SPECIAL AIRBORNE ASSAULT ISSUE!

WWII QUARTERLY

Curtis 07256

JOURNAL OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR

AIRBORNE INTERVIEW

Aerial Assault on "A Bridge Too Far"

Costly German Capture of Crete

EBEN EMAEL

Fallschirmjäger Blitzkrieg

A Screaming Eagle Remembers

From D-Day to the Bulge

OPERATION MARKET-GARDEN

Yanks Land in Holland

LOS BAÑOS RAID

Jumping to the Rescue

Plus: AIRBORNE TRANSPORT, JUMPIN' JIM GAVIN, AIRBORNE TRAINING, JUMPING THE RHINE, AND MORE!

WINTER 2010

$9.99

50>

0 74470 07256 0

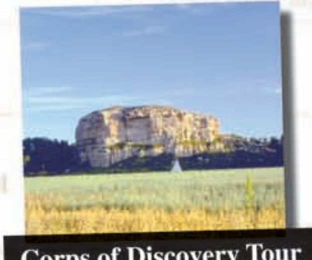
WWII QUARTERLY ▪ WINTER 2010 *Volume 1, No. 2*

Experience history first-hand.

Stephen E. Ambrose always said that the best way to understand history is to study the places where it was made. Whether visiting Omaha Beach with D-Day veterans to pay homage to their fallen, following the path of Lewis and Clark down the Missouri River, or tromping the battlefields of the Civil War, Dr. Ambrose sought to enlighten, entertain and educate with his tours. Since 1979, when he began leading informal tours to Europe, Stephen Ambrose has introduced generations, young and old, to the American heroes—citizen soldiers—who fought and won a nation's freedom.

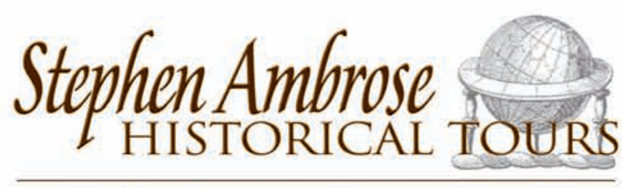
2010 Tour Dates

D-Day to the Rhine – *June & September*
Band of Brothers – *May & September*
WWII in Poland & Germany – *September*
In the Footsteps of Patton – *June*
Italian Campaign – *October*
The Champagne Campaign – *May*
Lewis & Clark's Corps of Discovery – *June*
Civil War: The Mississippi Campaign – *November*
Iwo Jima: War in the Pacific – *March*
Israel – *April*



Space for all tours is limited — call today and reserve your spot.

Toll Free 1-888-903-3329
www.stephenambrosetours.com



Preserve the Legacy Forever

Introducing *WWII Quarterly*, The Journal of World War II

Available in Exclusive Hardcover Volumes

Now, for the first time, an exciting new magazine devoted to the study of World War II is available in exclusive hardbound editions. Subscription copies to *WWII QUARTERLY* are meticulously hardbound for your family library, and will be delivered to your home in pristine condition.

Exquisitely Crafted

From The Battle of The Bulge to Iwo Jima, the history experts at Sovereign Media, publisher of *WWII History* magazine, will document the battles like never before, in a beautiful new hardbound magazine suitable for your coffee table or family library.

An Exceptional Value

Only those who reserve mail subscriptions will receive the exclusive hardbound volumes of *WWII QUARTERLY*. A softcover version will be available in the bookstores and on newsstands, but no hardbound volumes will be available for sale at any store nationwide. You can only receive them by subscribing here, today. Yet, *your four-issue, hardbound subscription costs the same as the softbound newsstand copies...* an exceptional value for subscribers!

Order Now

Don't delay. Sign up for your hardbound subscription now.

WWII QUARTERLY

Hardbound Edition

SUBSCRIPTION RESERVATION CARD

❑ *Two Years, 8 Hardbound issues, Only $79.95.*
❑ *One Year, 4 Hardbound issues, Only $39.95.*

❑ Credit Card (below) ❑ Payment Enclosed. ❑ Bill Me

Name____

Address______________________________________

City__________________ State_____ Zip__________

CREDIT CARD: ❑ Mastercard ❑ Visa ❑ American Express

Card Number: ____________________________________

Name on Card: _______________________ Exp. Date: _____ / _____

CVVC Code: ________ *(on back of MC & Visa; on front of AMEX)*

Canada and Overseas, please add $20 per year for additional postage. Payment in U.S. funds must accompany foreign orders.

Mail to: Sovereign Media, 1000 Commerce Park Dr., Suite 300, Williamsport, PA 17701

BD1003

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Features

18 **Silent Blitzkrieg: The Fall of Eben Emael**

A handful of well-trained German glider troopers subdued a seemingly impregnable fortress in a matter of hours.

ROBERT BARR SMITH

26 **Pyrrhic Parachute Victory in Crete**

Elite German parachute troops found the resistance from Commonwealth soldiers particularly brutal, but prevailed at terrible cost in the fight for the Greek island.

RICHARD RULE

38 **A Screaming Eagle's Journey**

Trooper Lud Labutka of the 502nd Parachute Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division, fought his way through Normandy, Holland, and the Battle of the Bulge.

RICHARD A. BERANTY

48 **British Paratrooper at Arnhem**

An interview with James Sims.

ERIC NIDEROST

58 **The Americans in Market-Garden**

Troopers of the U.S. 101st and 82nd Airborne Divisions fought with distinction during the air-ground assault in the autumn of 1944.

MAJ. GEN. MICHAEL REYNOLDS

72 Hell in a Small Place

Canadian paratroopers pierce the Rhine in March 1945.

BERND HORN

82 Canines to the Rescue

To help downed airmen, the U.S. Army trained dogs to parachute out of airplanes.

MICHAEL DOLAN AND KEVIN M. HYMEL

84 Angels to the Rescue

Thousands of prisoners were at risk outside Manila when the 11th Airborne Division staged a daring and coordinated assault to bring them to freedom.

ROBERT A. LYNN

92 Learning to Fly and Land—Hard

The U.S. Army's elite infantry had to earn their wings before they could leap into battle.

KEVIN M. HYMEL

Two fully equipped American airborne infantrymen await takeoff somewhere in Sicily. Photo courtesy of the National Archives.

Departments

06 Editorial

Warriors on the Wind

FLINT WHITLOCK

08 Ordnance

The Junkers Ju-52 was versatile enough to meet the Luftwaffe's ever-shifting transport missions.

WILLIAM E. WELSH

12 Profiles

General James M. Gavin and the 82nd Airborne Division became legendary during World War II.

MICHAEL D. HULL

Warriors in the Wind

IN THIS, OUR SECOND ISSUE of *WWII Quarterly,* we are pleased to devote much of it to exploring the contributions of the airborne forces—American, German, and British. Like commandos, rangers, mountain troops, frogmen, submariners, etc., paratroopers are regarded as one of the "elite" military forces.

Made up strictly of volunteers, these high-risk types of units are characterized as possessing tough, special training, distinctive capabilities, exceptional courage, and an unmatched esprit de corps. Often the first into battle, these units also traditionally suffered disproportionately high casualties. Yet, there were (and are today) no shortage of volunteers. It is amazing what some men (and women, too) will endure just to wear a small cloth insignia or metal badge on their uniforms signifying that they are a cut above the average.

Parachutes were first imagined by Leonardo da Vinci in the 15th century and tested by the Croatia-born Renaissance scholar Faust Vrancic when he jumped from a tower in Venice in 1617. People then began jumping from hot-air balloons and, once the airplane became a practical reality, from aircraft—primarily as a means of escape.

The credit for developing a military parachute doctrine goes to the French, Italians, and Russians in the 1920s. But it was Nazi Germany and Luftwaffe General Kurt Student who advanced the concept into a potent weapon of war, when Student's Fallschirmjäger units used this surprise technique on May 10, 1940, to capture Belgium's Eben Emael, then considered the strongest fortress in Europe. On that same day, an even larger drop of Fallschirmjäger took place during the invasion of Holland.

One year later, though, after Germany's successful airborne and glider raid on the British garrison at Crete resulted in heavy casualties to the sky soldiers, Hitler forbade further large-scale airborne assaults. At this same time, however, the British and Americans began expanding their airborne capabilities.

In this issue, we bring you fascinating stories of the airborne forces. You'll land with the Fallschirmjäger at Eben Emael, and try to take "a bridge too far" with the British paras in Holland. You'll learn about the harrowing experiences of a 101st Airborne Division trooper who jumped into France and the Netherlands. You'll be treated to photo essays of American paratrooper training and even the exploits of "para-dogs"—canines who earned their jump wings!

You'll find out about by the 11th Airborne Division's daring attempt to rescue POWs in the Philippines, and the Germans' last-gasp use of paratroopers during the Battle of the Bulge. And you'll discover the little-known exploits of Canadian paratroopers during Operation Varsity—the Allies' massive crossing of the Rhine near war's end. There's something inside for every fan of airborne operations.

On a personal note, I have a strong attachment to the paratroopers, as I made the required minimum five jumps at Fort Benning, Georgia, in 1965 to qualify for my parachutist's badge. I still recall the mixture of fear and exhilaration that I felt on those jumps (which I wrote about in my recent novel, *Internal Conflicts*)—the sense that, while jumping out of a perfectly good airplane with just a few square yards of silk attached to my shoulders, I was doing something either incredibly brave or incredibly stupid. I also still recall that, during my three weeks of grueling training, I gained a healthy respect and deep admiration for the airborne soldiers who, just 20 years earlier, had jumped into enemy-held territory and skies full of flying lead.

Today, some say that paratroopers are an anachronism, as militarily obsolete as the horse cavalry, their arrival in a battle zone having been superceded by helicopter-borne troops. That may be true from a strictly tactical point of view, but there is no denying that those who still qualify for their jump wings consider their training and "elite status" to be an important part of the overall military tradition, worthy of respect and emulation.

On more thing. As this is a brand-new publication, we hope you'll write or e-mail us with your comments—either praise or criticism. Let us know what your interests are and what kinds of articles you'd like to see. And, if you're a writer, please tell us what articles you would like to contribute. If it pertains to World War II, we want to see it!

Flint Whitlock, Editor

WWII History Quarterly

Volume 1 ■ Number 2

CARL A. GNAM, R.
Editorial Director, Founder

FLINT WHITLOCK
Editor
WWIIQuarterly@gmail.com

LAURA CLEVELAND
Managing Editor

SAMANTHA DETULLEO
Art Director

CONTRIBUTORS:
Richard A. Beranty, Michael Dolan, Bernd Horn, Michael D. Hull, Kevin M. Hymel, Eric Niderost, Michael Reynolds, Donald Roberts II, Richard Rule, Robert Barr Smith, Willliam E. Welsh

ADVERTISING OFFICE:

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

MARK HINTZ
Vice President & Publisher

TINA POUST
Comptroller

KATHY PAULHAMUS, MARY NOLAN, SANDRA HILLYARD
Subscription Customer Services

KEN FORNWALT
Data Processing Director

CURTIS CIRCULATION COMPANY
WORLDWIDE DISTRIBUTION

SOVEREIGN MEDIA COMPANY, INC.
453 Carlisle Drive, Herndon, VA 20170

SUBSCRIPTION CUSTOMER SERVICE AND BUSINESS OFFICE:

1000 Commerce Park Drive, Suite 300, Williamsport, PA 17701

(800) 219-1187

PRINTED IN THE USA.

Visit the Wolf's Lair in Poland...

- Hear the real story of 'Operation Valkyrie'
- Trace Stauffenberg's steps at the Wolf's Lair
- Visit the Rastenburg / Ketrzyn Airfield
- Experience the tragic history of Warsaw
- Krakow Tour with Schindler Factory
- Visit Auschwitz KZ Memorial Site
- Discover Hitler's Secret Bunkers
- Visit the 'Bendlerblock' in Berlin

WOLF'S LAIR TOURS
www.wolfslairtours.com

Call us toll-free for Tour details!
1 (888) 991-6718

look

If a picture is worth a 1000 words, then a trip here will leave you speechless.

- **Mar.13, 2010** - Learn to grow your own "Victory Garden" with the Permian Basin Master Gardeners. Call (432) 563-1000, ext. 2270 for details.
- **Mar. 19, 2010** - Leather Care workshop with Catherine Williams Silver Lining Art Conservation. Call (432) 563-1000, ext. 2270 for details.
- **May 31, 2010** - Celebrate Memorial Day with us! Special ceremony, fly-over, and activities for all ages! Call (432) 563-1000, ext. 2270 for details.

CAF Airpower Museum
Honoring America's Legacy of Freedom
educational affiliate to the Commemorative Air Force
9600 Wright Drive
Midland, Texas 79711
halfway between Midland and Odessa
(432) 563-1000
www.airpowermuseum.org
www.commemorativeairforce.org
www.airsho.org
(2-for-1 museum admission with this ad! Promo code WWQT10)

CAF Airpower Museum CAFMuseum

Iron Annie

The Junkers Ju-52 was versatile enough to meet the Luftwaffe's ever-shifting transport missions.

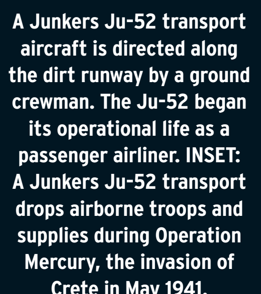
SHORTLY BEFORE DAWN on May 20, 1941, a flight of 500 transport planes took off from seven airstrips on mainland Greece. As they climbed upward, the tri-motor aircraft emerged from reddish-orange clouds of dust into blue sky. The dust clouds were generated by the propeller wash from hundreds of engines sitting on unpaved runways as the planes prepared for takeoff. Inside each aircraft, a dozen German paratroopers sat hunched on canvas benches sweating profusely inside their heavy uniforms. Each one welcomed the cool air that swept through the cabins once the aircraft were aloft.

The planes lumbered in tightly packed formations at low altitude over the pale blue waters of the Aegean Sea toward their objective. Once they crossed the coast of enemy-held Crete, they were greeted by a storm of flak that rocked the planes as if they were trees in the wind. Ignoring the turbulence, the veteran paratroopers stood up, shuffled toward the cargo door, and flung themselves spread eagle toward the ground below. Once the flight crews had delivered their human cargo to its destination, they turned their aircraft back toward the mainland to load the next wave. Operation Mercury, the largest airborne invasion the world had yet seen, was without doubt the finest hour of the Junkers Ju-52 transport, known to its crews as "Tante Ju," or Auntie Junkers.

The Ju-52 was originally envisioned as a commercial venture in 1925 by Deutsche Lufthansa. The concept moved from paper to production when the project was turned over to Junkers in 1928. Its chief designer, Ernst Zindel, oversaw work on two concepts. One was a single-engine freight aircraft (Ju-52/1m) and the other was a three-engine commercial passenger plane (Ju-52/3m) built to carry 17 passengers.

The first single-engine Ju-52 made its maiden flight on October 13, 1930. It was followed six months later by the three-engine version's maiden flight in April 1931. After just a few years in service, production of the single-engine version came to an abrupt halt in 1934, but the three-engine version, which offered better safety and considerably more power, captured the interest of Lufthansa as well as international customers that used the aircraft for both passenger and freight purposes.

A Junkers Ju-52 transport aircraft is directed along the dirt runway by a ground crewman. The Ju-52 began its operational life as a passenger airliner. INSET: A Junkers Ju-52 transport drops airborne troops and supplies during Operation Mercury, the invasion of Crete in May 1941.



The Ju-52/3m had a wing span of 29.5 meters and measured 18.9 meters from nose to tail. The all-metal plane (80/20 magnesium/aluminum) was easily recognized not only by its three-engine configuration but also by a box-like, corrugated fuselage that gave it an almost unfinished appearance.

Deutsche Lufthansa began flying the Ju-52/3m on heav-

Left:ullstein bild/Below: National Archives

ily traveled commercial routes, such as Berlin to London and Berlin to Rome in late 1932. Twenty-five countries throughout Europe and North and South America purchased the aircraft for commercial use during the 1930s. For 13 years from 1932 to 1945, the Junkers German factories produced Ju-52 variants. It was during its first few years in operation that the Ju-52 earned the endearing nicknames "Tante Ju" and "Eisen Annie" (Iron Annie) because of its reliability and performance that resulted in few forced landings and the need for minimal repair work.

When Adolf Hitler was elected chancellor of Germany in 1933, the future German dictator instructed the Air Ministry to put a plan into action to build a 1,000-plane air force. He did this despite the fact that Germany was prohibited from having any military aircraft through the Treaty of Versailles. Rather than develop an entirely new transport aircraft, the ministry ordered the conversion of a large number of existing aircraft from civilian to military use.

Minimal alteration was required. The Ju-52/3m freight version had a hatch in the roof for loading by crane, a large cargo door on the starboard side just behind the wing, and a door for passengers on the port side. A new hole was cut into the roof to accommodate a dorsal machine gun, and the interior was reconfigured for different missions.

The Ju-52/3m began its military service as a bomber during the Spanish Civil War. During the blitzkrieg period of World War II from 1939 to 1941 it served in a support role by delivering paratroopers to their targets, towing gliders carrying assault troops, and transferring air landing troops to captured airfields. After the invasion of Crete in May 1941, the airplane was used primarily for delivering fuel, ammunition, and supplies to troops in forward areas or isolated pockets and evacuating wounded.

A military version of Eisen Annie, designated the Ju-52/3mg3e was ready for service in 1934. While a version designated the Ju-52/3m Sa3 was already operating for the Reichswehr in the role of personnel transport, cargo carrier, and pilot trainer, the g3e was intended as an interim bomber before more sophisticated bombers were available in 1936. The military version was powered by three 660 hp BMW 132A radial engines and armed with dorsal and ventral 7.92 MG 15 machine guns, the latter of which was affixed to the aircraft's underside with a retractable dustbin attachment. When fully loaded, whether with troops or supplies, the aircraft had a top speed of 171 miles per hour and a cruising speed of about 120 miles per hour. The Ju-52/3m's round-trip range carrying a 1,984-pound load was 720 miles. This range increased to 900 miles with a lighter load (992 pounds) or decreased to 450 miles with a heavier load (3,306 pounds).

The Ju-52/3m was equipped with robust landing gear that enabled it to take off and land on dirt or grass strips as short as 400 meters that other aircraft could not use. What is more, the metal structure could withstand considerable punishment, which enabled the crews to complete their missions and limp back to safety when damaged.

Shortly after the Spanish Civil War broke out in July 1936, Hitler sent 20 Ju-52/3ms in September to support Nationalist General Francisco Franco in his struggle against the Republican forces on the Iberian peninsula. During the conflict, Eisen Annie served in a dual role of troop transport and interim bomber. Two years before, the Reichswehr (the Luftwaffe was not reconstituted until 1935) had requested that the Junkers plant at Dessau convert the Ju-52/3m to a bomber configuration (the g3e), and Junkers engineers had installed vertical magazines in its lower cargo bay to accommodate 3,306 pounds of explosives. The makeshift bombers operated with crews of five handling the positions of pilot, co-pilot, radio operator, dorsal gunner, and bombardier/ventral gunner.

National Archives/Below: Amber Books

German airborne troops are seated inside their Ju-52 transport plane en route to drop zones on Crete. The German paratroopers suffered horrendous casualties during the invasion but eventually secured the island after several days of hard fighting.

Early in the conflict, the Ju-52/3ms played a key role in transporting 13,900 Moorish troops and their heavy weapons to Spain. Lt. Col. Rudolf Moreau established the first official bomber squadron numbering 10 Ju-52/3mg3es in November 1936 to support the Nationalist ground forces. During the course of the conflict, the Moreau squadron dropped more than 6,000 tons of bombs on enemy positions and enemy-held territory. However, the Ju-52/3m's bomber days were numbered not only because of its lack of speed and maneuverability but because it could not accommodate the horizontal bomb racks that were being installed on newer medium-range bombers in production. As the fighter threat grew more severe in the following months, the Ju-52/3mg3e's were replaced with more advanced bombers, such as the Dornier Do-

17 and the Heinkel He-111. While the Spanish Civil War raged on into its third year, the Ju-52/3ms functioning as bombers were converted back to transports.

The invasion of Denmark and Norway on April 9, 1941, known as Operation Weserübung, heralded the use of Ju-52/3ms to deliver paratroopers and air landing forces to the battlefield. During Weserübung, the transports performed a number of key roles, including dropping paratroopers, ferrying air landing troops to captured airfields, and delivering heavy weapons and supplies to paratroopers and other ground forces.

Weserübung involved the first paratrooper attacks in military history. On the first day of the invasion, the paratroopers seized the Vordingborg Bridge linking Copenhagen with its ferry terminal and two airfields at Aalborg in Denmark. The Ju-52/3ms also dropped paratroopers at three key airfields in southern Norway at the cities of Oslo, Stavanger, and Kristiansand.

As the battle progressed over the following days, the Ju-52/3ms played a crucial role delivering weapons and supplies to the German troops fighting Allied forces at the North Sea port of Narvik. A particularly daring mission involved the ferrying of a fully equipped mountain battery to a frozen lake 15 miles north of Narvik with little chance of their returning due to the extreme conditions. The planes took off from Hamburg, refueled at Oslo, and proceeded to their destination. They remained on the frozen lake until they sank in the spring thaw. The lost planes, however, were only a small part of the Ju-52/3m losses incurred during the overall operation. The Luftwaffe counted about 150 transports destroyed or damaged beyond repair by the end of the affair. It was a taste of the heavy losses to come in campaigns ahead.

The Ju-52/3m had various types of landing gear to adapt to both snow and water. During the fighting in Norway, wheeled landing gear was replaced with floats to enable the planes to land in that country's numerous fjords. Similarly, skis replaced wheels when the Ju-52s had to land in the vast expanses of Russia during the cold months, whether at the front line or in rear areas. In addition, the service crews eventually removed the tear-shaped wheel covers from most planes serving on the Eastern Front when they discovered that mud collected quickly inside them.

National Archives

With a Ju-52 transport in the background, German Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt meets an Italian officer at an airfield. The Ju-52 carried personnel on long trips while also serving as the primary air transport for the resupply of the German Army.

Other modifications were made to accommodate paratroopers and to provide better protection against enemy fighter aircraft that attacked the Ju-52/3ms like sharks feeding on fish. The Ju-52 g4f included a reinforced cargo compartment floor, side, and loading doors. It could carry 12 to 13 fully equipped paratroopers and up to 18 air landing troops. In 1941, these planes were upgunned when the dorsal 7.9mm MG 15 was replaced with the 13mm MG 131. While the heavier gun afforded protection against attacks from the rear, the aircraft remained vulnerable to frontal attacks. For this reason, an additional MG 15 was installed in the roof of the cockpit and manned by the radioman. By this time the ventral dustbin had become impractical and was removed from many of the transports.

The Ju-52 also was employed as a minesweeper. At the start of the war, German scientists discovered that mines laid by British aircraft along German-held coastline could be detonated by a magnetic field. Thus, the Ju-52 g4f was outfitted with an enormous horizontal ring on the underside and wings. An electrical charge was fed into the aluminum ring by a battery. Since the mines were equipped with delayed fuses of seven seconds, the mines detonated about 200 to 300 meters behind the aircraft flying at low level. The minesweeper version was first deployed in 1940 along the Dutch coast and saw its greatest use along the coastline of occupied France.

The Junkers engineers designed two improved versions of the Ju-52 that were intended as replacements for the original design but never made it to full production. The Ju-252 had three Jumo 211 engines, was armed with the MG 131 dorsal gun placed directly behind the cockpit, and had nearly three times the load-carrying capacity of the Ju-52. It did not have the Ju-52's corrugated exterior, and it came equipped with a hydraulic rear loading ramp to make loading and unloading of weapons and equipment easier. After its maiden voyage in October 1941, roughly 15 were completed. The following year production began on the Ju-352. This variation was constructed of alternate materials, due to a shortage of metal, and featured three BMW-Bramo engines. The 352 made its maiden flight on October 1, 1943.

Following Weserübung, the Ju-52s had little time to be repaired and reoutfitted before they were delivering paratroopers to key objectives in Belgium and Holland the following month. About 430 Ju-52s participated in the operation. A group of 40 were assigned to tow DFS 230 gliders carrying assault troops who captured the Belgian fortress of Eben Emael, while the remaining 390 carried paratroopers and air landing troops to seize bridges and other objectives in Fortress Holland where the cities of Amsterdam and Rotterdam were located. The heavy attrition among the Luftwaffe's Ju-52 fleet continued in the Western Campaign with

167 of the aircraft involved destroyed.

An even larger, more significant airborne invasion took place almost exactly one year later. After the fall of mainland Greece, Hitler launched Operation Mercury to capture the island of Crete and deny the Allies the use of its three airfields. More than 500 Ju-52/3ms dropped the four parachute regiments of the 7th Air Division onto the island and also ferried the 5th Mountain Division to Maleme airfield, which was captured on the second day. It was the first battle conducted entirely by paratroops and air landing forces.

During the first day's assault, the Ju-52/3ms not only towed 75 gliders carrying the 7th Division's elite assault regiment but also delivered three regiments in two waves to seven separate objectives on the island's north coast. It was a costly battle in lives and equipment, with the Luftwaffe losing 271 of the 502 Ju-52/3m aircraft assigned to the operation. The thin-skinned fuselages and wings proved vulnerable to heavy antiaircraft fire from British and Commonwealth forces in strong positions. As a result of this experience and subsequent experiences on the Eastern Front, engineers made the air frames of a number of Ju-52s bulletproof to protect the flight crews.

More than 50 Ju-52/3ms had been deployed in December 1940 to Foggia, Italy, to support Italian operations in Albania and North Africa. They transported 1,665 Italian soldiers to Albania and evacuated more than 8,730 wounded Italians back to Italy over the next five months until Greece fell in April. Three months later, General Erwin Rommel arrived in North Africa at the port of Tripoli, Libya, with his Afrika Korps. Ju-52s were an integral part of supply operations from the time Rommel landed until the Germans evacuated the last of their forces from Tunisia in May 1943.

After United States forces invaded Morocco and Algeria in November 1942, U.S. fighters regularly intercepted Ju-52s engaged in the evacuation of forces from North Africa to Sicily. In a stunning aerial battle on April 5, 1943, U.S. Lockheed P-38 Lightnings jumped an armada of more than 50 Ju-52s in the early morning off the western coast of Sicily. The U.S. fighters shot 14 out of the sky and damaged 65 parked on Sicilian airstrips. Another Allied victory occurred on April 18 when U.S.

National Archives

German soldiers exit a Ju-52 which has just landed following a hazardous flight across the Mediterranean Sea from an airfield in Italy.

fighter aircraft pounced on an armada of 65 Ju-52s moving men and materiel and shot down 24 planes. Nevertheless, the Ju-52s left behind an impressive legacy, having flown 8,388 soldiers and ferried 5,040 tons of supplies to North Africa to support Rommel's campaigns.

The Junkers factories increased production of Ju-52/3ms from 388 in 1940 to 502 and 503 in 1941 and 1942, respectively. The increased production was necessary to literally feed the hungry stomachs of Germans soldiers on the Eastern Front. Five of the six air transport groups were shifted to occupied territories in the East to support troops operating hundreds of miles from the German frontier where partisans frequently disrupted supply lines and retreating Soviet forces practiced a scorched earth policy.

When their blitzkrieg ground to a halt a short distance from Moscow during the winter of 1941, large numbers of Germans were cut off in subsequent Soviet counterattacks. The only way they could receive supplies was by Ju-52s either landing on airstrips inside the pockets or dropping supplies from the air. The largest pocket stemming from the Soviet winter offensive of 1941-1942 resulted in the creation of the Demyansk pocket where nearly 100,000 German soldiers were surrounded by the Soviet Eleventh and Thirty-Fourth Armies. The forces trapped inside the Demyansk cauldron required about 300 tons of supplies per day. About 75 Ju-52s flew 33,000 sorties into the pocket, which existed from February 8 to April 21, 1942.

While the Ju-52s rose to the occasion in those situations, they would not be able to meet the impossible demands of supplying the German Sixth Army when it was surrounded at Stalingrad by four Soviet army groups in mid-November 1942. The success at Demyansk made Luftwaffe chief Hermann Göring and others believe it would be possible to supply the troops until they could be relieved. The daily requirement was 600 tons, which was twice that of the Demyansk pocket. This would require 300 Ju-52s. Even though all air transport resources on the Eastern Front were brought to bear, the number could not be mustered, and the actual number available steadily declined through battle losses. The greatest amount of supplies ever delivered on a given day was 289 tons, while the average was around 90 tons.

When the last airfield (Pitomnik) inside the pocket fell to the Soviets in mid-January 1943, the transports resorted to dropping supplies from the air. By the time the Sixth Army surrendered on February 2, the Luftwaffe had lost the equivalent of 266 Ju-52s in a futile effort to supply the beleaguered forces.

Like the breadwinner who is devoted to feeding his family, the Ju-52 would supply troops with food and ammunition in other major pockets until the end of the war, including the Crimean peninsula in 1944-1945, Budapest, and Breslau. Of the 2,822 Ju-52/3ms produced from 1939 to 1944, only 190 were left in service when Berlin fell on May 7.

Although the Ju-52/3m was clearly inferior in terms of flight speed and payload to the U.S. Douglas DC-3 Dakota/C-47 Skytrain, it has earned accolades from military aviation experts for its versatile performance during the war. There is little doubt that it will be associated for a long time with both the highs and lows of the Third Reich in World War II. □

Vienna, Virginia, freelance writer William Welsh has written articles on conflicts from the Middle Ages to World War II. He is also a regular contributor to Sovereign Media's Military Heritage *magazine.*

Airborne Tour of Duty

General James M. Gavin and the 82nd Airborne Division became legendary during World War II.

SHORTLY AFTER MIDNIGHT on Monday, June 5, 1944, the dark skies over the coast of northern France were filled with thunder.

Fourteen hundred C-47 and C-53 transport planes and 3,500 gliders were carrying 20,000 British and American paratroopers to assigned drop zones behind the French coast to spearhead the massive, long-awaited Allied invasion of Normandy on the morning of June 6. The airborne soldiers were to seize key junctions and bridges and to prevent German reinforcements from reaching the five landing beaches.

Wave after wave of planes droned over the coast and approached their drop zones. Inside each transport and glider, young paratroopers sat tensely fingering their weapons, adjusting their heavy packs, and waiting for the order to hook up and jump.

National Archives

Adjusting his parachute pack, James Gavin prepares to jump into Holland during Operation Market-Garden in September of 1944. Despite being injured in the jump, Gavin retained command of the 82nd Airborne.

The U.S. 82nd and 101st Airborne divisions, led by Maj. Gens. Matthew B. Ridgway and Maxwell D. Taylor, respectively, were headed for the town of Ste. Mere-Eglise astride the Merderet River in the Cotentin Peninsula. Maj. Gen. Richard N. Gale's British 6th Airborne Division was headed for a 24-square-mile area east of Caen, where the famed "Red Devils" were to capture bridges on the Caen Canal and the Orne River and knock out a coastal battery at Merville threatening British landings at Sword Beach.

The formations of transports carrying the American paratroopers neared six drop zones within a few miles of Ste. Mere-Eglise. In the first C-47, leading the battle-tested 82nd "All-American" Division, a slim, handsome officer peered through a window at the darkness and waited impatiently. Except for pathfinders who had jumped an hour earlier to prepare the drop zones, Brig. Gen. James Maurice Gavin, deputy commander of the division, would be the first man to parachute 10 miles behind the German lines.

Thirty-seven-year-old Gavin and his men had taken off from Cottesmore in the English Midlands a few hours before. Gavin knew that his troopers had only eight and a half minutes in which to jump in order to land in the correct drop zones. After ordering the men to stand and hook up their parachutes, Gavin glanced out of the window again and saw the thickest fog he had ever seen. He could see nothing—not even the next plane.

The fuselage door was opened, and suddenly the fog disappeared. "It was gone just as quickly as it had appeared," Gavin reported later. "I could see Ste. Mere-Eglise down there. I think it was the most dramatic moment of my life. Everything had depended on us jumping at just the right time." A few seconds later, he shouted, "Let's go!" He tumbled out of the door at an altitude of 600 feet, and stick after stick of paratroopers leaped out into the darkness.

Men of the 101st Division dropped into flooded meadows near Utah Beach after their

planes slipped past German coastal batteries without being fired on. But the 82nd ran into increasing fire, and many inexperienced pilots veered off course during the final run into the drop zones. Many troopers jumped several minutes too late into a sky filled with tracers and small-arms fire. They were critically scattered.

Ridgway's division fared much worse than Taylor's. Some men landed as much as 25 miles from Ste. Mere-Eglise, and many of the gliders plowed into hedgerows and buildings, pancaked into rivers, or settled helplessly into the Merderet River marshes. Casualties were high, and 60 percent of all equipment—including mortars, radios, and ammunition—was lost. Hundreds of gear-laden troopers fell into treacherous swamps, and many drowned in less than two feet of water. Only one unit of the 82nd, the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, jumped into its assigned zone.

Meanwhile, scattered groups of troopers struggled out of the marshes, using toy mechanical crickets to recognize each other in the darkness and trying to regroup and organize themselves. General Ridgway found himself alone, pistol in hand, in a field. At this time, Gavin was miles away in the Merderet River swamps. He had dropped into a pasture north of La Fiere, far from his assigned drop zone. But "Slim Jim" Gavin wasted no time, for he knew that by dawn his men would be under heavy attack when the German defenders realized what was happening.

By 4 AM, he had managed to round up a small group of stray troopers. He stood knee deep in cold water while the men tried unsuccessfully to salvage an antitank gun from a half-submerged Waco cargo glider. Gavin did not know where he was until his aide, Lieutenant Hugo Olson, reported that there was a railroad embankment nearby. The general knew that the Cherbourg-Carentan line passed through the Merderet valley. He felt better.

He led his band, which now numbered about 200, southward along the embankment to the vicinity of La Fiere, where he found another 300 men from various regiments milling about. Gavin split the force. He kept half at La Fiere, to seize the bridge there, and sent the other men to Chef-du-Pont to capture another bridge.

National Archives

Dotting the sky, men of the 82nd Airborne exit a C-47 transport aircraft and descend earthward.

As the sun rose on June 6, Gavin found himself walking back and forth between La Fiere and Chef-du-Pont, organizing and encouraging his troops as they fought to secure the two vital Merderet River spans. The Chef-du-Pont bridge was seized after a bitter fight, but it would take two days to capture the La Fiere span from the tenacious Germans.

Meanwhile, Gavin's men dug in around the Merderet and Douve crossings and held the rear of Utah Beach, where the 4th Infantry Division was landing. Gavin, never without his M-1 rifle, was close to his men at all times. They loved and respected him because he was a first-class soldier and was concerned with their welfare. They called him "Grandma" because his first question to a GI was often: "When was the last time you had a hot meal, son?" His rapport with enlisted men was unique among generals.

"He was the kind of man who never had to raise his voice," said Jack Norton, who served under him for nine years. "He led by example." Another trooper, Sergeant William Tucker, reported, "Gavin was always up front prowling around ... Wherever the battle was, wherever the troops needed to see and hear him, there was Gavin." Ted Morgan, a medical corpsman and later selectman in Edgartown, Massachusetts, would recall Gavin administering first aid to a badly injured staff sergeant during the Battle of the Bulge and bandaging him up.

He seemed to be fearless. Bill Walton of *Time* magazine reported, "I remember seeing the two of them (Ridgway and Gavin) walking down a road in Normandy with all sorts of stuff flying around. I was creeping along down in the ditch by the side of the road, and when they saw me, they yelled simultaneously, 'Get up here and walk like a man!' And I did." Gavin was a soldier's soldier. One division veteran recalled, "He could jump higher, shout louder, spit farther, and fight harder than any man I ever saw."

The All-Americans fought hard on a minimum of rest and food during those early days in Normandy. By the morning of June 8, they had gained almost full control of their objective area and were eliminating pockets of resistance. Casualties were high; on D-Day alone, the 82nd lost 1,259 men killed, wounded, or missing.

After the capture of the La Fiere bridge and the successful drop of the 325th Glider Infantry Regiment, the 82nd Airborne began a drive to cut off the Cotentin Peninsula. The troopers captured Saint Sauveur-le-Vicomte and advanced to La Haye du Puits near the western coast of the peninsula. Casualties continued to mount; 57 percent of the division's men were killed or wounded in 33 days of fighting without relief.

In the second week of July 1944, with the Normandy beachhead secured and the strategic port of Cherbourg in American hands, the exhausted troopers of the two airborne divisions boarded LSTs for England. The 82nd had 5,245 of its men listed as casualties. In Southampton, brass bands greeted the All-Americans, and in the Midland towns around their base, they were treated to many rounds of drinks in the inns.

General Gavin was awarded a cluster to his Distinguished Service Cross for "extraordinary heroism" while personally reorganizing a battalion and directing an attack on the town of Le Motey on June 9. That August, when General Ridgway was given command of the 18th Airborne Corps, Gavin moved up to head the 82nd Airborne Divi-

National Archives

sion. At 37, he was the youngest divisional commander in the Army since the Civil War.

The man who was proving to be one of the leading airborne tacticians and combat officers of World War II came from humble beginnings. Born in Brooklyn, New York, on March 22, 1907, Gavin was orphaned before he was two years old. He was adopted by Martin and Mary (Tearle) Gavin, and brought up in Mount Carmel, Pennsylvania. His new father was a semi-literate immigrant coal miner, and the family lived in poverty. "My parents were kind people; they could hardly read or write," Gavin recalled. The boy attended parochial schools and did odd jobs to help support his parents—delivering newspapers, picking coal, and assisting in a barber shop.

Young Jim developed a thirst for knowledge, with a particular interest in military affairs. He wrote an outline of the Civil War for his class and read every book he could get his hands on. There was then no library in the town, so he had to content himself with reading the books in the store where he picked up his newspapers. At the age of 15, Jim left school to become a clerk in a shoe store and later managed a filling station. But by the time he was 17, he was restless.

He was frustrated by his lack of education and felt that he had exhausted the few opportunities that Mount Carmel offered. Learning that he could further his education in the Army, he left home a week after his 17th birthday in 1924 and enlisted in the Coast Artillery. He served in the 16th and 2nd Regiments and rose to corporal in 15 months.

Assigned to the Panama Canal Zone, Jim was delighted to find a library at his new post. He made full use of it, teaching himself algebra and other subjects. An old sergeant persuaded him to take a competitive examination for admission to the U.S. Military Academy. Gavin had only an eighth-grade education, but he was ambitious and determined. He laboriously mastered the textbooks page by page, managed to pass the tests, and was accepted as a cadet at West Point on June 30, 1925.

With his humble background and lack of education, he realized that he was an oddball in the Long Gray Line. "When they got me, they got a case they could put in a laboratory and watch," he said later. "I was a perfect experimental subject. Well, they stimulated me to study my goddamn head off. I began to read extensively." To pass his first-semester "writs," the young man had to get up at 4:30 AM and study in the barracks latrines. He persevered, squeaking through his first year and gradually catching up with his classmates. He finished in the top third of his class, ranking 185th in a class of 299. Gavin graduated on June 13, 1929, and was commissioned in the infantry.

After taking three months of flight training at the Army Air Corps Primary Flying School at Brooks Field in Texas, Lieutenant Gavin joined the 25th Infantry Regiment at Camp Harry S. Jones in Arizona. Then followed tours of duty with the Infantry School at Fort Benning, Georgia (graduating in 1933), and with infantry regiments in Oklahoma, the Philippines, and Washington State. He was promoted to first lieutenant in 1934 and captain in 1939.

In August 1940, Gavin returned to West Point as an instructor in tactics. He studied the European war closely, particularly airborne operations, and saw their almost limitless possibilities. He applied for a transfer to a new parachute battalion at Fort Benning, but he was one of the best young instructors at the academy and the superintendent disapproved it. But Gavin persisted, cajoling a friend at the War Department to pull some strings and find a replacement for him at West Point. So, in August 1941, the tenacious young officer left for the new Army Parachute School at Fort Benning.

He completed jump training and displayed considerable ability in organizing and training units in airborne infantry tactics. Promoted to major and then lieutenant colonel, he attended the Command and General Staff School at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and eventually took command of the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment at Fort Benning in the summer of 1942. He welded the regiment into an efficient unit. Gavin devoted himself fully to airborne tactics, though he would often admit to his men, "Jumping is a poor means of transportation from the plane to the ground." The regiment was transferred to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, where it became part of the new 82nd Airborne Division. Gavin became a temporary colonel in September 1942, and the following April the division was sent overseas.

After a 12-day voyage, Maj. Gen. Matthew B. Ridgway's division docked in Casablanca on May 10, 1943. It moved overland by train to Oujda in French Morocco, where pup tents were set up and more training started. The troopers chafed and itched for action. Ridgway told them, "You've got to be tough because the German you meet will be goddamned tough!"

Ridgway told Gavin that the 82nd and the British 1st Airborne Division were to spear-

head Operation Husky, the Allied invasion of Sicily, that July. It would be the largest two-nation sea and air assault in history and would inflict the first sledgehammer blow on Nazi-held Europe. There were not enough C-47s available to drop the entire division, so the initial assault would be made by Gavin's 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, reinforced by a battalion of Colonel Reuben H. Tucker's 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment. They would be the first U.S. troops to invade Europe—in the first American airborne operation on a regimental scale, and the first mass parachute drop at night.

More training followed in bivouac at Kairouan, Tunisia. After General Dwight D. Eisenhower, the Allied ground commander, and his Algiers staff finally approved the plan for Operation Husky, Colonel Gavin distributed a letter on July 9 to his troopers. It read, "Tonight you embark upon a combat mission for which our people and the free people of the world have been waiting for two years.... The eyes of the world are upon you. The hopes and prayers of every American go with you...."

The airborne drops would precede an amphibious invasion by General Bernard L. Montgomery's British Eighth Army and Lt. Gen. George S. Patton Jr.'s U.S. Seventh Army. The paratroopers would block enemy counterattacks against the beaches and seize key bridges to block Axis reinforcements. Gavin's force was to drop north and northeast of the port of Gela and capture strategic high ground at Piano Lupo, while the British "Red Devils" would land in gliders and take the Ponte Grande bridge to allow the Eighth Army to attack Syracuse.

The Allied armada steamed toward the rocky island of Sicily. Daylight was fading on July 9 as Brigadier P.H.W. Hicks's British paratroopers clambered aboard 144 Horsa and Waco gliders at airfields around Kairouan. C-47s and Royal Air Force Albemarle and Halifax bombers towed them aloft and droned toward Sicily. Two hours later, Gavin's force boarded 266 C-47s and took off into the night.

The inexperienced pilots ran into high winds shortly after takeoff, and the transports were blown off course as heavy weather assaulted the armada below. Many of the C-47s missed signal beacons on Malta, two gave

National Archives

National Archives

ABOVE: Transport aircraft fly low over an open field as the 82nd Airborne conducts a training exercise in North Africa. RIGHT: Maj. Gen. James M. Gavin. OPPOSITE: Gesturing toward a map of the landing area, Gavin holds a briefing for his staff shortly before the Holland jump.

up and returned to North Africa, and one plane crashed into the Mediterranean. Instead of approaching in orderly V-formations, many of the planes carrying Gavin's men neared Sicily from every direction.

The British were faring worse. Approaching Cape Passero, the British formation was hit by enemy antiaircraft fire and tracers, and confused pilots released their gliders prematurely. Sixty-seven gliders plunged into the sea with a loss of 200 men, and only five gliders managed to reach Cape Passero. Less than 100 Red Devils reached the Ponte Grande bridge, but they held it until British infantry arrived.

Meanwhile, riding in a C-47 that was off course, Colonel Gavin stood in the open door and looked for a landmark. There was land beneath, but was it Sicily? The green light flashed, and Gavin leaped into the darkness. Immediately behind him came bearded John H. Thompson of the *Chicago Tribune*.

When he hit the ground, Gavin was still not sure that he had landed in Sicily. Twenty troopers landed near him, but the officer did not know that the airborne assault had been chaotic and that U.S. paratroopers were being scattered all over southeastern Sicily. Most of his men were floating to Earth near Noto, 60 miles to the east in the British sector—far from their drop zone near Gela.

Gavin's planeload had come down near the town of Vittoria, 20 miles east of Gela and in the hills overlooking the beaches where the U.S. 45th "Thunderbird" Division was to land. Four hours after the drop, Gavin still had only 20 men under his command. He had left Tunisia with 3,405. As dawn approached, he felt angry and impatient.

Small groups of paratroopers were now roaming across the rocky hills, cutting telephone wires and skirmishing with enemy patrols. Shortly after 3 AM, thousands of Allied infantrymen began wading ashore from landing craft, meeting fierce but brief resistance.

Gavin and his little group marched toward the sound of distant gunfire, hoping to find the rest of the combat team. But they still did not know what island they had landed on—Sicily, Corsica, or Sardinia? Early on the morning of July 11, Gavin found out when he stumbled onto an outpost of the Thunderbirds. He then led his group to Vittoria, where he grabbed a jeep and driver and raced toward Gela as dawn was breaking. Along the way, Gavin rounded up 250 wandering men of his combat team. He felt better now.

Meanwhile, General Paul Conrath's elite Hermann Göring Panzer Division was grinding toward Gela to smash the 45th Infantry Division. Along the road to Gela, Gavin heard heavy small-arms fire erupting half a mile away from the Biazza Ridge, where the Germans were dug in. A force of 750 panzergrenadiers, a company of Tiger tanks, and an armored artillery battalion, the eastern column of the Göring Division, headed over the ridge toward Gavin and his troopers. He did not know it, but Gavin and his little force were about to fight one of the critical actions of the Sicily invasion.

"Jumping Jim" Gavin commanded a motley group of paratroopers, engineers, cooks, clerks, orderlies, and riggers. He had no field guns, antitank guns, or tanks, and he knew he would be greatly outnumbered. But he decided to fight; he had waited long enough for action.

He formed his men into a skirmish line, with himself in the center, and waved his arm. The Germans on the ridge opened up with automatic weapons and rifle fire, killing

three of Gavin's scouts. The troopers hit the dirt, firing. More men were cut down, but Gavin and his soldiers pressed forward. The Americans fired furiously and yelled wildly. Despite increasing casualties, Colonel Gavin's little force expanded. Hearing the clatter and whine of gunfire, other GIs in the vicinity rushed to Biazza Ridge. They included part of a company of the 180th Infantry Regiment, a lost platoon of the 45th Division, knots of paratroopers, and even a couple of Navy ensigns who had parachuted in to coordinate naval gun support.

With their firepower increased, Gavin led his men up the ridge, and the Germans withdrew. By afternoon, the Americans were atop the high ground and enjoying a brief rest. But the fight was not over. As the GIs took over the enemy foxholes, German artillery and mortar fire began to rock the ridge. The Americans tried feverishly to deepen their holes. Gavin, using a shallow slit trench as his command post, then decided to follow a basic rule he had learned at West Point: when the enemy is on the run, pursue him. He ordered his men into action again.

The troopers moved down the ridge and along a road toward the retreating Germans. Then they heard a fearful sound—the rumble of diesel engines and the clank of steel treads. The Tiger tanks were coming to crush the All-Americans. Rounding a bend in the dusty road, Gavin's men suddenly were confronted by half a dozen big Mark VI Tiger tanks. The paratroopers had only ineffective 2.36-inch bazookas with which to defend themselves against armor. Fired at point-blank range, the rockets bounced harmlessly off the tanks. One GI was crushed under a Tiger's treads, and machine gunners leaped from the tanks and overran the bazooka teams before they could reload. The Americans cursed and raged.

Gavin was alarmed, and the battle raged on. But the American firepower increased slightly. A couple of 81mm mortars began lobbing shells at the Germans, and airborne artillerymen rushed two 75mm pack howitzers into position on the ridge and fired directly at the enemy tanks. Gavin dashed back and forth fearlessly, shouting encouragement to his men. "We're staying on this goddamn ridge, no matter what happens!" he shouted.

The Tigers rolled on as the howitzers blasted them and troopers edged up to them and fired bazooka rockets into their vulnerable gasoline tanks and ammunition racks. One tank turned and withdrew, and three others were demolished and their crews killed. Gavin lay on the ground, firing away with his rifle. The fight grew more intense as more German tanks were deployed. The Germans were massing for a major assault to retake the ridge.

As mortar rounds kicked up dust clouds around him, Gavin decided that he needed support, so he sent an officer back to the command post of Maj. Gen. Troy Middleton, commander of the Thunderbirds. The troopers fought on as the Germans pushed to within a few hundred yards of Gavin's command post. Then came the heartening sound of American 155mm shells whooshing overhead, and the ground shook as the rounds exploded among the enemy infantry and tanks. The enemy force wavered and then started pulling back. The shelling ceased, and Biazza Ridge was quiet until Gavin and his weary men were alarmed to hear the sound of heavy engines behind them. But it was half a dozen Sherman tanks and several half-tracks hauling antitank guns; more help had arrived from the 45th Division. Cheers went up.

Salvoes blasted the German positions, and the troopers moved forward through mortar and machine-gun fire to close with the enemy. The American 155s opened up again, and the Germans withdrew from the battlefield, leaving behind their dead and wounded and tons of equipment and supplies.

Colonel Gavin was proud of his untried paratroopers who had bested a battle group of the Hermann Göring Division and blocked a threat to the landing beaches.

However, the cost had been high. Many of the troopers, including Gavin himself, had suffered wounds, and 50 Americans were dead. That night, the fallen were buried on the ridge as heads bowed in prayer and Gavin wept.

The exhausted Colonel Gavin fell asleep in a shallow foxhole under a clump of olive trees. He was awakened early on the morning of July 12 by the hot sun on his face. One of his legs was stiff and sore, and his shinbone was red and swollen. He had fought for hours and then slept without realizing that he had been wounded by shrapnel. Fearing an infection and not wanting to be removed from the front, he went to an aid station and had sulfa powder sprinkled on his wound.

Early the next morning, Gavin rode a jeep to the high ground at Piano Lupo. After inspecting the barren terrain covered with bloated bodies where other All-American troopers had blocked the western column of the German division, he rode on to Gela. There was a lump in his throat. On a hill outside Gela stood General Patton, resplendent in his trademark starred helmet, cavalry jodhpurs, jackboots, and ivory-handled pistols.

As Gavin approached, rifle in hand, "Old Blood and Guts" grinned and said in his high-pitched voice, "Hello, Gavin. You and your men did one hell of a goddamn great job!" Then he offered the young colonel a drink from a large whiskey flask.

Although the Allied military command was critical of the results of the airborne phase of the Sicily invasion, enemy officers were impressed. Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, commander of the German forces in the Mediterranean Theater, stated later, "The paratroopers effected an extraordinary delay in the movement of our troops, and caused large losses." General Kurt Student, founder and commander of the German airborne forces, said, "It is my opinion that if it had not been for the Allied airborne forces blocking the Hermann Göring Armored Division from reaching the beachhead, that division would have driven the initial seaborne forces back into the sea."

Led by the British Eighth Army, the Allies next invaded the Italian mainland. At the Salerno beachhead, the British and Americans encountered stiff opposition. Despite all the power of artillery and naval gunfire brought against them after the September 9, 1943, landings there, the Germans managed to drive a two-mile wedge in the beachhead line and advance to within three miles of the water's edge. By September 13, the situation was "touch and go" at Salerno, according to General Mark W. Clark, commander of the U.S. Fifth Army. He sent an urgent message to Ridgway in Sicily for reinforcements.

Ridgway wasted no time. That night, men of Colonel Reuben Tucker's 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment jumped into the beachhead and were in the front lines before sun-

rise on September 14. That night, 120 transports dropped Colonel Gavin and his 505th Regiment into the beachhead, and they, too, were positioned by dawn the next day. Allied morale at Salerno rose with the arrival of the airborne units, and by the afternoon of September 15, the enemy had been beaten to a standstill. A German withdrawal all along the Allied front began on September 18.

The British and American forces began to punch their way out of the beachhead on September 23. Gavin's regiment spearheaded the drive northward, past the ancient ruins of Pompeii and around Mount Vesuvius. Early on September 30, 1943, British armor and infantry entered the outskirts of Naples, the first major European city to be liberated in the war. While elements of the 82nd Division remained in Naples, the Allied main force pushed on northward to the Volturno River, where the enemy halted and dug in.

Gavin, now 36 years old, received his first star as brigadier general (temporary) and was promoted to assistant commander of the division that October. In November, he was ordered back to England to assist General Eisenhower, now commander of the Allied expeditionary forces, as the chief American airborne planner for the forthcoming invasion of Northern Europe. The 82nd set up base near Leicester for rest and training before the Normandy invasion.

After taking command of the division in August 1944, Gavin was anxious to get back into combat. He would not have to wait long. The All-Americans were assigned a role in Operation Market-Garden, Montgomery's bold, hastily planned airborne invasion of Holland—a lightning stroke that he believed would end the war in 1944. The plan was to cut off major German forces in Holland that were blocking the Allies from using the strategic Belgian port of Antwerp, to outflank the Siegfried Line, and to place sizable British forces across the lower Rhine at Arnhem, Holland, where they would be positioned for a quick thrust into the Ruhr Valley, the German industrial heartland.

Lieutenant General Lewis H. Brereton's Allied 1st Airborne Army was to lay a 50-mile carpet of parachute and glider troops from Eindhoven northward to Arnhem. After the troopers had seized key bridges and towns, Lt. Gen. Brian Horrocks's British 30th Corps, spearheaded by the crack Guards Armored Division, would roll along the carpet to the Zuider Zee, loosing the full weight of British might on the Ruhr.

National Archives

Prior to their D-day jump into Normandy, members of the 82nd Airborne check over their gear. Like the 101st, the 82nd was spread out over miles of Norman countryside in the pre-dawn darkness of June 6, 1944.

The British 1st Airborne Division was assigned to capture the big Rhine bridge at Arnhem, General Maxwell D. Taylor's 101st Airborne Division would capture a 15-mile stretch of the main north-south highway between Eindhoven and Grave, and Gavin's division would drop along a 10-mile stretch of the road in the middle of the carpet, seizing the Waal River bridge at Nijmegen, the Maas River span at Grave, the Maas-Waal Canal bridges, and the Groesbeek Heights southeast of Nijmegen.

Monty's plan was a bold one, but it was fraught with potential problems. The Arnhem bridge was 64 miles behind the German lines, there was only one main two-lane highway, and the rest of the terrain—swampy and crisscrossed by canals—was unsuitable for an advance by armor. Several British and U.S. commanders voiced doubts about the operation. But Montgomery, the prickly, cocky victor of El Alamein, was confident and would brook no doubts. Dutch underground reports about panzers gathered at Arnhem were downplayed.

Shortly after 10 AM on Sunday, September 17, 1944, the sunny skies over southern England thundered as 1,545 transport planes and 478 gliders lifted from two dozen airfields and headed for Holland. It was the greatest armada of troop-carrying planes ever assembled for a single operation. The planes streamed along two parallel routes over the coasts of Holland and Belgium. The British Red Devils took the northern route, followed by Gavin's 82nd, and the 101st followed the southern route. Antiaircraft and small-arms fire peppered the armada, and several planes were hit. But the transports and gliders flew steadily on.

At 1:30 that afternoon, the airborne army began dropping behind the German lines. As they watched the parachutes drifting down and the Horsa and Waco gliders veering in for crash landings, Dutch people returning from church services waved and cheered. After more than four years under the Nazi yoke, they saw their moment of deliverance at hand. The parachute and glider troops were dropped accurately, despite the enemy gunfire, and many soldiers said it was the most precise drop they had ever made. But

Continues on page 94

Silent Blitzkrieg: The Fall of Eben

A handful of well-trained German glider troopers subdued a seemingly impregnable fortress in a matter of hours.

By Robert Barr Smith

THE BELGIAN FORTRESS of Eben Emael was as close to impregnable as modern defense works could be—or so it seemed. The installation was new, for one thing, just completed in 1935. It was the highest refinement of contemporary military architecture, one of a half-circle of eight forts covering the vital Belgian city of Liège. Now, in May 1940, it commanded the vital Albert Canal bridges at Vroenhoven, Canne, and Veldwezelt, the most direct pathway to the west for Hitler's mechanized juggernaut.

The bridges were all garrisoned and wired for demolition, and each was overlooked by a concrete bunker whose crew controlled the demolition—they would blow the bridges on order, or on their own initiative in case of emergency. If the Belgians blasted the bridges into the river, the guns of Eben Emael would fire on any attempt by German Pioneers (combat engineers) to throw bridges across them. If the demolition charges failed for any reason, or their firing parties were overrun, the fortress's guns could shell the bridges into junk.

In the autumn of 1939, Hitler urgently summoned General Kurt Student to Berlin. Student, a World War I fighter pilot, had transferred to the infantry after the war but retained his interest in aviation; he was an enthusiastic glider pilot. He was now commander of 7th Flieger, Germany's sole airborne division. Since the Polish campaign, the Luftwaffe had controlled paratroops in the German system, and Student had accordingly moved from the Army to the air force.

Hitler had work for Student. "Do you know Eben Emael?" he asked. "Of course," said Student. There had been much written about the place, and indeed, the Germans had access to many details about the fortress since two German contractors had been involved in its construction. "I have an idea," said the Führer. "I know you are a glider pilot. Can you land an assault force by glider on the grassy top of the fortress and attack its defenses?" Student asked for time to think the problem through, but returned the following day to tell Hitler that he thought it could be done.

akg-images

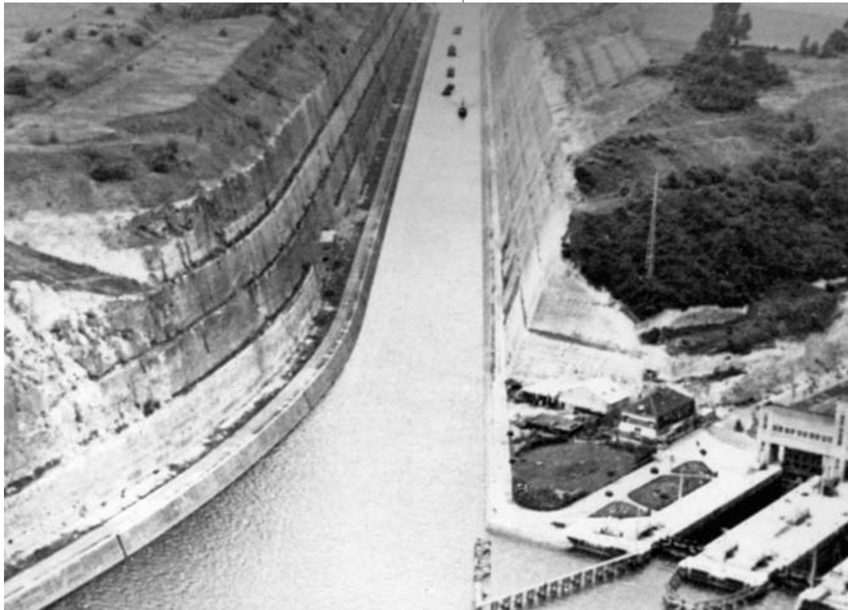
Emael

German paratroopers atop Eben Emael blast the fortress with a flamethrower and machine guns, May 10, 1940.

Hitler then launched into a discussion of the capture of French Fort Douaumont in World War I. Douaumont, part of the Verdun defenses, had fought well until it was battered into ruin by heavy German artillery. Hitler, it appeared, had drawn a lesson from its fall. "We have a new weapon that will destroy Eben Emael," he said. It was the *hohlladung*, the hollow charge, which would concentrate the explosive force of the charge into a jet of molten metal that would slash through concrete or steel. It came in both 20-pound and 110-pound sizes, and it had to be placed on the target by hand. The larger charge came in two parts, for easier carrying.

Between the world wars, Germany, deprived of an air force and most other heavy armaments, turned to ingenuity and subterfuge to train her new armed forces. A new generation of pilots learned their trade in unpowered gliders, which were not prohibited by the Versailles Treaty. Luftwaffe chief Hermann Göring, as early as 1922, revealed the future: "We will teach gliding as a sport to all our young men. Then we will build up commercial aviation. Finally, we will create the skeleton of a military air force. When the time comes...."

National Archives



Eben Emael was built into a 200-foot bluff above the Lanaye lock of the newly built Albert Canal. The lock joined the canal to the Meuse River. The Albert Canal generally followed the line of the Dutch border to the east, and to the north, straddling the Meuse, lay the Dutch city of Maastricht.

Many pilots were trained in the National Socialistische Flieger Korps, an arm of the Hitler Youth. Prior to the outbreak of World War II, many of the world's foremost sail-plane pilots were German.

And Germany also turned her attention to the construction of gliders larger than the average sport sail-plane. One was a flying laboratory, and when Luftwaffe General Ernst Udet saw that aircraft, he began planning for a combat version, an inexpensive glider that would carry at least nine combat-loaded infantrymen. The result was a sturdy troop-carrying glider called the DFS 230. It could be towed into action by Tante Ju—Aunt Ju—the reliable tri-motored Junkers 52 transport. The aircraft was test-flown by Hanna Reitsch, a champion sail-plane competitor and test pilot, who suggested changes. It was also improved with a new brake, shaped rather like a plow, to stop the glider more quickly on landing.

The DFS 230 was designed to carry about a ton and a half of cargo, more than its own weight. Its great value was that it could deposit a fighting unit together, ready to go into action, rather than scattered across the landscape like a stick of paratroopers. Hitler had clearly seen it as the ideal weapon to strike the mighty Belgian fortress at its only weak point, and Student went immediately to work to choose and train his strike force.

He chose well. The attackers would be commanded by Captain S.A. Koch, a paratroop officer drawn, like the other members of the force, from Student's own airborne division. Koch's force was composed of volunteers, 11 officers, and 427 enlisted men. They would have three missions: neutralize the great fortress of Eben Emael; attack and take—*intact*—the three Albert Canal bridges at Veldwezelt, Canne, and Vroenhoven; and hang on to all four targets—at all costs—until German ground forces could get there.

The unit was dubbed Sturmabteilung (storm detachment) Koch, and its commander split it into four combat teams, each assigned a specific target. Leutnant Schact would lead 96 men—the assault group called Beton (concrete)—against the Meuse bridge at Vroenhoven. A detachment of 92 paratroopers, called Stahl (steel), was to follow Oberleutnant Altman against the Veldwezelt bridge.

Leutnant Martin Schaechter commanded Eisen (iron), 92 men assigned to capture the span at Canne. The strike on Eben Emael itself would be led by a tough, able Oberleutnant named Rudolf Witzig. Witzig was 23 years old, an engineer and professional soldier. He would lead a force of Pioneers: two officers, 73 enlisted men, and 11 glider pilots—only these few, code-named Granit (granite), against the mighty fortress.

Inside Germany, near Hildesheim northwest of the Harz Mountains, the raiders practiced on fields laid out in the size and shape of Eben Emael. They were also given a section of Czech fortifications west of Prague—the one-time Benes Line—on which to practice assaults on gun cupolas and casemates. Captain Koch drove his men hard, and Witzig was as tough as his commander was. They rehearsed again and again on mockups in the Harz and Czechoslovakia, enduring endless drills in assaulting their objectives; getting out of their gliders at top speed; and stowing, securing, and unloading their weapons and gear, including the 110-pound shaped charges.

The strike force spent hours studying models of its targets, picture postcards of the area, and aerial photographs. The soldiers were briefed on fortress construction by teachers at the

German Engineer School and studied statements from Belgian deserters and from German workers who had helped to build Eben Emael. The bridge-assault detachments rehearsed repeatedly on similar bridges inside Germany.

The glider pilots had their own rehearsals, endless practice in postage-stamp landings. The attack squads had to be put down as closely as possible to the particular casemates, bunkers, or cupolas assigned as their targets, and the glider pilots' standard was to land within 20 meters of each objective. They had to get their fragile gliders on the ground as quickly as possible, exposing them and their human loads as briefly as possible to ground fire. Koch's unit rehearsed glider assaults on the one-time Polish border fortifications at Gleiwitz.

The Eben Emael landing would go in with the first dim light of morning—Student had insisted on that—so the pilots would have a reasonable chance to see and hit their targets. Even so, the pilots had to be perfect. They would have just one chance to do it right, and a lot of lives depended on their skill. After the gliders were on the ground, the pilots would fight as infantry.

The operation was shrouded in the utmost secrecy. Nobody sent mail or made telephone calls, and the force concealed its identity behind a series of false and unenlightening unit names. Airfield Construction Unit, one of the aliases of Witzig's command, was hardly a title to alert anybody to the real purpose of the unit.

Witzig's men were loaded with ordnance in addition to their own infantry weapons and hand grenades. They carried small explosive charges designed to push into viewports and cannon muzzles. There were charges on poles to shove into firing embrasures, flamethrowers, and Bangalore torpedoes to cut paths through barbed wire. Witzig requested, and got, special small charges to stuff into the viewports of the all-important observation cupolas, the steel eyes of the fort's artillery. He knew that if he could take out these observation posts—or blind them by destroying their periscopes—the big guns of the fortress would be useless.

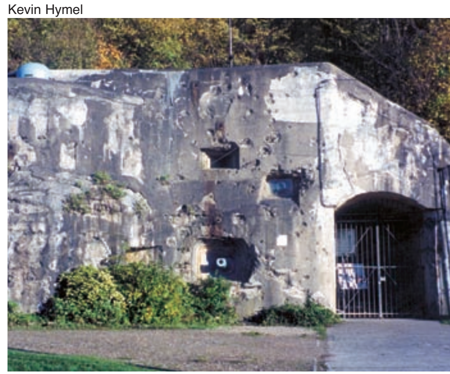
Then there was the *hohlladung,* the new weapon based on the "Monroe Effect," named for its American discoverer. This murderous device was nothing more complex than a hemisphere of explosive with a dish-like section scooped out of its bottom. The scooped-out section, the large end of which pointed at the target, was lined with metal. When the device fired, the shape of its structure directed an enormous shock-wave, liquifying the liner and spurting a slim jet of liquid metal like a knife into steel or concrete. Witzig's paratroopers trained with the heavy charge, the men running while carrying half of the bomb in each hand with leather carrying straps. They would take along 25 of the large charges and 25 more of the smaller ones.

Oddly, Witzig never permitted use of the *hohlladung* against steel or concrete in training, although he had plenty of now-useless Czech fortifications to blow apart. It was better, he thought, that his men did not know the awful power of the thing with which they practiced. If they knew the capability of the charge, that fact might prove so astonishing that the secret would leak out, compromising the mission.

In February 1940, Granit's 11 glider teams staged a full-scale attack on their section of the Benes Line, using all their weapons except the hollow charge. Witzig permitted these to be fired only into the bare earth, where they left an uninformative and somewhat unsatisfactory crater in the dirt. By the time the Benes Line exercise was completed, the strike force knew everything about its mission and its target, except where it was and what it was called.

The gliders that would carry Sturmabteilung Koch moved from Hildesheim in sealed furniture vans and were hauled to Ostheim and Butzweilerhof airfields near Cologne. Delivered in pieces, the DFS 230s were assembled at night, shrouded by clouds of vapor from smoke generators, behind guarded fences covered with matting to frustrate the gaze of the curious. As the aircraft were completed, they were hidden away in newly built hangars. In five days, the gliders were safely under cover. The Luftwaffe mechanics who had put them together were held incommunicado just as were the men of the strike force. Training of the strike force continued.

Kevin Hymel



National Archives

ABOVE: American soldiers mill around the entrance to Eben Emael in 1945. Damage from shell fire is apparent in both photos. TOP: The battle-scarred façade of the main entrance to Eben Emael has changed little since its capture by daring German paratroopers in 1940.

On May 1, 1940, the unit was alerted and the tension grew until, on the night of May 9, word filtered down to the troops that the operation was on at last. In late evening the airfield lights were extinguished, field kitchens appeared to feed the troops, and the Junkers 52 tow planes began to descend to the airfields. Once they were parked, ground crews pushed the gliders out onto the strip, marrying up each with its tow plane. The weaponry was loaded, and every foot of the tow ropes was inspected by flashlight. For the soldiers, there was nothing to do now but wait, play cards, doze, and talk. A little before midnight, Witzig tersely told his men they were to attack "a fort" in the Belgian defense system.

At last, around 0300, officers and NCOs ordered the men of Granit to load up. One by one the trimotored Junkers labored off down the strip and lumbered into the black sky, the gliders following reluctantly. The armada climbed through the gloom, reaching for its target altitude of 8,500 feet above blacked-

out Germany. Each Junkers had a series of small lights set beneath its tail, invisible to anybody but the pilot of the glider behind. The lead aircraft followed a series of beacons set up by Luftwaffe units leading toward their objective. They flew on into the night without incident until near-fatal calamity robbed the unit of its leader.

Witzig's own glider, flown by a Corporal Pilz, suddenly went into a violent dive. Pilz was expertly following the evasive action of his tow plane, which swerved to avoid another aircraft close above it. Both craft avoided the stranger, but the violent evasive action broke the tow line, and Pilz—knowing he could not make Eben Emael—had to put the glider down in a field of weeds. Witzig, furious, told his men to knock down fences and clear a rough runway, rousted out an officer from a nearby German unit, got a car, and roared back to Ostheim airfield. Yes, he was told, he would get another Junkers to retrieve his glider and his men.

Time was running out, and up ahead in the blackness Granit lost another glider when the Junkers towing it signaled the glider pilot to cast off the tow. The pilot, a Corporal Bredenbeck, knew the signal was premature but had to cut loose when the tow plane turned and began to dive. Bredenbeck had some 25 miles still to go, without enough altitude to reach the fortress. The attack force was now down to 70 men.

Just after 0400 the aircraft caught sight of their last beacon, a light on a hilltop northwest of Aachen. Although the attack plan called for the gliders to drop their tows at this point, the signal did not come. The tows and their gliders were too low and too early, and so the formation droned on for another 10 minutes until it reached the planned release altitude of 8,500 feet. Now the signal came, and the gliders cut loose from the mother planes, alone in the night, watching Dutch antiaircraft around Maastricht firing into the blackness.

Across the line of the Meuse and the Albert Canal, the Belgians were already alert. Reports began to come in from the Canne bridge and an outpost near it that many aircraft were approaching. Major Jean Jottrand, commanding at Eben Emael, had already sent details to clear out and set fire to his aboveground barracks, clearing fields of fire for the defenders. Now he puzzled over the reports, especially one that somewhat obscurely stated: "Airplanes are overhead! Their engines have stopped! They stand almost motionless in the air!" Without experience or information, neither the major nor anybody else could guess that the uninformative report meant the enemy was approaching in gliders.

Suddeutscher Verlag, Bilderdienst

ABOVE: Using inflatable rafts, Fallschirmjäger pioneers cross the Albert Canal to employ explosive charges and flamethrowers against Eben Emael. OPPOSITE: During an exercise in 1938, Fallschirmjäger perfect their parachuting techniques.

Jottrand heard the hammer of gunfire below him along the canal, as one Belgian unit after another opened up on the dark, silent birds swooping soundlessly down on them like malignant bats. And now Jottrand and his men could see them too, but Eben Emael's antiaircraft emplacements were silent. Frantic calls came from headquarters: "Why aren't you firing?" The officer in charge of the guns said he did not know who the silent aircraft belonged to, but they weren't Belgian. "Well then, shoot!" roared headquarters, "Goddamn it, shoot!"

The command came too late, for the gliders were already landing, and there was trouble at the canal bridges as well. Jottrand had ordered the Canne bridge blown once he saw aircraft descending on Eben Emael, but nothing happened. He had to give the order again before the Canne bridge was blown into the canal. Schaechter's platoon had been just too late. At the Veldwezelt bridge, however, Altman's men swarmed out of the gliders and took their objective

intact. Altman blew the major defensive casemate with a hollow charge. By the end of the day, his platoon would lose eight men dead and 21 wounded, but he would hold on.

Oberleutnant Schacht's platoon overran the defenders at the Vroenhoven bridge in one ferocious rush. Schacht lost seven killed and 18 wounded, but he had the bridge intact; his men pulled the demolition charges before they could be fired. Meanwhile, Koch's headquarters group laid on radio contact with his scattered attack elements. Within three hours, all significant Belgian resistance around the bridges would be over.

So two bridges remained intact and ready to use, for no signal had come to fire the demolition charges. Here the Belgian failure was caused by Stuka dive-bombers of the Luftwaffe. For as the sector commander was alerted to the attacks on the bridges and reached for his telephone, four of the gull-winged aircraft screamed down on his headquarters. The commander and 20 others died in the ruins, and the critical signal was never sent.

The Germans now had two major routes open to the west. The Belgians' only hope was the guns of Eben Emael. If they could come into action quickly, the spans might still be blown into junk before the German armor could cross to the west.

Granit's gliders, however, were already landing on the grassy top of the fortress. Even without Witzig, the long months of training were paying dividends. Every part of the Belgian defensive system had raiders assigned to neutralize it, and Oberfeldwebel (Master Sergeant) Helmut Wenzel took control of the attackers. The assault squads sprinted through the dim light of dawn, grenading machine-gun emplacements, spraying viewports with small arms fire. As they identified the casemates and cupolas that were their targets, the raiders began to plant the *hohlladungen* and touch them off.

The effect was astonishing, the more so since none of the men on top of Eben Emael had ever seen what a hollow charge would do to armor or concrete. The squad led by a sergeant named Niedermeier laid a hollow charge against the entry to a cupola housing a pair of 75mm cannons and touched it off. The explosion killed four Belgians, wounded seven more, and burned another eight, leaving the inside of the turret a charnel house, its guns useless. Behind the blast, German paratroopers dropped into the turret, pouring bursts of small arms fire down the shaft. All the surviving Belgians could do was retreat behind steel doors and steel-beam barricades. They were safe for the moment, but they were completely out of the fight.

The same scene was repeated over and over again across Eben Emael. In another 75mm turret, the *hohlladung* blast flattened the gun crew and blew a gun tube completely out of its mount and down a 60-foot access shaft. Inside, the Germans sprayed bullets down the shaft and finished the job with an explosive charge dropped down it. As the smoke cleared, there was no sound from below.

As assault teams methodically neutralized the fort's observation posts and artillery cupolas, other paratroopers dug in, set up machine guns, and opened fire on Belgian infantry probing toward them. Belgian artillery was finding the range now, and the attackers were under heavy fire from a dilapidated building on the north end of the fortress. And it proved impossible to silence 75mm fire from Casemate No. 23. A heavy hollow charge rocked the turret and damaged the gun-laying mechanism, but it did not penetrate. The Belgian gun crew inside, with great courage, kept on shooting, even though they had to re-lay their cannon after each round. Heavy Belgian artillery and small arms fire drove the Germans under cover before they could set up another hollow charge. Along the way, Master Sergeant Wenzel was hit, but he came of tough stock. His head streaming blood, he stayed in command.

As German troops began to push across the canal, the Belgian officer commanding the 120mm guns waited for orders to fire on his preplotted primary target, the Vroenhoven bridge. At first, neither Jottrand nor the distant headquarters in Liège gave the word. At last, about 1030, the order finally came down, but the 120s got off only a single round. Wenzel stuffed a charge down the gun tubes, and the blast filled the air with fumes, driving the crew from the turret. By this time, much of the fortress was filling with fumes from the explosives. Some of the Belgian defenders were forced to put on gas masks. In spite of this, several casemates continued to fight on.

The attackers did not have it all their own way. Within a quarter-hour of landing, two Germans were dead and eight badly wounded, leaving just 62 men to hold down the garrison of the mighty fortress. Although the defenders had been driven into the bowels of Eben Emael, nobody knew when they might come popping out of some sally-port to sortie against the handful of paratroopers.

Suddeutscher Verlag, Bilderdienst

Heavy and accurate Belgian artillery fire was falling on top of Eben Emael, and there was no telling when Belgian infantry from the west might swarm over the fort in a counterattack. With Witzig missing, the only officer left with the attackers was a lieutenant named Delica, a Luftwaffe liaison officer who was cut off on the southern end of the fortress. Wenzel remained in command and called in Stukas to hammer those Belgian

positions still holding out. Then, about 0830, into this maelstrom of fire flew a solitary glider. Oberleutnant Witzig had arrived.

Major Jottrand tried to mount counterattacks from inside Eben Emael, but his efforts came to nothing. All of his men were garrison troops, gunners, and none had been trained to fight as infantry. When their commander called for volunteers, there were few hands raised, and the timid sortie that followed accomplished nothing. A second attempt to clear the top of the fortress involved a Belgian infantry detachment from a neighboring position, but these men knew nothing of the terrain on the fort's top. This attempt collapsed under repeated attacks by the Stukas, as did a second sortie by the fortress garrison, ill-armed, short of grenades, and without machine guns.

In the early afternoon, a Belgian detachment at the village of Wonck, just three miles away, launched a counterattack. There were about 200 men involved to start, but the attack fell apart beneath the screaming Stukas. The remains of the force from Wonck, about a hundred, took refuge inside Eben Emael and could not be rallied to go outside the fortress again. It was the beginning of the end, even though a few of the defensive positions were still in action.

As night fell over the embattled fortress, Eben Emael's garrison huddled below ground, shielded by their steel-beam barricades, sand-bag barriers, and steel doors. For the night they were safe, but the German paratroops still controlled the ground above them. Belgian artillery from Forts Pontisse and Barchon shelled Witzig and his men to discourage further attacks, but in fact, wrote Witzig afterward: "That night was uneventful. After the hard fighting during the day, the detachment lay, exhausted and parched, under scattered fire from Belgian artillery and infantry outside the fortification; every burst of fire might have signalled the beginning of the counterattack we expected, and our nerves were tense. For the most part, however, the enemy lacked the will to fight."

The Germans did not. In spite of the Belgian artillery, at 0200 a monstrous explosion rocked Eben Emael. The defenders thought it must be a salvo from German artillery, maybe heralding an infantry attack, so those Belgian positions remaining in operation opened up into the darkness. Fire ceased when no assault followed, but in the gloom German paratroopers stuffed 2-pound charges down the tubes of two of the remaining 75mm guns. That emplacement, too, fell silent. One other turret kept firing throughout the night, dropping shells among German units across the Meuse and harassing Witzig's men on top of the fort. While this position's gallant resistance was an annoyance, it could decide nothing, since the critical gun emplacements, those that could fire on the bridges, were permanently silent.

During the afternoon and night of the 10th, German troops of 51st Engineer Battalion made several attempts to cross the canal in assault boats, but each time were driven back by Belgian fire, especially from Eben Emael's Casement No. 13. At last, late at night, the sappers got a party across the canal, linked up with Witzig's men, and used demolition charges to finally silence No. 13. The fort's garrison fell farther and farther back inside its tunnels, as the Germans dropped demolition charges and grenades into Belgian positions and sprayed small arms fire down the fort's passageways. Now the Germans were beginning to send troops inside the fortress, grenading and tearing down the sandbag walls the Belgians had thrown up. The attackers were also working around to the west of the fortress, and German tank units were across the canal and closing in. German infantry had joined the paratroopers and the sappers on top of Eben Emael.

By 1000 on May 11, few of the fort's guns were still in action. The corridors were littered with debris, crowded with wounded men. Barrels of chloride of lime, used for sanitation, had been ruptured by the explosions. Now chlorine gas was added to the smoke and fumes of the battle. In part of the fort, the air conditioning had failed, and the defenders were forced to wear gas masks. While many of the garrison fought gallantly on, others had simply given up. One officer was found hiding under a bed. Major Jottrand, still in communication with Liège, told his superiors flatly that without a counterattack, Eben Emael was lost. There won't be any help, was the reply, and Jottrand knew his war was over.

Repeated telephone calls to higher command could not even produce an order to surrender—no more than an adjuration that only Jottrand could make that decision, coupled with an order to "blow up the works" after getting the garrison out. If that were not possible, said the message, "you are ordered to blow up the Fort and all its men." This was all very well if the man giving the order was someplace else; the view from inside the dying fortress was quite different.

ALTOGETHER, KOCH'S LITTLE FORCE HAD LOST 37 DEAD AND 100 WOUNDED. IT WAS A SMALL PRICE FOR AN ASTONISHING SUCCESS.

Jottrand was not having any part of a *Götterdamerung*. He called a council of war with his ranking NCO and such officers as were still on their feet. Every one of them declared in favor of surrender. Jottrand, still full of fight, tried to rally support among his men for an attempt to break out, but his soldiers would not move. At last, Jottrand called higher command, but he got the same answer: No surrender. Eben Emael must be destroyed.

So, Jottrand sent an officer to open surrender negotiations, while he saw to it that as much of the operative equipment as possible was rendered useless. About 1215 a bugle sounded from within the fortress, playing the same call again and again. It was the call for surrender.

Both: National Archives

Before any real negotiations could take place, the Belgian garrison began to file out into the sunlight, hands raised. The German commander of the sapper battalion approached Jottrand. "Major," he said, "will you give me your word that no delayed-action charges have been left behind?"

"I will," said Jottrand. With that Eben Emael's war was over. It had lasted about 30 hours.

Witzig took his exhausted men into the nearby village of Eben Emael and found a bar. It was time for a beer, or more than one, and the men of Granit took a few hours of well-deserved rest. Then they began their return trip to Germany by way of Maastricht and Aachen. Altogether, Koch's little force had lost 37 dead and 100 wounded. It was a small price for an astonishing success.

ABOVE: One of the gliders that delivered German paratroopers to Eben Emael lies broken atop the fortress near a false cupola. TOP: After their successful assault, decorated Fallschirmjäger, including Oberleutnant Witzig (second from left) and Hauptmann Koch (third from left), pose with their Führer.

A handful of German paratroopers had captured the hinge of the Belgian defensive line south of Maastricht, at a cost of only six dead and 20 wounded. Of the garrison, 23 Belgians were dead and hundreds more were prisoners, 59 of them wounded. From that moment, Belgian national morale began to sag. With clear passage across the Meuse and the Albert Canal, Germany's panzers raced on toward the west and the English Channel. It had been an extraordinary feat of arms.

Germany was jubilant at the fall of the fortress. The rest of Western Europe was shocked, especially since official German accounts, even newsreels, said nothing about either gliders or hollow charges, so that the world concluded the German success had been an ordinary ground attack. Some guessed that poison gas or sabotage might have been a factor. *LIFE* magazine published a fantastic story that German workers from the fort's construction days had married Belgian women, become endive farmers, and under that cover had planted explosive charges beneath the fort.

Each man of Koch's force received the Iron Cross (with one exception, a free spirit who loaded his canteen with booze); each officer was awarded the Ritterkreuz, the Knight's Cross.

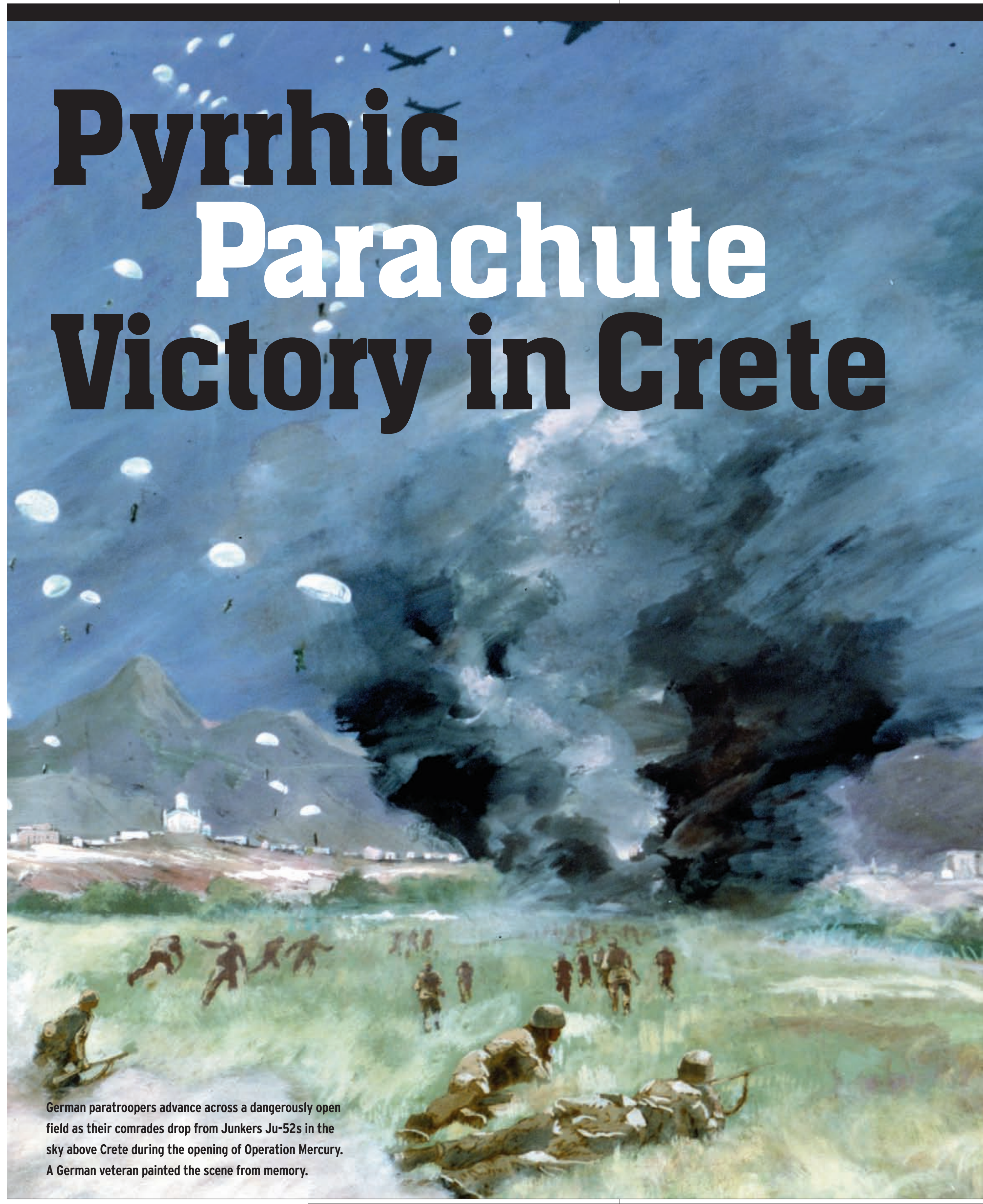
Koch's force broke up shortly after the attack on Eben Emael. Koch, now a major, rode another glider into the assault on Crete, which would prove to be the grave of much of the German airborne. Witzig was there too, and Wenzel, though this time these two went in by parachute. Witzig served later in Russia, and after the war rose to colonel in the peacetime German Army. Wenzel was commissioned, rose to the rank of captain, and became an American prisoner in North Africa. With the war's end, he went home to become an *Oberjaeger,* master of a peaceful forest.

Major Koch did not survive the war. He was a lover of fast automobiles, and one night on the autobahn in 1942 the fates caught up with him. It is one of the ironies of war that this bold, hard-charging soldier should survive two of the war's most spectacular actions to die crushed in his roadster beneath the rear of a truck.

The fortress is an empty shell today, a relic from another time. The Eben Emael Association gives two-hour guided tours to visitors, and there is a museum at the site. People of another generation can walk through the casemates and bunkers, now silent, and learn something of two desperate days in May, 69 years ago. If there are ghosts in the old corridors, they are quiet too. □

Robert Barr Smith is a retired U.S. Army officer and a professor of law at the University of Oklahoma.

Pyrrhic Parachute Victory in Crete



German paratroopers advance across a dangerously open field as their comrades drop from Junkers Ju-52s in the sky above Crete during the opening of Operation Mercury. A German veteran painted the scene from memory.

U.S. Army Art

Elite German parachute troops found the resistance from Commonwealth soldiers particularly brutal, but prevailed at terrible cost in the fight for the Greek island.

BY RICHARD RULE

IN MAY 1941, General Kurt Student's elite paratrooper forces descended like an anvil on the British garrison defending Crete. Instead of winning a quick and decisive victory, the airborne troops found themselves locked in brutal battle against some of the toughest veterans in the British Army. Here, on the sun-parched Mediterranean island of Crete, the Germans appeared to be on the brink of their first military defeat of the war.

As part of Germany's peripheral strategy against the British Empire in the Mediterranean, Hitler invaded Greece in early April 1941, with a provision for General Kurt Student's airborne troops to seize Crete. Within weeks, Hitler's panzer columns had decisively smashed all opposition in their path and were relentlessly streaming toward central Greece. Allied forces sent to the mainland had been completely outclassed and were soon left contemplating the prospect of another Dunkirk.

While German troops were enjoying incredible success in the Balkans, General Student feared that Hitler had changed his mind regarding the deployment of airborne forces in the Greek campaign. Desperate to get his men into the fight, Student decided to present the case for an air invasion of Crete directly to Hitler.

On April 21, he expansively outlined the many threats that Britain's advanced air bases on Crete posed to German interests in the Balkans. Not the least of these were bombing raids against the vital Romanian oil fields at Ploesti, the German Army's main source of oil. Hitler, immersed in the planning of Operation Barbarossa, the invasion of the Soviet Union, reluctantly agreed to the invasion of Crete on the provision that he be delivered a swift and decisive victory.

Fearing Hitler might once again change his mind if preparations stalled, Student and his staff pulled off a logistical miracle by quickly procuring the 1,200 aircraft needed for the attack, code-named Operation Mercury. While brilliantly conceived, Student's plan-

ning for the invasion was in many ways compromised by an unrealistic time frame. The Greek airfields, for example, were ill suited to accommodating so many aircraft and no ships were yet available to carry out additional seaborne landings. The tight schedule allowed little time to accumulate accurate intelligence about the enemy.

Based on air reconnaissance that had detected very few prepared defenses or troop deployments, the Germans believed the Allies were undermanned and totally unprepared. It was a bold assumption. For Student to launch a major operation of this kind without solid, detailed intelligence was deemed an acceptable risk. For the men going into battle, however, it was a matter of life or death.

Imperial War Museum

This early in the war, British soldiers still carried sword bayonets of the pre-World War I pattern. The older weapons proved invaluable for hand-to-hand fighting in Crete.

For Operation Mercury, General Student would use his one parachute division, a glider regiment, and Maj. Gen. Julius Ringel's tough 5th Gebirgsjager (Mountain) Division, part of which would be flown in when a suitable airfield had been captured, the rest ferried across by sea.

The 22,000 troops to be deployed were deemed sufficient to deal with the Allied garrison, estimated to be fewer than 5,000 disorganized, ill-equipped troops likely to surrender at the first opportunity. The reality would be far different.

It was a bold and tactically simple plan that would involve two waves of airborne landings in four locations along the north coast of the island. The first wave of paratroopers and gliderborne troops of the crack Air Assault Regiment, designated Group West, would secure the vital Maleme Airfield and clear the way for sea landings by the mountain troops. Simultaneously, the 3rd Paratrooper Regiment, Group Center, would land and take control of Galatas and the island capital, Canea. The German forces would then link up and push eastward to overwhelm the defenders at Suda Bay, allowing tanks to be shipped across to help roll up the defenders from the west.

During the afternoon, the second wave, Group East, comprising two more paratrooper regiments, would descend on Retimo and Heraklion to seize their airfields and Heraklion's harbor. It was a daring undertaking that would see the elite of the German Army launch the first massed airborne invasion in history; Student's vision of war from the air was about to be realized. When it was over, however, a visibly shaken Hitler would never allow another.

Crete lies in the eastern Mediterranean between the isles of the Grecian archipelago and the coastline of North Africa and western Egypt. It is a rugged island approximately 65 kilometers north to south and 265 kilometers east to west. Behind the island's northern lowland coastal plain rises a narrow mountain range with steep, rugged cliffs overshadowing a labyrinth of defiles, ravines, rock, and scrub that are passable by only a few tracks and rudimentary roads.

The northern half of the island contained the only defensible harbor, Suda Bay, along with Crete's three operational airfields at Maleme, Retimo, and Heraklion. British Middle East Command had always recognized the strategic importance of Crete, but was stretched too thinly to act on recommendations to upgrade its airfields or reinforce the garrison. It was not until the impending fall of Greece placed Crete as the most forward British position facing the Axis in the Mediterranean that Allied command would take a greater interest in the island.

The question of defending Crete left many senior officers, fresh from the mainland Greece fiasco, harboring grave reservations. They argued that Crete's physical makeup played directly into the hands of the Axis. All the key airfields, cities, and harbors were located in the north closer to German bases in Greece than British bases in Egypt. In any case, it appeared unlikely that Crete could receive enough equipment and aircraft to defend itself against an invasion.

However, with the swastika now flying triumphantly above the Parthenon, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill dismissed these concerns, gambling heavily on the edge he had secretly attained through the codebreakers at Bletchley Park. As Student forged ahead with his plans at breakneck speed, he was unaware that almost the entire operation had been fatally compromised. For the first time in the war, the ULTRA intercepts had given the British almost complete knowledge of what was to come. It was a priceless advantage upon which Churchill was determined to extract maximum value, and in a blunt cable to Middle East Command he made it clear that Crete was to be held at all costs.

The upcoming battle would need a fearless commander, and Churchill chose a New Zealander, General Bernard Freyberg, for the job. Not everyone agreed with this decision. Despite his legendary fighting reputation, there were those who felt the 50-year-old Freyberg had neither the training nor intellectual capability for an independent command of such difficulty and complexity. The British prime minister, however, would hear none of it, for in Freyberg,

Imperial War Museum

Hard-fighting Greek soldiers and civilians displayed a wide variety of uniforms and gear, but all were committed to defending their homeland to the death.

Churchill believed he had a fighting general who would inspire the garrison and defend the island to the last.

Toward the end of April, with the Greek campaign in its death throes, the Royal Navy was heroically evacuating as many troops as it could from the mainland. For the sake of expediency many of these men found themselves on Crete instead of in the relative safety of Egypt some 650 kilometers farther south. The harbor at Suda Bay was soon swamped with a massive influx of exhausted soldiers, many of whom had arrived with nothing but their rifles.

General Freyberg, one of the last to be evacuated, was landed at Suda Bay on April 29, expecting only a brief stay before moving on to Egypt. Soon after his arrival the matter of commanding Crete was placed squarely in his lap like a poisoned chalice. He was completely taken aback by the proposal, and the subsequent briefing he received did little to endear him to the task. The island, he was told, could expect air attacks almost immediately, followed up within weeks by major airborne landings supported by a seaborne invasion carrying tanks. His forces, numbering over 41,000 men, were gravely short of equipment, particularly artillery and antiaircraft guns, and could count on little help from the Royal Air Force or Royal Navy. Freyberg, who could not understand why Crete was being defended at all, felt that with most of his New Zealand command already on Crete he had no alternative but to take the assignment.

From his new headquarters outside Canea, the stout-hearted Freyberg faced formidable difficulties. In spite of knowing little about Crete, he set to work bringing order to the confusion, processing and organizing the thousands of demoralized troops he now commanded. Recognizing that the close-combat encounter that loomed would be for fighting men only, he saw to it that the wounded and most of the nonessential personnel were evacuated to Egypt. Those that remained amounted to approximately 17,000 British, 7,750 New Zealanders, 6,500 Australians, and 10,200 poorly equipped Greek troops.

The Cretan population, shaped by a tradition of guerrilla warfare, was determined to fight alongside the Allies. Freyberg, not opposed to the idea, wanted them incorporated into a formation similar to the British Home Guard, but nothing was organized before the invasion. Without the protection of military law, many hundreds were to be executed as partisans by the Germans.

Due to the geographical makeup of the island and his prior knowledge of German plans, Freyberg planned his defense around four self-contained fighting groups deployed in the regions where the airborne invaders would most likely seek a foothold. These areas would form the focal points of the Crete defense plan.

The first of these, at Heraklion, would be defended by an 8,000-man garrison comprising Australian, British, and Greek troops under the command of Brigadier B.H. Chappell. The second, in the Retimo-Georgioupolis sector, would have Brigadier G. Vasey commanding Australian and Greek units totaling 7,500 men. The third, in the Suda Bay-Canea sector, was under the command of Maj. Gen. E.C. Weston with a force of 8,000 men, while the fourth, under Brigadier E. Puttick, covered the Maleme-Galatas sector just west of Canea. The New Zealanders in this region were responsible for defending the airfield, the coast, and Prison Valley against the Germans.

Maleme's airfield was vital to both sides, and its defense fell to Colonel L.W. Andrews's 22nd New Zealand Battalion which, supported by two dug-in tanks and two artillery pieces, took up positions on the slopes of Hill 107 overlooking the airfield runway. It was a precarious deployment, for the nearest supporting troops would be over two miles away.

Brigadier Puttick's forces covered the airfield and the coast as Freyberg had ordered, but his defensive lines were very thinly spread, punctuated by yawning gaps that could not be sealed. Effective command coordination under these conditions would be difficult.

Freyberg, who emphasized camouflage and concealment, saw to it that each sector had a sprinkling of field artillery, a few antiaircraft guns, and a couple of tanks. The lack of short-range radios on the island would make communication a problem, leaving Freyberg to rely heavily on the initiative of

his local commanders. In public, at least, he adopted a positive outlook, confidant that his men would give an excellent account of themselves. Privately, he had grave concerns.

As predicted, the Luftwaffe was soon launching round-the-clock raids against ships and installations in Suda Bay. To add potency to the attack, Junkers Ju-87 Stuka dive-bomber pilots had been provided with a basic proximity fuse that detonated their bombs just before impact, resulting in a more lethal spread of shrapnel. The harbor was a nightmare of exploding bombs and choking black smoke, but with only a couple of fighters and precious few AA guns, there was little Freyberg could do to help the men on the docks.

Ships that had avoided the Stukas soon found themselves maneuvering through a waterway cluttered with the debris of war to be unloaded by troops who often worked as bombs fell around them.

As the invasion drew closer, the intensity of the air raids increased sharply. The island's three airdromes at Maleme, Heraklion, and Retimo were given special attention, forcing the Allied command to withdraw Crete's six remaining fighters to Egypt and leaving the troops with no air cover at all. With raids pushing men at all levels of command to the breaking point, many bitterly observed that "RAF" should stand for "Rare as Fairies."

At 7:30 AM on May 20, an enormous air armada launched fierce strikes around Suda Bay and the vital airfields. The New Zealanders at Maleme were singled out for one of the most concentrated local air attacks of World War II. Their positions were inundated with high-explosive and machine-gun fire.

Half an hour later, the main invasion commenced as nearly 600 Junkers Ju-52 troop transports surged slowly toward the island, disgorging paratroopers over the target areas. Brigadier Puttick's New Zealanders around Maleme bore the brunt of the first attack as troop-carrying gliders and paratroopers of the Air Assault Regiment descended into their midst.

Having lost the element of surprise, the Germans were in trouble almost immediately. Many of the gliders were systematically shredded by intense machine-gun fire while others crashed on the rocky terrain, wounding and killing many of the occupants. Those troops that scrambled to safety quickly rallied to overrun the AA guns south of the airfield, but most found themselves isolated and pinned down by heavy and accurate ground fire.

The men of the Air Assault Regiment fared little better, descending helplessly into a hail of bullets from strong New Zealand defensive positions beneath them. Hundreds of paratroopers, killed before they hit the ground, were paying the ultimate price for inadequate intelligence.

The airborne forces that had landed near the village of Kastelli encountered an even more hostile reception when they were mercilessly set upon by Cretan villagers as they struggled in their harnesses or while caught in the olive trees. Incidents such as these were repeated at all the drop zones as the population took up arms against the invaders. The Germans had not anticipated this type of determined civilian resistance, but would quickly retaliate with unbridled savagery of their own.

Another German view of the airdrop in Crete. The Germans, expecting to be greeted as liberators, were surprised by the rough welcome they received from Cretan civilians.
LEFT: Brigadier General Julius Ringel (top) and Major General Bernard Freyberg.

Imperial War Museum

National Archives

Meanwhile, at Maleme the paratroopers who landed unscathed regrouped in a dried-up riverbed near the western edge of the airfield and provided covering fire for other survivors to link up with them. Instead of quickly subduing a disorganized rabble, they found themselves in a parched, dusty hell pitted against battle-hardened veterans clearly capable of holding their own.

From their foothold near the riverbed, the superbly led paratroopers immediately began assaults on both the airfield itself and the New Zealanders occupying the vital Hill 107 that dominated the sector. In rugged, sun-bleached terrain, battered by searing heat and tortured by thirst, both sides were quickly locked in savage fighting that raged unabated throughout the morning. The Germans were unable to make inroads, so, in a desperate attempt to regain the initiative, they advanced up Hill 107 behind a group of RAF prisoners forced to act as a human shield.

Tragically, many of the airmen were cut down by friendly fire before the defenders realized what was happening. With cries of "shame" ringing in their ears, the Germans were once

U.S. Army Art

again forced back.

With most of the senior German officers already casualties, the operation at Maleme was in turmoil. The situation worsened as reinforcements in the Air Regiment's 3rd Battalion were slaughtered by ground fire within moments of jumping. The few survivors who managed to link up with forces near the airfield were too dazed to offer much fight.

Confronting the dreadful realities of war with all its unimaginable horrors had left many Germans too traumatized to function at all, while scores would surrender at the first opportunity. Crete was not proving to be the glorious adventure these young men had envisioned.

In the face of stubborn resistance, the Germans were unable to push the New Zealanders off Hill 107. By late morning, Freyberg's forces around Maleme had every reason to be satisfied, for despite mounting German pressure, they had prevented the men of Group West from achieving a decisive breakthrough.

While the troops at the Maleme airfield were paying a heavy price, the men of Group Center in the Canea-Suda Bay sector suffered a similar fate as airborne and gliderborne troops descended into the muzzles of the defenders. Hundreds were killed in the air or captured soon after landing, while many others were dragged to the bottom of a nearby reservoir. The survivors who had landed outside the New Zealand defensive areas quickly converted a prison into a strongpoint to which stragglers from other landing sites soon converged.

The troops, who had expected to land on a gently sloping valley, found themselves corralled into a funnel-shaped depression surrounded on all sides by the enemy. The only course open to them was to seize the heights around Galatas and from there break

through to Canea; the alternative was to be slaughtered where they stood. Once again the New Zealanders were in the thick of the fighting and eager to hit back after weeks of constant air attack.

The Germans pushed toward the village of Galatas, but casualties were high and by late afternoon they disengaged to consolidate for the night in anticipation of a counterattack. Group Center, which failed to take any of its objectives on day one of the invasion, now faced the prospect of being overrun altogether. Here, as in Maleme, the Germans had lost the initiative; any thought of taking the Maleme-Canea sector in the first attack had been completely dismissed.

News of the crushing German losses gave rise to optimism among senior Allied commanders that the situation on Crete was well in hand. Their spirits were lifted further with reports that an attempted German seaborne operation had been thwarted by the Royal Navy. Elements of General Julius Ringel's 5th Mountain Division, en route to Crete aboard a fleet of commandeered Greek fishing boats, were intercepted by British warships during the night. In a one-sided engagement, the Navy sank many of the small vessels and scattered the rest. Ringel, who had been skeptical about the whole operation on Crete, was seething when he learned two entire battalions had been lost in the ill-fated expedition.

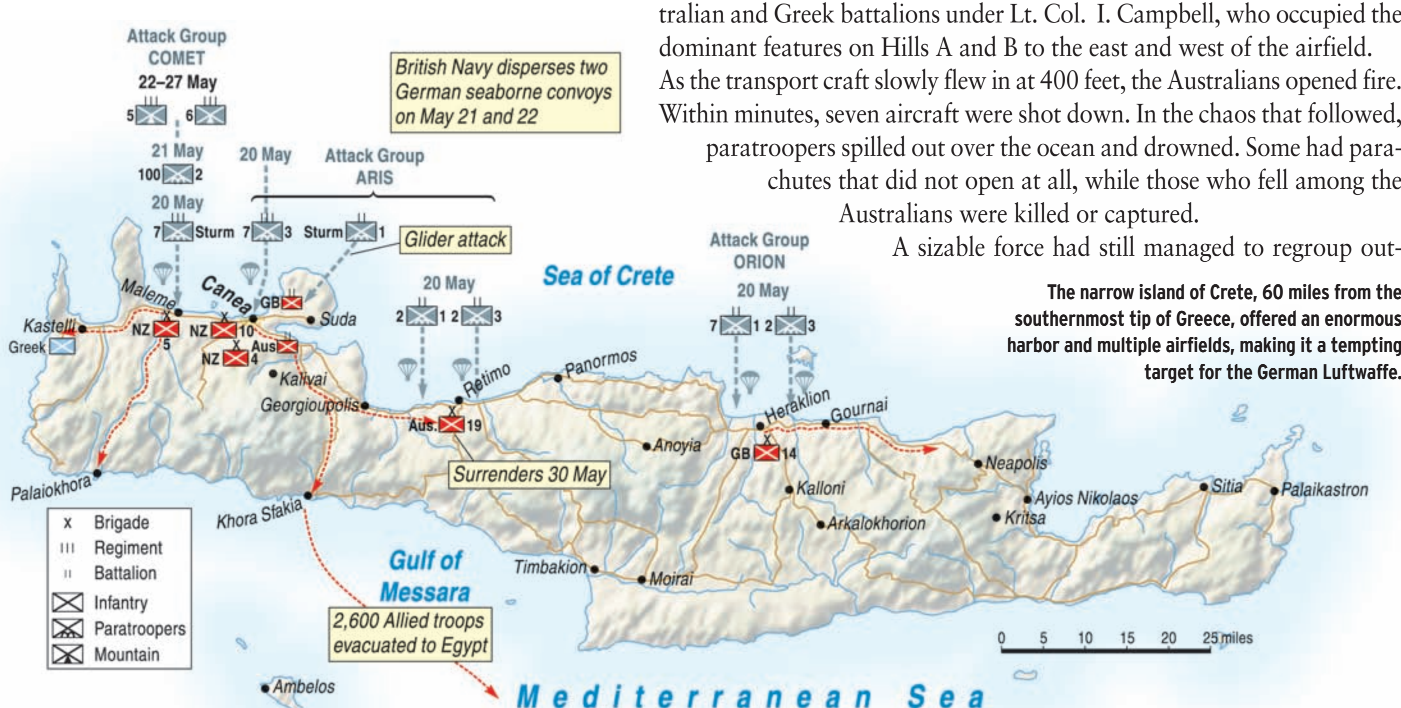
While Freyberg's defensive sectors had thus far weathered the storm and maintained their lines, the men were low on supplies and feeling the effects of the intense fighting. The warning signs were ominous. Freyberg was frustrated by a totally inadequate communications network that quickly put him out of touch with the developing battles, affording him little opportunity to decisively influence events. The battle was effectively left in the hands of the four sector commanders who, due to a lack of radios, rarely knew what was happening outside their own areas.

In the meantime, an air of crisis pervaded Student's headquarters in Athens. Reports of the losses at Maleme and Canea had stunned the entire command. The man who had arrogantly anticipated a quick and glorious victory now found himself desperately trying to stave off Germany's first defeat of the war. Acutely aware of the rumblings of dissatisfaction from Berlin, Student banked heavily that the second series of landings by Group East at Retimo and Heraklion would capture one of the airfields.

"We have been hard pressed. I believe that so far we hold the aerodromes at Maleme, Heraklion and Retimo and the two harbors. The margin by which we hold them is a bare one and it would be wrong of me to paint an optimistic picture."

The operation at Retimo depended on tight coordination between the air strikes and the parachute drops. Due to hasty planning, however, Student had not allowed an adequate turnaround time for the aircraft from the morning's landings. As a consequence, the second wave of paratroopers was delayed and did not begin their drop until around 5 PM, nearly an hour after the Luftwaffe raids had ended. The two battalions of the 2nd Parachute Regiment, believing the Retimo airfield was virtually undefended, were given a hot reception from Australian and Greek battalions under Lt. Col. I. Campbell, who occupied the dominant features on Hills A and B to the east and west of the airfield. As the transport craft slowly flew in at 400 feet, the Australians opened fire. Within minutes, seven aircraft were shot down. In the chaos that followed, paratroopers spilled out over the ocean and drowned. Some had parachutes that did not open at all, while those who fell among the Australians were killed or captured.

A sizable force had still managed to regroup out-



The narrow island of Crete, 60 miles from the southernmost tip of Greece, offered an enormous harbor and multiple airfields, making it a tempting target for the German Luftwaffe.

Map © 2007 Philip Schwartzberg, Meridian Mapping, Minneapolis, MN.

Imperial War Museum

A Junkers Ju-52 burns furiously as it plunges to the ground on May 21, 1941, over the Akrotiri Peninsula.

side the defensive zone and immediately started to fight its way toward the summit of Hill A. It was a savage engagement in which Australian gunners on the hilltop defended themselves with picks and shovels and fired their artillery into the advancing Germans at point-blank range. Both sides were paying a terrible price, but by nightfall the exhausted Germans had captured the hill at a cost of nearly 400 men. Their attempts to capture the town of Retimo, however, were thrown back by Cretan police and armed civilians who put up violent resistance.

For the landings at Heraklion, Student had gathered his strongest force with the objective of capturing the airfield and harbor. The Germans, expecting fewer than 400 defenders, would in fact be facing close to 8,000 men supported by tanks and deployed in a horseshoe defense around the airfield, town, and harbor.

The air assault commenced late in the afternoon of May 20 with 250 Ju-52s dropping thousands of men into battle. The strong Allied antiaircraft defenses, forewarned of what was coming, quickly went into action and sent 15 transports plummeting to earth. Some artillery on the high ground was able to fire virtually straight through the side doors as the Ju-52s flew past, blowing them to pieces.

One Australian machine gunner recalled, "The planes burst into flames, [the men] leapt out like plums spilt from a burst bag. [One aircraft flew] out to sea with six men trailing from the cords of their parachutes which were tangled to the fuselage. The pilot was bucketing the plane about in an effort to dislodge them."

The intense ground fire forced the air transports to fly higher than normal, which in turn increased the time of the descent; hundreds were killed as they hung helplessly beneath their parachutes. Many who made it to the ground alive were cut down by machine-gun fire or set upon by Cretan civilians. Others were scattered all over the countryside and would take most of the night to regroup.

These tough, resourceful troops gained their bearings and managed to force their way into Heraklion itself. Throughout the night, the ancient town echoed with the sounds of automatic gunfire as running battles raged up and down the narrow streets and lanes.

As at Retimo, the Germans found themselves battling hard against Cretan police and civilians, who eventually forced the paratroops to fall back with heavy losses.

The action at Heraklion descended into a bitter and bloody engagement with the Luftwaffe bombing the town itself and German troops shooting civilians in reprisal for atrocities committed by partisans. The Cretans counterclaimed that their actions were revenge against German troops who had deliberately set alight buildings with people still inside. This vicious cycle of partisan resistance and Nazi reprisal would continue without respite until the end of the war.

The Heraklion landings were a disaster from the beginning. By nightfall the following day, the Allied defenders had collected 1,250 enemy dead on top of the 200 killed during the initial landing. The remaining 500 troops desperately fought on.

Operation Mercury appeared to be coming apart at the seams, but Student would not allow a withdrawal. With his career and the reputation of the airborne forces hanging in the balance, he decided to concentrate all his efforts on Maleme's airfield, where his troops had at least established a tenuous foothold. He was a desperate man staking everything on one card.

The situation at Maleme, however, was far from encouraging; a serious New Zealand counterattack would have easily overwhelmed the exhausted paratroopers there, spelling the end of Operation Mercury. Student planned to reinforce Maleme with paratroopers and General Ringel's mountain troops the following morning, but everything hinged on his forces holding until then. Student spent a fitful night with a pistol by his bed, ready to use on himself if the situation collapsed.

With the Germans seemingly in disarray, Freyberg sent a cautiously optimistic cable to headquarters in Cairo: "We have been hard pressed. I believe that so far we hold the aerodromes at Maleme, Heraklion and Retimo and the two harbors. The margin by which we hold them is a bare one and it would be wrong of me to paint an optimistic picture."

In reality, the battle was about to slip from Freyberg's grasp as Student's gamble at Maleme lay the foundations for an unlikely German victory. Preceded by a massive combination of dive-bomber and artillery bombardment, the Germans pressed the attack at

Maleme in the early hours of May 21. Boosted by fresh troops and supplies, the paratroopers launched a surprise attack that drove the New Zealand forces off Hill 107.

The Germans then turned the captured guns against Allied positions around the airfield. The New Zealanders, already stretched to the limit of endurance, attempted a belated counterattack at 3:30 AM on May 22. With typical ferocity, they launched fierce grenade and bayonet assaults but could not get near the airfield until after daylight. By then it was too late; the Germans were firmly entrenched and could not be dislodged.

Colonel Andrews's men had put up a stirring defense, but by the third day of fighting nearly half the force around Maleme was either dead or wounded. With communication to his outlying positions lost and little hope of reinforcement, Andrews saw no alternative but to pull his decimated units back from the airfield. It was a fateful decision that altered the balance of force on Crete.

Imperial War Museum

Dead German assault troops lie beside the wreckage of their glider. Many were killed before they could even exit the aircraft.

At Maleme, Student now had possession of the vital airfield that the operation so desperately needed, and he wasted no time reinforcing his foothold. Ignoring the intense Allied artillery and mortar fire sweeping the runway, German pilots began flying missions to replace the men and equipment lost in earlier fighting. In retaliation, RAF bombers from Egypt launched aggressive bombing raids on the airfield, but these would have little impact.

As paratroopers began cautiously pushing forward beyond the airfield perimeter to secure Maleme, Student flew in General Ringel's mountain troops, many of whom had never flown before. Arriving at dusk they found themselves descending into a terrifying inferno of exploding and burning planes. Many were killed as they scrambled from their aircraft. The airstrip at Maleme was not designed to cope with such a large volume of air traffic, and accidents and collisions were commonplace. With burning wreckage piled up on the airstrip, pilots began landing on any open space they could find to deliver the men to the battlefield. The arrival of these additional troops and heavy weapons would allow Student to weather the storm on Crete, but the general found himself losing a political battle in Berlin.

The slaughter of the first day had shocked and angered Hitler. Furious at the prospect of a drawn-out campaign on Crete, he had Student unceremoniously removed from command and replaced by General Julius Ringel. Student was devastated. There was no love lost between the pair, for Ringel thought Student was a dreamer, while Student viewed Ringel as a plodder, blinded by the dust of the infantry.

In spite of Student's damning assessment, Ringel was a very capable, no-nonsense commander determined to finish the battle on Crete as quickly as possible. Upon assuming control at Maleme, Ringel wasted no time forming three battle groups to get the ground fight firmly in hand. The first would advance west and south to capture Kastelli and clear the way for the landing of tanks. The second was to cover Maleme from the east and push along the coastal road toward Canea, while the third group was to swing south on a wide outflanking move over the hills, forcing the New Zealanders to withdraw their guns, which were shelling the airfield. The ultimate aim was to join up with the survivors of Group Center and drive on to Suda Bay.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the island at Retimo, elements of the 2nd Parachute Regiment were still heavily engaged in a bitter struggle with Australian troops over the hill features that dominated the sector. In a seesawing battle, fighting for control of Retimo airfield would continue without respite until May 23, when both sides agreed to a three-hour truce to bury the dead and collect the wounded.

A joint hospital out of harm's way was established where German and Australian doctors, working side by side, could share supplies and medicines. With the completion of this humanitarian task, the fight resumed, but the Germans adopted a different strategy. With the capture of Maleme airfield, the paratroopers concentrated on pinning down the Allied garrison until the situation at Canea and Suda Bay had stabilized.

Ringel's flanking drive had successfully forced the withdrawal of Allied troops at Maleme, leaving the airfield out of the reach of their artillery. The loss of the airfield severely dented Freyberg's confidence. Neither an encouraging cable from Churchill nor the fact that the Germans had lost so many men could lift his spirits. All over the island the hard-fighting defenders battled gamely, but their isolated victories were no longer enough to stem the tide now that the Germans had a supply route onto Crete. With each passing day it became clearer to Frey-

Wearing their distinctive rimless helmets, three German paratroopers march toward an assembly point as others land behind them.

berg that his forces were being bled white with no way of making up the losses. No matter how many German troops they killed, more would quickly arrive to take their place.

Freyberg later remarked, "At this stage … the troops would not be able to last much longer against a continuation of the air attacks which they had during the previous five days.… it was only a question of time before our now shaken troops must be driven out of the positions they occupied."

Having committed practically all his men and running desperately short of ammunition and supplies, he would have no alternative but to order a retreat to a shorter line.

Ringel's aggressive thrusts around Maleme forced Brigadier Puttick to order a general retreat from the west of Crete to form a new line running from the sea west of the Kladiso River through the Daratsos Ridge to the Australian positions at the base of Prison Valley. With two airborne and one mountain regiment concentrated against his weary men and a second mountain regiment pushing toward Suda Bay from the south, Puttick's 4th New Zealand Brigade was withdrawn even farther to new positions outside Canea.

After four days of fighting, Ringel's battle groups, pushing along the coast toward Palanias and through the hills to the south, finally joined with the third group at Stalos. With Groups West and Center finally linked up, Ringel prepared a major drive to overwhelm the Allied troops grimly holding the last defenses before Suda Bay. With Luftwaffe support, he wanted to crash through this line and then drive eastward to relieve the parachute troops at Retimo and Heraklion.

At this time a tragic chapter in the battle of Crete unfolded as German troops probed toward Kastelli. Among the olive groves and vineyards they came across the bloated corpses of paratroopers who had been attacked by Cretans and left lying where they had fallen on May 20. The bodies showed signs of mutilation and torture. The discovery enraged Ringel, who ordered that any civilian caught with a weapon was to be immediately shot and that 10 hostages would be executed for every hostile act against the German Army.

The first to suffer under this harsh policy would be the civilians who had fought alongside Greek troops defending Kastelli. Despite protests from German POWs in the captured town, 200 male hostages were rounded up and shot. Brutal reprisals were carried out in other villages as the Germans exacted savage revenge for the atrocities they claimed had been committed against them.

With the west of the island under German control and assured of a constant flow of reinforcements, morale was again high. On May 25, with 15,000 troops in the Maleme sector alone and the battle now in hand, Berlin Radio belatedly broadcast news of the invasion. It was a clear indication to all that Hitler believed the operation was now going well.

The same day the German public learned of the invasion, a gaunt Student arrived at Maleme to see his men. He was now a mere spectator, only permitted to offer advice and make suggestions; for the dynamic Student it was a depressing experience. With his

career in tatters, he had to endure the indignity of watching the operation, which he alone had believed in, being led to victory by a fierce rival. It was a bitter pill to swallow.

As the Germans steadily advanced across Crete, the Allied command in Cairo could see the writing on the wall and ordered Freyberg to pull his forces back to Retimo and make a stand on the eastern part of the island. But it was too late; the road to Retimo had already been cut, the Canea front had collapsed, and Suda Bay was only a day away from being captured. There were really only two alternatives: surrender or evacuation.

Ringel, sensing that the overall Allied effort on Crete was near collapse, urged his men to crush the Allies as quickly as possible and prevent them from falling back toward Heraklion and joining with the forces there. As a result, he neglected the route to the south and concentrated his pursuit along the coast with his mountain troops, leaving the surviving paratroopers in reserve around Canea.

Freyberg had done his best to defend the island, but now it was time to save his men. With the battle all but lost, he saw no other alternative but to order evacuation preparations to proceed. Rumors of a withdrawal quickly caused the roads into the mountains to be crowded with leaderless men and deserters eager to escape the fighting. Freyberg tried unsuccessfully for two days to get orders to withdraw through to the Australians still fighting at Retimo.

By May 29, however, the men there were effectively isolated and too closely pinned down to have any chance of disengaging as a formed body. Utterly exhausted and with barely any food, water, or ammunition and with no hope of relief, the Australians had no alternative but to surrender. It had been a stirring defense that had cost them 120 dead and 200 wounded, but the action at Retimo had cost the Germans over 800 men.

Brigadier Chappell's forces at Heraklion were confident they could continue to hold the Germans at bay. Despite relentless pressure, Chappell had thrown up such a stiff and spirited defense that the German High Command in Athens had abandoned any hope of a landing in the harbor. However, days of continuous and brutal fighting saw the men, low on ammunition and supplies, nearing the end of their tether.

With the road south cut by the Germans and reinforcements being dropped out of range, the Allied position had become untenable. The Germans could not get into Heraklion, but Chappell and his men could not get out. Unable to communicate with Freyberg, Chappell was taking orders directly from Cairo, which informed him that the Royal Navy would evacuate his men from the Heraklion harbor on the night of May 28-29, but they would have to leave their seriously wounded behind. As they had done in mainland Greece, the British and Australian troops once again destroyed their equipment and at dusk made their way silently through the stinking wreckage of Heraklion to the harbor.

An Australian officer recalled the destruction they were leaving behind: "Roads were wet and running from burst water pipes, hungry dogs were scavenging among the dead. There was the stench of sulfur, smoldering fires and … broken sewer pipes but over everything hung [the] stench of decomposing bodies."

The resistance at Heraklion had achieved all its objectives, preventing the Germans from using either the airfield or the harbor. The men had fought magnificently, yet tragically a further 800 would subsequently be killed, wounded, or captured as a result of enemy air attacks en route to Egypt.

While thousands of troops had been successfully evacuated from Heraklion, escape for the troops still engaged in heavy fighting on the main battlefields around Suda Bay, Canea, and Maleme would prove far more difficult. Freyberg wanted to conduct an orderly retreat, but with Allied ships unable to approach Suda Bay these troops faced a 30-mile trek along a narrow road winding across the mountainous backbone of Crete to the southern shore town of Sfakia. With a rear guard comprising Australians, New Zealanders, Royal Marines, and

Australian War Memorial

German soldiers zero in with their light machine guns on Allied artillery on the island of Crete.

Australian War Memorial

German shells burst among the waterfront installations during the evacuation of Australian troops. This photo was taken aboard HMAS *Perth.*

commandos forming a protective screen, the weary men trudged south through vile weather to the beaches from which they might be collected by waiting ships.

Initially, Ringel had disregarded reports that the Allies were heading south; he could not believe that his enemy would contemplate a mass escape from a fishing village. Ringel's misunderstanding of the situation eased Freyberg's problems, as did the Luftwaffe's beginning its delayed move to Poland for Barbarossa. The troops on the road south would therefore be spared the kind of crushing attacks they had experienced earlier, as would the Royal Navy coming to evacuate them. It also meant that air reconnaissance failed to detect the Allied movement southward, affording Freyberg's men a valuable head start.

The main body initially made solid progress, but likened themselves to "souls marching into Purgatory." The arduous journey soon began to take its toll as many collapsed, completely exhausted or totally lame. The Germans soon realized what was happening and swung south in a hot pursuit punctuated by several violent clashes with the defiant rear guard.

Braving grave hazards to reach Sfakia, rescue ships would eventually evacuate over 15,000 men from Crete, but for many in the rear guard there was no escape. The sands had run out of the hourglass before they could get to the beach. Sadly, their reward for such a magnificent effort would be years in captivity.

After 12 days of what had been regarded as the fiercest fighting of the war, the Allies had once again been defeated, but it had been a pyrrhic victory for the Germans. Of the 22,000 German soldiers involved, 6,698 were casualties including 3,352 killed. Allied losses were equally grim, with the Army and Navy suffering a combined loss of over 3,500 dead and nearly 2,000 wounded, while 11,835 became prisoners.

Student's career and reputation had been dealt a terrible blow. He was not decorated for his role in the battle and had no personal contact with either Hitler or Luftwaffe chief Hermann Göring for nearly a year. His forces would never undertake another major airborne operation, and for the rest of the war they would fight with distinction alongside the infantry.

Within a short time, Crete's strategic importance had diminished; the airfields that had cost the lives of so many were rarely used for offensive action. The Nazi policy of terror instigated by Ringel continued unabated during the occupation, with over 3,500 Cretans shot in reprisal for partisan operations.

In 1944, when German forces abandoned Greece, the garrison on Crete was left besieged by local forces until it was, ironically, rescued by the British after the surrender in May 1945. □

Richard Rule writes from his home in Heathmont, Victoria, Australia. A veteran of the Australian Army, he works in sales management, enjoys fly fishing, and has written several books.

A Screaming Eag

Trooper Lud Labutka of the 502nd Parachute Infantry Regiment, 101st Airborne Division, fought his way through Normandy, Holland, and the Battle of the Bulge.

IN AN EFFORT to calm his nerves just before he jumped into Normandy on D-Day, Lud Labutka thought it might be a good idea to accept the drink being offered from the paratrooper sitting across from him on their C-47 transport as it crossed the English Channel. It didn't matter to him at the time whether it came from a bottle of blended Scotch or from a bottle of after-shave lotion. Labutka was simply looking for a little kick to help him get over the anxiety he felt about jumping from an airplane into Nazi-occupied Europe.

"There was a guy on our plane named Albert Jones," Labutka says. "He looked over at me and said, 'Lud, do you want a drink?' I said, 'What?' He said, 'Do you want a drink?' I still didn't think he had anything to drink until he pulled out a big bottle of Aqua Velva. I said, 'You're crazy!' He opened it and sucked down a drink. I said to him, 'Jones, if you're crazy, I'm crazy, too.' This was 20 minutes before we jumped! So I took a big drink. When I jumped into Normandy, I was heaving. I was puking on the Germans. That stuff made me sick."

History has failed to record whether Labutka's stomach contents had any effect on enemy troops; what is certain, however, is that never again would he consider drinking after-shave for a quick buzz, just as jumping from an airplane had never crossed his mind in 1939 when he joined the Pennsylvania National Guard as a 17-year-old high school graduate. Even to this day, more than 60 years after the war, a fear of heights has kept his feet planted on the ground.

"I wouldn't even go on the Ferris wheel at a fair," he says. "I still haven't been on one. I'm afraid of heights."

If that is the case, then how does this retired factory worker from Ford City, Pennsylvania, explain his wartime experience as a Screaming Eagle with the U.S. 101st Airborne Division, duty that not only took him into the night skies of France but also into Holland during Operation Market-Garden? It is because someone, at some point, questioned whether he had the intestinal fortitude to jump from an airplane. In other words, it was the result of a dare.

"In 1942 the Army was taking transfers into the Air Cadets," Labutka says. "We were kids, just 18-, 19-, 20-year-olds. Somebody mentioned Airborne and I said, 'Airborne? Are you crazy? I'm not going to jump out of an airplane.' So somebody called me chicken. That's all

National Archives

le's Journey

By Richard A. Beranty

it took. I was going. We all figured that we'd make a difference, so three of us—Rich Dinger, Joe Miklos, and myself—went to see the first sergeant of our National Guard company and told him to transfer us to the Airborne."

Labutka entered training on October 19, 1942, at Fort Benning, Georgia, where troops were hooked onto guide wires and slid to the ground from 40-foot towers. "Scary" training is what he calls it. This progressed to actual jumps from an airplane, five of which were required to qualify for Airborne duty.

"The first time I was up in an airplane I jumped. Back then we packed our own parachutes. At that time they were round, really huge things. Then, after jump school, riggers packed them. Every time I jumped I always wondered if the riggers had placed that little rubber band where it was supposed to be. It held the end of the parachute to the static line."

Labutka left Benning for the rigors of Fort

Bragg, North Carolina, the new home of the 101st, where its men trained by making more practice jumps, often in front of such dignitaries as Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall. They also endured 25-mile forced marches without canteens, running the last mile back to camp in cadence.

"At first during these marches, the route took us through a creek and some of us didn't mind scooping up a handful of water to drink. But after about three days of this our sergeant caught on and we were punished. We were made to do push-ups."

Labutka was assigned to the division's 502nd Parachute Infantry Regiment (referred to as the "Five-O-Two"), 2nd Battalion, Company E, 1st Platoon, which left for Europe on September 5, 1943, in a convoy from Camp Shanks, New York, aboard an aging British transport. The ship encountered engine trouble six days out, left the group, and put in at the small Newfoundland harbor of St. John's, where repairs were made. But as the ship headed to sea once again, it scraped bottom, forcing it back to port. Arrangements were then made for the troops to make their Atlantic crossing on the SS *Ericsson*, which left in another convoy and arrived at Liverpool on October 19. It took Labutka 44 days to reach England on a voyage usually made in a week.

"The convoy we joined contained Company C of my old National Guard outfit," he says. "By then they were the 28th Division. I didn't know it at the time, but I went overseas with my old buddies from Company C of the National Guard."

Once on British soil, men of the 502 lived in tent cities at Denford Lodge near Hungerford where they made more practice jumps in preparation for their assigned role on D-Day. Since the division had no battle history up to that point and its men were an untested force, it seemed to the other GIs stationed in England that these so-called "Screaming Eagles" were a group of overpaid and overly cocky servicemen. They appeared more famous for their fancy jump boots than for anything else. All of that changed, however, when they jumped from their C-47 transports in the predawn darkness of Normandy, fulfilling what General William C. Lee, the division's first commanding general, described as their "rendezvous with destiny."

Four objectives were assigned the 101st in Operation Overlord, the invasion of the European continent: The paratroopers were first to secure the roadway leading from Utah Beach where the U.S. 4th Division was to land; second, they were to eliminate a battery of large German guns that threatened that beach; third, they were to establish contact with the 4th Division as it headed inland; and fourth, with those missions accomplished, they were to attack and occupy the French town of Carentan, an important road junction leading to the Cotentin Peninsula and the port of Cherbourg. Labutka's 2nd Battalion was part of the force charged with eliminating the four-gun battery of 122mm howitzers at St. Martin de Varreville, two kilometers west of Utah Beach. General Omar Bradley, U.S. ground commander, called the guns a danger to the invasion forces and insisted they be eliminated.

Another anticipated danger for the D-Day invaders, this one limited to Airborne troops only, was the ability to recognize friend or foe in the Normandy darkness. Brig. Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor, who had assumed command of the 101st in March 1944, solved this dilemma by introducing one of the most ingenious tools used in the invasion: the cricket. Basically a kid's toy, similar to those sold in five-and-tens at the time, it proved extremely helpful for paratroopers to identify one another in the dark. The toy clicked when the tab on its back was pressed and released. One push asked, "Who's there?" Two presses in reply meant "Friend." A last-minute idea of Taylor's, the crickets arrived about four days before the invasion.

By late May the 101st was moved into new tent cities near the airfields from which the men would fly to assault German positions in France. On June 5 at about 5:30 PM, they ate their last preinvasion meal, consisting of pork chops and mashed potatoes, and returned to their assembly areas to take on their gear. Labutka says it included an M-1 rifle with eight or 10 clips of ammunition, six grenades, two canteens, two parachutes, flares, a medical kit, compass, and enough C-rations for three days. All told, their equipment weighed about 70 pounds. As evening drew on, Labutka's platoon leader, 1st Lt. Wallace C. Strobel, called his men away from their packing for some last-minute instructions. As they gathered outside their tents, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, the Allied supreme commander, paid them a visit. A photograph was taken of this encounter and it became one of the most famous of the invasion. In it, Eisenhower is standing on the left talking to Strobel. The two are shown in an apparent conversation about the invasion. When asked years later about what was said, Strobel, who died in 1999, recalled that, in part, it went like this: "Where are you from, lieutenant?" Eisenhower asked. "Michigan, sir," replied Strobel. "Michigan, eh?" Eisenhower commented. "Good fishing in that country."

Labutka, standing behind several other men and unseen in the photo, says he never heard the conversation.

"We heard earlier that Ike might come by and wish us luck," he says. "But I have no idea what he said to Lieutenant Strobel. I wasn't close enough. Believe me, if I had known they were going to take a picture, I would have gotten my mug in it somehow."

The men entered their C-47s at around 9 PM through the aircraft's rear door, which stayed open for the entire flight. They moved in single file with the first man headed to the front of the plane. The 16 paratroopers took their seats, located on both sides of the aircraft, facing one another. Along the ceiling of the plane's compartment stretched the static lines to which their parachutes were hooked just prior to the jump. The pilots were told to fly in a "V" formation of three planes each at an altitude of 500 feet to avoid German radar detection over

"ONCE WE GOT OVER CHERBOURG YOU COULD SEE THE ENEMY SHOOTING AT US. IT LOOKED LIKE THE TRACER BULLETS WERE COMING OUT OF A BARREL."

Author's collection

ABOVE: Lud Labutka (standing fourth from left) poses with fellow paratroopers of the 101st Airborne Division during training at Fort Benning. Labutka's close friend Henry Fuller (standing far right) of Wadsworth, Ohio, passed away on March 23, 2003. RIGHT: Photographed shortly after the war ended, a youthful Lud Labutka was nevertheless a hardened combat veteran. He had endured some of the most difficult fighting of the war, including the critical defense of Bastogne during the Battle of the Bulge.

the English Channel. Once they crossed the coast of France, the planes were to climb to 1,500 feet and then descend to 400 feet for the jump. Pilots were instructed not to veer from their assigned flight paths. The distance to their drop zone was 136 miles, and it took about an hour to reach it.

"We knew that it was about a hundred miles from where we were in England to where we were going," Labutka says. "We were told to take out these guns. They didn't tell us why, just that we had to take them out."

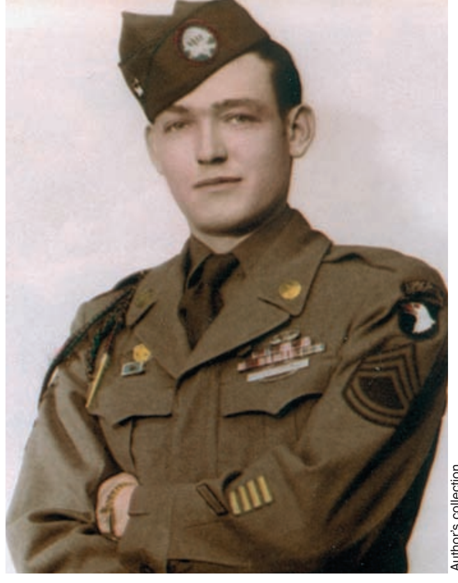
The flight was uneventful until they reached the French coast and German guns began firing. Since Labutka and others of 2nd Battalion were in some of the first planes of the assault, they reached France relatively unscathed.

"Once we got over Cherbourg you could see the enemy shooting at us," Labutka says. "It looked like the tracer bullets were coming out of a barrel. We could hear them hitting the wings going 'knick, knick, knick.' I was scared." That was when Labutka took the healthy swallow of Aqua Velva. With his stomach now churning, the C-47, piloted by men of the 438th Troop Carrier Group, neared its drop point and a red light flashed, telling the paratroopers that their jump time was near. It was shortly after midnight when a sergeant yelled, "Stand up and hook up!" Moments later a green light flashed and Labutka was the sixth or seventh man to leave the plane.

"The sergeant hit the first guy on the ass and said, 'Go!' We were lined up tight, right against each other," Labutka explains. "We were taught to count, 'One thousand, two thousand' when we jumped. If we got to the third count and the 'chute didn't open, we were to pull the reserve parachute. That one was on our belly. The only thing I remember thinking when I jumped was, 'I hope I land.'"

He did land, near the town of St. Marie du Mont just north of Carentan and south of the guns his battalion was ordered to destroy. "I landed in a farm courtyard, all brick and all fenced in, right beside a hay wagon," he says.

"The machine gunner landed in one corner of the courtyard. His name was Dempsey, from Rome, Georgia. In the other corner was Golembeski, the assistant machine gunner, from Pennsylvania. They both came over to me and said, 'Lud, what are we going to do?' Here, both of them were Pfcs and I was just a private, their ammo carrier, and they're asking me what to do! So I said to find a door so we could get out of this courtyard. The night was very dark. We found a door, or a gate, and went out and bumped into a guy here and a guy there until there were six of us. We walked around, snuck around, crawled around. We didn't meet anybody else. None of us fired a shot. Finally, when it was just getting light, about 5:30, we were walking around this hedgerow and saw a road.



Author's collection

"We crouched down because we heard people walking and talking," Labutka continues. "These guys with me said, 'Lud!' And I said, 'Shhhh!' I had my clicker and when the noise got near I went 'click-click' with the cricket. Boy, the nicest sound that I ever heard came back: 'click-click, click-click.' So we jumped out on the road. I'd say there were about 60 people there including a lieutenant colonel, a lieutenant, and a couple of sergeants, and we joined them."

Others in the drop were not so lucky, particularly those who came after the first wave. As the surprised Germans grasped the scope of the situation, these later planes received heavy doses of antiaircraft fire. Some pilots took evasive action, broke formation, and went off course. Paratroopers were scattered around the countryside. Many landed in swamps, rivers, and flooded fields. Others found themselves stuck in trees or in the middle of minefields. Some planes took direct hits

and crash-landed or burst into flames before impact. Because of the ground fire and confusion, the drop zone resembled a rectangle of about 25 miles by 15 miles. Scattered troops sought each other throughout the day and into the next.

The gun emplacements at Varreville did not pose a problem when Labutka saw them on June 6. They had been destroyed by Allied bombings just prior to D-Day and were void of German troops. It was there that Labutka met his battalion commander, Colonel Steve Chappuis, whose drop put him close to the guns.

"I'm glad we had the Air Corps," states Labutka. "They knocked out a bunch of German guns. When I saw Colonel Chappuis, he was sitting cross-legged on this cement curb. He said, 'Well, it looks like the Air Force took care of the guns.'"

With that threat neutralized, the gathered troops of 2nd Battalion moved toward the road leading south from Utah Beach. Securing it was the primary responsibility of Lt. Col. Robert G. Cole's 3rd Battalion. By 1 PM on D-Day, Cole and his men had made contact with elements of the U.S. 4th Division coming inland from the beach, and the paratroopers found their numbers increasing. Throughout June 6-7, those scattered in the drop linked up into larger fighting groups. The massed paratroopers set their sights to the south and the division's final objective, the town of Carentan.

"I don't think we really got together with any sizable force until about a day and a half after we landed," Labutka says, estimating that they then numbered about two regiments strong. "None of us had gotten any sleep, unless we slept standing up. It's hard to believe, but we did sleep standing up."

Carentan was a high-priority target assigned to the 101st because its main highway and railroad connected Cherbourg to St. Lô, and ultimately Paris. If American forces did not take the town, it could be used as a corridor for a counterattack against Utah Beach. Army intelligence estimated the size of the German garrison there at a battalion. As it turned out, the enemy was apparently more plentiful and extremely stubborn. The division's route of attack was down a causeway that ran through flooded fields and swamps. Labutka remembers that paratroopers called it "Purple Heart Lane," for obvious reasons. The 502's 3rd Battalion was assigned the lead.

"The first time I really heard gunfire was going toward Carentan. The Germans had machine guns pointed right down this road going into the town. There were four bridges we had to cross and swamps were on both sides of us. As we fought our way down the road we had to run this way, run that way, run this way, kind of zigzag our way down it."

It was here that Labutka first experienced the effects of the German 88mm gun, one of the most devastating artillery pieces used by either side during the war. He also encountered two Airborne buddies from home, and both were wounded.

Both photos: National Archives

ABOVE: Colonel Robert Cole commanded the 3rd Battalion of the 502nd Parachute Infantry Regiment. He was awarded the Medal of Honor for leading an assault at Carentan but did not live to receive it. Cole was killed by a sniper's bullet in Holland. TOP: Colonel Steve A. Chappuis commanded Labutka's outfit, the 2nd Battalion, 502nd Parachute Infantry Regiment, during the fighting in Normandy.

"Once we started down this road I met Joe Miklos," Labutka says. "He got hit from a bomb burst. There was shrapnel in his leg, and he was going back. After we crossed the second bridge, who do I see but Rich Dinger with a patch on his shoulder. He was hit pretty bad. He said, 'Lud, don't go down there. It's hell down there.' I said, 'Dick, I have to. My company's going down there.' Dinger was eventually shipped home. Farther down the road I came across this poor soldier who was hit right above his ear. I could see the matter leaking out. He tried to talk to me. He wanted morphine. I asked him if he'd had any but he couldn't answer. He was gone. He must have been from the 3rd Battalion, Dinger's outfit, because they went in ahead of us."

The German 88s were finally silenced, but not before the road's second bridge was shattered to pieces. This kept supplies from being brought in and the wounded taken out. It also prevented any possibility of retreat. Regardless, the paratroopers advanced, crossed the third bridge, and ran into their stiffest resistance on the other side of the fourth bridge. It was a heavily defended farmhouse about 150 yards away. With Colonel Cole and men of 3rd Battalion still in the lead, intense fire from German machine guns, mortars, and artillery pinned them to the ground for an hour. Knowing his men were low on ammunition, Cole ordered an attack with fixed bayonets and personally led the charge over open ground, eventually flushing the enemy from their positions. A bridgehead was gained across the Douve River, and Cole earned the Medal of Honor, the division's first award in Normandy. He would be killed by a sniper's bullet in Holland just months later.

"That Cole was a soldier," Labutka offers. "I know Miklos didn't like him much because he was too hard on the men. But he was a soldier through and through."

While division engineers worked to make bridge No. 2 passable, the badly depleted 3rd Battalion was replaced on the front by 2nd Battalion. More fierce fighting ensued. At one point the Germans counterattacked and some Americans thought the order was given for them to withdraw. It had not been, and reversing their rearward momentum was a challenge.

The American line held, but a final German attack neared success once again until a five-minute barrage from division artillery stopped it. Afterward, the fighting diminished as glider troops from east of Carentan joined the fight.

"After that we got to the edge of this hedgerow and the guys in front of us must have had

National Archives

Eight days after the 101st parachuted into Normandy, American soldiers enter the bitterly contested French town of Carentan on June 14, 1944. Troopers of the 101st had taken the village during a tough fight with German airborne troops and held it against a major counterattack.

luck because the Germans backed off," Labutka recalls. "We were involved in a lot of hedgerow fighting, a heck of a lot of it."

The hedgerows in Normandy were an obstacle underestimated by the Allies. For centuries farmers had fenced their small fields with solid walls of dirt, often four feet high, and topped them with hedges whose tangled roots bound each row into a natural fortification. They were created to prevent erosion, but the Germans used them for lines of defense and counterattack. Many little battles were fought around the hedgerows. When attacking Americans approached one row, they found a strong force of defenders behind it and properly emplaced machine guns at both ends. If the enemy were dislodged or fell back, German troops behind another hedgerow went into action with mortars or artillery.

"Finally, we got in a line across this last hedgerow and went into Carentan. That's when I saw dead Germans stacked like cordwood. Honest to God! We were shooting blind into the town, and when we got there, their bodies were stacked up just like logs. The Germans themselves must have stacked them that way. Somebody did."

On June 12, Carentan was declared clear of the enemy, and the town was occupied. The final job for the 101st in Normandy was to maintain positions at the base of the Cotentin Peninsula. As June turned into July this area proved relatively quiet, manned largely by Allied patrols and inhabited mainly by wandering cows. "It was about a month after the landing before we had a chance to get off the line," says Labutka. "We had no change of clothes and no showers during that time, but afterward we were eating steak. We'd kill a cow and cook it over a fire. We had steak for breakfast and steak for dinner."

The 101st was relieved after 33 days of continuous combat, and moved by trucks to an area behind Utah Beach on July 10. The division history records that in little more than a month of combat, the 101st suffered 4,670 casualties. According to E Company historian Emmanuel Allain of Normandy, France, Labutka's company of the 502 lost only three men during that time: one officer and two NCOs were killed in action.

The paratroopers were taken to England by landing craft from July 11-13 and returned to their old quarters north of London. At least one month of back pay awaited them, and leaves were approved. Labutka says most of the men who were given passes went to London to celebrate. "I went to London for booze and women. Don't forget," he says, "I was just a kid."

The division was replenished and took part in further training over the next two months. More Airborne missions were proposed, but each time they were canceled due to the rapid Allied advance in France. But the good life in England didn't last, as the 101st was slated to take part in a plan to liberate Holland and advance quickly into the Ruhr, the industrial heart of Germany. Dubbed Operation Market-Garden and developed by British Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery, it called for Airborne forces (the Market phase) to drop behind German lines and secure a hundred-mile corridor as British armored forces (the Garden phase) came up from Belgium to capture vital bridges over the lower Rhine River.

Strategically the plan failed. Eisenhower had been reluctant at first to support the mission, but eventually he relented. Bradley called it "the wrong plan at the wrong time in the wrong place."

The three parachute regiments of the 101st had separate assignments in Holland. The 502 was charged with securing its landing zone near Eindhoven, capturing a bridge over the Dommel River, and attacking the village of Best to protect the lower section of the British thrust. The paratroopers were loaded with the same amount of equipment as in Normandy, and the September 17 daylight drop into Holland was picture perfect.

"It was nothing like Normandy; it went off like a practice jump. There was no opposition." The only obstacle Labutka encountered in the jump was barbed wire, which gave him a cut above his right knee. The scar it caused has remained with him. "They wanted to give me a Purple Heart, but I turned them down. Why should I accept a medal for a scratch when guys around me were getting killed?"

While the paratroopers had an uneventful flight from England and an easy drop, it was different for the division's glider troops. Of the 70 gliders that took part, only about 50 made it to Holland intact. Some landed far behind German lines, some were hit by flak, and some were crashed upon landing by obstacles planted in the fields.

"The Germans had sticks, trees actually, buried in the ground every 10 feet, which ripped those gliders apart," Labutka says. "Some of them contained jeeps and cannon and when they hit the poles there was equipment all over the place."

With the landing zone secured and the Dommel River crossed, the march on the bridge that crossed the Wilhelmina Canal at Best commenced. Just as intelligence reports of enemy troop strength at Carentan were in error, so it was there. The Germans who defended the area were thought to be of poor quality, and Allied planners anticipated that a platoon could handle the mission. When enemy defenses stiffened, a company was sent to help. Later, both 2nd and 3rd Battalions joined the attack. At one point, 2nd attacked with three companies in line across an open wheat field and took serious losses from artillery, mortars, and machine guns.

"Some of the guys near me were bunched up," Labutka explains. "I even yelled at them to scatter. You're never supposed to get close to the next guy. That's what they taught us—don't bunch up because that's what the enemy is looking for. Then a mortar shell hit three of them. One guy was hit right in his lap. Another one of them was dying. He had me recite the Act of Contrition to him. He died right there in my arms."

Another fatality was Colonel Cole of 3rd Battalion. After calling for air support, friendly fire began taking its toll on American troops, so Cole decided to place orange panels in front of the line to benefit Allied pilots. While he was doing so, an enemy sniper killed him with a shot to his temple. Cole died never knowing that he had been awarded the Medal of Honor for leading the bayonet charge at Carentan. When the battle for Best ended, nearly half of the 101st had been involved, along with a column of British tanks. The area had been defended by about a thousand enemy troops.

"We captured about 200 German soldiers at Best, kids and old men," Labutka says. "They just threw down their guns. Two guys with bazookas were taking them back to the rear when somebody said, 'OK, we're moving.' So I was walking behind this machine gunner and he threw his machine gun over his shoulder and must have pulled the trigger. There was one shell in it and it hit my helmet, put a nick in it, and boy did I hit the ground. I gave him hell. I said, 'You're supposed to clear your gun.' He said, 'I thought I did.'"

After the fall of Best, the 502 was ordered to hold defensive positions in the area. Company E lost 18 men killed in action in the operation, 12 of whom had been with the outfit when they jumped into Normandy.

"Up to this time I was still a private," Labutka says. "But shortly after Best I went, on one order, from private to Pfc to corporal to sergeant to staff sergeant to tech sergeant. Three up and two down. That's how many guys got wounded or killed. In one order I went from private to platoon sergeant. I had 47 guys under me—three rifle squads and a mortar squad. That's when I was issued a Thompson submachine gun.

"This one time in Holland," he continues, "I was looking through my field glasses and saw Germans about a hundred yards away. They were squatted, with their pants down, so I radioed over to my mortar sergeant, Earl Rodd, and asked, 'Do you see that?' He said, 'How about me going back and laying a couple of shells in there?' I said, 'That's just what I want you to do when I let you know there are more Germans.' So he went back and I was on the radio with him and about five or six more of them came down. I said, 'Earl, lay a couple in there now.' He did. They were all tree bursts, hitting these big fir trees. Those Germans scattered all over. You should have seen them run with their pants halfway up. I laughed. I think it was the first time I laughed like that since I'd gotten over there."

It was also in Holland that Labutka had a chance encounter with the division's artillery commander, Brig. Gen. Anthony C. McAuliffe, who later gained fame with his "Nuts" response to a German surrender order at Bastogne. After their Holland jump, the paratroopers were told to take off their jump boots and wear regular-issue combat boots so the Germans could not identify them as Airborne if they were captured.

"One day, this was also after Best, General McAuliffe, accompanied by my platoon leader, Bill Parks, was checking our company area. Lieutenant Parks called me over and General

A DIME STORE TOY BECAME A D-DAY LEGEND.

IT WAS NOT EXPENSIVE to produce, but its value as a lifesaver was immeasurable. This was the cricket, the little toy noisemaker used by U.S. paratroopers to identify each other in the predawn hours of D-Day. Issued to soldiers about four days before the Normandy invasion, the device provided a means by which Americans could communicate in the darkness. One click of its tab asked, "Who's there?" Two clicks in response meant, "Friend." Over the years, a controversy of sorts has developed concerning which Airborne divisions were issued this tool.

It is an accepted fact that the man behind the cricket was Brig. Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor, commanding general of the 101st Airborne Division. Taylor came to the 101st in March 1944, following duty with the 82nd Airborne in North Africa and Sicily, where earlier jumps showed that troops needed a way to identify one another in the dark. According to the division history of the 101st, the cricket was used "only by the 101st, though some publications and movies later suggested that the 82nd Airborne used them as well." However, discrepancies abound. In his book *The Longest Day*, Cornelius Ryan cites several instances when paratroopers of both the 101st and the 82nd used the cricket.

Therein lies the mystery. Were men of the 101st alone given the cricket, or were troops of the 82nd also issued the device? Jim Patton, executive secretary of the 101st Airborne Division Association, dropped into Normandy at 0037 hours on D-Day from a burning C-47 transport as a first lieutenant with the 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment. "I've been told that only 101st paratroopers were issued the cricket," he says. "I'm not positive, but down through the ages I was always under that impression."

Not so fast, says Don Lassen, a private with the 82nd Airborne's 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, and publisher of *Static Line,* a monthly paper devoted to any and all men who jumped

National Archives

Although Operation Market-Garden ended in a bloody repulse, the initial air drop was executed with precision in daylight on September 18, 1944. Here, 101st Airborne troops already on the ground move past Dutch civilians to a rallying point. Gliders approaching touchdown can be seen in the background.

McAuliffe said, 'How are your men eating, sergeant?' And we had just passed third platoon, and they had a pig on a spit. I said, 'We're eating well, sir.' He said, 'So I guess you are.' And then he asked me, 'How do you like your combat boots?' I said, 'I hate them, sir.' He said, 'You do know why we can't wear jump boots?' I said, 'Sure, the enemy will know we're paratroopers.' He said, 'That's right, sergeant.'"

Whether German forces would have treated Airborne troops any differently from the regular infantry if they were captured, Labutka is not sure. But the switch of boots would be repeated again when the division was sent to Bastogne.

Since the main objective of Market-Garden, an advance into the Ruhr, never materialized, the operation failed. However, the Allies did drive 65 miles through German lines, crossed two major rivers, seized airfield sites, and created a buffer to protect the port of Antwerp. By mid-November, after 72 days of combat, the 101st was moved to its base at Camp Mourmelon, a one-time airfield in France, where paratroopers received passes to Paris, enjoyed good food and champagne, and experienced frequent USO performances.

"Bob Hope came one time. But that wasn't my cup of tea. I never went to a movie or saw a show," smiles Labutka. "I was busy drinking and playing poker. I had to be the unluckiest poker player in the world. Maybe I drank too much when I played. But what else was there to do? There were no women around."

Once again the good times were about to end as German forces opened their last offensive in Western Europe through the Ardennes Forest in Belgium. Their attack, launched on December 16, 1944, rolled through the sparsely held line of either inexperienced or battle-weary American troops. The 101st was soon in the center of the action during what has come to be known as the Battle of the Bulge.

"I was AWOL in Paris when they attacked," Labutka says. "I had a pass, but it was overextended. You see, me and my first sergeant were close. He gave me a pass whenever I wanted one. All I had to do was sign somebody's name to it and show it to the bus driver. He didn't know one lieutenant from another. It was easy. So me and a buddy were in Paris. I think we'd been there four days and were planning to visit the Folies Bérgère, the famous nightclub. But before we got there we stopped at this little outside café drinking gin and orange juice. We never got to the nightclub because somebody rolled us. It was probably one of the girls we met.

"So without any money we went back to Rainbow Corner. This was a place in Paris where all the GIs went. A lieutenant came by and said, 'Sergeant, I got bad news for you. Be at Rainbow Corner at 5 o'clock tomorrow morning.' I asked, 'What happened?' He said, 'Breakthrough.' There were about two truckloads of guys from our outfit in Paris and we went back to Mourmelon."

The surprise German attack easily knifed through the American lines. Poor visibility grounded Allied planes, and over the next three days the situation worsened for the

from an airplane. "There's no mystery as far as I'm concerned," he asserts. "I had a cricket, and I assume the rest of the 82nd were given crickets. When I landed at about 2 AM, it was darker than pitch. I was totally alone in a field, and tracers were going all around me. I couldn't find anyone, so I went over to the nearest cover I could find, a hedgerow, and I heard someone coming. I waited for the sound to get closer because I wanted to be sure that whoever it was would hear my click. As the sound got closer and closer I finally clicked. Sure enough, the person approaching me, someone from the 101st as it turned out, clicked his cricket and we both were OK.

"The cricket saved a lot of lives," Lassen continues. "In the dark there was no way I could identify an individual without a cricket. If I yelled, 'Halt! Who goes there?' hell, I might have been killed. The cricket was no good before we landed and no good when it became daylight. It was only good for D minus H-hour, H-hour being 6:30 AM. In my opinion it was one of the most ingenious devices the U.S. Army ever came up with."

But Joe Beyrle of Michigan says others may think what they wish. As a member of the 101st Division's 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment who was taken prisoner by the Germans four days after D-Day, he says he is certain that the cricket was issued only to those of the 101st.

"I know for a fact the 82nd Airborne was not issued crickets. They could have come into possession of them, but they weren't issued them. Regardless of what has been said, I know they weren't. The cricket was the brainstorm of General Taylor. He was helped by [Lt. Col.] Harry Kinnard (executive officer of the 501st Regiment at the time), who was on Taylor's staff. Kinnard was one of those involved with it. I know this as a fact also. I've talked to too many people about it and discussed it at reunions many times over the years."

As a footnote to this "mystery," Beyrle has imported reproduction crickets from the original manufacturer in England, the P.H. Harris Company, and says authentic crickets are highly prized by collectors. Originals are scarce, he says, because most paratroopers discarded theirs. "We were only supposed to use them until daylight." □

Americans. One option for Eisenhower was to commit his reserve units, one of which was the 101st. With its division commander in the United States and assistant commander in England, the job fell to General McAuliffe to lead the paratroopers into battle. But this time they did not drop from the air. They went on trucks and arrived in Bastogne, a key Belgian crossroads town, on December 19. This was the southern sector of the German thrust guarded in part by the tired U.S. 28th Division, which had been sent to that area for rest. The division had seen action since just after the Normandy landings, and more recently had been involved in the desperate fighting in the Hürtgen Forest. The 28th also contained men from Labutka's hometown National Guard unit. As the Germans advanced, the 28th fell back and the 101st moved in.

"Going into Bastogne I was in charge of two trucks," recalls Labutka. "That's when I heard that the National Guard from Pennsylvania was there. I knew guys in Company D from Butler, and naturally I knew guys in Company C from Ford City. So here they were, the 28th Division, coming out of Bastogne while we were going in. One of the guys I knew I did see coming out, Pete Rhodes from Company C."

Once in Bastogne, the 101st immediately set up a defensive perimeter in all four directions around the town, a radius of about 16 miles. The paratroopers were surrounded by German forces, and Labutka found himself on the northwest side of Bastogne during the worst winter in years, as nighttime temperatures frequently dropped below zero. When men touched a gun barrel, their skin stuck to it. Snow was as constant as the American patrols probing the German lines.

"We didn't go too far out on patrols," he recalls. "They just wanted to see how far [away] the Germans were. This one time we were on patrol and my radio operator, Jimmy Agnostis, was behind me. I was up the field a way, and I stopped because I thought I saw some German troops about 200 yards away. Then I heard this 'pow-pow' from behind me and damn if I wasn't hit in my helmet again! I said, 'Jimmy, you SOB! That's twice I almost got killed with our own guns!' He said, 'I'm sorry, I'm sorry.'"

The Germans underestimated American resolve to defend the town, and overestimated their own ability to take it. Four Germans approached U.S. lines south of Bastogne on December 22. One of them carried a white flag, and another held a message that proposed the Americans, since they were surrounded, should surrender. If the offer was rejected, the note promised that Bastogne would be destroyed by heavy guns. When the ultimatum reached McAuliffe, his first reaction was "Nuts." That answer was eventually delivered, but the German envoy did not understand its meaning. The American officer in charge said through a translator: "If you don't understand what 'Nuts' means in plain English, it's the same as 'Go to hell!'"

The German bulge in the American lines was reaching its high-water mark when the offensive began to run low on supplies and meet stiffer Allied resistance. By December 24, Hitler was said to be so incensed that such a small town could be such a big thorn in the German drive that he ordered Bastogne annihilated.

"The Germans did bring in tanks and shot 88s into our third platoon," Labutka says. "They got hammered. For the most part, my platoon was in reserve. That's why I didn't get into contact with German tanks. But our third platoon from E Company took it bad." E Company losses were 11 KIA, three of whom had jumped with the company on D-Day.

As Christmas Day neared, the visibility cleared enough for Allied planes, at times flying 250 sorties a day, to drop supplies to the beleaguered paratroopers who were now running low on everything. Most air drops reached American hands, although some landed too far away. Labutka remembers celebrating the holiday with an ice cream-like concoction made by putting snow in a canteen cup and adding lemonade powder from dropped C-rations.

"When those skies brightened and I heard those planes coming over to give us ammunition, food, everything we needed," he says, "I thought that was the nicest Christmas present I ever got."

National Archives

Douglas C-47 transport aircraft fill the European sky as U.S. paratroopers hit the silk. Airborne assaults were risky undertakings during World War II, and the C-47 was a mainstay of the air bridge from England into the war-torn Continent.

National Archives

Relieved at last, haggard and war-weary veterans of the epic 101st Airborne defense of Bastogne trudge toward rest and a hot meal. The troopers of the 101st held the encircled crossroads town against repeated German attacks at the height of the Battle of the Bulge. They were ultimately relieved by troops of General George Patton's Third Army.

A U.S. armored division finally arrived from the south on December 26 and pushed its way into Bastogne a few days later. This corridor was eventually widened, and on January 18, 1945, the 101st was poised to exit the town it had called home for a month.

"We marched out of Bastogne and got on trucks. Outside of town, somebody had put up this big sign: The Battered Bastards of the Bastion of Bastogne."

Now on trucks once again, the division was sent to Luxembourg and later to the Alsace region of France. Stationed there until mid-February, the paratroopers saw little action. Afterward, they returned by train to their camp at Mourmelon where, on March 16, the 101st became the first division in history to receive the Distinguished Unit Citation (now called the Presidential Unit Citation) as an entire division. General Taylor also addressed the men in Mourmelon, telling them that when the war in Europe was over the division would probably be sent to the Pacific to fight the Japanese. It did not go over well.

"He said that, if possible, we were going to Japan and finish off the Japs," Labutka remembers. "We weren't in the mood for that. Do you know what he heard? From the rear ranks: 'Boo!' Then louder: 'Boo!' Then finally from the entire division: 'Boo!' Can you imagine what that sounded like from a whole division?"

American forces by this time were well east of the Rhine River, and the 101st was ordered to Düsseldorf and then to southern Germany and finally to Bavaria, where Allied leaders expected diehard Nazis to put up their last fight. The division's final assignment of the war was to capture Berchtesgaden where Hitler had maintained his mountain home. That was accomplished on May 5, and two days later radio reports told that the Germans had agreed to unconditional surrender. The next day it became official, and the war was over.

"We were billeted in a nice house in Kempton, just outside Berchtesgaden," Labutka says. "At the time, people who owned the house could put their valuables in a room or on the third floor and lock it up. The house I was in belonged to Eva Braun, Hitler's mistress. It had lots of big rooms, high ceilings, but little furniture because it was all locked up. So somebody from my platoon broke into one of the rooms and took a bunch of stuff, mostly jewelry. We had a meeting with the company commander the next day, and he said, 'We'll give you guys 'til Reveille to put everything back. If not, there's going to be repercussions.'

"At 5:30 the next morning, nothing was returned. So the next day they made us go on a 25-mile forced march with a full pack—rifle, blanket, no water. They said we were going to do that every day until everything was put back. That night, after our march, the guys who took the jewelry put it all back. Three or four guys were involved. We knew who they were, and everybody wanted to beat them up. And they would have been beaten up if it had gone on any longer."

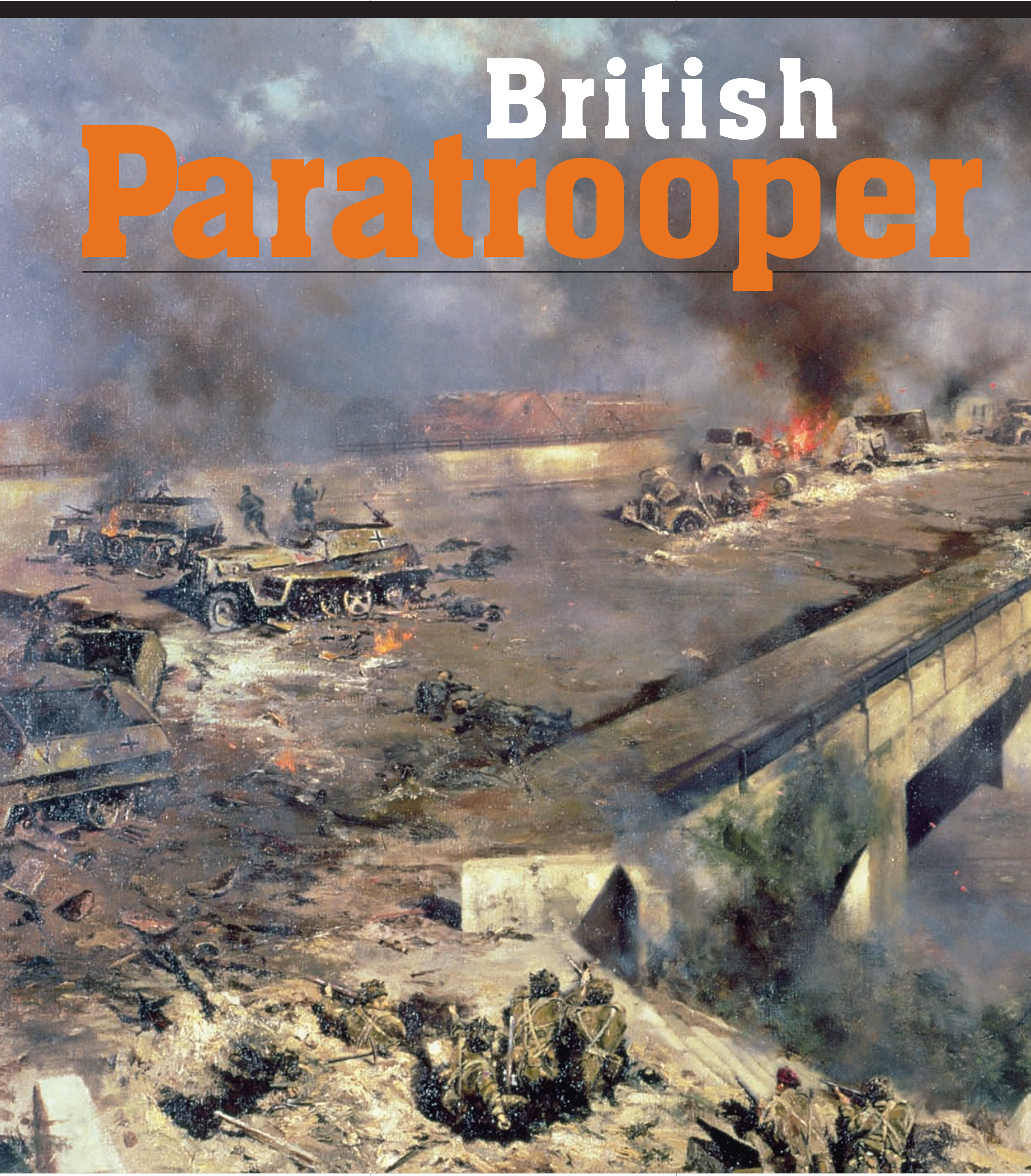
Labutka left Europe from the southern French port of Marseilles on September 6, 1945, and arrived Stateside eight days later. He was discharged on September 21.

"I wouldn't take a million dollars to do it over again," he says. "And you couldn't give me a million dollars not to have gone through it. I'm glad I went through it. I was lucky. The Lord took care of me because I'm still here. But I know one thing. I would never jump from an airplane again, unless somebody called me a chicken."

Perhaps the most fitting tribute a soldier can receive comes from the men who served with him. "Lud was a leader even before he became our platoon sergeant," offers Tony Diarchangelo of suburban Philadelphia, who served in Labutka's platoon through Normandy, Holland, and Bastogne. "He was one hell of a soldier, a great soldier, always calm, cool, and collected. As a unit we never lost a skirmish."□

Richard Beranty is a teacher of high school English and journalism in western Pennsylvania.

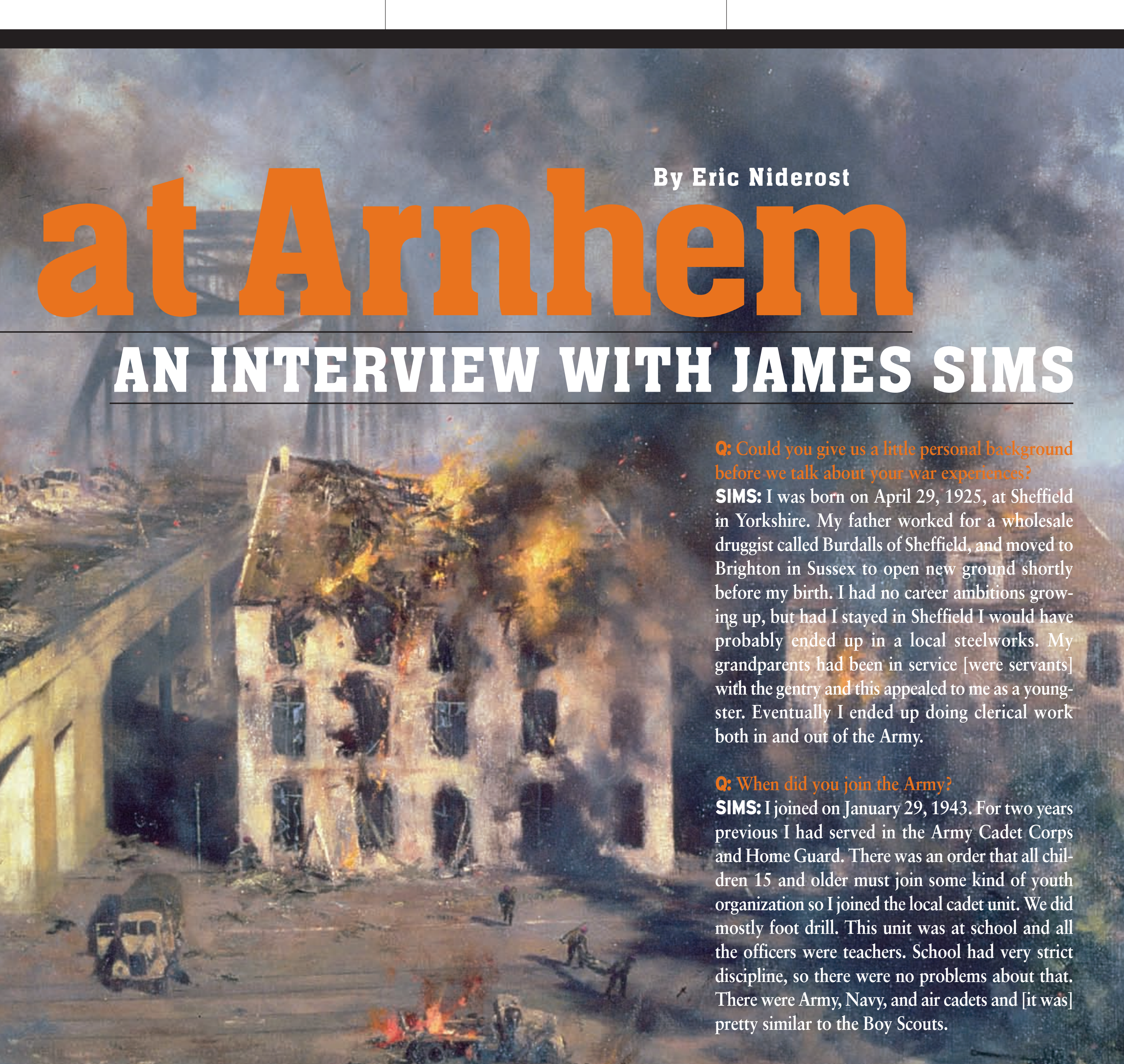
British Paratrooper



at Arnhem

By Eric Niderost

AN INTERVIEW WITH JAMES SIMS



Q: Could you give us a little personal background before we talk about your war experiences?

SIMS: I was born on April 29, 1925, at Sheffield in Yorkshire. My father worked for a wholesale druggist called Burdalls of Sheffield, and moved to Brighton in Sussex to open new ground shortly before my birth. I had no career ambitions growing up, but had I stayed in Sheffield I would have probably ended up in a local steelworks. My grandparents had been in service [were servants] with the gentry and this appealed to me as a youngster. Eventually I ended up doing clerical work both in and out of the Army.

Q: When did you join the Army?

SIMS: I joined on January 29, 1943. For two years previous I had served in the Army Cadet Corps and Home Guard. There was an order that all children 15 and older must join some kind of youth organization so I joined the local cadet unit. We did mostly foot drill. This unit was at school and all the officers were teachers. School had very strict discipline, so there were no problems about that. There were Army, Navy, and air cadets and [it was] pretty similar to the Boy Scouts.

A depiction of the Arnhem bridge at about 5 PM on the second day of the battle. The Germans attacked with armored cars from the far side to dislodge the paratroopers holding the northern approaches.

David Shepherd, Bridgeman Art Library

All photos: Imperial War Museum, except as noted.

Paratroopers assemble and gather their equipment immediately after landing.

Q: Was the Army your first choice?

SIMS: As soon as I was 17 I went to the local recruiting hall to join the Royal Air Force [RAF], as I was very air-minded, but was told I must wait until 18-and-a-half to join. Whilst recovering from this blow I overheard a chap joining up and he was going to Maidenstone in Kent to join the Royal Artillery. This was only 50 miles from Brighton so I volunteered and was accepted. The training in the RA was very intense and we trained with the 25-pounder gun howitzer, a very fine gun and backbone of the U.K. artillery.

Q: Why didn't you stay with the RoyalArtillery?

SIMS: There were two reasons I joined the Paras. Firstly, to get rid of the RA, because they treated the rank and file badly. The NCOs seemed bent on making your life a misery, and officers did nothing about it. As I said, I was air-minded, and firstly volunteered for the Glider Pilot Regiment, but at that time they were oversubscribed so the Paras were the only alternative. I joined the Paras on February 2, 1944. I certainly had my doubts about parachuting but thought if others could do it, then so could I. Until then I had never been in an aircraft.

Q: Describe your first experiences as a paratroop recruit.

SIMS: As "wingless wonders" we arrived at Hardwick Hall, Chesterfield. I was immediately struck by the different attitude of both officers and NCOs, and the enthusiasm of the recruits. We did two weeks of physical tests and had thorough medical inspections and we were amazed at the tough-looking types that failed and were returned to [original] units. We slept in two-tier bunks and it was bitterly cold but the food was plentiful and excellent. We carried out routine forced marches and the word "GO" was drilled into us.

Q: What was life like at Hardwick Hall?

SIMS: Everything at Hardwick Hall was done "at the double," and those who conked out were RTU'd [Returned to Unit]. For light relief we had "paratroop football." Dress was denims, boots, and steel helmets. I believe there were goals and a ball, but I cannot be sure. The whole object of the game was to get "stuck in." It lasted about an hour until there was a cracked collarbone or broken arm!

Q: The course at Hardwick was supposed to be grueling …

SIMS: We carried out, or attempted to carry out, a 10-mile forced march with full battle order in two hours. A blizzard erupted and so many recruits collapsed the exercise was abandoned. However, since we had done seven miles in one hour and five minutes, and that in a blizzard, it counted as a "pass"!

Q: The next stage of training was parachute jumping. Could you elaborate on your experiences there?

SIMS: After successfully "surviving" Hardwick Hall we were posted to Ringway Airport, Manchester, there to earn our wings. We were to be at Ringway for two weeks. The first week would be carried out in a huge hangar, using a lot of equipment that would help us prepare for the eight jumps we needed to qualify as a Para. While at Ringway we had RAF instructors. There were several items of equipment in the hangar; for example, a children's slide cut

in half. The recruit slid down the chute backwards and landed in thick mud. This was supposed to simulate landing on a Drop Zone (or DZ as it was known).

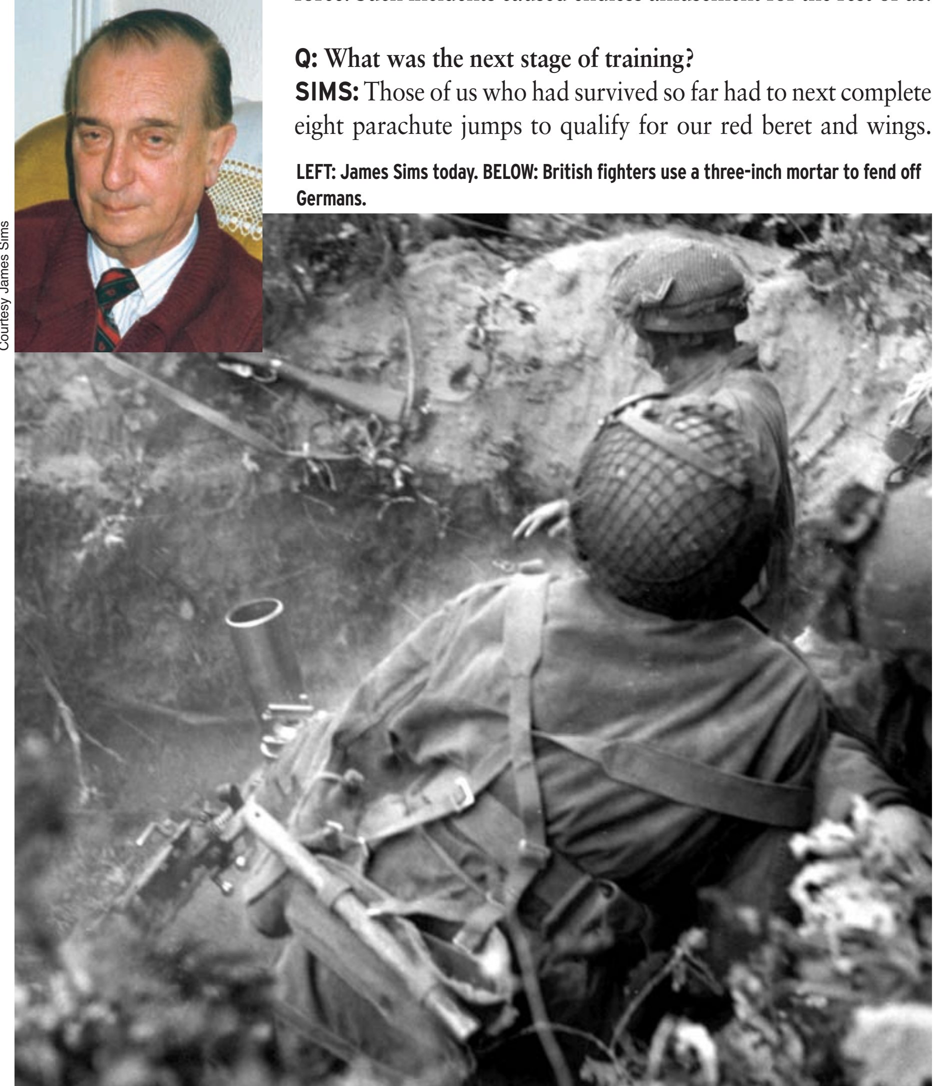
Another item was the "fan." You had to climb onto the roof of the hangar, and once there you'd see this equipment. Each "fan" would consist of a harness that was attached to what looked like piano wire that was wrapped around a drum. A fan was sticking out of it; hence the name. You put the harness on, and on the command "GO!" you jumped and hit the deck about 40 feet below. The attached "fan" was supposed to slow your descent similar to the use of a parachute. There were several fans; the first fan—the one I usually got—was worn, and so your descent was a bone-shaker. In fact, you hit so hard all your loose pocket change jumped out of your pockets. The RAF instructors collected this, regarding the cash as their beer money! I believe I lost more coins than any other recruit did.

Another piece of equipment was the "overhead railway." This consisted of a wire leading down from the roof of the hangar to a "railway sleeper" sunk in the ground. These "sleepers" were wooden posts and used under railroad tracks. The idea was that you slung a toggle rope and wheel over this wire, and then jumped. Your weight and momentum carried you down this slanting wire toward the "sleeper." Just before you reached the end you were supposed to let go on command, hitting the deck and rolling like a real parachute landing. However, some recruits became mesmerized by the sleeper, forgetting to let go and slamming into it with some force. Such incidents caused endless amusement for the rest of us.

Q: What was the next stage of training?
SIMS: Those of us who had survived so far had to next complete eight parachute jumps to qualify for our red beret and wings.

Courtesy James Sims

LEFT: James Sims today. BELOW: British fighters use a three-inch mortar to fend off Germans.



The jumps would be done at Tatton Park in Cheshire, the first being three balloon jumps, two by day and one by night. The day before we were to do our first jump we were taken by an RAF bus to see the balloon jumps. They were done from a basket suspended beneath an old barrage balloon. One recruit jumped and plummeted earthwards with his chute strung out behind him. He screamed as he fell the 700 feet with an undeveloped canopy, then fainted just as his chute developed! Our RAF instructor, a former Welsh rugby player named Ike Owens, casually said, "Damp chute—it often happens." Not reassured by these remarks, about 10 men withdrew from the course! You could withdraw from the course [i.e., quit the Paras] at any time until you were awarded your wings. It was a much disheartened bunch that returned to Ringway!

Q: Describe your very first parachute jump.
SIMS: The next day we were taken out to Tatton Park for our first jump in a tethered balloon. We jumped in "sticks" of four, one on each corner of the basket. Our instructor Ike Owens came up with us to supervise our exits. The basket came to a jolted halt and we got ready. "Action stations—GO!" was the cry. I made a good exit but fell 100 feet out of the 700 before my chute developed, quite an ordeal. We all made good landings and after a cup of tea from a mobile canteen we returned to camp. One jump down—seven to go! It was quite a contrast—whereas on the outward journey we all clutched our chutes silently, on the return journey we were "full of it—" talking, etc.

Q: How did you feel about these balloon jumps?
SIMS: Some people loved the balloon jumps, while some found it terrifying, including me! The next day we were to repeat the performance, but as it was quite windy we all expected this second jump to be canceled. Much to our surprise it wasn't! Once again, it was the long RAF bus journey to Tatton Park. When we got there the balloon was racing around like a zeppelin! We got into the cage and were winched aloft. When it came my turn to jump I sort of fell out instead of push-

ing off; my chute had caught on the exit. I was somersaulting into space, as Ike Owen was shouting, "You bloody fool, you don't deserve to live!" from the ground.

When the chute developed I was upside down with both feet entangled in the rigging lines. I did not panic, but remembered the training films showing how to get out of this predicament. I managed to make a good landing and Ike never mentioned my lousy exit.

Our third balloon jump was at night. Everyone said the night balloon jump was the best. This proved true as one could see and hear nothing. It was like lying in a black velvet bed—until you hit the deck. Many preferred balloons, but not me. I preferred an aircraft's slipstream, which developed your chute instantaneously. After the balloon jumps came five more jumps from the bombers, and after successfully completing the course you were rewarded with your wings and red beret. You were a Para!

Q: After earning your wings you were posted to the 2nd Battalion, The Parachute Regiment, one of the more famous units of the airborne forces.

SIMS: In the spring of 1944 about 30 of us paraded outside Stoke Rochford Hall, replacements for battalion casualties incurred in Tunisia, Sicily, and Italy. A signals sergeant formed us up and said, "Welcome to the 2nd Battalion, a battalion living off its past glories!" An officer emerged from the hall and I was thrilled to recognize Lt. Col. John D. Frost, famous for the Bruneval Raid [1942, France], one of the most successful airborne actions ever. [Interviewer note: Frost was portrayed by Anthony Hopkins in the 1977 movie *A Bridge Too Far.*] On reaching me, Colonel Frost asked my parent unit, and on learning it was the RA said I would be well suited to the Mortar Platoon.

Q: Describe Colonel Frost.

SIMS: Colonel Frost was a tall, heavily built man and behaved accordingly. He always had a lugubrious expression and the only time I ever saw him smile was in a burning house near the "Bridge Too Far" at Arnhem. We soon learned he was a strict disciplinarian. The colonel had a lot to put up with, and I can give you one example.

ABOVE: The British patrol through ruined homes in Oosterbeek near Arnhem. By the 25th of September when this picture was taken, the British perimeter was small. OPPOSITE: Arnhem was the distant and ambitious goal of the Allied plan.

We were given leave passes on Friday evenings, but Grantham Station was about six miles from where we were, and we had no transportation. With no buses or lifts it was a problem, but it was soon solved by one of our platoon. He waited for a civilian car to come along, and then stood out in front of it until it halted. "We are on an exercise and I am commandeering your vehicle. Drive us to Grantham Station," said our bloke. The driver obeyed; he wasn't going to argue with Paras. Eight of us jammed into the car and off we went.

We used this "scam" for some time until we stopped Colonel Frost's car in error! The old man was furious but we still got our passes.

Q: Describe the Mortar Platoon and its equipment.

SIMS: The Mortar Platoon was commanded by Lieutenant Woods; the platoon sergeant was Sergeant Jackson. There were four section sergeants and about 40 men. We were equipped with four mortars. The 3-inch mortar was used by infantry as portable artillery and both British and Germans were highly skilled in its use. When carrying the weapon the mortar was divided into three parts, namely the barrel, the legs, and the baseplate. Each part weighed about 40 pounds. Those not carrying mortar parts had to carry six 10-pound mortar bombs on top of the usual gear. In addition, I was assisting my officer, Lieutenant Woods, look for suitable targets, then I passed down to our two mortar positions. Only two out of four mortars ever reached our positions at the Arnhem bridge.

Q: Your outfit was part of the British 1st Airborne Division, which felt frustrated when it did not take part in D-Day. Even after D-Day, the 1st Airborne suffered through the ups and downs of operations being constantly canceled. Can you describe the feelings of the private soldier during this period?

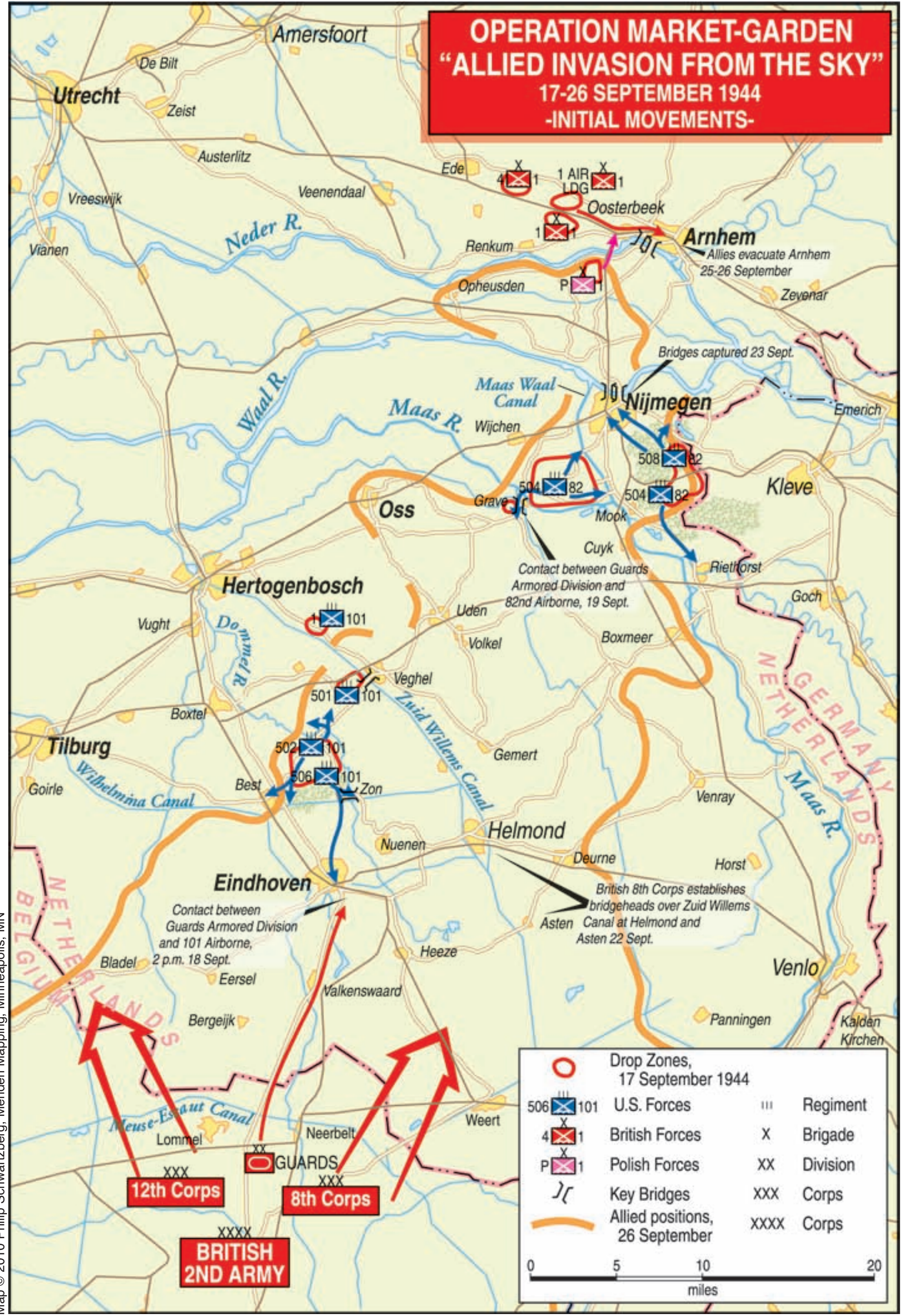
SIMS: Our division felt "out of it" when the 6th Airborne Division went on D-Day instead of us. Of course they did extremely well, which was even more upsetting. Then, operation after operation was canceled, but our officers told us we were being kept for "something special." There was a lot of speculation; jumping on Berlin and snatching Hitler was one rumor.

Q: What happened when you finally got the green light for Operation Market-Garden, the

taking of the Rhine Bridge at Arnhem? Weren't you almost left at home?

SIMS: When Arnhem was looked to be "on" everything changed completely and training intensified. In a couple of days we would land in Holland to take a town we had never heard of. Three of us, "Young Geordie"(I can't recall his full name), "Brum" Davis, and myself, were brought before the colonel who told us because we were only 19 years old we would not jump into action. Instead, we would go with the sea-party and as the colonel put it, "see something about what war is all about before rejoining the 2nd Para north of Arnhem."

I remember feeling somewhat relieved now that the operation was on, but suddenly three veterans went missing. Not on purpose, I believe, but because we had already "stood to" [went on alert] for 19 operations, only to see them canceled. NCOs in jeeps scoured districts in Grantham and Nottingham for these absentees but to no avail. That was it; we youngsters were put back in our platoon and told we would go the next day.



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

Q: Market-Garden started on September 17, 1944. Could you describe your feelings at that time, knowing you would be going into action for the very first time?

SIMS: We were taken to airfields throughout Lincolnshire to enplane on Sunday, September 17, 1944. Everyone was in top form; it was like a Sunday School outing. Loads of newsreel camera footage was taken, but I never saw any of it afterward. Finally we climbed aboard [a USAAF C-47 "Dakota"] and were airborne. I remember saying to myself, "What the hell am I doing here?" but was reassured by the cheerful attitude of my comrades.

Q: Could you describe the equipment the Paras were carrying into battle?

SIMS: When one considers what we carried into action it is amazing we ever got to Arnhem. There was battle dress and red beret, denison smock, six 10-pound mortar bombs, 40 rounds of .303-caliber rifle ammunition, two .36 grenades, one anti-tank grenade, one phosphorus grenade, water bottle, and 24-hour ration pack. And, of course, Dutch occupation money, maps, escape saws, a pick and shovel. Altogether it must have weighed one hundred pounds or so.

Q: Your immediate commander was Lieutenant Woods. What kind of a man was he?

SIMS: Woods was a tall and slim man of 25 who, like Frost, didn't smile much. He was a typical Airborne officer in that he ignored some behavior but was very strict with important things. The men held him in the greatest respect and his nickname was "Lakari," which I believe is Hindi for "wood."

Q: What was the flight to Holland like?

SIMS: We crossed the Dutch coast where we were fired upon by a German Naval vessel [MTB, Motor Torpedo Boat], but it was soon dealt with by one of our fighter escorts, a rocket-firing Hawker "Typhoon." Our aircraft dived to level off at operational

A German photograph of a German position during the battle.

height, 400 feet. The route to Arnhem was marked by blazing German flak posts.

Q: Then, finally it was the time to jump …
SIMS: We stood up and shuffled down our Dakota C-47 toward the open door in which Lieutenant Woods was framed. The man behind me plucked at my chute. "What the hell are you doing?" I shouted. He said, "It's not a chute—it's an old Army blanket!" The lamp blinked green and Lieutenant Woods vanished out the door. I made an awful exit and when my chute opened it was twisting closed. Luckily it finally untwisted, but then I couldn't release my kit bag that was secured to my left leg. We were told that if you landed with your kit bag on it could break your leg. In the few seconds I had I would find out if this was true! Luckily for me my leg didn't break, but it was a very hard landing. It was my 13th jump, and my worst!

Q: The drop zones were some eight miles from Arnhem bridge, a factor that compromised the operation from the start. Different units were to converge on the objective from different routes, thus advancing on a broad front. For example, Lt. Col. J.A.C. Fitch's 3rd Battalion was to go on a northerly road through the village of Oosterbeek. Your own 2nd Battalion under Lt. Col. Frost took the most southerly road that partly hugged the Rhine.
SIMS: Yes, and we were the only unit to reach the objective. In hindsight it might have been better if we had dropped north of the bridge; a glider-borne *coup de main* at either end of the bridge might have succeeded.

Q: German reaction was swift, wasn't it?
SIMS: Yes, the SS troops reacted rapidly and held up our advance with lone machine-gun teams, who proved highly effective. [These were elements of the 9th SS Panzer Division, reformed as the Kampfgruppe Hohenstauffen.] Our platoon was ambushed and men killed, including "Brum" Davis, but we pushed on.

Q: There was sporadic fighting, but at times the march into Arnhem resembled a triumphal parade.
SIMS: The Dutch came out and applauded, gave us fruit, and marigolds. They kept repeating, "We have waited four years for you." They thought the war was practically over. They also offered us gin, and Lieutenant Woods threatened to shoot them if they persisted. What surprised me was the quality of Dutch civilian clothes and shoes. As an ex-shoe salesman I noticed this and was surprised, since our propaganda told us the Dutch were starving and in rags. This was not the case at Arnhem.

Q: At one point British 1st Airborne Division commander Maj. Gen. Roy Urquhart came up to 2nd Para in a jeep … By this time there were some communications problems with the various units.
SIMS: General Urquhart caught up with us on the way into Arnhem and asked us where Colonel Frost was. We told him he was up ahead, so off he raced [Urquhart never managed to see Frost]. Urquhart was a burly, tough-looking soldier. Most impressive.

Q: What was your impression of Arnhem?
SIMS: Arnhem was a beautiful town surrounded by fields and bisected by the Lower Rhine. When we reached the lower end of the bridge we were allocated either to two mortar pits or one of the surrounding houses.

Q: What were your first hours at Arnhem like?
SIMS: "Slapsie" [a paratrooper from London] and I shared a slit trench, and things quieted down since we dominated the immediate area. Up on the bridge a German ammunition wagon was exploding. It sounded like a fireworks display. I fell asleep and slept right through the first enemy counterattack. Once I woke up, "Slapsie" drew my attention to the dead Germans nearby. He thought I was a cool customer when in fact I was absolutely exhausted.

Q: Any general observations on the Arnhem siege?
SIMS: I have always held the view that at Arnhem you got the best defensive fighters in the world against the best attacking soldiers, the SS. It was the national characteristics that counted. The Germans made one or two all-out assaults in AFVs [armored fighting vehicles]. The Paras dealt with all such attacks by knocking out the leading vehicles, which then blocked the road, tunneling the remaining AFVs into cramped areas between buildings where they could be also dealt with.

Q: One of your most dangerous assignments was to try and get water to make a stew from dehydrated meat tablets. Since water was at a premium, you couldn't use liquid from your water bottles.
SIMS: Yes, I had to get fresh water to make a stew. I discovered that the only working tap was on a standing pipe in the middle of the yard. It was an area where a furious exchange of shots was going on. I crawled on my belly until I was under the tap. The enemy could not see me but as soon as I turned the tap they realized where I was. I dared not turn the tap off, and the mess tin I had soon filled with water, half of it was spilled on the return journey. On rejoining Lieutenant Woods I heated up the stew, but it tasted so foul the lieutenant shared a slab of chocolate with me.

Q: You ran into Colonel Frost during the siege.
SIMS: Colonel Frost visited our positions, smiling and radiating confidence. Although surrounded and cut off from the main part of 1st Airborne Division we still believed that we would be relieved. Originally we had been told we would be relieved within 24 hours (from Sunday). When Tuesday passed we realized something had gone wrong.

Q: You found yourself on an island of trees and shrubs in the center of a road right in the heart of Arnhem. German attacks increased as time went on.
SIMS: I was caught in a bombardment by German mortars in a slit trench and it was terrifying. Eventually the explosions seemed to merge into one never-ending bombardment. I curled up in the bottom of this trench when something hit my boot. I died a thousand deaths, believing it was a bomb. It turned out only to be the tail fin of a German bomb. Despite frightening us to death the bombardment caused no casualties.
Toward the end I was the only one left out in the street; the rest were withdrawn to the houses and gardens still held by our lads.

Q: How were you wounded?
SIMS: As things got worse Lieutenant Woods was cut off, and Sergeant Jackson took over. The sergeant picked some veterans to hold the house and ordered the rest of us into the garden. I raised a pick to make a trench when a shell hit a wall about a yard away. It killed and wounded about six of us. I was wounded in the left leg. When I realized I was hit I fell down. I was eventually picked up and dragged to a building where the cellars were packed with the dying and wounded.

Q: The cellars must have been literally hell on earth, what with no supplies, little or no water, and pitch darkness, since the Germans had cut the power. Exhausted medics had to treat the wounded under flashlight beams.
SIMS: Conditions in the cellars were dreadful with the dying and the wounded huddled together. The medics did their best to alleviate our suffering. There were reckoned to be at least 300 men in those cellars.

Q: Describe the end of the ordeal.
SIMS: Men started to cough because the building was on fire and all of us were in danger from this burning building finally collapsing. I suppose Colonel Frost gave the order to cease fire and the Germans were contacted. A German officer entered and a Scot near to me grabbed his Sten gun to shoot him. Luckily, he was overpowered. It would have been a simple thing for the Germans to throw hand grenades down into the cellars.

Captured British paratroopers photographed by a German.

The German officer rapped out some orders and the cellar filled with Germans who commenced to evacuate us. In my case a Canadian press man smashed up his camera, lifted me up, and carried me out of the cellars. Some flaming roof debris just missed us. The enemy formed a half-circle facing us when someone fired from a cellar, just missing us and our guards. We shouted "British wounded! Cease fire!" and the firing stopped. The Germans seemed as interested in us as we were in them. They all spoke English and gave us coffee, sausage, and sour

black bread. They were pleased to have won, and the atmosphere was rather like that of a football match that has just finished. In fact, they seemed so friendly I originally thought they were Regular army, not SS. In those days we were not so familiar with enemy uniforms and badges. Some SS wore khaki trousers, British boots, and some even carried British Sten guns. They did have, however, their usual German helmets and tunics.

Q: What were the first moments of captivity like?

SIMS: When captured we were sat down on either side of the road, the wounded on one side, including me. A young SS man shot dead one of our lads because he tried to hang on to his wallet. When this same German reached me I had already emptied out all my pockets and put the contents on my lap. The young SS man smiled and said, "You are not supposed to have anything of military importance, but you will be searched again, and if anything is found, you will be shot." He was not interested in personal belongings.

We had a young Dutchman, a member of the underground, whose arms were badly burned when he had tossed a phosphorous grenade out a window. He was dragged out and made to kneel down and shot through the back of the neck. As his body slumped down an SS officer said, "That is how we treat traitors to the Third Reich." I only remember seeing this one Dutch Resistance man, and he was shot out of hand.

Q: Where did they take you then?

SIMS: We ended up in Soestdijk Palace, the summer residence of the Dutch royal family, which had been converted to an SS front-line hospital. The food was excellent and the surroundings very comfortable, but medical treatment was poor, and drugs were not delivered owing to Allied bombing raids.

Q: Wasn't there an escape during your time in the hospital?

SIMS: Yes, 12 walking wounded, aided by the resistance, escaped and made it back to Allied lines. The hospital was run by the Luftwaffe; in fact, there was a picture of Göring in one of the rooms. After the escape, Luftwaffe security increased dramatically. In fact, some later escapes failed and the men were shot. The SS medics seemed to be amused that the Luftwaffe had been thwarted.

Q: How were you eventually transferred to a POW camp?

SIMS: Toward the end of October we were told we would all be moved to an all-British hospital. Many actually believed this and got a nasty shock when, arriving at the railyard, we were rifle-butted into waiting cattle cars.

Q: The cattle cars are reminiscent of the ones that transported victims of the holocaust to concentration camps.

SIMS: There were 40 men to a car and no rations, save a jug of water. The trip was a nightmare. Some wounded died as a result of the journey, and every car jolt was agony. The dead were not removed until arrival in the Stalag; every body had to be accounted for, the list duly signed by the Stalag commandant.

Q: Wasn't there an escape attempt on the trip?

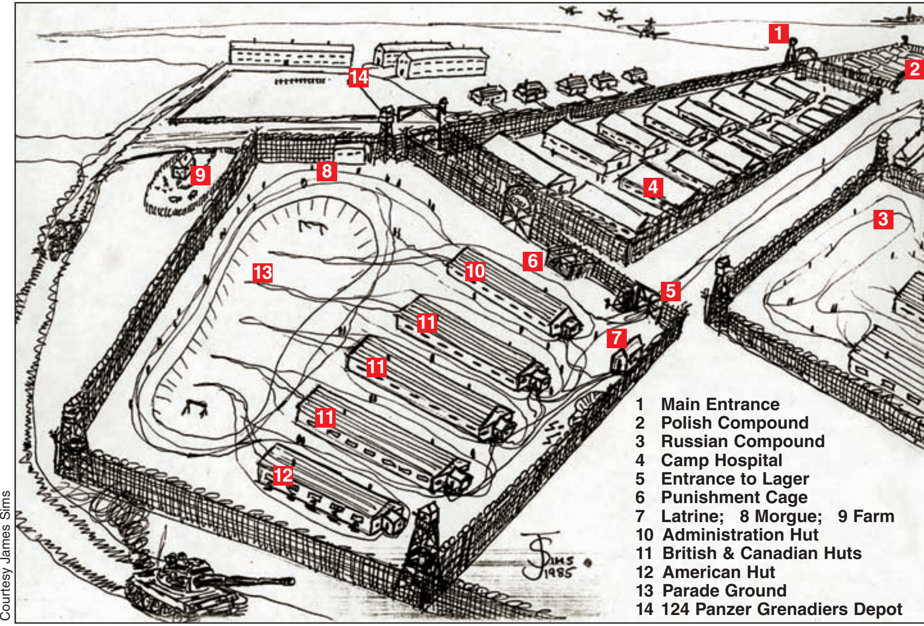
SIMS: Yes, three glider pilots in the next car used escape saws that had been hidden in their uniforms to cut a hole in the roof and try to escape. Two vanished but as a third emerged he was hit by machine-gun fire from the rear of the train. We could hear him roll off the roof and fall on the track moaning in pain. We then heard a guard come up, cock his rifle, and then there was the sound of a shot. The moaning ceased. A guard dog got the second escapee, and the third gave himself up when he heard a German officer threaten to shoot every third man if he didn't surrender. The escape hole was sealed, and off we went again.

Q: Describe your first impressions of Stalag XIB.

SIMS: Stalag XIB was near the town of Fallingbostel, Germany. It had taken us about three or four days of hell to travel the hundred miles or so from Holland. The Stalag was a large complex that had thousands of men of many different nationalities, including Russians, Poles,

Paratrooper Sims fought with Colonel Frost in these houses near the north end of the bridge.

Peter Newark's Military Pictures



Courtesy James Sims

Sims made this sketch of the prison camp where he was held through the fall, winter, and spring of 1944-1945.

French, Italians, British, and Americans. It was a nightmare. We were trained for battles like Arnhem, but nothing prepared you for XIB.

Q: Describe the daily POW camp routine.

SIMS: Daily routine in the camp was started with a 7 AM roll call. The Germans counted us off in fives, and sometimes we shifted place to confound them. The enemy reacted by keeping us standing for hours and some men passed out or died. Then we were detailed for fatigues. Other than that, one walked the perimeter of the lager. Twice around and you were all in.

About midday the [rations] cart came around. We lined up and were given about a half-pint of watery soup and three small potatoes. After all was distributed there might be two or three potatoes left. The NCO stepped back and the fit men dived into the container, fighting over the potatoes. Following rations one might seek out old friends in a different hut, but then at 4 PM would be roll call before lights out. The electricity was on all day and off all night so we made small lights from a small tin container of fat and a bit of string as a wick.

Q: You went on work details outside the camp.

SIMS: Once I was selected for a large Kommando, or working party. The selection was arbitrary. Those with open wounds—like myself—had to go, while other able-bodied men stayed behind in the Stalag.

We were taken to a railway center at Uelzen, near Hanover. At first we thought escape would be easy but soon discovered that being wounded, coupled by lack of food and dysentery, put a stop to such notions. The main drawback, though, was not being able to speak the language. All of us suffered from malnutrition and other ailments.

Q: Describe the events that led to your liberation.

SIMS: Suddenly it was mid-April 1945, and it was obvious the war would soon be over. Still we marched to work on the railway, which was now a ruin. One day we were on a hill when we heard a strange noise in the sky. Looking up we saw a German aircraft without engines, just two pods under the wings [probably an Me-262, the first operational jet in the world]. Two USAAF Thunderbolts dived on it, and suddenly it was just a dot in the sky. We had never seen such speed—it must have been 400 mph plus. It left the Thunderbolts far behind. When the guards saw our bewilderment they boasted that this was another one of Hitler's secret weapons that would drive us into the sea.

It was finally decided that we would all be marched to Berlin. The British Scots sergeant who headed our Kommando gave us a talk to the effect that it was important to keep as a group and not go off on our own as the SS were even killing their own people who "deserted." A fellow Para of the 2nd Battalion came up to me and asked me if I was going to escape with some others. "Didn't you hear what the sergeant said?" I asked him. "But Jim," he replied, "this will be our last chance for a medal." "Bugger the medals," I said, "I just want to get home to my folks." I heard the SS caught that group, and they slit their throats and left their bodies in a ditch. You might think that one might have rejoiced in the fall of Germany but it was a terrible thing to witness.

Q: What are your recollections of the march?

SIMS: Firstly we marched along the main road and at one point we came across a burned-out bus filled with charred corpses. We arrived at a hamlet called Vinstedt and were told to dig slit trenches and take cover in them. Most of us were exhausted by the day's events and had no spades anyway.

We were joined by Germans fleeing from the Red Army and its excesses. Our German guards surrendered to us, but when we saw vehicles coming we handed the guns back to them. This was just as well, as the vehicles were a half-track towing an 88mm gun. It was manned by an SS officer and fanatical Hitler Youth. He ordered us all to be gathered together and locked in a barn for the night, and gave instructions that we would continue our march to Berlin. As soon as he left we took charge again. It was a riotous night; when some of the POWs caught one of the worst of our guards who had deserted, they dragged him back before a kangaroo court and sentenced him to be hanged. They prepared to hang him, as we watched with no particular interest. Luckily for him the Durham Light Infantry arrived, part of the British 2nd Division. The next morning a British Bren gun carrier emerged from some woods and the whole Kommando swept toward it, nearly lifting it off the ground! We were free! □

In his painting *The Parachutist*, artist Harvey Dunn captures the moment when an American paratrooper leaps from his transport aircraft. The U.S. jump into Holland during Operation Market Garden was near perfect and carried out in daylight.

U.S. Army Art

The Americans in MARKET-GARDEN

Troopers of the U.S. 101st and 82nd Airborne Divisions fought with distinction during the air-ground assault in the autumn of 1944.

BY MAJOR GENERAL MICHAEL REYNOLDS

"IN THE YEARS TO COME everyone will remember Arnhem, but no one will remember that two American divisions fought their hearts out in the Dutch canal country," wrote U.S. Air Force Lt. Gen. Lewis H. Brereton, commander of the First Allied Airborne Army, shortly after Operation Market-Garden. Sadly, his prediction proved all too accurate. Many books have been written about the fighting in the Arnhem area, but few about the actions of the two American airborne divisions involved in this operation.

By the beginning of September 1944, the Allied advance toward Germany had been halted due to a lack of supplies, particularly fuel. As General George Patton is alleged to have said, "My men can eat their belts, but my tanks have gotta have gas!" No major port east of the Seine River had been captured, the British supply lines stretched 500 km, all the way back to Bayeux, and those of the Americans ran even farther, 600 km, through Paris to the Cotentin Peninsula.

In addition to the supply problem, there was at this point in the campaign a serious argument between the Allied leaders over whether to proceed on a broad front, with Field Marshal Bernard Law Montgomery's 21st Army Group advancing in the north toward the Ruhr and General Omar Bradley's 12th Army Group moving at the same time in the south toward the Saar, or in a single thrust by just one of the Army Groups.

The relative merits of each case have been set out clearly in the many books describing the strategy of the European campaign. On September 4, 1944, Supreme Allied Commander Dwight D. Eisenhower issued a directive ordering Montgomery's Army Group and two corps of the First U.S. Army to "reach the sector of the Rhine covering the Ruhr and then seize the Ruhr." At the same time, the Third U.S. Army and one corps of the First U.S. Army were to "occupy the sector of the Siegfried Line [West Wall] covering the Saar and then seize Frankfurt."

This directive, while apparently giving Monty a green light, presented him with a problem. Surprising though it may seem, he had insufficient forces to exploit the German weaknesses on his front. Of the 14 divisions and seven armored brigades in his 21st Army Group, only two armored divisions of XXX Corps were ready to continue the advance. The six Canadian divisions had been given the essential task of clearing Le Havre and the Pas de Calais ports, XII Corps was committed to pushing the German Fifteenth Army back to the Scheldt Estuary, and VIII Corps was still immobilized back at the Seine owing to a lack of transport.

Nevertheless, XXX Corps was told to push on, and on September 4, the 11th Armored Division captured Antwerp. Then, late on September 10, an armored group secured a bridgehead over the Albert Canal at Neerpelt, and the foothold required by Monty for his single thrust toward the Ruhr was a reality.

That same afternoon, Montgomery and Eisenhower met at Brussels airfield. After an acrimonious opening discussion, during which Ike had to remind Monty that he was a subordinate, the supreme commander eventually approved the latter's latest plan. This envisaged the First Allied Airborne Army, Eisenhower's only strategic reserve, securing crossings over the Maas, Waal, and lower Rhine Rivers, and then British armor advancing rapidly to outflank the West Wall and the Ruhr. The plan had the added advantage that, if successful, it would cut off all the Germans in western Holland, including the Fifteenth Army. Monty gave the go-ahead for Operation Market-Garden to be launched on September 17.

The First Allied Airborne Army was under the command of General Brereton, formerly the commander of the U.S. Ninth Air Force. His deputy was British Lt. Gen. "Boy" Browning, and he had a mixed staff of Americans, British, and Poles. Brereton's army had

National Archives

As he prepares to board a transport aircraft, Brig. Gen. James M. Gavin, commander of the U.S. 82nd Airborne Division, carries out a final check of his weapons and gear before heading toward his Market-Garden jump zone in Holland.

two corps, one American and one British. The XVIII U.S. Airborne Corps, under Lt. Gen. Matthew Ridgway, comprised the 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions. The 82nd and 101st were battle-experienced divisions, the 82nd having dropped and fought in Sicily and both having dropped and fought in Normandy. The I British Airborne Corps, under the command of the "double-hatted" General Browning, consisted of the inexperienced 1st British Airborne Division and the equally inexperienced 1st Polish Independent Parachute Brigade Group.

The soldiers of the First Airborne Army were "like coins burning in SHAEF's pocket." Since early July, most of them had been on standby for a whole series of operations, none of which had been launched, either because the ground troops had moved so quickly that the proposed operation became redundant or because the necessary aircraft were being used for aerial resupply. It was, therefore, with relief and enthusiasm that Brereton and his staff began their planning to employ three and one-third airborne divisions, to be dropped in three different areas and, hopefully, to be relieved within three days by the ground troops of the British XXX Corps.

The aim of Operation Market-Garden was to capture and hold the five major crossings over the canals and rivers lying across the British Second Army's axis of advance between and including the Dutch towns of Eindhoven and Arnhem. Command was vested in the British deputy commander of the First Airborne Army, Lt. Gen. "Boy" Browning. The decision to give him command was surprising for three reasons: First, because 75 percent of the troops taking part in the operation were to be American; second, because the U.S. Corps commander, Ridgway, was far more experienced; and third, because Browning's headquarters was basically a planning, administrative, and training organization and certainly not a command headquarters.

Inevitably, Browning's headquarters had no means of communicating with the two American divisions, and this meant that U.S. manpower and equipment had to be added to it at the last minute. In the event, Browning and his headquarters, due to totally inadequate communications, played little part in the forthcoming battle and wasted 38 gliders badly needed by the 1st British Airborne Division to increase its first lift.

The basic plan was for the 101st Airborne Division to seize the several bridges and defiles between Eindhoven and Grave. The 82nd Airborne was to capture the Maas crossing at Grave, at least one of the four bridges over the Maas-Waal Canal, and then, after securing the high ground between Nijmegen and Groesbeek, to capture the vast Waal road bridge in Nijmegen. At the same time, Maj. Gen. Roy Urquhart's 1st British Airborne Division, later aided by Maj. Gen. Stanislaus Sosabowski's 1st Polish Independent Brigade Group, was to capture "the bridges over the lower Rhine at Arnhem with sufficient bridgeheads to facilitate the passage of XXX Corps."

The XXX Corps' Operation Instruction included the prophetic words, "The success of this operation depends largely on speed of advance." Nevertheless, the problems and dangers of sending a complete corps of over 20,000 vehicles down a narrow corridor on only one proper road, across a series of six major canals and waterways, to link up with an airborne bridgehead 100 km away were all too obvious.

It will not have escaped the reader's notice that the extent of the missions given to the American divisions was infinitely greater than that given to the British and Poles. The latter had to hold on for a longer period, but at least their operational area was limited in size. In an attempt to deal with this problem, the Americans reinforced each of their divisions with an extra regiment, giving them four rather than the normal three. Even so, the sheer magnitude of their operational areas virtually guaranteed that the Americans would have problems holding them until they were relieved.

The risks inherent in Operation Market-Garden are well known. Put simply, they were: (1) the weather, (2) insufficient aircraft and gliders to carry out all the landings in one lift, and (3) carrying out the assault in daylight. The air commander for the operation, U.S. Maj. Gen. Paul L. Williams, commander of IX Troop Carrier Command, USAAF, decided, with Brereton's support, that no more than one lift should be flown each day.

This was due not only to the difficulties of navigating and keeping formation in the predawn or post-dusk flights that would have been necessary if two separate lifts had been launched in a single autumn day, but also to there being insufficient ground staff to turn around and repair aircraft in the time available. The effect of this decision was that three consecutive days of good flying weather would be needed to land the whole force.

In the early afternoon of September 4, General Kurt Student, the head of the German parachute arm, was telephoned in his Berlin office by General Alfred Jodl, head of the High Command Operations Staff, and told that he was to command a new army to be known as the First Parachute Army. Its mission was to build and hold a new defensive front on the line of the Albert Canal in northern Belgium. He was then told that General von Zangen's Fifteenth Army of over 80,000 men was isolated in northeast Belgium and could escape only by sea across the Scheldt Estuary.

Even if this were achieved, it would take at least three weeks and heavy losses were likely.

Furthermore, the remnants of the Seventh Army were being pushed rapidly toward the Ardennes Forest, and the only troops available to deploy into the resulting 120 km gap along the Albert Canal between Antwerp and Maastricht were those of a division badly depleted in the Normandy fighting and a fortress division that had been guarding the Dutch coastline.

Another division, composed of convalescents and men who had been invalided out of the Army and then brought back, was currently entraining at Aachen in Germany and would be available in two or three days. Student's First Parachute Army was therefore to comprise all garrison, training, and administrative troops already in Holland, the divisions just mentioned, and a new force of some 30,000 Luftwaffe personnel. The latter had been volunteered by Luftwaffe chief Hermann Göring and consisted of six parachute regiments in various stages of training or re-equipping, and some 10,000 Luftwaffe air and ground crew whose operations or training had been curtailed because of fuel shortages.

By any standards, what followed was an incredible feat of improvisation and organization. The precise details are complicated. Suffice it to say that by September 13, General Student had established a defensive line, albeit fragile, from the mouth of the Scheldt to Maastricht behind which further battlegroups or *Kampfgruppen* (KGs) could be formed and deployed. This line was manned by a mere 32 ad hoc battalions, backed by 25 assault guns.

It was while this basic defense structure was being established that, on September 8, the last elements of Willi Bittrich's II SS Panzer Corps arrived in central Holland. This corps had been badly mauled in the Normandy fighting and had been sent to Holland to lick its wounds and be refitted. In fact, the corps' two divisions, the 9th SS Panzer Hohenstaufen and 10th SS Panzer Frundsberg, numbered little more than 6,000 to 7,000 men each at this time, of whom only about half were combat troops. Nevertheless, the Hohenstaufen was to be heavily involved in the Arnhem fighting and the Frundsberg in the Nijmegen battle. From the point of view of this narrative, it is important to note that by the time the Allies landed, two Hohenstaufen panzergrenadier battalions and three batteries of artillery had been transferred to the Frundsberg. One of the grenadier battalions, SS Battalion Euling, named after its commander, SS Captain Karl-Heinz Euling, was to play a major role in the Nijmegen fighting.

Soon after his arrival in the Arnhem area, the Frundsberg commander, SS captain Heinz Harmel, was ordered to provide a strong KG as a reserve for the First Parachute Army. The KG was named KG Heinke, after its commander SS Major Heinke. It comprised two SS panzergrenadier battalions, companies from the Frundsberg's reconnaissance and Pioneer battalions, and an artillery battalion. Arriving south of Eindhoven on the 10th, Heinke took under command the Frundsberg's SS *panzerjäger* battalion, with 21 Jagdpanzer IVs and a company of 12 40mm towed antitank guns, which was already in the area. His KG would also play an important part in the forthcoming fighting.

Field Marshal Walther Model, commander of Army Group B and the overall commander in the area, set up his headquarters on September 15, just two days before the opening of Market-Garden, in the Hartenstein Hotel in Oosterbeek, a mainly residential area of about 10,000 people a few kilometers to the west of Arnhem. It was sheer coincidence that he found himself less than 4 km from one of the main British landing zones (LZs) and that the units of the Hohenstaufen and Frundsberg Divisions were within 50 km of all the Allied LZs.

Operation Market-Garden began during the night of September 16-17, with 200 RAF Lancaster heavy bombers and 23 Mosquito fighter-bombers attacking four airfields in the general area of the proposed drop zones. Shortly after first light, 54 more Lancasters and five Mosquitoes attacked known flak positions while a further 85 Lancasters and 15 Mosquitoes pulverized the German coastal batteries on Walcheren. Then, just before the troop-carrying aircraft flew in, 816 U.S. B-17 heavy bombers, escorted by 373 P-51 Mustang and P-47 Thunderbolt fighters, attacked an additional 117 known flak positions on the approaches to and near the LZs.

The airborne armada, protected by 919 fighter aircraft, including Tempests, Spitfires, Mosquitoes, Thunderbolts, Mustangs, and Lightnings, comprised 1,544 troop-carrying aircraft and 478 gliders. Beginning at

Both: National Archives

LEFT: Sometime after the withdrawal of airborne troops from Holland, Maj. Gen. Matthew Ridgway (left), commander of the XVIII Airborne Corps, talks with newly promoted Maj. Gen. James M. Gavin.

FAR LEFT: On October 18, 1944, German Field Marshal Walther Model visits a forward command post of a Volksgrenadier division on the Western Front.

1025 hours, they took off over a period of 11/2 hours from 17 U.S. and nine British bases in England.

Inevitably, reports of hundreds of Allied aircraft flying northeast began to arrive at the various German headquarters, but surprisingly few of the duty officers on this warm, sunny afternoon appreciated their significance. One senior officer who did was the commander of II SS Panzer Corps, SS Maj. Gen. Bittrich. He received his first enemy situation report at 1330 hours (German time) and 10 minutes later issued a warning order to both his divisions.

The Hohenstaufen was told to assemble its units for operations to secure Arnhem and its bridge and engage enemy air landings to the west of the city. The Frundsberg was told to assemble for an immediate move to Nijmegen, where it was to occupy the bridges over the Waal and then advance to the southern edge of the city. The Nijmegen sector and the 82nd Airborne Division's LZs became the immediate task of Military District VI. This was an administrative command, totally unsuited for controlling combat operations. Nevertheless, its commander was promised additional troops in the form of a complete parachute corps, which would be brought from Cologne.

While the British were heavily engaged in the Arnhem area 20 km to the south, 7,277 paratroopers and 48 gliders of the 82nd Airborne Division, under the command of Brig. Gen. James Gavin, had landed successfully. Lt. Col. Reuben Tucker's 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment, led by E Company of the 2nd Battalion, captured the vital bridge over the Maas at Grave, while other troopers of the regiment secured another over the Maas-Waal Canal. These actions were completed by 1930 hours.

This meant that as soon as the British armor arrived, it would be able to advance straight toward Nijmegen. Meanwhile, the 505th and 508th Parachute Infantry Regiments, together with the divisional engineer battalion and an artillery battalion with 12 75mm howitzers, occupied the strategically vital ground around and to the southeast of Groesbeek. Owing to the enormity of the task, however, the majority of these defensive positions were little more than platoon-sized roadblocks.

ABOVE: Gliderborne soldiers of the U.S. 82nd Airborne Division unload their wrecked aircraft after what amounted to a controlled crash in a Dutch field during the opening hours of Operation Market-Garden. BELOW: Consolidated B-24 Liberator bombers of the U.S. Army Air Forces fly over the Market-Garden glider landing zones in Holland while on their way to bomb a distant target on September 18, 1944.

Both: National Archive

The original orders to the 82nd Airborne specified that no attempt be made to take the main Nijmegen road bridge until the bridge over the Maas, at least one of those over Maas-Waal Canal, and the high ground covering the approaches from Germany at Groesbeek had been secured. Indeed, control of the Groesbeek feature was considered vital to the success of the whole Grave-Nijmegen operation. Accordingly, General Gavin had briefed Colonel Roy Lindquist, the commander responsible for the Groesbeek area, that he should only send a

battalion against the Nijmegen road bridge if the situation in the Groesbeek area was in hand, and then only under the cover of darkness.

By 1800 hours the situation seemed favorable enough, and at 2200 hours the move toward the bridge began. Three companies from two separate battalions were committed, but the two leading companies of the 508th ran into heavy opposition in the area of the main traffic island in the city, and their advance halted. The Nijmegen road bridge itself was defended by a scratch force of about 750 men from various training and reserve units in and around the city, cobbled together by a Colonel Henke, the commander of a spare parachute training regimental headquarters—another perfect example of German initiative and military competence. Henke also ensured that the 29 88mm flak guns and some additional 20mm weapons, sited to protect the road and rail bridges, were capable of firing in a ground-support role.

The third component of Operation Market-Garden, Maj. Gen. Maxwell Taylor's 101st Airborne Division, had also been largely successful in fulfilling its missions. Within a few hours, nearly 7,000 troopers of its three parachute regiments had captured the towns of Veghel and St. Oedenrode and all but one of the bridges in the 25 km corridor between Eindhoven and Veghel. This corridor eventually became known to the Americans as "Hell's Highway."

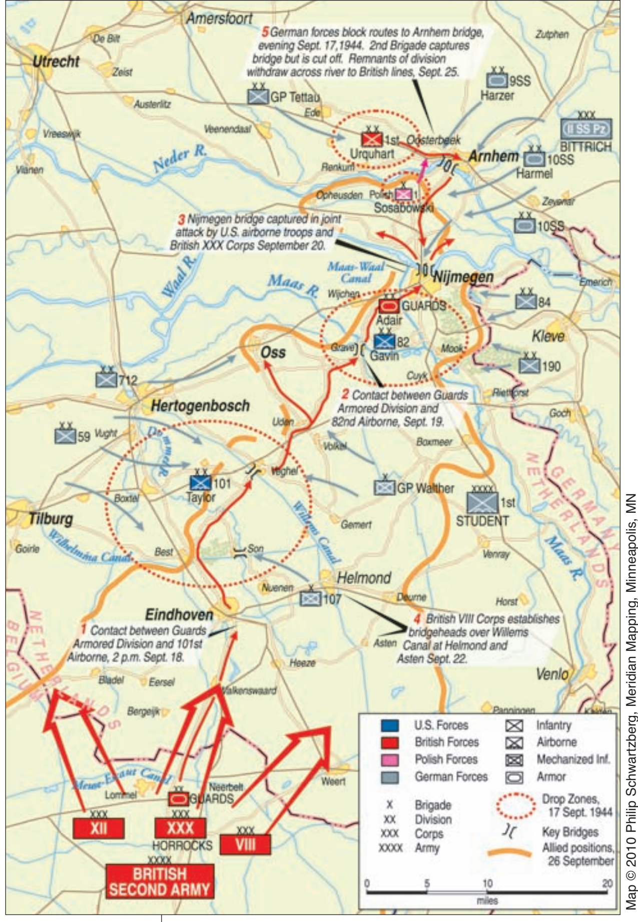
The only important bridge not to be captured was the one at Son (sometimes spelled Zon) over the Wilhelmina Canal. A KG from the Hermann Göring Training Regiment had managed to hold on long enough against part of Colonel Robert Sink's 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment for it to be blown at about 1600 hours. Nonetheless, during the night the Americans swam or crossed the canal in small boats and overcame the opposition. A makeshift wooden footbridge, based on the remains of the original metal bridge, was then constructed by the airborne engineers, and soon after dawn the men of the 506th were approaching Eindhoven, where they were expecting to link up with the British armor coming up from the south.

It will be remembered that Field Marshal Model had given General Student's First Parachute Army the task of dealing with this airborne assault. Accordingly, three combat groups were deployed: first, the leading elements of the very understrength 59th Infantry Division of the Fifteenth Army (some 3,000 men), having escaped across the Scheldt, were ordered to detrain at Tilburg, only 25 km northwest of Eindhoven, and advance toward the Best sector of the Wilhelmina Canal. Second, two scratch battalions of paratroopers from a training and reinforcement unit a similar distance north of Eindhoven were ordered to advance toward the 101st's bridgeheads at St. Oedenrode and Veghel. Third, Panzer Brigade 107, with a battalion of Panther tanks, a panzergrenadier unit in SPWs (armored personnel or weapons carriers), and a company each of *Sturmgeschütze* (armored assault guns) and SPW-mounted Pioneers, was diverted from the Aachen area. It was expected to arrive in the area in just over 24 hours.

The first of these groups to see action was part of the 59th Division, which, during the afternoon and night of the 17th, thwarted H Company of the 506th Parachute Regiment in its attempt to seize a bridge over the canal near Best.

What of the British advance toward Eindhoven? Although it was supported by a massive artillery barrage and plenty of close air support, the leading brigades of XXX Corps had been ordered to halt at Valkenswaard after an advance of only 12 km. This happened at 2200 hours on the grounds that the leading armored group "had been fighting hard and tanks require maintenance." Incredibly, the advance was not to continue until 0700 hours the following morning. One Guards officer later wrote: "We should never have stayed the night in Valkenswaard but should have continued to advance all night to Eindhoven and beyond non-stop.… It made no sense to stop, bearing in mind the distance to be covered to Arnhem and the river crossings ahead."

The first German troops to make contact with the force already protecting the Waal bridges in Nijmegen, KG Henke, were those of a Major Reinhold's Frundsberg SS Panzergrenadier Battalion and a party of Pioneers. The Pioneers immediately started preparing the massive road and railway bridges for demolition, while Henke briefed Reinhold on his defensive layout. After being told that a scratch force was already defending a line running approximately a kilometer south of the Waal bridges and that two 20mm and one 88mm flak gun were covering the Waal railway bridge, Reinhold decided to deploy his men on the north bank of the river immediately adjacent to the bridges.



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

The complex Market-Garden operational plan depended on the capture of several key bridges over the Maas, Waal, and Lower Rhine Rivers in Holland and the swift movement of the British XXX Corps up a narrow road to relieve the airborne troops holding the spans.

U.S. Army Art

One of the largest bridges in Europe, the span at Nijmegen is shown in an artist's sketch after Operation Market-Garden. The bridge across the Waal River was captured by troops of the 82nd Airborne Division, but the advance toward Arnhem bogged down in the face of heavy German resistance.

Next to arrive, at about midday, was Captain Euling's Hohenstaufen SS panzergrenadier battalion which had been attached to the Frundsberg. Reinhold gave orders that it was to secure the immediate approaches to the road bridge and placed the various Army and police detachments already manning strongpoints in the area under Euling's command. The latter set up his command post near the Valkhof, the citadel of Nijmegen and the highest point in the city, not far from the southern ramp of the bridge, while his men took up positions covering all the approaches to the large traffic island near the south end of the bridge.

This was the same traffic island where the leading companies of the 508th had been halted the previous evening. Four *Sturmgeschütze* were also allocated to Euling. They had crossed the Rhine at Pannerden where, since early that morning, the Frundsberg Pioneers had constructed a ferry service. Meanwhile, on the north bank, Reinhold ensured that the 88mm flak guns, already protecting the bridges from air attack, were re-sited among the houses at the water's edge so that they could engage with direct fire any vehicles attempting to cross. As further Frundsberg units arrived, including a few Mk III and IV tanks, they were incorporated into the overall defensive system and used to strengthen KG Henke. Mines were laid and various buildings, including factory chimneys and even church towers, were demolished to create obstacles.

What of the Americans during this time? Brig. Gen. Gavin knew full well that until the arrival of his second lift he did not have the strength to hold the vital Groesbeek area and at the same time mount a strong attack on the Nijmegen road bridge. To compound his problems, the abortive attempt to take the bridge the previous night had depleted his forces covering the LZs and the approaches from the Reichswald. There were, however, two factors in his favor. First, there were, and still are, no roads or even reasonable tracks leading from the Reichswald toward the thickly wooded high ground at Groesbeek. Second, the Maas-Waal Canal and waterways flowing into the Waal just to the east of Nijmegen channeled any German attack toward the Groesbeek ridge.

At 0630 hours on the morning of the 18th, the Germans launched their long-awaited counterattack. In another amazing feat of inventiveness, organization, and military competence, they had assembled an ad hoc force of four battalions armed with 24 mortars and 130 light and medium machine guns, three artillery batteries, and even a few armored cars and SPWs mounting flak guns. Totaling over 3,000 men, many of whom had never received even basic infantry training, this group, designated the 406th Division, was ordered to attack and drive the Americans back across the Maas.

In view of the very thin American defenses, it was perhaps not surprising that the German attacks made some progress and parts of the LZs were overrun. With the expected fly-in not due until 1300 hours, Gavin was forced to withdraw his men from Nijmegen and throw in his last reserves—two companies of the 307th Parachute Engineer Battalion. Even so, fighting was still going on when the first of 450 Dakotas, towing 450 gliders, appeared overhead at 1400 hours. Bad weather in England had delayed their take-off.

Although some casualties were suffered, the fly-in, which included 18 howitzers and eight 57mm antitank guns, was amazingly successful and caused panic among the Germans, who fled. Ninety-seven close air support sorties were flown during this action.

The Americans had suffered few casualties during the day, but the German counterattack and the late arrival of his reinforcements had ended Gavin's chances of mounting a proper attack against the Nijmegen bridges. His best hope now was a combined attack with the British armor, which he was told was due to arrive at the Grave bridge at 0830 hours the following morning.

At 0700 hours on September 18, the British 5th Guards Armored Brigade resumed its advance toward Aalst. The only immediate opposition at this time was the depleted remnants of a KG that had resisted the advance the previous day and one or maybe two Jagdpanzer IVs operating on the eastern flank of the Eindhoven road. Even so, with close air support unavailable during the first part of the day due to poor flying weather, it took until midday for the leading British battle group to cover the 5 km to Aalst.

Then, just to the north of the village, four 88mm guns were encountered covering another waterway and the approach road to Eindhoven. Armored cars managed to bypass this opposition to the west, and in an attempt to exploit this opportunity the reserve battle group was told to follow up. However, the weakness of the bridges in the area frustrated the advance of the heavier tanks and it was a further six hours before the leading elements of the division covered the last 2 km to Eindhoven and made contact with the U.S. 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment already in the city.

"IF I DID NOTHING MORE THAN POUR INFANTRY AND BRITISH ARMOR INTO THE BATTLE AT OUR END OF THE BRIDGE, WE COULD BE FIGHTING THERE FOR DAYS AND URQUHART WOULD BE LOST."

Eindhoven itself was undefended, and one young Guards officer later wrote: "On the outskirts of Eindhoven we passed our first American soldier standing at the side of the road and holding the hand of a small child. He waved and shouted, 'Great stuff, boys.' More and more Americans appeared, strolling round the town. It was surprising to see them in an almost peacetime atmosphere. There were no barricades at main roads, machine-gun posts, antitank guns, or other static defences."

The British tanks reached the Wilhelmina Canal at Son at 2100 hours, and Royal Engineers arrived shortly afterward to begin bridging the gap. Fortunately, a heavy German bombing attack on Eindhoven during the night did not interfere with this work and by 0615 hours on September 19, a 40-ton Bailey bridge was spanning the Wilhelmina and the tanks of the Guards Armored Division were ready to continue their advance.

In the meantime, a major battle had developed at Best where, it will be recalled, men of Lt. Col. John Michaelis's 502nd, H Company in particular, had been struggling to capture the bridge over the Wilhelmina Canal. Unfortunately, elements of the 59th Division of the Fifteenth Army proved too strong and at midday on the 18th the bridge was blown. Moreover, the continuing buildup of this division now began to pose a serious threat to the 101st's tenuous hold on Hell's Highway.

The bad weather in England affected the fly-in of the American follow-up troops. The IX Troop Carrier Command launched a total of 445 aircraft and 385 gliders on the 19th, of which 27 aircraft were lost and only 221 gliders reached their LZs. The failure to launch 258 of their gliders, carrying the 82nd Airborne Division's 325th Glider Infantry Regiment, was to end any hope Brig. Gen. Gavin might have had of capturing either of the vital Nijmegen bridges on this day. Just as bad, only 40 of the 265 tons of essential stores and ammunition destined for his division were recovered.

The British began their advance from Son at 0615 hours and at 1100 hours reached the Grave bridge, where their commander was met by Lt. Gen. "Boy" Browning, the airborne corps commander, and Brig. Gen. Gavin. Browning said he believed that a concerted rush could succeed in capturing the Nijmegen road bridge and, after a short conference, it was agreed that Gavin would place the 2nd Battalion of the 505th under British command for this mission. As a quid pro quo, the British gave Gavin a mixed battle group of tanks and infantry to help him defend his vital 40 km perimeter facing the Reichswald. He said later, "So far, we had been spared a German armored attack, but now, with the availability of British armor, we felt equal to anything that could happen."

The advance into Nijmegen by three combined columns began at 1600 hours. The smallest group, made up of a British infantry company and four tanks, was given the main post office as its objective in the belief that it contained the demolition control point for blowing the bridges. It was captured without difficulty, but nothing was found.

Stronger, simultaneous attacks were launched against the men of KG Euling defending the road bridge and KG Henke at the rail bridge. The road bridge attack was carried out by the 2nd Battalion of the 505th, less a company, but with 12 British tanks and a British infantry company attached. The attack against the rail bridge was taken on by single British and American infantry companies and 12 British tanks. Neither was successful. A German historian, Wilhelm Tieke,

gives the German version of what happened: "Heavy fire burst from all the houses and parks around the two bridges over the Waal against the attackers. On the approaches to the railroad bridge, several Shermans were knocked out by an 88mm. At the highway bridge they did not get anywhere near as close. Twenty millimeter flak hammered the length of the streets and two StuGs attacked from well-concealed ambush positions and shot up several enemy tanks. With the fall of darkness, the infantry attack was repulsed. The American paratroopers and British tanks took positions for the night 400m from the bridges."

A British liaison officer with the Americans in forward positions overlooking the bridge from its east side later wrote: "The plan had been to rush the bridge with the Grenadier Guards Motor Battalion but this failed as German SS troops and others were holding both ends of the bridge and the northern part of the town in strength.… The Grenadiers, together with the Americans, fought on all afternoon and after very bitter fighting reached a roundabout just short of the bridge where they were finally held up. These American troops are splendid types, brave and cheerful, and seemingly indifferent to the worst."

Late in the day, the commander of XXX Corps, Lt. Gen. Horrocks, came forward and met Gavin, Browning, and Maj. Gen. Adair, commander of the Guards Armored Division. They were all acutely aware that the attempts to take the bridges had failed and that, with the Germans on both banks, their men had little chance of capturing either intact. It seemed obvious that, rather than risk losing a bridge, the Germans would demolish it. In fact, in the case of the road bridge, Field Marshal Model had expressly forbidden such an act. He was determined to use it in a counteroffensive.

The Allied commanders were now facing a crisis. The British force at Arnhem was in deep trouble, the 82nd Airborne Division's eastern perimeter was under heavy pressure, and the extremely narrow XXX Corps corridor was under ground attack from both flanks and intermittent air attack. In similar circumstances, most commanders would have given up trying to fight their way to the bridges through a built-up area and would have carried out a river crossing on one of the flanks, followed by a bridging operation. These were far from normal circumstances, however, and the time needed to mount and carry out such complicated operations would have spelled annihilation for the British at Arnhem.

As Gavin put it, "If I did nothing more than pour infantry and British armor into the battle at our end of the bridge, we could be fighting there for days and Urquhart [commander of the British paratroopers at Arnhem] would be lost." He therefore came up with a daring, but extremely risky, plan to attack both ends of the bridge at once.

Only 1,341 out of 2,310 troops and 40 percent of the artillery pieces destined for the 101st got through on the 19th, and many of the re-supply bundles landed among the Germans in the Best sector. Maj. Gen. Maxwell Taylor's problem of defending his 25 km sector of the highway was now compounded by shortages of ammunition, fuel, and even food.

The fighting at Best reached a crisis on this day. The 59th Division was now posing a real threat, and early in the afternoon Maj. Gen. Taylor decided he had to throw in more troops to eliminate it. Supported by two battalions of Colonel Joseph Harper's recently arrived 327th Glider Infantry Regiment and a squadron of British tanks, he committed the 2nd and 3rd Battalions of the 502nd Regiment. By evening the Germans had broken and fled; more than 300 were killed and over 1,400 captured. As the fighting at Best ended, another German attack developed—this time at Son, where General Taylor had his headquarters. The new German thrust, by Panzer Brigade 107, was aimed at seizing Son and cutting off the advance elements of XXX Corps.

The 107th was a very powerful formation comprising a panzer battalion with 36 Panthers and 11 Jagdpanzer IVs, a full-strength panzergrenadier battalion with 116 SPWs and eight 120mm mortars, and an SPW mounted Pioneer company. Its surprise attack, called a "reconnaissance in force" by the Germans due to the difficult nature of the ground around Son, began shortly after 1715 hours. It was very nearly successful in that a few Panthers were able to take the newly constructed Bailey bridge over the canal under fire, but the situation was saved by the arrival of some of the glider infantrymen and a single 57mm antitank gun. The latter, together with bazooka fire, accounted for two Panthers, and as darkness fell the Germans withdrew.

General Gavin described September 20, 1944, as "a day unprecedented in the division's combat history. Each of the three regiments fought a critical battle in its own area and won over heavy odds." To the southeast of Nijmegen, the 505th (less a battalion) and the 508th fought a desperate battle to hold off German forces attacking from the direction of the Reichswald, and in the city itself the third regiment played a decisive part in the capture of the bridges over the Waal. General Browning witnessed this latter event, together with General Horrocks of XXX Corps, and is said to have exclaimed, "I have never seen a more gallant action."

"PATROLS OF AMERICANS, WEARING RUBBER-SOLED BOOTS THAT MADE NO SOUND, KEPT PASSING THROUGH US, ALERT AND EAGER TO ENGAGE THE ENEMY. WE JUST SAT IN OUR POSITIONS ALL NIGHT.... THE SITUATION IN ARNHEM REMAINED DESPERATE. YET THE GUARDS ARMOURED DIVISION DID NOTHING."

The German attacks from the direction of the Reichswald were launched by three KGs at around 0800 hours. By early evening they had made considerable progress against the badly overstretched Americans. They captured the villages of Wyler, Beek, and Mook and at one stage threatened the only bridge available to XXX Corps over the Maas-Waal Canal. The

National Archives

Almost obscured by a shower of earth created by a bursting German 88mm shell, an American paratrooper rushes for cover during Operation Market-Garden. While the British 1st Airborne Division was decimated at Arnhem, the U.S. 82nd and 101st Divisions suffered 20 percent casualties.

82nd had by this time suffered 150 killed and 600 wounded. Casualties in the Mook battle alone were 20 killed, 54 wounded, and seven missing. This critical situation was eventually restored that night and the following morning by strong American counterattacks, those at Mook and Beek being supported by elements of the attached British armored group.

Despite its obvious dangers, both Horrocks and the commander of the Guards Armored Division readily gave their approval to Gavin's plan for the capture of the Nijmegen bridges. It involved joint American/British attacks to secure the southern ends of the rail and road bridges and most of the 504th Parachute Regiment crossing the river in assault boats to the west of the railway bridge with the aim of securing the northern bank. In the case of the road bridge, British tanks were to make a dash across it in conjunction with the American attack. The dangers of the Germans blowing the bridge at this point were obvious.

It took five hours, until 1330 hours, to clear the jumping-off area for the final assault on the southern ends of the bridges and the bank of the Waal from which the river crossing was to be made. Further delays were then experienced in bringing forward 32 British assault boats from the XXX Corps column. A major cause of this delay was another extremely heavy Luftwaffe raid on Eindhoven the previous night, which had blocked roads and caused numerous civilian casualties.

Just before 1500 hours, following an air strike by eight British Typhoons and a 15-minute artillery barrage, the boats, each with 13 paratroopers and manned by men of C Company of the 307th Airborne Engineeer Battalion, set off across the 400-meter-wide river. Major Julian Cook's 3rd Battalion of the 504th led the way, with Lt. Col. William Harrison's 1st Battalion following, in a total of six waves. Major Edward Willems's 2nd Battalion and 30 British tanks provided direct fire support from the south bank near the power station, and some one hundred American guns and mortars provided indirect fire support. Smoke rounds were included in the fire plan to provide some cover for the boats, but much of it blew away before it could be effective.

The story of the incredibly gallant Waal River crossing and the seizure of the north bank by the men of the 504th has been told many times and portrayed vividly in the film *A Bridge Too Far*. It is unnecessary to repeat it.

Meanwhile, the complementary assault against KG Euling at the southern end of the road bridge was reaching its climax. By early evening, despite a considerable number of casualties and the loss of a Sherman, the attack by Lt. Col. Ben Vandervoort's 2nd Battalion and Lt. Col. Edward Goulburn's 1st Grenadier Guards, both supported by British Shermans, finally overwhelmed the German defenders. As the Grenadier Guards' History put it: "All serious German resistance seemed to crack … a patrol from No. 4 Company [Grenadier Guards] moved down to the bridge and, apart from a considerable number of shell-shocked Germans, found it clear.… It remained for the 2nd Battalion [the Grenadier Guards Tank Battalion] to move over the bridge. At 1830, a troop [platoon of four tanks], which had been held in readiness by the round-about, edged forward along the embankment, but it was still too light; they were met by strong anti-tank fire and forced to withdraw."

By this time the valiant men of the 504th, despite suffering 134 casualties killed, wounded, or missing, had secured the north end of the railway bridge and were continuing their advance to the north and east. At 1900 hours, as they approached the north end of the massive road bridge, the troop of four Grenadier Guards' Shermans was ordered to advance again.

Despite the fading light, they came under fire from two 88mm guns on the far side, a *Sturmgeschütze* firing straight down the bridge, and from men with hand-held anti-tank weapons and machine guns on the structure itself. The two rear tanks were hit but, against all expectations, the other two succeeded in crossing and after knocking out the *Sturmgeschütze,* linked up with Lt. Cmdr.

Reuben Tucker's paratroopers about a kilometer up the road. The time was 1915 hours. Within an hour the Americans had eliminated the antitank threat, and British engineers, more Shermans, four 17-pounder antitank guns, and two companies of infantry had reinforced the slender bridgehead.

With the remnants of the beleaguered 1st Airborne Division at Arnhem, less than 18 km away to the north, the Americans naturally expected the British armor to move rapidly to their rescue—but nothing happened. Lt. Cmdr. Tucker was, understandably, furious. He is said to have told a Guards major, "Your boys are hurting up there at Arnhem. You'd better go."

There is even a report that one American company commander was so angry about the failure to advance that he actually threatened a British officer with his submachine gun, causing him to close the hatches on his Sherman. Certainly, Tucker said to General Gavin the next morning, "What in the hell are they doing? We've been in this position for over 12 hours and all they seem to be doing is brewing tea." In view of the casualties his regiment had suffered securing the north bank of the Waal, his anger would seem to be justified.

A British Guards officer later wrote: "Patrols of Americans, wearing rubber-soled boots that made no sound, kept passing through us, alert and eager to engage the enemy. For our part, we just sat in our positions all night.... The situation in Arnhem remained desperate. Yet the Guards Armoured Division did nothing."

Sadly, it was true. It would be 18 hours before the advance was resumed, and yet for five hours, from 1900 until midnight, there was virtually nothing to stop an advance up the Elst-Arnhem road. Once again, however, British caution ruled the day. The plight of those in the Arnhem area seems to have taken second place to worries about the XXX Corps corridor south of Nijmegen. Or was it perhaps lethargy, military incompetence, or an unwillingness to accept a few casualties for the good of the majority—not least the Dutch people north of the Waal?

Many excuses have been offered for the failure of the Guards Armored Division to advance on the evening of September 20, but none of them is totally satisfactory.

One junior Irish Guards officer later wrote: "I led my platoon over the [Waal] bridge in the dark to take up a position astride the road ahead. Again, we sat there all night, with no German counter-attack.... It was a moment when you would have expected the commanders to order the Grenadiers [in Shermans] to continue hell for leather to Arnhem, with the 3rd Battalion Irish Guards riding on the tanks. Neither battalion was otherwise seriously engaged all night."

The failure of Horrocks to order the advance to continue "hell for leather" that evening, or of Adair to seize the initiative and give the necessary orders, was to result in tragic events on both sides of the lower Rhine.

Not surprisingly, the situation in front of the Nijmegen bridgehead on the night of September 20 soon began to change and, shortly after midnight, a new German defensive line, some 4 km north of the bridge, began to build. It was manned initially by KG Reinhold, and by dawn the following day it had been reinforced by 16 Mk IVs and *Sturmgeschütze* and a panzergrenadier battalion of the Frundsberg, newly arrived from the Pannerden crossing.

In an episode almost as amazing as the American crossing of the Waal, SS Captain Karl-Heinz Euling led the 60 or so survivors of his KG to safety that night. They fought on until around 2225 hours in various locations near the bridge and then managed to slip away, quite literally under the noses of the British, to find rowing boats and join their Frundsberg comrades on the north side of the river. Euling was later awarded the Knight's Cross for his actions on this day.

General Taylor's greatest concern was another attack by German armor, and his worst fears were realized when Panzer Brigade 107 attacked Son again early on the 20th. Panthers soon controlled the bridge by fire, and it would almost certainly have fallen had not 10 British tanks "belatedly responded to an SOS dating from the crisis of the night before." The Germans found they were unable to close on the village due to the canal, and after losing four Panthers to the British tanks they withdrew. Nevertheless, it had been a close-run thing.

General Taylor had already decided that since he could not maintain a static defense along the whole length of Hell's Highway, he would try to surprise and unbalance the enemy by limited offensive thrusts of his own. Accordingly, in the first of these operations Lt. Col. Kinnards's battalion of the 501st swept northwest from Veghel along the Willems Canal and "accounted for about 500 Germans, including 418 prisoners."

Imperial War Museum

National Archives

ABOVE: A British soldier fires a Bren gun in an open field near Arnhem as haystacks blaze in the background. Less than 2,000 members of the British 1st Airborne Division escaped capture or death during Operation Market-Garden. Relief forces failed to arrive in time to secure the bridge across the Lower Rhine. OPPOSITE: The war is over for one German soldier as he surrenders to members of the British Guards Armored Division during the abortive drive to relieve the embattled 1st Airborne Division near Arnhem.

Between 0830 and 1130 hours on September 21, two brigades of the long-awaited British 43rd Division, part of XXX Corps, arrived in Nijmegen. In view of the situation in the Arnhem sector, one would have expected them to continue to the north side of the Waal, but instead both remained in the city. This was, however, clearly a blessing in disguise for Gavin's division. With the British assuming responsibility for the city, the 82nd could focus its attention on its vulnerable eastern flank.

Farther south, General Taylor's tactic of carrying the attack to the enemy saw two battalions of Lt. Col. Johnson's 501st Regiment and two battalions of Lt. Cmdr. Michaelis's 502nd attempt to envelop the Germans in the Schijndel area between Veghel and St. Oedenrode. The operation began after dark and was progressing well, but as shall be seen, it had to be called off at 1430 hours the following day due to another all-out German effort to cut Hell's Highway.

The 101st, with help from British tanks, had so far successfully defended Hell's Highway, but its task was being prolonged by the slow progress of the British on either flank. By the morning of the 22nd, when a major German attack was launched in the Veghel area, their VIII Corps was still southeast of Eindhoven and their XII Corps around Best, 8 km west of Son. The Americans were so stretched that in places the "front" was quite literally the edges of the main Eindhoven-Nijmegen road and defended only by the XXX Corps troops moving along it.

The failure of the flanking British corps to keep pace with XXX Corps and thus relieve the pressure on the Americans has been the subject of much postwar discussion. The bare facts are that XII Corps was not ready to advance on September 17, and three days later had covered only 15 km to reach the Turnhout-Eindhoven road, while VIII Corps, which did not begin its advance until the 20th, took six days to reach the Maas River, 25 km southeast of Nijmegen. Although no one would question the bravery of the junior officers and soldiers or the severity of the fighting, one has to question the motivation of some of their superiors and compare it with that of their opponents. It is significant that, long after the war, General O'Connor, the commander of VIII Corps, admitted that he had been instructed not to press too hard on his flank!

The German attack in the Veghel area was launched at 0900 hours on the 22nd from both sides of Hell's Highway. A KG Huber, with three infantry battalions, an artillery battalion, a flak battery, seven antitank guns, and four Jagdpanthers, attacked from the west. Following up was a parachute regiment, but it would not reach the battle area until the following day. The heaviest assault came from the east and was mounted by a KG Walther. This KG included the Panzer Brigade 107, a Frundsberg panzergrenadier battalion, an artillery battalion, and a flak battery, and KG Heinke. Panzer Brigade 107 had already been in action two days previously at Son, losing 10 percent of its armor in the process.

The 101st Airborne Division was inevitably too thinly spread to resist a strong attack at a single point. Lt. Col. Robert Ballard's 2nd Battalion of the 501st was positioned in Veghel, but the two other parachute battalions of the regiment were already involved in the Schijndel area. Fortunately, members of the Dutch Resistance had warned General Taylor of the German buildup on both sides of the corridor, and this enabled him to deploy some of his slender reserves: Lt. Col. Ray Allen's battalion of the 327th Glider Infantry Regiment, 150 men of Colonel Sink's 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment, and a battalion of British tanks.

The German attacks were violent and, although not fully coordinated, succeeded in cutting the road between Uden and Veghel by 1330 hours. Panthers then turned south toward Veghel, and shortly afterward KG Huber, advancing from the west, was able to bring fire to bear on the vital bridge over the Willems Canal. The Americans, however, were able to pull back the two battalions of the 501st from the Schijndel area to support their comrades in Veghel, and these battalions were able to engage and virtually annihilate KG Huber from the rear.

Meanwhile, the arrival of a small reserve force heading for Uden, supported by a squadron of British tanks and a battalion of glider infantrymen from the main divisional LZ, halted the move of the German tanks from the north and stabilized the situation. According to the U.S. Official History, the Americans "requested air support, but unfavorable weather denied any substantial assis-

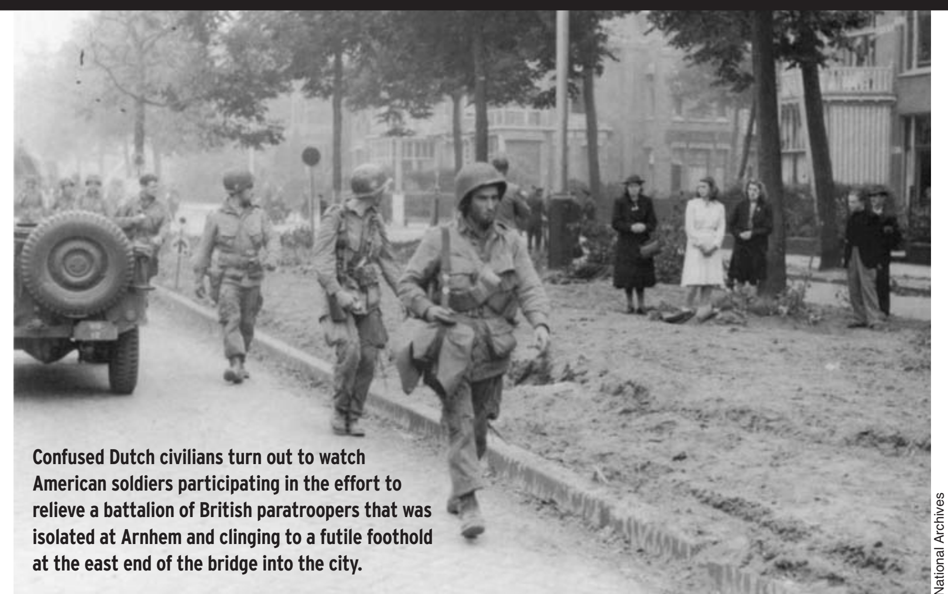
tance from that quarter." This statement is contradicted by General Brereton, who claimed that 119 Typhoon sorties were flown in support of the ground troops on this day. RAF records show a total of 74 Typhoon sorties being flown: 66 in the 101st Airborne sector where the alleged target was up to "100 tanks" and eight in the Reichswald area.

By last light, the 101st was holding the Veghel area with eight battalions of parachute and glider infantry and two companies of British tanks, but this force was still not considered strong enough to guarantee Hell's Highway for the movement of the XXX Corps units and supplies urgently needed north of Nijmegen. Knowing that the Germans would intensify their attacks during the night and the next day, Horrocks gave orders that a tank battalion and an infantry battalion from the Guards Armored Division in Nijmegen were to be sent back down the corridor to help the Americans. They received the order to move at 1230 hours and, after brushing with German elements south of Uden, went firm into the village as darkness fell.

In the meantime, the commander of the British Second Army, General Miles Dempsey, in an indication of how seriously he viewed the situation, placed the 101st Airborne Division under the British VIII Corps and told the VIII Corps commander to move one of his divisions to Veghel.

By last light on September 23, the 82nd had expanded its Nijmegen defensive perimeter to an average depth of 7 km in the east and 12 km in the southeast. Although the Germans had been reinforced, the American paratroopers had fought them to a standstill, and the expanded American bridgehead between the Maas and the Waal provided a much-needed firm base for the further advance of the British VIII Corps. It also provided greater protection for the vital Nijmegen bridges. With the safe, if belated, arrival of the 325th Glider Infantry Regiment on this day, Gavin could be justly proud of his division's achievements. His own performance had been remarkable. He had been in constant pain from a suspected broken back following his parachute landing on the 17th.

Farther south, in the 101st Division's sector, the situation was less stable. The balance of the Frundsberg's KG Heinke—SS panzergrenadiers and some panzerjägers—had closed up to KG Walther, as had a battalion of paratroopers. Thus reinforced, Walther resumed his attack on the Veghel sector of Hell's Highway. In conjunction with this attack from the east, the 6th German Parachute Regiment, commanded by the famous Baron von der Heydte, already exhausted after a 48-hour approach march, was ordered to attack from the west—on basically the same axis as that taken by the ill-fated KG Huber the previous day. Neither attack was successful.



Confused Dutch civilians turn out to watch American soldiers participating in the effort to relieve a battalion of British paratroopers that was isolated at Arnhem and clinging to a futile foothold at the east end of the bridge into the city.

National Archives

By midday the paratroopers from the west had been halted by their American counterparts and, at about the same time, Walther, no longer able to ignore the steady advance of the British VIII Corps to his left rear, decided to pull back. An hour later the overall American commander in Veghel, Brig. Gen. Anthony McAuliffe, sent two battalions, with British tank support, north to clear the road, and by 1520 hours his men had linked up with the British Guards units moving south from Uden. After 24 hours, Hell's Highway was open again. German reports confirm that Panzer Brigade 107 lost 16 Panthers, 24 SPWs, and over 300 men in its struggle to cut the highway.

A further Allied success on this day was the safe delivery by glider of the remaining artillery and 3,000 men of the 101st Airborne Division.

Von der Heydte's 6th German Parachute Regiment, with four weak battalions and a few assault guns, attacked Veghel again at 1000 hours. Heavy fighting between the rival paratroopers followed, and while this was going on a KG Jungwirth, cobbled together from another infantry division, found an undefended section of the highway, 6 km southwest of Veghel. Within 24 hours of Hell's Highway being reopened, it was cut again. Despite heavy interdiction from American and British guns, German paratroopers successfully reinforced KG Jungwirth during the night, and it soon became clear that much stronger Allied forces would be needed to reopen the vital road to Nijmegen.

At 0830 hours on Monday morning, a combined attack by American and British forces was launched to clear the Germans off Hell's Highway. The men of the 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment advanced from the direction of Veghel, while a reinforced battalion of the 502nd together with British infantry moved up from St. Oedenrode. British tanks supported both groups. Although they were surrounded on three sides, the Germans held on and sensibly used their time to heavily mine the whole area.

Although the Germans eventually withdrew after dark that evening, it took Allied engineers until 1400 hours the following day to clear the mines and finally declare Hell's Highway safe for use. From now on, the Germans would have to resort to artillery fire and aircraft to interdict the constant flow of traffic. In this respect, a major attack by 40 German

aircraft took place against the Nijmegen road bridge on the 25th. One bomb hit, but the bridge remained passable.

The withdrawal of the British and Polish survivors from the Arnhem sector took place between 2140 hours on the 25th and 0530 hours on September 26 in heavy rain. Nearly 2,300 men reached safety, including 160 Poles.

Operation Market-Garden was over. It had cost the Allies over 16,000 soldiers and 248 airmen. Of nearly 12,000 British and Poles committed in the Arnhem area, 1,446 British, including 229 glider pilots, and 97 Poles were killed, and 6,414 British and 111 Poles, many of whom were wounded, became prisoners. The British XXX Corps suffered 1,480 casualties, and VIII and XII Corps lost 3,874 men between them.

A total of 29,628 American troops were delivered into Holland by parachute or glider during Operation Market-Garden. The 82nd Airborne Division lost 215 killed, 790 wounded, and 427 missing; the 101st suffered 315 killed, 1,248 wounded, and 547 missing; and 122 glider pilots were lost, of whom 12 were killed. Precise details of German casualties do not exist, but they probably totaled about 6,400.

With the war still in progress, it was inevitable that Market-Garden would be presented to the British and American people as a victory. Churchill described it as "a decided victory," and Montgomery claimed it was 90 percent successful since 90 percent of the ground specified in the operation order had been taken. To this latter claim, Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands is said to have replied, "My country can never again afford the luxury of a Montgomery success."

In reality, Market-Garden was a strategic failure. The West Wall had not been outflanked, the British Second Army was not positioned for an attack on the north flank of the Ruhr, the German Fifteenth Army had not been cut off, and there had been no collapse of German arms. The salient achieved led nowhere and was to prove extremely costly in the coming months.

The vast majority of those involved in Market-Garden, of whatever nationality, displayed great bravery and earned the respect of their adversaries. In the case of two of the major participants, the Americans and Germans, their senior ground commanders—Gavin, Taylor, Model, Bittrich, Harmel (Frundsberg), and Harzer (Hohenstaufen)—demonstrated outstanding military competence. The same cannot be said of the British. The seven most directly involved—Montgomery, Dempsey, Browning, Horrocks, Adair, Urquhart (commander, 1st Parachute Division), and Thomas (commander, 43rd Infantry Division)—must bear responsibility for the failure of the operation.

The aftermath for those who returned from Market-Garden differed markedly, depending on their nationality. The British survivors of the Arnhem operation were flown back to England on September 30 and welcomed as heroes. In a surprisingly generous move by Eisenhower and the American authorities, the two U.S. Airborne Divisions were left under Montgomery's command and stayed in the line in Holland for a further six weeks. They suffered another 3,594 casualties, including 685 killed. Today, few Brits are aware of the contribution and sacrifice made by the Americans in Market-Garden. Horrocks, however, was in no doubt when he wrote after the war: "As this difficult battle progressed I became more and more impressed with the fighting qualities of the 82nd and 101st U.S. Airborne Divisions.… What impressed me so much about them was their quickness into action.… They were commanded by two outstanding men.… Both were as unlike the popular cartoon conception of the loud-voiced, boastful, cigar-chewing American as it would be possible to imagine. They were quiet, sensitive-looking men of great charm, with an almost British passion for understatement.… Under their deceptively gentle exterior both Maxwell Taylor and Gavin were very tough characters indeed. They had to be, because the men they commanded were some of the toughest troops I have ever come across in my life."

WITH THE WAR STILL IN PROGRESS, IT WAS INEVITABLE THAT MARKET-GARDEN WOULD BE PRESENTED AS A VICTORY.

The Poles, after marching back to Nijmegen under occasional mortar fire, spent the next 10 days on guard and patrol duties there before being returned to England. Their commander, Maj. Gen. Stanislas Sosabowski, was sacked on December 9, undoubtedly at Montgomery and Browning's insistence. Not surprisingly, two of his battalions went on what turned out to be an unsuccessful hunger strike.

For the Dutch people, the aftermath of the fighting was to be the most bitter and painful of all. Some 100,000 people had been forced out of the Arnhem area. Their homes had been destroyed and systematically looted by the Germans, who then cut their rations to less than 500 calories a day in what became known as the "Hunger Winter."

In retaliation for their assistance to the Allies during Market-Garden and a countrywide railway strike begun by Dutch workers on September 17, the Germans stopped all inland shipping. Without trains or barges it was impossible to move sufficient food from the agricultural east to the towns and cities of the west. It has been estimated that some 25,000 Dutch people died of starvation that winter. As they died, they wondered why the Allies did not continue their advance to free them.

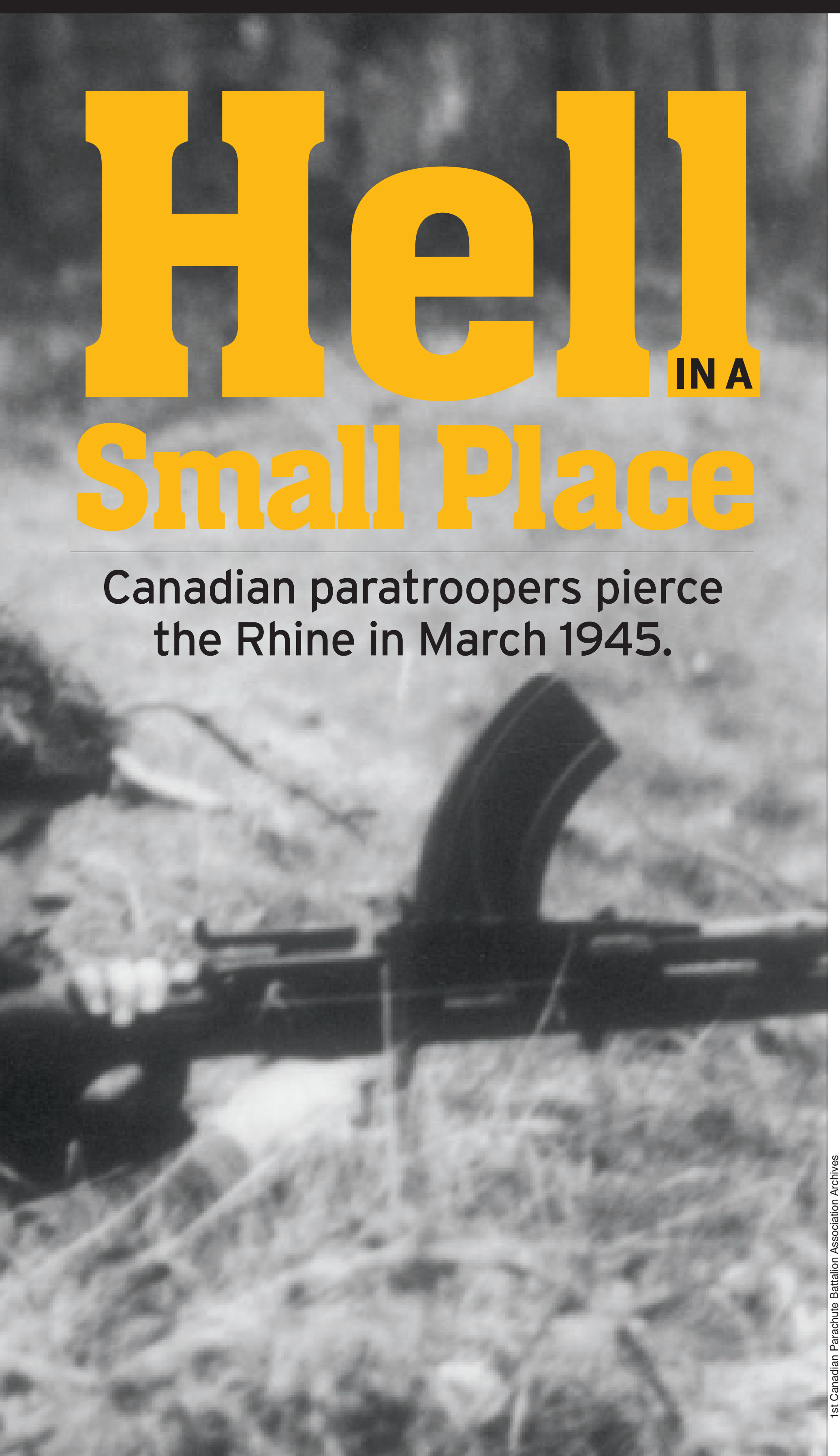
The answer was simple. The Germans were too strong and the ground too difficult. Any major advance would almost certainly have led to a level of destruction that would have resulted in the flooding of most of the Netherlands. The Allies turned instead toward the Rhine. ■

Retired Major General Michael Reynolds is a graduate of the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst. He served in the British Army around the world and was seriously wounded during the Korean War. He is the former director of NATO's Military Plans and Policy Division and the author of several well-received books.

Canadians man their positions once delivered to drop zones beyond the Rhine River. The airborne assault was undertaken in daylight and after the main attack to cross the Rhine had been launched.

Hell IN A Small Place

Canadian paratroopers pierce the Rhine in March 1945.



1st Canadian Parachute Battalion Association Archives

BY BERND HORN

In the hut no one spoke, no one joked. The assembled British and Canadian paratroop commanders awaited the briefing from their brigade commander on their next major operation. When it came, they were not disappointed. "Gentlemen," bellowed Brig. Gen. James Hill, the well-respected commander of the 3rd Parachute Brigade, "the artillery support is fantastic! And if you are worried about the kind of reception you'll get, just put yourself in the place of the enemy. What would you think," he posited to the troops, "if you saw a horde of ferocious, bloodthirsty paratroopers, bristling with weapons, cascading down upon you from the skies?"

The image set all at ease. Among those assembled for the briefing on Operation Varsity, the airborne assault that would breach the Rhine into the heart of the Reich, was a small group of Canadians who belonged to the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion.

The Canadian unit itself was a dark horse. During the early years of the war, Canadian commanders and politicians dismissed the idea of airborne forces as a luxury the Canadian Army could not afford, and for which it had no use. But the continuing American and British development of these forces and subsequent belief that paratroopers were a defining element of a modern army led the Canadians in July 1942 to organize paratrooper units, though on a much smaller scale than their American and British counterparts. Unsure of what to do with their paratrooper commands, the Canadian government attached them to the British 6th Airborne Division in the summer of 1943. The 6th subsequently distinguished itself during the Normandy invasion and breakout campaign in June-August 1944. They quickly demonstrated themselves to be preeminent combat troops.

1st Canadian Parachute Battalion Association Archives

BELOW: Lt. Col. Jeff Nicklin, the ill-fated commander. LEFT: Paratroopers pose for a photo on the day of their airlift to the drop zones in Germany.

National Archives of Canada

The battalion had just returned to England from its emergency deployment to the Ardennes where it assisted in stemming the surprise German Christmas offensive. The Canadian paratroopers now prepared for their next mission where they would once again be thrust into the forefront of battle.

Hitler's failed gamble in the Ardennes in December 1944 exhausted what little reserves the Germans had been able to cobble together. Conversely, the Allies had, by mid-January 1945, not only beaten off the desperate German counterattack but also, despite the heavy losses sustained in the Battle of the Bulge, amassed almost four million men under arms in northwest Europe. Consequently, the Allied steamroller once again began its relentless advance. By March 10, 1945, the Germans were forced to withdraw to the east bank of the Rhine River in a last effort to defend the German frontier itself.

Planning for the crossing of the Rhine River had begun as early as October 1944. At this time, Allied brass targeted the Emmerich-Wesel area as a crossing point because of its strategic location close to the vital industrial Ruhr region, as well as the suitability of its terrain for a rapid breakout by mechanized forces once a bridgehead was gained. In addition, the ground lent itself to the possibility of large airborne operations in support of the complex river crossing. Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery and his 21st Army Group were charged with conducting the portentous assault into Germany, which was given the code-name Operation Plunder.

"My intention," recalled Montgomery, "was to secure a bridgehead prior to developing operations to isolate the Ruhr and to thrust into the Northern plains of Germany." He planned to cross the Rhine on a front of two armies between Rheinberg and Rees with the Ninth U.S. Army on the right and the Second British Army on the left. He wanted the bridgehead to be sufficiently large to cover Wesel in the south from enemy and ground action, and to encompass bridge sites to the north in Emmerich. Equally important, the bridgehead had to provide enough space to form up large formations for the drive that would culminate in the complete collapse of German resistance.

Montgomery assigned to Lt. Gen. Sir Miles Dempsey's Second Army the task of thrusting across the Rhine and seizing Wesel. To assist Dempsey, Montgomery was given use of the First Allied Airborne Army (FAAA), which was responsible for dropping the American XVIII Airborne Corps in support of the operation. The XVIII Airborne Corps, commanded by Maj. Gen. Matthew Ridgway, consisted of the U.S. 17th and British 6th Airborne Divisions. Its mission was to "disrupt the hostile defense of the Rhine in the Wesel Sector by the seizure of key terrain by airborne attack, in order to rapidly deepen the bridgehead to be seized in an assault crossing of the Rhine by British ground forces." The airborne component of the assault into Germany was designated Operation Varsity.

The final XVIII Airborne Corps plan centered on dropping the two divisions abreast. They were to seize the Diersfordter Wald and high ground three to five miles east of the Rhine and north of Wesel up to the Issel River. Allied commanders felt this was critical to the success of the assault river crossing because it would bottle up potential reinforcements, and more significantly, deny enemy artillery observers the ability to call down accurate and devastating fire from the ridge that dominated the Rhine. Equally important was the necessity to seize control of the five-by-six mile tract of woods covering the high ground that could mask camouflaged, well-entrenched enemy infantry and gun positions. These were thought capable of inflicting punishing casualties and significant delay to the crossing and subsequent breakout operations.

As a result, the 17th U.S. Airborne Division was ordered to seize, clear, and secure the high ground east of Diersfordt plus a number of bridges over the Issel River to protect the south-

ern flank of the airborne corps and to establish contact with 1st Commando Brigade in Wesel to its right, 6th British Airborne Division to its left, and 12th British Corps to its rear. The 6th British Airborne Division was ordered to seize the high ground east of Bergen in the northwest part of the Diersfordter Wald, the town of Hamminkeln, and a number of bridges over the Issel River. It was also responsible for protecting the northern flank of the airborne corps and for establishing contact with both the 12th British Corps moving up from its rear and the 17th U.S. Airborne Division on its right.

In turn, the mission assigned to 3rd Parachute Brigade, to which the Canadian paratroopers belonged, was to secure the drop zone and then clear the northern part of the Diersfordter Wald. More important, it was given the daunting mission of seizing the 150-foot-high Schnappenburg feature that was defended by the well-bloodied 7th German Parachute Division. The brigade had to silence all enemy artillery positions and infantry entrenchments in the woods and surrounding farms and villages.

The brigade's 8th Battalion was ordered to seize the northern part of its allocated section of the Wald, while the 9th Battalion was assigned responsibility for the southern part, including the Schnappenburg feature. The Canadian paratroopers were responsible for the central part, specifically the western part of the woods, a number of buildings, and a section of the main road that ran north from Wesel to Emmerich.

Overwhelming force available to smother German resistance was not the only component of the plan. Airborne operations had markedly matured since the beginning of the war, and commanders considered some dramatic departures from established practice. Most significant was the decision to drop the airborne troops after the actual crossing of the Rhine River by ground forces. FAAA commanders and planners quickly noted that an airborne operation before the crossing would "hamstring artillery for the assault crossing." Moreover, they argued that the river crossing was not the most difficult part of the operation, but rather the real challenge lay in "the subsequent expansion of the bridgehead and in particular the capture of the Diersfordter wood" to ensure that the assaulting division would not be hemmed in on the far bank.

1st Canadian Parachute Battalion Association Archives

Men rain down to join their gliders. In the early stages, the drop went exceptionally well.

Montgomery endorsed this plan. Both he and his airborne commanders were convinced that a daylight drop would avoid problems experienced in previous airborne operations, such as missing drop zones, scattering of troops, assembling paratroopers in a timely fashion once on the ground, navigating to the objective, and providing troops with adequate protective fire. In addition, both divisions were to be dropped directly on their objectives within range of their supporting guns on the west side of the river. This available fire support would not only provide immediate assistance to the paratroopers but it would also facilitate linkup with ground forces on the first day, thus overcoming two fundamental problems experienced on earlier airborne missions.

The hazards of a daytime drop, however, particularly into an area that was easily recognized by the enemy as ideal for an airborne assault and known by the Allies to be inundated with flak positions and machine-gun nests, was well understood by airborne commanders. Nonetheless, they felt that the risk of a daylight drop directly on the objective would be mitigated by concurrent actions of the ground force, as well as the preparation of the battlefield by the Allied Air Force. They believed that by conducting the river crossing first, the German commanders would react accordingly and be preoccupied with the hordes of Allied forces flowing across the Rhine.

"Well, gentlemen, you'll be glad to know," announced Maj. Gen. Eric Bols, commander, 6th Airborne Division, "that this time we're not going to be dropped down as a carrot held out for the ground forces." He explained that the "Army and the Navy are going to storm across the Rhine, and just when they've gained Jerry's attention in front—bingo! we drop down behind him."

The airborne commanders also placed faith in the bombing campaign which, compounded by artillery support from the friendly bank, would theoretically disorient and destroy German infantry, artillery, and antiaircraft positions. They also felt that by landing directly on their targets, the para-

troopers would avoid a long, drawn-out fight to their objectives and be able to simply overwhelm any enemy force that survived the aerial and artillery bombardment.

To that end, it was decided that the airborne force be "put down in the shortest possible time" into a concentrated area. In addition, the glider element of the parachute brigades was increased above the normal allocation to enable the carriage of heavy weapons, jeeps, stores, and reserve ammunition. This also allowed for a margin of safety should attrition en route to and on the objective be excessively high. Finally, of equal importance, as already noted, landing on the objective enabled the airborne force the ability to link up with ground forces on the first day, alleviating the lightly armed paratroopers from a lengthy defense such as that experienced at Arnhem, in Holland, six months earlier.

The overall plan was carefully knit together and the necessary coordination completed. On March 14 a firm decision was made to conduct both Operation Plunder and Operation Varsity on March 24. Despite the overwhelming force that was amassed to crush German resistance, further steps were taken to guarantee success. During the three days before the operation the Allies waged a massive bombing campaign designed to suppress German preparations, communications, and capacity to fight.

In the initial phase, Allied bombers flew over 16,000 sorties and dropped nearly 50,000 tons of bombs. These strikes not only hampered the movement of vital economic traffic from the Ruhr industrial region, but also denied the enemy the ability to communicate and move large-scale reinforcements of men and matériel to the targeted Rhine area. In addition, 14 bridges and viaducts were made impassable, enemy headquarters complexes and hutted camps were demolished, 160 enemy aircraft were destroyed, and 23 known flak positions in the area of the parachute dropping zones (DZ) and glider landing zones (LZ) were neutralized. All told, the Germans suffered colossal damage before the first Allied soldier crossed the river.

Although initial planning for Operation Varsity had begun in October 1944, ongoing operations and the crisis in the Ardennes pushed the planning process to the back burner. When it was resurrected in February and March 1945, there was little time to mount the large preparations attendant to the Normandy invasion. On the other hand, there was neither the same interest, nor the same sense of significance—everyone was tired of the war. Moreover, it was apparent that the German Army was rapidly crumbling. "There was also some feeling," acknowledged veteran paratrooper Sergeant Andy Anderson, "that the success of the mission perhaps did in fact mean a rapid end to the war."

And so, when the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion returned on March 7 from seven days of leave awarded after its return from the Ardennes campaign, there was little time for much worry or preparation. The battalion was brought up to full strength. All personnel were once again tested on their weapon drills and then conducted field-firing exercises and a review of battle drill. But the need to pre-position and prepare equipment, as well as the necessity of not injuring soldiers before the operation, meant that no large-scale exercise or practice parachute drops were made.

This state of affairs did not sit well with the Canadian paratroop commanders. Their men had not jumped since November 1944. And now they were expected to jump onto the objective, into waiting enemy guns, without the ability to rehearse their parachuting drills.

National Archives of Canada

Nevertheless, anxiety was put aside so that all could get on with the realities of a complex operation. On March 19 follow-on equipment in the form of large packs was submitted for transit overseas. The next day the battalion was confined to Hill Hall Transit Camp in East Anglia in England. For the next three days the paratroopers were briefed on plasticine models and enlarged maps. Weapons were repeatedly cleaned and checked. Personal equipment was nervously prepared and in many cases, final letters written for loved ones back home. The waiting was always the worst. Nonetheless, the battalion was set. "If ever a fighting unit was ready for anything," extolled one veteran paratrooper, "this had to be it."

On March 23 the guns suddenly lifted their bombardment. Under cover of darkness British Commandos commenced their attack on Wesel. An hour later, the Second British and Ninth U.S. Armies began a series of assaults across the Rhine that were to continue throughout the night. By first light, they had secured nine small bridgeheads between Emmerich and Wesel.

As the Allied ground troops swarmed across the Rhine in the eerie darkness, the airborne forces were just beginning to form up in bases in England and France. The aerial armada, numbering 1,696 troop transports and 1,050 tug aircraft towing 1,348 gliders departing from 26 airfields, headed for the crowded airspace over Belgium. In their cramped fuselages were crammed approximately 14,000 American and British airborne soldiers. In support were 889 escorting fighters to ensure the air fleet was not molested by German fighter air-

1st Canadian Parachute Battalion Association Archives

ABOVE: Paratroopers move along the edge of a drop zone after the fighting had ceased. OPPOSITE: Canadians relax on the morning after the battle and prepare for further advance into Germany.

craft. In addition, another 2,153 fighter aircraft maintained an umbrella over the target area or ranged far over Germany hunting for any enemy plane that would dare to take off.

For their part, the Canadians had wakened at two in the morning and enplaned aboard 35 C-47 Dakota aircraft. By 7:30 AM they had departed from Chipping Ongar airfield in Essex for their two-hour flight to Germany. The aircraft were crewed by airmen of the American IX Troop Carrier Command.

"They were the scruffiest looking guys, with baseball hats and cigars," recalled Major Richard Hilborn, "but they were awfully good." Another veteran said, "The Yanks radiated matter-of-fact confidence, well suited to the fleeting but vital relationship between parachutists and aircrews." In fact, their skill was one of the primary reasons that Brigadier Hill based his plan on dropping 2,200 fighting men into a comparatively restricted area that measured approximately 800 by 1,000 yards in six minutes.

The flight across the English Channel and France was uneventful. The weather was perfect— a clear, blue sky and negligible winds. "It was a gorgeous morning," recalled Dan Hartigan, "one of the most beautiful days I've ever experienced." Joe King agreed. "Going across the Channel," he said, "seeing all those aircraft in the beautiful morning sky was fantastic." Moreover, not a single German aircraft penetrated the Allied fighter shield. "We met no opposition until we were right over the dropping zone," boasted one airborne commander. "The air cover was wonderful."

The tranquility, however, was deceiving. On the ground was a different story. "Pilots who flew east of the Rhine and north of the Ruhr," reported one journalist, "had never seen anything like it—whole towns and villages burning in an utter holocaust." The Canadian paratroopers would soon find themselves dropping into this furnace.

"Looking out the window briefly before 'Stand Up' my impression is of a very wide lake," wrote Sergeant Anderson. "I have no idea what I expected, but the river was massive, cold and uninviting … within seconds someone hollered the customary, 'stand up and hook up.'"

But Anderson's attention, as with so many others, was soon focused on the battle for survival. The transport planes, flying in nines, held true to their course and maintained a steady formation despite the heavy flak that now spit up from the ground. "We went out in a tight formation," confirmed Private Jan de Vries, "the pilots took no evasive action."

Private Morris Zakaluk recalled that "it was a ride to enjoy." But as they neared their objective, "I could see puffs of smoke in the air between hundreds of planes," he recalled, "anti-aircraft shells exploding and tracers arcing their way into the sky," mixed with "balls of fire"—aircraft hit and cascading to earth.

"Lying on the ground, looking up taking off my chute," remembered Lieutenant William Jenkins, "I could see these things [C-47s] blasted all over the sky." He added, "I couldn't help but admire those guys." The deputy commanding officer during the jump, Major Fraser Eadie, noted, "They came in a little higher than we wanted—we wanted 450 feet." Nonetheless, "the Yank aircraft did a hell of a job for us. I have never been on a better drop, not training or operational."

Major Hilborn wrote that his "pilot put us

down approximately 100 yards from where I wanted to be within a minute of the time I had to be there."

The descent was not quite as accommodating. Neither the aerial bombing nor the artillery bombardment was as effective as the airborne soldiers had been praying for.

"Listen clear now! Pay attention! As soon as you hit the bloody deck, and you're out of your parachutes, fix bayonets and go for the goddamn woods!"

Zakaluk was relieved to feel his parachute open and find himself descending to earth. But his relief soon dissipated. "Buzzing all around me!" he recalled, "I can't see them, but I can hear them." Then it dawned on him: "Hey! These guys are shooting at me!"

He was not the only one. "I heard bullets going by and looked up to see bullet holes in my chute," remembered Private de Vries, "it sounds just like being in the rifle butts!" His thoughts, he admitted, "were to get down fast." Major Eadie too became the target of some well-aimed shots that cracked about his ears. He quickly went limp in his harness, feigning death in hopes this would fool the Germans. It seemed to work, although his landing left a lot to be desired.

On the ground the airborne forces met with varying resistance. In some areas opposition was negligible, but elsewhere troops dropped directly on entrenched enemy positions, including dug-in artillery and air defense guns. From Eadie's vantage point, "It was hot!"

One paratrooper recalled that he landed "like a rock," and found himself stretched out on the ground, somewhat amazed to find nothing broken, and his kit bag still intact. Like others, he unpacked his gear and started for the rendezvous point (RV) at the edge of the woods about 200 yards away. "Crouched low, running like hell," he recalled, "[I was] conscious of fire coming from somewhere, and several men lying motionless on the DZ." A paratroop officer later acknowledged, "It was real flat-out fighting until about noon." Another simply said it was "two hours of real killing."

James Hill, the commander of 3rd Parachute Brigade, had counseled his NCOs before the operation that "if by chance you should happen to meet one of these Huns in person, you will treat him, gentlemen, with extreme disfavour." But evidently the enemy was given the same type of briefing. Although the Third Reich was crumbling, its soldiers were still proving to be formidable foes.

"The Germans we were up against on this operation put up a pretty good fight," said Company Sergeant-Major (CSM) Johnny Kemp, "they were as good as us." Even the 6th Airborne Division intelligence staff had to begrudgingly agree. Although they reported that the German First Parachute Army was severely mauled in the preceding month on the west side of the Rhine, the "Estimate of the Enemy Situation" before Operation Varsity warned that the enemy's fanaticism and level of skill was still such that they would be able to provide fearsome opposition.

And they did. Every farm was turned into a stronghold. "Morale was fairly high and this was especially true in the *Fallschirm* divisions," said Lt. Gen. Gustav Hoehne, commander of the German 2nd Parachute Division, in a postwar interrogation. But many of the Canadian paratroopers already knew this—the contested areas of the drop zone were murderous. "They were young and full of fight," reminisced Dick Creelman. Another paratrooper remembered that "they fought like tigers."

German tenacity did not bode well for the paratroopers. As the first Allied parachute formations appeared over the target at 9:52, an unexplained eight minutes early, enemy reaction began slowly but quickly gained momentum. The Canadians jumped three minutes later. Dug in on the edge of the woods, the German machine guns and light flak cannons now wreaked havoc on the DZ. It was chaos. "We were getting pretty badly hammered from some houses on the edge of the field we landed in," recollected CSM Kemp. "We knew we had to attack them right away." Most of the battalion faced heavy machine-gun and sniper fire, which accounted for most of the unit's casualties.

"We were fighting right on the dropping zone immediately as we landed," said Lieutenant Bob Firlotte. "It was pretty bad."

But this was not totally unexpected. "Listen clear now! Pay attention!" senior NCOs had bellowed in the different aircraft. "As soon as you hit the bloody deck, and you're out of your parachutes, fix bayonets and go for the goddamn woods!" Most followed this advice. The DZ became a hive of activity with small groups of men shedding their parachute harnesses and rushing the wood line, firing from the hip. Officers and NCOs attempted to rally men to form organized assaults wherever possible.

Where they were lacking, privates took the ini-

Met with a hail of German bullets upon landing, a group of paratroopers digs in near the rendezvous point.

German prisoners place a wounded comrade on a stretcher under the watchful eye of a medical orderly.

tiative. Private James Quigley gathered a number of men who were milling around him on the DZ, but were uncertain of the direction to the rendezvous point. Despite the intense fire, "by his dash and contempt for the hail of bullets he inspired them to follow him" and destroy a company objective.

The battalion quickly gained the upper hand despite the variance in the quality of the enemy and the subsequent level of resistance encountered. "It was individual fighting in the first stages until we got organized," recalled Hilborn, "and the boys did a terrific job." Then, organized, there was no stopping them. C Company, just as in Normandy, was once again the first Canadian subunit to jump. They raced off the DZ to their RV points from where platoons quickly assaulted their objectives—a series of road junctions, wood lines, and the Hingendahlshof farm. Within 30 minutes they had achieved all of their tasks.

This they accomplished without their senior leadership. The company commander, Major John Hanson, broke his shoulder on landing. The second-in-command, Captain John Clancy, and a platoon commander, Lieutenant Ken Spicer, failed to reach the DZ—their plane was hit by flak on the approach and set ablaze. Fortunately for them, the aircrew struggled to keep the airplane aloft and the paratroopers managed to bail out. All were dispersed, however, and Clancy was captured. Nonetheless, Sergeants Miles Saunders and Bill Murray quickly organized the available troops and accomplished the company's mission. With their objectives secure, they then dug in on the north side of the battalion perimeter. But for them the pressure remained. For the next 16 hours they held off German probing attacks and exchanged direct and indirect fire with an enemy that would not quit.

Concurrently, A Company landed on the eastern end of the DZ. They had an accurate drop, and within 30 minutes were organized in their RV with approximately 70 percent of their men. The officer commanding, Major Peter Griffin, decided to mount an immediate attack on a group of buildings that were designated for use by battalion headquarters. Initially they met fierce enemy resistance, and the attack seemed to falter. Without hesitation, and under heavy fire, CSM George Green organized covering fire and then led a PIAT antitank weapon detachment up to the first house. Using the weight of fire to his benefit, he then personally led the assault into the building. After vicious close-quarter combat, the structure was rid of Germans. Green then went on to clear the remainder of the houses in a similar manner. He was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal for his "contempt of danger" and "inspiration to the men."

The unit reported its objective clear by 11:30 and subsequently took up a position at the southern end of the village of Bergerfürth. Later in the day the Germans attempted to recapture the lost territory, but A Company held them back.

B Company's reception, much like that of C Company, was heavily contested. The company second-in-command described the DZ as a "holocaust. Everyone running in all directions, but finally following NCOs and officers to the RV." The company formed up in the rendezvous point "with the usual confusion that is attached to a reorganization." The commanding officer, Captain Sam McGowan, showed up late, bleeding heavily and sporting a bullet hole in his helmet that miraculously entered the front, traveled around the inside rim and then exited through the back. He immediately directed the platoons to assault their objectives.

These were a group of farm buildings and a wooded area. Under a heavy covering fire from their Bren guns, B Company quickly "overran the bunkers and buildings, driving the Germans out with grenades and gunfire." The Bren-gun coverage kept the enemy's heads down, explained one veteran, who added, "We ran in right after the explosion and shot up anyone still there." It was controlled chaos. "We are off and running," wrote Sergeant Anderson in his diary, "firing wildly from the hip covered by Bren fire. We overrun bunkers, toss grenades into the houses and barns, generally raise hell and take a few prisoners." In less than 30 minutes they too had secured their objectives.

Having established "B" Company in a defensive position to his satisfaction, the company commander ordered a patrol under the command of Sergeant A. Page to clear the woods in the vicinity of its perimeter. Soon Page and his six-man patrol returned with 98 prisoners. Throughout the day the company engaged enemy soldiers attempting to flee the battle.

By noon, the battalion was firmly in control of its area of responsibility. In fact, this was the case for the entire formation. Within 35 minutes of the drop, 85 percent of the brigade had reported in, and objectives began

to fall. Throughout the day, as the battalion settled into its defensive position, stragglers—many wounded—continued to report in to their respective organizations. By 2 o'clock in the afternoon it seemed as though direct enemy resistance in the immediate area had ceased. Consequently, patrols were dispatched to ensure the DZ and surrounding woods were clear of enemy. In addition, the patrols searched for missing, wounded, or injured paratroopers. They also attempted to bring in much-needed supplies from the damaged gliders that lay strewn around the landing zone.

Throughout the night the Germans made attempts to infiltrate the position or simply to escape the Rhine bridgehead. The alert paratroopers, with the aid of their Vickers medium machine guns (MMG) and mortars, ably responded to the enemy movements. However, at first light a number of self-propelled (SP) guns began to fire at the battalion positions from 400 yards. The SP guns specifically targeted the Vickers MMGs and mortars owing to their effectiveness. German infantry then began an assault but quickly withdrew as a result of the withering fire that poured into their ranks. One SP gun was destroyed and another pulled back when four PIAT antitank weapons and mortars fired on them. The defeat of the latest attack marked the end of the Germans' countermoves. Although the enemy had now largely disappeared, they still maintained harassing mortar and artillery fire—but these became more of a nuisance than an actual threat.

The battle was brief but exceptionally bloody. Two-and-a-half hours after the airborne assault, all Allied paratroops had been dropped and were in possession of their designated objectives. Moreover, 109 tons of ammunition, 695 vehicles, and 113 artillery pieces had been landed by gliders. The cost was high, however. Within the 6th Airborne Division approximately 45 percent of the vehicles, 29 percent of the 75mm Pack Howitzers, 50 percent of the 25-pounder artillery pieces, and 56 percent of the 17-pounder antitank guns delivered by gliders were damaged or destroyed. The casualty count for the division was 1,297 killed, wounded, or missing.

The battalion lost 67 of approximately 475 soldiers, including its commanding officer, Lt. Col. Jeff Nicklin. When he failed to show up at the RV, Fraser Eadie immediately took command. However, as time went on, concern began to mount. A clearance patrol found Nicklin approximately 36 hours after the attack. He was hanging from a tree still in his parachute, his body riddled with bullets. He had dropped into the trees directly above German entrenchments and never had a chance. The news was a shock to many. He was "one who almost seemed indestructible," remarked Anderson, "6'3" tall, football hero back home, a stern disciplinarian, physical fitness his specialty."

Ironically, Nicklin normally jumped in the middle of the stick so that he could have half of his headquarters on either side of him upon landing. But for this operation he wanted to be the first jumper so that he could lead his troops into battle. That decision cost him his life and the battalion their commanding officer.

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

Canadian paratroopers were dropped on the eastern side of the Rhine to take part in Operation Varsity.

As the members of the battalion reflected on their accomplishments, as well as their lost comrades, a fatigue and quiet personal rejoicing seeped over them. Harrowing tales of close calls and stories of individual gallantry and heroism now surfaced. One such account revolved around Corporal Frederick Topham, who earned the only Victoria Cross to be awarded in the 6th Airborne Division during World War II. The 27-year-old Toronto native was the 11th Canadian to win the British Empire's highest award for bravery in the war.

During the initial battle, while treating casualties on the drop zone, Corporal Topham and several other medical orderlies heard a cry for help emanating from the fire-swept DZ. Two medics moved forward to rescue the wounded soldier. But they were themselves perfunctorily shot and killed. On his own initiative and without hesitation Topham braved the intense fire to assist the wounded paratrooper, even though he saw the other two orderlies killed before his eyes. "I only did," he later modestly stated, "what every last man in my outfit would do." As he treated the wounded soldier he was shot through the nose. Bleeding profusely and in great pain he completed first aid and then carried the wounded man slowly and steadily through the hail of fire to protective cover in the woods.

For the next two hours Topham refused medical attention for his own wound, and continued to evacuate casualties from the drop zone with complete disregard for the heavy and accurate enemy fire. "I didn't have time to think about it," he later explained. "I was too busy." It was not until all the wounded paratroopers had been evacuated that he allowed his wound to be treated. By now his face had swollen up enormously and the medical officer ordered his evacuation. He interceded with such vigor that he was allowed to return to duty. On his way back to his company, he came across a Bren-gun carrier that had just received a direct hit. It lay burning fiercely, amid falling enemy artillery shells and its own exploding mortar ammunition. Despite the direction of an experienced officer on the spot who warned everyone not to approach the carrier, Topham immediately went out alone, rescued the three occupants, and arranged for their evacuation. Topham's valor was unrivaled. "For six hours," read his commendation, "most of the time in great pain, he performed a series of acts of outstanding bravery, and his magnificent and selfless courage inspired all those who witnessed it."

Bravery and courage by all belligerents aside, it became clear early on that the airborne assault had been a success. "The sight of the massive drop," wrote one Canadian veteran, "descending in an area about ten by ten kilometers square, floored the enemy." The show of force could not but impress even the Allied soldiers. "The very concentrated drop," wrote a medic, "gave an impression of irresistible might."

A British infantry captain, voicing the opinion of many, questioned, "How on earth can they go on in face of this?" Indeed, German prisoners attested to the hopelessness they felt once they witnessed the overwhelming number of paratroopers who seemed to flow from an endless stream of aircraft. Major-General Fiebig, commander of the German 84th Infantry Division, confessed he "had been badly surprised by the sudden advent of two complete divisions in his area," and throughout his interrogation reiterated "the shattering effect of such immensely superior forces on [his] already badly depleted troops."

The effect on the enemy quickly translated itself to events on the ground. By 3 o'clock in the afternoon reconnaissance elements of the 15th Scottish Division linked up with the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion. By 4:30 in the morning the first armored columns of tanks and Bren-gun carriers of the 15th Scottish Division began to pass through the unit's position. The paratroopers welcomed them warmly. They had achieved linkup with the ground force in less than 24 hours. But there was little time to celebrate. The final push was now commencing.

The following day, March 26, almost 48 hours after the battalion's drop into Germany, the Canadians were ordered into a brigade assembly area for a hot meal and some rest. "The battalion," boasted Hill, "really put up a most tremendous performance on D-day and as a result of their dash and enthusiasm they overcame their objectives, which were very sticky ones, with considerable ease, killing a very large number of Germans and capturing many others."

Overall, Allied commanders declared that Operation Varsity was an enormous success. "The airborne drop in depth," explained Maj. Gen. Ridgway, "destroyed enemy gun and rear defensive positions in one day—positions it might have taken many days to reduce by ground attack." He added that "the impact of the airborne divisions at one blow shattered hostile defense and permitted the prompt link-up with ground troops. The increased bridgehead materially assisted the build-up essential for subsequent success." The drive eastward and "rapid seizure of key terrain," he concluded, "were decisive to subsequent developments, permitting Allied armor to debouch into the North German plain at full strength and momentum."

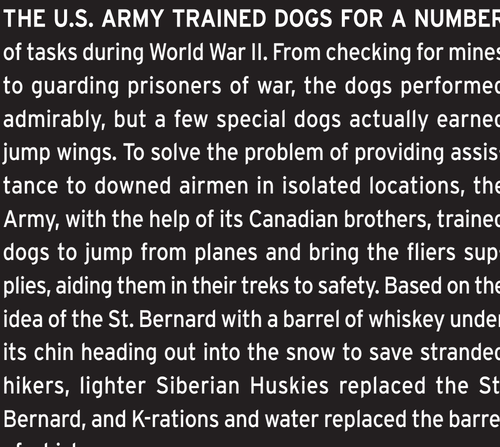
The Canadian paratroopers played an integral part in this success. They accomplished all of their missions, one of their own earning the Victoria Cross in the process. Now, despite their fatigue and the realization that casualties were once again heavy, they were buoyed by the thought that the war was coming to a rapid conclusion and that they had done much to bring this about. □

1st Canadian Parachute Battalion Association Archives

A Sherman "Firefly" and M3 half-track, part of the 15th Scottish Division, reach the Canadian paratroopers late in the day on March 24.

To help downed airmen, the U.S. Army trained dogs to parachute out of airplanes. By Michael Dolan and Kevin Hymel

CANINES to the RESCUE

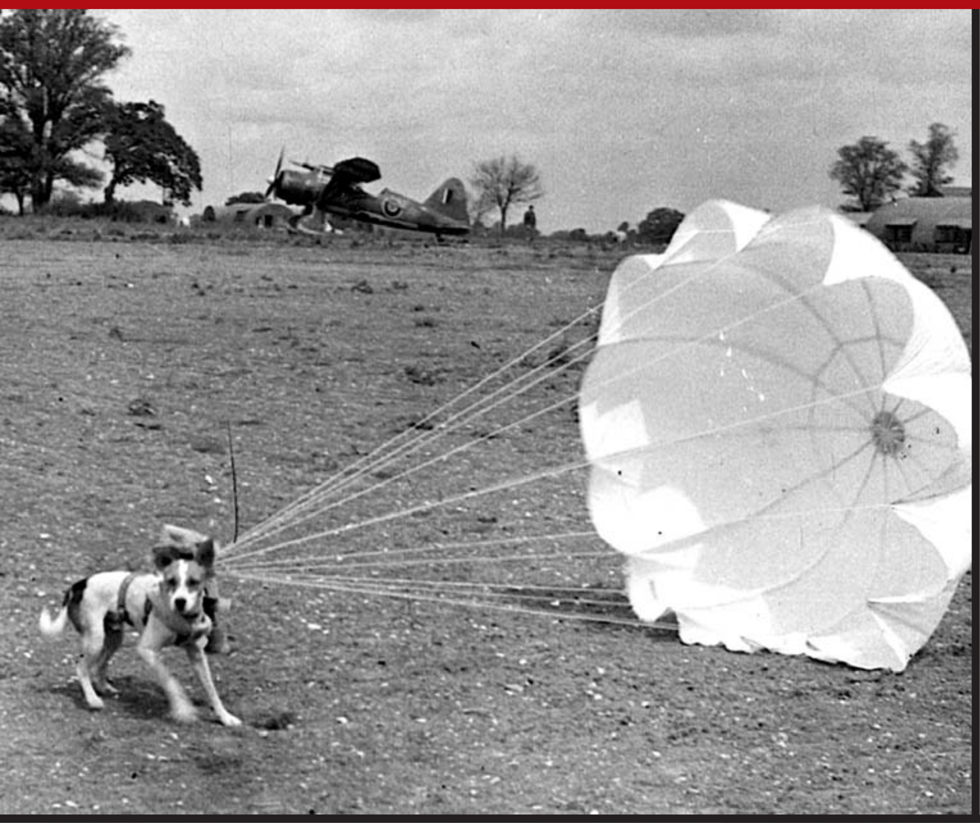


THE U.S. ARMY TRAINED DOGS FOR A NUMBER of tasks during World War II. From checking for mines to guarding prisoners of war, the dogs performed admirably, but a few special dogs actually earned jump wings. To solve the problem of providing assistance to downed airmen in isolated locations, the Army, with the help of its Canadian brothers, trained dogs to jump from planes and bring the fliers supplies, aiding them in their treks to safety. Based on the idea of the St. Bernard with a barrel of whiskey under its chin heading out into the snow to save stranded hikers, lighter Siberian Huskies replaced the St. Bernard, and K-rations and water replaced the barrel of whiskey.

To prepare the dogs for their jump, soldiers would take the animals, with full packs, on 75-mile hikes to relax before their ordeal. Next, the dogs were suited with parachutes—sometimes with two dogs to a chute—and loaded aboard a transport plane. The plane flew to a desired height and target zone where the dogs were pushed out of the side door. The parachute, on a static line, automatically opened as the canines cleared the doorway. Once on the ground, they could deliver supplies and aid the stranded airman.

While the experiment was never applied to the battlefield (Europe was too well populated and the islands of the Pacific too small), it showed that the Army would go to any lengths to facilitate the safe return of its pilots. □

All photos: National Archives



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:
Fido earns his wings! Having landed on all fours, this dog is resisting the pull of its parachute. In the background is a British Lysander biplane with Canadian markings. The two dogs waft to the ground with their supplies. To toughen up the paratrooper dogs, Army trainers (these two are with the 26th Infantry Division) take them on a 75-mile hike. By the time they are done, the dogs are in fine fettle and ready to jump.

OPPOSITE TOP:
Two 100-pound Siberian Huskies await takeoff from a Canadian airfield. A flight surgeon, with protective gear and mask, is responsible for getting them out of the plane.

OPPOSITE BOTTOM:
The Huskies are dropped from a search and rescue plane. Their parachute is already beginning to deploy.

Angels to the

BY DONALD J. ROBERTS II

Thousands of prisoners were at risk outside Manila when the 11th Airborne Division staged a daring and coordinated assault to bring them to freedom.

AS THE NINE C-47s flew closer to the drop zone, the lead plane descended to an altitude of 400 feet. Lieutenant John Ringler, the jump master in the lead plane, stood in the doorway and saw the open field that was to be used as the drop-zone approach. Behind Ringler's plane flew the remainder of his B Company, 1st Battalion, 511th Parachute Infantry, 11th Airborne Division paratroopers.

From his position in the open doorway, Ringler saw white smoke from a smoke grenade thrown by 11th Airborne reconnaissance personnel on the drop zone. Ringler immediately turned to his stick of paratroopers behind him and yelled, "Close in the door." Within seconds, at exactly 7 AM, the lead C-47 flew directly over the drop zone and Ringler shouted, "Let's go," and jumped out the door. Their attempt to liberate 2,000 prisoners of war was under way.

Following the Japanese sweep across the Philippines in late 1941 and early 1942, thousands of U.S. and Filipino military and civilian personnel were either shipped to prison camps off the islands or were forced to face imprisonment in one of the many POW camps on the islands.

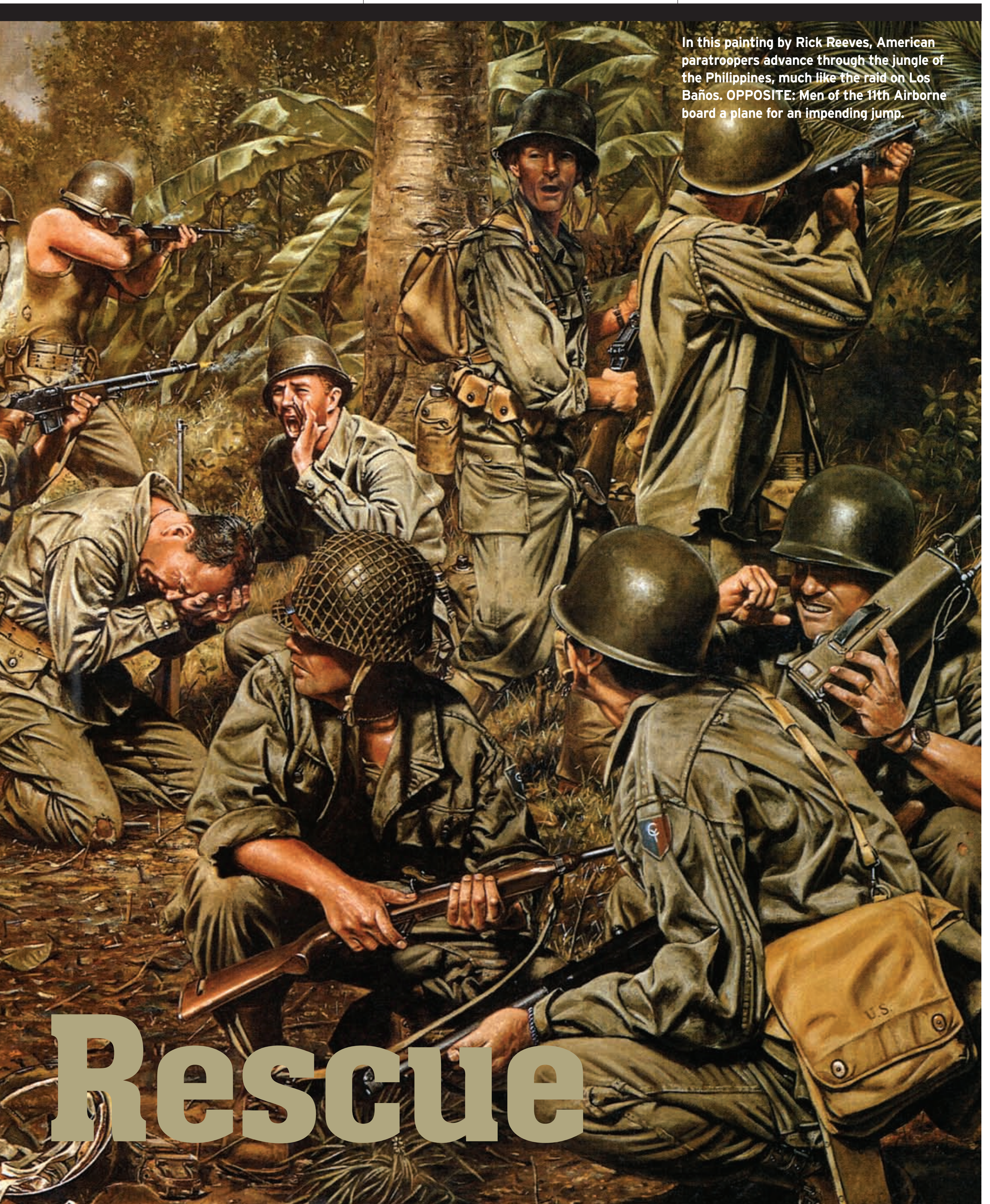
It was not until January 1945, following a long and exhaustive island-hopping campaign through the South Pacific, that General Douglas MacArthur—personally ordered to escape the Japanese onslaught—was ready to fulfill his promise to return to and retake the Philippines.

Because much of MacArthur's long career had been spent in the Philippines, he knew and had served with countless numbers of civilians and servicemen who were now being held in Japanese internment camps. Following the Allied invasion, MacArthur learned that Japanese guards had begun to increase the level of abuse of prisoners throughout the islands. MacArthur knew that the longer it took to rescue the inmates, the more horror they would be forced to endure. Regardless of the tough fighting his troops were experiencing, MacArthur ordered "special operations" to be planned and conducted by the Army in order to rescue theprisoners.

In his *Reminiscences* MacArthur says: "There was no fixed timetable [to reconquer Luzon]. I hoped to proceed as rapidly as possible, especially as time was an element connected with the release of our prisoners.… I knew that many of these half-starved and ill-treated people would die unless we rescued them promptly."

During the weeks of late January and early February 1945, rescue missions were conducted in many locations. One, which was launched in late January, included members of the 6th Ranger Battalion. These men freed some 500 prisoners at Pangatian. Another rescue operation, led by the 8th Cavalry Regiment of the 1st Cavalry Division, assaulted Santo Tomas University in Manila. There the soldiers were able to liberate more than 3,700 prisoners. Later, on February 4, the 8th Cavalry was able to free another 500 internees and nearly 800 Allied POWs from the Old Bilibid Prison in Manila. The final rescue operation planned during this time was to free the inmates at Los Baños Internment Camp. The assignment was handed to the 11th Airborne Division.

Los Baños prison was located on the campus of the College of Agriculture of the Univer-



In this painting by Rick Reeves, American paratroopers advance through the jungle of the Philippines, much like the raid on Los Baños. OPPOSITE: Men of the 11th Airborne board a plane for an impending jump.

Rescue

sity of the Philippines. The college was located 25 miles south of Manila, deep behind enemy lines, and along the southern shoreline of a huge inland lake, Laguna de Bay. Orders for the liberation were sent to Maj. Gen. Joseph Swing, commanding the 11th Airborne Division, on February 4, 1945. Because his men were fighting their way northward toward Manila and were involved in some very heavy combat, Swing immediately contacted Lt. Gen. Oscar Griswold, who commanded the XIV Corps, which was conducting the major offensive against Japanese positions in and around Manila.

Swing asked Griswold if the rescue mission could be postponed until the 11th Airborne Division accomplished its mission to help capture Manila. Griswold realized how difficult the fighting had become and granted Swing's request. However, he instructed Swing to "liberate the prisoners at Los Baños as soon as it becomes possible for you to disengage a force of sufficient size to carry out that mission."

Although Swing was granted a postponement on the liberation mission, he instructed his G-2 (Intelligence), Lt. Col. Henry J. Muller, to gather information about the camp. At the same time, Swing ordered his G-3 (Operations), Colonel Douglas P. Quandt, to begin planning how to reach the camp, defeat the enemy guarding it, and evacuate all prisoners safely.

To obtain accurate information on the Los Baños camp, Muller used a variety of resources to discover locations, defenses, and weaknesses. He used information from the division reconnaissance platoon, aerial photographs, guerrilla units, and Filipino civilians.

Muller learned that the prison compound had two barbed-wire perimeter fences, each six feet tall. Spaced along the fence line were pillboxes and several guard towers. Each position was manned by at least two guards armed with rifles and machine guns. Filipino guerrillas reported that prisoners left the camp every morning on work details that included finding firewood or obtaining food in the town.

As Lt. Col. Muller gathered his intelligence, he was helped by Major Jay D. Vanderpool, who had sneaked into Luzon in the fall of 1944 from a submarine. Since that time he had organized, helped train, and helped to plan many guerrilla operations and attacks against the Japanese around Cavite, Batangas, and areas west of Laguna de Bay. In fact, Vanderpool had planned an attack on Los Baños in which only Filipino guerrillas would have been used. In the end, Vanderpool had decided that to ensure the safety of all the prisoners in the camp, such a mission would require a larger force.

Much of what Vanderpool had learned, however, went into the planning of the operation. Then, just prior to the final planning stage, Muller and Vanderpool received very useful information from a Los Baños escaped prisoner, Peter Miles. Miles was one of many prisoners who would venture out from the compound through weak spots in the camp's containment measures to search for food to buy. The prisoners would then return to Los Baños before first light and hopefully sneak back into the camp undetected. It was on one of the food-search escapades that Muller agreed to meet with Miles.

There was one question on the minds of all inmates: Would their guards slaughter them rather than permit their liberation by the Americans?

During the meeting, Miles was able to describe the interior of the prison. Muller learned the movements and routines of prisoners and guards. Miles described the general population of the prison as roughly 2,100, plus individuals who were either Protestant missionaries and their families; Catholic nuns and priests; or doctors, engineers, and other professional people, all with families. There were also a few hundred wives and children of U.S. servicemen imprisoned at Los Baños. Miles explained that there was one big question on the minds of all inmates: Would their guards or other Japanese soldiers in the area slaughter them rather than permit their liberation by the advancing Americans?

Following the meeting with Peter Miles, Muller, Quandt, Vanderpool, and the rest of the 11th Airborne Division planners began to finalize their plans. The mission would consist of four phases, a separate unit from the division conducting each phase.

The first phase of the operation would be carried out by the 11th Airborne's Reconnaissance Platoon commanded by Lieutenant George Skau, along with nearly 80 Filipino guerrillas. Forty-eight hours before H-hour (the exact moment the mission would commence), the platoon would cross Laguna de Bay in small native boats called *bancas* and hide out in the vicinity of Los Baños until dark. Then these men would divide into three groups. The platoon and the Filipino guerrillas would secure a portion of beach east of the town, infiltrate as close as possible to the guard towers and defensive bunker emplacements, and secure a large field next to the compound to be used as a parachute drop zone.

Phase two would be a parachute drop of Lieutenant John Ringler's B Company, 1st Battalion, 511th Parachute Infantry. Once Ringler's company was on the ground and assembled, the men would assault the prison compound with elements of Skau's recon platoon. The attack was meant to kill or capture the guards and then prepare and assemble the inmates for extraction to safety.

The third part of the plan involved a formation of 59 amphibious "amtracs," each large enough to carry a platoon of fully equipped soldiers. They would leave from Mamatid on the west shore of Laguna de Bay. They were to set out in the early hours of "D-day" and time their arrival on the shore at Los Baños at exactly H-hour. At that time, C Company, 1st Battalion, 511th Parachute Infantry would deploy from the amtracs and set up roadblocks to prevent elements of the Japanese 8th Division from launching a counterattack. A company of artillerymen from Battery D, 457th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion would deploy from the amtracs as well. Their mission was to establish and secure the beachhead east of Los Baños. And A Company, 1st Battalion, 511th Parachute Infantry would secure the area

around the perimeter of the prison.

The fourth phase of the operation included the 1st Battalion, 188th Glider Infantry, commanded by Lt. Col. Ernest La Flamme. While the 1/511th attacked the prison compound, the 1/188th was assigned the task of conducting a diversionary attack to the west. La Flamme was ordered to advance his glidermen across the San Juan River from Mamatid and move toward Los Baños. The glider battalion had two objectives: engage as many enemy troops as possible and, eventually, link up with the paratroopers at the prison camp in the event they had to fight their way out of Los Baños.

As the plan developed, Quandt outlined the mission to Major Henry Burgess, who was commander of the 1st/511th Parachute Infantry, which was assigned the mission to liberate the camp. As Burgess began to concentrate on the final preparations for the mission, he realized the "tremendous obstacles" to be faced by his battalion and he worried, "How could my force of 412 paratroopers slip undetected deep into Japanese-controlled territory, wipe out a large number of enemy guards at the camp before they could kill the inmates, and bring back to safety, 2,200 weak men, women, and children, many of whom were unable to walk?"

On February 20, General Swing believed that he finally had accomplished enough of his objectives in Manila to allow the rescue mission to proceed. On the same day, Lieutenant John M. Ringler was ordered to report to division headquarters at Paranaque. Once there, he was briefed on the Los Baños mission and told that it would be his company making the parachute assault on the prison camp.

Division planners explained to Ringler that parachutes would be flown in from Leyte the next day. During the jump briefing, Ringler learned that Nichols Field, which had just recently been captured, would be cleared, and planes would be readied for the mission. Ringler was advised that just before B Company's drop, the drop zone would be marked by guerrillas using white smoke. The jump altitude would be 400 feet so the men would not be exposed to enemy ground fire for any longer than was necessary.

That night, Lieutenants Skau and Haggerty (who was an engineer from the 127th Airborne Engineer Battalion) left Paranaque to scout the Los Baños area. The two officers crossed Laguna de Bay by *banca* on their way to Nanhaya, a small village near the prison camp. Once there, they met with two escaped inmates, Ben Edwards and Freddy Zervoulakos. Both men agreed to escort Skau and Haggerty. Along with a few guerrillas from Hunter's 45th Regiment, the party moved quickly but quietly toward Los Baños.

The first thing the young officers made sure of was that the beach east of Los Baños was firm enough to support the column of amtracs as they rumbled onshore. They both decided it was. Next, the party checked the wooden bridges to ensure they were strong enough to support fully loaded amtracs. Again, both officers agreed that the bridges were safe. The third area Skau and Haggerty wanted to inspect was the drop zone that Doug Quandt had picked from the maps of the Los Baños area. After a careful analysis, Skau decided that the drop zone was sufficient, even though there were power lines and railroad tracks bordering the field. The final location to be checked was the camp itself.

The reconnaissance group stealthily moved from the drop zone along the route Ringler's men would take to the camp following their jump. They located the many guard towers spaced around the perimeter and decided that Ringler's men would be able to penetrate the camp's defenses. As soon as the men were satisfied they had learned all they could, the group moved back to the beach. Within minutes, Skau and Haggerty were back in their *banca* and returning to Paranaque.

The next day, February 21, the troops that were to participate in the rescue mission were pulled out of the line in Manila. Division plan-

All photos U.S. Army, except as noted.

The 8th Cavalry Regiment of the 1st Cavalry Division led a rescue of prisoners held at Santo Tomas University in Manila.

ners then decided that "D-day" for the mission would be February 23, just two days away.

During the day of the 21st, Skau got a few hours sleep. After dark, he moved his reconnaissance platoon to Mamatid and met with the guerrillas, who came with *bancas*. They began shoving off at 7 PM. Most of the force landed near Los Baños in the early morning and moved into the jungle to hide. The remainder of Skau's force came ashore after daylight and it, too, disappeared into the jungle for the wait until the following night.

The next day the other rescue units moved to their staging areas. A and C Companies along with Battery D marched from Manila to Mamatid. Once there, they prepared their equipment and weapons for loading onto the amtracs. At 4 AM on the 23rd, just three hours before H-hour, the paratroopers were to load onto the amtracs for their trip across Laguna de Bay to Los Baños.

Moving on the 22nd as well was La Flamme's Glider Infantry. This force, designated to conduct the diversionary attack, moved to an area near Mamatid and prepared to attack. They planned to maneuver down the road from Mamatid to an area near the San Juan River and hopefully draw many enemy troops away from the Los Baños area.

Ringler's B Company was pulled out of the line and trucked to the newly liberated New Bilibid Prison. The paratroopers were instructed to offload from the trucks, and all members of B Company were assigned cells to sleep in during the night. One member of B Company recalled: "We could feel something in the air. And the rumors! Something big, something important was coming up. What was it all about? And some thanks for all the fighting we had been doing! We were being put in a prison."

On the afternoon of the 22nd, Ringler joined his men at New Bilibid Prison. He called his men together and explained what the secret mission was. Ringler warned, "Watch out in particular for the high-tension line bordering the drop zone.... If you hit it, you're fried!"

Maj. Gen. Joseph Swing (on the right) conferring with Lt. Gen. Robert Eichelberger of the 8th Army on February 3, 1945.

Loading back onto trucks, the paratroopers were moved to Nichols Field, where they spent a restless night under the wings of the planes.

At 3 AM on the 23rd, just four hours before the attack was to begin, Skau began to move his men from their hiding places in the jungle to their final positions for attack. He sent one squad to the beach just east of Los Baños with instructions to mark the beach approach with smoke grenades for the amtracs at exactly 6:58. Another squad was sent to the selected drop zone. At exactly 6:58 this squad was supposed to mark the drop zone with smoke grenades for the approaching flight of C-47s carrying John Ringler's paratroopers. The remainder of Skau's platoon and guerrillas crawled through the

A Tragic Result of Success

Within a week of the Los Baños raid, paratroopers from Burgess's 1st Battalion moved back into the Los Baños area to occupy the region. They made a horrible discovery—the Japanese 8th Division had committed brutal atrocities against Filipino civilians in the area.

The unit primarily responsible for the attacks on the civilians was the Saito Battalion, under the command of Captain Ginsaku Saito. Following the successful American/Filipino raid, Saito ordered two companies from his battalion, plus a group of ex-guards from the Los Baños prison camp, back to the camp "to kill all guerrillas, men, women, and children in Los Baños."

For three days, Saito's men shot, bayoneted, and set fire to as many civilians as possible. By the time Burgess's men arrived in Los Baños, over 1,500 people had been killed.

The investigations that followed the murders generally agreed that the reason for the attack was a Japanese reprisal against the civilians in the area for supporting the American raid. Some people, however, believed the Japanese would have committed the brutal acts against the civilians whether the raid was conducted or not. There had been plenty of "sadistic tendencies" around Laguna de Bay in settlements such as Calamba and Canlubang before the rescue mission. Former inmate Ben Edwards said, "I do not believe the atrocities in and around the college were the direct result of the liberation. I have always been of the opinion that the taste of defeat [in the Philippines] drove the Japs into a frenzy that set off sprees of killing."

Teofilo Candari, a Filipino cook at a college in Manila, shows 33 bayonet wounds inflicted by Japanese Marines.

During the Japanese occupation of the Philippines, it became standard procedure for the occupation troops to conduct reprisal raids on civilians whom the Japanese suspected of aiding guerrillas. In 1943 when the Japanese began to consolidate their positions in the Philippines, they began a program designed to destroy the countless guerrilla bands throughout the islands. As the Japanese increased the number of patrols designed to capture guerrillas and their sympathizers, they began to execute each member they captured. As the raids grew larger and the "sweeps" intensified, the Japanese only grew angrier over their failures to suppress guerrilla activity. In addition, the Japanese suffered from frequent ambush attacks from guerrilla units as the tired and worn-out patrols returned to base.

Frustrated, the Japanese increased the level of

jungle to within range of the guard towers and pillboxes of the prison compound. Once in place, the men prepared their weapons and waited for H-hour, just a few hours away.

As Skau's men moved into position, Burgess's men began strapping their gear on, checking weapons, and moving out to their assigned amtracs. By 5:15, all amtracs were in the water and under way. Using handheld compasses to guide them, the force, in a column of threes, headed toward Los Baños.

By 5:30, the men of B Company were struggling into their parachute harnesses and strapping on their equipment. At 6 o'clock, nine C-47s started their engines and within 30 minutes were airborne. The aircraft fell into three formations of three planes, each formation in the shape of a V. For 40 minutes the planes circled Nichols Field and then turned south. The jump masters in each aircraft stood in the open doorways, and as the planes flew across Laguna de Bay, they were able to look down and see the amtracs churning away across the lake.

American paratroopers near Manila in February 1945.

As the men of the 11th Airborne Division approached their objective from different directions, none of them realized the drama that had unfolded during the night. A P-61 Black Widow night reconnaissance plane had returned from its mission to report a great number of trucks, all with headlights on, moving in the direction of the Los Baños camp. Division planners were shocked. What did this mean? Did the Japanese learn about the rescue and then decide to relocate all the prisoners before the attack? Or were they sending in hundreds of reinforcements in order to defend the camp? General Swing was notified immediately. He thought for only a few minutes. He knew that he could recall everybody except Skau's men, who would begin the attack at exactly 6:58—nothing could stop that. So he allowed the mission to proceed.

At 6:45, the Los Baños camp began to stir. Hundreds of prisoners began filing out of their barracks and lined up for a head count. At the same time, most of the guards began their daily routine of exercise. Witnessing all this were Skau's concealed men.

Inside the C-47s, Ringler's men were checking their equipment and parachute harnesses one last time as they stood waiting to jump. Ringler, the jumpmaster in the lead aircraft, leaned out the aircraft door and checked to see if all airplanes were properly aligned for the drop. At precisely 6:58, Skau's men at the drop zone popped white smoke grenades and threw them onto the field. Ringler now looked for the drop zone. He saw white smoke billowing up from the ground—the mission was on.

Inside the prison camp the inmates heard and then saw the low-flying aircraft approach. All of a sudden, parachutes began filling the

harsh treatment to the civilian population. Guerrilla or sympathizer suspects were often subjected to the salt-water torture: A person was tied throat to hands and feet so that struggling led to strangulation; the mouth was forced open and the nose pinched; seawater was poured into the mouth so that the victim had to swallow to breathe; if he talked, the torture stopped; if not the Japanese continued the torture until death.

Water torture, as well as other cruel treatments, caused many Filipinos to flee into the jungle. The Japanese would often pursue and many times kill an entire family when they caught them. They would also burn entire villages to prevent civilians from supporting guerrilla operations. In turn, bands of guerrillas effectively harassed Japanese military operations. Initially, these attacks against the Japanese were fragmented with little direction and focus. But slowly men like Lt. Col. Ruperto Kangleton, a Filipino Regular Army officer who had escaped capture, began to organize guerrilla operations throughout the Philippines.

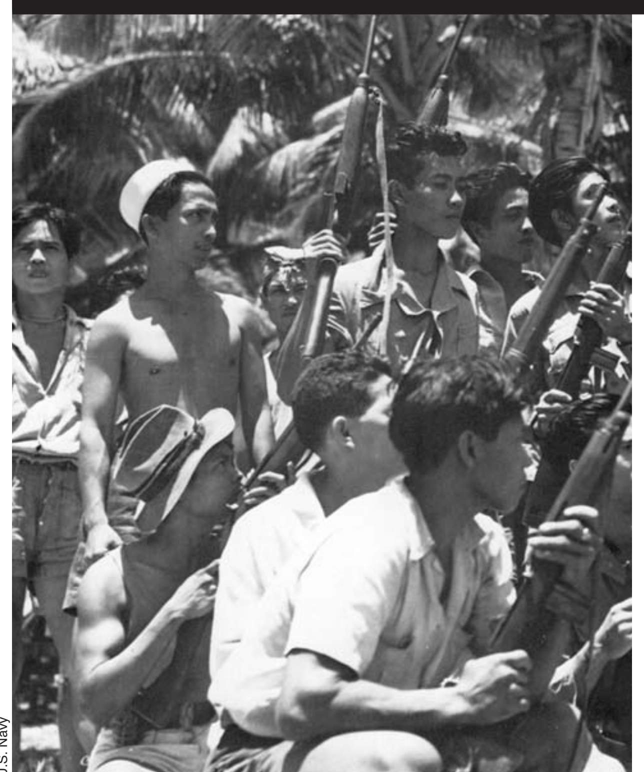
Soon others, including American officers and men who had eluded capture, began organizing guerrilla and resistance movements all over the islands.

In 1943, after contact was made with Australia, supplies, arms, and selected liaison personnel were transported to the islands by submarine in significant quantities to make a decided impact on guerrilla operations. Until the American liberation of the Philippines, these guerrilla groups were able to disrupt Japanese operations, ambush patrols, cut communication lines, and in general make life miserable for Japanese occupation troops.

As guerrilla activity increased so did the atrocities against those suspected of aiding guerrillas. The main reason for such a tremendous guerrilla network was the harsh treatment of Filipino civilians by the Japanese. By the time of the Los Baños raid, Japanese brutality toward Filipinos was commonplace.

But Japanese brutality was evident from the first day of occupation. It is "doubtful that those who were engaged in any sort of guerrilla activity were pro-American by conviction," according to Robert B. Asprey (*War in the Shadows: The Guerrilla in History,* Vol. I, Doubleday & Company, 1975). For the most part, with a few exceptions, "there was no real understanding of the basic issues involved in the war between the United States and Japan." At the same time, it was believed that the Filipinos had not "developed any feeling of real attachment to the Americans, not having closely mixed or associated with them, socially or otherwise." The real reason to join the Filipino guerrilla movement: "the sad and often tragic experiences which they or their relatives, friends, and countrymen had undergone at the hands of the Japanese."

Through the entire experience of Japanese occupation of the Philippines, the Japanese were never able to understand the aversion exhibited by the Filipino people against them. The basic cause for the relentless guerrilla activity was the Japanese lack of "respect for common people." ■



U.S. Navy

Filipino guerrilla groups were well organized and well armed by late winter 1945 as compared to their earlier struggles. They helped U.S. forces immensely in wresting back their cities and villages from the Japanese.

sky. James Bateman, a 20-year-old prisoner, remembered: "We all thought this would be the last day of our lives, that we would all be executed." [Japanese guards had ordered many of the prisoners to begin digging long trenches just outside the camp. Many inmates speculated that the trenches would be used for mass burial sites.] "The parachutes rained out of the sky. At first we thought they were dropping food in the camp. Then we realized they were American soldiers. We yelled and screamed and danced with joy."

Just outside the camp, Skau's men remained hidden until they saw the first parachute. Then they opened up on the guards along the perimeter. For about 15 minutes, the reconnaissance force assaulted pillboxes, bunkers, and guard towers. Knocking out the main gate, Skau's men ran into the camp, killing any Japanese guards they encountered.

By 7:15, Ringler had his men assembled and moving toward the camp. Within minutes they had killed many of the guards who had tried to run away. As Ringler's men entered the compound, they joined with Skau's group and began to hunt down the remaining guards.

On Laguna de Bay, Burgess's amphibious column rumbled ashore at exactly 7 AM, right on schedule. Burgess dispatched C Company westward to establish a roadblock near the town of Los Baños. A Company was sent to the east to set up another blocking position. Then Captain Lou Burris's D Battery, 457th Field Artillery was offloaded. Burris had been briefed only the day before by General Farrell, the division artillery commander. Farrell told Burris: "This operation has been kept secret because there are 10,000 Japanese troops within a two-and-a-half-hour truck ride of the camp. Your job is to block them with your battery. There is only one pass they can use through the hills. Be able to cover that pass with all four of your howitzers at all times."

A short time after the guns were in place, they were firing on machine-gun positions east of Los Baños. With all of Burgess's men in place, the amtracs proceeded full speed, about 15 miles an hour, toward the prison camp.

Back at the camp, the fighting petered out after about 20 minutes. The 243 guards had either been killed or had managed to run away. Not one of the 2,147 prisoners nor any member of the attacking force had been wounded or killed. The only casualty had been one of Ringler's men, who had landed next to the railroad tracks during the jump and was knocked unconscious when his head struck the track.

Following the attack, prisoners began cheering wildly and greeted their liberators with hugs, kisses, and back-slapping as the soldiers began to bring some order in the camp. One prisoner shouted, "Thank God for the paratroopers.… These are the angels He sent to save us!" Another prisoner, a Catholic priest, began to pray, giving thanks for the liberators who had arrived out of nowhere. Shortly, a paratrooper who came running by stopped and touched the priest. He said, "Sorry, Father, no time for prayers now.… You gotta get packed so we can get you the hell outta here before more Japs arrive."

As the soldiers tried to organize the huge mob of milling prisoners, Burgess's amtracs approached the camp. The driver in the lead amtrac called to Burgess, "The gate's closed, what should I do?" Burgess yelled back, "Crash through the damned thing!" The lead "trac" charged the gate and with a loud, crashing sound broke through. All the other vehicles followed.

The column made its way to the basefield and adjoining fields. There Burgess witnessed a scene of complete bedlam. By this time the entire camp was in a state of total celebration. The soldiers could not settle the "milling, laughing, and wandering" crowds of prisoners and get them organized for loading onto the amtracs.

At 7:45, John Ringler reported to Burgess. He said he and his men had not been able to organize any prisoners into groups to load onto the amtracs. There was too much confusion. He then told Burgess that some of the guards' barracks were on fire and that it was causing many of the internees to move ahead of the fire toward the assembled amtracs.

As the minutes ticked by, Burgess finally received word from his blocking forces back near Laguna de Bay that there were indications that large enemy forces might be making preparations to attack the rescuers.

Realizing that the burning barracks might be his salvation, Burgess told Ringler to take some of his men to the upwind side of the camp and begin torching as many barracks as possible. Burgess thought that maybe the threat from fire would motivate the prisoners to gather their belongings and begin loading onto the amtracs. As soon as Ringler began burning the barracks, "the results were spectacular." The paratroopers began to see the "internees pour out of their living quarters and into the loading area. Troops started clearing the barracks in advance of the fire and began carrying out to the loading area over 130 people who were too weak or too sick to walk.

Burgess was worried about the Tiger Division advancing on the camp. He had the most

seriously weakened prisoners loaded first. It was soon apparent that the amtracs would have to make two trips in order to evacuate all prisoners and soldiers from the camp. The strongest inmates were kept back in case they had to fight their way out with the troopers if the Japanese attacked.

By 10 o'clock, the first load of evacuees was ready to move out. Burgess ordered the drivers to get them to Mamatid, discharge them, and return as soon as possible. An hour later, the camp was nearly deserted. The prisoners who had been left behind began walking toward the beachhead. A rear guard was formed from Ringler's B Company and Skau's Reconnaissance Platoon. There were very few guerrillas remaining in camp. When the attack had ended, most of the Filipinos had disappeared back into the jungle. It was assumed that they had returned to their units. Burgess recalled his security companies and instructed them to provide flank security for the march to the beach.

When Burgess, who was in the rear of the procession, reached the shore, he received alarming news. Lieutenant Tom Mesereau, C Company commander, reported to Burgess that he

American troops disembark an amtrack, one of the amphibious vehicles used in the Los Baños raid.

and his men had shot up a Japanese detachment. The bad news was that he believed a much larger force of enemy troops was approaching. "If the amtracs did not return soon, some 1,200 civilians and paratroopers might be trapped and wiped out."

By this time in the mission, the diversionary attack of the 1/188th had advanced to just west of Los Baños. Here the battalion established a bridgehead next to the San Juan River and effectively blocked the road leading to Los Baños. Two of the glidermen in La Flamme's battalion were killed in this attack.

During the next few anxious hours, as Burgess's force secured the beachhead, Japanese mortar rounds were fired inside Burgess's perimeter. At the same time, an occasional burst of machine-gun fire kept the paratroopers pinned to the ground. Finally, at around 1 o'clock in the afternoon, the amtracs appeared on the horizon and within minutes came motoring ashore onto the beachhead.

Burgess began to hurry the remaining civilians onto the vehicles as he gave the order to withdraw his men from the defensive perimeter. As the defensive line grew steadily smaller, Japanese fire "grew bolder and stronger." By 3 o'clock, enemy fire on the beachhead increased to a dangerous level. As the last few amtracs loaded up and departed, the paratroopers sustained their first casualties. One trooper and one former prisoner each received minor injuries.

The Los Baños Prison raid was one of the finest missions of its type in the war. Many of the methods utilized by Swing's "Angels" during the planning and execution of the mission are still used in modern raiding techniques by today's special operations forces. The courage and daring of the men of the 11th Airborne Division, without a doubt, spared the lives of over two thousand men, women, and children held prisoner by the Japanese.

Perhaps the most poignant memory of the mission was voiced by Dr. Boosalis, an 11th Airborne combat surgeon who participated in the rescue. Dr. Boosalis remembered the attitude and "fatigued features" of the troopers as they departed from Los Baños on the amtracs, each with orders to guard the freed civilians from any more horrors of war. As each vehicle passed, Boosalis saw in each paratrooper a "quietude." Each man appeared to be wrapped in his own thoughts, thoughts about what had just occurred. The men were "very quiet... no complaints... no levity... just quiet." □

FOR FURTHER READING

The Angels: A History of the 11th Airborne Division, Lt. Gen. E.M. Flanagan, Jr., U.S.A. (Ret.), Presidio Press, 1989.

The Los Baños Raid: The 11th Airborne Jumps at Dawn, Lt. Gen. E.M. Flanagan, Jr., U.S.A. (Ret.), Presidio Press, 1986.

AIRBORNE!

LEARNING TO FLY AND LAND—HARD

EVERY AMERICAN SOLDIER WHO JUMPED INTO NORTH AFRICA, Europe, the Philippines, and other combat zones around the globe during World War II had to first learn his trade at Fort Benning, Georgia. For one month, soldiers went through tough physical training as well as classes and demonstrations on how to hurl themselves out of perfectly good airplanes.

They started off learning to fold and pack parachutes. Then, it was a week of jumping into piles of sawdust from mock doors four feet off the ground. Halfway through the training, the troopers jumped out of 30- and 250-foot towers. Attached to parachute harnesses to cushion their falls, they learned the stomach churning experience of falling helplessly until the wires slowed their speed. They also learned how to collapse their chutes while fighting against a wind machine.

To earn their jump wings, the paratroopers had to make five jumps out of a Douglas C-47 cargo plane. They climbed aboard, 25 men to a plane, and waited anxiously to get airborne. The jumpmaster ordered, "Stand up and hook up!" For each man's parachute there was a line attached to a metal clip that the men would attach to another line strung up within the length of the cabin. Once the men jumped out of the plane, their line would pull against the cabin's line and release their parachutes.

From that point on, it was all physics. The unfurling parachute would catch the plane's prop blast and inflate. The fall would be jolted to what felt like a standstill, and the men would begin swaying to and fro until they touched down.

Those lucky few who completed the training were presented with a certificate recognizing their status as qualified parachutists and the coveted Airborne wings to wear on their chest. Now, they were ready to jump behind enemy lines anywhere around the world.

Graduation. A student makes a successful landing on Mother Earth.

THE U.S. ARMY'S ELITE INFANTRY HAD TO EARN THEIR WINGS BEFORE THEY COULD LEAP INTO BATTLE.

PHOTO ESSAY BY KEVIN M. HYMEL

All photos: National Archives

1. New recruits wearing soft headgear board a C-47 for their first practice jump.

2. Boom! Airborne artillery-men fire off a round from their 105mm howitzer during a battle simulation.

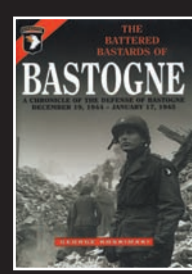
3. An instructor demonstrates how to collapse a parachute to a class of Airborne hopefuls at Fort Benning.

4. A paratrooper prepares to jump from a mock tower while instructors look on. Students were taught to put their hands outside the plane door before jumping. If they kept their hands inside, the instructors would push them aside and let the other students jump.

SOVEREIGN COLLECTIONS RECOMMENDS

WORLD WAR II BOOKS FOR THE SERIOUS COLLECTOR

The Battered Bastards of Bastogne



Written by George Koskimaki • Fully Illustrated with Photos and Maps • 484 Pages • Copyright 1994 • $32.95.

Through the eyes of the US 101st Airborne Division, The Screaming Eagles, *The Battered Bastards of Bastogne* relives the land and air war around Bastogne during the Battle of the Bulge. Firsthand accounts bring the battle back to life, for a look at this battle as viewed by the soldier, not the historian. George Koskimaki weaves the memoirs of each of these men into a cohesive whole. The memories of one soldier fit with those of another unit or group in another nearby piece of terrain to present a gripping account of the battle.

Hell's Highway-Chronicle of the 101st Airborne in the Holland Campaign

Written by George Koskimaki • Fully Illustrated with Photos and Maps 453 Pages • Copyright 1989 • $32.95.

Members of the US 101st Airborne Division, The Screaming Eagles, fought in Operation Market Garden to liberate the Netherlands. *Hell's Highway* is the personal account of the 612 members of this force who risked their lives for the freedom of the world. George Koskimaki expertly weaves together individual accounts of the battles and makes them into a cohesive whole. *Hell's Highway* helps us relive the battle by giving us a true picture of the war as seen through the eyes of the men who fought it.

To Order Call: 1-800-219-1187

PROFILES

Continued from page 17

the cost was high that day, with 68 transports, gliders, and escorting fighters going down in flames.

The German occupation forces were caught by surprise. At his headquarters in the village of Vaught, General Student, commander of the German 1st Parachute Army, stood on a balcony and was awed by "an endless stream of enemy transport and cargo planes as far as the eye could see." Landing in a great cluster, Taylor's "Screaming Eagles" swiftly organized themselves on landing and began seizing bridges at Saint Oedenrode, Zon, Veghel, and Eindhoven.

As in the air drops at Sicily, Salerno, and Normandy, General Gavin rode in the lead C-47 of the formation carrying his All-Americans into action. The green jump light flashed, and he stepped coolly out into space. Throughout the 25-mile airhead, the division's infantry and light artillery elements dropped with pinpoint accuracy. Landing at both ends of the big Maas River bridge near Grave, Colonel Tucker's 504th Regiment was able to capture it swiftly. This was the most significant accomplishment of the day by an airborne unit.

Meanwhile, at 2:35 that afternoon, the great armor and infantry column of General Horrocks's 30th Corps began its 64-mile push up the backbone of Holland along the strategic route the paratroopers were fighting to hold open. At the northern end of the carpet, Maj. Gen. Robert E. Urquhart's Red Devils were already fighting desperately against heavy odds—the 9th and 10th Panzer Divisions positioned in the Arnhem area. One British battalion battled to hold the northern end of the critical Arnhem road bridge, and the rest of Urquhart's division, outgunned, outnumbered, and hampered by malfunctioning radio sets, struggled to hold its drop zone near Oosterbeek.

Gavin, who had fractured two vertebrae in landing near Groesbeek but was not aware of it until later, rounded up his men and led them in capturing the town of Groesbeek. The troopers then set up defensive positions along the Groesbeek Heights facing the Reichswald Forest. That night, Gavin sent two companies into Nijmegen, where, aided by a Dutch guide, they made their way to the main post office where the Germans had set up mechanisms for detonating the big Nijmegen highway bridge. The troopers cut the wires but then found themselves battling the Germans defending the span. The enemy retained its grip on the bridge for another five days.

By the end of September 17, it was evident that serious problems were already threatening the success of Operation Market-Garden. The Screaming Eagles had been unable to capture Eindhoven, Gavin's men had been halted short of the Nijmegen bridge, and the British at Arnhem were out on a limb.

On September 18, the three airborne divisions endeavored to improve their tactical situations and to secure landing zones for glider reinforcements. Maj. Gen. Stanislaw Sosabowski's Polish 1st Parachute Brigade was held in reserve and then was delayed by fog in England.

After a fierce struggle against German artillery, tanks of the British Guards Armored Division clanked into Eindhoven that Monday evening and linked up with the 101st Airborne Division. The armor rolled on and joined Gavin's troopers at Grave the following morning. Meanwhile, the 82nd held tightly to the Groesbeek Heights and continued to fight for the Nijmegen bridge. That night, a Dutch message from Arnhem reported that the panzers were getting the best of the British paratroopers.

General Horrocks reached Gavin's command post on the afternoon of September 19. The American general briefed him on a plan for seizing the Nijmegen bridge so that the British armor could continue northward to Arnhem. That afternoon, the 2nd Battalion of the 505th Regiment, supported by British infantry and tanks, attacked the southern end of the bridge, but the enemy loosed a deadly hail of crossfire and held on.

Next, Gavin proposed to send some of his men across the Waal River in small boats to try and seize the northern end of the bridge. But there were no such boats in the area. Horrocks solved the problem by offering the use of 33 canvas and wood engineer assault boats, but they could not be brought up until the following day. The crossing would be made by the 3rd Battalion of the 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment led by Major Julian

National Archives

A lone paratrooper makes his way across a field to the assembly area as his comrades make their way to the ground.

A. Cook. It would be a hazardous crossing because the Waal was 400 yards wide and had a fast current.

On September 20, the battalion made ready to cross supported by mortars and artillery of the 82nd Division and 30 tanks of the Irish Guards Brigade lined up on the riverbank. Finally, after frustrating delays caused by German artillery and traffic jams on the single north-south highway, the assault boats arrived on 30th Corps trucks. They were hastily assembled, and around 3 PM, Major Cook's men clambered into the flimsy craft and pushed into the river. A deafening British-American barrage hammered the far shore as Cook's troopers paddled across, using their rifle butts as oars. Enemy small-arms fire raked them, and men were killed and wounded. The Americans used their helmets to bail out water and stuffed handkerchiefs into bullet holes in the boats.

The troopers paddled on into the German fire, with Major Cook alternately shouting encouragement and breathlessly repeating, "Hail Mary, full of grace, blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus …" His men struggled against the current and were exposed when the wind shifted and blew away a protective smokescreen, but somehow the 26 boats that had started out made it across. However, only 13 of them were fit for a return trip to pick up the next assault wave.

Major Cook and the survivors of the crossing scrambled ashore, formed small disorganized groups, and dashed across open ground to gain a toehold on the northern bank. With rifles, bayonets, and hand grenades, they fought their way to the bridge. Lt. Gen. Frederick "Boy" Browning, British deputy commander of the Allied 1st Airborne Army, who had jumped into Holland with Gavin, told General Horrocks, "I have never seen a more gallant action."

Eventually, after fierce fighting, the Nijmegen bridge was in Allied hands that evening. Tanks of the British Grenadier Guards rumbled across the span, but they would be unable to get through to Arnhem, where Urquhart's Red Devils—equipped only with small arms and running out of ammunition, food, and medical supplies—were being overwhelmed by the panzers. After the Nijmegen action, Gavin was visited by Lt. Gen. Miles C. Dempsey, the skilled, unassuming commander of the British Second Army, who told him, "I'm proud to meet the commanding general of the greatest division in the world today."

By September 24, Montgomery and Brereton realized that the British paratroopers at Arnhem were being annihilated, so their withdrawal was ordered. Of the 10,005 Red Devils there, 7,578 were casualties. The 101st Airborne Division lost 2,118 men in Operation Market-Garden, and Gavin's division suffered 1,432 casualties. The operation had failed, and Gavin was angered when the British press depicted Arnhem as something more than a glorious defeat.

After some more ground fighting in Holland while the British and Canadian Armies struggled to clear the approaches to Antwerp, the two American airborne divisions were trucked to camps near Rheims, France, for well-earned rests. Gavin was promoted to major general that October and was awarded the Silver Star for gallantry. He also received British, Dutch, French, Belgian, and Russian decorations, while his All-Americans were awarded a Presidential Unit Citation, the French and Belgian Fourragere, and the Dutch Order of Willem.

General Gavin was dining with his staff on the evening of December 17, 1944, when the

telephone shrilled. The Germans had broken through in the Ardennes Forest the previous day, and the American situation was critical. The 18th Airborne Corps was alerted to move to the front within 24 hours after daylight the following day. Characteristically, Gavin moved swiftly. He sent word to the 101st Division, alerted his troop units, and briefed the commanders. Another telephone call informed Gavin that the crisis in the bulge was now more urgent, and the airborne corps was ordered to move immediately toward the strategic road junction town of Bastogne in Belgium.

Acting as temporary commander of the 18th Airborne Corps in the absence of General Ridgway, who was in England, Gavin issued orders for the All-Americans to move by truck toward Bastogne an hour after daylight on December 18, with the Screaming Eagles following in the afternoon. While his troopers drew weapons, rations, and extra ammunition, Gavin rushed to General Courtney Hodges's U.S. First Army headquarters in Spa, Belgium. The First Army was bearing the brunt of the German offensive. Hodges assigned the 82nd Division to V Corps, defending terrain north of Bastogne and along the northern shoulder of the enemy penetration. The division would set up defensive positions around Werbomont, directly in the path of enemy units then attempting to encircle St.-Vith, while the Screaming Eagles were ordered to defend Bastogne.

Gavin met leading elements of his division when they started rolling into Werbomont on the evening of December 18. Roadblocks were set up, and Gavin established his command post in a farmhouse in the little crossroads village. Ridgway arrived that night as the truck columns continued to rumble in. As the enemy panzer and infantry groups pushed deeper into Belgium, Ridgway took over operational control of the 3rd Armored and 30th Infantry Divisions, conducting a brilliant defensive battle along the northern shoulder of the bulge.

At daylight on December 19, Gavin learned that Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt's panzers had cut the road leading southward from Werbomont to Bastogne. The situation was serious. The outnumbered American units at St.-Vith and Bastogne held firm, though both towns were surrounded by December 20. The Germans were forced to split their forces as the Americans fought desperately, and the enemy offensive weakened.

National Archives

Cold and frostbitten, members of the 82nd Airborne march with tanks of the 2nd Armored Division and advance into the northern sector of the Bulge.

While the Screaming Eagles under Brig. Gen. Anthony C. McAuliffe, deputy commander, heroically held Bastogne, Gavin's men fought equally hard to the north. After the encircled U.S. armored forces were pulled back from St.-Vith, the weight of the enemy attack fell upon units of the 82nd Airborne Division. The 504th Parachute and 325th Glider Infantry Regiments fought stubbornly against the Germans who had overrun St.-Vith, and refused to yield much ground. Colonel Tucker's 504th Regiment was awarded its second Presidential Unit Citation for gallantry—the first such citation won by an American unit in the Battle of the Bulge.

When the enemy threatened to break through at an isolated key road junction at the village of Baraque de Fraiture, Gavin rushed in a company of glider troops to reinforce a motley force of tankers and infantrymen there. He also dispatched a glider infantry battalion to the town of Fraiture, a mile northeast of the crossroads. The two units arrived on the morning of December 22, just in time to confront the first contingent of the 2nd SS Panzer Division. Heavily outnumbered, the GIs withstood artillery barrages and assaults by tanks and a panzergrenadier regiment. The Americans stood their ground for more than an hour but were overwhelmed. Only 44 of the 116 glider troops sent to the junction escaped; the rest were killed or captured.

After General Montgomery had been ordered by Eisenhower to "tidy" the Allied lines in the northern bulge, the 82nd Airborne withdrew to a stronger, more consolidated position a few miles to the north. Gavin's troopers groused about retreating, but their morale was still high. They blew up bridges across the Salm River, planted mines, and strung wire. By Christmas morning, all was ready. The enemy counterattack had run out of steam in the snow-clad, fog-shrouded Ardennes, and on December 26, besieged Bastogne was relieved by Sherman tanks of Lt. Col. Creighton W. Abrams's 37th Tank Battalion of the 4th Armored Division.

The following day, Von Rundstedt threw the 9th SS Panzer and 62nd Volksgrenadier Divisions against Gavin's All-Americans in a last desperate attempt to breach the northern shoulder of the Allied defense line. Howling and firing their weapons as they charged, the German infantry attacked the paratroopers east of the village of Manhay. One battalion was overrun, but the rest of the Americans held their ground. When they saw the big Tiger and Panther tanks rolling toward them, the GIs ducked down in their foxholes and rallied after they had passed. Gavin committed a reserve company, the Americans fought fiercely, and the Germans

Books • CDs • Videos • Flags • Pins
T-shirts • Posters • Daggers & more

Songs and marches heard just as the German people did during WW2!

CD200 - Panzer Marches

Features 60+ year old recordings that are digitally produced from original Third Reich 78-rpm records. Includes 2 instrumental and 1 choral version of the Panzerwagonlied. 28 songs and marches with a long playing time of 77:01 minutes.

Only $20.00 +s/h

201 - Waffen SS Repro Poster

Printed on 17 X 22 inch art paper suitable for framing.

Only $12.00 +s/h

Aged Reproduction Signs

Adolf Hitler-Straße

Exclusive Collectors Item from PzG

V709 - Adolf Hitler-Straße Sign made of 24 gauge steel, 20" x 5", rusted by hand for an aged / vintage look and feel.

Only $30.00 each +s/h

This edition is the only accurate and complete English translation of Mein Kampf ever made.

BK039f - Mein Kampf Ford Edition Everything you thought you knew about Mein Kampf is a lie! Read this modern, easy to understand, truly complete, accurate and uncensored edition of Mein Kampf which reveals more than any past translation.

Hardcover, 560 pages, includes b/w photos and Illustrations, English Text.

Hitler's own words answer the question "why?". It is critical that you understand.

Only $50.00 each +s/h

shipping / handling just $8.00 per order.

CATALOG / COLOR FLYER SHEETS send $1.00

PzG Inc.
™© P.O. Box 3972 Dept. 2
Rapid City, SD 57709-3972
www.pzg.biz

D-DAY
BATTLE OF NORMANDY

BATTLE OF THE BULGE
EAGLE'S NEST

NORMANDY WEEKEND
WORLD WAR II IN EUROPE

D-DAY and the Battle of Normandy
Bastogne to Bavaria

Ten Departures 2010, with Experienced Historians

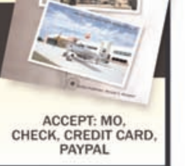
MATTERHORN TRAVEL
Established 1966

43 years of successful group holidays

For a detailed brochure with dates and prices, please contact:

MATTERHORN TRAVEL
3419 Hidden River View, Annapolis, MD 21403
(800) 638-9150 or (410) 224-2230
www.matterhorntravel.com
holidays@matterhorntravel.com

- PLUS CITY DISPLAYED AIRCRAFT
- ARMORED & NAVAL MUSEUMS
- RESTAURANTS
- WWII LANDMARKS
- RIDES
- ALPHABETIC LISTING OF ALL AIRCRAFT



Book or CD price $17.95 + S&H
Both for $26.95 + S&H
S&H in USA: $5.00
outside USA: $13.00

Michael A. Blaugher
124 East Foster Parkway, Dept. H
Fort Wayne, IN 46806-1730
email: airmuseums@aol.com
www.aircraftmuseums.com

ACCEPT: MO, CHECK, CREDIT CARD, PAYPAL

Merriam Press

Publisher of World War II and Military History Books and Publications since 1968

- 20+ memoirs by veterans (Army - Navy - Air Force - Marine - Civilian)
- 100+ titles on battles, units, weapons, etc
- 300+ high quality PDF files of manuals, publications and documents on CD disk
- bi-monthly *World War II Archives* with dozens of articles and hundreds of photos available on CD disk

Merriam Press
133 Elm Street Apt 3R
Bennington VT 05201-2250

Send LSASE for catalog or go to merriam-press.com

were forced back to their own lines. Some captured enemy soldiers said they had never before seen Americans fight so tenaciously.

On January 3, 1945, the Allied forces on the northern shoulder launched an offensive to reduce the German bulge. Gavin's men were in the thick of it, fighting aggressively though hampered by deep snowdrifts and bitter weather. The 82nd and the 1st Infantry Division led the offensive. The All-Americans blasted through the dragons' teeth of the Siegfried Line later that month, and by the night of February 2, they were on German soil. Switched to the Hürtgen Forest sector, the scene of a grim attritional struggle reminiscent of the Western Front in World War I, Gavin's division took part in the advance to the Roer River. On February 17, the exhausted troopers were relieved and trucked back to Rheims.

The 82nd rested and refitted, and then went back into action in April 1945. It crossed the River Elbe, and on May 2, Gavin received the surrender of the German 21st Army Group. Threadbare but elegant in field gray, with red collar tabs and an Iron Cross at his throat, Lt. Gen. Kurt von Tippelskirch went to Gavin's command post and asked for the general in charge. He was directed to Gavin, standing on a street corner wearing his faded jumpsuit and with his M-1 rifle slung over his shoulder. He looked like any other GI except for the two stars on his collar and helmet.

"He looked at me with some disdain," Gavin reported, "saying that I was too young and did not look like a general to him. It took only a moment to change his mind."

When the European hostilities ended, Gavin and his division were assigned to the U.S. occupation zone in Berlin. There, Jumping Jim served as the American representative on the City Kommandatura. On Sundays, though still pained by the cracks in his spine, he would drive out to the Tempelhof airfield and make parachute drops "to get the cobwebs out." He and the All-Americans left Berlin in October 1945, and returned home in December. Gavin and his division proudly led New York City's victory parade in 1946.

He stayed with the division at Fort Bragg until March 1948, when he became chief of staff of the Fifth Army in Chicago. He was assigned as chief of staff of Allied forces in southern Europe in June 1951, led the Seventh Corps in Germany, served at the Pentagon as assistant chief of staff for plans and research with the rank of permanent lieutenant general, and was appointed chief of research and development, with the status of deputy Army chief of staff, in October 1955.

National Archives

Major General James Gavin negotiates a well-trodden path in Belgium during the beginning phases of the Battle of the Bulge.

But Gavin found himself increasingly at odds with the "new look" defense policies of the Eisenhower administration, whereby strategic retaliatory power was emphasized at the expense of conventional forces. Manpower was pared, and there was a slowdown in the development of tactical weapons. The Army was cut from 27 to 15 divisions, and Gavin believed that it was being left unprepared to fight limited wars. He chafed and developed a reputation as a maverick. He was unwilling to watch the Army he loved whittled to a skeleton of its former self.

He went before a Senate preparedness subcommittee in December 1957, and outlined his beliefs with candor and eloquence. The following January, after "much soul-searching," he reluctantly retired. "I had decided," he explained, "I could serve my country better by releasing myself from the restrictions necessarily imposed on the military and telling the American people directly what I thought was wrong with the U.S. defense picture." He worked for 12-14 hours a day on a book, *War and Peace in the Space Age*, in which he insisted that the only way America could fight a limited war was to expand its forces to permit maximum mobility and flexibility. Gavin proposed the "airmobile" concept.

Published in 1958, the book was reviewed as "imaginative, probing, and sensitive" by a junior senator from Massachusetts named John Fitzgerald Kennedy. Gavin, who had also written *Airborne Warfare*, which became a standard text in its field, was one of the leading strategists of his generation, and was elated to see several of his proposals adopted during the Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson administrations.

Gavin and his wife, Jean, raised five daughters, and in retirement the general played tennis, squash, golf, and handball, and skated, swam, and bowled. He read voraciously, from Tolstoy to Stendhal to Dostoevsky, and took up oil painting. He became vice president of Arthur D. Little Inc., but his corporate career was cut short when President Kennedy asked him in 1961 to become his ambassador to France. Gavin got along well with the irascible French leader, General Charles de Gaulle, and his 18-month tour of duty in Paris was a success.

Gavin wrote another book, on France and the American Civil War, and became a vigorous opponent of the Vietnam War. He suggested in 1966 that U.S. troops in South Vietnam should fall back to fortified enclaves while America sought a diplomatic solution through the United Nations. He believed that the war was a "catastrophe" and that the Army was destroyed from within "because we sent officers out there just to get promoted." He even considered running for the presidency on an antiwar platform, but abandoned the idea when Eugene McCarthy made a good showing in the New Hampshire primary.

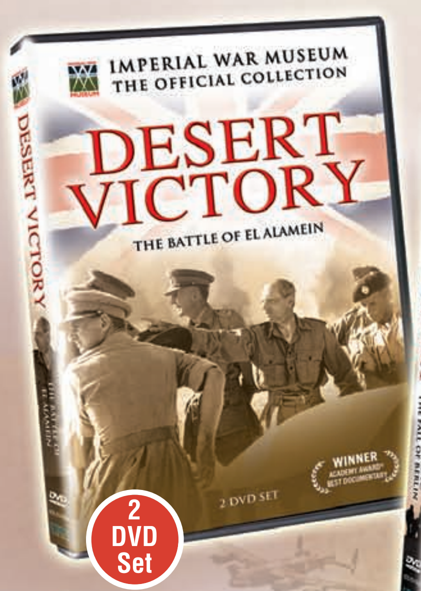
Slim Jim maintained homes in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Cape Cod, and Winter Park, Florida, and kept fit, continued to write, and painted New England and Parisian scenes. He died in Baltimore on February 23, 1990. □

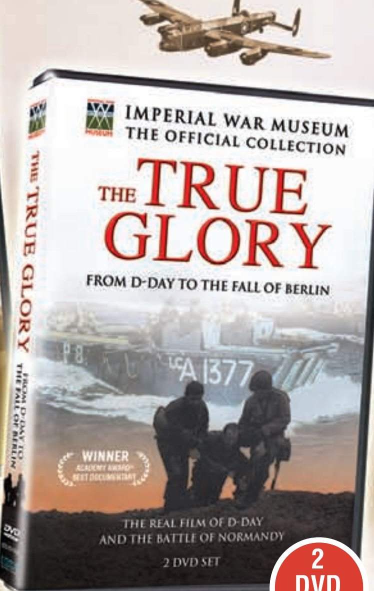
Author Michael D. Hull writes frequently about World War II. *He makes his home in Enfield, Connecticut.*

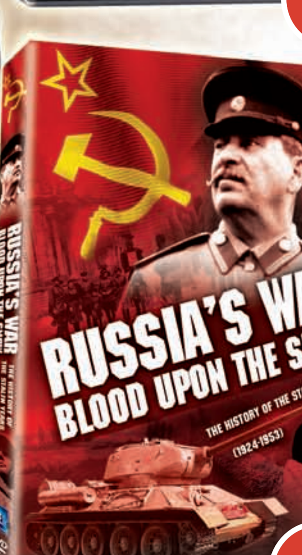
NAVY G-1	AIR FORCE A-2	CHEST SIZE	33-35	36-38	39-41	42-44	46-48	50-52	NAVY G-1	AIR FORCE A-2	S & H	Total Units	Total $
Dark Brown	Dark Brown or Black	REGULAR	XS	S	M	L	XL	2XL	$119	$99	$11 per Jacket		
		TALL Over 6'	–	–	MT	LT	XLT	2XLT	$129	$109			

DISCOVER WWII FROM ALL ANGLES

New DVDs Featuring Rare and Unseen Footage







RUSSIA'S WAR
BLOOD UPON THE SNOW
THE HISTORY OF THE STALIN YEARS
(1924-1953)
3 DVD Set

Desert Victory
WINNER ACADEMY AWARD® BEST DOCUMENTARY
Widely recognized as one of the best documentaries of WWII, this film was made by the British Army and R.A.F. to capture the Battle of El Alamein as it happened.

The True Glory
WINNER ACADEMY AWARD® BEST DOCUMENTARY
Compiled from over six million feet of film, this feature-length documentary was produced by the Allied military and covers every major engagement from D-Day to the fall of Berlin.

Embedded '45: Shooting War in Germany
While Americans where conquering the Third Reich from the west, cameramen were capturing all the action as seen in this unbelievable footage recently unearthed from the U.S. National Archives.

Russia's War: Blood Upon the Snow
AS SEEN ON PBS – NEW
An in-depth account of Russia's history before, during and after World War II providing remarkable insight into what led to the deaths of sixty-five million Soviets during Stalin's reign of terror.

AVAILABLE AT

Amazon, Amazon.com and the Amazon.com logo are registered trademarks of Amazon.com,Inc. or its affiliates
Academy Award® is the registered trademark and service mark of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.