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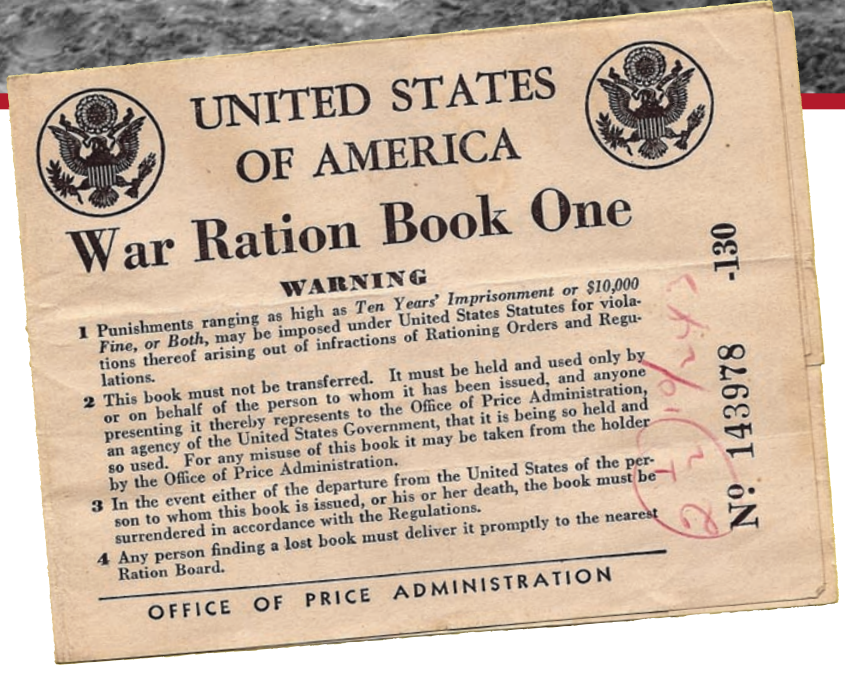

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A Wehrmacht soldier carries antitank mines during fighting on the Eastern Front. The photo originally appeared in *Signal* in 1943. Courtesy of akg-images.

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Learning from the Past

WELCOME TO THIS, our fourth issue! We have packed it like a seabag or field pack with features we are sure you will find of interest.

There's Ed Miller's update on one of the finest military books ever written—his 1995 epic about the Hürgten Forest, *A Dark and Bloody Ground*; Mike Haskew's piece on the 1943 Allied invasion of Italy at Salerno; Dick Camp's riveting article on the Marines' bloody (and perhaps unnecessary) struggle for the island of Peleliu; and John Osborne's inspiring story about Americans who flew with the Royal Air Force because they simply couldn't wait for their country to go to war against Nazi Germany.

We also give you Eric Hammel's overview on how and why decades of misunderstandings between Japan and the United States helped to touch off the Pacific phase of World War II; and Allyn Vannoy's intriguing piece on the Red Ball Express—the Allies' lifeline in the ETO.

Then there's Henrik Lunde's eye-opening feature on the 1944 campaign that dwarfed Operation Overlord in size and scope—the Soviets' Operation Bagration.

As icing on this particular cake, we've layered on Herb Kugel's informative memoir about wartime rationing in the United States; Blaine Taylor's examination of the mysterious death (or assassination) of movie star Leslie Howard; and a look inside the fabulous U.S. Marine Corps Museum.

Yes, there's a lot to digest, but we trust that you will find it very satisfying.

I was recently reading a brochure published a decade ago by the U.S. Army Center of Military History and there was something in its introduction that struck me—something that I want to share with you:

"World War II was the largest and most violent armed conflict in the history of mankind. However, the half century that now separates us from that conflict has exacted its toll on our collective knowledge. While World War II continues to absorb the interest of military scholars and historians, as well as its veterans, a generation of Americans has grown to maturity largely unaware of the political, social, and military implications of a war that, more than any other, united us as a people with a common purpose.

"Highly relevant today, World War II has much to teach us, not only about the profession of arms, but also about military preparedness, global strategy, and combined operations in the coalition war against fascism."

Those words rather sum up what this magazine is all about—a vehicle to teach the public about a war that most are too young to remember. The only problem: how do we reach the people for whom military history in general and WWII specifically are not subjects of interest?

We doubt that very many people who abhor all things military (and we all know some of those, don't we?) will browse through these pages and suddenly be fascinated to learn about the courageous men and women who have sacrificed for a higher ideal.

No, the bulk of the readership of this publication is 99.9 percent made up of people with more than a casual interest in World War II.

After all, people who hate cats don't subscribe to *Cat Fancy* and those who have no interest in sports cars probably don't read *Road & Track*. And those without the money to sail the ocean don't subscribe to *Yachting*.

In other words, are we "preaching to the choir" with this publication? Probably, but that ain't all bad. *WWII Quarterly* is, quite obviously, a "niche" magazine, written by and for people for whom the history of "the largest and most violent armed conflict in the history of mankind" is of compelling interest.

Maybe some of our readers are schoolteachers or college professors who will find the articles of interest and will pass the information along to their students. Also, there are many parallels between what was going on in the world some seven decades ago, before the conflict went global (e.g., countries struggling to recover from a severe economic downturn, violent extremists trying to take over the world, an America politically divided, etc.) and what is happening now (e.g., countries struggling to recover from a severe economic downturn, violent extremists trying to take over the world, an America politically divided, etc.). We can learn a lot about today (and tomorrow) by studying the past.

Which is what history is all about, isn't it?

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BY HENRIK LUNDE

Dwarfing even Overlord, Stalin's massive 1944 assault known as Operation Bagration was the Allies' largest World War II operation.

SOVIET TRIUMPH IN

OPERATION BAGRATION, the largest operation of World War II, has never been adequately acknowledged in the West to the same extent as a number of smaller campaigns. A few very recent books may be an indication that its importance is finally beginning to be recognized.

While it dwarfed all other operations, it lacked a dramatic and popular focal point like Normandy, Stalingrad, or Leningrad—which have been written about more extensively. It took place at a time when the Western Allies were still engaged in Operation Overlord—the fighting in Normandy's hedgerow country inland from the beaches—the landings in southern France, the dash across France, and the ongoing struggle in Italy. These have received the preponderance of attention while the near destruction of three German army groups on the Eastern Front has been relegated to a few paragraphs or pages in the more popular accounts of the war in the East. But Bagration was too large and important to ignore or minimize.

Background

The political scene for the Soviet 1944 Summer Offensive was set at the meeting between Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin at Tehran in December 1943. Many subjects of great importance were covered at this conference, the most important being their agreement to orchestrate future operations against Germany in 1944. Churchill and Roosevelt informed Stalin that they intended to open the long-awaited second front by landing in

Soviet infantrymen charge out of a trench in Belorussia during Operation Bagration.

THE EAST

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France in May 1944. In turn, Stalin promised to support this operation by launching a massive strategic offensive of his own.

Planning for the Belorussian Offensive, as Bagration is also known, began in the spring of 1944. Knowledge of the operation was severely limited to the five or six officers working on the plan. It was decided to launch the offensive on June 22. While this had symbolic importance since it marked—to the day—the three-year anniversary of the German invasion (Operation Barbarossa), it can be safely assumed that the practical Stalin had other reasons for delaying his offensive for a month after the announced date for the Allied landings in France.

The Soviet armies involved in bloody fighting during the winter and early spring had made spectacular advances, particularly in the south. They had also driven the Germans away from the immediate area around Leningrad. The armies needed time to reorganize and resupply before undertaking another major effort. Stalin was also skeptical about the planned American-British landings in France. By delaying his own strategic offensive, it gave him a chance to see how that operation developed before beginning his own offensive in Belorussia.

If the Normandy landings were successful, they might draw off German forces from the East and the delay would thus benefit the Soviets. However, after the landings, the Western Allies were still almost 1,100 kilometers from Berlin and the eastern bulge of Germany's Army Group Center was 1,200 kilometers from

Berlin. The distance from the rail-junction city of Orsha—still in German hands—to Moscow was roughly 400 kilometers.

While the German Army in 1944 was only a shadow of what it was in 1940-41 in terms of troop quality and leadership, it was still a potent force. If the landings in France ended in a fiasco, Stalin had to assume that the Germans would move the bulk of their 50 infantry and 10 armored divisions then in France and the Low Countries to the Eastern Front; a resurgent Wehrmacht with a major victory under its belt would be tough to deal with. The prospect of having to cope basically alone with Germany for another year or two must have given Stalin pause.

Such redeployment would also alter the space/force ratio, an often-overlooked element that increasingly plagued the Germans. As the German armies in the East were bled white from 1941 to 1944, the space/force ratio increasingly swung to the advantage of the Soviets, and that could only change by a significant increase of German forces or a withdrawal to shorter defensive lines. As the Germans were forced back to Poland and the German border, the Soviet planners were no doubt aware that the space/force ratio would change to the advantage of the Germans.

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ABOVE: A Panzer V Panther of the Panzergrenadier Division Grossdeutschland rolls into action during Operation Bagration, June 1944. OPPOSITE: A battalion of Soviet infantry rushes forward to attack the Germans near Minsk.

The Military Situation

The Soviets had 12 fronts (army groups) facing the Germans and their allies along a 3,200 kilometer front. The strength of the Soviet Army on the Eastern Front in the spring of 1944 stood at 6,077,000. The Germans had four army groups and an independent army with a total strength of 2,250,000 facing these fronts.

Army Group Center was commanded by Field Marshal Ernst Busch, not a particularly capable commander. His appointment was due primarily to his unquestioned loyalty and obedience to Hitler. His forces occupied a huge bulge extending eastward north of the Pripet Marshes close to the headwaters of the Dvina and Dniper Rivers east of Vitebsk—the historic Russian invasion gate. Both sides referred to this bulge as the "Belorussian Balcony."

This salient developed as a result of the misfortunes of the neighboring German army groups, particularly the disastrous events that occurred in the southern sector in the wake of Stalingrad, Kursk, and the withdrawal from the Caucasus. The Soviets had advanced to the border of Romania and past Kovel near the Polish border in northwestern Ukraine, while Army Group North was driven away from Leningrad to Lake Peipus.

While numerically the strongest army group on the Eastern Front—slightly over 700,000 troops in 51 divisions, including reserves and rear security divisions—it held the longest front by far: about 780 kilometers. It was, therefore, a thinly held line that its four armies occupied—Second, Ninth, Fourth, and Third Panzer. By comparison, Army Group North Ukraine occupied a front of 350 kilometers with 45 divisions (including 10 Hungarian). The space/force ratio was therefore much greater in the Army Group Center area.

The air support resources were also out of balance between Army Group Center and Army Group North Ukraine. The Sixth Air Fleet which supported Army Group Center had 775 aircraft, but 405 of these were long-range bombers of limited value in support of defensive operations. The Fourth Air Fleet supporting Army Group North Ukraine had a total of 845 aircraft, of which 670 were fighters or ground support aircraft.

The air situation was actually worse than depicted by raw numbers. According to Fourth Army commander General Kurt von Tippelskirch, there were only 40 German fighter aircraft flyable in the Sixth Air Fleet on June 22, and there was insufficient gasoline to keep them in the air.

Soviet Strategic Planning

STAVKA (Soviet High Command) had not settled on striking at the Balcony without considering other options. One option studied was a strike into the Balkans, a continuation of the successful drive earlier in the year that brought the Soviets into northeast Romania. This option was rejected because it would leave much of western Russia in German

hands and dangerously expose the northern flank.

A second considered option called for a northwest strike from northern Ukraine across Poland to the Baltic Sea. This was promising as it could result in trapping both Army Group Center and Army Group North. But it was ultimately rejected because it was a long and perilous drive with dangerously open flanks and viewed as beyond the Soviet Army's logistic and maneuvering capabilities.

In April 1944 STAVKA settled on attacking the Balcony with the strategic objective of destroying Army Group Center. Success would bring the Soviets to the border of Poland and East Prussia—an ideal position for future operations. Pressure, meantime, would be maintained on other fronts.

The Eastern Intelligence Branch of the OKH (German Army High Command) made its own examination in early May of Soviet options. One was almost identical to the second option considered by the Soviets—a drive from Kovel in a north-northwest direction. The OKH rejected it for much the same reasons as the Soviets. The second option given serious consideration by OKH involved a Soviet offensive through Romania and Hungary into the Balkans.

While the Soviet and German appraisals were similar, they differed in their all-important conclusion. The Germans concluded that the offensive would be launched against Army Group North Ukraine, commanded by Field Marshal Walter Model. Model was a very capable and energetic officer—one of Hitler's favorite troubleshooters—with an offensive spirit. He certainly was not timid, as was Field Marshal Busch. The German intelligence estimate concluded that Army Group Center's area north of the Pripet Marches would remain quiet.

Soviet Buildup and Deception

Having settled on a strategic objective, the Soviets resorted to a vast strategic and tactical deception program. First, STAVKA ordered the entire Soviet Army to assume a defensive posture on April 19. This by itself was not sufficient to fool the Germans because they were well aware of Soviet superiority and it was inconceivable that this superiority would not be employed somewhere, at some time. The Soviet main deception effort thus became one of making the Germans believe that the resumption of the strategic offensive would come in July against the southwestern part of the front.

This was further refined so that the indicators pointed to the area of Army Group North Ukraine as the location of the main effort. The Soviets apparently knew that the Germans expected the strategic offensive to take place in Ukraine, not Belorussia, and it therefore became the task of the deception effort to reinforce existing enemy beliefs.

The Soviets had to achieve surprise while undertaking a massive redeployment of forces. They assembled 1,200,000 frontline troops to throw against Army Group Center. These were backed up by a further 1,200,000 troops farther to the rear under STAVKA control, to be used as the offensive began to roll.

The buildup of forces opposite Army Group Center began in early May and gathered steam as time passed. In just the

All photos: National Archives

first three weeks of June, 75,000 railroad carloads of troops and supplies were brought into the area opposite Army Group Center. The Soviets concealed their buildup with great skill and it was not until the end of May that the Germans began to detect an increase in the Soviet force level in the Army Group Center sector.

The four fronts opposite Army Group Center received an increase in personnel of 60 percent during May and June. In addition, there was a 300 percent increase in tanks and assault guns, an 85 percent increase in artillery and mortars, and a 62 percent increase in air strength.

In the most massive buildup of the war, the Soviets assembled some 4,000 tanks, 24,400 pieces of indirect-fire weapons, and 5,300 aircraft, giving them armor, artillery, and air superiorities of 10:1 at the assault points. The Soviet air force had full air superiority, bordering on dominance, and kept German reconnaissance aircraft at a distance except in areas they wanted the Germans to observe.

Reports of a Soviet buildup in the Army Group Center area increased rapidly in June but OKH viewed the buildup as a

ABOVE: Two young Russian soldiers, one possibly a woman, take cover as well as they can in the grass while the third takes aim at the enemy with his machine gun. LEFT: General Kurt Zeitzler, OKH chief of staff (top), Field Marshal Walter Model, commander of Army Group North Ukraine (center), and Field Marshal Ernst Busch, commander of Army Group Center at the beginning of Operation Bagration (bottom).

Soviet deception. Field Marshal Busch failed to react except for an increased concern for the curved flank of General Walter Weiss's Second Army on his right flank. The Germans had already played directly into Soviet hands in May when much of Army Group Center's strength was given to Model's Army Group North Ukraine. Both Army Group Center and Army Group North Ukraine had become concerned in early May about signs of buildup in the Kovel-Ternopol area on the border between the two army groups. The OKH Intelligence Branch also raised the specter of a possible Soviet secondary offensive south of the Pripet Marches, in the border area between Army Group Center and Army Group North Ukraine. This estimate was later amended to project that the secondary offensive would miss Army Group Center which had begun reinforcing its right flank corps, LVI Panzer Corps, with tanks, assault guns, and artillery.

General Kurt Zeitzler, OKH chief of staff, proposed the formation of a reserve army in the area, drawing on units from Army Group Center and Army Group North. He recommended using the proposed reserve army, with LVI Panzer Corps as its nucleus, to launch a spoiling offensive. Model saw in this proposal a chance to conduct an active defense and also acquire substantial additional forces for his army group. (It should be noted that, although Zeitzler was never considered a brilliant military leader, he was cho-

sen by Hitler to replace General Franz Halder in September 1942. Hitler probably did not select him because he sported a short, Hitler-like mustache but because he was far more pliable than Halder. His deficiencies would soon become glaringly apparent.)

Model proposed to Hitler that he be assigned the LVI Panzer Corps for offensive operations, knowing that this would sit well with Hitler, who much preferred offense to defense. Thus, LVI Panzer Corps was transferred to Army Group North Ukraine on May 20; Field Marshal Busch did not protest Hitler's order. The movement of the boundary resulted in a 47 kilometer reduction in Army Group Center's sector, but this miniscule reduction came at a high price. As already noted, Army Group Center had reinforced LVI Panzer Corps heavily and these reinforcements were all lost with the transfer of the corps. Army Group Center lost 15 percent of its divisions, 23 percent of its assault guns, and a staggering 50 and 88 percent, respectively, of its artillery and tank strength.

Signs of looming troubles multiplied in June in Army Group Center's sector. New Soviet units were identified and rumors that Marshal Georgi K. Zhukov, the architect of the successful defense of Leningrad and Moscow and the hero of Stalingrad, was in command of the forces being assembled were confirmed from prisoner interrogations as were the general objectives of the forthcoming offensive. These increasing signs of trouble, however, received only cursory interest at Army Group Center.

General Zeitzler convened a high-level meeting on the morning of June 14, 1944—a week after the combined U.S.-British invasion of Normandy—at OKH in Rastenburg in East Prussia. The meeting involved the chiefs of staff of the army groups and armies. They were to receive Hitler and OKH's assessment (one and the same) of the situation and told what to expect during the summer of 1944. Zeitzler was somewhat apologetic for having brought the chiefs of staff of Army Group Center and its armies to the meeting since the subject would not be of particular concern to them—announcing that OKH had concluded that the Soviets would continue their offensive against the southern army groups, with Army Group North Ukraine absorbing the brunt of the Soviet offensive.

Zeitzler's conclusion ranks as one of the most calamitous misreadings of enemy intentions in World War II. It was based mostly on preconceived ideas that brushed aside all indications to the contrary. In all fairness, it should be pointed out that most group and army commanders shared Zeitzler's conclusion, at least until some disturbing signs became obvious in June. Through their excellent deception plan the Soviets had achieved one of the first requirements of a successful campaign—to get into the head of the opposing commander.

Army Group Center under Busch had become a place devoid of proper operational conceptions and served only as a transmittal station for Hitler's orders. The Germans continued to believe blindly that the main offensive would take place against Army Group North Ukraine.

Busch flew to meet Hitler at the Berghof on the morning of June 22—Bagration's D-day. Except for trying to get LVI Panzer Corps back, the meeting was apparently called to deal with routine matters.

Order of Battle

The final Soviet operational directive was provided to the front commanders on May 31; the offensive was to be launched on a 480-kilometer front from just south of Polotsk, on the boundary between Army Group Center and Army Group North, to Rogatchev, near the boundary between the Fourth and Ninth Armies. Stalin had assigned the code-name "Bagration" to the

Map © 2010 Philip Schwartzberg, Meridian Mapping, Minneapolis, MN

operation. Pyotr (Peter) Bagration was a fellow Georgian, a general who was mortally wounded in the Battle of Borodino against Napoleon in September 1812.

Marshals Zhukov and Alesandr M. Vasilevskiy were each responsible for operational planning, coordination, and direction of two fronts. Zhukov was assigned the two southern fronts, 2nd and 1st Belorussian, while Vasilevskiy had the two northern fronts, 1st Baltic and 3rd Belorussian.

Unlike many operational plans, the Soviet plan worked so well that it is not necessary to discuss it in detail as it unfolded as planned in the described operations. The initial tasks of the four fronts were to isolate and reduce four communications centers to the rear of the German lines: Vitebsk, Orsha, Mogilev, and Bobruysk. The operations against Vitebsk were primarily the responsibility of the 1st Baltic Front under General Ivan K. Bagramyan.

The 3rd Belorussian Front, under General Ivan Chernyakhovskiy, would assist by enveloping Vitebsk from the south with 5th and 39th Armies before heading toward Senno. Another assault group from the 3rd Belorussian Front, consisting of the 11th Guards and 31st Armies, would attack toward Orsha. Cavalry-Mechanized Group Oslikovskiy would undertake a rapid advance west past Senno. The 3rd Belorussian Front had the 5th Guards Tank Army in reserve.

The 2nd Belorussian Front, consisting of the 33rd, 49th, and 50th Armies under the command of General Georgiy F. Zakharov, would hit the center of 4th Army and eliminate the German bridgehead east of the Dniper River. These forces would then take Mogilev.

General Konstantin Rokossovskiy's 1st Belorussian Front was to use two armies (3rd and 48th) east of the Beresina River and two armies (65th and 28th) and a Cavalry-Mechanized Group west of the Beresina. These forces would encircle Bobruysk.

The breakthroughs were to be achieved by massive infantry-led attacks with heavy artillery and air support against the German lines on narrow fronts. It is estimated that 250 pieces of indirect-fire weapons per kilometer were used at each of the breakthrough points. When holes had been punched in the German lines, armored spearheads would rush through and encircle the communications centers by double envelopments.

The second phase of the Soviet operation involved deep armor-led drives against Minsk from both the northeast and southeast designed to isolate the 4th German Army. Strong forces (3rd Belorussian Front) would bypass Minsk on the north and head for Molodechno, while equally strong forces (1st Belorussian Front) would head for Baranovichi to the southwest of Minsk. These drives would not only isolate 4th Army but would block the escape routes from Minsk which were restricted by vast areas of forests and swamps.

On the German side, the far left flank was held by General Hasso-Eccard von Manteuffel's Third Panzer Army from both sides of Vitebsk to near Polotsk where it tied into Hansen's Sixteenth Army of Army Group North. On its right, Third Panzer tied into Fourth Army north of Orsha. Fourth Army, which held a 40-kilometer deep and 130-kilometer wide bridgehead east of the Dniper River, tied into Ninth Army north of Rogatchev. Ninth Army held a front that curved southwestward along the Prut and Dniper Rivers to the area south of Zhlobin where it bent westward over the Bersina River to the lower Pitch and Pripet. Second Army held the longest sector along the Pripet River to where it tied into the left flank of Army Group North Ukraine north of Kovel.

The Offensive to Minsk

An avalanche of Soviet forces struck Army Group Center in the morning of June 22, although there are some arguments about the start date. The first Soviet communiqué mentioned June 23 as the start date and most Soviet accounts use this date. It seems, however, that the Germans should be aware of when all hell broke loose and we have therefore used June 22 as the start date. It may be, as Chris Bellamy suggests, that some of the attacks began on June 22 but that the full fury was not unleashed until the 23rd. Field Marshal Busch, who was still in Germany to see Hitler, hurried back to his headquarters in Minsk.

As in Normandy, partisan forces were of great help to the attackers. The estimated 143,000 partisans in Belorussia had begun attacks against Army Group Center's lines of communication on June 20 but paused when the Soviets launched diversionary attacks in the south. The reinforcements that the Germans sent south were allowed to proceed unmolested. When the reserves were turned around and sent north after the main blow fell on Army Group Center, the partisans went into action and virtually paralyzed traffic in the German rear area.

The main Soviet attacks proceeded according to plans. The 1st Baltic and 3rd Belorussian fronts quickly pierced the pulverized German front lines on both sides of the city of

It was finally dawning on OKH that the offensive against Army Group Center was on a greater scale than expected, with Minsk as a probable objective, but still they clung to the belief that another, more powerful offensive would strike Army Group North Ukraine.

Vitebsk and proceeded with its envelopment. Third Panzer Army, on the left flank of Army Group Center, was caught completely by surprise by the Soviet 6th Guards Army and its front was torn open. In this phase of the operation the Soviets employed their vast air superiority primarily against German artillery, which was established in open positions near the front so that the guns could be used in a direct-fire role. This left the German guns very vulnerable to air attack.

A German soldier watches through binoculars as an antiartillery shell explodes in front of his field position.

On the second day of the operation, the Soviets again overwhelmed 3rd Panzer Army's front north of Vitebsk and proceeded to encircle the city from the north, trapping five German divisions. Hitler's (and Busch's) fixation on a rigid defense and holding on to areas designated as "fortified places" began playing havoc with any efforts by the armies to mount a coherent defense.

The 3rd and 2nd Belorussian Fronts were tearing through the Fourth Army's front lines and heading for Orsha and Mogilev. A message from Busch reported that he saw no way of restoring the front of Third Panzer Army without giving up Vitebsk or receiving reinforcements; Hitler was not willing to give up Vitebsk. And OKH was not willing to bring units north from Army Group North Ukraine because they still expected the main attack to fall there. Busch himself was not willing to take units from Weiss's Second Army for the same reason. Decision-making had become paralyzed.

On June 24, 4th Army's left flank corps was beginning to disintegrate under powerful attacks, and the 1st Belorussian Front penetrated the 9th Army's lines near its northern boundary. The Soviets reached Senno in the 3rd Panzer Army sector where they turned south behind 4th Army's left flank. Hitler finally gave permission to withdraw four of the five divisions trapped at Vitebsk, but it was too late.

General Tippelskirch, commander of Fourth Army, requested permission to abandon the bridgehead east of the Dniper River but Busch refused. The following day Tippelskirch took matters into his own hands and ordered the withdrawal. On June 25, Ninth Army, in danger of having its main force trapped between the Dniper and Beresina Rivers, also requested permission to withdraw before it was destroyed. Busch, set on a rigid forward defense, again refused.

By the morning of June 26, Army Group Center appeared to be falling apart. It had committed all its reserves without stopping the Soviet advances. Vitebsk was encircled and the forces there were lost. Third Panzer Army was driven back on the Dvina and Ulla Rivers, 80 kilometers west of Vitebsk. The right flank corps of 3rd Panzer Army—badly mauled remnants of five divisions—was in full flight west and south of Senno and had lost contact with the rest of the army.

In Ninth Army's sector, the Soviet armies were pushing toward Bobruysk and fanned out on both sides of the city. The lead Soviet elements in the south were only five kilometers from the city on June 26. Repeated requests by Ninth Army to be allowed to withdraw to Bobruysk and the Beresina River were denied until the morning of June 27. But, before the army could react to this approval and thereby establish contact with the Fourth Army, new orders arrived forbidding any withdrawal.

OKH and Busch changed their minds again in the afternoon. General Hans Jordan, commander of Ninth Army, was given permission for a breakout to the north, but the permission was accompanied by an order to hold Bobruysk. The speed of events had by now overtaken the vacillating attitude of the army group and OKH. Bobruysk was encircled by 10

Soviet divisions, trapping two German corps of about 70,000 men in or east of the city. Panic broke out among the thousands of leaderless German troops in Bobruysk as they milled around in confusion. Ninth Army Headquarters, located outside the pocket, transferred its one remaining operational corps to the Fourth Army and withdrew to Marina Gorka where it tried to hold open an avenue of escape for the Fourth Army using parts of the 12th Panzer Division. The Ninth was the first German army to be ground to pieces in the Soviet offensive.

Things were not going much better for the other armies. General Rokossovskiy's 1st Belorussian Front was also driving toward Minsk and the city of Slutsk to its south. Zakharov's 2nd Belorussian Front forced a crossing of the Dniper north of Mogilev on June 26 and General Tippelskirch was forced to consider a withdrawal of his army by a single road through the swamps and forests between the Prut and Beresina Rivers. There was only one bridge across the Beresina, but intercepted Soviet radio messages to their tank spearheads revealed that they had orders to secure the crossing.

ABOVE: A shell bursts on the parapet of a German trench as a detachment of infantry fires at advancing Soviet assault troops on the southern Russian front. OPPOSITE: German generals captured during the Soviet summer offensive prepare to lead a march of 57,000 German prisoners through Moscow on July 17, 1944.

Tippelskirch sent a blunt message to Busch on June 27 which basically asked if the army group wanted Fourth Army to fight its way west or be encircled. Tippelskirch was told that if Fourth Army had to fall back, it was to establish a line on the Prut River but the "fortified places" of Mogilev and Orsha were to be held at all costs. By the time he received this message, the Soviets were already in Orsha. Tippelskirch ordered a withdrawal when the Soviets began enveloping his southern flank.

Fourth Army Headquarters moved from Belynichi to Beresino on June 28 over the same road the army would have to use—a road that was clogged by burning vehicles and dead horses from Soviet air strikes; it took nine hours to cover the 30-mile distance.

When Tippelskirch reached Beresino, he found a message from Busch ordering him to quickly get behind the Beresina River. An order from OKH (Hitler) gave permission to withdraw from Mogilev. That place had not been heard from since the previous day and had already fallen to the Soviets.

In his report to General Zeitzler on June 28, Busch noted that Jordan's Ninth Army had collapsed, the Fourth was retreating, and Third Panzer had only one corps left of the original three. Despite this disastrous situation, Busch promised to fully implement an order that had come in from Hitler during the night to hold a line in the vicinity of Beresino—despite the fact that the remnants of Third Panzer and Ninth Armies were already west of the line.

It was finally dawning on OKH that the offensive against Army Group Center was on a greater scale than expected, with Minsk as a probable objective, but still they clung to the belief that another, more powerful offensive would strike Army Group North Ukraine. OKH proposed to pull Army Group North back to a line running from Dvisk to Riga in order to shorten the front and gain divisions to use in the Army Group Center area.

Hitler ignored the proposal and instead sacked Busch and appointed Field Marshal Model to command both Army Group Center and Army Group North Ukraine. The new command structure pleased the commanders and staffs of Army Group Center. Model was held in high esteem, and with him in command of both army groups, it would make it easier to shift forces between them. However, it did nothing to correct the space/force ratio, which the OKH proposal would have done.

Soviet aircraft knocked out the only bridge across the Beresina River on June 29 while the 1st and 3rd Belorussian Fronts were outflanking what was left of Germany's Fourth Army from the north and south; the Soviets captured both Borisov and Slutsk.

The fate of Fourth Army was sealed on June 30 when Soviet tanks and artillery came within range of the bridge over the Beresina. Model was desperately trying to get some divisions from Army Group North, which could only spare these forces by a pullback, especially of its right flank, and this was something Hitler would not contemplate. He simply ignored Model's request.

The tanks and motorized units from Rokossovskiy's 1st Belorussian Front drove past Slutsk and Borisov toward Baranovichi and Molodechno. This caused Jordan's Ninth Army headquarters to leave Marina Gorka and head for Stolbtsy, halfway between

Baranovichi and Minsk. It hoped to hold a crossing over the Neman River, the last escape route from Minsk where a panicky situation already existed. Trying to organize a force of stragglers to defend the town proved impossible. The 5th Guards Tank Army was getting perilously close in the north. Jordan directed his only remaining panzer division against Stolbtsy from Marina Gorka but the Soviets had already captured the town.

With the exception of a rear guard, Tippelskirch's Fourth Army was across the Beresina River while his headquarters hurried to Molodechno to try to hold the railroad line running west from that town. Troops from the 1st and 3rd Belorussian Fronts took Minsk on July 3.

Ninth Army tried unsuccessfully to open the bridge at Stolbtsy while the Soviets drove toward Baranovichi the following day. After that, the only German troops to escape were individuals and small groups that made their way through the dense Nalibocka Forest. Ninth Army managed to hold the pocket around Minsk open long enough for perhaps 10,000-15,000 of its troops to escape. Jordan's headquarters had ceased to function by the time it reached Baranovichi and could no longer exercise control of the divisions arriving from Second Army. The headquarters was moved to the rear to reorganize and re-equip.

There are no other words to describe the state of Army Group Center after 12 days of combat than that it was shattered. Fourth Army's strength at the beginning of the operation was 165,000 men. It had lost 130,000 of these by the time Minsk fell. Third Panzer Army lost 10 divisions. In all, Army Group Center lost 25 divisions.

Westward from Minsk

Past experience led the Germans to believe that the Soviets would pause to resupply and reorganize. The Soviets had advanced 200 kilometers since the start of the offensive and this was farther than they had moved in one leap on previous occasions.

Field Marshal Model hoped to establish a defensive line between the cities of Baranovichi and Molodechno. To do so, he needed additional forces to close two gaps on his left flank. An 80-kilometer-wide gap had developed between the right flank of Sixteenth Army of Army Group North at Polotsk and the left flank of Third Panzer Army. A gap of similar size had opened between the troops of Fourth Army trying to establish a line at Molodechno and the right flank of Third Panzer. There was an acute danger that the Soviets could encircle and destroy what was left of Third Panzer Army. This would open the road to Riga and East Prussia and pin Army Group North against the Baltic.

General Georg Lindemann, commander of Army Group North, had no troops to spare to help Model seal the gaps as long as he was forced to hold Polotsk. On July 3, Lindemann was given permission to fall back a short distance from Polotsk and ordered to attack southwestward to establish contact with Army Group Center. Lindemann replied that with the few troops made available by the short withdrawal he could still not attack; he was promptly relieved by Hitler who appointed General Johannes Friessner to take command. Friessner set about to stretch his front westward, thereby narrowing the gap between Army Group North and Army Group Center to about 30 kilometers. Friessner intended to close this gap with a southward attack by three divisions. The attack never materialized.

Nor did the pause in the Soviet offensive that the Germans had expected occur. STAVKA ordered the offensive to continue without cessation on a broad front. The 1st Baltic Front was ordered to advance toward Dvinsk; the 3rd Belorussian Front was aimed at Mododechno and the Neman River; the 1st Belorussian Front advanced on Baranovichi and then on to the city of Brest; and the 2nd Belorussian Front remained behind in the Minsk area to conduct mopping-up operations.

The rapid Soviet advance on a wide front nullified Model's plans to establish a defensive line from Mododechno to Baranovichi. On July 6, the 3rd Belorussian Front had penetrated the narrows south and east of Mododechno and the road to Vilnius was wide open. Weiss's Second Army was able to hold Baranovichi for only a couple of days before it fell to the Soviets on July 8.

General Friessner's attack from the north ran into the 4th Shock and 6th Guards Armies from the 1st Baltic Front advancing toward Dvinsk. Friessner now proposed that Sixteenth Army be allowed to withdraw to the Lithuania position, from Kraslava to Ostrov. Hitler relented but his solution—withdrawal halfway to the Lithuania position—only made things worse.

With no prospects of stopping the Sovi-

ets anywhere, Model requested a meeting with Hitler on July 9. Hitler was adamant about not withdrawing Army Group North. Instead, he promised to immediately make available to Model a panzer division from Germany and two divisions from Army Group North, followed by two more divisions later. With these reinforcements, Third Panzer Army was to attack northward to close the gap between it and Army Group North.

Nothing came of this plan. General Friessner informed Hitler on July 12 that he intended to attack south toward Third Panzer Army but emphasized that the effort would be useless since the 1st Baltic Front under General Bagramyan would continue its westward drive. He pointed out that his own front was unstable and he urged a withdrawal of Army Group North to a line running from Riga to Kaunas. If his proposal was not acted upon, Friessner asked to be relieved of his command. Hitler rejected Friessner's proposal and countered with a plan to assemble five panzer divisions behind Kaunas to drive north to close the gap between the two army groups.

The following day, Model informed OKH that he would try to stop the Russians along a line from Kaunas along the Neman River to Brest, but to do so he needed the panzer divisions that Hitler had planned for the northward drive. Even counting the new units arriving, he would have only 16 divisions near full strength to counter 160 Soviet divisions and brigades. At a conference at Rastenburg on July 14, Hitler agreed to let Model have the divisions to first stop the Soviet offensive and then use them offensively to plug the gap between the two army groups. The logical solution of withdrawing Army Group North was again rejected.

The Germans managed to restore some semblance of order in the Army Group Center area after the middle of July. The Fourth Army and Third Panzer Army were able to establish a line from Ukmerge through Kaunus and along the Neman River south of Grondo while the Second Army continued to pivot its left flank as it withdrew toward Bialystok. Ninth Army was still in the rear reorganizing and preparing defensive works to protect East Prussia. The Germans were helped immeasurably by the fact that the Soviets, after advancing more than 320 kilometers, were outrunning their supplies. Railroads, bridges, and roads had to be rebuilt or repaired in the area devastated by the offensive before another sustained drive could be undertaken.

On July 17, the Soviets paraded 57,000 German prisoners through Moscow to underscore the extent of their victories. It also served to refute German claims that they had conducted a planned withdrawal from Belorussia. Finally, it provided evidence to counter claims in Western newspapers that the Soviet offensive was made easy because of the large number of German troops tied down in France. In fact, it was not until July 18 that the Americans captured St. Lo, just 30 kilometers from Omaha Beach. The Soviet offensive had covered over 320 kilometers by July 18, while the U.S. 1st Army and British 2nd Army—with about one million men ashore—had become bogged down in the treacherous hedgerows of Normandy.

Two days after the Americans captured St. Lo, the famous unsuccessful attempt on Hitler's life was made at Rastenburg by an anti-Hitler conspiracy within the Army. The conspiracy was quickly shattered and resulted in a number of new officers being placed in key posts, mostly on the Western Front. The only changes that affected the Eastern Front were not a result of the attempt. On July 21, General Heinz Guderian was appointed successor to Zeitzler, who had reported sick three days earlier. Two days later, General Ferdinand Schoerner, commander of Army Group South Ukraine, and General Friessner exchanged assignments.

Soviet Pressure on the Flanks

Army Group Center radio monitors intercepted a Soviet order to their tank units north of Vilnius which raised the distinct possibility of another and greater catastrophe on the Eastern Front. The messages instructed the Soviet units to attack in the gap between Army Groups Center and North. This actually initiated the next phase of the Soviet offensive—pressure against the flanks as the advance in the center began to lose momentum as a result of supply problems. Model told OKH that he could not assemble an attack force in time to stop the Soviet drive and that Army Group North had to manage on its own.

ABOVE: Soviet artillerymen fire a 45mm M1937 antitank gun at a German position. OPPOSITE: A German 8-ton semitrack Sd. Kfz. 7 troop prime mover hauls several soldiers and an antitank gun past a wrecked Russian T-34 tank near Madona/Latvia in August 1944.

The conditions in Army Group North were dire. It was trying to get into the Lithuania positions but these positions were already beginning to crack. Friessner had no reserves left. He warned that the front was about to collapse.

The dangerous situation resulted in a meeting between Hitler, Hermann Göring (commander of the Luftwaffe), General Zeitzler, Field Marshal Model, and General Friessner. The only forces Hitler had to offer were two assault gun brigades intended for Finland. This was one of those rare occasions where Göring spoke up against Hitler's strategy. He observed that the only way to generate sufficient forces and keep Army Group North from being encircled was to withdraw behind the Dvina River and establish a line between Riga and Kaunas. Hitler agreed that this was the simplest solution but noted that this would cost Germany the Latvian oil, Swedish iron ore, and Finnish nickel. As it turned out, all these would be lost within a month. Hitler insisted that Army Group North stay in place by every possible means. Zeitzler thereupon offered his resignation. When this offer was refused, he reported sick.

The Soviet pressures against the northern flank of Army Group Center took the form of a drive into the gap between that army group and Army Group North with Riga as the objective. General Bagramyan's 1st Baltic Front was given two fresh armies—2nd Guards and 51st—just brought in from the Crimea.

The pressure on the southern flank, opposite Army Group North Ukraine, was delivered by Marshal Ivan S. Konev's 1st Ukrainian Front with 10 armies, three of them tank armies. Rokossovskiy's 1st Belorussian Front, on Konev's right, had been reinforced by a Guards army and a tank army as well as the 1st Polish Army, a force of four divisions. The armies of these two fronts were positioned for a three-pronged drive: to Brest and Lublin in the north; to Lwow in the center; and Stanislav in the south.

The offensive against Army Group North Ukraine began on July 13 (the Lwow-Sandomierz Offensive) and resulted in weeks of bloody fighting. Converging tank columns reached the Bug River 50 kilometers west of Lwow on July 18, catching six German divisions of XIII Corps in a pocket east of Lwow. An attempt to break out to the south was made on July 22; only 5,000 managed to escape. First Panzer Army still held Lwow and its front to the south but was in danger of being encircled.

Army Group North Ukraine withdrew under pressure to the Bug River because of the breakthrough in the south and because the neighboring Second Army on its north was in retreat toward Brest, where it went into defensive positions on July 22. The Soviets forced the Bug and created a bridgehead on the west bank at Chelm, Poland, on July 20. From this crossing, the Soviets drove on to Lublin 70 kilometers to the west. They bypassed that town and headed northwestward in the morning of July 23.

In the north, Third Panzer Army was hard pressed around Kaunas. Between July 18 and 21, the 1st Baltic Front had created several bridgeheads across the Neman River while other forces were pushing the left flank of Third Panzer Army south. The division on the left flank began to disintegrate under continual attacks by six divisions of 2nd Guards Army. A 60-kilometer gap was formed on the left flank of Third Panzer Army, and 2nd Guards Army poured through it on July 22, its spearheads reaching a point 70 kilometers behind Third Panzer by evening. Third Panzer was virtually ineffective, its frontline strength having fallen to 13,850 men.

Hansen's Sixteenth Army, on the right flank of Army Group North, had withdrawn to the Lithuania position on July 19 but it could not hold, so Friessner ordered a further 15-kilometer withdrawal on July 22. Friessner warned OKH that further withdrawals would be necessary to save the army group from destruction.

Serious gaps had formed in the German front in the Army Group North Ukraine sector. First Panzer Army was still holding at Lwow but Soviet forces had pressed the Fourth Panzer Army to the vicinity of the San and Vistula Rivers. There was no longer a continuous front. The armies requested permission to withdraw behind the Vistula and San Rivers without delay to avoid encirclement and destruction. Model agreed with these requests and he wanted to bring both army groups (Center and North Ukraine) behind the Vistula since the Soviets were moving rapidly north between the Vistula and Bug toward Siedlce, threatening to cut off Second Army and because the 1st Baltic Front had thrust past Kaunas and Third Panzer Army in the north.

Guderian and Hitler did not agree. A directive prepared for Hitler's signature on

July 23 ordered Model's two army groups to halt where they were while Army Group Center was to create a solid front on a line from Kaunas via Bialystok to Brest while assembling strong forces on both flanks. These "strong" flank forces were to strike north and south and reestablish contact with the neighboring groups. All army groups were promised reinforcements.

In the last week of July, the Soviet armies were still rolling west through a German front that was more or less shattered from the Baltic to the Carpathians. On July 24, several crack Soviet armies were closing on the San River 80 kilometers west of Lwow between Jaroslaw and Przemysl, which the 4th Soviet Tank Army crossed on July 25, forcing First Panzer Army to withdraw from Lwow toward the Carpathians on July 27. The Fourth Panzer Army of the same army group retreated behind the Wieprz River southeast of Lublin, but the Soviets had torn open the German front for a distance of over 100 kilometers in the south and almost as much in the north. Fourth Panzer Army was given permission to retire behind the Vistula River.

Second Army of Army Group Center was trying to establish a defense at Brest but the 2nd Soviet Tank Army was racing north toward Siedlce in its rear on July 24 while two Soviet armies hit its southern flank. Headquarters, Ninth German Army, was again sent to the front to try to defend Siedlce and the approaches to Warsaw. It was given four divisions but three of these were still in transit. Rokossovskiy's armored columns easily penetrated the thin screening line established by Ninth Army and reached the east bank of the Vistula at Deblin and Pulaway. Motorized Soviet columns were pouring west from Panevezhis behind Manteuffel's Third Panzer Army. On July 25, Second Army reported that it could no longer hold Brest but OKH prevaricated so long in giving permission to retire that it was virtually encircled. Ninth Army, with all the forces it could muster, tried to defend Warsaw and hold Siedlce long enough for the divisions coming from Brest to escape.

Bagramyan's motorized columns, which had passed Third Panzer Army's left flank, turned north and, in an 80-kilometer night dash, captured Jelgava and cut the last rail link to Army Group North. Third Panzer Army, itself in trouble, did not have adequate forces to halt the Soviet advance. Nine rifle divisions and two Guards tank corps fell on the right flank of Third Panzer Army south of Kaunas on July 29. On the same day, Rokossovskiy's tanks drove north past Warsaw. Soviet forces were within 11 kilometers of the city in the southeast and had captured Wolomin, 13 kilometers to the northeast.

Third Panzer Army's flank collapsed on July 30 and the Soviets advanced to Mariampol, only 30 kilometers from the East Prussian border. General Georg-Hans Reinhardt, the Army commander, sought permission to withdraw from Kaunas where two of his divisions were being encircled and pulverized. Model said he could not grant that permission and it was useless asking OKH. Taking matters into his own hands, Reinhardt withdrew his troops during the night behind the Nevayazha River, 15 kilometers to the west.

On July 31, Soviet mechanized forces reached the Gulf of Riga, trapping Army Group North. In the Warsaw area, the 8th Guards Army seized a bridgehead near Magnuszew while 1st Tank Army began ferrying troops and tanks across the Vistula at Baranow.

Soviet Onslaught Crests

On the positive side for the Germans, there were signs that the Soviet offensive was running out of steam. They did not try to expand on their breakthrough to the Baltic, the tanks in the Warsaw area ground to a halt—apparently short of gasoline—and Chernyakovskiy's 3rd Belorussian Front did not move against East Prussia through the gap between Mariampol and Kaunas, although it captured Vilkavishkis, 15 kilometers from the border. The Soviets, having advanced in some places more than 240 kilometers since the capture of Minsk and about 560 kilometers in all, had finally outrun their supplies. Logistics had dammed the flood.

The Warsaw uprising (not to be confused with the uprising in that city's Jewish Ghetto, which took place in April-May 1943), under General Tadeusz Bor-Komorowski, began on August 1. That is a story in itself and outside the scope of this article. Suffice it to say that it was not in Stalin's interest to assist the Poles in the city and he had a convenient excuse in the fact that his armies had outrun their supplies. Nevertheless, they certainly had the ability to push through to assist the insurgents had they wanted to.

The energetic Model took advantage of the Soviet slow-down. He managed to seal their bridgeheads across the Vistula and establish a continuous front from around Shaulyay to the Vistula near Pulawy. But the 670-kilometer front was thinly manned—just 39 German divisions and brigades faced one-third of the Soviet strength on the Eastern Front.

Model sent Hitler a somewhat optimistic report on August 3. After completing a number of containment operations and counterattacks with newly arrived units by August 15, he would assemble sufficient forces to attack and reestablish contact with Army Group North.

The most urgent issue on the Eastern Front in early August was to keep Army Group North from collapsing. General Ferdinand Schoerner told Hitler on August 6 that his group would hold until contact with Army Group Center was restored—as long as that happened soon, since his exhausted troops were under relentless pressure. He told Guderian that if the relief did not come quickly, he would pull back to a line from Riga to Kaunas—if that were still possible.

August 16 was an eventful day. The 3rd Belorussian Front threw three armies against the right flank of Third Panzer Army just as Model began his relief attack from Shaulyay toward Army Group North with two understrength panzer corps. Then Model was

Victorious Soviet soldiers riding on tanks and trucks parade past the government building in Minsk, the capital of White Russia. Minsk was liberated on the 11th day of Operation Bagration.

ordered to take over as commander on the Western Front. General Reinhardt, as senior army commander, took over the army group.

Two panzer brigades from Manteuffel's Third Panzer Army captured Tukums on the Gulf of Riga on August 20 and the encirclement of Army Group North was broken; the corridor to Army Group North along the gulf coast was widened to 30 kilometers over the next few days. A suggestion by Reinhardt to withdraw Army Group North was supported by Guderian but refused by Hitler.

As August ended, it was evident in the zones of Army Groups North, Center, and North Ukraine that the Soviet armies had taken up a defensive posture, thereby bringing the offensive to a close. The Soviets had a large bridgehead on the Vistula at Baranow and smaller ones at Magnuszew, Serock, and Rozan.

The Soviets let the uprising in Warsaw burn itself out after an unprecedented level of viciousness without offering any meaningful assistance and without allowing the use of Soviet airfields for long-range U.S. aircraft flying supply missions for the insurgents until September 10, when it was too late. The insurgents in the shattered city finally capitulated to the Germans on October 2.

Costs and Consequences

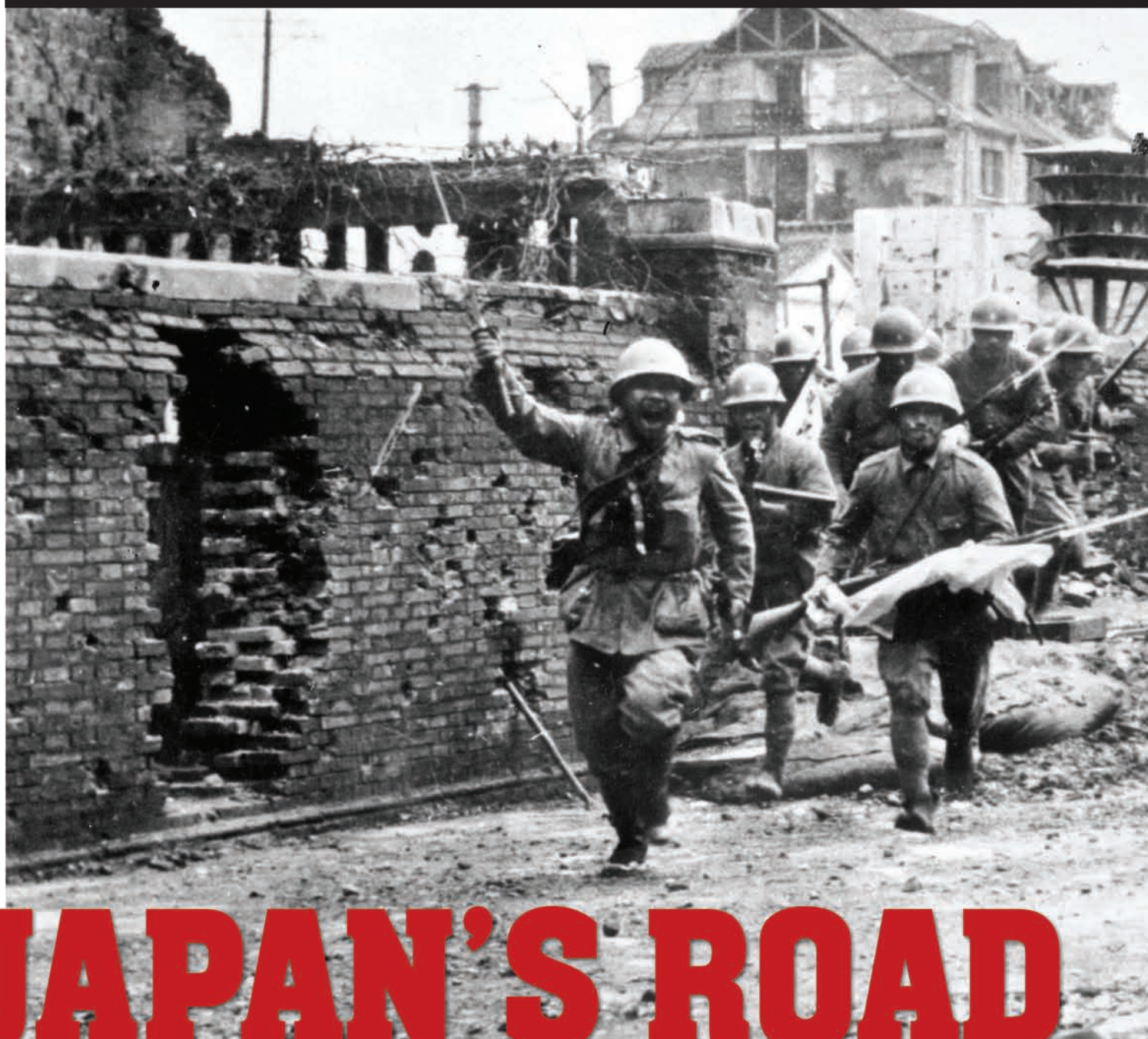
It is difficult to establish accurate casualty figures for Bagration—they vary from account to account. Some include all three army groups (North, Center, and North Ukraine) while others do not. Most accounts seem to agree that Bagration cost the German Army about a quarter of its Eastern Front manpower. Estimates for German losses range as high as 300,000 killed or missing, 120,000 captured, and 250,000 wounded.

The Soviet losses were also substantial—possibly as high as 178,000 killed or missing (some sources report all casualty categories as high as 750,000)—although other estimates place the number of killed and missing at around 70,000. Both sides lost substantial quantities of equipment, but it was by far more injurious for the Germans.

Some of the debacle can be traced to Hitler's intransigence in not making military decisions dictated by logic. He repeatedly disregarded entreaties from his commanders to make withdrawals and adjustments that would have improved his armies' chances to counter the Soviet offensive. In his quest for loyalty, he had failed to appoint the best officers to key posts and kept shifting commanders between commands, most often to the detriment of the units.

The German Army never recovered from the disaster between Vitebsk and Warsaw. The virtual destruction of three armies of Army Group Center was the most calamitous defeat suffered by the Germans in World War II, and the loss of experienced officers and noncommissioned officers could not be made good at this stage of the war. The Soviets could sit calmly on the Vistula, reorganizing and resupplying their forces, supremely confident of their ability to drive to the Oder and Neisse Rivers and Berlin. The demoralized Germans—now coping with a full-fledged two-front war—could only mount a weak defense along the Vistula. Operation Bagration had sealed their fate. □

All photos: National Archives



JAPAN'S ROAD

Japan's road to World War II was a long one. Throughout the late 19th century, the island nation broke out of its feudal past on a path to modernity with a ruthlessness and singlemindedness that would have scared Western nations had they been paying attention.

The modern Japanese Navy was modeled on Britain's Royal Navy, its army was patterned on the Prussian army, and it imported its new modern industrial base from the best examples the world around. By 1894, Japan was ready to join in the game of empire that had so enriched the major European powers over the previous 400 years.

Japan's first target for acquisition was Korea. First, in July 1894, it attacked the Chinese forces that outposted the peninsula, then it declared war four days later. The Chinese were routed and a peace treaty was signed in March 1895 that gave Japan access to Korea and Formosa. Shortly, France, Germany, and Russia informed Japan that they would oppose the outright absorption of Korea into a Japanese empire. This so-called Triple Intervention was taken by Japanese leaders to mean that even the most modern Asian state was not to be granted a status equal to that of European nations. This rebuke only fueled Japan's newfound lust for empire.

Japan needed resources to realize its industrial ambitions. The country possessed precious few of its own, but nearby Korea and adjacent Manchuria had them in abun-

Japanese soldiers rush into the Chinese city of Toh-an, the terminus of the Nannsun Railway, north of Kiukiang.

to WAR

Five decades of mutual antagonism spark war in the Pacific and East Asia.

BY ERIC HAMMEL

dance. This outlook cast Russia as a leading contender. As proof against the alliance that had denied it a complete domination of Korea, Japan signed a naval treaty with the United Kingdom in 1902. Under the treaty's terms, the Royal Navy was obligated to support Japan against Russia if Russia acquired just one active ally in a war with Japan. While this treaty raised Japanese prestige in the industrial world, Russia refused to yield in its hostility over the extent of Japanese exploitation of Korea.

Japan went to war with Russia on February 9, 1904. Opening with an attack on the Russian Far Eastern Fleet in Port Arthur, Japan then declared war a day later. The Russian fleet was soundly defeated and a Japanese field army in Korea invaded Manchuria. The Russians dispatched a field army of their own from Europe—which was 6,000 miles away—and a land war ensued. Japan won the land war in a year, and the Russian field army retreated overland.

At sea, the Russian Baltic Sea Fleet completed an 18,000-mile sortie that saw it utterly routed at Tsushima on May 27, 1905. This singular victory, more than anything, raised Japanese prestige among the leading European nations. The United States stood in as an interlocutor. By the terms of a peace treat signed in September 1905 in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, Japan was allowed to fully incorporate Korea into its empire; it also received a lease to exploit Manchuria's Liaotung

peninsula, adjacent to northwestern Korea; and it was given the southern half of Sakhalin Island, to its immediate north.

An outgrowth of the American role in the peace with Russia was a strengthened mistrust by the Japanese of the United States. The trouble actually started in 1898, with the American acquisition of Hawaii, Guam, and the Philippines. To the Japanese, these additions to a fledgling overseas American empire appeared to be direct competition, a limiting factor in the event the new Japanese empire desired to expand eastward at some future date.

Moreover, in 1900, the United States had issued its "Open Door" proclamation, which was aimed in part to forestall direct Japanese aggression in China. There were also racist attacks against Japanese—the "yellow peril"—living in the San Francisco area, where many of the relatively few Japanese immigrants to the United States settled. Indeed, if California-based jingoists had had their way, the United States would have gone to war against Japan by 1908, the year a so-called gentleman's agreement caused Japan to restrict the emigration of blue-collar workers to the United States.

President Theodore Roosevelt formed the Great White Fleet and sent it off on a world cruise—with a stop in Tokyo—as a sop to anti-Japanese elements in California. The whole purpose of the exercise was to intimidate Japan, but it only deepened her growing animosity toward the United States. By 1913, anti-Japanese sentiment had risen to the point in California and Hawaii that Japanese were singled out among all immigrants to be denied purchase, or even lease, of land in many neighborhoods.

A war might have broken out between Japan and the United States by 1914 or 1915, but events in Europe forestalled it by giving Japan an opportunity to match America's Pacific empire at one swoop. Honoring its mutual defense treaty with the United Kingdom, Japan declared war on Germany on August 23, 1914. Immediately, a Japanese army besieged the German naval base at Tsingtao, China, and forced its surrender in November 1914. A short time later, Japanese troops mounted their nation's first amphibious assaults against lightly defended German colonies in the Mariana, Marshall, Palau, and Caroline island groups.

In 1915, Japan exploited the weakness of a civilian Chinese regime that had overthrown the imperial system in 1911. It issued a long list of demands for commercial concessions, and the Chinese, who lacked any European backers because of the war, acceded to most of them.

The 1919 peace conference in Versailles granted Japan a mandate over all the former German Pacific possessions north of the equator, and most of the concessions in China remained intact. What Japan was unable to get at Versailles was an explicit expression of racial equality. This it blamed directly on President Woodrow Wilson. Japan's nationalistic feelings were further hurt when, at the Washington Naval Conference of 1921-1922, it was placed on a footing by which its allotted tonnage in warships was only 60 percent that of the United Stated and the United Kingdom. This rankled beyond the explicit advantage offered the United States; it gave explicit voice to the deeply rooted belief that the United States saw Japan and Japanese as inferior.

As the Russian Revolution moved east across the huge land mass of Siberia, the Japanese Army intervened in its own behalf. To counter Japan's obvious imperial interests, the United States landed its own troops in Siberia as a somewhat more than tacit statement that it would not countenance a direct seizure of land or wealth north of the prewar Japanese spheres.

The United States mended a lot of fences in Japan with an outpouring of aid and charity in the wake of the 1923 Tokyo earthquake. But in 1924, trumping all of the previous insensitivity and stupidity in its implicit program to rile Japan on racial grounds, the United States imposed the new Immigration Act to override the merely insulting gentleman's agreement of 1908 by specifically forbidding any Japanese immigration.

The Showa Emperor, Hirohito, came to power upon the death of his mentally ill and alcoholic father, Taisho, on Christmas Day, 1926. Taisho, perhaps as a reflection of his mental instability, was all for military adventures in East Asia and an eventual showdown with the United States, but Hirohito took an opposite view. He favored a more peaceable approach to Japanese industrial and trade expansion. This placed him at odds with the generals who had exploited and dominated the mad Taisho.

But Hirohito was the emperor, a living god, so they could not act against his person, nor even in a way that appeared to contradict his absolute authority. Fortunately for the generals and their ambitions for conquest, the aesthetic Hirohito, a talented and dedicated marine biologist, was not given to hands-on management of Japan's affairs. He reigned while others ruled in his place.

A rather bizarre tradition had sprung up in Japan with to the assassination of uncooperative civilian politicians whose policies clashed with the Army's fine sense of what was and what was not in the interests of the emperor's greater glory.

By the late 1920s, talk concerning expansion of the Japanese imperial base on the mainland was done under the rubric of "bringing order" to lawless China and its outlying provinces. After the Chinese Revolution of 1911, the nation had balkanized into a network of fiefdoms that became the private plantations of warlords. No powerful central authority ruled China in more than name. Quite aside from the opportunities of empire, there were prominent Japanese who felt that Japan's destiny was to bring order to lawless, balkanized China.

With the emperor's attention drawn far from the affairs of state, Imperial Army offi-

Japanese Emperor Hirohito reviews the troops prior to the outbreak of war.

cers began to plan in earnest a campaign that was to eventually bring all of China under Japanese domination—either for purposes of bringing order or outright appropriation of China's assets, its work force, and its untapped natural resources.

The first step was directed against Manchuria for two reasons: it was only across the narrow Sea of Japan, and its wild rivers could be harnessed to create immense reserves of hydroelectric power that would in turn foster an aggressive industrial reformation. Also, Japanese troops already had a foothold in Manchuria's southern province, including around the Manchurian capital, Mukden.

The Imperial Army's Manchuria plan opened on the night of September 18, 1931, with the detonation of an explosive device beneath a railroad track near Mukden. The device had been planted by Japanese under orders from the commander of the Japanese Kwantung Army (based in Korea and southern Manchuria), who acted in defiance of orders from Tokyo to stand down an invasion plan.

Within hours, ostensibly to "bring order," Japanese troops stormed the city of Mukden, seized the Chinese Army arsenal, and moved out to conquer all of Manchuria. When a League of Nations investigation pinpointed Japanese culpability in the railroad bombing, Japan withdrew from the League, which placed it outside the strictures of international law, such as it was in 1931.

The success of the adventure—which started off with a mutiny against the national authority!—added gloss to the Imperial Army's résumé and brought forth a rise in the already overt influence the Army had over politics. Moreover, a rather bizarre tradition had sprung up in Japan with respect to the assassination of uncooperative civilian politicians whose policies clashed with the Army's fine sense of what was and what was not in the interests of the emperor's greater glory. When Army officers felt they needed to guide events (typically for the greater glory of the emperor), they laid on a culturally acceptable coup d'etat by either tacitly wielding their prerogative of assassination as a tool of intimidation, or by actually cutting off heads.

In the wake of the Mukden incident, a military plot against the cabinet was indeed planned, but it was uncovered. No one died but the government was reliably intimidated and the conspirators received slaps on their wrists. Everyone paid lip service to an admonition that the Kwantung Army stand down, but it did no such thing.

The Japanese venture into Manchuria was a mixed blessing. The wild areas could not be tamed by force of arms and it cost as much to defend industrialized areas as the exploitation earned. The military factions that held the most sway in Japanese government had for more than a decade been divided over the issue of where to turn next.

One faction embraced the "go north" strategy, meaning both Manchuria and the Soviet Far East; the other advocated a "go south" strategy, meaning resource-rich Southeast Asia, the oil-rich Netherlands East Indies, perhaps even the labor-rich Philippines. Either way meant war—with the Soviet Union or with the Dutch and British, and perhaps the United States.

At first, it was just a debate, but by the end of 1935, the go-north clique felt it had lost the argument. Thus, on February 26, 1936, go-south army officers of middle rank seized a portion of the capital and assassinated several imperial ministers. For

Hirohito appointed Prince Fumimaro Konoye as his premier in 1937. Konoye was charged with imposing the emperor's will on the military, but he failed and the situation worsened.

once, Hirohito took firm personal control. He ordered his imperial guard to liberate the capital and restore order, which was accomplished fully by February 29. The emperor then ordered the mutineers to be court-martialed, but senior Army commanders ignored the order, though they reported it had been carried out. This false report, when it was revealed via news outlets, caused foreign ambassadors in Tokyo to advise their governments that when Japan went to war, it would move south rather than against the Soviet Union.

Also in 1936, the Japanese announced their withdrawal from the odious and unequal terms of the Washington Naval Conference of 1922. The Imperial Navy had long been gaming the self-policing aspects of the treaty, lying outright about the tonnages and numbers of their warships, but the withdrawal from the treaty made outside inspection impossible even if the other signatories had asked.

To counter the alarming influence of the military over the affairs of state, Hirohito in early 1937 named Prince Fumimaro Konoye as his premier. Konoye's brief was to bring the military in line with the emperor's views. Konoye tried for a time to impose the emperor's will, but he lacked will of his own, and the military slipped farther from imperial control than ever it had been. (It must be said that Konoye was one of the aesthetic emperor's few close friends, someone whom Hirohito apparently could not find fault with, much less rebuke, and even less dismiss.)

Konoye had been premier for only six months when the Army manufactured or exploited an incident at the Marco Polo Bridge, in a demilitarized zone near Peking. A Japanese soldier went missing on the night of July 7, 1937, and the Japanese demanded Chinese help in finding him. The broad implication that the missing man had been kidnapped by Chinese troops led to a number of brawls and shootings that in turn led to pressure on Prince Konoye to sanction the outright invasion of several Chinese provinces. Konoye, who had turned passive in the face of Army demands, acceded to the demands.

All the Japanese objectives were seized well within a six-week time frame offered to Konoye, but throughout the period Hirohito refused to declare war or otherwise personally sanction the conquest. World opinion easily saw through the stated cause of what Japanese diplomats, who had to obey the emperor, painfully referred to as the China Incident.

In November 1937, the utterly compliant Konoye proclaimed the "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere"—a name that seemed to stand in opposition to the domination of so much of China's trade by European nations and the United States. Suddenly, Japan recast itself as the guarantor of Asian rule in Asia. The Chinese leader Chiang Kai-shek, the Chinese supreme warlord whose ideas ran rather more along the lines of Chinese rule in China, immediately declared war on Japan and ordered a nationwide mobilization.

In Chiang's declaration of war, Japan's militarists found a license to run amok in China.

Japanese excesses in the China War are too numerous to describe. To the extent they led to war with the United States, here are the salient facts:

On December 12, 1937, Japanese naval aircraft, guided by an Army colonel out to foment immediate war with the United States, attacked the clearly marked and neutral U.S. Navy gunboat *Panay* in the Yangtze River near Nanking. Three oil barges under escort by *Panay* were attacked at the same time. The *Panay* was hit and sunk, two of the barges were sunk, and three lives were lost. President Franklin Roosevelt was so outraged that he gave a speech in which he suggested that Japan be quarantined, and he followed up with letters in which he asked leading American industrialists to curtail trade with Japan.

Far from working against the Roosevelt administration's marathon program to reverse the Great Depression, the letter simply pointed out that business might be more profitably and efficiently carried out with European trading partners. The industrialists responded positively to the call, and the Japanese were duly alarmed when Roosevelt's hand was revealed as the promoter of declining bilateral trade.

The only real consequence of the trade curtailment was Prince Konoye's eventual resignation, in January 1939. Certainly the Imperial Army didn't hold back in its treatment of Chinese civilians—of whom hundreds of thousands were murdered.

Nothing changed between Konoye's resignation and his return as premier in July 1940. This time around, the emperor's friend appointed Yosuke Matsuoka as foreign minister. Matsuoka had lived in poverty in Oregon as a young man but earned a degree at

Japanese troops have no difficulty crossing the frozen Liaq River into Tienqhuangtai, China, January 18, 1932.

the University of Oregon despite his many hardships. He hated Americans for their racism, whose sting he had certainly felt. Though Matsuoka took office at a time of extreme delicacy in U.S.-Japanese relations, he went out of his way to advocate alliances with Germany and Italy.

The emergence of Japan as an Axis pact signatory in September 1940 did Japan not one whit of good—the Axis partnership was Darwinian, to say the least—and it both alarmed and alienated those many Americans who were otherwise against U.S. rearmament or even alliances with traditional partners such as the United Kingdom. If U.S. policies vis a vis Japan had a racist component (they undoubtedy did, at some level), Japan's emergence as a full Axis power transcended it. The American press openly characterized Japan as a fascist state, which, at a time of total war in Europe, equated to an enemy of the United States. With or without President Roosevelt's arguable hostility toward Japan for her own acts and crimes, American public opinion identified Japan as an enemy in some near-future war.

Also in September 1940, Japanese Army units occupied the northern half of Indochina, a French colony. Even though the occupation was undertaken with the approval of the Vichy French government (a German puppet), and despite Japanese pronouncements that the new base of operations would only support the war in adjacent China, Americans felt this was a raw act of cynicism and deceit against a defeated nation that could not defend its own interests.

President Roosevelt responded to Japan's alliance with the Axis with ruthless efficiency. The trade treaty between the United States and Japan had already been torn up, but now Roosevelt severely curtailed the licensing of the remaining trade by American companies with Japanese agencies or firms. This draconian policy cast Matsuoka as a dark cloud in the Konoye cabinet, so he set off to Berlin and Moscow in March 1941 in quest of a silver lining.

In Berlin, Matsuoka gained Hitler's permission to make a treaty with the Soviets. In Moscow, he negotiated a five-year neutrality pact, based on Soviet recognition of Japanese sovereignty over Manchuria and Japanese recognition of Soviet sovereignty over Outer Mongolia. The pact assured Stalin that the Soviet Union wouldn't be stabbed in the back by Japan, and vice versa.

In the summer of 1938, some diehard Japanese advocates of the go-north strategy had managed to foment a little war with Soviet troops at Kalkhin Gol (also known as Nomanhan), on the ill-defined Manchurian-Outer Mongolian border. In several weeks of burgeoning, all-out ground and air war, the Soviets administered a drubbing that fully ended any notions of Japan's "going north."

Stalin had made a similar nonaggression pact with Hitler a week ahead of the dual invasion of Poland in September 1939. Unbeknown to Stalin, as he spoke with Matsuoka, this pact was only four months away from being traumatically overturned by Operation Barbarossa, the German invasion of the Soviet Union. Even more amazing was that, at the end of 1941, Moscow was to be literally saved from German occupation by troops Stalin withdrew from Outer Mongolia on Matsuoka's word that Japan would not attack again.

And most amazing of all was that Hitler had given Matsuoka permission to make a pact with Stalin that ultimately provided Stalin with the self-same troops who halted the German assault on Moscow.

To top everything else off, as Stalin saw Matsuoka off on the Trans-Siberian train that would take the Japanese foreign minister to Vladivostok, the Soviet supremo bellowed these parting words: "Japan can now expand southward."

Even as Foreign Minister Yosuki Matsuoka traveled to Berlin and Moscow in the spring of 1941 to nail down Japan's place in the Axis alliance and a nonaggression pact with the Soviet Union, it appears that Emperor Hirohito expressed his reservations with respect to the downward spiral of Japanese-American relations. He ordered the Japanese embassy in Washington to open talks aimed at restoring normal trade.

It must be said that the Japanese expansion begun in the 1890s was always about commerce and, thus, trade. Japan had no natural resources of her own beyond the compliant hard work of her citizens. Raw materials lay to the west and south, in easy reach for a modern industrial state, but it was all in the hands of white people from far, far away.

Americans are often quick to rationalize the "manifest destiny" that drove expansion of their nation from one ocean to the other. So, too, the Japanese felt it was their destiny to rule an Asia of and for Asians. They thought nothing more of moving west into Manchuria and Korea than the young United States had thought of moving west from Pennsylvania to Ohio and Kentucky—both peoples pushing aside or rolling over backward aboriginals as they went. In both cases, a weak power was to be replaced by a manifestly stronger power, better able to exploit god-given resources to the benefit of all.

So, even though President Roosevelt had staked his public goodwill on halting Japanese expansion, and even though Secretary of State Cordell Hull was as rabidly anti-Japanese as Foreign Minister Matsuoka was anti-American, Ambassador Kichisaburo Nomura arranged to open what was, even in the emperor's mind, a last-ditch effort to restore trade and, thus, comity between the United States and Japan.

TOJO AND YAMAMOTO


Hideki Tojo


Isoroku Yamamoto

Three generations of Americans wrongly believe that General Hideki Tojo and Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto were equally culpable in starting the Pacific War. This is untrue.

The Imperial Army was ascendant over the Imperial Navy throughout the modern period, and it was usually led by one or another faction of highly aggressive, hegemonistic officers. As the junior service, the Imperial Navy could do little but accede to the will of the generals and support the generals' expansionist policies.

Tojo, who was born the son of a junior Army officer in 1884, was known by his peers as "Fighting Tojo" and "Razor Brain." He was marked for high station by the character traits those nicknames encapsulate. His only direct exposure to the West was in postings to Switzerland in 1919 and Germany in 1921. Thereafter, his rise to power began when he was a junior major general serving in China in 1935. Anti-Soviet and pro-German, Tojo lobbied for war against the former so forcefully as to rattle other pro-war Army officers. He became chief of staff of the Kwantung Army in China in 1937, vice minister of war in May 1938, and inspector general of Army aviation in December 1938. He served as vice premier under Prince Fumimaro Konoye, then became minister of war on July 18, 1941. He finally—perhaps inevitably—took the helm as both minister of war and prime minister on October 16, 1941. While Tojo backed the final diplomatic efforts to avoid war in the Pacific and Southeast Asia, he had long since concluded that an American and British economic stranglehold against Japan was intolerable in the immediate term, that if diplomacy failed by early December 1941, war must ensue.

Except in the area of sheer brain power, Isoroku Yamamoto was Tojo's polar opposite. Also, though he commanded the Japanese fleet when the war started, he was more than a few rungs down from Tojo when war planning began. Tojo was the policymaker, Yamamoto the policy implementer.

Yamamoto was born to an impoverished farming family in 1884, the year of Tojo's birth. He entered the naval academy in 1900, graduated seventh in his class in 1904, and was wounded during the 1905 naval battle in Tsushima Straits, where the Imperial Navy battle fleet under Admiral Heihachiro Togo, trounced the Russian battle fleet. Young Yamamoto became an instant Togo worshiper and sought to emulate his hero throughout the rest of his life.

Where Tojo was insular and had limited foreign travel, Yamamoto studied petroleum economics at Harvard University from 1916 to 1918. (He also became an expert poker player.) Captain Yamamoto earned his aviator's wings and was made director of an air training base in 1923–1925. He was posted to Washington in 1925–1927 as naval attaché, rose to command the 1st Air Fleet in 1930, then headed the Imperial Navy's technical service in 1931 (with promotion to rear admiral). He was a delegate to the London Naval Conference in 1929–1930 and the Washington Naval Conference in 1934, following which he went into government as vice minister of the Navy. In his latter capacity, he lobbied against the construction of more battleships in favor of more aircraft carriers, an argument he lost to his ultimate grief.

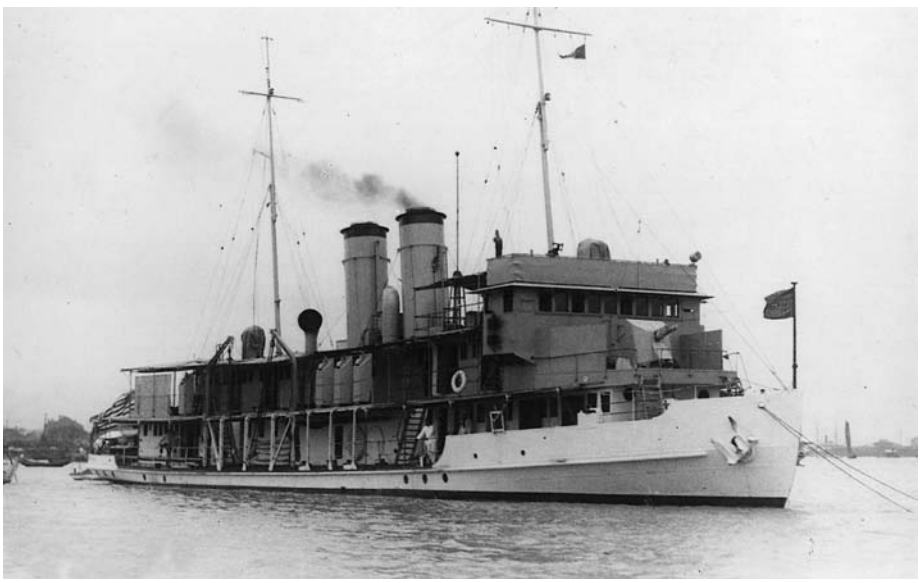
Unlike Tojo, Yamamoto opposed the Tripartite Pact of 1939 that brought Japan into the Axis alliance. Indeed, he had to be sequestered from possible assassination by the Imperial Army. His hiding hole was command in August 1939 of the Combined Fleet, the operational arm of the Imperial Navy.

Yamamoto was certain that Japan could not ultimately win a war against an Anglo-American military alliance, and he frankly communicated his doubts to his superiors. His ironclad reasoning was duly noted, but the decision to go to war obligated him to oversee the best planning for war his closely held team of geniuses could fabricate. Yamamoto remained dubious of outcomes, but he gave his all to achieving success. The idea of attacking Pearl Harbor by means of a carrier-borne air assault as a first strike—a concept cribbed from Togo's Tsushima strategy—was Yamamoto's, and he approved all the planning for the Imperial Navy's stunning series of war-opening moves.

The talks began in March 1941—around the time Imperial Navy strategic planners began to seriously promote the notion of a preemptive strike against the U.S. Pacific Fleet in place of the defense of homeland waters that had been the hallmark of Japanese naval doctrine, planning, and shipbuilding since the end of World War I.

The U.S. negotiators thought they had an advantage over Nomura and his team. They had broken the secret Japanese codes and could read the "Purple" diplomatic cipher. Underscore that: the diplomatic cipher, not the military cipher. If the Japanese diplomats in Washington were dealt out of the war planning—as they indeed were—there was not necessarily a way for American military leaders to learn of and therefore plan against the emerging preemptive naval strategy.

Short of a shooting war, there is nothing more effective than a trade embargo to demonstrate one nation's highest degree of disapproval of another nation's behavior. Trade embargoes cut in two directions; both nations suffer, though not necessarily equally. There was trade between the United States and Japan in the spring of 1941, but it was seriously curtailed on the U.S. side. Japan was suffering, and it was getting the message. It was not processing the message the way the Roosevelt administration hoped it might, but there was still some room to demonstrate yet more disapproval, or to come off the brake and reward what the United States considered to be good behavior.



ABOVE: The *Panay*, a U.S. Navy gunboat, was attacked by Japanese Navy aircraft while cruising in the Yangtze River near Nanking, December 12, 1937. RIGHT: Japanese Foreign Minister Yosuke Matsuoka signs the Japan-French Indo-China economic agreement in Tokyo, May 1941. Matsuoka hated Americans for the racisim he endured while living and studying in Oregon.

Besides, the longer the Nomura-Hull talks continued, the more American intelligence agents thought they could learn of Japanese intentions. Yet in that respect it must be said that the intelligence analyst who attempts to gauge future actions by means of what he perceives an enemy's intentions to be completely misunderstands the workings of intelligence, per se.

The only safe bets are those placed on what intelligence agents learn, in aggregate, about an adversary's capabilities. Absent a fait accompli—a message reading, in effect, "We will attack at dawn"—a good intelligence estimate based on the best and most accurate data can say only, "Beware! The enemy has the capability to attack at dawn." This is not what American diplomatic and military leaders were getting when their intelligence minions read Nomura's mail. If they had, they would have foreseen the next really stupid move the Japanese made.

For all that Japan is an island nation, dependent upon shipping for the entirety of its trade, it—like Great Britain—is nonetheless a continental power whose army holds the greater power in military councils. Indeed, in Japan, via its rather aggressive program of selective assassination of officials who did not hew to the Army's program, the Imperial Army had become the deus ex machina of foreign policy and other important preserves of government.

Japan faces west, across a narrow sea, to the great East Asian land mass. Once it was pulled into the modern world, once it embraced the industrial and imperial models of modern statehood, it became a continental power. True, it ruthlessly drove into the Pacific when the opportunity presented itself in 1914, but its real interests lay in the continent to its west. Japan perceived an enemy to the east, and it prepared itself to take on that enemy in due course, but the Imperial Army was much less interested in seeking redress of an insult over trade than in achieving a position of military and, therefore, economic hegemony over Korea; Manchuria; at least eastern China; and, in due course, oil- and rubber-rich Southeast Asia and the Netherlands East Indies.

By mid-1941, the go-north strategy had been completely expunged from Imperial Army planning. Kalkhin Gol had seen to that, and the northern flank had been sealed by Matsuoka's nonaggression deal with Stalin. That left plenty of room for going south.

The crisis in trade had begun with the Imperial Army's occupation of northern French Indochina. At the time, the Army and thus the government had claimed that the move had been in the interests of outflanking Chinese land forces in areas north of the Indochina frontier. That was a sop, for whatever it might be worth to whomever chose to listen. The Americans heard it, took it for what it was—then went ahead with ratcheting up their trade embargo.

In July 1941, the Konoye government was dissolved—for one day. When it was reconstituted, the next day, the only change was that Matsuoka, a go-north proponent, had been replaced as foreign minister by a compliant admiral named Teijiro Toyoda.

It must be said that Prince Konoye, by all accounts, personally desired a peaceful out-

Chinese soldiers manning a quickly constructed barrier in Shanghai await the onslaught of the Japanese. After the bombing of the railway in Mukden on September 18, 1931, Japanese aggression against China increased.

come to the crisis. But he and the other civilians in his government were so dominated by the military, particularly by the Army, that there was really only one foreseeable outcome.

So, now that the go-south faction was in complete control, and even with the Hull-Nomura talks ongoing, the Army-dominated Konoye regime sent the Imperial Army to occupy the remainder of Indochina. This time, they did not bother to employ the canard about outflanking the Chinese, for it was plain enough to see that southern Indochina outflanks the largest part of Thailand, a militarily weak independent monarchy that oversaw yet more vast, and underdeveloped, natural resources. Thailand then flanked British Malaya to the north and, along with Japanese holdings in China and northern Indochina, most of Burma. At the southern end of Malaya is Singapore, and south of Singapore is Sumatra, in the Netherlands East Indies. Back east of Sumatra is Borneo, where the British colony in North Borneo was the best oil-producing region in Asia.

The Imperial Army's plan, which was plain enough before the occupation of southern Indochina, was becoming manifest. The French had not held off the Japanese, and the Royal Thai Army could not do so in its wildest dreams. The British were fighting for their lives in Europe and North Africa, and they had drawn in most of the Australian and New Zealand armies to help them merely hang in against Japan's European Axis partners. The Netherlands, of course, was under German occupation, so the Royal Netherlands forces in possession of the East Indies were, perforce, both limited and finite. Anyone with a map of Asia and the merest smidgen of deductive powers could see where this was going.

Far from dialing back the sanctions in the face of Ambassador Nomura's formidable negotiating skills, President Roosevelt ratcheted them up about as far as they could go. Together with the United Kingdom and the free government of the Netherlands, the United States imposed a total oil embargo against Japan on July 26, 1941.

The Nomura-Hull negotiations were allowed to roll on, but the plain fact was that Japan had only 6,450,000 tons of oil in reserve. The most sanguine estimates showed that such a supply could not last beyond four years even with the most draconian regimen of economy. Of course, Japan was involved in a big war in mainland China, so economy was not an option, unless the Imperial Army simply quit the war.

As soon as the oil embargo was announced, the Japanese government released an all-out domestic press assault against the United States. What it came down to was that a jealous, hostile, and much wealthier United States, which had been allowed to find its destiny in its own West, was now leading the charge to deny Japan its destiny to its west.

As is the case of all modern continental powers, the Imperial Navy took a backseat to the Army in political matters. Perhaps Japan was an extreme example of a military dictatorship in the 1920s and 1930s, but at root it was dependent upon its army to take and hold the resource-laden lands it needed to at first modernize and then compete on the world economic stage. The Japanese Navy was thus grounded in the traditional role of navies, which is ensuring the unencumbered flow of maritime trade from offshore possessions and, indeed, from trading partners around the world.

The move against German possessions in the Pacific in 1914 had two purposes: to guard the long Pacific trade routes and to mirror and even outflank the string of American bases already extant in the vast ocean. Japan's acquisition of Formosa in the last years of the 19th century countered from the north the American move into the Philippines, and her acquisition of the Palau Islands further outflanked the Philippines, to the east. The former German possessions in the Mariana Islands countered the American hold on Guam, also in the Marianas; and possession of the far-flung Marshall and Caroline island groups pro-

With bayonets at the ready, a Japanese landing party rushes along a crumbing wall as it advances on a Chinese position in Zhabei.

vided a distant barrier far to the east and south. All that Japan lacked by way of a barrier against an American naval advance from Hawaii and the western United States were bases in waters north, northeast, and northwest of the Marianas.

The Imperial Army had absolutely no interest in the far reaches of the Pacific. It occupied Formosa, Korea, Manchuria, and French Indochina; it was massively at work expanding Japanese spheres in China; and it was certainly contemplating moves to and across all of southeast Asia. To undertake the latter, the Army would need the lift capacity available from the Navy, and the invasion fleets would have to be escorted and supported by warships. That was the Navy's role in the eyes of the dominant Army.

But the Imperial Army had never dispatched, nor did it plan to dispatch, troops and it had never spent, nor did it plan to spend, treasure on the Pacific barrier islands. Inasmuch as the Army controlled Japan's military purse, little was done in the post-World War I years to exploit the military aspects of the island mandates that had so attracted the Imperial Navy. Plans were made, but circumstances of budget forced the Japanese to go along with the provisos in the Versailles Treaty that prevented fortification of the central Pacific mandates. The Navy didn't have the funds to fortify any of the Pacific island possessions except the great Truk naval base in the Carolines, and the Army didn't care to spend any.

Aside from building and planning for the defense of home waters against a foe from the east—certainly the United States—the Imperial Navy took on just two tasks once the war in mainland Asia was launched: protecting the narrow sea's trade routes and sending large parts of its land-based air force to fight in the skies over China. It expected, in due course, to support Imperial Army offensive operations in Southeast Asia in the form of sealift and naval escort, and perhaps air support as well. Its role would be the traditional role of the navy of a continental power.

While waiting and planning for the arrival of an American battle fleet on Japan's doorstep, a number of influential naval thinkers reconsidered the notion of fighting a grand fleet action so close to home. The Japanese had honed and refined their battle plan—and, perforce, their battle fleet—to the last detail, literally to the last detail. But ... what if ... ?

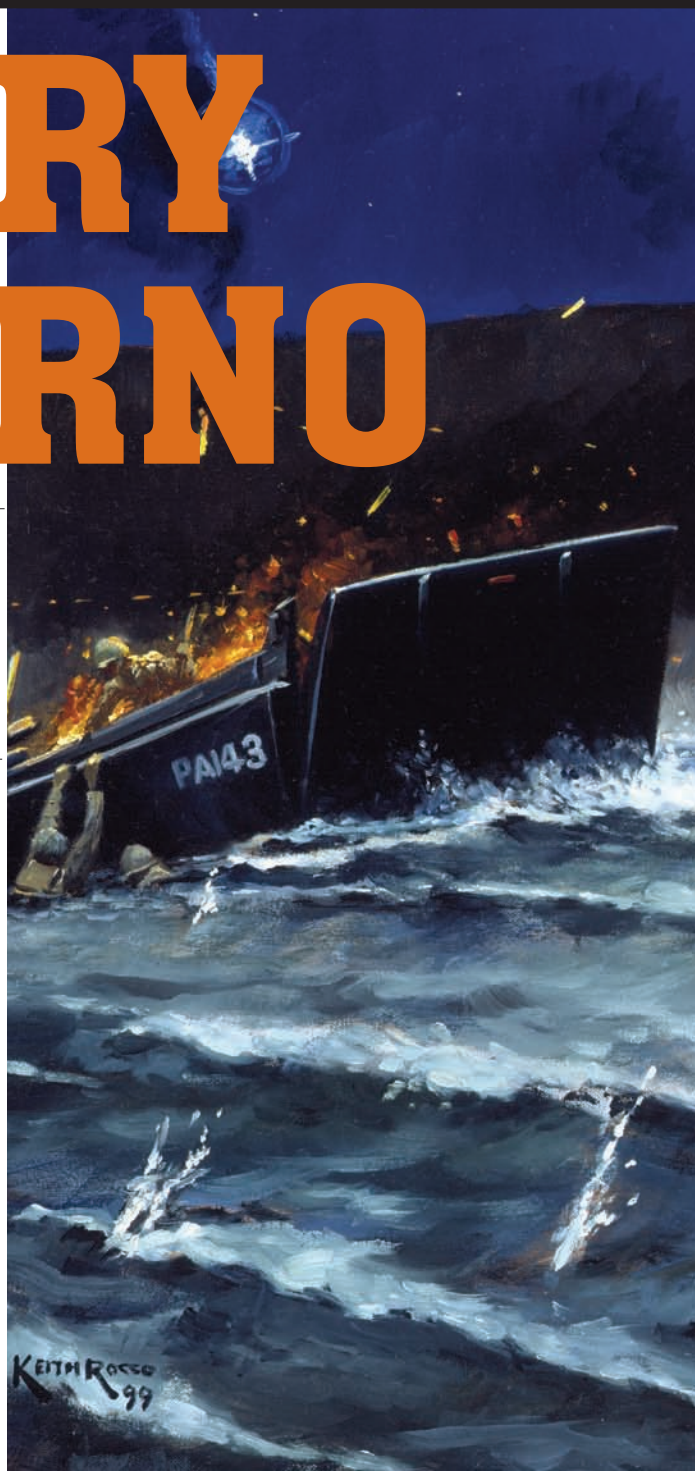
What if the Combined Fleet, as the Navy's operational arm was called, sallied east and took on the Americans close to their home waters? The Japanese knew of the American plan to hold advance bases across the Pacific and seize new ones—the Americans had published its outline. How did that look in reverse? Which American, British, and Dutch bases so threatened Japanese lines of communication that they had to be removed from the board?

Or, even if they didn't actually threaten Japanese possessions and lines of communication, which American, British, Dutch, and even French possessions would, in Japanese hands, further protect or enhance the Japanese strategic or tactical stance? And, of course, which American possession just south of Formosa, once in Japanese hands, would yield the greatest treasure in resources and colonial workers?

How could the Imperial Navy best hedge its bets in a naval war far from home?

And so the logic became inexorable. And by means of that inexorable logic, the Imperial Navy's best minds forged an action plan of far-reaching scope and breathtaking ambition. □

SAVAGERY *at* SALERNO



The Allies avoided catastrophe and began their long, bloody slog toward Rome with landings on the Italian coast.

BY MICHAEL E. HASKEW

As the 450 ships of the Operation Avalanche invasion force approached Salerno on the evening of September 8, 1943, the Allied troops, packed tightly aboard transport vessels, broke into wild celebration. Italy had surrendered, and many of the invaders in the ships thought German opposition on the beachhead might be light or nonexistent.

"I never again expect to witness such scenes of sheer joy," wrote Major Warren A. Thrasher, Lt. Gen. Mark Clark's aide-de-camp. "Speculation was rampant and it was all good…. We would dock in Naples harbor unopposed, with an olive branch in one hand and an opera ticket in the other."

Senior commanders knew, though, that the Germans intended to fight regardless. Actually, in addition to extensive military preparation, the days leading up to the Allied invasion of the Italian mainland had been filled with intrigue and political maneuvering. In the higher echelons of the Allied command there were few delusions of an easy march through Italy. Their troops had already fought a bloody campaign in North Africa and were only halfway across Sicily. Now, invading Italy and pushing the Germans up the mountainous Italian "boot" while persuading the Italians themselves to offer no resistance amounted a jumble of potential scenarios.

Six weeks earlier, late on the afternoon of Sunday, July 25, 1943, as the Allies were still battling across Sicily, more than 20 years of Fascist rule in Italy had come to an abrupt and unceremonious end. A car carrying Benito Mussolini, Il Duce, arrived at the Villa Savoia on the Via Salaria in Rome. King Victor Emmanuel III was waiting.

The downfall of Mussolini's government had inevitably arrived because of the Allied advance in Sicily and the growing weariness for war among the Italian people. Rationing had become extreme, with the daily allotment of calories down to less than 1,000 per person. Air raids were taking lives and devastating cities, diminishing the resolve of the common folk to follow a fading dream of empire.

"My dear Duce," the 74-year-old monarch said to Mussolini following a 19-to-7 vote by the Grand Council to remove the Fascist leader from office, "it cannot go on any longer. Italy is in pieces. Army morale has reached the bottom and the soldiers do not want to fight any longer. The Alpine regiments have a song saying that they are through fighting Mussolini's war. The result of the votes cast by the Grand Council is devastat-

The U.S. 36th Infantry Division (Texas National Guard) receives their baptism of fire as they storm ashore at Salerno in this painting, *Tip of the Avalanche,* by Keith Rocco.

ing.... Surely, you have no illusions as to how Italians feel about you at this moment. You are the most hated man in Italy; you have not a single friend left, except for me. You need not worry about your personal security. I shall see to that. I have decided that the man of the hour is Marshal [Pietro] Badoglio."

The stunned Mussolini was driven from the meeting in an ambulance and placed under guard in a military barracks. For a while, he entertained the notion that the confinement was for his protection, but slowly he realized that he had been placed under arrest. An enraged Hitler vowed to retaliate by arresting the members of the new Italian government, the royal family, and even the Pope. While he was dissuaded from this course of action, he nevertheless intended to rescue Mussolini.

Eventually, Il Duce, still under arrest, was located in the Campo Imperatore Hotel, a ski lodge high atop the Gran Sasso in the Abruzzi Mountains. Hitler authorized a daring, glider-borne rescue attempt, and SS commandos under Captain Otto Skorzeny plucked the deposed leader from

his captors and took him to northern Italy.

Marshal Badoglio, who had previously served as the chief of the armed forces general staff in the Fascist government, formed a new government and made overtures of peace to the Allies. In early August 1943, Italian diplomats had secretly met with two high-ranking staff officers of the supreme Allied commander, General Dwight D. Eisenhower. His chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Walter Bedell Smith, and his intelligence officer, British Brigadier Kenneth W.D. Strong, had met the Italians in the Portuguese capital of Lisbon.

Badoglio's envoys stated that the desire of their new government was to not only surrender but also to change sides and fight the Germans. In exchange, Badoglio wanted assurance from the Allies that they would land in force on the mainland and execute an airborne operation to liberate Rome before the Germans could occupy the Eternal City.

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Once allies, now enemies: A German paratrooper stands guard outside the Italian Ministry of Internal Affairs in Rome after Italy capitulated in September 1943.

The Italian nation was caught between the proverbial devil and the deep blue sea. To some, it was virtually impossible to distinguish which was the greater threat. The Allies were bombing Italy's cities with impunity and they were unlikely to be in a conciliatory frame of mind, particularly when it came to the prospect of fighting alongside such a recent enemy.

In fact, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill stated bluntly, "Badoglio admits he is going to double-cross someone."

Eisenhower's representatives had gone to Lisbon to arrange terms for the unconditional surrender of Italy. Undoubtedly surprised by the overture of military cooperation, they relayed the proposal to Eisenhower. While he was interested in working with the Italians if it meant less resistance, the supreme commander's assessment of the situation was also practical.

"Then began a series of negotiations, secret communications, clandestine journeys by secret agents, and frequent meetings in hidden places that, if encountered in the fictional world, would have been scorned as incredible melodrama," Eisenhower wrote later. "Plots of various kinds were hatched only to be abandoned because of changing circumstances.... The Italians wanted frantically to surrender. However, they wanted to do so only with the assurance that such a powerful force would land on the mainland simultaneously with their surrender that the government itself and their cities would enjoy complete protection from the German forces.

"Consequently they tried to obtain every detail of our plans. These we would not reveal because the possibility of treachery could never be excluded. Moreover, to invade Italy with the strength that the Italians themselves believed necessary was a complete impossibility for the very simple reason that we did not have the troops in the area nor the ships to transport them had they been there...."

After several weeks of political wrangling, the Italians, on September 3, were obliged to accept unconditional surrender terms. The surrender, however, was not to be announced to the world until September 8, the eve of the landings by Lt. Gen. Mark Clark's Fifth Army on the beaches at Salerno, south of Naples.

Brigadier General Maxwell D. Taylor, the artillery commander of the 82nd Airborne Division, and Colonel William T. Gardiner, an officer of the U.S. Army Troop Carrier Command, were dispatched on a dangerous mission to Rome on September 7 to evaluate the risk associated with a planned airborne drop on the city. Taylor was instructed to send the single word "innocuous" if, in his judgment, Giant Two, the proposed airborne operation, should be scrapped and the Italians were either unable or unwilling to send their own cancellation message.

A British motor torpedo boat transferred the American officers to an Italian Navy corvette, and the emissaries reached the shore near Gaeta. Their uniforms were splashed with water and mud to give them the appearance of airmen who had been shot down and rescued. Following a ride in a car and an ambulance, they reached Rome, safely skirting several German patrols. The Americans were offered a fine dinner but became irri-

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German soldiers set up a roadblock in a vain attempt to contain the American invasion at Salerno.

tated when no Italian official of consequence appeared to discuss the situation. Eventually, they were brought to Badoglio, who reiterated his pro-Allied stance and his concern that German forces would occupy Rome.

Given the circumstances, Badoglio decided to send a message to Eisenhower, effectively canceling his earlier commitment for an immediate armistice. Taylor sent a message of his own. Both urged that Giant Two be canceled. Taylor sent a third message late on the morning of September 8: "Situation innocuous." It was received hours before the transport aircraft had been scheduled to take off.

The purpose of the announcement of Italy's surrender being delayed until the 8th was to confuse the Germans, so Badoglio's message was ignored by Eisenhower. Ike announced the surrender as planned while the invasion force off the Italian coast at Salerno was preparing to land. Badoglio had no choice but to go along with the announcement.

Hitler was not surprised or confused in the least by the surrender announcement, for he fully expected the Italians to turn tail once their mainland was threatened. In anticipation of the event, he had ordered a concentration of more than 12,000 airborne troops with supporting artillery to move to the vicinity of Rome, along with the 24,000 men and 150 tanks of the 3rd Panzergrenadier Division.

Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, a former Luftwaffe officer who would perform brilliantly during the arduous campaign to come, maintained overall command in Italy south of a line running from Pisa to Rimini, and he was ably supported by Col. Gen. Heinrich von Vietinghoff gennant Scheel. In northern Italy, Field Marshal Erwin Rommel was in command of eight divisions. Depending on the location of an Allied invasion, each could be mutually supportive of the other.

The Germans also cut fuel and ammunition deliveries to Italian Army units, and wherever German forces were deployed near Italian coastal defenses, they were instructed to be ready to assume those defenses and disarm the Italians. The German military was in position to take control of Italy by force if necessary.

When the Germans moved to occupy Rome, which was to endure eight months of oppressive Nazi occupation, King Victor Emmanuel III, Marshal Badoglio, and members of the new government escaped to the south aboard a British warship.

The success of Operation Husky in Sicily and the ouster of Mussolini caused the Allied war planners to rethink their strategy. Instead of moving against the islands of Sardinia or Corsica, whose strategic value was limited, it became reasonable to consider the advantages of an assault on the Italian mainland.

The political situation in Italy had a direct impact on the military situation. Initially, Allied planners had been conservative in directing the course of the war after the campaign in Sicily. In the spring of 1943, their considerations were limited to occupying as much of the German armed forces as possible to relieve the pressure on the Soviet Red Army in the east and potentially compel Italy to surrender.

A landing on the coast near Rome was ruled out because it was beyond the range of supporting aircraft, which would be flying from bases in Sicily. Naples, too, was eliminated because its built-up harbor and congested urban core would too quickly lead to tough street fighting. Although farther south, Salerno, with its broad, sandy beaches and plenty of maneuver room, offered the greatest chance of initial success.

Although the Germans were bound to contest such a landing fiercely, it was determined that planning for an invasion should go forward. A number of deception plans were implemented to keep the Germans guessing as to where the invasion of Italy—if it came at all—would take place.

Three avenues of approach were authorized. First, General Sir Bernard Law Montgomery, hero of the North Africa campaign, was to command the British Eighth Army's XIII Corps—which consisted of the 1st Canadian and Fifth British Infantry Divisions, attached armored and infantry brigades, and several Commando

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units—during the short amphibious run across the Strait of Messina to Reggio Calabria, on the toe of the Italian "boot." The main effort, a landing by Clark's Fifth Army at Salerno, would then take place. Montgomery's command was to then advance northward 200 miles to link up with the Fifth Army lodgment and join in a combined movement northward to Naples and beyond.

In addition, on September 9, the same day as the Salerno landings, troops of the British 1st Airborne Division were to be put ashore from several cruisers in the harbor of Taranto and nearby Brindisi on the "heel" of the Italian peninsula. Taranto would provide a major port for resupply and, after Taranto was secure, these troops were to move up the eastern coast and take the airfields at Foggia.

The Salerno landing was code-named Operation Avalanche, while the Calabria landing was designated Operation Baytown and the attack on Taranto Operation Slapstick. British General Sir Harold Alexander was in overall command of XV Army Group ground forces, while Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham and Air Marshal Sir Arthur Tedder commanded sea and air operations.

Clark's Fifth Army consisted of both British and American units. The British contingent was X Corps, which included the veteran 46th and 56th Infantry Divisions, the 7th Armoured Division, and several Commando units. Tactical command of these forces was given to General Sir Richard L. McCreery when its original commander, General Sir Brian Horrocks, was wounded in an air raid. The American Fifth Army contingent was designated VI Corps and commanded by Maj. Gen. Ernest J. Dawley. It included the 36th and 45th Infantry Divisions, with the 3rd and 34th Divisions held in reserve.

The choice of Clark to command Fifth Army was scrutinized by senior military officials, particularly since both Lt. Gen. George S. Patton and Lt. Gen. Omar N. Bradley had substantial combat experience. Both of these, however, were still engaged in the fighting in Sicily while planning for Salerno was under way. Patton's infamous soldier-slapping incidents, which had occurred in Sicily, further discounted his potential for future command.

Eisenhower, a Clark fan, was prompted to write Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall that Clark was "the best organizer, planner and trainer of troops that I have met ... the ablest and most experienced officer we have in planning amphibious operations.... In preparing the minute details of requisitions, landing craft, training of troops and so on, he has no equal in our Army. His staff is well trained in this regard. Clark impresses men, as always, with his energy and intelligence. You cannot help but like him. He certainly is not afraid to take rather desperate chances which, after all, is the only way to win a war."

Clark expected to be in possession of Naples within five days, but the landing beaches and surrounding countryside at Salerno presented challenges of their own. While stiff German resistance was expected, the terrain around the landing zones included two rivers, the Calore and the Sele, which emptied into the Tyrrhenian Sea, creating a valley that split the low ground on the approaches to a series of imposing mountains. Artillery might play havoc with an invading force, and the Germans were sure to recognize this.

The beaches at Salerno were steep, which would allow landing craft to drop their ramps, emptying troops and supplies right onto them. Although Salerno was within the extreme limits of the range of Allied air support, an airfield at nearby Montecorvino

could be captured and used. A rail line and coastal highway lay within reach of the beachhead, both extending through Naples and on to Rome, more than 130 miles to the northwest.

Operation Baytown—Montgomery's foray across the Strait of Messina—was to be the first of the three-pronged invasion. The timing of the Calabria landing was left up to Montgomery, who did not deem the situation appropriate until September 3. Eisenhower wrote that this was 10 days later than he had hoped.

Considerable air bombardment of the intended Baytown landing area had taken place prior to September 3, and during the predawn hours of that day four Royal Navy battleships—HMS *Warspite, Valiant, Rodney,* and *Nelson*—raked the coastline with repeated salvoes. Destroyers, cruisers, gunboats, and three monitors armed with 15-inch cannons joined in. Eighth Army artillery, XXX Corps artillery, and four battalions of American artillery added to the total of 600 guns. Aircraft from bases in North Africa and Sicily supported the effort and attempted to hold the depleted Luftwaffe at bay.

The landings at Calabria were executed with virtually no opposition as Canadian troops of the Carleton and York Regiment and the West Nova Scotia Regiment splashed ashore. A few Italians appeared on the beaches and pitched in to help unload British landing craft. But Montgomery's progress was, in the eyes of onlookers, both British and American, painfully slow. His forces did encounter difficult terrain and the delaying tactics that the Germans had honed to perfection in Sicily, blowing up bridges and creating landslides with demolition charges.

Montgomery's penchant for perfection may have cost some of the initiative in southern Italy. The master of the set-piece battle, Montgomery may have been somewhat ill suited for a campaign that called for audacity and rapid movement.

Years later, author Alistair Horne in collaboration with Montgomery's only son, David, wrote, "Once into mainland Italy, in September, the early performance of Monty and his Eighth Army was not much better [than it had been in Sicily]. Both were tired. The Americans, in their freshness, sometimes didn't seem to appreciate what nearly four years of war, reverses and privations had done to their British allies. A huge preparatory barrage, Alamein-style, across the Straits proved unnecessary: the Germans had all withdrawn. Ambling leisurely northwards, Monty's men found it 'like a holiday picnic after Sicily and Africa'. Meanwhile, the US Fifth Army landings at Salerno, just short of Naples to the north, had run into serious trouble."

Six days after Montgomery's landing at Calabria, the troops of the British 1st Airborne Division came ashore at Taranto. Operation Slapstick was unopposed, and the harbor facilities were found to be in working order. The only major casualty was the minesweeper HMS *Abdiel,* which was sunk by a mine, killing 48 sailors and 101 soldiers.

At the time of the Salerno landings, the 16th Panzer Division, commanded by Generalmajor Rudolf Sickenius, was the only fully equipped German armored division in southern Italy, and was well posi-

BELOW: German troops defend an area near Salerno with a camouflaged 7.5cm PaK 40 antitank gun. OPPOSITE: After the initial invasion, U.S. reinforcements arrive at Salerno. Note the steel matting on the sand to facilitate the off-loading of vehicles.

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Imperial War Museum

National Archives

ABOVE: A Sherman tank of the U.S. Fifth Army moves inland after landing at Salerno, passing a German tank knocked out of action during fighting in the area. TOP: Men of the 2/6th Queen's Regiment advance past a burning German PzKpfw IV tank in the Salerno area, September 22, 1943.

tioned to meet the invading force. With 17,000 troops, 36 artillery pieces, and over 100 tanks, 16th Panzer was quite capable of disrupting the landings. The Germans had also taken control of six coastal batteries at Salerno, which had previously been serviced by Italian crews.

At 3:10 AM on September 9, less than half an hour ahead of the first wave of assault troops, the Rangers and Commandos came ashore to capture several key points on the northern flank of the Salerno beachhead, including the low ground along the approaches to Naples.

South of the gap created by the mouth of the Sele River, Maj. Gen. Fred L. Walker's 36th Division, which included a large number of soldiers from the Texas National Guard, was to take the main roads leading in the direction of Montgomery's Eighth Army and secure the right flank of the beachhead.

To the left of the 36th Division, the British 56th Division was to capture the Montecorvino airfield and the crossroads at Battapaglia. On the other side of the Sele, the 46th Division was to take the city of Salerno and maintain contact with the special forces to its left. Two regiments of Maj. Gen. Troy Middleton's U.S. 45th Division were held in reserve. While the British chose to take advantage of a pre-invasion naval barrage, Walker opted to forego such a preparation.

Both the U.S. Navy and the Royal Navy would play vital roles in the success of Operation Avalanche, just as they had in Sicily. At Salerno, Allied warships fired more than 11,000 tons of shells in support of the ground forces. In evaluating the performance of German forces that opposed the Allies at Salerno, General Siegfried Westphal, Kesselring's chief of staff, acknowledged the contribution the Allied navies made. "But the greatest distress suffered by the troops was caused by the fire of ships' guns of heavy caliber, from which they could find no protection in the rocky soil."

The contribution, however, was not made without a price. Three American destroyers, the *Rowan, Buck,* and *Bristol,* were lost to torpedoes, along with a minesweeper, six LCTs (Landing Craft, Tank), and a fleet tug. The Royal Navy lost the hospital ship *Newfoundland* and five LCTs. Numerous other vessels were damaged.

Unlike during the later Operation Overlord—the Normandy invasion—ownership of the skies above the beachhead was bitterly contested. The resourceful Luftwaffe was still a formidable force and attacked the Allied armada with a vengeance. In addition to traditional ordnance, the Germans also employed radio-controlled glide bombs known as Fritz X, which many consider the ancestor of the modern cruise missile, and they wreaked havoc among American and British warships.

When the surrender of Italy was announced, the battleships, cruisers, and destroyers of the Italian Royal Navy—the Regia Marina—sailed to ports in North Africa or Malta and surrendered. Some were scuttled, but others were pounced upon by Italy's one-time ally. For example, on September 9, a large battle group of eight cruisers, eight destroyers, and the battleships *Roma* and *Italia* (formerly the *Littorio*) that the Germans

A daring rescue bought Mussolini time and enhanced the reputation of SS Major Otto Skorzeny.

Moved at least six times following his arrest, ousted Italian dictator Benito Mussolini dropped out of sight for a time. He was eventually secreted at the Albergo Rifugia, a fashionable hotel located at an altitude of nearly 7,000 feet at Gran Sasso, in the Abruzzi Mountains north of Rome.

Through an intercepted radio message, the Germans learned of the former dictator's whereabouts. Hitler dispatched Waffen-SS Captain Otto Skorzeny and a handpicked force of 90 commandos to attempt a rescue, dubbed Operation Eiche (Oak). Skorzeny, whose pronounced dueling scars were worn as badges of honor, already was assuming a larger-than-life persona. He stood six feet, four inches tall, and cut a dashing figure.

"I will not leave Mussolini to his fate," Hitler declared. As the mission to rescue Il Duce took shape, it was shrouded in secrecy with only a handful of individuals aware that it was to take place. These included General Kurt Student, the father of the German airborne program, under whose authority supporting paratroopers were to participate.

On September 12, 1943, three days after the Allied landings at Salerno, German airborne troops took control of the rail line that ran through the valley and up the 7,000-foot mountainside. Skorzeny's commandos then made textbook glider landings near the hotel. Mussolini's guards were completely surprised and quickly overwhelmed. The former dictator was rescued without a shot being fired. Radio communications were disabled, and several Italian soldiers were bound and gagged.

Skorzeny, whose glider had been set down only 15 yards from the main hotel building, spotted Mussolini in an upstairs room and raced to him. Years later, Skorzeny recalled the brief conversation that took place at the moment of rescue.

"So everything is all right," said Mussolini. "I am very grateful to you."

Skorzeny responded, "Duce, the Führer has sent me. You are free."

Mussolini weakly affirmed, "I knew that my friend Adolf Hitler would not leave me in the lurch. I embrace my deliverer."

A Fieseler Storch arrived shortly, and the light aircraft completed a dicey landing on the mountaintop. Its mission was to take Mussolini to a Luftwaffe airfield where a Heinkel He-111 bomber was to complete the journey, delivering him to Hitler's Rastenburg headquarters in East Prussia for an incredibly conceived and executed reunion.

To heighten the drama, Skorzeny intended to accompany Mussolini at least as far as the airfield and climbed aboard the Storch. The combined weight of three men was much more than the small observation aircraft was designed to carry. The pilot gunned the engine, and the plane rolled forward and over the cliff, immediately plunging toward the valley floor.

Fighting the controls, the pilot managed to right the Storch with only seconds remaining before a fatal crash rendered the entire mission a failure. Mussolini did meet Hitler and expressed his gratitude. Skorzeny was quickly promoted to major and received the Knight's Cross for his incredible exploit.

Days later, Mussolini returned to Italy and was installed as Duce of the Italian Social Republic, nominally located at Salo on Lake Garda in the northern part of the country. By the spring of 1945, though, Mussolini's borrowed time had run out. He was captured by Communist partisans and summarily executed on April 28 at the Villa Belmonte on Lake Como, along with his mistress, Claretta Petacci. Their bodies were strung up at a Milan gas station and abused by an anti-Fascist mob. □

thought had steamed out of port to intercept the Allied invasion fleet, was actually heading for safe waters at Malta. The Luftwaffe swooped down on the group in the Strait of Bonifacio, inflicting heavy damage with Fritz X glide bombs and sinking the battleship *Roma*; more than 1,300 of her crew, including Admiral Carlo Bergamini, were killed.

When the British X Corps came ashore at Salerno at 4:45 AM, opposition to the initial landing was relatively light. However, soon after the British units began to advance inland, Maj. Gen. Gerald W.R. Templer's 56th Division was confronted by a force of German tanks that was beaten back with the help of naval gunfire from the destroyer HMS *Nubian* and warships of the Royal Navy's Cruiser Squadron 15, which included HMS *Mauritius, Orion,* and *Uganda,* along with the monitor HMS *Roberts,* and several destroyers. The 56th Division sent probing attacks into Battapaglia and attempted to capture the Montecorvino airfield but was unable to do so.

Naval gunfire also threw back several counterattacks against the 46th Division, commanded by General J.L.T. Hawkesworth. The destroyers HMS *Blankney, Mendip,* and *Brecon* added their fire against mobile batteries of German 88mm cannons. The 88mm could be used as an antitank, antipersonnel, or antishipping weapon, although it was originally intended as an antiaircraft gun.

Shortly after they came ashore, soldiers from the 9th Battalion, Royal Fusiliers were fired on by a battery of German rocket launchers. The Fusiliers called for support, and a Royal Navy destroyer obliged. "The shells almost parted our hair," remembered one of the Fusiliers. "The rockets were wiped out but a machine gun nest, spared in the barrage, had to be taken by the troops."

The job of silencing the machine guns fell to Lieutenant David Lewis, who had already gained fame as a rugby player in Wales. Lewis was mortally wounded during the attack, but the machine guns were

put out of action and 25 prisoners were taken.

Successive waves of Allied troops also encountered early and stiff resistance. The 141st and 142nd Infantry Regiments of the 36th Division came ashore on hotly contested beaches as knocked-out landing craft drifted ablaze near the shoreline. One 81mm mortar platoon waded in with its weapons but no ammunition because the boat carrying it had been blown up.

After moving inland only a short distance, much hard fighting swirled around a 50-foot-tall medieval stone tower that held a machine-gun nest. Pinned down, men of the 36th Division eventually knocked out the German position.

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Individual acts of heroism were numerous that morning on the beaches at Salerno. Corporal Royce C. Davis used a bazooka to disable a German tank, then crawled close enough to the disabled vehicle to flip a hand grenade inside the hole his weapon had made. Pfc. Henry C. Harpel took the loose planking from a bridge and threw it into the water of an irrigation ditch so that approaching enemy tanks could not cross. Sergeant John Y. McGill dropped a hand grenade through the open turret of a German tank. Sergeant Manuel S. Gonzalez advanced toward a machine-gun nest, wriggled out of his pack, which had been set on fire by a tracer bullet, and blew up the position with a grenade.

Sergeant James M. Logan killed several Germans from a concealed position along an irrigation canal while they advanced through a gap in a rock wall 200 yards distant. He then crossed an open field, wiped out a machine-gun nest, and turned the German weapon on the enemy. For his daring exploits, Logan received the Medal of Honor.

One counterattack against the 36th Division by 16 German Mark IV tanks was scattered just before noon on the 9th by the concentrated 6-inch gunfire of the cruisers USS *Boise* and *Philadelphia*. Six of the tanks were destroyed and the remainder were ordered back out of range of the big naval guns.

The Germans managed to destroy a key bridge across the Sele River on Highway 18 and prevented the British and American forces from closing the gap between them on the first day. The Commandos were still separated from the left of the 46th Division, but the small force held the city of Salerno. The 1st and 3rd Ranger Battalions destroyed a pair of German armored cars and claimed the high ground on both sides of the Chiunzi Pass, a commanding position above Highway 18, which was the best route over the rugged Sorrento Peninsula into Naples.

Clark knew that German reinforcements could be expected around Salerno and brought two regiments of the 45th Division ashore. Later, a drop by the 509th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division was ordered around Avellino on the 14th, while the third regiment of the 45th Division, elements of the 7th Armoured Division, and more airborne troops would reach the Salerno beachhead by September 15.

On the evening of September 9, however, Montgomery was still over 120 miles from Salerno. His troops were exhausted by their march, and Montgomery paused on September 10 for 48 hours. He lamented the difficulties, writing later, "The roads in southern Italy twist and turn in the mountainous country and are admirable feats of engineering. They abound in bridges, viaducts, culverts and even tunnels, and this offers unlimited scope to military engineers for demolitions on the widest possible scale."

Meanwhile, the men fighting for their lives at Salerno were fuming at Monty's leisurely pace.

During the first 24 hours, the Allied beachhead was in jeopardy, with the 36th Division occupying an extended front and the British X Corps taking the brunt of the German counterattacks on September 10. The Commandos were fighting pitched battles with the parachute battalion of the Hermann Göring Division, while the Royal Fusiliers and the 167th Infantry Brigade at Battipaglia and Vietri, a mere 12 miles from Salerno, had lost 1,500 men taken prisoner.

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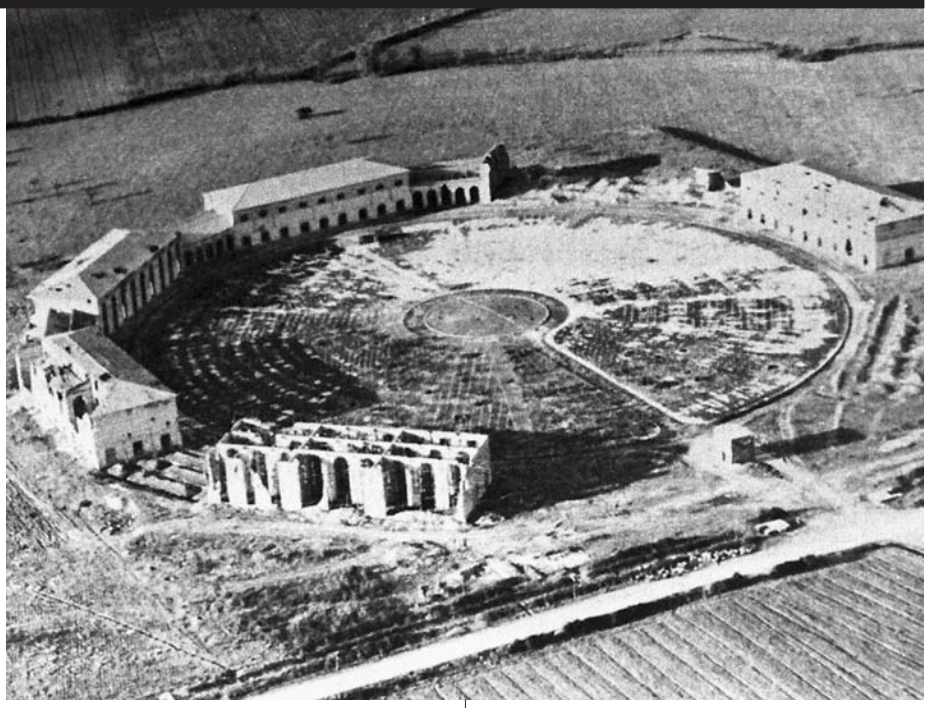

ABOVE: The 45th Infantry Division battled the 15th Panzergrenadier Division at the Tobacco Factory in Persano in the center of the beachhead on September 12 and 13. The fighting was among the most violent of World War II. OPPOSITE: Civilians of Eboli, Italy, work to clear the rubble of their town, left in ruins by the fierce fighting. Note the photo of Mussolini in the foreground.

Although the 16th Panzer Division had withdrawn from the immediate vicinity of the invasion beaches, Vietinghoff was convinced that the division had fought well. While it had not been strong enough to throw the invasion back into the sea, the landing force had been contained reasonably well thus far.

Additionally, the LXXVI Panzer Corps, which included the 26th Panzer Division and the 19th Panzergrenadier Division, was moving northward from Calabria as quickly as possible, while the 15th Panzergrenadier Division and the Hermann Göring Division, though roughly handled in Sicily, had been reconstituted and were positioned north of Naples.

The battle raged on land and sea for days. On September 11, the cruiser USS *Savannah* took a direct hit from a 660-pound Fritz X glide bomb on its No. 3 turret, causing such damage that the vessel settled by the bow until her forecastle was nearly at the waterline. With an escort of four destroyers, the wounded cruiser reached safety in the Grand Harbour at Malta.

On the afternoon of September 13, another radio-controlled bomb hit the cruiser HMS *Uganda,* penetrated seven decks, exploded, and damaged the ship so severely that she took on 13,000 tons of water before a U.S. Navy tug took her in tow. The battleship HMS *Warspite* was hit by two of these innovative weapons and shaken by two near misses three days later.

On September 11, two offensive efforts were mounted against the high ground at Eboli and Altaville, commanding both sides of the valley of the Sele and Calore Rivers. Moving against Eboli, two battalions of the 157th Regiment, 45th Division, were joined by a platoon of the 191st Tank Battalion. Just west of Persano, as the Americans approached a complex of five buildings arranged in a semicircle and known as the tobacco factory, a battalion of the 16th Panzer Division, ordered back from Battipaglia, was waiting.

When the Americans were within a few yards, the Germans sprang their ambush, fire erupting from a nearby rail line, positions along a parallel roadway, and the buildings. Seven American tanks were quickly out of action. The troops of the 157th were forced to dig in four miles short of Eboli while the buildings of the tobacco factory remained in German hands.

Another regiment of the 45th Division, the 179th, sent two battalions straight for Ponte Sele, while the third battalion guarded the right flank of the advance toward Hill 424 and Altaville. German artillery and small-arms fire hit the Americans before they reached Ponte Sele, and for a time the crossing of the Calore River appeared doubtful. Had the Germans captured the crossing site, the American infantry and armor might have been cut off. The two battalions from the 179th occupied defensive positions near Persano, four miles from Altaville.

The flank battalion of the 179th drove on with a platoon of the 190th Tank Battalion and the 160th Field Artillery Battalion, only to be stymied by further German resistance before retiring to defenses along La Cosa Creek. Ironically, the 36th's 142nd Infantry Regiment managed to occupy both Altaville and Hill 424 against little opposition. The following day, a ferocious German counterattack dislodged the 142nd from its position, which was the most forward and exposed of any along the VI Corps perimeter.

Vietinghoff's confidence in his ability not only to drive the invasion force into the sea but to cut off its escape had grown steadily. By the afternoon of September 13, the 29th Panzergrenadier and 16th Panzer Divisions launched a devastating attack while elements of the 36th Division were attempting to retake Altaville. The American attack fell apart, and small groups of infantrymen were forced to thread their way back to their lines after dark. Three soldiers, Corporal Charles Kelly, 1st Lt. Arnold Bjorklund, and Private William J. Crawford, later received the Medal of Honor for their part in this heavy fighting.

Some confusion existed among American commanders as to the defensive positions covering the Sele-Calore valley. The head of the corridor was, therefore, thinly defended. The Germans at LXXVI Panzer Corps headquarters were convinced that

National Archives

the Allies were evacuating. As the afternoon wore on, German attacks grew in intensity, and scores of tanks and infantry roughed up a battalion of the 157th Regiment before hitting the 143rd Regiment on both flanks and taking 500 prisoners.

By 6:30 PM on September 13, German tanks were within two miles of the beaches, with only two American field artillery battalions and a firing line of cooks, clerks, musicians, and walking wounded opposing them; the Fifth Army command post stood only a few hundred yards behind and Clark made plans to evacuate on as little as 10-minutes' notice. The artillerymen poured 4,000 shells into enemy lines and finally stopped the German attack.

A historian commented, "The only troops who stood between the Germans and the sea were some supporting artillery of the 45th Division. These guns saved the day and quite possibly the battle."

The invasion had come within an eyelash of disaster.

On September 14, German attacks were much less productive. Clark had consolidated and shortened his line during the night, and the combined artillery of the 45th and 36th Divisions fired over 10,000 rounds. Heavy bombers, diverted from missions against targets in Germany, added support. One tank destroyer of the 636th Battalion knocked out five German tanks and a truck filled with ammunition in 30 minutes. Altogether, 30 German tanks were destroyed. The VI Corps line had almost miraculously held.

Fighting continued at Hill 424 and Altaville, and one American soldier remembered, "Darkness was falling as we began to climb the foothills, shells screaming over us ... each explosion covering us with dirt and rocks. I'd never known real terror until that moment.... Cadavers of men from previous attacks lay scattered all over the hill. It was a horrible experience for us to see these countless dead men, many of them purpled and blackened by the intense heat."

Vietinghoff also struck back hard at the British on September 13 and 14, his armor hitting the 56th Division southeast of Battipaglia. The Coldstream Guards, Royal Fusiliers, and infantrymen of the 167th Brigade were bolstered by heavy naval and air support and beat back the attack.

A few days later, Company Sgt. Maj. Peter Wright took command of his company of the 3rd Battalion, Coldstream Guards, after all of its officers had been killed or wounded. Wright destroyed three machine-gun nests with hand grenades, relocated his company to a more favorable position, and captured important high ground. The action earned Wright the Distinguished Conduct Medal, but a year later King George VI ordered the medal upgraded to the Victoria Cross.

Private Ernest Hulse of the Durham Light Infantry exhibited conspicuous courage on the 15th and 16th when he evacuated wounded from a hillside north of Salerno. "It is fair to say that he was responsible for evacuating some 30 casualties ... and the majority of them under fire," wrote Lt. Col. J.C. Preston, commander of the 16th Battalion. Captain Frank Duffy, commanding a company of the Durham Light Infantry on the evening of the 15th, organized a bayonet charge and counterattacked the Germans along

American troops enter the ruined square at Acerno, 14 miles northeast of Salerno, as the Germans retreat northward.

the crest of a hill, killing 15 enemy soldiers and capturing 11.

After more than a week of tough fighting, it was clear that the Allies would not be dislodged from their clawhold on the Italian mainland and that the war was about to enter a new phase.

While the presence of Montgomery's Eighth Army, still moving up from the south, was sufficient to cause concern for the Germans and to at least present them with the necessity of prioritizing their defensive assignments, the crisis at Salerno had passed by the time Monty's troops made contact with the Fifth Army. Reinforcements from the VI and X Corps reserves bolstered the beachhead at Salerno, and both corps forged inland. On September 18, Vietinghoff realized that the game was up and directed his forces to withdraw northward to the Apennine Mountains.

Montgomery's chief of staff, General Francis "Freddy" de Guingand, wrote, "Some would like to think—I did at the time—that we helped, if not saved, the situation at Salerno. But now I doubt whether we influenced matters to any great extent. General Clark had everything under control before Eighth Army appeared on the scene."

The Allied victory did not come cheaply. In more than a week of desperate fighting, the British X Corps had lost over 5,500 casualties. The U.S. VI Corps had lost 3,500, with 500 killed and 1,800 wounded. One other casualty of Operation Avalanche was Maj. Gen. Dawley, the VI Corps commander. Some believed he had become unnerved by the strain of combat command, while others were surprised that he had been relieved by Clark on September 20; a telephone conversation with Dawley at the height of the fighting had left the Fifth Army commander concerned.

Eisenhower may have decided that the exhausted Dawley should be relieved before visiting the VI Corps headquarters himself. The official history of the U.S. Army in World War II relates, "When Eisenhower, Clark, Dawley, and Admiral [Kent] Hewitt visited his 36th Division command post and received a briefing from [General] Walker, the division commander had the feeling that Eisenhower was paying little attention to his words. At the end of Walker's presentation, Eisenhower turned to Dawley and said, 'How did you ever get your troops into such a mess?'"

On September 29, Marshal Badoglio met Eisenhower aboard the battleship HMS *Nelson* and signed the formal surrender document. Even so, the agony of Italy was far from over.

All the speculation about what should or could have been done at Salerno was hindsight as September began to wane. Months of difficult fighting lay ahead in Italy at places like San Pietro, the Rapido and Volturno Rivers, Cassino, Anzio, and the northern Apennines. The hard-won success of the first major landings by Allied troops on the continent of Europe would be followed by an excruciating northwestward drive. The old phrase, "See Naples and die," was destined to take on an ominous significance. □

Imperial War Museum

THE AMERICAN "FEW"

Yanks flying in Britain's RAF, 1940-1942, earned honors but paid a heavy price.

BY JOHN W. OSBORN, JR.

The "few" who defended Great Britain in the sky during the days it stood alone against Hitler would have been hundreds fewer without the volunteers from outside the British Empire.

Many were flying fugitives from the Nazi occupations of their homelands. But also among them were a pocket-sized pilot, a shipwreck survivor, an Olympic champion, a blunt-talking cowboy, a washed-out, would-be aviator, and scores of others from a country then avowedly neutral in the war—the United States.

That Americans first flew and fought in World War II under a foreign flag was due to the efforts of another American well acquainted with fighting for a country other than his own.

Colonel Charles Sweeny had been expelled from West Point in 1900 for a hazing scandal, then embarked on an almost 40-year career as an international mercenary, from South American revolutions to the Spanish Civil War. While serving in the French Foreign Legion in World War I, Sweeny got to know fellow Americans in the Lafayette Escadrille and, when World War II came along, decided to form a new American flying group for the French.

U.S. law at the time prescribed possible jail time for foreign recruitment and loss of citizenship for service, so Sweeny had to organize a clandestine network. Vague notices or word-of-mouth at airfields around the country led to secret meetings in hotels, then a train ticket to Canada. Most recruits were stopped at the border by the FBI, but one who made it through was a pilot who compensated for his diminutiveness with sheer determination.

Just 4 feet 10 inches, Vernon Charles "Shorty" Keough was, in 1940, still a veteran barnstormer and one of the first skydivers, with over 500 jumps. He had just invested his life savings in a new airplane which a friend had promptly crashed. Recruited by

Sweeny's network in May 1940, Keough met two others in a Montreal hotel lobby who also got through: Eugene Quimby "Red" Tobin, an ex-Hollywood flier, and Andrew Mamedoff, from a White Russian family.

The trio would become inseparable, flying and fighting together, and dying within eight months of each other. A film director who got to know them in Britain described them: "Andy was massive and broad. A Russian type with pale blue eyes in a puckish Mongol face. Shorty was a dynamo with a shock of fair hair and an Irish temperament. Red was, perhaps, the most typical young American of the three. Tall and lanky, he had a grin that split the face in two, and a devastating vocabulary of wisecracks that was the delight of his friends and the despair of his seniors."

The trio received a message instructing them to take the train to Halifax, Nova Scotia. At the train station they were met by a French agent who melodramatically led them through darkened backstreets and alleyways to an abandoned warehouse; inside he opened a safe to hand them money and boarding tickets on a tramp steamer bound for France.

In Paris, they were enlisted into the Armée de l'Air, then kept waiting while the Battle of France was being fought and lost. When finally sent to the front, without air-

Four Yank-piloted Spitfire Vbs of RAF Squadron 71 return to their base at North Weald after combat above the English Channel in this painting by Robert Taylor. LEFT: Andrew Mamedoff, Vernon Charles "Shorty" Keough, and Eugene "Red" Tobin pose for a photo before flying their first mission as members of the newly formed all-American Eagle Squadron.

Image courtesy of The Military Gallery, Wendover, Great Britain

All photos: Imperial War Museum

Members of 121 Squadron watch as three of their comrades return to their base at RAF North Weald after a sweep over northern France, August 1942.

craft or even uniforms, it was too late to do much more than shelter in airfield ditches under Luftwaffe attack.

After France capitulated to the Germans, they headed for the coast by train and on foot, caught one of the last ships out, and landed in Plymouth, England. The American Embassy told them to go home, but they decided, instead, to join the Royal Air Force. As Tobin explained, "The way we figured it, the RAF ought to be willing to take us on. It looked as though they were going to need every pilot they could get before long."

Tobin was right. Through an Englishwoman they had met on the boat across the Channel, Tobin, Keough, and Mamedoff received help in joining the RAF from a member of Parliament.

For all their tribulations, they had been preceded in the RAF, and in action, by a compatriot who had only to pull a few social strings. He would precede them in something else as well.

William Meade Lindsley "Billy" Fiske III came from a wealthy New England banking family and had twice driven a bobsled to victory in the Winter Olympics; he won gold as a 16-year-old in 1928 and again in 1932, but declined a third try when the 1936 games were held in Nazi Germany. When it became clear in the summer of 1939 that war was coming, he quit the family Wall Street firm and arrived in Britain by liner the day war was declared. While working in high finance in London, Fiske made many friends in the RAF Auxiliary.

With his social contacts, he had no trouble being allowed to join the RAF on September 18, 1939. "I can lay claim to being the first U.S. citizen to join the RAF," he wrote, though adding, "My reasons for joining the fray are my own."

He was assigned to RAF 601 Squadron, composed of his friends, and called the Millionaires' Squadron (Fiske was fond of driving his green Bentley around the base), at Tangmere, July 10, 1940, just as the Battle of Britain was beginning. His skill on ice and snow well prepared him for the air. "Unquestionably Billy Fiske was the best pilot I've ever seen," said the 601 commander.

A fellow 601 pilot said, "He was absolutely charming and completely natural. There was nothing forced or fake about him. That's what endeared him to the whole squadron—pilots and ground crew."

His service was to be tragically brief—just 28 days. On August 16, 1940, 601 Squadron was fighting a flight of German dive-bombers when a German gunner hit Fiske's fuel tank and set it on fire. Instead of bailing out over the Channel, he made it back to base.

"I taxied up to it and got out," Fiske's flight commander later said. "There were two ambulancemen there. They had got Billy Fiske out of the cockpit. They didn't know how to take off his parachute so I showed them. Billy was burned around the hands and ankles. I told him, 'Don't worry, you'll be all right.' Our adjutant went to see him that night. Billy was sitting up in bed perky as hell. The next thing we heard, he was dead. Died of shock." He was 29 years old.

The first American in the RAF, Billy Fiske was the first to die in it—or so it was long thought. After the war it was discovered that another pilot, Jimmy Davis, killed six weeks earlier serving with 79 Squadron, was also American. Soon, other Americans would be risking their lives in the skies over Britain in that desperate summer and early autumn.

A week after Billy Fiske died, Shorty Keough, Red Tobin, and Andy Mamedoff reported for duty at 609 Squadron, based at RAF Yeadon, near Leeds. The commander, first seeing Keough, asked, "What is he, a mascot?"

"Mascot! I'm a pilot, you mug … I mean, sir," Keough responded, quickly catching himself. He had to sit on cushions in his Spitfire, "though in the machine all you could see of him was the top of his head and a couple of eyes peering over the edge of the cockpit," an RAF pilot said.

During the Battle of Britain, which lasted from July 10 to October 31, 1940, Red Tobin was credited with downing two fighters with a third probable, and a bomber, while Mamedoff and Keough jointly downed a bomber.

After one aerial contest, Mamedoff managed to bring his crippled Spitfire back to base. In another battle, Tobin blacked out in action over the Channel, then went into a dive, coming to just in time to pull up at 1,000 feet.

"When you come right down to it, flying a fighter in combat is just about the great-

est game in the world—even if you are playing for keeps," remarked Tobin. "You're up there patrolling. Suddenly you sight those silver specks coming toward you from across the Channel. You hold them for an instant framed in the circle of your gunsight against a background of blue sky. You can't help admiring the picture made by those 300 planes in tight formations. Then you remember those boys aren't out for a ride and you start climbing to get above them. From then on, as the saying goes, you don't have to be crazy, but it helps."

Four other Americans fought in the Battle of Britain. One was Arthur Gerald Donahue, 64 Squadron, who fought for a week before being downed, bailing out with burns and injuries that required a lengthy recuperation. Hugh William Reilly, 66 Squadron, lasted a month in action before being killed on October 17, 1940, just two weeks before the Battle of Britain ended. Phillip Leckrone, 616 Squadron, flew a single sortie, helping down a German bomber.

Least distinguished of the Americans in the Battle of Britain was John Kenneth Haviland, 51 Squadron, who was the son of a U.S. Navy officer and an English mother. Thrown into combat without adequate training, he collided with another Hurricane on his first day in September 1940, managed to land, and did not fly again during the battle. He did serve with the RAF for the duration of the war, however.

Keough, Tobin, and Mamedoff flew for only a month with 609 Squadron. They were transferred to be among the very first Americans to fly as an organized unit in the RAF.

While Colonel Charles Sweeny was busy finding pilots for France, his namesake nephew was trying to convince the British to form a squadron of Americans, putting up $100,000 raised from wealthy friends and business associates to fund it. He made plain his reason: "The war could not be won without the assistance of the U.S., and I thought that everything that registered the effort of Americans in the war would help bring the U.S. in on the side of the Allies."

With the FBI soon looking the other way (in November 1940, with the United States still officially neutral, the Justice Department announced it would not take action against the citizenships of Americans serving in the RAF), a committee run by artist Clayton Knight worked out of the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York recruiting for service in Britain.

In contrast to the later Flying Tigers for China, drawn from the best Army and Navy pilots, what became the RAF's "Eagle Squadrons" were all civilians, representing 63 professions, led by students (43) and pilots (19), including one self-listed "playboy." Some were rejects for military service, such as the Eagles' future commander, Chesley Peterson, turned down for the Army Air Corps for "inherent lack of flying ability."

One of the oldest (at 38) of the Eagles, Harold Strickland, best summed up their reasons for going: "We were all motivated by the thought of high adventure, the excitement of combat flying, and a desire to help the British. I hesitate to use the word 'romance,' but it was there. It was the romance of the highest adventure, a sort of trademark among fliers everywhere. Adventure could have been found in any of the British armed services where thousands of Americans had volunteered, but we could fly."

One American was so determined to be an Eagle that, stuck in Canada instructing, he deserted the RCAF for the RAF!

But no Eagle had a stronger reason for joining than James A. Goodson. Hehad been a passenger on the British liner *Athenia,* the first British ship to be sunk by a German U-boat in the war—on September 3, 1939.

The liner was crossing from Glasgow to Montreal when *U-30* attacked. *Athenia* was carrying 1,103 civilians, including some 300 Americans, and 315 crew members. Of the 1,418 persons aboard, 98 passengers and 19 crew members were killed. Filled with a desire for vengeance, Goodson said later, "I felt an overwhelming fury that was to sweep over me time and time again during the war. No one had the right to cause such suffering to innocent people."

The most important distinction between the Eagle Squadrons and the Flying Tigers was that, while the Tigers earned top mercenary wages of $600 a month for service and a $500 bonus for each downed Japanese aircraft, the Eagles received no more than standard RAF pay. But some questioned whether they were worth even that.

Founded in September 1940, 71 Eagle Squadron became operational on January 4, 1941 (two others, 121 and 133, would be established later). But, in training, the Eagles soon earned a serious reputation for lack of discipline—drinking, gambling, forgetting to salute or rise for a superior, letting their uniforms go to seed, and stunting with aircraft. An RAF air marshal openly called them "a bunch of primadonnas."

Red Tobin, photographed in 1940, would be killed in action on September 7, 1941.

One, for a joke, pretended not to know who the king was when presented to him. Worst of all was Byron Kennerly. Finally sent home without seeing action for excessive drinking and public disturbances, he wrote a bogus memoir that was filmed by Hollywood (*International Squadron,* Warner Brothers, 1941) with no less than Ronald Reagan playing him!

Arthur Donahue quit the Eagles in disgust after a month to go back to flying with the British (he was killed in action in

September 11, 1942). "They're a mad bunch of Wild Westerners," Colonel Sweeny, who had usurped his nephew's role in founding the Eagles to be named as their honorary commander, told the British. "They need licking into shape and it's no use of being easy with them just because they are Americans."

In their first seven months of operations—air battles over the English Channel defending convoys, fighter sweeps over France, etc.—the Eagles' only air "victory" was when a section leader accidentally shot up his wingman's Hurricane while driving off a Messerschmitt; the wingman barely limped back to base but the Hurricane had to be scrapped.

First losses were "in accident" rather than in action—most tragically Shorty Keough. On February 15, 1941, he was flying to the defense of a convoy when he suddenly dived into the Channel. Faint hope for his survival had to be abandoned when size five flying boots were found amid floating wreckage. "Nobody but little Shorty could wear such small boots," the Eagles' record book reported sadly.

His friends Red Tobin and Andy Mamedoff did not long survive him. Tobin was killed in action on September 7, 1941; a month and a day later Mamedoff, just promoted to flight commander of the newly formed 133 Eagle Squadron and leading it to station in Northern Ireland, crashed in bad weather.

By that time, determined leadership had turned the Eagles into some of the best formations in the RAF. "I put it to them that if the Old Man thought we were prima donnas, why, let's be the best prima donnas there are," the Eagles' commander, Chesley Peterson, said.

In October 1941, 71 Eagle Squadron, based at Kirton-in-Lindsey, north of Lincoln, led all RAF squadrons in kills, then repeated its standing in November. By year's end, the Eagle Squadrons in total had a score of 45 confirmed kills, 15 1/2 probables, and 24 1/2 damaged. However, the Eagle who had most significantly contributed to the turn-around, their most colorful, outspoken, character, would see his achievements swept under the carpet for decades.

William R. Dunn was a cowboy and horse wrangler in Montana and Wyoming with the dream of emulating an uncle, a World War I flier. After receiving flying lessons from him, Dunn served in the U.S. Army from 1934 to 1937, trying without success to transfer to the Air Corps, even once going AWOL to find a unit.

Five days after Germany invaded Poland and World War II began, he took the train to Vancouver, British Columbia, to join the RCAF, only to be turned down. "I guess I came to Canada too quickly," Dunn wrote in his memoir *Fighter Pilot* (1982). "Since I was broke, I decided my heroic potential might be of some benefit to the Canadian Army."

He first joined the elite Seaforth Highlanders, a Scottish infantry regiment of the 3rd Brigade, 1st Canadian Division, then fought in France with a mortar unit. Evacuated back to England, he took over an antiaircraft gun after the crew was killed during a Luftwaffe raid on his camp, and downed two Stukas.

In October 1940, the RAF was scouring the other services for pilots with at least 500 hours of flying time. "My pencil may have slipped on my application form with my 160 [hours] sort of like 560," Dunn wrote, with tongue in cheek.

Dunn joined 71 Eagle Squadron in April 1941, but "felt my reception was somewhat cool. Maybe it was because I'd been an enlisted man in the Canadian Army who had crawled from the muddy trenches into their blue heaven."

Seeing an overtough squadron leader replaced "was the first I knew that we had a clique of any sort in the squadron—'the fair-haired boys,' we began to call them. Once I became aware of this clique, I could easily observe that they used political influence to gain promotions in rank and the new media for their 'heroic' war endeavors. Later, the more appropriate term 'brown-nosers' defined their activities. If you didn't belong to their clique, you were cut out of the pattern and pushed into the background. I would soon encounter these 'boys' myself."

After downing Luftwaffe aircraft from the ground, William Dunn then downed his first in the air while escorting British bombers near Lille, France, on July 2, 1941. "I saw an Messerschmitt 109E diving through the bomber formation at about 6,000 feet, squirting at the Blenheims as he dove. The 109 pilot made his break to port, right in front of me, maybe 70 or 100 yards away. I jammed the throttle wide open and, attacking the 109 from the port quarter, fired one burst of four seconds and three bursts of two seconds each. At about 50 yards range (the Hun kite filled my whole windscreen) I could see my machine gun bullets striking all over the German's fuselage and wing-root. Then he began to smoke. I continued my attack down to 3,500 feet, again firing at point-blank range. Now the 109 began burning furiously, dived straight down to the ground, where it crashed with a hell of an explosion near a crossroad."

"Ring the bell and run like hell." American pilots of 71 Squadron sprint to their planes as the order to "scramble" is received at RAF Martlesham Heath. INSET: A flight of "American Eagle" pilots gets familiar with Hawker Hurricanes during aerial training at an RAF base.

It was, finally, the first air kill by an Eagle. But Dunn "ran head-on into our squadron's 'fair-haired boys' clique.'" Another Eagle had downed a German fighter five minutes later and, "since I was not a member of the clique," Dunn saw his kill downplayed in favor of the other pilot's.

Dunn would achieve another aerial milestone for the Eagle Squadrons in another air battle near Lille on August 27, 1941: "I look around for a 109 that will give me a good target. In the previous months I had shot down four enemy aircraft. Now I needed one more victory to earn the coveted title of fighter ace. Just above the scrap I see two 109Fs that are evidently waiting for a shot-up Spitfire or Blenheim to drop out of the fight and try to get home. Then they'll dive down and finish it off—easy meat.

"I climb fast behind and above the two Huns. I'm about 1,500 feet above them now, and I have the sun at my back. I give my engine full throttle and dive on the rearmost enemy aircraft. The German leader of the two sees me coming and quickly half-rolls onto his back, diving away from me. The second 109, my target, does a climbing turn to the left. I close the range to about 150 yards, line the Hun up in my gunsight, then I press the gun-firing button. My aircraft shudders as I hear the sharp chatter of eight machine guns. Acrid fumes of burned gunpowder fill my cockpit and sting my nostrils. I like this odor. It seems to stiffen my spine, tighten my muscles, make my blood race. It makes my scalp tingle, and I want to laugh.

"I see the grayish-white tracer streaks from my guns converge on the Messerschmitt's tail section. The elevators and rudder disintegrate under the impact of the explosive DeWild bullets. Pieces fly off the enemy's fuselage. The range is now down

to 50 yards. Black liquid—engine oil—spatters my windscreen and a dense, brownish colored smoke is flung back at me. My enemy is finished. Splash one, but good! I've got my fifth victory."

Dunn immediately added to his score, downing two more Me-109s, but, then, "I could see four 109s climbing up to intercept me. This is getting too hot for me. I jam the throttle through the gate, jerk the control column back into my stomach, and climb up and over them. The nearest takes a squirt at my fast-moving Spitfire. His deflection is bad, luckily. The 20mm cannon shells and machine-gun bullets streak past me and veer off my tail.

"I roll my Spit onto its back, pull on the stick, and the reversed horizon comes up to meet me. I hear explosions and a banging like hail on my fuselage. My port wing is hit again. I see splashing holes and rents send pieces flying off. A ball of fire flashes through the cockpit, smashing into the instrument panel. My right foot takes a heavy blow, bounces off the rudder pedal, and is numb. Two sharp blows bang into my right leg. Then comes a soft, deep darkness. I just faintly hear bits of broken glass and metal strike the cockpit floor.

"Fear grips me. It is finally happening to me … I am being shot down and killed!"

Dunn, close to unconsciousness, went into a dive. His head hitting the side of the cockpit hood roused him: "I raise my head and look through the windscreen towards the swirling fields of earth charging madly upward to enfold me. Suddenly I become conscious of my two hands tugging back on the control column. The nose of my Spitfire is slowly lifting. The land below me stops swirling as earth and sky return to their rightful places. The horizon reappears. My brain tells me that I live! I laugh without sound. I still own life!"

Dunn had pulled up at only 1,200 feet. Wounded, aircraft crippled, he struggled across the Channel at only 800 feet to an emergency landing in Britain.

To his continued frustration, Dunn returned from a month's convalescence to learn two other Eagles had been awarded

ABOVE: A Hawker Hurricane Mark I of the 71 Eagle Squadron takes off from Kirton-in-Lindsey, Lincolnshire, March 1941. BELOW: Eagle Squadron pilots relax in the dispersal hut while waiting to make training flights.

the Distinguished Flying Cross, and one of them, considered more presentable for propaganda purposes, was being publicized as the Eagles' first ace. "What about my victories—didn't they count?" Dunn was to bitterly write. "It seemed as if my distinguished flying achievements had been purposely overlooked. After I got shot up and chucked in the hospital they decided to forget all about me. The DFC was normally awarded to a fighter pilot with five victories. I'm sure, but I can't prove it, that Robbie, our intelligence officer, who was also a Member of Parliament and very influential at the Air Ministry, worked the DFC gongs for his two fair-haired boys. I never did get a silver DFC, just some bullet and cannon shells awarded from my German opponents."

"On this note of discord," as he called it, Dunn left the Eagle Squadron to take an instructor's posting in Canada. By doing so, he remained in the RAF long after the other Eagles had left it.

Edwin Taylor was with 133 Eagle Squadron in Northern Ireland when the news of Pearl Harbor came over the radio: "I let out a yell that could be heard all the way to Derry…. That was the start of the bash to end all bashes—with unashamed tears running down their

cheeks and patting each other on the back and buying drinks for each other."

"We knew we had just gained a very powerful ally," a squadron mate said, "and that in itself was reason to rejoice. We no longer stood alone."

The next day, representatives from the Eagle Squadrons based in England were at the U.S. Embassy in London to request transfer to the American military. The process would drag on for 10 months, while the Eagles continued to fly their daily missions. Groups of them were sent to help defend Malta and Singapore, where James A. Campbell earned the unenviable distinction of being the only Eagle to be a POW of the Japanese.

The Eagle Squadrons' last major action was in support of Operation Jubilee, the Canadian landing at Dieppe on August 19, 1942. "The air above Dieppe was thick with enemy and Allied aircraft," recalled Barry Mahon, a section leader with 121 Eagle Squadron. He downed a Focke-Wulf diving for the landing boats, then, out of ammunition, was turning back for England to rearm and return when he "got a funny feeling and looked out. There was a yellow-nosed spinner about 200 feet below me and climbing. The FW had a better climbing ability than the Spitfire."

Mahon tried to outclimb his opponent, but stalled out and dropped into the Focke-Wulf's line of fire. "The noise was terrifying—like a thousand shot-puts all being thrown on a galvanized tin roof over your head. The gun panels ripped off my left wing. The engine exploded, and oil covered the cockpit, shells exploded on my right wing."

Parachuting into the water, Mahon wrote, "I lay on my back in the dinghy and watched the tremendous air battle, probably the greatest air show the world had yet seen. There must have been 80 or 90 German planes and an equal number of British aircraft in a five-mile-square cube of the sky.

"The sights that morning and part of the afternoon were unbelievable. There would be a Spit being chased by a German being chased by a Spit being chased

Continued on page 98

ABOVE: 71 Squadron pilots Chesley G. "Pete" Peterson and Gregory A. "Gus" Daymond (front). Both Yanks were awarded Britain's Distinguished Flying Cross and Peterson became squadron commander at age 21. TOP: Pilot Officer William Dunn in his Spitfire Mk IA, 1941.

The Foreign "Few"

The British had a veritable flying foreign legion fighting for it during the Battle of Britain—145 Poles, 88 Czechs, 29 Belgians, 13 French—making up almost 10 percent of the RAF Fighter Command.

Of the Poles, an RAF wing commander said, "They fought for English soil with an abandon, tempered with skill and backed by an indomitable courage such as it could never have been surpassed had it been in defense of their own native land." Polish pilots downed 126 German aircraft in six weeks. The British Air Minister would later say that the Battle of Britain could not have been won without the Poles.

One of the leading Polish aces, with 17 kills, was Jean Zumbach. Even in a group that could "be a handful" on the ground, as another RAF officer put it, Zumbach stood out as the most colorful and outrageous. During one particularly rowdy gathering, he shot an apple off the head of another Pole with a pistol. After the war, he continued his flamboyant ways as an air smuggler and mercenary until he turned up dead in suspicious circumstances in Paris in 1986.

A Czech, Josef Frantisek, fled to Poland when Hitler occupied Prague in March 1939, flew with the Poles against the Germans that September, then, as Zumbach and other Poles had done, made his way to Britain through Romania and the Middle East. He chose to continue flying with the Poles rather than with his fellow Czechs, but, as his score climbed, he began to deteriorate mentally from the stress.

On October 8, 1940, he suddenly broke formation and disappeared; hours later, his aircraft, with no sign of battle damage or evidence of malfunction, was found crashed. At the time of his death, Frantisek was the RAF's leading ace, with 17 kills.

A pilot who raised concern of a different sort was the Belgian Comte Rudolph de Henricourt de Grunne. Before fighting against the Luftwaffe, he flew alongside it on Franco's side in the Spanish Civil War, claiming 13 kills.

Despite the Fascist taint, he was allowed to fly with the RAF, his squadron commander considering him "not a Nazi sympathizer as much as a mercenary." He was killed in action over the English Channel in May 1942.

A striking memorial to those who served with the RAF during the Battle of Britain was unveiled in central London on September 18, 2005, by Prince Charles and the Duchess of Cornwall, the former Camilla Parker Bowles. The monument is located on the Victoria Embankment (north bank of the Thames) about 200 yards from Westminster Bridge, almost directly opposite the Millennium Wheel (the huge London Eye Ferris wheel), which is on the south bank of the Thames.

Bronze plaques with the names and ranks of every airmen who took part in the battle are mounted around the outside of the monument, with the airmen's names grouped under their respective countries. □

Public Domain

Road conditions were often challenging for drivers of the Red Ball Express. RIGHT: A corporal in the 783rd Military Police Battalion waves a Red Ball convoy through on its way to forward areas near Alençon, France, September 5, 1944.

Red Ball EXPRESS

The Allies' Unprecedented

Despite being pushed to exhaustion, American soldiers kept on trucking across Europe. **BY ALLYN R. VANNOY**

Lifeline to Victory

WHILE SUPPLY and logistics may seem like dull, dry topics, they are absolutely essential to military operations, for no victory can be achieved without a steady, uninterrupted flow of food, fuel, ammunition, clothing, medical supplies, and other key matériel.

Never was this so clearly the case than when millions of men crossed from southern England to northern France in June 1944. To get the supplies to an army on the move became the role of the U.S. Army's "Red Ball Express." Far from being dull, the story of this vital operation was filled with action, adventure, and danger.

The Red Ball Express was the result of a sudden and unplanned situation that the U.S. Army recognized and responded to quickly as it advanced across northern France in the summer of 1944. The operation—born out of necessity—lasted only three months, from August 25 to November 16, 1944, and involved thousands of men and thousands of vehicles.

Adding to the logistics crisis that necessitated the operation were continually changing requirements and the activities of Paris gasoline gangs. The Express also presented an opportunity for African-Americans to prove themselves and contribute to the campaign in Europe.

Operation Overlord, the invasion of Normandy, followed months of intensive preparation. An absolutely critical part of the overall plan was making sure that the million-man-plus U.S. Army had all the essential supplies it would need once it reached the Continent.

To ensure this, the War Department early on established the Services of Supply, ETO, in England on May 24, 1942, to take charge of the growing mountains of supplies and to prepare to move these mountains across the English Channel. (After D-Day, the organization's name was changed to Communications Zone, or COMZ; today it is known as the Army's Quartermaster Corps.)

Commanding this massive organization was the egotistical, hard-driving, and ultra-religious Maj. Gen. John Clifford Hodges Lee. (Behind his back, some of those who dealt with him called him "Jesus Christ Himself," based on his initials.)

Of Lee, Supreme Allied Commander General Dwight D. Eisenhower wrote in *Crusade in Europe,* "Because of his mannerisms and his stern insistence upon the outward forms of discipline, which he himself meticulously observed, he was considered a martinet by most of his acquaintances. He was determined, correct, and devoted to duty; he had long been known as an effective administrator and as a man of the highest character and religious fervor. I sometimes felt that he was a modern Cromwell, but I was ready to waive the rigidity of his mannerisms in favor of his constructive qualities. Indeed, I felt it possible that his unyielding methods might be

U.S. Army

vital to success in an activity where an iron hand is always mandatory."

Ike also noted the indispensable nature of an efficient logistics system: "The work accomplished under [Lee's] direction was so vital to success and so vast in proportion that its description would require a book in itself."

Critical to ground operations was having a sufficient supply of POL (Petroleum-Oils-Lubricants). Allied logisticians in England worked out a detailed plan for POL support on the Continent. All vehicles used in the assault were to arrive on the beachhead with full fuel tanks and carrying extra gasoline in five-gallon jerrycans, otherwise known as "packaged distribution." This was to continue throughout the invasion's initial phase, D-Day to D+41. Planners had predicted a fairly slow-paced offensive, allowing for systematic construction of base, intermediate, and forward-area supply depots. In the meantime, it was hoped that the early capture and development of the Cherbourg port facilities on the northern tip of the Cotentin Peninsula, by around D+15, would enable combat engineers to begin laying three six-inch fuel pipelines toward Paris.

Pipelines were expected to eventually move about 90 percent of all POL entering the European Theater to forward area terminals or transfer points. By D+90, it was planned that the front line would be anchored on the banks of the Seine. The post-Overlord period, D+91 to D+360, would have the Army pushing steadily eastward to the Rhine, where it was assumed the war's final showdown would occur.

On D-Day, events occurred much as planned in terms of getting POL supplies ashore. Right behind the fighting men came the fuel and ammo. As the trucks and amphibious vehicles (DUKWs) rolled ashore, the supplymen began stacking their cargoes of five-gallon cans. They were placed in small, widely scattered dumpsites throughout the lodgment. This simple method of open storage made fuel supplies easily accessible. At the same time, this storage method rendered supplies less vulnerable to enemy attack. By the end of the first week, D+6, petroleum-supply companies were on hand to begin moving stores away from the beach as the troop buildup continued and the front line moved slowly inland.

By the end of June, the Normandy beachhead had expanded considerably, but Allied combat units were only advancing slowly through the hedgerow country in a bloody slugfest that would last several weeks. The Allies' inability to score a quick breakthrough greatly impacted the supply situation. Since there was so little forward movement, stockpiles grew. Approximately 177,000 vehicles and more than a half million tons of supplies, had come ashore by D+21. At the same time, failure to capture Cherbourg as planned—and the enemy's almost total destruction of the port's facilities—meant that the proposed pipeline schedule had to be delayed. For the next few weeks, all POL requirements had to be met solely by packaged distribution, i.e., the five-gallon jerrycans.

National Archives

Trucks and trailers loaded with supplies pass a sign warning civilian traffic to stay off the express route reserved for Red Ball Express and military use.

The breakout from the Normandy beachhead finally occurred in the last week of July. Following a massive aerial bombardment on the 25th, General Omar N. Bradley's First Army ruptured German lines near the town of St. Lô in an operation code-named Cobra. The next day, three armored divisions poured through the gap.

As the Allies broke out from the coast in late July, Lt. Gen. George S. Patton took command of the newly activated Third Army. By August 13, American spearheads had reached Le Mans, 90 miles from Paris (the French capital itself would be liberated on August 25).

After smashing German forces in the Falaise Pocket (August 12-21), Eisenhower authorized Bradley and Patton and British General Bernard L. Montgomery to cross the Seine in pursuit of the fleeing German Army. Eisenhower knew that this decision would impose a heavy burden on the Allied logistics system—that the task of keeping the troops supplied might exceed its capabilities. Logistic requirements were already strained by the speed with which the last 200 miles of advance had been covered.

National Archives

Trucks laden with gas for refueling an advance American tank column enter St. Gilles between two wrecked German tanks. MPs stand by to direct traffic.

Patton summed up the situation facing his army: "At the present time our chief difficulty is not the Germans, but gasoline. If they would give me enough gas, I could go all the way to Berlin!" As Patton was racing across France, Third Army was consuming an average of 350,000 gallons of gasoline a day.

Suddenly, the Allies faced a new set of problems.

Supply difficulties were complicated by the fact that the U.S. Army was supporting more troops than had originally been anticipated. The Communications Zone (COMZ) had expected to supply 12 divisions—a division in combat requiring 500 to 750 tons or more a day—in the first 90 days following the invasion and then only in the area west of the Seine. COMZ did not expect to support these forces beyond the Seine until after September; however, by late August, COMZ was supporting 28 divisions operating in France and Belgium, 16 of which were some 150 miles east of the Seine.

There was no shortage of supplies; they were just in the wrong places. Planners had also not foreseen Third Army's penetrating into Lorraine and growing into a "large" force. It had been thought that Patton's push would be a small, secondary effort south of the Ardennes to divert enemy resistance from the main Allied drive by Lt. Gen. Courtney Hodges's First Army, in the north. The situation was further complicated as large numbers of trucks were being used to haul equipment for the construction of fuel pipelines and to build depots.

Because of the rapidity and success of the American advance, the original logistics plan was modified to support Patton's major thrust south of the Ardennes.

The invasion beaches had been expected to serve as the main point of entry to Europe for men and matériel for only about a month. By D+30, Allied planners expected to occupy and be operating the port of Cherbourg along with five smaller Normandy ports. But, by late July, nearly 90 percent of matériel was still arriving over the beaches and would continue to enter the ETO via those same beaches well into the fall when Antwerp was finally opened.

Although trucks were considered to be crucial to delivering supplies to the front, the logistics planners had assumed that trucks would not be used for hauling supplies over distances greater than 150 miles. They had not accounted for how long the French railway system would be out of action because of the success of the Allies' pre-invasion air bombardment and the French Resistance's sabotage efforts.

Supply requirements had been projected on the basis of anticipated troop strengths. The Army's Motor Transportation Division assumed the use of standard truck companies, each operating a nominal 40 of 48 authorized 2 1/2-ton, six-by-six trucks (known as "Deuce-and-a-halves"). Calculations were made using 100 percent overloading to five tons, a single driver, and a maximum average daily range of 50 miles, thus giving a truck company a capacity of 10,000 ton-miles per day. Based on these calculations, it was proposed that 240 truck companies would be needed to support operations, but the War Department had allocated only 160.

The decision to cross the Seine and continue eastward without waiting to fully develop lines of communication and supply also constituted a major departure from previous plans. While the decision posed difficulties for logisticians, it presented a gamble senior commanders were willing to risk. Once across the Seine, the Allied forces fanned out, doubling the length of their front. With 90 to 95 percent of Allied supplies on the Continent still in base depots, the situation grew more critical with each passing day.

In late August, Eisenhower directed that most petroleum supplies go to Hodge's First Army and Montgomery's 21st Army Group. This action was to come at the expense of Patton's Third Army.

When American forces reached Sens, southeast of Paris, on August 22, it became clear that additional road transport would be needed to stock the road-heads of the

advancing forces.

The urgency of the situation called for drastic measures, but there was little time for thoughtful planning. An attempt was made to offset the shortage of trucks by pooling 90 Advance Section (ADSEC) quartermaster truck companies into a single organization—the Advance Section Motor Transport Brigade or ASMTB, under Colonel Clarence W. Richmond.

Allied planners met in a "brainstorming" session on August 23 to come up with a solution to the burgeoning supply crisis. Two of the principal planners were Lt. Col. Loren A. Ayers, chief of MTB (Motor Transport Brigade), who was in charge of gathering and training drivers and obtaining equipment, and Major Gordon K. Gravelle, of COMZ headquarters. The plan conceived of by Ayers and Gravelle called for pooling truck assets and facilities of COMZ and MTB. They also called for requisitioning trucks from other Army units. Vehicles were to be taken from anti-aircraft and artillery battalions, engineer companies, and infantry units awaiting transfer to the front. The decision to establish the operation was made by Brig. Gen. Ewart G. Plank, ADSEC, on the night of August 23. The Red Ball was established 36 hours later—the name "Red Ball" borrowed from a railroad term indicating a freight train that was to be given the right-of-way.

The first phase of the Red Ball Express began on August 25, initially running for five days with 76 truck companies using 3,358 trucks, mostly deuce-and-a-halves. The prime aim was to deliver 75,000 tons of supplies, plus quantities of gasoline, to the Chartres-La Loupe-Dreux area, a distance of 125 miles from St. Lô, by the beginning of September. The complete truck route was not determined in detail until the afternoon of August 27.

RIGHT: Major General John Clifford Hodges Lee (right) commanded the COMZ. Lieutenant Colonel Loren A. Ayers (left) trained the Red Ball drivers and obtained equipment. BELOW: Red Ball Express drivers line up for coffee at one the stations set up to operate 24 hours a day.

All: National Archives

The limited width of the roads in Normandy caused Richmond and Ayers to demand that a one-way system be implemented.

There was little precedent for a large-scale motorized supply operation such as the Red Ball Express. The Transportation Corps had used a somewhat similar, but limited, effort as it moved supplies from dumps in Britain to Channel ports prior to D-Day. Before the invasion, the Army had considered but never tested a long-haul supply operation.

By the planned end of the first phase of the Express, 132 Army truck companies with 5,958 trucks had been employed. By September 1, when the first phase of the operation was supposed to have been completed, the French railway system was still not ready to meet the needed volume, so the target for road deliveries was increased accordingly. The operation was extended until September 4, delivering 89,939 tons of supplies to depots in the Chartres-La Loupe-Dreux triangle.

To facilitate operations, MTB officers established traffic-control points (TCPs) that operated around the clock at principal intersections and in cities, towns, and villages. TCP personnel regulated convoys, or any other vehicles, to ensure that Red Ball convoys had the right-of-way. TCP troops recorded passing convoys, logged their destinations and weights. TCPs also provided rest areas where trucks refueled, made minor repairs, and drivers received hot coffee and meals. TCPs were established at St. Lô, Vire, Domfront, Alençon, Montagne-au-Perche, La Loupe, Chartres, Nogent-le-Rotrou, Bellême, Mamers, Villaines-la-Juhel, Mayenne, and Mortain.

Some trucks were also required to travel north to the Normandy Base Section depot in the beachhead area, and even as far as Cherbourg, to collect cargo. But the control point was established back at St. Lô, where the convoys were to be assembled and dispatched.

Traffic control was a major challenge as MPs did their best to ride herd on the convoys. There were hundreds of miles of highway to patrol, intersections to manage, and bridges to guard. Despite their efforts, entire loads of material went missing. In all, about 2,000 trucks were reported stolen.

The strain on personnel and equipment quickly became apparent. As the word spread among combat units and in news stories, the drivers attempted to live up to the growing reputation of the operation as they regularly began to ignore speed and weight limits, and their own fatigue. No trucks were to be idle due to the lack of drivers. Besides a driver shortage, the Express also faced problems of vehicle maintenance and increasing truck mishaps. As the number of single-vehicle accidents climbed, the Army began assigning relief drivers. Some 5,600 men were transferred to the 140 truck companies involved in the operation. Unfortunately, many of them had never driven a truck before.

In early September, General Bradley believed that an all-out effort would smash the Siegfried Line defenses and reach across the Rhine within a week, and he urged his commanders to pursue the enemy relentlessly.

Bradley's plan was a two-pronged thrust north and south of the Ardennes. The northern thrust, using First Army, would drive east from Brussels through Liège and Aachen to Cologne. The southern thrust, with Third Army, would jump off from the Meuse River bridgeheads and move east to the Rhine through the Saar toward Frankfurt. Augmenting both thrusts would be V Corps, which would fill the gap between the two armies.

However, Eisenhower was concerned that Bradley might be trying to do too much too soon given the logistics situation. But offensive operations could not be denied in the face of the pressure to defeat the Germans as quickly as possible.

As a result of Eisenhower's decision to permit Patton to aggressively pursue the retreating German forces, it was decided to expand logistic operations. The new operation, phase two of the Red Ball Express, was extended eastward to Soissons and Sommesous.

It was hoped that Patton's forces could achieve a quick victory and that the Red Ball operation would be successfully completed. But fuel consumption for Third Army was now reaching close to a million gallons a day.

As the Red Ball was extended beyond Paris into eastern France in the second and longest phase of the operation, two new

U.S. troops unload projectiles from a Red Ball truck to be used against the German front lines near St. Lo.

National Archives

Gasoline transported across the English Channel by boat is unloaded in a canal near the French front, June 24, 1944.

truck routes that looked on a map like a giant race track were created. They branched north and south to serve an ever-expanding front stretching from Belgium to Alsace.

The northern leg skirted Paris, passed through the suburb of St. Denis, and terminated at Soissons, 30 miles northeast of Paris. On the return leg it ran south to Château Thierry, Coulommiers to Fontainebleau, and back to Chartres. The southern leg of the extended Red Ball ran southeast to Melun, Fontenay-Trésigny, and Rozay-en-Brie, then east to Esternay and Sommesons. The return route ran through Arcissur-Anbe and Nogent-sur-Seine and back to Fontainebleau and Chartres. The northern route was later extended to Hirson, France, the southern to Metz and Verdun.

With the extension of the Red Ball, its length was nearly tripled. The round-trip length from Normandy to Hirson was 686 miles, the southern route 590 miles.

By early September 1944, with the First Army's advance into Belgium, and as Hodges prepared to move into Germany, Red Ball trucks were driving as far as Liège, where a massive supply depot was being prepared. Logistics units were put to the test as Montgomery's 21st Army Group faced a crisis. Some 1,400 British trucks were out of service due to faulty engines, and replacement engine parts were found to be defective. At the same time, Montgomery believed that if his bold new operation, Market-Garden, could create a bridgehead over the Rhine, his armies could make a dash for Berlin and end the war in 1944. The logistics support operation for this was code-named the "Red Lion Express."

The task of supporting the operation fell to the U.S. Army. Acceding to Montgomery's requirements, Eisenhower ordered the daily transport of some 500 tons of supplies 300 miles from Bayeux, in the Normandy base area, to Brussels—17,000 tons in all. This placed an additional burden on the Red Ball's resources at a time when there was a critical shortage of trucks.

COMZ began scouring units for nonessential vehicles. Trucks and drivers were requisitioned from evacuation hospitals, salvage and repair companies, engineering units, signal companies, and maintenance units. Ten trucking companies with some 340 vehicles came from antiaircraft units. Two engineer general-service regiments were reorganized into seven truck companies and a chemical smoke-generating battalion was organized into four truck companies. The largest number of trucks and drivers came from idled infantry divisions awaiting transfer to the front. Forty companies with 1,500 trucks were pulled from three divisions bivouacked in Normandy—the 26th, 95th, and 104th Divisions initially, and later from elements of the 84th, 94th, and 104th Divisions. In all, 61 provisional truck companies were created.

On any given day, 899 trucks were operating on the Express, driving an average 54-hour roundtrips. The round-the-clock movement of thousands of trucks necessitated a strict set of rules. The trucks were to move in complete company-unit convoys. A company's full strength was 48 vehicles, but 40 was used for planning purposes, allowing for maintenance and breakdowns. Convoys of no fewer than five trucks were allowed.

Vehicles in a convoy were to maintain 60-yard intervals. The convoys were divided into "serials," each with a minimum of five trucks. The trucks were numbered to indicate position in the convoy. A one-minute interval was to be kept between serials, and two minutes between convoys. A jeep generally ran at the head and rear of each convoy.

The maximum speed limit, although widely disregarded, was set at 25 miles per hour. Drivers were not permitted to overtake or make unauthorized stops. A 10-minute break was scheduled every two hours at 10 minutes before each "even" hour to allow loads to be checked and readjusted, for minor repairs, and to allow drivers a break.

Operations continued through the night, and, in the absence of enemy air activity, the crews were permitted to use full headlights.

For defense against possible air or ground attacks, some of the trucks were outfitted

with .50-caliber machine guns, but generally the drivers carried only carbines for personal defense.

As part of the operation, eight sites, or towns, were designated as repair facilities and for staging replacement vehicles along the Red Ball Express routes. These included St. Lô, Vire, Alençon, Montagne, Chartres, Nogent-le-Rotrou, Mayenne, and Mortain. The routes were also regularly patrolled by service and recovery units operating out of these facilities. Disabled vehicles were to be moved to the side of the road where they were either repaired by roving maintenance units or removed to rear-area depots for repair.

The transport effort required the coordination of various service support branches. Engineers maintained roads and bridges, Military Police (MPs) ran checkpoints directing traffic, and matériel handlers and petroleum specialists were ever present along the route and at forward-area truck-heads.

The trucks were not empty on the return leg of their trips. Salvaged shell casings, war debris of various kinds, wounded soldiers, POWs, and the remains of the dead were all carried back from the front for processing.

Routes were marked with red circle signs, the "red ball." Only trucks with a matching red ball insignia were permitted to use them. The special road markers and MPs were intended to keep the trucks on the correct roads.

Bivouac areas were set up along the Express roadways. One was at Alençon and another near Chartres. The transportation hub and rest areas around Alençon were the home base for some 100 truck companies and 22,000 service personnel. The area provided quarters, mess facilities, and medical care for the men along with vehicle-maintenance operations.

Much of the fuel transported was still in five-gallon containers—jerrycans. However, at the very height of Red Ball activities, a severe shortage of jerrycans threatened fuel deliveries. The cans had been carelessly discarded and littered roads from the beachhead to the front. The Army's Chief Quartermaster offered a reward to French civilians to help round up the containers, but a shortage remained until more cans could be manufactured and delivered.

National Archives

The Red Ball Express also faced an inherent problem in terms of diminishing returns. As supply routes lengthened, the Red Ball required increasing amounts of gasoline to run its own trucks, reaching 300,000 gallons per day.

Beside the long hours and distance covered, there was also the threat of hijacking and theft. A jerrycan of gas could fetch $100 on the Black Market.

Once Paris was liberated the demand for gasoline became astronomical. Millions of gallons of U.S. Army gasoline disappeared into Paris, a good deal of it taken by AWOL soldiers who also disappeared into the city as the Americans advanced beyond the Seine. In the fall of 1944, an estimated

Army Transportation Museum

ABOVE: African American members of the Red Ball Express repair a 25-ton truck while a crewman keeps a watchful eye for the enemy. LEFT: One truck in a Red Ball convoy has gone off the road in France. Frequent accidents were caused by vehicle breakdowns, driver fatigue, or carelessness.

20,000 American soldiers were reported to be AWOL in France. AWOL soldiers needed cash to survive and found easy money in the Black Market. Many of these soldiers either joined existing underworld gangsters or formed their own gangs.

The most common method of acquiring gas was petty theft, where gang members cruised Paris streets and stole jerrycans off unattended vehicles. The more brazen of the gangs simply drove up to fuel dumps with dozens or even hundreds of empty

jerrycans and asked for gas. Because of the speed of the Allied advance, gas dumps got in the habit of servicing GIs without question. There was no time to determine if a soldier was telling the truth, plus there was no proper system of acquisition in place. The situation was ripe for theft and abuse.

The gasoline gangs were highly organized, some along the same lines as military units with promotions, passes, and duty rosters. The boss of one gang was an AWOL medic who dressed as an MP lieutenant and rounded up other AWOL soldiers. He induced, threatened, or blackmailed soldiers to become part of his gang.

The AWOL soldiers made so much money so fast that it eventually became the undoing of many of them. Criminal Investigation Division (CID) agents assigned to break up the gangs caught many of them when they tried to send home thousands of dollars in War Bonds or postal money orders. Others were arrested when they flashed large wads of bills in cafés or were caught driving expensive cars. Many were caught in AWOL roundups. Some were given up by the French—jilted girlfriends, jealous boyfriends, and Parisians who hated seeing the Americans exploiting the city's needs.

As with any and all armies, there were the normal weaknesses and temptations. Transportation operations had to deal with drunkenness and unauthorized absences in truck units. There was also the distraction of women. And there were reports of drivers dropping out of convoys and loads being sold.

Despite the many problematic issues, in a message to the members of the Red Ball Express on October 1, 1944, General Eisenhower stated, "To you, the drivers and the mechanics and your officers, who keep the Red Ball vehicles constantly moving, I wish to express my deep appreciation. You are doing an excellent job."

Of the more than 50,000 men who were employed on the Red Ball Express, some 40,000 were African Americans. All of these men were initially drawn from Quartermaster truck companies.

African Americans made up just over 10 percent of the U.S. Army during World War II, but almost 21 percent of service units. Approximately 73 percent of the transport companies of the Motor Transport Service in the ETO were made up of black soldiers.

In addition to driving trucks, African American soldiers made up engineering units that kept open the supply routes, maintenance companies looking after vehicles and depots, and three-quarters of the stevedores in port battalions unloading ships delivering supplies at French ports.

[It should be noted that other African Americans served in the few segregated ground-combat units in Europe such as the 92nd Infantry Division, which fought in Italy. They also saw combat in segregated artillery battalions, as well as segregated armored units, including the 84th, 827th, and 761st Tank Battalions, the latter distinguishing itself during 183 days in combat.]

By early 1945, increasing losses in American infantry regiments had reached crisis proportions. Thirty thousand white soldiers were hurried to Europe. Fresh from training, they were rushed into combat units only to add to the casualty lists. The shortage of riflemen worsened. Eisenhower offered amnesty to men in the stockade if they would serve, but there was little response. Finally, Ike looked to the black service units, offering them the chance to fight. They were to be integrated into infantry divisions, but only by platoons. Twenty-five hundred blacks volunteered immediately. Because of the prohibition of blacks being in charge of white soldiers, only privates and PFCs were accepted. As a result, many black soldiers took a reduction in rank to be included. The platoons were distributed among the Sixth and Twelfth Army Groups, though not to Third Army.

In reviewing the logistic transport operations, ADSEC identified deficiencies in road maintenance, handling supplies, traffic control, communications along the extended routes, and vehicle maintenance. Driving was often extremely reckless and accidents were common. ADSEC concluded that convoys should have been smaller than company size—reduced to 13 to 16 vehicles. But the Red Ball had been initiated with minimal training and little preparation. As a result, there were delays in loading and unloading supplies, extending convoy turn-around times.

Fortunately, during the first week of September 1944, the port of Antwerp finally fell into Allied hands and, as soon as repairs could be made, would become the principal port for bringing supplies into the ETO. It would also put the Red Ball Express out of business.

The Red Ball Express involved endless hours of dull, hard, and many times dangerous work. Nonetheless, it captured the media's attention, and had the effect of placing supply and service personnel in the spotlight.

When the Red Ball program finally ended in mid-November 1944, Express truckers had delivered 412,193 tons of food, gasoline, oil, lubricants, ammunition, and other essential supplies, moving an average of 5,000 tons a day.

While the Red Ball Express may have been the most famous, it was only the first of a number of logistic operations that occurred during 1944-45 in Western Europe. Besides the Red Lion Express, September 13 to October 12, other operations followed in various sizes and scope, including the Little Red Ball Express, which operated for only a month beginning December 15, transferring 100 tons of cargo a day from Cherbourg to Paris.

A staff sergeant checks an empty convoy truck at a regulation point in France.

Another operation of short duration was the Green Diamond Express, running from October 10 to November 1, using approximately 600 trucks to move supplies from Normandy depots to railheads at Avranches and Dol-de-Bretagne. The White Ball Express, from October 6, 1944, to January 6, 1945, cleared the ports of Le Havre and Rouen by transferring supplies to railheads at Paris, Beauvais, and Compiegne.

Two larger supply-transport operations of longer duration included the ABC Express, which moved over 244,000 tons from Antwerp to Brussels, Liêge, Charleroi, and Mons, from November 30, 1944, to March 26, 1945, providing supplies to the U.S. First and Ninth Armies and to the British-Canadian 21st Army Group. The second and largest of all operations was the XYZ Express, which ran during the last days of the war in Europe, from March 25 to May 31, 1945, delivering nearly 872,000 tons of supplies from Liêge, Duren, Luxembourg, and Nancy into Germany, as it supported the U.S. First, Third, Seventh, and Ninth Armies during the final drive into Germany.

The Red Ball had achieved its greatest success during the first chaotic weeks of operation. The Transportation Corps' original plans were to transport 75,000 tons of supplies, excluding bulk POL, to the Chartres-La Loupe-Dreux area by September 1. By September 5, it had delivered 88,939 tons.

For over two months, the Red Ball Express transported petroleum and other supplies up to 400 miles. But success came at a price. Round-the-clock driving put a strain on personnel and equipment. Continuous use of vehicles led to their rapid deterioration and resulted in a drain on parts and labor. The situation was aggravated by driver abuse, including speeding and overloading. Fatigue also led to an increased number of accidents, and even instances of sabotage where drivers disabled their vehicles in order to get some additional rest.

The Red Ball Express involved endless hours of dull, hard, and many times dangerous work. Nonetheless, it captured the media's attention, and had the effect of placing supply and service personnel in the spotlight.

The need for the Red Ball Express arose from the mismatch between the supplies piling up at the beachheads and the needs of the unexpectedly rapidly advancing Allied armies. The situation allowed little time for advance planning or preparation. The Express was, as one observer noted, "largely an impromptu affair." Yet, it proved to be an outstanding success to the Allied victory in Europe.

As General Omar Bradley put it, "Logistics, this was the dullest subject in the world. But logistics were the lifeblood of the Allied armies in France." □

Most Americans at home willingly made sacrifices for the war effort but others resorted to cheating and Black Market activities. **BY HERB KUGEL**

Home Front USA: RATIONING

In 1941-1942, British journalist Alistair Cooke traveled through the United States. In his description of his trip, *American Home Front 1941-1942,* he reported stopping for breakfast at a restaurant in West Virginia where, "the sugar was rationed at breakfast, and there was a note on the menu requesting that ... in the interests of 'national defense,' keep to one cup of coffee."

Rationing struck the American public in 1942. It arrived with force and uncertainty and generated an economic crisis that could have caused America to lose the war. It came originally on August 28, 1941, without the approval of the United States Congress. The Office of Price Administration (OPA), which administered rationing during World War II, was established within the Office for Emergency Management by President Franklin Roosevelt's Executive Order 8875.

The OPA's initial function was to stabilize prices (price control) and rents as the U.S. government readied for America's certain involvement in World War II. From this beginning, the OPA's economic power soon grew mighty.

The OPA became an independent agency under the Emergency Price Control Act, a law passed by Congress and signed by President Franklin Roosevelt on January 30, 1942. The organization was given the authority to place ceilings on all prices except agricultural commodities. It could ration virtually everything else, including tires, gasoline, and new automobiles, as well as such consumer items as sugar, coffee, shoes, silk stockings, meats, perfumes, and processed foods.

The OPA didn't wait to exercise the power it knew it would be handed. Richard Lingeman reports in *Don't You Know There's a War On? The American Home Front 1941-1945,* that the OPA "got itself into the rationing business by ordering, on its own initiative, a tire-rationing plan." The program went into effect on December 30, 1941, and was fully active in January.

The American Historical Society records that 8,000 rationing boards were created to oversee the tire-rationing program as well as the many other restrictions the OPA knew would soon follow. Lingeman reported, "More than 30,000 volunteers were recruited to handle the vast paper work involved in controlling prices on 90 percent of the goods sold in more than 600,000 retail stores and issuing a series of rationing books to every man, woman and child in the United States. As the war drew on, nearly every item Americans ate, wore, used or lived in was rationed or otherwise regulated."

Stephen W. Sears reported in the October/ November 1979 issue of *American Heritage,* "In size the OPA was second only to the Post Office Department; in bureaucratic complexity it was unmatched. It was, said one observer, 'born in strife and lived in turmoil.'"

The strife and turmoil commenced even before the OPA was formally activated. It began


WAR GARDENS
FOR
VICTORY
GROW VITAMINS AT
YOUR KITCHEN DOOR

All photos: National Archives

ABOVE: A shopper and her children watch as a clerk tears point stamps from a War Ration Book 2 to cover the processed foods being purchased. OPPOSITE: A mechanic shows off two pairs of hardwood tires—the pair on the left is new while the other has been driven 500 miles.

with a rubber crisis but rapidly expanded outward into gasoline. Whether the OPA had been legal in acting on its own in regard to tire rationing, the fact remained the government desperately needed tire rationing to begin at once. Just 660,000 tons of crude rubber had been stockpiled as opposed to an annual U.S. consumption of between 600,000 and 700,000 tons; the War Department saw its rubber stockpile rapidly vanishing.

Japan's seizure of vast rubber plantations during its conquests in the Malay Peninsula (southwest Thailand, western Malaysia, and the island of Singapore) and the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia) in early 1942 made the situation even more critical by cutting the sources to nearly 90 percent of America's natural rubber supply.

After the OPA clamped down on the sale of tires, it followed with a ban on tire recapping and a shocked American motoring public of some 30 million drivers was slammed with an initial taste of what life under rationing would be like. Few drivers were allowed to obtain certificates to purchase new tires, and anyone who owned more than five tires was ordered to turn over the "extras" to his or her local gas station. While some drivers complied, others did not, and still others paid exorbitant prices for tires, doing this without concern about the government's regulations or where the tires came from.

Even with the shortage, not every driver experienced difficulty in getting new tires in early 1942. Cooke reported on a unique tire contest he had observed: "[Getting tires] ... was child's play for a couple of ex-gangsters of my acquaintance (they bought their phonograph records where I bought mine) who, immediately after the order freezing rubber had gone out, started a snobbish game of seeing who could most frequently drive out in the morning with a new set of white-walled tires."

Restrictions of the sale of new cars came next. This began on January 1, 1942, when a freezing order banning the sale of all new cars went into effect until a rationing program could be worked out. This program was to be made public by January 15, but that date was quickly pushed back to an unspecified date in February. However, on January 14, 1942, the government ordered the stockpiling of all cars shipped after January 15. Cars shipped to dealers could not be sold until specific permission was granted—if this permission was deemed "in the public interest." The January 14 stockpiling order was followed a month later with a government order that placed all new cars in stock into long-term storage.

Nevertheless, after these bold beginnings with tires and automobiles, the government began to shilly-shally about what it knew must come next. The next step—and it was critically important—had to be gas rationing, but Roosevelt was afraid to order it. Lingeman succinctly described a situation in which "the experts debated and the government from Roosevelt on down procrastinated about what measures to take beyond tire rationing...."

Various desperation-measure rubber-collection drives were tried, but the shortage remained critical while Roosevelt continued to hesitate even as work began on building synthetic-rubber plants. Finally, the president was forced into action. Gas rationing for the 17 states in the eastern United States was announced at the beginning of May; as might be expected, it set off a storm of opposition before going into effect on May 15, 1942. While the struggle over eastern states' gas rationing continued unabated, the OPA went ahead with rationing and the issuing of ration books for the entire United States.

Gas rationing in the eastern states had not been ordered because of the rubber shortage but because of a fearsome and expanding oil crisis. On paper, America's oil future had looked secure as far as supplies were concerned. Stephen Sears recorded that "the United States was entirely self-sufficient in oil, and indeed was a major exporter of petroleum products. At the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, North America accounted for 64 percent of the world's crude-oil production. (The Near and Middle East's share, by contrast, was a mere 5.7 percent.)"

Sears then reported the view of Dr. Robert E. Wilson, a Standard Oil Company of Indiana executive and a government consultant on oil production. Wilson had stated that the

outlook for the American petroleum industry was very positive, so much so that "even satisfying the enormous demands of a mechanized army presents no serious problems."

Dr. Wilson was wrong. There were "serious problems" and the outlook was grim. Wilson had omitted both the transportation of oil and German submarines from his thinking. Before the war, the eastern oil refineries depended on tanker delivery for 95 percent of their oil; many tankers sailed along the Gulf Coast from ports in Texas, Mississippi, and Louisiana and then up the East Coast to their various destinations. However, with the start of the war, German submarines, operating alone or in wolf packs, began sinking a great many American or American-leased tankers sailing this route.

Cooke reported a conversation with a Texan, a man who operated a small fleet of tankers that sailed along the Gulf Coast then up the East Coast to New Jersey. The man confessed that he was a constant insomniac since the war began, "waking with a start and wondering how many boats I lost last night." When asked how many boats he ran, the Texan replied sadly, 'Well I have twelve. [At least] this morning I had twelve. By the time I get to New Orleans ... I'll have eight or nine maybe. I had twenty, three months ago.' "

The government solution was to link the rich Texas oil fields with the northeastern states through the construction of the Big Inch—a 24-inch pipeline beginning at Longview, Texas, and eventually extending to various refineries throughout the eastern United States. Gas rationing was urgently needed because the first stage of the Big Inch was not scheduled to be completed for another year. In spite of an obviously desperate situation, gas rationing was met by powerful protests from within Roosevelt's cabinet as well as by outrage from the big oil interests when they heard details of the rationing plan. The government limited motorists to between 2.5 and five gallons of gasoline per week.

Harold L. Ickes, Roosevelt's secretary of the interior as well as his petroleum coordinator, slammed the rationing plan as "half-baked, ill-advised and hit or miss." Many oil executives claimed East Coast gas rationing did nothing more than set the stage for future nationwide rationing. Powerful oil interests organized a propaganda campaign against East Coast rationing and on the May 10 weekend, the last weekend before rationing went into effect, over 200 members of Congress asked for and received X cards, which allowed the bearer unlimited purchase of gasoline.

However, for senior American planners, the issue was not only corporate greed, although that was bad enough. The main issue was America's economic and military survival. Would America's drivers have enough gasoline to go to and from work and, if not, what would this do to them, the economy, and the war effort? The situation was a government nightmare.

Sears stated: "All across the country new arms factories were springing up ... far from public transportation. This was particularly true in California, center of the burgeoning aircraft industry. Seven out of ten war workers in the Los Angeles area depended on their automobiles to get to work; at some plants the ratio was as high as nine out of ten.... Investigators at two hundred key industrial sites in fourteen states found 69 percent of the employees had no alternative to commuting by car."

It became obvious that the private automobile was absolutely critical to the war effort, but still Roosevelt continued to vacillate. Cooke attempted to explain the American public's deep concern over gas rationing to often extremely unsympathetic British radio audiences: "But consider that everywhere west of the Mississippi, cities were built on the assumption that the only way a human moved was by motor car." He then reported a conversation with a Wyoming sheep rancher, who, commenting on the government's request for motorists to share their cars with their neighbors, said forlornly, 'My neighbor lives 97 miles away.' "

The government discovered a painful truth as many people in the eastern United States seethed in anger and did their best to break the gas rationing rules. If rationing was to work, the same rules would have to be applied equally all across the country.

However, as May 1942, ended with Roosevelt still waffling over nationwide gas rationing, the OPA had frozen or was readying to freeze the prices on practically everything. Virtually all consumer goods were either rationed or soon would be. Sugar would be rationed first and coffee would soon follow.

In her article about rationing, Mary Brandeberry described what happened with the first item rationed, sugar: "Individuals were required to go to local grade schools, where volunteers and teachers interviewed them, checked on the size of the family and how much sugar that they had at home. Then, based on what the rationing board heard, the individual was issued a ration book with a year's worth of stamps."

The plan had obvious flaws, the most obvious being that many board members knew the applicants personally, and some were even relatives. However, even with this, rationing soldiered on. The OPA had originally planned to issue five ration books but finally issued only four. The first page of the first book displayed warnings that violating the rationing rules and regulations could result in fines of up to $10,000 and 10 years of imprisonment. This was followed by a series of rules. The rationing book could only be used by the person to whom it was issued and if that person left the country or died, the book had to be surrendered back to the government. Any book found had to be returned to the OPA.

Brandeberry continued her description of the first rationing book: "Page two and three was actually the Certificate of Register. This certificate contained vital information such as the name and address of the individual, and his or her physical description such as height, weight, eye and hair coloring, sex, and age. The bottom of the certificate contained numbered stamps towards sugar, and later coffee. The last page of the book shows the signature of the person that the book belonged to."

The rationing system itself was fraught with difficulties, and the rules changed as the system went along. The rationing coupons themselves almost became a second monetary system, as the following from the University of Massachusetts Digital Collection illustrates: "Ration book four also introduced red and blue cardboard tokens, each valued at one-point, to be used as change for ration coupon purchases.... For example, if a can of corn was listed at 7 ration points, and the purchaser had only a 10-point stamp left for the week ... [the purchaser] would lose three ration points as part of the purchase. When tokens came into use, the purchaser could receive three tokens, each worth one point, in exchange. An advantage of tokens was that they never expired, while the stamps did. Ration book four also included 'spare' stamps that were occasionally validated for the purchase of five extra pounds of pork."

An inspector looks at evidence of a Black Market meat operation in a filthy building. The black marketeers spread lime on the floor in a poor attempt at cleanliness.

While rationing struggled along, more and more American workers were earning more and more money as defense and defense-related industries geared up for the massive war effort. However, there was less and less on which these workers could spend their money as meat, clothing, and other items became rationed and as quotas were set for their production.

More and more dollars began competing for fewer and fewer new consumer goods as more production was shifted away from the civilian market and into the war effort. New radios, refrigerators, and stoves started to vanish from stores as tanks and airplanes began to roll from assembly lines. The rationing rules became comprehensive.

The government seemed on track except in the most critical area, gasoline. As summer arrived, even though the need was growing more desperate by the hour, the government had yet to define a nationwide gas-rationing policy. Roosevelt was in trouble and he knew it, but luckily he was handed a way out when Congress decided to "go it alone" and passed Iowa Senator Guy M. Gillette's bill to establish a "Rubber Czar" whose job would be to head a special organization that would be independent of the War Production Board. This civilian agency would be charged with overseeing and coordinating the war economy.

The bill creating the czar had been shoved through Congress by the farm bloc and its real purpose was to force synthetic rubber to be made only from agricultural and forest products. Roosevelt knew that he could not let this bill become law—he could not allow two organizations, one frankly biased toward the farm bloc, to struggle against each other with America's war economy as the prize.

He knew he must stop this bill from becoming law or risk critical damage to America's war production machinery; thus he vetoed the bill, but did it in a way that rather elegantly got him off the hook. In his veto message he announced the formation of a completely reliable and impartial fact-finding commission to thoroughly examine rubber, oil, and gasoline rationing in great detail. Sears noted that Roosevelt, "in one neat maneuver, had side-stepped, gotten out from under, and passed the buck" on gas rationing. Nevertheless, Roosevelt desperately needed a man who had unquestionably earned the nation's complete trust and respect to run this committee.

Fortunately for both Roosevelt and America, there was such a man. He was Bernard Baruch, the 72-year-old "Park Bench Statesman," the wealthy "Wall Street Whiz" who had been a presidential adviser, first to Woodrow Wilson during World War I, and then, between the two world wars, to Presidents Harding, Coolidge, and Hoover. Now, he would advise Roosevelt (and Truman after the war). In an article, "Three Men on a Bench," in *Time,* August 17, 1942, Baruch is described as a man with a "white-topped frame ... long legs and [wearing] the inevitable high black shoes." Baruch liked to confer with officials on a bench in Washington's Lafayette Park because the park provided privacy and a relaxed atmosphere, thus he became known as the "Park Bench States-

man." The "Three Men" in the article's title referred to Baruch and his two fellow committeemen, James Bryant Conant, the president of Harvard University, and Karl Taylor Compton, president of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

The report Baruch and his two associates issued to Roosevelt was blunt and frightening. In a September 21, 1942, *Time* article, "Outline of the Future," the staff writer quotes parts of the Baruch committee's report to the president: "We find the existing situation to be so dangerous that unless corrective measures are taken immediately this country will face both military and civilian collapse. The naked facts present a warning that dare not be ignored. If they are, the U.S. will have no rubber in the fourth quarter of 1943 to equip a modern mechanized army."

In no uncertain terms, Roosevelt was warned that America could lose the war if he took no action and continued to allow various pressure groups to continue unchecked in their greed and total self-interest. Roosevelt got the message: He ordered full gas rationing to begin on December 1, 1942. He also ordered a ban on pleasure driving, as well as a 35-mile-per-hour speed limit on all of America's highways.

Rationing had already stomped into the American way of life. For example, when it came out, the 1943 Sears, Roebuck and Company catalogue already contained a complete list of rationed farm equipment. Planting, seeding, and fertilizing machinery were listed, as were tractors, and dairy farm machinery and equipment. There was even a section in the catalogue titled "If you are a farmer or poultry raiser and want to buy a hand pump" and, conversely, a section on, "If you are not a farm or poultry raiser and want to buy a pump or other farm equipment."

In this, as with other items, the rulings of the OPA were all-powerful though they were very often furiously appealed. Nevertheless, the bottom line for the nation as a whole was that the "Park Bench Statesman" had pushed Roosevelt into finally taking the action he knew he had to take.

In the government's gas-rationing rules, individual driver gasoline rationing quotas determined an A, B, or C sticker that was required to be displayed on the bottom left corner of the windshield. In effect, it was a sticker that defined a driver hierarchy. An A-sticker driver was assumed to do no "essential" driving. The driver who received this sticker was given the lowest gas allocation: four, and then later three, gallons per week. Since the government estimated 15 miles to the gallon, an A-sticker holder was limited to 60 miles of driving per week. Many drivers, frustrated with the restrictions, simply put their cars up on blocks, drained the oil from their engines, removed the batteries, and covered the vehicles with tarps "for the duration."

ABOVE: Reducing the speed limit to 35 mph saved both rubber and gas. LEFT: A service station attendant measures out the precious fluid in accordance with OPA's A gasoline ration books, July 1942.

The B-sticker holder had some essential driving to do and received a supplementary allowance based on that need. The C-sticker driver also needed the car for essential driving (such as a physician making house calls) but was allocated all the gasoline needed. There was also a T-sticker for truck drivers, who also could get all the gas they needed. Taxi drivers and farmers had their own stickers.

Gas rationing quickly faced serious difficulties because the government did not take into account the personalities of many American drivers—personalities that expressed themselves through a mass influx of A-sticker drivers flocking to their local rationing boards with the most absurd reasons for demanding that their A-stickers be upgraded to B- or C-stickers. The gas ration sticker somehow had become a status symbol and many drivers argued furiously to have their A-sticker upgraded.

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Storming THE POINT AT PELELIU

BY DICK CAMP

The 1st Marine Division staged a bloody amphibious assault for a questionable prize.

Prologue

By the summer of 1944, the United States was advancing on Japan's Home Islands in a two-pronged attack through the Central and Southwest Pacific theaters. Japan's first line of defense in the Marshall and Mariana Islands had been shattered. General Douglas MacArthur's southwestern forces had reached the western extremity of New Guinea and were preparing for a move onto the Philippine island of Mindanao, to honor his "I shall return" promise. Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, commander in chief of the U.S. Pacific Fleet, directed the seizure of the southern Palaus in the western Carolinas to "remove a definite threat from MacArthur's right flank, and to secure a base to support his operation into the southern Philippines." On July 7, 1944, he designated it Operation Stalemate II and assigned Phase I, the capture of Peleliu, a target date of September 15.

Admiral William F. "Bull" Halsey, Jr., commander of the Third Fleet, was charged with the initial preparation of the Palau operation by "seeking out and destroying hostile air and naval forces that threaten Stalemate II." He launched his fast carrier task force in far-flung sweeps that ranged from the Bonin Islands south to the Philippines and was surprised at the weakness of the Japanese opposition. "Enemy's non-aggressive attitude unbelievable and fantastic," he wrote. "We found the central Philippines a hollow shell."

After carefully considering the sweep's success, Halsey sent a message to Nimitz recommending the cancellation of the Peleliu operation because there was no serious threat to MacArthur's flank. "I'm going to stick my neck out," he remarked, adding later that "such a recommendation would upset many apple carts, possibly all the way to Mr. Roosevelt and Mr. Churchill." Nimitz received the message but did not concur and ordered Operation Stalemate II to proceed as planned.

Chosen to assault the small island (only six square miles) was the 1st Marine Division—a seasoned outfit that had already taken part in the seven-month-long battle for Guadalcanal (August 1942-February1943). Guadalcanal (including Florida and Tulagi Islands) was the first American land offensive of the war, and it cost the 1st and 2nd Marine Divisions 991 dead, 2,894 wounded, and 51 missing and presumed dead. It also earned the 1st Marine Division a Presidential Unit Citation and the respect and admiration of a nation.

After Guadalcanal came the fight for Cape Gloucester on New Britain (December 1943). Okinawa lay ahead. As would every battle for every Pacific island, Guadalcanal and Cape Gloucester represented jungle fighting at its worst: energy-sapping heat and humidity, close-quarters combat, night battles, fanatical banzai charges, monsoonal downpours, disease, festering wounds, and an enemy that preferred to die rather than surrender.

Following Cape Gloucester, the 1st Marine Division got a well-deserved break at Pavuvu in the Russell Islands, just north of Guadalcanal.

But no successful military unit gets to rest on its laurels for very long. Soon Maj. Gen. William J. Rupertus received orders alerting his division that it would be the leading assault force against the Japanese garrison at Peleliu.

A Marine fires his Thompson submachine gun at Japanese positions from the shelter of a sandbank on Peleliu.

National Archives

National Archives

ABOVE: Pfcs. John Clifton and Anthony Tillman haul ammunition and cans of fresh water up a hill to combat troops who are flushing the last of the Japanese out of their caves.

By the summer of 1944, the Japanese had some 30,000 troops stationed in the Palaus, with about 11,000 of those on Peleliu—primarily from the 14th Infantry Division, augmented by Korean and Okinawan laborers. These workers had honeycombed the island with miles of underground bunkers, living quarters, and fighting positions. Thousands of mines had been buried at the beaches the Japanese commander thought the Americans likely would use.

On September 4, the Marines left their station on Pavuvu for the 2,100-mile trip to Peleliu. Standing offshore, the sizable Navy armada (five battleships, five heavy cruisers, three light cruisers, three aircraft carriers, and five light carriers) began pounding the island with a pre-invasion bombardment on September 12.

The three-day-long naval barrage and aerial attacks that shrouded the island in dirty gray smoke and gave the Marines waiting in their transports the hope that maybe, this time, all those shells would actually mean an easy landing. Their hopes would prove unfounded.

Three days later, on the morning of September 15, 1944, the 1st Marine Division headed for Peleliu against the fanatical Japanese, who, burrowed deeply in their subterranean fortress, were largely immune to the thousands of bombs and shells. The landing beaches were described as a hell on earth by the veterans who had to assault through murderous mortar, artillery, and automatic weapons fire. One spit of land on the extreme left flank of White Beach 1 was particularly vicious. It contained two anti-boat guns, several machine-gun positions, and entrenchments that were pouring fire into the flank of the assault force. K Company, 3rd Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment was given the mission of knocking them out.

"They've Come at Last"

Hundreds of explosions rocked the earth in a cacophony of sound that threatened to overwhelm the senses. Huge fountains of blast-torn earth and coral reached skyward. A towering wall of smoke, stinking of cordite, obscured the island's interior. One tiny spit of land jutting out from the beach, however, remained free from bombardment, a haven of relative tranquility in a sea of violence.

The six-man crew of the Japanese 75mm mountain gun (Yonichi Shiki Sampo) peered fixedly through the narrow embrasure of their concrete reinforced bunker. They were mesmerized by the sight of a line of strange vehicles that rose out of the sea and clambered over the outer fringe of the reef. One knowing veteran muttered, "They've come at last."

The sharp bark of a noncommissioned officer interrupted his thought and sent him scampering to his action station. A gunner snapped open the breach, while another slammed an armor-piercing shell into the opening, just as one of the strange vehicles came into range. "Fire!" the NCO shouted.

White Beach

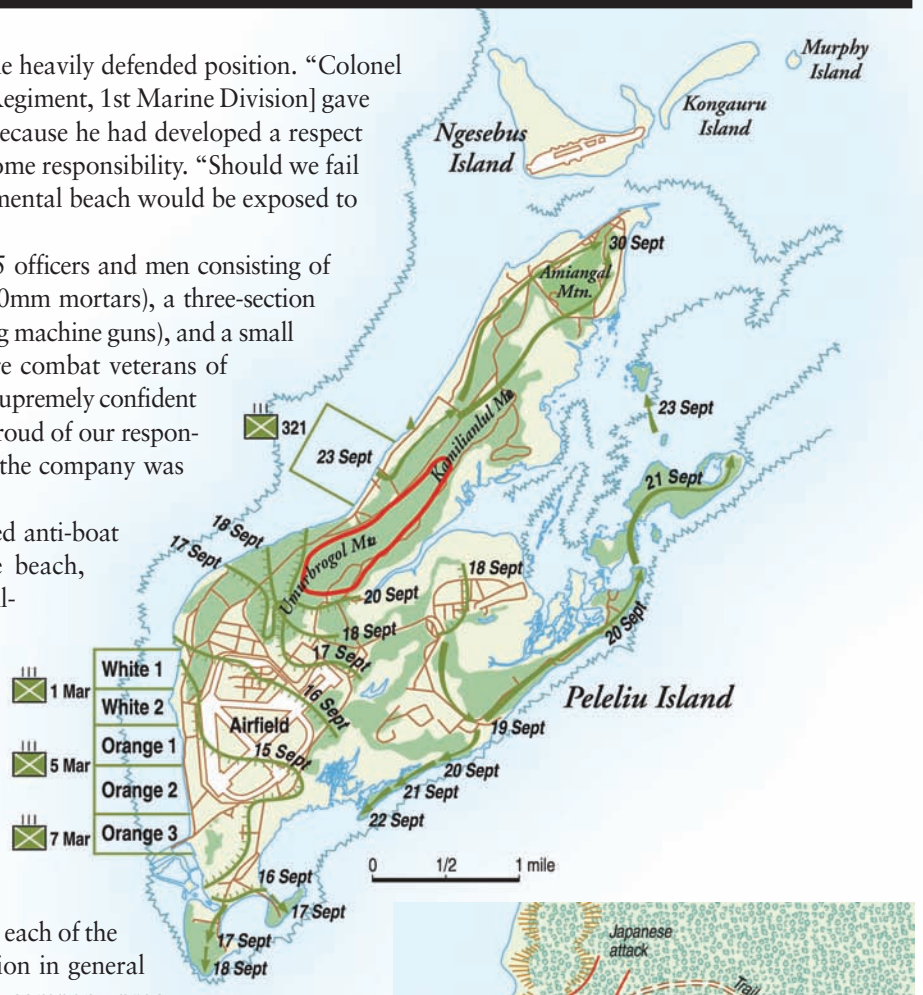
White Beach, a 656-yard concave strip of sand on the 1st Marine Division's left flank, was dominated by a pitted spit of land that jutted out from the island and was well fortified. "The point, rising thirty feet above the water's edge," Captain George P. Hunt described, "was of solid, jagged coral, a rocky mass of sharp pinnacles, deep crevasses, and tremendous boulders. Pillboxes, reinforced with steel and concrete, had been dug or blasted in the base of the perpendicular drop to the beach. Others, with coral and concrete piled six feet on top were constructed above, and spider holes were blasted around them for protecting infantry."

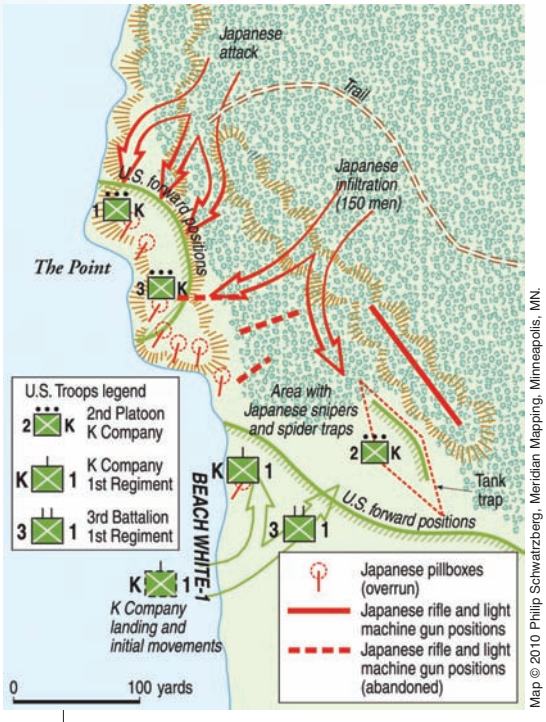
Hunt's K Company was assigned to take the heavily defended position. "Colonel [Lewis B. "Chesty"] Puller, [CO, 1st Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division] gave me the toughest job of taking the left flank because he had developed a respect for my company," Hunt said. It was an awesome responsibility. "Should we fail to capture and hold the Point, the entire regimental beach would be exposed to heavy fire from the flank," he articulated.

His reinforced rifle company numbered 235 officers and men consisting of three rifle platoons, a mortar section (three 60mm mortars), a three-section machine-gun platoon (six .30-caliber Browning machine guns), and a small headquarters platoon. Many of his men were combat veterans of Guadalcanal and Cape Gloucester. They were supremely confident of themselves and their company. "We were proud of our responsibility," Hunt expressed, "and every man in the company was determined to fill it."

Aerial photographs of the objective "showed anti-boat obstacles on the coral reef in front of the beach, entrenchments on the beach itself, and two pillboxes," Hunt recalled. After carefully studying them, he decided that his company would "perform a gate-like maneuver by pivoting 90 degrees to the north with our left flank anchored on the beach."

Hunt assigned the 3rd Platoon to clear the point, while the 2nd Platoon assaulted the right half of the company objective. The 1st Platoon was to follow in trace of the 3rd Platoon. He attached one machine-gun section to each of the two assault platoons and kept the third section in general support, along with the 60mm mortars. The company practiced the maneuver over and over until "every man in the company knew what to do in relation to the man next to him."





The U.S. landings on Peleliu took place at beaches on the southwest end of the island. The Marines fought their way across the spit of land while rooting out determined Japanese defenders. The map shows the tactical scheme of K Company's employment as well as the route of the Japanese counterattack.

D-day

Riding in a tracked, open-top amphibious vehicle known as an amtrac, Hunt braced himself as "the nose of the amtrac shot upward, hung in mid-air; the tracks took hold, and we leveled off and jerked to a halt." He shouted, "Get out and off the beach," to his men and rolled over the side of the vehicle. "The impact of the eight-foot jump jarred my legs and momentarily upset my balance. Regaining it, I raced off the beach."

He ran for about 75 yards with bullets thwacking the sand around him and explosions erupting in a seemingly endless barrage before going to ground in a shell hole. "My lips and tongue [were] as dry as sandpaper," he recalled. "Black vapor and the pungent odor of gunpowder which was seeping from the earth helped to clog my throat. Sweat was running off the end of my nose."

As the command group took cover around him, his radio operator tried to raise the platoons—but without success. Suddenly mortar fire erupted, bracketing them. Small-arms fire snapped overhead. The plaintive cry of "Corpsmen!" rose above the din—it was pandemonium on the beach.

Hunt struggled to get a clear picture of the situation. "I had to know what was going on ... the uncertainty was agonizing." He sent runners out to gain information but they failed to return. A wounded man stumbled into the makeshift command post exclaiming, "There are K Company guys dead and wounded lyin' all around." The situation

National Archives

ABOVE: A Marine loads an ammunition belt while his companion fires at a well-entrenched Japanese position on Suicide Ridge. OPPOSITE: Captain George Hunt, photographed after the battle.

was grim. Something had to be done—and quickly. Hunt reached a decision.

He rolled out of the hole, yelling for his radio operator to follow, and headed for the Point. As he ran along the shell-blasted sand, he was shocked to see the full impact of the Japanese fire. "I saw a ghastly mixture of bandages, bloody and mutilated skin; Marines gritting their teeth resigned to their wounds; men groaning and writhing in their agonies; men outstretched or twisted or grotesquely transfixed in the attitudes of death; men with their entrails exposed or whole chunks of body ripped out of them."

Hunt discovered that the 3rd Platoon had landed 100 yards too far to the right and was pinned down about 50 yards from the point. During its hard-fought assault, the platoon had knocked out one 40mm gun, two heavy machine guns, and numerous light machine guns, but the gains had been at the cost of the platoon's leadership. The platoon commander was badly wounded and out of the fight.

The platoon sergeant, John Koval, "unhesitatingly assumed command and, despite a wound sustained from leading an assault against enemy pillboxes and infantrymen entrenched in spider holes along the beach, tenaciously continued pressing the attack toward a Japanese antiboat gun emplacement, which was inflicting heavy damage on our landing craft," his posthumous Navy Cross citation read. "Although wounded a second time and in a dying condition, he courageously directed the final assault and was responsible in large measure for the destruction of the enemy gun."

The 2nd Platoon was badly shot up, its platoon commander dead on the beach, and the platoon sergeant wounded. The leaderless men fought their way through 75 yards of rifle and machine-gun fire to a 10-foot-deep tank trap where they were pinned down by extremely heavy fire from an unseen enemy dug into a coral ridge.

The boulder-strewn, tree-blasted high ground rose 30 to 40 feet high and was studded with heavily camouflaged Japanese machine-gun positions. Pfc. Joe Dariano recalled, "Our guys were dropping all around me. We were totally unorganized—without officers or squad leaders, and completely cut off from the rest of the company. Out of the 45 guys in my platoon, 19 were killed and 21 wounded."

Minutes after crawling out of the tank trap, Dariano was badly wounded in the head and shoulder. The remnants of the platoon were trapped, cut off from help, and unable to maintain contact with the 3rd Platoon. The gap was quickly filled by the Japanese.

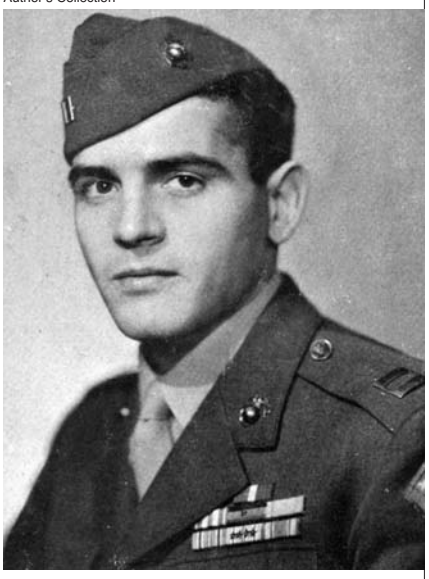
Private First Class Fred Fox came face to face with a Japanese soldier who ran by him before he could get a shot off and disappeared into a well-camouflaged coral bunker. "I couldn't see an embrasure but there was a stairway cut into the coral going down into the ground. I threw a white phosphorus and two regular hand grenades down there, but

nobody came out. So, I took a couple of steps down to where I could see clearly. A Japanese officer, with cloth cap and black-rimmed glasses lay at the bottom of the steps. His left arm was burnt black but he was leaning on his elbow with a Nambu pistol in his hand aimed at me. I pressed the trigger on my Tommy gun and fired four or five rounds into him. I went on down the steps and into the middle of a 12-by-15-foot room. There was another officer with a sword stuck in his belly, sticking up in the air. There were several other Jap bodies in the back corner." Fox beat a hasty retreat after relieving the body on the stairs of its pistol.

Captain Hunt finally made contact with 1st Platoon's Lieutenant William L. Willis and ordered him to push through the stalled 3rd Platoon and take the point. The fortifications were constructed of steel-reinforced concrete surmounted by five feet of coral rock and manned by six to 12 enemy soldiers. Willis led the attack on the last emplacement.

Willis's Navy Cross citation described how he led his men forward in a daring and skillful assault: "The fierce hand-to-hand conflict reached a high pitch of intensity when he and his men penetrated the Japanese ring of infantrymen and were assaulting the pillboxes themselves."

Author's Collection



"A squad covered the rear exit of the pillbox," he explained. "Anderson, one of my corporals, sneaked part way down the rocks about twenty yards in front of the embrasure, while I crawled to a cut in the cliff where I could heave a grenade without being shot."

Lieutenant Willis threw a white phosphorous grenade that obscured the vision of the Japanese defenders while Anderson fired a rifle grenade at the embrasure. "The grenade launched perfectly and smacked the gun on the barrel," the officer recalled. "It ignited something flammable, and after a big explosion the pillbox burst into flame. Black smoke poured out of the embrasure and the exit. I heard the Japs screaming and their ammunition spitting and snapping as the heat exploded it. Three Japs, with bullets popping in their belts and flames clinging to their legs, raced from the exit waving their arms and letting out yells of pain. The squad I had placed there finished them off."

With this last pillbox destroyed, Hunt gathered the remnants of K Company and established a hasty defense. One of the survivors estimated that "out of perhaps ninety in the two platoons, we had only thirty men in fighting condition on top of the point."

George Hunt counted 110 dead Japanese in and around the blasted hilltop but estimated that nearly two-thirds of his company were casualties, including "most of my machine-gun platoon that had been mowed down on the beach."

The small band of battered men piled up coral rocks for protection. All afternoon the Japanese staged scattered infantry and mortar attacks on the skimpy positions. The Marines held, but more and more men were lost. All the company machine guns had been knocked out, and Hunt had resorted to using a captured Japanese heavy machine gun on the lines. The irrepressible Fred Fox had "liberated" it from its dead crew.

"I found the air-cooled Hotckiss in a small clearing; two dead Jap bodies lay alongside it," Fox remembered. "We carried the gun up to the point, and gave to [Corporal Bob Anderson] from the machine-gun platoon. I had no desire to keep carrying the damn thing anyway."

Late in the afternoon, an LVT (amphibious vehicle) was able to make its way to the point with badly needed supplies of ammunition, barbed wire, C rations—and water. "The water was brought up in a 55-gallon drum," Fox recalled, "but the drum had not been cleaned properly and the water tasted awful, sickening. It was oil and water and no way could you drink it. So, when you got the chance you went out, found some dead Jap bodies. and took their canteens."

After replenishing his supply of ammunition, Fox tried to scrape a foxhole in the coral but it was impossible. Instead, he just piled it up for protection and then carefully laid out hand grenades and rifle clips so he could find them in the dark. There was nothing else to do except wait. "I guess we all knew that something unpleasant was going to happen ... this was the Japanese's time, their time to fight."

Hunt made a last tour of the lines. "As blackness crept up and completely enveloped us, we were subdued to an eerie silence. Even the clicking sounds of a rock, probably brushed off by the sweep of a man's elbow, seemed a harsh disturbance. Though there was no moon, the sky ... was just light enough to reveal the weird and grotesque silhouettes of knotted trees and stumps." Jagged, pinnacled rocks melded with the gnarled tree remains, providing cover for Japanese infiltrators. Their odd shapes played tricks on the Marines' imaginations, transforming them into Japanese attackers in the darkness.

"The Jap loves the night and he loves to sneak," Hunt philosophized. "He is an animal who prowls noiselessly with padded, two-toed shoes on his feet. When he attacks ... out of the night ... with bayonet and knife, he is dangerous and clever."

Japanese Raiding Units

The Japanese had always used infiltration as a means to counteract massed American firepower. Peleliu, however, marked the first time that they used infiltration and raiding units as part of their defensive strategy. A captured Japanese document outlined five types of night-raiding units:

National Archives

ABOVE: A Marine 60mm mortar crew bombards Japanese positions on Peleliu. The spent shell containers around them speak to the intensity of the fight. OPPOSITE: The strain of combat is written all over this Marine's face as he moves to a new position.

(1) pillbox defense units; (2) close combat infiltration units; (3) prearranged fire units (called sudden fire units by the Japanese); (4) combined fire power and close combat units; (5) incendiary assault units.

The members of the units were extensively trained in night infiltration and raiding techniques. The training stressed thorough preparation, camouflage and concealment and small-unit close combat. They were lightly armed—light machine guns, grenade dischargers (knee mortar), and small arms—and whenever possible wore U.S. uniforms and equipment. Their attacks were launched from prepared positions placed about 220 to 275 yards behind the beach positions. The unit remained in hiding until after the beach fighting was over and then attempted to attack key emplacements, such as command posts, artillery positions, etc. In a sense, the raiding units replaced the fanatical banzai attacks that had proved so costly.

Terror in the Night

Private First Class Fox shared a foxhole with a buddy. "Some time between 11 and 12," he said, "we heard movement out in front." Pfc. Swede Hanson was close by. "You could hear movement going about, and your ears got bigger and bigger because you're wondering: Is it a Marine or is it a Jap? And you didn't want to take a chance ... so I started throwing hand grenades out there in front. And then I waited. Then, brrrr, that Nambu machine gun. So I threw a couple more grenades out there and I heard it again. It took a little longer to get that one."

Captain Hunt requested illumination. "Flares swished up from the rear. I prayed they wouldn't break over our own position and light us up ... but they burst well in front of us, flooding the area with light." Someone shouted "Here they come!" and the fight was on.

"A machine gun fired a burst," Hunt exclaimed. "Another one opened up with a vibrating roar, BARs [Browning Automatic Rifles] and rifles ... hand grenades were bursting in rapid succession. The explosions were muffled in the woods, where there were gullies and ridges. Then much louder bursts—approaching our lines—closer—and I heard the cry 'Corpsman!' Jap mortars, big stuff, were pounding in the middle of us. Shrapnel was clinking across the rocks."

Corporal Bob Anderson manned the captured Japanese machine gun. "Whenever someone heard the Japs jabbering, they would call for a star shell [illumination] and when it would go off, we could see Japs running out to our front. Then I would open up with the machine gun at the running Japs. I don't know if I hit any or not, but I used up a lot of ammunition."

Hunt recalled, "White muzzle flashes spit into the black. The noise increased as the Japs answered and their bullets splattered on the rocks and ricocheted in every direction. Their mortar shells thundered into the coral, raising the stink of gunpowder."

Suddenly the Japanese attack stopped. At first light, the ground in front of the lines was strewn with enemy dead. One Marine veteran said, "I never saw so many dead Japs in one place in all my days of combat."

D+1

Early in the morning of September 16, Hunt was resupplied and reinforced. "Tractors [amphibious vehicles] rolled up to us all day along the reef. They brought my mortar section ... with clover leaf after clover leaf of shells. They brought up an artillery obser-

vation team and a radio to communicate with the gun batteries—and the remaining 10 men from my 2nd Platoon."

With the resupply and reinforcement, Hunt allowed that "it would be our turn to throw the heavy stuff: mortars and artillery. We had seven machine guns on the line and 30 more men. Radios were working, and there were two telephone lines to battalion. For the first time since we landed we felt secure."

Hunt felt strong enough to send a patrol out in front of his lines. After a short, vicious firefight that cost the lives of three men, the patrol leader reported back, "There's a mess of 'em in the caves—take a hell of a lot of men to rout 'em out." Hunt reported to his battalion commander that there were "still plenty of Japs in front of us—seem to be gathering for something—maybe a night attack."

Fred Fox was all alone in a position close to the water. "About midnight the Japs really started the action," he recalled. "They began with mortars and then followed up with everything else, almost a banzai charge! It was rifles, machine guns, and hand grenades—everything that was available."

Fox heard noise in the water and started back to notify Captain Hunt when "I heard a step behind me ... I turned around as fast as I could. In turning, I hit a bayonet that had started into my chest and knocked it out of the way. It cut through my jacket and left a four-inch-by-one-half-inch gash through the flesh of my left chest. I had a pistol in my hand; it was cocked and loaded but I didn't shoot the man. I hit him in the face with it ... as hard as I could. He immediately dropped the rifle, which I took and bayoneted him. I pulled it out and started yelling "Nips! Nips!"

Marines picked up the cry, "There they are!" "They're comin' on us!"

Hunt shouted encouragement. "I bellowed until I thought my lungs would crack. 'Give 'em hell!' Kill everyone one of them!' The Japs were assaulting us with stampeding fury, wave after wave, charging blindly into our lines—above the uproar, I heard their devilish screams, banzai, banzai!"

Author's Collection

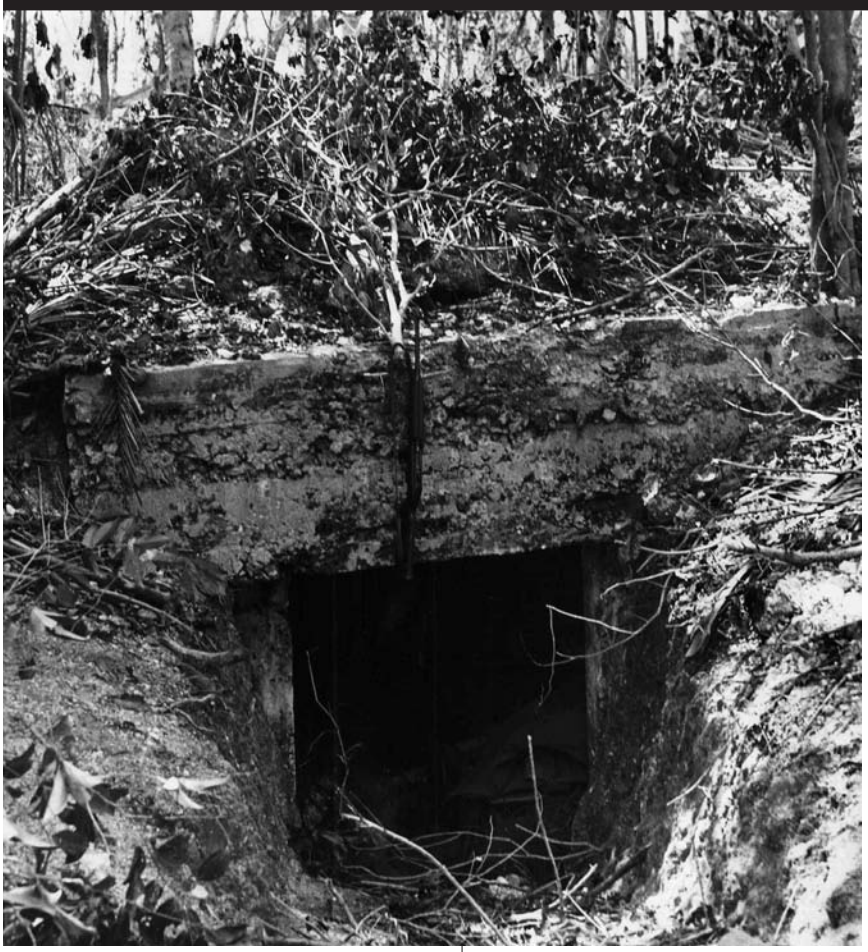
Marine artillery blasted the exposed Japanese and Hunt's own 60mm mortars laid down a thick wall of shrapnel. Despite the firepower, about 30 Japanese managed to penetrate the lines. In the light of parachute flares, figures could be seen in deadly hand-to-hand struggles. Hunt watched transfixed as "two figures, dim and queerly distorted in the battle fog, fought against each other on the crest of the cliff. Their arms were swinging wildly, their heads lowered and legs intertwined. The largest figure seemed to heave forward with his entire right side. The knees of the other bent back, he turned sideways and losing his balance tumbled off the cliff."

The Japanese attempted to go around the left flank through the water's edge just below the cliff. Fred Fox was in serious trouble, caught between the enemy and his own men. "In a second or two there were another two or three Japs starting after me. Then there was an explosion, and I went down in the water ... hit along the left side with five chunks of steel in my left leg and left arm." Another Japanese soldier bayoneted him in the neck and across the back and left him for dead. "I lay quiet in the water," he recounted. "At certain times I would look out of the corner of my eye ... and I could see wrap leggings and split toed shoes."

Barely conscious, Fox lay bleeding as the battle raged all around him. "The guns fired across the water over me and against the cliff," he said. "This went on until sometime just before daylight." His yells for help were heard. A Marine left his position, worked his way over to the badly wounded man, and carried him to safety. "He did a hell of brave thing to come out in the open to pick me up," Fox related gratefully. Fox was evacuated to the United States where he spent eight months in various hospitals before being discharged.

When morning came, K Company still held the point—but at great cost. Marine bodies lay intermingled with Japanese in a ghastly carpet of death. The survivors stood hollow-eyed and emotionless, not quite believing they had lived through the night. Another company moved through their depleted ranks to continue the attack, leaving K Company to lick its wounds and

Author's Collection



prepare to take their place in the lines. Out of the original 235 men that landed on D-day, only 78 remained.

Captain Hunt received a few replacements—clerks, wiremen, and support troops—and reorganized. PFCs became squad leaders and the few remaining NCOs led platoons. Within days, many more of the men who landed on D-day were gone, victims of mortar, artillery, or small-arms fire, but the company continued to attack. On D+8, K Company was pulled off the lines along with what was left of the 1st Marine Regiment.

A bedraggled, worn-out Marine dragged himself up the cargo net to be taken off the island. Upon reaching the top, he was approached by an eager, clean, close-shaven, immaculately dressed young naval officer. "Got any souvenirs to trade?" the officer asked. The exhausted, sweat-soaked Marine stood silent for a moment, then reached down and patted his rear end. "I brought my ass outta there, Swabbie," he retorted. "That's my souvenir of Peleliu."

Russell Davis, who served as a rifleman in the 1st Marines on Peleliu, spoke for those infantrymen who survived. "We won before. We'll win the next one. But this time we got beat—and that's the truth of it."

Epilogue

The 1st Marine Division was awarded another Presidential Unit Citation for its heroic achievements at Peleliu; it would receive a third one in a few months on Okinawa. The Peleliu citation reads:

"For extraordinary heroism in action against enemy Japanese forces at Peleliu and Ngesebus from September 15 to 29, 1944. Landing over a treacherous coral reef against hostile mortar and artillery fire, the First Marine Division, Reinforced, seized a narrow, heavily mined beachhead and advanced foot by foot in the face of relentless enfilade fire through rain-forests and mangrove swamps toward the air strip, the key to the enemy defenses of the southern Palaus.

"Opposed all the way by thoroughly disciplined, veteran Japanese troops heavily entrenched in caves and in reinforced concrete

THE POINT TODAY

The 600 inhabitants of Peleliu today live on the northwest side of the island, where a small dock for boats provides their only link to Koror, the administrative capital of the Republic of Palau. Fishing, subsistence farming, and tourism—scuba diving and battlefield tours—support the local economy.

Most of the battlefield remains relatively unspoiled. Dense scrub growth conceals the point's battlefield relics from the casual observer. However, if one looks closely, the coral is littered with vestiges of the fighting. Relics abound in the caves, bunkers, tunnels. Ordnance litters the ground, including unexploded mortar and artillery rounds—and even Japanese hand grenades. Exploring the sites is not for the faint of heart. Shell fragments, expended .30 caliber cartridges, remnants of fighting positions—and on the edge of the 30-foot spit of land, two half-concealed concrete bunkers, still housing the Japanese 47mm antitank guns that played such havoc with the landing.

At low tide, the exposed steel treads of an amphibious tractor (amtrac) lie just 55 yards from the embrasure of the left flank bunker, mute testimony to the deadly effects of the Japanese gun. During the landing, some unknown Marine had dumped an ammunition crate, the wood long since rotted away, in the salt water. Mounds of .30 caliber rounds lie fused together in the coral, the brass shiny from being scoured with sand.

Ashore, the coral rocks teem with scuttling land crabs, trying to escape the danger of an invader's footsteps. Except for the sound of their movement, the point is deathly quiet, a far cry from that day in September 1944 when deafening explosions and the screams of wounded and dying men reverberated across the island.

pillboxes which honeycombed the high ground throughout the island, the officers and men of the Division fought with undiminished spirit and courage despite heavy losses, exhausting heat and difficult terrain, seizing and holding a highly strategic air and land base for future operations in the western Pacific. By their individual acts of heroism, their aggressiveness and their fortitude, the men of the First Marine Division, Reinforced, upheld the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service."

Captain George Hunt, who survived the battle, was awarded the Navy Cross for gallantry in action.

His Navy Cross citation reads as follows:

"For extraordinary heroism as Commanding Officer, Company K, Third Battalion, First Marines, First Marine Division, in action against enemy forces during the assault on enemy-held Peleliu, Palau Islands, from 15 to 17 September 1944. A bold and aggressive leader, Captain Hunt led his men in a daring assault against the enemy who were firing from concrete pillboxes on a coral point. Knowing the great danger the seizure of this point would incur, but realizing the immediate necessity for its capture, he quickly and skillfully maneuvered his company and, with two platoons, captured the point after a fierce struggle during which five hostile concrete pillboxes, numerous coral pillboxes and lighter emplacements were destroyed and over one hundred of the enemy were killed. Isolated from the rest of his battalion for a period of twenty-six hours with only thirty-four men remaining, Captain Hunt expertly organized a defensive perimeter and, successfully defending his position against three hostile counterattacks, repulsed all three of them and annihilated four hundred and twenty-two Japanese. By his outstanding leadership and cool judgment in the face of grave danger,

"Captain Hunt contributed materially to the success of our forces during this critical period, and his gallant conduct throughout was in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service."

Hunt went on to become an artist, writer, and managing editor of *Life* magazine. He died in 1991 at the age of 72.

Author's Collection

ABOVE: A destroyed Japanese 47mm antitank gun is shown in a photo taken well after the battle. It appears that the shell that knocked out the gun most probably entered through the embrasure. OPPOSITE: A view of the rear entrance of a camouflaged Japanese concrete antitank position. Note that the bunker was not scathed by the prelanding bombardment. It had to be taken by infantrymen with bayonet and rifle.

Parting Shot

The veteran 1st Marine Division lost over 6,500 men on Peleliu, of whom 1,252 were killed in action. (Eight Marines would be awarded the Medal of Honor, five of them posthumously.) Having lost more than a third of its fighting strength, the division remained out of combat, resting, refitting, and training, until the invasion of Okinawa on April 1, 1945. The U.S. Army's 81st Infantry Division, which was in reserve and replaced the Marines, lost another 1,393 men at Peleliu. Except for about 200 men taken prisoner, the defenders were entirely wiped out.

With such high casualties, the question became, "Was Peleliu worth the cost?" Many historians feel that the operation should not have been launched because the island did not pose a threat to MacArthur, as pointed out by Halsey. The Japanese simply did not have the air or naval capability to interfere with the Philippine operation from the Palaus. As events unfolded in the Pacific, Peleliu quickly became a backwater as the United States advanced toward the Home Islands.

Admiral Nimitz never commented on the operation; however, two other naval officers felt compelled to go on record. Admiral Halsey stated in his memoirs that the whole campaign was a mistake. "I felt they would have to be bought at a prohibitive price in casualties. In short, I feared another Tarawa [a small atoll in the Central Pacific that cost the Marines and sailors 3,000 casualties]—and I was right.

Noted World War II naval gunfire expert Admiral Jesse B. Oldendorf said that, "If military leaders [including naval] were gifted with the same accuracy of foresight that they are with hindsight, undoubtedly the assault and capture of the Palaus would never have been attempted." □

FOR ALL THE WRONG REASONS

Shortsightedness badly affected the U.S. Army's campaign in the Hürtgen Forest and needlessly cost many American lives.

EDWARD G. MILLER

Hürtgen Forest. Chilling rain, freezing fog, mud, impenetrable forest. Unremitting misery for GIs and Landsers alike. War correspondent Ernest Hemingway famously called it "Passchendaele with tree bursts." An unknown 4th Infantry Division soldier called it "hell with icicles." One German general with years of combat experience called the fighting the worst he'd ever seen, including that on the Eastern Front.

Nearly 70 years have passed since mid-September 1944, when GIs from Maj. Gen. Maurice Rose's 3rd Armored Division swept into the western edge of the forest. They were in headlong pursuit of the tens of thousands of Germans falling back through Belgium in disorder, desperate to reach the incomplete border defenses of the Reich. Many on both sides believed the end of the war in northwest Europe might be only weeks away. Maybe they could avoid fighting in a damp, cold Rhineland winter.

Expectations for an early end to the war degenerated into a brutal campaign of unending attrition within weeks of the GIs' entry into Germany. The fighting in the hilly, forested land southeast of the city of Aachen brought little more than excessive losses with no appreciable gains in attacks aimed at doubtful objectives. No American general who ordered operations there expected the disastrous outcome that occurred.The first objectives were the roads and key terrain the generals thought vital to support attacks to cross first the Rur, then the Rhine River.

However, no attack could succeed without securing the flood control and hydroelectric dams that controlled the Rur. GIs fought in the Hürtgen Forest for almost three months before the objectives changed from roads and towns to these dams. Unfortunately, when these attacks began in mid-December 1944, the initiative was long gone and the Germans controlled the outcome.

Senior German commanders in Army Group B also had little understanding of the potential value of the dams. Their initial goal for defense of the border was simply to delay the Americans, whose persistence in fighting in the forest surprised

Pfc. Benny Barrow of Company I, 3rd Battalion, 8th Regiment, 4th Infantry Division helps a buddy with a difficult climb in the Hürtgen Forest, November 18, 1944.

National Archives

them. They knew that by doing so the Americans gave up many of their advantages in air and artillery support. Only when corps and division commanders in late autumn finally learned about the upcoming offensive in the Ardennes did the value of the forest become starkly apparent. Here would rest the northern shoulder of that attack, and regardless of its outcome, the Americans could not safely cross the Rur unless they held the dams.

Historians, veterans, and even casual students of the campaign in Western Europe have been justifiably unkind to the American leadership and they have picked apart the tactical conduct of both sides. Perhaps what sets the Hürtgen Forest apart, at least for the Americans, is what it reveals about high-level decision making, recognition of goals, and consideration of alternatives.

Planning estimates for operations beyond Normandy saw the Allied armies reaching Germany by about D+330, or April 1945; instead they were at the border on D+97, or September 11, 1944. To support the drive to Germany, logisticians planned for echeloned logistics bases across France, Belgium, Holland, and Luxembourg. This would enable short turn-around of supply transport vehicles making deliveries to field army rail- and truck-heads. The German collapse in France completely upset these plans; in fact, the Americans reduced production of large-caliber artillery ammunition. They also considered whether to plan the return of Christmas mail to the States. Senior U.S. Army leaders, particularly those in Washington, who urged the public not to be overly optimistic, lost out to wishful thinking.

Throughout August and into September, there was also an undercurrent of deep concern over the ability of logistical units to sustain the momentum. Troops and equipment were worn out and the attacking units lived hand to mouth. Corps artillery trucks augmented the transportation units, but this trade-off eliminated some fire support when it was needed during the approach to Germany. Overloading damaged many of the trucks and further disrupted the flow of supplies. Availability of repair parts then became a problem.

National Archives

Even the equipment that was on hand, such as clothing, was not the type best suited for the cold, damp climate of northwest Europe with fall and winter coming on; poor decisions by Eisenhower's quartermaster staff had already ensured that GIs would not have adequate clothing before the onset of bad weather.

Not only were supplies and clothing burgeoning crises—War Department manpower policies and faulty projections of losses would soon culminate in a theater-wide infantry replacement crisis. Transfer of men from rear-echelon and Air Forces ground units did little to solve this problem because the new men were not trained for combat. Units might even be better off without them. Probably more than the British and the other Allies, the Americans were victims of their own success. The time spent by staffs to ensure that operations in Normandy and northern France did not fail led them to neglect thorough planning for contingencies. Success depended on the Germans doing what the Allies expected them to do.

The first decision leading to operations in the Hürtgen Forest came in late August. Unwilling to compromise the initiative and gains made since the July-August breakout from Normandy, Supreme Commander Dwight D. Eisenhower directed the Allied armies

GI riflemen of the 110th Infantry advance through the Hürtgen Forest near Vossenack, Germany, in December 1944.

to continue operations without a pause to await resupply. Looking ahead, the most important objective relating to longer term logistical sustainment of Allied operations was the port of Antwerp. Eisenhower and British General Bernard L. Montgomery decided that the capture of Antwerp and the key French ports on the English Channel must take priority over opportunities to complete the destruction of the enemy west of the German border.

Eisenhower directed U.S. 12th Army Group commander, Lt. Gen. Omar N. Bradley, to support the British attack north of the Ardennes that was aimed toward both Antwerp and the Ruhr. Bradley ordered Hodges's First U.S. Army to attack generally north of the Ardennes. The Third Army (Lt. Gen. George S. Patton, Jr.) aimed toward Lorraine and the German border opposite the Saar. Hodges in turn directed his two forward corps, the V (Maj. Gen. Leonard T. Gerow) and the VII (Maj. Gen. J. Lawton Collins) to attack on either side of Aachen. The northern wing was the VII Corps, with only one armored and two infantry divisions. By the second week of September, it was on a collision course with the Hürtgen Forest.

Gerow's troops, meanwhile, hit the German border defenses in the Schnee Eifel and to the south. Army group and field army operations and engineer planning staffs meanwhile produced estimates on the enemy situation and the resources needed to cross the Rhine and envelop the Ruhr. These staffs did not fully address intermediate objectives such as the Rur River, a necessary prelude to the Rhine.

Joe Collins, without a doubt Hodges's favorite subordinate, focused on the German border defenses. He ordered the 3rd Armored Division and the 1st and 9th Infantry Divisions to penetrate the concrete fortifications of the West Wall in the Aachen area before attempting to capture the city. Based on intelligence reports and experience to date, driving through the border did not appear to be a particular challenge as long as the corps retained its momentum. These assumptions evidently carried over to estimates about the forest mass southeast of Aachen, known to the area's residents as the Wenau, Roetgen, and Hürtgen State Forests.

Breaching the border and gaining the Rhine plain required the First Army to secure a road net adequate for conduct of logistical support. Collins understood the tenuous situation with his supply lines and, over Gerow's counterarguments, Hodges approved Collins's request to continue the attack by reconnaissance in force through the border defenses. Gerow's corps likewise had only one armored division and two infantry divisions, but it operated on a much broader zone in Belgium and Luxembourg. Gerow could not concentrate his combat power to the extent that Collins could.

Intelligence reports most often noted the weakness of the enemy, though no one could predict with certainty how strongly the Germans could hold the West Wall. Nor could they predict with accuracy the resilience of the German Army.

Meanwhile, residents of the border villages prepared for the fight. Helene Hermanns of Mützenich, a village on the fringe of the Hürtgen, wrote in her diary on September 12, "German soldiers are in the village. Young men with machine guns.

ullstein bild

Helmets camouflaged, German infantrymen move toward the position of advancing American troops near Aachen in December 1944.

Hungry and tired, they came to our door and asked for a loaf of bread. They are here to defend our town."

Though time remained on the side of the Americans, they did not know the initiative was about to shift to the Germans.

That same day, a few miles from Helene Hermann's house, Lt. Col. William B. Lovelady's tank-infantry task force of Rose's 3rd Armored Division was approaching the border as part of the reconnaissance in force. His troops passed through the concrete obstacles that marked the West Wall defenses and immediately hit strong resistance near a dam and reservoir. At that time the Americans had no idea just how important the flood control dams in the area were to their plans. Instead, Bill Lovelady's men consolidated their gains, set up outposts, and prepared to exploit their penetration of the border. So far, so good.

Logistics dictated the pace, power, and extent of the Allied attack into Germany. Since the forested area occupied a portion of the First Army's axis of attack, its limited road net became an important concern. Capture of these roads and the villages that controlled them became the focus of operations. They did not link the Rhine crossings with the objectives necessary to reach that river—the Rur River and the series of flood control and hydroelectric dams buried in the woods. The larger dams controlled the level of the Rur which, when not at flood stage, was just a few yards across. If the Germans flooded the Rur after the Americans crossed, units isolated on the east bank of the stream would be open to defeat in detail—and at flood stage, the river's width might grow to half a mile or more.

Like Task Force Lovelady, the rest of VII Corps was worn out by the third week of September. The reconnaissance in force sputtered to a close with the corps half in/half out of the West Wall. Yet the Americans remained confident that perhaps one more drive would break the developing thin crust of enemy resistance. The problem was that much of First Army's combat power was becoming tied up in the Hürtgen Forest.

Concurrent with the attack of Task Force Lovelady, elements of Maj. Gen. Louis Craig's 9th Infantry Division tried to sweep the lower half of the forest. Lack of troops forced Collins to divide the division into two large elements. One infantry regiment, the 47th, operated on the northern fringe of the forest, supporting the 3rd Armored Division. The 39th and 60th Infantry Regiments pushed ahead in the center of the forest. The 60th reached Germany after having sustained significant and un-replaced losses in riflemen while crossing the Meuse River in Belgium. It was simply impossible for two virtually unsupported infantry regiments to sweep an area of forest so dense that the trees shut out much daylight even on the sunniest days.

Rifleman Billy F. Allsbrook recalled, "All I saw were trees, firebreaks and more trees." A rifle battalion executive officer later remarked, "Conditions in the interior were such as to cause opposing forces to come within fifty yards of each other before either could discern a target at which to shoot." Six decades after the fact, Hubert Gees, a 19-year-old messenger in the German 275th Infantry Division, was unable to speak of what he saw there without tears.

September turned into October and the skies grew steadily gray as American commanders decided to try once more to break through the center of the forest to gain roads

that could sustain their drive to the Rhine.

It was then, during early October, that the fighting in the forest became less a "battle" than it was a campaign without a clear objective. Still without enough combat power to tip the balance in their favor, the two regiments of the 9th Infantry Division tried to drive through the forest and take the key road running through the village of Hürtgen. From there, they would be within striking distance of the next objective, the important crossroad town of Schmidt, which commanded the western approaches to the largest of the Rur dams.

Yet, as vital as this and the adjacent dams were, they were not an objective of the attack. Even had they been, the VII Corps was not strong enough to physically secure them or to even control them by fire. Collins needed at least another infantry division, significant artillery and armor support, and several days of good weather. Hodges could not provide such reinforcement to Collins without significantly altering his broader plan, which also involved securing the approaches to the Rhine in the strongly defended open country north of Aachen.

Finally, Hodges's boss, Omar Bradley, commander of 12th Army Group, had to be prepared to support the Allied airborne operation in Holland, maintain pressure on the Germans throughout the Ardennes-Hürtgen region, and to keep Patton moving in eastern France. Success in the Hürtgen, if fighting was to continue there at all, depended on a very weak German defense. However, the forest was a great equalizer of combat power and even weak German units could draw much GI blood.

The next round of hard fighting—between October 6 and 16—yielded little. If the Americans were not already convinced the Germans would control the outcome of the forest fighting, they should have been. German defenders fought from familiar ground, with artillery and mortar reference points precalculated to speed their fire. Their log and dirt-covered bunkers made excellent fighting positions. American leaders from squad to company found it extremely difficult to control their troops; resupply during combat was virtually impossible.

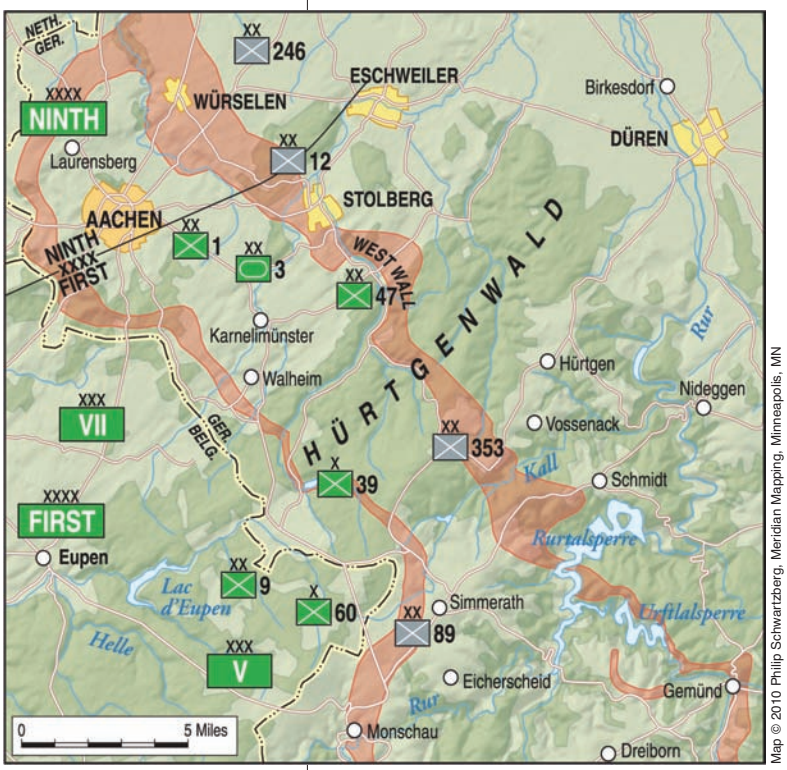
Because of the artillery tree bursts, mines, and mud, evacuation of casualties was as dangerous as direct combat. It was not unusual for troops to be wounded again on their way to a battalion aid station or casualty collecting point. What began as coordinated infantry-tank attacks often devolved into broken, dispersed infantry-only combat at close range against a nearly invisible enemy.

So brutal was it that the Americans took six days to gain just two miles from their line of departure to the north-south road leading through Germeter and Hürtgen (town) to Düren. On October 16, when the hell finally let up, they were about a hundred yards beyond that road. Devastated units on both sides drew back exhausted and, in some cases, near the breaking point.

Eisenhower and his subordinates faced a continuing dilemma as October wore on. The Germans still controlled access to the great Belgian port at Antwerp. In Allied hands, its cargo throughput capacity could ensure continuation of a major attack into Germany as long as logisticians could synchronize cargo deliveries with the arrival of combat units.

Intelligence estimates favored continued operations despite the impending onset of winter. What the supreme commander called "an unremitting offensive" would further drain German troop and matériel reserves and almost certainly shorten the war. His controversial broad front approach was still the strategy underpinning the campaign, and it made sense to the extent that it was simply impossible for the Germans to effectively concentrate strength everywhere.

First priority was a general buildup along the Rhine that would begin in early November with an attack by First Army to gain a crossing south of Cologne. Other elements of Bradley's 12th Army Group would either support the First; or in the case of Patton's Third U.S. Army, continue operations aimed at the Saar.



Map © 2010 Philip Schwartzberg, Meridian Mapping, Minneapolis, MN

Stretching northeast from the Belgian-German border, the Hürtgen Forest covers an area of about 50 square miles within the triangle formed by the towns of Aachen, Düren, and Monschau.

The First Army had priority since its ultimate goal was encirclement of the Ruhr industrial area from the south. Montgomery's 21st Army Group would focus on the capture of Antwerp before it joined the attack. Its succeeding goal was encir-

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Two medics of Company I, 3rd Battalion, 8th Regiment, 4th Infantry Division treat a wounded infantryman in the Hürtgen Forest near Düren, November 18, 1944.

clement of the Rhine on the north. In short, concerns regarding the logistical situation (e.g., Antwerp as an example) did not dictate the decision to continue the attack into Germany. However, it is clear that commanders were deeply aware of the need to ensure uninterrupted sustainment of Allied combat power.

Key to the German Army's ability to withstand attrition was the cohesiveness of their divisional and corps staffs. Here the Germans excelled in their ability to control and reform shattered regiments and battalions, and direct them to the most threatened areas of the front. Their ability to buy time through extremely effective use of their damaged road and rail transportation system was without peer as 1944 drew to a close.

One of the German units facing the Americans in November was General der Infanterie Erich Straube's LXXIV Corps under Seventh Army (General der Panzertruppen Erich Brandenberger). Their keen ability to hastily reorganize a command and control structure, shuffle or dissolve headquarters lacking subordinate units, and unhesitating transfer of sub-par soldiers out of the divisions and other maneuver units they wanted to keep reasonably strong (such as panzer and panzergrenadier) went a long way in equalizing the balance of power in the forest.

Personnel accountability and poor training were inescapable problems, particularly in the units filled with Luftwaffe and Kriegsmarine replacements. Such conditions forced small units to remain in the line, prodded by exhortations to fight to the last round, and then to continue to fight hand to hand. Such thinking would not have counted for much in less difficult ground.

Another equalizer was the Heer's (German Army) emphasis on the selection and training of field- and company-grade officers and senior noncommissioned officers. Even the relatively untried and underequipped Volksgrenadier divisions, often derided by historians, could perform reasonably well with excellent small-unit leadership. These organizations also benefited from standardization of small arms and crew-served weapons.

There were spot shortages of weapons and vehicles as these units entered the line in late 1944, but even Volksgrenadier divisions could effectively employ their small arms in the defense with devastating results. Despite years of Allied air attacks, German industrial output at the time remained high enough to impact the pace of operations. Specific figures for deliveries to units fighting in the Hürtgen Forest are incomplete, if they exist at all.

Yet German records and American reports of units in the Aachen area indicate that German artillery strength was impressive even by American standards. For example, one corps operating on the northern fringe of the forest in October-November had up to 250 available artillery pieces. While the U.S. First Army units opposite this German unit had a significant advantage in numbers, ammunition was strictly rationed in October because commanders wanted to build up reserve stocks for later operations. Heavy guns (8-inch and 240mm, for example) were rationed to an average of less than four rounds per day.

As hard as the forest fighting was in September and October, nothing prepared the Americans for what they would face in the first half of November during a preliminary attack to ensure a firm south flank for the big First Army offensive.

Once more, only a single division, though strongly reinforced this time, was available to strike the high ground around Schmidt. Yet again, only the terrain, not the largest of the Rur dams, was the objective of the 28th Infantry Division when it jumped off on November 2. The 28th's commander, Maj. Gen. Norman D. Cota, a hero in the Omaha Beach fighting, went into the action knowing the risks. He told an interviewer not long afterward that he did not think his men had a gambler's chance of success.

The 112th Infantry Regiment's attack began with excellent prospects as it rolled across objectives the 9th Infantry Division had not secured in October. The villages of Germeter, Vossenack, and Kommerscheidt (a few hundred yards from Schmidt) were in American hands by the night of November 3, and Cota received congratulatory messages from colleagues and superiors. However, his 110th and 109th Infantry Regiments were deadlocked on either side of the successful penetration. Also unknown to the Americans was the presence of strong German reserves, directed to the area as a result of a coincidental high-level staff exercise with a scenario that by chance duplicated the actual events underway in the Hürtgen Forest.

A sense of unease settled on the GIs of the 112th during the night of November 3-4. Engineers were unable to improve the single trail linking Schmidt to Germeter, and only a handful of tanks and tank destroyers were en route to the infantry by morning. It was too late anyway, because about 7:00 AM the Germans blanketed Schmidt with artillery, followed by armor. Within a few minutes the panzers were firing directly at American foxholes and the situation was sheer bedlam. GIs reformed a weak defense at neighboring Kommerscheidt, where the U.S. armor delayed what ended up as a total breakdown of the defense.

Meanwhile, the 2nd Battalion of the 112th was subjected to four days of constant shelling and exposure to freezing temperatures. Soldiers reported that German artillery and armor emplaced on a ridge just four kilometers away could fire with near impunity

at specific foxholes. When the breaking point came early on November 6, the battalion gave much of Vossenack back to the Germans. Cota now had to reinforce the defenses there, and all he had available was his weak 109th Infantry Regiment, which had been unable to punch through thick minefields and stubborn defenses northwest of Vossenack. Its rifle companies were nearly all down to platoon strength. So were those of the 110th to the immediate south.

These events caused a near emergency within V Corps. Hodges authorized General Gerow to attach a regiment of Maj. Gen. Raymond O. Barton's 4th Infantry Division, then en route to VII Corps, to the 28th Infantry Division; it replaced the 109th Infantry, northwest of Germeter on November 6. Swallowed up in a dense forested plateau, company commanders, platoon leaders, and NCOs of the rifle companies of the relieving 12th Infantry Regiment spent most of their time simply trying to control unsuccessful limited objective attacks.

Troops of both sides were intermingled; combat often took place between units that were only yards apart, and some men simply disappeared. It might have been the GI equivalent of the Civil War's Muleshoe Salient at Spotsylvania. One German counterattack separated two rifle companies and surrounded a battalion command post, and the regiment was split into five pieces by November 9. The 12th Infantry Regiment soon withdrew for reorganization, having gained little if any ground.

Cota's 28th Infantry Division and its attachments, meanwhile, lost almost 6,200 of about 16,000 assigned and attached men on November 2. German casualties are harder to assess, but likely exceeded 3,000. The Germans had forced the south flank of the upcoming American attack to rest on ground well distant from the Rur River.

The largest air attack of the war in direct support of ground troops, Operation Queen, was initiated on November 16. While it ultimately failed to secure Rur crossings and did not target the dams anyway, the attack resulted in the most widespread fighting of the campaign. It cost the Americans nearly 25,000 of the nearly 100,000 GIs fighting in and near the forest.

Unfortunately for the GIs on the ground, the need to avoid "friendly fire" casualties like those suffered during the Operation Cobra air attack in Normandy led to positioning of the bomb line well behind the Germans' forward positions. While this spared First Army GIs considerable harm at first, it also protected the enemy.

Most VII Corps GIs fighting in the forest found it hard enough to just survive. For example, between November 16 and December 4, the three rifle battalions of the 4th Infantry Division's 22nd Infantry Regiment went through 10 commanders—the 2nd Battalion had four commanders in one day, including two wounded and one killed. One rifle company had six commanders; another had five over the course of three weeks.

The first three days of combat (November 16-18) cost the regiment 391 battle

American tanks make their way cautiously up a narrow, muddy track in the Hürtgen Forest. The dense forest was difficult terrain for armor.

National Archives

and 63 nonbattle casualties, numbers that include 28 officers and 110 NCOs. Such were the effects of stubborn German resistance, weather and the brutal terrain. Day after day, the GIs picked themselves up from water-filled foxholes and stepped into a shroud of mist, never drying out, and eating cold C-rations if they had time.

Resupply and medical evacuation routes were narrow, mine-filled forest trails and firebreaks because the area's few roads were often impassable. Armor necessarily remained well behind, and though direct support artillery battalions fired thousands of rounds, the limited visibility prevented accurate adjustment and effectiveness. German units suffered equally—some simply evaporated as their survivors died or were captured. Artillery duels lasted for hours, literally blasting the woods to splinters.

It took the 22d Infantry nine days (November 16-25) to penetrate less than six miles of forest to reach the village of Grosshau, alongside the key highway through Germeter and Hürtgen to the Rur crossings at Düren. By then, according to one source, "a fatalistic attitude began to permeate the regiment."

Leader casualties were particularly damaging—by November 26, Company C had only one veteran officer and less than a half dozen NCOs left. The vicious fight for Grosshau itself dragged on through November 29. Fifty percent or higher casualties despite replacements were the rule, due in part to the extreme difficulty of getting tanks and tank destroyers through the woods. German mortar and antitank fire often disrupted combined armor-infantry operations when they occurred. And even that was not the end, for beyond Grosshau was the village of Gey.

On December 1, one rifle company suffered 65 percent casualties, with many of the GIs being killed outright. The company commander was forced to put privates first class in command of two platoons. Between November 16 and December 3, the regiment lost 86 percent of its assigned strength.

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ABOVE: Weary from the rough travel through the Hürtgen Forest, men of the 4th Infantry Division take a brief but much-needed rest. RIGHT TOP: German artillery fires at American positions in the Hürtgen Forest, November 22, 1944. RIGHT BOTTOM: Major General Joseph Collins, commander of VII Corps, observes a German withdrawal movement with his aide, Captain Walsh, at a forward observation post near Düren.

By November 21, meanwhile, the situation with the 12th Infantry, rushed into the forest under near emergency circumstances near Vossenack, was such that a regiment from Maj. Gen. Donald A. Stroh's 8th Infantry Division (V Corps) replaced it. This regiment, the 121st, finally captured the town of Hürtgen at the end of November.

Texan Paul M. Boesch, a former professional wrestler who was now a rifle company lieutenant in the 121st, recalled, "From house to house we fought, each house a determined strongpoint until the Germans inside at last became convinced they could hold no longer and still live."

Each house and store, and in some cases, each room, became a battleground. When they finally caught up with the riflemen, American tanks first sprayed the windows and doors with machine-gun fire, then used their cannons to blast a hole for the GIs. Sensing there was little hope for escape, some Landsers fought until the end. Others waited for an American to appear, then surrendered. German mortar and artillery fire continued even after the town fell.

One look at the terrain through which the GIs attacked the town of Hürtgen explains why it took a week to gain just a mile and a half—an almost sheer vertical valley wall canalized a battalion axis of attack to the width of a single narrow road leading sharply uphill onto a small forest-cloaked plateau. There was no other usable approach given the ground captured by that time. Previous decisions to operate in this terrain without significant advantage in combat power led to continual operations on frontages that were sometimes literally squad- if not soldier-wide. And in areas where broader front operations were possible, the Germans still were able to control the pace of events.

Even after the 121st Infantry secured Hürtgen, there remained work to do to get the V Corps to the highest ground in the vicinity from where it could help protect the south flank of the VII Corps main-effort attack to the Rur.

The first week of December arrived with the tired regiment securing attack positions for elements of Maj. Gen. Lunsford E. Oliver's 5th Armored Division and the 2nd Ranger Battalion's attack to capture Hill 400. This elevation was just over three miles by road from Hürtgen, but its capture took another week of misery at a high cost in soldiers and armor. Hill 400 offered a commanding view of part of the reservoir created by the big Schwammenauel Dam, but by the time the hill was under American control, the troops could do nothing more than establish observation positions. They did not have the combat power to exploit the attack.

Concurrently with these operations, Maj. Gen. Clarence R. Huebner's 1st Infantry Division fought on the northern reaches of the forest to sweep the area east of Aachen.

Conditions here differed little from those to the south: tree bursts, water-filled foxholes, very limited visibility, and German counterattacks. Fighting in two villages in the north are good examples of what happened even when the GIs broke free of the confines of the dense forest. At Hamich, a strong counterattack by elements of the 47th Volksgrenadier Division, supported by armor, slammed into a battalion of the Big Red One's 16th Infantry Regiment. Fighting was so intense and close-in that little more than rubble was left of the town.

Nearby Merode proved disastrous. Platoon leader Sidney Miller (Company F, 26th Infantry, 1st Infantry Division) recalled some years later, "A new CO, two new inexperienced platoon leaders, and a large number of new replacements didn't appear to me to be the right combination of a cohesive fighting unit. It had all of the earmarks of a disaster, which it eventually turned out to be."

Getting to Merode was hard enough. Miller was fortunate that of two 120mm rounds that landed close to him, one failed to explode and one caused only a concussion. Two of the company's three platoons were nearly destroyed in the forest before reaching the village. After the GIs entered the buildings, German mortar and artillery fire cut them off from the rest of the battalion and, during the evening of November 29, a counterattack supported by panzers overran them.

Tanks fired directly into the windows and blew down walls. American Shermans contributed nothing because they were unable to negotiate the trails and firebreaks in time to shift the balance of power. Entries in the 26th Infantry Regiment's operations journal reflect the desperation on the night of 29-30 November 29-30:

2033 hours: "Have 2 companies in town ... shelling is heavy along road. Road is blocked by a turned over [U.S.] tank."

2120 hours: "[Companies] E & F are in town ... We have to have the road open tonight."

2205 hours: "Our casualties have been very heavy these days."

November 30, 0030 hours: "There is [sic] one to two enemy tanks and some infantry in town ... I am afraid the men in the town are going to take a beating, but there is nothing we can do about it."

0354 hours: "We heard that 'F' Co. runner come back saying that there were at least three [German] tanks in town."

0530 hours: "What's in town may be annihilated now."

0850 hours: "We are out of communication at present."

1030 hours: "[C]an't imagine a whole company getting gobbled up."

The First Army attack that began on November 16 with such high hopes had degenerated into a brutal fight of attrition where success was measured in gains of a few yards of muddy earth. Time and terrain were on the side of the Germans.

Only after prospects of success had dimmed did Eisenhower speak to Bradley about the issue of the dams. General Hodges at first called for air attacks to breach the largest (Urft and Schwammenauel), but air officers argued that the attacks would not be worth the effort. The first mention in a 12th Army Group situation report of any type of deliberate air or ground attack on a Rur dam came on December 4: "The RAF was assigned the mission of bombing the dams in the vicinity of the ROER River." There was no reported damage on either of the two largest ones, and the weather forced cancellation of a second attack that day. A December 5 attack failed to breach the Urfttalsperre.

Bradley and Hodges then turned to Gerow's V Corps to make the first ground attack deliberately aimed at the Schwammenauel and Urft dams. The new 78th Infantry Division, under Maj. Gen. Edwin P. Parker, committed two regiments and attached armor to the drive, which began on December 13. That same day, an unnamed prisoner said the Germans were prepared to open the flood gates on order.

Both: National Archives

ABOVE: A tank destroyer and GIs manning a bazooka and rifle fight from house to house in a small German town as they follow the enemy on the road to Düren. RIGHT: A 4th Division bazooka team in an abandoned buidling in Grosshau awaits the arrival of German tanks.

Yet aerial reconnaissance reported that the enemy had removed previously identified antiaircraft guns from the vicinity of the dams.

It is impossible to know for certain if such information might have led Bradley and Hodges to wonder if the Germans had decided not to defend the dams, and in some way to justify their lack of focus on them. Whatever the thinking on the American side, by now senior German officers realized the importance of both the dams and the forest to their imminent offensive in the Ardennes and they would in fact continue to defend them.

Still, the V Corps attack had to go on because the Americans were irretrievably committed to the forest, the dams would not go away, and the Rur River, gateway to the Rhine/Cologne plain, remained under German control. It was too late to bypass the dams, and it was clear that air attacks, especially at that time of year, had little value.

A swift and powerful German counterattack at Kesternich, a village sitting on high ground overlooking the western approaches to the Urft Dam, cost elements of two rifle battalions of the 78th nearly 1,000 casualties in just three days (December 13-15). Operating on the southwest fringe of the forest mass, Maj. Gen. Walter M. Robertson's 2nd Infantry Division sustained about 1,500 casualties trying to capture an important crossroads on the route to the Urft Dam.

Now, after three months of fighting in the Hürtgen Forest, the Americans had to turn their attention in another direction with the start of the so-called "Battle of the Bulge," which began on December 16. Limited engagements in the forest area continued, and troops on both sides suffered casualties from combat and exposure in the harshest winter in decades.

Had the Germans not wasted so many resources in the Ardennes, they might have forced continuation of fighting for the dams until early spring 1945. Still, it was late January, well after the worst of the fighting in the Ardennes was over, before the Americans could renew their attacks, first against the dams and then the Rur River line.

Why did it take so long for commanders and their staffs to recognize the importance of the dams compared to the forest and its roads? Certainly logistics remained uppermost in their thinking well into the late autumn. Even so, some staff officers realized the impact of a flooded Rur valley. An October report by the 9th Infantry Division's G-2 (Intelligence Officer) and division engineer warned about the impact of floods caused by opening the floodgates on the Schwammenauel and Urft Dams. The U.S. Ninth Army's engineer staff issued a similar warning in late October. Bradley's army group staff engineer on November 4 referenced a prewar German plan to cause a slow flood of the big Schwammenauel reservoir.

Twelfth Army Group staff estimates through September mentioned the goal of gaining the Rhine in November, but Bradley's G-3 (Operations Officer) urged completing the destruction of German forces west of the Rhine before crossing it. Bradley, on October 8, ordered Hodges to "continue your attack to the stream [Rur River] running through Düren," but he added that First Army should do this only if the "going is easy." Otherwise, Hodges must delay until the British resumed operations so that the Germans would face multiple threats.

Meanwhile, Hodges remained committed to keeping broad pressure on the Germans with the limited resources available to him. He evidently failed to recognize the importance of the dams to any attack designed to cross the Rur. Whether due to an absence of vision, or a stubborn, single-minded focus on objective, Hodges's mid-November attack had dragged on for nearly two weeks before an army group situation report

called the Rur "a strong river barrier" and noted the importance of the dams.

By then, the Americans were concerned that the Germans had concentrated armored reserves to counterattack any crossing. Compounding the lack of planning focus, a comparison of some unit situation reports with actual events indicates that when Hodges did get out of his headquarters, he did not always receive an accurate picture of conditions within the frontline units. Perhaps the corps and division commanders did not always know the situation themselves. One reason that orders to attack continued was that these reports usually characterized division and regimental combat effectiveness as "excellent" despite the realities on the ground.

The forest and dams became a matter of open concern at corps and higher levels only in mid-November. Synopses of staff updates to Bradley mention events in the Hürtgen Forest and concern about the condition of the largest dams; however, operations were irretrievably aimed at other goals. Discussion of the forest during Bradley's staff updates usually centered on the progress of division-level operations, not the status of the dams. Yet whatever the context, specific discussion of the forest fighting evidently did not lead senior commanders to reconsider the objectives. Further, while there was also mention of the Rur River, discussion seems to have involved ways to force the enemy to withdraw across the river, not on securing the dams.

Finally, when renewed operations began after the Americans were assured of success in the Ardennes, everyone clearly understood the importance of the Rur dams. The positioning of U.S. forces at the easternmost end of the Bulge placed significant combat power in the area. Shifting field army and corps boundaries in early 1945 put the First Army once again in charge of the Hürtgen battleground. Plans called for a drive to cross the Rur to begin on February 10 as a prelude to a general offensive to the Rhine.

Of course, everyone now fully understood the importance of the dams to such operations, and these plans called for preliminary attacks aimed specifically to capture the dams by ground attack. The zone of attack would be across the relatively open high ground on the south fringe of the forest. Here waist-high snow drifts complicated operations, but by February 2 the 78th Infantry Division and its reinforcements were in position to continue to the Schwammenauel Dam. They had in the meantime encountered a familiar enemy from December 1944, the remnants of the 272nd Volksgrenadier Division, and retaken Kesternich after another extremely vicious fight. To the south, it was somehow fitting that the veteran 9th Infantry Division, among the first to fight in the forest, secured the Urft Dam on February 4-5.

Bitter cold and snow gave way to driving rain as the 78th meanwhile fought for successive objectives to clear the approaches to the dam. It also recaptured Schmidt, lost to the 28th Infantry Division three months before. General Parker's troops endured mixed-up orders and too much involvement by the V Corps (now commanded by Maj. Gen. Huebner) staff due to the pressure to secure the Schwammenauel dam and prevent the Germans from flooding the Rur before the planned February 10 start of Operation Grenade, the attack to cross the river.

Still, late on February 9 the division had a rifle battalion on the high ground overlooking the dam. German resistance varied from bitter to ineffectual, but the balance of power had fully turned and they could not answer multiple-battalion barrages of U.S. artillery that literally illuminated the valley holding the dam and reservoir.

ullstein bild

German infantrymen and their platoon leader man a position on the Rur front, December 14, 1944.

The message traffic from regiment to army group reflects the tension as the generals awaited word on the condition of the dam and the floodgates, and much of the pressure reached the battalion level at least. The Germans still managed to destroy the flood valves before the Amer-

Continued on page 96

German Junkers Ju-88s shot down actor Leslie Howard's plane en route from Lisbon to Bristol. The reason remains a mystery.

By June 1, 1943, British actor Leslie Howard, 50, was one of the most famous actors in the world, one of the leading male stars of one the greatest box-office draw movies of all time, the 1939 blockbuster *Gone with the Wind*.

Born of Hungarian Jewish immigrants as Leslie Howard Stainer in London in 1893, Howard had served as a junior officer in World War I until he was mustered out of military service in 1916 after suffering shell shock in the trenches of France.

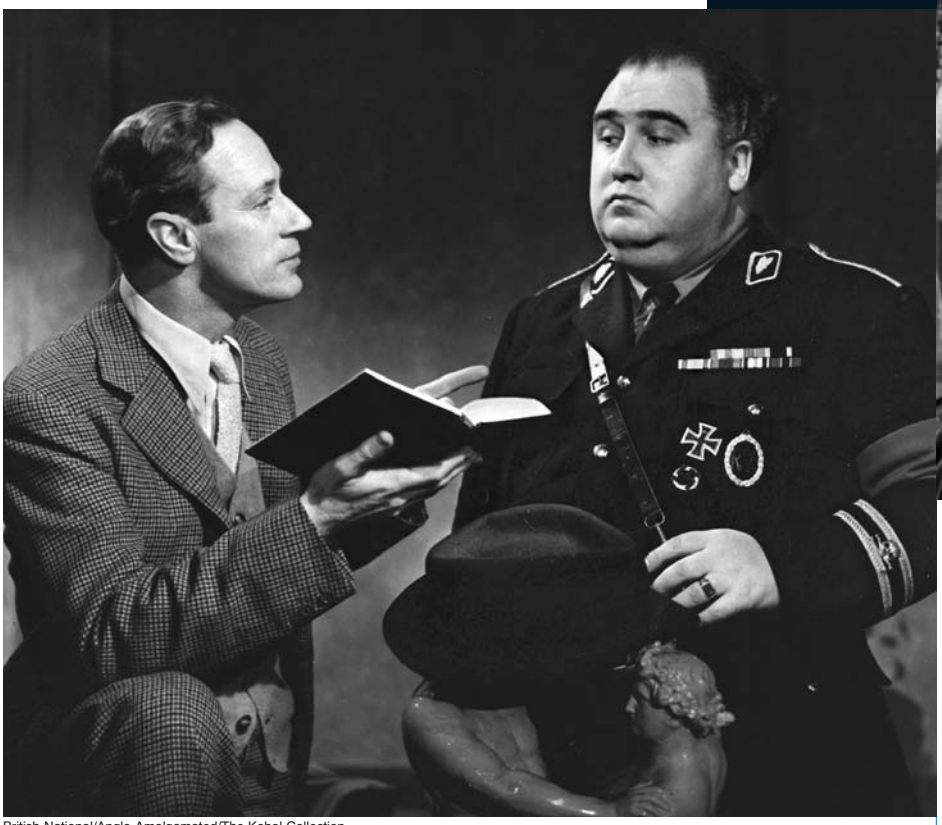
Becoming an actor as therapy on the advice of his doctor, Howard made his stage debut in 1917, and later earned Academy Award nominations for both the 1933 film *Berkeley Square* and the 1938 movie *Pygmalion*. But it was as the star-crossed Confederate lover Ashley Wilkes that he remains best known to this day. His acting career, however, would soon come to a tragic end.

In 1940, he left Hollywood and returned to England where he hoped he might be able to do something to help Britain's war effort. In 1941 and 1942 he starred in several war films including *49th Parallel* (1941), *Pimpernel Smith* (1941), and *The First of the Few* (called *Spitfire* in the United States; 1942), the latter two of which he also directed and co-produced.

In April 1943, Howard flew into neutral Lisbon, Portugal, ostensibly to present a series of lectures on his films and on the role of Hamlet, as well as to look after his own film-distribution business affairs on the Iberian Peninsula. However, other reports said that he was in Lisbon for another reason—to rally support for the anti-Fascist cause. As he prepared to fly out of London, however, he told his wife Ruth that he had "a queer feeling about this whole trip, but—what the hell!—you know that I'm a fatalist anyway."

One thing that may have planted the seed of apprehension in his mind was the fact that on April 19, just two weeks earlier, this very same plane in which he was to ride—*Ibis*—a DC-3 plane operated by the Royal Dutch Airlines, had been oddly and unexpectedly attacked by a flight of from six to eight deadly German Luftwaffe Junkers Ju-88s off Spain's Cape Corunna. The plane had even taken some hits before escaping to safety in a cloudbank and then continuing on to Portugal.

Leslie Howard (left) starred in and directed *Pimpernel Smith*, which the Nazis perceived as an attack on the Third Reich. BELOW: Howard, shown with Vivien Leigh, is best known for his portrayal of Ashley Wilkes in *Gone with the Wind*.



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Airport officials were mystified, since both the British BOAC aerial service and the Royal Dutch Airlines had flown entirely undisturbed despite the ongoing air war over the Mediterranean, and at least 5,000 passengers had taken off and landed safely. Until the spring of 1943, there had been a sort of gentlemen's agreement between the capitals of Lisbon and London to continue

the daily flight without hindrance. Thus, despite the freak attack of April 19, the daily flights between Portugal and the United Kingdom resumed.

Until June 1, 1943, the Germans had left the Lisbon-to-Free World flights alone, as many of their passengers were useful to the Axis war effort, but that day's Flight 777 to London was about to be proven the exception.

With his visit concluded, Howard and a dozen or so other passengers boarded the *Ibis* at Lisbon's Portella airport at 9:35 AM on June 1, 1943, for what was expected to be a routine return flight to London.

A nervous Leslie Howard boarded the flight with Arthur Tregear Chenhall, a heavy-set friend and business associate of the famous actor, who somewhat resembled Winston Churchill and who also enjoyed smoking large cigars. (A persistent rumor during and after the war—fueled by the prime minister himself—had it that German agents in Lisbon mistakenly thought Chenhall was Churchill, and thus had planned to target him.)

Did Howard have reason to feel unsafe? Maybe so. Having previously played the roles of Professor Henry Higgins in *Pygmalian,* Romeo to actress Norma Shearer's Juliet, and Philip Carey in *Of Human Bondage,* Howard was also known for his famed 1934 role in *The Scarlet Pimpernel* opposite Merle Oberon. Therein he portrayed an English nobleman secretly helping condemned French aristocrats escape the blade of the guillotine and constantly thwarting his rival, a diabolical secret policeman of Revolutionary France.

To aid the Allied war effort and defeat the hated Nazis, Howard reprised this role in the 1941 film, *Pimpernel Smith,* which was updated to replace French Revolutionaries with the Nazis of the Third Reich as the villains. The actor played Horatio Smith, an archaeology professor traveling in Europe who rescues refugees from the German Gestapo (Secret Police).

ABOVE: *Spitfire,* known as *The First of the Few* in England, was released in the United States in 1942. Howard had returned home to aid in the war effort. He directed himself and David Niven (left) in *Spitfire,* which told the story of R.J. Mitchell, tha plane's designer.

According to author Jerrold M. Packard in his excellent 1992 study—*Neither Friend Nor Foe: The European Neutrals in World War II*—"[German] Propaganda Minister Dr. Josef Goebbels had seen Howard's 1941 film *Pimpernel Smith* … [and] decided to get the man who not only starred in this attack on the Reich, but who directed and produced it as well."

Packard noted, "When passing Germans in the lobby of the Ritz ... the actor made gentlemanly efforts to conceal his own contempt. He wasn't aware, of course, that among these Germans were agents reporting his movements back to Berlin."

Other passengers on Flight 777 included Reuters News Service reporter Kenneth Stonehouse; Wilfred Israel, a Jewish relief activist; mining engineer Ivan Sharp, who had been negotiating important tungsten imports for England; Shell Oil Company's Lisbon manager, Tyrrel Shervington; and two other men, a trio of women, and two or three children.

Oddly, the only reason that both Howard and Chenhall were able to find seats aboard was because the airline had "bumped" at the last minute two other would-be passengers: nanny Dora Rowe and Derek Partridge, the young son of a Foreign Office official, to make room for the famous actor and his aide.

Another who missed the fatal flight was Roman Catholic English College Vice President Father A.S. Holmes. Waiting in the terminal, Father Holmes received a hasty message to call either the British Embassy or the papal nunciature right away. Because the aircraft wouldn't wait for him, the priest watched it take off from the terminal.

Afterward, strangely, no one at the telephone switchboard could verify having received a call for the priest, and both the embassy and the papal office denied making any such request for him to contact

British Aviation Pictures/The Kobal Collection

British National/Anglo-Amalgamated/The Kobal Collection

Lawrence Olivier, Anton Walbrook, and Leslie Howard starred in 1941's *Forty-Ninth Parallel*. The film tells the story of Nazi naval officers and crew stranded in Canada and their attempts to gain sympathy from the local residents.

them. His last-minute removal from the doomed aircraft thus remains a mystery, one of several.

Later, in the wake of what happened, it developed that there had been more odd occurrences before the flight. Shervington had dreamed that the plane had been shot down and that he'd gone down with it, and Stonehouse moaned to a friend before taking off, "I'm not normally frightened, but somehow, I feel bad about this air trip. I wish that I could go to sleep here and wake up at some English airfield."

Were these just the usual "fear of flying" jitters shared by many passengers before and since? Again, maybe not, as it later developed that Berlin not only perceived Howard as an outright wartime Allied propagandist, but also, perhaps, as more than that: as an intelligence agent. The Nazis also viewed Shervington as a fellow spy, and Zionist activist Wilfried Israel as an avowed enemy of Third Reich.

Indeed, as the passengers boarded the flight, they were even watched by the crew of a nearby Lufthansa German civilian airliner.

The ill-fated *Ibis* took off and soon reached an altitude of 9,000 feet, setting a

course for a landfall at Spain's Cape Villano before flying out over the Bay of Biscay for the seven-hour flight to Bristol, England. Unknown to the passengers and crew of the *Ibis,* as they passed Cape Villano, a powerful German omnidirectional radio navigation beam locked on to the Dutch aircraft.

Another fact unknown to the doomed passengers and crew aboard *Ibis* was that, as it took off from Lisbon, a squadron of eight German Junkers Ju-88 crews were also preparing to take off from their Luftwaffe base in German-occupied France near the port city of Bordeaux for a patrol over the Bay of Biscay. Its exact orders were never made known, and it is doubtful that these deadly Ju-88 fighter-bombers were on either air-sea rescue or U-boat protection missions.

What is known, however, is that the *Ibis* and the flight of eight Ju-88s were now flying on intersecting paths. Shortly before 1:00 PM on that clear June day, Flight 777 suddenly was raked by bursts of cannon fire and machine-gun bullets from the attacking Ju-88s over the water some 200 miles northwest of A Coruña, Spain. The DC-3's wireless operator quickly tapped out a chilling message in Morse code: "From G-AGBB [*Ibis*'s call sign] ... I am followed by unidentified aircraft ... I am attacked by enemy aircraft." After that, the transmission went dead.

As during the April 19 assault, the DC-3 again tried unsuccessfully to reach the safety of the clouds, but instead headed for the sea below, trailing a stream of flames. It slammed into the water with great force, killing all on board. After the airliner crashed, the attacking planes photographed bits of smoking wreckage floating on the rough seas and then returned to their home base.

Three days after the incident, the *New York Times* reported, "It was believed in London that the Nazi raider[s] had attacked on the outside chance that Prime Minister Winston Churchill might be among the passengers."

Both the British and Portuguese air authorities were shocked when it became known that an armed belligerent had apparently shot down an unarmed, clearly marked civilian airliner in broad daylight. So sure had they been that such an event would never happen—and that the earlier attack of April 19 had been but an accidental aberration—that they had summarily refused to extend the air routes farther out over the Atlantic Ocean as a defensive measure. Nor had they rescheduled the flights to the hours of darkness.

When the Allies' secret Nazi code-breaking capabilities known as ULTRA were finally made public decades after World War II ended, it was learned that the British had known in advance of possible German plans to shoot down Flight 777 based on their assumption that Churchill was aboard. To avoid compromising the ULTRA secret, the British could not pass on this bit of intelligence to the airline.

In his monumental history of the war, Churchill kept alive the mistaken-identity thesis, and referred to Leslie Howard's death as one of "the inscrutable workings of fate." □

The National Museum of the Marine Corps ("The Marine House") is a spectacular tribute to an elite fighting force.

One of the world's great military museums is also one of the newest: the National Museum of the Marine Corps (known as the "Marine House" by those who staff it), located just outside the Marine Corps base at Quantico, Virginia—about 40 miles south of Washington, D.C. on Interstate 95.

The museum's striking building and 135 wooded acres offer not only a respite for travelers but an opportunity to honor the service, commitment, and sacrifices made by all Marines throughout the Corps' 235 year history. Guests are warmly welcomed to share its hospitality. Since opening on November 10 (the Corps' birthday) 2006, over 1.7 million people have enjoyed visiting the museum.

The museum's self-guided tour encompasses six unique spaces:

Leatherneck Gallery. The core values of the Marine Corps—honor, courage, and commitment—echo from the marble walls. A gleaming mast rises 210 feet high, and a Curtiss Jenny, two Corsairs, and a Harrier fly overhead inside the glass dome. On the deck, in a full-size diorama, an amphibious tractor tackles a coconut log wall as startlingly lifelike figures hit the beach at Tarawa; nearby, a helicopter disembarks Marines onto a Korean battle scene.

Making Marines. Follow recruits through boot camp from the recruiting sta-

Denver-based Fentress Bradburn Architects designed the 210-foot spire to resemble the flag raising at Iwo Jima, the raised barrel of a howitzer, and the Corps' raised swords. ABOVE: The central Leatherneck Gallery includes an AV-8B Harrier "jump jet" while a Sikorsky HRS-2 helicopter disembarks a machine-gun unit onto a Korean War position.

All photos courtesy of the National Museum of the Marine Corps

TOP: An amphibious tractor scales a coconut log wall on Tarawa during World War II. ABOVE LEFT: Marines watch the battle taking place above them in the WWII Gallery. ABOVE: An Ontos antitank vehicle rumbles through Hue City in the Vietnam exhibit. LEFT: The early history of the Marine Corps is represented by this diorama.

tion and bus ride, from the first haircut to graduation. Meet your drill instructors and spend some close-up and personal time with them. Lift a pack, do some pull-ups, and qualify on the M-16 laser rifle range—and learn that every Marine is a rifleman.

Uncommon Valor: Marines in World War II. Recall hard-fought battles across the Pacific: Guadalcanal, Peleliu, Iwo Jima. Look for a Wildcat and Avenger patrolling the skies. Just outside a Japanese-held cave, a Sherman tank stands ready. Receive your briefing before boarding a Higgins Boat to land on the beach at Iwo Jima; the Corps' most sacred icon in this gallery is the actual flag raised on Mt. Suribachi.

Send in the Marines–The Korean War. Follow the Marines in this "forgotten" war. Land at Inchon, fight in the streets of Seoul, brave the cold at "Frozen Chosin" Reservoir (a huge diorama in which the air conditioning is purposely set low to give you a physical chill as well as an emotional one), and endure the tedium and tension of the "see-saw" years of the war. A Sikorsky helicopter and Panther jet tell stories of the Marines' innovative use of aircraft, while a Pershing tank fights an urban battle.

In the Air, on Land and Sea–The War in Vietnam. It was a long conflict fought in hamlets, cities, jungles, and rice paddies. In a recreated village (this time, with real heat to convey the tropical atmosphere of Vietnam), find the weapons of this war. Learn about how helicopters made all the difference! Onboard a CH-46 helicopter, you will be inserted on Hill 881 South at Khe Sanh—in a hot landing. An A-4 Skyhawk serves as a movie screen, while an Ontos and a captured Soviet artillery piece add realism to the gallery.

Gulf War on Terrorism: The U.S. Marine Corps in Today's Fight. Images from Combat Camera personnel take you from the acts of terrorism of September 11, 2001, to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. These photographs capture powerful images that add personality and emotion to battlefield scenes.

There is also a restaurant, gift shop, and cinema on the premises.

No doubt about it—a visit to the National Museum of the Marine Corps is one you and your family will long remember.

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icans reached them. As dawn came on February 10, though, it was clear that the fighting in the Hürtgen Forest was drawing to a close.

Although it was finally in American hands, the Schwammenauel Dam damages caused a slow flooding of the Rur that ultimately delayed Grenade until February 23, when engineers expected most of the water would be drained from the dam's reservoir.

The Allied logistical situation, coupled with tactical opportunities, had led to the First Army's September 1944 head-on encounter with the Hürtgen Forest. However, logistics alone did not dictate that General Hodges keep his troops fighting there. Fairly addressing why the First Army entered the forest to begin with—and the stubborn continuation of operations there—requires understanding of the logistical constraints on the U.S. forces and the context of the operational decisions.

The 12th Army Group's stunning drive across France and Belgium drew to a stop in mid-September 1944 in large part because supplies were not moved forward at a pace to sustain the maneuver forces. The logistical plan fell apart because it depended on establishing intermediate supply bases across northern France and onward toward Germany. This did not happen because supply, maintenance, and transport units could not move literally millions of tons of supplies fast enough. [Editor's note: see the Red Ball Express article elsewhere in this issue.]

While conservatism in logistical planning has received due criticism from students of the campaign, the success of Operations Overlord/Neptune was too important to trust anything to chance. It was a necessary trade-off of the available time to plan. It is further doubtful that anyone could have foreseen the collapse of the Heer in Normandy. Even had the planners done so, constraints on trans-Atlantic shipping (if nothing else) would have prevented them from assembling enough transportation resources to support what became the pursuit to the German border.

Tactical/operational opportunities outweighed the supply constraints and the lead elements of the American V and VII Corps drew up to the German border exhausted and short on everything from antifreeze to ammunition.

Based on what Eisenhower and his subordinates knew at the time, the decision to drive through the German border without a thorough logistical pause made sense. However, putting the First Army alongside the British 21st Army Group forced the Americans to confront some of the strongest German border defenses and the Hürtgen-Ardennes region. Unsure of German strength, committed to gaining the Rhine on a broad front, and, based in part on their experiences in World War I's Meuse-Argonne campaign, Hodges and his colleagues were unwilling to simply bypass the forest. Unfortunately, once operations began there, commanders "had the bear by the tail and we just couldn't turn loose." Yet the campaign in the Hürtgen Forest was not the product of a single order. Rather, it was the product of a series of decisions.

Efforts to maintain the momentum of the pursuit were at first logical, but Hodges and his corps commanders did not see the evolving conditions that should have forced them to rethink their operations. They knew full well in September that their own forces were terribly weakened from the pursuit but they persisted in thinking that their enemy was weaker, or at least that penetrating the border defenses would force the Germans to fall back to the Rhine. For their part, the Germans were able to take advantage of the condition of the American maneuver units in September-early October to stabilize the situation and use their defenses to the best advantage. Only their most senior commanders were aware at the time of plans for the pending Ardennes attack. Even to corps commanders, the forest held no particular value outside of the fact that the Americans were bleeding to death in its midst. Only late in the autumn did the area take on an important role as the northern shoulder of that upcoming offensive.

Barring the discovery of new evidence, it is hard to conclude that the Rur dams were particularly important in the thinking of American commanders before November. Some expressed concern early on about their potential impact, but the dams simply were not stated objectives until December. The only specific objectives mentioned in operations plans and orders were towns and roads. These were important to sustaining an attack across the Rur, but they would mean nothing if forces across the river were trapped by floodwaters.

By the time the Americans launched attacks aimed specifically at the dams, the Germans were also well aware of their importance and they devoted an exceptional amount of artillery and armor reserves to their defense.

When the fighting was over in early February 1945, the casualties had been appalling—probably 35,000 Americans and at least as many Germans fell there to all causes. Many of these losses happened before December, when the Rur dams were finally the objectives of a ground attack. Decisions have consequences, and the irony of this campaign in particular is that it was the product of so many decisions that were generally valid at the time they were made.

The Hürtgen Forest is a relatively compact area, and it is stunning to think of the bloodletting that occurred there. Dispersed operations characterize maneuver combat today; traditional linear operations, when they occur at all, might have 20-mile-deep brigade sectors.

On the other hand, standing on one side of the Germeter-Hürtgen road, it is hard to imagine the intensity of fighting that prevented GIs from crossing only 30 yards to take the buildings on the other side. Other than distant traffic noise, the forest is nearly silent today—only the creaking of the fir branches in the wind; maybe the rustle of a deer—thankfully, nothing more. □

Rationing

Continued from page 67

Crime was also a serious problem throughout the nation at that time. Ration books and stamps were regularly stolen, even from OPA offices. Counterfeiting grew into a real problem as both ration books and stamps were regularly forged. Some of this forging was of excellent quality as "top professionals" expanded their efforts from the counterfeiting of money to the excellent counterfeiting of ration books and stamps.

A significant black market was another problem, with, for the most part, the black marketers selling meat, sugar, and gasoline. The demand for black-market gasoline was significant enough to cause armed criminals to attempt to hijack trucks on solitary roads; many drivers started carrying guns.

Yet, in spite of all its difficulties, did rationing work? Lingeman stated that "rationing was the most concerted attack on wartime inflation and scarcity, and by and large it worked."

One way to examine the success or failure of rationing in this "concerted attack" was to consider the U.S. Government Consumer Price Index (CPI) calculations during the war. CPI is an inflationary pointer that measures the change in the cost of a fixed basket of products and services, including housing, electricity, food, and transportation. The CPI is also called the Cost-of-Living Indicator and for America's war years—1942, 1943, 1944, and 1945—the figures were:

$1.00 in 1942 had the same buying power as $1.06 in 1943.

$1.00 in 1943 had the same buying power as $1.02 in 1944.

$1.00 in 1944 had the same buying power as $1.02 in 1945.

Using 1942 as a base year, inflation ran at six percent in 1943, and then remained lower and constant at two percent in 1944 and 1945.

Although the rationing system was widely hated and often abused, it worked. The massive American military machine rarely lacked for any essential item. □

The American Few

Continued from page 51

by a German, and the first three would be blown up, leaving the remaining one victorious until he turned into the guns of another opponent.

"[It was] a giant Fourth of July display, only much more ominous. The spent bullets were falling like hailstones, so hot they made a sizzling noise as they struck the water."

Mahon finally drifted ashore, to be the only airman of some 3,000 Allied prisoners in the debacle—and the seventh Eagle—to be captured by the Germans. The Eagle Squadrons' scores over Dieppe were nine confirmed, four probable kills, and 14 damaged; that brought the Squadrons' final scores to 41 for 71 Squadron, 18 for 121 Squadron, and 14½ for 133 Squadron.

A month later, on September 29, 1942, the Eagle Squadrons were inducted into the U.S. Army Air Forces as the Fourth Fighter Group (FFG) of the Eighth Air Force. The former Eagles were allowed to wear their RAF wings—the only American servicemen permitted to wear foreign insignia. The one-time service reject, Chesley Peterson, became, at 23, the youngest colonel in the USAAF.

The FFG went on to be the highest-scoring American unit in the European Theater, with 1,016 victories. The *Athenia* survivor, James A. Goodson, would be the group's third-ranking ace with 30 victories, until he became one himself for a German pilot and was captured.

Losses among Americans serving in the RAF were heavy. Of the first who served in the Battle of Britain, only John Kenneth Haviland, who never joined the Eagle Squadrons, survived the war. He flew with the RAF for the entire war, earning a DFC, and was later Professor of Aeronautics at the University of Virginia. He died in July 2002.

Of the 244 serving in the Eagle Squadrons, 77 were killed flying with the RAF, then another 31 with the FFG, for a staggering loss rate of 44 percent.

After the war, Byron Kennerly, the former Eagle who did not face such risks, but fraudulently claimed he did, let his incorrigibility cross over into criminality and went to prison for bank robbery. He died in Los Angeles in 1967. Some Eagles continued with the Air Force, with Chesley Peterson and another Eagle retiring as major generals.

William Dunn went on his controversial way. He wanted to stay with the RAF, but "it was sort of implied that if I didn't agree to a transfer, they'd come and get me." He was transferred in June 1943 and finished the war flying in Burma as an acting lieutenant colonel. After being an "adviser" with Chiang Kai-Shek's Nationalists in China, Dunn was unexpectedly denied permanent promotion to captain in the U.S. Air Force in 1949 and he was summarily discharged. He immediately reenlisted as a sergeant, eventually seeing action in Vietnam, and finished with a career total of 378 combat missions.

On the day he finally retired, February 1, 1973, he was promoted in one jump from chief warrant officer to lieutenant colonel. At the ceremony he was also, finally, recognized by the Royal Air Force as both the first Eagle to down a German fighter and the first American ace of World War II.

Blunt as always, Dunn wrote in the aftermath of Vietnam: "I have been asked what I thought about young men who refused to serve in the military in the defense of our nation. My thoughts are expressed completely in the following statement: War is an ugly thing, but not the ugliest of things; the decayed and degraded state of moral and patriotic feeling which thinks that nothing is worth war is much worse. A man who has nothing for which he is willing to fight; nothing he cares about more than his own personal safety; is a miserable creature who has no chance of being free unless made and kept so by the exertions of better men than himself."

One of Dunn's "better men," Billy Fiske, is memorialized on a plaque in the crypt below St. Paul's Cathedral in London: AN AMERICAN CITIZEN WHO DIED THAT ENGLAND MIGHT LIVE. □




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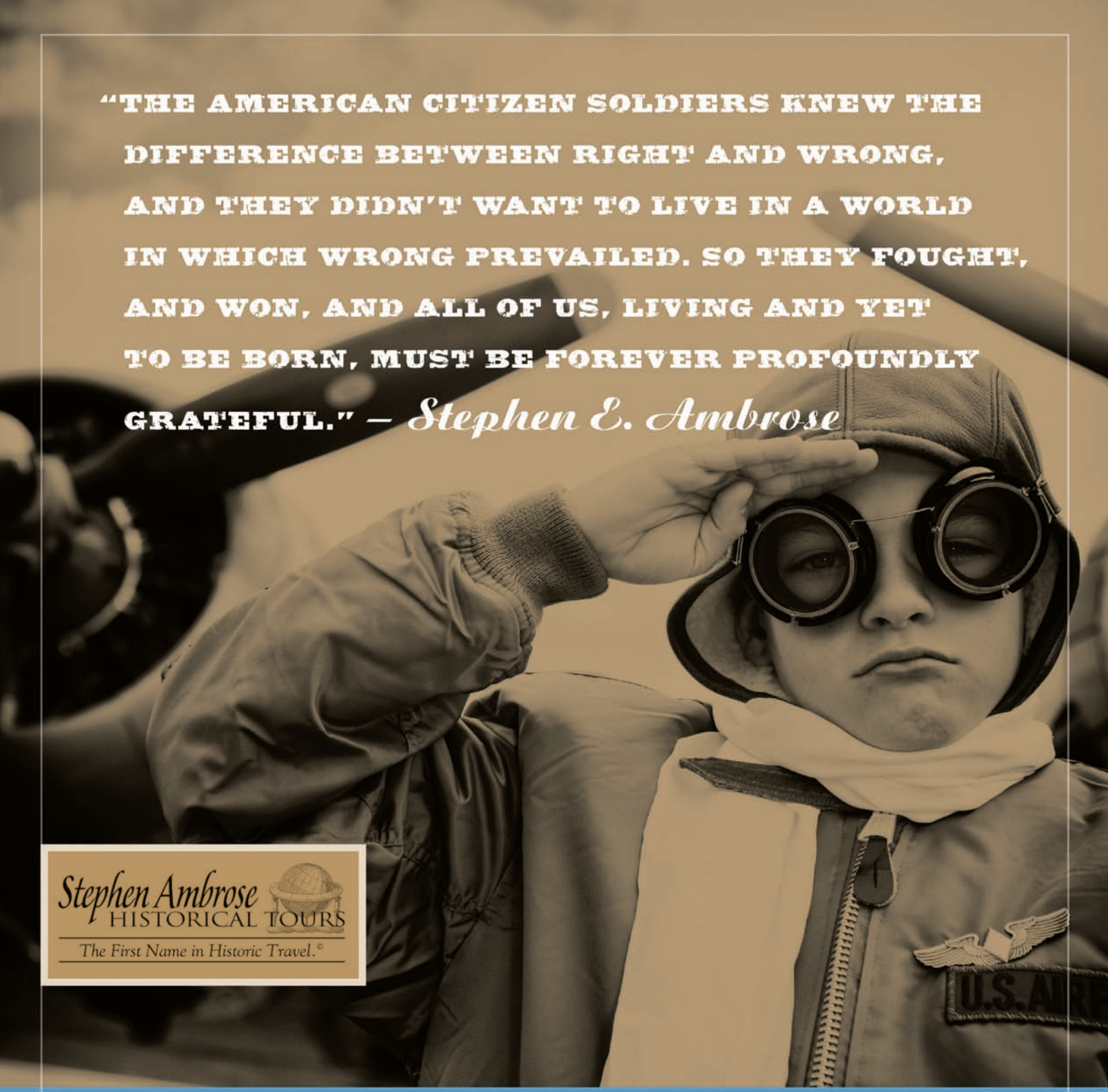

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