WWII QUARTERLY

Curtis 07256

JOURNAL OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR

www.WarfareHistoryNetwork.com

D-DAY
Bloody Struggle for Gold Beach

JUMPING INTO NORMANDY

EYEWITNESS
Survival on the Russian Front

OPERATION DRAGOON
Rampage on the Riviera

LOST BATTALION
Heroic Stand in the Philippines

NAVAL ASSAULT ON MUNDA

SUMMER 2015

$9.99

5 7>

0 74470 07256 0

RETAILER DISPLAY UNTIL SEPT. 21

WWII QUARTERLY • SUMMER 2015 Volume 6, No. 4

EXPERIENCE THE ACTION OF WORLD WAR II AFLOAT!

Aboard the Liberty Ship JOHN W BROWN

2015 CRUISES

- **MAY 9:** Honoring All Who Served
- **JUNE 13:** D-Day Plus 7
- **OCTOBER 3:** Sailing Home from Victory

From Baltimore on the Chesapeake Bay

Visit www.ssjohnwbrown.org for special pricing, group rates, gift certificates and more.

The SS JOHN W BROWN *is one of the last operating survivors from the great fleet of over 2,700 war-built Liberty Ships and the last operational troopship of World War II. The ship is a maritime museum and a memorial to the shipyard workers who built, merchant mariners who sailed, and the U.S. Navy Armed Guard who defended the Liberty ships during World War II. The JOHN W BROWN is fully restored and maintained as close as possible to her World War II configuration. Visitors must be able to walk up steps to board the ship.*

This exciting 6 hour day cruise *includes lunch, music of the 40's, period entertainment and flybys (conditions permitting) of wartime aircraft. Tour on-board museums, crew quarters, bridge and much more. See the magnificent 140-ton triple-expansion steam engine as it powers the ship through the water.*

- **Order your tickets online at: www.ssjohnwbrown.org**
- **For information call: 410-558-0164**

Last day to order tickets is 14 days before the cruise. Conditions and penalties apply to cancellations.

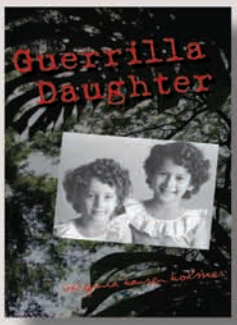
Project Liberty Ship is a Baltimore based, all volunteer, nonprofit organization.

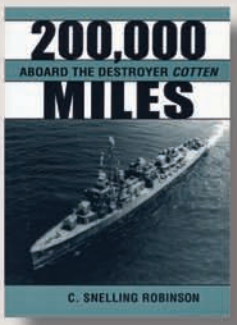
CFC

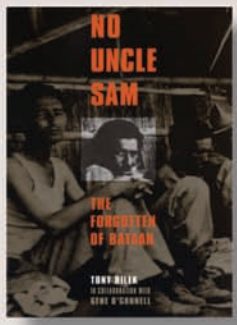
Find us on Facebook

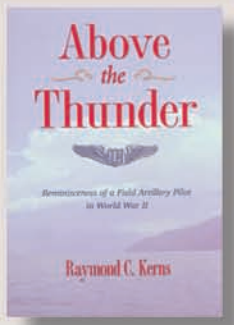
LIBERTY SHIP JOHN W. BROWN

First-Hand Accounts That Will Put You in the Middle of the Action









Grasshopper Pilot

A Memoir

"There is a group of men who have been forgotten, ignored, or are just plain unknown to most people . . .the Grasshopper pilots . . . These daring men were constantly in the thick of battle. . . . The only defense against an assault upon the Piper Cubs was the pilot's ability to outmaneuver enemy fighter planes and dodge gunfire."

—from the Introduction

Guerrilla Daughter

This memoir of an American family's struggle to survive the Japanese occupation of Mindanao is the story of how the men in the family fought as guerrilla soldiers in the resistance movement, while the women were left to their own resources to evade the Japanese. Faced with immediate death if found and suffering from hunger, disease, and barely tolerable living conditions, they hid out in the jungle and remote villages to remain just ahead of the Japanese presence and avoid capture.

200,000 Miles Aboard the Destroyer *Cotton*

"Written with a navigator's penchant for accuracy, a mariner's love for the sea, and an abiding interest in human nature, Snell Robinson's chronicle of the campaigns of the destroyer *Cotten* [from its precommissioning to becoming a part of the Occupation Force in Tokyo Bay] is a fresh and compelling narrative history of the naval war against Japan."

—Colonel Joseph H Alexander, USMC (Retired)

No Uncle Sam

The Forgotten of Bataan

Anton Bilek was only twenty-two when he was captured in Bataan. This is his story of survival through the Death March, his imprisonment under horrific conditions in the Philippines and Japan, and his servitude as a slave laborer in the Japanese coal mines. Bilek tells of the frustration, anger, fear, humor, hope, and courage that he and his fellow prisoners shared during their captivity.

Above the Thunder

Reminiscences of a Field Artillery Pilot in World War II

Winner of the 2009 Army Historical Foundation Distinguished Book Award

"If you're looking for macho, fighting-man talk, you've picked up the wrong book. . . . This is just an honest narration of some of my experiences . . . during my service in the U.S. Army between 1940 and 1945."

—Raymond C. Kerns

"One of the ten best memoirs of Combat action to come out of World War II."

—Edgar F. Raines Jr., U.S. Army Center of Military History, Washington, D.C.

Available from your local bookstore or from www.KentStateUniversityPress.com 800-247-6553

THE KENT STATE UNIVERSITY PRESS
1118 LIBRARY • KENT, OHIO 44242-0001
■ www.KentStateUniversityPress.com

TABLE OF CONTENTS

WWII QUARTERLY

Departments

COVER: A U.S. tank crew looks for retreating Germans in the days following Allied landings on the southern coast of France. See story page 86.
Photo: National Archives

Features

WWII Quarterly (ISSN 2151-3678) is published four times yearly by Sovereign Media, 6731 Whittier Avenue, Suite A-100, McLean, VA 22101-4554. (703) 964-0361. *WWII Quarterly*, Volume 6, Number 4 © 2015 by Sovereign Media Company, Inc., all rights reserved. Copyrights to stories and illustrations are the property of their creators. The contents of this publication may not be reproduced in whole or in part without consent of the copyright owner. ***Subscription services, back issues, and information:*** (800) 219-1187 *or* write to *WWII Quarterly* **Circulation, WWII Quarterly, P.O. Box 1644, Williamsport, PA 17703.** Hardbound single copies: $19.99, plus $3 for postage. Yearly subscription in U.S.A.: $39.95; Canada and Overseas: $79.95 (U.S.). Editorial Office: Send editorial mail to *WWII Quarterly*, 6731 Whittier Avenue, Suite A-100, McLean, VA 22101-4554. *WWII Quarterly* welcomes editorial submissions but assumes no responsibility for the loss or damage of unsolicited material. Material to be returned should be accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope. We suggest that you send a self-addressed, stamped envelope for a copy of our author's guidelines. **POSTMASTER: Send address changes to WWII Quarterly, P.O. Box 1644, Williamsport, PA 17703.**

The floating harbor used during the infamous WWII landings is just one of the included D-Day tours you'll experience on our river cruises from Paris to the historic region of Normandy.

Book your cruise soon and receive up to $2,000 off per stateroom.

800.626.0126 | www.AmaWaterways.com

AMAWATERWAYS™
LEADING THE WAY IN RIVER CRUISING

Terms & Conditions: Offer valid for new double occ. bookings on select dates only, subject to availability. See website for full terms. Other restrictions may apply. CST#2065452-40.

What I did last summer (and fall)

ONE OF THE GREAT THINGS ABOUT BEING A MILITARY HISTORIAN IS that you get to go places and meet people you might not ordinarily get to see and meet. Such was the case last summer and fall, when I was privileged to lead three tour groups to England and France for the 70th anniversary of the D-Day invasion.

All three tours were filled with people who are as passionate about history as I am. Many of them had relatives who fought in World War II (and some who died in the war), and we were honored to be allowed to place wreaths at the memorial at the U.S. military cemetery atop the bluffs overlooking Omaha Beach—what an emotional experience!

We were also, as part of these tours, admitted to several places where "ordinary" tourists usually aren't allowed to go, such as Southwick House near Portsmouth, which was Eisenhower's and SHAEF's forward headquarters just prior to the embarkation for Normandy.

At times the tours took on the character of a forced march, enabling us to pack a lot into a very short time: visiting the Churchill Museum and Cabinet War Rooms in London; heading to Bletchley Park where the codebreakers cracked the fiendishly difficult German secret codes; riding in a WWII jeep; hitting an abundance of outstanding museums; exploring the remains of spooky German bunkers; strolling through villages liberated by the Allies; and standing on hallowed ground where thousands of men fought and died and changed the course of world history.

But, despite the pace, I believe that everyone enjoyed every minute of the tours. (There was also great food and excellent accommodations, not to mention the beauty of the English and French countrysides.)

The tours also proved the truth of the military historian's adage, "To understand the battle, you have to walk the battlefield." The guests certainly have a greater understanding of the D-Day invasion now that they have walked the battlefield.

After the third tour in October ended, I decided to stay on for an extra week and explore on my own some places I had not visited before: the bunkers of Hitler's Atlantic Wall, from Sword Beach northward to Calais and beyond. What an eye-opening experience that was!

My weeklong solo tour also inspired a few upcoming magazine articles, one of which ("Bombing Our Friends") appears in this issue. Ideas for future articles—such as the massive underground complex at Mimoyecques that was to house Hitler's "London Super Gun," which was conceived to relentlessly bombard the British capital, and the creation of the Atlantic Wall—were spawned by my exploring this region of France.

Your editor (foreground) and a D-Day tour group at Pointe-du-Hoc.

This year I will be involved in more battlefield tours—at least one more D-Day tour, and an Italian battlefield tour for the Minnesota WWII History Round Table. If you have an interest in World War II (and you wouldn't be reading this magazine if you didn't), I strongly recommend that you sign up for a tour. (It doesn't have to be one of mine; there are several reputable companies that offer a variety of battlefield tour packages.)

I guarantee that such a tour will be an experience you will never forget.

— Flint Whitlock, Editor

SPRING 2015 ISSUE ERRATA

Page 56: Supermarine is the name of an aircraft company, like Lockheed or Boeing, and doesn't need quotation marks. It should precede the aircraft name.

Page 87: "PBO" is the U.S. Navy designation for the Lockheed Hudson and does not apply to the New Zealand version. "PB" means patrol bomber and the "O" is the letter suffix assigned to Lockheed. The term "observation" isn't part of this.

Page 91: The aricraft was incorrectly identified as being a P-40 Kittyhawk; it is actually a Hawker Hurricane.

WWII Quarterly Volume 6 • Number 4

WARFAREHISTORYNETWORK

CARL A. GNAM, JR.
Editorial Director, Founder

FLINT WHITLOCK
Editor
WWIIQuarterly@gmail.com

SAMANTHA DETULLEO
Art Director

KEVIN M. HYMEL
Research Director

CONTRIBUTORS:
Glenn Barnett, André Bernole, Dorothy Brotherton, John J. Domagalski, Robert F. Dorr, David Hurt, Kevin M. Hymel, William Lubbeck, Jeff Patton, Nathan N. Prefer

ADVERTISING OFFICE:

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

MARK HINTZ
Vice President & Publisher

TERRI COATES
Subscription Customer Services
sovereign@publishersservicesassociates.com

PUBLISHERS SERVICE ASSOCIATES
Circulation Fulfillment

CURTIS CIRCULATION COMPANY
WORLDWIDE DISTRIBUTION

SOVEREIGN MEDIA COMPANY, INC.
6731 Whittier Ave., Suite A-100
McLean, VA 22101-4554

www.WarfareHistoryNetwork.com

SUBSCRIPTION CUSTOMER SERVICE AND BUSINESS OFFICE:

2406 Reach Road
Williamsport, PA 17701
(800) 219-1187

PRINTED IN THE USA.

From the publishers of WWII HISTORY Magazine

Get these authoritative e-Book Publications from the Warfare History Network absolutely FREE!

Warfare History Network has created these e-Books and is making them available to you **free with no strings attached.** Well, actually there's one string attached. When you download any or all of these free e-Books we'll sign you up as a member of the Warfare History Network, and the good news is that's **also completely free.**

Warfare History Network is the official web portal of MILITARY HERITAGE, WWII HISTORY MAGAZINE, WWII QUARTERLY, and CIVIL WAR QUARTERLY. As a member of Warfare History Network you'll have access to all of the fresh, in-depth perspectives on a wide variety of topics including battles, weapons, leaders, strategy, and more. All written by the top experts in the field.

As a member of Warfare History Network you'll have access to hundreds of military history articles from the archives of our magazines, you'll be able to download any and all of our free e-Books, plus you'll receive WARFARE HISTORY DAILY, our free email newsletter to bring you important new facts and insights, all at absolutely no cost to you.

WARFAREHISTORYNETWORK

There's no cost, no risk, and no obligation to buy anything.

Download your free e-Books today at:

www.WarfareHistoryNetwork.com/free-briefings

Klenk and the Clunk: "Your Average Naval Aviator" Battled Japanese Destroyers in his Curtiss SB2C-3 Helldiver.

LIEUTENANT WILLIAM A. "BILL" KLENK, PILOTING a Curtiss SB2C-3 Helldiver, bristled at the "clawing, miserable weather," with inverted pyramids of cloud hanging from a low ceiling and gray murk everywhere. Down below him, the Japanese destroyer *Hatakaze* was maneuvering at high speed in the South China Sea. It was January 15, 1945.

Klenk observed the elusiveness of the fast-moving destroyer: "A thin, narrow target that would have been hard to hit even if he wasn't jinking from one direction to another," Klenk said in an interview for this article.

Accompanying Klenk were four other deep-blue, cylinder-shaped Helldivers, each with a pilot and radioman-gunner aboard, jockeying into position to attack the destroyer. They belonged to Bombing Eighty, or Squadron VB-80, from the aircraft carrier USS *Ticonderoga* (CV 14). There were supposed to be six, but one squadron pilot had aborted with mechanical trouble.

Klenk was, by this point in the war, a seasoned pilot of the Helldiver. He believed the SB2C had overcome early technical troubles and achieved its design goal of being faster and more robust than the SBD Dauntless of Battle of Midway fame. "It was not the most forgiving aircraft," said Klenk. "You had to learn it. But once you'd 'gotten' it, the Helldiver would serve you well." Klenk added, however, "Still, some of the guys never stopped calling it 'The Beast.'"

SB2C Helldiver pilot Bill Klenk shortly after receiving his ensign's commission and naval aviator's wings in June 1943. BELOW: SB2C-1C Helldiver 80B31 leads the way carrying pilot William B. Klenk and radioman-gunner William Saari, followed by 80B12 with pilot Don Monson and radioman-gunner Howard Arthur Young. The Helldivers are pictured near Oceana, Virginia, in 1944.

The Navy's Bureau of Aeronautics ordered the SB2C on May 15, 1939, at a time when its fabric-covered, biplane predecessor, the SBC, also called the Helldiver, was still standard equipment in its carrier air groups. The new SB2C was a tailwheel-equipped, low-wing monoplane similar in appearance to the Brewster SB2A Buccaneer, against which it competed successfully. Ironically, Brewster may have been the only aircraft manufacturer with more factory-floor workmanship and corporate management problems than Curtiss.

Apart from having an internal bomb bay not found on the Dauntless, the SB2C was unremarkable in appearance: It had 49-foot, 9-inch wings that folded for carrier stowage, another feature not found on the Dauntless. The pilot and radioman-gunner sat in tandem, the latter with a seat that could rotate to face in any direction.

The Helldiver derived its power from a 1,900-horsepower Wright R-2600-20 Double Cyclone, 14-cylinder, two-row radial piston engine driving a 12-foot, four-bladed

Both: U. S. Navy via Robert F. Dorr

Curtiss Electric propeller. The powerplant experienced some early developmental problems but these were resolved more quickly than were the aerodynamic and structural problems associated with the Helldiver.

The head of the SB2C Helldiver engineering team was not Curtiss's well-known Don R. Berlin (who created the P-40 Warhawk) but the company's Raymond C. Blaylock. The prototype XSB2C-1 made its maiden flight on December 18, 1940, but crashed days later; Curtiss rebuilt the prototype. It flew again and crashed again on December 21, 1941, when test pilot Barton T. "Red" Hulse had to bail out during a high-speed dive. Small wonder critics were beginning to suggest that SB2C stood for "son of a bitch second class." Apart from the familiar "Beast" appellation, some pilots were calling the aircraft the "Clunk."

Nor was a lot of comfort to be gotten from the maiden flight of the first production SB2C-1 on June 30, 1942. A shift of production from Buffalo to a new plant in Columbus, Ohio, led to quality-control issues on the assembly shop floor and criticism from the Senate committee on national defense headed by Senator Harry S. Truman (D-Mo).

Klenk, who picked up an early-model SB2C-1C at Columbus, said it was "common knowledge" that the work practices at the plant were shoddy. By publicizing these issues, the Truman Committee helped to bring about improvements.

"On that early version the bad reputation was deserved," said Klenk. "The arrangement in the SB2C-1C cockpit was horrible. It was a hydraulic nightmare. There were six hydraulic valves in the cockpit and we had to memorize all the combinations for emergencies. If the flaps wouldn't come down, you had to turn a couple on and off. If the wheels didn't come down, you needed to remember a different combination of 'on' and 'off.'

"To improve the cockpit in the SB2C-3 model, they eliminated valves and simplified their use, put in different emergency procedures. It still had a lot of problems. One problem: to get the landing gear up, you had to reach pretty far forward to get the landing gear handle. If your shoulder straps were pulled tight, you could not reach it. They eventually put an extension on the handle so we could reach it."

Larry Titchenal

U. S. Navy via Robert F. Dorr

ABOVE: SB2C-1C Helldiver of Squadron VB-80 on approach for landing, with gear down. TOP: Today's only airworthy SB2C Helldiver, seen in an air display at Marion, Ohio in 2013.

Mostly because of poor stability and structural flaws—both later remedied—Britain rejected the Helldiver after taking delivery of just 26. The U.S. Army curtailed plans to put its A-25 Shrike version into combat; the Army's 900 Helldivers ended up doing utility work. Some were transferred to the Marine Corps to become trainers and given the out-of-sequence designation SB2C-1A.

The January 15 air strike was big. Two hundred Navy warplanes from two full carrier air groups—from *Ticonderoga* and USS *Essex* (CV 9)—struck Japanese naval forces along the Formosa coast. The bad weather, the heavy antiaircraft fire, and the elusiveness of Japanese warships reminded Klenk of an earlier mission.

Weeks before, on November 5, 1943, Klenk and his squadron mates in VB-80 attacked the Imperial Japanese Navy at Manila Bay. On that mission, the Helldivers sank a destroyer after Klenk put a bomb squarely down the ship's stack. For that, Klenk received the Distinguished Flying Cross.

"I'm your average naval aviator," said Klenk. "We were products of very good training. It was not uncommon for the Navy to take a year to 18 months to transform a new student pilot into a seasoned flier ready for action in the Fleet. It was a luxury the United States could afford. As far as I know, we never sent any aviator into battle who wasn't fully prepared."

For Pennsylvania native Klenk, the war began at a football game in Washington's Griffith Stadium when his beloved Philadelphia Eagles were playing the Washington Redskins before 27,102 fans on December 7, 1941. Suddenly, the announcer was calling out names of important people in the nation's capital and telling them to report to work.

But Redskins president George Preston Marshall would not allow an announcement of Japan's attack on the U.S. Fleet during the game, explaining that it would

distract fans. That made Griffith Stadium one of the last outposts of an era that had already slipped away. After Philadelphia won 20-14, Klenk and a friend learned about Pearl Harbor from an "extra" edition of the *Washington Star* newspaper.

Bill Klenk's journey from civilian to naval aviator took more than two years. The United States could afford to spend that long training a pilot, and could keep huge numbers of men in the training pipeline so that those who had experienced war could return home after a period of time. Neither lengthy training nor any end-of-tour relief were luxuries the Axis nations could afford. A typical U.S. naval aviator in a carrier-based squadron was expected to complete two combat cruises. Many, like Klenk, got into the war too late to ever begin a second cruise.

Klenk's first trip to the recruiter led to a rejection. "I was a skinny kid, five feet ten, weighing just 100 pounds. I was told to go home, eat some bananas, and come back again. I was earmarked for pilot training and sworn in as a Seaman 2nd Class in the U.S. Naval Reserve on May 26, 1942."

Neither Nazi Germany nor Imperial Japan could afford to shunt around a pilot trainee the way the United States routinely did. Klenk underwent ground training and then went to Hutchinson, Kansas, for primary flight instruction in the Stearman N2S biplane. He made his first flight in the Navy on December 10, 1942. He went to Corpus Christi, Texas, for basic flight training in the Vultee SNV-1, then transferred to Kingsville, Texas, for an introduction to dive bombing in the SBD Dauntless.

After all that, Klenk received his ensign's commission and aviator's wings of gold on May 7, 1943. He was then assigned to Jacksonville, Florida, for operational training in the SBD Dauntless and thereafter to Glenview, Illinois, for carrier-landing practice, landing the Dauntless on the carrier USS *Sable* (IX-81), a converted side-wheel steamer used for training on the Great Lakes. Only after that was Klenk assigned to Squadron VB-80, which formed at Wildwood, New Jersey, in February 1944. The squadron soon moved to Oceana, Virginia, to prepare to go aboard the *Ticonderoga*.

Meanwhile, Curtiss was improving the Helldiver design. Lengthening the fuselage by one foot and redesigning the fin fixed the plane's most serious aerodynamic problem. Curtiss built 978 SB2C-1 models and a single XB2C-2 seaplane version before turning out 1,112 SB2C-3s with numerous minor changes to engine and propeller.

Both: U. S. Navy via Robert F. Dorr

ABOVE: Posing on the hangar deck of the aircraft carrier USS *Hancock* (CV 19) to which they transferred after being aboard USS *Ticonderoga* (CV 14) are SB2C pilot Bill Klenk (left) and radioman-gunner Bill Hall. TOP: Fires send black smoke aloft from Japanese ships and facilities at Manila Bay on November 13, 1944, following an attack by SB2C Helldiver dive-bombers.

More than 15,000 U.S. pilots lost their lives while training for a war they never reached—and Klenk almost became one of them. "When we got our new SB2C-3s in Virginia, we did carrier qualifications," he said. "On my first flight in the SB2C-3 model, I made normal approach to the USS *Charger* [CVE 30] in the Chesapeake Bay. Because of a manufacturing flaw, I had a bad tailhook.

"After my normal landing, the tailhook pulled out of the airplane and stayed on the wire while I kept going up the deck toward parked planes. My right wingtip hit the island and my plane spun around and then I hit the island head-on right under the bridge and almost knocked the captain overboard." No one was seriously hurt.

The principal version of the Helldiver, and the one eventually operated by Klenk's squadron, was the SB2C-4, of which 2,045 were built, with redesigned flaps for improved dive performance, a propeller spinner, and eight under-wing stations for 5-inch high velocity aircraft rockets. Curtiss built 970 SB2C-5 models with increased fuel capacity but these were too late to see combat. Total production was 7,141 Helldivers.

In the spring of 1944 with most of the Helldiver's teething troubles behind, Klenk's squadron went aboard the *Ticonderoga* and embarked for the Pacific. *Ticonderoga*'s air wing, including squadron VB-80, saw its first combat in the Philippines on November 5, 1944—2½ years after Klenk was sworn in. By the time of his first combat, Klenk had 800 flight hours and 51 carrier landings in his logbook. "That was typical of me and of all of those around me," he said.

Ahead was the January 15, 1945, action off Formosa.

"The Japanese were using high-speed

destroyers as transports to move ships and supplies during the night," Klenk said. "A destroyer is very narrow, so it's not a good target from the air. Moreover, it has a lot of small-caliber guns. To engage and defeat a destroyer under steam, that was a real challenge." And that was the situation when Klenk arrived overhead, looking down at the *Hatakaze* ("Flag Wind") with a 1,000-pound bomb in his bay and two, 250-pound bombs hanging under his wings.

A five-plane Helldiver division from VB-80 carried out the attack on the destroyer *Hatakaze* after a sixth pilot, Ensign Habet Maroot, aborted with mechanical problems. VB-80 skipper Commander Edward Anderson went first, bombed, and missed. Jim Newquist, Bob Mullaney, Chuck Downey, and Ben Case each attacked the *Hatakaze* with mixed results, including some major hits. Anderson had a "hung" bomb and had to shake it off. The aircraft piloted by Mullaney—later, chief engineer on the Apollo Lunar Excursion Module—was damaged by Japanese gunfire but airworthy.

It looked as if the destroyer was going to elude the dive bombers until it was Klenk's turn.

He followed the attack sequence drilled into dive bomber crews: "From 10,000 feet, the target slides under the left center section leading edge of your wing," Klenk said. "You slow down to dive brake deployment speed of 125 knots, turn left with rudder and aileron to take you into a vertical dive, and head straight down at him. You keep your nose on target and release just prior to 1,000 feet of altitude for maximum effect. And then, you pull out, stay low, and run like hell."

On an earlier mission on November 13, 1944, Klenk witnessed a Helldiver piloted by Ensign John Manchester being blown out of the sky by antiaircraft fire. Manchester and radioman-gunner John Griffith were swallowed up in a ball of flame. Retired Navy Captain Nathan Serenko, a fighter pilot who flew alongside the dive bomber pilots of VB-80 said, "Those Helldiver guys had balls of brass. They went diving right into the dragon's teeth."

Klenk's 1,000-pound bomb went straight

Continued on page 98

A soldier of the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division, armed with a German MP 40 submachine gun that he likely found on the battlefield, checks for signs of life in a demolished building in Normandy. The Canadians landed 14,000 men at Juno Beach on June 6, 1944, while another 1,000 came in by parachute and glider.

National Archives

AS JOHN WESLEY POINTON jumped into the cold English Channel water with the Royal Canadian 7th Brigade Signal Corps and struggled with a heavy radio strapped to his back toward the beach that was being torn apart by shot and shell, the farm boy from Saskatchewan tried to make his mind go blank.

He wanted to stop his brain from recording the sights around him as friends fell and men's limbs were blown into the air. But the images of D-Day streamed into his mind and deposited their carnage forever, even as he gained the shore and pushed across the devastation of Juno Beach.

In front and beside him, the scene was a nightmare from which he could not wake. Besides noise the likes of which he had never experienced before, the sights were also worse than anything he had ever imagined. The beach was erupting in fiery, violent explosions, tanks were aflame, and men were going down, screaming, or being blasted to pieces. Behind him landing craft were burning or exploding. Wounded men lay bleeding on the sand, imploring him—or anyone—to help them.

The hellish reality at Normandy was a far cry from John Pointon's halcyon growing-

FROM THE GREAT NORTH TO NORMANDY

Although often overlooked, Canadian troops did their part to ensure victory on D-Day.

BY DOROTHY BROTHERTON

up days on his dad's homestead at Major, Saskatchewan, near Regina, and an equally far cry from the pleasant scenes of the Okanagan Valley in British Columbia, where he would live out his senior years after a simple career driving a taxi.

In his elderly years, with the help of a cane, John would climb onto a bus to go for a bit of shopping or to join friends for coffee. He was a regular at church. He lived with his daughter's family. He was a quiet man who never thought of himself as a hero. More than half a century after D-Day, he agreed reluctantly to sit down with a journalist, but he didn't really want to talk about his war experience. It was still too painful.

Slowly, though, pieces of Pointon's story came out. Hunkered down with his radio on French soil on June 6, 1944, the young man in his 20s had fallen into a protective daze. He had a hard time remembering why he had signed up back in Regina. It had something to do with being unable to find a job, the same reason behind many young men signing up for war.

The war opened up plenty of jobs for Depression-ravaged Canadians, just as it did in the United States, although few volunteers had any real concept of what they were getting into. The political reasons were somewhat vague, but the allegiance to freedom was clear and strong in young Canadians.

Before the war, Pointon had left the family farm, which his brothers capably managed. He thought it was time to seek his livelihood elsewhere, but all he could find was meager farm labor and a stint delivering meat by bicycle.

When he turned 18, Pointon tried to join the Canadian Army, but at only five feet, five inches tall, he needed two more inches to qualify to be a soldier. Pointon remembered, "I heard that the Signal Corps would take you if you were four feet tall as long as you had brains in your head."

So he joined the #12 District Depot Royal Canadian Corps Signals. With the urgency of being shipped off to active duty upon him like many of his generation, Pointon married his girlfriend of the time in

National Archives

ABOVE: Canadian troops rehearse for Operation Overlord at the Slapton Sands training area in Devon, England. They are disembarking from wooden lifeboats rather than the military landing craft they will come ashore in on D-Day. OPPOSITE: Of all the Allied forces on D-Day, the Canadians made the deepest penetration inland—four miles from Caen.

a hurry (a marriage that later fell apart). Just a couple of months after the wedding, he began military training in Regina. It simply seemed to be his destiny.

Pointon certainly had no idea he would one day take part in one of the most telling battles of history, the pivot of World War II, a battle in which Canadian forces acquitted themselves with true heroism, the invasion of Normandy.

Alone among North and South American nations, Canada had been part of the war effort from the beginning in 1939. Prime Minister William Mackenzie King had said, "There has not been a time when countries of the world have faced such a crisis as they face today. If this conqueror [Hitler], by his methods of force, violence and terror, and other ruthless iniquities, is able to crush the people of Europe ... there will be in time no freedom on this continent. Life will not be worth living."

During World War I, Canadian troops had fought admirably but had done so under the British flag and British command. Then a historical first happened. On September 10, 1939, Canada, now a nation responsible for her own actions, made her own declaration of war. It was still 27 months before Japan's December 7, 1941, bombing of Pearl Harbor brought the United States actively into the war.

Hitler was galloping across Europe, crushing Poland, Denmark, Norway, Holland, Belgium, and France. Germany became "master of the entire west coast of Europe from Spain to the Arctic Circle," according to historian George Brown.

Back in Regina, a frustrated Pointon studied Morse code and wireless technology wondering if he'd ever get to use them, and impatient to be on the battlefield.

"In 1939 the Royal Canadian Corps of Signals was in desperate need of young men," says the Canadian Heritage Information Network. The recruits learned on wireless sets manufactured by Northern Electric in 1937, which had little output power and were difficult to tune. That was all that was available to the Canadian signalmen at the start of World War II.

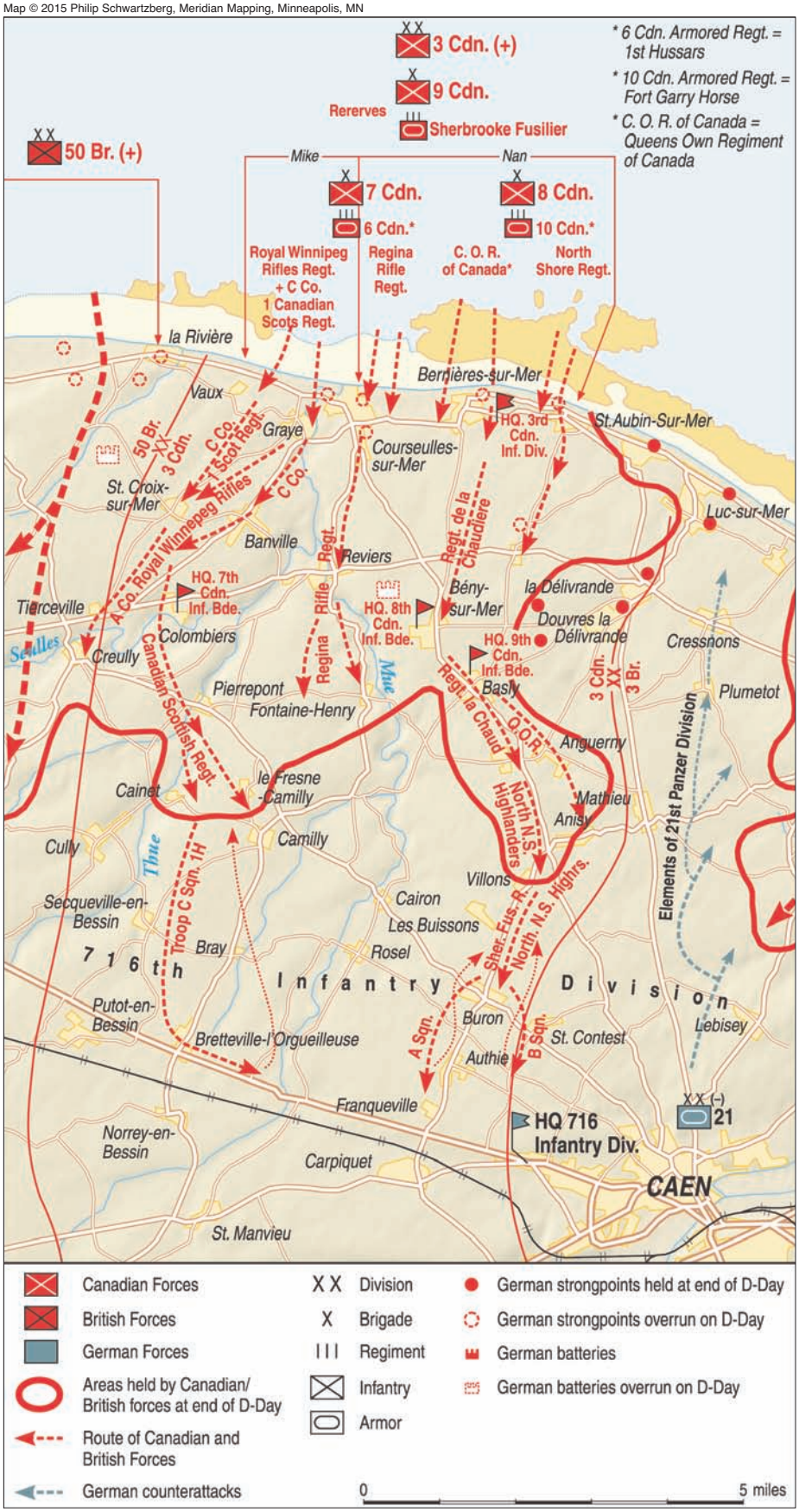
But the better wireless set, #19, built in Canada throughout the war, formed the backbone of the Canadian Army's field communications network with its ability to send Morse code over approximately 18 miles and voice about half that distance.

Meanwhile, in Europe disaster followed disaster for the Allies in the early years of the war. There were the dark days of Dunkirk; the plucky British managed to rescue 300,000 men in thousands of tiny boats, bringing them back across the Channel after a disheartening defeat. Then Romania and Greece fell.

Canada's leaders saw that if Britain lost control of the seas, then Iceland, Greenland, and Africa's west coast would become stepping stones for Germany to launch an invasion of the Western Hemisphere. Hitler's fantastic dream of dominating the world now seemed ominously possible.

On August 19, 1942, the Allies threw themselves at the French port city of Dieppe in a surprise attack, but the raid was poorly planned and German coastal defenses were

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



tougher than anyone had judged. Among the 5,000 Canadians at Dieppe, 3,350 became casualties.

Strategy was thereafter shaped more carefully in Ottawa, Washington, and London. It was agreed that another European front was needed. After months of secret plans, Operation Overlord, the massive invasion of northern France, dawned on June 6, 1944. From the English Channel fog emerged ships to land troops on the beaches of Normandy. Air power paved the way.

The D-Day Invasion Plan

The Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force had been established on February 12, 1944, under General Dwight Eisenhower. The initial plan produced by the Allies outlined an assault on the Normandy coast to secure "as a base for future operations a lodgement area," says a report from Veterans of the United Kingdom.

Troops would cross the Channel under cover of darkness in a great naval armada and drop anchor in front of the 50 miles of five designated invasion beaches. From west to east, they were codenamed Utah, Omaha, Gold, June, and Sword, and they were strewn with steel and concrete fortifications, machine-gun nests, mortar pits, heavy gun blockhouses, and a maze of mines and anti-invasion obstacles. Three Allied airborne divisions would drop to secure the flanks of the invasion.

Military brass had assigned a major role to Canada. The Americans were to go after Utah and Omaha Beaches in the west, and the British could handle Gold and Sword Beaches. Between Gold and Sword was Juno, the Canadian objective.

The plan was for Canada to land 14,000 soldiers onto Juno Beach and to drop another 1,000 behind enemy lines by parachute or glider. The Royal Canadian Navy supplied ships and about 10,000 sailors, and the Royal Canadian Air Force Avro Lancaster bombers and Supermarine Spitfires supported the effort.

The Juno Beach force was part of Britain's Second Army, under command of British Lt. Gen. Sir Miles Dempsey. The Canadian assault forces were the 3rd Cana-

dian Infantry Division, commanded by Maj. Gen. Rodney F.L. Keller, and the 2nd Canadian Armoured Brigade, with Brigadier R.A. Wyman in charge. After heavy air and naval bombardment, troops were to land, and after the beachhead was established follow-up troops would land and move inland. The hope was that by the end of the day the cities of Caen and Bayeux would be captured and the beachheads consolidated.

Major General Keller, in command of the 3rd Canadian Division from September 1942 through August 1944, was not a popular officer. Graduating from the Royal Military College in 1920, Keller served in the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, one of Canada's three regular infantry regiments, until the outbreak of war.

National Archives

Left: John Wesley Pointon, Canadian 7th Brigade Signal Corps, survived the war. Right: Kurt Meyer's SS troops massacred Canadians POWs.

Keller went overseas in 1939 as a brigade major and became a brigadier in 1941, taking over the 3rd Division the next year. Although the troops admired Keller's tough-talking demeanour, his staff officers were not happy with his hard drinking and cavalier attitude toward security. He had also taken a married mistress, and some felt his visits to her left the general staff officers to run the division in his absence a little too often.

Despite these disadvantages, the Canadians would do themselves proud and accomplish their mission.

Preparation for Invasion

Preparation had been going on for months with assembling and training in southern England; at the same time, a plan unfolded to deceive the enemy into thinking the main attack would be at the Pas de Calais, not Normandy. A plan called Operation Fortitude used Hollywood-style mockups of bases, inflatable rubber tanks, fake aircraft, and phony radio traffic to cause the enemy to believe the invasion would happen across the narrowest part of the English Channel at Calais. Other preparations involved aerial reconnaissance and bombing the French railways to damage German supply lines.

Imperial War Museum

In a newsreel frame, Canadian infantrymen of the North Shore (New Brunswick) Regiment disembark from an LCA (Landing Craft, Assault) at Juno Beach, "Nan Red" Sector, at la Rive, near St. Aubin-sur-Mer, at about 8:05 AM on June 6, 1944, while under fire from German troops in the houses facing them.

Weather assumed the role of a starring character in this theater of war. The invasion was first planned for May 31, but the weather was the worst it had been in the springtime in 20 years. So the operation was reset for June 5, a date that would have good moonlight for the parachute troops, halfway rising tides to help landing vessels avoid beach obstacles, and plenty of daylight.

Weather, of course, is notoriously unpredictable. As troops assembled and waited tensely on British shores and the vessels from eight navies and merchant fleets gathered off the coast, the weather deteriorated. Clearly, a June 5 attack had to be postponed. But if weather pushed the invasion past June 7, the Allies would have to wait two weeks until the necessary combination of conditions occurred again. That delay would give German troops time to strengthen coastal defenses even more and risked leaking the secret elements of the plan.

The storm was bad during the night of June 4 and all day June 5, but weather forecasters promised it would be a little better on June 6. The decision was made. June 6 would be a go.

The Five-Pronged Invasion

Shortly before midnight on June 6, hundreds of transport planes carrying paratroopers and tow planes pulling the first wave of gliders took off from their bases in England. Shortly thereafter, the naval armada left various ports and headed toward Normandy.

The magnitude of the Allied forces deployed on D-Day was truly impressive. Making up the aerial assault were 11,680 aircraft, including 4,370 bombers, 4,190 fighters and fighter-bombers, 1,360 transport planes, and 1,760 other aircraft. In the invasion fleet were 6,939 vessels, including 1,213 warships, 4,126 transport vessels, and 1,600 support vessels. The number of Allied troops that were headed toward Nor-

mandy included 130,000 troops landed via ship and 19,000 airborne troops coming with parachutes and gliders.

Keller's 3rd Canadian Infantry Division, reinforced by the 2nd Canadian Armoured Brigade, would land in two brigade groups: the 7th Brigade (of which John Pointon was a part) made up of the Royal Winnipeg Rifles, Regina Rifles, and Canadian Scottish Regiments, and the 8th Brigade was made up of the North Shore Regiment, Queen's Own Rifles, and Le Regiment de la Chaudiere.

Each brigade had three infantry battalions and was supported by an armored regiment, two field artillery regiments, combat engineer companies, and extra units such as the Armoured Vehicles, Royal Engineers. The Fort Garry Horse's tanks supported the 7th Brigade on the left and the 1st Hussars' tanks supported on the right.

The 9th Brigade, made up of the Highland Light Infantry, the North Nova Scotia Highlanders, and the Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry Highlanders Regiments was scheduled to land later in the morning and push through the leading brigades. The Sherbrooke Fusiliers would provide the 9th Brigade with tank support.

Escorting the Canadian contingent across the Channel were the armed merchant cruisers HMCS *Prince Henry* and HMCS *Prince David,* accompanied by the destroyers HMCS *Algonquin* and HMCS *Sioux*.

At 3:30 AM in the middle of the English Channel, the Canadian soldiers on board ship were served breakfast. The CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Company) reported that on one ship the men ate scrambled eggs, bacon, coffee, bread, and jam. Then they waited.

Some men tried to read as their ships plowed forward. On one ship, men of the 3rd Canadian Division held an amateur night with recitations, jigs, reels, and singing. On another, Dublin-born journalist Cornelius Ryan reported that in a convoy, on a landing craft where nearly everyone was seasick, Canadian Captain James Douglas Gilan "brought out the one volume which made sense this night. To quiet his own nerves and those of a brother officer, he opened to the Twenty-third Psalm and read aloud, 'The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want....'"

Meanwhile, the British 6th Airborne Division (including the 1,000-man 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion) had dropped paratroopers and landed gliders northeast of Caen to seize bridges over the River Orne and Caen Canal and take a four-gun battery at Merville. Simultaneously, two American airborne divisions landed in marshy terrain behind Utah Beach to grab bridges and road junctions to delay German counterattacks and pave the way for the Allied advance.

At that point the German forces went on full alert, but the highest military authorities, including Hitler, apparently were still convinced for days to come that these landings were a diversionary tactic and that the main attack would come at the Pas de Calais.

But Allied bombers were already raining down fire on enemy positions and, as the sun rose over the Normandy coast at about 5 AM, the invasion fleet opened fire.

German observers spotted the approaching armada that, for the next two hours, blasted the shore and deposited thousands of men on the five invasion beaches. A German lieutenant named Frerking, at strongpoint WN62, is said to have looked at the sight and said, "But that's not possible!"

Everything was now ready for the troop landings. All along Sword, Juno, and Gold Beaches, the British and Canadians swarmed ashore.

Lieutenant Michael Aldworth and about 40 men crouched in their landing craft as shells exploded around them. Someone asked him how long it would be, and he called, "Wait a minute, chaps. It's not our turn." After a moment someone asked, "Well, just how long do you

Imperial War Museum

With the beachhead relatively secure, second-wave troops of the Highland Light Infantry, 9th Canadian Infantry Brigade disembark with bicycles from LCI(L)s (Landing Craft Infantry, Large) onto Juno Beach, "Nan White" Sector, at Bernières-sur-Mer, shortly before noon on June 6.

think it will be, old man? The ruddy hold is filling full of water."

The craft was going under. The men from the sinking craft were picked up by several boats, with some delivered to the beach and others taken out to a Canadian destroyer. One officer, Major de Stackpoole, is said to have dived overboard and began swimming for shore, not wishing to be out of the fight.

Sword Beach

At 5:30 AM, the big transport ships began to disgorge small landing craft packed with troops into choppy seas. As they plowed toward the beach in heavy seas, many men became violently seasick.

To buck up his men, Major "Banger" King of the East Yorkshire Regiment recited passages from Shakespeare's *Henry V,* including the famous passage, "Once more unto the breach." As men and equipment approached the beach, Allied warships fired at German strongholds. This was reinforced by field guns of the 3rd Division's own artillery firing from ships up to six miles back from the coast, enabling most of the craft to approach the beach without significant damage.

Sword Beach was on the eastern edge of the Normandy invasion site, stretching eight miles from the Orne estuary at Ouistreham to St.-Aubin-sur-Mer. From east to west Sword was sliced into four sectors, called Roger, Queen, Peter, and Oboe, although rocks kept the 3rd British Division from landing on Peter and Oboe.

The 8th Brigade Group formed a spearhead, attacking defenses on Queen Beach. The British assault force combined infantry, commandos, and specialized armored units, which formed a template for the battles that would be repeated on the other two British-Canadian beaches.

The incoming tide at Sword Beach was already higher than expected. It meant several landing craft crashed into obstacles that the Allies had thought would be visible above water, and it made the beach narrower. That helped by cutting down the space the infantry would need to dash across, but it also cut down space for armored vehicles to assemble. By 7:30 AM, two regiments were on the beach and battering their way forward supported by armored firepower.

For two hours they pushed on and captured at last the coastal strongpoint at la Breche. But it was not without a steep price. One observer described this section of beach as "a sandy cemetery with unburied new dead and half undead, missing arms and legs, their blood clotting in the sand."

Other British and French troops fought into the outskirts of Ouistreham, driving two miles inland to capture Hermanville-sur-Mer. Troops continued to land on the narrowing strip of beach, hampered by a traffic jam of armor. By noon, the British 185th Infantry Brigade pushed inland without supporting armor, which would catch up when possible.

Gold Beach

Gold Beach was the westernmost British-Canadian sector, a nine-mile stretch from la Riviere to Port-en-Bessin in the west. The sectors were named King, Jig, Item, and How. Rocks squeezed the British 50th Infantry Division assault into the King and Jig Sectors only.

Between 5:45 and 7:15 AM, Allied naval vessels bombarded the defenses, helped by 72 artillery pieces handled by the 50th Division. Sgt. Maj. Jack Villader Brown said these artillery pieces fired rapidly for so long that "the guns got so hot the blokes could hardly handle them."

At 7:30 AM the 69th Brigade assaulted King Sector with two infantry battalions backed by specialized armor, while a similar group from the 231st Brigade and a Royal Marine Commando unit landed on Jig Sector. Again, the naval bombardment aided the landings.

Farther west, the German-held village of le Hamel stood firm despite being pounded by Allied Hawker Typhoon fighter bombers. The armored support wasn't enough to pre-

National Archives

National Archives

ABOVE: A member of the 12th SS Panzer Division (Hitlerjugend) has his facial wound treated. The 12th SS Panzer Division was the Canadians' toughest, most ruthless opponent during battle for Normandy. OPPOSITE: An M4A2 Sherman III tank of the Canadian 3rd Armoured Brigade kicks up dust while rolling through hedgerow country in Normandy.

vent the Hampshires from becoming pinned down opposite le Hamel.

Private Hooley from A Company said later, "A sweet rancid smell, never forgotten, was everywhere; it was the smell of burned explosive, torn flesh, and ruptured earth." He watched as a flail tank exploded, "out of which came cartwheeling through the air a torn, shrieking body."

Despite terrible carnage, the British forces secured the beach by around 9:30 AM. The le Hamel battle carried on until afternoon as the 50th British Division pushed inland four miles to the town of Cruelly; a few units went west to grab Port-en-Bessin and close the gap with the Americans at Omaha Beach.

The British and Canadians made full use of amphibious tanks and armored vehicles. Cornelius Ryan wrote, "Some, like the flail tanks, lashed the ground ahead of them with chains that detonated mines. Other armored vehicles carried small bridges or great reels of steel matting which, when unrolled, made a temporary roadway over soft ground. One group even carried giant bundles of logs for use as steppingstones over walls or to fill in antitank ditches. These inventions [known as 'Hobart's Funnies,' after their inventor, Maj. Gen. Percy Hobart], and the extra-long period of bombardment that the British beaches had received, gave the assaulting troops additional protection."

Juno Beach

Meanwhile, at Juno Beach the Canadians, sandwiched between the two British beaches, found their place in the sun and in the mud. In the first wave, there were about 3,000 Canadians of all ranks (11,000 more would follow) who stormed Juno Beach, which stretched six miles from St.-Aubin-sur-Mer in the east to la Riviere. In the middle was the small fishing port of Courseulles-sur-Mer. To the east lay two smaller villages, Bernières-sur-Mer and St. Aubin.

Juno was divided into three sectors: Nan, Mike, and Love, and the landing places fairly bristled with guns, barbed wire, concrete emplacements, and mines. Keller's men not only had to contend with the obstacles and small-arms fire, but also came under intense mortar fire.

The initial assault was handled by four regiments with two companies supporting the flanks: The North Shore Regiment on the left at St. Aubin (Nan Red Sector), the Queen's Own Rifles in the center at Bernières (Nan White Sector), the Regina Rifles at Courseulles (Nan Green Sector), the Royal Winnipeg Rifles on the western edge of Courseulles (Mike Red and Mike Green Sectors), with a company of Canadian Scottish securing the right flank and a company of British Royal Marine Commandos securing the left flank.

The Canadians rushed through curtains of machine-gun fire and attacked the pillboxes with Sten guns, small-arms fire, and grenades. The first wave took heavy casualties. When tanks arrived, the pillbox defenses were largely decimated, and in hand-to-hand fighting the Canadians cleared the enemy positions. In less than two hours, they managed to secure the first offensive routes off the beach.

One of the toughest pockets of resistance was met by the Canadian 3rd Division when the men ran into lines of pillboxes and trenches in Courseulles, then fought through fortified houses and from street to street. In many cases the fighting was hand to hand.

Farther west at 7:45 AM, the 7th Canadian Brigade Group approached Mike Sector. John Wesley Pointon from Saskatchewan was hunched down inside his landing barge.

Pointon, loaded down with a 50-pound radio and 60 pounds of other gear, was just one man among 300 in the belly of the craft.

His barge hit a mine just offshore. "We had to jump over the sides," he remembered, but his precious signal radio was sealed in waterproofing material. "Most of our group got safely on shore, but we had no transport. Our trucks were useless in the barge where the mine had blasted the landing ramp."

Then came the part Pointon didn't want to talk about, even decades later. The first wave of infantry had landed ahead of them, to face the German pillbox defenses—

Both: National Archives

bunkers where tiny slits were spitting out machine-gun bullets that cut down men like mown hay.

Pointon and his buddies clambered ashore, moved through the dead and wounded strewn on the beach, and pushed past the pillboxes. A few miles inland and a few hours later, Pointon found himself among a handful of men pinned down by a sniper shooting from a tiny church balcony.

Ironically, it reminded him to pray. He worried that he'd strayed from his strict Canadian prairie Christian upbringing. He'd been named John Wesley after the famous founder of Methodism, but he had little time to dwell on how he'd wandered from those ideals or on thoughts of his brand-new wife and his parents back home in Saskatchewan.

The events of the present became a blur. He had walked a long way, passing through a small village. Signal Corps men were not heavily armed because they weren't supposed to be combat soldiers, but even the support troops were running out of ammunition; the men's extra ammunition was back on the barge. They simply hunkered down and hoped the enemy fire would go overhead.

Pointon concentrated on his radio. Amid the confusion, the Signal Corps had to keep relaying messages. They picked up crackling frontline messages and passed the information to headquarters and then back again. The wireless communication chain went all the way to England. They dared not make a mistake. Pointon remembered his Morse code and did his job with trembling fingers.

Fighting Inland

Throughout the morning, Canadian and British commandos pushed forward through St. Aubin and Courseulles and advanced about four miles inland. At every move, pockets of enemy forces harassed their steps and held out in the coastal villages until early evening.

The Regina Rifles and Royal Winnipeg Rifles fought their way through Courseulles and Graye-sur-Mer. The North Shore Regiment captured St. Aubin, while the Queen's Own Rifles took the town of Bernières.

ABOVE: A Canadian 4.2-inch mortar crew in action against the Germans a few days after the landings. OPPOSITE: A Canadian soldier dashes past a disabled Sherman tank whose rubber track pads are on fire.

CBC News gives a helpful minute-by-minute account of D-Day as compiled by Robin Rowland. He summarized the Canadian invasion at Juno this way: "At 8 AM, the first Canadian beachhead is established in Courseulles in Mike Sector by the Regina Rifles, covered by the tanks of the 1st Hussars. Naval gunfire had taken out the German guns in their area, but nearby the Royal Winnipeg Rifles come under heavy fire—there the navy had missed the German guns and many of the soldiers died in the water, never reaching the beaches.

"In the Nan Sector, the North Shore Regiment lands under heavy German fire. At 8:30 AM, the Queen's Own Rifles land at Nan Sector, held up by high seas. The soldiers have to run 183 meters [200 yards] from the shore to a seawall under fire from hidden German artillery. Only a few men of the first company survive.

"At 10 AM, Canadian soldiers are on the beach in all sectors. Reserve troops begin to reach the beach on the rising tide. While the Canadian Scottish suffers only light casualties, the landing craft bearing Le Regiment de la Chaudiere hit hidden mines, killing many men. Others drowned trying to reach the shore.

"At 10:30, Major General R.F. Keller, Canadian commander at Juno, sends a message to his superior, General H.D. Crerar: 'Beach-head gained. Well on our way to our immediate objectives.'"

By noon, all units of the 3rd Canadian Division were on shore at Juno Beach. By that evening, the North Shore Regiment would capture St. Aubin, and in the next few hours other Canadians would take Courseulles and Bernières. Later, the Highland Regiment took Columbiers-sur-Seulles. The First Hussars reached its objective at the Caen-Bayeux highway intersection—the only Allied unit to capture its planned final objective on D-Day.

Moving Inland Together

As this historic day progressed, few individual soldiers on the ground grasped the big picture, but a bird's-eye view would have shown the Allies advancing farther inland from

the five separate beaches to form two larger beachheads.

Advancing south four miles from Sword, elements of the 185th Brigade reached Biéville, while No. 45 (Royal Marine) Commando, part of the 1st Special Service Brigade under Lord Lovat, thrust south-southeast and crossed Pegasus Bridge to link up with the airborne forces located east of the Orne River. The commandos then continued northeast to relieve the paras at the Merville Battery.

Meanwhile, as No. 41 (Royal Marine) Commando attacked the town of Lion-sur-Mer, the 8th and 9th Infantry Brigades pushed southwest, but German resistance stalled their drive on the Periers Ridge. Elements of the German 21st Panzer Division then attempted to smash toward the coast through a three-mile gap that existed between the Sword and Juno beachheads. Determined resistance prevented all but a small enemy force from reaching the coast.

Meanwhile, the 3rd Canadian Division had moved forward to five miles inland across a five-mile front, from Anisy in the east through to Cruelly. There the Canadians linked up with the 69th Brigade, 50th Division, which had moved six miles south from Gold Beach to the town of Coulombs.

Farther west, the 50th Division's other two brigades had moved five miles southwest to reach a position just two miles short of Bayeux. By nightfall, parts of two British divisions had started disembarking onto the beaches at Normandy to reinforce the Allies.

Farther west, American forces pushed inland from Utah Beach to link up with airborne forces. At Omaha Beach, where fighting had been difficult all day, Americans managed to drive inland to secure a precarious four-mile-wide by one-mile-deep foothold on French soil. The cost of the bloody Omaha battle was more than 2,000 casualties.

Once ashore, speed was paramount. From Gold Beach, British troops headed for Bayeux, seven miles inland. From Juno, the Canadians plunged onward for the Bayeux-Caen highway and Carpiquet Airport, about 10 miles inland. From Sword, the British headed for Caen.

Night fell, and Allied troops pushed on. By midnight, 159,000 Allied troops had grabbed four sizable beachheads. The Sword Beach operation had linked up with the 6th Airborne at Pegasus Bridge and the Merville Battery to carve out a 25-square-mile stretch, while the Juno and Gold forces had joined up to secure a 12-mile-wide beachhead; farther west were the two American beachheads.

The price of victory was high. The battles for the Juno beachhead on D-Day cost 340 Canadian lives and another 574 wounded; during the first six days of the Normandy campaign, 1,017 Canadians would die, and by the end of the campaign 5,020 Canadians would be dead. Despite the excruciating cost, D-Day was a stunning success. It established the coveted second front, and was a crucial step on the march to victory.

American, British, Canadian, and some French forces had established a beachhead in France. Maybe it was just a toehold, but it signaled one of the most successful military operations of all time.

Although the Canadians had been the last of the five Allied divisions to land, the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division and the 2nd Canadian Armoured Brigade had penetrated six miles inland from Juno Beach, farther inland than any other. They were headed for Caen, a vital center of road and railway networks that radiated throughout Normandy and on to Paris.

News Reaches Home

The first bulletins arrived at CBC headquarters in Toronto around 3:30 AM on June 6. Although details were scant, the first CBC broadcast on June 6 opened with: "The invasion of France began early this morning. Thousands of Canadian, British, and American soldiers are storming the beaches of what Hitler called 'Fortress Europe.'"

Headline stories hit newspapers and other media outlets around the free world.

In Britain, one read, "British Prime Minister Winston Churchill has told the House of Commons in London that an armada of 4,000 [sic] ships has crossed the Channel to France. Mr. Churchill says the sea passage was made with minimal losses. The enemy was caught by surprise. The attack began shortly after midnight in France, with heavy bombardment by the planes from all Allied Air Forces. Airborne troops were

dropped by parachute in key locations and it is reported they have captured most of their objectives."

Another reported in Washington, "President Franklin Roosevelt has told reporters in Washington that minesweepers and PT (patrol torpedo) boats cleared the way for the fleet. Two U.S. destroyers and one LST (landing ship tank) have been lost."

At Allied headquarters in southeast England, a third stated, "The Canadian 3rd Division has landed at a beach codenamed Juno. The attack began just before 8 AM local time, three hours before low tide. There are reports of casualties on the landing craft due to beach obstacles and bombardment by the enemy. Heavy fighting is reported near the town of Bernières where the Royal Winnipeg Rifles landed just after dawn."

Back in Canada, Prime Minister Mackenzie King issued his official statement (preserved in CBC archives): "At half past three o'clock this morning, the government received official word that the invasion of Western Europe had begun.

"Word was also received that the Canadian troops were among the Allied forces who landed this morning on the northern coast of France. Canada will be proud to learn that our troops are being supported by units of the Royal Canadian Navy and the Royal Canadian Air Force.

"The great landing in Western Europe is the opening of what we hope and believe will be the decisive phase of the war against Germany. The fighting is certain to be heavy, bitter and costly. You must not expect early results. We should be prepared for local reverses as well as success. No one can say how long this phase of the war may last. But we have every reason for confidence in the final outcome."

After D-Day

Expanding the beachhead had its share of problems. On June 7, the North Nova Scotia Highlanders and the 27th Armoured Regiment (Sherbrooke Fusiliers Regiment), pushing toward the Carpiquet airfield, were attacked by SS Colonel Kurt Meyer's 25th Panzergrenadier Regiment and the 50

Both: National Archives

ABOVE: Fighting was intense in the towns and villages behind Juno Beach. Here, 3rd Canadian Infantry Division soldiers defend their position in a French town. Three of the soldiers are equipped with Lee Enfield Mk I rifles while the soldier at right is firing a Bren .303 Mk II machine gun. OPPOSITE: A Canadian patrol stops to inspect a German staff car and motorcycle in a village "somewhere in Normandy."

tanks of the 12th SS Panzer Regiment Hitlerjugend at Saint-Germain-la-Blanche-Herbe, near Caen. The Germans inflicted heavy losses on the Canadians and destroyed 28 tanks.

A group of Canadians was captured by the Germans and herded into the walled courtyard of the Abbey Ardennes. On June 7 and 8, 20 unarmed Canadian prisoners of war were taken into the serene courtyard and murdered by Meyer's men, each shot in the back of the head.

Unaware of the atrocity taking place at the abbey, three "Grizzly" tanks (the Canadian version of the Sherman) of the 1st Hussar's C Squadron (Canadians) drove toward Carpiquet airfield and advanced all the way to the Caen-Bayeux railway line. It was the only unit on the whole of D-Day to reach its final objective (although they had to withdraw for lack of reinforcements). The Canadians finally captured Carpiquet airfield on July 5.

Despite the failure to capture any of the final D-Day objectives that day, the Juno Beach assault is considered by many historians to be the most tactically successful of the D-Day landings alongside the American landing at Utah.

In about a month, Cherbourg was captured, providing the Allies with a port besides the artificial Mulberry ports they had towed with them across the Channel, and the British and Canadians had finally battled their way into Caen to dismantle a keystone of the German defenses.

The 3rd Canadian Division's commander, however, suffered his share of criticism during and after D-Day. Maj. Gen. Keller was not highly regarded by British corps level commanders before II Canadian Corps had been formed on the Continent. The division's performance was rated as having "immense dash and enthusiasm" on D-Day followed by "the rather jumpy, high-strung state of the next few days, and then a rather static outlook."

Keller himself was described as having gone through the same phases, and his corps commander felt the division would "never be a good division so long a Major General Keller commands it." His own staff officers thought him to be anxious and overly concerned for his own safety.

After II Canadian Corps was activated in the field, Keller was confronted by his new corps commander, Lt. Gen. Guy G. Simonds. Keller surprised Simonds by reporting himself to be in ill health and seeking to be relieved. Simonds in turn acted surprisingly by refusing and asked Keller not to be hasty. The next day Keller agreed to continue in command of the division.

After three more weeks, Simonds changed his mind, but by then Keller had become the only Canadian general wounded in action in World War II when Allied planes bombed his headquarters by mistake. Simonds later stated, "I was saved from a very embarrassing situation by Keller being wounded and invalided home before I had to act, which I had become convinced was necessary." Keller was replaced by Maj. Gen. Daniel Spry.

More victories followed—including the liberation of Holland where Canada played a vital role—as well as setbacks. Germany finally surrendered on May 7, 1945.

After the War

Six months later, John Pointon returned to Canada aboard the *Queen Mary,* one of 740,000 men and 36,000 women who served Canada in World War II. There were heavy casualties; 42,042 Canadians had been killed and 54,414 wounded. Pointon was thankful that he was able to come home to live a quiet life, drive his taxi, and raise his family.

It took men like Pointon and all the Allied forces together to stop what Prime Minister MacKenzie King had called "this violence, this terror, this ruthless iniquity" of Nazism. It took the foot soldiers, the men in the skies, the men at sea, and the men who passed the signals. It took the fallen and the survivors. They were all heroes.

Like many others, D-Day was John Wesley Pointon's finest hour. He went to his final reward in the year 2000 at age 82.

Normandy Today

Among the memorials of Normandy today stands Juno Beach Center, a museum built close to the place where Canadians landed during the D-Day assault. The center's website says, "The Juno Beach Center at Courseulles-sur-Mer in Normandy will provide recognition of Canada's military and civilian contributions during the Second World War. It will preserve for future generations the knowledge of the contributions of that generation of Canadians and honour the gifts of valour and freedom that were given by all Canadians who participated."

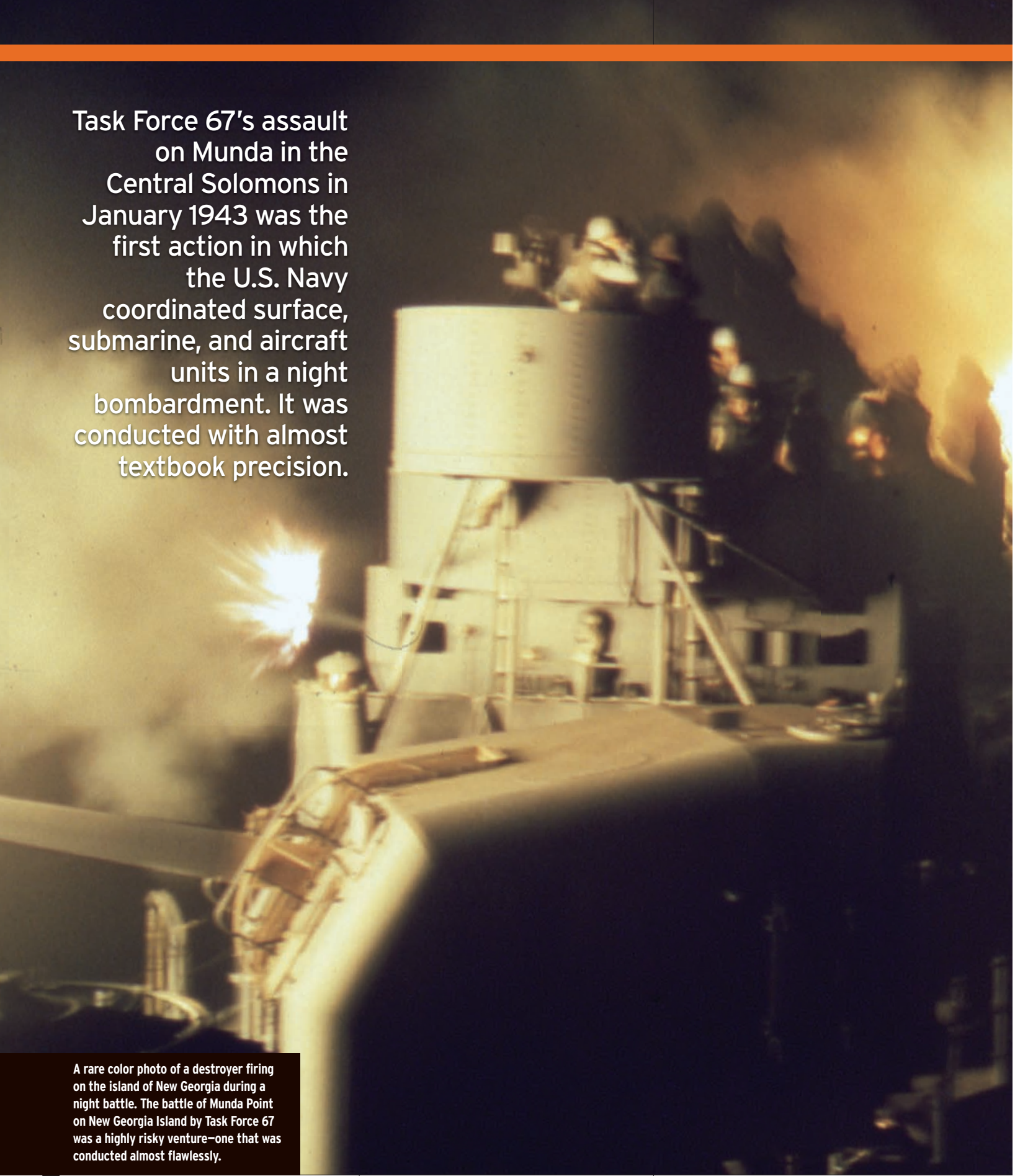
The museum opened June 6, 2003, after a seven-year effort. Eighty-year-old Alex Kowbel, a veteran of D-Day, said at the unveiling of a memorial at the site, "We tend to forget, so this memorial will help people remember."

A memorial to the 20 murdered Canadians also exists in the garden of the Ardennes Abbey in Saint-Germain-la-Blanche-Herbe.

Dr. Serge Durflinger, historian at the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa, said, "D-Day itself was piercing the crust of Hitler's Atlantic Wall. After Canada was a major player in doing that, I think the army gained a lot of confidence, a lot of maturity, and they had proven themselves in the test of combat."

British historian John Keegan paid tribute to the Canadian 3rd Division on D-Day: "At the end of the day, its forward elements stood deeper into France than those of any other division. The opposition the Canadians faced was stronger than that of any other beach, save Omaha. That was an accomplishment in which the whole nation could take considerable pride." □

Task Force 67's assault on Munda in the Central Solomons in January 1943 was the first action in which the U.S. Navy coordinated surface, submarine, and aircraft units in a night bombardment. It was conducted with almost textbook precision.



A rare color photo of a destroyer firing on the island of New Georgia during a night battle. The battle of Munda Point on New Georgia Island by Task Force 67 was a highly risky venture—one that was conducted almost flawlessly.

NAVAL ASSAULT *On Munda*

BY JOHN J. DOMAGALSKI

The first days of January 1943 found American forces winning the prolonged struggle for control of Guadalcanal in the South Pacific. The Imperial Japanese Navy had been defeated in a decisive naval battle the previous November. Fresh American troops were pushing the Japanese into a shrinking perimeter on the western side of the island. The Japanese supply line slowed to a trickle due to growing American air and sea power.

Even as the Japanese were slowly losing the fight for Guadalcanal, work was under way to strengthen their positions farther north in the Central Solomons, a region that had been largely bypassed in 1942 by Imperial forces in favor of Guadalcanal. It now took on a new level of importance because of their unfavorable results in the south.

Never able to dislodge control of the airfield on Guadalcanal from the stubborn American defenders, the Japanese sought an alternate location to build a new one from scratch. Positioned about 175 miles northwest of Guadalcanal, New Georgia Island was determined to be an ideal place. The location would shorten the flight time for aircraft now flying to Guadalcanal from bases farther north.

In late November 1942, a small Japanese convoy landed on the southwestern portion of New Georgia. Work began immediately near Munda Point to build a runway at a small coconut plantation. Flanked by the smaller Rendova Island, the area was largely sheltered from seaborne invasion because of its shallow water and dangerous reefs.

This increase in Japanese activity around New Georgia was immediately noticed by American eyes. Aerial reconnaissance, however, initially did not detect the airfield because clever Japanese workers had strung cables along the top of coconut trees before cutting down the trunks as part of the runway construction. As a result of the ruse, the airfield escaped American detection until early December when it was almost 90 percent complete.

Once aware of it, Allied planes immediately began to bomb and strafe Munda on a regular basis in an attempt to prevent the completion of the runway. Japanese workers, however, simply repaired the damage and continued with the construction. In spite of the continuous air attacks of ever-increasing intensity, the airfield was operational by Christmas.

American commanders saw the new air base as a serious threat. In addition to cutting the flight time to Guadalcanal, it could be used as a possible staging point for another Japanese counterattack.

With airpower alone unable to shut down Munda, Admiral William F. "Bull" Halsey, the American commander of naval forces in the South Pacific, devised an ambitious plan: He decided to bombard Munda from the sea. Venturing up the Solomons Islands chain into Japanese waters would be the first mission of its kind. The daring undertaking close to enemy air and sea bases was a risky and dangerous.

Admiral Halsey tapped Rear Admiral Walden Ainsworth to lead the operation. Recently promoted to flag rank, Ainsworth had moved over to the Pacific from the Atlantic Theater where he had led a destroyer squadron; Halsey put him in charge of Task Force 67. The force had been recently rebuilt after suffering heavy damage in the Battle of Tassafaronga off Guadalcanal the previous November.

The scope of the operation expanded when Halsey decided to combine the bombardment mission with a delivery of Army reinforcements to Guadalcanal scheduled

All photos: National Archives

for January 4. The seven transports slated to carry the soldiers to the front lines would also pick up Marines for a return trip to Australia. With the advances American forces were making on the ground, it was imperative that the supply operation be completed without Japanese interference.

Operating in distant support of the combined mission would be three battleships and four destroyers under Rear Admiral Willis Lee. To draw attention away from the supply operation, land-based aircraft were scheduled to hit Munda and air bases farther north in the days leading up to the operation.

Immediately upon receipt of Halsey's orders, Admiral Ainsworth grappled with a plan for the bombardment operation. He felt there were two critical issues that needed to be addressed in the planning. "First, how to get in there undetected, or at least deny the enemy any knowledge of our intended move in his direction," Ainsworth later wrote.

"Second, how to retire beyond reach of his land-based air by daylight the following morning and make use of the air coverage provided for us. The time and duration of the bombardment depended on these two factors."

A large-scale chart of the area and a mosaic of the latest aerial reconnaissance photos were obtained for planning purposes, and the details of the operation began to take shape. The admiral learned he had additional resources at his disposal for the operation when a dispatch disclosed that the submarine *Grayback* would be stationed near the bombardment area to serve as a navigational aid. The submarine was already en route to New Georgia and thus was incorporated into the overall plan.

Once the navigation details were set, planners turned their attention to the firing arrangement. It was clear the final approach to the point of fire had to be carefully planned due to the confined waters between New Georgia and Rendova. "It was also apparent that greater accuracy could be obtained by having the ships fire singly." Noted Ainsworth. "A study of the bombardment area and the ammunition available gave us an estimate of the fire effect available, and we found we could distribute it over an hour and get a very fair bombardment."

The admiral's conclusion was to begin the bombardment at 1 AM on January 5, 1943, and pour fire onto Munda for one hour.

Ainsworth and his staff worked feverishly to finalize the plan even as the warships put to sea. A careful review was undertaken to ensure that nothing of importance was overlooked. The planning concluded with a final conference between Ainsworth and his ship captains aboard the cruiser *Louisville*.

Concerns were raised during the meeting about the time spent in the confined waters off Munda during the approach and firing times. Captain Charles Cecil of the cruiser *Helena* was particularly uneasy about the situation as his ship would be the last of the three cruisers to fire, so the location of the bombardment force would be well known at that juncture. He made sure his gunners had antiship ammunition close at hand should the task force run into trouble.

Ainsworth foresaw the possibility of communication problems during the mission and took steps to prevent it. "The night bombardment of Munda is the first naval action against shore installations in which the most modern instruments, including our latest

ABOVE: The American submarine USS *Grayback* (SS-208) served as a navigational aid for the task force during the operation. BELOW: USS *Fletcher* (DD-445) photographed in the Pacific in March 1943. During the bombardment of the island, the destroyer spotted a mysterious "ghost ship."

The St. Louis-class light cruiser USS *Helena* (CL-50), one of four cruisers taking part in the Munda operation, displays her impressive armament. Her AA guns may have brought down a Japanese plane during the Munda assault.

developments in radar, were available for navigation and fire control purposes," he wrote. "It is also the first action in which our navy has coordinated surface, submarine, and aircraft units in a night bombardment." Timing and communication among the various units would be of the utmost importance to the success of the operation.

After polling his cruiser commanders, the admiral concluded the Curtiss SOC seaplanes carried aboard the warships were not well suited for night bombardments and thus would not play a major role in the mission. Therefore, a number of Black Cats—Catalina PBY seaplanes specially equipped with radar for night operations—were placed at his disposal.

To help ensure good communication between the ships, planes, and submarine, one PBY was outfitted with an aircraft radio set obtained from the aircraft carrier *Enterprise*. Ainsworth also directed a member of his staff to make additional preparations.

"Lieutenant Commander Crowley, Aviation Officer of my staff, together with the Operations Officer [of the South Pacific Command] drew up the coordinating plan for Black Cat spotting operations," the admiral noted. Crowley and two well-trained aviation spotters went to Guadalcanal to ride along on night flights over Munda in the days leading up to the bombardment.

Taking place on the nights of January 2 and 3, the flights were the final precursor to the bombardment operation. "The planes arrived over Munda Point at about midnight on each of these nights and harassed the airfield area with 500-lb. bombs (four each plane), 30-lb. demolition bombs, motor shells, and flares," Crowley reported. "This harassing was extended over a period of two to two-and-a-half hours each night."

In addition to harassing the Japanese, the two night's worth of bombing allowed Crowley and his men to become familiar with the Munda area for the pending mission.

The transports arrived safely at Guadalcanal and unloaded their occupants during the early evening hours of January 4. The completion of the reinforcement operation signaled the start of the bombardment mission, and Admiral Ainsworth departed the area for the dash north in direct command of five warships.

The operational plan called for the group to approach Munda from the south, the only area accessible from the sea, and turn parallel to the coast before opening fire. After an hour's barrage, the force would begin the journey home to be largely out of harm's way by morning light.

At 8 PM, Task Force 67 split into two groups at a position southwest of the Russell Islands. The bombardment force consisted of the light cruisers *Nashville, Helena,* and *St. Louis* and the destroyers *Fletcher* and *O'Bannon*. Admiral Ainsworth chose the three cruisers based on flag facilities, radar equipment, and available ammunition; he used *Nashville* as his flagship. The remaining cruisers and destroyers of the task force would remain on patrol in the Guadalcanal area to ensure the safe departure of the transports.

The ships of the bombardment force were operating in the dark as they sped toward Rendova at 26 knots. Knowing full well that secrecy was the key to the success of his mission, Ainsworth was careful to keep the ships well clear of coastal areas and potential Japanese lookouts, and his navigators used radar fixes and echo-ranging gear to keep the ships away from known coral reefs.

The weather conditions seemed favorable to hide his approach. "The night of January 4 was very dark with an overcast sky and passing showers," Ainsworth recalled. A radar-equipped Black Cat flew just ahead of the force, searching for any sign of the enemy.

Also in the air were two additional Black Cats to act as gunfire spotters. After searching the area around Rendova, the planes took station over Munda and began to harass the airfield as they had done the previous two nights and again drew heavy antiaircraft fire from the ground below.

"Each Black Cat had orders to drop flares individually and to cease illumination at zero hour minus 45 minutes," reported Aviation Officer Crowley. "This was designed to give our surface force a well-silhouetted area as they rounded the west end of Rendova and, at the same time, to avoid illuminating our own ships when they came into range."

Just after 11:30 PM, each of the three cruisers, starting with *Nashville,* catapulted off a float plane. "These planes carried four flares each and were for standby purposes only," Ainsworth wrote. "They had orders to keep behind Rendova Island and over Blanche Strait. When the bombardment started, they were to keep to seaward and over our formation to warn us of the approach of enemy surface forces, and to warn our ships should they seem to be running into navigational dangers." With the operation taking place deep in Japanese-held territory, the admiral wanted to take every possible precaution against being surprised by the enemy.

The weather conditions that helped to hide the approach of Ainsworth's force now changed to favor the bombardment.

"At this time a black rain cloud hanging in the direction of Munda was moving slowly to the eastward and stars were dimly visible overhead," the admiral wrote. From his position aboard *Nashville,* Ainsworth could see that the navigational setup was unfolding well. "Rendova Island came up distinctly on our starboard hand and approximate tangents could be taken on the entrance to Blanche Strait. The land masses showed up beautifully on the SG radar as we closed Banyetta Point." Jutting out into the sea, the point was the westernmost extension of Rendova.

The final advance to Munda needed to be carefully executed so the ships could gain the proper firing position and steer clear of the dangerous rocks and reefs that lay just ahead; the submarine *Grayback* was positioned about two miles northwest of Banyetta Point to aid in the navigation process. During the critical last stage of the approach, crewmen aboard *Nashville* worked diligently to ensure the flagship remained exactly on course.

As *Nashville* approached Banyetta Point, her radar showed the area ahead and to the west to be clear. The flagship blinked a message for the other ships to spread apart for the final approach to the firing point.

Rounding Banyetta Point at exactly eight minutes after midnight, lookouts immediately spotted *Grayback* about 4,000 yards off *Nashville*'s starboard bow—positioned exactly as required by the plan. The cruiser and submarine exchanged brief acknowledgements by blinker, making sure that no messages flashed in the direction of land. At the closest point, *Nashville* passed within 2,100 yards of *Grayback*.

After passing the submarine, the bombardment force slowed to 18 knots and changed course to starboard. The ships were now pointed almost directly toward Munda. "After approaching and rounding Banyetta Point, the ship's position was plotted almost exclusively from bearings and ranges from the SG radar," Spanagel explained. Visual fixes later verified the movements as accurate.

Standing on a gun tub, Rear Admiral Ainsworth, commander of Task Force 67, addresses the crew of the *Fletcher*.

About 15 minutes after midnight, lookouts aboard *Nashville* reported seeing flares over the Munda airfield. Ten minutes later, planes were sighted off the flagship's starboard beam, followed almost immediately by gunfire near the beach. Crewmen aboard the flagship assumed friendly planes were drawing the unwanted attention of Japanese gunners.

The destroyer *Fletcher* led the formation during the crucial final approach to the firing line. The area around Munda Point was clearly defined on *Nashville*'s radar scope with the outlying rocks and reefs shown to be seven or eight miles away from the cruiser. Banyetta Point was plotted off the starboard side. The radar scope and plotting provided an accurate picture of the flagship's current location and confirmed that the force was proceeding on the planned course.

The bombardment plan called for each cruiser to fire for 10 minutes while traveling along a three-mile firing line. Once shells were seen to land in the center of the target area, the ship would shift to rapid fire and walk salvos along a predetermined area. As one ship's fire ceased, the next would start. The two destroyers were to fire in tandem after the cruisers to conclude the bombardment.

Just before 1 AM, *Nashville* turned onto the firing line. Her speed had slowed to 18 knots, down from the 25-knot clip attained during the final approach to the area, and the sharp turn to port put her on a parallel course to Munda.

At about the same time, the Black Cat observation plane moved into position over the

ABOVE: Although relatively small, an American destroyer could put out a lot of firepower. Here a destroyer fires at targets on New Georgia during a night attack on the islands. BELOW: A group of Catalina PBY "Black Cat" seaplanes were specially equipped with radar for night operations.

airfield. "Mark. Mark. Mark" was broadcast over the spotting frequency to signify the plane was in position. A few minutes later, the flagship's main battery guns opened fire with a thunderous roar and a volley of six-inch shells streaked out into the black night.

The flagship was aiming at the center of the runway with an initial range of 13,400 yards. An observer in the Black Cat above quickly radioed down an adjustment, "Up 500, no change in deflection." The second salvo appeared to be on target and "No change" came down from the spotter.

The cruiser sent additional salvos in various directions along the runway and adjoining areas. Each time her six-inch guns roared, 15 130-pound shells lashed out into the night. When *Nashville* switched to rapid-fire mode, her guns sent a torrent of shells raining down on Munda.

The shelling was a spectacular sight to observers aboard the other American ships. "The bombardment afforded a beautiful display of fireworks from seaward and evidently looked very good from aloft, to judge by the remarks from the spotting plane," Admiral Ainsworth observed. "The tracers were beautifully bunched for the 15-gun salvos, and when the cruisers took up continuous rapid fire, the stream of tracers looked as though were playing a hose on the target area."

Nerves became tense when lookouts aboard the destroyer *Fletcher* suddenly reported a large ship dead ahead. The vessel looked to be 4,000 to 5,000 yards away. Although multiple lookouts confirmed the sighting, the destroyer's radar did not. Thinking the device was malfunctioning, a radar operator shook his fist and yelled at the screen. The sighting was immediately reported over TBS radio to Admiral Ainsworth.

As *Fletcher* turned, however, the mysterious vessel seemed to move in the same direction, although the target angle remained the same. "This was the first intimation to all hands that something was screwy in the picture.…" Briscoe continued. Torpedo fire was held while the situation was sorted out. The target suddenly disappeared before any decisions could be made. The men aboard *Fletcher* soon realized they were seeing the shadow of their own ship illuminated in the light haze by the light cruiser's gunfire. Their conclusion was clinched when the target's disappearance was determined to have coincided with *Nashville*'s cease firing and reappeared as *St. Louis* started shooting.

The destroyer was not the only ship of the bombardment force to see a phantom target. Lookouts aboard *Nashville* later spotted what was thought to be a torpedo boat closing fast off her starboard bow. The secondary guns quickly opened fire, sending 10 rounds of 5-inch streaking toward the reported target before it was determined to be a false alarm.

"This matter of firing at one's own shadow is much more real than can at first seem possible," Ainsworth rationalized. "With everyone on their toes and all lookouts alerted, we are all prone to see things which do not exist, and these black shadows reflected on cloud masses near the horizon certainly appear to be enemy ships." It was just another experience in the fog of war.

At 1:13 AM, *Nashville* ceased fire and increased her speed to 20 knots. Her turret crews worked through some minor gun

problems but managed to hurl 853 6-inch rounds at Munda. The only causalities aboard the flagship were a burned hand suffered by a gunner in Turret Two and some damage to communication equipment.

At almost the same time that *Nashville* stopped shooting, *St. Louis* opened fire. Her first few salvos overshot the runway and were wide to the right. The spotter above radioed several requests to shift fire to the left. Six-inch shells were soon raining down on the runway and a report of "No change" came from the spotter.

"It is estimated that this ship placed 65 percent of its ammunition in the target area," aerial observer Crowley reported. Several large fires started near the edge of the airfield and continued to burn throughout the remainder of the mission.

While *Nashville* and *St. Louis* pounded the airfield, the Japanese defenders briefly attempted to retaliate, with most of the fire seemingly directed at *St. Louis*. "This return fire was detected by seeing the tracers rise from the vicinity of the airfield, and occasionally a slight flash could be seen as the guns fired," observed Captain Colin Campbell of *St. Louis*.

None of the fire came close to the ship and no splashes were seen. "It is concluded, from the path the enemy trajectories took, that all their fire fell considerably short," Campbell reported.

At 1:25 AM, it was time for the third light cruiser to open fire. *Helena*'s first salvo fell short and to the left of the target. The Black Cat observer radioed a series of spots to get the ship's fire on target. About 10 minutes later, a spotter was heard to exclaim, "It is beautiful, excellent, excellent!"

Adjustments from the various reports now had the shells raining down on the assigned target area. "This ship covered Munda Point thoroughly, causing a large explosion," reported airman Crowley. "They sprayed the beach area to the north of the point and caused a large explosion on the hill to the north of the runway." From his vantage point, it looked as if about 80 percent of the light cruiser's shells landed in the target area.

ABOVE: View of Munda airfield. After the war, it was expanded and today is a commercial airport used by regional airlines. OPPOSITE: Bombs explode on Munda airfield. The Japanese quickly repaired the damage and put the airfield back into operation until the island was seized by American XIV Corps soldiers in August 1943.

After moving out of position to chase down the phantom target, *Fletcher* eventually took up station behind *Helena*; the destroyer *O'Bannon* was about 750 yards farther astern.

When the light cruiser's firing stopped, it was time for the two destroyers to take center stage, and both opened fire simultaneously at 1:40 AM. The first salvoes were directly on target. Subsequent 5-inch shells landed on beach areas north and south along the coast. Gunfire from the destroyers touched off a large explosion, possibly from an ammunition dump.

By the time the bombardment ended at 1:50 AM, about 4,000 shells had been hurled at Munda. As soon as the firing stopped, *Fletcher* and *O'Bannon* increased speed to 32 knots and raced to get ahead of the cruisers. The formation quickly closed ranks, narrowing the distance between the ships. The approach to Munda had been undetected and the bombardment had apparently taken the Japanese by complete surprise. Admiral Ainsworth now had to return to the Guadalcanal area with an alerted enemy on the hunt.

The bombardment force began zigzagging and making occasional course changes shortly after turning south. As with the approach to Munda, Black Cats searched ahead of the ships during the remaining hours of darkness. Wanting to avoid any potential trouble, Ainsworth steered the force well clear of a reported cluster of Japanese midget submarines near the south end of New Georgia Island.

Determined to find the American task force that carried out the surprise intrusion, Japanese air commanders ordered extra reconnaissance planes airborne during the morning hours. The effort was later bolstered when a group of 14 Zero fighters and four Val dive bombers was dispatched on a search-and-destroy operation.

Lookouts and radar operators aboard the bombardment ships kept careful watch as the task force sped out of Japanese waters; American air cover was en route in the form of four Wildcat fighters dispatched from Henderson Field on Guadalcanal.

A group of approaching planes was detected on radar scopes at about 7 AM when the ships were almost 30 miles south of the Russell Islands. Quickly identified as friendly,

the planes took station overhead as the bombardment force reduced speed to 28 knots.

The arrival in the Guadalcanal area marked the end of the first leg of the journey home for the bombardment force. Admiral Ainsworth moved toward a rendezvous with the remaining ships of Task Force 67. Under the command of Rear Admiral Mahlon Tisdale, the cruisers *Honolulu, Achilles, Columbia,* and *Louisville* spent the night patrolling near Guadalcanal in the company of three destroyers. The two groups made visual contact with each other at 8:15 AM about 30 miles southwest of Guadalcanal and were operating in close proximity about 45 minutes later.

The cruisers of both forces needed to slow in order to recover float planes. For Ainsworth's force it was the three seaplanes launched during the bombardment. The trio went to Tulagi at the conclusion of the mission before taking flight to return to the cruisers. Admiral Tisdale's ships needed to recover the same number planes from antisubmarine patrol and to launch replacements.

The Japanese search-and-destroy group stumbled upon the unsuspecting warships during the critical time of aircraft recovery. The enemy planes suddenly approached the force from the north at a high rate of speed, taking the warships by complete surprise.

The suddenness of the encounter left little time for any of the warships to react before the four Val bombers started into their steep attacking dives. The planes approached Admiral Tisdale's cruisers, heading directly toward the lead ship *Honolulu*. The light cruiser started a sharp turn just as three bombs straddled her. The first projectile sent up a tower of water 25 yards off her port bow; the second and third bombs landed a similar distance off the starboard side. An assortment of antiaircraft guns opened fire after the planes passed over the ship. One Val was seen to be riddled with bullets.

At least one bomber had its sights on the second ship in the column, the New Zealand light cruiser *Achilles*. Lookouts aboard the vessel sighted the planes moments earlier, but mistook them for American fighters. When the hostile actions revealed the planes to be enemy, the New Zealand sailors raced to man antiaircraft guns. Only a few guns were able to fire before a bomb landed on Turret Three. The blast wrecked the gun house and killed 13 men.

After attacking the two lead ships, the planes briefly flew parallel to the column of cruisers, taking fire from both *Columbia* and *Louisville* before veering toward Admiral Ainsworth's ships. Both *Helena* and *St. Louis* sent up a wall of antiaircraft fire at the approaching planes.

The two cruisers, however, did not come under bomb attack as the planes flew past the stern of *Helena* before turning sharply to the north to depart the area. One Val crashed in flames as a result of antiaircraft fire, possibly from *Helena.* A second plane was splashed by Wildcat fighters, and the air attack was over almost as quickly as it had begun.

The episode marked the end of the mission to bombard Munda. The fire aboard *Achilles* was quickly doused and the ship kept her position in column. The combined force patrolled in the immediate area before heading south and entering the anchorage at Espiritu Santo, New Hebrides, just before 9 AM on January 8.

Admiral Ainsworth had successfully led the first major American seaborne intrusion into the Japanese-held waters of the central Solomons.

"Reports from our spotting Catalina over Munda indicate that the bombardment was successful, approximately 80 percent of the fire taking effect in the target area and the remainder being partially effective near its boundary," he later wrote.

The cruiser commanders shared Ainsworth's belief that the operation was a large success and felt each of their respective ships performed exceptionally well. Captain Campbell of *St. Louis* rated the performance of his gun crews and fire control men as simply "Excellent."

All combined, the three cruisers hurled 2,773 6-inch shells at the enemy; the destroyers added 1,376 5-inch rounds. American planes flying over Munda the next morning reported substantial damage to the airfield and inconsequential antiaircraft fire.

But success was short lived. Although the heavy naval shelling destroyed 10 buildings and killed or injured 30 men, the Japanese were able to repair the runway in a mere two hours, and the airfield was reportedly in use 18 hours after the attack.

The struggle over Munda continued well into 1943. Although pummeled by air and sea, the determined Japanese kept the airfield operational for all but short stretches of time. Munda finally fell after American ground forces captured it on August 5, 1943, following the hard-fought invasion of New Georgia.

Major General Oscar Griswold, commander of the Army's XIV Corps, personally radioed Admiral Halsey the good news. "Our ground forces today wrested Munda from the [Japanese] and present it to you … as the sole owner…."

Eight days later, the first Allied plane landed on the runway. □

A young German officer recalls his personal struggles for survival and the life-and-death battles against the Soviets during his time on the Eastern Front.

BY WILLIAM LUBBECK AND DAVID HURT

SUICIDE *or* SURRENDER

BACKSTORY: *Wilhelm Lubbeck served as an enlisted man in the 58th Infantry Division on the Eastern Front during Germany's 1941 invasion of the Soviet Union before being promoted to lieutenant. Here he recounts his experiences near the end of the war, when death or capture seemed inevitable.*

LAST ORDERS: APRIL 16–18, 1945

It was the end.

It was the end for my company.

It was the end for the 58th Infantry Division.

It was perhaps the end for Germany and for me.

In the four years since the invasion of Russia, April 16, 1945, was for me the worst day of the war. In the past hours, the heavy weapons company under my command had simply ceased to exist.

The disaster at the key road junction of Fischhausen was not a battle, but rather the catastrophic climax to the unrelenting Soviet barrage that had pursued our retreat westward during the previous weeks. Finally, trapped in a congested mass with other German units trying to move down the single main road through this East Prussian town, there was no longer any way to move forward.

Concentrating on this chokepoint, the artillery of four Soviet armies combined with several hundred aircraft to let loose a devastating assault. Everyone who failed to escape into one of the side streets was annihilated in a cataclysm of Russian rockets, shells, and bombs. A strafing run by a Soviet fighter plane on the western outskirts of Fischhausen left my face perforated with small bullet fragments and my eyes almost blinded by dirt and blood, but I realized that I had been fortunate simply to survive the onslaught.

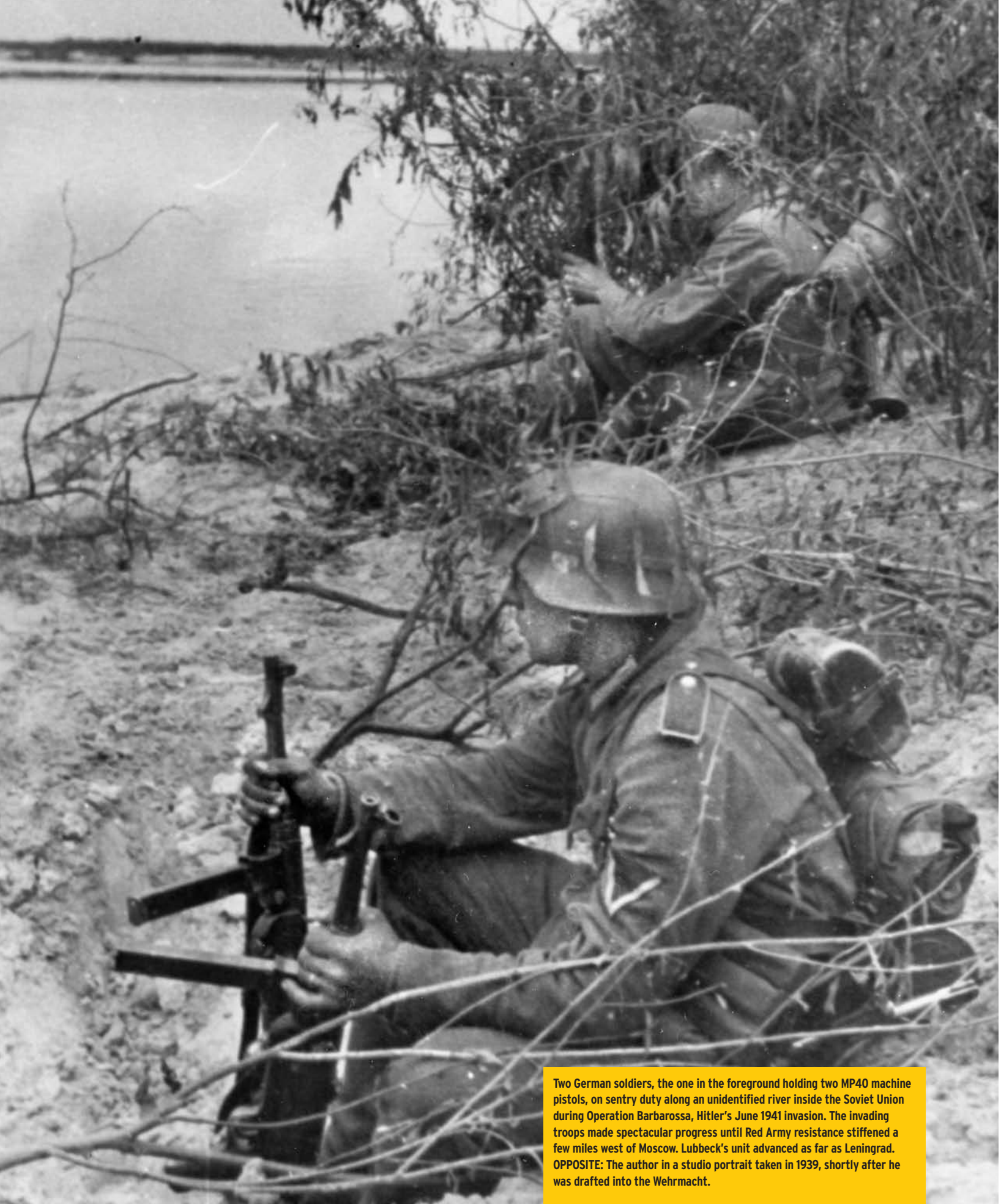
Of the roughly 100 remaining troops from my company who had entered Fischhausen, it was clear that most had been killed in the attack. The death of so many of my men was emotionally wrenching, even if the loss of soldiers had become tragically commonplace during the course of the war.

What was most shocking to me was the ongoing collapse of military order that had begun even before we reached Fischhausen. Until this point, even as the military circumstances had grown more calamitous, the Wehrmacht had successfully maintained its discipline and unit cohesion. Now, everything was in utter disarray.

In our catastrophic condition, it seemed impossible that only 3½ years earlier these same Russians had appeared to be on the verge of collapse as we stood at the gates of Leningrad. Yet in the years that followed I had seen the tide of war steadily turn as the Soviets recovered and joined with the Western Allies to force Germany onto the strategic defensive.

I knew what war meant. Relentless heat and dust in summer, bone-chilling cold in winter. Bottomless mud in fall and spring. Insatiable mosquitoes and incessant lice. Sleep deprivation and physical exhaustion. Bullets whistling through the air. Shells and bombs shaking the earth. Stench from rotting corpses. Constant fear of capture or death. The agony of losing comrades. Numbing brutality. Painful separation from my loved ones.

National Archives



Two German soldiers, the one in the foreground holding two MP40 machine pistols, on sentry duty along an unidentified river inside the Soviet Union during Operation Barbarossa, Hitler's June 1941 invasion. The invading troops made spectacular progress until Red Army resistance stiffened a few miles west of Moscow. Lubbeck's unit advanced as far as Leningrad. OPPOSITE: The author in a studio portrait taken in 1939, shortly after he was drafted into the Wehrmacht.

Even without being shelled or shot at, life at the front was unpleasant. Personal hygiene remained difficult and very low by today's military standards. Occasionally we would rig a tub or shower or have access to a lake or river in which to bathe. More often, we would just wash with a little water and a bar of soap once a week or so, if we were not in combat. Lacking a toothbrush, I would squirt toothpaste on my finger to clean my teeth perhaps once or twice a week. There was generally only an opportunity to shave with my straight razor every couple of weeks.

With only two uniforms, we laundered our clothes whenever our situation at the front made it possible. Wearing the same clothes and underwear for two or three weeks without changing, soldiers were almost always covered by itchy bites from the ubiquitous body lice, even in the cold of winter. You could feel them and see them crawling around on you. We would strip off our shirts to kill them but could never rid ourselves of all of them. However, in contrast to the trenches and bunkers during the First World War, we experienced few problems with rats.

In 1941, just after my 21st birthday on June 17, orders came down to us that the invasion of Russia was at hand. On Sunday, June 22, 1941, the predawn silence was shattered by the roar of guns, as three million German troops commenced Operation Barbarossa, the invasion of Russia along an 1,800-mile front from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea.

Advancing about 15 miles a day, we reached Siauliai, about 60 miles northeast of Pajuralis, by June 28. Though the panzer units were far ahead, the 58th Division's rapid progress soon placed it in the lead among the infantry divisions of Army Group North. Despite occasional traffic jams, everything was moving swiftly east, boosting our confidence. In the midst of our success, there was growing optimism that we could defeat the Soviet Union by the coming winter or the following spring.

I wanted to be in the middle of the action, even if this placed my life at risk. Following the promotion of the previous forward observer (F.O.), when the company commander offered me the opportunity to serve up front directing the company's heavy guns I enthusiastically seized the opportunity. In my role as F.O., I would act as the eyes for our company's howitzers located about half a mile to a mile behind the front. I had acquired invaluable knowledge of the guns by regularly watching and working with the previous F.O.

Combat might be described as controlled chaos, but you have to maintain a sense of calm so you can focus on your mission. The F.O. position was well suited to my character since I found I had a knack for staying calm under enemy attack as well as an insatiable curiosity to know what was happening at the front.

Our eastward advance across Estonia went well as the enemy retreated before us. Following a two-week pause to regroup, on August 8 the German offensive was resumed. In an effort to reach Narva, on the Russian border, and shut the corridor to the Baltic region, our division's 154th Regiment had pushed about 10 miles north of Niso to the junction of the Plyussa and Pysta Rivers. At this point, roughly four miles south of the Estonian capital, a destroyed bridge across the Plyussa on the main road to Narva halted our advance.

Our new assault commenced early on the hot, sunny morning of August 14 with German artillery pounding the Soviet positions across the river. Our regiment began crossing the river on rubber rafts about 50 yards to the right of the ruined bridge. Lacking specific orders in my role as F.O., I decided to tag along with a group of infantry troops heading up to the Plyussa River to get into the action. Just as we reached the river, the air around us suddenly filled with the shriek of incoming artillery fire. Reacting instantly, I darted to the left of the blown bridge, seeking cover in one of the many foxholes dug into the riverbank.

National Archives

With few available bridges, German troops used inflatable rubber boats to cross the many rivers and streams of the Soviet Union. OPPOSITE: Lubbeck, a private first class and forward observer for his company's howitzers in 1942, walks the front lines with an MP-40. He is wearing the infantry assault badge and has the ribbon denoting the Iron Cross in his buttonhole.

The area was soon inundated with a storm of shells. With some landing as close as a few feet away from my position, it was impossible even to stick my head above ground. When the shelling finally slowed about five hours after it had started, I decided to cross the Plyussa River to seek out my company and obtain new orders. Squeezing onto an infantry squad's raft, I headed for the opposite shore, perhaps 30 yards away.

Once across, perhaps 150 yards from the river, an enemy bunker built of wooden logs appeared just ahead of me on the edge of the road. The Soviet troops inside were blazing away in the direction of German troops to my rear. It was clear to me that our advance would be slowed until the bunker was eliminated. With the attention of the Russians focused on the road, there was a chance for me to destroy the fortification on my own, if I could get close enough to use one of the three or four grenades that I carried.

Moving out 20 yards from the road into the brush, I began working my way around to the side of the bunker. Just as I reached a position at a right angle to the structure and started crawling toward it on my belly, the gunner inside must have spied the waving of grass to his right.

As he swung the gun in my direction, I flattened my body into the ground. At the same instant, the machine gun began spraying a fire that passed only a little above my head and back. Even with my body pressed against the earth, I felt one of the bullets literally rip the fabric of my uniform. Expecting to be killed at any second, a wave of terror ran through me.

All of a sudden, the gunner shifted his weapon back to the road, perhaps believing me already dead. I lifted my head up; the bunker's gun portal was only 10 or 15 yards away. A quick sprint might just give me time to toss a hand grenade through the gun portal. Yet, even with my adrenalin pumping, my brain told me that I would be cut down before I could obtain a position safely out of the line of fire. Lacking any other options, I began to slide slowly backward.

My stealthy retreat had carried me only a short distance from the bunker when two deafening back-to-back booms resounded. Looking up, I watched in amazement as the bunker's logs rose briefly into the air before crashing back to earth in a pile of debris. It seemed almost miraculous. The mysterious source of my salvation was revealed when I saw one of our 75mm howitzers deployed in the middle of the road back near the river.

By the time the 58th Division reached Narva on August 18, the fighting had largely ended. Another month of often vicious combat with the Red Army lay ahead of us before our campaign would reach its goal—Leningrad.

After fighting off days and weeks of desperate Soviet counterattacks, late in the afternoon of a September day our company passed through Uritsk, which appeared to be just another typical Russian village of small wooden cottages. Only when we reached the shore of the Gulf of Finland did I realize our location. Just seven or eight miles away, central Leningrad's high-rises and tall smokestacks stood silhouetted against the horizon.

After halting for a couple of days, we resumed our advance, fighting our way into the streets of Leningrad's suburbs, past blocks of two- or three-story wooden buildings, meeting only intermittently stiff resistance from the Red Army.

After advancing a mile or two farther, we received orders to halt and pull back from the city into a more defensible position back at Uritsk. Because of our trust in our high command, we believed that they must have had a good tactical reason for such a decision. Many of us expected that this halt was a temporary measure to allow us to regroup before resuming our offensive. There was no indication that our effort to capture Leningrad by direct assault was at an end. A few days later, we learned with some frustration that Hitler had ordered a siege of the city rather than an attempt to take it by storm.

For the next three months we fought off and endured Russian counterattacks and artillery barrages. On October 1, 1941, I was promoted to lance corporal (Obergefeiter) and was permanently tasked to serve as our company's forward observer.

Author's Collection

In November 1941, just after we had settled into our new bunkers, we began to confront bitterly freezing temperatures of minus 40 degrees Fahrenheit. This was far colder than any conditions we had ever experienced in Germany. By my estimation, the cold weather that first winter in Russia was responsible for perhaps a third of the deaths among wounded casualties who might otherwise have survived. Then, too, there were the Russian snipers and the unceasing storm of artillery barrages.

[*Editor's Note: From November 1941 to March 1942, the opposing lines became more or less static, and the German troops holed up in a series of bunkers and trenches; the fighting was mostly exchanges of artillery shells.*]

At one point, our intelligence learned that the Red Army was infiltrating dogs across the lines. These poor animals had dynamite strapped around their bodies and were trained to run under our vehicles. When they did so, the triggering antennas on their backs would bend and

detonate the explosive.

Though there were probably few dogs actually armed this way, the army directed us to shoot all dogs as a precautionary measure. Carrying out these orders was especially painful to us, but we obeyed. Over time, war hardens your heart and leads you to do brutal things that you could never have imagined yourself doing in civilian life.

[*Editor's Note: In December 1941, the Red Army ceased retreating, turned around, and threw its considerable weight against the forces of Army Group Center, which had been attempting to capture Moscow. To assist their beleaguered comrades in Army Group Center, at the beginning of March 1942, Army Group North stripped its portion of the front and ordered the 58th Division, along with other units, to redeploy to the Volkhov River front, south of Leningrad, where Red Army units had broken through German lines.*]

Pulled out of Uritsk in early March, our division's infantry immediately journeyed directly south on trucks. Meanwhile, our company and other heavily equipped units traveled south by train on a circuitous, roughly 200-mile route. Neither group knew that its destination was the Volkhov River; we only knew that we had to halt a Russian breakthrough.

The German counterattack started on March 15. With temperatures still far below zero Fahrenheit, our infantry and other German forces advanced northward along the western side of the wide Volkhov River. Simultaneously, other German units were moving southward to link up with us and isolate the Soviet spearhead from its main lines to the east. By the time our two pincers met on March 19, we had trapped almost 180,000 Red Army troops in a Kessel (pocket).

Unlike the long lulls in the fighting at Uritsk, the air at the Volkhov was filled day and night with the incessant roar of artillery and the clatter of machine-gun fire.

When the spring thaw arrived in early April, it swiftly turned the whole Volkhov battlefield into a muddy bog. The warmer weather was initially welcomed, but we would soon discover that conducting combat operations in the steamy heat of a swamp was even worse.

Author's Collection

The author poses between two comrades outside a wooden bunker in a forest at Oranienbaum, located on the Gulf of Finland west of St. Petersburg (then Leningrad) in the summer of 1942.

By the middle of May, the Red Army had decided to abandon its attempt to regain the offensive initiative at the Volkhov. Seizing the opportunity, we began an assault that pressed in around the entire perimeter of the pocket on May 22. By the end of the month, the 58th Division and other German forces had overcome determined Soviet resistance, resealing the pocket a second time. In desperation, the entrapped Soviet infantry conducted increasingly suicidal attacks against our positions. Prisoners reported to our intelligence that special Soviet units with machine guns were sometimes placed behind these hopeless attacks to make sure that soldiers obeyed orders to advance.

[*The Battle of the Volkhov Front continued for several more weeks, waning at last on July 1; the 58th Division was then transferred some 75 miles northwest to the perimeter of the Oranienbaum Pocket, where Soviet forces were surrounded with their backs to the Gulf of Finland, about 15 miles west of the division's old positions at Uritsk. With little fighting taking place, the 58th took the opportunity to rest. Medals and promotions were handed out. On August 1, Lance Corporal Lubbeck was promoted to sergeant and given a three-week leave.*

After returning from leave, Lübbecke found that his unit had moved about 70 miles south of Leningrad at Novgorod on the northern shore of Lake Ilmen. The Russian winter was fast closing in, and the 58th Division, along with other units, was repositioned to hold open the vital and vulnerable land bridge to the Demyansk pocket, where a considerable number of German units were trapped.

After surviving the fighting and another winter, Sergeant Lübbecke received another leave from the front lines and he once again returned home, where he renewed a romance with Anneliese Berndt, a girl from Hamburg who was studying to be a nurse. Then it was back to the war—this time at Krasny Bor, where pitched battles with Soviet troops were often the rule.

One day, performing his job of forward observer during a suspicious lull in the fighting, he decided to climb a tree with a field telephone to get a better look at the terrain to his front. He soon spotted four Soviet T-34 tanks approaching across the flat ground directly toward his company's position. Russian soldiers were riding on top of the tanks,

which were followed by a large number of infantry on foot.]

While our company's heavy guns were not designed to serve in an antitank role and lacked armor-piercing rounds, I knew from long experience that it was possible to accurately target the fire of the guns into an area about 10 yards square.

With a chance to halt the advance before it progressed any further toward our regiment's position, I used the field telephone to direct one of our 150mm guns to fire a round against the closest T-34, about 500 yards to my front. Falling just to the left of the target, the first shell's blast knocked the enemy troops from the tank but failed to damage the vehicle. After redirecting the howitzer to shift its fire to the right, the next round fell short of the tank. The next shell landed very close, missing the T-34 by only a few feet.

Receiving a further correction, the gun crew fired a fourth round. When the shell detonated against the turret, the tank instantly ground to a halt. Seconds later, a small plume of white smoke began to drift from the vehicle.

Shifting my attention to a second T-34 about 20 yards behind the destroyed one, I called in a fifth round. Smashing into its treads from the side, the shell's explosion immobilized the vehicle, forcing its crew to jump out and run for cover. The third Soviet tank in the group immediately ceased its advance while the fourth one began to retreat.

As this assault ended, a larger group of around 15 tanks momentarily came into view 1,000 yards behind the scene of the attack before moving out of sight behind a hill. Unsure whether this larger armored force would renew the advance, I telephoned back to headquarters to make our new regimental commander, Colonel (Oberst) Hermann-Heinrich Behrend, aware of the situation.

"Where are you?" he demanded before I could even speak.

"I am in a tree right behind the front line," I responded with some trepidation.

"What the hell are you doing up there?" he yelled back, obviously concerned that I would place myself in such a vulnerable position.

Informing him that we had stopped an armored attack probing behind our defenses, I warned that significant tank forces were massing behind it and might conduct another assault.

After requesting details on the number of tanks and their location, he indicated that he would pass along the intelligence to divisional headquarters and then he hung up.

National Archives

A Soviet T-34 tank (foreground) and another unidentified armored vehicle smolder after being hit by German antitank fire. As a forward observer, Lubbeck managed to stop an armored attack by directing a 150mm artillery piece to knock out two tanks.

Once their initial thrust was halted, the Soviets did not, however, attempt to renew their attack on our sector of the front.

Despite my thrill at knocking out the tanks, there was still a danger that the enemy would spot me the longer I remained in my exposed position. Yet, climbing down the tree in the daylight would greatly increase the risk of attracting the attention of a Russian sniper or machine-gun crew. In this dilemma, my only choice was to wait for the cover of darkness.

When dusk finally fell about an hour later, I made a rapid slide down the trunk and headed for safety in the rear. Reaching the gun crew, I passed along news of our small triumph. In a war filled with many combat engagements, hitting a moving target with indirect fire from guns in the rear was a rare and memorable accomplishment.

[*The summer of 1943—filled with ceaseless barrages, tank and human wave attacks, and close calls—turned to fall; another agonizing winter was about to arrive soon. Before it did, however, Sergeant Lubbeck was awarded the Iron Cross First Class and then was appointed to become an officer candidate. After serving a trial period in charge of a squad, he left his comrades at the front and, in early December, reported to his officer-training course near Dresden, from which he graduated on March 15, 1944. He had also become engaged to Anneliese during that time.*

Now it was back to the front once more, where he was assigned to command the heavy weapons company of the 154th Grenadier Regiment, 58th Division.]

When I returned to the Eastern Front from officer training in May 1944, the Wehrmacht had already retreated from most of the conquered Soviet territory. Army Group North, one of the three large German Army Groups in the East, had pulled back from Leningrad into Estonia. Weeks later, Army Group Center to the south of us was nearly destroyed by a gigantic Soviet attack. In the months that followed, we withdrew ever farther west, back into the territory of the German Reich.

National Archives

A line of German soldiers marches past a burning Russian building somewhere on the Eastern Front. The vast spaces of the USSR swallowed German armies and led to mass casualties. Few German POWs lived to return home.

Since late January 1945, I had led the steadily thinning ranks of my heavy weapons company in continuous combat against the inexorable torrent of Soviet forces pushing into East Prussia. Overwhelmed by the Red Army's enormous advantage in men and equipment, it was clear that our situation was worsening by the day. Nonetheless, we battled on. What choice did we have? Faced with enemy troops to our front and the Baltic Sea to our rear, there was little hope of ever getting back to central Germany. Like cornered animals, we were simply fighting for our lives.

Promoted from first lieutenant (Oberleutnant) to captain (Hauptmann) in late March, I struggled to maintain discipline and morale among the troops under my command. The men in my company attempted to retain their usual confident spirit, but there was little secret what the future held for us. In these circumstances, falling to a Russian bullet on the battlefield seemed far better than the hellish conditions that faced a German POW in the Soviet Union.

As an officer, I felt a special dread of capture by the Red Army. If not killed in combat, I expected to be confronted with a choice between surrender and suicide. I planned to save one last bullet for myself, though it was uncertain whether I would be able to summon the courage to use it. Just two months short of my 25th birthday, I did not wish to die. So far, I had succeeded in escaping death and eluding this terrible dilemma.

With Fischhausen now reduced to smoking rubble and the Red Army only a couple of miles away, I wandered west from town along with other surviving German troops heading along the main road into the pinewoods.

At the limits of physical fatigue and psychological stress, my body moved forward almost robotically. My mind was numb, but I still felt a deep responsibility to my men. My purpose now was to locate any others who might have evaded the slaughter and taken refuge in one of the abandoned homes or many empty ammunition bunkers that filled the forest.

Sand and blood from the earlier attack still clouding my vision, I stumbled along beside the road, barely able to see where I was going or what was around me. Every 20 yards or so, the whistle of another incoming artillery shell forced me to throw myself against the ground. Getting back to my feet, I staggered forward again, constantly trying to blink my eyes clear in order to be able to identify the next position where I might seek cover.

Perhaps a mile from Fischhausen, a group of 10 soldiers from my company appeared on the north side of the road, huddled just outside the entrance to one of the immense 60-by-100-foot earth-camouflaged bunkers. Among them was Senior Sergeant (Hauptfeldwebel) Jüchter, the head of the Tross (rear area); a couple of other sergeants (Feldwebels); two lance corporals (Obergefreiten); and several privates (Schützen).

"Where are the rest?" I asked in a somber voice. One of the men quietly replied, "We were attacked with bombs, rockets, and artillery fire. We lost our horses. We lost our equipment. We lost everything. It is all ruined. We are the only ones left." Anyone else who may have survived the assault had disappeared in the ensuing confusion or had simply fled west.

There was little further conversation. The events of the preceding hours and weeks had left us traumatized and exhausted. With the end in sight, a bleak mood filled the bunker. The men only wanted basic information and direction. They looked to me to provide it, but I knew no more than they did. For the first time in the war, I was on my own with no orders where to go and no idea what to expect.

In urgent need of new orders, I told my men that I would seek to locate the commander of our 154th Regiment, Lt. Col. (Oberstleutnant) Ebeling, as soon as my vision

cleared. By the time one of the men had finished wiping my eyes and removing bullet splinters from my face an hour later, I could see well enough to commence a search.

Ordering my men to remain at the bunker, I set out into the woods on the narrow neck of land farther west. Shells continued to rain down intermittently, but did little to hamper my reconnoitering of the area. Fifteen minutes later, I came upon a small camouflaged bunker about 25 yards south of the main road. When I stepped inside, I anticipated nothing but another vacant chamber.

To my astonishment, the bunker instead held half a dozen senior German generals, easily identifiable by the red stripes that ran down the side of their pants. Left momentarily speechless, I reflexively came to attention and saluted. Gathered around a table studying maps, they failed to show any surprise at my abrupt appearance and simply returned my salute.

Just as I was about to request new orders, the sudden drone of planes outside ended the awkward moment. As the generals scrambled under the table inside, I ducked back outside the entrance. From the south, a formation of about a dozen American-made B-25 bombers marked with Soviet red stars had already begun to dive toward our area. Still 3,000 feet up, a steady stream of small black objects began tumbling out from beneath the aircraft. There were only seconds to take cover before their bombs commenced plastering the ground where I stood.

Sprinting 20 feet from the bunker, I leapt into a long, six-foot-deep trench. If you seek shelter in a bunker that takes a hit and collapses, you are doomed. If you can take cover in a foxhole or a trench, however, a shell or bomb must land almost directly on your position to cause death or serious injury. You might suffer a concussion if a shell or bomb impacts nearby, but you will live.

Crouching down in the trench, I kept my head just below the surface to avoid the risk of being buried. With my hands cupped loosely over my ears, I opened my mouth. This allowed the air pressure inside my head to match that of the atmosphere. If an explosion occurred nearby, it would prevent my eardrums from blowing out. Combat teaches a soldier many tricks of survival, if you live long enough to learn the lessons.

At the same moment that I gained cover, the Russian bombs began detonating around my position in rapid succession, almost like a salvo of giant rockets. A succession of deafening blasts shook the earth and convulsed the air with indescribable violence. In that instant, I wondered whether my luck had finally run out and it might be the end for me. Strangely, perhaps, I experienced no sense of terror. Shelling, rocketing, and bombing had become such a routine part of my existence in the preceding years that I had almost grown accustomed to them.

Author's Collection

Four soldiers pose for a staged photo with their 75mm (7.5 cm) light infantry howitzer in the Lake Ladoga area during the summer of 1943.

As the bombs pulverized my surroundings, there was nothing for me to do but wait it out. My mind became a numb void as an animal instinct to survive took over. Even with my mouth opened to equalize the pressure, an explosion perhaps six feet away generated such concussive force that it nearly blew my eardrum out.

When the minute-long rain of bombs finally ceased, I knew that I was fortunate to have survived once again. With my ears ringing and my mind dazed, I unsteadily climbed out of the trench. Despite minor wounds, lack of sleep, and inadequate food during the preceding weeks of combat, I was still in fair shape physically. My psychological state was more battered, but I had to try to remain clear headed. As an officer, it was my duty to lead and take care of my men.

Though the generals' bunker was still intact, I decided that they had greater concerns than providing orders to a company commander. Renewing my search for my regimental commander, I headed back in a northerly direction and recrossed the main road.

Perhaps 10 minutes later, I unexpectedly found Lt. Col. Ebeling attempting to establish a new defensive line a quarter of a mile away. Relieved, I could now finally find out what was going on and obtain new orders.

In a short conversation, he informed me that the high command was sending us back to Germany. All the surviving officers from our 58th Infantry Division were to return there to serve as the nucleus for a new division that the army planned to create in Hamburg. Meanwhile, the few remaining enlisted men in our division

Author's Collection

The author with his fiancée Anneliese on a park bench in Hamburg, 1943; they were married in December 1946. In addition to the infantry assault badge, he is wearing the wound badge, the German equivalent of the U.S. Purple Heart medal.

would be transferred to the still intact 32nd Infantry Division, which would remain behind as a rear guard to slow the Red Army's advance.

After explaining the directive, Ebeling wrote out and signed the order in my small Soldbuch (military record book). Since the officers of our division would be traveling on their own to increase the likelihood that some would reach Germany, these written orders would prevent the SS (Schutzstaffeln) from punishing me as a deserter if I was stopped. A stroke of the pen had opened the door for me to escape death or capture by the Russians.

Grateful for the chance to escape the mounting chaos, it was nonetheless apparent that accomplishing such a journey would be almost impossible. Already, the Red Army had cut off the overland route back to Germany farther west beyond the Frische Isthmus, a long, narrow strip of sand that ran along the coast of the Baltic Sea. At the same time, ships attempting to reach Germany over the Baltic faced great risk of Soviet attack.

When I reached my remaining soldiers waiting at the bunker, I pulled aside Senior Sergeant Jüchter and explained that I had been directed to return to Germany with one soldier from my company. As my second in command, Jüchter was the natural choice to assist me in building a new unit, but I felt it was important to allow him to make his own decision rather than issue an order. "Will you go with me?" I inquired. With a simple "*Jawohl*," he assented.

While our own prospects for reaching central Germany appeared doubtful, Jüchter and I would at least be given a chance to try. Aware that such information would only compound their sense of hopelessness, I did not divulge my own orders as I informed the other men of their imminent reassignment to the 32nd Division.

With almost all of my company lost, it was anguishing for me to leave these few men behind. In the two days that remained at the ammunition bunker, I sought to oversee the successful transfer of these surviving troops in my company to their new unit. Meanwhile, Jüchter attempted to use his connections with the rear echelon of our regiment to obtain medals that several of them were due.

Two days after the disaster at Fischhausen, I was able to present an Iron Cross First Class and several Iron Crosses Second Class, but it simply proved impossible for me to oversee their reassignment in the prevailing chaos. In the end, I had to leave my men to report to the 32nd Division on their own, like lost sheep in a storm.

Unless they were killed in the final days of the war, they almost certainly became Soviet prisoners of war. If they were strong and lucky, they perhaps endured the ensuing three or four years of captivity in Russia to return home to Germany. Even now, the thought of their suffering and the uncertainty of their fate deeply torments me.

Under sporadic fire from Soviet artillery, Jüchter and I left the bunker late in the afternoon of April 18 and set out down the main road toward the city of Pillau, located about six miles away. If we were able to reach the harbor there, we hoped to cross over the short span of water that separated Pillau from the northernmost tip of the Frische Isthmus.

Approaching the city as dusk fell perhaps three hours later, a gruesome scene greeted us. Along the road, a dozen or so bodies of German soldiers hung down from the branches of tall trees. Jüchter and I remained silent, but it was apparent that this was the grisly handiwork of the SS. Whether the men were deserters or simply soldiers who had been separated from their units or in shell shock would have made no difference to them.

Most German troops with whom I had fought perceived the Waffen SS (the military formations of the Schutzstaffeln) to be, in essence, part of the Wehrmacht, but disdained the regular SS, which was seen as a thuggish Nazi political militia. With the Nazi regime facing its end, it was not surprising that the SS would string up any of those they judged to be traitors as a warning to others. Witnessing their crude "justice," I hated them.

As we made our way through Pillau in the lingering twilight, the intensity of the shelling grew heavier as the Russians concentrated their fire on the sector's one remaining major target. Whenever there was a momentary lull, Jüchter and I left our cover and raced to the next ruined building, always remaining alert for the next incoming rounds so as to avoid being caught out in the open.

When we arrived at the inlet on the west side of town a few hours later, there was already a growing throng of hundreds of troops and civilian refugees gathered at the dock. Despite the chaos, one or two ferries continued to carry passengers and a few vehicles across the 200 yards of water that separated Pillau from the start of the Frische Isthmus. There was nothing for us to do but wait our turn under continuing intermittent artillery fire.

It was dark a half hour later when Jüchter and I squeezed onto a ferry with perhaps 100 soldiers, refugees, and a variety of trucks and other military equipment. As soon as the boat docked on the far shore 10 minutes later, we joined a couple of dozen other soldiers cramming onto one of the trucks just ferried across the channel.

As shells still occasionally dropped around us, our truck joined the impromptu convoy departing westward down the Frische Isthmus. The column proceeded slowly through the darkness, driving without headlights in order to avoid attracting the attention of any

Russian aircraft that might be lurking above.

A few hours into the trip, we passed a group of burning buildings. Since there was no artillery fire or bombing in the area, this seemed very odd to me. Turning to the soldier seated next to me on the truck, I asked what had been there. "Oh, they are probably burning the KZ," he responded.

My unfamiliarity with the term led him to explain that a "KZ" was a Konzentration Lager (concentration camp) for enemies of the Nazi regime. As incredible as it may seem, it was only at this moment at the end of the war that I became aware of the existence and function of concentration camps.

The revelation left me bewildered, though I still did not connect such camps to a Nazi policy of genocide. My ignorance of the system of concentration camps during the war matched that of most other Germans. Actual photos of the camps were not seen by any public, German or Allied, until after the war.

The ability of Hitler's regime to keep this massive atrocity a secret from the population demonstrates its effectiveness in controlling information that would have jeopardized its support. Like most Germans, I felt bitterly betrayed when I eventually learned that Nazi leaders had directed the execution of millions of Jews, Gypsies, and other prisoners in these camps. That was not the cause for which I had fought and for which so many of my comrades had sacrificed their lives.

Just before dawn, our ad hoc convoy reached Stutthof, an assembly point for the troops who had made the 35-mile journey from Pillau. We spent the rest of the day under cover before renewing our journey northwestward by sea. Boarding a ferry that night, Jüchter and I crossed the Gulf of Danzig to Hela, a port located on the end of a long peninsula about 20 miles from Stutthof.

Disembarking at Hela, we took refuge in a block of three-story brick apartment buildings which had been deserted by their owners. Exhausted after months of combat and our long trek, we fell into a deep slumber.

While we were unaware of it at the time, the disaster at Fischhausen had occurred on the same day that the Red Army had commenced its final assault on Berlin far to the west of us. This offensive made the whole Baltic coast a relative backwater in the larger war, though Hela's geographical isolation probably also served to deter the Russians from trying to occupy it. In any case, they appeared content to keep hammering us with artillery fire from the area around Gdingen, a town and harbor about 10 miles away on the Soviet-occupied mainland.

Finally out of combat, I thought almost constantly of my fiancée, Anneliese, whom I had met six years earlier, a few months before being drafted into the military.

Though several months had passed since we had last corresponded, my love for her remained my lone source of hope in the otherwise dark and uncertain future that lay ahead. In my heart, I felt sure that we would be together for the rest of our lives, if I could somehow evade the Russians and reach Germany.

Throughout the days that followed, my unit did little more than rest and try to scrounge up something to eat. One afternoon, I caught sight of Lt. Col. Ebeling and a group of staff officers from the 154th Regiment off in the distance but did not speak to them. Though we were all seeking to find our way back to Germany under orders, it was clear that the Wehrmacht was in the process of disintegrating. Everyone was now basically on their own.

During this period we received word of two of the worst maritime disasters in history. In back-to-back tragedies in January

National Archives

A Red Army soldier, with his comrades behind him, dashes past a knocked-out German Panzer IV during the German retreat from the Soviet Union. Casualties on both sides during the war were horrendous.

and February of 1945, the German liners *Wilhelm Gustloff* and *General von Steuben* had been torpedoed and sunk by the Russians while evacuating thousands of civilian refugees and wounded personnel from East Prussia back to central Germany. Despite all we had endured at the front, this news further deepened the overpowering sense of grief and despair among us.

Even if it was possible to find space on one of the few vessels departing Hela, the threat of Soviet naval attack made the prospect of reaching Germany appear more remote than ever. At the same time, most of the officers on the Hela Peninsula were not even making a serious effort to leave, regardless of their orders to return to Germany. A lingering sense of honor and a bond of solidarity among us created a kind of inertia. In spite of the general breakdown in military order, none of us wished to give the appearance of deserting our comrades by departing before they did, even if it served no purpose for us to remain where we were.

About 2½ weeks after our arrival on Hela, Jüchter was outside the apartment building one afternoon when a sudden Russian artillery barrage began hammering the area. Caught in the open, he was hit in the thigh by a piece of shrapnel. Notified by a medic of his injury, I requested that our regimental physician come to examine him.

Observing the doctor as he bandaged Jüchter's wound, I asked whether he should place a tourniquet around the sergeant's leg as a precaution to ensure that he would not lose any more blood. The physician assured me that this measure was not necessary and that his injury was not life threatening.

Once the bandaging had been completed, the doctor directed me to take Jüchter to a field hospital that had been established in an underground concrete bunker. Together with the medics, I assisted in carrying Jüchter the 75 yards to the facility.

Inside, wounded men were lying like cordwood along the bunker's walls. Locating the doctor on duty, I informed him that I had a badly wounded soldier who needed urgent medical attention. He responded, "Yes, but take a look. We have to go in order of priority. Lay him down there and we will take care of him." Leaning down to Jüchter, I assured him, "I will be back tomorrow to see how you are doing."

On my return to the hospital bunker the following morning, I was told that Jüchter had passed away during the night. Realizing that he probably died from shock and loss of blood, it was difficult not to feel angry and bitter at the regimental doctor's decision not to apply a tourniquet that might have saved his life. Even after experiencing the loss of so many comrades, Jüchter's death seemed an especially needless sacrifice to me.

Now alone and possessing nothing other than my uniform and a couple of pistols, I contemplated my situation. Nothing had changed in my orders, but I finally felt a renewed sense of motivation to find a way off Hela.

Early the following evening, I wandered the 500 yards from the apartment building to the harbor area to find out what was happening. Unexpectedly, I stumbled onto a chance situation that changed the course of my life.

Observing about 400 fully equipped troops standing around near the dock, it was obvious the unit was preparing to depart Hela. In an instant, I made up my mind to tag along with them wherever they were destined. Conversing with the soldiers, I recognized their Silesian accents and learned that their infantry regiment had orders to sail for Germany.

Oddly, no one ever questioned my presence nor requested my orders either in Hela or during my journey there from the front. This may have been due to the deference given an officer, though I still only wore the lower rank of first lieutenant despite my field promotion to captain in March. Alternatively, this failure to challenge me may have simply been another reflection of the mounting chaos behind the lines.

When the order to depart came just after dark, I filed onto the deck of one of the small barges with a couple of hundred of the soldiers. A half hour later, a mile or so outside the harbor, a giant shadow loomed up in front of us. A brand-new destroyer of the Kriegsmarine (German Navy) was readying to sail for Germany.

After climbing up a net hung down the side of the ship, we were warmly welcomed by the crew and directed where to go. While the enlisted personnel bedded down in the cool night air on the deck, I was escorted to one of the cabins below.

Despite the recent torpedoing of other German ships sailing west, I finally felt a flicker of optimism about my chances of survival as I lay in my bunk. What would happen now?

Early the following morning, a sailor came to my bunk and woke me. In a somber voice, he announced, "*Der Krieg ist vorbei.*" ("The war is finished.")

The date was May 9, 1945.

Looking back, my lucky escape from Hela that night probably saved me from making a choice between going into captivity in Russia or taking my own life. Yet at that moment when I learned of the surrender, my mood was neither one of joy nor sadness. Instead, I felt only numb disorientation at the loss of all that I had known, and deep uncertainty about what lay ahead for me and for Germany.

EPILOGUE: *Wilhelm Lubbeck was taken prisoner by the British and survived the war. He returned to a destroyed Germany, married Anneliese in 1946, emigrated to Canada in 1951, Anglicized his name, and eventually reached the United States, settling in the Cleveland, Ohio, area in 1956, where he found work as an electrical engineer. He and Anneliese had three children: Harold, Marion, and Ralph.*

He retired from Union Carbide in 1983, moved to North Carolina, and started his own firm, William Lubbeck Company, working as a consultant to the steel and foundry industry. Sadly, Anneliese died of cancer in 1988.

His memoirs are captured in At Leningrad's Gates: The Story of a Soldier with Army Group North, *published by Casemate Publishers, 2006.* □

WWII QUARTERLY

The Hardcover Journal of The Second World War

Not available on newsstands, the WWII Quarterly Hard-bound Edition can only be obtained and collected through this personal subscription offer.

Each quarterly issue is meticulously printed and bound in vivid full color on thick, luxurious, oversized paper.

WWII Quarterly brings you in-depth coverage of the battles, campaigns, strategy, and tactics, and uncovers fresh new facts you may not have heard before.

For example, you've probably read that Hitler's Atlantic Wall was heralded as a mighty series of bunkers, underwater obstacles and artillery that was impenetrable against an Allied invasion. But WWII Quarterly reveals to you that it was anything but…

Do you know why Stalin launched a massive offensive in a secondary theater against little Finland in June 1944? WWII Quarterly fills you in on all the details and shows you how this conflict played an important role in the Allies plans for their Normandy landing.

But we've only scratched the surface. WWII Quarterly brings World War II to life. All this brought to you in 4 beautiful hardbound volumes… an excellent addition to your World War II library!

And there's no risk to you! Order now, and if at any time you decide you're unsatisfied with the publication, cancel and you'll receive a full refund on all unserviced issues…no questions asked!

WWII Quarterly is also available in digital format for iPad, iPhone, Android, Kindle, and more. See our website for details.

www.WarfareHistoryNetwork.com/magazine

SHORT FLIGHT INTO THE DRINK

A Grumman TBF Avenger torpedo bomber spun into the Pacific Ocean seconds after launch.

BY KEVIN M. HYMEL

It was a routine carrier takeoff, but nothing in warfare is ever routine. Lieutenant B. Sevilla launched his TBF Avenger torpedo bomber from the USS *Anzio* but within seconds he lost control and spun into the water. The *Anzio* was conducting antisubmarine patrols off the Philippine coast of Leyte on December 21, 1944.

Sevilla's bomber carried a total crew of four, including Ensign W.K. Bowdon, who served as an observer; Petty Officer 2nd Class W.L. Mills; and Petty Officer 3rd Class J.B. Robinson. All survived the impact and either climbed or swam out of the bomber to await rescue. It would not be long. They were soon retrieved by the destroyer USS *Morris* to fight another day. □

After catapulting off the USS *Anzio*'s deck, Lieutenant B. Sevilla's TBF drops its port wing.

The TBF's wing dips into the ocean.

The TBF disappears in a spray of water as it spins out.

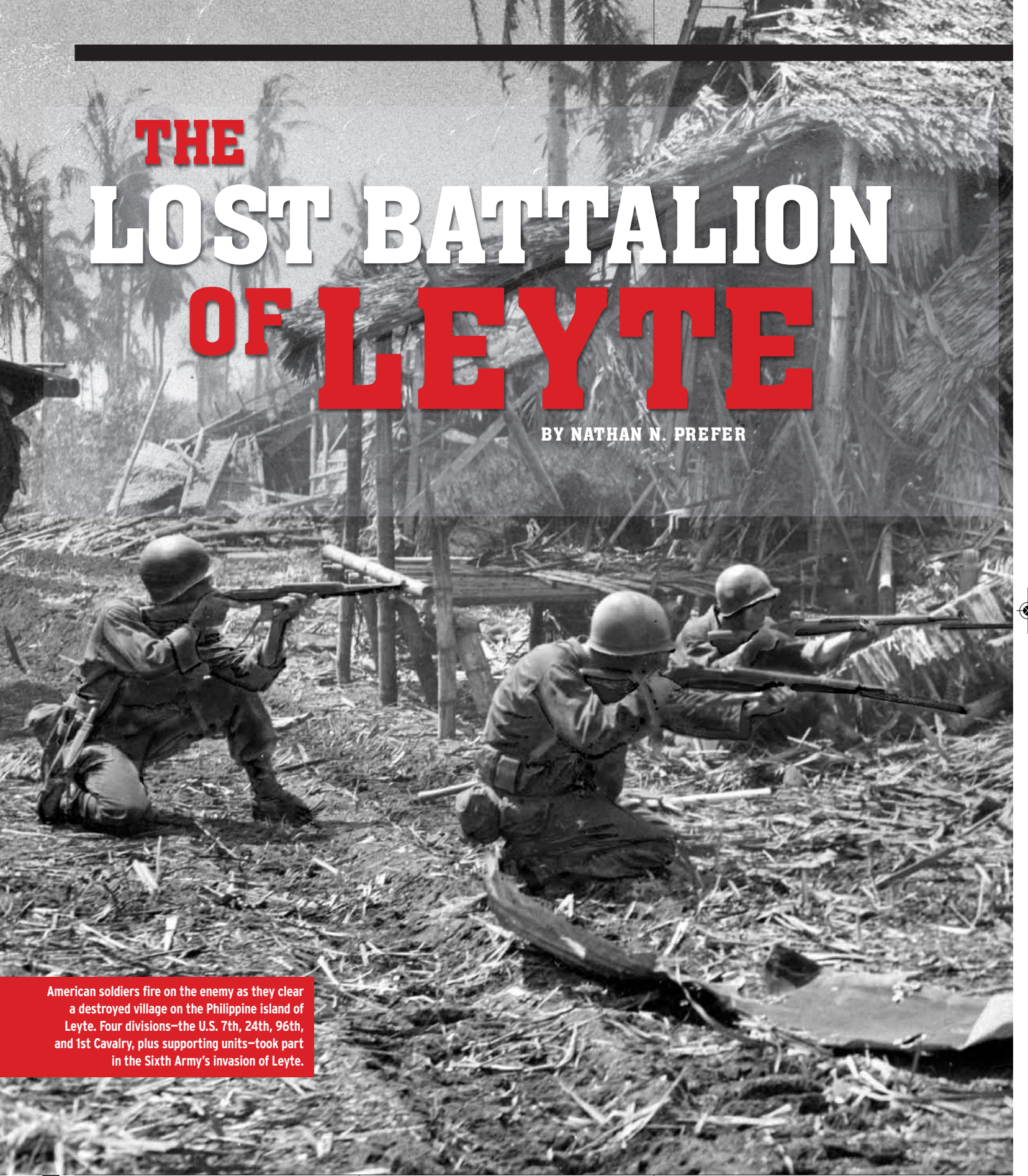
Lieutenant Sevilla climbs out the cockpit as his bomber begins to sink. Another crewman, who escaped through the belly hatch, pops up beneath the ball turret.

As the TBF sinks deeper, the entire four-man crew safely emerges. One man on the right prepares to unravel an inflatable raft.

Under the watchful eye of a sailor from the USS *Morris*, the crew await pick up as the bomber sinks, tail last.

THE LOST BATTALION OF LEYTE

BY NATHAN N. PREFER



American soldiers fire on the enemy as they clear a destroyed village on the Philippine island of Leyte. Four divisions—the U.S. 7th, 24th, 96th, and 1st Cavalry, plus supporting units—took part in the Sixth Army's invasion of Leyte.

All: National Archives

ON OCTOBER 20, 1944, General Douglas MacArthur redeemed his personal pledge to the people of the Philippines. He had returned. After two years of fighting his way up the New Guinea coast, he had landed Lt. Gen. Walter Krueger's Sixth U.S. Army on Leyte, a large island in the central Philippines. Yet, even as he waded ashore onto the newly established beachhead, things were not going as planned.

For the Imperial Japanese Army, the Philippines would be the decisive ground battle of the war. General Tomoyuki Yamashita, the Japanese commander in the Philippines, had decided he would await MacArthur's attack on the main island of Luzon, where he would crush him in an aggressive battle. But Yamashita had only taken command in the Philippines two weeks earlier. His predecessor had been relieved of command for being, in the eyes of Imperial General Headquarters, a "defeatist." Their interference in the coming campaign would continue.

As the Americans expanded their beachhead on Leyte, the Japanese high command determined that the decisive ground battle would be fought on Leyte, not Luzon, as originally planned by Yamashita. Despite his objections, Japanese troops and supplies began to pour onto Leyte, slowing the American campaign. Crack Japanese troops from as far away as Manchuria, China, and Korea were funneled into Manila and then shipped to Leyte through several ports that the Japanese held on the coast of the Camotes Sea.

Lieutenant General Sosaku Suzuki commanded the Japanese 35th Army and was responsible for Leyte. He immediately began to ship additional troops to the island. Suzuki arrived on Leyte soon after the Americans landed and immediately began to develop a defensive line in the nearly impenetrable mountains while he organized a massive counterattack designed to drive Krueger's Sixth Army back into Leyte Gulf. By the end of October, more than 50,000 additional Japanese troops were on or en route to Leyte. Cheered by inflated reports of the Imperial Japanese Navy's illusory success in the Battle of Leyte Gulf, Suzuki was so confident of victory that he planned the Americans' surrender ceremonies and brought along his best uniform for the occasion.

In October 1944, although cut off and running out of food and ammunition, a battalion of the U.S. 24th Infantry Division gave the Japanese all they could handle.

For his part, the 63-year-old, German-born Krueger was growing increasingly concerned. Although his four infantry divisions had all but destroyed the original defenders of the Japanese 16th Infantry Division, his intelligence sources reported more and more identifications of enemy units not previously known to be on Leyte. He knew that he had to stop the enemy reinforcement pipeline, and to do that he had to seize the enemy ports on the opposite (west) coast of the island. Driving his X and XXIV Corps west and south, Krueger intended to halt the enemy reinforcements.

Initially his advance went well, but in early November his X Corps (under Lt. Gen. Franklin C. Sibert) hit a strong defensive line at a series of mountains that soon became known as Breakneck Ridge. The ridge was heavily covered in jungle and was composed of high ridges with cliff faces, severely restricting passage. The many crevices and heavy jungle provided excellent cover for the defending Japanese and prevented the Americans from using their tanks, while also preventing good observation for their artillery.

With X Corps, the 24th Infantry Division (under Maj. Gen. Frederick A. Irving) spent the next three weeks, starting November 7, trying to crack what the Japanese called the Yamashita Line. In the course of the battle for Breakneck Ridge, a regimental commander was relieved, and American casualties mounted sharply without commensurate gain.

General Irving, an experienced commander, decided to use extraordinary tactics to break the hold of the crack Japanese 1st Infantry Division on Breakneck Ridge. After consulting with Generals Sibert and Krueger, he sent one of his battalions on a wide flanking maneuver to Kilay Ridge, where it would flank the Japanese and harass one of their supply routes. He sent a second battalion, Lt. Col. Robert Beirne Spragins' 2nd Battalion, 19th Infantry Regiment, to infiltrate enemy lines and establish a roadblock along the main enemy supply route, known as the Ormoc Road.

Colonel Spragins' men had already been fighting for more than two weeks, having been used as an assault battalion on October 20 when the Sixth Army landed on Leyte. Battle casualties, illness, and heat exhaustion had reduced its number of effectives to less than 700 men, including all administrative personnel.

At the time they received the order to infiltrate and block the Ormoc Road near the town of Limon, they believed that they were on Hill 1525, but no one was sure, given the lack of accurate maps and the thick jungle coverage of the entire area. Spragins, a 28-year-old New York native and West Point graduate (Class of 1939), quickly deduced that his battalion would have to move behind Japanese lines some

4,000 yards. He immediately asked for guides and a food supply, his men not having eaten in more than a day.

Known as Doughboy White from its radio call sign ("Doughboy" for the 19th Infantry and "White" for the 2nd Battalion), the 2nd Battalion began its move on November 10, led by a platoon under 1st Lt. George Whitney of San Francisco.

ABOVE: X Corps commander Lt. Gen. Franklin Sibert (left) confers with Maj. Gen. Frederick Irving, 24th Infantry Division commander, on Leyte, October 1944. BELOW: Lt. Col. Robert Spragins commanded the 2nd Battalion, 19th Infantry during its ordeal.

For two days the troops struggled over fallen trees, thick underbrush, and sharp cliffs. In one of the skirmishes, Lieutenant Whitney killed a Japanese captain who was carrying a dispatch case filled with vital intelligence material; this was sent back to 24th Infantry Division headquarters for evaluation. Avoiding open spaces so as not to be seen by the enemy, and with no trail to follow, the battalion struggled forward. The one day's ration each man had received just before starting out had to be stretched for two days. Requests for an airdrop resupply went unanswered.

The patrols leading the battalion forward began to encounter more and more enemy patrols, but they soon found a wooded streambed that offered cover and concealment, allowing the battalion to bypass the Japanese. Under strict noise discipline, Spragins' battalion advanced as stealthily as possible, often covered by the jungle vegetation or nearby noises of battle. Only once did it encounter a group of Japanese, who were getting water from the stream, and these were killed in a brief battle.

On November 12, after two days of marching, Colonel Spragins decided to move his battalion forward on a compass bearing directly to the objective. The native guides were directed to find a trail that corresponded to the bearing and on which the battalion could move forward faster. That morning the battalion forded the Leyte River and moved up a deep gorge before following a trail over the next ridge. Alerted by their guides that they were on a Japanese trail, the battalion remained on high alert. As the scouts moved forward, they came upon a Japanese patrol. The resulting firefight revealed the battalion's presence to the Japanese.

The Japanese, however, did not know how many Americans were in their rear, nor did they know what they intended to do. They fired blindly into the general area where they thought the battalion was, without success. Captain William R. Hanks led his Company G up the next defended hill and attacked the Japanese flank. Captain Hanks heard a scream and turned to see a Japanese soldier charging him with fixed bayonet. Firing twice, Hanks killed his attacker.

Nearby, Sergeant Peter R. Slavinsky of Pennsylvania saw a grenade land at his feet. Knowing he had seconds to save his life, he scooped it up and threw it back at the enemy.

A strong Japanese force counterattacked but was pushed back. Suddenly, shouts came from the leading scouts. They had at last found the hard-surfaced Ormoc Road. Doughboy White had cut the main supply route to the Yamashita Line.

Captain Hanks rushed forward to confirm the objective. Heavy firing continued from across the road, but knowing a frontal attack was suicidal Colonel Spragins called for a thorough reconnaissance before moving across the road, seeking a weak spot in the enemy defenses. Before any could be conducted, however, darkness ended operations for the day. The battalion set up night defenses at the head of a ravine and waited for a Japanese reaction. Artillery fire was registered on likely avenues of enemy approach.

The Japanese were unprepared for the sudden appearance of Doughboy White behind their lines. Usually it was the Japanese who infiltrated their enemy's rear areas, spreading confusion and cutting supply lines. Now Colonel Spragins' battalion had turned the tables on them. Combined with the heavy defensive fire of American artillery, this confusion prevented any counterattacks that night, but the ominous sounds of Japanese vehicles moving along the Ormoc Road kept the battalion officers awake much of the night.

At dawn, the fighting flared up again. Enemy mortar rounds fell on the battalion, and patrols encountered groups of Japanese trying to scout out the American position. These groups were killed or dispersed. By noon, the fighting had calmed down. Colonel Spragins took this moment to again seek food for his starving men. Ammunition and medical supplies were also scarce. A resupply airdrop was again requested.

While the request went up through channels, Company F counterattacked a group of

Soldiers cautiously advance toward a Japanese machine-gun nest on Leyte.

Japanese who came too close to the battalion perimeter. The Company F attack hit a strong Japanese force armed with machine guns, mortars, and small arms and was recalled. No supporting fire had accompanied the attack because Spragins wanted to preserve what was left of his small supply of mortar ammunition.

By the afternoon it was apparent from patrol reports that the Japanese had dug in both in front of and behind Doughboy White. The Battalion was now surrounded by strong enemy forces from Japan's crack 1st and 26th Infantry Divisions. The requested airdrop for November 13 failed to materialize.

Colonel Spragins had his battalion dig in. The soldiers, without food for more than a day and a night, ate palm hearts. Packs were stripped from enemy dead and searched for food. Cooking fires were prohibited, as they would bring down enemy mortar and artillery fire. That night passed quietly, except for the heavy rains that poured daily during the next few weeks on Leyte and added to the misery.

The following morning, patrols discovered more enemy casualties, and several of the packs carried by the dead contained food. While the patrols were busy, Captain (Chaplain) Lamar Clark of Texas conducted funeral services for two of the men killed the day before. After cutting several enemy communication wires, the patrols returned to report several strong well-armed Japanese groups around the perimeter. They had also seen enemy supply convoys moving in both directions along the Ormoc Road. One patrol leader reported that he had discovered some undefended high ground, which offered excellent observation of the road.

That afternoon came the first resupply drop. The exhausted and starving men of Doughboy White watched in frustration as the entire drop landed well within Japanese lines. A quick radio message corrected the drop zone, resulting in a drop between the opposing forces. The Japanese, realizing that the American pilots were looking for some sign to differentiate between friend and foe, stopped all their firing. The thick jungle did the rest. The third supply run went entirely to the Japanese. The fourth drop landed again between the two groups. The American aircraft, now empty, turned for home.

Captain Hanks sent out patrols to recover what they could from the supply drops. They were specifically directed to seek out radio batteries, as the ones the battalion had were running low on power. Without radio communication, Doughboy White was doomed, as it could not direct artillery support or call in supply drops.

Skirmishes broke out between Americans trying to recover supplies and the Japanese trying to prevent them. Sergeant Wesley Greer was busy detaching the parachute from a supply bundle when a Japanese soldier came from behind a tree and attacked. Greer eliminated the enemy soldier and dragged off his 100-pound prize. Private John Miller, of the Bronx, New York, found a box of radio batteries but had to fight his way back to the battalion perimeter with them.

After the battle, an inventory showed that a few radio batteries, some medical supplies, 64 mortar shells, and six cases of rations had been recovered. There were now 200 meals for 700 men. The men of 2nd Battalion, 19th Infantry watched helplessly as the Japanese went about recovering the bulk of the supplies. That night four men were killed by friendly artillery fire.

Colonel Spragins decided during the

night to move his battalion to the high ground discovered by his patrols; his mission was to interdict the Ormoc Road, which he could not do from his present location. On November 15, he put his plan into effect. Determined to prevent the Japanese from learning his strength, which he hoped would make them more cautious, Spragins refused artillery support and had patrols lead the battalion by covered routes to what became known as Saddle Hill.

By early morning Company G was attacking Saddle Hill using only Company G. Reinforced with machine guns from Companies F and H, Company G was led by Colonel Spragins while the rest of the battalion remained under cover commanded by the executive officer, Major Charles Issackson of South Dakota.

As Company G moved to the attack, the battalion rear echelon encountered a group of Japanese intent on outflanking the battalion. Major Isaackson directed the defense and stood exposed to ensure he saw everything.

Nearby, Sergeant Edward Gauthler from Texas noticed a bush moving and shouted to the major, "Look out!" Isaackson ducked just in time to avoid a bullet that hit a tree at the level his head would have been had not Gauthler warned him.

Meanwhile, Company G crossed the Ormoc Road and sought a way up Saddle Hill. An enemy pillbox was knocked out with rifles and grenades, and Captain Hanks then organized an attack to gain the hilltop. As the skirmish line moved up the hill, Japanese strongpoints halted the advance. Hanks called upon his mortars while Colonel Spragins sent Company E to find a quicker way up the hill.

Company E did find another way, which was easily climbed since the Japanese were concentrating on Company G to their front. Company E reached the hilltop and began eliminating the defenders.

Captain Hanks pulled Company G back and then circled the hill to join Company E, clearing the slope. By late afternoon both companies were digging in atop Saddle Hill. The leading elements of the new perimeter were within 10 yards of the Ormoc Road.

ABOVE: A 105mm artillery battery opens fire on Japanese positions. BELOW: American troops cross a stream while pursuing the enemy through a Leyte jungle.

Colonel Spragins then ordered Major Isaackson to take the rest of the battalion, remain on the east side of the road, and form a new perimeter as a reserve force and a place to care for the wounded. Isaackson's group soon became known as the East Perimeter, while Colonel Spragins' became the West Perimeter. The East Perimeter was not to engage the Japanese unless it was absolutely necessary.

Again, Spragins wanted to hide his true strength from the enemy. Communications were established with the 2nd Battalion, 34th Infantry, which was on a similar mission on Kilay Ridge.

The Japanese did not get the word about the new American position quickly. Nobody had informed them that Ormoc Road, their main supply route, had been cut by the Americans. Shortly after midnight on November 14, a convoy rolled down the Ormoc Road. The Japanese were completely unaware of the danger into which they were driving.

Because of the pitch darkness, the Americans could see nothing from the West Perimeter. Estimating the range by the sound of the truck tires, American machine guns opened up on the roadway. A considerable amount of noise and shouting resulted, indicating that the trucks were carrying troop reinforcements for the Yamashita Line defenses. The Japanese quickly pulled back up the road.

Colonel Spragins immediately ordered a cease-fire, not wanting to give away his position or strength. He issued orders that his men were to fire only when they had a clear target and to stop firing immediately when the target disappeaed. This would not only conceal their strength but also conserve their limited ammunition supply. Although the Japanese now knew there was a blocking force on the west side of the Ormoc Road, they were still unaware of the East Perimeter.

A few hours after this first encounter, a column of troops was heard marching down the Ormoc Road. Once again the Americans opened fire. After the commotion on the road stopped, the Americans listened as Japanese medical personnel hauled away the dead and wounded.

Later that morning, two Japanese field artillery pieces opened fire on the West Perimeter. These were soon countered by American artillery guided from observations made in the West Perimeter.

The enemy barrage tightened the nerves of Colonel Spragins' men. They had not eaten in more than 27 hours and were exhausted from marching through the jungle and the fighting at Saddle Hill. Some soldiers were too weak even to walk. Their declining alertness was of great concern to Spragins, who feared his diminished battalion would be overrun by the enemy.

Patrols sent out to contact the battalion on Kilay Ridge in the hope of obtaining supplies and evacuating wounded found that the hills and jungle between the two American forces were thick with Japanese troops. There was no way a line of communication could be opened between the two American forces.

The two perimeters of the 2nd Battalion, 19th Infantry were also separated from each other. Three attempts to pass between them resulted in fights with the Japanese. With the battalion aid station in the East Perimeter, those wounded in the West Perimeter went without medical aid beyond what could be provided by the company aid men. The wounded lay in water-filled foxholes exposed to enemy fire and the constant rain.

Japanese troops ford a river in the Philippines in this captured war photograph. The Japanese lost 70,000 men killed, wounded, or missing on Leyte.

Although they did not complain, their plight was apparent to all.

Even obtaining water in the midst of all the rain was a dangerous chore; it had to be brought up by combat patrols from a stream at the bottom of a nearby hill. The water was carried in helmets to avoid the considerable noise made by American canteens.

That afternoon, a carrying party from the Regimental Cannon Company arrived from the rear with chocolate bars and cigarettes. Then an airdrop was conducted, and a portion of the supplies were recovered. Both of these were heavily opposed by enemy fire.

One of the incoming mortar rounds landed near Colonel Spragins, covering him with mud and earth. Although wounded twice in this campaign, he remained in command of Doughboy White. After things quieted down, the battalion enjoyed its first meal in 48 hours, but that night several seriously wounded men died.

The next day, November 17, the Japanese tried a different tactic. Instead of boldly moving large groups of men and material down the blocked road, they began to send small groups alongside the road, trying to filter past the roadblock. The Americans spotted these groups and opened fire as they attempted to pass.

Japanese patrols constantly probed the West Perimeter defenses, trying to locate a weak spot to exploit. That afternoon another airdrop landed 83 cases of rations within the East Perimeter. The Cannon Company detachment was used to bring the West Perimeter's share across the road.

So exhausted were Spragins' men that some of them fainted while eating. Colonel Spragins and several of his officers gave their shares to the wounded. No radio batteries were recovered, and the battalion's sole generator had rusted out from the constant rain.

Toward darkness, two Japanese tanks loaded with supplies ran the roadblock. So surprised were the Americans that the antitank gunners could not fire in time. Later, these two tanks ran the roadblock in the opposite direction. This time the Americans

were ready for them, and one tank was damaged.

Frank Fantino, a machine gunner from Connecticut in Company H, recalled, "Later, after we had fired at a Japanese weapons carrier that had come down the road toward us, one of their tanks came around the bend and fired a round at us. The round hit just below us with enough force to lift the machine gun a couple inches, but the round didn't explode! Then they fired another round, which went just over our heads and hit the hill above us. But that round didn't explode either! The tank then left."

Again, Japanese artillery opened fire on the West Perimeter, but counterbattery fire knocked the enemy guns out. This day saw the last attempt by the Japanese to move troops or supplies past the Doughboy White roadblock.

November 18 brought word that the 32nd Infantry Division (Maj. Gen. William H. Gill) had arrived on Leyte and was attacking Breakneck Ridge. The message also said that a battalion of the 34th Infantry Regiment was trying to break through to Doughboy White with food and supplies. If successful, it would also evacuate the wounded.

A few hours later the relief force arrived. While it was being welcomed, another airdrop was made, but once again the bulk of the supplies landed in Japanese-held areas. Patrols from both sides tried to recover as much as possible, and several skirmishes broke out. Americans and Japanese were once again battling over food. That night, three Japanese tanks ran the roadblock three times. The American bazooka teams fired the last of their ammunition and scored some hits, but none of the enemy tanks was disabled.

November 19 saw preparations being made for the evacuation of the wounded. Rations for two days per man had been recovered and distributed. By midday, the carrying party departed with 23 wounded men on litters and another 27 walking wounded. The party soon disappeared into the jungle.

On the road, four Japanese tanks ran the roadblock again, this time firing at the West Perimeter as they passed. After they had turned north, a group of Japanese soldiers came from the direction of Breakneck Ridge. They seemed unaware of the American roadblock and were caught in its fire on the road. The column dispersed and tried to reform but was shattered again by American mortars and machine guns.

ABOVE: Medics from the 19th Infantry Regiment cross a stream to pick up wounded. During its six months of combat on Leyte, the 24th Infantry Division suffered 2,342 casualties, including 544 dead. OPPOSITE: Three soldiers manning a machine-gun post are on the alert for an enemy counterattack on their position, November 1944.

The morning of November 20 brought orders to Colonel Spragins to withdraw his battalion to Hill 1525, from which it had begun its odyssey. Just as the colonel was digesting his new orders, a group of Japanese made a direct attack on the West Perimeter. In a fight lasting over an hour, the Japanese were halted, but Spragins was suspicious of the enemy's intentions and ordered reinforcements to other sections of the defensive line.

Just after he did so, a large enemy group attacked the East Perimeter in a banzai charge. American fire halted it within a few yards of a breakthrough, and the Japanese left behind more than 300 dead. Three more attacks met the same fate. Some of the men in Doughboy White began to think the enemy knew of the withdrawal order and was trying to finish them off before they could get away.

But they didn't. By mid-morning Colonel Spragins' half of the battalion crossed the Ormoc Road once again, one man at a time, running to avoid enemy fire. Company G covered the withdrawal and soon the two groups were reunited within the East Perimeter. The battalion moved back to the Leyte River, in flood stage. No ford was discovered, so the men used bamboo vines tied together to cross the raging stream.

Spragins crossed the river twice, once to lead the forward elements across and a second time to assist with the wounded men. The crossing took time but was accomplished by mid-afternoon. Not one weapon had been lost or abandoned. The battalion then moved to some nearby high ground and settled in for the night.

The march resumed the next day, and Colonel Spragins received welcome news from some local natives. They reported that a day earlier another group of Americans, carrying the battalion's wounded, had safely passed the same way. The battalion continued toward Hill 1525. Within some 600 yards of it, the men heard firing, possibly indicating that the carrying party had been ambushed by the Japanese.

Ordering the two groups to join forces, Spragins waited until Major Carl E. Mann brought the carrying party safely back into the battalion lines. Mann had lost seven men killed and added 16 wounded to his load during his four-day march to the rear.

November 22 was spent getting the wounded to the crest of Hill 1525. Many of the men of Doughboy White were exhausted, again going without food for 48 hours. The litter party, still carrying the wounded men on stretchers made from saplings and parachutes, was equally exhausted. Many had lost their shoes to the rain and thick, glutinous mud of Leyte; their boots had simply fallen apart. Some wore shoes taken from Japanese casualties. Additionally, some 113 men were suffering from jungle rot, foot ulcers, dysentery, and various fevers.

Having successfully reached Hill 1525, Colonel Spragins was now ordered to move his battalion to a rest area near Pinamopoan. Reports indicated that there were Japanese troops between him and the rest area. Once again Doughboy White moved out in combat formation, patrols leading the way and ready to clear any enemy forces blocking their path. Protected by three rifle companies, the litter party followed close behind. Each litter had a carry party and an assigned group of riflemen for protection.

Enemy fire occasionally struck the column, but no attack developed, and a change in route brought it safely to the coast. The battalion made its painful way to the rest area. Behind them the litter party was less fortunate as incoming knee-mortar fire killed two men and wounded three others. Snipers killed another of the walking wounded and a soldier accompanying him.

The depleted column passed through Pinamopoan on November 24. Even after arriving in the reserve area, the men were forced to march another mile to Pinamopoan Point because enemy machine-gun fire prevented landing craft from picking them up any closer to the front. Wounded men were immediately evacuated, including 241 officers and men who had made the return march unaided. Those remaining were treated to their first cooked meal in 14 days: peas, carrots, bully beef, and coffee. It was Thanksgiving Day.

The battalion had killed hundreds of Japanese soldiers, but the exact number could never be established since the nature of the battle precluded a count. The Japanese removed their dead whenever possible. The men of Doughboy White returned to Tanauan to rejoin their regiment and prepare for their next assignment.

For their feat of going behind enemy lines and successfully cutting the enemy's main supply route, helping to crack the Yamashita Line under the worst possible conditions, the men of Doughboy White were awarded the Presidential Unit Citation.

Lieutenant Colonel Robert B. Spragins would be awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for his leadership of the 2nd Battalion in November 1944. The citation reads: "The President of the United States takes pleasure in presenting the Distinguished Service Cross to Robert B. Spragins, Lieutenant Colonel, for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an armed enemy while serving with the 19th Infantry Regiment, 24th Infantry Division, in action against enemy forces from 10 to 23 November 1944.

"Lieutenant Colonel Spragins' intrepid actions, personal bravery, and zealous devotion to duty, exemplify the highest traditions of the military forces of the United States and reflect great credit upon himself, the 24th Infantry Division, and the United States Army."

He later achieved the rank of brigadier general and died on November 1, 2003, at the age of 87. □

Strangling the ENEMY

Operation Strangle seemed like a promising way to cut off the movement of enemy troops and supplies in Italy. The only problem was the air interdiction campaign did not work. **BY JEFF PATTON**

Following the spectacular success of the Allied air campaign against Iraq during Operation Desert Storm in 1991 and against the Serb forces in Kosovo in 1999, the value and efficiency of utilizing air power to shape or forgo the need for a ground battle has been taken for granted by military planners. It was not always this way.

The successful application of current air power to shape the battlefield had its rocky genesis in the air campaign supporting the Allied advance up the boot of Italy in World War II—a campaign codenamed Operation Strangle.

Air interdiction in Italy did not start with Operation Strangle. Allied air interdiction of German supply lines had begun before the September 1943 Allied landings in southern Italy. However, Operation Strangle was unique in that it departed from prior practice by attempting to create a near total stoppage of German supplies far from the battlefront.

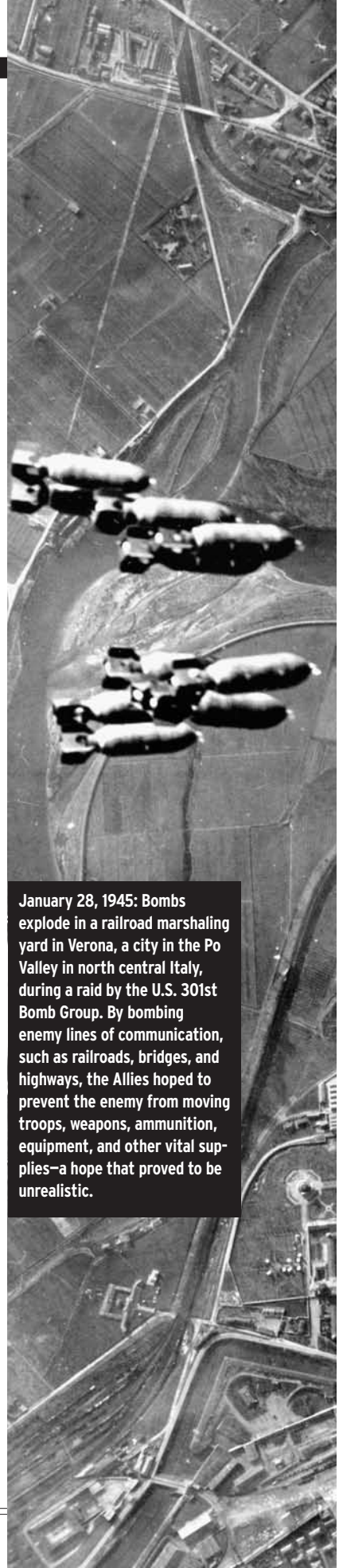
Following the fall of Sicily to the Allies in August 1943, the Germans were able to evacuate more than 60,000 men and their equipment to the mainland of southern Italy. But Hitler was convinced that his Italian cohort might be close to committing an "act of treachery" by signing a separate armistice with the Allies.

With the arrest and imprisonment of dictator Benito Mussolini by the Italian government in July 1943, the OKW (Oberkommando der Wehrmacht, the German high command) began moving troops into northern Italy in anticipation of being forced to occupy and defend the entire peninsula without the aid of the Italian armed forces.

The commander of German forces in southern Italy, Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, reorganized these forces into the Tenth Army. This army consisted of the XIV Panzer Corps with three divisions and LXXVI Panzer Corps with two divisions and elements of a third; two additional divisions were in reserve near Rome. All were seasoned troops. Some were veterans of the fighting near Stalingrad who had escaped annihilation and had been reconstituted into new units in France. Others were veterans of the Eastern Front and the fighting in North Africa and Sicily.

The invasion of mainland Italy and the collapse of Italian forces caused a crisis in German strategy. The two field marshals in Italy—Erwin Rommel with Army Group B in the north and Kesselring with Tenth Army in the south—were diametrically opposed as to the best strategy to counter the Allies.

Rommel argued for a retreat of all German troops



January 28, 1945: Bombs explode in a railroad marshaling yard in Verona, a city in the Po Valley in north central Italy, during a raid by the U.S. 301st Bomb Group. By bombing enemy lines of communication, such as railroads, bridges, and highways, the Allies hoped to prevent the enemy from moving troops, weapons, ammunition, equipment, and other vital supplies—a hope that proved to be unrealistic.

National Archives

north of the Po River. He would concentrate his forces to defend against an Allied advance through Austria or to counter an Allied swing through Yugoslavia into Austria and southern Germany.

Kesselring countered with the proposal to defend all of Italy. He was convinced he could stall the Allied advance by utilizing the mountainous terrain of Italy and lack of an adequate road network to keep not only the Allied armies at bay but also deny airfields to them that they could use to stage bombing missions closer to the German homeland. Hitler did not want to yield a single foot of ground. His refusal to allow his commanders to use a tactical withdrawal had already cost the Wehrmacht the Sixth Army at Stalingrad and the Afrika Korps. In the end, Hitler sided with Kesselring and moved Rommel and Army Group B to France to prepare for a possible Allied invasion. Given Hitler's blessing, Kesselring went to work.

By November 1943, the Allied advance northward in Italy had been stalemated by experienced, well dug in German forces. Facing the Allies was Germany's greatest defensive genius. Kesselring had chosen a line that ran east-west across the Italian peninsula approximately 70 miles south of Rome from the mouth of the Garigliano River across the Apennine Mountains to the mouth of the Sangro River on the Adriatic Sea.

The line had a narrow coastal plain in the east, rugged mountainous terrain in the middle with few roads, and a wider coastal plain in the west consisting of the Liri River Valley that was overlooked by the high terrain of Monte Cassino. The defensive fortifications consisted of several lines for defense in depth and were collectively known as the Winter Line, with the main defensive line codenamed Gustav.

For six months, Kesselring, now sole commander in Italy and head of Army Group C, had swelled his forces to 19 divisions and had stymied the further advance of the British Eighth and American Fifth Armies. To counter this stalemate, the Allies planned a World War I-style "big push" to break the Gustav Line, but this planned Allied spring offensive, codenamed Diadem, required a reduction of the German Army's combat power to be successful. The tool that promised to do that was air power.

Operation Strangle was one of the few air campaigns in World War II in which it is possible to observe the results of air interdiction alone, unaided by supporting arms, in shaping the battlefield for the success of ground forces. It was a milestone in the development of air force doctrine on air interdiction, and the lessons learned and the effectiveness of the campaign are very much in the eye of the beholder.

Operation Strangle was ordered by the Combined Chiefs of Staff after the abortive attempt to take Monte Cassino in March 1944. Its stated objective was to "reduce the enemy's flow of supplies to a level which will make it impossible to maintain and operate his forces in central Italy."

The commander of the Mediterranean Allied Air Forces (MAAF), General Ira Eaker, was a proponent of the plan and looked upon Strangle as a showcase for the effectiveness and utility of air power. U.S. Army Air Forces (USAAF) leaders, too, were eager to showcase the ability of air power to shape the battle on the ground.

A year previously, disjointed penny packet distribution of air assets to individual army ground commanders in North Africa led to inefficiencies and inconclusive results. Aerial bombing showed promise by disrupting the movement of German and Italian troops to the front lines in Sicily. Now, at last, was an opportunity to show how air power alone would force an enemy army to disengage and withdraw due to the destruction of his logistical support. Not only did USAAF leaders have a gut feeling what air power could do, they could empirically prove it.

National Archives

During a bombing mission over Naples, this B-17 of the 414th Bomb Squadron, 97th Bomb Group has lost part of a wing and is about to plunge earthward. The pilot was able to level the plane momentarily and five parachutes were seen to open.

General Eaker was a believer in the British Air Ministry's scientific analysis of warfare titled Operational Research. Operational Research was composed of nonmilitary men whose professional expertise was turned to solving wartime problems.

One of the members of the Operational Research team at the Air Ministry was a British medical doctor named Solomon "Solly" Zuckermann. Zuckermann's specialty was research into primate behavior in the Anatomy Department at Oxford University. Due to his familiarity with primates, he was commissioned to do studies on the effectiveness of the German Blitz on England—how bomb blasts affect monkeys (and humans), the merits of one size or kind of bomb over another, and more.

Zuckermann had risen to prominence by predicting that an aerial bombardment of the Italian island of Pantelleria, south of Sicily, would lead to its surrender. When the Italian garrison commander welcomed the first invasion craft with a white flag, Zuckermann's stock rose as a genius of Operational Research.

It was Zuckermann's belief that the enemy's communications were his Achilles heel. He considered the railroad marshaling yards, bridges, and roads critical targets. Since he believed bridges and roads were notoriously hard to bomb, railroad marshaling yards promised to be key targets that could be easily hit and dramatically affect the enemy's logistical support.

National Archives

Having released its bombs, a B-26 Marauder heads for home after attacking strategic rail bridges near La Spezia on Italy's west coast, April 1944. Such raids rarely produced the extensive damage the U.S. Army Air Forces claimed, nor slowed enemy train or vehicular traffic for long.

The large size of marshaling yards ensured there would be less wastage of bombs that fell outside their aiming point. Railroad marshaling yards thus became the primary initial focus of Strangle.

The overall commander of Allied forces in Italy, Field Marshal Harold Alexander, was deeply skeptical of Strangle's focus on railroad marshaling yards.

"As far as Italy was concerned," he said, "the fallacy of the policy of attacks on marshaling yards lay in the fact that these are usually on level ground and always contain a large number of parallel tracks so that any damage can be rapidly repaired and a through line established in a very brief time."

"A reduction in rolling stock and facilities was of little importance as for their military purposes," he continued, "the Germans only needed about 16 percent of the total available. A broken bridge on the other hand meant a long delay and stores had to be ferried round the break by road thus wasting as much fuel as would be lost from the destruction of a good-sized dump."

Planners in London, who had experience in planning the strategic Combined Bomber Offensive, thought the best way to accomplish the interdiction mission was by concentrating attacks on railroad marshaling yards. General Ira Eaker's Mediterranean Allied Air Force (MAAF) planners in Italy pushed for the targeting of bridges and rail lines. This difference in philosophies did not fill Fifth Army Commander General Mark Clark with confidence in its success.

One of the proponents of Strangle's effectiveness on the German side was the Commander of Luftwaffe forces in Italy, General Erich Ritter von Pohl. In a postwar debriefing, General Pohl stated, "In the spring of 1944, the German truck transportation system was, for the first time, seriously threatened by systematic commitment of enemy fighter bombers … such that the supply situation at the front was very serious."

It is a common theme for German officers to emphatically credit Allied air power and air interdiction with a major share of the responsibility for the defeat of Axis forces in Western Europe by denying them freedom of movement. These "claims" could be discounted as self-serving efforts by Wehrmacht officers to excuse the failure of the German Army. General Pohl's comments on the effectiveness of Allied air interdiction could be influenced by his air force professional leanings, his desire to excuse the defeat of the German Army, or they could be the unvarnished truth.

While Pohl may have anecdotal information to share on the effectiveness of Allied air interdiction, during Strangle he was behind a desk in Rome and not in a position to observe its results firsthand. To get a more accurate viewpoint, it is necessary to look at precisely what effect Strangle had in reducing the flow of supplies to the Wehrmacht.

Intelligence officers in the MAAF estimated that Kesselring's 19 divisions along

the Gustav Line consumed 5,500 tons of supplies, including fuel, per day. They also estimated that the Italian railroad system had, at the start of Strangle, a capacity of 80,000 tons a day. By performing straight-line calculations, they predicted that if interdiction could cause a 93 percent reduction in rail traffic, then the German Army would run out of consumables.

As it turned out, their intelligence was flawed. According to German quartermaster reports, the 19 divisions on the Gustav Line consumed only 2,500 tons of supplies a day when not engaged in combat, and the trickle of vehicle resupply, coupled with coastal barges and horse-drawn transport, supplied an average of 3,000 tons a day.

National Archives

Direct hits on rail cars, such as these in the marshaling yards at Vicenza, Italy, were the exception rather than the rule—and the damage was usually quickly repaired.

The result was, by the time of Operation Diadem, the breakthrough of the Gustav Line, the supply dumps for Army Group C had actually increased from 17,000 to 18,000 tons after Strangle began. The commanders of the German Tenth Army and XIV Panzer Corps made no mention of supply shortages even during the heaviest fighting, and Kesselring said his supply situation was satisfactory during the 20 months from the Allied invasion of the Italian mainland to the end of the war.

The British pioneered the use of scientific analysis for judging the effectiveness of warfare, and the United States followed their example. The United States had established the Committee on Operational Analysis (COA) composed of scientists, economists, industrial engineers, psychologists, military men, and others who analyzed the enemy's capabilities both in detail and holistically to determine vulnerabilities.

Additionally, the Air War Plans Division had the responsibility to formulate the operational plans to carry out the targeting suggestions of the committee. Unfortunately, the COA frequently got things wrong. It consistently misinterpreted German economic and military resiliency and advocated the attacks on the German ball bearing factories that cost the USAAF 60 bombers and 600 men on one attack on Schweinfurt with little impact on the German war industry. Likewise, they overemphasized the significance of attacks on railroads, especially the marshaling yards in Italy.

The MAAF had been conducting a low-level interdiction campaign prior to Strangle. When Fifteenth Air Force heavy bombers were prevented from bombing their primary targets north of the Alps, they used railroad marshaling yards in the Po Valley in northern Italy—from Venice westward through Padova, Vicenza, Verona, Brescia, Pavia, Milano, and Torino—as secondary targets. These yards had been bombed sufficiently to cause doubts in the minds of USAAF targeting officers as to the effectiveness of the Zuckerman plan.

In January 1944, three months prior to Strangle, Twelfth Air Force intelligence personnel sent a report to MAAF headquarters stating that marshaling yards were poor targets in Italy because the rail lines were close to population centers capable of providing labor for repair and were close to repair facilities and their materials.

Marshaling yards were also difficult to block as all tracks and sidings had to be eliminated to render them inoperable. By Twelfth Air Force calculations, such complete blockage of a medium-sized marshaling yard required 425 tons of bombs for a four- to eight-hour blockage versus 196 tons for a bridge blockage, which might take longer to repair.

Additionally, the report noted that the yards were not vitally important to the Germans because they could repair a single line and use through trains direct from Germany to the front to transport supplies without having to transfer cargo in marshaling yards.

Lastly, destruction of marshaling yards destroyed rolling stock that could be useful to support the Allied advance once the Gustav Line had been breached. This failure to assess the resiliency of the German/Italian rail system was a major intelligence error.

Counting their own considerable railroad assets and the captured rolling stock from conquered countries, the Germans at the beginning of 1944 had thousands of locomotives and a million boxcars available. The capability of the Germans to run trains on one-way trips direct from Germany to southern Italy largely negated the critical nature of marshaling yards in their ability to support their forces in Italy.

Shortly after Strangle began, General Eaker noted that attacks on bridges seemed to be more effective than those on rail yards. Based on operational reports, MAAF intelligence officers found that damage done to bridges was harder and took longer to repair than damage done to rail lines. As a result, Eaker shifted the emphasis, particularly for medium bombers and fighters, more and more toward bridges.

In fact, the fighter bomber came to be seen as the weapon of choice for bridges. It could

National Archives

Before and after photos of the destruction of the small Italian railway town of Roccasecca, northwest of Monte Cassino. When Allied bombs hit and detonated a German munitions train on a siding, the town was virtually obliterated. Note the large holes in the earth caused by exploding munitions.

fly in weather that grounded the medium bombers, which needed high ceilings to acquire the target and drop their payloads from a horizontal delivery. From a high-level, horizontal delivery, at best only one bomb per bomber had a chance of hitting a target as narrow as a bridge or road due to "ripple release."

Fighter bombers utilizing dive bombing deliveries came to average one bridge destroyed for every 19 sorties versus 31 sorties for the same effect from medium bombers. This shift to bridge busting was not only a more efficient use of sorties and bombs but, due to the mountainous topography of Italy, dive bombing was the only reliable delivery for small point targets such as bridges.

An intelligence summary distributed to fighter bomber units at the start of Strangle stated that 1,000-pound bombs were the preferred weapon against bridges to ensure sufficient structural damage to bridge abutments and supporting piers.

Medium bombers were incapable of dive bombing, and the P-40, A-36 (P-51A), and P-39 were mediocre dive bombers at best, as the P-39 and P-40 could not carry a 1,000-pound bomb and the A-36 had severe range restrictions carrying just one.

The real increase in effectiveness of the interdiction campaign can be traced to the introduction of significant numbers of Republic P-47 Thunderbolts in theater in December 1943. The P-47 was ideally suited to dive bombing. Heavily armed, stable in a dive, and sporting a huge radial engine that protected a pilot from ground fire while carrying up to 2,500 pounds of bombs, the P-47 bore the brunt of the bridge-busting missions against targets south of Florence.

With the shift of targeting emphasis from marshaling yards to bridges, the focus of the operation changed from an interdiction zone belt running from the east to the west coast between Florence and Rome to the area south of Rome to allow for fighter bombers to carry heavier payloads and loiter longer in search of targets from their bases in southern Italy. This also allowed a concentration of photoreconnaissance assets and more frequent coverage of all roads and railroads.

The MAAF, by the spring of 1944, had photo mosaics covering the entire Italian peninsula that highlighted roads, marshaling yards, bridges, ammo dumps, troop concentrations, and gun positions. The three reconnaissance groups allowed MAAF to photograph each possible target every 72 hours, weather permitting.

While no doubt a valuable tool, the MAAF came to overrely on photo intelligence. While photos appear to give unmistakable information, the Germans were great practitioners of deception. One technique was the "night operational bridge." The Germans would repair a bridge, leaving one span that was visible to photo reconnaissance as a cut bridge. At night, a temporary span would be erected for vehicle or rail movement and then the span would be removed before daylight.

Likewise, the Germans used pontoon bridges that were hidden during the day-

Both: National Archives

light to span rivers at night and, when the Po River bridges were all cut in the spring of 1945, the Germans used pipelines to carry their petroleum products across the river. As determined as the Allied effort was to interdict supplies, bad weather and the cover of night greatly reduced its effectiveness.

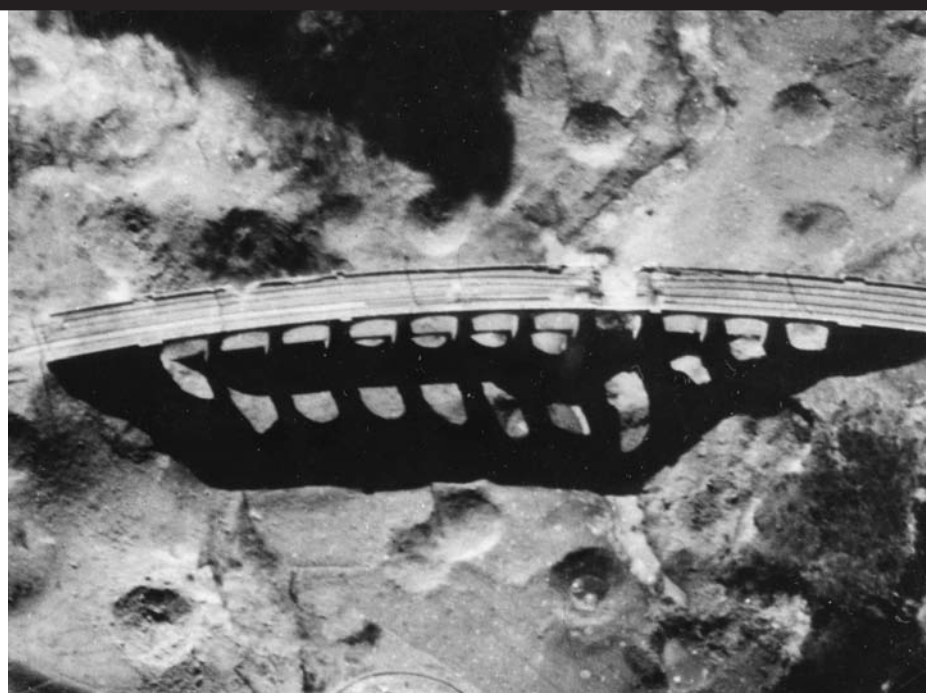
As the proposed start date for the 1944 spring offensive on the Gustav Line approached, it became apparent to Strangle's most ardent proponent that the interdiction campaign was not achieving its objective of forcing the Germans to withdraw. General Eaker's deputy, RAF Air Marshal John Slessor, noted his concern in mid-April that the German supply situation had not become desperate due to "frugal" German living conditions, their ingenuity at making adaptations in their supply system, and poor flying weather.

While it was becoming apparent that Strangle's objectives would not be met, MAAF did not have a Plan B for use of its resources. It continued to pursue the air interdiction countersupply strategy of Strangle by shifting the focus of its air attacks closer to the Gustav Line, hoping that, once the ground campaign began and the enemy's supply requirements increased, the air interdiction would at last realize its goal.

With confidence that airpower had achieved its objective of making the Germans' hold on the Gustav Line untenable, General Harold Alexander ordered Operation Diadem to commence on May 11, 1944.

As a collateral effect of Strangle's interdiction campaign, air power had effectively isolated the German Army from its major source of supplies, and the constant of attrition of vehicles, bridges, and roads drastically hindered Kesselring's ability to move his forces laterally to reinforce weak areas and to close breakthroughs.

Lack of lateral mobility coupled with an Allied deception campaign that threatened an amphibious landing north of Rome prevented Kesselring from shifting forces to confront Allied penetrations and to bring up his limited strategic reserve from the vicinity of Rome.



ABOVE: Bomb damage to the South Viaduct at Bucine, Italy, after several attacks by B-26s of the 442nd Bomb Squadron, 320th Bomb Group, Fifteenth Air Force, in April 1944. Bomb craters surround the bridge. BELOW: Repeated air attacks by the Twelfth Air Force brought down this bridge over the Po River at Borgoforte. The Germans either quickly repaired bridges or installed temporary pontoon bridges to keep troops and supplies moving.

With Hitler's orders to stand his ground, Kesselring's options to stem the Allied assaulton and penetration of the Gustav Line were limited. The stress of ground combat on the German Army finally yielded evidence of the effectiveness of the air campaign on its combat capacity.

While the U.S. Army's history notes that the collapse of the German right flank on the Tyrrhenian Sea was precipitated by the overwhelming firepower of American artillery, the MAAF saw the retreat of German troops as a delayed reaction to the effectiveness of

Strangle.

Regardless of the difference of opinion as to what arm was responsible for finally rupturing the Gustav Line, the effects of the air interdiction campaign were unmistakable. The rear of Army Group C was a shambles. Beyond the range of artillery, the Twelfth Air Force had chewed up roads, dropped bridges, destroyed vehicle and animal transport forced to travel in daylight, and eliminated railroads as viable transportation south of Rome.

Faced with multiple ruptures of his main defensive line, Kesselring was finally forced to withdraw. Forced into the open and limited in mobility, the retreat of his two armies turned into a near rout. From the abandonment of the Gustav Line to the Rimini-Pisa line, codenamed Gothic, 200 miles to the north, Kesselring lost 70,000 men—30 percent of his forces. Forced from dug-in positions and slowed by the loss of motor transport and interdicted lines of communication, his forces were prey for Allied fighter bomber attacks.

On the surface, it would appear that the dislodgement of Army Group C from the Gustav Line and its 200-mile retreat to the Gothic Line would have been a disaster for the Germans. With complete air superiority, longer periods of daylight, better weather, and an enemy in the open, Alexander should have been able to destroy Kesselring easily.

However, with the shift of divisions to Operation Anvil-Dragoon—the Allies' invasion of southern France in August 1944—coupled with four new German divisions assigned to Kesselring, the effect on the Italian campaign was disastrous. The pursuit of a routed enemy was essentially called off.

This gift from the Allies allowed Kesselring to retreat to the Gothic Line and, in an identical fashion, sit out the winter of 1944-1945 entrenched in fortified mountainous terrain and stalemate the Allied advance. While Kesselring lost a significant portion of his troops on the retreat northward, he was able to keep his understrength formations together as effective fighting units and delay a desultory Allied pursuit.

Part of the reason for the less than vigorous pursuit of the retreating Wehrmacht was the Germans' excellent use of demolitions and mines to slow the Allies. Additionally, Alexander, like all British senior generals, clearly remembered the slaughter of the Great War and the psychological impact it had on the British public. As a result, British Army units moved slower and with more caution than did American units. They also emphasized firepower to the maximum extent to degrade enemy formations rather than direct combat.

Mark Clark was also cautious in pursuit. Following his single-minded obsession with capturing Rome, the rest of the campaign was almost anticlimactic for him.

Following Diadem and the breakthrough of the Gustav Line, the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) informed Alexander that support for Operation Anvil-Dragoon would become the priority for the Mediterranean Theater, and assets to support the operation would come at the expense of Alexander's forces. By the end of June 1944, SHAEF stripped Alexander of three U.S. and two French divisions along with six P-47 fighter groups. In July, an additional seven divisions were removed from Italy.

U.S. Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall had agreed with SHAEF's strategy of shifting the emphasis in the Mediterranean Theater from Italy to southern France, and concurred with stripping Clark of his best divisions. Additionally, until the Americans could repair the port at Livorno to supply the Allies' push north, logistical problems caused by having to move supplies from Naples over 200 miles of broken roads and cut rail lines necessitated the Allied advance's slowdown.

Why was Strangle not an overwhelming success?

First, faulty intelligence. Allied intelligence misjudged the availability and redundancy of the German rail system. With 63,000 locomotives and over a million boxcars, the Germans had the luxury of sending their trains on one-way trips to the front and obviate the need to run train traffic in two directions. Also, intelligence officers and Allied planners had a preset idea of the effectiveness of an air interdiction campaign, and their reliance on 8x10 black-and-white photographs of bomb damage did nothing to dissuade them.

Second, technology. By 1944, the U.S. Army Air Forces constituted the largest and most technologically advanced air force in the world. Barring the relative handful of German jet and rocket fighters, the bulk of the USAAF was superior qualitatively and quantitatively to any air force, especially with respect to bombers.

One key qualitative advantage was the Norden bombsight on heavy and some medium bombers. So secret was the Norden that it was taken from a vault before each mission and returned afterward; bombardiers took an oath to protect the bombsight from falling into enemy hands in the event of a forced landing.

Despite the fact that the Norden bombsight was the most accurate in the world, it was not as accurate as advertised. The Norden was a primitive analog computer bombsight that took inputs of the aircraft's altitude, winds aloft, true airspeed, and type of bomb carried (for ballistic calculations) to compute drift due to winds and air density and to predict a release point that allowed a bombardier to "put a bomb in a pickle barrel from 20,000 feet." In practice, Norden-guided bombing was much less precise.

In October 1943, the Eighth Air Force launched 250 bombers against the ball bearing works at Schweinfurt, Germany, where only 10 percent of the bombs landed within 500 feet of their aiming point. While this accuracy may have been adequate for area targets, Norden-equipped B-26s took over 40 sorties—with each aircraft dropping three bombs—to hit a single bridge during Operation Strangle.

For fighter bombers such as the P-47, the problem was more low tech. A dive bomb delivery required the pilot to set his gunsight for the proper amount of "mils" (i.e., milliradians of depression of the sight from level) based on the ballistics of the bomb, the dive angle, and release altitude.

The pilot had to visually acquire the tar-

Both: National Archives

ABOVE: P-47 Thunderbolt fighter bombers with belly fuel tanks en route to an attack in Italy's Northern Apennine Mountains, April 1945. OPPOSITE: P-47s, escorting a B-25 with a damaged engine returning from a bombing mission, pass over a destroyed bridge. The scores of bomb craters dramatically demonstrate how difficult it was to hit and destroy such a small target.

get, roll into his dive, and set his gunsight reticle the proper distance short of the target. As he approached the target in a dive, the gunsight moved closer to the estimated release point. The pilot applied "combat offset" for the estimated winds and rechecked his dive angle. For the sight picture to be valid, the g forces on his aircraft during the dive had to be the cosine of the dive angle.

For example, a 45-degree dive bomb delivery required 0.707 gs to be maintained. This was all done through experience and seat-of-the-pants sensation. At release altitude, the gunsight needed to be offset the proper amount into the wind, and the bomb was released. If everything was perfect, a direct hit was scored, but that was seldom the case.

While level bombers attacked bridges 90 degrees perpendicular to their long span to have a better chance of getting a hit from their string of bombs, the fighter bomber pilot attacked along the longitudinal axis of the bridge with his single bomb since most dive bomb errors are long or short. Since single-span bridges were usually less than 30 feet wide, misses were frequent and collateral bomb damage was minimal.

Third, weather. Adverse weather had a major impact on the operation. During the March-May 1944 period of Operation Strangle, approximately 45 percent of medium bomber sorties and 39 percent of fighter bomber sorties were noneffective due to weather. These were sorties that were either cancelled due to weather below minimums for takeoff or clouds obscuring the primary and alternate targets.

No aircraft involved in Strangle possessed even rudimentary radar bombing capability such as the Eighth Air Force and RAF Bomber Command were using in northern Europe. Ordnance could only be expended on targets that were visually acquired. This limitation was also a factor at night. General Eaker complained that tactical air forces were never allocated sufficient quantities of flares for night bombing, and as a result night bombing attacks were infrequent and of little value. A daily operational summary for April 25, 1944, reported that a night attack by eight RAF Bostons (USAAF A-20 twin-engine light bomber) and 36 B-26s on the road complex and railroad bridge at Subiaco (southeast of Rome) resulted in no roads obstructed, no hits on the bridge, and only "superficial" damage to one road due to a near miss.

These limitations in all-weather attack capability were significant factors in hampering the success of the operation. During the spring in northern Europe, the lengthening days still provide 11 hours of darkness per night. This, coupled with frequent bad weather during the day, allowed the Germans a sanctuary to repair road and bridge cuts and operate their motor transport in daylight.

Allied intelligence estimated that a direct hit on a rail line by a 1,000-pound bomb resulted in a crater 16 feet wide and five feet deep—a crater that took the enemy only four to six hours to repair. Similar to the analogy of a man shoveling sand, he must shovel faster than the rate of sand filling the hole in to make progress. Aircraft, crews, and munitions were available for the Allied interdiction task, but what was not available were sufficient favorable weather conditions to disrupt enemy supply routes faster than the Germans could make repairs to maintain a minimal resupply capability.

Fourth, assessment. Operation Strangle's results were a mixed bag of opinions. The overall Allied commander in the Mediterranean, Field Marshal Alexander, gave tepid praise to the operation as "aiding" the breakthrough of his armies from the Gustav Line. General Clark, frustrated by dogged German resistance to his drive on Rome, flatly declared all air interdiction, including Strangle, "a flop."

The commander of Strangle, General Eaker, was enthusiastic in his praise for his commanders and aircrews that "forced the withdrawal" of German forces along the Gustav Line. The commander of Army Group C, Albert Kesselring, complimented the Allied air effort but claimed his "supply situation was satisfactory" during the Italian campaign. The two supreme commanders, Allied and German, probably had the best view and most accurate overall assessment of the March to May 1944 period of Strangle.

Not surprisingly, the official history of the U.S. Army Air Forces overstated that "Operation Strangle completely stopped rail traffic south of Rome." In addition, the history lists tremendous amounts of railroad rolling stock destroyed and vehicles damaged and destroyed on highways. Although the official history documents the damage done by Strangle, it does not measure its effectiveness against its objective: to force the Germans to cease military operations due to lack of supplies.

Neither does the official history give an insight into the effect of the interdiction campaign on its intended victim, the German Army. It intimates that it completely stopped all rail traffic south of Rome and thereby cut off all supplies to Kesselring's forces. The official history focuses on hard numbers: sorties flown, tonnage of bombs dropped, rolling stock destroyed, bridges destroyed, enemy aircraft shot down, and paints a one-sided picture of the operation. It is more of a numerical summary of the effort expended than an in-depth analysis of Strangle's effectiveness.

Did Strangle change German defensive tactics or shorten the war in Italy? It could have but did not due the previous errors discussed, an increase in German reinforcements, and an overcautious Allied ground strategy.

In assessing the impact of Strangle and the entire war in Italy, one overriding factor to be considered is that the war in Italy was considered by both sides to be a sideshow to the decisive campaigns on the Eastern and Western Fronts. There was no "On to Berlin" mood for the Allies, and the German troops there were fighting far from home on foreign soil.

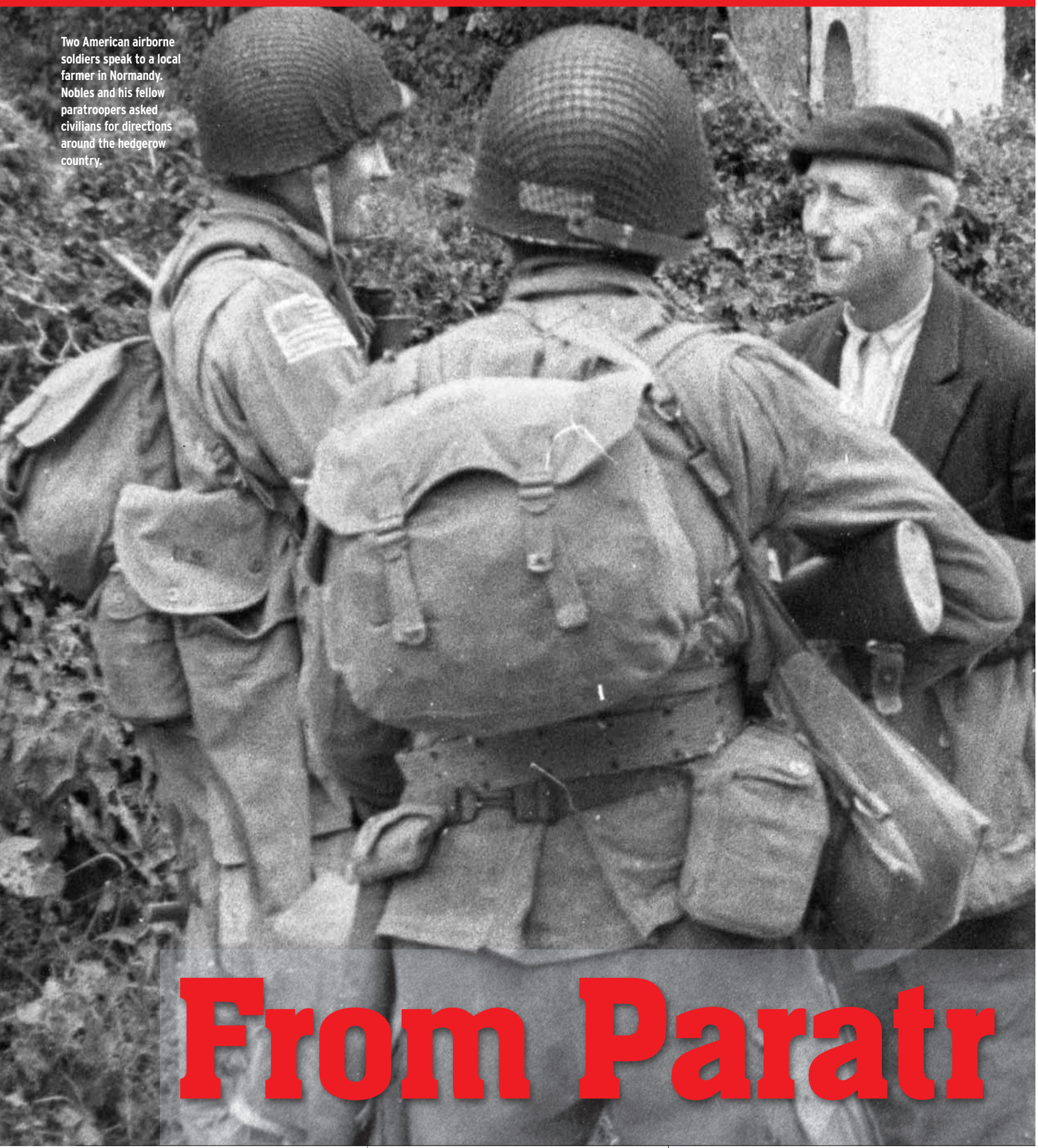
The Allied forces in Italy also became a dumping ground of sorts for divisions that other theater commanders did not want. Some of these units fought well, such as the U.S. 10th Mountain Division. The 10th was assigned to Italy where its logistical requirement for its hundreds of mules proved to be an extra strain on quartermasters.

Likewise, the Nisei 100th Regimental Combat Team, composed of Japanese Americans, distinguished itself in battle. Other units such as the Brazilian Expeditionary Force, the Jewish Hebron Brigade, Canadian, South African, New Zealand, Royalist Italian, Rhodesian, Polish, Indian, Gurhka, and the African American 92nd Division troops added to the friction of command of such a cross-cultural and polyglot group.

Strangle did not reach its ultimate objective of starving the Germans of support during their occupation of the Gustav Line, due in part to the Allied ground forces not pressuring Kesselring into expending his consumables. Similarly, the slow pursuit of the German armies by Alexander relieved the pressure of an enemy nipping at his heels and allowed Kesselring precious time to conduct an orderly withdrawal.

The Allies implemented a replay of Strangle in August and September 1944 in an attempt to cut off Kesselring's forces from resupply prior to his reaching the Gothic Line. This interdiction operation was codenamed Mallory Major, and its

Continued on page 98



Two American airborne soldiers speak to a local farmer in Normandy. Nobles and his fellow paratroopers asked civilians for directions around the hedgerow country.

From Paratr

National Archives

ooper to POW

BY KEVIN M. HYMEL

Paratrooper Bob Nobles fought for a week in Normandy with the 82nd Airborne Division until captured by the Germans. Then his new war began.

Courtesy Bob Nobles

Paratrooper Bob Nobles jumped into Normandy, France, on D-Day and fought for six days before the Germans captured him. Portrait of Bob in 1943.

"THE LIEUTENANT SAID FOR EVERYONE TO LAY YOUR arms down," a fellow paratrooper told Pfc. Bob Nobles, who had been fighting for six grueling days in the hedgerows following his unit's jump into Normandy.

Nobles and his comrades of Company C, 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division, were surrounded by Germans. After a short firefight, their lieutenant put out the word and Nobles, an elite warrior with one of the most storied units of World War II, was now a prisoner of war.

Back in early December 1941, 21-year-old Nobles was eating dinner at his sister's house in Ithaca, New York, when he learned the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor. "I knew it was coming," he explained. He had already registered for the draft and lost his job at an adding machine company that was converting to make war materials. He grew up in a family of six, with three older siblings and two younger. He had a newspaper route to help his family's finances, but it was not enough. "Every time the rent came due, we moved," he recalled.

When Nobles' draft notice arrived, he and his best friend headed to Fort Niagara, New York, for induction, leaving behind Nobles' girlfriend, Bette Ridley, whom he had been dating for the past five years. He signed up for the paratroopers, having seen the 1941 movie *Parachute Battalion* starring Robert Preston and thinking, "That looks like fun." His friend, however, thought the paratroopers were too dangerous. Nobles' friend opted for the Air Corps and later died in a plane crash at Fort Bragg.

Nobles did his basic training at Camp Blanding, about 50 miles southwest of Jacksonville, Florida, where he was assigned to Company C of the newly formed 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment, under the command of Lt. Col. Roy E. Lindquist; out of 4,500 men who originally joined the unit only 2,300 would pass the airborne requirements. The maximum age limit for airborne recruits at that time was 32, resulting in a lot of the older soldiers washing out.

Nobles enjoyed the camaraderie and work schedule of the camp, remembering it as "kinda like college." The 508th, also later known as the Red Devils, became part of Maj. Gen. Mattew B. Ridgway's 82nd Airborne Division.

The training introduced Nobles to the M-1 Garand rifle, of which he took particular care; he developed the habit of cleaning it whenever possible. Whenever he waded through a stream, he would strip it down and clean and oil the parts. "Inspectors didn't have to check it," Nobles said proudly.

After basic training at Blanding, it was off to Fort Benning, Georgia, to learn to be a paratrooper. To qualify for silver wings on his chest, Nobles had to make five jumps from a Douglas C-47 Skytrain.

For the first jump, the men had to pack their own chutes. "Boy, were we careful,"

recalled Nobles. "By the fifth jump we just threw them together." On his first jump, he and his fellow paratroopers missed the landing field. The second jump was harder; Nobles was the first man out the door and could see how high he was. "Looking down at the ground, that was scary," he admitted. But the drop went beautifully. "We were jumping from 700 feet. It was nice and quiet."

The fourth jump was a real challenge. As Nobles' plane approached the drop zone, one paratrooper in the middle of the line (also called a stick) froze and refused to jump. The plane circled over the drop zone a second time and a third time, but still the man refused. As the rest of the men in the plane became nervous from the pent-up anxiety and the false jumps, some began vomiting. As the smell permeated the cabin, others succumbed.

By the time the plane reached the drop zone for a fourth pass, everyone was throwing up. "That stuff was running down on the floor," remembered Nobles, "and that was not a good feeling." The man finally jumped, followed immediately by the whole stick. "We were anxious to get out of the plane." Luckily, the fifth jump went off without a hitch.

Now fully parachute qualified, Nobles and the rest of his regiment were sent to Camp Mackall in North Carolina for 13 weeks of intense unit training. Anyone who fell out of a daily exercise had to remain in the camp and salute those who made it. When an especially cruel sergeant fell out on the last day of a 33-day exercise, the men cheered. "It lifted everyone's spirits," said Nobles.

It was at Camp Mackall that Bette finally got to see her longtime boyfriend again. She visited with Nobles' friend Charlie Howe's girlfriend. With three-day passes, the two couples headed off to Charlotte and checked into separate rooms at a local hotel. They were enjoying each other's company when military policemen knocked on the door. "They were protecting us from hookers," recalled Nobles.

After the weekend, the two girlfriends stayed in nearby Hamilton and came to the post to watch the parachutists in their airdrops. On one jump, Nobles told Bette which plane he would be in and even dropped a roll of toilet paper out the door before he jumped so that the women would know where he and Howe were landing. But the two women, as paratroopers dropped around their car, forgot to count the planes and missed Nobles' paper streamer.

Both: Courtesy Bob Nobles

ABOVE: Nobles shown fully equipped for a parachute jump during training with the 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment at Camp Mackall, North Carolina. Bette came to see some of his jumps. TOP: Nobles married Bette Ridley on April 25, 1943, while he trained at Fort Mackall, North Carolina.

Nevertheless, Nobles and Howe visited their girlfriends at night, and since Howe had a car they could be back on base in time for reveille.

On Easter Sunday, April 25, 1943, Nobles and Howe married their girlfriends in a double wedding ceremony. After a quick honeymoon, they returned to their regiment, which soon shipped out to Cheraw, South Carolina, for large-scale war games, followed in August with more war games in Tennessee.

On December 19, the well-trained and newly married Nobles headed next to Camp Shanks, near Orangeburg, New York, with the rest of the 508th's 1st Battalion. Once billeted, the men were given final examinations and inoculated for typhus and other diseases. Three days later, they boarded the U.S. Army transport *James Parker* and headed to sea.

Would they be headed to the Mediterranean, where elements of the 82nd Airborne were fighting in Italy, or head south through the Panama Canal, destined for the islands of the Pacific? Would they dock in England and await the invasion of France? If their battalion commander, Lt. Col. Herbert Batcheller, or company commander, Captain Walter Silvers, knew, they weren't talking.

Until they were at sea, the Army did not divulge their destination for security reasons. While sailing east across the Atlantic, the men learned their destination was Northern Ireland and that they eventually would be part of the invasion of France. "We arrived in the snow," recalled Nobles.

From there, the regiment transferred by train and ship to Wollaton Park near Nottingham, England. The devil-may-care Americans were a breath of fresh air for the war-weary British. "We had a motto of 'Live today, die tomorrow,'" said Nobles. "The women loved it."

Wollaton Park is a large country estate that was created in the 16th century. Wollaton Hall, the main manor house, which today is a museum, bears a vague resemblance to the sumptuous home in the PBS series *Downton Abbey.* The grounds surrounding

National Archives

A paratrooper at Fort Benning, Georgia, makes a practice jump from a C-47 Skytrain. Nobles once dropped a roll of toilet paper before he jumped so Bette could identify him.

the manor house were converted into an Army camp.

Another 508th paratrooper noted, "Nottingham was a modern city with theaters, excellent restaurants, and fine public buildings. The population was about 250,000. It was more than we expected or could have possibly hoped for. [Our camp was in] a gorgeous location with manicured greens and lots of trees.... Although we were living in tents, it wasn't primitive. All the floors were paved with concrete stepping stones and each tent contained a very suitable heat-stove set in its center."

While Nobles and his comrades trained for the airborne drop into France, the two American airborne divisions in England, the veteran 82nd and green 101st, were going through changes. Originally, both were composed of two parachute infantry regiments and a glider regiment, but a third parachute regiment was added to each for Normandy.

Ridgway's 82nd had proven itself in heavy fighting in Sicily and Italy with the 505th and 504th Parachute Infantry Regiments. But, while the 505th reached Ireland in December, the 504th remained in Italy and did not return to England until April, a scant two months before June 6, 1944—D-Day. With its numbers reduced by combat and the men exhausted, the 504th would sit out D-Day, replaced by Colonel George V. Millett Jr.'s 507th and Colonel Lindquist's 508th.

The Allies planned to drop the 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions behind Utah Beach, on the western flank of the Normandy invasion. Both divisions would hold bridges, causeways, river locks, towns, and road intersections to support the American 4th Infantry Division's amphibious assault.

Lindquist's 508th would be dropped west of the Merderet River on the 82nd's far west sector. Its mission: protect bridges over the Douve and Merderet Rivers and the road intersections near the towns of Brienville and Beuzeville-la-Bastille, blocking the Germans from pushing the 4th Infantry back into the English Channel. Nobles' company would be protecting a road intersection.

Now it was a matter of waiting. Physical conditioning was stepped up, and the practice jumps ended. No one was told when the operation would start or where it would take place. Most of the soldiers correctly guessed it would be in northern France, but that's all they knew. At the end of May, the parachute divisions were trucked from their encampments and locked into tightly guarded airfields where row after row of C-47s and gliders were parked. The 508th's 1st and 3rd Battalions were taken to RAF Station Folkingham, 31 miles southeast of Nottingham. There, paratroopers studied detailed maps, aerial photos, and sand tables showing villages, coastlines, rivers, and roads, but there were no identifying names on any of the information.

A couple of days before Operation Overlord was scheduled to begin, a powerful storm was predicted to blow across Britain and the English Channel. The weather prediction was frightening enough to cause General Dwight D. Eisenhower and SHAEF to postpone the start of the invasion for 24 hours; it was reset for the early morning hours of June 6, and the paratroopers would lead the way.

D-Day arrived. In the late-night darkness of June 5, after receiving doughnuts and

coffee from Red Cross Doughnut Dollies at RAF Station Folkingham, Nobles and the rest of the men in the 508th's 1st and 3rd Battalions strapped on their gear and weapons; Nobles also packed four letters from Bette. The men in Nobles' stick then loaded onto a C-47 that belonged to the Ninth Air Force's 313th Troop Carrier Group and roared off the tarmac shortly before midnight, heading for Normandy along with hundreds of other planes.

The flight over the English Channel was uneventful. "We were all thinking," Nobles said. A lieutenant walked the aisle, talking to everyone, trying to both cheer the men up and calm them down, but Nobles did not appreciate it. "I almost told him to sit down."

When the red light by the fuselage door lit up the cabin shortly after midnight, Nobles and his 16-man stick stood up and hooked their static lines to the anchor cable running the length of the cabin and checked the preceding man's equipment. Then the red light went off, replaced by a green one, and the men charged out the door. Nobles could see tracers coming up and trees below him, but he did not have time to take it all in. "By the time my chute opened up, I was on the ground," he said.

Nobles landed in a farmer's field all alone and immediately unhooked himself from his parachute. He then removed the reserve chute on his chest, which was blocking him from his rifle. He threw away his gas mask, correctly thinking he would never need it. Relieved of this equipment, he took off on foot until he came across another paratrooper. "Don't shoot! Don't shoot!" shouted the man. "I'm from Kokomo, Indiana! I forgot the password!" Nobles just laughed at the panicked soldier.

Nobles had no idea where he was, but he was not alone. Most of the 508th paratroopers had missed their drop zone because the unit's pathfinders had run into trouble. Pathfinders were specially trained paratroopers who jumped prior to the bulk of the unit to set up guiding lights and Eureka transponders that communicated with the aircraft-mounted Rebecca airborne transceiver sets that told the pilots carrying the follow-on troops when and where to drop them.

But the 508th's pathfinders had jumped into the midst of the German 91st Infantry (Air-Landing) Division and took heavy casualties. The surviving pathfinders managed to set up only two signal lights and a single Eureka. As a result, the regiment—like virtually every other airborne unit—was wildly misdropped; Nobles and his stick landed 10 miles from their designated drop zone.

More disaster befell the 1st Battalion. The 33-year-old commander, Lt. Col. Herbert Batcheller, West Point Class of 1935, was killed by a German machine gunner on June 6 or 7; a few days later, command of the battalion passed to Major Shields Warren, the unit's executive officer.

Warren said later, "I heard by word of mouth on [June 9 or 10] that Lt. Col. Herbert Batcheller's body and that of his radio operator had been found together next to a hedgerow. Apparently he had absorbed a 30-40 round MG 42 burst in the chest.... To the best of my knowledge, no one in the 508th saw Herb Batcheller or his radio operator alive after the drop."

The handful of men with Nobles gathered themselves and headed off in search of the intersection, stopping to cut telephone wires and skirmishing with German infantry along the way. Nobles' campaign started off ingloriously. "I stumbled into a pit used for a bathroom," he recalled. When asked if there were any members of the 101st Airborne intermixed with Nobles' group of about 20, he recalled, "There may have been one or two here or there."

Late on the afternoon of D-Day, as the sun began to set, C-47s flew over Nobles' head, releasing gliders. "We didn't see them land," he said. They landed too far away, behind numerous hedgerows. But that was it for Allied air cover. "Before we left England, someone told me, 'There are gonna be planes above you, on your sides, everywhere.'" Where were all the planes? Nobles never saw any Allied air cover the entire

National Archives

Allied bombers raided the Trappes Marshalling Yard in Paris, while Nobles and his fellow prisoners of war remained locked in a train car.

National Archives

Paratroopers of the 82nd Airborne Division take a break during the fighting in Normandy. Nobles and his comrades fought for six straight days in the hedgerows.

time he fought in Normandy.

For six days, Nobles and his group roamed the hedgerows looking for the road intersection they were supposed to hold. At one point he tried to climb a steep, nine-foot-high hedgerow while a paratrooper holding a bayoneted rifle stood behind him, ready to follow. But Nobles slid back and nicked his buttocks on the bayonet.

To hide from the Germans, the paratroopers moved at night and slept during the day. They asked local French farmers where their intersection might be, but the language barrier made communicating difficult. "One guy spoke Latin and conversed with the French," Nobles recalled, but it did not help. The men never found their intersection, and they never came across any other Americans—only some French farmers burying dead paratroopers. The Americans did manage to capture a few Germans.

The whole time, though, Nobles never thought about the amphibious forces on Utah Beach—the 4th Infantry Division. All he knew was, "If the invasion on the beaches failed, we were on our own."

At first Nobles and his lost comrades survived on K-rations, which no one liked, except for the chocolate D-Bars. Once the food ran out, they killed a cow and ate it. The men drank from streams and accepted food from local farmers, but it was never enough. "We were looking for crumbs," recalled Nobles. Whenever the men had free time, they picked lice off their bodies and cracked them between their fingernails. "Our pastime," Nobles called it.

On June 11, Nobles and his group clashed with a larger enemy force. He spied a group of Germans walking across a field, raised his trusted M-1 Garand, and aimed at a soldier. "I fired, and he fell," he said, simply. The paratroopers managed to nab a few prisoners during the skirmish.

Soon thereafter, a German "potato-masher" grenade exploded in the tree above Nobles, but he escaped harm. The Germans attacked and the Americans pulled back to a farmhouse. With the Merderet River to their backs, they could not retire any farther.

While the Americans put their German prisoners into the farmhouse, one American climbed into a wine barrel and fired on the encircling enemy. Things looked bad for the Americans. "We were surrounded," said Nobles.

Nobles was lying on the ground next to the farmhouse when a German shell screeched overhead and smashed into the structure. "It was a hell of a scary sound," he recalled. A few minutes later a paratrooper told him the lieutenant had ordered everyone to lay down his arms. The fight was over.

The Germans emerged and began disarming the Americans. Nobles thought they looked odd. "They looked like gypsies," he said. "They didn't have usual uniforms." An English-speaking German officer oversaw the surrender. One German took Nobles' rifle while another took his watch. Angry about the robbery, Nobles tapped the officer on the shoulder and told him what happened. The officer made the man give back the watch.

It was dark once the Germans finished organizing the Americans into ranks and marched them to some waiting trucks. The next day as the trucks headed into the interior of France, American P-47 Thunderbolt fighters swooped down on the caravan. Some of the men dove into a roadside ditch while others remained in the trucks as the planes opened fire.

"Those .50-calibers made some sound," recalled Nobles. "We didn't know if they were trying to help us get away from the Germans." Unfortunately, the planes killed some of the American POWs.

The trucks arrived at the city of Alençon, where the Germans put Nobles to work carrying burn victims into a hospital operating room. He and his comrades were then placed in a boxcar and shipped to Paris by rail. There, as the train waited at a station, American planes bombed the rail yard. The German guards scrambled to escape, leaving the prisoners in their locked car. "We could hear them [the bombs] going off," recalled Nobles. "We didn't know if the car was marked as POW, but they didn't hit us."

After the raid, the train continued its journey. For bathroom facilities, the Germans set a bucket in the middle of the boxcar, but there were too many prisoners for it. Nobles spent most of the trip looking at the countryside through a small window

National Archives

ABOVE: American, British, Canadian, and French POWs await liberation in a German POW camp in Faulkenau, Czechoslovakia. OPPOSITE: Miners chip away at coal in the warm temperatures of a mine. Nobles spent nine months working in a coal mine as a POW.

until someone urinated through it. "It got pretty smelly in there," he remembered.

The train crossed the border into Germany and, after several days, arrived at Oflaf XIII-B, a POW camp in Hammelburg. German civilians lined the way as the men dismounted from their car and marched into the camp. German men with missing limbs stared at them with hatred in their eyes. "Good thing they didn't have guns," said Nobles.

The camp contained British, Polish, and Russian prisoners and boasted a library and a swimming pool. The POWs even formed soccer teams, but Nobles never got a chance to enjoy the amenities or the camaraderie of sports as he and his comrades were soon transferred to a coal mine in the Sudetenland area of Czechoslovakia.

For the next nine months, Nobles toiled in the mine with his fellow POWs and Czech civilian prisoners. The civilians would drill holes in the coal veins and then blast them with explosives. The POWs then shoveled the loose coal into rail cars.

The men had to walk an hour back and forth from their barracks to the mines, which were lit only by small lamps. But the men could escape work by covering the lamp with a cloth, leaving the tunnels in complete darkness. "If you wanted to goof off," explained Nobles, "[you could] go into a tunnel and no one could find you."

The work was dirty and dangerous, both because of its nature and the management. The coal was stored in underground rooms with 12-foot-high ceilings. "You could hear the creaking of the coal," Nobles recalled of the unsteady room.

One paratrooper from Nobles' company was killed when a huge chunk of coal broke off the mine's ceiling and crushed him. When the other prisoners found out, they refused to work and remained in their barracks until a guard walked in and shot one of the protesters as he lay in his bunk. The men then went back to work.

In another incident, a prisoner tried to escape, but the Germans shot him dead. As an example to the other prisoners, they laid out his body in the camp yard.

Nobles' POW number was 743, which he had to learn in German for roll calls. Once,

when the guards read off numbers to assign men to a double shift, Nobles did not answer, not wanting to return to the mine. When they realized what he had done, they sent him below for 18 hours. It was enough to teach him a lesson. "So I started doing what I was supposed to do," he explained.

Nobles worked with Czech civilian prisoners, some of whom came from their homes every day. One Czech wore good clothes, but once in the mine he changed into his mining clothes and sent his good clothes up on a pulley. When the shift ended, his clothes were lowered back down, and he would shower and change. Nobles eventually made friends with the Czech, who would sometimes bring him food from home. "He'd bring an apple and I'd eat it, seeds and all," said Nobles.

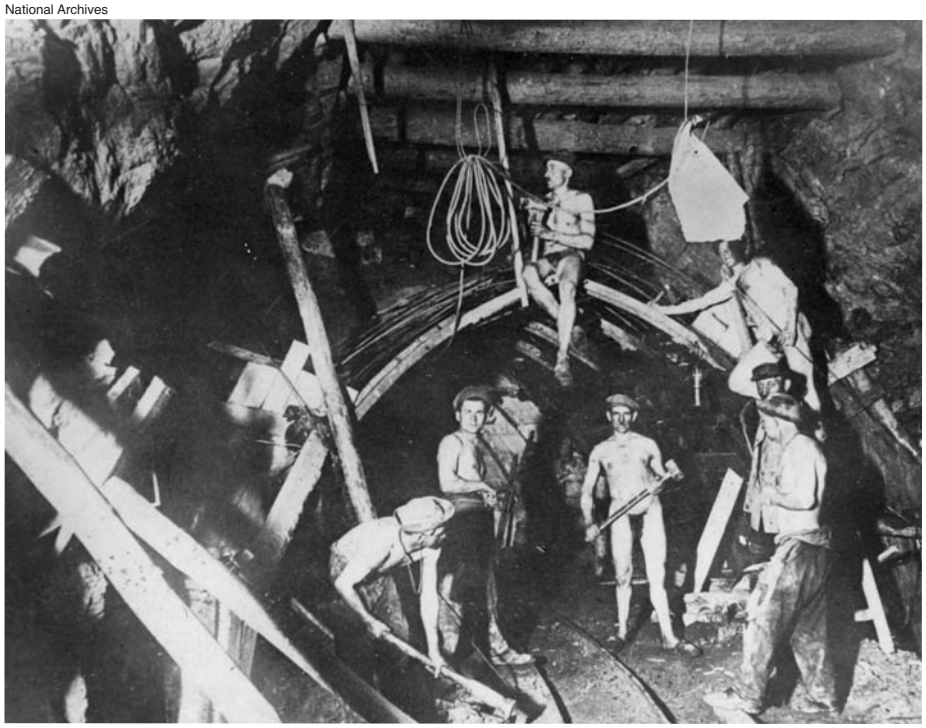
He needed all the nourishment he could get. The daily meal was a single bowl of thin soup with, if he were lucky, a piece of rotten meat in it. On rare occasions, round bread loaves—often made with sawdust—were distributed to the prisoners, one loaf for every eight men. Nobles would cut it into eight slices and hand each slice to a fellow prisoner who stood with his back to him and called out names. "That way if someone got a piece bigger than another [prisoner's], no one could complain about favoritism."

Food became an obsession and the main topic of almost every conversation among the prisoners. "I'm never going to walk by a bakery shop and not go in," Nobles would say about the future.

The men scrounged food. They often collected vegetables from nearby fields surreptitiously because guards would beat or shoot a man caught stealing food. When marching back to his barracks from the mines one day, Nobles grabbed some potatoes, but they did not agree with him. "I got heartburn so bad I didn't think I could breathe." He lost more than 40 pounds over nine months.

The only prisoners who never seemed to lose weight were the German-speaking prisoners working in the kitchens. "How come you guys are getting fat and we're getting skinny?" he asked the cooks. Nobles kept a diary of his time as a prisoner, but when the well-fed cook noticed it, he made Nobles an offer: "I'll take care of it for you." Thinking that the prisoner had a better chance of protecting the diary, Nobles gave it to him. He never saw it again.

National Archives



The only relief came in the form of Red Cross parcels, which included canned, dry, and powdered foods, as well as cigarettes and soap. Nobles used his package to make his best meal of the war. "I made a sundae with snow and powdered milk and a little jam." Since he did not smoke, he traded his cigarettes for food and used some contents for unique purposes: "I washed my teeth with soap."

The weather turned cold. "I remember the frost was real heavy," he recalled, only having his thin cotton jump jacket for warmth. Working in the mines, most men wore through their socks. As a remedy, the Germans showed the men how to fold a piece of cloth over each foot before slipping on their boots. "And that was your sock," he explained.

The prisoners were also left in the dark about the progress of the war. The Germans would sometimes report that their troops had made a strategic withdrawal. "They never said 'retreat,'" recalled Nobles.

At Christmastime, a wounded German who was once a guard visited the barracks and sang Christmas carols with the prisoners but said nothing about the German offensive in the Ardennes. "We didn't hear much about the Battle of the Bulge." The prisoners actually felt sorry for the recuperating German because they knew he would eventually be sent back to the front.

With a lack of news, warm clothing, or decent food, Nobles relied on something else to get him through the war. "I had four love letters [from Bette] I got before D-Day," he said. He had somehow kept them from all the searches. "I don't know how I held them."

He read his wife's letters constantly whenever he had a private moment, even as they became covered in coal dust. He loved reading and rereading them, though they made him homesick. After Nobles' jump into Normandy, Bette had received a missing-in-action notice from the War Department. Three months later, she received a notice that he was a prisoner of war. "For three months she didn't know if I was dead or alive," he said. He recalled that while he felt the physical strain of war,

"she got the mental."

After a while, the POWs were allowed to write home and receive mail. "What could you say?" Nobles asked. "'I'm doing well.' I never got sick. I was in good shape but was losing weight." Bette eventually sent him a picture of herself sitting on a chaise lounge chair, wearing shorts. "It didn't help my homesickness," he said. "What a picture to send me in a prison camp!" Nobles determined to make it back to her. "I always had it in my mind that I would be going home."

There were signs that the war was coming to an end and that he might just make it home. American fighter planes began flying near the camp. "We knew the front was getting close," said Nobles. When the planes got too close, the Germans marched the prisoners out of camp.

On one march when they passed a farmhouse, Nobles and another soldier broke away from the column and hid in the basement. The farmer and his wife protected the two Americans even after German soldiers later occupied the first floor. Their food situation improved as the farmer's wife brought down home-baked goodies.

One day at the end of April 1945, the farmer's wife walked down the basement steps and reported that the Germans had left. The men hustled up the stairs and out of the house, where they encountered American soldiers who had already liberated their slave-labor camp. "I heard that when the Americans got to the camp they asked, 'Is there someone we should take care of?'" The prisoners told their liberators about the German who had killed the protesting prisoner who refused to work. "I heard they shot him," Bob Nobles said.

The first thing the liberated Nobles ate was white bread. "It tasted good," he recalled, reliving the moment. He stayed up all night reading magazines. Soon, he was sent to a hospital to gain back his weight. "They told us, 'Take what you want but eat what you take.'" They didn't have to tell him twice.

He was in an Army hospital when he learned about Germany's capitulation on May 8, 1945—VE-Day. "There wasn't much reaction," he said. "We were still in the service," and there was still a war raging in the Pacific.

Once Nobles was well enough, he was sent to Camp Lucky Strike in Janville, France, the first leg in the trip back home for many Americans. From there he returned to Nottingham, England, for the boat ride back home. He had been reissued a paratrooper's jump uniform, but only regular infantry boots. "Everyone had jump boots but I could not get a pair," he groused.

When Nobles arrived in New Jersey in June, he went to call his wife in Ithaca but changed his mind when he saw the long line of soldiers waiting to use the phones. Had he called, he would have found out that his mother-in-law had died that day from high blood pressure. He had missed the chance to support his wife for her mother's death, but he was determined to make it back to Ithaca for the funeral.

Courtesy Jonathan Hall

At 94 years old, Nobles still looks good in his original uniform. From time to time he reads the four letters his wife sent him before D-Day.

After finally contacting Bette and learning about her mother's death, Nobles hopped on a northbound bus. After a long ride, the bus pulled into the Ithaca station and he stepped off to see his wife, his mother, and members of his own family. His mother looked resigned but his wife had a big smile; his sister snapped pictures of the reunion. Bette told him it looked like he had put on a little weight. "Yeah," he agreed with a smile, "I do look a little pudgy."

Two months later, Nobles lost his worry about again having to leave Bette and take part in the invasion of Japan. The radio announced Japan's surrender on August 14, 1945, and Ithaca exploded in celebration. Citizens packed the downtown area, cheering any and all servicemen. Nobles attended the joyous ruckus in his uniform with the 82nd Airborne patch on his shoulder; everyone offered the veteran a drink. The happiness had its effect. "I passed out from drinking too much," he said with a grin. Bob Nobles' war was at last over.

After returning to civilian life, he went to work for the U.S. Postal Service in Ithaca—a career he held for 32 years. Bob and Bette Nobles had three children, two grandchildren, and one great-grandchild; they remained married for 66 years, until Bette passed away in 1997. He still has her coal-covered letters and reads them from time to time.

Since that moment when a fellow paratrooper told Nobles that his lieutenant had issued the order to surrender, he has felt guilty that after years of intense training he surrendered after only six days of fighting. He also feels bad that during the Battle of the Bulge the 508th was rushed into the line with the rest of the 82nd Airborne Division while he was working in a relatively warm coal mine. "Anyone would feel that way," he admitted.

When asked if he was proud of his service, his answer was surprising: "It took three years out of my life, but it was worth it." He enjoys shoveling snow in the winter and says it is no worse than shoveling coal. He also spends a great deal of time reflecting on his past, but there is one promise he made to himself during the war that he no longer feels compelled to follow. He can walk by a bakery shop and not go in. □

It took 6 Years to Fight... and 300,000 American Lives to win.

Now, WWII is being revealed as never before.

WWII HISTORY

The Foremost Authority on the Greatest War In History

Now available in traditional print, as well as digital format

WWII HISTORY Magazine is more like a fine reference for your history library than it is like a regular magazine that you just flip through and discard. Incisive articles from the top experts in the field are beautifully illustrated with historic photos, paintings, and battle maps.

In just the first few issues, you'll gain a fresh new understanding of the war. For example:

- *What went wrong with Operation Barbarrossa*
- *The behind the scenes actions that led to the Kassel Raid Disaster*
- *What happened when the Aussies took on the Japanese along the Kodoka Trail.*
- *Why it took so long for the US Cavalry to switch from horses to mobile armor.*

Each issue, WWII HISTORY's regular columns discuss important specifics on the war:

- PROFILES, *where you'll meet the heroic individuals who changed the course of history ...*
- ORDNANCE, *where you'll field test the hardware that made the difference between victory and defeat.*
- INSIGHT, *where you'll learn aspects of the war you won't find elsewhere ...*

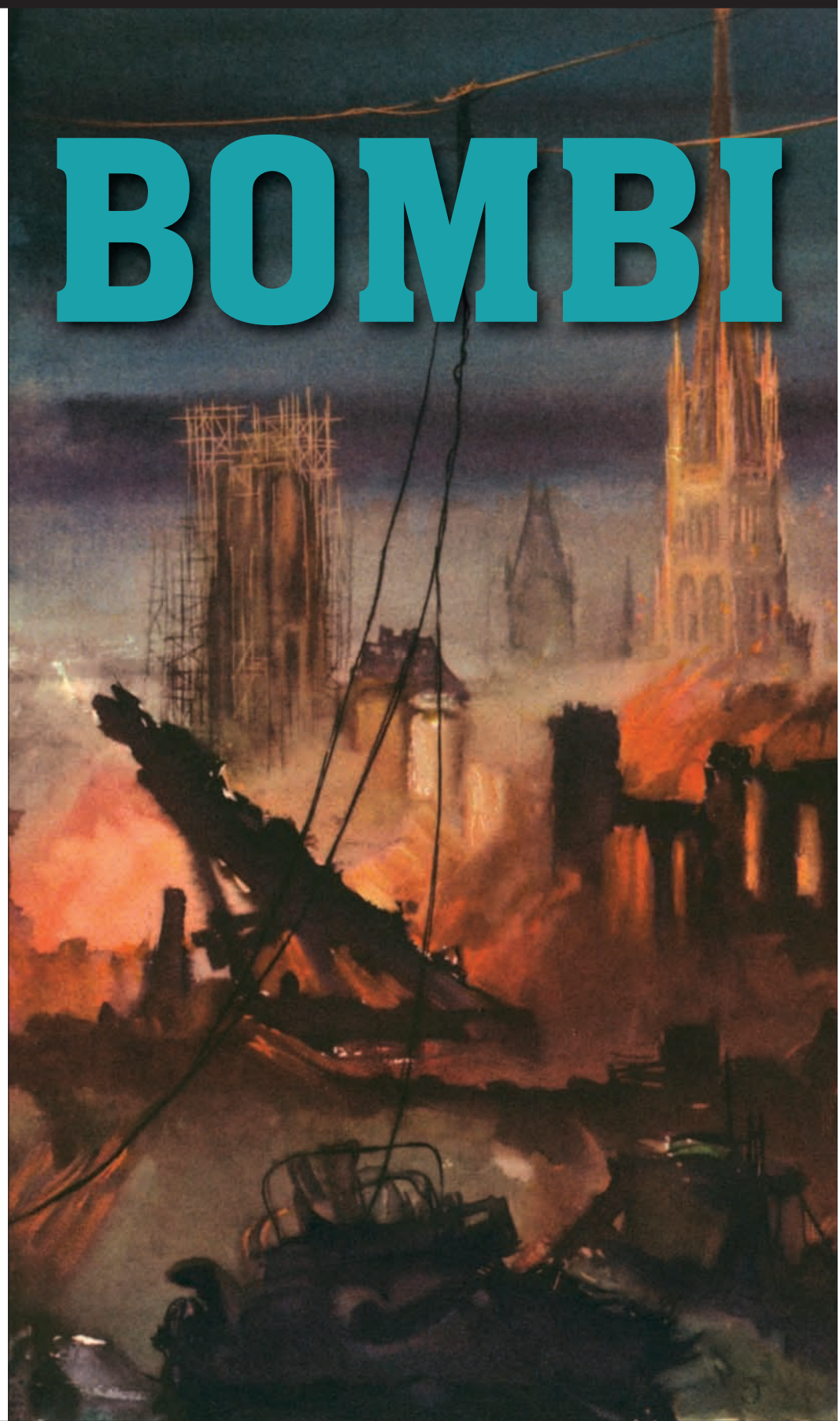
OUR GUARANTEE: Order now, and if at any time you decide WWII HISTORY isn't for you, you'll receive a full refund on all unserviced issues, no questions asked!

Subscribe now!

Visit our website below for our best subscription offers!

www.WarfareHistoryNetwork.com/magazine

BOMBI



BY ANY STANDARD, the ancient city of Rouen, in Upper Normandy, is a historical treasure. Within its magnificent High Gothic Notre-Dame Cathedral (which was portrayed in a famous series of paintings by the Impressionist Claude Monet as well as by his contemporary Camille Pissarro) is a tomb containing the heart of Richard the Lionheart (1157-1199) who had been King of England and the Duke of Normandy. A few streets away is Vieux-Marché, the place where Joan of Arc was burned at the stake on May 30, 1432.

Unfortunately, like many French cities that felt the weight of Allied bombs during the course of the war, Rouen was particularly hard hit. The city on the Seine, which existed even before the Romans reached Gaul, was and is a tangle of narrow, winding streets lined with quaint, half-timbered, medieval homes and shops.

Many books and articles about World War II tend to focus solely on the battles, the movement of troops, and the territories won and lost. Several recent books have given us a picture of what life was like for the German people in the wake of defeat. But not many dwell on the impact of the war on the French people who, after all, bore the brunt of two invasions—the German invasion in 1940 and the 1944 invasions in Normandy and the Riviera by the liberating Allied armies. And even fewer works concentrate on the suffering caused by American and British aerial bombing.

The British had began bombing France shortly after its capitulation and occupation by the Germans in June 1940. As French Army units pulled out of Rouen and retreated westward, they dynamited the bridges over the Seine; the German 5th Panzer Division moved in and claimed the city on June 9.

On June 11, a large fire of unknown origin broke out in the old city between the Notre-Dame Cathedral and the Seine River. The Germans did not allow firemen access to the fire, and the city burned for 48 hours, destroying some 900 buildings dating from the 14th century.

Following its fall, Rouen, then a city of

Age Photostock / © Everett Collection

NG Our Friends

The frequent bombing of the beautiful medieval city of Rouen, France, caused widespread death and destruction—and resentment toward the Allies.

BY FLINT WHITLOCK

A 1944 painting by well-known German war artist Hans Liska shows panzers and a motorcycle maneuvering through burning Rouen after an attack by Allied bombers. The city in Upper Normandy was a frequent target of both sides, but mostly of the Allies.

about 120,000, was quickly turned into a German logistics and administration center where the occupiers located numerous commands. For example, Feldkommandatur 517, the administrative headquarters for the region, was established there along with a variety of supply depots, a pay and administration center, and offices for transportation coordinators. In the western suburb of Canteleu were the headquarters of LXXXI Army Corps. Two antiaircraft battalions were supposed to protect Rouen from aerial attack.

To cross the Seine, at least two temporary bridges were built by the Germans to replace the ones the retreating French had destroyed. With its extensive harbor facilities 35 miles inland from the estuary of the Seine at Le Havre, Rouen was one of France's most important shipping ports. In fact, Germany planned to use it as one of its springboards for launching Operation Sea Lion, the invasion of Britain. A number of maritime repair facilities in Rouen were used to maintain Kriegsmarine vessels, and the navy's Channel Coast Command had its headquarters there.

Furthermore, the southern suburb of Sotteville-lès-Rouen was a major regional railroad hub that enabled the occupiers to shuttle troops from Germany into France. Major telephone-telegraph lines also ran through Sotteville, making the Rouen-Sotteville area a vital communications center.

After the United States entered the war, it was decided in early 1942 to establish American air bases in Britain so that the U.S. Army Air Forces could join the British in bombing the Continent. It took months before that could happen—bases had to built, bombers and bombs had to be brought from the States, and personnel had to be trained.

Most of the targets, of course, were supposed to be strictly military: German supply bases, submarine pens, shipyards, bunker complexes, V-1 launching sites, railroads, bridges, and highways the Germans used to shuttle troops to various locations. Manufacturing plants producing goods for the occupiers in France were also targeted. But planned targets do not always translate into bull's-eyes, and bombs do not discriminate between friend and foe.

Bundesarchiv Bild 101II-MW-0916-01; Photo: Wehlau

Rouen first felt war's impact when the 5th Panzer Division rolled through during the German invasion in June 1940.

The Americans also wanted to devote their efforts to daylight bombing—something the Royal Air Force had already tried and abandoned due to unacceptable losses in aircraft and personnel. The Americans were confident that they could succeed at daylight raids, thanks to the Norden bombsight and the more heavily armed B-17 Flying Fortresses and B-24 Liberators.

The official U.S. Air Force history says, "The subsequent bombing of Germany by the RAF had as yet been conducted on a scale too limited and in a manner too specialized to answer conclusively the opponents of air power. As for the USAAF, its doctrine of daylight bombardment remained entirely an article of faith as far as any experience in combat under European conditions was concerned."

Some Brits were highly skeptical. One British newspaper reporter for the *Sunday Times* scoffed that "American heavy bombers—the latest Fortresses and Liberators—are fine flying machines, but not suited for bombing in Europe. Their bombs and bomb-loads are small, their armour and armament are not up to the standard now found necessary, and their speeds are low."

Determined to prove the skeptics of daylight bombing wrong, finally, in August 1942, Brig. Gen. Ira C. Eaker's VIII Bomber Command was ready. The first Flying Fortress sortie against Europe was the 97th Bombardment Group's mission to hit the rail-marshaling yard at Rouen-Sotteville on August 17, 1942. An earlier mission scheduled for August 10 had been scrubbed due to bad weather and heavy cloud cover over Rouen.

The Air Force history continues: "So it was that on 17 August 1942 all eyes were fixed on a bombardment mission which in the later context of strategic bombing would have appeared insignificant indeed. The experiment begun on that day culminated during the following year in the Combined Bomber Offensive, a campaign which could only have been attempted after all major doubts regarding the use of heavy bombardment forces had for practical purposes been removed."

The raid on Rouen-Sotteville was an admittedly small effort: 18 B-17Es (six of which would fly a diversionary sweep along the coast) accompanied by four squadrons of Spitfire IXs lifted off at 3:30 PM from RAF Grafton Underwood in Northhamptonshire. Pilot-

ing the lead aircraft of the group, Butcher Shop, was Major Paul W. Tibbets, Jr., who would later pilot the *Enola Gay* on the first atomic bomb mission to Hiroshima, Japan, while the group commander, Colonel Frank A. Armstrong, Jr., one of Tibbets' squadron commanders, was co-pilot.

General Eaker was flying in the lead plane of the second flight of six, nicknamed *Yankee Doodle*. Inside the 12 bombers destined for Rouen-Sotteville were 36,900 pounds of bombs; nine of the B-17s carried 600-pound bombs, while three others carried 1,100-pound bombs intended for the locomotive workshops.

A little more than three hours later, as the formation approached the target at 23,000 feet without arousing enemy flak or fighters, Eaker moved from his position in the radio compartment to the bomb bay to watch the 600-pound bombs descend on Sotteville and its "long lines of railroad track crowded with freight cars surrounded by locomotive repair shops, factories, and sheds."

Eaker watched as the formation's 18 tons of bombs got smaller. "As each plane's bomb load reached its mark," the general said, "a lofty, mushroom-like pall of smoke and dirt rose sluggishly into the air and clearly identified the point of impact.

"The tallest of these giant mushrooms was within the central target area; two appeared to engulf the roundhouse while four were well spaced among the tracks of the marshaling yard.... The bombing, I thought, was especially good."

National Archives

A damage-assessment photograph after an American air raid on July 8, 1944, on the Rouen-Sotteville marshaling yards shows extensive cratering; the Germans—and the French railroad workers—usually were able to repair the damage quickly.

Despite attracting some German fighters on the way out, the bombers returned to their base without losing a plane. Maj. Gen. Carl "Tooey" Spaatz, commanding general of the U.S. Eighth Air Force, told a newspaper reporter, "It is only the start. We expect to keep up these raids. Everything went according to plan."

Spaatz also telegraphed his boss, Henry "Hap" Arnold, chief of the U.S. Army Air Forces, in Washington: "The attack on Rouen far exceeded in accuracy any previous high-altitude bombing in the European Theater by German or Allied aircraft. Moreover, it was my understanding that the results justified 'our belief' in the feasibility of daylight bombing." Thus was the myth of "precision daylight bombing" born.

But there was nothing precise about the August 17 raid. Only about half the bombs fell in the rail yard; the rest hit the commercial and residential areas around it, killing 52 civilians and wounding 120.

On the day after this first mission, Air Marshal Sir Arthur T. "Bomber" Harris, Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, RAF Bomber Command, sent a message to Eaker: "Congratulations from all ranks of Bomber Command on the highly successful completion of the first all-American raid by the big fellows on German-occupied territory in Europe. *Yankee Doodle* certainly went to town and can stick yet another well-deserved feather in his cap."

High praise, but Harris was careful not to mention the mission's shortcomings. The U.S. Air Force official history also downplayed the errors: "The bombing was fairly accurate for a first effort. Approximately half of the bombs fell in the general target area. One of the aiming points was hit, and several bombs burst within a radius of 1,500 feet. Those intended for the other aiming point fell mostly about 2,000 feet to the south.

"Fortunately, the yard and adjacent facilities presented a large target, so that even technically inaccurate bombing might still be effective. Nevertheless, it was surpris-

ingly good bombing. And it was effective enough, considering the small size of the attacking force.

"Direct hits were scored on two large transshipment sheds in the center of the marshaling yard, and about 10 of the 24 tracks on the sidings were damaged. A quantity of rolling stock was destroyed, damaged, or derailed. As it happened, activity in the yard was not at its peak when the attack occurred, or destruction of rolling stock might have been much greater.

"Damage to the tracks no doubt interfered with the flow of traffic, but a sufficient number remained undamaged.... The bottlenecks at each end of the sidings were not damaged. The locomotive workshop received one direct hit which probably slowed up the working of locomotives and other rolling stock in and out of the building quite apart from the constructional damage resulting from blast."

The history concludes, "It was clear that a much larger force would be required to do lasting damage to a target of this sort. But for the time being, the extent of the damage inflicted was less important than the relative accuracy of the bombing."

Much larger forces would follow shortly.

On September 5, 1942, the Americans returned to hit Rouen-Sotteville again. This time, 31 B-17s attacked, but their accuracy was even worse than on the first raid; less than 20 percent of the bombs struck the rail yard. And this time civilian casualties were even greater: 140 killed and 200 wounded.

Stephen Borque, a historian who has studied the Allied bombing of France, noted, "Free French leaders, who the Allies would need to govern postwar France, were angry over the bombing of French cities and towns and the growing toll of civilian casualties."

Six months later, on March 12, 1943, American raiders struck Rouen-Sotteville for a third time, from 25,000 feet. The mission report from the 91st Bomb Group (Heavy) says it was "the perfect mission. First time Spitfire escorts kept enemy fighters at arm's length while group bombardiers executed their runs in peace. Inbound diversionary pattern, then target was destroyed. 91st put up all 18 flyable forts." (The famed B-17 *Memphis Belle* took part in this raid—her 14th.)

Sixteen days later, another mission, this time by 79 B-17s and 24 B-24s, took off to hit Rouen-Sotteville once again. All the B-24s turned back because of bad weather, but the B-17s continued on, dropping 209 tons of bombs on or near the rail yards. One B-17 was shot down, and three others were damaged.

Michel Leveillard, then 11 years old and living in Rouen, said, "Although I cannot be absolutely certain, I believe I saw that airplane go down since it was the first B-17 shot down over Rouen, and because that day we saw no parachutes, and we had a lull period with no heavy bombardments following that one until July.... I sure have vivid memories of all the 100-plus bombings of my hometown."

After July, raids continued intermittently. On August 25, 1943, B-26 Mitchell Marauders from the 386th Bombardment Group (Medium), based at Snetterton Heath, hit the power plant at Rouen. Then, well before dawn on Monday, September 6, 1943, the same 386th was briefed on "Mission Number 14"—target identification Z435: the marshaling yard at Sotteville-Rouen. Forty B-26s would each carry 500-pound general-purpose bombs and rendezvous with another B-26 bomb group, the 387th, coming from Chip-

Bundesarchiv Bild 101I-299-1810-06; Photo: Scheck

Rouen firefighters work to extinguish flames inside the Notre-Dame Cathedral, which suffered severe damage on May 30-31, 1944.

National Archives

B-17s were a dreaded sight for the residents of Rouen, who suffered through more than two dozen air raids during the war.

ping Ongar." The combined planes in the formation would be escorted by 10 squadrons of Spitfires.

The raid went well. After the mission, the 386th's historian noted, "The formation neared the I.P. [Initial Point] at Blainville as a few rounds of inaccurate 88mm flak came up just as the formation made a right turn to commence their bomb run at 10,500 feet. Black puffs of flak appeared as it was bombs away at 0748 hours. Bomb strikes were observed at the north end of the rail yard in the midst of tracks and buildings, with results from fair to good.

"The 386th second box ... released their bombs from 9,300 feet with good results. [The commander's] crew reported seeing a big flash of red flame when their bombs erupted on the target."

The B-26s made it back to their bases without the loss of a single plane. But the U.S. Army Air Forces were not yet finished with Rouen.

By the fall of 1943, the tide of war was turning against the Germans. North Africa had been cleared of German and Italian forces, Sicily had been taken after a month of hard fighting, Italy had dropped out of the war but was nevertheless invaded, and the Soviets were slowly regaining ground that had been lost to Hitler's legions in 1941. The invasion of the Continent by the Western Allies was imminent.

Shortly after arriving in London on January 15, 1944, and assuming his duties as Supreme Allied Commander, General Dwight D. Eisenhower insisted that he take overall command of both the British and American air forces so that their efforts would be coordinated with the needs of the troops on the ground.

As Ike put it, "My insistence upon commanding these air forces at that time was ... influenced by the lesson so conclusively demonstrated at Salerno [Italy]; when a battle needs the last ounce of available force, the commander must not be in the position of depending upon request and negotiation to get it."

Ike also understood the necessity of "softening up" targets on the ground, including the road and rail networks that the Germans would undoubtedly try to use to rush reserves and tanks to the invasion sites and throw the invasion back into the sea.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur W. Tedder agreed; he had envisioned what became known as the "Transportation Plan"—using the Allies' air assets to bomb French roads, bridges, rail lines, and marshaling yards—anything to slow the movement of German personnel, weapons, ammunition, and other vital supplies to the invasion areas.

In early 1944, Professor Solly Zuckermann, an adviser to the Air Ministry, expressed his support for Tedder's Transportation Plan, and Eisenhower endorsed it.

Not everyone was on board, however. Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Harris and his RAF Bomber Command were concentrating on destroying German cities (Operation Pointblank) while his American counterpart, General Spaatz, was focused on the "Oil Plan"—the effort to knock out refineries that provided fuel for German trucks, tanks, and aircraft.

At a contentious meeting on March 25, 1944, Harris said he didn't think his massed bombers could effectively destroy bridges and rail centers; Spaatz felt the same, despite having bragged earlier about the "pinpoint accuracy" of American "precision daylight bombing."

Spaatz was also deeply concerned about a backlash against his Eighth Air Force in the event of heavy French civilian casualties. He said to his staff, "I won't do it! I won't take the responsibility. This (expletive deleted) invasion can't succeed, and I don't want any part of the blame."

Ike was so angry at the reluctance of his air commanders to support the plan that he deemed vital to the success of the invasion, he threatened to resign as head of SHAEF. Eventually cooler heads prevailed, and Harris and Spaatz agreed to go along with the Transportation Plan.

One potential sticking point was the matter of likely French civilian casualties. Harris and Spaatz both told Churchill that the death toll could conceivably climb as high

as 80,000 civilians and cause a negative reaction from the French against the Allies and the invasion. The prime minister wrote to President Franklin Roosevelt and expressed his misgivings about "this slaughter ... among a friendly people who have committed no crimes against us."

Roosevelt, too, was concerned but told Churchill, "However regrettable the loss of civilian life is, I am not prepared to impose from this distance any restrictions on military action by the responsible commanders that, in their opinion, might mitigate against 'Overlord' or cause additional loss of life to our Allied forces of invasion."

With the "blessing" from the men at the top, the Transportation Plan was approved, and in March 1944 Ike and the rest of the planners at SHAEF pegged the end of May as the start of Operation Overlord, depending on several factors, including and especially the weather. Ike also directed the RAF and the USAAF to begin intensely striking at a long list of targets in France such as the major transportation centers at Noisy-le-Sec, Tergnier, Juvisy, and Rouen, with the intention of making roads, bridges, and railroads unusable for the Germans.

The RAF's Rouen raid on the night of April 18-19, 1944, was especially destructive. The attack began with 16 twin-engine RAF DeHavilland Mosquito bombers from No. 514 Squadron marking the Sotteville rail yards with incendiaries. The Mosquitos were followed by 273 Avro Lancaster bombers flying at 10,000-15,000 feet and carrying 1,524 tons of bombs.

The center of the rail yard was accurately plastered by the first salvo of bombs, but the second missed badly, exploding in residential areas of Sotteville and even in the center of Rouen. The magnificent Notre-Dame Cathedral, a couple of miles from the Sotteville marshaling yards, was hit by nine bombs and suffered extensive damage to its south side, blowing out two stained-glass "rose" windows and seriously weakening the church's 500-foot-tall, cast-iron St.-Romain spire that had once made the building the tallest in the world.

A few blocks from the cathedral, more bombs fell on the Palace of Justice, France's largest Gothic-style civic building, and started a fire that gutted the interior. With the water mains ruptured, the firemen could do little but watch helplessly.

Residential buildings also succumbed. As one historian wrote, "The flames digested the old wooden houses," and some 900 civilians in Rouen and Sotteville lost their lives that night. In the latter town, more than 2,200 buildings were destroyed.

After-action reports from RAF crews reported, "Weather was good with a small amount of haze. PFF markers [target indicators] were somewhat scattered. Fires and smoke from the marshaling yards were seen by some crews. There was very little opposition over the target.... Another success for Bomber Command with widespread damage to the railway infrastructure, with no aircraft lost."

It is not known exactly how much damage was inflicted upon German interests in Rouen and Sotteville, but the bombings were badly damaging French civilian morale. After all, it was the Allies, soon to launch an invasion to free France from German occupation, who were the ones causing the awful death and destruction in one of the most treasured and historic cities in all of France.

One slightly wounded German soldier by the name of Franz Gockel was confronted by French civilians as he fled from the front and reached a bombed-out town. "I expected them to tear me apart," he said. "One man pulled out a dagger, but he pointed it to the sky. 'This is for the Americans,' he told me."

Even though the American and British press had minimized the effects of the bombing on the populace and the infrastructure, Eisenhower was receiving reports that said the Rouennaisse were becoming incensed at the wanton destruction. But as terrible as the devastation of Rouen on April 18-19 was, worse was to come.

After the April 18-19 raid, the bombing of France was stepped up. On May 8, 1944, Marvin Schulze, a B-26 pilot with the 599th Bomb Squadron, 397th Bomb Group, wrote in his diary that Mission Number Five was "the hottest one yet. Our target was a couple of bridges near Rouen, France. We got 28 flak holes, a busted hydraulic line, a hole in oil tank. One piece came pretty close to [turret gunner] Piwitz. All ships returned."

The official U.S. Air Force history notes, "During the first half of 1944, while the Eighth Air Force participated in the combined bomber offensive, the Ninth Air Force—commanded by Maj. Gen. Lewis Brereton and comprising the IX Fighter Command, the IX Bomber Command, and the IX Troop Carrier Command—... also carried out medium-bomber attacks on the German rocket-launching sites on the northern coast of France and, in support of the combined bomber offensive, bombed airfields and marshaling yards, primarily in France....

"By the end of April [1944], the Allied air forces had done enormous damage to many continental rail centers. The Germans responded by intensifying repair work and increasing their antiaircraft defenses around critical areas. In May, the Allied attacks expanded, but the Germans were still able to move trains."

On May 20, responding to this continued movement, the Allies ordered wide-scale fighter sweeps against moving trains. The history continues, "Prior to this order, Allied fighters had been attacking moving trains without the express approval of higher headquarters. After May 20, the attacks were carried out openly on a large scale. In the next two weeks, fighters damaged approximately 475 locomotives and cut railway lines at more than 100 different points.

"These raids severely disrupted enemy traffic, ruined equipment, and produced impor-

National Archives

ullstein bild / The Granger Collection, NY

ABOVE: Civilians use a temporary bridge in Rouen. The bridge includes a barge that can be moved to allow for river traffic. BELOW: Civilians inspect the ruins of a curbside gas station and burned-out shell of a building, 1944.

tant psychological effects among railroad personnel. French crews abandoned their trains in large numbers, especially after Allied fighters began dropping belly fuel tanks and setting trains on fire by strafing. The Germans reacted by manning the trains with their own crews, but that was not enough. By the end of May, the enemy had been forced to sharply curtail daylight railway operations, even where the lines remained unbroken."

The end of May 1944, a few days before the greatest combined air and sea operation of all time took place, is bitterly remembered in Rouen as la Semaine Rouge—"Red Week"—connoting the flames and blood that overwhelmed the city. It was during those days that the city suffered some of its most trying times.

The official history of the Royal Air Force says, "The main programme of bridge destruction was begun on 24th May by the United States Ninth Air Force, whose low-level fighter-bombers were particularly successful. By D-Day, 18 of the 24 bridges between Rouen and Paris were completely broken and the remainder blocked."

During Red Week, hundreds of tons of American bombs fell on Rouen, killing perhaps as many as 1,500 people, obliterating more of the city's most historic structures, completely destroying a large part of the left bank, and leaving Rouen with over 40,000 homeless.

Emmanual Delaville, a resident of the area, recalled, "During this week, about 400 tons of bombs were dropped on the area. My father, his mother, and sister were forced to live during this week in caves carved into the cliffs along the Seine River.

"Several times before my father died, he told me about the times before the war when he often went with his father to visit people who lived in ... Sotteville-les-Rouen. The ward where they lived was razed by bombing in 1944 during a week known as 'la Semaine Rouge.'"

Another observer noted, "On 30 May 1944, the city was heavily bombed. The [Notre Dame] cathedral again (in 1940 it had already suffered fire damage) fell prey to the flames and architectural damage was considerable. The inhabitants tried throughout the night to extinguish the fire."

Flying these missions could also be hazardous for the bomber crews. On May 31, 1944, the 394th Bomb Group (Medium), flying 36 Marauders from RAF Boreham, was on a mission to take out a bridge in Rouen.

One of the Marauders was piloted by Lieutenant John Connelly of the 587th Bomb Squadron. His plane was heavily weighted with fuel and two 2,000-pound bombs, and during takeoff Connelly lost one of his two engines. Making a split-second decision, Connelly chose not to jettison his bomb load, but his Marauder crashed in an orchard near the Boreham runway. The entire six-man crew survived but suffered injuries.

Most of the rest of the Marauders made it to their target and dropped their bombs,

starting a fire in Rouen that spread to the cathedral's 500-foot-tall St.-Romain tower and melted the bells.

During Red Week, Brereton's Ninth U.S. Air Force mounted attack after attack on Rouen. At 11 AM on May 30, 38 B-26 Marauders struck the Viaduc d'Eauplet, an already damaged railroad bridge that connected Sotteville with Rouen, with 142,000 pounds of bombs. At 11:15, a second wave of 35 more B-26s hit the bridge again, this time with 70,000 pounds of bombs. Finally, at 11:30, a third flight of B-26 bombers arrived. But, with dust and smoke covering the target area, the bombardiers were unable to pick out the two other bridges they were supposed to hit and jettisoned their explosives into residential and commercial areas along the river's edge.

When, at last, the all clear was sounded, the shaken residents emerged from their shelters to inspect the extent of the devastation. Along the Seine, a bomb had penetrated a shelter beneath a bank and more than a dozen people inside were killed. Vieux-Marché, the old marketplace (and the spot where Joan of Arc had been burned at the stake), was blown apart. The ornate Palais des Consuls, built in 1734, was a shattered ruin. Much of the area near the bridges was in flames. As one historian noted, "More than 40 fire units from Rouen and the suburbs spent the afternoon and evening fighting fires and trying to save the city."

This was not the end of Rouen's agony. Shortly after noon on May 31, 41 more B-26s appeared and sent 68 tons of bombs hurtling down toward the temporary bridges. But the bombardiers' aim was off and the bombs scattered across the city, destroying the L'Eden Cinéma, obliterating the 16th-century Saint Vincente church, reputed to have the finest stained-glass windows in all of Rouen, and leaving hundreds of people dead.

On the afternoon of June 1, heat from surrounding fires evidently detonated an unexploded bomb near the Notre-Dame Cathedral, setting the roof alight. The flames threatened to destroy the entire structure; it took all the efforts of the firefighters, civilians, and even German soldiers to finally extinguish the blaze.

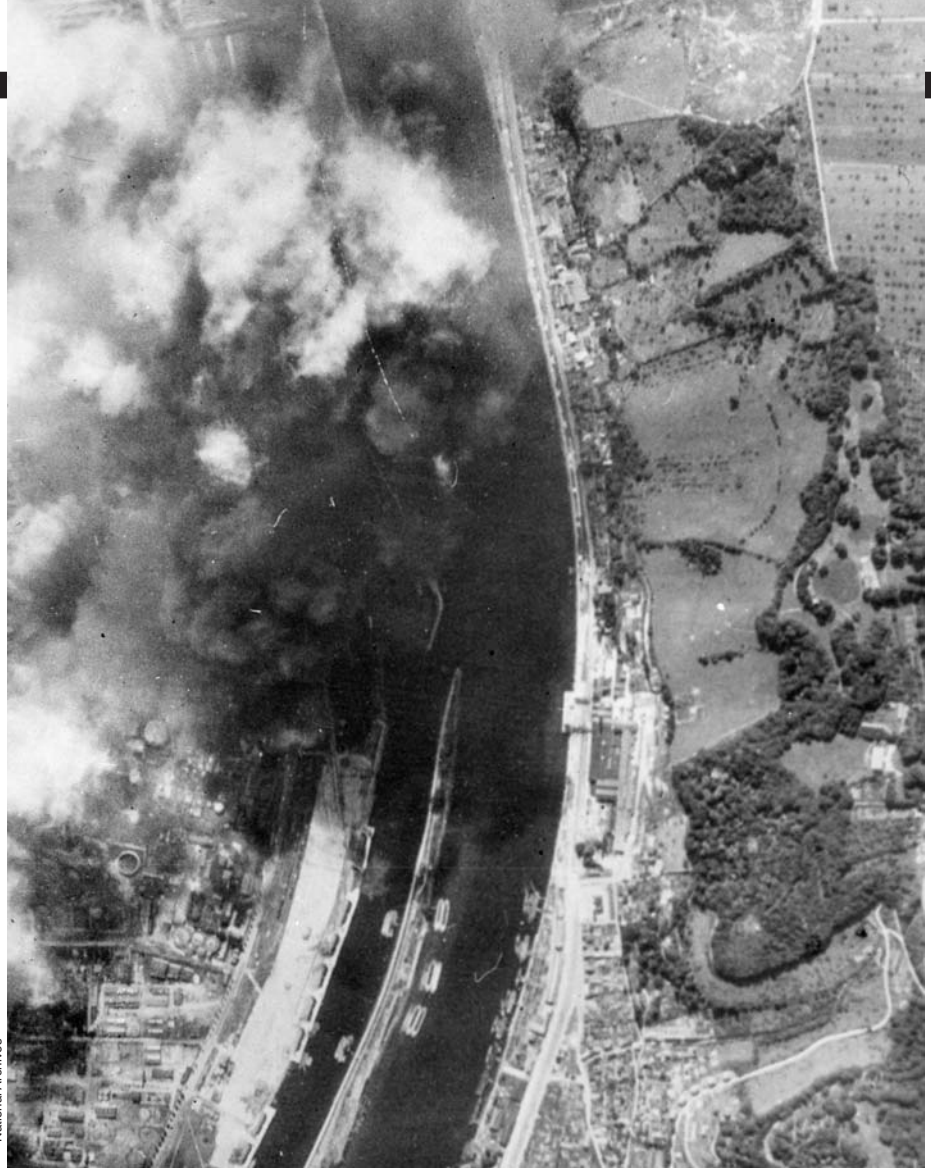
The next evening the bridges over the Seine again came under attack, this time by P-51 Mustang fighters carrying 500-pound bombs. A temporary railway bridge was damaged, and a great number of other buildings that had managed thus far to escape destruction were lost, including the Gare d'Orleans, south of the destroyed Pont Boieldieu.

Attacks continued for another three days, damaging or destroying many priceless structures such as the 16th-century Gothic Eglise Saint-Maclou, the main post office, and the shopping district known as the Boulevard des Belges. On June 4, P-47 Thunderbolt fighter bombers hit the bridges that German engineers had rebuilt and what was left of the city with 83 1,000-pound bombs. The official death toll for Red Week has never been conclusively established; some accounts have as many as 1,500 residents perishing.

The Allies invaded Normandy on June 6, 1944, and began a long, slow push across the Channel coast and into the interior of France, driving the German Seventh Army eastward as they progressed.

Despite the devastating consequences to the civilian population, the Transportation Plan worked remarkably well for the Allies in disrupting German efforts to counter the invasion. A German Air Ministry report of June 13, 1944, admitted, "The raids ... have caused the breakdown of all main lines; the coast defenses have been cut off from the sup-

National Archives



National Archives

ABOVE: Smoke pours from a Rouen oil depot during a raid by the U.S. Eighth Air Force in August 1944. OPPOSITE: Harbor facilities on the Seine River in Rouen had been some of the most important in France before the war, but constant air raids left the docks in shambles.

ply bases in the interior ... producing a situation which threatens to have serious consequences."

The report continued, saying that although "transportation of essential supplies for the civilian population has been completely disrupted ... large scale strategic movement of German troops by rail is practically impossible at the present time and must remain so while attacks are maintained at their present intensity."

As German forces fled eastward to escape being annihilated in Normandy, endless columns of trucks and tanks, many of them covered with tree branches to camouflage them from Allied air, rolled through Rouen.

One slightly wounded German soldier by the name of Franz Gockel was confronted by French civilians as he fled from the front and reached a bombed-out town. "I expected them to tear me apart," he said. "One man pulled out a dagger, but he pointed it to the sky. 'This is for the Americans,' he told me."

There was no letup in the bombings; nearly every city within 100 miles of the Channel coast was hit. On June 22, 1944, Rouen was again struck from the air by the 749th Bomb Squadron, 457th Bomb Group. On August 13, the 414th Squadron, 97th Bomb Group, hit Rouen again. By this time, of course, Rouen was little more than charred rubble.

Emmanual Delaville said that his father told him about "the USAAF/RAF bombardment of Von Kluge's army on August 25, 1944, on the south side of the Seine River in Rouen, known in France as *la rive gauche*."

It was the Canadian II Corps that first reached Rouen on the ground. The official history of the Canadian Army says, "In the neck of the great bend of the Seine, at the top of which stands the city of Rouen, is a thick, eight-mile range of woodland known as the Forét de la Londe. On 27 August, the 2nd Canadian Division began the task of clearing this obstacle. First reports indicated that it was not strongly held, but shortly very serious difficulties began to appear."

SS troops in the Forêt de la Londe, described as "definitely a suicide force," were rushed into position in the eastern end of the forest, across the isthmus closing the river loop. The Canadian history says, "The woods, honeycombed with enemy machine-gun positions, presented innumerable opportunities for ambush, and our infantry, fighting their way through the thick bush, repeatedly found themselves being fired upon from these prepared positions by an enemy who had every avenue of approach registered but who was himself quite invisible.

"He was well supported by artillery with excellent observation, and he had many mortars. Of the fighting on 28 August, the Commanding Officer of the Calgary Highlanders said: 'There was not a ten-yard area in the battalion position that was not hit in the course of the day;' and his was not one of the forward battalions."

The Germans were putting up stiff resistance to enable as many of their units as possible to cross the Seine and withdraw to the east. As the bridges had all been destroyed, the river crossings were accomplished by ferries.

The official report continues: "Both the 4th and 6th Canadian Infantry Brigades suffered very heavily in these operations. The South Saskatchewan Regiment led the 6th Brigade into the forest. This unit, and the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders of Canada in rear of it, bore the brunt of this difficult business. The South Saskatchewan

came under particularly heavy fire from machine-guns and mortars.

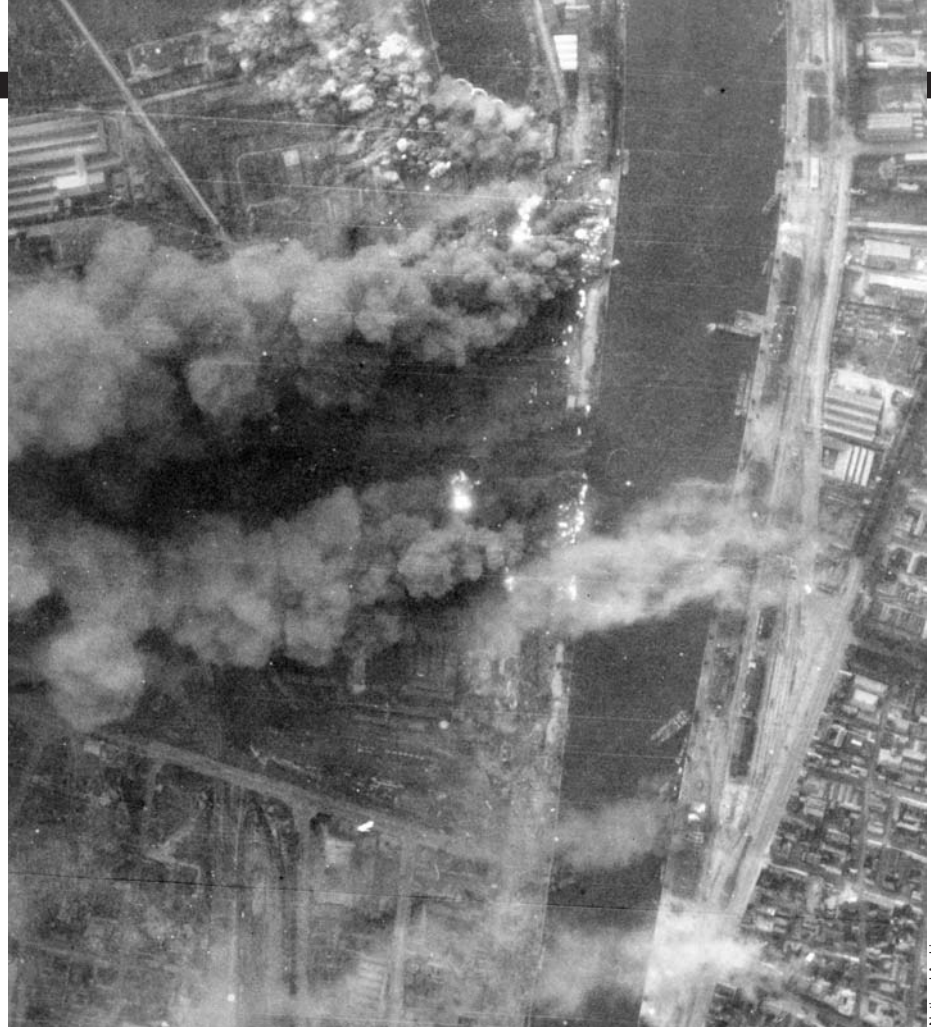
"After being hammered in this manner for more than 24 hours without being able to make any progress, the Battalion's rifle companies were reduced to a total strength of about 65 all ranks. The enemy positions in the forest were not cleared until the night of the 29th-30th. Only on the morning of the 30th was the process of mopping-up south of the Seine completed. On this same day, patrols of the 9th Canadian Infantry Brigade entered Rouen and reported the city clear."

After Canadian troops liberated Rouen, Emmanual Delaville said, "My father went to Rouen and he told me he will never forget the smell of death that lingered in the air."

On August 31, 1944, the *Ottawa Citizen* proclaimed, "Canadian infantry from Ontario and the Maritimes entered historic Rouen today in drizzling rain, and the city reacted like a little Paris [which had been liberated six days earlier]. French Maquis [resistance fighters] were all over the city, guiding the Canadians through the streets of this ancient Seine port. Civilians poured into the streets in hundreds, waving the Canadians on and tricolors were thrust from every window as street after street was cleared of light German opposition."

The newspaper failed to report that when the Canadian Army marched into Rouen, all the soldiers found was a giant pile of bricks, timber, roof tiles, and thousands of stunned residents picking through the wreckage of their once beautiful city.

Of course, Rouen was not the only French victim of Allied bombs, nor was it even the worst. Some 1,570 French cities and towns were bombed or hit by artillery fire by Anglo-American forces between June 1940 and May 1945. As an example of the devastation, it is estimated that 95 percent of Saint-Lô was destroyed; Carentan and Caen, too, were virtually flattened. Some figures show that 432,000 homes and apartments across France were destroyed and another 890,000 homes were damaged.



National Archives

Thick black smokes rises along the river front as Marauder and Havoc bombers hit German forces fleeing the city, August 1944.

Those cities suffering the greatest civilian loss of life from Allied bombing and shelling during the German occupation or liberation were: Boulogne-Billancourt (near Paris, March 2-3, 1942) more than 600 killed; Saint-Nazaire (November 9, 14, 17, and 19, 1942) 228 dead; Rennes (March 8, 1943) 299 dead; Boulogne-Billancourt again (April 4, 1943) 403 dead; Le Portel (September 8, 1943) 510 dead; Paris western suburbs (September 9 and 15, 1943) 395 dead; Nantes (September 16 and 23, 1943) 1,247 dead; and Toulon (November 24, 1943) 450 dead.

The grim list goes on: Lille (April 9-10, 1944) 450 dead; Rouen (April 18-19, 1944) 900 dead; Noisy-le-Sec (April 18-19, 1944) 464 dead; Paris-La Chapelle (April 20-21, 1944) 670 dead; Sartrouville (May 27-28, 1944) 400 dead; Orléans (May 19 and 23, 1944) 300 dead; Saint-Etienne (May 26, 1944) over 1,000 dead; Lyon (May 26, 1944) 717 dead; Marseille (May 27, 1944) 1,752 dead; Avignon (May 27, 1944) 525 dead; Lisieux (June 6-7, 1944) 700 dead; Vire (June 6-7, 1944) 400 dead; Caen (June 6-7, 1944) over 1,000 dead; St.-Lô (July 11-19, 1944) nearly 800 dead; Le Havre (September 5-11, 1944) more than 5,000 dead; and Royan (January 5, 1945) 1,700 dead.

The number of French civilians killed and injured before, during, and after their liberation has long been a matter of heated debate in France. One French historian estimates that more than 50,000 men, women, and children died. During 1943 alone, some 7,458 French civilians were killed by Allied aerial bombing. The total number of dead could be as high as 70,000; more than 100,000 were wounded. The French certainly paid a high price for their liberation.

Perhaps the high cost of liberation explains why so many Americans and Britons have claimed that some French people have been "rude" and "ungrateful" toward them since the end of World War II.

In June 1994, the 50th anniversary of the D-Day landings, there was still palatable anger, frustration, and bitterness expressed by many of those who remembered the civilian deaths. One woman, Frederique Legrand, an infant when Allied bombers missed a bridge at Caen but killed her parents, said, "We were forgotten, left to our own devices."

Thousands died as Caen was leveled and orphanages were too crowded to take in all the children who had lost their parents; Legrand said she became a ward of the state until she was 21. "Relatives helped raise me and my sister and brother," she said. "But we were different from other kids. No one seemed to know what Normandy suffered."

Visitors to Rouen today, 70 years after the war, will see little evidence of the ravages of the bombs and fires. The first hint that something is not quite right are whole sections of the city with jarringly modernistic architecture that visibly clash with the rebuilt old sections.

But, while walking around Rouen, one encounters reminders of the horrors that unjustly visited the city on so many occasions. For example, in the Gare de la Rue Verte railroad station there is a monument to nearly 200 railroad workers who lost their lives when the bombs crashed down on the Sotteville rail yards.

On a fence surrounding the Palais du Consul there are photos showing the extent of the damage to the building, and parts of the Palace of Justice still bear the deep gouges in the stonework made by the RAF attack on April 18-19, 1944.

Only the stone archway of the Tour Saint André, minus its formerly attached church, remains standing as a memorial, much like the Kaiser-Wilhelm Church in Berlin. Within the Cathedral of Notre Dame there is a display of photos that dramatically show the damage done and how close the entire cathedral came to being completely destroyed.

Near the restored Palace of Justice there is a modest square known as the Place du 19 Avril 1944, with a fountain in its center with a modernistic sculpture of a mother kissing her child and the father and an older child looking fearfully upward toward a sky full of unseen bombers.

Many Americans and Britons today are ambivalent about the tens of thousands of German civilians who died under the rain of Allied bombs, feeling perhaps that, because they were the enemy, they got what they deserved.

The indiscriminate deaths and suffering of French civilians and those of other occupied countries at the hands of the Allies, however, are generally ignored today—or at least unknown outside these countries. It is time for these unnecessary deaths to be acknowledged.

It is not that the majority of the French people are ungrateful for being liberated. Far from it. It is just that they still wonder why they had to endure so much for their freedom. □

One of the bridges over the Seine knocked out by Allied bombers, photographed on May 27, 1944. The ancient Notre-Dame Cathedral (right) miraculously escaped destruction, but the rest of the city suffered extreme damage. Some 50,000-70,000 civilians all across France died during the war.

National Archives

RAMPAGE ON

The Riviera—the seaside playground for Europe's rich and famous—became a battleground on August 15, 1944. Here, soldiers of the U.S. 45th Infantry Division wade ashore at Sainte-Maxime and head for a breach in the German-built sea wall. Unlike Operation Overlord in Normandy, Operation Dragoon—sometimes called "the Forgotten D-Day"—was conducted with near-perfect timing, precision, and minimal enemy response.

THE RIVIERA

Waco CG-4A gliders carrying members of the 550th Glider Infantry Regiment are towed across the Mediterranean to landing zones in southern France.

In August 1944, the Allies followed up the massive Normandy invasion with another in southern France known as Operation Dragoon.

BY GLENN BARNETT AND ANDRÉ BERNOLE

EARLY IN 1944, German Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, the defeated hero of North Africa and now head of Army Group B in France, was tasked with strengthening the Atlantic Wall defenses against Allied invasion. This impossible task required fortification of 2,800 miles of coast—from the Arctic Circle in Norway to the French-Spanish border. Yet Rommel, despite his private misgivings that Germany was going to lose the war, went at it with his usual iron will.

In mid-May 1944, he was dispatched to the Mediterranean coast of France to inspect the preparations being made against possible invasion there. He was horrified to find that almost nothing had been done to discourage an Allied landing anywhere from Italy to Spain. He fumed at the commander of Army Group G, General Johannes Blaskowitz, in overall charge of southern France, and ordered him to get busy. Rommel then sped away to continue his work in the north.

Flush with humiliation, Blaskowitz immediately stepped up efforts to fortify the beaches and inland fields. Tens of thousands of mines were buried, and iron stakes were submerged just below the level of the tides, many with an artillery shell attached to rip open landing boats. More than 550 concrete casemates were constructed to house the guns that would defend the coast—whether the guns were available or not.

Farther inland, sharp stakes were planted in open fields to impale parachutists, and stout wooden poles were planted to rip open any gliders or planes attempting to land. These poles were about four inches in diameter and nearly 10 feet tall. They were crisscrossed with barbed wire, and many of the poles were rigged with Teller mines that would explode on impact.

On paper the German forces were formidable. Blaskowitz and General Friedrich Wiese, commander of the Nineteenth German Field Army, had 250,000 men available in 11 divisions to guard the 300-mile-

Both: National Archives

long French Mediterranean coastline. But this strength was deceptive.

Three divisions had been detached in June to stem the Allied tide in Normandy, while other troops, trucks, tanks, and equipment had been requisitioned for the ever worsening Eastern Front. Two whole divisions were "static," without transport of any kind, while a third division, the 157th, nominally in reserve, was completely occupied battling the French Resistance.

Only the 11th Panzer Division, commanded by Maj. Gen. Wend von Wietersheim, had armored vehicles. Recently arrived from a mauling in Russia, it was only at half strength with a mere 75 tanks. Worse, it was stationed on the Atlantic coast at Bordeaux—some 300 miles away from where the landings would come.

To compensate for withdrawing the troops needed elsewhere, replacements—men who had been wounded in Russia—were forwarded to southern France. Yet these men were better than the conscripted or "volunteer" soldiers of Eastern European origin, most of whom were non-German speakers from Poland, Ukraine, Armenia, and elsewhere and were armed with a variety of obsolescent weapons gathered from all over Europe.

Although these replacements were commanded by German officers, they were considered unreliable—and would prove to be so. To make matters worse, Hitler had issued his usual order to fight to the last man. After the July 20 attempt on his life, confusion in the ranks reigned, distrust and suspicions blossomed, and decisions were crucially delayed.

While Blaskowitz frantically worked his men to exhaustion trying to fulfill Rommel's orders, the Gestapo, Nazi Germany's secret police, began rounding up leading figures in the French underground in a desperate attempt to break up the resistance movement collectively known as the Maquis. By this time the resistance was well established in southern France, but contrary to the situation reports received and distributed in London, they were not a unified force.

The Allies believed that 20,000 Frenchmen were armed and ready to fight. In reality, the French Resistance fighters were lightly armed and deeply divided. There were several different underground organizations that were mutually antagonistic. The Communists were the largest and best organized resistance fighters, but many others were loyal to Charles de Gaulle's Free French movement. When possible, de Gaulle saw to it that his fighters got most of the Allied air drops of weapons and ammunition.

National Archives

German armor rolls through Toulouse. After the Allies invaded southern France, the Germans retreated northward to try and make a stand in the Rhône Valley.

One such drop from a wing of 60 B-17s occurred two weeks before the start of Operation Dragoon. B-17 tail gunner Larry Stevens remembers, "We flew in formation at an altitude of 500 feet with our landing gear and flaps down to lower our air speed. We dropped 3,780 containers of who-knows-what to the Free French. I recall seeing multicolored chutes, and little people scrambling for packages."

The pleasant German duty in the sunny backwater of the French Riviera came to an end on July 17, 1944, when American heavy bombers let go their loads on German facilities throughout the region in the opening round of Operation Dragoon. Guided by the French underground and Ultra intercepts of German communications, the Allies knew where nearly every German gun and strongpoint was located, and for a month they pounded the German positions.

Of course, the Allies had their own problems. British Prime Minister Winston Churchill was adamantly opposed to a landing in southern France; he advocated landings in the Balkans that would sever Germany's access to Romanian oil.

Churchill was planning ahead. An Anglo-American front in Eastern Europe would deny that area to the rapacious Soviets. As early as December 1941, Josef Stalin had laid out his postwar strategy to British Foreign Secretary Antony Eden. He told Eden that he planned to absorb much of Eastern Europe as a shield against Western Europe. Echoes of this strategy can be seen in Russia's current relations with Ukraine.

Not surprisingly, Stalin endorsed the plan to invade southern France. Churchill was overruled by his allies, who wanted to focus on the war at hand, which meant the logistically easier invasion of Mediterranean France. As it was, the entire operation, then called Anvil, was put on hold after the near disastrous landing at Anzio in January 1944.

However, when Allied forces in Normandy became bogged down in tough fighting in the hedgerow country, plans were dusted off. The operation was renamed Dragoon and given the go-ahead on June 24. The name is said to have come from Churchill himself, who said that he was "dragooned" into the operation.

The Allies hastily prepared for their invasion to take the pressure off Normandy. The

3rd, 36th, and 45th Infantry Divisions of General Alexander Patch's Seventh U.S. Army were pulled off the line in Italy and given a quick refresher course in amphibious landing. They were to be augmented by seven, mostly colonial, French divisions.

Meanwhile, a force of paratroopers and glider pilots also began training. In early July, Maj. Gen. Robert T. Fredrick was given command of all airborne troops for the invasion. He had five weeks to organize the First Airborne Task Force from scratch.

Crack teams of parachutists and commandos from 13 different units were pulled out of Italy and North Africa and hastily reorganized, trained, and briefed. One of these outfits was the antitank company of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, which was an all-Japanese American unit.

Without knowing the reason, the Nisei gunners (like many other units) were hastily sent to Rome from their frontline positions in northern Italy. There they underwent three weeks of glider training with the Waco CG-4A glider, a flimsy craft made of metal tubing, canvas, and wood. The glider had no motor, no armor, and no guns. A Douglas C-47 could pull two gliders 350 feet behind it with 11/16-inch thick nylon ropes all the way to the drop site.

After only two glider practice flights, the gunners were deemed qualified for their mission. During this time it was discovered that their American-made 57mm guns would not fit into the gliders. Quick thinking resulted in the requisition of smaller British 57mm guns.

After that, Shiroku "Whitey" Yamamoto, a Hawaii-born jeep driver in the antitank company, explained, "We learned how to load a glider…. You can load your 57mm British antitank gun, or a trailer full of ammunition, or you can load up a jeep. So each glider carries only one wagon with ammunition, a jeep, or that British six-pounder."

In all, Yamamoto's company would employ 44 gliders. Two pilots from the First Airborne flew each glider, while three to six Nisei gunners from the antitank company rode inside. Their job would be to provide artillery support for the lightly armed independent 517th Parachute Infantry Regiment that would be making its first combat jump.

Bundersarchiv Bild 183-J27018; Photo: Bronsema

After being blistered by Field Marshal Rommel for neglecting coastal defenses along the Riviera, General Johannes Blaskowitz (center), commander of Army Group G, inspects German positions, June 1944.

As thousands of men trained for the invasion, their mission became the most open military secret of the war. German POWs told their captors that the coming invasion of southern France was common knowledge, while Italian priests prayed openly for the success of the mission. It was a hard secret to keep.

There would be 300,000 men involved in Dragoon. As many as 2,000 planes and nearly 900 ships were assigned to the task along with 21,000 tanks, trucks, jeeps, and other vehicles that would be landed. The Germans could counter with fewer than 200 planes and no ship larger than a destroyer. The German Abwehr spy network was well aware of what was to come but could do little to prevent it.

There were constant American reconnaissance flights. The best plane available was the P-38 Lightning. With its heavy guns removed and a camera mounted, it could cruise at 30,000 feet, high above any German pursuit plane.

On the morning of July 31, at the Poretta airfield near Bastia in Corsica, a 44-year-old man climbed into his P-38 and strapped himself into the pilot seat. He wore the uniform of the Free French Armée de L'air. He had flown recon flights four years earlier in the Battle of France before escaping to North America. Now he was back in the war.

His name was Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, a famous French aviator who, in the 1930s, was one of the first to fly the mail from France to South America before embarking upon his career as an author. While cooling his heels in exile after the fall of France, Saint-Exupéry resumed his writing, producing his most famous work, *Le Petit Prince,* or *The Little Prince.* At his age he could have sat out the war, but he applied for a special exception that would allow him to keep flying—and it worked.

Now he was in Corsica, eager to do his bit, and had already flown eight missions. He took off at 8:25 in the morning for a long flight over southern France and the Rhône Valley. His mission was to take pic-

tures of the Grenoble and Annecy region in the Alps. After his liftoff, he was never heard from again, and his fate remains a mystery.

On August 11, General Wiese learned that Allied troop convoys had shipped out from ports in North Africa. The Abwehr thought they were either headed for Genoa to get behind German defenders in Italy or to southern France; Wiese knew it would be France. General Blaskowitz, meanwhile, was desperately trying to move the 11th Panzer Division from Bordeaux into a defensive position along the Riviera to meet the possible invasion at the beaches. For

Bundersarchiv Bild 101I-027-1479-34; Photo: Wolfgang Vennemann

Photographed in 1942, this heavy German coastal gun battery along the Riviera looks formidable but did little to impede the Allied invasion.

that, however, he needed permission from Hitler, which would be late in coming.

On August 12, Allied convoys departed their ports in Italy and headed northward to join up with the invasion force from North Africa. Altogether, Allied ships disgorged from 10 different ports in Italy, North Africa, and Corsica to create a mighty fleet.

To support the vulnerable troopships, 247 warships steamed as escort. They included five battleships, among them USS *Nevada,* which had survived the attack on Pearl Harbor (see *WWII Quarterly,* Winter 2015). There were also three heavy cruisers and nine escort carriers sailing in the Allied armada. Among the warships were vessels of the growing Free French Navy, Poland, and Greece. Many of the ships had come straight from Normandy, where they had bombarded the coast for that invasion two months before.

On that same day, several fighter squadrons—including the 332nd Fighter Group, the famed Tuskegee Airmen known as the Red Tails, flying from their base at Ramitelli, Italy—were dispatched to strafe German radar stations along the French Riviera. Their goal was to knock out the German radar prior to the landing.

Meanwhile, in Berlin the German high command, and Hitler in particular, had been convinced that an invasion along the Atlantic coast was coming. His information came from the same covert British agents of the XX Committee (the famed Double Cross) who had convinced him to keep an entire army in Calais to guard against an invasion there. As a result, Hitler would not release the 11th Panzer Division to the Mediterranean coast until August 14, the day before the invasion, when it would be too late.

As with Overlord, the Allies would employ several deceptions and diversions, known as Operation Span, to keep the Germans guessing and off balance. For this they even employed "star power." Lt. Cmdr. Douglas Fairbanks Jr., the famous Hollywood actor, had joined the U.S. Navy at the beginning of the war and now commanded a small flotilla in an action called Operation Rosie. Fairbanks led 11 gunboats, PT boats, and motor launches whose job it was to land 67 French Navy commandos on the coast at Pointe de l'Esquillan, just west of Cannes.

The French disembarked at 1:25 AM. They were to move inland and cause as much noise and destruction as they could to make the Germans think that this was the main invasion spot, but the landing was a disaster.

Reports from the resistance the day before stated that the landing beach was not mined, but after that report was received the Germans laid mines on the commandos' landing beach. Exploding mines and the screaming of the wounded alerted the defenders, who rained machine-gun fire at the invaders and threw them back into the sea, where many more were killed or captured.

Saddened by the setback, Fairbanks would take heart when his ruse de guerre was reported by Radio Berlin to be a major Allied invasion that had been repulsed. The four small-caliber rounds fired by his gunboats were reported to be the salvos of several large battleships. Though most of the Frenchmen had given their lives, the gambit had worked.

Meanwhile, the American destroyer *Endicott,* under the command of Lt. Cmdr. John Bulkeley, was leading another deception. Earlier in the war, Bulkeley had been awarded the Medal of Honor when his PT boats rescued General Douglas MacArthur from Corregidor just before the Japanese overran the island in Manila Bay.

Bulkeley's task was to lead a flotilla of PT boats and motor launches to the Baie de la Ciotat, a quiet bay between Marseille and Toulon. The boats were spread out over a 12-mile length and eight-mile width to simulate a major invasion fleet. In the dark, and with the help of radar-jamming strips of aluminum known as window or chaff, to confuse the local radar station (it had been purposely spared from Allied bombing), the tiny fleet was

National Archives

Although lightly armed, a group of Maquis fighters moves in on a German sniper hiding in a coastal town.

made to look like the real thing.

Bulkeley maneuvered his boats into the bay and began firing at the port facilities and German ships. The Germans responded with their shore defense guns but in the dark could see nothing. After making his pass, Bulkeley sailed back out to sea while the local garrison reported that they had repelled a major Allied landing attempt. On D+1, Bulkeley would repeat the ruse to keep the Germans guessing.

A third deception involved fake paratroopers. Three hundred dummies dressed in American uniforms were flown over Bulkeley's fleet at Ciotat and dropped about 15 miles north of Toulon. They were rigged with firecrackers, which gave the impression of a firefight once they hit the landing zone. German troops were dispatched to the site only to find the dummies had been booby trapped; when a soldier tried to lift a dummy, an explosion went off and he was severely wounded.

Earlier that day the German 11th Panzer finally received permission to leave Bordeaux. It moved at dusk to avoid the Allied fighter bombers, but it had 300 miles to travel. At first it rumbled along on back roads but progress was slow. General Wietersheim ordered a move to the main road which, in the dark, would be reasonably safe.

On that same evening of August 14 at 7 PM, French Resistance leaders tuned to the French broadcast of the BBC as they had for months. Among a stream of seemingly meaningless phrases was the sentence, "*Nancy a le torticolis,*" or "Nancy has a stiff neck"—the coded signal that the invasion was imminent. After a few other innocent phrases came a second message: "*Le chasseur est affamé,*" or "The hunter is starving." It was repeated. This phrase meant that the invasion would start early the next morning.

All along the Riviera, resistance groups swung into action. In St. Tropez, resistance leader René Girard heard the messages and gathered his section leaders to carry out their sabotage assignments. The men were cautiously optimistic, but they had been burned before. On June 5, the day before D-Day in Normandy, a similar BBC message urged a general uprising all over France. The Maquis in southern France rose up even though they were lightly armed and unsupported. The Allies finally called off the uprising on June 15. Unfortunately, by that time the Germans had already rounded up hundreds of men and women fighters. Torture, execution, or concentration camps were the fates of an unknown number of French patriots.

But on this night the resistance conducted several acts of sabotage that, by 10 PM, convinced General Wiese to order the entire Nineteenth Army on full alert. The resistance was active far beyond the Provence region and behind German lines. In Puligny-Montrachet, a village about 25 miles south of Dijon, a wine grower named Paul Cabanon had converted his rare, American-made Buick to run on wood-fired charcoal because there was no gasoline to be had. But the car always seemed to break down on a bridge that spanned a small brook.

Cabanon remembered that before the war a telephone cable had been laid down along the brook that was the main phone line between Paris and southern France. For weeks Cabanon swore and labored over his Buick on top of the bridge while a friend below dug away at the cement that encased the phone line.

When they heard on the BBC that the invasion would be the next morning, they sprang into action. While Cabanon's wife sat in the car on the bridge as lookout, the two men poured 50 liters of sulfuric acid into a hole in the concrete and onto the cable. Then a small amount of plastic explosive with a delayed fuse was set.

When it exploded, the line was cut. Worse, 50 meters of cable were eaten away by the acid. It took two days to repair, which caused a blackout of German communications between Provence and Paris during the first two crucial days of battle. Cabanon escaped, but the Gestapo, looking for a Buick, arrested and tortured his wife before sending her to Ravensbrück, a Nazi concentration camp for women.

Back in Provence, the surviving German radar picked up the real Allied fleet making a change in course. Instead of sailing toward Genoa, it was now headed directly for the French Riviera.

By 11 PM, the transports began arriving at their assigned positions some six to 10 miles off a 37-mile-long stretch of the French coast. At the western end of the line, transports carried the 2,000 American and Canadian commandos of Colonel Edwin

Walker's 1st Special Service Force—the famed Devil's Brigade. Alongside them were 700 French commandos under the command of Lt. Col. Georges-Regis Bouvet.

The Americans were assigned to take two German-held islands some five miles off the coast of Toulon. One of these, the Île du Levant, was thought to house three 6.5-inch coastal defense guns, which could decimate the landing craft in the area. The other island, the Île du Port-Cros, also commanded the landing beaches. While the 1st Special Service Force hit these targets, the French commandos would simultaneously assault the mainland beach at Cap Nègre, east of Toulon.

Colonel Walker sent 1,300 men of the Devil's Brigade, called the Black Devils by the Germans because they had painted their faces black during night raids at Anzio, against the seaward cliffs of Île du Levant. He reasoned that the cliffs would not be defended; he was right. The three guns that the Allies feared were there were nothing more than drain pipes convincingly camouflaged to look like guns from the air.

There was a garrison of Germans entrenched in an island cave that rained mortar shells down on the Americans when they came ashore. The British destroyer HMS *Outlook* provided fire support, but her shells could not reach the interior of the cave. For that, the attackers had to get close enough to fire bazooka rounds into it. At that point the Germans surrendered, and 240 prisoners were taken.

On Île du Port-Cros, meanwhile, the remaining Black Devils encountered some 58 Germans entrenched in a Napoleonic-era fortress called Fort L'Éminence with 12-foot-thick stone walls. The Germans pinned down the Americans, who were out in the open. When the cruiser USS *Augusta* was called in for fire support, her 8-inch shells bounced off the battlements. For two days the fort held out against periodic shelling and bombing. Finally, the World War I-era battleship HMS *Ramilles* was called in.

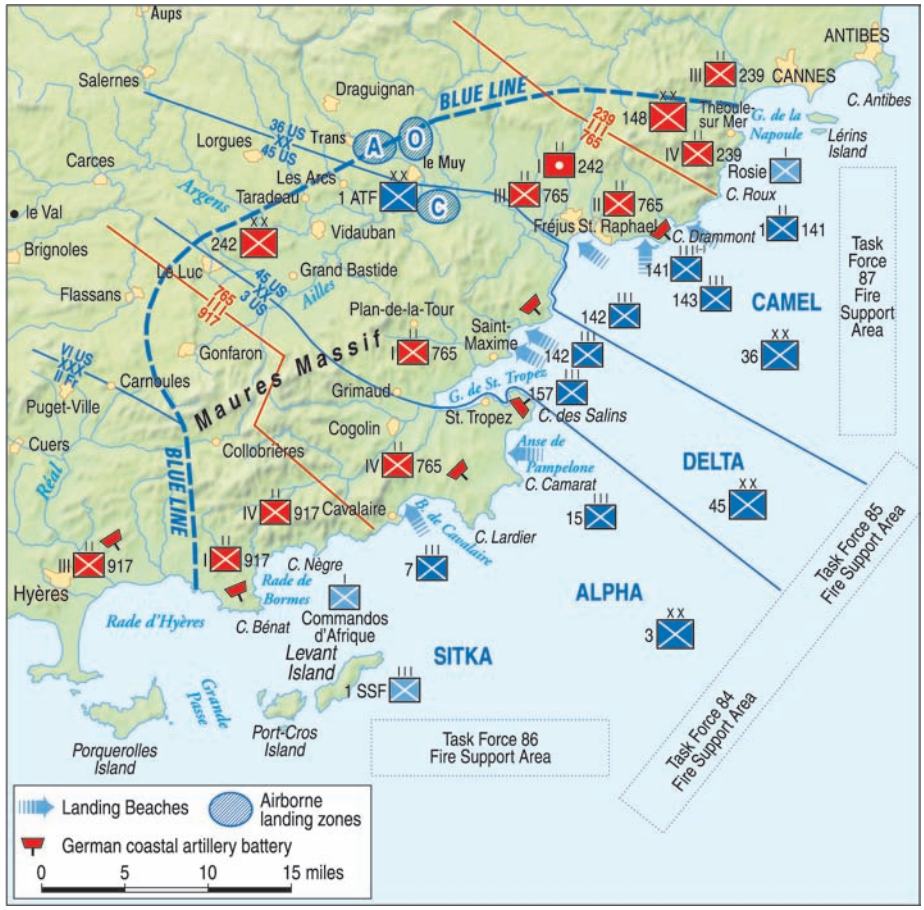
Though outdated, *Ramilles,* with her 15-inch guns, had been active throughout the war. Recently she had supported the landings at Normandy, knocking out shore batteries and breaking up enemy concentrations. Firing from six miles offshore, her third salvo found the fortress, and the defenders frantically waved white flags amid the smoke and surrendered.

On the mainland, the French commandos had their own problems. Two advance teams of nine men each were towed in rubber dinghies by PT boats to within 1,000 yards of shore. Their goal was the stretch of beach between Rayol and Cavalaire, from which they would signal with a green light to show the main body where to land.

Released from the towing boats, they silently paddled their rubber boats to the beach. Unfortunately, navigation errors put each group about a mile distant from its intended landing site. It cost valuable time to reach the intended beaches just east of Cap Nègre. This rocky outcropping was the site of three German costal defense guns. Groping in the dark, the first group at last found the right beach, but at the critical moment the batteries of their flashlights went dead and no signal could be sent.

The other group of nine landed at the base of Cap Nègre. The group leader, Master Sergeant Noel Texier, decided to change his mission. He would scale the heights with his eight men and capture the guns himself. But the Germans had been alerted, and a shower of hand grenades killed Texier and pinned down his men on the cliff.

At sea, the main body of commandos could not see any green lights to signal their landing sites. But the invasion could not wait. The next party, in two landing craft of 30 men each, was assigned to knock out the German guns on Cap Nègre. With no green lights from shore to guide them, they headed toward the wrong beach. The captain of the first boat saw in the darkness that they were not at a rocky shore and turned back out to sea.



German troops were still dealing with the after-effects of the Normandy invasion when the Allies, with three amphibious task forces and parachute and glider troops, hit southern France.

National Archives

The skies are filled with silk as transport planes drop hundreds of 551st Parachute Infantry Battalion paratroopers near Le Muy, 10 miles inland.

The second boat, however, landed its men, who stormed the heights and knocked out the two guns they found (the reported third gun was not located). Despite the mishaps, the French now had a toehold on their beloved homeland.

While the diversionary raids were taking place and naval preparations were being made for a beach landing, the paratroopers of Frederick's First Airborne Task Force boarded their C-47s at their bases in Italy, each man with a 70-pound pack of personal and company gear on his back, for an operation codenamed Rugby.

The British and American Pathfinders of the 509th, 551st Parachute Infantry, and the 550th Glider Infantry went first. These men were to prepare the landing sites for their units in designated locations around the town of Le Muy. Their job was to secure a perimeter and lay out landing lights. An hour later, 396 C-47 troop transports would follow.

Twelve miles inland, Le Muy was a strategically important town that commanded a narrow valley and one of the few roads that led inland. The Germans realized its importance and garrisoned it with two full regiments. It was a high-priority Allied target, and the paratroopers focused their drops around the town.

At 3 AM on D-day, the Pathfinders approached the French coast only to find that it was covered in a thick blanket of fog. The men, under fire from German antiaircraft guns, had to jump blind. When they landed in darkness and fog, they had no idea where they were or where their mates were; some had landed up to 25 miles off target.

An hour and 15 minutes later, the main body of the 509th made its jump into the featureless fog below. In at least one case, an entire planeload of men dropped to their deaths into the unseen sea, carried to the bottom by their heavy packs. Many more were seriously injured upon landing. Like the Pathfinders, they had trouble finding their drop zone or their comrades in the dark and fog. Fifteen minutes later, 3,900 men of the 517th landed blind. Among those who were lost was General Bob Frederick, who was in overall command.

While there was much confusion among the Allied paratroopers, it caused even greater confusion among the enemy. As happened during the scattered Overlord drops, with Allied paratroopers landing far from their targets, they gave the impression of deliberate landings over a much larger area. For the defenders all was chaos.

Individually and in small groups, the paratroopers cut German communication lines, ambushed patrols, shot at vehicles, and took prisoners. There were firefights all over the Côte d'Azur. When reported back to German headquarters, the number of enemy combatants was always exaggerated, giving the impression that the Allied forces were numerically superior.

This was an accurate impression when the French Resistance was added in. These guerrilla bands attacked the occupiers wherever they could. In one incident, a company of 250 Germans had captured a patrol of Americans. No sooner had they done so than they were themselves surrounded by a greater number of angry Frenchmen.

The ranking German officer summoned one of his prisoners, a private, and surrendered his command to the Americans rather than trust to the tender mercies of the vengeful French. The private disarmed the entire company and turned them over to the French anyway. Yet, despite some small Allied victories, the Germans still held Le Muy.

Meanwhile, just before 6 AM swarms of Allied bombers roared out of the south and dropped their bombs on the beaches while

National Archives

eager fighter pilots sought out a nonexistent Luftwaffe. Over 4,000 Allied sorties were made that day against no opposition. At 7:30, it was the turn of the naval guns to bombard the coast.

Just as the combined air and naval bombardment began, the troop transports, 10 to 12 miles from shore, began to lower their landing craft. By the time the troops reached the Rivera beaches at 8 AM, it was hoped that all resistance would be subdued.

The main landings were accomplished by the VI Corps of the U.S. Seventh Army under the aggressive leadership of Maj. Gen. Lucian Truscott. It would be bolstered by the French 1st Armored Division, commanded by Maj. Gen. Jean de Lattre de Tassigny.

There were three landing beaches. From left to right they were Alpha, which was assigned to the 3rd Infantry Division; Delta, centered on the resort city of Saint-Tropez and assigned to the 45th Infantry Division; and Camel, assigned to the 36th Infantry Division.

Only at Camel Beach did German defenders put up serious resistance, but this was soon overcome.

Among the soldiers in the 3rd Infantry Division was the son of a sharecropper from Texas named Audie Murphy. He would soon be the most highly decorated American soldier of all time. His heroics in the south of France, where his best friend was killed, earned him the Distinguished Service Cross and were featured in his autobiography and in the 1955 movie *To Hell and Back*.

With much of their communications cut, the Germans could not offer a unified resistance, and it would be the next day before counterattacks could be launched.

All day Allied troops waded ashore, parachuted down, or landed in one of 400 gliders as the invaders consolidated their positions.

Shiroku Yamamoto recalled his entry into France on a glider: "As the men approached the green fields around Le Muy, they could see many colorful parachutes lying on the ground, like giant yellow, red, and blue morning glories. They also were greeted by bursts of antiaircraft flak. The tail of one glider was hit."

There would be close to 300 casualties among the glider men alone. These were listed among the 1,000 casualties suffered by the First Airborne Task Force, one tenth of their strength. By the end of the battle, the count would be much higher.

There was only one bright spot for the Germans on D-day. A flight of Junkers Ju-88 and Dornier Do-217 bombers flew over the coast at St. Raphael around 9 PM after Allied fighters had retired. At least one of the bombers carried a Henschel He 293 antiship missile. Among the hundreds of ships at anchor below, the pilot selected the American *LST-282,* which was loaded with 1,000 men awaiting their turn to land. The pilot's aim was true, and the LST sank in shallow water near shore, killing 40 and destroying the equipment aboard.

Tom Riordan, a mortarman in the 45th's 157th Regiment, G Company, recalled, "On the morning of the 15th, we were aroused at two o'clock for breakfast. We ate quietly. 'Hope this goes like the Anzio landing,' an old timer said. 'No Germans to meet us.' Another replied, 'Sure as hell not like Sicily. That was a real SNAFU.'

"Father Joe Barry, the 45th's Catholic chaplain ... reminded us there would be a Mass in the hold of the [LST] at 4 AM. By 3:30 it was packed—GIs sitting on tanks, jeeps, trucks, boxes of ammunition, and rations.

"For Company G, the actual landing was a breeze. In our sector, heavy dawn bombardments by naval guns had silenced German pill boxes. Not a shot was fired by the Germans or us. Slogging through heavy sand, we saw French civilians watching at the edge of the beach. They were cheering. For me, there was one surprise. A plump, middle-aged French woman rushed towards us. Without warning, she planted a wet kiss on my cheek."

By dawn the next day, the bulk of the Allied force was ashore, armed, and organized. The feeble German counterattacks did little good, but accidents did to some units what German defenders could not. On August 16, while the 157th Regiment of the 45th Division was off the shore of Saint-Tropez, a landing craft full of soldiers suspended from davits on a transport broke free and crashed onto another landing craft below it; 11 men were killed.

On the afternoon of D+1, the beaches were secure. By the 17th, it was clear that the

Germans could no longer throw the enemy into the sea.

General Truscott, who had witnessed the disaster of troops digging in at Anzio, ordered immediate thrusts inland before the Germans could get organized. He got his way. The 3rd and 45th Divisions, spearheaded by the French 1st Armored Combat Command under General Aime Sudre, pushed westward north of Toulon and Marseille and on to the Rhône and Avignon.

The 36th Division, meanwhile, dug in on the eastern flank near Cannes to guard against potential German reinforcements from Italy.

Despite the cool morning fog, the subsequent days were hot and muggy. Everywhere in the battle men suffered from the heat and dust. But the scent of victory was in the air, and the Allied commanders were pushing their men forward to take advantage of the situation.

Both: National Archives

ABOVE: The Free French underground played important roles during the invasion. Here, a couple of FFI fighters give GIs information on German locations.
RIGHT: An American Sherman tank crew scans for Germans retreating up the Rhône Valley in southern France.
OPPOSITE: After parachuting into southern France, these First Airborne Task Force troopers head down a road near Le Muy, August 15, 1944.

German positions were crumbling all over France. In the north, an entire army was trapped in the Falaise Pocket. French citizens rose up throughout the country to hinder the occupiers' movement and communication.

When German troops invaded France in 1940, they had moved faster and with more violence than the French and British could prevent. Now the situation was reversed. On the 16th, Hitler had at last agreed to authorize a pullback. Blaskowitz (and Allied commanders through Ultra intercepts) received the order the next day.

Most German units in the south were ordered to withdraw to northern France to form a defensive line between Dijon and the Swiss border, while the two divisions east of the Allied beachhead were ordered to Italy to reinforce the garrison there. For the static units, however, retreat was not an option as they were ordered to defend the port facilities to the last man.

As rapidly as General de Lattre's infantrymen could come ashore, they were pressed westward to liberate Toulon and Marseille. De Lattre decided to attack both cities at once. He had learned from his French sources that Toulon was garrisoned by some 18,000 Germans, while Marseille was defended by 13,000 more. He also knew that the Germans had not prepared defenses against a landward attack.

Attacking Toulon on August 20, de Lattre's men took just six days to force a German cease-fire. One of the strongest German positions was a fort at Cap Brun. French engineers tapped into the German phone line to the fort. A Free French colonel, speaking perfect German and pretending to be the fort commander's superior, told the commander that he had new orders from Hitler himself: the garrison was to shout "Heil Hitler" three times, destroy its guns, and surrender. To the amusement of the French outside, the Germans obeyed the orders.

Meanwhile, at Marseille an armada assembled offshore to bombard German strongpoints. The honor of firing the first salvo was given to the French battleship *Lorraine*. Inside the city, Maquis fighters rose up in support of the Free French soldiers battling their way into the city. In the hills outside the city, 6,000 fierce Moroccan Berbers, called Goumiers, along with their pack mules blocked routes of escape. Both cities officially surrendered on the 28th. The French suffered 4,500 casualties but took 28,000 prisoners.

Continued on page 97

The D-Day Invasion Museum in Arromanches-les-Bains is one of many fine military museums in Normandy.

THERE IS SUCH a treasure trove of fine military museums in Normandy—perhaps more than anywhere else in the world—that we could devote an entire issue to nothing but them.

These include the Musée Mémorial d'Omaha Beach (Omaha Beach Memorial Museum) in Saint-Laurent-sur-Mer; La Musée du Débarquement at Utah Beach (La Madeleine); the Musée D-Day Omaha in Vierville; the Airborne Museum in Sainte-Mère-Église; the Musée des Rangers (Rangers Museum) at Pointe du Hoc; the Musée du Débarquement No. 4 Commando (No. 4 Commando Museum) at Sword Beach/Ouistreham and the Musée du Mur de l'Atlantique (Grand Bunker and Atlantic Wall Museum) also at Ouistreham; Centre Juno Beach (Juno Beach Museum) in Courseulles-sur-Mer; Musée Mémorial de la Bataille de Normandie (Battle of Normandy 1944 Memorial Museum) in Bayeux; Musée des épaves sous-marins du Débarquement de Port-en-Bessin (Museum of Undersea Invasion Wrecks) in Port-en-Bessin; Overlord Museum in Colleville-sur-Mer; and the Arromanches 360 (D-Day Circle Vision Cinema) at Arromanches-les-Bains.

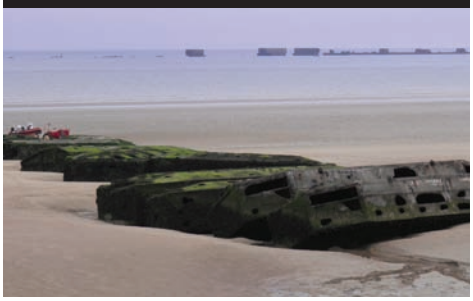
Since we can't cover them all here we've selected one at random: the Musée du Débarquement (D-Day Invasion Museum) that opened in 1954 at Arromanches-les-Bains, on the shore of what was Gold Beach. Here is a wide variety of uniformed mannequins, artifacts (such as an original "Rupert" dummy parachutist that doesn't look anything like the ones in *The Longest Day*), a film presentation, a sound-and-light diorama of the landing, and a working model of the artificial "Mulberry B" harbor.

Just outside the museum are the remains of Port Winston, aka "Mulberry B." When the tide is out, you can walk right out and closely inspect the 20 huge concrete caissons that, for 70 years, have been battered by the sea.

After an unequaled engineering and construction project, cargo ships began unloading here on June 14—just eight days after the first troops had set foot on the beach. Mulberry B managed to withstand the severe June 19-21 storm that wrecked a similar anchorage (Mulberry A) at Omaha Beach.

This and the other museums will ensure that you never forget one of history's most pivotal battles.

The outstanding, full-scale dioramas at the Overlord Museum in Colleville-sur-Mer, near the American Cemetery at Omaha Beach, convey the sheer force of the invasion.



TOP: A mannequin of General Eisenhower chatting with 101st Airborne troops outside a C-47 transport plane is one of the highlights of the Airborne Museum at Ste.-Mère-Église. CENTER: The remains of "Mulberry B" can be visited at low tide at Gold Beach right outside the Musée du Débarquement (D-Day Invasion Museum) at Arromanches-les-Bains. BOTTOM: A working scale model of the artificial harbor at the Musée du Débarquement at Arromanches.

D-DAY INVASION MUSEUM

Arromanches, Normandy, France
Location: Place du 6 Juin, Arromanches
Hours: Hours vary; see website for details.
Admission: Admission fee charged.
Website: www.musee-arromanches.fr

Dragoon

Continued from page 95

While the French were clearing the ports, General Truscott sent a flying column under Brig. Gen. Frederick B. Butler 50 miles north to try to cut off a German retreat up the Rhône Valley. But, as more Allied troops pushed inland, logistics became an issue. There were not yet enough trucks ashore to resupply the growing and fast-moving armies, and this inhibited Butler's mission. Without sufficient fuel, artillery, or ammunition, Butler could not get significant forces across the Rhône Valley road near Montélimar, a town world famous for its candy nougat, quickly enough to cut off the German retreat.

The recently arrived German 11th Panzer Division, with infantry support, counterattacked Butler's position for a week, which allowed many German soldiers to escape. The fight to bottle up the Germans lasted until the 29th, when the exhausted panzer unit was at last ordered northward as the rear guard gave way. This allowed the Americans control of the highway. They captured more than 3,000 prisoners who had failed to run the gauntlet.

Truscott would not stop to rest. The 3rd Division (including Audie Murphy) struck northward from Montélimar toward Lyon (170 miles inland) with the 1st French Armored Division marching in tandem to the west of the river. In the east, the 36th and 45th Divisions moved northward along the Swiss border. Resistance in most places was minimal and easily overcome.

Mortarman Tom Riordan of the 45th recalled, "Our orders were to keep moving until we ran into resistance. We force-marched for two days, mainly through rain, until reaching a little town called Le Luc—my baptism under fire. It lasted about 20 minutes. We set up our mortars, but they weren't needed. The Germans has quickly pulled back off.

"Our company commander was about to signal us to move out when four French civilians joined him. They wore armbands with the letters FFI. We were seeing our first Free French resistance fighters. 'Anyone in the outfit speak French?' the CO asked. George Courlas stepped forward. The Frenchmen excitedly began to chatter and wave their arms. George listened carefully. "They say there's a German Mark IV tank hidden in the next village, sir. They want to knock it out."

"Okay, tell them to go and do it," the CO said. And they did.

By August 31, the Americans had reached the outskirts of Lyon, France's second largest city. However, the 11th Panzer, the only intact German force, was again deployed as rear guard and the Americans feared the possibility of house-to-house fighting. Units were deployed to flank the Germans with little success. When two scouting troops succeeded in getting behind the Germans, the panzers turned and mauled them badly.

By the night of September 3, though, the German rear guard pulled out of its positions and followed the disintegrating army northeast toward the Alsace-Lorraine region; Truscott's three divisions and the 1st French followed immediately. The Allies' supply lines were thinning, however, and French peasants volunteered their aging vehicles to augment the meager deliveries from the coast. They also supplied the Allies, especially the Free French, from their own stocks of food and wine.

On that same day, Allied cargo ships began unloading at the port of Marseille, and by the 9th, the entire French Mediterranean coast was in Allied hands. The final goal of Operation Dragoon was realized on that day when a patrol of de Lattre's French Corps, racing north along the Rhône, met up with a patrol of Maj. Gen. Jacques Leclerc's 2nd Free French Armored Division, which had landed at Normandy and recently liberated Paris.

Soon, all Allied troops in France would come under General Dwight Eisenhower's overall command while the Maquis was disbanded by de Gaulle and its fighters absorbed into the French Army.

Despite a chaotic start, Dragoon had achieved all its objectives. The war would move into Germany, and the people of France could breathe free. □

Personality

Continued from page 11

down the *Hatakaze*'s main stack.

The destroyer blew up.

"The ammunition blew completely," said Klenk. "The ship didn't sink. It just broke into little pieces and disappeared in the explosion. Newquist had hit it and I hit it. One moment, that ship was leaving a wake behind, maneuvering to evade us, and the next moment it was gone. The ship disintegrated."

Klenk and his squadron mates were aboard *Ticonderoga* when two kamikaze suicide aircraft hit her off Formosa a week later on January 21, 1945. Some 144 sailors lost their lives and the ship was saved only through the heroic efforts of many. A pilot who'd recently left VB-80 for other duties was among those killed. Klenk had vivid memories of a smoke-filled ready room, burning planes on deck, and sailors heaving aircraft and bombs overboard to deter fires from spreading. The damage took *Ticonderoga* temporarily out of the war. Klenk's squadron mates Anderson and Mullaney were among those too badly wounded to remain in the war. But Squadron VB-80 was intact and transferred to USS Hancock (CV 19). Klenk and his squadron mates flew combat missions against the Japanese home islands until Hancock's cruise ended in May 1945.

Helldivers flew 18,808 combat sorties in the Pacific, sank or helped to sink 120,000 tons of Japanese shipping, and shot down 41 Japanese aircraft. Some 271 Helldivers were lost to antiaircraft fire and 18 to Japanese fighters.

By then, Bill Klenk was in another squadron, VB-15, stateside, preparing to fly the Helldiver during the invasion of Japan. "That's one invasion I'm glad didn't happen," said Klenk, who lives today in Gibsonia, Pennsylvania.

In a fitting salute to the end of their participation in the war, some Curtiss SB2C Helldivers participated in the massive flyover of the surrender ceremony on the battleship USS Missouri (BB 63) in Tokyo Bay September 2, 1945. □

Strangle

Continued from page 63

results were similar to Strangle's. Tactical air forces did an excellent job of cutting all the bridges over the Po River and denied Kesselring's troops any supplies for a time. However, the lack of air and ground joint planning negated the success of this interdiction campaign.

Mark Clark was not ready to attack at the end of Mallory Major and, coupled with the withdrawal of troops for southern France, caused a near cessation of interdiction sorties for six weeks. This respite allowed the resourceful Germans time to lay pipelines across the Po and establish sufficient pontoon bridges and shallow underwater crossings to keep supplies flowing. Mallory Major, like Strangle, became more of a harassing campaign than a decisive military blow.

Yet, the Army Air Forces learned a lesson. Interdiction must be continuous to be effective. Following the breakthrough of the Gustav Line, the majority of combat sorties were shifted to close air support of Fifth and Eighth Armies with minimal resources allocated to interdiction. Following the breakout from the Gothic Line, tactical air planners continued to hammer retreating German troops on the flat, open terrain of the Po Valley, turning an orderly retreat into a rout.

Like Strangle, Mallory Major received lukewarm praise from Alexander and Clark. Tactical air intelligence, which had learned some lessons from overly optimistic reporting of Strangle results, reported that Mallory Major had limited success. "Despite its width, the Po River failed to halt the flow of supplies after its bridges had been destroyed in Operation Mallory Major, and the lesson was demonstrated anew that multiple barriers are necessary to effectively undo the enemy's logistics."

However, the Germans were much more emphatic in assessing the effectiveness of what was essentially Strangle Part II.

General Fridolin von Senger und Etterlin, commanding general of XIV Panzer Corps, admitted, "The Allied bombings of the Po River crossings finished the Germans in Italy." Pressed by constant daylight air attack and attack by night under flares, the Germans were forced to abandon most of their equipment and the disorganization caused by hurried river crossings caused unit cohesion to disintegrate. General von Senger added, "North of the Po, we were no longer an army."

The problem with assessing Strangle's effectiveness lies in the fact that it was an exclusive Army Air Forces show that was dependent upon ground troops to assist in keeping constant pressure on the enemy. In that way, such repeated blows against the German supply system would be magnified by the increased consumption during daily fighting and erode German combat effectiveness. It was an operation that was too optimistic in its scope.

Never before had such an intensive interdiction campaign been conducted, and the methods to assess its progress were invented on the fly. Operational Research scientific methods predicted success based upon skimpy data from campaigns that were not similar to the conditions in Italy. Overreliance on photo intelligence painted a false picture of the progress of the campaign.

Finally, the technology of the day did not permit a continuous application of air power against the enemy's logistical network, allowing many hours or days of sanctuary from air attack for a resourceful enemy to react and adjust. Many of these same lessons were relearned some 25 years and half a world away during the interdiction campaign against the North Vietnamese supply line on the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

Ultimately, measured by Operation Strangle's objective as directed by the Combined Chiefs of Staff to "reduce the enemy's flow of supplies to a level which will make it impossible to maintain and operate his forces in central Italy," Strangle must be judged as having failed to meet its objectives. As effective as it may have been in harassing the enemy, it did not shorten the war. German forces in Italy surrendered on May 2, 1945, just days prior to the capitulation of the Third Reich. □

★ U.S. Secure Coins ★

SECURITY • TRUST • QUALITY

ARE YOU PREPARED?

GET YOUR GOLD AND SILVER AMERICAN EAGLES

BEFORE THEY ARE GONE!

Coins not to scale. Enlarged to show detail.

2015 One Dollar
Silver American Eagle
$14.98 Each*

2015 Five Dollar
Gold American Eagle
$112.00 Each*

ASK ABOUT OUR **EXCLUSIVE PROVISIONS** FOR ORDERS OVER $25,000

CALL U.S. SECURE COINS AT 800-727-2099 TO PLACE YOUR ORDER

COINS WILL BE SHIPPED AFTER THEY ARE RELEASED FROM THE MINT
PRICES SUBJECT TO CHANGE

- and check or money order -

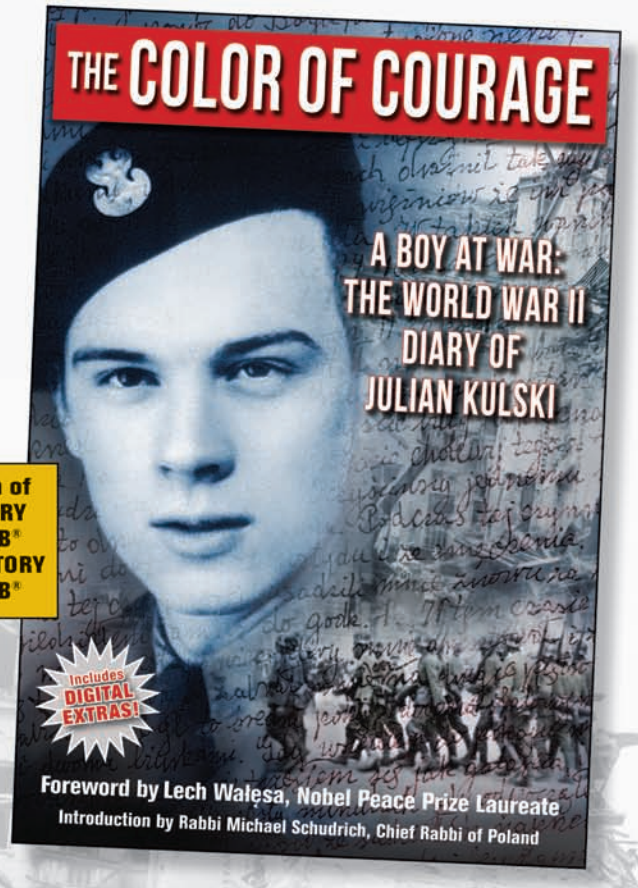
NO DEALERS PLEASE • EXPIRES: 10/07/2015 • LIMIT: 2 • OFFER ONLY VALID WHILE SUPPLIES LAST • IF WE ARE UNABLE TO FULFILL YOUR ORDER YOU WILL RECEIVE A PROMPT REFUND • ORIGINAL HARD COPY MUST BE IN HAND TO PLACE ORDER • ONE PER HOUSEHOLD • **VAULT VERIFICATION # UWW2Q770615U**

Gold Basis: $1,140.87 | Silver Basis: $13.29

GROUNDBREAKING
A NEW WAY TO SEE WWII

An INNOVATIVE use of today's technology paired with historical film and audio material in the print book creates a VIVID READING EXPERIENCE unlike any other.

"Julian Kulski's wartime diary stayed with me long after I had finished reading it—I knew we had something special here, which deserved special treatment," says Aquila Polonica Publishing president Terry Tegnazian.



"Showcases the gallantry of one man... provides clear insights into SPIRITUAL and MORAL STRENGTH of an entire nation."
— General John R. Allen, U.S. Marine Corps (Ret.)
Commander, NATO International Security Assistance Force (2011-2013)
Special Presidential Envoy for the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL

"A SUPERB lesson of humanity."
— Lech Wałęsa, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate

A Selection of the MILITARY BOOK CLUB® and the HISTORY BOOK CLUB®

"An INSPIRING read."
— The Chief Rabbi of Poland, Rabbi Michael Schudrich

"COMPELLING, readable, and very moving."
— Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski

"At once ABSORBING, inspiring, and tragic."
— *Publishers Weekly*

"POIGNANT, haunting, gritty, and bursting with realism...brings a deeply moving and UNIQUE perspective to World War II."
— *Foreword Reviews*

"One of the most EXTRAORDINARY war memoirs we have ever seen."
— Rafael Goldkorn, Editora Valentina

Includes DIGITAL EXTRAS!

A rare and fascinating look at WWII through the eyes of a child.

This remarkable diary follows Kulski, a 10-year-old Boy Scout when WWII begins, as he is recruited into the clandestine Polish Underground Army by his Scoutmaster, undertakes a secret mission into the Warsaw Ghetto, is captured by the Gestapo, sentenced to Auschwitz, rescued, fights in a Polish Commando unit in the Warsaw Uprising, and ends as a 16-year-old German POW.

Includes more than 150 photos and maps, plus 11 Digital Extras. These historical multimedia elements bring an entirely new dimension to the experiences chronicled in Kulski's diary.

DIGITAL EXTRAS SAMPLE

GERMAN VICTORY PARADE
Warsaw, October 5, 1939
www.polww2.com/GermanVictoryParade

AQUILA POLONICA®
www.AquilaPolonica.com