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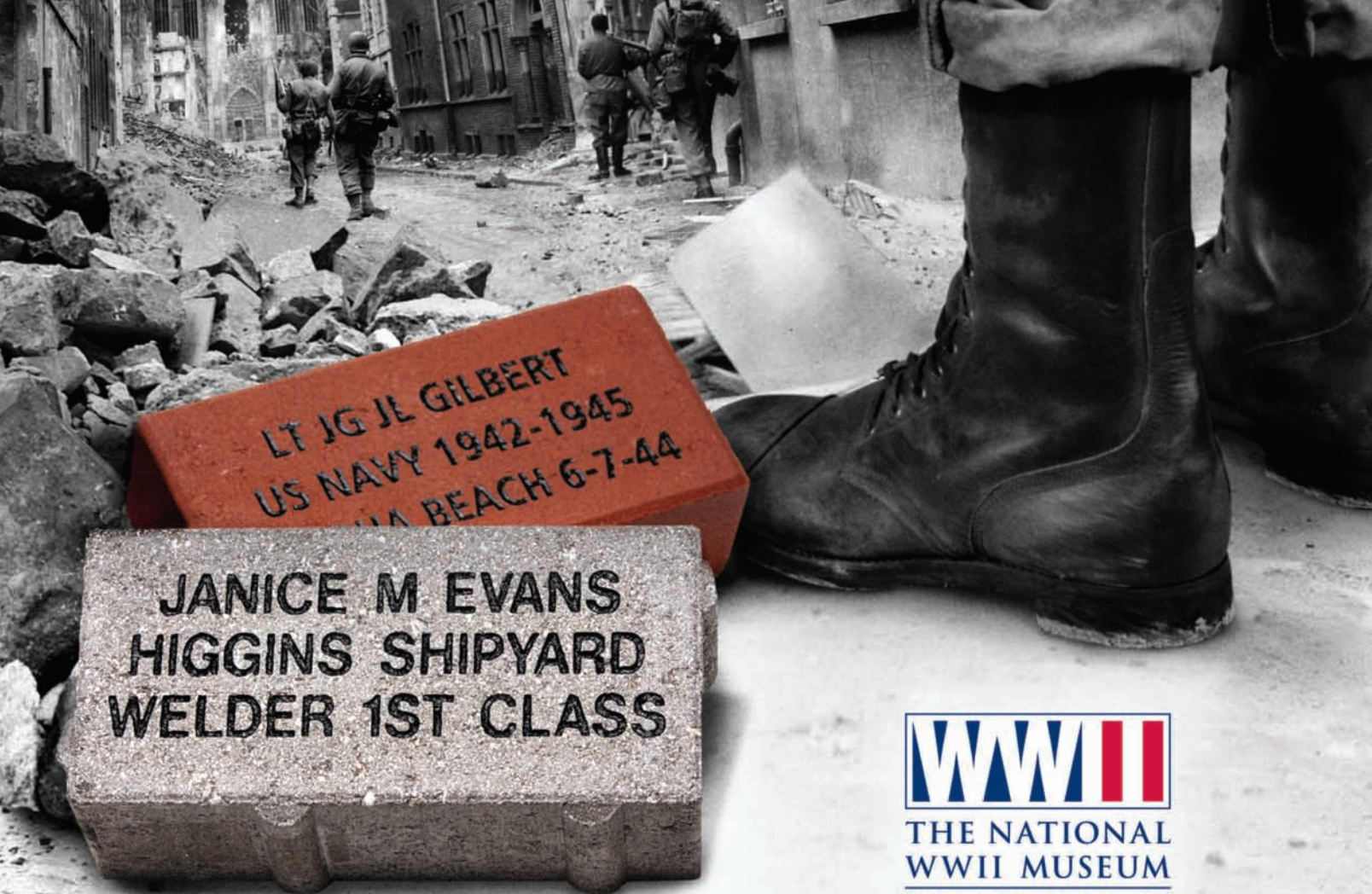
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Cover: In December 1944, General George Patton boasted in a meeting with General of the Army Dwight Eisenhower and other top brass that he could stop the German offensive at Bastogne—and then he did. See story page 14. Photo: AKG Images.

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As a teen, she worked at a concentration camp in Poland. At 97, she went on trial for her Nazi past.

German prosecutors continue to go after anyone associated with the Third Reich's concentration and death camps with a tenacity that would make Hitler's victims proud.

A series of trials have taken place in Germany since 2011, after the conviction of former Nazi death camp guard John Demjanjuk, found in Cleveland, set the precedent that being a camp guard was sufficient evidence to prove complicity in war crimes. He was jailed for five years for being at the camp when more than 28,000 Jews died at the Sobibor death camp, but released pending an appeal and died in 2012 at age 91.

Oskar Gröning, the "Bookkeeper of Auschwitz," was sentenced in 2015 as an accessory to the murder of 300,000 Jews. He never went to prison, dying in 2018 at 96 during the appeals process.

Reinhold Hanning, a former SS guard at Auschwitz, was convicted in June 2016 of being complicit to mass murder but died a year later at age 95 with appeals still pending.

Friedrich Karl Berger, aged 95, a former guard at the Neuengamme concentration camp, was deported to Germany from the U.S. in February 2021. German prosecutors dropped charges against him and his current fate is unknown.

In June 2022, Josef Schütz was sentenced to five years for assisting in the murder of more than 3,500 prisoners at the Sachsenhausen concentration camp near Berlin. Aged 101, he is the oldest person to be convicted for Nazi-era war crimes in Germany but, because of age and ill health, is unlikely to spend any time in prison.

The latest is Irmgard Furchner, 97, of Hamburg, a teenager who was hired as a secretary and worked for Paul-Werner Hoppe, the commandant of the Stutthof concentration camp located near the modern-day Polish city of Gdansk; she worked there from 1943 to 1945.

It took 40 days for Furchner to break her silence at the 2022 trial, when she told the court "I'm sorry about everything that happened. I regret that I was in Stutthof at the

time—that's all I can say," she said.

Her defense team argued that she should be acquitted because of doubts surrounding what she knew, as she was one of several typists in Hoppe's office. (Hoppe was jailed in 1955 for being an accessory to murder; he was released five years later.) After the war, Furchner married an ex-SS squad leader named Heinz Furchtsam, whom she probably met at the camp.

Although she was a civilian worker, the judge agreed with prosecutors that she was fully aware of what was going on at the camp. Furchner was found guilty of aiding and abetting the murder of 10,505 people and complicity in the attempted murder of five others. She was given a two-year suspended jail sentence.

An estimated 65,000 people—Jewish prisoners, non-Jewish Poles, and Soviet POWs—are thought to have died in horrendous conditions at Stutthof.

Shortly before the Covid pandemic, I toured northern Europe, paying my respects at the Stutthof memorial located near the modern-day Polish city of Gdansk. Like the other camps that have been preserved as memorials, Stutthof is a chilling reminder that evil knows no bounds—nor time limit.

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

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CARL A. GNAM, JR.
Editorial Director,
Founder

FLINT WHITLOCK
Editor
WWIIQuarterly@gmail.com

KEVIN SEABROOKE
Managing Editor

SAMANTHA DETULLEO
Art Director

KEVIN M. HYMEL
Research Director

CONTRIBUTORS:
Glenn Barnett, James Bilder,
Howard Brodie, Kevin M. Hymel,
Nathan N. Prefer, Allyn Vannoy,
Mason B. Webb, Flint Whitlock,
Peter Zablocki

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

LINDA GALLIHER, Ad Coordinator
570-322-7848, ext. 160
lgallier@sovmedia.com

BUSINESS OFFICE:
MARK HINTZ
Vice President & Publisher

STEPHANIE RUPP
Subscription Customer Services
customerservice@sovhomestead.com

PUBLISHERS SERVICE ASSOCIATES
Circulation Fulfillment

COMAG MARKETING GROUP
WORLDWIDE DISTRIBUTION

SOVEREIGN MEDIA COMPANY, INC.
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D-DAY

Through A Soldier's Eyes...

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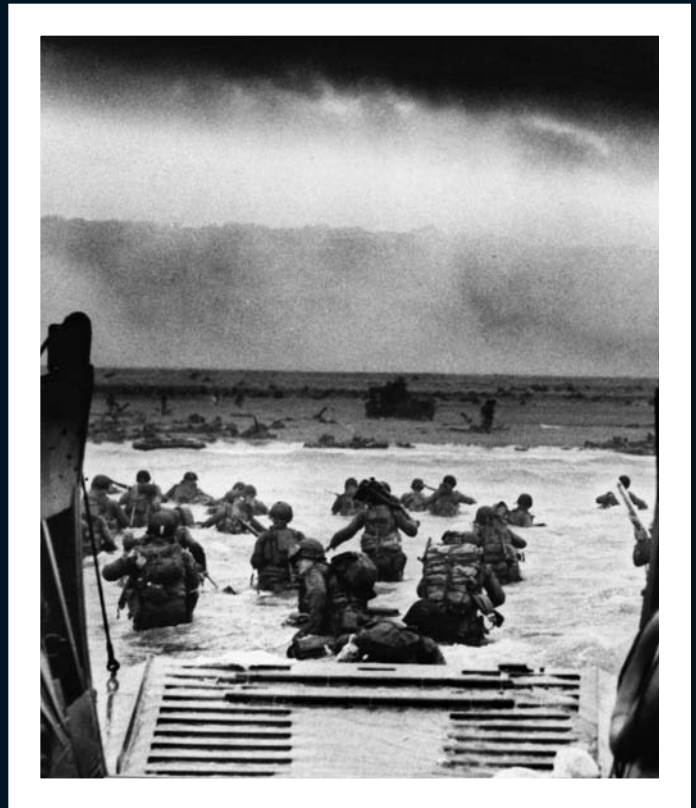
The storm was violent, the waves were huge and the noise was deafening for the soldiers in the landing craft on D-Day, June 6, 1944. As they neared the beach, the door dropped open ... and this photo lets you see exactly what they saw, and feel what they felt: treacherous breakers, withering machine gun fire, a long beach, huge cliffs, and near-certain death.

None hesitated. These brave unselfish men jumped into the cold Atlantic waters. Two thirds of them died soon after, so that we could live in freedom.



This historic photograph shows American soldiers from Company E, 16th Infantry, 1st Infantry Division exiting their LCVP landing craft under heavy German machine gun fire on Omaha Beach. The photo was taken by Coast Guard Chief Photographer's Mate Robert F. Sergeant.

Company E landed on Easy Red Beach at 0645 in the face of murderous fire. Those few who survived kept wading right into everything the enemy had and took their objective, which provided the only exit from the beach that the entire Fifth Corps had for two days. Company "E," perhaps by strength of will and courage alone, helped keep the entire landing force from being thrown back into the sea. For a month afterwards, those who survived remained almost in a daze.



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Japanese submarine *I-19* was the scourge of the Pacific.

After the Great War, the leading naval powers met to try to avoid another ruinously expensive arms race and, hopefully, prevent future wars. Great Britain, the United States, France, Italy and Japan agreed to set limits on the number and sizes of warships that each nation could build.

The limit was for submarines was 2,000 tons, a figure most nations found easy to comply with as World War II began. British, Italian and German submarines topped out at less than 1,000 tons. American attack submarines, which had to ply the wide Pacific, remained steady throughout the war at around 1,500 tons.

The Japanese knew they could not match the industrial might of the Allied nations and so built fewer, but larger and more powerful ships. The *Bismarck* weighed in at 41,000 long tons, while the Iowa-class of American battleships reached 45,000 tons. The Japanese built two battleships—*Musashi* and *Yamato*—that topped out at 64,000 tons. These two giants also boasted the biggest guns ever mounted on warships.

It was the same with submarines. The I-class boats, considered to be fleet submarines, had long range and good speed. The *I-19* displaced 2,584 long tons and mounted a 5.5-inch naval gun as compared to the American Gato-class subs at 1,525 long tons with a 3-inch gun. As the war progressed, American subs would also mount 5-inch guns. *I-19*'s top speed was 23 knots, and she had a range of 14,000 nautical miles at her most economical speed of 16 knots on the surface, compared with the Gato submarines, which were designed for 11,000 miles at nine knots.

The *I-19*—and other submarines of the B-Type of the I-class—had another weapon that no other nation built into its submarines: They carried an airplane, which made them underwater aircraft carriers. Housed in an air-tight compartment, *I-19* carried a Yokosuka E14Y float plane (allied designation “Glen”) that could be used for scouting, reconnaissance, or light bombing. The size and the air component of the I-boats required a larger

crew, from 94 to 105 men compared to the Gatos complement of around 60 men.

Her most formidable weapon, however, was the Type 95 torpedo, a modified version of the ship-launched Type 93 “long lance” torpedo and the most advanced in the world throughout the war. It had a range three times that of its contemporary American counterpart, the problem-plagued Mark 14 torpedo. The Type 95 was also the fastest torpedo in the world and its warhead was larger than any other submarine torpedo.

Type 95 propulsion consisted of a kerosene-oxygen fuel with a wet-heater rather than the compressed air used by most other navies. Allied ship captains who thought themselves out of range of Japanese torpedoes had little time to correct their mistake.

I-19 was commissioned on April 1, 1941. Her first captain was Narahara Seigo. On November 21st, *I-19* departed Japan for Hawaii, refueling en route. Her assignment, along with *I-21* and *I-23*, was



and gave chase for an hour. Three torpedoes were fired at *Storey*, but they all missed. *Storey*'s SOS brought naval patrol planes, forcing *I-19* to dive to escape depth charges.

On Christmas Eve, near San Pedro, another torpedo was launched toward the 2,146-ton lumber schooner *Barbara Olson*. It, too, missed. Later the same day, *I-19* attacked the 5,695-ton lumber carrier *Absaroka*. One of two torpedoes hit the ship and caused damage but did not sink *Absaroka* because of her buoyant cargo of lumber. Again, the *I-19* was subjected to a depth charge attack before escaping.

The synchronized Christmas Day shelling of the coast was postponed until the 27th, but by then the Japanese boats along the west coast reported that their fuel reserves were rapidly being depleted. They were all recalled without the planned shelling.

For most of the boats assigned to harass the coast of North America, it was a dis-

to scout in front of Admiral Chūichi Nagumo's carrier force, which was rapidly approaching Pearl Harbor. On December 7, *I-19* patrolled at a distance of 120 miles northeast of Oahu, on the lookout for any American ship that might come within range of the carrier task force. No such threat was encountered.

On December 14, *I-19* was ordered to the West Coast of North America along with *I-15*, *I-9*, *I-10*, *I-17*, *I-21*, *I-23*, *I-25*, and *I-26*. Each boat was assigned a specific area along the west coasts of the U.S. and Canada. They were to attack shipping until Christmas Day. Then, simultaneously, they were all to shell their portion of the coast to create panic in the western United States and Canada before returning home.

When *I-19* arrived on station off the California coast, north of Santa Barbara, her lookouts spotted the 4,200-ton Norwegian freighter *Panama Express*. The submarine fired a torpedo at her but missed. The next day, lookouts found the 10,763-ton Standard Oil Company tanker *SS H.M. Storey*



ABOVE: The *I-19*, with Type 95 torpedoes, was one of Japan's most successful submarines until her sinking on November 25, 1943, near Makin Island. **BELOW:** On December 20, 1941, *I-19* and seven other Japanese subs attacked allied shipping along the west coasts of the U.S. and Canada. The General Petroleum Corporation tanker *SS Emidio* became one of the first casualties off California's Pacific Coast. **TOP:** The American destroyer *USS O'Brien*, right, explodes near Guadalcanal, September 15, 1942 as the aircraft carrier *USS Wasp* burns in the distance (left). Both ships, along with the *USS North Carolina*, were torpedoed by Captain Kinashi Takakazu's *I-19*, which escaped a heavy depth-charging by other ships in the convoy.



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appointing trip. They had come a long way, expended precious torpedoes, placed wear and tear on men and machines, accomplished little, and endured depth-charge attacks from thoroughly alarmed and vigilant American defenses.

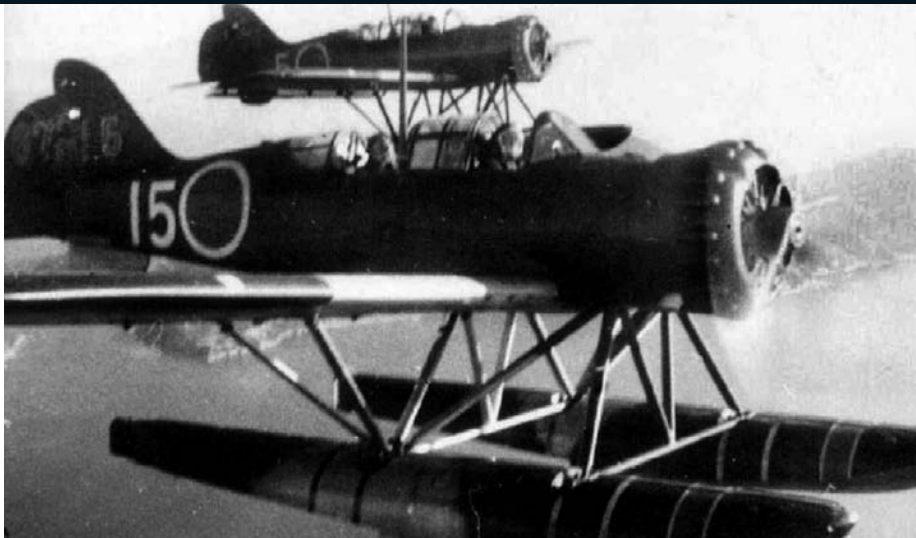
Life aboard a submarine of any nation was not pleasant. Japanese submarine designers paid little attention to creature comforts. Fresh water was in short supply; fresh food was exhausted quickly. There was little or no personal space. Even with the greater size of the I-class subs, wiggle room was precious. Heat, too, was a problem; after diesel engines ran for several hours on the surface at night, the boat would submerge to run on batteries, but the built-up engine heat permeated the entire claustrophobic interior of the tube. It was also constantly clammy inside, which encouraged the growth of mold.

In Tokyo, an operation called "K-1" was devised to raid Pearl Harbor again. This time, rather than risk an entire carrier force on an alert enemy, two Kawanishi H8K "Emily" flying boats would be used. The planes, each carrying 1,800 pounds of bombs, departed Wotje Atoll in the Marshall Islands group and flew to French Frigate Shoal in the Hawaiian Island chain to refuel from I-class submarines acting as tankers.

For its part in the raid *I-19*, *I-15*, and *I-26* had their float planes removed from their on-board hangers and replaced with six tanks filled with aviation fuel. Their job consisted of refueling the two Emilys in the calm water of the shoals for the attack on Pearl Harbor. *I-19* was also used as a radio beacon to guide the Emilys to their refueling spot.

On the night of March 4, 1942, *I-19* and her sisters refueled the Emilys as planned. The seaplanes flew on to Pearl Harbor and an ineffectual raid because of bad weather. The Americans did not even realize that they had been bombed. *I-19* then returned to Yokosuka at the entrance to Tokyo Bay for a much-needed overhaul. She was still there when the Doolittle Raid attacked Tokyo on April 18.

In May, *I-19* took part in the complicated strategic plan to attack Midway Island. For her part in the scheme, she was assigned to the Aleutian Islands to support



The *I-19* carried a Yokosuka E14Y "Glen" float plane in a watertight compartment, making her an underwater aircraft carrier.

the diversionary invasion of Attu and Kiska Islands. On May 26th she was scouting for any unknown American activity on Umnak Island. Her float plane was being assembled when an American destroyer was spotted. Captain Narahara recalled the deck crew and crash dived, which destroyed the half-assembled float plane. Continuing with their scouting mission, the

crew of *I-19* made a two-day submerged, periscope observation of Dutch Harbor.

On July 7, she arrived safely back at Yokosuka and was dry docked for repairs. While there she received a new captain, an experienced submarine commander, Kinashi Takakazu. *I-19* was still in dry dock when, on August 7th, the U.S. Marines landed on Guadalcanal in the

Solomon Islands. When repairs were finished, *I-19* was dispatched to meet the American challenge.

By August 24th, *I-19* arrived on station 200 miles southeast of Guadalcanal and took up patrol duties, searching for targets. She was still there on September 15. Meanwhile, two separate American task forces, centered on the aircraft carriers *Wasp* and *Hornet*, steamed side by side. This impressive armada escorted a reinforcement convoy of six troop transports carrying the 7th Marine Regiment from Espiritu Santo to Guadalcanal. The carriers were steaming in sight of each other about 8 miles apart.

While cruising submerged, the sound operator on *I-19* picked up the noise of several ships on a northerly course. At 10:50 a.m., Captain Kinashi looked through his periscope to see the American squadron heading in his direction. Although they were zig-zagging, one of their turns put the carriers into the wind for the launch and retrieval of planes. *Wasp* headed right for *I-19*. Kinashi calculated the carrier's course and speed, and

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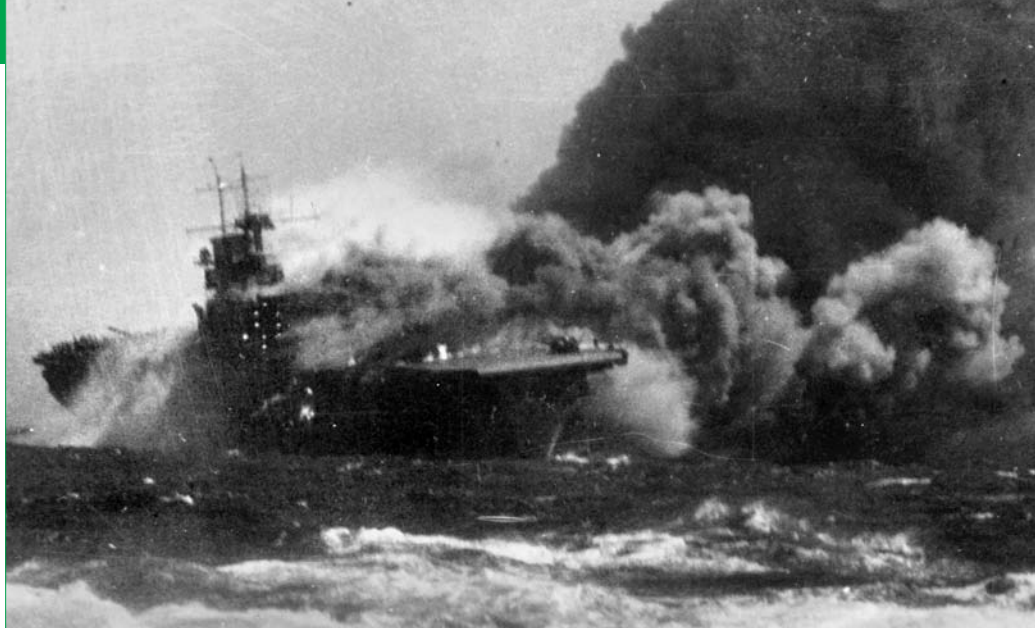
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When the *I-19* sank the *USS Wasp* on September 15, 1942, 193 sailors were killed or went missing; 367 were wounded. After striking two more ships that day with her torpedoes, the submarine submerged below the burning *Wasp* as depth charges began falling.

at 11:45 he used all of his forward tubes to fire a spread of six torpedoes at *Wasp*.

At that same moment, aboard *Wasp*, ship's cameraman Leslie Elliott Jr. was standing watch on the bridge, observing the retrieval of planes, when torpedoes were spotted in the water heading for them. The helmsman desperately turned his wheel hard to starboard, but the bow had only just begun to answer her helm when three of the torpedoes slammed into the carrier causing multiple explosions that, among other things, ruptured the ship's water main and pumps, which prevented her crew from fighting the resulting fires.

Elliot was hit by shrapnel in the forehead and bled profusely. His first impulse was to set up his camera and record the action, but Captain Forrest P. Sherman told him to get to sickbay as fires raged uncontrolled in the doomed ship. While standing in the hangar deck, Elliot heard the order to abandon ship as thick black smoke filled the air and secondary explosions rocked the ship. Elliot climbed over the side on a net ladder and dropped into the sea to await rescue. When it was all over, *Wasp* lost 193 killed and 367 wounded.

While *Wasp* convulsed, the destroyer *O'Brien's* lookouts spotted a torpedo in the water and were able to speed up as it passed astern. The crew did not see the torpedo that then hit the ship on the port bow. It tore open a deep gash and desta-

bilized the keel. *O'Brien* was still afloat and could steam under her own power, but the explosion had caused structural damage. *O'Brien* steamed to Espiritu Santo for temporary repairs. She was seeking more lasting repairs on Pago Pago when her seams opened up on October 19th and she finally sank, a month later, from *I-19's* torpedo blast.

The spread of torpedoes from *I-19* was not done yet. Another one slammed into the battleship *North Carolina* on her port bow, just forward of the thick armor belt designed to protect her from torpedoes. The enormous blast shook the ship, jolting it to starboard. Tons of fuel oil and water shot skyward. Seawater quickly flooded into the 32-by-18-foot hole, causing the mighty battleship to list to port, a situation quickly corrected by counter-flooding compartments on the starboard side.

Ruptured fuel-oil tanks exploded, causing fires that threatened to destroy the ship if they reached the forward magazines. The magazines were quickly flooded to prevent this, and the ship's two forward turrets were put out of action. The flooding saved the ship, but in her condition, she could not fight. The radar was also knocked off line, as were the catapults. Five men were killed and 23 were wounded. The accumulated damage caused by that single torpedo strike was arguably the most impressive single attack

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by any submarine in history.

Now it was *I-19*'s turn to be the target. Angry and humiliated destroyer captains, who had failed to protect their carrier, converged on the offending submarine. Captain Kinashi maneuvered his boat to the wake of the dying *Wasp* and submerged to 265 feet. The detritus falling overboard from the carrier, airplanes, bombs, tools and much more confused the destroyers' sonar. The first depth charge exploded just six minutes after the last torpedo hit *North Carolina*. Soon, the depth charges were exploding all around. They rained down as many as 80 depth charges. Yet *I-19* survived to fight another day.

After some R&R and replenishment of stores and weapons at Truk (now called Chuuk) Lagoon, *I-19* was assigned to reconnoiter the town of Noumea on New Caledonia. On October 19th, she launched her Glen floatplane to observe from overhead but could not recover it intact. The submarine would stay on patrol near Noumea until November 12th, when she was reassigned to participate in the "Tokyo Express" to deliver supplies and reinforcements to Guadalcanal. Her first run was disrupted by an attack from American aircraft, and she dove before completing her task.

The Japanese then developed a new resupply tactic. The submarines carried supplies wrapped in floating rubber containers that were released, at night, while submerged to avoid the vigilant American air patrols. In all, *I-19* would make three successful supply runs to Guadalcanal, delivering a total of 52 tons of badly needed supplies.

On January 25th, 1943, she arrived back in Japan for a quick overhaul. After a rapid turnaround, *I-19* returned to Guadalcanal to be a part of Operation "KE," the evacuation of Guadalcanal. She did her share in extracting 11,700 exhausted and starving troops from the island.

By April, she had begun a patrol around the New Hebrides and Fiji Islands. On April 30, 1943, she torpedoed and sank the 7,176-ton Liberty ship *Phoebe A. Hearst*. On May 2nd, the 7,181-ton American freighter *William Williams* was

Continued on page 37

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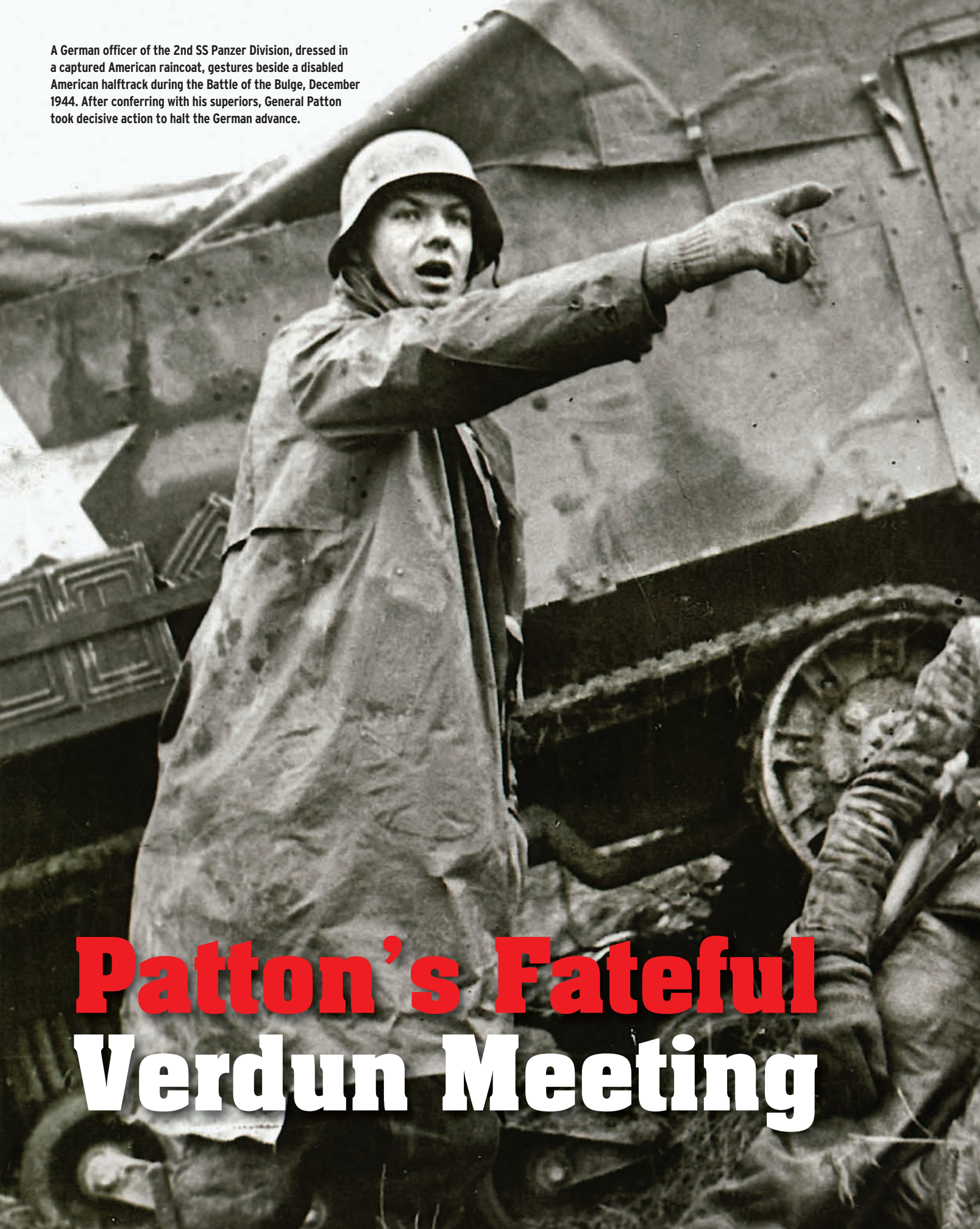
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A German officer of the 2nd SS Panzer Division, dressed in a captured American raincoat, gestures beside a disabled American halftrack during the Battle of the Bulge, December 1944. After conferring with his superiors, General Patton took decisive action to halt the German advance.

Patton's Fateful Verdun Meeting





On the morning of December 19, Lieutenant General George S. Patton, Jr., prepared his Third Army for a battle raging north of him—the Battle of the Bulge. Three days earlier, three German armies had burst out of the Ardennes Forest in Belgium and Luxembourg and smashed into Lt. Gen. Courtney Hodges’ First Army.

At first, Patton tried not to get sucked into the campaign, but when Lt. Gen. Omar Bradley, commander of 12th Army

ing, yet serious and professional speech equal to the moment:

“Third Army has a chance to go down in history as the greatest Army of this war,” Patton said. “We are going to attack the enemy on his exposed flank and end the war this side of the Siegfried Line. That is going to kill the Germans coming at us, instead of going after the bastards holed up in bunkers and pillboxes.”

He cautioned them all about getting too excited and reminded them to remain pro-

Days after the Battle of the Bulge began, Patton met with Eisenhower and Bradley to convince them that his Third Army could stop the German onslaught. He was right. **BY KEVIN M. HYMEL**

Group, showed Patton a map of the enemy’s progress against Hodges, Patton snapped into action, reorienting two of his corps north while keeping one facing east.

That morning, as he prepared to depart his headquarters in Nancy, France, and head to Bradley’s headquarters in Verdun to meet with him and General Dwight D. Eisenhower to figure out how to meet the German onslaught, Patton ordered Maj. Gen. Walton Walker’s XX Corps to go on the defensive. He ordered Van Fleet’s 90th Infantry Division to pull out of Dillingen and create a defensive front on the west bank of the Saar River.

Since the Germans had knocked out the bridge, it took the men of the 90th three days to complete the maneuver. One of the division’s battalion staffers wrote in a unit log, “This is the first time this Battalion ever gave ground and even though it was a strategic retreat rather than tactical, it still hurt.”

After making the XX Corps arrangements, Patton held a 7:30 a.m. meeting that included Maj. Gen. Manton Eddy, commander of XII Corps and Maj. Gen. John Millikin, commander of III Corps, and their collective staff. He began with a rous-

professional. “Third Army is what it is because you have always done the impossible as of yesterday. We are going to do it again.” He ended his remarks by reminding everyone that they would not be taking any German SS prisoner, implying their death.

After telling them about Bradley’s order to turn three of his divisions north, Patton explained his plans by making a rough draft map. He began by saying that Maj. Gen. Troy Middleton’s VIII Corps would come under Third Army command and then explained how he intended to reach him: both Maj. Gen. Willard Paul’s 26th and Maj. Gen. Horace McBride’s 80th Infantry Divisions would head west to Metz, while Maj. Gen. Hugh Gaffey’s 4th Armored Division would head west to Pont-à-Mousson.

All three divisions would then head north to Longwy, where Millikin would decide the direction of their attack. Eddy’s XII Corps, fighting in the south, would have to swing north and take over Third Army’s eastern front.

In addition, Major General Leroy Irwin’s 5th Infantry Division and Maj. Gen. Robert Grow’s 6th Armored would head

west to Thionville and Metz, respectively, and then head north to Luxembourg City. To cover the corps-sized gap, Lt. Gen. Alexander Patch's Seventh Army would stretch itself to cover Third Army's southern sector. Both Longwy and Luxembourg City provided the best roads to continue north into the Bulge.

Walker's XX Corps, which would change from Patton's northernmost corps to his southernmost, would be left out of the drive and would instead hold Patton's southern flank. Walker, who thought he was getting the most important role of the campaign since his corps was closest to the fight, had been relegated to placeholder.

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Patton also stressed that Eisenhower had told Bradley, "I want to put as many troops as possible under Patton."

For the main thrust into the Bulge, Patton developed three possible axes of attack, each with a well-coined code name. "Cent" called for an attack north through Diekirch, cutting the Bulge at its base. "Nickel" called for an attack from Arlon, 13 miles north of Longwy to Bastogne. "Dime" would be an attack against the tip of the Bulge, wherever that might be. Patton jotted the three codes down on a piece of paper and handed it to Lt. Gen. Hap Gay, his chief of staff.

Once Patton knew what Eisenhower and Bradley wanted him to do, he would simply call Gay and give him the chosen code word. He preferred Cent, cutting the Bulge off at its base, but told the staff to get cracking on all three contingencies. He considered his plan inspired but warned the staff, "Only they [SHAEP] don't think that way up there. [They're] not made that way."

Before Patton met with his staff, up north three German divisions, two panzer and

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ABOVE: Lieutenant General George Patton rides in an open jeep on his way to visit the headquarters of the 87th Infantry Division, one of his Third Army units that he ordered to attack the Germans during the Bulge. **LEFT:** After the war, Patton awards a Bronze Star medal to Lt. Col. Richard Stillman, Patton's aide for 19 months. **RIGHT:** Sir Arthur Tedder, Deputy Supreme Commander, wanted Patton to transfer XX Corps to Seventh Army; Patton refused.

one infantry, clashed with the smaller combat teams of Desobry, Cherry, and O'Hare in the snow-covered and battered towns of Noville, Longville, and Wardin, respectively.

The fighting had started at 5 a.m. and continued throughout the day, despite blinding fog that only lifted periodically. American infantry, tank, and tank destroyer crews fought desperately as the paratroopers from the 101st Airborne marched through Bastogne and fanned out to reinforce the teams, helping form Bastogne's perimeter.

Further north, the two surrounded regiments from the 106th Infantry Division also fought desperately in hopes of relief. The U.S. military's greatest strength, ground-support aircraft, played no role in the fighting, with all planes grounded in the pea-soup fog.

"Sure looks like the devil is helping his own," Patton said as he glared up at the low-lying clouds and fog over Nancy. He and his staff, consisting of Major Charles Codman, Colonel Paul Harkins, Colonel Walter Muller, and Lt. Col. Richard Stillman, climbed into two armored jeeps with mounted .30-caliber machine guns, side doors, and extended mud flaps, and headed out over snow-covered roads for the 60-mile trek to Verdun.

After about an hour and a half, the jeeps drove through Verdun, turned off Goubet Van Heeghe Avenue, entered the gate, and drove through the muddy courtyard to the main entrance of Bradley's headquarters. Two MPs greeted them as they ascended the stairs to the entrance.

Bradley had arrived first from Luxembourg City, having navigated roads filled with escaping civilians. When British signal equipment blocked the road, he impatiently leaned out the window and shouted at them to move. Lt. Gen. Jacob Devers, the commander of 6th Army Group, arrived in a sedan escorted by two MP jeeps. With him were Brig. Gen. Reuben E. Jenkins and Major Eugene Lynch, his operations and intelligence officers.

Eisenhower and British Air Marshal Arthur Tedder, Eisenhower's deputy, arrived in a Packard and hurried up the stairs and into the building. Despite the seriousness of the situation, Eisenhower smiled as he shook hands with Bradley's staff. The two men then

ascended to the second floor and entered the room where the other officers awaited them. Other American and British officers arrived and filed upstairs.

From Eisenhower's staff came Lieutenant General Walter Bedell "Beetle" Smith, British Air Marshal James Robb, and British Colonel James Gault. Members of Bradley's staff were also on hand, as were numerous lower-ranking officers. Missing from the meeting were Field Marshal Bernard Law Montgomery, who had refused to attend any meetings unless they were held at his headquarters, and Hodges, who was busy fighting the onrushing Germans.

Usually, General Freddy de Guingand represented Montgomery at such meetings, but he was stuck in London, unable to fly to the Continent due to heavy fog. Hodges was in contact with Bradley, although the communications link was at times poor and subject to interference. When Major Generals Harold "Pink" Bull and Kenneth Strong, also from Eisenhower's staff, entered the room, Ike said, "Well, I knew my staff would get here—it's only a question of when!"

Altogether, there were at least 16 men in the freezing room, 12 Americans and four British; others waited outside. The men kept their coats on to ward off the cold, which overwhelmed a small coal-burning stove in the corner. The room filled with smoke as the men puffed away at cigarettes, cigars, or pipes. Coffee and sandwiches were served. The room contained rows of simple wooden folding chairs in front of a huge map that almost took up the whole wall.

Patton paced the room, puffing on a cigar. Despite his upbeat attitude, his face was etched with grim concern. Bradley looked stern. He had spent the morning reviewing reports of deeper German penetrations, trying to get a picture of the confusing situation.

Along with the bad news about the 106th Division's two surrounded regiments, he had also been following the German drive on Bastogne and reports of enemy buzz bombs (V1s) dropping on Liège. But the Americans were fighting back. Engineers were destroying bridges to prevent the Germans from reaching Hodges's headquarters in Spa.

Along with Brigadier General Anthony McAuliffe's 101st, Maj. Gen. James Gavin's 82nd Airborne had reached the 7th Armored Division and was driving east, looking for

Verdun headquarters (Caserne de Jardin-Fontaine), of Lieutenant General Omar Bradley, commander of 12th Army Group, where the "Bulge conference" took place on December 19, 1944. Today, the barracks building is still used by the French army.

the enemy. But when Bradley received a report that air operations had been stymied by bad weather, he just shook his head.

Only Eisenhower seemed to be in a good mood. Seeing old friends and acquaintances lifted his spirits. He started the meeting by declaring, "The present situation is to be regarded as one of opportunity for us and not of disaster. There will be only happy faces at this conference table."

Patton, happy to see his commander in such an aggressive mood, blurted out, "Hell, let's have the guts to let the bastards go all the way up to Paris. Then we'll really cut 'em off and chew them up."

The exchange broke the tension in the room, if only temporarily. Eisenhower, remaining serious, told everyone that the enemy must not be allowed to cross the Meuse River separating France from Belgium.

General Strong stepped in front of the wall map and presented the situation as well as Eisenhower's headquarters knew it. He told them that the Germans had launched an all-out attack aimed at Brussels in the hopes of splitting the British and American armies. While the Allies were holding firm on both shoulders of the penetration, in between, "German units were pushing ahead and already bypassing the resistance at St. Vith and Bastogne."



Strong would later admit that while his predictions seemed gloomy, everyone reacted with surprise, even though he was only repeating, according to him, “with greater confidence and in more detail,” what he had told Eisenhower on the afternoon of December 16.

Strong also presented four possible objectives the German might consider to reinforce their offensive: the almost defenseless city of Namur on the Meuse River, 75 miles northwest of St. Vith, the next major city on the way to Brussels; the German city of Monschau, north of St. Vith, which, if the Germans captured it, would widen the mouth of the offensive; a secondary attack from Trier; and lastly, an attack somewhere north of Lt. Gen. William Simpson’s Ninth Army (which meant a pincers movement), although Montgomery had enough forces to deal with such an attack.

Eisenhower wanted to hold the shoulders of the German breakthrough and then attack the Bulge from both sides. While the first part of his idea was sound, the second part would be more difficult, with Hodges busy pulling units out of the Roer River line and sending them piecemeal into the German flank. Bradley worried that Hodges’ line would crack and the Germans would flood across the Meuse into France.

There was, however, no talk of defense—pulling back to the Meuse was not an option. Bradley’s operations officers considered that alternative “too unthinkable to merit consideration.”

Bradley proposed that Devers gradually take over Patton’s southern front so Patton could focus on an immediate counteroffensive. The gradual takeover would prevent any confusion with supplies since Devers’s supplies came from southern France and Patton’s from the northern part of the country. Bradley explained that, for the northern side of the Bulge, he was adding two divisions to Maj. Gen. J. Lawton Collins’s VII Corps and would expand Collins’s sector to allow Maj. Gen. Leonard Gerow’s V Corps to focus on the northern shoulder.

Eisenhower asked Devers how much of Patton’s southern sector he could take over. After Devers told him that a salient

Patton’s claim that he could rapidly launch an attack toward Bastogne in three days caused quite a bit of commotion in the room. As Godman remembered it, “There was a stir, a shuffling of feet, as those present straightened up in their chairs.”

in his lines—the Colmar pocket—restricted him from taking over Patton’s entire zone, Eisenhower told him to reach out as far as possible to his left—about halfway between Saarlautern and Saarbrücken—while giving Patton every division he could spare.

Devers was not happy about relinquishing the offensive and losing divisions, but was resigned to dealing with the crisis at hand. Eisenhower permitted him to give ground if necessary to keep his forces intact. He did the same for Eddy, telling Patton he could fall back in the Saar region if necessary.

Throughout the meeting Patton sat still, only commenting that he needed replacements and suggesting using the soldiers from three recently arrived infantry divisions as replacements for his depleted army. Bradley agreed and said he would provide Patton with a portion of the men that were to go to Hodges and Simpson.

Bull recommended shipping nine infantry regiments from the newly arrived 42nd, 63rd, and 70th Infantry Divisions directly to Bradley, for a total of 2,700 soldiers. He even suggested sending the regiments of the 66th Infantry, which was scheduled to relieve the 94th Division. All that was still not enough for Patton. He recommended using untrained logistics personnel.

Devers, too, asked for more troops, but not as forcefully as Patton. “No,” Eisenhower responded, “I won’t admit we are that near beaten.”

Patton quickly shot back, “We will be if we don’t get more.”

Bradley expressed concern about Bastogne and its vital road net. Eisenhower agreed that protecting it should be the goal. The generals also discussed using Third Army to cut off the Bulge at its base, but with the threat of an additional German thrust out of Trier, Eisenhower decided that for the immediate future they needed to simply strengthen the southern shoulder while driving for Bastogne.

He would later say of his decision, “I firmly believed that by coming out of the Siegfried [Line] the enemy had given us a great opportunity which we could seize as soon as possible.”

Eisenhower turned to Patton. “George, you’re going to have to abandon your plan to break free of the Siegfried Line and attack north,” he told him. “I want you to go to Luxembourg and take charge.”

Patton did not miss a beat, replying, “Yes, sir.”

Eisenhower needed to know how long it would take him to get back to Nancy, pack, get the word out to his staff, and move his headquarters 50 miles north to Luxembourg. “When can you start up there?” he asked.

Patton claimed he would be ready on December 21, Eisenhower accused him of being “fatuous,” and worried that Patton would attack before he had a large enough force. To guard against that, Eisenhower specifically told Patton, “If you try to go that early, you won’t have all three divisions ready and you’ll go piecemeal. You will start on the 22nd and I want your initial blow to be a strong one! I’d even settle for the 23rd if it takes that long to get three full divisions.”

Patton responded to Eisenhower’s request by telling him, “I can put on a spoiling attack with three divisions in three days or a more concentrated attack by six divisions in six days.” Eisenhower said, “We can’t wait for six days. When can you get moving?”



ABOVE: Patton rushed Third Army units over many miles of snow-covered roads to slam into the base of the German penetration. BELOW: From left, Supreme Allied Commander General Dwight Eisenhower, Lt. Gen. Omar Bradley, and Lt. Gen. George Patton meet in Bastogne, February 5, 1945, after the crisis was over.



National Archives

Patton turned to Colonel Harkins and said, “We can do that.” To which Harkins responded, “Yes, sir.”

Patton turned back to Eisenhower. “If you’ll let me go to a phone we’ll be on the road in less than an hour.” (One account had Patton responding, “I’ll not only attack, I’ll shove von Rundstedt down Montgomery’s throat.”)

Patton’s claim that he could rapidly launch an attack toward Bastogne in three days

caused quite a bit of commotion in the room. As Codman remembered it, “There was a stir, a shuffling of feet, as those present straightened up in their chairs. Patton later wrote, “Some people thought I was boasting and others seemed pleased.” Some of the British officers openly laughed. Others looked up excitedly. One staff officer remembered, “It almost knocked me out of my chair.”

Patton was promising to turn part of his army 180 degrees north and attack in only three days. Yet, it was not impossible. He would use Millikin’s III Corps with three divisions—Gaffey’s 4th Armored, Paul’s 26th, and McBride’s 80th—which were behind the lines and had been resting (until he had alerted them the night before). The hard part would be getting the second corps, Eddy’s XII, disengaged and heading north. Only Irwin’s 5th Infantry was off the line in Eddy’s zone. Patton knew if he could launch his initial attack quickly, he would entirely surprise the Germans.

Eisenhower still worried the attacking force was too weak and that Patton had underestimated the strength of the German assault. Tedder interjected, suggesting Patton turn over Walker’s XX Corps to Deviers, but Patton refused, wanting to use Walker’s zone as a possible rest area for his attacking divisions. Walker was also closest to the German city of Trier. With Trier captured, he could race across the German Palatinate region, something Patton yearned to return to.

Eisenhower instructed Patton to advance by phase lines, keeping all his forces tightly together and avoiding wasting his divisions’ strength through dispersion. But where would Patton attack? While Patton wanted to attack the German offensive at its base, Bradley felt that by attacking toward Bastogne, Third Army would still threaten the enemy’s rear.

Finally, Eisenhower assured everyone in the room that he would urge Montgomery to launch his own attack from the north as soon as the “German blow in that sector had spent itself.”

Patton’s three-division assault did not surprise Bradley. The two had discussed it

the night before when he told Patton about the situation. He was surprised, however, at the speed with which Patton was promising to do it. When he asked about the feasibility of turning an Army around and going on the attack in two days, Patton responded by lighting a cigar and pointing at the bulge on the battle map.

“Brad,” he told his commander, “This time the Kraut’s got his head in a meat-grinder.” Then he closed his hand into a fist, “and this time I’ve got hold of the handle.”

When Patton predicted he could reach Bastogne in his first rush, Eisenhower told him that as long as he was advancing he would be satisfied. Bradley worried the attack would be hard to disguise, so he turned to Lt. Col. Ralph Ingersoll of the 23rd Headquarters Special Troops, the deception unit that had worked so well for Patton in Brittany and outside Metz, and asked him if there was anything he could do to keep the Germans from knowing where Patton would strike. Ingersoll promised to come up with something.

Eisenhower summed up the meeting in a telegram to Beetle Smith: “The general plan is to plug the holes in the north and launch a coordinated attack from the south.” He would leave the details to Patton.

Patton’s plan seemed to galvanize everyone in the room and they wanted to help. Two of Bradley’s logistics officers chimed in. Colonel Raymond Moses told Patton and Mueller that COMZ, the supply command for all forces in Europe, would cooperate fully on all transport and that they would keep up with Patton’s drive as closely as possible. Colonel William A. Barriger added that 10 truck companies were already on the way to Third Army and the leading trucks should be through Verdun that evening.

As the high-ranking generals and their staff filed out of the room, Patton was already in action. He called over to Harkins and ordered, “Telephone Gay, give him the code name [Nickel], tell him to get started. Then get back to Nancy yourself as soon as you can. You know what to do.”

He wasn’t finished. He turned to Codman and barked out more orders. “Cod-

man, you come with me. Tell Mims (Patton’s driver) we start in five minutes—for Luxembourg. And telephone General Walker and tell him I will stop and see him in Thionville on the way.”

As they left the room, Eisenhower told Patton, “Funny thing, George, every time I get promoted, I get attacked.” Eisenhower was referring to the Kasserine Pass debacle in North Africa in early 1943, when German General Irwin Rommel punched the center of the American II Corps and sent it reeling back a hundred miles. The military disaster occurred merely days after Eisenhower had been promoted to full general.

It had been Eisenhower’s first crisis as a war commander and he reacted immediately, firing commanders, racing reinforcements to the front, and bringing in Patton to command II Corps.

Now, on the day the Germans launched the Battle of the Bulge, he learned that President Roosevelt had nominated him for the five-star rank of General of the Army.

“Yes,” Patton agreed, “and every time you get attacked, I bail you out.”

Historian Martin Blumenson called Patton’s claim to move his army in three days his sublime moment, but it was not. While it was dramatic and shocking, Patton’s real sublime moment came after he left the room, and lasted for the next three days as he turned most of his army north. It was one thing to claim he could pivot his army and go on the attack, it was another to deliver on the goods. And that he did.

He never returned to his headquarters in Nancy, instead moving directly to Luxembourg City. He would also be close to Bradley’s headquarters, where he would spend much of his time. When not meeting with Bradley or the Third Army staff, Patton would be out on the road, directing, cajoling and physically moving his troops north, despite the snow and freezing temperatures.

The Verdun meeting was also important to Eisenhower. In two hours he came to grips with his entire front and developed a plan of not just matching the German offensive but defeating it. Before the meeting he was using ad hoc methods to deal with the breakthrough; now he had an overall idea about the attack and how his forces would go about

Both: National Archives



ABOVE: As Patton was meeting with high command at SHAEF (Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force), thousands of Americans were fighting for their lives or being marched off to POW camps. **OPPOSITE:** Despite being cold and weary, some reconnaissance troops of the 87th Infantry Division (Patton’s Third Army) can smile as they march through Bihain, Belgium, to attack German troops dug in beyond the town, January 1945.



erasing the Bulge. It would be another week before the plan began to bear fruit, but the seed had been planted. In a way, Eisenhower and Patton were the star players of the meeting. Patton would lead the charge and Eisenhower would provide the means.

Would the Verdun meeting have been different had Montgomery attended? Possibly. The energy of Patton's can-do spirit may have prompted him to come up with his own offensive from the north, committing British forces between the American corps for an assault aimed in the direction of Bastogne.

On the other hand, the meeting may have reinforced Monty's attitude that Americans did not understand the European way of war and that Patton's plan was unrealistic and foolhardy. Patton's dynamic attacks in Sicily did not change Montgomery's plans during that campaign at all.

In fact, the Verdun meeting might have simply entrenched Montgomery in his own battle plan to wait out the German offensive until it had spent itself. While that battle plan would have frustrated Eisenhower, at least his American commanders would have seen for themselves what Eisenhower was up against with Montgomery and what Patton had been complaining about for the last five months.

By the time the Verdun meeting ended, things had gotten worse for those freezing American soldiers. Around 4 p.m. the two surrounded regiments from General Jones's 106th Division surrendered.

Further east, the spearhead of the German attack toward Antwerp, Battle Group Peiper, reached its high-water mark at Stoumont, 50 miles into the American lines but 30 miles short of its goal. It had been stopped by an American armored counterattack, but no one realized at the time that the Germans would get no further.

Around Bastogne, combat teams Cherry and O'Hare fought off repeated German armored attacks, while Team Desobry actually counterattacked in Noville with the help of a battalion of paratroopers from the 101st Airborne. The situation in Bastogne became serious enough for Middleton, the VIII Corps commander, to relocate his headquarters from Bastogne to Neufchâteau, 18 miles southeast. General McAuliffe took

command of Bastogne.

Patton walked Eisenhower out to his vehicle while Bradley remained inside, calling Hodges on the phone for updates. As Eisenhower prepared to leave, a jeep rolled up and off jumped a sergeant from a medical battalion.

The sergeant did not approach Eisenhower and Patton for any medical crisis, instead he saluted and asked the two if he could have his picture taken with them.

They both agreed, with Eisenhower telling Patton, "George, move over and let the soldier in the middle." He did. □

This article is excerpted from Kevin Hymel's latest book, Patton's War: An American General's Combat Leadership, Volume 2: August—December 1944, published by University of Missouri Press. The author is a contract historian for Arlington National Cemetery. He previously served as a historian for the U.S. Army Combat Studies Institute's Afghan Study Group and U.S. Air Force Medical Service and Chaplain Corps. Mr. Hymel has also served as this magazine's research director and is a frequent contributor.



A line of 92nd Infantry Division troops marches along an Italian mountain road, May 1945. The "Buffalo Soldiers" saw their first combat action in December 1944 and suffered 3,000 men killed and wounded during their five months in combat.

There are important similarities between Hitler’s final great push into Belgium and Luxembourg and Mussolini’s drive south of Garfagnana. To conduct their operations, both dictators had to scrape together the last remnants of effective fighting men and equipment, both had to wait for inclement weather to conceal their troops’ movements from the Allied warplanes that ruled the skies, and both faced incredibly long odds.

But the similarities largely end there. The world watched breathlessly as the fighting in the Ardennes played itself out. The Germans, after some five weeks of bitter fighting, were finally beaten and largely driven back.

Scant notice was paid to the near-simultaneous fighting in northwest Italy, where from December 26-31, 1944, an Italian force supported by Austrian mountain troops hit the Americans head-on along the western edge of the Gothic Line in the Serchio Valley and sent the GIs reeling back 25 kilometers to the south.

Unlike the Germans at the Bulge, the victorious Axis forces at Garfagnana not only secured their positions along their main defensive line but were able to hold onto them until the latter part of April in 1945.

Known to the Italians as the “Christmas Offensive” (*Offensive di Natale*) and to the

ers and whisked away to Austria. Within three days, Mussolini was meeting with Hitler in the Wolf’s Lair in East Prussia.

There he heard Hitler’s plan for a new Fascist Italian State propped up by the German forces stationed there. Mussolini supposedly hesitated, preferring instead to go into retirement. Hitler is claimed to have then threatened to destroy a number of Italian cities and their inhabitants, thus forcing Mussolini to graciously reconsider the offer.

On September 23, 1943, the formation of the Italian Social Republic (RSI) was proclaimed with Benito Mussolini designated, once again, as its leader. Mussolini held the dual titles of prime minister and

THE BATTLE OF GARFAGNANA: Italy’s ‘Battle of the Bulge’

In December 1944, Mussolini succeeded at Garfagnana, Italy, while Hitler failed in the Ardennes—but neither grand offensive could forestall the inevitable. **BY JAMES BILDER**

Germans as “Operation Winter Storm” (*Unternehmen Wintergewitter*), the roots of the Battle of Garfagnana go back to Hitler’s rescue of Mussolini from captivity in September 1943 and the setting up of a puppet state in northern Italy.

The first half of 1943 had been disastrous for Mussolini and the Italian military. In February, what was left of the battered Italian troops fighting in the Soviet Union had to be withdrawn lest they be annihilated. By the end of May, the Anglo-American forces in North Africa had captured any Italians left stranded there, and by mid-July the Americans and British were advancing across Sicily.

The Italian people had reached their limit. The Italian Grand Council of Fascism approved a vote of “no confidence” against Il Duce around 2 a.m. on July 25, 1943. The vote of the council was 19-8 against the dictator. Mussolini’s son-in-law, Count Galeazzo Ciano, voted with the majority, an action for which he would pay with his life when Mussolini had him shot “for treason” the following January.

At first, Mussolini thought the vote meant nothing and went ahead with a scheduled meeting with King Victor Emmanuel III that same day. Following the meeting, the King had Mussolini taken into custody.

Mussolini was comfortably confined in an exclusive resort (Hotel Campo Imperatore) on the Gran Sasso massif in the Apennine Mountains when, on September 12, 1943, he was unceremoniously rescued (possibly even contrary to his desires) by German paratroop-

chief of state, but he and the RSI were both a complete farce, nothing more than puppets under Hitler’s control.

Rome was designated the titular capital of the RSI, but Mussolini did not dare go there—though Allied air attacks were a genuine concern, the greater threat would probably have been from his own citizens.

Instead, Mussolini was in a virtual state of house arrest in the Province of Brescia, in the de facto capital of Salo, in northern Italy. For that reason, the Italian Social Republic is often referred to as the Republic of Salo.

The fate of the Axis forces in Italy did not improve with any of these events. The day before Mussolini’s rescue by the Germans, Italy had changed sides, and Italian citizens, with the support of many Italian

military and partisans, were in full revolt against the Germans and any Italian military loyal to fascism.

The German/Italian Axis continued to lose its grip over Italy throughout 1943 and 1944. Despite the highly competent leadership of German Field Marshal “Smiling Albert” Kesselring and the spirited resistance of the Axis troops under his command, the Allies continued to claw their way slowly northward up the Italian peninsula.

Allied forces battling in Italy had to endure staggering casualties among their ranks, but still they managed, one by one, to break through the formidable defensive lines that were always quickly established by the retreating Axis forces whenever they were forced to give up ground.

Rome, declared an open city, fell to the Allies in June 1944—just two days before the Allied landings at Normandy. The outlook could hardly have been dimmer for Hitler and Mussolini; still, both dictators and their armies were determined to fight to the last.

As August 1944 drew to a close, the noose was tightening on all sides. On the Western Front, nearly all of France had been liberated, and Patton had almost reached the German border. To the east, the Red Army was at the gates of Warsaw, and, to the south, German and Italian troops of the RSI were dug in along the Gothic Line (renamed the “Green” Line by the Germans in June 1944) defending the northern section of Italy that was still under Mussolini’s control.

After the capture of Rome, the fighting in France took precedence over that in Italy, so the Allied high command had started to siphon off troops from Italy and send them to France. On the Italian front, this clearly reduced the combat effectiveness of Lt. Gen. Mark Clark’s Fifth U.S. Army (on the western flank of Italy) as well as that of Lt. Gen. Richard McCreery’s Eighth British Army (in the east of Italy). Still, the Allies pressed on with an offensive against the Gothic Line (Operation Olive) that began on August 25, 1944.

Here the Allies would encounter an Axis defensive line that was seemingly impreg-



ABOVE: Italian dictator Benito Mussolini (center) reviews his goose-stepping troops during a parade in Rome early in the war when fortunes were smiling on the Axis powers. **BELOW:** Mussolini poses with his German rescuers in front of the Gran Sasso resort hotel, September 1943, prior to being evacuated to meet Hitler in Austria. He would head a puppet government but was assassinated by Italian partisans in April 1945. **OPPOSITE:** Ancient Italians built cities on the peaks of the Apennines for defense. The Germans stretched their fortified Gothic Line across these peaks.



nable. The Gothic Line stretched from roughly La Spezia on the west coast, across the Apennine Mountains, all the way to Ravenna on the east coast. It held almost 500 artillery emplacements and just under 2,400 machine-gun nests. These were all connected by an elaborate trench system that was, in turn, protected by a jungle of barbed wire, numerous tank ditches, countless concrete bunkers, and a steep, stony terrain that was almost impossible for civilians to traverse in peacetime.

The Allies knew the Axis defenders would fight ferociously, and they did. Yet the American and British forces pressed forward and seemed to be within reach of breaking the Gothic Line. The lynchpin was Bologna, near center of the line. It appeared for a

while that a two-pronged attack there, carefully coordinated between the Anglo-American armies, might succeed in breaking the enemy's defenses.

Hopes rose on October 20, 1944, when the "Blue Devils" of the U.S. 88th Infantry Division captured Monte Grande, but that was as far as the U.S. Fifth Army could effectively go. Heavy casualties and the transfer of troops to France meant no reinforcement and, by October 28, the American drive simply ran out of steam.

The British fared only slightly better. The Eighth Army got as far as Faenza on December 17 before they, too, had to stop for the same reasons.

Winter weather, mountainous terrain, strong enemy defenses, and difficult logistics meant the Allies would have to wait for spring before continuing their assault on the Gothic Line. This is what Mussolini and his German overseers had been waiting and hoping for—a chance to strike back over the Christmas truce with a surprise counterattack.

Mussolini and his minister of defense, Field Marshal Rodolpho Graziani, had been pressing Kesselring for an offensive since early October. Graziani was a dedicated fascist and the only Marshal to remain loyal to Mussolini after he was deposed. Graziani believed in an Italian empire and had demonstrated his determination and ruthlessness in places like Libya and Ethiopia.

Mussolini wanted an offensive for obvious reasons. Like Hitler, he had delusions that the Axis could still win the war. By attacking southward, Mussolini hoped the Allied forces might be pushed out of Italy, or, short of that, enough room could be secured for the production and deployment of German "wonder weapons." If nothing else, it could buy him more time to keep his neck upright on his shoulders.

Axis generals were far more pragmatic. They had known, since the height of Operation Olive's drive in October, that they had to do something to take the pressure off Bologna. A successful drive south against either the British or Americans could accomplish that, while simultaneously boosting Axis morale and lowering that of the Allies.

There was also a chance to capture much-needed supplies such as weapons, ammunition, food, medicine, communications equipment, and even fuel. Finally, a successful push south would allow for the lines to be reconsolidated in a way even more favorable to the Axis defenders.

A series of fatal or near-fatal events among military leaders on both sides shifted com-

mands in Italy. First, on the Axis side, Field Marshal Kesselring was severely injured on October 23, 1944, when his staff car, driving at night under blackout conditions, ran into an artillery piece being towed along a narrow mountain road in the midst of a military traffic jam. It would be more than three months before he could return to duty.

The changes for the Allies began on December 15, 1944, with the death, from natural causes, of Field Marshal Sir John Dill in Washington, D.C. Dill was the Chief of the British Military Mission in Washington. Dill's replacement was General Henry Wilson, the Supreme Commander of Allied Forces in the Mediterranean. Wilson's position was filled by General (now Field Marshal) Harold Alexander, who had been commanding the 15th Army Group in Italy.

The elevations in command then affected the Americans, as General Mark Clark was promoted from commanding the U.S. Fifth Army to command of the 15th Army Group. Finally, command of Clark's Fifth Army went to General Lucian Truscott.

Truscott was an amazing soldier and commander. He had enlisted in the U.S. Army during World War I and falsified his



academic record, claiming that he had completed a year of college when in reality he had not even finished high school. He secured a spot in the officer's candidate school at Fort Logan Roots and was commissioned a second lieutenant and stationed along the Mexican border throughout the war.

Truscott was a "mustang"—a soldier who works his way up through the ranks without the benefit of graduating from a military academy. He performed admirably as commander of the 3rd Infantry Division during the invasion of Sicily and the fighting in Italy. He was given command of VI Corps in February 1944 during the Battle of Anzio; 14 months later he was promoted to command of the U.S. Fifth Army.

The Germans, too, had a new army commander, opposing the Americans on the west side of the Apennine Mountains. He was a man whose daring and luck, along with an ability to cheat death, were almost as impressive as his name. He was General Kurt Oskar Heinrich Ludwig Wilhelm von Tippelskirch, and on December 13, 1944, he assumed command of the German 14th Army, positioned on the north side of the Gothic Line directly across from Truscott's Fifth Army.

Unlike Truscott, Tippelskirch began his military career as an officer. He joined the German army cadet corps in 1910; when war broke out four years later, he was captured by the French in the first Battle of the Marne; the French held him for six years.

Tippelskirch held staff positions between the wars and, after Hitler's invasion of the U.S.S.R., took command of the 30th Infantry Division outside Leningrad as part of Army Group North. Tippelskirch distinguished himself at the Pola River when his division successfully blunted and then battered a Russian corps as it was about to breach the German lines. He was awarded the Knight's Cross for his actions.

When his division was among those encircled in the Demyansk Pocket during the winter of 1942, he was prepared to stay and fight until he was ordered to be flown out. He returned to Russia to fight at Stalingrad as the German liaison to the

Italian Eighth Army. He went on to both a Corps and Army command in Russia, but nothing could slow the Red Army's advance.

When the German forces were encircled at Minsk, his Fourth Army had been skillfully repositioned as far east as he could dare move it. That did not allow it to avoid encirclement, however, and eventual destruction, but Tippelskirch was fortunate enough to be in Germany at the time. Even there, he had a near-fatal air crash in July 1944. He was awarded an oak cluster to his Knight's Cross at month's end.

As the new commander of 14th Army, Tippelskirch had to make the decision as to where the joint Italian/German offensive would strike. It was not a difficult analysis for him to make. On the other side of the Gothic line, in a quiet sector, was the U.S. 92nd Infantry Division.

The U.S. Army was still racially segregated during World War II, and the 92nd Division was made up of mostly African-American troops. The 92nd had adopted the motto "Buffalo Soldiers" in 1917. It was a moniker that had been given to the black troopers of the 9th and 10th Cavalry Regiments during the Plains Wars by the Native Americans they fought. It was a respectful reference to the toughness the black troopers displayed in battle.

The 92nd was the only black infantry unit of the United States to fight in Europe, and their record is debated even today. They are generally regarded as having been poorly trained, poorly led, poorly regarded, and (not surprisingly) poorly performing.

They arrived in Italy in August of 1944 and participated in the Operation Olive Offensive. They did not demonstrate a high degree of aggressiveness, and their gains, while modest, were often quickly lost in counterattack.

Back in October, Mussolini and Graziani had hoped for a massive push involving 40,000 troops, massive armor, and air power; but Tippelskirch had limited time and



ABOVE: The 92nd's commanding officer, Maj. Gen. Edward Almond, inspects his troops, March 1945. He had a low opinion of Black soldiers and firmly believed that they were inferior to whites. He is quoted as saying, "No white man wants to be accused of leaving the battle line. The Negro doesn't care." **OPPOSITE:** A 92nd Division mortar squad fires their weapons near Massa, on Italy's west coast, November 1944.



few resources with which to mount a significant offensive. His force would consist of infantry equipped with small arms and some machine guns. There also would be some artillery units to provide support. There were no tanks or planes available, which made little difference since there was also no fuel available.

There were enough troops to form three columns for an attack: one German and two Italian divisions.

The first column would consist of German troops from the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the 285th Regiment of the 148th Infantry Division. These troops were mainly French “volunteers” from Alsace; most had been in the ranks since 1940. They were not highly regarded and were expected to show limited aggressiveness on the battlefield. Desertion rates were so high among this unit that Italian mountain troops had to be dispensed on November 26 and 27 to keep the remainder of the regiment in the ranks at gunpoint.

The second column would be made up of Italian troops. The majority would come from the 4th “Monte Rosa” (Alpine) Division. The units included were the 3rd Battalion of the 1st Regiment, the 1st Battalion of the 2nd Regiment, and the 23rd Reconnaissance Unit.

The Monte Rosa Division consisted of volunteers from the north of Italy, loyal fascist Italians who had made their way north at the time of the Italian armistice, as well as some Italian POWs being held by the Germans. The Monte Rosa Division was trained in Germany and sent to Italy in July 1944. Their original mission had been to prepare coastal defenses against American amphibious landings, but they had spent most of their time fighting partisans. By December, the division’s original strength of 20,000 troops had been reduced by roughly half due to casualties and desertions.

The rest of the Italian troops came from the 3rd “San Marco” (Marine) Division—specifically, the 2nd Battalion of its 6th Regiment. This division was made up of formal naval personnel along with volunteers from northern Italy. Like the Monte Rosa, the San Marco had been trained in Germany, sent back to Italy to prepare coastal defenses, and ended up having their primary mission converted to fighting partisans.

Also, like Monte Rosa, the San Marco Division was also plagued by low morale and desertions. Still, it should be noted that the remaining troops of these Italian units had fought well and remained in the ranks because of their devotion to the cause.

The third and final column was made up primarily of Austrians. It consisted of the 4th Battalion (Mountain Troops) of the 148th Infantry Division, the “Mittengewald” (Mountain) Battalion, also from the 148th Infantry Division, and finally, the Kesselring Machine-Gun Battalion of the 148th Division. Like the Monte Rosa Division, the Germans’ 148th Division was also understrength.

The Austrians were an elite group, highly trained and well experienced. Like the Italians participating in this offensive, they could be counted on to fight. The combined force in these three columns totaled some 9,100 men (about two-thirds of whom were Italian). The Axis force was about half the total number of Americans in the 92nd Infantry Division facing them on the other side of the Gothic Line.

The artillery supporting the Axis Christmas Offensive totaled around 100 pieces and came from the 51st Artillery Regiment (Motorized) and the 1048th Artillery Regiment. It consisted of a single 155mm battery, three 105mm batteries, two 75mm batteries, an 88mm anti-aircraft group, and mortars.

Overall command of the Axis attack would go to German General Otto Fretter

92nd Division troops fire a bazooka at a German machine-gun nest prior to attacking near Altopascio, Tuscany, September 1944.



Pico, the commander of the 148th (Reserve) Division. He was a career officer who'd fought in the First World War, and in the Second he'd held combat commands in Poland, France, and Russia. His list of decorations was extensive, including the Knight's Cross.

Tactical field command would go to Italian General Mario Carloni, the commander of the Monte Rosa Division. Carloni, too, fought in both world wars. His service in World War II included Greece and Russia, where he had a son killed in action in 1942. After the Italian armistice, he was briefly held by the Germans but was freed when he expressed his desire to join Mussolini's RSI army. It was Carloni who advocated strongly for a major offensive as early as October 20, 1944, when he met with Lt. General Walter Jost, who commanded the 42nd Jäger (Light Infantry) Division.

The Axis commanders decided to take advantage of the Christmas truce and jump off shortly after midnight on December 26. Their primary objective was to drive the Americans back as far as possible and perhaps even retake Lucca and the strategic port at Livorno. Their plans were not a

complete secret to Allied commanders; German messages encoded through Ultra and sent back and forth to Italy were intercepted by the Allies and revealed enough for Clark and Truscott to know that something was coming their way.

The area held by the 92nd Division was a somewhat obvious target, as the division was inexperienced and had not shown a very aggressive spirit when on the offensive. Truscott immediately transferred the 2nd Brigade of the 8th Indian Division, along with the 337th and 339th Regiments from the U.S. 85th Infantry Division, to IV Corps to bolster the area. His timing could not have been more opportune.

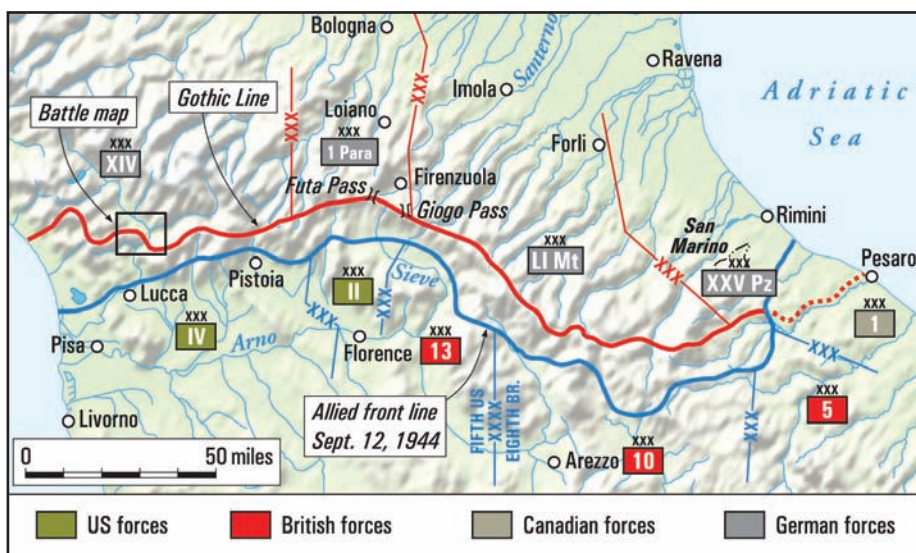
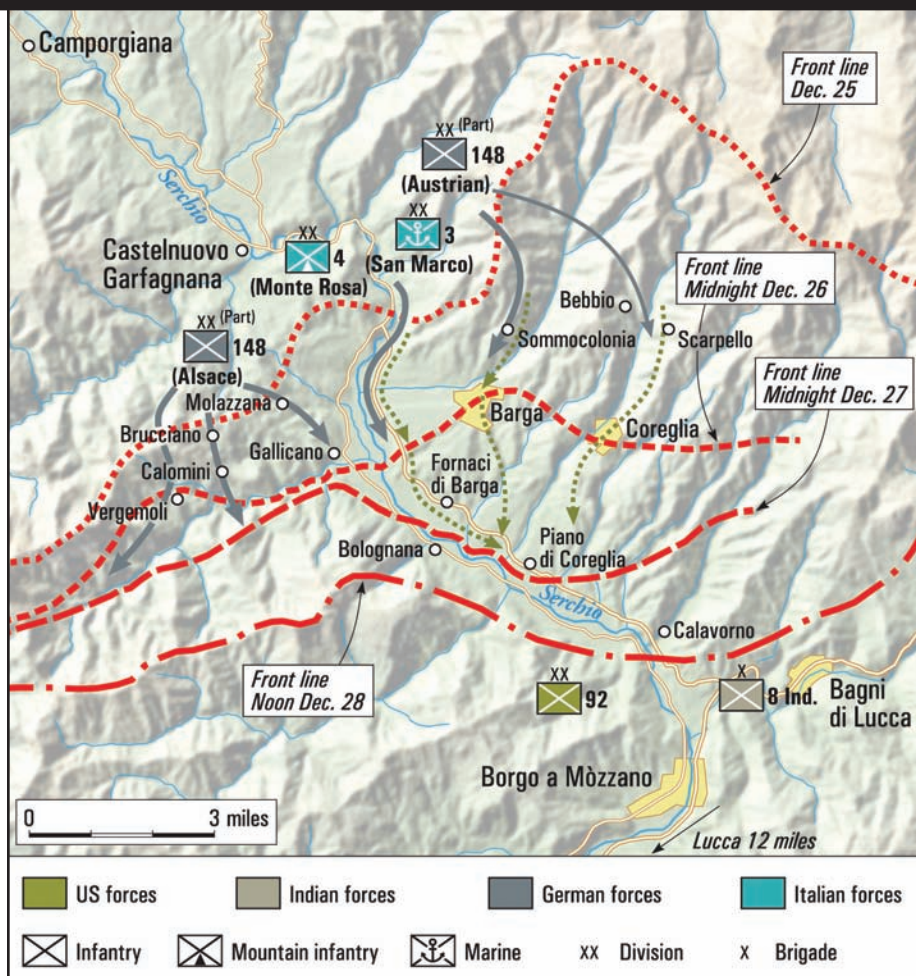
The 92nd Division was commanded by Major General Edward Almond. Almond was a native of Virginia and had graduated from the Virginia Military Institute prior to the United States' entry into WWI. He had fought at the Argonne in 1918, where he was wounded, and also awarded a Citation Star (these were converted to Silver Star medals by Act of Congress in 1932).

Almond taught military science at the Marion Military Institute in Alabama and infantry tactics at Fort Benning, where he became friends with George C. Marshall, the Army Chief of Staff and a fellow VMI alumnus.

Almond received additional training at both the Army and Navy War Colleges, worked in military intelligence, and seemed well prepared for a significant combat command. Because of Marshall, Almond moved from brigadier to lieutenant general ahead of many of his peers. He was given command of the 92nd Infantry Division as soon as it was activated on October 15, 1942, and held that command until war's end.

Almond made no secret of his beliefs that black soldiers were inherently inferior to their white counterparts. He did not appear to believe that the 92nd would be a highly effective infantry division, and his attitudes and command decisions seemed to play no small role in making his beliefs something of a self-fulfilling prophecy.

As the day of battle approached, Almond had 18,000 men, mobile guns, and armor holding a six-mile line that started in the Serchio River Valley and extended westward to the Ligurian Sea.



ABOVE: The Germans' "Gothic Line" defenses stretched the width of Italy. The 92nd Division was positioned along the far western end. TOP: The Battle of Garfagnana, known to the Germans as Operation Winter Storm and nicknamed the "Christmas Offensive," was a successful Axis offensive against American forces on the western sector of the Gothic Line, December 1944.

The Axis could not conceal their troop movements from Italian partisans and Allied air reconnaissance, so they had been sending out false messages that an attack in the Serchio Valley was set for December 10. Almond responded with extensive field works

that included minefields and trenches complete with barbed wire.

When the date came and went without an attack, Almond issued an order that would prove to be both contrary and confusing. The 92nd Division, along with the rest of IV Corps, was already preparing to launch their own offensive on Christmas Day. Almond ordered his division to be on alert and patrol in anticipation of an enemy attack. Division officers weren't certain whether their mission was to prepare for offense or defense.

Meanwhile, the Axis geared up for their offensive. Defense Minister Graziani and General Carloni paid a visit to the troops of the Monte Rosa Division, who would be expected to do the lion's share of the fighting. The German offensive in the Ardennes was well underway, and thus the awaited offensive in Italy was not long in coming.

On Christmas Eve, word came down to the 92nd Division that the Allied offensive for Christmas was canceled. The directive was to prepare for an enemy attack expected on December 27.

A sigh of relief must have gone through the ranks—the men could enjoy Christmas Day and even have the day after to prepare their defenses. Unfortunately for the men of the 92nd Division, Allied intelligence had missed the mark by 24 hours and it would cost them.

The Axis did not want to forewarn the Americans of an attack by opening with an artillery bombardment, so at 3 a.m. on December 26, the code word to initiate the attack, "Gustav" was issued. The Austrians of the German left flank (3rd Column) moved up quietly out of the fog and darkness, and by 4:50 a.m. began their assault against Sommocolonia on the east side of the Serchio River.

The area was garrisoned by elements of Fox Company of the 2nd Battalion of the 366th Regiment along with some Italian partisans. Axis officers commented after the battle that while the 92nd may not have demonstrated much determination on offense, they were very tenacious on defense. The fighting lasted most of the day and was only resolved when the Aus-

trians finally called for artillery support. Only 18 Americans were able to successfully withdraw; the rest of their outfit was now either KIA or POW.

There was no love lost between Axis troops and partisans of any type, but on this occasion the tactics of the partisans (mostly communists) were equal to Nazi standards. The partisans were using the civilians at Sommocolonia as human shields; once, when an Austrian fired through a door at a partisan, the bullet took the life of a four-year-old child.

The “Mittenwald” Machine-Gun Battalion (around 200 strong) moved further south and quickly seized the villages of Carpelo and Bebbio from the 92nd Recon Troop, which retreated to the south. The Austrians pressed on and began to assault the strategic garrison at Barga, which was being defended by the 2nd Battalion of the 366th Regiment, at about 2 p.m.

The defenders would fight all through that day but, as night approached, they fell back in disarray, leaving a 500-yard gap that the enemy used to seize Barga and then Coreglia to the southeast. The Austrians had made some small diversionary attacks to their west earlier in the day, but the Americans quickly recognized these as a ruse since the Germans quickly fell back whenever challenged there.

This was as far as the Austrian troops needed to advance in order to secure the Axis left flank, and that would allow the Italians in the center to make the main thrust of the attack.

By dawn of the 26th, there was no element of surprise left to be had, so the Italian sector in the center and the Alsatian sector on the right opened up on the American defenders south of Castelnuovo di Garfagnana with an artillery barrage consisting primarily of mortars while the Monte Rosa Division had heavy artillery support, as well.

The Alsatians encountered only light resistance and, under the watchful eyes of Italian supervision, quickly took Fornaci; but the Italians cursed the Alsatians for their obvious failure to seize and press the initiative against the poorly organized American defenders.

The center of the attack proved to be the most difficult for the Axis. The Americans were falling back, but their withdrawal was more organized and costlier to the attackers. By nightfall, the Italians were in Galicano and Molazanna, but they were repulsed with heavy losses at Brucciano, which they assaulted with troops from their regimental headquarters.



ABOVE: Young POWs from the Monte Rosa Division appear to be relieved at having deserted from their unit. They wear distinctive “alpini” hats common to Italian mountain troops. **TOP:** A wounded 92nd Division soldier is carried down the steep slope of a mountain in the Serchio Valley. The rugged terrain made the transporting of supplies and wounded a difficult chore. **OPPOSITE:** At the same time the Allies were dealing with German attacks far to the north in Belgium and Luxembourg, the Germans struck with their Christmas Offensive in Italy. Here American tanks pull back south of Ghivizzano to establish a new line of resistance, December 27, 1944.



The Italians were far from beaten, though, and went on to occupy Calomini, which then put the Americans of the 370th Regiment, defending Vergemoli, in danger of being encircled.

Vergemoli had a minefield as its forward defense, and American artillery was raining down fire on the Italians as they tried to cross it. In addition, the American defenders and some partisans were putting up a stubborn defense despite being hit by enemy artillery. In the end, the Americans finally had to slip out, leaving the partisans to cover their withdrawal.

Vergemoli fell to the determined Italians, but the victory was somewhat pyrrhic, the losses in men simply could not be replaced. The attackers had penetrated roughly 10 kilometers behind the American lines across a front that was almost 25 kilometers wide, but there were more advances yet to come.

On the morning of December 27, the Italians pressed forward and took Bolognana while the Germans had patrols on the outskirts of Calavorno, where the Americans were reported to be in full retreat. The Austrians took Fornaci di Barga without a fight, as it had already been abandoned by the retreating Americans, and then secured Piano di Coreglia, which was the last of their designated objectives.

Small Axis units continued to move south all the way to Bagni di Lucca. Axis scouts at the most forward positions again reported that the Americans were in full retreat. Even so, this was as far as the Axis offensive could proceed.

Like the Allies before them, the Axis simply ran out of steam. There were simply no more men—no reserves with which to press forward, and no reinforcements with which to hold on to captured ground.

The attackers would be facing fresh troops from the U.S. 1st Armored Division, the 34th and 85th Infantry Divisions, and the 8th Indian Infantry Division of the British Army. If that weren't enough, the skies had cleared and P-47s fighter-bombers from the XXII Tactical Air Command could now attack Axis forces at will.

Over 4,000 sorties were flown by a variety of Allied planes. The bombing was so extensive that civilian casualties ran high, and even an Axis hospital at Camporgiano, which was caring for the wounded of both sides, was hit.

On the night of December 28, General Fretter Pico was forced to give the order to fall back. It was an organized withdrawal; although skirmishes took place all along the lines, the Allies—under the command of the Eighth Indian Division—failed to press their pursuit of the retreating enemy.

There was a noteworthy clash at the Sergio River between the retreating troops of the San Marco Division and those of the pursuing Eighth Indian Division. The Indian troops were not as well trained or experienced as their Italian counterparts and were forced to disengage after the Italians knocked out two of their tanks. By New Year's Eve, the Axis forces were essentially back to where they had started.

Allied figures for the battle put the number of KIA and POWs at around 1,000 men for each side. Italian historians claim their casualty rates were only half that number.

The desires of Mussolini and Graziani to continue the attack were as deluded as Hitler's after the Battle of the Bulge; unlike the Ardennes, though, the Christmas Offensive in Italy did not hasten the eventual defeat of the Axis forces there, but

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War Through an ARTIST'S EYES

Combat Artist Howard Brodie witnessed the stark reality of combat and drew what he saw.

BY HOWARD BRODIE



Newspaper artist Howard Brodie enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1942, soon joining the combat artist program. He was sent by Yank magazine to capture his impressions of the war with a pencil during the Guadalcanal campaign and then the fighting in Europe. One observer of his work wrote, "By capturing emotions on the field with fluid lines and attention to detail, Brodie's work is honest and at times, harrowing, but this honesty established him as one of the top news artists of his time.

In February 1945, he had been assigned by Yank to accompany K Company, 406th Regiment, 102nd Infantry "Ozark" Division, as they approached Germany's Roer River. This is his report.



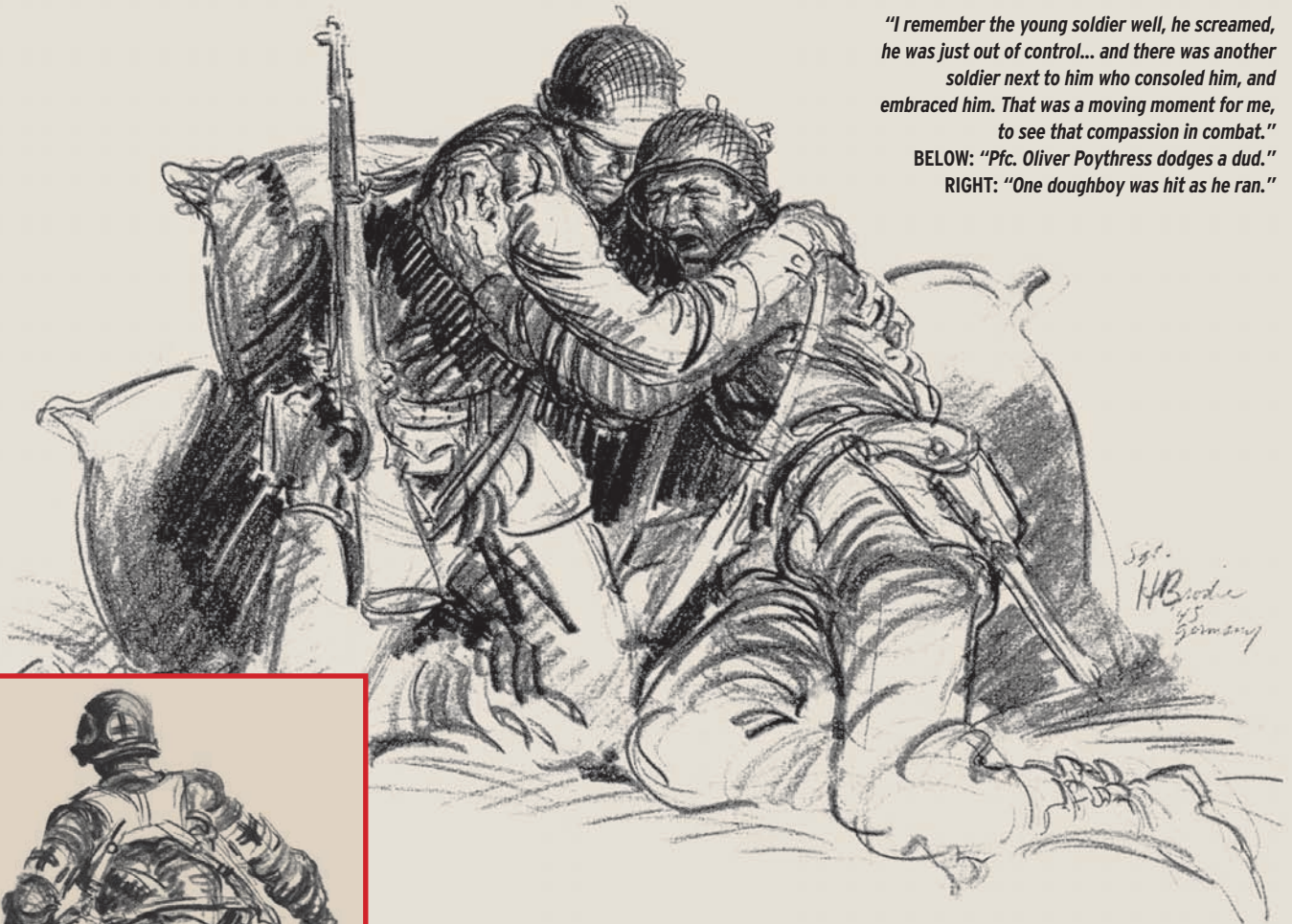
I felt every one of us sweated it out as we went to sleep that night. At 0245 our barrage awoke us, but we stayed in our sacks until 0440. After hot chow we saddled our packs and headed for an assembly area in a wrecked town about five miles away. It was a silent company of men spaced on either side of the road—the traditional soldier picture of silhouettes against the crimson flashes of shells bursting on the enemy lines in the distance.

In the assembly town, we waited in the shattered rooms of a crumbling building. It was not pleasant waiting, because a dead cow stank in an adjoining room. We shoved off at daylight and came to gutted Rurdorf. I remember passing crucifixes and a porcelain pee pot on the rubble-laden road and pussy willows as we came to the river. A pool of blood splotted the side of the road. We crossed the Roer on a pontoon bridge and

Brodie illustrated the massacre at Malmedy from accounts of survivors: "The outfit was put into one group and a German officer searched us for wrist watches and took our gloves and cigarettes.... We were marched into an open field about 100 feet from the road where German tanks were moving by. There were about 150 of us, counting officers and medics. We all stood there with our hands up when a German officer in a command vehicle shot a medical officer and one enlisted man.... Then the MGs on the tanks opened up on the group..."

"I remember the young soldier well, he screamed, he was just out of control... and there was another soldier next to him who consoled him, and embraced him. That was a moving moment for me, to see that compassion in combat."

BELOW: "Pfc. Oliver Poythress dodges a dud."
RIGHT: "One doughboy was hit as he ran."



red crosses, they resembled crusaders. In another group were a couple of German females, one of them in uniform. Mines like cabbages lay on either side of the road.

We entered the town of Tetz and set up the CP in a cellar. Two platoons went forward a few hundred yards to high ground overlooking the town and dug in. We were holding the right flank of the offensive finger. Several enemy shells burst in the town. Some tracers shot across the road between the CP and the dug-in platoons, seemingly below knee-level. Night fell.

The CP picked up reports like a magnet: "The Jerries are counterattacking up the road with 40 Tiger tanks...." "The Jerries are attacking with four medium tanks." Stragglers reported in from forward companies. One stark-faced squad leader had lost most of his squad. The wounded were outside, the dead to the left of our platoon holes. It was raining. I went to sleep.

The next day, I went to our forward platoons. I saw a dough bailing his hole out with his canteen cup ... saw our planes dive-bomb Jerry in the distance ... saw our fire burst on Jerry, and white phosphorous and magenta smoke bombs. I saw platoon leader Lieutenant Joe Lane playing football with a cabbage.

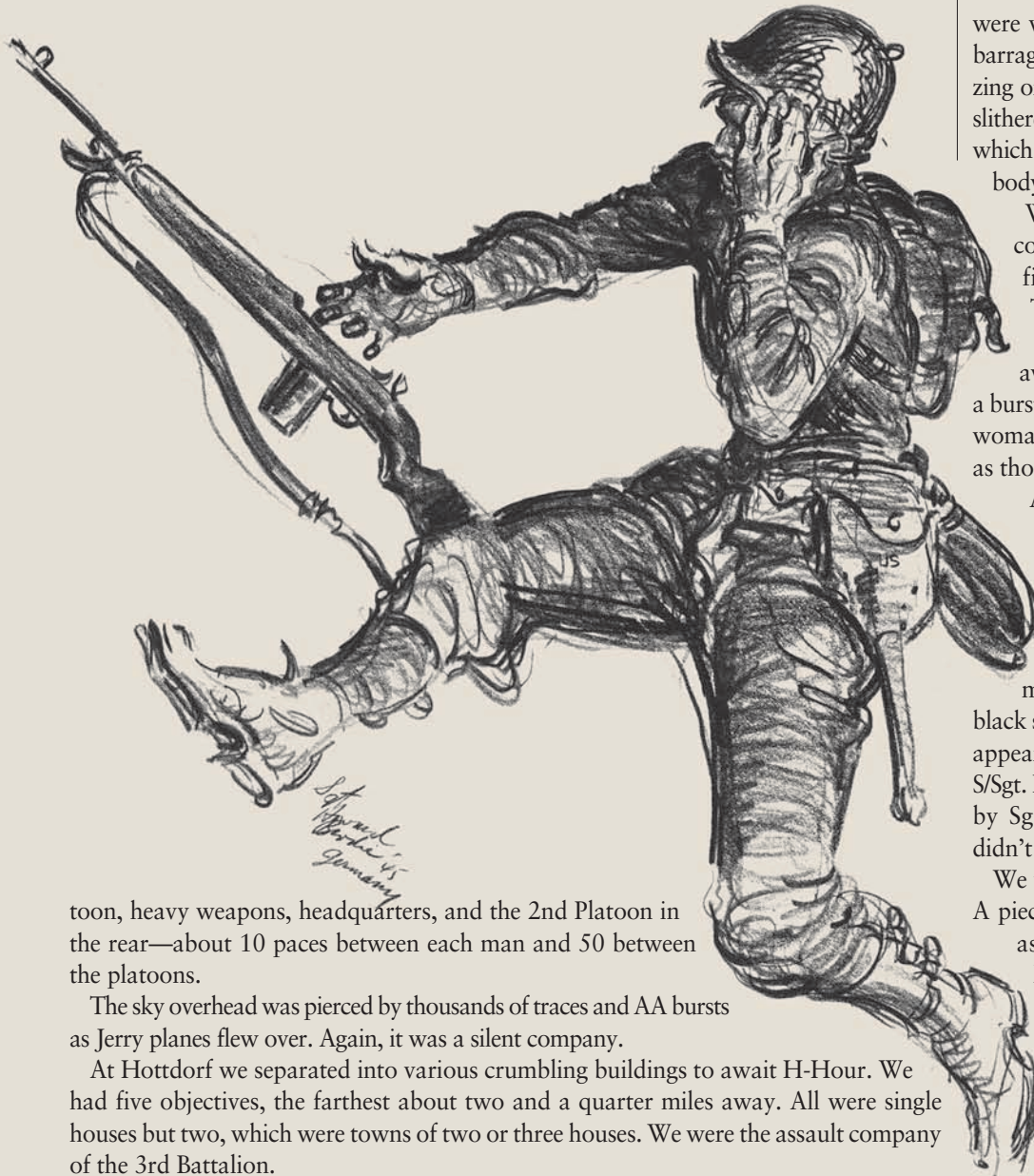
I saw a dead GI in his hole slumped in his last living position—the hole was too deep and too narrow to allow his body to settle. A partially smoked cigarette lay inches from his mouth, and a dollar-sized circle of blood on the earth offered the only evidence of violent death.

Night fell and I stayed in the platoon CP hole. We didn't stay long, because word came through that we would move up to the town of Hottdorf, the forward position on the offensive finger, preparatory to jumping off at 0910.

K Company lined up in the starlit night—the CO, the 1st Platoon, MGs, the 3rd Pla-

moved on. The forward elements were still ahead of us a few miles.

We passed a still doughboy [U.S. soldier] with no hands on the side of the road; his misshapen, ooze-filled mittens lay a few feet from him. Knots of prisoners walked by us with their hands behind their heads. One group contained medics. In their knee-length white sacks, emblazoned with



toon, heavy weapons, headquarters, and the 2nd Platoon in the rear—about 10 paces between each man and 50 between the platoons.

The sky overhead was pierced by thousands of traces and AA bursts as Jerry planes flew over. Again, it was a silent company.

At Hottdorf we separated into various crumbling buildings to await H-Hour. We had five objectives, the farthest about two and a quarter miles away. All were single houses but two, which were towns of two or three houses. We were the assault company of the 3rd Battalion.

H-Hour was approaching. A shell burst outside the window, stinging a couple of men and ringing our ears. We huddled on the floor.

It was time to move now. The 1st Platoon went out on the street followed by the MGs and the 3rd Platoon and the rest of us. We passed through doughs in houses on either side of the street. They wisecracked and cheered us on. We came to the edge of town and onto a broad, rolling field. The 3rd and 1st Platoons fanned out in front of us. Headquarters group stayed in the center.

I followed in the footsteps of Pfc. Joe Esz, the platoon runner. He had a light aluminum case upon which I could easily focus the corner of my eye to keep my position and still be free to observe. Also, I felt that if I followed in his footsteps I would not have to look down at the ground for mines. He turned to me and commented on how beautifully the company was moving, properly fanned and well-spaced.

Several hundred yards away I noticed Jerries running out of gun position waving a white flag. A black puff of smoke a few hundred yards to my right caught my attention, then another closer. I saw some men fall on the right flank. The black puffs crept in. There

were whistles and cracks in the air and a barrage of 88s burst around us. I heard the zing of shrapnel as I hugged the earth. We slithered into the enemy 88 position from which I had seen the prisoners run. Somebody threw a grenade into the dugout.

We moved on. Some prisoners and a couple of old women ran out onto the field from a house. Objective One.

There was the zoom and crack of 88s again. A rabbit raced wildly away to the left. We went down. I saw a burst land in the running Jerries. One old woman went down on her knees in death, as though she was picking flowers.

A dud landed three feet in front of T/Sgt. Jim McCauley, the platoon sergeant, spraying him with dirt.

Another ricocheted over Pfc. Wes Malden, the 300 radio operator. I looked to the right flank and saw a man floating in the air amidst the black smoke of an exploding mine. He disappeared just in front of the squad leader, S/Sgt. Elwin Miller. A piece of flesh slobbered by Sgt. Fred Wilson's face. Some men didn't get up.

We went on. A couple of men vomited. A piece of shrapnel cut a dough's throat as neatly as Jack the Ripper might have done it.

The right flank was getting some small-arms fire. I was so tired from running and going down that it seemed as though my sartorius muscles would not function. The 300 radio wouldn't work and we couldn't get fire on those 88s. Pfc. George Linton went back through that barrage to get another [radio] from Hottdorf. Medic Oliver Poythress was working on wounded in that barrage.

Objective Two loomed ahead—a large building enclosing a courtyard. Cowshed, stables, toolshed, hayloft, living quarters opened on the inner court. I saw an 88 explode over the arched entrance.

We filtered into the courtyard and into the surrounding rooms. The executive officer started to reorganize the company. The platoons came in. First Sgt. Dick Wardlow tried to make a casualty list. A plan of

"We passed a still doughboy on the side of the road with no hands, his misshapen, ooze-filled mittens a few feet from him."



defense was decided on for the building. A large work horse broke out from the stable and lumbered lazily around the courtyard. T-4 Melvin Fredell, the FO radio operator, lay in the courtyard relaying artillery orders. An 88 crashed into the roof. The cows in their shed pulled on their ropes. One kicked a sheep walking around in a state of confusion.

A dying GI lay in the tool room; his face was a leathery yellow. A wounded GI lay with him. Another wounded dough lay on his belly in the cowshed, in the stench of dung and decaying beets, and another GI quietly said he could take no more. A couple of doughs started frying eggs in the kitchen. I went into the toolshed to the dying dough.

"He's cold, he's dead," said Sgt. Charles Turpen, the MG squad leader. I took off my glove and felt his head, but my hand was so cold he felt warm. A medic told me he was dead.

Lt. Bob Clark organized his company and set up defense. FO Philip Dick climbed the rafters of the hayloft to report our artillery bursts. The wounded dough in the cowshed sobbed for more morphine. Four of us helped to carry him to bed in another room. He was belly down and pleased for someone to hold him by the groin as we carried him: "I can't stand it. Press them up, it'll give me support." A pool of blood lay under him.

I went to the cowshed to take a nervous leak. A shell hit, shaking the roof; I ducked down and found I was seeking shelter with two calves. I crossed the courtyard to the grain shed, where about 60 doughs were huddled.

Tank fire came in now. I looked up and saw MG tracers rip through the brick walls. A tank shell hit the wall and the roof. A brick landed on the head of the boy next to me. We couldn't see for the cloud of choking dust. Two doughs had their arms around each other; one was sobbing. More MG tracers ripped through the wall, and another shell. I squeezed between several bags of grain. Doughs completely disappeared in a hay pile.

We got out of there, and our tanks joined us. I followed a tank, stepping in its treads. The next two objectives were taken by platoons on my right, and I don't remember whether any 88s came in for this next quarter mile or not. One dough was too exhausted to make it.

We were moving up to our final objective now—a very large building, also enclosing a courtyard, in a small town. Jerry planes were overhead but for some reason did not strafe. Our tanks spewed the town with fire and led the way. Black bursts from Jerry time-fire exploded over our heads this time.

We passed Jerry trenches and a barbed-wire barrier. Lt. Lane raced to a trench. A Jerry pulled a cord, setting off a circle of mines around him, but he was only sprayed with mud. S/Sgt. Eugene Flanagan shot at the Jerry, who jumped up and surrendered with two others.

Jerries streamed out of the large house. Women came out, too. An 88 and mortars



came in. I watched Pfc. Bob de Vaslk and Pfc. Ted Sanchez bring out prisoners from the basement, with Pfc. Ernie Gonzalez helping.

We made a CP in the cellar. The wounded were brought down. Stray Jerries were rounded up and brought to the rear. Jittery doughs relaxed for a moment on the beds in the basement. Pfc. Frank Pasek forgot he had a round in his BAR and frayed our nerves by letting one go into the ceiling.

A pretty Jerry girl with no shoes on came through the basement. Doughs were settling down now. The CO started to prepare a defense for a counterattack. Platoons went out to dig in. L and M Companies came up to sustain part of our gains.

Most of us were too tired to do much. The battalion CO sent word he was relieving us. All of us sweated out going back over the field, although this time we would go back a sheltered way. We were relieved and uneventfully returned to a small town. The doughs went out into the rain on the outskirts and dug in. A few 88s came into the town.

Early the next morning, K Company returned to its former position in the big house with the courtyard as the final objective. Just when I left, Jerry started counterattacking with four tanks and a company of men. □

This article by Howard Brodie originally appeared in Yank magazine, Vol. 3, Number 43, April 13, 1945.



Artist Howard Brodie awarded Bronze Star for valor.

In his obituary of the artist (Brodie died in 2010 at age 94), William Grimes of the *Boston Globe* wrote: "Mr. Brodie was a staff artist at the *San Francisco Chronicle* when he enlisted in the Army during World War II. He was sent to the South Pacific as a combat artist, and covered the last days of the Guadalcanal campaign.

"He never carried a weapon, but he came under fire on several occasions, and worked as a medic when needed. He was awarded the Bronze Star Medal for valor.

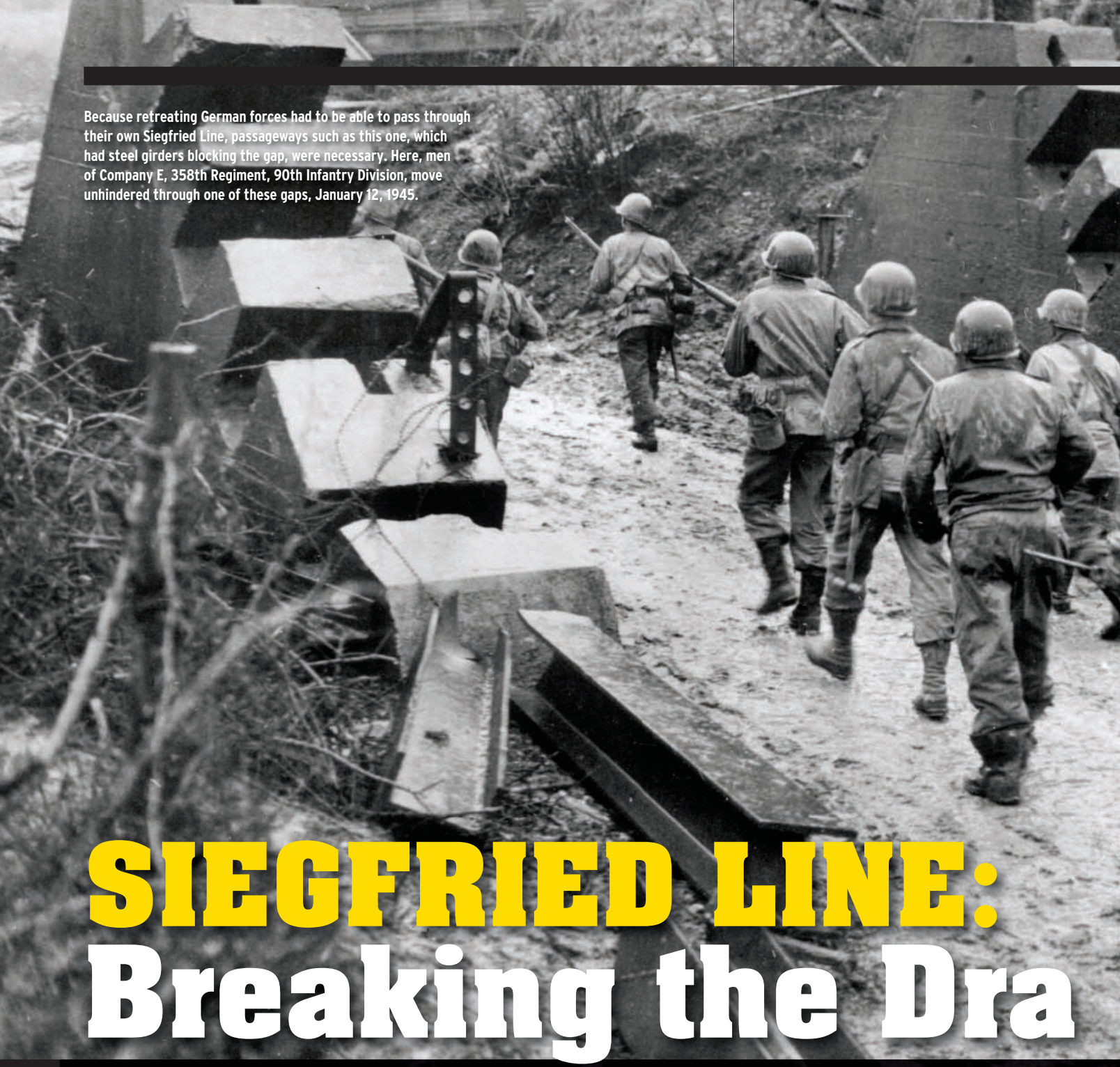
"A strong draftsman, he conveyed the drama of

men under fire as well as routine life in the field.

"After being assigned to the European theater, he sketched his way with the troops through France, Belgium, and Germany. His work was featured prominently in *Yank*, the Army's weekly publication.

"After the war, he rejoined the *Chronicle*, which sent him to cover the Korean War. As an artist for Associated Press and *Collier's* magazine, he accompanied French Foreign Legion troops to Indochina. He would return to cover the war in Vietnam."

—Flint Whitlock



Because retreating German forces had to be able to pass through their own Siegfried Line, passageways such as this one, which had steel girders blocking the gap, were necessary. Here, men of Company E, 358th Regiment, 90th Infantry Division, move unhindered through one of these gaps, January 12, 1945.

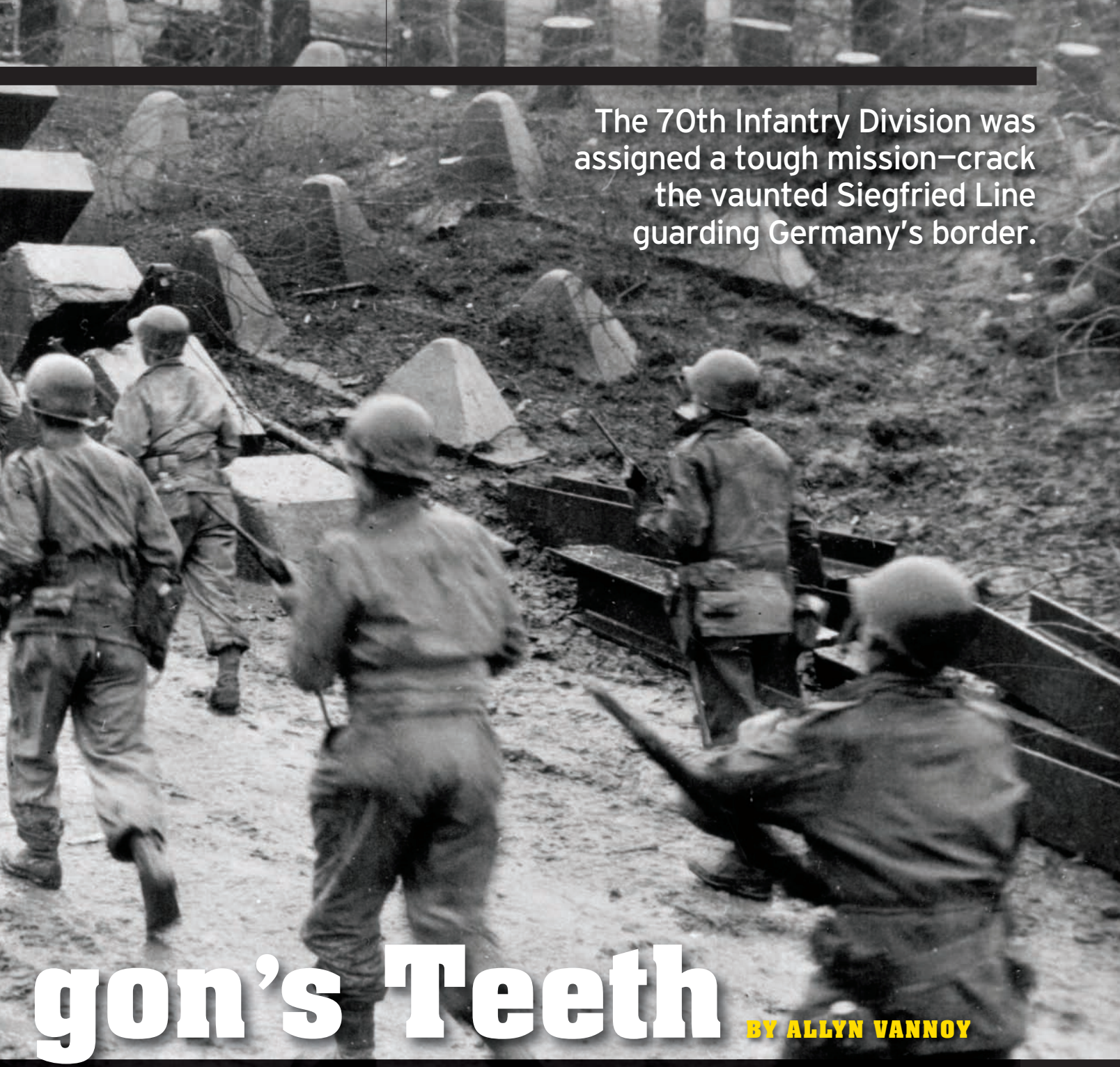
SIEGFRIED LINE: Breaking the Dra

As the battalion officers surveyed the terrain before them, they must have been worried about the men who would have to cross it—the 300 yards of open ground to the banks of the Saar River lined with barbed-wire, concrete pillboxes, anti-vehicle “dragon’s teeth,” and reinforced with minefields in depth known as the Westwall or, more commonly, the “Siegfried Line.”

In March 1945, the Third Reich was under tremendous pressure as the Western Allies, having survived the Battle of the Bulge, were bulldozing toward Berlin.

Moving across the northeast corner of France toward the Rhine River, Lt. Gen. Alexander Patch’s Seventh U.S. Army was operating on the right (southern) flank of George Patton’s Third Army. The 70th Infantry Division, part of the Seventh Army’s XXI Corps, faced the Siegfried Line from Saarbrücken down to the Rhine River at Lauterbourg.

The Seventh Army’s Operation Undertone called for all three of its corps to move against the line. The main effort was to be made by XV Corps, in the center, at Zweibrücken, some 20 miles east of Saarbrücken. The XXI Corps, on the left, and VI Corps, on the right flank of Seventh Army, were to provide support. The 70th’s job was



The 70th Infantry Division was assigned a tough mission—crack the vaunted Siegfried Line guarding Germany's border.

gon's Teeth

BY ALLYN VANNOY

to exert pressure on Saarbrücken's defenders, keeping them in place.

Formed in 1943 at Camp Adair, Oregon, the 70th Infantry Division adopted the nickname "Trailblazers," with a shoulder patch showing an ax head over a mountain and an evergreen tree. The division had only arrived in the ETO in mid-December 1944, by way of Marseille, France; in January, it helped blunt the Germans' Operation Nordwind in the Alsace-Lorraine region.

The villages south of the Saar River, to be assaulted by the 70th Division, represented the outer defenses of Germany's fortified Westwall. The line, which had been started in 1936 by Nazi Germany's Organisation Todt, the same engineering-construction group that had built the autobahns, stretched 390 miles—from Germany's border with Holland

to Switzerland. Hundreds of thousands of forced laborers worked on the line that Hitler was sure would be impregnable.

Saarbrücken, Germany, on the border with France, was the hub of the line along the 70th Division's sector to the front. The 70th's 274th Infantry Regiment, in the center of the division front, and the 276th Infantry, on the left flank, were to push the enemy back beyond the Saar, using direct

fire to deal with pillboxes and bunkers, and then make an assault crossing.

High command pressed Major General Allison Barnett, the 70th's commander, to attack without delay. Barnett passed the order to Colonel Samuel Conley, 274th Infantry commander, who in turn selected Lt. Col. Fred Cantrell's 1st Battalion to lead the 274th in its attack. An advance beyond the Saar depended on cracking the Westwall and securing the highway to Metz as part of a strategic route into the Reich.

On March 9, Sergeant Patrick Barry, A Company, 274th Infantry Regiment, informed Sergeant Clyde W. Hill that their platoon had orders to move forward from the French town of Stiring-Wendel, about five miles southwest of Saarbrücken, until they made contact with the enemy; if they ran into a delaying force, they were to continue on until they had encountered enough to stop them.

Their platoon left Stiring-Wendel at 2 a.m. equipped with an SCR-300 radio—a back-pack-mounted unit called a “walkie talkie”—with orders to contact company headquarters every 30 minutes. They moved past the Simon Mine, a large ore-processing complex, and advanced to the edge of the woods. When they radioed this information back to A Company headquarters, they were told that the regiment had issued orders for them to keep moving as fast as possible.

By this time Sergeant Hill and his platoon were well in front of the rest of the company. They advanced through woods, barbed-wire entanglements, and around abandoned German positions. They finally stopped at daybreak.

Once the rest of A Company had caught up, the platoons formed skirmish lines—3rd Platoon to the right, 1st on the left, with 2nd in support. The 3rd Platoon had advanced about 400 yards when its scouts spotted German troops on the distant banks of the Saar. The Americans dug in and kept their eyes on the enemy.

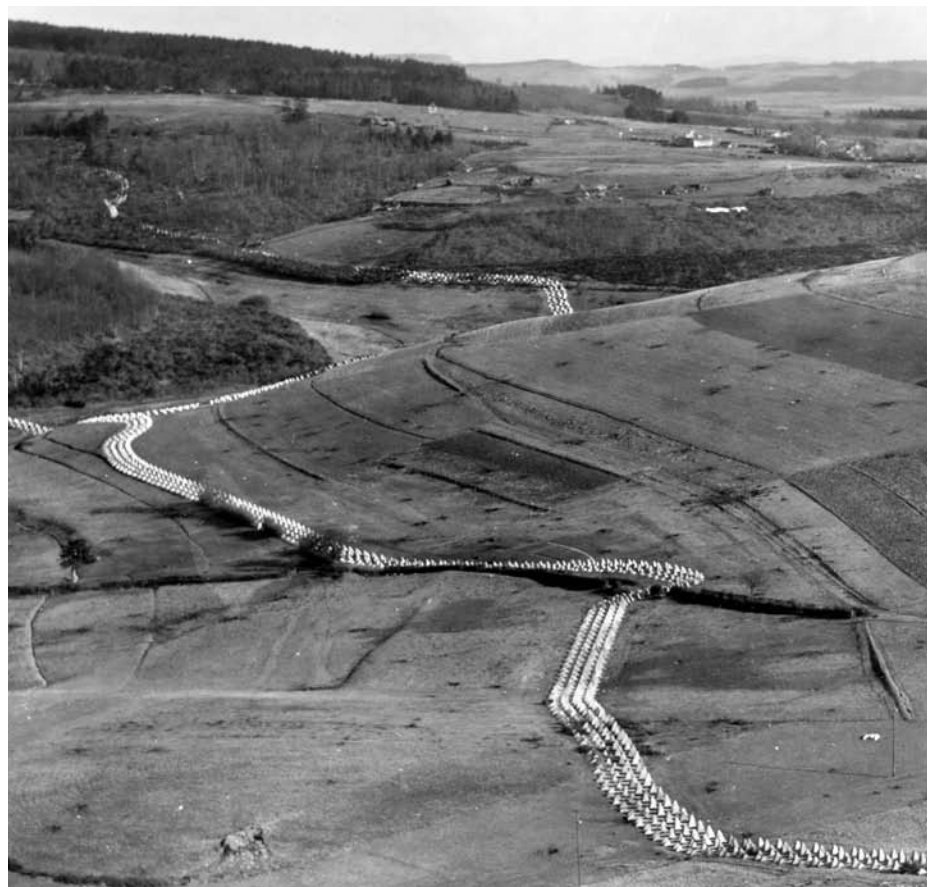
Meanwhile, the 3rd Platoon, B Company, had had orders to move to positions on the forward slope of the ridge just to the right of Stiring-Wendel overlooking the

Metz Highway. They moved out at dusk in a squad column on the road leading into Stiring-Wendel, turned off on a curve, and proceeded out onto the ridge through the woods where they dug in.

While placing his men, Sergeant Edward Dunn told Privates James Moore and Vince DiFano to take a position in a former German trench. Moore jumped in the trench and landed on something soft. Moore told DiFano he thought it was a pile of trash. He felt around and caught hold of a foot, and then, seeing what it was, dropped it. He came bolting out, telling DiFano that they should move away as there was a dead soldier there.

Houses on the outskirts of Saarbrücken could be seen far off in front of B Company. Nearer to their right front, to the right of the town of Habsterdick, halfway between Saarbrücken and Stiring-Wendel, was a thick pine forest. Immediately in front of their positions ran the Metz Highway and about 800 yards across a flat open field lay Habsterdick, on the French-German border. Less than a mile to the southwest was Stiring-Wendel. Some distance away was a high railroad embankment. In the center of their position, a few yards to their front, was a small cemetery.

Habsterdick was situated atop a low hill. Just west of the town, running due north, was a deep valley bounded by high hills through which a small stream ran. To the north was the Saar River, Saarbrücken, and the pillboxes of the Siegfried Line. North of Habsterdick, was a large cement plant and quarry. Railroad tracks from Forbach and Stiring-Wendel, to the southwest, passed alongside the plant and then followed the stream bed up the narrow valley to the Saar. The valley appeared to be a natural approach route,



ABOVE: An aerial view shows a line of anti-tank obstacles that made up a portion of the 390-mile-long Westwall, which was constructed by Organisation Todt—the same engineering and construction firm that built the autobahns. **OPPOSITE:** U.S. Army armored car drives through a hole blasted in the dragon's teeth anti-tank defenses near Saarburg, Germany.



causing the Germans to shell the area almost constantly.

Captain Edwin Mitchell, B Company commander, sent S/Sgt. James Broone, Jr., 2nd Platoon, to see the battalion commander, Colonel Cantrell, and be briefed about a planned raid into the German lines.

When Broone returned to the platoon, he informed the squad leaders that they were going to reconnoiter the terrain between the edge of the woods by the graveyard and the first few houses in Habsterdick. The plan was to occupy the first two houses and then launch an assault under cover of machine-gun and artillery fire. The orders were to complete the assault quickly, taking no prisoners.

Sergeants Broone and “Rhino” Luuko, along with Pfc. John Crozier, examined the terrain, but were not pleased about the company’s prospects. Broone notified Captain Mitchell and was told to await further instructions.

At 5 p.m., as the platoon waited and rested, replacements arrived. The veterans were shocked to see so much clean and complete equipment. The blankets were given special admiration.

B Company received word from battalion that there might be German tanks in Habsterdick, so it was decided to send a daylight patrol from the 1st Platoon to search the houses and barns. S/Sgt. Lloyd Horner, platoon sergeant, was to be in charge. Along with him were Sergeants Joseph Marshall and Robert Huttenhower, and eight privates equipped with an SCR-536 radio—a “handie talkie”—and a bazooka. They were to use their own judgment if they met any opposition—whether to fight or withdraw.

The patrol left at about noon and reached Habsterdick without any opposition. The patrol split into two groups and searched each block, followed by curious women and children. The civilians unlocked doors, let them into cellars, and allowed them to search their homes. They found no German troops.

Most of the civilians encountered said the Germans had left, and that they had been waiting for the Americans to arrive for almost four months. Many houses had been dam-

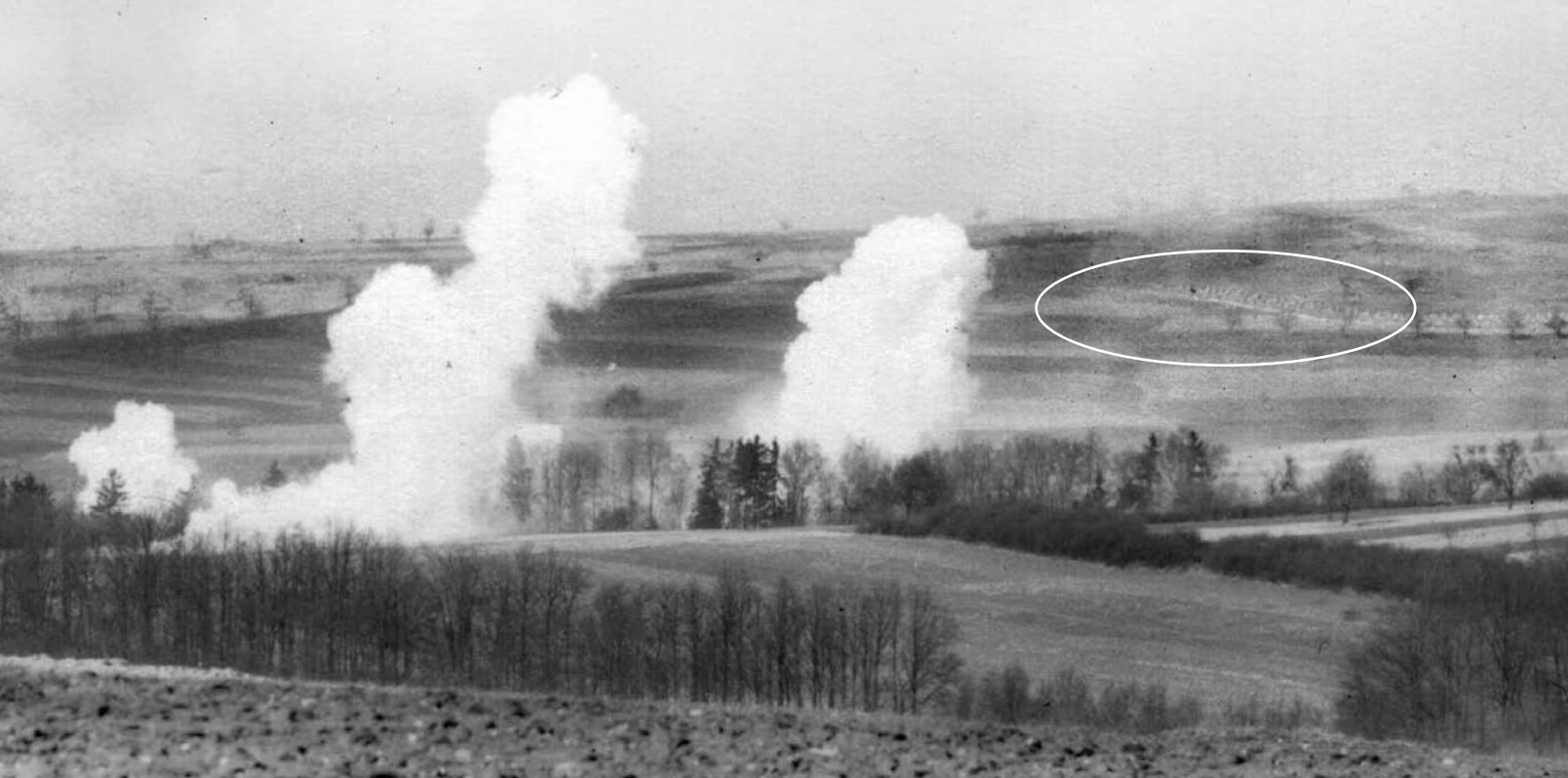
aged by aerial and artillery bombardment. There was also a large Polish settlement there, with many of the men working in nearby mines.

B Company’s 2nd Platoon then arrived and together the two units moved out to clear the woods to the east of Habsterdick. After they had gone about 400 to 600 yards, they were ordered to dig in in the woods, right on the German border. No opposition had been encountered.

Each squad leader was told to send out a three-man patrol that night to maintain contact with the heavy machine guns that were located approximately 75 yards out on the right flank, and also to keep tabs on the woods that they had come through during the day. The 3rd Platoon arrived in Habsterdick about dusk.

At about 8 a.m. on March 14, Lieutenant Elmo Chappell’s 1st Platoon of B Company left Habsterdick and moved northeast toward Saarbrücken, crossed the German border, then over railroad tracks and a ridge, descended into a draw, and climbed a hill overlooking Saarbrücken.

Suddenly, intense machine-gun fire burst



from a series of emplacements at the edge of Saarbrücken—the Siegfried Line. Visible were long rows of anti-vehicle, reinforced-concrete pyramids known as “dragon’s teeth” in front, backed up by a network of pillboxes with interlocking fields of fire.

Captain Edwin Mitchell’s B Company was chosen to spearhead the attack into the German defenses. He recalled. “It was sure suicide to cross the flat fields swept by perfect enemy fire, but orders were orders and we were going to try it.”

At about 9 a.m., B Company’s 1st Platoon passed through the 2nd Platoon. After 300 yards or so they halted, the 2nd Platoon coming up on their left. To their front was a wooded hill. On the left were some houses and behind the houses was a road and then a railroad track.

The 1st Squad was sent to clear the houses while the rest of the platoon waited. The squad was led by Pfc. Jack Hartwright, acting squad leader, along with 10 privates. They searched the houses, but found them empty. The men were ordered to move forward. The squad was sent along the banks of a brook, with a road to their left.

As they moved along the brook, Hartwright saw a German on a nearby hill. Hartwright fired at him, as did the others. Another German appeared from a bunker. As soon as they opened fire on this second

man, German machine guns forced the GIs to take cover behind what trees were available.

Private Joseph Greco was hit and hollered for a medic, but the medics were held back by the murderous machine-gun fire. Private Harry Bargy managed to reach Greco and half-carried, half-dragged him back to where the medics were pinned down, but Greco died on the way.

Hartwright was also wounded and started calling for a medic. Bargy told him to crawl up to the road to where he could be helped across. Hartwright made it to the road, but was hit while crossing. Bargy ran to him, picked him up, and carried him down the road on his back, in spite of intense machine-gun fire. (Incredibly, Hartwright was later accused of having self-inflicted his wounds.)

Once he had delivered Hartwright to the medics, Bargy headed back to his squad. Atop the hill, Bargy saw Captain Mitchell and told him what had happened to the 1st Squad. Later, Bargy was hit by a sniper’s bullet that pierced the left side of his helmet, broke his left cheekbone, and lodged in his left shoulder.

In the meantime, Private Daniel Devitt, having taken cover behind a tree, was trying to convince Private James Gurley, who had been hit in the shoulder, that he needed to get back to the medics. When this proved unsuccessful, he told Gurley that he was going for help. Devitt found a medic, but he was involved in dressing Hartwright’s wounds.

In the quiet after a mortar barrage, Hartwright was taken to litter bearers who carried him back to the battalion aid station. Devitt then discovered he had a bullet hole through the sleeve of his own jacket and another through his helmet.

While the 1st Squad had been engaged, the 2nd Squad reached its objective on the left of the 3rd Platoon and saw Germans on the hill to their front. When they and the 1st Squad began firing, they also received intense machine-gun fire in return.

Four Germans were caught in the open and raised their hands to surrender. They started walking towards the Americans when Private Virgil Sherburn, a BAR man, either frightened or over-exuberant, shot at them. He missed as the would-be targets ran under the crest of the hill and disappeared. Rifle grenades were then fired at the far hillside. The 2nd Platoon then dug in at the top of the hill.

B Company’s 3rd Platoon had moved out at 8 a.m. with two squads forward and one following, accompanied by Captain Mitchell. When they reached the railroad track that ran towards Saarbrücken, they stopped for about an hour while Mitchell attempted to

make contact with the forward platoons.

Mitchell ordered Sergeant Dunn to make contact with either the 1st or 2nd Platoon and find out if they had met any opposition, but he wasn't certain of the position of either. Dunn took three privates with him as he headed out. They went about three quarters of a mile before they found the 2nd Platoon digging in. Dunn notified Captain Mitchell.

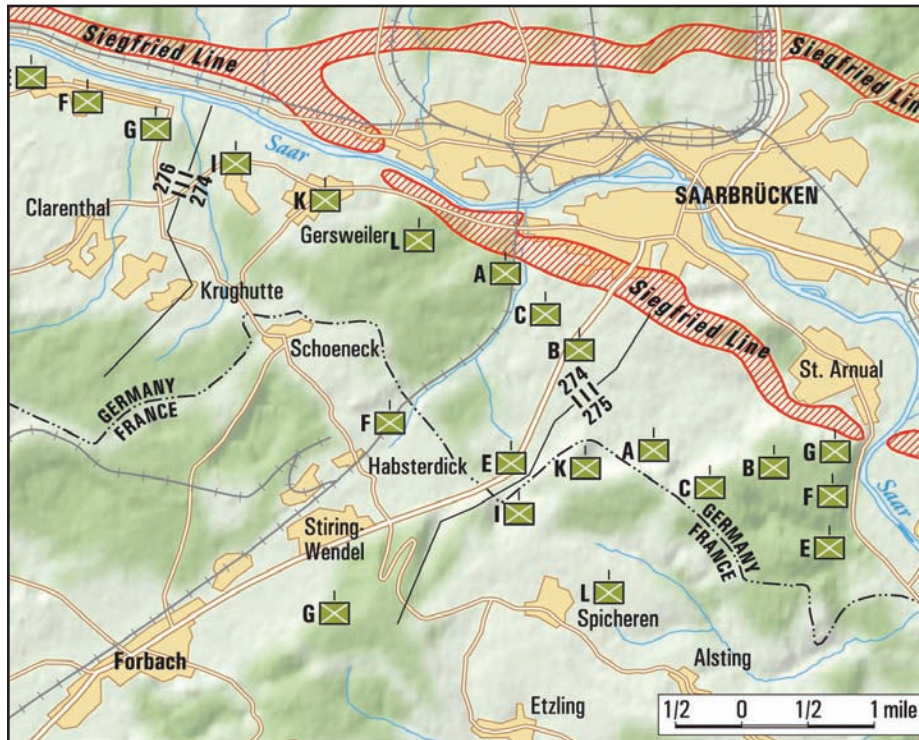
The 3rd Platoon moved forward again. After a short while, they contacted the rear of the 1st Platoon. When they reached an open field, they skirted it to the right. They went down into a small draw and joined the 1st Platoon on a dirt road leading onto a bare hill overlooking Saarbrücken. The forward elements of the 1st Platoon had been stopped by machine-gun fire from Siegfried Line pillboxes.

Late in the afternoon, the 3rd Platoon, with the 1st Platoon in the woods to their left, moved back into a long winding trench that the Germans had vacated. The 1st and 3rd Platoons' CPs were in a house about 50 yards behind the trench. Heavy machine guns were set up behind the 3rd Platoon positions covering the right flank. Another section of heavy machine guns, along with the light machine gun and mortar sections, were placed with the 2nd Platoon.

While B Company had been advancing during the day, C Company had also been in motion. On the night of March 13-14, C Company was told that they would be moving to Stiring-Wendel to aid A Company in its attack.

In the morning, the members of the 4th Platoon, C Company, not on duty, finished ridding themselves of German ammunition and other equipment they had collected. Several men had found bicycles they used to carry the bulk of their items—loaded like packhorses. A detail also dug a grave for the bodies of two German soldiers and then was assigned to bury a horse that had been killed by shrapnel and was giving off a strong odor.

Map © 2023 Philip Schwartzberg, Meridian Mapping, Minneapolis, MN



ABOVE: The 70th "Trailblazers" Infantry Division approached Saarbrücken from the southwest through the towns of Gersweiler, Schoeneck, Habsterdick, Stiring-Wendel, and St. Annual. OPPOSITE: American artillery sets up a smokescreen prior to an assault against enemy-held positions near Zweibrücken. A line of dragon's teeth obstacles (circled) is visible in the distance.

At about 7 p.m., K Company, 275th, arrived to relieve C Company, the company pulling out at 9 p.m. As they moved along the road towards Stiring-Wendel, the members of the 1st Platoon could hear the distinctive boom of 4.2-inch mortars rapidly firing from the hill behind them. The troops suspected that something big was coming.

The 3rd Platoon led the move into Stiring-Wendel, taking up positions at the edge of the town at about 10 p.m. The company paused while further movement was being worked out—determining how to deal with anti-tank ditches and possible mine fields. After an hour, they were told to fall in and prepare to move out. Those with bicycles were told to leave them behind. For the next three hours they climbed up and down railway and anti-tank embankments, following A Company. At 3 a.m., exhausted, they came to a halt.

On the morning of March 14, D Company's mortar platoon arrived at Habsterdick and immediately set up its tubes in accordance with company commander Lieutenant Ernest Rokahr's orders. Emplacements were dug in the yards and gardens between the houses where the platoon had established billets.

Sergeant Anthony Study and Pfc. Lawrence Grinwald returned to the platoon after spending 10 days assigned to OP duty. Study appeared to have difficulty moving about, having a bad case of the "GIs." The 1st Squad saw to it that he had clean facilities and then put him to bed—the sergeant refusing to go to the medics. The members of his squad tried to keep him in bed to rest up, but—such was his dedication—every time he heard the mortars in action he would come out to lend a hand.

Most of the city of Saarbrücken was north of the Saar, the river running east through the city, then looping southeast to the town of St. Annual, with the Siegfried Line running northwest to southeast along the city boundary.

To the men committed to the attack on the Siegfried Line, it looked much more formidable on the ground than it had on paper—it appeared impregnable.

In front of the 274th was open ground,

about 300 yards to be crossed, to the steep southern bank of the Saar. The northern bank, also steep, was lined with a double-wire barrier, backed by bunkers with interlocking fields of fire covering every foot of ground. Concrete machine gun nests, flush to the ground, were set along the riverbank. Mine fields reinforced the defenses.

On the morning of March 15, the 3rd Platoon, A Company, reached Schoeneck, just west of Habsterdick, then moved north to the village of Gersweiler, overlooking the Saar and the German defenses. The GIs dug in, reinforcing their positions with sandbags and logs.

One of the light machine guns of the Weapons Platoon, B Company, was placed near the 2nd Platoon CP. On its left was a blind spot created by a high rock wall. The machine-gun squad consisted of a crew of six. In the early morning hours, in the pitch dark, two crewmembers had just come off guard. They woke up two others and then went over to the 2nd Platoon CP for a smoke. In the meantime, a German patrol slipped through B Company's perimeter, quietly capturing the gun crew along with the two sleeping men.

At dawn, there was such a heavy smoke-screen that it was possible to see only a few feet. At first the men of B Company thought it was fog and then thought it was a German smokescreen laid down in preparation for an attack. Captain Mitchell gave orders to hold positions at all costs. Later it was learned that the smoke had been laid down by American artillery or 4.2-inch mortars, and that C Company was to attack across the open field to their left. But the attack did not materialize.

Around 6 a.m., members of the 2nd Platoon, B Company, heard firing along their left flank. Sergeant Luuko, leader of the 3rd Squad, was told by Sergeant Broone that the Germans were counterattacking; however, he couldn't see any Germans. The firing was spasmodic, though at times very heavy.

Pfc. Henry Zampier, D Company, recalled: "Early in the morning, we heard shouts of 'Counterattack!' We took shelter behind a shed as cover against the flat-trajectory fire just as the enemy started drop-

ping smoke shells. We started sending fire orders and digging ourselves a hole at the same time. Soon the 88s began dropping all around us.

"Our radio, which was the only means of communications that we or the rifle platoon had, was knocked down [out] twice . . . We fired the mortars by sound as we were not able to observe because of the smoke and dust and the fire being laid down by the Germans. However, we figured we were doing plenty of damage as the guns were well zeroed in and were firing only about 25 yards ahead of our own positions."

The light machine gun near Sergeant Luuko's position fired into the woods to their right front; the Germans responded with heavy fire. Sergeant Broone called for a 60mm and 81mm mortar barrage into the area that the Germans would have to cross to reach the American positions. The barrage gave the area a heavy pounding.

German artillery, mortar, and machine-gun fire continued intermittently all day while sniper fire harassed and caused casualties. Privates John Blair, Broadus Bunce, and Ronald Althausen were together in a foxhole. Bunce was hit during the morning in the right shoulder by sniper fire; he was evacuated. Later, Blair was shot in the head, probably by the same sniper, but it only knocked him out. A medic was not able to reach Blair for a half hour.

As the medic started to lift Blair out of his foxhole, the sniper killed the medic instantly with a bullet through the head, the bullet striking the red cross on his helmet. Since it was now impossible for a litter team to get to Blair, Private Althausen stayed with him until after dark when a litter team arrived and carried him out; however, Blair died later.

When orders were received that B Company was to attack the Siegfried Line, Captain Mitchell called the platoon leaders together to discuss plans and review aerial photos and topographic maps. It was decided to make a frontal approach to the German positions rather than moving to the left; German positions on the left were well fortified and strongly defended. Also, the Germans might not expect an attack to come right over the bare hill before them. The attack was to be preceded by an intense artillery barrage.

According to intelligence from prisoners, each pillbox was manned by at least 17 men, mostly ex-Luftwaffe personnel, each with enough food to last two weeks, and there were trip-flares and mines in front of the pillboxes. It was also reported that the American

wikimedia



ABOVE: In addition to the dragon's teeth, attacking forces also had to deal with reinforced-concrete bunkers such as this one south of Saarbrücken. Their silent remains still exist nearly 80 years after the war. **OPPOSITE:** A platoon sergeant of the 276th Infantry Regiment, 70th Division, hustles his men along during action near the Saar River, March 1945.



artillery had not had much effect on the pillboxes.

Plans called for the 3rd Platoon to jump off at 3:15 p.m. following an artillery barrage. But then it was decided to fire an additional barrage, and so it was almost 4 o'clock before the platoon moved out. As they advanced, Lieutenant Chappell brought his 1st Platoon into position behind the 3rd along a reverse slope.

The 3rd Platoon moved out with two squads forward and one back. The 1st Squad was on the left, the 2nd Squad, under Sergeant Penland, was about 75 yards to its right; the 3rd was to the rear under Sergeant David Mann. S/Sgt. Robert Rysso was with the 1st Squad, carrying an SCR-536 radio, maintaining contact with company headquarters.

While the 1st Platoon was waiting on the slope of the hill, the Germans laid down artillery fire; however, most of it landed off target, causing no injuries. As they moved out, Sergeant Rysso sent Private Lawrence Condict, scout of the 1st Squad, over the crest of the hill. He came back and reported that he thought it was going to be rough going.

With the 1st Squad providing a base of fire, both squads started moving up towards the brow of the hill. Sergeant Penland and Dunn were trying to get scouts out, so Pfc. Luther Hanson was told to move out fast so that they would reach the brow well before the rest of the squad.

Private Nicokoris reached the top and started down the other side. Pfc. Gordon Pean, from his position, could see the dragon's teeth, dug-outs, and trenches of the Siegfried Line. He wondered why it was so quiet and why they were being allowed to walk over the top of the hill and into the open.

Most of 1st and 2nd Squads had reached the brow of the hill and passed over to where the ground leveled out when all hell broke loose.

Nicokoris hit the ground, then got up and ran back a short distance but was knocked flat. Not knowing the extent of his injuries, Nicokoris's buddies told him to lie perfectly still. Dunn, the squad leader, reached the wounded man and saw he had been hit in the right side of the chest.

In an exposed position, Dunn and Nicokoris started to crawl to the rear but another

bullet hit Nicokoris, this time in the left upper chest as he tried crossing a fence. Dunn told him to stay down as American tanks were on the way. The rest of the squad had gone to ground, using any depression for cover.

On the left, as the 1st Squad came under fire, the squad leader, Pfc. David Traum, went out to check on Condict, the scout, who was pinned down. Traum came back and also reported to Sergeant Rysso the location of the German machine guns. Rysso called back and had artillery laid in on them. As Traum went back for Condict, he was hit in the foot by a machine-gun bullet, but managed to crawl back about 50 yards to a large shell hole that was half full of water.

Meanwhile, a medic and Private Sigsbee Newton were called forward. Newton was new to the unit—this was his first action, and he had volunteered to assist the medics. Although scared, he remained in the fight, doing all he could for the wounded.

While tanks were coming up, Private L.T. Ingraham, who had taken over the 1st Squad after Traum was wounded, was himself hit in the shoulder and collarbone

by machine-gun fire. Meanwhile, Nicokoris was hit again, this time by shrapnel, in the back and legs.

When the tanks appeared, several men made an effort to get behind and use them for cover. Private Maurice Palmer, Pfc. Howard Frazier, and another man were running towards a tank when a shell burst nearby, hitting all three. Frazier was dazed for a minute, then discovered that he had been hit in the hand and right shoulder, but was able to make his way back to an aid station where he found he also had a machine-gun bullet in his leg.

Pfc. Pean saw Palmer lying in the open and told him to get behind the tank. Palmer said he couldn't, that he was hit and needed to be assisted.

Additional casualties included Condict, who was hit in the thigh by shrapnel, Pfc. George Rakowski, who was hit in the arm, Private Francis Casto received a broken leg, and Private Norbert Jannink, a bazooka man, was hit in the head and face.

After 15 minutes, the two tanks providing support decided to withdraw. The crews claimed that the ground was so soft that they could not cross the obstacles before them. As the tanks started back, the remaining infantrymen were ordered to withdraw; artillery provided a covering barrage.

Several of the riflemen and a medic went out onto the hilltop to help bring in the wounded. Although in the open, they drew no fire. They found Palmer dead, Jannink unconscious.

Sergeants Rysso, Penland, Dunn, Mann, and Private Newton took cover in a shell hole. Penland recalled what happened next: "Two artillery shells whistled across the top of the hole, coming from behind our lines and almost knocking me flat. They landed in the general vicinity of our wounded out on the field. I called back to Sergeant Rysso to have the fire lifted because it appeared to be landing among our wounded men.

"I was on the forward slope of the crater near the top, trying to see where the shells were landing. Out of the corner of my eye, I could see, coming from my left, two men supporting another, coming towards the shell hole. I glanced around and recognized



An American machine-gun team sets up a position in the shattered ruins of a building facing the defenses of the Siegfried Line. OPPOSITE: Soldiers of the 275th Infantry Regiment, 70th Division, sprint across open ground in the border town of Stiring-Wendel, south of Saarbrücken.

[Pfc. Charles] Andrews on the right, supporting a wounded man and [Pfc. John] Helaszek to the left. I did not have time to recognize the third man who I was told later was [Private Fred] Ledford.

"I just got out the first word of 'Get down!' when a large-caliber shell made a direct hit on the three men who were at that time approximately six yards from the hole. I saw a tremendous flash of fire and black smoke and pieces of the men's bodies flying through the air.

"The concussion from the shell blew my steel helmet off and threw me into the bottom of the crater, which was filled with water and mud. One man's body flew over me and hit the water beside me. One of the men's legs hit on the right of me in the water. The medic, who was on the near side of the crater, was rolling down the side. I threw out my hand and stopped him before he rolled into the water. He was covered with blood from the men who had been hit by the shell. I asked him if he was hit and he said he didn't know.

"He crawled over to help another man who was pushing himself toward the water with only his legs. This was probably Ledford who was later found dead in the hole. I looked around and saw a man's chest and hands sticking out of the water. I grabbed him to pull him out, thinking that possibly he was still alive and would drown. I saw that he was mangled and dead and let him slip back into the water."

When Penland was able to withdraw back to where the rest of the platoon was, he could only find 10 uninjured men—the 3rd Platoon's casualties were four killed and 17 wounded. Those left took up positions to meet a possible counterattack, which failed to materialize.

After the 3rd Platoon returned from the day's action, the 1st Platoon moved up and took positions to the left of the 3rd, with the 2nd to its right.

Lieutenant (later Captain) Charles Blanchard, C Company CO, had assembled his company near Stiring-Wendel and set out at 9 a.m., following a route that A Company had taken during the night up toward the high ground overlooking Saarbrücken. The company advanced over a mile, moving through Habsterdick, until it reached the cement plant and quarry. There, Blanchard halted the company and held a council of war.

The advance then resumed with Blanchard's C Company entering a wooded area and spreading out, then making contact with the 2nd Platoon. While moving through the woods, the 3rd and 2nd Squads drew fire.

Lieutenant Robert Connor ordered assistant squad leader Pfc. John Poveliatis to take three men and check the situation ahead of them. As Poveliatis moved towards the left, where Pfc. Frank Travis, 2nd Squad scout, was located, machine-gun and sniper fire pinned them down. The GIs responded with their own fire, but this was ineffective as the Germans could not be spotted.

It appeared that the fire was coming from a hillside some distance away, directly in the line of advance. The 2nd Squad was able to finally advance in short rushes, but had to halt at the edge of the woods when they reached a wide ravine. Beyond they could see the dragon's teeth of the Siegfried Line.

With the rifle platoons pinned down, mortar fire was called down to knock out a couple of machine-gun nests. Sergeant Leon Bartram selected positions for his mortars, ran wire to a forward OP, and then directed fire. About this same time American artillery opened up with a heavy concentration that saturated enemy positions.

The Germans were seen to be running from their trenches and foxholes to the protection of the Siegfried Line pillboxes, but the platoon's 60mm mortars were able to pick them off as they ran. Despite being wounded in the right hand, Sergeant Bartram continued to direct fire. He was later evacuated to the battalion aid station.

Later, the word was given for C Company to move to the right of B Company with A Company to move in and replace C.

As the men maneuvered, German machine guns opened up again, causing the GIs to dash for the cover of a wooded ravine. Emerging, they were forced to scamper across railroad tracks while exposed to enemy fire, jump down from a high wall, and then cross a highway, taking cover in what was formerly a zoo and park.

They found the buildings had been badly damaged, so they sheltered along the side of a hill behind the remains of the structures. Although subjected to a severe shelling, they were protected there and afterwards received the first hot chow they'd been given in days—providing a boost to morale.

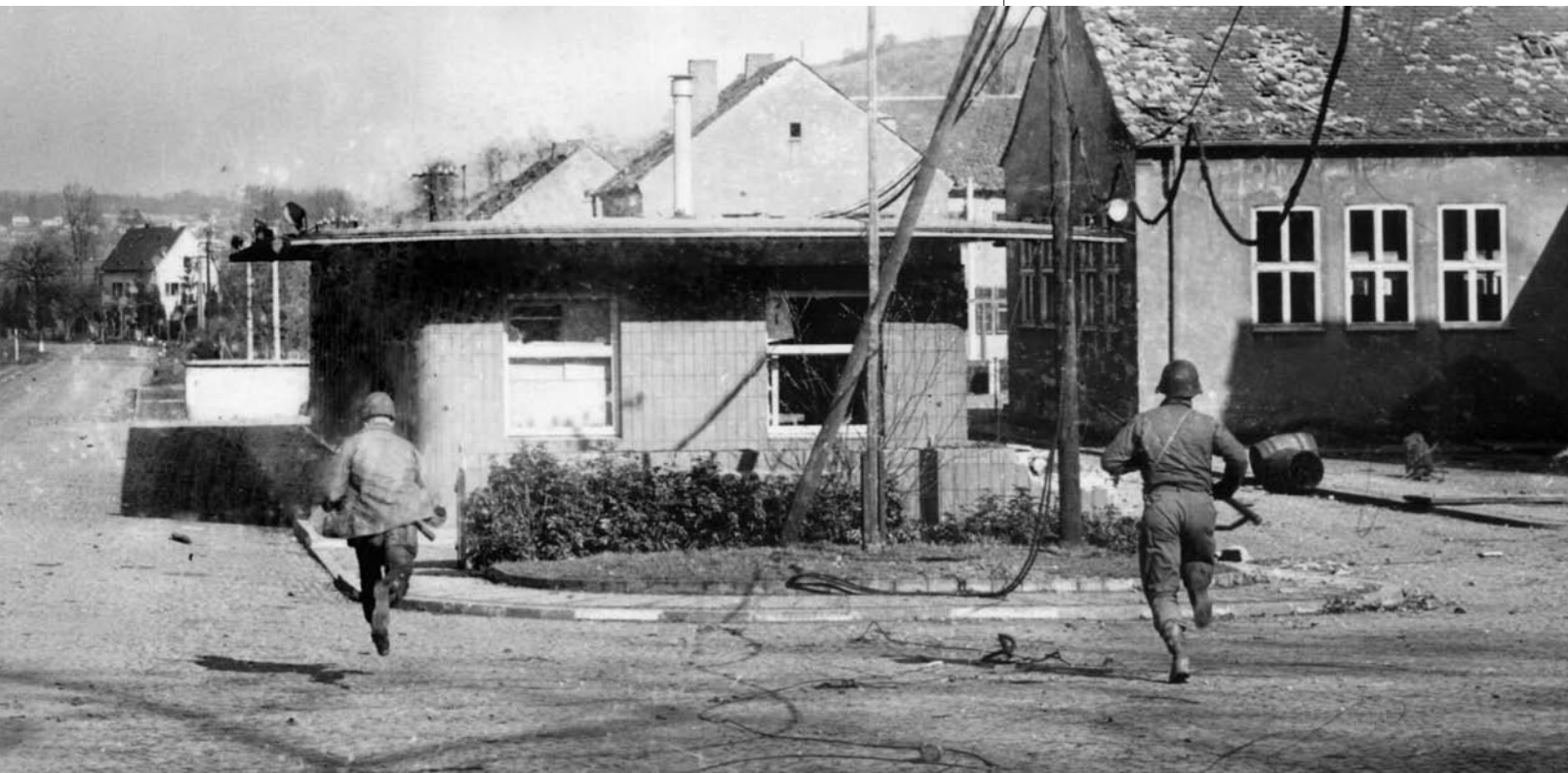
The night passed uneventfully, although several contact patrols were sent out. Tech/5

Edwin Pressler, 2nd Platoon, B Company, had his BAR ready for action, should it be needed, covering the front. "The presence of that worthy weapon always gave a fellow a good feeling of security," he said.

Lieutenant General Alexander Patch, Seventh Army commander, arrived at 70th Division headquarters on March 16 to press Barnett to get his attack underway. Barnett argued that an immediate attack would cost needless casualties. Also, Third Army's advance to the rear of Saarbrücken would cut-off the Germans, thus negating the need for a frontal assault. Patch nodded and agreed to a delay.

That morning, a replacement officer, Lieutenant Marcil, arrived and was attached to the 1st Platoon, B Company, where he spent most of the day asking questions and looking over the company's positions. He and Lieutenant Chappell went to the 2nd Platoon's previous positions to check on a report that a private first class named Harold Davis had been found alive and evacuated. Instead, they found Davis' body.

They also discovered that C Company had not taken over the positions to which





they had been assigned, and that there was a gap in the American lines. Chappell notified battalion headquarters, which directed C Company to move and fill the gap.

During the morning, Chappell went out to the shell crater where the 3rd Platoon men had been hit the day before and identified Pfc. Helaszek's body by his dog tags. While he was in the hole, he heard the crack of a bullet as it hit the ground just outside the hole.

At first he didn't recognize what had happened, then realized it was a sniper's bullet. He tried to see where the sniper was as another bullet came in. As he dashed to get his carbine, which he had left outside the hole, a third round struck nearby.

Chappell noted a water tower to his right and calculated from the angle the shots that the sniper must be there. He then made a break back to his lines and warned others. As soon as he got back to his CP, he showed the artillery forward observer where he thought the sniper was. They fired a few rounds and, once they had it zeroed in, they added time-fire. After a few more rounds, the sniper and water tower were eliminated.

During the morning, Blanchard's C Company moved out, prepared to bypass A Company on its right flank; however, orders were changed at the last minute, so

they moved to the left and rear of A Company. The 1st Platoon led the company, followed by the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th.

When they had just reached the nose of the hill they were assigned, Siegfried Line machine guns opened up, hitting three 1st Platoon men. Unable to advance, the platoon dug in while the other platoons moved into position on the left, behind A Company.

In the meantime, tanks returned, moving into position to where they could fire on the Siegfried Line pillboxes, and C Company was ordered to pull back and move to relieve B Company. As C Company moved into the vacated foxholes, they found that B Company had departed in such haste that they left behind several wounded and dead comrades.

The men of B Company spent the 17th, a warm and sunny day, cleaning weapons and reinforcing their foxholes—deepening them and adding a covering of boards or logs with dirt over it for protection against air bursts.

Lieutenant Chappell, 1st Platoon, visited the Company CP to see Captain Mitchell. While he was there, a call came in saying that the sound power system between the 1st and Weapons Platoons would be used to adjust artillery fire, but the sound power equipment had to be moved from the cellar of a house to an upper story.

S/Sgt. Horner and a medic were handing it from the top of the cellar steps through the kitchen window to Lieutenant Marcil and an artillery observer when a shell screamed in and hit the side of the house, killing the lieutenant and the observer. Horner and the aid man were badly hurt as well; Horner later lost his leg. It had only been Marcil's second day on the line.

The day of an infantryman was one of move, dig in, move again, and dig in again—this was how one survived. A foxhole or dugout was never complete, never deep enough, never comfortable enough.

The 2nd Platoon, B Company, was engaged in such activity when orders came to move about 200 yards to a new position and dig in again. A line of defenses was established covering the strip of woods from the left flank to the open field on the right flank while the 3rd Squad established outposts. The line was reinforced with a section of light machine guns. Lieutenant Connor located his CP a few yards behind the 2nd Squad. The platoon was delighted to see members of the CP group digging in as well.

During the morning, the 3rd Platoon, C Company, pulled back about 300 yards while artillery pounded German positions, but with little apparent damage. About 5 p.m., they

moved back up to their previous positions.

The action picked up. In C Company's 4th Platoon sector, heavy sniper fire had wounded nine riflemen and two medics; any movement in the area seemed to draw fire. The snipers were too close to the company's positions for the use of artillery, so 60mm mortars were employed. The mortars had only fired a few rounds when a German "88" round landed close to the mortars, wounding three men—Pfc. Warren E. Culp, Pfc. Harry D. Brown, and Sergeant Leon F. Below—and knocking one mortar out of action.

At about 2:30 p.m. on March 18, Pfc. Gerald Luther and Winifred Bollinger, Weapons Platoon, were reading comics near their foxholes. A mortar round came in behind them and another to their front. Bollinger stayed where he was, but Luther took off for his hole. He was wounded just as he reached the hole while Bollinger was untouched; Luther returned to his unit in April.

In the 4th Platoon's area, an occasional German mortar or artillery round fell. There was one incident that members of the company considered a near miracle. Sergeant Glen Main was standing about five feet from his foxhole when a mortar round landed within three yards of him, blowing him several feet into the air, and landing him in his hole, virtually unhurt. However, his rifle was riddled with holes.

During the day, elements of Patton's Third Army reached a point 60 miles northeast of Saarbrücken; Intelligence reported German forces withdrawing towards the Rhine. But the German defenders in front of the 70th Division continued to resist. American patrols, attempting to cross the Saar by boat, encountered withering fire.

The division was again ordered to attack across the Saar the next day, March 19. The 274th was to take over the 276th's positions and prepare to attack Saarbrücken's defenses



ABOVE: Men of the 2nd Battalion, 275th Infantry, 70th Division, move through Saarbrücken while being watched by citizens, March 20, 1945. **OPPOSITE:** Observers on a bank overlooking the Saar River watch as men of the 3rd Battalion, 276th Regiment, carry a flat-bottom boat across a field toward the river, March 1945.

south of the river, then cross the Saar at the Metz Highway bridgehead. General Barnett cautioned his commanders to minimize casualties. H-hour was to be determined by the situation at hand, and all units were to be prepared to move on an hours' notice.

Around daylight, all direct-fire weapons—anti-tank guns and tank destroyers—opened up with a furious barrage in an effort to reduce the river-front defenses. The cannonade appeared to be effective against the pillboxes while other guns targeted factories and possible enemy OPs.

C Company relieved B Company and crossed the road on their left, climbed a hill, turned left, and followed railroad tracks until they branched off. Here, they went to the right and then turned into the woods, advancing until they reached another railroad track on a high embankment. They proceeded and finally reached a road in the vicinity of Schoeneck, north of Stiring-Wendel. The terrain was heavily wooded and hilly.

Lieutenant Harold Dunbar, 1st Battalion S-2, had sent word that it was believed that the Germans had abandoned the pillboxes to their front, and that heavy German artillery and mortar fire falling on the battalion's positions was probably covering a withdrawal. Lieutenant Blanchard, therefore, decided to send out a patrol to see if the German pillboxes were still occupied.

The patrol, led by Tech/5 Willie Prejean of the 2nd Platoon, returned shortly after 6 a.m. They had checked six pillboxes and found all of them abandoned. Once the information was transmitted to battalion, the company was ordered to move forward, pass through the Germans' fortified positions, and occupy the high ground just over the Saar.

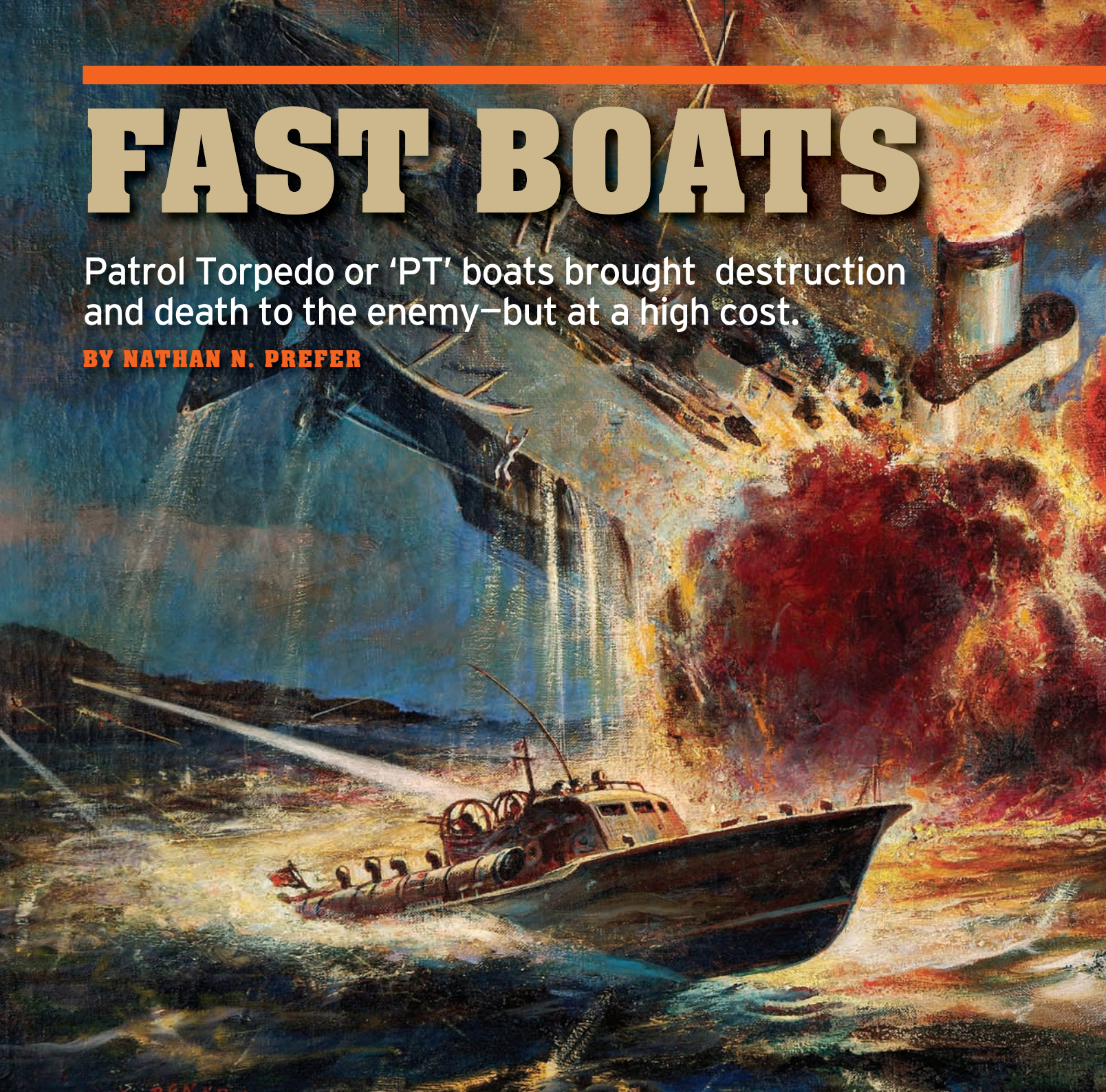
At about 8 a.m., the company moved out. Advancing in columns of platoons and checking pillboxes and bunkers as they went, they passed through the Siegfried Line without incident, then wheeled left onto high ground. Five prisoners were taken by the 3rd Platoon as they came forward, one of them volunteer-

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FAST BOATS

Patrol Torpedo or 'PT' boats brought destruction and death to the enemy—but at a high cost.

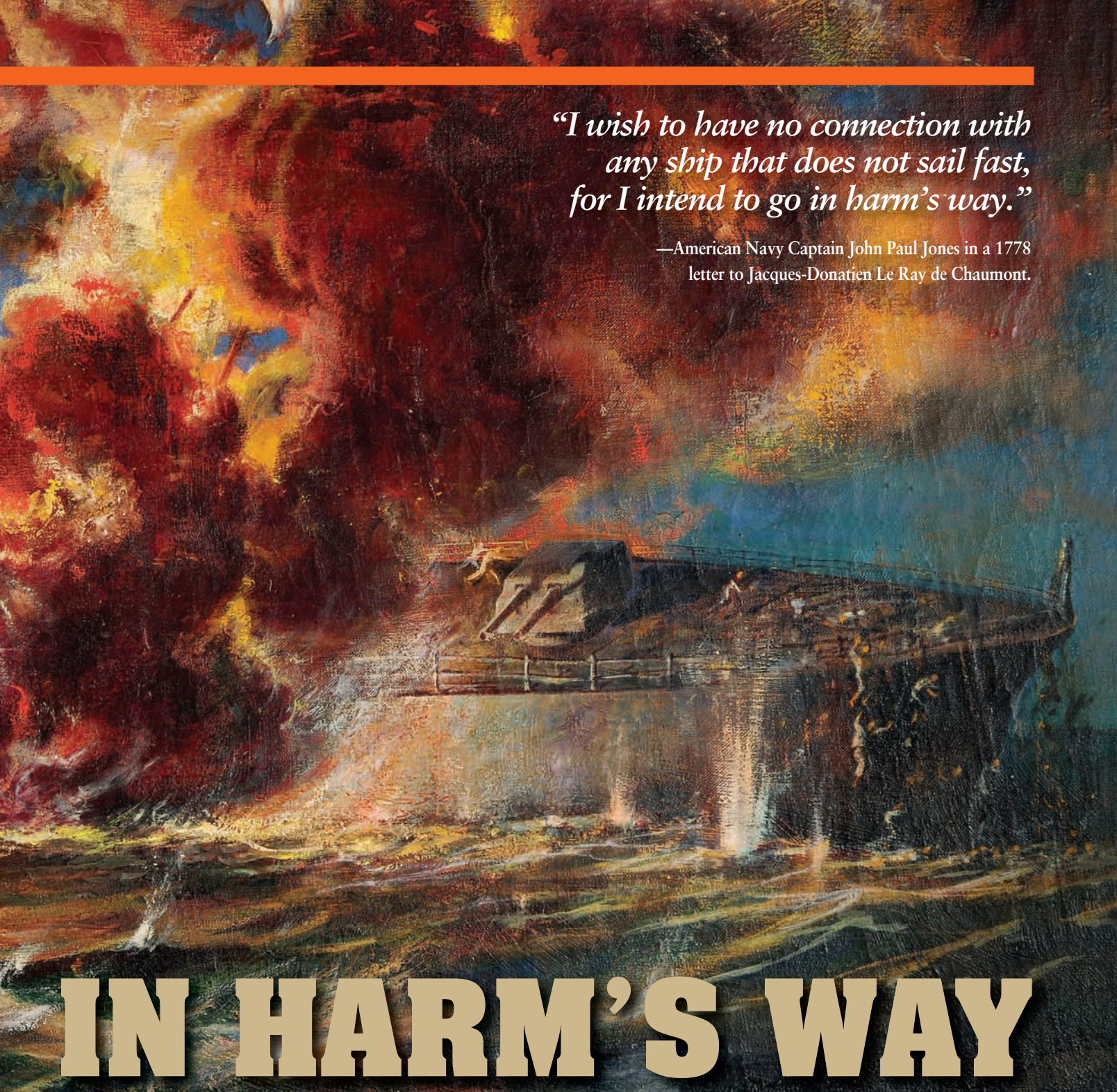
BY NATHAN N. PREFER



The U.S. Navy put many ships in harm's way during World War II, but none more so than the Patrol Torpedo or "PT" Boats. These small, speedy, maneuverable, and extremely vulnerable craft served in all theaters of the war and compiled an admirable record during their brief wartime existence. Officially known as

Motor Torpedo Boats, they would soon earn the name of "Devil Boats" from the Japanese.

The PT boat could loosely trace its origins to the First World War, when a proposal was presented to the Navy for the development of 50-foot motor torpedo boats. The U.S. Navy rejected the idea, but the Royal Navy did show some interest after the developer, W. Albert Hickman, built a prototype at his own expense. But the war ended before any contracts for development were signed. For the next 20 years the idea lay dormant, although periodically the U.S. Navy tested various examples of a motor torpedo boat with negative results.



*“I wish to have no connection with
any ship that does not sail fast,
for I intend to go in harm’s way.”*

—American Navy Captain John Paul Jones in a 1778
letter to Jacques-Donatien Le Ray de Chaumont.

IN HARM’S WAY

It was not until 1938, with war looming over the horizon, that the Navy renewed its interest in the motor torpedo boat idea. In July, the Navy issued design contracts for four new boats—a 165-foot sub chaser, a 110-foot sub chaser, a 70-foot motor torpedo boat, and a 54-foot motor torpedo boat.

More than 30 designs were submitted. The winners were Higgins Industries (New Orleans, Louisiana), Sparkman and Stephens Designs (Newport, Rhode Island), Fogel Boat Yard (Miami, Florida), Huckins Yacht Corporation (Jacksonville, Florida), and Fisher Boat Works (Detroit, Michigan). Each was to produce two boats of slightly differing

The fury of a night engagement in the Philippines is captured by combat artist Robert Benny. Disregarding the obvious danger, a small PT boat takes on a much larger Japanese destroyer and sends it flaming to the bottom of the “Slot.” Although small, the “mighty midgets” packed a punch that the Imperial Japanese Navy (IJN) greatly feared.

designs for the U.S. Navy's evaluation.

Meanwhile, Henry R. Stephens of the Electric Launch Company (Elco) visited Britain and studied the designs of the British Navy's motor torpedo boats. Elco purchased one of the British boats, later renamed *PT-9*, and brought it home to study it further. (The Germans had developed a similar craft—the Schnellboot, or “fast boat,” that the Allies called the E boat.)

After the initial trials, the Navy ordered several Elco-designed boats, but found them unsatisfactory. New competitions were held, with more trials. In the end, the Navy accepted three: Elco's 80-footer, and two 78-foot designs from Higgins Industries and the Huckins Yacht Corporation.

A standard crew for the boats was three officers and 14 enlisted sailors, though in practice the number could vary from 12-17. This usually depended on the weapons carried by the individual PT boat. Fully loaded, the boat weighed 50 tons. The boats were made of two layers of 1-inch mahogany with a painted canvas layer between them. Copper rivets and bronze screws held the boat together. This resulted in a strong but light hull easily repaired when damaged in battle.

This was confirmed when Lieutenant (j.g.) John F. Kennedy's *PT-109* (an Elco boat) was cut in half during the Solomon Islands campaign by a Japanese destroyer; the front half of the boat remained afloat for some 12 hours before finally sinking on August 2, 1943.

A similar incident occurred when *PT-323* (“Calamity Jane”—another Elco boat) was cut in half by a kamikaze off Leyte on December 10, 1944, but remained afloat for several hours. Even more incredible, in the Mediterranean, *PT-308* (a Higgins boat) had her stern sheared off in a collision, yet managed to return to base for repairs. And, off Bougainville, *PT-167* (Elco) was hit on November 6, 1943, by a dud torpedo that passed through the bow and failed to explode. Holed clear through, this boat was back in action the following day. Clearly, it took a lot to finish off an American PT boat.

Yet survival was not the main purpose



ABOVE: PT boats under construction on the assembly line at the Higgins Industries City Park Plant in New Orleans, Louisiana, during World War II. Other manufacturers, such as Elco, also produced the swift craft; a total of 531 were built. **OPPOSITE:** Three PT boats—*PT-281*, *PT-277*, and *PT-288* (left to right) of Motor Torpedo Boat Squadron 23—are commissioned at the Higgins Industrial Canal Plant on June 28, 1942. Higgins had 20,000 employees working at seven different plants during the war.

of the boats. They were there to strike at the enemy. To do this, they carried two to four Mark 8 (later Mark 13) torpedoes with a range of 16,000 yards.

Each PT boat also carried several automatic weapons—usually two or more twin M2 .50-caliber machine guns in rotating ring mounts. Many boats had 20mm Oerlikon cannons, while some carried .30-caliber Lewis machine guns on pedestal mounts. Others added .30-06-caliber Browning machine guns near the torpedo tubes also mounted on pedestal mounts. Some used 37mm cannons lashed to the forward deck. Rocket launchers and mortars also appeared on some boats.

Still others took the 37mm Oldsmobile M4 automatic cannon off of crashed P-39 Airacobra aircraft and mounted them for defense. The 40mm Bofors gun, with its 120 rounds-per-minute rate of fire was also popular. Just about anything that could shoot and fit aboard was used at some point by some boats. Only the torpedo tubes and .50-caliber machine guns could be considered standard.

Each boat was powered by three engines provided by the Navy, all derived from the Packard 3A-2500 V-12 liquid-cooled, gasoline-fueled engine, and provided a top speed of 45 knots per hour. The boats carried 3,000 gallons of fuel, enough for a standard 12-hour patrol. This decreased as the hull became fouled or the engines began to wear. Although the cockpits of the boats were armor plated, hits from enemy fire could, and did, cause catastrophic gasoline explosions, which too often resulted in the loss of a boat and her entire crew.

PT boats usually attacked at night, which covered them from enemy observation (except from aircraft, which could easily spot their phosphorescent wake in the slightest light). Only later in the war, when radar became available to them, were the odds evened. Further protection was provided by stern-mounted generators that deployed a smoke screen behind the racing boat. Like the rest of the Navy, the PT boats suffered from defective

torpedoes early in the war.

For the U.S. Navy's PT boats, the war began at Pearl Harbor. Motor Torpedo Squadron 1 was moored at the Submarine Base, Pearl Harbor. Lt. Cmdr. William C. Specht was in command while Ensign N.E. Ball was the squadron duty officer. When the first bombs exploded at Battleship Row, Ensign Ball rushed into the mess hall shouting, "We're under attack! Man the guns!"

The sailors of MTB Squadron 1 raced to their action stations and opened fire on the swarms of Japanese planes circling overhead. Gunner's Mate 1st Class Joy Van Zell de Jong and Torpedoman 1st Class George B. Huffman, lounging on the deck of *PT-23*, jumped to their machine gun and had the pleasure of seeing their torpedo-plane target fall smoking into the waters of the harbor.

MTB Squadron 1 was en route to the Philippines, and four boats had already been loaded aboard a transport. These boats also opened fire on the enemy and are credited with shooting down a second aircraft while out of the water. The PT boats were at war!

In the Philippines, 5,000 miles to the west of Hawaii, Lt. Cmdr. John D. "Buck" Bulkeley, commander of MTB Squadron 3, was jolted awake by a phone call with the news that the United States was now at war with Japan, and that Pearl Harbor had been attacked.

He immediately assembled his six-boat squadron and sailed to the tip of the Bataan Peninsula to await an attack by the Imperial Japanese Navy. Aware that he was operating before the Navy had even developed an operational doctrine for the PT boats, Bulkeley knew he was on his own.

It was here that one of the ongoing problems for the PT boats surfaced. Sailing in the darkness without lights, they came under repeated attacks by friendly forces, who mistook them for enemy vessels. This happened often throughout the war.

Bulkeley and his men were forced to watch helplessly as Japanese planes destroyed their base at Cavite and had to dodge enemy air attacks on their boats while shooting down three enemy planes.

MTB Squadron 3's executive officer, Lieutenant Robert B. Kelly, took his section and began rescuing survivors of ships sunk in the attack. The PT boats began a system of nightly patrols, harassing the Japanese. On December 31, Bulkeley took one boat into Manila Bay and surreptitiously sank several enemy craft moored there even as the Japanese were marching into the Open City.

But this constant activity began to wear on the PT boats and crews—engines broke down but no spare parts available, gasoline was sabotaged with wax, lack of replacement torpedoes, and little to no rest for the men.

Undeterred, the PT crews continued to plague the Japanese, who at about this time gave them their nickname of "Devil Boats." On January 18, 1942, they set off after four Japanese ships reported off Port Binanga. Taking *PT-31* (Lieutenant Edward G. DeLong) and *PT-34* (Ensign Barron W. Chandler) with him, Lt. Cmdr. Bulkeley entered Subic Bay, only to be detected by Japanese shore batteries and searchlights.

Racing out of sight, *PT-34* returned to the area and identified an enemy cruiser. Ensign Chandler launched a torpedo attack, claiming two hits on the enemy ship and a subsequent large explosion. But aboard *PT-34* one torpedo had stuck in the tube, running wildly, and was in danger of destroying the boat itself. Using toilet paper stuffed into the propeller of the torpedo to stop its mechanism, *PT-34* was able to make its way home. Not so *PT-31*.

Lieutenant DeLong's boat had been sabotaged by soluble wax placed into the gas tanks. The engines stopped and the boat drifted aground. Ordering his crew to abandon ship, Lieutenant DeLong remained aboard to scuttle the boat before the nearby Japanese could capture it intact. After several close calls ashore avoiding the Japanese, DeLong and his surviving crew were rescued by loyal Filipinos, but three crew members were lost.

MTB Squadron 3 was down to four boats after another ran aground. These kinds of firefights would continue over the next three months, slowly whittling away





ABOVE: Perhaps best known for his rescue of MacArthur and ferrying him to safety, U.S. Navy Lt. Cmdr. John D. Bulkeley, commander of MTB Squadron 3, received the Medal of Honor for his actions in the Pacific. LEFT: General Douglas MacArthur (second from left) is taken by PT-525 to Tacloban, Leyte, for liberation ceremonies on October 24, 1944.

the fighting strength of MTB Squadron 3.

It was while searching for survivors of *PT-31* that Bulkeley's men would begin fighting an opponent they would face throughout the war: a Japanese military barge. These barges were of various sizes and powered by engines not unlike the PT boats themselves. They were armed, some were armored and, when carrying infantry, could make use of their weapons as well.

Not worth a torpedo, in the American estimation, they were usually attacked with machine guns and other weapons carried aboard the PT boat. Once subdued, PT sailors would board them, if still afloat, and recover prisoners and intelligence information, which often proved quite valuable. In this first instance, for example, a wounded Japanese captain and captured documents provided the information that would lead to the next PT triumph.

On February 1, 1942, Lt. Cmdr. Bulkeley's MTB Squadron 3 acted on the intelligence gathered in the fight with an enemy barge. The Japanese had, unknown to the Americans, been landing troops behind their lines on Bataan, on a nightly basis. The idea was to build up a strong force to

attack the American lines from the rear. The Army commanders asked for Navy help.

Together with a few remaining Army fighter planes, MTB Squadron 3 intercepted this operation and sank several barges loaded with troops headed for the enemy enclave.

Times were hectic and confused, and some of the successes claimed by MTB Squadron 3 were mistaken, but the PT reputation continued to increase. As one noted historian wrote about the fight off Bataan, "The PTs did not accomplish much else in this campaign and on every occasion claimed more damage than subsequent investigation substantiates. Of the two cruisers and two large merchant ships that they claimed, none were actually sunk or even damaged."

But if any episode made the reputation of the PT boats, it was their "rescue" of General Douglas MacArthur. Ordered to evacuate to Australia to continue the fight, MacArthur had few options for transportation. Only the Navy had a way—either by submarine or by PT boat to Mindanao, where Army bombers would take his party (his wife, son, and other members of his staff) the rest of the way; MacArthur chose the PT boats. The news came as a shock to MTB Squadron 3, which had been planning their own escape to the China Coast.

Bulkeley selected his four boat captains. In addition to Lieutenant Kelly, Ensigns Anthony Akers, and George Cox, and Lieutenant Vincent S. Schumacher would captain the PT boats. Their instructions were to stay together, but if any boat broke down it was to be left to its own resources. The Japanese were to be avoided at all costs, but if attacked, Lieutenant Kelly and three boats were to attack the pursuers while Bulkeley in *PT-41* with General MacArthur's party was to try and escape. Navy officers on Corregidor were giving five-to-one odds that the escape would fail.

It was a good bet. None of the boats had navigational devices, so navigation was by guess and by God. Each boat carried extra gasoline in steel drums on deck, a recipe for disaster should so much as one bullet strike the drums.

PT boat engines were supposed to be overhauled every few hundred hours, but those of MTB Squadron 3 had been running for months without an overhaul; there were no

spare parts. Rust in the engines had reduced speed to about half of what it was supposed to be in a clean engine. Nevertheless, MTB Squadron 3 loaded MacArthur's party aboard *PT-41* and set off for Mindanao, followed by *PT-32*, *PT-34*, and *PT-35*.

Lieutenant Kelly's *PT-34* was the first to run into trouble. It slowly began to fall behind because of fouled engines. In the middle of the night the engines finally quit and the boat began to drift. In accordance with orders, the others pushed on. *PT-34*'s crew began frantically cleaning the engines and soon had them running again. But by now dawn was beginning to break over the Philippines, so Kelly headed for a cove in the Cuyo Islands to shelter for the day.

Lieutenant Schumacher's *PT-32* also ran into trouble. A Japanese destroyer began pursuing him, and to increase speed, the steel drums loaded with essential gasoline were rolled overboard. To further lighten the load and discourage pursuit, torpedoes were fired at the destroyer, which soon became identified as *PT-41*! The morning mist had nearly caused a "friendly fire" incident between PT boats.

Bulkeley, along with Schumacher and Kelly soon rendezvoused at the Cuyo Islands, where the crews worked tirelessly on their engines. Ensign Akers' *PT-35* would never arrive. It had broken down and the crew and passengers had to make their own way to Mindanao.

After several close calls with real Japanese destroyers, the group reached their destination, after 35 hours and 580 miles navigating enemy-controlled waters. The first legend of the PT boat had been born. For this and other actions, Bulkeley received the Medal of Honor.

While Lieutenant Commander William Specht was in Melville, Rhode Island, creating "Specht Tech," to turn out highly trained PT boat skippers, the U.S. Marines were landing on the Solomons. Soon this campaign involved the bulk of the American and Japanese navies.



One feature of this ongoing naval battle was the "Tokyo Express"—a naval supply and reinforcement route which the Imperial Japanese Navy employed almost every night. To stop this flow of enemy troops and supplies, a new MTB Squadron 3 was sent to the island of Tulagi. These new and improved boats were crewed by fresh officers and men eager to prove that they were the equal of their predecessors.

They got their chance the night of October 14, when the commander, Lt. Cmdr. Alan Montgomery, ordered them out to intercept a Japanese bombardment of Guadalcanal. Riding in Lieutenant John M. Searles' *PT-60*, Montgomery led his boat into battle for the first time. Torpedo hits on two Japanese cruisers were claimed.

Night after night the boats went out and usually found the enemy in the infamous "Iron Bottom Sound." Soon a pattern emerged. Two boats would go ahead, acting as scouts for the others. They would give warning of an approaching Tokyo Express convoy to the main body, which would then deploy for a surprise attack.

The seamen, average age 19 or 20, quickly adapted to the needs of the Guadalcanal Campaign. In the hot, torrid climate of the Solomons, the young PT crews soon learned that the uniform of the day was either no shirt, or a tattered one, khaki pants torn off at the knee, and scuffed shoes with toes cut off to allow air to enter.

Successes began to accumulate. On December 11, 1942, Lieutenants Lester H. Gamble, Henry S. "Stilly" Taylor, and William E. Kreiner combined to sink the enemy destroyer, IJN *Teruzuki*. To the south, off the New Guinea coast, MTB Division 17 probed the many inlets in search of the enemy.

On Christmas Eve, Ensign Robert F. Lynch in *PT-122* was doing just that when he spotted the dark outline of a surfaced submarine. Attacking without hesitation, two torpedoes produced one large explosion. But the enemy vessel was still afloat.

PT-285 shown underway on October 19, 1943. Known as "Scuttlebutt John," the boat saw action at Bougainville and Palawan but was scuttled by U.S. forces in November 1945, after the war ended.



ABOVE: The crew of Elco-built *PT-157* "Aces & Eights" poses for a photo at Rendova, Solomon Islands, while operating in support of the New Georgia operation, July 1943. The next month saw *PT-157* and others engaged in a wild melee with IJN destroyers. **RIGHT:** Men of a PT boat squadron await their next call to action. PT boats normally accommodated three officers and 14 enlisted men, but crews varied from 12 to 17, depending upon the number and type of weapons installed. **OPPOSITE:** Elco's *PT-323*, dubbed "Calamity Jane," was cut in half by a kamikaze off Leyte on December 10, 1944—the first PT boat sunk by a suicide pilot. Two officers were killed and 11 men wounded.



Another run launched two more torpedoes and another explosion. The IJN's submarine *I-22* was no more.

It was not all one-sided, of course. Against the coast of Guadalcanal, Japanese destroyers caught Lieutenant Jack Searles's *PT-59*, Lieutenant Bart Connolly's *PT-115*, and Ensign J. J. Kelly's *PT-37*. The Americans' only chance was to break through the surrounding enemy.

PT-115 charged one destroyer, fired two torpedoes, and saw the enemy ship begin to list. Shells and torpedoes filled the night, star shells lit the dark sky, and the PTs continued their fight. Connolly managed to find a protective rain squall and race to safety.

So, too, did Jack Searles. Ensign Kelly had fired his four torpedoes when a blinding flash engulfed his *PT-37*. A shell had hit the gas tanks and the boat swiftly disintegrated, the crew finding themselves in the dark waters of Iron Bottom Sound. Badly wounded Motor Machinist Mate 1st Class Eldon C. Jenter spent the next three or more hours trying to stay afloat while sharks swam nearby. He was the only survivor of *PT-37*.

Nearby, Ensign R.L. Richards' *PT-123* was engaging an enemy destroyer when a Japanese float plane, unseen and unheard,

glided in and dropped a bomb on *PT-123*'s fantail. The boat swiftly became a blazing wreck and the crew forced into the water.

Enemy fighter planes, guided by the flames of *PT-123*, strafed the men swimming in the water. Four men disappeared beneath the waves. Three others were wounded by machine guns.

Even after the fall of Guadalcanal, the Tokyo Express kept running to Japanese-held islands in the northern Solomons. Again, the PT boats were called upon to stop this flow.

On August 1, a report that five Japanese destroyers were making an "Express" run through Blackett Strait sent 15 PT boats, including that of Lieutenant John "Jack" F. Kennedy's *PT-109*, to the area. The group divided to cover more ground, and Lieutenant Henry "Hank" Brantingham in *PT-159* led five boats to an attack on what he believed to be barges hugging the coastline.

The boats soon discovered that the barges were in fact Japanese destroyers. Brantingham's *PT-159* and Lieutenant William F. Liebenow's *PT-157* attacked with torpedoes and reported one hit on an enemy destroyer. The ensuing fight erupted into a crescendo of noise and flashing lights.

But, to the north, Lieutenant Kennedy saw none of this and continued his patrol in com-

pany with Lieutenant John R. Lowry in *PT-162* and Lieutenant Philip A. Porter, Jr., in *PT-169*. None had seen or heard any enemy vessels in the vicinity. But at about 2:30 in the morning, suddenly the IJN *Amagiri* loomed out of the darkness and sliced *PT-109* in half.

The Japanese destroyer, equally unaware of the American's presence, sailed away. Two of Kennedy's men died with the boat, while the others, many wounded or burned by gasoline fires, were left floating in the water. The epic story of their survival and Lieutenant Kennedy's gallantry would be yet another legend of the PT boats. (See Sidebar)

Along the New Guinea coast, the main enemy of the PT boats continued to be enemy barges. The Japanese were now plating them with armor and arming them heavily in anticipation of conflict with the American patrol boats, which they now called "Green Dragons."

The PT boat skippers were finding that when they attacked now their bullets would bounce off the barges' armored sides while they faced gunfire from guns as large as 40mm. Further, the Japanese were placing coast-defense guns and heavy machine guns along the coast where their barges usually sailed.

But the Americans were improving their weapons as well. New boats—faster, more maneuverable, and more heavily armed—were appearing in the combat zones. These carried torpedo racks rather than the more cumbersome tubes, had radar aboard, and were now guided by electronic gyro-stabilized compasses, making navigation much easier and more accurate.

Lieutenant Commander John Harlee, a veteran of the Pearl Harbor attack, came out to New Guinea with his Squadron 12 in early 1943. Hidden a mile up the Morobe River to avoid detection from the air, the squadron began operations on September 21, when Ensign Rumsey "Rum" Ewing and his *PT-191* ("Bambi") were sent out on the first night mission.

Ensign Ewing remembered his instructors' words at Melville, "Going into battle, there are two kinds of men who are not afraid—liars and bigger liars." Sailing along the coast on a dark night, "Bambi" spotted a small cargo ship dead ahead. Attacking with guns, Bambi soon set the enemy ship ablaze.

But word quickly came that enemy float planes were about, and, to avoid air attack, Ensign Ewing wanted to finish off the enemy ship quickly. An attack by depth charges was decided upon—the PT boat would race up to the side of the enemy ship and roll a 400-lb. depth charge off the stern, to explode under the enemy vessel.

But the stubborn Japanese vessel refused to sink. Ewing ordered a second attack, fol-

lowed by Ensign Robert R. "Red" Read's *PT-133*. Calling "Closer," "Closer," the two PT boat skippers renewed their attack. This time the charges exploded almost aboard the cargo ship, and it quickly disappeared beneath the waves. This method of attack with depth charges soon became known as the "bowling ball attack."

Ewing and Bambi were also involved in another episode in New Guinea some weeks later. Patrolling quietly along the coast, Bambi and Lieutenant Robert Lynch's *PT-68* came upon two enemy barges sailing along the darkened coast. The boats attacked as the barges raced for the safety of the nearest beach. Bambi scored first and was followed by *PT-68*.

Ewing turned away successfully, but when Lynch turned, he suddenly ran aground. Calling for help, Lynch soon discovered that, while firing on the barges, the PT boats had overshot into the nearby jungle, which was now on fire. It quickly became apparent that the PT boats' gunfire had not only hit the barges, but a Japanese installation hidden in the jungle ashore.

Even as *PT-191* tried to pull *PT-68* off the reef, Japanese soldiers ashore began to fire upon both boats. Fighting an urge to run, Bambi continued to try and pull her sister boat off the reef, to no avail. Then enemy shore batteries opened fire on the boats. Enemy soldiers ashore armed with





In the Battle of Surigao Strait in Leyte Gulf, *PT-131* and other boats prepare for action, October 24, 1944. Note the Mark XIII torpedoes, rockets, mortar (atop the forward deckhouse), 20mm cannon, and .50-caliber machine guns.

rifles began wading out towards the American boats. Clearly, it was time to go.

PT-68 was abandoned, her crew climbing onto *PT-191*. Once away from shore, they fired at *PT-68*, which burst into flame, and the Japanese who retreated back into the jungle.

With the crew of *PT-68* aboard and relishing the massive fires that now swept the newly discovered Japanese base ashore, Bambi made it safely back to base.

Secret enemy bases seemed to draw the PT boat crews. One such base had been discovered a few miles inland along the Pulie River in eastern New Britain. Far inland, covered by jungle and on a barely navigable stream, it was considered secure from enemy attack. But not from the PT boats.

Lieutenant Oliver J. "Ollie" Schneiders was anxious to take a crack at the base. Taking a Japanese interpreter with him, he sailed his boat under a starless night using

his radar to move up the river. Sailing into ideal ambush territory, the Americans held their breath, expecting at any moment to be ambushed by Japanese guns on either side of the stream.

But nothing happened, and soon huts and a small wharf appeared out of the darkness; Lieutenant Schneiders had arrived at the hidden enemy barge terminal. The Japanese interpreter shouted out, "Where can we tie our barge?" but received no response.

But then a voice answered, and lights flashed on, revealing a large enemy base with huts, warehouses, and sheds all hidden under thick jungle cover. Instantly, Lieutenant Schneiders shouted "Fire!" and the PT crew blasted the base with every weapon aboard. Fires broke out everywhere. Scores of the enemy ran out of the huts directly into the Americans automatic-weapons fire. Ammunition dumps began exploding. Surviving Japanese ran off into the jungle.

Lieutenant Schneiders now ceased fire. Half his mission was complete; the enemy base was destroyed. But there remained another, equally important half: his escape. Every Japanese for miles around was now alerted to the presence of an American "devil boat," and would be trying to destroy it. The boat turned around and began a slow return to the ocean.

But it had not gone far when it became stuck on the muddy bottom of the Pulie River. Stranded, and exposed by the fires still raging at the enemy base, Lieutenant Schneiders' crew used the engines to free the boat. Soon they were on their way again. Without a shot being fired against it, the boat and crew made it safely back to their own wharf at Morobe.

By July 30, 1944, General MacArthur's New Guinea Campaign was ending. The western tip of the island had been reached, and tens of thousands of Japanese lay stranded behind the advancing Americans. But the PT boats were still in the fight.

One of their assignments was to prevent the 37,000 Japanese on Halmahera from escaping to the nearby island of Morotai. This they managed to do, keeping them bottled up until the end of the war, allowing the invasion of Morotai to proceed without inter-

The PT Boat in Hollywood Films

At least three Hollywood films featured PT boats in their storylines. Probably the most well-known is *PT-109* (1963), starring Cliff Robertson as John F. Kennedy. The combat action takes place at Blackett Strait in the Solomons, where PT boats are sent out on a dark night to intercept a run by the Tokyo Express, ferrying troops and supplies to Japanese garrisons.

A Japanese destroyer suddenly appears out of the night and slices *PT-109* in half. Kennedy and the unhurt members of the crew swim among flaming wreckage and burning fuel oil to rescue the survivors. Making it to an island, and despite his injuries, Kennedy repeatedly swims out to pull more survivors ashore. The group then swims to another island where friendly natives do their best to care for them.

Finding a coconut, JFK scratches out an SOS message and the natives take it to an Australian coast watcher who alerts American authorities; Kennedy and his crew are rescued. Film critic Jay Hyams wrote that *PT-109* was “a unique film if only because its leading character was at that time president of the United States.”

Another movie in which the PT boats play a major role is *In Harm's Way* (1965). As part of the sub-plot, a young PT boat officer, Jere, played by Brandon De Wilde as the son of Rock Torrey (John Wayne), dies when his boat is crushed by a Japanese ship.

A third—and arguably the best—Hollywood film about PT boats is *They Were Expendable* (1945), directed by John Ford and starring John Wayne and Robert Montgomery (the latter who actually had commanded a PT boat in the Pacific during the war). The film is loosely based on the real-life exploits of John Bulkeley, who sued the filmmaker for what he thought was a false and disparaging depiction of his character.

Nevertheless, Hyams wrote, “The crewmen of the PT boats are the ‘expendables,’ and their heroism lies in their unquestioning—if fatalistic—determination to perform their duty.”

—Flint Whitlock



One of the “Green Dragon” boats docked in New Guinea prepares for a combat run. A number of PT boats were brought out of mothballs after the war to take part in Hollywood productions

ference from the large enemy force on Halmahera.

It was during the invasion of Morotai that Ensign Harold A. Thompson’s aircraft was shot down by enemy fire. He landed in Wasile Bay, badly wounded. A Catalina flying boat dropped him a raft, into which he climbed. But the raft began to drift towards the enemy-held shore. Soon he was at an enemy cargo ship barely 150 yards from shore.

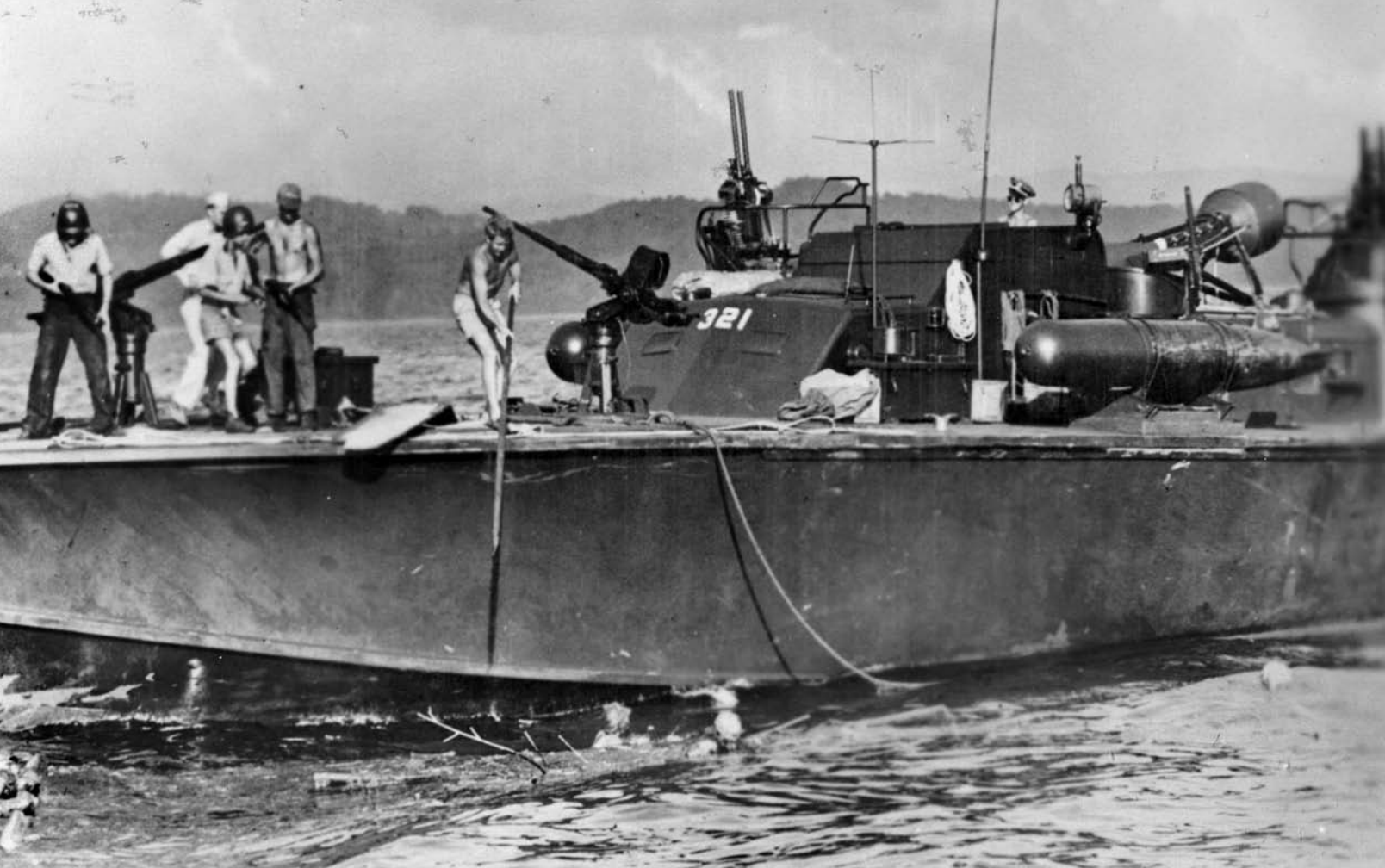
To avoid drifting ashore, Ensign Thompson tied his raft to the Japanese ship, which was unmanned. A Catalina tried to rescue Thompson but was driven off by enemy fire from coast artillery and nearby machine guns. The downed pilot was now being used as bait for further rescue attempts. He was in a narrow channel blocked by a minefield and protected by shore batteries. His only hope was rescue before darkness set in, when the Japanese would come for him.

Thompson’s plight came to the attention of Admiral Daniel “Uncle Dan” Barbey, the commander of the Morotai operation. He summoned Commander Selman “Biff” Bowling, commander of Seventh Fleet PT boats, along with his intelligence officer and two of his squadron commanders. They were asked to give a rescue mission a try.

Commander Bowling did not want to order any of his men on what they all understood was a suicide mission, but both squadron commanders were willing, if not eager. The choice fell on Lieutenant Arthur Murray Preston’s Squadron 33. Lieutenant Preston was a 31-year-old graduate of Yale University and Virginia University’s Law School. Faced with the most difficult mission of his Navy career, he called for volunteers from Squadron 33. Every officer and man volunteered.

Preston selected Lieutenants Wilfred B. Tatro’s *PT-489* (“Eight Ball”) and Hershel F. Boyd’s *PT-363*. Bowling reluctantly allowed the squadron intelligence officer, Lieutenant Donald Seaman, to accompany the mission.

With Preston sailing in “Eight Ball,” they raced south to the area of the rescue. Meanwhile Lieutenant Robert Stanley



studied maps of Wasile Bay in preparation for the rescue. Not only was Lieutenant Thompson close to the enemy beach, but there was an active enemy airbase on a nearby island!

The boats arrived at the entrance to Wasile Bay only to find that their promised naval air cover had failed to arrive. With darkness fast approaching, Lieutenant Preston gave the order to enter the bay. Immediately, several enemy shore batteries opened fire on the zig-zagging boats. Faced with accurate enemy fire, Preston gave the order to retreat, which led the boats through an enemy minefield. Fortunately, neither hit a mine.

Once the two boats had left the bay, the promised air support arrived. Lieutenant Preston again ordered his boats into the bay under the air cover. Lieutenant Tatro opened full throttle on his three engines and raced into Wasile Bay as the air cover bombed and strafed the coast-defense guns. But the Japanese continued to fire on the two PT boats, which maneuvered wildly to avoid that fire.

Twenty minutes passed while the boats reached the entrance to the bay once again. Here the noise level rose to fever pitch, as explosions, tracers, and shouting voices filled the air around the bay. Every gun on the two boats fired back, few seeing targets but feeling better while fighting back.

Lieutenant Preston's Medal of Honor citation reads, in part, "Lt. Cmdr. (then Lieutenant) Preston led *PT-489* and *PT-363* through 60 miles of restricted, heavily mined waters. Twice turned back while running the gauntlet of fire from powerful coastal defense guns guarding the 11-mile strait at the entrance to the bay, he was again turned back by furious fire in the immediate area of the downed airman.

"Aided by an aircraft smokescreen, he finally succeeded in reaching his objective and, under vicious fire delivered at 150-yard range, took the pilot aboard and cleared the area, sinking a small hostile cargo vessel with 40-mm fire during retirement.

"Increasingly vulnerable when covering aircraft were forced to leave because of insufficient fuel, Lt. Cmdr. Preston raced PT boats 489 and 363 at high speed for 20 minutes through shell-splashed waters and across minefields to safety. Under continuous fire for 2½ hours, Lt. Cmdr. Preston successfully achieved a mission considered suicidal in its tremendous hazards and brought his boats through without personnel casualties and with but superficial damage from shrapnel. His exceptional daring and great personal valor enhance the finest traditions of the U.S. Naval Service." Lieutenant Preston's Medal of Honor was the second, and last, awarded to PT boat sailors in World War II.

In a rare occurrence, PT boats also took part in the largest fleet action of the war. During the multi-faceted Battle of Leyte Gulf in October 1944, the PT boats were assigned to defend Surigao Strait in the Philippines. Some 35 boats of Squadron 7 (Lt. Cmdr. Robert Leeson) and Squadron 12 (Lieutenant Weston C. Pullen, Jr.) were ordered to station themselves in advance of the battleships, cruisers, and destroyers of the U.S. Seventh Fleet at the end of Surigao Strait. Their orders were specific: they were not to engage the

Japanese until they had reported their composition, course, and speed.

Near midnight of October 24, Ensign Peter R. Gadd in *PT-131* ("Tarfu") looked at his radar screen and was shocked to see an increasing number of large targets begin to appear. Together with Lieutenants Joseph A. Eddin's *PT-152* ("Lack-A-Nookie") and Ian D. Malcolm's *PT-130* ("New Guinea Crud") the skippers soon identified two battleships, two cruisers, and destroyers.

Repeated attempts to notify Seventh Fleet of the sighting failed to elicit a response. But the Japanese had spotted the "Green Dragons" and opened fire on the boats with heavy naval guns. Lieutenant Malcolm's *PT-130* took a direct hit from an 8-inch shell that failed to explode but damaged the boat. Aboard *PT-152* an enemy shell blew the 37mm gun off the forecastle, killing the gunner and starting fires aboard.

To escape, gunners fired at the Japanese searchlights, which were soon extinguished. The battered boats soon joined with Ensign Dudley J. Johnson's *PT-127*; Johnson was finally able to contact Seventh Fleet. The "Devil Boats" had done their job.

In the Philippines, the boats came up against their deadliest enemy: the kamikaze. Inexperienced Japanese suicide pilots often mistook the boats for larger U.S. Navy ships and crash-dived on them, thinking they were hitting destroyers or even cruisers.

In mid-December 1944, Lieutenant Byron F. Kent and his *PT-230* ("Sea Cobra") were cruising off Mindoro when three enemy planes were spotted approaching. Immediately the boat went to full speed and began zigzagging. The first plane was fast approaching, and Lieutenant Kent had to choose: turn left, or turn right. The wrong call would mean the lives of 15 Americans and loss of *PT-230*. He turned right at the last possible moment, and the



ABOVE: A twin-fifty gunner aboard a PT boat scans the sky for enemy planes as he protects transports and landing craft heading into Empress Augusta Bay at Bougainville, November 20, 1943. PT boats took part in virtually every engagement in the Pacific Theater. OPPOSITE: Sailors aboard *PT-321* prepare to lift a Japanese survivor clinging to a tree branch out of the water in the Surigao Strait in 1944.

first kamikaze fatally plunged into the sea.

The second plane came in hard on the heels of the first and again Lieutenant Kent had to choose. This time he turned left, and the kamikaze slammed into the ocean less than 45 feet from Kent's boat. The third plane came screaming down with guns blazing. Another last-second turn and the last Japanese plane went into the water so close that the boat's stern was lifted out of the water and the crew splashed with flame, smoke, debris, and water. But there were no injuries, and *PT-230* was still afloat.

At the end of the war, the United States Navy decided that it would be too expensive and too time-consuming to retain the PT boats in a mothball fleet. The decision was made to beach them and, after stripping them of all useful materials, to burn 121 of them on the beach of Samar Island in the Philippines.

During the war, 531 PT boats were built. Of these, 99 were lost during the war. Accidents and friendly fire accounted for 32, while 27 were scuttled to avoid capture, eight had been rammed by enemy ships, two destroyed by kamikazes, nine by enemy mines, six by coast-defense guns, three by strafing, and seven by enemy naval guns.

Several boats survived the war and post-war destruction. Thirteen are known to have survived and are still afloat. *PT-48* (Elco), a South Pacific veteran, is being restored in Kingston, New York. *PT-305* (Higgins), a Mediterranean veteran, is fully restored at the National World War II Museum in New Orleans.

Another Mediterranean veteran, *PT-309* (Higgins) is also fully restored at the Museum of the Pacific War in Fredericksburg, Texas. Two boats, *PT-617* (Elco) and *PT-796* (Higgins), are on display at Battleship Cove Naval Museum at Fall River, Massachusetts.

Most of the other survivors have been converted to pleasure boats, dinner cruise boats, sightseeing boats, and fishing boats. Recent research indicates that Lieutenant Kennedy's second boat, *PT-59*, may be under the Harlem River in New York City.

At least 330 officers and crewmen of the PT boats lost their lives during the war. □

Combat Command: GLORY IN THE WRENCHES



Once an armored division or battalion landed in Europe, it was the job of the Ordnance personnel to prepare the tanks and other armored vehicles for long road marches and eventual combat. Here, members of a maintenance unit service M4 Sherman tanks that have just arrived in Cherbourg, France, November 4, 1944.



The dedication and bravery of Combat Command maintenance personnel kept America's armored spear driving forward into the heart of Germany and victory in the war in Europe. **BY ALLYN VANNOY**

The U.S. Army's drive across France and Belgium during the late summer and fall of 1944 was made possible by the support of the logistics and maintenance personnel that performed their duties magnificently—but received little credit or glory. But those “up front” could not have accomplished their job without these hard-working and dedicated units. In many cases, their work was not only difficult but dangerous.

One of those support personnel was First Lieutenant Belton Y. Cooper, who went on active duty with the U.S. Army in June 1941 and was subsequently assigned as an ordnance officer. He attended the Army's Ground Force School at Ft. Knox, Kentucky, where he received instruction on tank and vehicle maintenance, as well as tactics in armored combat.



National Archives

This instruction proved valuable later during his service in Europe and also provided an appreciation of how German armored superiority forced American tank commanders to disregard doctrine and improvise in the face of tactical situations. Cooper would be assigned to the 3rd Armored Division's Combat Command B (CCB), the equivalent of an infantry regiment.

Of the 16 armored divisions of the U.S. Army in World War II, only the 2nd and 3rd Armored Divisions maintained their armored heavy organization—having two armored regiments and a single armored infantry regiment, whereas the light armored division had just three tank battalions and three armored infantry battalions. The heavy armored divisions had 232 medium tanks as compared to 168 medium tanks for the light armored divisions.

Although inferior in firepower and armor to heavier German models, the division had as many tanks as two-and-a-half German panzer divisions. The 3rd Armored Division included the 32nd and 33rd Armored Regiments and 36th Armored Infantry Regiment.

Following each of the unit's combat operations, maintenance personnel would go for-

ward to locate damaged vehicles. Per operating instructions, unless they were able to locate the knocked-out tank and obtain its vehicle number, along with determining the extent of the damage, it was difficult to obtain a replacement tank through supply channels.

Once the extent of damage to a vehicle had been determined, a decision was made as to whether it could be repaired by the combat maintenance facilities, or whether it would have to be left for the army ordnance depot to pick up later. In the latter case, a request would be made for a replacement vehicle. If the tank was in a minefield, the engineers would be called to clear a path so that recovery vehicles could get to it.

Maintenance personnel sometimes found themselves close to the action—sometimes too close.

The 3rd Armored Division landed in France on June 24, 1944, and was sent to the St. Lô area as U.S. forces fought to break out of the Normandy bridgehead

As the division moved forward, Lieutenant Cooper found himself at the head of the liaison group just behind CCB's headquarters. Just east of the town of Airel, north of St. Lô, they came upon a burning building along the roadway where two dead American soldiers lay naked on the ground near a jeep. They appeared to have attempted to take cover from artillery fire when a shell struck the building and the blast deflected down upon them. It had blown them out of the jeep. They were terribly burned. Cooper and his driver were revolted at the sight—the war was now very real to them.

As Cooper's column continued on, moving through defilade between hedgerows, they came under fire. They found themselves with Germans in the hedgerows to their north and Americans in hedgerows to their south. Fortunately, the hedgerows were high, and most of the bullets and shells passed over their heads. The column crawled slowly forward in the dark without blackout lights.

At the top of a hill, they were directed into a field that was the CCB headquarters' bivouac. But the area was also on the forward slope of the hill and open to direct enemy fire. They later learned that the Germans had hoisted a 75mm PAK-41 anti-tank gun into a church steeple about a quarter-mile away. Luckily, the darkness had hidden the CCB headquarters. Close to daybreak, one of the American tanks was able to locate the

anti-tank gun and knock it out.

The CCB's first Vehicle Collecting Point (VCP) was established near Airel with the 33rd Maintenance recovery crews starting to bring in damaged vehicles. As tanks and other armored vehicles arrived at the VCP, the horrors of the war became apparent. Maintenance crews had to crawl inside and clean up the remains of crewmen—blood, gore, and brains were splattered everywhere. Body parts and soldiers' identifications, if any, were gathered and turned over to Graves Registration personnel.

Strong detergents and disinfectants were used to clean the interior before repair crews began their work. After repairs were completed, the interior was repainted. Despite this, the stench of blood and death could not be removed.

As the Allies advanced across France and Belgium the combat elements would set up in a circle off the road before nightfall, forming an all-around defensive position. Tanks and infantry would establish an outer perimeter, and the maintenance, medical and supply units would be on the interior, where they could do their work. At daybreak, when the combat units moved out, the maintenance unit commander designated repaired vehicles that were considered ready for action and returned to their units or were towed to the next stopping point.

If there were more damaged vehicles than the wreckers could accommodate, a VCP was established and the ordnance company commander detached a maintenance platoon to remain at the VCP and repair the vehicles still needing work. This work could take several days—the platoon often being in areas where enemy units were still active—requiring the maintenance personnel to be responsible for their own security.

After the vehicles were repaired, they were returned to their units, and the maintenance

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ABOVE: While one man looks into the turret of a Sherman, another mechanic (left) works to re-attach a track that has come off after the tank drove into a ditch in the Vosges region of France, December 1944. Maintenance personnel often had to retrieve the torn and burned bodies of crewmen from the tanks' interiors. **OPPOSITE:** Using a Federal C-2 wrecker, a maintenance crew installs a new radial airplane engine in a 2nd Armored Division Sherman tank named "Hurricane" near the front lines at Le Teilleul, France, east of Avranches, July 1944.

platoon moved forward to rejoin the ordnance company. In some instances, there would be several VCPs along the route of advance. This system of repair, along with replacement vehicles brought up each day by the ordnance liaison officer, allowed the combat command to continue to advance and fight as an effective force.

Towards the end of the day, a list was prepared of all the vehicles and other ordnance work in the VCP. This included any spare parts needed, along with a list of all vehicles considered too badly damaged and that had been cannibalized for usable replacement parts. There was also a list from the recovery crews of any tanks and other vehicles that had been damaged beyond repair and had not been recovered. From these lists Lieutenant Cooper created a combat loss report after each action of CCB.

After dark each day, Cooper was responsible for delivering the combat loss reports to the division maintenance battalion headquarters some 30 to 50 miles behind the front. Because of the sensitive nature of the information, it could not be sent by radio, but had to be hand carried. The reports were placed in a wooden box in the back of Cooper's jeep along with a thermite grenade. In the event of an ambush, the grenade was to be set off and the reports destroyed.

During the division's advance, the armored combat commands would bypass many enemy positions—leaving them for trailing infantry to mop up a day or more later. So, the trip to deliver the reports presented possible hazards.

Cooper and his driver would leave the combat command VCP after midnight, driving without blackout lights. The jeep's windshield was lowered and covered with canvas, and a small angle iron wire-cutter was mounted on the bumper to protect against wires that the Germans sometimes stretched across a roadway to decapitate those riding in jeeps or on motorcycles.

Cooper and his driver lived in their jeep. The inventory of the items that Cooper carried onboard the jeep included two bedrolls, two backpacks, two ponchos, a pair of binoculars, a case of 10-in-1 rations,

a case of K-rations, and the wooden box for reports with the thermite grenade inside. Cooper carried a .45-caliber automatic pistol and his driver had a .30-caliber carbine. In addition, they had a 1903 Springfield rifle, two .30-caliber M1 rifles, a box of hand grenades, and two German panzerfausts they had found.

When Cooper arrived at the division maintenance battalion headquarters, he would report to the maintenance battalion shop officer and provide him the combat-loss report. He also would give him information on the tactical situation as well as the location of knocked-out tanks and other vehicles. Cooper would then lead fresh vehicles forward daily, when needed, enabling the combat command to maintain its strength.

Cooper was required to maintain knowledge of the location of the division maintenance battalion headquarters and the relative location of combat units. Leading the column of replacement vehicles also required some idea of where the combat command was headed. This information was critical to operations, but also made Cooper a valuable asset as well as a concern if he should be captured.

When Cooper and his driver paused to catch some sleep, they would dig a two-man foxhole about seven-by-five-feet long and two feet deep. They would cut down small saplings and place them over the hole, then place their shelter halves on top. A layer of dirt several inches thick was placed on top of this with a small entrance left at one end.

While this would not withstand a direct hit by artillery shells, it offered some protection from near hits; as long as they were able to stay below an explosion's blast cone, they had a chance of surviving. The overhead cover was also important as German night bombers would scatter butterfly bombs—small bomblets about the size of a hand grenade—over an area.

After fighting near Airel, France, a VCP was established and a steady stream of knocked-out tanks and other vehicles were delivered to the VCP.

As armored vehicle casualties mounted, new procedures needed to be adopted. Ord-

nance logistics training for operations on the continent had been based on the assumption that vehicle casualties, especially tanks, would be much lower than they were in reality, so supply of spare parts was grossly inadequate. The directive had been to not cannibalize tanks.

Cooper's commanding officer, Major A.C. Arrington, was shocked when he saw the first combat-loss report—that the M4 Shermans were suffering terrible losses. He ordered that every seriously damaged vehicle be cannibalized so that other tanks in the VCP could get back in operation quickly. Also, replacement vehicles and tanks were now requested orally, rather than waiting for paperwork to be processed.

Maintenance crews erected shelter halves over the back end of tanks so they could work on engines in the field after dark. They were extremely careful working under tarps after dark as the slightest glimmer of light could be seen for miles by low-flying aircraft. Working around the clock, crews caught catnaps whenever they could.

The 3rd Armored Division had entered combat in France on June 29; by July 16, the division had only penetrated five miles into enemy lines, but had lost 87 M4 Shermans. This figure did not include those that had been repaired and returned to units.

Among the problems with the M4 Sherman was its engine. The tank's air-cooled radial engine had been selected as a result of the lack of funding during the pre-war years, prompting the use of surplus aircraft radial engines. The use of such engines in tanks resulted in greater fouling of spark plugs—with nine cylinders, and two plugs per cylinder—maintenance was not an easy undertaking. The units made an effort to replace these with Ford V-8 engines whenever possible as they were easier to maintain.

If a projectile penetrated to the interior of the tank, a series of incandescent particles would shower the crew compartment, killing or seriously wounding the crew. The incan-

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ABOVE: Near a windmill at Hasselt, Belgium, a young boy watches as tank crewmen clean the bore of their gun, September 1944. Crews often performed their own maintenance for simple jobs, leaving the difficult ones for the trained ordnance personnel. **OPPOSITE:** A 3rd Armored Division Sherman (right) passes a knocked-out Pz.Kpfw V "Panther" tank on a snowy Belgian forest road during the Battle of the Bulge, December 1944. A curious GI can be seen examining the enemy tank.



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descent particles would also generate small splinters which, if embedded in the electric cables, would short out systems.

Often, the sparks would set the tank on fire. Repairs were made quickly to the least damaged tanks. If a tank had not been burned out completely, it could usually be repaired. Hits to the gas tanks or engine would also result in fires. Heat from a fire would anneal the hardness of the armor plate so that it was considered beyond repair.

Ordnance maintenance crews were also responsible for familiarizing replacement crews with replacement tanks, particularly if they had new equipment. This grew more vital as the number of veteran tankers declined. The ability of the division to restore its strength after heavy fighting depended largely on the capability of maintenance crews to train new personnel and get the tanks and crews ready to return to operations.

Cooper's duties required him to travel day and night, taking note of potential trouble spots. Near the crest of a hill just outside the town of Maubeuge, France, near the French-Belgium border, a column of repaired tanks led by Cooper paused as he went forward to reconnoiter. On the lower slope of the hill before him was a large wooded area to the left of the roadway, and an open field to the right with woods about 300 yards beyond.

Approached by a French farmer, Cooper learned that German soldiers occupied the woods to the left of the road. He also learned that there was a French Resistance headquarters in Maubeuge where he could obtain more information on the local situation. After informing his sergeant of the situation, he headed off to Maubeuge.

Cooper found the Resistance headquarters guarded by civilians armed with a mix of German and American weapons. He was led to a situation room, the walls covered with maps showing the positions of both enemy and friendly forces. The French commander was a tall, good-looking blonde woman, dressed in GI coveralls. She had excellent command of the situation that she shared with Cooper. He learned that the 3rd Armored Division was at Mons, Belgium, just to the north, under pressure from the Germans.

Returning to his column, Cooper prepared his crews to move out. While no enemy movement had been seen in the suspect woods, the tank commanders were directed to swing their guns to the left as they moved down the road. Their objective was to get the tanks to the division and not to be delayed by a firefight.

As they prepared to move out, the assistant division commander of the 1st Infantry Division, Brig. Gen. Willard Wyman, leading the 26th Regimental Combat Team,

appeared on the scene, asking who was in charge of the column of tanks. Wyman was surprised to learn that a first lieutenant was leading what he thought was a task force.

Wyman asked if Cooper thought he could use his column as an effective fighting force. Cooper explained that his tanks did not have radio communications with one another, but that they could use hand signals and could put up a good fight if they had to.

Wyman directed Cooper to set up a perimeter and await further orders. Wyman then had his air liaison officer call for an air strike on the suspect woods. In a short time, six P-47 fighter-bombers appeared and circled overhead. They strafed and bombed the area, leaving the woods boiling with flames and secondary explosions. The next day, Cooper's column reached Mons.

On September 15, as CCB was penetrating the Siegfried Line about a mile south of Kornelimünster, Germany, Cooper saw a long white plume of a rocket going straight up from the woods to his east. Unlike an artillery rocket, this one kept going straight up, not arching over. As he watched the rocket continue skyward, a second appeared, launched from near the first, following the same trajectory. The launch site appeared to be only about a mile to the east. The next day there was a report that

the Germans had fired the first V2 rockets on Antwerp.

By September 23, the division had reached the Stolberg-Aachen area. Of the 400 tanks that the division had started with in Normandy, only about 100 were still operational. Although ordnance had replaced most of the losses, maintenance crews had undertaken extraordinary efforts as well to keep the combat units up to strength.

During September and October, as the First U.S. Army prepared to drive to the Roer River, attacks into the Hürtgen Forest had been extremely costly. The decision was made to use the 3rd Armored Division in a formal assault—contrary to doctrine.

A key terrain feature in the area of the assault was Hill 287, near Mausbach, east of Stolberg. The fall rains had turned the area into soggy terrain. In addition, the Germans had heavily mined fields in the area. But instead of planting their mines in front of the forward infantry positions as they usually did, they placed them slightly behind their forward infantry outposts.

Standard operating procedure was for combat engineers to infiltrate the outposts at night to locate and remove the mines, but this new arrangement negated such action. The Germans planned to hold their outposts as long as possible, leaving the Americans to deal with intact minefields.

The 3rd Armored Division was to penetrate the minefields on the reverse slope of Hill 287 and seize three heavily fortified villages in the valley beyond. CCB was to make the initial penetration.

The morning of November 16 was overcast with patchy ground fog. The attack began at 11:15 a.m. with a major bombing strike—hundreds of heavy and medium bombers struck the towns of Eschweiler and Langerwehe and targets further east. In addition, 90 field artillery battalions fired concentrations.

CCB assembled just southwest of Hill 287. As the CCB task forces proceeded over the crest of the hill, passing through American lines, they moved into the German minefields.

Each task force had one flail tank—a

tank equipped with a series of heavy chains attached to a horizontal, rapidly rotating drum mounted on two arms in front of the vehicle—intended to clear minefields.

The tanks had to deal not only with the mines, but also with the extremely soggy ground. The flail tanks detonated several mines, but soon bogged down in the muddy fields. They were then knocked out by enemy gunfire.

The second tank in each column had to go around the flail tank in order to continue the attack. After proceeding several yards, it struck a mine and was disabled. The next tank bypassed this tank and, in turn, was disabled by a mine. This process continued with several more tanks encountering mines until one was finally able to make it through the minefield.

Hoping to take advantage of this success, the next tank attempted to follow the same path and made it through; however, as the third tank tried to follow the same path, it became mired in the soft ground. At the same time, the Germans continued to fire on the tanks until they set them on fire.

The assault had begun with 64 M4 tanks, but within 26 minutes 48 Shermans were put out of action. By nightfall, one of the task forces had only four operational tanks out of the 19 with which it had started the operation.

By the next morning, the engineers had cleared some of the mines on Hill 287, placing tape markers so that the recovery crews might reach the disabled tanks. Although most fighting had ceased in the area, there was still sporadic small-arms and mortar fire. When this happened, the recovery crews took cover until the firing ceased, slowing their efforts as they worked to remove the tanks.

In addition to the sporadic fire, there was still the danger of mines. In an effort to minimize the danger, the recovery crews attached 100-foot-long cables between the tanks and the recovery vehicles and attempted to winch the tanks from the field. The crews were able to recover all but eight of the tanks—those all having been burned out. Of those recovered, the maintenance crews were able to repair all but 13 in just three days.

By mid-December, the 3rd Armored Division and its attached units had a strength of approximately 1,800 combat vehicles and 2,300 wheeled vehicles, presenting a challenge of a diverse assortment of vehicles to the maintenance crews. In addition to the maintenance battalion, which had more than 1,000 men, there were another 1,000 men in the maintenance companies in the armored regiments, plus the platoons and maintenance sections of other units—a total of 2,000 involved in maintenance. There were also 8,200 drivers and assistant drivers who performed first-echelon maintenance on their own vehicles.

This seemingly large maintenance organization allowed the combat commands of the 3rd Armored Division to exploit breakthroughs and maintain the unit's momentum.

Equipment was not only exposed to combat, as well as weather and poor road conditions, but the wheeled vehicles—850 two-and-a-half ton trucks in the division—were heavily overloaded. These trucks were often carrying as much as 10 tons.

On December 16, with the opening of the German Ardennes offensive, also known as the “Battle of the Bulge,” the 3rd Armored Division was ordered to Eupen, Belgium, north of the German advance. CCB left Mausbach, Germany, late on the afternoon of December 19, heading south, moving all night, through falling snow and freezing rain.

Maintenance personnel dealt with breakdowns while on the move in an effort to keep the columns on schedule. A column of 1,200 vehicles, half of them tanks, half-tracks, and other fighting vehicles, normally experienced 150 to 200 breakdowns during a march of 50-60 miles.

After the front was stabilized, as the Allies prepared to push back German forces in the Ardennes, maintenance personnel worked feverishly to ready equipment and vehicles for the coming fight. Maintenance efforts were complicated by the bitter cold. But the maintenance personnel felt lucky as compared to their infantry and tanker counterparts.

The constant exposure to the winter elements eventually caught up with Lieutenant



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Cooper. One evening, as he prepared to turn in for the night, he noticed that his feet seemed unusually sore, and then found large black splotches on the ball and heel of both feet. An examination the next day by the battalion surgeon determined that the spots were frostbite.

Cooper pleaded with the doctor not to send him to the hospital, afraid that the temporary transfer from the division might prevent him from returning. The doctor used a scalpel to peel away some of the skin, applied antiseptic, and bandaged his feet. Cooper remained at the aid station for a couple of days.

Heavy losses during the Battle of the Bulge resulted in a critical shortage of tank crews. The standard M4 Sherman had a crew of five, including driver, assistant driver, gunner, assistant gunner (or loader), and the tank commander. The first to go was the assistant driver, eliminating the use of the hull's ball-mounted machine gun. Next, the assistant gunner was removed, the tank commander having to double as the loader.

On January 8, 1945, as 17 tanks were prepared to be issued to combat units, the ordinance unit had to not only ready the tanks, but to also find crews to man them. The 33rd Armored Regiment sent them 17 tank drivers who had limited or no combat experience. Another 35 soldiers came from the replacement pool, but had no experience or training with tanks. Thirty-four of these men were selected and split into two-man teams.

They, along with the drivers, made up 17 three-man crews. They were given a brief orientation covering the equipment and vehicle operation—shown how to operate the turret, load the main gun, and given a chance to fire three rounds.

Cooper later learned that within less than a day, 15 of the tanks had been knocked out and destroyed. But he was unable to find out how many of the young crewmen were lost.

On January 20, the division moved to the Barvaux-Durbuy, Belgium, area for rest and rehabilitation. While there, the maintenance and supply units worked feverishly to get the division back up to strength.

Crewmen of a 3rd Armored Division M4 glance at the burned and blasted remains of a Pz.Kpfw IV tank near Marienburg, Germany, March 28, 1945. The Germans could not match the Americans' ability to repair their tanks and quickly get them back into action.

During the fighting in the Ardennes from December 16 to January 20, the division had lost 125 M4 medium tanks, 38 M5 light tanks, six M7 self-propelled guns, and 158 half-tracks, armored cars, and other vehicles.

As an answer to the German heavy tanks, the first 20 M26 Pershing heavy tanks to arrive in the ETO were divided with 10 each to the 2nd and 3rd Armored Divisions. Five were issued to each armored regiment.

When the U.S. Army was developing the Pershing tank, a heavier vehicle with a wider track than the M4 and armed with a long-barreled 90mm gun, it was given a low priority for production. The Sherman was thought to be sufficient to meet the German tanks that would be faced.

The Pershing was the first completely new American main battle tank of the

war—a radically new design. It weighed 47.5 tons as compared to the M4's 34 tons. Although heavier than the Sherman, its longer and wider track gave it a ground-bearing pressure of three to four pounds per square inch against the Sherman's seven pounds per square inch—indicating its better ability to cross muddy terrain. It had four inches of cast-steel armor on the glacis plate at 45 degrees, where the German Panther had three-and-a-half inches at 38 degrees.

The tank was equipped with power traverse and had a gyro-stabilized gun control, enabling it to fire while on the move—the gun remaining fairly level. The 90mm gun fired a heavy projectile at a velocity of about 2,750 feet per second. The Pershing's 550-horsepower Ford in-line engine gave it a higher horsepower-per-ton ratio than the German Panther.

But the Pershings came too few and too late to have any significant impact on the fighting.

As the next phase of operations began, the 104th and 8th Infantry Divisions established a bridgehead over the Roer, followed by columns of the 3rd Armored Division crossing into the bridgehead on the night of February 24-25.

The concentration of an armored assault force in a small bridgehead presented dangers. As maintenance elements were moving into the bridgehead, Cooper witnessed anti-aircraft fire erupt, tracers arching skyward, seeming to focus on a part of the sky where a low-flying twin-engine German fighter appeared.

Cooper recalled that when he was stationed in Gloucester in May 1944, he had seen and heard the British Gloucester jet fighters being tested. He recognized the same shrill noise now—it was an Me262 that came screaming in low over their heads. In the next moment, an American P-47 Thunderbolt fighter was seen approaching in a sharp dive from several thousand feet, attempting to intercept the German jet. But the Me262 took off and easily out-distanced the P-47. Despite the impression it left on those who witnessed it, they knew that the momentum of win-

ning the war was on their side.

The 3rd Armored Division broke out of the bridgehead on the morning of February 26, inflicting heavy casualties on the German defenders. Cooper witnessed terrible sights: "I was shocked to see a young German soldier sitting fully erect in his foxhole, holding his rifle. He had been struck by a single projectile, and I could see daylight through a two-inch hole in both sides of his helmet and his head."

From the bridgehead the division moved towards Cologne, assaulting the city on March 3rd. On March 25, after the Allies had crossed the Rhine and were driving deep into Germany, Cooper found himself with CCB near Altenkirchen, some 30 miles east of the Remagen bridgehead.

As he and his driver headed back to their maintenance battalion headquarters they drove along the roadway on the south bank of the Sieg River, heading west. Moving in the opposite direction was a truck convoy of the 1st Infantry Division. Near the crest of a hill, the trucks were exposed to observation from the north bank of the river and German artillery fire. Due to the heavy traffic, the convoy became jammed up and exposed across the top of the hill.

As shelling began, the infantrymen bailed out of the trucks and took cover. One of the trucks was hit. Cooper's driver stopped their jeep well short of the crest as they assessed the situation. Given the size of the explosions and the time interval between rounds—estimating 20 to 25 seconds—Cooper believed that the Germans were using a single heavy howitzer. With 400 yards of open ground to cross, Cooper carefully calculated

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ABOVE: A German panzerfaust anti-tank weapon, operated by Hitler Youth members, has knocked out this Sherman tank and set it ablaze in the center of Leipzig, Germany, April 1945. The hit devastated the crew inside and created a psychologically difficult job for the maintenance personnel. **OPPOSITE:** Armored recovery vehicles (ARVs) retrieve a damaged tank near Begendorf, Germany. ARVs were typically built on a tank chassis and hoisting cranes in place of a gun turret.



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the time needed to make their dash to safety.

After another round fell, Cooper and his driver crouched low in their jeep and hit the gas. They reached the crest in 18 seconds. As they passed through a slight depression, their heads below the level of the embankment, another shell exploded about 15 feet from the edge of the embankment, the blast wave passing over them. Through a cloud of dust and debris, they were able to make their escape.

On the night of March 28, Cooper made his run with the combat-loss report stopping by headquarters on his way out to check the G-2's map for the next day's objective and the routes the columns would follow. With the situation changing rapidly every day, Cooper and his driver were particularly vulnerable.

The next morning he headed out to catch up with the forward elements of the division pushing the jeep's maximum speed until they reached a "Y" junction about 10 miles from Marburg, some 60 miles north of Frankfurt. Unsure which was the main road, he directed his driver to the right fork. But after 100 yards, his sixth sense told him to turn around. Back at the junction checking his map, Cooper heard a voice call out, asking if they were from the 3rd Armored. On a small knoll above the roadway were two GIs in an armored car so well camouflaged that Cooper had missed them.

Cooper said that they were with CCB. A sergeant with the 83rd Recon said that they had taken the wrong fork. If they had continued down the right fork they would have come to a German roadblock. Cooper's experience had sharpened his senses and likely saved their lives.

In another incident, a task force of the division encountered a group of seven German King Tiger tanks, with disastrous results. When the maintenance crews arrived on the scene, they found that the Germans had knocked out 17 Shermans, 17 half-tracks, three trucks, two jeeps, and an M36 tank destroyer—though three King Tigers were also disabled or abandoned in the action.

As the maintenance crews did their work, Cooper gathered the information for his report. He then went to examine the King Tigers. The upper left side of the rear armor on one of them had been penetrated by a 76mm round, passing through the fuel tank and setting the tank on fire. The round had then entered the crew compartment and struck the inside of

the faceplate. The projectile then ricocheted around the inside, killing everyone.

Curious about the penetrating power of the German 100-meter version of the panzerfaust, Cooper decided to test it against the Tiger's armor.

From 30 yards, directly in front of the Tiger, he aimed at the turret faceplate, to one side of the gun mantlet. The anti-tank rocket struck with a tremendous explosion, showering Cooper with small cement particles (the Germans having covered their tanks with a thin layer of cement to protect them from magnetic mines that a daring individual might try to attach). The warhead's shaped-charge made about a three-quarter-inch diameter hole through the faceplate's 8.5-inch turret armor. The blast showered the interior with small fragments.

A few days later, Cooper examined a knocked out Sherman. Nearly six feet of the tank's 76mm gun barrel was missing. There had also been an explosion in the crew compartment. The gun's breechblock was open, resulting in blast damage to the interior. Cooper wondered if the crew had been firing a round that detonated in the gun tube, the gun's recoil opening the breech. However, they concluded that a

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The Forgotten Rhine Crossings

BY MASON B. WEBB



Troops of the 4th U.S. Infantry Division cross the Rhine River at Worms, March 26, 1945, on a pontoon bridge constructed by the 85th Engineer Heavy Pontoon Battalion. In background are the ruins of the Ernst Ludwig highway bridge that the retreating Germans destroyed in a vain hope of stopping the Allied advance.

After the bridge at Remagen was taken on March 7, 1945, 10 U.S. Army divisions crossed Germany's mighty Rhine river, spelling doom for the Third Reich.

While British Field Marshal Bernard L. Montgomery's 21st Army Group was marching across Belgium, Holland, and into northern Germany on his way to the Rhine, Omar Bradley's 12th Army Group, made up of Courtney Hodges's First and George Patton's Third U.S. Armies, was doing the same on Monty's southern shoulder.

In the previous weeks, Bradley's group had overcome numerous rivers in the western half of Germany: the Erft, the Ruhr, the Roer, the Mosel, the Main, the Ahr, the Our, the Lauter, the Saar, the Nahe, the Kyll, and many more—each waterway being more or less vigorously defended by desperate German troops on home soil. Before them now was the Rhine, mightiest of them all.

American intelligence had identified the remnants of 21 German divisions lined up across the Rhine, but all were believed to be exhausted, seriously understrength, and incapable of putting up a sustained fight.

Hitler's hopes for a victorious last stand were dashed when, on March 7, 1945, elements of the 9th U.S. Armored Division captured the still-standing Ludendorff railroad bridge over the 980-foot-wide Rhine at the town of Remagen, between Cologne and Koblenz.





The unexpected crossing stole the thunder from Montgomery's carefully planned Operation Varsity, a combined aerial and amphibious assault across the Rhine that he had scheduled for March 24. Now Patton wanted his Third Army to do the same thing.

Third Army's Crossing

In early March, Patton arrived at the Rhine in the vicinity of Koblenz, south of Remagen, and noted that German resistance in the area had markedly diminished.

He selected Major General S. Leroy Irwin's 5th Infantry "Red Diamond" Division to spearhead his army's effort. Acting as the tip of Maj. Gen. Manton S. Eddy's XII Corps, weeks earlier the 5th had moved across the Sauer, Kyll, and Moselle/Mosel Rivers, and crashed through the Siegfried Line, heading eastward.

Patton wasn't only concerned with beating the Germans; he also very much wanted to beat Montgomery in the race across the Rhine—it was a matter of personal as well as national pride. Using Monty's perceived

dismissive attitude toward American soldiers as motivation, Patton was out to prove, once and for all, that the Yanks were every bit as good as the Tommies. To ensure his success, Patton ordered every combat engineer company with boats and bridging material to get to the river's west bank as quickly as possible.

Eddy was planning to cross the Rhine on March 23, but Patton pushed him to move up the operation by 24 hours. "We've got to get a bridgehead at once," he said. "Every day we save means the savings of hundreds of American lives! We can take the Rhine on the run!"

Consequently, horrendous traffic jams full of vehicles loaded with bridging equipment clogged every road to the west of the Rhine. The Navy and Coast Guard arrived, too, with a fleet of LCMs and LCVPs. There were also amphibious trucks known as DUKWs.

The U.S. Navy and Coast Guard were not used solely for attacking hostile ocean shores; they also played a vital role in the Rhine crossing operations. One of the types of boats was the Landing Craft, Mechanized, or "LCM," popularly known as a "Mike" Boat. It was an all-metal vessel that displaced 30 tons and was developed to carry a single Sherman tank.

The LCM's little brother was the LCVP (Landing Craft, Vehicle and Personnel) which could carry 36 men and a crew of three, had a 36-foot length and 10-foot beam that allowed it to carry a two-and-half-ton truck or two quarter-ton jeeps. Both the LCM and LCVP participated in the Rhine River crossings and were piloted by U.S. Navy sailors and Coast Guardsmen, many of whom had served on such boats during the June 1944 Normandy invasion.

The crews were members of the Navy's Task Unit 122.5, which was composed of five subordinate task units; initially they were equipped with the LCVP, but when it was realized that craft capable of carrying armored fighting vehicles would be required, LCMs were added to the task units.

In early autumn 1944, after the failure of Operation Market Garden, there was little prospect of an immediate drive to cross the Rhine. This gave the Navy the opportunity to join with Army engineers in training for deliberate river crossings using both Army and Navy assets. By November, Army and Navy planners had reached a general outline for crossing the Rhine.

Certain Army engineer units positioned in the rear areas took up the task of training and experimenting with not only their own equipment but with the employment of Navy boats.

The XII Corps' Crossings

First to set Patton's gamble in motion was Eddy's XII Corps, consisting of the 5th and 76th Infantry and 4th Armored Divisions. To fool the Germans into thinking that the crossing would take place at Mainz, XII Corps laid on a heavy smoke screen around the city while the actual crossing occurred at Oppenheim, 10 miles to the south, late on March 22.

Michael Bilder, a sergeant in the 5th Infantry Division, remembered that Patton was hell bent on beating his British rival across the Rhine. "These two had been archrivals since the Allied campaign in North Africa," he wrote in *A Foot Soldier for Patton*.

"We may not have cared for Patton, but we liked Montgomery even less. Patton could at least justify his prima donna attitude with results, but Montgomery was far too cautious and seemed to plod along ... Monty would not attack until he had overwhelming superiority, and even then he advanced in inches. Most of us felt ... he should have been fired.

"Patton told General Eddy to get one of the outfits in XII Corps over the Rhine before Monty. The 5th Division was the only outfit even close to the Rhine, so we got the order to cross it for the Third Army and the United States.... We had to race at full speed for a full day to meet Patton's deadline."

According to historian Charles MacDonald in *The Mighty Endeavor*, the crossing began the night of March 22 as "assault boats rushed forward in a wild ride from stocks carefully maintained far behind the lines since the preceding fall. They did it silently, without



ABOVE: Men and vehicles of the 80th U.S. Infantry Division load into Coast Guard-operated landing craft on the west side of the Rhine prior to making the crossing. The U.S. Navy and Coast Guard were instrumental in transporting troops over the river. OPPOSITE: With several men in a captured German halftrack leading a column of vehicles, troops of the 5th U.S. Infantry Division wait for orders to move out from a Belgian village toward the Rhine River. The "Red Diamond" division would cross at Oppenheim on the night of March 22, 1945.

advance artillery preparation at the little town of Oppenheim, 10 miles upstream [south] from the Rhine city of Mainz, where the Main River flows into the Rhine."

The endeavor began with some confusion about how exactly to deploy the boats for troop transport, but once that was figured out, activity quickly accelerated.

In 48 hours the LCVPs carried more than 15,000 troops across the river. With a turnaround time of six to eight minutes, in addition to ferrying troops across the river, the boats brought back casualties and German prisoners of war. All this work was done under sporadic German artillery and small-arms fire as well as occasional air attack, but the Navy suffered no casualties.

Bilder said that his regiment, the 11th, began crossing at 10 p.m. with two battalions of Americans nervously paddling across the rushing water under a bright, full moon, not knowing if the Germans were lying in wait, ready to blast them out of the water.

Another 5th Division soldier in another boat remembered, "It seemed ages before that far shore came into view ... my boat nosed into the bank and we stepped out into the water, which was very cold."

When those first boats touched the opposite bank, several surprised Germans quickly surrendered, but another nearby group fought back briefly, killing 20 Americans before being overwhelmed.

"The area was very lightly defended," Bilder noted. "Patton had won his race with Montgomery by a full 24 hours."

Patton called Bradley near midnight on the 22nd to crow about his—or, rather, his men's—accomplishment: "Brad, for God's sake, tell the world we're across.... We knocked down 33 Krauts [aircraft] today when they came after our pontoon bridges. I want the world to know that Third Army made it before Monty starts across."

In his memoir, *A Soldier's Story*, Bradley wrote, "In this first assault crossing of that river bastion by a modern army, the division [5th Infantry] suffered a total of 34 dead and wounded.

Patton wrote in his self-congratulatory tone, "In connection with this crossing, a somewhat amusing incident is alleged to

have happened. [Montgomery's] 21st Army Group was supposed to cross the Rhine on March 24, and, in order to be ready for this earth-shaking event, Mr. Churchill wrote a speech congratulating Montgomery on the first assault crossing over the Rhine in modern history. This speech was recorded and, through some error on the part of the British Broadcasting Company, was broadcast—in spite of the fact that the Third Army had been across for some 36 hours.”

By dawn on the 23rd, six battalions from the 5th Division were on the east side, with more on the way, followed by the tanks of Hugh Gaffey's 4th Armored Division over newly constructed bridges.

On the 23rd, while Montgomery was up north deliberately moving his pieces like a chess master, and U.S. combat engineers continued to bolt together bridges to bring more men and vehicles to the east bank at Oppenheim, Patton pushed his divisions across as fast as they could go.

As the troops crossed and moved beyond the east bank, there were sporadic firefights, but nothing like the concentrated resistance everyone had expected. In some areas, about the only opposition were some desultory artillery fire and pitiful groups of old men and young boys—the Volkssturm—that had been pressed into service to hold back the American tide. It was an unequal fight; the defenders stood no chance—they either surrendered or were killed.

“Immediately after we crossed the Rhine, the Germans regained their fighting spirit,” Bilder wrote. “German [Luftwaffe] fighters and bombers hit the engineers working to set up a bridge, and their infantry attacked our bridgehead with tank support. Despite this, we advanced and expanded the bridgehead some eight miles wide and five miles deep.

“Heavy fighting continued until March 24. Once we crossed the river, our command advanced us any way they could. We rode any type of vehicle available, and if none were available, we marched on foot. The idea was to keep moving. We had to keep the Germans off balance and prevent them from setting up a stable defense or counter attacking.”

So impressed was Patton with the 5th

Division that in a letter dated November 17, 1945—just a month before his death in a traffic accident—he wrote to General Irwin, “Nothing I can say can add to the glory which you have achieved. Throughout the whole advance across France you spearheaded the attack of your Corps. You crossed so many rivers that I am persuaded many of you have web feet, and I know that all of you have dauntless spirit. To my mind, history does not record incidents of greater valor than your crossing of the Sauer and Rhine.”

Patton at Boppard

In his memoir, Patton wrote, “We then flew to the headquarters of the VIII Corps [on March 23] to see about the crossing at Boppard ... and the crossing of the 76th Division at St. Goar on the next night.

A 90th Division historian wrote, “The 90th Division crossed the Rhine River over an engineer pontoon bridge on the crossing secured by the Fifth Division; together they secured a bridgehead for the 4th Armored Division.”

Patton was also satisfied with XII Corps' progress thus far. “All of the 5th Infantry” he wrote, “and the 90th and most of the 4th Armored were across, and arrangements were made for the 6th Armored to start crossing on the morning of the 25th.

“In the meantime, the XX Corps was assembling in the vicinity of Mainz, where we had decided to construct a railroad bridge, because the railway net was such that this was of necessity on our main supply line.”

Patton noted that ensuing operations involved moving one regiment of the 76th Division along the Rhine to capture the high ground overlooking Mainz, followed by the 5th Division crossing the Main River there, and sending the 80th Division to the confluence of the Rhine and Main.

The rest of Eddy's XII Corps would cross the Main east of Frankfurt, where it was to meet up with Troy Middleton's VIII Corps. “I told each Corps commander that I expected



ABOVE: Soldiers of the 89th U.S. Infantry Division crouch low as their amphibious truck known as a DUKW comes under fire from the vineyard-covered far bank of the Rhine at Oberwesel, March 28, 1945. OPPOSITE: Assault boats carry Patton's Third Army troops across the Rhine at St. Goar, Germany. Troops in foreground are on the alert for snipers.



him to get there first,” Patton said, “so as to produce a proper feeling of rivalry.”

The Luftwaffe, or what was left of it, did not sit idly by. At least 200 sorties attacked the various crossing sites, but American anti-aircraft guns and the XIX Tactical Air Command fought off the enemy, who did little damage.

Patton wrote in his memoir, “On March 24, [Patton’s aide, Colonel Charles] Codman, [another aide, Lieutenant Al] Stiller, General Eddy [XII Corps commander], and I crossed the Rhine at Oppenheim, stopping to spit in the river.”

Codman has a slightly different version: “We proceeded to Oppenheim, through the town, down to the barge harbor, from which the Oppenheimer vineyards are plainly visible. The General’s manner was casual as he led the little procession across the low-lying bridge. Halfway across he stopped.

“‘Time for a short halt,’ he said. Walking on the bridge’s edge, he surveyed the slow-moving surface of the great river.” Then, without further comment, he unbuttoned the fly of his trousers and relieved himself into the mighty Rhine. “‘I have been looking forward to this for a long time,’ he said, buttoning his trousers.”

Photographs taken of the incident prove that Codman’s version was the correct one.

Other divisions were about to be thrust into the river-crossing business. The boats, DUKWs, and landing craft that were still serviceable from the Oppenheim operation were removed from the river and trucked 60 miles north to where Middleton’s VIII Corps units could use them at Boppard and St. Goar.

Major General Frank L. Cullin, Jr.’s 87th “Golden Acorn” Infantry Division crossed at Boppard in the wee hours of March 25. Peter Allen, author of *One More River*, wrote that while “the 87th Infantry Division crossed in assault boats, the enemy opened a devastating fire. Shells tore apart boats and ripped men to pieces as they battled across the swirling, bouncing current. Conditions were so bad that one regiment had to abandon it and try further south at a different site.”

Richard Manchester, a member of Company K, 345th Infantry Regiment, 87th Division, recalled, “After several days of what passed for R&R in Koblenz, we loaded up and climbed on trucks in the late afternoon of March 24 and moved upstream on the west side of the Rhine to the small town of Boppard. We began to cautiously filter down through the moonlit streets toward the shingled beach.

“The enemy had mounted 20mm guns on the heights across the river. We stayed in the dark shadows. Any movement into the brightly lit streets brought immediate fire from the 20mm guns.

“Around midnight, we climbed into small metal boats. With no explanation, engineers handed paddles to men with no training in how to use them. We set out to cross the river in bright moonlight. I was resigned. Nothing could be done. We were on the river without cover or concealment.”

Somehow, Manchester made it to the other side without incident and there saw “one dead G.I. lying on his side, his face covered with a film of dust. I didn’t recognize him. I looked away. Dead Germans didn’t bother me; I never wanted to look at our own men.”

At 2 a.m. the following morning, Major General Thomas D. Finley’s 89th “Rolling W” Infantry Division, which had only been on the continent since January 21, received orders to move out from St. Goar. By now, of course, the Germans all along the east bank knew that a general assault was underway and that they were probably the next to be attacked.

Two regiments from the 89th hit the water, with the 1st Battalion of the 354th heading for Wellmich and the 2nd Battalion



Navy Seabees wearing Army uniforms at the request of General Patton ferry soldiers and equipment across the Rhine River at Boppard, Germany

aiming for St. Goarshausen.

James Hahs, also with the 89th, remembered seeing long convoys passing his duty station near St. Goar: “Whatever my work assignment was, it kept me busy most of the day and I paid no attention to the passing convoys. Evening approached and chow was served. When I went to my bedding spot I looked up and noticed that a long convoy seemed to be making a rest stop. I was surprised to see guys wearing sailor hats sitting all over the cargo of landing boats on semi trailers.

“I walked within hailing distance and shouted a joking remark: ‘Hey, you swab jockeys! Are you lost?’ Their reply was something in the order of, ‘We are not lost. We heard that you dogfaces needed a little help, so here we are.’ They were not subject to conversation and did not discuss their reason for being there.

“That night I slept soundly and never heard the convoy start up and move on, for they were gone when I awoke at dawn.... We went up or down stream and crossed on another bridge and returned to St. Goarshausen and set up quarters overnight for the next day. I looked in vain along the banks for any sign of those boats, or the sailors, with no sign of their presence of being.”

An historian wrote that the 89th failed to use smoke to mask the division’s crossing, which left the boatmen exposed and subjected to deadly fire. “In another move that prematurely telegraphed the Americans’ intention to cross the Rhine Gorge to the Germans, the 89th conducted an artillery barrage the evening prior to the assault. Therefore, it is not surprising that, as the first wave began to cross [from Oberwesel to] St. Goarshausen and Wellmich, the Germans were prepared for their attack.

“The defenders initiated with heavy small-arms fire, machine guns, and 20mm anti-aircraft guns; they even illuminated the entire engagement area by shooting a barge soaked in gasoline, providing clear fields of fire on the American soldiers trying desperately to paddle their way across the stiff current.” Casualties were alarmingly high.

Ed Quick, an artilleryman with the 89th, recalled that his B Battery convoy “moved slowly along the twisting road leading to the riverside town of Oberwesel. As we reached the crest of the hill and looked down into the Rhine valley, I saw a crudely printed sign, painted with a whitewash brush, on the side of a building. ‘See the Rhine and leave your skull there,’ it said, and a skull and crossed bones were painted beneath the words to magnify the unsettling message.

“The two-and-a-half-ton gun trucks, pulling the battery’s four howitzers, whined in low gear as they made their way down the steep hill to the Rhine. As we towed the howitzers upriver, we passed a number of gray-painted landing craft parked beside the road

on large, flat-bed trucks. Navy personnel in blue dungarees and hats accompanied the boats and we shouted jibes at the sailors, pointing out to them the general direction of the ocean and asking them if they were lost.

“The first gun section (truck, crew and howitzer) and our #2 gun truck and crew were loaded onto the first LCVP. As we left shore, we could see right ahead of us an island in the middle of the river and a castle on it that we later learned was called “The Pfalz.”

Quick went on, “The current was very swift and carried us rapidly downstream as the propellers on our craft churned the muddy water, driving us forward at the same time. We passed the island on our starboard side and saw our landing site ahead of us, the paved sloping bank leading up to the village of Kaub.

“Our landing was without incident, but as we climbed the ramp to the village, we had to step over a dead German soldier, lying on his back at the top of the slope. There, beside his corpse, we waited for the next LCVP to bring us our #2 gun.”

The afternoon of March 26 saw six LCVPs again in action with the 89th Division’s crossing at Oberwesel. The initial transit was made in unprotected Army DUKWs and proved to be very costly in infantrymen losses. The division, having failed to establish a bridgehead, turned to the Navy and this time, along with the LCMs, the “swabbies” took over the operation.

Al Rust, also a member of the 89th, said that both the 53rd and the 354th Regiments were ordered to cross at St. Goarshausen and Oberwesel: “They both accomplished their objectives but only under murderous fire and with the loss of many men. The 1st Battalion, 355th (Task Force Johnson), was then directed to proceed north and cross the river in the 87th Infantry’s sector at the town of Boppard. We crossed the river on a ready-made Bailey bridge.

“On that day, March 26th, the 1st Battalion crossed the Rhine with Able Company in the lead followed by Baker and Charlie Companies. We were to proceed southeast through St. Goarshausen and head down the east side of the river toward Wiesbaden. Able Company soon ran into resistance south of Boppard in a small town called Kestert. One of Able Company’s rifle platoon leaders was killed here along with several of his men.”

Within 48 hours, the entire 89th, with all its vehicles and equipment, was carried across the Rhine. Patton was pleased with the 87th and 89th Divisions’ progress, because “All of the historical studies we had ever read on the crossing asserted that, between Bingen and Coblenz [sic], the Rhine was impassable. Here again we took advantage of a theory of our own, that the impossible place is usually the least well defended.”

The 358th Regiment of the 90th Infantry Division was attacked frequently by the Luftwaffe in the days after the crossing in a frantic effort to annihilate the bridgehead, but there was no stopping now, and the advance continued to the Main River where, on March 28, the 90th forced the crossing of the Main. The division would go on to seize the town Merkers in April and the salt mine there, capturing a fortune in the form of the Reich gold reserve and a storehouse of priceless art treasures, stolen by the Nazis from occupied countries.

Sixth Army Group’s Crossings

The 6th Army Group was originally created in Corsica, France, and activated on July 29, 1944, as “Advanced Allied Force HQ” a special headquarters within AFHQ (the headquarters of Henry Maitland Wilson, the Supreme Commander Mediterranean Theatre) and commanded by Lt. Gen. Jacob L. Devers, a 1909 West Point graduate.

The group’s initial role was to supervise the planning of the combined French and American forces that invaded southern France in Operation Dragoon in August 1944 and provide liaison between these forces and AFHQ.

Dragoon was the operational responsibility of the Seventh U.S. Army commanded by Lt. Gen. Alexander Patch. Available to Patch were three corps: Frank Milburn’s XXI,

Wade Haislip’s XV, and Edward Brooks’s VI (with a combined strength of nine infantry and three armored divisions), plus the French I and II Corps.

With Dragoon a success, and the ensuing march up France’s eastern border to the Vosges Mountains region and the subsequent plunge into southwest Germany having gone well, the time had come for the 6th Army Group to join with Bradley’s 12th Army Group and make an all-out thrust deep into southern Germany.

Devers directed Patch and his Seventh Army to spearhead the drive. It would be an onslaught that the Germans in the region had never seen before.

March 24: Seventh Army’s Crossing

South of Third Army’s crossings, Seventh Army prepared to cross at Worms with the XXI, XV, and VI Corps lined up north to south along the east bank of the Rhine. Thirteen anti-aircraft battalions also arrayed themselves in the Seventh Army sector to protect the assembled divisions and the engineers building the river crossings from the Luftwaffe.

Devers also told the 3rd and 45th U.S. Infantry Divisions, who were being held in SHAEF and Seventh Army reserve, to prepare to join XV Corps for an assault crossing of the Rhine at Worms. (The 11 divisions of Jean de Lattre de Tassigny’s French First Army troops, many of them from France’s North African colonies, would also be added to the weight of the assault and would hit the Pforzheim Gap, west of Stuttgart and 18 miles south of Mannheim, but not until April 1.)

The 45th “Thunderbirds” had been teamed with the 3rd Infantry Division ever since the invasion of Sicily in July 1943, and had fought its way up to the Gustav Line and Monte Cassino, then took part in the bloodletting at Anzio. It finally helped liberate Rome and fought its way northward before being tabbed to take part in Operation Dragoon. It had then spent months fighting in eastern France and spent a miserable winter battling in the snowy Vosges Mountains before entering Germany.

The Thunderbirds, now under the command of Maj. Gen. William T. Frederick, the former head of the 1st Special Service Force (“The Devil’s Brigade”), were weary from nearly 500 days of combat but could, at last, see the end of the war looming ahead of them. If they could cross the Rhine, perhaps that would hasten the Allied victory.

Now, as part of Seventh Army and XV Corps, the 45th prepared for its crossing. In addition to its organic artillery, 15 battalions of light, medium, and heavy artillery were attached to the 45th, while the engineers of the 40th and 540th Engineer Combat Groups constructed support rafts, one heavy pontoon ferry, and one DUKW ferry in each assault regiment’s sector. The engineers were also tasked with building one heavy pontoon bridge, one floating tread-way bridge, and one dummy bridge.

On March 24, the division command post moved up to Westhofen, northwest of Worms, and the next morning the advance assault units began crossing in a swirling, moonlit fog that hid the movement from the enemy.

Jack Hallowell, a soldier with the 45th, wrote, “Soon after midnight, the 179th and 180th Infantry Regiments launched the 45th Division attack across the Rhine. Crossing the quarter-mile stretch of water in assault boats, and with no protective artillery concentration preceding them, the troops took the enemy by surprise; it was not until the boats had been emptied and were returning to the opposite bank that intense mortar fire fell into the division sector.

“Though 50 of the boats were damaged, the main body of assault troops had gained the foothold which doomed the enemy position.”

As the assault boats scraped against the Rhine’s eastern bank, German forces opened up with rifles, machine guns, 20mm flak guns, and 88s. The 45th’s official history says, “In the face of strong initial resistance on the shore line, the assault troops leaped ashore on the low bank ... then fanned out into the misty darkness to carve out a bridgehead.

“The initial resistance was strongest in the 180th Infantry Regiment’s sector,

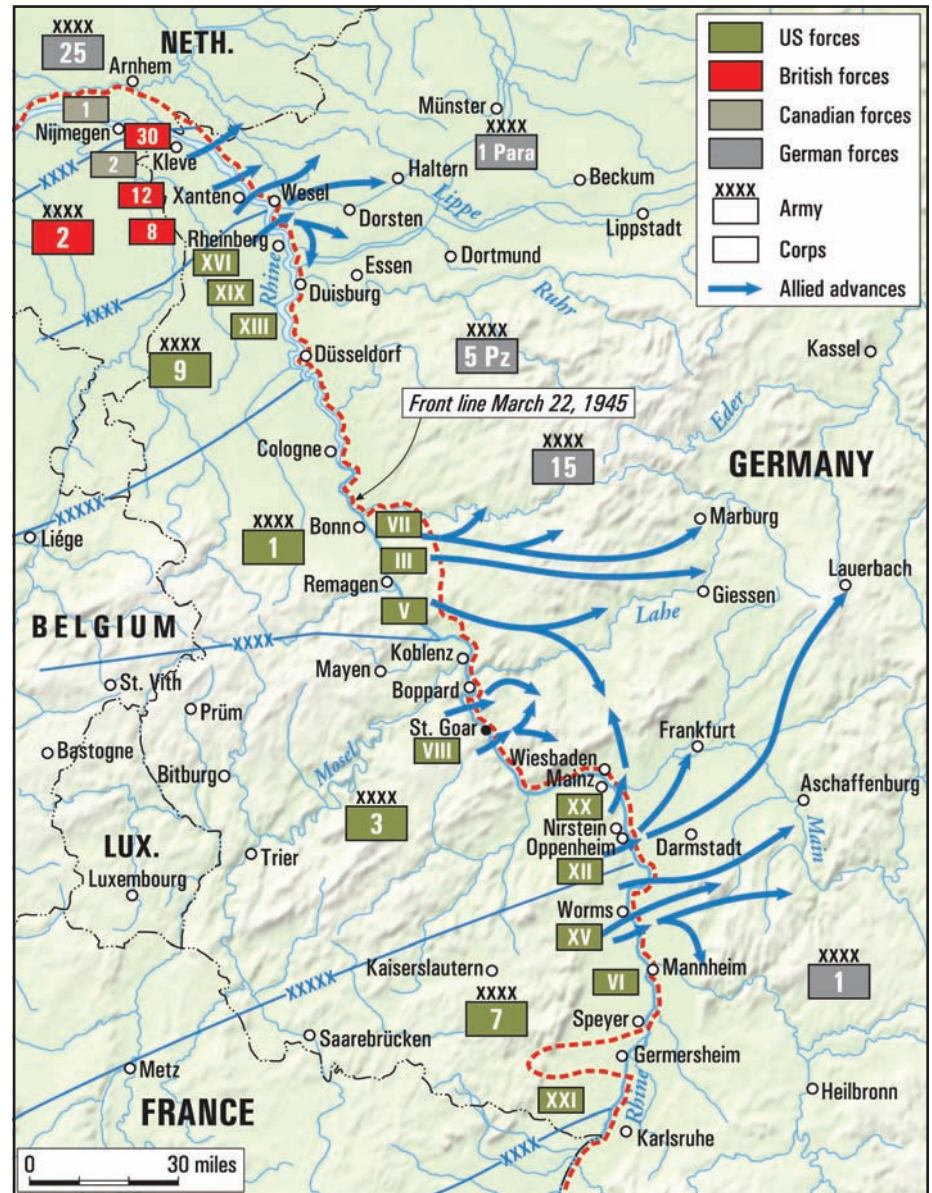
where more than half the assault boats in use by the 40th Combat Engineers were lost in the crossings.

“By dawn they were firmly established on the eastern bank, and by the close of day they had secured a bridgehead 104 square kilometers in size.... The Air Corps furnished a canopy of protection throughout the entire operation.”

George Fisher, author of the 180th Infantry’s regimental history, said that his regiment assembled in the vicinity of Wachenheim on March 23 and prepared their weapons for the big day. Shortly after midnight on the 25th, a four-man patrol [led by a lieutenant colonel] set out across the river from the village of Rhein-Durkheim in an inflatable rubber boat.

“Once on the east bank,” Fisher said, “they penetrated the German-held ground for 40 minutes and plotted German installations and estimated the enemy strength.”

Map © 2023 Philip Schwartzberg, Meridian Mapping, Minneapolis, MN



ABOVE: The American divisions of the First, Third, and Seventh Armies made a broad-front crossing of the Rhine a day before Montgomery’s 21st Army Group, which included Simpson’s Ninth U.S. Army, began their crossing. OPPOSITE: Hidden by a smoke screen, U.S. Navy LCVPs are loaded with equipment to be ferried to troops already on the east bank.



“The patrol ... had located the German position so accurately that troops of the battalion ... were able to get past the beach defenses that consisted of 14 flak guns and 100 men manning machine guns and small arms.”

At H hour on the 25th, after the main body had launched, the German fire from the east bank was intense. One of the assault boats flipped over, throwing the men into the cold and swift-flowing water. When one soldier with a heavy radio strapped to his back appeared on the verge of drowning, a buddy went to his rescue and, removing the radio, helped him get to shore safely.

In the dark on the east bank, one sergeant approached a group of men he thought were Americans but they turned out to be Germans and they took him prisoner. Moments later, several other Americans in the 180th came upon the scene, killed the Germans, and freed their sergeant.

Warren P. Munsell, Jr., a member of the 45th's 179th Regiment, wrote, “At 0230, March 26, the engineers pushed the storm boats over the crest of the bank. Sergeants gathered their squads together, shadowy figures in the deep shadows of the trees. As the assault boats slapped into the racing tide, the troops piled in, and the 1st and 2nd Battalion men began to cross.

“The enemy cut loose with a furious small-arms crackle from the eastern bank. T/Sgt. Llewellyn Chilson saw his platoon leader take a slug as the boats neared the enemy bank, and realized that he was now in command of a platoon in G Company.

“Heavy German SPs [self-propelled artillery] let fly at the tiny boats swarming toward the eastern edge of the river. Then the Americans hit the bank, scrambled over the rise, and poured down on the German machine-gun nests. Rifles cracked, carbines spit back, German burp guns spoke in dribbling bursts.

“Chilson's platoon met small-arm, then machine-gun, fire. Several men fell. Sgt. Chilson signaled his men to halt, then crawled up the bank of the dike and wiped out two nests single-handedly with white phosphorus grenades and his carbine. His platoon followed and picked up 23 kraut prisoners.

“By 0330, both the 1st and 2nd Battalions had all their foot elements across and, overrunning the German defenses after a few desperate, costly moments, were driving inland.”

Munsell also noted that, as it grew light, Company G was moving out of a small village when the men were “suddenly mowed down by two flak wagons turned into anti-personnel weapons set up at opposite ends of an open field to catch the Yanks in a deadly crossfire. The Air Corps bombed and strafed the guns.”

Small groups of the enemy, sometimes supported by panzers, attempted to halt the incursion at the water's edge—an attempt as deadly as anything encountered by Allied troops at Normandy—but they were repulsed each time by the Yanks and hundreds of Germans were killed or taken prisoner. Well-deserved Bronze and Silver Star medals and DSCs would be the reward for the acts of heroism the Americans performed that morning and in the days that followed. Even chaplains and medics were decorated for ignoring the danger to help their fellow Americans.

Simultaneously with, and south of the 45th's crossing, the 3rd Infantry Division, which had been under the command of Lucian Truscott, Jr., for most of the war and now was led by Maj. Gen. John W. “Iron Mike” O'Daniel, began its assault after a 12,000-round artillery barrage of the eastern shore at Sandhofen, between

Worms and Mannheim-Ludwigshafen.

Charles Smith, 3rd Division, recalled, “When we got to the Rhine, the Navy brought in 22 assault boats. We piled into the boats; there were 22 of us in the first two. We got to the German side of the river and the Germans sunk all the rest of the boats. So 22 of us were on one side of the river with the whole German army and the rest of our boys were back at the start.”

Lawrence “Larry” Bennett, also a member of the 3rd, had survived combat from the landings in Italy to the Vosges Mountains but was wounded in December 1944. After spending four months in army hospitals, he returned to his unit on the night it was crossing the Rhine River. “I stayed with the motor pool that night,” he said, “and joined my outfit the next morning, crossing the Rhine on my 21st birthday. White flags were on the houses in Germany.”

The last river crossing was made on short notice opposite the city of Mainz early on March 28 by the XX Corps’ 80th “Blue Ridge” Infantry Division packed into 12 LCVPs and six LCMs. The 80th tried what the 89th had attempted and was also initially unsuccessful.

The first assault wave, in 20 Army assault craft at 1 a.m., was virtually wiped out. At 3:30 a.m., the Army officer in charge sus-

ended the crossing operation.

Naval Reserve Ensign Oscar Miller, however, was not informed of the suspension. He launched the first LCVP across the river that landed 500 yards below the planned line of departure. It met with no enemy resistance and the other boats were then launched, all with no casualties.

In three hours, 3,500 men successfully crossed, but at 7 a.m. German artillery saturated the launching site and scored a direct hit on a bulldozer, demolished several trucks on shore, and killed Lieutenant (j.g.) Vincent Avallone, the only Navy fatality during the entire operation. Still, work went on unabated with the boat crews and support personnel working six-hour shifts without respite for three continuous days.

Robert T. Gholson, a member of the 80th’s 313th Field Artillery Battalion, wrote a history of his unit, referring to himself in the third person: “March 27: This day the rain fell as the 313th Field Artillery Battalion moved nine miles, stopping at the town of Mainz—only two miles from the Rhine River.

“March 28: The 313th Field Artillery Battalion fired concentration across the Rhine all day long. The 105mm howitzers were clearing out any remaining German forces on the opposite side of the river. The 317th Infantry crossed the Main River and cleared out the town of Wiesbaden. Along the way they captured factories, airstrips, ammunition-storage depots, and a champagne factory filled with 4,000 bottles of the wine.

“Word of the 317th’s champagne victory the day before had spread fast. The men of the 317th Infantry made sure that their friends (the artillerymen in the 313th Field Artillery Battalion), who had supported them for so many months, didn’t miss out on the ‘bubbly booty.’ That evening Gholson and his buddies celebrated hard and officers looked the other way.

“March 29: Gholson and the 313th Field Artillery Battalion made their way to the river crossing arriving at 6:30 p.m. Battery B’s trucks and guns drove across the huge pontoon bridge constructed by the engineers a few days before. The whole area was encased in smoke from canisters set off to shield the Americans from view as they crossed. The smoke was so dense that, after they crossed to the east side, they couldn’t see but 10 or 15 feet in front of themselves. The 313th traveled another few miles after the crossing to Wiesbaden.

“March 30: The 313th Field Artillery Battalion continued to move forward. This day





ABOVE: Farther north, British Field Marshal Montgomery pushed his troops, including Simpson's Ninth U.S. Army shown here, across methodically. Patton crowed about beating Monty to the rivers' eastern bank. **OPPOSITE:** With a destroyed railroad bridge behind them, 3rd Infantry Division troops scramble from their assault boats onto the eastern bank of the river. Enemy opposition varied in intensity

Gholson and his buddies drove past a makeshift cemetery under construction. They were shocked to see about 100 dead bodies lying nearby, dead civilians and German soldiers.”

By March 27, the 80th Division's 317th Regiment was preparing for a crossing of the Main River at Mainz the next morning, but Major James Hayes of the 2nd Battalion was shocked to learn that the field order had eliminated the preparatory artillery fire in an attempt to achieve surprise.

He argued with Lieutenant Colonel August Elegar, the division operations officer, that the troops could not surprise the enemy because of the wide-open terrain and a full moon, but Maj. Gen. Horace McBride, the division's commander, would not change the order.

As Hayes feared, the moonlight made the soldiers excellent targets for German artillery and small-arms fire that zeroed in on the crossing of the troops of the 2nd Battalion. Lieutenant Frank, a platoon leader in G Company, was killed during the crossing. Hayes said that he was one of the original enlisted soldiers of G Company and had earned a battlefield commission due to his outstanding performance. Hayes blamed his death, along with many others, on the lack of preparatory artillery fire.

When the soldiers eventually reached the east bank, enemy resistance lasted a mere 15 minutes and then the Germans began to surrender en masse. By the time the second wave of G.I.s landed, all opposition had ceased and the soldiers moved on to Wiesbaden.

Advance to the East

At a press conference in Paris on March 28, General Eisenhower praised the Allies' work along the Rhine. After acknowledging Montgomery's victory in the north, he said, “The success of those operations was due to the extraordinary preparation and skill and drive of General Bradley's armies, coupled with the tremendous power of General Devers' thrust—the Seventh Army under General Patch, and to which were attached also a French group called the Group Monsaberg, on the right—were able to put in from the south.”

Over the next few days, Bradley's armies that had reached the east side of the Rhine engaged the determined enemy in a series of battles large and small—in tiny hamlets and

major cities, in farmers' fields and along highways.

Some scenes were startling. GIs were surprised to find various towns with Esso gas stations of the Standard Oil Company in their streets—a touch of home. Many of the houses that hadn't been destroyed were elegant and exquisitely furnished. A 45th Division soldier said that one residence had 83 sets of deer antlers fastened to the walls. Another said he slept in a real bed for the first time in months.

Still to be fought for and taken were scores of German towns and cities—Frankfurt-am-Main, Aschaffenburg, Nuremberg, Munich, and many more. The end of the war was only a little more than a month away, but no one knew it.

Yet, for those men who died along it, the road to victory might have been a million miles long. Their sacrifice was no less great—and their contribution no less important—than that of the men whose lives were cut short in North Africa, Sicily, Italy, Anzio, Normandy, the Riviera, or anywhere else. Their loved ones would forever mourn them and honor their memory.

Patton's bold move had taken the wind out of Montgomery's sails, but the British field marshal nevertheless went ahead and executed his carefully laid plans, starting on March 24, with a British and Canadian force of 26 divisions, four armored brigades, and a separate commando brigade. Two airborne divisions were standing by at their aerodromes to be dropped east of the Rhine once the amphibious crossings had begun between Arnhem and Dusseldorf, just north of Simpson's First U.S. Army.

The 180th Regiment's Warren Munsell wrote, “Seventh Army's Rhine crossing was a success. Hotly contested by the enemy, especially in the 3rd Division sector to our south, nevertheless the veteran divisions had done their job swiftly and surely.

“They had swept inland at many points so rapidly after crossing the Rhine that whole companies of Germans had been caught flat-footed and surrendered. Japs might lose their necks to save face, but Germans were perfectly willing to lose face to save their necks.” □

BY PETER ZABLOCKI

WARSAW RISING: The Battle for Poland's Capital

Polish General Tadeusz “Bor” Komorowski knew the fight for the Old Town Warsaw was over. His last hope—and that of his army—was to slip out unnoticed and move the headquarters position to the town center.

Cut off and desperate, the Armia Krajowa (AK), the “Polish Home Army,” had recently adopted a new means of travel that offered the best hope of evading the Nazis: the city sewer system. Komorowski and his men silently made their way through the foul wastewater that reached up to their chests.

The general put his hands on his knees and pushed them down to help him get through the muck that slowed his advance. Darkness engulfed them, and silence was key to surviving and not being discovered by the German positions directly above them. Komorowski could only listen to the men around him, who all fought their urge to vomit.

The sewer guide—outranking even Komorowski when down in the sewers—lit the torch for just a few moments, enough for Komorowski to notice the bodies of dead cats floating around him amongst the otherwise indescribable filth and excrement. Then the light went out again, and all the General could wonder was if the same fate awaited his Home Army. But until then, they continued into the darkness.





On August 1, 1944,
the Polish Home
Army rose up in a
brave-yet-futile
attempt to re-take
Warsaw from the
Nazi occupiers.

A Polish fighter of the Crazyna Company of the Harnas Battalion stands watch within the ruins of Warsaw's Church of the Holy Cross. The outnumbered Polish Home Army launched a determined revolt against their German occupiers, but was ultimately defeated



Henryk Swiercz / Warsaw Uprising Museum

Poland Before the War

Poland was a nation fighting for relevance and identity after years of geographical nonexistence caused by political partitions by the Austrian, Russian, and Prussian Empires.

Within two years of re-emerging as a new Polish state in 1918, the Poles found themselves having to defend their nation and capital of Warsaw from an invasion by the Soviet Union. The Treaty of Versailles granted Poland eastern lands once partitioned to the Russian Empire, which Lenin wanted back. Known as the 1920 Battle for Warsaw, or “Miracle on the Vistula,” the Polish forces not only pushed the Red Army out of its capital but, through their later victories, reclaimed even more eastern lands. Thus, when the Second World War began on September 1, 1939, with the German attack on Poland from the West, many Poles were not surprised by the subsequent Soviet invasion from the east 17 days later.

Following the September invasions, the Polish government, under its new Prime Minister and Commander-in-chief, Władysław Sikorski, relocated first to France

and then to London, where it received the moniker of Britain’s “First Ally,” and operated as a government-in-exile.

Even though Poland fell to the Nazis and the Soviets within four weeks, the two nations failed to force a passive submission upon their new subjects. Many Polish soldiers escaped across the Romanian border to France and then to Britain, where they would eventually join Polish RAF units or, later, the newly created Polish II Corps under the command of a one-time Soviet prisoner Władysław Anders.

To those left behind, it quickly became apparent that the German and Russian occupation would be brutal. Polish citizens experienced mass roundups, arrests, and murders. In Warsaw alone, the Germans killed over 40,000 civilians within the first year.

The Soviets deported 84,000 Poles to Siberian labor camps during the same period. Stalin and Hitler hoped that by exterminating the educated, influential, and ruling classes, they could subjugate the remaining peasant population through fear and intimidation. Instead, many Poles joined the underground armed resistance sanctioned by the Polish government-in-exile to avoid a fate similar to that of their countrymen.

The AK was not a ragtag group of peasants carrying out small sabotage missions. According to the historian Kenneth F. Koskoda, the resistance was a complete, autonomous, and fully functioning nation within Poland. Placed under the command of Gen. Komorowski, by the time of the 1944 Warsaw Uprising, the AK’s ranks would swell up to 380,000 troops organized into secret combat units.

The occupied nation’s complex, hidden state answered only to the London-based Polish government. It divided its power amongst multiple political parties, passed laws and statutes, and even established an underground judiciary system. Because both the Soviets and the Nazis closed down all Polish schools, the AK also operated a secret education system designed to help its youth maintain a sense of identity and defiance.

Still, the principal aims of the AK were, first, to support the Allies by transmitting intelligence and creating diversions, and second, to prepare for a national uprising as the hour of German collapse became inevitable. The latter centered around liberating

the national capital of Warsaw. To Wladyslaw Sikorski in London, and Komorowski in Poland, there could be no more critical signal to the world that Poland had not surrendered than to free its capital city when the time seemed right to do so.

While Poland's approach towards fighting Hitler's Germany never wavered, the situation between its eastern neighbor, the Soviet Union, became that much more compli-

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TOP: Major Ivan Denisovich Frolov (center) defected from the Red Army and commanded a unit of the Russian Liberation Army (RONA) that collaborated with the Germans to crush the uprising. Frolov was executed as a traitor by the Soviets in 1946. **ABOVE:** German soldiers prepare a remote-controlled "Goliath" tracked mine that contained a 120-lb. explosive for use against the insurgents. Polish volunteers cut the cables that controlled the weapons. **OPPOSITE:** Four men and a woman of Warsaw's Milosz Battalion man an improvised barricade against a German assault. Wearing a mixture of Polish and German uniforms, the fighters are also wearing red-and-white armbands—the colors of the Polish flag.

cated after Germany invaded Russia in June 1941. Pressured towards a more pragmatic relationship with their long-time adversary, Sikorski's government signed an uneasy peace treaty with the Russian leader, Josef Stalin. This new agreement brought back the 84,000 Poles imprisoned in Russian Gulags.

Still, the distrust between the two nations continued and grew to a boiling point when, in April 1942, the German army found the mass graves of 22,000 Polish officers murdered by the Soviet secret police in May 1940 in the Katyn forest of the Russian Smolensk region. The Poles asked the International Red Cross to investigate what the world was already referring to as the "Katyn Massacre," resulting in Stalin severing all relations with the Polish government-in-exile and blaming the Poles for unfairly trying to turn the West against him.

The Allies, namely Britain and the United States, watched in apprehension as the Soviet Red Army turned the tide on the Eastern Front after the February 1943 Battle of Stalingrad and made their way towards Poland—this time as liberators.

Hoping to gain recognition from the Allies as a legitimate national military branch involved in the liberation of their nation, the AK took the 1944 Soviet push westward as a sign to launch their own Operation Tempest (*Burza*). Regardless of the recently severed diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, the AK saw the Red Army's advance as a means to overthrow their long-time German oppressors.

Tempest called for an armed uprising of all units along the eastern border, direct large-scale combat against the retreating German forces, and most importantly, the control of the nation's capital before the inevitable Soviet entrance. The prospect of being liberated by a power that did not recognize Poland as an ally had quickly become a reality. And if the Red Army's treatment of the AK between January 2—when the Soviet tanks crossed the pre-war Polish border—and the end of July told the Poles anything, it was that their suspicions were far from misplaced.

Russia viewed the AK, composed of inde-

pendent and patriotic troops, as a threat to its post-war plans for a fully compliant and Communist Poland. Following the Polish Katyn Massacre debacle, Stalin labeled the Polish government-in-exile and the AK as criminals. In their place, the Soviets announced the creation of a new, official, pro-Soviet Communist governing body of Poland, the so-called “Lublin Committee.”

The Soviet intent became that much more pronounced in the city of Lwow. As part of Operation Tempest, the AK helped liberate the city in April 1944, only to have the newly arrived Soviet forces arrest and murder the AK officers that had just fought alongside them. The Red Army conscripted the remaining AK soldiers from Lwow into their hastily created pro-Communist Polish units.

The Poles could see that Stalin wouldn't recognize any Polish organization that threatened his post-war plans. To Komorowski, it only meant that saving Warsaw was now even more of a priority. The Red Army *must* enter the Polish capital on equal terms as allies and not supposed liberators—or aggressors, as many in the AK suspected.

Preparations

Between 1939 and 1944, Warsaw vital for German control of the Eastern Front. The AK's leadership knew that taking the city from the Nazis would not be easy, and they also knew that their success in doing so would rely on the Red Army's support.

The goal was to seize control of Warsaw right before the Soviets entered the city, thus having to only hold on to their positions for a few days. As the Soviet advance continued toward Warsaw, the years of secret preparations turned towards active planning for retaking the capital.

By July 25, 1944, the people of Warsaw could hear the Red Army's artillery firing at the retreating German Wehrmacht. Yet, even when Soviet bombers appeared above their city, and Russian radio broadcasts into Warsaw urged the population to rise against the Germans, the 40,000-strong AK did not take the bait and stuck to their pre-planned start time of August 1.



As far as Stalin was concerned, an uprising, especially an under organized one that he hoped for, would be a blessing. As prominent Polish historian Adam Zamoyski would later say, “It would have been madness for him to interfere while the Germans were liquidating the very elements that would be hostile to his purpose of turning Poland into a Soviet satellite.”

Various districts made up the geography of 1944 Warsaw, the fulcrum of which was the City Center which encompassed the Jewish Ghetto, which had its own failed uprising the previous year. To the west lay the Wola district, and to the east, the Old Town and Praga—the latter separated from the former by the Vistula River. The residential area of Mokotow completed the topography from the south and Zoliborz from the north.

A total of 40,000 AK soldiers within the city limits that housed one-and-a-half million citizens spent the final days of July amassing weapons near their selected objective points, ready for the planned 5 p.m. start time on August 1. Ironically, the Germans, themselves preoccupied with the Red Army now within one mile of Warsaw, did not notice the extra activity around them.

On August 1, the AK troops hurried to their preselected buildings, crossroads, and bridgeheads—the latter to establish safe crossings for the Red Army expected to arrive within days.

Although only one in 10 members of each unit possessed a firearm, and the entire army had no heavy weapons, the AK did not go into battle empty-handed. At zero hour, the Home Army had 1,000 basic carbines, 300 submachine guns, 60 light machine guns, seven heavy machine guns, 3,500 special carbines and bazookas, 1,700 revolvers, and 25,000 hand grenades.

Most of the weapons available to the soldiers came from caches buried by the Polish Army in 1939, supplemented by supplies left over from the Soviet retreat across the country during Operation Barbarossa. All of this was bolstered by the secret manufacturing of grenades and Molotov cocktails and eventually complemented with minimal airdrops from the Polish section of the British Special Operative Executive (SOE).

Due to the peculiar armament situation, the AK command designated German bar-



Sylwester Braun / Wikimedia

ABOVE: Polish reporters and a film crew (right) look over a German SdKfz 25 halftrack on display in Warsaw's Okolnik Gardens. It was captured by the Poles from the 5th SS "Viking" Division early in the fighting. **RIGHT:** German soldiers are taken prisoner by Polish fighters wearing mostly German uniforms. **OPPOSITE:** A round from a German 600-mm "Karl-Gerät" explodes against the Prudential Building, Warsaw's tallest structure. The self-propelled seige mortar, along with tanks, artillery, and Luftwaffe bombers, were used to level the city.

racks and weapons supply locations as their army's first objectives.

The entirety of the force was divided into companies that ranged from 50 to 100 soldiers, which included women and girls. On the eve of the fighting, 8,000 Warsaw women had taken the AK oath, with some becoming combatants while others nursed the wounded, prepared meals, and carried ammunition, mail, and dispatches.

The Polish Scouts, the *Szare Szeregi* (Gray Ranks), composed of boys between the ages of 12 and 17, made up one of the fiercest assault groups of the entire Uprising. The remainder of the troops came from all walks of life and social classes, including skilled and unskilled workers and former soldiers who went into hiding following the failed 1939 campaign. On August 1, 1944, they faced 13,000 Germans—a force that would swell up to 50,000 throughout the insurrection.

The Battle Begins

The Warsaw Uprising began at 5 p.m., but because of the tremendous secrecy of not letting everyone know the start time until a few hours before, many AK members had



Engeniusz Lokajski

not yet made it to their destinations when the shooting started.

The first objective was weapons, whether from dead enemy soldiers or their fellow fallen brothers-in-arms. To that end, the Mokotow section and its Woronicz School, a known German stockpile of weapons, became one of the primary targets, as did the Wola district's two large cemeteries, with the anticipation that they

would become drop sites for Allied-delivered supplies and weapons. The other major objectives were the Praga district, which the AK hoped would become the bridgehead for the Red Army's crossing into Warsaw, and the Municipal Building in the city center, which housed the main German garrison.

Although red-and-white Polish flags flew once more in some places, and Komorowski's assessment had the AK in control of two-thirds of the city by the morning of August 2, the Warsaw Uprising's beginning was rocky. By the end of the first day, the AK had lost 2,000 soldiers, four times the German losses.

Though the AK held large portions of Warsaw, the Germans held firm in the town center and controlled the train stations, bridges, and both Warsaw airports.

In the Mokotow section, the Germans beat back all AK advances on their weapon stockpiles, severely limiting their desired objective of quickly arming the insurgents. In Praga, instead of securing the bridges into the city, the Home Army was beaten back by the German counter-attack of panzers and heavy infantry.

Meanwhile, in the Wola district, the inability of Komorowski's men to secure a former prison building near the cemetery drop zones gave the Germans a fortress within the Polish lines and the control of the city center.

When the people of Warsaw woke up on August 2, their city was split into pockets of AK-occupied zones surrounded by various German strongholds. Polish attacks continued from the previous day, followed closely by German counterattacks. Komorowski's potential mistake of splitting his forces to take vital positions instead of a concentrated assault on the center of town left the Poles with little to show on the second day of the Uprising.

Also, due to the disjointed command and lack of radio and telephone usage, closely monitored by the Germans, there was inadequate communication between the Home Army units. The two staff radio transceivers, explicitly intended for communicating with London, had also been



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TOP: To ward off a panzer attack, Warsaw citizens dig an anti-tank trench in a street in the Wola District. **ABOVE:** Bodies of civilian victims of the "Wola Massacre" are laid out on the street. From August 5-12, 1944, more than 40,000 men, women and children were murdered—including doctors, nurses and patients in hospitals. A majority of the murders and rapes were committed by the SS-Sturmbrigade Dirlewanger, an infamous Waffen SS penal unit led by SS-Oberführer Oskar Dirlewanger. In all, about 180,000 civilians died during the 63-day-long siege of Warsaw.

made inoperative due to damages sustained on the first day of fighting and the missing vital parts needed to repair them. On August 2, Komorowski had to climb up on a roof to survey his troops, as below him, women and girls as young as eight years old delivered vital messages between the various AK positions.

As the AK command spent most of the second day attempting to establish communication with the Polish government-in-exile, the Home Army fought on in the streets with much more success than the previous day. Komorowski's radio controllers finally

got a link-up with London. The general asked for the much-needed supplies and weapons and the support of the Polish 1st Parachute Brigade now training in England.

His message ended with, “In view of the fact that the fight to capture Warsaw has begun, we ask for Soviet help to be supplied in the shape of an immediate attack from outside.” The reports from the Praga district remained unchanged; the Soviet advance into Warsaw had imprudently stopped.

Even as the AK’s transmission was still going through, the Polish Home Army was capturing vital objectives and setting up defensive fronts that would allow them to hold out a few more days until Allied help arrived. At the Woronicz School building in the Mokotow section, a German garrison made over-confident by their previous day’s victory left the confines of the building and launched their counterassault.

The Poles, reinforced by new units during the night, quickly surrounded the Wehrmacht troops by sneaking into the school building and cutting the enemy garrison in half.

The school’s overwhelming cache of German weapons and supplies became vital for maintaining the AKs initiative throughout the remainder of the day.

After ferocious fighting that began the previous evening, the Poles were finally able to take back the power plant from the Germans. That same day, Komorowski’s men also secured the post office and the Prudential Building, which became the AK’s main stronghold.

In the Polish-held sections of the town, the civilian population came out to help the soldiers build fortifications and barricades. The anti-tank obstacles consisted of overturned vehicles, piles of furniture, and stacked paving stones.

Behind the fronts, the AK set up aid stations, hospitals, soup kitchens, and even printing

Launching an attack on a Polish stronghold, German soldiers move through the rubble of Warsaw’s Theater Square, September 11, 1944. German forces suffered heavy casualties.

presses. The city seemed to come alive with Polish newspapers, posters, and announcements appearing for the first time since 1939. Men and women wearing the red-and-white cloth armbands about five inches wide—an official uniform of the AK as there was no real army garb but leftover German uniforms and civilian clothes—moved freely in Home Army-held areas. Help, they thought, was around the corner.

In reality, Komorowski was having a hard time convincing the Allies to join the fight. The requests for aid and men remained unanswered. Unbeknownst to the Polish general, the Allies had no intention of sending the London-based Polish Paratroop Brigade set up for the push forward in France and Italy, nor would Stalin help if such a plan was in place.

As the battle to help Warsaw raged on between London and Moscow, the Soviets refused to acknowledge the Uprising, initially reporting it as a rumor. Once the battle was in the Western press, the Soviets couldn’t deny its existence.



Still, Stalin refused Prime Minister Winston Churchill's request to allow British planes to use Soviet-controlled airspace and airfields. Long-range supply planes would need to land and refuel at Soviet bases in eastern Poland. Stalin complicated matters for the AK in Warsaw by ignoring all requests for Soviet supply drops and artillery support.

By the third day, a few Allied airplanes made it to the Polish capital and dropped some supplies, including machine guns, ammunition, grenades, and food.

The sporadic and un-coordinated air drops were not enough to help the Poles in the onslaught they were about to face at the hands of the Germans. Cut off from the West, and with the Red Army stalling their advance before entering the city and giving full air autonomy to the German Luftwaffe by withdrawing all their aircraft from Warsaw's airspace, the AK was on its own. The real battle for Warsaw had just begun.

Bloody Retribution

The AK continued to gain ground through the remainder of the first week. With the German stockpiles mostly secured, the Poles held tight to most of the Old Town, the city center, Zoliborz, Mokotow, some of Wola, and select pockets of Praga.

The AK also broke into the Warsaw Ghetto to free the small number of Jews who remained after the purges and deportations that followed the 1943 Ghetto Uprising; many of those released volunteered to serve in the Home Army ranks. The infamous sign of Nazi oppression would never enslave another human being within its walls.

Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler himself spearheaded the German counteroffensive by promptly ordering SS-Obergruppenführer Erich von dem Bach-Zalewski's units that specialized in battling guerilla groups, to crush the Warsaw Uprising.

Himmler's personal orders called for the annihilation of the city of Warsaw, stating, "Each block of houses is to be burned down and blown up so that none of their units can dig themselves in." Adolf Hitler gave the Reichsführer -SS his blessing with

Eugeniusz Lokajski



a simple comment, "Wipe them out!"

Himmler and Zalewski brought all available troops to Warsaw, including police regiments from nearby occupied Polish cities, and the infamous SS Brigade Dirlewanger and Russian SS Assault Brigade RONA, led by Brigadier Mieczyslaw Kaminski. Out of the 21,000 reinforcements that occupied Warsaw by the third week of the Uprising, the two groups numbered close to 5,000 men.

The German military sanctioned the *Russkaya Oswoboditel'naja Narodnaja Armija*—the Russian National Liberation Army (RONA)—in 1941 to self-govern a remote region of the Eastern Front. Made up of anti-communist Russians who chose to betray their own in return for German clemency and their own survival, the unit consisted of unruly, single young men without much military training.

Zalewski gave this uncivilized and wild group, distinguished from the other German units by their Soviet uniforms with a yellow armband, the right to pillage and do as they please in their fight against the Poles. The results were barbaric and inhumane.

To make matters worse for the Poles, the already violent RONA unit was reinforced by one of the most infamous German formations of the entire conflict: SS Brigade Dirlewanger—the so-called "poachers" regiment under the command of SS-Oberführer-SS Oskar Dirlewanger.

The Führer permitted its commanding officer to collect criminals from German prisons to fill the regiment's ranks. Their methods became so infamous that the SS Supreme Command suspended Dirlewanger's 2,500-strong brigade for their wholesale looting, rape, and barbarity toward fighting partisan groups on the Eastern Front.

Even Dirlewanger, a convicted rapist, was arrested by a superior SS officer, albeit only



Bundesarchiv Bild 146-2022-0021; Photo: Curt Collmer

ABOVE: A group of RONA soldiers attacks a Polish position. This uncivilized and wild group, distinguished from the other German units by their Soviet uniforms with a yellow armband, pillaged and fought the Poles with barbaric tactics. **INSET:** SS-Oberführer Oskar Dirlewanger commanded a unit of convicted criminals who were not expected by Nazi Germany to survive their service. The ruthless brigade that bore his name was infamous for its atrocities during the war. **OPPOSITE:** Women fill sandbags to be used as a barricade in one of Warsaw's streets.

briefly. The “murderous crew,” as one enraged army general called them, were now needed in Poland.

The two infamous formations took the initiative in leading the German-reinforced counterattack, which now saw the Polish AK outnumbered three to one. On August 5, 1944, RONA and the Dirlewanger units entered the Wola district in hopes of setting an example, raping and killing with complete disregard for age or gender.

By the next day, when they moved on to other parts of the town, Zalewski and Dirlewanger’s men managed to kill 40,000 civilians, including women, children, hospital staff, and priests. In every recaptured street in Wola, the Germans ordered all inhabitants to leave their homes and herded them together before firing squads cut them down.

Witnesses later recalled the skies over Wola illuminated by burning ruins of all buildings and large heaps of dead bodies soaked in gasoline and set ablaze. Earlier in the day, the “poachers” regiment stormed the Wola hospital and shot all the sick and wounded, setting the building on fire with the doctors and nurses still inside. At the Curie-Sklodowska institute hospital, containing only women suffering from cancer, Dirlewanger’s men raped the patients and nurses alike before finally killing them.

It now became obvious to the German generals that air support would be necessary, as their units were not advancing as much as they were plundering and committing mass murder. Within days, as the criminal units moved on to other sections of the city, the people of Warsaw could add around-the-clock bombings to their already perilous situation.

With the enemy back in the open, the AK’s lines and strongholds became much more isolated, hindering the army’s communications and ability to move around within and to and from their positions. Initially, the Poles blew holes between the hidden outside walls of the city’s connected buildings, just small enough for men and women to squeeze



Bundesarchiv Bild 183-S73495; Photo: August Ahrens

through. This was not an easy task as the concrete walls were almost two feet thick.

“I remember my hands were so bloody from going through those holes,” recalled Halina Knowiak, an AK courier. “On the street, the Germans were very close, they had tanks and snipers shooting at us all the time, so we had to use the holes.”

As moving freely proved too slow and nearly impossible, Komorowski soon adopted a new means of travel that would come to symbolize the Polish struggle in Warsaw—the city sewer system. After the Wehrmacht split the Polish strongholds in half on August 9, the AK headquarters found itself cut off within the confines of the Old Town and separated from its main force in the city center.

A former municipal worker suggested to Komorowski that the underground tun-

nels and passages would allow the AK to move undetected below the Germans.

The city tunnels became a major lifeline for the flow of materials, reports, and troops. Some of the tunnels were tall enough to allow standing, but most were only two feet wide and three feet high.

As traveling in the dark was mandatory, Komorowski created a staff of traffic managers whose role in the sewers superseded even his rank. Those in charge assigned the traffic flow directions to specific times of the day, and nobody could enter the sewers without written permission.

The guides, who would sporadically use torches in an otherwise pitch-black environment, assisted with moving from one destination to another. And because the tunnels passed directly below the Germans, any noise or light infraction was severely scolded.

A Shift to the Old Town

In the third week, the brunt of the German onslaught shifted towards the Old Town district. The hopes of the young men and women cut off from the remainder of the Polish positions got a brief respite in the form of a three-day run of British RAF bombers finally dropping the much-needed supplies. Quickly brought to a halt by the Soviet's denial of using their refueling stations, the drops did little to sustain any real excitement among the AK, as most of the packages landed in German-occupied streets.

The situation worsened as the Germans moved additional units into Old Town, including the Dirlewanger Brigade.

And while the district had already withstood around-the-clock artillery barrages and Luftwaffe bombings two to three times a day, the Germans added experimental, small, unmanned remote-controlled tanks, named Goliaths, to bring explosives closer to the AK lines. When the experiment failed—the Poles simply cut the control lines—the Wehrmacht brought in a 600mm mortar to level the Old Town completely.

The AK and thousands of the district's civilians were at the mercy of the SS, who now began rounding up Poles as human



ABOVE: A Polish fighter is pulled from his hiding place in a sewer and taken prisoner by German soldiers. He was probably executed. **OPPOSITE:** A year after the battle, Warsaw is still a mass of rubble. However, with the Soviet Union's help and Polish volunteers, the city was completely rebuilt from 1945 to 1952, with very few scars remaining. Today, the reconstructed Old Town area is a UNESCO World Heritage site

shields in front of their panzer and infantry units.

By August 27, the situation in the Old Town was critical enough for Komorowski to make the nearly unbearable five-hour trek through the sewers to establish a new headquarters in the city center, which itself was barely hanging on from the German onslaught.

By August 30, the Germans had lost 91 officers and 3,770 NCOs, with losses at Old Town reaching 50 percent of the total German strength sent to take it. The Supreme Commander of the Ninth Army brought into Warsaw weeks prior would inform his superiors, "I see no prospect of holding Warsaw with my present forces."

Even the Dirlewanger unit was badly depleted, prompting the SS to reinforce it with 1,500 fresh concentration-camp convicts. The daily shelling and dive-bombings took their toll on the Poles holding Old Town and when Komorowski's forces failed to break through from the city center on August 30, the remaining AK soldiers held out for a couple more days to cover their escape through the sewers. Men continued to attack the enemy from their posts, running from one position to another and firing a few bursts to give the impression there was still a sizable force hidden in the rubble.

Because the casualty numbers were so high, the Germans requested a temporary cease-fire on September 1 for both sides to retrieve the dead and wounded from the remnants of the Old Town. By the time the last 20 AK soldiers under the young officer Czeslaw Korzycki made the final departure the following night, no building was left undamaged.

Gunboats on the Vistula River, railroad guns, artillery, tanks, and Luftwaffe bombers pounded the three-quarter square mile area with 1,500 tons of ordnance for 11 days. Germany brought in 13,000 infantry troops against the 5,000 entrenched AK fighters and thousands of civilians. "This was hell, I mean hell," was all Korzycki could say about his time in defense of the Old Town.

With the fall of Old Town, and the Mokotow and Powisle districts all but in the Ger-

man grasp, the city center became the enemy's number one target. The war of attrition worsened after the Germans cut off the city's water supply and then repossessed the electrical plant in Powisle, which supplied power to the Polish-controlled regions under the AK control.

The lack of light and electricity hampered explosives and food production and limited medical care often administered in the cellars of destroyed buildings. By the second week of September, the people of Warsaw and its defenders sustained themselves on bread made from sawdust and watered-down barley soup—with even those quickly running out. Within days they would resort to eating horses and rats as dysentery and disease took the lives of those spared by the German bullets.

At one point, the Poles set up a dog-eating system to ensure that people did not eat their own pets, which relied on families exchanging their animals.

Komorowski's unanswered messages to London painted a grim picture for his Home Army. Help was not coming, and the Polish general seemed to have only two options left: continue a fight they could not win, or surrender. "Warsaw is not waiting for empty words of praise, for expressions of recognition, not for assurances of sympathy," stated the London-published Polish newspaper *Dziennik Polski*. "Warsaw is waiting ... Warsaw is waiting ... for weapons, food, and ammunition."

The last remnants of any hope for survival ended with the German discovery of the AK's sewer system. By September, German soldiers were ordered to throw grenades down manholes, while actions were taken to pour concrete and debris down into the tunnels. In some instances, the Germans poured flammable liquids down through the above-ground openings, followed by tossing down lit matches upon hearing any noises from below. The situation was growing more desperate by the hour.

With only two weeks left in the Uprising, Stalin, well aware of the AK's situation,

acquiesced to Western sentiments and air-dropped supplies. What the American and British press took as the Communist leader's change of heart and goodwill amounted to a few small planes that flew at low altitude and whose crews threw out weapons wrapped in potato sacks without parachutes—rendering the cargo inoperable after it crashed to the ground.

As a further insult, some of the drops contained single cans of food, presumably meant to feed hundreds of thousands of people. And to make matters worse, when the Soviet artillery resumed firing on September 15 after weeks of silence, the barages landed on Polish instead of German positions.

Seeing Stalin's initiative, two days later Churchill ordered the RAF to supply Warsaw. While the 107 B-17 bombers were initially a welcomed sight, the event soon turned into further frustration. Only 21 containers out of 1,248 landed in AK-occupied territories, with the rest falling into enemy hands; had the drops come



sooner, they could have landed in the majority-controlled Polish Home Army areas. None of that mattered now, especially as the Red Army's artillery and airplanes once again went silent on September 18—Warsaw was once again alone.

By September 23, the Germans had squeezed the remainder of the AK units into the city center. While Komorowski's men established a new stronghold, by then, all the supplies had been used up. The few remaining doctors and nurses could do nothing but offer words of comfort to the wounded and dying, as there simply were no medical supplies left to share.

Meanwhile, the German artillery and bombing intensified. The main Wehrmacht units, the RONA, and the Dirlewanger Battalions were all held back to avoid risking casualties in the crossfire. Ironically, by those final days of fighting, the latter two units' atrocities became public enough for the SS to pass an order to have RONA's brigadier general shot—which they later blamed on Polish partisans.

Dirlewanger used his high-ranking connections to escape reprisals for his war crimes in Warsaw. He returned to Germany and received the Knight's Order of the Iron Cross.

Inside the city center, people could not move without being covered by dust, glass, splinters, and debris. The attacks began each day at 8 a.m. and continued at hourly intervals. Four German Stuka dive bombers covered the entire area with high explosives each time. Major Wardejn-Zagorski, the press officer for the AK, recalled those final days in his diary: "On Miodowa Street, a hit buried about 200 people in the air-raid shelter, and on Jacka Street, 20 more suffered the same fate."

General Komorowski sent a final message to the Russian lines on September 28, notifying them that unless help arrived within the next couple of days, the AK would be forced to surrender—no reply ever came.

The Polish leaders realized that any attempt to continue the fight would result in the senseless slaughter of the people of Warsaw. And unlike the Soviets, the Ger-

mans were quick to respond to Komorowski's letter asking for the terms of surrender.

The End Comes

The AK's guns ceased firing on October 2, 1944, as General Komorowski met with German General Erich von Dem Bach-Zalewski. By then, the most crucial point for the Polish general was the German recognition of his soldiers, men, and women, as an official branch of the Polish military, guaranteeing them humane treatment as proper prisoners of war, not criminals.

With the Soviet Army still waiting quietly on the city's outskirts and with the German guarantee of POW status secured, the members of the Armia Krajowa assembled for surrender on October 5, 1944; they had fought for Warsaw for 63 days.

In the end, the Battle for Warsaw saw the Armia Krajowa fight off numerous German panzer divisions, Wehrmacht units, the Luftwaffe, heavy artillery, tank units, and uniformed criminals. Germany lost 20,000 men and had another 9,000 wounded, while the AK did not fare much better, losing 18,000 men and women. And as almost every Home Army soldier suffered some form of injury, the estimated number of casualties is unclear. The most sobering statistic from the battle was the deaths of more than 180,000 Polish civilians.

Surprisingly, the Germans kept their word and treated the surrendered AK members as prisoners of war, not bandits as their Soviet counterparts viewed them. Within days of the surrender, the Germans expelled all remaining in the city, with many sent to die in concentration and labor camps. Although more than two-thirds of the city lay in complete ruin, Hitler ordered Warsaw to be leveled to the ground.

While AK units outside Warsaw continued to operate and conduct sabotage raids for at least a few more months, most of its members dispersed back into the population following the fall of the Polish capital. When the AK surrendered, and Warsaw was completely leveled, the Soviet Red Army resumed its offensive and pushed toward Berlin.

As the Soviets liberated Poland in the winter of 1944-1945, their presence was as unwelcome as that of the Germans in 1939. News of the Warsaw Uprising spread like wildfire, and all knew of Stalin having left the Poles to fend for themselves in what became the largest partisan uprising of the entire Second World War.

Instead of giving the Polish government-in-exile a bargaining chip at the Allies' table, the Uprising's failure hindered any meaningful progress on guaranteeing post-war Polish sovereignty. Unwilling to offend Stalin, whose force continued to win victories against Hitler's forces, Churchill and President Franklin D. Roosevelt—and his successor Harry S. Truman—pressured the Poles into agreeing to the Soviets' land demands, the establishment of a Poland-based Communist government, and the complete dissolution of the Home Army.

By the time Stalin's true intentions for a Polish satellite state and a Communist Eastern Europe became clear, it was already too late. Despite strong objections from Churchill and Roosevelt at the Yalta Conference in February 1945, and again at Potsdam in July, the Soviet leader officially appointed an interim Communist government in Poland, consisting of 21 ministers, of whom 16 were his men.

The Allies saw no choice but to recognize this new government as legitimate, withdrawing recognition from the democratically elected, London-based Polish leadership. Poland would remain under Soviet control until the fall of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War in 1990. □

*Peter Zablocki is the author of numerous books and articles pertaining to history. For more information, visit www.peterzablocki.com. The author recommends Norman Davies' *Rising 44: The Battle for Warsaw* (Viking) and Kenneth K. Koskoda's *No Greater Ally: The Untold Story of Poland's Forces in World War II* (Osprey).*

Weapons

Continued from page 13

severely damaged by one of her torpedoes. Finally, on May 16th she torpedoed and sank the 7,181-ton freighter *William K. Vanderbilt*. After her successful patrol, *I-19* replenished at Truk and began a new patrol off Fiji. This time, she torpedoed the 7,176-ton Liberty ship *M. H. DeYoung*. After *I-19* departed, *DeYoung*, still afloat, was towed into the nearest allied port but was beyond repair.

Returning to Truk, *I-19* received her third commander, Kobayashi Shigeo, before setting out on her next patrol. In November she quietly approached Oahu and launched her float plane after sundown. The Glen made a reconnaissance pass over Pearl Harbor and returned to the submarine in the dark. The pilot reported seeing one battleship and one carrier in the harbor, and the news was radioed back to Truk. Unfortunately, as pilot and plane were being recovered, American planes were spotted, forcing *I-19* to crash dive without recovering the float plane.

On November 19, 1943, the captain made his regular situation report to Tokyo. It would be his last. The next day, American troops landed on Tarawa and Makin Islands. On the 25th near Makin Island, the destroyer USS *Radford* (DD-446) made night-radar contact with a surface vessel 8 miles distant and changed course to intercept. When radar contact was lost, the destroyer switched on its sonar and reacquired the submarine. *Radford* went to general quarters and approached quickly to release a pattern of seven depth charges. *I-19* was sunk with all 105 of her crew.

Japanese submarines and their crews did all that skill, luck, and courage could accomplish, but it was not enough. The boats were technologically superior at the beginning of the war but, for the I-class, their large size made them vulnerable as the new technologies of radar, sonar, and improved depth charges and tactics came on line. *I-19* was caught up in the carnage that befell her country. □

Gothic Line

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probably extended their survival time.

The offense had accomplished all of the tactical and strategic objectives that Generals Tippleskirch, Fretter Pico, and Carloni had set forth. The attacking Axis forces secured all of their designated objectives, routed an American infantry division (essentially destroying much of its effectiveness as an attacking force), and raised morale among the Axis forces in Italy while simultaneously lowering Allied morale.

The Axis troops also captured much-needed ammunition, medicine, food, and communications equipment. The Gothic Line was re-consolidated—some two kilometers forward in some places—and held until late April 1945 due in no small measure to the forces that the Allies had to divert from Bologna. The Gothic Line was still intact even after the Russians had surrounded Berlin.

General Almond is rightly regarded as having behaved shamelessly. Despite his initial inaction, his inability to organize either an effective defense or fighting withdrawal, and his failure at the appropriate time to lead a counterattack, he lay the blame entirely on his troops.

He maintained that their performance had “cost” him a promotion to a higher command—this despite the fighting resolve shown by his own men at Sommocolonia, Barga, and Vergemoli. Almond asserted that black troops were inferior to whites despite historical accomplishments of black units ranging from the 54th Massachusetts of the U.S. Civil War, to the “Harlem Hellfighters” of World War I, and the Tuskegee Airmen, just to name a few.

The success of the Christmas Offensive only delayed the inevitable for Mussolini and his Italian Social Republic. He and his mistress were captured and executed by communist partisans on April 25, 1945, as they attempted to escape to Switzerland. The Axis forces in Italy were surrendered to the Allies by General Kesselring on April 28, 1945—closing a theater that had seen some of the worst fighting of the war. □

Dragon's Teeth

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ing to lead the way through booby-trapped and mined areas. Positions were occupied without losses.

Lieutenant Blanchard was informed by Colonel Cantrell that C Company was to cross the river and fan out, securing the bridgehead while those units that had crossed earlier pursued the enemy. However, word was then received that they were to pull back and that the 275th would relieve them. Their battalion was to be the last battalion of the division to cross the Saar.

Shortly after noon, Blanchard and his men moved back to the company supply point, drew rations, and were told to wait for trucks that were to carry them forward. When no trucks appeared after a couple of hours, they started walking. While heading down the road, the trucks arrived to collect them, transporting them across the Saar.

As they passed through Saarbrücken, they found that the center of the city had been pulverized during the fighting. Streets were unrecognizable as such. There were not even skeletons of buildings—just acres of wreckage and large heaps of rubble.

The men of the 274th Infantry were nearing the end of their journey across France and into Germany. Mopping-up operations were to follow, the division performing occupation duties in the Saar Basin area and then finding itself in the vicinity of Frankfurt, Germany, when hostilities ended in May 1945. They had compiled 86 days in combat and suffered 3,919 men killed, wounded, missing or captured during that period of time.

In October 1945, the Trailblazers returned to the U.S. and were deactivated at Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, proud of the fact that they had performed with honor in its assignment to breach the Siegfried Line and break the dragon's teeth. □

The author, a frequent contributor to WWII Quarterly, resides in Hillsboro, Oregon. He is the author of Against the Panzers: United States Infantry versus German Tanks, 1944-1945.

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Tank Repair

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German 75mm round had entered the gun tube and detonated, blowing off the end of the barrel, part of the projectile then traveling down the barrel, through the open breech and killing two of the crewmen.

The bodies of the two dismembered crewmen were still inside the tank. Two mechanics that were sent in to remove the bodies were overcome by the blood and gore. When volunteers were called for to remove the bodies, there were no immediate takers. Even the most hardened members of the unit were not inclined to help.

Finally, a pale thin young man stepped forward. He was a fire-control instrument-repair mechanic with the headquarters unit. A low-key individual, he felt that the individuals deserved a decent Christian burial.

Afterwards, the interior of the tank was scrubbed and disinfected. The gun barrel was replaced and electrical wiring repaired. The entire interior was repainted with a heavy coat of white lead.

The risk to maintenance liaison personnel was always significant. But as the Allies drove deeper into Germany, chaos and confusion increased the threat. At one point, a division liaison officer and his driver went missing. The wreckage of their jeep was discovered alongside a road along with their bodies. They had been beaten, their skulls crushed.

In Lieutenant Cooper's capacity as CCB's ordnance liaison officer, he likely witnessed more damage done to American tanks than any other member of the U.S. Army in Europe. Having to prepare combat-loss reports after each action, Cooper became very familiar with the weaknesses and inadequacies of the M4 Sherman medium tank.

While Cooper was very critical of the M4 Sherman's design, he seemed not to recognize that he was part of its ability to overcome its shortcomings. The Sherman's mechanical reliability and ease of maintenance and repair, as well as the support of a better logistics system, were qualities that the heavier German tanks—the Panther and Tiger—lacked. The M4 also shared the

same hull, chassis, and many parts with other vehicles, such as the M10 and M36 tank destroyers and the M7, M12, M40, and M43 self-propelled artillery pieces.

Also, the U.S. Army's fighting doctrine did not intend for the Shermans to be used to engage enemy tanks, but to provide infantry support while tank destroyer battalions dealt with German panzers. While the Sherman's 75mm and 76mm main gun was at a disadvantage when dealing with the frontal armor of the Panther or Tiger, the British sought to provide a solution by mounting a 17-pounder gun on their American-supplied vehicle—the Sherman Firefly—a threat that the Germans recognized as they took special care to target these vehicles.

The key to logistics support for a rapidly moving armored force was the capability of the armored division's maintenance units to assist the forward elements of the mechanized forces. A task force with 50 tanks moving 30-40 miles a day would see between 15 to 20 tanks drop out during a single day for maintenance and repair—requiring minor fixes or even major repairs. Tanks, half-tracks, and other armored vehicles were subject to heavy wear during everyday operations.

The hard work of battlefield recovery and evacuation, field repairs, vehicle maintenance, and replacement created a strong mutual respect between the combat troops and the maintenance personnel, as they depended on one another for survival.

As part of the spearhead of the First U.S. Army, the 3rd Armored Division destroyed more enemy tanks, and participated in the capture of more prisoners than any other American armored division—the division's CCB destroyed more German tanks than any other combat command. The division also lost more tanks than any other armored division, but the support of its logistics and maintenance personnel allowed it to always keep driving forward. □

A frequent contributor to WWII Quarterly, Allyn Vannoy lives in Oregon and is the author of several books, including Against the Panzers: United States Infantry Versus German Tanks, 1944-1945.

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