Curtis 02313

CROSSING THE RHINE!

WWII QUARTERLY

JOURNAL OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR

SS Panzers at the Battle of the Bulge

4TH INFANTRY DIVISION

D-DAY Landing on Utah Beach

Marines' Bloody Ordeal at Iwo Jima

Hitler's Killing Squads

+ SOVIET FEMALE SNIPERS, GERMANY'S FAILED BOMBER

WWII QUARTERLY • FALL 2019 Volume 11, No. 5

FALL 2019
RETAILER DISPLAY UNTIL DEC. 9

$11.99US $12.99CAN

93>

0 74808 02313 4

WARFAREHISTORYNETWORK.com

D-DAY MEMORY TOUR

NORMANDY 75th

AFTER ACTION REPORT

Normandy,

The ceremonies related to the 75th anniversary of D-Day are now over This is an opportunity to share with you the unforgettable moments we have had with our guests. We have created a unique program, to discover and live in real immersion the events that took place on June 6, 1944.

Scott came from Pennsylvania with his son, *Doug*. Both former soldiers, they walked in the footsteps of their relative who landed at Omaha Beach in June 1944. *Rony*, a former member of the 101st Airborne and a retired NYPD officer, was coming to Normandy for the first time, passionate about the History of D-DAY. The experience forged unforgettable memories of the jeep rides on the historic trails in the vicinity of Sainte-Mère-Eglise.

Gary and Carol came from Michigan., They found the DDMTUSA experience an extraordinary way to discover places inaccessible to the public. *Jose* is pastor in Nebraska and a former member of the 82nd Airborne. He wanted to celebrate a service in a small church near Sainte-Mère-Eglise. These are all moments that make our program unique.

Tony & Hope, from Colorado, came to Normandy to see the place where his father landed with his glider. Using our jeeps we could follow together the way he had traveled on June 7, 1944.

Josh came from Ohio and brought with him the dog tags of his grandfather. We found his grave in the cemetery of Colleville. Gathering his emotions, he was able to travel the places where his grandfather had fought.

Unfortunately, we cannot list them all here, but on the testimonial page of our website www.ddaymemorytour.com you can read their comments. They are obviously our best ambassadors. Never before has a tour operator conceived such a concept to offer this kind of experience. It is about presenting history from another angle, to give an immersive character to learn, respect and pay homage to those who have made it possible to enjoy the freedoms we have today..

EXPERIENCE

FULL IMMERSION...

Normandy battlefields...

Imagine that you are part of a unit of GI's landing on Normandy.

Imagine yourself wearing the uniform of Paratroopers while riding in convoy Willys Jeeps on Normandy pathways.

Imagine the French villages, le Bocage, the roads and hedgerows, the landing beaches, Utah and Omaha and more.

This is what we propose to experience a full IMMERSION with DDAY MEMORY TOUR. We are passionate about History and the liberators who came on June 6th, 1944 to fight for Freedom. We will show and share with you Normandy as no one has ever yet done. We have the expertise, the proficient guides, the best team based here in the USA and in Normandy near St-Mere-Eglise, one of the first town liberated on June 6th, 1944. This journey will transport you into the past to live a unique and incomparable experience.

ENLIST NOW...

The town of Sainte-Mere-Eglise, liberated on June 6 1944 during first hours of Operation Overlord in Normandy. Here a stop in front of the marker O km.

Request our catalog at info@ddmtusa.com

76th Anniversary TOURS 2020 Calendar:

7 Days

May 20-26
June 03-09
July 01-07

ENLIST NOW!

844-276-1611

Explanation, during a ride close to Utah Beach

Special Forces next to 507 PIR monument at AMFREVILLE

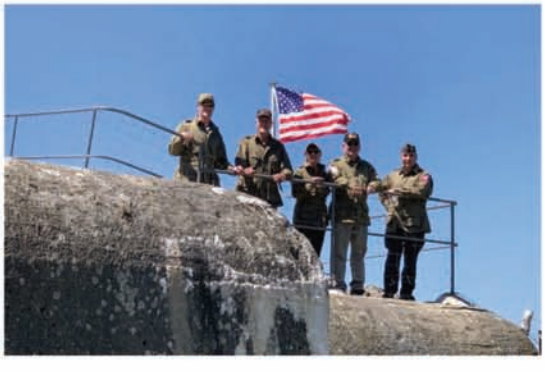
A NEW WAY TO VISIT NORMANDY

The way in which DDMTUSA operates is totally different from what can usually be found, staying in a castle or sleeping in a US camp under a tent, everything is planned to recreate the conditions in which the GI's discovered Normandy in June 1944.

Our programs are based on a duration of 1 to 10 days, with guides and support 24 hours a day. The stages and meetings will be numerous. Our route will allow you to discover not only the most famous places, but also places unknown to the public. We will customize with you the route you want to take, and you will discover unusual places. Thanks to its different versions, our program is accessible to all, no particular physical condition is required., We constantly adapt the pace and the course according to your wishes.

In order to fully enjoy your stay, we have developed this program for small groups, with a maximum of 12 people. The 2020 tours dates are listed on this brochure and can be found on our web site. www.ddaymemorytour.com

Maps Compass, Hedgerows, Convoy , this is immersion



www.ddaymemorytour.com

D-DAY MEMORY TOUR

D-DAY MEMORY TOUR

BOCA RATON, FLORIDA 33487
Contract Fla.Seller of travel ref No.ST40723
Email: info@ddmtusa.com
Tel: 1-844-276-1611

TABLE OF CONTENTS

WWII QUARTERLY

Departments

Features

COVER: U.S. Third Army troops hunker down in their landing craft as they come under enemy fire while crossing the Rhine River, March 22, 1944.

Photo: National Archives

WWII Quarterly (ISSN 2151-3678) is published four times yearly by Sovereign Media, 6731 Whittier Avenue, Suite A-100, McLean, VA 22101-4554. (703) 964-0361. *WWII Quarterly,* Volume 11, Number 1

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

ALPVENTURES®

WORLD WAR II TOURS

Alpventures® World War II Tours are packed with History, Fun & Adventure.

Visit the World War II Battlefields of Europe and Russia on our Guided Tours, and enjoy exceptional service, first-class hotels, experienced guide, and much more...

(888) 991-6718 **worldwar2tours.com**

MAXIMUM 25 GUESTS PER TOUR!

- **Normandy to the Eagle's Nest Tour**
- **Men, Masterpieces & Monuments Tour**
- **Holocaust Memorial Tour to Poland**
- **Battleground Italy Tour: Sicily to Rome**
- **Franco's Spain Tour with Gibraltar!**
- **Britain at War! Tour**

Travel with America's most knowledgeable Tour Guide

Standing on Hallowed Ground, 75 Years Later

This past June I once again had the honor of guiding a group of 30 Smithsonian guests to the hallowed ground of Normandy, France, to visit the sites. This time was especially memorable as it was the 75th anniversary of Operation Overlord—the largest combined air and sea invasion in history.

This was my sixth tour, and it never gets old. This one was especially moving. In addition to seeing more than 30 C-47 transport planes flying in formation over the beachheads, and walking on the sands at Omaha and Utah Beaches, and standing on the insignificant-looking bridge at La Fiere where a tremendous battle once raged, and walking the field where Dick Winters' small company blew away a battery of German guns, and standing in the town square of Ste. Mère-Église where paratroopers drifted down into waiting German fire, and being present at the American cemetery when French President Emmanuel Macron and U.S. President Donald Trump gave two of the best speeches of their lives, there was also the thrill of being able to meet and talk with and shake the hands of many of the British and American survivors of that horrific day of June 6, 1944.

A veteran is being escorted by family members through the British cemetery at Ranville, not far from Pegasus Bridge.

These men—a dwindling bunch now in their 90s and bent with age and infirmities—had been, three-quarters of a century ago, mere lads in their late teens and early 20s, thrust into a maelstrom of fire and death. How anyone came out of the invasion alive is beyond me.

Yet, they were there, and they did it. When the medal-bedecked U.S. veterans were introduced on stage at the cemetery ceremony, the audience of some 15,000 rose as one and gave the gentlemen a standing ovation that lasted for 10 minutes. If we could have gone on for 10 hours or 10 days, I think we would have done it. They deserved all of it—and more.

There were other events that have seared their way into my memory. One of the people in my group was first cousin of two men with strong connections to the invasion—Roland and Walter Ehlers of the 1st Infantry Division. Tragically, Roland was killed on Omaha Beach on D-Day, while Walter went on to receive a battlefield commission and earn the Medal of Honor. (I had the privilege of interviewing Walter for my 2004 book, *The Fighting First*, and now I have met a relative of his.)

On our last day, we visited the famous Pegasus Bridge and then the British cemetery at Ranville. British headstones carry personal inscriptions; the one that got me was one that said, "We had planned a wonderful future, but now that is all gone. Your loving wife, Claire." There are hundreds like that. There wasn't a dry eye in the cemetery.

One member of our group summed up the tour perfectly: "It started out as a 10 and kept getting better."

If you've never been to Normandy, don't put it off any longer.

Flint Whitlock, Editor

WWII Quarterly Volume 11 • Number 1

WARFAREHISTORYNETWORK.com

CARL A. GNAM, JR.
Editorial Director, Founder

FLINT WHITLOCK
Editor
WWIIQuarterly@gmail.com

SAMANTHA DETULLEO
Art Director

KEVIN M. HYMEL
Research Director

CONTRIBUTORS:
Raymond E. Bell, Jr., Al Hemingway, Chace V. Howland, Kevin M. Hymel, Pat McTaggart, Mark Simner, Allyn Vannoy, Mason B. Webb, Phil Zimmer

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

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

BUSINESS OFFICE:
MARK HINTZ
Vice President & Publisher

TERRI COATES
Subscription Customer Services
sovereign@publishersservicesassociates.com

PUBLISHERS SERVICE ASSOCIATES
Circulation Fulfillment

CURTIS CIRCULATION COMPANY
WORLDWIDE DISTRIBUTION

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

www.WarfareHistoryNetwork.com

SUBSCRIPTION CUSTOMER SERVICE AND BUSINESS OFFICE:

2406 Reach Road
Williamsport, PA 17701

(800) 219-1187

PRINTED IN THE USA.

We have coins to fit any budget.

OWN A PIECE OF AMERICAN HISTORY

In 1921, WWI ended, the first Miss America was crowned, and Babe Ruth was hitting homers...

This is also the last year the U.S. minted the famous Morgan silver dollars which is often considered the #1 silver investment coin.

1883-CC Morgan Dollar DMPL
PCGS MS64 CAC
$793.00

Circulated Morgan Dollar
$22.00

1885-CC Morgan Dollar
NGC MS65 CAC+
$1,405.00

The Morgan Dollar obverse features Lady Liberty wearing a headband labeled LIBERTY. Her curls fall loosely from a twist at the nape of her neck. She is surrounded by 13 stars representing the original colonies. The year of issue appears at the bottom.

The reverse of each Morgan Dollar features an American Eagle with the words UNITED STATES OF AMERICA at the top. It is also engraved with the motto IN GOD WE TRUST and the coin's denomination.

BLANCHARD
America's rare coin and precious metals firm

www.blanchardgold.com | 888-546-5866

Soviet female snipers accounted for the deaths of hundreds of Germans on the battlefield.

Roza Shanina was cute as a kitten, yet as dangerous as a Siberian tiger.

The 20-year-old drew many an eye behind Soviet lines in World War II with her striking blue eyes, fair skin, and strawberry blonde hair, but she earned her reputation out front in no-man's-land. There, she stalked and officially took down 75 unsuspecting German officers and men—including 12 enemy snipers—with well-placed shots from her well-worn Mosin Nagant rifle.

Roza was one of more than 2,000 female snipers trained and employed by the Soviets to put fear in the hearts of the invaders by striking thousands from the Germans' "rations list." Other women were even more deadly and more famous. Lyudmila Pavlichenko, for example, had 309 confirmed kills and was selected to go on a wartime goodwill tour of Allied countries that included a visit to Franklin Roosevelt's White House.

Nina Lobkovskaya (foreground) poses with her platoon of female snipers who fought in the battle for Berlin. Nearly 2,500 Red Army female snipers accounted for at least 12,000 German deaths. Only about 500 of the snipers survived the war.

The initial female snipers were individuals like Nina Petrova, who served as a nurse on the front, although she had been a physical education instructor who had trained marksmen before the war. At first, the Soviets had been reluctant to employ her as a sniper because of her sex and the fact that she was 48 years old.

But the nurse was persistent, got her hands on a sniper rifle, and eventually was given permission to "go hunting" in her free time. As her official kill tally mounted, she gained the go-ahead for further outings, and she began to teach frontline sniper courses.

Other units also set up similar frontline programs, and in March 1942, a Central School for Sniper Instructors was established in Veshnyaki near Moscow. Petrova, Pavlichenko, and other women on the front lines had already demonstrated their abilities and coolness under fire, so it was a fairly logical follow-through when the Soviet high command established a separate three-month-long women's training program there in December 1942.

Before the war was over, more than a thousand snipers had graduated in seven separate classes from the school before finding their way to the front lines, while others continued to learn on the job.

The women who graduated from the program continued to impress male officers at the front with their dedication, determination, and deadly marksmanship. In late May 1943, the training program was retitled the Central Women's School of Sniper Training and was extended from three months to seven. A month later, the women's school was transferred to Amerovo in Chechnya, and then moved a few months later to near Podolsk in the Moscow region.

The women studied ballistics and deception, calculated distances, worked in two-person teams, employed camouflage, and spent hours on the firing range shooting at distances from 200 to 1,300 yards. They were taught the importance of ignoring "simple soldiers" and to focus on officers, machine gunners, and communications personnel.

They traveled light, carrying a Mosin Nagant sniper rifle with ammo, bandages, a shovel, and a mess kit. Crucially, they were taught to carry two grenades: one for the Germans and one as a last resort to prevent being captured, raped, tortured, or killed. As the war progressed, some of the women preferred a purloined German pistol in place of the grenades, with the last bullet saved for themselves.

The women were taught the importance of harassing and killing the enemy from a distance. They were not to participate in deadly mass frontal assaults with the men, nor were they to keep diaries that would prove helpful to the enemy if captured.

Most of the women snipers adhered to those common-sense rules. But Roza, being Roza, ignored the crucial directives about diaries and frontline assaults. Her diary became her "personal confidante," as one observer noted. It held her most personal thoughts and feelings, even those she did not share with her two closest sniper friends, Alexandra Yekimova and Kaleri Petrova. The three had been together since training at Podolsk and formed what they called the "troika."

Although her early wartime diary has been

SARCO, INC.

www.E-Sarcoinc.com
(610) 250 - 3960
Phones Open: Mon-Fri, 8:30am-5pm

50 HILTON ST, EASTON PA 18042
VISIT OUR SHOWROOM
Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm
Friday til 8pm
info@sarcoinc.com

World's Largest Supplier of Firearms, Firearm Parts and Firearm Accessories - And We're All About Militaria, Too !! SOURCE CODE: **WW2FALL**

Newly manufactured full size, non-firing German WW2 Panzerscrheck now available with an inert rocket!

Almost impossible to find actual inert rockets of this type, we have the next best thing which will be perfect to display or reenactments. Our steel launcher comes with wood furniture and leather sling and detachable shield. Our inert rockets are cast synthetic from the old Kamabee Keep iron rockets, long gone from the market. We can offer the ensemble or individual items as follows...

Panzerschreck Launcher & Rocket

(Inert)

Panzerschreck Launcher only..... **$300.00** RL008
Panzerschreck Launcher with Inert Rocket **$355.00** RL017
Panzerschreck Inert Rocket..... **$55.00** each or **3 for**..... **$145.00** MISC724
Panzerschreck Launcher KIT... **$200.00** MISC504
Panzerschredk Launcher KIT with Inert Rocket **$255.00** RL018

U.S. WW2 M19 60MM MORTAR

U.S. Marine Raider and Army Airborne units benefited from this lightweight mortar rushed into action in 1942 which saw use in Europe and Pacific theaters and from Korea through Vietnam. Our non- firing mortar uses the original baseplate and M15 sight assembly blended with our new made tube. Never offered before in the U.S.! Mortar only.

$325.00 MISC397

(non-firing)

German M35 Helmet WWII

Model 1935 German helmet with rolled edge, metal banded liner with 8 tongue leather liner and leather chinstrap assembly mounted by 3 rivets on the 1.7-1.9mm thick steel shell in German 'Feldgrau' green color. Helmet fits 7-1/4" to 7-5/8" head size (large). New, well made and great for static displays or reenactments. We have purchased the remaining stores of these from 'Kamabee Keep' along with various German helmet decals which we are using to provide one set of helmet decals with each helmet at no charge as long as supplies last. M35 helmet with decal - Sorry, no choice on decals as they are quite limited. **$45.00** HLM037

CALL US !!

M6A3 High Explosive Rocket

M6A3 HIGH EXPLOSIVE ROCKETS FOR THE M1, M1A1 & M9 BAZOOKAS
Completely inert, new made, and perfect for display or reenactments. **$39.95** MISC447

Reich WW2 Metal German Wall Plaques 15 inches
$22.95 MISC371

M24 German Stick Grenade

Standard Potato Masher grenade as used by German troops in WW2. Wood and metal construcion with individual components.
$24.95 (Inert) MISC464

M11A3 WWII DUMMY RIFLE GRENADE (Inert)

Rare! Lost in the warehouse for 10 years. Repainted and may have minor storage dings on fins. These don't exist anymore. **$34.95** AM125

Please note: No dummy grenades to California - Some States may have restrictions on ownership of INERT grenades. Check your local & State laws.

M43 GERMAN WW2 STICK GRENADE

The improved German 'Potato Masher' grenade from WW2 was an improvement over the M24 Stick Grenade and became the staple offensive hand grenade of the Wehrmacht soldier. The design offed greater throwing ranges and safety and simplicity in activating the fuse. Our wood and steel replica is full size and comes with appropriate WW2 markings **$29.95** MISC677

(Inert)

M39-B German WW2 Smoke Grenade (Inert)

M39B Stick Grenades were used by the Wehrmacht & SS, all over their theater of operations. We have the tapered finger version rarely encountered today. Full size and can break down into components. Made from wood and metal. **$29.95** MISC678 (Inert)

Rarely offered with tapered finger handle, used for identifying it in the dark by touch.

Breaks down into separate components for display.

German WW2 M39 Egg Grenade

Accurate inert steel reproduction with detachable Fuse assy. Full Size. **$22.95** MISC680 (Inert)

Save $4.00 on a fragmentation sleeve when you purchase the sleeve with the M24 German stick grenade! Sleeve with Grenade (inert) **$34.90** MISC791

JAPANESE WW2 TROPICAL ARMY HAT WW2

Japanese Army tropical khaki brown cap with 4 pc. neck protector, leather chinstrap, star emblem and 6 grommet vents. This wool hat also comes with the soft leather sweat band which makes it very comfortable. Available in 3 sizes: 7-1/4", 7-1/2", 7-5/8"

$19.95 HAT07

ORDER ONLINE !!

(NON-FIRING)

37MM RUSSIAN SPADE MORTAR

When is a spade not just a spade? When it's a Mortar too! Sarco has the 'Kamabee Keep' rework of the coolest mortar design in the history of warfare. Innovative Russian designers took the concept of the standard 'Entrenching Tool' that every soldier wore on his belt, and elevated it to 'Heavy Weapon Status', by allowing it to dig trenches & also fire 37mm Mortar Rounds! Designed in the late 1930s and fielded against Finland in late 1939/40 in the Russo Finn War, and throughout WW2 along the Russian Front. Never been on the U.S. or World market! It can be attached to your belt using the canvas & leather carrier, be detached to operate as a small shovel, or used to lob rounds on the enemy. Transforms into a mortar in @15 seconds with practice. This is a new made replication of the original and is non-firing. Sarco Inc. carries this item exclusively and they are currently in stock. We also have the 'late war' style 15 round bandoleer used by troops to carry mortar ammunition including Mosin Nagant Rifle ammunition. To top it off, we have replica 37mm Mortar inert display rounds available too ! The only place to see this item in the entire world is in a Russian military museum. Truly this is a piece of ordnance lost to history!

The design concept was amazing and its impact could still be amazing in this day & age! Imagine a platoon of infantry Riflemen also each carrying 15 mortar shells and working as a fire and maneuver machine. Stalinist purges and a failure to develop better ammunition put this idea to sleep before its time!

37mm Spade Mortar Assembly.....**$175.00** MISC458
Belt Carrier for the Mortar.....**$19.95** MISC421
Chest Bandolier w/ Mosin Pouch.....**$65.00** MISC429
Mortar Round, inert for display.....**$19.95** MISC356
Complete Set of each of the above.....**279.90** MISC689

GERMAN MP40 SMG (non-firing)

Famous full size display gun with operating bolt, recoil assembly, folding stock, mag catch and trigger. Saw combat throughout Europe, Africa, and even Vietnam! Bound to spark interest and conversations from all who see it. Realistic metal and plastic construction and it comes with steel magazine and leather sling.

$210.00 REP02

WE HAVE A WIDE VARIETY OF REPLICA GUNS ! SEE OUR WEBSITE !!

Japanese WW2 Paratrooper Bandolier *(17 pocket)*

Japanese Khaki bandolier (only)
$27.95 MISC676

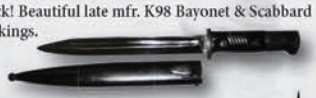
STEEL TYPE 99 PROTECTIVE SHIELD

As used by Japanese forces during WW2. Complete with handle and monopod.
New. **$99.95** MISC443

GERMAN K98 MAUSER BAYONETS

Finally we have them back in stock! Beautiful late mfr. K98 Bayonet & Scabbard with bakelite/plastic grips w/markings. New.

$39.95 BAY254



We Have DOZENS of Types Of BAYONETS in Stock ! See our website

WW2 JAPANESE ARMY HELMET W/ NET

Steel helmet complete with suspension, chin strap, and helmet net as used by Japanese forces during WW2. Excellent quality and perhaps even better than the original. New made.

$54.95 HLM038

German Imperial WWI Flag

Classic German Imperial Flag that adorned Battleships, Army, and Headquarters installations from the late 1800s through 1918. Befitting that we can offer this classic war flag in 3'x5' cotton 100 years after it flew during the War to End all Wars!

$24.00 FLAG27

U.S. Pineapple Grenade (inert)

Inert cast iron body with inert US GI fuse lends authenticity to this iconic staple of the American serviceman in the last century. Introduced in WW1, the original designed grenade progressed through evolutions to serve in WW2, Korea, and beyond to retirement @1969. A very deadly grenade due to its girth and castellated body which reminded GIs of a Pineapple. Comes with WW2 era, (1943) 'overpaint Yellow' band and O.D. green body. **$11.50 ea, 3 for $32.00** AM026

(Some States may have restrictions on ownership of INERT grenades. Check your local & State laws)

lost to history, a second, later one, survived. It revealed the tumultuous highs and lows in the life of the 20-year-old sniper. She came across as an occasionally gruff young woman who experienced very high highs as well as extended periods of sadness. Roza admitted in her diary to more than a few crying fits during confrontations with her superiors. With her dramatic mood swings, she may have suffered from what today would be termed bipolar disorder.

On August 8, 1944, she "decamped" on her own and went AWOL from her sniper unit to go on the attack with the men. She did her part, shot Germans, and managed to take three prisoners, but she was reprimanded for her actions. She did the same thing a few days later and nearly paid for that adventure with her life when the unit came in contact with German tanks. Yet again, she returned unscathed and with German prisoners.

That and other "decamping" events to the front lines led to further sanctions and an angry fit when a political commander refused to let her go on additional excursions. She was an adrenaline junkie who begged to go back on the front lines. "Some force draws me to the front lines," she wrote. "I'm bored in the back. Some people say I just want to get back to the boys, but I don't have anyone I know there. I want to see real war."

In one frontline attack alone, Roza reportedly killed 54 Germans and captured three others. Those figures were not included in her official sniper tally but resulted in a front-page feature in a Moscow magazine. Her action prompted Soviet writer-propagandist Ilya Ehrenburg to "thank her 57 times over. She has saved the lives of thousands of Soviet people."

She was eventually awarded both the Order of Glory, Third Class and the Order of Glory, Second Class for her marksmanship on the front lines. Her attitude and behavior contributed to her near-mythical status and helped generate additional articles in the national and international press about the deadly, comely sniper.

On occasion, Roza was officially granted permission to take part in heavy frontal assaults. On November 1, 1944, she came off the front lines totally exhausted. "I am going to remember this war. This town [near Pillkallen, in East Prussia] switched hands four

The bemedaled Nina Lobkovskaya fended off 12 counterattacks in one day.

times, and three times I just barely slipped through the Nazis' fingers. As a matter of fact, taking the war into enemy territory is pretty serious business," she admitted.

In early January 1945, Roza convinced the commander of the First Belorussian Front to let her participate in an offensive in East Prussia. She did her part, and on January 14, she may have had a premonition of death when she wrote, "My definition of happiness is fighting for others…. If I must, for general happiness, fall, I am ready." She fell on January 27, just months before her 21st birthday, in fierce fighting in East Prussia as she protected a wounded artillery officer. She died the following day.

"Maybe it is for the best that Roza has died. How could she have lived after the war? She shot so many people," said her mother.

Roza was certainly one of the more colorful and more memorable snipers, but nearly all were determined to personally avenge the deaths of parents, siblings, or lovers who died at the hands of the gray-coated "Invaders of the Motherland." As the advancing red tide swept westward through Belarus, she and the others were further emotionally swept up as personal eyewitnesses to the death and destruction caused by the fighting. They were further whipped up by the writings of Ilya Ehrenburg—a Bolshevik revolutionary, author, and historian—and others.

As the war entered its fourth year, both Soviet and German fighters became more fierce and more exhausted. At several stages,

the female snipers and their comrades were on the march nearly constantly as the Germans fell back to more defensible positions. The weariness, lack of sleep and food, and the near constant dampness took a toll on everyone. Even horses had difficulty working their way forward through the mud and obstacles.

Yulia Zhukova recalled that many of the female snipers occasionally fell asleep while on the march as their "consciousness switched off." Fellow sniper Nina Lobkovskaya stated that "in order to not fall asleep or fall down, we held each other by the arms, and if someone fell asleep, those next to that person would help."

In many areas, it became more common for the women to take part in the direct fighting with their male comrades. Lobkovskaya recalled one battle where her unit fended off 12 fierce counterattacks in one day. Between battles, she and other female snipers served as nurses, providing first aid and retrieving wounded Red Army comrades from the battlefield.

The Soviets were the first Allied troops to personally see the horrors of the Nazi con-

Roza Shanina was credited with 75 kills. She begged to be sent to the front lines, even going AWOL at times to participate in combat.

centration camps, which they liberated in their sweep toward Germany. The young Lobkovskaya recalled seeing a group of weary French concentration camp survivors hobbling homeward. When they saw the women with their sniper rifles, they applauded, blew kisses, and shouted out, *Brava! La femme sovietique*!"

The frontline experiences were harrowing for snipers like Lobkovskaya. She was among those who rescued injured Soviet tankmen, including tank commander, a Lt. Col. Popov. They gently placed him on a *plash-palatka* (Soviet raincoat) and crawled, dragging him back to friendly lines for treatment at a field hospital.

As might be expected, the female snipers had to fend off unwanted sexual advances from their Soviet comrades, both enlisted men and officers. The officers often had the upper hand, with an ability to reassign female snipers and others to less hazardous duties behind the lines. A number of women succumbed to the offer of safer, second-tier duties, and became what the Soviets euphemistically called "officer wives" during the war. At war's end, the couple often parted when the man returned home to his real wife and children.

Nearly all the women who had served on the front lines suffered greatly after the war, with rumors abounding about their living for years alongside young and virulent men and not knowing if the next bul-

Sniper Tanya Baramzina waves to the camera from her position on the Baltic front, 1944. After scoring 36 kills, she was captured, tortured, and executed.

let had their name on it.

The returnees, like their male counterparts, often had to deal with post-traumatic stress syndrome (PTSD)—all this while acclimating themselves to the challenge of rebuilding their lives and a nation that had been devastated by war.

One sniper, referred to only as Klavdiya, was one of only about 500 female snipers who managed to return home physically unscathed after years at the front. She spent much of the rest of her life reflecting on her fate.

"A bullet is a fool; fate is a villain," she often said in quoting her mother. "We are a feather; a sparrow's feather. You can never know your future. It is not given to us," Klavdiya added.

She returned home to her mother, only to find that her two brothers had gone missing early in the war and her father had been killed at Stalingrad. She and her mother were reduced to living in a dugout, but she managed to move forward, married a factory engineer, and had a son and a daughter. The boy prospered, completed his university training, and became an architect, but the girl had disabilities. She did not begin to walk until she was five, and only at seven did she say her first words.

Klavdiya, the former sniper with two Orders of Glory and four medals, began to believe that she was being punished for killing so many people. Her husband left her after asking, "Would a normal woman have gone to war? Learned to shoot? That's why you're unable to give birth to a normal child."

The vast majority of others, like Roza Shanina, did not have the opportunity to return to the Motherland. Take Nina Petrova, the aging sniper-instructor who had been a physical education instructor before the war. On March 14, 1945, just a few months before the war's end, the 52-year-old was personally awarded the Full Cavalier of the Order of Glory by the commander of the Second Assault Army for her more than 100 kills, making her the second woman to receive that prestigious award. Just a few months later, fate intervened when the truck she was riding in fell off a bridge and she was killed. The grandmother died before she got to return home to see her tiny granddaughter.

Not all female snipers suffered such a fate. Nina Lobkovskaya, for one, returned home, earned a degree in history at Moscow State University, and worked more than two decades at the Central Lenin Museum in the capital city. She did presentations on the war for students from universities and military academies and was cited for her work in 1974.

She fondly recalled the time, several years after the war, when she answered her door to see Colonel Popov, the wounded man she rescued during the war. Against all odds, he had tracked her down to personally present flowers and thank her for saving his life on the battlefield.

Sniper Klavdiya Grigoryevna told of returning home at age 21—with completely white hair. She had grown four inches taller during her time away and she had to relearn how to wear shoes and dresses after four years at the front. But she was alive, physically uninjured, and ready to resume life. □

"To you, it's the perfect lift chair. To me, it's the best sleep chair I've ever had."

— J. Fitzgerald, VA

Sit up, lie down — and anywhere in between!

Easy-to-use remote for massage, heat, recline, and lift

We've all had nights when we just can't lie down in bed and sleep, whether it's from heartburn, cardiac problems, hip or back aches – it could be a variety of reasons. Those are the nights we'd give anything for a comfortable chair to sleep in, one that reclines to exactly the right degree, raises feet and legs to precisely the desired level, supports the head and shoulders properly, operates easily even in the dead of night, and sends a hopeful sleeper right off to dreamland.

Our Perfect Sleep Chair® is just the chair to do it all. It's a chair, true – the finest of lift chairs – but this chair is so much more! It's designed to provide total comfort and relaxation not found in other chairs. It can't be beat for comfortable, long-term sitting, TV viewing, relaxed reclining and – yes! – peaceful sleep. Our chair's recline technology allows you to pause the chair in an infinite number of positions, including the lay flat position and the zero gravity position where your body experiences a minimum of internal and external stresses. You'll love the other benefits, too: It helps with correct spinal alignment, promotes back pressure relief, and encourages better posture to prevent back and muscle pain.

This lift chair puts you safely on your feet!

And there's more! The overstuffed, oversized biscuit style back and unique seat design will cradle you in comfort. Generously filled, wide armrests provide enhanced arm support when sitting or reclining. The high and low heat settings along with the multiple massage settings, can provide a soothing relaxation you might get at a spa – just imagine getting all that in a lift chair! It even has a battery backup in case of a power outage. Shipping charge includes white glove delivery. Professionals will deliver the chair to the exact spot in your home where you want it, unpack it, inspect it, test it, position it, and even carry the packaging away! You get your choice of bonded stain and water repellent leather or plush microfiber in a variety of colors to fit any decor. **Call now!**

The Perfect Sleep Chair®

1-888-760-5870

Please mention code 111066 when ordering.

BBB ACCREDITED BUSINESS Rating of A+

Because each Perfect Sleep Chair is a custom-made bedding product, we can only accept returns on chairs that are damaged or defective.

Long Lasting DuraLux Leather

Tan | Chocolate | Burgundy | Blue

DuraLux II Microfiber

Burgundy | Cashmere | Chocolate | Indigo

46513

Plagued by confusion, cutbacks, and contradictory orders, Nazi Germany's heavy bomber program barely got off the ground.

The Heinkel He-177 Greif (Griffin) was to become the only long-range heavy bomber operated by the Luftwaffe during World War II. But it was an aircraft plagued by problems, earning the aircraft the nickname *Luftwaffefeuerzeng* (Luftwaffe's Petrol Lighter).

The Allies became aware of the Greif on June 13, 1940, when a Luftwaffe prisoner provided a description of the bomber's features, but it wasn't until January 21, 1944, that one of the aircraft was shot down over England.

In the 1930s, the Luftwaffe's chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Walther Wever, championed development of a heavy bomber, believing that such a bomber would prove a decisive factor in a future European conflict. He demanded bombers capable of carrying a heavy load over distances sufficient to permit an assault on any part of the British Isles—aircraft that, in view of the weakness of the German Kreigsmarine, could also harass British shipping far out in the Atlantic.

Prototypes of two four-engine heavy bombers, the Junkers Ju-89 and the Dornier Do-19, were built under his tutelage, but with Wever's death in an airplane crash in 1936, the development of these aircraft was abandoned. Wever's successors favored smaller, medium-range bombers.

An artist's rendering of a Heinkel HE-177 under attack by American warplanes. More HE-177s were lost to malfunction during flight than were lost in combat.

Despite Wever's death, the Heinkel Flugzeugwerke received a specification for a new bomber from the German Air Ministry in 1936. The aircraft was to be capable of carrying a 2,200-pound bomb load over a range of 3,100 miles at a maximum speed of 311 miles per hour, enabling it to outrun the fighters of the time. In June 1937, Heinkel received instructions to proceed with construction of a full-scale mockup.

Heinkel estimated that its aircraft could reach a top speed of 342 miles per hour at a ceiling of 18,050 feet and have a loaded weight of 59,500 pounds. To achieve such performance, though, Heinkel's chief designer, Siegfried Gunter, believed several revolutionary features would have to be incorporated into the design, such as a pair of 1,973-horsepower engines. However, no engine at the time was that powerful.

The aircraft's advanced features included coupled power plants with surface evaporation cooling, which was still unproven. The coupled power plants brought together two liquid-cooled engines mounted side by side in a single nacelle with a single gear casing connecting the two crankcases, the two crankshaft pinions driving a single airscrew shaft gear. The use of two engines of large output in a heavy bomber seemed sound aerodynamically. The coupled engine also avoided the delay associated with development of a new high-powered engine. The first prototypes were equipped with two counterrotating Daimler-Benz DB 606-A power plants.

For aerodynamics, Gunter wished to dispense with the usual system of drag-producing engine radiators and employ an evaporative cooling system, where the coolant water is pressurized, thus raising the coolant's boiling point. As the superheated water left the engine, it would enter an expansion area where the pressure dropped and the water flashed to steam. The steam would then be cooled as it flowed through pipes running along the outer skin of the fuselage and wings.

It was determined, however, that such a cooling system would not be capable of dealing with the vast amount of heat generated by each pair of engines. As a result,

Clip this offer to apply for coverage!

Now, from United of Omaha Life Insurance Company and Companion Life Insurance Company...

$25,000.00 Whole Life Insurance.

Are you between the ages of 45 and 85*?

Then this GUARANTEED ACCEPTANCE policy is for YOU!

- » Choose from 4 benefit levels - up to $25,000!
- » Rates "lock-in" at the age you apply - never go up again!
- » Call for your FREE all-by-mail application packet!
- » Call TOLL-FREE **1-888-312-2444**

Or apply online at
www.DirectLifeInsure.com

NO medical exam!

NO health questions!

Plus...

- Proceeds paid directly to your beneficiary
- Builds cash value and is renewable up to age 100!**... Then automatically pays YOU full benefit amount!***
- Policy cannot be canceled – EVER – because of changes in health!

Why this policy? Why now?

Our graded death benefit whole life insurance policy can be used to pay funeral costs, final medical expenses...or other monthly bills. You know how important it can be to help protect your family from unnecessary burdens after you pass away. Maybe your own parents or loved one did the same for you. OR, maybe they DIDN'T and you sure wish they would have!

The important thing is that, right now, you can make a decision that could help make a difficult time a little easier for your loved ones. It's a responsible, caring and affordable decision. And, right now, it's something you can do with one simple phone call.

You may have been putting off purchasing life insurance, but you don't have to wait another day. This offer is a great opportunity to help start protecting your family today.

United of Omaha Life Insurance Company
Companion Life Insurance Company
Mutual of Omaha Affiliates

Your affordable monthly rate will "lock-in" at your application age* ...

	$3,000.00 Benefit		$5,000.00 Benefit		$10,000.00 Benefit		$25,000.00 Benefit	
Age	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
45-49	$10.45	$8.80	$16.75	$14.00	$32.50	$27.00	$79.75	$66.00
50-54	$11.50	$9.70	$18.50	$15.50	$36.00	$30.00	$88.50	$73.50
55-59	$14.20	$11.95	$23.00	$19.25	$45.00	$37.50	$111.00	$92.25
60-64	$17.20	$13.30	$28.00	$21.50	$55.00	$42.00	$136.00	$103.50
65-69	$20.50	$16.00	$33.50	$26.00	$66.00	$51.00	$163.50	$126.00
70-74	$27.40	$21.40	$45.00	$35.00	$89.00	$69.00	$221.00	$171.00
75-79	$37.00	$30.10	$61.00	$49.50	$121.00	$98.00	$301.00	$243.50
80-85	$50.50	$42.55	$83.50	$70.25	$166.00	$139.50	$413.50	$347.25

The rates above include a $12 annual policy fee.

This is a solicitation of individual insurance. A licensed insurance agent/producer may contact you by telephone. **These policies contain benefits, reductions, limitations, and exclusions to include a reduction in death benefits during the first two years of policy ownership.** In NY, during the first two years, 110% of premiums will be paid. Whole Life Insurance is underwritten by United of Omaha Life Insurance Company, 3300 Mutual of Omaha Plaza, Omaha, NE 68175 which is licensed nationwide except NY. Life insurance policies issued in NY are underwritten by Companion Life Insurance Company, Hauppauge, NY 11788. Each company is responsible for its own financial and contractual obligations. Not available in all states. Benefit amounts vary by state. Policy Form ICC11L059P or state equivalent (7780L-0505 in FL, 828Y-0505 in NY).

*Ages 50 to 75 in NY.

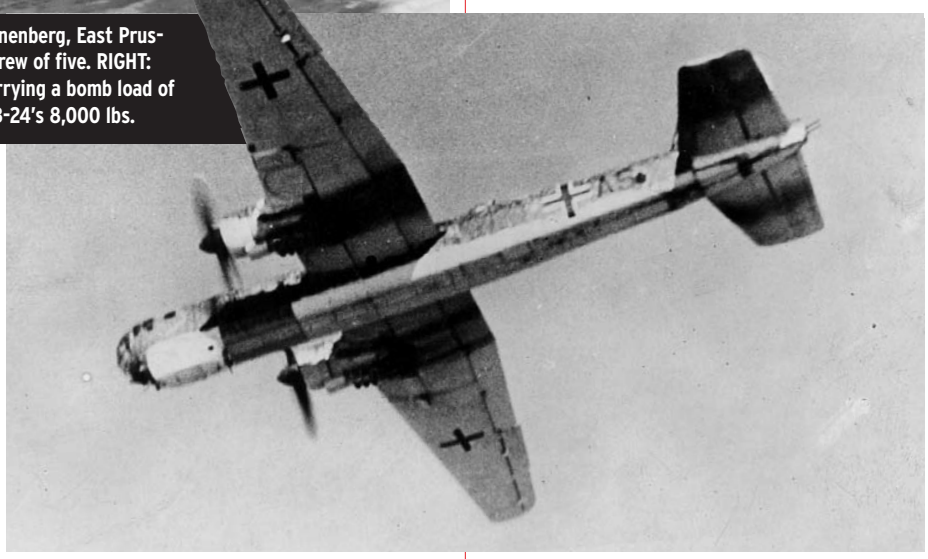
**In FL policy is renewable until age 121.

***All benefits paid would be less any outstanding loan.

452747

Bundesarchiv Bild 101I-676-7969A-25; Photo: Schroeder

ABOVE: Crew members gather around an HE-177 at Tannenberg, East Prussia, before a mission. The bomber normally carried a crew of five. RIGHT: Specifications said the HE-177 should be capable of carrying a bomb load of 2,200 lbs—far less than the B-17's 4,800 lbs. and the B-24's 8,000 lbs.



the evaporative cooling system had to be abandoned in favor of conventional radiators fitted directly behind each propeller, adding significantly to weight and drag.

For armament, Gunter's design called for outfitting the He-177 with three cockpit-controlled remote gun turrets and a single manned position in the tail. Remotely controlled turrets allowed the gunner to be placed in a protected position with excellent observation where he would be less likely to be blinded by the flash from his own guns.

Unfortunately, technical progress proved insufficient to keep pace with the He-177's development. As a result, the He-177 had to be modified to accommodate larger and heavier manned positions, each fitted with a single 13mm gun.

As dive bombing was believed more effective for pinpoint accuracy, attention was diverted away from horizontal bombing.

In November 1937, Luftwaffe dive bombing expert Ernst Udet presented the Luftwaffe's dive bombing requirement to Ernst Heinkel, who responded that the aircraft would never be capable of achieving such performance. In spite of this, the He-177 was required to be strengthened to support the stresses imposed by the pullout from a dive.

By now, the gross weight of the bomber had increased so alarmingly that providing an undercarriage of sufficient strength became a serious problem.

In November 1939, the first He-177 prototype was flown. It weighed 30,247 pounds when empty and 52,734 fully loaded. The flight terminated after only 12 minutes due to overheating engines. The prototype then received several modifications, including a 20 percent increase in the tail surface area, soon after which a second prototype made its first flight. During these trials, the second prototype developed severe control flutter and disintegrated in midair.

The fourth prototype, while undergoing stability tests over the Baltic, failed to recover from a shallow dive, crashing into the sea. The partially salvaged aircraft indicated that the crash was the result of a malfunction of the airscrew pitch gear.

The fifth prototype incorporated a number of trial installations. Triple bomb bays were installed, and hand-operated 7.9mm machine guns were installed in the nose, in a turret immediately aft of the flight deck, in the nose of the ventral gondola, and in the tail. Early in 1941, during a simulated low-level attack, both of the prototype's power plants burst into flames, causing the aircraft to hit the ground and explode.

The sixth prototype was the first equipped with production-type, 2,700-horsepower DB 606 engines. Maximum speed was 289 miles per hour, cruising speed 263 miles per hour, the service ceiling 22,966 feet, and range 3,417 miles.

The design led to poor access to the engines, resulting in the lack of routine maintenance in the field, the engines having a tendency to catch fire in flight.

The initial lot of 35 pre-production aircraft was employed in a wide variety of trials, and although the bomber was still considered dangerous because of engine fires, most of the pilots expressed favorable opinions concerning handling qualities and general performance.

Although the bomber's teething problems were still largely unresolved by the spring of 1942, the Luftwaffe's commander in chief, Hermann Göring, demanded delivery of He-177s to enable the Luftwaffe to destroy the British fleet. Trials with prototypes and pre-production aircraft dictated continued modifications all the while, and a substantial number of those aircraft were lost in accidents and crashes.

A total of 130 He-177A-1 bombers were manufactured by June 1943, but attempts to employ the aircraft operationally met with little success. Six were used for test-

ing with the Henschel Hs-293 radio-controlled missile.

The He-177A-1's forward fuselage housed a crew of four: a pilot, co-pilot/bombardier, navigator/radio operator, and gunner. The tail housed a second gunner. The A-1's maximum speed was 317 miles per hour, its cruising speed 267 miles per hour, and it had a range of 3,480 miles.

While production of the He-177A-1 was underway, Heinkel introduced an improved variant: the He-177A-3. This new version included an additional dorsal turret mounted midway between the trailing edge of the main-plane and the leading edge of the tail-plane; the turret contained two 13mm guns. A new power plant consisted of a pair of DB 605 engines that produced a maximum output of 2,950 hp.

In the autumn of 1942, the 3rd Squadron of Kampfgeschwader (Air Wing) 4's Group 1 began converting to He-177s, but the conversion was extremely slow due to a shortage of aircraft. Finally, in early 1943, the 1st and 2nd Squadrons were formed using newly arrived He-177A-3s.

In the meantime, Kampfgeschwader 50 received 20 He-177A-1s for conversion training. Its Group 1 was hurriedly trained on the A-3 and redesignated Fern-Kampfgeschwader (long-range air wing) 2 before being rushed to southern Russia, where the -3s were employed as transports flying supplies to the trapped 6th Army at Stalingrad. But the unit suffered an average loss of one aircraft a day due to crashes, its strength falling so rapidly that in February 1943 the surviving machines were withdrawn.

In April 1943, a variant of the A-3 model was introduced with an improved electrical system, a modified gun mount in the nose of the ventral gondola, an upgraded cannon, and a redesigned tail-gun position. This aircraft was the first to carry the Hs 293 missile, with two mounted under the wings and another under the fuselage.

The first He-177A-5s left the assembly line in February 1943. By July, the production rate of six planes a month was doubled and then increased to 42 a month, yielding a grand total of 415 delivered for 1943.

In October 1943, He-177 assets were

Continued on page 98

"Easy" Victory at Utah Beach

Of the five Allied invasion beaches during Operation Overlord, Omaha was the bloodiest and Utah the luckiest.

BY MASON B. WEBB

IN the weeks leading up to the still-undefined D-Day, commanders argued about every detail of the Overlord plan. Sometimes, the arguments grew contentious. In one, just a few weeks before the Normandy invasion was launched, British Air Chief Marshal Trafford Leigh-Mallory, under whose aegis the airborne forces would operate, got cold feet and told Lt. Gen. Omar Bradley, commander of the U.S. 1st Army, which was slated to land at Utah and Omaha Beaches, that he feared casualties among the U.S. 82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions would be catastrophic and urged the commander of Overlord ground forces, General Sir Bernard L. Montgomery, to cancel them.

Furious, Bradley replied that if the airborne and glider landings were eliminated, then he would insist that the whole Utah Beach plan be scrapped. "I won't go in without the airborne," Bradley told Leigh-Mallory. Ultimately, Monty had to step in and settle the heated disagreement, ruling that the airborne and glider portion of the invasion would proceed as planned.

Leigh-Mallory's pessimism and predictions of doom were one more burden for Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) commander General Dwight D. Eisenhower to carry. Ike noted in Crusade in Europe, "If [Leigh-Mallory] was right, it appeared that the attack on Utah Beach was probably hopeless, and this meant that the whole operation suddenly acquired a degree of risk, even foolhardiness, that presaged a gigantic failure, possibly Allied defeat in Europe."

The airborne and seaborne landings at Utah Beach had been deemed vital, because in addition to being a blocking force that could prevent the Germans in the Cotentin Peninsula from attacking the western end of the invasion area, the troops that landed at Utah would be in good position to head north and, it was hoped, capture the deep-water port at Cherbourg.

In the event, Ike did not order the Utah assault cancelled. "To abandon it," he said, "really meant to abandon a plan in which I had held implicit confidence for more than two years."

Nevertheless, as Eisenhower biographer Michael Korda wrote, "Nobody liked the look of Utah Beach, the only one that was available [on the east coast of the Cotentin Peninsula]. Ike himself described it as 'miserable.' On the landward side was a shallow, wide lagoon, crossed by narrow causeways, on which the Germans would certainly direct their artillery. If the Germans could hold on to the exits from these causeways, the troops would be trapped on the beach and 'slaughtered' there."

National Archives

Teddy Roosevelt, Jr., left, was first Allied general to land in France on D-Day. Capt. Leonard T. Schroeder, right, is credited with being the first American on Utah Beach.
OPPOSITE: While infantry landing on Omaha Beach endured chaos and heavy casualties, the landings at Utah Beach came off smoothly and with no major disruptions, allowing the U.S. 4th Infantry Division to quickly move inland and take its objectives.

American troops take part in practice landings at Slapton Sands, UK. An attack during the rehearsal by German E-boats caused more casualties than the actual landing itself.

SHAEF had the responsibility of selecting the units that would participate in Overlord, and the planners were worried that two of the three American infantry divisions slated to land by sea (the 4th and 29th) had not seen combat before, but it could not be helped. The only other experienced combat divisions on that side of the world were tied down in Italy. Selected to lead the charge at Utah Beach, therefore, was the U.S. 4th Infantry Division.

The 4th's lineage began in December 1917 when it was formed as America geared up to take part in World War I. In April 1918, the "Ivy Division" embarked for France. (The nickname comes from the design of the division's insignia, which has four green ivy leaves joined at the stem. The word "Ivy" is a play on the Roman numeral four, or IV. Ivy leaves are symbolic of tenacity and fidelity, the basis of the division's motto, "Steadfast and Loyal.")

It fought with distinction in the Marne and Aisne regions, and was the only American combat force to serve with both the French and the British in their respective sectors, as well as with all corps in the American sector.

When the Great War ended on November 11, 1918, the Ivy Division was awarded five battle streamers. More than 2,000 officers and men had been killed in action, and the list of wounded and missing totaled 12,000.

Deactivated at the conclusion of "the war to end all wars," the 4th was brought back to life a month after Nazi Germany invaded France, Norway, Denmark, Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands.

Reactivated on June 1, 1940, at Fort Benning, Georgia, the division was made up of the 8th, 12th, and 22nd Infantry Regiments, plus supporting units. From August 1940 through August 1943, the division was designated a "motorized" division and participated in the Louisiana Maneuvers, then moved to the newly opened Camp Gordon, Georgia, where it took part in the Carolina Maneuvers.

On July 3, 1942, 53-year-old Maj. Gen. Raymond Oscar "Tubby" Barton was appointed commander of the 4th Infantry Division, coming into the position with a reputation as an exacting and demanding leader.

Barton was born in Denver, Colorado, in 1890 and graduated from West Point in 1912. Although his sports at West Point were boxing and wrestling, he somehow acquired the nickname "Tubby," a moniker that stayed with him the rest of his life. He served in World War I in France with the 1st Battalion of the 8th Infantry Regiment.

One 4th Division colonel later described Barton as "a very strict disciplinarian who commanded his division with an iron hand."

His no-nonsense attitude was made clear when he first addressed the officers and men of the 4th Division on the day he assumed command: "I am your leader…. In the not-too-distant future, we will be in battle. When bullets start flying, your minds will freeze, and you will act according to habit. In order that you develop the right habits, training discipline must be strict. I know that 90 percent of you want to cooperate. I will take care of the other 10 percent."

A member of the 22nd Regiment said, "His manner was firm and brisk, but not sour or stiff. The rank and file are strongly impressed with the ability and energetic leadership he has exhibited in the short time since he took command of this division." It would be his leadership and his instilling of discipline in his young, untried soldiers that would be a major factor behind the division's success in the battles to come.

The 4th finally moved to Fort Dix, New Jersey, and was converted back to a "regular" infantry division redesignated the 4th Infantry Division. In September 1943, the 4th moved again, this time to Camp Gordon Johnston, Florida, where the men received realistic amphibious training in preparation for the assault on Fortress Europe.

In early 1944, the division was sent to England to prepare for the long-awaited invasion of Europe. The division was spread out in camps across Devon in towns with names such as Newton Abbot, Tiverton, and Bishopsteignton.

Before the division set foot on French shores, though, it would require a further tuning-up prior to D-Day.

It had been decided that the units going into Normandy on D-Day needed to rehearse their actions in places in the UK that most resembled the actual landing places in France. For that reason, the beach at Slapton Sands in Lyme Bay on the Devon coast was found to be an almost identical twin to the place where the troops destined for Utah Beach were scheduled to land.

In December 1943, homes, businesses, and villages in the South Hams area of Devon were ordered abandoned by the British government so that the soldiers could gain experience fighting mock battles in real towns. More than 3,000 people found themselves uprooted by government order.

Naval History and Heritage Command

ABOVE: Rehearsals at Slapton Sands, March 17, 1944. Tanks, men, and an LST (upper right) are visible in this aerial photograph. BELOW: Men of the 4th Infantry Division—many of whom are all smiles for the camera—are packed into a Landing Craft, Infantry, waiting for Eisenhower's order to go.

National Archives

In April 1944, to prepare the green troops for the real thing, it was decided to use live ammunition during a full-scale dress rehearsal known as Exercise Tiger. Perhaps things were a bit too realistic. A stray dog ran into the lobby of the abandoned Slapton Sands Hotel, triggering a demolition device that destroyed the building—and the dog.

During Exercise Tiger, a number of LSTs (Landing Ship, Tank) were being protected by two British Royal Navy destroyers, three torpedo boats, and two motor gunboats bristling with .303 Vickers machine guns, depth charges, and 6-pound cannons. Their role was to guard Lyme Bay and keep away any enemy who might want to interfere. But a mix-up led to tragedy.

On April 22, according to historian Robert Heege, "Unaware that both the live-fire battle simulation and H-hour had been delayed, several LSTs, still adhering to the exercise's initial timetable, made landfall and disembarked their men at Slapton Sands just as the now-rescheduled naval bombardment began raining shells down on the beach.

"Soldiers that had never really expected to be placed in harm's way in what was supposed to be a simulation, albeit an ultra-realistic one, suddenly found themselves in danger of being blasted to pieces. According to plan, the machine guns firing just above their heads had also been directed to fire a few bursts into the ground a few yards ahead of the landing zone on U Beach for the added benefit of the infantrymen as they came ashore, a realistic touch that was to have chilling consequences.

"As the machine gunners' bullets began tearing up the gravel directly in front of them, the now understandably bewildered soldiers reacted like a clutch of startled bumblebees. Worse still, the soldiers hitting the beach had been ordered to return fire at their imaginary enemy as they went forward

Naval History and Heritage Command

ABOVE: LST-73 departs its port carrying troops and vehicles destined for Utah Beach while barrage balloons fly overhead to keep any marauding German warplanes at bay. RIGHT: Fourteen-inch guns of the battleship USS *Nevada*, which had been badly damaged at Pearl Harbor, soften up German defenses at Normandy, June 6, 1944.

Naval History and Heritage Command

as part of the simulation. Many did so, apparently under the impression that they had all been issued blank cartridges. However, the GIs on the beach that day had inadvertently loaded up their rifles with real ammunition instead of blanks. Bunched up as they were, some of the boys became the unwitting casualties of friendly fire.

"Meanwhile, according to plan, the British heavy cruiser HMS *Hawkins* continued its bombardment, pouring ordnance into a designated section of the beach that the beach wardens had obligingly marked off for the naval gunners with a cordon of white tape. In the ensuing chaos and confusion, scores of soldiers desperately attempting to get out of the line of machine-gun fire strayed across the white demarcation line and ended up directly in the kill zone. As the officers on the bridge of the *Hawkins* looked on in stunned horror and disbelief, these unfortunate souls were practically vaporized, blown to bits by the Royal Navy's big guns."

As if that weren't bad enough, soldiers participating in a night exercise five days later encountered an even greater tragedy. As eight LSTs loaded with 4th Division troops made their run into shore, a squadron of German torpedo boats (known as E-boats, the equivalent of the U.S. Navy's PT boats) appeared out of nowhere and began attacking

Map © 2019 Philip Schwartzberg, Meridian Mapping, Minneapolis, MN

Fourth Division soldiers landing at Utah Beach (upper right) had the mission of breaking through German defenses and linking up with airborne troops that had been dropped miles inland.

the unsuspecting flotilla.

A British journalist noted, "At first, many of the Americans thought that it was all part of the realism of the exercise. Then there were explosions and huge mushrooms of fire as the torpedoes struck. In that one terrible night, more than 800 U.S. servicemen died. And they were only practicing." It would be a toll far greater than what the division would suffer on D-Day.

Complete secrecy was clamped around the disaster. For decades, it was hushed up. Army surgeons and nurses were threatened with court-martial if they even spoke with the wounded, and the casualty lists were kept top secret. Families were only notified that their loved ones had died due to a training accident.

Despite the tragedy, Operation Overlord would go on as scheduled.

After being delayed for 24 hours because of a strong storm sweeping through the English Channel, the great day arrived, and with it, a great armada that had been assembled for Operation Neptune—the assault phase of Overlord—in the hours before dawn: more than 4,000 landing craft; 287 minesweepers; 138 destroyers, cruisers, and battleships; 221 escort destroyers; 1,260 merchant ships; and more than 400 ancillary ships.

Packed into their transports were 156,000 young American, British, Canadian, and Free French troops. Thousands of American and British sailors and Coast Guardsmen stood ready to play their part in this biggest of war dramas, history's largest and most important combined air and sea invasion.

The 4th Infantry Division, scheduled to sail from Plymouth, England, and land at Utah Beach, had been designated "Force U." (Troops destined for Omaha Beach were "Force O.") Once the beachhead had been secured, follow-on forces would arrive at Utah later in the day. These included the 90th Infantry Division (Maj. Gen. Jay W. MacKelvie) and the 4th Cavalry Regiment (Colonel Joseph Tully).

To soften up German defensive positions, 18 ships from the U.S. Navy (including the battleship USS *Nevada*, sunk at Pearl Harbor but repaired in time for Overlord) and Royal Navy pummeled miles of shoreline with thousands of high-caliber shells.

Then, 20 minutes before the scheduled 6:30 AM seaborne landings began, 300 Martin B-26 Marauders of the U.S. Army Air Force's IX Bomber Command came in low over the beachhead and laid their ordnance effectively on German positions. (This was in stark contrast to what happened at Omaha Beach, where the Navy overshot its targets and the air force bombed too far inland.)

A heavy shroud of smoke and dust from the bombing and naval gunfire hung over the beachhead, obscuring the view of German gunners. Onboard one of the rocket-firing boats off Utah Beach was 19-year-old Seaman Second Class Lawrence P. "Yogi" Berra, a future New York Yankees baseball player who had enlisted in the Navy. "It was just like a Fourth of July celebration," he remarked about the fiery barrage.

He said in an interview 65 years after the war that he was proud of the small part he played in the D-Day invasion. "I felt sorry for the paratroopers who went in there before us. They caught hell over there, boy."

Two American airborne divisions, the 82nd and 101st, had dropped into Normandy a few minutes after midnight on June 6. Their casualties, as Leigh-Mallory had feared, were heavy, but they managed to sow confusion among the enemy, stop German reinforcements from reaching the beachhead, and captured important towns and road junctions.

At 6:30 AM, 300 men of Lt. Col. Carlton O. MacNeely's 2nd Battalion, 8th Infantry Regiment of the 4th Division became the first Allied seaborne unit to hit the beaches of Normandy on D-Day. Their group of 20 LCVPs landed at low tide at Les Dunes de Varreville near the hamlet of La Madeleine. After wading in waist-deep water for 200 yards, the men threw themselves down on the golden sand, waiting for German rifles or machine guns to open up on them.

Surprisingly, the only noise of battle to greet them was the crump of random mortars and artillery shells and the ripping sounds of shells still flying overhead from

Allied ships off shore. The expected fury of enemy fire just didn't happen.

The landing area was divided into three sectors: Tare Green, Uncle Red, and Victor. Landing at Tare Green were Companies B and C, while Companies E and F landed to their left on Uncle Red. Captain Leonard T. Schroeder, commanding Company F, is credited with being the first American to reach Utah Beach. He later told an interviewer, "Today, I realize that to be the first man ashore is an immense honor, yet I do not merit it more than anyone else. Five of my men died at Normandy. They alone are the heroes."

Wading ashore with the first wave was a little man with a cane who wore a single star on his steel helmet. His name was Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., the eldest son of the former "Rough Rider" president of the United States and the fifth cousin to the current occupant of the White House.

It quickly became apparent to Roosevelt and other officers in the first wave that they had landed at the wrong beach. They had come ashore not north of the Madeleine as planned but to the south of that village, under the gun embrasure of the German strongpoint WN5. The strong current had pulled them too far to the southeast, and three of the four designated control craft that were supposed to have guided the Higgins boats in had been lost to mines.

The sole surviving control craft eventually rounded up the confused LCVP drivers who were still looking for landmarks they had memorized, and using a bullhorn for communication, led them in. The force eventually landed one mile southeast of its designated landing area, in the less heavily defended Victor sector at Exit 2.

While under fire, Roosevelt gathered the 8th Regiment's Colonel James Van Fleet, Commodore James Arnold, the naval officer in charge of the Utah Beach landings, and other officers to make a command decision. Realizing they were in the wrong place, Roosevelt said in his bullfrog voice to Arnold, "I'm going ahead with the troops. Get word to the Navy and bring them in. We'll start the war from here."

National Archives

ABOVE: Soldiers from the 4th Division in an LCVP view other landing craft ahead of them and soldiers wading ashore. BELOW: Unlike at Omaha Beach, where most of the amphibious tanks never made it to shore, the 4th Division enjoyed the support of the DD Shermans.

National Archives

He designated the new landing beach as "Uncle Red."

Officers began shouting, "Get going! Get off the beach!" and small clumps of men began moving forward, running through the soft sand and crawling over the low dunes covered with tall beach grass, hoping to avoid the profusion of mines that seemed to be everywhere.

One of the 8th Infantry soldiers, Harry Bailey of Company E, remembered jumping off the ramp of his landing craft into waist-deep water. He recalled that a man in his platoon "was the first to reach the sand dunes, and I ran and dropped down beside him…. He was immediately killed with a hit to the head by a sniper's bullet. I knew I had to move fast or I would be next."

German shells now began exploding here and there on the beach, throwing up huge geysers of sand and water. But the shelling seemed to have no intensity to it. Swinging to the right toward La Madeleine, the men of Van Fleet's 8th Infantry Regiment saw a group of concrete German pillboxes and casemates scattered across open fields that had

been flooded, and waded toward them, killing or capturing their occupants.

Five minutes after the first wave hit the sands, the second wave—Companies A and D of the 1st Battalion and Companies G and H of the 3rd Battalion—began arriving at Tare Green to the north of Uncle Red. Accompanying them were combat engineers and underwater demolition teams who set to work removing and destroying beach obstacles and mines.

Next came the amphibious tanks. A group of 32 duplex-drive (DD) Sherman tanks from the 70th Tank Battalion was supposed to have arrived 10 minutes before the infantry, but rough sea conditions caused them to be 20 minutes late.

Four swimming Shermans of Company A never made it at all because their LCT (Landing Craft, Tank) struck a mine and sank. The remaining 28 tanks made it safely to the beach. They began pulling themselves out of the sea, their long-barreled snouts looking for something to shoot at.

Sam Grundfest was a junior officer on the LCT that lost the four tanks. "It blew us skyhigh," he recalled. "The other officer in the boat was killed. Everyone was killed except me and two of the Navy personnel…. And the four tanks were lost. I didn't hear the explosion that blew up my boat, but when I opened my eyes, I was underwater…. Were it not for the Mae West life jackets that we wore ... I don't think I would be here today."

Shortly thereafter, the next armored wave arrived: 16 conventional Sherman tanks and eight tanks outfitted with bulldozer blades delivered by LCTs.

British sailor Graham Hiscox, aboard an LCT of the Royal Navy's 44th LCT Flotilla, was helping to offload the Shermans. His craft was soon targeted by German shore batteries, but the Allied fleet gave them covering fire, which stopped the German guns—the crews of which now feared giving away their position—from firing.

It was only some time later that Hiscox learned where they had landed. "My job was simply to look after the craft's engines and generators," he said, "So I wasn't party to any information where we were heading."

The 4th Division had planned to have artillery support on D-Day, but a large landing craft carrying 60 men of Battery B, 29th Field Artillery Battalion struck a mine and all 60 were killed.

At about 10 AM, elements of Colonel Hervey A. Tribolet's 22nd Infantry Regiment began arriving. As enemy defenses succumbed to the Americans, the 22nd pushed northward along the coastal road and through the flooded fields toward St. Germain de Varreville, terrain that was occupied by the German 709th Infantry Regiment.

The 3rd Battalion of the 22nd Infantry, supported by five tanks, moved north along the shoreline to eliminate German strongpoints as they were encountered. In some cases, naval gunfire had to be called in to finish the job.

Morris Austein, Company I, 22nd Infantry, recalled, "On the shoreline itself, there were land mines. Germans put them down, and if you stepped on one, you blew up. I lost five men that way. There was

A German artillery round explodes on Utah Beach. Fortunately, enemy resistance was relatively light, making it possible or the 4th Division to drive further inland than at any of the other invasion beaches.

National Archives

utter confusion on the beach, and soldiers were crying for help."

Meanwhile, 8th Regiment infantrymen were pushing farther inland, engaging any Germans who might have survived the naval and air bombardments. As they advanced upon defensive position WN7 and the headquarters of 3rd Battalion, 919th Grenadiers near La Madeleine, which was 600 yards inland, the men of Company B met little resistance. At the same time, Company C attacked the enemy strongpoint WN5 at La Grande Dune, which essentially had been knocked out by the bombardment.

Companies E and F advanced inland about 700 yards to defensive position WN4 at La Dune, where they encountered some stunned Germans who put up a brief fight before being eliminated. As this action was taking place, Companies G and H moved south along the beach to Beau Guillot and enemy strongpoint WN3. There they encountered a minefield and came under machine-gun fire but soon captured the position.

For soldiers who had never before seen combat, the men of the 4th Infantry Division were doing a remarkable job.

Arriving in a later wave, 25-year-old infantryman Claire Galdonik was heading shoreward in an LCVP, watching naval shells exploding inland and dirty black clouds roiling in the sky. The boat scraped the sand, the ramp dropped, and suddenly Galdonik was in the water with the other men who had been penned up in the landing craft. They trudged toward land.

"Something I feared more than German artillery was … stepping on a land mine," he confessed. "So far, so good, but enemy shelling had taken its toll on the beach area. Tanks and trucks were gutted and burning, but only a few dead Americans were there. It shook me up."

Captain John L. Ahearn, Company C, 70th Tank Battalion, recalled that his tank company was the first armored unit landed on the beach. Once ashore, he took a group of seven Shermans south toward Pouppeville.

"As my tank proceeded down a small lane, it hit a land mine. The front left bogie wheel was blown off, and we were immobilized." Ahearn climbed out of his tank and heard cries for help. He went across several hedgerows before he found several wounded paratroopers. He went back to his tank to retrieve a medical kit, but while returning to the injured men, stepped on a mine that knocked him unconscious. He was taken back to a field hospital.

National Archives

Working from their office—a foxhole—members of a 4th Division commo section send and receive messages. One soldier is hand-cranking a generator to power their radio receiver-transmitter BC-654-A.

"I later learned from our battalion maintenance officer that they had discovered some 15,000 mines in that vicinity. So the odds were not very good that I would be unharmed."

Ahearn's war was finished; surgeons had to amputate one of his mangled feet.

Lieutenant Colonel Carlton O. MacNeely's 2nd Battalion, 8th Infantry, accompanied by several Shermans, pushed inland along Causeway 1 toward Pouppeville, only to discover that the hamlet was already in the hands of the 3rd Battalion, 501st Parachute Infantry Regiment. There was understandable joy when the two battalions met up.

As more men and tanks piled onto the sand, Causeway 2, directly behind La Grande Dune (today the site of the Utah Beach museum at the former WN5), soon became the main exit road off the beach in the direction of Ste. Marie-du-Mont, about three miles inland.

In his book, *Utah Beach*, author Joseph Balkoski said that the Germans had blown a small bridge over a culvert, and movement was delayed while engineers made repairs. With Causeway 2 becoming congested, some units waded through the flooded areas beside the road.

The 6th Fallschirmjäger Regiment of the German 91st Infantry Division was prepared to defend Ste. Marie-du-Mont, but members of the 506th Parachute Infantry, 101st Airborne Division successfully attacked and knocked out the batteries at Holdy and Brécourt Manor, then took Ste. Marie-du-Mont in house-to-house and street combat, allowing Lt. Col. Erasmus H. Strickland's 3rd Battalion, 8th Infantry to advance up Causeway 2 practically unopposed.

By mid-afternoon on D-Day, Strickland's men, accompanied by elements of the 82nd Airborne, reached National Highway 13 at Les Forges and then headed north to Fauville (less than half a mile southeast of Ste. Mère-Église), where a group of Germans were holding out. Although encircled to the north by the parachutists and to the south by the 3rd Battalion (supported by tanks), the Germans held firm at Fauville and prevented any

Gutsy little Brig. Gen. Teddy Roosevelt, Jr., steadied the troops at Utah Beach.

Teddy Roosevelt, Jr., had enjoyed a distinguished career even before D-Day. He had commanded a battalion in France during the Great War, served as secretary of the Navy from 1921 to 1924, been the governor of Puerto Rico from 1929 to 1932, and been governor-general of the Philippines for a year in the early 1930s. In 1934, he left government service to become chairman of the board at the American Express Company. There was absolutely no reason for him to have been in another war, and yet there he was.

During Operation Husky, the invasion of Sicily in 1943, he was the assistant division commander of the 1st Infantry Division, second only to Maj. Gen. Terry Allen. Both he and Allen were beloved by their men—and there was the rub.

Both he and Allen were relieved of command of the 1st Infantry Division at the conclusion of the battle for Sicily by Omar Bradley, who said the relief was necessary, because, Bradley asserted, "Despite their prodigal [sic] talents as combat leaders, neither Terry Allen nor ... Roosevelt, the assistant division commander, possessed the instincts of a good disciplinarian. They looked upon discipline as an unwelcome crutch to be used by less able and personable commanders....

"Had he been assigned a rock-jawed disciplinarian as assistant division commander, Terry could probably have gotten away forever on the personal leadership he showed his troops. But Roosevelt was too much like Terry Allen. A brave, gamy, undersized man who trudged along the front with a walking stick [he had been wounded at the battle of Soissons in 1918 during World War I], Roosevelt helped hold the division together by personal charm."

Bradley remembered that, after Roosevelt had been relieved as the Big Red One's assistant division commander, he was assigned to a desk job in Italy but couldn't stand the boredom. "He wrote to me in England, begging for a job on the invasion," Bradley said. 'If you ask me, I'll swim in with a 105 [howitzer] strapped to my back. Anything at all. Just help me get out of this rats' nest down here.'"

Bradley gave the request special consideration. He noted, "Because the 4th Division was green to fire, it was difficult to anticipate how it might behave on the assault. If Roosevelt would go in with the leading wave, he could steady it as no other man could. For Ted was immune to fear: he would stroll casually about under fire while troops around him scrambled for cover and he would banter with them and urge them forward.

ABOVE: General Roosevelt taking a break on the bumper of his jeep dubbed "Rough Rider," after his famous father's nickname.
RIGHT: Brig. Gen. Teddy Rooevelt, Jr., used a cane because of a leg wound he had sustained in World War I.

"He braved death with an indifference that destroyed its terror for thousands upon thousands of younger men. I have never known a braver man, nor a more devoted soldier," Bradley said.

Now, on June 6, he walked across Utah Beach as though he was taking a stroll along the beach at his Oyster Bay, Long Island, home, talking to the young soldiers who were under enemy fire for the first time, joking with them, telling them that they weren't going to win the war by lounging around on the beach.

Later, during the breakout from the beachhead and hedgerows code-named Operation Cobra, Bradley and Eisenhower were trying to decide who should be selected to replace the commander of the 90th Infantry Division. Both Roosevelt and Raymond McLain were up for consideration.

Bradley recalled that he and Ike "had agreed in Sicily that Ted's easy indifference to discipline would probably limit him to a single star. 'The men worship Ted,' I had explained to Ike, 'but he's too soft-hearted to take a division, too much like one of the boys.'"

But Ike decided that Teddy should command the 90th, and Bradley was about to give Roosevelt the good news when he received some very bad news. Roosevelt had died in his sleep of a heart attack on July 12, near Ste. Mère- Église.

As Bradley wrote, "Ted had died as no one could have believed he would—in the quiet of his tent."

Roosevelt was later awarded the Medal of Honor, posthumously, and is buried at the American Military Cemetery above Omaha Beach next to his brother Quentin, an aviator who was killed during World War I. Teddy Roosevelt, Jr., was just 57 when he died. □

advance along the national road.

Time was of the essence: the Americans needed to neutralize this position that threatened the later arrival of glider reinforcements on nearby Landing Zone W, which was still within range of the Germans.

The 4th Division's 12th Infantry Regiment, under Colonel Russell P. Reeder, Jr., was now ashore and, without any opposition to hold the regiment back, began moving inland in the wake of the tanks and the other two regiments.

As one British historian noted, "For the 12th Infantry Regiment, the going was, if anything, worse as they crossed the inundations behind the Grand Dune and half-swam toward La Galle and Ste. Marie-du-Mont. By 1300 hours, contact was made

National Archives

with the airborne forces and by nightfall, the bridgehead was secure. To those who took part, it seemed incredible that the 8th and 22nd Regiments should have lost only 12 men, and that the total casualties of the division on that first day in Europe amounted to 197."

At the end of the day on June 6, 1944, 1,700 vehicles and nearly 23,250 American soldiers had landed on Utah Beach.

That night, at least one aid station had been established, first in a large shell crater and then farther forward near a knocked-out German bunker. Battalion surgeon Captain Walter E. Marchand recounted large numbers of wounded men that he and his staff had treated since shortly after the landing: "Finally, we got all of our aid station together—we were all exhausted—and we were so tired we just fell down and fell asleep, with artillery, mainly enemy, going overhead, most of it, fortunately for us, being directed toward the beach. This

National Archives

ABOVE: Medical personnel work on a casualty on the sands of Utah Beach before evacuating the wounded men to off-shore floating hospitals. LEFT: A casemate at the Crisbcq Battery as it appeared after its capture. It is part of a museum complex today. OPPOSITE: After consolidating their positions on Utah Beach and catching their breaths behind the cover of a stone wall, U.S. troops begin the long trek inland on the morning of D-Day.

is the end of D-Day. It was hectic from the start."

The following day, the Germans—actually Georgian soldiers serving in German uniforms and belonging to Ost Battalion 795, 709 Infantry Division—were still stubbornly holding out at Fauville and keeping the Americans at bay with heavy machine-gun and artillery fire they called in.

On the right flank of the 3rd Battalion, 8th Infantry, MacNeely's 2nd Battalion, operating in coordination with Lt. Col. Ben Vandervoort (2nd Battalion, 505th Parachute Infantry), seized nearby Ecoquenéauville, half a mile east of Fauville, forcing the Germans to abandon Fauville, thus clearing National Road 13 and ending resistance in the area.

Earlier on D-Day, van Fleet's 1st Battalion hurried up Causeway 3 toward Audouville-la-Hubert, which they found was already in the hands of the 502nd Parachute Infantry.

Had it landed at the originally intended site, the 4th Infantry Division would have had tougher going, for close to that stretch of beachhead was the Crisbecq Battery (sometimes called the St. Marcouf Battery), one of the most powerful gun batteries in Normandy. It covered the shoreline between St-Vaast la Hougue and Pointe du Hoc.

The site had three 210mm Skoda naval guns, two 20mm antiaircraft guns, six 75mm antiaircraft guns, and a 150mm tracer cannon. On D-Day, however, only two of the 210mm guns had been installed and protected by concrete casemates, as the third casemate was still under construction.

On June 5, the U.S. Army Air Forces had dropped 13,000 pounds of bombs on the battery, which destroyed all the antiaircraft guns around the position and killed a large number of personnel. The remaining troops of Oberleutnant zur See Walter Ohms's battery nonetheless manned their larger guns, and on June 6, they sank the American destroyer USS *Corry.* Counterbattery fire from warships demolished most of the other casemates and artillery pieces.

A crewmember in the forward engine room of the *Corry,* Grant Gullickson, recalled, "All of a sudden, the ship literally jumped out of the water; the floor plates came loose, the lights went out, and steam filled the space. It was total darkness, with severely hot

National Archives

and choking steam everywhere. We figured that this was it, that our grave was to be the forward engine room on the *Corry*.

"The water reached … up to our waist, but the steam had stopped…. We evacuated through the hatch, and by the time we got up on deck, the main deck was awash…. The deck was ruptured clean across. It was obvious that the *Corry* was dead." Gullickson and several of his crewmates managed to abandon the ship and float until picked up by another destroyer, but 24 crewmembers of the *Corry* had lost their lives.

While the Ivy Division was enjoying what has been described as being the military version of a cakewalk, the 1st and 29th Infantry Divisions, assaulting Omaha Beach 20 miles to their east, were getting the hell kicked out of them by much stronger German resistance. Between the two beachheads, where a large battery posed a danger to the landings, the Rangers were climbing the cliffs at Pointe-du-Hoc and fighting desperately against the defenders, even though the guns there had been removed some weeks earlier.

On June 7, the Crisbecq Battery was still holding out. Every time the 4th Division troops tried to assault the position, Ohms called in fire from a neighboring battery at Azeville that broke up the ground attack. Over the next four days, continual attacks were repelled with heavy American losses. Finally, on June 11, Ohms was ordered to withdraw his 78 surviving men to the north, abandoning the battery. (Today the site is a museum.)

As June 7 wore on, the skies were filled with combat gliders swooping in with additional troops, weapons, equipment, and supplies. Although many gliders crashed upon landing, those that made it were contributing to the overwhelming success of the landings on the Utah beachhead.

After relieving the isolated 82nd Airborne Division at Ste. Mère-Église, Barton's men were in continuous action, fighting through the hedgerows, clearing the Cotentin Peninsula, and taking part in the capture of Cherbourg on June 25. The Germans had totally wrecked the port before surrendering, and it took many weeks to repair it. During the period starting June 6, the 4th Infantry Division sustained more than 5,450 casualties, with more than 800 men killed.

After engaging in heavy fighting near Periers from July 6 to 12, the 4th Division broke through the left flank of the German Seventh Army, helped stop the German drive toward Avranches, and by the end of August had moved to Paris, assisting the French in the liberation of their capital. The 4th, in fact, was the first American division to reach Paris, but it stepped aside to allow Free French forces under General Charles de Gaulle to have the honor of liberating the City of Light.

The division would then take part in innumerable battles across northern Europe: fighting in the Hürtgen Forest in September 1944 (on September 11, a patrol from the division's 22nd Infantry Regiment became the first American unit into Germany), fighting in Luxembourg during the Battle of the Bulge, and crossing the Rhine at the end of March 1945. Its wartime commander, Raymond Barton, became seriously ill during the Battle of the Bulge and had to be relieved. The 4th returned to the United States in July 1945.

Once Overlord had succeeded, Eisenhower wrote, "Our good luck was largely represented in the degree of surprise that we achieved by landing on Utah Beach, which the Germans considered unsuited to major amphibious operations." Ike's words were a fitting tribute to the officers and men of the Ivy Division. □

Furious Fight in a FROZEN HELL

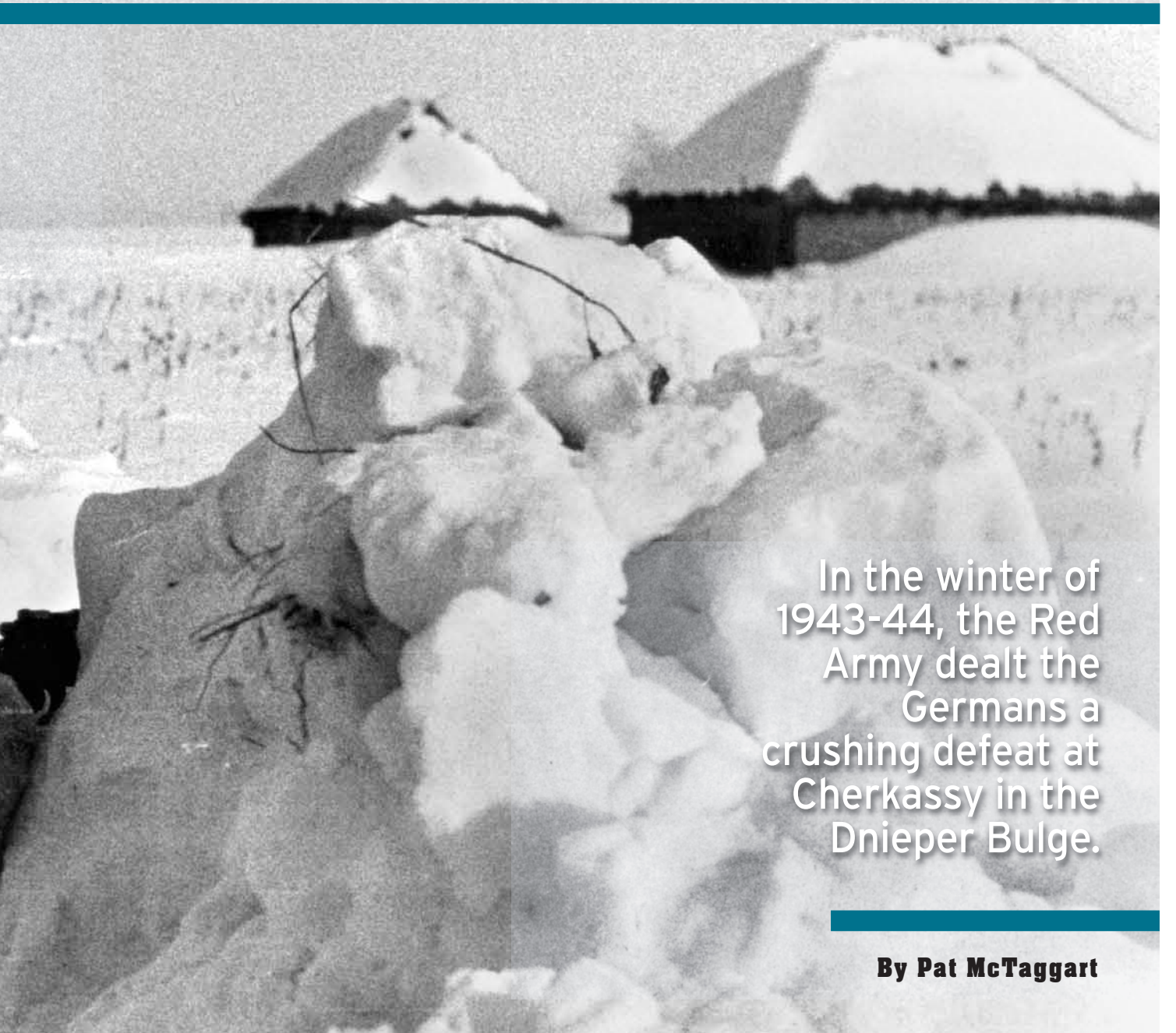
AKG-Images

German soldiers in winter camouflage defend their lines against oncoming Russians.

It was the third winter in Russia for the men of Field Marshal Erich von Manstein's Army Group South, and things were going from bad to worse. Since the gigantic battle at Kursk in July 1943, von Manstein's battered divisions had been steadily pushed to the west. In a massive counteroffensive after the battle, Soviet forces drove the Germans to the Dniepr River in the Ukraine with a series of shattering blows.

Pausing to regroup after reaching the eastern bank of the river, the commanders of four Red Army fronts waited anxiously to continue the offensive while streams of supplies and replacements filled their depleted ranks. In Moscow, Stalin and his high command (STAVKA) were planning a drive that would not only liberate the Ukraine, but reclaim the Crimea as well.

Even von Manstein would have approved the audacity of the operation. Spearheaded by armored divisions and motorized infantry, the Soviets planned a staggered attack by the four fronts, which would keep the Germans guessing as to where the main attack was taking place. After the German line was breached, regular infantry would surge through the gaps and hit any enemy units left in the main line from the rear. Taking a page from German armored doctrine, the Red Army tank units would keep going without worrying about their flanks until the Crimea was isolated. The following infantry and motorized units were to consolidate their gains, possibly encircling the three armies of Army Group South (1st and



In the winter of 1943-44, the Red Army dealt the Germans a crushing defeat at Cherkassy in the Dnieper Bulge.

By Pat McTaggart

4th Panzer and the 8th Army) in the process.

On paper, von Manstein had a powerful force with which to defend the Dniepr Line. In fact, many of his infantry divisions had an average combat strength of a thousand men. His panzer divisions were not in much better shape.

Von Manstein's southern flank was protected by Col. Gen. Karl Hollidt's 6th Army, consisting of 13 understrength divisions. The meandering Dniepr made it necessary for Hollidt's divisions to defend the eastern side of the river in positions that had been hastily constructed and that were practically worthless in the face of overpowering Soviet superiority.

On October 1, the 3rd Ukrainian Front under Rodion Malinovsky began attacking German forces near Zaporozhye. While the Germans scrambled to send reinforcements to help, the 4th Ukrainian Front (Fyodor Tolbukhin) struck Hollidt on October 9. Supported by 400 batteries of artillery, Tolbukhin's 45 infantry divisions, two guards mechanized corps, three tank corps, and two guards cavalry corps smashed through the almost useless defense works of the 6th Army.

The final blow came when the 1st and 2nd Ukrainian Fronts of Col. Gens. Nikolai Vatutin and Ivan Konev hit Army Group South on October 15. The Germans were slowly pushed back across the entire front of attack and were saved only by the rainy season, which began in mid-November. Casualties on both sides had been horrendous, and the Germans had little means of replacing their losses.

It was different for the Soviets. On their way westward, they immediately drafted any male of fighting age into their ranks. Few said no to the NKVD squads that roamed liberated areas on the prowl for new recruits. Taking advantage of the lull, Soviet commanders fleshed out their ranks, teaching the new soldiers the rudimentary basics of combat. At the same time, supplies poured into the battle area, bringing food and ammunition to continue the advance once the ground had sufficiently frozen.

Meanwhile, STAVKA revised its original plan, since annihilation of German forces on the entire southern front was no longer feasible. The bulge created in the October offensive, defended by General Erhard Raus's 4th Panzer Army and the 8th Army under General Otto Wöhler, was tailor made for encirclement. Destruction of the two armies was assigned to Konev and Vatutin.

The Russians struck with with the onset of winter in early December. While Konev headed out toward the important communications hub of Kirovograd, Vatutin struck the 4th Panzer Army's left flank and then headed for the Bug River. Both fronts were to link up on the Bug River at Pervoinaysk.

Blowing snow whipped by gale-force winds prevented either side from using air support, and the battle soon became hopelessly confused as marauding groups of Soviet tanks and mechanized infantry clashed with columns of German troops attempting to form a new line. Many of the German units soon found that they had been cut off and surrounded.

One of these units was commanded by 22-year-old Sergeant Franz Hofbauer. In a letter to the author, Hofbauer described those first harrowing days of the Soviet attack:

"I had barely taken over command of the 3/Fusilier Battalion 72 when the Russians attacked. Our company commander had been killed a few days earlier. By December 3, I realized that Ivan had us surrounded, so I formed the company into a Hedgehog [all around] defensive position. This was near the town of Cherkassy. We were attacked again and again by the Russians, but our position held long enough for the battalion to occupy a new defensive line.


General Theobald Lieb
National Archives


Col. Gen. Ivan Konev
National Archives


Captain Leon Degrelle
Library of Congress

"Our ammunition was almost nil, and I realized that the only thing that we could do is [sic] attack. We formed a wedge and struck Ivan in an area closest to our own main line. Luckily, the Russians were caught by surprise, and we were able to break through, taking our wounded and our weapons with us. I received the *Ritterkreuz* [Knight's Cross] for this action, but it was the courage of my men that really saved us."

The Soviet attack continued, with Vatutin creating more havoc with the 4th Panzer Army. Von Manstein tried to convey the seriousness of the situation to Hitler, but the German dictator would not listen, calling the field marshal a defeatist and threatening to relieve him. Seeing the writing on the wall, von Manstein decided to take matters into his own hands by reshuffling his forces. He handed over the 1st Panzer Army's sector to Hollidt's 6th Army and ordered it to Uman. There, the 1st Panzer Army would add to its ranks the XXIV Panzer Corps and the VII Army Corps of the 4th Panzer Army.

The commander of the 1st Panzer Army, the one-armed General Hans Hube, was also ordered to created a reserve armored force around the headquarters of the III Panzer Corps, which would soon be commanded by General Hermann Breith. The force included the 6th and 17th Panzer Divisions, the 16th Panzergrenadier Division, and the 101st Jâger Division.

The move was justified when on January 3, 1944, Soviet advance units were caught and mauled a mere 30 miles from Uman. As that engagement was taking place, Konev's 2nd Ukrainian Front made a thrust toward Kirovograd. Led by Col. Gen. Pavel Rotmistrov's 5th

ABOVE: A snowsuit-clad German machine gun squad holds the line. BELOW: Russian tanks piled with soldiers thunder across the frozen landscape. It was not uncommon for Soviet commanders to flesh out their ranks with new recruits from liberated areas.

Both: National Archives

Guards Tank Army, the Soviets fought through the German defenses and encircled the four divisions now trapped inside the city.

Against Hitler's orders, General Fritz Bayerlein led the four divisions in a successful breakout, giving von Manstein a new force to use against the Russians. They succeeded in stemming the Soviet advance, but the Red Army offensive had gained important ground and had created a dangerous bulge in the German line on the Dniepr bend. Von Manstein repeatedly called for the withdrawal of the units inside the bulge, but Hitler steadfastly refused.

Throughout January, the Soviets tried to keep their momentum going, but German counterattacks seemed to thwart them at every turn. In Moscow, STAVKA decided to shift the focus of the offensive and ordered Vatutin and Konev to concentrate on eliminating the Dniepr Bulge. With those orders, the two Soviet generals devised a plan similar to the double encirclement used so effectively at Stalingrad. The inner ring would be formed by infantry units supported by some tanks, while an outer ring, with the purpose of meeting enemy counterattacks, would be composed of mechanized and armored corps with infantry support. For the operation, the Soviets would enjoy an overall superiority of 7:1 in artillery, 5:1 in tanks and 2:1 in men.

Pressed into the bulge were General Theobald Lieb's XLII Army Corps (5th SS Panzer Division "Wiking," SS Brigade "Wallonien," and the remnants of the 112th, 255th, and 332nd Infantry Divisions known as Corps Abteilung B) and General Wilhelm Stemmermann's XI Army Corps (57th, 72nd, and remnants of the 389th Infantry Division). Joining them were the 88th Infantry Division and elements of the 167th, 168th, and 323rd Infantry Divisions, the 213th Sicherungs (Security) Division, and the 14th Panzer Division.

"We had no second or third line of defense, as was usual in the preceding years," General Heinz Gaedke, who as a colonel had been Stemmermann's chief-of-staff, wrote to the author." But our corps was so depleted that our divisional commanders were happy that we even had a single line to occupy."

The battle for the Cherkassy bulge began on January 24 with an attack by Konev's 2nd Ukrainian Front against a 12-mile front that had no more than one German infantryman for every 15 yards. Penetrations in the German line were soon made, although it was not the knockout blow that the Soviets had expected.

STAVKA had hoped for a penetration of at least 30 kilometers on the first day, but steadfast German resistance upset the timetable. Interior communications and accurate artillery fire allowed German units to slowly retreat. Konev threw Maj. Gen. A.I. Ryzhov's 4th Guards Army and Co.l Gen. Pavel Rotmistrov's 5th Guards Tank Army into the fray, but only four kilometers were gained for a heavy price.

On January 26, the 1st Ukrainian Front attacked the border of the 88th and 198th Infantry Divisions. Supported by tanks, three and a half Red Army divisions smashed into the 198th, forcing it to retreat to the west. The 6th Tank Army under Col. Gen. A.G. Kravchenko exploited the gap, pushing the 88th to the northwest and breaking communications between the XLII Army Corps and the remainder of the 1st Panzer Army.

In the 2nd Ukrainian Front sector, Konev succeeded in expanding his previous gains, but an attack by the 14th and 11th Panzer Divisions almost succeeded in driving the

Russians back. While the fighting continued, Rotmistrov, in a Guderian-style thrust, sent two tank corps (20th and 29th) on an end run. Disregarding his flanks, Rotmistrov pushed his armor westward to meet the 6th Tank Army. The outer ring of what would be called the Cherkassy Kessel (Cauldron) was almost complete.

The Germans in the Cherkassy bulge were in dire straits. The commander of the XLVI Panzer Corps, General Nikolaus von Vormann, recorded that Soviet tank and mechanized units sped past his panzers without stopping to give battle. Regardless of losses, the Russians were determined to bypass attacking German armor in order to close the ring around the Germans inside the bulge.

With Rotmistrov's 5th Guards Tank Army moving from the south and Kravchenko's 6th Tank Army advancing from the north, it was only a matter of time before the two met. Supported by infantry, Kravchenko's 233rd Tank Brigade reached Lysyanka on the bank of the Gniloy Tikich River on January 27. The 233rd was followed by other units that crossed the river to form a bridgehead of 12 to 15 kilometers on the eastern side.

On January 28, the 233rd met with 5th Guards Tank Army units at Zvenigorodka, effectively sealing off the Dniepr bend. Both Konev and Vatutin continued to pour in more forces to strengthen the outer ring. German commanders inside the bulge pleaded for freedom of action, but no orders came. Bypassing regular channels, General Herbert Otto Gille, commander of the 5th SS Panzer Division "Wiking," sent Reichsführer SS Heinrich Himmler a message reading, "In three hours, the encirclement of my division will be accomplished."

Gille's division was the strongest unit inside the Kessel. Its 15,000 troops were drawn from nations all over Europe and included Norwegians, Danes, Dutch, Flemish, Swiss, and Swedish volunteers. There were also Finns, Estonians, and *Volksdeutsch* (ethnic Germans) from most of the Eastern European countries. Gille had a total of 90 panzers and *Sturmgeschütze* (assault guns) at his disposal to fend off the Soviets. The armor would play a vital role in the coming days, as is evidenced by a letter to the author from 1st Lieutenant

ABOVE: Two Russian artillerymen take position in the snow. With lack of air support due to foul weather, infantry and armor would play a major role in breaking German resistance on the southern front. BELOW: On the edge of a Russian village, German soldiers wait for the inevitable enemy approach.

Both: National Archives

Willi Hein, a company commander in the 5th Panzer Regiment "Wiking":

"On January 28 we attacked Olschana with four assault guns. The enemy had fortified the town, so we were attacking the high ground around it. We destroyed five enemy vehicles and lost one of our own.

"At 0600 on January 29 we attacked the village of Kirillovka with two assault guns, but strong enemy attacks north and east of Olschana forced us to retreat. Close combat took place after an enemy breakthrough.

"The following day Ivan took the high ground near our position with armor and supporting infantry. We had two assault guns left for a counterattack with an infantry company. Three enemy tanks were destroyed and 200 prisoners were taken before we were forced to retreat to our old positions."

Other units were just as hard pressed. Captain Harry Schlingmann, commander of the 112th *Pionier* (engineer) Bn./Korps Abteilung B, wrote to the author, "(T)he constant action of the previous months had diminished our strength to that of a regular company. Once the Russians broke through our front line, we had to make due with little or no shelter in the freezing weather.

Nevertheless, our orders were to attack the enemy whenever possible. We had no anti-tank guns so we used bundles of grenades and 'sticky mines' to destroy the Russian tanks.

"Our method was simple. We would huddle in our foxholes until the T-34s passed over us. Then, one group would fire at the following infantry while 'killer teams' would tackle the enemy tanks. We inflicted heavy losses on Ivan, but we lost many men ourselves. The enemy could replace his casualties, but we could not, so in the end, we were forced to retreat time and again."

The Russian commanders in the field worked hard at consolidating their gains and in reinforcing the outer and inner rings of the encirclement. German forces inside the Kessel were fighting for their very existence as Soviet tank and infantry units pounded them. Elements of the 14th Panzer Division that were trapped inside the pocket battled the 18th Tank Corps, while the 389th and 57th Infantry Divisions began to fall back under the weight of savage Russian attacks.

Stemmermann, who had been given overall command of the Kessel, ordered his troops to fall back to shorten the main line of resistance. The retreat was covered by men like Sergeant Gerhard Fischer, an 18-year-old commander of a Sturmgeschütz (assault gun) in the "Wiking" Division, and Captain Fritz Steinbacher, a 30-year-old artillery commander in the 72nd Infantry Division.

Vatutin and Konev continued to push reinforcements into the battle. The outer line, which ran from Vinograd to Zvenigorodka, received the 53rd Army's 49th Rifle Corps to help the 5th Tank Army keep the Germans from counterattacking. Other units arrived to help the 6th Tank Army hold the Germans at bay.

Supplying the Kessel fell to Luftwaffe transports that operated out of a forward airfield at Korsun. Although Soviet antiaircraft fire was heavy over the Russian line, the transports continued to fly ammunition and food to the surrounded Germans and pick up wounded for a harrowing flight to a field hospital outside the pocket. Oskar Hummel, a 22-year-old member of the "Wiking" Division, described his personal ordeal: "My right leg was shattered in a counterattack, and they [his comrades] saw to it that I was brought back. The whole platoon covered me so that I could make it to a field hospital. Ten men would rather have risked their lives than to leave one lying wounded. We knew that all Waffen SS soldiers were automatically shot by the Russians."

Hummel's ordeal was only just beginning. The field hospital came under attack and had to be abandoned, but Hummel was once again rescued by his unit. They loaded him on a horse-drawn cart and made for an airstrip, fighting their way through roving enemy patrols. Hummel sustained another wound during the journey and was finally put aboard an aircraft for the flight out. He survived the war, but lost his leg due to his wounds.

The Russians increased their efforts to wipe out key German defenses on January 31, when they launched combined arms attacks against the 88th Infantry Division near Boguslav and the Estonian "Narwa" Battalion of the "Wiking" Division. Neither unit gave much ground to the pummeling attacks.

One unit that had escaped most of the initial Soviet fury was the 2,000-man "Wallonien" Brigade, composed of Belgian volunteers under the command of Lt. Col. Lucien Lippert. In its ranks was the leader of Belgium's pro-German Rexist Party, Captain Leon Degrelle. Rabidly anti-Communist, Degrelle had joined the German Army as a private. He rose through the ranks before transferring to the Waffen SS and had made a name for himself in several combat actions. In the coming days, the Belgians would be put to the test again and again as the battle for the Kessel intensified.

While the Germans fought to hold their perimeter, von Manstein moved to build a relief force with the III (General Hermann Breith) and XLVII Panzer Corps (General Nikolaus von Vormann). He planned a two-pronged attack, with the III Panzer Corps striking near Lysyanka and the XLVII Panzer Corps hitting the Russians south of Svenigorodka.

Schwere Panzer Regiment (heavy tank regiment) Bäke (Lt. Col. Franz Bäke) formed the nucleus of the III Panzer Corps. It consisted of 45 Tiger tanks and 45 to 50 Panthers augmented by two artillery battalions and a Panzergrenadier regiment. Additional tanks from elements of the 1st, 6th, 16th, and 17th Panzer Divisions brought its total armored strength to between 175 and 250. The Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler (LAH) SS Panzer Division was also ordered to move with all possible haste to reinforce the III Panzer Corps.

Von Vormann's Panzer Corps was reforming, and most of its planned armored components were fighting in other areas of the front. Five panzer divisions (3rd, 11th, 13th, 14th, and 24th) were ordered to place themselves under von Vormann's command, but von Manstein planned to use whatever forces that were on hand when the attack began since time was the critical factor.

The attack was planned to begin on February 3, and Stemmermann proceeded to shorten his line on his eastern flank in preparation for a possible breakout. His men had been fighting in blizzard conditions, with the average temperature hovering around zero degrees. On February 1, all that changed as a sudden thaw set in.

"The frost was 10-15 centimeters thick, but the thaw caused our heavy vehicles, such as tanks and artillery, to break through into the mire," Sergeant Fischer wrote. "Thus, we were only able to pull back slowly, meter by agonizing meter."

It was even tougher on the German infantry. Some tied their boots around their necks during the pullback to prevent them from being sucked off their feet by the clinging mud.

The fickle weather changed once again as it grew dark. Sub-zero temperatures returned, freezing vehicles and heavy equipment up to their axles in the Russian earth. German infantry and engineers used every means at their disposal, including pick axes, torches and even small amounts of explosives, to free the stricken vehicles in order to continue the withdrawal.

The pullback did not go unnoticed by the Soviets. Col. Gen. K.A. Koroteev, commander of the 52nd Army, ordered his infantry to attack, and a breach in the German line was made at Losovsk. A company under Captain Degrelle was ordered to retake the village, which it did after savage house to house fighting. As Degrelle reported his success, he received orders to pull out and report to

brigade headquarters in Moshny.

Upon his arrival, Degrelle found himself in the midst of a new battle with Russian forces pressing hard to take the town. The Walloons were ordered to hold the sector while the rest of the "Wiking" Division pulled back farther to the west to form a new defensive line. After 10 hours of heavy fighting, they were told to abandon the town and make it back to the new line.

Meanwhile, von Manstein's relief forces began arriving at their assembly areas. They were sent piecemeal to jump-off points, clawing their way through the mud. Von Manstein had to make changes in his plans on the spot because many of the units were having problems disengaging from their former positions. Also, his spearhead division, the 24th Panzer, was forced to turn around and head to the Nikopol sector because of Soviet attacks there.

Nevertheless, von Manstein ordered the relief attempt to start on schedule. Elements of the 16th and 17th Panzer Divisions smashed into the 104th Rifle Corps, breaching the Soviet line. Shielded by units from the 134th and 198th Infantry Divisions and the LAH, the panzer divisions drove toward Veselyi Kut, a key crossing point on the Gniloy Tikich River.

Farther south, units from the 11th and 13th Panzer Divisions became bogged down in the mud after making initial progress against the Soviets in the Zvenigorodka sector. The 3rd Panzer Division was also forced to halt in the face of savage Russian counterattacks after taking the village of Kamunovka.

With the relief attempt underway, Stemmermann ordered his own forces into action. The 88th Infantry Division "Wiking" and Corps Abteilung B assaulted Soviet forces in Boguslav, but were thrown back with heavy losses. "We had heavy casualties," a doctor in the "Wiking" Division wrote. "My dressing station was overflowing to the point that we had to use all available transport to get the unattended wounded to the main hospital."

Russian countermoves made the relief attempt slow going as Vatutin ordered General S. I. Bogdanov's 2nd Tank Army into the fray against the III Panzer Corps. Konev also shuffled his forces, sending the 5th Guards Mechanized Corps forward to stem the drive of the XLVII Panzer Corps.

The Russians also attempted to use propaganda to weaken the Germans. General Walter von Seydlitz, who had been captured at Stalingrad and was now working for the Soviets, wrote a letter to General Gille promising good treatment for his soldiers and an early release from captivity after the war.

Captain Schlingmann recalled, "the Seydlitz men (German POWs from the National Free Germany Committee, an anti-Hitler group) spoke to us through loudspeakers. They promised us everything a soldier dreams of if only we would surrender.

"We had been in constant combat and were freezing in our open trenches, so my men and I talked the situation over. We were very democratic about it. In the end, we decided that continuing the fight was the only solution—much preferable to dying in a Soviet labor camp—so there was no more thought of surrender."

A short time later, Schlingmann was wounded in the thigh, his fifth wound of the war. His men took him to a hospital, where he was operated on in a room thoroughly riddled by artillery fire. Later, he was flown out of the Kessel for further treatment. He received the Ritterkreuz (Knights Cross) on February 14 for valor shown during the Cherkassy operation.

Things got worse inside the Kessel when mud forced both airfields used to land supplies to close down on February 5. Engineers immediately started building a new one on drier ground, but it would take four days to complete. The closures gave transport pilots a much needed rest. More than 40 of the aircraft had been shot down or lost through accidents from January 29 to February 4.

The relief effort was also in trouble because of the mud. The LAH was still struggling to get most of its elements into the combat zone to reinforce the struggling III Panzer Corps, its Panther unit bogged down in the morass. Roads and bridges were inadequate to handle the heavy tanks, and going overland was next to impossible. The same held true for most of von Vormann's XLVII Panzer Corps.

Stemmermann requested freedom of action as the Soviets closed in from three sides, noting that the relief force was inadequate to the task assigned it. Hitler refused to give up the Dniepr bend at first, but as the Russian pressure mounted he finally gave his approval for a breakout on February 6, with the attempt to begin on the 10th.

The field marshal made his decision and ordered his corps commanders to attack on February 11. They were told that this was a "do or die" operation and that if it failed their trapped comrades inside the Kessel were doomed.

Once again, the weather took a hand in events as a new thaw during the day made moving men and equipment to assembly areas inside the Kessel virtually impossible. Looking at the overall situation, Stemmermann was forced to radio a request for more time before a breakout could be attempted.

Outside the Kessel, Bäke's panzers finally reached Veselyi Kut on February 8. There they were halted by extremely fierce Soviet resistance from the fortified east bank of the Gniloy Tikich, which made any thought of crossing the river obsolete. Bäke was ordered to pull back and assemble farther to the south, along with the bulk of the III Panzer Corps. So far, the relief attempt had caused thousands of casualties on both sides, and the toll on equipment was just as fearful. On February 9, the 17th Panzer reported that it had only four operational tanks, while the 16th Panzer reported 19. German maintenance units worked furiously to get damaged machines back in service for the ongoing battle.

Breith's Panzer Corps was now reinforced with the bulk of the LAH and the 1st Panzer Divi-

Surrounded by spearheads of the Red Army's 1st and 2nd Ukrainian Fronts, elements of the III Panzer Corps moved to free their encircled comrades near Cherkassy.

sion, which had finally arrived near Risino, bringing with it 75 to 80 tanks. The weather had turned cold again, freezing the ground and making it easier for the tanks to move across the battered landscape.

Frozen ground also helped Stemmermann in his attempt to shorten his line for the upcoming breakout. His heavy equipment once again was able to move, and he was able to take Colonel Hermann Hohn's 72nd Infantry Division out of the line and put it in reserve. The 72nd was the second strongest division inside the Kessel, next to the "Wiking." It would be the spearhead division when the breakout took place.

Among the men of the 72nd were 1st Lt. Matthias Roth and Captain Fritz Steinbacher. Roth had recently taken over command of the 105th Infantry Regiment's II Battalion after its commander became a casualty, while Steinbacher was a battalion commander in the division's artillery regiment. Roth's battalion would be on the cutting edge of the breakout, supported by Steinbacher's artillery.

Time now became critical. German infantry units had suffered heavy casualties as they fought off Soviet attacks on the flanks of the advancing panzers, and there was no way to replace those losses. The Russians were funneling more men and armor in to try and cut off the relief forces. If von Manstein waited to order Stemmermann to begin the breakout, the Russians would have time to attack and force the Germans out of striking range of the Kessel. The field marshal made his decision and ordered his corps commanders to attack on February 11. They were told that this was a "do or die" operation and that if it failed their trapped comrades inside the Kessel were doomed.

At 6:30 AM on the 11th, German artillery blasted the Soviet lines and the Regiment Bäke and the 16th and 17th Panzer Divisions rolled forward, annihilating Russian forward defenses. On their right flank, Colonel Richard Koll's 1st Panzer Division widened the gap, while the left flank was covered by the LAH and the 198th Infantry Division.

Koll ordered a *kampfgruppe* (combat group) of his division to head straight for the Gniloy Tikich. The unit took the river town of Bushanka and sped across a bridge spanning the river, establishing a bridgehead on the eastern bank. Soviet counterattacks soon followed, and Russian control of the hills surrounding the bridgehead made further progress impossible.

Koll then ordered his men to drive south for a surprise attack on Lysyanka, which was taken late on the 11th. It was a Pyrrhic victory, however, as Soviet engineers blew up the bridge spanning the Gniloy Tikich just as Koll's panzers reached it.

Vatutin and Konev were quick to react to the German threat. The 21st Rifle Corps (4th Guards Army) was ordered into the Lysyanka sector, while the 5th Guards Cavalry Corps and elements of the 1st Guards, 5th Guards and 2nd Tank Armies were also moved to the area. Marshal Georgi Zhukov now assumed command of the Soviets' outer ring, while Konev was placed in charge of the inner ring.

On the 12th, Soviet forces pushed the LAH out of Repki and then headed toward Votylevka, where they were stopped by other elements of the division. The LAH was also involved in a battle near Vinograd, where the Russians had broken through the lines of the 198th. A fierce battle ensued in which the Soviets were finally encircled and destroyed.

Sunday, February 13, gave the Germans a present. An enterprising Panther commander of the 1st Panzer Division, Sergeant Hans Strippel, discovered a ford that crossed the 30-meter-wide Gniloy Tikich. He ordered his driver to cross and was soon followed by other tanks from his platoon. Tanks from the 5th Guards Tank Corps opened fire on Strippel and his men, but the Panthers soon reduced them to smoking hulks. Two more Panther companies followed, accompanied by elements from the 113th Panzergrenadier Regiment.

Moving along the riverbank, Strippel found an intact bridge guarded by two T-34s. After making his 59th and 60th tank kills, he informed his headquarters that the bridge was in friendly hands and that it was strong enough to support armor. Reinforcements were immediately rushed to the area, giving the 1st Panzer a link between the two riverbanks.

The bridgehead on the east bank of the Gniloy Tikich was tenuous at best. Only a few elements of Regiment Bäke and the 16th and 17th Panzer Divisions could be spared as

Both: National Archives

ABOVE: Russian vehicles and wagons move forward past the shells of blasted buildings as the push westward continues. OPPOSITE: German Panzer units in and around the Kessel were not only isolated in many cases, but were also severely outnumbered by the advancing Soviets. By conflict's end, most would be lost.

reinforcements because those units were themselves engaged in heavy fighting around the villages of Chishinzy, Dzhurshenzy, and Daschukovka.

The final obstacle between the relief forces and the Kessel was Hill 239, midway between Dzhurshenzy and Potschapinzy. Although the 1st Panzer had only 10 operational tanks and two battalions of infantry in the bridgehead, an attack was ordered to take the hill on February 14. The assault took the village of Oktybar but was stopped dead in its tracks before Hill 239 could be reached.

Elements of the 5th Guards Tank Corps counterattacked during the next two days as tanks from the LAH, 16th Panzer, and Regiment Bäke joined the fray. The fighting was fierce as both armies fought at near point-blank range. Strippel and his platoon of seven Panthers accounted for another 27 Soviet tanks, but it soon became clear that the III Panzer Corps could go no further. The fate of the men inside the Kessel was now in their own hands.

Fighting was also raging inside the Kessel itself as the relief forces struggled forward. Stemmermann had been ordered to shorten his lines and move toward Schenderovka to assemble for the breakout. He had the "Wiking" and "Wallonien" abandon their positions at Gorodishche, while the 88th pulled out of Yankova.

"The plan for the breakout was designed by the 8th Army," Gaedke wrote. "We naturally had to carry them out. Radio contact between the Kesseltruppe and the relief forces were constant, so we knew approximately where they were located."

Under intense artillery fire, the Germans trudged through the mud and snow protected by the few remaining tanks and assault guns left inside the pocket. Units formed into assault groups around the Korsun area and final orders were given for the breakout. The first order of business was securing the villages of Schenderovka, Novo Buda, Kamarovka, and Khilki.

First Lieutenant Roth moved his men into position to attack the Russians on the night of February 11. A Soviet sentry noticed the gray shapes moving forward and raised the alarm as Roth's men reached the Soviet lines. Roused from their sleep, the Russian troops valiantly tried to defend themselves, but Roth's troops were already in the enemy trenches, slashing out with bayonets and entrenching tools as the Soviets poured from their night quarters. The savage fight lasted for an hour and a half, but the Germans took the line and went ahead to secure Novo Buda.

At Schenderovka, the "Germania" Regiment of the "Wiking" took the village by storm. Soviet forces immediately formed for a counterattack, and the SS troopers dug in, fighting off several enemy assaults. The fighting for the village continued on the 12th with the Germans holding firm.

On the 12th, Lippert's "Wallonien" relieved Roth at Novo Buda, leaving his battalion free to continue the attack. Roth led his men against Komarovka, supported by Captain Steinbacher's artillery. His men closed on the well-defended village, and fierce fighting erupted. On the 13th, the village was finally secured.

"Ivan fought like the devil," Roth wrote to the author. "We used every trick that we knew to take the village. When it was over, we had killed about 90 enemy soldiers and had captured 50 more. We also destroyed eight tanks, seven mortars, and three antiaircraft guns."

Stemmermann followed the action closely. He abandoned Korsun on the 13th, but was forced to leave his severely wounded cases behind in the main hospital. "The wounded, there were more than 2,000 of them, were left behind in the hospital with a volunteer doctor," Gaedke wrote. "We hoped that the Russians would treat them properly. However, no one ever found out what happened to them once they fell into enemy hands."

Throughout the 14th, the "Wallonien" was hit by several Russian attacks. Red Army artillery blasted away at the defenders of Novo Buda, and combined armor-infantry attacks pushed their way inside the village. The Walloons fought like tigers, destroying several Soviet tanks and finally pushing the Russians out of the village.

Lippert fell, mortally wounded in the head. Captain Degrelle took command of the brigade, which had already lost more than 200 men. For the next two days, the Walloons continued to hold the village against overwhelming odds.

Meanwhile, the 72nd Infantry Division was fighting two actions—one defensive and one offensive. In Komarovka, the 124th Infantry Regiment was engaged in a heavy defensive struggle against Soviet armor and infantry. Lieutenant Roth, commanding the lead battalion of

Major Robert Kaestner's 105th Infantry Regiment, assaulted Khilki supported by Steinbacher's artillery. After a fierce struggle, the village was finally taken.

Outside the Kessel, the battle for Hill 239 was still in full swing. The III Panzer Corps attacked the position again and again, but Rotmistrov's men held. Late on the 15th, a message was sent to Stemmermann stating "Capacity for action of III Panzer Corps limited. Group Stemmermann must perform breakthrough as far as Dzhurshenzy/Hill 239 by its own effort. There, link up with III Panzer Corps."

No mention was made of the German failure to take the heavily defended hill. Therefore, Stemmermann and his men were set to unknowingly clash with a heavy concentration of Soviet troops in their desperate bid to escape. Thousands of German soldiers would die because of this miscommunication.

The breakout was set to begin at midnight on February 16. By now, the Kessel had shrunk to a five-by-seven-kilometer area, with Soviet artillery pounding all German positions. Stemmermann ordered an attack on three separate approaches. The 72nd would form the center of the attack, while Corps Abteilung B attacked on its left and "Wiking" on its right. When the main attack forces penetrated the Soviet line, the wounded and remnants of other decimated divisions would follow. The 57th and 88th Infantry Divisions formed the rear guard to hold off Russian forces attacking from the east.

Advance forces moved out in the bitterly cold night, unaware of what lay in front of them. The III Panzer Corps had finally realized its communication error, but attempts to inform Stemmermann failed because he had already ordered the destruction of his long-range radio equipment.

"There was no communication with the relief forces once the breakout began," Gaedke wrote. "We did, however, know that the Oktybar area had been heavily fortified, so we went south of the village, where the Russian lines were supposedly weaker."

Once again, Lieutenant Roth's unit formed the spearhead for the 72nd. He was ordered by Kaestner to take Soviet outposts by bayonet in order to maintain secrecy. After silencing Soviet forward positions, it took Roth's men more than four hours to reach Hill 239, which was assumed to be in friendly hands. Approaching the hill, Roth could see the silhouettes of enemy T-34s on the hilltop. He immediately informed Kaestner of his find.

Roth then moved his battalion around the northern edge of the hill and made contact with a Soviet trench line. With sharpened entrenching tools, bayonets, knives, and rifle butts, the Germans overwhelmed the enemy and burst through the Soviet line, followed by the rest of Kaestner's regiment.

Other units tried to follow, but the Russians had been alerted and moved heavy reinforcements to close the gap. Heavy fire ripped through the German columns as commanders looked for alternate escape routes through the now heavily defended Soviet line.

Kaestner's regiment continued forward and eventually ran into advance units from the III Panzer Corps. The regiment had finally made it, but the price of freedom was staggering. Three weeks earlier, the 105th had a strength of 27 officers and 1,082 men. When a muster was taken on the 17th, only three officers and 216 men reported.

The Russians were now fully alerted, and pure chance dictated which German units would make it through relatively unscathed, and which would be decimated trying to escape. Most of the 72nd Infantry Division took a southerly route around Hill 239. It sustained heavy casualties, not only from fire from that hill, but from Hill 222, which lay south of the escape route.

Corps Abteilung B made some initial penetrations, and several regiment-sized groups made it through before the Russians could fully mobilize. Those that followed were forced to run a gauntlet of fire to make it to safety.

"Wiking" ran headlong into the heavily entrenched Soviets. Its badly understrength Panzer Abteilung was engaged in heavy combat around Novo Buda and Schenderovka, supporting the 57th and 88th Divisions in an effort to stem advancing Russian forces coming from the east. Degrelle's Walloons were also fighting for their lives against the advancing Soviets.

When dawn broke, the temperature stood at about 20 degrees fahrenheit, with blizzard conditions hampering both sides. In some areas, it was impossible to tell friend from foe in the blinding snow, and running gun battles sometimes erupted between friendly forces as the breakout attempt continued.

General Lieb had been placed in charge of the assault forces, with Stemmermann commanding the overall operation. With more Soviet reinforcements arriving, the follow-up German forces were pushed steadily south-

National Archives

Picks and shovels are used to clear snow from the tracks of a buried German tank. Conditions around Cherkassy shifted from near blizzard-like to a muddy mess—all serving to delay troop movements.

ward toward the Gniloy Tikich. Lieb drove his men forward unaware that Stemmermann had already fallen victim to Russian fire.

His chief of staff, Gaedke, described the general's death to the author: "Stemmermann, leading the rear guard, wanted to fight his way out on foot. However, his strength soon gave out. We halted a horse-drawn cart, and the general climbed aboard. A short time later, an antitank shell hit the cart, blowing it to pieces and killing everyone on it."

Lieb and his staff finally reached the Gniloy Tikich around midday on the 17th. Lieb was greeted by a sight of pure chaos. Literally thousands of German troops were stranded on the bank of the river while Soviet artillery blasted the area. The screams of the wounded filled the air, and the dead lay everywhere.

The river was more than two meters deep and was several meters wide with a very strong current. Ice flows sailed by on the water as the men desperately looked for an avenue of escape. Pure bad luck had led the Germans to this section of the river. About two kilometers upstream, the 1st Panzer Division had built two temporary bridges, but Soviet blocking forces were now between the trapped Germans and the way to safety. The bridges might as well have been on the moon.

When the "Wiking" arrived on the scene, General Gille ordered his remaining vehicles to be driven into the river, hoping to form a makeshift bridge. Most of them were swept away in the strong current, as were the human chains of swimmers and nonswimmers attempting to cross. Some men used everything from tree limbs to vehicle doors to try and make it across.

At that point, Russian tanks were spotted coming from the east. The last panzers left in the Kessel rushed to engage them as panicked German solders stripped off their uniforms and ran into the freezing river. Some of the better swimmers took non-swimmers with them, returning again and again to bring other comrades across.

The German tanks were soon destroyed, and all hell broke loose as the Russian T-34s advanced on the eastern bank. Firing at point blank range, the Soviet tanks roamed at will, crushing those that could not escape their treads and blasting huge gaps in the vast crowd of Germans. The river was soon filled with thousands of naked or half-naked men, all trying to make it to the western bank.

At Lysyanka, the initial trickle of survivors alerted the 1st Panzer Division about the inferno taking place just a few kilometers away. Engineers were rushed to the scene, where they began building temporary bridges under heavy Russian tank and artillery fire. More men struggled across, and by nightfall only German corpses remained on the eastern shore. Up to 35,000 German troops had escaped the Kessel, but nearly all heavy weapons and equipment had been lost, and two German Corps had been more or less destroyed.

Only 4,000 men remained alive in the "Wiking," and the "Wallonien" Brigade, whose men had brought the body of their dead commander with them, was down to 632. Several of the other divisions engaged in the Kessel were disbanded soon after.

Sergeant Fischer, the 18-year-old Strumgeschütz commander, received the Knights Cross for his actions at Cherkassy, as did Lieutenant Roth and Captain Steinbacher. In a 1989 letter to the author, Fischer summed up his feelings about the battle: "The military commanders saw it as an excellent operation—35,000 men escaped! However, the soldiers who were there regarded it as a sad, bestial massacre." □

Pat McTaggart is an expert on World War II on the Eastern Front and the author of the book Siege! Six Epic Eastern Front Assaults of World War II. *He resides in Elkader, Iowa.*

TO SINK A Battleship

In November 1944, the submarine *Sealion* did what no other American sub in World War II did: sink an enemy battleship.

BY CHACE V. HOWLAND

"THORNTON! Go let the captain know he's needed in the conning tower." Nineteen-year-old Quartermaster Third Class Ed Thornton from Three Notch, Alabama, scurried to the conning tower hatch and slid down the ladder into the control room. Through the control room and into the forward battery, Thornton hustled along the dimly lit narrow passages to Lt. Cmdr. Eli Thomas Reich's small stateroom.

The 31-year-old captain was sleeping off the bouts of frustration afflicting him and his crew on the Balao-class USS *Sealion* (SS-315). For 10 days, *Sealion* had patrolled the northern section of the Formosa Strait—an expressway for Japanese merchant and war ships—without any action except for a surface gun battle with a trawler, which *Sealion* failed to sink. The mood aboard USS *Sealion* was about as gray as the bulkheads that confined the submariners.

As Thornton approached Reich's stateroom, he could see that the green privacy

Naval History and Heritage Command

In a painting by Navy war artist Georges Schreiber, activity in a submarine connng tower becomes frenzied as the captain sights a target through the periscope and other men scramble to their duty stations. The USS *Sealion* (SS-315) carried a crew of 10 officers and 70 enisted men and was the only American submarine to sink an enemy battleship during the war.

curtain was closed. Thornton remembered being told to never wake the captain by touching him. Pulling aside the green curtain, Thornton quietly poked his head in. "Captain…" Reich was propped up on his elbow before Thornton could get the words out. "You're needed in the conning tower." Without hesitation, Reich sprang from his bed, stepped into his slippers, and headed for the conning tower.

Lieutenant Clayton Brelsford and the radar officer Danny Brooks were hovering over the radar when Reich arrived wearing powder-blue pajamas. Twenty minutes after midnight, November 21, 1944, Reich learned that enlisted torpedoman Bill "Moose" Hornkohl was on radar watch when the pips had flashed on the radar screen.

Reich was incredulous. Forty-four thousand yards was simply too far. The Xueshan Mountain Range in northern Formosa stands close to 13,000 feet high. The SJ radar signal must be reflecting off the Formosan mountains, thought Reich. A couple of nights prior, USS *Sealion*'s radar had mistaken land for Japanese naval vessels. Had it happened again?

Reich deemed it prudent to continue tracking and told his men he would return to the conning tower shortly. Reich rushed back to his stateroom to change (powder-blue pajamas were not appropriate attire for a commanding officer in battle).

Admiral Takeo Kurita of the Imperial Japanese Navy had been at sea for four days and was making haste back to Japan aboard *Yamato,* which, along with her sister ship *Musashi,* were the world's largest battleships. On the November 16, while anchored at Brunei—a small nation on the large island of Borneo, southwest of the Philippines—Kurita's ships had narrowly escaped a raid by American carrier planes.

Yamato employed its antiaircraft guns and engaged the attacking American planes. The American pilots pulled back, and Admiral Kurita ordered his First Strike Force out of Brunei immediately. The Americans were tightening the noose around the Central and Southwest Pacific. Admiral Nimitz's naval victories across the

ABOVE: Two months before attacking Admiral Takei Kurita's ships, USS *Sealion* was one of four U.S. subs that unknowingly sank prison ships carrying American, British, and Australian POWs. Here the POWs from the *Rakuyo Maru* are being rescued by *Sealion.* BELOW: With Japanese kill flags flying, *Sealion* steams into port. The sub went on six war patrols and earned five battle stars during the war.

Both: Naval History and Heritage Command

Central Pacific throughout the summer of 1944, coupled with Admiral Halsey's naval victories and General Douglas MacArthur's ground successes in the Philippines that fall, endangered all Japanese forces in the South China Sea, the First Strike Force being one of them. Kurita was determined to return his ships and men safely home to Japan.

Two days after escaping the American air assault on Brunei, Kurita ordered his First Strike Force to navigate west around Formosa. Japanese intelligence reported that an American task force could reach Formosa by November 19 or 20. Traveling west of Formosa allowed Kurita and his forces the comfort of shallow water, a strong current, and protection by Japanese planes stationed on the Formosan coast to the east and the Chinese coast to the west.

Running from the northern tip of Formosa, along the Ryukyu Islands, and up to Honshu was a strategic minefield planted by the Japanese to protect the Asian coast from a naval invasion from the east. An American attack by submarine, surface ships, or air, it

was believed, would be difficult to execute under such hazardous conditions.

By noon on November 20, Kurita's strike force had made its way into the Formosa Strait unimpeded. Kurita, and his prestigious passenger aboard *Yamato,* Vice Admiral Matome Ugaki—who until four days prior served as the commander of the First Battleship Division aboard *Yamato*—felt confident that the most dangerous part of the trek home was behind them. In just four days, the First Strike Force was scheduled to arrive in Japan.

Around midnight, Ugaki stood on the bridge of *Yamato*. He and those around him were concerned. *Yamato*'s radar had detected mysterious waves. The waves were shifting, and because of that, they were shifting the opinions of the officers. What the chances were of an American submarine penetrating the minefield, reaching the northern Formosa Strait, and then attacking a strike force of that size was a question the officers must have debated. The fashion in which the radar waves were moving and the unlikely chance that an American submarine, alone or in a wolf pack, could have penetrated that deeply gave every indication that *Yamato*'s radar had picked up patrolling American B-29s.

All ships in the First Strike Force had been warned of potential aircraft or submarine activity in their proximity but were told to keep moving forward. Kurita had made the decision to suspend zigzag movements, crank the engines, and bully their way home. Ugaki, a combat rear admiral, was comfortable with Kurita's decision. With only a few hours until sunrise, Ugaki returned to his room to sleep, confident in the power of the First Strike Force, which comprised four escort destroyers and three battleships: *Kongo, Nagato,* and *Yamato*.

Naval History and Heritage Command

The second *Sealion* (SS-315) being launched at Groton, Connecticut, on October 31, 1943. The first *Sealion* (SS-195) had to be scuttled after she was damaged in the Philippines in December 1941.

Within 15 minutes, Reich had returned to *Sealion*'s conning tower and found the sub closing in at 30,000 yards from what was now believed to be the enemy. The numerous yellow pips that continued to flash on the green radar screen were consistent with what the pips looked like when making contact with ships of considerable size. Reich confirmed that *Sealion* had made radar contact with a large Japanese naval force.

At 12:46 AM on November 21, Reich called for battle stations and ordered communications officer Joe Bates to file a ship contact report. Bates rushed to the radio shack, but before he made the report, he jumped on the phone and called up to Reich, who was now on the bridge with the engineering officer, Harry Hagen. Bates, a cautious sailor, asked Reich to determine exactly how many ships and what type of ships he should report. Excited with the unfolding circumstances, Reich snapped back, "Dammit, Bates, Nimitz isn't looking for an affidavit!"

Activity aboard *Sealion* was moving at a feverish pace as all men hurried to their battle stations, and whispers about the size of the target moved from bow to stern. Hornkohl shoved off from the radar and ran to the forward torpedo room where he joined forces with Chief Torpedoman Joe Bell and Torpedoman Third Class Bill Lavender. They were to make sure that all six bow tubes were ready to fire six Mark 18 torpedoes filled with 575 pounds of torpex.

Bill Scarano, a boatswain's mate from Groton, Connecticut—only a mile away from where Sealion was built and launched—manned his station on the bow planes inside the control room. At his side was George Davis, who operated the stern planes. Chief of the Boat James Utz stood close by, ready to monitor the hull opening indicator panel, better known as the "Christmas tree" because of its green and red lights. The control room was ready for Reich to sound the klaxon alarm and submerge.

Diving the boat, however, was not what Reich decided to do. The Japanese strike force was moving at 17 knots—"a damn good speed"—and just shy of 20,000 yards away from the *Sealion* two hours after initial contact. The sub was closing at surface speed, but fighting the elements of the East China Sea made it all the more difficult. By 2 AM, Reich and Hagen were windswept and soaked on the bridge, unable to identify anything in front of them.

Plagued by dense fog, the lookout, Quartermaster William Pierson, also struggled to see through the pitch black. If *Sealion* were to successfully execute an end run and maneuver itself in front of the strike force, it would be up to the men in the conning tower operating the attack scope, radar, and torpedo data computer.

"Looks like you've got good dope down there, Joe," Reich reassured Joe Bates who was operating the torpedo data computer for the first time. Reich's leadership was on full display.

"Left full rudder!" the skipper ordered the final turn.

At 2:45 AM, Reich successfully maneuvered *Sealion* forward of the strike force and lay in wait for its prey. The energy in the conning tower was a mixture of excitement and anxiety, while outside on the bridge there was excitement and frustration. Reich and Hagen knew a major Japanese strike force was somewhere in front of them but no matter how tightly they squinted or how quickly they wiped the ocean spray out of their eyes, they simply could not see. Were they chasing a task force of aircraft carriers, battlewagons, or both, the crew wondered. Thornton and the officers around him in the conning tower were working feverishly, and the more they learned, the more the tension grew.

Executive Officer Jim Bryant, beloved by all on *Sealion*, kept his eyes glued to the attack scope and voiced his concern to

Reich on the bridge. The destroyers on the port side of the main column were only a few thousand yards away from *Sealion*, and Bryant was dubious of running that close on the surface. But Reich would not waver. If Reich could not see the enemy, he was confident the enemy could not see him.

The fire control party in the conning tower was ready to fire, Bryant shouted up to Reich. It appeared to Reich that Bryant preferred firing from a safe distance but this would mean the risk of the torpedoes running erratically.

"Let me worry about that—we've got to close this guy!" Reich told Bryant. Even back in his Annapolis days, Reich was known to be a pugnacious fighter, and he proved that as he battled the winds and waves on the bridge, ordering *Sealion* closer. Reich was pushing his luck, and both he and Bryant knew it. "Three thousand five hundred yards for a torpedo run," Bryant dutifully informed Reich.

At 2:50 AM, Reich determined it was now or never. "As soon as you get your bow out, we'll swing around 180 degrees and get the stern out. Just steady the solution," he voiced to Bryant. The solution was all set as Joe Bates had the torpedo data computer working flawlessly. Moose Hornkohl was in the forward torpedo room and set the depth of the six fish at eight feet as Reich prescribed.

Reich yelled instructions down to Bryant and Bates in the conning tower. "All right, shoot when you're ready…. You're good to go…. Fire away!"

From a distance of 3,000 yards, *Sealion* was ready to attack. Bryant shouted, "Fire six! Fire five! Fire four! Fire three! Fire two! Fire one!" as the firing circuits were pressed at 2:56 AM. All six forward "tin fish" sprang from their tubes and ran hot, straight, and normal toward the second ship in the column: the battleship *Kongo*. "All six have been fired."

"Full right rudder!"

As *Sealion* turned hard to bring the stern into position, Pierson, a veteran of surface ships, cast his eyes on the Japanese battlewagon and was the first sailor aboard *Sealion* to identify the pagoda mast as that of the namesake of the Kongo-class battleship. Three minutes after the forward fish began their attack on the strike force, three stern tubes joined the assault and raced for the third ship in column—the battleship *Nagato*. Billy Mansfield and those running the engines slammed *Sealion* into flank speed away. With no fish in the tubes, one submarine would not last long on the surface amid three battleships and four destroyers fighting for their lives.

The conning tower roared at the sight before them.

"Woooo!"

"The whole sky lit up!"

"That'll put 'em in drydock!"

Yamamoto Takika, manning a 25mm gun aboard *Kongo,* jumped up from a dead sleep. He had heard the loud boom and his body vibrated as he felt and heard the grinding of steel. He instinctively knew that his ship had been hit by a submarine torpedo. In a mad dash across the deck of *Kongo,* Yamamoto ran for his 25mm gun mount. Yamamoto wondered why those already at the guns were firing into the sky. He was positive that the belly of *Kongo* had been punched with torpedoes from a submarine, not an aircraft.

Panic had taken over the minds of many aboard *Kongo*. Major Takahata Yutaka, the second battery officer aboard the ship, however, remained calm. Like Yamamoto, Takahata knew that *Kongo* had just been on the receiving end of a multiple punch combo by an enemy submarine. Although torpedoes had punctured the forward and middle sections of *Kongo* on the port side, he was still confident *Kongo* would stay afloat, regardless of the list that had already set in.

Kongo was a seasoned battleship, well built, and had endured close calls from American bombers before. Surely she would handle this latest attack. *Kongo*'s starboard escort, the destroyer *Urakaze,* was not so lucky. Upon seeing the flames and sea shoot above *Kongo,* the *Nagato* and *Yamato* responded quickly and spun hard on the helm.

Nagato and *Yamato* maneuvered quickly enough for *Sealion*'s stern torpedoes to miss them. At 3:04 AM, *Sealion*'s stern torpedoes, now on the starboard side of the column, ripped through the side of *Urakaze*. The explosion sent up huge flames that illuminated the sky above the vessel and then quickly subsided. In a matter of seconds, the victim had slipped below the waves of the East China Sea to settle on the sea floor.

There was no time to search for survivors of *Urakaze* or slow down to help those struggling aboard Kongo. Because of the sudden explosion and sinking of *Urakaze* on the starboard side of *Kongo,* the strike force feared they had sailed into an ambush.

Naval History and Heritage Command

ABOVE: One of *Kongo*'s escorting destroyers, the *Urakaze,* was torpedoed by *Sealion* in the South China Sea before dawn on November 21, 1944, and sank within seconds. OPPOSITE: Displacing 37,000 tons, the powerful Japanese battleship *Kongo* was sunk by *Sealion* on November 21, 1944, as it was returning to Japan following the battle of the Philippine Sea.

Naval History and Heritage Command

Admiral Kurita called for *Yamato* and *Nagato* to continue sailing at full speed north toward Japan. Kurita then ordered *Kongo* to head to a Japanese-held seaport city on the northeastern coast of Formosa. Escorted by the destroyers Isokaze and Hamakaze and still able to make 16 knots, *Kongo* was believed to have a reasonable chance of reaching the safety provided by Keelung's harbor.

On *Yamato,* Admiral Ugaki, relieved that *Kongo* was doing as well as she was, thought the ship would survive. Under that assumption, Ugaki retired from the bridge of *Yamato*.

Aggravation was thick in *Sealion*'s conning tower, control room, and torpedo rooms. Below the conning tower, inside the control room, Scarano was listening to what he could through the open hatch. He could hear Reich's lament: "I think I set the torpedoes too shallow!" Reich was right. Fired to run at a depth of only eight feet, the torpedoes swam into Kongo's armor plate. While an eight-foot depth setting was appropriate for destroyer escorts, it was too shallow for battleships.

The distance between *Kongo* and *Sealion* was widening and Reich was frustrated. "That was bad…. If you had fired on the last ship, you would have had a damn good setup," Reich told Bryant.

"I thought we were on the last one, Captain," Bryant replied.

Sinking *Urakaze* was good, but Reich wanted the battlewagons. Had *Sealion* waited a bit longer, the fish that were buried in *Urakaze* could have been slammed through the hull of Y*amato*. Suddenly, *Yamato,* which had stopped zigzagging, cruised through the mist past *Sealion*'s stern 800 yards away, silhouetted against a pitch-black backdrop. If Sealion had had even one torpedo in the tube, Bates was confident that *Yamato* would have been impossible to miss.

Although the tubes were empty, there were still more fish on board. Through his headset, Moose Hornkohl, who was standing between the tubes in the forward torpedo room, heard the intensity in Reich's voice: "I need those torpedoes ready now!"

Reich was not one to quit, and he loved a good fight.

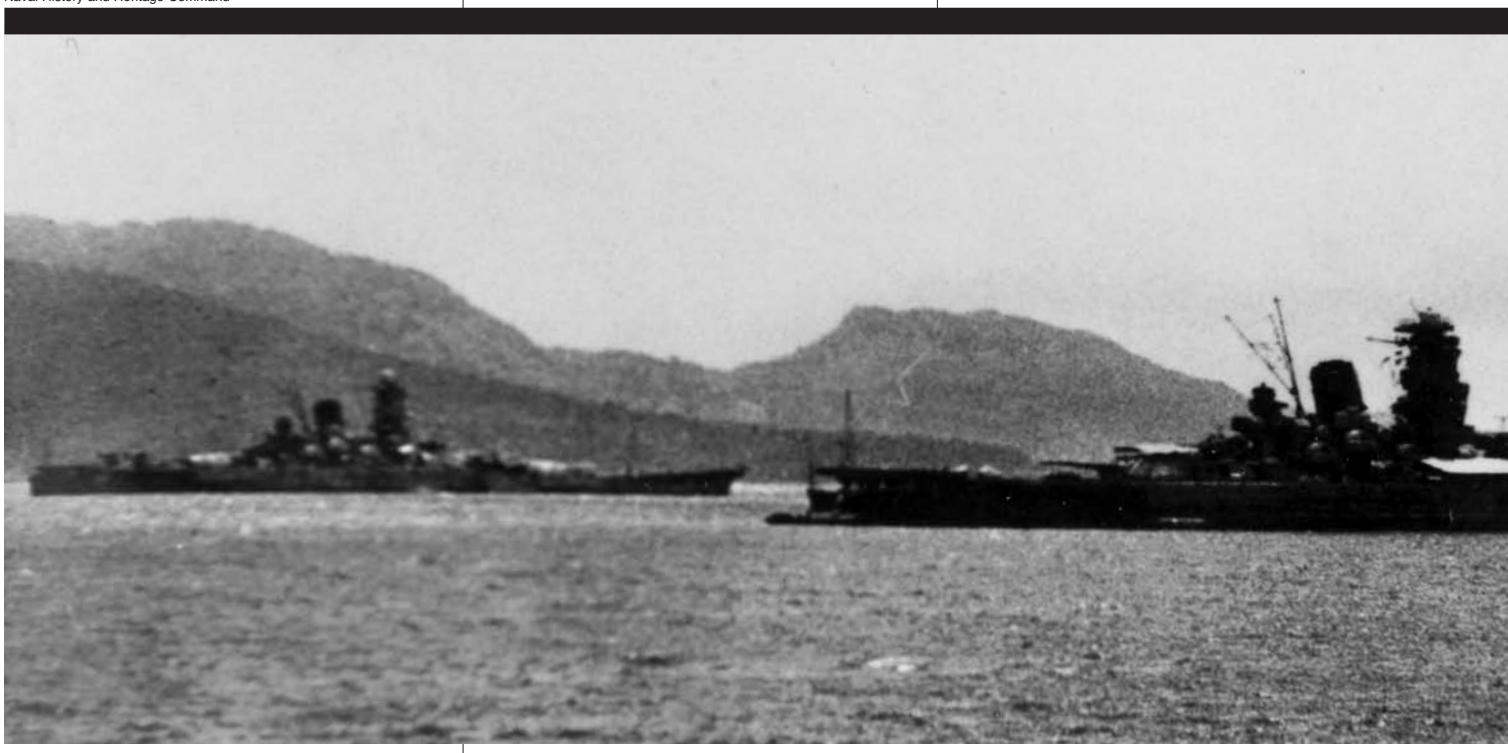
Joe Bell, Bill Lavender, and Moose Hornkohl went to work. The forward tubes were now filled with seawater. Although this was normal, it was also a hindrance. When torpedoes were fired, the outer door of the torpedo tube opened to release the torpedo, but as the torpedo exits the tube, the seawater enters. To reload the torpedoes into the tubes, the reload crew had to pump the water back into the sea. But doing so in a situation such as the one *Sealion* was in would cost the sub precious time.

"I'd dump water from the tubes into the bilges," Hornkohl suggested to his chief torpedoman, Joe Bell. Bell agreed. The forward torpedo room called the pump room and explained the situation. With very little time, there was only one option—pull the plug on the tubes. Dumping the water into the bilges was not ideal, as the bilges already held large amounts of water and oil and were carefully monitored. Stephen Gorski, a muscular man considered to be an auxiliary expert, ran the pump room and was well aware of the risk, and he had the pumps working as fast as possible.

When the water level gauge on the torpedo tubes read empty, Hornkohl and company began loading. The forward torpedo crew forced the torpedo skids into position and rigged the block and tackle on a ring inside the tube. Having hooked the torpedo to the block and tackle, the men were ready to shove the fish into firing position.

With the waves smashing against the sides of *Sealion*, the rocking motion of the boat made loading the fish far more dangerous than normal. Hornkohl feared being crushed to death between the deck and the 3,000-pound missile. "Don't let that torpedo come back on us!" yelled Hornkohl. "I ain't going to let it come back

Naval History and Heritage Command



on you!" chirped Bell.

Hornkohl clambered onto the torpedo racks and shimmied himself behind the missile. With two hands on the skid, his backside in between, and two feet on the torpedo propellers, Hornkohl called for help. "Bill, push on me!"

Bill Lavender stood about 6'5" with a frame that resembled the underwater warhead. With their backs pressed against one another, Lavender used his weight and power and leaned into the back of Hornkohl, who was pushing directly on the torpedo. Together they pushed the fish into position.

Moving as quickly as possible, Hornkohl had to be careful how much force was used to push the torpedo into place. Too much force ran the risk of shoving it over the stops and banging against the outer door and possibly damaging it. Four days prior, Fire Controlman George Davis had mistakenly fired a live torpedo through the outer door of Number 8 tube in the after-torpedo room, rendering the tube inoperable; a thin interior door was all that protected *Sealion* from flooding and sinking to the seabed. One damaged torpedo tube was enough; *Sealion* couldn't afford another.

"It's on the stops, Joe!" Hornkohl yelled out to Bell with a sense of relief. Bell confirmed. Reinforced by Lavender, Moose and Bell guided the torpedoes into the forward tubes in less than half an hour. Six forward torpedoes were now ready for Reich to use at his disposal.

The clock read 4:06 AM. More than an hour had passed since Reich heard the explosions and saw the plumes of smoke billowing from *Kongo*. Unfortunately for Reich and his crew, the battlewagon was zigzagging at a speed of 14 knots and appeared to be gaining.

Running at 25 percent overload, the engines of Sealion were pushing their limits. Throttleman Billy Mansfield, a submariner who had made nine war patrols prior to boarding Sealion, ran the forward engine room. Mansfield, Casey Mallough—the chief motor machinist's mate—and Harry Hagen feared blowing the engines, and Reich wasn't pleased with their caution. Begrudgingly, Reich listened to his engineering team and reduced *Sealion*'s speed from flank speed to roughly 17 knots.

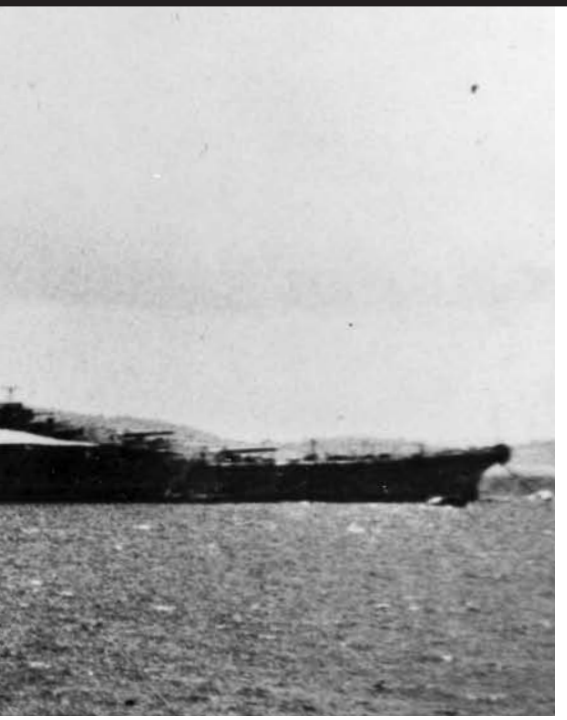
Waves lapped over and against the sub's hull and deck, and foamy green saltwater bathed the bridge and forced its way down into the conning tower through the open hatch. To finish off *Kongo, Sealion* had to stay on the surface. For Reich, the risk was worth the reward.

At 4:50 AM, Danny Brooks and those around the radar screen identified two separate enemy formations and noted that the one nearest *Sealion* had slowed to 11 knots. Reich was told that the closest formation comprised one battleship and two destroyers. "Beginning to look rosy again," thought Reich. It is reasonable to believe that the men in the conning tower knew what was happening: the battleship they had struck earlier could not keep up with the other two ships and her limp was worsening.

Using the same tactical approach that a pack of wolves uses when hunting their prey, Reich ordered the men in the conning tower to turn toward the enemy formation that had slowed. Bryant had his eyes against the scope and read out the bearings that Bates plugged into the torpedo data computer and fixed a solution. Clayton Brelsford plotted.

Thirty minutes after Brooks reported that the formation had reduced its speed, he shared more good news. The target was about 17,000 yards away and its pip on the radar screen was smaller in size than it had been only minutes before. At 5:20 AM, Reich prepared to correct his earlier mistake.

Then came the words: "The target has stopped! She's dead in the water!"



Kongo was not doing as well as Ugaki and Kurita had hoped. *Sealion*'s Mark-18 fish had penetrated the walls of Kongo's #6 and #8 boiler rooms, and the storm surge was exacerbating the wounds. The onslaught of seawater slowed *Kongo,* and the ship continued to list dangerously closer to capsizing.

Takahashi Masahiko, *Kongo*'s gunnery officer, stood by his antiaircraft gun and observed the lip of the waves getting closer. *Kongo* was listing at about 45 degrees and what had been 32 yards above the surface was now making contact with the water. Commander Suzuki and Captain Shimazaki worked with the other officers on board to mitigate the frightening situation. Pumping the water proved futile as the East China Sea bested each measure *Kongo*'s crew employed.

Naval History and Heritage Command

Left to right: The hunter: *Sealion*'s skipper, Lt. Cmdr. Eli Reich; the hunted: Admiral Takei Kurita, commander of First Strike Force, and Vice Adm. Matome Ugaki, head of First Battleship Division. TOP: The world's largest battleships, *Yamato* (left) and *Musashi*, photographed in Truk Lagoon sometime in 1943.

Dangerous as it was, the only other option was to patch the hole. As the damage-control officers dressed and readied themselves to slip over the side rail, Captain Shimazaki realized such an act was foolish. The damage officers were far more likely to drown in the raging sea than they were to patch the hole. Captain Shimazaki rescinded the order.

All men were ordered to *Kongo*'s starboard side. Even as they wondered if the aggregate weight of the sailors could counter the port list, their weight proved no match for the power of the sea. Soon after the command to rush starboard was given, Captain Shimazaki ordered the ship's flag to be lowered.

Kongo now listed at 60 degrees. Capsizing was imminent.

At 5:22 AM, Captain Shimazaki ordered all hands to abandon ship. Two minutes later, the forward 14-inch shells in K*ongo*'s magazine compartment were knocked over and fell, detonator forward, toward the deck. There was an enormous blast.

Seconds later, Takahashi and Yamamoto were suddenly gasping for air, unsure of how they got where they were amid the waves of the East China Sea and unaware that more than 1,000 of their fellow sailors had just perished.

"Oh, the luck of the Irish!" Reich, a proud Irish Catholic, yelled in jubilation.

Shards of metal were being launched into the East China Sea. Even though there were still 90 minutes until sunrise, Reich watched as the flames from *Kongo,* so powerful and bright, illuminated the entire sky, turning night into day and quickly back into night again in just seconds. The ferocity of the explosion was so terrific that within one minute Brooks noted the radar pip had disappeared, making him wonder if the radar had broken.

"I can't see it anymore."

Scarano, still in the control room manning the bow planes, had resigned himself to death upon hearing and feeling the explosion. "We're hit," he thought. The concussion of the blast had jolted *Sealion* so badly that Scarano was convinced the sub had suffered a fatal shot to the hull.

Energy from the explosion grabbed loose papers and caps in *Sealion*'s conning tower and control room and scattered the materials in different rooms of the boat, littering the floors. Above Scarano, in the conning tower, the mood was far different as they were aware of the situation outside.

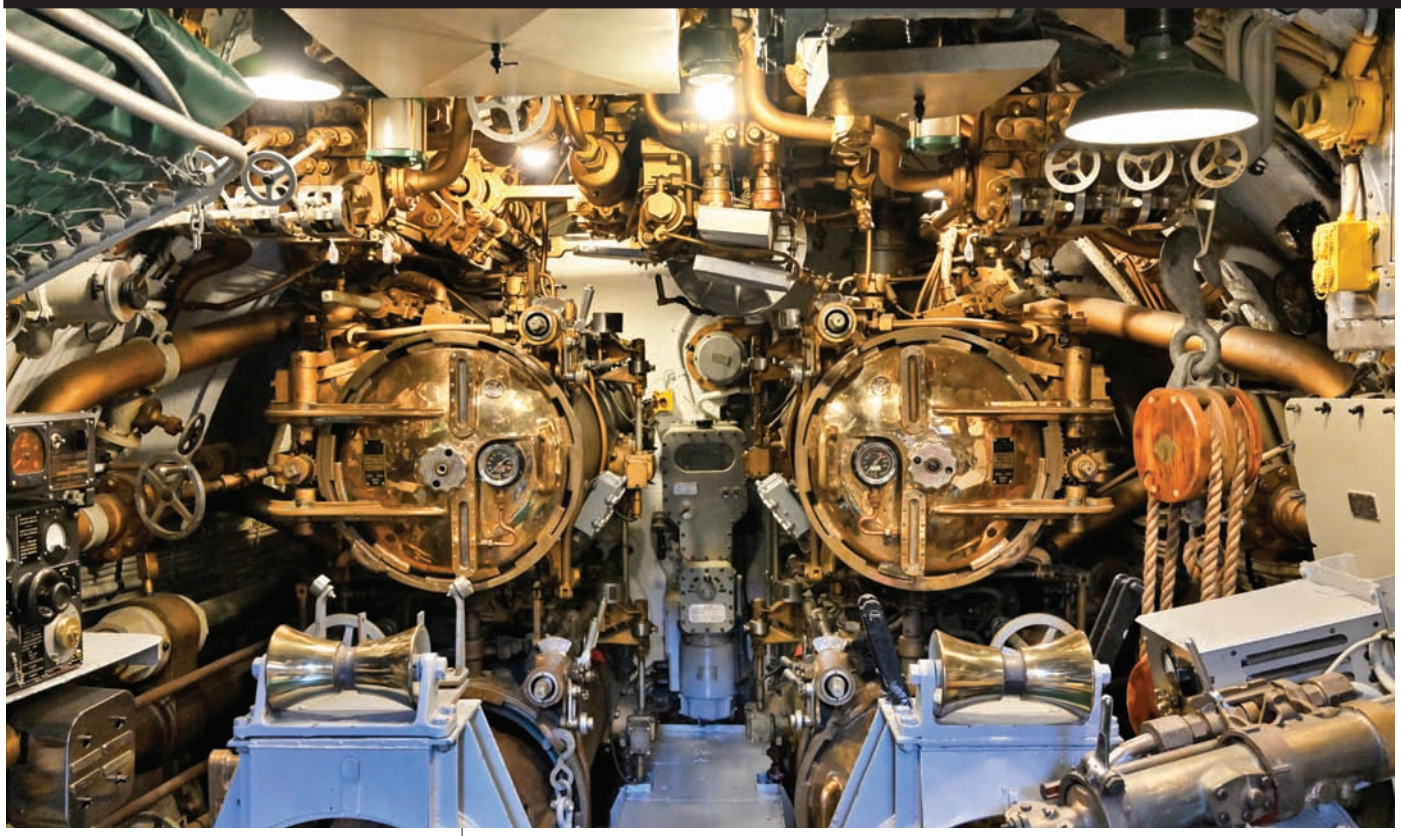
"Woooooo!" could be heard in the conning tower as the men celebrated upon realizing what had happened. "There's a lot of white smoke out here," Reich observed. "His boilers are going off." Bates was relieved to hear his captain's voice, because he feared *Sealion*'s bridge had been blown off the boat and assumed it had taken Reich for the ride.

Reich was alive and wasted no time. What was done was done. "All right, I'll tell you what we'll do." Reich ordered *Sealion* to ignore *Kongo*'s escorts and instead turn to pursue the two battleships that had continued sailing north.

From 20,000 yards, it would be nearly impossible for *Sealion* to catch up because, by this time, the storm had assumed typhoon-like force. Within 15 minutes of Reich's order, the radar had recorded *Yamato* and N*agato* moving at 19 knots and 24,000 yards out. The size and power of the battlewagons were far better equipped to handle the severe weather conditions than *Sealion*.

Reich was not giving up, though. *Sealion*

Alamy



remained on the surface, being walloped by angry green waves, tossed left and right by the strengthening winds. There was another problem. Green water was running like a waterfall through the sub's main induction shaft and making its way toward the engine room, recalled Scarano more than seven decades later. Down the conning tower hatch, the saltwater rushed into the conning tower, control room, and pump room. Six inches had pooled in the radio shack. Nevertheless, Reich did not stop hunting. He wanted what he knew he had missed.

After two hours, however, Reich had had enough. Water damage to the circuit panels in the control room and pump room and damage to the engines were a far more likely outcome than taking down two more battleships 35,000 yards—nearly 20 miles—away. At 7:44 AM, *Sealion* submerged.

For the remainder of the day, *Sealion* stayed below the surface while the crew mopped up the soaked interior and patiently waited for a response from Admiral Charles Lockwood, commander of Submarine Force Pacific Fleet, who was stationed thousands of miles away at Pearl Harbor. Soon after the attack, Reich had issued a report to Lockwood to update him on what had just transpired along the edge of the Formosa Strait and East China Sea.

Surprisingly, *Sealion* had been able to pick up a radio station on the shore of Australia, which forwarded the message to Pearl. Lockwood responded with alacrity, and Reich received his response the following morning, November 22.

If Reich and *Sealion* wanted credit for being the only American submarine to sink an enemy battleship, they were going to have to prove they had done so. Despite the explosion, there was still a possibility Japanese sailors aboard *Kongo* had survived, so Lockwood ordered Reich to return to the area and scoop up a survivor if possible. At 5:50 AM, Reich ordered Sealion to run on the surface and head back to the coordinates where *Kongo* had been obliterated.

Alone on the surface, surrounded by a vast expanse of sea and sunlight, *Sealion* prowled the waters looking for any piece of flotsam that could identify the sunken ship as *Kongo*. The sun burned brightly that afternoon and provided *Sealion* ample light to look for life or activity.

At 12:30 PM, the lookouts on the bridge called out. They saw something. Approximately four miles away, as clear as the blue sky above them, the Japanese were thought to be in sight. But there was no floating wreckage or bobbing heads or lifeboats. Instead, *Sealion*'s lookouts had spotted two potential Japanese Nell bombers, fully equipped with machine guns and cannons, closing fast on *Sealion*'s starboard quarter.

Capable of flying at 230 miles per hour, the Nell bombers could be on top of *Sealion* before the boat had submerged deep enough to avoid Japanese firepower.

Clayton Brelsford, a more than capable officer who relieved the deck watch 30 minutes prior to the aircraft contact, appeared cavalier about the sighting. Rather than do what all submarine officers were taught to do when making contact with unidentified or enemy air patrol close by—dive the boat—Brelsford called for the SD radar to be turned on.

Why Brelsford approached the situation as he did is difficult to understand, for the SD radar was one of the earlier air search detection devices installed in the American fleet

submarines and often proved to provide more frustration than protection.

Brelsford called Reich to inform him of the situation. Immediately Reich screamed, "Dive the damn boat!" Upon hearing the captain's orders, Joe Bates, the diving officer on duty, called for *Sealion* to dive. Only luck would allow the sub to make it to periscope depth before taking a bomb directly on the hull. Excited by the command, Bates ordered the dive at an extreme angle.

Soon after *Sealion* began its steep descent into the East China Sea, an air bubble made itself known in the bow buoyancy tank that ran along the sub's exterior forward hull. From approximately 120 feet below the surface, with an air bubble in the buoyancy tank, Sealion shot back up to the surface.

Unable to correct the grave mistake before *Sealion* reached the surface, the bow of the boat emerged from beneath the waves, exposing her entire hull to the two bombers above. By itself, only 24 hours after its shining moment, *Sealion* had breached. "This is the works!" hollered Bates.

Frantic, Bates and those in the control room operating the diving mechanisms worked with due speed to get *Sealion* back below the surface. Quietly, Bates had anticipated death. Ninety seconds would pass before *Sealion* could recover from its near-fatal error. Like a lily pad in a pond, Sealion sat on the surface as the bombers circled overhead. Where was the explosion and impending death that all combat submariners had imagined at least once? Men aboard prayed.

After the longest 90 seconds many of these men would ever endure, *Sealion* finally slipped beneath the waves, miraculously unscathed. At 150 feet below the surface, *Sealion* trimmed, while some aboard questioned why they had been spared. Chief Boatswain Mate Henry Joyce believed it was divine intervention. Only by the grace of God had they survived, he thought.

Reich and his officers had more on their minds than prayer. They needed to ascertain what had just happened and who was above them: friend or foe. Reich ordered the boat to periscope depth—60 feet—and he, Brelsford, and Bates took turns examining the circling bombers through *Sealion*'s periscope.

Brelsford argued that the bombers had to be American B-25s. There had been word that planes would be patrolling the area and looking for evidence of the reported sinking of *Kongo*. A battleship of that size sitting on the ocean floor only 250-300 feet below the surface could be spotted from above on a clear day. If the planes circling overhead were Japanese bombers, reasoned Brelsford, the men aboard *Sealion* would not still be alive to argue.

Reich passively agreed with Brelsford and thought about surfacing. Bates was perplexed. There was absolutely no reason for questioning who was flying those bombers, thought Bates. He argued that Formosa and China were too close and the Philippines too far to have B-25s casually patrolling above. Having deliberated for a while, Reich sided with Bates. Further examination confirmed that the two bombers were indeed Japanese Nells.

Ordered to a depth of 100 feet, *Sealion* cleared the area and spent the day patrolling, hoping to find any evidence that would help establish *Sealion* as the only American submarine to sink an enemy battleship. That day's search proved fruitless.

Throughout the following day, *Sealion*'s officers and crew gathered around the mess tables and gave thanks for what they had achieved and survived throughout the previous 48 hours. Thursday, November 23, 1944, was the first time the crew of *Sealion* had celebrated Thanksgiving together.

All were thankful for simply being alive. They ate the roasted turkey, indulged in warm pumpkin pie, and spent a mindless 86 minutes watching the 1942 Hollywood drama starring the beautiful Jean Rogers, *The War Against Mrs. Hadley.*

Back in Pearl Harbor, the high brass was able, through intelligence intercepts, to confirm *Sealion*'s stunning victory over *Kongo*. Admiral Charles Lockwood was thankful for what he referred to as a "historic patrol." Admiral Chester Nimitz was so thankful for *Sealion*'s "extraordinary heroism" and for the tremendous feat of achieving the only enemy battleship kill by an American submarine that he awarded Eli Thomas Reich his third Navy Cross in as many patrols. Less than one year later, on October 10, 1945, President Harry Truman awarded the Presidential Unit Citation to the entire crew of USS *Sealion*.

Naval History and Heritage Command

ABOVE: *Sealion* heads to Norfolk, Virginia, after the war, her missions successfully completed. OPPOSITE: View of the equipment-crammed after torpedo room of a World War II-era American submarine. Balao-class submarines such as *Sealion* carried 24 Mark XIV torpedoes.

The submarine and her crew survived the war, but her end was ignominious. She was decommissioned and then recommissioned to serve in several postwar roles, and was later used for target practice. USS *Sealion* was ultimately sunk off the coast of Newport, Rhode Island, on November 8, 1978, gone but far from forgotten. □

Peiper's Bloody Blitz Through Belgium

As the Belgian town of La Gleize burned to the ground around him, 29-year-old SS Lt. Col. Joachim Peiper remained calm in his headquarters, listening to reports and issuing orders. Outside, his outnumbered tanks, exchanged fire with American armor.

The date was December 22, 1944, and Peiper's forces clung to the small town, waiting for a relief column to reach them. Peiper had gone into battle six days earlier as the spearhead of Adolf Hitler's Operation Herbstnebel (Autumn Fog), the Battle of the Bulge. He had started out with 4,800 men, 117 tanks, and numerous other vehicles and heavy weapons. Now he was down to about 800 men and no fuel for his vehicles. How had it come to this?

After the Allies' invasion of Normandy and the subsequent ejection of German forces from France and Belgium in the summer and fall of 1944, Hitler had planned an all-out drive to retake the Belgian port city of Antwerp, an important supply base for the Western Allies, to take place during December, when short days and heavy fog would prevent the Allied air forces from flying.

By cutting a path to Antwerp, his armies would divide the American and British army groups, sending both into a headlong retreat. The two demoralized forces, he believed, could then be pursued and destroyed. Another victory in the West would allow him to refocus his attention in the East, where the Red Army was closing in on the German border.

To capture Antwerp, Hitler created two new armies: General Hasso von Manteuffel's Fifth Panzer Army and General Joseph (Sepp) Dietrich's Sixth SS Panzer Army. They would constitute the main driving force, while General Erich Brandenberger's Seventh Army would protect the offensive's southern flank. From north to south along the Belgium-Luxembourg border, the three armies lined up as Dietrich's Sixth SS Panzer, Manteuffel's Fifth Panzer, and Brandenburg's Seventh.

Once the breakout had been achieved, so the plan went, Dietrich's I SS Panzer Corps would drive for the town of Huy near Liège on the Meuse River, some 80 miles behind Allied lines. Once across the Meuse, the II SS Panzer Corps would take over and drive northwest for Antwerp.

Colonel Wilhelm Mohnke's 1st SS Panzer Division Liebstandarte SS Adolph Hitler, would spearhead Dietrich's attack. Serving as Mohnke's tip of the spear would be a reinforced regiment under Lt. Col. Peiper. The regiment consisted of three tank battalions, supported by artillery and flak battalions, plus engineer and supply companies. Altogether, Peiper commanded 4,800 men and 800 vehicles (117 tanks, 149 halftracks, 24 artillery pieces, and more than 30 antiaircraft weapons). Mohnke labeled each of his reinforced regiments as battle groups (Kampfgruppen) and named each after their commander, thus creating Kampfgruppen Peiper.

His tankers wore traditional black jackets, while the infantry and antitank units wore gray, both with SS markings on the right lapel and rank on the left. The left sleeve included a Nazi eagle on the arm, distinguishing them as SS, and their division name on their cuff band. Most of the infantry wore camouflaged smocks of orange, green, purple, and brown.

Peiper had earned a reputation as an efficient and ruthless warrior on the Russian Front, for which his men venerated him.

National Archives

An SS officer and his detachment from Kampfgruppe Peiper, 1st SS Panzer Division, pause at the Kaiserbaracke crossroads between St. Vith and Malmédy, Belgium, the latter near where 130 American POWs were gunned down by Peiper's men. BELOW: Colonel Joachim Peiper, leader of the spearheading battlegroup that bore his name. He was tried and convicted of war crimes.

During the Battle of the Bulge, German SS Lt. Col. Joachim Peiper led the most powerful armored unit in the campaign's deepest penetration—but all for naught.

BY KEVIN H. HYMEL

National Archives

ABOVE: The same SS officer shown on the previous page looks over a map during the opening hours of Hitler's Ardennes offensive, December 1944. Peiper considered the terrain too rough and confining for his tanks and the roads better suited for bicycles. OPPOSITE: A German PzKpfw. V Panther medium tank rolls forward across a snow-covered road during the Battle of the Bulge in December 1944. The Panther's sloping armor could resist all but a point-blank blast from the lighter American Sherman tank.

"Peiper was the most dynamic man I ever met," one SS soldier later said. "He just got things done." Having lived through Allied bombings of Germany, Peiper was also motivated by revenge. After having rescued survivors from an American bombing, he swore to castrate the enemy with a blunt piece of broken glass.

Peiper's 117 tanks consisted of Mark IV medium tanks, Panther V heavy tanks, and Tiger II heavy tanks. The Mark IV had served throughout the war and had been upgraded to keep up with enemy technology. Its short-barreled 75mm cannon had been replaced with a long barrel to penetrate thicker armor. Steel plates had been added around its turret and sidetracks, enhancing the tank's two inches of frontal armor, thus providing better survivability on the battlefield. It was considered equal to the American M4 Sherman tank.

The Panther V likewise fired a 75mm cannon but was classified as a heavy tank with four inches of frontal armor. It was faster and weighed twice as much as the Mark IV. Its sloping armor could better resist all but a point-blank shot from a Sherman.

Finally, the Tiger II, better known as the Royal (or King) Tiger, had no equal on the battlefield. The second generation of the war's most formidable tank, it dominated the minds of the enemy. To the Allied soldiers, every tank was a Tiger. Its 88mm cannon, in reality an antiaircraft gun, was the most powerful of any tank (until the last months of the war). Its seven inches of frontal armor was the thickest, yet it was slow, prone to mechanical failures, guzzled gas, and weighed too much for many of Europe's bridges. Peiper considered them more trouble than they were worth in the terrain common in the Low Countries.

Some of Hitler's planners hoped Peiper might cover the 80 miles to the Meuse River by the end of the first night. Maj. Gen. Fritz Kraemer, Dietrich's chief of staff, was more pragmatic, projecting a four-day journey. Peiper did not even share Kraemer's enthusiasm. His route would take him through confined towns on twisting and turning two-lane roads that crossed numerous bridges.

"These roads were not for tanks, but for bicycles," he explained to his superiors. Unlike the Soviet Union, where open land allowed tanks to spread out for an attack, Peiper's route condemned his unit to travel in an almost constant column, strung out for miles.

With German fuel stocks dwindling and fuel trucks having difficulty keeping up with the lead tanks, Peiper would need to capture American fuel depots along the way, a dubious prospect at best.

Well before sunrise on December 16, 1944, German artillery exploded on the American lines, signaling the beginning of the offensive. During the night, Peiper had moved his unit into a wood north of the town of Stadtkyll and waited for the 3rd Parachute Division to crack the American line. He waited most of the day, until he received word at 4:00 PM to advance. The tanks and half-tracks rolled west, reaching a blown-out railway bridge in less than an hour. Undeterred, Peiper ordered his tankers to drive into the depression and out the other end.

As his panzers advanced, one tank plowed into a minefield, detonating a mine. Another followed. Engineers had to clear minefields as the sun set. The loss of the tanks led Lieutenant Werner Sternebeck to lament, "Our two Panthers, which were thought of as battering rams, were lost for the rest of the deployment without having made any contact with the enemy." Not long after that, Sternebeck's tank hit a mine.

Around midnight, Peiper's tanks rolled into Lanzerath—several hours behind schedule—where an American platoon had held up an entire parachute regiment most of the day. A furious Peiper stormed into the regimental headquarters in the Café Stolzen and demanded to know who was in charge. When Colonel I.G. Hoffmann identified himself, Peiper asked, "Why have you stopped?" Hoffman outranked Peiper, but he knew better than to correct an SS officer. Hoffman explained that the enemy was too strong and the battlefield mined. When Hoffman tried to explain the situation on a map, Peiper picked it up and, using two bayonets, pinned it to the wall near a lantern.

Peiper then called a major on the telephone. When the major admitted he had not reconnoitered the area, Peiper got a captain on the phone who reported the same. Infuriated, he slammed down the phone and shouted, "There's nothing out there!" Then he demanded

that one of Hoffman's parachute battalions join his attack on Honsfeld, which he had scheduled for 4 AM the next morning, promising to plow through any American mines.

Peiper spent the rest of the night reorganizing his unit for the attack. Half-tracks would lead the way, followed by tanks with some paratroopers riding atop while others cleared the woods on either side of the roads. Peiper, whom his commanders had hoped might sprint the 80 miles to the Meuse on the first day, had traveled only 15 miles and was 18 hours behind schedule.

Before dawn the next morning, Peiper's men headed north in a sleeting rain. To prevent drivers from using their lights in the darkness, paratroopers guided them by waving white handkerchiefs. The column bypassed a few homes occupied by sleeping American soldiers. Within a half hour, the Germans reached Honsfeld, waking up the occupying Americans.

The spearhead half-tracks continued through the town, while the followup troops shot at the houses' windows. Some 15 Americans returned fire, picking off Germans in the street, but the outnumbered Americans soon surrendered. The SS troops rounded up their prisoners, with their hands above their heads, and gunned them down with machine pistols. Other surrendering Americans were sent to the rear.

The Germans sacked Honsfeld's church and homes, stealing food, valuables, and clothes. Paratroopers stripped the boots off dead Americans lying in the street and laced them on. They then found civilians huddled in the church basement and had them clear debris from the streets. (A few days later, after the spearhead tanks had long gone and followup troops marched west, five SS soldiers entered a home and shouted downstairs that they needed a guide. One of the adults volunteered, but the Germans picked the pretty, 16-year-old Erna Colla. Her family would never see her again.)

Peiper's spearhead continued north to Büllingen. Along the way, the men encountered an American truck column heading south. An SS soldier in the lead scout car flashed a red flashlight, and the trucks stopped. Again, the Americans surrendered, only to be cut down. "They were unarmed and held their hands in surrender position," explained one of Peiper's men, Siegfried Jaekel. "I shot at them with my pistol for two or three rounds."

National Archives

As the half-tracks approached Büllingen, they captured a company of Americans lining up for breakfast. American engineers then opened fire on the Germans with rifles, machine guns, and grenades. They also fired flares into the air, signaling their battalion that the Germans were coming.

Some of Peiper's tanks left the column to blast aircraft lining an airfield. As Peiper urged his men on, they pushed the Americans through the town, although the GIs, firing from the surrounding buildings into open half-tracks, killed and wounded a number of Germans, including two platoon leaders. One engineer blasted a Mark IV panzer with a bazooka while his comrades cut down the crew bolting from the burning machine.

In the confusing fight, the Germans became disoriented and headed north, not west, out of the town. Farther up the road, an American antitank gun hit a lead Panther tank in the turret and killed its commander. The SS column backed down to Büllingen where an old man wearing a Nazi armband stepped out of his house and showed the Germans where the Americans' supply dumps were. The SS tankers put some 200 captured Americans to work refueling their tanks with American gas before sending them to the rear.

Refueled, the column quickly headed west, passing unhindered through the villages of Domane, Shoppen, Odenvaal, and Thirimont. When the vehicles and tanks reached a crossroads at Baugnez, they ran into another column of American trucks, this time from the 285th Field Artillery Observation Battalion. Panther tanks opened fire. Trucks veered into drainage ditches along the road, others simply hit the brakes. The Germans quickly gathered the men, again, with their hands above their heads, and led them to a field north of the intersection.

As Peiper rolled by in a half-track, he called out to the surrendering Americans:

"It's a long way to Tipperary, boys," the title of a popular British World War I song. He then asked an American if he could drive and, receiving a negative response, removed the man's ammunition bandolier, telling him, "You won't be needing this anymore."

Several of the SS dismounted to pilfer food from the trucks or round up prisoners. Peiper spotted them and shouted, "Goddamit! What kind of business is it to stop here for hours?" Then he scornfully told a tank commander, "The little that has to be done here, the men in the rear will do!" and pushed on.

About 130 Americans stood in the field, wondering their fate. When an SS engineer asked Major Werner Pötschke, the battalion commander, what to do with the prisoners, he told him, "Shoot them."

Lieutenant Lloyd Iams, an American who spoke German, overheard the conversation and told Staff Sergeant Henry Zach, "They're going to kill us." Before they could react, SS Lieutenant Erich Rumpf shot into the prisoners with a P-38 revolver and was immediately joined by men in their half-tracks and tanks. Fire swept the field. The Americans collapsed, some screaming or moaning in pain, others praying out loud.

After a few minutes of fire, SS men walked among the bleeding Americans, kicking them to check for signs of life. "Hey Joe!" they would call out. Anyone who reacted was subsequently shot in the head.

"A single American was standing up straight," recalled Panther tanker Georg Fleps. "I pointed my pistol at him and fired. Watching my shots, I saw him fall." The soldier was probably Sergeant Don Geisler who stood up after the initial fire. After collapsing, he staggered to his feet a third time until machine-gun fire finally killed him.

The Germans kicked Lieutenant Iams, and he stood up, only to be shot in the head, falling backward onto the ground. "I'll give that lieutenant credit," Zach later said. "He never begged or whimpered or anything." Another American, Kenny Kingston, pleaded in vain to a German, "Please don't shoot me!" before he received

ABOVE: German soldiers search an abandoned American camp for food and fuel. One soldier has already found some Jerrycans. During Peiper's attack, his men had to rely on captured stocks of fuel and supplies to sustain their drive. BELOW: While Peiper's force crossed through Stavelot, the Americans retook it, denying Peiper any reinforcement. Heavy fighting in Stavelot left the town burning and partially destroyed.

Both: National Archives

a fatal bullet. Amazingly, Kingston survived the ordeal.

The Germans then removed from the dead their rings and watches. One German tanker, Hubert Huber, kicked and shot Americans until he came to a wounded man and ordered him to take off his overshoes. Once the American complied, Huber shot him in the head. The massacre took less than 15 minutes.

The Germans mounted up and continued west. Back on the field, passing tanks continued to shoot the Americans. Some had survived by either holding their breath so the Germans wouldn't see mist exiting their mouths or staying quiet while the Germans kicked them. Private James Mattera, who had escaped injury, called out, "Let's go!" and got to his feet. Others followed and staggered away, some carrying others. The Germans rolling

by fired at the fleeing Americans and even set a small café afire where some of the Americans were hidden, burning to death the Americans and the woman who owned the café.

Altogether, 84 Americans died at Baugnez while 57 survived. A handful made it north to the town of Malmedy, where they reported what had happened. The incident became widely known in the U.S. Army as the Malmedy Massacre, and word of it spread like wildfire. Any captured SS troops stood little chance reaching an Allied prisoner-of-war camp.

Peiper's men next entered Ligneuville, where they hoped to capture an American brigade commander, but he had slipped out. Americans, however, were still in the area. A Mark IV headed toward a bridge, only to be blasted from behind by an American Sherman tank. American riflemen then opened fire from nearby houses as the tankers escaped their burning vehicle. Another tank round destroyed a German half-track.

Peiper jumped from his own half-track with a Panzerfaust antitank weapon, ran into a house, and was preparing to fire when an artillery-mounted half-track knocked out the Sherman. The Germans soon crossed the bridge and headed to Stavelot.

National Archives

U.S. soldiers surrendering. In a field near Malmédy, troops under Peiper's command committed one of the most infamous battlefield atrocities of the war.

As the sun set, Peiper's column snaked along a narrow road, with a steep hill to the right and a deep slope to the left. As the lead tank crept around a tight corner, someone shouted out, "Halt!" The tanks opened up. The lone American who challenged them fired back with his rifle.

The few Americans defending the curve—a company of engineers—had placed mines along the road and had prepared the bridge ahead for demolition. Peiper, thinking he was up against a strong enemy, decided to rest for the night and attack Stavelot in the morning (he would later claim he was up against American armor that attacked him, but only a handful of engineers stood in his way). He had traveled 36 miles. He was not even halfway to the Meuse.

Before dawn the next morning, December 18, Peiper's tanks started forward. American tanks and tank destroyers had rushed to the town overnight to challenge him. As the sky turned from black to gray, an American antitank gun protecting a narrow stone bridge over the Ambleve River hit the lead Panther tank. "The gas pedal is stuck. We're hit!" shouted the driver to the tank commander, who ordered the gunner to take out the American gun. "Open fire!" The first round missed, but the second shattered the antitank gun, showering pieces onto the German tank. It then rolled across the bridge.

While the lead tank slugged it out on the bridge, two American M-10 tank destroyers blasted the tanks lined up behind it. "The Americans blanketed us with fire from a variety of calibers," recalled one SS man. Slowly, the German tankers pushed the Americans back into the town. Just the sight of King Tiger tanks demoralized the Americans, who knew they possessed nothing to stop the behemoths. "It had cost us several panzers and wounded," reported one German, "but the bridge over the Ambleve was open."

Even though the Americans continued to fight in Stavelot, Peiper's tankers burst west, headed to Trois Ponts, a town where three bridges crossed the connecting Salm and Ambleve Rivers (hence the town's name). To reach it, Peiper sent his main force west to cross the Ambleve and a smaller force of Mark IV tanks south to cross the Salm.

As the main force approached two railway underpasses outside Trois Ponts, an American antitank gun fired at the lead panzer, grazing it. The German commander fired back, aiming his cannon by looking down its barrel. "One high-explosive shell, and there was no more resistance," he reported. He did not see the wounded American engineer retreating into the town.

The engineer warned his fellow engineers about the approaching column, and they promptly blew the Ambleve bridge before pulling back. The Germans, furious about being denied their bridge, fired on several civilians. One SS soldier chased down a teenage boy and executed him.

Denied the fast route west, Peiper's men had no choice but to turn north, but that road was blocked by a stack of mines. The lead tank fired a round at the mines. "The pile of mines blew into the air with an extraordinary explosion," said the commander. "We continued the advance."

The American engineers at the Salm River bridge probably heard the action but remained at their bridge. When Peiper's southern force approached, the engineers fired on the tanks with bazookas, but they bounced off the Mark IVs' hulls.

The engineers pulled back behind the bridge. As the tanks roared up to the bridge, the engineers blew it up. The column, low on fuel and blocked by the downed bridge, would go no farther. "Back to the starting point and follow the lead," Peiper radioed the unit commander. The men had to transfer the fuel from half their tanks to drive the others back.

The main column headed north toward La Glieze, then turned southwest toward Cheneux. As the column raced west, the skies cleared, and a flight of 16 P-47 American Thunderbolt fighter aircraft dove on the column. Men hurried into and under their tanks while the antiaircraft gunners returned fire. Aircraft strafed and bombed the column.

"The men on the two guns ignored the sweat on their faces and anxiety in their throats as they were continuously attacked by the aircraft," recalled one of the flak gunners. The fighter planes knocked out three Panthers and five half-tracks, along with accounting for a number of dead and wounded, while the gunners managed to down only one Thunderbolt. The attack

National Archives

ABOVE: Tanks of the U.S. 740th Tank Battalion negotiate a snowy roadway during the Battle of the Bulge. The 740th led a valiant defense of the town of Stoumont and slowed the advance of Kampfgruppe Peiper during a critical phase of the Ardennes offensive. OPPOSITE: Kampgruppen Peiper penetrated 50 miles behind the American lines in Belgium, a little more than half the 80 miles needed to reach the Meuse River. Counterattacks in places like Stavelot and aggressive fighting by the Americans in front of the Kampgruppen forced Peiper to retreat after four days of advancing.

lasted more than an hour.

As the fighter planes flew away, the column took off again, the men hoping to cross the Lienne River and reach Werbomont. As the tanks approached the bridge in the gathering darkness, around 4:45 PM, the lead Tiger II gunner spotted American engineers ahead and fired a round from his 88mm cannon. The Americans scattered, leaving their detonator behind.

One engineer, realizing the mishap, ran back and grabbed it. At his officer's signal, he set off 2,500 pounds of TNT packed under the bridge. An explosion boomed across the hills. Bits of concrete and steel flew in every direction. The bridge was gone.

"Those damn engineers!" Peiper shouted. "Those damn engineers!" As he cursed, more Tiger IIs spread out and brought the Americans under fire. A firefight ensued, and Peiper lost two half-tracks and a number of men, but it meant nothing. He had lost the most direct path to the Meuse River. He was 26 miles short of his goal.

Not all was lost. Peiper had sent a company of six half-tracks north to reconnoiter another bridge to see if it could hold tanks. The half-tracks roared across the narrow bridge (which was barely wide enough to handle them) and turned south, paralleling the river's west bank. Suddenly, one of the half-tracks hit a mine and flipped completely over.

As the hour approached midnight, the other half-tracks raced south, firing into houses, to link up with Peiper. As they approached the left turn that would put them at Peiper's bridge, the lead half-track driver flicked his light to spot the turn. Two American tank destroyers, hidden in the dark, saw the light and immediately opened fire. One blasted three rounds into the lead half-track. The resulting explosion lit up the whole area.

American infantry fired at the column from homes and trenches. One of the half-tracks tried to turn around but succumbed to American fire; the Germans abandoned the third. The last two managed to turn around, but as they fled, American Pfc. Mason Armstrong fired bazooka rounds at them from a second-story window, knocking both out.

The surviving Germans worked their way back from where they had come, and their commander reported to Peiper that the northern bridge could not support tanks. With nowhere else to go, Peiper turned back toward La Gleize. Not all his tanks made it. One stalled from mechanical problems.

Meanwhile, problems were growing to the east. The Americans counterattacked at Stavelot, capturing the northern half of the city and keeping relief forces from reaching Peiper. In addition, American Maj. Gen. James Gavin and elements of his 82nd Airborne Division had reached the bridge where the half-tracks had crossed. American forces were building to eject Peiper from Belgium.

Since advancing southwest had failed, Peiper would now head northwest toward Liège through the town of Stoumont, which was only two miles away. The tanks started off in a heavy fog around 7 AM, overrunning antitank guns set up on the eastern edge of Stoumont. Other antitank guns in the town and tanks hidden in the woods opened fire at point-blank range. The Germans ground to a halt amid the heavy fire. Major Werner Poetchke urged his tankers forward, but the fire was too intense.

The Americans managed to jam a Panther tank's turret. "I was trying to aim our gun

at the antitank gun, despite the jamming," explained the tank's gunner. "We were hit in the engine compartment by an antitank gun shell from the left." As the tank began to burn, the crew bailed out.

German tanks began to back up until Poetchke jumped out of his tank, armed with a Panzerfaust, and threatened to kill any man who retreated. The tanks pushed forward as rounds ricocheted off their sloping armor. Somehow, they missed the landmines the Americans had laid out.

After a two-hour battle, the Americans pulled back through Stoumont. The Germans rounded up prisoners, dragging Americans from their hiding places. When a civilian teacher, worried about the fate of the Americans, asked a German officer for a doctor to treat a wounded American, the German snapped, "All the people around here are terrorists!" Peiper later entered the town, and as he checked the condition of the American antitank guns, an artillery barrage crashed around him. He jumped into the back of a house. When it was safe, he proceeded in a jeep through the rest of the town.

The Americans retreated west through the town of Targnon and the Stoumont railway station. As they pulled back, the crew of an antiaircraft gun, acting as a rear guard, leveled their barrel and blasted a pursuing half-track and Panther tank. The Germans returned fire, knocking out the gun. German infantry and paratroopers quickly dismounted and captured the station.

Then the Americans counterattacked. Out of the late afternoon fog, Sherman tanks rolled east. At a curve in the road, the lead Sherman fired on a Panther only 200 yards away. The round hit just below the gun base and ricocheted down into the tank. It started to burn. The American tank advanced and fired another round, this time at the followup tank. The closely fired round penetrated the Panther's sloping armor, stopping it.

When the American tanker fired at the third Panther, his gun jammed. The Panther fired several rounds but failed to knock out the Sherman. Instead, an M-36 tank destroyer, immediately behind the Sherman, fired off a 90mm round that penetrated the Panther's turret. Subsequent rounds set the German tank ablaze.

The knocked-out tanks blocked the road, stopping Peiper's reinforced regiment in its tracks. The spearhead of Hitler's attack west had come to a violent end. Peiper had traversed 50 miles of the 80 he needed to reach the Meuse.

Peiper now focused on keeping his tanks and men in La Gleize alive and sustained. His tanks were just about out of fuel, and his men had barely eaten or slept in days. They were, much like his offensive, exhausted. He attacked again, this time eastward, hoping to reach Stavelot for resupply, but American outposts between Stavelot and La Gleize stopped his men cold.

Stavelot was no safe haven, either. The Americans continued to fight for the town, pummeling Germans on the southern bank of the Ambleve with tanks and artillery. One German officer described the scene: "A knocked out Panther, numerous burning vehicles, a heavy 9.2cm American antitank gun, noise, smoke, and dead comrades."

The Americans fought savagely after they discovered more than 130 civilians, half of whom were women and children, sprawled dead in the streets. Officers had to restrain their men from killing surrendering SS soldiers.

The Germans repeatedly tried to capture the city's main bridge, only to be repulsed. "We were immediately barraged with heavy antitank and mortar fire, and infantry fire as well," one German soldier reported. Later that day, the Americans blew up the bridge, preventing the Ger-

mans from pushing north.

Peiper spent the next four days holding out in La Gleize. On December 20, the Americans recaptured Targnon, east of Stoumont Station, but failed to retake Stoumont. Peiper's men repeatedly counterattacked but only managed to push the Americans back about 100 yards. Some of the heaviest fighting occurred for two days around a sanatorium west of the town. Amazingly, none of the 260 locals who had taken refuge in the sanatorium's basement were killed.

The next day, Peiper learned that German forces in Stavelot were trying to push west to relieve him. Deciding to hold on until relieved, he pulled his tanks out of Stoumont. He would make La Gleize a fortress until his comrades reached him.

By December 22, the Americans closed in on Peiper from the north, east, and west. The Germans referred to La Gleize as Der Kessel (the cauldron). American numeric superiority in tanks and artillery suppressed Peiper's heavy tanks. Phosphorus rounds crashed into the town's church steeple and set the structure on fire. One Tiger II absorbed so many Sherman tank rounds the entire crew became concussed. One shot from another Sherman knocked the cannon off a Tiger II, rendering it useless. It would never leave La Gleize. (Its battered hull remains outside a museum in the town.) Most of the other tanks ran out of fuel while repulsing the attacks.

Through it all, Peiper remained calm, issuing orders and questioning his commanders as they reported to him. When he learned of the death of a friend, his lips pursed and fists tightened, but then he returned to the business at hand. "That was Peiper," one of his men explained, "the man who gave even the last of his men so much support and a strong sense of security."

That night, German Ju-52 transport planes flew over and dropped supplies. Unfortunately, they ended up in American lines or in no-man's-land. To make matters worse, Peiper later learned there would be no rescue attempt for his survivors.

In the late afternoon of the next day, as the Americans tightened their vise on La

ABOVE: Peiper's drive came to a screeching halt outside of Stoumont, where an American tank and a tank destroyer knocked out two Panther tanks, blocking the road from any other advancing German armor. Further American counterattacks forced Peiper to circle his tanks around the town of Le Gleize until finally deciding to retreat. BELOW: The Americans and Germans battled for possession of the St. Edouard's Sanitorium, a mile west of Stoumont. About 260 locals hid in the sanitorium's cellar while the Germans above exchanged fire with the Americans. Amazingly, none of the civilians were killed. OPPOSITE: American infantrymen advance past a knocked-out German Tiger II tank. The final stages of the battle turned La Gleize into a tank graveyard. By halting Peiper's drive, the Americans crushed the goal of Hitler's campaign.

National Archives

Gleize, Colonel Mohnke finally gave Peiper permission to break out; American prisoners and his own wounded would be left behind. His vehicles—heavy and medium tanks and half-tracks—long out of fuel, would be torched. The men would escape on foot in the only direction still open: southeast.

A few hours into December 24, Germans quietly spoke the password to one another: "Merry Christmas." They dropped grenades into their vehicles or set timed charges in the tanks. Peiper ordered that the charges be staggered to give the impression of firing.

The Germans plucked two farmers to act as guides. Then, some 800 men silently headed south over frozen roads and into the woods. "Our knees trembled to the point of near collapse," recalled one German, "but we had to hold on." He eventually turned around to look at La Gleize. "We saw only a burning tomb."

Peiper worked his way back and forth along the column offering encouragement to his men. By 5 AM, the men could hear the charges going off. "Inside 30 minutes the entire area formerly occupied by Colonel Peiper's command was a sea of fiercely burning vehicles," reported American Major Hal McGown, a POW with Peiper's retreat.

For the entire day, they climbed hills and forded streams. As evening approached, they clashed with an American patrol near Trois Ponts but managed to disengage after 20 minutes of fighting. Somewhere along the way, enemy fire had ripped into Peiper's right hand.

Early the next morning, Christmas Day, the men reached the Salm River, but Americans were on guard at all the bridges. The men found a spot shallow enough to cross the 38-yard-wide river. The stronger men rolled rocks into the river for steppingstones and the men formed a chain to get everyone across. In some spots, the men stood in chest-deep freezing water. "As we emerged, all our belongings had frozen stiff," remembered one man.

They then climbed a hill to the town of Wanne, inside German lines. To the men of the 1st SS Panzer Division, Peiper and his men looked like "walking icicles." They were dirty, unshaven, exhausted, and totally whipped. Peiper reported to an aid station. As a doctor treated his right hand, he told him, "We left with 3,000 men from Germany and now we have 717."

He then waved his hand in the direction from which he had come. "You can find the others the whole way along our path." His numbers were a bit off, but he made his point. His troops had taken a beating. A final roll call revealed that 770 men of the 800 men who left La Gleize survived.

Peiper had failed in his mission to reach the Meuse River. He had gone into battle 10 days earlier with 4,800 men, 117 tanks, and numerous other vehicles and heavy weapons. He came out with a fraction of troops and none of his tanks or vehicles. While he had caused near panic in the American chain of command, the men on the ground—engineers, soldiers, tankers, and artillerymen—as well as American fighter aircraft had slowed and then stopped his force cold.

Peiper's men had penetrated farther than any other German unit, but it was all for naught. The Meuse River was never crossed, and Antwerp never came under threat. In stopping Peiper, the Americans had won a decisive battle.

While Peiper's destruction can be measured by the casualties on both sides and the number of tanks and vehicles destroyed, there is no metric to measure the pain and misery inflicted, only anecdotal evidence. Thus is the destruction of war.

In May 1945, long after the campaign, the winter snows melted to reveal 16-year-old Erna Collas's body, the girl from Honsfeld the Germans had picked as a guide. She was discovered in a foxhole near the road to Büllingen with seven bullet holes in her back. The science of the time could not reveal what else Peiper's men had done to her. □

National Archives

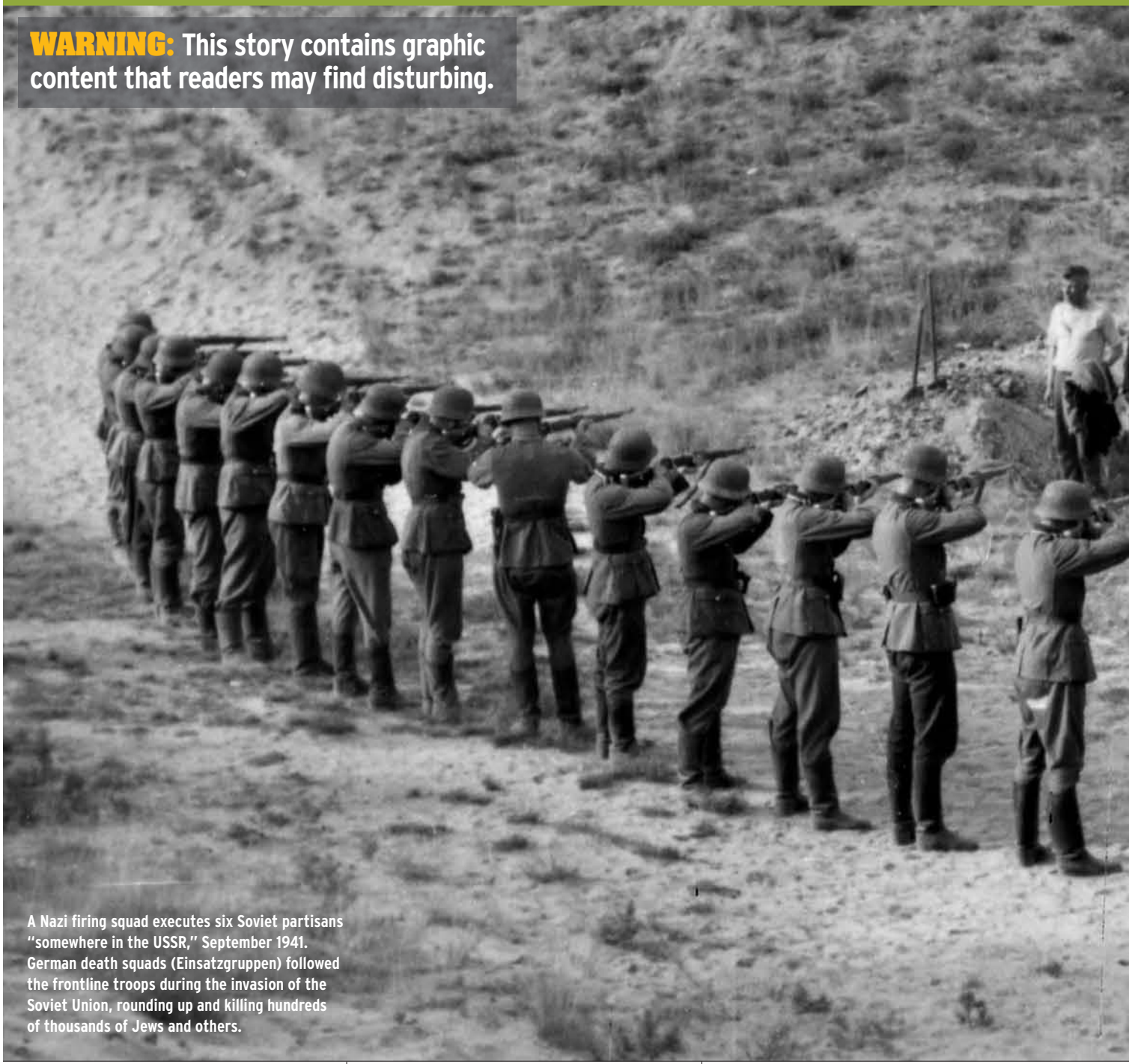
"I must tell you something.... I took part in a mass killing the day before yesterday.

[When we shot the Jews brought by] the first truck, my hand trembled somewhat during the shooting, but one gets used to it. By the tenth truck, I was already aiming steadily and shooting accurately at the many women, children, and babies.... The babies went flying through the air in a big arc and we shot them down as they flew, before they fell into the grave or into the water.... Damn it! I never saw so much blood, [feces], bones, and flesh. Now I can understand the phrase 'drunk with blood.'"

These grotesquely chilling words, written in a letter to his wife in October 1941, were penned by Walter Mattner, an Austrian SS and police lieutenant attached to Einsatzkommando 8 of Einsatzgruppe B. In September 1941, he had arrived in the Byelorussian city of Mogilev, where he took a terrifyingly enthusiastic part in an act of mass murder on October 2-3.

In the space of just a few hours, Mattner and his "blood-drunk" colleagues had slaughtered more than 2,200 men,

WARNING: This story contains graphic content that readers may find disturbing.



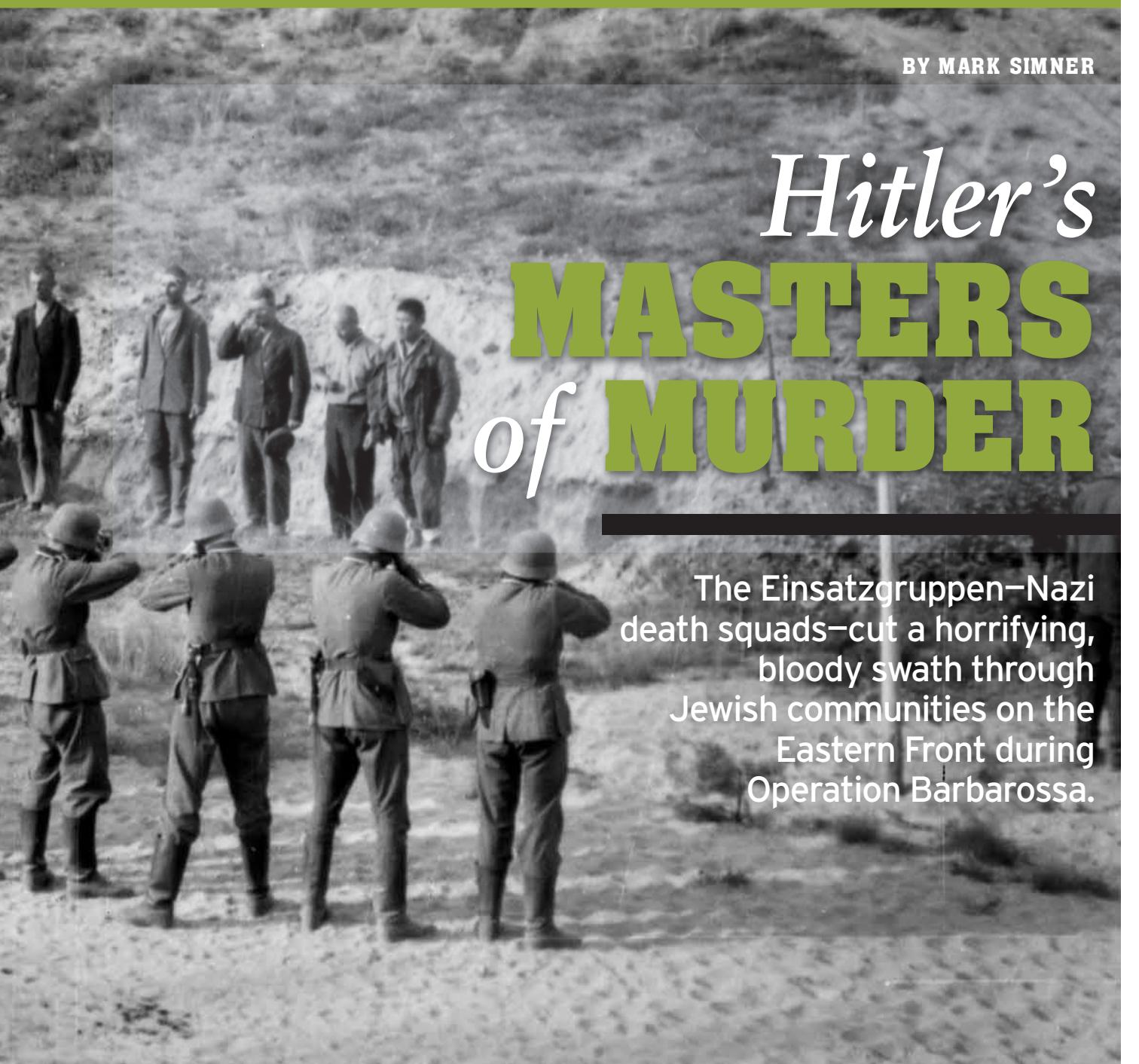
A Nazi firing squad executes six Soviet partisans "somewhere in the USSR," September 1941. German death squads (Einsatzgruppen) followed the frontline troops during the invasion of the Soviet Union, rounding up and killing hundreds of thousands of Jews and others.

Bundesarchiv Bild 101I-212-0221-06; Photo: Thiede

women, and children in cold blood, disposing of their bullet-riddled corpses in a nearby forest. The victims had one thing in common: they were all Jewish and, for this alone, the Nazis had deemed them unworthy of life.

This act was just one example of the many mass killings conducted by the notorious Einsatzgruppen in Eastern Europe during World War II. Although estimates vary, it is believed that these "Special Task Forces" murdered around 1.5 million Jews during their period of operation. Other victims included local intelligentsia, Soviet political commissars, Sinti and Roma, and anyone else the Nazis simply wanted eliminated.

While the extermination camps such as Auschwitz, Treblinka, and Sobibór are better remembered today, some historians argue, with much justification, that even the hell of the gas chambers cannot compete with the sheer cruelty, barbarity, and sadism of the Einsatzgruppen. So what exactly were these highly mobile death squads, what sort of men staffed them, and what evil crimes did they commit?



BY MARK SIMNER

Hitler's MASTERS *of* MURDER

The Einsatzgruppen—Nazi death squads—cut a horrifying, bloody swath through Jewish communities on the Eastern Front during Operation Barbarossa.

Bundesarchiv Bild 146-1968-034-19A; Photo: Unknown

Many histories of the Einsatzgruppen begin with the German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941—codenamed Operation Barbarossa—but its inception, in fact, predates this by several years.

An Einsatzkommando (or operational command) had been formed in early 1938 for operations in Austria following the Anschluss in March. In September of the same year, others, made up from members of the Sicherheitspolizei (Security Police, or SiPo), were established in the Sudetenland in anticipation of an invasion of Czechoslovakia, although the subsequent Munich Agreement rendered military action unnecessary.

Bundesarchiv Bild 146-1994-081-25; Photo: Unknown

ABOVE: A group of Poles is lined up and gunned down by an Einsatzgruppe firing squad (right) on October 20, 1939, during the invasion of Poland. LEFT: Volksdeutscher Selbstschutz (a paramilitary unit of ethnic Germans who had been living in Poland before the war) are trained to carry out their horrific duties.

Nevertheless, the Einsatzgruppen were still tasked with rounding up Czech communists and other political opponents, as well as seizing important government buildings for the Nazi regime.

The first major deployment of the Einsatzgruppen came with the invasion of Poland in September 1939. As German forces unleashed blitzkrieg, or lightning war, upon the Poles, the Einsatzgruppen followed closely behind the fighting men to carry out a decapitation operation.

Their objective was to round up and execute, or otherwise arrest, the Polish intelligentsia—politicians, university professors, teachers, doctors, lawyers, church leaders, and others members of the social elite—to remove the entirety of Poland's leadership and thus reduce potential resistance to German occupation. This plan of systematic mass murder became known as the Intelligenzaktion (Intelligentsia Action).

For operations in Poland in 1939, a total of seven Einsatzgruppen were deployed, numbered I to VII, each consisting of up to 500 men recruited from the SS, the Sicherheitsdienst (SD), the police, and the Gestapo. Each Einsatzgruppe was divided into five Einsatzkommandos of around 100 men each.

Overall command of the Einsatzgruppen was given to SS-Obergruppenführer Karl Rudolf Werner Best, a trained lawyer and Gestapo chief who had notoriously established a registry of all Jews in Germany before the outbreak of the war. Best initially commanded 2,700 men, but the Einsatzgruppen would grow to 4,250 during the campaign in Poland—a small but deadly band of vicious murderers.

In readiness for the Intelligenzaktion, the Nazis had drawn up a detailed list of an incredible 61,000 people they wanted eliminated. This list was called the Sonderfahndungsbuch Polen (Special Prosecution Book-Poland), and it was compiled by the Zentralstelle IIP Polen (Central Unit IIP-Poland), a special department within the Gestapo, prior to the invasion of the country.

On August 22, 1939, mere days before the outbreak of war, Adolf Hitler made a speech in which he made his views about the coming campaign clear: "Kill without pity or mercy all men, women, and children of Polish descent or language. Only in this way can we obtain the living space [Lebensraum] we need." Thus was the level of Nazi organization and preparation for the mass murder of tens of thousands of Poles before World War II in Europe had even begun.

The Einsatzgruppen ruthlessly carried out their orders from the outset. Within the first few months of the war, they either killed or sent to concentration camps to die virtually all the 61,000 on the Zentralstelle list. In addition, they murdered thousands of Romani and Sinti, mentally ill patients, and Jews, although the method for the systematic mass slaughter of the latter had not yet been determined.

In this bloody task, the Einsatzgruppen benefitted from the eager assistance of the Volksdeutscher Selbstschutz, a paramilitary unit staffed by ethnic Germans who had been living in Poland before the war. The killings were carried out by shooting, the bodies of the unfortunate victims being unsympathetically dumped into mass graves dug in forests and other remote areas.

One example of these mass murders was the operation named Intelligenzaktion Pommern, in which an estimated 23,000 Poles in the Województwo Pomorskie (Pomeranian Voivodeship, corresponding to a province in many other countries) were killed.

Here, Einsatzkommando 16, under the command of Gestapo officer Rudolf Tröger, and Regiment 6 of the SS-Wachsturmbann Eimann, led by SS-Sturmbannführer Kurt Eimann, perpetrated several massacres at Piasnica and Bydgoszcz (the Valley of Death). The killings in Piasnica are remembered as the first large-scale Nazi atrocity committed in Poland, where an estimated 10,000 to 12,000 Polish civilians are believed to have been murdered in 1939-1940.

It is, however, the actions of the Einsatzgruppen following the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941 for which they are most chillingly remembered.

This Vernichtungskrieg (war of annihilation) with the Soviets would be one of the most bitter military campaigns in history, during which some of World War II's largest battles and worst atrocities took place, and the Einsatzgruppen would come to play a significant part in the resulting enormous death toll.

In the spring of 1941, several thousand men from the SS, police, and security services received orders to attend a police academy at Pretzsch, a small German town about 50 miles southwest of Berlin. None had been told exactly what their assignment would be, but many of them had served in the campaign in Poland and some could speak Russian. Most, therefore, would have had at least an idea why they were going there.

It is common today for us to think of criminals as unintelligent or war criminals as uneducated thugs. Many of those assembled at Pretzsch, however, were quite the opposite. Among them were lawyers and physicians, and a few even held doctorates in other fields. They were to form the backbone of a new Einsatzgruppe operation, one that would be bigger, deadlier, and more devastating than anything that came before.

The training at Pretzsch lasted for only three weeks, after which the men were officially told they would be operating in the Soviet Union. This time, four Einsatzgruppen would work behind the invading German forces, labeled Einsatzgruppe A to Einsatzgruppe D.

Einsatzgruppe A would be commanded by the 40-year-old SS-Brigadeführer Dr. Franz Walter Stahlecker; Einsatzgruppe B would be led by 46-year-old SS-Brigadeführer Arthur Nebe; Einsatzgruppe C under 49-year-old SS-Gruppenführer Dr. Otto Rasch; and Einsatzgruppe D under 34-year-old SS-Gruppenführer Professor Otto Ohlendorf. As before, each Einsatzgruppe would be subdivided into smaller units, including 16 Einsatzkommandos or Sonderkommandos.

Sonderkommando 12b of Einsatzgruppe D kills Jewish women and children in a pit, September 14, 1941, at Dubossary, Moldova.

Einsatzgruppe A was to be attached to Army Group North for operations in the Baltic States of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. Einsatzgruppe B was to follow Army Group Center to operate in Byelorussia. Einsatzgruppe C likewise would follow Army Group South into northern and central Ukraine. Finally, Einsatzgruppe D would attach itself to the Eleventh Army to carry out its murderous work in Bessarabia, southern Ukraine, the Crimea, and the Caucasus.

The size of each Einsatzgruppe varied, the largest, Einsatzgruppe A, being almost 1,000 strong, while the smallest, Einsatzgruppe D, consisted of a mere 500 men. The recruitment of local auxiliaries, though, would later greatly boost numbers and thus wield even greater killing power.

Overall supervision of the Einsatzgruppen rested with SS-Gruppenführer Reinhard Heydrich, director of the Reich Main Security Office (RSHA), who in turn reported to Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler.

To prevent friction between the Einsatzgruppen and the Wehrmacht (the German armed forces), Hitler had personally edited subparagraph B of the "Guidelines in Special Spheres re: Directive No. 21 (Operation Barbarossa)" on March 13, 1941, so that it now stated: "In the operations area of the Army, the Reichsführer-SS has been given special tasks on the orders of the Führer, in order to prepare the political administration. These tasks arise from the forthcoming final struggle of two opposing political systems. Within the framework of these tasks, the Reichsführer-SS acts independently and on his own responsibility."

The senior officers of the Wehrmacht would have been under no illusion as to Hitler's intentions toward the Jewish population of the Soviet Union. The killing of Jews and others was talked about using euphemisms, such as "special tasks" and "executive measures," but the fact that the

Bundesarchiv Bild 146-1993-023-31; Photo: Unknown

ABOVE: Murderers' Row (L to R): Arthur Nebe, head of Einsatzgruppe B; Nazi scholar Dr. Helmut de Boor; Werner Best, commander of all Einsatzgruppen forces. BELOW: Encouraged by German soldiers, pipe-wielding Lithuanian criminals attack Jews in Kaunas, Lithuania, as civilians and soldiers look on.

Führer had so often talked about the destruction of Judeo-Bolshevism (the Nazis believed there was a complete identity between communism and the alleged Jewish "world conspiracy") in his speeches left little room for doubt.

While some officers and men of the Wehrmacht objected to the actions of the Einsatzgruppen during Barbarossa, many others would become complicit in the murders.

The invasion of the USSR began on June 22, 1941. As the juggernaut of the Wehrmacht rolled eastward, the Einsatzgruppen once again followed in its wake. Their targets were many, including Soviet political commissars, Jewish males aged 15 to 45, and any Soviet prisoners of war who were found to be Jewish.

Others, such as saboteurs and troublemakers, were also to be eliminated at the discretion of individual Einsatzgruppe commanders. It was also expected that local populations were likely to carry out spontaneous pogroms (violence against the Jews and their property), and so orders were given for these not to be interfered with—rather, they were to be secretly encouraged.

On June 23, the German Army occupied Kaunas in central Lithuania. Just behind it came an advance unit of Einsatzgruppe A, which immediately began to organize "spontaneous" pogroms against the Jews, who constituted 35,000 of the city's 120,000 citizens.

Several days later, a German NCO became aware that a large gathering of local Lithuanians had appeared in the center of Kaunas. "I was informed by a driver in my unit that Jews were being beaten to death in a nearby square…. Upon hearing this, I went to the said square … [and] saw civilians, some in shirtsleeves … beating other civilians to death with iron bars."

The civilians being beaten to death with iron bars were in fact Jews. The NCO continued: "When I reached the square, there were about 15 to 20 bodies lying there…. I saw Lithuanians take hold of these bodies by their hands and legs and drag them away. Afterwards, another group [of Jews] was herded and pushed onto the square, and without further ado, beaten to death."

Unbeknownst to the German NCO, the killers were violent Lithuanian criminals whom the SS had earlier released from the local prison to make the pogrom look spontaneous. This was just one of many early examples of the Einsatzgruppen secretly inciting local populations to commit extreme acts of violence against local Jews.

The commander of Einsatzgruppe A, Franz Stahlecker, recruited 600 Lithuanian irregulars under the collaborator Algirdas Klimaitis to form an auxiliary police unit, and a further 200 under the command of a Dr. Zigonys. On June 25, these auxiliary policemen set fire to synagogues and houses occupied by Jews.

They then rounded up some 1,500 Jews and murdered all of them, and on succeeding nights, savagely slaughtered a further 2,300. The trigger-happy Lithuanians later attempted to justify the murders by claiming that the Jews had opened fire on German troops from house windows. These claims were, of course, a complete fabrication.

When Einsatzgruppe A reached Latvia's capital Riga on July 1, Stahlecker similarly established a Sonderkommando made up of 300 Latvian auxiliary policemen under the

command of Viktors Arajs. This Arajs Kommando, as it became known, was again tasked with setting up a spontaneous pogrom. As in Kaunas, violence erupted against the city's Jewish population and those living in the surrounding area.

Throughout the summer and fall of 1941, Arajs embarked upon an orgy of mass killing of Jews. Twice a week, his Sonderkommando went to work, rounding up Jews and communists and taking them to the Bikernieki Forest, some four miles from Riga. Here, pits had been dug to hold the bodies of the victims after being shot. The killings were conducted in the darkness, the auxiliaries typically leaving their homes at 1 AM and commencing their murderous activities several hours later.

By breakfast time, their latest victims would be dead, although when killing larger numbers, they would work into the early afternoon. To keep his men going through their difficult work, Arajs would ensure they received copious amounts of schnapps and food.

In late July 1941, Arajs stepped up his murderous activities when he commandeered Riga's public buses. Filling these buses with his men, Arajs would drive out to the outlying villages, where they rounded up Jews and shot them. Village after village would be declared *Judenfrei* (free of Jews).

But it was not just Jews Arajs murdered while touring the countryside in his buses: the mentally ill also became victims of his unrestrained bloodlust.

To illustrate the horrific work of Stahlecker's Einsatzgruppe A, the following is a report he wrote in 1941 before his work was even complete: "The systematic mopping-up of eastern territories embraced, in accordance with the basic orders, the complete removal, if possible, of Jewry. This goal has been substantially attained—with the exception of White Russia—as a result of the execution of 229,052 up to the present time. The remainder still left in the Baltic provinces is urgently required as labor, and is housed in ghettoes."

Sonderkommando 1a, under the leadership of SS-Sturmbannführer Martin Sandberger, conducted similar operations in Estonia following the arrival of German combat troops in July and August 1941. Over half of Estonia's Jews, who numbered around 4,500 before the war, had fled the country prior to the arrival of the Wehrmacht.

Nevertheless, Sandberger lost no time recruiting local militias to assist in the destruction of those who remained. By mid-October 1941, he reported to his superiors that "all male Jews over 16, with the exception of the appointed Jewish elders, were executed by the Estonian self-defence units under supervision of the Sonderkommando."

At the same time as Stahlecker was ruthlessly murdering thousands in the Baltic States, SS-Brigadeführer Arthur Nebe's Einsatzguppe B was likewise murdering its way through Byelorussia (modern-day Belarus). Upon the commencement of Operation Barbarossa, the Jewish population of the country was considerable, with an estimated 670,000 residing in the western side of the republic and 405,000 in the eastern side. Upon the commencement of Operation Barbarossa, the Jewish population of the country was considerable, with an estimated 800,000 residing in the republic.

Sonderkommando 7a arrived in Minsk on July 4, 1941, and Nebe instructed the unit to carry out a "reprisal action" against Jews in the city on the pretext that they had set fire to their homes after being told to leave to make them available to other Byelorussians.

According to Walter Blume, the Sonderkommando's commanding officer, "Ten men at a time would be brought to the execution place.... There was [an anti]tank ditch. The 10 men were put at that ditch and in a military manner were shot by rifles by the execution command, which included forty men. Three men always shot at a victim...." Between 50 and 60 Jews were murdered during the so-called reprisal.

Bundesarchiv B 162 Bild-07620; Photo: Unknown

Otto Ohlendorf's Einsatzgruppe D rounds up a group of middle-class Jews in Simferopol, Crimea, before executing them. More than 22,000 locals were killed during the German occupation.

Blume's unit moved on to Vitebsk, where Nebe again demanded the Jews be executed, and several days later the killings were duly carried out. Again, the victims were killed 10 at a time by shooting, their bodies falling into a pit where they were unceremoniously buried; around 80 Jewish men were killed there. There would, of course, be many similar acts of murder committed by Sonderkommando 7a and the others of Einsatzgruppe B in Byelorussia.

As in the Baltic States, Nebe recruited local men to carry out the killings under the supervision of his German units. On July 7,

1941, the Bielaruskaja Dapamoznaja Palicyja (Byelorussian Auxiliary Police) was established and became involved in the so-called "pacification actions" conducted in Byelorussia. These actions included the rounding up of Jews in Homel, Mozyrz, Kalinkowicze, and Korma, where the Germans found their assistance particularly helpful due to the fact they knew many of the local Jews on sight.

The Byelorussian Auxiliary Police were also deployed in guarding the Jewish ghettoes in Byelorussia, and when the killings began, they would escort the Jews to the killing sites. These mass executions took place from September to November 1941. According to an Einsatzgruppe B report, a total of 45,467 killings had been performed in Byelorussia by mid-November.

As the killing progressed, Nebe and his Einsatzgruppe B became unable to cope with the sheer number of Jews they were expected to execute. According to a report sent to Berlin in November 1941, "It is already at this time evident that this [the shooting] cannot be a possible solution of the Jewish problem.

"Although we succeeded, in particular in smaller towns and in villages … it is nevertheless observed repeatedly in larger cities that after such an execution all Jews have indeed disappeared, but when after a certain period of time a Kommando returns again, the number of Jews still found in the city always surpasses considerably the number of the executed Jews."

Nevertheless, the mass killings by shooting continued throughout the remainder of 1941 and into 1942.

In late July 1941, the Germans had ordered the establishment of a ghetto in Minsk into which Jews from Slutsk, Dzerzhinsk, Cherven, Uzda, and other local villages were forced. A Judenrat (Jewish council) was set up, which had the responsibility of registering the entire local population of Jews and providing able-bodied men for labor.

For many, though, their time in the ghetto would be short, for on November 7, 1941, Einsatzgruppe B conducted an action to clear out large numbers of Jews

Bundesarchiv Bild 101I-138-1084-24; Photo: Rudolf Kessler

ABOVE: A German soldier tells a fearful crowd of civilians in Mogilev, Belorussia, that they will be relocated to a ghetto, July 1941. Einsatzgruppe D wiped out nearly all the Jews in Mogilev. RIGHT: Two German soldiers, probably looking for valuables, pick through the corpses of nearly 34,000 Jews killed at Babi Yar, a ravine outside Kiev, in September 1941.

to make room for others being transported to the ghetto from Germany.

Some 6,624 Jews were rounded up and taken by trucks to a former NKVD warehouse in the village of Tuchinka, where they were all murdered between 7 and 11 AM by Sonderkommando 1b of Einsatzgruppe A. On July 20, 1942, another 5,000 were likewise shot at Tuchinka.

As already seen in Walter Mattner's chilling letter to his wife, the Jews of Mogilev would also suffer the murderous wrath of Nebe's men. The Germans occupied on July 26, 1941, after which they almost immediately registered all 6,437 Jews living in the city (the number had originally been higher but 2,000 Jews are thought to have perished during the city's defense).

In mid-August, all of Mogilev's Jews were ordered into a ghetto near the Jewish cemetery, but it proved too small, so a second ghetto was established in September on the opposite bank of the Dubrovenka River.

In September, Einsatzkommando 8 arrived in Mogilev, and on October 2-3, Police Battalion 322 of the Ordnungspolizei (ORPO), commanded by SS officer Erich von dem Bach-Zelewski, moved into the new ghetto and carried out an action.

According to the unit's war diary, "On October 2 … at 15:30, the 9th Company … together with HQ staff of the Higher SS and Police Leader 'Center' and the Ukrainian auxiliary police, carried out an action in the ghetto in Mogilev…. Sixty-five were shot trying to escape … [on] October 3 ... Companies 7 and 9 ... executed 2,208 male and female Jews in a forest outside of Mogilev."

Two weeks later, the same unit carried out several further operations. Again, according to their own report, "On October 19, 1941, a large-scale operation against the Jews was carried out in Mogilev with the aid of the Police Regiment 'Center.' Three thousand seven hundred twenty six Jews of both sexes and all ages were liquidated by this action.... On October 23, 1941, to prevent further acts of sabotage and to combat the partisans, a further number of Jews from Mogilev and surrounding area, 239 of both sexes, were liquidated."

Very few Jews survived the executions, but one who narrowly escaped death at

Mogilev in October 1941 was a 14-year-old girl named Ida Arman: "They forced the people, mainly the women, to undress. The Gestapo men hit the naked women on their backsides with whips and laughed…. I started to cry, 'Mother, they will shoot us! Mother, I don't want to die!' When they took us to the pits, it was crystal clear where they had taken us and why.

"Mother whispered in my ear, 'Tell them you are not Jewish, that you're Russian, and got into this truck by accident.' She approached the SS men and started to explain: 'This girl got into the truck by accident. She was living in our apartment and ended up in the ghetto by accident. She is not my daughter.'

"They put me aside. Mother tried to also save my little brother. My sister looked Jewish but my brother didn't. Mother said no one knew whose son he was. The translator said to him, 'Drop your pants.' They pulled down his pants and started to laugh loudly. Like all Jewish males, my little brother was circumcised.... As for me, they threw me into a truck, took me back to Mogilev.

Units of SS-Gruppenführer Dr. Otto Rasch's Einsatzgruppe C swept into northern and central Ukraine and almost immediately began rounding up Jews. In the middle of July, it entered Zhitomir, a town in the western part of Ukraine that had suffered immensely in the fighting unleashed by Barbarossa.

By the time the Germans entered the town, its population had already been reduced by more than half to around 40,000, 5,000 of which were Jewish. Sonderkommando 4a, under the command of Paul Blobel, spent several weeks executing communists, Jews, and those accused of being Soviet informants in and around the city. By the end of the month, the commando had murdered 2,531 people.

On August 7, 1941, Blobel had organized the public hanging of Wolf Kieper and Moshe Kagen, both Soviet judges who were Jewish, on the charge of murdering ethnic Germans. As part of this, 402 Jews were brought to the town square and ordered to watch the executions.

A large group of non-Jewish locals also attended, whom the Germans asked if they had any grievances they wanted addressed. This crowd gradually became angrier until they turned violently toward the Jews in the square, savagely beating them to death while Wehrmacht officers looked on. This, of course, was simply another "spontaneous" pogrom planned and initiated by the Einsatzgruppen.

Four or five days later, Sonderkommando 4a was ordered to Bila Tserkva to round up and dispose of the adult Jewish

It may seem unbelievable today, but Täubner's unauthorized killing of Jews led to him being arrested and put on trial. During the trial, it was stated,

"The accused shall not be punished because of the actions against the Jews as such. The Jews have to be exterminated and none of the Jews that were killed is any great loss."

population of the town. After executing the adults, the Jewish children of the town were left locked in a school with a handful of Jewish women tasked with looking after them until they too were to be executed the next day.

The plight of these unfortunate children came to the attention of some soldiers of the Wehrmacht, who turned to several chaplains attached to their division for advice on what to do. In response, Father Ernst Tewes and the Pastor Gerhard Wilczek visited the school where they saw the hungry children in appalling conditions.

The chaplains, joined by others, protested the treatment of the children, and so Oberst Helmuth Groscurth, a staff officer, ordered their executions to be postponed. However, Walther von Reichenau, commander of the German Sixth Army, intervened and ordered the executions to be carried out as planned.

SS-Obersturmführer August Häfner later described the horrific killing of the children of Bila Tserkva: "I went out to the woods alone. The Wehrmacht had already dug a grave. There, children were brought in a tractor (drawn wagon). I had nothing to do with the technical procedure. The Ukrainians [Ukräinische Hilfspolizei/Ukrainian Auxiliary Police] were standing around, trembling. The children were taken down from the tractor. They were lined up along the top of the grave and shot so that they fell into it…. The wailing was indescribable…. Many were hit four or five times before they died."

It would be for his actions within the area of operations of Einsatzgruppe C that Unterstürmfuhrer Max Täubner of the 1st SS Infantry Brigade, along with four other co-defendants, would ironically be court-martialed for killing Jews. Täubner's unit, a Werkstattzug (workshop platoon), had arrived in Novograd Volytnsky, located some 60 miles west of Zhitomir, on September 17, 1941.

Here, Täubner met the town's mayor who complained he had more than 300 Jews locked up in the local prison. The mayor wanted to be rid of the Jews and asked Täubner if they could be shot. Täubner told the mayor that his platoon would perform the executions. The Ukrainian auxiliaries dug a pit nearby, after which the SS men murdered the 319 Jews.

Bundesarchiv B 162 Bild-05598; Photo: Unknown

ABOVE: Officers of Einsatzgruppe A take a break from their murderous enterprise to pose for a picture in the USSR. OPPOSITE: After stripping and being herded into a killing pit, Jewish women from the Mizocz ghetto were gunned down, October 14, 1942. Here a German police officer is shooting those still alive.

One of the SS men from the Werkstattzug recalled the killings: "The victims were shot by the firing squad with carbines, mostly by shots in the back of the head, from a distance of one meter on my command…. Before every salvo, Täubner gave me the order—'Get set, fire!' I just relayed Täubner's command.…"

"Meanwhile, Rottenführer (foreman) Abraham shot the children with a pistol. There were about five of them. These were children whom I would think were aged between two and six years…. The way Abraham killed the children was brutal. He got hold of some of the children by the hair, lifted them up from the ground, shot them through the back of their heads and then threw them into the grave."

Täubner's sickening lust to kill Jews did not end there. His platoon next went to a village called Sholokovo, where he murdered 191 Jewish men, women, and children on October 17. The Werkstattzug then moved on to Aleksandriya, where Täubner allegedly heard a rumor that Jews planned to poison the local water supply. Again, pits were dug, and the brutal killing began as before.

The Unterstürmführer struck his victims in the face with a whip, took photographs of the killings, and even spontaneously played an accordion as the SS men pulled the triggers on their rifles.

It may seem unbelievable today, but Täubner's unauthorized killing of Jews led to him being arrested and put on trial. During the trial, it was stated, "The accused shall not be punished because of the actions against the Jews as such. The Jews have to be exterminated and none of the Jews that were killed is any great loss.

"Although the accused should have recognized that the extermination of the Jews was the duty of Kommandos which have been set up especially for this purpose, he should be excused for considering himself to have the authority to take part in the extermination of Jewry himself. Real hatred of the Jews was the driving motivation for the accused. In the process, he let himself be drawn into committing cruel actions in Aleksandriya which are unworthy of a German man and an SS officer."

The court sentenced Täubner to imprisonment, but he would be released after two years following a pardon from Himmler. It is unlikely the murder of Jews was the real issue for the SS; rather, it was the need to ensure discipline among the frontline units, as Täubner had acted without orders.

Einsatzgruppe C would be involved in many other murders, including the particularly infamous massacre at Babi Yar. By December 1942, this unit alone had killed almost 120,000 Jews.

The story of Otto Ohlendorf's Einsatzgruppe D is another similar and hideous tale of brutal murder. On August 16, 1941, the Germans occupied Nikolayev in southern Ukraine, where they immediately established a Judenrat and gave orders that all Jews in the city be registered. In 1939, prior to the outbreak of war, the Jewish population of the city stood at 25,280.

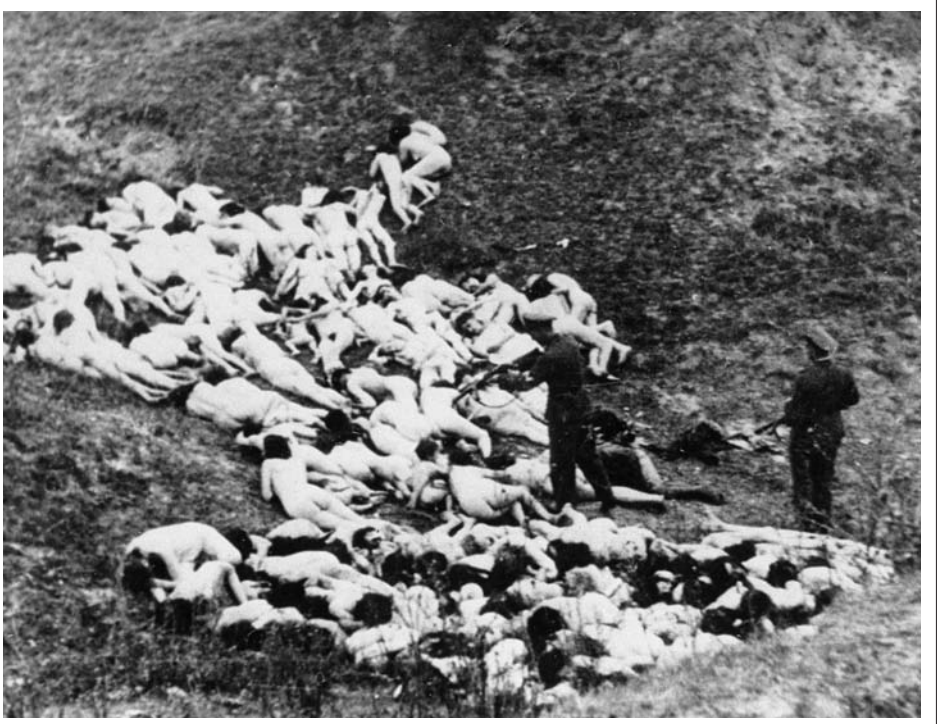
Many more arrived after the invasion of Poland, having fled advancing German forces. Those Jews now trapped in Nikolayev were ordered to sew a Star of David patch on their clothes and were set to work doing manual labor. A ghetto was also set up in Nikolayev at the end of August or in early September, 1941.

It would, however, only be a matter of days before the men of Einsatzgruppe D began their murderous work. In late August 1941, Sonderkommando 11a shot 230 Jews for failing to register, or for some other perceived disobedience of German authority.

A much larger massacre occurred later. On September 14, all Jews were ordered to assemble at the Jewish cemetery in the Slobodka district of the city. Here, they were told they were to be resettled, and, from the 16th to the 18th, the Jews were rounded up. Three days later, they were loaded onto trucks and taken to the Voskresenskoye Ravine, located about six miles east of Nikolayev.

The victims were herded into the ravine in groups of 35 to 40, where they were ordered to strip naked before being shot. The units involved in the massacre included Sonderkommando 10a, Sonderkommando 11a, Einsatzkommando 12, and the 9th Reserve Police Battalion (attached to Einsatzgruppe D). In all, they murdered around 5,000 people.

Following the massacre at Voskresenskoye, the Germans conducted a roundup of Jews who had managed to escape the executions. It is not known how many were caught, but those who were apprehended were transported to Temvod, a suburb of Nikolayev. Here, they were similarly shot and buried in pits near the bank of the Ingul River in October 1941 by members of Sonderkommando 11a and Einsatzkommando 12.



One witness to the work carried out by Einsatzgruppe D was Wehrmacht Oberleutnant Erwin Bingel. He was later taken as a prisoner of war, and during his time in captivity, he made the following testimony of the killing of Jews in Vinnitsa in September 1941: "In the morning at 10:15, wild shooting and terrible human cries reached our ears. At first, I failed to grasp what was taking place, but when I approached the window from which I had a broad view over the whole of the town park, the following spectacle unfolded before my eyes and those of my men, who, alerted by the tumult, had meanwhile gathered in my room.

"Ukrainian militia on horseback, armed with pistols, rifles, and long straight cavalry swords, were riding wildly inside and around the town park. As far as we could make out, they were driving people along before their horses—men, women, and children. A shower of bullets was then fired at this human mass. Those not hit outright were struck down with the swords.

"Like some ghostly apparition, this horde of Ukrainians, let loose and commanded by SS officers, trampled savagely over human bodies, ruthlessly killing innocent children, mothers, and old people whose only crime was that they had escaped the great mass murder, so as eventually to be shot or beaten to death like wild animals."

Another example of Einsatzgruppe D's work can be seen in the massacre of Jews in Simferopol in the Crimea. The Germans had occupied the city on November 1, 1941, upon which they ordered all Jews to wear white armbands marked with the Star of David on both arms. Again, a Judenrat was appointed, and all Jews in the city were registered. Around 12,000

Jews were listed on the register, and many were put to work doing physical labor.

As at Nikolayev, on December 6, the Jews of Simferopol were ordered to assemble at several locations across the city, where they were told they would be resettled. Three days later, 2,500 Krymchaks (Crimean ethnic Jews) were loaded onto trucks and driven down the Simferopol-Feodosiya Road. After traveling for about six miles, they were told to get out and were shot, their bodies dumped into an antitank ditch.

Between December 11 and 13, 9,500 Ashkenazi Jews were loaded into caravans and onto trucks and taken to the site of the December 6 murders. Here, they were

Latvian War Museum

ABOVE: Thousands of Latvian Jews are forcemarched to execution pits in a forest at Rumbula. Thirteen thousand were killed in one day. RIGHT: A teenage boy, whose family has just been murdered, stands over their bodies at Slorow, Ukraine, just before he is shot by the officer standing behind him, July 5, 1941.

forced to strip before being shot and buried in the antitank ditch. These latest murders were performed by Sonderkommando 10b, Sonderkommando 11a, Sonderkommando 11b, and the 683rd Motorized Military Police Detachment.

These killings were as brutal as those carried out before. Men and women were lined up in groups of 100 to 300 on the edge of the ditch before being shot by machine guns. Once their bodies fell into the ditch, they were covered with a layer of earth before the next batch of victims was likewise put to death. Small children are said to have been murdered in front of their parents when poison was smeared under their noses or on their lips.

The Roma (or gypsy) people of Simferopol were also murdered during the Simferopol-Feodosiya Road massacre.

Perhaps one of the largest atrocities committed by the Täubner were the massacres at Babi Yar, a ravine on the outskirts of Kiev, in late September 1941. The Germans had occupied Kiev on September 19, 1941, but the Soviets were able to bomb some of the buildings that had been taken over by the Wehrmacht. In retaliation, the Nazis decided to murder all the Jews in the city.

To round up the Jews, the Germans posted the following notice around the city in Russian and Ukrainian: "Kikes [an ethnic slur for Jews] of the city of Kiev and vicinity! On Monday, September 29, you are to appear by 7 AM with your possessions, money, documents, valuables, and warm clothing at Dorogozhitshaya Street, next to the Jewish cemetery. Failure to appear is punishable by death."

Fritz Hoefer, a local truck driver forced to assist the Germans, was witness to what happened. He said, "Naked Jews were led to a ravine about 150 meters long, 30 meters wide, and 15 meters deep. The Jews went down into the ravine through two or three narrow paths. When they got closer to the edge of the ravine, members of the Schutzpolizei (Germans) grabbed them and made them lie down over the corpses of the Jews who had already been shot…. It took no time.

"The corpses were carefully laid down in rows. As soon as a Jew lay down, a Schutzpolizist came along with a submachine gun and shot him in the back of the head. The Jews who descended into the ravine were so frightened by this terrible scene that they completely lost their will."

Hoefer recalled that only two men actually did the shooting, one starting at one end of the ravine and a second at the other. They would then work their way toward each other, shooting their victims as they went.

Hoefer continued, "I saw dead bodies at the bottom laid across in three rows, each of which was approximately 60 meters long; I could not see how many layers were there. It was beyond my comprehension to see bodies twitching in convulsions and covered with blood, so I could not make sense of the details.

"Apart from the two machine gunners, there were two other members of the Schutzpolizei standing near each passage into the ravine…. They made each victim lie down on the corpses, so that the machine gunner could shoot while he walked by. When victims descended into the ravine and saw this terrible scene at the last moment, they let out a cry of terror. But they were grabbed by the waiting Schutzpolizei right away and hurled down onto the others."

Another witness to the murders at Babi Yar was Dina Pronicheva, herself a Jew who, incredibly, managed to survive the shootings: "When we neared Babi Yar, shooting and inhuman cries could be heard…. When we entered the gate, we were ordered

Bundesarchiv Bild 183-A0706-0018-030; Photo: Unknown

to hand over documents and valuables, and to take off our clothes. One German approached my mother and tore her gold ring off her finger…. All [the Jews] were being taken to an open pit where submachine gunners shot them. Then another group was brought….

"With my own eyes I saw this horror…. [A] policeman ordered me to strip and pushed me to a precipice…. But before the shots resounded, apparently out of fear, I fell into the pit. I fell on the [bodies] of those already murdered…. The shooting was continuing and people kept falling…. Suddenly, all became quiet. It was getting dark…. I felt we were being covered with earth…. When it became dark and silent, literally the silence of death, I opened my eyes and threw the sand off me…. I said to myself: 'Dina, stand up. Get away!' So I stood up and ran."

Some 33,771 Jews were murdered at Babi Yar over the two-day period of September 29-30, 1941. Those carrying out the killings were men of Blobel's Sonderkommando 4a of Einsatzgruppe C. Due to the large numbers being killed in only two days, the men of the Sonderkommando failed to ensure everyone in the pit had died before proceeding to shoot the next batch. This allowed Dina Pronicheva and a handful of others to survive and later testify as to the horrors they endured, a rare occurrence in the history of Einsatzgruppen murders.

Thousands of Jews were murdered on November 30 and December 8-9, 1941 in the Rumbula Forest, five miles southeast of Riga along the Riga-Dvinsk railway and the Riga-Salaspils road. Although second only to the better known Babi Yar massacre, the Rumbula killings have received relatively little attention from historians. This is despite the fact that some 26,000 Jews (estimates vary) were shot by German killing squads and their Latvian auxiliaries at Rumbula.

In mid-August 1941, all Jews in Riga had been ordered into a ghetto that had been established in the Moscow quarter of the city. Here 15,738 women, 8,212 men, and 5,652 children were eventually interned. Meanwhile, Himmler was planning to dispose of the Latvian Jews to make room for Jews being transported to the ghetto from Germany and Austria.

The Reichsführer-SS brought in SS-Obergruppenführer Friedrich Jeckeln to organize and carry out the killing operation. Jeckeln, a veteran of World War I and a long-standing Nazi Party member, had previously served with the Einsatzgruppen in Ukraine and had been responsible for the massacres at Babi Yar and Kamianets-Podilskyi (August 27-29, 1941). He was thus ruthlessly qualified for the job.

On the first day of the murders, Jeckeln ordered the ghetto to be cordoned off and the Jewish work detachment, which was to be temporarily spared death, marched out. The remaining Jewish inhabitants of the ghetto were told they were to be resettled farther to the east and to be ready to move.

The blue buses of the Arajs Kommando were then driven up to the ghetto entrance in readiness for the action. About 12 miles away, in the Rumbula Forest, execution pits had already been dug by Russian POWs. Jeckeln had chosen the site due to the sandy soil, which was much easier to dig in than the swampy ground Riga had been built upon. The Jews were then force-

marched to Rumbula, with many dying during the harsh journey.

Frida Michelson, a Latvian Jew who would miraculously survive the massacre, recalled the horror of the march to the killing pits: "The columns of people were moving on and on, sometimes at a half run, marching, trotting, without end. There one, there another, would fall and they would walk right over them, constantly being urged on by the policemen, 'Faster, faster,' with their whips and rifle butts…. Corpses were scattered all over, rivulets of blood still oozing from the lifeless bodies. They were mostly old people, pregnant women, children, handicapped, all those who could not keep up with the inhuman tempo of the march."

After arriving at Rumbula, groups of 50 were sent into the forest and forced to run a gauntlet made up of hundreds of auxiliaries of the Arajs Kommando. The victims were then ordered to undress and made to run to the killing pits. As they descended into the pits, they were positioned so they would fall on top of those killed before them, in order to stack as many bodies into the pit as possible.

The killers then opened fire, using Russian-made submachine guns. The process was then repeated until, by the end of the day, some 13,000 Jews had been murdered.

The efficient system of killing employed at Rumbula—also employed at Babi Yar and Kamianets-Podilskyi—had been devised and refined by Jeckeln and thus became known as the "Jeckeln System."

It was ruthless but simple: Jewish populations earmarked for death were assembled with the promise of resettlement and then marched or transported to their place of execution. Once they arrived, they were stripped of their valuables and clothes, which would be recycled by the Germans, and forced to lie face down in the bottom of the killing pits. The shooting then took place and the procedure repeated for successive groups of victims.

A week later, on December 8, Jeckeln repeated the entire process, liquidating the remaining 10,000 Jews of the Riga Ghetto. A number of German Jews transported to Riga from Berlin were also executed at Rumbula on the first day, but Jeckeln had killed them without authorization from Himmler. The former, incredibly, found himself being disciplined by the latter for their murder.

The preferred method—although methods varied between individual Einsatzkommandos and Sonderkommandos—of many of the killers of the Einsatzgruppen for shooting their victims was known as Genickschuss, the shooting of a person through the back or nape of their neck.

Jeckeln and others also employed Sardinenpackung, which, in Jeckeln's own words, involved stacking the bodies of those executed "like sardines" neatly into the killing pits. It was a horrendously brutal and cruel system that worked extremely well, but the killing of unarmed men, women, and children in cold blood took its toll on the executioners.

On August 15, 1941, Himmler personally attended a mass execution near Minsk carried out by Einsatzkommando 8 of Einsatzgruppe B and Police Battalion 9. The victims were brought up to the execution pits in trucks, where they were shot.

SS officer Erich von dem Bach-Zelewski later recalled Himmler's reaction when the killings began: "Himmler was extremely nervous. He couldn't stand still. His face was white as cheese, his eyes wild, and with each burst of gunfire he always looked to the ground." During the execution, two women were repeatedly hit but not killed outright, at which point Himmler allegedly screamed, 'Don't torture these

women! Fire! Hurry up and kill them!'"

Once the killings had ended, Bach-Zelewski claimed he said to Himmler, "Look at the men [the Germans], how deeply shaken they are! Such men are finished for the rest of their lives! What kind of followers are we creating? Either neurotics or brutes!"

A more humane way of killing was sought—not for the victims but for the killers. The transition from bullets to gas began with gas vans, previously used to euthanize mentally ill patients, being made available. These vans proved unpopular with the Einsatzgruppen, as the removal of the dead from the van for burial was a difficult and a particularly harrowing process.

Nevertheless, experiments using gas to kill continued and would eventually evolve into the main method of killing in the extermination camps. As the Operation Reinhard camps (Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka) and Auschwitz became the main killing sites, the Einsatzgruppen switched to fighting partisans. Their brutality, however, never abated.

These are only a handful of the many, many mass murders carried out by the Einsatzgruppen in eastern Europe during World War II. A second sweep of the region would commence at the end of 1941, which lasted well into the summer of the following year. The commanders of each Einsatzgruppe would also change, while the Germans relied increasingly more on their locally raised auxiliaries to do the actual killings.

Estimates of Jews killed vary, sometimes considerably, depending on the source, but the following statistics were compiled from the Jäger (SS-Standartenführer Karl Jäger, December 1, 1941) and Stahlecker reports: Einsatzgruppe A, 363,337 killed; Einsatzgruppe B, 134,000; Einsatzgruppe C, 118,341; Einsatzgruppe D, 91,728; and higher SS and police leaders and staff, 445,325. There were, of course, many non-Jewish victims in addition to this number, raising the overall figure to well over a staggering two million.

Following the defeat of Germany, the Allies tried 24 senior Einsatzgruppen leaders for war crimes and crimes against humanity at the Nuremberg Trials in 1947-1048. A total of 14 were sentenced to death, two given life sentences, while the remainder received lesser sentences.

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Babi Yar Society

ABOVE: Dina Pronicheva, a Jewish survivor of the Babi Yar massacre, testifies about her experiences during a war-crimes trial in Kiev. OPPOSITE: Thousands of Jewish men, women, and children fill a pit near the Soviet town of Zdolbunov as their German captors prepare to slaughter them, October 1942.

Only four of the executions were actually carried out, though, although an additional four Einsatzgruppen leaders were executed by other nations.

Franz Stahlecker was killed in combat on March 23, 1942, by Soviet partisans near Krasnogvardeysk in Russia. Arthur Nebe was implicated in the July 20, 1944, plot against Hitler and hanged in Plötzensee Prison, Berlin, on March 21, 1945. Otto Rasch, although initially put on trial at Nuremberg, had the case against him dropped after it was claimed he was suffering from Parkinson's disease and dementia, and he died on November 1, 1948.

Otto Ohlendorf was one of those sentenced to death at Nuremberg, his execution being carried out at Landsberg Prison in Bavaria on June 8, 1951.

Thirty-four years after the war, Viktors Arajs, having initially escaped prosecution, was found guilty by the State Court of Hamburg on December 21, 1979, for the mass murder of Jews at Rumbula. He was sentenced to life imprisonment and died in 1988.

Erich von dem Bach-Zelewski agreed to testify against former colleagues in exchange for not facing trial at Nuremberg, although he was later tried and convicted of killing political opponents of the Nazi regime in the 1930s. He received a prison sentence and died in a Munich prison on March 8, 1972.

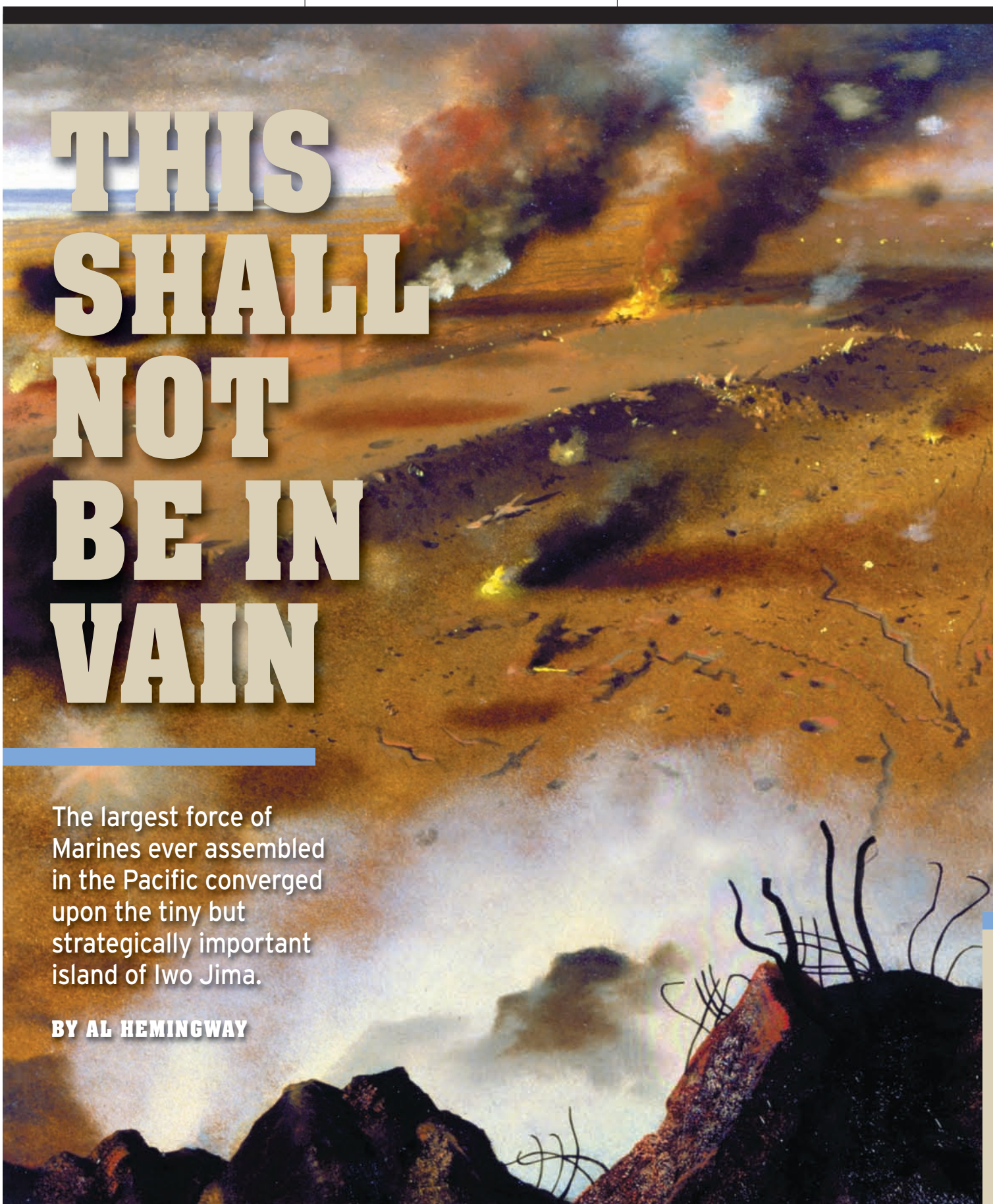
Friedrich Jeckeln fell into the hands of the Soviets, who tried him at Riga in January and February 1946. He was found guilty and hanged in the city in front of a crowd of 4,000 onlookers on February 3, 1946.

Despite their horrific, unforgivable crimes, the vast majority of Einsatzgruppen murderers were never charged nor brought before a court to answer for their wartime actions. The West German Central Prosecution Office of Nazi War Criminals did later bring charges against 100 former Einsatzgruppen personnel, but the sad reality was most of them escaped justice and lived out the rest of their lives as free men. Conversely, the bodies of their victims remain buried in unmarked graves littered across Eastern Europe. □

THIS SHALL NOT BE IN VAIN

The largest force of Marines ever assembled in the Pacific converged upon the tiny but strategically important island of Iwo Jima.

BY AL HEMINGWAY



Marine Corps

In this painting by artist Chesley Bonestell, from high atop Mount Suribachi, LSTs and transports are visible on the beach below at Iwo Jima. Combined U.S. Army, Navy, and Marine forces amounted to more than 100,000 troops.

Lieutenant General Holland M. Smith was 62 years of age. At a time in life when most men contemplate retirement, he was a very busy individual. He was the top Marine in the Pacific and, despite his grandfatherly appearance, he had a tremendous temper. This earned him the nickname of "Howlin' Mad." After 40 years as a Marine, this would be Smith's last assignment, but it would not be easy.

In October 1944, Smith received a message from Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, commander-in-chief of the U.S. Pacific Fleet, informing him of the target for the next invasion of a Japanese-held Pacific island: Iwo Jima. It was given the code name Operation Detachment, but for those that fought there, it was simply called Iwo.

Smith ordered Maj. Gen. Harry Schmidt, commanding general of the Fifth Marine Amphibious Corps (VAC), to begin planning for the assault. Schmidt would use his 4th and 5th Marine-divisions which were training in Hawaii, in the initial attack. The 4th Division was led by Maj. Gen. Clifton B. Cates and the 5th by Maj. Gen. Keller E. Rockey. The 3rd Marine Division, headed by Maj. Gen. Graves B. Erskine, was involved in mopping-up operations on Guam and was corps reserve.

Iwo Jima needed to be seized if the Allies were to be victo-

National Archives

rious against the Japanese Empire. That summer, General Henry A. "Hap" Arnold of the Army Air Corps quickly grasped its importance. The new B-29 Superfortress heavy bombers could carry twice the bomb load of the older B-17 Flying Fortresses and had a range of over 3,000 miles, compared to the B-17's 2,400. Arnold was anxious to strike at Japan with the B-29s, but he needed an emergency airfield for the crippled aircraft returning from bombing runs over Japan. Iwo Jima would be the most likely place. Arnold drew a line from the Marianas to Japan—it ran through Iwo.

From the air, Iwo Jima resembled a pork chop. Slightly less than eight square miles in size, it was five miles long and two and a half miles at its widest point. It was a barren land and until the outbreak of World War II had very few inhabitants. From the beaches to Moto Yama Plateau, located near the center of the island, the soil was nothing but ash and cinder. Northward, it was comprised of a yellowish clay-like substance, which was not conducive to any agricultural endeavors. The island's mainstay was a sulphur refinery, that produced a strong, overpowering rotten egg odor. Hence, Iwo Jima was also referred to as Sulphur Island.

Iwo Jima had become part of the Japanese Empire in 1891. It is located in the Nanpo Shoto chain, a string of islands created by active volcanoes that had risen from the ocean thousands of years before. After the fall of Saipan, Tokyo realized the importance of Iwo Jima and fortified the island with troops and supplies to resist the inevitable invasion.

Lieutenant General Tadamichi Kuribayashi, a bright, innovative leader, was selected to command this crucial post. He had roughly 21,000 men on the tiny island. His units consisted of the 109th Division, the 145th Regiment, 17th Independent Mixed Regiment, 26th Tank Regiment, 2nd Mixed Brigade, the brigade artillery group, plus other machine gun and rocket companies and naval personnel.

Kuribayashi was disappointed upon his arrival to discover that the island's defenses were in complete disarray. He chose a different strategy to repel the landing. He disregarded the traditional banzai charges and instead decided to dig tunnels, gun emplacements, observation posts, and supply dumps—even hospitals—completely underground. He would let the assault waves land, advance inland a few hundred yards, and hit them with everything he had.

In the north, heavy artillery was sited in a horseshoe configuration consisting of two 6-inch guns commandeered off a cruiser, 10 13mm machine guns, and 10 25mm anti-aircraft guns. It was dubbed the Heavenly Mountain Battery.

Rocket guns, recently invented, arrived in the summer. There were two sizes: an 8-inch round launched from a barrel that could be rapidly disassembled and moved to another location, and a 16-inch round that was fired from a wooden chute. They had ranges of 2,000 yards and 3,000 yards, respectively.

In July 1944, six more 75mm mountain guns were positioned around Hill 362A in the northwest section. Also, several 47mm cannon were positioned in the area. Sniper holes, machine guns, and automatic weapons were situated in the caves, gullies,

ravines, and gorges that dotted Iwo's northern ground.

At Kitano Point, the extreme northern part of the island, Kuribayashi made his headquarters. It was an engineering masterpiece. A maze of tunneling ran 500 feet in all directions. His planning and strategy rooms were built 75 feet underground. The only structure above ground was the communication blockhouse, 150 feet in length and 70 feet wide, with its walls and ceiling fabricated from reinforced concrete five to 10 feet thick.

Nearer the center of the island, the Japanese erected another communication center to coordinate and control all the artillery fire. On the plateau, extra artillery and field pieces would cover the beaches where the Marines would come ashore. In all, there were an amazing 26 miles of passageways on Iwo Jima.

At the southern end of Iwo Jima loomed the 554-foot-high inactive volcano known as Mount Suribachi. It bristled with every weapon in the enemy's arsenal and had seven stories of caves and tunnels. All of these were braced with any available material that could be confiscated: logs, driftwood, and even parts of damaged aircraft. Near the volcano, the Korean laborers could work for only 15 minutes at a time due to the incessant heat and sulphur fumes. Many of the compartments had electricity, water, and numerous entrances built to escape the flamethrowers the leathernecks would certainly employ against them. Cave openings were angled at 90 degrees to further frustrate the attackers. All the living quarters were vented to allow the sulphur fumes and steam to dissipate into the atmosphere. Every acre of Iwo Jima had been transformed into a killing zone.

By the beginning of February 1945, Iwo's fortifications were nearly finished. As the time neared for the invasion, Kuribayashi knew that, even with his formidable defenses, he could not win. He was determined, however, to make the Marines pay with their blood for every yard of Japanese soil they took.

The naval and Marine forces assembled for the invasion were on a scale unprecedented thus far in the Pacific conflict. Nearly 800 warships would be used. Among these were eight battleships, 12 aircraft carriers, 19 cruisers, 44 destroyers, plus transports, LSTs (Landing Ship, Tank), LSMs (Landing Ship, Mechanized), and cargo and auxiliary vessels of all types. The Marines numbered over 70,000; add to that the Navy and U.S. Army personnel and the force totaled over 100,000 troops.

Strategic planning for the conquest of Iwo Jima proceeded smoothly until October 24, 1944, when a serious rift developed between the Marine Corps and Navy concerning pre-invasion bombardment. Schmidt wanted 10 days, using three battleships and assorted cruisers. This request went to Admiral Richmond K. Turner, commander of Task Force 51. It was denied. Turner felt they would lose the element of surprise with such a prolonged shelling and wanted just three days. This was ludicrous. The Japanese knew full well that a large invasion force was steaming toward Iwo Jima.

National Archives

ABOVE: Mount Suribachi was a fortress in more ways than one. Aside from its imposing height it contained seven stories of tunnels, living quarters, and virtually every weapon in the enemy's arsenal. OPPOSITE: The 554-foot-tall Mount Suribachi looms in the background as the wakes of landing craft carrying invading U.S. troops stretch like fingers in the waters off the coast of Iwo Jima.

On November 8, 1944, another request was submitted, this time asking for nine days of bombardment. It was also rejected. The original plan, calling for three days, would stand. In fact, the Navy was planning to attack Japan with the might of Task Force 58 during the Iwo campaign mainly to offset all the publicity the Army Air Force's B-29s were receiving. The Navy wanted to demonstrate that its carrier-based planes were as potent as the much-publicized bombers.

"Howlin' Mad" was furious. He did not want any interservice rivalry to cause any serious hardships on his men. He took the argument all the way to Admiral Raymond A. Spruance, overall commander of the operation. This time the Marines requested just four days, but they were turned down again. Smith was heartbroken. He could not forget the bodies of hundreds of Marines floating in the lagoon at Tarawa in November 1943. These men, in his opinion, had died needlessly because naval gunfire had not neutralized the enemy defenses as planned. Years later, noted Marine historian Colonel Robert Heinl would write that canceling the additional shelling of Iwo Jima was a "costly irony." The leathernecks would have to make do with three days.

Schmidt opted for the eastern beaches as the landing sites. The western approaches were discussed and initially approved, but the Navy did not like the surf conditions on that side of the island. The Marines reluctantly agreed, even though this gave the Japanese excellent fields of fire on the landing craft carrying the assault troops to the beaches. Each landing zone was divided into 500-yard sections totaling 3,000 yards.

Map © 2019 by Philip Schwartzberg, Meridian Mapping, Minneapolis, MN

National Archives

TOP: Gradually, during a struggle that lasted more than a month, the Marines were able to take control of the porkchop-shaped island of Iwo Jima. ABOVE: General Kuribayashi (center) looks over a plan of underground defenses at Iwo Jima.

The 1st and 2nd Battalions, 28th Marines, 5th Marine Division would land on Green Beach nearest Mount Suribachi. Next, on Red 1 and 2, the 1st and 2nd Battalions, 27th Marines, 5th Marine Division would hit the beach and seize Moto Yama Airfield No. 1. On Yellow 1 and 2, the 1st and 2nd Battalions, 23rd Marines, 4th Marine Division would wheel right and strike at Moto Yama Airfield No. 2. Lastly, the 1st and 3rd Battalions, 25th Marines, 4th Marine Division would take a sharp right after landing and move against the Quarry. The remaining battalions and the 3rd Marine Division would be held in reserve.

As the assault teams steamed toward their objective, Admiral William R.P. Blandy and his Task Force 52 had already commenced the three-day preliminary bombing of Iwo Jima. Simultaneously, just 60 miles off the coast of Japan Admiral Marc Mitscher's task force was launching a carrier strike. Blandy's armada of six battleships and five cruisers began its careful, methodical firing at predetermined targets. At day's end, the fleet withdrew out to sea, with disappointing results. The overcast skies had proved detrimental to their shelling.

The following morning the UDTs (Underwater Demolition Teams) went into action. The frogmen were given the dangerous task of removing any mines or other obstructions that might hinder the landing. LCIs (Landing Craft, Infantry) had been outfitted with 20mm and 40mm cannon to provide cover for the UDT teams. As the spunky vessels came close to shore, the Japanese opened fire on them. Dropping off the frogmen, the tiny boats zigzagged trying to avoid the enemy gunners. Of the 12 ships involved, all were struck by artillery, with nine of them totally destroyed. When it was over, 43 were killed and 109 had been wounded from the LCIs, plus another seven killed and 33 wounded off one of the destroyers. The second day of the bombing was over, and the beaches were declared suitable for landing. The Japanese had drawn first blood.

On the last day of bombing, the primary targets were the base of Suribachi and artillery that protected the avenues of approach. From 7:45 AM until 6:30 that evening the big guns blasted the tiny island. The Navy was optimistic at day's end and estimated they had destroyed or damaged half of Iwo's fortifications. The northern area was barely touched.

Admiral Blandy radioed Admiral Turner to report that his mission was complete and said another day of bombing would be fruitless. The Navy had completed its job. Now it was up to the Marines.

Dawn on Monday, February 19, 1945, saw the murky, gray skies over Iwo Jima change to an azure blue. The Marines stood, combat loaded, on the decks of the various transports, waiting to board their landing craft. The temperature was a pleasant 70 degrees, the sea was relatively calm, and a slight breeze was blowing. It was a perfect day for an invasion.

At 6:40 AM, the pre H-hour bombardment commenced. Five battleships on the east coast and two on the west fired 75 rounds each in 80 minutes. Iwo rocked from the concussions of the 16-inch salvos. Four heavy cruisers and three light cruisers hurled 100 rounds of 8-inch shells and the destroyers fired their 5-inch rounds as well.

Although the bombardment was an awesome sight, many veterans from previous campaigns knew the Japanese would be waiting. As they prepared to go over the gunwales into the awaiting landing craft, the chaplain asked for a moment of silence and recited the 23rd Psalm. As they started their descent, Corpsman Greg Emery, attached to the 28th Marines, wished he had chosen something a little more uplifting. The part about the "valley of death" upset him.

Other Marines were to make the assault on the LVTs (amphibious tractors). As they climbed down the narrow metal ladders below deck, the Navy coxswains who guided the vessels to shore started the engines. Soon, the hold of the ship was filled with the sickening smell of the fumes emitted by the craft.

The line of departure was established several miles offshore. Shortly after 8 AM, an air strike composed of 120 carrier planes soared overhead in two columns, dropping napalm on their first run. The jelly and gasoline mixture erupted, creating great billowing clouds of fire and intense heat that brought a loud chorus of cheers from the Marines. The aircraft soon returned with orders to "scrape their bellies on the beach" as they pounded the sandy coastline with strafing runs and rocket fire. When the fighters finished, the fleet resumed its bombardment. In total, the Navy fired over 8,000 rounds at Iwo Jima.

Just past 8:30 AM, the main control ship dropped her pennant. The LCIs manned with rockets were followed closely by 68 LVTs mounted with 75mm howitzers. The vessels began their mad dash to the beachhead. The rocket boats launched 20,000 projectiles then swerved to the right and left to allow the amphibious tractors to get to the beach. Just before 9 AM, the naval gunners began zeroing in their weapons on inland targets in a rolling barrage. When it was over, more fighters flew in, dropping their loads and peeling off over the sea. At 8:59 AM, the first Marine touched ground on Red Beach 1. Americans had set foot on Japanese soil.

In rapid succession, the remaining waves churned ashore and headed for the wave-

National Archives

National Archives

TOP: Taking cover from interlocking fields of Japanese mortar, artillery, and small arms fire, troops of the 4th Marine Division lay low on the beach at Iwo Jima. ABOVE: Smoke and debris fill the air behind a demolition squad as they comb the beach for Japanese booby traps.

cut terraces that loomed ahead of them. These terraces, three in all and one right after the other, were caused by severe storms several years earlier that had pushed the loose ash into 10- to 15-foot piles. They stretched from the shore to the plateau where Airfield No. 1 was located.

Infantrymen soon discovered how taxing it was to maneuver in the volcanic ash. Pfc. Fred Walcsak, a mortarman from Company E, 2nd Battalion, 28th Marines, was exhausted carrying the excessive weight from the weapon and the extra rounds. As he sunk ankle deep in the loose soil, he muttered to himself, "Goddamn this ash! Goddamn this ash!"

Enemy activity in the first half hour ashore had been surprising light. An occasional mortar round and some sporadic automatic weapons fire had been the extent of the resistance. That, however, was about to change.

Suddenly, the Japanese sprung to life. They had allowed the Marines to become crowded on the beaches before beginning their attack. From atop Suribachi and from the north, artillery and mortars cascaded on the Marines. It was impossible to make any type of tactical move—there just wasn't any room. The only course of action was to move forward. According to one participant. "Front lines? There aren't any goddamn front lines. This whole island is a front line."

By late morning, Company B, 1st Batalion, 28th Marines had reached the western beaches and successfully separated Suribachi from the rest of the island. Without tank or artillery support, it was a battle of individual Marines armed with just rifles, grenades, flamethrowers, and satchel charges. Pillboxes that were eliminated suddenly came alive again and shot at advancing leathernecks from the rear. Kuribayashi's underground defenses were working perfectly and inflicting numerous casualties on the Marines.

Lieutenant Frank Wright, a platoon commander with Company B, had started the day with 60 men. Only two remained. Captain Dwayne Mears fell with a serious throat wound but he urged his men for-

ward. Corporal William Faulkner of Company C was one of the lucky ones when he was flung backward into a bomb crater after a shell exploded in front of him. A piece of shrapnel dented his helmet, but he escaped injury.

Conditions on the beach were worsening. The Japanese were concentrating a great portion of their ordnance at the trucks, jeeps, LVTs, tractors, and amphibious tractors. The lifeless bodies of Marines and sailors floated aimlessly in the surf, adding to the congestion.

Howitzers and tanks were attempting to get ashore. A mass effort was being made to clear paths for the equipment to move inland and support the assault companies. The 31st Seabees, attached to the 5th Marine Division, managed to get the first bulldozer ashore at noon. Its operator, Seaman 1st Class Ben Massey, was quickly shot in the neck. Machinist Mate Hollis Cash jumped into the seat and began operating the machine. Cranes and caterpillars were utilized to dislodge vehicles mired in the wet volcanic ash. Navy beachmasters were shouting orders into their bullhorns as enemy shells continued to explode among them.

Machinist Mate 1st Class Alpenix Bernar's LSM ran aground on the wet sand. As the ramp dropped, he prepared to get his caterpillar off as fast as possible. He was the first one to leave the craft, followed closely by the tanks and bulldozers. As he lurched forward, he noticed the bodies of the dead in front of the boat. Not bearing to look, he clenched his teeth and drove over them. He kept telling himself he had to get ashore and level the terraces so the tanks could push ahead.

Meanwhile, the 4th Marine Division sector was even worse. The 3rd Battalion, 25th Marines were in the worst position. They were near the ridge that was closest to the beach from the north. "If I knew the name of the man on the extreme right of the right hand squad of the right hand company of 3/25, I'd recommend him for a medal before we go in," said Maj. Gen. Clifton B. Cates.

The 1st and 3rd Battalions, 25th Marines were trying to reach the ridge and cliff area but, as with all movement on Iwo, it was extremely slow. To their south, the 1st and 2nd Battalions, 23rd Marines were running into formidable Japanese defenses protecting the first airfield. Sergeant Darrell Cole of the 1st Battalion, 23rd Marines snuck around one pillbox and slipped grenades through the apertures. He crawled back to his lines and acquired more grenades, returning to the concrete structure to do it again when an enemy grenade landed nearby, killing him instantly. He was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor.

The bloodshed on D-day was appalling. Kuribayashi had done exactly what he had planned: let the Marines land, and move inland about 500 yards and unleashed his artillery. Due to the large caliber of the guns, most bodies were horribly mangled. Heads, arms, legs, and other human remains were scattered over a large area. Enemy shrapnel disemboweled one Marine; his entrails, pinkish in color, looked like a giant earthworm in the ash. One company, while in reserve, suffered 30 casualties. There was no safe haven. One individual was lying prone on the beach when a shell furrowed beneath him. The resulting explosion heaved him 50 feet in the air. He landed with a thud and his crumpled body lay motionless on the beach.

National Archives

National Archives

TOP: A U.S. Marine prepares to leave his position as his unit moves across an airfield on Iwo Jima. ABOVE: Surrounded by spent shell casings, a group of Marines man a .50-caliber machine-gun nest and scan the horizon for signs of attacking Japanese.

Somewhere on Red Beach 1, lying face down in the sand, was the body of Gunnery Sergeant John "Manila John" Basilone of the 1st Battalion, 27th Marines. Basilone was awarded the Medal of Honor on Guadalcanal and was pulled from action to go on War Bond drives. The soft duty did not appeal to the New Jersey native, and he petitioned to be returned to a line company. He got his wish and was killed in action on Iwo Jima the first day. He was posthumously awarded a Navy Cross.

Medical personnel were taxed to their limit. Corpsmen and doctors alike were not spared the enemy's guns. In one area, two doctors and 16 corpsmen were killed. Another medical detachment landed with a complement of 26 men and at day's end had lost 11.

The first night on Iwo Jima was described by *Time-Life* correspondent Robert Sherrod as a "nightmare in hell." The illumination shells fired from the destroyers created a surrealistic effect on the battlefield. To one Marine, Iwo looked like "another planet."

Major General Clifton Cates wished he had another six hours of daylight, or even four. "Hell," he thought to himself, "I'd compromise for two." He was worried about the 14th Marines, his artillery regiment that had not landed yet. Luckily, the 75mm and 105mm cannon managed to get ashore by dusk. The 13th Marines, the artillery arm of the 5th Division, had also landed some of their pieces. Both units would be sorely needed in the morning when the attack resumed.

National Museum of the U.S. Army, Army Art Collection

In this painting by an unknown Japanese artist, enemy soldiers, taking cover behind a wrecked American plane, fire on U.S. forces making their way up from the shore at Iwo Jima.

Steaming toward Iwo Jima were the 9th and 21st Regiments of the 3rd Division. The 3rd Regiment would soon follow. Nearly 30,000 troops were now ashore. An incredible 50,000 men were crammed on an island a mere eight square miles in size.

The Banzai charge "Howlin' Mad" Smith hoped for did not come. Kuribayashi was too wise for that. He sent out "wolf packs," two- and three-man squads to harass the weary Marines throughout the night. An enemy thrust containing nearly 40 soldiers was destroyed by elements of the 1st Battalion, 28th Marines as it tried to reach Kitano Point.

Later that evening, Yellow and Blue Beaches were closed because the enemy artillery fire increased in intensity. The steady, raucous shriek of the 675-pound spigot mortar shells could be heard as they traveled overhead. Most Marines eyed the strange weapon with curiosity, as the shell left a trail of red flame behind it. Fortunately, it was not very accurate but the remainder of the Japanese arsenal was devastating.

Colonel Harry "The Horse" Liversedge, 28th Marines commander, sat hunched over his maps, preparing the following day's assault. As he scanned the charts, he realized it was not going to be easy for his troops to seize Suribachi, but it was essential that it be taken, and quickly, to assist those units advancing northward. Ironically, the man from Volcano, Calif., was going after a volcano in the morning.

Dawn on February 20, 1945, was cool, cloudy, and miserable. All units were poised for the attack. The 26th and 27th Marines were ready to move up the west coast. On their right flank were the 23rd, 24th, and 25th Regiments, advancing up the east coast.

To the south, surrounding Suribachi, was the 28th Marines. They had to penetrate 1,300 yards of pillboxes, tunnels, bunkers, blockhouses, antitank ditches, machine-gun emplacements, and mortar pits.

Just prior to jumping off, carrier planes strafed and bombed Suribachi's base. Rounds from the 13th Marines and additional firepower from the mine layer *Thomas E. Fraser* were added.

At 8:30 AM, Lt. Col. Chandler Johnson's 2nd Battalion, 28th Marines started moving toward Suribachi. To their right was Lt. Col. Charles Shepard's 3rd Battalion, 28th Marines. The base of the mountain was encircled with broken, jagged rocks and sparse areas of underbrush. Skirting the foundation was a green edging that contained the majority of the enemy's weapons. The sharp crack of the 5-inch shells from the destroyers could be heard. They drilled over 1,500 rounds into the mountainside and as close as 200 yards to the Marine lines.

Demolitions and flamethrowers became the vanguard for the assault as the 2nd Battalion alone blasted shut over 40 caves. By late morning, the 3rd Battalion, 13th Marines moved their 37mm half tracks and 75mm howitzers closer to the infantry for more accuracy.

Johnson fired off a message to division headquarters saying, "Enemy defenses much greater than expected. There was a pillbox every ten feet. Support given was fine but did not destroy many pillboxes or caves. Groups had to take them step by step suffering severe casualties."

As the 5th Division was slugging its

Both: National Archives

ABOVE: Japanese dead litter the ground near two Marines warily making their way up a hill toward their next objective. OPPOSITE: In an effort to establish field contact with the front lines, two Marine wiremen race across an open field under enemy fire.

way closer to Suribachi, the 4th Division was having a hard time as well. Many of the officers became casualties. The 2nd Battalion, 25th Marines lost its commander, Lt. Col. Lewis C. Hudson, Jr, its executive officer, Major William P. Kaempfer, and its operations officer, Major Donald K. Ellis, when a mortar round made a direct hit on their command post (CP). A half-dozen corpsmen from the 1st Battalion, 25th Marines were killed outright as well by an artillery shell. The round also severely wounded seven others. Enemy rounds spared no one. Despite the fierce shelling, the 23rd Marines took the airfield by early afternoon, assisted by 4th Division tanks.

The 28th Marines, however, had moved just 200 yards against Suribachi. The going was treacherous, time consuming, and very discouraging. Kuribayashi transmitted a message to his men defending the mountain. "First, one must defend Iwo Jima to the bitter end. Second, one must blast enemy weapons and men. Third, one must kill every single enemy soldier with rifle and sword attacks. Fourth, one must discharge each bullet to its mark. Fifth, one must, even if he be the last man, continue to harass the enemy by guerilla tactics."

This was last message sent to Suribachi. Marines from the 5th Engineer Battalion uncovered a cable an inch and a half thick and quickly severed it. The enemy inside the mountain fortress was truly isolated.

At day's end, the leathernecks controlled roughly one-fourth of the island. The 5th Division had lost another 1,000 men, and the 4th suffered 2,000 dead and wounded. Secretary of the Navy James V. Forrestal was aboard the flagship *Eldorado* to observe the battle. The horrendous suffering left him speechless.

LST 779 wedged its way through the wrecked remains on Red Beach 1 and delivered the first of the V Amphibious Corps' 155mm howitzers. By late in the afternoon, four of the big guns were ashore and ready to pound Suribachi.

During the night the star shells filled the inky blackness. The tiny island trembled from the force of the artillery blasts. Near the eastern side of the mountain, a number of enemy soldiers were congregating in what appeared to be a banzai charge. The destroyer *Henry A. Wiley* silently slipped to within 200 yards and saturated the area with her 5-inch rounds. It was a long night on Iwo.

February 21 was a cloudy day on Iwo Jima. The thunderous roar from the howitzers of the 13th Marines and shells from the naval vessels offshore hammered the mountain. The bombardment was precariously close to the assault troops as they were pelted with flying rocks, earth, and other debris. Liversedge wanted it to be close. "Ask for all of it Pete," he told his operations officer, Major Oscar Peatross, "and tell those planes to drop it close—we can't use air tomorrow."

As the aircraft peeled off, a ghostly silence fell upon the lines. For a brief moment nothing happened, then one, two, three men, followed by clusters of Marines, stood up and began walking toward their objective. All along the 700-yard line the Marines began to zigzag to avoid the increasing enemy fire.

Lieutenant Colonel Jackson Butterfield's 1st Battalion, 28th Marines moved along the western beaches while Lt. Col. Charles E. Shepard's 3rd Battalion hurled itself at the center of the volcano's fortifications. On the eastern side, Johnson's 2nd Battalion met stubborn resistance.

Casualties began to multiply. The cry of "Corpsman" could be heard above the din of battle. Corporal Richard Wheeler of Company E, 2nd Battalion, 28th Marines had his jaw broken by a piece of shrapnel. The same mortar round also wounded another Marine in the same shell hole. While Pharmacist Mate 3rd Class Clifford Langley tended to their wounds, another mortar round burst in the hole. This time, Wheeler sustained a severe leg laceration as the metal fragments sliced his calf muscle. The other Marine was now lying on his stomach devoid of skin and bleeding heavily. Langley ignored his own wounds and kept working on them. As he was doing this, another mortar landed among them. Wheeler and Langley watched helplessly as the projectile burrowed itself

in the loose ash. To their relief, it did not detonate.

The fighting around Suribachi was intense. Marines carrying the Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR) would perform a "leap frog action." One would fire moving forward while the other reloaded as they inched their way closer to the mountain.

Private First Class Daniel Friday of Company E, 2nd Battalion, 28th Marines ran to the front of one tank to guide it after the phone was shot from another Marine's hand. The Arapaho Indian from Wyoming stood in the open and steered the Sherman using hand and arm signals. As a result, the tank's 75mm gun delivered accurate fire and destroyed several pillboxes.

By day's end, the 28th Marines had reached the foot of Suribachi. The riflemen had blasted shut hundreds of caves and neutralized numerous pillboxes and other structures.

To the north, the fighting was equally gruesome. The 4th Division was running into Kuribayshi's main line of defense. By nightfall, the 21st Marines of the 3rd Division were given the word to come ashore. They assembled near Airfield No. 1 to attack in the morning.

During the night, Condition Red was sounded as kamikazes from Japan struck the USS *Saratoga*. The aircraft carrier managed to stay afloat in spite of being struck by six planes. Not so lucky was the escort carrier USS *Bismarck Sea*. One kamikaze hit triggered an explosion that destroyed the fire mains and rendered the plane elevator useless. Airplanes, gassed on the flight deck, were soon engulfed in flames. Ammunition began to cook off, and the order was finally given to abandon ship. Over 200 men lost their lives.

February 22 was a wretched day on Iwo. The rain turned heavier, transforming the ash into a slurry mixture. The thick mess wreaked havoc with weapons. The fighting resumed and the all too familiar sounds of the wounded, the roar of artillery fire, and the whoosh of the flamethrowers permeated the air.

As the infantrymen pressed forward, grenades flew at them from cave openings and many fought the enemy at close quarters. No artillery or air support could be given to them because they were too near the mountain.

Major General Keller Rockey came ashore and established his division headquarters in a shell hole near Airfield No. 1. As he and his staff pored over charts and maps, the dull drone of the bulldozers could be heard preparing the 5th Division cemetery. Men from Graves Registration, clad in rubber aprons and wearing gloves that reached to their armpits, were assigned the ghoulish task of gathering the dead. In some cases, only an arm or head was found. Bodies were piled while their final resting places were being dug. Nearby were the thousands of white crosses that would adorn the graves.

With Suribachi finally surrounded, all that remained was to climb to the top and secure it. The constant bombardment, however, had obliterated all paths to the summit. With nightfall, Liversedge halted all combat operations until morning, when the Marines would begin their final assault on the volcano.

Inside the mountain, about 300 Japanese were all that was left of the fighting force. Half the group tried to rejoin other units in the north, while the remainder decided to remain and die fighting in the dark abyss of Suribachi.

There was a slight overcast on Friday, February 23, D+4. The rain had stopped, and the sunlight appeared through the clouds. Suribachi was strangely silent. The fortifications that ringed the volcano were now abandoned, with the Japanese soldiers retreating to the top to make their final stand. The mountain bore the effects of the tremendous shelling. Its scarred slopes revealed the twisted wreckage of the huge naval guns emplaced there. The tunnels, most of which were now empty, were smoldering.

A meeting was held to discuss the course of action. "Colonel Liversedge and I went to the 2nd Battalion, 28th Marines CP and talked with its commander, Lt. Col. Chaney Johnson, his executive officer Major Tom Pearce, and his operations officer, Captain Martin Reinemann," recalled 28th Marines operations officer Major Oscar Peatross. "We emphasized the need to let the rest of the troops know that the mountain had been secured. Consequently, we talked smoke pots and other things and finally decided on Colonel Johnson's idea of taking a flag up and raising it on the spot where it could be seen over the entire island."

The most logical route up the mountain was on the northeast side, so Johnson selected Company E. He informed Captain Dave Severance, the company commander, who chose the 3rd Platoon to be led by his executive officer, 1st Lt. Harold Schrier.

Just after 8 am, Schrier's 40-man patrol started its climb to the top of Suribachi. Schrier ordered riflemen on each side of the column to protect their flanks. The extra gear the Marines were carrying slowed them down, and they would stop for a brief rest on their way to the crest. Certain areas had to be ascended on hands and knees. "Those guys ought to be getting flight pay," remarked one observer.

Schrier's patrol reached the summit at 10 AM The climb had proved uneventful. Everyone peered apprehensively about, but no enemy soldiers were seen. Schrier gestured for the patrol to take up positions on the outer rim. One Marine, in a show of

National Archives

defiance, urinated. Still nothing happened.

As half the patrol was covering the edge of the mountain, the remainder moved toward the center. A firefight ensued when a Japanese soldier was spotted at one of the cave openings. As this was happening, six Marines tied the U.S. flag that Johnson had handed them prior to their ascent to a drainage pipe. At 10:20 AM, it was hoisted. This was the first Japanese territory seized by American troops in World War II. Staff Sergeant Louis Lowery from *Leatherneck Magazine* snapped a picture but this photo would be forgotten when Associated Press photographer Joe Rosenthal took the now famous picture hours later.

To the Marines on Iwo Jima, however, pictures meant nothing. All they knew was Suribachi had been captured and they did not have to worry about their rear while they moved northward. When the news spread, the island erupted into a tumultuous roar of bells, whistles, and foghorns.

A wounded Marine, lying on the deck of a hospital ship, tried in vain to lift himself up to get a better look at the flag. He was too weak to shout. He slumped back down on his cot and wept.

To the north, the battle was in a stalemate. Gains were minimal as a thousand Marines were falling, dead and wounded, every day. The bitterest fighting was taking place around Airfield No. 2. Shells from the battleship USS *Idaho* and the cruiser USS *Pensacola* hammered the center of the island. Cates complained about the ordnance not doing its job, and he requested the U.S. Army's heavy bombers stationed in the Marianas to provide support.

At 9:30 AM, on February 24, the 2nd and 3rd Battalions, 21st Marines jumped off to seize the airstrip. The enemy had over 800 pillboxes surrounding the field. Companies I and K started running across the runway, led by 1st Lt. Raoul Archambault. Marines

made it to the ridge and began a seesaw action to hold the position.

"In the wild fighting they fell on [Col. Masuo] Ikeda's men with rocks, rifle butts, bayonets, knives, pistols, and shovels," wrote Richard F. Newcomb in his book *Iwo Jima*. "In ninety minutes it was over. Archambault and his men were on top of the ridge, the advance had covered 800 yards, and the line was breached. Through the gap poured tanks, bazooka men, mortarmen, and machine gunners, cleaning up as they advanced."

On the east coast, the 24th and 25th Marines moved closer to the airfield by occupying Charlie Dog Ridge. By the end of day six, the 9th Marines were tapped to land. Over 1,600 were now dead and 4,500 were wounded, but only one-third of the island was in Marine hands. Only the 3rd Marines were left in reserve.

The end of February saw the 26th and 27th Marines involved in bloody fighting on the west coast. They faced one ridge after another as they endured a viscous crossfire. The 9th and 21st Marines were facing Hills Peter and Oboe, while the 23rd, 24th, and 25th Marines were ready to strike at Hill 382, the second highest elevation on Iwo. Hill 382 was a maze of pillboxes and bunkers. Its crest had been dug out and fitted with artillery and gun pits.

To the right of this stood the Turkey Knob, a small rise stripped of foliage. In addition to the usual fortifications, a huge blockhouse, which also doubled as an observation post and communications center, was located there. Eighty-five rounds from a 75mm howitzer failed to put a dent in it. Next was Minami. Originally a small village, it was now a nest of bunkers. Completing this ring was the Amphitheater, an open bowl-shaped depression 300 yards long and 200 wide.

From the tops of these positions, the enemy threw grenades and satchel charges down on the attacking Marines. Armored bulldozers tried desperately to clear away rocks and debris so tanks could get through and assist the infantry. Advances were measured only in feet in some places. The area was soon dubbed the Meat Grinder.

All nine battalions of the 4th Division hurled themselves at the Meat Grinder. By nightfall on February 27, they had the area encircled. The cost, however, was staggering: nearly 800 casualties. Erskine wanted to bring his 3rd Marines into the fight but "Howlin' Mad" Smith disagreed. The island, he thought, was too congested. It was—with the exception of the front lines.

On March 1, the 28th Marines, which had been in reserve after securing Suribachi, swung into action against Hill 362A on the west coast. Marines from the 1st and 2nd Battalions reached the top but were confronted with an 80-foot cliff on the other side.

Both: National Archives

TOP: Hellcat fighter-bombers from carriers of the Fifth Fleet release their payload on Japanese positions. ABOVE: Marines evacuate an injured comrade to the rear in February 1945. OPPOSITE: Attempting to root out Japanese defenders from a strongpoint, two Marines wield flamethrowers and throw up a devastating wall of fire.

Also lying ahead was Nishi Ridge, an open area the Japanese had covered from all sides. All the approaches were studded with caves, spider holes, and small niches that held riflemen and automatic weapons. Company C, 5th Tank Battalion supported the advance. Flamethrower tanks were helpful, but the terrain was so impassable only 350 yards were gained.

The attack resumed on March 2 on all fronts. The 3rd Division assaulted Hill 362B in the center of the island. In one area, dubbed "Cushman's Pocket" after Lt. Col. Robert Cushman, commanding officer of the 2nd Battalion, 9th Marines, the leathernecks had a tough time. They finally secured it but spent the next two weeks mopping up.

Hill 382 was taken as well by the 2nd Battalion, 24th Marines. Artillery and airpower had pulverized the Amphitheater and the Turkey Knob. Over a ton of demolitions were used as combat engineers closed tunnels and caves. The Meat Grinder, however, had taken its toll—over 3,000 casualties from the 4th Division alone.

With the 26th Marines on the right and the 28th Marines on the left, the 5th Division operated on the western side of the island. The 21st and 2nd Battalions, 28th Marines went around the flanks of Hill 362A to assault Nishi Ridge. Four separate tunnel systems were uncovered, one reaching over 1,000 feet in length and having seven different entrances. Tanks had great difficulty maneuvering around a stretch of anti tank ditches in a draw but managed to blast their way through to reach the rifle companies. The Marines found themselves in the midst of natural rock formations where they found fewer concrete structures. Here the enemy relied on nature to provide their cover.

"It was just a maze of tunnels and caves," wrote 1st Sgt. John Daskalakis of Company E, 2nd Battalion, 28th Marines. "It was very easy to lose sight of each

NAVAL SUPPORT OF THE MARINES AT IWO JIMA | Kevin M. Hymel

THE U.S. MARINES ON Iwo Jima had mortars, heavy guns and artillery to back them up, but they also had an ace up their sleeve that the Japanese lacked: the big guns of the U.S. Navy. No less than 25 ships poured fire onto Iwo, ranging from old and new battleships to cruisers and destroyers. Two of the battleships, the *Nevada* and the *Tennessee*, had been damaged by the Japanese at Pearl Harbor.

The naval bombardment began on February 16, 1945, three days before the invasion. The ships ringed the island and awaited firing orders. Iwo had been mapped out into numbered squares—700 in all, with some of the larger boxes named specifically for the surrounding ships. Spotter planes, taking off from the escort carrier *Wake Island*, radioed coordinates, and the bombardment began. The first day's results were minimal with only a dozen targets destroyed. Rain clouds and poor visibility prevented better results.

During the second day's bombardment the Japanese mistook a group of rocket-firing LCIs for the first wave of the landing force. A concealed Japanese gun opened up, damaging the ships but revealing their positions. The Navy concentrated fire on the location, which would have had excellent range on the landing force the next day, and destroyed it. The Navy made note to try to draw out Japanese fire before any invasion.

With only one day of bombardment left and more and more Japanese emplacements being discovered, the Marines begged the Navy to concentrate its last day on the pillboxes and heavy guns around the invasion beaches. The Navy concurred and let loose a final day of salvos.

On D-day alone, the Navy started firing at the island at 5:37 in the morning and did not end until 12: 57 that night, breaking only once, temporarily at 8: 00 am for spotter and attack planes to hit specific targets. After the 9: 00 am invasion, the ships increased fire and even changed to moving targets. By 12:30 the heavy cruiser *Indianapolis* was ordered to fire on Japanese tanks advancing on the Marines. Two hours later the fleet received a message from the Marines on the island: "Cannot overemphasize importance of securing all VOC in addition to every other available plane to search for JAP artillery and mortars."

As the Marines inched forward, the Navy

other. The soil at the northern end of the island was clay-like—grayish in color—almost like a marl type. The Japanese were underneath you and behind you. Men were shot in the back. They had CPs, hospitals and ammo dumps underground. You couldn't see them. It reminded me of the Devil's Den at Gettysburg."

While the leathernecks were advancing north, a damaged B-29 limped into Iwo Jima. As the aircraft made a bumpy landing, a few mortar rounds thumped behind her as she touched down. Marines and Seabees greeted the crew members with slaps on the back. Soon after the aircraft was repaired, the Superfortress was winging its way back to Guam. Before war's end, over 2,000 B-29s would make emergency landings on Iwo Jima with over 24,000 crewmen saved as a result. They had the Marines to thank for that.

As the days passed, the leathernecks slugged it out with the remaining Japanese defenders. Only 80 prisoners had been taken so far in the battle. Of these, 45 were Korean laborers. The enemy was not surrendering. Many Marines would stop and gawk at the survivors. It was the first time many of them had actually seen a Japanese soldier.

Marines of the 4th Division repelled the only organized banzai attack on Iwo Jima when 1,000 of the enemy charged their lines. Machine-gun and rifle fire mowed down the human waves, some of whom were only armed with spears. When it was over 784 bodies were counted. The Marines lost 90 killed and almost 300 wounded. But the attack signaled the end of organized resistance on the east coast of the island.

Kitano Point was the last stronghold of the Japanese. Just before the attack against it, 75mm and 105mm howitzers of the 13th Marines and the 155mm cannon of the corps artillery let loose over 22,000 rounds. Eight-inch shells from the cruisers also aided in the softening up of the western side of Iwo. The attack moved ahead until the infantry was halted near the high ground that ran southeast from Kitano Point. The 28th Marines were looking over a deep gorge. It was the worst terrain on the island. They called it Death Valley.

Heavy weapons were useless in such narrow and hilly ground so the 75mm and 37mm guns were utilized. The 28th Marines edged their way up the gradual slope, a key position that commanded all approaches to the north. They were ordered to hold on while the 27th Marines swung around from the west. The 26th Marines would also join in and converge on the final enemy stronghold.

By now the Marine divisions were decimated. Companies were now platoon size, and, in some cases, led by corporals. Nerves were strained. Casualties kept coming into the field hospitals with "wounds that make you sick to look at." Artillerymen, cooks, and clerks were now being sent to the front lines to reinforce the exhausted men.

Of the 21,000 Japanese at the start of the battle, a mere 1,500 remained. Kuribayashi sent his last dispatch to Tokyo, which read in part "The situation is now on the brink of the last … I shall lead the final offensive, praying that our empire will eventually emerge victorious. Bullets are gone and water exhausted … we are ready for the final

National Archives

An artillery spotter carefully examines the island shoreline.

continued to pound the island. Fire was called in not only by planes but from Shore Fire Control (SFC) parties. Good training and coordination paid off as information was radioed quickly to the ships and the salvos were adjusted. In one incident on February 25, a SFC party called in five different targets which the Navy responded with ninety rounds of five-inch shells fired into the targets in eight minutes. One member of the party responded, "You put them fast enough for us."

When a SFC party called for Naval support in a tight space, the ships relied on their Mk 8 radar to adjust their fires. On February 22, an SFC party "urgently and repeatedly" called for support against a Japanese counterattack. It was raining over the area and visibility was poor. Using radar, twenty six-gun salvos were fired at the Japanese for a half hour, stopping the attack. The blind yet successful fire mission showed the Japanese and Americans "what our modern radar and fire control equipment is capable of doing," read one after action report.

When SFC parties, planes or radar were unavailable, the Navy relied on the old method of looking out the window. When no targets were called in, the destroyers swept the enemy's territory looking for puffs of smoke or rocket or artillery fire. One ship spotted two Japanese rockets taking off near an emplacement of eight mortars. The area was brought under fire with five-inch and 40 mm fire, until nothing was left. The only casualties were the range finding operators, three of whom rubbed the skin off their noses from pressing up against the rubber eye guards of their range finders.

act." That evening he ordered the colors of the 145th Infantry burned.

On Wednesday, March 14, 1945, the official flag-raising ceremony was conducted in the southern part of Iwo Jima. As Colonel Davis H. Stafford read the proclamation, the dull sound of gunfire could be heard in the distance. A team of stretcher bearers carried a wounded Marine to a field hospital, and nearby a 105mm cannon roared. The battle was still very much in evidence.

A hushed silence fell over the crowd as "Colors" was played. The flag was hoisted atop an 80-foot pole as the one on Suribachi was lowered. When it was completed, very little was said among the group. Misty eyed, "Howlin Mad" Smith said "This was the toughest yet."

Two days later the island was declared officially secured. The Marines fighting in Death Valley were stunned. They would spend another 10 days there fighting a stubborn foe.

In the early morning hours of March 26, the Japanese on Iwo Jima staged their last assault. Hundreds of them formed near Airfield No. 3 and quietly crept along a trail heading south. Reaching the tent area that housed the 5th Pioneer Battalion and Army Air Force personnel, they attacked. Caught completely by surprise, these units were overrun in a few minutes. Airmen had their throats cut while they slept.

First Lieutenant Harry Martin of the 5th Pioneers organized a counterattack, rescued two men, and was twice wounded before being killed. He was posthumously awarded a Medal of Honor. It was the last one given in the campaign. In all, 27 Medals of Honor were presented—the most for any single battle in Marine Corps history.

By morning it was over. Over 250 enemy bodies were accounted for and another 18 were taken prisoner. The Pioneers lost nine killed and 31 wounded. Forty-four airmen were butchered and 88 wounded. Rumors were rampant that Kuribayashi led the raid himself, but his body was never recovered.

Soon, the U.S. Army's 147th Infantry assumed garrison duty on Iwo Jima. Japanese stragglers were captured long after the battle was over. Some survived on discarded food and by drinking their own urine. Only 1,083 enemy soldiers survived. The Marine losses were staggering: 6,821 killed and 19,217 wounded plus 2,648 cases of combat fatigue.

The words of Chaplain Roland B. Gittleson are a fitting memorial to those who paid the supreme sacrifice: "Thus do we memorialize those who, having ceased living with us, now live within us. Thus do we consecrate ourselves the living to carry on the struggle they began. Too much blood has gone into this soil for us to let it lie barren. Too much pain and heartache have fertilized the earth on which we stand. We here solemnly swear; this shall not be in vain! Out of this, and from the suffering and sorrow of those who mourn this, will come—we promise—the birth of a new freedom for the sons of men everywhere." □

Author Al Hemingway is a U.S. Marine Corps veteran of the Vietnam War. He is an expert on the island fighting during World War II in the Pacific and resides in Waterbury, Connecticut.

The American Ninth Army's crossing of the Rhine River at Remagen on March 7, 1945, is a well-known chapter of military history. At least one book and one Hollywood movie, along with numerous magazine articles and websites, have detailed the subject. But the story of the boat units that took American soldiers across Germany's last natural barrier has rarely been told—until now.

ACROSS *the* RHINE

By Brig. Gen. (USA, Ret.) Raymond E. Bell, Jr.

On March 22, 1945, Lt. Gen. George S. Patton, Jr.'s U.S. Third Army made a surprise hasty crossing of the German Rhine River in the vicinity of Oppenheim at the village of Nierstein. The assault was conducted without prior artillery or air preparation and without any formal plan. It was made in moonlit waters "on the run" by the fast-moving divisions of Maj. Gen. Manton S. Eddy's XII Corps.

The lead unit across was Company K, 5th Infantry Division, 11th Infantry Regiment, Third Battalion. Immediately after that division's successful passage, 90th Infantry Division troops swept across the river, followed by the tanks of the 4th Armored Division.

The crossing was another of Patton's successful exploitations of the crumbling German homeland defenses. And it was made with great assistance from the U.S. Navy

Naval History and Heritage Command

Troops of the 89th Infantry Division, U.S. Third Army, hunker down in their amphibious DUKW as they come under enemy fire while crossing the Rhine River at Oberwesel, Germany, March 22, 1945. The Rhine was Germany's last major natural barrier in the West.

Although combat troops usually get all the attention, the U.S. Army's crossings of the Rhine River in March 1945 would not have been possible without the heroic efforts of the unheralded U.S. Navy and Coast Guard boatmen.

and Coast Guard.

Among the naval participants was Seaman First Class Richard Michael Birkler, U.S. Naval Reserve. Birkler served as the coxswain of a Landing Craft, Mechanized, or LCM, which was popularly known as a "Mike" boat. It was one of the creations of Andrew Jackson Higgins, who had conceived and built the famous Higgins landing craft officially known as the Landing Craft, Vehicle Personnel (LCVP). Along with the LCVP, the LCM was built by the thousands and was employed globally in World War II.

The Mike boat, an all-metal vessel that displaced 30 tons, was developed to carry a single armored fighting vehicle the size of a Sherman tank. Some times called a "tank lighter," it had twin diesel engines that made it quite maneuverable and therefore required a skilled coxswain such as Birkler to "drive" it. The craft's 130-mile range also meant that it could sail across the English Channel on its own.

Naval History and Heritage Command

The LCM's little brother was the LCVP. It had a longer history than the LCM, having evolved from the initial Higgins boat called the Landing Craft, Personnel (LCP). The LCP was a flat-bottomed vessel, 36 feet long, made of plywood, and it had a bow in the shape of spoon, which allowed it to swim up on a gradually sloping beach. This characteristic, along with the shallow draft and flat bottom, was exploited in the development of the LCVP, which could carry 36 men and a crew of three. The LCVP's 36-foot length and 10-foot width also allowed it to carry a two-and-a-half-ton truck or two quarter-ton jeeps after a bow ramp was added, which allowed the vehicles to drive off the vessel.

Both the LCM and LCVP were participants in the Rhine River crossing. They were "driven" by U.S. Navy sailors and Coast Guardsmen, many of whom had served on such boats in the June 1944 invasion of Normandy. The crews were members of the Navy's Task Force 122.5, which was composed of five subordinate task units initially equipped with the LCVP. When it was realized that craft capable of carrying armored fighting vehicles would be required, LCMs were added to the task units.

Each unit had a complement of boat crews and a maintenance detachment. One unit each was assigned to the First, Third, and Ninth U.S. Armies as task units (TU) and designated as TU 122.5.1, TU 122.5.2, and TU 122.5.3, respectively.

The commanders of these task units were U.S. Naval Reserve officers, Lieutenant Wilton Wenker, Lt. Cmdr. William Leide, and Lt. Cmdr. Willard T. Patrick. A fourth task unit (TU 122.5.4) was organized under Reserve Lieutenant (j.g.) Thomas Reilly and stationed at the French port of Le Havre where it could serve as a backup to the three forward-deployed TUs. (The fifth TU was assembled in the British Isles and did not deploy to the Continent.)

Each unit was composed of 24 "boats" (as they were called in the Navy), 13 officers (most of very junior grades), and 205 men, either U.S. Navy or U.S. Coast Guard. Task Group 122.5, to which the boats were assigned, was commanded by U.S. Navy Commander William J. Whiteside. Because of the decentralized nature of the various river-crossing operations, he exercised limited command and control over the task units.

Preparations for an assault over the Rhine began well before the first successful crossing from the German town of Remagen on March 7, 1945. Had the British succeeded in crossing the river in early September 1944 at Arnhem in the Netherlands, the U.S. Navy may never have had to provide assistance in the Rhine River effort.

The failure to defeat the Germans defending the bridge over the river at Arnhem, therefore, helped precipitate the employment of LCVPs and LCMs in the crossing by the British and the American First, Third, and Ninth Armies in March 1945.

In anticipation of the destruction of all bridges over the Rhine River, and recognizing that the river with its great width and swiftly flowing current posed a major obstacle to its crossing in early October 1944, Lt. Gen. Omar Bradley's engineers went to the commander of U.S. Navy forces in Europe, Admiral Harold Stark, to inquire about possible Navy assistance.

The result was the decision to deploy LCVPs and LCMs with their ability to operate the best in the Rhine's challenging eight-knot current. Planning conferences began that same month.

In the early autumn of 1944, there was a stalemate across the entire battlefront in northwestern Europe after the failure of Operation MarketGarden with little prospect of an immediate drive to cross the Rhine. This gave the Navy the opportunity to step in and join with Army engineers in training for deliberate river crossings using both Army and Navy assets. By November 1944, Army and Navy planners reached

Naval History and Heritage Command

ABOVE: Two M-36 tank destroyers from a U.S. Ninth Army unit roll onto U.S. Navy LCMs (Landing Craft, Mechanized) in preparation for an assault crossing. Such large craft had to be transported to the river on tank-retriever trailers. BELOW: A rare color photograph shows 79th Infantry Division troops preparing to cross the river at Orsoy, Germany, north of Duisburg, March 10, 1945. The boats in the foreground are bridge pontoons. OPPOSITE: A crane lifts an LCVP (Landing Craft, Vehicle and Personnel)) into position prior to the Rhine crossing.

Naval History and Heritage Command

a general outline for the Rhine crossings.

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. For the Navy, training began with the shipping of the LCVPs on British ships to the French port of Le Havre, where the boats of TU 122.5.4 remained as the command reserve. The LCVPs to support the three U.S. armies were placed on trucks with trailers and dispatched to selected engineer locations on rivers in Belgium and France where required precrossing training could be conducted.

The first LCVP boat unit to reach the European continent was Wenker's TU 122.5.1. It arrived in Belgium on October 18 and was attached to the 1120th Combat Engineer Group of First Army's VII Corps. Within a week, six of the boats were moved from the group's location at Andenne on the Meuse River in Belgium to a training site with the 298th Engineer Combat Battalion at the village of Cheratte. The site offered a river purportedly similar to the Rhine River. One week later, another site was opened at Liege with the 297th Engineer Combat Battalion.

Just moving the boats to the various rear areas turned out to be a training exercise as routes to accommodate the loaded vehicles had to be carefully selected. Buildings sometimes had to be demolished in rubble-filled villages and towns to allow passage of the oversized vehicles.

When the LCMs sailed across the English Channel in January 1945, they were loaded on tank-retriever trailers that, along with the tractors, were 77 feet long and weighed 70 tons. Through careful handling, the boats reached their destinations safely and the lessons learned in transporting the vessels over land were put to good use later when they were required on short notice to be taken to launching sites on the Rhine.

On-site training for Wenker's Task Unit 122.5.1 resumed at Andenne after experimentation with different LCVP launching methods was brought to a successful conclusion at Cheratte. Because the Army engineers were to control the boat operations, half a week's training was with Army engineers. The boats worked on assisting the engineers in the building of various bridges, prototypes for those that might be built over the Rhine.

The remaining week was spent in conducting Navy training and maintenance of the boats. The training was intermittent but intensive, as First Army's plans changed, first with a possible crossing of the Roer River, which was cancelled, and then the German Ardennes offensive (the Battle of the Bulge) in December. In the latter case, the Germans came within 11 miles of Andenne, and it became necessary to move the crews and boats farther back into Belgium to Waremme to avoid their capture or destruction.

Leide's Task Unit 122.5.2's experience for the cross-river assault is demonstrative of the preparation activities conducted by the boat units. The unit was attached to the U.S. Army's 1134th Combat Engineer Group located in the vicinity of Toul, France, on the Moselle River for training and experimentation purposes. It was billeted in a former cavalry barracks that had been occupied by the

German Army and was close to the river where the launching and retrieving of the boats could be practiced.

On November 15, 1944, the boat unit reached Toul and prepared for a scheduled December crossing of the Rhine River. The boat crews began intensive training that was conducted day and night under disagreeable weather conditions (cold with continuous rain, sleet, and mist). The Moselle had recently been at flood stage, which caused some problems, but otherwise provided no real challenge as its normal width hardly matched what was to be encountered on the Rhine.

In addition to the repetitive training, the boat unit performed many and diverse experiments in loading and transit. Unit members attempted different techniques for loading and securing every type of weapons system that would fit in an LCVP. For the purposes of evacuating wounded, a kit was developed to allow for the litter transport of 14 prone casualties. Different techniques were experimented with for carrying various types of small, wheeled vehicles and it was found, for example, that a nine-and-a-half-ton bulldozer could be barely fit into a LCVP's hull. All the work, however, was done with the LCVP, as the LCMs would not be available for the anticipated December crossing.

On December 10, Leide and his key personnel attended a river assault briefing at Third Army Headquarters in Nancy, France. The Army had just launched a crossing of the Saar River in Germany with the plan to penetrate the German West Wall and advance on the Rhine River.

Hopes were high but turned out to be premature, because on December 16 the German Army launched its Ardennes offensive. Boat training was turned to practicing demolition of the vessels with thermite grenades if the offensive reached the boats' locations.

Wenker's boats at Andenne on the Meuse River in Belgium were the most threatened as they were in the path of the German thrust toward Antwerp. Those of Leide and Patrick, located out of the intended path of the German advance, were not so nearly in danger of being overrun, but destruction preparations were made just in case.

As the German attack faltered, 45 LCMs arrived on the Continent for transporting heavier vehicles and equipment over the Rhine River. With the boats came additional personnel to include, for Third Army, a detachment of Seabees (members of a Naval Construction Battalion), who were to instruct Army engineers in the assembly of light-range pontoons. Leide's boat unit grew to include 250 enlisted men and 18 officers. The other boat units received similar increases in strength.

With the reduction of the so-called Bulge and the retreat of the German Army back into Germany, the time for a Rhine River assault crossing approached. On March 7, elements of the U.S. Army's 9th Armored Division seized the Ludendorff railroad bridge over the Rhine at Remagen. Wenker's task unit in the First Army sector was the first to see action.

The training in boat operations and overland movement proved its worth when, on the night of March 7, 1945, Wenker got a hurried call informing him that the U.S. 9th Armored Division had captured a bridge intact at Remagen on the Rhine. This

was a revelation, for the Germans had blown all the other bridges behind them as they escaped farther to the east. Wenker was ordered to move his boats to the crossing site as soon as possible.

Loading his LCVPs and LCMs onto their tractor-trailer combinations, Wenker moved his Boat Unit 1 over narrow and congested roads. Avoiding bottlenecks wherever possible, his behemoths had to compete with troop units, armor formations, and supplies for road space. Official reports described the trip as being "nightmarish." But on March 11, his sailors and Coast Guardsmen launched the first 10 of their boats into the Rhine at the riverside town of Bad Neuenahr.

Operating now under the control of First Army's III Corps, the first boats were assigned to assist the 552th Engineer Combat Battalion in constructing a heavy pontoon bridge over the Rhine at Quip. The intensive preparatory training began to pay off.

In the first week of the crossing, while the Ludendorff Bridge was still capable of supporting troops and heavy equipment, the boats worked continuously, often under fire, in helping build six additional bridges and protect them from enemy suicide swimmers. They did yeoman's work in supporting the engineers with their ability to operate in the swift Rhine River current that challenged Army water equipment.

By March 15, all 24 of the LCVPs were in action, operating on a 35-mile front. When the weakened railroad bridge at Remagen finally collapsed, the unit turned to transporting troops of the 1st, 2nd, and 69th Infantry Divisions across the river while bringing back several hundred wounded. By March 27, 14,000 troops and 400 vehicles had been ferried to the east side of the Rhine.

Patton's Third Army had raced to the Rhine River at multiple points before it began to cross early on March 22. In all four points, Third Army units made four assaults

Naval History and Heritage Command

ABOVE: 80th Infantry Division soldiers and vehicles of Patton's Third Army load into a landing craft prior to a Rhine crossing "somewhere in Germany." OPPOSITE: Men of the U.S. 7th Army scramble from their assault boat and head up the muddy eastern bank of the Rhine River near Frankenthal, March 26, 1945.

across the river. The first, on March 22, was at Nierstein, a short distance from Oppenheim, by the 5th Infantry Division and was followed closely by the 90th Infantry Division.

The second assault crossing was made by the 87th Infantry Division, down the river at Boppard, on the morning of March 24, which was followed the next night at St. Goar a few miles upriver from Boppard. The last crossing was from the city of Mainz at the confluence of the Rhine and Main Rivers on March 28 by the 80th Infantry Division. All the landings were supported by Leide's task unit using LCVPs and LCMs.

Although training with the Army's 1134th Combat Engineer Group had proceeded well, Leide found the Army units at the various sites were vague as to how and when to employ the boats when it came to actually executing crossing missions.

Leide had to assert himself several times to get the Army units to even consider utilizing the Navy elements. It did not take long, however, for the boats to prove their worth, as statistics revealed, and it resulted in an emphatic letter of commendation from Patton after the crossings.

Once Patton decided to beat his rival, British Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery, across the Rhine, events moved fast. On March 21, Leide and his executive officer were on their way to coordinate the crossing at the town of Worrstadt about 20 miles from Oppenheim when Army headquarters told them the jump-off time was slated for 10 PM that evening. Leide had not even had an opportunity to make a reconnaissance of possible launching sites, which complicated where along the river to bring the boats for entering the water.

As it was, the LCVPs, which had left Toul earlier, arrived on their tractor-trailers at 9:30 to find that the 11th Infantry Regiment was to make the initial assault in Army engineer craft. The sailors found the combat troops unsure as to how to use the LCVPs and could not decide at first how many they wanted Leide to deploy. On his own initiative, Leide chose to unload his boats using Tournau cranes

Both: Naval History and Heritage Command

from the Army vehicles and launch them into the water at Nierstein.

By five o'clock in the morning of March 22, Leide had his boats in the water and performing various tasks. The Rhine at Nierstein at the time was approximately 800 feet wide, with a slow current of about two and a half miles an hour, with an estimated depth of 10 feet. The conditions there favored the use of the LCVPs, three of which began to help Army engineers build bridges and lay booms and nets.

Once the method for deploying boats as troop transports was sorted out by the Army, activity quickly accelerated. In 48 hours, the LCVPs carried more than 15,000 troops across the river. The boats managed to ferry troops across the river and bring back German prisoners-of-war and casualties within a turnaround time per trip of six to eight minutes. All this work was done under sporadic German artillery and small-arms fire as well as an occasional air attack, but the Navy suffered no casualties.

The next assault crossing was made in the VIII Corps sector at Boppard with the 87th Infantry Division, in which six LCVPs from Oppenheim were designated to participate. Leide wanted to launch the boats during early morning darkness on March 26 to protect them from German artillery fire, but he was overruled, and the crossing began in daylight, fortunately without loss of boats or personnel. Every hour, the landing craft, each carrying 36 men, made nine round trips resulting in 5,000 men and 400 vehicles being ferried across.

The afternoon of March 26 saw six LCVPs again in action with the 89th Infantry Division's crossing at Oberwesel. The initial transit was made in unprotected DUKWs (Army amphibious trucks) 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, took over the operation. Within 48 hours the entire 89th—with all its vehicles and equipment—was carried across the Rhine without suffering casualties. The Navy made its point but at a high price for the foot soldiers who were in the first waves.

The last river crossing was made on short notice opposite the city of Mainz early on March 28 by the XX Corps' 80th Infantry Division with a dozen 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 AM was virtually wiped out. Later, at 3:30 in the morning, the Army officer in charge suspended the crossing operation due to heavy enemy fire.

Naval Reserve Ensign Oscar Miller, however, did not get the suspension word. He launched the first LCVP across the river that was to land some 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 made the crossing, but at 7 AM, German artillery found its mark on the launching site, scoring a direct hit on a bulldozer, demolishing several trucks on the launch pad, and killing Navy Lieutenant (j.g.) Vincent Avallone, the Navy's only fatality during the entire operation.

Still, work went on unabated with the boat crews and support personnel working six-hour shifts for three continuous days without respite.

For its performance in supporting the Third Army's four Rhine River crossings, Leide's boat unit drew special praise from Patton. In an April 23 letter of commendation, Patton cited the transport of thousands of soldiers and vehicles in such a manner as to draw the appreciation and admiration of his army for the unit's participation.

While the Third Army's river crossings were made on the run, those by Lt. Gen. William Simpson's Ninth Army reflected the character of British Field Marshal Montgomery, under whose command Simpson was to cross the Rhine. Montgomery called for a detailed and elaborate plan, which stipulated exact times for nighttime transits at specific times by Army assault boats and Navy LCVPs that would commence after a two-hour artillery fire preparation. Ninth Army's 30th and 79th Infantry Divisions were to cross on either side of the small Rhine River town of Rheinberg.

Supporting the assault was Patrick's task unit with its allocated LCVPs and 24 LCMs. After the first assault waves were ferried in Army assault boats, the landing craft followed. Initially, there was trouble unloading the boats from the tractor-trailers in the dark on rough terrain while under German artillery fire.

A crane also dropped the first LCVP to be unloaded, which augured poorly for launching the remainder of the boats, but by 9:30 AM, five other LCVPs had taken to the river. The LCMs had to be pushed into the water bow first, which was accomplished without damaging their propellers.

On D-day, Patrick's boat unit ferried 3,000 troops, 374 tanks and tank destroyers, 15 bulldozers, 80 57mm antitank guns, and 500 jeeps and other vehicles across the Rhine. On the return trips 200 casualties were evacuated along with 500 prisoners of war.

One LCM had the dubious honor of ferrying British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, Field Marshals Montgomery and Alan Brooke, and General Simpson about on the Rhine for half an hour with the only notable contribution of each of the high-ranking individuals being to relieve themselves in the river.

Seaman First Class Richard Birkler, the coxswain on a U.S. Navy LCM of TU 122.5.2, was one of the many unheralded sailors and Coast Guardsmen who manned the boats that transported thousands of American soldiers, weapons, and tons of equipment across the Rhine in March 1945. Their contributions have largely gone into the history of World War II as a minor footnote.

Yet, without their invaluable contribution, there would not have been the many successes the U.S. Army had in moving so many of its forces across the very wide and fast-moving obstacle that the Rhine River presented. □

TOP: Smoke rising from St. Goarhausen screens the enemy's view of assault boats carrying troops across the Rhine, March 26, 1945. ABOVE: Tanks of Patton's Third Army are ferried across the Rhine by LCMs at Oppenheim on March 22, 1945. Had it not been for the participation of the U.S. Navy and Coast Guard, the Allied crossing of the Rhine would not have been accomplished so swiftly.

Continued from page 16

organized to participate in Operation Steinbock, marking the debut of the He-177 over Britain. The operation was prepared at the direct order of Adolf Hitler as a reprisal against London. Luftwaffe Supreme Command redeployed units from Italy to Russia as bombers. In addition to He-177s, the core of the attack force, some 80 He-111s, Do-217s, Ju-88s, and Ju-188s, were rounded up.

The London attacks began on January 21, 1944. While Operation Steinbock would be regarded as a failure because of the decimation of the medium bombers, the He-177s achieved some success. While only four of the He-177s were lost to enemy action, serviceability was low because of mishaps.

On another night, eight of 13 He-177s had to return to base due to overheating or engine fires. Of the remaining aircraft, only four reached the target. Operation Steinbock was called off at the beginning of March.

While production of the He-177A-5 had proceeded, several improved versions of the Greif evolved, including the He-177A-6. Work had begun early in 1944, but the constant flow of modifications resulting from frontline complaints delayed plans so that instead of 15 He-177A-6s ready for delivery by the end of May 1944, only six were completed.

The He-177A-6 program was subsequently abandoned in favor of the He-277, which was also known as the He-177B.

In January 1944, five He-177A-5s were equipped with batteries of 33 obliquely mounted 210mm rocket tubes—likely derived from components of the Nebelwerfer infantry barrage rocket system—to create the Grosszerstörer (Big Destroyer), meant to break up and destroy the combat box formations of USAAF daylight bombers.

Limited operational trials against American bombers were authorized. The mode of operation called for the aircraft to follow the bomber formations, passing below and to port. A few daylight operations were flown, but no contact was made with Allied bomber formations, and as American escort fighters were becoming more numerous, the scheme was abandoned.

Until 1943, the Air Ministry remained adamant in its refusal to permit any major redesign of the basic He-177A, but during a meeting with members of the German aircraft industry, Hitler directed creation of a bomber capable of attacking London by day and night from beyond the reach of Allied interceptors and capable of attacking Allied convoys in the Atlantic. Ernst Heinkel claimed that his He-177B could fulfill these requirements and was instructed to proceed with immediate development.

A standard He-177A-3/R2 airframe was quickly modified to use four DB 603A engines. Flight tests commenced late in 1943, and, to hide the effort from Göring and the Air Ministry, the machine was referred to as the He-177B-0. A second prototype, using a converted He-177A-5 airframe, was flown on February 28, 1944. Test pilots reported exceptional handling.

The B-5's defensive armament comprised a 7.9mm machine gun in the nose, interchangeable with a 15mm or 20mm cannon, four machine guns in the chin barbette, twin guns in the forward dorsal barbette, one gun in the rear dorsal turret, and four guns in the tail. Despite Göring's order to begin production of the He-277B immediately, the bomber program was abandoned on July 3, 1944, and only eight He-277Bs were produced.

In the end, the He-177's development resulted in too many variants. A total of 1,137 He-177s were produced, including prototypes and pre-production aircraft, but only about 200 He-177s became operational. More He-177s were lost to engine fires than to combat.

The aircraft's technical difficulties were due in part to the overly optimistic design requirements: long range, high speed, heavy bomb load, and dive bombing. Although the He-177 entered service in 1942, it was still far from operational by war's end.

In the final assessment, it seemed that the He-77 was deadlier to its crews than to its potential targets, although it was the only heavy German bomber to attain quantity production during the war. In fact, it was one of the few German combat aircraft that progressed from prototype to operational service during the war. □

WORLD WAR SUPPLY®.COM

M1 Garand M1923
Cartridge Belt
$39.99

WW2 M3 Premium
Shoulder Holster
$36.99

US M1936 Suspenders
$24.99

INFO@WORLDWARSUPPLY.COM

24/7 Order Line
(616) 682-6039

BBOB
BEYOND BAND OF BROTHERS

WWII ADVENTURES TAILORED TO YOUR BUDGET

BRINGING HISTORY TO LIFE

Experience the Western Front of WWII from the D-Day landing in Normandy to the Eagle's Nest in the Alps – at a price that won't force you to issue war bonds.

9-DAY WW2 BUCKET LIST ON A BUDGET TOUR

BUDGET PACKAGE

BOOK NOW!
STARTING AT
$2,400

Contact us

1-888-335-1996
1-859-368-7992

info@bbob.com

Explore history 24/7 at www.bbob.com

BEYOND BAND OF BROTHERS TOURS
400 North Ashley Drive, Suite 1010 - Tampa, FL 33602