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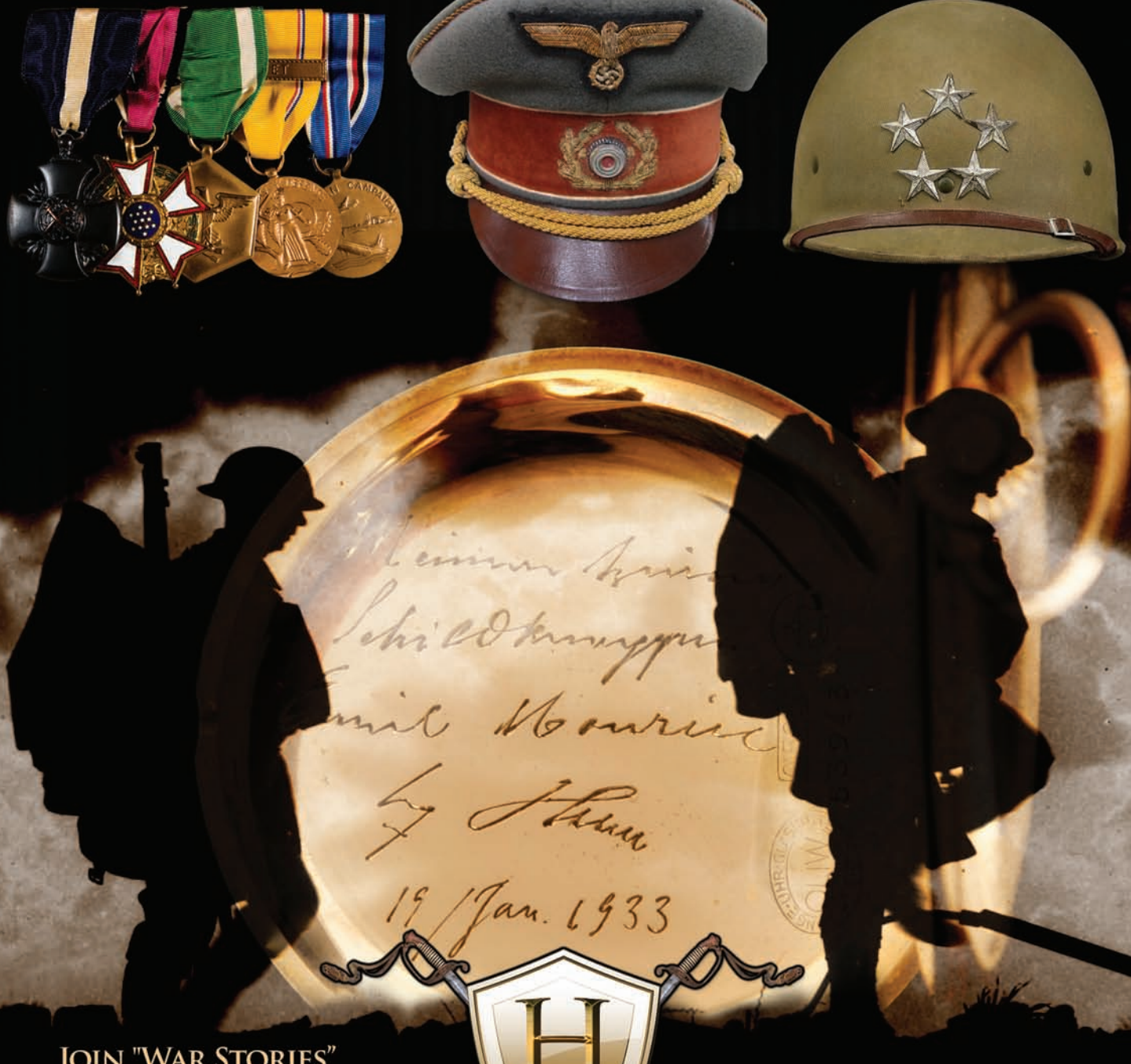

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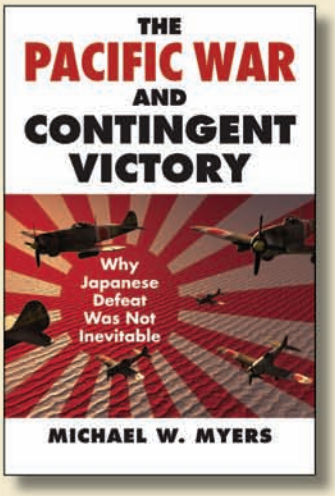

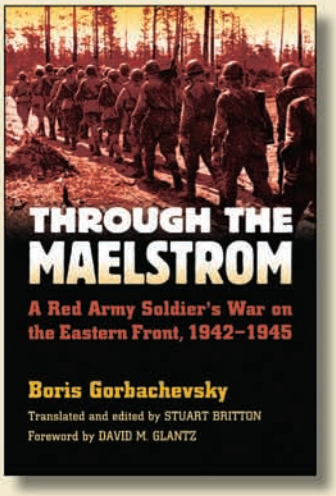

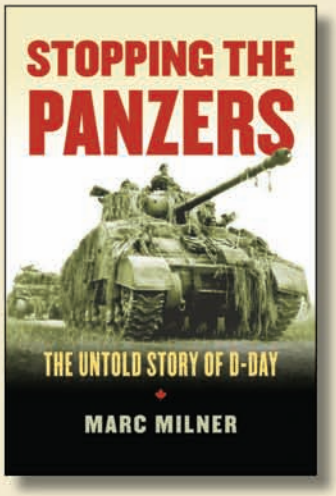

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COVER: A German infantryman photographed somewhere on the Eastern Front in 1943. Two years later the Russians were attacking Berlin and Hitler lay dead in his undergraound bunker. See story page 12. Photo: © Scherl/SZ Photo/The Image Works

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Remembering the end of the war in Europe

In May 1945—70 years ago—the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) sent out a terse, unemotional, 15-word communiqué: "The mission of this Allied force was fulfilled at 0241 local time, May 7, 1945."

Hitler and Mussolini were dead, the Third Reich and Fascist Italy were defunct, and the war in Europe was, at long last, well and truly over. A very strange sound came over Europe: the sound of silence. It was as if someone had suddenly turned the war switch to "Off."

There was no more rattle of machine guns; no more pop-pop-pop of small arms; no more whistle of falling bombs; no more visceral thud of incoming artillery shells; no more screams and shrieks of soldiers and civilians caught in war's merciless grip.

It was a deep and profound silence that came over Europe, punctuated only by the tolling of church bells (in those places where churches, with their bells intact, still stood) announcing that peace, after nearly six years of continuous bloodshed, had finally returned to the Continent.

The surviving soldiers and civilians on all sides took a moment to get down on their knees and offer thanks that they had been spared, and to say a prayer for the 50 to 60 million people around the world who had not been so fortunate.

In places like London, Paris, New York, and Moscow, massive celebrations took place to mark the end of the war. People danced in the streets, kissed strangers, waved flags, showered flowers and tons of confetti down on ranks of marching soldiers, and, for a short while, partied like they had never partied before.

Winston Churchill, Britain's wartime leader, said, "We may allow ourselves a brief period of rejoicing; but let us not forget for a moment the toil and efforts that lie ahead. Japan, with all her treachery and greed, remains unsubdued. The injury she has inflicted on Great Britain, the United States, and other countries, and her detestable cruelties, call for justice and retribution.

"We must now devote all our strength and resources to the completion of our task, both at home and abroad. Advance, Britannia! Long live the cause of freedom! God save the King!"

Pulitzer Prize-winning war correspondent Hal Boyle summed up America's collective relief in a radio broadcast on May 14, 1945: "All I can remember with any feeling of pride in the whole sorry business of war is the courage and fortitude of the men who fought it."

Then came the rebuilding process. Putting Europe back together would be an immense, staggering task, unlike anything that mankind had ever faced before, just as the war had been on a scale unlike any conflict the world had ever seen. Refugees would have to be resettled, millions of prisoners of war sent home, the sick and wounded restored to health, cities and infrastructure rebuilt, new forms of government established, and the Nazi war criminals hunted down and put on trial.

Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel surrenders to the Russians at Soviet Army headquarters in Berlin, May 9, 1945. During the war-crimes tribunals in Nuremberg, Keitel was found guilty and hanged on October 16, 1946, along with nine other Nazis.

I still have a dim memory, as a young boy, of my mother taking me down to the local bus station in Hammond, Indiana, to greet my father coming home from the war. I was too young to appreciate the significance of the moment. I only recall my mother hugging a tall man in uniform and crying; I did not know who he was, or why she was crying. I would soon learn.

On this, the 70th anniversary of the war's end, it is good and right for us to remember V-E Day, even if not all of us had been born at the time. Chances are, mankind will never see its like again.

—Flint Whitlock, Editor

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Battle of the Bulge

70TH ANNIVERSARY SPECIAL ISSUE

By December 1944, time and resources were running out for Adolf Hitler. The Allies had gained a solid foothold in Europe after the D-Day invasion, and his armies in the Soviet Union were being pushed back toward Germany.

Hoping he could repeat history, Hitler mustered up a quarter-million troops from three different armies to launch the riskiest, most costly counter-offensive of the entire war. The plan? Another surprise blitzkrieg through Belgium, splitting the Allied armies through the rugged Ardennes Forest.

For the Americans who spent the winter of '44 surrounded by 200,000 German soldiers, it was known as the Battle of the Bulge. …and within the pages of this Special Issue, you'll get a first-hand look at what they experienced.

The **BATTLE OF THE BULGE 70th Anniversary Special** E-Book has expanded bonus coverage from the expert editors of *WWII Quarterly* Magazine. Over 120 pages of features and analysis, including the destruction of the 106th Division; the daring advance of Patton's Third Army; the 1st SS Panzer Division at Bastogne; the heroic stand of the 28th Division, the Malmedy Massacre, and so much more.

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Three VMI graduates—Generals Marshall, Gerow, and Handy—made a powerful impression on America's conduct of war.

WATCHING HIS FORCES prepare to attack the Union Army at Chancellorsville in 1863, Confederate General Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson commented to an aide, "The Institute will be heard from today." Jackson, who before the Civil War had been an instructor at the Virginia Military Institute in Lexington, Virginia, observed that in the oncoming combat, three of the four infantry divisions in his 26,000-man corps, and most of his brigades, regiments, and battalions, would be commanded by alumni of VMI.

Years later, if Jackson could have seen the enormous influence VMI would exert at the highest levels of the very army its cadets and graduates had once so ferociously opposed, he might have allowed himself a tight smile. For during World War II, a small group of VMI alumni at the very top of the War Department general staff would formulate policy and strategy, issue directives and orders, and recommend and approve top command appointments, which would drive the 8.5 million-man U.S. Army to an Allied victory in the war.

These officers were Generals George Catlett Marshall (VMI '01), Leonard "Gee" Gerow (VMI '11), and Thomas Handy (VMI '14). Marshall was chief of staff of the U.S. Army, which then encompassed all ground and air forces of the United States. Gerow served as assistant chief of staff, and chief of the War Plans Division (WPD) of the general staff, while Handy was assistant chief of staff and chief of the Operations Division (OPD) of the general staff. He also later served as deputy chief of staff of the Army. Because of their power and reach, WPD and OPD were the true brains and heart of the Washington command post of the wartime Army.

ABOVE: Colonel George C. Marshall, in France, 1919. He was a key planner of U.S. operations. BELOW: The Joint Chiefs of Staff, photographed at their weekly breakfast meeting, left to right: Admiral Ernest J. King; General George C. Marshall; Admiral William D. Leahy, Chief of Staff to President Roosevelt; General Henry H. "Hap" Arnold, Army Air Force.

All: National Archives

Serving these generals as secretaries of the general staff were Colonels Frank McCarthy (VMI '33) and H. Merrill Pasco (VMI '37), both of whom accompanied Marshall on his many wartime travels in the United States and overseas. Of the concentration of VMI men serving around him, Marshall would later firmly state that until it was brought to his attention by General Henry "Hap" Arnold, he had not been aware of it. Several had preceded him to the general staff, he said, and those who followed did not make their connection to VMI known until later. His greatest concern after being so informed was that it would be seen as favoritism, whereas, he maintained, every officer on the staff was there by individual merit.

Marshall, Gerow, and Handy were born into late 19th-century America, in which the South had suffered greatly during post-Civil War Reconstruction. The emotional and physical scars of the war, which had killed half a million combatants and wounded millions more on both sides, were still raw. This context enveloped the Virginia Military Institute, founded in the Shenandoah Valley town of Lexington in 1839 as the site of an arsenal for the Virginia Militia. The school has become known as the "West Point of the South."

Before the Civil War, VMI's corps of cadets was overwhelmingly Virginian, its academic curriculum a Spartan regimen of lectures and recitations. Two of the best-known of these were Major Thomas J. Jackson's courses in artillery mathematics, and "natural and experimental philosophy," known today as physics.

Lexington was still a Shenandoah Valley backwater when the tide turned against the Confederacy in the spring of 1864 and

the Union Army invaded the Shenandoah in force. "Stonewall" Jackson had been killed the year before, and the cadets of VMI, organized as a battalion of 257 boys, were ordered up as reserve infantry under Confederate General James Breckinridge.

On May 15, after a three-day, 80-mile forced march from Lexington, VMI's cadets were committed to a frontal attack against Union artillery near the little town of New Market. Incredibly, their charge across a muddy field and into the teeth of the cannons carried them into the Union battery, where they routed the gunners and broke the Federal line, losing 10 cadets killed and 48 wounded.

As a result of the cadets' victory, when the Union Army overran Lexington later that year, the "viper's nest" of VMI was shelled, then burned. Solid cannon shot are still embedded in the walls of the cadet barracks today. Each May 15, the corps of cadets parades. On that day the roll of the boys killed at New Market is called. For each name, a solitary voice from the ranks responds, "Died on the field of honor, sir!"

When Marshall, Gerow, and Handy graduated from VMI, commissions were scarce, won by competitive examination, and guarantors of years of lean existence in the Army of a fledgling and not yet understood empire. As junior officers, they served in typical regimental postings: stateside, Panama, the Philippines, China. They followed the Army's education track: Advanced Course at the Infantry School; Command and General Staff; the War College. Handy would attend both the War College and the Naval War College.

VMI notables (L-R): Colonel H. Merrill Pasco (VMI, '37), a secretary of the general staff; General Thomas Handy (VMI, '14), Marshall's assistant chief of staff; General Leonard Gerow (VMI, '11) commander of V Corps. BELOW: Marshall inspects smartly uniformed VMI cadets in 1940.

Marshall entered VMI as a "Rat" (freshman) in 1898. As a result of the brief war with Spain, America gained the Philippines, Marshall's first assignment in 1902. In that year, man had not yet flown, wireless was in its infancy, and horse cavalry was still considered the Army's "decisive arm." Yet he chose infantry, and in the training, movement, and command of infantrymen, Marshall would write his name across the Army's future. He showed his gift as a planner early, serving as chief of staff of the 1st Infantry Division in France during World War I, and as aide to General Pershing for five years afterward.

In the interwar years, Marshall's direction and influence on the Infantry School at Fort Benning, and the cadre of dynamic young lieutenant colonels he assembled had the greatest effect on changing Army doctrine to enable performance in a future "war of motion," unlike the set-piece trench fighting of World War I. His organizing and equipping the Depression-era Civilian Conservation Corps in Illinois brought him to the attention and approval of FDR confidant Harry Hopkins.

Elevated over 34 names on the seniority list, on the September 1939 day German armor smashed into Poland, Marshall was sworn in as chief of staff of the Army. Two months later, VMI celebrated its centennial.

Marshall's impact on U.S. preparedness for World War II was immense. In a five-minute conversation with Roosevelt in 1940, he reversed the president's decision against a budget appropriation critical to the buildup that would ensure the multi-million man army. His lobbying of Congress was almost solely responsible for passage of Selective Service—by a single vote. Without both, history may have written a completely different scenario, for America's fate in World War II.

"I've kept a small list," Marshall told military correspondent George Fielding Eliot. On it were all the future "greats": Dwight D. Eisenhower, Omar Bradley, Courtney Hodges, George Patton, William Simpson, Joseph Stilwell, and others. He had watched them through the lean years, adding or checking off a name; noted their performance at Benning and Leavenworth; and assessed their performance in the great maneuvers in Louisiana and the Carolinas.

He listened to the armor "visionaries." While the Germans were demonstrating blitzkrieg in Poland, the *Cavalry Journal*

was still arguing tactical use of the horse. The U.S. Army was only the 19th largest in the world, with 200,000 men and 70 tanks, smaller than the armies of Portugal or Romania.

Marshall knew the oncoming war would need radical tactics and young, dynamic officers to fight it. Only one thing mattered to "the Chief": performance. A man had one chance; if he shirked or flagged, he was gone. One general officer ordered overseas replied he could not leave immediately. His house was in disarray; his wife was away. "I'm sorry"' he told Marshall on the phone. "I'm sorry, too," replied Marshall. "Tomorrow, you will be retired."

On the list of senior general officers serving at war's outbreak, only one, Walter Krueger, would make the cut, brilliantly (and modestly) commanding Sixth Army in the Pacific.

It is difficult today to appreciate how powerful and far-reaching the small War Plans Division of the general staff was. Unlike the rest of the general staff, which was involved with organization and training of the Army within the United States, WPD's responsibility was nothing less than formulation of all strategic plans for military operations worldwide and oversight of their execution. It was also the sole general staff agency representing the Army in interservice strategic planning.

During 1940 and 1941 under Leonard "Gee" Gerow, WPD was principally engaged in formulation of the Rainbow War Plan series, culminating in Rainbow Five, which dealt with danger to United States security from Germany, Italy, and Japan.

In January 1941, WPD also prepared the agenda and military position of the United States for the "ABC-1" meetings, held in Washington, D.C. These first joint British-American planning discussions sketched fundamental Allied cooperation, should the United States enter the war, and set the "Germany first" strategy to be followed thereafter. They were the genesis of what would become the immensely effective wartime combined chiefs of staff.

It is also interesting to note, in relation to modern military staffing structures, that even with this crushing load of planning, on

Marshall, center right, and Colonel Frank McCarthy, center left, watch British military exercises with Prime Minister Winston Churchill and high-ranking British officers, 1942.

January 1, 1940, WPD's strength stood at no more than 24 officers, including Gerow.

Gerow and Handy were already on the General Staff as lieutenant colonels when Marshall arrived in the summer of 1938 from commanding 5th Brigade at Vancouver Barracks in the Pacific Northwest. America was still all but asleep; the General Staff was headquartered in Washington's old Munitions Building, a stifling rabbit warren of musty offices and long, linoleum-floored corridors left over from World War I. It was the first time either had met Marshall. They knew of him by reputation, but other than duty, there was no social contact.

Handy, an artilleryman, had come to the War Department after finishing the War College and Naval War College back to back. He succeeded Eisenhower in 1942 after Ike was dispatched by Marshall to England to prepare for command of Torch, the landings in North Africa. Handy would serve as assistant chief of staff and chief of the Operations Division, and from 1944 onward as deputy chief of staff of the Army.

Of Marshall's knowledge of Handy's VMI connection, Handy would remark, "I told him years later; there were two things that should have put me 'out of the question.' One was I wasn't in 'the air business.' Another was I came from VMI. He said if he had known of either fact, especially the latter, I wouldn't have been there."

Gerow, an infantryman, had come to Washington from service in China in the late 1930s, and served as assistant chief of Staff and chief of the WPD from 1940 to 1942. He was succeeded for several months in 1942 by Eisenhower, who served as assistant chief of staff and chief of the new Operations Division (OPD), which was formed after a lightning-fast staff reorganization in March of that year. Gerow and Eisenhower had been study partners at Command and General Staff, graduating first and second in their class, respectively. For a time, Gerow's brother Lee, a colonel and also VMI, served in WPD. (Gerow, after several staff assignments, commanded the 29th Infantry Division, then V Corps, and finally the Fifteenth Army in the European Theater.)

Eisenhower's appearance on the General Staff was no small irony. In March 1941, Gerow, seeing the oncoming war and chafing for a field command, tried to entice Eisenhower to join WPD. Then serving on the staff of IX Corps at the Presidio of San Francisco, Eisenhower declined, hoping for a field command himself. Several days after Pearl Harbor, the officer responsible for WPD's Pacific operations was killed in an

aircraft crash in the Rockies.

Because of Eisenhower's long service under MacArthur in the Philippines and his stellar staff work in the Louisiana Maneuvers of that year, Eisenhower held the "magic ticket" for the slot. Gerow would depart for his new command, the 29th Infantry Division, which would land on Omaha Beach in 1944 as part of V Corps, by then commanded by Gerow, who would be the first corps commander ashore.

Frank McCarthy, one of the two secretaries of the general staff, came to Washington in 1941 as a reserve major. He had been a publicist for the popular 1936 Broadway play *Brother Rat*—about the antics of a trio of cadets at VMI—and technical adviser to the movie version, starring Eddie Albert and Ronald Reagan. Starting in the Intelligence Division of the General Staff, he became assistant secretary of the general staff, liaison officer between the general staff and the White House and, as military secretary to the chief of staff, accompanied Marshall to conferences in London, Casablanca, Algiers, Cairo, Teheran, Yalta, and Potsdam. After the war, McCarthy became a successful Hollywood film producer, responsible for *Patton* and other military-themed films.

McCarthy shared the Staff Secretariat duties with Merrill Pasco, who had been a star football player at VMI. While McCarthy covered Marshall's overseas missions, Pasco accompanied the chief to all stateside conferences, inspections, and briefings. Pasco also served as the General Staff's officer custodian for all top-secret traffic from "Magic" (America's top-secret breaking of the Japanese diplomatic and military codes) and the Manhattan Project, the development of the atomic bomb. This vested him with occasional Olympian power.

At the Quadrant Conference at Quebec in 1943, Marshall and Pasco were assigned adjoining quarters. An officer courier from the Manhattan Project mistakenly knocked on Marshall's door, to be met by the chief himself, in bathrobe and pajamas. The courier refused to release the message pouch to Marshall, who, nonplused, patiently had Pasco hunted down to sign for it.

After the war, Marshall was interviewed extensively by biographer Forrest Pogue. Of the issue of the VMI men who served all around him on the staff, he replied, "I might pause to say that in the Second World War, at one time we [VMI graduates] held the Chief of Staff, the Deputy Chiefs of Staff, the Secretaries of the General Staff, and I don't know how many division commanders and corps commanders, and things of that sort.

"Way early in the game, when we had the Army-Navy Board [of the Joint Chiefs of Staff], we had one meeting at which three out of the four Army generals were all VMI men. I didn't know it at the time. As we were leaving the meeting, one of the generals [Henry "Hap" Arnold, USMA '07 and chief of the Army Air Forces; one of the very few officers with whom Marshall was on a first-name basis] commented on the fact that it was rather unusual that three out of the four generals should be from the VMI. That was the first time I knew it.

"The thing got so numerous there with VMI men, that I called the president of the Alumni Association and requested personally for them not to make any point of it all, because no one would believe that it hadn't been done on purpose by me, because I was a VMI man—and actually, it was not that at all. I was very anxious for the alumni to have nothing to say about this in the way of 'tooting it up,' because I would be the sufferer for it, for everyone would believe that I did it purely because of my VMI affiliation.

"As a matter of fact, I didn't know a one of these men at the time they were made, and I didn't bring any of them into the War Department, or near the deputy chief of Staff's jobs, or the Secretary's jobs."

It was a unique collection of officers, at a critical moment. From the Civil War, when a small school in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia had sent its own cadets into combat, and been destroyed as a consequence, to devoted and unflagging service to the nation in another time of war and great peril, a handful of VMI men had come together to serve, at the very top of the War Department General Staff.

As history records, they served it very well. □

THE TRAMPLED SWASTIKA

BY ERIC NIDEROST

In April 1945, as the Allies crushed Nazi Germany from all sides, the Reich that Hitler boasted would last for a thousand years was about to expire after just 12.

ON APRIL 20, 1945, Adolf Hitler, Reich Chancellor and Führer of Germany, emerged from his underground bunker in the center of Berlin. The Third Reich was in its death throes, and Hitler's presence in Berlin only seemed to prolong the agony. Actually, Hitler believed that his presence in the city would inspire the soldiers and civilians to fight on.

Germany was on its last legs, but Hitler refused to accept reality, stubbornly clinging to the notion that victory might still be achieved against the odds. In rare moments of lucidity, he candidly admitted the war was lost. "I am not going to leave Berlin," he declared to his closest associates. "I will defend the city to the end.... Either I win the battle of Berlin or I die in Berlin. That is my irrevocable decision." He also ranted and raged about how he had been "betrayed" by all around him.

Even at this late date Hitler couldn't resist playing the warlord. April 20 was his 56th birthday, and on this special occasion a public appearance might bolster morale for the coming fight. Soviet armies—over two million soldiers—were even now in the process of encircling the beleaguered Nazi capital, and within a day or two Berlin would be completely cut off.

With artillery rumbling ever closer, a group of uniformed boys had assembled in the Reich Chancellery garden, where Hitler could greet them and personally award them Iron Crosses for bravery in combat. Most of them were teenagers, members of the Hitler Youth or the Jungvolk, a literally junior Nazi branch that was composed of 10- to 14-year-olds. German newsreel cameras from the Wochenschau film unit were on hand to

In one of the best known images of the war, Sergeant Meliton Kantarija hoists the communist banner atop the Reichstag with the ruins of Berlin below him, May 7, 1945. Another flag had been placed there on April 30 but had been shot off the building by the Germans. Kantarija and a comrade (lower right) replaced the flag for the benefit of the photographer. Today the banner is on display in the Central Museum of the Armed Forces, Moscow.

National Archives

record the ceremony, although so few theaters were still open that the viewing audience was bound to be small.

Hitler shuffled forward to the line of boys, a weak smile playing on his lips. For those who only knew him from earlier newsreels, postage stamps, or even propaganda photos, his appearance must have been shocking. At 56, he looked 30 years older, his face puffy and gray, his signature mustache streaked with white. He was wearing a military cap and an army greatcoat, the collar curiously turned up. The ailing Führer was hunched over, and his left hand shook uncontrollably, a symptom of advancing Parkinson's disease.

Hitler spoke a few words to each boy, but his trembling hand prevented him from actually pinning the medals on their tunics. That job was done by Hitler Youth leader Arthur Axeman, who stood by Hitler's side. And then Hitler came to the youngest soldier, a 12-year-old with the ironic name of Alfred Czech. After all, Hitler's rape of Czechoslovakia had helped propel Europe into war.

Czech had rescued some wounded German soldiers under heavy Russian fire near his home in Goldenau, Silesia (now Poland). "So, you are the youngest of all!" a smiling Hitler remarked as he patted the young boy's cheek. "Weren't you afraid when you rescued the soldiers?" Czech, dazzled by the honor and Hitler's presence, could only murmur, "No, my Führer!"

Then Hitler asked the boys if they wanted to go home or to the front. "To the front, my Führer!" they obediently cried. Even as the Reich crumbled around him, Hitler still exerted a certain power over the minds of many Germans.

Young Czech survived, but most of the other lads were later killed in battles with the Russians. The waste of young lives in an obscene cause was one of the great tragedies in these last days of the war. Hitler, blinded by his own delusional megalomania, said to the boys, "Despite the gravity of these times, I remain firmly convinced that we will achieve victory in this [Berlin] battle, and above all for Germany's youth and you, my boys."

It was going to take more than Hitler's fanciful rhetoric to stop the Allies, particularly the encroaching Russians. In fact, the capture of Berlin was going to be a bone of contention among the Allied powers.

In March 1945, the British and Americans were advancing rapidly from the west. By April 1, the U.S. Ninth and Sixth Armies had completed their encirclement of the Ruhr, ultimately bagging 325,000 German soldiers. Farther south, General George S. Patton Jr.'s celebrated Third Army was pushing forward, an advance that would take it into Czechoslovakia and within 30 miles of Prague.

After eliminating the Ruhr pocket, the U.S. Ninth Army reached the banks of the Elbe River on April 11. Earlier, it had been decided that the Elbe would be the future demarcation line between the Western Allies and the Soviets. Nevertheless, the Americans initially didn't let politics stand in the way of their advance. At Magdeburg the U.S. 2nd Armored Division created a bridgehead across the Elbe, and the U.S. 83rd Infantry Division established another at Barby.

American tank crews were certain that the Ninth Army would push on to Berlin, regardless of what Prensident Frankin D. Roosevelt, Prime Minister Winston Churchill, or anyone else had agreed to. The bridgehead across the Elbe was enlarged, until the Americans were at Tangmunde, a scant 50 miles from the German capital. General William H. Simpson, commander of the Ninth Army, asked General Omar Bradley for permission to go on to Berlin. The request was forwarded to General Dwight D. Eisenhower, Supreme commander of Allied Expeditionary Forces in Europe.

On paper, at least, it seemed very feasible. The only German force blocking the road to Berlin was General Walther Wenck's Twelfth Army. Wenck, nicknamed "the boy general" because he was the youngest general in the Wehrmacht, was nevertheless competent and generally liked by his men.

His command, a fairly new formation, was a mixed bag typical of the late-war German Army. Wenck had young cadets, 16- and 17-year-old soldiers, and units of the RAD (Reichsarbeitdienst, or the State Labor Service). The RAD men performed simi-

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In a still taken from a German newsreel, Adolf Hitler awards medals to members of the Hitler Youth in Berlin on his 56th birthday, April 20, 1945. Ten days later, the Führer, who vowed never to give up, would be dead by his own hand.

Bundesarchiv Bild 183-J31397; Photo: Unknown

Berliners dig an antitank trench and other defensive works outside the city in hopes of stopping an all-out Soviet assault.

lar functions for the German Army as the U.S. Navy's "Seabees" did for the Marines and soldiers in the Pacific—building roads and fortifications and doing general construction work. In this crisis, they had to trade their shovels for rifles.

Perhaps even more telling was the fact Wenck had no tanks and virtually no air cover. He explained, "If the Americans attack they'll crack our positions with ease. After all, what's to stop them? There's nothing between here and Berlin." But in the end it wasn't German resistance that stopped the American advance, but orders from Eisenhower himself.

General Eisenhower was reluctant to risk American lives for "prestige" or political purposes. There was also a concern that the Nazis might stage a last stand in southern Germany. It seemed best to mop up remaining resistance as soon as possible and end the war. Though Eisenhower had made the decision, not everyone agreed with it.

Winston Churchill was strongly in favor of the Western Allies taking Berlin ahead of the Russians. Earlier in the war Churchill cautiously welcomed the Russians, operating under the old adage "the enemy of my enemy is my friend," but the Red Army's rapid advance into Eastern Europe was a cause for alarm. Churchill rightly feared that the Russians would set up puppet Communist regimes in the countries they liberated from the Germans.

The prime minister felt that the Anglo-Americans should go as far east as possible. Demarcation lines like the Elbe River could always be sorted out and renegotiated if necessary. Churchill expressed his concerns in a letter to Roosevelt. "If the Russians take Berlin," Churchill explained, "will not their impression that they have been the overwhelming contributor to the common victory be unduly imprinted in their minds, and may this not lead them into a mood that will raise grave and formidable difficulties in the future?"

Eisenhower sent a personal message to Josef Stalin, telling the Communist dictator about the American intention to focus on southern Germany and asking him what the Russian plans were. Duplicitous as always, Stalin lied about the coming Soviet offensive. He agreed that Berlin had "lost its former strategic importance," so the main Russian objective would be Dresden. Some "secondary" forces might start moving on Berlin, but in any event the offensive would probably begin in May.

Stalin's assertions were in fact a pack of lies. Furtive, devious, and paranoid, always suspicious of people's motives and intentions, the Soviet leader automatically assumed that the Western Allies were as treacherous as he was. Stalin was certain that Eisenhower's message was a clever ruse and that the Allies were going to make a dash to Berlin in spite of American assurances.

In fact, Stalin had every intention of taking Berlin before the British and Americans. First, there was the question of national prestige and honor. The Russian people had suffered more than any other nation, with the possible exception of China. The figures are disputed, but the Soviet Union lost somewhere between 20 and 25 million dead during World War II. Perhaps five to seven million of these were military deaths, and the rest were civilians. After so much suffering the Russians felt they deserved to capture the ultimate prize.

Stalin also had other motives for seizing the German capital before the Allies could reach it. Though it was one of the most closely guarded secrets of World War II, Stalin's spy network had uncovered information about the Manhattan Project, the American plan to develop an atomic bomb. In 1938, German scientists at Berlin's Kaiser Wilhelm Institute had experimented with nuclear fission. Stalin hoped to get equipment, scientific data, and even a German scientist or two to help the Soviet Union's own quest for a nuclear device.

This was an opportunity not to be missed because Stalin knew that the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute would be located in the future American occupation zone. On April 1, he summoned two of his top generals, Marshal Georgi Zhukov of the First Belorussian (sometimes called White Russian) Front and Marshal Ivan Konev of the First Ukrainian Front, for a conference. Originally, Stalin had promised that Zhukov would have the honor of capturing the Nazi capital. The Russian dictator was going to keep his options open.

"Who is going to take Berlin? We or the

Allies?" he asked the marshals. Stalin ordered each marshal to formulate his own attack plan and submit it within 48 hours. When their plans were finished, the marshals reported back to the Soviet leader for his approval. In general, Zhukov would launch an attack over the Oder River and take Berlin, while Konev would surround Army Group Vistula, secure Zhukov's southern flank, and simultaneously push on to the Elbe. A third army group, the Second Belorussian Front under Marshal Konstantin Rokossovsky, was to secure Zhukov's northern flank by taking on German forces along the lower Oder River.

Stalin loved to stir up rivalries among his generals, which enabled him to exert more control over them. Drawing a pencil line on the situation map, Stalin designated each front's movements to within 40 miles

Both: National Archives

of the city. He also drew a demarcation line on the map, a boundary that was supposed to divide the two Russian army groups. Moving his hand steadily, he continued to draw the line until his pencil reached Lubben, just southeast of Berlin. He stopped drawing, leaving much of the south "open" and unmarked.

Not a word was spoken, but the message was loud and clear. If Konev could achieve a breakthrough, he would be permitted to capture Berlin from the south. The message was not lost on Zhukov either. He was more determined than ever to be the first into the capital of the Third Reich. Plans went ahead for the offensive, which was set for the early morning hours of April 16.

Marshal Zhukov was a hard-headed realist who knew that the capture of Berlin would not be as easy as some people thought. He later wrote, "Troops were expected to break through a deeply echeloned defense zone extending from the Oder River all the way to heavily fortified Berlin. Never before in the experience of warfare had we been called upon to capture a city as large and as heavily fortified as Berlin. Its total area was almost 350 square miles."

While no pushover, Berlin's defenses were not quite as formidable as Zhukov seemed to think. The city had been formally designated Fortress Berlin ("Festung Berlin") in February, but planning had been confused, even chaotic, in the weeks that followed. The city had been divided into defense sectors, each with a designated letter from A to H. In addition, two concentric defense lines had been established, one roughly followed the city outline, while the other hugged the S Bahn (railroad line) that also encircled the great metropolis.

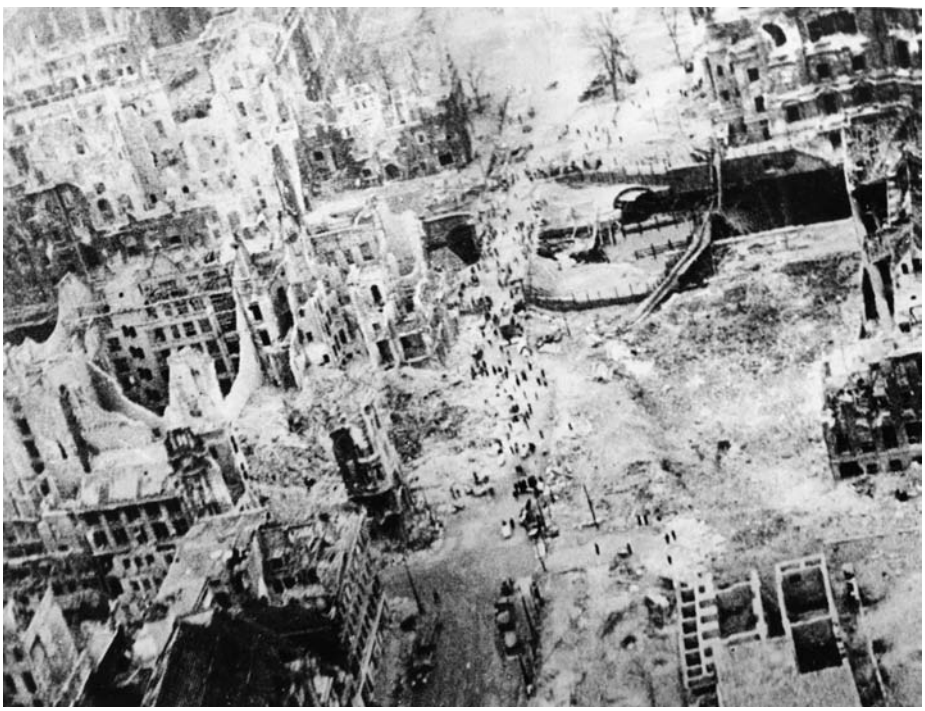
The inner, "last ditch" defense line protected the administrative district, where most of the government buildings such as the Reich Chancellery were located. The inner defense line centered on the island formed in the Spree River and the Landwehr Canal.

Berlin was also protected by three huge flak towers, the most notable being the Zoo Flak Tower in the Tiergarten. It was given this name because of its proximity to the world-famous Berlin Zoo.

The Zoo Flak Tower was actually composed for two ferro-concrete structures, Main Tower G and Tower L. The main tower was as high as a 13-story building and boasted walls 26 feet thick. Main Tower G looked like a castle keep, and indeed some of its functions paralleled its medieval counterpart. In the Middle Ages, the keep was usually the strongest and safest part of the castle. In similar fashion, the main tower was designed to accommodate 15,000 people during air raids. There was also a fully functional hospital within its concrete walls.

When all was said and done, the Zoo Flak Tower was primarily designed for the city's defense. The tower's roof had four twin mounts of 128 mm Flak 40s. The guns were

LEFT: Hundreds of Allied bombing raids completely destroyed Berlin's infrastructure. Here, Berlin women line up to draw water from one of the city's few working fountains. BELOW: Once Berlin had fallen, a cameraman of the Royal Air Force flew over and captured this image of the devastated city that once was home to millions.



ullstein bild / The Granger Collection, New York

Members of the Hitler Youth take up defensive positions in the rubble of Berlin.

loaded electronically, with gun crews loading ammunition into special hoppers. Some of the lower platforms featured 20mm and 37mm antiaircraft guns. The 350-man garrison had enough provisions to last a year.

When Allied bombing raids grew more intense, several thousand civilians crowded into the Zoo Flak Tower until living conditions became intolerable. The situation worsened when the Russians finally arrived. As many as 30,000 terrified Berliners crowded into quarters designed for half that number.

The Zoo Flak Tower also protected some archaeological treasures, including the 3,300-year-old bust of Queen Nefertiti that had been on display in the Egyptian Museum at Charlottenburg and the disassembled ancient Greek Altar of Zeus from Pergamon, removed from Berlin's Pergamon Museum.

Berliners were a tough breed, determined to live as normally as possible. They would take trams to work, stoically ignoring the bomb craters in the streets and the wrecked, rubble-filled skeletons of buildings that arose on every side. Food was rationed, and scores of women would queue for even the most basic of items. The bombing was bad enough and shattered one's nerves, but it was the Russian approach that was feared the most.

Berliners were being fed a constant diet of Russian atrocity tales, some true, some wildly exaggerated by Joseph Goebbels and the Propaganda Ministry. Stories of looting, rape, and murder of civilians were circulated almost every day. Nothing was said about what might have caused the Russians to behave in such a fashion. The Soviets wanted revenge, a payment in kind, for the terrible atrocities the German inflicted during four years of brutal war.

At times the fear of the Russians was almost palpable. Some of the terrorized citizens found relief in gallows humor. All around the city were signs that bore the legend LSR. It stood for Luftshutzraum, or "Air Raid Shelter," but Berliners claimed the letters really stood for Lernt Schnell Russesch," or "Learn Russian quickly." But to most Berliners there was only one phrase that stood in high relief in their hearts and minds: "Bleib ubrig!" ("Survive!").

German soldiers both inside and outside the city knew that the war was lost, but they continued to fight. There were two possible outcomes for a German soldier on the Eastern Front, death or capture. If captured, chances were that a soldier would end up a Stalinpferd, a "Stalin horse"—starved, beaten, and ultimately worked to death in a Siberian labor camp.

One German soldier explained how many in the Wehrmacht felt at that time. "We no longer fought for Hitler, or National Socialism, or for the Third Reich, or even for our finances or mothers or families trapped in bomb-ravaged towns. We fought from simple fear…. We fought for ourselves, so that we wouldn't die in holes filled with mud and snow. We fought like rats."

The Führer appointed General Helmuth Reymann to command of the city's defense. Throughout the war, technically, Berlin had no garrison. There was the Berlin Guard Battalion, troops that had helped suppress the July 20, 1944, attempted coup against Hitler, but for "regular" troops Reymann only had some severely decimated German Army and Waffen-SS units, about 45,000 men in all.

Ironically, some of these men were not even Germans but were from all over Europe. There was, for example, the SS "Nordland" unit, composed mostly of Danes and Norwegians, but also an odd assortment of French, Hungarians, Romanians, and even some Swiss.

Whatever their origin, they proved to be some of Berlin's best fighters. Most were fascist fanatics, to be sure, but they also fought with the courage of despair. They

were turncoats and traitors to their countries, and they knew that, even if they survived the battle, they faced imprisonment or execution back home.

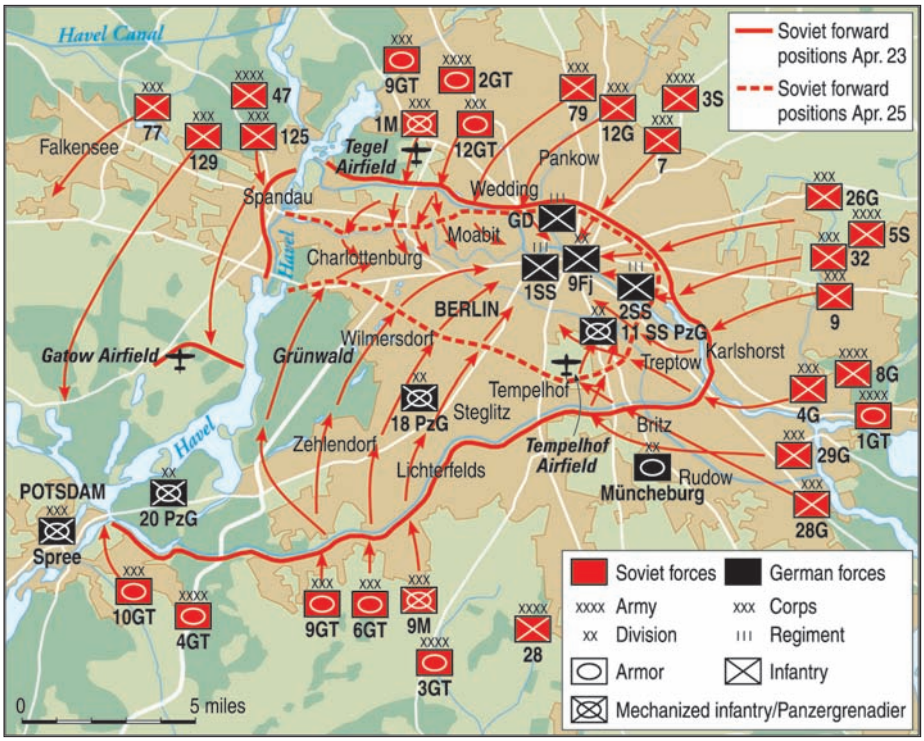
The regular troops were supplemented—if that was the word for it—by Volkssturm, Hitler Youth, and an odd assortment of city police and whoever else could be rounded up. The 40,000 Volkssturm were a mixed bag of older—sometimes really elderly men. Some had been soldiers, and some were veterans of World War I. Young boys of the Hitler Youth were also pressed into service, many of them around 14 years of age.

The city's central administrative core, named "the citadel," was a separate command. SS Brigadeführer Wilhelm Mohnke, appointed by Hitler himself, took charge of this area. Mohnke commanded about 2,000 men, the core of which was the 800-man Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler Guard Battalion, the Führer's personal bodyguard unit.

Later on April 20, right after the boys' award ceremony, Hitler held a situation conference in his underground bunker. The bunker was a two-level complex made of reinforced concrete 50 feet below the ground. The upper story featured the kitchen, staff quarters, and living quarters for the Goebbels family.

The lower portion was the heart of the Führerbunker. There were 18 rooms, including Hitler's bedroom, sitting room, and study. Eva Braun, Hitler's secret mistress, occupied rooms right next to the Führer. A surgical suite, quarters for Hitler's personal physician, and a guard room were also included. Perhaps the most important room was the telephone exchange, since it was the bunker's link to the outside world.

The April 20 "birthday" conference was the last time that the Nazi hierarchy met together in one place. Most notable was Herman Göring, Reichsmarshal and head of the now largely defunct Luftwaffe. Others in attendance included SS Chief Heinrich Himmler, Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop, Admiral Karl Dönitz, and architect and Armaments Minister Albert Speer.



ABOVE: By completely encircling Berlin and attacking from all sides, several Soviet armies allowed no one out and no reinforcements in. BELOW: Fighting back, a German 88mm gun fires on Red Army troops approaching the Seelow Heights, a key position 40 miles east of Berlin. Once this position fell, nothing could stop the Soviets from entering the city.

When the group discussed the latest situation reports, it was clear that Germany was completely and irrevocably defeated, but Hitler still refused to accept reality, ordering nonexistent armies and divisions to come to the aid of the capital, shouting and screaming that he was surrounded by defeatists. Delusional as ever, Hitler announced that he was firmly convinced that the Russians would meet their "bloodiest" defeat at Berlin because of some last-minute "miracle" such as the sudden overwhelming influx of Speer's top-secret "wonder weapons."

Older than his years, ravished by overwork, stress, and Parkinson's disease, he plainly wasn't thinking clearly. Parkinson's is a progressive, degenerative disease of the nervous system and can affect nerve cells in the brain. One symptom is a certain mental inflexibility.

Hitler's health was also adversely affected by the injections he was given by his personal physician, Dr. Theodor Morell. Most members of the Führer's entourage—even Eva Braun—felt Morell was an unprincipled quack, but Hitler depended on him. Morell pumped Hitler with a cocktail of 28 different drugs, either taken orally by pill or injection with a hypodermic needle. There were also vitamins, testosterone, an extract made of bull's testicles, laxatives, sedatives, and opiates. Some injections were amphetamines, and the "anti-gas" pills Hitler swallowed actually contained strychnine.

Most of Hitler's visitors found excuses to leave the city. Göring, for example, left to supposedly help organize the defense of southern Germany. It was all a transparent ruse, and Hitler wasn't so far gone that he didn't recognize what was going on. The symbolism was exact. The rats were leaving a sinking ship.

Colonel General Gottard Heinrici's Army Group Vistula was Berlin's principal field defense against the coming Russian assault. Heinrici had experience in fighting the Russians and was an expert in defensive warfare, but he knew he faced an impossible task, made worse by the fact that the Oder River "moat" had been breached and the Russians now had a bridgehead on the west bank at Kustrin.

In mid-April, Army Group Vistula had about 320,000 effectives, while the combined forces of Zhukov, Konev, and Rokossovsky had well over two million. There were two major formations in Army Group Vistula. The first was General Theodor Busse's German Ninth Army, which occupied an area from the Finow Canal to Gruben—an area that included the all-important Seelow Heights. Busse had only 587 tanks, 55 of which were in repair and another 20 in transit.

The other major formation in Army Group Vistula was the aristocratic General Hasso Freiherr (Baron) von Manteuffel's Third Panzer Army, on the Oder River to the north of the Ninth Army and stretched as far as Stettin. Manteuffel was also a short man, about five feet in height. A diminutive dynamo, he served with distinction in World War I and had a solid reputation as a panzer general.

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Desperate to flee the battle for Berlin, German civilians and freed Allied prisoners of war head westward past a column of Soviet tanks and toward American forces.

Marshal Zhukov began his offensive to capture Berlin at precisely 4 AM on April 16, 1945. The attack was preceded by the greatest artillery barrage ever experienced on the Eastern Front. Over 40,000 field guns, mortars, and Katyushka rocket launchers sprang to malevolent life, relentlessly pouring a heavy rain of explosives onto German positions. The Katyuska rockets, nicknamed "Stalin's Pipe Organs," were particularly feared by the Germans.

It was a barrage of apocalyptic proportions; the noise was deafening, while villages were pulverized and forests were set ablaze. The destruction was compounded by numerous sorties by the Soviet Air Force. It seemed that nothing living could survive such an onslaught, but Zhukov and his First Belorussian Front troops were in for a nasty surprise. Most of the shells landed in empty positions.

General Busse had anticipated a major Russian attack at the Seelow Heights, where the Berlin-Kustrin autobahn (highway) cuts through to the capital. Heinrici, ever the master of defensive warfare, knew exactly what to do. He abandoned the German forward positions, knowing they would be pulverized in the coming action. Instead he had his engineers fortify the crest of the heights, which rise about 150 feet and afford a great and commanding view of the Oder River area to the east.

But the wily general was not yet done. The Oder River's floodplain was already quite soggy from the spring thaw of winter snow, but German engineers further flooded it by releasing water from a nearby swamp. The whole area in front of the heights became a morass, a swamp that would be a challenge for enemy tanks or any armored vehicles.

The hurricane of steel and fire ended after half an hour. It was time to launch the main assault. Col. Gen. Vasili Chuikov's Eighth Guards Army was given the honor of spearheading the attack. It

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A Soviet soldier, armed with a PPSh-41 submachine gun, drags a German defender from his hiding place.

had been a long, hard road for the Eighth Guards, who had fought in the epic battle at Stalingrad. Now the prize—the "lair of the fascist beast" as one officer put it—seemed well within their grasp.

Russian women soldiers who were manning searchlights now turned them on, flooding the area with a blinding artificial illumination that created brightness of a hundred billion candlelight. The advancing T-34 tanks also turned on their headlights. The object, of course, was to blind the German defenders, but ironically many of the advancing Russians were blinded, too. A thin screen of dust and debris particles kicked up by the preceding barrage reflected light and made it hard for the Russians to see ahead.

The attack literally bogged down, the tanks finding the marshy ground almost too soft for their tracks. Slowed, they made tempting targets—almost sitting ducks—for the well-served German artillery, particularly the rightly feared 88, one of the best antitank guns of the war. Tank after tank was knocked out, but the Russian infantrymen pressed forward shouting their distinctive "Urrah!" cheers. Any T-34s that survived the 88s were taken out by fire from the panzerfaust—the German bazooka.

The Russian advance stalled, much to Zhukov's embarrassment and chagrin. There was nothing left to do but press on, even at the cost of more and more casualties. Zhukov was even more upset by the realization that his rival Konev's First Ukrainian Front was making good progress in the south. In fact, by the 17th Stalin was more than happy to give Konev the green light to swing around and take Berlin from the south. Even Rokossovsky's Second White Russian Front, which was protecting Zhukov's northern flank and taking on General von Manteuffel's Third Panzer Army, was making slow, if steady, progress.

Manteuffel had his hands full but managed to fight on until April 25, when the Russians finally broke through. The fighting was so intense that some Russian soldiers found their way into Manteuffel's headquarters where they managed to kill four of his staff and wounded four more. The general personally shot one Russian and dispatched another with a trench knife. Small but gutsy, von Manteuffel also risked his life doing reconnaissance flights in a Storch light airplane.

In the end nothing could stop Rokossovsky's drive north. Manteuffel and what remained of his Third Panzer Army retreated to Mecklenburg to avoid annihilation. They later surrendered to the Americans.

Meanwhile, Konev's advance in the south was so rapid it threatened the OKH command center in Zossen. General Hans Krebs, chief of the Army General Staff, was ordered to move the command center to a Luftwaffe air base not far from Potsdam. It was just in the nick of time because, not long after the German staff left, the Russians roared in on their tanks.

The "Ivans" could scarcely believe their eyes—there were two huge camouflaged complexes, Maybach I and Maybach II, with elaborate banks of telephones and teleprinters that could send and receive messages from far-flung Wehrmacht commands. This was the nerve center, the "brain" of the German Army and even as the Russians were shown around by an accommodating caretaker messages were coming in. The phone rang, and

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The shattered remains of the German Reichstag, where German defenders held out for several days against Soviet assaults. This photo was taken in August 1945. The building was partially renovated in the 1960s but would not be fully restored until 1999.

akg-images

A Red Army gun crew loads their antitank cannon in a Berlin street during the fighting for the city.

a Russian soldier answered it. On the other end of the line was a German general who asked, "What is happening there?" Bemused, the Russian said, "Ivan is here—go to Hell!"

Busse's Ninth Army held out as long as it could, but it, too, had to give way. A portion of it fell back into Berlin, while the rest was surrounded and sealed off in a pocket in the Spree Forest; some soldiers managed to break out and surrender to the Americans. Once organized resistance was broken outside Berlin, it was only a matter of time before the Russians took the German capital.

The Seelow Heights defenders managed to hold for another two days, much to Zhukov's frustration. The Russians, furious at the delays, attacked again and again with suicidal abandon. One German officer reported, "They come at us in hordes, in wave after wave, without regard to loss of life. We fire our machine guns often at point-blank range until they turn red hot. My men are fighting until they simply run out of ammunition. Then they are simply wiped out or completely overrun."

There was nothing subtle about this kind of warfare. The Russians simply overwhelmed the defense by sheer weight of numbers. The Seelow Heights were finally taken on April 19, but not before the Russians lost an estimated 30,000 men and well over 700 tanks. But to Zhukov, it was worth it. There were a few scattered German units here and there, but essentially the road to Berlin was now wide open.

On April 20, Zhukov reported that the "long-range artillery of the 79th Rifle Corps of the 3rd Shock Army opened fire on Berlin. The guns were firing at extreme range and only the suburbs were hit." The next day the 3rd Shock Army, 2nd Guards Tank Army, and 47th Army—all Zhukov formations—reached the outskirts of the city. The 1st and 2nd Guards Armies were given the "historic task to break into Berlin first and to raise the banner of victory."

In essence two giant pincers—one from Zhukov, the other from Konev—were enveloping Berlin. Soon the pincers would become jaws, crushing and grinding the city between them. Hitler, still fantasizing, envisioned a counterattack that would involve SS Gruppenführer Felix Steiner and his Operational Group Steiner. In theory, Steiner and some other units would attack the northern pincers, but it came to nothing when Steiner reported that he simply did not have the men or equipment for such an attack.

By April 25, the trap was closed; Berlin was completely encircled by Zhukov and Konev. With the city cut off from the rest of the world, all pretense of normal life was abandoned. Postal service stopped, and the few remaining policemen were told to report to military units. Food became even scarcer, and most of the water mains were broken, creating acute shortages. Several million Berliners crowded into cellars or into the flak towers, where conditions went from bad to appalling, and waited for the end.

Sanitation became a problem when there was little or no water to be had. When the flush toilets became inoperable, the people crowded into the dank cellars used buckets. The stench from these makeshift chamber pots was unbearable, but to go outside was to risk death. There was no water to wash, so people wore the same dirty, sweaty clothes for days. Some people committed suicide in despair, and sometimes in all the chaos the bodies were not immediately removed.

Yet Berlin women once again showed an inner strength that was nothing short of amazing. As Russian shells began to hit the city, women in the food lines stubbornly refused to take cover. Food meant life, so it was worth the risk. It was said that a shell made a direct hit on a line of women while they patiently waited for rations. Those not immediately killed or wounded simply wiped the blood off their ration cards and reformed the shattered queue.

Fanatical SS units prowled for deserters, shooting or hanging suspects to provide an object lesson for others. As the Russians entered the suburbs and started encroaching on the city proper, the long-dreaded looting and rape began. German women tried to disguise themselves as men or purposely make their faces ugly, all to no avail. Young women and teens were special targets, but after a while virtually all women, even the elderly, were raped. Russian revenge would be complete.

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Berlin was a city of broad avenues lined with 19th- and 20th-century apartment blocks. The German did have strongpoints, including turned-over trolley trams that were filled with rocks. Berliners didn't think much of such defenses. They joked that it would take the Russians 2½ hours to take the city—two hours of laughing their heads off and a half hour to break down the barriers.

In some respects the German defense was much more subtle. Snipers and machine guns were placed on upper floors because Russian tanks could not elevate their cannons high enough. Panzerfaust men were stationed in cellars to ambush unwary Soviet T-34s. At first Russian tanks went boldly down the centers of streets, but soon found they were sitting ducks if they used this method. They soon learned to hug the sides of the streets.

Colonel General Chuikov of the Eighth Guards Army wrote out some general assault guidelines that proved to be very effective. Small assault groups of seven or eight men armed with grenades, submachine guns, daggers, and sharpened spades would be the first to move forward. They would be backed up by reinforcement units that were heavily armed with machine guns and antitank weapons.

Since fighting was often from house to house and room to room, Russian sappers were on hand with pick axes and explosives to blast or bore though walls if necessary. German defenders often countered by throwing grenades into newly opened holes in the walls. Russian artillery was also employed to pound resisting buildings into rubble. The fighting was brutal and bloody, and many civilians were killed as they cowered in cellars, attics, and other hiding places.

On April 25, Hitler appointed General Helmuth Weidling as the new commander of "Fortress Berlin." Weidling's 56th Panzer Corps had been part of Army Group Vistula, and the general took what remained of his men back to Berlin after the Russian breakthrough. Initially, Hitler thought of executing Weidling because he had retreated in the face of the enemy but then relented and gave the surprised general his new command.

Weidling accepted the assignment, but an inspection tour was anything but encouraging. As he remarked, "The Potsdamer Platz and Leipzigerstrasse were under strong artillery fire. The dust from the rubble hung in the air like a thick fog ... shells burst all around us. We were covered with bits of broken stones. The roads were riddled with shell craters and piles of brick rubble."

The general devised a plan for Hitler to break out of Berlin before it was too late, but the Führer rejected it out of hand. "I don't want to be wandering in the woods," an irate Hitler told his new commander. He intended to stay "at the head of his men" and die in Berlin. The general was cautioned, however, to continue the defense as vigorously as possible.

Hitler still had one hope. If General Wenck's Twelfth Army could disengage from the Western Front, it might be able to save Berlin from the Russian hordes. For a time it looked as if Wenck was indeed a miracle worker. His weary troops disengaged, turned around, and moved toward Berlin. The Russians, not expecting an attack from this quarter, were thrown off balance, and Wenck's men did make some progress.

The Twelfth Army got close to the city but was finally halted at Potsdam. When he found he couldn't break through, Wenck wisely did the next best thing. He fought hard to keep a corridor open to the west so that civilian refugees and scattered German units

could take refuge or surrender to the Americans. For several days Hitler was always asking, "Where's Wenck?"

The fighting raged on, and soon the Russians were approaching the citadel, or Government District. A Russian war correspondent, Lt. Col. Pavel Troyanovski, wrote, "Our guns sometimes fired a thousand shells into one small square, a group of houses, or even a tiny garden. The German firing points would be silenced, and the infantry would go into the attack.… At the height of the street fighting, Berlin was without water, without light, without landing fields, without radios stations. The city ceased to resemble Berlin."

Meanwhile, Heinrici's Army Vistula Group was being reduced to irrelevancy, and the general, who realistically viewed the war as lost, pleaded with his superiors to declare Berlin an open city so that the civilians could escape. But the Nazi leadership would have none of it and, on April 28, after Soviet forces had broken through at Prenzlau, Heinrici was relieved of command.

By April 29 the Government District was completely surrounded by Soviet forces, but the Eighth Guards Army in the Tiergarten and the 3rd Shock Army were held back by accurate fire from the Zoo Flak Tower. The gunners there were assisted by Hitler Youth, who were lending a hand even though they were not officially assigned to that position.

The 13-story tower afforded a panoramic view of Berlin, but the sweating German flak crews were too busy to pause and gaze at the view. Perhaps it was just as well. A German colonel named Wohlermann did have a look, and what he saw chilled him to the bone. There, spread out before him, was a vision of hell that would have tested even the powers of a Dante to describe. The colonel recalled later, "One had a panoramic view of the burning, smoldering, and smoking great city, a sight that shook one to the core."

The Government District included Hitler's Reich Chancellery, the Ministry of the Interior Building, the Kroll Opera House, and the most important symbol of all, the Reichstag or German Parliament building. Many of these structures were built around a large plaza called the Königsplatz, with the 220-foot Siegessäule (Victory Column) its centerpoint. Even in its battered condition, the Reichstag was an imposing structure, but had not been used since a mysterious fire had raged there in 1933.

National Archives

ABOVE: Knocked-out tanks sit amid the rubble of once beautiful Berlin. It is estimated that the battle for the city cost the Soviets more than 300,000 casualties, including 70,000 dead. German military losses are estimated at 150,000-175,000 killed and wounded, with more than 125,000 civilians dead. OPPOSITE: After the battle ended, Soviet tanks patrol a Berlin street. The graffiti says, ironically, "Berlin will remain German."

The Reichstag had been turned into an Alamo, manned by about 5,000 stubborn defenders. The lower stories had been reinforced with concrete steel rails and all windows and doors had been bricked up and then pierced by loopholes. A water-filled antitank ditch fronted the building, and all the roads leading to the Reichstag and the Königsplatz were mined. With the Reichstag sheltered in the loop of the meandering Spree River, some German 88mm guns in the Königsplatz covered the Moltke Bridge, one of the spans across the Spree.

The Russians crossed over the Moltke Bridge and took the Interior Ministry after some hard fighting. The Russians nicknamed the Interior Ministry "Himmler's house," because that is where the headquarters of the Gestapo was located.

On the morning of April 30, Maj. Gen. Perevertkin of the 79th Rifle Corps was given orders to take the Reichstag by storm. This was a great honor, and it is worth noting that the 79th Rifle Corps was part of the 3rd Shock Army—one of the units under Marshal Zhukov, who had bested his rival Konev.

The 79th Rifle Corps' attacks on the morning of April 30 were in two phases. One at 4:30 AM and a second at 11:30 AM were repulsed by heavy German small-arms fire. After unleashing an artillery barrage on the building, the Russians surged forward yet again. This time they broke into the Reichstag, but the fighting was not over. The German defenders used everything they had—grenades, pistols, machine guns, and panzerfausts within the shattered rooms and halls. The struggle was bloody and merciless.

German guns became red hot and useless from continued firing. Every room, every foot of ground was fiercely contested. The last defenders, trapped in a basement, held

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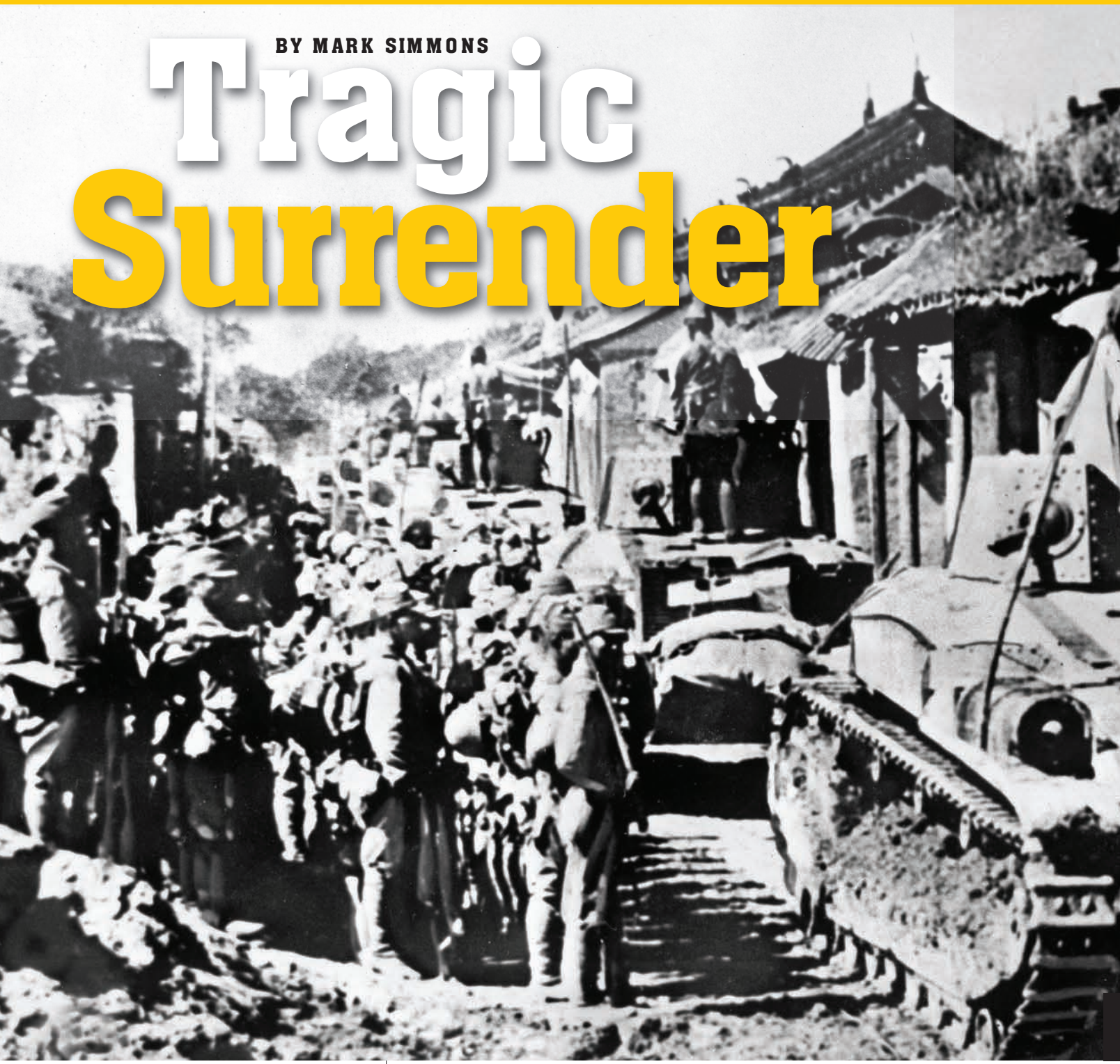
BY MARK SIMMONS

Tragic Surrender



ON SATURDAY, December 6, 1941, a Royal Australian Air Force Lockheed Hudson bomber on a reconnaissance mission from Khota Bahru on the west coast of Malaya was flying northwest over the China Sea toward the Gulf of Thailand.

At 12:12 PM, near the limit of its range, the Hudson's crew spotted a Japanese cruiser and three transports steaming in the same direction. Half an hour later a bigger convoy of 18 transports with cruisers and destroyers was spotted south of the first sighting.

Flight Lieutenant John C. Ramshaw took his aircraft down for a closer look. The Japanese did not open fire. The Hudson signaled the sighting back to Khota Bahru.

The reports of the sightings, and that of a second Hudson confirming those of the first, could not have come at a better time for the Commander in Chief Far East, Air Chief

Ullstein Bild / The Granger Collection, NY

During their conquest of Southeast Asia in December 1941-January 1942, Japanese troops advance through a Malayan village on their way to Singapore. With 30,000 men, the Japanese were able to force the surrender of 100,000 British and Commonwealth and Empire troops—the worst military disaster in British history.

Marshal Sir Robert Brooke-Popham. He had been appointed to the command in 1940. His charge was to avoid war with Japan, if possible.

The Japanese plan to capture Malaya and Singapore was based on Japan's wish to prevent any risk to shipments of vital oil supplies from the Netherlands East Indies when, as expected, those islands were seized.

The Japanese also wanted to dent British prestige by capturing Singapore—the naval and commercial symbol of Britain's empire in the Far East. The 25th Imperial Japanese Army, under General Tomoyuki Yamashita, was given five months to take Singapore and Malaya. He had three divisions under his command: the 5th (Lt. Gen. Takuro Matsui), the 18th (Lt. Gen. Renya Mutaguchi), and the Imperial Guards (Lt. Gen. Takuma Nishimura), for a total of 62,000 men, with 183 guns and 228 tanks.

The 3rd Air Division was attached to 25th Army with 168 fighter aircraft, 180 bombers, and 45 reconnaissance aircraft. The Southern Expeditionary Fleet, with the 22nd Air Flotilla and 158 aircraft, was to protect the convoys.

The day after Pearl Harbor, a large Japanese force descended on the vital British military installations at Singapore and gave Britain its most humiliating defeat.

The plan belonged to the Imperial Navy under Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, but the Army and Navy had bitterly argued strategy, with the Army feeling no move south should be made until China had been conquered.

The Navy wanted the Dutch oilfields and the approval of the emperor for its plan. The first task was to capture Bangkok, the capital of Thailand, to secure Japanese lines of communication to Burma and Malaya.

British strategy in the region was based on political considerations rather than sound military thinking. The Army was in Malaya to protect the air bases. The Air Force was there to protect the naval base on Singapore Island. In times of danger, so

National Archives

ABOVE: Left: Lt. Gen. Tomoyuki Yamashita, the "Tiger of Malaya," led Twenty-Fifth Army's invasion. Right: Lt. Gen. Arthur Percival, commander of British troops, surrendered Singapore's garrison. RIGHT: A flight of American-made Royal Australian Air Force Lockheed Hudsons cruises over Malaya shortly before the Japanese invasion.

the theory went, the Royal Navy would provide the power to deter any invasion; they could be there in force in 48 days.

Additionally, the British had not even considered the possibility of a land attack from the thick jungles to the north; their 15-inch coastal defense guns at Singapore pointed out to sea; they could not be rotated to fire at a threat from the north. In 1940, First Lord of the Admiralty Winston Churchill had gone so far as to smugly declare that any attempt by Japan to capture Singapore would be "a mad enterprise."

Certainly, by the middle of 1940 British intelligence was well aware of Japan's military planning through its signals intelligence (Sigint) based on intercepts of Japanese telegraphic messages. Commander Eric Nave from the Royal Australian Navy's cryptographic unit, and Hugh Foss, a Scot, were the two men principally responsible for breaking Japanese naval codes in the prewar years.

Japanese intelligence was also aware of the poor state of Singapore's defenses through spies on the ground. In 1940, the Japanese had received documents captured by the Germans from the British cargo ship *Automedon,* which contained secret British reports and was captured and sunk by the German surface raider *Atlantis*. One of the captured reports included the minutes of the British War Cabinet meeting of August 15, 1940. It outlined the Far East policy, including the defense of Malaya, and revealed Hong Kong and

Library of Congress

Borneo to be indefensible while Singapore could not be reinforced. Nor would Britain go to war if Japan attacked Thailand.

However, by 1941, the Royal Navy was heavily engaged in the Atlantic and Mediterranean and had few resources to spare in the event of Japanese aggression in or near Malaya. In 1941, the Admiralty did, however, work on a plan to create Britain's third fleet—the "Eastern Fleet." It was to consist of seven battleships, one aircraft carrier, and numerous cruisers and destroyers. However, the capital ships selected were old or slow, including the old battlecruisers *Renown* and *Repulse* and the battleships *Nelson* and *Rodney,* along with other well-worn ships.

Time was against the Royal Navy; many of the ships needed refitting and the latest radar equipment installed. The biggest drawback was that destroyers were not available, being fully committed in the Home and Mediterranean Fleets or for convoy work. Implementation of the plan was postponed to an optimistic March 1942.

After becoming prime minister, Winston Churchill had made his view clear to the First Sea Lord that a strong force should be sent to the Indian Ocean. "The most economical disposition would be to send *Duke of York* as soon as she is clear of constructional defects, via Trinidad and Simonstown to the East. She could be joined by *Repulse* or *Renown* and one aircraft carrier of high speed. This powerful force might show itself in the triangle Aden-Singapore-Simonstown. It would exert a paralysing effect upon Japanese Naval action."

It was the new battleship *Prince of Wales* (commissioned January 1941) that finally sailed for Cape Town. Later she joined the aging battlecruiser *Repulse* at Ceylon; both ships arrived at Singapore on November 11, 1941. It was planned that the new aircraft carrier HMS *Indomitable,* working in the West Indies, would join the small fleet.

However, on November 3, *Indomitable* ran aground on a reef off Bermuda and damaged her hull; she was ordered to Norfolk, Virginia, for repairs. The U.S. Navy dockyard worked fast, and she was away in 12 days. But it was all too late by the time she reached the Indian Ocean; the fate of *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse,* designated Force Z, was settled. The two warships were sunk by Japanese aircraft on December 10.

The Royal Air Force had 158 aircraft, some of which were obsolete, to defend Singapore and Malaya. It had been estimated that some 550 first-line aircraft were needed for an adequate defense. The Army had III Corps consisting of the 11th and 9th Indian Divisions and the 8th Australian Division with the Singapore Fortress troops and a

reserve brigade, for a total of 88,600 men.

The British had planned a preemptive strike, Operation Matador, to meet the Japanese head-on in southern Thailand. It was a good concept. A 24-hour warning of a Japanese landing was all it required for to be effective. Brooke-Popham had the warning, and he was also free now from asking permission from the War Cabinet to order Matador.

On December 1, Britain obtained a pledge of American support in the event of war with Japan. However, it was conditional on a Japanese attack on British territory. "They've made you personally responsible for declaring war on Japan," observed Brooke-Popham's chief of staff, General Ian S.O. Playfair.

Matador's plans included the occupation of Singora and Patani in Thailand. However, due to troop shortages, this was not possible. The operation was revised with the main force, the 11th Indian Division based in Kedah, moving as far as Singora, 130 miles north of the Malayan border.

ABOVE: Malay soldiers, equipped with British uniforms and weapons, take part in exercises in typical Malayan swamp country. BELOW: Soldiers from other parts of the British Empire defended Singapore. Here, Sikh soldiers train with an artillery piece in late 1941. They would be overrun by the Japanese.

Both: Library of Congress

A smaller force from the Penang garrison would drive along the Patani Road from the border town of Krah. Its objective was the Ledge, 35 miles on the Thai side of the frontier. The road here was cut into the sheer side of a hill and could easily be blocked. The plan envisioned the Japanese being resisted at Singora, allowed to land at Patani, and then boxed in at Krah.

There were several beaches in eastern Malaya that the Japanese could use for amphibious landings. The four most likely were Khota Bahru, defended by 8th Indian Brigade, Kuantan, Endau, and Mersing much farther south and defended by the Australians.

At that time of the year, the northeast monsoon could whip up the seas, but even in these conditions landings were possible; only the most severe weather would stop the Japanese. Fixed defenses had been built at Jitra, inland near the Thai border, to defend the airfields but not the border itself. Even those were incomplete.

On December 6, General Arthur Percival, commander of Commonwealth forces in Malaya, flew north to clear up some matters regarding Operation Matador with General Sir Lewis Heath, commander of III Indian Corps, who was not in favor of the operation. That evening Percival returned to Singapore to find that Brooke-Popham had not activated Matador. Even with everything pointing to a Japanese invasion, the commander in chief could not make up his mind.

On the afternoon of December 6, a Consolidated PBY Catalina flying boat failed to locate the enemy fleet. Another Catalina found the Japanese convoy 80 miles south of Cape Cambodia sailing west toward Thailand. The Catalina was shot down by the convoy's air cover before it could report the sighting, and Hudson bombers failed to find the convoy due to poor visibility. Thirty crucial hours had passed since the first sightings; Matador waited.

Both: National Archives

A view from Raffles Square shows a pall of smoke drifting over Singapore after a Japanese air raid on the capital.

At 5:50 PM, another Hudson spotted the convoy and was shot at but sent a radio signal. The convoy was 70 miles north of Singora, steaming south toward Patani and Khota Bahru.

Brooke-Popham still dithered. He met Percival at 9 PM on the 6th in the War Room at the naval base on Singapore Island. At 10:30 PM, Admiral Sir Tom Phillips, commander of Force Z, joined them. At last a decision was made. Matador would be activated at dawn on December 8. That would, however, be too late.

Shortly after midnight on Sunday, December 7, Mutaguchi's 18th Division began landing at Khota Bahru (where the 3/17 Dogra Regiment was defending the beaches); the 3rd Air Division began bombing and strafing the airfield a mile and a half inland. A few hours later the Japanese had 26,000 men ashore. Meanwhile, the 5th Division landed in Thailand at Singora and Patani.

At dawn on December 7, the Indian troops at Posts 13 and 14 of the 3/17 Dogra Regiment reported they were about to be overrun as Japanese landing craft continued to disgorge their troops. British 18-pounder guns opened fire, and Japanese warships replied. Many in the first wave of assaulting troops were cut down by machine-gun fire. Some of the landing craft came into the creek between the Bandang and Sabak beaches and attacked the defenders from the rear. By 1 PM, after savage hand-to-hand fighting, the beaches were cleared by the Japanese troops.

The Australian Hudsons from Khota Bahru airfield attacked the Japanese transports off the beaches with some success. One burst into flames after being bombed and was abandoned; another was damaged. Japanese soldiers leaped over the sides of the stricken ships or scrambled into landing craft as Hudsons bombed and strafed them. Two Hudsons were shot down by antiaircraft fire.

General Heath could hardly believe his situation. His III Indian Corps would have to stand-to all night awaiting the order to move into Thailand. Shortly after midnight on December 8, he telephoned Singapore, rousing Percival from his bed with the news the Japanese were ashore at Khota Bahru.

Admiral Phillips had not returned from Manila, where he had held talks with American Admiral Thomas C. Hart about joint action with the U.S. Asiatic Fleet. At the War Room meeting he suggested he could take his ships to sea and head north, reasoning that if an invasion was under way he might be able to stop it before the Japanese gained a foothold.

He put his plan to those at the meeting and asked for land-based fighter cover. Air Vice Marshal Conway Pulford indicated the limitations of his fighter pilots and lack of training in the naval support role, although they would try to support Force Z. The meeting was broken up by an air raid warning. At 4:30 AM, Japanese bombers hit Singapore.

Phillips signaled the Admiralty at 6 AM on December 8 and told them he was taking Force Z to sea toward Khota Bahru: "I rate the chances of getting there no higher than 50-50, but I'm sure it's the only way in which to halt the invasion and, if it can be halted, they should find it impossible to start again. Surprise is absolutely essential but it is just possible in this thick monsoon weather, given even an average amount of luck. But, if

we are spotted, which is bound to happen sooner or later, we shall be attacked."

At last Percival informed General Heath at his Kuala Lumpur headquarters that the Japanese were already in Singora and Patani and told him to send a mobile force across the border to delay the enemy advance. Then, at 10 AM a message arrived at Heath's headquarters, canceling Matador. After the war, Heath wrote, "I find it impossible to excuse General Percival for permitting Air Chief Marshal Sir Robert Brooke-Popham not to arrive at a decision on 7 December when everything pointed to the certainty of Japan initiating the war in Malaya."

It was a terrible mix-up that only benefitted the Japanese. Seventy minutes before the aircraft of the Imperial Japanese Navy attacked Pearl Harbor, troops of General Yamashita's 25th Army were pouring ashore on the beaches at Khota Bahru.

All through December 8, about 150 aircraft of the 7th Japanese Air Brigade flying initially from southern Indochina attacked the seven RAF airfields in northern Malaya. Pulford had started the day with 110 aircraft at these bases. By the end he had half that number—40 had been destroyed and 20 damaged—forcing him to withdraw the remaining aircraft south. The Japanese had won air superiority in a single day.

Japanese aerial photo taken during high-level bombing attack against the battleship HMS *Prince of Wales* (upper right) and HMS *Repulse* (lower left), December 10, 1941. *Repulse* has just been hit by one bomb and near-missed by several more. Both ships were sunk.

Singora and Patani soon fell to the Japanese 5th Division, which brushed aside token resistance from the Thai Army. The Japanese soon had 60 aircraft operating from Singora airfield and over 100 farther north at Bangkok.

Brigadier Berthold Key, commander of 8th Brigade of the Indian 9th Division, ordered two of his battalions to counterattack the Japanese on the beaches at Khota Bahru. However, the assault quickly broke down in a heavy monsoon downpour, and Key's men failed to stop Japanese attempts to take the airfield. Although Pulford had ordered the aircraft sent farther south to Kuantan, about midnight the airfield fell after desperate resistance by the Indian troops.

At 7 PM, Japanese ships were back at the beaches landing more troops. Key had no option but to withdraw to Khota Bahru town. In the deluge, his troops struggled to retreat with many getting lost, while others did not receive the order and remained in their trenches to be wiped out.

Brooke-Popham's hesitation had already severely weakened the 9th and 11th Indian Divisions and the RAF. Pulford's air force was now largely tasked with the defense of the naval base at Singapore and the protection of convoys bringing supplies and reinforcements.

This highlighted the flawed strategy the British had adopted. The Army had been deployed to protect the airfields, and half of Percival's infantry battalions in northern Malaya were committed to this role. Instead, they should have been dug in along the main routes south with strong mobile forces in support. With well-trained troops and adequate transport, it might have been possible to transfer troops as needed, but this would prove extremely difficult.

At 5:10 PM on December 8, the Australian destroyer *Vampire* led Force Z away from Singapore. She was followed by the destroyer *Tenedos,* then *Repulse* and *Prince of Wales* and two more destroyers, *Electra* and *Express.* It was a fine evening and, as the ships moved down the Johore Strait, spectators lined the shore

to wave them off. The onlookers must have been heartened at the sight.

Some on board the ships were not so confident. Seaman W.S. Searle of *Prince of Wales* wrote, "We had left Singapore in glorious weather but I had this premonition that the *Prince of Wales* would never return to Singapore or any other port. I had this feeling that this was the end as far as the ship was concerned." He was right.

Admiral Phillips was as concerned as Seaman Searle as messages came in from Rear Admiral Arthur Palliser in Singapore. The RAF would provide reconnaissance from 8 AM on December 9, but only with one Catalina up to a range of 100 miles northwestward. Even worse, "Fighter protection on Wednesday 10th will not, repeat, not be possible." And, "Japanese have large bomber forces based southern Indo-China and possibly in Thailand," and that the military situation at Khota Bahru "does not seem good."

ABOVE: After invading Thailand (Siam) and northern Malay on December 8, 1941, the Japanese marched southward through mountains and jungles to push the defenders to the tip of the peninsula at Singapore. OPPOSITE: Two Japanese tanks smashed and set on fire by Australian antitank gunners lie among felled trees blockading a road in Malaya.

However, the RAF had not abandoned the Navy altogether, although heavily engaged in the land fighting in northern Malaya. Number 453 Australian Squadron with Brewster Buffalo fighters at Sembawong airfield on Singapore Island were tasked to support Force Z.

At 1:30 PM on December 9, Force Z was spotted by the Japanese submarine *I-65*. The submarine managed to stay in visual touch until 3:50, when the ships entered a squall and contact was lost. The submarine regained contact about 6 PM but an approaching aircraft forced it to dive. When *I-65* surfaced there was no sign of the ships. There had been a two-hour delay from the first sighting and the receiving of the signals from *I-65*.

The Japanese Navy was convinced the British ships were still in Singapore, so it came as a shock to find them heading toward Khota Bahru. Vice Admiral Jisaburo Ozawa aboard the cruiser *Chokai* was about 120 miles from the reported position of the British ships and ordered all Japanese warships in the area to search for the British in the remaining hours of daylight. Several of Ozawa's cruisers launched their seaplanes to aid the search.

About an hour before dusk, *Prince of Wales*' radar picked up three aircraft—seaplanes from the Japanese cruisers. They kept out of antiaircraft range and plotted the course and speed of Force Z, relaying this information to Admiral Ozawa.

By 8:15, Admiral Phillips knew Force Z had been sighted. At 8:55, *Prince of Wales* signaled *Repulse*: "Have most regretfully cancelled the operation because, having been located by aircraft, surprise was lost and our target would be almost certain to be gone by the morning and the enemy fully prepared for us."

Force Z was returning to Singapore. However, just before midnight, Admiral Palliser signalled: "Enemy reported landing Kuantan. Latitude 0.350 north."

Phillips was well aware that if the Japanese seized the road running inland from Kuantan, Malaya would be cut in two. He turned his ships toward Kuanton and increased speed to 25 knots. He was keen to catch the enemy by surprise, so he did not break radio silence to inform Singapore of his change of plan, feeling this might reveal his position to the enemy.

Phillips seems to have assumed Palliser would arrange air cover for the morning of the 10th; No. 453 Squadron was on standby to support Force Z. However, nothing was done, the Kuanton report was a false alarm, and RAF HQ at Singapore had no idea where Force Z was.

The Japanese submarine *I-58* spotted the British ships about midnight on a southerly course and shadowed on the surface, sending several signals after first trying an unsuccessful torpedo attack.

The position of Force Z was relayed to the Japanese 22nd Air Flotilla in French

Indochina; on December 9 it had tried to find the British ships without success. At 6 AM on the 10th the Japanese launched 30 bombers and 50 torpedo bombers. They flew south 150 miles beyond Kuanton, almost as far as Singapore, but spotted nothing. However, on the return a break in the clouds revealed the British ships. The high-level bombers came in first at about 11 AM, followed by the torpedo bombers.

The British ships had spotted the Japanese aircraft on radar. In the very first attack, *Repulse* and *Prince of Wales* were hit by bombs, and then a torpedo hit the flagship.

Captain Bill Tennant of *Repulse* reported after the action, "The second attack was shared by *Prince of Wales* and was made by torpedo-bomber aircraft. I am not prepared to say how many machines took part in this attack but, on conclusion, I have the impression that we had succeeded in combing the tracks of a large number of torpedoes, possibly as many as twelve.

"We were steaming at 25 knots at the time. I maintained a steady course until the aircraft appeared committed to the attack, when the wheel was put over and the attacks providentially combed. I would like to record the valuable work done by all bridge personnel at this time in calmly pointing out approaching torpedo-bombing aircraft which largely contributed to our good fortune in dodging all these torpedoes."

Repulse tried to help *Prince of Wales,* but *Repulse* was hit again by a bomb, then four more torpedoes hit *Prince of Wales*. Having dodged 19 torpedoes, *Repulse* was struck five times; she rolled over at 12:33.

Sergeant H.A. Nunn of the Royal Marines aboard *Repulse* recalled, "It was time for me to go over the side, so I kicked off my shoes and climbed over the guardrail. It was possible to walk partway down the ship's side, but I had to finish the rest of the journey on my seat, regardless of the rips and tears to my person and clothing. I had my lifebelt with me but I had no qualms about going into the water, as I was a strong swimmer.

"I didn't even think of the possibility that there may be sharks in the vicinity. My only concern was to try and get away from the ship and the oily patch that was beginning to spread out over the surface of the water."

From *Repulse,* 796 men out of a complement of 1,309, including Captain Tennant and Sergeant Nunn, were rescued. The destroyer *Express* came in to take men off the stricken *Prince of Wales*.

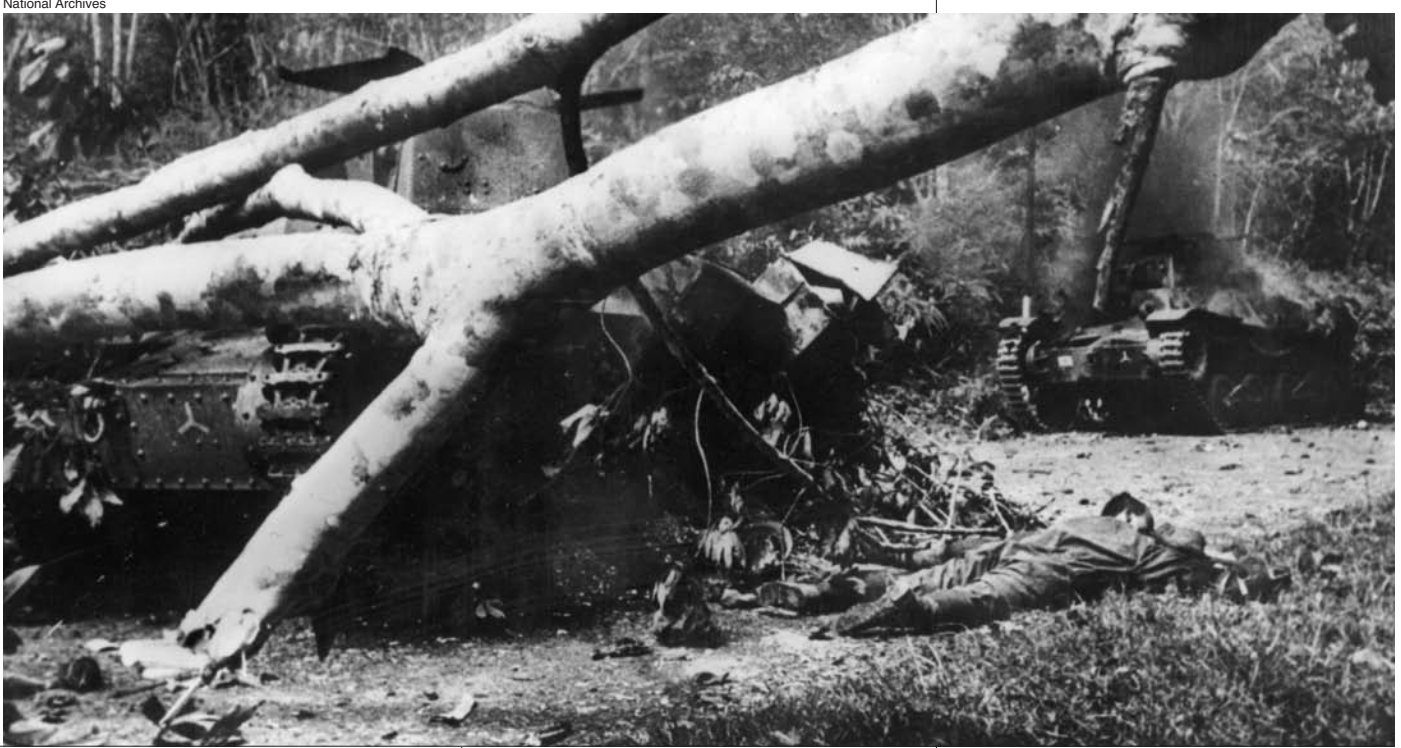
Lieutenant W.M. Graham remembers surviving as *Prince of Wales* keeled over. "I was able to muster most of my close-range gun crews over on the starboard side and remember quite clearly walking over the bilge keel, keeping pace with the roll, and thinking how clean the ship's bottom looked as I swam away. The last time I had seen the underside of the *Prince of Wales* was when I saw her being launched at Cammell Laird's yard at Birkenhead [Liverpool] in 1939."

The Buffaloes of No. 453 Squadron arrived just in time to see *Prince of Wales* go down. Flight Lieutenant Tom Vigors recalled seeing the survivors in the oily water waving to him. "I [saw] many men in dire danger waving, cheering, and joking as if they were holidaymakers at Brighton waving at a low-flying aircraft. It shook me, for here was something above human nature. I take off my hat to them, for in them I saw the spirit that wins wars."

Winston Churchill stated, "In my whole experience, I do not remember any naval blow so heavy or so painful as the sinking of *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse*."

The loss of the British warships was a huge boost to Japanese prestige, bolster-

National Archives



ing the myth of their invincibility. In Berlin, Adolf Hitler was jubilant at the news and then made the fatal mistake of declaring war on the United States.

In Malaya, the British Army was now largely on its own. On December 8, General Matsui's 5th Division had started moving south from Singora and Patani, hoping to cross the Perak River. The British Operation Krohcol was designed to foil this move. However, the British needed to win the race to the Ledge—the road cut into the hillside above the Patani River.

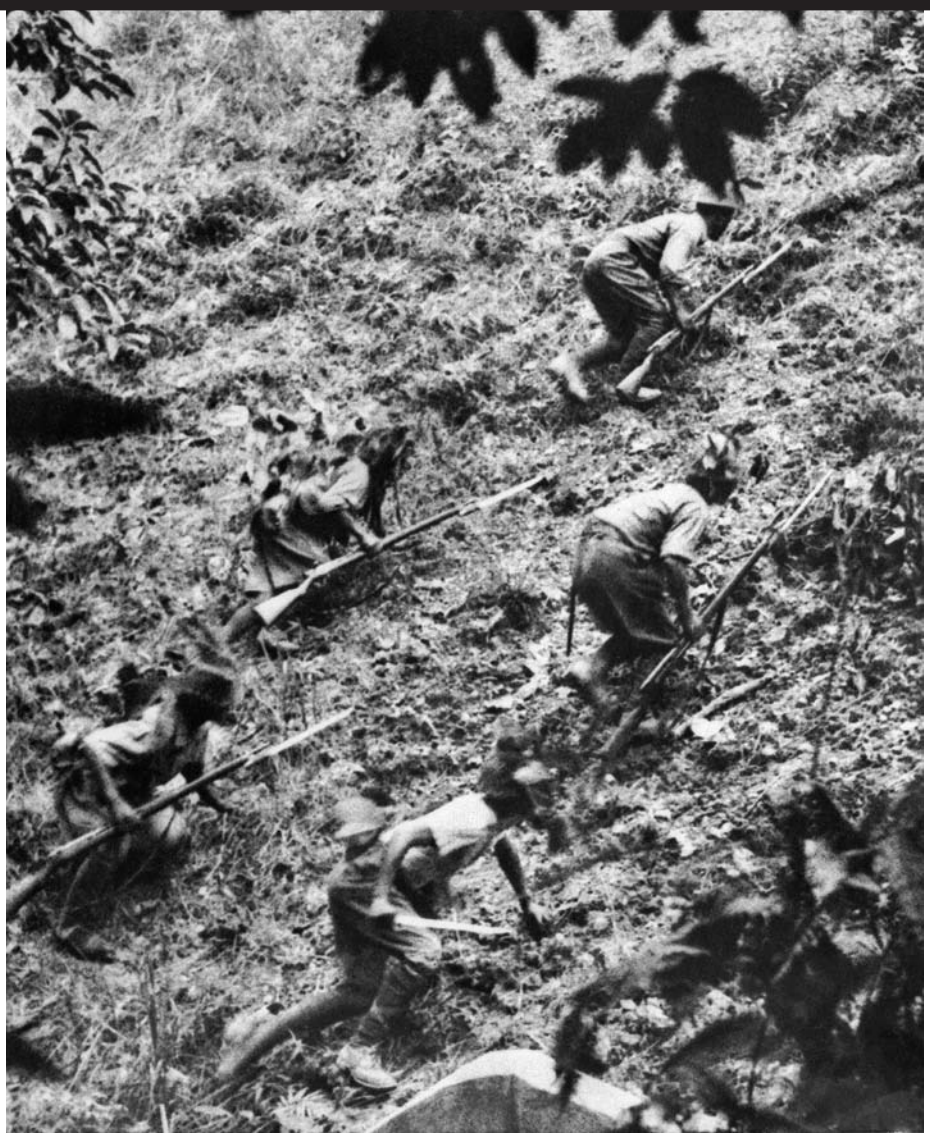
Major General David Murray-Lyon's force, assigned this role, got off to a bad start and did not arrive at the start line on December 8. However, the 3/16 Punjabis were there and started forward into Thailand on their own without artillery support. They soon ran into trouble with the Thais, who had been told to defend the country against the British in the hope of not provoking the Japanese. Thus, the Thai police were manning roadblocks, unaware the Japanese had invaded, and delayed the British advance.

The next day the Punjabis got within six miles of the Ledge but soon came under fire from the Japanese 42nd Regiment, supported by tanks, which had beaten them there. The 3/16 was forced to withdraw and suffered heavy casualties.

Another British force, this time mechanized and with artillery, advanced into Thailand from Kedah along the Singora-Jitra Road and ran into a Japanese column. The British gunners brought the column to a halt, but Japanese infantry swarmed into the jungle and soon outflanked the position, forcing back the British, who then destroyed bridges as they rejoined the 11th Indian Division at Jitra.

The Jitra line was not strong or based on natural features, and Murray-Lyon spread his forces too thinly over a 12-mile front from Jitra to the sea instead of concentrating on the two main roads leading into Jitra from the north.

The Japanese had captured a map showing the British defenses at Jitra. Their attack was reckless but the tanks carried them through the poorly prepared lines. In



ABOVE: With camouflaged helmets, Japanese soldiers close in on British positions near Singapore, January 14, 1942. OPPOSITE: Members of the jungle-trained 2nd Battalion, Argyle and Sutherland Highlander Regiment, on maneuvers. The vehicle is a Lanchester 6x4 Mark I armored car. The soldier in the foreground carries a Vickers Mark VI machine gun.

15 hours, the Japanese broke through and 3,000 Indian troops surrendered. Huge amounts of equipment were captured—enough ammunition and food to keep the Japanese going for months. The Japanese poured into northern Malaya along good roads, the infantry speeding along on bicycles. On the east coast, the 18th Division took Khota Bahru.

Murray-Lyon's request to withdraw 30 miles south to Gurum was refused. However, he repeated the request as the Japanese advance from Kroh threatened to cut him off. On December 13, his tired, rain-soaked, and largely confused men trudged south. At Gurum, the 6th Brigade headquarters was destroyed and the 11th Indian Division was in danger of collapse. They withdrew beyond the Muda River, losing men constantly. By December 20, they were farther south, near Taipang, leaving Penang uncovered. The British lacked air cover. The outdated Buffaloes were no match for the Japanese Zero fighters.

From Brigadier Archie Paris's reserve 12th Brigade, the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders were pushed forward to Bailing on the main road from Kroh with three com-

panies, while C Company with armored cars went to Grik in case the Japanese used that mountain track. The Argylls were one of the few British infantry units that, thanks to their commanding officer, Lt. Col. Ian Stewart, had undergone rigorous jungle training. Many desk-bound soldiers thought Stewart, who kept his soldiers "square-bashing," was "barking mad."

Stewart created fast-moving Tiger Patrols designed to encircle enemy troops and drive them into roadblocks of artillery, mortars, and armored cars. Now he was about to put his tactics to the test.

In the first clash, the Japanese lost heavily. However, weight of numbers forced the Argylls back. Company C managed to hold back the 42nd Japanese Infantry Regiment for a time but had to fall back to Sumpitan, conducting a fighting withdrawal down 150 miles of the Grik Road.

With the 5/2 Punjabis, the Argylls fought at Sumpitan, Lenggong, and Kota Tampan. Captain Kenneth McLeod paid tribute to the support provided by the 2/3 Australian Motor Transport Company. "They were always at the waiting points ready to take our troops. Every now and again, they would grab a rifle and have a shot at the enemy. They were great chaps."

Lieutenant General Sir Henry Pownall reached Singapore on December 23 to take over command from Brooke-Popham and wasted no time in touring the battlefields on the western front. He hoped to hold the Japanese at Kampar, a hill position that gave scope for artillery, an arm in which the British were superior. He wrote, "The 11th Division have had a pretty good shaking up. They were thrown on to the wrong leg and took some time, indeed too long, to recover. Heath is, I think, all right. He has aged a lot since I knew him in India. He's not 'full of fire,' but he does know what is to be done to pull the troops around."

Both: Australian War Memorial

Pownall was not overly impressed by Percival and confided to his diary that he hoped he wouldn't have to relieve Percival, whom he found lacking in inspiration and "gloomy."

The combined remnants of the 6th and 15th Brigades were to dig in at Kampar, while the 12th and 28th Brigades fought delaying actions to the north. Eleventh Division commander Murray-Lyon and all three of his brigade commanders had been replaced. On the night of December 27-28, Archibald Paris, Murray-Lyon's temporary replacement, sent his own 12th Brigade south of Ipoh.

The 28th Brigade was to join the defenders at Kampar while the 12th Brigade delayed the Japanese approach, then withdraw through Kampar to Bidor. They were largely ineffective at delaying the Japanese; the Argyll's armored cars came to their aid by holding the bridge over the Kampar River and allowing them to pass. By the time 12th Brigade reached the reserve position, it was shattered, losing 500 men and most of its vehicles.

The British commanders were well aware that reinforcements—the 18th British Division and 50 Hurricane fighters and pilots—were on their way. It was vital to hold the Japanese as far north as possible to keep their aircraft away from Singapore; but the convoy was not expected to arrive until January 13-15.

On December 31, the Japanese started probing the positions at Kampar. The next day, the main attack came, with bitter fighting lasting 48 hours. Then the 6th and 15th Brigades started to pull back. However, it was not the assault at Kampar that forced this withdrawal; the Japanese had outflanked the position by sea. In an armada of small boats they had used the Perak River via Telok Anson.

When news of the landing reached Brigadier Paris, he sent the weakened 12th Brigade from Bidor to stall the enemy. The Argylls and 19th Hyderabad Regiment initially held the Japanese 4th Guards at Telok Anson. The fighting was fierce, and the Argylls bore the brunt of the attack. The 12th Brigade could not keep the road south open, so the good position at Kampar was lost and the 11th Division withdrew to an inferior one on the Slim River.

The 12th Brigade took up positions on a stretch of road between Songkau and Trolak, with the 28th Brigade covering the line eastward along the road to the Slim River Bridge. Most battalions were down to company strength and lacked antitank defenses, and the country did not favor field artillery.

On January 5, the Japanese attacked down the railway line after 12th Brigade had been heavily bombed. They were ini-

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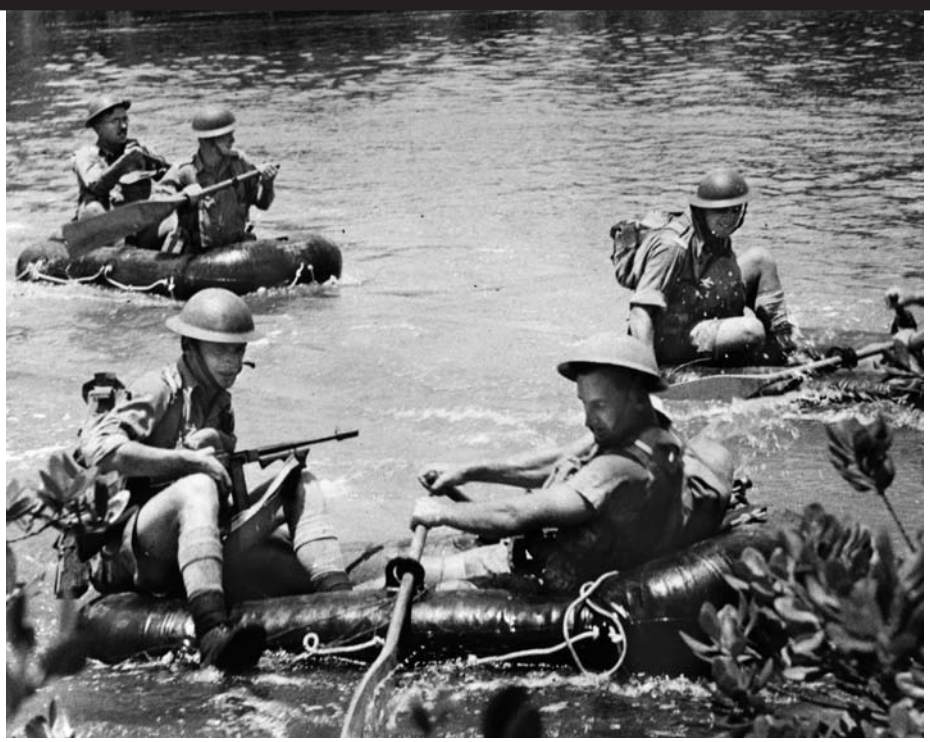


Six Australian soldiers with tommy guns cross a jungle river in rubber rafts during training. The Aussies worried that if Malaya fell, Australia probably would be invaded next.

tially thrown back but came forward the next day via the railway and road with tank support. The bridge over the Slim River should have been blown but was taken intact.

The thrust came to a halt with the Japanese penetrating 19 miles into the 11th Division's area. With the loss of this battle, central Malaya was gone and with it the largest city, Kuala Lumpur.

Australian Maj. Gen. Henry Gordon-Bennett became more involved in the battle after the decision was made to make an extensive withdrawal into Johore. Giving up the provinces of Negri Sembilon, Selanger, and Malacca, this would mean fighting in open country where Japanese armor would be even more useful. However, Gordon-Bennett felt he had a good chance to hold the Japanese, although he had not been impressed by the display of British leadership so far. The decision was taken to stand at Muar, where there were no bridges over the Muar River's lower reaches.

On December 30, General Archibald Wavell was appointed Supreme Commander, South West Pacific. On January 7 he arrived in Singapore then flew north to review the situation. He soon confirmed Percival's opinion that the decisive battle should be fought in northwest Johore using the Australians and 45th Indian Brigade. It was hoped this would give time for the 18th British Division to arrive and for the 9th and 11th Divisions to rest and reorganize.

Wavell was impressed with Gordon-Bennett even if the Australian was dismissive of the Indian soldier's lack of fighting qualities. His contention that "one Australian is worth 10 Japanese" was largely bluster. However, Wavell was well aware of the fighting spirit of Australian troops and he felt Gordon-Bennett was the aggressive commander needed. He informed London that Gordon-Bennett would "conduct very active defence and will hopefully be able to delay enemy till collection of reserves enables us to deliver counter-stroke which will not be before the middle of February."

On January 13, the 53rd Brigade of 18th British Division disembarked in Singapore with 50 Hurricane fighters but only 25 pilots.

Meanwhile, Yamashita was resting his 5th Division at Seremban, 30 miles south of Kuala Lumpur, while the Imperial Guards concentrated in Malacca. By this time the remainder of Mutaguchi's 18th Division had landed at Singora. On January 14, the Japanese moved against the Australians of Gordon-Bennett's Westforce.

At Gemas, the Japanese were allowed to cross the river via a bridge, but it was then blown behind them. They met the 2/30 Australian Battalion and a field artillery battery, which cut the Japanese to pieces. The renewed attack the next day was repulsed, but pressure increased and the Australians withdrew that night.

On the west coast, the Japanese landed by sea behind the British position at Muar, then cut the Muar-Bakri Road behind the British 45th Brigade. The road to Yong Peng was open, threatening the Australians in the center. Gordon-Bennett sent the 2/29 Battalion to reinforce Muar.

While the newly arrived 53rd Brigade (which had been on ships for three months) relieved an Australian battalion on the east coast, Percival was convinced he now faced five Japanese divisions and flung the 53rd into the fight before it was acclimated.

More Japanese landings were made between Muar and Batu Pahat. The British 45th Brigade was ordered to recapture Muar to allow the Australians in the center to withdraw south from Segamat before becoming trapped. The counterattack soon broke down, the brigade having to fight its way back through Japanese roadblocks.

Finally, the 45th, with the 2/29 Australians, took to the jungle, abandoning vehicles and guns. Out of 4,000 men, fewer than 1,000 made it back; the Japanese massacred the wounded. However, their sacrifice had held up the Imperial Guards, allowing Westforce to escape south.

The next defense line was 90 miles south, crossing Malaya from Batu Pahat through Kluang to Mersing on the east coast. This was III Corps' area, and Lt. Gen. Heath took command. Percival ordered no retreat without his permission. However, it was the same story as the Japanese moved by sea. At Batu Pahat, the 6/15 Brigade was withdrawn after losing half its strength, 2,700 men escaping the surrounding Japanese by sea. This

compelled Westforce at Kluang to pull back.

Thanks to two Australian battalions, in six days of fighting ending on January 22, Muar Force managed to destroy a company of Japanese tanks and the equivalent of a battalion of Imperial Guards.

General Yamashita was now running behind schedule. He wrote in his diary that Nishimura, commander of the Guards Division and Matsui of the 15th Division, had disobeyed his orders and delayed the advance.

In the east, the Australians repeated their ambush technique near Hersung, luring the Japanese into a "firebox" of rifle companies and field guns and wiping out a Japanese force. But such actions did not reverse the trend of withdrawal.

On January 30, Wavell authorized Percival to withdraw to Singapore Island. The Japanese managed to slip between the retreating brigades of the 9th Indian Division and, during this last period of the mainland campaign, the 45th and 22nd Indian Brigades suffered so many causalities they no longer existed. The III Corps arrived at Singapore Island with several thousand men missing.

On January 22, the 44th Indian Brigade arrived with 7,000 raw, untrained men. Two days later, 1,900 Australians arrived in a similar state, but with them was the 2/4 Australian Machine Gun Battalion—a welcome reinforcement. A week later the bulk of the 18th British Division arrived; the 54th and 55th Brigades came ashore from American transport ships.

Unfortunately, the *Empress of Asia,* carrying 2,235 members of 18th British Division, including the Reconnaissance Battalion, 9th Northumberland Fusiliers, 125th Anti-Tank Regiment, and other elements, was bombed and sunk on February 5, almost within sight of Singapore. Much of the crew and almost all the soldiers were rescued, but all the equipment was lost.

The Australians crossed the Causeway at dawn on January 31, but it was the Argylls that were the last unit to cross—with their pipers playing "Hielan Laddie."

Major John Wyett asked Lt. Col. Ian Stewart why he did that. "You know, Wyett," Stewart said, "the trouble with you Australians is that you have no sense of history. When the story of the Argylls is written, you will find they go down in history as the last unit to cross the Causeway—piped across by their pipers."

The population of Singapore had swollen to nearly a million. To defend it, Percival had 85,000 men—17 Indian battalions, 13 British, six Australian, and two Malay. But numbers are misleading; many units had been battered in the mainland campaign while others were raw from the convoys. Some of those had never even fired a rifle before.

Percival divided the island into four sectors: the City held by the Malaya Brigade and Fortress troops; the Northern area, including the naval base, held by III Corps, reinforced by 18th Division; and the Western area held by the 8th Australian Division; the 12th Indian Brigade formed the reserve and held the water reservoirs.

Percival had parceled out his men to cover all possible shore landings, a recipe for failure. He believed the Japanese would attack east of the Causeway. His main concern was holding the naval base, but that was near useless now. Wavell had told Percival that, in his opinion, the Japanese would attack in the northwest along the route of their main axis of advance down the west coast of Malaya. To move their entire force from west to east to cross at a wider spot made no sense to anyone except Percival.

National Archives

Japanese infantrymen crawl behind a tank through a shattered street during the Battle of Singapore, early February 1942.

Although the situation looked grim, many of the British refused to concede. On January 29, 1942, 210 Royal Marine sur-

National Archives

The Japanese army committed numerous atrocities during its invasion of Malay. Here, a soldier bayonets the body of a prisoner, one of a group executed by firing squad near Singapore.

vivors from *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse,* under Royal Marine Captain Bob Lang, joined 250 men of Major Angus Rose's 2nd Argylls to carry out operations using boats to strike from the sea 140 miles behind Japanese lines. As both detachments were from the Marine Plymouth Division, the composite unit, officially called the Marine Argyll Battalion, became known as the Plymouth Argylls after the English soccer club of that name. Roseforce, as they were also known, set ambushes, destroyed vehicles, and killed two senior Japanese staff officers in their cars.

On February 6, Yamashita issued his attack orders to his senior commanders. The assault on Singapore would begin at 8:30 PM, February 8. The 5th and 18th Divisions would land on the west coast, their first objective Tengah airfield. In the second phase, the Imperial Guards would attack the Causeway sector and then isolate British forces in the naval base. Next would be the water reservoirs. When these were taken, Yamashita calculated the British would surrender.

Nishimura was not happy that his Guards were relegated to the second phase, which he viewed as an insult. Yamashita's chief of staff, General Sosaku Suzuki, tried to smooth things over between the two men but failed.

Churchill expected a battle in the streets and told Wavell, "I expect every inch of ground to be defended ... and no question of surrender to be entertained until after protracted fighting among the ruins of Singapore City."

On the night of February 8, Japanese artillery opened fire with 440 guns using 200 rounds per gun all along the Johore Strait. At 8:45 PM, the first wave of 4,000 Japanese troops crossed the Johore Strait and gained a foothold on Singapore's northwestern shore. Meanwhile, the Imperial Guards had been demonstrating in east Jahore, feigning an attack from the northeast. Over the next hour, the whole front from the Buloh River to the righthand company of the 2/19 Battalion was under attack. The Vickers machine guns cut up the invaders, but still they came on, closing in on the 2/19's weapon pits. The men there held out for only 15 minutes before being overrun.

As the exhausted Australian defenders withdrew, the Plymouth Argylls were ordered on the morning of February 9 to advance northward up the Bukit Timah Road then westward along the Choa Chu Kang Road toward Tengah airfield.

Shortly after arriving, the Royal Marines came under air attack, and some sections became lost in the unfamiliar terrain. Two more days of fighting followed as the Plymouth Argylls engaged the Japanese between Tengah and the dairy farm that lay east of the Upper Bukit Timah Road. Most of the Argylls were cut off when the Japanese brought their tanks down the road and smashed through two roadblocks.

The main body of Royal Marines escaped across the dairy farm and down the "Pipeline" to the golf course. No sooner had they arrived at Tyersall Park than the camp and the neighboring Indian military hospital were destroyed in an air attack. In the confusion that followed and subsequent shelling and mortaring, there was a further dispersal of men, including the wounded.

By late morning on the 9th, both Japanese divisions were ashore along with their artillery. The 44th Indian Brigade hung on, but the 22nd Australian Brigade, which bore the brunt of the attack, was wrecked. Although reinforced by the 6th and 15th Brigades, the Australians were split up by the enemy's infiltration tactics. That night, Yamashita set up his headquarters in a rubber plantation just north of Tengah airfield.

The next morning, Percival still found it hard to believe that no attack would come in the northeast, so he left all the formations there intact but moved the 12th Indian Brigade to the Bukit Panjang area. This brigade now consisted of the 2nd Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders (aka the Plymouth Argylls) and 400 men of the 4/19 Hyderabads.

On the evening of February 9, the Imperial Guards came across the strait near the Causeway. The Japanese wanted to take Singapore by Kigensetsu Day, February 11, the founding day of the Japanese Empire. By dawn on the 11th, they had taken Bukit Timah.

To hasten the British capitulation, a message was dropped by air urging Percival to surrender; he ignored it.

The defenders at the city's water reservoirs were attacked on February 12, but by now

the 5th and 18th Japanese Divisions were exhausted. The Guards were now the main strength, although Yamashita disliked them and their commander. He had to rely on them, but they refused to be hurried.

Repairs to the Causeway were completed, and Japanese forces to the north were streaming onto the island. The Japanese realized their artillery ammunition was running out, while the British gunners were devastating and seemed to have an inexhaustible supply of shells. One Japanese infantry attack was broken up by a furious barrage before it could start.

From London, Churchill demanded, "There must be no thought of sparing the troops or population; commanders and senior officers should die with their troops. The honour of the British Empire and the British Army is at stake."

The demand went unheeded. At 2 PM, February 15, surprising news reached Yamashita that a peace envoy—a brigadier with a white flag—had appeared on the front line. At first the Japanese thought it was a trick. Major Kunitake, one of Yamashita's staff officers, felt the white flag was a ruse, for the Japanese infantry was dropping with fatigue and beginning to wonder if they might be the ones to surrender. Later in the day Percival came himself to the Ford Factory at Bukit Timah to sue for peace.

In his diary Yamashita wrote of his anxiety during that meeting: "I now realized that the British Army had about 100,000 men against my three divisions of 30,000 men. They also had many more bullets and other munitions than I had. I was afraid ... that they would discover that our forces were much less than theirs."

He adopted a hectoring manner with Percival to hide his anxiety. He emphasized "Yes" or "No" in English several times as to whether Percival was going to surrender. Finally Percival agreed and signed the surrender document, and the two generals shook hands. At 8:30 PM on February 15, 1942, the British troops on the island ceased fire.

The Plymouth Argylls were one of the few units that fought with distinction in the dying days of the Malayan campaign, battling to the end, while many other units deserted or tried to force their way onto ships in the harbor. The surviving Plymouth Argylls went into captivity and spent the next 3½ years in the atrocious conditions of Japanese prison camps working as slave laborers on the infamous Burma-Thailand "Death Railway."

Australian War Memorial

After being ordered by Percival to cease resistance, British soldiers surrender in Singapore on February 15, 1942. Many were sent to slave-labor work camps.

Percival was undoubtedly influenced in his decision by Japanese atrocities at the Alexandria Hospital on February 14, when the wounded and staff were massacred in cold blood. These were the "Butchers of Nanking," well known for their brutality. Percival was a humane man, and he had to consider Singapore's vast civilian population in a prolonged resistance.

Later, while summing up the campaign, Percival felt defeat was due to British inferiority in the air and a lack of tanks. However, Yamashita felt racial disunity between British, Chinese, Malays, Indians, and Australians was an important factor.

It is an interesting question to ask how long the British would have needed to fight to turn the tables; Wavell thought the Japanese could be fought to a standstill. But Yamashita could call on resources from China and Manchuria, whereas British reinforcements were limited.

Perhaps Wavell was right; a more aggressive commander might have succeeded. General Stanley Kirby later wrote that he felt the catastrophe rested with more men than just Percival. "One can sum up by saying that those responsible for the conduct of the land campaign in Malaya committed every conceivable blunder. Wavell, Percival, Heath, and [Gordon-] Bennett had all made serious errors of judgement regarding the enemy and the best ways of dealing with him. From the beginning, Wavell, as he later admitted, had underestimated the Japanese soldier just as he overrated Percival's chances of beating him."

Instead, in 70 days at the cost of 3,500 dead the Japanese defeated the British and led nearly 100,000 troops into captivity, smashing forever the British Empire in the East. Thousands of British, Indian, and Australian prisoners died in captivity. □

HEROIC STAND AT HOSINGEN

BY ALICE M. FLYNN AND ALLYN VANNOY

FIRST LIEUTENANT Tom Flynn and his fellow POWs remained locked inside their boxcar prison on a Frankfurt railroad siding on Christmas Eve, 1944, as air raid sirens wailed and bombs exploded throughout the city. A number of boxcars were hit, sending shock waves and shrapnel throughout the rail yard. The sound of explosions and shrapnel hitting the side of the boxcar was deafening and terrifying. This was not where Flynn, commanding K Company, 110th Infantry Regiment, 28th Infantry Division, had envisioned himself being just a few weeks earlier.

Thomas Joseph Flynn was born on August 21, 1920, the fourth child of Richard E. and Josephine Engfer Flynn, a working-class family living on the Upper East Side of Manhattan. Thomas graduated from high school in June 1937, having studied French and achieving fluency in German that he would find useful a few years later. In October 1937, he joined the 165th Infantry Regiment, 27th Infantry Division (New York National Guard), which three years later,would become one of the first National Guard units "federalized" and placed on active duty more than a year prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor.

After the United States entered the war, Sergeant Flynn applied for and was accepted for Officers Candidate School. After OCS, he was assigned to the 353rd Infantry Regiment, 89th Infantry Division, at Camp Carson, Colorado. While there he met Army Nurse 2nd

National Archives

American GIs take cover during a German artillery barrage on the front lines in Luxembourg. Hitler's December 1944 "Ardennes Offensive" caught U.S. commanders by surprise, but some units, like Lieutenant Thomas Flynn's K Company, 110th Infantry, 28th Division, refused to be routed and delayed the Germans' attempts to reach Bastogne.

Caught in the Battle of the Bulge onslaught, First Lieutenant Thomas Flynn and his company held out for days in a small Luxembourg town before being taken prisoner.

Lt. Anna Bennedsen. Following a short romance, they wed on September 13, 1942.

In March 1943, Flynn was promoted to first lieutenant in the regiment's antitank company. He was then reassigned five months later as company commander of E Company, 85th Mountain Infantry Regiment of the newly formed 10th Mountain Division. Injured in a rock-climbing exercise at Camp Hale, Colorado, in October, he remained hospitalized until the end of the year.

While still recovering, he was assigned as an infantry instructor until restored to full service in June 1944. He then shipped to the ETO on September 23, assigned to a replacement depot in France, and subsequently to the 28th Infantry Division (known to the Germans as the "Bloody Bucket" given its red keystone shoulder patch).

Just prior to Lieutenant Flynn's arrival at the division, the 28th had completed a near disastrous operation in and around the village of Schmidt in the Hürtgen Forest, where it suffered heavy casualties. On November 8, Flynn was made temporary commanding officer of K Company, 110th Infantry Regiment.

Some 500 replacements were assigned to fill the devastated ranks of the 110th, 100 of them to K Company, though this still left the company understrength (the authorized strength of a rifle company was 193). Despite this, the unit was immediately ordered to continue operations in the Hürtgen Forest during November 10-13.

Alice Flynn

ABOVE: Lieutenant Thomas Flynn, shown with his pet collie Biff. BELOW RIGHT: The quiet Luxembourg village of Hosingen before the battle.

Machine-gun fire from well-positioned German bunkers, along with antipersonnel mines, mortar attacks, and artillery tree bursts, took a devastating toll on the 110th.

In addition, freezing weather, a foot of snow, and a lack of proper winter gear caused many of the GIs to suffer frostbite, Lieutenant Flynn among them. By the time the 110th left the forest, there were only a handful of men left in K Company that had been with the unit prior to arriving in Europe.

The 28th Division was transferred to a supposedly "quiet area" in the Ardennes Forest, 60 miles to the south. After treatment for knee injuries sustained in combat and frostbite, Flynn rejoined the company on November 20 at the village of Hosingen, Luxembourg.

The company commander, Captain Frederick Feiker, who had been injured prior to action in the Hürtgen Forest, had not yet returned to duty. Thus, despite only having just arrived at the unit, it fell to Flynn to help rebuild and prepare it for action. His prior duty as a training instructor served him well.

Hosingen was one of five company strongpoints the 110th Infantry had established along the front. The village was defended by the 1st and 2nd Platoons of K Company, 3rd Platoon having been assigned to a position just south of the village. Also in the village was B Company (with only 125-130 men) of the 103rd Engineer Combat Battalion, under Captain William H. Jarrett, that was responsible for road maintenance in the area. In support were the 2nd and 3rd Platoons of M Company, the battalion heavy weapons company.

Additional support was provided by attached elements (about 30 men) with three 57mm antitank guns and three .50-caliber machine guns positioned at a crossroads south of Hosingen along Skyline Drive, the main north-south road paralleling the front.

Hosingen was at the middle of the 110th's 15-mile-long sector, set on the Ober Eisenbach-Hosingen-Drauffelt road that led west to the town of Bastogne. The village was situated on a ridge top with a twisting road to the east, dropping down to the Our River, and to the west to bridges over the Clerf River at Drauffelt and Wilwerwiltz.

Upon arriving at Hosingen, Lieutenant Flynn quickly assessed the situation. Most of the company's NCOs had come from the 41st Replacement Battalion and seen action in the Hürtgen Forest along with Flynn. There were also some 20 RTD (return-to-duty) men who had recovered from injuries or wounds.

Flynn directed his men in improving defensive positions previously established by the 8th Infantry Division, relocating some mines, and adding minefields along likely avenues of approach. But on-hand ammunition stocks were minimal and the supply system promised little relief.

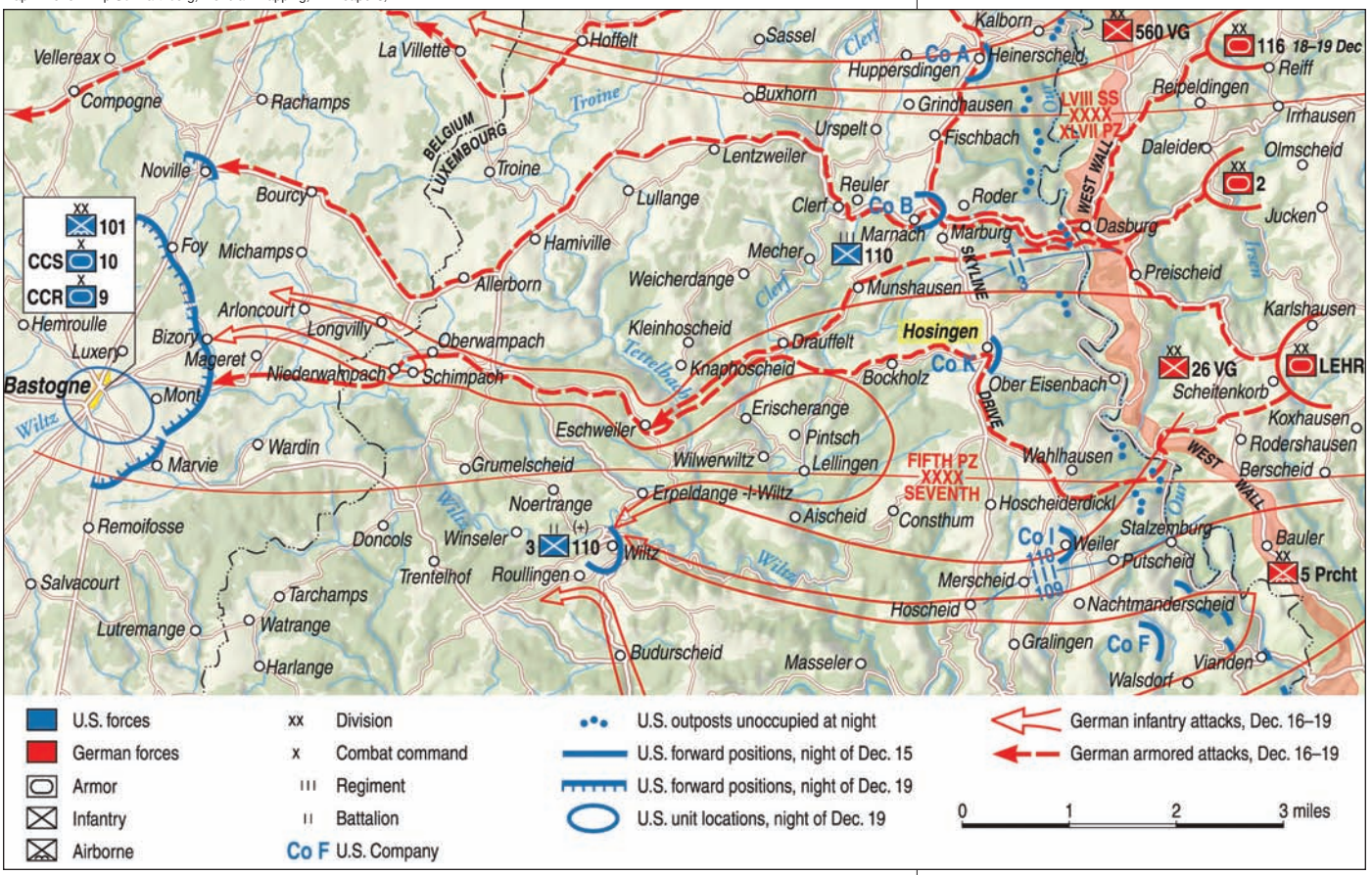
The communications network was well established with phone lines to the 3rd Battalion command post at Consthum, the engineers, each platoon CP, northern and southern observation posts (OPs), the mechanized cavalry units on either flank, and the other companies of the 110th Infantry, as well as the regimental headquarters in Clervaux. SCR-300 radios provided communications redundancy to the 3rd Battalion net and with the 1st and 2nd Platoon CPs.

K Company was assigned a two-mile stretch of Skyline Drive with patrols monitoring the area between the highway and the Our River during the day, along with OPs near the river, but which were pulled in during the night.

Along with preparing defenses and patrolling, the unit also conducted tactical training of its many replacements in scouting and patrolling, sniping, and observation.

Courtesy of the Archives of Hosingen, Luxembourg

Map © 2015 Philip Schwartzberg, Meridian Mapping, Minneapolis, MN



The village of Hosingen, occupied by Flynn's K Company, had the misfortune of being directly in the path of the Fifth Panzer Army on its way to Bastogne.

Flynn established the K Company CP in the Hotel Schmitz, a two-story structure in the middle of Hosingen. The 1st Platoon, K Company held the northern perimeter of the village. First Lieutenant Bernie Porter's 2nd Platoon covered the south end of town and 3rd Platoon was positioned 250 meters southeast of Hosingen on Steinmauer Hill. Support elements of M Company's 2nd Platoon were positioned to support both 2nd and 3rd Platoons of K Company, covering the southern and southeastern approaches to Hosingen.

A section of 81mm mortars was set up behind one of the buildings near the center of the village. A pair of .30-caliber machine guns from K Company's weapons platoon were placed in the northern end of Hosingen covering Skyline Drive, and its 60mm mortars were set up in a courtyard. Squad-strength OPs were maintained on Steinmauer Hill and in the water tower at the northeast edge of Hosingen. All in all, the village seemed to be well defended against just about anything the Germans might throw at it. Or so the men of K Company thought.

Captain Feiker returned to duty on December 6 and Flynn became his executive officer. GIs on the line had increasing indications that something was developing on the far side of the Our River—sounds of heavy vehicles, plus information from prisoners—but higher command failed to take the intelligence seriously.

By mid-December, on the other side of the Our, the German 26th Volksgrenadier Division (VGD) was preparing for operations against the Americans as part of the forthcoming Ardennes offensive. Plans called for Hosingen to receive the attention of an entire battalion.

The 26th VGD was considered to be the best infantry division of General Hasso-Eccard Freiherr von Manteuffel's Fifth Panzer Army. Twelve thousand men strong and under the command of Maj. Gen. Heinz Kokott, the 26th VGD's mission was to capture the positions held by the 110th, seize control of the bridges over the Clerf River, and then move on to Bastogne by the end of the second day of the offensive.

On the evening of December 15, K Company's southern OP picked up the sound of what were believed to be motors coming from the direction of the Our, but the sounds soon faded. As a precaution, the company's mortars were shifted to new positions.

Around 3 AM on December 16, elements of the 304th Panzergrenadier Regiment, 2nd Panzer Division and the 39th and 77th Volksgrenadier Regiments of 26th VGD began quietly crossing the Our River in rubber boats, hidden by a thick blanket of fog.

The 77th Volksgrenadier Regiment's mission was to bypass Hosingen and head for Drauffelt to seize the Clerf River bridges, which German armor planned to

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ABOVE: Members of a Volksgrenadier unit move through a Luxembourg forest during the opening hours of their surprise Ardennes Offensive, December 16, 1944. OPPOSITE: Four Sherman tanks with 76mm guns form a line along a snowy Luxembourg road. The 707th Tank Battalion helped bolster Flynn's defense of Hosingen—for a while.

cross by nightfall on December 16 if they were to take Bastogne the following day. Delays could be ill afforded.

American defenses were quietly surrounded by German units. Once in place, some of the Germans began attacking American outposts. But most of the German units waited for the artillery bombardment that would signal the beginning of the offensive.

At 5:30 AM, a freezing cold Saturday morning, GIs in the OP atop the water tower in the northeast corner of Hosingen noticed hundreds of "pinpoints of light" to the east. Seconds later, artillery shells began to splatter in Hosingen and the surrounding area, severing wire communications.

During the barrage, Lieutenant Flynn dashed to the north end of the village to check on 1st Platoon while Lieutenant Porter went to the south end to the 2nd Platoon. The 45-minute artillery barrage set five buildings on fire. "The town was pretty well lit up," Flynn recalled, illuminating the whole ridge top.

When the shelling ended, some members of K Company noted that shells had fallen in the area where the company mortars had been located a few hours before; luckily, no casualties had been suffered among the defenders.

Between 6:15 and 7:15 AM, the sound of troops moving could be heard to the north, but it was still too dark to see. At daylight, around 7:30, through the smoke and morning fog the GIs could make out shadows moving in the distance across Skyline Drive. Flynn ordered his men to open fire on the shadows. The machine guns knocked down quite a few Germans and interrupted their westward movement. The American fire was disciplined, the GIs not firing unless they were sure of their targets.

At the same time, Sergeant James Arbella, a 60mm mortar section leader of M Company, and Staff Sergeant Henry Shanabarger climbed the water tower where the two GIs of 1st Platoon were stationed as lookouts and gave their mortar crews direction as to targets along Skyline Drive, helping to pin down the Germans.

As the water tower lookouts scanned the area around the town and the fog lifted, they observed a company of white-clad German soldiers of the II Battalion, 77th Volksgrenadiers charging across open fields from the east. They quickly alerted the GIs on the ground. The combination of mortar shells, BARs, machine guns, and rifle fire shattered the enemy assault. The surviving Germans retreated, leaving behind scores of dead and wounded.

An initial rush of the 77th Grenadier Regiment along the Ober Eisenbach-Hosingen-Drauffelt road overran the outpost on Steinmauer Hill and cut off the 3rd Platoon, K Company and the antitank unit south of the village. Some of these troops were able to retreat to the west, while others continued to fight on until killed or captured.

Captain William Jarrett, commanding officer of B Company, 103rd Engineers, had climbed Hosingen's church steeple, then contacted Lieutenant James Morse, commanding a section of M Company 81mm mortars in the village and informed him of the targets. Morse's mortars went into action, pounding the Germans and temporarily halting their movement across Skyline Drive to the south of the village.

From his Hotel Schmitz CP, Captain Feiker requested artillery support, but the nearest artillery unit, Battery C, 109th Field Artillery Battalion, located directly to the west of the ridge, was also under attack by German infantry that had bypassed Hosingen. So the village's defenders had only their own mortars for support, as Captain Jarrett's engineers had not yet joined in the defense of the town.

When other German troops managed to penetrate the southern outskirts of Hosingen, Lieutenant Porter's men engaged them in house-to-house fighting. During the action, a German officer who possessed a map outlining the German XLVII Panzer Corps' attack plan all the way to Bastogne was captured.

Recognizing the significance of the map and that the attack was actually part of a much larger counteroffensive, Captain Feiker attempted to have a runner carry it to the regi-

mental CP at Clervaux. But by then there were too many Germans between the two towns, and the runner only made it a mile out of Hosingen before being forced to return.

Feiker then contacted Major Harold F. Milton, 3rd Battalion CO, at battalion headquarters to inform him of the situation and tell him that it was impossible to get the map to Colonel Hurley E. Fuller, commanding the 110th Infantry, in Clervaux.

Milton ordered Feiker to hold his position, promising that L Company, in reserve near the 3rd Battalion CP, would come forward to help and also bring up more ammunition; however, L Company became involved in its own fight and never reached Hosingen.

Sufficient information had reached Colonel Fuller and Maj. Gen. Norman D. Cota, the 28th Division's commanding officer, for them to realize that the 110th's line companies were facing a massive German assault and that most of their positions were surrounded or cut off.

Fuller tried to convince Cota to release his 2nd Battalion from reserve to bolster his positions around Clervaux, but Cota didn't want to commit his reserves so early in the battle. However, at 7 AM, the general alerted the 707th Tank Battalion to prepare to counterattack. By 9 AM, Major R.S. Garner and 16 Sherman tanks of the 707th's Companies A and B moved out from Drauffelt and Wilwerwiltz, heading for Clervaux to support the 110th.

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By 8 AM, Captain Jarrett and the officers of K Company concluded that the enemy might next attack the village from the west, so Jarrett sent his 1st Platoon, under Lieutenant Cary Hutter, to the western edge of the village, shielding the M Company mortar section. Jarrett's 2nd Platoon, led by Lieutenant John Pickering, set up a roadblock on the Skyline Drive at the southern edge of Hosingen.

The 3rd Platoon of engineers, under Lieutenant Charles Devlin, took up positions in the northeastern part of Hosingen, where they could provide fire support for the K Company outpost in the water tower. Jarrett moved his company CP to a hotel in the northern part of town between the left flank of the 3rd Platoon and the right flank of the 1st Platoon.

Meanwhile, moving beyond the range of the Hosingen weaponry, German infantry continued to bypass the village to the north and the south throughout the day.

When elements of the 707th Tank Battalion got to Clervaux, Colonel Fuller split the tank force into platoons and sent them forward. Part of B Company headed towards Munshausen and Marnach.

The tanks fought their way through the German infantry to the edge of Hosingen. When they reached the intersection of Skyline Drive on the south edge of the village around 1 PM, they took up defensive positions and stayed there for two hours but did not contact the troops in Hosingen.

At 3:15, 1st Lt. Robert Payne led the 707th's 3rd Platoon of A Company south along Skyline Drive from Marnach, which had just been retaken by an American counterattack. With machine guns blazing, Payne's tanks entered the north end of Hosingen at about 4 PM.

At about the same time that Payne's tanks arrived, the four Shermans of the 1st Platoon, B Company that had taken up position at the south end of the village suddenly pulled up stakes and headed south toward Hoscheid. Lieutenant Payne scrambled to get his tanks into defensive positions before dark.

Feiker sent three tanks, accompanied by infantrymen, to the high ground on Steinmauer Hill to help slow the enemy traffic coming up the Ober Eisenbach road; Payne moved his own tank to cover the road to the south of the village. The remaining Shermans positioned themselves to cover Skyline Drive to the north.

At 4 PM, German engineers finally finished construction of bridges over the Our at Gemünd, Dasbürg, and Ober Eisenbach, permitting German armor to cross the river. The Germans desperately needed to eliminate the stubborn American position at Hosingen, regain valuable lost time, and clear the 26th VGD's main supply route. So, at 5 PM, three panzers from the Panzer Lehr Division's armored reconnaissance battalion, Kampfgruppe von Fallois, were to be sent against Hosingen.

The Germans were torn between committing the unit to seize Bastogne or using it against Hosingen. To assist Kampfgruppe von Fallois, General Kokott called on part of his division reserve, the I Battalion, 78th Grenadier Regiment. The bat-

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A GI calmly loads his M-1 Garand near two dead Germans whose white camouflage clothing did them no good.

talion assembled two kilometers west of Ober Eisenbach while the II Battalion bypassed the town and headed for the Clerf crossing at Wilwerwiltz. Two German panzers appeared on the high ground on Steinmauer Hill and fired on the three Shermans there, forcing the tanks to withdraw into Hosingen near 2nd Platoon, K Company.

German traffic resumed on the Ober Eisenbach-Bockholtz road and passed Hosingen after the three Shermans withdrew. But Payne's crews spent the evening periodically sneaking out of their defilade positions, lobbing a few shells at the Germans, and then racing back to cover.

The Germans continued firing on Hosingen all night. German patrols were also spotted moving close to the village in preparation for another assault. In the morning the main German attack struck the north part of the village in the area of the 1st Platoon, near the water tower.

The Germans pushed forward, disregarding their losses, capturing a few houses on the outskirts of the village. Vicious and often hand-to-hand fighting continued until around 10 PM.

Lieutenant Flynn became involved in one of these skirmishes, killing a German officer. Searching the officer's body, he discovered a document that provided details on American positions along the front line; he reported this to Captain Feiker.

Throughout the action, the GIs in the water tower continued to provide the location of the Germans to the 81mm and 60mm mortar crews.

Back in his CP, Feiker assessed the situation. Even as the fighting died down, German patrols continued to work their way to the edge of the village. Amazingly, there were few American casualties. As the day ended, the American troops in Hosingen were still holding.

Just before dawn on December 17, small groups of German troops from the 78th Grenadiers moved to the high ground on Steinmauer Hill and began to fire into K Company's positions.

German commanders were growing increasingly impatient as the Americans continued to impede their supply route, restricting the flow of matériel to units attempting to cross the Clerf River, delaying their advance. They therefore made the decision to divert Panthers and Mark IV panzers from the 2nd Panzer Division and move them south to help the II Battalion, 78th Grenadier Regiment assault the village.

About 9 AM, with the panzers and grenadiers in place, artillery began to rain down on Hosingen. Once again, the town was set ablaze. Captain Jarrett moved his Engineer's CP to the basement of a nearby dairy.

As the artillery fire lifted, the Germans began another assault on the village perimeter from several directions. The Americans' already depleted ammunition supply was running low.

The fighting lasted for an hour, but the Germans were again unsuccessful in dislodging the Americans, suffering heavy casualties in the process and then pulling back around 10 AM, leaving the ground strewn with wounded and dead.

About an hour later, two half-tracks were observed moving rapidly down Skyline Drive from the north, the lead vehicle being an American half-track. But it was not clear as to the identity of the second vehicle. Flynn and Payne's men held their fire to see what would happen next. Payne cautiously kept his tank in its defilade position, awaiting developments.

When the half-tracks were about 1,000 yards from the American positions, the two wheeled about and sped back up the road. The Sherman crew identified the second half-track as German. Still suspicious of what the Germans were up to, the GIs kept watch and shortly afterward the lookouts in the water tower sighted two German Panthers hiding to the northwest in a position from which they could have blasted the Sherman had it revealed its location.

The German commanders were increasingly annoyed at the impact the water tower OP was having on their operations. At 1 PM, the two Panthers opened fire on the tower, but the Americans suffered no casualties within the hardened structure, the outer walls of thick concrete supported by a steel shaft column enclosing a circular steel stairway in the center.

Before long, six more Panthers and Mark IVs from the 2nd Panzer Division, pulled from their position three miles to the north in Marnach, joined the other German panzers. As they fired at Hosingen, German small-arms fire once again increased as grenadiers

advanced from the north.

Although U.S. machine guns and mortars pinned down the Germans to the north, more grenadiers attacked from the west. Captain Feiker tried to send bazooka teams to drive off the Panthers, but German small-arms fire prevented the Yanks from moving beyond the edge of the village.

The fighting continued all afternoon. The eight panzers began to work their way closer to the northern edge of the village behind supporting infantry, wary of the Shermans and possible bazooka teams. Buildings in Hosingen were slowly and methodically reduced to rubble.

Lieutenant Payne shifted his Shermans from south to north and west to engage the panzers. Flynn's 1st Platoon fired on the attackers while mortar shells, still directed by observers in the water tower, pinned down the enemy. Despite the Americans continuing to inflict significant casualties, more grenadiers kept coming from the west.

When communications with the water tower were lost, Sergeant Lloyd Everson, in position a few hundred yards south of the tower, ran a new phone wire. Dodging a hail of fire that kicked up the snow beside him as he ran, Everson made it to the tower only to find that the wire had been cut about 15 or 20 feet from the door of the structure. Exposing himself once again, he was able to repair the phone line.

German infantry worked their way into the village from the north and the west, their numbers too great to be stopped. They were finally successful in taking out both of 1st Platoon's machine guns covering Skyline Drive as well as a .50-caliber machine gun. Eventually, all the 60mm mortars either ran out of ammunition or were destroyed, and even rifle ammunition was running out.

The water tower went next.

One of the panzers fired two rounds at the tower. Not satisfied with the results, it moved to a new position. Sergeant Everson, firing at the approaching German infantry, watched the tank out of the corner of his eye. The next tank shell exploded and blew Everson down the stairs. Stunned, he was unable to see or hear. When his sight and hearing returned, he found a German pointing a machine pistol at him.

A German medic bandaged wounds to Everson's face and hands. Two Germans marched several GIs they'd taken prisoner about a hundred yards with their hands over their heads. Everson noted by his watch that it was 4:15 PM.

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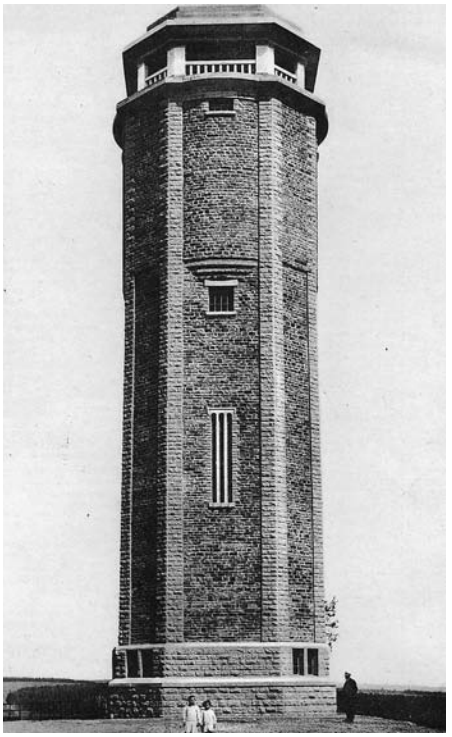
Courtesy of the Archives of Hosingen, Luxembourg



ABOVE: A prewar photograph of Hosingen's water tower, which became an American observation post and a focal point of the battle for Hosingen. LEFT: A Sherman tank from the 707th Tank Battalion lying on its side behind a knocked-out German Sturmgeschütz III at the cemetery outside Clervaux are mute testimony to the heavy fighting throughout Luxembourg.

During the fighting, Flynn discovered that the radio in the 1st Platoon CP had been damaged. To report 1st Platoon's situation and the enemy attack on the north edge of town to Captain Feiker, he ran a gauntlet of fire through the rubble-strewn streets, even crawling at times to avoid enemy tank fire. He dodged bullets and shells all the way to Feiker's CP, where he learned that the Germans was moving into the southern end of Hosingen.

By dusk the Germans were inside the town, and fighting became house to house and hand to hand. When forced to withdraw, the GIs set booby-traps that inflicted casualties or started fires. The fires lit up the fields around the village, exposing the Germans to gunfire. But despite American efforts, the Germans pressed forward as their numbers in the village continued to grow.

Gradually, most of the men from 1st and 2nd Platoons of K Company, Lieutenant Payne's Sherman crews, and the Engineer's 3rd Platoon under Lieutenant Devlin, worked their way back to the vicinity of the Hotel Schmitz. However, Captain Jarrett's 1st Platoon, under Lieutenant Hutter, was now isolated in a small pocket to the west, Flynn's 1st Platoon had a few small groups of men cut off in the north, and Lieutenant Pickering's 2nd Platoon had individuals and groups of two or three still scattered throughout the town.

Payne's five Shermans had limited movement so they set up a perimeter defense at Feiker's CP. Two tanks were knocked out by antitank rockets or panzerfausts.

Feiker met with his officers to assess the situation: small pockets of his and Jarrett's men were cut off, their ammunition was almost gone, there were only three operating tanks, and there was no artillery support or relief force on the way.

At one point, two groups of grenadiers stormed Captain Jarrett's command post in the dairy, but he and his men fought them off.

At 4 AM on Monday, December 18, Captain Feiker once again spoke with Major Milton, explaining K Company's situation and asking for instructions. Milton ordered the Hosingen defenders to infiltrate westward through the German lines in small groups while it was still dark.

But Feiker said it was too late: "We can't get out, but these Krauts are going to pay a stiff price.…" Milton then told Feiker that he and his men should do whatever they saw fit.

Feiker promptly called together his officers. K Company had only two rounds of smoke ammunition left for the 81mm mortars, the last 60mm mortar had been knocked out, and rifle ammunition was nearly gone. They agreed with Feiker that there was little chance of escaping through the German lines.

Flynn recommended that they surrender so the men would have a better chance of survival. Feiker conceded and the other officers agreed. Feiker then radioed Milton to tell him of their decision. In the meantime, all the engineer trucks and road equipment were burned, K Company vehicles and their garage were set on fire, the tanks were rendered useless, and all weapons were destroyed.

Between 8 and 9 AM, German snipers and panzers once again began to fire on Hosingen. To prevent additional American casualties, Captains Feiker and Jarrett had a white flag hung from a building on the north end of town and had white panels hung on the tanks. The Germans ceased fire immediately. Together the American commanders walked out into the open to meet with the ranking German officer on the scene, a colonel from the 78th Grenadiers, and discussed surrender.

At 10 AM, Feiker and Jarrett returned at gunpoint, accompanied by German officers and troops. They told their men to come out with hands on their helmets and to assemble in front of the church.

Out of a force of some 300 defenders, casualties included just seven killed and 10 wounded, two seriously. The defenders had inflicted an estimated 2,000 casualties on the Germans, including more than 300 killed.

The Germans were surprised when the American defenders gathered in the street. They could hardly believe that such a small force had put up such a fight against some 5,000 Germans and suffered so few casualties while inflicting such enormous damage on their forces.

Hosingen was the last of the 110th Infantry's garrison towns to surrender, having held out and delayed the Germans for 2½ days, giving First Army time to rush troops to Bastogne.

The Germans searched the GIs, taking anything of value. The American officers could only watch in silence as their men were yelled at, slapped, and stripped of their valuables. Many of the enlisted men were also forced to give up their overcoats or field jackets, overshoes, and exchange their boots for the inferior, ill-fitting boots of the German soldiers. The situation was tense as two of the defenseless GIs were shot by one of the Germans.

Lieutenant Flynn and the other American officers were taken to a house at the south

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American soldiers captured during the early days of the Bulge are marched away from the front toward captivity in Germany. Thousands of Americans were taken prisoner during the fighting in Belgium and Luxembourg.

Courtesy of the Archives of Hosingen, Luxembourg

The devastated center of Hosingen with the Hotel Schmitz (right) where K Company had its command post during the battle.

end of Hosingen where they were searched and then interrogated about the location of minefields and booby traps—German vehicles having detonated several mines.

The enlisted men were moved out into the open fields around the town to help with the dead and wounded. Medic Wayne Erickson was one of the men forced to help bury some of the 300 dead Germans, then care for the wounded prisoners.

Once the officers rejoined the group, the POWs were corralled into a fenced-in area while the Germans tried to figure out what to do with them. It was late in the day when they were finally marched to Eisenbach and locked in a small church for the night. Most of the GIs had not slept for three days and were exhausted.

The Germans had promised a hot meal at Eisenbach but that did not happen. The POWs did their best to get some sleep on the floor or church pews, but the building had no heat.

The next morning the POWs were given only a small cup of hot coffee for breakfast. Standing outside the Eisenbach church, they saw large numbers of heavy artillery pieces moving up the road from the south on the west side of the Our River and realized that the Germans had captured all the frontline towns that had been held by the 28th Infantry Division.

Once again, the K Company prisoners were formed into columns to continue their march to Prüm Germany, a 24½-mile, two-day journey. When they arrived in Prüm late on December 20, other prisoners were added to the group from the 3rd Platoon of K Company, which had been overrun on December 16 on Steinmauer Hill. POW columns from both the 28th and the 106th Divisions also converged in Prüm for transport to prison camps.

The men did not get much rest as the Germans rerouted them to Gerolstein, another 12½ miles away. The weather continued to grow colder. The winter of 1944-1945 would prove to be one of the coldest on record in Germany and would take a devastating toll on the POWs.

The prisoners did not receive any rations until the following day, December 21, when they were issued a small amount of hot soup upon their arrival in Gerolstein. They were starving and what they were given did little to fill their empty stomachs.

In Gerolstein, they were then issued some straw to sleep on and were locked in an icehouse overnight. As more prisoners were added to the group, Captain Feiker instructed his men not to speak to anyone they did not know. He was concerned that the Germans would mix spies in with the prisoners in an attempt to gather intelligence. Thankful to be off their feet and out of the winter weather, the men tried to rest and tend to their aches and pains as best they could.

The next day, the Germans issued a two-day food ration for their next move. It consisted of two packages of German field biscuits per man and a can of cheese to be split between six men. The POWs were divided into officers and enlisted men and then split into groups of about 50 to be loaded into boxcars, which were then locked.

Lieutenant Flynn's train was headed for Frankfurt, Germany, 147 miles away. The guards rode in separate cars and dismounted to patrol whenever the train stopped. The train pulled into the Frankfurt marshaling yards later that day. The POWs remained locked inside the boxcars on a rail siding for two more days—waiting, worrying, and wondering—and it was now Christmas Eve, 1944.

It had been nine long days since the Germans' Ardennes counteroffensive had begun, and a break in the weather finally came on December 24. The U.S. Eighth Air Force and England's Royal Air Force together launched massive air attacks intending to cut German communications and transportation routes. As a result, 143 planes headed for Frankfurt.

Air raid sirens began to wail and bombs began exploding throughout the city. A number of boxcars were hit not far from where Flynn's car was sitting, sending shock waves and shrapnel throughout the rail yard. The prisoners were terrified; they had no idea if the next bomb would land directly on them. In a panic, one man tried to escape out a small window in the boxcar but was immediately shot and killed by a German guard. Fortunately, there were several trains parked between Flynn's boxcar and the exploding bombs, absorbing the shrapnel.

The next day, Christmas, the POWs were given one Red Cross parcel per five men to share in lieu of German rations. The following day, the trains finally headed northeast out of Frankfurt for Bad

Orb, Germany, and Muhlberg, in Poland.

On December 26, their train pulled into Bad Orb, where Flynn and hundreds of other GIs were organized into columns and marched up a hill to Stalag IX-B. Flynn's group was the first wave of American soldiers to be sent there, and the camp authorities were unprepared for them.

Flynn was one of 250 officers jammed into a barracks they would temporarily occupy before being moved to another camp. Most of the men were issued a single blanket that was worn and threadbare. Some men had no blankets and many had to sleep crowded together on the bare wood floor.

Conditions at Stalag IX-B were terrible; it was considered one of the worst German POW camps that held American prisoners. Many of the rooms had broken windows and the wood or cardboard covering the holes did little to keep out the below-freezing weather. There were only three primitive latrine houses and three latrine trenches. There was no hot water, soap, or washrooms. The men had to make do with just one or two cold water taps in each barracks.

German rations were minimal. The POWs typically received a coffee-type beverage for breakfast. Some type of vegetable soup was served at noon. Occasionally, a dead horse would be dragged through the camp, meaning the prisoners might find a piece of meat in their soup. Even a dead bug in the soup was deemed acceptable—it was just another form of protein to the starving POWs. Late in the afternoon, each man received one-sixth of a loaf of bread, a small portion of margarine, and occasionally, a little cheese or meat—usually horsemeat.

In compliance with the Geneva Convention, the officers were separated from the enlisted men. Officers were not allowed on work details outside of camp, which meant there were no additional opportunities to supplement the minimal rations they were given, nor chances to gather firewood for the stoves in their barracks.

Not everyone from Hosingen was sent to Stalag IX-B. Captain Jarrett, 103rd Engineers, Colonel Fuller, 110th Infantry,

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Aerial view of the Stalag IX-B POW camp atop a hill overlooking the town of Bad Orb, Germany.

and other officers of the 110th were taken to a camp in Poland: Stalag IV-B at Mulburg, where they were liberated by the Russians in late January 1945 after just a month of captivity.

The Germans divided their POW camps into Stalags for enlisted men and Oflags for officers. On January 11, 1945, Flynn and 452 officers, 12 noncommissioned officers, and 18 privates were relocated to Oflag XIII-B, 34 miles south near Hammelburg.

Flynn and his group were the first Americans to be sent to this camp as well. They were lodged in premises formerly occupied by Serbian POWs.

Flynn kept track of the days spent in captivity. As mid-January approached, it would be his wife Anna's 25th birthday. This was not how he had pictured them celebrating. He knew she was probably worried about him and wondering if he was still alive.

The Hammelburg camp was old and rundown. The International Red Cross had been unable to improve living conditions. Only one hot shower was provided a month and lice were prevalent in all the barracks. The lack of hot water to clean kitchen utensils led to frequent outbreaks of dysentery, further weakening many men in the camp. Many POWs lost more than 50 pounds during captivity and their muscle strength deteriorated significantly, leading to immobility or, in some cases, death. Flynn was no exception, dropping from 165 to 125 pounds on his 5-foot, 10-inch frame.

Barrack temperatures averaged about 20 degrees Fahrenheit. throughout most of the winter so the POWs—40 per room—tried to keep from freezing to death by wearing all the clothing they could find. Life at Oflag XIIIB was reduced to the basics: scrounging enough food to stay alive and finding ways to keep warm.

The prisoners also feared for their lives after several men were shot and killed by guards for minor offenses. The POWs were finally allowed to send their first Red Cross cards to their families, but the camp never received any incoming mail.

Flynn kept his thoughts to himself as he found it difficult to establish friendships. Despite the cold, he preferred to be outside as much as possible, spending his time talking through the fence to the Serbian officers in Oflag XIII-A. He developed a friendship with one of them and, as a token of friendship, the man handed him a beautiful, hand-embroidered silk scarf through the fence—a gift he would keep for many years after the war.

On March 27, 1945, General George S. Patton Jr. sent a 293-man task force with two

companies of Sherman tanks, under Captain Abraham Baum from the 4th Armored Division, 50 miles into enemy territory in an attempt to rescue his son-in-law, Lt. Col. John K. Waters, and liberate the Hammelburg camp.

After the tanks broke down the camp's gate, Colonel Paul Goode, the senior ranking officer at the camp, let each man decide whether they wanted to try and make it back to the American lines with Baum's unit, strike out cross-country on their own, or stay at the camp if they were too weak to travel, hopeful that other American units would be coming soon.

Flynn and four other officers decided to try for the American lines on their own and made plans to head southwest; Flynn secured a compass and a case of C rations and they headed through the woods toward Gemünden.

They soon came upon a small house near the edge of a stone quarry where an older German couple lived. With Flynn acting as interpreter (he had taken German in high school), they convinced the couple that they meant no harm and that they were only trying to get back to the American lines. The woman gave them milk and the first good cup of coffee they'd had in months while she heated some of their rations on the stove. The elderly man gave them a map and information to help them with their escape.

After evading capture for three days and traveling more than 13 miles, they were recaptured on March 30 by a search party looking for escaped prisoners. Once again, Flynn's high-school German came in handy as he explained that they were unarmed POWs and that they had become lost in the woods. They were returned to Hammelburg where they learned that Task Force Baum had been shot up trying to get back to the American lines and that all the prisoners had either been recaptured or killed in the fighting.

The evacuation of the Hammelburg camp had been under way for several days since their escape, as the Germans moved the prisoners farther into the interior of Germany to keep them away from the advancing Allied armies.

The following morning, Flynn and all the remaining POWs were loaded into unmarked boxcars, en route to Nuremberg. Approximately eight miles outside of Hammelburg, American P-51s strafed their unmarked train. The fighters flew the length of the train, shooting up the engine at the front. As the train slowed to a stop, Flynn and the other POWs convinced their guards to open the doors before the fighters came back. The guards jumped out first, and the POWs followed, taking cover away from the train. The fighters returned to rake the train again, but the men were far enough away by then to be safe.

National Archives

An American Sherman tank of Task Force Baum crashes through a gate at the Hammelburg POW camp during Patton's abortive attempt to rescue American soldiers and his son-in-law, Lt. Col. John K. Waters. Thomas Flynn was one of the POWs held at Hammelburg.

The senior U.S. and British officers protested that their men would not ride any farther unless the train was plainly marked as a POW train. The German commander then gave the men the choice of walking or riding the remaining 90 miles. The majority chose to walk to Nuremberg.

The warmer spring weather made the march much easier. Flynn was happy to be out from behind the barbed-wire fences and chose to be a straggler at the end of the column, walking as slowly as the guards would let him in order to delay their arrival at the next camp. Anything was better than confinement.

When Flynn's group reached Nuremberg and Stalag Luft III, he learned that the first group of American prisoners evacuated from Hammelburg had included Captain Feiker, but that Feiker had been killed during an Allied air raid of Nuremberg on April 5 as their column was being marched through the city.

Stalag Luft III had been so badly damaged by air raids that Flynn's group was only kept at there for two days. Flynn was marched through Nuremberg en route to Stalag VII-A in Moosburg, another 90 miles away. By this time, American fighter planes and bombers had destroyed much of Nuremberg so the POWs, especially those who were pilots, were met by angry and hostile mobs as they were marched through the bombed-out streets.

Flynn understood what the civilians were saying and told all the pilots around him to hide the pilot wings on their uniforms. When a group of civilians would

press too close, Flynn would point to the crossed rifles insignia on his uniform and tell them, "fuss soldaten" (foot soldiers or infantry). He was able to save the pilots in his group from harm in this way, and they made it safely through the city without injury. Some POWs in other groups were not so lucky and were pelted with stones by the mobs.

Near exhaustion, Flynn lost track of time on the march to Moosburg. The prisoners walked as slowly as the German guards would allow in an attempt to prolong the journey. By this time, both prisoners and guards were scrounging for food from the Bavarian farmers, and thanks to warmer weather, they were able to sleep in haystacks in the fields at night.

Yet, they were still not safe. They were once again attacked by an American fighter plane near a railroad overpass. Flynn wasn't sure if they had been the primary target this time, but some POWs at the front of the column were injured. Flynn was content to be one of the stragglers at the rear of the line.

Flynn's POW column arrived at Stalag VII-A about April 15. The camp was meant to hold 3,000 prisoners but, as of mid-April, the population had swelled to more than 100,000. There were men from every nation Germany had fought for the past five years.

After Flynn and the other POWs were shown their billets, American and British airmen there gave each of the new arrivals a Red Cross package. This was the first time in four months of captivity that he had received a package just for himself. The airmen shared rumors that Hitler had ordered all American officers in the camp killed rather than surrendering them to any liberators.

On April 28, Flynn and the other prisoners heard artillery fire in the distance to the southwest. By sunrise the next morning, sounds of an approaching armored column could be heard, sounds that excited Flynn and the rest of the prisoners.

With the advancing American Army nearby, SS troops began to fire their weapons into the camp in an attempt to carry out Hitler's orders. The camp guards told the POWs to stay inside with their heads down as the prison guards and the German Army fought off the Gestapo and SS and saved the prisoners' lives.

The fighting was over in less than an hour, and Flynn soon felt the vibration of tanks approaching. It didn't take long for the sound of the tanks to be drowned out by the sounds of euphoria erupting from the men in Stalag VII-A.

The Shermans of the 14th Armored Division crashed through the fences of the compound and were engulfed by a sea of ragged, emaciated POWs. When the camp commandant surrendered to Brig. Gen. Charles H. Karlstad, 14th Armored Division, the Americans assumed control of the camp.

As Flynn joined the celebration, he witnessed 1st Lt. Martin Allain, a bomber pilot who had been a POW for more than two years, reveal a treasured American flag he had been hiding for most of that time. When Allain climbed up the camp flagpole with Old Glory in hand, the entire camp went silent as he replaced the ugly swastika with his beautiful Stars and Stripes at 1 PM on April 29, 1945.

Regardless of nationality, every man immediately came to attention and saluted the American flag. The prisoners were overcome with the emotion that most had locked away for months, if not years, and almost every eye filled with tears. They were safe at last and going home.

With Stalag VII-A, the last POW camp to be liberated, the American Army now had the job of not only feeding the starving men but providing medical attention, clothing, and transportation and helping the troops of other nations as well.

The next day, April 30, Hitler committed suicide. General Patton arrived at the camp on May 1, where he spoke briefly to the men and shook a few hands.

Lieutenant Flynn was one of the first officers to be interviewed at Moosburg by Army Field Historian Captain William K. Dunkerly about the Battle of the Bulge and how he and the other POWs were treated during their captivity. These interviews are housed in the National Archives.

Flynn then had his first plane ride in a C-47 on May 7, en route to the 195th General Hospital outside of Paris. Six days later, Flynn boarded the merchant ship *John Erisco* and sailed for New York. From there he would go to his oldest brother Bill's place in Chicago.

Anna received a telegram from the War Department on May 21 telling her that her husband had been liberated from a POW camp. Without telling anyone, or turning in her resignation at the hospital where she was working, Anna immediately packed her bags and left Minnesota to meet her husband in Chicago.

As they entered New York harbor, Flynn watched eagerly as the ship passed all of the familiar landmarks of home. Later that evening he walked in the door of his mother's Manhattan apartment, and the next day he caught the train to Chicago, where Anna was waiting for him.

Flynn was awarded the Bronze Star and Purple Heart with Oakleaf Cluster for his actions in the Hürtgen Forest and the Battle of the Bulge and promoted to captain. He was honorably discharged in January 1946 and attended Iowa State University on the GI Bill while his wife worked as an RN at a local hospital.

He graduated with a degree in veterinary medicine in 1950 and established his practice in Anna's hometown of Kimballton, Iowa. Tom and Anna raised eight children, seven of whom earned college degrees and one who served four years in the Air Force. Tom Flynn was very involved in the town's civic activities and with the Kimballton Volunteer Fire Department, serving 41 years as a fire fighter, 27 years as chief.

Thomas Flynn passed away in November 1993. The following year, the Kimballton Fire Department honored Tom's memory and dedication to serving the community by having his name inscribed on the Iowa Firefighters Memorial in Coralville, Iowa. □

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Following the failure to knock out the RAF during the Battle of Britain, Hitler switched tactics, hoping to beat the British into submission by pummeling England from the air. Here a Heinkel He-111Z bomber flies over London's East End on the Thames River, September 7, 1940, the first day of the 37-week-long "Blitz." INSET: To warn of possible German invasion, Royal Navy motor torpedo boats patrol the English Channel, 1940.

HOW "THE FEW" SAVED BRITAIN

It may have been the Royal Navy, rather than the Royal Air Force, that persuaded Hitler to abandon his plans to invade Britain.

BY MARK SIMMONS

THE LEGEND OF 1940, "THEIR FINEST HOUR," HAS BECOME ALMOST considered fact in Britain. Many felt, as they saw it at the time, the Germans merely had to turn up on her shores for Britain's defeat. Indeed, strong opinion in the United States, too, felt it was only a matter of time before Britain and her empire would fall to the jackbooted Nazis.

Both: Imperial War Museum

It was often said at the time, and afterward in memoires, that "Britain had nothing." But average citizens knew little about the real situation, only what they saw: the antics of the Civil Defence volunteers, later to become the Home Guard, "Dad's Army" parading with broom handles. Or the newsreels depicting a defeated army plucked from the beaches of Dunkirk by the little ships. And later they witnessed the vapor trails in the skies above southern England as the RAF fighter pilots—"the few"—took on the mighty Luftwaffe, the world's most powerful air force.

Yet, on the other side of the hill, the Germans, after their stunning victory against France and much of Western Europe, were as confused in victory as the British were in defeat. For them there were many problems in taking on Britain and her empire. On June 30, 1940, Maj. Gen. Alfred Jodl, Hitler's closest military adviser, expressed the view that final German victory was inevitable and "only a matter of time." Yet this was a simplified view. Vice Admiral Kurt Assman of the naval staff was nearer reality when he sarcastically dismissed this view with, "We Germans could not simply swim over."

On May 21, when Hitler met with Grand Admiral Erich Raeder, commander of the Kriegsmarine, a proposed invasion of Britain was first raised and briefly discussed. The admiral asked beforehand how the war was going. All Hitler would tell him was "the

big battle was in full swing." Operation Yellow, the attack on France and the Low Countries, was not expected to bring about a rapid collapse of the Allies.

Hitler showed no interest in the invasion project and, at their next meeting on June 4, by which date the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) had been evacuated from the beaches of Dunkirk, the subject was not even mentioned.

Even after the defeat of France, Hitler did not exploit the advantage and attack Britain. Luftwaffe aircraft were ordered not to infiltrate British airspace. The mood in Berlin as well as in the Army was that the war was virtually over. Most felt the British could be induced to make peace. When the "crazy English" rejected Hitler's peace offer speech in the Reichstag on July 19, the practical problems of an invasion began to loom.

On July 16, 1940, Hitler issued his directive No. 16, which began: "As England, in spite of the hopelessness of her military position, has so far shown herself unwilling to come to any compromise, I have decided to begin to prepare for, and if necessary to carry out, an invasion of England."

It was nearly six weeks since the "Miracle of Dunkirk," when 338,226 Allied troops were evacuated to Britain, although losing all their heavy equipment, in Operation Dynamo. Some indeed were brought to Britain in small boats and ships, but the vast majority were brought off in destroyers and transports, carried out under fairly continuous air attack.

There were then no plans in the German High Command of the Armed Forces (OKW) for an invasion of Britain. The Kriegsmarine had produced a study in November 1939 of the problems that such an operation might pose. It identified two preconditions—air and naval superiority—of which the Germans, in 1940, had neither.

The Kriegsmarine was poorly equipped for such an undertaking. It had no purpose-built landing craft worth mentioning. It had suffered heavily in the Norway campaign. All it had available was one heavy cruiser, the *Hipper,* three light cruisers, and nine destroyers. All other major warships had been damaged or were not yet commissioned.

National Archives

Imperial War Museum

TOP: Hermann Göring (second from left) was confident that his Luftwaffe could destroy both the RAF and British morale, opening way for a seaborne invasion. ABOVE: King George VI chats with a member of the Home Guard, Britain's last line of defense, in Kent, August 10, 1940.

Besides, the British fleet was overwhelmingly powerful. The Germans might be able to flank the invasion sea lanes with mines, but sea minefields were notoriously hard to maintain and the Royal Navy would certainly target this operation.

Everything, then, depended on the Luftwaffe being able to deal with the Royal Navy and RAF—and still support their landing forces. But could the Luftwaffe, with all its bluster, led by its commander Hermann Göring, who did not even attend any preinvasion meetings but who boasted it could knock Britain out single-handed, defeat the Royal Navy? Certainly the German naval commanders were not confident in the Luftwaffe's ability to perform all these tasks.

At this stage the invasion was codenamed Operation Lion but was soon changed to Sea Lion (Seelöwe).

For their part, the Wehrmacht commanders wanted to land on a broad front stretching from Ramsgate near Dover to west of Portsmouth and the Isle of Wight. The first wave would consist of some 90,000 men landing in three main areas; by the third day the Germans expected to have 260,000 men ashore.

The Kriegsmarine planners had grave misgivings, though, favoring postponement until the spring of 1941, arguing that the Navy was still far too weak. They also pointed to the fact that the weather in the English Channel was unpredictable and presented great hazards for their motley invasion fleet, none of which was purpose-built for the task. The Army wanted to land at dawn; the tides on August 20-26 or September 19-26, 1940, would be suitable. The Navy, seemingly losing the argument on postponement, could not be ready for August, so September was chosen. Even in the best of conditions, the river barges that made up most of the invasion fleet would be slower crossing the Channel than Caesar's legions 2,000 years earlier.

The Kriegsmarine expected to lose 10 percent of its lift capacity due to accidents and breakdowns before the Royal Navy and RAF took action. Raeder used these arguments to insist on a narrow-front invasion from Dover to Eastbourne, adding that the Luftwaffe would be unable to protect the long front.

Colonel General Franz Halder wrote in his diary that the Army rejected the Navy's plea for a short front. "From the Army's point of view," he said, "I regard it as complete sui-

cide." However, Hitler would back the Navy view.

At the beginning of August, Hitler directed the Luftwaffe to "strike down" the RAF. For the coming battle the Germans had some 2,500 serviceable aircraft: 1,000 medium bombers (He-III, Do-17, and Ju-88); about 260 Ju-87 Stuka dive bombers; and approximately 1,000 fighters—800 Me-109s and 220 twin-engine Me-110s. These were divided into three air fleets, or Luftflotte.

Luftflotte 2, based in Holland, Belgium, and northern France, was commanded by the capable Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, a former Army officer who would later command field armies. Luftflotte 3 was to the south and west of France under Field Marshal Hugo Sperrle, who had commanded German air forces during the Spanish Civil War. Luftflotte 5, based in Norway and Denmark and commanded by Colonel General Hans-Jürgen Stumpff, would create a diversion by attacking northern England.

The Luftwaffe had been one of the main keys to German victories in Poland, Norway, and France. However, its main role was supporting the army but not as an independent strategic air force. It lacked long-range heavy bombers and long-range fighters. It was severely limited by the endurance of the main fighter, the Me-109, of about 80 minutes. Having to cross and recross the Channel, it could barely stay in British air space for more than 20 minutes.

The longer range Me-110 proved unable to hold its own against the more maneuverable British fighters. Thus the bombers that needed protection were restricted to the fighters' range and even then not enough Me 109s were available. As each bomber required an escort of two fighters, only about 400 bombers could be deployed at any one time. However, the Luftwaffe's commanders were basking in their recent victories and overestimated their own capabilities.

Hermann Göring had no real ability to command a modern air force, being more at home with politics; he spent much of the upcoming battle in his country estate at Karinhall. He had such contempt for the RAF he felt it would be destroyed in four days in the south of England.

However, the RAF had been preparing for this type of battle for several years, and by 1940 a sophisticated system of air defense was largely in place. At its backbone was a chain of 52 radar stations covering the coast from Pembrokeshire to the Shetlands. Although not complete by 1940, the system was still able to give good information on the bearing, altitude, and numbers of enemy aircraft from about 70 miles out. Thus, the defending fighters could be guided to the targets, relieving them of the need to maintain time-consuming standing patrols. Without radar, the RAF would have been seriously strained, to say the least.

At the end of July 1940, the RAF had about 1,200 aircraft, over half of which were fighters. Most of the 55 fighter squadrons were equipped with Hurricanes or Spitfires, both of which were armed with eight wing-mounted Browning .303-caliber machine guns; a two-second burst could blow an enemy aircraft out of the sky. The Hurricane was the mainstay of Fighter Command. Highly maneuverable,

Saluting sailors welcome Hitler aboard the German battleship *Tirpitz* at Gotenhafen, May 5, 1941. Having no experience with large-scale seaborne invasions, the Germans were unsure how to carry out Operation Sea Lion, the planned invasion of Britain.

National Archives

it was nevertheless inferior in performance to the Me-109.

The Spitfire, on the other hand, had a similar performance to the Me-109, although the system of direct fuel injection gave the German machine the edge.

Nevertheless, aircraft production in Britain was outstripping that in Germany, producing twice as many fighters in June-September 1940: 470 Hurricanes and Spitfires to fewer than 200 Me-109s.

Yet it was the pilot situation that would be most critical in the coming battle. Some 300 British fighter pilots had been lost to Fighter Command during the Battle of France, when the BEF tried to hold off the German invaders. At the beginning of the Battle of Britain, then, Fighter Command was 154 pilots below complement.

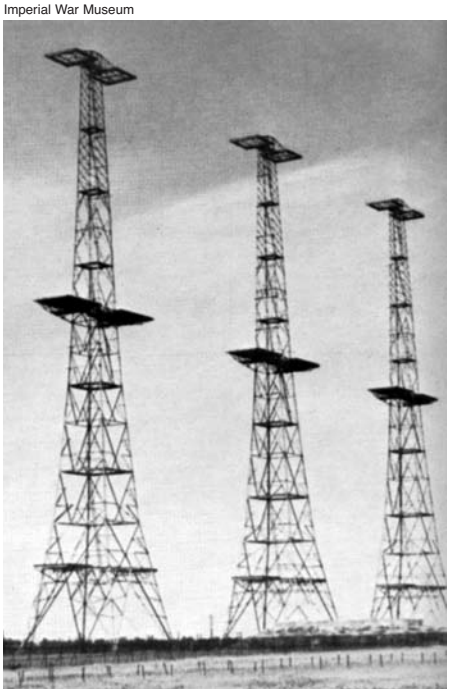
In the coming battle, the remaining pilots would be fighting over their own territory, so RAF pilots who bailed out or crash landed could be quickly returned to the fight. Also to Fighter Command's aid came welcome reinforcements from the occupied countries and the Commonwealth and volunteers from the United States (the American Eagle Squadrons).

Another factor was that the RAF's Fighter Command was led by highly professional men such as Air Chief Marshal Sir Hugh Dowding. Reserved and dedicated, Dowding was a complete contrast to the bombastic Göring.

Fighter Command was divided into four groups. No. 10 Group covered southwest England and Wales under Air Vice Marshal Sir Quinton Brand. No. 11 Group covered London and the southeast under Air Vice Marshal Keith Park, a New Zealander. No. 12 Group covered the Midlands under Air Vice Marshal Trafford Leigh-Mallory, and No .13, under Air Vice Marshal R.E. Saul, was responsible for Scotland and the north.

Park's No. 11 Group, which would bear the brunt of the battle, had seven sector stations at Tanmere, Northolt, North Weald, Debden, Hornchurch, Biggin Hill, and Kenley. The other groups were also divided into sector stations. Fighter Command's headquarters were at Bentley Priory near Stanmore and had an overall view of the fighting. The tactical conduct of the battle, however, was left to the groups and sectors.

Imperial War Museum

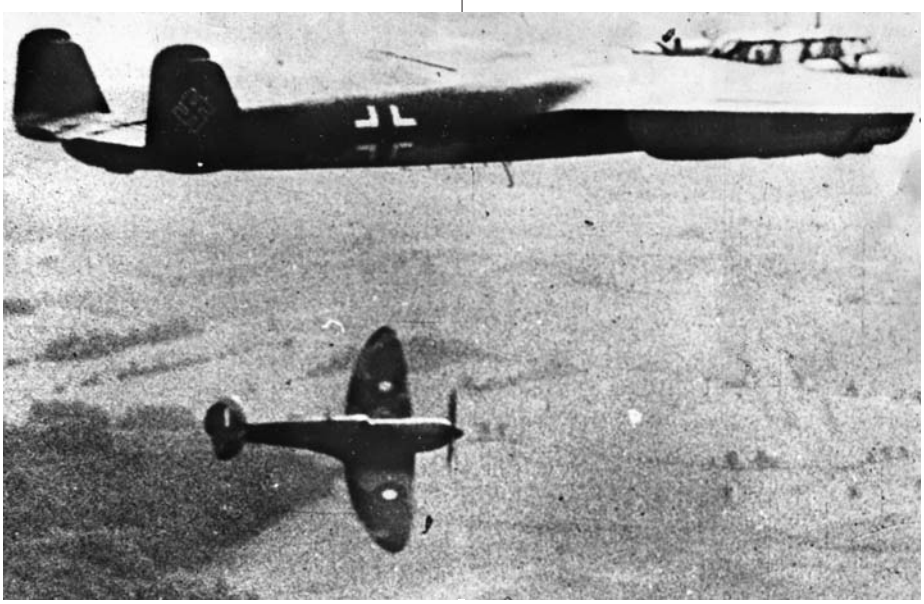


Early in July 1940, the Luftwaffe began trying to wear down Fighter Command by attacking ports and convoys in the Channel. However, Dowding refused to be drawn in, committing only a few squadrons. The Germans sank 30,000 tons of shipping and gained air superiority in daylight over the Dover Straits but lost twice as many aircraft as the British.

Various dates are given for the opening of the Battle of Britain. The official account published in 1941 by His Majesty's Stationery Office gives August 8, 1940. Dowding accepted August 8 but pointed out that the first attack in force actually took place on July 10 when 70 German aircraft attacked Portland in an attempt "to bring our Fighter Defence to battle on a large scale."

On August 12, the Luftwaffe struck its first heavy blows at RAF fighter airfields and radar stations when six radar stations were hit; Ventnor on the Isle of Wight was out of action for 10 days. The next day, Adlertag, or Eagle Day, which was to mark the beginning of the main assault, proved an anticlimax. The radar stations were not attacked, although several airfields were heavily bombed. But, often due to faulty German staff work, airfields such as Eastchurch, Detling, and Andover were hit but they were not fighter stations.

On August 15 the Luftwaffe flew its greatest number of sorties during the battle: 1,786. All the German fighters were committed as well as all three Luftflotte. However, 75 German aircraft were shot



National Archives

TOP: Advance warning of approaching German bombers came from a chain of 52 Home Radar stations such as this one at RAF Ventnor on the Isle of Wight. ABOVE: A Spitfire "Supermarine" takes on a German Dornier Do-17 in the skies over England, December 1940. With the RAF getting most of the credit for preventing a German invasion, the role of the Royal Navy has been overlooked.

National Archives

Firemen battle flames in London's hard-hit East End during a German air raid during "the Blitz," which lasted from September 7, 1940, to May 11, 1941, when Hitler decided to invade Russia instead of Britain.

down, while the RAF lost 34. Luftflotte 5 was severely mauled by Nos 12 and 13 Groups and as a result took no further part in the battle.

The following day the British fighter stations came under attack. Tangmere in No. 11 Group was heavily bombed, but its squadrons were already airborne when Stukas of Stukageschwader 2 hit the base, which left it badly damaged. Station workshops, the sick bay, water pumping station, officer's mess, and five hangers were destroyed or damaged. Six Blenheim bombers, seven Hurricanes, and two Spitfires were destroyed or damaged on the ground. Thirteen people were killed with another 20 wounded.

During the attack, a badly damaged Hurricane crash landed at Tangmere. The pilot was William "Billy" Fisk of 601 Squadron, the first American to die for the British cause and a very popular pilot at Tangmere, noted for driving a four-liter Bentley in British racing green.

Fisk's flight commander, Sir Archibald Hope, was quickly on the scene. "There were two ambulance men there," he said. "They had got Billy Fiske out of the cockpit. They didn't know how to take off his parachute so I showed them. Billy was burnt about the hands and ankles. I told him. 'Don't worry. You'll be all right...' Our adjutant went to see him in hospital at Chichester that night. Billy was sitting up in bed, perky as hell. The next thing we heard he was dead. Died of shock." (See *WWII Quarterly,* Summer 2010.)

Another wave of heavy attacks on August 18 was followed by a spell of cloudy weather that brought the first phase to an end. By now Göring believed Dowding was down to 300 fighters when, in fact, the British had more than twice that figure. The Luftwaffe tactic was to keep hitting the fighter stations, which they hoped would draw the British into an all-out fighter action. However, on Park's orders British fighter pilots were to engage the bombers and try to avoid tangling with the Me-109s.

This forced the Germans to deploy more of their fighters in close bomber support rather than in more productive offensive sweeps. To reinforce the escorts for the bombers, most of the Me-109s in Sperrle's area were transferred to Kesselring; the Ju-87s, which had suffered heavy losses, were withdrawn.

On August 24 the second phase of the battle began with Luftfotte 2 attacking No. 11 Group's airfield at Manston; it was badly damaged and evacuated.

Over the next 10 days the Luftwaffe began to narrow the gap in aircraft losses and came close to winning air superiority over Kent and Sussex. This was due partly to a change in tactics; they maintained continuous air patrols over the Straits of Dover and launched frequent feint attacks that confused the directors of Fighter Command.

When they came up to do battle, Park's pilots found the bombers protected by swarms of Me-109s. Losses narrowed over a week from the last day of August to September 6, when the Luftwaffe lost 225 aircraft and the British 185 fighters. As bombers accounted for more than half the German aircraft, the British were losing considerably more fighters.

The Luftwaffe was also causing crippling damage to No. 11 Group's airfield facilities. Biggin Hill was attacked six times in three days; all buildings were damaged and 70 ground staff were wounded or killed.

Park felt that during the period August 28-September 5 he was seriously hampered in deploying his squadrons. This was "felt for about a week in the handling of squadrons by day to meet the enemy's massed attacks." Continued pressure would force Park to withdraw his squadrons north of the Thames, from which a defense of southeast England would be difficult.

However, on September 7, Göring switched the main attacks from the fighters' stations to London, thereby relaxing the pressure on Fighter Command's No. 11 Group airfields. Late in the afternoon, 300 German bombers, escorted by 600 fighters, attacked the capital; the East End and London Docks took the brunt of the attack and were soon blazing. Fighter Command was taken by surprise, and the Luftwaffe suffered few losses. That night the blazing oil refineries and warehouses acted as a beacon for 250 more bombers that added to the inferno.

Why did the Germans change their tactics? Often put forward as the main reason for the switch to attacking London was a reprisal for British raids on Berlin, which

had been ordered as reprisals for the accidental bombing of London on the night of August 24, 1940.

There was rather more to it than that, however. The day of decision for Sea Lion was close, and preparations for the invasion were not going well. The Luftwaffe had its hands full trying to overcome Fighter Command and had been unable to divert attacks against warships or coastal defenses.

Meanwhile, RAF Bomber Command, under Air Marshal Sir Arthur Harris, was bombing invasion barges moored in Ostend in occupied Holland and going so far as to claim it was these attacks "that convinced the Germans of the futility of attempting to cross the Channel." However, the Royal Navy had bombarded minesweepers and barges, hitting Dunkirk, Boulogne, Calais, Ostend, and Cherbourg.

In addition, Admiral Reginald Drax's naval flotillas from the Nore at the mouth of the Thames raided several of the Germans' invasion ports (Dunkirk, Boulogne, Calais, and Ostend) and sank several invasion barges, while flotillas from Plymouth and Portsmouth organized similar raids on ports of embarkation. British naval intelligence claimed 12.5 percent of transports and 12.6 percent of barges had been lost to British attacks.

The German Army was also getting cold feet when it realized the essential panzer divisions would have to be loaded in the Antwerp area—a long way from the landing areas—and they would be extremely vulnerable on the long "flank march" with little naval protection. Minefields were regarded with skepticism, and the Germans did not have enough mines, anyway.

The Royal Navy was carrying out regular sweeps with destroyers and motor torpedo boats and, on the night of September 8/9, these were joined by the 2nd Cruiser Squadron. These sweeps curtailed German coastal movements of shipping by night. This alone had a great deterrent effect, for the Germans had no way to challenge it. Hitler was expected to give the order for S-Day on September 11, but he postponed his decision until September 14, bearing in mind that 10 days were needed to implement the decision.

London was attacked again by large forces on September 9, 11, and 14, and heavily bombed every night. On September 11 the Luftwaffe inflicted greater losses than it incurred, while on the 14th it was nearly a draw. Also on the 14th, Hitler declared that Sea Lion was "not yet practical" because the Luftwaffe had not achieved air supremacy. Urged on by a confident Göring that air supremacy was just a couple of days away, Hitler again postponed his decision until September 17.

On September 15, the Luftwaffe launched two large attacks against London. However, the tactics of feints that had served them so well were abandoned, thus Park was able to deploy his fighters to better effect. Leigh-Mallory's No. 12 Group also joined the battle with five squadrons, led by Squadron Leader Douglas Bader. The Luftwaffe took a heavy beating, losing over 50 aircraft while Fighter Command lost half that number. More significantly, few of the German bombers succeeded in reaching their targets.

It was obvious now that the Luftwaffe was not close to destroying Fighter Command nor gaining air supremacy. And the terror bombing of the civilian population seemed unlikely to break the British will to resist. The German naval staff identified the likely abandonment of Sea Lion on September 10.

They argued, "It would be more in the sense of the planned preparation for operation 'Sea Lion' if the Luftwaffe would now concentrate less on London and more on Portsmouth and Dover, and on the naval forces in or near the operation.... The Naval War Staff, however, does not consider it suitable to approach the Führer now with such demands, because the Führer looks upon a large-scale attack on London as possibly being decisive ... bombardment of London might produce an attitude in the enemy which will make the 'Sea Lion' operation completely unnecessary."

Bundesarchiv Bild 101II-MW-5674-33; Photo: Engelmeier

Bundesarchiv Bild 116-483-099; Photo: Bernhard Borghorst

Bundesarchiv Bild 101II-MN-1369-10A; Photo: Schwarz

TOP: German troops rehearse for Operation Sea Lion on a canal at St.-Valery-sur-Somme, France, June 1940. ABOVE: Invasion barges assembled at Wilhelmshaven to transport German soldiers across the Channel. The conversion of barges and other invasion vessels had absolute priority in shipyards in the summer of 1940, delaying the completion of U-boats and other warships. LEFT: For Operation Sea Lion, the Germans experimented with submersible Pz Kpfw III tanks (Tauchpanzer) designed to be launched from a vessel and stay underwater for 20 minutes, rather than "swim" as the Allies' DD tanks did on D-Day.

On September 17, Hitler postponed Sea Lion indefinitely, and with continued attacks being made against the invasion fleet two days later ordered that dispersed. September 15 has come to be celebrated in the United Kingdom as Battle of Britain Day.

There were several reasons for the Luftwaffe's failure in the Battle of Britain: Göring's poor leadership; the failure to identify Britain's radar screen as key to the defence; the shortage of Me-109s and that aircraft's lack of range; the high morale of Fighter Command's pilots and ground crews; and the skilful tactics of Dowding and Park (the latter was surely the victor of the Battle of Britain).

However, this did not prevent both Dowding and Park from being sacked shortly after the battle. Their conduct of the battle, in particular their reluctance to use their fighters in "Big Wings" advocated by Leigh-Mallory, made it a close-run thing, for a simplistic comparison of losses showed the battle of attrition did not favor the RAF, even with its advantages.

In the course of the battle, Fighter Command lost 915 aircraft, the Luftwaffe 1,733. By the end of the battle Fighter Command had more aircraft than it did at the beginning; it took the Luftwaffe longer to recover, mainly because of Germany's low rate of aircraft production.

The conclusion was that the Battle of Britain air campaign was not the principal reason that the invasion was prevented. This perception that the RAF was Britain's savior came about more as a propaganda tool to inspire the public in Britain and the United States. Indeed, many Germans, including Luftwaffe air ace Adolf Galland, felt that the Battle of Britain was the Battle for Britain—the invasion battle that was never fought.

The invasion of Britain was thwarted by all parts of Britain: politicians (Churchill most of all) who were determined to fight, backed by the public; the British Army that prepared to defend the beaches; the Merchant Navy, and, of course, the RAF. But the principal dissuading factor in the minds of Adolf Hitler and his admirals and generals was the Royal Navy. In particular, the German naval planners never believed that the Luftwaffe could defeat the immense numerical superiority of the Royal Navy, regardless of gaining a degree of air superiority.

The Battle of Britain did have far-reaching strategic consequences despite its inconclusive outcome. It was the first setback suffered by German forces in World War II; Hitler realized that by 1941 Britain would be too tough a nut to crack. Instead, he pursued a costly strategy in the Mediterranean, and in his invasion of the Soviet Union—Operation Barbarossa—planning for which had already started before the Battle of Britain had really begun, whereby he had to leave 35 divisions to face the British for an invasion that was never launched.

A military medal, the 1939-45 Star, with the clasp "Battle of Britain," was issued to all aircrew of the Royal Air Force from throughout the empire and the Allies who flew operations between July 10, 1940 and October 31, 1940.

Unfortunately, "the few" to whom the many in Britain owed so much did not include those members of the Royal Navy, who never received the recognition that was due them. □

From the hedgerows of France to the Hürtgen Forest to war's end at the Elbe, the U.S. 83rd Infantry Division blazed a largely unheralded trail of courage across Europe.

BY SUSAN ZIMMERMAN

WITH THE "RAGTAG CIRCUS" ACROSS EUROPE

The 83rd U.S. Infantry Division had been mobilized for World War I in September 1917. Its unit patch was a downward-pointing black triangle with the letters O-H-I-O stitched as an abstract gold monogram in the center. As the letters suggest, it had its origins as a mostly Ohio unit, although after the outbreak of World War II, there were boys from all over the nation in its ranks.

Its Great War nickname was Old Hickory, but in World War II it became known as the Thunderbolt Division. The 83rd trained for nearly two years before it saw its first combat. Its three infantry regiments were numbered 329, 330, and 331.

Along with the rest of the 14,000-man division, Frank Fauver, a telephone lineman with G Company, 329th Regiment, 83rd Infantry Division, crossed the English Channel and landed in Normandy, France, on June 23, 1944—two weeks after D-Day. It was the beginning of the 83rd Infantry Division's entry in World War II's European Theater of Operations.

In 2013 Fauver spoke to *WWII Quarterly.* During these conversations Fauver remembered pieces of the past: the landing at Normandy, the battles for Brittany, central France, Luxembourg, then Germany's Hürtgen Forest, the Battle of the Bulge, and the race to the Elbe. Time had dulled his memory somewhat, but the pain of war remained.

"I was with frontline telephone communications," Fauver recalled. "My job was to lay and maintain the wires that were right up front. At first I was scared to death, then after so many days up there at the front, we kind of came to the conclusion that we're not going to get out of this alive and we're going to give them Germans all we got. Then we didn't worry about dying because we knew we were gonna.

"We were the forgotten boys. I'm not looking for glory; I'm looking for recognition for the ones who didn't come home. There's no glory in a war."

"When we got home," he said, "we knew if we tried to talk to somebody, they wouldn't believe what we would tell them anyhow, so we didn't talk about it. I spent a lot of time having a beer with buddies, but even then we didn't talk much about it. We didn't ask many questions because we wanted to put the war behind us. The real horrible parts were pushed out; it would eat you up if you didn't.

"We had an awful lot of men who just broke, literally collapsed, from stress; war is not something a normal human being is used to. We turned over five times; every man was replaced five times, but not every man was replaced, do you understand what I'm saying? Our replacements were five times our original number. We had 270 days of actual contact with the enemy, in other words we were out there fighting. We just made

Photo Courtesy Frank Fauver

All photos: National Archives

In this photo taken January 8, 1945, soldiers of the U.S. 83rd Infantry Division pause after coming off the front line during the Battle of the Bulge. In the foreground, Private David Hibbitt digs ice out of his canteen so that he can fill it with much needed water. OPPOSITE: Frank Fauver, photographed in April 1944.

up our minds we weren't going to get out of it alive and to do the best darn job we could over there till the next shell got us. We were the closest Yanks to Berlin when the war was over. That was us, the Thunderbolts."

During Fauver's service as a qualified lineman in telephone communication, switchboard operation, and telephone line installation, he said he installed some 11,900 miles of telephone wire needed between the commanders at regimental headquarters and the frontline troops as they battled German forces across Europe.

Soldiers of the 83rd Infantry Division occupy an observation post in France during the summer of 1944. Following the breakout from the hedgerow country of Normandy, that summer was one of tremendous gains and rapid movement.

Two weeks after the 21-year-old farm boy from Wauseon, Ohio, was inducted on October 13, 1942, he reported to Camp Perry, Ohio. After that it was training at Camp Atterbury, Indiana, then field training in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, and Ranger training at Fort Breckinridge, Kentucky.

"I trained in G Company," he said, "but fortunately I got transferred to Regimental Headquarters because of my high points. When you go in the Army, you take an IQ test, and they gauge you by your intelligence, so to speak, according to the high points. I don't know what I scored, but I got transferred. They didn't tell you anything in the Army but 'do it.'"

On April 6, 1944, Fauver and the division embarked on a 10-day voyage from New York aboard a British transport vessel named HMS *Samaria*. Fauver was seasick the entire trip; he recalled that halfway through the voyage, as he was "feeding the fish" over the side, he lifted up his head and saw a "thing" in the distance coming his way. That "thing" racing toward him was on top the water and looked like a big fish.

Fauver remembered, "At first I thought it was a whale. I had never seen one, and so I turned around and said something to one of the sailors. I think he was the only one on deck. He took one look at it and never said a word to me. He called down to the quarters where they run the ship and gave a full speed ahead and a hard left turn. I found out it wasn't a big fish but a torpedo skipping across the water. If I had not been on the deck that day, the torpedo would have gotten our ship.

"And, like a fool, I wanted to see if it was going to miss us so I went back to the tail end of the ship. I don't think it missed us by more than 10 feet. It went right on past us and went through the whole convoy and never touched a ship. Afterward, I found out my ship was part of the largest convoy that ever crossed the ocean. When I landed in Liverpool, England, on April 16, it was my 22nd birthday and [reaching solid ground] was the nicest present I ever had; I had been seasick all the way over."

After disembarking at Liverpool, Fauver's division moved to Wrexham, Wales. For two months the division trained in the Midlands and northern Wales, and then, shortly after D-Day, the 83rd was assigned to the First Army. Around June 20, the 329th Infantry boarded an LST (Landing Ship, Tank) bound for Normandy. Life would never be the same from that day forward.

Fauver recalled that the seas were so rough in the English Channel that, as one man climbed down the rope to board the LST, he was crushed between the two vessels. Fauver said the man's screams stayed in his head the rest of his life.

The accounts written by Raymond J. Goguen, author of *329th "Buckshot" Infantry Regiment: A History,* and published in occupied Germany in July 1945, conveyed the cross-Channel journey still fresh in the men's minds: "We grappled with the rope ladders descending heavily into the LSTs. On these, we were soon ferried to the blood-spotted shores of Normandy.... Moving past shores, our heads bent as we saw freshly dug graves with their immaculate white crosses just recently planted into the soft ground."

BAPTISM IN THE HEDGEROWS

Around June 26, the 83rd Division reached an area near Carentan, France, and took part in the hedgerow battles. The fighting in this sector, which was heavily defended by German SS, panzer, and airborne troops, was considered some of the most difficult of the war. The three-to-five-foot-tall and equally wide earthen hedgerows prevented Allied units from seeing beyond the next embankment and made the American tanks easy targets for antitank fire.

According to Goguen, "The 4th of July, 1944, will always live in our memories, especially in the ones of our 2nd Battalion.… On that day, the 83rd Division, as part of the VII Corps, attacked south of the town of Carentan.… The terrain … consisted of nothing but the hedgerows so typical of Normandy. In addition … the battalion was confronted by a swamp. Those who attempted to cross the swamp were either killed or left to bleed in the waist-deep marsh; few returned. Leaders and non-coms died gallantly in trying to lead their men to an almost impossible objective.

"We began to feel the loss of our dead and wounded, for casualties were mounting rapidly. We wondered if every day of combat on this continent would be as terrible as those we had just fought. With hidden tears we hardened at the sight of our buddies lying dead along the embankments of the hedges. We cursed aloud as brave medics and litter

ABOVE: Situated in a doorway somewhere in France, a soldier operates mobile communications gear so that an officer can coordinate mortar fire during offensive operations. As a qualified lineman, Frank Fauver estimates he laid thousands of miles of communication wire for the Army. RIGHT: Major General Robert Macon, commander of the U.S. 83rd Infantry Division, watches the effect of Allied artillery fire on the island of Cezembre, near St. Malo, France.

bearers carried moaning soldiers with limbs torn off and others with loose flesh staining the stretchers red. We refused many meals, for the sight and smell of decaying human flesh and cattle was simply too much for our nervous stomachs.

"We spent long sleepless nights, our bodies hugging the ground of foxholes, as shells whistled and lighted nearby, rocking and shaking the earth beside us. Was it possible for a man to live through all of this? We wondered when our turn would come. We cried to all known powers that someday the German race would suffer tenfold for all the suffering and human sacrifices we were enduring."

Fauver, too, recalled the 4th of July attacks in the hedgerows: "There was fierce fighting between Sainteny and Carentan. The officers had maps and stuff, but none showed a swamp, and our division attacked right through it and, because of that, we lost near a battalion of men. The Germans just mowed them down like ducks. You know when you get in a swamp you can't move. You are in mud and sink down. If you get in far enough, you could sink in clear over your head."

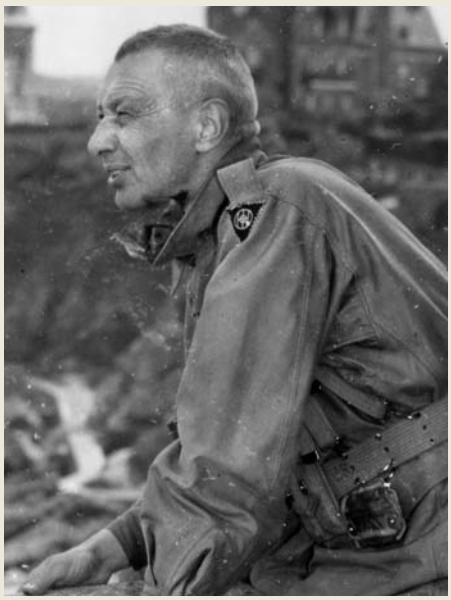
Once out of the marsh, Fauver worked at night stringing telephone wires along the narrow roads between hedgerows, which required the headlights and tail lights on the jeeps to be covered so only small slits of light would come through.

Fauver also remembered that jeeps were driven with the windshields down. Vertical bars extending above the heads of jeeps' occupants had to be welded onto the front bumpers because the Germans had strung wire across the roads neck high. "Some of the guys driving jeeps were getting decapitated from the wires if there wasn't something on the jeep to break the wires," explained Fauver.

"There was usually a hole or opening in the corner [of a hedgerow] or someplace where the Germans could get in and out with their machinery," he continued. "They dug into these hedgerows when we first started coming across the field. We were sitting ducks the first time; they just murdered us. It was terrible; we had terrific casualties. They darn near wiped out G Company, which was my own company."

During this time, while Fauver's division was fighting in the hedgerows, he recalled a visit by Supreme Allied Commander Dwight D. Eisenhower and General Omar Bradley. When the Germans started shelling his position, Fauver dove into one of the nearest trenches and landed on Ike's shoulders. Fauver attempted to get out, but Eisenhower pulled him down and said, "There's room enough for two, soldier."

By now, the Allied juggernaut that had invaded France on June 6 was unstoppable. In his memoirs, *Crusade in Europe,* Eisenhower wrote, "By July 2, we had landed in Normandy about one million men, including 13 American, 11 British, and one Canadian division. In the same period we put



ashore 566,648 tons of supplies and 171,532 vehicles.... During these first three weeks we took 41,000 prisoners. Our casualties totaled 60,771, of whom 8,975 were killed." Also during this time, 400 members of the 83rd's 329th Infantry died.

CRACKING THE CITADEL

On July 25, the Normandy breakout of the hedgerows, known as Operation Cobra (see *WWII Quarterly,* Winter 2013-2014), began near St. Lô. The Americans feinted

toward the Brittany peninsula, tying up four German divisions there. The recently activated Third Army, led by Lt. Gen. George S. Patton, Jr., then moved eastward toward Argentan, while the British drove from Caen toward Falaise.

In early August, the 83rd (now transferred to Patton's Third Army) headed west into Brittany through Coutances and Avranches toward the coastal towns of St. Malo and Dinard. Inside the fortified city of St. Malo, the citadel was held by German troops led by General Andreas von Aulock, who declared, "I was placed in command of this fortress; I did not request it. I will execute the orders I have received and, doing my duty as a soldier, I will fight to the last stone. I will defend St. Malo to the last man even if the last man has to be myself."

Fauver said, "On August 3 our division was moved to Brittany and St. Malo, France. We had very few casualties; but we could not touch that fortress. We even had an air corps come over and drop blockbusters. I don't know how they mixed that concrete, but it was so solid that those big bombs just bounced instead of tearing up the fortress."

In the 83rd Infantry Division history (1962), the authors wrote: "Day after day, squadrons of bombers dropped tons of bombs on the Citadel; the artillery pounded it from every conceivable angle; even those immense eight-inch Corps Artillery guns were brought up within 1,000 yards of the Fort and fired point blank at it. The three-inch towed TDs [tank destroyers] fired hundreds of rounds of armor piercing ammunition with no visible effect.... 'Mad Colonel' von Aulock commanded the areas from an underground fortress, with 20 feet of solid rock overhead."

U.S. intelligence estimated that between 3,000 and 6,000 German troops occupied St. Malo, but actually the number was closer to 12,000 defending the walled city. On August 6, the Germans demolished all the quays, locks, breakwaters, and harbor machinery and set fire to the city; then, on August 9, they retreated back to the citadel. Despite house-to-house battles, artillery fire, and fighter-bomber attacks,

ABOVE: After the German garrison on the island of Cezembre has surrendered, soldiers of the U.S. 83rd Infantry Division raise the American flag in triumph. The island is located near the French city of St. Malo, where troops of the 83rd Division were also engaged. OPPOSITE: An open-turreted American tank destroyer fires on German positions in the French city of Orleans as a French civilian and an American spotter observe the action. The German garrison under General Botho Elster surrendered to the 83rd Division's commanding general, Robert Macon, and 20,000 enemy troops marched into captivity.

Aulock finally surrendered after his artillery and machine-gun emplacements were destroyed by direct hits from American 8-inch guns.

Fauver said, "We tried to get von Aulock to surrender several times, and he would say, 'I'm a German soldier and German soldiers do not surrender;' well, he did surrender on the 17th. He came into St. Malo all decorated in dress parade with all these awards; this was von Aulock."

The 83rd captured 12,393 Germans in this battle.

INTO THE LOIRE VALLEY

After St. Malo, the 83rd moved to the Loire Valley to protect the entire right flank of Patton's Third Army as it moved across France. The mission began on August 22 and lasted for about a month. The division's zone extended from St. Nazaire eastward along the Loire through Nantes, Angers, Tours, and Orleans to Auxerre. This was a distance of more than 200 miles—the longest line of responsibility given any division in the war.

Fauver commented: "They moved us out of there and we went south to the Loire River. We had a sector that was over 100 miles long, which is almost unheard of for one division. It was pretty much a motorized patrol with the jeeps. The Germans were on one side of the river, and we were on our side of the river. Sometimes, when you were out in the open you could look over and see the Germans and they could see us. I remember every once in a while they would take a pot shot at us and sometimes would wave at us, which was rather unique. We would wave back; we tried to get them to like us so they would quit."

During the division's month on the Loire, some 20,000 Germans, including Brig. Gen. Botho Elster, were captured; formal surrender ceremonies were held at Beaugency Bridge on September 17. General Elster handed over his pistol to 83rd Division commander

Maj. Gen. Robert C. Macon, and then his 20,000 men marched to a prisoner of war enclosure—the largest mass surrender of the war of German troops to Americans. During the operation, the 83rd was transferred from Patton's Third to General William H. Simpson's new Ninth Army.

"After that battle they moved us to Orleans, France. We were there for quite some time, just doing holding, and occupation, and reorganizing, and absorbing replacements and supplies so we would be ready. While we were there in Orleans, our intelligence went down across the river and did some reconnaissance. They ran into the Free French, the people who were against the Germans, who told them that some Germans down there would like to surrender.

"I was not involved in that but I do know they arranged for the German general to have a meeting. He wanted us to come and do a big bombing—not on his troops, but in his area to make it look good, and then he would surrender. We didn't do that, and they argued back and forth, but eventually he did surrender. The Germans marched to Orleans with full equipment. We had some of our troops marching on the side to keep the Free French from shooting at them and to keep the peace."

On September 24, the 83rd Division rolled rapidly eastward across France and into Luxembourg to take up positions along the Moselle and Sauer Rivers and relieve elements of the 5th Armored and 28th Infantry Divisions.

HELL IN THE HÜRTGEN

The losses for the U.S. Army in the Hürtgen Forest were great, with at least 33,000 killed and incapacitated, including both combat and noncombat casualties; German casualties were 28,000. The ancient city of Aachen, Germany, eventually fell on October 22, 1944, but at a high cost to the U.S. Ninth Army. The Hürtgen was so costly a battle that Field Marshal Walter Model called it an "Allied defeat of the first magnitude."

The Battle of the Hürtgen Forest, the objective of which was to stop German forces from reinforcing the front lines farther north in the Battle of Aachen, was the longest battle on German soil during World War II and the longest single battle the U.S. Army has ever fought. The battle area covered 50 square miles east of the Belgian–German border and lasted from September 19 until December 16, 1944.

The division historians noted in *The Thunderbolt Across Europe,* "Approximately in the center of the triangular area marked by Aachen, Duren, and Cologne lay the Hürtgen Forest. It was here that the men of the 4th Infantry Division were fighting, fighting and dying. In this thickly wooded forest, Jerry easily concealed himself and his weapons. It was a forest filled with death. There were many Heinie snipers; there were machine guns, mortars, and camouflaged and entrenched Nazis with rifles and burp guns.

National Archives

On December 17, 1944, as the German juggernaut rolls forward during the Battle of the Bulge, two infantrymen of the American 83rd Division, both armed with Thompson submachine guns, peer around a corner in the rubble-strewn streets of Gurzenich, Germany.

"Besides all this, there were the ever-deadly tree bursts—artillery shells fired so that they would explode near the tops of the trees and send fragments flying in all directions. In places, nearly every tree contained a booby trap and nearly all the space between the trees was covered with mines.…

"It was here that the 83rd was to be committed. Our mission was to relieve the 4th Division, to continue through the Hürtgen, and to seize the west bank of the Roer River. This would be our first fight in Germany, our first engagement with the enemy in his homeland."

Fauver recalled, "On December 9, we moved to the Hürtgen Forest and relieved a division that was up there; they were all shot to pieces. I don't think they had 10 men left out of any company. They were really hurting."

Jack M. Straus, another veteran of the 83rd, wrote in *We Saw It Through: A History of the 331st Infantry Regiment,* "On December 6, we gave our positions along the Moselle Valley to the 22nd Infantry of the 4th Division. We then moved by truck to the Hürtgen Forest east of Aachen to relieve the battered men of the 12th Infantry [of the 4th Division] in this densely wooded area of hell, mud, and snow.

"In this cold and depressing forest, we were greeted with Nazi propaganda leaflets which informed us we were 'given a damnable Christmas present by being transferred to the famous Aachen sector where fighting is harder than anywhere else. It's all woods here. They are cold, slippery and dangerous.' They reminded us—'Death awaits you behind every tree. Fighting in woods is hellish.' But it took more than these silly notes to dampen our spirits. Even the nightly 'serenades' of enemy heavy artillery and their devastating tree bursts and intensive strafing from the Luftwaffe could not make us buckle. Still it was plenty tough, about the roughest experience we had since Normandy. It wasn't enough that we lived in holes roofed with logs, ate K rations with a hot meal only once each day. Our feet got numb and our hands got blue from the wet and cold.

"Trench foot was our biggest nemesis. At every opportunity we removed our shoes and dried and massaged our feet, changing to dry socks. One man massaged the feet of another. Drying tents were set up near the battalion aid stations. As our companies came off the line, we visited the tents in rotation where our chilled bodies were warmed and our clothes, shoes, and socks dried. But the constant exercise of one's feet was the only real safeguard against trench foot, and this was done right in the foxholes wiggling one's toes as often as possible while sweating out artillery, mortar barrages and German counterattacks."

Fauver said, "Some armchair strategists long before had ventured the opinion that Jerry, once he had lost his hold of the occupied countries, was beaten, and that he would-

n't elect to muss up the sacred soil of the Fatherland by fighting for it.… We, ourselves, were soon to learn that Jerry was fighting, and fighting like hell, on his own soil."

According to Fauver, "It was all mud, cold, hell…. It was a forest of tall pine trees, and the Germans constantly shelled us with tree bursts. The shells exploded at treetop level and shrapnel and pieces of pine flew everywhere. We managed to drive them [the enemy] back across the Roer River, and we took several prisoners. About that time, a new aspect of the war started to become clear to us. All the German prisoners were old men and young boys, some hardly strong enough to carry a rifle. That told us Hitler was sending in everybody he had."

The Germans were desperate to keep control of the Hürtgen because it was to serve as a staging area for the Ardennes Offensive (which became known in the West as the Battle of the Bulge) that was already in preparation, and the mountains' access to the Schwammenauel Dam at the head of the Rur Lake (Rurstausee) which, if opened, would flood low-lying areas downstream and prevent any Allied crossing of the river.

Jack Straus noted in *We Saw It Through,* "We slugged our way out of the forest, and hurling our might against the German town of Gey on December 10th, smashed one of the most formidable Nazi strongholds on the outskirts of the Hürtgen Forest and drove the stubbornly resisting enemy to the banks of the Roer River just south of Duren."

"Such crack divisions as the 1st and 4th Infantry Divisions," wrote Raymond J. Goguen, author of *329th 'Buckshot' Infantry Regiment,* "had been fighting since November the 11th to clear the enemy from the Hürtgen Forest. Their main obstacles, and they were tough ones, had been the fanatical stand staged by die-hard SS troops; the extensive mine belts and booby-trapped trees, all part of the inner Siegfried Line; the heavy concentrations of artillery and mortar fire causing tree bursts to send hot shrapnel into many of the men, thus inflicting heavy casualties; and the bad weather with constant rain and poor drainage which caused a high rate of non-battle casualties."

Goguen said that shelter for the Yanks consisted of log huts and dugouts built by the former units in the forest. "We built more log cabins and improved those left to us until these primitive dwellings provided us with sufficient cover; but they were still poor from the standpoint of comfort. The narrow roads with a thick, knee-deep layer of mud made the going tough for vehicles."

The 329th Infantry Regiment jumped off on the attack at 10 AM on December 12 with the objective of reaching the edge of the Hürtgen Forest and closing up on the Roer River. The goal for the first day's operation was a north-south road running through a tiny, three-house hamlet known as Hof Hardt. Goguen wrote, "The spirited 2nd Battalion started its ball rolling when F Company, displaying great courage, rushed five machine gun nests with heavy rifle fire and rapid movement and, as a result, overran them."

The next day, 3rd Battalion was ordered to take the town of Birgel. To reach Birgel, the battalion would need to pass through thick woods to within 500 yards of the town. According to Goguen, "Very little resistance was met while advancing to the edge of the woods.… At the same time that the artillery was smoking the town, I and K Companies advanced using, in the words of Lt. Col. [John C.] Speedie, 'the most beautiful and perfectly executed marching fire ever witnessed.' We were out of the Forest."

The 83rd's official history noted that the division's "most distinguished hero of World War II was Sergeant Ralph G. Neppel of Gilden, Iowa. He received the Congressional Medal of Honor for his actions on December 14, 1944, near Birgel.… Sergeant Neppel was a machine-gun leader who calmly ignored a German tank about to overrun his position. A shell blew off his left leg, but the sergeant held his position and, with grenades, wiped out 20 Germans.

"A German commander found 19-year-old Neppel lying in the snow, and, either as a favor to a horribly wounded man, or in anger, because the American had killed so many Germans, he shot Neppel in the head. Neppel was wounded and left for dead; apparently the bullet was deflected by his helmet. The next morning he had to be chipped out of the ice and snow. The bullet left only a slight scar."

SURVIVING THE BULGE

On December 16, 1944, the fighting that became the last offensive by Nazi Germany in World War II began. As the Germans advanced, a large salient or bulge was created in the U.S. lines, giving rise to the name "Battle of the Bulge." The front was more than 50 miles across and, at one point, the deepest penetration by the Germans was more than 50 miles.

Confined to a wheelchair due to injuries sustained in combat, Sergeant Ralph Neppel of the 83rd Infantry Division receives the Medal of Honor from President Harry S. Truman.

No sooner was the 83rd starting to make good progress in the Hürtgen than Hitler's great counteroffensive in the West was launched. Goguen wrote, "Although the German Army's plan of penetration was farther south, the enemy facing us launched fierce counterattacks all morning long against the towns of Gurzenich and Birgel.… Germans infiltrated every-

where and powerful enemy tanks fired point blank into buildings from which we defended. With our bazookas, M-1s, BARs, and machine guns we returned the fire; hunted down the infiltrators and after a real hard battle, we successfully repulsed the attacks. The 329th Infantry Regiment had stood its ground again."

From December 20-27, 1944, the Belgian town of Bastogne became a key part of the larger Battle of the Bulge. The goal of the German offensive was the harbor at Antwerp. Because all seven main roads in the Ardennes mountain range converged on the small town of Bastogne, control of its crossroads was vital to the German attack. And, of course, the 83rd was in the thick of the fighting.

Although official records show that the 83rd Infantry Division was committed to the campaign at Rochefort, some 50 miles northeast of Bastogne and drove northeast of the town, Fauver swears he was close by. Fauver said, "Our objective was to drive a point toward Bastogne at the same time another division from the south was doing the same thing. We wanted to meet so the Germans would be trapped, so we kept driving, but when we were about one or two city blocks from Bastogne, the order came to hold up and not to take another inch. We could look into Bastogne and see the [trapped 101st Airborne] soldiers in there; wave to them, holler at them.

"We wondered, 'What's going on?' All we have to do is go down there and walk in with a rifle and there would be no resistance. About that time we heard a terrible noise from the rear, and here comes Patton's Third Army. They rode up through and into Bastogne. Well, when the *Stars and Stripes,* which was our newspaper, came out, it said that Third Army did it all and that we weren't even there. That didn't go over very good.

"The highway into Bastogne was terrible. The only way to advance was to follow the tanks on foot or in jeeps because they would pack the snow down. You couldn't even walk on the snow; if you did you would sink in, it would bury you. So we followed the tank tracks to lay our telephone line. We would throw it up on the banks where the tanks couldn't get them, otherwise the tank treads would chew them all to pieces.

In this photo taken on January 11, 1945, soldiers of an 83rd Infantry Division reconnaissance unit trudge across the wintry landscape through the town of Bihain, Belgium, north of the crossroads town of Bastogne, which the Americans held against relentless German pressure.

"They said that was the worst winter they ever had over there, but the snow didn't stop us from putting down our telephone lines. We lost so many men. They lost their toes, legs, hands, and fingers from frostbite. It was terrible. It was worse than the enemy. I often wondered how many froze to death in that snow."

The Battle of the Bulge remains one of the longest and bloodiest battles ever fought by the United States, with 83,000 American troops committed, as compared to 200,000-250,000 Germans. Casualty figures for both sides are staggering. Nearly 21,000 Allied soldiers were killed, while another 43,000 were wounded and 23,554 were captured or reported missing. German losses numbered 15,652 killed, 41,600 wounded, and 27,582 captured or missing. In addition, the Germans lost 1,400 tanks and 600 other vehicles.

THE RAG-TAG CIRCUS

Like most combat soldiers in World War II, Frank Fauver had his share of close calls. Once, while installing phone lines at the front, a German tank shot out the bottom of the pole he was working on, which left him hanging on wires. Another time, a German mortar shell blew the front wheel off his jeep and shot a piece of shrapnel through a five-gallon gas tank in the back, which fortunately did not explode.

Another close call came when he dove into a roadside ditch for cover from incoming artillery. A shell hit a few feet from him and blew a deep hole that completely covered him with dirt; his buddies thought he had been blown to bits. In all 270 days of combat and close calls, Fauver only received a small nick on his finger from flying shrapnel.

"I really had doubts I would come home alive," he related. "I always said I made it through the war because I had two guardian angels watching over me—my birth mother and my adopted mother."

In late March 1945, the 83rd was ordered to turn east and head toward Berlin. The

division commandeered anything on wheels—from bicycles to motorcycles to horses from the surrounding German countryside—to make a mad dash across northern Germany. Because of these tactics it became known as the "Rag-Tag Circus."

Fauver said, "After we crossed the Rhine on March 29, 1945, the Germans were already on the run, so we commandeered anything that had an engine and that would run. We just took off cross country from the Rhine to the Elbe. They called us the Rag-Tag Circus because when you looked at our convoy you couldn't tell if it was German or American."

The resulting cavalcade included many captured German vehicles, among them tanks, motorbikes, buses, and at least one fire engine carrying infantrymen and a banner on its rear bumper that read, "Next Stop: Berlin." The division would not stop until it had secured a position across the Elbe River.

In a span of only 13 days, the Thunderbolts fought their way across 280 miles of northern Germany as unit after unit within the 83rd leap-frogged one another to continuously press the attack eastward, outracing even armored units to the Elbe River.

The 83rd Infantry Division history says: "The Thunderbolt caused the newspapers to run out of descriptive phrases. Reporters referred to 'crack troops of the 83d,' and the 'ace, shock troops of the Ninth Army,' but, to those who were there, the 83d was called the 'Rag-Tag Circus.'"

UNCOVERING A HUMAN CATASTROPHE

On April 11, 1945, elements of the 83rd discovered and liberated Langenstein-Zweiberge, a slave labor camp near Halberstadt that had been established a year earlier and was a sub-camp of the Buchenwald concentration camp system. The main Buchenwald camp, near Weimar, was discovered that same day by elements of the 6th Armored Division.

At its height, Langenstein-Zweiberge held 5,000-7,000 inmates from 23 different countries. When the 83rd arrived, the Yanks found some 1,100 surviving inmates in horrific condition, some weighing only 80 pounds. The prisoners told their liberators that they had been forced to work 12-16 hours a day in the nearby Harz Mountains, digging what was to become a vast, underground factory for fighter planes and V-2 rockets. Those too weak to work were murdered. Life expectancy was only six weeks. Deaths occurred at a rate of 500 per month.

Infantrymen of the 83rd Division walk past Sherman tanks that have momentarily halted on a dirt road in Germany. This photo was taken in February 1945, and the war in Europe ended three months later.

One of the liberators from the 83rd was Dr. Kenneth Zierler, battalion surgeon with the 399th Armored Field Artillery. Alerted by two war correspondents traveling through the area, Zierler said, "They told me that there was a concentration camp nearby and that we could liberate it because, they had heard, the guards had fled two days earlier at the sound of our tanks rumbling down the road. They had demobilized themselves simply by changing into mufti and melting into villages.

"The ambulance driver, Corporal Henry Mertens, the two newsmen, and I took off. The gate was open. There were no guards. A handful of men, in the vertical-striped uniform of the concentration camps, had placed themselves near the gate, but no one had been able to bring himself to cross the line past the open and unguarded barrier to the world outside.

"As we descended from the ambulance, they kissed our shoes. We lifted them to their feet. These walking skeletons were young men, looking aged. They told us we were the first Allied personnel they had seen. Some were covered with lice. Their faces were drawn, pale and gray. Most of the living huddled in their huts on cots, too weak to stand. From a tree swung the corpses of two inmates, hanged just days before. No one had had the energy to climb the tree and cut them down.

"Many survivors were barely alive. They showed us a large pit, one of several, covered with earth and lime, containing, they said, about 350 bodies of those who had died during the course of their labors. We were told that most had died of weakness and disease, but that about 50 had been

hanged as disciplinary examples."

A Hungarian prisoner showed the liberators his back covered with bruises and welts. He said that two weeks earlier he had been beaten by a guard with an iron rod for the crime of eating potato peelings he had found on the floor of the guards' kitchen."

One of the correspondents spoke with a 20-year-old skeleton of a man. "His face was green with jaundice, his skin stretched taut over his skull." Zierler said. The correspondent asked him what his offense was, why he had been imprisoned. 'I am a Jew,' he answered."

The doctor went on. "Those who were able to walk swarmed about us in a variety of moods, many speaking at once, or trying to. Some voices were so feeble we could scarcely hear them. Some seemed to be mumbling madly. Most blessed us, thanked God, wanted to know when there would be food, when they would go home.

"Our aid station could not handle this catastrophe. I was in a hurry to return to base to call division headquarters to send evacuation units for the survivors."

Elements of the 329th also came upon Eschershausen—an underground aircraft and tank parts factory, concentration camp, and slave labor camp—and freed some 6,000 inmates.

ON TO THE ELBE

With anger at its enemy renewed by the discovery of the camps, the division rolled eastward. Frank Fauver noted, "One day when we were moving, we saw a German command car off to our rear. They were really making hay and when they came past us, I hollered 'Germans!' Then somebody fired just over their heads instead of shooting at them. Well, that got their attention. They thought that we were Germans but they took a second look at us and realized that the convoy that was moving was not German. So we commandeered their car, disarmed them, put them in the convoy, and took them with us, because we didn't have time to take prisoners. We eventually ended up at the Elbe River."

Reaching the Elbe on April 13, 1945, the 83rd made the first Western Allied crossing of the river within 40 miles of Berlin. According to the Thunderbolt's commander, Maj. Gen. Macon, the division "set an infantry record by racing 215 miles across four rivers in two weeks to establish and hold the only American bridgehead over the Elbe." The 69th Infantry Division's historic meeting with Soviet troops at Torgau on the Elbe did not occur until April 29, 1945.

Fauver said, "When we got up to the Elbe River, we radioed our commanding general back at headquarters and said, 'We have a bridge here to cross; what do you want us to do?' We could have walked to Berlin because there was no resistance, but he said stop at the Elbe. He said, 'Stay where you are and don't take another half inch of ground.' In other words, he meant business, no movement; so we just sat there as kind of an army of occupation for a while. That's where we met the Russians—in the little town of Barby."

But first, there was a battle for the river crossing at Barby, 25 kilometers southeast of Magdeburg. The April 28, 1945, edition of the division's newspaper reported that the 329th Infantry was in a "knock-down, drag-out" fight for the bridgehead on the west side of the Elbe. While the 2nd and 3rd Battalions were battling their way into the town against a force of about 600 German soldiers, an engine pulling 90 freight cars started to cross the railroad bridge but was quickly destroyed by American artillery.

The Luftwaffe then made a rare appearance in the afternoon and began strafing the troops. The retreating Germans blew the bridge that night. One of the Yanks said, "The first thing I saw was a tremendous white smoke ring. That was followed by a thunderous explosion and billowing clouds of black smoke." This was followed by an aerial bombing attack on 329th positions.

The next morning the 329th resumed its attacks and, after a few hours of house-to-house fighting, the white flags came out. That afternoon, the first assault boats were paddled across the 150-yard-wide Elbe while under sporadic fire from the opposite bank.

They did not get far. Because the 83rd was now within the Russian sector due to the new territorial lines drawn at the Yalta Conference in February, Fauver's outfit was ordered to pull back from the Elbe. On May 6, 1945, the 83rd turned over its positions

Elements of the U.S. 83rd Infantry Division liberated Langenstein-Zweiberge, a sub-camp of the Buchenwald concentration camp system, on April 11, 1945.

At Cobbelsdorf, Germany, near the Elbe River, officers of the 83rd Infantry Division are entertained by their Soviet Red Army hosts during a victor's banquet in May 1945. According to terms agreed upon by Allied leaders, American soldiers halted their eastward advance into Germany when they reached the Elbe.

to the 30th Infantry Division.

Considerable debate has surrounded the decision to allow the Soviets to take Berlin. In his memoirs, Eisenhower wrote that Berlin "was politically and psychologically important as the symbol of remaining German power. I decided, however, that it was not the logical or the most desirable objective for the forces of the Western Allies." For the British and Americans to invest any more lives in taking Berlin was, in Ike's words, "more than unwise; it was stupid."

Ike's decision was a sound one in terms of potential British and American lives spared; Berlin cost the Soviets some 300,000 casualties, including 70,000 killed.

The Elbe was where the war ended for Fauver, but it also left him with the feeling that the 83rd was forgotten. His division had given its blood and sweat; being prevented from reaching Berlin cut deeply. Fauver wasn't the only one who felt this way.

For years, veterans from the 83rd have argued that the division's accomplishments were worthy of the Presidential Unit Citation, the highest award given to an Army unit. The division was nominated for the citation after Germany's surrender but did not receive the award. The 83rd Division Association recently resubmitted its request in hopes that new documentation will bolster its case.

Such a quest is a long shot, however. The standards for the citation, as defined by the Military Awards Branch, are quite high. The unit must have displayed such gallantry, determination, and esprit de corps in accomplishing its mission under extremely difficult and hazardous conditions as to set it apart from and above other units participating in the same campaign. Moreover, the citation is rarely awarded to a unit larger than a battalion. The officers of the association contend that the case for the 83rd merits a look, particularly for its actions in the closing days of the war in Europe.

In all, the 83rd covered some 1,400 miles in its race across Europe. The division fought against 36 major units of German infantry, panzer, and parachute divisions in eight major battles and fired off almost 22 million small-arms and mortar rounds. The 83rd's losses were heavy, with 3,161 killed in action, 11,807 wounded, and another 459 who died from their wounds.

Overall, by war's end the men of the 83rd Division were awarded one Medal of Honor, one Distinguished Service Medal, five Legions of Merit, 798 Silver Stars, 34 Soldier's Medals, 7,776 Bronze Stars, 4,747 Purple Hearts, 271 Medical Badges, 20 Meritorious Service Unit Plaques, and 106 Air Medals. They were honored with 18 British awards and 65 French awards and credited with destroying 480 enemy tanks, 61 enemy planes, 29 enemy supply trains, and 966 enemy artillery pieces.

At war's end, Maj. Gen. Robert C. Macon told his Thunderbolts, "To those of you who fought in Normandy, Brittany, the Loire Valley, Luxembourg, the Hürtgen Forest, the Ardennes, and during the drives to the Rhine and over the Elbe, there is no need to relive the experiences encountered or to remind you of the inspiration set forth to us by those of our comrades who were killed or wounded.

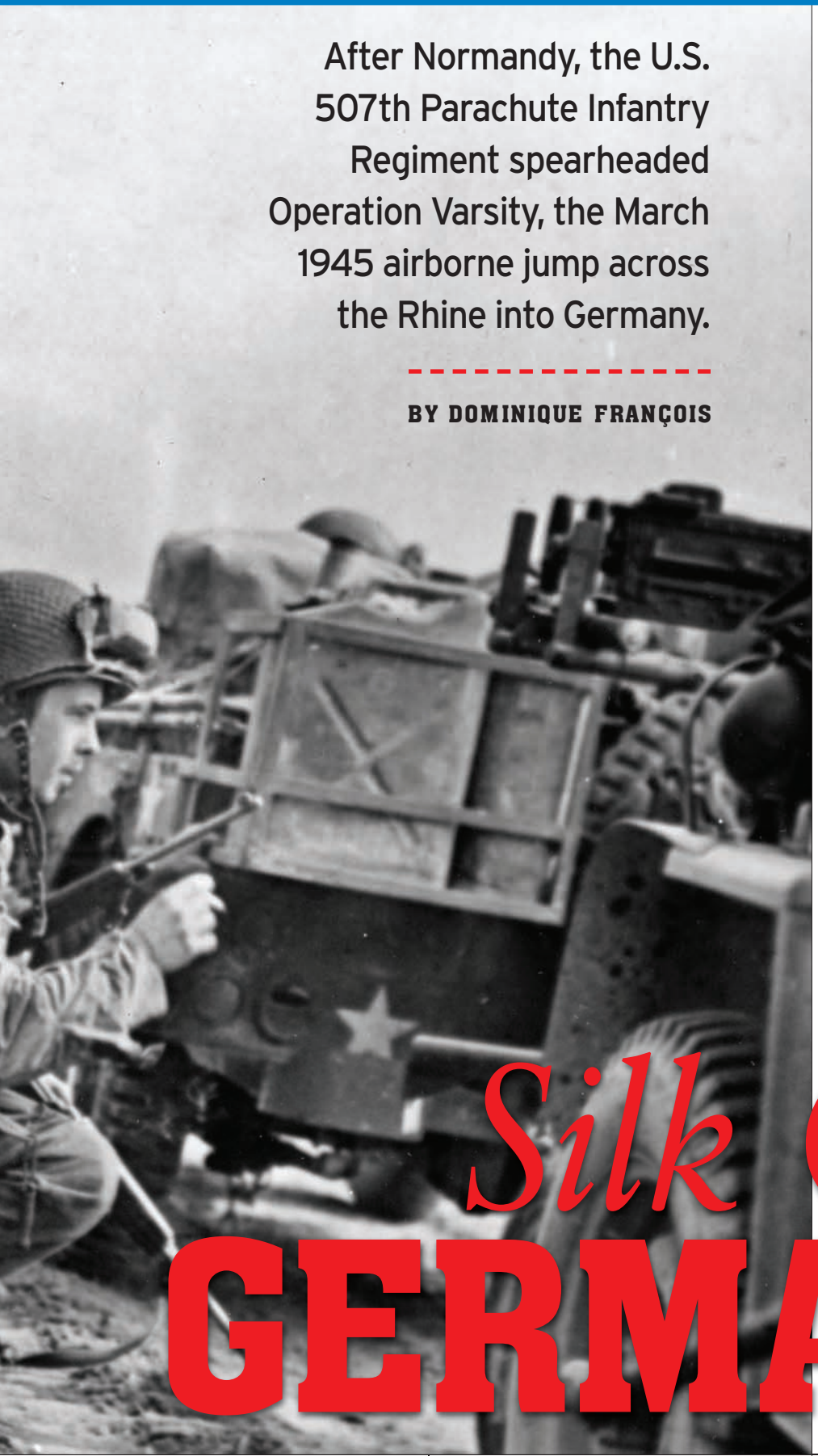
"For it is you who made this history, you who performed the heroic deeds recorded here, you who captured St. Malo, took 20,000 Nazi prisoners in one day, reached the lower Rhine before any other troops. It was you who set an infantry record by racing 215 miles across four rivers in two weeks to establish and hold the only American bridgehead over the Elbe."

Fauver remained forever proud of his division and its considerable role in the Allied victory in Europe. He received the Expert Infantryman Badge, the European Theater of Operations Medal with five battle stars, the Bronze Star, the World War II Victory Medal, the American Theater Service Medal, and the Good Conduct Medal. He died in February 2014, just two months shy of his 92nd birthday, shortly after being interviewed for this article.

The stories of the boys of the 83rd—and all who served in World War II—are fast disappearing as the veterans pass away. They all deserve to be remembered. □

National Archives

Paratroopers from the U.S. 513th Parachute Infantry Regiment take cover from German fire behind jeeps on Landing Zone R north of Wesel, on March 24, 1945. The area was principally occupied by the German II Parachute Corps. For unknown reasons, the American soldier at left is wearing a British dispatch rider's helmet and carrying a British MK5 Sten gun.



Silk Over GERMANY

After Normandy, the U.S. 507th Parachute Infantry Regiment spearheaded Operation Varsity, the March 1945 airborne jump across the Rhine into Germany.

BY DOMINIQUE FRANÇOIS

At the beginning of 1945, Nazi Germany was on the ropes. Being pounded by the Allies from both east and west, it was believed that Hitler's Third Reich was near collapse. With her cities bombed into rubble, her armies decimated, her economy shattered, and her civilian population on the verge of starvation, Germany was a hollow shell of her once mighty self. A new operation, codenamed Plunder, was seen by its planners, principally British Field Marshal Bernard Law Montgomery, as the final knockout blow.

If the British and American armies could cross the Rhine in the north—at or above the cities of the Ruhr industrial complex—then the Western Allies would have a straight shot toward Berlin and bring the war to a speedy conclusion.

Montgomery's 21st Army Group's Operation Plunder was designed as a joint British-American push across the lower Rhine and into Germany's heartland. The ground assault would be conducted by Lt. Gen. Miles Dempsey's British Second Army and Lt. Gen. William H. Simpson's U.S. Ninth Army. A key component within Plunder was Operation Varsity, a huge parachute and glider assault that would employ both U.S. and British airborne divisions under the aegis of XVIII Airborne Corps, commanded by Maj. Gen. Matthew Ridgway.

For months in late 1944, the Allies prepared for this final push, gathering equipment and supplies, improving techniques for crossing rivers, and selecting certain

armies, corps, divisions, and regiments to take part in the effort.

These planned airborne and glider forces consisted of the British 6th Airborne and the U.S. 13th and 17th Airborne Divisions (with glider and parachute artillery elements). Those airborne forces would be Colonel Edson D. Raff's 507th Parachute Infantry Regiment (PIR), Colonel James W. Coutts' 513th Parachute Infantry Regiment, and Colonel James R. Pierce's 194th Glider Infantry Regiment. The 13th Airborne Division was ultimately dropped from the operation due to limited airlift capability and would never see combat as a division, although some of its personnel were used as replacements.

After the summer battles in Normandy, Raff's 507th Parachute Infantry Regiment was a battle-tested outfit that had performed well. Formed at Fort Benning, Georgia, in July 1942, the 507th arrived in Northern Ireland in December 1943 and was attached to the U.S. 82nd Airborne Division, training in England for the Normandy invasion on June 6, 1944. The 82nd was short one regiment because its organic 504th PIR had taken heavy casualties during the Italian campaign. Once the 504th was reconstituted and reunited with its parent division, the 507th was transferred to Maj. Gen. William M. Miley's 17th Airborne Division.

Anxious for their next combat assignment, not all of the 507th's paratroopers applauded the regiment's transfer. "This move had a decidedly depressing effect on morale within the regiment," said then-Major Paul F. Smith, commander of the 1st Battalion of the 507th. Although the troops were unhappy that they had been stripped from an experienced airborne division that had distinguished itself during Operation Overlord and put into an inexperienced division that had yet to make a combat jump, Colonel Raff did everything possible to correct the situation.

"By December [1944] morale had been restored and replacements received and brought up to operational speed by an intensive training program," Smith said. "The regiment was ready and eager for another airborne operation. But that was not to be. The German push in what is now known as the 'Battle of the Bulge' had the effect of vacuuming the 507th, indeed the entire 17th Airborne Division, into the Ardennes area. For us, this was a miserably cold, high-casualty, straight infantry-type operation for which the regiment was neither organized nor equipped."

Both: National Archives

ABOVE: A 507th PIR soldier plays his harmonica to ease prejump jitters. Operation Varsity was the only time all elements of the 17th Airborne Division made a combat jump together. OPPOSITE: C-47 Skytrain and C-46 Commando transport planes drop 17th Airborne paratroopers north of Wesel, Germany, March 24, 1945. Some 40,000 paratroopers and 1,500 troop-carrying planes and gliders took part.

Following the Bulge, during which the 17th and the 507th were mauled by the massive and unexpected German offensive but still fought back heroically, the paratroopers were pulled off the line to rest and refit and wait for a new opportunity.

As the 507th withdrew to a tent camp at Châlons-sur-Marne, France, in February 1945, few of the troopers knew that they would spearhead the airborne invasion of Germany in a few weeks. Suspicions began to grow quickly, however, as little time was given to cleaning and repair of combat gear before field training was underway.

While three-day passes to Paris were had by a few lucky troopers, hard, realistic training was the rule of daily camp life. New troopers were received into the 507th to replace the 700-plus casualties taken during the Bulge, and rehearsal jumps were conducted using the Marne River to simulate the Rhine.

Varsity would mark the first use of a new aircraft, the Curtiss C-46 Commando, for deploying airborne troops. The C-46 could carry twice as many paratroopers as the C-47 Dakota (36 versus 18). Furthermore, the C-46 was faster and had doors on either side of the fuselage, allowing troops to exit the aircraft quickly. The one drawback for Varsity planners was that only 75 C-46s would be available, and most soldiers would still be carried by the older, slower C-47s.

Coutts' 513th PIR was assigned to the new aircraft, and the men of the 507th grumbled that they did not get the new planes, although, as events would soon show, they would be the lucky ones.

THE PLUNDER PLAN

The plan called for the 15th Scottish Division of British XXX Corps to launch Plunder by crossing the Rhine by boat in the predawn hours of March 24, 1945. Ten more divisions would follow. A few miles to the south, the 120,000-man U.S. XVI Corps, consisting of the 30th, 79th Infantry, and 8th Armored Divisions, among others, would do the same.

The next phase of the operation would be Varsity—the dropping of the two airborne divisions north of the city of Wesel on the northern fringe of the sprawling Essen-Düsseldorf-Dortmund industrial complex and 4 to 6 miles east of the 15th Scottish Division's assault crossings.

Varsity called for airborne forces to be dropped almost all at once at landing zones as close as possible to their objectives. The 17th Airborne would land in the southern portion of the drop zones while the British 6th Airborne would drop in the northern area. The drop would also take place during daylight hours, which had the disadvantage of exposing the slow-flying gliders and transport aircraft to German antiaircraft fire.

Realizing the danger, however, the planners chose a daylight drop because it would facilitate a quick linkup of forces and avoid the still active night fighters of the Luftwaffe, as well as avoid the problems associated with the night drop that caused so much chaos during Overlord.

Ridgway was concerned about a repeat of the previous September's Operation Market-Garden, when unexpectedly heavy German resistance delayed XXX Corps' advance on the ground and forced the airborne forces to hold their objectives for longer than planned, leading to a debacle. Dempsey assured Ridgway that the linkup of his Second Army with Simpson's Ninth Army would occur quickly, with two divisions reaching the airborne forces in no more than 48 hours. Ridgway, however, remained skeptical of Dempsey's promise; he blamed much of Market-Garden's failure on Dempsey's lack of aggressiveness in pushing British ground forces forward.

The Varsity drop and landings would put the parachute and glider troops behind the German forward riverline defenses and squarely on top of their reserves and supporting artillery. The German II Parachute Corps, with the understrength 6th, 7th, and 8th Parachute Divisions, was the principal defense force in the Wesel area.

The 17th Airborne Division's threefold mission was to seize, clear, and secure its area with priority given to the high ground east of Diersfordt and bridges over the small Issel River north of Wesel; protect the Corps' right flank; and make contact with the two river-crossing forces and British 6th Airborne.

The 507th, nicknamed "Raff's Ruffians," was made a combat team (CT) by the attachment of the 464th Parachute Field Artillery (PFA) Battalion and Battery A, 155th Antiaircraft Battalion. The 507th CT would lead the entire XVIII Corps assault. It was to seize its objective, assist the Rhine crossings of the 15th Scottish Division, and assemble along the eastern edge of the woods when junction with the assault units was made. It would also capture a castle at Diersfordt that intelligence said was the headquarters for German units in the area. Drop time was set for 10 AM on March 24.

After four weeks of training at Châlons-sur-Marne, the 507th was on its way to being sealed into marshaling areas at airfield A-40 at Chartres, southwest of Paris, and A-79 at Reims, east of Paris.

For several days, maps and aerial photos of the airborne invasion area east of the Rhine were updated. Detailed terrain

National Archives

ABOVE: Immediately after landing, men of the 507th PIR, known as "Raff's Ruffians," head for their objective, the Diersfordt Castle. BELOW: Maj. Gen. William M. Miley, second from left, sets up the 17th Airborne Division's command post immediately after landing near Wesel at 3 PM, March 24, 1945.

boards of the Varsity drop area and plans for the assault were studied and restudied by all troopers. Equipment was checked and rechecked. The time between briefings, eating, and sleeping was filled with physical conditioning, sports, movies, and jesting about Axis Sally's radio broadcast prediction that the jump they were about to make would end in bloody failure.

THE LIFT

D-day, March 24, 1945, dawned clear and sunny as the first three aircraft transporting Colonel Raff and his regimental command group lifted off from A-40 at 7:17 AM. In the next plane, leading 1st Battalion assault elements, were battalion commander Major Paul F. Smith, B Company commander Captain John Marr, and Major Floyd "Ben" Schwartzwalder, who would be spearheading the 17th Division military government efforts. Completing the 41-plane first serial was the remainder of the 1st Battalion, slated to go into regimental reserve north of the drop zone (DZ) upon landing.

Next in line with 45 planes from A-79 was Lt. Col. Charles J. Timmes' 2nd Battalion, which was tasked with taking positions west of the DZ and assisting the British river crossing. With another 45 planes from A-79, Lt. Col. Allen Taylor's 3rd Battalion began taking off behind 2nd Battalion with the mission of seizing and holding the high ground northwest of the DZ at Diersfordt.

The 17th Airborne planes, all headed for DZ W, would require 2½ hours to reach the drop zone. Coutts' 513th PIR would follow immediately, and then additional C-47s, towing 906 CG-4A Waco gliders, would bring in Pierce's 194th Glider Infantry Regiment.

The last planes took off just before 9 AM. The airborne lift included a total of 9,387 paratroopers and glider-borne soldiers carried aboard 72 C-46s, 836 C-47s, and 906 CG-4A gliders. This, combined with the British airborne armada of nearly 800 transports and 420 gliders carrying over 8,000 soldiers, stretched nearly 200 miles and took 37 minutes to pass a given point.

The aerial panorama unfolded as the skytrain of IX Troop Carrier Command moved toward the showdown on German soil. Below, the peaceful French and Belgian landscape was greening and farmers were already in the fields. The zigzag pattern of old trenches came into view—mute testimony of another world war that had engulfed humanity a generation earlier.

Fighter planes protecting the air column cavorted about doing barrel rolls and other aerobatics. Brussels became visible, then a thick haze of smoke from generators, used to screen the British river crossings, enveloped the air column as it crossed over the release point for its final leg to the drop zone.

The unnamed author of the 507th's official *Historical Report–507th Combat Team–Operation Varsity* noted that the view from the planes "showed a beautiful European landscape, colorfully roofed hamlets, large industrial areas, and cozy little farms. War seemed far away. [At] the 20-minute warning, the men stood up and hooked up. It won't be long now.

"Suddenly, as if a curtain had been lifted, the view changed. The countryside was beaten and gray, barren, a graveyard look, the smoke of battle wafted drearily upward, shots could be heard; we were approaching the Rhine."

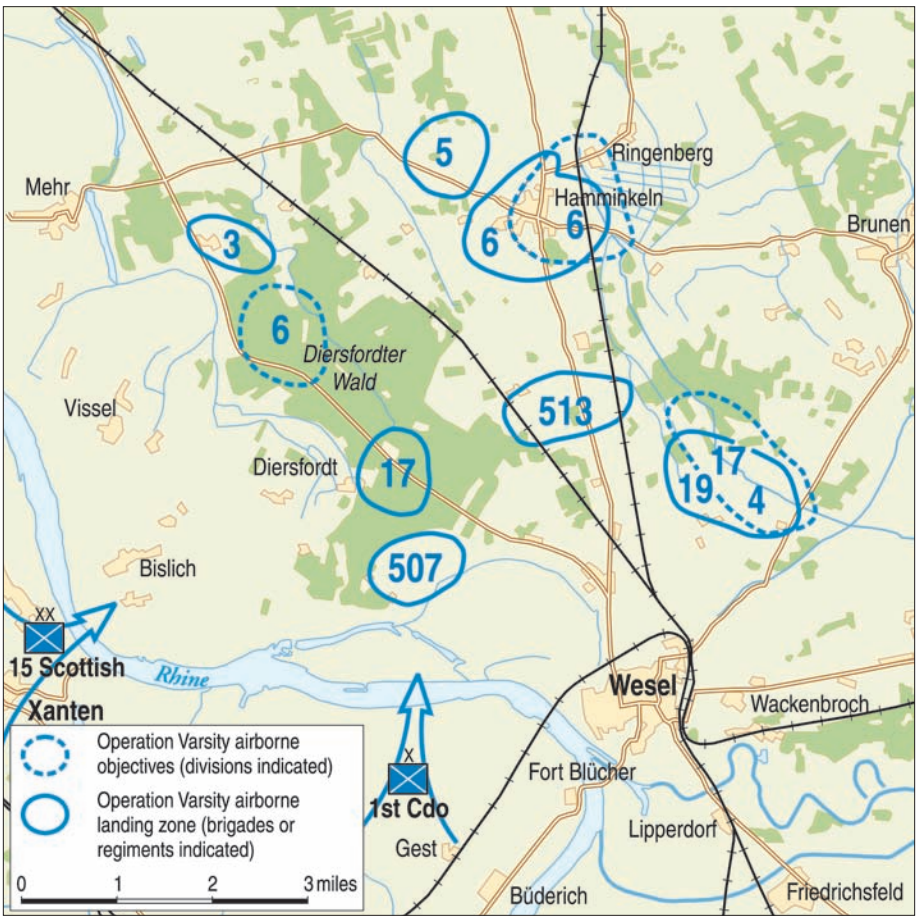
At once the air was filled with hundreds of explosions from flak guns positioned behind the German riverline defenses—explosions meant to bring down the low-flying troop-carrier columns. Axis Sally's claims to have detailed knowledge of the Allied airborne plan, along with her dire predictions about the outcome, seemed to have credibility as flak-damaged planes could be seen spilling out paratroopers while veering sharply, losing altitude, and streaming flames.

Just before the jump, Colonel Raff, a devout Catholic, said a silent prayer. "I was alone standing in the door of the plane looking down at the river passing beneath the plane, smoke partially obscured my view. At that moment, I said a prayer to the infant Jesus, the Little Flower: 'Flower, in this hour show Thy power.' The prayer was given to me by my sister, who was a nun. I said the prayer before every jump. A split second after I said the prayer, the green light came on."

THE DROP

At 9:50 AM the men in Raff's C-46 jumped out behind their commander. As the regimental command group and the men of the 1st Battalion left their planes, they were confident that Colonel Joel Crouch's Pathfinder Group, in whose planes they rode, had brought them over DZ W, two miles north of Wesel. En route to the DZ, Crouch had bet Raff a case of champagne that the drop would be made squarely on the DZ.

The anonymous author of the 507th's official report captured the moment: "For an instant the big river flashed beneath us, ack-ack and anti-aircraft fire rattled and cracked around the planes; the green light, GO! A rush of air, a jerk, a look around, a jolt, we were on the ground and the 507th Parachute Infantry had been committed."



The mission of the airborne and glider troops was to eliminate the threat that German artillery around Wesel posed to the Allies' Rhine River crossings and to block German attempts to attack the bridgeheads.

National Archives

An American transport plane, its right wing aflame, plunges to its doom; 72 aircraft were lost on the mission.

Raff noted, "As I looked down, I saw several objects below me. The first thing that caught my attention were several German soldiers on the ground with rifles in their hands, looking up. The second thing I noticed was a heavy equipment bundle that was swinging back and forth as it descended toward the ground. The bundle saved my life because the Germans thought it was a bomb and disappeared into the cellar of a nearby house.

"I landed in the chicken yard behind one of the homes. There were no chickens, since they had all been eaten. The loneliness was numbing as there wasn't another paratrooper in sight. But soon I joined up with others in the 507 and I was astonished to see Germans to our right in the process of pulling artillery behind us. Needless to say, they were soon captured."

Raff won the champagne bet easily as Crouch's group missed DZ W with all 45 planeloads, dropping them to the northwest of Diersfordt, 2,500 yards from DZ W and atop a host of German artillery positions in the 513th CT's area of responsibility. The German gunners inflicted some casualties during the descent, but the defense collapsed quickly in the face of

return fire from organized groups of paratroopers.

The story was different on DZ W, where Timmes' 2nd and Taylor's 3rd Battalions and the 464th PFA Battalion landed in the midst of heavy fire from machine guns, mortars, and small arms that killed many paratroopers in the air, at touchdown, during assembly, and while attacking German strongpoints.

The 507th's official report said, "Several planes were destroyed in the air. At least one plane crashed on the DZ with all aboard. Other planes burned after dropping their personnel. In some, the Air Corps personnel escaped; in others, charred bodies gave stark testimony to the devotion of duty performed by good soldiers. Some parachutists were hit during their descent, some were killed in their harnesses, and others while scrambling off the field."

Immediately behind Colonel Raff in the first plane was A Company sergeant and bazookaman Harold E. Barkley. During the drop, he lowered his bazooka bag on its tether, slipped his parachute to the side to avoid an equipment chute, and saw himself headed toward a hole in a barn roof. Helpless to avoid it, he uttered a prayer and came to an unexpected landing in the hayloft inside. When the door burst open below, he was certain that it was the enemy but then someone shouted, "Hold it, that's Barkley!"

Another A Company man, John H. Nichols, remembered the skill and courage of the troop-carrier pilots as they brought his plane, being buffeted by flak, in for the drop at 400-600 feet. He was shocked at the sight of some of his buddies hanging dead in their chutes from the bare tree limbs at the edge of the woods.

This was echoed by H Company's Pfc. Gordon Nagel. Cut and blinded by blood in his eyes after being hit across the face with his own submachine gun when he received the shock of his parachute opening, Nagel did not see his landing. As he regained his sight on the ground, he saw the dead bodies of three paratroopers, all close friends, sprawled nearby.

Private First Class Bob Baldwin, H Company, also had a horrifying experience. During the descent, he saw his platoon sergeant disintegrate in midair when his bag of explosives was hit by a German bullet. He also remembered pulling himself over a seven-foot-high fence while German gunners tried to kill him.

National Archives

ABOVE: 17th Airborne Division paratroopers are pinned down by German fire shortly after landing. One trooper (right) appears to be lying dead on his back. OPPOSITE: A German half-track burns after being destroyed by a 507th bazooka team.

Upon hitting the ground, D Company's Paul N. Peck heard buzzing sounds reminiscent of bees. He started to run and fell with his chute still attached to his harness. Looking down, he noticed bullet holes in his jacket and trousers and quickly realized that the buzzing sounds were German machine-gun bullets tracking him across the DZ. Without helmet, rifle, or grenades, Peck ran to safety and then helped a mortar crew fire some rounds. He soon found a carbine and took up the duties of scout.

Staff Sergeant Joe Faust, C Company, fell victim to the white flag ruse so often used by the Germans. About 50 flag-waving Germans were in the woods and, as Faust advanced to take them prisoner, the flags were dropped and guns were drawn. In the hail of lead that followed, Faust went down with a bullet wound in the thigh.

Individual acts of heroism took place all over the area. One particularly conspicuous one involved G Company's Private George Peters, from Cranston, Rhode Island. After landing near Flüren, the 20-year-old Peters and 10 other troopers were fired upon by a German machine-gun crew, supported by riflemen, while struggling to free themselves from their parachutes. Pinned down, Peters, without orders and armed only with a rifle and a few grenades, stood up and charged the gun position 75 yards away.

He was hit and knocked to the ground by a burst from the German gun but got to his feet and continued his charge. Hit again and unable to rise, he crawled directly toward the machine-gun nest that had wounded him. In his dying moments, he hurled a grenade that destroyed the gun crew, caused the riflemen to flee, and saved the lives of his fellow troopers. He was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor.

Such acts of bravery were making a difference. The 507th's history said, "During this period the enemy seemed to be completely demoralized and disorganized. Some gave up without fighting, although they had the advantage of ground, prepared positions,

combined with the fact that the paratrooper is comparatively helpless for some seconds after he hits the ground. Others fought hard and ferociously, inflicting casualties on the DZ and in engagements immediately beyond the DZ. Our positions were beginning to take form, but as yet the Germans did not seem to be maintaining any line."

Although they had landed in the wrong area, Colonel Raff's group and Lt. Col. Paul Smith's 1st Battalion took the initiative and began battling the enemy wherever they found them. A group of about 150 troopers assembled with Captains Murray Harvey of Headquarters Company, John Marr of B Company, and John T. Joseph of C Company headed north to assemble in the woods and began clearing German artillery crews from the objective of 2nd Battalion, 513th Combat Team.

While Smith's troopers were attacking and destroying the enemy positions, Raff's men knocked out a machine-gun nest and dug-in infantry on their way to the assigned regimental objective—an old castle at Diersfordt.

The official Army history noted, "Spotting a battery of five 150mm artillery pieces firing from a clearing, Raff and his force detoured to eliminate it. They captured both the German artillerymen and the guns and spiked the guns with thermite grenades. By the time Raff's paratroopers reached the vicinity of Diersfordt, they had killed about 55 Germans, wounded 40, and captured 300, including a colonel."

The 37-year-old Raff, who had been at war ever since he parachuted into Oran, Algeria, in November 1942, was much beloved and respected by his men. One of them said, "If we were ordered to invade Hell, I'd have followed him there." Even General Dwight D. Eisenhower, Supreme Allied Commander in Western Europe, had high praise for Raff, saying '"The deceptions he practiced, the speed with which he struck, his boldness and his aggressiveness, kept the enemy completely confused during a period of weeks."

THE BATTLE FOR THE CASTLE

Reversing direction, Raff's group turned southeast and by 11 AM arrived at the northwest edge of the grounds of the Diersfordt castle, a fortress that dated from 1432 and was being used as a headquarters. The most determined enemy troops, and the last to fall in the 507th's area of responsibility, were entrenched in and around Diersfordt Castle.

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Here, the Raff group, along with Harvey's, Marr's, and Joseph's men, were rejoined by Major Smith, who had collected about 200 paratroopers, the bulk of them from A Company commanded by Captain Albert L. Stephens.

Smith and his group had eliminated some enemy positions when they were fired on by German tanks coming from Diersfordt Castle. The Army's official history said, "Two German [Mark IV] tanks emerged from the castle and headed down a narrow forest road toward the waiting paratroopers. An aptly placed antitank grenade induced the crew of the lead tank to surrender, whereupon a tank-hunter team armed with a 57mm recoilless rifle set the second afire with a direct hit, the first instance of successful combat use of the new weapon."

With about 90 percent of his battalion available and under orders from Raff to continue the assault on the Diersfordt stronghold, Smith launched his attack.

The Army's official history continued: "While two companies laid down a base of fire from the edge of the forest against turrets and upper windows, Company G entered and began to clean out the castle, room by room."

With a lot of rooms to clear and after two hours of nonstop fighting, Captain Bill Miller's G Company began its assault on the turret of the old fortress's tower, where a number of German officers held out.

Wounded during the battle and unable to continue in the fight, Captain Miller passed an American flag to Staff Sgt. Bill Consolvo. Earlier that morning, before takeoff, Miller had displayed the flag to the G Company troopers and vowed that it would be flying high over Germany before day's end. Now it was up to Consolvo.

When a German colonel in the castle turret was severely burned by a phosphorous grenade, the holdouts came rushing out and surrendered. The castle fight yielded nearly 500 prisoners (including a number of senior officers from the German LXXXVI Corps and 84th Infantry Division), five tanks, and a host of other weapons. Consolvo climbed the turret,

unfurled the flag, and secured it to the highest point. G Company troopers, busy consolidating their positions, stopped long enough to give a proud salute to the victory flag.

The hoisted flag was a fitting punctuation for the 507th's last major skirmish of March 24. That evening, the regiment, with Diersfordt and the castle firmly in its grasp, sent out patrols and made contact with the British 1st Commando Brigade in the ruins of bomb-ravaged Wesel.

Compared to other units in the 17th Airborne Division, the 507th Combat Team's casualties had been light—about 150 killed and wounded.

As the battle for the castle raged, other companies of Timmes' 2nd Battalion continued fighting their way through the area, reducing enemy strongpoints one by one. Nearby houses used for German gun emplacements also had to be taken. Once the woods southwest of Diersfordt were cleared, F Company contacted the British river-crossing forces at about 2:30 PM.

The 464th PFA followed the 507th onto DZ W and, to the surprise of the Germans, began reducing points of resistance on the DZ with direct fire from its 75mm pack howitzers. With steady accumulation, 10 of its 12 howitzers were in support of the 507th within three hours. Shortly before 3 PM, regimental headquarters was established north of the town of Flüren and south of Diersfordt.

Against a powerful German force that had every advantage of terrain and choice of position, Raff's CT had accomplished all its missions with distinction. It had converted initial adversity into the opportunity of an early assault on its main objective.

In the 507th's sector, only minor points of resistance were left to be mopped up. A firm link with the British forces had been forged, and bridges across the Issel River had been taken for the drive eastward.

THE 513th ARRIVES

The arrival of the 507th had, of course, brought German antiaircraft defenses to full alert, and the gunners who had survived Raff's initial assault were waiting when the planes carrying the 513th PIR approached the drop zones. These gunners now turned their attention to the low-flying transport planes and descending paratroopers overhead.

Almost immediately, a fatal C-46 design flaw became tragically apparent. The planes lacked self-sealing fuel tanks. If a fuel tank were punctured, high-octane aviation gas would stream along the wings toward the fuselage. All it took was a single spark to turn each plane into a flying inferno. German 20mm incendiary rounds proved extremely lethal, and several damaged aircraft were set ablaze.

Ridgway later reported that the heaviest losses during Varsity came in the first 30 minutes of the 513th's drop. Nineteen of the 72 C-46s were lost, with 14 going down in flames, some with paratroopers on board. Another 38 were badly damaged. Many soldiers wounded during the flight to the drop zones chose to jump and take their chances rather than remain in the dangerously flawed aircraft. After Varsity, Ridgway issued orders prohibiting the use of C-46s in future airborne operations.

The C-46 carrying the 513th's commander, Colonel Coutts, was hit by long-range antiaircraft fire and was ablaze as it crossed the Rhine. Coutts' stick managed to hook up one wounded soldier and shove him out of the plane before the rest followed.

Upon hitting the ground, Coutts and his men came under intense small-arms fire, and many were killed and wounded as they descended. Suddenly, the drop zone was being invaded by hundreds of British paratroopers, and British gliders soon began landing all around. At first Coutts thought that the British had landed in the wrong zone, but soon he realized that his regiment had been mistakenly dropped in the British sector, about a mile and a half from Hamminkeln.

After assembling under heavy fire, the battalions of the 513th fought their way south toward their assigned objectives, destroying two tanks, a self-propelled gun, and two

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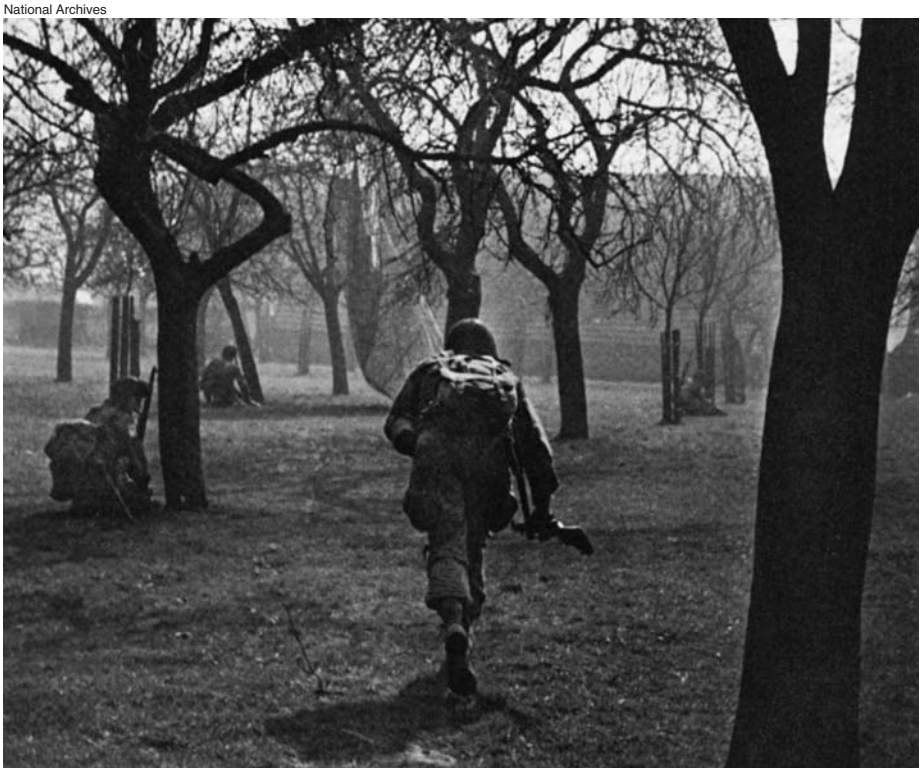

507th PIR men advance on a farmhouse full of German soldiers and civilians in this photograph by Robert Capa, who jumped with the 507th. The Germans were captured soon after this photo was taken. Note the parachute hanging from a tree.

Imperial War Museum

National Archives

ABOVE: (Left) Colonel Edson D. Raff, 507th PIR's commander. (Right) Private George J. Peters earned the Medal of Honor posthumously. LEFT: After crossing the Rhine, a Sherman Duplex Drive amphibious tank (right) provides a lift to men of the 6th Kings Own Scottish Borderers, 15th Scottish Division, moving to link up with the 507th PIR.

batteries of 88mm guns in the process. One battalion reached the Issel River, the easternmost of the first day's objectives. The 507th, however, also having been dropped in the wrong area, had already seized many of the 513th's objectives by the time it arrived.

As the 513th's Company E advanced south, it was raked by heavy fire from enemy machine guns set up in some buildings; one platoon was immediately pinned down. With complete disregard for his own safety, 21-year-old Pfc. Stuart S. Stryker of Portland, Oregon, rose and charged toward the enemy. He was cut down by enemy fire, but his actions rallied others in the company and shortly thereafter they overran the German position, taking more than 200 prisoners and freeing three American airmen who had been shot down and captured. Stryker was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions. He was the second 17th Airborne trooper to earn America's highest military award during Varsity.

The 513th's supporting artillery, the 466th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion commanded by Lt. Col. Ken Booth, landed on the correct drop zone southeast of Hamminkeln, but enemy fire there was heavier than that faced by the infantry. German fire took a great toll among the battalion's officers, and many artillerymen were forced to fight as infantry while others assembled their 75mm pack howitzers and gathered ammunition and equipment off the drop zone.

Despite the intense fire, the artillerymen assembled several of their guns within 30 minutes and were soon blasting away at German targets. By noon, the 466th had captured 10 German 76mm guns and was providing artillery support for the 513th Parachute Infantry.

By around 3:30 PM, the 513th had taken all its objectives along with some 1,500 prisoners. Operation Varsity's airborne phase was all but over.

On D+1 (March 25), the 507th's 3rd Battalion was in reserve, as were the 1st and 2nd Battalions with tank-destroyer guns attached. They cleared enemy pockets from the area between the 507th, the Scottish Commandos at Wesel, and British forces making a new crossing of the curving Rhine, south to north, about 5,000 yards west of Wesel.

This put the 507th on Phase Line London, facing east. The airborne drop had collapsed German defenses east of the Rhine. To prevent the enemy from building a defense elsewhere, speed was of utmost importance. A series of Phase Lines (dubbed London, New York, Paris, Boston, etc.) were laid out to the east toward the ancient city of Münster (founded in AD 793), the cultural capital of the Westphalia region, to coordinate the Allied advance.

The British Second Army and the U.S. Ninth Army would attack eastward with the Lippe River separating them. Maintaining contact between the two armies would be the responsibility of the U.S. 30th Infantry Division and the 17th's 507th CT. With a company of tanks added to its arsenal, the 507th stood on Phase Line London, ready for the upcoming sprint.

THE DASH TO MÜNSTER

At three minutes past 9 AM on March 26, the 507th CT began its advance to Phase Line New York just beyond a north-south autobahn with the 1st and 2nd Battalions in the lead; the goal was Münster, 50 miles away. The 507th advanced against sporadic resistance in what was to become the most prevalent form of the Germans' delaying tactic, one or two self-propelled guns and a platoon or so of infantry equipped with machine guns and mortars.

These small, highly mobile teams would open fire from concealed positions, force deployment of the advancing troops, then scoot to the rear to repeat the tactic at another village, road intersection, bridge, or other critical point.

The German tactics were effective to a certain extent, but the enemy was overwhelmed by the speed of the Allied advance. As the 507th kept up the pressure to the towns of Peddenburg,

Schermbeck, and Wulfen, the battalions leapfrogged from reserve to frontline duty, using trucks on occasion to speed the advance.

At 11:04 AM on the 27th, the 17th Division's commanding general, Maj. Gen. William M. Milley, called for pursuit tactics, which meant that units should step up the pace, bypass points of resistance, and go for deep objectives. In keeping with pursuit tactics, the British 6th Guards Armoured Brigade, with the 513th CT soldiers riding its tanks, passed through the 507th on March 28 and sped off to Haltern.

The push was relentless day and night with only short respites at key coordination points, and it became difficult for commanders to keep up with the forward progress of their frontline units. On one occasion Colonel Raff and his bodyguard, Cleo Crouch, went forward to find H Company's Captain Stephens, who was reported to be out front trying to locate a German self-propelled gun. They moved forward to the top of a hill but failed to find the captain. As they turned about to retrace their steps, a dud from the unseen German self-propelled gun crashed at their feet. As the two men ran for the woods, the gun spit out three more rounds that exploded harmlessly in the trees.

On March 29, the 507th CT, having fought its way over 25 miles in four days, was detached from the 17th Division, attached to XIX Corps, and sent to Haltern, between Wesel and Münster, to relieve the Guards Armoured Brigade. By this time German soldiers were streaming to the west by the hundreds, many in unit formation, in an attempt to stop the Allied advance.

At Haltern the 507th fought off counterattacks, many from the south, rooted out pockets of resistance, and searched for German military installations in the city and outlying suburbs, where it flushed out pockets of stubborn enemy soldiers. And Münster had plenty of military installations. It was the home of the VI and XXIII Corps as well as the XXXIII and LVI Panzer Corps, not to mention 24 infantry and armored divisions.

After Münster fell to the 17th Airborne Division (now under the command of Maj. Gen. Alvan C. Gillem) and 6th Guards Armoured Brigade on April 2, XIX Corps relinquished control of the 507th back to the 17th Airborne Division, and it was trucked to Münster, where battalion sectors were assigned for cleanup and protection duties.

THE BATTLE OF THE RUHR POCKET

Early on April 6, the 507th's 1st and 3rd Battalions performed a night relief of the 315th Infantry Regiment and a battalion of the 314th Regiment, 79th Infantry Division along the Rhine-Herne Canal on the southern edge of Bottrop, northwest of Essen. Here the CT was tasked with guarding four factories. Curfew and a policy of a minimum number of troopers on duty were adopted.

This respite gave time for bathing, delousing, clothing change, equipment repair, restoring basic ammunition loads, and rest from the rigors of the past 12 days. Combat was not over, however, as the enemy dished up a fairly constant menu of sniper, machine-gun, artillery, and mortar fire. The troopers along the canal returned the fire and, using assault boats issued to each battalion, systematically patrolled the German side.

At 3 AM on April 7, the 79th Division attacked south across the canal from positions to the left, while the 507th conducted a successful demonstration to draw German fire away from the 79th. As that action got underway, 3rd Battalion forged a small bridgehead across the canal on the right side of the 507th zone with two platoons from I Company.

At 9:55 that evening, the 3rd Battalion had captured 11 prisoners and dispatched a combat patrol, led by H Company's 1st Lt. Bartley E. Hale and accompanied by Regimental S-2 (Intelligence) Captain George J. Roper, that clashed with a strong German force. Roper was killed, and the patrol disappeared. Efforts to reach Hale and his men were unsuccessful.

The next day, Battalion S-2 1st Lt. Donald C. O'Rourke flew over the point of last

Imperial War Museum

Men of the 17th Airborne Division ride atop a Churchill tank belonging to the 6th Guards Tank Brigade through Dorsten, Germany, east of Wesel.

National Archives

Men of Company C, 513th PIR, fighting with the U.S. Ninth Army, pass through a roadblock in Münster, northeast of Wesel, April 1, 1945.

contact and, seeing 12 guarded paratroopers lined up against a wall, presumed them to be part of the lost patrol. When the patrol was freed after the German collapse in the Ruhr Pocket, it was learned that it had exhausted its ammunition and had to surrender.

On April 8, 2nd Battalion attacked across the canal and captured 38 Germans while reaching its objective on the right flank of the 79th Division. Meanwhile, Taylor's 3rd Battalion hung onto its bridgehead under increasing fire and counterattacks. The 1st Battalion reverted to reserve.

The Germans still had plenty of fight left as the 1st Battalion discovered when it came out of reserve the following morning and passed through 2nd Battalion on the front lines. When 21-year-old Pfc. Dante Toneguzzo's platoon from C Company was pinned down by fire from two mutually supporting pillboxes near Essen, he arose on his own initiative in the face of withering enemy fire and stormed the nearest pillbox alone. His grenade killed two and caused nine Germans to surrender.

Then, still alone, Toneguzzo unhesitatingly moved against the second pillbox, again exposing himself to intense machine-gun and sniper fire. He threw another grenade, which killed one enemy soldier and forced five others to surrender. For this selfless act of heroism, the native of Columbus, Ohio, was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.

HEADING EAST

By April 10, the tempo of Allied operations began to step up as the Germans began withdrawing, leaving cities open in their wake. All 507th battalions linked up south of the Rhine Herne Canal. At 2:30 PM, two five-man jeep patrols entered Essen, home of the renowned Krupp Steel munitions works, and returned at 5 PM to report no resistance in the bomb-shattered city. By 2:30 the next morning, the 507th was holding assigned sectors in Essen.

With little rest, the CT was on the move again by 7 AM and in Mulheim with a small bridgehead west of the Ruhr River by noon; the 194th Glider Infantry Regiment followed shortly thereafter and relieved the 507th, which was ordered to attack Duisburg, one of the major industrial cities of the Ruhr area. Although the orders were soon cancelled, the cancellation came too late to stop two jeep patrols that reached the edge of the city and found that it was ready to surrender.

At 3 PM, the German military commander of Duisburg, realizing further resistance was futile, surrendered to the 2nd Battalion's S-2, 1st Lt. Harley Bennett. An hour later Colonel Raff signed the formal acceptance of the German surrender. At midnight, B Company of the 1st Battalion entered the quiet, shattered city and established control.

It was apparent that German resistance in the West was rapidly collapsing and, despite Hitler's demands that all Germans fight to the death, many local commanders were choosing surrender over annihilation.

The 507th took up positions along the Ruhr River south of Essen from Kettwig to Dalhauser. The pressure of other American forces pushing up from the south caught the Germans in a huge vise.

Almost unbelievably, here and there some German units were refusing to give up and continued fighting. Some German units seemed focused on retaking bridges over the Ruhr, especially the one at the small village of Werden, where Timmes' 2nd Battalion had established a bridgehead.

After April 16, the Germans delivered concentrations of heavy-caliber fire and launched counterattacks to wipe out the bridgehead, but each time they were repulsed. On the 16th, gunfire could be heard from the south and German guns could be seen firing. At 6:55 AM, F Company's 2nd Lt. Thomas J. Danes moved forward to link up with Task Force Leonard of the 13th Armored Division. But the fighting was almost over.

At 8:45 AM on this last day of combat for the CT, E Company was contacted by the 13th Infantry Regiment, 8th Infantry Division, the same division that had relieved the 507th of its combat duties in Normandy nine months earlier, and the guns went silent.

HOSTILITIES CEASE

While open hostilities were at last over for the 507th, it still had urgent military duties

Continued on page 96

KIWIS *over the Pacific*

The Royal New Zealand Air Force played a pivotal role in the war against Japan.

BY ALLYN VANNOY

During early World War II operations in the Pacific, Geoff Fisken would become one of the most outstanding pilots of the RNZAF—the Royal New Zealand Air Force.

Fisken was born in Gisborne, New Zealand, in 1918, and during the 1930s he learned to fly a de Havilland Gypsy Moth biplane. In 1939, Fisken was working for a farmer in Masterton, and at the outbreak of war in Europe he volunteered for flying duty. Being in a "reserved" occupation, it was not until early 1940 that he was released for service in the RNZAF.

In February 1941, Fisken was posted to Singapore to join No. 205 Squadron RAF which was operating Singapore flying boats manufactured by Short Brothers of Britain. When he arrived, however, he discovered that these machines were being transferred to No. 5 Squadron RNZAF, so Fisken was sent instead to complete a fighter conversion course using Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) Wirraway trainers and Brewster Buffaloes. Upon completion of this course, he was posted to No. 67 Squadron RAF, which was primarily made up of fellow New Zealanders.

In October 1941, as the threat of war with Japan was increasing, No. 67 Squadron was moved to Mingaladon, Burma, but Fisken was posted instead to No. 243 Squadron RAF.

With the Japanese attacks across East Asia and the western Pacific on December 8, 1941, No. 243 Squadron was assigned to defend the Royal Navy's Force Z—the battleship HMS *Prince of Wales* and battlecruiser HMS *Repulse*. Two days later the British warships were attacked and sunk by Japanese air units. Then, as the Japanese advanced down the Malay Peninsula, Singapore became the target of an increasing number of bombing raids.

On December 16, while operating in defense of Singapore, Fisken claimed a Mitsubishi A6M Zero fighter shot down. A fortnight later, on December 29, he claimed two Japanese bombers, and on January 12, 1942, Fisken downed a Nakajima Ki-27 Nate fighter. Then, two days later, he downed another Zero, being lucky enough to land his disabled aircraft after being caught in the explosion of the Japanese plane.

On January 17 he shot down or assisted in the destruction of three Mitsubishi G3M Nell bombers, and four days later he brought down another enemy fighter. Amazingly, all of these actions were while Fisken was flying an obsolescent Brewster Buffalo.

By this time No. 243 Squadron had lost the majority of its pilots and virtually all its aircraft. As a result, it was merged with No. 453 Squadron of the RAAF, which continued to operate along with No. 488 Squadron RNZAF.

Fisken claimed another fighter destroyed on February 1. Five days later he was

Bristol Beaufort torpedo bombers of the Royal New Zealand Air Force make a January 1942 bombing run against the Japanese-occupied city and harbor of Rabaul, New Britain. Painting by Australian war artist Alan Moore.

Australian War Memorial

bounced by two Japanese fighters, shooting down one while narrowly escaping the other, though he was injured in the arm and leg by a cannon shell.

On the eve of Singapore's surrender, Commonwealth pilots were withdrawn to Batavia (now Jakarta), Java, and later to Australia. As a result of his performance in Singapore, Geoff Fisken received a commission and was promoted to the rank of pilot officer.

Fisken was just one of hundreds of New Zealanders—Kiwis—who loved nothing more than a good brawl but of whom little is known today outside their island nation.

LONG ROAD

The Kiwi pilots had traveled a long road to become part of the Pacific War, but they would labor in relative anonymity.

When Great Britain declared war on Germany in September 1939, the Royal New Zealand Air Force's strength was only 1,160 personnel with a mere 102 air-

craft, mostly secondhand Blackburn B-5 Baffins and Fairey Gordons, both biplanes, along with some relatively newer but still obsolescent aircraft—five low-wing, two-engine Airspeed Oxfords and nine Vickers Vildebeest biplanes that were totally outclassed by Japanese aircraft. The role of the RNZAF then was purely as a training organization that supplied pilots to the Royal Air Force (RAF).

During the first 12 months of the war, the RNZAF undertook efforts to transition from a training organization to a combat force—initially arming all available machines, including airliners, and endeavoring to reequip with more modern machines. The period saw an expansion of the RNZAF with new pilot training schools established at Taieri, Harewood, New Plymouth, and Whenuapai, and an air gunner and observer school at Ohakea.

The possible presence of German surface raiders in the Pacific led to the formation of units flying Vildebeest biplane torpedo bombers, organized into three territorial squadrons to patrol off Auckland, Wellington, and Lyttelton.

Early in 1941, the RNZAF obtained Lockheed Hudsons, American-built, two-engine light bombers, to be used for maritime patrol and reconnaissance operations. At about the same time, the RNZAF's No. 5 Squadron, equipped with obsolete Vickers Vincents biplanes and four worn-out Singapore flying boats, was sent to the British colony of Fiji to conduct patrols and reconnaissance.

On December 8, 1941, the RNZAF had 641 aircraft, the majority used for training. Its combat aircraft included 36 Lockheed Hudsons, 48 Vickers Vincents, 26 Vickers Vildebeests, and two Short Singapore III flying boats. The RNZAF's strength had grown to 17,000 personnel, with 10,500 in New Zealand, 1,100 in Canada, some 3,600 attached to the Royal Air Force, and nearly 600 at other Pacific locations, mainly on Fiji.

To offset its own meager resources, New Zealand received some assistance from Britain, but most of the aircraft initially provided consisted of trainers, including North American Harvards (designated the AT-6 by the U.S. Army Air Corps and the SNJ by the U.S. Navy), Hawker Hinds (light biplane bombers), and de Havilland DH 82 Tiger Moth biplanes. These aircraft were repainted for combat operations and armed.

In late March 1942, the RNZAF formed the surviving pilots from operations at Singapore—Nos. 243 and 488 Squadrons—into No. 14 Squadron RNZAF under Squadron Leader J.N. Mackenzie. Employed in a defensive role, they were initially equipped with obsolete Harvards.

As few combat-capable aircraft were yet available, New Zealand turned to the United States for assistance.

A great deal of discussion took place between New Zealand, Britain, and the United States on the question of equipment for the RNZAF and the role the RNZAF was to play in the Pacific Theater. The New Zealand government, under Prime Minister Peter Fraser, proposed that the RNZAF be expanded to a strength of 20 squadrons by April 1943 and that a proportion of the squadrons should take part in offensive operations against the Japanese. The proposal was submitted to the joint planning staffs in Britain and the United States for consideration.

In view of the overall supply position, and the fact that the expansion and equipping of the RNZAF would necessitate the supply of considerably more than just fighter aircraft, the American joint planners recommended to their chiefs of staff that the RNZAF should be limited until April 1943 to a strength of four light bomber squadrons with Hudsons and five fighter squadrons with Curtiss P-40s. The British chiefs of staff recommended a further six squadrons with 64 North American B-25 bombers and 48 fighters.

On September 3, 1942, a "Lend-Lease" agreement was signed by the United States and New Zealand. In time, the program provided 297 P-40s to the RNZAF. The aircraft were designated Kittyhawks, but later models subsequent to the P-40K were given the American designation Warhawk. The RNZAF flew a mixture of both models and generally referred to them all as Kittyhawks.

These aircraft were used to equip six squadrons—Nos. 14 through 20; later, the num-

Clad in shorts because of the oppressive heat, RNZAF pilots discuss a mission in the "ready room" at Henderson Field, Guadalcanal.

National Archives

Lockheed Patrol Bomber/Observation (PBO) Hudson aircraft saw widespread use around the world. These PBOs from the New Zealand Observation Group approach Henderson Field on Guadalcanal, May 1943.

ber of RNZAF fighter squadrons operating in the Pacific would increase to 13 (No. 14 through 26). The P-40s, and later Vought F4U Corsairs, were the backbone of the RNZAF.

By June 1942, the RNZAF had only eight operational squadrons—six in New Zealand and two in Fiji.

The first RNZAF squadron to engage the Japanese in combat in the Southwest Pacific was No. 3 BR (Bomber Reconnaissance) Squadron, as a detachment of six Hudsons arrived at Henderson Field on Guadalcanal in November 1942. The squadron was tasked with performing reconnaissance duties and scouting for Japanese shipping attempting to deliver troops and supplies to Guadalcanal.

The RNZAF Hudsons flew four to six patrols daily over New Georgia, Santa Isabel, Choiseul, and the surrounding waters. While essentially a reconnaissance aircraft, the Hudson could carry a bomb load of four 500-pounders. American and RNZAF aircraft carried out regular patrols by day and night seeking enemy convoys in the Slot—the north-south channel between the New Georgia group and Choiseul and Santa Isabel Islands.

The arrival of No. 3 BR Squadron filled an important gap in the types of aircraft available in the Solomons and was heartily welcomed by the overworked aircrews of American Air Group 14. Prior to the arrival of the New Zealand squadron, the Americans had been using torpedo and dive bombers for reconnaissance work, supplemented by long-distance patrols with heavy bombers. The Hudsons, with their longer range, relieved the dive bombers and at the same time released the long-range bombers from much of their reconnaissance work.

Just a day after arriving, on his first flight from Henderson Field, Hudson Pilot Flying Officer George E. Gudsell and his crew spotted a Japanese tanker and two transports being escorted by a destroyer near Vella Lavella, northwest of Guadalcanal. As they approached, the ships' gunners commenced firing at his Hudson. Three Japanese Nakajima floatplanes then attacked Gudsell's aircraft. By skilfully maneuvering the Hudson at altitudes as low as 50 feet, Gudsell managed to evade the fighters and returned safely to Henderson.

Three days later, when shadowing another convoy, Gudsell's aircraft was attacked by three Zeros. In a 17-minute duel, again at very altitude, the Hudson was hit several times, but none of the crew was injured as Gudsell again managed to safely return to Henderson. For these actions, Gudsell was awarded the U.S. Air Medal, the first member of the RNZAF to be awarded a decoration in the Southwest Pacific. Amazingly, Gudsell's Hudson, NZ2049, involved in both of the November 1942 actions, exists today in the aircraft collection of John Smith of Mapua, New Zealand.

Aircraft of No. 3 BR Squadron not only flew routine patrols but occasionally were used for special missions. On January 8, 1943, a Hudson bombed the village of Boe Boe on southern Bougainville. The natives had been supporting the Japanese against the Allies' coastwatcher, and the strike was intended to frighten them and bring them under the coastwatcher's control. The aircraft bombed the village just before dawn, and the coastwatcher later signaled his thanks.

The Kiwi personnel based at Henderson shared the same hardships as Guadalcanal's other defenders. The most urgent need for the Kiwis was providing dugouts to give squadron personnel protection from nightly air raids. This was achieved by digging a tunnel in a ridge close to the squadron's camp. The New Zealanders lived in tents in a jungle gully, where rain,

National Archives

While a Vought F4U Corsair streaks overhead, New Zealand P-40s, provided by the United States, are serviced after returning from a strike on Rabaul in December 1943. The RNZAF got good service out of the obsolescent P-40s.

mosquitoes, and mud made life miserable until a new camp could be built on a nearby ridge.

After their failure to recapture Guadalcanal in 1942, the Japanese undertook no further offensive operations in the Solomons. Instead, they concentrated on developing their forward bases at Munda, Vila, and Rekata Bay and building up the Buin-Kahili area in southern Bougainville into their major base in the Solomons, while establishing outposts on Vella Lavella, Choiseul, and Shortland.

The last two months of their campaign on Guadalcanal had been a delaying action to cover the development of these areas. They also brought in army reinforcements to Bougainville and occupied most of the island. The increasing effectiveness of the Allied air attacks on shipping forced the Japanese to give up the use of ships south of Bougainville, replacing them with barges for resupply operations.

RNZAF BUILD-UP

In the months that followed the Japanese evacuation of Guadalcanal, the main concern of the American command in the South Pacific was building sufficient forces to carry out operations against the northern Solomons and New Britain. During this period the strength of the RNZAF was increased by the arrival of additional squadrons.

In 1943, the RNZAF began to flex its new muscle, transforming itself into an offensive force as it was deployed to forward bases. A squadron of Kittyhawks, No. 15, which was established in 1942 under Squadron Leader A. Crighton, arrived on Guadalcanal in April 1943 and would go on to fly more sorties than any other RNZAF fighter squadron in the Pacific, seeing service at Tonga, Guadalcanal, New Georgia, Espiritu Santo, Bougainville, and Green Island.

The first operations conducted by No. 15 Squadron, beginning on April 29, were local patrols followed by flights in early May providing cover for American naval forces and escorting American bombers attacking Japanese air bases at Munda and Rekata Bay and barge concentration areas at Kolombangara. The squadron's first contact with enemy aircraft occurred on May 6, when two RNZAF Kittyhawks escorting a patrolling Hudson shot down a Japanese floatplane.

Also during April, another RNZAF squadron, No. 14, was posted to Espiritu Santo, in the New Hebrides. The squadron then moved to Guadalcanal on June 11, and the next day, in its first combat, shot down six enemy aircraft, of which two Zeros were credited to Geoff Fisken of Singapore fame. On July 4, while patrolling over Rendova in his P-40 nicknamed *Wairarapa Wildcat,* Fisken scored his final victories, destroying two Zeros and a Mitsubishi G4M Betty twin-engine bomber.

Although Fisken's air victories in the Solomons were well documented, his kills and probables at Singapore were contested, reducing the number of his wartime victories from 13 to 10. Nevertheless, he was reputed to be the highest scoring Commonwealth ace in the Pacific Theater. In September 1943, Fisken would receive the Empire's Distinguished Flying Cross; however, due to complications from injuries received at Singapore he would be medically discharged from the RNZAF in December 1943.

American experience had shown, particularly with regard to fighter squadrons, that aircrews should remain in a combat area only for a short time if they were to remain effective. The RNZAF decided to follow the American practice, giving its crews six-week-long tours of duty. At the end of a tour they returned to New Zealand for leave and training.

At 9:30 AM on May 8, 1943, 19 Douglas SBD Dauntless dive bombers and three Grumman TBF Avenger torpedo bombers of the U.S. Marine Corps, escorted by 32 RNZAF F4U Corsairs along with eight Curtiss P-40 Warhawks of No. 15 Squadron, took off from

Guadalcanal to search for Japanese warships and transports reported in Blackett Strait, the waterway in the western province of the Solomon Islands.

The TBFs and F4Us turned back due to weather, but the SBDs and the P-40s continued on and made contact with enemy destroyers near Gizo Anchorage. The Kiwi pilots, led by Squadron Leader M.J. Herrick, attacked in two sections of four, flying line abreast.

In the face of heavy gunfire as they approached a Japanese destroyer that was run aground, the P-40s made their attack just feet above the water, then leapfrogged over the destroyer and returned to wave-top level on the other side.

As the second section made its strafing run, the SBDs dove on the ship and scored a hit with a 1,000-pounder, setting it alight. The New Zealand fighter pilots then continued on to attack Japanese landing craft that were in the process of putting troops ashore on a nearby island, inflicting heavy casualties.

MAIN OFFENSIVE

By the middle of 1943, the Allies had amassed sufficient matériel and men in the South Pacific to launch an offensive against Japanese positions in the central Solomons. The first objective was the airfield at Munda on New Georgia.

The role of the Allied air forces in support of the land and naval operations was to carry out reconnaissance throughout the Solomons and as far north as Buka and New Ireland to give maximum air cover and support to the land forces, check Japanese air operations from New Georgia and southern Bougainville, and destroy Japanese naval units threatening Allied forces in either the South or Southwest Pacific.

At the end of June, the Allied air forces had established two forward base complexes for operations against New Georgia at Guadalcanal with four airfields and in the Russells with two airstrips.

The main Japanese bases in the area included Kahili, with 70 to 100 aircraft; Ballale, which had a small number of planes, mainly bombers; Buka, used primarily as a staging base for moving between Rabaul and Kahili; and Rabaul, where the main air reserves were stationed.

On the morning of July 1, the Japanese launched dive bombers and fighters to attack American positions on the island of Rendova but were intercepted by Allied fighters, including eight P-40s from No. 14 Squadron. In the resulting action, 22 Japanese aircraft were shot down against the loss of eight Allied fighters; No. 14 Squadron claimed seven aircraft destroyed and three probables. Two New Zealand aircraft were lost with one pilot rescued.

On July 25, No. 14 Squadron was rotated out of Guadalcanal. During its tour, the Kiwi pilots had destroyed 22 Japanese aircraft with another four probable, with the loss of four aircraft and three pilots.

On September 3, eight fighters of No. 16 Squadron provided bottom cover to a force of Consolidated B-24 Liberators bombing Kahili. On the way home, two Kiwi pilots dropped back to cover a damaged B-24, which was under attack by eight to 10 Zeros. They were successful in driving off the attackers and escorted the bomber safely back to base. For their efforts, both pilots, Flight Lieutenant M.T. Vanderpump and Flight Sergeant J.E. Miller, received the American Distinguished Flying Cross, the first awarding of the decoration made to RNZAF personnel.

The Allied capture of Munda on August 5 drove a wedge into the Japanese screen of defensive outposts south of Bougainville. This brought Allied forces to within 120 miles of Japanese air bases at Kahili and Ballale, while they continued to maintain considerable air forces in the Bismarcks and Solomons. During the previous few weeks the Japanese had suffered such losses that they were forced to husband their strength to protect their bases on Bougainville and New Britain.

On October 1, American ships lying off Vella Lavella, carrying troops of the 3rd New Zealand Division, were attacked by Japanese dive bombers and fighters. Eight Kittyhawks of No. 15 Squadron in company with 12 U.S. Marine F4U Corsairs intercepted the third of three attacks; the New Zealanders accounted for seven enemy dive bombers.

From October 12, 1943, as part of Operation Cartwheel, RNZAF aircraft became an integral part of the Allied air campaign while operating under U.S. Navy direction. Cartwheel was a twin-axis operation aimed at neutralizing the Japanese base at Rabaul on New Britain with advances along the northeast coast of New Guinea by forces under General Douglas MacArthur, while other Allied units under Admiral Chester W. Nimitz advanced through the Solomon Islands toward Bougainville.

FINAL STAGES

The elimination of the Japanese positions in the central Solomons opened the way for the final stage of the campaign, designed to secure bases from which Rabaul could be attacked. The operation took the form of a landing at Cape Torokina, north of Empress Augusta Bay and halfway up the western shore of Bougainville, by the 3rd Marine Division on November 1. Two days after the landing, naval construction battalions began building an airstrip on Cape Torokina, which was ready for use on November 24.

The New Zealand Fighter Wing was established at Ondonga, New Georgia, and flew over 1,000 sorties in November during the Bougainville fighting. Despite fatigue, difficult operating conditions, heat, rain, mud, and nights interrupted by Japanese air raids, the morale of the unit remained exceptionally high.

The RNZAF official news service reported that on November 22 four New Zealand P-40s encountered a large group of Japanese Zeros over Bougainville. Led by Flight Lieutenant R.H. Balfour, the section was patrolling in the area of Empress Augusta Bay at 24,000 feet when 35 to 40 Zeroes approached. Diving into the Japanese, Balfour exploded two of the enemy

planes with machine-gun fire. He and his fellow Kiwis shot down five Zeros, damaged at least six others, and chased the remainder off, all without loss.

Squadron activities developed into daily routines. The squadron's workday began before dawn as pilots prepared for morning patrols over Ondonga or flights to Cape Torokina. After a quick breakfast, the pilots received a final briefing at the operations room, which included the latest mission information from the intelligence officer and the meteorological officer. Servicing and repair parties had worked through the night, often interrupted by air raids and heavy rain, preparing planes for the day's missions.

Two hours after the first pilots had left, another flight was ready to take off to patrol over the Torokina beachhead, strafe Japanese targets, or to accompany an American bombing raid. At mid-morning the first sorties returned, and the planes were serviced for the next operation.

In the afternoon, flights took off for Bougainville to patrol over the Allied positions. Other assignments included escorting air-sea rescue Consolidated PBY Catalinas or Douglas Dakotas hauling supplies to Torokina or giving fighter protection to Allied shipping between Guadalcanal and Bougainville. The last patrols came in at dusk.

The construction of airstrips on Bougainville made it possible for land-based fighters equipped with long-range fuel tanks to operate against Rabaul, both on offensive sweeps and as bomber escorts. The first fighter sweep was made by 80 aircraft, which included 24 from the New Zealand Fighter Wing, on December 17, 1943.

Originally, the American fighter command had planned not to use P-40s over Rabaul, as they were considered second-rate fighters; however, the Kiwis soon proved themselves and the P40s, and they were used in all subsequent operations.

On December 24, the New Zealand Wing in conjunction with 24 American fighters made a sweep over Rabaul. The force approached the target area in a formation of tiers, with the New Zealand squadron forming the two bottom tiers.

Ten miles northeast of the town, some 40 Japanese fighters came climbing up to intercept, but the New Zealand squadrons each selected a group and dived to attack. This broke up the Japanese formations and resulted in a series of dogfights. Twelve Japanese aircraft were shot down, with four more claimed as probables and a number of others damaged, for the loss of five New Zealand pilots.

FLYING CLOSE COVER

Since the P-40s could not operate efficiently above 20,000 feet, they acted as low cover when escorting bombers, flying at 18,000 feet. Above them American Grumman F6F Hellcats, Lockheed P-38 Lightnings, or Corsairs provided medium and high cover.

The role of close cover meant staying with the bombers and dealing with any enemy fighters that had succeeded in piercing the other layers of the escort. It demanded a high level of flying discipline and resistance to the temptation of being drawn into combat elsewhere. The New Zealanders were particularly popular with American bomber crews because they stuck to their close support assignments.

By early 1944, New Zealand Fighter Wing pilots flying P-40s over the Solomons and Bismarcks had racked up 99 confirmed kills and 14 probables. The list included 80 Zeros shot down plus 11 probables, five Hamps downed along with two probables, 11 Vals shot down, one Betty, one Dave, a Tony probable, and one unknown type shot down.

The shootdowns were made by 61 individual Kiwi pilots and included two aces—the indomitable Flight Officer Geoff Fisken and Squadron Leader P.G.H. Newton. Twenty P-40s were lost to enemy action with another 152 to accidents; 67 pilots lost their lives. Additionally, four Japanese aircraft were destroyed by RNZAF Venturas and Hudsons of No. 1 and 3 Squadrons, respectively.

During 1944, RNZAF fighter squadrons were reequipped with Corsairs. The first such squadron, No. 20, arrived at Bougainville on May 14.

There were several advantages to changing to the Corsairs. First, the model was already in use in the Pacific by the U.S. Marines. Because the P-40 was powered by a straight-block V12 Allison engine, one bullet could put the cooling system out of action, and the loss of one cylinder would throw the crankshaft out of balance, resulting in bearing failure. These problems did not exist with radial engines as used in the Corsair. Such engines could still perform satisfactorily even with a cylinder shot out. Second, the Corsair was faster than the P-40 and was extremely stable in flight. Third, the Corsair's endurance allowed it to fly for almost 13 hours with a full internal fuel load.

While the RNZAF Fighter Wing was operating from Ondonga, New Zealand bomber and reconnaissance aircraft continued to carry out patrols and searches, first from Guadalcanal and later from Munda. These squadrons were reequipped with Lockheed PV1 Venturas, replacing the obsolete Hudsons. The Ventura was a twin-engine bomber and reconnaissance aircraft with a maximum speed of over 300 miles per hour and a cruising range of over 2,000 miles. The Ventura was also more versatile than the Hudson and had greater offensive power.

Bombing and strafing missions along the coast of Bougainville were a regular feature of the Ventura squadrons' work. Formations of up to six aircraft, sometimes accompanied by fighters, attacked enemy barges, encampments, and troop concentrations. Bombing was usually done from a few hundred feet, after which the aircraft strafed the target. The normal bombload for each aircraft was six 500-pound bombs, with fuses set to provide just enough delay for the aircraft, flying at low levels, to escape the blasts.

With almost daily attacks on Rabaul, Venturas were also detailed to follow the strike force and search for pilots who might have been shot down or had bailed out into the sea. If a downed airman were found, the Ventura crews signaled for a Catalina to conduct a rescue and, when possible, remained over the spot until the Catalina arrived.

National Archives

An RNZAF officer briefs a group of pilots standing beside what is possibly a Curtis P-40 Kittyhawk Mk IV fighter.

As these survivor patrols followed the striking forces close to Rabaul, where they were liable to encounter Japanese fighters, aircraft were sent in pairs for mutual protection.

On one such raid, a Ventura cruising over the mouth of St. George's Channel, just beyond Rabaul, was attacked by six to nine Zeros and a running fight ensued. Skillful piloting combined with efficient fire control and accurate gunnery resulted in three Japanese planes being shot down and two others possibly destroyed, while the Ventura, although extensively damaged, made it safely back to base.

Other operations carried out by the Venturas included minelaying by night in Buka Passage, searching for submarines, and dropping supplies to coastwatchers.

Part of the strategy of cutting off Rabaul was the securing of Green Island north of Bougainville. A coral atoll, its chief islet, Nissan, was determined to be suitable for the construction of airfields. It would provide a base midway between Cape Torokina and Rabaul.

New Zealand infantry landed on Green Island on February 15, 1944. Construction battalions followed immediately, so that by March 7 a fighter strip was ready for operations and a bomber strip was well advanced. The use of Green Island allowed fighters to reach Rabaul without carrying long-range fuel tanks.

On February 29, troops of General MacArthur's Southwest Pacific Command landed on Los Negros in the Admiralty Group northwest of Rabaul and across the Bismarck Sea. This was followed on March 20 by the 4th Marine Regiment, 3rd Marine Division, occupying Emirau, north of New Ireland. These landings completed the encirclement of Rabaul, cutting off 50,000 Japanese on New Britain and New Ireland and another 30,000 on Bougainville and Choiseul.

At the beginning of 1944, the Japanese suffered heavy aircraft losses—126 in January and another 58 in the first half of February. They concluded that it was no longer possible to maintain air cover over Rabaul and withdrew the shattered remnants of their squadrons. Of the 700 Imperial Japanese Navy and 300 Army aircraft that had been flown into Rabaul during 1942 and 1943, only 70 remained in February.

The last engagement between the RNZAF and Japanese fighters occurred on February 13, when aircraft of No. 18 Squadron were escorting American TBFs on a bombing raid against Vunakanau, a major airfield of the Rabaul complex. The raid was met by 25 Zeros. Two were shot down with the loss of one P-40. These were the last two recorded kills made by New Zealand fighter pilots in the Pacific. But the RNZAF was far from finished.

CHANGE IN ROLES

With no enemy air opposition, the RNZAF's new Corsairs were switched from a fighter escort role to fighter bomber operations. One Dauntless and two Avenger squadrons added their weight to bombing operations from airfields on Bougainville. No. 6 Flying Boat Squadron operated over the area carrying out maritime reconnaissance and rescue missions using Catalinas, while bomber and reconnaissance squadrons equipped with Venturas conducted raids on Japanese positions in the northern Solomons.

Although the threat posed by Japanese aircraft had virtually disappeared, combat operations were nonetheless perilous. In one incident, Flight Sergeant "Rip" Reiper was flying with a section of four Corsairs that had set out from Bougainville to bomb a target at Rabaul. Reiper was in the number four position in the section as it flew for about an hour through clouds in a tight formation.

Over Rabaul the flight leader made a sudden turn. The number two aircraft, on the leader's left, apparently became disoriented during the turn and collided with the leader. Both aircraft exploded, the impact of which caused the number three aircraft to also explode, leaving the young and frightened Reiper to find his way back to Bougainville alone.

Whenever strikes were flown against Rabaul, a Catalina with fighter escort was sent to patrol south of New Ireland to pick up any downed pilots; RNZAF crews were able to rescue 28 men from the sea between Bougainville and the Gazelle Peninsula.

As the South Pacific campaign appeared to be drawing to a close, the future of the

RNZAF became the subject of considerable discussion between New Zealand and American authorities. As early as March 1944, it was felt that without any further Japanese fighter opposition there was no point in continuing to send fighter squadrons to the forward area; however, it was felt that it would be bad for morale if trained, operational units were kept in New Zealand doing nothing. So, it was decided to continue sending the squadrons forward in rotation even if they could only be employed as fighter bombers.

In April the Joint Chiefs of Staff in Washington weighed the future role of the RNZAF. Consideration was given to restricting it to a few bomber and reconnaissance and flying boat squadrons for garrison duties in the South Pacific, which meant that all fighter squadrons would be scrapped and that the RNZAF would no longer be given a combat role. It was felt that this would have had a twofold effect.

Domestically it would have meant that the size of the RNZAF could be reduced, releasing men to meet the acute shortage of manpower in industry and agriculture; but the millions of man hours and the immense amount of money that had been spent in training and equipping the squadrons would be wasted. Also, if New Zealand dropped out of the Pacific War before it was finished, it might reduce that nation's role in the postwar councils.

Taking these factors into consideration, the RNZAF was not satisfied at being relegated to a secondary role. The New Zealand minister in Washington was instructed to press the point and try to have the RNZAF included in any active theater where it might be of use.

Three options were considered. First, the squadrons might continue to operate under U.S. Admiral William F. "Bull" Halsey's command in the Central Pacific. This would mean continuing to work in a command with which they were familiar along with minimal supply problems since they were already equipped with U.S. Navy-type aircraft. Second, they might be transferred to the British Southeast Asia Command. But this meant sending them to India and reequipping them with British-made aircraft.

Finally, they might be transferred to General MacArthur's command in the Southwest Pacific. This would mean that, as part of an Army command, they would have difficulty getting appropriate supplies of aircraft and spares.

In the meantime, early in May 1944, U.S. Admiral Ernest J. King, Chief of Naval Operations, while not committing himself as to the future role of the RNZAF, agreed that the Kiwi squadrons should continue offensive operations in the northern Solomons.

The program called for 11 squadrons to carry out garrison duties in the Solomons area. The U.S. Navy was to provide four squadrons and the RNZAF seven—four fighter, two medium bomber, and one flying boat.

Two New Zealand fighter squadrons were to be stationed at Espiritu Santo and two at Guadalcanal; one bomber-reconnaissance squadron was to be stationed at Guadalcanal and the other at Fiji; and the flying boat squadron was to be based at Halavo Bay, Florida Island.

In addition, New Zealand squadrons to be transferred to the Southwest Pacific Area would include another four fighter, two medium bomber, and one flying boat. One fighter squadron was to remain at Bougainville while another was to be moved to Los Negros. The other two were to be assigned to Emirau and Green Island. New Zealand bomber-reconnaissance squadrons were also located at the latter two bases.

While these arrangements were being worked out, fighting continued in the Solomons and over New Britain.

National Archives

RNZAF ground personnel service Lockheed Ventura PV1 medium bombers on Green Island in the Solomons, December 1944. The versatile PV1 replaced the Lockheed Hudson.

Australian War Memorial

An RNZAF crew poses in front of their Lockheed PV1 Ventura after returning from St. Georges Channel near Rabaul, where they were jumped by six to nine Japanese Zeros. As detailed in the story, the New Zealanders shot down three enemy aircraft and scored two other "possibles." The plane returned to Munda full of holes and with a crew member wounded in the ankle.

GRUELING FIGHT

In the final months of the Pacific War, fighting took on a grueling nature for the crews of the RNZAF. From October through December 1944, American ground units were gradually withdrawn from the Solomons-Bismarcks area for operations in the Philippines, their place being taken by Australian forces.

Also, early in December 1944, the RNZAF Venturas had begun to take part in "night heckles" over Rabaul, which had previously been done exclusively by American PBJs (the U.S. Navy/Marine Corps version of the B-25 medium bomber), assisted sometimes by "Black Cats" (PBYs). It was part of the Allied effort to make life for the Japanese as uncomfortable as possible by keeping one or more aircraft constantly over Rabaul during the night, each carrying bombs that could be dropped anywhere at any time during the patrol.

Under the Australians, the campaign on Bougainville assumed a new character. For the Americans, the island had not been an objective in itself but a stepping stone in the advance northward, and their operations were limited to ensuring the integrity of the Empress Augusta Bay base.

The task of the 2nd Australian Corps, on the other hand, was to retake the island from the 22,000 Japanese troops who still occupied a large part of it. It was in support of these operations that New Zealand aircraft flew eight to 46 sorties daily in addition to the continuous pounding of Rabaul and New Ireland.

The bombing line on Bougainville was only 30 miles south of Cape Torokina. Strikes were routinely close support bombing runs to assist the Australians in their advance toward the south end of the island. The bombs were usually either 1,000-pound high explosive or depth charges. The latter were almost entirely explosive with little metal casing.

Both types were fitted with a detonator mounted on the end of a 2½-foot rod protruding from the bomb. Called daisy cutters, they were designed to explode slightly above ground level to clear the jungle without digging too deep a hole that would hamper an advance.

DARK DAYS

The brutal nature of the Pacific War was exemplified when a Kiwi pilot was shot down during a bombing raid on Japanese positions on Bougainville. The bombing was in support of Australian troops, and after the pilot bailed out the Australians made a dash toward where he would have landed. When they reached the scene, the pilot was found to still be alive, strung up to a tree by his thumbs, but with his stomach slit open and his intestines spilling out.

Another dark day for the RNZAF came on January 15, 1945. During a strike on Toboi Wharf in Simpson Harbor at Rabaul, conducted by aircraft of Nos. 14 and 16 Squadrons flying from Green Island and No. 24 from Bougainville—a total of 36 Corsairs—one was knocked down by antiaircraft fire. The F4U was piloted by Flight Lieutenant Francis George Keefe of No. 14 Squadron, who managed to bail out, landing in the harbor.

An exceptional swimmer, Keefe struck out for the harbor entrance. For some time he made good progress. Then, in the middle of the afternoon, by which time he had been swimming for six hours, the tide and wind changed and he began to drift back up the harbor.

A rescue force had been quickly organized while sections of Corsairs kept watch overhead to prevent Japanese attempts to capture Keefe. Two bamboo rafts were assembled and loaded aboard a Ventura at Green Island, intended to be dropped to the downed pilot.

As two Corsairs orbited above Rabaul awaiting the arrival of the Ventura, an American Catalina pilot circling just beyond the harbor entrance spotted Keefe and twice requested permission to land and pick him up. The request was denied both times by the officer in charge, Squadron Leader Paul Green, the commander of No. 16 Squadron, due to the threat posed by Japanese coastal and antiaircraft guns.

When the Ventura arrived, it was accompanied by another 12 Corsairs, whose task was to strafe the Rabaul waterfront while the Ventura dropped the rafts. Everything went as planned, but Keefe failed or was unable to reach the rafts. The rescue was then aborted, and all aircraft were directed

to return to base.

Approximately halfway back to Green Island, the Corsairs encountered a tropical storm front stretching across the horizon and down to sea level. Due to limited navigation aids, the aircraft were required to maintain a tight formation as the storm and darkness reduced visibility. The pilots could only see the navigation lights of the other aircraft in their flight.

Five of the Corsairs crashed into the sea, one crashed at Green Island as it was making its landing approach, and a seventh simply disappeared. The lost pilots included Flight Lieutenant B.S. Hay, Flight Officer A.N. Saward, Flight Sergeant I.J. Munro, and Flight Sergeant J.S. McArthur from No. 14 Squadron and Flight Lieutenant T.R.F. Johnson, Flight Officer G. Randell, and Flight Sergeant R.W. Albrecht from No. 16 Squadron.

After the war, it was reported by Japanese troops captured at Rabaul that Keefe had managed to swim ashore. With a wounded arm, he was taken prisoner and died a few days later.

One of the pilots involved in the operation, Flight Sergeant Bryan Cox, suffered a failure of both his radio and lights during the return flight but happened to stumble upon the landing strip at Green Island just as he was nearly out of fuel. It was not only a fortunate day for him, but also his 20th birthday.

WINDING DOWN

From January through August 1945, 10,592 sorties were flown by the RNZAF against Japanese positions on Bougainville and Buka, with 4,256 tons of bombs dropped.

Agreement was finally reached between the U.S. and Australian governments for the RNZAF to take part in operations in Borneo with the Australians and in the Philippines supporting U.S. forces.

But both of these commands were using U.S. Army Air Forces combat aircraft, so the RNZAF would need to be reequipped. North American P-51D Mustang fighters had been ordered to form new fighter squadrons, and while 30 were delivered out of some 320 ordered to replace F4Us, the war ended before they could be brought into active service.

Of the 424 F4Us supplied to the RNZAF during the war, a total of 154 RNZAF Corsairs were written off due to accidents and 17 to enemy action, with 56 pilots killed or missing and one dead as a POW. Forty-two Ventura bombers were also lost in combat and accidents during the war.

At its peak, the RNZAF in the Pacific had 13 squadrons of Corsair fighters, six of Venturas, two each of Catalinas and Avengers, two of C-47 Dakota transport/cargo aircraft, one of Dauntless dive bombers, along with mixed transport and communications aircraft, a flight of Sunderland flying boats, and nearly 1,000 training aircraft of various types.

From September 3, 1939, to August 15, 1945, a total of 3,687 RNZAF personnel died in service, the majority with RAF Bomber Command flying in Britain and over Europe. The RNZAF had grown from a small prewar force to over 41,000 men and women (WAAFs) by 1945, including just over 10,000 serving with the RAF in Europe and Africa; 24 RNZAF squadrons saw service in the Pacific. On VJ Day, the RNZAF had more than 7,000 of its personnel stationed throughout the Solomons and Bismarcks.

The Kiwi airmen had not only fought proudly against their Japanese foes, but also carved out a place for themselves among their much larger Allies—Britain, Australia, and the United States—as they wrote their names into the history of the Pacific air war. □

National Archives

Crew members of a New Zealand squadron work on their new Douglas SBD Dauntless dive bomber at Espiritu Santo, March 1944.

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507th Regiment

Continued from page 83

to perform. For the next eight weeks, until a more permanent occupation structure could be put in place, the mission of the regiment was twofold: It was to administer military government to more than one million Germans in the Essen Zone and provide care for about 25,000 displaced persons (DPs). The zone was divided into subzones that were administrated by the battalions; Colonel Raff was the zone commander.

The Americans' almost insurmountable task was to provide life-sustaining services to the entire population. The DPs were representative of nearly all the nationalities of Europe, each with unique problems to be solved. Most of the DPs were concentration camp inmates used as slave laborers for the huge industrial base of the German war machine, and their animosity toward the Germans presented special problems.

To facilitate care and repatriation, self-governing DP camps were set up in the subzones, but military governance was not an endeavor in which the regiment had spent a great deal of training. Disciplined efficiency was needed for effective and compassionate administration of this mix of the newly vanquished and the newly freed. As expected, the regiment performed these final military tasks with distinction.

On June 17, 1945, with the war won and with the Essen area in the British zone of occupation, the 507th was relieved by British forces and prepared to leave Europe. During its time in combat since the previous June, the regiment had suffered 423 men killed, 893 wounded, and another 496 listed as missing.

While performing spectacularly in its first combat airborne assault, the 17th Airborne Division alone lost 159 killed, 522 wounded, and 840 missing (many of whom later turned up to fight again). British losses among the 6th Airborne Division were even heavier. The IX Troop Carrier Command lost 41 killed, 153 wounded, and 163 missing. Fifty gliders and 44 transport aircraft were destroyed, another 332 transport

planes were damaged, and only a few of the gliders were salvageable.

While tactically successful, Varsity brought many questions, especially about whether or not it was militarily necessary. In his postwar memoir, *A Soldier's Story,* General Omar Bradley contended that the Germans had diverted the bulk of their forces east of the Rhine to counter the breakthrough at the Remagen bridgehead, leaving only weak forces around Wesel.

He added that if Montgomery had crossed the Rhine with the same dash and élan that the commands of Generals Courtney Hodges and George S. Patton had or had allowed Simpson to do so with his Ninth Army, Varsity would not have been necessary. To Bradley, Varsity was typical Montgomery overkill. Other officers had even harsher words, claiming that Montgomery used airborne forces to simply "put on a good show" and to further to his own reputation as a military genius.

Whether or not Operation Varsity was actually necessary will, no doubt, continue to be debated, but that in no way diminishes the courage and resourcefulness demonstrated by the soldiers who took part and, in the process, wrote another chapter in the history of the U.S. Army and the American airborne forces.

After returning to the States, the 507th Parachute Infantry Regiment was deactivated at Camp Miles Standish, about 40 miles south of Boston in Taunton, Massachusetts, on September 15, 1945. Once a proud and highly skilled regiment with 21 months overseas, four campaigns, and two combat jumps to its credit, the 507th devolved into a collection of footlockers filled with paper and consigned to a records depot.

The 507th Parachute Infantry Regiment was reactivated in 1948, served for a year, and then went dormant again. In 1985, a full 40 years after it helped secure final and total victory in Europe, the 1st Battalion of the 507th was brought back to life. It continues to serve proudly, training future paratroopers at Fort Benning, Georgia. The legend of Raff's Ruffians lives on in glory. □

Swastika

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out until May 2. But for all intents and purposes, the Reichstag was taken on April 30. Russian soldiers climbed to the roof and displayed the crimson Communist banner of the Soviet Union. Later, when the flag raising was recreated for newsreel cameras, it became one of the iconic images of World War II. About half the Reichstag defenders were killed, and the rest were taken prisoner.

By this time, however, Adolf Hitler, fearing Russian capture, was dead, having committed suicide on the afternoon of April 30. First he had his dog Blondi poisoned, then he and Eva Braun, whom he had married less than 40 hours earlier in a ceremony in the bunker, closed the door to his quarters. Aides heard a shot and then entered to find their Führer dead of a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head; his bride was sprawled on the sofa next to him. She had taken cyanide. The bodies were carried upstairs to the courtyard of the bunker and set on fire.

Before he died, Hitler had named Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels the new chancellor. Nazi fanatic though he was, even Goebbels recognized that further fighting was pointless. He sent General Krebs, who spoke Russian, to General Chuikov of the Eighth Guards Army at Schluenburgring near Templehof airport to negotiate an end to the fighting.

The meeting took place on May 1 at 4 AM. Krebs was authorized to negotiate a ceasefire, truce, or armistice, but the Russians would have none of it—it was unconditional surrender or nothing. Krebs came back empty handed, and he later committed suicide in the bunker. Chuikov had lost patience with all the wrangling. "Pour on the shells," he ordered. "No more talking."

By this time, Goebbels was also dead, having killed himself while his wife poisoned their children and took her own life the day after Hitler's suicide. Grand Admiral Karl Dönitz (who was not in Berlin) was named Reich President, Head of State, and Commander in Chief of the German Armed Forces.

It fell to General Weidling to finally surrender what was left of the German defenders. He was taken to General Chuikov's headquarters at 6 AM on May 2. Once the capitulation was signed, Weidling ordered all remaining German units to "cease resistance forthwith."

All across Berlin dazed German defenders emerged from the rubble, hands held high. On May 2, 1945, at 3 PM, the battle of Berlin was officially over. Elsewhere in Germany a few pockets of resistance held out. Breslau, for example, did not surrender until May 6.

The Russian guns stopped firing, creating what one historian called "a great enveloping silence." But the agony of defeat was not yet finished. Around 125,000 Berliners had died during the siege, many by suicide.

Once the shelling had stopped and the Soviets entered Berlin, a great wave of sexual assault swept across the city. Some German women killed themselves after being raped. Other victims—aged 12 to 70—were killed outright, sometimes being shot or having their throats cut after being ravaged by the victors.

One 17-year-old German girl's experience was typical: "There were eight Russians.... I was incredibly afraid.... They tore the clothes from my body.... I screamed but afterward I had no tears anymore ... then I thought how many more are still coming, and then I thought when this is over then there will be a shot in the back of the head." Somehow she survived the ordeal.

Berlin was a silent, smoldering ruin, its buildings mere hollow shells, its streets filled with craters, debris, and corpses. There were no city services; water, food, and electricity were all but nonexistent.

The victorious Russians had at last gotten their revenge, but at a heavy cost. Between April 16 and May 8 (the official end of the war in Europe), Zhukov and Konev lost 304,887 killed, wounded, and missing—about 10 percent of their combined strength.

The fall of Berlin was also the fall of the Third Reich. □

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