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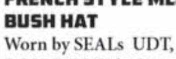

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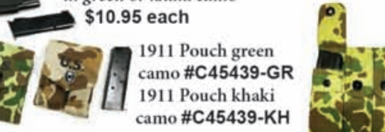

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

WWII QUARTERLY

Features

18 Patton's War for Sicily's Beaches
General George S. Patton personally helped repel an enemy armor attack on his beachhead at Gela, Sicily.
KEVIN M. HYMEL

28 Flaming Death in Tokyo
To bring Japan to its knees, Generals Hap Arnold and Curtis LeMay devised Operation Meetinghouse—a bombing program that killed more civilians than the atomic bombs.
NATHAN N. PREFER

40 The Fight for Weiler
A Luxembourg village found itself in the path of the German onslaught in December 1944, with only 132 American soldiers to defend it. **ALLYN VANNOY**

50 Tigers on the Prowl
From Metz to Bastogne and from Trier to the Alps, the U.S. 10th "Tiger" Armored Division blazed a bloody trail of victories across Europe. **MASON B. WEBB**

64 Apocalypse on the Volga
When Adolf Hitler invaded Russia in the summer of 1941, he expected a swift and stunning victory. At Stalingrad, his troops ran headlong into the Russians' best commander: General Winter.
JOHN WALKER

76 Sidi Rezegh—Key to Tobruk
Rommel, his forces weakened and outnumbered, demonstrated German tactical superiority and the use of combined arms in the North African desert. **THOMAS HAYMES**

86 Operation Hannibal: The Third Reich's Last Hurrah
Germany's last major military operation took place at Königsberg, along the shore of the Baltic Sea, from January to May 1945.
DR. RICHARD SELCER

Departments

6 Editorial
The Legacy of Justice Jackson.
FLINT WHITLOCK

8 Top Secret
Dummy paratroopers did their part to help the Allies win World War II in the flak-filled skies over Europe. **RICHARD L. BAKER**

14 Museums
The long-awaited National Museum of the U.S. Army is a stunning tribute to America's oldest branch of service.
LTC ADAM MORGAN

Cover: During the amphibious assault on Sicily, July 11, 1943, Lt. Gen. George S. Patton personally helped repel an Axis attack against the town of Gela. Photo: Imperial War Museum.

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The Legacy of Justice Jackson

A few weeks ago, I was able to take a long-delayed summer vacation, this time to New England, where I took in the Maine Maritime Museum and Bath Iron Works (where many American warships were constructed in WWII—and are still being built). I also visited the Revolutionary War fort at Ticonderoga, on the border between New York and Vermont.

My travels also took me to Jamestown, New York, the hometown of the late Robert H. Jackson, where a fine museum pays homage to his life. Jackson was the Chief U.S. Prosecutor at the first War Crimes Tribunal that was held at Nuremberg from November 1945 to September 1946.

According to a handout from the Robert H. Jackson Center, the jurist "came from a humble background, was largely self-taught, and never ran for political office. Yet he became one of the greatest statesmen of the 20th century."

At the time a member of the U.S. Supreme Court, Jackson was named by President Harry S, Truman in June 1945 to serve on this tribunal for the purpose of bringing 22 high-ranking Nazis to justice.

A superb orator, Jackson was at his finest at Nuremberg, remarking in his opening statement, "The wrongs which we seek to condemn and punish have been so calculated, so malignant, and so devastating that civilization cannot tolerate their being ignored, because it cannot survive their being repeated."

Like a bulldog, Jackson, along with prosecutors from Great Britain, France, and the Soviet Union, went after the accused (they weren't called defendants) with justifiable zeal.

"If we can inculcate the idea that aggressive war-making is the way to the prisoner's dock, rather than the way to honors," Jackson said, "we will have accomplished something toward making the peace more secure."

For the tribunal's second session, Jackson prepared a 20,000-word statement that made several points: "The real complaining party at your bar is Civilization. Civilization asks whether law is so laggard as to be utterly helpless to deal with crimes of this magnitude …

"We will not ask you to convict these men on the testimony of their foes. There is no count in the indictment that cannot be proved by books and records … These defendants had their share of the Teutonic passion for thoroughness in putting these things on paper."

In February 1946, Jackson cited precedents and gave a warning for our own time by noting that the Ku Klux Klan flourished in the U.S. at about the same time as the Nazi movement began its growth in Germany.

"It [the KKK] appealed to the same hates and practices, the same extra-legal coercions, and likewise terrorized by weird nighttime ceremonies. Like the Nazis, it was composed of a core of fanatics but enlisted the support of respectable persons who knew it was wrong but thought it was winning."

Tens of thousands of Germans who were complicit in the "crime of the century" escaped justice, and only a handful felt the full force of international law. Nevertheless, Jackson stands as a towering figure in the quest for justice for the millions of Nazism's victims.

—Flint Whitlock, Editor
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Dummy paratroopers did their part to help the Allies win World War II in the flak-filled skies over Europe and the Pacific.

Using parachutes to insert large forces behind enemy lines quickly fostered the idea of also using decoys to sow doubt and confusion. The earliest known operational use of decoy, or dummy, paratroopers occurred during the Nazis' successful assault on Fort Eben-Emael during the 1940 blitzkrieg. Colonel Rudolf Witzig was a first lieutenant and commander of the sapper detachment involved in the attack on Fort Eben-Emael. He recalled that "a final stroke of ingenuity, characteristic of our thorough preparation, was the plan to drop by parachute several groups of uniformed dummies behind the Albert Canal to the west. As we had guessed, this caused considerable confusion to the Belgian command."

General Major Gerhart Schact was a senior German officer whose early military career included the attack on Belgium. As a first lieutenant, he commanded an assault group at Fort Eben-Emael. Schact recalled that the "transportation plans were given a supplementary mission of dropping parachute dummy figures at a distance of forty kilometers from the objectives shortly after the landing of the gliders, in the area of the Fifth Belgium Division. This deceptive operation was successful, for during the decisive first hours it misdirected the attention of a large part of the Belgian army."

The operations in Holland and Belgium were not the last time the Germans used dummy parachutists. In December 1944, Adolf Hitler ordered the use of a battle group of parachutists for action in the planned Ardennes offensive. The assault group included 300 dummy figures, loaded for drops north of Camp Elsenburg to confuse the Americans. Overall, the Germans' airborne operations during the offensive were a resounding failure, but the deception effort was the most successful feature of the entire plan.

The Allies had started developing a paratroop decoy of their own in the late 1930s. The deception plans for Operation Overlord, the Allied invasion of Europe, included four airborne diversions using paratroop dummies. Operations Titanic I, II, III, and IV were designed to confuse the German high command and influence the movement of their forces and reserves. Operation Titanic I simulated the dropping of one airborne division north of the River Seine. The action was intended to draw enemy reserves from south of the Seine to the north. Two hundred dummies were dropped, along with noisemakers and Special Air Service (SAS) teams. The SAS teams conducted small assaults and cut communications, thus adding to the

Real paratroopers or fake? The Allies were inspired to use dummy parachutists from the Germans, who deployed decoys during their 1940 attack on the Belgian fortress of Eben-Emael. (Shown here are real Americans during Operation Market Garden.)

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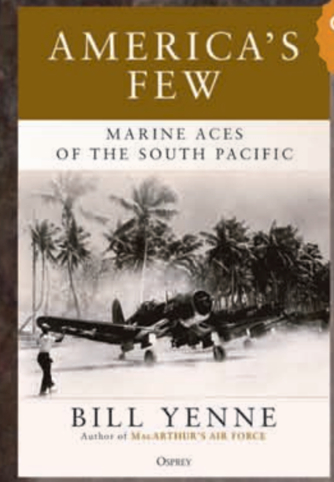

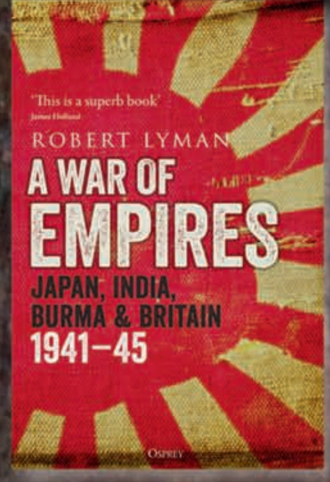

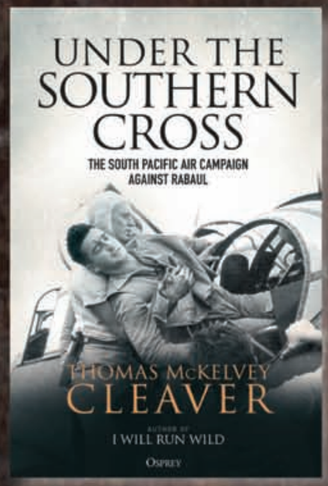

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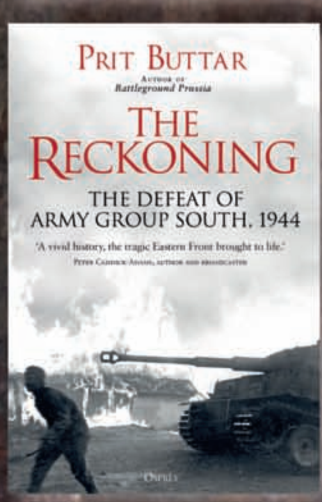

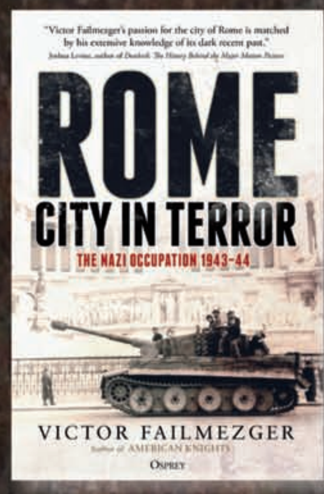

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perception of a larger airborne assault.

Operation Titanic II deployed 50 dummy paratroopers and noisemakers. Its intent was to delay local reserves from moving westward toward the Allied landing beaches. Operation Titanic III used 50 dummies and accompanying noisemakers. It was designed to draw German counterattack troops to the southwest of Caen. It was to be accomplished in conjunction with the landing of the 6th Airborne Division. The final decoy drop was Operation Titanic IV; it was hoped that it would draw counterattack forces around St. Lo to the west. Another 200 dummies were used, supplemented with noisemakers. Again, two SAS teams were also dropped to create havoc and substantiate rumors of massive paratrooper landings.

The combination of decoys and commandos achieved many of the desired results. The dummies were described as being "in the shape of a man, but only about half size, because the dummy only had to be identified as a paratrooper in the air."

George Freedman, an American manufacturer working on a secret British contract, made 3,800 of the dummies in 1938. He and his brother Fred operated a small fabrication business in Ashland, Massachusetts. A British Trade Commission agent approached them in 1938, and they agreed to secretly produce "a small dummy paratrooper." The two brothers designed, tested, and produced a dummy they named "Rupert."

Freedman retained an interest in the project and later developed an inflatable version of the decoy. In 1942, he introduced his concept to an associate of the United States government. He called his experimental model "White Knight." Freedman was contracted in September 1943 to produce 5,000 dummy paratroopers for a secret U.S. Navy project. Completed in March 1944, his product was shipped off to England. White Knight evolved into what is now known as the Navy PD (Paratroop Decoy) Pack.

The August 1944 invasion of Southern France, Operation Dragoon, saw the combat introduction of the Navy PD Pack. The complete unit included a rubber dummy, inflation equipment, and a demolition outfit. When thrown from the transport aircraft, the unit inflated and activated a delay fuse. Dropping at 15 to 20 feet per second from about 700 feet, the pack produced simulated automatic-rifle fire and then self-destructed some three minutes after hitting the ground.

The August 1944, employment of the Navy PD Pack was combined with the use of "Window," a tinfoil radar-interference method, to support Seventh Army's amphibious landings. German commanders sent reserves to the drop zone, where considerable confusion prevailed. After-action reports summarized the effectiveness of the Allied deception effort.

The operation was prefaced by a successful airborne diversion designed to serve two purposes in the cover plan. First, it was to create the illusion of a southern airborne corridor; second, it was to simulate a false airborne drop zone by dropping rubber parachute dummies in several areas. The six aircraft used on the mission dropped Window en route to give the effect of a mass flight, and at 0205 on D-Day they dropped 600 dummies as planned on false drop zones north and west of Toulon. German radio reports indicated the complete success of the simple ruse. The rifle simulators and other battle noise effects used in the diversion functioned well and added to the overall realism of the feint. Afterward, Axis Sally, a German radio propagandist, referred to the decoys as the "product of a fiendish Anglo-Saxon mind."

Dummy paratroopers were also used as a deception tactic in the Pacific Theater. The assault against Hollandia, New Guinea, on April 22, 1944, included efforts to convince the Japanese command of an attack against another location in the

ABOVE LEFT: For Operation Dragoon, the British dropped 600 three-foot-tall "Rupert" dummies that, in the dark, looked realistic enough to fool the enemy. ABOVE RIGHT: A rifle fire simulator (left) and machine-gun fire simulator with an attached parachute pack.

area. Dummy parachutists were dropped in the area prior to the operation against Hollandia. Decoy drops were also included in operational plans for the invasion of the Philippines in October 1944. Further plans included using decoys during the 511th Parachute Infantry Regiment's landing in February 1945; the Navy PD Pack was also used in that operation.

The end of World War II did not bring about the retirement of the paratrooper dummy. "Oscar," the code name for the American version, would live on in several incarnations, remaining in the American arsenal of deception techniques and devices well into the 1970s and beyond. The National Defense Research Committee (NDRC) coordinated the early American development of the paratrooper decoys. The Engineer Research and Development Laboratories (ERDL) was assigned the mission, and in May 1945 the ERDL approved three separate projects. The projects entailed the development of the paratrooper dummy, a rifle/machinegun simulator, and a mortar-fire simulator.

Various deficiencies had been encountered with Rupert, the British cloth dummy, and the Navy PD Pack. ERDL's attempts to overcome these problems produced a series of trials and models of new paratrooper dummies.

ERDL first focused on a wind sock-type simulator and a plastic-film figure, as it believed these models could decrease the cost of the Oscar unit. An inexpensive pasteboard container for storing and deploying the units was also planned. The dummy's fabrication and means of self-destruction were primary considerations in its development. The wind-sock figure used the principle of inflation, as did the Navy PD Pack. It was designed to eliminate the PD Pack's rubber fabric and the required inflation equipment. Inflation was achieved by the passage of air through the figure while it descended. The four-foot high decoy came with a 12-foot diameter parachute. The first model had parachutes made from salvaged Army sheets. A series of tests was conducted, and various modifications were made to try to achieve complete destruction and obtain realistic appearance in operation. The results

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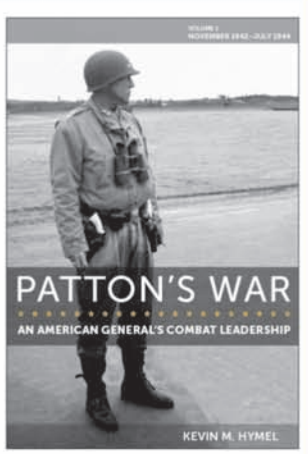

"With *Patton's War*, Kevin Hymel has established himself as one of the finest historians in the United States. His depth of research and keen observations about General George S. Patton, Jr., in this fascinating, well-paced book, breaks new ground in the study of the famous World War II battlefield commander."
—**Brian M. Sobel**, author of *The Fighting Pattons*

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TOP: A more realistic paradummy developed by the U.S. was this 36-inch-tall decoy intended for daylight drops. Paradummies were used until the 1970s. ABOVE: American parachute dummies of the 504th Parachute Battalion at Fort Benning, Georgia, in 1942.

proved unsatisfactory, as complete inflation could not be achieved. These poor results led to the abandonment of the wind-sock principle and its replacement with the plastic-film model.

The ERDL team developed several test models. The new Oscar had a solid head and feet appropriately weighted to hold the body in the proper position. The body was expanded by a series of plastic rings in the legs, trunk, and arms. It included a lightweight camouflage suit with hands added to lengthen the arms. The decoy was found to have "a natural appearance in descent." The success of the design resulted in the construction of several plastic Oscars. A 0.04-inch thick vinyl sheet and a 1/8-inch cellulose-nitrate sheet were used in fabricating the figures. The bodies were weighted by iron grits in the head, hands, chest, and feet.

A significant shortcoming was the inability to find a flammable material that would allow destruction of the dummy without the use of explosives. Two models of the plastic-film figure were developed for testing: a three-foot figure and a four-foot figure. Several deficiencies were identified through testing: Vinyl proved to be an unsatisfactory material, susceptible to temperature variations. It became rigid at low temperatures, and at higher temperatures it stretched and was susceptible to damage in handling. Adding to these difficulties was the lack of parachutes able to handle the lighter-than-normal load. The need to have rigid heads and weighted feet, combined with the other difficulties, resulted in abandoning efforts to create a "lightweight completely collapsible figure."

The next stage of development produced a body made from cloth, plastic, steel, and plaster of Paris. Three sizes were developed to determine whether small-scale or full-sized models worked best. These included a three-foot, 35-pound decoy with a 12-foot parachute; a four-foot, 75-pound decoy with an 18-foot parachute; and a five-foot-10-inch, 125-pound model with a 28-foot parachute. All the models used flexible cellulose-acetate rings in the trunk, legs, and arms to maintain fullness. Steel grit was carried in a chest pack to provide weight for stability and control. The plaster of Paris head and feet were molded hollow with burlap used as a reinforcement medium.

As testing continued, the body shape of the dummies improved until the likeness to an actual paratrooper emerged. Combined engineering tests occurred in March 1946 at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Comparisons of the three-foot, four-foot, and six-foot models were conducted. Tests were made with single units and in mass drops. Observations were taken at close range and at distances of up to one mile to determine whether the decoys were effective and realistic. The conclusion was that the four-foot dummy presented a "satisfactory simulation" under controlled conditions.

The resulting model was 15 pounds lighter than the initial test version. Its major components included the dummy, self-destructive mechanism, parachute, pack, and pack carrier. Service tests were conducted at Fort Bragg from the fall of 1950 through the spring of 1951. Testing included single and mass drops at altitudes varying from 500 to 1,500 feet and air speeds ranging from 70 to 160 mph.

The paratrooper decoy was judged an "excellent airborne diversionary simulator." A realistic appearance in descent was achieved, deceiving actual paratroopers. It was touted as the "central item of equipment around which an airborne diversionary operation would evolve." When the final report of ERDL was issued in October 1955, Oscar became a regular member of the United States Army's airborne forces.

The use of decoys was a recommended practice found in field manuals until 1977. Unofficial references citing limited use in Korea and Vietnam do appear. Oscar stayed in the Army arsenal for nearly 33 years, being dropped from the Army stock number listing in July 1977.

The dummies presented significant advantages for assaulting forces while creating serious problems for defenders, causing considerable confusion on the battlefields of Europe and the Pacific. The concept contributed to the success of the Allies' airborne operations during World War II. Oscar earned his stripes and deserves to be considered one of the most successful deception devices of the entire war. □

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The long-awaited National Museum of the U.S. Army is a stunning tribute to America's oldest branch of service.

After many years of planning, fundraising and construction, the spectacular, long-awaited National Museum of the United States Army was finally opened on Veterans Day, 2020, promptly shut down due to Coronavirus restrictions, and has reopened.

The museum has borrowed the best ideas from other military museums around the world and incorporated them in this one location on 84 acres at Fort Belvoir, Virginia, 20 miles south of Washington, D.C.

The main building is approximately 185,000 square feet. Thousands of artifacts, documents, paintings, and photographs—the vast majority of them having never been seen before by the public—trace the history of the United States Army from the Revolutionary War to today's global war on terrorism through a series of galleries.

The museum consists of five main exhibit halls, a theater, Veterans' Hall, food-service and retail areas, an experiential learning center, and a lobby with visitor-reception area. Full-scale dioramas—such as displays of Sherman tanks and soldiers descending a "scramble net" from their transport ship into a landing craft heading for a hostile D-Day beachhead—put the visitor in the heart of the action.

While displays and exhibits representing the Revolutionary War, War of 1812, Mexican-American War of 1846-48, Civil War, World War I, Korea, Vietnam, and the Global War on Terrorism are all spectacularly featured, it is World War II that will probably hold the most interest for readers of this magazine.

The museum's advanced interactive design makes it an immersive, technological marvel that provides educational opportunities certain to captivate visitors old and young.

At the museum's dedication, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Army General Mark A. Milley said that the museum will allow visitors to understand what the Army does to protect American freedom: "We cannot truly appreciate the sacrifice

The M4 Sherman tank was the iconic American tank of World War II. 1st Lt. Charles P. Boggess, commanding officer of Company C, 37th Tank Battalion, led the attack from atop Cobra King—now in the Global War Gallery.

All photos: National Museum of the United States Army, Duane Lempke

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TOP: As museum visitors emerge from the trench-like entrance of the Nation Overseas Gallery, cast figures, lighting effects, imagery, and sounds of distant battle recreate a setting based on a famous photograph of the Meuse-Argonne Offensive.
ABOVE: Pvt. Teahan—his name carved into the stock—parachuted into Normandy with this rifle in the early morning hours of June 6, 1944. He was killed in the fighting shortly thereafter, along with more than half the men of the 508th Infantry regiment.
RIGHT: The 185,000 square foot National Museum of the United States Army is located on 84 acres on the grounds of Fort Belvoir, VA.

of our soldiers, from the Continental Army to today, or comprehend what they went through unless we see the weapons they used, feel the uniforms they wore, hear the stories they told, or read the letters they wrote." he said.

And as the museum's website says, "The National Army Museum will celebrate the selfless service and sacrifice of over 30 million men and women who have worn the Army uniform since 1775."

As of the publication of this magazine, a date for reopening had not been set, but the museum will continue to monitor the conditions in the National Capital Region and the Commonwealth of Virginia and determine next steps for a controlled reopening, as appropriate.

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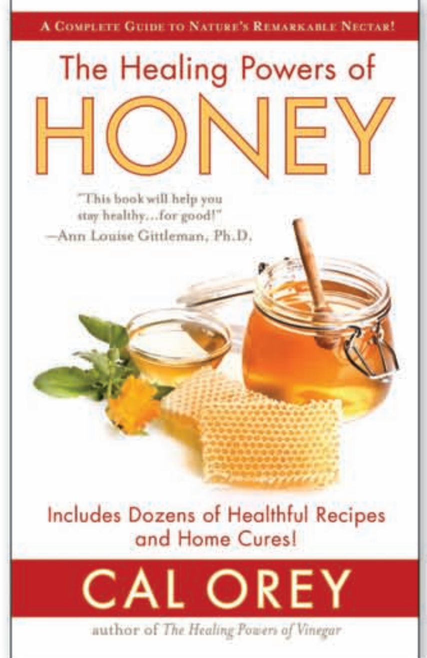

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This article is excerpted from Kevin Hymel's latest book, Patton's War: An American General's Combat Leadership, Volume 1: November 1942—July 1944, *published by University of Missouri Press. Volume 1 follows General Patton from the beaches of Morocco to the battlefields of Normandy, the day before his Third Army became active on the Continent. The book is on sale beginning December 1. Mr. Hymel has served as this magazine's research director and is a frequent contributor.*

General George S. Patton personally helped repel an enemy armor attack on his beachhead at Gela, Sicily.

BY KEVIN M. HYMEL

PATTON'S WAR *for* Sicily's Beaches

National Archives

"Only God and the Navy can do anything until we hit the shore," Lt. Gen. George S. Patton, Jr. confided in his diary on the night of July 6, 1943, about the invasion of Sicily, codenamed Operation Husky. But once ashore, he knew what was going to happen: "We will not be stopped."

Patton and his Seventh U.S. Army had been packed into some 58 ships along the North African coast and headed to Sicily, the island at the end of the Italian boot. He intended, along with British General Bernard Law Montgomery, to capture the island from the Axis powers of Germany and Italy.

One of the sailors who saw Patton on the USS *Monrovia,* the attack transport which would take him to battle, described Patton's demeanor: "It was to him not a ship's deck he stood upon, but a peak of glory."

Patton planned to hit Gela Beach, in southern Sicily, while Montgomery would hit southeast Sicily near Syracuse. For his

Lt. Gen. George S. Patton, Jr., gives direction to his amphibious troops on Gela Beach. The African-American soldier (left) told Patton he had served with him in World War I and had gone AWOL from his unit to serve under him again for the invasion.

attack, Patton would use an airborne drop followed by a three-division amphibious assault.

Colonel James Gavin’s 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, reinforced by a battalion of Colonel Reuben Tucker’s 504th—both from Major General Matthew Ridgway’s 82nd Airborne Division—would drop between 11:30 p.m. and midnight of July 9.

Once on the ground, the paratroopers would capture the high ground of Piano Lupo to block enemy forces headed south against the 1st Infantry Division and cover the Ponte Olivio airfield, making it easier for capture by the amphibious forces.

The amphibious landings would hit the beaches at 2:45 a.m. and would be, from north to south: Maj. Gen. Lucian Truscott’s 3rd Infantry Division, supported by Army Rangers and some tanks from Maj. Gen. Hugh Gaffey’s 2nd Armored Division around the town of Licata; Maj. Gen. Terry Allen’s 1st Infantry Division, also supported by Rangers, around the town of Gela; and Maj. Gen. Troy Middleton’s 45th Infantry Division near the town of Scoglitti.

Follow-up forces included the rest of Gaffey’s 2nd Armored Division, Maj. Gen. Manton Eddy’s 9th Infantry Division, and the 4th Moroccan Tabor of Goums—a French battalion commanded by French officers and noncommissioned officers with Berber Goumiers (indigenous Moroccans) as the fighting troops.

Patton hoped to capture the three coastal towns and airfields and link up with the British in three days. D-Day was set for July 10. Combined with Montgomery’s British Eighth Army four-division assault and a single airborne brigade drop on the southeastern side of the island, Operation Husky would be the largest and most dispersed amphibious assault of the war.

Patton was proud of the plan, yet remained humble about the complex operation. When General Sir Harold Alexander asked him if he was satisfied with the plans, Patton clicked his heels, saluted, and responded: “General, I don’t plan—I only obey orders.”

National Archives

ABOVE: Nervous paratroopers with the 82nd Airborne prepare to jump over Sicily on July 10, 1943—the first American combat jump of the war. They would spearhead the attack on the island, but many would be killed by friendly fire. BELOW: Counterattacks by the German Hermann Goering Division and Italian forces threatened Patton’s Gela beachhead; however, hard-fighting soldiers and Patton’s leadership won the day.

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

Gavin’s paratroopers spearheaded the invasion. All 3,400 of them had loaded onto 226 C-47 transports at sundown and taken off at 8:30 p.m., July 9, bound for the island of Malta, where they were to turn north for the run to Sicily. But the pilots could not find Malta in the mists and clouds, and were forced to make their best guesses.

The planes that made it to Sicily encountered enemy ground fire. In the confusion,

the planes dropped their paratroopers wherever possible, widely dispersing them along the southern coast. Once on the ground, the paratroopers gathered themselves up, searched for comrades, and headed for bridges, high ground, or anywhere they heard gunfire. Some of the pilots gave up on trying to find Sicily, and returned their planes to base with full loads.

Patton stayed up that night on the *Monrovia,* sitting at a small table in his underwear, reading the Bible by flashlight. At 3:30 a.m., Maj. Gen. Albert C. Wedemeyer, in full battle gear, knocked on his door. Wedemeyer had been sent by Army Chief of Staff George C. Marshall to examine the landings and report back to him.

He bid farewell to Patton and thanked him for his hospitality as he prepared to depart with the first assault wave. Patton teared up and told him he appreciated his help. He shook his hand and told him to be very careful. “If anything happens to you,” Patton said, “General Marshall will give me hell.” With that, Patton went to bed for a few hours.

The planes flying over the *Monrovia* on July 10 did not wake Patton, but a broken davit banging against the ship did. He donned a khaki uniform and leather bomber jacket and made his way to the bridge. The shoreline burned brightly as landing boats churned into the darkness. Searchlights in the distance pierced the night sky as mortars and rockets smashed into targets. Sicily and uncertainty lay ahead. “We may feel anxious,” he reasoned, “but I trust the Italians are scared to death.”

The Luftwaffe bombed the fleet around 5:00 a.m., sinking the destroyer USS *Maddox*; American fighter planes soon arrived and tangled with the enemy. Despite difficulties caused by the weather and a shifting sandbar off the beach, the 1st and 45th Infantry Divisions landed and captured their objectives before sunrise, the 3rd Infantry Division following soon thereafter. Navy destroyers sailed to within a mile of the beaches, firing on enemy targets. Army Rangers overcame enemy machine-gun nests and pillboxes in Gela so quickly that they ran into Navy covering fire.

At 6:00 a.m., Ranger Lt. Col. William O. Darby radioed Patton that Gela had been taken. Three hours later, Patton heard over the radio that 30 enemy tanks were attacking Allen’s 1st Infantry. The paratroopers had failed to capture the Piano Lupo heights, allowing the Germans a route of attack. The Navy cruiser USS *Boise* shelled the enemy lines. Patton also wanted fighter planes to strafe the area, but they were not yet over the battlefield.

Throughout the day, Navy anti-aircraft gunners fired wildly into the air at both friend and foe. By the afternoon, Patton ordered Gaffey to land most of his 2nd Armored Division at Gela and await further orders. He then postponed a second airborne drop scheduled for later that day to the following night, so that he could focus on getting his armor ashore.

Communications with troops soon broke down. Only two of his II Corps’ hourly reports reached the *Monrovia*. Much of the communication equipment was insufficiently waterproofed for the rough weather. While communications would improve, Patton initially relied on messengers going from ship to shore during his opening moves on Gela.

Before the sun went down, the Luftwaffe attacked again, this time sinking an empty Landing Ship, Tank (LST). But the news of the day was mostly positive. The

Naval History and Heritage Command

National Archives

A cigar clenched in his teeth, Patton climbs over the side of the USS *Monrovia* to a waiting landing craft that would take him to Gela Beach. LEFT: Onboard the USS *Ancon*, British Field Marshal Harold Alexander, the 15th Army Group commander (left), reviews the attack plan with Patton (center) and U.S. Admiral Alan Kirk (left), the amphibious force commander.

National Archives

beaches had been taken, objectives had been secured, casualties were low, and Patton's men had captured more than 1,000 prisoners. There was no word from the paratroopers except from one unit that had linked up with the 1st Infantry.

Patton was so busy coordinating armor, naval, and air support that he never left the *Monrovia*. "I feel like a cur," he lamented in his diary, "but I probably did better here."

That night the Luftwaffe returned a third time. A series of bombs exploded in the water near the *Monrovia* as Patton entered his cabin. "Let's get off this damn ship the first thing in the morning," he told his staff. Another succession of bombs burst nearby. "If this thing is still afloat." With that, he went to bed.

The next morning, with Luftwaffe bombs still falling around his ship, Patton put on a khaki uniform with puffy, jodhpur trousers and polished cavalry boots, strapped on his Colt revolver, his binoculars, and camera, and grabbed his riding crop. To get more troops onto the beach, he ordered the 82nd Airborne's 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment to drop behind the 1st Division's zone. He then warned his principal commanders that paratroopers would jump about 11:30 that night.

Patton boarded his landing craft with his staff and Ridgway for the half-hour trip to the beach, where he waded ashore, chomping on a cigar. Equipment cluttered the beach as soldiers and seamen wrestled to free beached landing craft. Patton could hear machine-gun and heavy-weapons fire, and saw a row of dead soldiers, attesting to the previous day's intense fighting.

Geysers from enemy shells erupted in the water and artillery exploded on the beach, impeding the unloading operations and killing civilians. "It's all right, Hap," Patton told Colonel Hobart "Hap" Gay, his chief of staff. "The bastards can't hit us on account of the defilade afforded by the town."

At the sight of Patton, some men climbed out of their foxholes and charged across the dunes at the Germans, prompting a reporter to write, "I saw, for the first time, just how a brave general can turn the tide of battle by sheer leadership."

Ridgway took off on foot to find his paratroopers while Patton waited for his vehicle to be de-waterproofed. While he waited, an African-American soldier greeted him and reminded him that they first met when Patton was a lieutenant at Fort Riley, Kansas. The soldier had gone absent without leave (AWOL) just to take part in the invasion.

Patton then climbed the stairs of an apartment from which he could see Italian soldiers advancing across open ground towards Gela. "Can I help you sir?" asked a young naval ensign who was busy directing fire from the USS *Savanna*. "Sure, if you can connect with your Goddamn Navy, tell them for God's sake to drop some shellfire on that road."

The ensign went back to work as Patton grabbed his field glasses and stepped out onto the veranda, where German and Italian soldiers fired at him, forcing the ensign to temporarily evacuate the room.

American naval and mortar fire, combined with two captured Italian artillery pieces and the Rangers' stout defense, repelled the Axis attack. As the fighting died down, Patton looked down to see a group of American MPs marching a handful of slovenly looking Italian prisoners to the rear. "Make it double time!" He shouted from his perch.

"Kick 'em in the ass! Make it double-time!" The men broke into a trot.

When Patton noticed a Ranger captain with his chin strap dangling, he pointed it out, and the officer quickly buckled it. Before he departed, he implored the captain: "Kill every one of the Goddamn bastards."

Patton and Darby returned to Darby's headquarters. As they spoke, two German artillery rounds punched a hole in the building across the street, injuring some civilians. "I have never heard so much screaming," Patton recalled.

He contacted the naval commander responsible for the landing force and ordered his tank reserves to land immediately, but the naval officer refused, explaining he needed orders from Admiral Kent Hewitt. Patton eventually reached Hewitt and secured permission, but the delay caused confusion and stress.

His need for armor was finally satisfied when 10 tanks arrived from Truscott's 3rd Infantry Division in Licata, some 20 miles away; Patton ordered the tankers to pursue the retreating enemy. He then ordered a pontoon causeway rammed over a series of sandbars, allowing more tanks to race ashore. The rest of the reserve force finally arrived once an LST captain forced his own way over several sandbars. Patton directed the tanks to close the gap between the 1st Infantry and the Rangers.

The enemy attack had almost achieved success, pressing their tanks within 2,000 yards of the beach. So close was the fighting that the ships had to stop shelling, for fear of killing Americans. The Italians and Germans had punched holes in both the 1st Infantry and 82nd Airborne lines but were finally halted at Allen's last defensive lines around noon. The attack had cost the Germans heavily. Ten tanks lay in smoking ruins.

Once the Germans realized they could not push the Americans into the sea, they withdrew, giving the Navy even more targets. Shells rained down on the retreating enemy. By the end of the day, the Germans had lost one-third of their tanks and some 600 men; Darby counted 500 Italian prisoners. When the Americans began feeding the prisoners, Patton put a stop to it, telling the men that rations would be limited until more supplies arrived.

ABOVE: U.S. Navy salvos explode on the plains north of Gela. The bombardment helped stop the Axis attack and sent the enemy retreating north. OPPOSITE: Patton examines the situation in Gela. When soldiers saw him, they climbed out of their foxholes and attacked the enemy, prompting one war correspondent to write, "I saw … just how a brave general can turn the tide of battle by sheer leadership."

During the fight for Gela, some local children, chased by adults, had dashed to the enemy lines and began climbing on their weapons, preventing the Americans from returning fire.

While planning the campaign, higher headquarters had asked Patton how many military government officers he wanted. He responded, "Not a Goddamn one of those civilian sissies!" Now he radioed a request to immediately send 25 MPs and 25 military government officers competent in handling children. He also radioed for air support to bomb the advancing tanks, but the planes did not arrive until five hours after the action.

Before noon, during the fighting, the Italians had intercepted a message from Patton ordering his troops on the beach to bury their equipment and to be ready to re-embark. While several Italian officers after the war attested to seeing the message, several people who were with Patton that day had no recollection of him sending any such communique.

"I am quite certain Patton did not personally send the message," explained British Colonel Robert Henriques, "but it is quite likely that someone, either in 1st Division or Seventh Army Headquarters, may have sent it when the battle was at its height." Allen did not recall Patton making the decision either: "At no time during his visit did General Patton ever make any mention whatsoever of any re-embarkation plans for the 1st Infantry Division or of any other unit in the U.S. Seventh Army."

After briefly meeting with Brig. Gen. Teddy Roosevelt, Allen's assistant division commander, Patton went to find Gaffey and Allen. Meanwhile, 14 German bombers roared in and strafed the area. Nearby anti-aircraft batteries opened up, and shrapnel rained down on the convoy, one piece of shrapnel landing 10 yards from Patton. Two enemy aircraft were shot down.

At Allen's headquarters, Patton declared

his displeasure that the Ponte Olivo airfield—Allen's objective for the day—remained in enemy hands. Allen reassured him that the day was not over and that he was planning a night attack, "Come hell or high water." Mollified yet skeptical, Patton departed.

Lt. Gen. Omar Bradley, the II Corps commander and Allen's direct superior, would later angrily confront Patton about the attack on the airfield. He had specifically ordered the attacking unit to hold fast until a pocket of German resistance had been eliminated. Patton's order to Allen directly contradicted Bradley's order, thereby violating the chain of command.

Worse, Patton had neglected to inform him about it. Patton later apologized, but Bradley still considered Patton's move reckless. Bradley's poor health may have contributed to his sour mood. On the journey from Tunisia, he had undergone hemorrhoid surgery and had to use a flotation device as a pillow when driving around Sicily's rough terrain.

On the way back to Gela, Patton marveled that he could drive parallel to the front without coming under fire. While it made him feel lonely, it still boosted his confidence: "It is good for self-esteem," he later wrote. Looking out to sea, he saw the Liberty ship *Robert Rowan* explode and split in two from a Luftwaffe attack.

Upon reaching the beach, Patton noticed some soldiers digging a foxhole between two huge stacks of bombs and high-explosive shells. "I told them if they wanted to save the Graves Registration burials, that was a fine thing to do but otherwise they better dig somewhere else." Just then, two enemy bombers strafed the beach, and the men jumped into their foxhole. The bombers circled and came in for another run.

As Patton watched, men unloading landing craft picked up weapons and returned fire. Naval gunfire helped break up the attack. The whole time, Patton strode up and down the beach, ignoring the strafing and barking orders. When a panicked signal officer destroyed a box of signal equipment, Patton ordered him arrested. When he later learned that the officer had been ordered to do so rather than have it fall into enemy hands, he had the man released.

Patton made it back to the *Monrovia* soaking wet from the turbulent waves. Maj. Gen. John P. Lucas, one of Eisenhower's deputies, was both happy to see him alive and worried for his health. He thought Patton stood up well under the terrific strain of command. "I would be more irritable than he is," Lucas later wrote.

Both: National Archives

ABOVE: 82nd Airborne Division paratroopers study the battlefield outside Gela, before they attacked Italian troops trying to repulse Patton's landings. BELOW: An M4 Sherman tank rolls off a landing craft at Gela Beach. Patton wanted tanks rushed to the front to stymie the enemy attack against his beachhead. OPPOSITE: A German Panzer III raises a cloud of dust as it drives towards the U.S. Seventh Army's beachhead. Axis tanks broke through the thin lines at Gela until individual acts of heroism and naval gunfire took a heavy toll on German and Italian armor.

Imperial War Museum

After seeing the Luftwaffe's dominance over the battlefield, the accuracy of anti-aircraft weapons, and the Navy's willingness to fire at anything in the air, Patton cancelled the second airdrop. Unfortunately, the *Monrovia's* radios could not reach Ridgway's headquarters.

Worsening matters, the Luftwaffe attacked the fleet around 10:00 p.m., an hour and a half before the 504th was scheduled to fly over. Allied and enemy fighter planes crisscrossed the night sky, dogfighting while dodging anti-aircraft fire from the ships and on the beach. Before he went to bed, Patton penned in his diary, "Am terribly worried."

Patton's apprehension proved prescient. Although the 504th flew into peaceful skies above Sicily, tension and anxiety gripped the men on the ground and on ships. The first group of paratroopers landed without incident. The second group drew fire from a single machine gun. Soon, numerous anti-aircraft guns on land and sea opened fire. Six aircraft crashed before their paratroopers had a chance to jump.

Out of 144 planes, 23 never returned and 37 were badly damaged. Eight planes returned to North Africa without having dispatched their loads. The 504th lost 229 men—81 dead, 132 wounded, and 16 missing, all at the hands of their fellow countrymen. It had been a disaster.

The next morning, July 12, Eisenhower visited Patton onboard the *Monrovia,* where Patton proudly showed him a map of Seventh Army's progress. All his divisions save Allen's 1st, which had blunted the Axis attack, had advanced beyond their objectives, while Middleton's 45th Infantry Division was expected to meet up with a Canadian division at any moment.

In fact, the 1st Infantry may have again saved the beachhead. At midnight, Allen had launched his promised attack, supported by artillery and naval gunfire. The Germans, preparing to attack at dawn, were caught completely by surprise as Allen's division rolled up their lines and captured Ponte Olivio airfield.

Despite the rosy news, Eisenhower fumed. He scolded Patton about his progress reports, which did not adequately address the help needed, particularly in terms of air cover. Eisenhower did not realize communiqués were running seven hours behind, nor did he know yet about the airdrop disaster. His lecturing done, Eisenhower and his party headed to his launch, escorted by Patton. As Eisenhower motored away, reporter John Gunther, who was with Eisenhower, noticed Patton standing on deck, "looking like a Roman emperor carved in brown stone."

The meeting had left Patton embittered. Lucas, who did not hear Eisenhower's words, commented, "He must have given Patton hell because George was much upset." Patton agreed: "It is most upsetting to get only piddling criticism when one knows one has done a good job." Navy Captain Harry C. Butcher, Eisenhower's naval aide, later summed up the tense meeting in his diary: "Ike had stepped on him pretty hard."

Patton resumed fighting his army from onboard the *Monrovia* until he departed the ship for good later that afternoon. He headed ashore aboard a landing craft while enemy fighter planes strafed the area; two were shot down. On shore, as he had done the day before, he checked in with the Rangers and was pleased to learn that they had captured 250 Italians.

He had reason to be proud. The Gela

beaches had been taken, and all the American assaults had been successful. Patton then went to his headquarters, which his staff had established in the middle of town in an eight-room house with a backyard patio. It had been owned by a doctor who fled so quickly there were still toothbrushes in the bathroom.

Patton's first order was for his staff to clean themselves up. Most had been unable to shave in the pitching seas. They had, almost to a man, lost all their equipment when their landing craft disgorged them in deep water and heavy surf, and they had failed to dig latrines for fear of hitting a landmine.

As naval shells rumbled over the house, Patton tried to organize his units. He plugged gaps in the line and sent lost units to their commanders. Maj. Gen. Geoffrey Keyes, Patton's deputy commander, called from Truscott's headquarters, whose division had spread out after several running battles with the enemy, and offered that Truscott could attack Agrigento, on the west coast, or Caltanissetta, directly north, but Patton refused to approve either attack until he heard from Alexander.

But before Patton could contact his British commander, he clashed with his British peer. A British lieutenant showed up at Patton's headquarters carrying a suitcase tied with a string. His presence infuriated Patton, who had earlier sent a liaison team consisting of a colonel, a major, and a communications section in two halftracks to Montgomery's headquarters. In exchange, Montgomery had sent a single lieutenant. Patton sent the officer back to Montgomery, with a note explaining that he could not permit boys in his headquarters.

Instead, Patton requested Colonel Robert Henriques, with whom he had worked well in Morocco. Henriques arrived and summed up Patton's successful attack: "The Seventh Army plan was straightforward, simple, and as ambitious as circumstances of craft and shipping allowed. Within the limits of the Allied plan, General Patton had few, if any, alternatives to the course which he adopted."

That night, after a dinner of canned cheese and champagne, Patton discovered his bed filled with bedbugs, forcing him to sleep in his bedding roll on the ground.

National Archives

Patton examines the front with Brigadier General Teddy Roosevelt Jr., the assistant commander of the 1st Infantry Division and the son of the twenty-sixth president. With his beachhead secure, Patton could now focus on capturing the rest of Sicily.

The next morning, July 13, Patton went to a 1st Infantry Division forward operating post, stomped up to the balcony, and demanded to see what was going on. Just then an artillery shell hit near the building and some forward observers ducked for cover. He bawled the men out for cowering and threatened to arrest them. He then left the building to watch supply ships arriving on the beach below.

Colonel James Gavin, the commander of the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, who had been fighting nonstop since parachuting in on D-Day, rolled up in a jeep. Patton whipped out his flask. "Gavin, you look like you need a drink. Have one." To Gavin, Patton exuded confidence, and he was proud to see an army commander "in the midst of things."

When a German Messerschmitt Me 109 strafed the beach, Major Alexander Stiller, one of Patton's staffers, opened up with a .50-caliber machine gun, knocking it out of the sky. Patton immediately awarded him a Silver Star for setting an example, encouraging other soldiers and—most important—engaging the enemy and not diving into the sand.

Patton had successfully landed his army in Sicily and could now focus on what to do next. While his job was to head northeast and protect Montgomery's left flank, he had other ideas. If he could capture a port, he could supply himself rather than relying on supplies from the British. And if he could do that, he could drive his army north and capture the city of Palermo, basically cutting the island in half. But first he needed a port, and Patton eyed Agrigento, only 27miles away. □

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FLAMING DEATH IN TOKYO

A frightening sight to the Japanese: the underbelly of a B-29 Superfortress. Some 4,000 of the giant bombers were produced during the war. One of the last two flyable examples is "Fifi," which was delivered to the USAAF in 1945. It was purchased in 1971, restored, and is flown today by the Commemorative Air Force. It is based at the Vintage Flying Museum at Meacham International Airport in Fort Worth, Texas.

To bring Japan to its knees, Generals Hap Arnold and Curtis LeMay devised Operation Meetinghouse—a bombing program that killed more civilians than the atomic bombs.

BY NATHAN N. PREFER

Despite his nickname, General Henry Harley ("Hap") Arnold was unhappy. In early 1945 he was having major problems with one of his own special projects, the development of the Boeing B-29 Superfortress strategic bomber, for which he had often risked his career.

The end of the war was in sight, but the Japanese maddeningly refused to concede defeat. What was needed, he believed, was the B-29 to prove its potential by hitting the Japanese Home Islands so hard that the enemy would be forced to surrender without the Allies needing to invade.

Arnold, commanding general of the U.S. Army Air Forces, was born in Gladwyne, Pennsylvania, in 1886. A doctor's son, Arnold had been commissioned into the infantry from West Point in 1907. There he earned the nickname "Hap" because of his bright disposition. He quickly became interested in aviation, and in

National Archives

Aerial view of the flaming city of Shizouka, 85 miles southwest of Tokyo. The city was bombed 10 times during the war. On June 19, 1945, over 13,000 incendiary bombs were dropped on it, destroying nearly 27,000 homes.

1911 had taken flying lessons from Orville Wright, becoming one of the very first Army pilots. He soon became well known in aviation circles, earning several decorations and trophies for flying. During World War I he had overseen the Army's aviation program and was a strong advocate of Brig. Gen. Billy Mitchell's demands for greater American air power.

After graduating from the Command and General Staff School in 1929, he was given command of the Army aviation operations at March Field in Riverside, California, where he was awarded his first star. Three years later, Arnold was a major general and Chief of the Army Air Corps (later Army Air Force).

After the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, he was promoted to lieutenant general and retained in command of the Army Air Force. As such, he was included on the American Chiefs of Staff and later the Anglo-American Joint Chiefs of Staff with the rank of four-star general. But by early 1945, he was having problems with the B-29 program—one of his pet projects.

The interim between the world wars had been filled with new military innovations that were strongly espoused by their supporters. The United States Navy was leaving its battleships behind and beginning to build large aircraft carriers carrying greater

Alamy

numbers of airplanes. The U.S. Army was also developing new weapons, including an improved tank and the semi-automatic rifle. And the Army Air Corps was seeking new ways to strike at distant enemies.

To this end, in 1935 the General Headquarters, Army Air Force, was created to lead the still-fledgling Air Corps into the next technological era. Their main job was to build a strategic air force from scratch. Under Brig. Gen. Frank M. Andrews, three airfields were chosen for testing new airplanes. Offensive air operations were believed to be the key to the destruction of an enemy's air power and basic industries. Planes had to be developed that could carry heavy loads over long distances, be able to defend themselves against enemy air opposition, and strike with precision bombing.

By 1930 the Air Corps already had a 10-year plan to develop such aircraft. GHQ Army Air Force was designed to see that plan to fruition. The plan called for four different bombers to be developed, each one an improvement on the last.

The first to be completed was the Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress heavy bomber. This was followed in quick succession by the XB-15 and the XB-19, neither of which was put into production. Opponents of the expansion of the Air Corps took advantage of each misfortune, crash, or failure to try to cancel the programs. Only one XB-15 was built, and from its difficulties came the improved B-17. The largest test aircraft, the XB-19, was the predecessor to the coming B-29.

It was General Arnold who had come up with the specifications for the heavy bombers. His engineers were told to "make them the biggest, gun them the heaviest, and fly them the farthest." But time after time, the new Superfortress developed problems, delaying its entry into combat. And each time, General Arnold pushed for the project to continue.

In August 1938, for example, the B-17 project was also having problems, but it was rushed forward because the next model, known as the XB-15, was in even greater difficulty. Its engines had nowhere near the power required for long-range missions and heavy payloads.

Undaunted, Arnold then demanded a larger bomber, known as the XB-19, one that could fly 10,000 miles with an adequate payload. After nine months of work, the Douglas Aircraft Company declared the project unsuccessful and asked to be removed from the development project.

Arnold ordered that at least one such bomber be built, and in July 1941, the one and only XB-19 first flew. It was enormous—by 1941 standards—with a wingspan of 212 feet, a length of 132 feet, and was twice the size of the new B-17. But once again, its engines were inadequate. For Arnold, though, there was now no turning back on the path to bigger and better bombers.

Four aircraft companies were invited to submit prototypes for the new project. Only one, Boeing, of Seattle, Washington, was granted a contract, in September 1940. But Arnold hedged his bets and asked Consolidated Aircraft Company to submit another prototype, which became known as the XB-32, just in case the Boeing version failed to meet Air Force requirements.

Arnold was betting that between the two companies, they could come up with an aircraft of the desired size, range, and payload and, critically, the engines to carry the aircraft successfully.

When Germany attacked Poland in 1939 and it became apparent that America might soon be drawn into the war, a new bomber was requested by Arnold. This one, known as the XB-36, was to have a wingspan of 142 feet, a length of 99 feet, and weigh about 120,000 pounds—twice the weight of the planned XB-15.

It was to fly 10,000 miles at 300 miles per hour with a ceiling of 36,000 feet. Consolidated Aircraft won this contract, and began development on a six-engine aircraft, with

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ABOVE: Consolidated Aircraft Company developed the XB-32 as a rival to Boeing's B-29 program, but the XB-32 was too flawed to go into production. OPPOSITE: The first B-29 is rolled out of the Glen L. Martin-Nebraska Bomber Plant on May 24, 1944. The nose of the plane was raised to lower the tail and allow it to pass under the canopy doors.

a wingspan of 230 feet and a weight of 278,000 pounds.

But before this could be further developed, Boeing completed its B-29 design and included four powerful Wright engines that could carry the plane its desired distance and with the prescribed payload. As it turned out, the B-29 was ready before the bases from which it would have to fly were in American hands.

No other aircraft ever combined as many technological advances as the Boeing B-29 Superfortress. It is remembered as a gigantic airplane, one that was produced in large numbers—about 4,000 in total. It is also the only aircraft that dropped atomic bombs and conducted the fire-bombing of Japan.

Even before the war, American strategists understood that it would be far harder to bomb Japan than mainland Germany and Italy. The Japanese home islands are surrounded by concentric archipelagoes, all fortified and defended by hundreds of thousands of veteran Japanese troops and dozens of fighter bases. Even those few fields in friendly hands in China and India were simply too distant for any of the current bombers to reach Japan and return.

By 1944, Japan was clearly losing the war, but its home industries were still producing more combat aircraft than at any time previously. Even as Berlin lay in ruins, Tokyo remained largely untouched by the war. For the American strategists, the only solution was to develop an ultra-long-range heavy bomber with a range of more than 3,000 miles and a bomb load of 20,000 pounds.

As noted, work on such an airplane had begun even before the war, when in October 1938, the Boeing Aircraft Company had begun work on just such a plane. That year the Chief of the Army Air Corps, General Oscar Westover, had issued a requirement for a super bomber to replace the recently developed Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress heavy bomber. One of the backers of this new project was General Henry H. Arnold, who later succeeded General Westover.

Boeing had begun working on the project that year, and, despite Congressional disinterest, kept the project alive despite financial and technological problems that plagued the development of the B-29 throughout its existence.

The ensuing development of the B-29 turned into a very expensive program—even more than the entire cost of the Manhattan Project, the program that created the atomic bombs. Estimates of between one and three billion dollars are considered reasonable, depending on how cost is computed. It was the most sophisticated plane in aviation history, and it was enormous.

The first prototype flew on September 21, 1942, and mass production followed in 1944. It weighed 135,000 pounds at maximum weight, had a wingspan of 141.3 feet—larger than any existing aircraft—and carried a crew of 11, one more than a B-17.

The B-29 was armed with ten .50-caliber machine guns and one 20mm-cannon. It was pressurized, allowing it to fly at up to 36,000 feet, and could carry a payload of 20,000 pounds. Top speed was 390 miles per hour and its range was 5,333 miles. If the Americans could get close enough to Japan, this aircraft could bomb the Japanese Home Islands with impunity. Neither antiaircraft fire nor enemy fighters could reach the heights or speed of the new super bomber.

PROBLEMS GALORE

But there were problems. A B-29 burned between 400-500 gallons of high-octane aviation fuel per hour, creating logistical headaches. Keeping the four Wright R-3350-23 Duplex-Cyclone turbo-supercharged engines in tune was an ongoing headache. The computerized gun systems all required constant maintenance, expensive spare parts, and specially trained ground crews.

More than 60 factories across the United States contributed parts to the completed aircraft. But before they could be given over to the Army Air Force, each one had to be flown to a modification plant in Salina, Kansas, where problems in each individual aircraft were repaired and systems upgraded.

Pilots, even experienced bomber pilots, had difficulty flying in what they called the "fishbowl"—the nose canopy. General Curtis E. Lemay, soon to command the largest fleet of B-29s, was heard to remark that the B-29 "had as many bugs as the

Entomological Department of the Smithsonian Institution. Fast as they got the bugs licked, new ones crawled out from under the cowling."

Yet, over time and with continued difficulty, the aircraft became more and more reliable. The plane flew and was capable of the necessary range and payload required by the strategists. By June 1944, it was in combat.

For the leaders of the Army Air Force, the new aircraft required a new command. This was the 20th Bomber Command under Maj. Gen. Kenneth B. Wolfe. An advance group had been sent to India at the end of 1943 to prepare bases for the new command, and, in April 1944, 20th Bomber Command arrived in India with the first B-29s. With fields in India and western China, the plan was to begin bombing Japan as soon as possible.

But once again, problems arose. Supply to both India and China required long logistical lines, and in the case of China this included the long and dangerous flights over "The Hump," the Himalaya Mountains, subject to interception by the Japanese. The situation required that the B-29s do their own logistical flights to keep the 20th Bomber Command supplied. For a B-29 to perform one combat mission, six round-trip logistical flights had to be flown over "the Hump."

The first mission was flown on June 5, 1944, from Indian bases near the Bay of Bengal against railroad targets in Bangkok, Thailand. Ten days later, the first target within Japan, the Imperial Iron and Steel Works at Yawata, on Kyushu Island, was attacked. After stopping in China to refuel, only 47 B-29s reached the target. Only 15 of those could see the target and bombed with minimal results. Seven planes and 55 men were lost.

B-29S GO TO WAR

But the B-29s were finally in the war. These night raids continued despite increasing problems, including intense heat that overheated the planes' engines while idling, hail as large as eggs, monsoons, high humidity, which shorted out wires in the planes' delicate electrical system, and instrument failure due to these conditions. Logistical needs continued to be a major concern.

In July 1944, General Wolfe was ordered home to a new assignment. His deputy, Brig. Gen., La Verne "Bloody" Saunders, held temporary command through September. Then, Maj. Gen. Curtis E. LeMay, at 38 years of age the youngest two-star general in the Air Force, arrived to assume command.

National Archives

ABOVE: Ground crews at a base on Saipan prepare B-29 "18th C.B." for a mission. The SeaBee mascot holding a machine gun is painted on the nose. OPPOSITE: B-29s on a mission over Japanese-occupied Singapore, February 24, 1945. The success of the raid proved to LeMay the devastating value of incendiary munitions.

Curtis Emerson LeMay was born in Columbus, Ohio, in 1906, and received his engineering degree from Ohio State University in 1927. He was commissioned into the Army Air Corps two years later and rose steadily within its officer ranks until by October 1943 he was a brigadier general commanding the 3rd Bomber Division flying combat missions over Germany. These included the deadly raids over Regensburg, Schweinfurt, and other costly operations. Promoted to major general, he was ordered to India to assume command of the 20th Bomber Command.

Throughout the early war years, the leaders of the U.S. Army Air Force were convinced that the way to hit the enemy hardest was with precision daylight bombing. Many of the leaders of what one historian has called the "Bomber Mafia" were convinced that by proving the worth of strategic bombing, they could convince Congress that an independent Air Force, like the British Royal Air Force, was necessary, and that they would receive the accompanying benefits of such a creation.

They had adopted the Norden bombsight, a precision instrument developed by Carl L. Norden, and claimed that it could drop a bomb into a pickle barrel from 30,000 feet. So convinced were they of the accuracy of this weapon that they refused to join the British night attacks on Germany, insisting that their own precision bombsight would destroy Germany's ability to wage war more quickly, and with fewer casualties, than the British area bombing methods. But that did not happen.

Problems quickly surfaced, and the bombsight's accuracy was affected by mechanical and human factors, not to mention enemy opposition in the air. Plus, to use the sight, one had to be able to visually see the target, something not always possible over cloud-covered Europe or, later, Japan. As a result, targets like Regensburg, Schweinfurt, and many others had to be attacked repeatedly, causing more, rather than fewer, American losses.

It had long been appreciated by American military leaders that the best solution to

long-range bombing of Japan would be using the B-29s from an American-controlled, supplied, and secured base. The most suitable bases were at that time held by the Japanese, in the Mariana Islands. The United States Navy, Army, and Marine Corps seized these islands—Saipan, Tinian, and Guam—in mid-1944 and they were rushed to completion as air bases for an American strategic-bombing campaign against Japan.

EARLY MISSIONS, MORE DIFFICULTIES

The first B-29s arrived there in early September, under the command of Brig. Gen. Haywood "Possum" Hansell and his 21st Bomber Command. The first mission was a "shakedown" mission to the bypassed enemy bastion at Truk, in the Caroline Islands.

Raids on Japan itself began on November 24 with an 88-plane attack led by Brig. Gen. Emmett "Rosie" O'Donnell, covering a 1,500-mile one-way distance to Tokyo and striking that city's Musashima Aircraft Plant. Problems with winds and other natural conditions allowed only 24 bombers to bomb the target, while the others were forced to hit alternate targets. Only 45 bombs hit within the target area. One B-29, apparently hit by a damaged Japanese fighter, was lost over Japan.

The bombers had some unique difficulties to overcome. The targets were more than 1,450 miles from their bases, requiring a long flight. That flight was mostly over water, making navigation difficult. And there were several Japanese-held air bases between the Marianas and Japan over which the bombers would have to fly, including Iwo Jima.

Finally, the physical location of Japan between the Asian continent and the wide Pacific Ocean presented unusual weather conditions—such as turbulent winds, stagnant clouds, and violent headwinds—that the bombers would have to overcome. On occasion, pilots reported that winds were so bad that they had to approach their targets downwind, or that winds were so strong that their planes were held motionless in the air. Tail winds propelled the huge planes as fast as 450 miles per hour.

Bombardiers often had to make as many as half a dozen corrections when dropping their bombs to account for the erratic passage of bombs through layers of wind going in different directions. This was the flyers' first indication of what later became known as the jet stream. Because of these and other considerations, results were often disappointing. On average, there were only seven days a month with clear skies over Japan.

In January 1945, LeMay left his bombers in India and assumed command of the 21st Bomber Command in the Marianas. He was succeeded in India by Brig. Gen. Roger M. Ramey.

In the Marianas, General Hansell had decided that the Japanese aircraft factories were his prime target. Reconnaissance showed that these were primarily located in and around the Tokyo area. He had launched his first mission, "San Antonio One," with that in mind. He would later say, "The operation wasn't as good as we would have liked, but as an initial effort, it did show it could be done. This was a very doubtful issue at the time."

Repeated efforts produced no better results, and little damage was being done to the Japanese aircraft industry. The clouds, winds, and weather over Japan made it far more difficult to effectively use the Norden bombsight than it had ever been over Germany.

One bombardier turned to his pilot and said, "I can't get this damn telescope on the

target … and so we called the radar operator to check our ground speed and … he came back and he says we've got a 125-knot tailwind. He said we're going about 480 miles an hour. It's impossible—it can't be. There's no winds like that." But there were, over Japan, and that made the use of the Norden bombsight problematic.

General Hansell's chief of staff, Colonel John B. Montgomery, tried to persuade the general that they would have to bomb lower and at night, but Hansell, a firm believer in the Norden bombsight and precision bombing, refused to listen to his advice. But at Florida's Eglin Airfield, General Arnold was conducting a series of tests with the B-29—and napalm—to learn what they could, and could not, do. Other tests were being conducted at the U.S. Army's Dugway Proving Ground in Utah.

National Archives

ABOVE: Brig. Gen. Thomas Power, right, led Operation Meetinghouse on March 9/10. Maj. Gen. Lemay, center, looks over the after-action report with Brig. Gen. Lauris Norstad, Chief of Staff, 20th Air Force. OPPOSITE: A B-29 named "Booze Hound," 500th Bomb Group, 73rd Wing, flies over Saipan, 1945.

BURNING DOWN A TEST VILLAGE

Napalm had only recently been invented when scientists, Louis Fieser of Harvard, Hoyt Hottel of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), and E.B. Hershberg were working for the National Defense Research Committee (NDRC). They developed an incendiary gel, soon known as napalm, which stuck to whatever it landed on—roofs, walls, furniture, and skin—and burned for long periods of time. It is estimated that napalm killed more Japanese in World War II than did the two atomic bomb blasts.

To determine the effects of napalm, in March 1943 an area of the Dugway Proving Ground, a huge U.S. Army post and desert wasteland about 90 miles southwest of Salt Lake City, Utah, was selected for a test. The Standard Oil Company was contracted to create a million-dollar, full-scale model of both a German and a Japanese town on which the new munition could be tested.

In total, a dozen Japanese-style dwellings were constructed, along with six German buildings, in just 44 days. Every effort was made to re-create the traditional architectural styles and building materials used—right down to the roofs, furniture, and floor coverings, including *tatami* (straw floor mats) in the Japanese homes.

As one report noted, "With the villages constructed and furnished, initial testing of the incendiary weaponry began on May 17, and ended on July 16, 1943, but additional tests were conducted into 1944 to refine the M-69 into cluster bombs. In total, the structures were destroyed and completely rebuilt at least three or four times … Planes dropped a variety of bombs on the structures, including the M-50 and M-52 thermite-based bomb, as well as the M-69 napalm-based bombs."

A model of Tokyo was also built at Eglin Air Force Base near Fort Walton Beach, Florida. Conventional wisdom said that in order to destroy the city, it should be first bombed with high explosives, and then the debris could be ignited with incendiaries. But Arnold's tests proved otherwise. Instead, it was found that the use of small napalm bombs would ignite the buildings and spread rapidly, creating an enormous fire that would quickly spread uncontrolled throughout the city.

With these results, Arnold ordered a new attack on the Japanese city of Nagoya, center of the aviation industry. Hansell protested, but to no avail; he did as he was ordered, bombing Nagoya from 15,000 feet. The clusters of incendiaries were dropped too high, scattering over too large an area to make the best use of their potential.

Arnold was becoming increasingly impatient with Hansell. But on January 19, Hansell conducted an attack on the Kawasaki Aircraft Plant west of Kobe and for the first time had good results. Without any losses, he had reduced the production of that plant by 90 percent. In fact, so effective was this strike that the plant was never reopened during the remainder of the war. But it was too late. The next day General Lauris Norstad arrived to tell Hansell that he was being replaced by Curtis LeMay, coming over from India.

LeMay arrived at an opportune moment. The Navy Seabees had completed three more airfields in the Marianas, allowing for the deployment of three additional B-29 bomber wings. In addition to the pioneer 73rd Bomb Wing, LeMay now had the 313th, 314th, and 315th Bomb Wings at his disposal.

But LeMay found that the training of his crews was abysmal. They needed training particularly on the use of radar. With the usual cloud cover over Japan, using radar for bombing became even more crucial to success, so he put all wings to training full-time.

General Frank Armstrong's 315th Bomb Wing had arrived with the latest-model radar,

the AN/APQ-7 Eagle, and LeMay reserved this wing for use against critical Japanese oil refineries. He also took the highly unusual step of stripping his B-29s of weight to make them more maneuverable. Armor plate, gunners, ammunition, and most of the gun turrets were all removed.

He then trained his crews in flying the "combat box" formation that he had developed in Europe. It was a tight formation of bombers grouped together to concentrate their firepower against enemy fighters. By using this tight formation, all the remaining guns of each B-29 would support the whole flight.

This did little to improve bombing accuracy, but it did address the new danger of Japanese ramming tactics. Lately, Japanese fighter pilots, unable to shoot down the giant bombers, had taken up kamikaze tactics, ramming the B-29s and going down with them.

They had also begun to use the new "BAKA" (Fool's) Bomb, a two-ton bomb with wings, a tail, and rocket propulsion piloted by a kamikaze pilot that was carried up to 20,000 feet and then launched against the bombers. Flying into the bomber formations at 600 miles per hour, it left the Americans without a defense against it. Fortunately, Japanese resources were so limited at this stage that the BAKA Bomb was soon unavailable to them.

For six weeks General LeMay intensively trained his crews, making few attacks on Japan. During this time, he had become convinced that incendiary attacks on Japanese cities worked only if they were mounted by a large force attacking from a low altitude. He tested this theory first on Japanese-held Saigon, Kuala Lumpur, and Rangoon and then on February 24, 1945, with an attack by 105 B-29s on Singapore, which burned out half of the huge dock area of that port.

The following day he sent 172 bombers to hit the aviation plants around Tokyo. But once again cloud cover saved most of those plants, and alternate targets were hit. Despite this, snow-covered Tokyo had about one square mile burned to the ground.

Convinced more than ever that he was right, LeMay began intensive training of his crews in low-level incendiary bombing. The crews bombed from 1,000 feet, at night, using the British technique of "maximum compression"—planes following one another at two-minute intervals and flying at the same speed, but a hundred feet higher than the preceding aircraft. This method allowed visual bombing despite weather conditions, would increase damage accordingly, and reduced gasoline expenditure, thus allowing for a greater payload to be carried.

It was believed that Japanese antiaircraft fire, effective at high altitudes, was less so at lower altitudes. Speed and darkness would replace the guns as the main armament of the B-29. With this training complete, LeMay ordered Mission 40—Operation Meetinghouse—to launch.

Fears by some of heavy-bomber crew casualties prompted LeMay not to request approval of his new tactics from General Arnold, but he did brief General Norstad, Arnold's Chief of Staff, on his plans.

National Archives

The target of Operation Meetinghouse was an area of about four miles by three miles in the Shitamachi District of Tokyo, and included the Asakusa, Honjo, and Fukagawa wards of the city. These included a large majority of working-class neighborhoods. Tokyo's population of over one million inhabitants made it one of the most densely populated urban areas in the world.

There were no significant military facilities in the area, but it did contain many small factories supplying the Japanese war industries. As elsewhere in Japan, most buildings were built of wood and bamboo and were thus highly flammable. The area had suffered heavily from the large fires started during the 1923 Kantõ earthquake, and American intelligence rated Shitamachi as being the most combustible district within Tokyo.

The plan called for each bomber wing to fly at different altitudes, ranging from 5,000 to 7,000 feet, which were expected to be too high for the lighter antiaircraft guns, and too low for the heavier antiaircraft guns. Because he had knowledge of the Manhattan Project (the atomic bomb), LeMay was prohibited from leading the raid, as he had often done in Europe.

For over 36 hours the specially trained mechanics worked over the technically temperamental bombers to have as many operational aircraft as possible for this great raid. This was a successful effort, as the usual 60 percent available rate was upped to an unusual 83 percent rate for this operation.

Ground crews then loaded the planes with fuel and bombs. The units based on Saipan, Brig. Gen. Emmett ("Rosie") O'Donnell, Jr.'s 73rd Bombardment Wing and Brig. Gen. John H. Davies' 313th Bombardment Wing, contributed 169 and 121 bombers, respectively. The 314th Bombardment Wing was still in the process of setting itself up on Guam, and so had only 56 B-29s available.

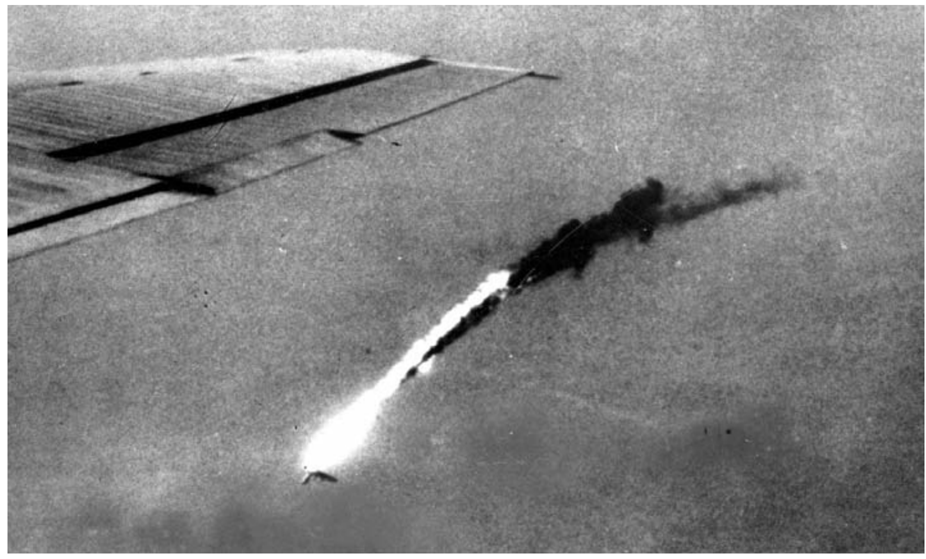
The planes carried M47 or M69 bombs, both filled with napalm. The Saipan-based bombers each carried six-and-a-half tons of bombs, while the more distant Guam-based bombers carried four-and-a-half tons of bombs.

Instead of LeMay, Brig. Gen. Thomas Sarsfield Power would lead the actual attack. Born in New York City in 1905, he had attended Cooper Union College before enlisting in the Air Corps in 1928. Commissioned in 1929, Power had already served in the Philippines, graduated the Air Corps Tactical School, and had commanded bombing groups and wings in Europe before coming to the Pacific. Recently promoted to brigadier general, he had been awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, Silver Star, and other decorations, attesting to his dedication to the Army Air Force.

General Power, commander of the 314th Bombardment Wing, would lead 325 bombers from the 73rd, 313th, and 314th Bomb Wings to Tokyo on March 9/10, 1945. Of these, some 279 bombers would reach and bomb the targets. Led by pathfinder squadrons that flew ahead to mark the targets with fires, the attackers were facing approximately 638 antiaircraft guns of the 1st Antiaircraft Division and 210 fighters of the 10th Air Division assigned to protect Tokyo. The latter had already been training in night attacks, and one flying regiment, the 53rd Air Regiment with about 25 fighters, had been converted to a specialized night-fighter unit.

Both: National Archives

ABOVE: Bombs fall on the city of Nagoya, Japan's third-largest city, the night after the Tokyo raid. BELOW: Despite beliefs to the contrary, B-29s, like this one with its wing shot away, were not immune from ground fire. OPPOSITE: A formation of B-29s on their way to hit a Japanese factory complex. Tokyo was hit by 350 B-29s on March 9-10, 1945.



As early as March 3, the Japanese had intercepted American radio messages that indicated that the Americans of 21st Bomber Command were about to start major night bombing operations against Japan. Although this allowed the Japanese to prepare for night defense against American attacks, they did not know that General LeMay had ordered low-level attacks.

In addition to the fighters and antiaircraft guns, the Japanese had prepared an early-warning network of picket boats and radar stations, as well as lookouts to warn of incoming enemy air attacks. But shortages of radar equipment and lack of fire-control equipment for the antiaircraft guns weakened the enemy defenses.

These were under the command of General Shizuichi (Seiichi) Tanaka, a distinguished officer who had served in England, was on the Army General Staff, had commanded infantry in battle, served as head of the Military Police, served in China and the Philippines, and had recently been placed in command of the Eastern District Army in the defense of Japan. The fact that his command included the protection of the emperor's Imperial Palace was a mark of the high regard the Japanese Army held for him.

The B-29 bomber crews were told that the purpose of the raid was to destroy the many small factories that supplied the Japanese war effort, but they were also advised that by causing many civilian casualties, the enemy war effort would be severely impacted. This disturbed many of the airmen, who felt safer at high altitudes and concerned about leaving their guns behind.

Each of the three wings was given a different altitude to bomb from, in hopes of avoiding collisions.

After taking off from their bases, the bombers approached Tokyo at altitudes varying from 4,900 to 9,200 feet. Ahead, the fires begun by the pathfinders highlighted their targets and could be seen from 50 miles away.

As they approached, the thermal currents tossed the bombers around like toys, often 700 feet high. As the bomb bay doors opened, the smell of the fires entered the bombers and stuck to the clothes of the airmen.

In addition to the antiaircraft guns and fighters, the Japanese had for three years trained the entire adult male population of Tokyo in firefighting techniques. With a city made of paper, wood, and bamboo, this was necessary even when not at war, as the Great Kantõ earthquake had shown over two decades earlier. There were also about 8,000 trained professional fire personnel divided among 287 fire stations.

Unfortunately, they had little in the way of modern firefighting equipment and had never encountered incendiaries. The neighborhood firefighting associations were even less prepared for a major conflagration. But what was about to happen was nothing like the Japanese had prepared for in training.

The first bombs were dropped on Tokyo

Naval History & Heritage Command

shortly after midnight, local time, on March 10, 1945. The increasing roar of engines of hundreds of B-29s caused many Japanese to look upward; the dark sky was orange; the color of aluminum being illuminated by the pathfinders' fires. Suddenly the bomb-bay doors opened, and the small, cylindrical cylinders came raining out all across the great city.

The bombers created great concentric circles of fire around their aiming points. Then following groups dropped their incendiaries into those circles, and the wind did the rest. This evening it was recorded as being 30 miles an hour, creating a huge firestorm that made any attempt at controlling the fires impossible.

Water in the Sumida River, flowing through central Tokyo, and its many canals boiled, glass melted, temperatures reached 500 degrees Fahrenheit. People jumped into the water only to be boiled alive. There was nothing the Japanese, or anybody, could do. Few homes had air-raid shelters; most civilians just had a recently dug foxhole shelter for the immediate family that would give no protection from a major fire.

Over 200,000 homes had been deliberately destroyed earlier by the Japanese themselves to create firebreaks, but the rubble within these breaks had not been cleared, and simply added more fuel to an already out-of-control-situation.

As noted, pathfinder crews from the 73rd and 313th Bombardment Wings had already flown over the city and dropped their first incendiaries—M47 napalm bombs—in an "X" shape to mark the center of the target area for the following bomber stream. Each of the bomber commands had been briefed to attack a different sector of the X to maximize the effect of the bombing.

Above the growing firestorm, General Powers circled for 90 minutes, observing the results of the attack. With him was a team of map makers who catalogued the districts destroyed by the fires.

The raid continued for more than two hours and 40 minutes. Each individual bomber covered an area 2,000 feet long and 300 feet wide with its bombs. As the later bombers appeared over the city, the smoke and flame covered the targets, and the pathfinder markings disappeared into the larger firestorm. This led some bombers to bomb outside the designated areas.

The intense heat from the burning city also created updrafts that tossed these late arrivals around almost as badly as the jet stream had on earlier raids. So bad did the smell of burning become in the later bombers, many airmen had to use their oxygen masks to overcome the sickening odor.

As General LeMay had hoped, Japanese defenses were overwhelmed. No warning of the attack came until the first bombs dropped on the city. The Japanese night fighters, who had instructions not to fly until an actual raid had been reported, got off to a late start because of these instructions. Picket boats had reported the incoming attack, but communications failure had prevented the word from reaching the 53rd Air Regiment in time for them to get enough altitude to protect their city.

Some reports indicated that the early-arriving B-29s, the pathfinders, were on a reconnaissance mission, and therefore not considered an immediate threat. Other reports were simply not taken seriously, since they stated that the high-level bombers were coming in at extremely low altitudes.

Both: National Archives

ABOVE: Firemen and Civil Guards attempt to find victims in the wreckage of a Tokyo building. BELOW: The 1,800-degree heat generated by the March 9/10 firestorm instantly cremated residents of Tokyo. It is estimated that 90,000-100,000 Japanese died during Operation Meetinghouse. OPPOSITE: The devastation caused by the fire-bombing was widespread over much of Tokyo. Only brick and concrete buildings stood a chance of survival. Despite the damage, the Japanese government refused to surrender—until two atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945.

Imperial War Museum

It was not until well after the first bombs had dropped that the 1st Antiaircraft Division turned on their searchlights and opened fire. Most of their fire was too high or too low to seriously impede the bombers. Many gun positions soon had to be abandoned due to the raging fires all around them. Even so, a dozen B-29s were reportedly shot down by Japanese gunners.

Five crews were rescued by American submarines lying offshore. Another 42 bombers were damaged but managed to survive. In total, 96 American airmen were killed or missing, and another six wounded. Japanese night fighters were completely ineffective. Some even crashed after they ran out of fuel while searching for American aircraft.

In Tokyo, the fire was out of control within 30 minutes of the first bomb landing on the city. Within an hour, the Tokyo Fire Department acknowledged that they could not control the flames. The firemen did what they could to guide people to safety, but they lost 125 of their own, along with 500 Civil Guards assigned to assist them; 96 of their fire engines were destroyed.

The strong winds quickly spread the fire over a large area of the city and destroyed or seriously damaged every building in their path. Pre-attack instructions from authorities such as "Fight, don't run" and "No matter what sort of air raid comes, this neighborhood association will be safe," only led to thousands of unnecessary deaths. Civilians who remained in their homes had no chance of survival.

One historian has written that "the key to survival was to grasp quickly that the situation was hopeless and flee." One eyewitness, Father Gustav Bruno Maria Bitter, remembered seeing "the first circle of fire" which reminded him of "a silver curtain falling, like the *lametta*, the silver tinsel that we hung from Christmas trees in Germany … and where these silver streamers would touch the earth, red fires would spring up." Another eyewitness recalled that the incendiaries "did not fall; they descended rather slowly, like a cascade of silvery water. One single bomb covered quite a big area, and what they covered they devoured."

Many sought sanctuary in the only water nearby, the Sumida River. This ran through the Honjo and Mukojima factory districts and drew many civilians who sought safety in the river. These people who fled could see barely 10 feet in front of them as they ran, so thick was the smoke.

One woman, Funato Kazuyo recalled, "People panicked. Running, screaming, 'We're all going to die! The fire is coming!' The sound of incendiary bombs falling, *whizzz*, the deafening reverberations of the planes, and the great roar of the fire and wind overwhelmed us. If we stay here, we'll die! Let's run … Women and children follow us! Why are you hesitating?'"

Those in the river soon began to crush

Continued on page 97

The Fight for Weiler

BY ALLYN VANNOY

A Luxembourg village found itself in the path of the German onslaught in December 1944, with only 132 American soldiers to defend it.

IN a house in a small, nameless Belgian village, 26-year-old Sergeant Tom Myers, a newly assigned member of the 5th Armored Division, was upstairs changing his filthy uniform for a fresh one. One of the other GIs was Carl Nimnicht, who was preparing food for the group in the kitchen of the house. When Nimnicht called him to come down for chow, Tom stopped what he was doing and headed downstairs.

He was about halfway down the stairs when the house was suddenly violently jolted as German gunners dropped several artillery rounds on the village. Myers managed to make his way down to the kitchen where he found his four companions on the floor, shaken up, but otherwise all right. A shell had landed in the street in front of the house.

Returning upstairs, Myers found a large hole in one wall and a pile of rags and wood scraps that had been the bed he had been sitting on just moments earlier.

That evening, the unit's field kitchen had been set up in a small pasture below the house. Myers and the other GIs had been through the chow line and were sitting on the grass eating when they heard a swishing sound, followed by an explosion in a gully just below them. Many of the men got up and ran for the protection of nearby houses. Myers stayed in place but was now hugging the ground.

The force of the explosion, the blast wave, had passed over them due to the contour of the hill where they sat; the explosion was determined to have been that of a V1 "Buzz Bomb." The Germans had turned to using the V1 rockets, also used to bombard England, in an effort to strike targets just behind the front. Everyone wondered if the next rocket would be a direct hit.

It was December 16, 1944, and the start of the Germans' Operation *Wacht am Rhein*—better known today as the Battle of the Bulge.

Tom Myers was born on November 10, 1917, on a wheat farm about 10 miles east of Lodi, California, some 40 miles southeast of Sacramento. The youngest of seven children, he was delivered by a horse-and-buggy doctor.

When he was just a few months old, his father moved the family north to the state of Washington, where he built an auto repair shop and a blacksmith shop—covering both modes of transportation in those days when many people were still making the switch from teams of horses to automobiles and tractors. In October 1926, they moved again, this time to Oregon farm country—the Willamette Valley.

In the winter of 1928-29, Tom's father bought a large dairy and fruit farm, placing the family deeply in debt. In the fall of 1929, as the stock market crashed and the economy collapsed, the Great Depression loomed, and Tom's family, like many others, faced financial ruin.

Tom was just completing the eighth grade with hopes of eventually graduating high school and attending Oregon Agricultural College (now Oregon State University). However, midway through his first year of high school, Tom's older brother left the farm; his father lacked the stamina to perform the hard work of running a farm and had no money to hire help. So, Tom had to leave school at age 14.

When Tom's mother died in 1937, and the other children were grown and gone, it was just Tom and his father left on the farm. In the spring of 1940, they scaled back farm operations and Tom left to begin working at a local cannery, soon becoming a supervisor. He married on July 12, 1940.

Following the attack on Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941, Tom considered joining the Army immediately, but at the time he was a foreman at the cannery that was processing fruits and vegetables for the Army and Navy. The cannery's manager convinced him that he was more valuable to the war effort at home than in uniform. His wife felt the same, so his manager obtained a draft deferment for him.

All photos National Archives

A little girl hands a flower to a lieutenant of the 110th Infantry Regiment, 28th Infantry Division, as flag-waving Luxembourgers welcome the liberating Yanks to their village, September 1944. Unfortunately, the celebration was premature; the Germans launched a counteroffensive that became known as the Battle of the Bulge three months later and nearly drove the Americans out of Luxembourg. Tom Myers was a soldier in the 110th Infantry whose unit was caught up in the chaos.

When Tom changed jobs in January 1944, his deferment no longer applied, and he became eligible for the draft. When he received his "call up," he felt a certain a sense of relief from guilt. Tom recalled: "I was not unhappy about being drafted, as I had been feeling for some time that I should be in there, doing my part."

He was inducted into the Army on March 4, 1944—at age 26 an "old man" by Army standards.

In August 1944, after completing 17 weeks of basic and infantry training, where he qualified as an "Expert" with the M-1 Garand rifle and "Sharpshooter" with the Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR), he was given a 10-day furlough home. After the furlough, he boarded a train for Fort Meade, Maryland, leaving behind his wife and baby daughter.

On September 1, he and other replacement soldiers boarded the SS *Ile de France*, a passenger liner converted into a troop transport, headed for Scotland, then on to Southampton and across the English Channel to Omaha Beach. From there, he and other replacements were trucked to a replacement depot in Belgium.

Myers, along with 50 or so replacements, was sent to the 5th Armored Division, positioned at a small Belgian village about two or three miles behind the front lines.

While waiting to be sent forward, Myers and four others made themselves "at home" in a vacant house. One of the other GIs was Carl Nimnicht, who Tom got to know while at Fort Meade. That was the day when German artillery shells rocked the house—his "baptism of fire."

During his first few days with the 5th Armored Division unit, Myers became friends with several members of the company and would have liked to have stayed with them, but orders arrived directing him to report to the "repple depple" (replacement depot) for reassignment.

The next morning, instead of being assigned as a rifleman, Myers was sent to a headquarters unit and assigned to repair lines for field phones. At night, he was assigned to guard the company CP (command post) near the north end of the village. It was while guarding the CP that Myers had his first face-to-face encounter with two German soldiers as the individuals approached the CP—deserters who wanted to surrender.

ABOVE: American troops of the 2nd Battalion, 109th Infantry Regiment, 28th Infantry Division, march through a flag-bedecked Luxembourg town in pursuit of the enemy on September 10, 1944. OPPOSITE: 28th Division soldiers cross an open field while approaching Siegfried Line defenses. Some of the toughest fighting of the war lay ahead of them.

Next, Myers received orders to report to the 28th Infantry Division, commanded by Maj. Gen. Norman Cota. Arriving at a division assembly area, he and other replacements were told to file past a pile of supplies and take as many K-rations and as much ammunition as they could carry—a portent of things to come.

They assembled along a muddy, rutted road and then started into the woods, which was part of the dreaded Huertgen Forest—where many units of the American First Army had suffered heavy casualties and operations had come to grief. Myers was assigned to the 28th's I Company, 110th Infantry Regiment.

The replacements were guided to company kitchen tents and fed. While there, the cooks and KPs—soldiers assigned as "Kitchen Police" to assist the cooks—filled them in on what had been happening during the past few days—that the company had been pinned down a short distance away and that guides were to lead the replacements up to the line.

Tom noted that while they were waiting to move forward, several soldiers emerged from the forest, trudging along without packs or rifles, their heads down.

Myers recalled, "They were dirty, unshaven, and looked as if they could hardly put one foot in front of the other. They did not seem to see us. Another fellow and I went up to one of them and asked him where he was going and where he had been. He did not look up or acknowledge that he heard us; he just kept walking west on the trail. I guess he had seen too much war."

While Myers and others were waiting near the kitchen tents for their guides to arrive, several artillery rounds crashed into the area. One of the cook tents was hit, injuring some of the cooks and KPs. The replacements were saved from harm as they went diving into nearby foxholes with log overheads.

Once the guides arrived, the column moved out. As Myers and the other GIs went up to the line, their guides warned them to keep under cover at all times as the Germans were only a short distance away. But not everyone seemed to pay attention. As one of the replacements straightened up to remove his pack before getting into his foxhole, a well-placed sniper's bullet dropped him.

When Myers and Wayne Newman, Tom's foxhole mate, slipped into a vacated hole with overhead cover—logs that would protect them from shells that would burst in the trees above them—they found discarded clothing and blankets. While in the process of cleaning things out, Tom picked up a boot that seemed oddly heavy. Examining it further, he found it contained a severed foot. Horrified, he immediately tossed it into the woods.

During the next eight or nine days, the American forces made repeated efforts to advance, but were unable to gain ground against stiff German resistance. When not pinned down by small-arms and machine-gun fire, they came under mortar and artillery barrages, suffering devastating tree bursts that chewed up the unit. Some planned assaults were called off because units were unable to muster sufficient numbers of able-bodied men.

The GIs crouched in their cold, wet holes that were covered by bits of logs and tree limbs salvaged from the tree bursts that mowed through the forest like a giant scythe. They waited hours in the darkness, in fog, snow, and rain, listening for the approach of the enemy.

Myers tried to be realistic about the situation that he and his comrades faced: "When the artillery stops, the silence there in the forest is eerie," he wrote. "Beautiful conifers are now broken and torn, and the ground is a tangled mass of bushes and broken treetops. But then the shells start coming in again and you wonder if one of them today might have your name on it.

"I did not waste a lot of time worrying about it though, that by this time I was convinced that I was leading a charmed (or rather, guided) life. I don't mean to say that I wasn't afraid, I just didn't let my mind dwell on it too much."

Tom and Wayne were relatively safe in their foxhole with its heavy log roof—protected from anything but a direct hit. Their greatest concerns were when the Germans would drop a round near the top of the hill that they were dug in on, then another would fall directly below them. They would repeat, adjusting a few yards each time, walking the rounds closer and closer. They heard one round explode on the hill above them and expected the next to fall directly on them. A dull thud shook them in their hole—a dud burying itself next to their foxhole.

In response to the dangers they seemed to face each day, Myers recalled: "Wayne and I immediately dug a new hole in the side of the mountain and covered it with logs and limbs. I saw only a few German soldiers, and then only fleetingly, but we knew where they were, just as they knew where we were. We exchanged patrols at night, but at that stage of the battle, neither side seemed to have much interest in going on the offensive."

The 28th Division was to start offensive operations on November 2, 1944. The division's 109th Infantry Regiment was assigned to capture the wooded area north of the town of Germeter but ran into trouble after advancing just 300 yards when it encountered a previously undetected minefield, then was pinned down by mortar and artillery fire and harassed by local counterattacks.

Just one mile was gained after two days

Imperial War Museum

of fighting, after which the 109th dug in. This was nearly all the ground the 109th would take during the battle. The division's other two regiments fared little better during their operations, the division failing to secure the objectives it was assigned due to weather, prepared defenses, determined defenders, and terrain.

Early on the morning of November 17, the 28th Division was relieved by the 8th Infantry Division. It was also the second birthday of Myers's daughter. And Tom had just turned 27 the week before.

The threat to the GIs was not just the enemy. Departing the front lines left an impression on Myers: "When we reached the assembly area, after walking out of the Huertgen [Forest], Wayne and I were so exhausted that we unrolled our water-soaked blankets on the ground, crawled between them and immediately fell asleep … I didn't realize how cold it was until I started to throw back the blankets. They were frozen stiff. When I stood up, my feet were like clubs. But then, when my feet thawed, and the pain started, I knew that they too, had frozen.

"In spite of that, however, it felt good to be alive and out of that dark, dreary Hell of the Huertgen. So many died or were crippled for life. Some suffered mental or emotional scars that they would carry the rest of their lives. Some were heroes, some were cowards. I was just one of those that did what needed to be done … and was fortunate to come out of there in pretty good condition."

The 28th Infantry Division had suffered over 6,000 casualties in the Schmidt-Vossenack sector of the Huertgen Forest. Following the action, the 110th Regiment had to absorb some 2,000 replacements, many of them fresh from basic training.

Myers felt that he was aided by his sturdy farm-family upbringing as well as by his faith. He also retained a sense of humor even under the most trying of circumstances.

As of November 16, Tom was one of the 3rd Battalion's just 75 "combat effectives." In order to recover and absorb replacements, the 28th Division was transferred to a quiet sector of the front—the Ardennes. On November 17, Tom's company arrived at the Luxembourg town of Weiler.

The 28th Infantry Division, originally part of the Pennsylvania National Guard and known as the "bucket of blood" division because of the shape of its red sleeve insignia, was spread across the front, with its 112th Infantry Regiment on the north or left flank, the 110th Infantry in the center, and the 109th Infantry on the right flank.

ABOVE: American troops in a defensive position in steep terrain deep within the Hürtgen Forest prepare to ward off the bone-chilling cold and the advancing Germans. A log bunker is visible in the background. OPPOSITE: Members of Tom Myers's 110th Infantry cautiously move through the "green hell" of the Hürtgen Forest, November 2, 1944.

Due to the wide frontage that the division was required to cover, it established a series of company-level strongpoints connected by observation posts and contact patrols. Weiler was east of "Skyline Drive" (the St. Vith-Diekirch highway), which contained most of the 28th Division's strongpoints.

The GIs of the 28th Division thought they were going to a rest area; their trucks dropped them about two miles from Weiler. For those men suffering from fatigue and frozen feet, it was a difficult journey, though it was no more than a dirt track that intersected the hard-surface road to the village. They didn't reach the town until after dark.

One of Myers's buddies was having difficulties—more than the other GIs—his feet frozen and painful, so Tom took part of his comrade's gear to lighten his load. In spite of this, the man lagged further and further behind the main body, along with three others that also were struggling to keep up.

Myers recalled the difficult trek: "After a time, partly because my feet were also paining, I became irritated and did something that I regretted later. I put his gear that I was carrying down in the road and hurried to catch up with the others, leaving him and the other three men to fend for themselves." After reaching the town with the main body, Myers was told that a German patrol had probably ambushed the straggling Americans.

Myers found sleeping that night difficult. "That night I slept very little, as my conscience was hurting. Why had I been so selfish? Why had I become irritated and left him behind?"

To Myers's relief, the next morning the four men who had been left behind appeared. They had spent the previous night sheltered along the road.

Weiler was garrisoned by the 3rd Platoon, I Company, with an anti-tank platoon of the 110th Regiment, two mortar sections of M Company, and the headquarters staff of Companies I and M. The authorized strength of a rifle platoon was 40 officers and men, a company headquarters of some 33, two 81mm mortar sections with a total of 16, and an anti-tank platoon with 10; the town's garrison would be about 132 officers and men.

The morning after arriving at the town, Myers's squad was sent to man outposts on high ground between Weiler and the Our River, to the east of the village. A second squad was assigned to conduct contact patrols to the units on the left and right flanks. The two squads would switch off duties each day.

Myers recalled those first days in the village: "On the days that we were on out-post, we seldom saw the enemy, though one time, during a snowstorm, just before darkness, we saw a German patrol, dressed in white snow suits moving toward Weiler … when they squatted down in the snow, it was impossible to see them."

Most of the encounters with the Germans occurred during the day, while conducting patrols.

In one instance, near the Stolzembourg Castle—located on a hill in the center of the village of Stolzembourg, east of Weiler, near the Our River—the Germans had established a position on the American side of the river in the village. Myers's squad of eight to 10 men were sent to investigate. As they moved down a gully and came into view of the castle, they came under fire.

The squad took cover and began to return fire at windows in the tower of the castle. Myers took the opportunity to use a grenade launcher on his rifle. His first shot struck two feet above the window where the firing was coming from. He adjusted and fired again, this round going through the window and exploding. Later, when they encountered more fire, they pulled back—without casualties.

Weiler was a village of no more than about 30 main structures that lined two north-south parallel streets, cut by two others that created a single block, the southernmost exiting the village to the east, its other end to the southwest. The village church stood at the southern end of the single block that most of the buildings were centered upon.

During the first week at Weiler, Myers's squad was housed at the Rue Principale 6, Café Peffer, along the north side of the street, just a few doors from the village church. Anti-tank guns were positioned just yards away, one set behind the next building to the east and a second across the street in a backyard where it could fire to the south. Later, the squad was moved to the next building to the west, the house of Kissen-Zanter Jos at Rue Principale 5.

On the days that Myers's squad were not manning outposts, they were allowed to sleep late. Some days the men were driven to the nearby town of Clervaux, just 11 miles to the northwest of Weiler, where the regimental headquarters was located, in order to have a day off the line. There they were able to shower, shave, and get into clean clothes.

One building in Weiler was off-limits—the town's church. The GIs did not wish to disturb its sanctity. However, one evening, just before dark, Myers's squad had just returned from a patrol and gone to their quarters when the stillness was broken by the ringing of the church bell. Their suspicions were further raised due to the odd hour and the strange pattern of the ringing. Myers's sergeant arrived from the Company CP and told Tom to take some men and investigate the church.

Myers: "We went to the church and cautiously opened the front door, shining our flashlights around. The only movement

Imperial War Museum

ABOVE: Covered with white sheets to help them blend in with the snow, an American patrol sets out during the Battle of the Bulge. Tom Myers recalls encountering German soldiers wearing American uniforms during one such patrol. OPPOSITE: Myers noted that foxholes and the ruins of buildings in Weiler often became the only shelter from the harsh weather conditions. Here an American officer (second from left) uses a field phone to communicate with higher headquarters.

that we could see was the bell rope near the rear wall which was slowly moving up and down. We called up to the bell tower for the person, whoever he was, to come down. There was no answer. The rope continued to move up and down and the bell continued an eerie, code-like ringing."

Myers found a ladder to the bell tower and climbed to a trap door. Pushing the door open, he shined his flashlight about.

There, lying on the floor, was a man in an American uniform with staff sergeant's stripes and an 8th Infantry Division shoulder patch slowly pulling the bell rope. He was disheveled and unshaven, and appeared that he had been there for several days. There were also several empty wine bottles lying about. He seemed oblivious to Myers's presence, but then asked where he was.

Though his speech was slurred, it seemed that he had been celebrating his promotion to second lieutenant; he claimed that he did not know how he got to the church. He was taken to the company CP for questioning, and then to the division headquarters. What the truth behind his story was did not get back to the company.

Another incident of note occurred shortly before December 16 at a crossroads near the town. The company had been making regular contact with a unit of the U.S. 109th Infantry Regiment to their south, or right flank. Sometimes contact was made at the crossroads, other times at the nearby CP of the 109th.

On this day, Myers and his patrol arrived at the crossroads to make contact. After over an hour of waiting, four or five men, not familiar to them, approached. They were in clean, new uniforms without insignias. About 50 meters short of the crossroads this little group stopped. Then one of them came forward. When asked where the patrol that they usually met was, the individual explained that they were a new unit, replacing the previous one.

But the individual then began asking questions about the defenses and the number of men in Weiler, explaining that his company commander had told him to obtain the information. But this seemed suspicious. When members of Myers's patrol started down the road to talk to the other men in this new party, the stranger broke off the discussion, saying that they were late and had to get back to their CP, then disappeared with his comrades in the direction that they had come from.

Upon returning to their CP, Myers's patrol reported their concerns to their company commander, believing that the patrol they had encountered were probably Germans in American uniforms, but weren't certain.

A few days later, Myers was standing night guard at the back of the house that his squad occupied. The moon was bright as clouds rolled by. At one point, a cloud blocked the moonlight, throwing the area into near darkness. Myers suddenly caught movement out of the corner of his eye in the dim light, accompanied by a slight rustling sound.

Preparing for the worst, Myers took a hand grenade from his harness and pulled the pin but held the handle down as he tried to determine what the source of the movement was. After a minute or two, the clouds moved off the moon, the light revealing a large house cat sitting on a fence. For the next hour Myers labored to replace the pin in the grenade.

Accidents, especially in a combat zone, were always a possibility. A machine-gun squad, occupying a house across the street from Myers's squad, was coming up the road one night with some of its members talking loudly, having an argument, when, suddenly, gunfire erupted. One of the men in the street was nearly cut in two by the blast of a machine gun fired at close range. A member of his crew, while lowering the weapon from his shoulder, had accidentally triggered it.

During early December there were rumors that the 28th Division was to soon be relieved and send back to France to re-organize and re-build. Despite such rumors, I Company remained at Weiler, receiving a few replacements and returnees from hospital.

About December 14, Myers's squad had just finished reporting on the results of their latest patrol to the company commander when he told them that they would be relieved on Sunday, December 17, and that trucks were waiting to pick up their extra ammunition.

They were to turn in all ammunition beyond their basic load—that required for a day of combat. Myers kept just two bandoliers of ammo for his M-1 and a belt of clips. In addition, he kept three or four anti-tank and anti-personnel grenades for his grenade launcher.

About midnight, as Myers was going on guard duty, another squad was returning

from a patrol along the Our River. They reported that the Germans appeared to be having a party across the river.

About 5:35 a.m., Myers, who had completed his turn at guard duty and returned to the building where his squad was housed, was jarred awake by artillery shells landing in and around the village. He jumped out of bed, slipped on his overcoat, got into the harness that held his ammunition and put on his belt with bayonet, canteen and first aid kit, grabbed his rifle and headed down the stairway to join the rest of his squad.

Men who had started out for the river earlier came streaming back into the village. They reported large numbers of German troops coming across the river.

Myers was told to take one of the unit's new replacements, Private Thorne, a 39-year-old former bookkeeper from Chicago Heights, Illinois. The two were to man a position at the southern edge the village overlooking a deep ravine. Myers and Thorne got into a shallow foxhole and waited. As they attempted to peer into the morning fog that enveloped the village, they could see little. But as the fog lifted, they were able to see into the woods on the other side of the ravine—where forms were moving about.

As they waited, Thorne felt the need to tell Myers the story of his life.

Thorne had arrived at the company just a few days earlier, coming to I Company as a raw replacement, fresh from the United States. He said that he wasn't supposed to be there, or even in the Army. He'd had a back operation some years before and his back was very weak. Also, even though nearly 39, he had been called up by his draft board for a physical exam and classified as "4F" (unfit for service). But later, he was again called up and was inducted.

During basic training, there was a number of tasks that he could not perform and was even sent to the hospital on one occasion. While there, he was told that he should receive a medical discharge, but while the discharge was being processed, orders came through and he was shipped out. He was expecting to receive his discharge any day.

As they waited in their foxhole, small-arms fire erupted from the other side of the ravine.

One German soldier crossed the ravine and crawled up the near side towards their position. When a bullet smashed into the dirt behind them, Myers and Thorne raised their heads above the side of the hole to see where the shot had come from. As they did so, another shot was fired, betraying the German's position; Myers returned fire. But the previous shot had struck Thorne in the head just under his helmet, ending the life of the 39-year-old "4-F" bookkeeper from Illinois.

Myers remained in the hole for another half hour, checking Thorne's lifeless body, while it appeared that the German who had fired the fatal shot was also dead.

From a house directly behind Myers's foxhole, which was also under fire, a sergeant yelled to Tom to fall back to the house. Myers cradled his rifle in his arms and quickly crawled to the side of the house where there was a window. He rose to his feet, rolled through the window and onto the floor.

Myers quickly found that he faced as much danger once in the house as he had in the foxhole. "I looked up and saw a young, white-faced private pointing his rifle at my head, with his finger on the trigger. I yelled his name and asked him what

Imperial War Museum

he was doing. He said, 'Oh God, I thought that you were a German, and I almost pulled the trigger.'

"I then proceeded to give him a lecture, telling him that my helmet and uniform should have told him that I was not a German. But if he thought I was, he should have shot me before I got him. I was very angry with him, and he was so unnerved and weak in the knees that he sat in a corner for some time, shaking."

The Germans had planned to capture Weiler early on the morning of the 16th in order to secure a route into the rear of the American positions, but the fighting for the village went on all day and into the night.

The defenders of Weiler, I Company—less the 1st Platoon that had been deployed to a battalion observation post (OP) along the Wahlhausen road to the north—supported by a section of 81mm mortars and an anti-tank platoon, repelled wave after wave of attacking infantry.

When the mortar crews and the anti-tank platoon ran out of ammunition, they joined the infantry and fought as riflemen. Fighting along the roadway to the north of the town had forced the Germans to draw off troops from those that were to attack Weiler.

Twice during the morning, the forces attacking the town were allowed to send forward aid men and remove their wounded.

One of Myers's comrades told him that they could not hold the village, that they should hide in a closet or cellar until the Germans found them and then surrender. But Myers would have none of it. "I had a hard time not showing my contempt for him, when I told him, 'You may do what you want, but I will not surrender. I am staying here to fight as long as I can.'"

At 1:30 in the afternoon, the Germans ceased fire and sent an officer under a white flag to the village requesting the Americans surrender or that they would be annihilated. The I Company commander refused their request.

When most of the men in Myers's house moved to other defensive positions, he encountered another GI, called "Tennessee."

Imperial War Museum

ABOVE: An officer in front of a mortar position communicates with a forward observer to adjust fire during a fire mission. Myers recalled that his battalion's mortar crews ran out of ammunition at Weiler and had to fight as infantrymen. OPPOSITE: Cold and dispirited, American soldiers, captured during the Battle of the Bulge, are marched to a POW camp behind German lines. Myers was one of hundreds of Americans taken prisoner and held until the end of the war.

Tennessee, carrying a BAR, and Tom, went to another house in search of ammunition. There they found several other GIs. Another soldier then burst in, yelling, "We had better get out of here—a large number of Jerries are coming up the street, firing!" Everyone started for the rear door, but Tennessee grabbed a .30-caliber machine gun that had been left standing in the corner. He asked that someone grab an ammo can and come with him to the street. Myers picked up a can of .30-caliber ammunition and followed.

They ran to a low stone wall along the edge of one of the main north-south streets. As Tennessee fired, Myers fed a belt of ammo. Tom saw several Germans go down and others dive for cover. This stopped the German advance up the street for the moment.

By nightfall, Myers and the other GIs had consolidated their positions in the upper part of the village; the Germans occupied the lower part. But the Americans soon found themselves nearly out of ammunition.

Shortly after dark, word came from the I Company commander that the village was surrounded, but they were to hold their positions until 6:00 p.m. They were to then rendezvous at the CP, split into two groups, and slip out of the village to the west, or over the hill to the north, and attempt to get back to battalion headquarters at the town of Consthum, a few miles to the northwest.

Along the Wahlhausen road, the I Company platoon called for ammunition and were told that tanks were being sent with re-supply. At Weiler, the rest of the company and the anti-tank platoon, their ammunition supply dwindling, also waited for the tanks to arrive. But the tank platoon of the 707th Tank Battalion had not reached I Company as night fell.

At 6:30 p.m., the Walhhausen road OP reported that it was under attack by enemy vehicles, some mounting multiple-barrel 20mm guns, and requested American artillery fire on their own positions. Only one man was able to escape.

Myers recalled that the night of December 16/17 was one of terrible frustration, as they attempted to find a way through the German positions, but without success.

As another cold and foggy day dawned, the Americans found the Germans closing in on them. Myers and the other GIs were in a wooded area with a shallow ravine to their backs. In front of them was a steep open hill. As German mortar fire intensified, they realized that they would have to leave their position. Myers overheard his company commander issue the order for the men to charge up and over the hill.

Myers described what happened next: "The hill was so steep that I found myself gasping for breath after some distance of running, straight up the hill. At this time, I saw a hole in the earth. My thought was to jump in the hole [for] two or three minutes to escape the blistering fire, while I regained enough breath to finish running up over the hill.

"However, as I jumped into the hole, several other men also had the same idea and I soon found myself covered with the bodies of several men. I could hardly breathe as I struggled to get out from under the other men. At last, the men were getting off of me and I turned over and looked up. The hole was ringed with German soldiers, with fixed bayonets on their rifles. I did not realize that they were following us so close."

One of the Germans announced, "For you, the war is over."

Myers was gathered up with 14 other GIs, several of whom were wounded, and marched off the field into captivity.

Some 25 American troops, led by a captain, managed to extract themselves from Weiler and reach friendly lines after a long and desperate march, narrow escapes, and avoiding ambushes.

Tom Myers and hundreds of other GIs ended up in a German POW camp in Czechoslovakia. Months later, Tom would be liberated and return to the States. He was discharged from the Army on November 30, 1945.

Tom returned to Oregon, added three sons to his family, and had a career in agriculture and in the lumber industry. He passed away in March 2011.

Although major accounts of the Ardennes actions, such as Hugh Cole's *Battle of the Bulge* or Trevor Dupuy's *Hitler's Last Gamble*, say little about the fight at Weiler, the citizens of the town remembered the heroism of the American defenders enough to create a memorial to their actions.

On September 12, 1983, a memorial to the soldiers of the U.S. Army's 28th Infantry Division was dedicated in Weiler, Luxembourg. At the same time, the square where the memorial was erected was named "Plaza Tom Myers Square." The inhabitants of Weiler had created the memorial as an act of remembrance of the many American soldiers who had lost their lives in and around Weiler on December 16 and 17, 1944, defending the town during the German offensive into the Ardennes—the Battle of the Bulge.

Tom Myers was a symbol to the citizens of Weiler of American GIs—the men who had faced a superior German force as they fought for the town's defense. □

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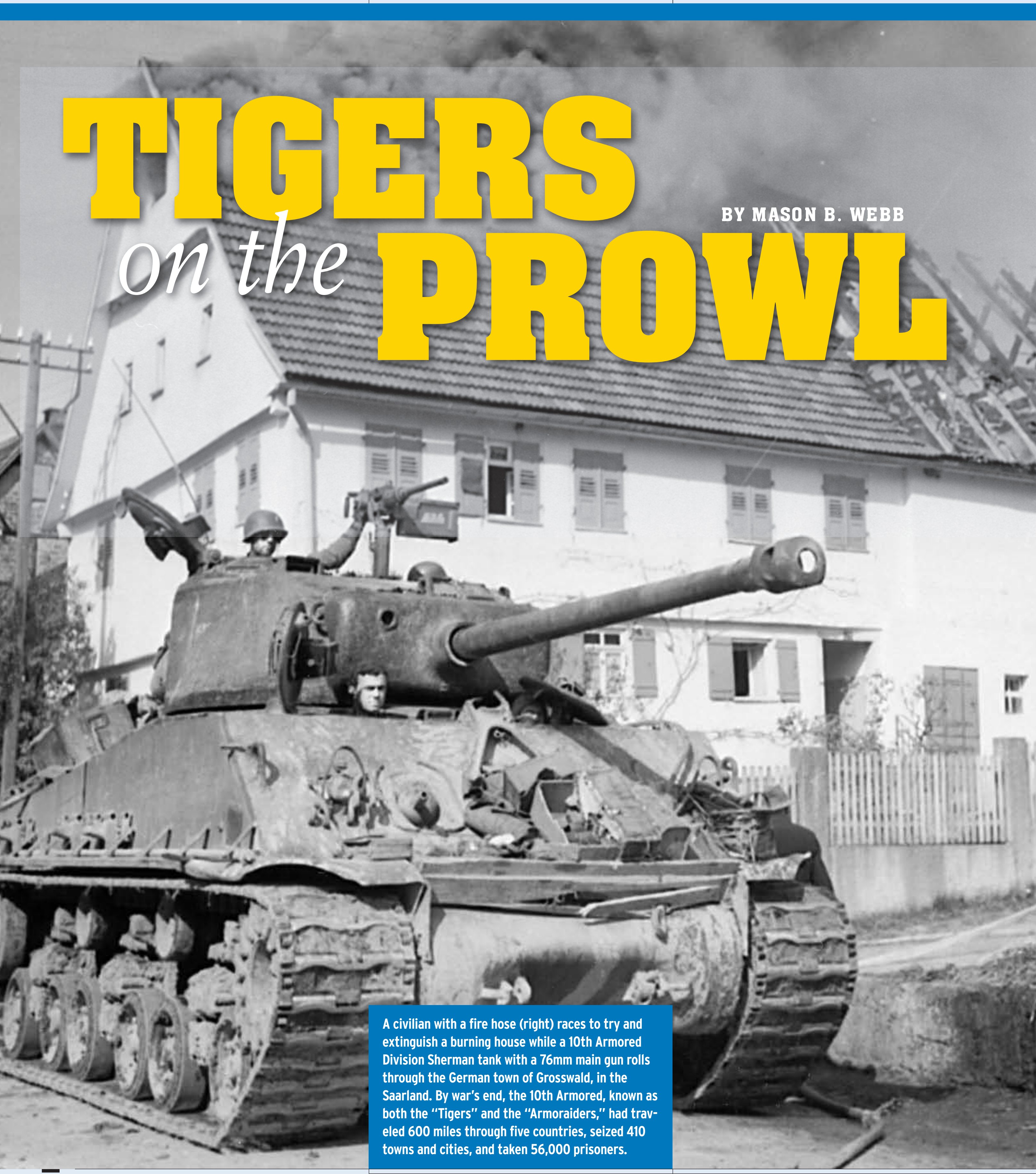
TIGERS *on the* PROWL

BY MASON B. WEBB



A civilian with a fire hose (right) races to try and extinguish a burning house while a 10th Armored Division Sherman tank with a 76mm main gun rolls through the German town of Grosswald, in the Saarland. By war's end, the 10th Armored, known as both the "Tigers" and the "Armoraiders," had traveled 600 miles through five countries, seized 410 towns and cities, and taken 56,000 prisoners.

National Archives

During World War II, the United States fielded 16 armored divisions, and all contributed to the Allied victory. But perhaps the one with the most storied history is the 10th Armored Division—nicknamed the "Tiger" Division and the "Armoraiders."

The division was activated at Fort Benning, Georgia, in July 1942, with Maj. Gen. Paul W. Newgarden, a Patton disciple, at the helm. "Terrify and Destroy!" became the 10,610-man unit's battle cry. The 10th Armored went on to complete its training at Camp Gordon, Georgia, but tragedy struck even before the division could be deployed for combat.

General Newgarden and Colonel Renn M. Lawrence, commander of Combat Command B (an armored division's equivalent of an infantry regiment), had been attending a conference at Fort Knox, Kentucky, and on July 14, 1944, had taken off in a small plane from the post to return to Camp Gordon to review the division in celebration of the anniversary of his assuming command. Near Chattanooga, Tennessee, their small plane went down in a storm, killing all five men on board.

A week later, Maj. Gen. William H.H. Morris, Jr., took command of the grief-stricken Tigers. A division historian wrote, "Just as General Newgarden was an expert trainer of men, General Morris was a master tactician."

Morris (West Point, 1907) had seen action in France during the First World War as a member of the 90th Division. After the outbreak of World War II, he became the 6th Armored Division's commanding general and was given his second star. He was later appointed to command XVIII Corps in the U.S. but, upon learning of Newgarden's death, he requested that Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall demote him and allow him to command the 10th Armored; Marshall agreed.

From Metz to Bastogne and from Trier to the Alps, the U.S. 10th "Tiger" Armored Division blazed a bloody trail of victories across Europe.

The division, which called themselves the "Armoraiders," arrived at Cherbourg, France, on September 23, 1944, and, after being initially assigned to Ninth Army prior to embarkation, became part of Patton's Third Army. It had missed out on the battle for St. Lô, but there was plenty of combat still ahead. After a month of training near Cherbourg, Morris' men moved out and headed across France to Mars-la-Tour, just south of Luxembourg, where it received its baptism of fire on November 2.

On November 16, Corporal Bob Weber, the company clerk in A Company, 54th Armored Infantry Battalion, 10th Armored Division, wrote in his diary, "Crossed the flooded Moselle River on pontoon bridge with the 11th Tank Battalion in the morning at Malling. Cold and snow. Saw first Germans—dead and alive—and took 34 prisoners that day. Spent the night on guard in a ditch by a railroad embankment east of Laumes-

feld. Freezing night!

"Turcotte was killed by an 88mm shell through Cronin's half-track. Someone in the 1st platoon killed a German motorcycle rider who came up the road after nightfall. Captain Ralph C. Maddox, of the 1lth Tank Battalion, was our team commander and he was killed by a mortar shell, so our company commander, Captain Arthur C. Eisberg, replaced him as commander of the team."

Three days later Weber wrote, "We were shelled during the day and had several casualties, some civilian. One little man who gave us some apples when we entered Filstroff was killed during the shelling.

"At night we moved anti-tank guns up on the hill next to the cemetery above town. Just as we were moving the last [gun] up and getting into the peeps [another term for jeeps] to go back, 88s began whamming all around us. I jumped out and into a patch of stickers and thorny weeds and buried my face into them. We moved out that night. Blew the bridge. Made a thrust towards Orscholz, Germany."

After being stopped by heavy shelling, Weber's unit turned back to Buschdorf and made camp on a grassy hillside. "Before long," he wrote, "We had churned up mud 10 inches deep around the halftrack. We dug slit trenches and holes. Then it rained and snowed and got muddier than Hell while we stayed there. We were plenty cold and wet. We were shelled once in a while. Al Phenes and I shared a foxhole with water in the bottom of it, but he sat in the water and wouldn't get out. It was miserable."

On Thanksgiving Day, Weber noted, "Had kidney stew and a shelling along with it. Sgt. Earle dished out the stew. The Germans dished out a mortar shell that I swear lifted up the front end of our half-track. Late that day we pulled back into [Buschdorf] and bedded down in a stone barn. At least straw is warm and comfortable and the barn gives protection."

A few days later came Patton's siege of Metz, France, on the Moselle River.

While the U.S. 5th and 95th Infantry Divisions assaulted the city, the 10th Armored was ordered to cross the Moselle and circle to the north and east of Metz to cut off the German garrison's lines of communications and supply, and to ensure that no defenders escaped toward their homeland.

To break the siege, the German high command sent reinforcements rushing towards Metz, only to run head-on into the advancing Armoraiders, who proved that even novices to battle, if well led, could be an unstoppable force.

Soon the 10th Armored was fanning out into the Saar Basin. William Brown, a lieutenant at the point of Task Force Cherry (Lt. Col. Henry T. Cherry), was credited as being the first man in the Third Army to cross the German border.

Morris' men had done remarkably well in their first major combat action. They had liberated 100 square miles of France, occupied 10 square miles of Germany, taken 2,000 prisoners, repulsed 11 counterattacks, and inflicted serious casualties on the enemy.

The first half of December was spent in a stationary position while tanks and equipment were repaired, replacements arrived, and Patton waited for much-needed supplies of fuel to arrive before continuing the advance.

The Germans also used this period of inactivity along the entire Allied line to lull

Both: National Archives

ABOVE: During a lull in the fighting, two 10th Armored Division crewmen replenish their tank's supply of ammunition "somewhere in Germany." OPPOSITE: The Germans built formidable anti-tank obstacles called "dragon's teeth" along their western border with France and Belgium, but the concrete barriers barely slowed American forces on their drive into the heart of the Third Reich.

Eisenhower and his generals into thinking that the Wehrmacht was content just to hold defensive positions. In actuality, the Germans were building up their forces for Hitler's final major counteroffensive, which he called Operation *Wacht-am-Rhein*—but which would soon earn the name "the Battle of the Bulge."

Battle of the Bulge

At dawn on December 16, 1944, the Germans broke out of their Ardennes Forest hiding places, smashed into American lines in Belgium and Luxembourg, and threatened to take Bastogne, the hub of the Ardennes road and rail network. Hardest hit were the veteran 28th Infantry and the totally green 106th Infantry Divisions, both of which were in the direct path of the Germans.

The 106th stood no chance; it was overrun by the enemy onslaught and crumbled, while the 28th held firm but took heavy losses.

Lt. Gen. Omar Bradley, commanding the 21st Army Group, realized the importance of holding Bastogne, which was at the moment occupied by Combat Command Reserve of the 9th Armored Division. Bradley committed the 101st Airborne and 10th Armored Divisions to bolster 9th Armored. The 10th was split up, with Combat Command B (CCB) sent off to Bastogne while the balance of the division helped to hold the southern shoulder of the Bulge in Luxembourg.

Pfc. William R. Barrett, of the 10th Armored's 420th Armored Field Artillery Battalion, recalled, "On the afternoon of the 17th we moved through Bastogne and set up in firing positions just north and east of Bastogne. There was no snow on the ground that day. We spent the night on the ground and woke up the next morning with seven inches of snow on us. From that position we never fired a shot. Then we had to move back through town to another site and got shelled going through."

Morris' men played a key role in the defense of Bastogne, and no contribution was more important than that of Task Force Cherry (Lt. Col. Henry T. Cherry). On December 17, German units—including the 2nd Panzer, 26th Volksgrenadier, and Panzer Lehr Divisions—approached the city, and their artillery and tank fire pummeled the defenders—the 9th Armored Division's Combat Command Reserve.

Task Force Cherry consisted of Company A and two light-tank platoons of the 3rd Tank Battalion; Company C of the 20th Armored Infantry Battalion; the 2nd Platoon of Company D, 90th Cavalry Reconnaissance; and a few medics and engineers. Cherry established his headquarters in Neffe, just east of Bastogne.

At 8:30 a.m. on the 18th, advance elements of the 2nd Panzer Division ran into a 9th Armored Division roadblock set up by Task Force Rose near Lullange, Luxembourg—10 miles northeast of Bastogne. Unable to hold, the American task force fell back under heavy fire. The 9th Armored Division then found itself nearly surrounded by the 2nd Panzer, 26th Volksgrenadier, and Panzer Lehr Divisions.

The Army history continues: "On the evening of 18 December Team Cherry moved out of Bastogne on the road to Longvilly. Since he had the leading team in the CCB, 10th Armored column, Cherry had been assigned this mission by Colonel [William L.] Roberts [commander of the 10th's Combat Command B] because of the immediate and obvious enemy threat

to the east." Maj. Gen. Troy Middleton, VIII Corps commander, had designated Longvilly as one of the three positions that Roberts' CCB was to hold at all costs.

Cherry knew that Lt. Col. Joseph Gilbreth's CCR, 9th Armored Division, was somewhere around Longvilly, but did not know exactly where. After dark, Cherry sent 1st Lt. Edward P. Hyduke, commanding the team's advance element, to find it. Hyduke reached Longvilly at about 8:00 p.m. and discovered the village filled with vehicles and frightened, confused GIs.

No one seemed to know what the situation was; Gilbreth's only orders were to "hold at all costs." Hyduke told Gilbreth not to worry—Team Cherry was just down the Bastogne road. Cherry soon arrived at Gilbreth's headquarters, and suddenly the gloom and doom that had pervaded CCR's command post lightened.

At around 2:00 a.m. on December 19, Cherry learned that the hamlet of Mageret, three miles east of Bastogne, had been overrun by the 2nd Panzer Division and that his headquarters at Neffe was now cut off from the rest of his team at Longvilly.

Cherry ordered Captain William F. Ryerson to send a patrol up the traffic-jammed Bastogne-Longvilly road toward Mageret to reconnoiter the situation. The captain didn't like what he saw and passed that information back; then Cherry ordered Ryerson to fight his way through Mageret while the advance guard conducted a rear-guard defense of Longvilly.

The U.S. Army's official history said, "Longvilly, five-and-a-half miles [east-northeast of] Bastogne, was the scene of considerable confusion. Stragglers were marching and riding through the village, and the location of the enemy was uncertain, although rumor placed him on all sides."

The road to Bastogne was still open, so Cherry decided to head back to Bastogne to tell Colonel Roberts about the situation. Before departing, he left orders for the advance guard to scout and establish a position about a thousand yards west of Longvilly while the main force, under Ryerson, took up defensive positions along the Bastogne-Longvilly road.

Cherry also positioned the cavalry platoon, four Sherman tanks, and seven light tanks to the south of Longvilly, where elements of Gilbreth's CCR had been badly mauled and where the main gap in the defenses now existed. But the Germans were closing in.

The 2nd Panzer Division reached Longvilly at about this same time and collided with Team Cherry at a crossroads just outside Longvilly. The panzers overwhelmed Cherry's men and pushed them back to the village.

Pfc. Barrett remembered, "We were shooting in all four directions, including the road we came in on. The enemy had surrounded us. We started running low on ammunition. The orders came through that if you saw our tanks, to shoot *between* them, because the enemy was behind them.

"We held our positions as best we could. Colonel Brown, commander of the 420th at the time, was hit by a shell that went over my head and hit the colonel and killed him. Major Crittenberger took over for him."

The German armored force—2nd Panzer and Panzer Lehr Divisions—was too strong and smashed into Cherry's men holding positions at Longvilly, sending them reeling backwards.

Luckily, the 101st Airborne Division had arrived in trucks from France just in the nick of time, and its elements began fanning out to blunt the German offensive. Cherry was ordered to retire to Bastogne, but that proved impossible because the highway was choked with American vehicles from other retreating units.

As historian John R. Bruning wrote, "Frantic M4 crews tried to get off the road and deploy, but they simply didn't have the chance. Sherman after Sherman exploded in flames. Halftracks blew apart as armor-piercing shells tore through their gas tanks. The stricken GIs aboard the vehicles bailed out and scattered under a hail of machine-gun fire."

Hundreds of GIs were killed or captured, and the snowy landscape became littered with wrecked and burning vehicles: 23 Shermans, 15 self-propelled howitzers, and 14 armored cars. As Bruning noted, "Team Cherry ceased to exist."

Elsewhere, the Germans also nearly obliterated another 10th Armored task force, Team Desobry, at Noville. But the Americans hung on and, with the help of the newly arrived 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment, dealt the Germans a heavy blow. Although the paratroopers and Desobry's men suffered heavy casualties, the 2nd Panzer Division had it worse—35 tanks and over 500 dead.

Although fighting continued for a few more days, the Germans had shot their bolt and succumbed to increasing American replacements and firepower. It was time for the Yanks to continue their eastward march.

In Luxembourg, on December 21, Corporal Bob Weber recorded in his diary, "Pulled out in early afternoon and made a mounted march to Consdorf [southwest of Echternach, Luxembourg] where the Germans were trying to break through. They threw artillery, mortars, and rockets into the town…. HQ squad was to put up in a big house but the major wanted us to pull down the street, and we stayed in a barn across the street from the schoolhouse. Stayed in the schoolhouse that night as runner to our CP in the garage across the street.

Both: 10th Armored Division Veterans; www.10tharmored.com

ABOVE: Tanker Sergeant Henry Perry, 11th Tank Battalion, applies whitewash to his Sherman in Belgium, January 1945. OPPOSITE: 10th Armored Division crewman Walter Streetman mans his .50-caliber machine gun during the fighting around Bastogne. His vehicle is camouflaged with white sheets in an effort to blend in with the expected coming snow.

"In the morning we passed our big house that we were going to put up in and it had a big hole over the door leading into our room where a huge shell had gone through. While in the schoolhouse, they pulled a guy out of his shot-up tank, dead."

Four days later Weber wrote, "Christmas! And in Europe of all places—but I'm glad it's Luxembourg instead of somewhere else, and at least we are in the rear today, which is a lot to be thankful for…. Luxembourg is a beautiful country…. Clean, neat houses, streets, intelligent people, and good, rich beautiful country. By all means it is the finest part of Europe."

With the crisis in the Bulge at last over, Patton directed Morris' tankers, accompanied by the 94th Infantry Division, along with the rest of Third Army to head southeast into the Palatinate region of Germany, taking the important railroad center of Zerf in the process.

Bob Weber noted on February 27, "Rode up the road blasting both sides and taking mortar and 88 fire all day. At Zerf we made a 90-degree turn north and headed for Trier. At one sharp turn—probably where we made the major change of direction—we stopped on the road and 88s began firing at us. We could see the shock waves in the air when the mortar shells exploded because it was sort of misty or foggy out across the fields.

"One fellow in the half-track ahead jumped out and was knocked over. The medics came over and looked at him but didn't even bother to tum him over. We got out and jumped into V-shaped foxholes that the Germans had dug all along the road."

The next day Weber's unit took fire outside a village called Pellingen, set in rolling hills south of Trier. He recalled, "We had a hellish afternoon of mortar and direct artillery fire on us. Ten snipers in foxholes in the hill to the right of us eventually … gave up but not until one of them tried to jump out of his hole and run over the hill. He had a camouflage suit on and he ran several hundred yards before our machine guns knocked him down for good.

"Wayne McDuffee, our company mail-

man, was killed by a direct hit on the ring mount of the HQ squad half-track; Sgt. Earle was hit in the eye by the fragments of the same shell. Johnny Webb got a case of nerves and cracked up…. Lt. Lergner got hit severely and was evacuated to England eventually, and Sgt. Curtis Schrock was hit by snipers and died later. Martin Zozofsky, Ulysses Lingerfelt, James Dell, Vern Johnson, Willie Raleigh, George Miller, and Lawrence Henderson were also killed at Pellingen."

On to Trier

After the opposition at Pellingen was overcome, it was time to head for Trier, a city founded by the Romans over 2,000 years ago. It is said that Trier contains more important Roman remains than any other place in northern Europe. Its most important landmarks are the Porta Nigra arches, built in 275 AD; the piers and buttresses of the bridge over the Mosel River are said to date from 28 BC.

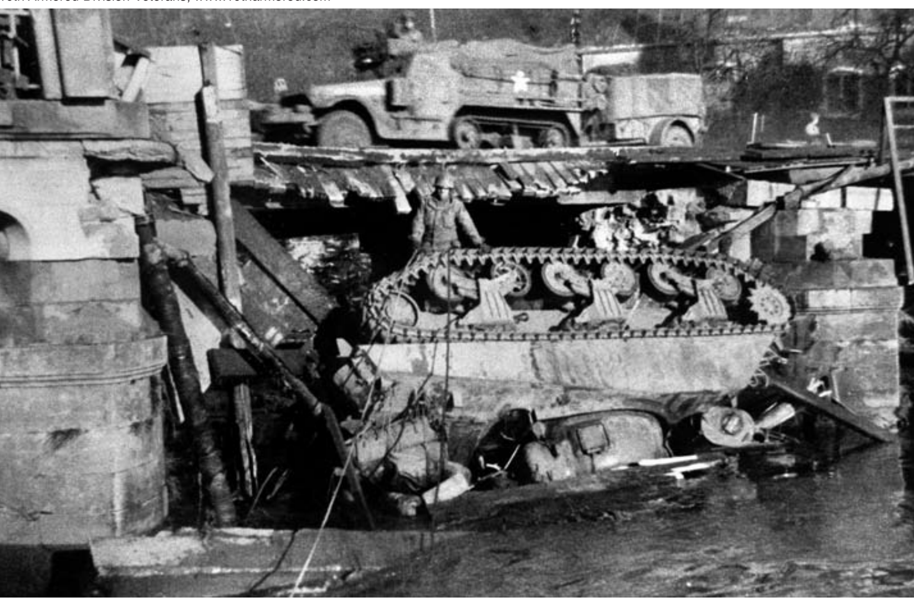
Trier had been subjected to heavy Allied shelling and aerial bombardment for months, and the defenders had no stomach for a fight when the 10th Armored came calling on March 1; after a half-hearted stand, the defenders surrendered.

A *Stars and Stripes* reporter accompanying the 10th Armored noted, "Attacking with five columns of infantry and tanks, the 10th reached the outskirts of Trier yesterday at noon, and 24 hours later Captain Robert Wilson raised an American flag that his wife had sent him from Newark, N.J., over the Porta Nigra.

"Ignoring snipers, Lt. Col. Jack Richardson … led a task force through the town to take one of the two bridges over the Moselle intact. Lieutenant Wilbur Beadle, Jr., led a force of armor and infantry across the bridge to secure it.

"After the bridge was taken, the 55th Engineers cut all the wires and removed two tons of dynamite from underneath the structure. Then Task Force Richardson turned its attention to clearing the city to the east from the Mosel. More than 800 German troops were scooped up as they came out of the houses in the morning

10th Armored Division Veterans; www.10tharmored.com



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TOP: A 33-ton Sherman from the 11th Tank Battalion has broken through a bridge over the Alzette River in Luxembourg, January 1945. LEFT: Lt. Col. Henry Cherry's task force was instrumental in saving Bastogne. RIGHT: Bob Weber captured the personal side of war with the 10th Armored Division in his diary. OPPOSITE: Why walk when you can ride? Infantrymen get a lift to the front atop a 10th Armored Division tank.

ready to defend a city that had already been overrun."

The reporter continued: "Richardson's command post was set up in the center of the city at dawn. Just across the street from the CP, a group of Germans sauntered out of a house to help defend Trier. They, too, were much too late to help."

A house-to-house search commenced, and 3,000 prisoners were rounded up. General Morris coordinated with the 94th to help occupy the city and evacuate prisoners to the rear.

Once Trier was secure, both Generals Eisenhower and Patton visited the 10th Armored command post. A division historian noted, "Ike's visit to Trier brought to mind a rumor which had widely circulated. Eisenhower supposedly sent a directive to Patton on March 2. In it, Patton was ordered 'By-pass Trier to the south … it will take four divisions to capture it.'

“The Third Army commander immediately radioed Eisenhower with the news that he had just taken Trier with one armored division, adding, ‘What the hell do you want me to do—give it back to the bastards?’”

After a four-day rest, it was time to resume the offensive. Morris’ division was ordered to head eastward toward Wittlich, battling stubborn resistance all the way and losing men at places such as Ehrang and Schweich—places that no one had ever heard of before.

Corporal Bob Weber recalled that Ehrang was especially tough. “We attempted crossing the Kyll River into Ehrang on foot after dark but, when we passed in front of a burning house across the river, a machine-gun opened fire on us and we had numerous casualties. Dana Goodwin was killed here.

“We took off to a comparatively safe distance down the street and stayed in a large empty house for the night…. Large caliber—possibly 270mm—guns shelled the street and hit the corner of the house, so we spent the night in the cellar with some civilians. Kenneth Ruth, on guard outside, was knocked down by one blast, but he was OK.”

The next day, March 5, Weber noted, “At 11:00 a.m. we hiked back to the halftracks and started out through the woods again to try crossing farther up the river. That ended badly also as we had mortar and small-arms fire thrown at us all the way down the draw; a bunch of us spent the late afternoon and night in a water tunnel with the creek flowing underfoot. Sgt. Mallick sat down next to me on the bank of the draw and he was hit in the leg by a sniper almost right away. Kenneth Ruth was hit by mortar fragments and he cracked up.”

On the 6th, Weber’s unit again tried crossing the Kyll. “I was so weary I could hardly walk uphill,” he wrote. “Going down the same trail we used the night of the 4th, we caught more small arms and mortar. I could see the bullets strike the rocks nearby. As soon as we reached the clearing between the railroad and the river, the fire ceased to a large extent, though all but two of our rubber boats were sunk and Capt. Eisberg was wounded badly in the leg.”

After crossing the Kyll, the 10th Armored took Wittlich on March 10. The division moved so fast and showed up unexpectedly at so many places that the Germans began calling it “the Ghost Division.”

The remaining enemy holdouts were caught in a vise between Patton’s Third Army in the north and General Alexander

National Archives

Patch's Seventh Army in the south. On March 14, 1945, the vise began to squeeze the hilly Saar-Palatinate Triangle—with the Germans stuck in the middle.

But the enemy would not give up without a fight. Hitting their opponents with everything they had, the Germans were now fighting on their home turf. The middle of March saw the 10th Armored engaged in one of its fiercest battles since the Bulge.

A division historian wrote, "At night, Tigers trained anti-aircraft searchlights on overhanging clouds to illuminate the battlegrounds. Fighting around the clock, the 10th pushed a 13-mile front 21 miles in three days, stood outside its first objective, St. Wendel." Although not a major city, St. Wendel was a good-sized town and an important German communications center about 30 miles southeast of Trier.

Going into battle alongside the 10th Armored were two infantry divisions: Maj. Gen. Horace L. McBride's 80th and Maj. Gen. Willard S. Paul's 26th.

With Brig. Gen. Edwin W. Piburn's CCA in the lead, the drive on St. Wendel began at 3:00 a.m. on March 16; Roberts' CCB followed. Before dawn the next day, elements of the division were fanning out to cross the Blies River and encircle the city from the north.

A division historian wrote, "A few minutes after midnight on March 17, both combat commands struck out in a coordinated assault, utilizing searchlights to light up the battleground. Against very stubborn resistance, the advance was slowed during the day, but by dusk on March 18, Team Cherry managed to reach the outskirts of St. Wendel.

"At this time, the other task forces had knifed their way to within three miles of the city. Teams from Task Force Hankins [Lt. Col. Curtis L.] plowed forward towards the division's first big objective at St. Wendel. Before they reached that place however, they had to clear Castel."

Clearing Castel, 10 miles from St. Wendel, proved to be easier said than done. After initially entering the hamlet against little resistance, four panzers suddenly appeared from out of nowhere and quickly knocked out three Shermans. A bazooka team took out three panzers and forced the fourth to flee.

Late that night, large antiaircraft searchlights were switched on, their beams bouncing off the cloud cover and creating what is called "artificial moonlight," which allowed the 10th Armored to continue its march toward St. Wendel. Then, according to the division historian, "As the column rolled down the road toward St. Wendel, the lead tank almost ran into an enemy anti-tank position. Before the Germans could man their gun, it was knocked out by a well-placed shot."

The enemy seemed ready and eager to defend St. Wendel, for, as the advance elements of the division approached the city, anti-tank gunners opened up with four powerful 88s and knocked out two Shermans. After being located by a recon unit, the four guns were destroyed.

National Archives

ABOVE: 10th Armored Division troops and vehicles crowd the town square of St. Wendel, 30 miles southeast of Trier. White flags indicate the citizenry has surrendered. OPPOSITE: A small German town near Stuttgart goes up in flames as a 21st Tank Battalion Sherman dashes eastward.

With the way into the city now cleared, the rest of the 10th Armored rolled in and took St. Wendel against slight opposition. Teams Cherry and Chamberlain (Lt. Col. Thomas C.) roared onward 20 miles to the east in the direction of Kaiserslautern and the Rhine beyond, supported on the flank by Colonel Wade C. Gatchel's CCR.

One element of the advancing 10th pressed northeast and came across a large Wehrmacht *Kaserne* (barracks) and training area located at Baumholder; it was overrun with little resistance.

As Baumholder was being captured, the rest of the division rolled onto one of the fabled autobahns and roared past Ramstein and Landstuhl, amazed to find thousands of German soldiers marching west in the grassy median of the divided superhighway, unarmed and waving small white flags.

As the 10th Armored and 80th Infantry Divisions approached the outskirts of Kaiserslautern, an industrial city and Wehrmacht supply center with a pre-war population of some 100,000, they were met by sporadic gunfire but with none of the intensity they were expecting. Kaiserslautern was soon in American hands.

In a tribute to the 80th Infantry Division, which had done the dirty work of mopping up the city, Maj. Gen. Morris insisted that the 80th—not the 10th—be credited with Kaiserslautern's capture.

From the end of March until the middle of April, the U.S. First (Hodges) and Ninth (Simpson) Armies were engaged in encircling the industrial Ruhr area while, to the south, George Patton's Third and Patch's Seventh Armies were knifing toward Boppard, Wiesbaden, Frankfurt-am-Main, Darmstadt, Aschaffenburg, Worms, and Mannheim.

The Armoraiders were directed to take Mannheim on the Rhine and, a few miles beyond, the university town of Heidelberg. Some resistance was met at Mannheim but was quickly overcome, and the wise burghers of Heidelberg declared it an "open city" and surrendered to the 10th Armored and the 63rd Infantry Divisions without a fight.

When the 10th Armored entered Heidelberg to establish its headquarters in the city, most of the townsfolk turned out to cheer the arrival of the Yanks and to strew flowers in their path. Heidelberg was spared the destruction that had befallen many other German towns and cities.

On April 2, the Nazi Party secretary Martin Bormann proclaimed, "National-Socialists, Party Comrades! After the collapse of 1918, we gave ourselves body and soul to the struggle for our national preservation. The hour of greatest danger has now struck. The threat of renewed enslavement calls for our every and final effort. From now on let us resolve to oppose the invader with a remorseless will.

"Provincial and district leaders and other Party officials will carry on the good fight in their own territory, will vanquish or die. Only scoundrels will leave their posts without the Führer's express orders, will refuse to fight to the last breath. Lift up your courage and stamp out every trace of weakness! The hour allows only one slogan: 'Victory or Death!'" For many Germans, it would be the latter.

The 10th Armored, 63rd, and 100th Infantry Divisions were directed to head for Heilbronn on the Neckar River—an important supply center for the Wehrmacht and where the Germans were determined to fight. Brig. Gen. Piburn's CCA and Colonel Roberts' CCB were in the van of the attack on Heilbronn in early April.

According to the division's history, "East of Heilbronn, the crack 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division had holed up. While the [U.S.] 100th Infantry Division assaulted the Heilbronn bastion, the 'Ghost Division' was 40 miles east of Heilbronn, behind the startled 17th SS, and astride the Nurnberg-Stuttgart highway

deep in Germany. In two days, CCA and CCR had engineered one of the division's most brilliant maneuvers."

After Heilbronn fell, VI Corps ordered the 10th Armored, along with the 63rd Infantry Division, to leave the mopping up to the 100th Infantry Division and continue southeast for Crailsheim, 40 miles southwest of Nuremberg and 100 miles from Munich.

The French First Army was given orders to take Stuttgart, 25 miles to the south and home to a population of 500,000. Stuttgart was one of Germany's major industrial cities in the south, where the Porsche tank factory and the Daimler-Benz/Mercedes works were located. The French succeeded.

Patton's Third Army secured Frankfurt-am-Main on March 29 and headed east into Thuringia where, on April 4, elements of the Army discovered the German national treasury hidden in a salt mine in Merkers and the nearby Ohrdruf and Buchenwald concentration camps a few days later.

Tough Fight for Crailsheim

The 10th Armored Division was about to engage in a three-day fight for Crailsheim, some 45 miles northeast of Stuttgart—one of its most difficult battles of the entire war and the strongest stand by the German Army since the Battle of the Bulge.

After dark on April 5, Task Force Hankins, the advance element, began moving but was slowed by enemy resistance, roadblocks, anti-tank fire, and thick woods that lined both sides of the roads and limited maneuvering capabilities while providing perfect cover for snipers and ambushes.

TF Hankins fought its way into Crailsheim but, as Herbert Stone, a member of the division's 90th Cavalry Recon Squadron, recalled, "Four German divisions, including an SS panzer division, encircled the town and cut off Hankin's lifeline from the rest of the 10th…. The Germans controlled several wooded areas on both sides of the road leading into Crailsheim. We were alerted to mount up and lead the charge. This was going to be a turkey shoot and we were the turkeys. The Germans were buried in foxholes on both sides of the road and the troops in open vehicles were most vulnerable.

"The 1st Platoon of C Troop was to lead the charge…. My machine-gun peep was next in line. I was seated in the rear on the right-hand side, crouching as low as I could possibly get and firing my rifle at an unseen enemy hidden on the left side of the road. The soldier on my left was firing the .30-caliber machine gun into the wooded area on the right side of the road. There were times when I could feel the top of my helmet rubbing up against the bottom of the machine-gun barrel. Bullets were flying all around us."

One of the bullets found its mark in the open peep in front of Stone's vehicle; a GI was hit and died from loss of blood. Stone said, "He joined our outfit as a replacement for a casualty we incurred at the Battle of the Bulge. He left a wife and two small children."

Seconds later, a German bullet hit Stone's rifle while he was firing it and blew it apart. Using a P-38 pistol he had taken off a German officer a week earlier, Stone said that he kept firing into the woods until the weapon jammed. "The only weapon I had left was my bayonet and needless to say, this did not give me a sense of security."

Bob Weber, A Company, 54th Armored Infantry Battalion, who had just been promoted to staff sergeant, recalled, "Lieutenant McGrath called the squad leaders together saying that 1,000 Heinies had attacked Crailsheim in early morning, cutting us off. Heinie planes were active—they had an airfield only 19 kilometers away—and we were in a hot spot.

"It was at Crailsheim that I saw the first jet-propelled German planes. They were so fast I could hardly keep binoculars on them…. Our column was strafed on the way to

Crailsheim and we jumped out of the track and out into the field beside."

Before dark on April 6, CCA had penetrated the outer defenses of Crailsheim, but the next morning brought difficulties as the defenders refused to give up the city without a fight. As additional 10th Armored forces approached the city, heavy barrages of rockets and artillery smothered them. Then the Luftwaffe swooped in with Me 109s, Me 110s, and Me 262 jets that prevented CCR from reaching and reinforcing CCA. This was followed by ground attacks launched by enemy units brought in by General Hermann Foertsch, German First Army commander, from surrounding areas.

Brig. Gen. Edwin Piburn later commented that at no other time during the war had he seen so many German planes as there were over Crailsheim—a swarm of 325 aircraft; 50 of them were swatted out of the sky by the 10th Armored's antiaircraft batteries.

Bob Weber recalled, "A Heinie plane came down the street and dropped a bomb nearby, sending plaster crashing down and glass flying."

"We had two peeps, two halftracks, and a 105mm gun tank. The two peeps led, followed by the half-tracks and then the tank. Just past an intersection on the way out, our convoy was fired on by panzerfausts (anti-tank rockets) from alongside the road on our left. The first shot hit the peep right in front of us square on the left side and the next went over the hood of our track into the field on the right of us."

One of the men in the peep began firing the machine gun in the general direction of the enemy fire, but, as Weber said, "Whoever had put the machine gun back into its mount had placed a retaining pin in the wrong place and we couldn't depress the gun below horizontal. I gave the driver, Jim Denton, of the machine-gun squad (our driver, Lowery, was so drunk that we couldn't rouse him down in the cellar), the order to back up. After we had backed about 100 yards, we rammed into the track behind, which had stalled. In doing so, we damaged our halftrack, bending the body so that it scraped the track.

"We got turned around and went back to Ilshofen. The squad in the stalled track got in with us and the tank crew, I understand, in turning around got bogged down in the mud, had to bury their breech block and walk back to Ilshofen. I reported to the task-force commander, Major Wheeler M. Thackston, that we had been fired on and the crummy guy raked me as though it had been my fault."

Both: National Archives

ABOVE: American trucks, tanks, and jeeps roll eastward along an autobahn while thousands of German troops march west down the median on their way to a POW enclosure. OPPOSITE: Tanks and men of the 10th Armored Division make their way through the city of Kaiserslautern in the Palatinate region of southwest Germany.

On April 7, General Morris flew to Crailsheim in a Piper Cub plane to reestablish contact with forward elements. A 10th Armored historian wrote, "Prior to this flight, the general ordered Task Force Roberts and the CP of CCA to the Crailsheim area. When he got to Crailsheim, the Tiger Commander sent word to Riley [Lt. Colonel John R. Riley, commanding officer, 21st Tank Battalion] to pass through Hankins and set up a forward CP with Task Force Hankins.

"It was not until late in the morning of April 7 that Riley was able to send Team Felice towards Schwäbisch Hall. On the way it captured Rossfeld. By afternoon, the Force had gone on to take IIshofen and Wolpertshausenn. At Ilshofen, Riley was bombed and strafed by a squadron of Me 109s."

Once the Armoraiders had battled their way into the heart of the city, the Germans responded with a strong counterpunch, hitting the town with heavy storms of artillery fire and infantry assaults.

To ease supply problems, a fleet of C-47s dropped much-needed food, ammunition, and fuel to Morris' men. With urban combat taking its toll on the Yanks and a German mountain regiment blocking roads to the northwest—which effectively cut off the division's supply lifeline, which stretched back to Stuttgart—American fighter planes were called in to bomb and strafe German positions.

Then, on April 8, a sniper outside of Crailsheim killed Colonel Bernard F. Luebberman, the division's artillery commander. He was the division's highest-ranking officer killed in the war. The following day, as the Army's official history said, "A contingent of CCB finally got through with a few supply trucks … but to travel the road to Crailsheim remained a task for the fearless and strong."

As Americans and Germans battled in the

rubble of the smoldering, burning city, a *Stars and Stripes* reporter wrote, "The fighting at the tip of the Crailsheim finger was the most bitter along the Western Front."

Another historian said, "Crailsheim was assuming all of the characteristics of another Bastogne."

At one point in the fighting, Task Force Roberts (Lt. Col. William T.S. Roberts) was advancing when it came under enemy fire. The rear elements of TF Roberts mistakenly headed in the wrong direction, towards Leofels, northwest of Crailsheim. As he rushed to the rear to turn the elements around, Lt. Col. Roberts was killed by a sniper's bullet.

The loss of Roberts was a blow to everyone. Captain Richard Ulrich, the S-3 and senior remaining commander, was named by Piburn to take over temporary command of the task force. Ultimately, Colonel Basil G. Thayer became the commander.

Suddenly, higher headquarters decided that Crailsheim, once regarded as "vital," was not worth the bloodletting and so, on April 11, ordered Morris' division to pull out of what was now deemed an "unimportant" city. The withdrawal was a jagged pill for the proud Armoraiders to swallow.

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While returning to Heilbronn, the 10th Armored ran into stiff resistance by Hitler Youth and old men who had formed a unit of the Volksturm at Öhringen, a small city between Crailsheim and Heilbronn. It took a concentrated barrage of "time on target" artillery fire to subdue the fanatical defenders, and resistance in the city collapsed on April 13.

Eighteen-year-old Richard W. "Dick" Abraham, of the 10th Armored's C Company, 61st Armored Infantry Battalion, recalled arriving at Öhringen: "The next morning was an intense period that involved crossing a field under continual mortar shelling. One of the casualties was a man several paces behind me.... We secured the village that was the source of the mortar fire and waited for our halftracks to join us.

"My recollections of the next few days are very slim. We slept on the halftrack as they covered great distances and only awoke when stopped for refueling, isolated small-arms fire, or roadblocks. If the small-arms fire or roadblocks were serious, we would dismount, set up the .30-caliber, and return the fire."

The division then continued west to Heilbronn to assist in subduing the holdouts there.

Now, in the final, heady weeks of the war, with the scent of spring flowers and victory in the air, German resistance was crumbling and sporadic. In many of the towns

rubble of the smoldering, burning city, a *Stars and Stripes* reporter wrote, "The fighting at the tip of the Crailsheim finger was the most bitter along the Western Front."

Another historian said, "Crailsheim was assuming all of the characteristics of another Bastogne."

At one point in the fighting, Task Force Roberts (Lt. Col. William T.S. Roberts) was advancing when it came under enemy fire. The rear elements of TF Roberts mistakenly headed in the wrong direction, towards Leofels, northwest of Crailsheim. As he rushed to the rear to turn the elements around, Lt. Col. Roberts was killed by a sniper's bullet.

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Both: 10th Armored Division Veterans; www.10tharmored.com

ABOVE: Having lost the will to fight, German troops in Konken, a village close to the Wehrmacht's training area at Baumholder in southwest Germany, surrender to TF Richardson, March 1945. OPPOSITE: Working in tandem with the tanks, an M3 halftrack of the 61st Armored Infantry Battalion packed with soldiers and their weapons rolls toward Geisselhardt, April 1945. The war would be over in less than a month.

and villages a profusion of white bed sheets—in violation of the Nazi government's prohibitions—fluttered from windows and balconies, signaling surrender, while in others, fanatical Germans set up roadblocks and barricades to slow the Allied advance. Snipers took up positions in church steeples or upper-story windows and waited for their prey to march into view, knowing that their stand would be their last.

One historian noted, "American troops had a simple rule: if a town showed white flags and offered no resistance, they rolled through peacefully. If American troops came under fire, they smashed the community."

The Third Reich was now in a state of collapse; the Russians had reached Berlin, the British closed in on Hamburg, Hodges' First and Simpson's Ninth Armies neared the Elbe facing Berlin, and Patton's Third Army entered Czechoslovakia.

The Battle for Ulm

Now came orders for Alexander Patch's Seventh U.S. Army, to which the 10th Armored had been attached on April 8, to drive southward toward the Danube and the Bavarian Alps, block the mountain passes into Austria, and seize the Brenner Pass-Innsbruck area. Ulm was in the way.

The 10th Armored historian wrote, "Task Force Hankins joined Thackston's unit and both were assigned to the Reserve Command, which was now pushing northeast to assist the 44th Infantry Division at Ulm."

On April 23, three days after Hitler celebrated his 56th birthday in his besieged Berlin bunker, the 10th Armored Division reached the outskirts of Ulm—about 40 miles southeast of Stuttgart, and the site of one of the last urban battles of World War II.

The next morning, TF Hankins fought its way into Ulm, regarded in the 14th century as one of the world's great trading centers, before in the ensuing centuries its power diminished.

Until 1945, Ulm, the charming city on the Danube in the southwest German state of Baden-Württemberg, was famous for two things. First, in the fall of 1805, the French Leader Napoleon Bonaparte and his Grande Armee of 210,000 men defeated a 72,000-man Austrian Army here.

Second, Ulm was, and is, home to the Ulm Cathedral (known as Ulm Minster)—at 530 feet the tallest building in the world until the 20th century. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart played its organ in 1763, and Albert Einstein was born in the city in 1879.

(Ulm has another historical connection: Field Marshal Erwin Rommel's state funeral was held in the city on October 18, 1944. He had been coerced into committing suicide when it became known that he had had some knowledge of the assassination attempt on Hitler's life on June 30, 1944. Rommel was buried in Herrlingen, west of Ulm. His grave is still decorated by admirers.)

Ulm's 92,000 citizens had luckily avoided destruction at the hands of the American and British air forces. But her luck ran out on December 17, 1944, when an RAF raid saturated the city center with 1,449 tons of bombs.

The primary targets were of military significance: two truck factories (Magirus-Deutz and Kässbohrer) that supplied vehicles for the Wehrmacht, along with other industrial firms and the railroad marshaling yards. But the bombs also fell into the city's historic center.

Over 700 people died in the bombing, with 613 wounded and 25,000 civilians left homeless. Two more U.S. and RAF raids—on March 1 and April 19, 1945—caused more deaths and damage: 632 killed and over 80 percent of the city center destroyed. As with Cologne, the bombs spared the medieval cathedral but left much of the rest of Ulm in ruins.

As the 10th Armored closed in on Ulm, Bob Weber said that his unit was taking hundreds of prisoners and that he saw "a gallows erected to the right of the road and a body with a sign pinned on it was swinging from the crossbar. It was reported to be a German who had refused to fight and was executed by the SS."

Patch's Seventh Army plunged like a bayonet into the heart of the Tyrol and Bavaria. On the right flank was Brooks'

Continued on page 98

Apocalypse ON THE VOLGA

BY JOHN WALKER

When Adolf Hitler invaded Russia in the summer of 1941, he expected a swift and stunning victory. At Stalingrad, his troops ran headlong into the Russians' best commander: General Winter.

After Adolf Hitler's audacious invasion of Russia finally ground to a halt in December 1941 on the forested outskirts of Moscow, the exhausted German Army stabilized its winter front in a line running roughly from Leningrad in the north to Rostov in the south. The strain of the harsh winter campaign upon the ill-prepared Wehrmacht, as well as the severe strain placed on the Luftwaffe in its prolonged efforts to air-supply the army's string of city-bastions along the front, was tremendous. But despite the horrendous losses they had suffered in the heavy fighting of 1941—a staggering 850,000 casualties—the Germans remained confident that they would master the Red Army once winter conditions no longer hindered their mobility.

Hitler's decision to resume offensive operations on the Eastern Front crystallized in the early months of 1942 after his economic advisers convinced him that Germany could not continue the war unless it captured vital oil supplies, wheat, and ore from Russia's Caucasus region. Conceding that another all-out offensive was out of the question, Hitler limited the scope of the renewed offensive to just one flank, an idea that ran contrary to traditional German strategy. The Nazi armies in the center and left would hold their ground while the main thrust took place on the southern front near the Black Sea, a drive down the corridor between the Donetz and Don Rivers. After reaching the Don, German armies would turn south toward the Caucasus oil fields and advance east toward the great industrial city of Stalingrad, on the west bank of the Volga.

ABOVE: A battle-weary German lieutenant armed with a captured Soviet PPSh41 sub-machine gun peers cautiously out of the rubble at Stalingrad. OPPOSITE: Self-sacrificial Russian soldiers literally martyr themselves on the cross in this heroic painting, *Stalingrad*, by Soviet artist Boris Ugarov.

The capture of Stalingrad, a vital communications center that commanded the land bridge between the Volga and the Don and was a critical transport route between the Caspian Sea and northern Russia, was not part of Hitler's original plan. The advance to the Volga by General Friedrich Paulus's Sixth Army was meant to provide strategic flank cover for the all-important advance into the Caucasus, where a successful offensive would complete the takeover of the Ukraine, interdict grain supplies from much of the Soviet bread basket, and cut off fuel to Joseph Stalin's war machine.

The drive into southern Russia could only be carried out if the Germans drew heavily upon their allies—the Romanian Third and Fourth Armies, the Italian Eighth Army,

the Hungarian Second Army, and the 369th Croatian Legion—to furnish most of the rearward cover for the flanks of the advance. The problem was that the foreign units were clearly inferior to their German counterparts. The potential for the offensive's success improved considerably when a Russian Army numbering 640,000 men launched an overly ambitious offensive of its own on May 12, 1942, in the direction of Kharkov. The assault, which struck Paulus's Sixth Army, absorbed great numbers of Russians reserves. Two complete Soviet armies, plus parts of two others, were cut to pieces, and by the end of May some 241,000 Red Army soldiers had been captured. The failure of the Soviet offensive meant that few reserves were available when the Germans launched their own sledgehammer blow, code-named Operation Blue, on June 28.

The German southern flank ran obliquely from the coast near Taganrog in the south, along the Donetz River north toward Kharkov and Kursk. It was a battlefront in echelon—the parts farthest back, on the left, were to move first, while the advance units on the right would wait for the left wing to come up before moving forward. On the German far right was the Seventeenth Army; next in line to its left and farther back, was the First Panzer Army. These two armies composed Field Marshal Wilhelm List's Army Group A, destined to invade the Caucasus. On its left was Field Marshal Fedor von Bock's Army Group B, which included Paulus's Sixth Army and the Second Army, the latter consisting of the German Fourth Panzer Army and the Hungarian, Italian, and Romanian satellite armies. The two panzer armies were to deliver the decisive thrusts against the Russians' most advanced positions, after which the infantry armies would follow.

A siege assault was launched against Sevastopol on June 7 as a preliminary to the main offensive. Despite fierce Soviet resistance, the fortress fell on July 4 and with it the whole of the Crimea, thus depriving the Russians of their chief naval base on the Black Sea. Meanwhile, the Germans forced the passage of the Donetz River, established a bridgehead on the north bank, and delivered a powerful armored stroke northward 40 miles to the city of Kupiansk, gaining invaluable flanking leverage to assist the easterly thrust of the main offensive, where heavy fighting raged for several days before the Fourth Panzer Army broke through between Kursk and Belgorod. After that the armored advance swept rapidly across a 100-mile stretch of plain to the Don River, near Voronezh. At Voronezh, three Soviet armies resisted fiercely against the onslaught of the combined forces of the Fourth and Seventeenth Panzer Armies and Paulus's Sixth Army, believing the attack was a prelude to a German advance upon Moscow. To avoid encirclement, the three Soviet armies withdrew eastward in the direction of Stalingrad.

Now Hitler split Army Group South into Groups A and B. After the Hungarian Second Army came up and relieved the Fourth Panzer Army, the Fourth then wheeled southeastward down the corridor between the Don and the Donetz, followed by Paulus's army. The Sixth Army, the Fourth Panzer Army, and the Axis satellite armies then began their push east toward Stalingrad. As Army Group A pushed far into the Caucasus, its advance slowed as its supply lines grew overextended, and the two German army groups were not positioned to support one another due to the great distances involved. The Führer, obsessed and impatient to capture the Caucasus, had divided Operation Blue

National Archives

ABOVE: Russian civilians join soldiers during the defense of Stalingrad. By the end of the battle, only 1,500 citizens remained alive in the ruined city. OPPOSITE: German infantrymen follow their armored vehicles on the advance into Stalingrad. Few if any of the Nazi soldiers would survive the meat-grinder battle.

Imperial War Museum

from a coherent, two-stage whole into two separate parts, changing the organization, timing, and sequence of the offensive, much to the chagrin of his top generals. Consistently underestimating the resilience of his Russian enemy, Hitler decided that the city of Stalingrad would have to be taken.

Marshal Andrei Yeremenko, commander of the Soviet southern front, searched for a strategy to keep the 700,000 soldiers in the Axis armies currently pushing toward Stalingrad from overwhelming South Russia's last natural line of defense, the Volga. As the Germans neared the city in August 1942, the primary defense of the city fell to the Soviet Sixty-second Army. Yeremenko, needing a commander with the spirit and tenacity to rally the Russians and hold the Volga at all costs, chose Lt. Gen. Vasily Chuikov. Yeremenko immediately issued a terse directive to his army commanders—"Not a step back"—and instructed the Soviet secret police force, the dreaded NKVD, to shoot anyone who failed to comply. (Soviet authorities eventually executed 13,500 soldiers during the Stalingrad fighting, the equivalent of a full division.) Chuikov, convinced that he could not match the Wehrmacht's firepower on the open steppes, laid plans for a street battle, picking out future strongpoints the enemy would be forced to pass en route to the Volga. He positioned his artillery in sectors where the Germans would be concentrated in the greatest numbers. The Soviet Sixty-fourth Army would defend Stalingrad's southern sectors.

At the time, Stalingrad was the Soviet Union's third-largest city, sprawling along a narrow band 20 miles long and five miles deep on the Volga riverfront. Although Soviet officials had considered evacuating children and nonessential citizens, some 600,000 of the city's population of 850,000 still remained. A massive, sustained Luftwaffe carpet-bomb attack on August 23 set downtown Stalingrad aflame, reducing much of it to rubble and killing thousands of noncombatants. The reason so many citizens and refugees still remained on the west bank of the Volga was typical of the Soviet regime: the NKVD had commandeered almost all river craft for its own use while allotting low priority to the civil population.

Joseph Stalin, deciding that no panic would be allowed, refused to permit further evacuation of citizens across the Volga. This, he believed, would force his troops, especially locally raised militia, to defend the city even more desperately. Throughout the region, the civilian population was mobilized; all available men and women between 16 and 55 years of age—nearly 200,000—were formed into workers' columns organized by their district Communist Party committees. As in Moscow the year before, women and older children were marched out and given long-handled shovels and baskets for digging antitank trenches over six feet deep in the sandy earth. While the women dug, Army sappers laid heavy antitank mines on the western side. Younger schoolchildren were put to work building earth walls around petroleum-storage tanks on the river. Those workers not directly involved in producing weapons were mobilized into special militia brigades. Some ammunition and rifles were distributed, but many men were able to arm themselves only after a comrade was killed.

The German Sixth Army, combined with two corps from the Fourth Panzer Army, was the largest formation in the Wehrmacht, with nearly a third of a million men. It pushed down the north side of the corridor between the Don and the Donetz rivers toward Stalingrad, supported by an armored drive farther south. At first Paulus made good progress. As the advance continued, however, its strength

Both: National Archives

ABOVE: Already showing the strains of continuous battle, these German soldiers clamber through captured Russian ordnance works in October 1942. Winter was coming soon. RIGHT: German General Friedrich Paulus was promoted to field marshal mere days before he surrendered—the first of his rank ever to do so.

dwindled as more and more German divisions had to be detached to cover the ever-extending northern, or left, flank, which extended along the Don all the way back to Voronezh. Long, rapid marches in severe heat, as well as battle losses caused by stiffening Russian resistance, added to the German wastage.

On August 23, the Germans began the final stage of their advance upon Stalingrad. It took the form of a pincer attack by the Sixth Army from the northwest and the Fourth Panzer Army from the southwest. That night German mobile units reached the banks of the Volga, 30 miles above the city, and neared the bend of the Volga, 15 miles south. While Russian resistance kept the pincers from closing, German pressure on Stalingrad was intense. Attacks fell in endless succession, and the city became a hypnotic symbol for the Germans, and especially for Hitler who lost all sight of strategy and regard for the future. It was an obsession for which Germany would pay dearly.

Despite immense losses, the Soviets' reserves of manpower remained far greater than the Germans'. As the end of summer neared, an increasing flow of equipment came from Soviet factories to the east as well as from American and British suppliers, and the volume of new divisions arriving from Asia also increased. The Germans, being the attackers, suffered proportionately higher losses, which they could ill afford. Back in Berlin, General Franz Halder, chief of the Army General Staff, attempted unsuccessfully to warn Hitler of the potential dangers his armies now faced. As winter approached, the German concentration at Stalingrad drained reserves from the flank-cover, itself already strained to the breaking point. The general's warning to Hitler that it would be impossible to hold the line during the winter fell on deaf ears; all defensive considerations were subordinated to the aim of capturing Stalingrad.

By September 1, the Soviet Sixty-second Army was fully engaged throughout the city. With the panzers unable to maneuver quickly through the debris-choked streets, the traditional German war of rapid movement ended. Germans gains began being measured in feet and yards, as the determined Russians fought viciously for every house and building that remained standing. When Stuka dive-bombers hammered Russian strongpoints, inflicting huge losses, surviving defenders merely found new places to hide in the rubble. Although they were suffering horrendous losses themselves, the Germans systematically leveled the city, block by block, and pressed relentlessly toward the Volga. While it was still capable of production, the Krasny Oktybar plant continued to produce its formidable Soviet T-34 tanks, driving them directly from the production line into battle crewed by the very workers who had built them.

Chuikov struggled to maintain contact with his beleaguered forces as they were driven back through the city. Many Russians continued fighting for weeks without orders, reinforcements, or supplies, inflicting heavy losses on their attackers before running out of food and ammunition and being wiped out themselves. As reinforcements and supplies finally began flowing toward Stalingrad from every region of the Soviet Union, the struggle for the city became a test of wills between Stalin and Hitler. Ample matériel was available to the Soviets on the east side of the Volga, but with the Germans in control of the river to the north and south, everything had to be funneled through a single ferry landing into central Stalingrad. The east bank of the Volga became a vast marshaling

yard for men and materials as well as the location of a huge field hospital and a launching point for batteries of newly developed Katyusha rockets. Dubbed "Stalin's organs," the truck-launched, 130mm rockets fired 16 at a time. Nearly five feet in length, the missiles were deadly accurate, and the horrific screech they emitted from launch to impact became a considerable psychological weapon as they rained down day and night on German-held sectors of the city.

The Soviet Air Force had finally been supplied with modern aircraft such as the Yak 1 and began to contest the Luftwaffe for air superiority over the city. For the first time in the war, German ground forces began receiving the same punishment from the air that the Luftwaffe had been inflicting upon their enemies. With bombs, rockets, and shells pouring into Stalingrad around the clock, the city cast a macabre glow that could be seen from 30 miles away at night. The gruesome pall of smoke and dust that churned up from the embattled city panicked many Russian reinforcements being ferried into the city from the Volga's east bank. Hoping to escape the fighting, hundreds jumped from the shuttle boats into the Volga's frigid waters, only to be shot by NKVD officers.

Both Paulus and Chuikov had ample forces at their disposal, but the Germans' narrow approaches to the city and the Russians' bottleneck at the river crossing forced both commanders to feed their units into battle piecemeal. The Germans slowly gained ground, at an enormous cost in blood, while Chuikov's delaying tactics worked well, but at a tremendous cost of Russian casualties. Chuikov worked to funnel and fragment German massed attacks with "breakwaters," fortified buildings manned by infantrymen armed with machine guns and antitank weapons to deflect attackers into channels where camouflaged T-34 tanks and antitank guns waited, half buried in the rubble.

The battle was being closely monitored in Berlin, where Halder repeatedly expressed grave concerns to Hitler about the exposed German left flank. With no end in sight, Hitler in mid-October dismissed Halder, replacing him with General Kurt Zeitzler, a timid yes-man, and announced prematurely to the German people that victory in the East was almost at hand. In Stalingrad, however, although the Soviet Sixty-second Army was being forced back into several small sectors of ground near the west bank of the Volga, the battle itself was far from over.

National Archives

A Russian soldier with the much-feared PPSh41 sub-machine gun crouches in the rubble of a ruined building in Stalingrad. Fighting was house-to-house and street-to-street.

With German infantry and panzers in control of 90 percent of the city, Chuikov's troops struggled to hold onto their precarious footholds. Prolonged street fighting had reduced the city almost entirely to rubble, and the smell of charred buildings and the sickly stench of decaying corpses was overpowering. Chuikov instructed his troops to close with the enemy and seek hand-to-hand combat. The battle became a vicious war of attrition involving hundreds of brutal, small-unit actions. If Paulus could bleed the Russian Army to death before the Volga froze over, he could take the city before the onset of winter. But Soviet artillery, snipers, and booby traps had already sent German casualty lists soaring far beyond what they had anticipated. If the German losses were heavy, Russian casualties were staggering: as many as 80,000 Soviet soldiers had been killed in action by the middle of October 1942. The combined toll on Russian civilians, Red Army soldiers, and Axis forces had already reached a quarter of a million people.

German infantry units now controlled the summit of Mamaev Kurgan, also called the Tartar Mound, a towering hill in central Stalingrad, as well as the southern suburbs, and had broken through to the Volga north of the city. With his command split, Chuikov held downtown Stalingrad, the all-important ferry landing, the Barrikady Metal Works, and much of the Krasny Oktybar plant, all of which were reduced to rubble. At one point, German ground forces pushed to within 200 yards of Chuikov's command bunker and were seemingly on the verge of victory, but isolated Russian strongholds thwarted the final conquest of the city. A platoon of the 42nd Guards took possession of a three-story downtown building that commanded all approaches to the Volga, turning it into an almost-impenetrable fortress bristling with machine-gun nests and snipers. With all its officers killed or incapacitated, Sergeant Yakov Pavlov assumed

command of the platoon and held the building for 59 days before being relieved. He had discovered early on that an antitank rifle mounted on the rooftop could destroy German panzers with impunity, since a tank approaching the building could not elevate its barrel sufficiently to reach the rooftop.

By early September, the Sixth Army found itself trapped at the edge of a huge salient, with few reserves, fighting an intense battle of attrition and dependent upon a single railway line that crossed the Don at Kalach, 60 miles from the Soviet lines. Paulus had no illusions about the prospects of maintaining his army through the winter in a devastated city still contested by a stubborn enemy. By this time, he had already committed eight divisions to the fighting and 11 more manned nearly 130 miles of front stretching across various river bends and over the sprawling Russian steppes.

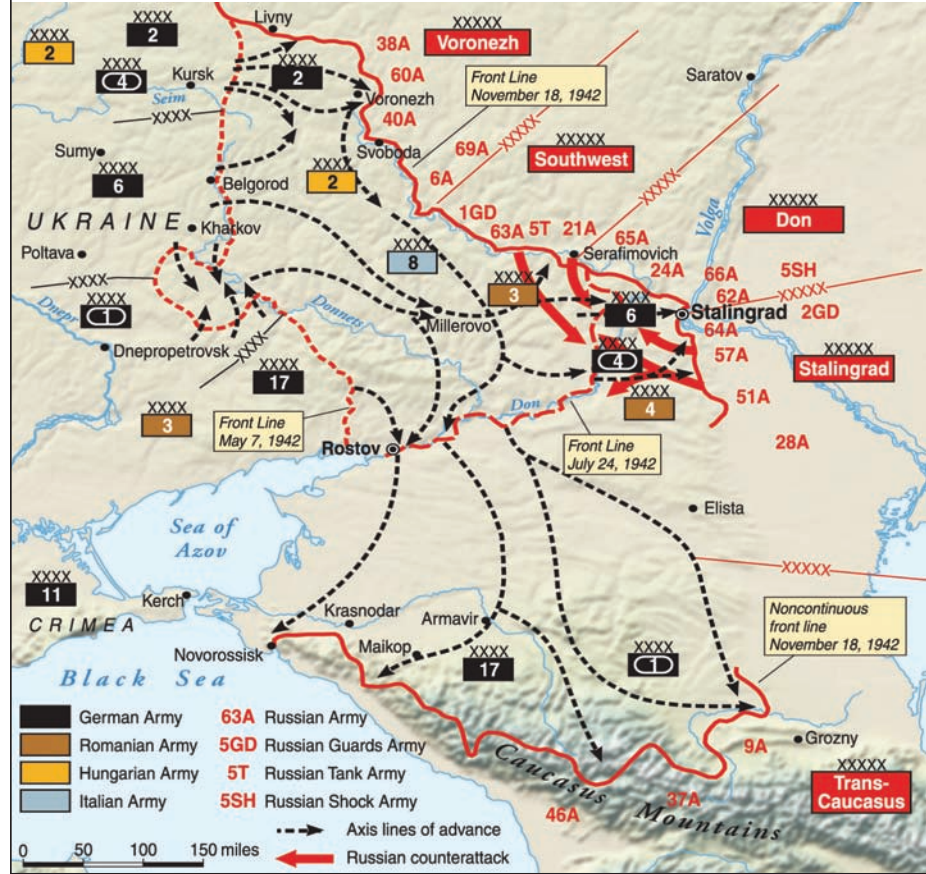
To bring an end to the exhausting battle, Paulus called in several battalions of elite pioneer combat engineers, experts in demolition and street fighting, and used them to spearhead a last major attempt to capture Stalingrad. In a furious assault on the burrowing Russians, the German engineers poured gasoline into sewers and ignited them, ripped up floorboards, and threw satchel charges into cellars to root out defenders. Paulus followed on November 11 with an attack by five divisions into the factory district. The ensuing breach in the Russian lines was expanded, and Chuikov's command was split in two. Still the Russians held on, despite appalling losses. Spent and exhausted, the Germans regrouped while Paulus pondered his next move.

Ice had begun forming on the Volga, and by November 14 all boat traffic ceased—the river was impassable. Efforts were made to air-drop supplies to the Sixty-second Army, but with the Soviet foothold reduced to such a narrow margin, most of the matériel fell into German hands. While Chuikov fought to hold the city until relief arrived, German reconnaissance planes and intelligence reports began detecting signs of a huge Soviet buildup northwest of Stalingrad. The exposed left flank that had worried Halder was showing unmistakable signs of becoming a ripe target for a massive Russian counterattack.

Back in Berlin, Hitler was made aware of the Soviet buildup, and his response was typical: remain on the offensive. On November 17 he sent a dispatch to Paulus urging him to quickly complete the conquest of the city. Paulus circulated the Führer's exhortation to his unit commanders, but they never had a chance to act on it. On the morning of November 19, the rumble of heavy artillery to the northwest could be heard rolling across the steppes. The deafening explosions were the opening salvos of a well-prepared, overwhelming Soviet counterattack, one that would seal the fate of Paulus and his men.

While Chuikov had been fighting for time, Stalin, General Georgi Zhukov, and Soviet Supreme General Staff chief General Alexander Vasilevsky had assembled the forces necessary to close an impenetrable iron ring around Stalingrad. Massive Soviet forces

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



ABOVE: Russian defenders trapped the German Sixth Army inside a giant pincer movement west of Stalingrad in late November 1942. Only 91,000 Germans were left to surrender. BELOW: Few airlifted supplies could reach German lines at Stalingrad. Luftwaffe General Wolfram von Richthofen called the Führer's relief orders "stark, raving madness." OPPOSITE: A Russian Guards mortar team lobs shells toward the German lines. The immovable, well-supplied Russians gave the enemy no relief.

had been clandestinely deployed in the steppes north and south of the city. To the north was the Southwest Front under General Nikolai Vatutin. Next was the Don Front under General Konstantin Rokossovsky, and to the south of the city was the Southeast Front under Andrei Yeremenko. While just enough men and supplies were funneled to Chuikov to enable him to hold the city, over a million fresh troops, 1,500 tanks, 2,500 big guns, and three air armies deployed along a front almost 150 miles wide. The Soviets intended to attack the German flanks at their two weakest points—100 miles west of Stalingrad and 100 miles south of it—in sectors held by the Romanian Third and Fourth Armies.

On November 19, the Red Army unleashed Operation Uranus in a blinding snowstorm. The attacking Soviet units on Vatutin's front—three complete armies—swept southeast from the Serafimovich bridgehead, shattering the Romanian Third Army along a 40-mile-wide stretch of the Don on Paulus's northern flank. The next morning, a second Soviet offensive—two complete armies of Yeremenko's Southeast Front—got under way from the south of the city, advancing northwestward against positions held by the Romanian Fourth Army.

Under the sudden pressure of the massive Russian artillery and advancing tank columns, the Romanian forces collapsed almost immediately. The two Soviet fronts raced west in a huge pincer movement and met four days later near the town of Kalach, sealing the ring around Stalingrad. Meanwhile, troops of Rokossovsky's Don Front had spread over the country west of the Don in a multipronged drive southward into the Don-Donetz corridor, linking up on the Chui River with the left pincer thrusting in from Kalach. The movement dropped an iron curtain across the most direct routes that any relieving German forces might use to come to the aid of Paulus and his army.

As Paulus flew to a new command post to escape the onrushing Soviet tide, he saw for himself the extent of the rout and knew that it would be a matter of only days before the Sixth Army was completely surrounded and cut off. He radioed headquarters, urgently requesting permission to withdraw his forces 100 miles to the west before the Russian ring around his troops became unbreakable. Hitler dismissed the

request and ordered Paulus to assume a "hedgehog" defense. The Sixth Army slowly ran out of time while Hitler moved his own headquarters to East Prussia to get a better look. In the meantime, he named Field Marshal Erich von Manstein head of the newly formed Army Group Don, which left Paulus under Manstein's operational control but did not materially affect the situation.

Hitler's decision to hold Paulus in place left no alternative but to attempt to sustain the Sixth Army from the air. Paulus, his army trapped within a tightening ring of Soviet armor, informed Hitler that he had only six days' worth of food remaining for his men. Morale, said Paulus, remained high, since the men believed they would be saved by other German armies. The Germans dubbed their position der Kessel—the kettle. General Wolfram von Richthofen, commanding Luftflotte 4, tried to fulfill Hitler's promise to sustain Paulus by air, but from the outset he realized the task was hopeless. Paulus needed a minimum of 500 tons of supplies daily just to sustain his army in a defensive posture and prolong the Soviet effort to liquidate the pocket.

When the Russians captured the Kalach Bridge on November 23, Paulus's army and a corps of the Fourth Panzer Army were sealed inside a pocket some 30 by 40 miles wide, the nearest German reinforcements more than 40 miles away. After expanding the corridor separating the Sixth Army and the rest of the German forces to a width of over 100 miles, the Russians moved 60 divisions and 1,000 tanks into position to attack Paulus's army. Fierce fighting began to shrink the pocket. Although convinced that Hitler's orders would lead to the total destruction of his army, Paulus remained intent upon obeying the Führer, saying simply, "A Prussian general does not mutiny."

Despite Richthofen's efforts, the airlift never had a chance for success. The shortage of aircraft, horrible flying weather, and the sheer distances involved doomed it from the outset. Pilot fatigue, improperly trained air crews, icy buildup, and Soviet fighters left a trail of downed Luftwaffe aircraft strewn across the steppes on the approaches to Stalingrad. As the airlift sputtered out, Paulus cut his troops' rations in an effort to conserve food. Ammunition stockpiles were steadily depleted, and the Sixth Army's capacity to resist began to dwindle accordingly. Orders went out to return fire only when essential and then to take only "sure shots."

Although Hitler added to the confusion by issuing orders that were ever-more absurd

SOVIET HEROES OF STALINGRAD

The concentration of forces and the intensity of the fighting for Stalingrad in late 1942 and early 1943 were possibly unprecedented in the history of warfare. Divisions attacked in some sectors along a front of just a mile wide or less. Many key positions, such as the Tartar Mound, changed hands a dozen times or more, while the ruined city became a perfect killing zone for large numbers of expert snipers on both sides. Entire units were sacrificed in General Vasily Chuikov's last-ditch effort to hold the Russians' final line of defense, the Volga River.

One such unit, the elite 13th Guards Rifle Division, commanded by General Alexander Rodimtsev, was rushed across the Volga in the early stages of the battle to repel a German attack near the city's center that threatened to turn the tide of the battle. Ordered to retake Mamaev Kurgan (the Tartar Mound) and Railway Station No. 1 on September 13, 1942, almost a third of the division's 10,000 soldiers were killed in action during its first 24 hours in battle. The railway station changed hands 14 times in six hours. Only 300 of the men survived the battle for Stalingrad, a staggering death rate of 97 percent, giving rise to the oft-repeated claim that the life expectancy of soldiers in the unfortunate division was one day for an enlisted man and three for an officer.

After being briefed by Chuikov on his assignment, Rodimtsev, a veteran of the Spanish Civil War and a national hero, declared: "I am a Communist, I have no intention of abandoning the city." One of Rodimtsev's junior officers was handpicked by the commander of the Soviet Sixty-second Army himself to carry out a vital, though suicidal, mission—to hold the railroad station in downtown Stalingrad. Lieutenant Anton K. Dragan received his orders from Chuikov in person. Gathering a platoon of 50 men, Dragan and his soldiers proceeded to frustrate the Germans for almost three weeks in an epic room-by-room struggle for control of the depot.

Breaking through walls, crawling over rafters, and burrowing under floorboards, the Russians grudgingly yielded portions of the building to the attackers, only to emerge elsewhere and resume the struggle all over again. Like Soviet soldiers elsewhere in the city, Dragan's men contested every inch of ground, even down to the sewer system. Combatants were reduced to a primitive, almost inhuman level of existence in the blasted, gutted ruins, fighting a war the Germans called *Rattenkrieg*, or "rats' war," in a hellish, surrealistic tableau recalling scenes from Dante's *Inferno*. Exchanging gunfire down hallways and lobbing grenades back and forth between rooms, Dragan and his men inflicted as many casualties as possible upon their enemies while selling their own lives dearly.

Despite its heroic resistance, Dragan's small force was eventually reduced to a mere handful of survivors. Running out of ammunition and rations, one of the soldiers took out a bayonet and carved on the wall, "Rodimtsev's Guardsmen fought and died for their country here." Under cover of darkness, Dragan and just five survivors slipped out of the building, made their way through enemy lines, and rejoined the fighting elsewhere in the city.

National Archives

Soviet soldiers storm the ruins of School # 6 in a photpgraph by Russian newspaper photographer Georgy Zelma.

and self-contradictory, German morale received a boost when word spread that the Führer had ordered Manstein to mount a relief operation and open a supply corridor to Paulus by punching a hole in the encirclement. Operation Winter Storm, launched on December 16, proved as hopeless as the airlift. Manstein's division-size force of panzers was inadequate to pierce the ring of Soviet artillery and armor. Meanwhile, the Sixth Army's fuel and ammunition situation had deteriorated to the point that most heavy equipment, trucks, and armor would have to be abandoned if a breakout was attempted. Hitler steadfastly refused to consider the withdrawal of Sixth Army from Stalingrad, saying that without their heavy guns and armor such a retreat would have a "Napoleonic ending." In this, at least, he would prove correct.

As Christmas 1942 approached, the Sixth Army's situation became increasingly desperate. The relief column had retreated, supplies arriving by air were diminishing, and starvation had begun to thin the ranks. As the full impact of the harsh Russian winter set in, the trapped German Army rapidly ran out of heating fuel and medical supplies, and thousands of the Army's remaining effectives began suffering the effects of frostbite, malnutrition, and disease. With no fodder for their horses, the Germans began slaughtering the animals for food, and on Christmas Eve Paulus ordered the last of the horses killed to provide a makeshift Christmas dinner for his men. The following day, he ordered yet another cut in the men's rations; the food allotment for each man was now a bowl of thin soup and 100 grams of bread per day. German doctors, coping with an increasing number of wounded men and diminishing stocks of medicine with which to treat them, were forced to give first priority to wounded soldiers who stood the best chance of recovering and being returned to battle. It was a triage of the damned.

Rokossovsky and Yeremenko, meanwhile, tightened the noose around the Germans daily, shrinking the perimeter Paulus had to defend. Additional Soviet advances swept the Axis flank defenders—Romanians, Italians, and Hungarians—almost entirely out of the Don-Donetz corridor, threatening the rear of the German forces on the lower Don and in the Caucasus. Hitler at last realized the inevitability of a disaster even greater than that of the Stalingrad encirclement. The decision was made to withdraw from the Caucasus just in time for Army Group B to escape being cut off itself. That withdrawal made it clear to the world that the German tide of conquest was on the ebb.

On January 10, 1943, Rokossovsky issued a call for Paulus to surrender, promising food and medical treatment for all the defenders and allowing German

officers to retain their badges of rank and decorations. Paulus radioed Hitler, asking permission to surrender and thus save the lives of his remaining men, but again the Führer refused, ordering Paulus to stand and fight where he was—to the last man and the last bullet, if need be. Hitler dispatched Luftwaffe Field Marshal Erhard Milch to the front to revive the flagging airlift effort, but not even Milch could figure out a way to stanch the bleeding caused by worsening winter weather and the dominance of Soviet fighters controlling the skies around Stalingrad.

As the attempt at resupply by air faded away, the proud army that Paulus had led to the edge of the Volga disintegrated. The elite soldiers of the German Sixth Army were now a tattered collection of emaciated, walking skeletons. With starvation, disease, and despair stalking the Army, desertions, unauthorized surrenders, and an occasional local mutiny diminished the Sixth Army's capacity for organized resistance. In the meantime, the Red Army relentlessly closed the ring around the city.

His demand for surrender rebuffed, Rokossovsky ramped up the pressure on the Stalingrad pocket. On January 10, the Soviets attacked the city with 47 divisions, and by mid-January the remnant of Paulus's command held an area just 10 miles square. Staff officers at Army headquarters in Berlin, tacitly admitting to themselves that Sixth Army was lost, tried to salvage what they could of its technicians and specialists while abandoning the rank and file to their fates. They stepped up evacuation of officers with rare skills and ability, giving them priority on flights out of the pocket ahead of the wounded. General Hans Hube, commander of the 16th Panzer Division, was one such officer. After being ordered to abandon his command and fly out of Stalingrad, Hube refused, only to be evacuated forcibly by a squad of Gestapo agents sent to the city. By the end of January, the starved, frozen, and exhausted survivors of the Sixth Army were on the verge of collapse.

Paulus dispatched an aide to speak directly to the Führer, hoping that a firsthand account of the dire situation might change Hitler's mind. Hitler was unmoved, replying that the Sixth Army's ordeal was tying down Soviet forces that might otherwise prevent the planned evacuation of the German Army Group then in the Caucasus. German airlift operations struggled on until January 24. Immediately after two Ju-52s managed to lumber off the runway at Pitomnik airfield, a Soviet T-34 tank broke through the outer defense ring of the airfield and began shooting up the control tower and makeshift airport facilities. More tanks and Soviet infantry followed, and the airfield fell into Soviet hands, bringing the German airlift to an abrupt and final halt.

With all hope of relief or rescue now gone, Paulus radioed a message to Hitler: "The troops are out of ammunition and food, effective command is no longer possible. There are 18,000 wounded without any supplies, dressings or drugs. Further defense senseless. Collapse inevitable. Army requests permission to surrender in order to save the lives of the remaining troops." Hitler gave the same response he had made to all similar requests: "Surrender is forbidden. Sixth Army will hold their positions to the last man and last round and by their heroic resistance make an unforgettable contribution

towards the establishment of a defensive front and the salvation of the Western world."

In an unprecedented, if cynical, show of generosity, Hitler gave promotions to dozens of senior officers of the Sixth Army, most notably a field marshal's baton for Paulus. In the entire history of the German Army, Hitler noted, no field marshal had ever surrendered or been taken alive. The implication was clear, but Paulus had no intention of throwing himself onto his own funeral pyre. A few days later, Soviet forces closed in on his command post, a cellar in the bombed-out ruins of a store in downtown Stalingrad. On the verge of collapse, dirty and unshaven, Paulus surrendered, and on February 2 the last German resistance in Stalingrad ceased. Of the nearly 350,000 soldiers who had followed Paulus to Stalingrad, barely 91,000 survived to surrender to the Soviets.

After Stalin announced to the world the news of Paulus's surrender and the Soviet victory at Stalingrad, a sense of foreboding fell over the Third Reich. The German people were finally informed of the loss of the German Sixth Army, and a three-day mourning period went into effect. While Paulus relaxed in a warm suburb of Moscow, the soldiers of the Sixth Army who had been promised food and shelter were not so fortunate. The Russians put 20,000 of them to work rebuilding the destroyed city, and the rest were dispatched to POW camps scattered from Siberia to central Asia. Many died shortly after the surrender from a typhus epidemic brought on by lice and the unsanitary conditions experienced during the battle. Many more would perish from malnutrition, disease, and neglect in the various Soviet prison camps. Of the 91,000 men who surrendered with Paulus, only 5,000 survived to eventually return to Germany in 1955.

For their role in the great Soviet victory, Chuikov and his Sixty-second Army received the highest honors the Red Army could bestow upon its soldiers. It was renamed the 8th Guards Army for the heroic defense of the city, and Chuikov led his men on a march across Europe that ultimately reached Berlin. His troops had the honor of capturing the Reichstag and planting the hammer and sickle atop the building in the fallen capital of the Third Reich.

ABOVE: Corpses of either German or Soviet soldiers litter the ground at Stalingrad. The Soviets had over a million men killed or wounded in the fighting while Germany and its allies suffered about 760,000 casualties. OPPOSITE: Victorious members of the Soviet Sixty-second Army advance through the rubble of Stalingrad in what is probably a staged photo taken after the battle.

From the Soviet perspective, the struggle for Stalingrad carried implications far beyond its borders. It defined the major, psychological turning point of World War II in Europe. By halting the advance of one of Germany's elite armies and ultimately defeating it, the Russians proved that the Nazis were not invincible, and in doing so they gained the confidence and skills they would need to ultimately defeat Germany. Conversely, the disaster at Stalingrad shattered the myth of Hitler's infallibility among the Germans themselves. Indeed, the path to the Soviet Union's rise to the status of a true superpower began on the banks of the Volga River.

The monumental scale of the battle lived on in the ruins of the shattered city. Although a panel of the Supreme Soviet determined that it would be easier to abandon the city and build a new one elsewhere, Stalin's ego and determination brought about the ultimate reconstruction of the city. But buried among the ruins was the horrendous price the Russians had paid for their victory. It will never be known how many people died at Stalingrad. Some postwar estimates claim that Chuikov lost over a million soldiers in his effort to hold the city, but that figure is almost certainly exaggerated. Still, the loss of life was appalling.

The casualty figures for the German Sixth Army, the Fourth Panzer Army, and their Axis auxiliaries that supported the march to the Volga were staggering. The Germans lost about 400,000 men; the Italians, Hungarians, and Romanians about 120,000 each. According to archival figures, the Red Army suffered a total of 1,129,619 total casualties—478,741 killed and missing and 650,878 wounded—in the greater Stalingrad area. In the city itself, 750,000 Russians were killed, wounded, or captured. The most horrendous toll fell on the city's civilian inhabitants. Of Stalingrad's estimated 850,000 residents in 1940, only 1,500 citizens remained in the pile of rubble that once was Stalingrad. □

SIDI REZEGH–

ROMMEL, HIS FORCES WEAKENED AND OUTNUMBERED, DEMONSTRATED GERMAN TACTICAL SUPERIORITY AND THE USE OF COMBINED ARMS IN THE NORTH AFRICAN DESERT.

BY THOMAS HAYMES

By the end of the second day visibility was reduced to almost zero. Burning hulks of everything from ME-109s to M3 "Honey" tanks, Panzer IIIHs, and trucks of all descriptions littered the battleground that was once an airfield. The desert floor had been pulverized into a dust that just hung in the air, further reducing visibility. It was a scene out of Dante's *Inferno*, and yet thousands of men and vehicles continued to be drawn to this stretch of the North African desert like moths to a flame.

Key to Tobruk

With no cover or concealment, the Libyan desert near Tobruk became a killing ground for men and machines in November 1941. Rommel's tactical acumen enabled his forces to initially outmaneuver the British while conducting a strategic withdrawal. Here a German panzer heads toward black smoke that marks where British tanks have been knocked out.

Alamy

In a campaign that had hitherto been unique for its lack of fixed geographic points, the airfield at Sidi Rezegh had become the gateway to the besieged fortress of Tobruk. Whichever side held it in force would, in theory, be able to determine whether that siege would be maintained or broken. In reality, though, events miles away would determine the outcome of the three-week battle known as Crusader, and yet for days forces were sent into the meat grinder that the former airfield had become.

This is the story of a fixed point on the sea of the North African desert. It is significant because in actions on or within a few miles of the landing strip, British armor doctrine was soundly defeated time and again by the combined arms tactics of the Germans. Ultimately, however, forces unrelated to the actual combat on the field forced the victors at Sidi Rezegh to retreat. Up to then General Erwin Rommel, commander of *Panzergruppe Afrika*, had been the master of the attack. When the attack ultimately failed him, Sidi Rezegh became one of the first places from which he was to demonstrate his mastery of the strategic retreat. Before that could happen, however, hundreds of British tanks and

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dozens of German panzers—as well as thousands of men—would die within sight of the little dirt airstrip.

Sidi Rezegh had been built by the Axis as a forward airbase to assist in their defense of Western Libya. Its most recent occupants were elements of the *Luftwaffe* that had occupied the field since shortly after Rommel's successful counteroffensive of April 1941. The primary function of the forces stationed there was to support the efforts of the besiegers of the fortress of Tobruk, whose perimeter lay only a dozen or so miles north of the field.

In late November 1941 this role suddenly changed as Sidi Rezegh became a focal point for the British attempt to force an end to the siege of Tobruk. Any aircraft that

EYEWITNESS VIEWPOINT

LIEUTENANT HEINZ WERNER SCHMIDT

On the afternoon of November 23, known as Totensonntag to the Germans, General Ludwig Crüwell, commander of the *Afrika Korps*, decided to launch both of his armored divisions at the box being defended by the 2nd South African Brigade which had laagered just south of the contested airfield at Sidi Rezegh. The 2nd SA was augmented by remnants of the 4th Armoured Brigade which had been heavily mauled the day before attacking the *Afrika Korps* on the airfield itself. Crüwell decided that the South African box was just too tempting a target to pass up, and set out to annihilate it with a wild charge into its weakest side.

Lieutenant Heinz Werner Schmidt, until just days before aide-de-camp to General Rommel, was commanding a heavy weapons company in the attack. He described the scene as follows:

"We headed straight for the enemy tanks. I glanced back. Behind me was a fan of our vehicles—a curious assortment of all types—spread out as far as the eye could see. There were armored troop carriers, cars of various kinds, caterpillars hauling mobile guns, heavy trucks with infantry, and motorized anti-aircraft units. Thus we roared on towards the enemy 'barricade.'

"I stared at the front fascinated. Right ahead was the erect figure of the Colonel commanding the regiment. On the left close by and slightly to the rear of him was the Major's car. Tank shells were whizzing through the air. The defenders were firing from every muzzle of their 25-pounders and their little 2-pounder anti-tank guns. We raced on at a suicidal pace."

Crüwell's charge destroyed the South African Brigade after a fierce fight but it was ultimately self-defeating for the *Afrika Korps*, because it lost 72 panzers during the attacks—the highest one-day total of the entire Crusader campaign. Panzer losses proved to be the key factor in forcing Rommel's eventual withdrawal as the three-week-long battle deteriorated into a war of attrition, which could not be won by the Germans.

From: Heinz Werner Schmidt, *With Rommel in the Desert.* London: Constable and Co., 1997, p. 108.

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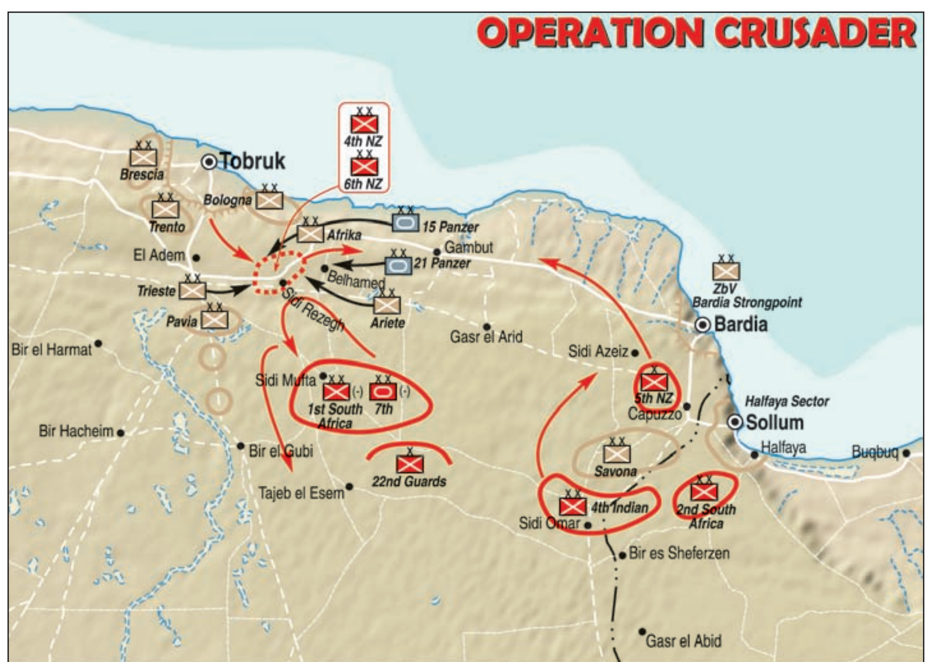

ABOVE: The British opened "Crusader" with a long thrust toward Tobruk that eventually brought in Axis armor. Much fighting then concentrated on Sidi Rezegh. OPPOSITE LEFT: General Sir Claude Auchinleck. OPPOSITE RIGHT: Lieutenant General Sir Alan Gordon Cunningham.

could fly were hastily dispersed to other Axis airfields. The remainder were caught on the ground and captured or destroyed by the surprise arrival of the 7th Armoured Brigade with its Mark IVA Cruiser tanks on November 19. With the 7th Armoured Brigade was the divisional support group of artillery and antitank guns, which immediately began to dig in under the shadow of the escarpment that overlooked the southern part of the airfield. The 7th Support, as it was known, was commanded by Brigadier "Jock" Campbell, who was to win the Victoria Cross for his subsequent actions in the battle.

The 7th Armoured Brigade, part of the 7th Armoured Division of the Eighth Army, crossed the frontier wire from Egypt during the night of November 18. The "Desert Rats" of the 7th were to be the armored fist of the attacking British forces trying to break the siege of Tobruk. The division consisted of over 400 tanks—more than the stock of the entire *Deutsche Afrika Korps* (*DAK*). Most of it moved in a wide, flanking movement south of the main German and Italian dispositions. Its specific aim was to neutralize and destroy the German armor so that forces advancing along the coast road, the Via Balbia, could relieve the besieged garrison of Tobruk. As Maj. Gen. William "Strafer" Gott, commander of the Desert Rats, summed up his mission before Operation Crusader, "This will be a tank commander's battle. No tank commander will go far wrong if he places his gun within hitting range of the enemy."

The plan was to lure the *Afrika Korps* into a massive armored battle in the middle of the desert dozens of miles south of Tobruk near a spot called Gabr Saleh. Rommel, focused on his impending attack on the Tobruk garrison, refused to believe reports of a large British force advancing in the south and held his armored forces close to Tobruk. Eventually, General Ludwig Crüwell, commander of the *Afrika Korps*, prevailed upon Rommel to send his two divisions to the south, and on November 19 the 15th and 21st Panzer Divisions rumbled south in search of the British. It was too late—the British had already dispersed their forces.

When Rommel had failed to take the bait and come south to engage the main British armored forces, Lt. Gen. Alan Cunningham, commander of the Eighth Army, had gone looking for him instead. Consequently, the 22nd Armoured Brigade, one of the three brigades of the 7th Armoured Division, ran into the Ital-

Imperial War Museum

AKG Photo

ian Ariete Division at a small desert outpost called Bir Gubi and became engaged in a firefight there, losing 25 of their 136 tanks. The 4th Armoured Brigade, the third brigade in the 7th, had been farther to the north, ordered to protect the flank of the infantry forces moving along the Via Balbia and Trigh Capuzzo (an unpaved desert track running south of Tobruk). Gott therefore instructed the forces he had left, which were the 7th Armoured Brigade and the divisional support group of artillery and antitank guns, to take Sidi Rezegh airfield. The 4th and 22nd Brigades would follow as soon as possible in order to meet the expected reaction of the missing German armor to the fall of the airfield, which was only a dozen miles from the backs of the besiegers around Tobruk.

The fall of the airfield at Sidi Rezegh served as a wake-up call for General Erwin Rommel. He was in the final stages of planning an assault to break the siege of Tobruk. Initially, he looked upon the British moves to the south as merely a raid or reconnaissance in force. While Crüwell's move south missed engaging the main strength of the 7th Division—as the British hoped and intended—his forces did skirmish with elements of the 4th Armoured Brigade, with the British losing 23 tanks to the Germans' three. More importantly, the Germans retained possession of the battlefield and were able to salvage their losses.

On the evening of November 20, Rommel ascended the hill at Belhamed, which overlooked Sidi Rezegh on the one side and the British siege lines around Tobruk on the other, and became concerned about the large armored force that was apparently digging in at the airfield. He immediately issued instructions to Crüwell to break off contact with whatever forces he was engaging and to hasten to the airfield in an overnight march. This came none too soon because the Afrika Division, soon to be renamed the 90th Light, suddenly found itself pressed on both sides on the morning of November 21 as it attempted to hold the line between the 70th British Division attacking from Tobruk and the 7th Armoured Brigade and Support Group pressing up from the airfield.

Rommel ordered his artillery stationed on Belhamed Hill to fire on the airfield in an attempt to slow down the attacking forces. He also personally took command of an antitank screen that was to be decisive in holding the line between the Tobruk defenders and the attackers coming from Sidi Rezegh. One British armored regiment, the 6th Royal Tank, was decimated when it attempted to charge a battery of 88mm dual-purpose guns between the airfield and the Tobruk defenders. The other two regiments were preparing a new attack when dust clouds in the south signaled the arrival of the

ABOVE: During Operation Crusader, tanks from both sides crisscrossed the desert in search of the enemy. Here a British Matilda II, with Brodie helmets hanging from the turret, stands ready for action. OPPOSITE: British gunners, protected behind a parapet of stones, prepare to engage Rommel's panzers with a captured Italian 47mm anti-tank gun.

armored divisions of the *Afrika Korps*.

As the 7th Armoured Brigade turned to meet them, its commander, Brigadier G.M.O. Davey, committed a cardinal error by sending only part of his remaining armored force against the approaching German armor. One regiment of Crusaders attempted to hold off two divisions of Panzer IIIs and IVs while the final regiment in the brigade was ordered to hold position on the airfield as a reserve.

By making this kind of move, Davey further compounded the error of 8th Army Command by even further dividing British armored forces. This kind of penny-packet strategy was to cost the British dearly in tanks and lives. The 15th and 21st Armoured Divisions of the *Afrika Korps* merely brushed aside the British Cruiser tanks of the 7th Hussar Regiment as they met them in the open desert. German antitank guns wiped them out before they could even engage the panzers. This attack exemplified the German strategy of saving their armor and letting antitank guns do the lion's share of the antiarmor work. Between the abortive attack on the *Afrika* Division and this engagement, two-thirds of the 7th Armoured Brigade was decimated without destroying, or even engaging, a single German tank.

The Germans now turned their attention to the 2nd Royal Tank Regiment waiting on the airfield. The remainder of the 7th Armoured Brigade was nearly annihilated as it made its stand on the airfield. By the end of the day the 7th was down to fewer than 10 running tanks and the Support Group was forced into a precarious defensive position in the lee of the southern escarpment. Ironically, if the tanks of the 7th Brigade had made a defensive stand with their antitank guns they might have had a better chance against the German onslaught. Instead, the dozens of tanks lost by the 7th became the first victims of Sidi Rezegh.

That afternoon, as members of the Support Group dug in against the drive of the German armor, their commander, Brigadier "Jock" Campbell, frantically

EYEWITNESS VIEWPOINT

LIEUTENANT ROBERT CRISP

On the evening of Saturday November 22, Lieutenant Robert Crisp of the 4th Armoured Brigade came upon the airfield at Sidi Rezegh. He describes what he saw as he crested the southern escarpment overlooking the airfield:

"Straight ahead and below, in the middle distance, lay the square, clean pattern of a desert airfield, its boundaries marked by neat lines of wrecked German and Italian fighter planes, its center littered with shattered tanks from some of which the smoke was rising black into the blue sky. On my left the desert stretched away covered with thin-skinned vehicles, but strangely empty of human movement. On my right, and between our two tanks and landing ground, the slope and bottom of the escarpment was crawling with the limp dark figures of men digging slit trenches, putting down mines, clustered around anti-tank and field guns or, unbelievably, cooking a meal. On the other side of the depression the opposite escarpment was full of men, less active than those below, and every now and again I saw a flash of gunfire.

"Neither Tom [the other Honey commander] nor I could tell whether any of the men, vehicles or guns were enemy or friendly. The only positive identification we had were the tanks on the airfield … all the burning ones were British Crusaders."

The men that Lieutenant Crisp saw on the bottom of the escarpment were the remnants of the 7th Support Group and 7th Armoured Brigade while the troops on the far escarpment were members of the German *Afrika* Division.

Source: Robert Crisp, *Brazen Chariots.* New York: Bantam, 1979, p. 50.

raced around the field trying to rally his men to hold on until relief could arrive. After the destruction of the 7th Armoured Brigade, however, the German panzers turned their attention to the Support Group and severely mauled it, although the British were able to take out several panzers in the ensuing melee. These losses, coupled with the need to resupply and refuel, forced Crüwell to order his forces to withdraw for the evening. Because of this action, the remnants of the Support Group and the few remaining tanks of the 7th Armoured Brigade were able to hold on to the airfield, but only just.

On November 22, the Germans launched a three-pronged attack on the British forces holding the western edge of the airfield. Elements of the 21st Panzer Division attacked the remains of the armor and the Support Group on the airfield, while elements of the *Afrika* Division attempted to clear the escarpments. Panzer Regiment 5 surprised the defenders at the airfield and destroyed much of the remaining armor in addition to waging a fierce battle with the antitank gunners of the Support Group.

Scattered units of the 4th Armoured Brigade began to appear on the battlefield. Brigadier Campbell commandeered whatever forces turned up and led them to the edge of the field to engage the advancing Panzer Regiment 5. One of these units was a group of two M3 Stuart "Honey" tanks led by Lieutenant Robert Crisp. They fol-

THE DEVELOPMENT OF ARMORED TACTICS IN LIBYA IN 1941

By the time of the Crusader battles in late 1941, the German panzer forces in North Africa had developed a sophisticated combined-arms doctrine. This was as much out of necessity as experience. Unlike the British, who never really developed an effective combined-arms doctrine in the North African campaign, the Germans were almost always starved for tanks. In order to augment the striking power of their panzer units, mobile antitank weapons of a bewildering variety were integrated directly at the battalion level.

Ironically, according to Ian Hogg, it was the British who taught Rommel how effective this tactic could be. During their initial assault on Tobruk in April 1941, the German forces attempted to storm the British perimeter, at that time held by the 9th Australian Division and the remnants of forces forced eastward by Rommel's first offensive after arriving in Africa. Upon reaching the fortifications surrounding Tobruk on April 14, Rommel attempted to storm them using his panzers supported by infantry. General Sir Leslie Morshead, commanding the Australians, developed a plan to use his meager forces to repulse the Germans. He ordered the infantry to keep their heads down and allow the panzers to pass and only engage the following German infantry. Morshead liberally distributed his artillery and antitank guns around the perimeter as a second line of defense. In addition to the 2-pounder antitank gun, the standard British antitank weapon at the time, Morshead used 25-pounder artillery pieces firing over open sights. His strategy was an unexpected success as the Germans lost 17 out of their 38 tanks in the assault and were forced to withdraw. By forcing the German panzers to assault the improvised antitank line and trapping their follow-on infantry with his own, Morshead was unwittingly giving a valuable lesson to his enemy.

Rommel took this lesson to heart and started integrating antitank forces directly into his panzer battalions. He also had one big advantage over the British: the 88mm antitank gun, the effectiveness of which he had discovered at Arras in France the previous year when he beat off a British counterattack using these weapons. At the time, Rommel was forced to improvise with these antiaircraft guns because they were the only defense on hand that could stop the British armored attack. Rommel used this experience, along with the lesson learned from Morshead, to develop an offensive role for the antitank gun, which could take out any British tank at more than twice the range of British 2-pounder (40mm) main armaments. At this time most of the German tanks employed in Africa had a main armament of either a 37mm or 50mm gun, so the 88 outranged them as well.

By the time of the Crusader battles, the typical German panzer battalion had three to five heavy antitank guns (88mm, and the smaller 50mm and 37mm variety) directly attached to its formation. These guns could either fire from improvised mobile mounts or unlimber from trucks and half-tracks in a matter of minutes. In addition, mobile antitank units were attached to infantry formations such as the *Afrika* Division to increase their effectiveness. It was these guns that caused the most carnage on and around Sidi Rezegh airfield during the Crusader battles.

The British, on the other hand, did not learn the lesson provided them by Morshead and the Australians at Tobruk. They continued to operate tank formations largely independently of antitank formations, which were considered almost entirely defensive. The fact that 7th Division Support Group, which was the division's primary antitank formation, was a brigade-sized formation illustrates this British mentality: The tank was essentially a cavalry replacement and the antitank gun was essentially specialized artillery. The British also had an equivalent to the German 88mm in their 90mm antiaircraft gun, but this weapon was never employed in an antitank role in any systematic fashion. It is also ironic that the most damage inflicted on November 22 by British forces on the airfield—and the following day at the South African box—was done by antitank and artillery forces operating independently of tanks. Compared to these losses, relatively few German panzers were destroyed in direct tank-to-tank combat.

National Archives

German Panzers advance through the desert toward Tobruk and the British forces at Sidi Rezegh.

lowed Campbell's staff car as it raced across the field under heavy shellfire, and Crisp suddenly found himself facing "70" panzers advancing from the east. To make matters worse, Crisp had already lost the other remaining tank in his troop when its driver was killed and it careened wildly around the airfield at full throttle.

Ignoring the odds, Campbell waved and drove off to find other reinforcements. Crisp engaged the panzers as long as he could, but was forced to pull back. He didn't make it back to the escarpment—his tank caught fire and he and his crew were forced to bail out.

All of this time Crisp had been calling for the remainder of the 4th Brigade to join him on the field, but they got lost in the swirling dust and smoke at the bottom of the escarpment and never engaged the attacking panzers. The 4th was never able to truly regroup after this point because the 15th Panzer Division overran their command post laager during the night, resulting in the capture of dozens of vehicles as well as most of the brigade staff.

In the fading light of the afternoon, the 22nd Armoured Brigade appeared on the scene and charged across the airfield—right into the waiting German antitank gunners. Campbell once again climbed into his staff car and led the tanks of the 22nd Brigade into one charge after another. The result was another slaughter of British tanks, dozens of which now blazed upon the airfield. By the end of the day, the 22nd Armoured Brigade was down to 34 tanks and was no longer an effective fighting force. With the 4th Armoured Brigade scattered, the commanders on the scene recognized that their position was becoming untenable and withdrew across the southern escarpment under heavy pressure. Sidi Rezegh had now claimed more than two-thirds of the 7th Armoured Division at little cost to the Germans.

Recognizing the precariousness of the forces attempting to hold the airfield, General Gott ordered the remnants of the 7th Support Group and 7th Armoured Brigade to withdraw into the positions of the 5th South African Brigade, which was forming a defensive box south of the airfield. By dusk the airfield was once again fully under German control.

The next day, November 23, called "Totensonntag" by the Germans in honor of the dead of World War I, the action shifted a scant few miles to the south of the airfield and the South African box which also held most of the remnants of the 7th Armoured Division brigades that had been mauled on the airfield. Rommel wanted to bypass this box and instead focus on the British forces farther to the south—hoping to catch them in a pincer movement with the Italian Ariete Division advancing from the southwest. General Crüwell ignored these orders and instead flung his two panzer divisions against the South Africans.

Up until this point, losses among the German panzers had been light. A few had been lost skirmishing with the British armor south of Sidi Rezegh on November 20, and some had been destroyed in the final attack on the airfield, but the two divisions of the *Afrika Korps* could still count better than 160 panzers between them. Crüwell mounted all of his forces—even keeping the infantry in their trucks until the last possible moment—and charged them straight at the South Africans. Despite a withering defensive fire, the vastly superior numbers of the German forces overwhelmed the box and effectively destroyed the 2nd South African Brigade. Some measure of

revenge, however, was attained for the previous day's mauling of the British armor as the Germans lost 72 panzers in this attack.

It was this kind of loss that ultimately proved fatal to the German efforts to hold off the British. Even though the Brits lost over 300 tanks around Sidi Rezegh in the three days of the battle for the airfield, they were able to replace many from reserves; the Germans had no reserves to speak of. Indeed, at the beginning of December Rommel was informed that he would not be receiving any supplies whatsoever for at least a month.

Rommel was completely unaware of Crüwell's attack until after it had happened. On November 23, communications started to become a serious problem for the Germans. One of the main reasons was the capture of the *Afrika Korps* headquarters that morning by the 1st New Zealand Division advancing from the east. Rommel was to remain blissfully unaware of this Kiwi formation for several days. Instead, he rallied the two German panzer divisions on Monday, November 24, and sent them in a wide sweeping motion toward Egypt, that is, away from Sidi Rezegh and Tobruk. These forces would be largely out of contact for four critical days.

Meanwhile, the 1st New Zealand Division, which had captured the *Afrika Korps* HQ, advanced toward Sidi Rezegh north of the German forces sweeping in the opposite direction. This division boasted 133 heavy infantry tanks, slow-moving Matildas and Valentines. On the evening of November 25 this force attacked the Italian and German defenders who now held the airfield. The Italian Bersagli Regiment held out on the escarpment over the airfield despite repeated attacks by the New Zealand 6th Brigade, but was eventually forced to withdraw westward.

More important to the British, part of the 1st New Zealand Division managed to link up with the Tobruk garrison on El Duda Hill the following day. The New Zealanders dug in at the airfield to keep the corridor to Tobruk open against the expected return of the *Afrika Korps* armor.

Given a respite from the battle, the scattered elements of the 7th Armoured Division began to reform to the south of Sidi Rezegh. The various brigades were brought up to a strength of more than 130 tanks within a few days from the enormous stocks of replacement vehicles in Egypt.

While these British reinforcements were coming up, the 15th and 21st Panzer Divi-

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ABOVE: Lying prone as protection from exploding munitions, British troops in the open prepare to charge an objective. OPPOSITE: Members of the 1st New Zealand Division, often called the "Rats of Tobruk," meet with British tank commaders. The Kiwis were a key to British success in November 1941.

sions were chasing around the Egyptian frontier attempting to panic the British into a general withdrawal. But General Sir Claude Auchinleck, Commander-in-Chief in the Middle East, was not so easily panicked. Since he had relieved Cunningham on November 25 and had taken personal control of the battle, he had been decisive. He recognized that the critical area to be held was the corridor to Tobruk across the Sidi Rezegh airfield and accordingly ordered the New Zealanders to dig in and hold on.

It was not until November 29 that the *Afrika Korps* returned, exhausted from its foray into Egypt. Rommel finally recognized the danger that the New Zealanders presented to his position. His staff officers, operating independently while Rommel had essentially disappeared into the desert, had already started recalling elements of the two panzer divisions from the border to deal with the New Zealanders. By the 29th, Rommel and Crüwell had agreed that the threat at Sidi Rezegh had to be dealt with.

The German forces that attacked that day were far weaker than those that had attacked the previous week. After chasing around the Egyptian border for the better part of four days, the 21st Panzer Division was down to nine tanks and the 15th was down to 31 Panzer IIIs and IVs with an additional 12 light Panzer IIs. Thus the battle to dislodge the New Zealanders was first and foremost fought by the artillery, and Rommel concentrated almost his entire force of heavy guns on the positions of the hapless Kiwis. Only later did the panzer divisions advance to mop up the remnants of the force. By December 1, infantry battalions from the 15th Panzer Division managed to force the New Zealanders from Belhamed Hill where Rommel had directed the attack on the 7th Armoured Division a little more than a week earlier. Once again Tobruk was encircled.

Owing to lack of command coordination, superior British armored forces from the 7th Armoured Division and the remainder of the South African Division failed to effectively intervene to save the New Zealanders. This force of British armor and South Africans, however, continued to pose a threat to Rommel's severely weakened armored strength. More importantly, Rommel's fuel situation was becoming critical. The attack on the New Zealanders was to prove the last act in the battle over the battered airstrip at Sidi Rezegh. Despite heavy odds against them, the Germans won it. Again the British had failed to coordinate their armor with infantry forces in a defensive fight.

By the time they took the airfield this final time, the Germans were a spent force. Despite having destroyed hundreds of British tanks, the *Afrika Korps* had lost the vast majority of its own panzers. On December 4, the Italians informed Rommel that those losses would not be made good for over a month—if then—because of the difficulty of getting supplies across the Mediterranean. Ultimately, the British were able to bring their strength up to several hundred tanks while Rommel's tanks could be counted in the dozens. More critical was the lack of ammunition and fuel to power the forces he did have left. It was this attrition that ultimately forced the Germans to abandon the airfield south of Tobruk, where they had won every major armored engagement over the previous three weeks. Rommel ordered the withdrawal of all forces east of Tobruk and the abandonment of the siege.

The Desert Fox would not return for another six months, but then he finally did take Tobruk—only to lose it again following the battle of attrition with Montgomery at El Alamein, which took place less than a year after the Crusader battles of late fall 1941. The battles around Sidi Rezegh, when taken with the Gazala battles fought in the same region six months later, however, demonstrate the height of German tactical superiority in armored conflict and the use of combined arms. This was a lesson not fully learned by the Allies until the battles in France almost three years later.

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OPERATION HANNIBAL: The Third Reich's LAST HURRAH

German soldiers man an MG-34 machine gun in the swiftly collapsing Courland Pocket, March 24, 1945. With defeat only weeks away, Grand Admiral Karl Dönitz did his best to evacuate civilians and soldiers from the area while disobeying Hitler's orders to hold fast.

Germany's last major military operation took place at Königsberg, along the shore of the Baltic Sea, from January to May 1945.

BY DR. RICHARD SELCER

Alamy

AS Soviet armies threatened Berlin in February 1945, Nazi Propaganda Minister Josef Goebbels promised the German people that the capital would be defended to the last stone and the last man. "We cannot let Königsberg put us to shame," he declared, comparing Berlin to the capital of East Prussia, at the time surrounded and desperately holding out against the Red Army.

Königsberg would hold out until April 9, 1945, three weeks before Berlin fell. What Goebbels and his master, Adolf Hitler, never knew was that 450,000 German civilians and wounded soldiers had managed to escape from the Königsberg pocket, thanks to the extraordinary efforts of the Kriegsmarine—the German Navy.

The last great German military operation of World War II was not the Ardennes offensive of December 1944 but Operation Hannibal on the shore of the Baltic Sea, from January into May 1945. Operation Hannibal was a seaborne evacuation on a scale that put the British evacuation of Dunkirk to shame. It has been largely forgotten because it was a strictly naval operation and contravened Hitler's explicit orders.

Mass evacuations are born of the sort of desperation where flight takes precedence over fight. They do not go down in history because they mean defeat. It took a unique British spin to turn Dunkirk from the disaster it was into a triumph of British pluck. Germany was able to duplicate that feat in the final months of World War II and even top the "Miracle of Dunkirk" by bringing out five or six times as many people.

In the fall of 1944, the German army was in full retreat in Eastern Europe between the Baltic and the Danube. From the heady days of 1941, when German forces swept through Poland and the Soviet Union driving everything before them, the Wehrmacht was now back on its heels.

The turnaround began with the Battle of Kursk (July 5-August 23, 1943), with the German forces suffering irreplaceable losses. The three German army groups that had begun the invasion of Russia (North, Center, and South) were bled white. Army

Imperial War Museum

Group North waged a fighting retreat from Leningrad south through Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. Army Group Center was charged with shielding East Prussia, wedged between Belarus and the Polish Corridor.

The stage for German defeat was set in June 1944, when Moscow launched Operation Bagration to coincide with the opening of the Western Front in France. It pushed the Germans back from Leningrad all the way to Latvia and liberated Belarus. By August it had obliterated Army Group Center, cut off Army Group North, and was driving toward the Baltic.

The Germans retreated into a defensive pocket on the Courland Peninsula (Latvia), where 200,000 Germans and Latvians, 33 divisions in all, fought with their backs to the sea against 1.7 million Soviet troops. By October, they were surrounded and cut off from all resupply except by sea.

Not even the Luftwaffe could help the army, as it was concentrated in the west to defend against the British and American bombing campaign. In January, Hitler ordered the remnants of Army Group North rebranded as Army Group Courland.

It was not just Hitler's suicidal obsession with not surrendering a single meter of German soil that lay behind the orders to hold the eastern Baltic. The new Type XXI U-boat was undergoing sea trials there. The new-and-improved U-boats, like the V-1 and V-2 rockets, were the last forlorn hopes to save the Thousand Year Reich.

Grand Admiral Karl Dönitz was as interested in putting the new U-boats into operation as Hitler, not because he clung to any hope of winning the war but in the hope of persuading the Allies to negotiate a more favorable peace.

Hitler's standing orders on the Eastern Front were "no surrender, no retreat." He insisted on a strategy of *Feste Plätze*, which meant holding "fortified places" like the Courland peninsula and the cities of Kolberg (Kolobrzeg, Poland), Königsberg (Kaliningrad, Russia), and Danzig (Gdansk, Poland) at all costs. He believed it would cost the Red Army more to take these places than it would the Germans to hold them.

Also known as the "wave-breaker" strategy, this produced a series of encirclements and precipitous retreats in late 1944 that so infuriated Hitler that in January 1945 he issued orders that no troop movements whatsoever be initiated without his personal approval. This meant no withdrawal to more defensible lines. It also meant, as the Red Army raced across Poland covering a hundred miles in little more than a week, that the sea was the German defenders' last lifeline.

East Prussia became a death trap for tens of thousands of Germans. Masses of civilians joined broken military units fleeing to the west. Those who made it across the Oder River swelled the refugee population of Germans already evacuated from bombed-out cities in the western Reich. Secret pre-war plans had called for a "phased evacuation" of East Prussia in the face of overwhelming attack until a counterattack could be organized; Hitler's orders put an end to those optimistic plans, and instead, every German who could flee westward did so, terrified of being caught by the Red Army.

By early 1945, Germany controlled only a narrow land corridor some 50 miles wide stretching along the Baltic coast from Königsberg to Swinemünde. It was under constant attack from the air and would be completely cut off by the Russian army in March. Long before then, the best escape route was not overland but by ship to safe ports.

Control of the Baltic was crucial to mass evacuations. It had been a "German lake"

at the beginning of the war. Kiel was the home port of a large part of the German fleet. However, by 1944 things had changed—RAF bombers and Soviet submarines were making operations risky.

In 1944, the Kriegsmarine got practice shuttling transports up and down the coast when it evacuated British and American POWs from stalags (POW camps) in Poland and East Prussia. Most POWs had to march overland, but some were transported in the holds of ships. They ironically dubbed their trips "Baltic cruises."

The Kriegsmarine itself had very little to do with these evacuations, only providing escort. Still, those evacuations served as a blueprint for the wholesale evacuation of Germans a few months later. Thus, Baltic ports were not just defensive citadels; they were havens for fleeing Germans.

Danzig, at the mouth of the Polish Corridor, was one of those strongpoints blocking the Russian advance into the German heartland. With its deep-water port of Gotenhafen 20 miles away, it formed a single defensive citadel. The Poles had turned Gotenhafen into the largest and most modern port on the Baltic even before Germany seized it in 1939. The Germans had turned it into a major naval base, an extension of Kiel's *Deutsche Werke* shipyard, whose drydock and heavy cranes were capable of servicing the largest warships.

At the end of 1940, the battleship *Scharnhorst* went there for repairs, and in April 1942 *Scharnhorst*'s sister ship *Gneisenau* came to Gotenhafen to be decommissioned on Hitler's orders. Her gun turrets were removed and repurposed as shore batteries.

Gotenhafen was home port for several units of the Kriegsmarine, and, unrelated to its naval activities, was a subcamp of the Stutthof concentration camp, holding thousands of Poles, Russians, and others. Their presence was another reason to keep Danzig-Gotenhafen from falling into Russian hands. The initial Russian offensive would bypass Danzig-Gotenhafen in January 1945; it only became a focus of the Red Army in March 1945, when Marshal Kinstantin Rokossovsky was ordered to take it.

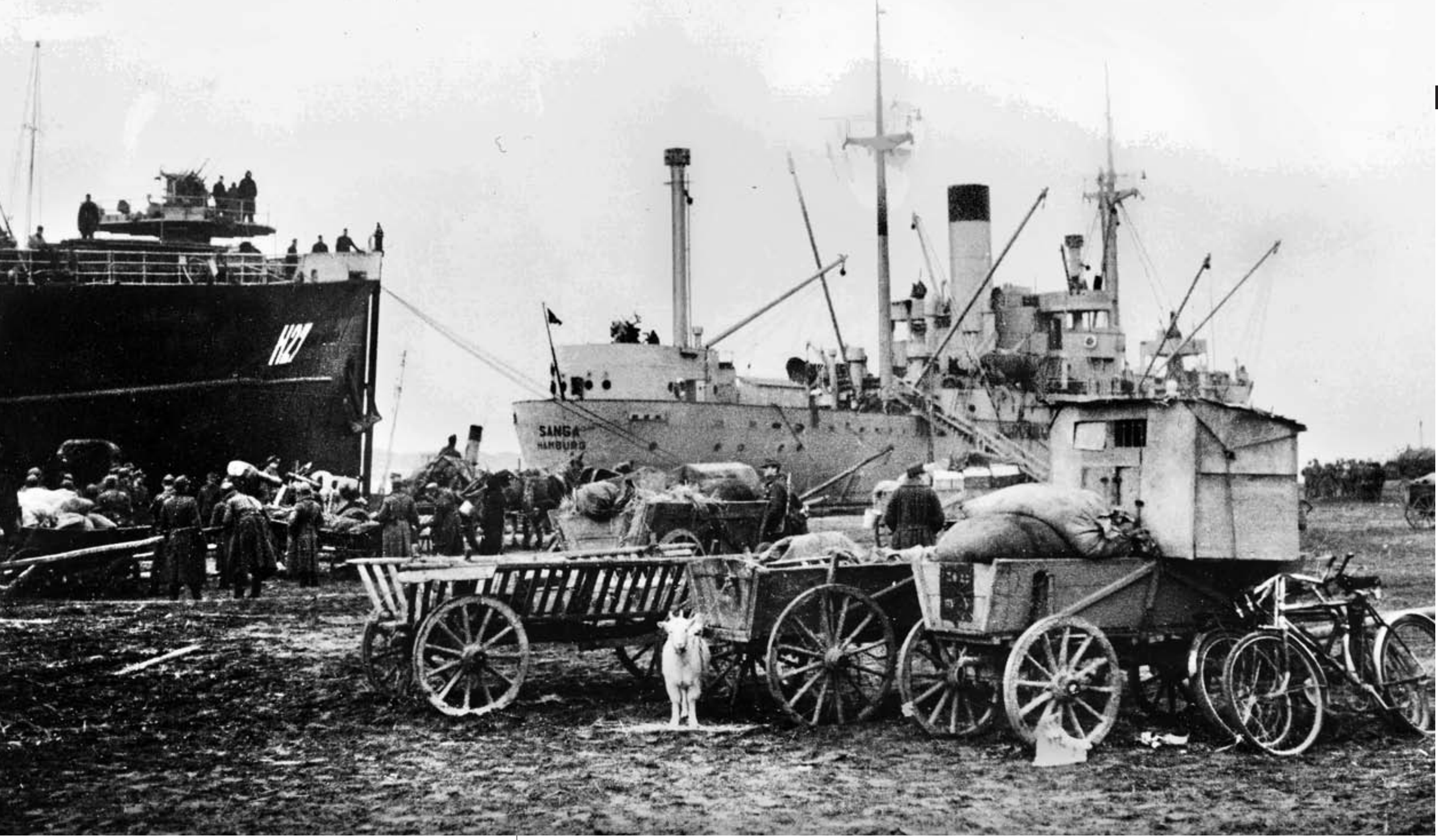
Across the Gulf of Danzig was Königsberg, another German strongpoint, designated an "invincible bastion of German spirit" by Hitler himself. It lay on the north end of the Vistula Lagoon and served as the gateway to the Königsberg peninsula. On the same peninsula was Pillau (now Russian Baltiysk), one of Germany's last U-boat training bases and a vital port for resupplying Königsberg.

On August 26, 1944, RAF bombers hit Königsberg for the first time, bringing the war home to people who to this point had heard nothing but Nazi propaganda about how Germany was winning the war. Those who could, fled the city in panic, mixing with retreating German army units in a chaotic mass of humanity.

In October 1944, Königsberg was completely cut off by the Red Army, leaving 130,000 German defenders bottled up inside. From that point on, the only way in or out was by sea—either from its own harbor facilities or through Pillau.

BELOW: This map shows movement of German convoy and evacuation routes across Germany's Baltic shore. Königsberg is at far right. OPPOSITE: January 1945: Advancing through a wintry landscape, Red Army troops and armor approach East Prussia.

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



The last German strongpoint on the coast was Kolberg, transformed into a defensive bastion even as 70,000 civilian refugees poured into the city. The German Army High Command (OKH) hoped to keep Kolberg open as a supply port for forces farther east while bleeding the Russian army white at the gates.

What Hitler saw as "fortified places" to wreck the onrushing Russian juggernaut were in reality death traps. They were defended by forces that existed mostly on paper, like the impressive-sounding 4th, 16th, and 18th Armies, which were actually a grab-bag of SS, Wehrmacht, and home-guard units possessing few tanks or heavy weapons. German civilians trapped in these pockets with the defenders faced three distasteful options: stick it out and hope their defenders could keep them safe, surrender to the Red Army, or try to get aboard an evacuation ship.

Grand Admiral Karl Dönitz held the key to the fate of Baltic Germans. Appointed Supreme Commander of the Kriegsmarine by Hitler in 1943, he also assumed command of what was left of the German merchant marine. He lost most of his capital ships in January when Hitler, in a fit of pique, ordered them decommissioned and their crews transferred to land defenses and submarine duty.

Dönitz managed to save most of his ships from the scrap pile, but keeping them at sea was a different matter. The idea for Operation Hannibal came to him in late 1944 or early 1945. He was supposed to keep supply lines open to the Baltic strongholds and carry off the wounded. But why bring back transports half empty when there were thousands of German refugees begging to be evacuated?

With most of his surface fleet tied up at the docks, he was forced to assemble a makeshift flotilla to mount a sea-borne evacuation of massive scope. To man his fleet, he would have to make do with the skeleton crews he still had at his command, augmented by the wharf rats he could scrape together in German-held ports.

The Kriegsmarine of 1945 was still impressive, on paper at least. Capital ships included the heavy cruisers (dubbed "pocket battleships" by the British) *Lützow* (formerly *Deutschland*), *Admiral Hipper*, *Admiral Scheer*, and *Prinz Eugen*.

The *Lützow* had gone to Kiel at the end of 1943 for a complete overhaul before getting a second life in Baltic operations. The *Admiral Hipper* went there in 1944 to put her beyond the reach of RAF bombers. Like the other capital ships, she had been decommissioned on Hitler's orders, but Dönitz returned her to service in the summer of 1944, moving her to Gotenhafen, a more secure port. Most of her crew was subsequently drafted into the defenses of Danzig. In January 1945, she was ordered back to Kiel, where she was sunk at her moorings in April.

The sister ships *Prinz Eugen* and *Lützow* of the *Admiral Hipper* class would prove to be the most effective in Baltic operations in the last months of the war, serving in both fire-support and escort-duty service almost to the end.

Other warships at Dönitz's disposal for his Baltic operations were the light cruisers *Köln* and *Leipzig* and the antiquated battleship *Schlesien*. They were supported by the Sixth Destroyer flotilla and a handful of torpedo boats. Half of Dönitz's challenge was keeping them in operating condition. Mechanical problems, shortages of fuel and ammu-

nition, and depleted crews made implementing Operation Hannibal all the harder.

Fortunately, the Soviet Red Banner Fleet remained in port late in the war even after most of the German Baltic fleet was confined to port. This has led one modern scholar to speculate that Stalin planned to depopulate East Prussia in the first organized ethnic cleansing in modern history by letting its German population flee to the west of its own volition.

According to this theory, such a strategy had the added benefit of burdening the rump Reich with refugees. However, the Red Air Force spurred them on their way, ranging at will in the skies over Courland, Königsberg, and other areas of German resistance.

In early January, Hitler granted permission for a partial withdrawal from the Courland pocket. Dönitz's little crackerjack fleet pulled out the 4th Panzer Division, 31st, 32nd, and 93rd Infantry Divisions, 11th SS Division "Norland," remnants of 227th, 218th, and 389th Infantry Divisions, and the 15th Latvian SS Division. This still left nearly 120,000 men trapped in the pocket, ordered to hold down the Russian army, and Dönitz still had to keep them supplied and bring out the most severely wounded.

While German officers like Generaloberststs Ferdinand Schörner and Lothar Rendulic dutifully held their positions on the Baltic front, Dönitz defied the Führer's "no retreat, no surrender" orders.

Dönitz was the rare German officer who refused to follow Hitler's headlong rush to annihilation. Operation Hannibal was implemented on his initiative alone to evacuate military personnel in addition to as much of the desperate German population of East Prussia as he could save.

Word did not get back to Berlin because high-ranking Nazi officials caught behind the lines were as desperate as any civilian to hitch a ride to safety on one of Dönitz's evacuation ships; they were not about to report him.

And Dönitz himself had a ready defense for his actions. Writing in his memoirs years later, he insisted that his purpose was never to capitulate but to fight on, "evacuating as many [Germans] as possible away from the Soviets."

Another objective was to save the last two U-boat training bases. At this point in the war, the precious submarine fleet was the only branch of the Kriegsmarine still conducting offensive operations. If called to account, Dönitz could argue that Operation Hannibal aimed to save those U-boat training divisions stranded in the Baltic that were going to could turn the war around even now. The Grand Admiral's priorities were to first bring out naval personnel, then sick and injured fighting men, and finally high-ranking military and civilian personnel. Any ordinary Germans able to hitch a ride were a bonus.

ABOVE: Grand Admiral Dönitz defied Hitler's "no retreat, no surrender" orders and pulled German ground units (shown here piling into small boats) out of the Courland Pocket to be repositioned further west in accordance with Operation Hannibal. OPPOSITE: After having brought carts and wagons loaded with their prized possessions (including a goat), desperate German refugees line up to board ships at the port of Pillau.

The Baltic ports capable of handling large ships and masses of people were Gotenhafen, Pillau (tip of the Samland peninsula), and Swinemünde (on the Oder-Neisse estuary), but even those were not truly safe. Swinemünde came under RAF bombardment in 1945, and the land link between Königsberg and Pillau was so vulnerable to Russian bombardment that civilians were forced to flee across the frozen Vistula Lagoon on foot.

Also driving Dönitz's actions was the unlikely hope that Germany could find common cause with the Western allies against the Soviet Union. The more personnel Dönitz could save from destruction, the more attractive such a proposal might be to SHAEF (Western high command). At the very least, they could make a final stand on German soil. But first, he had to get them out of East Prussia and Poland.

He put *Generaladmiral* Oskar Kummetz and Admiral Konrad Engelhardt in charge of Operation Hannibal. Their pairing and their ranks are an indication of the high priority Dönitz put on the operation, and he issued the formal orders on January 23, 1945.

Kummetz and Engelhardt rounded up between 600 and 1,000 vessels—including pleasure craft, fishing trawlers, ferry boats, landing craft, freighters, and passenger liners. This fleet staged in Gotenhafen, Pillau, and Swinemünde. Over the course of the next 15 weeks, they brought off some 350,000 military and naval personnel, plus 800,00 to 900,000 civilian refugees, including high party officials, medical personnel, and the families of a few fortunate soldiers.

Often compared to the "Miracle of Dunkirk," which saved 338,000 British

and French military personnel, there were other differences besides the numbers. Operation Hannibal had no air cover, which the RAF had provided at Dunkirk. Also, the fleeing Germans did not try to bring their equipment away with them. This was strictly a human evacuation.

Furthermore, large numbers of German evacuees were civilians who could contribute nothing to carrying on the German war effort. The high command euphemistically called the civilian evacuees "compatriots" to avoid using the word "refugee," with all its demoralizing connotations.

Regardless of the terminology, there was no denying the numbers brought home. By Dönitz's estimation, Operation Hannibal saved more than two million German lives.

The refugees were dropped off at several ports and fishing villages on Germany's Pomeranian coast: Swinemünde, Sassnitz (Rügen Island), Rostock and Warnenemünde (Bay of Mecklenburg), Stolpmünde and Rügenwalde. These places were out of the path of the Soviet army but in no way prepared to receive thousands of refugees. Due to the hasty and secretive nature of the operation, the locals were unprepared to either feed or house the refugees dropped in their laps.

The supposed safety of these destinations proved short-lived, in any case, because they did not have defensive garrisons or anti-aircraft defenses. This merely prolonged the agony of many evacuees, who had believed they were now safe.

Other drop-off places could not even be dignified by calling them ports; they were dots on the map, with names like Horst, Dievenow, and Wollin (the name for both the town and the island it was on).

Readying and loading the evacuation ships was mixture of desperation and determination. German port authorities tried to send the ships off in convoy for their own protection, but this delayed outbound trips and made them vulnerable to Russian air attacks in port.

On any given voyage, the number of people trying to board the outgoing vessels far exceeded the available space. Fear made people frantic, causing them to rush the gangways or try to sneak aboard unnoticed. Who knew when another convoy would sail, or even if there would be another?

The authorities tried to implement a system of passes, but papers were easily forged, and the guards were not especially diligent. Officially, priority went to submariners who were considered "essential personnel" and to Nazi officials (with their families). They went to the head of the line.

The first evacuation ship out of Pillau sailed on January 28, carrying 1,800 civilians and 1,200 badly injured military casualties. The ship slipped out of port without escort under cover of darkness to avoid air attacks and reached safety the next day. Back in the Königsberg pocket, the German defenders fought to keep the lifeline to Pillau open because it was their last hope of escape.

On February 9, a German counterattack by elements of the 3rd Panzer Army and 4th Infantry, led by a captured T-34, reopened the route from Königsberg to Pillau. The Germans managed to keep it open until April, allowing supplies to come in to the defenders and casualties and refugees to be evacuated. The Soviets focused their attentions on smashing the defenders, content to let the sick and wounded flee back to Germany. Surviving soldiers would be in no condition to fight again, and the refugees would be an added burden on a collapsing German economy.

Some German civilians got on the evacuation list because of their previous sacrifice for the Reich. The pastor of a small East Prussian village church and his wife got a pair of passes because they had given two sons to the army. But first they had to get to Gotenhafen, which meant joining a stream of refugees on the icy roads going west. They took whatever personal belongings they could carry with them. The pastor made it and was taken on board the *Wilhelm Gustloff*, but his wife died along the way, to be hurriedly buried on the side of the road. He told a crew member of the *Wilhelm Gustloff*, "Everywhere we looked there was only suffering and despair."

The pastor's journey to hell was not over yet. He was on board the *Wilhelm Gustloff* when it was torpedoed and went down. He was one of the few survivors.

ABOVE: Elderly civilians in Pillau wait patiently to be granted passage on an evacuation ship, February 1945. Operation Hannibal enabled some 265,000 Germans caught in the Soviets' route of advance to reach safety. BELOW: Red Army soldiers with a 76mm ZiS-3 gun prepare to fire it against buildings in downtown Danzig, March 1945. OPPOSITE: With their possessions piled into horse-drawn wagons, German civilians flee in an orderly line to a place of hoped-for safety.

Luftwaffe Captain Franz Huber was one of the fortunate wounded German soldiers whose injuries were serious enough to get him a ticket home without being fatal. He was scheduled for evacuation on February 9 from Pillau. Arriving at the port, he was loaded aboard the *General von Steuben*, along with other wounded Luftwaffe and Wehrmacht officers, headed for Swine-münde and a German military hospital.

They were all under the impression they would have safe passage aboard an official hospital ship, although not a single Operation Hannibal transport had the distinctive Red Cross painted on it. There was no time, nor any guarantee the Russians would have respected it.

Space was limited even on the available passenger liners because of the harsh winter weather. Refugees could not be left on open decks for the entire voyage. Military personnel and Nazi officials got the cabins and staterooms. Civilians were placed in steerage class and passageways. Still, some managed to stow away out of sight on the upper decks, desperate enough to take their chances with the weather. No one complained about their accommodations.

Other issues came up that were a product of the desperate times. Large passenger liners like the *Wilhelm Gustloff* and the *General von Steuben* were supposed to carry a full complement of lifeboats, but those had been taken for other purposes at this stage of the war, and there was no time to find replacements.

Life jackets, which should have been issued to all passengers and crew, were also in short supply. That did not matter much, because anyone plunged into the icy waters of the Baltic would die of hypothermia in a matter of minutes.

Then there was the matter of fueling and making sea-worthy the rust-buckets that had sat at anchor for months. The *Wilhelm Gustloff*, for instance, had not put to sea for four years. During that time, it had been used as a training barracks for submarine crews.

Soviet aircraft did not make things any easier. Not having to tangle with the Luftwaffe, they strafed oil tanks and refugees crowded onto the wharves. German antiaircraft fire was limited by a shortage of guns and ammunition.

Even the idea of sending the evacuation ships in convoy proved to be wishful thinking; the Kriegsmarine did not have sufficient escort vessels to protect the ships. The only warships available were the handful of destroyers, minesweepers, and torpedo boats still operable. The surviving German cruisers were either holed up in port or providing fire support for besieged strongpoints like the Courland pocket.

Ironically, arming the evacuation ships with a few deck guns would have offered no practical protection, but it would have removed any claim they might have had to

protected status as either hospital ships or civilian liners.

The operational plan of Hannibal was for the evacuation ships and any escorts they could muster to make a dash for their destination under cover of darkness, sticking close to the coastline to avoid Soviet airstrikes standing out against the night sky. It was a flawed plan, though, because while a dark, overcast sky might hide them from aerial attack, it could not protect them if a Soviet submarine caught sight of them.

Nor could darkness offer any protection against the mines both sides had liberally seeded the sea routes with. Every voyage was a roll of the dice but still preferable to setting out overland with all the horrors that held. Everyone had heard the stories of slaughter and rape being perpetrated by the Red Army. And if the Red Army did not get them, they faced death from exposure or starvation.

Operation Hannibal was fortunate that the Soviet surface fleet did not come out to challenge it. But Soviet submarines were not so passive. Several refugee ships were torpedoed and went down, with little hope of rescue ships showing up. The waters were icy cold, and many passengers were weak from hunger or wounds. Once they went into the water, they survived only a few moments even if they had on lifejackets.

There was also the fact that potential rescue vessels were reluctant to help because they, too, were afraid of being torpedoed. The doomed voyages of the *Wilhelm Gustloff* and *Hansa* were examples of everything that could go wrong going wrong.

The two vessels left Gotenhafen for Kiel carrying more than 9,000 passengers on the night of January 30, 1945, with a token escort. Not far from the harbor, the *Hansa* broke down and had to limp back to port, while the *Wilhelm Gustloff* pressed on in the darkness. A few hours into her journey, Soviet submarine S-13 sent her to the bottom, killing more than 7,000 people, making this the worst maritime disaster in history.

The *Wilhelm Gustloff* was the worst, but hardly the only, loss during Operation Hannibal. On February 9, the *General von Steuben* left Pillau for Kolberg with more than 3,000 aboard. It, too, was caught by S-13 and sunk. Three hundred survivors were picked up by its torpedo-boat escort and carried on to Kolberg.

On February 22, the *Göttingen* left Courland carrying 5,000 wounded soldiers who thought they were on their way home. On their second day out, they were torpedoed, killing 2,000 of those on board. On March 7, the *Hamburg* hit a mine field off Sassnitz and sank. In a rare stroke of good luck, it had already unloaded its passengers. Still, the loss of the 21,600-ton liner was a cruel blow to the evacuation.

One by one, the Baltic evacuation ports fell: Kolberg on March 18, 1945; Gotenhafen on March 26; Danzig on March 30; Königsberg on April 9; Pillau on April 25; the Courland pocket on May 12, 1945.

The Red Army showed their populations no mercy. Kolberg was cut off in February and, even as it girded itself for a fight to the death, it remained a destination for refugees from farther east. It became a Russian target because it was the major supply port for German forces at Gotenhafen, Danzig, Königsberg, and Courland. Its defenders held out for a month with the help of artillery fire from the *Lützow* and *Admiral Scheer* while Operation Hannibal carried off as many as possible.

The best estimate of how many got out of Kolberg is 40,000 military personnel and 70,000 civilians. Two thousand troops remained behind on March 17 and 18 to cover the last departing transports. Eighty percent of the city was destroyed by that time, and Germans who couldn't escape were expelled or killed.

The Russian 70th Army reached the sea on March 22, cutting the Danzig-Gotenhafen pocket in two. When Gotenhafen fell four days later, survivors retreated first to Danzig, then to the headland at Oxhöft, where they prepared for a last stand with their backs to the sea.

Königsberg was still in German hands in April, though by that time it was hundreds

ABOVE: Soviet tanks and infantrymen advance into the smoking ruins of Königsberg. The city fell on April 9, 1945. OPPOSITE: Red Air Force Ilyushin IL-2 fighters fly uncontested over Königsberg, April 1945. Such planes strafed columns of refugees and attacked defenseless ships packed with evacuees.

of miles behind the lines. It owed its survival that long to Admiral Dönitz's lifeline. Whenever ships brought in supplies and reinforcements, they took out military and civilian evacuees.

The last four days of combat (April 5-9) was the same kind of house-to-house fighting seen in Berlin and Budapest. By that time, Königsberg's defenders were no longer in contact with Berlin. They only kept fighting because they had been ordered to hold out.

Even as German ports fell one by one, Operation Hannibal struggled on, saving those who could get to the coast, including what was left of an army corps of mostly panzer units that had fought their way to the coast and established a bridgehead near Hoff and Horst. From there, they moved on to Dievenow, where evacuation ships picked them up on March 11 and 12 and carried them to the island of Wollin (between the Bay of Pomerania and Stettin Lagoon).

Days later, a powerful flotilla organized around the heavy cruisers *Lützow* and *Admiral Scheer*, with three destroyers and a torpedo boat as escorts, brought off another 70,000 from Wollin.

Evacuation ships were still coming and going from Stolpmünde, Rugenwalde, and Kolberg in mid-March. They brought off 18,300 safely from Stolpmünde and another 4,300 from Rugenwalde before the Red Army overran those places.

After the *Lützow* and *Admiral Scheer* were withdrawn to Kiel for safety, the evacuation fleet continued to run the gauntlet without their comforting presence in the area. On the night of April 4-5, small boats and landing craft brought off 30,000 soldiers and civilians from Oxhöft and dropped them off on Hela, the 35-mile-long sandbar (peninsula) between the Gulf of Danzig and the Bay of Puck. The Germans camped out on the beach and dug in, enduring continuous Soviet air attacks.

Hela turned out to be just a temporary stop. The evacuation fleet carried Germans off the beaches until May 10. Not all made it to safety. On April 15, a convoy of four liners and other transports left Hela with more than 20,000 refugees. The next day, Soviet submarines lying in wait pounced, sending the liner *Goya*, with more than 6,000 persons on board, to the bottom; only 183 survivors were pulled from the water.

In the first week of May, the evacuation brought more than 150,000 away from Hela. Some sources put the total number brought out of the Danzig-Gotenhafen pocket at 900,000. There is no way to tell for sure, because there were no records kept. Undoubtedly, many thousands were left behind.

The RAF did its part to make life hell for evacuees and for the towns that received them. On March 6, RAF bombers hit Sassnitz, the fishing village that was the final destination for many refugees. Now those refugees were caught in the open and pummeled for no good military reason. Six days later, German ships delivered 2,000 refugees to Swindmünde. They were no sooner ashore than they were hit by 671 U.S. Army Air Force bombers acting on

the request of Soviet authorities. Nearly 600 died on the beaches, and six evacuation ships were sunk. Estimates of total casualties range from 5,000 to 23,000, making the raid on Swinemünde one of the "10 most destructive" bombing raids of World War II.

Operation Hannibal continued right to the end of the war and beyond. After Hitler committed suicide on April 30, Dönitz succeeded him as Führer. In a public address on May 1, the admiral vowed that the German army would "continue the struggle against Bolshevism until the fighting troops *and the hundreds of thousands of families in Eastern Germany* [italics added] have been preserved from destruction."

He was still trying to negotiate a separate surrender with the West when Eisenhower informed his representatives that he had 48 hours (May 7-8) before the unconditional surrender terms would be imposed unilaterally, thereby severing the Russian sector from the West. When Dönitz realized there was not going to be any detent with the Western allies, he shifted to trying to surrender as many German troops as possible to the Brits and Americans rather than the Russians.

Even in the last 48 hours of Eisenhower's ultimatum, Dönitz kept Operation Hannibal going. It is estimated that in the last several weeks of the war, when, for all practical purposes, the Kriegsmarine had ceased to exist, Operation Hannibal managed to carry 265,000 Germans caught behind the surrender lines to safety.

Operation Hannibal was still going on, in defiance of surrender terms, even after Germany's capitulation on May 8, 1945. Unarmed coastal craft continued to steam up and down the Baltic coast, picking up frantic groups of refugees and carrying them beyond the reach of the Red Army. There were still a few ports inside German borders where refugees could be dropped off. What happened to them after that was up to fate.

On the very last day of the war, as Dönitz formally surrendered the Third Reich, a flotilla of 92 vessels left the Latvian port of Libau (Liep ja), part of the

German soldiers, including several wounded, surrender to Russians in East Prussia. Most of the German prisoners captured by the Russians would not return from captivity.

Courland pocket, saving 18,000 soldiers and civilians from Soviet clutches. Or not. Russian motor torpedo boats pursued the little group and forced the slowest ships to heave to so they could be boarded. Their passengers went into captivity, where those who did not die remained for years to come.

By the end, Dönitz's mass evacuation was no longer an organized operation. It simply kept going on its own momentum until it ran out of gas, figuratively and literally speaking. With no warships and no command and control, the Kriegsmarine ceased its humanitarian mission when the news of the official surrender finally reached the last holdouts of the Reich. Left in the lurch were an estimated 180,000 German troops still in the Baltic region. They would soon be swallowed up by the Red Army and shipped off to POW camps, from which very few would return.

Operation Hannibal was the most successful operation conducted by the Third Reich in the latter stages of the war. A crippled Kriegsmarine that had mostly been swept from the sea rose to the occasion one last time. The operation cost the Germans four large passenger liners and 157 other vessels but not a single major warship.

Taking the half-full view, it Operation Hannibal saved up to two million Germans from internment or worse, but it did not save the mass of Germans in East Prussia. In 1940, East Prussia was home to 2.2 million Germans. By the end of May 1945, that population had been reduced to 193,000 desperate, starving people.

Still, Dönitz was justifiably proud of what Operation Hannibal had accomplished. Writing in his *Memoirs* 10 years later, he said, "Ninety-nine per cent of the refugees brought out by sea succeeded in arriving safely at ports on the western Baltic. The percentage of refugees lost on the overland route was very much higher."

Of an estimated 200,000 who fled west by land, untold thousands died of exposure and Soviet bombs and strafing. Of those taken off by ship, the best estimates are that only three percent died at sea. It is easy to focus on the losses at sea like the *Wilhelm Gustloff*'s 7,000+ deaths, but Operation Hannibal was a remarkable success story attributable to German ingenuity, determination, and more than a little luck. It was a credit not to Nazis ideology but to old-fashioned classic German efficiency.

In the end, Operation Hannibal deserves to be recognized as a magnificent logistical accomplishment, ranking ahead of the British evacuation of Dunkirk in 1940, the American flight from Corregidor in 1941, and the failed Russian withdrawal from Sevastopol in 1942. □

Tokyo Bombing

Continued from page 39

one another from the amount of people jumping in, seeking shelter there. The flames roared across the river, sucking away the oxygen and killing hundreds who thought they had reached safety. Some survived by hiding in sewer pipes. Others sought shelter in city parks.

The carnage was horrendous. One historian wrote, "The heat, which is reported to have reached an unimaginable temperature of 1,800 degrees in some locations, sucked the oxygen out of the air, asphyxiating those it did not simply roast to death. The clothes on people's backs, those that weren't on fire from the actual bombs, literally burst into flames from the heat."

Estimates range from 90,000 to over 100,000 civilian deaths from the Operation Meetinghouse bombing alone—nearly eclipsing the number of all U.S. personnel killed in the Pacific Theater during the whole of the war. At least one million others were made homeless that night.

Of the nearly 350 B-29s that took off on March 9, 279 made it to Tokyo and dropped more than 1,665 tons of incendiaries on the helpless city. Many of the bombers that had departed their airfields in the Mariana Islands in bright aluminum silver arrived back at their bases late on March 10 covered with smoke and soot from the intense fires they had begun.

Sixteen square miles of Tokyo was a "burned empty prairie." Not one building remained intact in the fire zone. One reporter wrote that there "was nothing but heaps of ashes, bits of corrugated iron, bricks, concrete blocks, a few twisted girders, and here and there the shell of a burned-out concrete building. Skeletons of motor vehicles, including fire engines, dotted the landscape."

Both Generals Arnold and LeMay considered the attack a success. Photographs taken after the attack showed extensive damage. Arnold wired LeMay a complimentary message that read, "This shows your crews have the guts for anything."

Both men regarded the firebombing of Japan, begun in earnest at Tokyo on March 10—which came almost a month after the destructive firebombing of Dresden, Germany, that took some 22,000-25,000 lives—as necessary to save American lives and destroy Japan's war-making potential before an invasion of her home islands was launched.

Japan's history to date had been never to surrender despite the worst odds against them. There was every reason to believe that this attitude would continue until Japan's home islands were invaded, at great cost to both Americans and Japanese. Generals Arnold and LeMay were determined to do anything they could do to further weaken Japan and to reduce these losses.

The Tokyo raid was followed by one on Nagoya (March 11/12), then Kobe (March 17/18), and Nagoya again (March 18/19). A precision raid against an aircraft factory at Nagoya failed on March 23/24. Aware now of what they were facing, Japanese civilian casualties in these raids were far lower than Operation Meetinghouse, the March 10 raid on the nation's capital.

There was then a lull, as the Americans had run out of incendiary bombs. In April and May, XXI Bomber Command concentrated on supporting ground operations on Okinawa. Then they returned to firebombing Japanese cities, as well as mounting precision attacks when the weather was favorable.

Tokyo was struck again on the night of May 25/26, and what remained of the city was left 50 percent destroyed, with four million people homeless. Further raids were deemed to be not worthwhile. The expensive, controversial-yet-cherished dreams of the supporters of the long-range heavy B-29 Bomber had been accomplished.

After the war, LeMay said in his memoirs, "No matter how you slice it, you're going to kill an awful lot of civilians. Thousands and thousands. But if you don't destroy the Japanese industry, we're going to have to invade Japan ... Do you want to kill Japanese, or would you rather have Americans killed?" ☐

10th Armored

Continued from page 63

VI Corps, in the center was Maj. Gen. Frank W. Milburn's XXI Corps and on the left was Maj. Gen. Wade H. Haislip's XV Corps.

Maj. Gen. Morris sent his recon units dashing to the Danube to find any bridges between Ulm and Ehingen that might be suitable for his armored units to cross. The 44th Infantry Division was assigned to support the Tigers in their drive.

Soon the 10th Armored was positioned along the north bank of the Danube southwest of Ulm. Combat Commands A and B captured three bridges intact and, before midnight, crossings were made.

The 10th Armored's history: "At 0700 on April 25, Connolly [Captain Bernard Connolly, Company A, 3rd Tank Battalion] abruptly altered his direction of attack when he was informed that four other attacking columns, including part of a French armored division, had been stopped by strong enemy anti-tank fire, and proceeded to Grittelfinger, located less than two miles from Ulm."

Looking down on Ulm from a nearby hill, Connelly devised a plan of action. Leading his team across an enemy-defended mine field, Connelly, with five Sherman tanks in the lead, dove into the western part of the city, taking 600 stunned Germans prisoner in the process. Shortly thereafter, a German battalion commander sent word that he wished to surrender his 900 men.

With the western part of Ulm now in American hands, resistance in that portion of the city ceased, and the Armoraiders spread out to encircle Ulm and cut off escape routes. The situation became somewhat confused when a contingent of French troops showed up, but soon the mess was untangled.

On April 25, a war correspondent noted, "The fighting 10th Armored Division in the past 48 hours has captured an estimated 1,200 prisoners and taken 40 towns. The big news of the day comes from Task Force Hankins, currently 'reducing' resistance in the city of Ulm. Hankins reports that it was Team Connolly who first entered Ulm yesterday morning at 0854."

The communiqué continued, "On April 26, the 44th Infantry took charge of the situation at Ulm permitting [three] Task Forces to join the chase to the south and east. Pushing ahead with violent effectiveness now were the 10th's three major battle commands. As they streamed southward to the Memmingen-Mindelheim-Landsberg line, they were egged on by Maj. Gen. Brooks who declared, 'Push on and push hard—this is a pursuit, not an attack.'

"The Tigers reached fantastic speeds of more than 30 miles a day during the rout and at the same time managed to gobble up 9,000 prisoners. Along the way, undermanned strong points were destroyed by fire and the enemy's vehicles wrecked. Huge enemy groups were shipped to the rear in never-ending truckloads. During this period, the Tigers of Task Force Hankins overran a carefully camouflaged airfield and sharpened their aim as they picked off German jets as they attempted to take off."

On April 26, with Ulm secured, the rest of VI Corps troops crossed the Danube and began a mad dash into the Tyrolean Alps and all the way to the Brenner Pass at Innsbruck, Austria.

On that same day, the Armoraiders reached Memmingen, site of a Nazi concentration camp. "I think it was a work camp, not a death camp," said Robert Anderson of the 10th Armored's 150th Signal Company. "I'm sure people died right and left, but it was a work camp. That was my first experience seeing people with the striped uniforms.... They must have been from Russia or something like that, but there were a lot of people that didn't look like Germans or like us Caucasians. They were obviously from a different ethnic group. They were wearing the striped uniforms, milling around and so on. [Our officers] didn't want us to have any contact with them."

The next day, the Tigers liberated the Landsberg concentration and displaced-persons camp, a sub-camp of Dachau.

10th Armored units were the spearheads into the mountain passes, picking up more of the surrendering enemy as they went. Following the armor were the 44th and 103rd Infantry Divisions that protected the 10th's flanks and helped to smash the last remnants of General Erich Brandenberg's Nineteenth German Army in the south.

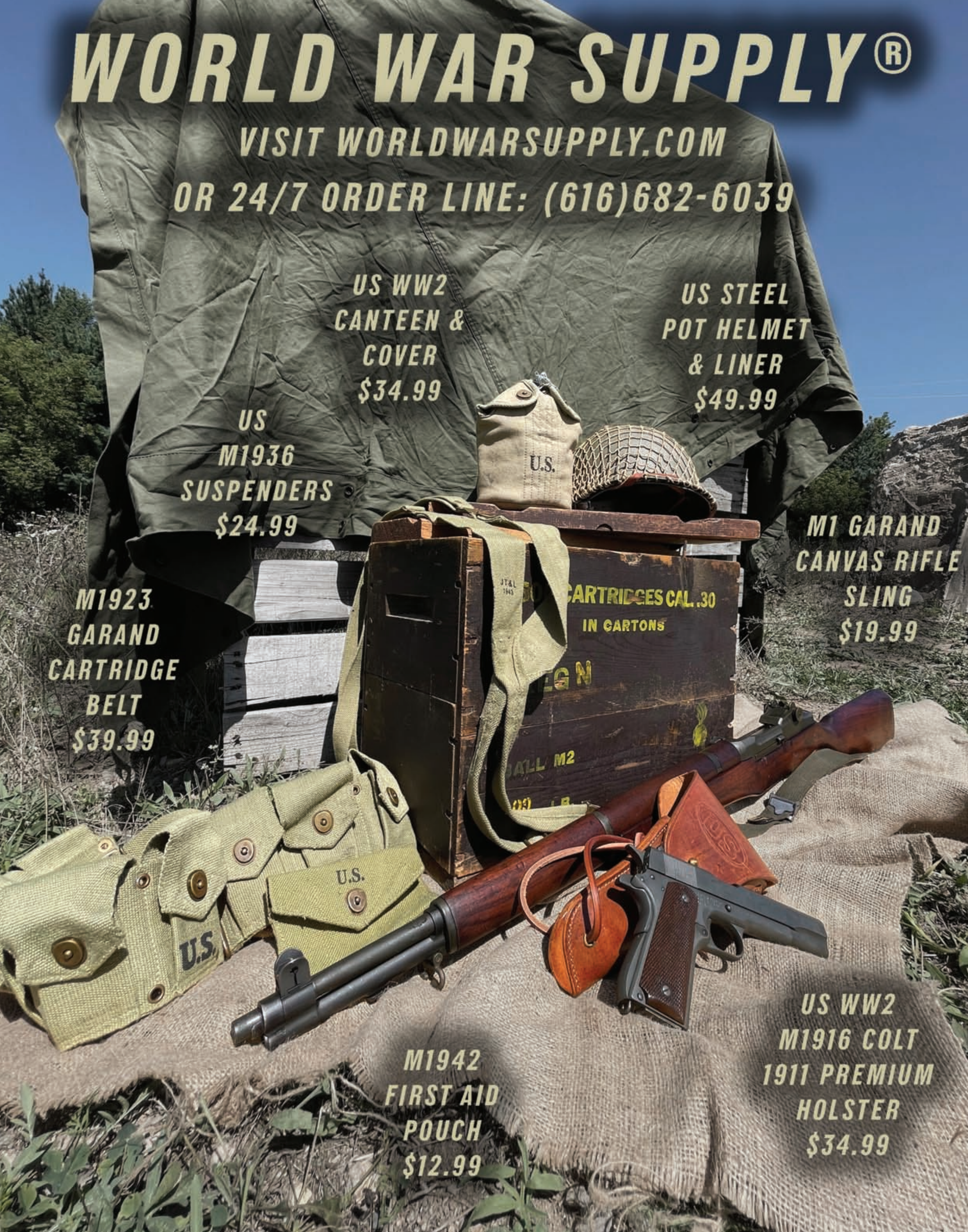
A historian wrote, "Seventh Army's 10th Armored Division took 28 towns in a single day on 23 April. By April 27, both the Seventh and Third Armies had crossed the Danube, and Ulm, Augsburg, and Regensburg were in their hands." The U.S. Army's official history of the war noted, "Ulm, for its size the most heavily bombed city in the south, was a ruin. Water-filled bomb craters covered blocks where factories and houses had once stood. The streets were rough paths through the rubble. But the 500-year-old Gothic cathedral still stood, towering above the flattened city around it."

At the end of April, the 10th Armored came across and liberated almost 4,000 Allied prisoners of war from a POW camp, then continued on to occupy Oberammergau and Garmisch-Partenkirchen. A task force crossed from Füssen into Austria—the first Seventh Army unit to enter Hitler's homeland. At this point, the war for the Seventh Army and the 10th Armored Division ended.

During its eight months in combat, the 10th Armored had compiled a sterling record. The Tigers had traveled 600 miles through five countries, seized 410 towns and cities, and taken 56,000 prisoners. When hostilities finally ended on May 7, the division had lost 951 men killed and had 3,109 wounded.

The Tigers were inactivated on October 13, 1945, but their spirit never disappeared. ☐

The author wishes to thank Craig Charlton, Webmaster, 10th Armored "Tiger" Division Veterans Association and son of veteran Reginald "Reggie" Charlton, for his assistance with this article.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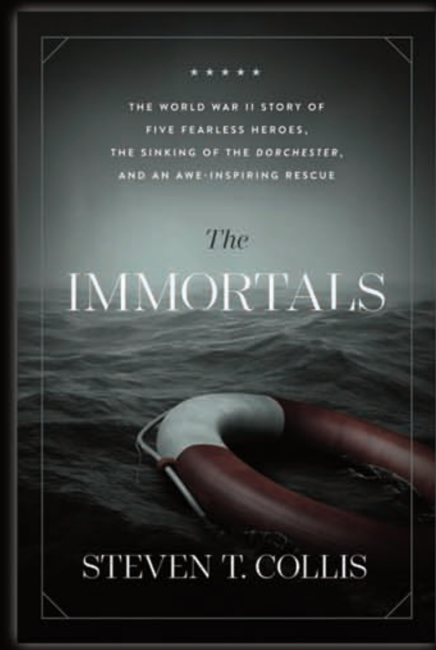

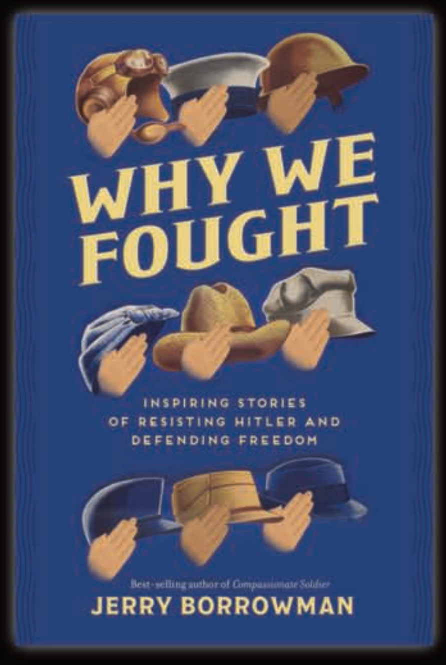

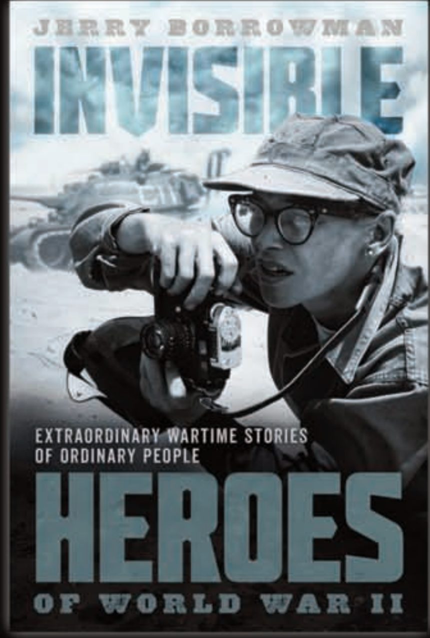

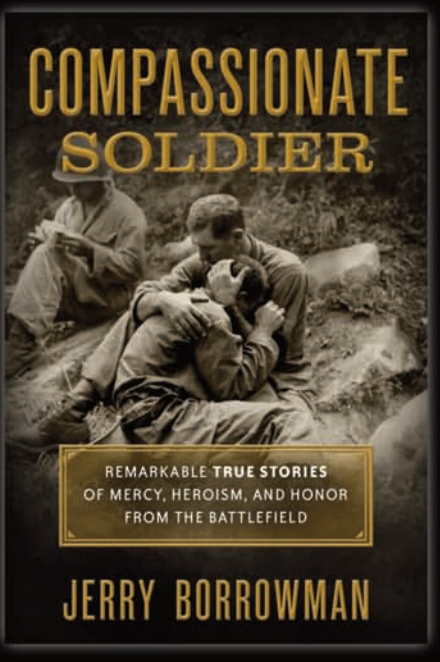

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