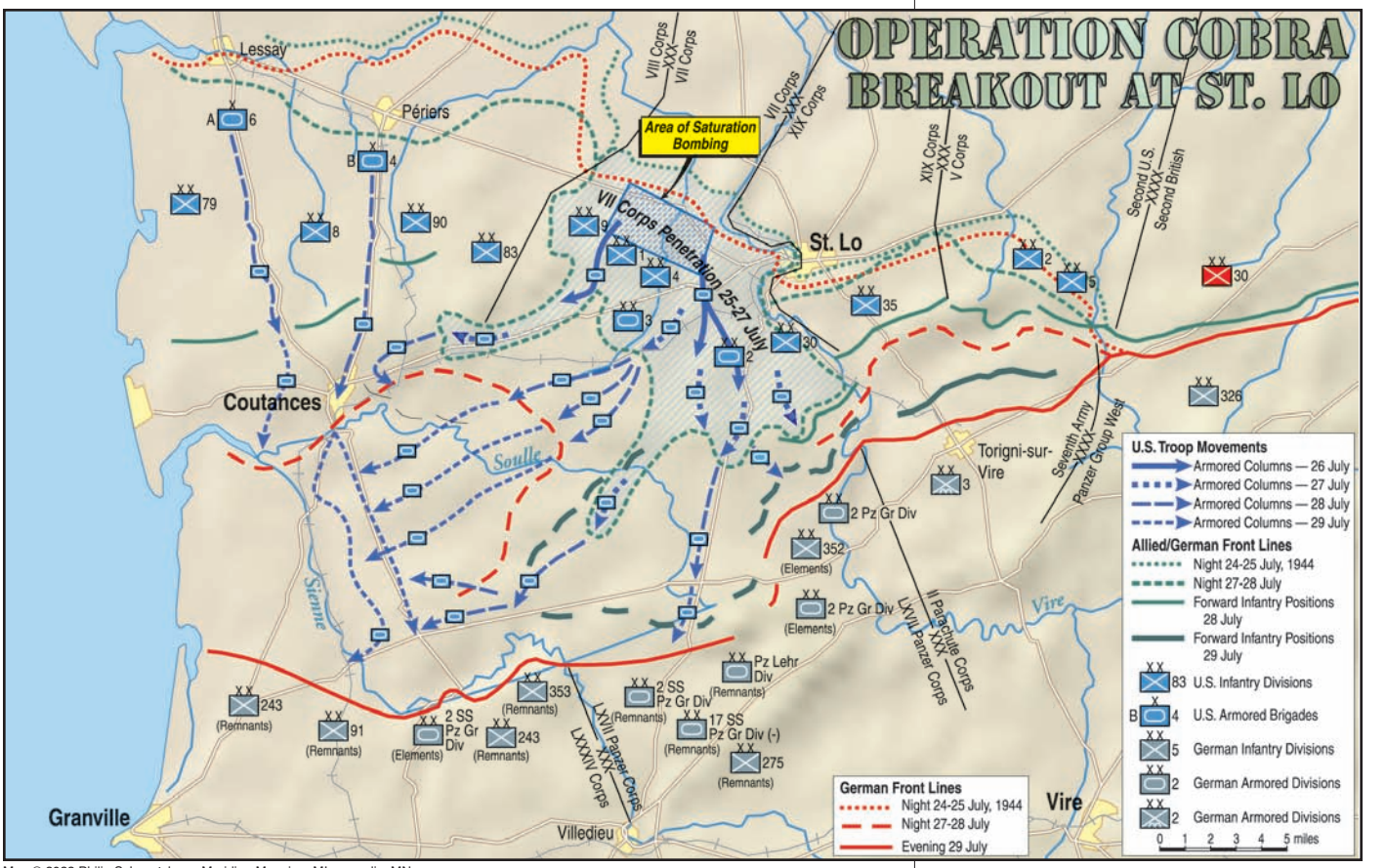
Once the bombs had been dropped, the U.S. 2nd and 3rd Armored Divisions would punch a hole through the German defenders and finally break out of the peninsula.

Bradley understood that timing was crucial to Cobra's success. The general wanted a short, intensive bombardment to maximize shock value. He wanted the bombers to approach the target box parallel to the front and along German lines in order to provide a greater security zone for his ground troops. He believed the bombers could attack in the morning east to west, and west to east in the afternoon, placing the sun in the eyes of German antiaircraft gunners. Immediately after the bombing stopped, the American follow-up attack had to capitalize on the shock. To best do this, Bradley planned to withdraw his troops a mere 800 yards from the front line, keeping them close enough to attack quickly and reoccupy conceded space. In order to avoid the huge craters that had slowed the British advance at Caen during Operation Epsom, Bradley required that only 100-pound fragmentation bombs be dropped.

After obtaining Montgomery's approval, Bradley flew to England and presented his plan to Allied air commanders on July 19. In attendance were the Air Chief Marshal Arthur Tedder, deputy supreme commander for Overlord; Air Marshal Sir Trafford Leigh-Mallory, Commander-in-Chief of Allied Expeditionary Air Force for Overlord; and Carl Spaatz, Supreme Commander of U.S. Strategic Air Forces in Europe. Bradley asked the men who controlled the skies over the battlefield to give him the air support he needed to break out of the Cotentin Peninsula. He was greeted in England by enthusiasm for his plan. In his memoirs, Bradley commented that "[a]ir's enthusiasm for COBRA almost exceeded that of our own troops on the ground, for air welcomed the St. Lô carpet attack as an unrivaled opportunity to test the feasibility of saturation bombing." He left the meeting with a commitment for 1,500 heavy bombers, almost 900 medium bombers, and some 350 fighter-bombers.

Although the Allied air commanders agreed to the plan for Cobra, they wanted some modifications. The airmen initially wanted a safety zone of 3,000 yards, compared to Bradley's 800. Bradley finally agreed to 1,200 yards, but the heavy bombers would not strike the front edge of the target box. Instead, fighter-bombers would cover this 250 yards. More important, Bradley assumed his desire for the bombers to fly a parallel run along the German front had been accepted by all participants of the meeting. This assumption would prove to be wrong.

Bad weather forced the postponement of Operation Cobra from July 21 to the 24th. Although the weather on the morning of the 24th proved dubious as well, Leigh-Mallory ordered 1,586 B-17s and B-24s from the Eighth Air Force to support Cobra. Leigh-Mallory himself and other senior airmen flew to Normandy and, after seeing firsthand a 5,000-foot ceiling over the target box, called off the mission and rescheduled it for the next day. But Leigh-



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Both: National Archives

Mallory had waited too long to cancel the mission. With bombers only seven minutes from target, calling back all of the airplanes would be impossible. In all, 352 heavy bombers loosed their loads over the target box before finally receiving the recall order. And contrary to Bradley's wishes, all the bombers had dropped their loads perpendicular to the front line. Some bombs fell short of their target and on the American 30th Division. Friendly fire killed 25 men and wounded another 131. Moreover, confusion caused by the cancellation of the air phase of Cobra forced Bradley's men to fight again for the ground conceded as a safety zone.

The confusion and tragedy of the July 24 strike can be blamed on many factors. Direct communications between the bombers and the ground troops was nonexistent. Although Leigh-Mallory was physically at Bradley's headquarters near the front, his cancellation order had to be sent back to the Eighth Air Force's Headquarters in England, then sent to Eighth Air Force planes approaching the target area, delaying the execution of his order. Also, Bradley's emphasis on the shock effect of the bombing at the July 19 meeting led Eighth Air Force Headquarters to instruct their planes to bomb at a right angle to the front, thereby ensuring the greatest number of bombers through the short side of the target box in the least amount of time. The perpendicular strike increased the likelihood of friendly-fire casualties, but it also saturated the breakthrough point with bombs in the way Bradley required. Given the choice between a safer, lengthier attack or decreasing the shock value of the carpet bombing, Bradley reluctantly agreed to another perpendicular strike.

The air phase of Operation Cobra began at 10 a.m. on the morning of the 25th. Some 1,503 of 1,581 B-17s and B-24s dropped their high explosive and fragmentation bombs on the Panzer Lehr Division. Joining the Eighth Air Force's heavies were medium bombers and fighter-bombers. All to-gether, the air effort dropped over 4,100 tons on German positions, killing over a thousand German soldiers, wiping out three battalion command posts, and destroying or severely damaging most of its armor and armored personnel carriers.

The effect of the bombing on the already understrength Panzer Lehr Division was significant. The German division commander, Lt. Gen. Fritz Bayerlein, described the scene outside of St. Lô in a postwar interrogation: "It was hell.... The planes kept coming overhead like a conveyer belt, and the bomb carpets came down.... My front lines looked like a landscape of the moon, and at least seventy percent of personnel were out of action—dead, wounded, crazed, or numb." Bayerlein placed the actual losses of dead and wounded at approximately 50 percent by bombing, 30 percent by artillery, and 20 percent by other weapons.

Still, despite the devastating pattern bombing and the artillery barrage that followed, the Americans were unable to break through the German lines on the 25th. But the American commander opposite the most battered part of the Panzer Lehr Division's

lines, Maj. Gen. J. Lawton Collins, shrewdly realized that the German command and control structure had been badly disrupted by the air attack, and planned a full-scale attack the next morning. On the evening of the 25th, Collins brought his VII Corps armor, newly equipped with iron shears to bulldoze the hedgerows, to the front with orders to push through the remaining German defenders at dawn. In the morning the 2nd Armored Division, supported by tactical air and building on the accomplishments of the 30th Infantry Division, cut through the demoralized German defenders. Breakthrough had become breakout, and the race to Germany had begun.

The July 26 breakthrough at St. Lô owed its success to aggressive pattern bombing the previous day. Bradley's use of heavy bombers in close air support of ground operations brought the weight of American airpower to bear against a vulnerable opponent at an opportune time. But the success of Operation Cobra was tainted by more friendly-fire incidents. Once again, American bombs accidentally hit units in the 30th and 9th Infantry Divisions.

In all, short bombs killed 111 Americans, including Lt. Gen. Leslie J. McNair who had come to Europe to assume command of the newly forming American Ninth Army, and wounded 490 more. Moreover, the close proximity of American troops to the intensive bombing caused 164 post-traumatic shock cases in the 30th Infantry Division, further reducing their combat efficiency.

High-level finger pointing took place as a result of the friendly-fire deaths. General Spaatz tried to place blame on the medium bombers of IX Bomber Command. The Eighth Air Force's own investigation showed the 2nd Air Division was responsible. In his memoirs, General Bradley accused the airmen of "duplicity," claiming they had told him the July 25 bombing would be parallel to the road. But Bradley and other ground commanders' failure to pull their troops back from what was known as a very dangerous front raises their culpability. What is certain is that the blame for the short bombings does not rest entirely on any one service. Although there was no "duplicity" on the part of the Army Air Force (in fact, air commanders were reluctant to undertake the operation at all), airmen from Tedder and Leigh-Mallory to the bombardiers themselves deserve some of the blame.

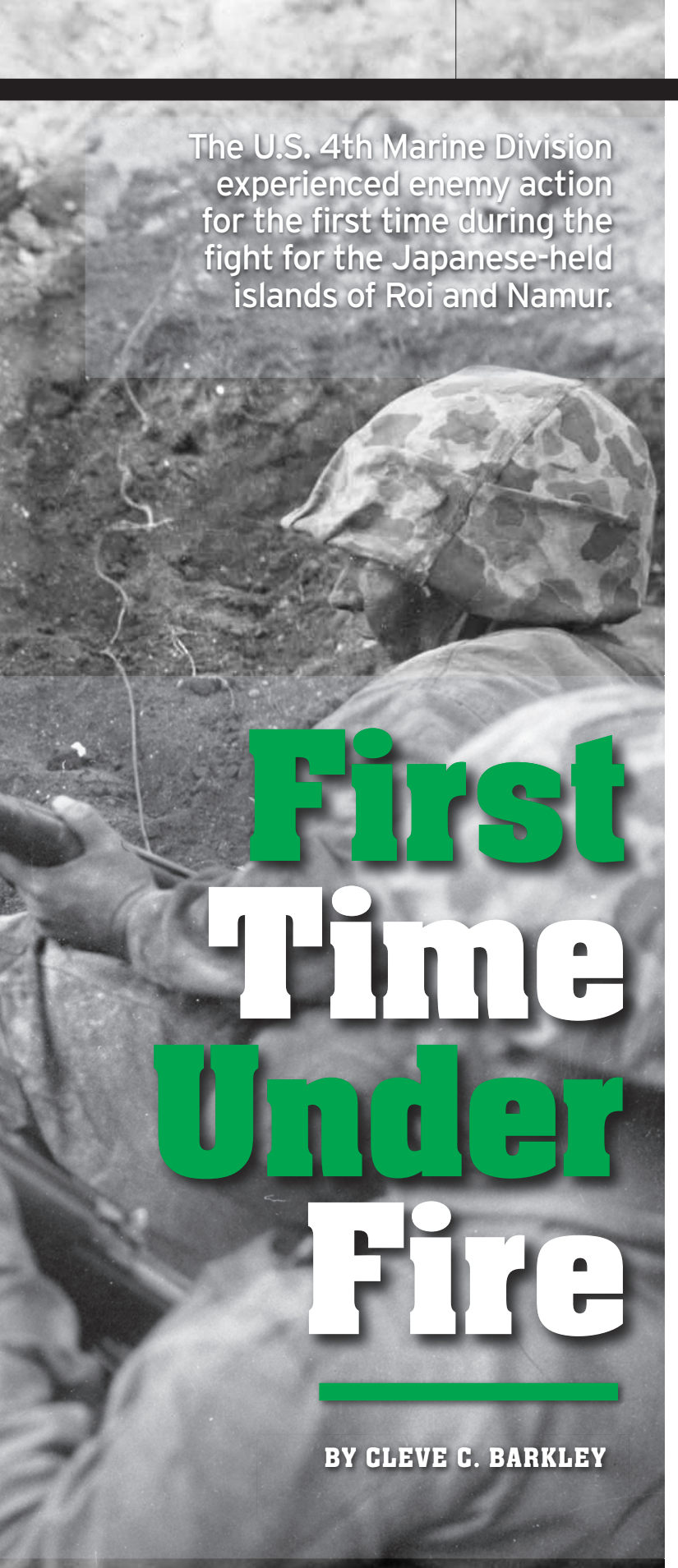
BELOW: Six members of the 353rd Infanterie-Division surrender to GIs of the 4th Armored Division in the village of Coutances, July 29th, 1944. OPPOSITE: A German Panther tank with its turret blown off near St. Lô, likely the result of aerial bombing, evidence to the ferocity of the American breakout operation.

Despite the demoralizing effect close air support had on friendly troops, American ground forces successfully pushed through the battered German defenders. The success of Cobra owed to many factors. Unlike Montgomery's failure in Operation Epsom a month before, Bradley attacked with a much greater force against a critically weaker enemy. The German forces in Normandy had suffered seven weeks of attrition and were split between defending the strategic crossroads at St. Lô and the defense of Caen. Unable to reinforce either sector rapidly due to Allied air interdiction, short of ammunition and without Luftwaffe air support, the German line of defense was vulnerable to puncture.

Both Montgomery and Bradley recognized the utility of using heavy bombers in support of ground troops, but the failure of Allied heavy bombers to break the back of German resistance at Caen (causing considerable collateral damage to French civilian and friendly troops) did not deter Bradley from using them at St. Lô. Although friendly-fire casualties did occur in both operations, it was a relatively small price to pay considering the overall stakes. In July 1944, the breakout of Normandy had stalled, and without a determined Allied combined-arms offensive the very existence of a Second Front was endangered.

Operation Cobra vividly illustrated the firepower heavy bombers could bring in support of ground troops. Although an inexact science in the summer of 1944, the close air support operations in Normandy were the precursor to heavy bombers being used in later ground support missions in the European Theatre and later in Korea, Vietnam, and the recent Gulf War. Heavy bombers have proved a powerful addition to the arsenal of ground commanders, providing critical offensive mass at crucial moments. □

A U.S. Marine squad leader motions to his men to stay low within the protection of a shell hole on the island of Namur. The Marines assaulted Namur and the island of Roi on February 1, 1944, with a primary focus on seizing the airfield that took up nearly the entire landmass of Roi. Preinvasion bombardment had given the Marines plenty of craters in which to take cover.



The U.S. 4th Marine Division experienced enemy action for the first time during the fight for the Japanese-held islands of Roi and Namur.

First Time Under Fire

BY CLEVE C. BARKLEY

AS 1943 drew to a close, Admiral Chester Nimitz's Central Pacific campaign was gaining momentum. His forces had taken the Gilbert Islands that November and now targeted the Marshall Islands as the next step on the long road to Tokyo. Codenamed Operation Flintlock, the plan called for Rear Admiral Richmond Kelly Turner's V Amphibious Force to bypass the Marshalls' stronger outer defenses in favor of striking directly at Kwajalein Atoll in the archipelago's center. Maj. Gen. Holland M. "Howlin' Mad" Smith, USMC, commander of V Amphibious Corps, selected the Army's veteran 7th Infantry Division to secure naval facilities at Kwajalein Island in the atoll's southern group while Maj. Gen. Harry Schmidt's untried 4th Marine Division, sailing directly from San Diego, would take Roi-Namur and its excellent airfield, 44 miles to the north.

Flat, barren Roi measures 1,200 by 1,250 yards, barely enough room to accommodate the airfield. Tethered to Roi by a 400-yard causeway and a narrow, lagoon-side sand spit lay Namur, encompassing 800 by 900 yards of heavily forested terrain that shaded the garrison's barracks and other structures. Thirty-five aircraft and approximately 2,000 members of Japanese Vice Admiral Michiyuki Yamada's 24th Air Flotilla occupied the islands, along with a 345-strong contingent of the 61st Guard Force and perhaps 1,200 service personnel. For defense, Roi-Namur boasted two batteries of twin-mounted 127mm guns, four 37mm cannons; 19 13.2mm heavy machine guns, and 10 20mm antiaircraft guns, nearly all facing northward in anticipation of an ocean-side landing. Eight blockhouses and 52 pillboxes dotted the landscape with general purpose machine guns sprinkled throughout. Antitank ditches and fighting trenches girdled the beaches.

Following a two-month bombing campaign, Rear Admiral Richard Connoly's Task Force 53 closed in on January 29, 1944, to commence a massive three-day bombardment, pummeling the defenders with more than 2,655 tons of high explosives. In November 1943, the Navy's 21/2-hour preparatory barrage at Tarawa proved woefully inadequate, resulting in 3,178 Marine casualties. As a result, Admiral Connoly was committed to destroying every man, tree, and building that occupied Roi-Namur.

The first objectives were five outlying islands that were taken by the 25th Marines on D-day, January 31, with little trouble. With these secured, the howitzers of the 14th Marines were placed to support the main invasion scheduled for the following morning.

Throughout the night, U.S. Navy gunners hurled shell after shell at the hapless islands. Just before dawn on February 1, the cannonading ceased to allow the lumbering Marine-carrying LSTs (Land Ships, Tank) to break from the fleet and enter the lagoon. Once these were in place, the bombardment resumed with unbridled vigor.

All photos: National Archives

In the lagoon, the Marines prepared for action. Colonel Louis Jones' 23rd Marines were to take Roi with Lt. Col. Hewin Hammond's First Battalion going in on Red Beach Two while Lt. Col. Edward Dillon's Second Battalion stormed Red Beach Three, to Hammond's right. Colonel Franklin Hart's 24th Marines would make a simultaneous assault on Namur. Hart chose Lt. Col. Austin Brunelli's Third Battalion to storm Green Beach One while Lt. Col. Francis Brink's Second Battalion hit Green Two, to the right of the L-shaped Yokohama Pier, which served as the battalion boundary. W-hour, the time of assault, was set at 10 AM.

The infantry was divided into boat and assault teams with the former comprising riflemen and the latter a combination of demolitions specialists, bazooka men, and machine gunners, all embarked in LVT-2s (Landing Vehicle, Tracked). These amphibious tractors, or amtracs, were fitted with cleated treads designed to claw over barrier reefs. Each held 18 to 24 men. Four companies of armored LVT(A)s—amtanks—equipped with turreted 37mm cannons and machine guns would precede the infantry. Followup units would arrive in flat-bottomed LCVPs (Landing Craft Vehicle, Personnel).

The assault waves of the 23rd Marines would be carried by the 4th Amphibian Tractor Battalion, while those of the 24th would ride the amtracs of the 10th Battalion. However, the 10th was in a state of disarray, having seen continuous service the previous day ferrying elements of the 25th Marines to the outlaying islands. It had been a long and trying ordeal for the crews, which expended much of their fuel and virtually all of their energy while transporting personnel and supplies to and from the various islets. As darkness fell many were unable to locate their mother ships. Consequently, some LVTs ran out of gas, causing bilge pumps to cease working. A number swamped and sank in the choppy seas, while others sought refuge on nearby beaches. By morning only 62 of 110 LVTs allocated for the Namur landings were available.

ABOVE: Marines leap over the side of their amphibious Amtrac landing craft during operations in the Marshall Islands. Instead of attacking the strong defenses of islands in the outer Marshalls, the Marines struck at Roi-Namur while veteran Army troops attacked Kwajalein. OPPOSITE: The islands of Roi and Namur are conjoined by a sandspit and causeway that runs the width of a lagoon between the two shores. On February 1, 1944, Marines of the 23rd Regiment hit the beaches and began the arduous task of clearing the island of defending Japanese troops.

As late as 6:30 AM, Captain Charles Berkeley, Jr.'s Company G, one of the scheduled assault companies for Brink's Landing Team Two, was unable to secure enough LVTs to make the landing, so a last minute revision called for Captain John Ross, Jr.'s Company E, initially battalion reserve, to exchange roles with G Company. Berkeley's men would have to wait until enough vessels could be corralled to take them in. Similar shortages plagued Landing Team Three, but Lt. Col. Brunelli simply combined all available amtracs until both assault companies had sufficient transportation while his reserve element, Company L, remained aboard its LST with no means to embark. Chaos replaced order as the ad hoc assault waves struggled to gain the line of departure. As a result, W-hour was postponed until 11 AM.

Meanwhile, the Navy kept a tight schedule. At 6:50 AM Rear Admiral Howard Kingman's Fire Support Unit One had eased to within 3,000 yards of Namur's oceanside beaches to commence the final bombardment, while Rear Admiral Laurence DuBose's Fire Support Team Two ripped off salvoes toward Roi. At the first inkling of daylight, the howitzers of the 14th Marines chimed in from the neighboring islets. By then the entire Japanese air fleet had been destroyed, as well as the communications and command structure, including Admiral Yamada and his staff, all of whom perished in the rubble.

While all this occurred, naval control officers tasked with aligning the waves of the 24th Marines were experiencing much consternation as unscheduled units hove into view while designated teams were nowhere in sight. Fifteen more minutes ticked by with negligible improvement. It was feared that once again unnecessary fuel consumption would jeopardize the LVTs circling impatiently in the lagoon. Furthermore, the initial landing teams still lacked proper reserves. Fortunately, the floating reserve, Lt. Col. Aquilla Dyess' 1st Battalion, was already embarked in LCVPs 3,000 yards behind the line of departure.

Colonel Hart ordered Companies A and B to fill the void. But no sooner had these units arrived at the departure line than scraps of Company G materialized, loaded in a

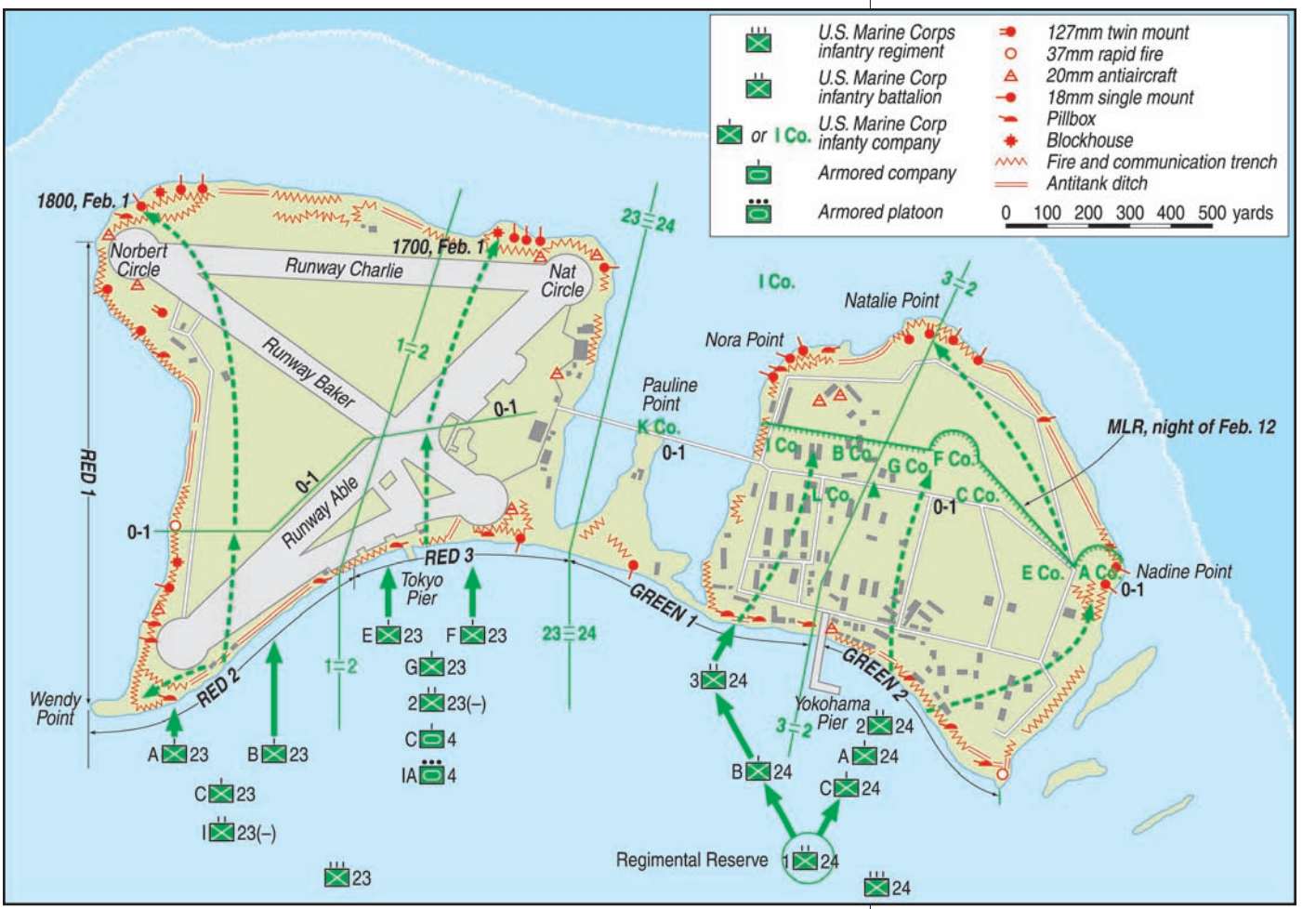
combination of LVTs and LCVPs, determined to reclaim their role as Landing Team 2's reserve. Wave officers were at their wits' end as Company A relinquished its position. Just then the red signal flag dropped from the control ship: "Launch the invasion." It was 11:12 AM. The landing craft of the 23rd Marines streaked for their designated beaches. Caught off guard, the coxswains transporting the disheveled 24th gunned their engines and set bearings for hostile shores, 4,000 yards away.

LCI(G) gunboats (Landing Craft, Infantry) led the procession, trailed by the armored LVT(A)s of the first wave with the assault infantry close behind. One thousand yards from shore, the gunboats swung broadside and cut loose with rockets and rapid-firing 40mm guns while the assault waves continued toward their destinations. On cue, the Navy's bombardment shifted to the interior while dive bombers commenced their final runs.

At Roi, the 30 LVT(A)s assigned to the 23rd Marines came in hot, lacerating the thick battle haze with streams of searing tracers as they waddled ashore. They had hardly made landfall when an imposing antitank ditch loomed a mere 60 feet from the surf. Unable to proceed inland, the armored tractors lurched to a halt while releasing a galling fire from their machine guns and turreted cannons. It was 11:33 AM.

Within 20 minutes the LVTs bearing the 23rd Marines clattered ashore. In the right-hand sector, the Marines of Companies E and F of Lt. Col. Dillon's 2nd Battalion hit Red Beach Three and scrambled up a slight rise, then dropped to peer apprehensively into a wall of smoke and dust. Although plenty of gunfire flashed overhead, very little seemed to be incoming—naval artillery had destroyed virtually every beachside pillbox and the Japanese defenses lay in shambles. Dillon's men crossed the ditch, shooting the few disoriented defenders encountered, then moved rapidly inland. By then the M4 Sherman medium tanks of Company C, 4th Tank Battalion had landed, followed by several light tanks of Company A. After crossing a collapsed section of antitank ditch, these quickly joined the assault. Within 20 minutes of landing, the Marines had reached the O-1 Phase Line along the lower arm of the airfield, about 200 yards inland. Company G beached soon after and commenced rooting out any bypassed enemies.

On the far left, Lt. Col. Hammond's 1st Battalion landed on Red Beach Two five minutes behind Dillon's men, also against negligible opposition. Captain James Scales' Company A peeled left to assault a pair of large pillboxes reported to occupy Wendy Point, 300 yards distant. These Marines found only smoldering, rubble-filled craters where the fortresses purportedly stood—mute testimony to the Navy's devastating



Map © 2022 Philip Schwartzberg, Meridian Mapping, Minneapolis, MN

firepower. Wendy Point, expected to be a tough battle, was a pushover.

Having secured their first objective without a fight, Scales' men dashed up the western shore to claim their sector of the O-1 Line. En route, a spattering of gunfire erupted from a large blockhouse designated "Buster" 400 yards up the coast, but this too was quickly silenced after

Lt. Col. Dwight Dillon led the 2nd Battalion, 23rd Marines during the battle to wrest the airfield on Roi from Japanese control. The Marines who fought at Roi-Namur in early 1944 received their baptism of fire.

Marines crept close enough to pelt its entrance with grenades.

While Scales' men were securing Wendy Point, Captain William Weinstein's Company B pushed effortlessly inland to join Dillon's men along the crater-pitted runway, where resistance proved feeble at best. Live Japanese were scarce. At times, Bangalore torpedoes or satchel charges were required to snuff out a few pernicious riflemen, who sniped from nearby trenches and debris-shrouded culverts, but by 1 p.m. all elements were on line and anxious to proceed.

By then Colonel Jones had landed and set up his regimental command post near the beach. Ecstatic at the ease of the operation, he radioed General Schmidt aboard the amphibious support ship USS Appalachian. "This is a pip," he crowed, adding a few minutes later, "Give us the word and we'll take the rest of the island." General Schmidt advised Jones to calm down and prepare for the second phase of the attack.

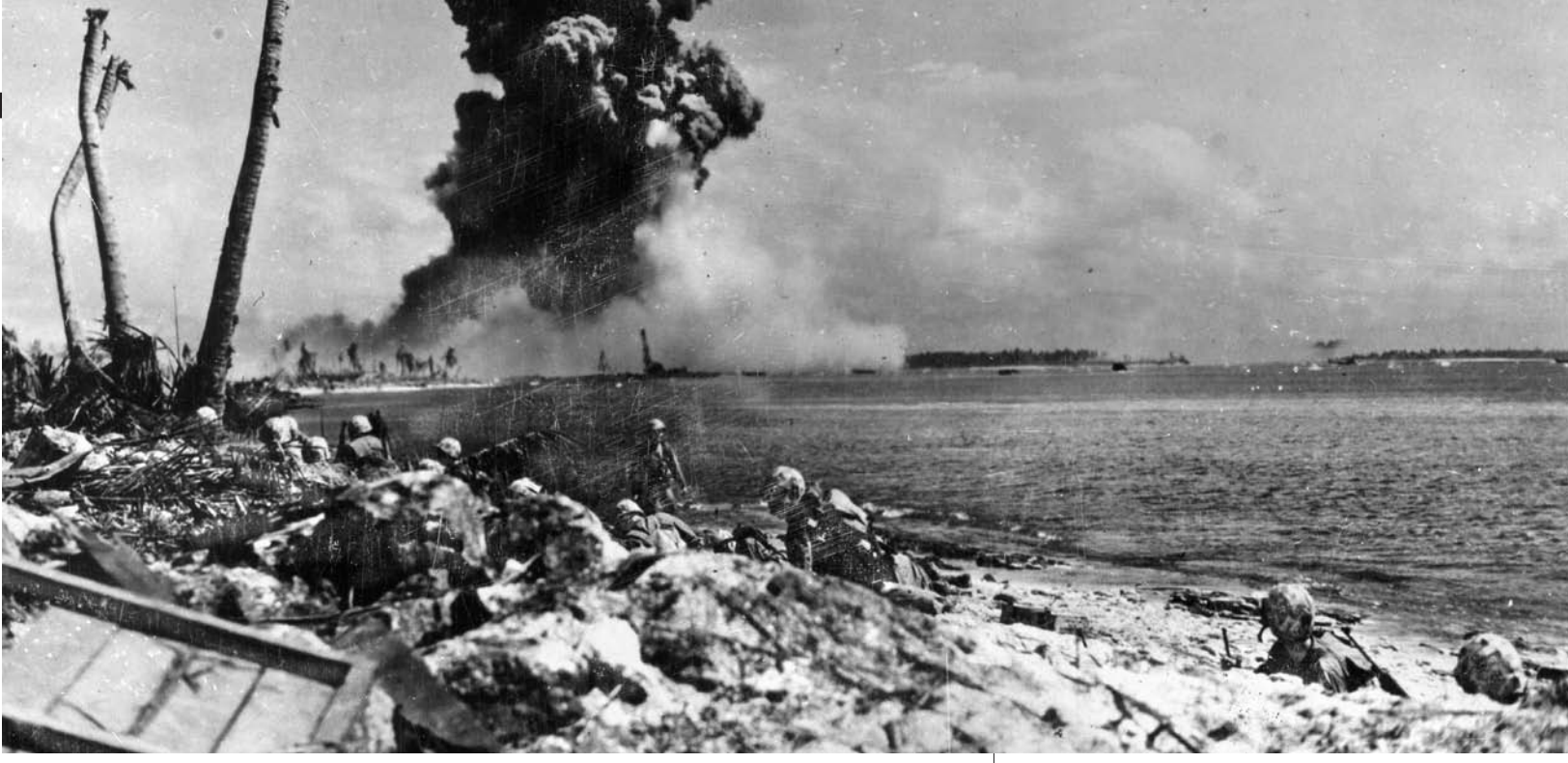
Captain Robert Neiman, commander of Company C, 4th Tank Battalion, had no intention of settling down. His M4 mediums sat idle and exposed on the flat, open terrain, presenting juicy targets for the numerous antitank guns reported to infest the area. Favoring action over inaction, Neiman ordered his command to advance. The tanks set off, blasting every suspicious structure with their 75mm guns while bow gunners mowed down individual Japanese soldiers, who scurried like frightened rabbits before the massive treads. Upon seeing the tanks lumbering across the plain, the Marines of Company A moved out to provide protection while a platoon of amtanks waddled up the western coast in support. By 1:30 p.m. several M4s were dueling with enemy machine gunners defending the northeastern runway terminus called Nat Circle, while six others prowled the northern airstrip. It seemed as if victory was at hand.

However, General Schmidt was not pleased with this unauthorized action and ordered Jones to recall his wildcats lest they fall victim to the preliminary bombardment scheduled for the final push. It took nearly an hour before the mavericks were reined in and order was restored at the O-1 Line. Phase Two was to be launched at 3:15 p.m. with each assault battalion pushing straight up its respective half of the island.

At 3:10p.m., the cruiser Santa Fe commenced pumping five-inch shells into troublesome Nat Circle. Twenty minutes later, the 2nd Battalion jumped off, supported by a 75mm halftrack firing from mid-island. Although 20mm fire sputtered from Nat Circle, resistance was sporadic at best with Marines discovering many more dead than living Japanese. Within seven minutes Captain John Padley's Company F was clearing out skeletal hangars along the northern runway while Captain Neiman's tanks reengaged the enemy defending Nat Circle. Captain Carl Grussendorf's Company E kept pace on Padley's left. While advancing, four of Grussendorf's Marines tumbled into a shell hole, believing that enemy soldiers occupied a nearby trench. Unwilling to take unnecessary chances, Pfc. Richard Anderson had just pulled the pin of a grenade when it slipped from his grip and rolled to the bottom of their crater. Realizing his blunder, Anderson threw himself on the bomb to save his comrades. He was awarded a posthumous Medal of Honor.

Initially, Hammond's 1st Battalion remained stationary to provide supporting fire for Dillon's men and did not join the advance until 4 p.m. Led by a platoon of light tanks, Captain Fred Eberhardt's fresh Company C bolted up the western seashore trailed by three 75mm halftrack guns. Mutilated Japanese corpses littered the landscape, residue of the fierce naval bombardment. The little resistance encountered came in the form of isolated rifle and machine-gun fire. In less than an hour Eberhardt's men were mopping up Norbert Circle on the island's northwestern corner.

Now only Nat Circle remained. Although Captain Neiman's tanks had knocked out several enemy positions, one pillbox continued to spew machine-gun fire in three directions. Colonel Dillon ordered his reserve, Captain Frank Snepp's Company G, to knock it out. While a half-track battered its steel door with 75mm rounds, a demolitions team closed in for the kill. When someone noticed a rent in the roof, a Bangalore-toting Marine climbed up and jammed his torpedo through the fissure while comrades ignited shaped charges at the apertures. Before the dust had settled, a half dozen Marines dashed inside and found three machine guns and three dead gunners. They also noted that the fort's firing slits, like many of the island's defenses, faced only north, east, and west, making their lagoon approach immeasurably easier. By 4:45 p.m., all major resistance on



Having taken cover on the beach at Roi, American Marines look across the lagoon toward Namur as a huge explosion destroys a Japanese bunker. Marines on the adjacent island had placed a satchel charge to destroy the bunker, and its demolition ignited an ammunition storage area with spectacular results.

Roi had ceased. Although the usual mopping up had yet to be completed, Colonel Jones declared the island secure at 6:02 p.m.

For the most part, the battle for Roi had indeed been a pip. Namur would prove to be a different story.

A thousand yards from Namur's beaches the jumbled assault waves of the 24th Marines churned past the rocket-spewing LCI(G)s as they skittered toward war's seething cauldron. Nearly three dozen cannon-wielding amtanks of Companies B and D, 1st Armored Amphibian Battalion led the way, ordered to push 100 yards inland upon landing. For unknown reasons, the entire wave pulled up 50 yards short of the surf line where the landing craft continued to blast the unseen enemy.

Minutes later the infantry's amtracs scuttled past the reluctant LVT(A)s. Chancing enemy fire, 2nd Lt. John Chapin of Company K peered over the bow of his vehicle and searched for his assigned landing site on Green Beach One. He saw nothing but roiling smoke and dust. Uncertain, he turned to consult with his platoon sergeant only to discover his right-hand man slumped over dead, his skull reduced to bloody pulp. Unnerved, Chapin refocused on the island before him.

Several hundred yards to Chapin's right the amphibious tractors of Second Battalion clambered over Green Beach Two a bit before noon, while his own battalion struck Green One shortly after. All came in with machine guns blazing, intending to disgorge their Marines 100 yards inland, but as on Roi a deep antitank ditch forced them to an abrupt halt. Officers bellowed, "Let's go!" and vaulted the gunwales. Covering fire rose to a crescendo as heavily-laden Marines plunged a full seven feet to the beach below and then scrambled forward a few yards to belly flop, breathless, before the impeding ditch.

On Green One intermittent machine-gun fire scattered several boat teams as Captain Albert Arsenault's Company I and Captain Doyle Stout's Company K disembarked. Lying in the sand, Chapin asked his platoon guide if he knew his men's location. No sooner had the sergeant commenced pointing than his hand disintegrated in a spray of blood and bone. Wild eyed, the sergeant gripped his splintered stump and began yelling, "Sailor! Sailor!" employing the current term for corpsman, having been told that snipers understood the latter's meaning and would invariably target any medic who hastened to his aid. Having lost two key subordinates within a matter of minutes, young Chapin pondered whether Namur was about to degenerate into another Tarawa.

On Green Two elements of both assault companies also became intertwined upon landing, but fortunately resistance in their sector was nearly nonexistent. Occasionally, a Japanese soldier would spring from a trench, snap off a round or two, then disappear. Marines answered with a shower of grenades followed by a headlong charge, which ended the gunman's life. Only on the far right was serious opposition experienced when erratic machine-gun fire raked Company F from a pillbox planted above Sally Point on the extreme southeastern promontory. But this, too, was soon quelled with the cooperation of the heavy weapons of the 25th Marines firing from neighboring Ennugarret Island.

The boat and assault teams quickly cleared both beaches and pressed rapidly inland only to encounter an unexpected obstacle. Roi had been flat and open to accommodate the airfield, but Namur was heavily foliaged. Now, thanks to the savage naval bombardment, heaps of palm fronds, splintered trunks, and other debris meshed with the undergrowth to shroud the island's buildings, bunkers, and pillboxes from view. As a result, the Marines advanced with measured caution. Some-

times a lone defender would stagger from concealment in a desperate bid to die for his emperor accompanied by one or two others, but all fell in a hail of bullets. Elsewhere, defiant pillboxes required the skills of demolitions men while lesser positions were left for followup troops. Within 15 minutes many teams had penetrated to a depth of 200 yards.

At this point, the left flank of Brink's 2nd Battalion lost contact with Brunelli's 3rd. This troubling situation developed after elements of Company E landed directly behind Company F on Green Beach Two. Upon entering the jumbled vegetation, both companies became tangled, with much of Company E somehow winding up on the battalion's right flank—a complete reversal of the order of advance. As a result, a substantial gap appeared on the battalions' boundary. Fortunately, about half of Captain Berkeley's Company G had made landfall by then and was immediately dispatched to plug the gap. However, these troops ran into ever stiffening resistance from isolated enemy machine guns and riflemen and got no farther than 175 yards from the beach. Although they stumbled upon a lost team from Company E, the reserve was unable to gain contact with either assault battalion.

Captain Berkeley's men were not the only ones having a rough time. In the 3rd Battalion sector an assault team led by Chapin converged with that of Lieutenant John Power before a large, aggressively defended strongpoint constructed of sand-filled oil drums. Every attempt to bypass it was thwarted by scathing gunfire. Chapin and Power crouched behind a concrete wall 25 feet distant to formulate a plan. Under heavy covering fire, Power led a pair of automatic riflemen to the rear entrance while Chapin and another Marine armed with a Bangalore torpedo crept up to a narrow entrance near the front. Chapin flipped in a grenade, buying time for his companion to shove home the torpedo. Both rolled away just as the entrance collapsed in an effusion of smoke and dust. Mission accomplished, they quickly joined Lieu-

ABOVE: With a couple of Marines watching intently, an M4 Sherman medium tank moves across the sandy berm adjacent to the beach at Namur. OPPOSITE: The defending Japanese had heavily fortified an administration building on Namur, and these American Marines are taking cover during operations to silence enemy rifles and machine guns firing at them from its windows and apertures. An American aircraft flying in support of the ground troops is visible in the distance.

tenant Power, who had somehow acquired a shaped charge. This time Power led the assault and the rear entrance vanished in a deafening roar as the bunker went silent. About then Chapin noticed blood oozing from Power's belly, but Power simply shrugged it off and rejoined his platoon.

A short time later Power faced another menacing pillbox. Intent on repeating his earlier feat, Power and a demolitions man darted forward and placed their charge against its door, then winced as the blast ripped open a jagged hole. Pressing one hand against his bleeding stomach, Power inserted his carbine into the jagged slot and emptied its magazine. As he paused to reload, shots sounded from within. Power reeled as another bullet punched his gut while a third ripped out his throat. Enraged, his Marines rushed forward and finished the job. Power was awarded a posthumous Medal of Honor.

Despite such desperate actions, enemy resistance remained scattered and uncoordinated. Captain Milton Cokin's Company B hit Green Beach One at 12:45 p.m. and commenced mopping-up operations. Three light tanks of Company B, 4th Tank Battalion followed only to become immobilized by soft sand and shell holes. Just as the crews dismounted to free their vehicles nearly three dozen Japanese swarmed from supposedly vacant pillboxes and charged the tankers, who cut them down with small arms, netting two prisoners in the process at the cost of one Marine.

Meanwhile, Lt. Col. Brunelli's battalion pushed steadily up the western half of Namur with one flank hugging the coast as his teams plunged steadily toward the O-1 Phase Line set at an east-west road codenamed Sycamore Boulevard, roughly two-thirds of the way inland. However, as with the rest of the island, this defining landmark was obscured by debris making it difficult for onsite commanders to determine its location.

To the east, the right flank of Lt. Col. Brink's disorganized 2nd Battalion was badgered by intense machine-gun fire coming from a sturdy blockhouse guarding Nut Lane near Nadine Point midway up the coast. Less than 200 yards to the left, other elements pulled up short of Sycamore when another large bunker loomed into view. There was no indication that it was occupied, but it was feared that any attempt to bypass it would result in heavy flanking fire or counterattacks from any defenders who

might be waiting inside. Realizing it would be foolhardy to ignore it, demolitions men were summoned to ply their trade.

An assault team led by Lieutenant Saul Stein of Company F approached from the left while Lieutenant Joseph E. Lo Prete's group from Company E closed in from the right. Demolitions men edged forward and placed a shaped charge against the bunker's wall then quickly backed away. Upon detonation, 20 or more occupants bolted for the surrounding bush, no doubt convinced that they had just survived a potentially fatal blast. Once the dust settled it became obvious that the charge had done its job—a cavernous hole yawned from the building's side. The sappers moved in again, this time with satchel charges that were flung into the gaping maw. What happened next was incomprehensible.

Everything within sight vanished in one catastrophic explosion. Smoke and fire and chunks of concrete shot skyward as if launched by a volcanic eruption, drawing up a dark gritty cloud that soared to a height of 1,000 feet or more. Those Marines not killed outright were rendered speechless, stunned by the sheer magnitude of the blast. Concussion waves bowled over men and trees and swept the lagoon with such force that incoming landing craft were stopped dead in the water. One Marine from Company F was blasted clear out to sea where he was later rescued, unbelievably intact, by the Navy. High overhead an aerial observer reported, "The whole damned island has blown up!"

At the moment of detonation every Marine's face on neighboring Roi snapped "Eyes Right!" with parade ground precision. Many believed that the entirety of Namur had been destroyed and every Marine there killed. Others thought that either the Navy had resumed its shelling or that a 500- or 1,000-pound bomb had been inadvertently dropped. Later evidence proved that the bunker had been utilized as a munitions storage facility that housed 100 or more torpedo warheads that were detonated by the demolition team's satchel charges.

A heavy brown cloud billowed from the epicenter and seeped across Namur like something inherently evil. Suddenly no one could see. Marines gagged and choked as acrid fumes clogged their lungs. Fearing that the Japanese had launched a chemical attack, a few cried, "Gas! Gas!" as they searched frantically for protective masks discarded earlier as useless equipment.

But the nightmare had only begun. Suddenly, monolithic chunks of reinforced concrete came screaming to earth like killer asteroids, accompanied by smaller but no less deadly missiles of concrete, splintered tree trunks, and lumber, some of which splashed far out to sea. At least one Marine was crushed by the unholy avalanche, and others were injured. In addition, scores of the stowed torpedo warheads tumbled from the darkness, some of which exploded upon impact.

In rapid succession, two more shattering detonations wracked the front, possibly

from other bunkers. For a time, chaos reigned. In all, 20 Marines were killed and some 100 wounded. The effect on Captain Garretson's Company F was devastating: 14 killed including Lieutenant Stein and 43 wounded. Lt. Col. Brink was also injured but refused evacuation and quickly called up his recently landed reserve, Company A, to bolster his devastated command.

While these morale-sapping events disrupted the regiment's momentum, they seemed to have encouraged the Japanese. Suddenly, the entire front came alive with the distinctive chatter of Nambu machine guns and the crack of Arisaka rifles. From that moment the battle took a dramatic turn for the worse. What had once been a steady drive against fragmented and poorly organized defenders now disintegrated into an inch-by-inch progression as the scattered teams closed on the O-1 Line. By 2 p.m. most had gained Sycamore Boulevard, but every attempt to cross was checked by intense machine-gun fire from three well-placed blockhouses fronting the Second Battalion sector: one at Nubbin Lane in the island's center, another located at the end of Nut Lane, not far from Nadine Point on the east coast, and a third at a nearby intersection designated Road Junction 58. The tempo slowed and then ground to a halt.

By that time, the regimental command post was ashore and fully operational. Realizing that the enemy had shaken off the stunning effects of the naval bombardment, Colonel Hart ordered a general halt to reorganize and reinforce his front with orders to resume offensive operations at 4:30 p.m.

With the 2nd Battalion still reeling from the bunker catastrophe, Captain Irvin Schechter's Company A assumed operations on the far right flank while Captain Horace Parks' freshly arrived Company C moved up to relieve the shaken Company E. At the same time, Captain Houston Stiff's Company L, which had finally found enough boats to make the landing, moved up to 3rd Battalion to relieve Company B from its mopping-up duties, enabling that unit to replace battle-weary Company K, which in turn was sent to Pauline Point, the finger-like sandbar jutting between Roi and Namur, to provide flanking fire for the upcoming attack alongside the regiment's heavier weapons.

Now reorganized, the front ran from left to right as follows: Company I anchored the western shore abutting Company B near the junction of Sycamore Boulevard and Nasturtiam Lane while Company L hunkered as Third Battalion reserve. In the center, half of Second Battalion's Company G carried the line eastward along Sycamore Boulevard with Companies F, C, and A extending the front toward Nadine Point; remnants of Company E remained on line, having failed to learn of their relief.

As the hour of attack drew nearer, several light tanks and LVT(A)s rumbled up and commenced pumping 37mm shells into the three troublesome blockhouses that had plagued the infantry along Sycamore Boulevard. While those at Nubbin Lane and the road junction were neutralized, the guns proved too feeble to penetrate the thick concrete of the Nut Lane box, which remained a thorn in the battalion's side for the balance of the day.

At precisely 4:30 p.m., Brunelli's Third Battalion launched its attack but was stunned by the ferocity of the Japanese response. Pockets of resistance more than made up for their lack of coordination with a tenacity born of desperation, pecking away with machine guns and sniper fire as Marines dashed forward amid bursting mortar shells. The dense terrain continued to mask enemy strongpoints, and the advance on the left was justifiably slow. At one point, Corporal Alex Haluchak's squad of Company B was

pinned down by heavy machine-gun fire. Haluchak, already twice wounded, told his men to sit tight while he scouted the gun's location. Now alone in enemy territory, he stormed the menacing weapon and killed its crew, enabling his squad to proceed. Haluchak received the Navy Cross.

On the right the confusion of reorganization delayed the 2nd Battalion's attack for another hour. Supported by the light tanks of Company B, 4th Tank Battalion, the infantry crossed Sycamore Boulevard and waded into a jungle crackling with small-arms fire. Being forced to investigate every damaged building and pile of debris, the infantry soon lost contact with the tanks. The armor pressed on, covering one another with machine-gun and canister fire as they negotiated the jungle-like terrain. Within 20 minutes it had gained Narcissus Street, 300 yards beyond the line of departure. Here, several tanks pivoted right and churned down the road as it cut southeast toward a junction with Sycamore Boulevard.

After dodging one obstacle, Captain James Denig's command tank became isolated from the others, so Denig stopped in a clearing to gain his bearings. At that moment, five Japanese charged from the underbrush and swarmed his vehicle. One mounted the turret and dropped a grenade through a small signal port left open for ventilation, wounding the entire crew while setting the compartment on fire. Just then Pfc. Howard Smith of Company A broke through the brush and sprayed the tank with his BAR, killing four assailants while a buddy picked off the fifth. Climbing aboard the smoldering wreck, Smith pulled the mortally wounded Denig from the hatch then returned to extract two others but failed to rescue the driver who perished in the flames. Smith's actions earned him a Navy Cross.

ABOVE: For some Japanese soldiers defending Roi-Namur, surrender was such a dishonor that suicide was preferable. This Japanese soldier killed himself as American Marines closed in on his position atop one of the few hills on the islands. OPPOSITE: Cautious with every step, these Marines pick their way through the ruins of a building previously used by the Japanese on Roi-Namur to store ammunition.

Meanwhile, Captain Garretson's decimated Company F finally broke through in the center and also reached Narcissus Lane, only 35 yards from the northern beach. Lacking proper support, Garretson was ordered back 100 yards where his men maintained a bulging salient.

Things were perhaps even more desperate on the far right where elements of Company A pushed up the eastern coast near Nadine Point. At the tip of the spear was an irascible, tobacco-chewing former Marine Raider, Corporal Arthur Ervin, who charged far ahead of the lead scouts, flinging grenades and triggering round after round at every Japanese soldier he saw. When the company came upon the formidable blockhouse at Nut Lane, it was Ervin who led the assault. First Lieutenant Roy Wood's platoon was hot on Ervin's tail when heavy gunfire drove them to ground.

Dodging bullets, Lieutenant Phil Wood (no relation to Roy) and machine gunners George Smith and 18-year-old Steve Hopkins, son of presidential adviser Harry Hopkins, tumbled into a trench where they set up their Browning. Smith quickly went to work, adding havoc to mayhem while Wood summoned Hopkins to follow him farther down the trench. En route they passed a Japanese "corpse" that suddenly sprang to life and pulled a grenade. Hopkins was startled, and his rifle was nearly touching the soldier's skull when he pulled his trigger. The Japanese brute simply shook his head, as if stunned. Shocked, Hopkins quickly emptied an entire clip into the superman. "Did you see, Mr. Wood?" Hopkins queried incredulously. "Did you see the grenade? Did you see what he was about to do?"

Just then Japanese mortar rounds began plunking near the trench. Undaunted, the impetuous Ervin vaulted the parapet to conduct a one-man reconnaissance of the imposing Nut Lane blockhouse, killing two machine gunners as he did so while enemy bullets ripped the helmet from his head. Upon his return, Ervin gave his report. Lieutenant Phil Wood decided his platoon's 60mm mortars were the answer, but before the weapons could be deployed bazooka rounds slammed into the bunker and Marines rushed forward. First to arrive were Ervin and Lieutenant Harry Reynolds, the company executive officer. Both whipped grenades through the embrasures until gunfire from a nearby dugout punctured Ervin's abdomen, evoking a litany of curses. Lieutenants Reynolds, Wood, and Wood grabbed a few men and rushed the offending position, bombarding it with grenades and rifle fire as Sergeant Frank Tucker and Corporal Franklin Robbins sprang up and charged. Tucker shot an enemy rifleman guarding the dugout's entrance, then both ducked inside and riddled the interior with bullets, killing every enemy soldier.

Meanwhile, the Nut Lane bunker resumed firing. Hoping to outflank it, a dozen Marines crossed Sycamore Boulevard only to come under fire from a maze of entrenchments near the beach. Before others could join them, heavy machine-gun fire swept the road, denying further penetration. Led by Lieutenants Roy Wood and Reynolds, the isolated squad took matters into its own hands. Platoon Sergeant James Adams, a tagalong from battalion headquarters, charged the trench and gunned down a machine-gun crew only to crumple dead in a hail of bullets. Close by, Corporal Robbins emptied several clips, singlehandedly stopping an

enemy counterattack before falling himself. Reynolds dropped several Japanese soldiers from behind a fallen log until a bullet slashed his leg.

Down the line, Sergeant Tucker stood upright behind a shattered tree trunk and zeroed in on dozens of enemy soldiers who scurried in the trenches a mere 15 yards away. Return fire ripped bark from Tucker's meager shelter. One round pierced his helmet and another drained his canteen, but Tucker kept firing. Noting Tucker's advantageous position, other Marines began tossing him grenades which the sergeant hurled into the trench until all were exhausted. More bullets whacked Tucker's tree. Sensing disaster, the sergeant called for covering fire. Pfcs. Lawrence Knight and Lester Kincaid hammered away with their BARs. Just as Tucker scuttled away, a bullet splattered Knight's cheek. Angered, Knight resighted his weapon and resumed firing until Reynolds ordered him to seek aid.

Their blood up, the other Marines closed in and drove the defenders from their works, killing a least 30 as they scampered for the shelter of another pillbox. By then dusk had arrived and the surviving Marines dug in, still separated from their comrades.

As daylight waned, Colonel Hart opted to cease offensive operations in favor of digging in with expectations of securing the island the following morning. Knowing that the northern beaches were but 200 yards away, the few combat veterans thought this folly. Having experienced the terror of Japanese infiltration tactics and the obligatory Banzai attack, these old hands believed the regiment should have pressed on and finished the job. But being Marines, they obediently pulled their entrenching tools and began hacking at the soil.

Darkness fell. Star shells popped and shimmered throughout the night, illuminating a landscape rife with rotting corpses, shredded foliage, and the battered ruins of the enemy's structures. No one slept. At times the highpitched crack of Arisaka rifles sounded from the rear as well as the front and flanks, bearing evi-

ABOVE: Weary of fighting, a Japanese soldier raises his hands in surrender at Roi-Namur as a companion begins climbing out of a hole near the center of this photograph. These are two of only a handful of Japanese troops that survived the fighting on Roi-Namur, choosing surrender rather than suicide. A wary Marine covers the prisoner with his rifle, taking no chances. OPPOSITE: A Marine corpsman gives medical aid to a wounded Japanese soldier at Roi-Namur. By early 1944, the American juggernaut across the Central Pacific was beginning to gain momentum.

dence that the enemy was indeed all around. American arms responded, stitching the darkness with neon tracers. At times resolute infiltrators died at the rims of hastily dug foxholes. Marines died too, including young "Hoppy" Hopkins, who had earlier saved his lieutenant's life. Hopkins was mortally wounded while pulling flank security near Nadine Point.

Just before daybreak a rustling in the brush fronting the 3rd Battalion caused eyes to strain and heartbeats to quicken. Trigger fingers tensed as the thrashing swelled to a universal clamor, and then it happened. "Banzai! Banzai!" Japanese soldiers burst from the undergrowth in groups of 10 to 20, yelling madly and brandishing rifles, bayonets, and swords. The Marines let loose with everything they had. A gap between Companies I and B was exploited, and the fight degenerated into a tangle of bayonets, knives, and clubbed rifles. Only the timely arrival of Company L and a few medium tanks stabilized the situation. Now reinforced, the Marines counterattacked.

During the melee, six Marines had taken position in a shell hole when something thudded and rolled sputtering to their feet. Private Richard Sorenson hesitated and then threw himself on the grenade just as it exploded. In a nearby crater, Corpsman James Kirby was treating several patients after they had been overrun earlier that night and heard Sorenson's screams. Scrambling to his assistance, Kirby dragged Sorenson to his impromptu aid station, now overflowing with 15 wounded Marines. Although grievously wounded, Sorenson survived to receive the Medal of Honor for saving his buddies' lives.

The entire action was over within 35 minutes. Company B's Third Platoon had nearly been wiped out, but more than 100 enemy corpses were strewn before its position. As a precaution against similar attacks, Lt. Col. Brunelli ordered Company K to rejoin his command from Pauline Point.

General Schmidt, the divisional commander, had landed the previous evening and took command of the entire operation. Wanting to reinforce his line, he ordered Captain Neiman's Company C, 4th Tank Battalion and a battalion of the 23rd to cross from Roi to Namur. At that time only four tanks had sufficient fuel and ammunition to make

the trip. These had assisted 3rd Battalion in repelling the early morning Banzai attack. But now, with supplies stockpiling on both beaches, the balance of Neiman's command was fueled, armed, and moving into position. The men of the 23rd were held as reserve.

The attack would resume at 9 AM. Company K, now reunited with Landing Team Three, would roll up the western shore with Companies I and L deployed to its right and supported by two platoons of Captain Neiman's medium tanks. Captain Cokin's decimated Company B was pulled back as battalion reserve.

Lieutenant Colonel Aquilla Dyess of 1st Battalion assumed command of the right flank after Francis Brink had been evacuated for wounds received during the bunker explosion. Dyess kept Company G, now intact, tied in with Brunelli's battalion while Companies F, C, and A extended his line to the eastern shore. Captain Ross's Company E remained in battalion reserve while Company B, 4th Tank Battalion would provide support.

The attack jumped off on schedule with Brunelli's men easily overrunning the few enemy troops that remained. Within two hours his battalion had reached Nora Point on the island's northwest corner where it wheeled right to sweep the oceanside beaches.

Colonel Dyess did not get started until 10:05 AM due to the late arrival of his armor. The stubborn Nut Lane blockhouse continued to defy every attempt against it until tanks and half-tracks beat it into submission. After that the pace accelerated. Dyess seemed to be everywhere at once, cajoling reluctant Marines here and leading others there as they combed the underbrush of battle-weary Japanese. By mid-day his Marines were within sight of the northern beaches where 25 to 30 Japanese had rallied in a deep antitank ditch. A platoon of light tanks trundled up and scoured the trough with machine-gun and canister fire. That done, Dyess sprinted to the ditch's rim to direct one final assault, and a burst of machine gunfire ripped through his body. For his dynamic leadership and unflinching courage, Dyess was awarded a posthumous Medal of Honor, the fourth and final such award for the two-day battle.

Shortly after noon, both battalions converged near Natalie Point, the island's northernmost promontory, where the Marines ferreted out the last of the diehard defenders. By 2 p.m. the battle for Roi-Namur was over and the coveted airfield in American hands. The victors were appalled at the slaughter—numerous ditches and trenches overflowed with mangled corpses, in places heaped five deep. Most of these were victims of the fierce naval bombardment. Every building, tree, and shrub lay in shambles. Of the 3,563 defenders, only 92 were taken prisoner, more than half of them Korean laborers. The others were too stunned to resist. The Marines suffered 737 casualties in taking both islands, 190 killed. Four Medals of Honor and 17 Navy Crosses attest to the Marines' courage; who knows how many unseen or unreported acts of valor were performed.

Operation Flintlock was declared an unequivocal success. Having learned the bloody lessons of Tarawa, the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps had devised the blueprint for further amphibious operations, a plan that, with some tweaking, would prove invaluable through subsequent campaigns.

With the Army's success at Kwajalein and another Marine victory at Eniwetok later that month, the conquest of the Marshalls was complete and the stage set for the assault on the Marianas, from which American bombers could stage raids on the Japanese mainland.

The struggle for Roi-Namur was the first combat action for the 4th Marine Division. The survivors would be engaged in other, bloodier battles as they did their part to dismantle the forces of Imperial Japan, including Saipan, Tinian, and ultimately the uncompromising horror that was Iwo Jima. But it was Roi-Namur where the Marines of the "Fighting Fourth" received their baptism of fire. Always attacking. Never looking back.

Cleve C. Barkley writes from his home in Loraine, Illinois, with a focus on military history. He is the author of the book In Death's Dark Shadow: A Soldier's Story, *which chronicles his father's service as an infantryman in the ETO.*

Continued from page 15

On the Road

Then, in a major February offensive, the Americans pushed out of the Hürtgen Forest onto more open terrain and crossed the Roer River on the way to the Rhine River. The going was tough because the weather was unsettled, with much driving snow, heavy rain, cloudy mist, dense fog, and low temperatures, while many of the roads were torn up, muddy, or unimproved.

On February 23, the 893rd was still in the forest, but not for long, as German tanks and other armored vehicles soon began to reappear as the fighting spilled into terrain more suitable for mobile combat.

At 4:40 p.m. on February 28, Kenney's 1st Platoon reported to the battalion headquarters that Company B had destroyed one enemy Mark IV tank at a range of 1,000 yards using three armor-piercing capped rounds. Another panzer, a Mark V Panther, was knocked out at a range of 700 yards with two high-velocity armor-piercing rounds. The 1st Platoon also killed five enemy soldiers and destroyed a German observation post using five high-explosive rounds—examples of excellent marksmanship.

The three types of American tank ammunition described above—Armor Piercing Capped (APC), High Velocity Armor Piercing (HVAP), and High Explosive (HE)—were part of the tank destroyer "basic load" of ammunition. Knocking out a German Panther or Tigewith the first-two cited ammunition types was difficult at best.

American gunners had learned that the panzers' heavy frontal armor meant that the best chance of scoring a decisive hit was to aim at their less-well-armored rear, or at the road wheels. Even then, such hits did not necessarily put the enemy tanks out of action. The American TD's gun, it was discovered, was more effective against the German medium Mark IV tank.

At the end of February, the Americans were about to find a quick way across the Rhine River—the main natural obstacle to reaching the heartland of Germany and the end of the war in Northwest Europe.

Kenney's platoon advanced with the rest

National Archives

ABOVE: A M18 Hellcat from the 824th TD Battalion blasts German positions near Wiesloch, Germany. The M18 was faster, but lightly armored and some TD units preferred the heavier armor on the M10. RIGHT: 1st Sgt. Dean Kenney celebrates the world's return to peace with his wife Diane at Tom Breneman's popular restaurant at Sunset and Vine in Hollywood.

of the American forces to the Rhine when the still-intact railroad bridge at Remagen was captured. There were no more tank targets for his platoon to engage before the unit itself crossed the river. The tank destroyers, therefore, once again fired in conjunction with the American artillery to deliver indirect fire in support of the troops who had first crossed the Rhine on March 7 and beyond.

Eight days after the first crossing of the river, the 893rd was also on the east shore with the action picking up. Supporting an infantry company of the 78th Infantry Division, Company B's third platoon knocked out three Tiger tanks, destroyed two armored personnel carriers, and captured 22 prisoners while killing 19 of the enemy.

The weather was also improving, and it was possible for the tank destroyers to move faster. Better roads also made it easier to advance, and drier weather enhanced cross-country movement.

But while action against the Germans was yielding massive numbers of prisoners and the capture of many towns and villages almost without opposition, Company B was experiencing some personnel difficulties.

On March 20, Company B's commander, 1st Lt. Jack W. Fuller, met with the 893rd Battalion's commander, Lt. Col. Henry Kerlin, to discuss possible personnel changes in the company—including a request that Kenney, the unit's senior NCO, be promoted to platoon sergeant of the 3rd Platoon. For Kenney, it was also a step towards becoming the top-ranking soldier in a company—that of first sergeant.

While great progress was being made to master the enemy, American casualties were beginning to add up. On April 5, an M10 in Company B's 2nd Platoon received a direct hit from a German Mark IV tank

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or anti-tank gun, wounding all of the TD crew and killing the platoon leader, 1st Lt. William J. Ellis. Luckily, such casualties in the company were few.

Three days later, a report to the battalion headquarters stated that a TD in Company B's 3rd Platoon had knocked the track off a Tiger tank. The round of ammunition that hit the tank would also have disabled it and, if it also penetrated the tank from the rear, would have killed the crew.

There was, however, no mention in the battalion after-action report specifying the killed German soldiers as being tank crew members, but it is probable that it was this action in which Kenney is described in a memorandum written by another soldier:

"Dean [Kenney] and another [soldier] were told to go on recon [reconnaissance]. I don't know if they were using M4 Shermans or M10 tank destroyers. They were traveling on a large open area when Dean noticed how much dust they were raising. Dean headed for a somewhat paved road a few minutes later. He heard a large explosion and saw the other tank hit about a quarter-mile away. He knew it was an enemy tank and wondered if he had been seen also.

"He then saw a barn near the road with one wall standing. Dean drove his tank behind this wall. Minutes later they felt the ground shaking and, as Dean looked through the spaces between the wood, it looked like a house had moved there. Dean knew it was a dreaded Tiger. It was on the road, stopped with its very loud engine running.

"Dean started his tank knowing that the Germans would not hear him and backed out and got behind the German tank. He told the gunner to load and he asked what kind of shell; Dean said 'Anything.' The gun was lowered but it would have hit the Tiger's turret. He backed the tank up so the shot would hit the radiator section of the tank. Dean said 'I knew I penetrated the tank as dust blew out of the hatches and openings. We ran to the tank, opened the hatches; they were all dead.'"

There is no other confirmation of this action taking place in the unit's after-action report or operations logs and, as is often the case, details in the heat of battle become confused, exaggerated, or nonexistent. The memo is to be taken simply as a second-hand recounting of an action that can be viewed as a personal account seen from the perspective of an individual known to Kenney.

While Kenney never purported to be a hero, his competence as a TD leader was recognized a few months after the Northwest Europe campaign ended. He was transferred to the 630th Tank Destroyer Battalion (SP) and promoted to first sergeant of Company C. He held that position when, in March 1946, he returned with the battalion to the United States.

Kenney's Post-War Military Career

His April 7, 1946, honorable discharge from the U.S. Army did not require further service in the Army, but Kenney nevertheless decided to remain an inactive member of the Army's Enlisted Reserve Corps. In doing so, he was promoted to the rank of master sergeant.

In June 1950 the North Koreans invaded South Korea. Kenney was not recalled to active duty to participate in that conflict but nonetheless volunteered for an assignment as a trainer with the 31st AAA Brigade at Fort Lewis, Washington.

His performance of duty there led to his consideration for commissioning in the U.S. Army Reserve, but he did not follow through to obtain a commission. His Army career came full circle when, in the spring of 1951, he served, still in the anti-tank mode, on the Tactics Committee of the 7th Armored Division at Camp Roberts, California, located north of Los Angeles.

Due to changes in U.S. Army doctrine, the tank-destroyer branch, with just 63 active battalions at war's end, was disbanded and replaced by the M26 Pershing heavy tank with a 90mm gun. The last TD battalion was disbanded in 1946.

As one of over 15 million Americans who served in the armed forces during World War II, Dean Kenney, who passed away on April 11, 1998 in Culver City, California, exemplified the type of individual who uncomplainingly did his duty to the best of his ability and played his part in ensuring an Allied victory. ☐

Jug Pilot

Continued from page 67

He joined the Air Force Reserves to make a little extra money and still serve his country. When the Air Force Academy was being developed in Colorado Springs, he was assigned to visit local high schools and get kids interested in applying to become cadets. He stayed in the reserves for 28 years, retiring at the grade of lieutenant colonel.

He was the Director of Athletics at Milton Hershey, at an orphan school for boys in Hershey, Pennsylvania. After three years, he went to West Chester State College, where he taught swimming and classroom subjects, and coached tennis, football, baseball, and golf. Eventually, he taught in the graduate school and became the Associate Dean, until retiring at age 57.

About the years after World War II, Cottrell said, "For a long time, I didn't talk about the war. I wanted to forget it. Then about 15 years ago, at one of our squadron reunions, we talked about how the country was different now.

"So, at that reunion, we all said that if we were ever asked, we would talk about our military experiences. That's why I talk about what we went through in order to preserve the freedom of this country. If Hitler had been successful, he wouldn't have stopped at anything. Thank the Lord, *we* stopped him."

Ed and Millie lived in Florida and Pinehurst, North Carolina, before moving to Hendersonville, North Carolina. She had worked as a physical education, health, and dancing teacher in many schools over the years, sometimes even with her husband. The couple celebrated their 76th wedding anniversary on April 21, 2020. ☐

This story is from the book "We Shall Come Home Victorious." Stories of WWII Veterans, *by Janis Allen. tinyurl.com/We-Shall-Come-Home-Victorious. Buying this book helps the Veterans History Museum of the Carolinas in its work to honor veterans. Museum admission is free. Visit www.theveteransmuseum.org*

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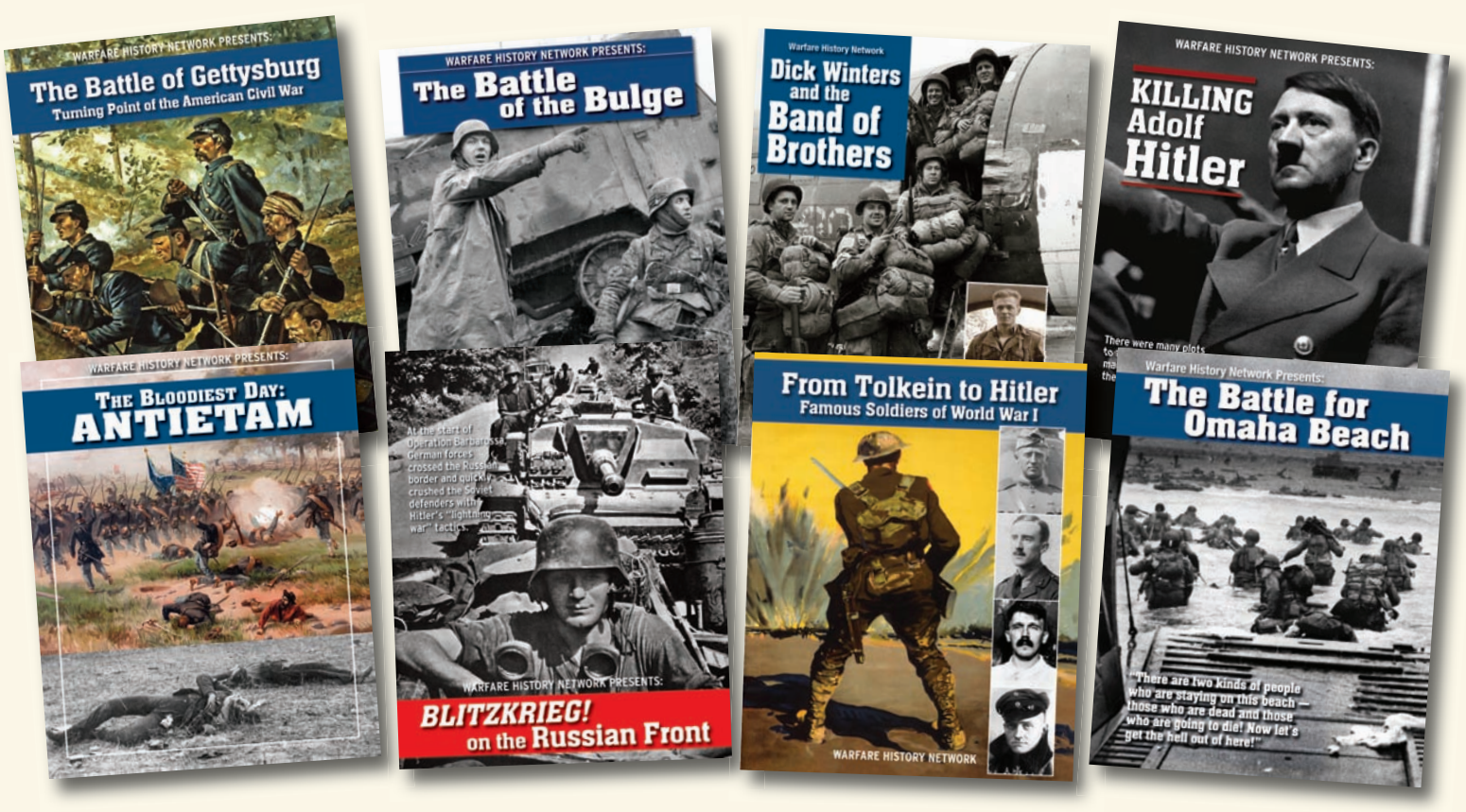

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