WWII QUARTERLY

Curtis 07256

www.WarfareHistoryNetwork.com

JOURNAL OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR

1ST MARINE DIVISION
Hand-to-Hand Combat on Guadalcanal

MARKET GARDEN
Airborne's Desperate Fight

CROSSING THE RHINE
Battle at Remagen

EYEWITNESS
PANZER ATTACK IN RUSSIA

Return to D-Day

SINKING THE *SCHARNHORST*,
WWII'S SMART BOMBS, AND MORE!

FALL 2014

$9.99
49
0 74470 07256 0

RETAILER DISPLAY UNTIL DEC. 29

WWII QUARTERLY ▫ FALL 2014 Volume 6, No. 1


PLAY FOR FREE
WAR THUNDER
WWW.WARTHUNDER.COM
BATTLES WITH PLAYER-CONTROLLED PLANES AND TANKS
16x16 PVP BREATHTAKING ACTION
NOW WITH GROUND FORCES!
350+ HISTORICAL PLANES AND TANKS
CHOOSE YOUR PLAY STYLE: ARCADE, REALISTIC AND SIMULATION MODES
2013 gamescom award
Gaijin entertainment
STEAM
Oculus
PC
TEEN ADOLESCENTES
T
Violence
ESRB CONTENT RATING
www.esrb.org
PS4

DRIVE A TANK

CLIMB INTO THE DRIVER'S SEAT OF HISTORY

AVAILABLE NOWHERE ELSE IN THE WORLD

M4 SHERMAN

M16 HALF-TRACK

DRIVEATANK.COM

507•931•7385

KASOTA, MN

TABLE OF CONTENTS

WWII QUARTERLY

Departments

Features

COVER: A U.S. Marine looks over the remains of a Japanese soldier killed during brutal fighting on Guadalcanal. See story page 68. Photo: National Archives

WWII Quarterly (ISSN 2151-3678) is published four times yearly by Sovereign Media, 6731 Whittier Avenue, Suite A-100, McLean, VA 22101-4554. (703) 964-0361. *WWII Quarterly,* Volume 6, Number 1

Subscription services, back issues, and information: (800) 219-1187 *or* write to *WWII Quarterly* Circulation, WWII Quarterly, P.O. Box 1644, Williamsport, PA 17703. Hardbound single copies: $19.99, plus $3 for postage. Yearly subscription in U.S.A.: $39.95; Canada and Overseas: $79.95 (U.S.). Editorial Office: Send editorial mail to *WWII Quarterly,* 6731 Whittier Avenue, Suite A-100, McLean, VA 22101-4554. *WWII Quarterly* welcomes editorial submissions but assumes no responsibility for the loss or damage of unsolicited material. Material to be returned should be accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope. We suggest that you send a self-addressed, stamped envelope for a copy of our author's guidelines. **POSTMASTER: Send address changes to WWII Quarterly, P.O. Box 1644, Williamsport, PA 17703.**

BATTLE OF THE BULGE

This was the last major German offensive of WWII and the single largest battle fought by Americans during WWII. You can recreate this Battle with our 240 piece set. Included in the set is our exclusive hand painted street front. The German army is led by 6 tanks consisting of Tigers, Panthers and Panzer IV tanks plus two hanomags and one 88mm cannon supported by over 85 German troops.

The American army fights to hold their position with a force of 75 men supported by 4 Sherman tanks, 2 half tracks and 3 105mm cannons. To round out the set you will receiver a bridge and guard tower, stone walls, concertina wire and much more. The set also comes in a beautiful custom printed box with art work done by renowned WWII artist James Dietz. Order Classic Toy Soldiers 240 piece **"Battle of the Bulge Playset"** for **$374.95** plus **$35.00 S&H** today.

BATTLEGROUND PLAYSET

This 160 plus piece playset is the perfect set to get any toy soldier collector started into the Earopean Theater of WWII. Included in the set are over 45 Germans and 50 Allied troops including GI's, French and British. You also get 5 German tanks, 1 German 88mm cannon, 2 Sherman tanks, 1 British Churchill tank, 1 US half track, and 1 US 105mm cannon. Additional accessories include barbed wire, heavy weapons, stone walls, trees, mortar pit, matching gun nest, and much more. This set is a tremendous value for the price.

CTS 160 piece **"Battleground Playset"** can be yours for **174.95 plus $25 S&H**. You save over $150.00!

THE BATTLE OF KURSK

In the spring of 1943 the Germans gambled all their reserves on a massive attack in Russia. If their plan succeeded, they would destroy more than 5 Russian armies. The ensuing Battle of Kursk became the largest tank battle in history and one of the decisive turning points of WWII.

You now can recreate this massive engagement with Classic Toy Soldiers 180 piece "BATTLE OF KURSK" playset.

The set includes 60 Axis troops with 3 Panzer tanks and 88mm cannon to battle over 75 Russian troops accompanied by 4 T-34 tanks and a 105mm cannon. Include is a large railroad embankment turned into a fortified position, plus stone walls, barbed wire, and lots more.

Order your 180 piece **"Battle of Kursk Set"** for **$274.95** plus **$30.00 S&H**

CTS has over 50 additional playsets and over 2,500 different items for sale. To see these and all the other products we have for sale, send $6.00 for our catalog and color brochure or visit our website at: www.classictoysoldiers.com

Hours are 9:00 am to 7:00 pm Central Standard Time

Classic Toy Soldiers, Inc.

15148 Mohawk Circle • Leawood, Kansas 66224

DAVID PAYNE, Call: 913-451-9458 • Fax: 913-451-2946 • www.classictoysoldiers.com

Contents and colors may vary from pictured but piece count will remain the same • Personal Checks will be held for 21 days to clear.

Getting Goosebumps

THIS YEAR I feel deeply honored to have been chosen by the Smithsonian Institution to lead three 70th anniversary D-Day trips to England and France (one took place in May; the other two are scheduled to take place in September and October).

I say this not to brag but to express how humbled I am to be entrusted with accompanying small groups (about 25 per trip) and sharing my knowledge of Operation Overlord with people who have a fascination about one of the pivotal battles of World War II.

While I have spent many years reading and writing about the war and about Overlord, it's easy (and wrong) for me to assume that most people are as familiar with the operation as I am. But when I explain the operation while standing on the sands of Omaha Beach, or at Pegasus Bridge or La Fière, or the cratered, clifftop battlefield at Pointe-du-Hoc, or the quaint streets of Sainte-Mère-Église, and I see the look of amazement and sudden understanding in the eyes of my group, I get all the more excited.

I tell them that all the books and films about D-Day cannot compare with actually being there—that to understand the battle, they must walk the battlefield.

In their minds' eyes, they begin to experience for the first time the operation that they have heard so much about for so long. They are actually touring Churchill's bunker and the Cabinet War Rooms beneath central London, left in virtually the exact condition they were in when the lights were turned out at war's end in 1945.

They are visiting the once super-secret facilities at Bletchley Park, where the German diplomatic and military "Enigma" codes were broken, enabling the Allies to read the enemy's mind.

They are walking on the very same decks and exploring the innards of the British cruiser HMS *Belfast,* whose guns fired some of the first shots on D-Day.

They are viewing the same huge, wall-sized map of England and France that Eisenhower and his generals and admirals viewed at Southwick House as they tracked the progress of the great flotilla that crossed the English Channel and launched The Great Crusade.

They are exploring the battered, shattered concrete casemates that held the German guns—and gunners, who must have gulped at the sight of thousands of warships bringing death straight for them.

They are touring magnificent museums filled with innumerable artifacts, large and small, that graphically demonstrate the truth of Patton's observation: "Compared to war, all other forms of human endeavor shrink to insignificance."

They are standing in small town squares that were once the place of ferocious fighting, crossing bridges that once ran red with blood, standing in fields that witnessed tremendous courage and carnage, walking on the same sands and stones that were once carpeted with dead and wounded soldiers who came to liberate a continent and a people they didn't know. They are walking on hallowed ground.

They are walking the rows after rows of well-tended German, British, and American graves that silently speak more eloquently than any words about the tremendous toll that war exacts on the young men (and women) of nations engaged in violent conflict.

As the actor Rod Steiger said during his cameo appearance in the 1962 epic Hollywood blockbuster, *The Longest Day*, "I don't know about you, but I get goosebumps just thinking about it."

Well, no matter how many times I have visited the battlefields and the other places associated with the war, I, too, "get goosebumps just thinking about it."

And I presume everyone else does, too.

—Flint Whitlock, Editor

CORRECTION: On page 16 of the Summer 2014 issue, the ship pictured is not the *Bismarck,* but rather a King-George V-class battleship, probably the *Price of Wales.* We regret the error.

WWII Quarterly

Volume 6 ■ Number 1

CARL A. GNAM, JR.
Editorial Director, Founder

FLINT WHITLOCK
Editor
WWIIQuarterly@gmail.com

SAMANTHA DETULLEO
Art Director

CONTRIBUTORS:
Jason Abady, Jon Diamond, Kevin M. Hymel, Martin K.A. Morgan, Horst Fuchs Richardson, Robert Barr Smith, Mark D. Van Ells, Mason B. Webb, Susan Zimmerman

ADVERTISING OFFICE:

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

MARK HINTZ
Vice President & Publisher

BROOKE BLEE
Subscription Customer Services
sovereign@publishersservicesassociates.com

KEN FORNWALT
Data Processing Director

CURTIS CIRCULATION COMPANY
WORLDWIDE DISTRIBUTION

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

SUBSCRIPTION CUSTOMER SERVICE AND BUSINESS OFFICE:

2406 Reach Road
Williamsport, PA 17701

(800) 219-1187

PRINTED IN THE USA.

EXPERIENCE THE ACTION OF WORLD WAR II AFLOAT!

Aboard the Liberty Ship JOHN W BROWN

2014 CRUISES
• October 4

2015 CRUISES
• May 9 • June 13

From Baltimore on the Chesapeake Bay

Gift Certificates available
Tickets are $140 each
Group rates available

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

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

CFC Combined Federal Campaign

Find us on Facebook

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

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

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

LIBERTY SHIP JOHN W. BROWN

Operation Aphrodite: radio-controlled B-17s proved to be deadly—and ahead of their time.

WHEN IT CAME to advanced military technology in World War II, arguably no one was better at it than Nazi Germany, whose scientists Adolf Hitler keep busy trying to invent the ultimate "super weapon" capable of defeating his enemies.

For a while, it seemed that Germany might just succeed. After all, it was the Germans who had created, tested, and deployed the V-1 flying bomb, the V-2 ballistic missile, the Fritz X glide bomb, and a family of jet-powered aircraft. German tanks were, in many respects, superior to American tanks. Only in the race to build an atomic bomb were the German scientists lagging behind the United States and Great Britain.

During Operation Avalanche—the invasion of Salerno, Italy, on September 9, 1943—the Allies had their first encounter with German drones. After Allied landing craft deposited infantry on the beaches south of the city, the battleships, cruisers, and destroyers accompanying the troop transports became targets of an unexpected new weapons system: a radio-controlled glide bomb called the Fritz X.

The Fritz X (also known variously as the Ruhrstahl SD 1400 X, Kramer X-1, FX 1400, and PC 1400X) was 11 feet long, had four stubby wings, carried 705 pounds of amatol explosive in an armor-piercing warhead, and had an operational range of just over three miles. It could reach a speed of 770 mph—faster than any aircraft of the day.

Two mother ships, B-17 bombers that control the drone bomber (center), flank their experimental charge after the pilot of the drone has bailed out during an exercise held under the auspices of Operation Aphrodite. Note that the drone's wings have been painted bright yellow for better visibility from the mother ships.

All: National Archives

Early on September 13, a Dornier Do-217 K-2 bomber released a Fritz X from an altitude of 18,700 feet; gunners aboard the USS *Savannah* (CL-42), a 9,475-ton Brooklyn-class light cruiser, saw the missile and tried to shoot it down as it streaked toward them, but without success. The drone slammed into the top of a 6-inch gun turret and penetrated deep into *Savannah*'s hull before exploding and killing 197 sailors and wounding 15 more. Only through sheer luck and incredible bravery on the part of her remaining crew was the badly damaged ship able to make port in Malta.

That drone was one of several used against American warships on September 13. Others barely missed the cruiser USS *Philadelphia,* while the British light cruiser HMS *Uganda* was hit that same afternoon; two cargo ships may also have been struck. Three days later, the British battleship HMS *Warspite* was also hit by a guided bomb but remained afloat.

The United States was shocked by the technological lead the Germans had opened up in sky-borne weapons. Of course, by August 1944, the United States was already well along in its development of an atomic bomb, but in other aspects of weaponry America had slipped behind.

The United States began looking at ways to deliver a huge, conventional payload precisely on target. Even with the vaunted Norden bombsight, the boasted concept of "precision daylight bombing" rarely lived up to its billing.

What if, some officer in Washington D.C., said, we stuffed an unmanned bomber full of explosives and, by radio control or some other method, flew it directly into a target? The idea sounded good, especially since the United States (and Britain, too) was losing so many aviators on bombing runs over enemy-held territory. But how to accomplish it?

Engineers began working on the concept but discovered that it was well nigh impossible, given the technology of the time, to

STOCK UP ON SILVER

INVENTORY CLEARANCE

BUY ONE SILVER AMERICAN EAGLE, GET ONE FREE.

CALL TODAY
800.727.2099

★ U.S. SECURE COINS ★

SECURITY • TRUST • QUALITY

NO DEALERS PLEASE - EXPIRES : 11/7/2014- LIMIT: 2. OFFER ONLY VALID WHILE SUPPLIES LAST. IF WE ARE UNABLE TO FULFILL YOUR ORDER YOU WILL RECEIVE A PROMPT REFUND - ORIGINAL HARD COPY MUST BE IN HAND TO PLACE ORDER. VAULT VERIFICATION # UWWII220914M

Please read our Customer Disclosure and Transaction Agreement on our website at www.ussecurecoins.com. If for any reason you are not 100% satisfied with your Silver purchase, then return within (10) days of receipt of order for a full refund. No refunds will be issued on promotional offers without the return of any free/reduced coins included. All Bullion related coin purchases will be subject to a 20% re-stocking fee. Orders may not ship all at once due to back ordered items; all back ordered items will be refunded if not shipped within 30 days of order funding. Estimated delivery time is 3-4 weeks from receipt of good funds. Mail orders will only be accepted with a good contact phone number. U.S. Secure Coins, LP, 7945 Old Voth Road, Beaumont, TX 77708.

get a pilotless bomber to taxi and take off by remote control. The idea then evolved to a pilot and co-pilot taking off in an explosives-laden B-17 or B-24, gaining altitude, then bailing out over England while a trailing aircraft controlled the plane by radio signals, finally crashing it into the target.

On August 4, 1944, the Air Force put the concept to the test against hard-to-knock-out targets (such as V-1 and V-2 missile-launching sites, submarine pens, and deep underground installations) in what was called Operation Aphrodite.

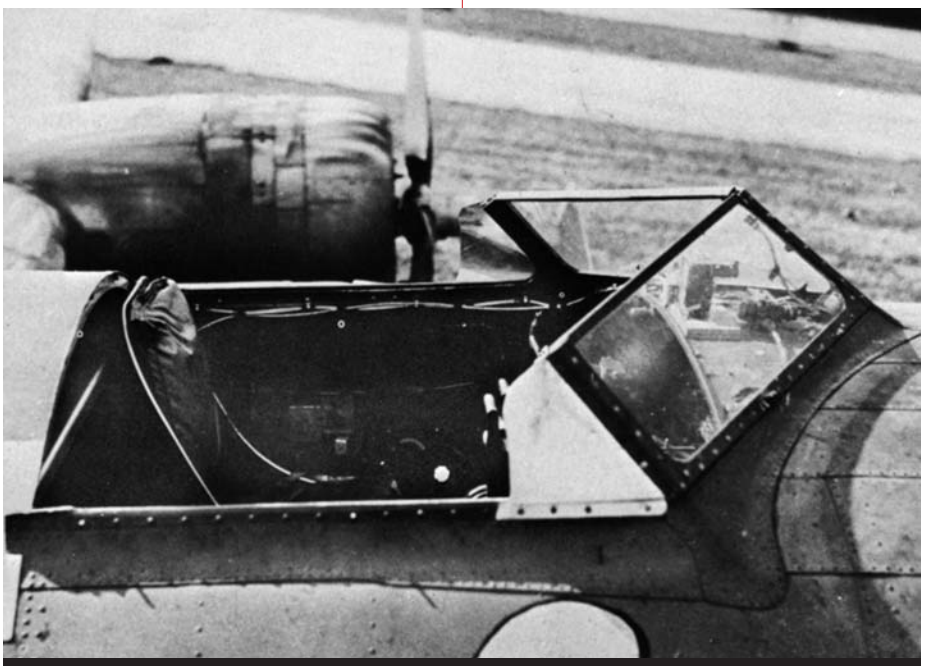
The U.S. Army Air Forces loaded four war-weary, modified B-17 bombers, redesignated BQ-7s, each with 12,000 pounds of Torpex, which was used in both aerial and underwater torpedoes and was 50 percent more powerful than TNT.

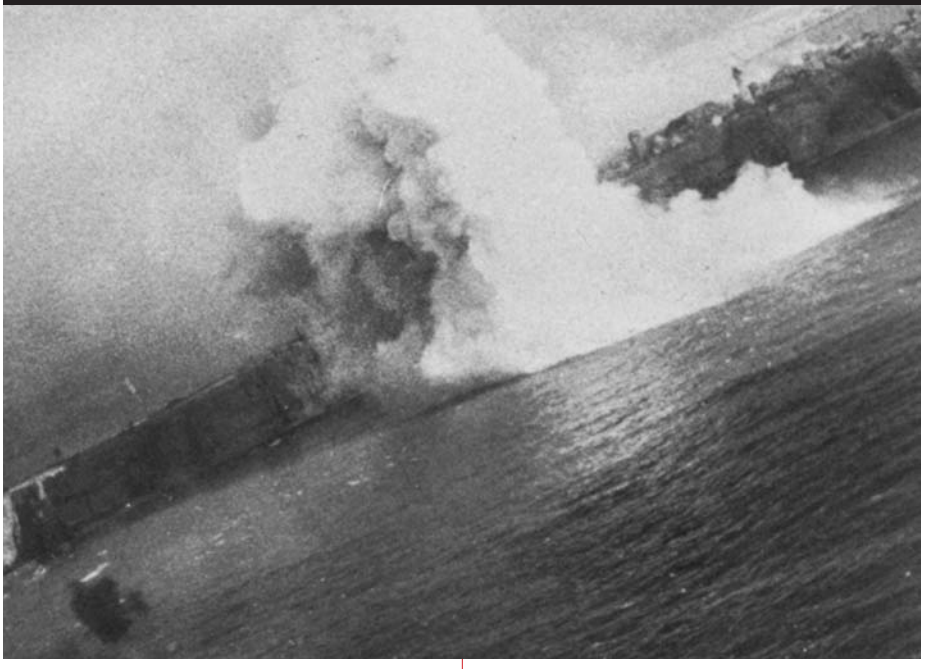
The first test run out of RAF Fersfield, home of the 38th Bomb Group located northeast of London near Norwich, did not go well. The first B-17 took to the air and the pilots bailed out safely; the plane, however, spiraled into the ground with a resultant massive explosion near the coastal village of Orford. The second plane developed problems with the radio-control system and it, too, crashed; the pilot was also killed when he bailed out too soon. A third B-17 met a similar fate.

The fourth plane fared better, although it crashed about 1,500 feet short of its target, a massive, hardened V-2 site at Watten-Eperlecques in the Pas-de-Calais region of France, doing very little damage.

Three days later, Aphrodite was repeated—with similarly disappointing results. Two planes crashed into the sea off England, while a third was shot down over Gravelines, France. A third test resulted in a B-17 crewmember dying when something went wrong during his parachute jump; the plane continued on to its destination in Heligoland but was shot down before it reached its target.

On September 3, 1944, an Aphrodite B-17 (#63945) attempted to attack the U-boat pens at the small German coastal town of Heide, Heligoland, Schleswig-Holstein, but the U.S. Navy controller accidentally crashed the plane into Düne Island. Eight days later, in one more attempt to hit the submarine pens, another radio-controlled B-17 came close but was downed by ground fire.





ABOVE: Standard Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress or Consolidated B-24 Liberator bombers were modified to participate in Operation Aphrodite. Here, the open cockpit of a modified bomber is shown with its top removed. BELOW: After antiaircraft fire has pushed it off course, an Operation Aphrodite drone crashes into the water short of its target. Operation Aphrodite was innovative and ahead of its time, but plagued with technical flaws.

As terrifying as the V-2 rockets were to those on the receiving end, the Nazis were preparing an even more diabolical weapon: the V-3 "super cannon," also called the London Gun. When completed, the underground cannon, whose barrel was 460 feet long, was supposedly capable of firing in an hour five 300-pound shells more than 100 miles. The muzzle velocity of the monster gun was estimated to be almost 5,000 feet per second. In September 1943, German engineers had begun preparing a site at Mimoyecques, France, from which the shells could be fired across the Pas de Calais and into London.

The Allies were tipped off to this new weapon by the French Resistance, which

NEW FROM THE IWM Imperial War Museum

CHURCHILL

By His Granddaughter, Celia Sandys

CELIA SANDYS

From Churchill's birth at Blenheim Palace to his tumultuous political life in Westminster, Celia Sandys is uniquely placed to examine the life of one of the most revered Britons in history. This fully illustrated book is essential reading for anyone interested in learning more about Winston Churchill and how he came to shape the world that we live in today.

Paper $25.00

ART FROM THE SECOND WORLD WAR

IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM

Throughout World War II, the British government employed a diverse group of artists to produce a rich visual record of wartime events. This volume showcases some of the most compelling works from the Second World War, which provide a fascinating, powerful insight into its impact and legacy.

Paper $20.00

BRITISH POSTERS OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR

RICHARD SLOCOMBE

"Keep calm and carry on." In 1939, Britain's Ministry of Information produced this now-ubiquitous reminder to its citizens in the event of air attacks. In the next six years, the British public would feel keenly both the physical and moral hardships of war. To boost morale and raise awareness of how citizens' efforts might help—or hinder—the wartime effort, one of the most effective forms the British government had at its disposal was the poster. This volume reproduces one hundred of those posters.

Paper $20.00

SPITFIRE FLIPBOOK

IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM

As you flip through the *Spitfire Flipbook*, you'll come face to face with a 1940s Spitfire plane flying through the air. The single seat fighter aircraft dips and dives at lightning speeds as the pages progress. Capturing the action of old-time film strips, this flipbook will transport you to Britain's wartime past.

Paper $8.95

Distributed by the University of Chicago Press • www.press.uchicago.edu

also reported that slave laborers were involved in its construction. Considered even more accurate and devastating than the V-1s and V-2s, the V-3 had to be neutralized. On July 6, 1944, RAF 617 Squadron attacked the site with several five-ton "Tall Boy" bombs and essentially put the site out of commission; no V-3 shells were ever fired.

Either the U.S. Army Air Forces was not informed that the V-3 site was hors d'combat or, for some reason, decided to hit it again; an Aphrodite mission was scheduled to hit Mimoyecques on August 12, 1944. This mission would be carried out by U.S. Navy aviator Lieutenant Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr., and his flight engineer, Lieutenant Wilford J. Willy flying a PB4Y-1—the Navy's version of a B-24J Liberator. Packed into the plane's fuselage were 21,170 pounds of Torpex.

Kennedy, of course, was the oldest son of the former U.S. ambassador to Great Britain and older brother of future American president John F. Kennedy. Willy, from New Jersey, had "pulled rank" over Ensign James Simpson, Kennedy's regular co-pilot, to fly the mission.

On that August day, Kennedy's plane took off from RAF Fersfield, accompanied by two Lockheed Ventura aircraft equipped with radio-control sets that would fly the bomber once Kennedy and Willy bailed out; two P-38 Lightning fighters approached to escort the BQ-18 across the Straits of Calais. A sixth aircraft, a de Havilland Mosquito camera plane, joined the formation; aboard the Mosquito was Air Force Colonel Elliott Roosevelt, one of President Roosevelt's sons, and the commanding officer of the 325th Photographic Reconnaissance Wing.

As they approached the coast over Halesworth, Lieutenants Kennedy and Willy transferred control of their aircraft to the Venturas. Before the two men bailed out, Willy switched on a primitive television camera in the bomber's nose that would help guide the BQ-8 to its target; Kennedy armed the 21,170 pounds of Torpex carried in 374 boxes. But then something inexplicable went terribly wrong.

At 6:20 PM, the plane suddenly disap-

Continued on page 98

CRUISE THROUGH NORMANDY


AMALEGRO


FINE DINING ON BOARD


FRENCH BALCONY STATEROOM


NORMANDY BEACHES

PARIS & NORMANDY 2015
7-NIGHT CRUISE ROUNDTRIP FROM PARIS

Save Up To $1,500 on French Balcony Staterooms

Select dates from April–October 2015

Cruise fares from ~~$3,998~~ **$3,249** per person

INCLUDES FULL DAY "D-DAY REMEMBERED" EXCURSION TO NORMANDY BEACHES

Optional 2-night land program in Paris available for $600 per person

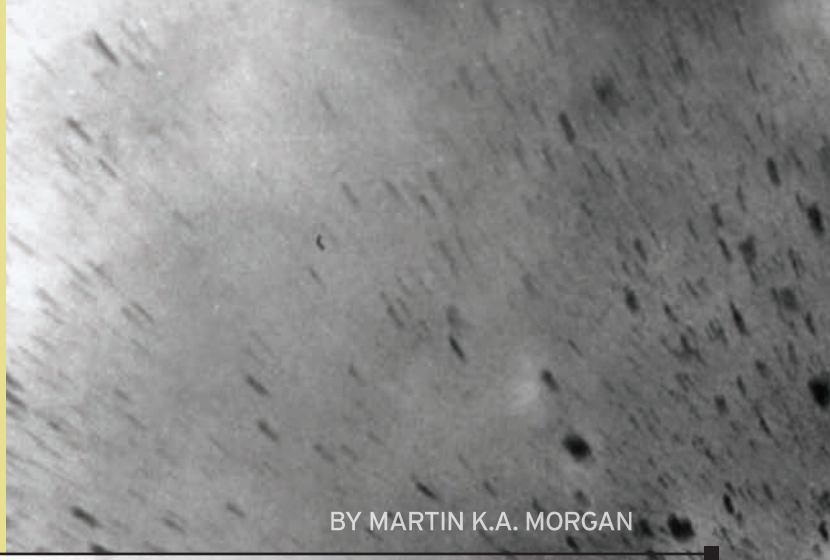
FOR RESERVATIONS, CONTACT YOUR TRAVEL AGENT OR AMAWATERWAYS
800.626.0126 | WWW.AMAWATERWAYS.COM

AMAWATERWAYS™
LEADING THE WAY IN RIVER CRUISING

Terms & Conditions: All rates and total savings are per person in USD for cruise only, based on double occupancy. Total savings applies to categories C-A (excludes categories E, D, Single and Suites); Solo Traveler discounts available, ask for details. Promotions are valid only for new bookings made by Jan 31, 2015. Offers are not combinable with any other promotions/discounts, are limited to availability, are capacity controlled and are subject to change or termination without notice. Promotional rates are valid on select sailings only. Total savings shown may include value of multiple discounts and upgrades and is an example of a savings amount only. Port charges, land programs, roundtrip airfare, and gratuities are additional. Other restrictions apply. CST#2065452-40.

BY mid-August 1944, the U.S. Army's 82nd Airborne Division had been fighting off and on for over a year. The previous July, the division had gone into combat for the first time as a part of Operation Husky, the invasion of Sicily. Two months later, in September 1943, the 82nd supported the Operation Avalanche landings at Salerno on the west coast of Italy.

With the exception of the 504th Parachute Infantry, one of the division's three organic parachute regiments, the 82nd departed Italy for England in December to prepare for the upcoming Normandy invasion. The 504th, meanwhile, remained in Italy to rest and refit and made the XI Corps' amphibious landings at Anzio on January 22, 1944.



BY MARTIN K.A. MORGAN

OPERATION MARKET GARDEN, A BOLD PLAN TO END THE WAR QUICKLY, LED INSTEAD TO AN ALLIED DISASTER IN HOLLAND, BUT THE 82ND AIRBORNE DIVISION HELD FIRM.

AUTUMN DEBACLE IN HOLLAND

Although the 504th joined the rest of the division in England in March, it had by then been temporarily replaced by the 507th Parachute Infantry Regiment. In the predawn hours of June 6, 1944, the division (minus the 504th) parachuted into the marshes and hedgerows of the Cotentin Peninsula behind a stretch of coastline that would forever be known as Utah Beach. During the next 35 days, the 82nd experienced intense combat in battles at places with names such as Ste.-Mère-Église, Hill 30, and a little stone bridge at La Fière.

By the third week of July 1944, the 82nd was back in England. Upon returning, all of the division's troopers were given short furloughs before getting down to the important business of recovering from the aftereffects of the Normandy fighting. Since the division had suffered more than 5,000 casualties, a large number of replacements had to undergo jump training so that the ranks of its combat-depleted battalions could be brought up to strength.

In August, the division's combat veterans began the process of transmitting the experience they had earned in Sicily, Italy, and France to the young replacement troopers joining the 82nd.

Also that month, the division's leadership underwent a change. Until then, the 82nd Airborne had been under the command of Maj. Gen. Matthew B. Ridgway. Following the Normandy campaign, though, Ridgway was promoted to

National Archives

American paratroopers are caught in the open as a German 88mm shell explodes, showering them with dirt, dust, and shrapnel during Operation Market Garden, September 1944. This dramatic photograph was taken by a U.S. Army Signal Corps photographer who had jumped into a foxhole moments before the shell struck.

National Archives

American paratroopers load gear and adjust their packs as they prepare to board a Douglas C-47 transport plane for the airborne invasion of Holland.

the rank of lieutenant general and given command of the XVIII Airborne Corps.

Ridgway was not the only one to receive an additional star that month. His former assistant division commander, 37-year-old James M. Gavin, was promoted to the rank of major general and designated the new commanding officer of the 82nd Airborne. For Gavin and the rebuilt strength of his division, new campaigns were on the drawing boards and would soon begin.

Several new airborne operations were proposed in August. In each case, the men of the 82nd prepared themselves for combat only to learn that rapidly advancing ground forces had overrun the objectives they were to have assaulted from the air. Following the breakout from the Normandy beachheads in July, Allied armies drove forward much more swiftly than had been anticipated. Lt. Gen. George S. Patton's Third Army quickly overran Brittany, Allied forces headed by Maj. Gen. Philippe LeClerc's French 2nd Armored Division liberated Paris on August 25, and from there the British Second Army surged through Belgium to the Dutch frontier.

Although Allied armies had penetrated deep into German-held territory with stunning speed, as September 1, 1944, approached, those armies were still being supplied off the Normandy beaches some 300 miles behind them. As lines of supply grew longer and longer, major logistical problems began to haunt the Allies.

In early September, British Field Marshal Bernard L. Montgomery approached General Dwight D. Eisenhower, the Supreme Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Force, with a plan to push the northern flank of the Allied front forward to secure the channel ports of the Low Countries. This move would, in theory, open those ports, shorten the lines of supply, and make it possible for the British XXX Corps to force the flanks of Germany's defenses, cross the Rhine River, and drive into the heart of the Reich. The plan even proposed a swift capture of Berlin by Allied armies and a swift end to the war.

Years later in his memoirs, Eisenhower remembered, "Montgomery suddenly presented the proposition that, if we would support his 21st Army Group with all supply facilities available, he could rush right on into Berlin and, he said, end the war." Although it meant slowing Patton down—if not stopping him altogether—Eisenhower approved Montgomery's plan.

Patton was naturally incensed. Ike's naval aide, Captain Harry Butcher, noted that a war correspondent told him "that officers and personnel of Patton's Third Army are burned up because they feel the British have been favored by General Ike with transport and permitted to advance while the Americans in the Third Army were stalled because of lack of gasoline. He said he had talked with junior officers in Patton's army and some had said, 'Eisenhower is the best general the British have.'"

To secure the way for General Brian Horrocks' XXX Corps' overland thrust toward the Rhine, Montgomery recommended the deployment of the various divisions of Lt. Gen. Lewis H. Brereton's First Allied Airborne Army. According to the Montgomery plan, these divisions would be dropped in broad daylight up to 64 miles behind enemy lines in Holland where they would have to quickly seize objectives essential to the success of the battle.

Code named Market, the First Allied Airborne Army's role in the operation would be to secure bridges over major waterways in the vicinity of Eindhoven, Nijmegen, and Arnhem. With those bridges securely in the hands of Allied airborne forces, the British XXX Corps—led by armor—would advance from its front lines along the Albert Canal in Belgium—first to Eindhoven, the southernmost of the three cities. From there, XXX Corps—the Garden portion of the operation—would continue north to Nijmegen and, finally, on to Arnhem where it would cross the farthest bridge over the Lower Rhine River.

Because of where they were based in England, the British 1st Airborne Division and

the Polish Independent Parachute Brigade were best positioned for the assault on Arnhem. Since Maj. Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor's 101st Airborne Division was based at a series of airfields west of London, it was assigned the southern bridges near Eindhoven. The job of securing the bridges in the center was given to Maj. Gen. "Jumpin' Jim" Gavin's 82nd Airborne.

In his 1978 book *On to Berlin,* Gavin described what his division would have to do: "The mission assigned to the 82nd Airborne Division was to seize the long bridge over the Maas (Meuse) River at Grave, to seize and hold the high ground in the vicinity of Groesbeek, to seize at least one of the four bridges over the Maas-Waal canal, and finally to seize the big bridge over the Waal (Rhine) at the city of Nijmegen."

Although Gavin necessarily focused on what was specifically required of the 82nd, two issues concerned him: the strength of the opposition and the British 1st Airborne's attack plan. To him, the plan for Market seemed more akin to a peacetime exercise than an actual war plan. Intelligence reports indicated that the 82nd Airborne would face strong enemy forces; a regiment of Waffen SS panzergrenadiers was known to be in Nijmegen, and a German armored unit was supposedly concealed in a nearby forest called the Reichswald.

It was also known that 29 heavy and 88 light antiaircraft weapons were deployed around the city. "It was assumed that the [antiaircraft] crews would be prepared to fight as infantry," Gavin remembered in *On to Berlin.* That was an assumption that the 82nd would later learn the Germans had also made.

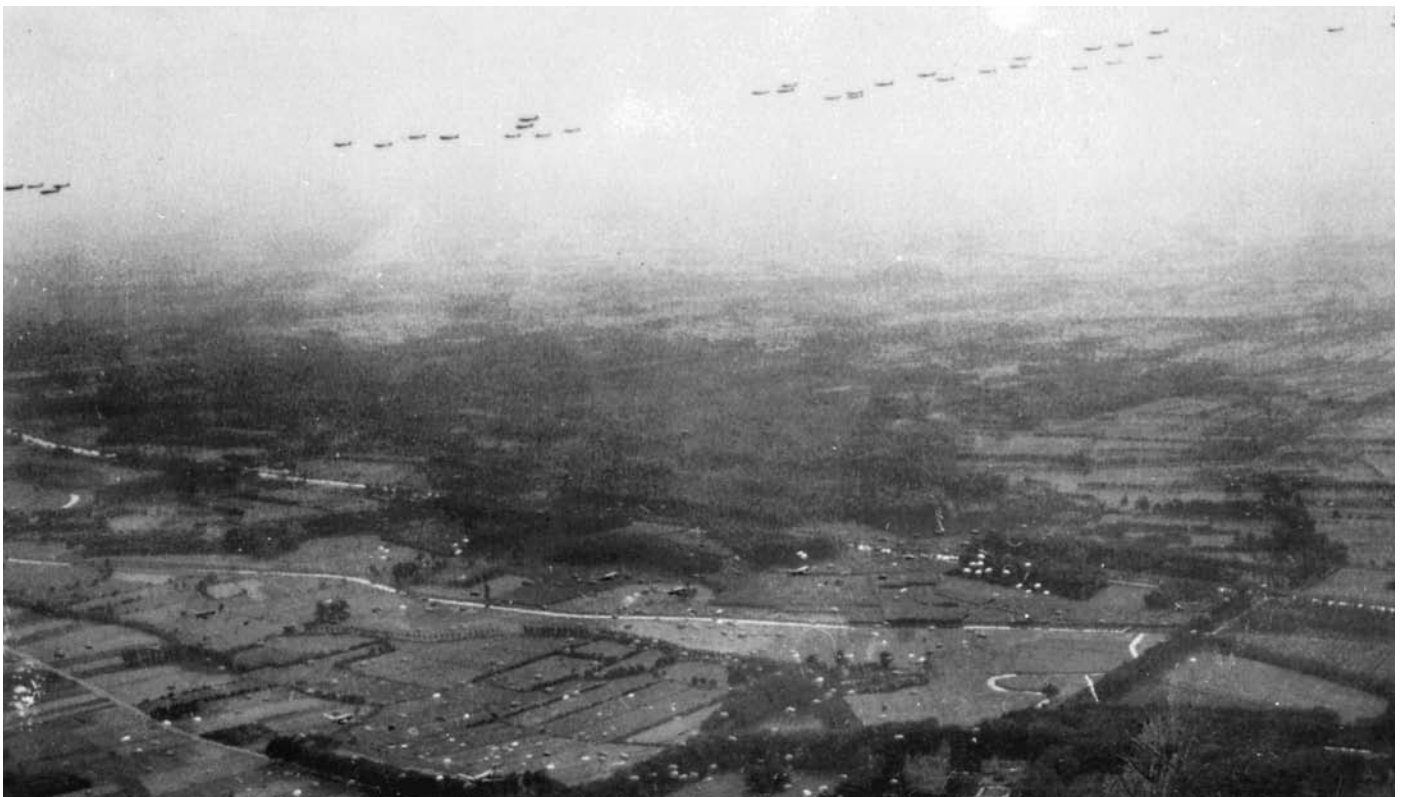
For their part, the Germans—considering the heavy losses they had suffered a few months earlier during Operation Cobra, the Allies' breakout from Normandy—were about as well prepared as they could be. In charge of the defenses in the West was Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt, whom Hitler had recalled from retirement. As many divisions, regiments, battalions, tanks, and guns as could be found were patched together and transported to Holland to dig in for an expected Allied attack.

These units and fragments of units included the Fifteenth Army, First Parachute Army, II Panzer Corps (9th and 10th SS Panzer Divisions), LXXXVI Corps, and a number of infantry divisions (such as the 84th, 85th, 89th, 176th, and 719th Infantery Divisions). Luftwaffe and Kriegsmarine (Navy) formations, antiaircraft batteries, and SS units, too, were thrown into the mix. All were badly understrength, but all were ready for one final, do-or-die battle.

On Friday, September 15, the men of the 82nd Airborne were moved to and sequestered at their respective airfields. The entire next day was spent preparing weapons, distributing ammunition, and reviewing maps and aerial reconnaissance photographs—much as they had done prior to the June jump into Normandy.

On Sunday, September 17, Market Garden began. At each of the 82nd Airborne airfields, the men were up before daylight, busily trucking equipment bundles and otherwise making final preparations for the jump. Thirty years later, Gavin described what the men carried: "Because

Parachutes begin to blossom from the aerial armada of American transport aircraft over Holland during the opening moments of Operation Market Garden on September 17, 1944.



National Archives

National Archives

An American paratrooper tumbles upon landing in a Dutch field during the airborne phase of Operation Market Garden, September 17, 1944.

of our experiences in Normandy, the troopers loaded themselves with all the ammunition and antitank mines they could carry. Having checked personal loads of all the troopers in each regiment, we decided that about 700 individuals could each carry an antitank mine apiece.

"In addition, every trooper who could get his hands on a pistol carried one as well as a rifle. So overloaded were they that one or two troopers stood beside the steps of the C-47s and helped boost the others up the steps and into the planes."

Dawn on September 17 revealed a cloudless sky and moderately warm temperatures—the weather was perfect. That morning, a total of 1,545 Douglas C-47 troop transports and 478 Waco and Horsa gliders took off from 24 airfields from Dorset to Lincolnshire. After taking off and forming up, the transport formations proceeded over the English Channel under the protection of 1,130 fighter escort aircraft. The division was carried to Holland that day by 480 C-47s from the 50th and 52nd Troop Carrier Wings of the IX Troop Carrier Command.

The aerial armada carrying and protecting Brereton's First Allied Airborne Army was so immense that it literally filled the sky. The next day, the *London Daily Express* described the spectacle: "Thousands of people on England's coast yesterday saw the great glider armada streaming out to sea toward Holland. For an hour and a half, from 11 AM to 12:30 PM, the fleet filled the skies. So great was the roar that no one on the coast could use the telephone until the planes had passed."

The 82nd Airborne's three parachute infantry regiments (PIR)—the 504th, 505th, and 508th—would be leading the initial assault of the Nijmegen element of Operation Market by jumping into three primary drop zones (DZ) designated O, T, and N. Drop Zone O, located east of the city of Grave on the east bank of the Maas River, would be the 504th's DZ.

Drop Zone T, north of the city of Groesbeek, would be the 508th's DZ, and Drop Zone N, south of Groesbeek, was where the 505th would land. One part of their mission would be to secure and defend the drop zones to make it possible for supporting parachute and glider units to make subsequent landings.

In addition to the primary drop zones, E Company, 504th PIR, would assault a special drop zone on the west bank of the Maas River west of Grave. Dropping on the west bank, it would be able to assist the other 504th rifle companies on the east bank during the assault on the Maas River Bridge.

The 82nd Airborne's Pathfinder team, led by Lieutenant G.W. Jaubert, jumped on DZ O near Overasselt at 12:47 PM. Right behind it came the 82nd's vanguard regiment that morning—Colonel William E. Ekman's 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment. Not the kind of commander to lead from the rear, General Gavin was jumping with Ekman's 505th.

Through the open door of the C-47 carrying his command group, Gavin personally observed the incredible procession of aircraft and described what he saw: "As far as one could see, the sky was filled with planes and gliders, and as we neared the coast of

Europe, we could see the fighter-bombers flying back and forth over the land beneath us, looking for antiaircraft guns and enemy weapons to knock out."

On another C-47 nearby, 24-year-old Sergeant Thomas J. Blakey of A Company, 505th, was admiring the same sight. As he later remembered, September 17 was a "beautiful sunny summer afternoon." He had taken off earlier that morning from RAF Saltby, the airfield in Leicestershire, in a Douglas C-47A from the 50th Troop Carrier Squadron/314th Troop Carrier Group. A veteran of the Normandy campaign, Blakey was about to make his second and final combat parachute jump of the war.

A few minutes after the Pathfinders jumped, the 505th PIR's C-47s approached from the west toward Drop Zone N. General Gavin recalled the final approach to the DZ: "Everything that I had memorized was coming into sight. The triangular patch of woods near where I was to jump appeared under us just as the jump light went on."

At 1 PM, just 13 minutes behind Jaubert's Pathfinder team, the men of the 505th began jumping. On Gavin's C-47, all 18 men went out the door "without a second's delay." Gavin recalled, "We seemed to hit the ground almost at once. Heavily laden with ammunition, weapons and grenades, I had a hard landing while the parachute was still oscillating. At once we were under small-arms fire coming from a nearby woods. I took my .45-caliber pistol out of its holster and laid it on the ground beside my hand."

The M1911A1 .45-caliber pistol, created before World War I, was a weapon that came in handy for a number of troopers at Drop Zone N that day. Remembering how German antiaircraft guns in Ste.-Mère-Église had fired on descending paratroopers during the Normandy drop, a number of 505th men drew their .45s and began firing at the German gunners as they drifted downward under their open parachute canopies. Although the men engaging these big antiaircraft guns with their pistols could not have expected their fire to be particularly effective, they must have been pleasantly surprised when most of the German crews broke and ran.

With his personal .45 close at hand and with German small-arms fire sweeping over the drop zone, Gavin worked to free himself from his parachute: "I quickly began to take my [M1 Garand] rifle out from under the reserve chute, and I got out of the parachute harness while I lay on the ground. The moment I had my equipment off and my rifle ready to use, I replaced my pistol in the holster and ran over toward the woods."

While most high-ranking airborne officers jumped armed with M1A1 carbines or pistols, Gavin always jumped armed with the weapon that most privates carried—the 9.5-pound M1 Garand rifle. For the Market jump, he also wore the airborne's new jump uniform, which consisted of an M1943 field jacket and a pair of M1943 trousers with heavy canvas reinforced pockets. Although he was by then a two-star general, Gavin wore the same M2 parachutist's helmet he had worn in Normandy that still carried the single star of a brigadier general.

The 505th was on the ground 12 minutes after it began jumping. Lt. Col. Edwin A. Bedell's 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion jumped next, followed at 1:15 PM by Colonel Reuben Tucker's 504th spilling out over Drop Zone O; it took the 504th a mere four minutes to complete the jump.

Next was Colonel Roy Lindquist's 508th Parachute Infantry, which began jumping over Drop Zone T north of Groesbeek at 1:26 PM. The 508's assignment was to seize about six miles of territory—from Nijmegen through Wyler to Groesbeek. It was also to assist in taking the bridges over the Maas-Waal Canal at Hatert and Honinghutje, plus secure two glider landing zones. It was a big job, but one that Lindquist was confident his men could perform.

Two minutes after the last of the 508th men were on the ground, Lt. Col. Wilbur Griffith's 376th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion began parachuting into Drop Zone N, the last unit of the division to jump on September 17.

According to Gavin, bringing the 376th in on the first day of Market was an "experiment." The division's leaders reasoned that the first opposing units the Germans would potentially commit against the Nijmegen-Grave landings would be ad hoc formations of soldiers on furlough and local home guards. The 82nd's staff further reasoned that accurate field artillery fire would keep those formations far from the American parachute infantry assembling on the drop zones.

For that reason, the 376th would jump

National Archives

Anticipating that their liberation had begun, Dutch civilians greet an American 82nd Airborne Division paratrooper on the edge of a drop zone near the city of Nijmegen. The troopers of the 82nd assembled quickly and started off toward their assigned objectives but the operation would soon run into trouble.

as a part of the initial assault with 12 M1A1 75mm airborne howitzers. When mated with the M8 Airborne Carriage, the M1A1 howitzer could be disassembled and packed into nine paracrates. Each of the nine crates could be dropped with its own parachute, and once on the ground airborne artillerymen could reassemble the weapon and begin firing.

One of the men who jumped with the 376th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion that day was 26-year-old 1st Lt. Alphonse J. Czekanski. The son of Polish immigrants, Czekanski had enlisted in the U.S. Army in March 1940. Interestingly, by 1944 fate had made him a participant in some of the most significant events of World War II. He was serving as a corporal in Battery B, 11th Field Artillery Regiment, stationed at Schofield Barracks in Hawaii on December 7, 1941, when the Japanese attacked the American Pacific fleet anchorage at Pearl Harbor.

Within a few months of the attack, he was attending Officer's Candidate School at Fort Benning, Georgia, and received his commission as a second lieutenant on August 27, 1942. The following month, Czekanski attended jump school and became a paratrooper. Because of his previous experience in the field artillery, he was assigned to the 376th shortly before it deployed to North Africa in April 1943. Thereafter, he jumped with the 82nd Airborne during Operation Husky, the invasion of Sicily in July 1943, and then landed at Anzio with the 376th in January 1944.

In the predawn hours of June 6, 1944, he jumped with the 82nd Airborne into Normandy and spent the next 35 days in combat there. By September 1944, Czekanski was a first lieutenant in D Battery, 376th, the battalion's antiaircraft/antitank battery. Holland would be his third combat jump.

Soon after Czekanski jumped over Drop Zone N at approximately 1:33 PM on September 17, things began to go wrong. As he descended under his open parachute canopy, he was struck in the back of the head by a 300-pound equipment bundle. The force of the blow knocked him unconscious, and because he did not have control of his chute he landed on the roof of a barn, breaking one of his legs. Still unconscious, he rolled off the roof and dropped two stories to the ground below, breaking his other leg. He was later evacuated to England and then, in November, home to the United States. Though he had survived his third and final combat jump, for him the war was over.

Despite numerous other injuries suffered on the jump, the 376th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion was quick to swing into action on the drop zone; the battalion's first howitzer was assembled and ready to fire within 20 minutes. Four hours after the drop, eight of the 376th howitzers were dropping shells on enemy positions. Although four of the battalion's 75s were damaged on the drop, the 376th set up a 360-degree perimeter with the eight guns available. One crew even hauled its howitzer 1,000 yards by hand to reach a more advantageous firing position.

After the last C-47s flew off and the 82nd Airborne Division was on its own, it was not long before General Gavin began to take inventory of his assets on the ground; 7,250 82nd Airborne paratroopers had jumped in the vicinity of Grave and Groesbeek that afternoon. It was soon apparent that the jump had gone well. As Gavin later described, "Early indications were that the drop had been unusually successful. Unit after unit reported in on schedule and with few exceptions all were in their preplanned locations."

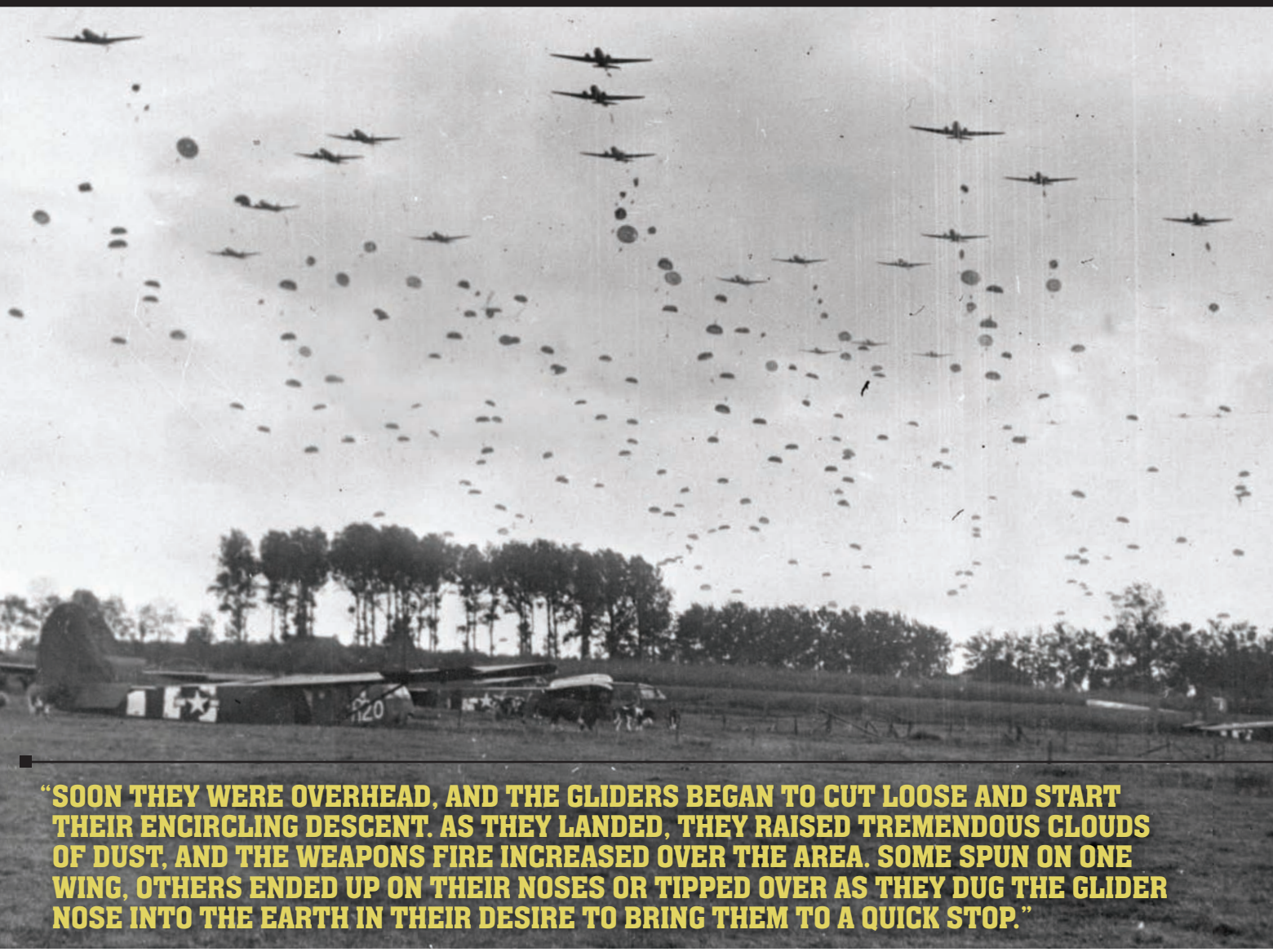
Late that afternoon, Gavin began making the rounds of his division. By then, he had a jeep on the ground and proceeded from Drop Zone N north toward Groesbeek and beyond. The first unit he encountered was the 376th. Gavin soon found that the battalion's commanding officer, Lt. Col. Wilbur Griffith, had broken his ankle on the jump and was being moved about in a wheelbarrow. When Griffith saw Gavin approaching, he laughed, saluted, and said, "General, the 376th Field Artillery is in position with all guns ready to fire."

It was true. During the first 24 hours on the ground in Holland, the 376th fired 315 rounds and was "most effective" at keeping enemy units away from the drop zones. In addition to the valuable fire support that the battalion's howitzers provided during the first critical hours of the operation, 376th troopers also captured 400 German

BELOW: American airborne soldiers wrestle a 57mm gun aboard one of more than 1,000 gliders used by British and American airborne units during Operation Market Garden. OPPOSITE: American paratroopers stream from their Douglas C-47 transport aircraft and begin their descent to an open field near the town of Grave, Holland. Gliders already litter the area after landing to disgorge men and supplies.

National Archives

National Archives



"SOON THEY WERE OVERHEAD, AND THE GLIDERS BEGAN TO CUT LOOSE AND START THEIR ENCIRCLING DESCENT. AS THEY LANDED, THEY RAISED TREMENDOUS CLOUDS OF DUST, AND THE WEAPONS FIRE INCREASED OVER THE AREA. SOME SPUN ON ONE WING, OTHERS ENDED UP ON THEIR NOSES OR TIPPED OVER AS THEY DUG THE GLIDER NOSE INTO THE EARTH IN THEIR DESIRE TO BRING THEM TO A QUICK STOP."

enlisted men and eight officers. General Gavin's "experiment" with parachute field artillery had worked well.

Upon assembling in their drop zones, 82nd troopers moved quickly to capitalize on the element of surprise and capture their primary objectives: the Maas River Bridge at Grave, the four bridges spanning the Maas-Waal Canal, and the Waal River Bridge at Nijmegen.

The Maas Bridge at Grave was captured by E Company, 504th PIR, about two hours after landing. Responsibility for taking the canal bridges belonged to the 504th PIR's 1st Battalion, which swiftly advanced on the objectives from Drop Zone O.

The southernmost bridge at Molenhoek (known to the paratroopers as Bridge #7) was captured intact by troopers from B Company, 504th, as well as by elements of the 505th PIR advancing from the direction of Groesbeek. As troopers from the 504th, 505th, and 508th approached the two bridges in the center—Bridge #8 near Malden and Bridge #9 near Hatert—they were just in time to see them both blown sky high by retreating German soldiers.

Bridge #10 near Honinghutje, the largest of the canal bridges, was the only one between Grave and Nijmegen capable of bearing the weight of tanks. Accordingly, capturing it intact was of the utmost importance. However, a network of pillboxes, trenches, and barbed wire defended its approaches. That night, troopers from Colonel Roy Lindquist's 508th PIR moved into positions and commenced an attack at first light on Monday, September 18.

At 10:30 that morning, the Germans set off demolition charges on the railroad bridge running next to Bridge #10, destroying it and weakening Bridge #10 to the point that it could not be used after its capture. Suddenly, Bridge #7 at Molenhoek was priceless real estate.

Paratroopers from the 508th made early attempts to seize the 1,960-foot-long highway bridge at Nijmegen on September 17 but were thwarted by a superior German force. They did, however, manage to locate and deactivate demolition equip-

ment that otherwise could have been used to blow the bridge.

The paratroopers were soon locked in a furious firefight with the German soldiers defending the south end of the bridge (see *WWII Quarterly,* Winter 2010-2011). That defense was resolutely fought, and a stalemate followed that would not be broken for three more days.

Stunned, the Germans failed to immediately mount their customary counterattacks in the wake of the largest airborne-glider operation of the war. After nightfall on the 17th, a train filled with German troops attempting to escape rolled out of Nijmegen but was stopped by the 505th's reserve battalion, which ended its journey with a bazooka, rifles, and machine guns. The surviving Germans fled into the woods but were soon rounded up by the paratroopers.

D+1 (Monday, September 18) saw more than just the struggle to capture Bridge #10 and the stalemate in front of the Nijmegen Bridge. German counterattacks from the direction of the Reichswald (as forewarned by members of the Dutch underground) and the city of Wyler (just over the border in Germany itself) were thrusting westward toward Groesbeek. Because there were several gaps in the 505th's line to the east of the town, those German counterattacks threatened to overrun DZs T and N, which were soon to become glider landing zones.

That morning, another large air armada departed from bases in southern England carrying the first wave of 82nd Airborne gliders. This force consisted of additional divisional artillery in the form of the 319th and 320th Glider Field Artillery Battalions and the 456th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion. The gliders were also carrying the 307th Medical Company, the 80th Airborne Anti-Aircraft/Anti-tank Battalion, and the division's signal company, as well as additional elements of the 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion. With German infantry swarming out of the Reichswald toward the landing zones, nothing could be done to warn the approaching gliders.

Shortly before 2 PM, the great aerial formation of 450 C-47s towing 450 gliders could be seen approaching from England. General Gavin described what happened next: "The drone of the engines reached a roar as they came directly over the landing zones. I experienced a terrible feeling of helplessness. I wanted to tell them that they were landing right on the German infantry.

"Soon they were overheard, and the gliders began to cut loose and start their encircling descent. As they landed, they raised tremendous clouds of dust, and the weapons fire increased over the area. Some spun on one wing, others ended up on their noses or tipped over as they dug the glider nose into the earth in their desire to bring them to a quick stop."

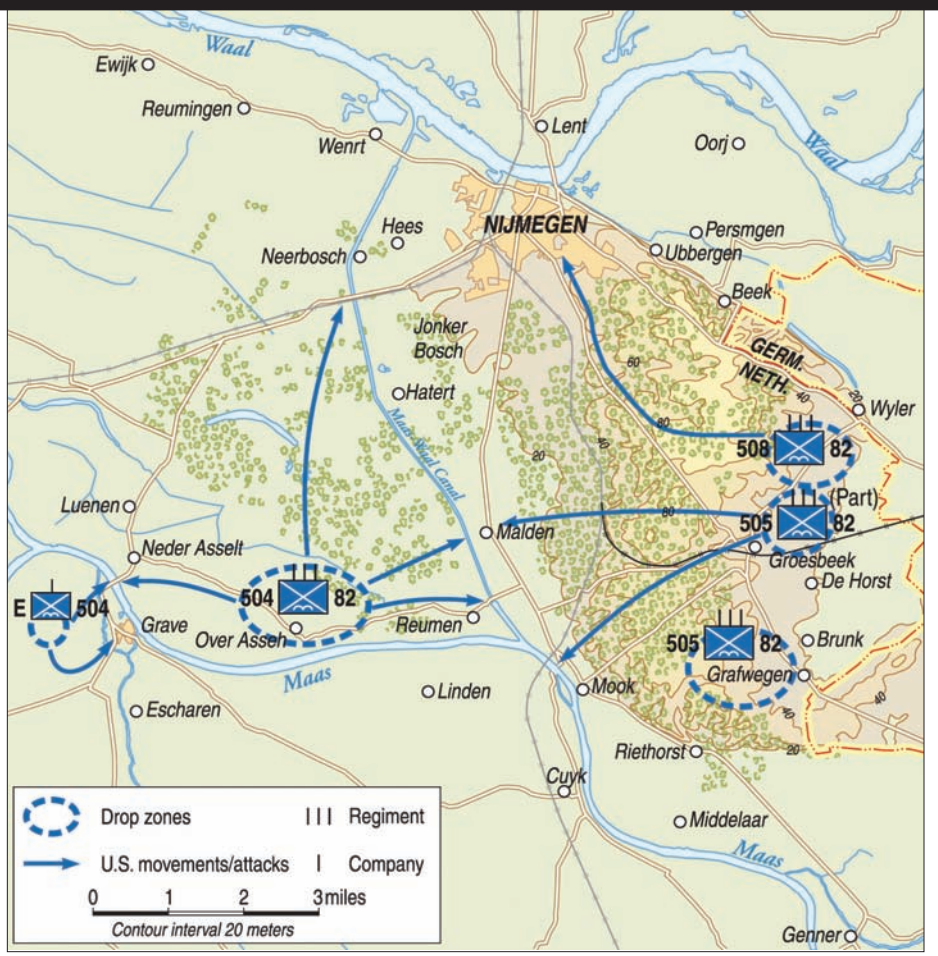
The Army's official history notes, "Beginning at 1300 [hours], after the troops had made a forced march of eight miles from Nijmegen, the attack by Lt. Col. Shield Warren's 1st battalion [508th PIR] might have stalled in the face of intense small-arms and flak-gun fire had not the paratroopers charged the defenders at a downhill run. At the last minute, the Germans panicked. It was a photo finish, a 'movie thriller sight of landing gliders on the LZ as the deployed paratroops chased the last of the Germans from their 16 20mm guns.' The enemy lost 50 men killed and 150 captured. Colonel Warren's battalion incurred but 11 casualties."

Under intense German small-arms fire, some 82nd Airborne glidermen were seen running from their engineless aircraft and firing on the enemy, while others were struggling to free artillery pieces and jeeps from their gliders. Despite the intense enemy fire, most of these newly arrived units were miraculously intact, bringing with them a large quantity of valuable equipment. They delivered 135 jeeps and eight M1 57mm antitank guns—weapons that would prove vital in the event that German armor appeared in the area.

The gliders also landed 30 additional M1A1 75mm pack howitzers, which were quickly brought into action alongside the M1A1s that had landed with the 376th the day before. Before September 18 was done, the 82nd Airborne Division had a total of 41 75mm howitzers firing in support of its operations.

German airborne troops, or Fallschirmjager, shown here manning defensive positions during the early stages of Operation Market Garden, were among the prisoners taken by Allied troops in September 1944. This machine-gun crew appears to be using an American .30-caliber Browning M-1919A4 air-cooled machine gun, probably captured during a previous battle.

Bundesarchiv Bild Bild 101I-590-2332-16A; Photo Arppe



Minutes after the glider landings were complete, 135 Consolidated B-24 Liberator bombers thundered in over the area, dropping parachute bundles containing much needed supplies. While some of the supply bundles landed behind German lines, the paratroopers ultimately recovered approximately 80 percent of them.

As the stalemate at Nijmegen continued the following day (Tuesday, September 19), advance elements of the Guards Armoured Division (from the Garden element of the operation) entered the 82nd Airborne's sector near Grave. With the road to Nijmegen clear before it, units of the British XXX Corps moved up to contribute their firepower to the fight against the German defenders.

Late that afternoon, General Gavin had a conference with British Lt. Gen. Frederick M. "Boy" Browning, deputy commander of the First Allied Airborne Army. During the meeting, Browning warned Gavin, "The Nijmegen bridge must be taken today—at latest tomorrow." To Gavin, the hour was becoming "desperate."

By then, Maj. Gen. Robert F. Urquhart's British 1st Airborne Division had been cut off in Arnhem for three days and yet the Nijmegen Bridge was still in enemy hands. If XXX Corps was to get through to relieve the 1st Airborne Division, that bridge had to be taken.

To break the deadlock, Gavin came up with a bold plan: a force of parachute infantrymen would cross the Waal River in engineer boats borrowed from the British, a smokescreen masking their advance. Upon reaching the opposite bank, the force would then attack the Nijmegen Bridge from the rear, outflanking its defenders. During the attack, British tanks from XXX Corps would provide fire support to suppress the German 88mm guns on the east bank.

After capturing the bridge, 82nd Airborne soldiers would cross it and secure a bridgehead on the opposite bank, allowing XXX Corps to begin its advance to relieve Urquhart's beleaguered paratroopers in Arnhem. Gavin ordered the attack for the following day, September 20, and selected Lt. Col. Reuben Tucker's 3rd Battalion, 504th PIR, to lead it.

The night was spent locating and assembling the canvas and wood-slatted engineer boats that would carry the 504th troopers across the Waal. Only 26 of the flimsy craft were available, arriving only 20 minutes before the attack was due to kick off. (Those who have seen the 1977 film *A Bridge Too Far* will recall Robert Redford's character, Major Julian Cook of the 3rd Battalion, saying to his dismayed men, "What did you expect—destroyers?")

LEFT: Troopers of the U.S. 82nd Airborne Division parachuted near the towns of Nijmegen and Grave, Holland, during Market Garden and proceeded rapidly toward their objectives. BELOW: Brigadier General James Gavin, commander of the 82nd Airborne Division, confers with General Miles Dempsey, commander of the British Second Army, several days into the Market Garden operation.

National Archives

Fifteen minutes before H-hour, American artillery opened up against the Germans on the opposite side of the river.

At 2 PM, someone yelled, "Go!" and the paratroopers wrestled the boats down to the water's edge and launched them one

mile west of the bridge. A shortage of paddles meant some men had to row with their rifles. Each 19-foot-long boat carried 13 troopers from I Company, 504th PIR, and three troopers from C Company, 307th Airborne Engineer Battalion; there were 416 men in the first wave.

A smokescreen was laid down to hide the river assault from German eyes. As the overloaded boats entered midstream, a breeze blew the smokescreen away, revealing them to enemy guns on the east bank.

Despite the enemy fire and the difficulties they encountered in maneuvering the boats in the river's strong current, the troopers reached the opposite shore and deployed for action, but the enemy's artillery, machine guns, and 20mm antiaircraft guns were so destructive that of the 26 boats in the first wave only 11 returned for the second and subsequent five crossings. The human cost was high, too: 48 men from the 504th and the 307th were killed during the crossing.

The water-borne paratroopers were aided in their assault by the timely arrival of British tanks from the Guards Armoured Division's Coldstream Guards Group, which pummeled German positions with their main guns.

In the intense firefight that followed on the east bank, the paratroopers battled the German defenders at close quarters with rifles, bayonets, and grenades. Though the battle was savagely fought, the paratroopers had momentum that carried them on to the objective. Troopers from I Company, 504th, flanked the highway bridge while men from the 504th's H Company flanked the railroad bridge.

Simultaneously, troopers from the 505th PIR launched an attack from the Nijmegen side of the bridge. The combined assault overwhelmed the defenders. Trapped on the bridge that they had been defending since September 17, German soldiers were decimated by the furious small-arms crossfire. After the fight concluded, 267 dead Germans littered the bridge.

With the Nijmegen Bridge now open for Allied traffic, the British Guards Armoured Division crossed it and began the drive north to relieve their countrymen at Arnhem. The 82nd men then took up positions to defend the bridgehead they had fought so hard to secure.

All the while, Gavin kept an eye open for any reports of a German counterattack coming out of the Reichswald; he didn't have long to wait. On the morning of September 20, a heavy artillery barrage preceded a German ground attack against 82nd forces in the Mook area and threatened the Heuman Bridge. Speeding there by jeep from Nijmegen, Gavin asked the Coldstream Guards for help, which they were happy to provide.

As Cornelius Ryan wrote in his book *A Bridge Too Far,* "Shifting his forces back and forth like chess men, Gavin held out and eventually forced the Germans to withdraw. He had always feared an attack from the Reichswald. Now Gavin and the Corps commander, General Browning, knew that a new and more terrible phase of the fighting had begun. Among the prisoners taken were men from General [Eugen] Meindl's tough II Parachute Corps. [Field Marshal] Model's intention was now obvious: key bridges were to be grabbed, the corridor was to be squeezed, and Horrocks' columns crushed."

The next day, September 21, the men of C Company, 504th, were in defensive positions near the city of Oosterhout when the Germans launched a counterattack. The enemy force of approximately 100 infantry supported by a half-track and two panzers surged forward in a drive to recapture the Nijmegen Bridge.

Without being ordered to do so, a C Company soldier, Private John R. Towle, left his foxhole and ran 200 yards forward to a position on an exposed dike roadbed. From there, Towle fired his M1A1 rocket launcher at both tanks, inflicting damage that forced

Imperial War Museum

Dutch civilians celebrate their liberation, gathering around an armored vehicle of the British Guards Armored Division as the ground troops pass through the village of Grave, Holland. The ground forces have just linked up with troopers of the 82nd Airborne Division.

both of them to turn back. When he drew fire from a nearby house being used by nine Germans as a strongpoint, Towle fired a single rocket into the house, killing all nine of the enemy. He then rushed forward through enemy fire again to get into a more advantageous position to fire his bazooka at the advancing half-track.

Towle was kneeling and aiming his bazooka when fragments from a German mortar round fatally wounded him. He had singlehandedly broken up the enemy counterattack, which had posed a serious threat to the security of the Nijmegen bridgehead. For his self-sacrificing bravery, Private John R. Towle was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor.

September 21 turned out to be an important day at Nijmegen, where the fight for the highway and railroad bridges continued. Lt. Col. Ben Vandervoort's 2nd Battalion of the 505th PIR, assisted by British tanks and infantry, continued to pound the German defenders guarding the approaches to the south end of the highway bridge. The Germans, faced with mounting pressure on the Nijmegen bridge, decided to destroy it.

On Saturday, September 23, the 325th Glider Infantry Regiment arrived in Holland. Originally scheduled to land on D+1, poor weather conditions delayed the 325th in England for five days. Without delay, General Gavin fed the 325th into battle.

Although the Nijmegen bridge had been captured and held by the 82nd and British armor only after some of the most desperate fighting of the entire war, other Allied elements were not so fortunate. British paratroopers at Arnhem had been cut off and decimated; Horrocks' XXX Corps had fallen far behind in its timetable to reach the beleaguered paratroopers. And the 1st Polish Parachute Brigade that was supposed to have bolstered British troops on the ground was delayed departing England because of fog; the Poles did not arrive in Holland until September 21. By then it was too late to salvage Market Garden.

The relief column never reached Arnhem, and Operation Market Garden ultimately failed to deliver the swift and decisive victory that Field Marshal Montgomery had envisioned. That failure came at a high price with the Allies suffering more than 17,000 dead and wounded. American casualties alone amounted to a total of 3,974—1,432 of which were "All Americans" from the 82nd Airborne Division. The troopers of the 82nd remained in Holland until mid-November.

The Allied generals did not waste time brooding over the failure of Market Garden. The port of Antwerp had to be opened to shorten the lifeline of supplies coming from Britain. Plans for a new thrust against Germany's western defenses were already in the works, an operation designed to envelop the Ruhr, Germany's industrial heartland, and a massive assault to penetrate Hitler's formidable West Wall fortifications. □

In this somewhat desolate painting, British armored vehicles cross the embattled bridge over the Waal River at Nijmegen, Holland, during Operation Market Garden. The costly operation failed to realize Montgomery's hopes for a quick victory.

Imperial War Museum

DEATH IN THE ARCTIC NIGHT

THE GERMAN BATTLESHIP *SCHARNHORST* WAS GREATLY FEARED BUT NOT, AS IT TURNED OUT, INVINCIBLE.

SHE WAS A BEAUTIFUL SHIP, long and sleek and very fast. She was christened *Scharnhorst,* named for Prussian General Gerhard Scharnhorst, one of the revered founders of the Prussian Army. She could do more than 31 knots, she displaced almost 40,000 tons fully loaded, and she carried a complement of more than 1,900 officers and men. She was the ultimate commerce raider—at least in theory.

Scharnhorst carried nine 11-inch guns and a host of smaller weapons from 5.9-inch to 20mm. Her Krupp armor was as thick as 14½ inches amidships and 14 inches around the barbettes of her big turrets. Her main battery was somewhat lighter than the 14- or 15-inch guns usually carried by battleships. *Scharnhorst*'s builders, some said, had deliberately sacrificed a little gun power in trade for more speed and heavier armor; in fact, Adolf Hitler had decided to settle for 11-inch cannon to avoid arousing the suspicion of his European neighbors. The big ship's main armament was to be upgraded to 15-inch at a later time—a time that would never come.

She was sister to *Gneisenau,* also named for a Prussian general who, with General Scharnhorst, rejuvenated the dispirited Prussian Army in the latter days of the Napoleonic Wars. It is one of the many ironies of war that both Prussian commanders—in life men of liberal views—now lent their names and fame to ships flying the ugly black swastika of Nazi Germany.

These fast battleships were not the first warships to bear these famous names: their predecessors, armored cruisers, were at the bottom of the South Atlantic, sunk by British men-'o-war off the Falklands in 1914. By way of further irony, they had gone down

Illuminated by British star shells, one of Germany's most advanced battleships, *Scharnhorst*, is depicted by artist Charles Peal while under attack by British ships on December 26, 1943. A surface raider, *Scharnhorst* was fast and heavily armored, but she could not escape the British ambush.

BY ROBERT BARR SMITH

under the command of Admiral Graf von Spee. His namesake, the pocket battleship *Graf Spee,* was a scuttled heap of junk in the estuary of the River Plate, driven into Montevideo, Uruguay, by the guns of Royal Navy cruisers in December 1939.

With her great swiftness, substantial range, and heavy armament, *Scharnhorst* was the perfect commerce raider. If she were careful with her speed, she could cruise for 10,000 miles without refueling. She could run away from nearly any ship she could not sink, and she carried three seaplanes to spot quarry for her. She and her sister ship and the pocket battleships *Graf Spee, Admiral Scheer,* and *Deutschland* (later renamed *Lützow*) should have been a deadly scourge to the convoys so vital to the survival of Britain. Fortunately for the Allies, the ships were timidly employed by Nazi Germany. Compared to what they might have been, they were a miserable failure.

Both *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* were laid down about the same time. Like her sister ship, *Scharnhorst* was begun in Wilhelmshaven in 1934. *Gneisenau* was completed in May 1938, *Scharnhorst* the following January. Leaving the estuary of the Jade in November 1939, the two big ships came upon the ex-P&O liner *Rawalpindi* in the Iceland-Faroe passage of the North Atlantic. *Rawalpindi* had been converted into an armed merchant cruiser with the addition of a handful of 6-inch guns. Hopelessly outclassed, she nevertheless gamely battled both German ships, hitting *Scharnhorst* with at least one 6-inch shell, causing casualties on her quarterdeck.

The end came quickly for *Rawalpindi*. As she burned like a blowtorch in the arctic darkness, the German ships were able to rescue a few of her crew. But upon the

National Maritime Museum, London / The Image Works

appearance of HMS *Newcastle,* a comparatively small light cruiser, both big German vessels ran for home under cover of smoke.

They returned safely, but the German command had demonstrated the persistent timidity that would plague its heavy ships throughout the war, in sharp contrast to British dash and aggressiveness. The German Navy chief of staff, Admiral Kurt Fricke, registered the anger many German officers felt: "Battleships are supposed to shoot," he wrote, "not lay smokescreens!"

Both *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* were at sea during Operation Nordmark, the abortive German reaction to British destroyer HMS *Cossack*'s boarding of *Altmark,* the supply ship servicing pocket battleship *Graf Spee*. *Cossack* had pushed boldly into an icy Norwegian fjord, putting a boarding party over the side in the old style, and freeing some 400 British merchant navy prisoners taken by the raider. Neither *Scharnhorst* nor *Gneisenau* fired a shot during Nordmark, although they sortied as far as the Shetland Islands.

During Operation Weserübung ("Weser Exercise"), the German invasion of Norway, the two ships traded shots with the British battlecruiser HMS *Renown*. *Gneisenau* took a hit in the foretop, and both ships turned away. Fighting in heavy seas, the Germans had great difficulty serving their main guns with any speed. *Scharnhorst*'s war diary recorded the ship's frustration and the impressive performance of their single adversary. "I found astonishing," wrote a turret commander, "the high rate and continuity of the enemy's fire, which was not impaired by the heavy movements of his ship."

The engagement with *Renown* furnished further proof of the lack of experience and training of the German crews and of the well-known tendency of both Kriegsmarine ships to be "wet"—shipping large quantities of water over their low freeboard and their bows, even after both ships had been refitted with graceful "clipper" or "Atlantic" bows, intended to better parry the monstrous waves of the northern seas.

Still, *Scharnhorst* and her sister ship scored a major success by sinking the homeward-bound aircraft carrier HMS *Glorious*—her decks crowded with Hurricanes of the Royal Air Force, flown from Norway as the British and French withdrew. They also sank her two escorting destroyers, *Ardent* and *Acasta*. Before she went down in hopeless battle against the big ships, however, little *Acasta*'s captain, Commander C.E. Glasfurd, punched a torpedo into *Scharnhorst*; *Acasta* sank not long afterward. In the finest tradition of the Royal Navy, Glasfurd stood on the bridge-wing smoking a final cigarette

National Archives

Imperial War Museum

ABOVE: With a band and all hands on deck, and the German Navy Kriegsmarine (Navy) ensign flying from her stern, *Scharnhorst*'s commissioning ceremony takes place at Kiel on the ship's after deck, January 7, 1939. Note the stern anchor and Nazi eagle. BELOW: The last photograph of the British aircraft carrier HMS *Glorious* before being sunk by *Scharnhorst* and *Gniesenau* on June 8, 1940, in the Norwegian Sea. *Scharnhorst* suffered severe torpedo damage during the engagement, however.

Imperial War Museum

***Scharnhorst, Gniesenau,* and *Prinz Eugen* make their dash from the western coast of France to northeast German ports through the English Channel, February 1942. *Gniesenau* was sunk by British aircraft on February 26, 1942.**

as his little ship went down. There was only a single survivor from *Acasta*.

Acasta's torpedo put *Scharnhorst* out of action for many months. She would not be operational again until the autumn of 1940, for the little destroyer's torpedo had torn a monstrous hole below the stern turret of the German battleship, rupturing a fuel tank and killing 48 of her crew. His Majesty's Submarine *Clyde* torpedoed *Gneisenau* on June 20, and she joined her sister ship on the long list of German ships sunk or disabled during Weserübung. For all practical purposes, both ships would be hors d'combat for the rest of the year.

Back at sea in early 1941, both German ships tried again, and this time came up with a British convoy. Again there was trouble for the Germans, however, for the convoy escort included a battleship, HMS *Ramillies*—a slow and relatively antique veteran of World War I. But she carried 15-inch guns, and her crew and captain were spoiling for a fight.

Scharnhorst tried to lure her away while *Gneisenau* struck at the merchant ships, but *Ramillies* wasn't having any of the Germans' bluff. Both German ships—with all their modern armament and fire control—turned and ran for home from one old battleship.

In March the two big ships savaged an unescorted convoy, sailing empty on its way back to Canada, and sank several ships. Later in the month they closed in on still another convoy in the area of the Cape Verde Islands, only to find it escorted by the battleship HMS *Malaya*. *Malaya* was another veteran, launched in the spring of 1915, but she packed 15-inch guns and substantial armor. Mindful of their orders and the pugnacious nature of the British, the two German ships used their superior speed and turned away.

Then, still in March, the Kriegsmarine managed a substantial success. *Gneisenau* and *Scharnhorst* got loose into the North Atlantic and there intercepted a number of freighters and tankers sailing independently after their westbound convoy had been dissolved. Between them, the two big ships sank 13 merchantmen and captured three others—two of which, with their German prize crews, were promptly recaptured by the British battlecruiser *Renown*. The only resistance to *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* was a gutty fight by the little freighter *Chilean Reefer,* which banged away at her two monstrous opponents with her one tiny deck gun. It took 73 11-inch shells to sink her.

The two German dreadnaughts might have done even better, but once again they were interrupted by the approach of a single vessel, the battleship HMS *Rodney,* another veteran warship with a curious arrangement of three turrets forward and none aft. But the guns were 16-inch, and *Rodney* was looking for a fight. Again the two modern German ships ran from a single older battleship.

In the summer of 1941, in La Pallice on the western French coast at La Rochelle, *Scharnhorst* was hit by five British bombs, requiring more repair in the port of Brest and causing further inaction.

The German naval command knew its two sleek ships would have to be moved out of harm's way, and early in 1942 ordered the famous "Channel dash," in which both ships successfully escaped up the English Channel, first to Wilhelmshaven, then to Kiel in northern Germany. On the way, *Scharnhorst* struck two mines off the Dutch coast, requiring more repairs.

On February 26, 1942, however, a British air strike finished *Gneisenau* for good with a single bomb that tore through the two top decks and exploded. White-hot gas was sucked through the ventilation system and into the magazine of A turret, which went up with a colossal roar, killing more than 100 seamen and leaving *Gneisenau* unfit for any offensive sortie. By early March, *Scharnhorst* was in Norway's Altenfjord, in company with the superbattleship *Tirpitz*.

In September 1942, with her sister ship in harbor for extensive repairs, *Scharnhorst* sortied with *Tirpitz* and nine destroyers to destroy Norwegian installations on

National Archives

Scharnhorst **salutes the German submarine** ***U-47*** **on October 14, 1939, at Wilhelmshaven after the U-boat sank the British battleship HMS** ***Royal Oak*** **at the Scapa Flow anchorage. OPPOSITE:** ***Scharnhorst*** **photographed in a Norwegian fjord before heading out to disrupt Allied convoys. With overly cautious Kriegsmarine leadership, Germany's capital ships spent much of their time avoiding decisive engagement with the enemy.**

the remote island of Spitzbergen. While their big guns did a great deal of damage, *Scharnhorst*'s shooting was so bad that on her return to Altenfjord she put to sea again to improve her gunnery.

In her absence, Royal Navy midget submarines sailed boldly into the fjord and crippled mighty *Tirpitz*. The heavy cruiser *Admiral Hipper* had already been decommissioned after the bitter December day on which she, *Lützow,* and six big destroyers had been driven away from a convoy by Royal Navy destroyers and two light cruisers. By the winter of 1943, *Lützow* was gone from northern waters as well, sent to Gdynia in the Baltic for an overhaul.

On December 20, 1943, Allied Convoy JW55B set sail from Loch Ewe in far northwest Scotland, 18 merchantmen bound for Russia through the bitter cold and vile weather of the Barents Sea. They were covered by a close escort—minesweeper *Gleaner,* destroyers *Wrestler* and *Whitehall,* and corvettes *Honeysuckle* and *Oxslip*. The destroyer escort—the outer ring of defense—comprised destroyers *Onslow, Onslaught, Orwell, Scourge, Impulsive, Iroquois, Haida,* and *Huron*. Captain James McCoy, in *Onslow,* commanded the escort.

Two days later, westbound Convoy RA55A left Kola Inlet at Murmansk bound for Britain, its escort commanded by Captain I.M.R. Campbell in the destroyer *Milne*. RA55A, traveling unladen, slipped past the Kriegsmarine and Luftwaffe altogether and by Christmas Day had left dreary, desolate Bear Island behind it on its way to safety in Britain.

Eastbound JW55B was not so fortunate. It was spotted by Luftwaffe reconnaissance aircraft as early as the 22nd. Loaded with military equipment and stores for the Russian juggernaut, the slow merchantmen were prime targets.

The British Admiralty, wary of a sortie from Norway by *Scharnhorst,* was prepared to provide heavy support if a major surface action developed. First there was the usual cruiser force, called Force 1, now waiting in Kola Inlet near Murmansk.

In command was veteran arctic admiral Bob Burnett, one of the authors of the stinging defeat of *Hipper, Lützow,* and their destroyers in the Barents Sea just a year before. Burnett's flag flew aboard the light cruiser *Belfast,* in company with her sister ship, the light cruiser *Sheffield,* and the heavy cruiser *Norfolk*.

Also at sea was HMS *Duke of York* escorted by the light cruiser *Jamaica* and four destroyers; *Duke of York* sailed from Akureyri in Iceland late on the 23rd. Aboard the 14-inch-gun battleship, Admiral Sir Bruce Fraser, commanding the Home Fleet, suspected a sortie by *Scharnhorst* might be in the wind, and he made plans accordingly. He had drilled his force in night tactics, and on the 24th even rehearsed an attack on *Scharnhorst* with *Jamaica* playing the role of the German warship.

Fraser also detached from the homeward-bound convoy a division of four fleet destroyers, *Musketeer, Matchless, Opportune,* and *Virago,* and sent them to join JW55B and strengthen the escort. Captain R. L. "Boggy" Fisher, in *Matchless,* commanded the division.

For his part, Fraser sailed northeast, setting course to cut *Scharnhorst* off from Norway if she came out, as he expected, to attack the Russia-bound convoy. On the 24th, he signaled Captain J.W. McCoy, commanding the convoy, to reverse course for three

hours, allowing Fraser more time to close in on the vulnerable merchantmen and their escorts. Since the convoy was already behind schedule, McCoy achieved the same end simply by further reducing speed.

Christmas at sea was no holiday for either the Royal Navy or the crews of the weathered merchant ships. Even an alteration of course could cause major shifting in the freighters' deck cargo or a loss of their boats. Hammered by gale force winds and monstrous seas, the crews—especially those of the little escort vessels—had no chance for a decent meal; as their battered ships pitched and yawed in the howling perpetual night of 73 degrees north latitude, the crews made do with mugs of hot tea and cocoa, sandwiches, and whatever other meager fare the galleys could provide. There were no Christmas trees in the Barents Sea.

Back in Altenfjord on the northwest coast of Norway, *Scharnhorst* was indeed preparing for sea. Lying at anchor in relative peace, her crew had decorated the ship with little fir trees for the Christmas holiday, eaten well, and sung their Christmas songs; now they were preparing to fight.

Admiral Erich Bey, temporarily commanding at Altenfjord, would take five destroyers with him into the winter wilderness of the icy Barents Sea: Z29, Z30, Z33, Z34, and Z38. These ships were all of the so-called "Narvik flotilla" and carried four 5-inch guns plus torpedo tubes and antiaircraft armament. They displaced between 1,800 and 1,900 tons. They were fast and well armed, but they lacked the excellent sea-keeping qualities of British destroyers.

Bey was a fine seaman, a big officer popular with his men, and a survivor of the Norwegian massacre of German destroyers by the Royal Navy in 1940. A destroyer officer, he had not commanded any ship the size of *Scharnhorst,* but he had capable help in Captain Julius Hinze, who would actually command the battleship.

On board *Scharnhorst* were 1,968 officers and men, including more than 40 officer cadets. With a number of personnel on leave, Bey drafted from the crippled *Tirpitz* replacements for his absent officers and key enlisted men.

AS THE RANGE DECREASED, BRITISH LOOKOUTS PEERED THROUGH THE GLOOM, TRYING TO ACQUIRE VISUAL CONTACT WITH THEIR ENEMY. NOT UNTIL 9:30 AM DID THE VAGUE SHADOW OF *SCHARNHORST* APPEAR...

National Archives

The operation against the British convoy was dubbed Ostfront 1700. The coded signal directing it ordered Bey to intercept the convoy on December 26, at first light, about 10 AM in those wild waters in that miserable month. Bey was reminded—as if he needed it—that the British enemy was "trying to hamper the heroic endeavors of our eastern armies by sending a valuable convoy of arms and food to the Russians. We must help."

His orders further directed that "the tactical situation must be exploited with skill and daring, and the attack must not end in stalemate. Every opportunity to attack must be seized using the *Scharnhorst*'s superiority to the best advantage." But then came the usual dismal cautionary instruction: "You must disengage if a superior enemy is encountered."

German naval intelligence had lost track of the powerful *Duke of York* and her escorting destroyers, but the Germans did not find their lack of information worrisome; apparently their intelligence analysts believed Fraser's force had accompanied the empty convoy back to Britain. In any case, they thought, even if Fraser had not returned to the Royal Navy anchorage at Scapa Flow, in Scotland's Orkney Islands, his ships were probably too low on fuel to remain in the Barents Sea and fight. They were wrong on both counts.

Even the usually reliable German B-Dienst, the radio-intercept service, had been wrestling with a series of British transmissions that they could not decipher. The B-Dienst analysts guessed, however, that the traffic might indicate the possibility of a "heavy covering force [heading] toward the target," which target, of course, was Fraser's convoy. However, the German headquarters at Navy Group North then decided the report was insufficiently reliable to pass on to Bey at sea. The error would have tragic consequences for a great ship and her crew.

Admiral Fraser now had confirmation that the Germans were coming out. The British were reading Germany's Ultra

coded signals, and the Admiralty had radioed him that a British agent had seen the big ship leave Altenfjord. Bey had no such hard information. He was dependent on Luftwaffe reconnaissance aircraft, supposedly covering an area of some 300 miles around the convoy, watching for any Royal Navy covering force.

He would also have the dubious aid of U-boat surveillance by the boats of Gruppe Eisenbart (ironbeard), which would report what little they could see through the enormous swells, snow squalls, and driving rain of the Barents Sea. U-boats and shadowing aircraft were able to keep track of the progress of the convoy, although British escort vessels drove U-boats deep time and again and at least kept them from using their torpedoes.

Most importantly, both submarines and aircraft failed to find *Duke of York* and her consorts. Fraser was coming up fast from the west, and the Germans did not know he was there.

The weather had turned vile, as it usually was in these latitudes at this time of year. The winds were Force-8 from the south, gale force, driving mountainous seas. Visibility was generally down around two to four nautical miles, depending on the intensity of the overcast, the flurries of snow, and the sheets of bitter rain that whipped through the almost perpetual night of this desolation.

The German destroyers, less seaworthy than their British counterparts, were already having great difficulty, and Bey signaled Grand Admiral Karl Dönitz asking whether the operation should continue. Yes, answered Dönitz, although he did give his commander at sea permission to carry on with *Scharnhorst* alone, at his discretion.

And so, by 4 AM on the morning after Christmas—St. Stephen's Day—*Scharnhorst* and her destroyers were steaming north to intercept the convoy. Burnett's cruisers, about 150 miles away from the convoy, were sailing in from the east, and Fraser was bringing Force 1 eastward to get across Bey's line of retreat to Norway.

Westbound Convoy RA55A was already some 200 miles west of dreary, desolate, fog-shrouded Bear Island and apparently still undetected by the Germans. It was out of danger. JW55B was about 50 miles south of Bear Island, making a glacial eight knots in the foul weather. It was very much in harm's way.

The weather was delaying Admiral Fraser, too. He was forced to hold his group's speed down to around 24 knots to save his destroyers from broaching-to in the huge seas and a southwesterly wind howling in at 50 knots. They were having, to quote Fraser's flag captain, "a hell of a time of it in this sea." The waves were so bad that even big *Duke of York* steadily buried her bow in the swells; ice water was pouring down her ventilation ducting into the spaces below.

If Admiral Fraser could lure *Scharnhorst* far enough to the north away from safety,

HMS BELFAST: THE BATTLE'S SOLE SURVIVOR

Wikipedia Commons

HMS *Belfast* is owned and operated by the Imperial War Museum and is moored in London on the RIver Thames.

Visitors to London, England, are sometimes surprised to see a large, gray warship complete with bristling guns anchored in the River Thames, not far from Tower Bridge. Those who venture closer discover that it is HMS *Belfast,* a museum ship owned and operated by the Imperial War Museum and the sole surviving ship from the Royal Navy's December 26, 1942, engagement with *Scharnhorst*. The rest were either lost in subsequent actions, sold to other nations, or, if they made it through the war, broken up as scrap.

The *Belfast,* however, was saved from the ship breaker's yard in 1967 and retains all her old, wartime charm that visitors find endlessly fascinating as they clamber from the highest bridge, into the gun turrets, and down into the depths of her magazines.

As a way of bringing history to life, the IWM has populated various sections of the ship with lifelike mannequins and piped in snatches of sailors' banter and conversations. Drop in on a group of sailors playing cards or snoozing in hammocks. Check out the sailors peeling potatoes in the galley. And wince as a ship's doctor and dentist perform procedures in their operating rooms.

To add an even greater sense of realism, many of the scenes are enhanced with subtle odors: the aroma of food cooking in the galleys, for example, or a whiff of disinfectant and anesthesia in the medical facilities.

Like a trip to view the crown jewels at the Tower of London and the changing of the guard at Buckingham Palace, a visit to HMS *Belfast* should be high on every London visitor's things-to-see-and-do list.

— Flint Whitlock

Imperial War Museum

National Archives

Imperial War Museum

ABOVE: In this still from a Nazi newsreel, heaving seas throw waves across the bow of a German vessel. Bad weather played a role in the demise of *Scharnhorst*. LEFT: Rear Admiral Erich Bey (left), "Narvik Flotilla" leader during the time of *Scharnhorst*'s sinking; Admiral Sir Bruce Fraser (right), Home Fleet leader, met *Scharnhorst* in the Barents Sea.

and if Burnett's cruisers could intercept and delay her, *Duke of York* might catch the German ship and put an end to her. Fraser signaled Captain McCoy to swing his convoy to the northeast, away from the German threat, and ordered Admiral Burnett to close up to the vital convoy.

By 7 AM, the British knew contact had to be imminent. *Belfast* came to First Degree Readiness at about that hour. Aboard *Scharnhorst*, Admiral Bey, sure he was close to the convoy, went to action stations a half hour later.

About 8 AM, Bey received a message from a U-boat, from which the German admiral decided he had probably passed ahead of the convoy. Accordingly, he ordered his destroyers to shake out into a picket line some 10 miles ahead of the battleship, keeping station about five miles apart. The smaller ships apparently got only part of Bey's signal or read it wrong, for they began their sweep of an area not intended by Bey and lost contact with *Scharnhorst*—as it turned out, forever.

About 8:30, *Sheffield* came to action stations. Burnett's cruisers, moving roughly northwest, were now approaching Bey's force at right angles or nearly so. Antiflash hoods pulled over their heads, the gun crews waited by their tubes. The officers' wardroom was laid out for use as a hospital operating room. High up in the cruiser's superstructure the men at the directors squinted into their gunsights. The ready lights glowed: all guns loaded and ready to shoot. Overhead the huge white and red battle ensigns streamed in the gale.

At 8:34, *Norfolk*'s radar picked up a contact at last, a little over 17 miles away through the gloom to the west-northwest. *Belfast*'s radar found the same blip moments later, and Burnett radioed that he had found the enemy.

With the convoy, Captain McCoy in *Onslow* heard the report. On Admiral Fraser's order, McCoy detached the four destroyers acquired from the homeward-bound convoy and sent them racing down to form a skirmish line between the convoy and its enemy.

As the range decreased, British lookouts peered through the gloom, trying to acquire visual contact with their enemy. Not until 9:30 AM, still dark in this arctic December, did the vague shadow of *Scharnhorst* appear to *Sheffield*'s lookouts, distant about 13,000 yards. From *Belfast*, British starshells burst in the gloom overhead, shedding a weird pinkish light over the wild sea. There she was—a sleek menace amid the dark, heaving seas—and the cruisers opened fire.

The onslaught came as a complete surprise to Bey. Neither of his radar sets had spotted the British cruisers, and the Royal Navy's gunnery was excellent.

An eight-inch shell from *Norfolk* tore *Scharnhorst*'s fore-top apart, left behind a pile of dead and wounded seamen, smashed the gunnery director that controlled the forward port 5.9-inch guns, and turned the forward radar antenna into junk.

Another shell slammed into her forecastle moments later, and still a third landed between a port 5.9-inch gun turret and the battleship's torpedo tubes. With his cruisers engaged, Admiral Fraser now ordered Captain McCoy to turn the convoy onto a northerly course, away from the action.

Scharnhorst was unable to spot either of the light cruisers, since both were using flashless cordite powder. All Bey could see was the flare of muzzle-flashes from *Norfolk,* not yet equipped with the new propellant. Surprised and with his ship hurt, Bey turned away to the southeast. Much faster than the cruisers in these heavy seas, *Scharnhorst* pulled away. Steaming out of effective gunfire range, she would soon be beyond radar contact.

Imperial War Museum

BEY HAD HAD ENOUGH. THESE DOGGED BRITISH CRUISERS WERE BETWEEN HIM AND THE CONVOY AND OBVIOUSLY PROPOSED TO STAY THERE; IT WAS TIME TO GO HOME. HE TURNED AWAY...

At this point in the engagement, Admiral Burnett made a command decision—a bold, well-reasoned choice that would control the course of the entire action. Perceiving that his quarry was edging around, turning first east and then northeast, Burnett correctly decided that *Scharnhorst* was trying to work around him to try again to strike the convoy.

"Ah!" he said. "So she's not running for Altenfjord after all. Well, we'll take the short cut." Acting on his conclusion, he broke off his pursuit and turned back again to the northwest, sailing to join the convoy and stay between it and the raider.

Duke of York, Jamaica, and their destroyers were still almost 200 miles away to the west. Fraser had made the difficult decision to press on to the east, even though his destroyers were dangerously low on fuel. Burnett's cruisers, two of them armed only with 6-inch guns, would have to fight the big ship alone until help arrived.

Imperturbable Bob Burnett was no stranger to this kind of work. A year before, with two light cruisers and a handful of destroyers, he had driven the heavy cruiser *Hipper,* pocket battleship *Lützow,* and six big destroyers away from a hard-pressed convoy in these very waters. Now he led his ships north to join the endangered convoy; he was deliberately breaking radar contact with *Scharnhorst,* convinced he knew where the German ship was going. He was entirely correct.

Meanwhile, *Scharnhorst* plowed on to the northeast. Bey had lost all contact with his destroyers during the engagement with Burnett's cruisers. Now he radioed them to turn back to the north at high speed and rejoin the big ship. They complied, but by now they were so far separated from Bey that they could not catch up; they would never see *Scharnhorst* again.

For the rest of the morning, as a dim, dreary imitation of daylight marginally brightened the blackness of arctic December, *Scharnhorst* pushed on northward, looking for the merchantmen. Burnett had joined the convoy, as had the four destroyers detached from the homeward-bound convoy. Led by Commander R.L. Fisher in *Musketeer*, the little ships plowed through the waves ahead of Burnett's cruisers, themselves sailing some 10 miles ahead of the convoy.

Bey had received a message from German scouting aircraft that had spotted Fraser's force. The Luftwaffe had correctly identified one heavy unit as part of the British force, even though its position, as reported, was 50 miles in error. As the signal came to *Scharnhorst,* however, it made no mention that a British heavy unit was part of the force the aircraft had seen.

Bey pressed on. If he had misgivings, he had also received the message from Dönitz some what stridently urging Bey to "strike a blow for the gallant troops on the eastern front by destroying the convoy."

A little while before noon, McCoy ordered the convoy to alter course toward the southeast. As the convoy complied—a complicated maneuver—the radar operator on board *Belfast* reported a contact. It was *Scharnhorst* coming from the northeast. Just before 12:30, all of Burnett's cruisers opened fire at a range of about 10,000 yards, again lighting up the arctic gloom with starshell. The German ship immediately turned northwest, firing her 11-inch guns at her tormentors. She concentrated her fire on *Norfolk*, the best target because of the visible flash of her broadsides.

Scharnhorst hit *Norfolk* twice. One of the big shells disabled X turret (the rear-most); a second started a formidable fire amidships, but the cruiser pressed on, her speed unaffected. In the smoky ruins of X turret, surrounded by the dead, Marine C.G. Hardy was methodically removing powder charges from the gun rammers, although he knew he might be blown to bits at any second. The ship came first. Hardy's heroism would earn him the Distinguished Service Medal.

During the exchange of fire, shells from all three British ships struck *Scharnhorst, Belfast* hitting the German seven times. The British destroyers added their own lighter

broadsides and tried to close in to attack with torpedoes. As the German ship smashed through the wild seas at 28 knots, the destroyers could not catch her.

Bey had had enough. Those dogged British cruisers were between him and the convoy and obviously proposed to stay there; it was time to go home. He turned away, and at about 2 PM he signaled his lost destroyers to do the same. They complied, although without knowing it they were less than 10 miles west of the convoy when Bey's signal was received.

Now, as Bey raced for safety in Norway, Burnett's ships shadowed him, lurking behind him and watching the German with their radar. Visibility was decreasing from bad to worse, low stratus clouds and wind-driven spume adding to the gloom.

Scharnhorst's crew at last had a chance to eat. Details carried buckets of hot soup and big chunks of bread from the galley to duty stations all over the ship. The British ships were behind them now and falling ever further back. There was no firing, and the ship was racing for home. It must have seemed to the German sailors that the mission was over. Safety was less than 200 miles away.

On the bridge, Bey and Hinze were not so sure. The British were still tracking them, and they must have wondered if their enemy still had some ugly surprise waiting for them. At about 4:45 PM, they would find out.

The chase was difficult for Burnett's cruisers. *Sheffield* lost a shaft bearing and was forced to drastically reduce speed while repairs were made. *Norfolk* also had to temporarily reduce speed while she fought a fire caused by one of *Scharnhorst*'s big shells, leaving *Belfast* and the destroyers to shadow *Scharnhorst*.

Behind them, the crews of *Sheffield* and *Norfolk* worked frantically to get back to speed and rejoin *Belfast*. If *Scharnhorst* were to turn on that single light cruiser now—but she did not. Bey was running for home. The cruisers had done their job and done it well indeed. Bey, though he could not know it, was well into the trap. Fraser's tactics had worked perfectly, and he was now close enough to get across *Scharnhorst*'s path to safety.

Fraser knew he was close to his quarry, closing in on *Scharnhorst* at about right angles to the German's course. Fraser had split his four destroyers into two divisions, two little ships on each bow of *Duke of York*. Now, at 4:32, as the anemic northern daylight faded, his radar operators reported contact up ahead. It was more than 45,000 yards away—and it was *Scharnhorst*.

At last Fraser could come to grips with Germany's last seaworthy capital ship, but he had to be careful. *Scharnhorst* was faster than any ship in the British armada; if *Duke of York* or the cruisers could not hit her hard enough to slow her down, she might still escape into the fading light of the arctic night.

As Fraser's force closed in on *Scharnhorst, Norfolk,* her fire now under control, was catching up with *Belfast*. *Sheffield* still trailed her two sisters, even though she had been able to get her speed back up to 23 knots. Flanking the cruisers on the west were *Virago, Opportune, Matchless,* and *Musketeer. Duke of York,* trailed by *Jamaica,* was led by *Savage* and *Saumarez* on her port bow and *Scorpion* and *Stord* to starboard. The stage was set.

Bey did not know he was under attack until that sickly pinkish glare again shattered the darkness above him, and monstrous waterspouts rose all around his racing ship. *Duke of York* and *Jamaica* had begun to shoot, opening fire at about six miles through swirling rain and snow, and their gunnery was superb.

Duke of York's very first salvo straddled the German ship, and one of the 1,400-pound shells struck home, crashing into *Scharnhorst*'s Anton turret—the one closest to the bow. Minutes later a second 14-inch projectile exploded onto the quarterdeck, causing heavy damage. *Jamaica* hit *Scharnhorst* with her third salvo. The hit on Anton turret set fires that quickly spread aft to Bruno turret, and *Scharnhorst*'s skipper partially flooded the powder-handling room to prevent an explosion.

Though the fire was controlled and the powder room drained within minutes, Anton turret was finished. Then *Duke of York* scored again, a hit aft that set more fires. The shock of the big guns knocked *Duke of York*'s bridge clock loose, coming


Imperial War Museum

ABOVE: Smoke and flame belch from her 14-inch after-turret guns as the battleship HMS *Duke of York* fires at *Scharnhorst* during the Battle of the North Cape. OPPOSITE: Gun crews aboard the HMS *Duke of York* man their battle station in a 14-inch turret. The men are wearing antiflash, flame-retardant hoods to prevent cordite burns when the guns are fired.

close to the admiral's head in its fall. It is not recorded that Fraser minded at all.

Scharnhorst's superior speed—31 knots—began to open the range, and two of her shells tore through *Duke of York*'s masts without exploding. One round cut through all the battleship's radio antennas and severed the wires leading to her gunnery control radar.

In spite of the wild sea and atrocious weather, a Royal Navy reserve lieutenant named H.R.K. Bates managed to climb the wet, swaying mast in the screaming wind and make repairs. Clinging to the mast in the darkness, shaken by the battleship's thunderous broadsides, working with numb hands, he got the vital gunnery radar up and running again.

Imperial War Museum

Fraser's destroyers, pitching and yawing terribly in the monstrous seas, tried desperately to gain enough speed to attack the German leviathan with torpedoes. Running light—they had used most of their fuel—in constant danger of broaching-to from huge following seas, *Savage* and *Saumarez* tried to close in on the German's port side. *Scorpion* and Norwegian *Stord* struggled to reach attack positions to starboard. Off to the north, *Musketeer* led her three destroyers on a course parallel with that of *Scharnhorst*.

Just before 5 PM, the guns of *Belfast* and *Norfolk* joined in, and both Force 1 and Force 2 chased *Scharnhorst* to the east. *Duke of York* continued to hit the German ship.

Scharnhorst's twisting course made *Duke of York*'s gunnery difficult. Even so, by 6:20 PM, *Duke of York* had fired more than 40 salvoes and straddled her rapidly moving quarry with more than 30 of them. Still, even as the destroyers gained on *Scharnhorst* with terrible slowness, *Duke of York* was gradually losing ground to the speedier German vessel. For all his careful planning and his ship's good shooting, Fraser knew he still might lose his quarry.

And then, at 6:40, *Duke of York*'s guns found *Scharnhorst* again and hit her hard. This time British shells took out Bruno, the other forward turret, and also hit *Scharnhorst* below the waterline. The big shell tore into number one boiler room, cutting a steam line, and *Scharnhorst*'s speed dropped off to about 10 knots.

Although heroic work by the German engineers got her quickly back to 22 knots, *Duke of York* and the destroyers now began to overhaul her rapidly.

Scharnhorst's superstructure was twisted junk by now, and the ship was littered with dead men and pieces of dead men; everywhere there were wounded. Writhing men terribly scalded by steam lay on the decks far below. She had lost two-thirds of her main armament and several 5.9-inch turrets.

Still, her speed was now back, and she was again pulling away from the British. At 6:30, Hintze got on his intercom and complimented his crew, but his congratulations were premature. Only a few minutes later four British destroyers appeared out of the murk, two on each flank of *Scharnhorst,* making 30 knots in spite of the tumultuous seas.

Savage and *Saumarez* closed in first, cutting the range down to 10,000 yards, their guns repeatedly hitting *Scharnhorst*'s massive superstructure without receiving fire from *Scharnhorst*'s ineffective 5.9-inch secondary armament. And now, from the other flank, *Scorpion* and *Stord* were attacking unobserved. As *Scharnhorst* turned south, *Scorpion* and *Stord* fired 16 torpedoes at a range of about a mile; one struck home.

Under the unearthly light of starshell, *Savage* and *Saumarez* closed in to launch their own torpedoes. Between them, the two little ships slammed three torpedoes into *Scharnhorst*.

Saumarez, however, was hit by several 11-inch shells, and two big rounds took out her fire director and rangefinder. Her luck was in, however, for neither shell exploded. Other big rounds did explode in the water near her, sweeping her decks with clouds of steel splinters, puncturing her hull, and leaving 11 of her crew dead and 11 more wounded. Her speed reduced to 10 knots, the destroyer made smoke and turned away. But one of her deadly "fish" had struck home.

At 7:01, *Duke of York* and *Jamaica,* which had ceased fire during the destroyer attacks, again opened fire at about 10,000 yards, almost point-blank range for their guns. They hit the German ship again and again, *Duke of York* straddling her with her first salvo and hitting her with the second, starting huge fires aft.

On *Scharnhorst,* the crew was moving 11-inch ammunition aft to C turret, the ship's only operational big guns. Ten minutes later that turret was also put out of action, perhaps by two successive hits from *Belfast*'s guns. *Scharnhorst* was listing now, and the

National Maritime Museum, London / The Image Works

ABOVE: In a painting by C.E. Turner, the blazing and blasted hulk of *Scharnhorst* heels to starboard on her way to the bottom of the Barents Sea, carrying over 1,900 of her sailors with her. Today the *Scharnhorst* wreck lies 66 nautical miles north-northeast of North Cape, Norway, in 950 feet of water. OPPOSITE: Blindfolded and wearing merchant seamen rescue kit, the 36 survivors of the sinking of *Scharnhorst* are led down the gangway of a British ship at Scapa Flow on January 2, 1944, and into internment.

massive fires overwhelmed her damage control parties.

Belfast and *Jamaica* launched their own torpedoes and got two more hits on the dying giant. In the wild arctic darkness *Scharnhorst* blazed with fires, and her speed fell away to a bare five knots. Bey knew he and his ship were finished and signaled the German naval command that the ship would "fight to the last shell."

Now it was the turn of Commander R.L. "Boggy" Fisher with his wildly pitching *Musketeer* and her three weather-beaten consorts after a long chase through wild seas. At the start of it, he had shouted to his torpedo officer, "We'll have a shot at torpedoing the bastard if we can get near enough!"

"Aye-aye, sir!" responded an officer poised by the torpedo-sight on the destroyer's bridge. Now their moment had come. *Musketeer* and *Matchless* could also use their 4.7s enclosed in turrets; *Opportune* and *Virago,* with their older open gun mounts, could not.

Between them, *Musketeer, Opportune, Virago,* and *Matchless* hit the German ship with six more torpedoes. There was nothing to be seen of *Scharnhorst* now but a thick smoke cloud with a hideous evil glow inside it, like coals in the heart of a blacksmith's forge. At 7:45, as *Belfast* closed in to launch more torpedoes, a monstrous underwater explosion shook the wild sea, and the glow disappeared into blackness. It was over.

Belfast and *Norfolk* did what they could to collect survivors from the bitter cold of the Barents Sea. They could find only 36 living men in the frigid darkness, some of them singing in the night: "On a sailor's grave no roses bloom." The others, over 1,900 of them, were gone with their ship, 150 fathoms down.

Neither Admiral Bey nor Captain Hinze nor any of the other officers were among the survivors. Hinze was spotted, but in the bitter cold he could not hold onto a lifeline long enough to be hauled to safety.

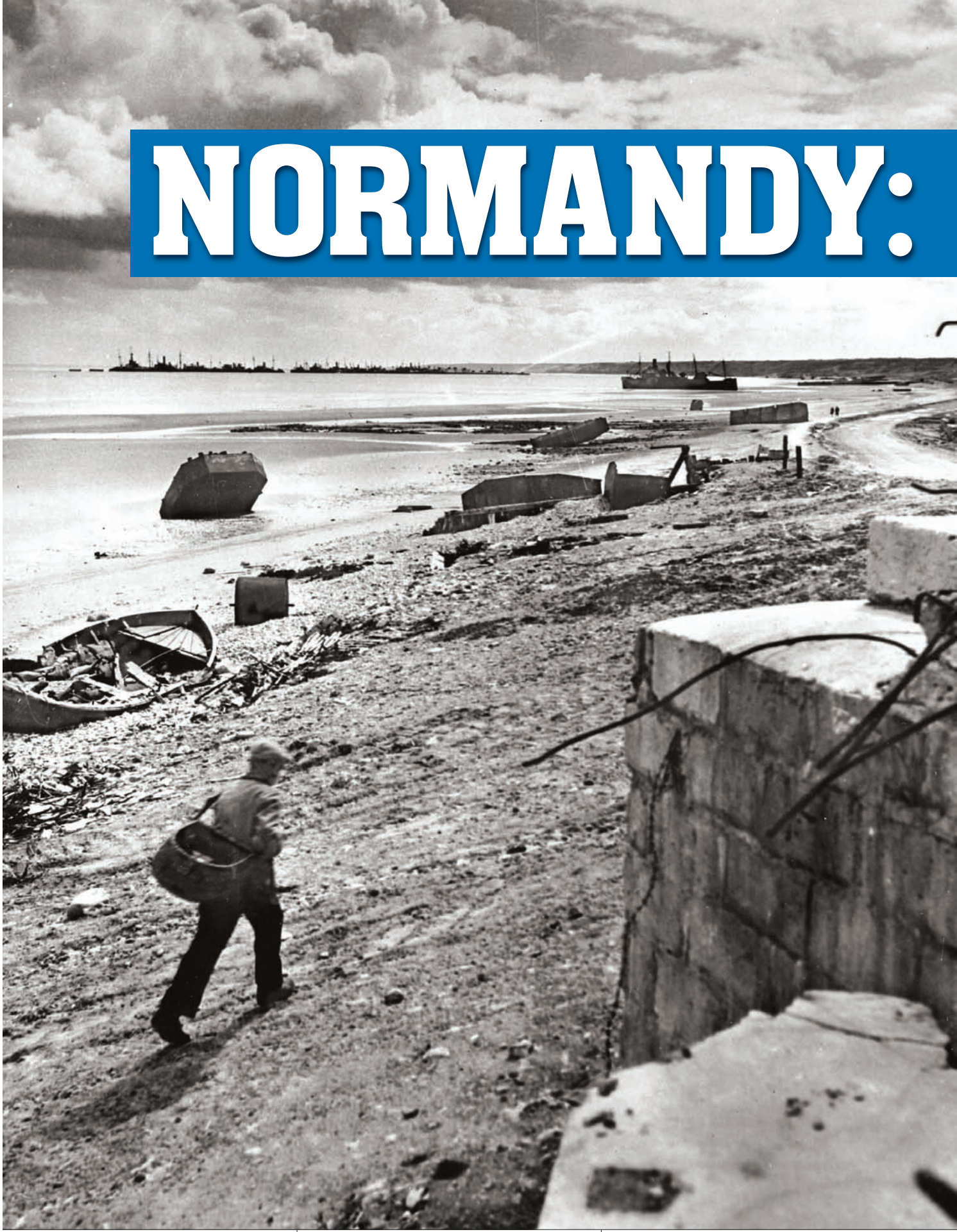
Admiral Fraser called Burnett on the TBS—talk between ships—rarely used at sea for security reasons. "Well done, Bob" he said in the clear, and then he turned to his officers on the bridge. "I think we may secure from Action Stations. It's unlikely that we shall be worried again tonight."

Scharnhorst's protracted death struggle was a testament to her design and construction. She had absorbed 11 torpedoes, at least 13 hits from *Duke of York*'s 14-inchers, 10 or 12 more 8-inch shells, and a great many rounds from the smaller guns of the light cruisers and the destroyers.

For the Allies, with the sinking of *Scharnhorst* the convoy routes to Russia were at last rid of the longtime threat from Germany's battleships. The battle against the U-boats was not over, but the Royal Navy was winning that fight, too. Many of the British Home Fleet's big ships were now free for employment on other missions.

The death of *Scharnhorst* was the final nail in the coffin of Germany's surface navy. □

NORMANDY:



D PLUS 1 YEAR

A year after the Allied assault, the Normandy countryside still bore the scars of battle.

BY KEVIN M. HYMEL

ON JUNE 6, 1945, two *Stars & Stripes* newspaper reporters traveled to Normandy with a mission: to photograph the effects of the year-old D-Day landings on the beaches, towns, and fields. The beaches were still strewn with the weapons of war, towns were in rubble, and almost every inch of ground contained some evidence of the great armies that battled for this part of France.

Their photographs reveale the enormous scale of the operation and its power. They also display the machines and inventions of modern warfare. Wandering civilians serve as a reminder that these battlefields were home to simple farmers and their children. The guns had fallen silent all over Europe a month before, but it would be years until Normandy's scars of war finally healed.

FAR LEFT: A Frenchmen walks past a former German bunker on debris-strewn Omaha Beach near the Vierville exit where so much fierce fighting took place 12 months earlier.

LEFT: The mute barrel of an 88mm gun overlooks the Dog Green sector of Omaha Beach. The gun emplacement became a memorial to the U.S. National Guard.

ABOVE: A half-submerged landing craft drifts in the waves off the Normandy beaches.

TOP LEFT: French children play atop a knocked-out Sherman tank that once belonged to the 3rd U.S. Armored Division.

TOP RIGHT: A *Stars & Stripes* reporter views a wrecked treadway section of a Mulberry artificial harbor marooned below the cliffs of Pointe du Hoc, scene of U.S. Rangers' heroics.

LEFT: A farmer guides his team of plow horses around a British soldier's grave in his field near Caen.

ABOVE: Life in Normandy gradually returned to normal, but farmers had to worry about unexploded land mines.

ABOVE: German prisoners of war tend the graves of Americans killed in France. The cemetery where they are working would become the huge American Military Cemetery at Colleville-sur-Mer, above Omaha Beach.

LEFT: Forlorn and forgotten, a Sturmgeschütz (StuG IV) assault gun remains undisturbed where it was destroyed a year earlier in an unidentified French town. It would be many years before all the wrecks and debris were removed.

Letters

FROM THE EASTERN FRONT

A German soldier's correspondence reveals the courage and hardships on one of World War II's toughest battlefields.

BY HORST FUCHS RICHARDSON

BACKSTORY: *My father, Karl Fuchs, was a German soldier in World War II who fought and died on the Eastern Front. He had a love of scholarship, of music, and sports. He was also a prolific writer of letters and postcards. His letters from 1937 to 1941 provide a unique perspective of this important period from the point of view of a typical, young German man caught up in the thrall of Adolf Hitler and the "New Germany."*

After a brief internship as a village schoolteacher, he joined the Wehrmacht on October 1, 1939. For the rest of his short life, he served his country as a member of the tank corps. He was truly devoted to the cause of Greater Germany and felt it was his sacred duty to engage in battle for this cause.

From the many thoughtful letters which my father wrote during this period (and which my mother and grandmother saved), I have selected a few for publication. I believe they accurately describe his hopes and dreams, his beliefs and plans, his observations of occupied France and battle-torn Russia, and the trials and tribulations of a soldier who is separated from his loved ones.

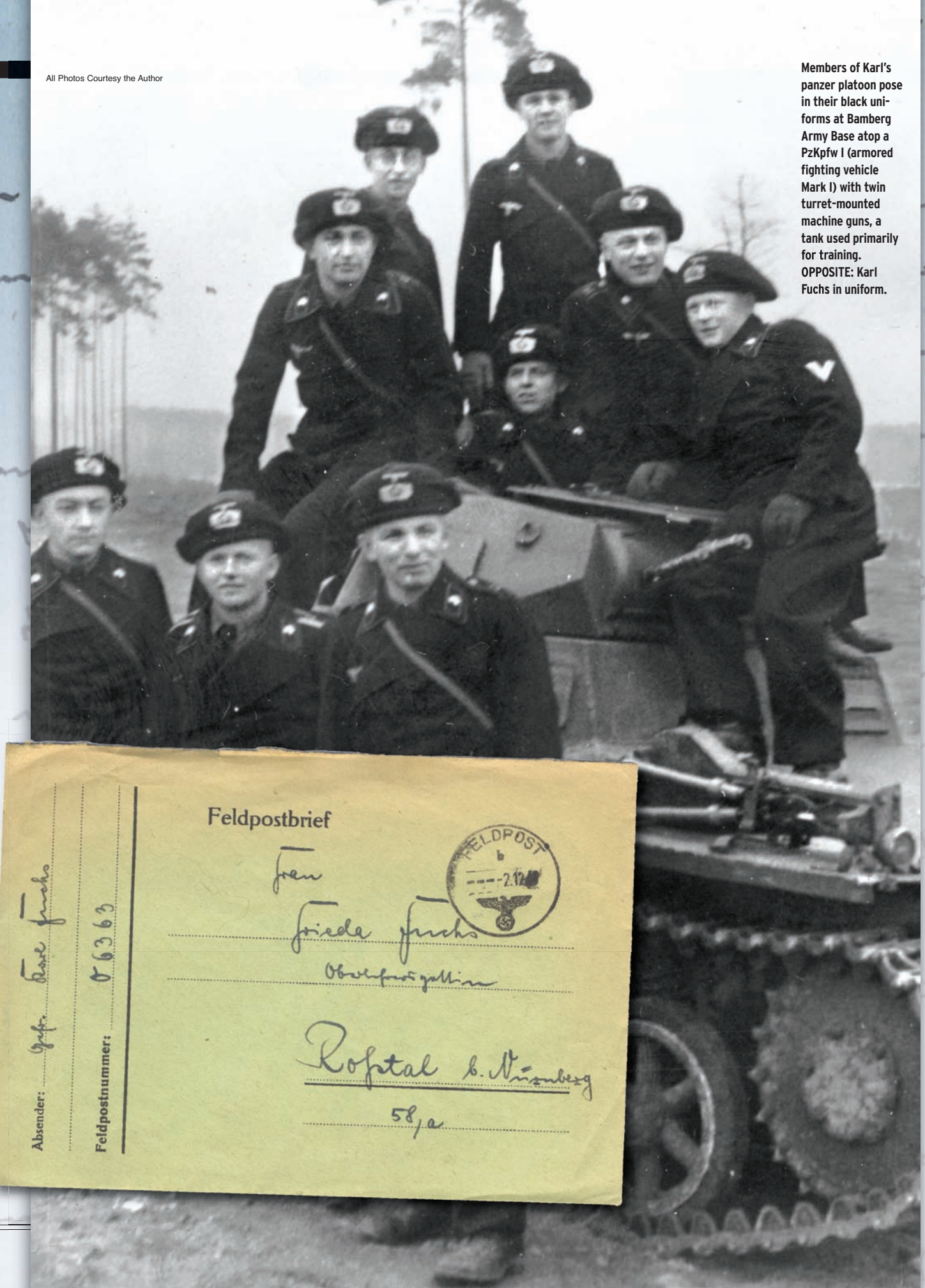
It was my father's intention to use these letters as the basis for a novel he hoped to one day write. In translating and publishing the letters, I am not only sharing my father's thoughts, feelings, and impressions of the war years with the readers, but I have also grown to know him, a man I never met, for he was killed a few months after I was born. I would be very much remiss not to mention that these letters should also serve as a warning to future generations of young and vulnerable idealists. They, too, may be tempted and seduced by an attractive, yet evil, authority and pay for this brief adventure with their lives.

August 22, 1937

(Eltmann on the Main, National Labor Service Camp)
My Dear Parents,
All of us are very enthusiastic because most likely our [National Labor Service] unit will become the honor guard [at the 1937 Nazi Party Day Rally in Nuremberg]. Just think of it!! Our unit, the best platoon in the entire Reich! We would be up front whenever the Führer made an official proclamation; one hundred men from the Reichswehr [army], a hundred from the SS, and us—all directly behind the Führer.

On September 1st we will arrive in Nuremberg and remain there for two weeks. Isn't that incredible! Now let me explain about the parade. Father will most likely sit in the reserved section of the Zeppelin-Field. Only half of the original 40,000 labor service volunteers will march past the Führer. We will be the first platoon that marches by. Only the Reichsführerschulen [Reich Leadership School] are ahead of us. So when Detachment #5/286 marches by,

All Photos Courtesy the Author



Members of Karl's panzer platoon pose in their black uniforms at Bamberg Army Base atop a PzKpfw I (armored fighting vehicle Mark I) with twin turret-mounted machine guns, a tank used primarily for training. OPPOSITE: Karl Fuchs in uniform.

I'll be in the sixth row on the left wing. Maybe you'll see me. On Saturday when I come home, I will explain it to you more precisely.

Your son, Karl

Rosstal, July 4, 1939

Dear Mädi [Karl's girlfriend, Helene "Mädi" Schoeppe, whom he met in Würzburg in 1938 and would later marry],

I've just spent some time improvising on the piano—Lehar of course. Should I bring along the sheet music of his operetta "Land of Smiles" when I see you tomorrow? I already know the answer to this question and do want to make you happy.

While I am writing, I'm sitting in our garden. Blossoming nature fills my joyful surroundings. All is so peaceful and serene. Fragrant rose bushes and the lush green of the garden encircle me. This rural peace at home is something very special, my dear Mädi. I am much happier here than in the hustle and bustle of city life. I hope you understand what I mean. Of course, I cannot do without the cultural programs and entertainment opportunities of the city; however, these are only secondary when compared to a walk through nature's fields, meadows, and forests, particularly when this walk is taken arm-in-arm with the one you love. I hope that we can take another such outing soon.

Love, Korri [a pet name she gave to him]

October 1939

[a month after Germany's invasion of Poland]

My dear Parents,

We've been at the Langwasser [Army] Training Camp [near Nürnberg] since Wednesday at noon. For the past two days I wanted to call you but was unable to get through to Rosstal. On Monday, however, a sizeable group of us will parade in front of Gauleiter Julius Streicher and then march through the entire downtown area of Nuremberg. We expect to have a day off on Saturday or Sunday and I will call you then. Hopefully we will be able to meet. I have met a lot of my old friends here and everything is fine. Heil Hitler!

Karl

Fall 1939

Dear Father,

A week has gone by and we're now settled in at the military installation. The entire compound is superb! We have had our psychological examinations and, based on these tests, I was assigned as a tank gunner. Now, of course, we have to learn and train until we perfect all of our skills. Infantry training is almost behind us and in eight weeks we have to be fit for combat. You, as an old soldier, know best what this means. The intensity of training is tremendous and there is no rest for anyone. All of us are eager to make progress and no one complains, least of all your son. You won't ever have to be ashamed of me; you can depend on me.

Several days ago I had to report to the captain of our company and speak to him about my plans for officer training. Today for the first time we had to practice pistol shooting—five shots and five bull's-eyes for me! Next week we have training in shooting with rifles and machine guns. The recruits are looking forward to this training. All of us tank gunners need to be crack shots.

Next week we'll be able to climb into our tanks for the first time. Operating the vehicle will have to become second nature to us. Tanks are really awesome!...

Sieg Heil and on to old England!

Your loyal son, Karl

Bamberg Army Base, December 8, 1939

Dear Mother,

A cold wind is whistling outside our barracks today. Believe me, it's no cakewalk to stand guard in this kind of weather from 7:00 until noon with full military uniform, steel helmet on your head, rifle ready and your cartridge belt and bayonet slung around your shoulder and hip.

Today is Wednesday and we were sworn in as soldiers. This was obviously a memorable experience for us, especially for me. While all the other comrades marched to the square where we were to be sworn in, another soldier and I were selected for a special task; we drove with a small tank [an obsolete Mark I] to a square and looked out from the turret with our eyes bright and hands saluting the officers. This was a tremendous honor for me and I will cherish it forever. That's all for today. Heil Hitler!

Your son, Karl

Christmas 1939

Dear Father,

....What is uppermost in our minds this Christmas is adherence to duty to our beloved Führer and to our Fatherland to our last dying breath. May this sense of duty and a quiet handshake between us be our mutual Christmas greeting. Heil Hitler!

Your loyal son, Karl

January 20, 1940

Dear Mädi,

It's snowing outside; as a matter of fact, it's snowing so much this winter that it seems like "old man winter" is trying to catch up with what he missed during last year! Even under this blanket of snow there is a promise of a new beginning, a promise of spring. Soon the snow will melt and underneath it, new, young life will sprout up.

What will the new time bring for us? We really don't know but one thing is for sure: we will never lose the belief in our good fortune, no matter how difficult times will be in the future. All of us believe in a just victory and in peace. This peace will become a reality only if we fight for it. I don't believe in this report about an imminent offer of peace [during the lull between the invasion of Poland and the invasion of Denmark, Norway, France, and the Low Countries known as the "Phony War"]. In my opinion, it's no more than a rumor. Of course, many people would like to believe it and would be very relieved and happy if peace did come about soon. In the meantime, the struggle continues. We'll fight to the end and must be victorious!

Love, Karl

Bamberg Army Base, February 9, 1940

Dear Father,

Today during inspection it was pretty cold; nevertheless, we performed our duties during inspection with great enthusiasm and were praised for our efforts and performance. It must have been

ABOVE: Karl's RAD unit marching with heavy poles as part of its physical training. OPPOSITE: Before joining the army, Karl was a member of the National Labor Service (RAD). Here Karl (third from right) poses with his fellow unit members before the Nazi Party Day parade in August 1937.

a magnificent sight to see hundreds of tanks maneuvering in unison. All of us were dressed in black death's-head uniforms for the very first time. It was a picture of unquestioned courage and military strength. We all hope we'll be transferred to the front soon. That is our greatest wish!

It is understandable that our women don't understand this wish. Well, that cannot matter. That is how the female soul functions. Women do not understand anything about the necessary struggle of a man and, in the final analysis, this must be the highest and noblest goal: a man must prove himself in battle. This battle is not only an individual struggle but also a struggle for our family as well as our German people.

Now to something very important. Mädi and I plan to marry at Easter time, but only if we can get an apartment by then. I hope this news doesn't shock you and that you and Mother will approve....

For today and the future, a hearty Sieg Heil!

Your loyal son, Karl

[*Author's note:* At this time Karl's father Hans, a World War I veteran, was also on active duty with the Luftwaffe in Fürth.

Editor's note: The Death's Head insignia was traditional to Prussian cavalry, and German armored formations carried on the tradition. It should not be confused with the SS use of the Death's Head insignia.]

February 14, 1940

Dear Mother,

I received your parcel today and want to thank you for it.... Believe me, I can understand that you are sad now since Father has been transferred from Fürth, but you simply have to endure this hardship like a brave German woman. You wrote that your only wish is for peace and I, as your son, can understand this

completely. I am sure other people are wishing for the very same thing. But whatever must be, must be....

Greetings from your son, Karl

April 1, 1940

My dear Parents,

This morning we moved our quarters. All of us officer candidates are together now and in a few days we'll be the only ones left in our company. It was a wonderful day! Outside the sun was shining brightly and almost the entire day was spent buzzing around in our tanks. Great!

In the next weeks we are going to be taught to drive practically every kind of vehicle there is in the army and I will get a driver's license. I guess that's important since I want to drive you around the countryside once I'm out of the army....

Now it's time to hit the sack. In my thoughts I am with you.

Your thankful son, Karl

April 9, 1940

Dear Father,

What a day! What enthusiasm everywhere! German troops have marched into Denmark and Norway! What a depressing feeling that must be for those gentlemen in London and Paris. The "Huns" have done it again in good German style.

And what are we doing here? We're sitting around at home like corralled horses and can only watch our comrades do our job. Believe me, many of us are becoming angry. We firmly believe, though, that our turn will come....

Your loyal son, Karl

[Author's note: In mid-April 1940, Karl and Mädi were married.]

Bamberg Army Base, May 5, 1940

Dear Father,

After the wedding festivities I returned to the routine here at the base. Slowly but surely I'm becoming upset with the daily routine here and would like to get out and fight at the front. My comrades and I don't want to spend our entire military careers here conducting dull training exercises. My God, we would like to accomplish something! We are tired of play-acting and are full of enthusiasm for battle. We didn't become soldiers to be treated like idiots. We should do something other than drill and instruction.

All of these personal gripes become insignificant, though, when we hear news of victory at the front. Isn't it incredible what our troops, especially the Air Force, are achieving? Let me just mention the recent sinking of a British battleship with only one bomb! I feel sorry for the English, don't you? Slowly but surely they are getting the picture over there on their island. I certainly wouldn't have wanted to be on that battleship. In the future people will say that the English rule the waves, but the Germans rule the air and control whatever happens to be floating in the water!

I'm anxious to find out how things are going to develop in the south. I think the Balkan powder keg will explode soon and if it does, England will certainly feel it too. I guess for us there is only one goal in this battle—to beat England on the water, on the land and, above all, in the air....

Well, that's enough for today. Let me greet you with our old battle cry: Germany, Sieg Heil!

Your loyal son, Karl

Bamberg Army Base, May 19, 1940

[nine days after Germany's invasion of the West]

Dear Mädi,

I just heard the imposing sounds of the *Englandlied* ["The England Song," a patriotic German song from World War I] over the radio. The whole base is excited. German soldiers have taken Saint Quentin [northeast France, between Paris and Brussels]! The German army is before the gates of Paris! It is wonderful what our soldiers are achieving! It is as if the old Teutonic spirit and the old strength of our forefathers are with them. Friedrich Barbarossa has arisen! He is with us in our fight against our archenemy. He leads us on to greater victories and soon to peace. And this Friedrich Barbarossa is none other than our Führer Adolf Hitler!

Love, Korri

LEFT: Karl and Mädi shown at home during one of his brief furloughs, spring 1940. RIGHT: Karl's father, Hans, pictured as a captain in the Luftwaffe. He had served in World War I and survived World War II with no battle wounds.

Even at this early stage of the war, many German units had no motorized transport and had to rely on old-fashioned horsepower.

May 25, 1940

Dear Mädi,

Another Sunday. There's light rain and a breeze coming from the West.... And what do you think of yesterday? It certainly was an eventful day for Germany. German paratroopers landed on the island of Crete! There was also a sea battle off the coast of Iceland and we sank one of the biggest battleships in the world [theGerman battleship *Bismarck* sank the British battlecruiser HMS *Hood*]. Splendid—indeed, splendid! That, my dear, is the German military spirit. Can you understand that all of us here sit around with tears in our eyes because we have to watch these heroic deeds from afar! We're sitting here in the Fatherland and feel like incompetent idiots!....

Love, Korri

Erlangen Army Base, June 2, 1940

Dear Father,

We haven't heard anything from you in such a long time that we have reason to be worried. Mother, in particular, is ill at ease. Yesterday Mädi sent me the letter which you had mailed to her. At least now I have a military postal number and can write to you. [Author's note: Hans Fuchs' unit provided communications for the Luftwaffe during the advance across France.]

From your letter it becomes evident that you were in the midst of things and that you once again saw all those battlefields which were so familiar to you from the Great War, battlefields which evoke German heroism and manliness. You were part of all the activity and I, your son, must sit here at home at the army base and wait.

Dear Father, believe me, an incredible anger and sadness has gotten hold of us here. Have we not completed our course work? I was transferred with two comrades to Tank Regiment 25 in Erlangen. It was explained to us officer candidates that all of us had to remain here and would not be sent to the front after all. This command, presumably, came right from the top. We tried everything to change their minds, but nothing helped.

We had to stay, and they tried to appease us by telling us that we would certainly be part of the transport to the front. This is supposed to be in eight weeks. Can you believe it? Naturally, we want to try everything we can do to get to the front and fight, but nothing seems to help. I almost don't dare to come home anymore because I am so ashamed.... [T]he war will be over without any of us having fired a shot. Father, if anyone tags me a coward, I could not live with the shame!

My only pleasures in life are Mädi's visits. Father, she has become a dear friend and we understand each other so well since the wedding....

Your sad son, Karl

Erlangen Army Base, June 5, 1940

My dear Mother,

I must tell you something that will probably cause you great pain but that can't be helped. Next Monday, June 10th, I'm off to the front. I am looking forward to it; otherwise I wouldn't be a German. Just look at my brave comrades who have fought all this time, who have put their lives on the line for our Fatherland and

Although sun-burned and wind-blown, three Wehrmacht soldiers smile confidently, not realizing that disaster on the Eastern Front is in their future.

our Führer. The first battle [Poland] has taken place and ended in glorious victory. This current battle [France] has been raging for only a short time; yet these foreign culprits refused the peace offerings of our Führer. In a few weeks this struggle will also come to a victorious conclusion and in the fall the war will be over.

I know how difficult it is for you, Mother, and it also is hard on my young wife. You must understand that you women have to be as brave as those of us at the front. I know that I will return and there will be no more beautiful reunion than the one we will experience in peacetime....

All of us are ready to march. We have received new gear and new uniforms and things couldn't be better. Please say hello to all my friends in town.... Tell them I didn't have time to write to all of them. You, dear Mother, think of me when I am out there on the front fighting and be certain that I will always honor you as my good Mother.

Your loyal son, Karl

[*Author's note*: The order for Karl's unit to move out was cancelled several days later.]

Erlangen Army Base, June 12, 1940

My dear Mädi,

Are you listening to the radio? I just heard an announcement about the latest German victory. German troops are only 20 kilometers from Paris!! Of course, we aren't part of this and it looks like we're going to be too late anyway. You, my dear, must be happy and glad since you don't have to fear for my safety. Yes, the biggest victory has taken place! France has capitulated and peace is at hand. Don't worry, Mädi, because it doesn't look like we'll be called upon to fight....

I firmly believe that this year we will celebrate the most fantastic [Nazi] Party rally ever and perhaps by then I'll be out of the army. Who would have thought it? God in heaven led our magnificent Führer and our brave and loyal soldiers. Are you glad I'm not in danger? I am somewhat saddened that I wasn't involved at all. Fate apparently ordered that I should be with you. I just hope no one will call me a coward. I rejoice with you and the entire German nation. To our Führer a Sieg Heil!

Your Karl

Erlangen Army Base, June 20, 1940

Dear Father,

You could be proud of your only son if he had been part of Germany's most magnificent victories. Several weeks ago I told you that it was finally our turn to go to the front, but now nothing came of it. On June 10 our march unit went to the front but without us. Orders from headquarters: All officer candidates have to remain here!! This time we weren't disappointed but enraged!

We ran from officer to officer and finally to the commander, explaining to them that we would renounce all claims to becoming officers if only we got to go. All of our attempts were in vain. While we told them that we wanted to volunteer for the paratroopers, they asked us, "Gentlemen, aren't you proud of your tank unit?" Obviously, they were trying to call upon our loyalty. Apparently our division is in dire need of young officers, much more so than any other division. We have become pessimists and believe that we will never get to the front—not even to take revenge on England.

Oh, Father, had I listened to you and gone into the Air Force, I would have been part of the action long ago. I am ashamed in front of you and all my comrades. You are a part of the action and I, the son of an old soldier, am banished to the hinterland. The war will be over and I won't have had a chance to do anything for our Führer or for our Fatherland. Perhaps my chance is yet to come. Please write and console me.

Your sad son, Karl

[*Author's note*: Karl's fervent wishes to see combat finally came true when his unit was ordered to take part in the huge surprise invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, known as Operation Barbarossa. Karl was now a member of the 7th Panzer Division (part of the 39th Panzer Corps, an element of Army Group Center's Panzergruppe 3) from the Bonn area.]

On the move to the East, June 12, 1941

Dearest Mädi,

By now our child has, no doubt, been born. If I only knew how you are feeling and whether it's a boy or girl....

The departure from our army base where we've been stationed so long was a real ceremony and very uplifting. We pulled out of there with our tanks decorated with flowers! The townspeople had given us many small presents and were very nice to us. That was several days ago....

Since we are having such terrible weather all of a sudden, wind, rain, and cold, I'm freezing! But since we're soldiers, that's not supposed to bother us....

Your Korri

Eastern Front, Lithuania, June 25, 1941

Dearly beloved Mädi,

Today was a day of pride for us all! Victoriously we marched into Vilnius [Lithuania], cheered on by the jubilant citizens. Yesterday I knocked off a Russian tank, as I had done two days ago! If I get in another attack, I'll receive my first battle stripes. War is half as bad as it sounds and one thing is plain as day: The Russians are fleeing everywhere and we follow them. All of us believe in an early victory!...

Kiss my dear son Horsti [diminutive for Horst] for me.

Your Papi

Eastern Front, Russia, June 28, 1941

My dearest wife, my dear little Horsti,

After three days of heavy fighting, we were finally granted a well-deserved day of rest. Unfortunately, there is maintenance work to be done....

...Today I received my first war decoration from our commander, namely, the tank assault medal. I wear it proudly and hope you are proud of me.

Up to now, all of the troops have had to accomplish quite a bit. The same goes for our machines and tanks. But, nevertheless, we're going to show those Bolshevik bums who's who around here! They fight like hired hands—not like soldiers, no matter if they are men, women, or children on the front lines. They're all no better than a bunch of scoundrels.... Europe stands under the leadership of our beloved Führer Adolf Hitler, and he'll reshape it for a better future....

Your Korri

Eastern Front, Russia, July 5, 1941

My darling wife, my dear boy,

We have fought in battle many days now and we have defeated the enemy wherever we have encountered him. Let me tell you that Russia is nothing but misery, poverty, and depravity! That is Bolshevism!...

Our losses have been minimal and our success is great. This war will be over soon, because we are fighting against only fragmented opposition....

Intimate kisses to you, Papi

Eastern Front, Russia, July 11, 1941

My dearest wife, my dear little Horsti,

Today our united forces captured the Russian city of Vitebsk. It is a large city and has been totally destroyed.... Now we are only several hundred kilometers away from Moscow, and I'm certain that we will soon be in the enemy's capital.

At any rate, these Russian dogs are now on the run. Sometimes I'm tempted to feel sorry for them because many of the soldiers are young boys, hardly 16 or 17 years old. But you can't afford to have pity on them.... If I only had some water to wash myself!...

Your Korri

Smolensk, Russia, July 15, 1941

Dearest darling, my dear little boy,

For the first time in a long time I have had a chance to take a bath. That was a marvelous, refreshing feeling! My entire body felt like it had been reborn....

We are now positioned outside the city of Smolensk and have penetrated the highly acclaimed Stalin lines. I would imagine that within eight to ten days this campaign will be over. Yes, you can be proud of the German soldiers and the military accomplishments of our men....

Your Korri

German pioneers (combat engineers) build a bridge over the Dnieper River to replace one that was destroyed by the retreating Red Army.

Eastern Front, September 17, 1941

Dearest Mädi,

My hands are so cold that I can hardly write. Thank God we're on the move again and about to camp at another location. I can tell you that the roads are in terrible condition. There's mud everywhere and the rain doesn't seem to want to stop. Horses would probably be of more use to us now than vehicles. Sometimes we have to make new roads by simply driving across the countryside. But everywhere you go, you slip and slide and get stuck....

Your Korri

Eastern Front, October 9, 1941

My dearest Mädi, my dear little boy,

I'm sure that you must have heard the special radio announcements about our battle achievements. Yes, you can find me somewhere on this front near Moscow! The Russians didn't believe that we would attack at this time of the year when the cold weather is setting in. They probably thought that we would give them a recuperative period until next year.

The last hour of Bolshevism is near and that means that Old England's destruction is imminent. You can hear on that island now the same desperate cries which once were uttered in ancient Rome: "Germani ante portas" ["Germans at the gates!"], and this time it's Adolf Hitler who is standing before the gates....

For the time being, we are resting in a Russian blockhouse. Since it is terribly cold and unfriendly outside, we have no choice but to move inside and fight it out with the lice. Don't be afraid when I come home in a few weeks, my darling, I won't bring any of these bugs along. The only thing I'll bring is myself....

In two days our child will be four months old. In these four months I have been separated from you and have been with you only in my thoughts. All of us believe and trust the words of the Führer in his great speech. Indeed, the last decisive battle stands before us. Soon I will be home to hug and kiss you and then I will finally hold my baby boy in my arms.

Your Korri

BELOW: During the German invasion of the Soviet Union, German infantrymen pass an abandoned 62-ton Soviet Kliment Voroshilov KV-2 heavy tank with an M-10 152mm gun. OPPOSITE: Sergeant Karl Fuchs's Czech-built Panzer 38(t) in which he fought, and died, in Russia. Note the bent barrel of the 37mm Škoda A7 main gun.

Vyazma, Russia, October 12, 1941

Dear Father,

You must have heard the special announcement about Vyazma. Yes, you can find me here. I almost think that this battle is the last flickering moment of a once-powerful Russia. For days now the enemy has tried to break our iron encirclement, but their efforts have been in vain. Whenever there is a hot spot, we appear like ghosts and engage the enemy in battle.

Yesterday must have been our company's proudest day in this campaign. The alarm sounded and our tanks moved out! Russian tanks reinforced with support troops wanted to break out of our ring. My unit (and I'm its temporary commander) was assigned the task of scouting the opposition. Visibility was low because of ground fog. We moved four tanks into an advantageous position.

Suddenly three heavy [KV-1] Russian tanks, big as battleships, appeared out of the fog to the right of us. We opened fire immediately, but these tanks had enormous armor plating. If they had known that only four tiny scout tanks were opposing them! But here as well, courage and audacity brought us victory. Two of their tanks were burning and the third pulled away.

Once the fog lifted from the valley, we really let them have it with every barrel. Tanks, antiaircraft guns, trucks, and the infantry fired on everything in sight. Once the main body of our company arrived, our comrades destroyed their remaining forces. Proud and satisfied, our company commander smiled at us while our eyes were still flashing. We had no losses at all. My cap, though, had a five-centimeter tear in it, due to a splinter.

In the evening, civilians helped us reload our machine guns. You cannot imagine how glad they were to have been freed of Bolshevism. You can see that we are prepared at all times to beat the enemy wherever he may appear!

Germany, Sieg Heil!

Your loyal son, Karl

Eastern Front, October 15, 1941

My dearest Darling! My boy!

It is snowing and a carpet of pure white covers the earth, the earth which has drunk so much red blood. My brave, young friend Roland just died of severe wounds. Why did he have to give his life now, with the end practically in sight? We hardhearted soldiers

have no time to bemoan his fate. We tie down our helmets and think of revenge, revenge for our dead comrades.

The battle of Vyasma is over and the last elite troops of the Bolsheviks have been destroyed. I will never forget my impressions of this destruction. From now on, their opposition will not be comparable to the previous encounters. All we have to do now is roll on, for the opposition will be minor.

But that's enough talk about war. Let's talk about tomorrow, about the future, which hopefully will bring an early peace....

Korri

Eastern Front, October 15, 1941

My dear Mother,

While a terrible snowstorm is howling outside, my comrades and I are camping in one of these terrible peasant houses. Although it's not much of a home, we managed to clean it up yesterday. Up until now we've always preferred to dig a hole in the ground and maybe pitch a tent. Now, however, it's simply too cold outside. If you could see how these people live here, you would be horrified!

This present abode is in better shape than most. In one corner there is even a structure that looks like a bed. Most Russians don't sleep in beds, but either behind or on top of their stove. I won't describe the other facilities, such as water and sanitation. Suffice it to say that they hardly exist.

Our duty has been to fight and to free the world from this Communist disease. One day, many years hence, the world will thank the Germans and our beloved Führer for our victories here in Russia. Those of us who took part in this liberation battle can look back on those days with pride and infinite joy....

Your son, Karl

Eastern Front, October 20, 1941

My dearest Darling, my little happy boy,

...It has been raining again and an unexpected thaw has set in. The formerly white cover of snow has turned dirty brown, and mud and slush are everywhere. We drive our vehicles across the fields and leave deep furrows behind. Frequently the vehicles slip and slide and even get stuck.

We have lost all sense of time and don't know what day it is or what time it is. The early gray of the morning, which penetrates through the small windows of our bunker, indicates the coming of a new day, and the dusk that seems to settle in soon thereafter heralds the coming night. This cycle seems to be an endless one. In between the changes is an endless monotony. The landscape here is bleak and desolate.

If we weren't here to fight and were only here to live—I mean, to exist here—we would become imbeciles. Now that we have been here for some time and have had a chance to become acquainted with this land, we all of a sudden understand why it

ABOVE: Two German soldiers try to pull their motorcycle from a muddy stream during the march on Moscow. OPPOSITE: Three Soviet soldiers lie where they were killed trying to stop the German invasion.

was an easy thing for the Communist agitators to systematically poison these people....

We Germans can hardly breathe in this atmosphere. Their houses are oppressive. Certainly we couldn't live here. And the lice are terrible....

Love and kisses, Korri

Eastern Front, October 26, 1941

Dearest Mädi, little Horsti,

I'm enjoying the taste of one of those excellent Nestor cigarettes that you sent me. Thank you very much. Yes, it's Sunday again, but don't ask what the weather is like. Rain, rain, nothing but rain! The countryside looks like an endless gray swamp. The roads, at least what's left of them, have become totally impassable. Even walking has become a feat. It is very difficult to stay on your feet—that's how slippery it is.

As each day passes we're becoming more and more conscious of Christmas. I suppose we will have to celebrate Christmas out here in soldier fashion, because we no longer believe that we will be able to spend this festival of peace with our loved ones at home. But, look, dear Mädi, we really have no reason to complain when we think of our comrades who are at the front stuck in mud, water, and terrible conditions and, nevertheless, ready to beat back the last possible attack of the Russians. They are even ready to pursue them with a quick counterattack.

A great friendship binds us German soldiers together out here. It is this camaraderie and the support that we're able to give each other that is, in my opinion, the secret behind our incredible successes and victories. This loyalty and devotion to the cause again and again was the decisive factor in many a battle and, I tell you, this comradeship has been one of the most magnificent experiences out here.

This loyalty is the essence of the German fighting spirit. We can depend on each other unconditionally. Each one of us sets the example for the other and that makes us strong. I've always known of this loyalty, but today it burns in me like a holy flame. Let this loyalty which I've experienced out here in comradeship be the foundation of our future life....

Mädi, you are my one and only love and my heart belongs to you always. I hug and kiss you.

Your Korri

Report on the Defensive Battle of Vyazma, November 1, 1941

WRITTEN BY SERGEANT KARL FUCHS

The encircling movement of our troops around the area of Vyazma [about 130 miles west of Moscow on the highway to Smolensk] had been completed. Our fall offensive, conducted with lightning speed, surprised the Russians so much that the enemy found no time to break out of the encirclement.

Our tank company had been assigned to support a motorized battalion which occupied the ridges to the west of Vyazma. This battalion held the ridges with great tenacity. On October 11, 1941, an early dawn alarm robbed us of our sleep. Once again the Russians were attempting to break out of the encirclement by attacking the infantry battalion. Within minutes our tanks were on the move and pushed across meadows and fields and through the underbrush toward the danger area.

Enemy tanks were sighted. The Second Platoon [Karl's unit] was given the job of reconnoitering. The ridges occupied by our infantrymen were under heavy artillery and machine-gun fire. We were in radio contact with the infantry unit and slowly and carefully, like hunters stalking their prey, we moved toward the ridge. A thick ground fog limited our visibility considerably.

Suddenly out of the fog to the right of us a huge Russian tank appeared. Damn the fog! We had hardly sighted this monster before it disappeared again like a ghost into the white curtain of fog. At least we knew the direction in which it was moving.

Carefully we pursued the monster. Suddenly a gust of wind ripped apart the fog and there it was. Immediately we opened fire, attacking it from several different directions. Clearly we could see our hits, but the monster seemed unharmed.

We radioed to headquarters: Engaged in battle with heavy Russian tanks! Two of the Russian tanks turned away from our fire and disappeared into a little valley. The last one became the target of our concentrated fire. Again and again we hit its steel armor until it, too, turned and fled.

The sun then broke through the fog and the valley was in clear view before us. From our advantageous position on the slope we

continued attacking the enemy tanks until these monsters were either burning or left abandoned by their crew. Seven tanks were destroyed or had been inactivated. We changed our position in order to be a different target for the enemy's artillery fire.

It also deceived the enemy about our relative strength. If they had known that there were only four of us which prevented the escape of seven of them! Our cannons silenced them.

The rest of the company arrived. Our collective firepower destroyed the last elements of enemy resistance. A truck convoy stood ablaze. The crews from eight heavy pieces of artillery, as well as an uncounted number of infantrymen, ran for their lives. Our infantrymen greeted us with open arms. The entire company gathered together and were ready for new orders.

(Signed) Fuchs

Eastern Front, November 4, 1941

Dear Father,

Your letter which arrived today must have been on a real odyssey since it took the letter six weeks to get here. But at least I have news of you. My assumption that you were in the battle area around Kiev was true after all. I guess you have searched in vain for me as well but it seems as if the two of us are competing for bigger and bigger achievements.

Our last battle of encirclement against the enemy up here and your experiences in Kiev will never be forgotten. We have never before struck the enemy with such crushing defeats. I guess the Russians never dreamed that we would engage in this kind of an offensive prior to winter. I'm convinced that the last cohesive forces of the enemy have been decimated and once again our Führer has proven to the world that the German soldier can do incredible tasks.

In the quiet evening hours we often think of those comrades who have given their lives for our sacred German cause. You're right, Father, we will never forget them—especially not my best friend, Lieutenant Preussner, with whom I had shared so much joy and sorrow for over two years. The cool earth covers him now but he lives on in me just as your friend Eckstein lives on in you. I'm struck by the similarities and repetitions that take place in our respective lives.

I assume that you will be home much sooner than I. Please greet my son for me and make sure that everything is all right. In the meantime, we stand guard. Let me shake your hand and Sieg Heil!

Your loyal son, Karl

Eastern Front, November 6, 1941

Dear Father,

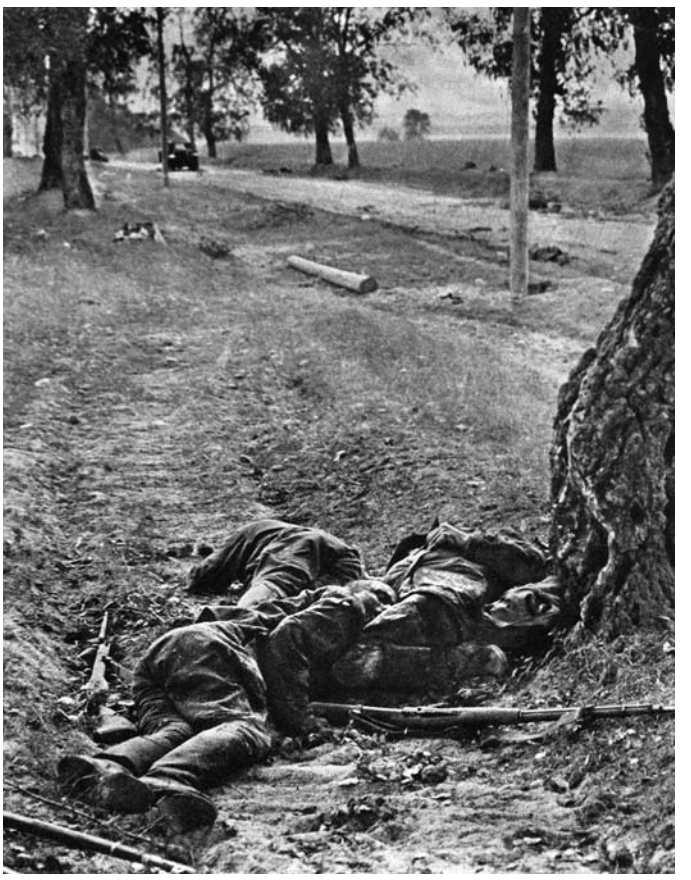
Yes, we're moving out again. In spite of the terrible cold and snow, our unit has been called up again. At least we know now for sure that we won't be spending Christmas at home. Somewhere in the north here we will find a little Christmas tree and celebrate Christmas with comrades. We know what our duty is and will be up to the task.

Don't bother looking for me. Suffice it to say that we're moving in the direction of Moscow. I suppose that you may even be home by now....

Mädi and Mother sent me a few pictures of my son. Damn it all, I'd really like to see him soon, but I suppose that I'm in the same situation now that you were during the Great War. We have to suppress our longing for our loved ones because we're fighting for a great cause. I enjoyed hearing about your adventures. Yes, we too are familiar with the partisans and have dealt with them.

On to new deeds and victories! Sieg Heil.

Your loyal son, Karl



Eastern Front, November 11, 1941

My Dearest, my little boy,

Today is a very happy day for me. It's almost as if I'm back in my childhood because I remember St. Nicholas Day and all the activities associated with it. Starting with St. Nicholas Day, the anticipation of Christmas grows real. I suppose St. Nick thought of me, a distant soldier today, since I received so many presents.

Dear Mädi, I really want to thank you for all the lovely gifts. Let me tell you what they are so that you know I received them; first of all, many thanks for the cigarettes.... Thank you also for the candy, the toothpaste, and the lotion, the woolen gloves and the woolen scarf. I can really use the two last items now.

German medics load a battle casualty into a field ambulance. Heavy losses and the oncoming brutal winter weather would halt the German advance short of Moscow.

Yes, here I am again, sitting in one of those God-forsaken Russian peasant houses, supporting my head with my hand and thinking of you, our dear boy, and of all those loved ones back home who've been so good to me. And today, our boy is five months old. I can imagine that he has grown big and strong and is a very sweet baby.

All my comrades here continuously ask the all-important question—when, when are we going to be able to go home? I still can't give you a definitive answer to that question. When I do return from these battles, I will probably come empty-handed, but my heart will be full of endless love for you and that is probably worth more than any present.

A few days ago it really started to get cold around here. It's a gripping cold and not comparable to anything that we might experience at home. Yes, we really have to bite the bullet now, but we will survive this as well.

I love you forever—you alone and Horsti.

Your Korri

Eastern Front, November 12, 1941

My dear Mother,

Yesterday my son was five months old. You don't know how often I think of him. Soon he will babble his first word, "Mama," and maybe he'll say "Papa" as well, and I, his father, am farther away from home than ever.

My plight today is similar to Father's in the Great War. We men out here on the front know what our duty is and act accordingly. All of us have become serious and mature in this struggle for the future of our people.

If we don't see our homeland by the end of this year and maybe not right away next year either, then we simply have to endure the disappointment because we know that this sacrifice must be made.

Our thoughts, wishes, and dreams fly to you at home, and when we men gather out here around a small Christmas tree in a few weeks, our eyes will be bright because we'll know that our homeland and our loved ones can celebrate this feast in peace.

You at home must always keep in mind what would have happened if these hordes had overrun our Fatherland. The horror of this is unthinkable!

We know no fear. The cold is going to be a factor, but we shall endure that too. One of these days we will meet again and no one is looking forward to this more than I.

I send my greetings and remain forever your loyal son, Karl

Eastern Front, December 2, 1941

My dear Mrs. Fuchs,

As leader of the unit to which your husband, Sergeant Karl Fuchs, was assigned, I have the sad duty to inform you that your husband was killed on the field of battle on November 21, 1941.

His heroic death occurred when he was fighting bravely for Greater Germany in the front lines during a heavy battle with Russian tanks. The entire company and I would like to extend our deepest sympathies to you for the terrible loss which has befallen you.

We commiserate and are saddened that fate did not allow Karl to see his little daughter [sic] of whom he was so proud. Be assured, however, that we will never forget your husband who was one of our best and bravest tank commanders and who always fought in an exemplary fashion against the enemy.

We have prepared a dignified resting place for him near the city of Klin, north of Moscow. I hope it will be a small consolation for you when I tell you that your husband gave his life so that our fatherland may live. I greet you with sincere compassion.

Lieutenant Reinhardt, Company Commander

He was one of our best comrades and was popular with his superiors as well as with those he commanded. He lives on as a shining example of bravery for the entire company. His last resting place, as well as the grave of his ammunition loader, were prepared by us in the village of Syrapkoje, in the county of Klin. We also photographed the grave of the hero. As soon as I make copies, I will send you a picture....

I greet you with sincere compassion.

Förster, Master Sergeant

ABOVE: Karl Fuchs's grave (right) on the battlefield the village of Syrapkoje near Klin, north of Moscow. The graveyard no longer exists. RIGHT: Letter and envelope to his wife informing her of his death.

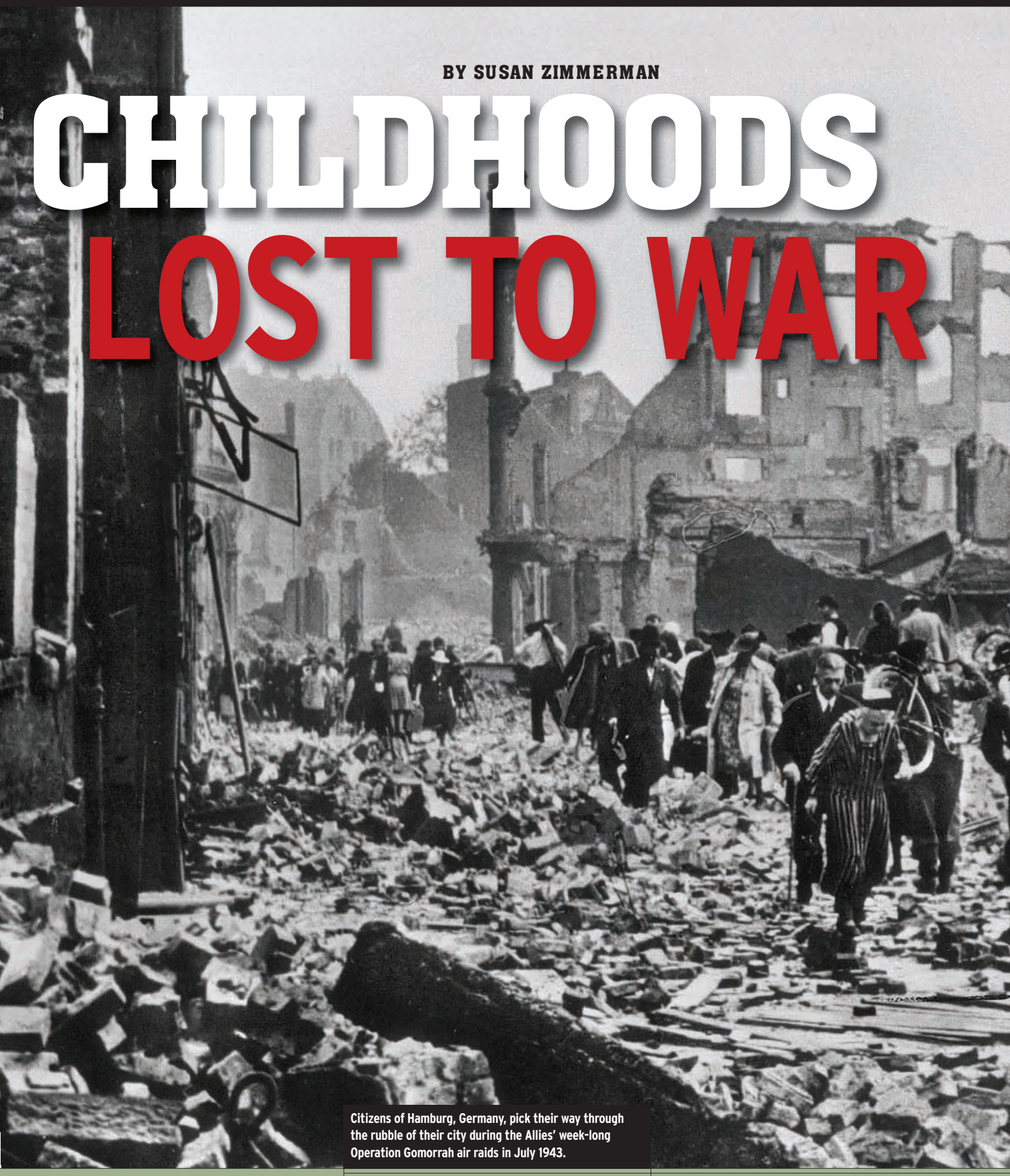
Eastern Front, December 2, 1941

Dear Mrs. Fuchs,

In the name of the company, I wish to extend to you our deepest sympathy for the painful loss that has befallen you. Our comrade, Sergeant Karl Fuchs, was killed in the evening of November 21, 1941, during a skirmish with Russian tanks.

BY SUSAN ZIMMERMAN

CHILDHOODS LOST TO WAR



Citizens of Hamburg, Germany, pick their way through the rubble of their city during the Allies' week-long Operation Gomorrah air raids in July 1943.

Four women—children in the 1940s—caught up in the turmoil of war in Germany and Japan recount their often terrifying experiences.

Erich Andres - ullstein bild / The Granger Collection

WORLD WAR II affected nearly every area of the world. It was the deadliest conflict in all of human history. Between 50 and 70 million people died, cities were flattened, and millions were left battle scarred. The young victims of circumstance were forced to grow up wiser than their years should have allowed. They were witness to atrocities, hardships, and broken families. Their childhoods were lost to war.

American-born sisters Eleanor and Dorothy Lobes were 11 and three years old when they traveled to Hamburg, Germany, with their mother to visit relatives. A month before their scheduled return to New York, war broke out in September 1939, and their planned seven-month visit became a seven-year nightmare. In July 1943, Hamburg experienced one of the heaviest assaults in the history of aerial warfare. Their father did not hear from them throughout the entire war and believed they had all died.

Joan Borsberry was born and raised in Shanghai, China, and was living in the city's International Settlement when Pearl Harbor was bombed. The following day the Japanese took control of the Settlement and by February 15, 1943, the Japanese began to intern their "hostile citizens," mostly British and Americans. Nine-year-old Joan and her family spent three years in a Japanese prison camp.

Helga Stahl was just two years old when war struck her home in Wiesbaden, Germany. Her chief memory of those years was running to bomb shelters. Between August 1940 and March 1945, the city was bombed by the Allies 66 times. About 18 percent of the city's homes were destroyed, and approximately 1,700 people lost their lives. "I remember the worst thing about the war was that we had no childhood," she said.

Although the ravages of war have faded with time for these women, the passage of time has enabled them to recount their damaged youths with a frankness that belies the traumas they lived through. These are their childhood memories.

British night attacks and American daytime attacks on Hamburg in July 1943 created a firestorm—a fire tornado over 1,500 feet high and temperatures in excess of 1,500º F.

ullstein bild / The Granger Collection, New York

Eleanor Lobes: Hamburg, Germany

"My mother went through World War I in the Saarland, which is close to France. She went through World War II [in Hamburg] and then the Cold War here [in America]. She said, 'If there is ever another war, I will kill myself. When you've been through a war, you're not the same, you can't be, you can't possibly be the same."

—Eleanor Lobes

In 1939, Eleanor left her father in New York for what was supposed to be a brief separation. It was Eleanor's 11th birthday when she arrived in Hamburg with her mother and three-year-old sister Dorothy. Then, just a month before their scheduled return home, Germany was thrown into war. For the next seven years they lived behind enemy lines.

Eleanor's story ...

"I am first-generation American. My parents were both born in Hamburg, but my father loved America. He never wanted to go back to Germany. My mother was going there to collect an inheritance left to her by her legally adopted mother, my grandmother. She also wanted me to meet the friends and family she grew up with. I remember my father said, "Spend the money as quickly as you can because you can't take it out of Germany. So while you're there, buy a couple of cameras, you know, some good German stuff."

My father saw us off at the docks in Manhattan, and before we sailed away I said to him, "Poppa, are we going to go to Germany for seven years?" He said, "No, no, maybe seven months." Our return tickets were for October 1, 1939, but on September 1, war broke out and immediately all gates were closed, mines were laid in the ocean, and there was no way of getting out." Her seven-year ordeal was about to begin.

The following questions and answers were compiled from conversations with Eleanor.

Q: Was there any sign of an upcoming war when you arrived?

A: The first thing I noticed was a food shortage. I didn't understand why we had to eat the way we did. It was horrible. We had margarine, but the old-fashioned kind that wasn't consolidated. That was like eating fish oil. The bread was old, and there was no refrigeration at the time, so the milk was served warm. I remember it had the "skin" on top. Then they started to have restrictions on certain items before the war broke out. I thought maybe it was poverty, but then later I realized they knew we were going into a war.

What happened to you when war broke out?

All our money was spent because we thought we were going home. So we now moved in with my mother's brother's foster mother. She treated my mother as though she were her own daughter, but everything was very crowded. We're talking about a one-bedroom apartment. There was my aunt and uncle, my mother, my sister, and myself. My uncle slept on the couch in the kitchen, and the four of us slept in one bed. Luckily, that apartment had one bathroom.

What was it like being an American in Germany at this time?

In Germany they considered me having dual citizenship since I was born American but of German blood. The only thing that happened because of this is the police would come to the door every now and then and they would say to me, "You know you have to come down to the police station and sign away your American citizenship; you know you are German." I would say "I don't know where my mother is, and I have to ask her permission." They respected that and went away and left me alone. They tried that a couple of times.

Were you ever involved in the Hitler Youth?

The Hitler Youth was for boys. For girls, the Hitler Youth was called the Bund Deutscher Mädel, or The League of German Girls. The organization was really no problem for me. I was not required to wear a uniform or forced to attend meetings if I volunteered. They really didn't bother me. We had what was like a social hour, that's all. They weren't talking about murder. I don't have any bad memories of that. It was just a name, like the Girl Scouts. It was a teenage thing. You know, I met him, I met Hitler.

Where were you?

It was when Hitler ordered all the children out of Hamburg in the beginning of the war. I was in a camp, and he came and made a speech and gave all of us a postcard with a picture of himself.

Did you shake his hand?

Yes.

What do you remember?

He seemed like a nice old man.

What was it like when the bombings started?

We got there in 1939, but the real war didn't start until 1941-1942. The British planes would come at night and the Americans during the day. I used to sit and look up at the sky and curse the Americans and say, "Don't you know I'm an American down here?" But we got used to it. Like anything else in life, there is nothing you can do about it. We lived with air raid sirens day and night. I remember we got into card reading with my aunts. They used to think that would tell us when it would be over. We prayed a lot too.

Were you going to school at this time?

I went to grammar school whenever I could leave the bunkers. But eventually the schools were all bombed out, so there weren't any schools and there weren't any teachers. I graduated when I was 14, then went to work in a law office to become a legal aide. I was supposed to be there for three years. It was a full-time job, five days a week. The first year I got $20 a month, but you couldn't buy anything anyway, so it didn't matter. There was nothing to purchase.

What was your daily life like?

At the law office where I worked, we had to volunteer one night a week to catch bombs in an apron. These were incendiary bombs that would flame up if they hit any hard surface. But if they hit something soft you could just discard them, so that is what I had to do. You couldn't say no. When there are people walking around with rifles, you don't refuse anything.

But if you missed catching an incendiary bomb, would it blow up next to you?

I was always alone whenever I did that work, but I never heard of anyone being killed.

How would you catch an incendiary bomb at night?

I was lucky; it was never dark because of the bombing, and you had planes and you had moonlight. This was also the main part of the city, and you had street lights, too, so at night it wasn't that dark. I would do this on the roof of the office building where I worked.

What was it like to catch an incendiary bomb?

You just held open your apron and waited for something to fall. I didn't look up—I was too scared. I just held out the apron. They were very large aprons, like denim, but heavy. The bombs were small, like the size of a long-neck beer bottle, which holds maybe six or seven ounces. There was never one bomb; you always caught at least 10 at a time. There would be hundreds that would drop out of the sky. I just collected and discarded them in a pail of water. But the best part of the whole thing was you would get a voucher for a free hotel room afterward. It was very exquisite because it was right in the heart of the city where movie stars stayed. I would dream that I was a movie star and had this wonderful place.

Courtesy Eleanor Lobes

ABOVE: Eleanor Lobes at age 13 in Hamburg, 1941. She recalls shaking Hitler's hand, catching firebombs in her apron. BELOW: Recent photo of Dorothy (left) and Eleanor Lobes. Born in America and visiting Hamburg when war broke out, they endured numerous horrific air raids.

Courtesy Eleanor and Dorothy Lobes

How long did you work at the law office?

I didn't complete the three years at the law office because they then put me in a munitions factory, and if you didn't report to work they would come and get you. I was too afraid for that, and that's when I went out regardless of what the streets looked like. I used to step over dead bodies going to work in the morning.

Do you remember anything else about going to work?

After a bombing when you went out, you didn't know where you were because everything was at ground level. You didn't even know what street you're on when that happened. The stench and the smoke were terrible.

ullstein bild / The Granger Collection, New York

ABOVE: Despite widespread destruction, Hamburg citizens pitch in to clean up the damage as best they can. With most men serving in the military, women did much of the clean-up after bombings. OPPOSITE: A woman runs through the streets with her last few possessions, perhaps heading to one of the city's bunkers, during an American daylight air raid on Hamburg, July 1943.

How did you get assigned to the munitions factory?

We were picked at random. They took me out of the law office and put me in the munitions factory where I had to make screws and bolts for planes. I used to steal the vegetable oil so that we could eat.

How much would you steal, and how did you conceal it?

I would steal about a pint and sneak it out in my brassiere.

You could get a pint of oil in your bra?

Well, yeah, in a container. I'm big chested still. That's how I got away with it, I guess. The oil was used on the machinery to make nuts and bolts for planes. When the oil was heated, it solidified into lard, and I pressed it into my bra. We also had to pass through a large gate after work which had a security light and siren, like our airports today.

What would happen if you were caught?

If you were caught, you went to jail. A lot of the men stole alcohol because that was used in the factory, and they were almost killed for doing that. I remember in the summer I had all this grease in my brassiere and had to walk almost four blocks to get out of the factory. I remember feeling the grease running down inside my body. It scared me, but I made it and wasn't caught. I was just lucky.

What would you do with the stolen oil?

When I got home, I put it in a crock and buried it in my aunt's small vegetable garden, and then sometimes a week later a bomb would hit it and that would be the end of what I stole.

Were you on your own a lot?

When I was 15, I paid my own rent in a furnished rooming house. I didn't know where my mother was most of the time.

And what about the rest of your family?

I knew where there was an aunt and uncle, but they had their own problems.

Do you feel like you grew up quickly?

I lost my childhood. When I was 15 years old and living in the furnished rooming house, a bomb hit the building and split it in half from top to bottom. The half I was in was swaying back and forth, and the other half went down. The people on the bottom got ladders together and got me out of there safely. It was three or four stories up, and even the ladder was swaying back and forth. That really scared me. But I didn't want to leave without my trunk and photo albums, so they went back up and pushed the trunk out, and it fell to the ground. I hitchhiked with that trunk, looking for my mother.

What happened to your job at the munitions factory?

I didn't have a place to stay, so they couldn't come get me.

What happened after that?

I went to work in the Saarland where my mother's best friend lived. She had negotiated the sale of my grandmother's property.

What was it like there?

When they had air raids there, you went into the mountains. They dug out mountains and made them into bunkers. It was horrible going in there. There was screaming and yelling, and even women were giving birth. I remember water running down the inside of the mountain. It was terrible. It was a long walk to even get into the place, and meanwhile bombs were falling down. You wanted to get in there, and then you wanted to get out of there.

Did anyone panic?

The panic was when the German soldiers would come home on leave. I guess they got furloughed for medical reasons. If they were in the bunker with us, they would be on their knees praying and scared to death. The soldiers couldn't take it, but we would be singing, playing the accordion or the harmonica like it was a daily routine. When I asked one soldier why he was so frightened, he said, "When we fight, we have guns."

Were you able to find food?

We all starved. There was no food, there was nothing. We used to pull potato peelings out of garbage cans. We ate mustard that was old and dry. We ate turnips fried,

mashed, and boiled and collected berries from the wild. Some of us had vegetable gardens, and we had one fresh egg a year. When everybody is starving, you just go along with it.

What else do you remember about the food shortage?

When Hitler first ordered all the children out of Hamburg, they put us in schools in Dresden before it was totally bombed out. We slept on straw sacks, and every morning our breakfast consisted of flour soup, just plain flour with skim milk. It was real skim milk that looks blue because there is no fat. It was a horror. When Italy and Germany were allies, we did occasionally get oranges from Italy. We didn't have them in Germany because it was too cold.

Were you hungry all the time?

All the time. One time—I don't know where I got it from—I had a piece of chocolate. I was in a girls' school toward the end of the war. After I ate the small piece of chocolate, I passed around the tin foil to each girl to sniff it just to remember what chocolate was like.

After Saarland what happened next?

We were on a waiting list to come home once the war was over, and they told us to go to a group home over in Hamburg because there weren't any ships going out of Saarland.

And were you still on your own?

Yes, I hitchhiked all the way back in cattle cars on the railroad, jumping in and out of these trains. Once I got on a troop train that was packed to the gills. We were riding for hours, coming from Saarland to the seaport to get ready to come home. It was all German soldiers plus other people, but it was so packed like sardines on that train that the soldiers passed helmets so we could pee into the helmets. There was nothing we could do; we couldn't go backwards or forwards, or eat or sleep or sit down or anything.

When you got to Hamburg, where did you go?

We had to report to the group home in Hamburg to wait for our passports. It was in a beautiful neighborhood and a gorgeous place. It was so nice to be in a comfortable bed, but we still didn't have any food.

When were you reunited with your mother?

My mother was in a concentration camp for about three months near the end of the war. When the Americans came through town, they liberated her, and then she was able to get in touch with her best friend in Saarland. We were in touch that way, plus we were on the radio with the Red Cross. They put us on long-distance calls to New York to reach my father and my uncles—my mother's two brothers.

Had she been in touch with her husband, your father, at any point in the war?

No, just at the end of the war.

Did he have any idea what happened to you?

He remarried because he thought we were dead. We finally got through to him, and when we landed he picked up me and my sister at the docks. It took two years for my mother to come home. She was still considered a German citizen, so since we were American citizens we sailed back to New York on our own. My mother had to wait for transport. The American troops and American citizens went first. We left in 1947, and our mother didn't leave until 1949.

And where was she?

After my mother came to New York she still wasn't allowed to come ashore. She was an epileptic and had a seizure on the way home and had to stay on Ellis Island until her brother put up a bond that she wouldn't go on welfare. First, she couldn't get out of Germany because she was a German citizen—even though she was married in New York and had two children there—and then Ellis Island. She finally became a U.S. citizen when she was 50 years old. She went through hell, my mother. She died in 1969 on Memorial Day.

What happened when you saw your father?

When he picked me and my sister up at the landing there in Manhattan, he said, "I have to have a drink." We went to the bar, and he ordered two ginger ales, one for my sister and one for me. I said, "No,

Pop, those days are over, no ginger ale. I want a drink like you're having." He looked at me when I said that; it was such a shock to him. You have to remember I was 11 when I left and now I was 18; there is a big difference between those ages.

So what did you have?

I had a rye and 7-Up. The first meal I bought for myself in America was one small loaf of Bond's white bread and a stick of salted butter. I ate the whole thing, and shortly after I threw it all up, but it was such a great treat for me. It was real American food.

Courtesy Dorothy Lobes

Dorothy Lobes

Eleanor's sister Dorothy was just three years old when war broke out.

Dorothy, what was one of your first memories of the war?

I don't remember being on the ship going over to Germany or anything like that, but by the time I was 4½, they started to send all the children to the country because Hitler wanted the children to grow up and serve him and so he wanted to save them.

Where were you sent?

I was in three different places. The first time they shipped me out was to Bavaria in southern Germany. I lived there with a professor in a one-room schoolhouse. The next place was called Döbeln, and that was in Saxony in the middle of the state. After that I was in Saarbrücken at an aunt's house.

Did you get to see your mother while you were in the country?

My mother came to visit me sometimes. I was always glad to see her, but I knew she had to leave. She would say, "'Dorty,' you can't come home because there is too much going on in the cities. I want you to be safe, and I will be back."

Was there any talk among the children that there was a war going on?

I did know right away when I lived with the professor because every morning, when he would come into the classroom, we'd all have to stand up and put our arm out and say 'Heil Hitler.' We were told that he was going to save the world. No matter where you went, it was Heil Hitler.

So you understood there was a war?

Oh, yeah, I knew there was a war going on, but I never was in it, so that is why my mom said, "You know I can't take you with me. You are going to be safe here." That is what it was all about, to save the children so they could be trained to be little Hitlers.

At this point did you feel American or German?

As far as I was concerned, I was German. When I finally came back home, I was 10 years old and couldn't speak a word of English.

What do you remember about Saarbrücken?

I was probably about seven or 7½ years old. I remember how the air raid sirens would go off when there was going to be a bombing. If it was the first alarm, everyone turned out their lights then hung blankets on the window so you couldn't see the candlelight. If it happened again, you had to leave. We lived right around the block and down a hill [from the nearest shelter]. It was like an old railroad tunnel-type thing that we went into. But one time I forgot my doll and turned around and went back, and by the time I came back out with my doll you could see the planes and the bombs dropping. So I'm walking along the street, and I got on the sidewalk close to the houses, and somebody grabbed me by the back of the neck and pulled me in and said in German, "What are you doing? Where's your mother?" When the first alarm sounded again that everything was clear, he took me down, and we had to walk through the whole tunnel to find my mother.

What happened when the war ended?

When the war ended, I left Saarbrücken and went to Hamburg because that is where my parents' families lived. Then the American consul told us to go to Frankfurt and stay there until it was time to ship home. We went to Sachsenhausen on the outskirts of Frankfurt-am-Main and lived in a D.P. camp for displaced persons in an apartment building that was converted into housing for Americans waiting to return home. The Germans who lived there were told to move out so we had a place to stay until it was time to catch the ship.

Courtesy Joan Borsberry

ABOVE: Joan Borsberry, photographed in 2013, grew up in a Japanese prison camp. LEFT: Six-year-old Dorothy Lobes, photographed on her first day of school, September 1941.

Joan Borsberry, Shanghai, China

Before being sent to the prison camp, Joan remembered that a Japanese teacher had come into her school and told her class that the Japanese were the great race. "I was nine years old when we were interned and old enough to know what was going on." Joan spent three years in a Japanese prison camp with her mother, father, and two

Courtesy Joan Borsberry

ABOVE: Interned foreign children on their way to school in the Lungwha camp in Shanghai, China. Joan Borsberry attended the school. RIGHT: A group of kitchen workers at Lungwha strike a carefree pose. Joan's father, John, is standing at far left.

younger sisters. "It started after Pearl Harbor. The Japanese were shelling the British and American ships in the harbor. I had woken up with the sound of the shelling, and my dad told me to go back to sleep, that it was just thunder. We were now enemies of Japan, and people were being taken to camps at different intervals."

What was life like in the prison camp?

They had POW camps for British, American, French, and anyone who was not an ally of the Japanese, except for the Chinese; that was their country. We were interned. Actually, we were told we were guests of Emperor Hirohito. They didn't gather everyone up at the same time, so my mother requested we be sent to where her sister was, and that is how we wound up together. We would have gone eventually, but this way we chose where we would stay. We were fortunate to be in one of the better POW camps.

You could only take a suitcase, so we lost everything else. The reason my mother made this request is a strange story. You know how the English like their pubs? Well, my dad enjoyed the Elephant and Castle pub in Shanghai, and, being the great Englishman that he was, he would come walking home at night singing the English national anthem, "God Save the King." He was picked up twice by the Japanese police, and they would bring him home and tell my mom that if he was ever picked up by the military, that would be the end of him. You don't sing "God Save the King" when the Japanese are in charge.

Why were you living in China at that time?

My mother was born in China but had a British passport. Her dad was from Yemen and her mother's family was from Iraq. They ran an import/export business in Shanghai. My dad was with the British Army. He was from England and was stationed in Shanghai. After he and my mother met and married, he resigned from the Army and went to work for the Shanghai Water Works. We lived in the British settlement in Shanghai and I went to the same Shanghai public school that my mom attended. I learned to speak Shanghai Chinese. My mother's brother, Spencer Moosa, was an Associated Press correspondent and a friend of Chiang Kai-Shek, the Chinese leader.

Where was your camp?

Our camp was called Lungwha. It was in an old Chinese college that was bombed in the first Chinese/Japanese [Sino/Japanese] War in 1939. Some of the dorm buildings were still standing, and we were in those buildings. My dad, my mom, and my two sisters were all in one room. There were several buildings with three or four floors, and they were all full.

We were fortunate because we were allowed to live with our dad. In our camp there were a lot of English, Americans, and a smattering of French, and then the Belgian consul, and one Filipino lady who was married to an American serviceman in the war. The camp was out in the country and had an airdrome on one side, a brick factory on another that had antiaircraft guns, and a railroad on another side. Our camp perimeter was constantly bombed.

Courtesy Joan Borsberry

How were you treated?

The children weren't treated as badly as the parents. We had a fence and guards with guns patrolling to keep people from escaping. One or two people did, but they caught one and flogged him with bamboo poles. We all had to watch. My friend at another camp had to watch an American pilot being beheaded.

What was daily life like?

Our camp commander's name was Mr. Yamashita. He was Japanese but had been educated at the University of California. I understand he wasn't treated very well there, and he disliked us. Every morning we would have to stand at attention in front of our rooms in the doorway in the hall. This included little children. The guard would enter the building and check each floor, and you had to stand at attention until he left the building. One time he snuck back in after he left to go downstairs, and the Belgian consulate's wife,

who was very ill, had already lain down and couldn't get to the door in time to stand at attention. You could hear him slap her across the face, but of course nobody could do anything. You stood at attention.

The grownups all had things to do. They had formed a government, so people were assigned duties, not by the Japanese, but by the people in camp. My dad stoked the fire and mother would take care of us. Being children, we played. I remember making a baby crib out of match boxes and a doll when I was nine years old, which I still have. My mother taught me how to knit when I was eight years old. The most precious gift I ever received was when Mother took one of her sweaters and unraveled it and made little balls of thread and took some bamboo knitting needles, shortened them, and made knitting needles for me. I can still see the box it was in; that was such a precious gift.

Courtesy Joan Borsberry

The Borsberry family was incarcerated by the Japanese in this college dormitory at the Lungwha Civil Assembly Centre in China.

Did you have any kind of schooling?

We had missionaries in our camp, and, when we were allowed, they would have school for us. Some people would have packages sent to them, and sometimes all the camp would get supplies, like American soldiers' food packages. We would use the wrappers from gum and the labels on the cans for our schoolbooks and writing paper. We had some wonderful people in our camp. There was one gentleman who would take us to an old soccer field and read us masterpieces like *A Tale of Two Cities*.

Did you have much to eat?

Food was very scarce. There were times we would only get one meal a day. Our food would be a soup made of vegetables the Japanese didn't want. Our drinking water would be trucked in, then we would have to boil it in huge pots with wood fires. Each family would get their ration for the day. When we got a loaf of bread, it would have weevils in it. My mom was skinny because she would save her food to give to us if we didn't have anything good to eat. When I say "good," it meant that it didn't have weevils. Sometimes the people who worked for my dad would send us something, and the Swiss consul would send some stuff for us, but it wasn't often. Some people would have packages sent to them quite often, but others got nothing. There was a poor little Filipino lady who didn't even have toilet paper. She would carry a small pan and a washcloth with her.

We were not physically abused, but my parents were emotionally upset. They worried if we would be eating the next day or would survive. My dad was nothing but skin and bones. I remember once there was a fly in my soup, and I hollered at my dad and said I wouldn't eat and he said, "Be quiet—it's protein. Everybody will come take it from you." He was a very funny Englishman. We were proud, and we didn't grovel for anything. The movie *Empire of the Sun* was suppose to depict Lungwha. It showed people groveling for raw rice, but that never happened.

Did anyone ever complain?

One time some people complained to the camp commandant. He told all the people in camp, the children and everyone, to meet in front of his home and he would speak to us and take the complaints. So everyone gathered in front of his building, men, women and the one or two babies born in camp. We were waiting for him to come out when we heard this rumbling, which turned out to be a bunch of trucks that came in and surrounded us. They rolled up the flaps on the side of the trucks, and inside they were filled with Japanese soldiers with guns pointing at us. They were in the shooting stance in case anyone complained or said anything. No one did anything, and they finally left and let us go back to our buildings. My mother marveled until the day she died that not even a baby made a sound to agitate them and give them cause.

Since the perimeter of the camp was constantly bombed, did you see any bombings?

Most of the bombing runs were done at night, but sometimes during the day we would see fighter plane dogfights. I remember once, a Japanese plane was shot and its tail was on fire. It looked like it was headed right for me. I ran and ran, and it still looked like it was headed for me. I wouldn't go into a building because I didn't want the plane to follow me in and hurt people, so I hid under a tree that was between me and a fence, and it flew right over my head and crashed into the field outside the fence. Another time I saw a bomber blow up. We were looking out the window during a bombing, and I saw a bomber take direct hit. It was an American plane that just blew up in the sky.

What did you do you when you found out the Japanese guards had left?

We woke up one morning, and the gates were open and there wasn't a guard in sight. They had all escaped during the night. I hope they escaped because if the Chinese got

A lucky German girl with a warm coat and a rare toy truck plays in front of a pile of rubble in her bombed-out city.

hold of them, they didn't get very far. There really wasn't too much we could do because we were out there in the country with no transportation. We would barter with the Chinese with what little clothing we had for food. When the Americans came, they would bring us stuff and take us to town. We eventually moved back to Shanghai, but it was a while before we got there.

We would probably still be there if it hadn't been for the war. People lived there for many years. After we were repatriated, we went to England for 18 months, then came to the United States in July of 1947. In 1961 I became an American citizen.

Helga Stahl's Story

Helga Stahl was born in 1937 in Wiesbaden, Germany. She was just two years old when the war started, but she remembers it vividly.

What was the war like for you, a German child?

I was born into war, so I didn't know what it was to not be running from bombs, not running into the bunker, or having all the food you can eat. I was like a puppy or a bird that is raised in a cage. They don't know what it is to be free so they cannot compare.

I remember hearing people talk about freedom time, and then I would say, "What is freedom?" They would explain it to me because I had never experienced freedom. They would say with freedom you can buy sugar and make caramel. When they talked about candy, I understood that. So I thought freedom is when you get chocolate and bombs are not falling, and we don't have to go to bunkers.

Courtesy Helga Stahl

Wiesbaden-born Helga Stahl, photographed in 2012, was nearly killed by an errant German V-1 rocket.

I remember my childhood; I was always running to the shelters. I had my certain luggage ready when we heard the sirens. The distance between the sirens told us how many minutes we had to get to the bunker. We had to run to those bunkers. I remember seeing stuff flying from the sky. My mother would say, "Hurry up—the Christmas trees are falling." I found out later they were phosphorous bombs and that if they hit your skin, you would burn alive.

Do you remember what the bunkers were like?

We lived quite a way from the bunkers, so when we got there, they would be overfilled. All the benches against the wall would be full, so we had to sit in the aisle on our luggage. We sometimes would be there for days. We would just sit there day and night. There were lights in there, but we would have to sit still. That was hard for a child. You couldn't sleep. There was no shower or soap. That is why we contracted lice, fleas, worms, whatever. There were people with whooping cough. The doctors were all at the front helping the soldiers, so there was no one to help people who were sick.

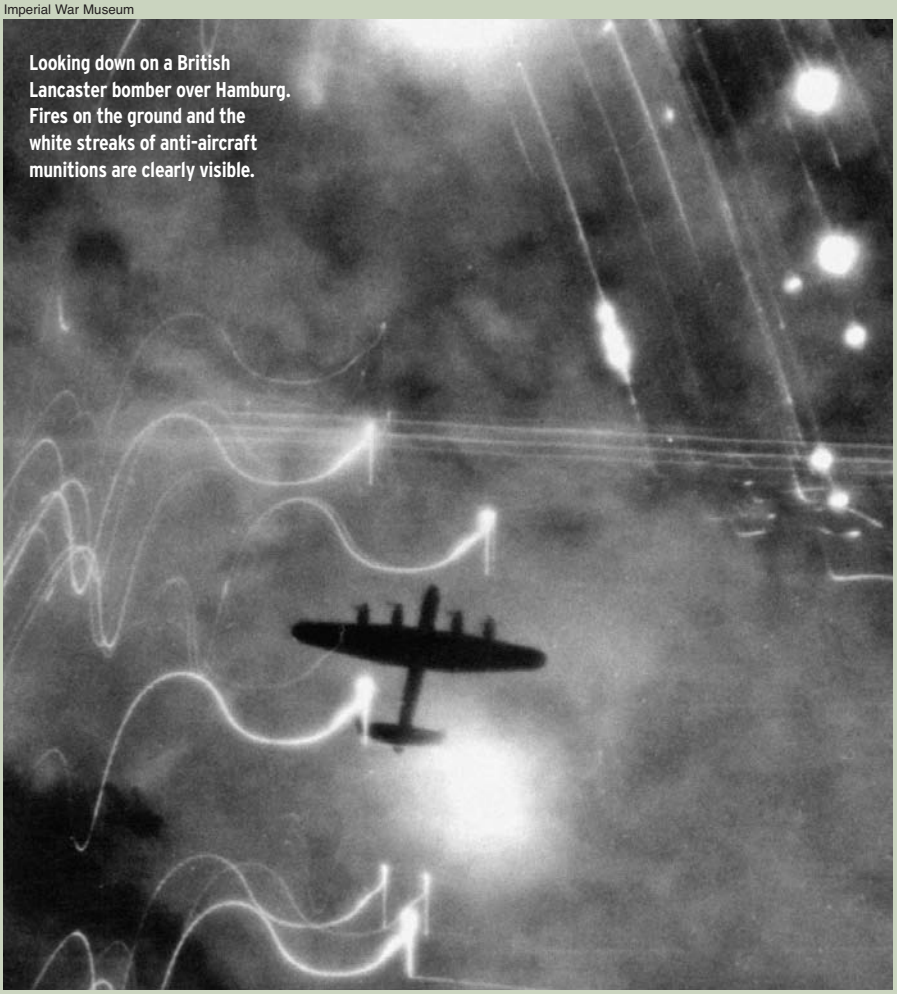
How often would you have to go to the bunkers?

We were constantly waiting for the sirens to let us know the Americans and British were close by. Then we had to get ready to go to the bunker. As soon as we heard the sirens, we had 15 minutes, then 10 minutes, then five minutes, then two minutes. The distance of the siren told us how far the planes were from our home. Sometimes we had to be at the bunkers three times a day. Sometimes we stayed two hours, came home, then two or three hours later we would have to go again. If I was out walking during the day and there was a sudden siren, I had instructions to go into the nearest house. The doors would always be open, and it didn't matter if you didn't know who lived there.

What did the city look like after a bombing?

The streets were bombed. The buildings

Imperial War Museum



Looking down on a British Lancaster bomber over Hamburg. Fires on the ground and the white streaks of anti-aircraft munitions are clearly visible.

OPERATION GOMORRAH: THE BOMBING OF HAMBURG

The inscription on a memorial to the victims of the Hamburg bombings reads: "On the night of the 29th of July 1943, 370 persons perished in the air-raid shelter on the Hamburgerstrasse in a bombing raid. Remember these dead. Never again fascism. Never again war."

Operation Gomorrah was the codename for the Battle of Hamburg. This campaign of air raids, in its time the heaviest assault in the history of aerial warfare, became known in British circles as the Hiroshima of Germany. The July 1943 raid, which lasted eight days and seven nights, involved approximately 3,000 British and American aircraft that dropped some 9,000 tons of bombs.

Beginning July 24, 1943, the British Royal Air Force proceeded to decimate Hamburg's large port and industrial center with a barrage of bombings that created a firestorm responsible for killing over 40,000 civilians, wounding 37,000, and destroying almost the entire city. Prior to the bombings, the RAF used Pathfinders to drop a torrent of shredded aluminum foil (known as "Window" or "chaff") to successfully blind the German radar. The warm weather and dry conditions enabled the highly concentrated bombing to cause an unprecedented 1,500-foot-high tornado-like fire and the resulting devastating firestorm.

The man behind the raids was British Air Field Marshal Arthur "Bomber" Harris, who believed that strategic bombing could bring Germany to its knees. He afterward declared, "No air raid ever known before had been so terrible as that which Hamburg had endured." The second largest city in Germany, with a population of two million, had been wiped out in three nights.

were bombed. The stores were bombed. There was no place to find a milk store or a bread store. I remember we went to bed many times without having any food or a slice of bread. If we had a slice of bread, we were king. If you had a garden or relatives who had a garden, you could survive. All the buildings that were left, that were not bombed, were used as hospitals for the wounded, so we did not have any schooling. We were deprived of just about everything.

Do you remember having any toys to play with?

I remember for my birthday I got a little sheet of paper, which I made into little airplanes and birds to fly through the air. It was the only toy I had and, when that was destroyed, I screamed, "Where is my bird?" Just a pencil, a piece of paper, or a handkerchief for Christmas was a gift of heaven. Those were our Christmas gifts during those Hitler years. We had no toys.

What was your family life like during the war?

My father was in the war and gone from the time I was two years old, so I hardly knew him. My mother worked two jobs. During the day she worked in a department store, and at night she worked for the German Air Force as a telephone operator. I remember that my brother and I weren't supposed to have lights on in the evening. Even with the curtains drawn, it was forbidden because the enemy planes could see these were homes and then bomb them. My poor mother got so many warnings. My brother and I would have the lights on, and the police would come and tell us to turn the lights off. We also weren't allowed to listen to certain radio stations like Radio Free Europe, but I sometimes took the radio under the blankets and secretly listened.

What was it like when the war ended?

When the war was over, I saw the Americans marching into my hometown and my mother was at the balcony crying and waving a white handkerchief. I said, "Mother, those are the enemies (we called them "Amis"). Why are you so happy?" She said, "The war is over, child, the war is over." So I slid down the handrail and went to the

ullstein bild / The Granger Collection, New York

Over 40,000 Hamburg citizens perished in buildings, on the street, and in air raid shelters during Operation Gomorrah. British officials later called the attacks on Hamburg the "Hiroshima of Germany."

street. The Americans were coming in with their music and throwing chewing gum to the crowd. I went down there, and I caught a piece, and then an American soldier gave me a banana. When I bit into it, I made a face that I didn't like it, so the soldier made a motion to peel it, and then, when I ate it, I rubbed my stomach. I hadn't anything that good to eat. I didn't know what an orange or banana was or chocolate or candy. I've thought about that kind soldier a lot.

How did your life change after the war ended?

The years after the war were just as bad if not worse. Our house was so demolished I could look up from the street into our bedroom. The only place with four walls was the kitchen. The marble steps were all bombed, so we had to climb up on the railing to get to our home. Everything was bombed, so there were no stores. You couldn't buy noodles, you couldn't buy anything. The post office was bombed, there were no schools or churches. Everything was torn apart.

Do you remember what people did then?

Nothing was the same. I don't know if you have seen picture of cities that have been bombed, but there is nothing there, there are no jobs there, there is nothing. I remember seeing people put a board on top of two bricks and on top of that they would have a gas stove and make potato pancakes. They would make a sign selling potato pancakes for five cents each. That is how people survived. You couldn't even tell if it was a sidewalk or a street. It was all in rubble. It took a long time until they cleared the street. We didn't have contractors because the contractors were at war, and we had nobody to clean the streets. It had to be done manually by women pushing those bricks from the street, so we at least had a place to walk.

Were you ever injured?

I remember how I almost died when a V-1 rocket misfired from an airbase at Erbenheim. This was where fighter planes took off and was close to Wiesbaden. The V-1 [known as the "buzz bomb" and a precursor to the V-2 rocket specifically targeted at London] had this compass-like navigation equipment that was not working properly, so at times it made u-turns and came back and bombed German cities. There was no warning to let us know like there was when enemy planes were coming, so when the rocket hit I was in the cellar with my mother and brother. It's where we lived during the war. The concussion from the rocket was so bad I was blown off my chair and went flying in the air. While my mother was trying to get a beam off of my brother, searchers were going through the houses looking for the dead, and they put me on this death wagon. When my mother realized I wasn't in the house, she went looking for me on this wagon and pulled me off and said to them I wasn't dead yet. Then my brother put me on this bicycle and took me to a doctor. That is when I was injured. A lot of my girlfriends died.

How did you survive after the war?

After the war, the Americans fed us. We stood in line with our little containers like refugees waiting our turn to get one scoop of noodles. That is what we lived on for quite a while. I remember there were great big blue pots with a lid that were filled with noodle soup. We would get that on a daily basis and had to stand in long lines and wait. They would put in a scoop for my mom, my brother, and me. For a long time I couldn't eat any noodle soup; I got so sick and tired of it. I can still see those heavy blue containers in front of me. I came to America in 1959, and I remember during one of my first dinners putting four rolls on my plate. I was hoarding, and my sponsor said, "You don't need to hoard anymore; we have plenty more." □

Eleanor and Dorothy now live in New York; Joan and Helga now live in Texas. They went on with their lives after the war and started families of their own, but they never forgot their lost childhoods, stolen by war.

A dramatic illustration by a Marine officer depicts the vicious night combat that frequently occurred on Guadalcanal in the Solomons. The author's father served as an officer with Company K, 3rd Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division, which engaged in heavy fighting for this key island.

When the Chips Were DOWN

ON GUADALCANAL AND PELELIU, THE MEN OF K COMPANY OF THE 1ST MARINE DIVISION'S 1ST REGIMENT GAINED A REPUTATION FOR EXTREME COURAGE UNDER FIRE.

BY JASON ABADY

IN APRIL 1942, a group of young Marines, having recently graduated from Officers Candidate School, arrived at New River, North Carolina, a sprawling tent city that stretched over a vast area and would eventually become known as Camp Lejeune.

Four second lieutenants—William H. Sager, Phillip Wilheit, Herman Abady, and Joseph Anthony Terzi—were assigned to the 1st Marine Division, 1st Marine Regiment, 3rd Battalion, K Company, commanded by Captain Robert Putnam. It was a unit that was just forming.

Putnam was respected as a hard but competent officer. Some of his men, such as Pfc. Don Bishop, would later describe him as having a slightly "holier than thou" attitude.

Lieutenants Sager, Wilheit, and Abady were assigned to take command of the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Rifle Platoons, respectively. Joe Terzi, an All-American football player from Long Island, New York, was given command of K Company's light weapons platoon, which consisted of .30-caliber light machine guns and 60mm mortar squads.

The commander of the 3rd Battalion, of which K Company was an organic unit, was Lt. Col. Bill "Spike" McKelvy, a colorful yet enigmatic character who came from a long line of Naval Academy graduates. The battalion roster also included two additional rifle companies: L and I, as well as M Company, a heavy weapons unit that was equipped with the Browning water-cooled .30-caliber heavy machine gun and 81mm mortars.

America and her soldiers saw the war framed in basic terms. To borrow a title from American filmmaker Aaron Russo, "It was Freedom vs. Fascism." It was obvious to everyone that the alliance between Germany's Adolf Hitler, Italy's Benito Mussolini, and Japan's Emperor Hirohito was on a brazen march to force the world into a totalitarian order, placing all free men in the service of a brutal oligarchy.

If they bothered to keep up with world affairs as reported in the newspapers, magazines, and radio bulletins of the day, the youth of America were likely aware of the Japanese invasions of China, Manchuria, and Korea, beginning in the early 1930s. For some young Americans, it was the reports and rumors of Japanese brutality that inspired them to join the Marines and motivated them to fight.

Such global hot spots may have inspired others to sign up, but certainly the surprise attack at Pearl Harbor brought the matter closer to home. The situation at hand revealed that the die had been cast, the battle lines had been drawn, and a war of survival had to be fought.

Most of the K Company officers and enlisted men (the latter of whom had received their basic training at Parris Island, South Carolina, arriving at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, in February) came from the small towns and farms of America. Without knowing the definition of fear, they signed up the day after Pearl Harbor and were anxious to get into the war on the ground floor.

Lieutenant Sager remembers that his men thought war could not possibly be worse than the harsh training regimen they endured. Pfc. Don Bishop recalls having to march all day in the hot North Carolina sun wearing several layers of clothing as the drill instructors sought to cull the weak from the strong.

Returning from an all-day march drenched in sweat, Bishop pushed his cap back on his head in an attempt to get some relief from the scorching heat. The drill instructor tersely approached him and jerked his cap back down. Bishop, exhausted, nervous, and at port arms, jumped back, his rifle with fixed bayonet almost stabbing the drill instructor.

"Watch it there! You almost stabbed me! What's your name, Marine?" the drill instructor snapped.

U.S. Marine Corps

"Private First Class Don Bishop, sir!"

"Listen to me, Bishop—from now on you ain't nothing but a Deacon!" (In the Roman Catholic Church, a deacon is of a lower rank than a bishop, so the drill instructor was "demoting" the private first class; "Deacon" became Bishop's nickname thereafter.)

As time went on, officers and enlisted men grew tighter and more familiar through the harsh training. The motto was "hang loose," and training relied primarily on noncommissioned officers to maintain control and discipline of the men.

Amphibious landing maneuvers were carried out the week of May 17, 1942. The official history of the 3rd Battalion records: "The period from 16 February 1942 to date of departure [21 June 1942] from Marine Barracks, New River, N.C., was spent by this battalion in organizing, equipping and intensive training.

"Training consisted of basic training, marksmanship firing, musketry problems, bivouacking from one to two weeks at a time, night problems, landing exercises using cargo nets slung over the side of a transport built on the bank of the 'Inland Waterway,' and landings made on the beach from the ocean side."

Deemed almost sufficiently trained for its first exposure to combat, the 1st Marine Division, after traveling via train to San Francisco, boarded the transport USS *John Ericsson,* which carried them to Camp Paekakariki outside Wellington, New Zealand.

Upon arriving in Wellington in July, the Marines were scheduled for another six months of training, but those plans were quickly cancelled. It was there that the Marines learned they would take part in the first land offensive against the Japanese on the island of Guadalcanal. An airfield there was 90 percent complete, and the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff in Washington, D.C., did not want the Japanese to finish it.

The official history said, "They feared that the establishment of such a base might presage a thrust southeastward that would sever the line of communications between the United States and Australia, and plans were quickly changed to focus the counteroffensive on the seizure of Guadalcanal and Tulagi."

The first three major land engagements on Guadalcanal—the Battles of the Tenaru (actually the Ilu) River (August 21), Bloody Ridge and Overland Trail (September 12-16), and Matanikau River (October 1942)—would all involve the same objective of trail or road access to Lunga Airfield, the island's airstrip.

The division departed Wellington and steamed to the Solomon Islands for Operation Watchtower. At 4:30 AM on August 7, 1942, the Marines were awakened on board ship, and a hot steak and eggs breakfast was offered to those who had the stomach for it. A fierce naval bombardment commenced, hitting Guadalcanal and the smaller nearby island of Tulagi, as well as two small islets, Gavutu and Tanambogo.

The Marines' landings that morning caught the enemy by surprise and with a small force; only after their airfield was complete did the Japanese plan to bring in large numbers of crack troops to Guadalcanal.

The invasion force was split into two groups. The 1st and 5th Marine Regiments came ashore at Red Beach at 8:30 AM. McKelvy's 3rd Battalion, which included the four second lieutenants of K Company, was in the third wave to hit the beach.

Colonel Merritt Edson and his Raider Parachute Battalions, with the 2nd Battalion of the 5th Marine Regiment, faced suicidal resistance on Tulagi and its two islets, a foreshadowing of the fierce fighting to come on Guadalcanal. But the Tulagi islet areas were secured by the second day.

After hitting the beach at Guadalcanal on August 7, the Marines of K Company,

Marines of Maj. Gen. Alexander A. Vandegrift's 1st Division land virtually unopposed on the beach at Guadalcanal. The Marines penetrated the nearby jungle and established a perimeter with relative ease—the last thing that would be easy on Guadalcanal.

National Archives

From left to right, Second Lieutenant Herman Abady, the author's father; Second Lieutenant William H. Sager; Second Lieutenant Joe Terzi; and Lieutenant Colonel Bill "Spike" McKelvy were among the officers who guided Company K through rough fighting.

National Archives

Patrolling along the Tenaru River on Guadalcanal, U.S. Marines avoid the thick, nearly impassable jungle and find better footing along the shallow stream.

along with the rest of the 3rd Battalion, were ordered to seize a terrain feature known as the Grassy Knoll (aka Mt. Austen). At an elevation of 1,000 feet, it overlooked the airfield and part of Guadalcanal's coast and was therefore an ideal tactical acquisition. The Marines soon found out it was three miles inland, rather than just one mile as their maps indicated.

The Marines, however, did manage to capture the Lunga Airstrip, along with its warehouses and construction equipment that was quickly deployed to finish building the airfield. After taking the airstrip, the Marines promptly renamed it Henderson Field in honor of Major Loftus Henderson, a Marine Corps aviator killed in the Battle of Midway.

The warehouses contained Japanese food—canned crab, fish heads, and rice—that had been contaminated by worms. Third Battalion Doctor Ben Keyserling passed by the chow line, administering the malarial depressant Atabrine and advising the Marines not to pick the worms out of their rice. "It's going to be the only protein you get, so leave them in there," he said.

Also captured were large amounts of Japanese whisky and saké. Lt. Col. McKelvy immediately ordered the liquor off limits to everyone except (no surprise) himself. His men remember him being a bit tipsy at times.

While the Marines were tramping inland trying to reach Mt. Austen, British Rear Admiral Victor Crutchley, on loan to the Royal Australian Navy, was patrolling the waters around Guadalcanal with his ships of Task Force 62.2 divided into three groups located north, south, and east of the island. The formidable task force was composed of three Australian and five U.S. cruisers, 15 destroyers, and a group of minesweepers, but Crutchley was in for a nasty surprise.

It started on August 8, when U.S. Vice Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher withdrew the aircraft carriers that had been providing air cover for the Marines on Guadalcanal. That night, Vice Admiral Gunichi Mikawa of the Imperial Japanese Navy took advantage of the situation and brought his seven cruisers and one destroyer down "the Slot" between Guadalcanal and Savo Island.

Having sent out seaplanes earlier in the day, by nightfall Mikawa now knew the location of U.S. and Australian ships. In the dark, Mikawa first came across the cruiser *Chicago,* which, in the exchange of fire, was badly damaged but managed to limp away to safety. However, the crew of *Chicago* inexplicably neglected to notify other ships that a Japanese attack was underway.

Continuing on, Mikawa then located and sank Crutchley's flagship, the Australian cruiser HMAS *Canberra,* as well as the U.S. cruisers *Vincennes, Quincy,* and *Astoria*. More than 1,100 sailors were killed and 700 wounded in the Battle of Savo Island, one of the U.S. Navy's worst defeats. The Navy and Marines subsequently referred to the waters around Guadalcanal as "Iron Bottom Sound."

After the resounding defeat, Fletcher elected to withdraw all U.S. naval forces from the area, taking with him 50 percent of the 1st Marine Division's scheduled equipment and supplies. Returning on August 9 from its unsuccessful assignment to capture Mt. Austen, McKelvy's 3rd Battalion was shocked to find the beaches empty. The men had expected to see the Navy guarding the area and continuing to offload supplies. But there was nothing.

Although caught off guard by the Marine landing, the Japanese quickly collected units that were spread across Asia and rushed them to Guadalcanal. On August 18, Regimental Colonel Kiyonao Ichiki landed with an initial contingent of 920 men (out of 2,300) with plans to take back

National Archives

Posing for the photographer while on patrol in August 1942, these U.S. Marines were among the first to land on Guadalcanal. Three Marines are pictured armed with bolt-action Springfield Model 1903 rifles, two with the 16-inch-long, Model 1917 bayonets. The Marines' distinctive camouflage uniforms and semiautomatic M-1 Garand rifles were not issued in the Pacific until 1943.

the airfield. But on August 21 Ichiki's men ran into the Marines that were about a mile east of Henderson Field and were chopped to pieces in what has become known as the Battle of the Tenaru River (also known as the Battle of the Ilu River and the Battle of Alligator Creek).

When the second element of the Japanese regiment landed at Taivu Point, between August 29 and September 4, they discovered that Ichiki was dead and the first element had been almost entirely wiped out. Realizing its strategic importance, the Japanese continued to funnel troops to Guadalcanal.

On September 2, McKelvy's 3rd Battalion took up a position on the eastern sector of the island that snaked through the jungle for 3,400 yards. At the extreme right flank of the battalion's position, K Company guarded the Overland Trail, which led directly back to the much coveted Henderson Field, only a mile away.

Directly opposite K Company was a 750-yard-wide kunai grass field behind which lay dense jungle and the Tenaru (Ilu) River. K Company's line ran the entire length of the kunai grass field with each rifle platoon guarding an area 250 yards wide. 2nd Lt. Herman Abady's 3rd Platoon was split right down the center by the trail, with two rifle squads on either side. To the left of Abady was Wilheit's 2nd Platoon, and on the right was Sager's 1st Platoon.

Even in a hot battle zone, the strained relationship between the 3rd Battalion commander and his men became the focal point of numerous pranks. On one occasion a Marine walked outside McKelvy's tent in a pair of Japanese split-toed moccasins, leaving a distinct set of footprints. Upon waking up that morning, McKelvy's men held back their laughter as they heard him scream, "Jesus Wept! Jesus Wept! Those god-damned Japanese bastards were right outside of my tent!"

No more than several hundred yards from the airfield's perimeter was the headquarters of Maj. Gen. Alexander Archer Vandegrift, commander of the 1st Infantry Division. If Japanese forces could seize the Overland Trail and retake the airfield, the Guadalcanal campaign would indeed take a perilous turn.

The 60mm mortar squads from 2nd Lt. Terzi's weapons platoon were emplaced 200 yards behind the line, with the remaining machine-gun squads on either side of the trail entrance. M Company's heavier 81mm mortar and Browning heavy machine-gun squads were also deployed to strengthen the K Company line.

Sager's right flank was unprotected. A yawning, 300-yard gap extended up to Colonel Edson's Raider Battalion that had recently been put on the ridges directly overlooking the airfield. Despite being worried about his exposed right flank, Sager knew nothing could be done about it. If the Japanese located this gap, they could walk back to the airfield without firing a single shot. With no reinforcements, the Marine line was only one man deep.

Fortunately, the enemy did not find the gap. However, more miseries were visited upon the Marines. The lack of adequate food and the abundance of malaria, jungle rot, and torrential rain took a heavy toll. Japanese naval guns and bombers from Rabaul on the island of New Britain constantly pounded Marine Corps positions. The diary kept by Pfc. Noel Billy Guise of K Company's weapons platoon provides a glimpse of what the battle against the Japanese in September 1942 was like:

"September 2: While on outpost all hell broke loose. Shelled and bombed. Came back

to camp—Then got word to move out. We are now in defensive position at edge of open field—Raider Bn. supposed to chase Japs into us. Got more mail. 18 bombers came over. Saw two planes crash in field.

September 4: Rained all night. God, it was terrible sleeping in the mud and puddles. Plenty of mosquitos. Have 30 or 40 bites on each arm. After breakfast 5 of us volunteered for a patrol. Went back to river where we spent 2nd night but saw no Japs. Came back hot, tired and thirsty.

September 6: Quiet night. Beautiful morning here on the front lines. Coconut grove on the left across the field, then jungles and then colorful mountains—purple, blue and the peaks hidden by clouds.

September 7: Paul and I went on guard at 4:00 AM and was scared to death by a boar. Rained all night and mud is ankle deep. We're still eating Jap food and it's full of worms. We're almost starved. Rained all day in buckets full. Our chow in the morning light was covered with water because there was no shelter to go to. We went to bed while it was still raining. We slept in a puddle of water if you want to call that a bed. It's a miracle we're not all dead.

September 8: It rained until three this morning. Everyone soaked. Built a fire to try to dry our clothes. Went on working party to make a road thru jungle. What a job. Rained about 10 and stopped at 4. Chow is getting less and less. Army at New Caledonia brought cigarettes and said they were for Marines at Guadalcanal. How nice. Guard at 10:30.

September 10: Everyone hungry. Worked on road in morning. Air raid 28 bombers. That was too close for comfort. Grass, weeds and branches fell all over us. George, Bower & Slok [sic] went after some food. We ate a little and it sure was good. I'm so damn weak I can hardly do anything. We finally had a good chow. Boy are we stuffed. Another air raid 26 bombers. Japs are coming down from the hills.

September 12: Quiet nite [sic]. God I hope they feed us today. Air raid 27 bombers and plenty of Zeros. What a sight—burning planes going down all over the sky. We got 17—rest ran into an aircraft carrier on the way back—10 bombers & 42 [Zeros] shot down."

Marine Corps units were aggressive in their patrolling. After arriving at the eastern sector, 2nd Lt. Bill Sager took his platoon on a patrol several miles into Japanese territory. The jungle was practically impenetrable, and the Marines needed machetes to hack their way through the dense foliage. No enemy was encountered.

One week later the Marines returned to the same area but with very different results. They discovered evidence of large enemy troop movements and found quantities of discarded cartridge belts, ammunition containers, cigarette wrappers, empty fish cans, and Japanese split-toed moccasins.

Upon returning from this second patrol, Lieutenant Sager relayed the details to Captain Putnam, who put him on the phone directly with Colonel Gerald Thomas of division intelligence. Sager deduced that the Japanese were headed southwest, towards the ridges overlooking the airfield where the Raiders were dug in.

At this time General Vandegrift had the majority of his forces at the beach area in anticipation of a Japanese amphibious assault. The patrols led by Sager may have been significant factors that led Vandegrift to put Colonel Edson and his Raider Battalion on the ridges, backed up by the 2nd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment.

On September 11, Corporal Walter Wrazen led a five-man listening post from Lieutenant Sager's 1st Platoon to the east of K Company's position. At around midnight, contacting Putnam via sound-powered phone, Wrazen said they heard large Japanese troop movements in the jungle, so the listening post was immediately withdrawn. Upon returning, Sager and Putnam questioned Wrazen extensively but doubted that he heard anything.

The following day, September 12, Lieutenants Wilheit and Abady took a six-man patrol approximately seven miles inside Japanese territory but were unable to make any close-in identification of enemy forces. They did, however, sense that they had been under surveillance from a series of ridges above their route of march. Wilheit wanted to return using an alternate path that led up a hill, but Abady convinced him to return via the same route along a creek bed with only a minor deviation.

The next morning Captain Putnam held a critical meeting at his command post. Lieutenant Terzi asked if he could take a listening post out that night, vowing to blast the hell out of the Japanese if he found them. Putnam granted him permission. Later that night Terzi, armed with his Colt .45, along with Privates Stephen Jabo, Charles Laurence, Thomas Pilleri, Orland Mixter, and Leo "Mac" McDermott—all of whom carried Thompson submachine guns—set out across the 750-yard-wide kunai grass field and disappeared into the jungle.

National Archives

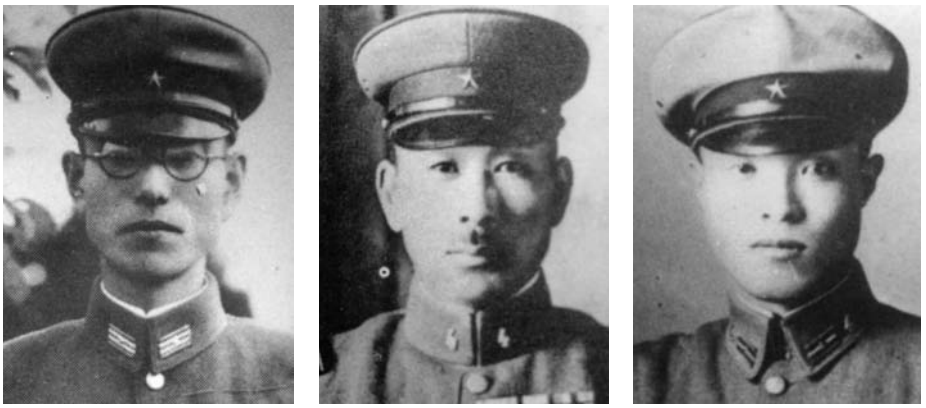
The Browning .30-caliber water-cooled machine gun was a workhorse of the U.S. armed forces early in World War II. Typical of the weapons carried by the men of Company K, the machine gun was instrumental in shredding Japanese suicide charges on Guadalcanal and other Pacific islands.

But where were the Japanese? Also having been deployed to the area in early September, the Kuma (Bear) Battalion under the command of Major Eiji Mizuno had been given aerial reconnaissance photos showing that the trail led directly back to Henderson Field.

After their staggering defeat on August

National Archives

Elite Japanese soldiers of the Kawaguchi Detachment pick their way through a coconut grove on Guadalcanal prior to launching an attack against Henderson Field, the island's vital airstrip.



Left to right, Major Eiji Mizuno, Lieutenant Yoshio Ohkubo, and Second Lieutenant Kiyoshi Satou were among the Japanese officers who participated in desperate attacks, including banzai charges, against Company K Marines on Guadalcanal. Mizuno was killed by a bullet that pierced his helmet.

21 at the Battle of the Tenaru River, the Japanese had developed a three-pronged strategy for taking back the airfield. The main attack would be led by Maj. Gen. Kiyotake Kawaguchi at the center ridges overlooking the airstrip while Colonel Akinosuke Oka would attack from the west. From the east the Kuma Battalion would also push toward the airstrip. Though smaller in scope, the flank attacks were essential stress on the Marines' line, which the Japanese felt would cause it to break.

The Kuma Battalion was an ad hoc force that included 130 men who had escaped annihilation at the Tenaru on August 21. The remaining elements had recently landed at Taivu Point from August 29 to September 4 and were composed of six elements, which included Mizuno's command staff and a small engineering squad. Two infantry companies were led by 2nd Lieutenants Kiyoshi Satou and Toshio Habara; Satou's company had 177 men while Habara's had 169.

Satou's company also had three Nambu 6.5mm light machine guns, while Warrant Officer Kosaku Nakao had one oversized Nambu 7.7mm machine-gun platoon consisting of four squads with 17 men in each, for a total of 68 men. 1st Lt. Yoshio Ohkubo commanded a 37mm (Type 94) gun company of 80 men, which brought the total strength of the Kuma Battalion to 550.

The climate and terrain of Guadalcanal were unforgiving and played no favorites. Mizuno and his men had been hacking their way through the jungle for nearly two weeks and were thoroughly exhausted. On the evening of September 12, the men of the Kuma Battalion heard tremendous gunfire breaking out to their west, which they correctly assumed was General Kawaguchi making the main attack at the ridges overlooking the airstrip.

At this point Mizuno was 1.5 kilometers south and one kilometer east of where he needed to be. In the early morning of September 13, he shifted his force in a northwesterly direction. Later that afternoon he sent his adjutant, 2nd Lt. Nobuo Fuji, on a reconnaissance mission with several other soldiers to locate the K Company line.

Shortly after sunset, Fuji reported to Mizuno that he had spotted what appeared to have been a machine-gun emplacement behind a line of barbed wire across the grassy plain in front of his observation point. Fuji said, "If the Kuma Battalion could attack and penetrate this position, it could surely reach the airstrip without much difficulty."

Later that night Mizuno decided to lead the attack with his headquarters and the engineering squad followed by the infantry units. The machine-gun platoon and 37mm gun company would be positioned on the western bank of the Tenaru to offer supporting fire but would not participate in the initial thrust at the Marines' positions.

In single file, the Kuma Battalion silently crept into the jungle. The wind blew through the trees, and the sound of unknown jungle life could be heard in the distance. General Vandegrift had recently elected to relocate his HQ and command staff about 300 yards from the airfield's perimeter. If Japanese forces managed to seize the Overland Trail, America's Guadalcanal campaign might indeed have taken a dramatic turn for the worse.

Marine turned author William Manchester noted, "Enemy breakthroughs seemed imminent. One night a Japanese officer brandishing a samurai sword came within a few yards of the pagoda-like structure that served as Vandegrift's command post. The general, pacing the muddy, wooden floor, turned, startled. 'Banzai!' screamed the Jap, disemboweling a gunny." The intruder was killed by a shot from an alert sergeant's pistol.

Mizuno, his command staff, engineering squad, and elements of the 1st Company, soaked, muddy, and sporting welts from ferocious mosquito attacks, soon reached the east bank of the Tenaru River. But where was the whole 2nd Company? Contrary to his own instructions to attack as a unified force, Mizuno impatiently decided to launch the attack. The Japanese force waded across the Tenaru, crawling up its western bank and pausing momentarily before proceeding toward the kunai grass field.

Simultaneously, Terzi's Marine listening post continued making its way into the darkness carrying a field telephone line that reached back to a sound-powered phone at the K Company CP. If Terzi's men encountered the Japanese, they were to alert Captain Putnam and withdraw back to the Marine line before it was hit.

Suddenly, Private Leo McDermott heard a clanking noise that gradually got louder. He crouched down on one knee, his Thompson clutched tightly in his hands. Other members of the patrol did the same.

Terzi ordered the patrol to open fire. Bolts of light shot forth from their guns as they blasted away, killing some 20 of the Japanese. Major Mizuno ordered his men to hurl grenades at the Marines and a salvo of 20 to 30 blasts rocked the earth. What were the Marines doing here? No contact was expected until the Japanese reached the Marine line in silence.

Believing he had now hit the principal Marine line, Mizuno yelled at his men to fix bayonets and attack. His decision was upsetting and confusing for his men, but more importantly it diverted them from the main objective. In the chaos of the night fighting, Terzi told his men to scatter and quickly gave his Colt .45 to one of his men whose rifle had jammed. In the melee, Private Thomas Pilleri was killed.

As the firing intensified, McDermott and Terzi jumped into the Tenaru River and hid beneath an overhanging patch of earth. The Japanese ran up and down the western bank of the river, screaming curses into the night and firing wildly at any Marines they could see in the fractional seconds of light provided by the blasts from the grenades.

National Archives

As its commander consults a map for firing coordinates, a Marine mortar team prepares to go into action against the Japanese. The 60mm and 81mm mortars of the Marines provided effective plunging fire against enemy infantry, and these were often the heaviest weapons available to the men of Company K during the heat of combat.

Back at the K Company line, Captain Putnam's Marines heard the explosions and knew the Japanese were on their way. Putnam ordered Privates Hugh Harwood and Walter "Ski" Szalanski to open up with their .30-caliber Browning machine guns that were on either side of the entrance to the Overland Trail. Both guns fired about 1,000 rounds before Putnam gave the order to cease fire; he wanted to see what the Japanese response would be, but there was none. A tense period of silence followed.

At five minutes after midnight, K Company heard empty shell casings inside ration cans strung along the wire starting to rattle. It was the sound of Sergeant Masakichi Wada's engineering squad cutting through the barbed wire. Putnam ordered his executive officer, Lieutenant Mike Scelsi, to launch flares. In the eerie cast of the light, the Marines could see the heavily camouflaged Japanese running across the kunai grass field.

Putnam yelled the order to commence firing, and Lieutenants Sager, Wilheit, and Abady echoed the command. Both sides opened up, their arsenals of weaponry unleashing an earsplitting series of explosions. The fighting raged through the night as both sides fought desperately for control of the lifeline, the Overland Trail.

The Kuma Battalion was closer than it had ever been to the airfield and Vandegrift's headquarters, but such key tactical objectives would not remain within reach for long. Machine gunners Harwood and Szalanski cut bright lines across the field with their tracer ammunition. At one point a Japanese gun had a fix on Harwood's position, but after several minutes Harwood won out.

At times the firing seemed to die down for significant periods only to be ripped away by more Japanese savagely engaging the Marines in hand-to-hand and bayonet fighting. Given the circumstance of close

National Archives

Charging Japanese soldiers were mowed down by U.S. Marine small-arms and artillery fire during the night attack of September 13, 1942, on Guadalcanal. The Marines of Company K endured horrific combat as waves of Japanese troops attempted to breach their lines.

quarter combat, Captain Putnam decided to move one of the 60mm mortars to drop rounds just 30 yards beyond the Marine line. The mortar squad fired with its tubes pointed practically straight up in the air.

The Japanese assault began to fall apart. A bullet pierced Major Mizuno's helmet, killing him instantly, and 2nd Lt. Nobuo Fuji, who had located the K Company line, was also killed. Refusing to be captured, Warrant Officer Shigekichi Katou took his own life with his pistol, while 1st Lt. Yoshiaki Sakakibara fled the scene. What was left of Mizuno's command staff began to scatter.

An eerie silence descended before dawn, and a pall of smoke covered the battlefield. Private Hugh Harwood peered into the dark distance. He sensed the Japanese might launch another bayonet attack and told his number two man on the gun, Private Jack LaBerge, to get the grenades ready. The plan was for LaBerge to throw the grenades while Harwood would free-swing the gun, scything down everything in its path.

As the sweat poured from his forehead in the stifling predawn heat, Harwood thought his eyes were deceiving him. Ever so faintly he could make out the Japanese coming across the field yet again. Despite being abandoned by their command staff, they somehow found the strength to press the attack. The blast of weapons resumed as the Japanese made one charge after another with fixed bayonets. Lieutenant Abady almost shot his own runner, Private Joe Flood, who was returning to deliver a message from Captain Putnam.

Suddenly a Japanese officer (probably Lieutenant Satou), with samurai sword in hand, broke through the line and yelled in good English, "Cease fire! Cease fire!" But Private Marion Peregrine took him out with a deadly burst from his Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR).

A Japanese spotter began directing knee-mortar fire toward 3rd Platoon squad leader Corporal Haynie Bryant. A group of shells ringed his foxhole, with the last one landing only three feet away; luckily, his foxhole provided just enough cover to deflect the blast over his head.

Private First Class Don Gohl began lobbing grenades along with the Marines around him as the Japanese came through the wire. Gohl looked to his right and noticed that Private Harold Enias had been wounded by a chunk of mortar shrapnel.

From behind a banyan tree Lieutenant. Abady shot several Japanese with his Colt 45. Corporal Cloyd Hines blasted out rounds from his BAR and bayoneted a Japanese soldier, then collapsed himself, wounded in the temple by a grenade fragment.

A group of men from 2nd Lt. Toshio Habara's company now located Sager's 1st Platoon at the extreme right flank of the K Company position and sent mortar and machine-gun fire raining down on the Marines. Sager screamed at his men to open fire. Howard Hayes fired his BAR so fast and long the barrel overheated and warped, causing the rifle to jam. But Habara's men were unable to break through. It was a close call, but the Marines held the line.

As dawn lightened the sky, the men of K Company crawled out of their foxholes. Their eyes bloodshot, they stood motionless and dazed from the hell they had endured. The Marines dragged the mounds of dead Japanese bodies away from their foxholes

to establish clear fields of fire.

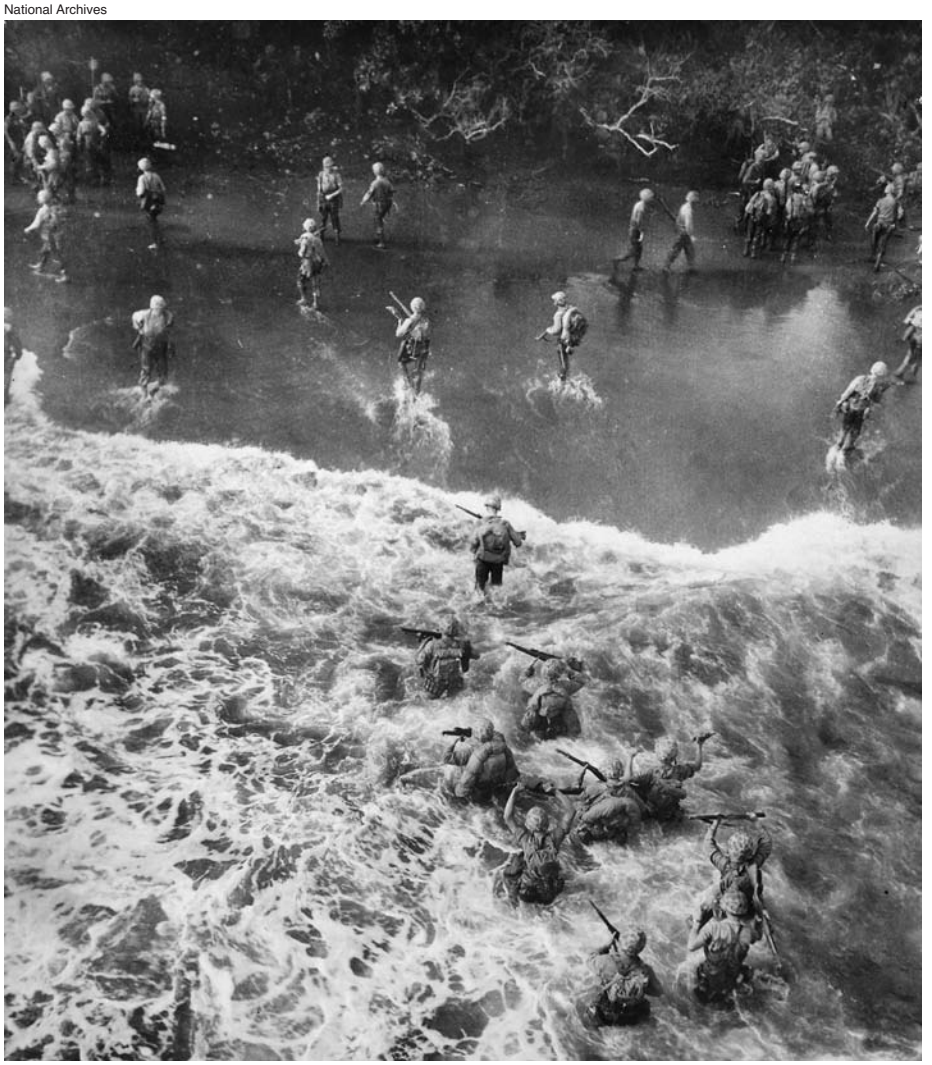
K Company had fought valiantly, and the 3rd Platoon commanded by Lieutenant Abady bore the brunt of the assault. At daybreak, some 30 enemy soldiers lay at 3rd Platoon's defensive positions with another 30 entangled in the barbed wire in front of them. The airfield and General Vandegrift's command post remained just beyond the Japanese grasp.

Captain Putnam ordered squads to assess the area to its front. Private Don "Deacon" Bishop counted an additional 200 to 300 dead Japanese along the 3rd Battalion line. He also discovered the lifeless bodies of Privates Bertram Hanscom and Harold Enias, both from Abady's platoon. Now blooded for the first time, K Company's losses of three dead and 17 wounded were few but painful.

Over the next few days, members of the Terzi patrol made their way back to the 3rd Battalion line. Through the long nights, they had had to avoid the Japanese as well as their own artillery and mortar fire. Terzi would receive the Silver Star.

On December 15, 1942, the Marines of K Company heard the words they had yearned to hear for so long: "Men, prepare to leave the island; we're headed for Australia." They had spent four months, two weeks, and a day on what would come to be known as the "Island of Death." The Japanese would refer to Guadalcanal as Jigoku No Shima, "Hell's Island." The period from August 7 to early November 1942 included some of the most tactically important land combat in the Pacific—and left 4,123 Marines dead. With grudging admiration, Vandegrift wrote to the commandant of the Marine Corps, "General, I have never heard or read of this kind of fighting. These people refuse to surrender."

National Archives



With almost no beach separating the water from the jungle at Cape Gloucester on the island of New Britain, U.S. Marines wade ashore and directly into the island's dense vegetation. Company K's Wilheit and Terzi, now captains, would both be killed here in December 1943.

In addition to the forces commanded by Colonel Merritt Edson, the 1st Marine Regiment commanded by Colonel Clifton B. Cates, which included McKelvy's 3rd Battalion, was responsible for the majority of fighting during this period. Guadalcanal was by no means the bloodiest fight in the Pacific, but it was the first land battle, and the American victory would guide and inspire troops and commanding officers of the Marine Corps as they fought their way to the doorstep of Japan.

After reaching Australia, the Marines of the 1st Regiment were billeted at the Melbourne Cricket Grounds. They did range work with their new semiautomatic M-1 Garand rifles, which were a vast improvement over the old, bolt-action Springfield 1903s they had used on Guadalcanal.

Abady and Sager, who had severe cases of malaria, returned to America in a casualty company; upon being released from the hospital, both were promoted to the rank of captain. Sager would receive an assignment to serve in SACO, the Sino American Cooperation Organization. He subsequently was sent to Kweichong Province, Camp Ten, where he trained Chinese guerrillas to fight the Japanese. Abady would receive orders to train Marines in amphibious warfare in America. Back in the Pacific, the surviving members of K Company would carry on the fight.

Nearly a year later, on December 26, 1943, the Marines waded ashore at Cape Gloucester on New Britain. Joe Terzi and Phil Wilheit, both having been promoted to the rank of captain, led K Company troops. There was no beach area at the cape, so as the large doors of the landing craft swung open, they walked right into the jungle where, after a short distance, they turned right, went over a small brook,

National Archives

and then made a left. There they ran into a Japanese pillbox and began taking heavy automatic weapons fire.

Terzi was killed first. Wilheit assumed control of K Company but was killed moments later; rifleman "Deacon" Bishop of K Company's 3rd Platoon pulled their bodies off the front line. The deaths were a tremendous blow to the morale of K Company.

Both captains were posthumously awarded the Navy Cross. The citation for Terzi reads: "The President of the United States of America takes pride in presenting the Navy Cross (Posthumously) to Captain Joseph Anthony Terzi, United States Marine Corps Reserve, for extraordinary heroism and distinguished service while serving as Commanding Officer of K Company, Third Battalion, First Marines, 1st Marine Division, in action against enemy Japanese forces on Cape Gloucester, New Britain Island, on 26 December 1943.

"Realizing that the nature of the terrain made a powerful frontal assault necessary when his right assault company was stopped by concentrated enemy rifle and machine-gun fire, Captain Terzi notified his battalion commanding officer of the situation, then boldly led his men in a savage frontal attack, fighting valiantly until he was killed by Japanese fire.

"By his able strategy and determined aggressiveness, Captain Terzi inspired his men to carry through the assault with so much splendid and heroic effort that all enemy resistance was completely destroyed. His forceful initiative, steady courage in a time of great peril, and his unwavering devotion to duty were in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service. He gallantly gave his life for his country."

Writing to Phil Wilheit's widow, K Company's newly appointed commander, Captain George P. Hunt, stated, "Bold, aggressive, fearless, he died as is expected of a Marine officer, at the head of his troops; and a vigorous inspiration to all, so calm and cool was his demeanor. He was struck by Japanese machine gun fire and was killed instantly.

"The impetus of his leadership and that of Joe Terzi, his company commander who was also killed at approximately the same time as Phil, was responsible for the ensuing victory that day and another one two days later. Their firm and driving spirits guided the company to glory against the enemy and still do."

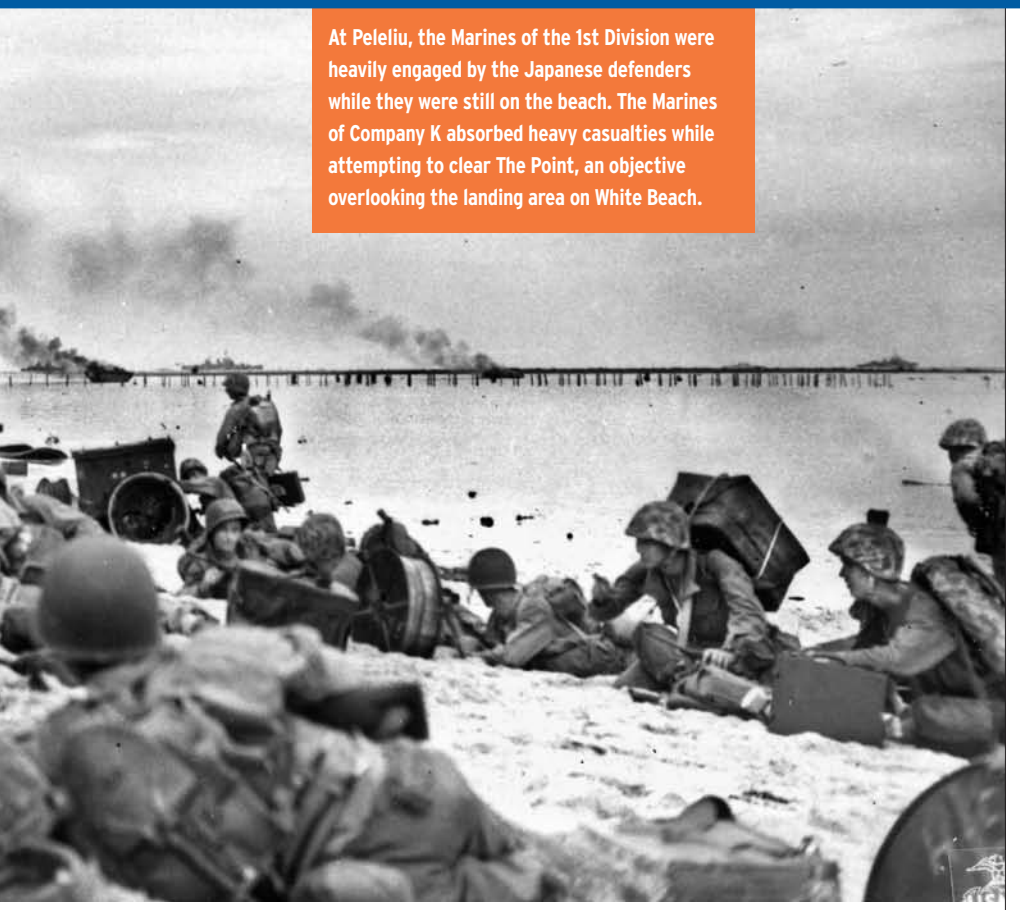
By September 15, 1944, the Japanese had spent 18 months constructing and reinforcing defensive positions on Peleliu. A deadly assortment of machine guns, mortar squads, and artillery awaited the Marines. Pillboxes were covered with up to six feet of cement and crushed coral. Many fortifications were surrounded by spider holes that had been blasted into the coral to hold snipers who could protect Japanese infantry. Jagged ridges overlooking the beach had also been cut out to hold additional pillbox emplacements.

The Japanese high command was shocked at the defeat on Guadalcanal, and victory at Cape Gloucester gave the Marines additional momentum. As the battle for Peleliu—codenamed Operation Stalemate II—approached in the fall of 1944, the outcome of the war was no longer an issue. America was on its way to victory, with one question remaining: How long would it take? The Japanese knew that victory was little more than a dream. With each passing day it slipped farther into the fog of a distant memory, but the Japanese vowed to bleed the Marines white with every ounce of strength they had left.

The Marines felt supremely confident in their ability as a fighting unit. Colonel Lewis Burwell "Chesty" Puller had gained significant respect for K Company. For this reason he gave Captain George P. Hunt and the Marines of K Company the task of clearing The Point on White Beach at Peleliu.

Rising some 30 feet above the water's edge, The Point overlooked all 600 yards of White Beach. It was of the highest necessity that it be seized immediately, as not having control of it would expose the entire 1st Regiment to heavily concentrated enemy fire.

Hunt thoroughly rehearsed his men for the upcoming battle. Each Marine in K Company knew his task and its significance to his squad, and each man understood the grav-



At Peleliu, the Marines of the 1st Division were heavily engaged by the Japanese defenders while they were still on the beach. The Marines of Company K absorbed heavy casualties while attempting to clear The Point, an objective overlooking the landing area on White Beach.

ity of the orders given to them by Colonel Puller and stood ready to fulfill them.

Captain Hunt decided to anchor his left flank on the beach, while another force would pivot 90 degrees. The 3rd and 1st Platoons were given the job of clearing The Point while the 2nd Platoon was to secure the area to the right.

On the morning of September 15, 1944, the landing craft approached the island and ground to a halt; Hunt ordered his men over the side and off the beach as quickly as possible. Running 75 yards straight ahead, he took cover in a blast hole, but the Japanese pillboxes and jagged coral quickly took a deadly toll. Most of K Company's machine-gun squads were mowed down as soon as they hit the beach. Hunt's command group had taken cover around him, and orders were given for the radio operator to make contact with the platoons—but to no avail. Runners were sent out to gain information but none returned.

Desperate to gain a handle on the situation, Hunt jumped from cover and screamed at his radio operator to follow him. He was devastated by the horror that confronted him. Dozens of his men lay dead or wounded, their faces grimacing in pain. In just a few minutes, one of the finest companies in the 1st Marine Division had been decimated.

Sergeant John Koval assumed command of the 3rd Platoon after its officer was badly wounded and taken out of the fight. This was the unit commanded by 2nd Lt. Abady on Guadalcanal. Despite being close to death himself, Koval rallied what remained of 3rd Platoon to The Point, where he was responsible in large part for knocking out a major Japanese gun emplacement. For his courageous actions, he was awarded the Silver Star. Pfc. Joe Dariano recalls that of the 45 Marines in his platoon, 19 were killed and 21 wounded—a casualty rate of 89 percent.

As nightfall approached, the Marines piled up stones to provide cover. Hunt called for flares to be sent up, illuminating the battlefield in a starburst of light. It was a situation reminiscent of flares being sent up before K Company's battle at the Overland Trail. Then someone screamed, "Here they come!" A BAR opened up, followed by grenades exploding in close succession. The fight raged through the night. K Company miraculously took The Point—but at tremendous cost.

On D+1, reinforcements and supplies were received throughout the day. They were just in time, as Hunt estimated over 80 percent of his men were either dead or wounded. By D+8, K Company was pulled off the front line with what remained of the 1st Marine Regiment. By the time reinforcements arrived, K Company had suffered 157 casualties and had only 18 men left who could carry a weapon. For his superb leadership, the Navy Cross was awarded to Captain Hunt, who went on to become an artist and managing editor of *Life* magazine after the war.

Historians have often asked whether it was necessary to take Peleliu. General Douglas MacArthur stated he wanted the Marines to seize Peleliu so he could have them on his flank as he retook the Philippines. Tragically, the Marines were never called upon to support MacArthur from Peleliu.

Peter Richmond, author of the book *My Father's War,* interviewed retired Brig. Gen. Gordon Gayle who commanded the 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines, on Peleliu and received the Navy Cross for getting his men across the island's airfield first. When Richmond asked him how he felt about Peleliu, Gayle responded, "I feel terrible about it. This is the one thing that's been hard for me to come to grips with: the fact that I lost 60 percent of my officers and 50 percent of my men to a campaign that did not need to be fought."

From the jungles of Guadalcanal to the deaths of Terzi and Wilheit at Cape Gloucester through the bloodstained coral at Peleliu, K Company fought in the highest tradition of the Old Breed. These men were emblematic of many Marine Corps detachments that fought in the Pacific. Their actions will forever be remembered in the annals of the Marine Corps. □

"THE AMERICANS HAVE CROSSED!"

In March 1945, courage and luck enabled U.S. forces to seize an intact bridge over the Rhine at Remagen and thrust into Germany.

BY JON DIAMOND

ON a cold March evening in the Goldenrod Café in West Point, Nebraska, Mary Timmermann, a waitress there, picked up the telephone receiver when her boss told her it was Omaha calling long distance for her. She immediately panicked because she had a son, Karl, who had been wounded fighting the Germans in Europe three months previously, and the mother thought the worst had now occurred.

The voice at the other end of the telephone line was not a War Department representative but rather a reporter from the *Omaha World-Herald*, who wanted to inform Mrs. Timmermann that her son, 2nd Lt. Karl H. Timmermann, commanding Company A, 27th Armored Infantry Battalion, 9th Armored Division's Combat Command B (CCB), was the first American officer to cross the Rhine River at Remagen.

Not overly impressed with his daring feat of arms, Mrs. Timmermann was only concerned whether or not her son was hurt, or worse dead.

After the capture of the Ludendorff Railroad Bridge over the Rhine at Remagen, the American First Army pushed as much armor and infantry as possible across the last natural barrier to the German frontier. In this photo, infantrymen and M4 Sherman medium tanks cross the bridge on March 11, 1945.

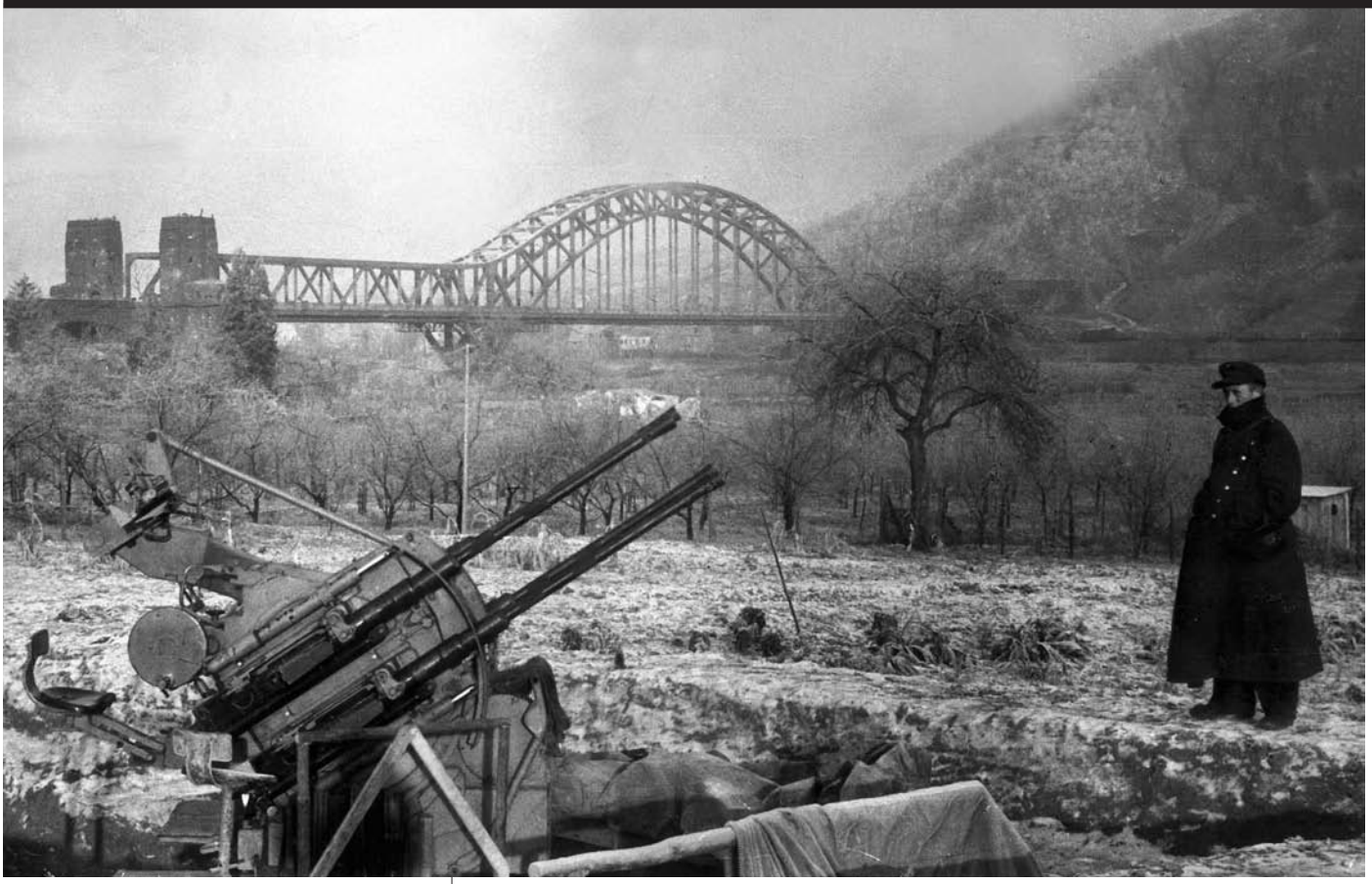
The Rhine has for centuries been Germany's natural barrier to invasion from the west. Broad and swiftly flowing, it is a formidable obstacle to attacking armies, and the few bridges that cross it are choke points that restrict the size and speed of invading armies.

The Rhine, some sources say, begins its 766-mile seaward journey high in the Alps at Lake Toma, Switzerland. From its confluence with the Moselle River at Coblenz, the river flows northward through mountainous country as far north as Bonn, where it emerges from the hills into rolling countryside.

Halfway through the mountainous stretch lies the town of Remagen, just north of the point at which the Ahr River flows from the Eifel Mountains to the west. This rugged terrain confronted General Omar Bradley's 12th Army Group, comprising General George S. Patton's Third Army on the southern flank and General Courtney Hodges' First Army to the north, in March 1945. The Americans agreed that this was not optimal country for armor, since tanks and trucks would be confined to the narrow, winding mountain roads.

National Archives

ullstein bild



Bundled against the cold of late winter, a German soldier contemplates a 20mm antiaircraft gun emplacement on the banks of the Rhine River. The Ludendorff Railroad Bridge with its great arch looms in the background. This photo was taken in January 1945, two months before American troops and tanks of the 9th Armored Division captured the bridge.

For the Allied armies driving eastward in early March 1945, the Rhine River was the last topographic boundary in their assault on western Germany, which contained the industrial heartland of the Ruhr and the Saar. Intriguingly, General Dwight D. Eisenhower's initial offensive plans after the conclusion of the Battle of the Bulge ignored a Rhine crossing in the American First Army's sector, which included the small town of Remagen.

The rationale of the SHAEF (Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force) commander was that the Rhine in this sector was not favorably viewed for river crossing operations since the eastern bank possessed 600-foot-high cliffs rising straight out of the river. Here the mountains on the east side quite literally fell into the water, making this a difficult place to cross the river and subsequently exploit a new bridgehead for a drive into the heart of Germany.

Farther beyond the cliffs lies the Westerwald—a forest with a primitive dirt road network that would be unsuitable for an armored advance. Also, the roads on the western bank leading to Remagen, 15 miles south of Bonn, were poor.

The Rhine is broad, deep, and with such a rapid current that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers reported, "At no place is the river fordable, even at low water." But the Allies also knew that the Rhine would have to be crossed. Thus, the Allied staff had been developing plans to cross the river even before the landings in Normandy in June 1944.

River-crossing schools were started on the Loire after the sweep across France. Several steel mills in Luxembourg were busy constructing metal beams for treadway bridges, and American boatyards were mass producing lightweight river craft that could carry a dozen GIs across the wide river. Seagoing landing craft, sturdy enough to transport tanks across the Rhine, were sent from England to the Rhineland via the port of Antwerp, Belgium.

Despite the vast collection at forward depots of assault boats, landing craft, motors, and enough steel beams and lumber pilings to erect dozens of bridges across the Rhine, everyone believed that capturing a bridge intact would be much simpler than building one, especially under tenacious fire from the Wehrmacht defending its last natural western barrier, which had not been successfully crossed during combat since the Napoleonic Wars.

As early as February 1945, German Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt believed that the Rhine was an excellent natural obstacle to deter further Allied eastward advances. However, to mount a proper defense of the river, all the major bridges would need to be demolished after the Wehrmacht retreated across them.

The Germans took particular efforts to ensure that no Rhine bridges fell into Allied hands. German pioneers (sappers) timed their bridge demolition activities to permit as

many escaping German troops as possible to get to the eastern side of the river before blowing them up.

Since the Nazi high command had regarded the Rhine as its final western defense line and, accordingly, had been destroying all the bridges across the great river to prevent their capture by the Allies, SHAEF knew that an amphibious river crossing operation across the Rhine would be needed—but not in First Army's sector where Remagen stood. That was reserved for Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery's 21st Army Group farther north.

General Gustav von Zangen's Fifteenth Army staff was at odds with SHAEF's assessment and believed that the advancing Americans would take advantage of the open terrain of the Rheinbach Valley toward the Ahr River. Zangen himself firmly believed and argued with German Army Group B commander Field Marshal Walter Model, "The Americans would have to be stupid not to take advantage of this hole and push tanks toward the Rhine. I think they will use this valley—like water flowing downhill."

National Archives

In March 1945, the crew of an American M26 Pershing heavy tank takes a break somewhere in western Germany. The Pershing, with its 90mm main gun, was developed as a match for the heavy German Tiger tank. While few of them reached the battlefields of Western Europe before the end of the war, a platoon of M26 Pershings from the 14th Tank Battalion fought at Remagen.

Zangen predicted that the Americans would take advantage of this natural funnel for military operations and viewed Sinzig and Remagen on the Rhine as probable targets for Hodges' First Army. The real danger, Zangen correctly predicted, was the outlet of the "funnel" at Remagen, and he wanted to block the Americans by withdrawing two corps from the West Wall defenses along the German frontier and placing them at Remagen to protect the Ludendorff Bridge.

At the height of World War I in 1916, construction was begun on the Ludendorff Railroad Bridge by Russian prisoners of war; it was finished three years later at a cost of over two million marks. The 1,200-foot-long structure's span consisted of symmetrical arches adjoining four stone-towered abutments and was wide enough for two trains to pass abeam. If motor traffic were required to use the bridge, wooden planks could be laid over the tracks to form a roadbed.

On the east bank of the Rhine, the train tracks entered a tunnel bored through a steep, 600-foot cliff named Erpeler Ley, on top of which, in 1945, was an array of antiaircraft guns. Explosives had been fitted to the bridge by the defenders and linked by cables through heavy conduits to an electrical firing switch located inside the eastern bank's tunnel.

Zangen still needed the bridge as a supply route, or, if his defenses cracked, as a last-minute escape route across the Rhine. Even Model, in keeping with the American planners' thinking, realized, "Only a fool would try to cross the Rhine where the cliffs rose steeply on the opposite bank," thus he refused to allocate more troops to Zangen's Remagen sector.

Model contended that the main American thrust would be against Bonn. Once the U.S. First Army started moving eastward again, after the German Ardennes offensive had failed, Model sent one of his few mobile reserves, Panzer Brigade 106, to Bonn.

The German military was reeling after the horrendous losses incurred during the Battle of the Bulge, in which more than 500,000 troops were killed during the Ardennes offensive and against the Soviets on the Eastern Front. Young teenage boys, old men, and even women were now serving as combatants against the Allied advance on both fronts.

Thus the German Fifteenth Army, which was defending a long section of the West Wall 25 miles west of Remagen, would have to make do without any reinforcements. According to historian Charles Whiting, "The bridge was left virtually undefended, save for a handful of engineers, members of the local home guard, and a few infantrymen. It was a fatal oversight. For against all military good sense, the Americans would indeed attempt to cross the bridge at Remagen."

Depleted infantry rosters were not the only shortages among Zangen's Fifteenth

Army in the Rhine sector in early March 1945. His 9th Panzer Division had less than 40 tanks and assault guns, while the once vaunted Panzer Lehr Division had only 50. The entire Fifteenth Army could muster only 300 tanks and assault guns.

The German command structure at Remagen was also chaotic. Remagen was part of Wehrkreis XII stationed in Wiesbaden, but the conduct of defensive operations in the Remagen area was initially the responsibility of General Kurt von Berg of Wehrkreis XII Nord, headquartered at Coblenz.

However, on March 1, 1945, command at the Remagen Bridge was relegated from Wehrkreis XII Nord to General Walter Botsch's command in the Bonn sector, reflecting Model's fear of an American assault on Bonn. The district had its own engineer regiment, Landes Pioneer Regiment 12 (Ld.Pi Rgt 12), and the Remagen area was the responsibility of its third battalion, commanded by Major August Kraft, headquartered at Bendorf-Sayn.

This engineer unit was made up of older soldiers, many of whom were veterans of World War I and unfit for regular combat units. The engineers were responsible for preparing the Rhine bridges for demolition and were also heavily involved in the operation of ferries to help evacuate troops from the west bank of the Rhine to the east.

The bridge itself was the responsibility of the 12th Company of Ld.Pi Rgt. 12 commanded by Captain Carl Friesenhahn, with just over 100 men. A convalescent company of 140 recuperating men was commanded by Luftwaffe Captain Willi Bratge, who had suffered three wounds on the Eastern Front.

On March 3, Maj. Gen. John Milliken's III U.S. Corps had been ordered by First Army commander Lt. Gen. Courtney Hodges to head for the Ahr River and link up with Patton's Third Army. The job of seizing the main road junction at Euskirchen fell to Maj. Gen. John Leonard's 9th Armored Division, a part of III Corps, with only token resistance being encountered. This, as Zangen feared, opened up the Rheinbach Valley to Milliken's III Corps.

Leonard was a hard-charging commander, having earned the Distinguished Service Cross as an infantry battalion commander during World War I. He had been wounded at Verdun and received the Purple Heart plus two French decorations.

On March 6, III Corps advanced through the Rheinbach Valley, overrunning German ammunition dumps and capturing a number of ammunition supply vehicles, which severely hampered Fifteenth Army's resupply of heavier ordnance.

Zangen's attempts to slow the movement of III Corps became fruitless, so he allowed many elements of Fifteenth Army to withdraw toward Bonn late that day, making Remagen an even easier and more attractive target.

The Germans were currently holding both sides of the Rhine, but on the west bank

> "YOU SEE THAT BLACK LINE ON THE MAP? IF YOU CAN SEIZE THAT, YOUR NAME WILL GO DOWN IN HISTORY."

National Archives

A jeep full of American soldiers pulls a trailer that is also filled to capacity with GIs as it nears the western approach to the Ludendorff Railroad Bridge at Remagen.

they were at widely separated places covering the most likely crossing points at Bonn and Coblenz. Between them was a 60-mile gap around Remagen, virtually undefended because Model thought the mountainous country beyond Remagen would dissuade the Americans from crossing there.

General Walter Botsch had ordered that demolitions be replaced on the Ludendorff Bridge on March 6, after they had previously been removed to prevent accidental detonation and bridge destruction by Allied bombs before all German troops heading eastwards could cross the Rhine.

On the bridge's access ramp at the western end was a large explosive charge of Donarit—a compound made of 80 percent ammonium nitrate, 12 percent trinitrotoluene (TNT), and a variable amount (2-8 percent) of nitroglycerine—controlled by a separate

National Archives

American jeeps and armored cars pause in Remagen before heading eastward across the bridge and into the heart of Germany.

detonator and placed to crater the ramp and stop vehicles. A series of other charges were placed to bring down the bridge's center and easternmost span and were controlled by another detonator.

To further compound the chaos of the German command structure for the defense of Remagen and the bridge, Botsch was replaced on March 6, literally hours before the lead elements of Brig. Gen. William Hoge's Combat Command B (CCB) reached Remagen. Taking his place would be a major named Hans Scheller, but he had not yet arrived.

Zangen's Fifteenth Army was still crossing the Ludendorff Bridge in a steady stream on March 6. The German defenses at the bridge clearly suffered from a lack of troops. The only potential resistance to the Americans would likely come from intermittent 20mm flak guns firing from across the river.

That same day, following Milliken's orders, Leonard sent a mixed task force of tanks, infantry, and supporting vehicles—Combat Command B (CCB)—toward Remagen; Hoge's CCB reached Meckenheim by the afternoon of the 6th and spent the day and evening clearing out the town; CCB was now within a day's trek of the Rhine itself, in the vicinity of Sinzig and Remagen.

Before the war, Hoge had been a construction engineer working on the Alaska-Canada highway, so he had plenty of experience with roads and bridges. His previous combat experience included leading engineering formations on D-Day at Omaha Beach to clear obstacles while under fire. Hoge had also led the 9th Armored Division's CCB defense of the Belgian town of St. Vith during the Battle of the Bulge.

A Piper Cub aircraft spotting for the 9th Armored Division's artillery flew over the Ludendorff Bridge on March 6 and reported that it was not yet destroyed. At 11 PM, General Milliken told Leonard over the phone, "You see that black line on the map? If you can seize that, your name will go down in history."

The "black line" Milliken was referring to was the Ludendorff Railroad Bridge over the Rhine River at Remagen.

On March 7, 1945, Cologne fell to the Allies; however, that city's link to the eastern bank of the Rhine, the 1,200-foot segment of the Hohenzollern Bridge, had been destroyed the previous day, making a Rhine crossing at Cologne impossible for Hodges's First Army. The other Rhine spans, too, were destroyed by German demolition—all but one.

Hoge's tanks, infantry, and other troops were again to be in the thick of it. Because of all the rubble blocking the roads around Meckenheim, they did not start their movement on March 7 until 10 AM; they arrived outside Remagen just past noon.

Although Hoge's initial orders had focused on a southeast movement toward the Ahr River, a western tributary of the Rhine a few miles south of Remagen, and made no reference to taking the Ludendorff Bridge or to gaining a bridgehead east of the Rhine, at 3:30 AM on March 7 Leonard's 9th Armored Division headquarters changed CCB's mission.

Hoge conferred with Leonard, and they agreed that the opportunity should be taken if the Germans were foolish enough to leave a bridge intact. However, no one in III Corps expected that the Ludendorff Railroad Bridge would remain standing for much longer.

Hoge organized CCB into two columns, a northern one, under Lt. Col. Leonard E. Engeman, aimed at seizing both Remagen and Kripp, and a southern one responsible for Sinzig's capture. Engeman's task force was composed of the 14th Tank Battalion, 9th Armored Division, and elements of the 27th Armored Infantry Battalion, commanded by Major Murray Deeveis. General Leonard then ordered CCB to advance to the west bank of the Rhine and capture Remagen and Kripp as well as secure bridgeheads over the Ahr.

Concerned about broadcasting his orders over a radio when the enemy might be listening, Hoge sent Major Ben Cothran to Engeman's northern column of CCB with orders to take the bridge if it still stood. By the time Cothran reached Engeman's column, the lead elements had already cleared the woods west of Remagen and were sitting in a hilltop clearing overlooking the intact Ludendorff Bridge.

Engeman, after training his binoculars on the valley below, jumped with excitement at the sight of the still standing bridge. Through the morning fog, he was able to make out that the German engineers had, with wood planking, turned one

set of tracks into a vehicle bridge. A long line of German vehicles was moving across the only still usable bridge over the Rhine within immediate American reach.

Engeman wasted no time. He summoned a platoon of the 14th Tank Battalion's newly arrived M26 Pershing tanks with their long-barreled 90mm guns that, unlike the undergunned Shermans, could knock out anything the Germans could offer in combat. The tank platoon had arrived at the edge of Remagen before the infantry and, having encountered no resistance, simply pushed on into the town.

Brigadier General Hoge himself arrived at Remagen and, seeing firsthand the opportunity before him, urged his forces down through the town as fast as they could go.

Engeman, in turn, instructed Lieutenant Karl Timmermann's Company A, 27th Armored Infantry Battalion (of which he had been in command for less than 24 hours): "Go down into the town. Get through it as quickly as possible and reach the bridge. The tanks will lead. The infantry will follow on foot. Their half-tracks will bring up the rear. Let's make it snappy."

Timmermann's unit had been resting in an abandoned German Labor Corps camp situated on the heights just above Remagen. Staff Sergeant Joseph de Lisio, from New York City, issued orders to his tired fellow soldiers to get up and start moving.

The infantry set off down the hill overlooking the bridge at 1:20 PM, following the Pershings as they descended down a steep, tree-lined road into the town.

Timmermann noted that Remagen appeared deserted, and also observed the tanks moving toward the bridge. He and his men followed along the main road running through the center of town.

Ahead of him, the Pershings wheeled into firing position near the west end of the bridge, prepared to smash any opposition across the river. One of their first targets was a locomotive that was pulling a string of freight cars along the opposite bank; Grimball's tanks opened up and knocked out the train.

The stage was set for the Americans' coup de main—a violent, all-out assault

National Archives

After crossing the Rhine via the Ludendorff Railroad Bridge at Remagen, American soldiers inspect the tunnel where German soldiers and civilians took refuge as fighting in the vicinity escalated. The tunnel extended beneath the Erpeler Ley, high ground on the eastern bank of the Rhine.

on the objective. A CCB operations officer turned to the intelligence officer, wondering how a little combat command, having only one understrength tank battalion and an infantry battalion, could possibly cross the Rhine and defend the bridgehead until help arrived.

In one of innumerable ironic twists during World War II, Timmerman had been born in Frankfurt, Germany, in 1921—not more than 100 kilometers from the last bridge standing across Germany's vaunted western natural barrier.

Karl's father, John H. Timmermann, an American of German parentage who spoke German well, had been a private in the American Expeditionary Force's 8th Infantry Regiment but had deserted from the U.S. Army Occupation Force in 1919 to his ancestral homeland and married a German woman. Eventually, the Timmermanns left Frankfurt and, with the assistance of American Quakers, were able to return to West Point, Nebraska. Karl had enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1940 in spite of the fact that he had uncles in the Wehrmacht.

On the morning of March 7, the Germans' new area commander, General Otto Hitzfeld, whose LXVII Corps headquarters were 35 kilometers from the bridge, ordered Major Hans Scheller to drive to Remagen and take charge of both the structure and any troops there. His orders were tentative; namely, preventing the Americans from capturing the bridge intact but also prohibiting any premature demolition of the bridge to allow as many men as possible in Hitzfeld's LXVII Corps to safely retreat across the Rhine.

Scheller arrived at the bridge at 11 AM, but he lacked any suitable radios to maintain contact with Hitzfeld's command. Within minutes of his arrival, some American tanks were sighted heading toward Remagen, and Scheller's new subordinates urged him to destroy the bridge.

Scheller did not want to demolish the bridge too soon and leave LXVII Corps stranded on the west bank of the Rhine; however, he instructed his engineers to finish their demolition preparations and wait for his orders to detonate the explosives.

At 1 PM, the Germans heard the tanks and small arms fire coming from Remagen. Despite pleas from his two junior officers—Captain Karl Friesenhahn, an engineer in charge of the bridge itself, and Luftwaffe Captain Willi Bratge, who commanded a small mixed force of antiaircraft and Volkssturm troops—to blow the bridge,

Scheller hesitated. He could not yet see any American soldiers so he denied that request as well.

At about the same time, Company A was advancing past a bend in the road through the hills. Acting Sergeant Carmine Sabia from New York shouted, "Jesus, look at that…. Do you know what the hell river that is?"

It was the fabled Rhine. And spanning the broad, brown, swiftly flowing river was a magnificent sight: a bridge. The graceful curve of the bridge's truss arch structure between the twin stone fortress-like towers at each end made for a picturesque view, and the long, gray line of German troops and vehicles streaming across the span gave life to the scene.

But none of the men in Timmermann's unit was considering the aesthetics. What they were concerned about was their orders: to take this 1,200-foot-long bridge at all costs. Never mind that the whole thing might blow up in their faces when they were halfway across.

By 2 PM, the men of Company A, going doorway to doorway, had cleared most of the opposition in Remagen and were now turning their attention to the bridge itself. Timmermann's men, deployed into three platoons, started a slow trek through the smoke surrounding the descending road leading to the western side's twin bridge abutment towers.

At the same time, the main detonation circuit for the demolitions was completed, but a secondary one was not fully operational. A few minutes later the German engineers tested the main firing circuit and concluded that it was still functional. To bolster their defenses, the Germans had a barge sitting half submerged in the river about 200 yards upstream from the bridge and filled with armed soldiers.

Major Scheller and Captain Friesenhahn inspected the western side of the bridge at approximately 2:30. Within minutes of reaching the western end of the bridge, both German officers heard the Americans fighting their way through Remagen and coming closer. At 3:12, the American tanks, still at the western end of the bridge, started covering it with fire.

Under sporadic German rifle fire, Timmermann led his soldiers past the few remaining houses above the river and noted Germans on the other side, apparently preparing to detonate other explosives to destroy the bridge.

It was truly an irony of war that the Americans, who had little intention of capturing a bridge because Remagen was halfway between two previously selected crossing points, Bonn and Coblenz, were now poised to do so.

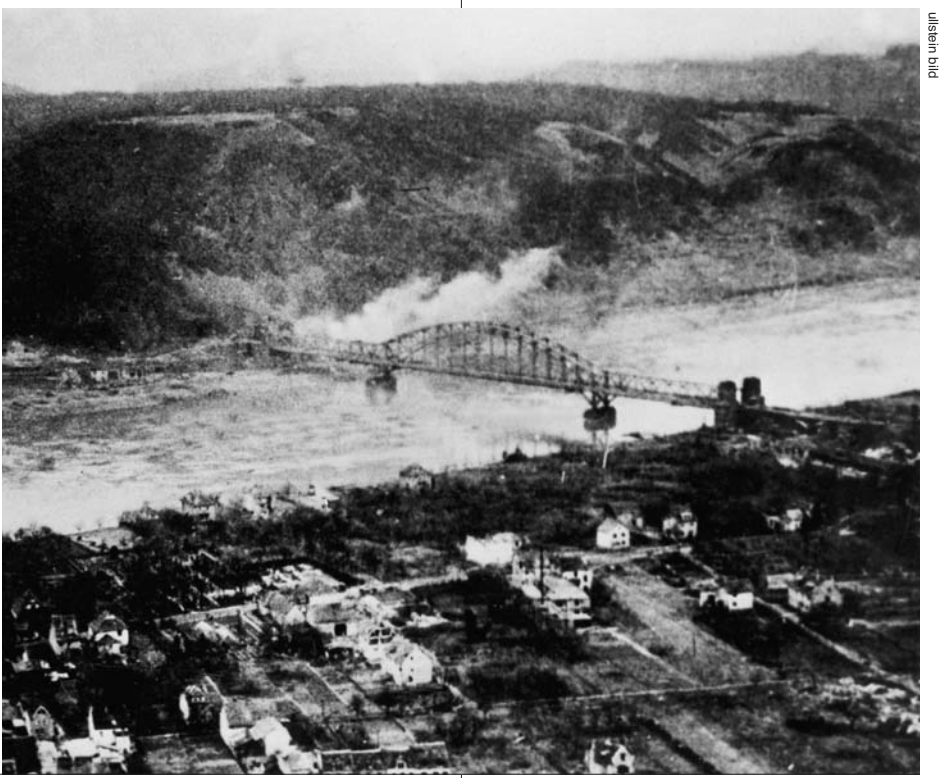
The Americans had just obtained information from German POWs captured early that afternoon claiming that the bridge was to be blown at 4 PM. The information was confirmed by several citizens of the town and was relayed to Brig. Gen. Hoge, who sent the following message to Colonel Engeman at 3:15 PM: "You've got 45 minutes to take the bridge."

At this time, Friesenhahn ordered a charge under the approach ramp to the western side of the bridge be detonated; a tremendous explosion went off on the causeway with a thunderous whump, causing a plume of dirt and cobblestones to rise into the air and cratering the road surface with a 30-foot hole he hoped would keep American tanks from gaining the bridge from the west.

As Timmermann's company hit the ground, the flying rubble cascaded down upon them. This large crater may have been capable of stopping vehicles but not

Both: National Archives

LEFT: Ironically, 2nd Lt. Karl Timmermann (left), the commander of Company A, 27th Armored Infantry Battalion which captured the Remagen Bridge, was born in Germany. Sergeant Alex Drabik (right) is credited with being the first American soldier to cross the Rhine. He did so during the assault on the bridge at Remagen. BELOW: The Ludendorff Railroad Bridge at Remagen comes under fire from German artillery on the eastern bank of the Rhine after its capture by elements of the U.S. 9th Armored Division on March 7, 1945.



ullstein bild

the assaulting American infantry. With gunfire from the towers of the bridge now being directed at his advancing company, Timmermann told his GIs to fix bayonets, and they raced onto the bridge.

Back on the eastern side, Scheller gave the order for the engineers to set off the main detonator circuit inside the tunnel entrance, which controlled the demolitions for the center and eastern spans of the bridge. The main detonator circuit failed to work and, with only a partial secondary circuit controlling the charges on the eastern portion of the bridge at the stone pier, a German soldier ran about 100 yards onto the bridge to set off the primer cord to this device by hand.

Soon there followed another explosion two-thirds of the way across. Planks rose from the railway, and the bridge seemed to lift up. However, it settled with the structure still intact. It was unclear to the German officers why the explosives did not detonate properly to destroy the bridge but, afterward, American engineers found that the blasting cap had gone off in the second charge, but it had been placed too deep to set off the explosives.

Meanwhile, Lieutenant Timmermann was prodding his three reluctant infantry platoons to keep moving despite intense machine-gun fire coming from the towers on the eastern end of the bridge.

With snipers on the barge also posing a danger, Timmermann went back to a Sherman tank sitting near the crater that blocked the access ramp and asked for some fire support. The tank gunners obliged and quickly opened up on the barge; a white flag soon appeared.

On the bridge, the covering fire from American tanks should have enabled Timmermann's men to advance, but he returned to find them immobilized, fearful that the bridge would blow up at any second. The lieutenant yelled at Sergeant DeLisio to get the men moving. DeLisio got up and started forward; his men followed. Next came the second platoon, led by Lieutenant Emmet J. Burrows. Their mission was to clear out the German machine-gun nests in the eastern towers.

By this time, the remainder of the 27th Armored Infantry Battalion had arrived. The armored infantrymen leaped from their vehicles and went into firing positions downstream from the bridge. The American assault guns and mortars began firing white phosphorus into Erpel, the village along the east bank of the river just north of the bridge, driving the defenders into cover.

The combat engineers of the 9th Armored Engineer Battalion also swung into action. Three members of the battalion (Lieutenant Hugh Mott, Sergeant Eugene Dorland, and S/Sgt. John Reynolds) dashed onto the bridge with Timmermann's assault infantry to cut the demolition wires, preventing the Germans from touching off explosive charges planted on the crossbeams underneath.

These engineers soon learned how close they came to disaster; they located a 500-pound charge of Donarit about two-thirds of the way across the river. Its cap had gone off, but somehow the charge failed to explode. Lieutenant Mott and his two sergeants also found 350-pound charges that had not gone off in the bridge's piers. One of the cables leading to the main charge had been severed, possibly by artillery.

Sergeant Dorland raced across the bridge and tried to cut a main explosive cable with pliers but, failing that, fired three shots from his carbine into the cable, smashing the line completely.

With most of the explosive charges now inert, the engineers were able to cut the lines for the remaining explosives to prevent accidental explosions, saving the bridge.

Timmermann and his men were still racing across the bridge, dodging bullets, cutting wires, and throwing explosive charges into the river. The lieutenant continually prodded his soldiers to keep going, to not give in to the temptation of seeking cover behind a steel beam.

Out of breath, Timmermann and a handful of his men finally reached the far side of the bridge. Enemy fire was still spitting from the twin stone towers, so DeLisio entered

> "SHOVE EVERYTHING YOU CAN ACROSS IT, COURTNEY, AND BUTTON THE BRIDGEHEAD TIGHTLY."

National Archives

one tower at its base and charged up the circular staircase. At the top he came upon three Germans trying to clear a jam in their gun, fired a couple of shots, then took the men prisoner; he threw the weapon out of the tower's gun port, then captured two more of the enemy, including a lieutenant. Simultaneously, three other GIs—named Chinchar, Samele, and Massie—were cleaning out the adjacent tower.

While this was taking place, Private Alex Drabik, leading a small pack of infantrymen, became the first American to set foot on the opposite side of the Rhine. Close behind were about 120 men from Company A.

Most of the German defenders had retreated into the dark railroad tunnel running beneath the Erpeler Ley. Huddling with them was a mob of frightened German civilians who had fled into the tunnel to escape the intense firing and shelling. Major Scheller had already taken a bicycle and escaped out the eastern side of the tunnel to report to Hitzfeld's LXVII Corps headquarters the loss of the bridge to the Americans.

In fact, Captain Willi Bratge had also sent a message to the German high command: "The demolition of the bridge was unsuccessful ... and the Americans have crossed!"

Then, Bratge, still in the tunnel, instructed his officers and men to surrender to the Americans. Shortly thereafter, soldiers and civilians raised their hands and headed west across the bridge that was battered but still erect. Upon clearing the railway tunnel, just to be sure, some of the American infantrymen blew apart the master demolition switch with rifle fire.

National Archives

ABOVE: German prisoners, some of them no doubt relieved that their trial at Remagen is over, stream back across the bridge at Remagen and into captivity in France. OPPOSITE: Maintaining a vigil against German aircraft intent on attacking the Ludendorff Railroad Bridge at Remagen, Pfc. Richard Schrame scans the sky and stands ready to spring into action with his quad .50-caliber antiaircraft machine gun.

There was still resistance, however. The crews of the antiaircraft batteries on top of the Erpeler Ley, called Flak Hill by the Americans, were still in place and needed to be neutralized, so Timmermann told Lieutenant Burrows to take 2nd Platoon up the steep slope and clear the Germans off the top.

It was an order easier said than done, as the steepness and the loose rock made the footing treacherous. German fire was also heavy, and Burrows' platoon from Company B took a number of casualties. Nevertheless, once they reached the top and silenced the enemy, the Americans could look down into neighboring towns and see what looked like the Germans preparing for a counterattack. Artillery fire was called in to disrupt it.

The command post of the bridgehead force was set up in Remagen 200 yards west of the bridge shortly after Timmermann crossed, while Hoge's CCB headquarters had been established at Birresdorf at noon. The Americans had intercepted German radio traffic ordering a heavy bombing raid on the bridge the following day; however, bad weather caused the mission to be aborted.

More troops were now streaming across the bridge and building up a bridgehead on the eastern bank of the Rhine, but until the crater at the Remagen end of the bridge could be filled in and the planked roadway on the bridge repaired, tanks, trucks, artillery, and jeeps could not be brought across. With daylight rapidly fading, those jobs would have to wait until the next day.

However, some Sherman tanks, narrower than the M26 Pershings, were able to crawl at a slow speed across the bridge, led by infantrymen acting as guides because the bridge's surface was pockmarked by the day's earlier fighting. Sergeant William J. Goodson drove the first American tank across the bridge.

By 10 PM, three American rifle companies from the 27th Armored Infantry Battalion, A, B, and C, all of which had many casualties, occupied the Rhine's eastern shore; Company C moved on Orsberg. This force was sufficient to beat back a German counterattack comprised of engineers and antiaircraft crews near the

Erpeler Ley. The counterattacking Germans were carrying 1,000 pounds of explosives with them to destroy the bridge. After the failed counterattack on the east side of the Rhine, Timmerman's company turned downstream to secure Erpel.

Repairs to damage caused by the previous charges' detonations could not be accomplished due to German sniper fire from both banks of the river and would have to wait until darkness descended. Bulldozers then filled in the crater on the western ramp of the bridge while American infantrymen ripped lumber from nearby house exteriors to put a new wooden surface over the rail planks destroyed earlier in the center and eastern spans.

Photo by Photo12/UIG/Getty Images

During the night of March 7-8, the roads from Birresdorf to the west and Sinzig to the south were clogged with reinforcements initially of CCB and then III Corps troops being rushed up by General Milliken.

The temporary bridge repairs were completed by midnight and enabled the Americans to establish one-way vehicular traffic. That night, Company A, 14th Tank Battalion, crossed the bridge and set up a roadblock. The 52nd Armored Infantry Battalion then crossed and established its command post at Erpel and took over the northern half of the perimeter on the east side of the Rhine.

At dawn on March 8, the 1st Battalion, 310th Infantry, 78th Infantry Division crossed the river and occupied the high ground south of the bridge around Ockenfels to prohibit the Germans from using this village as an observation post.

Also that morning, the 14th Tank Battalion, less Company A, crossed and went into mobile reserve. During the remaining daylight hours on the 8th, the 47th Infantry, 9th Infantry Division, and the 311th Infantry, 78th Division, crossed the Rhine and took up perimeter positions to the east and northeast of the 27th and 52nd Armored Infantry Battalions. The 99th Infantry Division was also ordered to exploit the 9th Armored Division's seizure of the bridge.

These crossings occurred during almost continuous German artillery fire on the bridge and bridgehead. Timmermann's coup de main had unintentionally carved out a bridgehead one mile deep and two miles wide on the eastern side of the Rhine.

Once First Army commander Courtney Hodges informed General Omar Bradley, leader of 12th Army Group, about the seizure of the bridge, Bradley said, "Shove everything you can across it, Courtney, and button the bridgehead tightly."

Bradley had now found the way, by pushing division after division across the Rhine at Remagen, to make sure that he would not lose any of his First Army divisions to other commanders, as he had to British General Bernard Montgomery during the Battle of the Bulge.

Bradley was still fuming at the British general for usurping his role during the Germans' Ardennes offensive and could only hope for a way to relegate Montgomery and his 21st Army Group to a secondary role in the Rhine crossing operation. Such was the "state of war" among the Allied generals.

Bradley had yet to inform Eisenhower, who still believed that Remagen was not the ideal position to cross the Rhine. But Maj. Gen. Harold R. Bull, Eisenhower's G-3, was none too pleased; all the plans called for Montgomery to be the first across the Rhine farther north. Bull told Bradley, "Sure, you've got a bridge, Brad, but what good is it going to do you? You're not going anywhere down there at Remagen. It just doesn't fit into the plan."

Bradley shot back, "What in hell do you want us to do? Pull back and blow it up?"

Upon telling Eisenhower about the breakthrough, though, the SHAEF commander responded to Bradley, "Sure, get right on across with everything you've got. It's the best break we've had…. To hell with the planners! Sure, go on, Brad, and I'll give you everything we've got to hold the bridgehead. We'll make good use of it even if the terrain isn't too good."

First Army Headquarters, upon being notified of the bridge's seizure and initial reinforcements, confirmed the decision to exploit the bridgehead, and the area suddenly swarmed with units to defend the hard-won prize. Hodges immediately attached the 7th Armored Division to III Corps and would also send to the bridgehead the 2nd Infantry

National Archives

ABOVE: The ruins of the town of Remagen around them, American soldiers go about their business on March 11, 1945. The Remagen Bridge remained virtually intact for 10 days after its capture, allowing the Americans to move men, tanks, and supplies to their lodgment on the eastern bank of the Rhine River. OPPOSITE: The Ludendorff Bridge at Remagen collapsed into a pile of twisted wreckage on March 17, 1945, killing and injuring a number of American soldiers. In this photo, an injured combat engineer is placed on a litter for transport to a hospital following the collapse.

Division from V Corps. Also, a 90mm antiaircraft artillery battalion, a treadway bridge company, and a DUKW (amphibious truck) company were dispatched to augment III Corps' assets at the Remagen bridgehead.

Other considerations were the need for artillery support, the protection of the bridge against enemy air action—including V-2 rockets—and sabotage. The construction of adjoining bridges at the Remagen crossing site was also of high priority.

As for artillery, one 4.5-inch gun battalion, one 155mm gun battalion, and one 8-inch howitzer battalion were trucked into position, ready to deliver fire. In the early hours of March 8, the 482nd Anti-Aircraft Artillery Automatic Weapons Battalion also had established defensive positions near the Remagen bridge.

In addition, Hodges' First Army staff was assured that air cover would be provided from any base on the Continent or in the United Kingdom from which planes were able to sortie, weather permitting. Milliken's III Corps headquarters set up the priority for the movements of troops available west of the Rhine as rapidly as they could be disengaged and established a tactical command post at Remagen especially for the control of rapidly emerging traffic circulation problems on the Ludendorff Bridge.

East of the Rhine, the enemy took no concerted actions. No counterattacks were launched, and no organized defenses were encountered. However, the Luftwaffe attempted 10 raids over the bridge with 10 aircraft, eight of which were Stuka dive bombers.

By the afternoon of March 8, the 482nd Anti-Aircraft Artillery Battalion had three batteries at the bridge site, with three platoons on the east and three platoons on the west bank of the river, while the 413th Anti-Aircraft Artillery Battalion went into positions on the west bank and shot down eight attacking German aircraft. Units were also employed to ensure that the bridge would be protected from floating mines, demolition-carrying swimmers, and explosives-laden river barges.

On March 9, the third day of the bridgehead operation, German opposition east of the Rhine became more tenacious, notably from elements of the 11th Panzer Division. In contrast, on the western bank of the Rhine all German resistance had ceased.

The III Corps Engineers was directed to assume control of all engineer activity at the bridge site, relieving 9th Armored Division engineers of that responsibility. Two ferries were in operation, principally to remove the wounded and keep the bridge open for combat vehicle traffic. A treadway and pontoon bridge upstream were now under construction along with log and net booms to protect the bridge from water-borne demolitions and obstacles.

As this third day ended, the bridgehead had been reinforced by the 308th Infantry Regiment and the remainder of the 310th Infantry Regiment, along with the 60th Infantry Regiment and additional antiair-

craft artillery protection. The antitank defense of the bridgehead had been bolstered by the tank destroyers accompanying the regimental combat teams.

Although no U.S. artillery was as yet operational on the east side of the Rhine, divisional and corps artillery supported the operation from their positions on the west bank of the river.

The German high command did not sit idly by after the capture of the Ludendorff Bridge. Field Marshals Rundstedt and Model both called for immediate counterattacks; however, a shortage of tanks, fuel, and ammunition curtailed such plans.

Instead of tank and infantry counterattacks, artillery fire from all types of guns commenced battering the bridgehead almost immediately after its seizure. The barrage included the biggest German artillery weapon, the 540mm railway-mounted siege mortar Mörser Karl, weighing 130 tons. After firing a few 4,400-pound shells, it had to be withdrawn for repairs.

During the early afternoon of March 9, a direct hit on an American truck carrying ammunition across the bridge caused such extensive damage that further traffic across it had to be curtailed for several hours.

The Luftwaffe also mounted over 400 sorties against the bridge, including the new Me-262 fighter jets and older Stukas, but the Allied antiaircraft defenses were too dense; over 700 guns surrounding the bridge threw up a curtain of lead at the planes.

American fighters based in France along with RAF Hawker Tempest fighters stationed in Holland also defended the bridge against the nine days of Luftwaffe air assaults. Over 11 V-2 rockets were launched against the bridge from Bellendoorn, Holland, without any scoring a hit on or near the structure (the closest was 300 yards away). This was the only occasion on which the V-2 was employed as a tactical weapon during the war.

On March 13, in an effort to protect the bridge against enemy waterborne attack, V Corps, commanded by Maj. Gen. Clarence R. Huebner, was informed that it was vital to use the utmost vigilance along the river to prevent enemy swimmers, mines, boats, or midget submarines from moving downstream.

III Corps also dispatched technical experts to the bridge zone, where installation of a cable across the river served as an antitorpedo boom. One platoon of Canal Defense Light (CDL) M3 Lee tanks from Company C, 738th Tank Battalion was instructed to maintain observation and protection on the river 24 hours per day.

The Americans continued to repair the bridge for nine days, even though quickly built treadway and pontoon bridges were by now carrying much of the vehicular traffic across the river. The construction of the treadway bridge, the first tactical bridge to be built across the Rhine since Napoleon's era, began two days after the seizure of the Ludendorff Bridge, while the bridge site was under heavy and continuous artillery and air attack.

Then tragedy struck. Weakened by the intense fighting, the near misses, and the heavy vehicular traffic, at about 3 PM on March 17 the old bridge collapsed as some rivets spontaneously snapped and a vertical hanger of the bridge fell. The bridge then seemed to fold onto itself before pitching into the Rhine at a cost of 28 dead and 63 injured American engineers.

THE REMAGEN BRIDGE TODAY

Wikipedia Commons

Still standing today, the twin towers of the Ludendorff Railroad Bridge on the west bank of the Rhine serve as a memorial to the fighting that went on there in the spring of 1945.

The Ludendorff Bridge was not rebuilt after the war, but the impressive bridge towers remain. The towers on the Remagen side of the Rhine have been turned into a 12-room, volunteer-run peace museum (www.bruecke-remagen.de) that is visited by thousands of tourists each year. Numerous stairs take visitors to the upper floors, and battle scars can still be seen on the stone walls.

Across the river (a ferry runs from Remagen to medieval Erpel, and there are new bridges at Bonn to the north and Neuwied to the south) the other two towers can be seen and visited. The Erpeler Ley can also be summited on foot or by car, but the entrance to the former railroad tunnel that ran beneath the Erpeler Ley is sealed and is not open to visitors.

Both: National Archives

ABVOE: With the ruins of the collapsed Ludendorff Railroad Bridge in the background, an American truck crosses the Rhine River on a temporary pontoon bridge near the German town of Remagen. BELOW: In this photograph taken several weeks after its collapse, the remains of the bridge lie amid the swift moving waters of the Rhine. By this time, the war has swept eastward into Germany, and the Third Reich itself was on the verge of collapse.

The loss of the bridge did not halt the American tide pouring into Germany. Both the heavy pontoon and treadway bridges were in operation to carry on the troop or supply movements, and DUKWs, LCVPs (Landing Craft Vehicle, Personnel), and ferries were used to augment the bridges' traffic.

The loss of the Ludendorff Bridge, however, proved disastrous for four German junior officers, including Major Hans Scheller, who had failed to demolish the bridge on March 7. On Hitler's personal order, the four were summarily tried and executed for cowardice with a coup de grace prior to burial in an unmarked shallow grave in the Westerwald. This sentence was carried out despite the fact that Field Marshal Model had stated that they were completely innocent.

Captains Bratge and Friesenhahn, who had been captured in the tunnel by Lieutenant Timmermann and his Company A infantrymen, were tried in absentia. Bratge was sentenced to death, and Friesenhahn was acquitted. The punishments were moot as they were now both Allied POWs.

Within a week, eight U.S. Army bridges would span the river at Remagen, helping maintain a previously unimaginable bridgehead in this area 25 miles wide by eight miles deep. For the initial 18 days, the expansion of the bridgehead was relatively slow, with advances made on foot and measured in feet and yards.

It has been said that no poorer place could have been selected for a crossing; the mountainous country not only restricted the use of armor, but it was extremely difficult for the infantry to assault. The rugged, forested hills gave the enemy good observation and formed a natural fortress that he used skillfully. Although German forces were weak initially, the arrival of several divisions, beginning with the understrength 11th Panzer from Dusseldorf on March 9, enabled the Wehrmacht to conduct an aggressive defense in which numerous and determined counterattacks played a large part.

This may explain why Eisenhower, who was initially enthusiastic about the bridge's seizure, later became distinctly cold about the whole enterprise. It was not until many days of hard fighting had driven the enemy across the Cologne-Frankfurt autobahn that the 3rd, 7th, and 9th Armored Divisions were able to break through to make the spectacular advances of the last days of March 1945.

According to Maj. Gen. John W. Leonard, commander of the 9th Armored Division, "The operation [Remagen bridgehead] is an outstanding proof that the American principles of warfare, with emphasis on initiative, resourcefulness, aggressiveness, and willingness to assume great risks for great results, are sound. The commander must base his willingness to assume those great risks upon his confidence in his troops."

Heroes were created that March day. Lieutenants Timmermann and Mott, along with Sergeants DeLisio and Drabik, were awarded Distinguished Service Crosses for their actions at the Remagen bridge. And every man who crossed the bridge under fire, even those whose names were unknown, became a hero to the American public.

To Mary Timmermann, however, the fact that her son was uninjured was the most important thing. □

The Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial Site reminds visitors of the crimes perpetrated by the Third Reich.

ABOVE: Entry to the Brausebad (shower room) that was in reality a gas chamber. It is believed that no gassings were carried out here, and this was only a training facility for SS personnel. BELOW: The main gate to the prisoner enclosure at the Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial Site.

THE NAZI REGIME in Germany has become synonymous with inhuman cruelty. Hitler incarcerated millions in his concentration camps and inflicted on his victims the harshest forms of torture and deprivation imaginable. Millions never made it out of these camps alive.

The first major Nazi concentration camp was located near Dachau, Germany—12 miles northwest of Munich. Today the Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial Site, a museum that opened in 1965, is dedicated to ensuring that Nazi crimes will never be forgotten. Anyone interested in contemplating the meaning of World War II should visit this place.

After assuming the German chancellorship in January 1933, Hitler wasted no time in rounding up his enemies. The camp at Dachau opened on the grounds of an old munitions plant barely two months after Hitler took power. It was administered by his personal security force, the dreaded Schutzstaffel (SS). It initially contained domestic political opponents, but as the Nazis extended their brutal reach across Europe, numerous other groups arrived. Dachau filled beyond capacity, and satellite camps opened across Bavaria to absorb the overflow.

Dachau was not built to be an extermination camp like Auschwitz in Poland, but thousands perished there nevertheless—beaten and tortured to death, "shot while try-

Get These WWII Publications Absolutely FREE at

Warfare History Network.com

No matter what your interest in World War II, you'll find it at *Warfare History Network.com*

Warfare History Network is the official web portal of Sovereign Media's magazines, WWII HISTORY, WWII QUARTERLY, MILITARY HERITAGE and CIVIL WAR QUARTERLY. But WHN contains so much than any other history website out there.

With your **FREE MEMBERSHIP**, you'll receive our **Free Daily Newsletter** with fresh in-depth perspectives on a wide variety of topics, including battles, weapons, leaders, strategy and more, written by the top experts in the field.

Get our FREE Publications

Download our **FREE REPORTS** which deliver in depth coverage of fascinating warfare history topics at NO COST TO YOU. There is absolutely no risk.

Choose any — or all — of our FREE REPORTS, by visiting the website and you'll also become a member to **WHN**, with all the benefits, including a constant offering of new Free Reports, a daily newsletter written by industry experts, and instant access to hundreds of military history articles from the archives of our magazines. And absolutely free!

Use the web address below to visit today!

Download our Special Publications for FREE!

www.WarfareHistoryNetwork.com/free-briefings

ABOVE: Footprints of the barracks (left), a partially filled in moat, sinister guard tower, and barbed-wire fence silently remind visitors of the cheapness of life at Dachau.
RIGHT: The former SS camp administration building today houses the camp museum.

ing to escape," or killed by starvation and disease, and by sadistic medical experiments. The camp also served as a training site for SS concentration camp guards—the men who would later serve as executioners at places like Auschwitz.

A visit to Dachau is not for the faint of heart. As prisoners arrived, they were greeted by the words *Arbeit Macht Frei* ("Work will set you free"), welded to the camp's iron gate. But work was not rewarded, and few were ever freed. This wrought-iron lie was standard at Nazi concentration camps.

The former administration building is now a museum. Exhibits tell of daily life in the camp and acknowledge the diverse array of people Hitler incarcerated there, including communists, socialists, union activists, Jehovah's Witnesses, dissident clergy, resistance fighters, Soviet prisoners of war, homosexuals, and Roma and Sinti peoples (better known as Gypsies). Jews had been present since the camp opened but arrived in large numbers after the anti-Jewish pogroms of 1938. Viewing these exhibits, the depth of Nazi hatred and paranoia becomes clear.

The museum also describes the various forms of torture the prisoners endured. In one, while hanging from steel beams with their arms tied behind their backs and suspended from the ceiling by their wrists, the victims were subjected to beatings and verbal abuse. One can almost hear the screams reverberating through the room.

The 34 barracks buildings that once housed the prisoners have long since been demolished, but the footprint of each has been filled with gravel and identified by number. Two barracks have been reconstructed to help visitors understand the stark prisoner accommodations—flimsy wooden structures with crowded bunk beds and communal toilets little better than a

DACHAU CONCENTRATION CAMP MEMORIAL SITE

Location:
Pater-Roth-Str. 2a, Dachau-Ost
(Car parking lot at Alte Römerstrasse 75)

Hours:
Open daily from 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM.
Closed on December 24.

Admission:
Admission is free but parking fees from March-October are 3.00 Euros per car

Website:
www.kz-gedenkstaette-dachau.de

kennel. High-profile prisoners were kept in a separate facility behind the administration building known as "the bunker."

A long rectangular building stands in a wooded area not far from the barracks. It contains the most disturbing sights of the entire camp. Inside is a room labeled *Brausebad* (shower). In reality, it was a gas chamber, but there is no evidence that prisoners were ever gassed there. It was likely used for training purposes only.

However, the crematorium also found in this building was used with great frequency to dispose of the many prisoners who died. Brick ovens stand with their steel doors open, as if to receive their next victim. The ashes from the crematorium were unceremoniously dumped along a cement wall behind the building. Prisoners were also lined up against this wall and shot. Trees, a tangle of underbrush, and even the occasional flower now grow where untold numbers of people were once executed—life thriving in a place where death once reigned.

Dachau is not just a reminder of past horrors, but also a place of healing. Religious memorials are clustered near the crematorium, providing a welcome sanctuary from the harsh realities of the camp. Roman Catholic nuns of the Carmelite Order even maintain a convent on the grounds.

The grim ovens within the crematorium where thousands of inmates who died at Dachau during its 12 years of existence were disposed of.

American troops arrived at Dachau on April 29, 1945, and ended the horror and bloodshed. The GIs who liberated the camp were shocked and outraged at what they saw but were also reminded of the reasons why the war had to be fought. Visitors to Dachau today come away with a better understanding and appreciation of those reasons as well. □

Contined from page 12

peared in an enormous fireball, and pieces of the aircraft began raining on the rural countryside below. Hundreds of trees were destroyed, nearly 150 properties on the ground were damaged, and some 50 people on the ground were injured. Chunks of the exploding BQ-8 struck Colonel Roosevelt's plane, but he was able to land safely. The bodies of Kennedy and Willy were never found.

Nine-year-old Mick Muttitt, a resident of nearby Darsham, told a reporter 60 years later that he and his brother were watching the formation flying about 2,000 feet above them. He said, "All of a sudden, there was a tremendous explosion and the Liberator aircraft was blown apart, with pieces falling in all directions over New Delight Wood, at Blythburgh."

He also noted, "I vividly remember seeing burning wreckage falling earthward while engines with propellers still turning, and leaving comet-like trails of smoke, continued along the direction of flight before plummeting down. A Ventura broke high to starboard and a Lightning spun away to port, eventually to regain control at tree-top height over Blythburgh Hospital.

"While I watched spellbound, a terrific explosion reached Dresser's Cottage in the form of a loud double thunderclap. Then all was quiet except for the drone of the circling Venturas' engines, as they remained for a few more minutes in the vicinity. The fireball changed to an enormous black pall of smoke resembling a huge octopus, the tentacles below indicating the earthward paths of burning fragments."

Although the cause of the disaster was never conclusively established, suspicion centered on the lack of electrical shielding material on the television camera. This is thought to have allowed electromagnetic emissions to open a relay solenoid, which in turn set off a detonator and thus the explosives.

After the Kennedy disaster, a dozen more flights ended in failure and General Carl "Tooey" Spaatz, commander of the Strategic Air Force in Europe, cancelled all further Operation Aphrodite missions.

Lieutenant Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr., eldest son of the prominent Kennedy family, poses for a photo on the day of the mission during which he lost his life. This was the last image taken of the young officer.

Wilford Willy and Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr., were both posthumously awarded the Navy Cross, Distinguished Flying Cross, and Air Medal. The citation for Kennedy's Navy Cross reads: "For extraordinary heroism and courage in aerial flight as pilot of a United States Liberator bomber on August 12, 1944. Well knowing the extreme dangers involved and totally unconcerned for his own safety, Kennedy unhesitatingly volunteered to conduct an exceptionally hazardous and special operational mission.

"Intrepid and daring in his tactics and with unwavering confidence in the vital importance of his task, he willingly risked his life in the supreme measure of service and, by his great personal valor and fortitude in carrying out a perilous undertaking, sustained and enhanced the finest traditions of the United States Naval Service."

The Kennedy family, of course, was devastated by the loss of their eldest son—a son they had been grooming for great things after the war, including the hope that he would become the first Irish-Catholic president of the United States. That honor would have to wait another 16 years when John Fitzgerald Kennedy, himself a Navy war hero, attained that lofty goal. □

Here's to the HEROES of the 110th Infantry Regiment, 28th Infantry Division - and to the 103rd B Engineers and 707th Tank Battalion who FEARLESSLY fought by their side

Outnumbered ten to one, they held off elements of Hitler's army from 16 to 19 December 1944, allowing the 101st Airborne Division to reach Bastogne before German forces could seize the key road junction.

During this time, the division's other regiments were able to pull back and regroup as the 110th, ordered to "Hold at all costs", fought off an assault by General Manteuffel's Fifth Panzer Army's XLVII Panzer Corps - the 26th Volksgrenadier and 2nd Panzer Divisions, and Panzer Lehr Division - until its 1st and 3rd Battalions were overcome.

We will **NEVER** forget your sacrifice.

Hold To The Last Round
Courtesy of James Dietz

K Company and 103B Engineers, 110th Infantry Regiment, 28th Infantry Division, defending Hosingen, Luxembourg, during the Battle of the Bulge, 16-18 December 1944.

Your **heroic actions** will live on **forever** in the stories we have told.

Robert F. Phillips, author of *To Save Bastogne*; 1983
Richard Anderson, co-author of *Hitler's Last Gamble*; 1994
Allyn R. Vannoy and Jay Karamales, co-authors of *Against the Panzers*; 1996
John C. McManus, author of *Alamo in the Ardennes*; 2008
Alice M. Flynn, author of *Unforgettable: The Biography of Capt. Thomas J. Flynn*; 2011
Leo Barron, co-author of *No Silent Night*; 2012
Chris Lawrence, President and Executive Director of The Dupuy Institute

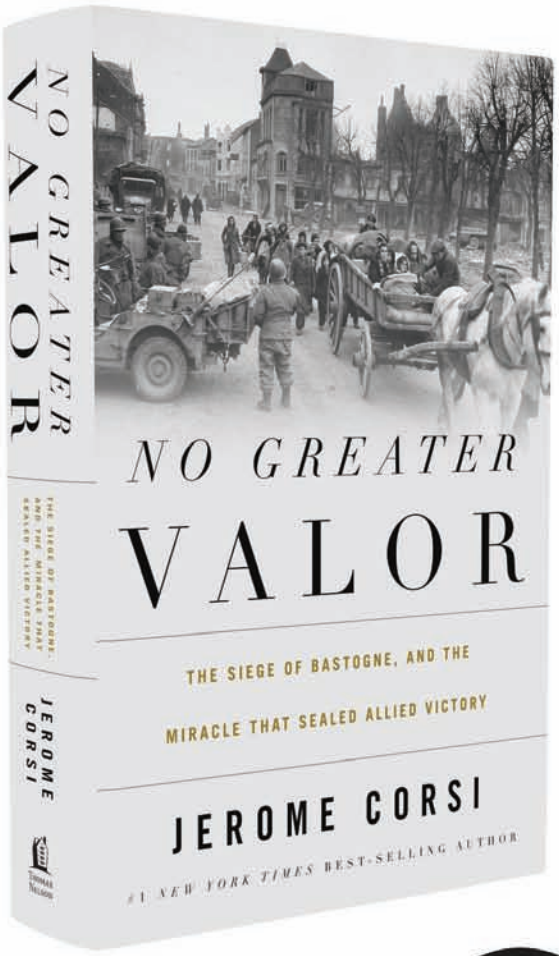
Available on Amazon

IN THE DEATH THROES OF NAZI GERMANY, US TROOPS TOOK UP ARMS ONCE MORE AND RUSHED TO BATTLE FOR COUNTRY, FAMILY, AND FAITH.

Jerome Corsi's newest opus, No Greater Valor, examines the Siege of Bastogne— one of the most heroic victories of WWII— with a focus on the surprising faith of the Americans who fought there.

In December of 1944, an outmanned, outgunned, and surrounded US force fought Hitler's overwhelming Panzer divisions to a miraculous standstill at Bastogne. The underdogs had saved the war for the Allies. It was nothing short of miraculous.

Corsi's analysis is based on a record of oral histories along with original field maps used by field commanders, battle orders, and other documentation made at the time of the military command. With a perspective gleaned from newspapers, periodicals, and newsreels of the day, Corsi paints a riveting portrait of one of the most important battles in world history.



AVAILABLE WHEREVER BOOKS AND EBOOKS ARE SOLD.

NELSON BOOKS

WWW.NOGREATERVALOR.COM