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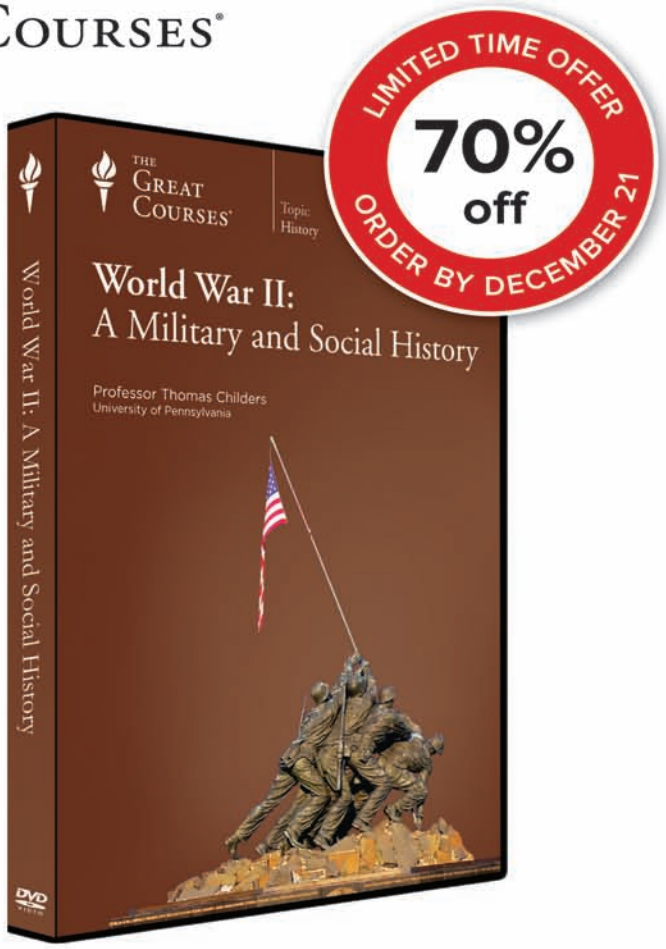

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COVER: A German dispatch rider on the Russian Front wears the Iron Cross First Class and Infantry Assault Badge. See story page 66. Photo: © SZ Photo / Scherl / The Image Works

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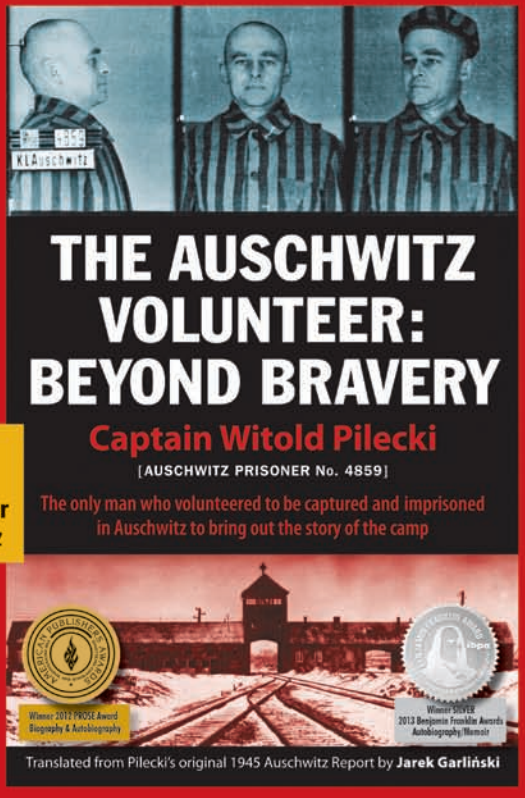

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Marching in the footsteps of heroes

I MENTIONED IN MY SUMMER 2015 EDITORIAL THAT I HAD GUIDED three D-Day tours in the summer of 2014. I repeated the tour-guiding experience in May and June this year for the Minnesota World War II History Roundtable during a tour of Fifth Army battlefields in Italy.

Although less well known today than the D-Day sites, the Italian battlefields are no less impressive—or important. This particular tour took us to the Operation Avalanche invasion site of Salerno, then moved northward to the huge palace at Casterta, where Lt. Gen. Mark Clark and his Fifth Army had its headquarters.

The flags of many nations, representing the nationalities of those who had been imprisoned at Buchenwald, fly during the memorial ceremony.

We continued on to the mountainside village of San Pietro, which has been left in its destroyed state as a memorial to those who fought and died there. A new museum and hotel/restaurant have sprung up from the ruins.

Our coach then climbed the steep road leading up to the Abbey of Monte Cassino, completely restored after being destroyed during the war. While in Cassino, we paid solemn visits to both the British and Polish war cemeteries.

We stopped in Anzio to visit museums and the scenes of some of the bitterest fighting of the entire war. Then we paid our respects, on Memorial Day, at the American Military Cemetery in Nettuno, Anzio's neighboring city. A stirring ceremony, attended by several hundred Americans and Italians, paid tribute to those who died during the struggles to free Sicily and Southern Italy.

When we reached Florence, we toured the graves of more than 4,000 Americans who died during the battles that took place north of Rome in the 11 months after the Eternal City fell to the Allies on June 4, 1944. We discovered that it is impossible to visit a military cemetery without a tear in one's eye and a lump in one's throat.

A month earlier I was in Weimar, Germany, to attend the 70th anniversary of the U.S. Army's liberation of the Buchenwald concentration camp. Meeting the mayor of Weimar, the American ambassador to Germany, and some of the survivors (a couple of whom chose to attend wearing replicas of their striped camp uniforms) are experiences I won't soon forget.

The people who somehow survived their terrible experiences at the hands of the Nazis are world treasures who, sadly, are diminishing in ever accelerating numbers each day. Not too many years from now these eyewitnesses to an incredible, terrible era in human history will all be gone, which is why it is so important that we listen to them while they are still with us.

I do hope that all of the readers of this magazine will avail themselves of the opportunity to take a battlefield tour someday—and walk in the footsteps of heroes.

—Flint Whitlock, Editor

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Was the deadly 1937 Japanese attack on the USS *Panay* in China's Yangtze River a case of mistaken identity or something more sinister?

FOR SOME AMERICANS, WORLD WAR II STARTED EARLY.

In December 1937, four years before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor propelled the United States into the war, Japanese planes attacked an American gunboat, the USS *Panay,* on China's Yangtze River, strafing and bombing the boat, sinking it, killing three American crew members, and the wounding 45 others.

Those same Japanese planes also attacked three Standard Oil tankers that were being escorted by the gunboat, killing the captain of one of the tankers as well as a number of Chinese passengers.

Two newsreel cameramen aboard the *Panay* were able to film the attack and subsequent sinking of the gunboat, the burning tankers, and the diving, firing Japanese planes. The attacks and the newsreels taken at the time helped to turn American public opinion against Japan and, for a time, there was talk of war.

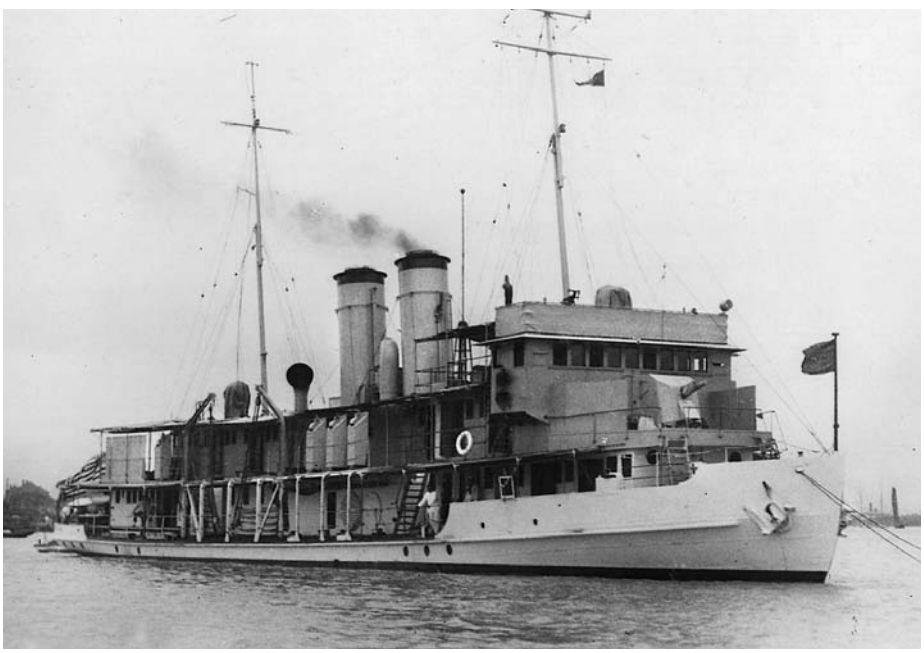
In the end, war was avoided, and Japan paid an indemnity of over $2 million to the United States. But, at the time and for years afterward, questions raised by the incident remained unanswered.

What had really happened? And why?

As early as 1854, the United States had gunboats on the Yangtze River, a right granted by treaty. By the 1870s, American interests in the area had expanded and the U.S. Asiatic Fleet was created to protect those interests from feuding Chinese warlords and pirates along the river.

By the early 1900s, Standard Oil's activity and use of tankers in the region had also picked up, and by 1914 the United States Navy had introduced specially built, shallow-draft gunboats to the river. By then the Navy was patrolling as far upriver as Chunghink, 1,300 miles from the coast.

Between 1926 and 1927, six new gunboats were commissioned and placed on the river.



ABOVE: In a frame from a film made on the day of the attack, Lt. Cmdr. James J. Hughes (right), is shown in a launch near the *Panay*. BELOW: The American gunboat USS *Panay* on patrol on China's Yangtze River. The boat had clear American markings, so the attack could not have been the result of mistaken identity.

One of the was the *Panay,* a 191-foot gunboat armed with eight. 30-caliber Lewis machine guns and two three-inch guns.

A brass plaque in the *Panay*'s wardroom summed up her mission: "For the protection of American life and property in the Yangtze River Valley and its tributaries, and the furtherance of American good will in China."

In July 1937, following decades of diplomatic and military incidents between the two countries, increasingly hostile Japan attacked China. By November, the Japanese had captured Shanghai at the mouth of the Yangtze and had begun moving up the river, leaving "a swath of destruction." In early December, Imperial troops were approaching Nanking, then the Chinese capital.

The United States was officially neutral in the conflict. Ambassador Joseph Grew and the staff of the American embassy fled the city in November, leaving four men including Vice Consul J. Hall Paxton behind to monitor the situation and do what they could to protect American citizens still in the area.

In early December, the *Panay* was sent from Shanghai to Nanking to remove the remaining Americans from the city. To prevent his gunboat being mistaken for an enemy vessel, *Panay*'s captain, Lt. Cmdr. James J. Hughes, ordered that American flags be lashed across the boat's upper deck and that a 6 by 11 foot United States flag be flown from the boat's mast.

Two sampans that were powered by out-

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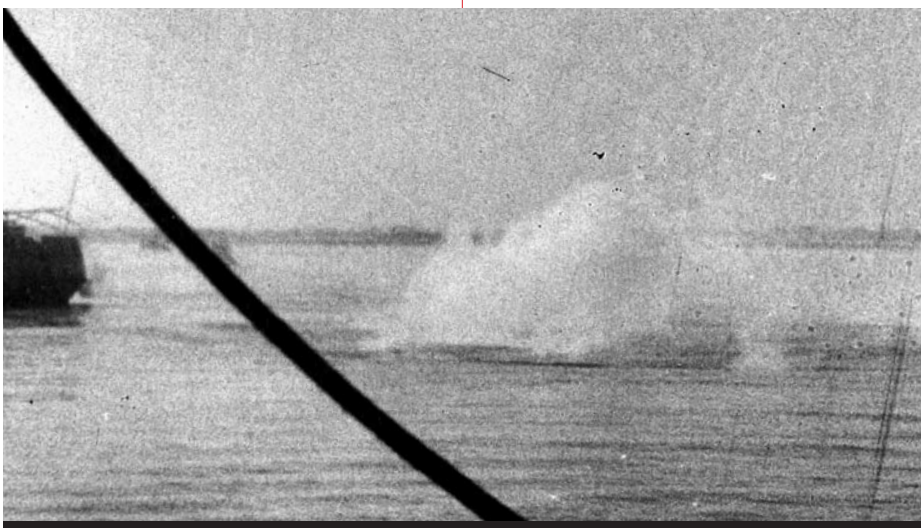

ABOVE: A Japanese bomb explodes near the *Panay*. Two newsreel cameramen were aboard and filmed the entire incident. BELOW: Three Yokosuka B4Y Type 96 carrier-based dive bombers struck the *Panay* first.

board motors were attached to the *Panay* to ferry those being evacuated to the gunboat. Hughes also ordered that the two sampans conspicuously fly American flags.

By December 9, the *Panay* was docked in the river at Nanking and 15 civilians had been taken on board—the four embassy staffers, four other U.S. nationals, and other foreign nationals including a number of journalists. Among the journalists were newsreel cameramen Norman Alley of Universal News and Eric Mayell of Fox Movietone.

At the time, the gunboat had a crew of five officers and 54 enlisted men. As the Japanese approached the city and shells began falling near the river, the *Panay* left the city and moved to an oil terminal a short distance upriver. Hughes sent a radio message to the Japanese alerting them to its new position.

"That night all of us stood and watched the burning and sacking of Nanking, until we rounded the bend [in the river] and saw nothing but a bright red sky silhouetted with clouds of smoke," Alley later wrote.

On December 11, shells began falling near where the *Panay* and three Standard Oil tankers, the *Meiping*, *Meian*, and *Meihsia*, were anchored; the tankers were there to help evacuate Standard Oil employees and agents from Nanking. The three tankers and the *Panay* quickly formed a convoy and moved seven miles farther upriver to avoid the shelling.

Witnesses to the action later claimed that the shells that had fallen appeared to be "aimed."

On the morning of December 12, as the convoy was heading upriver, a Japanese naval officer approached the ships and demanded information from the *Panay* about the Chinese disposition of forces along the river.

Captain Hughes refused to comply. "This is an American naval vessel," Alley reported Hughes as saying. "The United States is friendly to Japan and China alike. We do not give military information to either side."

The convoy was then allowed to resume its passage upriver and eventually anchored 28 miles north of Nanking. Once there, Captain Hughes sent his new position to American authorities with a request that the information be relayed to the Japanese.

At about 1:40 PM that day, three Yokosuka B4Y Type-96 bombers were seen heading toward the convoy in V-formation. Japanese bombers overhead were a familiar sight to the men of the *Panay*. They had seen them frequently since the Chinese-Japanese fighting had begun, and the planes had never been anything to be concerned about.

"We had no reason to believe the Japanese would attack us," Executive Officer

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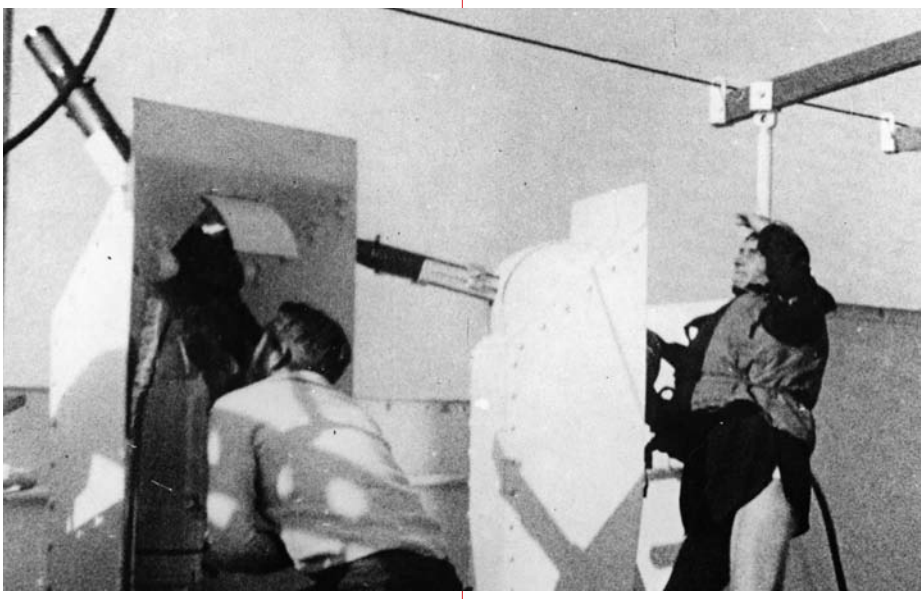


Lieutenant Arthur Anders later said. "The United States was a neutral nation."

This time was to be different.

To be safe, Captain Hughes summoned his men to battle stations and closed the gunboat's water-tight doors and hatches. As the planes approached, however, they were joined by several Nakajima A4N Type-95 biplane fighters. The Yokosuka bombers seemed to be losing altitude or even going into power dives.

Suddenly and unexpectedly, they released their bombs.

One of the bombs almost immediately hit the *Panay*'s pilot house. There was a brilliant flash and the sound of crunching steel and shattering glass. Captain Hughes was quickly incapacitated with serious wounds, the *Panay*'s three-inch guns were knocked out, and its pilot house, radio room, and sick bay were destroyed. The ship's propulsion gear was damaged. Electrical power was out.

Not realizing Captain Hughes had been wounded, Anders nonetheless gave the order to return fire.

Following the three Japanese bombers, the Yokosuka fighters strafed the gunboat while six single-engine dive bombers swept over the *Panay,* pounding it with more heavy explosives. The *Panay* began to settle at the bow and list to starboard.

The crew returned fire as best they could, but the gunboat's three-inch guns were down and her machine guns had been installed to fight targets on shore. Forward fire was almost impossible, and they could not be elevated enough to fire at the Japanese planes as they passed overhead. In addition, with many of the crew wounded, not all the guns could be manned. An Italian correspondent also had been struck and was critically injured.

Anders manned one of the guns himself but, when he became aware that Captain Hughes had been injured, he moved to the bridge to assume command. He was almost immediately struck in the throat by a shard of metal. Unable to speak and bleeding badly, he nonetheless wrote out orders in his own blood.

Throughout the chaotic scene, as bombs were exploding and machine-gun fire from the Japanese fighters strafed the boat, Alley and Mayell raced around the deck filming the action. Across the water, fire could be seen breaking out on the tanker *Meiping*.

On the *Panay,* crewmembers were throwing gas cans over the side and moving the wounded to the engine room. Twenty minutes into the attack, Anders said later, "Part of the [*Panay*'s] main deck was awash, the ship was slowly sinking and there were many injured on board."

He gave the order to abandon ship.

The *Panay* had no lifeboats and one of its two motor sampans had already left the ship and was heading away. A Japanese plane came down on the sampan "like a chicken hawk," Anders recalled. The plane dropped a bomb that fell short, but another Japanese plane came by and strafed the sampan before it could return to the gunboat.

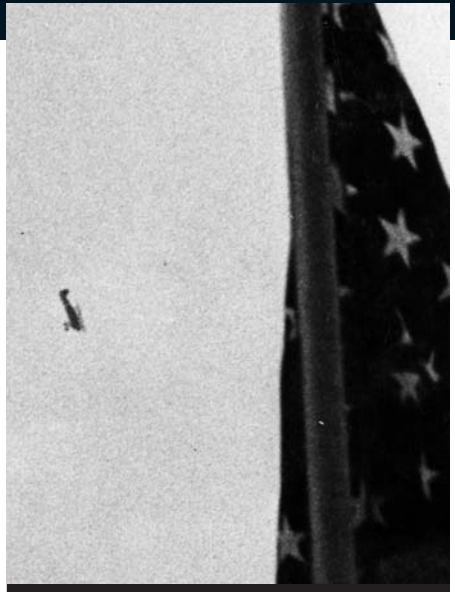
The wounded—including Captain Hughes—were evacuated in the sampans, code books were destroyed, and lifebelts were distributed. Some crewmembers leaned wooden tabletops against the rails in case a quick exit was required. The stiff current in the river, which was as much as seven miles per hour, made it dangerous for swimmers. Most of the crew was able to leave on the sampans, however.

"The sampan I was in had been strafed, Anders later said, "on one of its many previous trips ashore. The bullet holes in the bottom were leaking water."

Meanwhile, the Japanese had focused their attack on the Standard Oil tankers. On board the *Meian,* Captain C.H. Carlson had been killed and two of the three tankers were burning. "We could hear the pitiful screams of the Chinese crew members," Norman Alley wrote.

At about 3:55 PM, the *Panay* sank in 10 fathoms.

The gunboat survivors, meanwhile, had reached shore. Many of them were wounded, and they huddled in the reeds along the shore as Japanese planes "soared in vulturous circles above us," as Alley put it.



ABOVE: A newsreel frame shows an American flag on the *Panay* with a Type 96 dive bomber behind it attacking Standard Oil tankers. OPPOSITE: Boatswain's Mate Ernest Mahlmann, right, and another crewman fire antiaircraft weapons at attacking Japanese planes. Mahlmann gained fame as the "pants-less gunner of the *Panay*."

The two Standard Oil tankers burned on the river. The third tanker had by then beached itself.

Fearing they would be discovered by the Japanese, Alley wrapped the film he had shot, along with Mayell's film, in canvas and buried the package in the mud. By dark, the attack was over, and the group of survivors realized they were in Chinese-controlled territory and about eight miles from Hoshien, a small fishing village. They made litters from whatever was available and walked the eight miles to the village, carrying the wounded.

The *Panay* had suffered three crewmen killed and another 45 injured. Five of her civilian passengers were also wounded.

Once at Hoshien, the survivors were able to contact American embassy officials, and American and British Navy vessels were immediately dispatched to the area. The Japanese authorities, expressing confusion over what had happened, also took part in rescue efforts, launching search planes and ships.

The survivors were finally picked up at Hoshien by the American gunboat *Oahu* and by two British gunboats, HMS *Bee* and

HMS *Ladybird,* which had been fired on earlier by Japanese artillery. The British had suffered one man killed and four injured.

The Japanese quickly issued an apology, claiming they had received information that some of the Chinese fleeing Nanking were on the river and, from the altitude at which their bombers were flying and "in the mist," their pilots had mistaken the *Panay* and the tankers as the vessels carrying the Chinese.

Secretary of State Cordell Hull issued a formal complaint.

The Japanese continued to apologize, a Japanese admiral resigned in connection with the incident, and Japanese Emperor Hirohito announced that he would personally take charge of an investigation of the incident "no matter how humiliating [it] may be to the armed forces."

On December 19, Alley's and Mayell's film of the incident, which had been recovered from its hiding place on the Yangtze river bank, was released. The film put lie to Japanese claims that the *Panay* was not well marked and that visibility was limited. It showed a clear and sunny day.

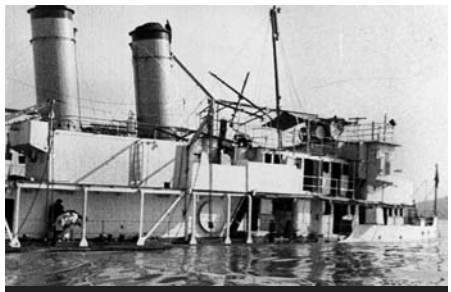
Public outrage followed—President Franklin D. Roosevelt said he was "shocked"—and the attitude of the American people began to turn against the Japanese.

A few days later, as the *Panay* survivors reached civilization, "filthy, cold, and wearing only blankets, Chinese quilts, and tatters of clothing," their photos and stories began being published and public outrage mounted.

Before Alley's film was made public, however, Roosevelt had viewed it and had requested that the cameraman remove 30 of the 53 feet he had shot. Those 30 feet showed Japanese planes attacking the *Panay* at almost deck level and contradicted many of the Japanese government's claims. In censoring the film, Roosevelt probably acted from fear that the explosive nature of the film would inflame the growing public sentiment in favor of war with Japan, something Roosevelt did not want at that time. (View the 22-minute newsreel at www.youtube.com/watch?v=WujTPNkjSeM.)

As the initial shock faded, things began to slowly return to normal.

Although wounded, Hughes manages a smile for the cameraman after coming ashore.



The *Panay* is shown partially submerged after the attack 28 miles from Nanking. Three crewmen were killed and 45 wounded.

Alley shifted his attention to the fighting in Europe. Lieutenant Anders amazingly coughed up a metal shard three days after the attack and regained the ability to speak; he was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal for his actions. Captain Hughes had suffered a severely broken femur but would recover to serve in the coming war.

But why had the Japanese planes attacked the *Panay* and the Standard Oil tankers in the first place?

As late as 1953, Commander Masatake Okumiya, who had led the Japanese bombers that day, continued to maintain that the attack had been a case of mistaken identity. The pilots operating the bombers, he said, had only been flying in China for about eight days and had never been briefed on how to recognize neutral ships. The firing against the two British gunboats had been quickly ended, he said, when a British flag was spotted on one of the boats.

At the time and later, this explanation was questioned.

The *Panay* was known to be well marked and, despite Japanese claims, visibility was also known to be good that day. Alley's film also showed that the Japanese planes had approached at a very low altitude, almost

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VMF-221, USS BUNKER HILL, "WHITE 183"

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P-51D MUSTANG COLONEL ARTHUR JEFFREY

434TH FS, 479TH FG, USAAF, "BOOMERANG JR."

Sent to England with the 434th Fighter Squadron in 1944, Arthur Jeffrey claimed his first aerial victory in July of that year when he shot down an Fw-200K near Cognac. He went on to achieve numerous additional kills in the following months over a wide range of Luftwaffe warbirds when, in October, his unit switched from the P-38 Lightning to the P-51 Mustang. In his "Boomerang Jr.", named as the smaller successor to his P-38 "Boomerang," he attained ace status on October 7th. Col. Jeffrey flew 82 combat sorties during World War II and achieved 14 victories.

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"deck high." In addition, analysts asked, if the Japanese truly believed they were attacking troop transports, why did they clearly attack the *Panay* first—the only vessel capable of returning fire?

It was also reported after the war that U.S. Navy cryptographers had intercepted Japanese radio messages to the attacking planes indicating they were under orders during the attack and that the attack was in no way unintentional. Allegedly, some of the Japanese aviators involved had protested their orders before finally agreeing to execute them.

The most probable explanation of what happened to the *Panay* that day is that the Japanese government did not sanction the attack. Analysts and American newspapers speculated at the time—and later historians have agreed—that the attack was most likely launched by radical elements within the Japanese military that were trying to provoke a war with the United States.

Or it may have been an attempt by those same radical elements to measure the U.S. response to an attack, or was simply intended to force the United States to abandon its presence in China.

In any case, it was rogue Japanese officers who were behind the attack, not the Japanese government. The chaos spawned by the Japanese attack of Nanking may have provided what those elements considered an opportunity to further their own aims. They almost succeeded.

The prospect of war with Japan and the possibility of abandoning China both gained some public traction following the attack and its resulting publicity. A *Los Angeles Times* editorial at the time, for example, suggested, "A gradual withdrawal form China is no doubt wise."

But the United States did not abandon China, and it did not go to war.

Roosevelt accepted an official Japanese apology for the incident. The Japanese government paid an indemnity of $2,214,007.36 to the United States in April 1938, and the United States declared the incident officially closed.

When it did so, one historian wrote, "A sigh of relief passed over the length and breadth of America."

There would be no war with Japan—at least not then.□

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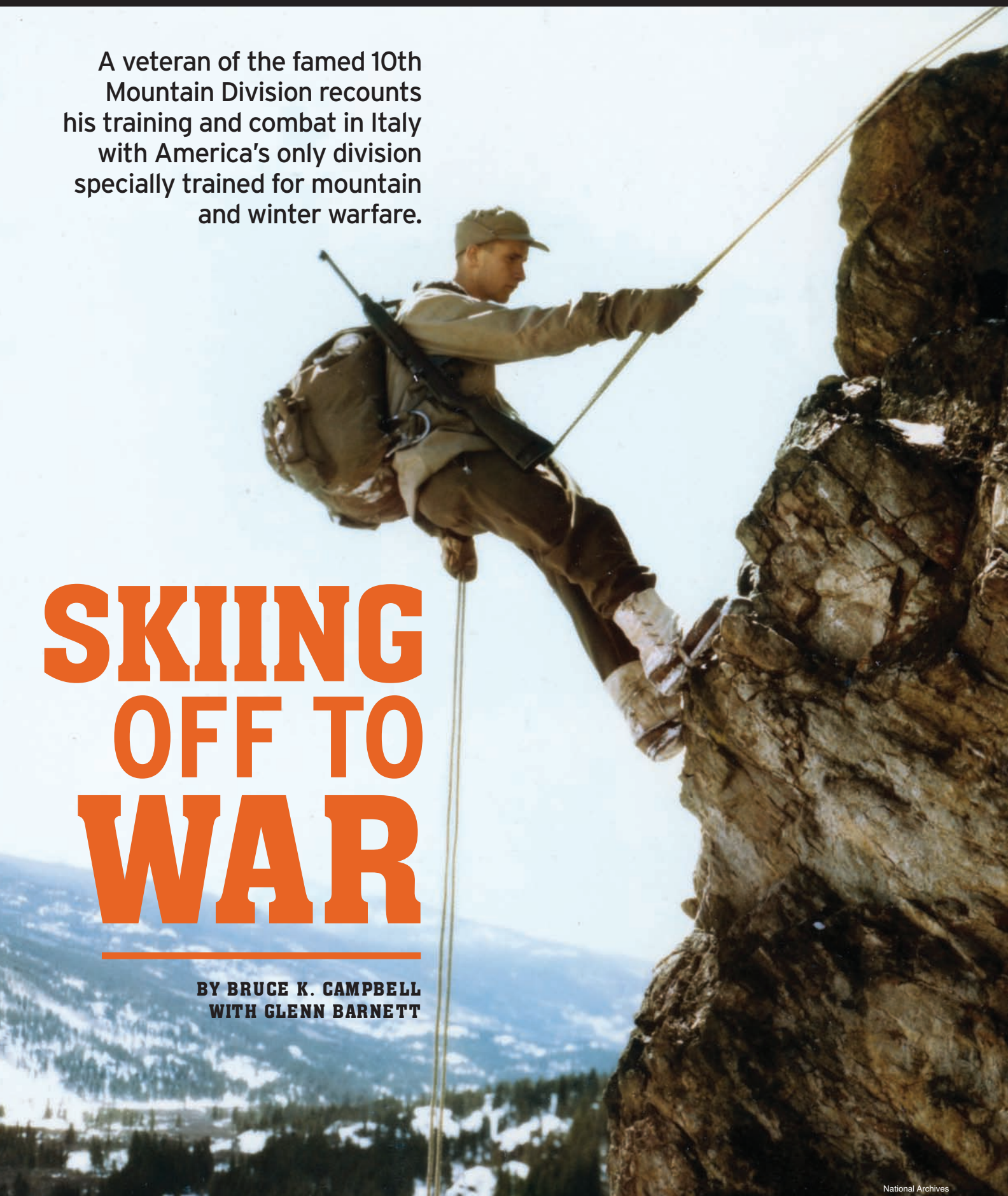
A veteran of the famed 10th Mountain Division recounts his training and combat in Italy with America's only division specially trained for mountain and winter warfare.

SKIING OFF TO WAR

BY BRUCE K. CAMPBELL
WITH GLENN BARNETT



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I WAS BORN IN LOS ANGELES in 1924 and attended local schools. In high school I enrolled in ROTC and, when I could, I went skiing for fun. When I graduated from Los Angeles High School in 1942, the country was at war—and we all knew that military service was a patriotic necessity.

As I was not yet drafted, I enrolled at UCLA in the fall. Early in 1943, I joined the Enlisted Reserve Corps (ERC—today the U.S. Army Reserve). That way, when I was called up, I could choose the branch of the service that I wanted. Meanwhile, I continued with ROTC training.

My decision about which branch of the military to join was made one afternoon at the movies. The theater showed a "short" about the 87th Mountain Infantry Regiment. It was produced by John Jay, a well-known ski film photographer. Afterward, the theater manager announced that there were applications in the lobby. Since I loved to ski, I filled out the application, which also required three letters of recommendation.

The idea for an Army ski unit was born during the winter of 1939-1940 when outnumbered and outgunned Finnish soldiers on skis were able to blunt the invasion of the Soviet Army. At home, Charles Minot "Minnie" Dole, the founder of the National Ski Patrol System, strongly and repeatedly urged the War Department to form a unit of men specially trained for mountain and winter warfare.

In the early days of the war, Americans found themselves fighting in the jungles of the South Pacific and the deserts of North Africa. There wasn't much need for ski troops. Dole, however, convinced the Army to establish a "mountain" unit similar to those in the Russian and German Armies. The armies of France, Italy, and others also had specially trained mountain units.

When I enlisted, none of my friends had ever heard of American ski troopers, so when I underwent orientation at Fort MacArthur in San Pedro, California, I was the only one assigned to Camp Hale in Colorado. As it turned out, I was one of the few southern California boys to join the ski troopers.

Camp Hale consisted of more than 800 whitewashed buildings—a real city—that had been hastily built in the summer of 1942. When I arrived on April 1, 1943, I was the only passenger to get off the train at Pando station adjacent to the camp. The station at Pando was about the size of a closet, and no one else was there. I thought it might be a cruel April Fools' trick. Shortly, however, I was picked up by an Army jeep and driven a short distance to Camp Hale, my home for the next 15 months. There would eventually be more than 12,000 men and 4,000 pack mules and horses living there.

My first run at the 9,200-foot altitude left me exhausted. When I arrived, I was 6 feet, 2 inches tall and weighed 155 pounds. In the next nine months I put on 30 pounds, all muscle. Some of our instructors were famous skiers from the National Ski Patrol, college ski team coaches, and even some from Norway, Switzerland, Germany, and Austria who had left home to avoid Nazi tyranny. One Austrian who would join us later was Werner von Trapp of the von Trapp family, who were chronicled in the movie *The Sound of Music*. He proved to be very useful as an interpreter.

The first volunteers had already become the 87th Mountain Infantry Regiment and

David Witte Collection

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ABOVE: Panoramic view of Camp Hale, Colorado. When completed in November 1942, the camp, at an elevation of 9,200 feet, had more than 800 buildings. RIGHT: The author with his mule Elmer. The smoke in the background is from two D&RGW trains passing through the valley where Camp Hale, Colorado, was located. LEFT: A 10th Mountain Division soldier with a carbine and rucksack weighing 50 pounds practices rappelling down a cliff face at Camp Hale, high in the Colorado Rocky Mountains. Many mountaineers said their training was more physically difficult than anything they experienced in combat.

had initially trained on Mount Rainier near Fort Lewis, Washington; they had also been sent, in August 1942, to the island of Kiska in the Aleutians to evict the Japanese who had captured it and Attu Island as a diversion from their attack against Midway.

Attu had been recaptured after bloody resistance. Now it was Kiska's turn, and the 87th was called upon to help retake the island. But the Japanese had secretly evacuated Kiska, so when 35,000 Americans and Canadians landed on the fog-shrouded island where no one could tell friend from foe the only casualties were from friendly fire and booby traps. (See *WWII Quarterly,* Summer 2013)

The new guys like me at Camp Hale were formed into the 86th Mountain Infantry Regiment; the 85th Mountain Infantry Regiment would be added as well, plus all the supporting units such as the artillery, engineers, quartermasters, medical personnel, and such. All together we would become the 10th Mountain Division. When the division was formed, our patch was designed. It consisted of crossed red bayonets forming the Roman numeral X on a field of blue.

Meanwhile, we trained and trained and trained. Most of the enlisted men had come from college campuses. Unfortunately, we would gain a reputation as dilettantes since our training included skiing and hiking through the woods. There were movies made about us as well as a lot of newspaper and magazine coverage, which added to our image as a glamorous outfit; some people resentfully called us "Eisenhower's playboys." If our critics had known how tough our training was, they would've changed their tune.

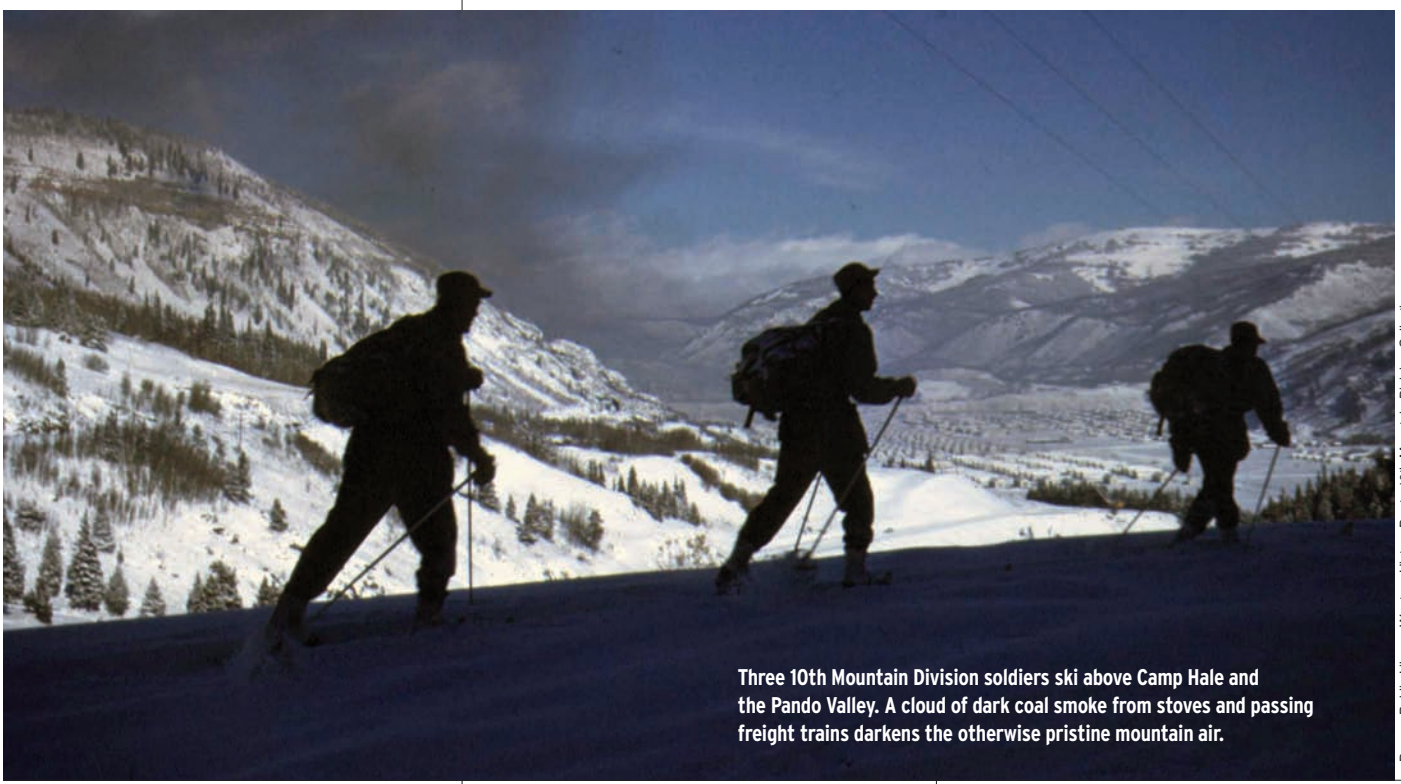
Some of our training took place on the mountain slopes that would, after the war, become the resorts of Ski Cooper and Vail in Colorado. At Cooper, about five miles south of Camp Hale, we traveled up to an elevation of 10,000 feet using a T-bar lift and then skied downhill with 90-pound rucksacks on our backs. If a man fell, someone had to help him up. It was a completely different technique than skiing without carrying all that weight.

Along with skiing and cold weather acclimation, we had to learn another skill, "mule skinning." We learned about the care, feeding, loading, unloading, and cajoling of these most stubborn of animals. My mule was named Elmer. We would have to rely on these animals in the trackless mountains where motor vehicles could not go. In any event, we didn't have motor vehicles except for a few jeeps and tracked vehicles called Weasels.

Finally, we learned rock climbing and rappelling. We didn't have the advanced equipment of today's climbers, but we had the basics: carabiners, pitons, small piton hammers, and nylon rope. One of our instructors was Glen Dawson, a prewar climber who had scaled many peaks around the world, sometimes with his friend, the photographer Ansel Adams. Another 10th man, Paul Petzoldt, was a world-class climber who was part of the first American team to attempt to conquer K-2 in the Himalayas—the world's second tallest peak. Another of my fellow climbers was David Brower who, after the war, would head the Sierra Club from 1952 until 1969. He would remain on their board until 2000.

That spring we were rarely allowed to sleep in our barracks. The instructors had us day and night in the field, skiing, hiking, and grazing our mules. For the most part we slept under the stars. This training would prove very useful when we got to Italy.

Although located in a spectacular setting rimmed by mountains, Camp Hale had its drawbacks. It was located in a high mountain valley through which passed a line of the Denver & Rio Grande Western Railroad. The coal smoke generated by the steam loco-



Three 10th Mountain Division soldiers ski above Camp Hale and the Pando Valley. A cloud of dark coal smoke from stoves and passing freight trains darkens the otherwise pristine mountain air.

Denver Public Library, Western History Dept., 10th Mountain Division Collection

Denver Public Library, Western History Dept., 10th Mountain Division Collection

Approximately 20 10th Mountain Division soldiers practice rock climbing at Camp Hale, Colorado. The group is wearing a variety of clothing, including denim jeans and jean jackets.

motives (not to mention the coal smoke generated by more than 800 chimneys) lingered in the valley, causing some of the men serious respiratory problems. The resulting persistent cough was known as the "Pando hack," and some men had to leave the outfit because they were too ill to continue.

The D&RGW soon gained a nickname among the men. We called it "Dangerous and Rapidly Growing Worse." Perhaps because I was from smoggy Los Angeles, the smoke that filled the Camp Hale valley never seemed to bother me.

After basic training at Hale, we were often able to get weekend passes so we could go into Denver, 100 miles away, or, more often, to Glenwood Springs, which then had a population of only 2,200. It also was home to the world's largest hot springs swimming pool. On one of these weekends my buddy and I hitched a ride with an older couple in an old car. Along the way, it broke down. A passing motorist promised to send help from the next town. So my buddy and I decided to swim in the nearby stream. As we did, the water level rose and trapped us on the other side near the D&RGW rail line.

We decided to hop a freight train for a ride home. I had never done this before, but my friend told me how to hide behind a rock and jump out, run alongside the train, throw my pack onto a gondola car, then grab hold of and climb the iron steps of the next car—all while trying not to fall under the deadly wheels of the train.

When the train stopped for water (it was a steam train), we confessed to the engineer. He was sympathetic and let us ride in the cab with him. We watched the fireman stock coal into the furnace to heat the boiler and were even allowed to pull the lanyard to sound the whistle. I have been in love with steam trains ever since.

At Camp Hale, when we marched or went on long training hikes, my ROTC training paid off. I was promoted to corporal, which meant that I no longer had to do KP. In the field we ate the infamous "C" and "K" rations—the tinned food of mysterious origin. I have to confess that to this day I still enjoy eating Spam.

It wasn't long before winter came to the Rockies. We were already aware that the 10th was different from other Army units. Now our white winter camouflage gear really set us apart. Curiously, our wool shirts and undergarments were still olive drab. Our collars were fur lined, and our wool mittens had trigger fingers. It seemed we were the guinea pigs to try out different types of winter gear; we constantly got different boots, hats, goggles, coats, skis, and all manner of other types of clothing from the Army to test.

I became the squad leader of a 60mm mortar squad. We carried heavier packs than the infantrymen. One man carried the tube, another the tripod, another the base plate. Other men, including me, carried ammunition, each round weighing three pounds. It was divided up so that each man carried up to 50 pounds of weaponry and another 40 pounds of personal gear. As a result, we wore snowshoes rather than skis. In deep snow this was a blessing, and we often broke trail for the skiers.

In February and March 1944, the entire division moved out with full packs for a month of war games known as "D Series." How well we did would determine if the Army would finally send us to a combat zone. We carried our full gear or loaded our packs on mules. That included skis, food, and ordnance. We fired live rounds with our mortars, causing some mini-avalanches

in the high country.

At night we dug into the snow and covered ourselves with a 6x8 canvas tarp. If we were below the tree line, we cut pine boughs and laid them under our sleeping bags. Sometimes the temperature would reach minus 35 degrees Fahrenheit. We were always cold. Except for being shot at, the conditions were much worse during the D Series than anything we would face in combat. After returning at the end of the exercises on the snowcapped high mountain peaks, our barracks felt like the Hilton.

All the while political tides surrounded our division. Some Army generals wanted us turned into a regular infantry division to fight on one of the growing number of Allied fronts or broken up and the men parceled out as replacements for other hard-hit divisions. Most of the Army considered us pampered college boys sitting out the war while skiing and rock climbing for sport.

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Denver Public Library, Western History Dept., 10th Mountain Division Collection

ABOVE: A captured German medic and a second German in back, helped by men from the 10th, carry a wounded comrade to an American aid station after the battle for Mount Belvedere, February 20, 1945. RIGHT: Bodies of 10th Mountain Division soldiers remain where they fell during the attack on Mount Belvedere in Italy's northern Apennine Mountains.

In the spring of 1944, most of our mules were taken from us and shipped to Burma to support jungle fighters there. Unfortunately, a great number of them died at sea during the long voyage. But the worst blow to our morale occurred in June when we were transferred from Camp Hale to Camp Swift some 40 miles from Austin, Texas.

Hot, dry, or humid by turns, flat and miserable Camp Swift was dreaded by us all. The move allowed us to expand to division strength by adding raw recruits from around the country. As mountaineers we felt invaded by these flatlanders. However, the expansion of the division did allow us to acquire heavy weapons.

Each battalion gained a heavy weapons company consisting of three sections of .30-caliber machine guns and three sections of 81mm mortars. Each section included two squads and their weapons. We were also issued additional pack artillery and had a battalion of tanks assigned to us. Proficiency in using the 81mm mortar earned me a promotion to staff sergeant in charge of a section consisting of two mortar squads. The 81mm mortar was a beast to haul. The tube, tripod, and base all weighed about 46 pounds each, and it took three men to carry these pieces along with all their usual personal gear. Other men carried several of the rounds that weighed seven pounds apiece but seemed to gain weight the longer you carried them.

While at Camp Swift, we endured eight-hour, 25-mile night marches with but one canteen (about a quart) of water each. We slept amid snakes and insects we had never seen before and never wanted to see again. We felt like an ordinary Army division now, and it was pretty discouraging. Then, in November of 1944, we got the shot in the arm we needed.

When Maj. Gen. Lloyd E. Jones, our commanding general, became ill, he was replaced by Maj. Gen. George P. Hays. Hays was a war hero and a real warrior. He had been awarded the Medal of Honor in World War I for bravery under fire. In this war he had fought at Monte Cassino and taken part in the Normandy invasion.

He didn't know about mountain troops and could not learn about us on the flat plains of Texas, but he inspired us with his words and actions. He also stood up for us. When our division was offered to General Dwight Eisenhower for use in France, Ike wanted us converted into an infantry division. Hays refused. We were now officially a mountain division, the only one in the United States Army, and there would be no more talk about converting us to an ordinary infantry division. We all admired General Hays, and he would

Denver Public Library, Western History Dept., 10th Mountain Division Collection

A line of 10th Mountain Division soldiers climbs Mount Belvedere, north of Florence, Italy, February 20, 1945. The hotly contested Riva Ridge is visible in the background.

lead us into combat when, finally in December, we were ordered to move again, this time to Italy, where the war had not been going well.

Before leaving Camp Swift, we were issued a little "Mountain" tab that we sewed on our uniforms above our crossed bayonet patch. It confirmed the fact that we were now considered elite troops and morale soared.

The 86th Regiment was shipped over first. The converted luxury ocean liner SS *Argentina* was our troopship. We slept in bunks stacked five high in cramped quarters below deck. Zigzagging across the Atlantic to avoid enemy U-boats, it took us 12 days to reach Naples, Italy. I had time for reading and finished *The Razor's Edge* by W. Somerset Maugham.

To our great disappointment, most of our winter gear, white uniforms, sleeping bags, and climbing gear languished in an Army depot. We spent the rest of the war without it.

We arrived two days before Christmas 1944. Sunken ships littered the Naples harbor, and portions of the city were demolished. While in Naples some of us were given day passes to leave our cantonment. It made us realize what this war was doing to people. The weather was cold, but children were running around wearing shorts, T-shirts, and sandals while we had overcoats. They scrounged scraps from our mess kits, ran off, and returned for more. I still remember the desperate condition of the people in this war-ravaged country.

The 10th Mountain Division had been called forward because of the difficulty the Allies faced trying to take the hilltop monastery at Monte Cassino during the winter of 1943-1944; it was a bloodbath for both sides. Now the front line lay in the northern Apennine Mountains north of Florence, and Fifth Army wanted us. We were finally about to get into the fight.

Shortly after Christmas, we were transported to the front—some of us by train and others by ship. We were also issued Italian pack mules that replaced the ones we had lost. Those of us traveling by sea to Livorno were the more fortunate. Our trip up the coast on the Tyrrhenian Sea was uneventful. There was no threat of U-boats, so we enjoyed what scenery was available. Livorno is a smaller port than Naples but was full of activity with Allied ships arriving laden with essential supplies for the troops in and around the northern Apennine Mountains. We then traveled to our staging area near the cities of Pisa and Lucca.

Since the end of the war, I have visited Pisa on two occasions and, of course, taken photos of the Leaning Tower, but my first viewing was in January 1945. We were still in our staging area, and I was on my way to the local hangout when I came across the most beautiful sight. The famous Leaning Tower was poised in brilliant moonlight without any tourists to interfere with the picture, which still remains vivid in my mind.

These outstanding surroundings were soon to be corrupted by tragedy. A couple of our men were walking along a local rail line when they stepped on a mine; the Germans had placed these randomly throughout the area. These men became our first casualties, but that was not the end because a chaplain and one of his assistants clambered down to render aid and

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A combat patrol from the 87th Mountain Infantry Regiment prepares to flush out a group of Germans holed up in an Italian farmhouse, March 1945.

encountered another lethal device. They also were killed. Naturally, everyone became aware of this incident, and from then on all of us were stepping lightly without leaving the known paths.

Our stay in Lucca was shortened by orders to advance to the front. We traveled east to Florence, then up to Pistoia and into the Apennines. Not knowing what to expect, we were filled with anxiety; there was admittedly a fear factor.

Fortunately, we encountered an unusually mild winter, although we found ourselves advancing into snow-covered mountains and with a light but cold snowstorm in progress. I couldn't help but be reminded of conditions that most of us endured at Camp Hale during D Series.

There were Allied troops in these mountains right across Italy from Livorno to Venice. We were somewhere in the middle and took our place in the line with the 92nd Infantry Division on our left and the division-sized Brazilian Expeditionary Force on our right. The Germans had fortified the mountain peaks in a chain, manning it with 33 divisions; the Allies had been stuck there since the previous autumn. Every time the Allies tried to advance, the Germans, observing from the peaks, halted them with accurate mortar and artillery fire.

Now, after all our training it was time for us to have a go at it and accomplish what we had been trained to do. Mount Belvedere was the highest peak in our sector. On one flank of that mountain was a series of steep peaks called Riva Ridge. The two German-held peaks offered observation and fire support for each other. The German IV Corps assigned the 334th and 94th Divisions to hold these strategic heights.

My outfit, the 86th Regiment, was assigned to scale Riva Ridge at night; we had to take Riva Ridge before the 87th and 85th Regiments could attack Belvedere. Before the assault, our engineers had cleared a path for us through a German minefield (a lousy detail). They also attached pitons and ropes to the steepest sections so we could climb in the dark. There was no preliminary artillery barrage to soften up the enemy, which would, of course, have alerted them to the fact that an attack was coming.

Hopefully, our advance would be in secret as our men ascended Riva Ridge, which rose steeply above the valley floor. This "ridge" was actually a series of adjoining peaks all ranging from 3,100 to 4,800 feet above sea level.

To ensure surprise, the men were not allowed to load their weapons because any accidental firing would give our approach away. Our mortar unit and other artillery stood by to offer fire support. After dark on February 18, 1945, the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 86th moved out from their hiding places and began a quiet, nighttime climb in four columns up the heavily fortified ridge. My battalion, the 3rd, was held in reserve.

The initial contact with the Germans was a complete surprise to them. We caught them sleeping in their foxholes or just making coffee. The surprise didn't last. The battle went on for 3 1/2 days as the Germans kept trying to retake their positions while our men held them off. The Germans were using their versatile 88mm guns to great effect.

When my 3rd Battalion was sent forward, we found ourselves continually advancing without the opportunity to dig foxholes or set up our mortar pits. There were times when I had some real doubts about any of us getting through these intense battles alive. As it

was, we suffered 1,430 casualties on Riva Ridge, but the Germans suffered more.

We had brought with us from the States a makeshift aerial tramway or cable car, which we set up on the ridge to haul up supplies and take wounded men down. Our engineer battalion had practiced setting it up and breaking it down at Camp Hale, and now in combat it worked like a charm.

On the second night, the 87th and 85th Regiments moved out to attack German positions on Mount Belvedere. This time, however, the Germans were not caught napping. Despite our mortar, artillery, and air support, the 87th took heavy casualties, but it also took Mount Belvedere.

Our successes sent shockwaves through the Allied higher command. Allied troops had been trying for months to force their way up these two heights, and we did it within a week. General Mark Clark, commander of the Fifteenth Army Group in the Mediterranean Theater, sent us his congratulations. German prisoners would later say how surprised they were to see our men rapidly moving up the slopes where other American troops walked.

With our success at Riva Ridge came new assignments. My battalion was tasked with taking Mount Della Torraccia, which formed part of the long ridge adjacent to Mount Belvedere. Our efforts were fiercely contested by two veteran German divisions.

I had a particular scare on that occasion. My mortar section was hiking to a forward position when we came under fire from German artillery. My buddy Aarre, a Finnish immigrant (we had a lot of foreign-born soldiers in the 10th), was carrying about 110 pounds of ammunition and gear when suddenly a German mortar round fell between us. Somehow it didn't explode, but it did cause Aarre to lose his footing. As he fell, his shoulder hit the mortar round. Fortunately, it still didn't explode, but it left us both plenty scared.

On another occasion our column was advancing through a deep draw in the snow. Shells from a German 88 advanced up the draw to zero in on our position. One shell landed about eight feet from Aarre and me. We dropped to our knees, but luckily that shell, too, was a dud.

National Archives

A line of 10th Mountain troops, accompanied by armored vehicles, passes dead Germans along a road in the northern Apennines, March 4, 1945.

Our unit reached the top of Della Torraccia after heavy fighting and had to hold it for several days. We were exhausted, hungry, and thirsty, but still had to ward off continual counterattacks. Once we arrived at our assigned destinations, we instinctively dug in. First, we dug our personal foxholes and then pits for our mortars.

That night we endured a pounding from German artillery before the assault we knew was coming. When the German attack began, they found that we had more firepower than they anticipated. My mortar section and the artillery called in from below overwhelmed their first attack, and they withdrew. There was then a lull when food in the form of ready-to-eat K rations (cook fires would give away our position), water, and ammunition could be brought to us before the Germans reorganized and again tried to throw us back.

During one fierce firefight, we ran out of mortar rounds and could not be resupplied while under attack. Our commanding officer decided we were to become infantrymen despite the fact that I only carried a .30-caliber carbine and my men only had .45-caliber pistols. Fortunately, our infantrymen and other artillery and mortar squads, still supplied with rounds, were able to hold off the attack without our help.

In one night attack, two companies of Germans silently outflanked our position. However, a carefully placed tripwire set off a flare that illuminated their location. Our machine guns and mortars laid into them. After suffering many dead and wounded, 60 of the Germans surrendered while the others retreated in haste.

The counterattacks continued for several days. During lulls in the fighting, we were resupplied, dug our foxholes deeper, and received replacements. The new men had not been trained in mountain fighting, but they soon earned their Combat Infantryman's Badges (CIB).

It was during this time that I learned the value of that multipurpose tool, the helmet. Although heavy, it could serve to catch rainwater for drinking and washing, or as a pillow. When fires were allowed, some of the guys used their helmets to boil soup or

Both: National Archives

ABOVE LEFT: A mountain trooper points out a German position to a .30-caliber machine-gun crew near Mount Della Vedetta, March 3, 1945. ABOVE RIGHT: Mountaineers with their pack mules ascend a steep path in Italy's northern Apennine Mountains, April 1945. OPPOSITE: 10th Mountain troops ride on tanks through the last line of mountains before descending into the Po River Valley a month before the war ended. The 10th's specialized training was instrumental in ensuring the division never lost a battle or gave up an inch of ground.

tea. The results were not too appetizing.

Occasionally we would come across small mountain villages in ruins. The locals who had stayed and endured the German occupation rejoiced when they saw us. They shared with us some of the food they had hidden from the Germans—mostly chickens, eggs, and wine. In return we provided them with fruit, canned goods, sweets, and smokes. Occasionally we could even find a roof over our heads at night.

While more Germans were surrendering, many kept fighting, especially with artillery. The Germans had a 150mm artillery piece for infantry support. Called the Schweres Infanterie Geschütz 33, it was accurate to 5,000 yards. When the shells came in, they sounded like a freight train and exploded with an awful sound. If we were on the march with our 100 pounds of gear, we didn't even duck. We just kept on moving.

After weeks of fighting, we were relieved. Finally, we could sleep off the ground on cots, shower, and enjoy a hot meal. We were issued clean shorts and brushed our teeth after a long absence from dental hygiene. Best of all, we were offered three-day passes to Florence. Aarre and I jumped at the chance to see one of Italy's most famous and beautiful cities.

While there, we came upon the opera house, and as a performance was scheduled we were able to buy two tickets when there was a cancellation. The theater was ornate and beautiful. The performance that night was Rossini's *The Barber of Seville,* and though we couldn't understand the Italian words, the music was unforgettable. Aarre and I talked about that night by phone and later e-mail for decades.

When we returned to the line after our three-day passes, we set to work with more "soil engineering"—meaning we dug deeper and bigger foxholes. Once we came upon some abandoned weapons from one of our chemical battalions, including a 4.2-inch smoke mortar and machine guns. We happily turned these on the enemy. I especially enjoyed firing the .50-caliber machine gun. It was great fun until the Germans started shooting back.

Around this time, April 12, we learned that President Franklin Roosevelt had died. It saddened our day, but there was little time for mourning. The enemy wasn't about to let us pause. We were making slow but bloody progress in clearing the northern Apennine Mountains.

A new, massive offensive code-named Operation Craftsman was scheduled for April 14. It was designed to break out of the mountains and drive down into the Po River Valley. It was during this offensive that our recon troop staged the U.S. Army's last horse-mounted cavalry charge. It did not go well, and many men and horses were killed and wounded when they ran into German mortars and machine guns.

Earlier, the 85th Regiment had received a replacement officer, a young lieutenant who was assigned to be a platoon leader. Although he had not trained with the division at Camp Hale and felt a little intimidated by the elite troops he now commanded, he would have an illustrious career after the war. His name was Bob Dole (no relation to Minnie Dole). He received a crippling wound at Castel d'Aiano on April 14 while attacking a German machine-gun nest (he lost the use of an arm—and almost his life), but that did not stop him from later becoming a U.S. senator from Kansas and being the GOP candidate for president in 1996.

Another casualty on April 14 was Staff Sergeant Torger Tokle, a Norwegian and holder

of the world's record in the ski jump before the war. He was standing next to another soldier who was carrying mortar rounds. Somehow they detonated and both men were instantly killed. Tokle was beloved by his men, and his death was a great blow to the entire division.

Nineteen-year-old Pfc. John Magrath from Connecticut, a member of G Company, 85th Mountain Infantry Regiment, became the 10th's only Medal of Honor recipient on April 14. Shortly after his company had crossed the line of departure, it came under intense enemy fire and the company commander was killed. Volunteering to accompany the acting commander with a small reconnaissance party moving against Hill 909, radioman Magrath set out with the group. After going only a few yards, the party was pinned down by heavy artillery, mortar, and small-arms fire near Castel d'Aiano.

Instead of flopping to the ground as the others had done, Magrath, armed only with his M-1 Garand rifle, charged ahead and disappeared around the corner of a house, where he came face to face with two Germans manning a machine gun. Magrath killed one and forced the other to surrender. Discarding his rifle in favor of the deadlier German MG-34 machine gun, Magrath killed five more of the enemy as they emerged from their foxholes.

Carrying this enemy weapon across an open field through heavy fire, he wiped out two more machine-gun nests, then circled behind four other Germans, killing them with a burst as they were firing on his company. Spotting another dangerous enemy position to his right, he exchanged fire with the Germans until he had killed two and wounded three. His actions allowed his company to advance and take their objective. Sadly, Magrath was killed later that day when two mortar rounds exploded at his feet.

On April 18, we came up against the 200th Regiment of the 90th Grenadier Division. This elite German unit had fought hard through the entire length of Italy and refused to surrender. It had to be dug out of an already ruined Italian village.

On April 20, Hitler's birthday, the 10th Mountain became the first Allied unit to leave the Apennines and descend into the Po Valley, the breadbasket of Italy. The mountains that we had taken from the

National Archives

enemy had guarded the valley and kept it in German hands—but no more.

We were the spearhead of the Fifth Army thrust in the western half of Italy while the British Eighth Army was to our east. There was also the Brazilian Expeditionary Force and groups like the Nisei 442nd Regimental Combat Team (which had fought in Italy earlier, had taken part in the invasion of southern France, and then returned to Italy to fight again) in the line as well.

Around this time I acquired a Thompson submachine gun and two extra clips of ammo when one of my gunners traded his

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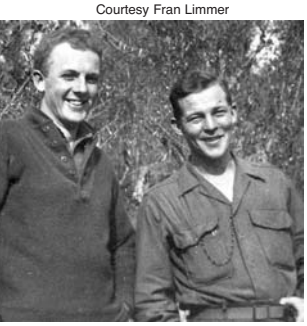
Two soldiers from the 86th Mountain Infantry Regiment dash over a hill during the first day of Operation Craftsman, April 14, 1945.

Courtesy Fran Limmer



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ABOVE LEFT: Ski trooper Fran Limmer (left) and his platoon sergeant Torger Tokle, shortly before Tokle's death. Before the war, the Norwegian-born Tokle held the world's record in the ski jump. ABOVE RIGHT: Twenty-year-old Private John D. Magrath, recipient of the Medal of Honor (posthumous) for his actions on April 14, 1945.

.45-caliber sidearm for it with a tank crewman. When he got tired of carrying it, I swapped him for my carbine. Despite the added weight, I enjoyed the feeling of having extra firepower.

We were now supported by tanks, and this made life easier, except on occasions when one of our own planes mistook our advancing Shermans for retreating German panzers. They would shoot up our boys pretty badly before we could set out the yellow smoke signal that identified us as friendlies.

When it was time for the big push down into the Po Valley floor, our friends with the British Eighth Army prepared for their push with a tremendous artillery barrage. Even though we were miles away, their cannon fire sounded like a continuous roll of thunder along with the flashes of explosions and tracer rounds. This show lasted nearly an hour, and then it was our turn.

Our initial advance was just a short distance, and we halted in the darkness, not even taking time to dig foxholes. We ignored security for some much-needed sleep. Meanwhile, our engineers went forward rebuilding roads and trails and placing tape to guide us safely through minefields.

When we finally reached the valley floor, we rushed forward as fast as we could to keep the Germans from reorganizing and hopefully to cut them off from escape into the Alps. We crossed the Po River at the town of San Benedetto Po. The Germans had blown all the bridges in the area, so we were forced to cross in small boats with the use of paddles while under fire.

During our advance against retreating German troops across the Po Valley, we walked for two days and rode for one (what a treat!). However, we would occasionally encounter resistance in the form of sniper fire, which was usually dealt with by tanks or our air support. When a P-47 Thunderbolt dropped a 500-pound bomb on a building housing a sniper, it was all over for him.

Late one afternoon when we were riding on trucks, a Luftwaffe plane dove down and strafed our column. We all jumped out of our vehicles and scattered. I ended up beneath our truck. It was then that I realized that in the last town we had driven through the locals handed us food, vino, and even eggs. I had placed one egg in each of my pockets, but they don't hold up well when you are diving for cover. One egg did survive, but to prevent a recurrence I immediately downed it whole. I normally prefer them poached, but what the hell.

One of the most rousing welcomes we received was in the city of Verona, known to us previously only through Shakespeare. Verona is at the base of the Dolomite Mountains, the Alps of northern Italy. Our battalion commander had been ordered to hold up so the rest of our regiment could catch up. But he was hell bent to lay claim to the celebration. It was just like in the movies with us riding through the broad streets and plazas with the entire civilian population greeting us. Their gratitude was overwhelming, making us feel proud that we had played a real part in bringing peace and freedom back into their lives.

This was a happy moment during a time when I couldn't help but think about all those killed in action. Their bodies, mostly German, were strewn across the battlefield and the roads we traveled. It makes me wonder just how hardened we had become while so close to a similar fate.

In the third week of April, our line of march led us to the shores of Lake Garda, Italy's largest lake, and the worst casualties we would suffer. The lake was 32 miles long, but

the western shore consisted of sheer cliffs that plunged almost straight down into the water. We had to cross to the eastern shore, where progress could be made through six tunnels that had been constructed before the war.

The enemy had fortified two towns at the northern end of the lake, Riva and Torbole. From these strongholds they rained shells down on us. Only one man was lost in the crossing, but he was a buddy of mine who was killed by a shrapnel splinter through the helmet.

On the eastern shore we advanced northward toward the series of tunnels that accommodated the road just as the Germans blew them up. One group of German engineers accidently blew themselves up just outside the entrance to one of the tunnels. Fifteen men were killed along with some of their horses.

While our engineers worked to clear the tunnels, we looked for ways around them. General Hays ordered up some amphibious vehicles named DUKWs, but universally known as "ducks." The DUKWs came forward and carried elements of the division across the lake to avoid the blocked tunnels.

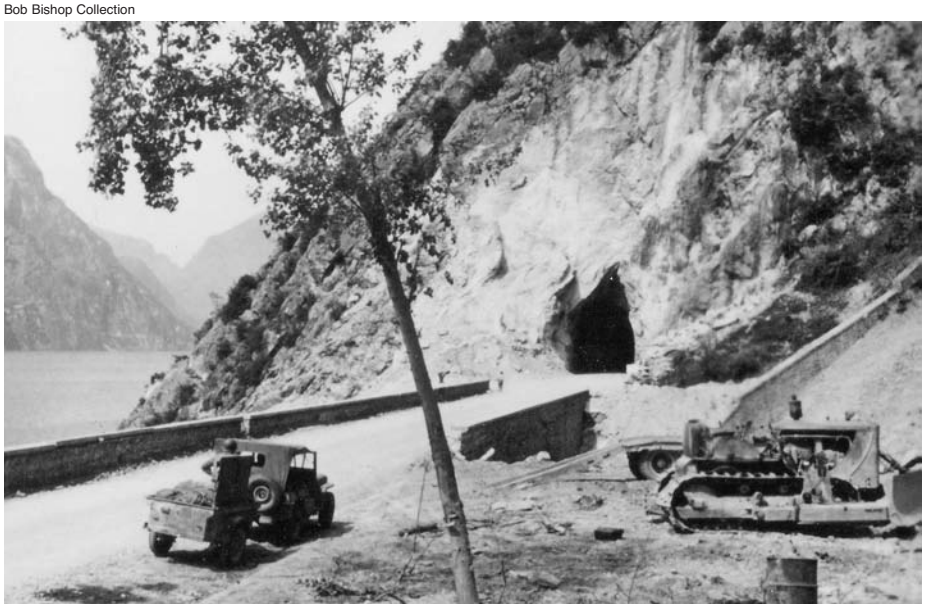
The DUKWs were loaded to the gunnels but off they went. They came under fire from German positions but made it safely to the shore. Later that day another DUKW loaded with artillerymen was swamped, drowning 24 men. There was only one survivor. (See *WWII Quarterly,* Summer 2013)

At the last tunnel, I was ordered to take my mortar team to the top of a ridge and fire a suppressive barrage toward the town of Torbole, from which the Germans were still firing at us. When they found out where we were, they fired back at us with 20mm cannon. One of these guns was housed in a three-story building with Red Cross markings. Since they abused their neutrality, we zeroed in on the building until their shooting stopped.

When we ran out of ammunition, we scrambled back down the slope only to find that we had been extremely fortunate. Inside the tunnel our men were advancing to the northern entrance. The Germans, meanwhile, got lucky and landed an 88mm shell inside the entrance, killing five of our men and wounding 50. One of the wounded was my friend, Ray Hellman, of the mayonnaise family. He always wore a St. Christopher's medal around his neck. That day a fragment struck him in the chest but hit and mangled the medal, saving his life.

By the end of April, we had reached and taken Torbole and were preparing to move northward. On April 30, one of our highest ranking officers was killed. He was Colonel William Darby who, earlier in the war, had founded and led the Army Rangers and won the Distinguished Service Cross. Now he was our assistant division commander. Stepping out of his headquarters and mounting a jeep for a ride to the front, he was killed by a random 88mm artillery shell fired by the distant enemy. He was our last casualty.

Bob Bishop Collection



The entrance to a highway tunnel along Lake Garda's eastern shore. Here a lucky shot by German artillery killed a number of 10th Mountain soldiers.

On May 1, we moved on to the town of Riva, where we heard rumors that the Germans were ready to surrender. All shooting stopped, and for us the war was over. Yet, we were almost involved in a new war.

In Yugoslavia, communist partisans under Marshal Tito had taken over the country. Fearing the Yugoslavs might have territorial claims on Italy, our entire division, along with elements of the British Eighth Army, was ordered to the border between the two countries near the city of Trieste. We arrived on May 20 and remained there until the situation stabilized. On July 14 we were ordered home.

I sailed home with the rest of the 86th Regiment on the SS *Westbrook Victory* to begin training for the invasion of Japan. While still steaming across the Atlantic Ocean, we learned about the atomic bombs and their terrible effect. Japan surrendered shortly after our arrival at Newport News, Virginia.

By the end of November 1945, the 10th Mountain Division was deactivated. But that is not the end of its service to America. In the postwar era, as many as 62 ski resorts in the United States were founded or run by veterans of the 10th. At Vail, Colorado (founded by 10th veterans near Camp Hale), a ski slope is named Riva Ridge in their honor; another is called "Minnie's Mile," to pay tribute to the man whose tireless efforts had led to the creation of the 10th. In 1985, the division was reconstituted, and as the 10th Light Division it has been deployed to such places as Haiti, Somalia, Bosnia, Iraq, and Afghanistan.

As I look back on my service with the 10th, I have feelings of great pride mixed with sadness in remembering the 1,000 young men who gave their lives to put an end to the Nazi menace. □

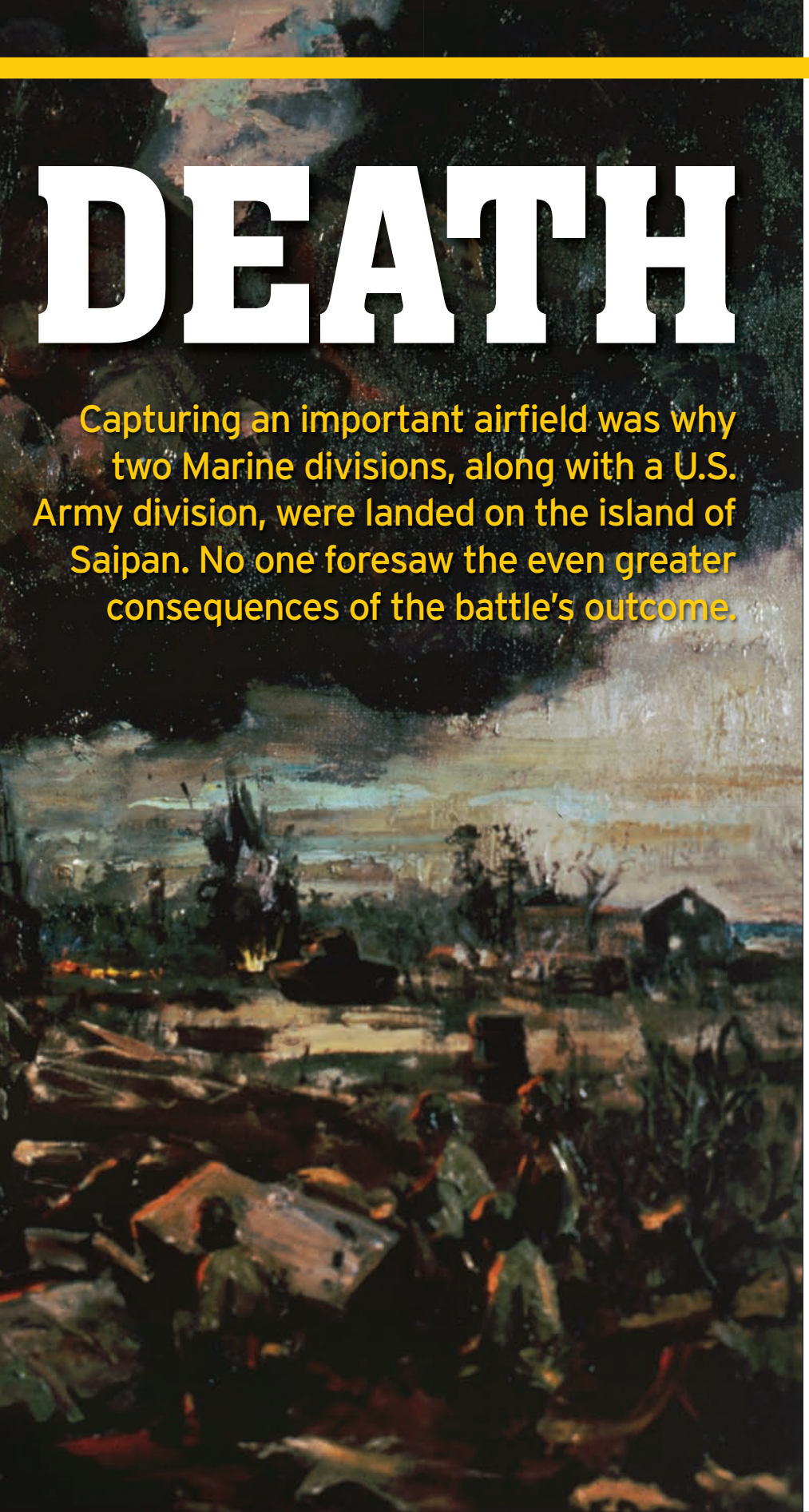
BY DAVID ALAN JOHNSON

DUEL *to the*

Navy combat artist William F. Draper's vision of the brutal battle for Saipan, titled *Inferno,* shows U.S. Marines advancing past the burning sugar mill at Charan Kanoa. Capturing Saipan and its airfield was strategic for the Americans, as it would put Tokyo and the naval base at Truk within striking range of the B-29 Superfortresses.

DEATH

Capturing an important airfield was why two Marine divisions, along with a U.S. Army division, were landed on the island of Saipan. No one foresaw the even greater consequences of the battle's outcome.



U.S. Navy

ON BOARD one of the transports headed for the island of Saipan in early June 1944, a battalion surgeon gave a group of Marines a lecture on what they could expect when they reached their destination. "In the surf," he explained, were "barracuda, sea snakes, anemones, razor-sharp coral, polluted waters, poison fish, and giant clams that shut on a man like a bear trap."

Warming to his subject, the doctor went on to tell everyone exactly what was waiting for them when they landed on the island itself: "Leprosy, typhus, filariasis, yaws, typhoid, dengue fever, dysentery, saber grass, hordes of flies, snakes, and giant lizards." The men were also warned not to eat anything growing on the island, not to drink the water, and not to approach any of Saipan's local inhabitants. After finishing his lecture, the surgeon paused, looked out at his audience, and asked if there were any questions.

After a moment, one private raised his hand. "Sir," he asked, "why 'n hell don't we let the Japs keep the goddamn island?"

There was a very good answer to that particular question, although the surgeon did not tell the private what it was. The primary reason why Saipan was so highly prized and why the U.S. high command wanted to take the island from the Japanese was Aslito airfield, a Japanese air base on the southern part of the island. This was probably the most important enemy airfield between their massive naval base at Truk and the Japanese home islands.

Saipan also had a good harbor, Tanapag, which the Japanese had modernized and improved since the war began, as well as an unfinished airstrip on the north tip of the island. But the primary American objective was Aslito Field.

The Combined Chiefs of Staff had seen the strategic importance of Saipan a year and a half earlier, in January 1943. Saipan and the other islands in the Marianas chain would be invaluable as forward bases for refueling submarines and other warships as American forces island-

National Archives

Marine Corps

ABOVE: Smoke drifts over Red Beach as men of the 4th Marine Division crawl ashore during Operation Forager, June 15, 1944. More than 30,000 defenders tried to hold off more than 65,000 invaders. LEFT: Two Marines take cover in a shellhole on Saipan.

hopped their way to Japan. But Aslito would be a part of the attack on Japan itself—as a base for the long-range Boeing B-29 Superfortress bomber. Tokyo was 1,500 miles from Saipan, within striking range of the Superfortress.

Saipan was also closer to the Japanese base at Truk, which has been described as "Japan's Pearl Harbor." Taking possession of Guam, Saipan, and Tinian—the largest of the Marianas Islands—would not only neutralize Truk but would also put B-29s closer to Japan than they had ever been.

The Japanese high command was also well aware of the strategic importance of Saipan and the Marianas and knew that the Americans would be turning their attention to the island chain at some point in the near future. On June 14, 1944, Admiral Chuichi Nagumo, commander of the newly created Central Pacific Area Fleet, wrote, "The Marianas are the first line of defense of our homeland. It is a certainty that the Americans will land in the Marianas Group either this month or the next." He was absolutely correct. American forces would make three separate landings on Guam, Saipan, and Tinian. Saipan would be the first.

By the time Admiral Nagumo made this statement, about 30,000 Imperial troops had been sent to defend Saipan. Most of the troops were from the 43rd Division. Nagumo was sent to oversee the defense of the island. When he arrived, the news he received from the defending troops was anything but encouraging.

General Hideyoshi Obata, who commanded all ground forces in the Marianas, gave the admiral a sobering account of the situation. "Specifically, unless the units are supplied with cement, steel reinforcements for cement, barbed wire, lumber etc., which cannot be obtained in these islands," he told the admiral, "no matter how many soldiers there are, they can do nothing in regard to fortifications but sit around with their arms folded, and the situation is unbearable."

Actually, thousands of tons of building materials had been sent from Japan to build up the island's defenses, but they never arrived; the ships carrying all the cement and barbed wire and lumber had been sunk by American submarines. There would be no more building supplies coming. The defenders would have to make do with what they had.

They would also need all the luck they could get. By early June, a flotilla of American ships—which is usually described as "massive"—had set sail from its bases and was steaming toward Saipan. This task force consisted of battleships, cruisers, and destroy-

ers, along with transports carrying the men of the 2nd and 4th Marine Divisions. They would be followed by the U.S. Army's 27th Infantry Division. Of the eight battleships in the invasion task force, four were veterans of the Pearl Harbor attack: *Maryland, Pennsylvania, Tennessee,* and *California*.

Aboard the transports, the men anxiously concentrated on preparing for the invasion. They belted .50- and .30-caliber machine-gun ammunition, sharpened their bayonets, and wondered what would be in store for them on an island most of them had never heard of.

On June 7, the Marines were given some news that helped take their minds off their own concerns, at least for a while. Half a world away, Allied forces had come ashore on the beaches of Normandy. Operation Overlord began the liberation of Western Europe from the Nazis. Reaction to the announcement varied from ship to ship.

Aboard most transports, the bulletin was short and to the point: "The invasion of France has started. That is all." On the aircraft carrier *Enterprise*, mimeographed news releases were distributed to the men. Groups of three and four leaned over each other's shoulders to read the releases as they came in, and the men shouted each other into silence whenever another announcement came over the loudspeaker. Most of the men throughout the task force reacted with relief and satisfaction when they heard the news, although some responded by saying "Thank God" to no one in particular.

The news of the Normandy landings was as welcome to Vice Admiral Richmond Kelly Turner, the commander of the Joint Expeditionary Force, as it was to everyone else in the task force. But Turner had more immediate things to worry about. This would be his fifth major amphibious operation after Guadalcanal, the Central Solomons, the Gilberts, and the Marshall Islands, and he probably knew more about this specialized type of warfare than anyone else. He would be putting all his knowledge and experience to use in the impending Marianas campaign.

Admiral Turner set the date for the invasion of Saipan for June 15, 1944. The landings on Guam and Tinian would depend upon how events turned out on Saipan—the sooner that Saipan could be secured the sooner the dates for invading Guam and Tinian could be decided. The overall operation for capturing the Marianas, the invasion, and securing of all three islands, was given the code name Forager.

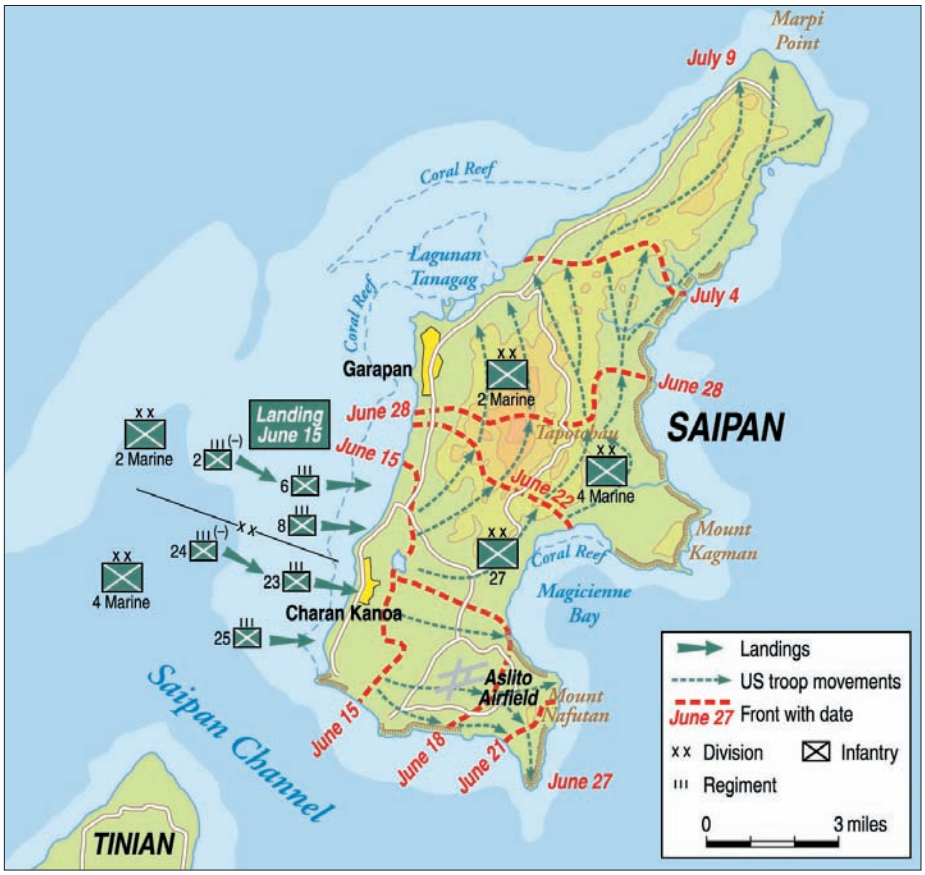
While Turner's expeditionary force made its way toward Saipan, a fast carrier group commanded by Admiral Marc A. Mitcher began a series of air strikes against Saipan and Tinian. On the morning of June 11, a total of 11 aircraft carriers launched more than 200 fighters and bombers against both islands. On Saipan they destroyed more than 100 Japanese aircraft.

Two days later, the battleships arrived at both Tinian and Saipan and began their own bombardment. At Saipan, they kept on shelling until just before the landing force went ashore. To the gunners on board the ships, it seemed that nothing could possibly be alive on the island, not after the pounding it had taken for the past two days.

Battleships, cruisers, and destroyers of the task force began their final bombardment of Saipan at 5:50 AM on June 15. Twelve minutes later, Admiral Turner gave the order: "Land the landing force." On every transport, the chaplain's last prayers and blessings were broadcast over the ships' loudspeakers. One chaplain said, "Most of you will return, but some of you will meet the God who made you." An officer turned to a war correspondent and said, "Perish-the-Thought Department."

It took until 8 AM before the landing force was actually ready to land. Shortly before that hour, more than 700 landing craft filled with eight battalions from the 2nd and 4th Marine Divisions started for Saipan's western coast.

The first of the landing parties came



After landing on Saipan's southwestern coast on June 15, 1944, the Americans pushed the Japanese to the far corners of the island within three weeks.

ashore on Beach Red 2 at 8:44 and came under heavy fire almost immediately. A Marine colonel, the operations officer of the landing force, described the scene in his report: "The opposition consisted mostly of artillery and mortar fire from weapons placed in well-deployed positions, as well as fire from small arms, automatic weapons, and anti-boat guns sited to cover the beach areas…."

American warships sailed back and forth off Saipan's western beaches, firing at inland targets. Others entered the strait between Saipan and Tinian and unleashed their ordnance at Saipan's southern tip. As the landing craft approached the shore, the defenders began shooting back. The battleship *Tennessee* and the cruiser *Indianapolis*, the flagship of Admiral Raymond Spruance, were both hit by Japanese shore batteries. As the landing craft made their runs toward the beach, they came under fire as well.

The run-in was about 1,500 yards, although it must have seemed a lot longer than that to the men in the landing craft. Shells exploded all around them; some of the boats were hit, and several were sunk. The rest kept going. There was no other option.

At the shoreline, the landing craft discharged their Marines, who ran as low and as fast as they could to get off the beach. While the Marines were landing, dozens of aircraft came in to strafe the Japanese defenses, and the warships kept pounding the shore batteries. An observer described the sight as organized bedlam.

North of the invasion beaches, Admiral Nagumo watched the landings from a 30-foot observation tower. The admiral stared out to sea at the fantastic array of American ships, absolutely transfixed by the sight. According to his yeoman, Mitsuhara Noda, who was standing nearby, Admiral Nagumo, who had been the commander of the Pearl Harbor attack force, was especially intrigued by the battleships that were standing offshore. He pointed out to Noda that "at least four" of those battleships had been sunk by his carrier-based aircraft at Pearl Harbor. Noda recalled that the admiral's tone "indicated as much admiration as concern."

The first objective of the Marines after they had fought their way off the beach was the abandoned village of Charan Kanoa. Most of the Americans expected to find flimsy little houses made of paper and bamboo. Instead, they found themselves facing a complex of one- and two-story concrete pillboxes, most of which were covered with bougainvillea in bloom. At the center of the village, the Marines came across another surprise—a baseball stadium, complete with a four-base diamond and a grandstand. A

National Archives

Marine Corps

LEFT: Marines inspect a knocked-out Type 95 Ha-Go light tank. BELOW: Marines keep low while moving against Japanese positions in the city of Garapan. More than 3,000 American servicemen were killed during the battle.

National Archives

Burned-out Japanese tanks on the slopes of Mount Tapotchau are all that remain of the battle of June 16-17.

Buddhist temple stood next to the ballpark.

Captain John C. Chapin and his men of G Company, 24th Marines, 4th Marine Division stopped at Charan Kanoa to get some drinking water and to have a quick bath. As soon as they stopped, enemy mortar shells began exploding among the Marines, who were caught unprepared and in the open. Everyone had been so preoccupied with the pillboxes and with washing and relaxing that they did not notice a ruined sugar refinery in the distance or its tall smokestack. The smokestack was being used as an observation post. A Japanese spotter had made his way to the top of it and was calling mortar fire down on the Marines.

Before somebody finally discovered the spotter, Captain Chapin recalled, "We lost far more Marines than we should have." He did not specify exactly how many of his men were killed and wounded, only saying that the observer "really caused a great number of casualties in G Company."

The commander of the Japanese 43rd Division, General Yoshitsugu Saito, was optimistic about mounting a successful defense of Saipan. He was receiving encouraging reports that his troops were fighting back in spite of the U.S. warships and their murderous naval gunfire and also that the invading Americans were suffering heavy casualties. Both General Saito and Admiral Nagumo were astonished by the American show of force at Saipan, but they were far from intimidated by it. They were confident that reinforcements would arrive and that the invaders would be wiped out. No enemy would ever take Saipan!

The Marines kept coming ashore along with most of their artillery. To back up the Marines, units of the U.S. Army 27th Infantry Division landed on June 16. But General Saito kept the landing beaches under fire all day long, inflicting more casualties among the Americans who had already landed.

General Saito ordered a counterattack that night, hoping to push the Americans back into the sea before they could organize effective defenses. Only about 500 troops took part in the night attack, but General Saito sent 44 tanks to break through the American lines.

The tank assault was led by Colonel Hideki Goto's 9th Tank Regiment. Just after 3 AM on June 17, Colonel Goto opened the hatch of his Type 97 medium tank, stood erect in the open turret, and waved his cavalry saber over his head. The other tank commanders did likewise. Colonel Goto then slapped the side of his tank with his saber, which made a resounding clank. Once again, his junior officers followed his lead; they slapped their tanks with their sabers. With that ceremony out of the way, all the tank commanders closed their hatches and pointed their tanks toward the American lines.

The Marines could not see Goto's tanks coming, but they could hear the clanking and rattling. They called the Type 97s "kitchen sinks," among other things. Captain Clarke Rollen warned, "It sounds like a night attack coming," and requested illumination from the ships offshore. The U.S. Navy warships responded by sending so many star shells that the jungle darkness suddenly turned into midday.

As soon as they caught sight of the Japanese tanks, the Marines opened fire with bazookas, 37mm guns, and hand grenades. The leading tanks caught fire, which lit up the others; a few of the tanks came to a stop. A Japanese officer climbed out of his machine, waved his saber, shouted a few orders, got back into his Type 97, and closed the hatch. Whatever the officer said was certainly effective. The tanks started moving forward again and were immediately hit by bazooka and 37mm fire.

One Marine, Pfc. Herbert Hodges, knocked out seven Type 97 tanks within a few minutes. Another Marine knocked out four tanks with his bazooka before running out of ammunition and disabled a fifth tank with a hand grenade.

By dawn, all but one of Goto's tanks had been destroyed. One was literally blown apart by an offshore destroyer's five-inch gun at about 7 AM. The burning wrecks of Goto's tanks littered the battlefield; General Saito's night tank attack turned out to be a complete failure.

By the morning of June 17, the Saipan beachhead had been secured. It had cost about 3,500 casualties, but the landing beaches belonged to the American troops.

The rest of the island was far from being secured, however, and Aslito airfield was still in Japanese hands.

Less than an hour after their night encounter with Goto's medium tanks, units of the 2nd Marine Division began an advance of their own. By the end of the day on June 17, the beachhead north of Beach Green 3 had more than doubled in size, and Marine General Holland M. "Howlin' Mad" Smith, the commander of all American ground troops on Saipan, had set up his command post at Charan Kanoa.

Units of the 165th Regiment of the U.S. Army's 27th Infantry Division reached the perimeter of Aslito Field by 2 PM, and the 124th Marine Regiment, 4th Marine Division had captured what has been described as "a commanding height" overlooking the airfield.

General Saito and Admiral Nagumo were still expecting reinforcements to come to the relief of the Japanese troops on Saipan. A Japanese fleet under Admiral Jisaburo Ozawa had been ordered to "attack the enemy in the Marianas area and annihilate his fleet." With the American warships out of the way, Japanese reinforcements would be able to land on Saipan and link up with General Saito's troops. If the Americans could be isolated and cut off from any further supplies, it would only be a matter of time before the enemy invaders were all either killed or captured.

Admiral Ozawa's Mobile Fleet made contact with Admiral Marc Mitcher's Task Force 58 on June 19. The results of the ensuing battle were not what General Saito, Admiral Nagumo, or Admiral Ozawa expected. The Battle of the Philippine Sea was a disaster for the Japanese Navy. Ozawa's Mobile Fleet lost three aircraft carriers, and hundreds of aircraft were shot down in what became known as "The Great Marianas Turkey Shoot." Ozawa withdrew. With no naval forces in the area, the Japanese garrison on Saipan was isolated.

A few attempts were made to reinforce the Japanese troops on Saipan. The commanding officer on Tinian tried to send

ABOVE: Marines advance behind a M4A2 Sherman tank (dubbed "King Kong") of the 4th Tank Battalion while cleaning out the northern end of the island. The Japanese were well dug in and prepared to defend to the last man. BELOW: Soldiers of the 27th Infantry Division hold their position atop Nafutan Ridge, June 21. Marine General Holland Smith was unhappy with the Army division's performance and relieved their commander, Maj. Gen. Ralph Smith.

Both: National Archives

soldiers across the Saipan channel several times, but the narrow strait was too closely watched by American warships for any of them to make the crossing. Two infantry units were also sent from Guam in 13 landing barges filled with men and artillery. They never came any closer to Saipan than the island of Rota, which is about one-third of the way between Guam and Tinian. The troops remained on Rota until the end of the war.

In his history of U.S. naval operations in World War II, Samuel Eliot Morison wrote, "As a result of the naval victory all Japanese forces ashore were sealed off and doomed." He went on to say that the defenders of Saipan "forced the United States to pay a heavy price for the island."

A Japanese tanker who had not taken part in the disastrous night attack of June 16-

17 wrote in his diary: "The remaining tanks in our regiment make a total of 12. Even if there are no tanks, we will fight hand to hand. I have resolved that, if I see the enemy, I will take out my sword and slash, slash, slash at him as long as I last, thus ending my life of 24 years."

General Saito organized his remaining infantry and artillery units into defensive positions around Mount Tapotchau, rugged terrain that favored the defenders. Some of the nicknames given to these positions were "Hell's Pocket," "Death Valley," and "Purple Heart Ridge." Japanese soldiers used the caves in the vicinity of Mount Tapotchau to ambush the Marines, sometimes making attacks by night.

American troops were as determined to capture Saipan as the Japanese were to defend it. Marine Captain John C. Chapin watched a unit of the 4th Marine Division make an attack on June 20. The attack took place about a quarter of a mile in front of him, which gave Chapin a perfect view of the action.

The Marines "were assaulting Hill 500," he said, "the dominant terrain feature of the whole area, and it was apparent that they were running into a solid wall of Jap fire." "But using [artillery] timed fire, smoke, and tanks, they finally stormed up the hill and took it." By this time, the operation's primary objective, Aslito Field, had already been captured. The airfield was renamed Isely Field, after Commander Robert H. Isley, who had been killed five days earlier. Commander Isely's TBF Avenger had been hit by antiaircraft fire and crashed on the south side of the airfield's runway.

Four days after its capture, P-47 Thunderbolts of the 19th Fighter Squadron landed at Isely Field from the escort carriers *Manila Bay* and *Natoma Bay*. The fighters were immediately fitted with launching racks for rockets and proceeded to deliver a rocket strike on Tinian a few hours later. By the autumn of 1944, B-29 Superfortresses would be flying bombing raids against cities on the Japanese mainland from Isely Field.

The Saipan operation also saw an unfortunate occurrence of interservice rivalry. On June 22, the U.S. Army's 27th Infantry Division had been inserted into the center of the line between the two Marine divisions as they moved forward. The Marines took Mount Tipo Pale and then Mount Tapotchau. Unfortunately, Maj. Gen. Ralph C. Smith's 27th was unable to maintain pace with the more aggressive 2nd and 4th Marine Divisions on its flanks, and the front line sagged in the middle.

Marine General Holland Smith, who held the Army in low regard anyway, was unhappy with the performance of the 27th Infantry Division. As far as he was concerned, the 27th was not aggressive enough, and he blamed the division's commander, Maj. Gen. Ralph Smith, for its shortcomings. Holland Smith complained to Admiral Turner that Ralph Smith's division was slowing the overall advance on Saipan and suggested that its commanding officer should be relieved of his command.

Both: National Archives

ABOVE: A Navy corpsman (facing camera) gives medical treatment to three wounded Marines. More than 16,000 American servicemen were casualties during the battle for the island. LEFT: A half dozen dead Japanese occupy a water-filled shellhole, giving mute testimony to the savagery of the fighting.

Agreeing that a change of leadership would get the 27th Division moving again, Turner and his superior, Admiral Raymond Spruance, approved the request, replacing the division commander with Army Maj. Gen. Sanderford Jarman.

The change in command did not seem to make much difference in the speed of the advance up Saipan. While the 27th

Both: National Archives

ABOVE: A Marine bulldozer digs mass a grave for those Japanese killed in the suicidal attack of July 7. RIGHT: Hundreds of dead Japanese cover a beach after their failed, all-out banzai charge against the 27th Infantry Division, July 7, 1944—the largest banzai charge of the war. OPPOSITE: Two U.S. Marines advance through the burning ruins of Garapan, July 1, 1944. Once home to 15,000 inhabitants, the Marines found it largely deserted until the night of July 3 when 200 Japanese returned to fight.

Division fought on, the 2nd Marine Division endured three days of brutal, relentless fighting marked by furious banzai charges. On the fourth day, the Japanese pulled back into Saipan's treacherous interior, hoping the terrain might slow the American advance.

The terrain was perfect for the Japanese defenders. The Americans' progress was impeded as much by the difficult landscape as by the enemy. In fact, the caves and ridges that were giving Japanese troops excellent snipers' posts and sweeping fields of fire were holding up the American advance more effectively than General Saito's diminishing number of troops. By June 25, only about 1,200 able-bodied Japanese soldiers and three tanks remained on Saipan.

One of Saito's commanders, General Keiji Igeta, radioed Saito's headquarters that Saipan could not be held. "The fight on Saipan as things stand now is progressing one-sidedly," the Japanese officer reported, "since along with the tremendous power of his barrages, the enemy holds control of sea and air." Any lingering optimism had disappeared. But there would be no surrender. Saito's message back to Igeta ended, "The positions are to be defended to the bitter end, and unless he has other orders, every soldier must stand his ground."

American units continued to push their way north in spite of Japanese resistance. A private first class with the 23rd Marine Regiment described how the men in his unit dealt with enemy cave defenses. "Quite often there would be multiple cave openings, each protecting another," he recalled. "Laying down heavy cover fire, our specialist would advance to near the mouth of the cave. A satchel charge would then be heaved into the mouth of the cave, followed by a loud blast as the dynamite exploded." Sometimes hand grenades were used instead of a satchel charge.

Warships offshore added their support to the advancing troops. A Japanese prisoner told his interrogators that naval gunfire was the most dreaded of all American weapons, even more than field artillery or aerial bombardment, adding that it was the "greatest single factor in the American success" on Saipan. Occasionally, some of the warships would be detached to take part in the softening up of Guam and Tinian in preparation for the landings on those islands.

Just after midnight on June 27, about 500 Japanese soldiers managed to penetrate the American lines around Isely Field, where they set fire to a P-47 and damaged two others. After doing as much damage as possible at Isely Field, the Japanese continued on to some nearby high ground, where they encountered a Marine position. The battle went on for most of the morning. The Marines lost 33 killed and wounded; Japanese losses were 140 men. Escaping Japanese were found and killed later in the day.

By the last days of June, the end was clearly in sight for the Japanese forces on Saipan. General Saito had moved his headquarters to a cave at the northern end of the island, and one of his battalions had been reduced to 100 men. But the Japanese troops resolutely refused to give up. According to one American account, "Enemy resistance was isolated, sporadic, and desperate."

American troops kept moving north. On July 3, units of the 2nd Marine Division occupied the city of Garapan. It had once been the home of 15,000 inhabitants; now it was a deserted ruin. The belongings of thousands of civilians littered the streets—everything from pots and pans to bits of clothing, which they had left behind when the city was abandoned. An occasional Japanese sniper would fire at a Marine patrol from a rooftop, but only sporadic resistance was encountered.

During the night, about 200 Japanese made their way back to Garapan and arrived in time to give the Marines a rude early morning surprise. After a vicious fight, the Marines chased the Japanese right out of the city. They set up a command post on one of Garapan's main roads, which they renamed Broadway, just across the street from what was left of the local bank.

The Japanese fell back to another defensive line just north of Garapan. At this stage, there were not many Japanese left. The men who managed to survive were all desperately hungry. Many were reduced to eating tree bark and grass.

Some Japanese soldiers stayed behind, usually holed up in caves, to slow the American advance as best they could. Sometimes they smeared blood on themselves and stayed perfectly still as the Americans walked past them, jumped up, and fired at the unsuspecting soldiers. The Americans responded to this by bayonetting all Japanese bodies—the dead and the wounded. "You had to do it!" one Marine officer explained.

Throughout the first week of July, the American troops advanced toward Marpi Point, Saipan's northernmost tip. Japanese troops steadily retreated before the Americans. Soon they had nowhere left to retreat. General Holland Smith feared that the remaining enemy troops would attempt an all-out suicide charge at the American lines—a banzai attack. When Japanese troops were cornered, this was their usual response.

At Japanese headquarters, it was decided that an attack would be made by all remaining troops in the area. On the evening of June 5, the headquarters staff ate the last of their rations. One staff officer asked General Saito if he intended to take part in the attack. Admiral Nagumo answered instead. He said that he and General Saito, along with General Igeta, would commit suicide.

Most of the following day was spent organizing the coming attack. Soldiers and sailors in nondescript uniforms, armed with weapons ranging from rifles to swords to bamboo spears, gathered for the assault. An onlooking staff officer thought the men looked like "spiritless sheep being led to the slaughter."

On July 6, General Holland Smith paid a personal visit to the senior officers of the 27th Division to warn them that a banzai attack was likely to come down the coast along the flat ground of the Tanapag Plain within 12 hours.

General Smith was absolutely correct. So far, the American advance from the southern part of the island had been almost unopposed. One Marine called it a "rabbit hunt." The constant movement of the American troops had prevented the Japanese from forming anything resembling a cohesive defensive line. By July 6, all surviving Japanese troops had been boxed into the northern end of Saipan.

At about 4 AM on July 7, the defenders reached their jumping-off point and prepared to charge down the northwestern shore of Saipan toward Tanapag village. As the sky began to brighten, the sound of

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Marines advance past dead Japanese during mopping-up operations near Mount Marpi at the northern end of the island, July 27, 1944.

a rifle was heard in the distance—the signal to attack! Between 3,000 and 4,000 men began moving forward. They ran headlong down the Tanapag Plain and threw themselves at the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 105th Infantry Regiment, 27th Infantry Division.

"Suddenly there was what sounded like a thousand people screaming all at once, as a hoard of 'mad men' broke out of the darkness before us," recalled a Marine who witnessed the attack. An officer in the 105th Infantry said, "It was like a stampede staged in the old Wild West movies…. These Japs just kept coming and coming and didn't stop." Another account compared the Japanese charge with "crowds swarming onto a field after a football game." Every Japanese soldier had just one thought in mind—to kill as many Americans as possible before being killed himself.

The defending American soldiers and Marines fought back as best they could against such an onslaught. "Our weapons opened up, our mortars and machine guns fired continually," one Marine reported. "Even though Jap bodies built up in front of us, they still charged us, running over their comrades' fallen bodies. The mortar tubes became so hot from the rapid fire, as did the machine-gun barrels, that they could no longer be used."

Behind the able-bodied troops came hundreds of walking wounded. These men belonged back in the field hospital; some of them were on crutches. They had been issued bamboo spears and swords and limped along behind the main attack, ready to die for the Emperor.

The American defenders could not help but fall back under the pressure of this human tidal wave. They managed to slow down the charge with artillery, including 105mm howitzers, .50-caliber machine guns, and sometimes bayonets and rifle butts. The two battalions of the 105th Infantry formed a defensive perimeter near Tanapag village.

By late afternoon, the Japanese spearhead finally lost steam and then was stopped altogether. The 105th Infantry's two battalions had suffered nearly 1,000 casualties but had killed nearly 3,000 Japanese. A final count of all Japanese killed in the suicide charge came to just over 4,300.

Saito, Nagumo, and Igeta had already made good their pledge to commit suicide. All three of them had been shot through the head by their aides at about 10 AM on July 6. Admiral Nagumo especially requested that he should be shot by a naval officer. Morison thought it ironic that the "proud commander of the First Air Fleet and Pearl Harbor Striking Force, of the crack carriers that had ranged victoriously from Oahu to Trincomalee," should die such an obscure death in a cave on Saipan.

On the day following the Japanese suicide charge, the Americans began their final mopping up of the island. Holland Smith transferred most of the 27th Division to what amounted to strategic reserve and combined units of the 2nd and 4th Marine Divisions

and the 105th Infantry Regiment in a final northern sweep toward Marpi Point. The remaining Japanese forces were not about to let the advance go unchallenged. They came at the Americans in suicidal rushes that could have only one outcome—miniature versions of the suicide charge that had been made the preceding day.

Marines finally reached Marpi Point on July 9, and units of the 4th Division captured a still unfinished airstrip on the northern tip of the island. At 4:15 P.M. Admiral Turner announced that Saipan was officially secured. The Americans next turned their attention to Saipan's sisters, Guam and Tinian.

The Battle of Saipan might have been officially over, but the fighting was far from finished. For several weeks small groups of Japanese soldiers still attacked the occupying American troops from hidden caves. Some of these attacks were made at night. Destroyers furnished star shell illumination, and sometimes gunfire, in support of the American units.

A flag-raising ceremony was held at Holland Smith's headquarters at Charan Kanoa on the morning of July 10. But a grisly postscript to the capture of Saipan began the following day. Hundreds of Japanese civilians, probably as many as a thousand, committed suicide rather than allow themselves to fall into the hands of the enemy. Japanese government propaganda had told the civilian population on the island that the Americans were devils who would kill and mutilate anyone they captured. Most of the civilians who lived on Saipan, about 25,000, were uneducated, and many believed what they were told.

Some jumped from the northern cliffs into the sea. The cliffs were "very steep, very precipitous," a Marine observer wrote. "The women would come down and throw the children into the ocean and commit suicide." Others were killed by Japanese soldiers. "The Jap soldiers would not surrender, and would not permit the civilians to surrender," the same Marine recalled. "I saw with my own eyes women, some carrying children, come out of the caves and start toward our lines. They'd be shot down by their own people."

Both: National Archives

ABOVE: A Marine finds a woman and her children in hiding. Many of the civilians, believing Japanese propaganda, were so fearful that the Americans would torture them that they committed suicide in droves. BELOW: After the island was secured, Aslito Airfield was turned into a vast B-29 base.

Soldiers also killed themselves. Some estimates put the number of military suicides as high as 5,000. "It was a sad and terrible thing," an American reflected, "and yet I presume quite consistent with the Japanese rules of Bushido."

Another American officer took a less sympathetic point of view: "This episode was a grim reminder that the road to Tokyo would be long and hard."

Japanese dead, including suicides, totaled between 23,000 and 24,000, depending upon which source is consulted. American casualties numbered between 3,000 and 3,500 killed. Admiral Morison gives the number of killed and missing as 3,426, and wounded as 13,099, for a total of 16,525. Saipan was a very costly operation for U.S. forces, but it was a disaster for Japan.

"I have always considered Saipan a decisive battle for the Pacific offensive," General Holland Smith wrote. "Saipan was ... the naval and military heart and brain of the Japanese defense strategy." The German naval attaché in Tokyo agreed with General Smith. "Saipan was really understood [in Tokyo] to be a matter of life and death," he said. General Smith himself had predicted that "the fate of the Empire will be decided in this one action."

Japanese officials in Tokyo certainly did understand the implications of what had happened at Saipan. One of the most immediate repercussions relating to the loss of the island was the fall of Prime Minister Hideki Tojo and his government. Tojo resigned on July 18, along with his entire cabinet.

In the wake of Tojo's resignation and the loss of Saipan, there was some talk that his successor, General Kuniaki Koiso, might even begin peace negotiations. But no high-ranking Japanese officer or politician would propose peace with the Allied powers. The war in the Pacific went on for another year. □

SMASHING HITLER'S Atlantic Wall

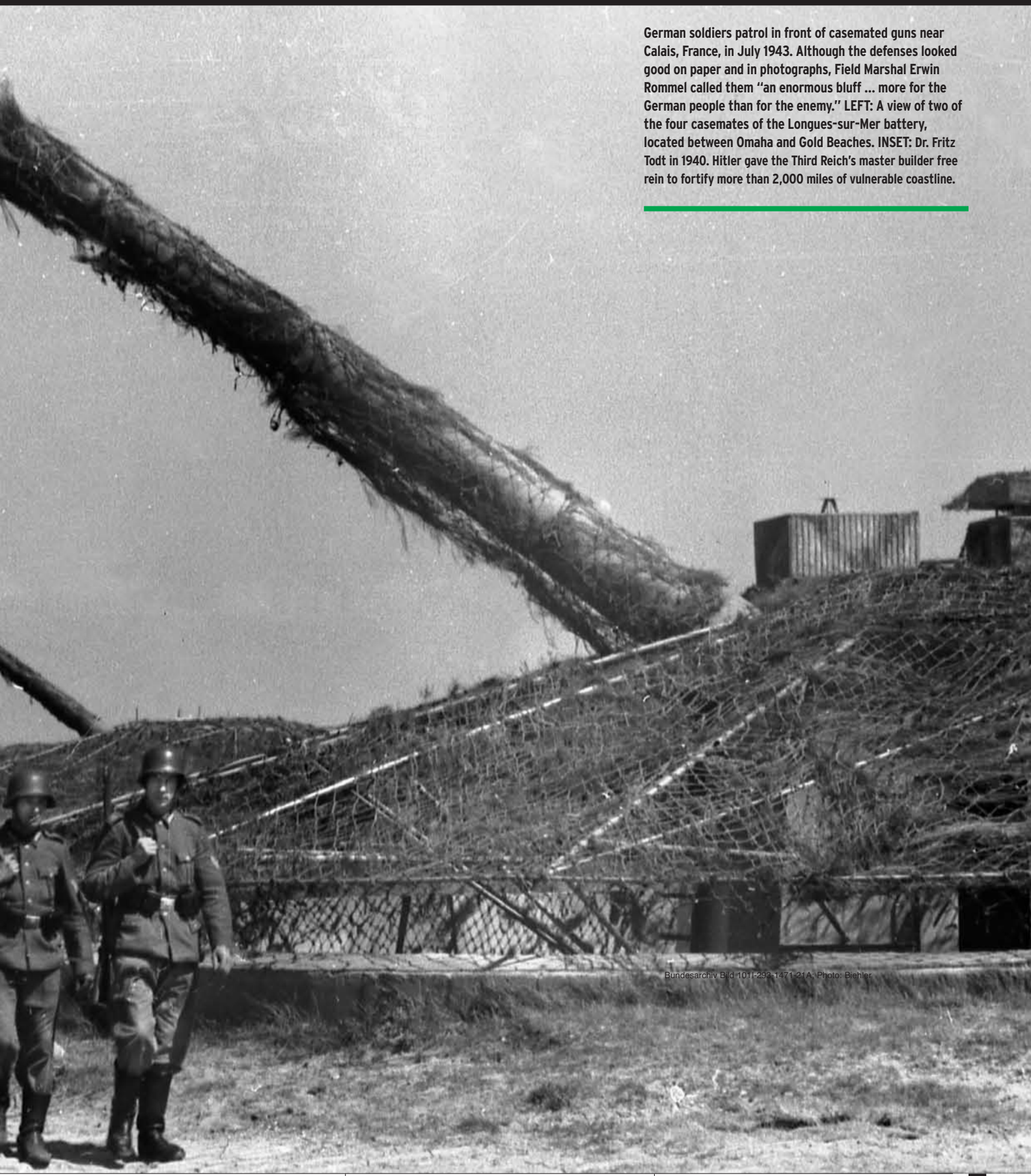
Nazi Germany spent many years (and a fortune) creating an invasion-proof barrier, only to have it breached in the span of a morning. BY FLINT WHITLOCK

After overrunning France and other Western European countries in 1940, Adolf Hitler was certain that the Allies would one day attempt to invade the European continent and attack through the occupied countries to destroy his regime. He just didn't know when or where.

To forestall an invasion, he ordered the construction of the world's second largest fortified barrier, second only to the 5,500-mile-long Great Wall of China. Hitler decreed that his so-called "Atlantic Wall" would stretch along the coast from northern Norway to France's border with Spain—2,400 miles in length.

Frederick the Great's military maxim holds, "He who defends everything defends nothing." This maxim was unknown to—or at least disregarded by—Hitler, whose goal was to so completely seal off his western coastal flank that the Allies would be dissuaded from attempting an invasion.

Money for such an ambitious, enormous project was no object to the Nazi regime; the only problem was one of time. While China's Great Wall took centuries to build, Hitler knew he did not have such luxury.

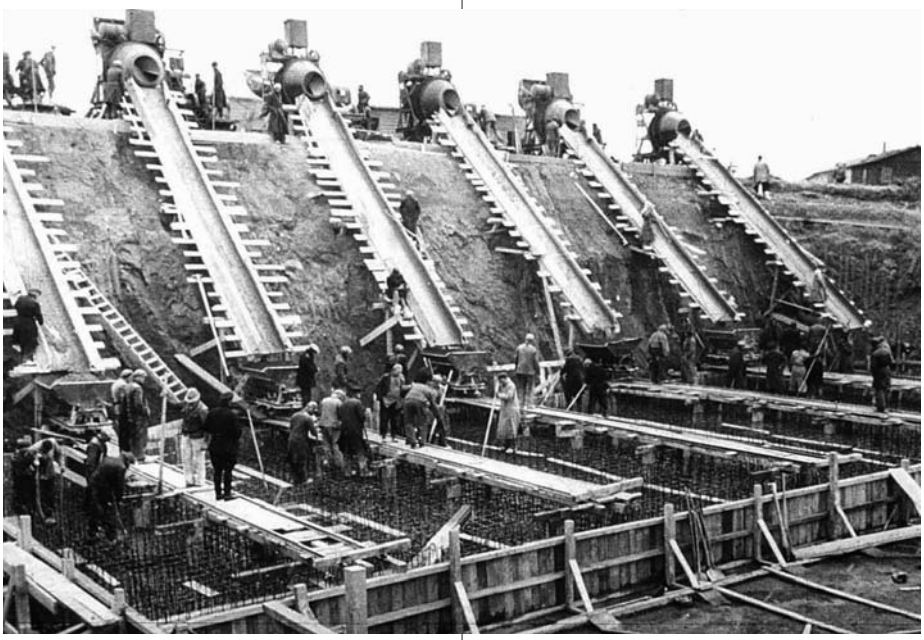


German soldiers patrol in front of casemated guns near Calais, France, in July 1943. Although the defenses looked good on paper and in photographs, Field Marshal Erwin Rommel called them "an enormous bluff ... more for the German people than for the enemy." LEFT: A view of two of the four casemates of the Longues-sur-Mer battery, located between Omaha and Gold Beaches. INSET: Dr. Fritz Todt in 1940. Hitler gave the Third Reich's master builder free rein to fortify more than 2,000 miles of vulnerable coastline.

Bundesarchiv Bild 101I-293-1471-21A; Photo: Biehler

The French coastline, from the border with Spain in the south to the border with Belgium in the north, was considered by Hitler and the German high command as the most likely place the Allies would invade. In this regard, the English Channel port city of Calais, in Upper Normandy, was deemed the most likely invasion site given its close proximity (20 miles) to southeastern England. Indeed, Calais was the place from which Germany planned to launch Operation Sea Lion in 1940—before Hitler called off the invasion and decided instead to attack the Soviet Union in 1941.

Library of Congress



Wikimedia

Large cement mixers pour the concrete for one of the casemates at Batterie Todt, the largest battery in France, located near Calais. RIGHT: A tank turret on Omaha Beach. The Germans frequently incorporated the turrets of captured enemy tanks into their fortifications.

Hitler entrusted his idea of creating an impenetrable wall to the one man whose organization he knew was capable of pulling it off: Dr. Fritz Todt.

Born in 1891, Todt studied engineering in Karlsruhe and at Munich's School for Advanced Technical Studies, then served in the Kaiser's army when the Great War broke out, earning the Iron Cross. After the armistice, Todt continued his education, earning his doctorate in engineering. Todt was impressed by the young firebrand Hitler and his plans for a new, revitalized Germany and eagerly joined the Nazi Party in 1922, and later the SA and SS.

In 1925, Todt became head of engineering for the Munich civil engineering firm of Sager and Woerner, which specialized in building roads and tunnels. The 39-year-old Todt came to the future Führer's attention in 1930 when he published a paper titled "Proposals and Financial Plans for the Employment of One Million Men."

This was just the kind of thinking that Hitler needed to help pull Germany, which had been especially hard hit by the worldwide economic depression, out of its doldrums. Todt's vision of a giant public works program, the building of a nationwide system of high-speed highways known as the Autobahn, would put Germans back to work on a large scale. And so, in 1933, shortly after becoming chancellor, Hitler appointed Todt to head a new, state-owned corporation—Organization Todt (OT)—that would create the roadway network.

After the Autobahn system became a dramatic success, Hitler began thinking of creating a static defensive system on the order of France's Maginot Line. In 1936, knowing that his buildup of Germany's armed forces would likely result in war, Hitler directed Todt to join together Organization Todt, private companies, and the Reichsarbeitsdienst (RAD) to begin constructing a string of fortifications along Germany's western border that would become known as the Westwall (called the Siegfried Line by the Allies).

In March 1940, with Germany now at war, Hitler appointed Todt Reich Minister for Weapons and Munitions; in 1941, the duties of General Inspector for Roads, Water, and Energy were added to Todt's growing plate of responsibilities. Onto this plate was soon heaped the creation of the Atlantic Wall.

Curiously, work on an anti-invasion coastal barrier did not get off to a fast start. Instead, in 1940-1941, construction efforts were focused on building bombproof U-boat pens along the French coast at places such as St. Nazaire, La Rochelle, and Lorient.

But, on December 14, 1941, with worry growing about British attempts to penetrate the German-occupied coast, Hitler ordered that efforts to fortify the shoreline be stepped up. Four months later, in March 1942, after British commandos had snuck ashore at Bruneval, France, and stolen top secret radar equipment, Hitler, fearing more commando raids, demanded that work on an adequate defense be accelerated, beginning with Norway and the Channel Islands to the west of the Cherbourg Peninsula.

Also, in March 1942, Führer Directive No. 40 was issued that pitted the services against each other. Hitler specified that the navy and air force were to have the primary responsibility for costal defense; the army would become involved only in the case of an actual

Bundesarchiv Bild 101I-263-1588-01A; Photo: Wette

A propaganda photo shows a German battery crew relaxing in their concrete concrete quarters inside a casemate.

enemy landing. Army commanders felt slighted when the navy received a larger allocation of concrete for the construction of its positions.

In May 1942, following another devastating British commando raid, this time on the St. Nazaire naval base on March 28 (Operation Chariot), Hitler again emphasized the need to finish the Atlantic Wall. By that time, however, Fritz Todt was dead (ironically, in German, the word "todt" means "dead"), having been killed when his plane mysteriously exploded on February 8, 1942, shortly after taking off from Rastenburg in East Prussia after he left a conference with Hitler.

The cause of the explosion was never decisively determined, but suspicion still centers around either Hermann Göring or Martin Bormann, who it is said were unhappy with Todt's growing influence with Hitler. Although Albert Speer succeeded Todt as Minister of Armaments and nominal head of Organisation Todt, OT was actually run by Franz X. Dorsch, his deputy.

Under Speer, work on the Atlantic Wall shifted into high gear in June 1942, with particular emphasis on fortifying port facilities to prevent an Allied invasion fleet from using them.

In August 1942, Hitler, aware of his combat manpower limitations, declared, "There is only one battle front (the Russian Front). The other fronts can only be defended with modest forces.... During the winter, with fanatical zeal, a fortress must be built which will hold in all circumstances ... except by an attack lasting several weeks."

BUILDING A BUNKER

The scope of the Atlantic Wall project was vast. In France alone, millions of cubic meters of earth were displaced by pick, shovel, and machine during the creation of the wall. Some 17 million cubic meters of concrete were poured, and 1.2 million tons of steel—representing five percent of Germany's total annual steel production—were used for everything from reinforcing bars (rebar) to bunker doors to gun platforms.

OT created numerous standard designs of casemates, bunkers, and other defensive works, labeled Types 134, 272, 501, 622, 669, 677, 683, etc., many borrowed from Westwall designs. Each design could be modified to fit the terrain or special tactical circumstances. And, since there were four different service commands in Normandy, not all under army authority, there were modifications for these as well. For example, the Type 677 might be appended with an "H" (for Heer, or army), an "M" (for Marine, or navy), or "L" (for Luftwaffe, or air force).

Tens of thousands of workers were needed for a project of this magnitude. They came from OT itself, from the Reichsarbeitsdienst, army, navy, and air force, plus foreign nationals from the occupied countries, and from private French and German construction firms. Another source of labor was free: prisoners of war and men from the concentration camps. Just before the Normandy invasion, OT was using some 286,000 workmen who toiled anonymously for years on the Atlantic Wall project.

Rene-Georges Lubat, 91, one of the few Frenchmen still alive who worked on the Wall, said that in 1942 he was "volunteered" by his village mayor and sent to work on defenses in the Arcachon (southwest France) sector. "There was no choice about it. We had to go," he said. "Naturally we weren't enthusiastic, but it is not as if we had any choice.

"The conditions were not terrible. We weren't beaten or anything, and we got a basic wage. At the start, we could go home on Sundays, but after [the German defeat at] Stalingrad, they put up barbed wire and we were stuck inside the work camp. Of course we knew we were building defenses for the Germans, and it felt bad."

Constructing the mammoth concrete structures was, in itself, no easy task. First the sites had to be selected and the ground prepared by removing foliage, tons of earth, and any already existing structures. A sub-base consisting of compacted stones and pebbles then had to be added, surrounded by wooden forms. Huge cement mixers were brought in and, after a grid of steel rebar was laid on top of the subbase, the floor was poured and smoothed flat with hand tools. In numerous cases, there were tunnels and subterranean rooms extending many meters below ground level.

Once the floor had hardened (cured), more wooden forms, or shuttering, were erected as molds so that the walls could be poured and held in place until the concrete dried. Into the footings of the walls, vertical steel rebar was set. Before the roof was poured, steel I-beams were placed horizontally to give it more strength against

Author photo

shells detonating on or above the roof. In many instances, a large-caliber artillery piece (often a large-bore naval gun) was installed by crane before the concrete roof and rear walls were built.

In many cases, all four walls of a casemate were poured, although in some (quite visible at Pointe du Hoc) the "backs" of the casemates (i.e., facing away from the direction of expected enemy fire) were made from large concrete blocks.

Once the casemate was finished, fill dirt was piled up around the structure to help it blend into the landscape, grass and foliage were added to help conceal it, and camouflage netting was draped over it to further hide it from prying eyes. It took from six months to a year to build and get most of the heavy batteries operational.

Contrary to popular belief, not all the bunkers were gun positions—massive concrete blockhouses that contained huge artillery pieces taken from battleships and cruisers. Crews manning the combat bunkers also needed fortified sleeping quarters, mess halls, trenches, water reservoirs, medical facilities, electrical generation, ammunition storage, command, communication, and observation bunkers, so these were also built.

There were open-top platforms for antiaircraft guns, radar and searchlight stands, mortars, and machine guns. Some fighting positions were merely a tank turret set into a concrete emplacement, while others were one- and two-man concrete foxholes known as Tobruks (so named because they had first been used in the 240-day siege of the Libyan fortress city of Tobruk in 1941).

Augmenting the fixed bunkers in France were 13 railway guns firing everything from 150mm to 380mm shells, the larger guns mounted on carriages that allowed them to be rolled out of a camouflaged shelter, fired, and then rolled back into their hiding places, safe from Allied aircraft.

All told, there were more than 1,300 guns of 100mm caliber or larger along the French coast in scores of casemates; more than half of these were 105mm and 155mm.

Day and night, seven days a week, all along the French coastline trucks filled the

A Krupp M-5 280mm railway gun named "Leopold" stands outside the Batterie Todt casemate. The 70-foot-long barrel was capable of throwing a 562-pound shell 40 miles. At one time the Germans had 13-inch railroad guns along the coast.

roads with building materials and giant cement mixers noisily ground on, along with the popping sounds of welders. The shouts of OT foremen filled the air along with the crack of whips on the backs of slave laborers who did not work fast enough. Despite Hitler's calls for maximum effort to complete the defenses as quickly as possible, time was not on Germany's side.

Of course, all the heavy construction activity going on could not take place in secret. Although ordinary civilians were banned from the work areas, members of the French Resistance managed to penetrate or work in the construction sites and pass information along to the Allies so they could pinpoint these targets.

An excellent example of a casemated battery is Battery Todt, built in 1940 near Audinghen, between Calais and Boulogne. Originally called Battery Siegfried, the name was changed to honor Fritz Todt after his death.

These four massive casemates, which housed long-range 380mm (15-inch) guns, had more of an offensive than a defensive mission. Their main purpose was to harass Allied ships in the Channel, bombard air bases, military camps, and other installations in Kent, and play havoc with any invasion fleet that might venture across the Straits of Dover.

The British also had several large-caliber, long-range, casemated batteries in Dover, installed in anticipation of the German invasion in 1940. From time to time they dueled with the German batteries across the Channel.

In the event that enemy forces tried to attack them, the main German batteries such as Todt and Lindemann had their own defensive systems, including antiaircraft guns, machine-gun positions, barbed wire, antitank ditches, and minefields.

Battery Lindemann, named for the captain of the battleship *Bismarck* who went down with his ship in May 1941, was located near Sangatte and was the largest battery in France. The three casemates (named Anton, Bruno, and Caesar), each of which housed a 406mm (16-inch) naval gun, had walls up to 13 feet thick, ammunition storage, and integrated crew quarters with all the comforts of home.

The bunkers, however, were anything but comfortable. The thick concrete walls made the interiors chilly even in summer, and the Channel winds blew in steadily through the large gun apertures.

For the gunners in these big bunkers, employing large-caliber guns that had been taken

from battleships or cruisers, the same problems that confronted naval gun crews confronted them—the deafening blasts and the danger of flash burns when the guns were fired. For these crews, ear protection and protective clothing were issued.

Add these conditions to the generally isolated positions and the uncertainty as to when, where, or whether the Allies would attack must have made static duty in the bunkers rather boring and unpleasant.

A SHIFT IN FOCUS

Although U.S. and British forces were still bottled up in the mountains of Italy, Hitler, on November 3, 1943, shifted his focus from the Eastern Front to the West and looked toward the future. He issued Führer Directive No. 51, which stated in part, "In the East, as a last resort, the vastness of the space will permit the loss of territory even on a major scale without suffering a mortal blow to Germany's chance for survival.

"Not so in the West! If the enemy here succeeds in penetrating our defenses on a wide front, consequences of staggering proportions will follow immediately. All signs point to an offensive against the Western Front of Europe no later than spring [1944], and perhaps earlier. For that reason, I can no longer justify the further weakening of the West in favor of other theaters of war. I have therefore decided to strengthen the defenses in the West."

With Hitler and most of his commanders and ministers convinced that the Allies would use the shortest route across the Straits of Dover to invade the Continent, OT was ordered to shift the bulk of its efforts to beef up defensive works in the Pas de Calais area.

For his part, Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels did much to tout the strength and immensity of the still unfinished fortifications. Through newspaper and magazine articles, newsreels, and images of massive concrete bunkers, with huge naval gun barrels poking out menacingly from their embrasures, Goebbels hoped to convince the Allies that attempting an attack against such obviously well-prepared coastal defenses would be suicidal.

But General Hans von Salmuth, commander of the Fifteenth Army in Normandy, was not impressed. "The Atlantic Wall is no wall!!!" he wrote scathingly to his superiors in Berlin in the autumn of 1943. "Rather it is like a thin and fragile cord which has a few small knots at isolated places such as Dieppe and Dunkirk. The strengthening of this cord was no doubt underway during the past spring and summer. Since August the effort has been getting steadily weaker ... and any considerable increase in bunker construction will not take place till spring [since] material and labor are lacking."

Bundesarchiv Bild 101I-364-2314-16A; Photo: Kuhn

Although the steel-reinforced concrete roof has yet to be poured, Batterie Lindemann, with its 406mm Krupp naval gun, is commissioned in 1942.

FROM DESERT FOX TO NORMANDY DEFENDER

Still recovering from a debilitating illness that necessitated his being relieved from command in North Africa, Field Marshal Erwin Rommel was personally appointed by Hitler in late 1943 to head Army Group B (France, Holland, and Belgium); Hitler also put the wily Desert Fox in charge of speeding up construction of the Atlantic Wall, sending him on a trip to inspect the incomplete defenses and make recommendations on what needed to be done.

Rommel was appalled by what he found. While Goebbels had been beating the propaganda drum in hopes of frightening the Allies into thinking the wall was more formidable than it actually was, Rommel was learning that the wall, in most places, was paper thin. The Wall, Rommel wrote in secret to a confidant, was nothing more than "a figment of Hitler's cloud-cuckooland ... an enormous bluff ... more for the German people than for the enemy."

In addition to the slow pace of construction and the lack of a defense in depth, Rommel knew that the Allies were building up a huge invasion force across the English Channel that would charge across the waves and skies in the very near future. He whipped his subordinate commanders into a frenzy of activity to complete the bunkers, the minefields, and the beach defenses.

As Rommel told Hitler on December 31, 1943, after his inspection tour, "The focus of the enemy landing operation will probably be directed against Fifteenth Army's sector [the Pas de Calais].... [I]t is likely that the enemy's main concern will be to get the quickest possible possession of a port or ports capable of handling large ships."

Rommel was obviously unaware that the Allies, correctly assuming that the Germans would destroy port facilities in France and Belgium before they fell into Allied hands, were building artificial harbors in Britain—codenamed Mulberries and Gooseberries—and would tow them across the Channel.

"Furthermore," Rommel continued, "it is most likely that the enemy ... will make his main effort against the sector between Boulogne and the Somme estuary and on either side of Calais, where he would have the shortest sea-route for the assault and for bringing up supplies, and the most favorable conditions for the use of his air arm.

National Archives

A Type 671 casemate at St.-Jean-de-Luz cleverly disguised to look, at least from a distance, like a house.

"As for his airborne forces, we can expect him to use the bulk of them to open up our coastal front from the rear and take quick possession of the area from which our long-range missiles [i.e., the V-1 and V-2 rockets] will be coming."

No detail was too insignificant to catch Rommel's critical eye. At one point less than a month before the invasion, Rommel was checking on the status of construction at La Madeleine, a place the Americans had marked as Utah Beach on their top-secret invasion maps. He came across Lieutenant Arthur Jahnke, who had been wounded on the Eastern Front and who was in command of a company working to stiffen the defenses there. Rommel was unhappy; there were not enough mines, not enough barbed wire, not enough beach obstacles.

"Let's see your hands, Leutnant," Rommel growled. When he saw that Jahnke's hands were just as calloused and scarred by physical labor as his men's, he relented a bit.

"Very well, Leutnant. The blood you lost building the fortifications is as precious as what you shed in combat."

To an impartial observer, the hundreds of concrete and steel blockhouses and casemates that had already been built or were still in various stages of completion—along with the mile after mile of coastline bristling with barbed wire, mines, and a fiendish variety of obstacles, not to mention the monstrous, large-caliber guns—looked as if Rommel had accomplished the impossible. He had managed, it seemed, to fortify an entire coastline well enough to prevent or at least inhibit an invading force from gaining a foothold in occupied France.

Rommel, of course, would disagree with that assessment. Each day, as he started out on his inspection tours in his big, open-top Horch staff car from his headquarters at La Roche-Guyon, 70 miles away from the nearest coastal installation (Dieppe), he would chew out the construction teams for not working fast and hard enough. Sensing that the invasion was imminent, he made constant phone calls and wrote dozens of letters back to Berlin, complaining about the shortages of concrete, rebar, cement mixers, men, and more.

Although there was still much to do, much had been accomplished in an incredibly short amount of time. Some four million mines had been sown, and thousands of miles of barbed wire had been strung. Hundreds of bunkers, casemates, and fighting positions had been emplaced (6,000 in France alone).

Guarding the approaches to the mouth of the Seine Estuary at Le Havre were casemated batteries at Vasouy, Villerville, Ste. Adresse, and Mont Canisy. Other bunkered batteries, such as the ones at Le Portel, La Trésorerie, Herquelingue, Wimereux, and Mont Lambert, protected the fortified port of Boulogne-sur-Mer.

South of Boulogne were batteries at St. Cecile-Plage, Hardelot, Le Touquet, and Le Treport. Still more ranged for hundreds of miles along the coast between Le Havre and Dunkirk; there was an average of one battery (usually four guns) every 17 miles. So well defended was the area around Calais that it became known as "the Iron Coast."

A six-gun battery sat atop Pointe-du-Hoc, where it had a commanding view of the Channel and beaches to both the east and west—beaches that would soon be known to the world as Utah and Omaha.

Under Rommel's tireless leadership, the coastal defenses were greatly expanded, comprising everything from thick minefields to beach and underwater obstacles (tetrahedrons, Belgian Gates, concrete stakes, and slanted logs topped with mines) to antiglider poles known as "Rommel's Asparagus" that would break up gliders when they landed behind the coast.

Many bunkers that were visible from the sea were camouflaged to look like civilian houses and shops, complete with painted signs, windows, and fake roofs. The largest casemates, such as those at Battery Todt, had camouflage netting draped over them to help them blend into the landscape along with heavy chains hanging down over their gun embrasures as a way of preventing enemy shells and/or splinters from flying directly into

the large openings.

Hitler sometimes suggested ideas for the Atlantic Wall, conceiving a weapon that he felt would further create fear in the Allied camp. "Can't we arrange for a special allocation of flame-throwers for the West?" he asked his cronies. "Flame-throwers are the best thing for the defense; after all, they are terrifying weapons.... [Speer] has workers available.... You could ... have them make flame-throwers. Especially in defense, the flame-thrower is the most terrifying thing there is.

"That will take the pluck out of the attacking infantry, I should say, before it starts hand-to-hand fighting. It will lose its pluck when it suddenly gets the feeling that there are flame-throwers on all sides. Also in battery positions there must be flame-throwers. Everywhere there should be flame-throwers."

Despite Hitler's fervent belief in fire-spewing weapons, the only flamethrowers used during the Normandy invasion were those carried by some American infantrymen in the assault waves.

The German fortification efforts began to face serious manpower shortages in 1943 as many of the workers engaged in the Atlantic Wall project were transferred to Germany and the occupied countries to repair the damage inflicted by Allied bombing. Additionally, in 1943, fortifying German and Italian positions became a priority in Sicily, Italy, and throughout the Mediterranean area, which further stretched the Reich's resources to the limit.

Lieutenant General Fritz Bayerlein, Rommel's former acting chief of staff in North Africa and still a close friend and confidant, wrote that Rommel once told him that despite Soviet advances on the Eastern Front, "The West is the place that matters. If we manage to throw the British and Americans back into the sea, it will be a long time before they return."

Bayerlein also admitted, "In France ... [Rommel] believed that victory could no longer be gained by mobile warfare—not merely because of the British and American air superiority, but also because the German armaments industry was no longer capable of keeping pace with the western Allies in the production of tanks, guns, antitank guns, and vehicles."

Both: National Archives

RIGHT: An American soldier peers through a bunker periscope at Batterie Grandcamp-Maisy after its capture. BELOW: With Field Marshal Rommel (far right) looking on, German troops install antilanding-craft obstacles on a Normandy beach. Many of the obstacles were fitted with mines designed to explode on contact.

BATTLE FOR THE BUNKERS

At last, early on June 6, 1944, the mighty Allied invasion force was unleashed against the Normandy coast. After the American 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions dropped behind Utah Beach to sow death and confusion among the Germans, the 4th Infantry Division (Force "U") stormed ashore; to the east, at Omaha Beach, the U.S. 1st and 29th Divisions (Force "O") did the same.

While the 4th quickly overcame enemy opposition at Utah, Force "O" had a much tougher time, mainly because the air force and naval gunners initially had overshot their targets, leaving the bunkers untouched. Only when American destroyers came close to shore and fired point-blank at the casemates were the pinned-down amphibious troops able to make headway off the beach and up the bluffs.

At one of the German installations, a German soldier survived to write, "The heavy naval guns fired salvo after salvo into our positions. The hail of shells falling upon us grew heavier, sending fountains of sand and debris into the air. The fight for survival began. Our weapons were preset on the defensive fire zones, thus we could only wait. We had planned that [the enemy] should land at high tide … but this was low tide. Slowly the wall of explosions approached, meter by meter, cracking, screaming, whistling, and sizzling, destroying everything in its path.

There was no escape."

But, because aerial and naval bombardments had only a limited effect on the stout bunkers, once Allied boots were on the ground in Normandy the fight to knock out the bunkers really began. The installations guarding Utah and Omaha Beaches were engaged almost immediately; some garrisons gave up quickly while others held out for several days.

GRANDCAMP-MAISY

Grandcamp-Maisy is a small port to the west of Pointe-du-Hoc controlling the bay of the Grand Vey and the mouth of the Vire River with a commanding view of Utah Beach, 12 miles to the west. At this location the Germans had installed two coastal gun batteries equipped with guns that had enough range to hit Pointe-du-Hoc but not either Utah or Omaha Beaches.

Nevertheless, because they posed a danger to the Allied fleet, the batteries at Grandcamp-Maisy had to be destroyed. On the night of June 5-6, a fleet of 100 Allied bombers dropped nearly 600 tons of bombs on the batteries but failed to make much of a dent; on D-Day, the German guns opened fire on the American fleet supporting the landings on Utah Beach.

On June 8, the 3rd Battalion of the U.S. 116th Regimental Combat Team, supported by the 743rd Tank Battalion, entered Grandcamp-Maisy and, by the end of the day, had neutralized the battery.

ST. MARCOUF/BATTERIE CRISBEQ

Despite their commanders' orders to fight to the last man and the last bullet, most German coastal batteries were either neutralized or their crews gave up quickly after offering only token resistance on D-Day. The six-gun Batterie Crisbeq at St. Marcouf was an exception, managing to hold out for several days. Although bombarded by thousands of tons of bombs (600 tons on June 5 alone) that destroyed all the antiaircraft guns, the Kriegsmarine crew, commanded by Oberleutant zur See Walter Ohmsen, fought back with unusual tenacity.

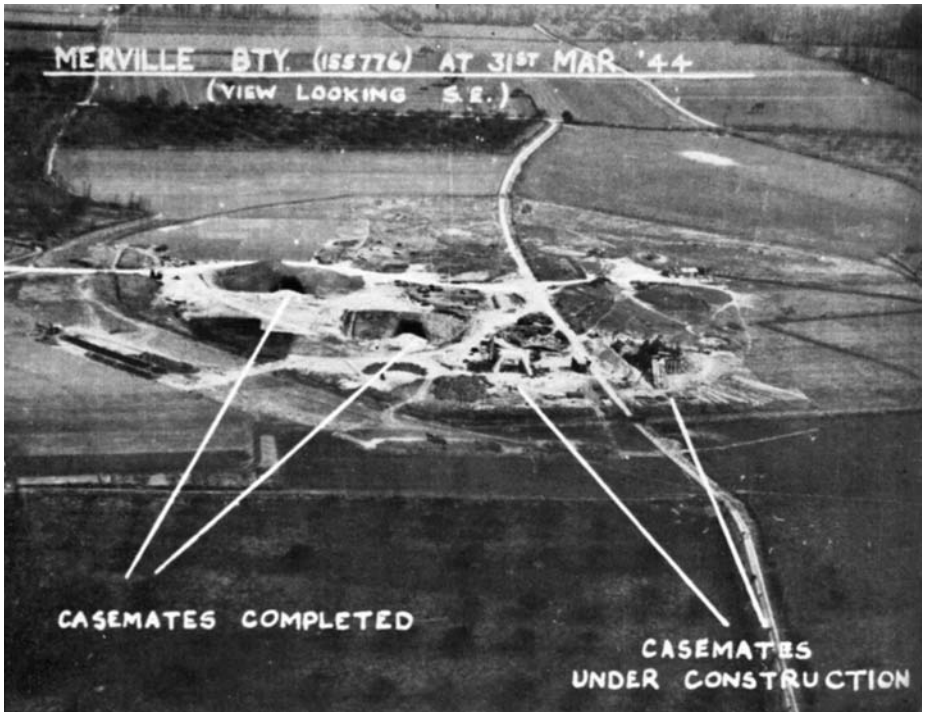
Guarded by eight antiaircraft guns, 15 machine guns, and ringed by minefields and barbed wire, Crisbeq withstood an attack by the 1st Battalion of the 101st Airborne Division's 502nd Parachute Infantry Regiment on the night of June 6 (20 of the airborne troopers were captured during the abortive assault), and the next day its 210mm guns even managed to sink the destroyer USS *Corry,* three miles away. The American battleships *Nevada, Arkansas,* and *Texas* responded by knocking out two of the German bunkers.

On June 7, after a 20-minute bombardment by naval guns, artillery, and mortars, two companies of the 1st Battalion of the 4th Infantry Division's 22nd Infantry Regiment assaulted the Crisbeq position. The Army's official history says, "Advancing then under a rolling barrage which the infantry followed at about 200 yards, and under indirect fire from heavy machine guns, the two companies reached the edge of the fortified area with few losses.

Both: National Archives

ABOVE: American troops inspect a 210mm gun at one of the St. Marcouf casemates. The defenders held out for nearly a week before abandoning the position. BELOW: After taking the heights at Pointe-du-Hoc, scene of numerous bunkers, U.S. Rangers enjoy a break in one of the enormous shell craters being used as an aid station. However, the guns they were expecting to capture were not there.

National Archives



In an oblique shot of the Merville Battery taken by the Photo Reconnaisance Unit of the RAF, construction is underway on Casemates 3 and 4, while 1 and 2 are completed.

"The third company was then passed through to blow the concrete emplacements with pole charges. The assault sections, however, used all their explosives without materially damaging the concrete and then became involved in small-arms fights with Germans in the communicating trenches."

Oberleutant Ohmsen, who had relocated his command post to the nearby Azeville battery, then had the Azeville guns saturate the Crisbeq site with heavy caliber fire that forced the 22nd Infantry's 1st Battalion to withdraw to its starting point north of Bas Village de Dodainville.

On June 8, more Allied warships again pounded Crisbeq with their big guns, but still the battery would not quit. On the night of June 11-12, the 78 surviving Germans, having slowed the American advance in their sector for nearly a week, abandoned the battery and withdrew. Ohmsen was awarded the Knight's Cross for his defense of the Crisbeq battery.

POINTE-DU-HOC

One of the best known episodes to come out of Operation Overlord is the Ranger assault on the six-casemate German battery at Pointe-du-Hoc, located between Utah Beach to the west and Omaha Beach to the east. Two hundred and fifty men of Lt. Col. James Rudder's U.S. 2nd Ranger Battalion were tasked with climbing the 100-foot-tall cliffs on the seaward side and taking this position.

To protect the guns from the intense air bombardment, the Germans, prior to the attack, had moved many of them approximately one mile away on June 4; poor weather conditions just prior to the invasion prevented reconnaissance flights from discovering the removal of the guns.

While reviewing the plans for the invasion, a senior American naval officer remarked to General Omar Bradley, commanding the American forces on D-Day, "It can't be done. Three old women with brooms could stop the Rangers scaling that cliff!"

Rudder was undeterred. "Sir, my Rangers can do the job for you," he replied.

Nevertheless, the German garrison at Pointe-du-Hoc fought back stubbornly as the Rangers, under the supporting fires of the American destroyer USS *Satterlee* and the British destroyer HMS *Talybont*, climbed the sheer cliff using ropes and ladders borrowed from the London fire brigades.

After the Rangers reached the top and fought off several counterattacks, they were surprised to find no guns in the casemates. A patrol went off in search of the guns, found them in an orchard a mile away, and destroyed them with thermite grenades.

BRITISH ASSAULT

East of the American beachheads, in the British/Canadian sectors, the bunkers closest to the beaches were attacked within a day or two of the landings, but those farther up the coast in the direction of Calais were taken out as the number of invaders steadily grew and pushed their way inland.

In the British sector, the coup-de-main glider assault under Major John Howard swiftly took the vital bridges over the Orne River and Caen Canal, but another airborne assault to knock out the four casemated guns at Merville on the far right flank of Sword Beach proved the adage that "anything that can go wrong will go wrong."

Lieutenant Colonel Terence Otway's 9th Parachute Battalion landed at Merville with only a fraction of its expected number; the rest landed miles off target. Most of the unit's demolition equipment was also missing. Only through courage of the highest order were Otway's men able to break through the barbed wire and minefields that surrounded the casemates to kill, capture, or scatter the defenders and disable the guns.

LONGUES-SUR-MER

Located five miles north of Bayeux, between Omaha and Gold Beaches, the Kriegsmarine Longues-sur-Mer battery, also known as Wiederstandnest 48, was sited atop a 220-foot-high cliff. Construction began on September 1943 but was not completely finished by the time of the D-

Author photo

ABOVE: Turm I of Batterie Todt today. The "windows" of the bunker-turned-museum were used to vent the buildup of gases inside the casemate when the 38cm gun was fired. OPPOSITE: An enormous 406mm gun points menacingly toward the English Channel from one of the casemates at Batterie Lindemann. The thick concrete walls and roof were impervious to shellfire; the casemates could only be taken out by infantry assault.

Day landings. Although manned initially by the Kriegsmarine, the battery was later transferred to the army.

The battery was composed of four large concrete casemates, a fire-control post, shelters for personnel and ammunition, and several defensive machine-gun emplacements. Each casemate was outfitted with a 152mm (six-inch) German naval gun with a range of up to 12.5 miles, enough to reach the Omaha and Gold Beach sectors.

During the night of June 5, Bomber Command tried to hit the battery with 1,500 tons of bombs, but most fell on the nearby village. Some of the bombs did destroy the telephone lines between the observation bunker and gun positions.

A backup system of signal flags was used, but the smoke from the guns made the flags impossible to see; the German gunners had to engage targets with open sights (no optical rangefinders had been installed), and at dawn the guns fired on the closest large ship—HMS *Bulolo,* the headquarters ship for the staff directing the Gold Beach landings—forcing *Bulolo* to retreat out of range.

The American battleship *Arkansas* and the Free French cruisers *Montcalm* and *Georges Leygues* arrived and began bombarding the position. During the duel, three of the battery's four guns were disabled by British cruisers *Ajax* and *Argonaut,* which had joined in later; the lone remaining gun continued to fire intermittently until 7 PM, when the *Georges Leygues* silenced it. It is estimated that the battery had fired over 150 rounds at the fleet but did no damage.

On the morning of June 7, the major commanding the Longues-sur-Mer battery and his 184 men surrendered to elements of the British 50th (Northumbrian) Division.

MONT CANISY

The Mont Canisy battery at Bénerville was one of the most important German positions between Le Havre and Cherbourg. Located on the highest ground in Normandy (360 feet), the French Navy constructed in 1935 a battery atop Mont Canisy with its unrestricted view of Le Havre to the north and which was operational there until 1940.

Following the fall of France in 1940, the French abandoned the position and the occupying German forces took it over; they, too, recognized the obvious importance of the location and improved the site, constructing a battery of four 155mm guns that could threaten any attempt to take the port by sea.

Mont Canisy was an army battery and was known to the Allies as Batterie Bénerville. Initially, the guns were in open emplacements with a 360-degree traverse, but to protect the guns from aerial attack Organization Todt encased them in Type 679 casemates. The site was also protected by a Renault tank turret. A 275-yard-long tunnel, 50 feet below ground, connected the casemates and the ammunition bunker.

At 5:30 AM on D-Day, the British battleships HMS *Ramillies* and HMS *Warspite* became the first Allied ships to open fire on the Norman coast at a range of some 25,000 yards (14 miles) offshore.

While the battery was under fire, the German 5th Torpedo Boat Flotilla attacked the two British battleships, firing 18 torpedoes at the dreadnaughts. As the torpedoes headed toward *Ramillies,* the ship turned, and the "fish" passed between her and *Warspite,* hitting the Norwegian destroyer HNoMS *Svenner,* which immediately sank with a loss of 33 crewmen. Seeing the huge Allied naval force, the German E-boats headed back to their base at Le Havre.

Despite being saturated by hundreds of bombs and shells, the Mont Canisy gunners continued to fire, managing to sink one ship and hit 34 more, badly damaging 12 of them.

A plan was formulated to launch a commando attack on the battery, but as the guns could not fire inland it became a meaningless target; the Allied commander decided to simply bypass Mont Canisy and let it wither on the vine. The Germans abandoned the battery during the night of August 21-22 without a fight and were taken prisoner.

BOULOGNE

Field Marshal Bernard Law Montgomery told Lt. Gen. Henry D.G. Crerar, commanding the First Canadian Army, "I want Boulogne badly." Crerar did his best to comply with his superior's desires.

The port of Boulogne was an essential prize, but it could not be taken unless and until the big guns at Cap Gris-Nez and Calais were silenced. So a plan, Operation Undergo, was formulated to do the job.

The defenses were formidable. Atop Cap Gris-Nez itself, between Boulogne and Calais, was Batterie Gris-Nez with its 10 casemated batteries, each with 175 men (as well as V-1 and V-2 launching sites). A mile to the south at Waringzelles were the four great casemates of Batterie Todt; at nearby Floringzelles stood the four 280mm (11-inch) guns of Grosser Kurfürst. Three miles east of the cape was a battery at Wissant, while the awesome Batterie Lindemann sat imperiously atop the Noires Mottes escarpment near Sangatte. There were other batteries at Fort Lapin and a two-casemate battery known as Oldenburg housing 240mm (10-inch) guns northeast of Calais.

On September 10, the Canadian 2nd Division surrounded Calais and began a siege. Then the Canadian 3rd Division's 7th Infantry Brigade, along with the Toronto Scottish Regiment and a regiment of the 17th Duke of York's Royal Canadian Hussars, mounted a ground assault against the Cap Gris-Nez batteries, manned by the 242nd Naval Coastal Artillery Battalion. They were initially repelled.

On September 17, while the Canadian 2nd Division continued its attack, the Canadian 3rd Division, supported by the 10th Armoured Regiment, detachments from the 79th Armoured Division, and the 328 guns of 17 artillery regiments, began their assault on Boulogne.

As part of the assault, the three infantry battalions (Royal Winnipeg Rifles, Regina Rifles, and 1st Canadian Scottish) of the 7th Infantry Brigade, along with the North Shore Regiment (New Brunswick), were assigned to silence Lindemann's four 406mm guns that were, along with the Todt and Grosser Kurfürst batteries, continuing to shell Dover. To support the attack, Crerar also threw in tanks and artillery, including the long-range heavy guns firing from Dover.

The assault on Boulogne (Operation Wellhit) began with the Canadians sealing off escape routes from the city before attacking with tanks, artillery, aircraft, and infantry. On September 20, a force of 600 bombers dropped 3,000 tons of high explosives on German positions. Six days later, the 10,000-man German garrison, after putting up a half-hearted fight, surrendered.

Wellhit ended with the capture of Wimereux, Wimelle, and the fort of La Crèche. The last two nearby German defensive positions, in Le Portel and Outreau, fell once the Boulogne fortress commander, Lt. Gen. Ferdinand Heim, who had vowed to fight to the death, changed his mind and surrendered on September 22.

CALAIS

The main attack on Calais commenced with the Canadian 3rd Division's 7th Brigade, bolstered by the North Shore Regiment, the Queen's Own Rifles,

Bundesarchiv Bild 146-1986-104-10A; Photo: Maier

Photo: Rich Higgins

Seventy years after the invasion, this shell-marked bunker at La Madeleine still looms menacingly over the sands of Utah Beach, where the U.S. 4th Infantry Division came ashore on D-Day.

Cameron Highlanders, and another Canadian unit, Le Régiment de la Chaudière, all going into action on September 25. The Germans defended stubbornly, but theirs was a lost cause.

On that same day, the Grosser Kurfürst battery at Floringzelle was essentially knocked out by the long-range Dover guns, and Canada's Highland Light Infantry easily mopped up on September 29.

Also on the 29th, the North Nova Scotia Highlanders captured Battery Todt. The infantrymen were supported by artillery and by tanks from the 6th Armoured Regiment and 79th British Armoured Division. One historian noted that as firing died down Lt. Col. D.F. Forbes, commanding the North Nova Scotias, "knocked on the steel door of one of the casemates and inquired about the strength of the garrison." The Germans soon came out with their hands up.

On the 30th, following an intense artillery and fighter bomber saturation, a succession of strongpoints in and around Calais were taken; by October 1, the city was in Canadian hands. The 7,500-man garrison surrendered at a cost of only 300 Canadian casualties.

Perhaps the most dramatic ending at any battery came at Battery Friedrich August at La Trésorerie on September 18 when, while under heavy assault by the North Shore Regiment and accompanying tanks, the commander and his second-in-command of the three 305mm casemated guns, seeing their position as hopeless, loaded demolition charges into one of their guns, strapped themselves into the firing seats, and blew the gun and themselves up. Their 450 men surrendered.

At last, the Normandy coastal batteries were neutralized, and the Allied forces that had knocked them out were employed elsewhere in the drive eastward to liberate the other occupied countries of Europe and thrust into the heart of Nazi Germany.

THE ATLANTIC WALL TODAY

Exploring the remains of the Atlantic Wall bunkers today is a fascinating, rewarding experience, and the fact that many bunkers are not marked on maps and remain forgotten under foliage makes it even more of a challenge. But "bunker hunters" are advised not to violate "no trespassing" signs or attempt to crawl into some of these spaces, as hidden dangers lurk within.

The Longues-sur-Mer battery site is one of the most visited and best preserved in France—and the only one where visitors can still see the original guns that were capable of firing shells weighing 100 pounds a distance of more than 13 miles. The view from the firing command post, dug into the cliff, offers a vast panorama over the Bay of the Seine. It is the only coastal defense battery on the landing beaches that is classified as a "historical monument."

After the war, Battery Todt's huge naval guns were dismantled and shipped to Norway for use in a gun battery run by the Norwegian Navy on an island in the Oslo fjord. The guns were later returned to France but their fate is unknown.

One of Todt's surviving three casemates ("Turm I") was privately purchased some years ago and turned into the Atlantik Wall Musée, which displays World War II weapons, uniforms, vehicles, ammunition, and one of only two Krupp M-5 280mm railway guns still in existence.

Mont Canisy, just a few miles south of Le Havre at Bénerville, is today incorporated into a nature preserve at the top of the hill; signs point the way. A postwar effort to destroy the casemates failed, and today volunteers on summer weekends conduct guided tours through 300 yards of underground tunnels. Incongruously, the site is surrounded

by luxurious, multi-million-euro mansions.

Some batteries no longer exist. Battery Lindemann, once the largest in France, was totally demolished to make room for the approaches to the Chunnel—the underwater tunnel that links France with Britain.

Unmarked bunkers, however, abound. For example, a complex being slowly absorbed by foliage is found along the D-513 roadway west of Honfleur, still overlooking the Seine Estuary south of Le Havre.

High on a bluff just north of La Havre, the graffiti-marred, open-top gun platforms of St. Adresse still offer a commanding view of the sea. Other bunkers are still in place around Boulogne and still look menacing.

Interestingly, long lost bunkers continue to be uncovered. A decade ago, Gary Sterne, an amateur historian from Britain, found an annotated military map in a pair of GI trousers he bought. On the map was a spot near the village of Grandcamp-Maisy marked "area of high resistance." Sterne decided to visit Normandy and examine the site.

"It sparked my curiosity because that area was previously thought to be just fields," he said. "To my amazement, I found I was standing on concrete. I followed the concrete to the edge of the tree line and discovered a bunker entrance, then a tunnel, an office, storerooms, headquarters buildings, radio rooms, bunkers."

The battery, he believes, was manned by about 180 soldiers of the 716th Artillery. He began digging and found discarded German water bottles, spectacles, and boots. The remains of one officer, too, were uncovered; the remains were reburied at the German military cemetery at La Cambe.

The "Maisy battery," as he determined it was, was built on the far side of the slope behind Omaha Beach. Company F of the 5th Ranger Battalion stormed the site and captured it after five days of furious hand-to-hand fighting (June 6-10), taking 86 prisoners at a cost of 15 Rangers. American veterans have told Sterne that they discovered more than $4 million worth of French francs, which they shared among themselves.

"After studying the RAF reconnaissance photographs, it was clear that the site was of major importance," said Sterne. "It was not just another little gun battery, but a major complex—a similar size to that at Pointe-du-Hoc, but virtually undamaged."

After doing excavation work, Sterne bought the 40 acres of land from more than 30 different owners, and he plans a museum. Most of the site is now open to tourists, and there are miles of trenches to explore, as well as some of the battery's original artillery pieces. Today, it and Longues-sur-Mer are the only Atlantic Wall batteries with their original guns.

Even today, with most of the Atlantic Wall bunkers in derelict condition, they still possess a somber, sinister grandeur, and it is easy to appreciate the tremendous amount of effort that went into building them. It is also sobering to realize that, no matter how impressive Hitler's Atlantic Wall—on which many years and many billions of Reichsmarks were expended—was, it was penetrated by the Allies in the span of a few hours.

Some parts of the wall have been demolished, some have crumbled or fallen into the sea. Wall worker Rene-Georges Lubat said, "I do think the wall should be preserved now. It is important to remember what happened—the ignominy of it all, the cataclysm that we had to endure."

Will France ever declare the Atlantic Wall—or at least of portions of it—a historic monument, thus ensuring its preservation? "That will never happen," said a BBC reporter. "No French government would elevate a symbol of national dishonor."

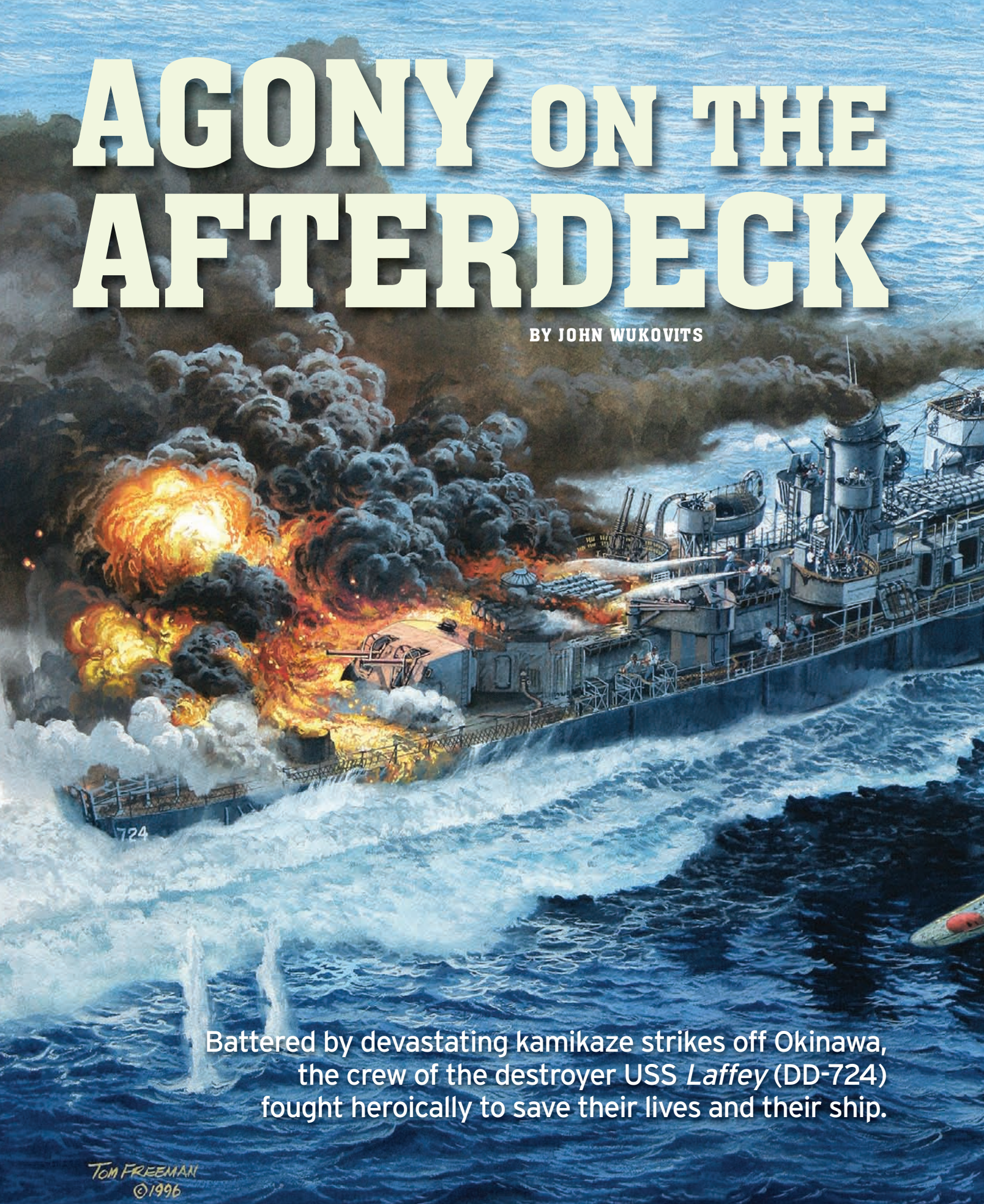
Hitler's Third Reich did not last for a thousand years. But the remnants of his Atlantic Wall just might. □

Both: Author photo

ABOVE: The Type M262 fire-control bunker at Longues-sur-Mer looks out toward the English Channel, which was filled with more than 7,000 Allied warships on June 6, 1944. Scenes for the 1962 film, *The Longest Day*, were shot here. RIGHT: A gun casemate at Mont Canisy, the highest point along the Normandy coast, was part of a battery that guarded the sea approaches to the port of Le Havre.

AGONY ON THE AFTERDECK

BY JOHN WUKOVITS



Battered by devastating kamikaze strikes off Okinawa, the crew of the destroyer USS *Laffey* (DD-724) fought heroically to save their lives and their ship.

Maritime artist Tom Freeman's portrayal of the Sumner-class USS *Laffey* (DD-724) under "Divine Wind," or kamikaze, assault. The destroyer survived 22 suicide attacks in 80 minutes off the northern coast of Okinawa, April 16, 1945.

BACKSTORY: *Two warships have been named in honor of Seaman Bartlett Laffey, a Civil War Medal of Honor recipient. The second* Laffey *was built as a Sumner-class destroyer by Bath Iron Works of Maine. Commissioned February 8, 1944, the USS* Laffey *(DD-724) had already amassed a proud record before her heroic stand on April 16, 1945. After participating in the June 1944 Normandy landings in France, where the crew battled German land batteries and provided gunfire support for the infantry ashore, the ship headed for duty in the Pacific.*

Unlike Normandy, where the German air arm was conspicuously absent, Laffey's *crew faced an intense air war off the Philippines—at Leyte and Lingayen Gulf, and also at Iwo Jima. For the first time in these battles,* Laffey's *crew faced kamikaze aircraft and, although they then escaped unharmed, the officers and young sailors, led by the gifted skipper, Arkansas-born Commander F. Julian Becton, Annapolis Class of 1931, witnessed up close the horrific damage just one suicidal pilot—never mind a whole swarm of them—could do by purposely smashing into a ship.*

The crew's main ordeal occurred on April 16, 1945, off Okinawa, an island only 350 miles south of the Japanese home islands. While Laffey *prowled the waters at Picket Station No. 1, the northernmost and thus the most dangerous of the 16 picket stations ringing Okinawa, the destroyer's radar screen suddenly filled with blips. In the next 80 minutes, 22 kamikaze aircraft broke off from their companions to attack the ship.* Laffey's *gunners, superbly trained by Becton, splashed the first eight, but as the following account depicts, the next four ravaged the ship's aft section.*

8:45 AM—KAMIKAZE NUMBER 9

The battle's opening quarter hour had gone well for *Laffey*. Commander F. Julian Becton's skillful maneuvering and the gunners' accuracy had dispatched the first eight kamikazes, but the agony of the afterdeck, 25 minutes of unadulterated hell, left survivors stunned with the ferocity of the attack.

In three harrowing minutes four separate enemy aircraft converged on the destroyer from four angles—two from port and two from starboard. Like a boxer absorbing a series of blows, *Laffey* took four punches in a remarkably brief, and deadly, stretch. "They came in thick and fast after that, beginning with the ninth plane," said Commander Becton of the kamikazes that attacked his *Laffey* after the first eight had been shot down.

Fire Controlman 3/c George R. Burnett tried to describe for his parents what next occurred, and wrote that "all hell broke loose." He added, "They all started to dive on us at once and poor little us all by ourselves out there so you can see we didn't have much of a chance because they were coming from all directions and you just can't shoot every way at once."

At the bridge, teenaged Quartermaster 2/c Aristides S. "Ari" Phoutrides noticed that after the first eight kamikazes, "They came in groups of ones and twos. It almost appeared that they waited their turn. At one time we had seven Vals [Aichi D3A] circling overhead that didn't attack us until a few others went in. They used all the tricks they could—flying low, coming in fast, and diving from the sun. In fact, many of them made bombing runs on us before attempting a suicide dive. All of them," he added somberly, "strafed as they came in."

In the CIC below the bridge Lieutenant Lloyd Hull, a product of the University of Pennsylvania's Naval ROTC, supervised the men who operated the ship's communications system, including the recently added FIDO team. Leaving control of events outside the CIC to Becton and the men on the guns, he focused on his main responsibility—to collect and relay to Becton the information he needed, such as targets spotted and the numbers of friendly aircraft in the area, if any, to arrive at the decisions he had to make with lightning speed.

As the battle swirled above, radarmen plotted surface and air targets, while radiomen and others manned the communications apparatus that linked the ship to the flagship, to other vessels, and to the outside world. Crew called "talkers" reported to Hull any updates they received over their circuits from the overtaxed lookouts on deck, and relayed information given them by Hull to Becton and other recipients.

Like Sonarman Daniel Zack in Mount 52, Hull and the others in CIC labored in a closed world, blocked from witnessing the battle raging outside. Unlike Zack, Hull and his crew could at least follow the progress from the radar screens and any communications that arrived. Hull wished he could have observed more, and knew that a kamikaze could at any moment ravage his CIC and end his run as an officer, but he concentrated on his tasks and tried to be as helpful as he could to Becton and, ultimately, to his shipmates. Maintaining a flow of information to the bridge was the prime manner in which he could best contribute to the action, for without it, Becton would be blindly skippering his ship.

As he moved from radarmen to talkers, Hull wondered how his friends on deck fared. He knew he was fortunate to work in CIC, where the bulkheads protected him and his men from the bullets and shrapnel that would undoubtedly sweep the decks with each crash, but in some ways he longed to be above, sharing the hazards with those he had commanded and those with whom he had grown close.

Long-range radar, able to discern targets up to 60 miles away, has difficulty locating low-flying planes. With his CAP still missing and his SG surface-monitoring radar already disabled, Becton leaned on the young eyes of the ship's lookouts, most of them recent high school graduates. Until CAP arrived and imposed themselves between the kamikazes and *Laffey*, Becton would have to rely on his own resources.

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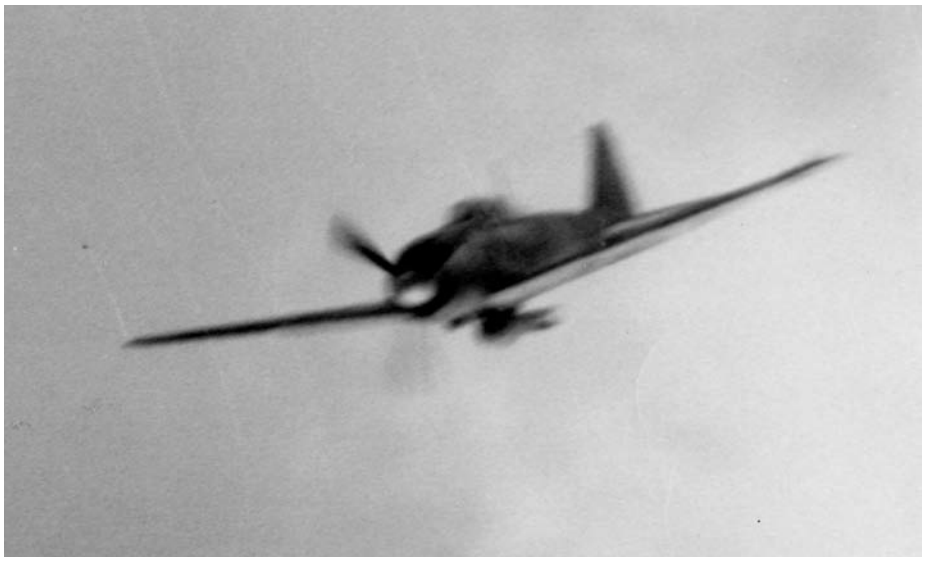

ABOVE: A bomb-laden Mitsubishi A6M5 Reisen ("Zero" or "Zeke") homes in on its target. The Japanese reliance on kamikaze attacks intensified during the Battle of Okinawa. OPPOSITE: The *Laffey* in her coat of "dazzle camouflage," shown in August 1944, after supporting the Normandy invasion. First used in World War I, the garish paint schemes worn by many warships partly disguised a ship's identity, size, speed, and heading.

At 8:45 AM, one of his sharp-eyed lookouts spotted a Judy [Yokosuka D4Y] coming in low on the port side. As he drew closer, the pilot banked slightly and then aimed at the ship's mid-section, hoping to destroy the bridge area. Even though the Judy, armed with a 1,750-pound bomb, raced in at more than 300 miles per hour, men on the port side guns were surprised that the aircraft created the illusion of moving toward them in slow motion.

Lieutenant Joel C. Youngquist checked the men on his 40mm and 20mm gun crews, one level above Gunner's Mate 2/c Lawrence H. "Ski" Delewski's five-inch gun on the main deck, but Seaman Tom Fern and the other men had opened fire almost as soon as the kamikaze was spotted. Fern and his companions stood their ground, exposed to the bullets pinging around them, and battled the instinct to crouch below the waist-high shield as the plane bore in.

While Becton executed frequent course changes to keep the plane away from the ship's vital mid-section, Lieutenant Frank Manson watched the kamikaze, uncertain whether it would veer toward the bridge and him or plunge directly into Youngquist's gun. Survival at this moment relied on those portside 40mm and 20mm guns, the ship's last line of defense, to knock down the plane. "You know he's [the kamikaze pilot] going to die—you pray he won't take you with him," Manson said. "You're up against a desperation and fanaticism that leaves you cold all over." Manson had witnessed other suicide attacks in the Philippines, but this was "blood-chilling. They [kamikazes] have a kind of insanity that makes war more horrible than it's ever been before."

Seaman Fern handed four-shell clips to his gunners, who fired them as rapidly as the loader placed them in the guns. Spent casings clanged into bins on the deck, adding their noise to the pow-pow of the 40mm guns and the rapid tat-tat-tat-tat of the 20mm guns. In return, bullets from the aircraft pinged off shields and mounts, igniting sparks and cutting into human flesh and bones.

Bullets from *Laffey* gunners kicked up hundreds of splashes in the water as they attempted to down the low-flying plane, making it appear as if crew could traverse from ship to plane by hopping along the splashes. Tracers nicked the aircraft, and the plane shuddered as 20mm slugs pierced the fuselage and wings, but on it came, astounding gun crews who had the target directly in their sights. If they could not hit the plane in the next few seconds, Fern and everyone else would become part of a fiery eruption that would turn the aft section into their funeral pyre.

Despite the 430 rounds fired in half a minute by the 40mm and 20mm guns, the kamikaze pilot barreled through. Men near Fern instinctively put their arms up to shield their faces as the moment of impact approached. The plane passed just behind the motor whale boat resting in its cradle and rose slightly above Mount 44, barely missing Fern and the gun crew at that station.

As its landing gear and part of one wing struck the two 20mm guns of Group 23 near Fern, burning gasoline spurted from the mangled wing and ignited a raging fire. The remainder of the plane tumbled over the starboard side and exploded close to the ship.

Men tried to process what they had just witnessed. "The shock, the flash of flame, the split second of awful silence, suddenly torn by the cries of injured men and the impassive voice of a bos'n on the bull horn, 'Fire, after deck house,'" wrote Lieutenant Manson after the battle. "The realization that it had actually happened. The pain of realization that *Laffey*, with all her power and security, like all other ships, was vulnerable to death and destruction."

A resounding jolt from the plane's impact and the explosive force of the bomb attached to its fuselage shook everyone in and near Lieutenant Youngquist's guns and resonated throughout the ship. Seaman 1/c Robert Powell, who was tossing depth charges over the starboard side to prevent fires from igniting them, thought that a freight train had just smacked head-on into *Laffey*.

The force of the blast hurled Seaman 1/c William L. "Lake" Donald out of a 20mm gun mount and under a torpedo tube. Shaken but unharmed, the sailor regrouped and rejoined his crew. Intense heat and flames enveloped the deck and mounts, trapping men in a lethal inferno. Shrapnel ripped through metal fixtures and human flesh, decapitating one man, wounding or temporarily blinding many

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Author's Collection

Clockwise, from top left: Commander Becton was faced with a quandary; QM 2/c Phoutrides witnessed the horrors; Seaman Fern's guns hammered at the enemy.

Author's Collection

others, and severing power cables connecting nearby stations to the bridge.

As happened with each kamikaze that rammed into *Laffey*, the impact spread gasoline over the adjoining area. The flammable material flooded Youngquist's gun mounts on the superstructure deck, eight feet above the main deck, and quickly ignited, engulfing men and equipment in a conflagration. Youngquist's Mount 44 and his 20mm guns were knocked out of commission, and Seaman 1/c Ramon Pressburger's Mount 43 directly across on the starboard side was badly damaged by the flames. The flames cooked off ammunition resting near the 40mm and 20mm guns, creating a fireworks display that punctured hundreds of holes in the superstructure deck.

Gasoline and flames quickly poured through those holes into the handling room below Mount 44, threatening to ignite the store of explosives earmarked for Youngquist's gunners. The conflagration spread into men's quarters and a washroom belowdeck, burned or severed electrical cables, and created noxious gases that raced through the venting system into the engine room.

Youngquist administered first aid to a man severely wounded by shrapnel from the explosion, then gathered four men to counter an immediate threat—the collection of four-shell clips of 40mm ammunition standing near the guns. Should most of the unused ammunition detonate, the result would be the maiming or deaths of most men around Youngquist's position, seriously reducing the chances that the ship and crew would survive.

Youngquist, Fern, Seaman 1/c Charles W. Hutchins, Machinist's Mate 3/c Donald J. Hintzman, and others ran to the shells and began tossing the clips over the side. Disregarding their personal safety, they hurled the ammunition into the ocean, despite pain from blistered and badly burned hands. "We used bare hands at first," said Lieutenant Youngquist. "We then wrapped cloth around the hands. What we did came from natural instinct. We were not trained for this."

The men worked as fast as they could to reduce the stockpile, but there were too many gun emplacements and too many shells for them to dispose of them all. With raging fires drawing closer, ammunition started to explode. Razor-sharp shrapnel sliced through men and materials and punctured additional holes in the deck, through which more gasoline and flames gushed down to areas below.

Ignoring the aerial attacks from additional kamikazes, Youngquist organized efforts to contain the fires that ravaged the aft part of the ship and prevent additional damage to the destroyer. Men grabbed hoses from the main deck amidships and raced to Youngquist's superstructure, where the officer directed them in spraying cooling waters onto burning plane wreckage, unspent 40mm shells, and the fires that had spread from his deck to areas below his gun position.

Tom Fern administered first aid to a wounded man before ignoring the exploding shells and raging fires to direct streams of water onto the worst part of the conflagration. "I was just trying to keep busy," he said. "I was trying to keep my mind from what was happening." Fern did not fear the bombs on the enemy aircraft as much as he did the gasoline the planes carried, which upon impact with the *Laffey* created "an enormous fireball. If that fireball caught you within 60 feet, you were dead." There was no sense seeking shelter anyway, for where on the small ship could he find refuge?

Meanwhile, the force of one explosion blew Ship's Serviceman 2/c Jim D. Matthews into the ocean as he battled the fires. The cooling waters quickly extinguished the flames that covered part of his body, but he barely avoided being chopped up by the ship's propellers as Becton executed another turn. Matthews drifted in the water, fearing he might be hit by falling bits of aircraft, shrapnel, or strafing, and became a spectator to the battle around him.

When Metalsmith 3/c Rex A. Vest was also blown overboard, Matthews swam over and helped Vest with his jacket. The pair remained in the waters until a rescue craft picked them up after the battle.

After hitting Youngquist's mounts, the kamikaze had cartwheeled over the top of Mount 43, the starboard 40mm gun directly across from Youngquist, spewing gasoline over the mount and setting men afire. Most of the gun crew scrambled over the mount's side and tumbled to the deck below, but Gunner's Mate Robert Karr, the gun captain, and Seaman 1/c K.D. Jones Jr., his pointer, had trouble getting out.

As exploding ammunition screamed by, the pair crawled on their stomachs around the gun tub toward the aft stack, hugging the deck to keep out of the way of the flames and ammunition. Karr and Pointer reached the gunner shack beneath Mount 41, the forward 40mm gun closer to the bridge, where Karr paused to regroup and to say a

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Destroyers bristled with guns for self-protection. This view shows a 20mm gun (foreground) and a Bofors 40mm gun behind it.

prayer. Gaining solace and strength from the moment, Karr continued to the main deck, where he helped treat wounded men.

The heroic efforts of Youngquist, Fern, and their mates had, for the time being, contained the fires and prevented *Laffey* from exploding into an uncontrolled inferno. However, Becton could not ignore the obvious—that more kamikazes would soon be rushing at the mauled ship to administer the coup de grâce.

"They like to find cripples," he said after the battle. "They'll go after one that's smoking." He could not hide the flames or the black smoke that curled upward from the damaged destroyer and made *Laffey* an attractive target, "for the smoke towering above us marked us a crippled ship." Becton glanced skyward and said later that "everywhere you looked you saw dive-bombers or fighters converging on you. All you could do was hope your gunners would get them."

Becton remembered his vow when he had faced dire situations in the Solomons and watched Japanese aircraft knock out two ships. The Japanese might be licking their chops over attacking a hamstrung vessel, but "they found out we were far from knocked out" and would soon learn that "we'd give them a fight."

8:47 AM—KAMIKAZES NUMBERS 10 AND 11

While Lieutenant Youngquist and his men battled the fires from Kamikaze No. 9, which had engulfed much of his gun position, the next two attackers converged to Youngquist's rear, targeting the fantail gun crews and Delewski's five-inch mount.

Kamikaze No. 10, a Val dive bomber, drew within one half mile of the ship before being spotted. The pilot flew so low to the surface that some of the crew thought the waves might slap the plane down, and arrived so suddenly that Delewski's men had no time to turn and fire the mount.

That left the defense to the three 20mm gun crews on the fantail, who fired only a few rounds before the plane was on them. They remained at their posts in the gun mount and fired gamely as the kamikaze zoomed toward them, with the pilot answering their machine gun bullets with those of his own. Japanese slugs clanged against mount shields and deck, while American 20mm shells tore off pieces of the Val, but the suicide-bent pilot barged through the hail of bullets and the smoke from the preceding kamikaze to smack directly into Radioman Lawrence Kelley and the others.

"You know, some of those kids have more damned guts," said the ship's executive officer, Lieutenant McCune, of the ship's gunners. "They stayed right in that gun mount and kept firing." Like everyone else aboard *Laffey,* McCune hoped *Laffey* could avoid further harm, "But it doesn't make any difference how good they are. You just can't get them all."

Kamikaze No. 10's landing gear ground into the fantail just inboard of the starboard depth charge rack, gouging an indentation in the deck two feet deep and three feet wide. The plane smashed against the aft and forward gun shields around Kelley and his shipmates, sending parts of men and machine flying through the air and knocking out of commission the three 20mm guns of Group 25. The kamikaze then crashed into the starboard aft corner of "Ole Betsy," Delewski's Mount 53, where the plane and its bomb exploded, disintegrating the pilot and whipping plane parts forward and aft.

The collision created pits in Delewski's gun barrels up to 1 1/2 inches deep, blew the gun mount shield upward several feet, punctured large holes in the mount and the surrounding deck, and started new fires that soon joined those already endangering Youngquist's men. Additional gasoline and flames gushed through the deck holes into the crew's quarters below, sparking widespread fires that destroyed personal items and severed hydraulic and electrical lines.

Kamikaze No. 11, another Val that had drawn within one-half mile of the ship's starboard side before being detected, dropped a bomb that exploded two feet inboard on the starboard side, piercing the deck plating and creating a hole six feet square in the starboard edge. The pilot and plane then disintegrated as they smashed into the metal mounts, pulverizing bodies

and bursting into flames against the starboard side of Delewski's Mount 53, causing further devastation to a gun already badly damaged by the preceding kamikaze. Additional flames turned *Laffey*'s aft section into a firestorm, and black smoke billowed to the heavens, where more kamikaze pilots waited their turn.

Delewski had just selected the next target for his gun and shouted to Coxswain James M. "Frenchy" La Pointe to turn the gun 135 degrees when the kamikaze hit. The explosion tossed Delewski, who had been standing in the open door on the side of the mount, 15 feet upward and away from the mount. Had La Pointe turned the gun one or two more degrees, Delewski would have been blown out in the direction of the flames; had La Pointe turned the gun a few degrees less, Delewski would have been propelled over the side into the ocean. Instead, he landed on the port K-gun depth-charge thrower.

Both: National Archives

Billowing smoke after being struck by AA fire, this Yokosuka D4Y3 Suisei "Judy" is about to smash into an American ship.

When he regained consciousness, still draped over the K-gun, the stunned gun captain was surprised to see that he had suffered only minor burns and scratches. Groggy from the explosion, he slowly rose as men tossed unexploded shells over the side, and stumbled back to the mount. As he neared his damaged gun, Delewski heard a familiar voice moaning, "Ski, please help me." The engine of the plane that smashed into the mount had pinned his closest friend, Coxswain Chester C. Flint, to a bulkhead. Delewski tried to free the stricken Flint, but his buddy died before Delewski could extricate him.

Delewski had no time to mourn as, 10 yards away, flames engulfed another of his crew, Seaman 1/c Herbert B. Remsen. He rolled Remsen around to extinguish his burning clothes, saving the sailor's life. Even though the seaman suffered burns to his face, left arm, and hair, he returned to the action.

The same explosion threw Seaman 2/c Merle R. Johnson out of the mount and set him afire. "I woke up on the portside hatch to the head," said Johnson. "Someone was spraying me with salt water because I was on fire." Crew manning hoses directed streams of water on Johnson to douse the flames, then carried him to the wardroom, where Darnell and his assistants carefully removed Johnson's jacket because the apparel's zipper had melded with his skin. "Burnt all over," said Johnson, "I lay in front of a blower from the engine room. The warm air felt soothing on my burns." The battle was over for Johnson.

Burned and nicked by shrapnel, Boatswain's Mate Calvin Wesley Cloer, the preacher with two religious names, shuffled to the wardroom for treatment. He took one look at the busy Darnell, inundated with disfigured wounded and dying men, and turned back to the mount. His shipmates needed treatment more than he did. He could handle a little pain, he concluded.

Across the deck, Fern battled the fires from Kamikaze No. 9 when he heard a man shout, "Plane coming in!" As men scattered to get out of the way of the aircraft and abandoned fire hoses shot water in all directions, Fern turned to see Kamikaze No. 11 just yards from the ship. Fern leaped over the side of the mount to the deck just as the plane impacted against Gun 53, emitting heat that immolated some crew and badly burned Fern. "Shoes, belts, flak jackets and helmets," Fern said later. "Everything else was completely burned away." Lieutenant Jerome Sheets perished in the explosion.

Although partially blinded from smoke and flash burns to his face, Fern returned to the gun mount, retrieved his hose, and sprayed water onto burning areas until, weakened from his injuries, he had to be helped away to receive treatment from Doctor Darnell. Fern had been so focused on his task that, combined with the effects of his injuries, he lost all recollection of events until after the battle. Later, as Fern was being treated for brain concussion on a hospital ship, his shipmates told him what he had done.

In the meantime a new peril arose. Baker 1/c William H. Welch reached the bridge to report that flames threatened to ignite the five-inch shells stored in the ship's handling rooms below Mount 53. When Becton gave him permission to flood the rooms with salt water, Welch raced back just in time to open the valves and let cooling seawater into three ammunition rooms before the potent shells ripped *Laffey* in half.

The three kamikazes inflicted heavy blows to aft section personnel and equipment. Most of the crew manning the fantail 20mm guns were killed, including Gunner's Mate 1/c Frank W. Lehtonen Jr., who had earlier refused treatment for a shrapnel wound and now perished at his post, and Radioman Lawrence Kelley, whose soothing Irish tenor voice had often entertained the crew.

Delewski's mount had suffered extensive damage. Six men had perished in the mount's blazing interior, including Frenchy La Pointe and Chester Flint, and six more suffered burns and internal injuries. Fires and explosions put Youngquist's guns out of action. "The whole stern of the ship was under a coil of smoke," said Becton after Kamikaze No. 11 ploughed into *Laffey*.

8:48 AM—KAMIKAZE NUMBER 12

Only one minute after the previous pair, Kamikaze No. 12 attacked. While *Laffey*'s guns focused starboard, at 8:48 another Val came out of the sun in a steep glide, approached from the stern, leveled off near the water's surface, and turned toward the

After the *Laffey* returned to Seattle for repairs, the ship was opened to the public. Here, a sailor sits on a damaged 5-inch gun turret that was hit by two kamikazes which, as the sign says, killed six sailors. Today the *Laffey* is a museum ship docked at Charleston, South Carolina.

ship. From his post at the starboard side K-guns, Torpedoman's Mate Fred Gemmell watched yet one more plane attack in what appeared to be a long line of kamikazes waiting to take their turn at his ship.

"Guns firing and planes coming in," said Gemmell. "When you heard gunfire, you paid attention to where it came from and what was happening. I recall thinking I wanted to get the heck out of here, but there was no place to go."

The ship's 20mm guns near the aft stack fired 120 rounds at the plane, but the pilot avoided the gunfire and dropped a bomb that landed on the port quarter above the propeller, punctured through the deck, and exploded in a 20mm ammunition room. The pilot, who had apparently decided to drop his bomb without smashing into the ship, evaded intense gunfire as he flew to starboard and disappeared beyond the horizon.

The solitary bomb caused astounding damage. The bomb punctured a seven-foot hole in the deck, three feet inboard from the ship's edge, twisting the main deck upward in the process. It ignited new fires and added fuel to those already ablaze, where damage control personnel battled "raging fires dangerously near the after magazine." Every gun aft of the ship's No. 2 stack had now been knocked out of action.

The bomb burst through the opening in the main deck to explode in the 20mm magazine, where fires speedily engulfed crews' quarters and storage areas. The force of the explosion thrust pieces of bunks and bulkheads from the ship's interiors upward and out through hatches, raining deadly shrapnel onto the deck crew.

Shrapnel belowdecks ruptured or pierced the bulkheads of seven adjoining compartments, including the steering gear motor room, the carpenter's room, and the steering gear room. The bomb's explosion ripped bulkheads from hinges, threatened the ammunition storage areas, and produced thick smoke that hampered damage control operations. Bomb fragments penetrated both the ship's deck and skin, allowing water to gush through and flood the aft end.

More alarming, in Becton's view, was that the bomb damaged the ship's steering ability and hampered his ability to maneuver. Flying fragments ruptured hydraulic leads in the steering gear room located beneath the fantail and jammed the ship's rudder while it was turned 26 degrees to port. With the rudder locked in position, the ship steamed in a perpetual circle, leaving Becton with only one evasion tactic at his disposal—confuse the enemy by rapidly increasing or decreasing his speed. "Evasive maneuvers were confined to rapid acceleration and deceleration, as the ship swung through tight circles with full engine power still available," explained Becton.

Becton faced a grim situation. Four kamikazes had smashed into *Laffey*'s aft quarter on three sides. He had lost the ability to maneuver, guns no longer protected the ship's stern section, and flooding in the aft areas hindered his attempts to change speed. The rear one-third of *Laffey* was a smoking clutter of mangled steel and dying crew. Unless Becton's damage control parties contained the fires and flooding, it would only be a matter of time before the end approached.

"Now *Laffey* circled madly like a wounded fish," wrote Lieutenant Manson after the fight had ended, "black smoke coiling above her like trailing viscera." Becton agreed. "We weren't quite a sitting duck," said Becton, "but we felt like one."

Unable to control the steering from the bridge, Becton tried to contact Seaman Andrew Martinis in the aft steering room directly below the fantail to determine if Martinis could steer from that post. Because the telephone lines connecting them had been severed in the attack, Becton was forced to send two men aft to check on the situation.

At the same time Lieutenant Theodore Runk, who had been organizing the fire-fighting efforts aft, left to see if he could free the jammed rudder. He worked his way through debris and bodies, stopping to toss overboard an unexploded bomb. When he arrived, he and Martinis disappeared into the aft steering room, already filled with smoke from the burning 20mm ammunition-handling room adjoining it.

"It was hard for us to breathe," said Martinis. "Runk had a wet handkerchief and he would cover his face, breathe, and then hand it to me." Passing the wet handkerchief back and forth to shield their faces from the smoke and flames, Runk and Martinis found that the hydraulic lines leading into the emergency steering room had been cut during the attack.

Martinis moved into the steering gear room behind the steering room to see if he could free the jammed rudders, but could not budge them. "The smoke was getting thicker for us," said Martinis. Unable to relieve the pressure on the rudder and give Becton full maneuverability, the pair exited before their air supply ran out.

"Well, that jammed our rudder all the way over to port," George Burnett wrote his parents after the battle. "So we were doing 30 knots around in circles and we had no guns aft to shoot with." Becton faced a terrifying quandary. He required top speed to avoid the kamikazes that were certain to approach, but top speed would further fan the flames that already threatened the destroyer. If he slowed the vessel to give his damage control teams time to combat the fires, he presented a more enticing target to the kamikazes.

A handcuffed Becton slowed the ship during the infrequent lulls, and then called for maximum speed whenever lookouts announced the arrival of another attacker.

BITS AND PIECES

Needing a clear picture of the damage aft, Becton asked Quartermaster Ari Phoutrides to leave the bridge for a quick inspection of the area. Phoutrides exited the bridge to the port side main deck below and slowly wound aft through the plane wreckage, death, and debris that littered his path. Although suffering serious wounds to his back and head, Seaman 1/c Marvin G. Robertson carried bloody Seaman 2/c Walter Rorie to the wardroom for treatment. Phoutrides passed by the body of a shipmate who had been burned to a crisp. The man's arms and hands covered his face, and he was frozen in a charcoal rigidness that depicted his final act of unsuccessfully warding off the blazing gasoline. Without pausing, Phoutrides gingerly moved aft alongside Delewski's Mount 53, now more a smoking, dented hunk of metal than an instrument of war, and approached the fantail.

"Then I saw the damage to the 20mm guns on the fantail," said Phoutrides. "There was a man still in his straps with both legs gone, bleeding. He was still alive and was begging, 'Please get me out of these straps.'" Phoutrides sickened at seeing the man's legs lying on the deck not far from the mortally wounded sailor, but regrouped to aid others who rushed to the man's side. Before they could lift him from the straps, the man succumbed.

Only feet away, a cluster of bodies from the fantail, including Radioman Kelley, lay grotesquely among the debris, mute testimony to the carnage inflicted by the kamikazes. "I saw five of them, all in different positions, one was flat on his face," said Phoutrides. He made mental notes of everything he observed—the burned guns and mounts, the decks punctured with hundreds of holes, the fires and smoke, the cries of the wounded, and the silence of the dead.

"They were all just lying there. It didn't hit me much, right then. I didn't get much reaction," Phoutrides said. "Then I went back toward the bridge, and got to thinking about it. Suddenly I knew I didn't want to see it again."

National Archives

Author's Collection

ABOVE: Burned, bruised, and battered but still afloat, the heavily damaged *Laffey* limps into the port of Seattle for repairs. She would return to sea, but not until after Japan had surrendered. OPPOSITE: A Seattle shipyard worker examines damage to the *Laffey*'s aft 5-inch gun turret. Note bullet and shrapnel holes in the armor plating.

Phoutrides thought he had witnessed the worst until, on his way back to the bridge along the starboard side, he "came upon three men just forward of Gun 53. The group had been hit, and it was more gruesome than the 20mm fantail guns. The three had been on damage control and were together, at a post, waiting for orders or something. A plane smacked right into them. There was nothing but bits and pieces of them left."

Phoutrides nudged the gruesome sight out of his mind and continued to the bridge. Along the way he came across his friend, Torpedoman's Mate John Schneider. "As I passed him I asked, 'How's it going?' He said, 'Greek [Phoutrides's nickname], if I could find a piece of rust on this ship I'd crawl under it!'" Phoutrides and Schneider shared a mild laugh at the remark before the quartermaster completed his inspection and reported to Becton.

He delivered a sobering summary. Both the main deck and the superstructure deck aft, upon which rested many of the ship's guns, were a mass of flames. Enemy planes, bombs, and shrapnel punctured holes in the decks ranging from inches to several feet in diameter. The fantail was "all the way down in the water and still going down farther," engines and aircraft pieces protruded from gun mounts and belowdecks compartments, and every gun aft had been destroyed or badly damaged. Smoke billowed skyward, while flames on deck and flooding belowdecks threatened to scuttle *Laffey* before additional kamikazes even had the chance.

Yet hope remained. "Sure, our radar was gone and the rudder was jammed and almost every compartment aft of the stacks and engine rooms was flooded," said Delewski, "but *Laffey* still made steam and continued moving in a circle. But we were moving."

EPILOGUE: Despite the damage inflicted by the four kamikazes in less than five minutes, Laffey*'s crew continued to battle 10 additional aircraft before their nightmare finally ended. Gunners splashed more enemy planes before they smashed into the damaged destroyer, but others raced through heavy gunfire to further harm the vessel.*

Most of the crew could hardly believe their ship remained afloat after the last kamikaze had ended its run. Flames ravaged gun mounts and raged belowdecks, smoke billowed to the sky, and injured and dying men lay on charred, blood-soaked decks.

During the 80-minute engagement that seemed like an eternity for the survivors, five kamikazes and three bombs struck Laffey, *and two bombs scored near misses. Thirty-two of her 336-man crew were killed and more than 70 were wounded.*

Tugs safely brought the destroyer to port, where temporary repairs enabled Commander Becton to inch across the Pacific to Seattle and a warm reception from the press and public. In an effort to remind civilians that the war was not yet over, the Navy Department made the ship—damaged gun mounts, punctured decks, and all—available for public viewing.

Laffey *was awarded the Presidential Unit Citation and earned five battle stars for her service during World War II. After being repaired, she was present (as a support ship) for the atomic bomb test at Bikini Atoll in 1946 (Operation Crossroads). On June 30, 1947,* Laffey *was decommissioned and placed in the reserve fleet. Recommissioned in 1951,* Laffey *earned two battle stars during the Korean War and in 1962 underwent FRAM II (Fleet Rehabilitation and Modernization) conversion and served in the Atlantic Fleet until decommissioned in 1975.*

The gallant Laffey, *the only surviving Sumner-class destroyer in North America, remains afloat today, berthed since 1981 at Patriots Point Naval and Maritime Museum in Charleston, South Carolina, along with the carrier USS* Yorktown *(CV-10), commissioned in 1943. The public can still walk* Laffey*'s decks and relive that heroic April day 70 years ago. She was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1986.*

Becton, who retired from the Navy in 1966 with the rank of rear admiral, wrote about the Laffey*'s experiences in his 1980 book,* The Ship That Would Not Die. □

Stunning Victories, Ultimate Defeat

BY R. JEFF CHRISMAN

German Field Marshal Erich von Manstein's efforts to rescue the Sixth Army at Stalingrad turned into a disaster of unimaginable proportions for Germany.

It was November 24, 1942. Speeding across the snow-covered landscape of eastern Ukraine, the personal command train of German Field Marshal Erich von Manstein was on its way to the southern Russian city of Novocherkassk, where he would take up his new assignment as commander of Army Group Don.

Two recent events weighed heavily on Manstein in the quiet moments. Just over a month earlier, Manstein had buried his favorite aide, Lieutenant Pepo Specht, who had died in the crash of a Fieseler Storch light plane. Less than a week later, Manstein's oldest son Gero was killed in action with the 18th Motorized Infantry Division of Army Group North. Both losses affected him deeply.

Manstein was widely considered the tactical genius of the German Army in World War II. As a staff officer in 1940, he created the attack plan that sliced through France in less than two weeks; as a corps commander in 1941, his LVI Motorized Infantry Corps swept through the Baltic States and up to the gates of Leningrad. In July 1942, his Eleventh Army conquered the huge Soviet fortress at Sevastopol.

Now, in his first operations as an army group commander, he was about to undertake the most formidable task of his career. But first, a small gathering of Manstein's staff on the train offered a toast to the field marshal; it was his 55th birthday.

On November 19, 1942, the Soviets had unleashed Operation Uranus against Army

German soldiers and tanks cross an icy river on a bridge constructed by pioneer units during the advance toward Stalingrad, December 1942.

Bundesarchiv Bild 101I-218-0544-14; Photo: Dieck

National Archives

Surrounded by destroyed buildings, a German heavy mortar crew follows infantry during fighting in Stalingrad. Hitler refused to allow the Germans to give up the city once it was surrounded by the Russians.

Group B. They quickly penetrated the Romanian Third Army holding the front on the Don River north of Stalingrad and, on the following day, attacked and penetrated the German Fourth Panzer Army and Romanian Fourth Army holding the front south of Stalingrad. Their aim, which they accomplished in a mere four days, was to cut off and isolate Field Marshal Friedrich von Paulus's German Sixth Army in Stalingrad; doing so left a massive hole in the German front in southern Russia. Manstein's mission was to bring the enemy attacks to a halt, rescue Sixth Army, and restore the front between Army Group B to the north and Army Group A to the south.

Disaster loomed. All of Sixth Army and most of Fourth Panzer Army were cut off; five German Corps of 20 divisions, two Romanian Corps of six divisions, plus many independent army artillery and engineering units were surrounded in frozen Stalingrad. Outside the encirclement remained the scattered remnants of several divisions of the Romanian Third Army and various Sixth Army rear area service and supply troops north and west of Stalingrad; only a few scattered remnants of Romanian cavalry units and the Fourth Panzer Army's 16th Motorized Infantry Division remained south of Stalingrad.

Based on Luftwaffe commander Hermann Göring's assurances of its capability, Hitler had ordered the Luftwaffe to organize an airlift to deliver supplies to the Stalingrad Pocket and told Sixth Army to dig in and await relief. Hitler demanded that Stalingrad be held at all costs due to the prestige factor.

Manstein knew, however, that Sixth Army could not remain in Stalingrad as Hitler expected; he thought that he would need it operational in order to stitch the southern front back together. For him, the only questions at this point were how soon a suitable relieving force could be assembled to attack the pocket from the outside, and could the airlift enable the Sixth Army hold out until then?

Out on the wind-swept steppe west of Stalingrad the scene was panic and chaos. The Soviet spearheads had swept through the rear supply and administrative services of the Sixth Army. Each little village across the steppe between Stalingrad and the Chir River housed some sort of repair shop, stable, supply troop, replacement center, or transport depot. Mechanics, bakers, clerks, farriers, photographers, and drivers were all cast adrift. Men going on leave, men returning from leave, officers just passing through all suddenly found themselves on their own.

The Don River is one of the great rivers of Russia. It rises about 100 miles south of Moscow, flows south past Voronezh and then, near Novaya Kalitva, begins bending southeastward toward Stalingrad. About 60 miles northwest of Stalingrad the river bends south then southwest, passing about 40 miles west of Stalingrad at Kalach and eventually flowing into the Sea of Azov at Rostov. The area of Novaya Kalitva–Kalach–Rostov, the great bend of the Don, stretches 200 miles north to south and 200 miles east to west. The Chir River flows southward through the great bend of the Don about 100 miles west of Stalingrad, curves northeastward, then southeastward and flows into the

Don about 65 miles southwest of Stalingrad.

The German XVII Army Corps was taking up positions along the upper Chir with two German infantry divisions and pieces of several Romanian units. The remnants of the Romanian Third Army, with pieces of several divisions and the remnants of the German XLVIII Panzer Corps, was gathering along the lower Chir at its confluence with the Don.

That was where something remarkable was happening. Responsible officers rounded up men on their own initiative and formed them into makeshift platoons, companies, and battalions. They recognized important tactical and strategic ground and undertook to hold it. They had no orders. They didn't even know what was happening over the next hill. They just instinctively knew what to do and did it. Soon ad-hoc units with names like Group General Spang or Group Colonel Schmidt or Group Colonel Abraham were digging in along the Chir, the first natural defensive line west of the Don and west of Stalingrad.

The Romanian Third Army was now Romanian in name only since the chief of staff of the German LVII Panzer Corps, Colonel Walter Wenck, had been sent to take charge of the army after it had been routed. Wenck, officially the chief of staff, started with literally nothing and was busily rounding up troops anywhere he could find them, in many cases using some creative recruiting methods. For instance, he had encountered a propaganda company that had been part of the Sixth Army rear services and had them put up tents with movie shows near several traffic junctions. Men who stopped by to take in the movies were rounded up, reequipped, and put in the line. When he found himself in need of transportation for his newly formed units, Wenck had his security team put up a sign reading "fuel issuing point," and soon had all the trucks and staff cars he could use.

South of the Don River in the Fourth Panzer Army/Romanian Fourth Army sector, the front was even more scarcely manned. The nearest Army Group A units were about 350 miles south of Stalingrad in the foothills of the Caucasus. About halfway between was the German 16th Motorized Division near Elista, and that was it. Remnants of Romanian cavalry troops were roaming the steppe, out of touch with headquarters, but nothing else—at all!

The Luftwaffe had nowhere near enough cargo planes to fly in the minimum requirement of 500 tons per day to Stalingrad, so it had to utilize Heinkel He-111 bombers and other combat aircraft that were totally unsuitable for the mission. Whatever aircraft were used, the conditions at the airfields both inside and outside the pocket were primitive. The ground personnel were housed in improvised barracks at best, mud huts at worst. There were no hangars for the planes; all maintenance and freight handling had to be performed out in the open, exposed to blizzards and temperatures far below freezing.

Manstein's train arrived at Novocherkassk just after noon on November 26 and his new Army Group Don was declared operational the next day. The new army group included the German Sixth Army and the Romanian Third Army as well as the German Fourth Panzer Army and the Romanian Fourth Army, the latter two being grouped together as Army Group Hoth under Colonel General Hermann Hoth, commander of Fourth Panzer Army. The weather warmed just enough that the snow became rain and the roads became quagmires.

The next day OKH (Oberkommando des Heeres, the German high command) informed Manstein of the reinforcements he would receive for the relief attack: LVII Panzer Corps with the 6th and 23rd Panzer Divisions and 15th Luftwaffe Field Division was to arrive at Kotelnikovo by December 3 for Fourth Panzer Army. Deployed in the Third Romanian Army sector and scheduled to be operational about December 5 would be a new formation known as Provisional Army Hollidt—an ad-hoc headquarters put together with scratch units and parts of the XVII Army Corps staff.

Provisional Army Hollidt was headed by the former commander of XVII Army Corps, General Karl Hollidt, who would take command of the XVII on the upper Chir River and replace the headquarters of the Third Romanian Army on the lower Chir. It would consist of the 62nd, 294th, and 336th Infantry Divisions, as well as the XLVIII Panzer Corps with the 11th and 22nd Panzer Divisions, 3rd Mountain Division, and the 7th and 8th Luftwaffe Field Divisions.

Wikipedia

ABOVE: Soviet General Andrei Yeremenko, beleaguered commander of the Stalingrad Front. BELOW: Colonel Walter von Hünersdorff led a battle group at Stalingrad, but was killed the following July at Kursk.

Bundesarchiv Bild 101I-022-2923-24A; Photo: Kipper

National Archives

ABOVE: Soviet troops use the rubble of Stalingrad as cover while firing on German positions. With the Luftwaffe unable to transport more than a fraction of the needed supplies to the Germans in Stalingrad, the situation was nearly unbearable. OPPOSITE: With Paulus's Sixth Army encircled at Stalingrad (upper right), Soviet forces kept Manstein's forces off balance with a series of counterattacks.

Manstein thought that these forces—four panzer divisions, four infantry/mountain divisions, and three Luftwaffe field divisions, if they were up to strength and arrived in good time—might just be sufficient to break through to the Sixth Army, even given the fact that the Luftwaffe divisions were only suitable for defense.

On November 28, Manstein sent a long teletype message to Hitler in which he described his appreciation of the situation and his intentions in some detail. Manstein knew that the best he could hope for was to reach Sixth Army and help it to withdraw from Stalingrad and to regain firm contact with Army Group A as it withdrew from the Caucasus, and he said so. Two days later Hitler called Manstein in the middle of the night.

"I cannot agree to your proposals, Field Marshal," Hitler began. "Sixth Army is dug in on my orders and will defend this stronghold! ... I want different proposals from you, Field Marshal."

"Mein Führer, put Army Group A under my command and give me operational freedom for both Army Groups!" Manstein shot back.

"That is not possible, Field Marshal!"

"Mein Führer, please tell me what Army Group A is supposed to be doing in the Caucasus?"

"It's a question of the possession of Baku, Field Marshal. Unless we get the Baku oil, the war is lost," Hitler intoned. "If I can no longer get you the oil for your operations, Field Marshal, you will be unable to do anything!" Tanks, aircraft, trucks, everything depended on oil, he continued, in the manner of a lecture.

"Mein Führer," Manstein interrupted. "Put the whole of Army Group A under me and give me operational freedom, and I will give you a decisive battle in South Russia ... after which you can get your oil wherever you like."

Hitler didn't react; he seemed to have stopped listening.

On December 1, Manstein released his plan for the relief attack. It called for LVII Panzer Corps to strike northeast from Kotelnikovo across the steppe to Stalingrad and for XLVIII Panzer Corps to strike from its bridgehead over the Don River near Nizhniy Chirskaya, due east to the pocket. Although Nizhniy Chirskaya was about 30 miles closer to the pocket, Manstein knew that the Russians were aware of the bridgehead's importance and were building up forces against it, so he hoped to gain some surprise by initiating his attack from farther south. When the LVII Panzer Corps advance came abreast of the bridgehead, XLVIII Panzer Corps would join the attack. He expected to begin the attack by December 8.

Conditions in Stalingrad had been unbearable for a long time. Once cut off and isolated, the deprivation only increased. Half a million men had bludgeoned each other and the cityscape for months, with artillery and bombs obliterating city block after city block.

A large portion of the pocket was outside the city proper on the steppe that surrounded Stalingrad, and conditions were no better there. Trees did not grow on the windswept steppe, so there was no firewood to gather. There were no prepared positions, so dugouts had to be blasted in the frozen earth with explosives. There were some burned-out and deserted tanks left over from earlier battles; these became firing positions and provided some shelter. Food quickly became scarce, forcing cooks to slaughter draught horses to feed the troops. There were constant Soviet probing attacks around the entire perimeter, so none of the German units could conserve ammunition; they were always under pressure. And it certainly didn't help that during the first five days of the airlift the Luftwaffe managed to deliver an average of only 58.3 tons of supplies per day, slightly more than 10 percent of the minimum daily requirements.

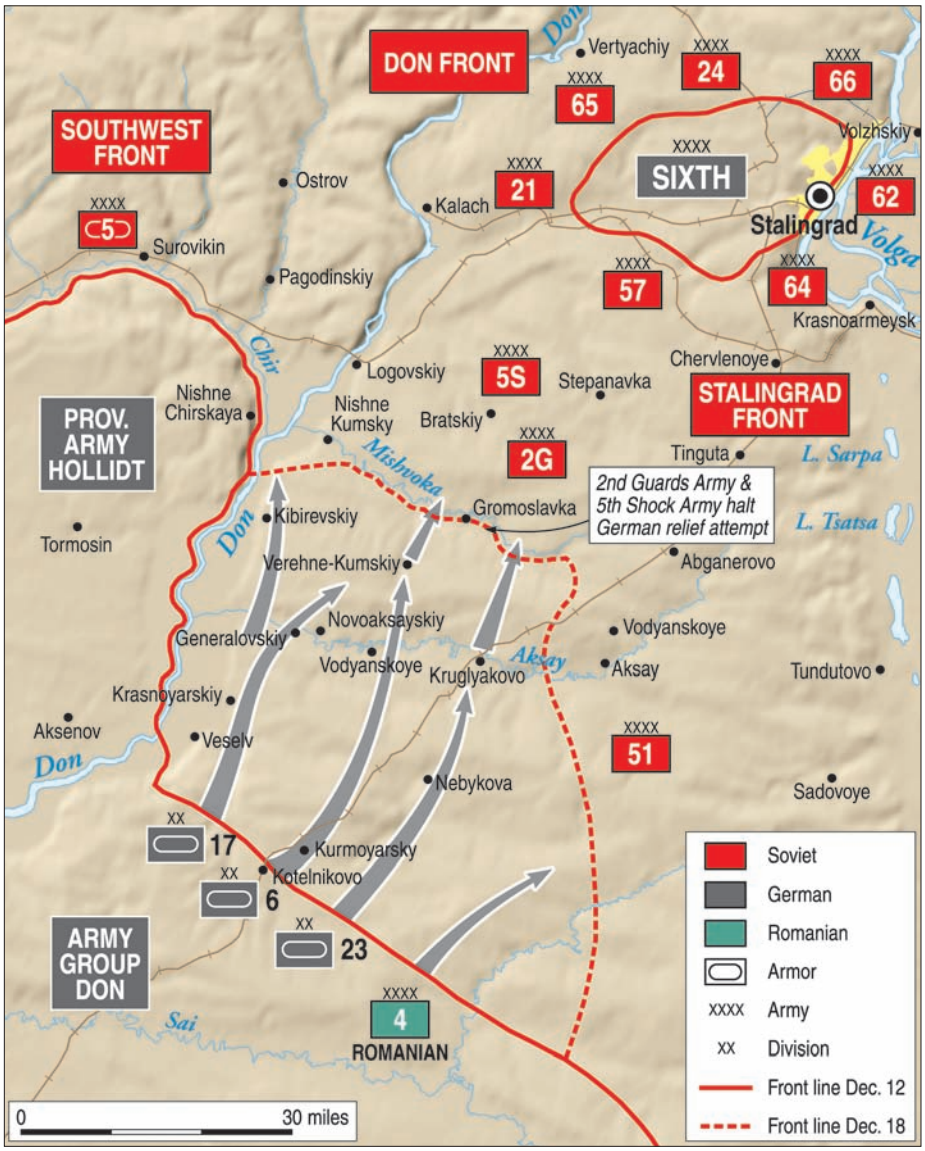
By the first week of December reinforcements began to trickle in. Provisional Army Hollidt received the 336th Infantry Division, transferred from Army Group B, which began filling in along the lower Chir, while the 7th Luftwaffe Field Division moved in to cover Morozovsk and its airfield. In a surprise move, General Zeitzler managed to drag another division, 17th Panzer, away from Army Group Center. The 17th left Orel for transit to Army Group Don on December 2 but was quickly hijacked by Hitler, who thought he detected an enemy buildup near the army group's northern boundary and diverted the division there.

The 11th Panzer Division arrived on the 7th, just in time to eliminate an enemy pene-

tration of the lower Chir River line near Surovikino. In fact, the Soviets had just turned up the pressure along the entire lower Chir front with the Soviet Fifth Tank Army undertaking a number of attacks along the river line. The 11th Panzer spent the next week as a fire brigade, striking one penetration after another: Lissinski, Kalinovski, Oblivskaya, traveling by night and attacking by day. During the course of these actions, it destroyed well over 130 enemy tanks was worn down.

The airfields at Morozovsk and Tatsinskaya, which were used for the airlift to Stalingrad, were located behind the Lower Chir; therefore, any penetration of the Chir threatened the supply effort and had to be eliminated. For this reason, it looked less and less likely that XLVIII Panzer Corps would be able to break free from the Chir front and participate in the relief attack; the entire attack would fall to General Kirchner's LVII Panzer Corps.

The 6th Panzer Division had arrived at Kotelnikovo in good time but had been forced to battle enemy units there ever since, just to gain hold of its starting positions. Panzer Regiment 201 of the 23rd Panzer Division had likewise arrived but needed all the time it could get to finish undergoing emergency rebuilding. Further, most of the division's wheeled units had not yet arrived due to a thaw in the Caucasus that turned the roads there into a sea of mud. As for the 15th Luftwaffe Field Division, it was still forming up



in the Salsk area. Manstein had no choice; he could not start the relief attack on December 8.

Manstein was in a race with death, and he knew it. First, he had to watch his northern flank. He knew that any repeat of the Soviet Uranus-type attack on his tenuous northern flank could very quickly turn into a catastrophe for both Army Group Don and Army Group A to the south, but that didn't seem imminent.

Right now he had to maintain Sixth Army in Stalingrad via an airlift that had so far failed to meet the minimum requirements and at the same time build up a strong enough relief force to liberate the pocket, all before the Soviets could bring to bear enough force to eliminate the pocket and perhaps the army group as well.

Fortunately for the Germans, Stalin had a similar problem. While Manstein had to free Sixth Army so as to have the troops to prevent Army Group Don and Army Group A from being cut off, Stalin had to eliminate Sixth Army to free up enough of his own troops to attack and cut off the German army groups.

Finally, Manstein received a bit of good news amid the doom and gloom. The 6th Panzer Division had delivered a stunning victory! In a two-day running battle north of Kotelnikovo, the division virtually destroyed the Soviet IV Cavalry Corps; the 85th Cavalry Division was smashed, its commander killed, the 115th Cavalry Division decimated and its commander killed, and 56 tanks of 65th Tank Brigade destroyed. The corps commander escaped by swimming the river, but his entire staff was captured. The only significant group to escape was a troop mounted on camels, as they were the only ones able to freely negotiate the extensive marshlands in the area.

There was also good news from the pocket. After a week of one attack after another without any apparent effect, the assaults were slackening. The brave defenders of Stalingrad had done an outstanding job parrying one thrust after another, eliminating one penetration after another, surrendering not one meter of ground.

At LVII Panzer Corps in Kotelnikovo, the

troops were ready and the ground had firmed up, thanks to a drop in temperature on the 11th. The 23rd Panzer, now with nearly 100 tanks, was on line and ready to go, and 6th Panzer, exulting in its recent victory, was champing at the bit. Still no 15th Luftwaffe Division, but the remnants of the Romanian 5th and 8th Cavalry Divisions, under command of German Colonel Helmut von Pannwitz, were ready to cover the corps' open right flank.

The terrain around Kotelnikovo and between there and Stalingrad was gently rolling steppe with virtually no vegetation except the ubiquitous steppe grass. What little there was in the way of bushes or small trees were only found in the many steep-cut ravines that were scattered throughout the area. Kotelnikovo is on the south bank of the southern branch of the Aksay River, and the LVII Panzer Corps held a small bridgehead on the north bank. The northern branch of the Aksay crossed the line of advance 28 miles to the north. The Myshkova River, 16 miles beyond the northern Aksay, also crossed the German line of advance. The distance from the Myshkova to the pocket was approximately 55 miles.

At first light on December 12, the 6th Panzer Division's 76th Artillery Regiment unleashed a storm of high explosives on the Soviet main strongpoint in the area of Gremyachi Station, on the rail line northeast of Kotelnikovo. After a few moments, while the panzergrenadiers fixed the enemy facing their bridgehead with strong assaults, the division's Panzer Regiment 11 burst out of the bridgehead and advanced along the rail line toward Gremyachi Station in a deep wedge formation.

At the same time, 23rd Panzer struck out northeasterly along both sides of the southern Aksay toward Pimen Cherni, 6 1/2 miles east of Gremyachi Station. At 9:50 AM, with Pimen Cherni in hand, the 23rd continued its advance, attacking Nebykoff and Koschara.

So rapid was the 6th Panzer's advance that it overran the enemy artillery positions before they could either commence firing or displace out of danger. By mid-morning

National Archives

Dashing through snow and sub-freezing temperatures, Soviet infantry rides into battle atop tanks on December 16, 1942, during Operation Little Saturn, an all-out attempt to halt Manstein's advance on Stalingrad.

the tanks had overrun the hastily abandoned enemy headquarters, paralyzing the enemy's control of operations. Once they had consolidated Gremyachi Station, they pivoted west and slashed into the Soviet troops flooding back from the Kotelnikovo bridgehead toward Verchne-Yablochniy.

All afternoon 6th Panzer's grenadiers approached Verchne-Yablochniy from the south in a widely echeloned formation, making it easy for troops there to see that the enemy was approaching. As they got within machine-gun range of the village, the Germans threw themselves to the ground and crept forward individually, from cover to cover, making several small probing attacks to keep the enemy's attention.

The tanks of Panzer Regiment 11, which had advanced independently of the grenadiers, had worked their way around the vast marshy area east of the village and were in position behind a low range of hills just north of the village. An hour before sunset, the panzers swept down into the village in a wide inverted wedge, hitting the surprised enemy in the rear.

The Soviets' attempts to maneuver their few tanks and defensive guns into position against this new threat were completely in vain as they were quickly destroyed. The village burned brightly from end to end, and 10 Soviet T-34 tanks were reduced to burned-out hulks. The German left flank was secured.

Meanwhile, the 23rd Panzer Division was securing the corps' right flank east of the railroad. At 1:35 PM, the 23rd captured Nebykoff and 250 prisoners, and at 2:45 it occupied Koschara II, destroying all enemy there. Shortly before dark, the division reached its objective for the day near Chilekovo and made contact with the motorcycle battalion of the 6th Panzer Division on its left. Overnight the division consolidated the positions taken and reorganized for the continued attack.

The German attack shocked the Soviets. General Andrei Yeremenko, commander of the Soviet Stalingrad Front, feared that Hoth's attack might threaten the rear of his 57th Army, which was holding the encirclement front south of Stalingrad. He warned Stalin that if this happened it might become possible for the Sixth Army to break out through the 57th and escape the pocket! Stalin was not happy; he told Yeremenko in no uncer-

tain terms to hold on and promised to send the best that he had left, the 2nd Guards Army, which was just arriving in Vertyachi.

That was fine, but the 57th Army needed something to hold the German attack now. Yeremenko withdrew the weakened IV Mechanized Corps and ordered it to Verchne-Kumskiy to block 6th Panzer and moved the XIII Tanks Corps to Aksay to block 23rd Panzer; it was all he could do.

By 8 PM, after a short break, 6th Panzer's tanks were on their way again; next target: the northern branch of the Aksay River, 14 miles to the north. Kampfgruppe (KG) Hünersdorff, composed of the panzer regiment plus a battalion of infantry and a battalion of artillery, as well as an antitank gun company and an engineer company, all led by the panzer regiment commander, Colonel Walther von Hünersdorff, advanced slowly. The ground was clear and gently undulating, and Hünersdorff expected few enemy troops in the area, but the night was pitch black, lit only by the stars.

Kampfgruppe Hünersdorff reached the fog-shrouded valley of the Aksay as dawn was breaking on the 13th and began searching for a crossing point. A suitable ford was soon found at Salivskiy, where the pioneers began building a bridge and the panzergrenadiers established a bridgehead while the tanks continued north toward Verchne-Kumskiy, eight miles away.

Bundesarchiv Bild 101III-Bueschel-090-39; Photo: Büschel

Grenadiers of a panzer division trudge through the snow near Stalingrad, December 1942. The weather played a significant role in the outcome of the battle.

Pressure against 23rd Panzer that morning was mostly from the east at Koschara II while the enemy in front of the division seemed to be withdrawing. At 10:50 AM, General Hoth, commander of the Fourth Panzer Army, arrived at the 23rd's forward headquarters. An intercepted radio message indicated that the enemy would be attacking the eastern flank of the division that day, so Hoth ordered the division to assume a defensive posture and await the attack.

Shortly after noon the expected attack began with Soviet units hitting simultaneously at Koschara, Koschara II, and Ternovy. Local troops and antitank units at those locations held up the enemy all afternoon while the panzer regiment hit the enemy's armored probes, eliminating one after the other. This action secured the corps' right flank, at least for the time being, but it tied down some of the division's infantry holding those villages.

As the 6th Panzer Division's KG Hünersdorff crested the ridge about two miles south of Verchne-Kumskiy, scouts reported no enemy in town, nor on Hill 140 to the west. Then suddenly the radio blared: "Enemy tanks!" Scouts to the east reported a heavy concentration of Red Army tanks in a broad depression south of Hill 147. Apparently the Soviets intended to block the Germans' access to Verchne-Kumskiy and were unaware that KG Hünersdorff was already there.

Hünersdorff detailed Major Bäke's II Battalion to deal with the enemy tanks while the remainder of the kampfgruppe proceeded into Verchne-Kumskiy. As the Soviet tanks began to climb the gradual slope of the depression, the Germans opened fire. The first 12 tanks were blasted in order; those following retreated back into the depression, followed closely by the German tanks which proceeded to surround the depression.

What followed was an unbelievably one-sided, concentric "battle" between Soviet tanks in the caldron and German tanks lining the rim. An entire Soviet tank brigade—more than 70 tanks—was completely destroyed in less than an hour with not a single German loss. Thus began an incredible day of tank combat in and around Verchne-Kumskiy, which saw KG Hünersdorff engage and defeat three Soviet tank brigades individually, one after the other, as they arrived on the scene.

Meanwhile, on the Chir front the 11th Panzer Division was exhausted after several days of moving and attacking; it was obvious that it would not be strong enough for the attack on the pocket. But Manstein came up with another option: move 17th Panzer from its reserve position into the Don bridgehead at Nishne-Chirskaya so that it could take 11th Panzer's place and attack toward the pocket when the time came.

Manstein made clear to Hitler that the new enemy forces being thrown in against Hoth's relief attack made it questionable whether it could reach Stalingrad, and the only option they had was to use 17th Panzer to enhance the attack's chances. After all, of what use was the division sitting in reserve when the front was in flames? To everyone's surprise Hitler finally recognized his folly and released 17th Panzer for the relief attack. It would move

into the Don bridgehead at Nishne-Chirskaya and attack from there when LVII Panzer Corps' attack came abreast of it.

Back at Verchne-Kumskiy, the remainder of KG Hünersdorff had rolled into town just in time to intercept another Soviet armored unit that was rushing to the aid of the tank brigade that was being obliterated south of Hill 147. Panzers of Major Lowe's I Battalion confronted the new enemy armor north of town and destroyed three tanks straight off the march. As German infantry arrived and set up defenses on the northern edge of town, the panzers slowly withdrew and turned the defense over to the grenadiers.

The din coming from the battle south of Hill 147 was just starting to fade when a third enemy tank brigade struck on the east side of town, just north of Hill 147. Major Lowe was trying to gather his forces to meet this new threat when he received a radio call from Major Bäke: "Hold on, we're coming!" The men in town looked south toward Hill 147 and could see only one thing—victory! Four wedges of German tanks simultaneously crested the hill and raced at full speed down the slope toward the enemy.

Colonel von Hünersdorff had Major Bäke spread his formation to his right to out-flank and encircle this new threat to the east while Major Lowe, having destroyed most of the enemy tanks on the north, was to hold in town and send some of his tanks to encircle the new enemy to the north. The Soviet commander tried to spread his tanks out and bend back his flanks to prevent their being turned, but he could not. Heavy fire from the panzers on the hill and in town pounded his every move. The first steel wedges reached his southern flank and pressed in, but still the Soviets resisted tenaciously.

Finally, facing annihilation, the Soviet commander ordered retreat. Many of the Soviet tanks had entered the killing ground east of Verchne-Kumskiy via a sunken road to the northeast; the survivors quickly withdrew the same way. But only a portion of the Soviet tank brigade escaped, leaving more than half its number on the field.

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ABOVE: Soviet troops watch from behind a fence as their comrades rush a German-held farmhouse outside Stalingrad during the German rescue attempt, December 1942. BELOW: German soldiers on motorcycles and a Sd.Kfz 250 light armored car cross a frozen field during the December battle.

Bundesarchiv Bild 101I-218-0545-15; Photo: Dieck

And so it went the rest of the day—a dazzling display of the advantage gained by determined men fighting on inside lines on a mobile battlefield. Three times numerically similar enemy groups rushed in from different directions to rescue their comrades and were destroyed. Dashing straight through Verchne-Kumskiy from one side to the other and back again, KG Hünersdorff defeated, one at a time, a force three times its size.

Just before sunset, KG Hünersdorff, low on fuel and ammunition, began to withdraw from Verchne-Kumskiy to the bridgehead at Salivskiy, which was under pressure.

The 23rd Panzer Division had spent the day fighting off the growing enemy on the right flank and had not reached the northern Aksay yet. If the Soviets could recapture Salivskiy, Colonel von Hünersdorff and his troops would be isolated north of the river in a perilous situation. Furthermore, the object of the day's combat was not to

take and hold ground; it was to attrite a numerically superior enemy—and that was certainly accomplished.

KG Hünersdorff arrived back at the northern bridgehead just as the third attack of the day was about to overwhelm its defenders. In the fading light, the grenadiers in Salivskiy thought the approaching tanks were the enemy and prepared for the worst. As the German tanks smashed into the rear of the Soviet attackers a cheer went up, and the enemy began to flee.

On December 14, Panzer Regiment 201 regained forward momentum for 23rd Panzer, capturing Samokhin before noon and approaching Kruglyakoff on the northern Aksay by mid-afternoon. In a bold move, a company of tanks turned south from the Kruglyakoff advance and, in an abrupt surprise, captured the railroad bridge over the Aksay intact. By 3:30 PM, the panzer regiment had consolidated its hold on Kruglyakoff and the railroad bridge. Overnight, German engineers replaced the Soviet bridge demolitions with their own and fended off several infiltration attempts by enemy sappers.

The most important development on the 15th was on the Chir front, where the long-held and potentially useful bridgehead over the Don River near Nishne-Chirskaya was lost. The fresh Soviet VII Tank Corps had attacked the bridgehead on the 14th and took only a day to make the German position there untenable. The Germans were forced back and blew up the bridge as they withdrew. Without the bridgehead, 17th Panzer could not attack toward Stalingrad and was therefore diverted south to join the LVII Panzer Corps attack on the Aksay River as soon as possible. The 17th began crossing the Don at Tsimlyanskaya that same afternoon.

The Soviet leadership had initially pulled units from the encirclement front to oppose the LVII Panzer Corps attack; it followed that up by committing a strong new army—2nd Guards Army—to confront the threat. Now it took the radical step of reaiming its climactic attack of the campaign—Operation Saturn—designed to strike once Stalingrad was secured and intended to sweep across the Don bend from the north all the way to Rostov, cutting off whatever was left of Army Group Don and the entire Army Group A in the Caucasus.

Now, Stalin ordered a change. Rather than striking southwest toward Rostov, 2nd Guards Army would strike southeast and hit the rear of Hoth's relief attack instead.

The aptly renamed Operation Little Saturn was launched early on December 16 from the northern reaches of the Don bend on both sides of Boguchar when the Soviet 6th Army, as well as the 2nd and 3rd Guards Armies, struck Provisional Army Hollidt and the Italian Eighth Army of Army Group B. Even after their tank brigades joined the assault about noon, the Soviets made little headway on that first day.

Early on the 17th the Soviets facing LVII Panzer Corps became more active as reports began rolling in at dawn: 20 panzers at Samokhin, tanks with infantry at Shutov I and Kamenka, and some 40 tanks with infantry at Shestakov. Those tanks crossed the frozen Aksay and entered Shestakov about halfway between the 23rd's bridgehead at Kruglyakoff and 6th Panzer's bridgehead at Salivskiy.

For the first time Stuka dive bombers assisted 23rd Panzer and brought palpable relief with their precision attacks on enemy concentrations. During the day the enemy pressure increased markedly on the eastern flank, north of the Aksay.

The 6th Panzer Division was also well supported by Stukas on the 17th when it undertook an operation to clear the hills south of Verchne-Kumskiy that the enemy had reoccupied. Just as the sun began to rise over the frozen steppe, German engineers and grenadiers, thoroughly camouflaged, began to infiltrate through the tall grass toward their first objective, a Soviet artillery observation post (OP) on Hill 140.

At 8 AM, with the grenadiers in position, the artillery regiment opened fire on the OP with all tubes. A few moments later, white flares signaled that the objective had been captured. The artillery shifted its fire, and Stukas appeared on the horizon flying in a majestic wedge formation. The first wave delivered its load of high explosives and was flying off as the second wave approached in a high altitude "V" above the horizon, then a third wave, and a fourth. Enemy artillery fell silent. Where a moment before had stood a gun, now only smoke and a deep hole remained. When advancing grenadiers encountered bunkers, German flamethrower teams burned the inhabitants out with a loud whoosh.

By early afternoon, a two-mile breach had been forged through the Soviet position; it was time for 6th Panzer's main body to surge through and retake Verchne-Kumskiy. But reconnaissance revealed that the town was held by strong enemy forces with numerous antitank positions and dug-in tanks. General Raus, commander of the 6th, decided to postpone the attack until after dark, in the meantime softening the enemy up with artillery and dive bombers.

After sunset, the assault detachments crept up to the edge of the village completely unseen. By the light of several burning buildings they could see the Soviet troops as they took a meal, totally unconcerned. The Germans burst into the town, and grenadiers rounded up the stunned troops while engineer antitank teams went after prelocated enemy tanks. The battle was over quickly, and German artillery targeted the few tanks that escaped. Not only did the Germans suffer minimal casualties, they captured several antitank guns and a great deal of heavy equipment.

The 17th Panzer Division finally made it to the corps sector on the 17th. Advancing from Verchne-Yablochniy against weak enemy resistance, it captured a bridgehead over the northern Aksay at Generalovskiy, 12 miles west of Salivskiy, by mid-afternoon.

Late on the 17th, the first units of Soviet Lt. Gen. Rodion Malinovsky's 2nd Guards Army began arriving at the Myshkova sector. Two rifle divisions of the 1st Guards Rifle Corps arrived that evening and deployed straight off the march. The remainder of the army, the 2nd Guards Mechanized Corps and 13th Guards Rifle

Corps, arrived continually over the next two days.

General Fridolin von Senger und Etterlin hustled his 17th Panzer Division forward into the bridgehead at Generalovskiy overnight in order to strike northward at first light on the 18th. By mid-morning it approached the enemy strongpoint at the collective farm "8th of March" over icy ground. The collective was about seven miles west of Verchne-Kumskiy and served as the western end of the defensive line the Soviets had formed in the hills north of the Aksay River.

While the artillery deployed, the tank detachment outflanked the farm to the west and Panzergrenadier Regiment 40 assaulted the building complex. As a company of tanks turned into the rear of the farm complex, the rest turned to meet a line of enemy tanks approaching from the north. In an hour-long swirling battle, 21 enemy tanks were destroyed and 150 prisoners were taken.

North of Verchne-Kumskiy, the 6th Panzer Division was preparing to strike northward when news arrived that 23rd Panzer was in serious difficulty and required 6th Panzer's assistance as soon as possible. Hünersdorff pulled his tanks back into Verchne-Kumskiy and turned east toward Kruglyakoff; pursuit of the broken enemy northward would have to be turned over to the 17th Panzer Division.

Strong Soviet units from the Shutov I and Kamenka areas were putting heavy pressure on the 23rd Panzer's bridgehead at Kruglyakoff. Stukas had relieved some of the pressure, but the enemy kept bringing up more troops. As KG Hünersdorff approached Kruglyakoff, the men could see the enemy swarming over both the railroad and road bridges into the town. Without hesitation, the tanks remaining on the north side of the river swung out along the enemy's right flank and opened fire. The enemy, fearful of being cut off, fled northeastward along the railroad tracks from whence they had come. The 23rd regained both bridges and its forward positions and reinforced them as much as possible.

In the meantime, 17th Panzer's advance detachment, built around Panzer Regiment 39, had circled around Verchne-Kumskiy to the west and left Panzergrenadier Regiment 63 to clean up and secure the town. General von Senger und Etterlin led the panzer group northward, and by 1 PM it reached Nishne-Kumskiy on the Myshkova River and surrounded it.

As soon as Kruglyakoff had been secured, General Raus ordered Hünersdorff and his tanks, which at that point had suffered no casualties, to turn north and push on through the night toward the Myshkova River at Vasilevka, 16 miles east of Nizhne-Kumskiy. Brushing aside the weak resistance that it encountered en route, the KG approached Vasilevka at dawn on the 19th and in a daring surprise move captured the bridge over the Myshkova in the center of town.

The spearheads of two German panzer divisions were now at the Myshkova River, where they expected the Sixth Army breakout to meet them. But the hard fighting had left both divisions severely weakened. Both had been forced to leave units behind to guard their flanks and supply line, and the two divisions together fielded barely 50 tanks.

On the army group's northern flank, the situation of the neighboring Italian Eighth Army of Army Group B had deteriorated on the second day of the Little Saturn attack. Then, on the 18th the Italians completely disintegrated, exposing the entire left wing of Provisional Army Hollidt. This meant that three Soviet armies were poised to charge southeast, 20-30 miles behind Provisional Army Hollidt's front lines on the Chir River and smash straight into the rear of the LVII Panzer Corps' attack on the Myshkova. The army group could be encircled or destroyed.

Manstein saw the writing on the wall; although Hoth's attack was only 55 miles from the pocket, it had slowed to a standstill and, considering the forces that the enemy was known to be bringing to bear in front of it, it was not likely to revive. Furthermore, the airlift was simply not delivering enough to sustain Sixth Army. Additionally, Manstein's northern wing was beginning to crumble under the weight of Little Saturn. Something had to be done, and soon.

The last remaining alternative was to have Paulus's Sixth Army break out and reach Hoth's spearhead. Manstein was certain that if Sixth Army began to break out to meet Fourth Panzer Army, it would have to be an all-out proposition, an attack with all its strength in front to ensure a successful breakout; Sixth Army did not have the luxury of being able to simply extend its front and link up.

Manstein's intention was to have Sixth Army break out in two phases. First, with the code words Winter Storm, Sixth Army would attack southwestward to link up with LVII Panzer Corps while maintaining the entire front around Stalingrad. Phase Two, the code word Thunderclap meant Paulus would begin a phased withdrawal from Stalingrad.

Manstein believed Hitler would agree to Winter Storm because it was the only way to get a supply convoy through. He also knew that Hitler would immediately countermand Thunderclap if it was issued too early. He hoped to present Hitler with a fait accompli because he expected that once Winter Storm was underway and the enemy realized what was happening, they would immediately attack—which would make the immediate execution of Thunderclap imperative because the front would certainly begin to collapse. It had to be done—Hitler would have no choice but to go along.

At dawn on the 19th, Manstein sent his intelligence chief, Major Hans Eismann, into the pocket to explain his plan to Paulus.

Meanwhile, on the Myshkova the 6th Panzer Division, in bitter hand-to-hand fighting, managed to forge a small bridgehead on the northern bank at Vasilevka on the 19th, but massive enemy forces surrounded it, preventing any breakout.

Farther west on the river at Nishne-Kumskiy, 17th Panzer tried to move east along the southern bank of the river toward Gromoslavka, but Soviet positions on the dominant heights on the northern bank prevented any movement in that area. The 23rd Panzer Division was still south of the Myshkova trying to cover the LVII Panzer Corps'

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A graveyard of German, tanks, guns, and personnel litter a snowy landscape outside Stalingrad, December 1942. Despite near-superhuman efforts, Manstein's rescue force was unable to free Paulus's trapped Sixth Army.

lengthening right flank.

Late that afternoon Manstein sent an urgent message to Hitler. He told the Führer that he doubted that the relief attack by LVII Panzer Corps would be able to reach the pocket. It was exhausted while its opposition was becoming stronger each day. But the major factor at the moment was that the left flank of the army group was in serious danger of collapse. The only solution, he said, would be for Sixth Army to attack southwestward toward a linkup with LVII Panzer Corps while simultaneously pulling back its northern and eastern fronts; there was no longer time for anything else.

At 5:50 PM on the 19th, before he had received a reply from Hitler, Manstein contacted Paulus over a new high-frequency radio link that had just been installed. Paulus explained the various scenarios that Eismann had described and said that he now felt that the only viable alternative was complete withdrawal from Stalingrad. Manstein asked how soon Sixth Army could be ready to break out and how much food and fuel it needed. Paulus replied it could be ready in three to four days and would need reduced rations for about 10 days and 1½ times the normal fuel rate.

Based on this conversation, Manstein immediately ordered Winter Storm and said that Thunderclap might follow soon thereafter, depending on circumstances.

There it was. Operation Winter Storm had been ordered, to commence in three to four days. The anxious wait began.

In the Provisional Army Hollidt area, the lower Chir front was mostly holding, but the Soviet 5th Tank Army was giving the XLVIII Panzer Corps all it could handle. Hollidt was desperately trying to form a north-facing front between the upper Chir and Millerovo, 75 miles to the west, but Soviet tank formations were surging southward almost unopposed.

On the LVII Panzer Corps front at the Myshkova, the Soviet 2nd Guards Army completed its deployment during the evening of December 21 and prepared to attack the next morning. There were now 19½ Soviet divisions with 149,000 men and more than 600 tanks deployed against the LVII Panzer Corps, which now had fewer than 85 tanks on hand.

The only glimmer of good news for the Germans was from the airlift. On December 20, the airlift delivered 291 tons, the most it had delivered in one day. Unfortunately, that was only 58 percent of the minimum daily requirement, and it remained the most the airlift would deliver on any one day through the rest of the siege.

General Zeitzler, chief of staff of the Army, had always agreed with Manstein on the need for Sixth Army to abandon Stalingrad, and on the 22nd he thought he had gained Hitler's consent. In discussing the matter, Hitler had finally said, "Very well then, draft a message to Paulus asking him how far he can get if ordered to break out." A relieved Zeitzler drafted the message to Paulus immediately. Paulus answered: "15 to 20 miles."

By December 23, the Soviet XVII Tank Corps and XVIII Tank Corps held a tight ring around Millerovo in the Provisional Army Hollidt sector, and the way to Kamensk, on the Donets River 44 miles to the south, was wide open. The XXV Tank Corps and 1st Guards Mechanized Corps were closing in on Morozovsk, and XXIV Tank Corps was about to burst into Tatsinskaya.

On the 23rd Manstein called Hitler at his headquarters at Rastenburg in one last desperate attempt to get Paulus permission to leave Stalingrad. After Manstein made his impassioned plea, Hitler responded with, "I fail to see what you're driving at! Paulus has only enough gasoline for 15 to 20 miles at most. He says himself that he can't break

Continued on page 97

An American officer observes the effect of artillery fire against German positions near Thionville, France—a key part of the Metz defenses. OPPOSITE: XII Corps commander Maj. Gen. Manton S. Eddy (left) and Lt. Gen. George S. Patton, Jr., head of Third U.S. Army, watch their men during the attack on Metz, France, November 1944.

IN HIS AUTOBIOGRAPHY, *War As I Knew It,* Lt. Gen. George S. Patton, Jr., set the tone for what was to become one of his Third U.S. Army's infantry divisions' major accomplishments in World War II. He stated: "I woke up at 0300 on the morning of November 8, 1944, and it was raining very hard. I tried to go to sleep but, finding it impossible, got up and started to read Rommel's book, *Infantry Attacks*. By chance I turned to a chapter describing a fight in the rain in September 1914. This was very reassuring because I felt that if the Germans could do it, I could.…"

Patton's army had been halted since early September by renewed determined German resistance before the eastern French city of Metz in the province of Lorraine. Efforts to capture the city and neutralize or destroy the ring of fortresses surrounding it had been in vain. On November 8, the beginning of a major coordinated effort by two U.S. Army corps to capture the city and fortification system which would open the way to the Rhine River, was the reason for Patton's sleeplessness and his late-

Conquering KOENIGSMACKER

During the struggle for the fortified French city of Metz, General Patton threw the U.S. 90th Infantry Division at the sturdy walls in a desperate attempt to crack the German defensive line.

BY BRIG. GEN. (U.S. ARMY, RET.) RAYMOND E. BELL, JR.

Both: National Archives

night reading of Rommel's book.

First, Maj. Gen. Manton S. Eddy's XII Corps launched its assault south of Metz early that morning. Then, before dawn the next day, elements of Maj. Gen. Walton Walker's XX Corps crossed the Moselle River north of Metz and the neighboring city of Thionville, which culminated in what Patton was to label "an epic river crossing."

German resistance to this major operation had previously proved successful in thwarting Patton's attempts to capture the forts of a defensive system west of the Moselle River. Prominent among these operations was the unsuccessful attempt to capture the formidable and largely underground complex of Fort Driant located on the western approaches to Metz and which effectively commanded river-crossing sites south of the city.

The German First Army was the principal enemy formation facing Patton's two attacking corps. South of Metz and opposite Eddy's XII Corps was the XII SS Corps' 17th SS Panzergrenadier Division, an elite—at least in name—combat organization in the German Army. In Metz itself was stationed the 462nd Volksgrenadier Division under Generalleutnant Vollrath Luebbe. (He would suffer a stroke on November 12 and be replaced by Generalmajor Heinrich Kittel.)

To the 462nd's north and covering a distance of some 20 miles to the small French town of Koenigsmacker was the 19th Volksgrenadier Division, which had been formed from remnants of the 19th Luftwaffe-Sturm-Division (19th Air Force Storm Division) in October 1944 and was led by the highly decorated Generalmajor Karl Britzelmayr.

The 19th Volksgrenadier Division was composed of three infantry regiments, the 59th, 73rd, and 74th. Each of these regi-

ments consisted of two battalions, the 1st Battalion of the 74th forming the division's right flank and manning Fort Koenigsmacker, which overlooked the hamlet of Basse Ham—not the fort's namesake, the adjacent village of Koenigsmacker.

To the north of the 19th Volksgrenadier was the 416th Infantry Division, commanded by Generalleutnant Kurt Pflieger, with its organic regiments, the 713th and 714th. The seam between the 19th and 416th ran through Koenigsmacker village, which was later to have fire support implications for the German defense of Fort Koenigsmacker during the Third Army thrust over the Moselle River on November 9.

The combat effectiveness of these German formations varied widely. As expected, the 17th SS Panzergrenadier Division Götz von Berlichingen, under SS Gruppenführer Werner Ostendorff, stood as the most effective, although it, like most such organizations, lacked certain key elements, in this instance tank units. On the bottom rung was Pflieger's 416th, which had arrived from Denmark at the beginning of October. Its role in German-occupied Denmark was that of static security. It had seen no combat and with its complement of elderly soldiers was regarded as best suited for strictly defensive battle.

Britzelmayr's 19th Division had combat experience and, with about 5,000 soldiers, was between 80 and 85 percent of full strength. Its artillery complement consisted of a medium and two light battalions with an antitank element of 10 heavy weapons. The division's subordinate units' battle effectiveness lay somewhere between that of the 17th SS and 416th with varying degrees of competence depending to some extent on each unit's access to fortress protection and fighting positions.

These German organizations were deployed in a defensive posture, which included manning forts reconditioned by the Germans during the time preceding Patton's drive to finally capture Metz and its surrounding ring of fortresses. To the north of Metz and around the city of Thionville, the front line lay along the Moselle River which—at the time Patton awoke on the early morning of November 8—was at full flood stage.

It was this rain-engorged waterway that the U.S. XX Corps' 90th Infantry Division, nicknamed the "Tough 'Ombres" and commanded by Maj. Gen. James A. Van Fleet, had been ordered to cross and, in a northern pincer movement, meet the 5th Infantry Division's southern pincer. The corps' objective was to seal off and capture Metz with the ultimate goal of advancing east into Germany. Another American infantry division, the 95th, would also be employed in the battle. In addition, the 83rd Division's artillery and the 10th Armored Division's tanks would be available to support the assault.

The U.S. Army's official history says, "The initial envelopment of the Metz area was assigned to the 90th Division, forming the arm north of the city, and the 5th Division, encircling the city from the south. The 95th Division was to contain the German salient west of the Moselle. Then, as the concentric attack closed on Metz, the 95th Division was to drive in the enemy salient and, it was planned, cross the Moselle and capture the city proper. The 10th Armored Division, after crossing the Moselle behind the 90th Division, was to close the pincers east of Metz by advancing parallel to and on the left of the 90th Division…."

Both: National Archives

ABOVE: The Germans placed mismarked signs to confuse the advancing Americans. Here, a deuce-and-a-half truck rushes through the village of Koenigsmacker, whose city limit sign has been corrected by Third Army units. OPPOSITE: Soldiers from the 90th Division's 358th Infantry advance down a rain-slickened road to meet the enemy at Fort Koenigsmacker, November 1944.

During Patton's major November 1944 northern thrust to envelope Metz's fortress system, his 90th Infantry Division had one enemy stronghold obstacle to conquer: the formidable German-occupied Fort Koenigsmacker.

The fortress complex lay directly in the division's path of the advance as the fort's guns commanded the Moselle River's crossing sites north of Metz and Thionville. U.S. Army Historian Hugh M. Cole noted in his volume of the Army's official history, *The Lorraine Campaign*: "The tactical effectiveness of its location forbade that Fort Koenigsmacker be bypassed; it had to be taken and quickly." The 90th's 358th Infantry Regiment, commanded by Colonel Christian H. Clarke, Jr., was charged with the critical mission of taking the fort, and the regiment's 1st Battalion was specifically assigned the task.

Fort Koenigsmacker contained a battery of four powerful 100mm guns mounted in revolving ground-level armored steel turrets which, if properly manned and maintained, had the range to interdict military activity several miles in any direction. Although the gun line was oriented primarily to the north, the cannons could effectively bring fire to bear along a significant stretch of the Moselle River.

The fort was part of a longstanding defense network protecting the city of Thionville and the metropolis of Metz, both being surrounded by a number of elaborate fortifications. Some of the forts dated back to the time of the famous French military engineer the Marquis de Vauban (1633-1707).

The Germans constructed pentagon-shaped Fort Koenigsmacker between 1908 and 1915 when they occupied the French province of Lorraine following the Franco-Prussian War of 1870. After World War I, the fort and the province reverted to French control. When the French constructed the massive Maginot Line designed to stop an inva-

sion from Germany in the 1930s, however, the fort was not considered an integral part of that elaborate defense system. Then, in 1940, the French lost the fort during the German invasion. In 1944, the Germans reactivated Fort Koenigsmacker to help stem the Allied advance into the Fatherland.

Besides the four-gun battery, the fortress contained three large blocks of underground living quarters, several scattered and protected shelter points, a deep moat on its eastern side fronted by a retaining wall, and armored steel observation posts with firing apertures for machine guns. Connecting the different parts of the fort was a system of deep underground tunnels lined with thick concrete. Numerous infantry fighting trenches around the various reinforced structures, zeroed in by mortars and artillery, encircled most of the top of the fortress. Dense thickets of barbed wire entangled the moats, which surrounded the complex and restricted movement within the fort's confines.

In November 1944, Fort Koenigsmacker overlooked a swollen, swift, and turbulent Moselle River fed by heavy rainfall from watercourses throughout the region. On November 9, opposite the fortress, the river was almost a mile wide, partially flooding villages on its western bank. In some places the water was four feet deep—too deep for vehicle movement up to the river's usual banks. A major impediment to even approaching the normal riverbanks was the mud.

Captain William M. McConahey, M.D., the battalion surgeon of the supporting 344th Field Artillery Battalion, noted, "The weather as usual was terrible—cold, muddy and pouring rain. The mud was worst of all. I knew how the infantry would be feeling [he had previously been a surgeon in the division's 357th Infantry Regiment]. The miserable weather and the nasty job ahead would not make their lot easier."

The Moselle River and its swollen banks north of Thionville thus represented a major obstacle to any military unit trying to pass over it and favored the defensive posture of the German troops on the river's east bank and inside Fort Koenigsmacker.

A couple of high-water factors, however, were to favor the Americans' initial river crossing. The surging water filled German foxholes and fighting positions strung out along the river's banks, forcing the enemy to abandon them. In addition, the water's depth at the crossing site was such that, until after the river crested, assault boats easily floated over the land mines laid along the shoreline. Only as the floodwaters receded did the mines become a hazard when the supporting engineers sought to bridge the river.

The 358th Infantry Regiment was just one of the 90th Division's three regiments making the river crossing on the night and early morning of November 8-9. On the 358th's left flank was the 359th Infantry, commanded by Colonel Raymond E. Bell, which was to make the crossing simultaneously with its sister regiment. Colonel Julian H. George's 357th Infantry Regiment, initially held in reserve, was to follow closely over the river behind the two other regiments.

The plan for the 358th was for Lt. Col. Cleveland A. Lytle's 1st and Lt. Col. Jacob W. Bealke's 3rd Battalions to cross the Moselle abreast with the 3rd Battalion on the left and to launch its attack at 3 AM on November 9 with the immediate objective of the village of Koenigsmacker and then advance eastward.

The 1st Battalion was to begin crossing a half hour later on the same day and capture Fort Koenigsmacker with Companies A and B while Company C secured the hamlet of Basse-Ham lying on the river in front of the fort. The regiment's 2nd Battalion, initially in reserve, was to cross the Moselle River after a bridgehead had been secured and then take over the regiment's left flank and advance eastward.

Success for the regiment, therefore, meant that the fort had to be captured—and quickly. The 358th could then advance with its two sister 90th Division infantry regiments in its thrust to meet up

with the 5th Infantry Division beyond Metz.

Preparations to gain surprise and ensure the success of the river crossing by the 90th Infantry Division and supporting units were extensive. The division's units had previously been engaged on the line opposite Metz and were withdrawn to a reserve position a week before the crossing was executed.

While there, key leaders surreptitiously conducted reconnaissance of the proposed crossing sites attired in clothing that did not identify them as members of the 90th Infantry Division. Division symbols on helmets were covered as was the number "90" on vehicle bumpers.

Special care was taken to see that the 90th Infantry Division shoulder patch was concealed from sight, especially from local people who might be German sympathizers. The division personnel conducting reconnaissance close to the river traveled in vehicles belonging to the 3rd Cavalry Group, which had long served along the Moselle, and the troopers' movements were familiar to the Germans observing from across the river.

To conceal movement of division and supporting artillery into position from around Metz, the 23rd Special Troops deployed dummy rubberized artillery pieces and simulated explosive flashes to maintain the illusion of preexisting firing activity by artillery previously deployed.

Preparations for the operation by the 358th Infantry Regiment and its 1st Battalion after their relief from containing a portion of the sector around Metz began on November 3 when they moved into barracks near the town of Morfontaine. The first order of business was to rest, then to replace lost and worn-out equipment, and soon be outfitted with proper clothing and gear while assimilating new replacements. Then began an extensive period of training, briefing, and reconnaissance.

As background to preparations for attacking across the Moselle, and from the experience of such units as the 5th Infantry Division in trying to reduce, neutralize,

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ABOVE: A smoke screen obscures the 90th Division's crossing of the Moselle River prior to their attack on Fort Koenigsmacker. OPPOSITE: An aerial view of Fort Koenigsmacker. The fortification, built from 1908 to 1915, bristled with revolving turrets, stout bunkers, and other gun emplacements.

and destroy the formidable complex of Fort Driant, a study was made about how to successfully attack Fort Koenigsmacker. Lessons learned from the inability to capture Fort Driant were applied to future operations. Possibly foremost of these was to avoid fighting within the labyrinths of the underground complex.

It was decided that it was sufficient to seal off entrances and escape routes while making it as difficult as possible for the fort's occupants to direct supporting fire and launch counterattacks. This could be partly accomplished by targeting air ventilation and exhaust ports as soon as above ground observation and combat posts were destroyed or neutralized.

Ultimately, the fort's garrison should be made to realize its situation was untenable and to surrender. Special attack techniques were developed and practiced with the realization that they would most probably be needed in the near future.

Before the soldiers could get to the fort, they had to get across the river, and this required special planning, training, and coordination with the supporting engineers. As it turned out for Lytle's 1st Battalion, 358th Infantry, it would have been better if engineers from the division's organic engineer combat battalion had been responsible for ferrying the men across the Moselle. That responsibility rested with soldiers from the attached 179th Engineer Combat Battalion, a Third Army engineer unit whose men were unfamiliar with the 90th's organic 315th Engineer Battalion.

From October 3-7, the staff of the 1st Battalion carefully planned where and how to load the assault boats with which the soldiers were to be conveyed over the river. The infantrymen would pick up the boats at the hamlet of Husange, the closest place providing concealment for the engineer trucks carrying the boats to drop them off and from where they would be carried by the infantrymen and engineer crews to the riverbank. Detailed assignments to specific boats were made for each assaulting soldier, and attempts were made to have the 179th's three-man engineer crews become familiar with their future passengers.

While the staff planned and saw that the troops were refitted and rested, the men themselves conducted intense river-crossing training on dry land. The battalion had not yet received a specified objective, although it was easy for its members to surmise that

a river crossing and an attack on a fortress were in the forecast.

With that in mind, soldiers practiced carrying assault boats to the launch sites and then loading them properly in darkness under arduous conditions. The engineers who would guide and steer the boats showed the infantrymen effective paddling techniques and had them practice them as if the boats were already in the water. The men were instructed on how to conduct themselves in the boats and sit in them so as not to capsize them. They learned the different directions and commands that they would have to obey to ensure passage.

To preserve secrecy and achieve surprise, it was during the last moments that detailed reconnaissance and final coordination were executed down to the lowest unit level. Despite the tight time frame, there was hardly an individual soldier who was not thoroughly briefed on his forthcoming task when the operation began.

On November 7, just before the XII Corps offensive to the south began, the division produced maps, charts, aerial photographs, and large-scale engineer drawings, distributing them within the units to all personnel on a need-to-know basis. It was during the briefings that members of the 358th's 1st Battalion first learned specifically that it had the additional difficult task of conquering Fort Koenigsmacker.

Headquarters officers briefed battalion leaders and key personnel, who then conducted reconnaissance in person as far as security allowed. By the time the operation was to begin, the entire command was well prepared for the coming action because planning, training, and coordination had been so thorough. The time allowed for the overall preparation activity and training had been unusually long—which frequently was not the case for such complicated and dangerous missions.

Lytle's 1st Battalion and the rest of the 90th Infantry Division were, therefore, as well prepared for the river crossing, the attack on Fort Koenigsmacker, and the pincer movement as possible.

The 358th was to move into the nearby dense west bank in the Cattenom Forest the day before the crossing of the Moselle was to take place. Then, during the night of November 8-9, having advanced on foot to the hamlet of Husange on the outskirts of the town of Catternom, the 358th's soldiers were to marry up with assault boats and carry them some 1,500 yards to the river crossing sites. Bealke's 3rd Battalion was to push off first at 3:30 AM on November 9, while Lytle's 1st Battalion was to follow in four waves of 40 assault boats each.

Carrying their boats, each crewed by three engineers from the attached 179th Engineer Combat Battalion, the heavily laden infantrymen struggled in the darkness along lines of tape laid by engineers to their launching sites through mud, muck, and water. Although cautioned to be silent to achieve a modicum of surprise as they moved forward, many of the struggling men still grumbled softly about their boat's weight and the distance to their crossing site. The thick mud was especially enervating to the stumbling soldiers, and they arrived at the launching sites thoroughly tired, as well as wet from the continuing rain.

The infantrymen loaded as quickly as possible and then prepared to meet their next test. Because the flow of water was so swift and turbulent, it was with great difficulty that the companies gained the far shore. Slowly and quietly, however, the assault boats made their way across the river.

There were no shots fired as the craft

Photo: Steve Zaloga

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floated over the abandoned German foxholes and mines submerged by the floodwaters. Battling the current, the engineers and infantrymen strained to bring their boats to the assigned landing sites, but the fast current carried many away from the intended dismount points.

As the damp and fatigued troops reached the far shore, they jumped into the mud and low water wary of any mines or other obstacles placed along the riverbank. Their wet boots and clothing added to their misery, but the soldiers pressed on in the darkness.

The 3rd Battalion's luck ran out shortly after crossing the Moselle. Badly wounded in the hand, Lt. Col. Bealke returned to the battalion command post (CP) in Cattenom at 5:05 AM and reported that the crossing had been undiscovered but not unopposed. Captain J.S. Spivey, an officer on Bealke's staff, left the CP immediately to take temporary command of the battalion.

After the 3rd Battalion had crossed the Moselle, the 179th Engineers carried A and C Companies across the river in two waves with A Company on the left and C on the right; a platoon of engineers from the 90th

ABOVE: Troops of the 1st Battalion, 358th Infantry, 90th Division, halt on a road leading to Fort Koenigsmacker and look toward their formidable objective. OPPOSITE: A diagram of Fort Koenigsmacker showing the attack routes of 1st Battalion, 358th Infantry.

Infantry Division's 315th Engineer Combat Battalion accompanied the companies.

B Company crossed in a third wave, but because the corps engineer crews had unknowingly abandoned the assault boats they left it to B Company's soldiers to row themselves across the river. The delay caused by the engineers' error, however, did not change the plan to assault the fort. The infantrymen, nevertheless, would have preferred to have had division engineers, whom they felt were more reliable and attuned to core division values, manning the boats.

Once across the river the troops in the two companies destined for the fight for Fort Koenigsmacker struggled forward in small groups making for the railroad tracks and road which paralleled the Moselle. There, still undetected by the enemy, the companies paused, regrouped, checked equipment, took count of unit members, and then lined up for the assault on the fort.

The banks of the railroad line provided cover for these last minute preparations, and then the men crossed over the tracks and roadway. Leaving the cover of the railroad embankment, A and B Companies advanced toward the hilltop fortress, each in column formation with two platoons abreast. A Company advanced on the left with B Company on its right.

Luckily, the German soldiers on the east bank, having been forced from their foxholes and rifle pits and taken refuge in nearby houses along the river, were not in position to offer resistance. As a result, complete surprise was gained. The enemy troops in Fort Koenigsmacker were also unaware of the crossing and brought no fire to bear on the Americans as they advanced on their objective.

The men entered the fields in front of the fort. It was tiresome work in a drizzling rain as they moveded their way forward, looking cautiously for antipersonnel mines, especially the deadly ones that flung themselves into the air when detonated. None were found.

The fields beyond the road and railroad morphed into a wooded area where each

company halted at the edge of the moat at the bottom of the hill where the fort was located. The men waited to cross at 7:15. A Company was pointed toward the northwest portion of the fort, while B Company headed to the west and southwest parts.

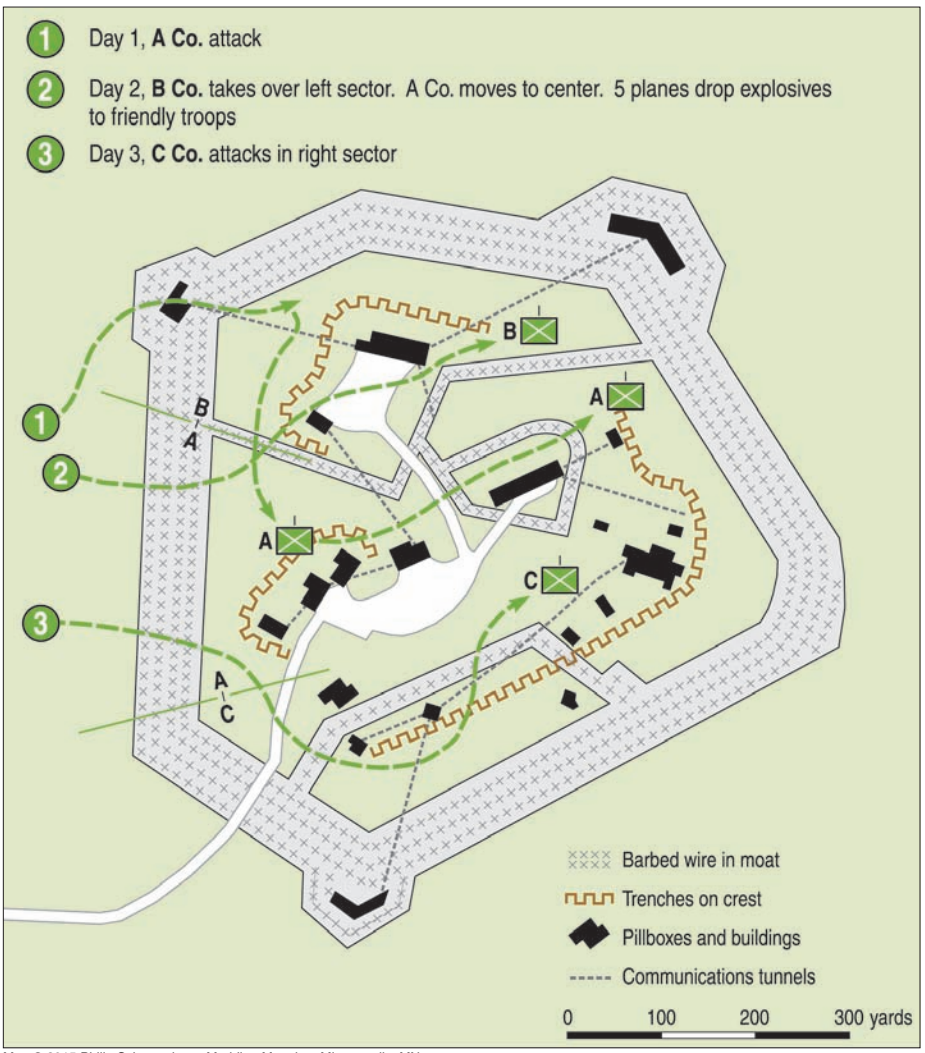
The woods and scattered trees had provided good concealment, allowing the two companies to approach the first obstacle, the moat heavily laced with barbed wire, unseen. With such protection the attached division combat engineers went to work cutting paths through the wire.

The moat in front of A Company was quite shallow, but much of the moat B Company had to cross was deep and wide with a concrete facing and filled with many coils of barbed wire. The task in front of A Company was accomplished relatively easily. The moat in front of B Company, however, soon proved to be an assault stopper.

At about the appointed time in the early morning twilight, A Company crossed the line of departure, moving through the wire and over the shallow moat. Cautiously the troops started up the moderately steep slope to the trenches located at the fort's summit, which encircled the tops of the north and west concrete underground barracks.

The company's 2nd Platoon remained at the bottom of the hill to neutralize an armored observation post and machine-gun position located there. The open trenches were unmanned, and the Germans in the observation post and machinegun position stayed silent.

It was not until A Company was on top of the barracks and into exposed German



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

fighting positions that the enemy became aware of the Americans. Reaction to the presence of the A Company's 2nd Platoon at the armored pillbox at the bottom of the hill, the remainder of A Company on top of the fort, and B Company hung up on the southwest moat was delayed but violent. A few German soldiers unexpectedly entered the trenches and opened fire on the advancing Americans. A close-in grenade battle ensued as the Germans sought to repel the attackers.

First Lieutenant Harris C. Neil, Jr., a platoon leader with Company A in the thick of the battle, remembered, "When my platoon reached the parapet [along the trench line], we surprised a group of Jerries. One jumped for a machine gun, and the sergeant killed him—fortunately. The others ran off down a trench and started throwing hand grenades at us. So for a little while we had quite a hand-grenade battle, mostly with us throwing their grenades back at them."

Surprise having thus been compromised, prearranged German 50mm mortar and artillery fire directed from an enemy observation post was laid on the American infantrymen.

Fortunately, the 100mm artillery pieces in the fort could not lower their tubes sufficiently to fire on the attacking Americans, although German machine guns and mortars could. Actually, the fort's artillery pieces never came into play; the artillery fire came from batteries located outside the confines of the complex.

The enemy garrison consisted of a battalion of the 74th Regiment of Britzelmayr's 19th Volksgrenadier Division, one of the middling German infantry formations. Protected by thick underground concrete walls, the foe, once fully awakened to the presence of the Americans, launched scattered and vicious counterattacks. Erupting from openings in the interconnected tunnels, the Germans inflicted some 40 casualties on A Company in three morning forays. The enemy attacks, however, failed to dislodge the Americans from the top of the west barracks.

The solution to rendering the fort harm-

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90th Division soldiers encounter a line of German soldiers killed during the battle for Fort Koenigsmacker.

less lay with the use of explosives carried by the accompanying engineers from the division's 315th Engineer Combat Battalion. They had brought satchel charges of C-2 explosive, which they knew from experience would be needed to win the fort. First Lieutenant William J. Martin's engineer platoon and two specially assigned A Company assault teams aggressively went to work under intense German mortar and machine-gun fire.

The 17-pound satchel charges were first used to blow open the steel doors of German Shelter Point 3, located between the north and west underground barracks on the west slope of the fort. The point was quickly cleaned out and occupied, giving the assaulting troops a measure of cover from which they could go about the business of reducing the German resistance. The effort was then concentrated on the two armored observation posts on top of the two barracks.

The method employed by the assault teams was a coordinated move by an engineer with a satchel charge and an infantryman, who would quickly rush an embrasure, door, or sally port. Under covering fire from the other team members and close-in fire support from the soldier with the engineer, the explosives were put in place, a short fuse was activated, and the two men swiftly retreated to cover.

The explosion did not necessarily destroy the target but instead stunned its occupants senseless, effectively neutralizing them, or in the case of a steel door, blasting it open and thereby clearing the way to a staircase leading to rooms and galleries below. As a followup, the troops then threw additional charges down the staircases to kill the foe, to block enemy access to the surface of the fort's underground structures, and to allow penetration of the fort's inner works.

By the end of the first day, the northwest pillbox at the base of the hill had been put out of action by the 2nd Platoon of A Company, which had then advanced toward the top of the north barracks. That platoon was later replaced by the 1st Platoon, which moved over from the top of the west barracks. The 2nd and 3rd Platoons then occupied the trenches around the armored observation post on top of the west barracks.

That day a third of Fort Koenigsmacker was occupied by A Company, but the cost had been high with 40 American casualties. Also, B Company had not succeeded in getting over the moat and through the wire. The resupply of ammunition and explosives was hindered both by German artillery and the rapidly flowing Moselle River.

November 10 saw more of the same fighting to knock out the enemy, while during the night B Company had been withdrawn from in front of the wire-filled moat and moved around to A Company's left flank on top of the fort.

The depleted supply of C-2 explosive called for another innovation to get at the German defenders deep in their underground quarters. The point of the American attack shifted in part to the ventilation ports atop the barracks. Lieutenant Neil came up with the idea of pouring 10 gallons of gasoline down a porthole and then igniting the fuel with a thermite grenade. This form of attack proved to be lethal and psychologically damaging to the Germans deep inside the concrete structures. During one such attack a German soldier was blown to the surface of the fort by the explosion's force.

By noon on November 10, all the armored observation points on the top of the fort in A and B Companies' sectors had been knocked out, but a new factor came seriously into play as the day progressed, the shortage of C-2 explosive. The resupply of everything across the Moselle River was severely interdicted by German mortars and artillery, which continued their effective fire on the crossing sites. In the case of the C-2 resupply, the remedy was to employ the 90th Infantry Division artillery spotter and liaison aircraft to fly close to the fort and air-drop the needed additional satchel charges to the infantrymen.

One pilot, 1st Lt. Lloyd A. Watland, was sent to discover the best approach by air to execute the resupply drop. Deliberately attracting enemy fire to disclose the positions of the antiaircraft guns, he flew as low as 10 feet above the ground to chart a reasonably safe route for the other pilots to follow over the fort. He was successful in accomplishing his dangerous touch-and-go reconnaissance mission and later received the Distinguished Service Cross for his selfless and daring action.

Following Watland's path, five liaison aircraft, each carrying 100 pounds of C-2 explo-

Photo: Art Meier

A view of the southwest side of Fort Koenigsmacker today. The elimination of the fort materially aided in Third Army's capture of Metz and Patton's drive to the German border.

sive, flew over the fort. Under enemy fire they dropped their loads precisely. This gallant effort and successful mission enabled the troops on the ground to continue to attack, and by nightfall they were well established on the west side of the fort.

That same day, C Company, having turned over its sector in Basse-Ham to other 1st Battalion elements, joined the other companies and moved to the northwestern sector of the fort.

The day's fighting had achieved slow but steady progress. The tired Americans, however, were now fighting a German force that continued to fight even more stubbornly than the day before. A German counterattack of 50 men late in the evening, which had temporarily cut off one of A Company's platoons, was met by a determined C Company assault and thrown back with the loss of 28 Germans killed.

Still the enemy persisted and the weather continued to take the side of the fort's defenders. German fire on the crossing sites and roads below the fort also continued to hamper resupply and evacuation of wounded; essential commodities were in short supply. However, by the end of the second day the 1st Battalion had blown open and secured lodgment in two tunnel entrances. As the other battalions of the 358th Infantry Regiment bypassed the fort and advanced eastward, however, it began to look like trying to capture the fort was not worth the effort.

On the third day, November 11, with most of the fort now in the battalion's hands, the three companies prepared to make a final attack at noon. Shortly before the attack began, the 90th Division sent a message to headquarters of the 358th Infantry that its 1st Battalion should be withdrawn from the fortress complex.

The regiment then sent the withdrawal message to the fort, where it was received by Lieutenants Neil and Ross of A Company who were standing in a recently captured tunnel and assembling a group of volunteers to make an assault on the fort's main entrance. Neil and Ross conferred and quickly agreed they were not going to heed it. They might well have done so because the 2nd Platoon was down to eight effective soldiers and the 3rd Platoon had only 13 men counting the slightly wounded. They knew that their force was not large enough to tackle the guts of the fort.

Neil, however, recalls that with Ross's agreement he composed and scribbled a note to battalion headquarters that read, "This Fort Is Ours—until my platoon is down to two men. Then and only then will we retire. I could not ask my men to leave now. They are more determined than I to finish the job." The final attack went forward.

Individual acts of bravery were common that day. B Company's Pfc. Warren D. Shanafelter, for example, volunteered to silence a troublesome concrete pillbox. While enemy fire kept his fellow soldiers down, he got to his feet with a satchel charge, calmly rushed the structure, and set off the explosive. He rushed inside, killing or wounding the occupants.

American help then came from an unexpected quarter as the Germans sought to reinforce their beleaguered garrison. The 3rd Battalion, 358th Infantry Regiment had managed a painful move under enemy artillery fire around and beyond the north side of the fort.

The battalion had established a position on the Bois d'Elzange Ridge, whereupon K Company intercepted a three-man German patrol making its way toward the fort along a back road. Swift interrogation of the captured enemy soldiers revealed that a relief column of some 150 men was en route to the fort along the same road. First Lieutenant Frank E. Gatewood, the K Company commander, quickly deployed his five light machine guns to set up an ambush. At a range of only 50 yards, the Americans opened fire on the stunned foe, over half of whom were quickly killed. The remainder fled.

In the meantime, G Company of the 2nd Battalion had come to the fight. It entered the battle attacking the fort from the east, encircling the enemy garrison. The company proceeded to reduce two pillboxes and forced entry into the fort, closing off the eastern tunnel exits.

At 4 PM, as G Company and A Company squeezed the Germans between them, the enemy attempted a mass breakout through one of the shelter points on the northeast side of the fort. Unfortunately for them, the German soldiers ran right into the

Continued on page 98

THE LAST FLIGHT *of the* LONESOME POL

Every February 11, Rouxmesnil-Bouteilles, a tiny town in Upper Normandy situated north of the Seine River a short distance inland from the coastal city of Dieppe and some two hours from the D-Day invasion beaches, pays homage to 10 American airmen who crashed into the town center, narrowly missing the local children assembled in their schoolhouse just a few yards away.

It was 9:54 AM, Friday, February 11, 1944.

A young civilian couple, Jeanine and Raymond Leconte, were in the kitchen of their home on the Rue des Jardiniers when the Consolidated B-24 bomber smashed through their ceiling, destroying the house and killing them instantly. No crewmember survived.

As did the Kaiser in World War I, German Chancellor Adolf Hitler had reached the point in World War II when he decided to tread on any residual qualms about playing

In February 1944, an American B-24 on a mission to bomb a V-1 launching site crashed into a small French town. It's a crash that reverberates today.

ECAT

BY DIANE CONDON-BOUTIER

dirty and deployed acts of terrorism on the English civilian population. In both cases the objective was to kill women and children in hopes of demoralizing the British troops on the front lines and to wreak such havoc at home in England that civilians would rise up against their government and demand an immediate end to the conflict via unconditional surrender.

In World War I, the vehicle of this policy was the Zeppelin. Attacks by the enormous but lethargic airship, nicknamed "the baby killer" by the British, terrorized the populations of the eastern coast of England and eventually London. These attacks were to be copied almost exactly by the Nazis in the latter stages of World War II, this time using unmanned missiles nicknamed "doodlebugs" but more specifically, the V-1 and, later, the V-2 rocket.

The early versions of the "V" series of airborne missiles were designed starting as early as 1936 in the now infamous laboratories at Peenemunde. The novelty of these engines of destruction was the lack of risk, other than monetary, to the Third Reich. They were unmanned. No brilliant piloting was necessary, and thus no brilliant pilots could be lost.

If a V-1 were shot down by Allied pilots, it would represent an economic loss, but in the meantime it might keep the Allies frantically flying around, chasing unmanned missiles, occupying their pilots while the fast diminishing number of Luftwaffe pilots could be put to better use elsewhere.

Death at 25,000 feet. A U.S. Army Air Forces B-24 Liberator bomber breaks in half and plunges to its doom high above enemy-controlled territory. The Allies did much to degrade Nazi Germany from the air, but at a heavy cost. The U.S. Eighth Air Force suffered 47,000 casualties, including more than 26,000 deaths.

Of course, Hitler's ultimate goal was not to send up targets for the Allies, but to target their cities, preferably London, where damage could be spectacular, all at no cost of human life—no German human life, that is. In short, the plan was quite brilliant, if indeed sordid and amoral.

Taking all of these factors into consideration, the obvious Allied response to the arrival on the scene of the V-1 was to nip the plan in the bud. To that end, squadrons of bombers took off from bases in the United Kingdom regularly searching out launch sites under construction, scattered throughout the northern zones of France primarily in Upper Normandy and the Pas de Calais regions. In 1944 there were an estimated 400 V-1 launch sites located in these areas, some of which were completed and happily firing up to 100 missiles per

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day. The remainder were still under construction.

The difficulty in bombing these sites lay in their configuration. A V-1 launched close to the ground—almost horizontal to the ground—with a low-angled trajectory, making it possible to camouflage the launch site in a thick forest or even in farm buildings. In wooded areas the sites were assembled under thick tree cover, many in the huge national forests abounding in northern France. All that was needed was a space along the perimeter of the trees, breaking onto farm fields for example, and the construction site would be virtually invisible from the sky.

Such was the difficulty in detecting these sites that the Allies resorted to tried and true methods such as the carrier pigeon. At the museum at Utah Beach, visitors can see a tiny barrel attached to a parachute that contained a carrier pigeon sporting a small map of the area captioned with the very historic and easily recognizable motto for the Order of the Garter: "Honi Soit Qui Mal Y Pense."

Both: National Archives

A local who came upon such a pigeon could simply mark the location of a V-1 launch site with an "X," release the pigeon, and hope it wouldn't fall victim to the slingshot of a local boy hunting his family's supper. "Pigeon aux petit pois" was considered a rare delicacy, as keeping pigeons had been outlawed at the beginning of the war. If the pigeon made it back home to England, his heroic journey would help the Allies pinpoint the coordinates of one of the launch sites and hopefully bomb it to smithereens.

ABOVE: Officers of the 93rd Bombardment Group, based at RAF Hardwick, study target maps prior to a mission. The group lost 100 aircraft and nearly 1,000 men during the war. LEFT: Colonel Edward J. Timberlake, commander of the 93rd, briefs combat crews before a mission. OPPOSITE: Eighth Air Force chaplain James Burris (right) leads the crew of the *Lonesome Polecat* in prayer before they take off on a mission.

It was on one such bombing raid, on February 11, 1944, targeting the launch site at Siracourt in the Pas de Calais region, that the 330th Bomb Squadron, 93rd Bombardment Group lost one of its planes. The *Lonesome Polecat* took off from RAF Station 104 in Hardwick, Norfolk, England, early that day, heading for the northern reaches of France. The squadron's mission was to demolish the V-1 ramp still under construction.

It must be said that these raids were rarely accurate, largely for the reasons mentioned. There was a significant amount of collateral loss of life among the French civilian population and also among the Russian and Polish prisoners of war who were in essence slave labor, pouring the concrete and working on the sites under the guard of a handful of heavily armed Germans. A huge amount of damage was inflicted on local farms and livestock as well. The collateral damage didn't disturb the Nazis in the least.

Damage caused to the building sites did create some degree of frustration for the officers overseeing the construction, but they simply moved to a nearby site and started over. By 1944, things were going badly for the Germans, and any progress toward a capitulation by Great Britain couldn't carry a price tag deemed too high. If they could force the British to pull out of the alliance, the Americans would no longer have a European base. This would complicate things to such an extent that victory for the Third Reich would not only be possible, but once again probable.

Lonesome Polecat, the ill-fated B-24, number 42-63978E, was named for an Indian character in Al Capp's *Li'l Abner* comic strip. The plane's nose had been jauntily decorated with a painting of an American Indian. The name was apparently very popular as a later B-24 was christened *Lonesome Polecat Jr.* and a B-17 was dubbed *Lonesome Polecat II*.

It is quite possible that this particular *Lonesome Polecat* was manufactured by the Ford Motor Company in its massive Willow Run, Michigan, plant. It would appear that Henry Ford had revised his initial admiration of Adolf Hitler's leadership qualities because, by 1944, Willow Run was churning out an astounding 14 airplanes per working day; a total of 2,728 B-24Ds would be manufactured there.

Willow Run also produced the lion's share of the Waco CG4A gliders used by the Americans of the 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions in the D-Day landings in the Cotentin Peninsula around Sainte-Mère-Église. The B-24 became the flying workhorse of the American Army Air Forces, with an amazing 16,188 aircraft produced by various manufacturers—over 400 of which were awaiting modifications at the end of the war and ended in the scrap heap.

The crew of the *Lonesome Polecat* numbered 10, including a pilot, co-pilot, navigator, bombardier, radio operator, left and right waist gunners, top and belly turret gunners, tail gunner, and a mechanical engineer. Although 11 positions are listed, at times crewmen performed more than one function. This group of men hailing from the four corners of the United States spent ample time together, bonding into a cohesive unit in the cramped confines of their workplace. They learned to speak to each other under duress using the odd language of the initiated, the lingo of a team of flying heroes, incomprehensible to their grounded colleagues.

So who were these men?

They were 10 individuals hailing from areas of the United States as diverse as their civilian jobs.

Prior to joining the U.S. Army Air Forces, the plane's pilot, 28-year-old Captain Omar A. Turner, service number O-669815, was a general office clerk from Fulton, Georgia. His two years of college brought him into the Army as a private, yet 23 months later he was at the stick of the *Lonesome Polecat* and had been for some time. A bachelor born in 1916, he was just 28 years old when his plane was shot out of the sky over Rouxmesnil-Bouteilles in Normandy.

The co-pilot of the *Lonesome Polecat* was 1st Lt. Hubert R. Tardif, service number O-731694, of Denver, Colorado. He enlisted in May 1942 as a private. He had two years of college and, at the age of 25, his profession as stated on his enlistment records was that of an actor. Few professions incite as much curiosity as this one. How an actor ended up co-piloting a B-24 stretches the limits of imagination, but his personal story went with him to his grave.

Author

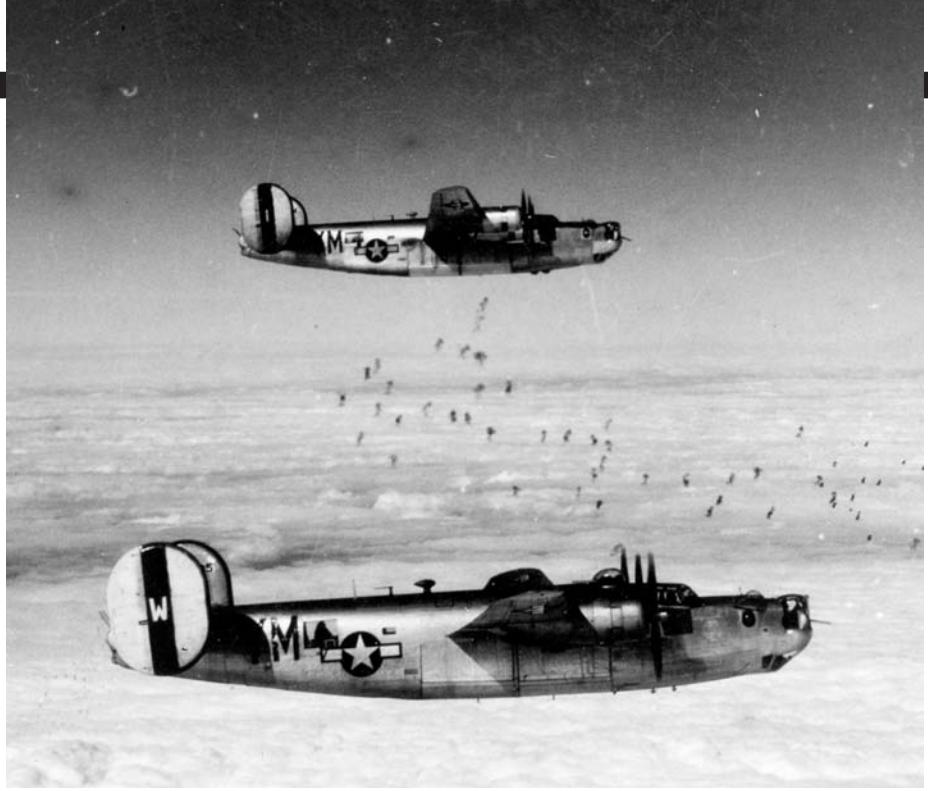
Bombardier 2nd Lt. Theodore H. Olson, service number 17062760, was born in Minnesota. In 1944 he was 24 years old and had spent just two years in the Army, having been drafted in February 1942. A resident of Ramsey, Minnesota, his job was something vague in the category of packing, filing, labeling, marking, bottling, and related occupations. Did he work in a brewery? Perhaps.

Olson's position on board the *Lonesome Polecat* was to operate the two bomb bays located in the center of the aircraft and drop their contents over enemy territory. Theodore—surely he had a nickname, such as Ted—belonged to Component Six of the U.S. Army, which indicates that he was possibly in the National Guard prior to being drafted. He, too, was single with no dependents.

The ship's navigator was 2nd Lt. Wilfred J. Koehn, service number O-795263. Born in Illinois in 1919, he had two years of college and was working in Cook County as a shipping and receiving clerk when, in January 1942, he enlisted in Chicago and went directly into the Army Air Forces. A bachelor like most of his fellow crewmembers, he was 25 years old when he calculated the coordinates for the sweeping arc toward the English Channel and home, which brought the B-24 into range of the German flak coming from the ridge above Rouxmesnil-Bouteilles.

One of the crewmen, the radioman and left waist gunner, was Staff Sergeant Robert E. Hagey, service number 15103517. Records show that he lived at 738 Cottage Grove Avenue, South Bend, Indiana.

Information obtained from Bob Schreiner, Hagey's nephew, includes the last three heartbreaking letters sent home from Robert Hagey in England. He tells his mother Matilda about being off in a "rest home" with his fellow aviators (likely a recreational leave) and how nice it was to relax. He consoles his mother on the very recent loss of her husband Alvin, his father, and hopes that she knows that Dad wouldn't have wished to linger long being ill. Bob suggests that mom use his own "nest egg" if she needs anything.



Flying in the sun above heavy cloud cover, two B-24s of the 93rd Bomb Group (identified by a yellow twin tail and black stripe) fly through bursts of flak over Germany.

In his very last letter, written on February 4 from his base in England, Bob writes that although he's close to reaching his quota of 25 missions bad news has just arrived on base, pushing back hopes of getting home as soon as previously planned. Bob writes to his mother with the assurance that everything is going to be fine, although he expects those last four missions to be tough, "The longest and hardest of all, from a mental standpoint."

Mrs. Hagey received a War Department telegram sent on February 26, informing her that Bob was missing in action. It was not until July 16, 1944, that his mother received the confirmation telegram that Bob had indeed perished over France—an awful wait that resulted in the tear stains on Bob's last letter dated February 4, just a week before the crash.

Staff Sergeant Willis D. King, service number 14005640, was the ball-turret gunner. He was born in Florida and at the time of his enlistment was living in Leon County, yet he enlisted in Montgomery, Alabama. Did he, while traveling, enlist on a whim? Probably not, as he had originally enlisted to participate in the Philippine Department in the regular Army in August 1940.

Of all 10 crew members, Willis had the longest Army experience as he had volunteered 16 months before America's official entry into the war. He was single, 22 years old with three years of high school behind him, and had been working as an office clerk/messenger boy before enlisting. Immediately he was assigned to the Air Forces, yet how did he end up at Hardwick instead of the requested Philippine Department? We do know that Willis King was the ball-turret gunner, which had to be one of the most terrifying positions in a World War II bomber.

The radio operator, Technical Sergeant Mitchell W. Powell, service number 38181478, joined the Army in August 1942 at the age of 25. He left behind a wife and extended family. Mitchell's nephew, Otto McCurdy, remembers his uncle well. Otto explains that Uncle Mitchell was a soft-spoken young man who loved to play ball with him and his brother. Otto remembers the proud day he was ring bearer at Mitchell and Pearl's wedding. In the eyes of his young nephews, Mitchell was a larger than life hero—flying planes and participating in dangerous missions to save the world from the Nazis.

Otto also remembers that Mitchell was the baritone in a gospel music quartet that included other members of the family; Aunt Pearl played the piano for the group. Mitchell was listed as a farmhand in Gotebo, Oklahoma, with no further education than grammar school. Yet, on February 11, 1944, less than two years after enlisting, he had achieved the rank of technical sergeant, which says something about the aptitude of this young man.

Otto McCurdy recalls one specific Sunday dinner after church at his grandparents' farm when the mailman drove seven miles out from town on his day off to deliver a telegram bearing the news of the crash. Otto was nine years old, but he doesn't remember much of the rest of that Sunday dinner, which melted into tears of heartbreak.

Counix, New York, was the hometown of Staff Sergeant Herbert J. Garrow, service number 32551821, the tail gunner on the *Lonesome Polecat*. A bachelor with just two years of high school education, Garrow worked in a machine shop until age 21, when he was drafted into the Army.

Garrow's sister-in-law, Elinor, recalled that he was "ever the gentleman," once insisting on making a long detour in order to see her safely on the bus home after accompanying her on a visit to her husband—Herbert's brother—in training camp one day in August 1942 at Fort Niagara. That "fun" day was the last one the two brothers spent together.

Training in a machine shop might prepare one to use the machine gun inside the tail of the B-24, but what discipline could prepare the human body for the cramped position Herbert adopted for hours on end, firing at enemy aircraft? One can only hope that Herbert Garrow was a small man and that he had the flexibility of a ballet dancer; it must have been miserable. Twenty-five missions later, Garrow squeezed himself into position for a final flight, which ended when the tail of the *Lonesome Polecat* broke off and careened down the side of a ridge into the heart of the village quite near the horse racing track.

The two remaining crewmembers remain somewhat of an enigma. Little information about Technical Sergeant Clifford A. Stafford, service number 37211296, is available. He is listed as the top turret gunner and as the mechanical engineer. Clifford's hometown is

given as Thayer, Kansas. Even less is known about Staff Sergeant Ruel K. Boone, service number 6923409, the right waist gunner, whose home town was Fort Hill, South Carolina.

Flying men were a breed apart from foot soldiers, and they did everything in their power to keep it that way. An undeniable prestige accompanied the risks taken on every single mission. Unlike their counterparts on the ground, air crewmen were called into action with little or no warning and with a recurrent frequency, leaving little time for kicking back and relaxing.

When they did find the time for a beer, they most often stuck together, downing their brews in the familiarity of their own company. Fate pushed fraternity to the extreme when the men of the *Lonesome Polecat* died together at 9:54 AM on a Friday morning in February.

The men of the *Lonesome Polecat* in particular had history as a group. They had been among those singled out to support the Allied invasion of Sicily in the summer of 1943. They also participated in the successful low-altitude raid on the Romanian oil refinery at Ploesti, helping to win a Distinguished Unit Citation awarded to the 93rd. In September 1943, they returned to Italy to support Operation Avalanche, the invasion at Salerno.

Upon their return to Hardwick they were assigned regular raids on factories, oil refineries, and other strategic targets in occupied France, Belgium, and the Netherlands and in Germany. In all, some 25 missions were completed by the 10 airmen making up the crew of the *Lonesome Polecat.*

When the squadron flew above Rouxmesnil-Bouteilles, they were flying above thick cloud cover: 80 percent at just 3,000 feet. The rest of the squadron never saw the town beneath them. They didn't see the German 88s until their shells burst in ugly black puffs above, below, and around them. Nor did they see the *Lonesome Polecat* crash to the ground.

The report by one of the other pilots in the squadron states that the *Lonesome Polecat* took a direct hit from flak in the area of the right lateral porthole. The tail separated from the body of the plane while the rest plummeted to the ground. No parachutes were seen.

Both: National Archives

The *Lonesome Polecat*'s target: the V-1 rocket depot and launching site at Siracourt, France, photographed in July 1944 after more than 25 heavy bombing missions by the Eighth Air Force and RAF; the site never went operational.

What other members of the squadron did see was more horrific than one can imagine today. They saw *Lonesome Polecat* take a hit, break in two, and the body of the right waist gunner, Staff Sergeant Ruel K. Boone, violently exit the aircraft and hurtle into the fuselage of one of the other planes below and behind.

The German gunners manning the 88s didn't see the B-24s, but they could hear them coming. They fired on the squadron, targeting different altitudes to increase the chances of hitting one of them. The fact that they actually hit a B-24 was a stroke of sheer luck.

A thunderous explosion was heard in the heart of the village of Rouxmesnil-Bouteilles, an explosion louder and more terrifying than any other noise anyone there had ever heard. When they were done firing at the unseen airplanes above them, the German gunners went down into the village to see exactly what had happened. A mass of unrecognizable debris greeted them—bricks, plaster, bits of furniture, a piece of an airplane, an engine, and a wheel. Civilians were picking through the charred ruins of what had once been a house, and the Germans pitched in to help.

The Germans dismantled the crushed home of Jeanine and Raymond Leconte, located near the factory workers' gardening plots. Nearby they found the body of Staff Sergeant Boone. The Germans buried him along with his nine comrades in the municipal cemetery, where they remained until the end of the war. They also buried the young couple near the Americans.

The Germans and the townspeople marveled at how close the falling airplane had come to hitting the school and the children in it. Luck had intervened again—bad luck for some and good luck for others.

Most of the *Lonesome Polecat* crewmembers were reburied after the war at the American Military Cemetery at Colleville-sur-Mer on the bluff above Omaha Beach. Captain Omar A. Turner's final resting place is there, in Section D, Row 18, Plot 30. Co-pilot and aspiring actor Hubert Tardif was buried in the same cemetery in Section A, Row 17, Plot 32.

Radio operator Technical Sergeant Mitchell W. Powell, along with the other crewmembers, earned a Distinguished Flying Cross on the Ploesti mission and is buried in Section A, Row 4, Plot 23 of the American Military Cemetery at Colleville-sur-Mer. He was posthumously awarded the Air Medal with three oak leaf clusters and a Purple Heart, as were most of the rest of the crew.

Ball-turret gunner Staff Sergeant Willis D. King is buried in Section B, Row 23, Plot 13 at the American Military Cemetery in Colleville-sur-Mer. He rests not far from Technical Sergeant Clifford A. Stafford—Section B, Row 19, Plot 5. Staff Sergeant Ruel K. Boone, who was ejected from the

Author

Lonesome Polecat, is in the same cemetery, in Section D, Row 20, Plot 32.

Bombardier 2nd Lt. Ted Olson's remains were sent home to Minnesota to rest eternally at Fort Snelling National Cemetery in Minneapolis-St. Paul. Likewise, navigator 2nd Lt. Koehn's remains were returned to the United States to be interred at Rock Island National Cemetery, Illinois. Staff Sergeant Robert E. Hagey, the left waist gunner, was buried in South Bend, Indiana. Tail gunner Staff Sergeant Herbert J. Garrow's remains were buried at a cemetery in upper New York State.

It is stories such as these that are the small tiles that make up in the larger mosaic of World War II. The stories of the individuals resting beneath the pristine white marble crosses remain largely untold, especially in cases where an entire crew fell together with no survivor to tell the real story of who they were, what they talked about, and to describe the group dynamic of the men who manned the *Lonesome Polecat*.

Rouxmesnil-Bouteilles

ABOVE: Each February 11, residents and officials from Rouxmesnil-Bouteilles honor the crew of the *Lonesome Polecat* that crashed into their town with a parade and wreath-laying ceremony at the memorial. LEFT: The grave of co-pilot 1st Lt. Hubert R. Tardif in the American Military Cemetery at Colleville-sur-Mer, Normandy.

However, despite the lack of these details, the people of the village of Rouxmesnil-Bouteilles gather every year on February 11, when invariably the weather is grim. They assemble at the town hall, the elected officials wearing their tri-colored sashes, former military men squeezed into uniforms pulled out of closets for the occasion, the elderly who remember the day they were in class and heard a terrific crash, and the children who attend the very same school today.

This makes up quite a lengthy procession with traffic being halted on the main street. They solemnly cross the road and walk the 200 yards to the crash site on the Rue des Jardiniers, now decorated with a granite monument. The names of the 10 American airmen are inscribed on the monument along with the names of the two civilian casualties. They are among the more than 30,000 U.S. Army Air Forces airmen who perished or went missing in the European and Mediterranean Theaters during the campaign to defeat Nazi Germany.

The mayor stands beneath the two flagpoles, one flying the French flag and the other the American flag. He gives a nice speech indeed, sincerely thanking the Americans who came from so far away to defend his right to be free. He also thanks the Americans of today, who have lost their uncles, husbands, brothers, cousins, and grandfathers for the sacrifice made every day, for the loss of all the Christmas dinners, birthdays, weddings, and family events they can't share with the men who stayed behind in France, and in all of Europe.

The French, the people of Normandy in particular, do not allow themselves to forget that the price of their peace was paid for largely by men they know so little about, and who knew nothing of them.

The people of Rouxmesnil-Bouteilles hope that when they try to sing "The Star Spangled Banner" each February 11 that the people of the United States of America can find it in their hearts to forgive the somewhat garbled version heard coming from the crowd gathered near the crash site of the *Lonesome Polecat*. □

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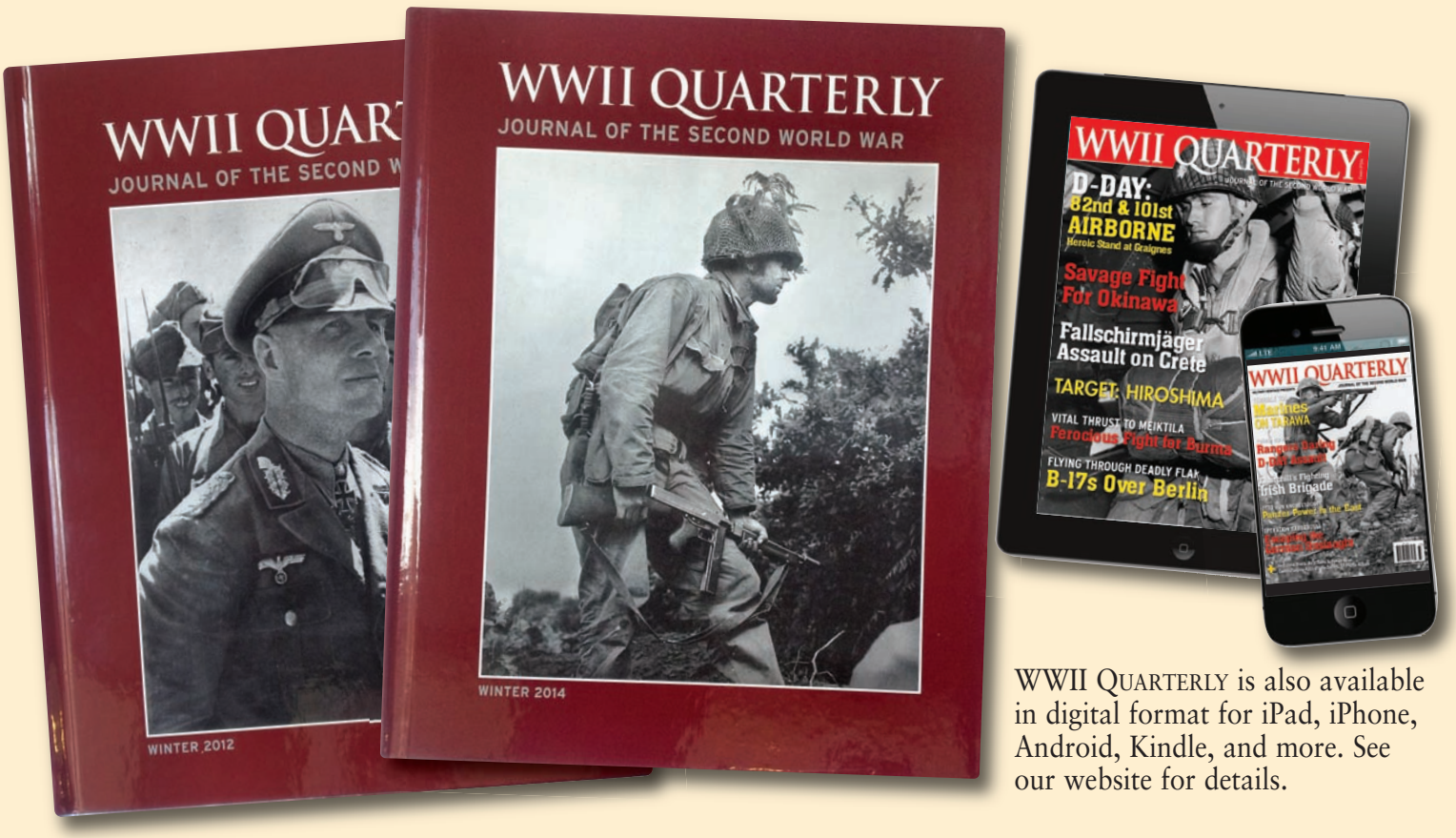

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Lubbock, Texas—once home to the U.S. Army's largest glider pilot school—now hosts the Silent Wings Museum.

ABOV:E A mannequin demonstrates how the hinged nose of a CG-4A could be opened to allow for large cargo to be loaded and unloaded. BELOW: World War II uniforms on display along with a Laister-Kauffman TG-4 training glider and nose section of a British Horsa glider in the background. LEFT: The Silent Wings Glider Museum is located in the former main terminal building of the Lubbock Municipal Airport and site of the former South Plains Army Airfield.

DURING WORLD WAR II, the use of airborne forces to "vertically envelop" the enemy went from an untested theory to a major part of offensive tactics, first for Germany and then the Allies. The huge U.S. and British operations at Normandy, into Southern France, Holland, and finally across the Rhine into Germany relied heavily on airborne elements.

For these operations to succeed, the paratroops on the ground needed instant support in the form of reinforcements and resupply, otherwise they could not have held their ground. Thus was born the combat/cargo glider.

In the United States, these huge "flying-boxes-with-wings" were piloted by a small corps of about 6,000 specially trained volunteers. They flew their unarmed and unarmored CG-4A gliders on one-way missions behind enemy lines in support of Allied airborne divisions, such as the 82nd, 101st, and 17th Divisions. The pilots then became infantrymen, performing "ground-pounder" tasks until they were released to make their way back to their home airfields for additional missions.

Approximately 80 percent of these forgotten flyers trained at South Plains Army Airfield (SPAAF) in Lubbock, Texas—located approximately 330 miles west of Dallas—going through their advanced training and receiving their "G" Wings at SPAAF. Located on municipal airport property leased by the Army from the city, SPAAF was a vital link in the training process for glider pilots.

After the war, SPAAF was closed and the facility returned to the City of Lubbock. A new, modern air terminal was built during the 1950s on the western edge of the old base while the cantonment portion of the base steadily disappeared.

SPAAF and the legacy of the glider pilots both seemed to be fading from history when, in the mid-1980s, a group of veteran pilots decided to launch their own museum in Terrell, Texas, east of Dallas. In the late 1990s, the aging pilots were determined to find a new home, with new ownership, for the museum. In 2002, the former Lubbock civilian airport terminal, which was standing virtually empty after a new terminal was built at Lubbock's Preston Smith International Airport in 1975, became the new home of the Silent Wings Museum.

The old terminal building was completely refurbished and expanded to include a soaring, glass-walled Hangar Gallery. Outside the museum's entryway, a vintage World War II C-47 stands guard, offering a preview of the exhibits inside.

The 40,000-square-foot museum houses one of the few fully restored CG-4A gliders in the world. The Hangar Gallery also includes an Aeronca L-3, a TG-4 training glider, a British Horsa cockpit section, and other glider-related exhibits. A separate space, the Combat Gallery, houses examples of the cargo carried by the gliders, including a small bulldozer, a Jeep, 75mm howitzer, quarter-ton trailer, and even heavy machine-gun and mortar teams. A

TOP: A C-47 "Skytrain" transport plane of the type used to tow gliders in WWII stands outside the museum in Lubbock, Texas. ABOVE: Interior of the spacious main hall of the Silent Wings Museum with its centerpiece—a restored Waco CG-4A glider—on display. BOTTOM: The interior of a barracks at the former South Plains Army Air Field has been recreated at the museum.

theater provides the visitor with a 15-minute film highlighting the glider program. Interactive kiosks provide the patron with audio-visual interviews with pilots, while other kiosks feature film footage from the war. A research library is also housed at the museum.

The Silent Wings Museum is the only museum in the United States—and probably the world—dedicated solely to the interpretation and memory of the seemingly forgotten World War II glider program.

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Manstein

Continued from page 77

out at present."

Frustrated, Manstein felt the last chance to rescue Sixth Army slipping away but could wait no longer; he had to act to save his army group, not to mention Army Group A in the Caucasus. He called General Hollidt and told him to send the 11th Panzer Division west to hold the airfield at Tatsinskaya, then called Hoth and told him to send one of his panzer divisions to the lower Chir front to take over for 11th Panzer there; Hoth ordered 6th Panzer to the lower Chir right away. The attack to relieve Stalingrad was over—at least temporarily. Manstein also ordered Hoth to maintain the LVII Panzer Corps' bridgehead over the northern Aksay in order to resume the relief attack as soon as possible, but whether it could be revived remained to be seen.

Manstein then contacted Paulus. Paulus told him that they would execute Thunderclap if there was no other alternative, but to do so would require 1,000 cubic meters of fuel. One thousand cubic meters was equal to 1,000 tons. That would take three to four days of relief flights at best—highly improbable.

The 11th Panzer Division recaptured the airfield at Tatsinskaya on the 29th, and the 6th Panzer Division maintained Provisional Army Hollidt's hold on the lower Chir. But in three days the LVII Panzer Corps was pushed back to its starting line at Kotelnikovo and then, by the end of the month, all the way back to the Little Kuberle River at Zimovniki. Operations to relieve Stalingrad were over. Operations to save the army group were just beginning.

In the end, both Manstein and Paulus refused to go against Hitler's wishes by evacuating Stalingrad, and both men used the fuel situation as an excuse not to act. Perhaps, if they had had any notion at all that in 10 years only some two percent of the enlisted men that went into captivity at Stalingrad would be alive to return to Germany, they might have acted differently. □

Koenigsmacker

Continued from page 95

attacking G Company, which quickly rounded up the survivors.

The German commander had had enough. It was time for him to bow to the inevitable and surrender the fort's garrison. He sought out the commander of G Company and presented his pistol to him. The two officers carrying the white flag of surrender then entered a gallery, passing dead and wounded German soldiers. They made their way toward the other side of the fort, where A Company was still fighting and blowing up doors and gun apertures.

At one entrance an explosion knocked the two officers to the ground, and the company commander reputedly grasped the white flag, struggled to the entrance, stuck the flag out so the A Company men could see it, and called out to cease firing as the fort was theirs.

The cost of the fight to the 358th's 1st Battalion was high; 111 American soldiers had been killed, wounded, or had gone missing. This did not count the many casualties at the crossing sites of the Moselle among those soldiers trying to reinforce and resupply the men at the fort. On the other hand, although official accounts differ, as many as 372 German soldiers were captured and many more—perhaps as many as 128—of the enemy were killed.

Still, the Germans did not give up easily. Following orders for a counterattack, on the night of November 11-12, Generalleutnant Paul Schurmann's 25th Panzergrenadier Division, which had been nearly destroyed in fighting on the Eastern Front and had been recently reconstituted at the Baumholder training area, supported by 10 tanks and assault guns, attempted to take back the fort, striking at the 359th's positions at the village of Kerling in an attempt to reach Petite-Hettange and the bridge site at Malling.

As the U.S. Army's official history of the Metz campaign noted, "The first clash came when the enemy hit G Company (1st Lt. A.L. Budd) and two platoons of the 2nd Battalion heavy weapons company (Captain S.E. McCann) deployed in the woods south of the road. A part of the German column turned aside to deal with these forces; a part continued on toward Petite-Hettange. The mortar and machine gun crews supporting G Company especially distinguished themselves in the action which followed.

"Sgt. Forrest E. Everhart, who had taken over the machine gun platoon when the platoon commander, 1st Lt. William O'Brien, was killed, led his men with such bravery as to be awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. Private Earl Oliver stayed with his machine gun when the other guns had been knocked out, and maintained a continuous fire until he was killed by a mortar shell. When day broke, 22 enemy dead were found in front of his position—some only 15 feet away. So close had the Germans pressed the assault that a sergeant in the mortar platoon had uncoupled the bipod of his mortar and used it at point-blank range. Although G Company was cut off, the attackers could not overrun its position, and they finally were driven off when the American gunners west of the river laid down a box barrage."

Eventually, the German counterattack against the 359th petered out. Fort Koenigsmacker and the surrounding territory were firmly in American hands.

Conquering Koenigsmacker was a minor victory for the 90th Infantry Division and Third Army in the context of the division river crossing characterized by General Patton as "epic." For the soldiers and officers of the 358th Infantry Regiment, especially the regiment's 1st Battalion, it was a major episode in their distinguished World War II battle history.

The fight for the fort is enthusiastically remembered in eastern France by both the liberated French and the American veterans who fought there. The French Moselle River 1944 Society makes an effort every five years to ensure that the American sacrifices at the fortress are not forgotten, even as the World War II veterans slowly go to their just final reward. □

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