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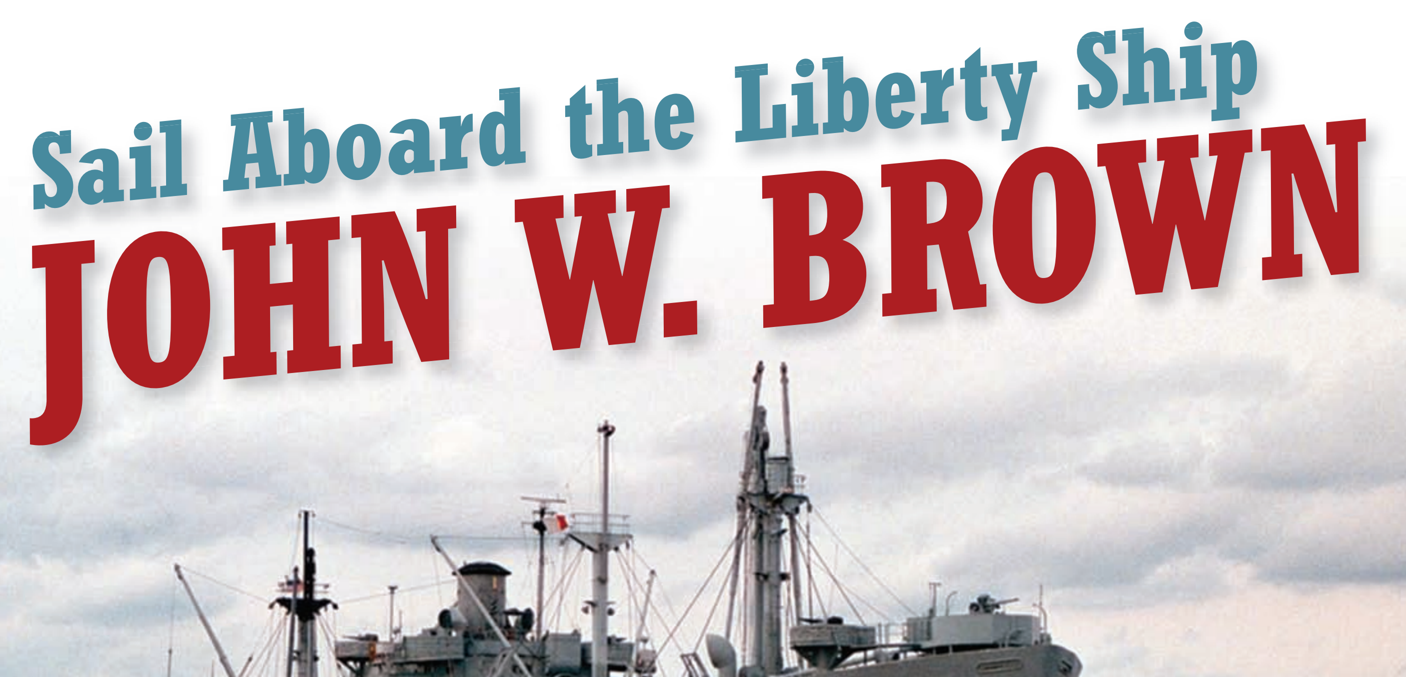

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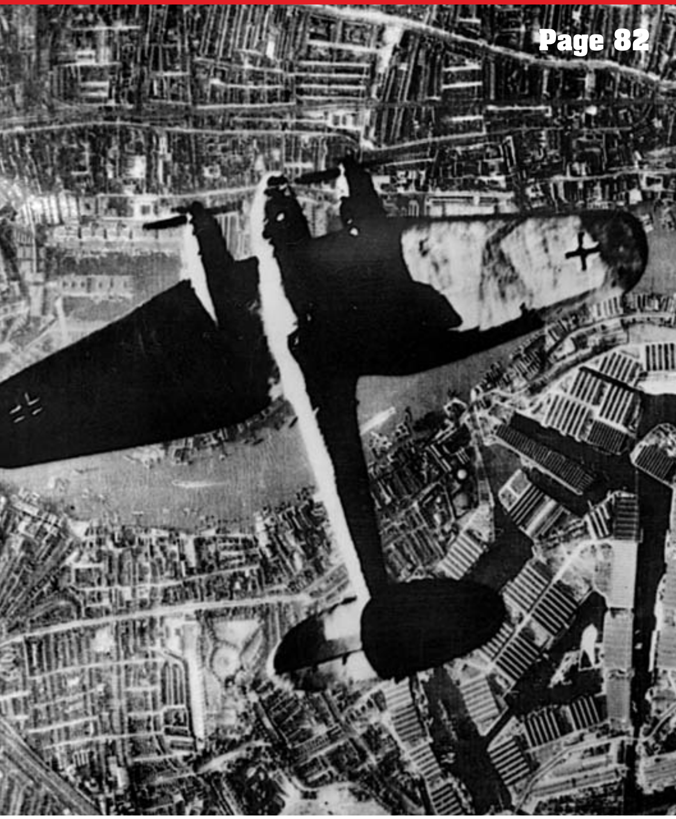
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Cover: A German Panzer VI Tiger tank passes through a village in Northern France in the summer of 1944. See story page 16. Photo: Bundesarchiv Bild 101I-301-1951-24; Photo: Bernhard Kurth.

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On the trail of the Amber Room

Nearly 20 years ago, I met a fellow in Germany (we'll call him "Hans") who was on his life's quest to find one of mankind's greatest treasures and solve one of WWII's greatest mysteries—the fabulous Amber Room.

In case you don't know, back in 1716 Kaiser Friedrich Wilhelm I gave a priceless gift—a room—made of gold, semi-precious stones, and carved amber (prehistoric tree resin) to Czar Peter the Great as a gesture of friendship between Russia and Prussia. It was installed in the Catherine Palace outside of St. Petersburg. So glorious was it that many called it the "eighth wonder of the world."

After Nazi Germany invaded the USSR in 1941, soldiers dismantled the room, crated up the panels, and brought them back to Germany, where they were installed in a museum in Königsberg. In 1943, with the Red Army closing in, the room was dismantled once again and removed to no one knows where.

Some people think the panels left Königsberg on a ship that was then sunk by the Allies and lies on the bottom of the Baltic Sea—or were destroyed in a fire that consumed much of the city. Others believe that the crates were loaded onto a train that was then hidden inside a sealed-up tunnel in Germany. Other tales say the crates are under the waters of a lagoon. Still others think they are in tunnels beneath a castle in Poland.

My friend Hans is sure that the crates are in a sealed-up mine in a forest near his hometown in Thuringia. He and a small team of fellow treasure hunters have spent over 30 years trying to break into an abandoned slate mine to reach what they believe (thanks to some old maps) is the Amber Room's final resting place.

They have found no amber, but came across a few intriguing artifacts that indicated that members of the Third Reich used this tunnel for something. Not only that, but the mine has some irregularities and, when Hans investigated about the current landowners, he found some very suspicious relationships. The owners are related to several important people, including West Germany's first chancellor Konrad Adenauer, Hitler's banker Hermann Joseph Abs, and a mine surveyor who was present at the mine in 1944.

Because the site is on private land, the team has had to do their work clandestinely on weekends, then cover up traces of their dig when they leave. I visited the site with Hans back in 2004 and it certainly had an air of mystery about it.

But Hans has not given up his search, which he and his group have continued despite having no funding. In a recent letter, he told me, "Last year we opened another tunnel about two miles from our main project. It was called B-tunnel and it had disappeared from the mine's maps. Nothing was found, but our main project will go on. It is the most mysterious location ever. Work in the tunnels is dangerous and time consuming, but we will not give up."

The reality is daunting. Without regular care, amber deteriorates. So, even if the room panels are discovered, chances are that they will be beyond repair and restoration.

A few years ago, my wife and I visited the Catherine Palace, where a full-size replica of the Amber Room was created and installed in 2003 (it took 25 years and cost $11 million). It is a faithful reproduction down to the smallest detail.

Yet, the lure of finding the original persists.

—Flint Whitlock, Editor
www.wwiiquarterly@gmail.com

(Hans can be reached at: webmaster@amberroom.org. The Amber Room Organization will forward all emails to him.)

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The forced relocation and internment of more than 100,000 Japanese Americans was a blot on America's credo of 'justice for all.'

IN the fall of 1941, as relations worsened between the United States and Japan and war became imminent, the presence of 110,000 Japanese Americans living on the West Coast pushed the issue of internment to the forefront. President Franklin D. Roosevelt wanted to know where their allegiances stood in the event of a war and tasked John Franklin Carter, the head of his newly formed White House intelligence and "fact-finding" operation, with the assignment. The question of loyalties and internment was a ticking time bomb.

Almost two months into the investigations, the loyalties of the Japanese Americans proved to be in good standing. Then a time bomb went off. Pearl Harbor was attacked, leaving 2,403 Americans dead and a nation in shock and more suspicious than ever of their Japanese American neighbors. While the country's attention was riveted on the devastation from the attack, hours later another time bomb went off about 100 miles northwest of Honolulu on the island of Niihau.

During the attack's second wave, a Mitsubishi Zero that was escorting the Japanese bombers back to their carrier was hit by an American P-36 Hawk and damaged. The pilot, Shigenori Nishikaichi, was instructed by his superiors to land on Niihau and await rescue on what was believed to be an uninhabited island. But the westernmost and second smallest of the Hawaiian Islands was a privately owned ranching island and home to 136 residents, three of whom were Japanese Americans.

The first islander at the crash scene was native Hawaiian Howard Kaleohano, who confiscated the pilot's gun and papers as he emerged from his plane. Although news of the

ABOVE: Japanese American children at the Raphael Weill Public School in San Francisco recite the Pledge of Allegiance, April 1942. The two girls in the front row were both sent to internment camps along with their parents. BELOW: Planes explode at Ford Island, Pearl Harbor Naval Base, on December 7, 1941. The Japanese attack ignited a wave of fear and hatred toward anyone who looked Japanese. The result was the forced relocation of 110,000 American citizens into 10 high-security prison camps.

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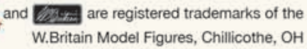

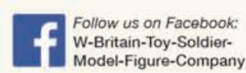

attack on Pearl Harbor had not yet reached Niihau, the islanders were aware of tensions with Japan and planned to transport the pilot by boat to authorities in Kauai. There was no electricity on the island, so those in Kauai were also unaware of the crash. After rough seas postponed the trip, the pilot was placed under house guard for the next three days with Yoshio Harada, a Japanese American citizen, and his wife, a Japanese alien. During this time, loyalties changed.

After Kaleohana refused to return the papers to the pilot, Harada helped the pilot escape from the house guard. Harada and the pilot got hold of guns and started terrorizing the islanders, taking several as hostages and threatening to kill them in an attempt to retrieve the papers. During the attack, they burned Nishikaichi's plane and also burned down Kaleohano's house, hoping to destroy the papers they believed were there. It all came to a brutal end the next day.

According to the report filed by Lieutenant C.B. Baldwin of the 14th Naval District, Benny Kanahele [one of the hostages] attempted to grab the pilot's pistol but failed. Benny's wife, also a hostage, attempted to take the pistol but Harada pulled her away, and seized the pistol. After Benny Kanahele was shot three times by Harada, Benny picked up the pilot bodily and dashed his head on a stone wall, killing him. [Some sources suggest that Benny's wife killed the pilot after he was knocked unconscious.] Then Harada, committing suicide, shot himself in the abdomen twice and died soon afterward.

The Niihau incident and the issue of Japanese American loyalties were both brought to the forefront during the Roberts Commission, which Roosevelt created to determine responsiblity for Pearl Harbor. At the hearings, United States attorney for Hawaii, Angus M. Taylor, Jr., was asked by the Chairman, "What is your attitude as to the Japanese here, should there be any Japanese victories or should there be a threat of a real invasion by the Japanese on this island?"

Taylor responded, "The incident at Niihau should have convinced anyone if they needed convincing, because they went right over to help that aviator … the minute that aviator landed they gave him assistance…. Based on my experiences of the Japanese in this territory and on my information, I think that if there were an invasion or something of that sort that they would go over to the other side."

TOP: The Zero fighter flown by Shigenoru Nishikaichi was shot down and crashed on Niihau, in the Hawaiian Islands. ABOVE LEFT: Ella and Benny Kanahele. Benny was shot by the pilot but managed to kill him. ABOVE RIGHT: The pilot, Shigenoru Nishikaichi, was killed by islander Benny Kanahele, after he tried to escape.

Although similar work was already afoot under the auspices of the Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI), Roosevelt had also sourced the job to his "informal" intelligence operation, run by John Franklin Carter, a journalist and government official. The man selected from Carter's "cadre of agents" was Curtis B. Munson, a wealthy Chicago businessman who operated under the guise of working for the State Department.

Munson spent four weeks traveling to San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Seattle, then another nine days in Hawaii, investigating the loyalties of the Japanese Americans. Roosevelt received regular updates from Carter, along with Munson's field notes. On December 8, 1941, the day Roosevelt gave his "day of infamy" speech and asked Congress for a declaration of war against the Empire of Japan, Carter delivered a memo to Roosevelt along with Munson's 17-page "Report on Hawaiian Islands," that confirmed the loyalties of the islanders. There was no mention of Niihau. Baldwin's official intelligence report would not be filed for another eight days.

In a December 20, 1941, report, Munson noted, "Your reporter, fully believing that his original reports are still good after the [Pearl Harbor] attack, makes the following observations about handling the Japanese 'problem' on the West Coast."

What followed were seven pages of suggestions about how "loyal Japanese citi-

zens should be encouraged." Munson's findings indicated the Japanese Americans were on the same side as their fellow Americans, but the push for internment was gaining momentum.

Words of caution from Assistant Attorney General James H. Rowe, Jr., did nothing to change the course of events. On February 2, 1942, Rowe sent a memorandum to Roosevelt's secretary Grace Tully: "Please tell the President to keep his eye on the Japanese situation in California. It looks to me like it will explode any day now.

"There is tremendous public pressure to move all of them out of California—citizens and aliens—and no one seems to worry about how or to where. There are about 125,000 of them, and if that happens, it will be one of the great mass exoduses of history … My only point now is to give him some warning."

Twelve days later, Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066, authorizing the evacuation and internment of 110,000 Japanese Americans, two-thirds of them citizens by birth. At the time that the Executive Order was issued, Munson had already produced copious amounts of material that established the loyalty of the Japanese Americans. The proof was in the President's hands, and still he signed.

The Munson Memos (now at the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library) document this black mark in American history. In Carter's first report of Munson's findings to Roosevelt, he wrote: "The essence of what he has to report is that, to date, he has found no evidence which would indicate that there is danger of widespread anti-American activities among this population group. He feels that the Japanese are more in danger from the whites than the other way around."

The day after Pearl Harbor, Carter sent Roosevelt Munson's 17-page Hawaii investigation report. Wrote Munson, "This reporter believes there is this fundamental difference between the Japanese 'Problem' on the Coast and the Japanese 'Problem' in the Hawaiian Islands. On the [West] Coast, the Japanese are discriminated against on a racial basis. In Hawaii it is really on a social and economic basis … The consensus of opinion is that there will

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The Manzanar Relocation Center in California's high desert, between Fresno and Death Valley, held over 11,000 internees, mostly from Los Angeles, at its height. Here, Japanese Americans walk through the camp on a snowy winter day in 1943.

be no racial uprising of the Japanese in Honolulu."

Eleven days later, Carter informed Roosevelt that five Los Angeles Japanese Americans had committed suicide because their honor could not stand the suspicion of their loyalty. Munson quickly headed to Washington to propose a program "for maintaining the loyalty of Japanese Americans and establishing wholesome race-relations… [and] to utilize Japanese filial piety as hostage for good behavior." The first point stated: "Encourage the Nisei [Japanese American citizens] by a statement from high authority."

Roosevelt had all the information he had asked for. The country's Japanese Americans would be loyal.

Where the Munson Report ended, the Ringle Report picked up. On January 26, 1942, the Chief of Naval Operations requested a report from Lt. Cmdr. Kenneth D. Ringle of the 11th Naval District in Los Angeles "concerning his views on Japanese."

Ringle, an ONI officer who had been looking into the loyalty issue since July 1940, was well ensconced in the Japanese communities and had also assisted Munson in his investigation by introducing him to some of his Nisei contacts within the Japanese communities. Ringle noted in his report: "A very great many of the Nisei have taken legal steps … to officially divest themselves of Japanese citizenship … even though by doing so they become legally dead in the eye of the Japanese law."

The Ringle Report was submitted on January 30, 1942, and strongly advocated against mass confinement of the Japanese Americans. Ringle noted "that, in short, the entire 'Japanese Problem' has been magnified out of its true proportion, largely because of the physical characteristics of the people; that it is no more serious than the problems of the German, Italian, and Communistic portions of the United States population, and finally that it should be handled on the basis of the individual, regardless of citizenship, and not on a racial basis."

In October 1942, Ringle published an article in *Harper's Magazine* that was based on his original report. Entitled "The Japanese in America: The Problem and Solution," it identified him only as "An Intelligence Officer." He wrote, "Had this war not come along at this time, in another 10 or 15 years there would have been no Japanese problem, for the Issei [first-generation Japanese Americans not eligible for U.S. citizenship] would have passed on, and the Nisei taken their place naturally in American communities and national life."

On February 17, 1942, two days before Roosevelt signed the executive order, Attorney General Francis Biddle sent a letter to the President, which summed up the racial prejudices on the West Coast: "It is extremely dangerous for the columnists,

acting as 'Armchair Strategists and Junior G-Men,' to suggest that an attack on the West Coast and planned sabotage is imminent when the military authorities and the F.B.I. have indicated that this is not the fact. It comes close to shouting FIRE! in the theater; and if race riots occur, these writers will bear a heavy responsibility."

Two days later, "one of the great mass exoduses of history" became a reality. The executive order authorized Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson to establish "military areas" from which "any or all persons may be excluded."

The language used in the edict was vague and never specifically stated the Japanese, but they were clearly the intended persons. Colonel Karl Robin Bendetsen of the Wartime Civil Control Administration then ordered anyone in California with 1/16th or more Japanese lineage be interned. Bendetsen went so far as to say that anyone with "one drop of Japanese blood" qualified.

Just two days after the order was signed, Munson sent Roosevelt's personal secretary, Grace Tully, a memo on the "Japanese Situation on West Coast at Present," saying "we are drifting into a treatment of the Japanese corresponding to Hitler's treatment of the Jews."

On March 29, 1942, under the authority of Executive Order 9066, Lt. General John L. DeWitt of the U.S. Army's Western Defense Command issued Public Proclamation No. 4, which began the forced evacuation and detention of West Coast residents of Japanese American ancestry on a 48-hour notice. At the start, 17 temporary assembly centers were established at racetracks, fairgrounds in Washington, Oregon, California, and Arizona.

By November 1942, the relocation was complete, with ten centers in remote areas in six western states and Arkansas: Heart Mountain in Wyoming; Tule Lake and Manzanar in California; Topaz in Utah; Poston and Gila River in Arizona; Granada in Colorado; Minidoka in Idaho; and Jerome and Rohwer in Arkansas. The evacuees lost their personal liberties, homes, and property.

The U.S. internment camps were overcrowded and, according to a 1943 report published by the War Relocation Authority (the administering agency), Japanese Americans were housed in "tar paper-covered barracks of simple frame construction without plumbing or cooking facilities of any kind."

In the Manzanar camp, the 500-acre housing section was surrounded by barbed wire and eight guard towers with searchlights and was patrolled by military police. By September 1942, more than 10,000 Japanese Americans were crowded into Manzanar's 504 barracks. Some 200 – 400 people lived in each of the 36 blocks, made up of 14 barracks divided into four rooms, each about 20-by-25 feet in area.

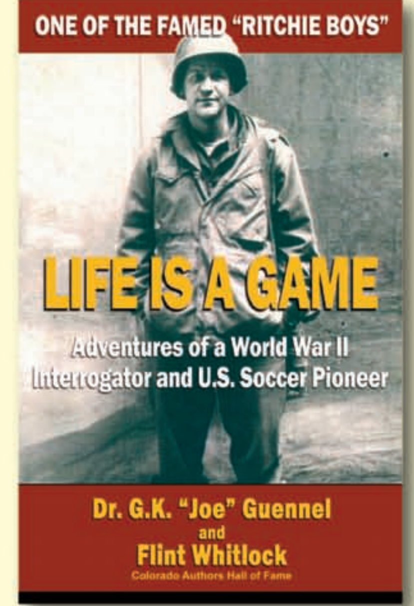
In stark contrast, in Hawaii, where some 160,000 Japanese Americans lived, by war's end only 2,000 people of Japanese ancestry were interned. Although martial law was declared, the military governor, Lt. Gen. Delos Emmons, refused to implement mass internment.

In a radio broadcast soon after the Pearl Harbor attack, Emmons assured Japanese Americans: "There is no intention or desire on the part of the federal authorities to operate mass concentration camps. No person, be he citizen or alien, need worry, provided he is not connected with subversive elements. While we have been subjected to a serious attack by a ruthless and treacherous enemy, we must remember that this is America, and we must do things the American way. We must distinguish between loyalty and disloyalty among our people."

There were at least three legal challenges by Japanese Americans in 1943 and 1944 that went to the Supreme Court. Gordon Hirabayashi, Fred Korematsu, and Minoru Yasui were each arrested for ignoring a curfew for Japanese Americans, or refusing to report to their assigned internment camp. Each lost their case due to the suppression of evidence by U.S. Solicitor General Charles Fahy, who told the court that all U.S. government and military assessments were in favor of internment. In 1981, a researcher for the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians, Aiko Herzig-Yoshinaga, discovered the tenth and only remaining "Final Report on Japanese Evacuation from the West Coast"

MEMOIRS OF A NAZI INTERROGATOR

THE AMAZING LIFE OF Dr. G.K. "JOE" GUENNEL



Soldier, scientist, artist, author, and the Johnny Appleseed of American soccer: his was truly a "life in full."

German-born G. K. "Joe" Guennel came to America in the 1930s and became one of the U.S. Army's famed "Ritchie Boys"—a highly trained interrogator of German POWs and Nazi war criminals.

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A wartime color aerial photo of the Tule Lake Relocation Center near Newell, California, and south of Klamath Falls, Oregon. Tule Lake was the largest of the 10 camps, with 18,700 inmates.

issued under DeWitt's name, which revealed this original 1942 report had been altered so as not to appear racist. Almost 40 years later, this lie was exposed, and justice was served.

The two red flags in the report that resulted in the "rewriting" were statements that it was "impossible to establish the identity of the loyal and the disloyal with any degree of safety," and that, "It was not that there was insufficient time … it was simply a matter of facing the realities that a positive determination could not be made, that an exact separation of the 'sheep from goats' was unfeasible."

So Bendetsen convinced DeWitt to insert a claim that time was indeed a factor in order to avoid appearing racist. This falsification of information was the basis for reopening the cases under the writ of coram nobis (i.e., reconsidering a verdict based on new evidence), allowing the court to correct its original judgment.

In 1985, Edward Ennis, a former Justice Department attorney, testified in the coram nobis hearing of Hirabayashi, who was charged with violating a curfew and refusing to report to an internment camp. This non-jury trial was held to decide whether the government had misrepresented evidence. At the time the Supreme Court upheld the conviction, it was not aware of contradictory evidence information in Ennis' 1943 memo that would have changed the course of history. Fahy had insisted it be withheld.

In his memo, Ennis revealed that the naval officers believed that "It was necessary to evacuate only about 10,000 people they could have identified by name; they did not feel that it was necessary to evacuate all of the Japanese. Presumably, they had not made this view known immediately because [Navy] Secretary [Frank] Knox was at that time greatly exercised about the Japanese Fifth Column, and since it was the Army's problem, it was safer to keep quiet than to brave the political storm then raging."

"In retrospect, it appears that this Department made a mistake 14 months ago in not bringing the Office of Naval Intelligence into the controversy. I suppose that the reason that it did not occur to any of us to do this was the extreme position then taken by the Secretary of the Navy… Thus, had we known that the Navy thought that 90% of the evacuation was unnecessary, we could strongly have urged upon General Dewitt that he could not base a military judgment to the contrary upon Intelligence reports, as he now claims to do."

Several weeks before the Ennis memo, Justice Department lawyer John Burling wrote a memo involving the Korematsu case: "We are now therefore in possession of substantially incontrovertible evidence that the most important statements of fact advanced by General DeWitt to justify the evacuation and detention were incorrect, and furthermore that General DeWitt had cause to know, and in all probability did know."

This time, Fahy participated in changing a footnote regarding false claims of espionage. The footnote included reports from J. Edgar Hoover of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Federal Communications Commission of the Navy that confirmed claims by the Army were false. The lights on California hillsides were not signals to Japanese submarines, but people using flashlights going to outdoor toilets. A power outage in Oregon was not sabotage, but the result of cattle scratching their backs against power lines. And the "arrows of fire" were not signals, but farmers burning brush.

Hirabayashi's exclusion and curfew convictions were overturned in 1986 and 1987, respectively. Korematsu's case was overturned in 1983, and Yasui's conviction was overturned in 1986. In 2011, U.S. Solicitor General Neal Katyal wrote a public repudiation of Fahy's actions.

In December 1944, two and a half years after signing Executive Order 9066, Roosevelt suspended the order, but it was not officially terminated by proclamation until February 17, 1976. In 1982, the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians (CWRIC) issued its final report, "Personal Justice Denied," saying that the internment was motivated by "race prejudice, war hysteria, and a failure of political leadership.

It also reported "that not a single documented act of espionage, sabotage or fifth-column activity was committed by an American citizen of Japanese ancestry or by a resident Japanese alien on the West Coast." In 1988, Congress offered an apology and individual reparations of $20,000 to surviving Japanese Americans who had been wrongfully interned.

December 7, 1941, and February 19, 1942, will both live on in infamy as tragedies in American history. A total of 2,403 Americans died during the attack on Pearl Harbor. A total of 1,862 Japanese Americans died in internment camps. The causes of death differed, but they all died on American soil, all victims of war. They were all Americans. ■

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SOHO CRIME

Perched atop one of the most strategic positions in Normandy, two young Forward Artillery Observers broke a siege by overwhelming numbers of Germans at Mortain.

National Archives

When the 230th Field Artillery Battalion was attached to the 30th Infantry ("Old Hickory") Division in Mortain, France, on August 6, 1944, many of its men had already received their baptism of fire in Normandy. They had trudged through the grim remains of the slaughter on Omaha Beach, then endured weeks of fighting in the notorious hedgerows before arriving at the abattoir of St. Lô.

In addition to being on the receiving end of the worst that the German army could throw at them, a number of the "cannon cockers" had also been caught up in the short-bombing incidents by their own air force on July 24/25, which killed Lt. Gen. Lesley J. McNair, the commanding general of Army Ground Forces, who was in France acting as a decoy as Commanding General of the fictitious FUSAG—the First United States Army Group (Lt. Gen. George S. Patton had played that role earlier).

This had taken place at the start of Operation Cobra, the breakout from the beachhead, which resulted in considerable American casualties. The 30th Infantry Division suffered particularly badly with many casualties coming from the 2nd Battalion, 120th Infantry Regiment. These men thought they had seen it all: landing craft, mines, tanks, snipers, friendly fire and the dreaded 88s, but fate had more horrors in store.

Private First Class Frank Denius from Austin, Texas, was one of the 230th FA's Forward Artillery Observers (FAOs). After initial military training at school from age 13, he had joined the Army at 17 and was sent to The Citadel military training academy in South Carolina. After two semesters he was called up for active service.

Following the detailed preparation for the invasion, Denius landed at Omaha Beach on June 10, 1944, still six months short of his 20th birthday, where his first task was to support the 29th Division, whose first waves had been decimated on D-Day.

American infantry and vehicles pass a Sherman tank (right) knocked out by German armor while en route to Mortain in early August 1944. The battle for the key village of Mortain and Hill 314 was some of the toughest fighting in the summer campaign for Northern France.

6 DESPERATE DAYS ON HILL 314

BY ALAN DAVIDGE

He was soon united with his attached division, the 30th Infantry and from there on it was combat all the way to St. Lô and Operation Cobra. In the process he earned his first Silver Star, taking over from his officer, a Lieutenant Miller, who had been gunned down beside him near St. Lô. A few days later, he found himself in a foxhole only 60 yards away from where General McNair died when an errant bomb fell into his foxhole.

To Denius's relief, his battalion and the rest of the 30th Infantry Division was soon pulled out of the line for a rest, which included a United Services Organization show with the singer Dinah Shore and Hollywood actor Edward G. Robinson. To the envy of his mates, he also got a kiss on the cheek from Dinah Shore!

Lieutenant Robert Weiss from Indiana, another FAO with the 230th FA, had joined the Army in 1943 at the age of 20. Arriving on July 28 via Utah Beach, he was soon integrating himself within the 30th ID. At the same USO concert where Frank Denius was getting familiar with Dinah Shore, Weiss was detailed to be Edward G. Robinson's driver, so they both arrived at Mortain on August 6 with name-dropping tales to tell. Their journey to Mortain through small French towns was equally memorable, with cheering crowds tossing bouquets of flowers and offering drinks to their liberators.

Leaving gun battery "B" of 105mm howitzers five miles outside of Mortain, Weiss drove with his team of three men into the town. Initially he met a Lieutenant Walsh of the 32nd Field Artillery, who was the Forward Observer of the unit that his battery was relieving. He then met his new artillery liaison officer, Lieutenant Webster R. Lee, who led them to Hill 314.

Previously occupied by German troops and more recently by the U.S. 18th Infantry Regiment of the 1st Infantry Division, the hill comprised a huge piece of craggy limestone overlooking the town, which was clearly a diamond in any army's defensive strategy, dominating the landscape and offering views of up to 15 miles in several directions across the surrounding plains.

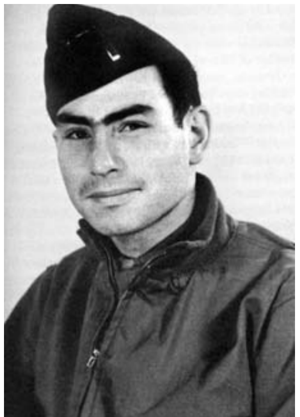
Mortain was quiet, a golden sun shone out of a pale sapphire sky, the 18th Infantry hadn't seen a German for five days, and Patton was chasing the enemy out of France. On this hill you could see forever. What could possibly go wrong?

Denius, now a corporal, had been assigned to C Battery and was also up on the hill by early afternoon with his radio sergeant, Sid Goldstein, with whom he had shared his battle honors since his arrival in France, plus a commander of one of the companies of the 2nd Battalion, 120th Infantry Regiment, who were already digging themselves into foxholes wherever there was sufficient depth of earth on top of the limestone.

Fortunately, as they were taking over from previous occupants, they were not starting from scratch, but their experience had already taught them the importance of a deep shelter and in this location, in the event of an attack, there would be splinters of rock and wood as well as shards of shell seeking a place to embed themselves.

They were also joined by a new officer to replace Lieutenant Miller, killed beside Denius three weeks earlier. Lieutenant Charles A. Bartz from Lincoln, Nebraska, was

All: National Archives



Left to right: Sergeant Frank Denius, an FO for the 320th FA Battalion; FO Lieutenant Robert Weiss called in accurate artillery fire; Lieutenant Ralph Kerley commanded Company E, 230th Infantry Regiment, 30th Infantry Division, at Mortain. BELOW: Supreme Allied Commander General Dwight D. Eisenhower inspects a gun crew of the 230th Field Artillery Battalion in England prior to D-Day. The unit arrived in France on June 10 and was heavily engaged in the battle for Hill 314 two months later. OPPOSITE: A sketch of Mortain and Hill 314 rising behind it represented the perfect observation post of the surrounding countryside for whichever unit held it.

U.S. Army Art Collection

24 and recently married, but his experience of combat was nil, so like all replacements he would have to discover very quickly how to put the theory he had learned into practice and follow the advice of those who had seen it all before. To those around him he was on a steep learning curve.

Writing about Bartz after the war, Robert Weiss said of him: “He always seemed to be looking over his shoulder and I could already see the pale stamp of death on his face. This gave me an uncomfortable feeling, and I could not look him in the eyes or study his face for long.”

The two teams of observers, on the advice of the departing 18th Infantry, and after discussion with their company commanders, chose the observation posts (OPs) where they would set up radios for their period on the hill. Weiss and his crew would occupy a high point on the east side of the hill, which gave a perfect view of the two main routes into Mortain: the road to the town of Ger (now the D157), and parallel to it on its south side, one they called the Bel Air Road, as it led to a small village bearing that name (now the D487). They also had a good view to the south.

Bartz, Denius, Goldstein and their driver, Louis Sberna, located themselves on the other side of Hill 314, facing west and looking down on Mortain itself and a little further towards the north, a location decorated with a series of rock outcrops that provided a fantastic view.

Denius and Bartz were able to explore the hill safely, out in the open on a clear summer’s afternoon and pre-register a series of points on roads and other crucial locations to call down artillery fire if necessary—a real luxury, considering the conditions under which artillery observers normally had to operate.

They worked out the coordinates of key places, allocated them a number as a reference for any artillery fire they may have to request, which would make the process quicker and simpler. On the Bel Air Road, and set between the two teams of observers, they discovered a farm, L’Hermitage, with a well and a pump that would be a great asset if the hot weather continued. They did, however, have sources on the hill from which they initially could draw water.

A number of companies from the 2nd Battalion took up positions on the hill while others stationed themselves in the town. Company K, under Lieutenant Joseph Reaser, located itself on the north of Hill 314 near the farm of Bonvoisin; G Company, under Lieutenant Ronal Woody, occupied a position further south but also spread out to the crags of Montjoie on the west (coincidentally “Montjoie” is an ancient French battle cry, shouted by warriors to hold the line).

H Company, essentially a heavy weapons unit, was down at the southern end. E Company, under Lieutenant Ralph Kerley, another proud Texan like Denius, was based in the east and south east which included the higher ground chosen by Weiss' observer team. The hill was a vast feature, however, and significant distance separated the different units, which could make communications difficult.

After their eventual breakout from Normandy, U.S. troops did not expect a counterattack from the Germans. They saw the enemy finally losing its grip and felt they were already on the road to Berlin. Hitler’s

decision, made four days previously on August 2 to reverse direction and try to push the Americans back to the coast at Avranches, would also have taken most German commanders by surprise.

His Operation Lüttich was a hastily conceived plan for a counterattack and despite the best efforts of Field Marshal Hans Günther Adolf Ferdinand von Kluge, whom he had placed in charge, there were delays and confusion among the Panzer divisions that would carry out the assault. The generals on the ground knew that it would not be possible to detach the eight divisions proposed by the Führer and position them for a counterattack within the time frame required, but planning proceeded.

The eventual line-up for the counterattack was: 2nd SS Panzer "Das Reich," 2nd Panzer, 116th Panzer, and part of 1st SS Panzer Division "Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler," plus some infantry divisions and other specialist groups and tanks.

General of Panzer Troops Hans von Funck was not optimistic of their chances and asked for a postponement of Lüttich, but without success. Hitler's unwillingness to listen to his generals, who in turn were fast losing confidence in their Führer, had been a contributory factor to the unsuccessful assassination attempt which had taken place only a few weeks earlier and now he scarcely trusted anyone.

He had dealt mercilessly with the plotters (the "von Stauffenberg group") and knew they still had sympathizers, so von Kluge and the other senior generals could not afford to raise his suspicions by questioning his plan, which privately they thought was crazy and unworkable.

The "Ultra" decoders at Bletchley Park in England picked up no clear warning of a counterattack but at 2 p.m. on August 6, while Weiss and Bartz were getting acquainted with Hill 314 in the summer sunshine, Panzer Division 2 broke radio silence and asked for nighttime air support in preparation for an attack.

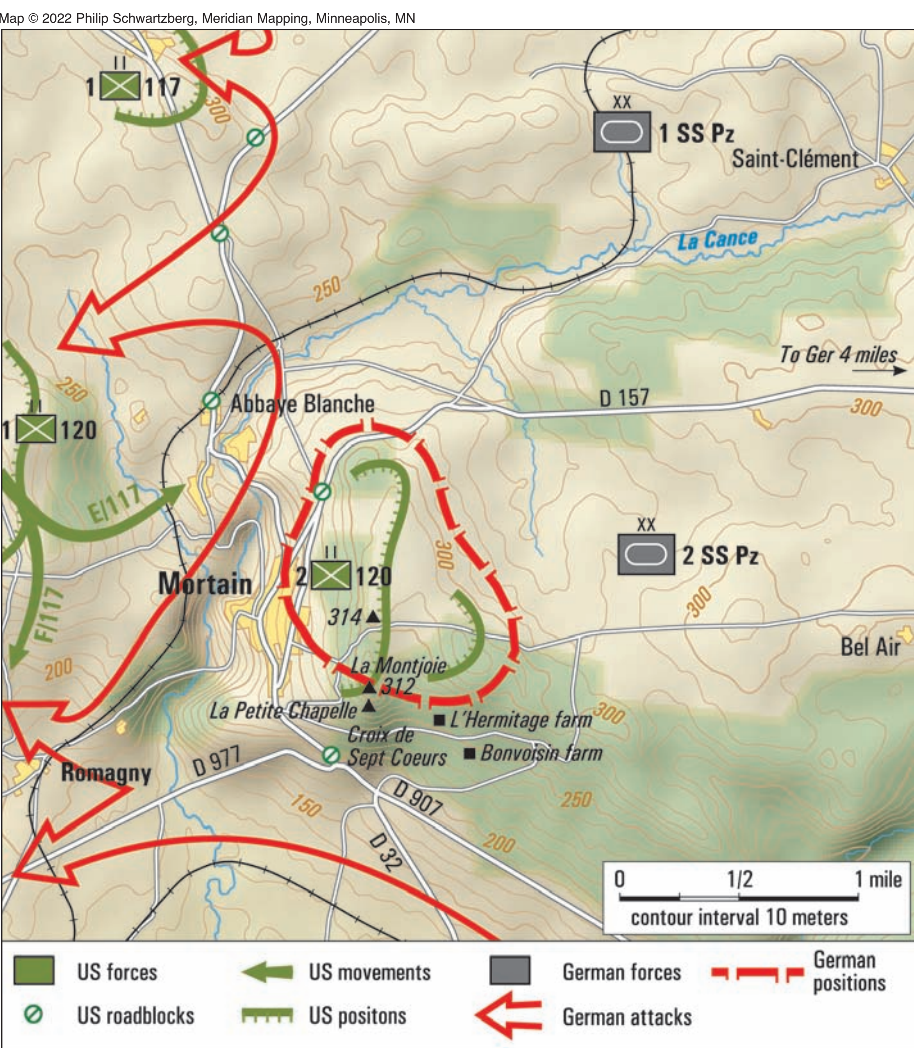
This was followed by a specific reference to an attack on Mortain at 8:30 p.m., the contents of which were relayed immediately to Lt. Gen. Omar Bradley, CG of 12th Army Group, and passed from him to American troops in the area. The scope of the attack soon became clear when a later message indicated the involvement of several Panzer divisions, followed by a further order to cut off supply lines and push American forces back to the coast.

The 30th Division records from 38 minutes after midnight on August 7 reported a possible enemy counterattack from the east or north within 12 hours, but this information arrived too late to reinforce the 120th Infantry. By 4 a.m. on August 7, the Americans had a complete picture of the plan, had already felt the first shells being directed at them, and realized that the odds were heavily stacked in Hitler's favor.

While the generals were considering how to react to the first indications of a counterattack, the FAOs on Hill 314 were ahead of the game. What the two teams started to observe that afternoon had not suggested an enemy in retreat. They were also perturbed by a single German aircraft that appeared at 2:30 p.m. and seemed to be undertaking a reconnaissance of their position.

By 4 p.m., when everyone was set up and well camouflaged, Weiss's top non-com, Staff Sgt. John Corn, began scanning the landscape to the east with the BC scope, the artillery

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



ABOVE: After reaching Mortain, the 30th Infantry Division was attacked from the east and south by strong German panzer divisions. OPPOSITE: Two Jagdpanthers of Heavy Tank Destroyer Battalion 654 roll through the streets of a Normandy village. The 2nd SS Panzer "Das Reich," 2nd Panzer, 116th Panzer, and part of 1st SS Panzer Division "Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler" spearheaded the German counterattack against the 30th Division at Mortain and Hill 314.

Bundesarchiv Bild 101I=301-1951-06 / Photo: Bernhard Kurth

observer's weapon of choice to seek out the enemy. A trusty but heavy piece of kit, the BC (short for Battery Commander's) required a tripod for accurate reading. Close by was the equally cumbersome but utterly essential Model 610 radio, weighing in at 35 lbs. and fitted to a battery pack of similar weight.

Corn called his lieutenant over to share what he saw. A company of German soldiers was marching along the road towards them, just over a mile to the east and already disturbingly close to the infantry's front lines.

A primary role of the FAO is to protect the infantry to which it is attached, and Weiss knew exactly what to do. He called an order to Sergeant Sasser, his radio operator: "Fire Mission!" It was his first real shoot since joining the team—he would call another 192 over the next six days and nights. Each call with its data and coordinates would be transmitted to a Fire Direction Center for further calculations and a command sent to the appropriate battery to hit the target.

The commander of this crucial unit was Lt. Col. Lewis D. Vieman, yet another Texan, whose three-word reply, "On the way," would become a mantra to the artillery observers on Hill 314 over the next few days. (Frank Denius chose it over 50 years later when he was searching for a title for his autobiography.)

Given the number of Texans on this hill, soon to be surrounded on all sides, they could have easily felt that history was repeating itself, but their radios would ensure a better chance of survival than their forefathers at the Alamo a century before!

The first of Weiss's shells burst close to their target and, as he had been trained to do, he made an adjustment and sent it through to strike a closer blow. When the dust cleared after the second salvo, there were no signs of German life.

It soon became clear that the enemy was going to use every weapon at its disposal to dislodge the infantry on Hill 314. Shortly after the first incident, the message log records six German Focke-Wulf 190s flying over the hill and explosions were heard to the north as bombing commenced.

Then the troops on the south east side were subjected to a mortar attack. The observers hit back after some intelligent guesswork. They saw the direction of fire and knew the mortars had a range of barely a mile, so that was their target. Then, shortly before dark, a runner arrived with further sightings of German uniforms in the distance. Another phone call and more artillery shells were on their way.

A temporary sense of normality then prevailed as hot food arrived, together with an allocation of D and K rations, plus a field telephone which allowed Weiss to speak to Lieutenant Lee, the artillery liaison officer who was back in Mortain after showing them around the hill. Lee provided Weiss with a nighttime plan for defensive artillery fire, just in case.

Not long afterwards, German troops stealthily occupied Mortain, captured Lee, and the line went dead. The hill was starting to become a lonely place. The Americans who had taken up defensive positions were soon reminded that they were among friends, as some of the French had remained and knew the local geography well enough to pass on valuable observations. The message log for the latter part of the day records a French civilian reporting

Author's Photo

enemy 75mm guns on high ground and, at 8:45 p.m., another brought in another sighting of a German gun battery.

The first attacks of the night manifested themselves south of Hill 314 at the Croix de Sept Coeurs (Cross of Seven Hearts) road block and at l'Abbaye Blanche (the White Abbey) north of the town. The southerly roadblock was overrun and a fierce attack was launched on the roadblock beside the abbey. The men stationed there held firm but could not prevent some Germans from entering Mortain.

On the west side of the hill, occupied by Denius, Bartz, and G and K Companies of the 2nd Battalion, 120th Infantry Regiment, there was a penetration just after 1 a.m. by SS troops screaming "Heil Hitler!" Denius had to lie on his radio to deaden its sound as it would have become an immediate target for their attackers.

A brand-new, air-cooled .30-caliber machine gun set up by an infantry team immediately jammed, resulting in desperate hand to hand fighting with the Germans tossing "potato-masher" grenades at them until the invaders were finally expelled. With the enemy literally on top of them in the middle of the night, the observers' specialist skills were of no use. They could only pick up the nearest weapon and fight for survival alongside their infantry comrades and wait for daylight to present them with a target they were trained for.

After the initial attack, the Bartz team moved further north to a location close to Lieutenant Reaser's K Company command post for better communication as Reaser had set up listening posts around its perimeter. This was a spot proposed initially by Denius but he had been overruled. Bartz instead had chosen an area on the west side of the hill where he, Denius, and Goldstein could share a foxhole and set up a radio.

But Bartz deferred to Denius now and their trek in the dark became a difficult one, especially given the burden of their 510 Signal Corps Radio (SCR) weighing 75 lbs. which they had to carry between them.

An hour after the western attack from Mortain, K Company had to deal with a second incursion from the north. This was most likely the group of Germans that had managed to squeeze past the otherwise effective road block at l'Abbaye Blanche.

To the south of the hill, some of the H Company positions were also overrun in the dark, losing much of their hardware, jeeps, and an 57mm anti-tank gun, prompting the survivors to withdraw and join up with units elsewhere. A number of them stayed with Lieutenant Kerley on the southeast side, bringing their remaining weaponry with them.

Locating the enemy by sound only, Weiss had to call down artillery fire to beat off the attackers. This was a risky business, but fortunately none of it came close enough to cause casualties among American troops. The men had suffered enough friendly fire already in Normandy.

The dawn of August 7 brought with it a mist and low cloud which incapacitated friend and foe alike, although the troops on the hill suspected it was a deliberate smoke barrage. The loss of a telephone line made matters worse and company commanders had to rely on runners.

One of the most important functions of the runners was to update the observers on where the enemy was threatening the other units so that they could call on artillery fire

for protection. The infantry did possess field radios but their range was limited and their clarity was poor.

Weiss relocated his OP on the east ridge to Kerley's E Company command post in the shelter of a draw to the southeast. One runner then arrived with details of several hundred enemy troops massing for an attack, but a well-targeted radio call and subsequent barrage soon scattered them.

As the visibility improved, Weiss and one of his team reoccupied the crest of the east ridge and called down artillery fire on anything that showed its face. He sent the other two in search of extra radio batteries, realizing the crucial role his radio was going to play in the defense of the hill. They soon became targets themselves from speculative machine gun fire from an enemy already familiar with the terrain.

More worrying was the sniping from the rear, suggesting that the Germans had gained a foothold on the southwest side. It later became clear that they had occupied the area around La Petite Chapelle on an outcrop of rock, a local beauty spot which also provided an excellent viewpoint.

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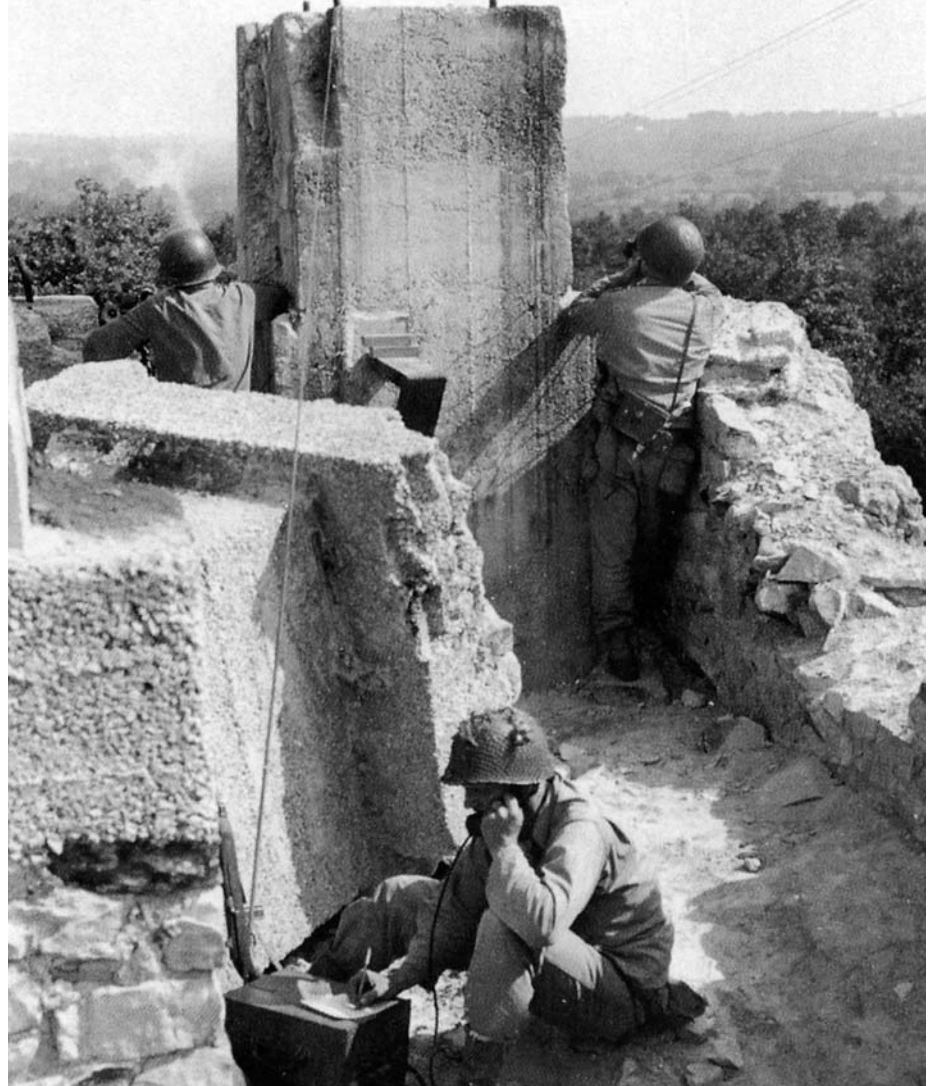

ABOVE: Artillery observers atop a concrete building near Mortain call in fire on German targets (left) during the fighting on August 9. Soon cut off from resupply, the FOs on Hill 314 began to worry about their radio batteries. OPPOSITE: This photo was taken from atop Hill 314, in a location believed to be opposite the foxhole that served as the command post for Lieutenant Bartz, who later died of wounds.

The other team, now firmly entrenched in K Company's area also made the most of the sitting targets below. In his autobiography, Denius states, "While Lieutenant Weiss called in artillery on the east and southeast, I called it for the south and southwest. We laid a solid ring of fire on them. Their casualties and vehicle damage were incredible. The few undamaged German vehicles withdrew to the east, loaded with men fleeing from a killing ground."

At this stage, the Germans were unaware that the American artillery observers had them in their sights and the appearance of their uniforms attracted one hail of shells after another. They gathered for another attack up the steep slopes from Mortain around 2 p.m. but were driven back down the hill by accurate artillery fire. This was fast becoming the only real resource available to the Yanks. Infantry ammunition was getting dangerously low and, as the last of the D rations were consumed, the men were in danger of losing their physical strength.

E Company's command post moved to the cliffs on the south side of Hill 314, effectively its highest point, and the observers followed. Its value in commanding the fields and roads to the south was immediately apparent, providing a choice of several slowly moving targets below. Boots or wheels, they couldn't get away fast enough. Weiss greedily devoured everything with his fire mission calls.

By the afternoon, the enemy had become much more circumspect in his incursions, a double success for the artillery. That which it hadn't destroyed was extremely cautious and forced to slow down. New tactics would now be necessary to dislodge the hill's defenders.

The Americans were soon pinned down by a sniper who had managed to infiltrate their lines and Kerley, always leading from the front (he was later to be awarded the DSC for his leadership), seized a rifle and disappeared into the undergrowth. An anxious wait, then two shots. Another wait and to everyone's relief, it was Kerley who emerged from the woods.

The company and observer team then

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ABOVE: Civilians always seem to be caught in the middle during a war. Here, three women are photographed after they returned home to Mortain once the battle had ended. Townsfolk provided food, water, and other help for the beleagured GIs. OPPOSITE: Men from Company A, 11th Infantry, 30th Division, advance through a break in the hedgerows on August 9. The soldier at right is using his handy-talky radio.

came under fire from an 88mm gun some distance away, causing infantry casualties and snapping the top off Weiss' radio antenna. Next it was the observer's turn for a narrow escape when an 88 shell bounced off an outcrop next to him and exploded harmlessly among the rocks below.

Weiss subsequently calculated the coordinates to silence one of the 88s but others still managed to penetrate the east side of the hill, as did the enemy's tanks and infantry. Snipers from behind also continued to test their nerve. At one point his message log states, "Enemy north, south, east, and west."

Although it was impossible at this time to get reinforcements through to Hill 314, they did receive support from the skies. On August 7, Denius stated in his autobiography that American fighter planes flew 429 sorties over German forces in the area, which kept the Luftwaffe busy, and RAF Typhoons unleashed over 2,000 rockets at German tanks and vehicles. However, despite all this support, the battalion suffered a reported 78 casualties that day.

Having no idea what the night would bring, Weiss devised a protective strategy. He would fire a regular barrage, then adjust it to bring it as close as was safely possible to his own company's lines. In the event of a night attack, he could then recall this concentration to defend their position. Reports were also coming in from French civilians, identifying movement of German troops, and at 10:30 p.m. they informed the observers of 100 German tanks that were gathered in Romagny, a small town to the south west of Mortain.

Company commander Kerley set up a series of listening posts around his perimeter as an early warning system and then dictated a message to say that ammunition was running seriously low. If the Germans had known the dire straits the battalion was in, they could have overrun the hill, but their dismemberment by the artillery that day whenever they moved into the open had made them extremely cautious.

Everyone in Mortain had also been taken by surprise the previous night and early morning and now the confusion continued. An Oberscharführer from the 17th SS described what he saw: "The houses had been abandoned by the people. Around 300 old people were gathered in a retirement home. The town's inhabitants had celebrated their liberation with the Americans that evening—food and drink was still on the tables. Some comrades feasted on it before they thought about further searches through homes. All houses were covered in flags. Nobody expected our attack. The town was abandoned in panic and fear."

American troops were outnumbered and a game of cat and mouse ensued. Lt. Col. Eads Hardaway, the battalion commander, had set up his HQ at the Hôtel de la Poste in the town's center and could not extricate himself. So Captain Reynold Erichson of F Company, the most senior company commander, was directed through a radio call from Colonel Hammond Birks, commander of the 120th Infantry Regiment, to take charge of the remains of the battalion on the hill.

In practice, communication problems would mean that the management of each company was down to their individual commanders who selected the best-protected positions and held on to them. An overall strategy for defending the hill would not be easy. As well as K, G and E Companies, which occupied discrete but separate areas, there was

now a platoon from C, a squad from F, plus survivors of H Company and the remains of a tank-destroyer unit. Erichson decided to position himself on the northern half of the hill near Bonvoisin farm and hoped that with limited radio contact and a system of runners, he could keep these disparate groups functioning.

On the east side of the hill, the careful listening paid dividends. At 2 a.m. on the morning of the next day, August 8, the unmistakable sounds of tanks drifted up from the Bel Air Road in an area previously registered for artillery fire. The next sound was Weiss on the radio, followed by shells exploding among the tanks. The Germans must have figured that their enemy could see in the dark!

Behind Kerley, Weiss and his crew with G Company on the west side decided to cross the Bel Air road and move further north, close to K Company, but there was a problem. When the west side of the hill came under sustained fire the first night, it was Lieutenant Charles Bartz's first real combat experience. Denius had been concerned about his nervousness and that when he tried to engage him in conversation, his replies did not make sense.

By early morning Bartz told Denius he couldn't cope and retreated to a foxhole. Despite being still only 19, young Frank took charge, ably assisted by his buddy Sid Goldstein and called in artillery fire as required, just as he had done when his previous officer, Lieutenant Miller, had been shot down beside him three weeks earlier.

Shortly after dawn that morning, enemy vehicles broke through a roadblock before being literally stopped in their tracks. Already it was apparent, however, that the radio batteries were not going to last much longer; Denius hit upon the idea of leaving them out in the sunlight to collect some extra charge. This only gave them about an extra six minutes each time, but it enabled contact with the Fire Direction Center at crucial moments. Weiss lost contact with Denius at this time and believed for many years that the batteries had expired, putting an even greater responsibility on his shoulders.

Operation Lüttich was now into its second day and its commanders were realizing that a major obstacle to its ambitious aim of pushing thousands of Americans into the sea at Avranches and splitting their armies was the few hundred troops who occupied a hill at Mortain and who had them in their sights—and were pouring all manner of Hell down upon them. If they could take the hill, they would not only be helping themselves to one of the best vantage points for miles around but also removing the threat from the showers of artillery shells being directed upon them by the forward observers.

The 2nd Battalion may have been running short of resources to defend its position but its real ammunition was the plentiful supply of 105mm howitzer shells that could be commanded from the sky by the forward observers to litter the roads and fields with burnt-out German tanks and wounded men at a moment's notice.

At 8 a.m., German troops were seen from the east side to be assembling for an attack. A radio call, followed by "On the way," and they were gone. Then the tanks lined up and suffered the same fate. Next, an 88 was silenced as soon as its voice was

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located. The summer sunshine and excellent visibility meant Weiss and his men were on a turkey shoot.

But the lieutenant was running short of juice in his radio batteries, and the water was almost gone. K rations would not suffice for long, either. Increasingly, valuable radio time was being used to plead for more supplies. Some of the troops closer to the road and G Company's position were able to get water from the well at l'Hermitage farm. but German snipers made access feel like a game of Russian roulette.

Enemy gunners were now varying their tactics. Armor-piercing rounds were hitting the rocks and sending out showers of splinters onto the men below. Next it was phosphorous shells dropping white-hot flakes that caused painful burns and which took a serious toll on morale.

Spirits were lifted when a group of British Typhoon fighter bombers appeared, flew low, and obliterated more tanks and guns. It was the batteries of 88s that were causing the greatest grief, however, and Weiss took the risk of climbing to the top of the highest crags, deliberately exposing himself to enemy fire in order to get a better view. He was hoping he was too small a target for an 88 shell, although his former radio antenna may have disagreed. When they started up again he was able to fix their positions, albeit with several adjustments, and put some of them out of action.

By evening the occupants of the hill were hit by something even bigger. Intelligence gained from a captured German the day before revealed a gun battery near Ger, about six miles to the northeast. This was probably the source and likely to contain 150mm guns. It was beyond the range of the 230th Field Artillery, but the location was estimated and details were passed on in the hope that the air force or the American 155mm guns located further away could take care of it.

Something that Weiss and his team could do was to keep an eye on the roads below their hilltop position and sure enough before midnight there was an attempt to overrun the 30th Division roadblocks by enemy tanks. Both the Ger and Bel Air roads to the east, and the dirt tracks that separated these parallel routes, saw significant tank activity. Three times they tried to attack and three times—thanks to the skill of the listeners and the prearranged fire plans—they were pushed back.

Then the German infantry behind them in the southwest, who had been sniping during the day, made an opportunistic attack in the dark, firing blindly and randomly with an apparently inexhaustible supply of automatic rifle rounds: these only claimed a small number of victims but greatly unnerved everyone on the east side of the hill. The best they could do in return with their sparse ammunition was to try and pick off the source of the last muzzle flash.

The next day, August 9, Weiss and his team moved to a third and final OP on the top of the east ridge, and the day followed the same familiar pattern. Five attacks had to be beaten off before 9 a.m. And still they came. The climax was a huge convoy of German infantry trucks in early afternoon. When they unloaded their men, they received an enhanced concentration of shells from the Fire Direction Center; 24 105mm howitzers, supplemented by a 155mm battery, tore the intended attack apart before it got started.

While some men resorted to scraping slivers of chocolate from their D rations with a bayonet to quell their hunger, others went out scavenging food from local farms and returned with potatoes, cabbages, rutabaga and apples. Some were very fortunate, receiving rabbit and chicken soup from the few French farmers who remained and who were prepared to risk retribution from the SS.

(It should be remembered that one of the divisions present was "Das Reich," which had committed the atrocities at Oradour sur Glane on June 10, where a whole village was massacred). Local French historians have recorded the contributions to the defense of the hill made by local French civilians who had been isolated along with the 2nd Battalion. Some of them were locals and others were simply taking refuge from the shelling

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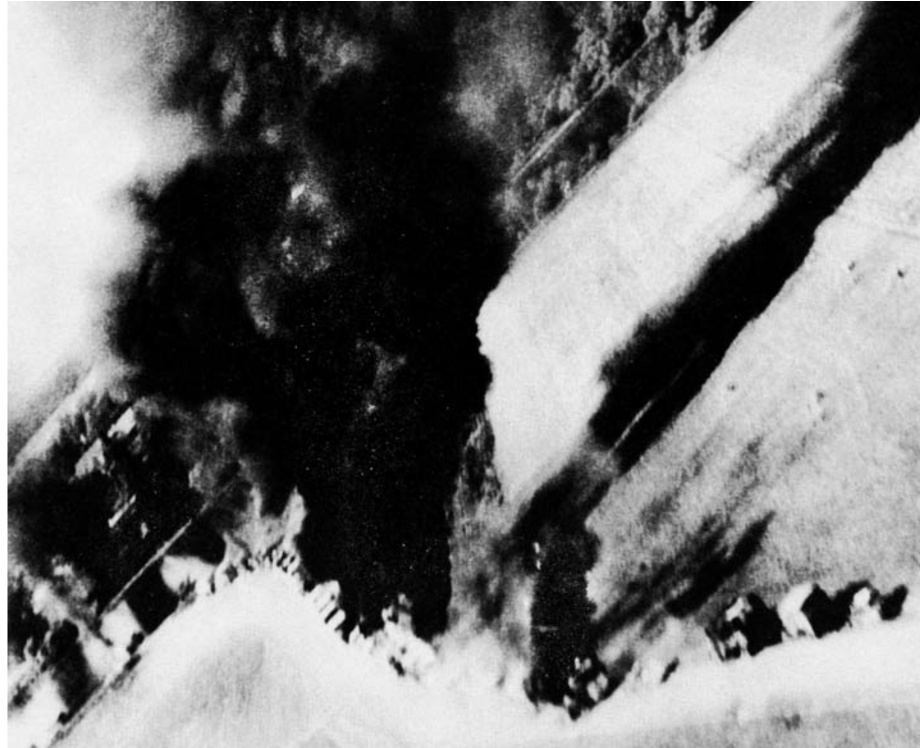

ABOVE: Gun-camera footage from a strafing American fighter plane hints at the heavy fire brought to bear on a German armored column on an open road in Normandy. Allied aircraft controlled the skies during Operation Lüttich, the Germans' failed counterattack. OPPOSITE: A GI on the La Grande Rue, Mortain's main street, looks at destroyed American vehicles, August 12, 1944.

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as the front line moved eastwards.

Mr. and Mrs. Laisné pumped water for the men who could avoid the sniper fire to fill their comrades' canteens and their efforts were supplemented by Mrs. Veuve Baudin and her young son. Elsewhere, Mrs. Lévêque and her daughters, Philomène Malherbe and Veuve Sineux, prepared soup and risked everything to support their liberators. Most of these women were enduring the war on their own, as their husbands had been captured in 1940 when France signed the armistice with Germany.

Shortly after 6 p.m., two Germans were seen in the distance—an SS officer, and a soldier holding a white flag. One of Kerley's platoon officers raced to meet them before they got close enough for their eyes to absorb anything of importance.

The SS officer spoke in perfect English, congratulating the troops on their heroic defense and offering honorable surrender terms and treatment for the wounded. They had until eight o'clock to accept but, if they refused, they would be blown to bits. The officer relayed the surrender offer to Kerley. His reply was recorded in some sources like an extract from an historical novel, stating that they would not surrender until the last bullet had been fired and the last bayonet broken in a German belly.

Kerley was not given to flowery language however and the general agreement from those present was that he simply told the bilingual officer "Go f**k yourself" Eyewitness accounts also confirm that many of the wounded within earshot also voiced their support for Kerley in spite of their injuries.

The deadline passed and everyone took up defensive positions. Weiss agreed on a fire plan as he had done before, considering the most likely directions from which the attack would take place. In all, there were seven artillery battalions in place which set up a protective ring of fire around troops on the hill. The post-battle report states, "We all slept with hands on our guns, ready for a final fight."

When it began, they found they were fighting tanks rather than infantry, a slightly less elusive target, and the artillery was able to hold them back until one tank managed to get though the roadblock and fire a couple of rounds.

The turret opened and the commander called out another "Surrender or die" threat, receiving a Kerley-esque response from most of those within earshot although one American soldier dropped his rifle, ran to the tank and clambered aboard. His apparent loss of nerve may have done his comrades a favor as it seemed to satisfy the tank commander who turned his vehicle around and left the hill.

The next day, August 10, and Day Five on Hill 314, began hopefully with the enemy apparently moving in the opposite direction, something noticed by both Weiss and Denius on their opposite sides. But far from being a retreat, it proved to be just a repositioning for a change of tactics. The fire missions continued but battery life became even more critical, and Weiss' corporal Dan Garrot managed to retrieve a spare pair from their jeep that had been concealed some distance away.

Radio operator Armon Sasser then developed a useful technique, putting one pack in the sunshine to absorb heat, which generated some power, and rotating them with the other set but never letting one completely run out so that it was beyond the point of no return. For the night session, they tried to ensure that both had a reserve of power.

After their frantic calls for extra supplies, spirits were lifted in the afternoon by a parachute drop. First came a Typhoon raid on enemy positions and tanks, then, half an hour later, the aircraft appeared again as escorts for cargo planes which dropped

a multitude of orange and blue parachutes over Hill 314. Unfortunately, many drifted into enemy lines; those that were retrieved, despite containing valuable food and ammunition, did not provide batteries or medical supplies.

Later that evening, an attempt was made to lob in medical supplies via artillery shells. Denius received a call from his the artillery battery to say they had shells that were used for propaganda leaflets which were going to be emptied and filled with medical supplies. As they were not designed to explode, they should arrive intact.

Denius and Weiss, in their separate accounts of the event welcomed the initiative at a time when their comrades were dying before their very eyes but, unfortunately, they were working against the laws of physics. The contents of some of the shells were destroyed in transit or even as a result of the exit from the gun barrels due to the tremendous forces involved, and the bandages were hopelessly compressed within the shell casings.

On Denius's side of the hill, he personally directed the shells that would bear distinct markings, into a position where they could be dug out of the ground and, although the contents were not in great shape, he remembered that they managed to get enough morphine and penicillin to put a smile on the faces of the wounded.

The best protective care that could be achieved for the wounded was to put them in slit trenches or shield them against hedgerows out of the way of shell fragments. The dead, both American and German, were placed out of sight of their comrades, but the summer heat reminded veryone that they were surrounded by death and corruption. Morale was being stretched to its limits.

A further attempt was made on the morning of August 11 to send more supply shells, but with limited success. The only certainty was more panzers, more soldiers, more fire missions, and more carnage.

That morning, Denius heard heavy firing from behind the lines and could see signs of the enemy withdrawing. As well as suffering his artillery strikes from radio batteries that were now breathing their last, the Germans were also becoming targets for the air force. He reported, "The view from Hill 314 gave us ringside seats to this horrible spectacle that the Germans had brought upon themselves."

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ABOVE: A leg splint is placed on a soldier (left) at a forward medical aid station set up near Mortain on August 12 while plasma is given to a soldier at right who suffered a head wound. OPPOSITE: An American officer examines dead enemy soldiers lying beside a German halftrack destroyed during the attack on Mortain. Although American casualties were high, the Germans suffered even more.

Toward the end of the afternoon, there was an assault from a heavy mortar which forced Weiss and his closest comrades to take cover. It became apparent that the excitement about the medical shells had brought many men out into the open and suggested a likely target to the enemy.

When Kerley realised what was happening he, typically, went in search of the perpetrators, taking a mortar man with him. Once located, he ordered their 60mm mortar to be carried across for some retaliation. Unfortunately, there was only one round left. The preparation took an eternity for precision to be achieved but when the projectile was launched, it landed within 10 meters of the enemy mortar. Those team members who were able to stagger away did so immediately and the threat was curtailed.

From the west side of the hill, Denius witnessed further devastation: "When night came, their foot soldiers began walking out and they too were cut down by artillery fire that plastered their routes of withdrawal using the preregistered firing instructions our forward observer teams had provided."

During the night of August 11/12, Weiss was still firing at tanks, relying largely on sound as a guide to the enemy's position. Around 5 a.m. he left his foxhole to observe the enemy as it was clear that they were now retreating, but he knew they could still be dangerous. This decision saved his life.

The foxhole he had just left was hit by a shell, mortally wounding Staff Sgt. John Corn and dazing the rest of the team. With what was left of their radio batteries they continued calling down fire on the retreating tanks and trucks and made a desperate but futile attempt to get medical help for the dying Corn. The last of Weiss's 193 calls to the artillery was made just before midday.

Elements of the 35th Division had now moved up to Mortain and were poised to relieve the men on the hill with much needed supplies. The first to arrive were troops

from the 320th Infantry who entered G Company's area at 11:30 a.m. The 1st Battalion, 119th Regiment, of the 30th Division itself marched through the town and relieved K and E Companies. The wounded were evacuated and food was distributed. Of the 690 men who had occupied Hill 314 on the afternoon of August 6, 277 were killed, missing or taken prisoner.

When Denius walked off Hill 314, he had one more unpleasant task to undertake. For six days and nights he had taken charge of his team in place of Lieutenant Bartz, who had been in no shape mentally to perform the duties required of him, a situation which could not be allowed to continue without putting lives in jeopardy.

He asked to see his battery commander, Captain Merrill Alexander, and told him the full story. The result was that a court-martial was arranged for Bartz to answer the charges against him. But while he was being escorted in a jeep by two military policemen, the vehicle was strafed by a German plane, killing its occupants, and seriously wounding Bartz. He was taken to a hospital in England, where he died of his injuries on October 31.

This was a double tragedy for the family. He left a young wife who never remarried and his mother lost her other son, an airman, the following year. It will never be known whether he was suffering from a condition that should have been picked up before he was sent into action or whether he was simply guilty of dereliction of duty. The court-martial did not take place and—innocent until proven guilty—he received a military funeral and a posthumous Silver Star for his role on Hill 314.

The men who staggered down its slopes would take indelible memories of those six days and nights with them to their next date with destiny. One of them, a certain J.D. Salinger, would become one of America's most celebrated writers. Several others would receive gallantry decorations, some posthumously, and a great number of survivors would wear a Purple Heart decoration on their chests with pride to remind them of their service on Hill 314.

The valuable time that the Germans wasted trying to capture Hill 314 cost them dearly, providing an opportunity for the Allies to race eastwards and carefully position themselves to encircle and destroy the retreating army near Falaise.

Stories of Hill 314 and what later became known in the literature as "The Lost Battalion" which occupied it August 6-12, 1944, continue to plant themselves in posterity. The wall of the mayor's office in Mortain bears a huge poster from the 40th anniversary in 1984, signed by many veterans, including Robert Weiss, who returned for the commemorations.

Weiss and Denius have made other visits and both wrote autobiographical accounts of their experiences, published in 1998 and 2016, respectively. In 2011, director Lew Adams, largely inspired by Frank Denius, completed a documentary

Continued on page 98

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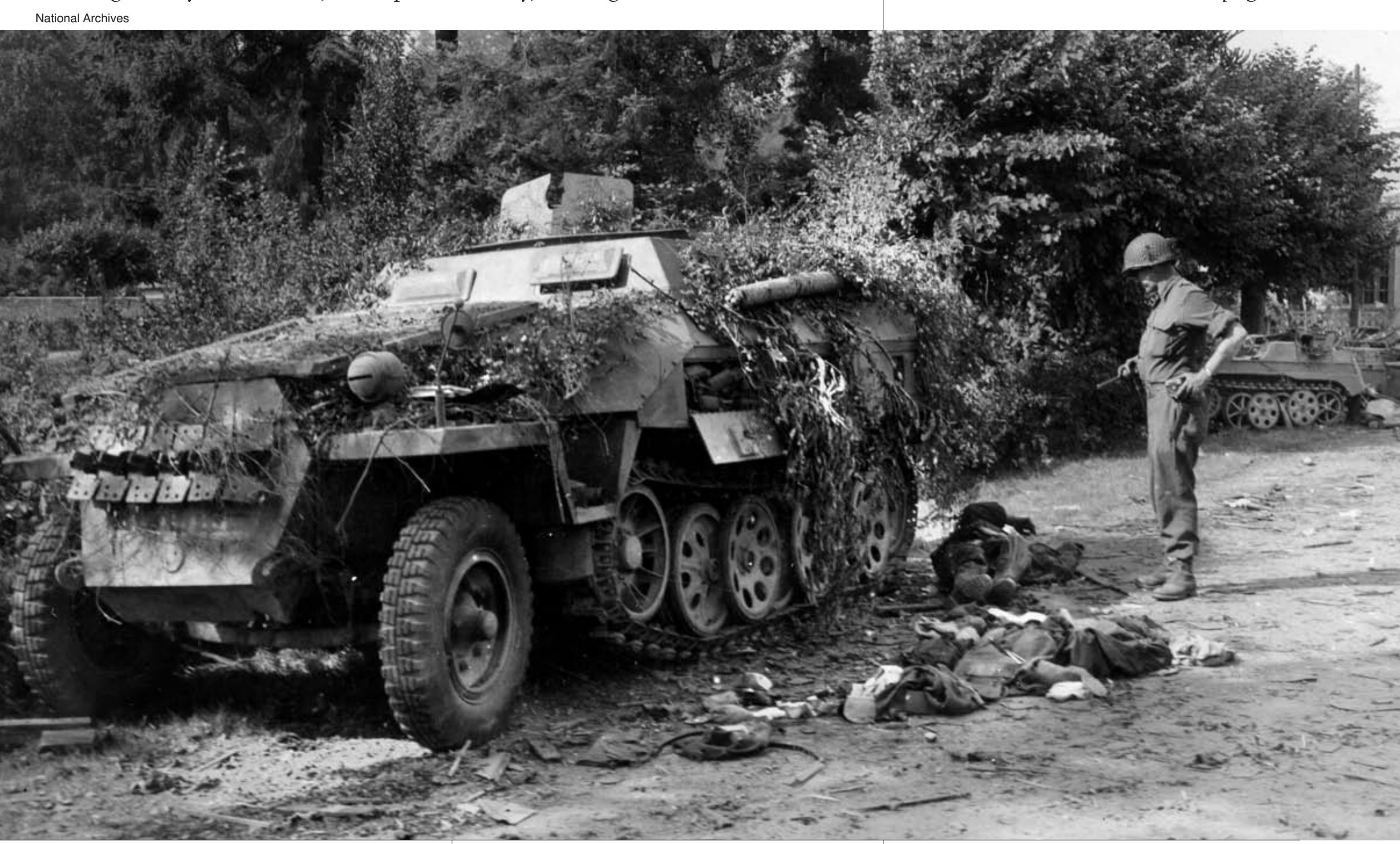


In an American-supplied tank destroyer, members of Maj. Gen. Philippe Leclerc's 2nd French Armored Division roll down a Paris street on the lookout for snipers. The author took part in the liberation of the City of Light—and was nearly killed in the effort.

BY JEAN RENÉ CHAMPION (WITH MARC AND DAVID CHAMPION)

Liberating PARIS

ONE OF THE FIRST MEN TO ENTER PARIS ON AUGUST 25, 1944, RECALLS 'THE MOST STIRRING DAY' OF HIS LIFE.

Jean René Champion (or René, as he preferred to be called) was born in 1921 in Neuilly-sur-Seine, a commune on the west side of Paris. He never knew his father, and his mother, Marcella, abandoned him to an orphanage at eight months of age. He came to America when he was eight years old and lived a hard-scrabble life during the Great Depression—riding the rails across the country as a hobo, working at such odd jobs as a cowboy and lay preacher, and spending time in Mexico living with a native tribe.

When World War II broke out, 20-year-old René, wanting to avenge the occupation of the land of his birth, made his way to England, where the 2nd French Armored Division was forming and training under Maj. Gen. Philippe Leclerc, with the purpose of one day taking part in the liberation of France.

Here is his remarkable story.

If I were given the choice of reliving just one day of my life, I would make that choice without hesitation—August 25, 1944—the day that Paris was liberated. On the morning of that great day, I drove a Free French tank [an American-made M-4 Sherman] into a Paris still held by the Germans.

Long after night had fallen on that day, I lay exhausted but unable to sleep in the still sun-warmed dust of the Jardin des Tuileries and marveled at the special brilliance of the summer stars as they shone on a free Paris.

Between that morning and that night, I had lived through one of those "once-in-a-lifetime" days and had experienced, I think, all of the emotions that are granted to man to feel, and I had known them with all the intensity of which man is capable.

But I'm getting ahead of myself.

In 1941, as a 20-year-old French citizen who had been living in the U.S. since 1929, I responded to General Charles de Gaulle's appeal to Frenchmen the world over to rally to him in England, to where, with the help of Winston Churchill, he had managed to escape from German-occupied France.

De Gaulle's objective was to create an army of volunteers that would eventually help

AKG Images

drive the German occupants of France back beyond their borders. He named those volunteers the "Free French" to distinguish themselves from those French units who had chosen to give their allegiance to France's German-controlled Vichy government.

I was then living in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, and traveled to the Free French Office in New York City, where I was approved as a volunteer on August 25, 1941 (exactly three years before the day of the liberation of Paris). I then I boarded a small whaler, the SS *Surabaya*, that joined a convoy bound for England.

Luckily, we did not encounter (to my knowledge) any German U-boats, which made a habit of attacking convoys full of Lend-Lease goods headed for Great Britain or the Soviet Union.

THREE DAYS AT THE ROYAL PATRIOTIC SCHOOL

Approximately two weeks after departing New York, we landed in Liverpool, which was under German aerial attack when we arrived. From Liverpool, I, along with a half-dozen volunteers for the Free French Navy, was sent for a brief stay to the "Royal Patriotic School" in Wandsworth Common, London.

There, the backgrounds of all travelers arriving without complete documentation (the only official paper I had was an "affidavit-in-lieu-of-passport" signed in New York by a British Consular official) were examined by members of British Military Intelligence to ensure that the new immigrant was neither an enemy spy nor saboteur.

The main building was a handsome, Victorian brick edifice three or four stories high. It had a gabled roof and towers and many large windows. Behind it was a large, charming, typically British garden, with wide walks and a great variety of well-tended plants and shrubbery. The entire compound was surrounded by a high wall.

Before the war, the Royal Patriotic School had been a school for girls, but its scholastic role had been abandoned in 1940 when London was being bombed day and night by the Germans. London children had been evacuated from the city and sent to the English countryside for safety. With the girls at the Royal Patriotic School having been likewise evacuated, the facility was then turned over to the British Intelligence Service, and its function was to provide quarters for newcomers to England while their backgrounds were investigated.

While waiting for our backgrounds to be checked, we filled our idle hours with various diversions such as chess, checkers, and bridge. There was a piano in one of the Patriotic School's large rooms, and there were enough piano players in the group to keep the instrument occupied almost the entire day. Rare were the times when the whole building was not filled with the strains of the classics or the popular melodies of the day.

Whenever the piece being played was a popular song, men would wander in from other rooms and begin to sing in their own native tongues. One day the pianist was playing *Amapola*, a popular and nostalgic love song of that era. He was soon joined by a singer with a trained operatic voice, and his rich baritone filled the entire ground floor of the building.

Chess players left their chessboards and came into the piano room. Readers folded their books and came to see and sing. Card players laid down their hands and stood and raised their voices. Soon almost everyone was standing and singing, each one in his own language, each one with his own thoughts and feelings.

The cheeks of more than one were wet with tears. They were singing with their hearts, singing of the loves they had left behind, of their families, of the lands they knew and

Photo courtesy of René Champion

ABOVE: Members of René Champion's 3rd Company photographed at Camberley, their training base near London, England, in 1942. The men were of various nationalities, including Americans, who volunteered to free France. OPPOSITE: A Sherman tank of the 2nd French Armored Division exits an LST (Landing Ship, Tank) onto Utah Beach, August 4, 1944, and prepares to go into action against the Germans. The unit reached Paris 20 days later.

National Archives

loved and were so far away from.

I, with my own tears, felt so very close to these men. In those magic moments, we were no longer strangers, but the closest and dearest of brothers. As I watched them, I couldn't help but wonder how many of them would survive the war and find again the things they were weeping for. The knowledge that many of them would not return filled me with a profound sadness.

My stay at the Royal Patriotic School lasted three days. I spent perhaps an hour in an interview with a British officer. I was astounded at the information he had about me—my runaway days in Johnstown; my brief incarceration in a children's correctional institution; my hoboing all over the United States under the assumed name of George Hoffman; my brief career as a lay preacher; my suicide attempt in New Mexico; my skills as an architectural draftsman; and countless other details.

I was given a clean bill of health and turned over to a Free French representative in London. After passing a cursory physical, I had my curly locks shorn, and then I signed my enlistment papers "for the duration of the war" and was advised that, as a member of the Free French Forces, I was now under sentence of death by the Vichy government of France. I must admit that I got a kick out of that—it is not just anybody who walks around with a death sentence hanging over his head.

I was issued a dress uniform (the famous British battle dress, since the Free French Forces at that time were being supplied by the British), a black beret, a British steel helmet, a gas mask, and sundry other articles of regulation attire.

NEW QUARTERS AT CAMBERLEY

The next day, several other new enlistees and I were driven out to the town of Camberley, some 30 miles southwest of London, where the Free French had their principal training facility. This location was called Old Dean Camp. Upon our arrival, we were each assigned to a barrack and issued a rifle and bandolier of cartridges, a mess kit, a straw tick for our cots, and a blanket.

Unlike our comparatively luxurious quarters at the Royal Patriotic School, our barracks at Camberley were Quonset huts, or Nissen huts, as the British called them. Cold and drafty, with only a pot-belly stove for warmth, they did little to keep out the cold, wet, English weather.

Most of the men at Camberley were in their 20s and 30s. There were a few as young as 16 and some in their late 40s and early 50s. They had come from almost every corner of the world, and many had undergone considerable hardships in their efforts to join de Gaulle's army.

French nationals had gotten to England in a variety of ways. A few were businessmen or students who happened to have been in England when France surrendered after the German invasion.

Besides French nationals, there were volunteers from many other countries. Thus, in the unit that was to become Third Company, there was a mix of Americans, Bel-

gians, Britons, Canadians, Mexicans, Middle Easterners, North Africans, Poles, Spaniards, South Americans, and Swiss.

A larger group, who were also in England at the time of the French surrender in 1940, consisted of French soldiers who had been rescued in 1940, along with British units, from the Dunkirk pocket and from the ill-fated Allied Norwegian campaign.

Although most of these "rescuees" were repatriated, a sizeable number enlisted in the fledgling Free French army and continued to fight with the hope of eventually liberating their homeland.

For the French at Camberley who did not happen to be in England at the time of France's surrender, their roads to England had been complicated and often difficult.

One such group consisted of French soldiers who had been in German prisoner-of-war camps and who had managed to escape from Germany and make their way to Russia.

Unfortunately for them, Russia at the time was officially an ally of Nazi Germany [before Operation Barbarossa, the German invasion of the U.S.S.R. in June 1941]. The Russians arrested the escaped prisoners and imprisoned them in concentration camps.

Five or six months later, when Germany betrayed its alliance by invading Russia, the French prisoners were released and sent to England. Without exception, they joined de Gaulle. At Camberley, we referred to them as *les Russes*—the "Russians."

Shortly after the arrival of les Russes, two other escaped French prisoners arrived at Camberley. These two had made their way from Germany into Sweden, a neutral nation. From there they were able to get to England. They were known as "the Swedes."

Others had made their difficult way from North Africa to England through Spain. Two of these men would later become members of my tank company. Both were Swiss nationals who had been in the French Foreign Legion in Algeria when France was defeated.

When they discovered that their commander had no intention of declaring his allegiance to General de Gaulle, they deserted and made their way across the desert to Spanish Morocco, where they were arrested and sent to the infamous Miranda concentration camp in northern Spain. There they lingered for seven months before being released to the British consul.

Spain, at the time, had declared itself a neutral nation whose Francisco Franco-led fascist government sympathized with Nazi Germany and its ally, fascist Italy. This situation did not make the transit of Frenchmen through Spain and on to England easy.

Indeed, the Free French volunteers who entered Spain knew that there was a very high probability that they would be caught by the Spanish police and would likely spend months in the infamous concentration camp at Miranda, where they would be ill-fed,

National Archives

ABOVE: The author in the turret hatch of his tank, Mort-Homme III, in March 1945, after his previous tank, Mort-Homme II, was knocked out by a German shell. OPPOSITE: German shells fire on the tanks of the 2nd French Armored Division as they approach Paris on August 25, 1944.

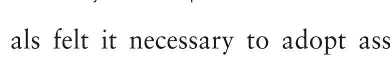


Photo courtesy of René Champion

ill-clothed, ill-treated, and ill-cared for.

But they also knew that eventually the British Embassy in Madrid would arrange for their release and their dispatch to England. So, motivated by love of country or simply the desire for adventure—or both—they crossed into Spain, suffered the penalty of Miranda, and eventually reached Camberley. When they arrived, many were emaciated and afflicted with a variety of pulmonary and other ailments.

A few of those who came through Miranda had difficulties even before reaching Spain. That was the case with two men who later became members of my tank company. Both were Swiss nationals who had been serving in the French Foreign Legion in Algeria when France was defeated.

When they discovered that their commander had no intention of declaring his company's allegiance to General de Gaulle, they deserted and made their way across the desert to Spanish Morocco, where they were arrested and sent to Miranda.

As deserters of the Legion, the trek from their desert post in Algeria was undertaken in full knowledge that there was a price on their heads—25 francs if caught and returned alive, 50 francs if delivered dead.

Other men had come to England directly from occupied France, also in great peril. Some had made the trip by sailing small boats through the German seaborne patrols off the French coast and across the rough and dangerous waters of the English Channel.

Several others were amateur pilots who managed to make the journey in their own airplanes. One of these pilots had even gone so far as to construct his own aircraft especially for the occasion. Needless to say, some of these patriots lost their lives in their gallant attempts.

Regardless of the means by which they came to England, many of the French nationals felt it necessary to adopt assumed names; they were afraid that the Vichy authorities in France would take reprisals against their families if it were discovered that they had joined de Gaulle.

Four of the "foreigners" in my company were referred to as *les américains*; I was one of them. My nationality was still French, but my home was in America. Henri Jolivet, another *américain* like me, had been born in France of French parents and had come to the U.S. as a child. His parents were naturalized Americans, and his home was in Staten Island.

"Red" Jourdain came from Chicago. He was rather taciturn, and little was known about him. In the minds of many of our French colleagues, the word "Chicago" conjured up movie-inspired visions of Al Capone and his band of gangsters, so that some of them suspected that Red had been in the employ of the Mob.

Maurice Gator, the fourth américain, was not American in any sense of the word. He was a native-born Parisian but had lived in New York for about a year before joining the Free French and, in the eyes of our French colleagues, that qualified him as an américain. Before he changed his last name, it was Introligator.

Our categorization as "Americans" was in no way meant to be derogatory. On the contrary, our French brothers-in-arms knew little about the U.S. except for what they had seen in the movies, and what they had seen generally had impressed them favorably. As américains, we were often asked questions about what life was like in the U.S. and were listened to almost with the awe of children listening to a fairy tale.

Gator, Jolivet, and I became close friends. Jourdain, more of a loner, remained on the periphery of our little group. I alone survived the war; Gator was killed in Normandy, Jolivet in Alsace. Jourdain survived the war in Europe but was killed in combat in Indochina after the European war had ended. They were good buddies and, although more than 60 years have passed, I grieve for them often.

That fact that, whether French or foreign, we had each risked or given up much

‘Stunned by the explosion, I let the tank roll forward a few moments before I realized that it was on fire.’

to join the Free French engendered among all of us in Camberley a profound mutual affection and respect. We were not just volunteers: we all shared a vision of a free France, we had all demonstrated the toughness to do whatever was required to rally to de Gaulle, and we all were ready to willingly give our lives in the performance of whatever mission might be assigned us. We were men! We were comrades! We were friends! We were brothers.

That mutual respect transcended the differences in rank. Our officers and NCOs necessarily maintained a certain social distance from the enlisted men—efficient command and operations required it.

But we knew that whatever their rank, if they were in England with us, they had made the same sacrifices we had made and had the same willingness to die fighting for the cause we all believed in. We respected and believed in them, and they in us.

We were indeed a brotherhood, a family. We became 3rd Company, 501st *Regiment de Chars de Combat* (an M4 Sherman tank battalion), 2nd French Armored Division.

(NOTE: 3rd Company of the 2nd French Armored Division numbered 149 officers and men when it landed in Normandy as part of Lt. Gen. George S. Patton, Jr.'s U.S. Third Army on August 4, 1944—two months after the initial D-Day landings, known as Operation Overlord.

(From Southampton, Leclerc's 2nd French Armored Division, which had over 14,000 men and hundreds of Sherman and Stuart tanks, self-propelled artillery, halftracks, jeeps, and trucks, reached French soil at Utah Beach in Normandy as part of Patton's Third Army. There was still evidence of the fighting that had taken place there two months earlier—demolished buildings, destroyed German and American vehicles, bomb craters, and temporary cemeteries.

(The 2nd French Armored Division played a crucial role during the battle of the Argen-

tan-Falaise Pocket and all but destroyed the Germans' 9th Panzer Division; Champion did not write about those actions but focused his attention on his tank's role in the liberation of Paris.)

ARRIVING IN PARIS

I shall never forget the morning of August 25, 1944, when the Free French 2nd Armored Division entered Paris. Two days earlier we were in Argentan when we received orders: Eisenhower had given permission for our division, and the U.S. 4th Infantry Division, to quickly advance on the capital city. An uprising there by the Resistance had sped up our timetable, and it was urgent we arrive before the Germans decided to destroy the city, just as they had done to Warsaw.

Our 3rd Company, commanded by Captain Branet, was not the first unit to arrive, however. An advance party of half-tracks from the 9th Company, 3rd Battalion, reached City Hall on the evening of August 24, but they became essentially surrounded. Our company arrived the next morning.

I shall never forget that triumphal entry as long as I live. Above us, the sky was clear and dazzling blue, and there was the warm and invigorating smell in the air of a perfect summer day. French flags, forbidden and concealed during the four years of occupation, were draped from every window and every doorway. Never had the sight of that tricolor thrilled me more deeply.

Both: National Archives

ABOVE: Mobs of Parisians are overjoyed to see Sherman tanks manned by French soldiers. The Allied high command gave the 2nd French Armored Division the honor of being the first troops into Paris. OPPOSITE: A French soldier with a carbine in his hand gestures in an attempt to keep Parisians away from German prisoners who are on his tank with their hands up. The Paris Opera House is in the background.

(Most of the tanks were given nicknames by their crews; René's was Mort-Homme*—"Dead Man.")*

The Parisians, radiant with the joy of their deliverance, surged like a restless, sun-flecked sea about our tanks as we rolled through the cobbled streets. As we passed, their cheers and applause echoed and re-echoed in the thin morning air.

Into that kaleidoscope of color, into that maelstrom of sound, we rode our lumbering metallic beasts, awed by the historicity of the event, overwhelmed by the wild acclamation of the Parisians, rapturous at the realization that we had finally reached our beloved Paris.

To our surprise, the Germans, who had resisted our advance so tenaciously the day before, were for the present nowhere to be seen. As we rode through the city streets, heads high, hearts swollen with pride, eyes shining, black berets at a jaunty angle, I almost had the feeling that the war had come to an end and that I was taking part in a victory parade.

The feeling persisted throughout the morning. While we waited near the center of the city for the Germans to respond to an ultimatum delivered to them by one of our officers, the citizens of Paris overwhelmed us in an orgy of rejoicing. They filled the streets singing, dancing, laughing, and hugging each other in happiness. They swarmed over our tanks like ants, crowding around us, showered us with gifts and kisses, and elbowed each other out of the way to shake our hands or just to touch us.

For those few hours while we waited, the war was forgotten and an enchantment as golden as the sunshine above us reigned in our hearts. Not for all the treasures in the world would I have wanted to be anywhere but in Paris at that moment!

If the day had ended right then, I would have felt that it had been the most stirring day of my life. Nevertheless, it was far from over. The liberation of Paris was being celebrated, but the city was still held by the Germans. As one o'clock approached—the hour at which the ultimatum to the Germans was due to expire—we learned that

they would not surrender the city without a fight.

The emotions I was to experience in the battle for Paris, although entirely different from the ones I had just felt, were to be in every way as intense. My five-tank platoon was assigned the key mission—capture the German headquarters of Paris and its commander, General Dietrich von Choltitz.

That objective lay now barely a mile ahead along the rue de Rivoli—the Hôtel Meurice, a squat building on the corner of the rue de Castiglione. All these buildings, as well as the Jardin des Tuileries facing them, were German strongholds. Our task was to neutralize them so that our infantry could capture the Meurice.

Promptly at one o'clock, we left the now-silent crowds behind us and began to advance slowly and in single file along the deserted street. For a few moments nothing happened. Then I heard the long stutter of a German machine gun. The battle of Paris had begun.

As we moved forward, I kept my eyes glued to the periscope (I was the tank driver). I could see little, save the tanks in front of me and the smoke and explosions of German vehicles that our guns had set on fire. Above me I could hear the incessant drumming of our turret machine gun and the occasional boom of our cannon, followed immediately by the ringing sound of empty shell casings as they were ejected.

UNDER FIRE IN PARIS

Suddenly I heard the voice of my tank commander, Lieutenant Albert Bénard, in my earphones: "Faster, Champion, faster!" A moment later, *Mort-Homme* was rocked by a tremendous explosion, and it began to fill with thick billows of acrid smoke. This incident was captured by Larry Collins and Dominique Lapierre in their best-selling book, *Is Paris Burning?*:

"Lieutenant Albert Bénard, the commander of the *Mort-Homme*, felt [the grenade] bang his head and slide down his back to bounce into his turret. Sliced from his fore-

National Archives

National Archives

ABOVE: A French Sherman lies in ruins after being hit by anti-tank fire. The painted inscription on the side says that its three crewmen died for France. OPPOSITE: A German tank burns in front of the Paris Opera House after being hit by an anti-tank round. René Champion's tank was also hit when a grenade was dropped into the open hatch.

head to his waist by its shards, his tank suit in flames, Bénard scrambled out of the smoking tank. His gunner went with him. Left alone in the choking machine, Jean Réne Champion tried to drive it forward, looking for cover."

I knew immediately that we had been hit, and I remember the surprised thought flashing through my mind that I was not dead.

Stunned by the explosion, I let the tank roll forward for a few moments before I realized that it was on fire and that all the ammunition in it could explode at any second. Quickly I brought the tank to a stop and killed the engines. I tore off my earphones and throat microphone, undid my seat belt, threw open my driver's hatch, and started to scramble out.

As I did so, the vision suddenly came to me of the charred and mutilated bodies that I had so often seen in the destroyed tanks of other companies during our battles across France.

I was filled with terror at the thought that my comrades might be lying wounded in the turret and unable to get out without help. Fearfully, I climbed back into the tank to get a fire extinguisher.

Once outside again, I stood on the back of the tank and sprayed the inside of the smoking turret. I could only see black smoke and flames, but I was sure my fellow crewmen were inside, dead or wounded, and the thought brought tears to my eyes. I expected that the tank would explode at any moment, and the fear that I would be torn to bits by the explosion made my knees tremble.

But, somehow, that fear was not strong enough to counterbalance the concern that I had for my comrades, and I continued to wield my extinguisher until it was empty. As I prepared to climb into the turret, I heard a voice call my name.

At first, I thought it came from inside the tank; then I realized that it had come from the street. I looked down—there I saw Duten, my co-driver, crouched against the tracks of the tank. In his arms he held the smoke-begrimed and blood-soaked form of the loader, Jacques Diot.

I jumped down to join them. Duten told me that the Germans had dropped hand grenades into the open turret from the windows of the buildings along the street. I also learned from him that by some miracle the entire crew had managed to get out alive.

Diot was conscious and was moaning softly. Together Duten and I dragged him behind the arcades that line the rue de Rivoli. There the three of us crouched behind a pillar and wondered what to do next.

In the Jardin des Tuileries across the street, the Germans had seen us and were firing at us. We could hear the crack of their rifles and felt the splinters of stone against our faces as the bullets struck the wall beside us.

Mort-Homme stood abandoned in the middle of the street, a thin wisp of black smoke still rising from its turret. The sight wrenched my heart. Out of the corner of my eye I could see the sparkling August sky and, as I looked for our troops who were still hundreds of yards away, I thought none of us would ever again see an August day.

Suddenly I heard a noise behind us. Turning quickly, I saw two faces peering at us from above a transom. Sure that they were Germans, I reached for my pistol, but before I could fire, one of the faces asked, "Are you French?" It was a shopkeeper and his daughter who had been observing us for some moments, and who had thought at first that we were German soldiers.

TAKING COVER

When we convinced them that we were friends, they raised the steel shutter in front of the entrance to their store just high enough to let us slide under it. In the darkened shop the three of us lay on the floor for just a moment and basked in the sweet warmth of safety.

The shop sold linens. While Duten and I tore up what were probably some of the finest tablecloths in Paris to make bandages for Diot, the man and his daughter brought

Photo courtesy of René Champion

a bottle of cognac and some glasses.

Poor Diot had passed out; he was riddled with shrapnel from head to toe. As I wiped blood from his face, I saw that he was terribly pale, and I was sure he was going to die. I suddenly decided that Duten and I were doing him no good, and I determined that I had to try to get back to our troops and return with a medic. Against the protestations of Duten and the shopkeeper and his daughter, I slipped under the steel shutter and out into the street.

I was alone. Our infantry was still two blocks away. Pistol in hand, crouching, hugging the walls of the buildings, I began to run toward them. At the first street corner I almost bumped into a German officer. What he was doing there, God only knew, but it was a fatal circumstance. Although he, too, had a pistol in his hand, he probably never expected to find a French soldier there.

His surprised hesitation gave me time to fire first, and I brought him down with one shot. It was the first man I had ever personally killed, and as I looked at his inert body sprawled on the sunlit sidewalk, I felt a sudden darkness enter my soul.

I resumed running. Our troops were just a block away now. I could see them crouching and flattened against the walls, firing into the street ahead of them. It suddenly dawned on me that they might mistake me for a German since I was still in German-held territory. I put my Colt pistol back into its holster, raised my hands above my head, and walked slowly toward them.

"What a stupid way that would be to die," I kept thinking to myself—shot by my own troops—and I offered a silent prayer that they would look carefully before firing. Fortunately, they recognized me and, a few moments later, I was safely in their midst.

I was unable to find a medic to bring back to Diot, but a young civilian stretcher-bearer agreed to accompany me. Everything went well until he realized that I intended to have him cross through the still-raging battle and into a sector still under enemy control.

When we reached the edge of the battle line, he refused to go on. I have to admit today that he was probably right, but then I could only think of Diot, who was probably dying. I pulled out my pistol and promised my stretcher-bearer that if he didn't march, I would put a bullet through his head. The poor young fellow didn't have much of a choice.

We must have made a strange and comical pair as we scurried back under the arcades of the rue de Rivoli. In one hand he held one end of the stretcher while, with the other, he waved a white handkerchief to show that he was a noncombatant. I held the other end of the stretcher in my left hand and waved my pistol at him with my right hand.

I kept repeating to him that if he didn't move faster, he *was* going to die, whether he wanted to or not. Somehow, we made our way back to the linen shop unscathed. Diot had regained consciousness and seemed to be feeling much better, although he was still in pain.

When I saw that I could do nothing more for him, I went out to get my tank. It had not exploded, and the fire was now out. I climbed in, started the engines, turned it around, and set out to find the rest of my platoon.

Our mission had been successful, but it had also been costly. In my platoon alone, four of our five tanks had been hit by grenades, and two of our tank commanders had been killed. More than a dozen other men, out of a total of twenty-five, had been injured. Among them were my own tank commander and my gunner, as well as Diot.

(General von Choltitz refused Hitler's orders to burn Paris to the ground and surrendered the city to the Allies.)

THE DREAM REALIZED

Much later that night, after the battle for Paris had been won, I lay next to *Mort-Homme* in the Jardin des Tuileries and tried to sleep. I couldn't. My mind was reliving that incredible day. I thought about the wondrous joy of the Parisians, about Diot and my other wounded crewmen, about the linen shop, and the dead German officer.

But most of all I thought about Paris—beautiful, wonderful Paris! How we had cherished the dream that we might someday be the ones to liberate it! For four years that dream had been our constant companion—across the deserts of North Africa, on the heaths of England, and among the hedgerows of Normandy. But we had never dared to believe that it could actually come true.

Now, late in the Paris night, I realized that it was no longer a dream. The dream had become truth, and the truth was far more thrilling and deeply satisfying than I had ever imagined.

Photo courtesy of René Champion

ABOVE: In 1994, on the 50th anniversary of the battle and liberation of the village of Badonviller, Rene poses with Mort-Homme III that today stands as a memorial in the town square. OPPOSITE: René, his cheek still recovering from burns received during a battle at Badonviller in November 1944, poses beside his tank shortly after the war.

René's Sherman tank Mort-Homme *was repaired after Paris but was destroyed in a battle in the village of Badonviller in the Lorraine region in November 1944. René's face was burned in that action, and he spent several months recovering before he rejoined his unit in late January or early February 1945. The tank is still there in the Badonviller town square, serving as a memorial to the Free French Forces who lost their lives in the liberation of their homeland.*

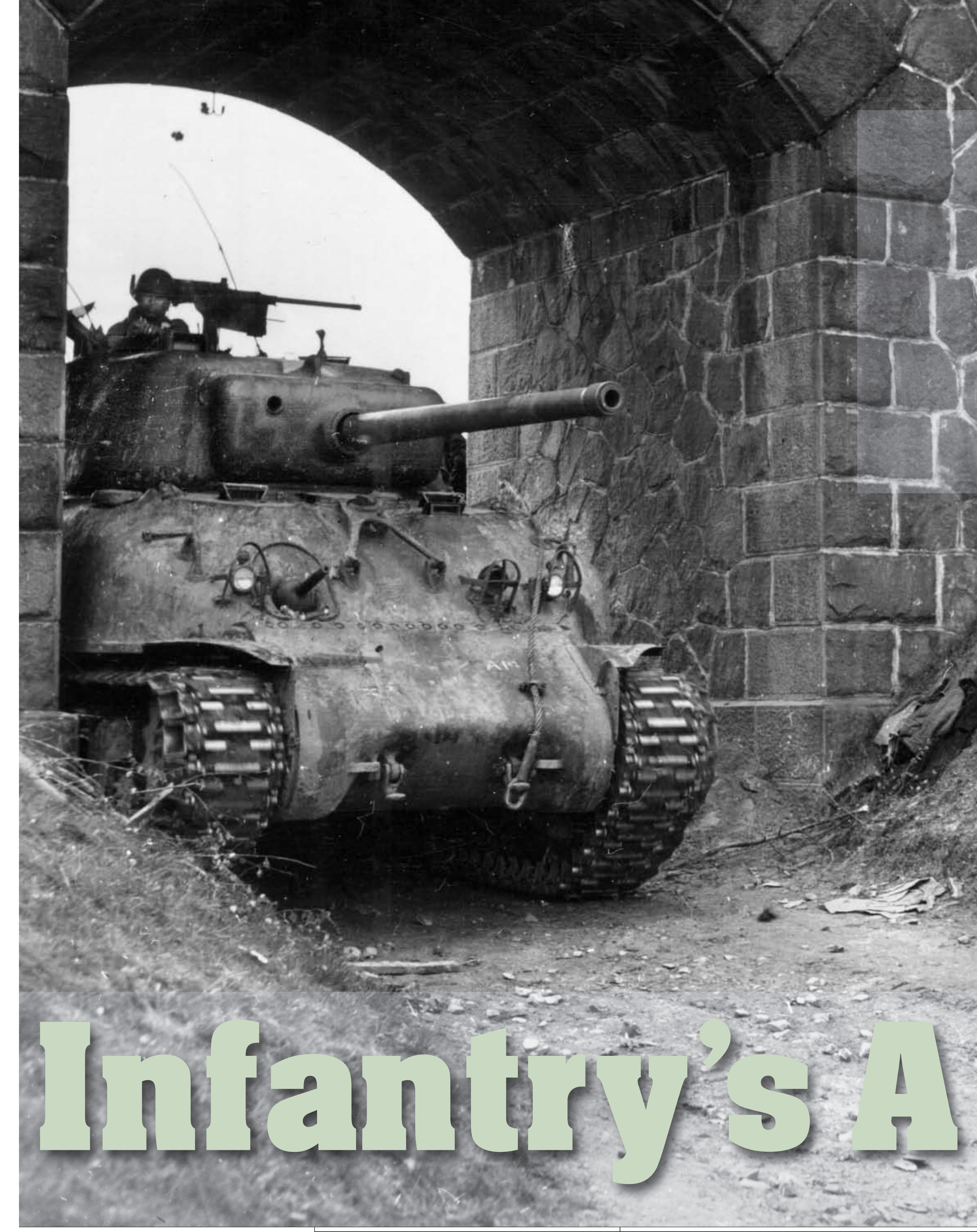
A replacement Sherman, Mort-Homme II, *was knocked out in December 1944, and the commander, René's friend Henri Jolivet, was killed. In early 1945,* Mort-Homme III, *under the command of Sergeant René Champion, was commissioned and survived the war.*

After the war ended, 3rd Company counted its losses: 30 killed and 78 wounded, including six who were wounded more than once.

Champion, too, survived. Following his return to the United States, he became a naturalized U.S. citizen on December 10, 1951, and in 1959 married Arlene Leslie Gordon. They had four children: Marc, David, Peter, and Michele. René also had two children—Peter and Michele—with his first wife, Hertha Schweinburg.

René Champion graduated magna cum laude from City College of New York and earned a Ph.D. in Anthropology from Columbia University. He spent 33 years working in the private sector as a defense analyst, manager, and executive stationed in Europe and the U.S. After moving from Belgium to the Denver area in 1973, he taught Anthropology part-time at the University of Denver and Metropolitan State University of Denver following his retirement from the Johns-Manville Corporation in 1990.

His life story is documented in an autobiography titled The Best Days of My Life: Memories of a Hobo Soldier. *In 1994, Jean René Champion received France's highest award—the Legion of Honor. He passed away on December 16, 2014, and is buried in Morrison, Colorado.* ■



Infantry's A

America's independent tank battalions accompanied the foot soldier into battle.

rmored Fist

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

The 782nd Tank Battalion spent two years training stateside as part of the U.S. Army's evolving strategy for armored units on the field of battle.

The 782nd was activated at Camp (now Fort) Campbell, Kentucky, on February 1, 1943. It was designated as the 782nd Tank Battalion (L), the "L" standing for "Light"—an organization equipped with light armored fighting vehicles. It then consisted of three companies each with 17 tanks.

The battalion, however, was redesignated as simply the 782nd Tank Battalion late in 1943. It was also equipped with the M4 Sherman medium tank and reorganized by adding an additional company of the newly produced M24 Chaffee light tanks.

The 782nd, organized as what was known as an independent tank battalion, had its genesis years before when tanks first appeared on the battlefield. During World War I there were two categories of tanks organized into battalions: heavy tanks for exploitation of a breakthrough and light tanks to accompany infantry in the attack. Grouped together into a tank corps, the organization as such did not survive the war, but the tank as an armored fighting vehicle did.

A Czech civilian with shovel (right) watches as an M4 Sherman tank of the 782nd Tank Battalion, attached to the 97th Infantry Division, moves cautiously through an underpass. The retreating Germans had blown a bridge during the U.S. Army's liberation of Cheb, Czechoslovakia, in April 1945. Attaching a tank battalion to an infantry division gave the foot soldiers the armored punch they needed.

Before World War II heavy tanks in the U.S. Army went to the infantry branch and the light tanks, called combat cars, went to the cavalry branch. As the possibility of the United States becoming involved in the war increased, American tank technology also advanced. Former heavy tanks, now obsolete, were replaced by medium tanks, such as the Grant or Sherman, while the more agile M5 Stuarts replaced the combat cars and former World War I light tanks.

At the same time two basic different tank, or armored force, structures evolved. One was the armored division consisting of a number of tank battalions which had the basic mission of exploiting the rupture of enemy lines. The other was the independent tank battalion to be attached to infantry divisions and tasked to accompany the foot soldier in battle.

The tank battalion, both the independent and in the armored division, after several evolutions, became basically structured the same way and consisted of a combination of both M4 medium and, at first M5, and then M24 light tanks. The Army deployed some 70 separate tank battalions in all theaters during WWII.

It was as the above equipped organization that the 782nd went to war as an independent tank battalion after spending months training in such places as Tennessee, Kentucky, California, and North Carolina. For example, the battalion participated in large-scale maneuvers in the Tennessee Training Area in the cold months from November 16, 1943 to January 25, 1944. It was not until Christmas Day 1944 that the 782nd reported to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, in prepara-

All Photos: National Archives

ABOVE: Sherman tanks and Patton's Third Army infantrymen advance together across the German-Czech border, April 1945. The relationship between the two forces was beneficial for both. OPPOSITE: A tankmen on an M24 Chaffee "light" tank points his .50-caliber machine gun at a building in Cheb as 97th Infantry Division troops move through the town. The Chaffee, with a 75mm main gun, began replacing the obsolete M5 Stuart tank in late 1944.

tion for shipment—but without its tanks and equipment—to France aboard the *SS Henry Gibbons*.

Landing at Le Havre in France on January 16, 1945, the troops loaded on the famous French "40 and 8" rail cars designed to carry eight horses or 40 soldiers. Upon arrival at their first designation in country, they were to draw their tanks and other vehicles.

But the battalion would encounter tragedy the following day before they ever saw their equipement or faced the enemy. The troop train taking them to Valery-en-Caux, France, had problems with its brakes coming down a six-mile grade into the town. The train crashed into the brick station at St. Valery at an estimated 60 mph killing 51 enslisted men and three officers of the 782nd. Another five officers and 29 enlisted men were injured. Other units suffered losses as well, including the 553d Ambulance Company which had 32 killed and many wounded.

Before the 782nd could continue its assignment, an influx of replacement personnel were needed to get back its authorized strength of 39 officers, three warrant officers, and 699 enlisted soldiers.

The survivors of the train disaster moved into facilities and homes in the town of Goderville near Le Havre on February 5. There the 782nd began receiving and training replacements for those men lost in the wreck as well as receiving its assigned allotment of tanks, support vehicles, and other equipment.

The rebuilding of the battalion was not something done overnight. Challenges involved assigning both tank crew members and specialists, such as turret and track mechanics. Replacing lost personnel meant having to train new unit members or retrain them as tankers if they had previously been in another branch of the Army.

Building a new effective tank crew also took time since the relationship among the members was tight in a confined space requiring good inter-personal coordination.

Trained replacements for armored units at the beginning of 1945 were not easy to come by. While some former battalion members who had recovered from injuries suffered in the train wreck returned to fill positions, it was still necessary to draw on what was becoming a greatly reduced pool of available manpower to meet required needs. Many of these meny had to be trained as well as integrated into the unit.

This activity lasted until April 7, 1945, when the battalion was ordered to an assembly area in Mechernich, Germany, before being assigned to combat.

Over the route of some 357 miles through Belgium and Aachen on the German border, another challenge presented itself. Traveling long distances by road for armored units meant extreme wear and tear on their tracked vehicles. Track pads attached to steel track section, for example, had to frequently be replaced. At the same time, the battalion's organic maintenance element had to carry a large number of extra spare parts to replace those most frequently in need of repair.

Tank battalions in armored divisions had specialized maintenance companies to provide needed track vehicle oriented services. Infantry divisions to which independent tank battalions were attached, on the other hand, had only wheeled vehicles so did not have

specialists such as track or turret mechanics.

Because the 782nd had no immediate higher maintenance support echelon to look to, it had to be vigilant with care of its vehicles. As an independent tank battalion, it also had to look outside the organization for extensive repair of more detailed and complicated vehicle components.

Mild weather and adequate road conditions favored the trek which, under other circumstances, would have been best made by railroad. Fortunately, there were minimum maintenance difficulties with the vehicles, which saved time and effort. It therefore spoke well for the battalion that in spite of the distance it arrived at its designation in good shape, ready to be committed to battle.

On arrival in the assembly area the battalion received word it would be attached to the 97th Infantry Division, which was new to the theater of operations and about to see its first action. It, like other American infantry divisions in World War II, had no tank battalions specifically assigned to it. That is, like tank-destroyer and anti-aircraft battalions, the basic infantry division force structure, according to doctrine, was to receive such units on an "as needed" basis, not to be an organic part of the division. Thus they were considered only attached to the division.

As it turned out, however, the distinction between attachment and assignment quickly became moot as those types of units were constantly needed by the division and as a result habitually worked with the same division throughout most of the war.

Still awaiting orders in Mechernich, the battalion suffered more losses before ever seeing combat. On April 12, while searching for mines, 2nd Lt. David Johnson, Sergeant Otto Schlottman Jr., and Pfc. Jesse Smith died when a soldier tripped a nearby mine which exploded, killing them. They were the only "Killed in Action" battalion personnel during the war.

On April 18, the battalion received it's orders to join the 97th Infantry Division of Patton's Third Army as it travelled across Germany to the front. Again, maintenance would be the biggest challenge as the tanks and other vehicles drove in cool weather more than 329 miles on roads, many in poor condition, across the Rhine River through Alsfeld, Fulda, Sonnenburg, Kronach, and Hof to Ober Kotzau in the vicinity of Wunsiedel on the Czech-German border.

Upon arrival, according to division standard operating procedure for the tank battalion, individual tank companies were attached to each of the infantry regiments. On April 23, while in an assembly area, "B" Company was attached to the division's 386th Infantry Regiment on a routine basis for combat operations but depended on the tank battalion for its logistic and administrative support.

The tank company then often had one of its three tank platoons attached to one of the regiment's three rifle battalions. The five tanks of the platoon would habitually operate with one of the infantry battalion's companies.

It was fortunate for the battalion that the war in Europe was fast coming to an end. There was little time to establish the needed bonding between elements of the two combatant organizations, which led to success in battle. Infantry divisions that had longstanding associations with the same independent tank battalion during combat operations took on the complexion of being an integral part of the division.

Having received its attachment orders for the 782nd's headquarters, "B" company moved on April 24 from Wunsiedel to Artzberg close to the Czech border, where it prepared to go into action with the 2nd Battalion of the 386th.

The 1st Platoon of "B" Company was attached to the rifle battalion's "E" Company with orders to attack the next day to seize the Czech city of Cheb, close to the border. Its start point was the town of Schirnding in Germany, and it was to advance through a number of small German hamlets to its objective.

The attack was successfully concluded by 10 p.m. of April 25, but not without loss. The platoon leader's tank was disabled by a Panzerfaust, the German antitank rocket, and 2nd Lt. Alexander W. Allport and Corporal John Henry went missing in action, presumed to be captured. The other three tank crew members were injured and evacuated. The tank, the only one in the war to be lost to enemy action, was later recovered and repaired.

After its action around Cheb, the 1st Platoon remained in position there until May 3, when it was dispatched south to the German town of Vohenstraus. Then on May 6, it moved with the rest of the company to the vicinity of Vseruby on the German-Czech border.

Just two days prior to "B" Company's arrival at Vseruby, the elite German 11th Panzer ("Ghost") Division had surrendered to the commander of the American 359th Infantry Regiment of the 90th Infantry Division, Colonel Raymond E. Bell (the author's father). "B" Company took part in the disarmament of the German panzer division.

While the 1st Platoon had been in action near Cheb on April 25, the company's 2nd Platoon had remained under "B" Company's control. Held in reserve, it was not until May 1 that it was attached to the 386th's 2nd Battalion at the Czech town of Rozvadov.

On May 2, having replaced the tank company's 1st Platoon, the 2nd Platoon moved out with the infantry "E" Company for an attack to seize the Czech town of Hostke. En route to the objective, the tanks encountered soft and spongy ground, which forced the tanks to stay on the road, although when not wet, the rolling terrain was considered good "tank country." The attack yielded 36 German prisoners with no losses to the Americans.

The 2nd Platoon then moved to the Czech town of Labut through which it had advanced on Hostke. It remained there until May 5 when it was attached to the infantry "B" Company of the 386th's 1st Battalion. On that day it was ordered to accompany the foot soldiers on an advance through several small Czech hamlets, liberating them as they went.

They finished the mission in the town of Damnov after encountering the same terrain conditions they had on May 2. The ground was too soft and unfavorable to support tanks, and when woods were encountered, they posed a challenge to passing through them. On May 6 the tank platoon rejoined its company headquarters at Vseruby.

While the 1st and 2nd tank platoons were engaged as described, the 3rd platoon was attached to the 1st Battalion of the 386th Infantry on April 25 in the German town of Silberbach. The platoon was further attached to Company "A" of the battalion and advanced against light resistance to liberate a number of Czech hamlets.

By 8:30 that evening the infantry and tanks had reached their objective and established a series of roadblocks in the neighborhood of Selb and Ash in Czechoslovakia. They manned the roadblocks from April 26 to 28. During the last two days in April the platoon went into an assembly area at Selb in preparation for a move to Vohenstraus in Germany.

On May 1, after arriving at Vohenstraus, the platoon was ordered back into Czechoslovakia and to the town of Neudorf where it was reattached to the 386th's 1st Battalion. The next day the 3rd Platoon rejoined the battalion's Company "A" where it was placed on the front line before the Czech town of Schoenwald.

On May 3 the infantry and tanks were ordered to liberate the town of Tachov, which they did by 5:30 p.m. The platoon was billeted there for the next couple of days.

Then, on May 5, with infantry Company "A," the platoon advanced to the Czech town of Stribo, liberating a number of hamlets en route. The weather was rainy with poor visibility but there was hardly any resistance. On May 6 it was reunited with the other platoons and tank Company "B" at Vseruby; the company then moved on to the town of Halze, where it remained until hostilities ended on May 9.

The attachment of the tank platoons down to the lowest echelon of infantry units made for a combined-arms team with the tanks and infantry mutually supporting each other. The foot soldier envied the relative comfort of the tank but preferred not being an obvious target of German anti-tank weapons. He also felt safer while accompanying tanks because of his "big brother's" heavier firepower.

The tanker, on the other hand, appreciated the infantry support because they were his eyes and ears and were able to respond to threats he could not see while "buttoned up." The tanker was also grateful to be in an enclosed environment and out of the rain, snow, and mud but fully understood the danger of being in a moving "iron coffin."

Many German panzers employed in the last years of the war were armed with the powerful 88mm gun and could make short work of an M4 Sherman. The German tanks also were heavily armored in front, which meant that to destroy or incapacitate one, the M4 had to get on the foe's flank or rear to knock it out.

ABOVE: Local partisans in captured German uniforms watch as an American Sherman tank, with townsfolk on board, rolls through Pilsen following its liberation on May 6, 1945. OPPOSITE: May 4, 1945: Czech civilians and GIs of the 90th Infantry Division's 359th Infantry Regiment gather near Vseruby in the Pilsen region to witness the formal surrender of Maj. Gen. Wend von Weitersheim, commander of the 11th Panzer ("Ghost") Division. The author's father commanded the 359th.

The 782nd suffered few battle casualties, in both men and vehicles. The final after-action report placed the battalion in the Czech Sudetenland from April 25 to May 8, where it engaged elements of the German 2nd Panzer Division and reserve German units.

It encountered mined roads, rocket-launched projectiles, automatic weapons, and infantry small arms, but lost only one tank and five men in the combat zone. It also took over 1,000 prisoners and captured a number of enemy hospitals.

Two men received the Bronze Star for Valor. Lieutenant Morris Moore from Company "A" earned it for actions involved in clearing German towns on May 2 and 3, while Sergeant Leo Horn was awarded the medal for his action in preventing the ambush of following tanks when, badly burned, he dismounted from his own tank to inform the others.

The 782nd remained in Czechoslovakia near the town of Domazlice until June 16, when it was ordered to Camp Twenty Grand in France in the vicinity of Le Havre for movement back to the United States.

It left its tanks behind and embarked on June 30 for home but with the knowledge that they were to be part of the massive task force scheduled to invade Japan later that summer. Upon arrival in the United States, the men were given a month's leave and ordered thereafter to report to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, for redeployment to the West Coast.

The move never came as the war with Japan ended and orders for movement west were cancelled. The battalion steadily lost its soldiers in the autumn and early winter of 1946. On February 25, the 782nd was inactivated at Fort Bragg.

As a unit the battalion was awarded the campaign streamer for Central Europe. Although not engaged in combat for a long time, the battalion members proved to be outstanding tankers who never failed to accomplish their assigned missions. They served with great pride. ■

A Finnish pilot at the controls of his Avro Anson FAF LeLv46 AN101 reconnaissance aircraft based at Tikkakoski, March 7, 1940, shortly before the Winter War ended in a truce. The Finns successfully blunted the Soviet invasion, thanks in large part to their air force.

DAVID VS. GOLIATH

Tiny Finland gave the mighty Soviet Union a bloody nose during the Winter War of 1939-40.

BY GLENN BARNETT

When Stalin and Hitler signed a non-aggression pact in August 1939, they secretly created spheres of influence. Besides dividing up Poland, they agreed to allow each other free reign over nations and territories they deemed important. Hitler agreed to give Stalin a free hand in the Baltic States and Finland.

This was good news for the Soviet leader. In 1918, when Finland gained its independence from Bolshevik Russia, Imperial German troops fought alongside the Finns and made the difference in the battle. This new pact meant that Germany would stay on the sidelines.

Moscow wasted no time before making proposals to Finland, in the form of demands to move their common border away from Leningrad (the Finnish border was just 20 miles from the city) and be compensated by land elsewhere. The Finns, distrustful of Russian intensions from past experience, refused, and when Finland rejected Soviet demands for territorial concessions, war was inevitable.

Hostilities began on November 30, 1939. Based on a flimsy pretext, Soviet ground forces jumped across the Finnish border in several locations without warning. Fighting commenced on the ground while Soviet medium bombers (DB-2s and DB-3s) attacked 21 cities and towns, including Helsinki, the Finnish capital, where over 100 people were killed. The small force of Finnish fighter planes took to the skies in pursuit, but the Soviet bombers, having the head start of a sneak attack, all got away.

On the second day, Finnish fighters patrolled the skies beginning at dawn and shot down several bombers; others, when attacked, dropped their bombs prematurely and ran for home. An inspection of one unlucky SB-2 revealed that the engines had armor plating but the fuel tanks in the wings did not. The Finnish pilots had found the bombers' Achilles' heel.

Starting on December 2, an epic snowstorm blew across southern Finland for several days, grounding the aircraft of both sides while, at the same time, setting up the

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snow and icy conditions that would make the ground war favorable for the defenders. The airfields on both sides remained "socked in" until the 18th.

By the 20th, skies were clear but the temperatures were below freezing. After thawing out their frozen motors, Soviet bombers took to the sky, targeting rail lines, depots, and towns. The Finnish fighters rose again to meet them. The enemy bombers concentrated on the railroad tracks and bombed them thousands of times, but they often missed—and when hit, the tracks were quickly repaired. The Finns could fix most bomb damage in a matter of hours.

On paper, the war seemed to be a one-sided affair. The Soviets had more men in their army (five million) than Finland's entire population (3.7 million). In the air, the odds were even more lopsided.

The Soviet Air Force, *Voyenno-Vozdushnye Sily* (VVS), could call upon 2,500 (or more) aircraft of all types, while the Finns had only 114 operational warplanes. Further, a few Russian pilots had combat experience in the Spanish Civil War and the short war with Japan on the Mongolian/Manchurian border. The Soviets quietly began moving 700 fighters and 800 medium bombers to the Finnish border.

Finland could only respond with 41 Fokker C.Vs and C.Xs, both designed from 1918 to 1924. These fixed-undercarriage, two-seater, open-cockpit biplanes were called "Frans-Kalle." During the war, the C.Vs flew 151 reconnaissance and harassment-bombing sorties without losing a plane. The more active C.X planes would suffer eight losses.

The heart of the Finnish fighter force was the 46 modern, fixed-landing-gear Fokker D.XXIs with fabric-covered fuselages. Most of these Dutch monoplanes were license-built in Finland. They came with an enclosed cockpit of plexiglass (a blessing in the harsh winter weather) and four 7.92mm machine guns. Altogether, these few planes would fly 5,963 sorties in the 15-week Winter War.

Finland also had 14 Bristol Bulldogs, two of which had been donated by Sweden. These antiquated biplanes with open cockpits first flew in 1927. Such was the desperation of the Finns that the Bulldogs were tasked as front-line fighters. Although they accounted for only a few victories, the Bulldogs caused distracted Soviet reconnaissance planes to abort their missions and harassed bombers, causing some to drop their bombs harmlessly into the snow.

Alamy

ABOVE: A Soviet navigator checks his settings on a Tupolev night bomber. At the beginning of the Winter War, the Soviet Air Force had 2,500 planes; the Finns only 114. BELOW: A Finnish pilot prepares to take off on a frigid day in his French-built Morane-Saulnier MS406 C-1 fighter, one of the fastest (250 mph) and most modern in Finland's arsenal.

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The Finns also had 18 modern, license-built Bristol Blenheims. These were twin-engine medium bombers that the Finns nicknamed "Tin Henry." Bristol Blenheims were assigned to the HLeLv 44 Bomber Squadron and would fly 423 missions during the war.

Finally, there were 15 Blackburn Ripons. Developed by the British and license-built in Finland, the Ripon, an open-cockpit biplane, was designed to be a torpedo bomber. First flown in 1926, it was woefully slow by 1939 and would serve only as a nighttime reconnaissance plane.

The leading Finnish fighter squadron was HLeLv 24, led by Major Gustaf "Eka" Magnusson, who was a masterful organizer and tactician and is considered to be the "Grand Old Man" of Finnish fighter aviation. He had visited air bases across Germany and France and was knowledgeable about modern designs and tactics. He rehearsed his pilots relentlessly in peacetime and focused on marksmanship and the importance of maintenance in order to be prepared for the war to come.

The skill of Magnusson's Squadron 24 was always the highest, and his pilots would score a 16-to-1 kill ratio by the end of the war. On December 19, 1939, when Magnusson's pilots destroyed 12 Soviet bombers, one pilot remarked, "Everything went exactly like training."

During the Winter War, Great Britain donated and sold 30 outdated Gloster Gladiators—enclosed-cockpit biplane fighters—to Finland to augment their Fokkers. One Finnish squadron leader would say that the Gladiators were "too slow, lacked firepower, possessed no firewall or armor, and tended to burn easily." Nevertheless, they were pressed into service when they began arriving in January and February of 1940.

From Italy, 33 Fiat G.50 fighters also arrived in February 1940. Like all open-cockpit planes, these were not popular with the pilots but, lacking anything better, were assigned to fighter squadron HLeLv 26. They arrived in the midst of the final Soviet offensive, and their airfields were bombed and strafed, limiting their time in the air.

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Buildings in the Finnish capital Helsinki burn after one of eight Soviet bombings during the Winter War that killed 97 civilians. The U.S. protested, but was rebuffed by the Soviets.

Other planes in Finland's arsenal were six Caudron C.714s from France (out of an order of 80). They were found to be unsuitable for combat (even in France) and grounded. Of greater use were 30 Morane-Saulnier M.S.406s, a gift from France. The first of these arrived in February 1940 and were assigned to Fighter Squadron HLeLv 28.

The Moranes and Fiats first arrived crated in Sweden, where they were assembled and flown on to Finland. The Moranes flew 259 operational sorties and downed 16 Soviet aircraft before the war ended, while the Fiats, rushed into service with Squadron HLeLv 26, downed 11 more against the loss of a single plane in combat.

The United States would contribute to the cause by selling the Finns 44 Brewster B-239s (similar to the "Buffalo" variant, which was so helpless at Midway and in Malaya against the Japanese Zero). After assembly in Sweden, they would not arrive in Finland until after the war was over, but in time for the "Continuation War," where they gave great service. There were also a dozen British Hawker Hurricanes, 10 of which arrived before the end of hostilities.

The frantic buying spree led to logistical nightmares. The new aircraft had been built from American, British, Czech, Dutch, French, Italian, Soviet, and Swedish designs requiring different tooling, maintenance schedules, and spare parts.

All of the newly purchased or gifted planes arrived too late to affect the outcome of the Winter War, but the Finns had a larger air force at the end of the conflict than they started with. All of these planes would be put to use from 1941 through 1944, when the Finns temporarily regained their lost territories.

During the Winter War, the Finns scattered their air resources around the country to prevent large losses to Soviet bombers. One favorite location was on the many frozen lakes during that winter of 1939-40. Planes were quickly hauled into the woods for concealment, anti-shrapnel walls were built to protect the parked planes, and

Both: SA-kuva

cheap decoys gave the enemy paper and cardboard targets to bomb and shoot at.

A curious legacy followed the Finnish Air Force (FAF) from its inception in 1918 until 1945: The emblem displayed on its planes was a blue swastika. Its use originated during World War I and was unrelated to the Nazi symbol, but it would later cause confusion and distrust among the World War II allies.

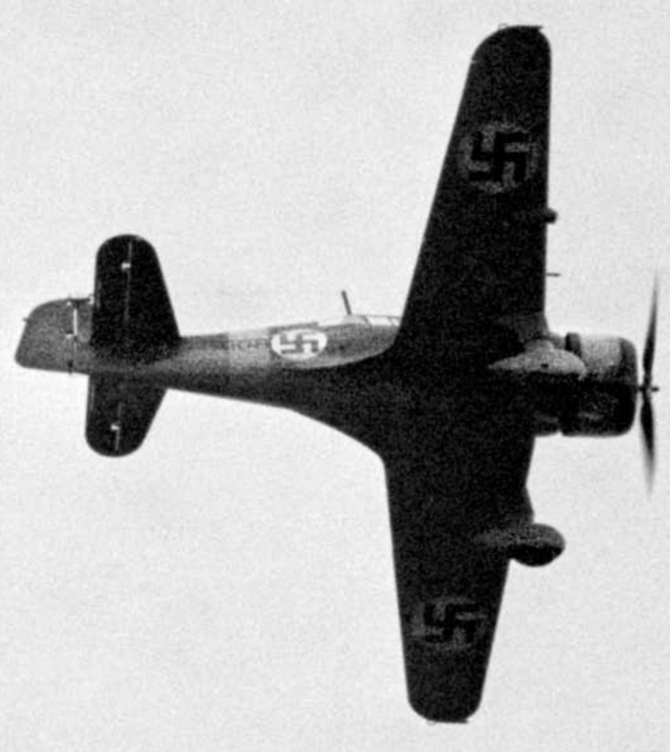
Before the war, Finnish defense spending was slight and mostly went to the Army and Navy. The Air Force had to adapt to operating under miserable conditions given the cold and freezing weather; ice and snow of the tundra; and vast, wind-swept plains of the high Arctic. Unable to build permanent buildings or hangars due to a lack of funds, the Air Force fabricated portable shelters and at least some limited heating for aircraft maintenance.

A little-discussed advantage that the Finnish pilots had over Russian fighter pilots was the use of radio. The Finns relied on voice communications with one another in flight. In this way, planes could be vectored together in attack or retreat. The available Russian-made radios were too large and bulky for installation on existing fighters, so they flew without them—slowing their reactions in combat.

Soviet planes in the Winter War included the I-15 "Seagull," an open-cockpit biplane with fixed landing gear, which had served in Spain and Manchuria with success but was becoming increasingly outdated. It would be augmented by the improved I-153 with a retractable undercarriage. The Winter War was the last aerial conflict in which both sides relied heavily on biplanes.

The more-advanced Soviet I-16 "Donkey" (or "Flying Squirrel" to the Finns) was a stubby, underwing monoplane—also with an open cockpit—which was unsuited to the sub-zero temperatures of Finland that had to be endured by both sides. Designed to emulate racing planes of the 1930s but loaded down with weapons, the Donkey was only marginally faster but less maneuverable than the Fokker D.XXI. When used in large num-

ABOVE: The Finns had help from volunteer Swedish airmen. Here, two Swedes, clad in heavy flight gear, stand beside a British-built Gloster Gladiator. The wide variety of aircraft from different nations caused supply and maintenance problems for the Finns. BELOW: This Russian Polikarpov R-5 light bomber was shot down near the Suistamo airfield. Although badly outnumbered, the Finnish pilots showed great skill and determination against their Soviet foes.



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A Fokker D.XXI of the Finnish Air Force with a blue swastika painted on the fuselage flies overhead. The symbol had nothing to do with Nazi Germany, and dates to 1918.

bers in February of 1940, however, the Finns could do little against them.

In the bomber role, the Soviets had the Tupolev-built DB-2 and Ilyushin DB-3—twin-engine medium bombers that flew unescorted for the first month of the war, leading to heavy losses. During the Spanish Civil War, they could outrun most of the contemporary fighter planes; in Finland, the Fokker D.XXI, with a maximum speed of 286 m.p.h., was just fast enough to intercept them. In one instance a Finnish Fokker chased a DB-3 for 250 miles before catching it and shooting it down.

The DB-2 could deliver 1,100 lbs. of bombs and had a range of 435 miles, but the DB-3 could carry more while flying faster and farther. Both bombers' dorsal gunners, compelled to wear bulky winter clothing, had a difficult time wielding their 7.62mm machine guns.

The Tupolev TB-3 was an antiquated four-engine heavy bomber, already withdrawn from frontline service but still used in the Winter War. At least one of these was shot down on March 10, just before the end of the war.

The Soviet efforts on both the ground and in the air were impeded by Stalin's purges of the military in the late 1930s; three-fourths of the ranking officers of the VVS were either executed or exiled. Many of the most experienced pilots also fell victim to Stalin's paranoia. Their replacements were timid and feared decision-making, deferring to the political officer assigned to them by Stalin.

This would be evident in the battle tactics used in the air as well as on the ground. Since the Great War, the fighter planes of most nations flew in a "V" formation, with a lead pilot in front and two others following closely behind on either side. Emphasis was on keeping a tight formation, which meant that the trailing planes had constantly to watch out not to collide with one another instead of searching the sky for the enemy.

In Spain, the Germans developed a new and more aggressive formation called the "finger four." This was a flight of four fighters resembling a hand without the thumb, the leader being the middle finger, flanked by two following planes—the ring and index finger— with the fourth plane slightly behind in the little-finger position. It allowed the two pairs of planes to either fight independently or attack as one unit. This formation is still used today in the "missing man" display.

The Finns also adopted this formation as it was more aggressive and less defensive than the "V" arrangement. It was one reason for Finnish success in the air. In the RAF, it was also adopted, but not until after the Battle of Britain. The Soviets had learned about this formation in Spain, but Stalin's purges interrupted its adoption by the VVS.

The Finnish fighter pilots attacked their VVS enemy with enthusiasm wherever they found him. One effective tactic was to locate flights of undefended bombers and strike from behind, aiming at the vulnerable fuel tanks. In taking on the speedy little I-16s, the Finns attacked head-on, breaking up their formations and engaging in dogfights using the clouds to play a deadly game of hide-and-seek.

The training and skill of the Finnish pilots evened their chances against untrained Russian pilots even though the latter flew superior airplanes. On December 23, Finnish Fokkers destroyed six

Soviet bombers and two fighters, with only one Fokker lost. Its pilot survived to fight another day.

By the last day of 1939, Finnish pilots had shot down 54 Soviet planes for the combat loss of just one. On January 6, 1940, one Finnish pilot really showed his talent: 1st Lt. Jorma Sarvanto shot down six Russian bombers in just four minutes. In January as a whole, the Fokkers shot down 34 enemy planes. However, by the end of that month, Squadron 24 had only 28 mission-capable Fokkers left due to combat loss, accidents, and lack of spare parts.

Occasionally, when requested by ground forces, the Finnish fighter planes could gain temporary air superiority over a limited area while the men on the ground shifted positions in attack or retreat.

The frequent "low ceiling" of overhanging clouds forced attacking Russian bombers to fly at low altitudes, allowing ground-based anti-aircraft gunners to down dozens of planes. Nevertheless, the Russians could usually bomb whatever target they liked—as long as they were willing to take casualties.

The Soviets were soon bombing known airfields, forcing the Finns to shift their bases—often to frozen lakes. Their mechanics loaded their tools, spare parts, equipment, and ammunition onto trucks and followed after them. Food supplies, too, had to be rerouted, and hot food in the freezing weather was scarce.

At the improvised airstrips, the pilots initially had to sleep in the open with temperatures dipping to -40° C. If a pilot could scrounge up a tent, he had some protection from the wind but none from the cold. While pilots tried to sleep in the numbing cold, the mechanics worked all night in the open and freezing weather to keep the planes in flying condition. Sometimes their only sources of heat were blowtorches. In the morning, once engines were warmed up, pilots took off with ice still clinging to cockpit canopies until the engine heat could melt it away. Later, the pilots were assigned to frozen lakes near buildings and, with luck, even a sauna, where it was easier to keep warm when not flying.

There were other shortages, too, that limited the effectiveness of the Finnish fighters. Important items such as spare parts specifically for the type of aircraft flown, compressed air for brakes, motor oil, special lubricants for the guns, and ammunition had

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ABOVE: Prior to a mission, Finnish pilots study an aerial chart at their base at Pyhäniemi Manor, a historic home that served as the headquarters for a squadron. OPPOSITE: An ungainly, obsolescent Tupolev TB-3 four-engine heavy bomber comes to an ignominious end after crash-landing on a frozen lake and being destroyed by a grenade launcher.

to be requisitioned from hundreds of miles away over roads clogged with winter snow and ice. Even if supplies could be sent, the pilots did not know if they would be at the same airfields from day to day.

The world loves an underdog, and badly outnumbered Finland certainly fell into that category. Sympathy among Western nations was almost totally on their side against the goliath of the duplicitous Soviet Union, whom everyone distrusted. Money was raised in the West to aid Finland; much of it was forwarded to the Finnish Red Cross to aid the wounded and displaced. Volunteer fighters also flowed into Finland from several countries, including Finnish-Americans. Some of the volunteers were pilots who put their skills to good use.

Probably the nation most sympathetic to Finland was its neighbor, Sweden. Though anxious to remain neutral, Sweden still assisted Finland in many ways. Machine guns, ammunition, rifles, grenades, and mines were sent across the border. Aircraft bound for Finland were assembled in Sweden and forwarded to the Finns, freeing up their mechanics for the front. In some cases, private individuals would pay for the purchase of aircraft. And as many as 10,000 Swedish volunteers crossed the border to fight in the ground war alongside their neighbors.

One important sign of Sweden's support was Flight Regiment 19. This "Finnish fighter squadron" was made up entirely of Swedish pilots flying Swedish planes, including a dozen Gloster Gladiator fighters and five Hawker Harts—open-cockpit, two-seater biplanes used as dive bombers.

Regiment 19, commanded by Swedish Major Hugo Beckhammar, was stationed in Lapland at Kemi on the Swedish-Finnish border. For the last half of the war, Regiment 19 kept Soviet aircraft at bay in the north while Finnish squadrons concentrated in the south. They accounted for 12 aerial victories, including a large four-engine Tupolev TB-3 bomber, while losing six of their own (four of which were due to accidents).

The Soviets, however, despite inordinate losses on the ground and in the air, did not let up. On Christmas Day they bombed 11 different locations throughout Finland. Then, in early February, winter again visited the war, dropping more snow and socking in the planes of both countries. The Soviets used the time to reorganize and revise their air tactics.

When the weather cleared, the Finnish fighter regiments were reinforced by a few more Gloster Gladiators, but the Russians now flew dozens of fighters in packs to find and destroy the Finns in the air. A Finnish flight of a dozen planes might be met with 100 I-15s and I-16s in a fight to the death. The Soviet bombers, meanwhile, had received additional armor plating to protect the fuel tanks and other vital spots.

On February 28, a flight of 34 Soviet fighters jumped 15 Fokkers and Gladiators as they were taking off. The 20-minute dogfight resulted in the loss of one Fokker and five Gladiators. It was the first—and only—Soviet aerial victory over the Finns.

The Finns avoided the Soviet fighter planes whenever they could, carrying out radio-guided "swarm" raids against formations of bombers and disappearing in the clouds and dispersing to different airfields before the I-15s and I-16s could arrive.

On the 4th of March, a battalion of Russian troops and their equipment—trucks, guns, and horse-drawn supply wagons—began a march across the frozen ice in the Baltic Sea to outflank Finnish defenders. Squadron 24 was ordered to strafe the column of men, horses and machines. Fifteen planes joined in the attack, guided by radio, using their machine guns to mow down men and destroy machines. The Russians retreated, leaving behind a considerable number of dead men, horses, and burning equipment on the ice.

For the remainder of the short war, the fighter planes were called upon to strafe the Russian troops that, by this time, were threatening to overrun Viipuri (Viborg), the most strategic city in southeastern Finland and a stated goal of the invaders. It was dangerous work as the low-flying Finns were at the mercy of packs of Russian fighters that sought to protect the ground troops from above.

The strafing attacks consisted of a single

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GUADALCANAL: ENDING WITH A WHIMPER

Instead of an all-out fight to the death, the Japanese cleverly fooled American forces by secretly evacuating the island in early 1943.

BY JOHN J. DOMAGALSKI

Admiral Ernest J. King wanted the battle for Guadalcanal to be over. There were additional objectives for the United States to pursue in the South Pacific and by the middle of January 1943 he was becoming impatient. Two months had passed since the United States defeated the Japanese in the dramatic Naval Battle of Guadalcanal breaking a stalemate in the Solomon Islands. Although American forces were now slowly gaining control of the embattled island, there was no sign the enemy was about to give up the fight.

King, the irascible American Chief of Naval Operations, sent a terse note to his subordinate commanders in the Pacific. "It now appears that campaign continues in current status of delay, linger, and wait," King wrote in frustration. The end of the battle seemed nowhere in sight.

Struggle for the "Canal"

The long and perilous Guadalcanal Campaign began with the landing of American Marines on the island on August 7, 1942. The landing was the first large-scale American amphibious operation of the war and the initial offensive move in the Pacific following the great carrier victory at Midway. The invasion was designed to halt the Japanese advance in the South Pacific towards Australia.

Naval artist John Hamilton depicted the night action on November 13, 1942, when eight U.S. destroyers and five cruisers engaged in an all-out slugfest against two Japanese battleships and 12 destroyers in "the Slot," between Guadalcanal and Florida Island. The action lasted only 20 minutes but ended in a victory for the U.S. Navy. During the six-month-long campaign, the two combatants lost over 60 ships and more than 1,200 aircraft.

The Americans were dealt a stinging and costly setback on August 9, just two days after the landing, when a force of Japanese warships launched a surprise night attack on U.S. shipping near the landing zone. Four Allied heavy cruisers were sunk in what became known as the "Battle of Savo Island."

The overall operation, however, continued with the campaign evolving into a bitter struggle. The southern portion of the Solomon Islands were engulfed in a series of land, sea, and air battles as both sides moved additional troops onto Guadalcanal.

The Imperial Japanese Navy initially brought reinforcements to the island using convoys of transport ships. Rival naval units clashed regularly in Iron Bottom Sound, a narrow body of water between Guadalcanal and the nearby islands of Tulagi and Savo, as American patrols attempted to thwart Japanese supply operations.

The Japanese later shifted tactics to moving soldiers and supplies under the cover of darkness using fast destroyers operating from bases further north. The warships had to transverse a narrow body of water in the Central Solomons, flanked by islands on both sides, known as the "Slot." The Americans dubbed the nightly supply runs the "Tokyo Express."

The critical turning point of the campaign came in November 1942. The battle was virtually stalemated on land. Repeated Japanese attacks were unable to take control of the single crucial airbase

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ABOVE: After coming ashore on August 7, 1942, U.S. Marines take a brief rest before continuing inland. Armed with WWI-era 1903 Springfield bolt-action rifles, the men had a tough assignment: evict the 30,000 Japanese who had occupied the hot, steamy island. Note that they have yet to be issued the cloth camouflage helmet covers that were a distinctive part of the Marines' uniform in coming months. OPPOSITE: Ships explode during a heavy exchange of gunfire at the Battle of Tassafaronga, November 30, 1942. The U.S. Navy was successful at interdicting Japan's attempts to resupply her troops on Guadalcanal, thus forcing the evacuation.

on Guadalcanal—Henderson Field—and American forces were not able to dislodge the enemy from the island. The newly appointed American naval commander for the South Pacific area, Admiral William F. "Bull" Halsey, was ready for a fight.

A Japanese plan to reinforce their garrison with an entire division of soldiers, loaded into 11 transports, included support and cover from the Combined Imperial Fleet. The large operation relied on heavy naval units to disable Henderson Field with a strong bombardment to help pave the way for the safe arrival of the transports.

A series of fierce naval and air battles followed spanning November 12-15, 1942, in what collectively became known as the "Naval Battle of Guadalcanal." The Japanese Navy suffered heavy losses in two furious night battles.

The Japanese transports fared even worse, with only four of the vessels arriving to the shores of the island. These came under withering air attacks after beaching. Just a token of enemy soldiers, estimated to be about 2,000 in number, made it ashore from the burning transports. The Japanese hope for breaking the stalemated campaign in their favor ended with the failed operation. An American convoy safely delivered reinforcements during the same timeframe.

The momentum in the campaign clearly favored the United States as 1942 entered its final month. American naval and air forces generally controlled the sea and air around Guadalcanal, especially during the daytime hours. The Japanese attempts to resupply their garrison via the Tokyo Express continued, although on a much smaller scale than during the previous months. Some of the supply runs were disrupted by American surface ships, such as during the Battle of Tassafaronga on November 30, and by PT boats in early December.

The Japanese effort soon expanded to using submarines, but the enemy quickly found the undersea boats carried an inadequate amount of supplies to make much of a difference. The use of the submarines was reduced after one was sunk off the northwestern end of Guadalcanal by PT boats during a night ambush in early December.

American naval intelligence staffers at Pearl Harbor completed an assessment of the Guadalcanal situation on December 7, 1942. "As there are insufficient enemy troops there to drive out the Marines, the enemy must (1) be reinforced heavily, (2) surrender, (3) starve," the report concluded. "The latter seems probable as long as we retain local command of the sea."

The analysts also cautioned additional enemy offensive moves against Guadalcanal were still possible. American field commanders were aware that surrender was outside of the

likely realm of Japanese thinking. The enemy still maintained strong naval and air forces in the region and had been aggressive during past operations around Guadalcanal.

Additionally, the construction of new airfields on Japanese-held islands less than 200 miles north of Guadalcanal—especially at Munda on the island of New Georgia—gave credence to the possibility of more attacks in the near future.

The beginning of 1943 brought no change in the American position. Various intelligence reports in January cited increased activity around the large Japanese naval and air base at Rabaul on the island of New Britain, movements of various naval units in the region, and the completion of a new air base at Munda—all suggesting an enemy offensive operation was near.

One report from the Office of Naval Intelligence issued late in the month ominously warned "various indications lead to conclusions that period of considerable consolidation and re-alignment completed and that pre-operational phase is now in progress."

It appeared another big naval battle was in the making during late January 1943. Such was the concern that a cautious Admiral Halsey put five naval task forces to sea during the last days of the month in an effort to ensure the safe arrival of a convoy of U.S. Army reinforcements to Guadalcanal.

No sea battle took place and the troops were delivered without incident. The heavy cruiser *Chicago*, however, was sunk by Japanese planes south of Guadalcanal near Rennell Island on January 30, 1943.

Change of Strategy

The loss of the big November sea battle, and the subsequent reduction of supply deliveries to a trickle, had grave consequences for the Japanese soldiers on Guadalcanal. Large numbers were starving, weak, and wracked by a variety of tropical diseases such as malaria. Medical supplies were nearly exhausted. Many of the approximately 25,000 troops on the island were unfit for fighting.

At the same time, the Americans were able to deliver more fresh troops, relieving the weary Marines who had been fighting for months. The number of American soldiers on Guadalcanal eventually topped 40,000 by early January 1943.

While American intelligence officials were trying to assess enemy intentions, the Japanese were making a major shift in strategy. Scores of Japanese ships and planes had been destroyed in the effort to resupply Guadalcanal—the staggering losses were occurring at an unsustainable rate.

There were growing doubts in the highest level of the Japanese military leadership that the effort could be continued. Many leading Japanese officers were now calling Guadalcanal the "Island of Death." Officers dispatched on fact-finding missions brought back the sobering realities of how bad the situation was on the ground.

War gaming by generals and admirals failed to produce a scenario where the Japanese could win the campaign owing to the stubborn Americans maintaining local control of the air.

After a series of squabbles between Japanese Army leaders, who wanted to stay and fight, and top IJN commanders who favored a withdrawal, the services united in agreement against continuing the Guadalcanal struggle. A higher priority was placed on New Guinea, where forces under American General Douglas MacArthur were advancing on the western side of the island.

The move was approved by Japanese Emperor Hirohito on the last day of December 1942 and made official less than a week later. Planning now shifted to how to remove the soldiers still on the island.

The evacuation mission assumed the name Operation KE, and a detailed plan was finalized in early January. The remaining soldiers on Guadalcanal were to be

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ABOVE: Sailors aboard the cruiser USS *Wichita* work to make ready a paravane, an anti-mine device, as other cruisers of Task Force 18 sail toward Rennell Island. The USS *Chicago*, center right, was sunk by Japanese warplanes on January 30, 1943, the day after this photo was taken. OPPOSITE: An aerial reconnaissance photo shows Japanese transports and destroyers in Shortland Harbor, Bougainville, on October 9, 1942. The Japanese would evacuate many of their men from this anchorage the following February.

taken off in a series of three Tokyo Express runs during the first part of February, with the voyages emanating from Shortland Harbor off the southern tip of Bougainville; 22 destroyers were assigned to the operation.

Additional sea support, in the form of the heavy cruisers *Chokai* and *Kumano* and the light cruiser *Sendai*, was on standby at New Ireland should more firepower become necessary. Air units were built up in anticipation of the need to establish local air control during the evacuation missions and to neutralize Henderson Field.

The Japanese had indeed been planning another offensive in the Solomons right up until the reversal of strategy. As a result, deception was a critical component of Operation KE. Combined Fleet Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto made sure there were plenty of happenings to keep American intelligence off balance and hide the true nature of the operation.

Distractions were staged in areas both east and west of the Solomon Islands in the weeks leading up to the start of the operation. An air unit was dispatched to the Marshall Islands, more than 1,000 miles to the northeast, to make it look as if forces were assembling in large numbers. A submarine was sent to bombard Canton Island, almost straight east of Guadalcanal, while the heavy cruiser *Tone* acted as if she were a larger task force. Japanese planes bombed Darwin, Australia, and radio traffic to the west was increased.

The center of the deception was the movement of heavy fleet units from Truk. A strong force built around two aircraft carriers, two battleships, and four heavy cruisers moved south from the central Pacific base to cruise the waters northeast of the Solomons; American intelligence detected the move within 48 hours. The Japanese carried out similar movements prior to each of the pervious large Guadalcanal offensives.

Japanese signalers changed their ciphers in early January, making it difficult for American intelligence officials to read coded messages in detail. American commanders in the South Pacific had no clear picture of Japanese intentions in early 1943 and were forced to rely on small pieces of intelligence information in making their assumptions. The result, as we have seen, was the belief the Japanese were embarking on another major offensive. The true plan of evacuation was cleverly masked.

Operation KE

The first phase of Operation KE began when a contingent of Japanese destroyers delivered 750 troops near Cape Esperance on the northwestern tip of Guadalcanal on January 14, 1943. The fresh soldiers, under the command of Lt. Col. Kumao Imoto, were to act as a rear guard during the upcoming operation. A temporary base was also set up on the nearby Russell Islands to be used if needed.

Imoto began his journey on foot to the Japanese field headquarters on the morning of January 15. He was to hand deliver the evacuation order to the local commander but was appalled by what he saw. The eastbound trail was littered with sick and dying soldiers, many desperately appealing for food and water. Dead bodies lay unburied at various points adding to the ghastly scene.

The evacuation directive came as a shock to the local army commanders on the island. Imoto quickly silenced the expected objections by proclaiming the orders came directly from Imperial Headquarters with the endorsement of the Emperor. The exhausted Japanese troops, already under pressure from advancing American forces, were to begin a retreat west in preparation for evacuation.

Reconnaissance planes kept a careful watch on American naval activities around Guadalcanal as the final preparations were made for the first evacuation run. Potential threats were attacked by air resulting in the Battle of Rennell Island on January 29-30, where *Chicago* was lost, and the sinking of the destroyer *DeHaven* on February 1. The latter was returning from escorting a small convoy of landing craft to the southwest coast of Guadalcanal. She had been mistakenly reported as a cruiser by a Japanese pilot.

American intelligence officials assumed the actions supported their assertion of a pending Japanese offensive. A fresh warning put the timing of the operation at February 3 or 4. The increased shipping activity at Shortland, reported by reconnaissance aircraft, created an additional cause for alarm.

Stung by the loss of two warships in the span of only a few days, Admiral Halsey decided not to deploy his heavy naval units just yet, but rather wait and see what developed. His larger task forces moved south and would not be in position to make a return trip north on short notice. Only aircraft and local naval forces around Guadalcanal were available to interfere with the Japanese plans.

First Evacuation Run

The anchorage at Shortland was a full of activity on during the morning of February 1. The first evacuation voyage began at 11:30 a.m. when 20 destroyers weighed anchor; a morning attack on the harbor area by a small group of B-17 bombers did not hinder the operation. The ships moved out forming two columns as they eased into the Slot with speed gradually increasing to 28 knots.

The warships were organized into two groups for separate pick-ups on the western part of Guadalcanal at Cape Esperance and Kamimbo. Each destroyer was designated as either an escort or transport. The former served as sentries to provide protection, while each of the latter towed a daihatsu (large landing craft) that was loaded with an assortment of smaller boats.

Rear Admiral Shintaro Hashimoto, an experienced destroyer commander, was in command of the flotilla. A second Japanese flag officer, Rear Adm. Koyanagi, served under Hashimoto as leader of the transport group. Hashimoto selected the destroyer Makinami as his flagship. The vessel led the entire procession.

Japanese planners made every effort to ensure the safe travel of the convoy. Additional protection came from the air with a flight of Zero fighters arriving to serve as an escort as the destroyer force steamed south through the Slot. A group of seaplanes appeared a short time later to scour the nearby waters for submarines.

It did not take long for the Tokyo Express to be spotted. Early sighting reports flowed into Guadalcanal from coastwatchers on the islands of Choiseul and Vella Lavella. Japanese lookouts spotted a distant American plane in the Slot—thought to be a B-24 bomber—at about 3:15 p.m. Radio operators then listened intently as the aircraft sent out a plain language contact report warning of the advancing foe.

The Americans assumed the Japanese ships to be on another Tokyo Express supply mission. Although the heavy American naval units were too far south to intercept, it did not stop the local area commanders from planning a hot reception for the visitors.

The first line of defense, an offensive mine field, was already in place near the

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ABOVE: In a desperate attempt to resupply their land-bound countrymen, Japanese sailors aboard a destroyer drop drums containing food and other supplies into the waters close to a beach on Guadalcanal. OPPOSITE: Although badly outnumbered, PT boats based at Tulagi played an important role in the effort to halt the Japanese from evacuating thier men. Here, a Navy crewman paints the symbol for a kill on his boat's bridge.

suspected landing zone. Three hundred mines were strung along the Guadalcanal coast starting at Doma Reef and proceeding west part of the way to Cape Esperance. It was the first offensive minefield laid by American ships in the Pacific War.

A destroyer force under the command of Captain Robert Briscoe was also available to help thwart the Japanese mission. The group had been operating in the area for several weeks, but was now down to three ships after the recent loss of *DeHaven*.

A group of small, fast torpedo boats—known as PT boats—based at Tulagi had been tangling with the Tokyo Express for months and would again be called into action. However, as with many previous Tokyo Express runs, the first weapon to strike was airplanes.

A group of planes from Henderson Field ventured into the Slot to hit Admiral Hashimoto's force with strong numbers in two waves starting at 6:20 p.m. The attack formation included 31 fighters and 24 bombers. There were 18 Zeros flying combat air patrol when the attackers arrived—enough to put up a stout defense. The group downed four American planes in the ensuing air battle, but were unable stop the attack.

Admiral Hashimoto's flagship *Makinami* was the only destroyer damaged in the strike. A near-miss bomb flooded engineering spaces, leaving her dead in the water. Admiral Koyanagi quickly took control of the force, radioing "I shall assume command as of now." He ordered *Fumizuki* and *Shirayuki* to stay behind with the stricken flagship as he continued on with the remaining destroyers. Hashimoto quickly transferred to *Shirayuki* and set out after the force, eventually catching up. The motionless *Makinami* was later towed back to Shortland by *Fumizuki*.

The Japanese soldiers designated for evacuation were completing an arduous journey west on foot through muddy jungles trails as the destroyers sped towards Guadalcanal. Amid confusion and lack of adequate preparation, they arrived at the debarkation points in close approximation to the estimated arrival time of the naval force only to find no ships waiting.

Admiral Koyanagi was forced to delay the pick-up time by a half an hour as a result of the air attack. He directed the screening destroyers to pull ahead to make a cautious sweep of the area as the force began its final approach to Guadalcanal. The destroyers designated for Kamimbo turned away from the main group soon afterwards to operate independently.

American PT boats were the last obstacle standing between the starving, exhausted Japanese troops and their rescue ships. The first sighting report of the enemy force arrived at the Tulagi PT base during the early afternoon of February 1 from the naval commander overseeing the Guadalcanal area. "Coastwatcher reports 20 possible dog dogs [destroyers] five miles north of Vella Lavella course east southeast…"

The ominous report was later updated to 16 destroyers just over 200 miles from Guadalcanal. The number was more destroyers than the PT sailors had encountered during any of their recent battles with the Tokyo Express.

Every operable torpedo boat was called to action. Lieutenant Hugh Robinson was serving as a staff officer at the PT base and wrote a summary report of the battle: "Shortly after dark, the 11 available boats of Motor Torpedo Boat Flotilla One got under way from Tulagi Harbor to take up stations in the Esperance-Savo area for an attack on the enemy force."

The small craft were made entirely of wood with no amor to protect crewmen. Each was armed with four torpedoes and a small assortment of light guns. The PT boats typically used the cover of darkness to stage close-range torpedo attacks against Japanese ships before relying on speed to escape.

Admiral Koyanagi knew an important key to the success of the mission was for his destroyers to slip into Iron Bottom Sound undetected. The 11 PT boats, none of which were equipped with radar, were divided into five groups and positioned at various key locations. The groups were to close for an attack once the enemy was sighted. The torpedo boats were deployed as follows:

- Two Miles Southeast of Savo Island: PT-39, Lieutenant Henry "Stilly" Taylor; PT-47, Lieutenant Robert Searles.
- Two Miles Southwest of Savo Island: PT-48, Lieutenant (JG) Lester Gamble; PT-111, Lieutenant John Clagett.
- Three Miles Northwest of Visale (Guadalcanal): PT-37, Ensign James Kelly; PT-59, Lieutenant John Searles; PT-115, Ensign Bartholomew Connolly.
- Three Miles South of Savo Island: PT-123, Ensign Ralph Richards; PT-124, Lieutenant Clark Faulkner
- Two Miles North of Doma Reef: PT-36, Lieutenant Charles Tilden; PT-109, Lieutenant Rollin Westholm

Captain Briscoe was also hoping to participate in the battle. He was certain the enemy was expecting PT boats, but believed the presence of American destroyers in the area would come as a complete surprise. He accordingly positioned his three warships west of Guadalcanal and hoped to launch an attack at the opportune time.

The night began with clear conditions allowing for good visibility. The weather would help both sides in the coming battle—aiding the PT sailors in locating the enemy destroyers, but also assisting Japanese planes to find the torpedo boats.

Two Zero floatplanes operating from Shortland were patrolling Iron Bottom Sound in support of the operation. The Japanese found seaplanes armed with small bombs to be very effective in combatting the torpedo boats, whose phosphorescent wakes were highly visible from above.

Additional Japanese planes were operating in the Guadalcanal area, with some designated to attack Henderson Field. Intermitted rain squalls developed as the night progressed, partially obscuring some visibility.

Some of the torpedo boats came under attack from the air even before they could reach their assigned patrol station. John Clagett and Lester Gamble saw the first of three flares explode over Iron Bottom Sound at about 7:30 p.m. The third illuminated Gamble's PT-48 just enough for it to be strafed by a seaplane.

"[Gamble] returned fire with his .50-caliber machine guns, but both gunners missed astern of the plane," Robinson later reported. About two hours later a large bomb suddenly exploded in the water about 200 yards from the boats. Each PT was shaken and jarred, but did not sustain any significant damage.

Clagett slowed PT-111 to idling speed

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after arriving in the assigned patrol area about two miles southwest of Savo Island; PT-48 was positioned about 200 yards off his starboard quarter. The pair became the first PTs to find the enemy warships at about 10:40 p.m. when Clagett sighted a destroyer about three miles east of Cape Esperance on a southeast heading. At almost the same time, Gamble saw two destroyers moving southwest about two miles west of Savo Island. Each skipper conned his boat to attack the target they had sighted.

Hugh Robinson continued the story in his battle report starting with the attack by PT-48. "Gamble closed to 900 yards range on the lead destroyer in column and fired his two after torpedoes. Both missed astern," he wrote. The boat unleashed her two remaining torpedoes at the same target just as the destroyer opened fire. "It is believed that the first torpedo tracks were not observed by the enemy ships. The second torpedoes were heading well and Gamble watched them run for a few seconds," Robinson explained.

The enemy's five-inch main battery guns could destroy a PT boat with one hit. A pair of salvos from one of the destroyers splashed dangerously close to Gamble's boat just after he launched the torpedoes, with one falling short and the other passing over. He made a hard right turn and increased speed while laying a smoke screen to conceal his departure. The boat captain did not see if his torpedoes hit.

Gamble was certain his boat was going to be trapped, for no sooner did he slip away from the initial target than another destroyer appeared and opened fire with large number of light weapons. Still more destroyers were in close proximity, prompting Gamble to make a sharp left turn to head for Savo Island.

He gave the order to abandon ship after nosing PT-48 up to the beach. The boat captain stood briefly next to his PT in knee-deep water watching the enemy searchlights scour the area. He knew a torrent of gunfire would quickly descend on his boat if found by a beam. Tense minutes passed, then an hour went by, but nothing happened.

John Clagett kept PT-111 on track to strike his original contact. His prey was most likely the destroyer *Kawakaze*. Bristling with four five-inch cannons and an assortment of light automatic guns, the 2,000-ton destroyer immediately opened fire.

Clagett gave the order to unleash two torpedoes when the PT closed to within 500 yards of her target. He let loose with the remaining two underwater missiles about 100 yards closer. He could not determine if any of the torpedoes hit due to the heavy volume of gunfire coming from multiple enemy warships.

The boat captain's luck ran out when PT-111 burst into flames after suffering a direct hit shortly after the last torpedoes leaped away. Clagett was thrown to the deck and sustained extensive burns to the face and arms. He managed to escape the flaming inferno by crawling over the side.

Unable to swim due to his injuries, two shipmates helped to keep him afloat while other crewmen fended off nearby sharks as the small group started a slow swim towards Savo Island. Clagett and most of his crew survived the night and were rescued the following morning. However, two sailors perished in the inferno and PT-111 was a total loss.

The three boats led by John Searles were the next group to join the action. Searles was riding in PT-59 in the company of Bartholomew Connolly in PT-115 and PT-37 under the command of James Kelly.

The group was moving through the passageway between Cape Esperance and Savo Island during the late evening hours when it was suddenly attacked by float planes. The

aircraft made a strafing run and unleashed at least one bomb, but none of the PTs was damaged.

About an hour later, the boats spotted multiple destroyers and were soon in a precarious position. “The three boats found themselves completely trapped by enemy destroyers on three sides of them with the Guadalcanal coast on the other,” said Hugh Robinson. “As many as 12 destroyers were counted encircling them at one time.” The situation had all the makings of a trap, prompting each boat captain to search for a way out.

Bartholomew Connolly in PT-115 singled out one destroyer and fired two torpedoes after closing to about 500 yards. “He is certain that both hit,” Robinson reported. “The ship slowed down abruptly and started to list.”

A second destroyer appeared close on the horizon about 2,000 yards away just as Connolly reversed course to retire. He immediately fired his two remaining torpedoes before reversing course again. The PT boat was now under intense gunfire that seemed to be coming from all directions.

Connolly cut his speed in a calculated gamble to throw off the enemy. The gamble worked. Japanese gunfire soon became inaccurate, presumably due to the gunners losing sight of the PT boat’s wake.

At about the same time an intense rain squall developed in the immediate area. Connolly saw it as an opportunity to get away from the enemy and pointed PT-115 directly towards the storm. The sudden weather change allowed him to slip away from the pressing danger. Connolly later went to Savo Island where he beached the boat on the western coastline.

The other two torpedo boats of the group were also surrounded by the enemy. John Searles in PT-59 used the same rain squall to escape the closing ring of enemy destroyers. He moved north of Savo Island and remained there until dawn. His boat was never in a position to fire torpedoes.

The remaining PT of the patrol group did not survive the trap. James Kelly fired all four torpedoes before turning PT-37 to retire. He then suffered every PT sailor’s nightmare—a direct hit to the fuel tanks. The high-octane aviation gasoline used power the engines exploded in a tremendous blast, reducing the wooden boat to splintered wreckage.

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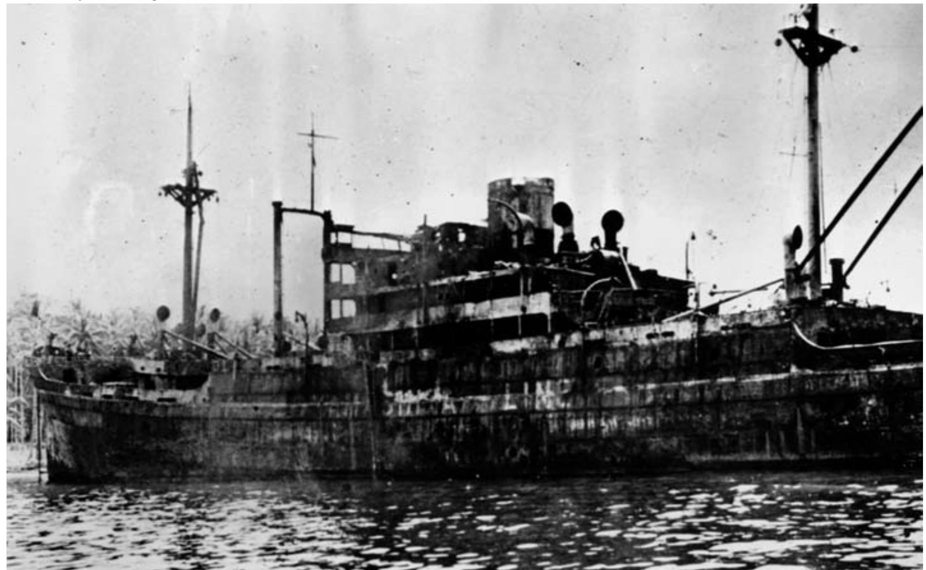

ABOVE: On November 15, 1942, Admiral Kondo orders four cargo ships to land and deposit reinforcements at Aruligo Point, near Cape Esperance. Here, the *Yamazuki Maru* lies beached and destroyed after being pummeled by naval aircraft. OPPOSITE: U.S. Navy Motor Torpedo Boat (PT) Squadron Five, photographed during training in July 1942, a month before the Marine landing on Guadalcanal.

“The brilliant, blinding flash of the explosion lit the whole sky in the vicinity of Cape Esperance,” Robinson later reported. The force of the blast blew MM1c Eldon Jester through the side of the boat. Burned and wounded, he spent about three hours in the water before a passing PT picked him up to become the sole survivor of PT-37.

The two-boat patrol under the command of Clark Faulkner in PT-124 was the last group to join the battle. Faulkner’s boat, along with Ralph Richards in PT-123, were attacked by float planes while traveling to their assigned area three miles south of Savo Island. Both PTs escaped damage.

At about 10:49 p.m. Faulkner spotted a destroyer moving through the channel between Savo and Cape Esperance. He took his boat in for an attack, firing three torpedoes at a range of 1,000 yards. “Two torpedoes hit sending up two large columns of fire,” Robinson wrote of the strike. “The ship broke into flame and continued to burn for more than three hours. It is believed that it finally sank.” Faulkner conned his boat back to Tulagi after the attack, but his accompanying boat captain did not fare as well.

PT-123 was directly behind Faulkner’s boat during the torpedo run. Richards was unaware a silent killer was lurking above as he lined up to attack a second destroyer. Before he could fire any torpedoes, a float plane silently glided in from behind. With almost precision aim it dropped a bomb that landed perfectly on the fantail of the PT. Flames sprouted at once and quickly spread across the boat, turning the craft into a burning inferno.

Richards wasted no time in ordering her abandoned, knowing the boat could not be saved from the spreading fire. Once in the water crewmen faced new danger when the plane returned to make a strafing run. The boat never exploded, but slowly settled by the stern before disappearing into the sea. Four crewmen were lost and three sailors seriously injured with a gruesome assortment of shrapnel wounds, burns, and fractures.

The two remaining patrol groups did not fire any torpedoes during the battle. The boats stayed in Iron Bottom Sound to search for survivors once daylight arrived. Robert Searles in PT-47 and Stilly Taylor in PT-39 diligently patrolled southeast of Savo Island, but never found the Japanese.

The next morning Taylor recovered three Japanese landing scows with outboard motors attached. It appeared the small boats were abandoned in haste as each contained an assortment of rifles, knapsacks, and the personal effects of Japanese soldiers. The remaining two torpedo boats, PT-36 and PT-109, were stationed further east and played no significant role in the battle.

The plan for the American destroyers to join the battle never materialized, as Briscoe's warships were unable to close on the enemy and Japanese planes held the larger vessels at bay throughout the evacuation operation.

The destroyers were northwest of Cape Esperance when aircraft first appeared on their SG radar screens. "They passed astern and broke up into three groups of at least two planes each," Briscoe reported. "One group immediately made an approach from the port quarter."

The warships increased speed and began evasive maneuvers while opening fire with main battery guns and smaller automatic weapons. "Shortly thereafter, at intervals of 10 or 15 minutes, successive approaches were made from the stern and quarters of the formation," Briscoe continued. One plane was shot down during an initial approach. "Thereafter the attacks turned off at a greater range when fire was opened. No bombs were observed to be dropped in any of these attacks."

The maneuvers and evasive tactics put the destroyers well out of position. The force was soon about 15 miles south of the Russell Islands—too far away to interfere or join the fast-developing battle. The enemy planes eventually withdrew from the immediate area staying a safe distance from the destroyers, but apparently keeping a watchful eye on the American warships.

Briscoe thought the planes were circling over the Russell Islands: "The Express had then just arrived off Esperance and an effort was made to return to an attacking position, first trying an approach in as close to the Guadalcanal shore as outlying reefs would permit."

Japanese planes immediately moved in from the starboard side to attack and were driven back by several salvoes of gunfire. The ships, however, were forced to change course to the west. Briscoe soon realized "any attempt to approach an attacking position undetected was definitely now out of the question." The planes withdrew only after it was reported the Japanese destroyers were retiring from the immediate area.

Briscoe eventually reached the Guadalcanal coast after the battle. He reported his destroyers "arrived off Esperance at daylight and assisted in picking up survivors of the PT boats, searching in the area until it appeared that all had been rescued." The ships then retired to Tulagi for fuel.

Operation KE Wrap-up

It was still unknown to the Americans, even after the first successful Japanese evacuation mission, that the enemy was leaving Guadalcanal. Advancing American ground forces moving west captured an abandoned base near Tassafaronga revealing a large radio station, machine shop, and 10 artillery pieces.

A large number of barges near Cape Esperance and the Russell Islands still gave the impression of a reinforcement operation in progress. A cautious Admiral Halsey edged his larger naval forces closer to Guadalcanal as a precaution.

Japanese airmen noted the increase in naval activity in the general vicinity of the island, but poor weather conditions and distance prevented a successful attack. A second evacuation run was ordered. Twenty Japanese destroyers departed Shortland at 11:30 a.m.

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ABOVE: The end of the Guadalcanal campaign came on February 9, 1943, when there were no more enemy troops left to fight. Here, wrecked Japanese landing barges, photographed in May 1942, lie abandoned near Cape Esperance at Guadalcanal's northern point. OPPOSITE: Japanese troops wade out to waiting boats as they evacuate the island. The Americans were unaware that the Japanese were pulling out, believing instead, that the transports were delivering more troops to Guadalcanal. During the campaign, the Japanese lost 19,000 men, half by disease and illness, while the Americans suffered 7,000 dead and 8,000 wounded.

on February 4 to run the gauntlet down the Slot bound for two pick-up points.

Twenty-nine Zero fighters were escorting the flotilla during the midafternoon when 74 American planes attacked. No warships were sunk during the ensuing battle, but two destroyers were withdrawn from the operation. The engine room of *Maikaze* flooded as a result of a bomb near-miss. She was towed back to Shortland by *Nagatsuki*. Two other destroyers suffered minor damage. Eleven American planes were lost in the operation.

The Tokyo Express arrived off Guadalcanal in clear moonless conditions. Seven Japanese bombers harassed Henderson Field, while a similar number of float planes scoured the seas around Cape Esperance for PT boats. The Japanese warships, however, were alone. Captain Briscoe's destroyers had already departed in the area.

The PT boats, mauled during the first evacuation run, did not venture out. The Japanese warships began the return voyage without incident after about two hours of loading passengers.

The discovery by an American patrol boat of about 30 abandoned barges off Cape Esperance on the morning of February 5 revealed the presence of a Tokyo Express run the night before. The finding did little to convince commanders the Japanese were leaving Guadalcanal. A flight of planes hurried up the Slot to search for the fleeing enemy, far too late for any contact.

American commanders still did not know the true nature of the enemy operation. Two Tokyo Express runs—apparently to deliver reinforcements—in the span of less than a week, coupled with aerial patrols reporting six large Japanese warships and a dozen destroyers just north of the Solomons, continued to support the notion an offensive operation was underway.

Aside from the sick and wounded Japanese soldiers who were unable to make the journey to the debarkation points, only about 2,000 men functioning as a rear guard remained on Guadalcanal.

Senior Japanese army and navy commanders for the region met on the night of February 6 to determine a course of action. Some expressed doubts over attempting a third evacuation mission amid reports of strong American naval units, including aircraft carriers, in the waters south of Guadalcanal. They decided to proceed with the operation with some added cautions.

When Rear Adm. Hashimoto departed Shortland bound for the Slot with 18 destroyers the next day, four cruisers moved into position about 550 miles north to be able to support the operation if necessary on short notice, and submarines scouted the area south of Guadalcanal on the lookout for big American warships.

American search planes quickly took notice. Bad weather partially obscured Hashimoto's force. One group of American bombers was able to attack while fighters tangled with the Zero escorts.

The destroyer *Isokaze*, a veteran of the

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CAPTURED in the Bulge

Of the thousands of GIs taken prisoner during Hitler's Ardennes Offensive, 350 of them—many of them Jewish-Americans—met a very different fate.

BY FLINT WHITLOCK

It took the HMS *Queen Elizabeth*, the world's largest passenger liner, only five days to transport 15,000 men of the 106th Infantry Division from New Jersey to Glasgow, Scotland, making port on November 17, 1944.

The troops were then carried by trains to Portsmouth, England, and shipped across a storm-tossed English Channel to France. The young American soldiers of the "Golden Lion" Division who had hoped to spend a few days in Paris, liberated from German occupation just three months earlier, were disappointed. The men were loaded like cargo into hundreds of unheated trucks and hauled eastward, crossing into Belgium on December 10.

As they drove on, these young men with fresh faces were appalled at the scenes all around them—towns and cities wrecked by shells and bombs, burned-out tanks and trucks that lined the roads, temporary cemeteries here and there—that exceeded a thousand-fold what they had seen in newsreels or newspapers. War was now not just an abstraction; it was very real, and the Golden Lions were about to be thrust into it.

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Maybe they should have been called the "Green Lions," for they had yet to hear a shot fired in anger. They had gone through basic training and advanced infantry training, and learned the way of war, but they were far from being warriors; the shouts of drill sergeants could not compare to the ground-shaking booms of artillery that would soon be coming their way.

In the middle of December 1944, the Allies held a 400-mile front—from Nijmegen, Holland, in the north to the French-Swiss border at Basel, in the south. Occupying the northern end of the front were the British and Canadian Armies of Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery's 21st Army Group, while General Omar Bradley's 12th U.S. Army Group were emplaced along the southern end.

Bundesarchiv Bild 183-1985-0104-500 / Photo: Dr. Paul Wolff

Hitler's 1944-45 winter counteroffensive caught the U.S. command totally off guard and permitted German forces to crash through American lines along the German border with Belgium, Luxembourg, and northeast France. Thousands of U.S. troops were killed or taken prisoner. Here, German armor drives through the snow-covered Hagenauer Forest in the lower Vosges Mountain, January 3, 1945. INSET: Stunned American GIs are taken prisoner and are quickly sent east to Germany.

Lieutenant General Courtney Hodges's First U.S. Army, to which the 106th Infantry Division was now attached, had the broadest sector to cover—from Aachen to the southern border of Luxembourg, a distance of 120 miles. To the north was the Ninth U.S. Army (Simpson) while to the south was the Third (Patton).

Making up Hodges's First Army were the 2nd, 4th, 8th, 28th, 29th, 30th, and 99th Infantry Divisions, plus the 2nd and 9th Armored Divisions—most of which had gained valuable combat experience over the past six months and during the grueling Hürtgen Forest campaign.

The 106th Division was inserted into the line near St. Vith, along the Belgian-German border, with the 99th Infantry Division on its left flank and the 28th on its right. Because this was a "quiet" sector where little or no enemy action was expected, the Army felt that this would be the perfect place to position the division so that the inexperienced lions could become gradually accustomed to life on the front lines.

Although he was a veteran of World War I, the 106th's commander Maj. Gen. Alan Jones had never commanded troops in combat before; he was as green as his men.

Through no fault of its own, the 106th was about as ill-prepared for combat as any division that America ever put into the field. While training at Camp Atterbury, Indiana, the 106th became a human quarry from which thousands of men were extracted and sent overseas to replenish divisions that had been hard hit in combat. It is estimated that, from the time of its activation in March 1943 until its deployment to Europe, the 106th had lost 80 percent of the men who started with it.

Once it arrived at the front, the 106th—and its the 442nd, 443rd, and 424th Infantry Regiments—had not had time to acclimate itself to its new positions. While the 2nd Infantry Division, which the 106th replaced on the line, had earlier plotted out preregistered artillery concentrations to its front, and established liaison with the 14th Mechanized Cavalry Group to its north, the 106th had yet to adequately carry out either of these two essential tasks.

The officers of the 106th may have thought that, as new arrivals at the front, they would be given time to get their feet wet before anyone expected them to do any "real" soldiering. And they may not have realized that the division, in its positions in the Schnee Eifel region of the Ardennes Forest, represented a deep penetration into Germany territory.

The Allied high command had no reason to expect a German counterattack through this hilly, heavily forested area in the dead of winter. German deception plans convinced the Allies that they were content to hold their positions and stay on the defensive until at least spring. American intelligence had not spotted the build up of panzers and infantry forces that sheltered under the tall pines a few miles to the east.

Operation Wacht-am-Rhein

On December 11, a group of German generals was ordered to Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt's headquarters at Langenheim-Ziegenberg, about 20 miles north of Frankfurt-am-Main. They were then loaded onto buses and taken to Adolf Hitler's secret underground forward headquarters at the resort city of Bad Nauheim.

Hitler himself was there, looking old and haggard. After a long-winded historical discourse, he got to the point: in four days the German army would launch the biggest offensive since Operation Barbarossa—Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union. The new operation would be code-named "Wacht-am-Rhein." His generals were aghast.

While it paled in comparison to Barbarossa, Wacht-am-Rhein still had plenty of power: three armies with 13 infantry and seven panzer divisions, plus five divisions in reserve, plus thousands of artillery pieces—a total of 290,000 men that would hit the thin American line being held by only 80,000 men on a front of 75 miles. In the direct path of the onslaught were the 99th and 106th Infantry Divisions. The date of attack, that would be known in the West as the "Battle of the Bulge," was set for the night of December 15-16.

One of the "Green Lions" trying to stay warm while on guard duty was Pfc. Peter Iosso from Newark, New Jersey, and a member of Company E, 422nd Regiment, 106th Division. "I had been out in the snow from about 6 p.m. on December 15 until about 6 a.m.

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A German scouting party, dressed in white camouflage smocks, moves through a snowy forest. Clifford Savage, 99th Infantry Division, recalled seeing Germans wearing "white bedsheets" during the attack.

The 106th Infantry Division was totally new to combat and stood no chance against the overwhelming number of Germans. Here, a unit from the 106th patrols near St. Vith, Belgium, December 1944.

Courtesy Norman Fellman

Courtesy Peter Iosso

Courtesy Gerland Daub

Courtesy William Shapiro

Four Americans taken prisoner (l. to r.): Norman Feldman, Peter Iosso, Gerald Daub, William Shapiro.

the next morning," he recalled. "My equipment and clothing were still wet, freezing at night and thawing in the daytime. Winter gear, we were told, was on the way."

Suddenly, a full barrage of German shells began saturating the front. A round exploded nearby and knocked Iosso unconscious. He awoke with a bloody chin and throbbing feet. "I managed to get to the company HQ," he said, "where somebody bandaged my chin. But the battle had begun and the aid station was getting ready to retreat."

Joe Mark, a radio-telephone operator from the Bronx, New York, was at his switchboard in an abandoned German pillbox that served as the headquarters for the 3rd Battalion, 422nd Regiment. "I was putting through calls from our artillery observer in the front to our artillery in the back," he said. "Our position held initially. We stopped them cold in front of us, but they got around us on both sides." Soon, Mark and the rest of the headquarters staff were falling back.

Mortarman James V. Smith, Company H, 423rd Regiment, learned on the morning of the 16th that the Germans had infiltrated the artillery positions of the 28th Division. He remembered, "We were supposed to go up to the front lines and chase the Germans out of the 28th's artillery positions. But we started seeing three-quarter-ton trucks passing us, heading for the rear. We could see all these dead soldiers stacked up in the trucks. That didn't cheer us up very much." Suddenly, Smith and his unit were coming under assault by pilotless V1 "buzz bombs."

To the north, the 99th Infantry Division was also being hit by the German attack. Clifford Savage, a member of the 99th, recalled that the Germans were wearing white sheets to camouflage themselves against the snow. Savage's position was soon overrun and his unit was forced to surrender after their platoon leader was shot between the eyes.

As an SS unit took Savage's unit prisoner, he said, "They searched us and we had to throw everything we had down on the ground—watches, money, everything. Then they made us take all the dead and wounded Germans back to their bunkers. We did that for maybe a couple or three hours."

By late morning on the 16th, the 14th Cavalry Group was also being pushed back, uncovering the 422nd Regiment's left flank. On the 423rd Regiment's right flank, in the village of Bleialf, a street battle resembling a Wild West shootout—only this time with using automatic weapons, armored vehicles, and artillery—took place; the seam between the American units was torn. The German breakthrough above and below the 106th's 422nd and 423rd Regiments was about to trap the division in a classic double envelopment.

St. Vith was in a panic, with civilians attempting to flee while German shells, fired from batteries in Prüm, 15 miles away, bombarded the town; German armored columns were spotted closing in. No one, least of all General Jones, seemed to know what was happening to the 106th's forward regiments.

What was happening was basically a rout; soldiers were running for their lives,

throwing their weapons away. The 106th, 99th, and 28th Infantry Divisions, squarely in the path of the German bulldozer, were crumbling.

Combat medic William Shapiro of the 28th Division recalled, "After a bombardment by the enemy stops, you know that tanks and infantry are heading toward your position. The machine-gun firings, mortar shell bursts, and 'Screaming Meemies' are all around you as you dig deeper and deeper into your foxhole. You are helpless and alone. Suddenly, I saw a very bright flash of light in front and to the right of me. There was a deafening loud explosion."

That's all Shapiro remembered; he was knocked out cold by the explosion. He woke up several hours later in the Clervaux railroad station, his ears ringing and his head feeling like it would come apart.

He said, "Major Clyde Collins said that the Jewish soldiers should throw their dog tags into the potbelly stove in the center of the room because we were surrounded by SS troops."

Shapiro complied with the order, but was puzzled. "I do not recall any thoughts about what this action meant, or even related the fact that I was Jewish and these were SS troops. I had not known of any incident in which Jewish soldiers had been shot."

Along with the rest of the men in the station, Shapiro came out with hands up. Germans were shouting "Raus! Raus!" and firing weapons into the air. After being searched by members of the 116th SS Panzer Division, the Americans were relieved of their watches, gold rings, cigarettes, and anything else of value. The prisoners were then marched to a nearby hotel and locked in for the night.

The next morning the POWs were marched farther east, scattering off the road every time motorized German vehicles roared past, heading west. "All of us remarked at the shabbiness of the German equipment when compared to American troops on the march," Shapiro recalled.

Complete Chaos

For the next several days, all was confusion and chaos in the American ranks as commanders tried to rally their troops and make a stand while higher headquarters was trying to bring in additional units to halt the German advance. Aircraft from both sides dueled in the air. A fierce snowstorm added to the mayhem.

Meanwhile, Joseph Mark and his unit had managed to escape capture for three days, but their freedom was about to come to an end. When finally surrounded by the enemy, he broke his rifle and gave up. "I thought that the war was over for me and that the worst was over," he said, "but I was wrong. The worst was coming."

The roads were packed with thousands of U.S. servicemen (some 8,000 Americans had

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ABOVE: A long line of American soldiers are about about to begin their long journey into captivity. Most of the troops were moved by rail; Allied planes sometimes unknowingly attacked trains that carried American POWs. OPPOSITE: Members of a 42nd Infantry Division machine-gun crew prepare to defend their log-and-dirt bunker in the Vosges Mountains during the Germans' Operation Nordwind, January 1945.

been taken prisoner) being marched into Germany, many of them toward Prüm, a small city on the German side of the border.

Joseph Mark recalled, "They marched us back to a town called Prüm, where a German took my galoshes, and then they searched me. I had a little tin of Bayer aspirin and one of the guards was going to shoot me because Bayer is a German company and he thought I had taken the tin off a German. A German sergeant told him that Bayer was commonly distributed, so I wasn't shot."

The POWs were taken to the Prüm railroad station and locked into boxcars that soon began rolling eastward.

William Shapiro, the 28th Division medic, was herded with his POW group on a march lasting three or four days until they came to the railroad station at Gerolstein. He recalled, "This was the first time we were guarded by soldiers holding German Shepherd dogs on leashes."

Pfc. Charles D. McMullan of the 422nd Regiment remembered, "I, along with several thousand others, were captured near St. Vith. We slept in a churchyard that night, and the next day we were walked to Gerolstein in zero [degree] weather and eight or 10 inches of snow, during which time I had my feet initially frozen." From Gerolstein, McMullan would be taken to Stalag VII-A, the first of four POW camps in which he would be interned.

As with the POWs at Prüm, the GIs at Gerolstein were packed into boxcars for a trip to a prisoner-of-war camp.

Of his rail excursion, Joseph Mark said, "The boxcars were made with square wheels that were imported from Italy. It wasn't a comfortable ride. They put 60 men in a boxcar and if you fell asleep, three or four guys piled on top of you. The toilet was in one corner of the boxcar. Not even a bucket—just the floor."

Toilet facilities were also horrendous in William Shapiro's boxcar: "Two simple boxes placed in the middle of the floor. The air was putrid and fecal-smelling and made worse by being confined in a very tight space. The stench was unbelievable. It led to arguments and fighting between the men as to when, where, and how to urinate and defecate."

The foul smell in the boxcars soon became the least of the POWs' worries as Allied pilots began bombing and strafing every train they saw traveling on German tracks; there was no way for them to know that the boxcars were filled with American GIs.

Ordeal at Bad Orb

Trains packed with prisoners soon arrived at Bad Orb, a health-resort town in the

snowy hills about 30 miles east-northeast of Frankfurt-am-Main. Here was Stalag IX-B, a POW camp that was one of the foulest in Germany, perched atop a hill that was once a children's nature camp.

After descending from the boxcars, the half-frozen POWs were marched through the town, festooned with Christmas decorations, where the civilians hissed and booed them and the children threw snowballs.

Once they made the tough climb to the hilltop camp, one 106th Division soldier recalled that during the in-processing, "Some men refused to give anything more than their names, ranks, and serial numbers. The German officer got mad and called two guards over. The guards hit the Americans with their rifle butts and made them stand outside in the snow for three or four hours. I saw this happen to 20 or 25 men." Many of those so treated came down with frostbite.

The GIs were then assigned to barracks that were pestilential at best. Each of the lice-ridden barracks held about 500 men but had no bathroom facilities and wholly inadequate stoves for heat. Some barracks even lacked bunks, so many POWs were forced to sleep on the cold, hard, concrete floors.

To keep the POWs busy, the Germans assigned them to work details, such as cutting wood in the surrounding forest. The quantity and quality of food could not keep up with the GIs' physical exertion, so the POWs began to lose weight at an alarming rate.

While POWs at most of the other German camps were treated humanely, the Geneva Convention's rules about the treatment of prisoners were blatantly ignored at Stalag IX-B.

James Smith said that at Bad Orb the kitchen was run by Russian POWs. "They served us a meal of carrots and all kinds of mixed vegetables—beets and carrots and cabbage and grass. I thought: 'That's the worst meal I've ever had.' Later on, I found out that it was the best meal I was ever offered there . . . At night we'd get a small loaf of black bread mixed with sawdust that had to be divided among eight prisoners."

During the day, before, after, and during work details, the German guards abused their prisoners verbally and physically, often beating them for small infractions of camp rules. And with basic sanitation lacking (the POWs weren't even allowed to bathe or change clothes), dysentery, diarrhea, and typhus were rampant.

The POWs did not learn for quite some time that the Battle of the Bulge in which they had been taken prisoner had turned out in the Allies' favor. After decimating the 28th, 99th, and 106th Divisions, Operation Wacht-am-Rhein fizzled out with horrendous casualties for the attackers. Germany's last major gamble had failed.

Caught in a North Wind

The Germans' second westward offensive, Operation Nordwind (North Wind), aimed at American forces further south in the Alsace-Lorraine region of France, also petered out—but not before more Americans were killed or captured. Pfc. Gerald Daub, a New Yorker and member of Company F, 397th Regiment, 100th Infantry Division, was one of those GIs taken prisoner.

Earlier in November 1944, he had been wounded in the head by a sniper, recuperated, and returned to duty. On December 31, the Germans attacked through the mountainous, heavily wooded area and the 17th SS Panzer Grenadier Division hit Daub's unit. He said, "We had no tank support at that time and were defending a crossroads. We were so vulnerable that they were able to attack us from both the front and rear."

During the battle, Daub and another soldier, Howard Hunter, wound up in a house surrounded by the enemy. Facing imminent death, Hunter suggested to Daub that they surrender. "Not me, Howard," Daub said. "I'm Jewish." A grenade thrown into the house convinced the pair to give up; they were quickly taken into custody.

A short distance away, Leon Horowitz, a member of Daub's company, was also taken prisoner. "When I was captured," he said, "one of my soldier mates advised me to throw away my dog tags, which I did. In those days, your religion was imprinted on your dog tags so that, if you were killed, they would know what kind of burial service to give you. Catholics had a 'C,' Protestants had a 'P,' and Jews had an 'H' for Hebrew. In retrospect, I'm sure the Germans would have quickly suspected that anyone who didn't have dog tags was Jewish."

'We had heard a little bit about the Nazi extermination of the Jews in Europe, but we couldn't conceive this would be carried out against American soldiers.'

Also being taken prisoner during the Nordwind counteroffensive was Norman Fellman, a New Yorker with Company B, 275th Regiment, 70th Infantry Division. Fellman said that his unit, nearly out of ammunition, had no choice but to surrender.

"We were marched to a railhead," he said. "My first encounter with a rifle butt was while going past a bridge abutment; there was an icicle hanging from it. I was dry and thirsty, so I stepped out of line and grabbed the icicle and got my first introduction to the fact that we weren't free to do what we pleased anymore."

After riding in boxcars after several days' march, Fellman recalled that his train was strafed by Allied planes and there were some casualties. After about a week's journey in the boxcars, the train finally arrived at Bad Orb. The prisoners were marched up to

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An aerial view of Stalag IX-B, located on a hilltop above the German city of Bad Orb. At this camp, 350 American soldiers—Jews and Gentiles alike—were separated from the rest of the prison population and sent further east to Berga-an-der-Elster, where they became slave laborers for the Nazis.

Stalag IX-B to join the men captured during the Bulge.

During the in-processing, prisoners were asked what religion they were. Morton Brooks, from Brooklyn and a member of 42nd Infantry Division that had been caught up in the fighting in Alsace-Lorraine, said, "I wasn't going to hide the fact that I was Jewish, so I told them." He had no idea what was in store for those who identified themselves as Jewish.

Conditions were so bad at Bad Orb that, one night, a pair of starving inmates broke into the camp's kitchen to find food. A guard tried to stop them but the two GIs attacked him with an ax. Norman Fellman recalled that the camp administration was furious about the incident and ordered all the prisoners out of their barracks to spend hours standing shoeless and coatless in the snow-covered roll-call square.

The camp commandant had machine guns set up and threatened that groups of 10 inmates would be shot unless and until the two culprits came forward. Once the two offenders were identified, the rest of the prison population was allowed back into their barracks.

Life, work, and punishment went on at Bad Orb for the next few weeks until, on January 18, 1945, the prisoners were assembled and told that all Jewish soldiers were to identify themselves.

Leon Horowitz recalled, "We didn't know what that order meant. We had heard a little bit about the Nazi extermination of the Jews in Europe, but we couldn't conceive that this would be carried out against American soldiers."

That evening, discussions in the barracks raged about whether or not the Jewish soldiers should comply. Some argued that the Germans might kill everyone if the Jews didn't come forward. Others said that the Germans would never dare harm Americans no matter what their religion was.

The inmates elected Hans Kasten to be their "Man of Confidence"—a soldier selected by the prisoners to be their spokesman or liaison with the German camp administration. Kasten and the other barracks leaders met with the commandant and were told again that all Jewish POWs must identify themselves the next morning.

When the order was given at roll call, most of the Jews stepped forward. The 80 to 100 Jewish GIs were told to gather their belongings and then were marched to a separate section of the camp—"a kind of ghetto within Stalag IX-B," recalled

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Horowitz. "We had to go out and chop down trees for firewood, most of which the Germans took for their own barracks. And we had harsher work details."

On the Move Again

The Jewish prisoners were not in their new home for very long. In early February, the commandant of Stalag IX-B received orders to ship 350 POWs by rail to a labor camp at Berga-an-der-Elster, a small town near the Czech border 125 miles east of Bad Orb.

The commandant selected the 100 Jewish prisoners as part of this shipment, along with another 250 non-Jewish POWs who had been singled out as "undesirable" or "troublemakers." Hans Kasten was part of this group.

Norman Fellman said that the Germans, in order to make the 350 quota, selected others who "looked Jewish or had Jewish-sounding names." Luckily, Leon Horowitz had fallen ill from pneumonia and was excluded from making this journey.

On February 9, the 350 selectees were marched down the hill from Stalag IX-B to the train station where a line of boxcars awaited them. Gerald Daub recalled that the conditions inside the boxcars on this trip were as bad as on their previous rail journey to Bad Orb, with a bucket in the corner their only toilet.

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In the four or five days that the trip took, the POWs had been given only a slice of bread and a drink of water at the start of the journey, and were subjected to strafing runs by Allied warplanes along the way. In each boxcar, which held from 60 to 80 men, some died, mostly by being crushed to death.

The train wound its way eastward, coming close to the Buchenwald concentration camp outside of Weimar, and on February 13 finally stopped at the small town of Berga on the Elster River.

The gaunt, weary, bleary-eyed POWs climbed down from their foul-smelling railcars and into the noise of shouting guards and barking dogs. As they were marched away from the train station, the prisoners saw a thousand terribly thin men in blue-and-gray striped uniforms staring back at them from a barbed-wire enclosure known as Berga One. These individuals had been brought from Buchenwald to work on constructing an underground factory in the mountains surrounding Berga.

Norman Fellman was haunted by the faces as he walked by. "Their eyes were the most dominating feature," he said, "just watching us in total silence. I will never forget it—the saddest eyes I've ever seen in my life."

The Americans continued marching southward out of town, toward the hamlet of Eula. The road steepened until, after about a kilometer, the group reached a small barbed-wire fence enclosing four or five wooden barracks—a hilltop camp unofficially called Berga Two. This would be their new home.

At first, the new camp seemed to be a vast improvement over their barracks at Bad Orb. Peter Iosso, one of the non-Jews selected to make the trip, said, "Triple-decker beds and bedding, new eating utensils, an outdoor sheltered latrine, a tank of water for personal hygiene and laundry, tea in the morning, a thick potato soup at noon."

But overcrowding quickly became a problem—350 men stuffed into five buildings. William Shapiro added, "None of us had the slightest clue as to what was in store for us."

The POWs were to be turned into slave laborers working in conjunction with the 1,000 inmates from Buchenwald to dig a series of mine shafts or tunnels in the Steinberg mountain on the bank of the Elster River.

None of the prisoners knew at the time why the tunnels were being dug. Some thought the tunnels were to be used as bomb-proof underground manufacturing facilities for various types of armaments. It was rumored that the Germans were building their aircraft in such in-mountain factories.

As it turned out, the 17 huge tunnels being excavated under the Steinberg were to be used as oil-shale production facilities to provide petroleum for the German war machine because most of its oil supplies were cut off by the Allies. The project at Berga was code-named "SS-Command Swallow Five." Work went on around the clock; the Buchenwald inmates would work a 12-hour shift and the American POWs would work the next 12-hour shift.

Working in Hell

On the first day the Americans were marched to the work site, Berga's "hostile residents spit on us as we walked through the town," Peter Iosso recalled. Once they got to the tunnels, the Buchenwald prisoners were just getting off work. Gerald Daub said that the gangs of political prisoners "looked like they were starving and dying, which they were. They were falling and being beaten by their own foremen to get up. Rocks were being drilled and explosions were going off, dust flying everywhere. It was my impression of Dante's Inferno, like my vision of hell—a totally hellish place."

Daub was picked to drill holes in the rock face of the tunnel. "I'm not a tremendously big guy. The drill was very big; it had a bit that was six feet long. The thing would vibrate; I could feel myself vibrating even after I was done drilling.

"We got back to the barracks and complained about it to Hans Kasten, our 'Man of Confidence,' who then complained to the commandant. We threatened that we would not go to work the next day, that we would go on strike."

Peter Iosso remembered that the strike threat did not go very far. "The next day when they came to take us to work, we refused and protested that the work violated the Geneva Conventions. The German guards entered the barracks with bayonetted rifles and rousted us out, kicking and hitting many with the butts of their rifles—the first of many occasions that they did this to make us move faster."

Daub added that the guards had vicious German Shepherds and threatened that they would turn the dogs loose if the POWs didn't get out and get to work. "So we all got out and marched off to work and really didn't give them any trouble after that," he said.

In early March, three prisoners, including the Man of Confidence Hans Kasten escaped. Because of this, the camp foreman was sacked and in his place came a brutal, sadistic World War I veteran named Erwin Metz.

Metz, 52, was a former bank clerk and a sergeant in Home Guard Battalion 621 that was in charge of the slave labor force at Berga. William Shapiro recalled that Metz "had a distinctive voice that sounded like Donald Duck." But the sergeant was no cartoon character.

"Unquestionably," Shapiro continued, "in Berga and on the 'death march' later,

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ABOVE: One of the barracks at Berga, photographed by the author in 2004. The American POWs suffered at the hands of their captors in the tunnels where they were forced to work 12 hours a day along with inmates from Buchenwald. OPPOSITE TOP: The officers and guards at Stalag IX-B in formation. Most German POW camps, while not resorts, were at least run humanely; Stalag IX-B was notorious for its harsh treatment of prisoners. OPPOSITE INSET: Sergeant Erwin Metz, the brutal overseer of the GIs at Berga. He was sentenced to death but served only a few years in prison.

2004 Author Photo

Metz's cruel, indifferent, oppressive, and deliberate actions caused the deaths of many of the POWs and added to our indescribable sufferings. We were the *Untermensch*—slaves, undesirable humans with whom he could do as he pleased without regard to any sense of humanity."

Shapiro related seeing many of the political prisoners in Berga One being lynched on Metz's orders: "I felt frightened, lost, defenseless, and intimidated. I looked away ... I did not want any of the SS troopers to notice my observation of the hangings."

Norman Fellman remembered the terrible working conditions in the tunnels: "We would drill holes in the rock walls of the tunnel with these big, pneumatic drills. We would drill 15 or 20 holes at a time. Some of our people made gunpowder 'sausages'—cloth bags filled with gunpowder—and would stuff 18 or 20 of those in the holes, and then they would run fuses to all of the holes.

"We would get out of the tunnel and they would blast. Before the dust had settled, before the noise had stopped echoing, we were forced back into the tunnels. Nobody had protective gear of any kind. You'd breathe that air, you'd breathe that [crap.]"

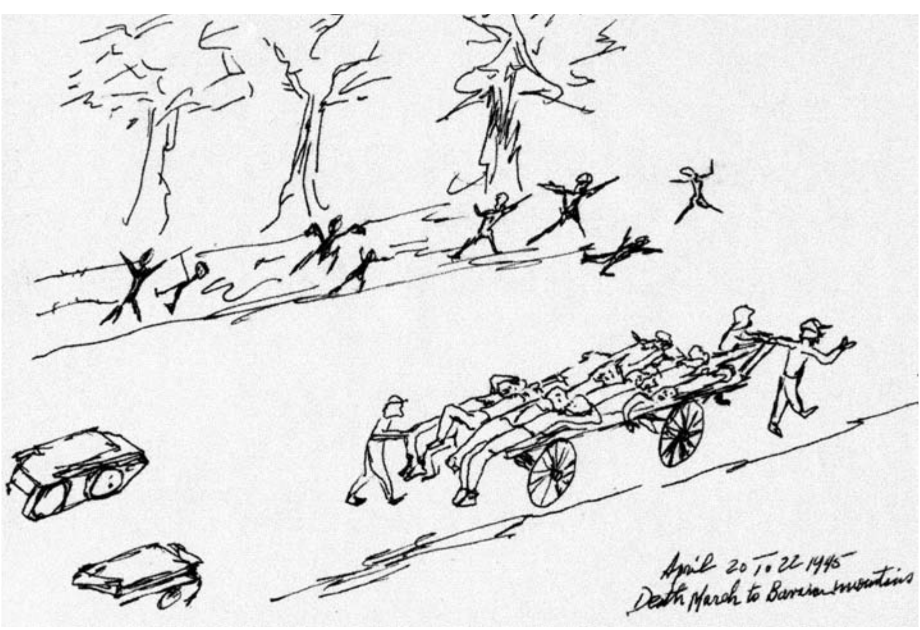
Gerald Daub recalled, "The air was just totally filled with stone dust. Everything was coated with it, including your lungs that were filled with it. And we had no bathing facilities; after a day or two we looked like cement statues walking around."

The rock blasted from the tunnels was then shoveled by the slave workers into mining cars and dumped into the Elster River.

Returning to Berga Two after a dirty, exhausting day of working in the tunnels brought no respite. "We had to stand in the cold, freezing weather for hours while the guards counted us over and over," William Shapiro said. "Finally, the rations of a bowl of rotted potato or turnip-top green soup and a slice of hard, grainy, black bread was the meager 'reward.'"

Peter Iosso remembered, "We tried to make that tiny piece of bread last as long as possible."

ABOVE: Some of the surviving members of the death march from Berga recall that they were in this barn on the outskirts of the village of Rötz in Bavaria, when they were finally liberated. BELOW: POW Tony Acevedo's sketch based on his memories of the death march shows sick POWs on a wagon, dead ones in a ditch.



Courtesy Tony Acevedo

Even the barracks brought no relief. Tony Acevedo, a Mexican-American from California, recalled, "White lice—oh, my God! I'll never forget it. I can still feel them running up my back."

Most escape attempts failed, and the escapees who were brought back were subjected to severe abuse by the guards. Sergeant Metz frequently did the beatings himself.

Joseph Mark and two other prisoners hatched an escape plan that almost worked. Slipping away from their work detail, the trio stopped at a farmhouse to steal potatoes and milk a cow. But they were captured by civilians after three days and turned over to the authorities; they were soon back in Berga.

It didn't take long for the POWs to begin dying. Causes ranged from starvation, ulcerated wounds, pneumonia, beatings, work-site accidents, suicide, and more. Medic William Shapiro said, "Impending death was all around me."

The only way the POWs could fight back was by small acts of sabotage at work.

Loading the mining gondolas incorrectly could cause them to tip over and fall into the river. Other inmates mixed dirt with the explosives, so the charges would fail to detonate properly. Of course, beatings with rifle butts and rubber hoses followed.

Beginning of the End

The POWs had had no news of how the war was progressing. The Germans might have won the Battle of the Bulge, for all they knew, and might even have won the war. But the sight of increasing overflights of Allied planes, and the sounds of bombs detonating not far away, gave them hope that perhaps the Allies were heading their way.

Norman Fellman noted, "Sometimes it would take about 45 minutes to an hour for the planes to go over because there were so many of them, and the sound always made us feel good."

Spring slowly arrived but the brutal work and punishments never ceased. Near the end of March the Americans suddenly found themselves working in a forest instead of the dust-filled tunnels. Joseph Mark said, "The change from the dark tunnels to the light of the forest was like an elixir for us, a reprieve. The sights and sounds of the trees and birds brought back memories of a more familiar and friendlier world we had known."

National Archives

Living skeletons from Berga were found by the 11th Armored Division in the barn at Rötz. Here, the emaciated GIs are being nursed back to health by their liberators, April 1945. Several of the GIs died shortly after being liberated.

On April 2, 1945, American forces reached Stalag IX-B, the mountaintop camp at Bad Orb. The POWs still there were unexpectedly left unguarded. A few German soldiers remained to try and halt the American advance but they were soon swept aside, and the liberators were shocked to find the sick, emaciated American prisoners in a state of near-starvation. Unfortunately, the generous distribution of rich food to the emaciated men killed some and brought others to the brink of death.

Over the next few days the freed POWs at Bad Orb were washed, deloused, carefully fed, and brought back to a reasonable state of health.

Unknown to the liberators, throughout Germany and the Nazi-occupied territories, the concentration camps were being emptied, the prisoners being sent under armed guard on a march to nowhere, a march to oblivion. SS boss Heinrich Himmler had ordered the camps evacuated in hopes of keeping evidence of war crimes from the advancing Allies. Those incapable of keeping up the pace were shot and their bodies either buried in ditches or left by the side of the road.

On April 3, the doors to their barracks at Berga were flung opened and the prisoners were rousted out for what they thought was just another miserable work day filled with hard labor and brutal treatment. But, after roll call, the men were marched, not toward the tunnels, but south through Bavaria, away from Berga.

Gerald Daub recalled, "We had no idea that the American Army was getting close to us until the Germans marched us out, and then we felt that we were probably marched out of camp, not to save our lives, but just to get us out of camp because the Americans were getting close. The Army entered Berga a few days after we left."

For days the march went on—past farm fields, through forests and towns and villages, up hills and down. A farm wagon was found and the POWs unable to walk were piled onto it; the ones on the bottom of the pile suffocated to death.

Occasionally a sympathetic farmer would surreptitiously slip a bit of food to the marchers when the guards weren't watching.

As if the work in the tunnels and the starvation rations weren't enough, the march to nowhere took its toll. Unable to put one foot in front of the other, some POWs collapsed and were either left to die in a ditch or were shot by their guards.

The marchers also encountered other scenes of horror. Marching prisoners from other camps had used these same back roads and often the bodies of other marchers in striped uniforms were encountered, their heads blown apart by their guards.

Norman Fellman was lucky. The group he was in became strung out and fell behind and was rescued by a unit of the 90th Infantry Division that was coming up the road. "We were about as close to being skeletons as we could be and not be one," he said.

The rest of the Berga Americans kept marching, their guards trying to stay ahead of those who would liberate them. At night the group was herded into barns, while the sickest of the POWs were taken to nearby hospitals. A few of the prisoners were able to escape while the guards' backs were turned but most were caught and returned to the marching group.

The march went on until, on April 20, Sergeant Metz and the Berga guards were replaced by a new set of guards, who seemed a bit kinder—or at least less brutal. At a rural village named Rötz, north of Cham, the exodus came to a halt, and the POWs were ordered into a large barn.

Everyone had reached their limit of endurance; their three-week, 400-mile death march had taken everything out of them; some welcomed death. Joseph Mark said that when they reached the barn at Rötz, "We just fell into a slush of cow urine. At that point, you just didn't care. You just wanted to die."

Liberation at Last

The next morning, April 23, when their guards ordered them up and out of the barn, the POWs, beyond exhaustion, just laid there. A few minutes later, tank engines and shots were heard outside and the guards suddenly vanished.

One of the prisoners looked out of the barn. Morton Brooks said, "He saw tanks coming up the road, and some of our fellows shouted, 'Americans!'"

It was the 11th Armored Division coming to the rescue.

The 11th had already discovered and liberated over 3,000 American and Russian POWs they found wandering the roads of Bavaria by the time they got to the barn at Rötz, so they were well-versed in what to do. They had also seen ghastly evidence of Nazi atrocities perpetrated on the death marchers.

William Shapiro remembered being faintly aware of the sounds of approaching tanks. "I believe that I was in that twilight zone before death that I had observed in some men in Berga. I do not believe that I was sick with any disease except severe weight loss, intermittent diarrhea, exhaustion, and lice infestation," he said.

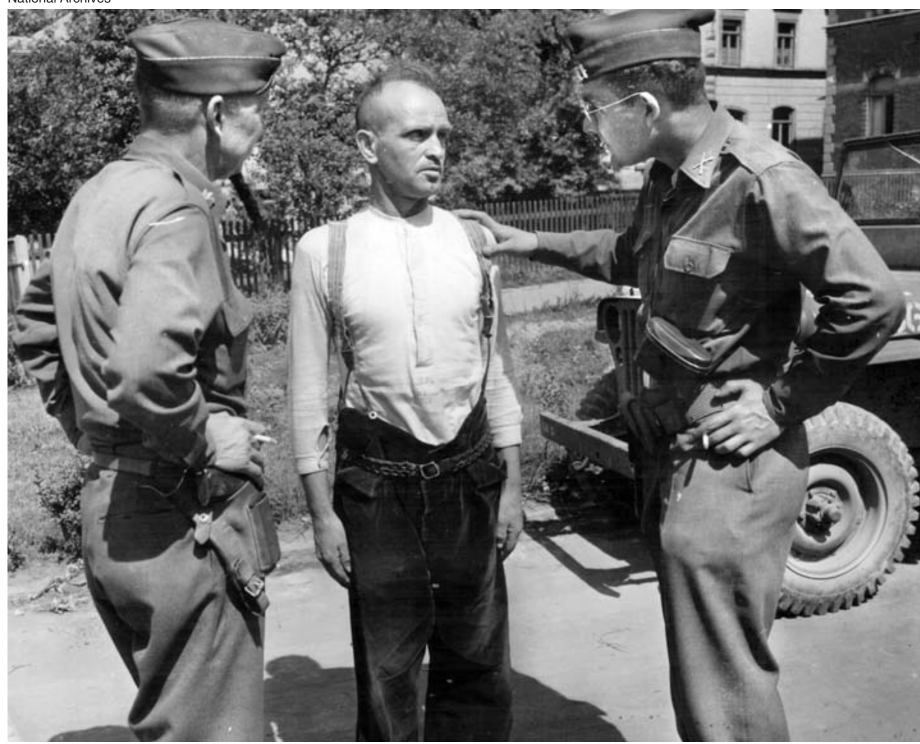
But then he saw a Sherman tank with a white star outside the barn. "And then some men started to shout and scream that they are Americans." It slowly came over him that he was liberated, saved.

Medical personnel began ministering to the 160 survivors of the approximately 280 who had started out from Berga three weeks earlier, working hard to bring each man back from certain death.

Two days later, an Army officer from the Military Intelligence Service came around with forms and said each man had to sign a "security certificate" before they could be discharged from the Army.

The certificate required that ex-POWs promised never divulge what had happened to

National Archives



Two officers from the 5th Armored Division question one of the Berga guards. Very few guards or camp administrators were tried and punished for their mistreatment of American POWs.

National Archives

Once Stalag IX-B at Bad Orb was liberated in April 1945, many of the prisoners, on the verge of death, needed to be transported in ambulances to military hospitals to receive proper medical treatment.

them during their captivity. The reasons for such a requirement remain unclear to this day.

Over the next few months, once the ex-prisoners had spent time in hospitals regaining their strength and being treated for their various ailments, they were transported back to the U.S. in ships and planes.

Each man had a heart-rending reunion with mothers, fathers, wives, and girlfriends, and remembered their return as the happiest day of their lives.

William Shapiro's homecoming in mid-June was typical. He flew in to Mitchel Field in Hempstead, Long Island, and scrounged a dime to call his brother David in Forest Hills, Queens, New York. His brother, wife, parents, and girlfriend Betty drove out to greet him.

"I was waiting at the front gate," Shapiro remembered. "I had a new uniform on. I was no longer emaciated but I was not up to my normal weight as yet. I began to run toward them as I sighted them walking through the gate. There was a lot of hugging and kissing. I remember sitting in the back seat of Dave's car; Betty and I were holding hands and I was looking out the window, viewing the highway, going to the Bronx, and I truly could not believe that the ordeal was over, that I was going home."

Epilogue

In 1945, war-crimes trials of the guards and administrators of the POW camps began. Sergeant Erwin Metz, along with his superior at Berga, a Captain Ludwig Merz, claimed that they had done everything within their power to make life at the camp as comfortable as possible. Metz even claimed that on the "death march" he would peddle ahead on his bicycle to obtain food for the marchers.

Despite the fact that no former Berga prisoners were called to testify (or even knew about the existence of the trial), both Germans were found guilty on October 15, 1945, and sentenced to death by hanging.

In 1948, petitions for clemency were presented to the War Crimes Review Board. The board reduced Captain Merz's death sentence to 20 years in prison and Sergeant Metz's to five years. Neither man served his full sentence and both were released from prison to resume their lives—something over 100 Americans who had been incarcerated at Berga were unable to do.

This article is adapted from the author's book, Given Up for Dead: American GIs in the Nazi Concentration Camp at Berga *(Hachette Book Group, 2005).*

A Heinkel He 111 bomber flies over the Thames River and the East End Docklands area at the beginning of German evening raids, September 7, 1940—the first of eight months of such raids that Hitler used to try to bomb Britain into submission. Some 40,000 Londoners died during the raids.

TAKING *the* BRUNT

BY ALAN DAVIDGE

Most of the action during the Battle of Britain in the late summer of 1940 took place over southern England where Royal Air Force Spitfires and Hurricanes began to dominate dogfights against their German rivals. There was also some bombing of British airfields in an attempt to destroy planes on the ground, but on August 24 a few bombs were dropped on London itself, probably by accident as the principal target had been a strategic one.

Prior to this, in May 1940 Britain had itself bombed German communities alongside industrial targets in Mönchengladbach, the Ruhr, and Hamburg, the latter raid killing 34 civilians. At the end of August, during an RAF raid on an armaments factory north of Berlin, some bombs fell on populated areas in the city itself, which provoked an angry response from Hitler; from there the situation escalated.

It was abundantly clear that for many months, the bombing raids conducted by both sides on strategic targets had caused casualties among civilians living nearby as well, but this apparent attack on the German capital seemed to tip the balance. On Saturday, September 7, 1940, Londoners found themselves the target in a war zone.

It began at 5 p.m. after everyone had been enjoying a hot, late summer's day with temperatures reaching 90 degrees Fahrenheit. The air-raid sirens wailed and many thought it was a false alarm until they heard the drone of the bombers.

The resistance to Germany so far had been delivered by fit, young men in uniform who understandably expected to endure bombing raids as part of their military duty. They were trained to handle this threat to their lives over a period of time until they were acclimatised to the noise of explosions and understood the effects of blast and concussion.

When Hitler couldn't defeat the RAF during the Battle of Britain, he turned his wrath on London's civilians in late summer 1940.

As servicemen, they were subjected to a rigid discipline which taught them how to react instinctively to an emergency. They had some basic body protection and knew the importance of seeking shelter below ground level to avoid the red hot shrapnel that sped indiscriminately from every explosion and their training gave them the confidence that if they followed instructions, they had a good chance of survival.

They were also issued a weapon with which to fight back, even if its protection was largely psychological. However, those at the receiving end of the bombs on September 7 largely comprised women, children, and those too old or infirm to react quickly and confidently to an attack.

Shelters were already in place for some and these were immediately put to use by anyone who could reach them in time. But nobody really knew what to expect when the bombs exploded and the fires started.

Luftwaffe squadrons of 348 Heinkel He 111 and Dornier Do 17 bombers, escorted by 617 Messerschmitt fighters, had followed the River Thames, which signposted the way up to the docks in London's East End. As they hurried across southern England, they had already been picked out by the RAF which, although depleted in numbers due to the incessant dogfights over the summer, did its best to take them down.

By the end of the day, RAF pilots had eliminated 33 German planes but lost 28 fighters in the process. A few former naval guns were in place across London but it was only the RAF fighters that scored hits on the enemy. The vast majority of German bombers were to succeed in their mission, dropping predominantly magnesium-filled incendiaries as well as a few high-explosive (HE) bombs on pre-selected targets.

National Archives

Imperial War Museum

Soon the docks were ablaze, particularly the Surrey Commercial Docks. Cargoes of wood and food supplies that had survived the hazardous journey across the Atlantic menaced by U-boats and German warships went up in smoke. The huge meander of the Thames, comprising much of the borough of Poplar and known locally as the "Isle of Dogs," was the epicenter of London's dockland and was a textbook target.

Beckton Gasworks, the largest in Europe, was also hit, as was an oil refinery at the mouth of the Thames and the Ford Motor Works in Dagenham, on the north side of the river. In 1940 most people lived near their place of employment and walked or cycled to work each day, which meant that, although the pilots may have aimed at commercial and strategic targets, their bombs would also rip through the rows of terraced houses that surrounded them.

Dockland was Cockney and working class; few houses had gardens that could accommodate the new brick and corrugated iron Anderson Shelters that had been designed for potential air raids, so families took their chances under the stairs or kitchen table unless they were close enough to the few municipal buildings that were commandeered as public shelters.

At 6:30 p.m. the planes turned tail and headed back from whence they came. Fire crews from the Auxiliary Fire Service, which had been recruiting since 1938 in preparation for raids such as this, continued to fight the flames, in many cases drawing water directly from the river. Families limped home and many packed bags and headed out of London to join relatives in outer suburbs or rural Essex. The glow from the fires was visible 30 miles away.

But it was not over. At around 8:30 p.m., 250 planes returned in menacing waves, this time to discharge 625 tons of high-explosive bombs, containing a lethal concoction of TNT and Amatol, using the fires caused by the earlier incendiaries as a beacon. This two-phase air raid worked well for the bombers and was to become a frequent model for attack over the following months.

Fire boats in the river pumped Thames water at the flames as the paint on their vessels peeled off in the heat. Surrey Docks was a square mile of fire with 1,000 pumps trying to control it.

Further downstream was the Royal Arsenal at Woolwich which stored live ammunition and nitroglycerine. It received several direct hits; the London Metropolitan Archives record 49 deaths from the raid. There was a further attack on the gasworks with HE bombs puncturing gasometers and sending up sheets of flames for the fire crews to deal with.

Among the lesser known heroes that night were the cohorts of teenage boys on bicycles and motor bikes, some as young as 14 who, in the absence of radios for communication, risked their lives acting as runners and message bearers between the central control points and the fire crews.

This second bombing of the docks that night, this time with HE bombs, brought further terror to the families in houses nearby. Those living beside the King George V dock at Woolwich on the north bank of the river were trapped between factories on fire on one side and the docks themselves, and had to run the gauntlet down to the water where they were rowed across to safety.

Also out on the streets in the midst of the inferno were members of the Women's Voluntary Service, escorting residents out of their damaged houses to organized accom-

modation in local hospitals for first aid and hot drinks.

When the "All Clear" signal sounded at 5 a.m. on the morning of September 8, the final tally of the night's casualties was 436 killed and 1,600 seriously injured—all of them civilians who had undergone a baptism of fire as horrific as many of their fathers who signed up to fight in The Great War in 1914. What they could not have imagined in their wildest nightmares was that, with the exception of November 2, they would suffer a further 76 nights of continuous bombing.

Those who survived did not expect that this would be last they saw of the Luftwaffe. Even in the lulls between the raids, many London residents woke up to find an unexploded bomb (UXB) in their back yard, which would have to be made safe in case the next raid set it off.

Residents near the Beckton Gasworks had noticed several bombs fall harmlessly in the spoil heaps along the perimeter, known locally as the Beckton Alps. (In the 1980s, after the closure of the gasworks, it was announced that this part of the site would be developed as an artificial ski slope, much to the concern of the locals with long memories!)

AP Photo

ABOVE: Men work to rescue a woman and her two children who were buried when the debris of their house fell on them during an early-morning raid. Her husband was killed. OPPOSITE: An RAF Spitfire's gun camera captures a formation of Heinkel IIIs on their way to hit London. The citizens raced for the bomb shelters when the air-raid sirens blared.

Survival of the night was not always an automatic reward for those who followed safety instructions. Often the opposite happened. Tom Betts, aged 12 and the eldest in his family, was expected to look after his mother after his father joined the RAF. As soon as the second bombing raid started, he insisted that they leave their flat for the official shelter under Columbia Road Market in Bethnal Green, believing it offered greater protection for his mother and himself.

He even found a place by a ventilation shaft to give them some air. Unfortunately a German bomb found the shaft as well, a million to one chance as the opening only measured three feet by one foot. Young Tom woke up in hospital with a serious head wound—and the terrible news that his mother had been killed, along with 39 others.

Tom Winter, aged 11, and his three younger siblings had been separated from their mother between the raids and when the bombing started again, he decided to hurry them along to a Refuge Centre, set up for displaced persons at Keetons Road School, Bermondsey, on the south side of the river.

A neighbor and friend of their mother spotted them and took them in, believing that they would be more distressed in the shelter surrounded by adults that they didn't know. This act of kindness saved them from death or serious injury because, like Columbia Road Market, the school also took a direct hit, killing 38 who had sought safety there.

The next morning, Prime Minister Winston Churchill, knowing instinctively that spirits had to be kept high, visited bomb sites all over the East End while surrounded by journalists. The response was encouraging and the papers reported what was heard: "It was good of you to come, Winnie. We can take it, give it back!"

Publicly, Churchill promised "Repayment with compound interest," meaning he would order attacks on German cities. But what the public wanted to see was retaliatory action in their own skies.

The following night, September 8, the

bombers returned, 200 of them, hitting the docks again and following the Thames upriver to the city itself. Offices, factories and railway lines were targeted, but the Londoners themselves suffered most, sustaining over a thousand casualties including 412 deaths.

On Monday September 9, the raids lasted ten hours, killing 370 people and injuring 1,400. South Hallsville School in the East End, which was used as a Rest Centre, took a direct hit, resulting in hundreds of casualties.

Entertainment venues in the affluent West End were also destroyed, and a bomb at the Holborn Empire put an end to nightly revues by the recently christened "Forces' Sweetheart," Vera Lynn and risqué comedian Max Miller, "The Cheeky Chappie."

Undeterred, Vera drove through London's streets in her canvas-topped Austin 10 cabriolet, wearing her "tin hat" to new venues where her songs could help Londoners forget their nightmares for a while.

In these first few days of the Blitz, Londoners voiced the opinion that the government was not doing enough to fight back. One reason was that, during the first daytime air raids, gun crews were told not to fire unless they had a clear view of the target, for fear of hitting a friendly Spitfire or Hurricane that was also trying to bring down the bombers.

Churchill knew that he had to raise morale and, having just witnessed the capitulation of France under similar pressure, and knowing that there were still some in government who favored an armistice, he had to take action.

Furthermore, the first night of bombing had seen large numbers of people packing their bags and leaving the capital. If such an exodus continued, it could have disastrous consequences.

All the victims of the raids agreed that the sound of their own gunfire was what most helped them to feel safe—and they wanted to hear more of it. However, this was not as simple as it sounded. Although London had suffered air raids during World War I, with Zeppelin airships and Gotha bombers flying from occupied Belgium bringing terror to the civilian population, its guns had not provided a satisfactory means of defense against them.

National Archives

The former naval and artillery pieces positioned around the capital were never designed for shooting down aircraft and, despite sounding impressive and reassuring, they were totally ineffective. Worse than that, their own returning shells were responsible for the deaths of large numbers of the population. The government was aware of this but it was kept from the media because of its likely effect on public confidence and morale.

After 1918 the guns were all removed and it was hoped that this tragic experience would never have to be repeated. In 1932 British Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin commented, "It is important for the man in the street to realize that there is no power on earth that can protect him from bombing, whatever people may tell him. The bomber will always get through."

It was becoming clear that, in a future war, the only effective strategy would be to take the fight to the enemy and bomb their cities and strategic targets harder than they were bombing our own. This would create a war of attrition like WWI trench warfare, but this time civilians would bear the brunt.

Writing in 1938, the British scientist and former WWI officer, J.B.S. Haldane esti-

Both: Getty Images

ABOVE: Prime Minister Winston Churchill, cheered on by his supporters, walks through East End streets in September 1940, to inspect damage and give Londoners "heart." TOP: King George IV and Queen Elizabeth talk with workers cleaning up bomb damage, October 18, 1940. After Buckingham Palace was bombed, the Queen said that having the royal residence damaged meant that she could empathize with the ordinary citizens. OPPOSITE: Anti-aircraft guns were set up in Hyde Park. Although largely ineffective, the sounds of the guns provided moral support to citizens who felt that the nation was doing something to fight back.

mated that in many World War I air raids, falling anti-aircraft shells had killed almost as many people as German bombs.

The first reason was unreliable fuzes. Clockwork timers were in their early stages of development and the traditional gunpowder or igniferous fuze often took longer to burn if fired to heights where oxygen levels were lower. The mass production of shells in wartime often resulted in poor quality control and "dud" shells.

The net result was heavy, live shells plummeting to earth at nearly 200 mph. If they exploded they could be just as deadly as a bomb. (Today, visitors to well-preserved European warscapes such as the cliffs of Pointe du Hoc in Normandy that were both bombed and shelled will see a cratered terrain where it is impossible to determine whether the deep depressions which still survive were the result of an air raid or naval bombardment.)

The former naval guns positioned around London as protection during the Blitz would have been perfectly effective in their previous role at sea; if they missed their target, their shells fell harmlessly into the water but these were coming back to earth! Even the shells that fell on the city without exploding could still be deadly, and the remains of those which worked correctly and exploded several thousand feet in the air would arrive at ground level as lethal, red-hot shards of metal.

The ultimate decisions on defense against the bombers were Churchill's. Ironically, he had opposed the use of artillery in WWI for this purpose. It was ineffective even against the gas-filled Zeppelins and primitive biplanes and, in his words, the guns were simply "Instruments of self-destruction."

But the people wanted more guns whose elevated cacophony each night would make them feel that they were "giving it back," so the government gave them their guns knowing full well that the price of higher morale would be greater damage and pain.

By the evening of September 10, twice as many artillery pieces were defending London than on September 7. They had

been moved from other strategic emplacements, and by the following night the RAF would disappear from the night skies to give them full rein in dealing with the predators.

The guns from now on would unleash a continuous barrage without the trouble of taking aim and, with only 11 gunlaying radar units at their disposal, there could be no effective guarantees of accuracy. The searchlights in place also did little to help, as their range was no higher than 12,000 feet.

On Wednesday, September 11, every gun barrel around London, an area of almost 200 square miles, was pointed skywards, firing continuously, and the Daily Express later celebrated "Gunfire louder than the bombs." Thirteen thousand shells were expended, but not a single plane was hit.

This firestorm did succeed in unnerving the German pilots, however, and their response on this and subsequent nights was less caution in selecting their targets in favor of an early exit. Many Londoners then caught a jettisoned bombload that had been intended for an industrial site several miles away.

Those who had made the decisions to increase the artillery bombardment, irrespective of the consequences at ground level, soon found shells arriving in their own back yards, literally. On September 11 there was a direct hit from an anti-aircraft shell on Westminster Abbey while another struck the House of Lords, followed by more shells hitting the House of Commons library and Horse Guards Avenue, causing several casualties.

On September 13, No. 10 Downing Street, the official home of the British prime minister, was damaged; four days later, the building's own air-raid shelter was hit.

It was later calculated by General Frederick Pile, in charge of Air Raid Precautions (ARP) that, during 1940, it took 20,000 shells to shoot down one plane. Work done at the Cavendish Laboratories in Cambridge on the fuzes used in British shells at the outbreak of the war suggests that up to 50 percent could have been defective.

Even if this is a gross over-estimate, the damage done by a significant proportion of these shells, weighing on average 30 lbs., exploding on the ground or hitting buildings, would be the equivalent of many additional bombing raids.

National Archives

ABOVE: Children of East London who were made homeless during the raids in September 1940 glumly sit in the rubble of their home. OPPOSITE: A bus leans against the side of a terrace in Harrington Square after a German bombing raid on London. The bus was empty but 11 people were killed in the houses two days after the start of the attacks.

The progress of the raids upriver meant that the city's most historic buildings were now under threat. These were as close to the heart of the Londoner as they were to the heart of London itself, and losing them would would be emotionally devastating.

Perhaps the most iconic during the Blitz was St. Paul's Cathedral, whose dome dominated the skyline throughout the bombing. On September 12 it had its first of many close shaves when a very large bomb, believed to be 2,000 kg, buried itself eight meters below Dean's Yard on one side of the cathedral.

Lieutenant Robert Davies led a team that spent three days clearing a path through fractured gas mains and electricity cables to remove the bomb as it could not be defused. It required two lorries to pull it out, and Davies then drove it without assistance along bumpy, cratered streets to Hackney Marshes in the East End. This area had been already chosen as the safest place for controlled detonation of ordnance, becoming London's "bomb cemetery."

When the dust settled after he had pushed the button, a 100-foot crater was revealed. It would have meant the end of St. Paul's. For his bravery in destroying this monster, Davies became the second person in Britain to be awarded the George Cross—a medal instituted by King George VI for conspicuous gallantry on the home front, equivalent to the Victoria Cross on the battlefield.

After the first few nights it was clear the pain was being spread further across Lon-

don, and on September 13 Buckingham Palace was hit. Queen Elizabeth (mother of the current queen) was quoted as saying, “I'm glad we have been bombed. It makes me feel I can look the East End in the face.”

Newsreels and daily papers carried features of the Queen and King George VI the next day visiting families near the docks and sharing their experiences of attacks by the Luftwaffe, although the more cynical of the Cockneys were quick to point out that they still had one or two palaces in reserve if they lost their primary place of residence.

As the threat to their homes increased, Londoners became very inventive in finding shelter during the air raids. London was rich in underground protection because of its “Tube” railway system but the government had expressly forbidden the stations to be used for this purpose.

On the night of September 19 the public decided to take matters into its own hands and began arriving at the stations as soon as the rush hour ended, with bags and blankets, ready to stake their pitch on the platforms. This became the norm and the government had to concede, eventually improving facilities to take account of this change to the stations' original functions.

A public shelter was created at Aldwych near the center of the city and flood gates were placed in tunnels that led under the River Thames; 79 stations were fitted with bunks for 22,000 people and 124 canteens were established within the Tube system.

Lord Woolton, appointed originally by former Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain as Food Minister, took further decisive action, allocating 144 vehicles, staffed by volunteers to take in food relief after air raids and “food trains,” which ran in the underground 7-9 a.m. and 5-7 p.m.

Woolton's intuitive actions on the provision of food where it was most needed played an important role in maintaining morale. When he was promoted to Minister of Reconstruction in 1943, Canada's *Montreal Gazette* wrote, “The famous British morale can be credited as much to Lord Woolton as to any individual.”

The people had spoken and the government had listened. It was a further boost to morale that Londoners did not have to fight authority as well as the Germans. The decision to allow the use of tube stations as shelters was to save many lives but it was not foolproof.

The following month, in south London, a bomb penetrated the road and tunnel at Balham station, smashing water and sewage pipes and killing 66 people who were sheltering there. Bank station in the financial center later received a direct hit from a huge bomb and the 100-foot crater collapsed on those below, killing 56.

Taking stock of the situation towards the end of September 1940, Londoners had gone, within the space of a couple of

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weeks, from enjoying the freedom to bask outside in prolonged summer weather to sheltering in corners through bombardments which lasted for hours, depriving them of their sleep, and not knowing whether the next day would be their last.

Nothing in their lives had prepared them for this, but they could not give in because the bombing campaign was very likely a prelude to an invasion. Furthermore, many had a job to do that would help to stop Hitler. Factory workers had transferred to the munitions production line at Silvertown, seamstresses had become welders, and the former car factories were now turning out Hurricanes and Spitfires.

If they ran away from London, they would be letting down the men who must be kept supplied with the necessary weapons to fight the enemy. They were not trained soldiers, but they were the front line, indeed the last line, in a war that would determine how they, and future generations would live.

Londoners were in no position to devise a long term strategy; they just had to survive from day to day. All that they had to embolden them was the sound of their own guns at night and speeches or songs from the BBC radio broadcasts between the sounds of the explosions.

In the community shelters they sometimes sang their way through the bombing, often using specially adapted versions of current hits like "Run, Rabbit, Run" which became:

Run, Adolf, run Adolf, run run run
You were the starter who fired the gun,
then taking aim at his henchmen:
We will knock the stuffing out of you,
Old fat Göring and Goebbels, too
and finishing with:
So cut your loss and pawn your Iron Cross,
Run, Adolf, run Adolf, run run run!

The bombers came back every night in varying numbers. On October 6 there were only seven of them, but on October 15, 380 bombers hit London, killing 200 and injuring 2,000.

The tactics varied nightly as well, as did the bomb load. The Luftwaffe began to realize that the tall city buildings cushioned some of the HE blast, so they experimented with the "parachute mine," which came down slowly and detonated above the ground, creating deadly shock waves and shooting metal fragments in all directions.

It was a parachute mine on the night of April 17, 1941, that was to kill the celebrated singer Al Bowlly in his London flat after he had returned from a singing engagement. Like many victims of this weapon, he suffered a fatal injury caused by the actual blast generated by the explosion which blew a door off its hinges, delivering a serious head wound. He was buried in a mass grave with other casualties of the night's bombing.

Another change in strategy was the switch to "night only" bombing, commencing on October 7; in addition to the Dorniers and Heinkels, Junkers Ju 88s joined in the raids. It is significant that all the bombers were medium, twin engined planes. Germany never developed a four-engined heavy bomber, which could be seen as a serious missed opportunity, considering the damage that was done later in the war to Germany by machines like the Avro Lancaster and Boeing B-17.

In addition, there was no specific strategy to target particular industries such as aircraft manufacture, which could have brought Britain to its knees. There was also inadequate intelligence on British industry because Hitler did not believe that the two countries would actually go to war with each other until the early part of 1938.

The result was more of a scatter-gun approach to bombing which, although painful, was survivable. If the Luftwaffe had concentrated on taking out one particular industry and then moving on to another, they could have used their resources to devastating effect.

Rare Historical Photos

ABOVE: A milkman makes his daily deliveries despite the destruction of streets of houses around him. At least one source suggests this image was staged by photographer Fred Morley and published to foster the attitude that daily life must go on to the extent possible. Many Londoners adopted that attitude. OPPOSITE: Pedestrians work their way through debris, October 15, 1940. As the war continued, the Royal Air Force and U.S. Eighth Air Force repaid Hitler by bombing German cities with even greater force.

National Archives

A further strategic move in November was to extend the attacks to other large industrial cities such as Birmingham and Manchester, while continuing to bomb London. In one of the worst nights of bombing, on November 14 the center of Coventry in the Midlands was almost completely destroyed, while port cities such as Liverpool, Bristol, Southampton, Plymouth, and Glasgow suffered treatment similar to the London docks.

Any criticisms of Luftwaffe strategy would be completely academic to those at the receiving end, who only knew that they were being bombed every night. Londoners were, however, finding ways to cope and, as well as occupying the local tube stations and sharing the public shelters, many were soon taking advantage of the new cage-style "Morrison" shelter which could be constructed in their own home.

Its steel top, which doubled as a table, was built to withstand the collapse of the upper half of a two-story house. These were to function well and reduced the death rate considerably.

The London shelters were put to a major test on December 29 during a night that was referred to as the second "Great Fire of London" by a U.S. reporter cabling an account back to his office. (The original Great Fire was in 1666 when most buildings were constructed of wood).

A total of 136 bombers attacked the city, focusing on non-residential buildings but still managing to kill 60 civilians and injure 250; 120 tons of HE bombs and 22,000 incendiaries fell that night on the city, creating 1,500 recorded fires.

On this occasion, the principal water main was fractured and the Thames was at low tide, making it much harder for fire crews. St. Paul's Cathedral was hit by 28 incendiaries, causing the lead on its dome to melt.

Churchill was aware of the value to morale in keeping this iconic building safe and had allocated more staff on site who managed to keep the fires under control. The American war correspondent Ernie Pyle reported:

"Into the dark shadowed spaces below us, while we watched, whole batches of incendiary bombs fell. We saw two dozen go off in two seconds. They flashed terrifically, then quickly simmered down to pin points of dazzling white, burning ferociously...

"The greatest of all the fires was directly in front of us. Flames seemed to whip hundreds of feet into the air. Pinkish-white smoke ballooned upward in a great cloud, and out of this cloud there gradually took shape—so faintly at first that we weren't sure we saw correctly—the gigantic dome of St. Paul's Cathedral.

"St. Paul's was surrounded by fire, but it came through. It stood there in its enormous proportions—growing slowly clearer and clearer, the way objects take shape at dawn. It was like a picture of some miraculous figure that appears before peace-hungry soldiers on a battlefield."

By the start of 1941, it was clear that the regularity of air raids was decreasing, but that did not mean that there would be any slackening of their intensity when they did arrive.

By March 8, Londoners had enjoyed almost two raid-free months, but that was to soon change. Overnight, several railway stations and Buckingham Palace became victims of 30,000 incendiaries. The West End's entertainment district, which had

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become popular once again, suffered badly, and the restaurant at the Café de Paris, located 20 feet below ground and regarded as one of the safest places to eat in London, was devastated by a stick of HE bombs that fell across Leicester Square. Thirty-four people were killed, among them the popular bandleader, Ken "Snakehips" Johnson, another contemporary of Al Bowlly who had regularly sung with the band.

On March 15, southeast London was carpeted with 100 tons of HE and 16,000 incendiaries. Four nights later, 500 planes dropped 470 tons of HE, including "Maxes" (5,500-lb. bombs) and 122,000 incendiaries, plus a large number of parachute bombs. One East End public shelter in Poplar was hit, killing 44 people.

A month later on April 16, the city was subjected to a seven-hour blitz which was remembered as being the worst since September 7 of the previous year. Then, on the 19th, 1,000 tons of HE were dropped on the city, together with 150,000 incendiaries. Again the docks suffered, all the way from Tower Bridge, to Greenwich where the prestigious naval college was amongst the casualties.

Saturday evening, May 10, saw London's population in high spirits after the conclusion of the soccer cup final at Wembley Stadium, watched by nearly 100,000 spectators, as merry as they had been on the sunny Saturday afternoon of September 7 the previous year.

But by 11 p.m. on that clear, cloudless night, the sirens were wailing again, signalling the approach of 507 German bombers that dropped their loads, flew home, and then returned to deliver more punishment.

The night's events began to stir painful memories of September 7, but it would prove to be even worse. Dockland was once again the main target and both sides of the Thames were soon alight from the first of the docks all the way up to the city; 2,154 fires were actually recorded, but they soon joined up to form giant conflagrations across London, causing damage to many historic public buildings.

ABOVE: Aldwych underground subway station in central London was used as a bomb shelter. Many Londoners sent their children to the countryside as protection from the raids on the city. OPPOSITE: St Paul's Cathedral was hit several times, this major London landmark at the heart of the Blitz stood firm against the Luftwaffe, providing inspiration to Londoners.

These included the Houses of Parliament, Westminster Abbey, St. James Palace, the Tower of London, the British Museum, Public Record Office, and the Law Courts, as well as many centuries-old guild halls, railway termini, and churches. Once again, fractured water mains and low water in the river made it impossible for the fire brigades to contain the inferno.

The All Clear did not sound until after 5 a.m. on May 11, by which time the capital had been the recipient of 711 tons of high explosive and over 86,000 incendiaries. The human cost was 1,436 dead and 1,800 seriously injured. Eleven thousand houses were damaged beyond repair and over 12,000 people were homeless. It had been the worst night of the Blitz.

Once the bombing had finished, there was another problem to be dealt with: what to do with the rubble and the bomb sites. Ever resourceful, the government decided to shift the debris to provide runways for the new airfields being constructed in the eastern part of the country that pointed towards Germany. (The rubble from the city of Birmingham built the airfields that were later to be used by the U.S. Air Force.) The spaces that were cleared were then turned into "Victory Gardens" to help feed the population that Hitler was trying to starve into submission.

Effectively, the London Blitz as such ended on the morning of May 11. At the time, especially in London after the night that they had just suffered, it could not have felt like a major turning point in the war. But it was.

Back in September 1940, Britain had been at its weakest and the future of Europe

rested on its shoulders. If the power of the German bombing had scattered London's population out of the city, it would have been the start of an economic and social collapse. Instead, the people rolled with the punches until they had a lucky break which, in this case, was Hitler's declaration of war on Russia in June 1941.

This act was to consume, increasingly, vast amounts of Germany's resources, particularly its bombers that would ease the pressure on Britain. The population of London, with no weapon with which to fight back, except its obstinacy, had turned the war. By the end of 1941 Britain had the United States as an ally, their factories were still turning out war materials, and they still had enough food to survive.

The future was still uncertain, and would remain so until the defeat of Field Marshal Erwin Rommel's Afrika Korps nine months later in October 1942 at El Alamein gave them some hope.

The citizens of the capital knew they could not afford to be complacent when the bombing appeared to stop. They were still painfully aware that the U-boat attacks on the Atlantic convoys could still deny them valuable food and equipment, but they would, however, be able to work longer days and nights to help the war effort.

There was some relief when news came through of daring commando raids against the Germans in Norway, but irregular attacks on other cities, especially seaports, were a reminder that further raids were possible on London.

In addition, the "Baedeker Raids" in April and May of 1942 caused considerable damage to historic cities such as York and Bath. There were also many false alarms.

Tragically, the worst loss of life associated with the air raids took place without a bomb being dropped. On the night of March 3, 1943, the sirens sounded in the East End, causing a large number of people to hurry down the steps of Bethnal Green tube station. A woman and child lost their footing at the base of the steps and those behind them fell forward resulting in 173 deaths by asphyxiation—mostly women and children.

The increase, in following years, of Bomber Command attacks on German industrial cities eventually prompted retaliation and, in January 1944, the Luftwaffe launched Operation Steinbock, nonchalantly referred to by Londoners as the "Baby Blitz." Raids were nowhere near as intense as in 1940/41 and the campaign ended in May of that year.

It achieved very little but resulted in the loss of 329 German planes, mostly shot down by the new Mosquito and Beaufighter fighter-bombers. This was to

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Imperial War Museum

prove particularly costly as it meant that the Luftwaffe was to have fewer resources with which to rely for repelling the Allied invasion of Europe on D-Day, June 6, 1944.

The arrival of the V1 flying bombs or "Doodlebugs," commencing June 13, 1944, brought the terror back to the streets of London, forcing its population to dig deep into its personal reserves once again.

Over 6,000 deaths resulted from V1 attacks and initially there was an exodus from the city which threatened to affect industrial production, but the Allies were now in Europe, taking the fight back to the enemy, which inspired hope that it would soon be all over.

However, Hitler had one more terror weapon in his arsenal, the V2 rocket, which arrived without warning at supersonic speed. The V2 campaign lasted from September 1944 to March 1945, killing over 2,700 people and injuring 6,500.

Had the V1s and V2s been developed earlier, it is difficult to imagine how the population could have stood up to them but, having coped with the Blitz, and knowing that the war could not go on much longer, Londoners steeled themselves and took the extra punishment, hanging on to the bitter end.

Much has been written to try and understand how Londoners coped during the Blitz, and some of it by the participants themselves. "Mass Observation," a national project, begun in 1937 by several authors including a social anthropologist from Cambridge University, invited the public to keep a daily diary of their experiences and feelings, as well as the contents of relevant conversations they were party to. Initially, it reflected how society in general was changing in the build up to war but the most valuable material comes from the period after the Blitz began.

The "Phoney War" experienced since September 1939 had caused many evacuees to return to the capital because it had not been affected as badly as they expected and they were prepared to put up with the blackouts, rationing, and queuing if it meant being back home.

ABOVE: An Anderson bomb shelter remains largely intact and the three people inside were not harmed despite the devastation surrounding it when a German bomb landed nearby on Latham Street. OPPOSITE: On April 26, 1945, four years after the Blitz had ended, a German V2 rocket struck 800-year-old Smithfield Market, causing heavy damage and 100 deaths.

September 7 changed all that, forcing them to get used to the fear of violent death and seeing it manifest itself every day. Many volunteered for work that made their lives even more precarious. In addition to the 6,000 regular firemen and the 60,000 auxiliaries, were tens of thousands of part timers—men and women who had full-time jobs as well.

As well as helping the fire service, people volunteered to work as Air Raid Precaution (ARP) wardens, ambulance drivers, medics, telephonists and messengers. After a serious incendiary raid on London on September 29, compulsory firewatching was also introduced: all men (and later, women) aged 16-60 were required to donate 48 hours of their time each month.

Next to the actual bombs, the biggest threat to health was sleep deprivation. Anderson shelters were cold, damp, and cramped places to try and spend a night, but they enabled families to stay together. Tube stations and communal street shelters were squalid, initially without any facilities, and frequently overcrowded.

Considering these options, some Londoners resorted to "Trekking"—getting away from the built-up areas to the nearest woodland and sleeping rough; but few managed to maintain this way of life. Those who had to go to work after a miserable night's sleep soon found themselves near breaking point the next day as the pressure to increase output did not slacken.

Families who were "bombed out" were sent to Rest Centres such as church halls; when the sirens went, they had no alternative but to use the communal shelters. They had lost their Anderson or Morrison as well as their house.

With such a tenuous hold on life, superstition began to play a more important role than before for many people. The Tower of London, dating from 1086, had always

been home to a flock of ravens. The legend attached to them is that if they should die or leave the Tower, England would fall. In the early part of the Blitz all but three were killed or died of stress, so Churchill, quick to see the threat to morale, took immediate steps to top up the flock.

At the individual level there were often rituals to be observed before entering the shelter. Women ensured they were wearing a clean pair of knickers in case they "copped a packet" and ended up in the hospital and families delayed entering their Anderson until lucky charms and mascots could be found; even then there would be portents to look out for.

The author's grandmother, Frances Elizabeth, a pub landlady in the East End and regular participant in games of chance among the local Chinese community in Limehouse, had managed the Spotted Dog in Poplar. She was lucky not be be there when a bomb demolished it in October 1940. The following year after an air raid, she returned to her house in East Ham to find a tombstone from a local cemetery had been blown through the roof and onto her son Joe's bed.

She took this as a harbinger of the worst possible news, especially when, several months later, she received a telegram that he was "missing, believed captured." Fortunately, by this time he was safe in an Italian POW camp overlooking the Bay of Naples.

It is estimated that around 40,000 people died in the Blitz and three times that number were injured.

Forecasts by psychiatrists before the Blitz predicted that hysteria, panic and despair would overwhelm the population but after the initial shocks, a determination to survive took over. The U.S. military attaché, General Raymond E. Lee, remarked after a month of the Blitz "The British are stronger and in a better position than they were at the beginning."

The U.S. Ambassador, John G. Winant commended "the effort made to maintain the appearance of normal life in the face of danger and the acceptance of hardships and hazards by ordinary people."

This attitude was supported by a more objective Gallup survey in October 1940 which calculated that 80 percent of the public felt it was impossible for Hitler to win the war by air raids alone and 89 percent were solidly behind Churchill's leadership.

The government had also expected a flood of mental-health breakdowns, but by December 1940 its surveys showed that the number of "Civilian Neuroses" admitted to psychiatric hospitals was just 25 in London and three for the rest of the country. In February 1941, five months into the Blitz, "Nervous shock" comprised only 5 percent of air-raid casualties, most recovering within two weeks.

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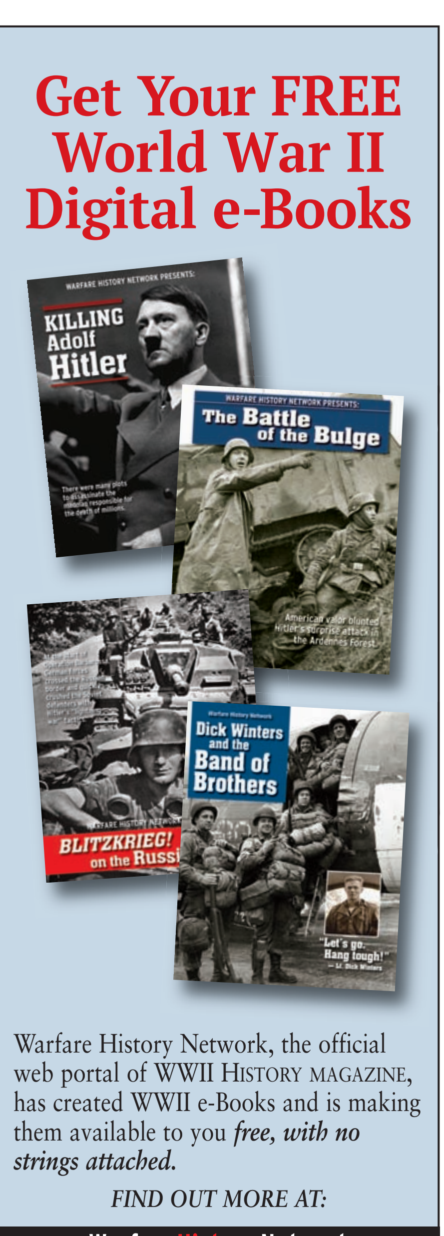

David vs. Goliath

Continued from page 55

quick pass before the Finns escaped into the clouds ahead of the vengeful Soviet fighters. At this point in the war, the exhausted Finnish pilots were flying up to eight sorties a day.

By the end of the war, the Finns had endured 2,075 Russian bombing attacks in over 500 separate locations around their country. Some 650 civilians had been killed and another 2,000 wounded in these attacks. The Russians are estimated to have flown 44,000 sorties during the war.

By March 13, 1940, when the war ended, the Finns counted 62 of their own aircraft destroyed, mostly the light bombers, reconnaissance, and artillery-spotter planes. Their fighters downed an estimated 207 to 240 Soviet aircraft, earning 10 of their pilots the designation of ace. Ground-based antiaircraft fire accounting for another 314 to 444 downed planes. It is impossible to have an accurate account of Soviet losses because they did not reveal these numbers.

The estimate of losses can only be measured by planes shot down over Finnish territory; Soviet planes trailing smoke back over their territory can only be listed as "possible." It is the same with the antiaircraft gunners, whose estimates of their prowess varied wildly. Accidental loss of Soviet aircraft is also unknown.

The short war was hard on Finland. Their losses amounted to as much as two percent of the total population. Yet, numerically, the Russians lost 10 times the number of dead on the ground and in the air. The difficulty the numerically superior Russians had in subduing tiny Finland no doubt gave Hitler a false sense of optimism as he was planning his invasion of the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941.

During the peace negotiations that followed, the Russians demanded and received 11 percent of Finnish territory but left her independence intact. Commenting about the Winter War, a wry Russian general remarked, "We have gained enough ground to bury our dead." ■

Guadalcanal

Continued from page 67

two previous evacuation missions, suffered moderate damage with 10 sailors killed from two bomb near-misses forward. She headed back to port with assistance from *Kawakaze*. The remaining warships pressed forward and would not be hindered for the remainder of the operation.

Some vessels diverted to pick up soldiers on the Russells—the location of a small auxiliary base set up for use during the evacuation—while the remaining warships proceeded to the main pick-up point on Guadalcanal. A flurry of small boats rushed out to meet the destroyers of the latter group. The work was completed by 1:30 a.m. and the destroyers were soon speeding north at a 30-knot clip.

American ground forces on Guadalcanal continued to advance towards Cape Esperance during the first week of February against decreasing Japanese resistance. The coastal area on the northwest end of the island was found to be littered with small boats and debris. It was suddenly clear to the Americans that the last Tokyo Express missions were not delivering reinforcements, but taking soldiers off the embattled island. The fight for Guadalcanal was over.

Various accounts differ as to the number of Japanese soldiers evacuated. The most reliable figure, derived from an exhaustive Japanese Army investigation completed in the weeks after the event, placed the total at 10,625.

The operation was an amazingly successful exploit, one historians have struggled to explain. The Japanese strained to deliver troops to the embattled island during critical parts of the campaign, but at the end of the fight were able to successfully extract much of their garrison without significant American hindrance. The destroyers of the third evacuation run sailing up the Slot marked a true ending.

The once-vaunted Tokyo Express had made its last voyage to Guadalcanal. A surface warship flying the flag of the Imperial Japanese Navy would never again sail the waters of Iron Bottom Sound. ■

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Mortain

Continued from page 29

film "Heroes of Old Hickory," partly shot in the town with aging super-heroes reliving their youth in open-topped jeeps, driven through the streets of Mortain, and once again being cheered and fêted by the people whose town they liberated.

Then, in July 2020, the 30th Infantry Division was finally awarded the Presidential Unit Citation after several well-publicized campaigns and veterans were honored at a celebration in Raleigh, North Carolina. One of those present, Tony Jaber, who was a mortar gunner assigned to Company E under Lieutenant Kerley, summed up his feelings: "I wondered if we'd ever get rescued, but I didn't think that I'd ever get killed up there. We had a company commander who wouldn't surrender, so we were lucky."

The signs in Mortain point upwards to Côte 314, but today it is a hill of two halves. An easily accessible footpath on the west side overlooking the town runs through the rocks of Montjoie, and the visitor is directed to some of the points where the action took place, by thoughtful signage thanks to the local French landowner.

A 10-minute walk from there, past the Hermitage farm on the Bel Air road, leads to the forest track down which Weiss was driven on August 6. This east side of the hill is now a hunting reserve and privately owned, an area of woodland so dense and overgrown that it seems as if Pan, the Greek god of forests, has reclaimed it for himself.

It even presented problems for Robert Weiss when he last visited Mortain in 1994 in an attempt to retrace his steps. In his account, *Fire Mission!: The Siege at Mortain*, he found little that bore any real resemblance to the bare, rocky ridges that earned him a place in history.

In a wooded depression which he felt bore the closest resemblance to the place where he said his farewells to Sergeant John Corn, he saluted his missing comrades for the last time and left his memories to rest in peace. ■

London Blitz

Continued from page 95

It was deduced from subsequent investigation that those who were most severely traumatized had left the city after the first few days and the ones who hung on managed to find a hidden determination that saw them through to the end.

Not all Londoners covered themselves in glory. Those who had lived off petty crime before the war had a field day during the Blitz. The London police, stretched to their limits by the nightly bombings, now found themselves facing a new crime wave.

One of the most notorious was a Cockney known as "Mad Frankie" Frazer who, like a number of his contemporaries, burned his conscription papers and disappeared into the underworld. The air-raid siren was his call to work. When the bombs smashed, Mad Frankie grabbed. Jewellers and furriers were favorites, especially in London's West End, but any opportunity for looting was welcomed. Frankie and the Luftwaffe made a perfect team.

Thefts gave rise to a flourishing Black Market in London and before long, armed gangs were controlling the show. Many criminals who spent their afternoons in darkened cinemas with George Raft, James Cagney, and Edward G. Robinson for company now fancied themselves as real gangsters and began seeking out army bases from which handguns could be traded for their ill-gotten gains.

However, although anyone caught in the act of stealing from fellow citizens could often be subjected to some rough justice, Londoners did find themselves ambivalent to anything offered on the "black market" at times of food shortages and when essentials were rationed.

When the war eventually ended, it seemed to the Blitz survivors from what they had heard from the national media that the great turning points at El Alamein, D-Day, and Monte Cassino and the dashing raids like the "Dam Busters" or St. Nazaire were what deserved the greatest credit.

Their passive resistance in the dark days of 1940/41 could not warrant the glory that belonged to the battlefield heroes—despite the fact that many had earned their "red badge of courage" and several had been awarded the George Cross for outstanding acts of bravery on the Home Front.

For most of the population, the priority was simply to pick up the pieces, welcome home their heroes and resume family life. The government they elected in 1945 was aware of their needs, however and began rewarding their stoicism with a program of social and economic reform that helped them to rebuild their lives.

Prefabricated temporary houses ("Prefabs") were assembled at great speed while local councils built new dwellings containing modern amenities. The 1947 New Towns Act provided for the construction of eight new towns around London, many of which provided a final destination for nomadic Blitz victims.

At the same time, a new National Health Service was created, providing support from "the Cradle to the Grave" in an attempt to make the remainder of their lives more bearable. As a bonus, they also found themselves among the recipients of the three billion U.S. dollars provided by the Marshall Aid Plan for the reconstruction of Europe.

There may have been a tendency subsequently to glamorize the Blitz, but for most of those directly involved there was no nostalgia, just a desire to try and forget what they had been put through and hope it never happened again.

Nevertheless, there would be moments in years to come after newspapers carried stories of the failure of others to cope with hardships elsewhere in the world, or even in Britain within the next generation, that generated a satisfying nudge and a wink among the Londoners, signifying that when their bugle had called, they had not been afraid to rise to the occasion, hold the line and treat the enemy with the contempt it deserved. ■

A frequent contrubutor to WWII Quarterly, *Alan Davidge lives in Normandy, France.*

HONORING OUR HEROES

USMC Ret. Master Gunnery Sergeant Bob Verell takes a moment to honor those commemorated on the replica Vietnam Memorial Wall.
Photo by Thomas Wells

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