Zhukov rips the heart out of the Wehrmacht

World War II

Desperate Bayonet Charge at Carentan

DUG IN: JAPAN Could Have Survived an ATOMIC AMERICA

The Rash and Disastrous Raid to Rescue His Son-in-Law From a Nazi POW Camp

Patton's Regret

July/August 2006

TheHistoryNet.com

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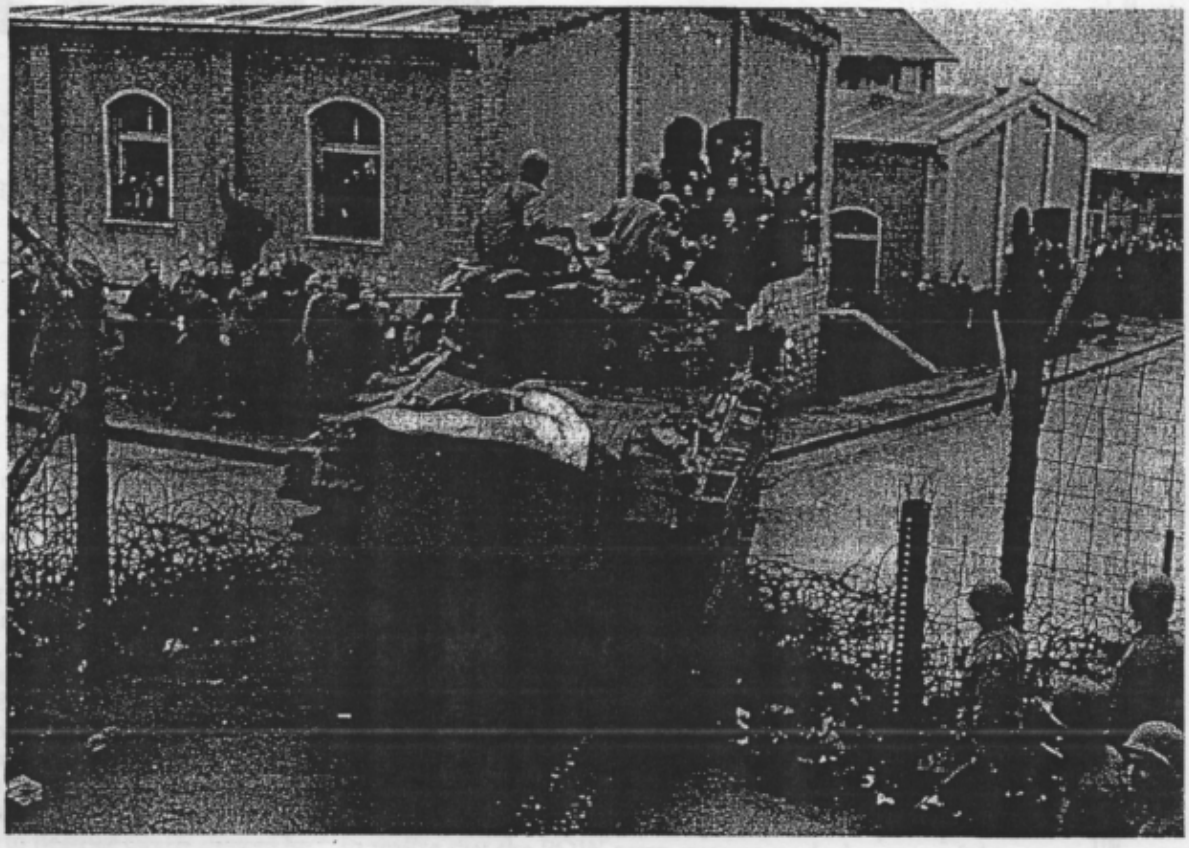


On the morning of March 26, 1945, Lieutenant Colonel Harold Cohen's 10th Armored Infantry Battalion (AIB) was heavily engaged at Aschaffenburg, a town near the Main River in western Germany. Hitler's Third Reich was in its death throes, crushed between Anglo-American armies in the West and a rampaging Russian juggernaut in the East. But Cohen knew that the end would not be easy and that his foe was like a mortally wounded animal, still capable of inflicting enormous damage with a courage born of desperation.

If nothing else, the demands of commanding an infantry battalion in combat kept Cohen's mind off his own physical discomfort—from hemorrhoids aggravated by bouncing along in a jeep. The 10th AIB was assisting the 37th Tank Battalion's lumbering Shermans in the Aschaffenburg push. The two units were part of the 4th Armored Division, considered by many the best armored formation in Lt. Gen. George S. Patton's vaunted Third Army.

It was in the midst of this melee that Cohen received an order from his immediate superior, Lt. Col. Creighton Abrams: "Prepare your battalion for a special combat mission for General Patton. ETD 1700." The directive was the start of one of the most controversial American military operations of the war and cast a shadow over Patton's otherwise illustrious career.

George S. Patton Jr. was no stranger to controversy, but in the spring of 1945 he was at the height of his power. A brilliant commander, courageous and daring, he was also vain, self-promoting and had a tendency to bully subordinates. The impact of his prickly personality was mitigated somewhat by the performance of his men. In the previous few months, the Third Army had done wonders, particularly during the Battle of the Bulge. While his army's exploits only increased the general's fame, they also fed his vanity.

Patton's successes bred a growing arrogance, a conviction that he could achieve miracles by the sheer force of his will. And events seemed to prove him right. On March 23, 1945, the Third Army crossed the Rhine—the first Allied army to do so. Basking in the glow of the accomplishment, Patton sat down that evening to write a letter to his wife, Beatrice. Among topics the general touched on was one of a personal nature: "We are headed for John's place, and may get there before he is moved."

"John" was Patton's son-in-law, Lt. Col. John Knight Waters, who had been captured in 1943 during the fighting in Tunisia, and was eventually imprisoned at *Oflag* 64 in Szubin, Poland. In January 1945, with the boom of Soviet cannons echoing through

RRAND

Putting his heart before his head, Third Army commander Lt. Gen. George S. Patton ordered a small armored column on a fatally flawed mission to rescue his son-in-law.

By Eric Niderost

the camp, the Germans marched their prisoners westward in an attempt to keep them out of the path of the rapidly advancing Red Army.

The trek was conducted under exceedingly severe conditions. Undernourished POWs endured heavy snow and temperatures that plummeted to 20 below zero without adequate food, shelter or clothing. Many did not survive, but Waters did, and by March he was being held along with several hundred other Allied officers at *Oflag* XIIIB near the sprawling military complex in and around Hammelburg, Germany.

Patton had gotten wind of his son-in-law's whereabouts, and two days after his first note to Beatrice, he wrote her again: "Hope to send an expedition tomorrow to get John." The Third Army's commander later insisted he had no idea that Waters was in Hammelburg. But intelligence reports had been circulating that indicated Allied POWs from Szubin had been sent to Hammelburg, and Patton's letters to Beatrice clearly showed he had been contemplating a rescue mission for some time.

At 10 a.m. on March 26, Patton arrived at Colonel Abrams' command post, accompanied by his aide, Major Alexander Stiller, and Brig. Gen. William M. Hodge of the 4th Armored Division. Patton needed no introduction, dressed as usual in his riding jodhpurs and immaculate Eisenhower jacket. A lacquered helmet was perched on his head, its three stars gleaming.

After the usual salutes and pleasantries, Patton explained that he wanted to send a mission deep behind enemy lines to rescue Allied prisoners he feared would be murdered. He then asked who was to lead the expedition. "I am," Abrams declared. "And I want to take Combat Command B." Patton immediately vetoed that idea: "You are not going and neither is your command. This is to be a small force."

A combat command was a highly mobile, self-contained unit of 3,500 to 5,000 men. Usually consisting of a battalion each of armored infantry, tanks and artillery, plus medical, engineering, recon and service elements, a combat command was flexible but strong enough to stand on its own. What Patton wanted was a smaller force of about 300 men and maybe 50 vehicles. Any debate was soon over, and Patton, as usual, had his way.

The men would come from Cohen's 10th AIB. The colonel, indisposed because of his piles, could not lead the proposed expedition, so command fell to Captain Abraham Baum, a seasoned officer with plenty of combat experience who took orders in stride. When Patton promised Baum the Medal of Honor if he succeeded, the captain replied, "I have my orders, sir; you don't have to bribe me."

His wishes made clear, Patton turned to leave, pausing at the door just long enough to say that Major Stiller would remain behind to "fill in the details." Cohen, Abrams and Baum still had only the vaguest idea of what they and their men were being asked to do. They soon found out.

"There's a POW camp there with 300 American officers in it," Stiller breezily offered, "and Patton wants them liberated." Hammelburg was 60 miles east of Abrams' CP, and some 50 miles behind German lines.

While the others talked, Baum pored over a map. Surprised to realize that the POW camp was not marked on any of the military maps, the captain immediately asked Stiller the camp's location. "Don't know," Stiller admitted. "But General Patton says you ought to be able to choke that out of some civilian when you get there."

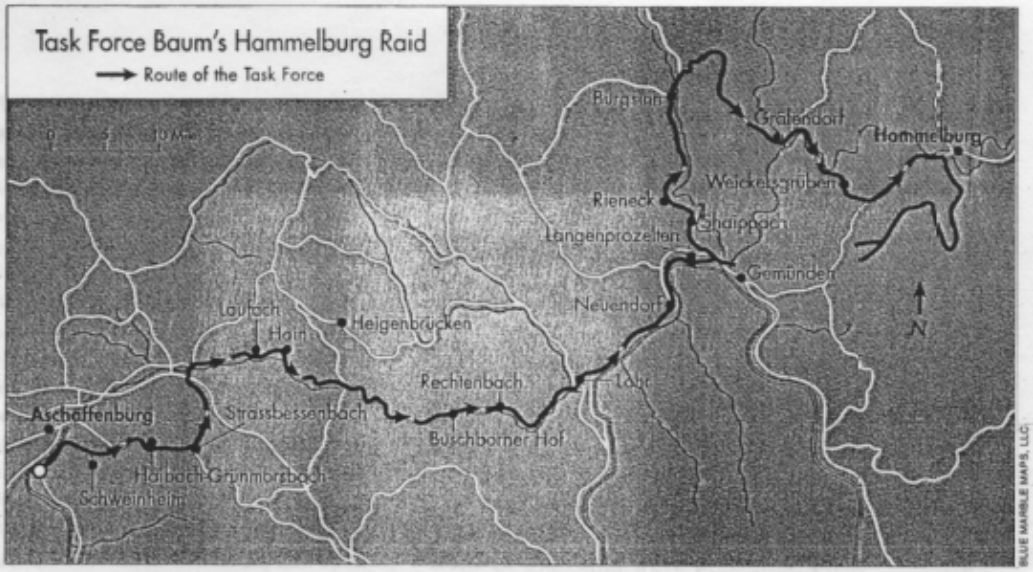
That was not all. After absorbing Stiller's nonchalant assessment of the situation, Baum was hit by another bombshell—he'd be on his own. In fact, the entire Third Army was shifting its position northward. Task Force Baum would operate in the Seventh Army's territory. Stiller assured Baum of the Seventh's cooperation and added that air support would be available if needed.

The conference was drawing to a close when Stiller mentioned he would be going along for the ride. Red flags shot up in Baum's mind. Something was not right. Stiller was a staff officer, a "pen pusher," but as a major he would outrank Baum.

PHOTOS: AFTER THE BATTLE

OPPOSITE: A Sherman from the 47th Tank Battalion, 14th Armored Division, crashes through the gates of the Hammelburg POW camp on April 6, 1945, amid the exultant cheers of newly liberated prisoners. An attempt to reach the camp—and one prisoner in particular—10 days earlier had ended in disaster. LEFT: Ordered by Lt. Gen. George S. Patton to launch a small task force 50 miles behind enemy lines, Colonels Creighton Abrams (left) and Harold Cohen had no clear explanation of why they were being asked to embark on such a risky mission.

Even though the war was winding down, Patton's plan to launch a raid 50 miles into enemy-held territory was an extremely risky venture. The task force was not only too small, its success depended on moving quickly through an area teeming with Germans and seizing a series of river crossings along the way. Suffering from a severe case of hemorrhoids and busy planning to move his 10th Armored Infantry Battalion to the north, Colonel Cohen turned command of the raid over to one of his most capable subordinates, Captain Abraham Baum (below).



When asked why he was coming at all, Stiller glibly answered: "The general wants me to get a taste of combat. I'm only going along for the laughs and a high old time." As soon as Stiller left, Baum remarked to Cohen: "Something's fishy. This doesn't make sense." "Can it, Abe," Cohen replied. "We've gotten our orders…and if Stiller says he's going along for the ride, you don't have to put up with any shit from him either. You got that?"

The real reason that Stiller had been "offered" the opportunity to see some combat was that he would be able to identify Waters in a crowd of hundreds of prisoners. Stiller would travel in his own jeep.

As unusual as all this was, Cohen and Abrams faced more pressing issues and had to put their doubts aside to focus on matters at hand. Foremost was the need to punch a large enough hole through the German front line to allow Task Force Baum to squeeze through. With little time to consider other options, they decided that one place this could reasonably be achieved was at Aschaffenburg, which was just beyond the bridgehead they had established over the Main River.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When Patton took Baum aside and promised him the Medal of Honor if he succeeded, Baum simply replied, 'I have my orders, sir; you don't have to bribe me.'

Even forcing a passage there would be tricky, however. Typical of that part of Germany, the town was full of narrow, twisting streets—a tanker's nightmare—and had been recently reinforced by German infantry. The next best option was Schweinheim, about a mile to the south, which was less heavily defended.

Working at a frenzied pace, Abrams and Cohen prepared Task Force Baum, which would comprise C Company, 37th Tank Battalion; A Company, 10th AIB; and supporting troops from other units. At 8:30 p.m., less than 12 hours since Patton had first presented the idea, American artillery opened up on a narrow section of the front to clear a way for Baum's 10 M4A3 Sherman medium tanks, six M5A1 Stuart light tanks, three self-propelled 105mm guns, 27 halftracks and eight jeeps. It was not enough. The attack had gotten off to a glacially slow start, and before long infantry had to be called in.

The original plan had been to achieve a breakthrough in two hours. It was well past midnight when Baum's force bludgeoned its way through the German front lines. After clearing Schweinheim, the pace picked up. Lieutenant William Weaver's Stuarts, armed with 37mm guns, took the lead. Next came a cluster of jeeps, including Baum's command vehicle. Behind the jeeps were the 10 Shermans, whose clanking metallic tracks ruled out any hope of a stealthy passage. Following behind the Shermans were halftracks stuffed with infantrymen. Bringing up the rear were the self-propelled guns and a handful of maintenance and supply vehicles.

The first objective for the mile-long column was Highway 26, part of Adolf Hitler's celebrated autobahn. The task force raced through the village of Haibach-Grünmorsbach without serious opposition, though German soldiers did fire an occasional potshot at the column. Most often, the Germans weren't even aware that the armored vehicles rumbling by were American. One small town the Americans drove through was full of civilians walking to work and rear-echelon soldiers more concerned with girls than the war. At one point, as the column passed a hospital, some German nurses leaned out the window and waved to the American tankers. The GIs waved back, hoping the young ladies wouldn't notice that their uniforms were not field gray.

Baum raced up and down the column in his jeep, partly to keep an eye on things and partly to encourage the men on what seemed an impossible mission. Leaving nothing to chance, he ordered the light tanks to knock down the telephone poles that lined the road and infantrymen to follow behind to cut any visible phone lines.

As soon as the task force reached Highway 26, Baum ordered it to move at full speed and the column was soon racing down the road. In the lead in his M5A1, christened *Conquering Hero*, was Lieutenant Weaver, who must have felt like one as he hurtled down the autobahn on his maiden combat mission. At first

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LEFT: The commander of the prison compound at Hammelburg's *Oflag* XIIIB was Maj. Gen. Günther von Goeckel, who quickly lost his nerve when he first encountered the Americans. Unfortunately for Baum, other German officers in the area were made of sterner stuff. BELOW LEFT: A Seventh Army tank waits by the side of the road as a house in Aschaffenburg burns. A fierce battle was raging in the town when Baum received his orders for the raid, and much-needed manpower had to be diverted from that fight in order to punch a hole through the German lines to allow Baum's column through. BELOW RIGHT: Smoke rises from Gemünden after the 14th Armored captured the town. The Sherman at left in the picture, part of Baum's task force, had been knocked out by *Panzerfaust* rockets. With a critical bridge blown up, Baum lost valuable time searching for another way across the Main River.

all Weaver could make out were trees of a forested countryside, but as the sun came up, the untried officer caught sight of a large parade ground filled with German troops performing their morning calisthenics.

Once they recognized the American tanks, the Germans rushed for their stacked weapons and opened fire. *Conquering Hero*'s Sergeant Robert Vannett fired back, and other tanks followed suit as they passed. But only some of the Germans actually reached their weapons to unleash a desultory fire; American bullets were falling on the parade ground so heavily that most of the stunned men simply sought whatever shelter they could. Next to greet Weaver was a group of Germans marching down the highway just ahead. Rather than fight, these soldiers simply threw down their arms and surrendered.

There was, however, no time to take prisoners, or any room for them in the crowded vehicles if there had been. All the GIs could do was instruct the Germans to lay down their rifles on the road so that the column could pass over them, crushing the weapons under the weight of tons of steel. The bewildered soldiers were then let go.

As Task Force Baum raced into the unknown, the POWs inside *Oflag* XIIIB rose to face another day. Most, about 4,000 in all, were Serbs captured in 1941 when Hitler's legions overran Yugoslavia. The first major contingent of Americans had arrived in January 1945 during the Battle of the Bulge. After Waters and the internees from Poland reached the POW camp in early March, the number of Americans held behind the wire was about 1,500—a far cry from the 300 men that Baum believed he would be trying to rescue.

Lieutenant Herndon Inge Jr. of the 94th Infantry Division was one of the officers incarcerated at the camp. Taken prisoner during the Battle of the Bulge, he had endured forced marches in blizzards and two train rides in freezing boxcars before reaching Hammelburg. Conditions in the camp were appalling. Fleas and bedbugs infested what blankets were available and lice roamed at will through the prisoners' uniforms. Food was poor, and sometimes the Germans withheld the life-saving Red Cross parcels from the malnourished men.

Baum was not aware of any of that, but he did know that he needed to cover a lot of dangerous ground in a very short time. Fearful of what his column might encounter as it charged ahead, Baum decided to place the Shermans commanded by 2nd Lt. William Nutto at its head instead of the lighter Stuarts. It was a fortunate decision, because soon after the change was made the task force ran into a German roadblock near Lohr.

Before the crew of the lead tank could react, a *Panzerfaust* round exploded against their Sherman. A blossom of smoke and flame burst from the tank with a roar, the explosion marking a direct hit. The Sherman shuddered and swerved to the right before coming to an abrupt halt. The crew quickly scrambled out of the vehicle and scurried to safety, but that exposed the second tank to enemy fire.

This time the American got off the first shot. The second Sherman was ready, and as soon as the lead tank cleared its line of fire, the crew lowered their 76mm cannon and blasted the roadblock to smithereens. They followed by machine-gunning its wrecked remains for good measure. One American tanker had been killed in the firefight, and the lead Sherman was so badly damaged it had to be abandoned.

Hoping to avoid a repeat of that unwelcome encounter, Baum returned Weaver's light tanks to the point and ordered them to

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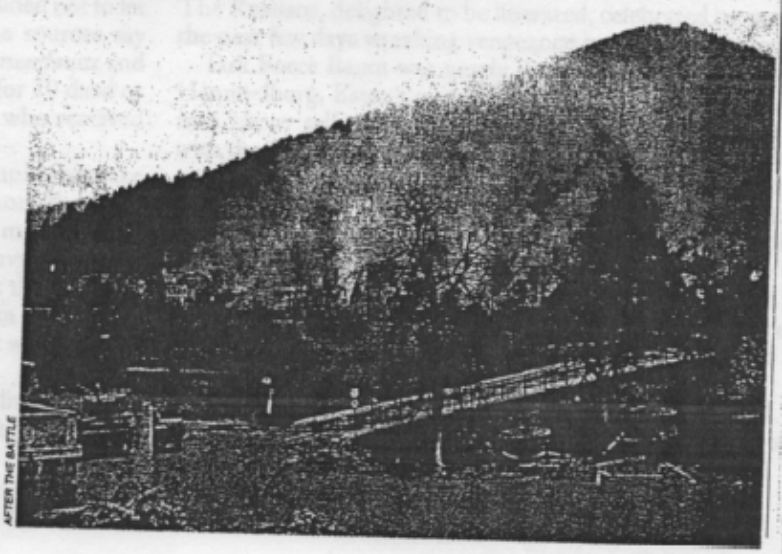

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A 37mm shell from *Conquering Hero* slammed into the locomotive's boiler, producing a huge explosion that pulverized the engine and turned the train into a mass of twisted metal.

keep their eyes open. The countryside was lovely, with hills carpeted by pines that reminded Weaver of Christmas trees. He began to sing "O Tannenbaum," but his refrain was cut short by the sight of two German tanks in the distance escorting a truck convoy bearing 88s and their crews.

Believing they were well behind the front, the Germans were completely unaware that the approaching armored vehicles were American. As the two columns passed each other on opposite sides of the road, the Americans opened up with their machine guns. The German tanks swerved, seemingly out of control, and one truck burst into an orange ball of flame. The 88s' crews scrambled out of the trucks, but many were not fast enough.

The encounter left the German convoy thoroughly decimated, its vehicles burning or angled crazily off the road. As Weaver passed the wreckage, he noticed one German soldier slumped over a vehicle. Weaver was prepared to see combat dead, but he was startled to discover that this enemy casualty was a woman, her hair flowing down in a cascade of blond strands. His reflective mood was shattered by a familiar voice shouting: "Don't slow down to mop up. Keep moving!" It was Captain Baum, barreling down the column in an effort to encourage the men to redouble their efforts.

The task force passed Lohr and headed for Gemünden, a town at the confluence of the Sinn, Main and Fränkische Saale rivers. As they approached, a German train came into view, chugging earnestly on a track that roughly paralleled Highway 26. It was pulling a mixed combination of freight and passenger cars, all loaded with German troops and anti-aircraft guns.

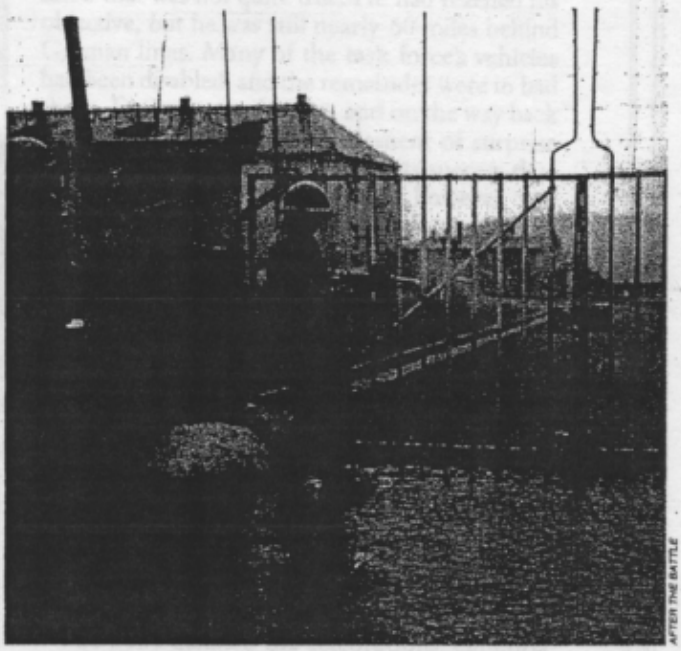
A 37mm shell from *Conquering Hero* slammed into the locomotive's boiler, producing a huge explosion that pulverized the engine and turned the train into a mass of twisted metal. Other tanks joined in the destruction by lobbing thermite grenades into the stalled cars. Closer to Gemünden, Task Force Baum stumbled upon a huge German railroad marshalling yard. The 10 or more trains assembled there were virtually defenseless.

Immediately realizing the value of this target, Baum ordered his tanks to fire into the massed engines and rolling stock. Large 76mm shells ripped through the yards, crippling locomotives and wrecking boxcars, but the job was too big for Baum's force and he requested an airstrike to eliminate what remained.

While the destruction of the rail yard was without incident, it cost the Americans time—time for the Germans to prepare to stop them. When Baum and his column entered Gemünden itself, they were greeted by enemy soldiers determined not to let them pass. In the ensuing firefight, two—some sources say three—of Baum's tanks were knocked out by *Panzerfausts* and abandoned. Enemy machine gun fire accounted for 20 dead or wounded GIs. Among those injured was Baum, who received deep gashes in a hand and knee.

Despite the casualties, the Americans were beginning to make progress when they discovered that engineers from the Germans' 46th Convalescent Company, consisting of men recovering from wounds and teenage cadets from the navy who were being retrained, had blown up the vital bridge over the Sinn and Fränkische Saale rivers where they joined the Main River. This was the span that Baum knew he had to have if he was going to reach his objective.

With no other option, Baum was now forced to disengage and seek another route to Hammelburg. One German prisoner offered, after receiving a few veiled threats, to lead the Americans to a crossing at Burgsinn. All this took time, however—something Baum could not spare.



AFTER THE BATTLE

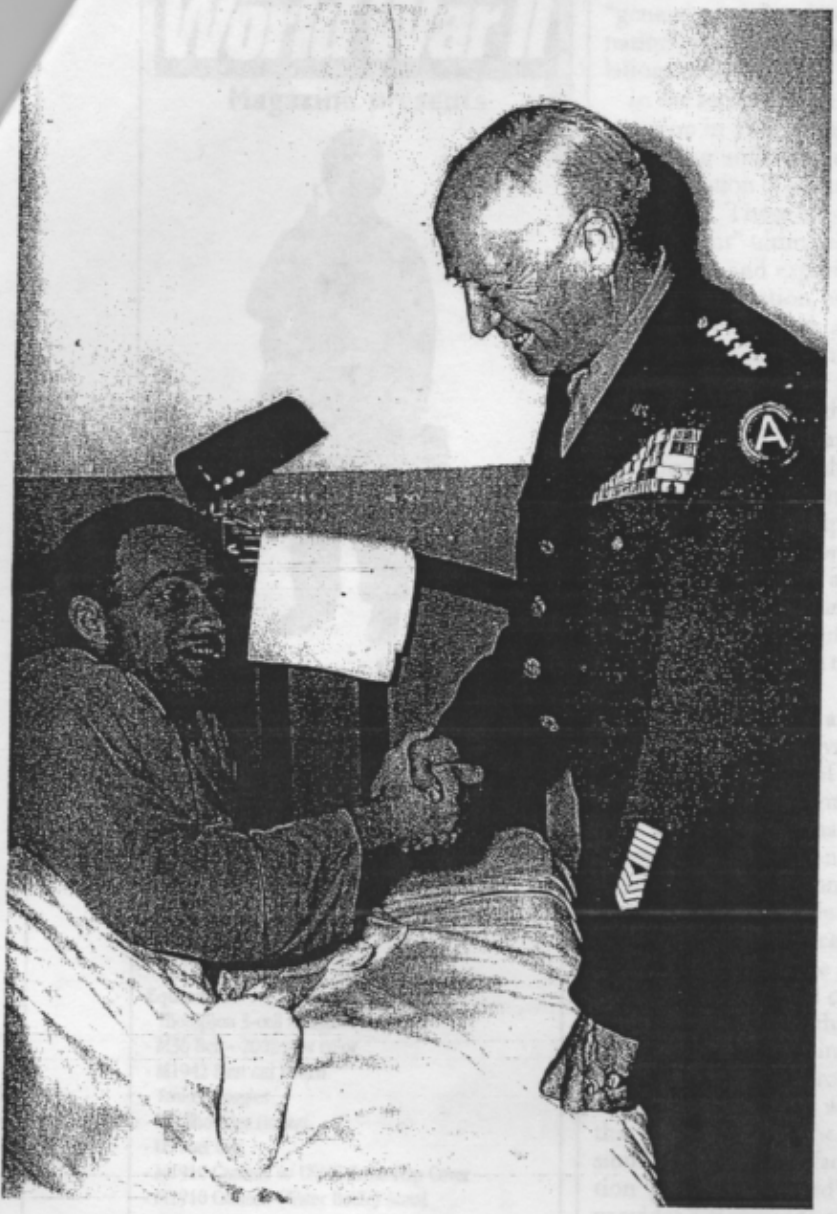
ABOVE: Infantrymen ceremoniously shoot the lock off the gate of *Oflag* XIIIB. When soldiers of the 14th Armored Division finally reached the camp, they were able to liberate approximately 1,750 American POWs as well as thousands more Serbians who had been prisoners since 1941. Among the GIs liberated were some 250 members of Baum's task force. RIGHT: Patton enjoys his long-anticipated reunion with his son-in-law Lt. Col. John Waters at Walter Reed Hospital in June 1945. Earlier, he had visited the newly liberated Baum, who was recovering from wounds suffered in the failed attempt to free Waters.

It was late morning on March 27 and the column was now only about 10 miles from *Oflag* XIIIB. When the task force reached Gräfendorf, it came across some 700 Russian POWs. The Russians, delighted to be liberated, celebrated by spending the next few days wreaking vengeance on the German locals.

Task Force Baum was nearly there—but not quite. Outside Hammelburg, Baum's remaining M4s tangled with seven German *Hetzer* self-propelled guns. While the Shermans grappled with the German tank-killers, Baum's light tanks, halftracks and one assault gun encountered two companies of German infantry dug in near the POW camp. They were cleaned out, but only after a long and bloody fight. The Shermans also eventually triumphed and rejoined the force.

The cost was high. Five halftracks and three jeeps had been destroyed. The vehicles that remained were battered, their crews exhausted. Worse, one of the demolished halftracks had contained the extra fuel necessary to make the return trip.

For the "Kriegies" at *Oflag* XIIIB, none of this mattered. Late in the afternoon on the 27th, the drudgery of their daily ordeal



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to survive was interrupted by the sound of the battle raging nearby. Then, as Lieutenant Inge recalled, "We saw several American tanks of Task Force Baum appear over the crest of the hill to the west of the camp firing their guns in our direction." Liberation seemed at hand.

Baum's Shermans began to fire on the parts of the compound where German opposition was expected. The 76mm shells arced overhead, only to land with a terrifying roar. Camp commandant Maj. Gen. Günther von Goeckel made his way to the office of Colonel Paul R. Goode, the senior American officer in the camp, shouting: "Your army is killing Serbs. You must tell them to stop. The Geneva Convention forbids fighting in a POW camp!

"I am now your prisoner!" the camp commandant announced. "Now it's your responsibility." Acting quickly, Goode conferred with Waters, who was a member of his staff. Waters volunteered to ask the American column for a cease-fire, but as he headed out, he was shot in the hip by a German guard who evidently had not received word of the camp's surrender. Badly wounded and bleeding heavily, Waters was taken to the Serb compound, where its medical staff saved his life.

Lieutenant Inge recalled that at "about 1630 hours, two of the big Sherman tanks broke through the double barbed wire fence, trailing the wires and uprooted fencepost." German resistance had been sporadic and soon ceased altogether.

Baum radioed the 4th Armored Division that the mission was accomplished, but in his heart he knew that was not quite true. He had reached his objective, but he was still nearly 60 miles behind German lines. Many of the task force's vehicles had been disabled, and the remainder were in bad shape. Fuel was running low, and on the way back the column would lack the element of surprise that had contributed so much to its success thus far. What concerned Baum most, however, was the number of POWs he found at the camp—the sprawling complex contained 1,500 Americans and the thousands of Serbs who had been incarcerated since 1941.

It fell to Baum to break up the revelry of thousands of joyous men who believed their hour of liberation had come and give them a sober assessment of the situation. The captain hobbled onto the top of his jeep—his knee throbbing—and shouted for quiet. "We came to bring you back to American lines," he said, "but there are far more of you than we expected. We don't have enough vehicles to take all of you. Some of you who want to go may be able to walk along with the column, but remember, we'll probably have to fight our way out of here."

The news deflated the celebrations, euphoria replaced by frustration and despair. Many simply gave up in disgust and walked back to the POW compound. About 200 elected to take their chances with the task force. Lieutenant Inge was one of them. He happily climbed onto one of the Shermans along with five or six other prisoners. "I felt exposed high up above the ground," he later recounted. "As we moved out, the cold wind blew in my face and I had an exhilarating and wonderful feeling of freedom." After loading up what men it could, the task force quickly left the prison compound and probed south.

Baum hoped to reach Highway 27, then race for safety. Colonel Richard Hoppe, the German commander of the Hammelburg training area, was determined to prevent it. Hoppe had assembled a menagerie of several disparate units to stop the Americans. His force included some self-propelled guns and a few *Panzerkampfwagen* Mark IV tanks. The German commander could also count on personnel from a nearby antitank school, and some 300 men from an officer candidate school. The cadets were veterans with at least one year's combat experience.

It was not much, but it was enough. Hoppe's men worked quickly to set up a series of roadblocks that stopped the American column in its tracks. As the Shermans attempted to back up and turn around, they were hit with a torrent of *Panzerfaust* rockets. Newly freed POW Inge experienced the attack firsthand, still clinging to his Sherman for dear life. "One of the rockets swooshed by my head like a Roman candle as it went past and exploded in the woods," he remembered. "I felt the heat and crouched down. If the round had been a few inches closer and had hit the tank, all of us hanging on would have been killed."

Inge was indeed fortunate. Three of Baum's other tanks were quickly knocked out. Hoping to regroup, the task force commander led his men to an area marked on the map as Hill 427. It was an unfortunate, if coincidental, choice of location. The

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on Moscow led to a broader campaign of "general terror" and "ideological extermination" that encompassed the local populations of the East.

In the second phase of the German occupation in 1942, Shepherd identifies an increasing shift toward "cultivation" of the population in an attempt to win hearts and minds. These efforts at "constructive engagement" ultimately failed due to the ideological and exploitive aspects of the German occupation, especially the expropriation of livestock and foodstuffs and the impressment of the population for forced labor.

In the third phase, the military reverses suffered by the German army in 1943 and the increasingly harsh conditions combined with lack of manpower, inadequate training and poor equipment led the unit's leadership to abandon constructive engagement in favor of a policy of increasing brutality. The result was the creation of dead zones designed to deny resources and areas of operation to the growing partisan movement.

Shepherd provides a fair and insightful analysis of the motivations that determined the actions of midlevel officers within the unit, ranging from the ideological to the pragmatic. He also contrasts the actions taken by the 221st with other security divisions in the East and demonstrates the wide latitude of discretion enjoyed by officers in these units. Unfortunately for the local populations, the 221st's efforts at cultivation proved the exception rather than the rule. Shepherd argues convincingly that midlevel officers played a key role in dictating the ruthless nature of the war in the East and that these men bear the weight of responsibility for the brutal face of Nazi occupation policy. Shepherd's excellent study provides a significant addition to emerging scholarship on the *Wehrmacht* that focuses on the actions and motivations of individual units, a trend that promises to offer important insights into the motives of those involved in Adolf Hitler's "crusade in the East."

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Americans were right on top of an antitank firing range, one that their opponents used frequently and knew intimately. By now it was clear to Task Force Baum survivors that the odds of their getting home were very long. Some of the recently liberated POWs saw the handwriting on the wall and began their own slow trek back to the camp.

At first light on March 28, Baum and what remained of his task force attempted a final breakout. German tank shells and *Panzerfausts* pulverized the column. Those Americans not killed were taken prisoner. Only a handful—perhaps 20—escaped the German net. Most had to endure another month of hardship and privation before the war ended and they enjoyed their freedom for good.

The ill-conceived operation was a disaster. The 37th Tank Battalion later reported four officers and 73 men missing in action, and their counterparts in the 10th AIB recorded losses of six officers and 209 men. Subsequent investigation revealed that of those, 25 had been killed in action. It was the 4th Armored Division's largest single loss of the war. To that figure must be added those men either killed or wounded at Schweinheim forcing a passage for Baum to begin the raid.

To counter any criticism, Patton claimed that Task Force Baum was a diversion for the Third Army's move northward. He also disingenuously claimed that he did not know his son-in-law was in the camp. When Patton visited the recently freed Baum in the hospital, the captain commented, "You know, sir, it is difficult for me to believe that you would have sent us on that mission just to rescue one man." The general responded, "That's right, Abe, I wouldn't."

Luckily for the Third Army's mercurial commander, the war was winding down and his superiors became more concerned with bringing the fighting in Europe to an end than in chastising him. It was not until the posthumous publication of Patton's memoirs, *War As I Knew It*, in 1948 that any admission or sense of guilt on his part came to light.

"I can say this," the general wrote, "that throughout the campaign in Europe I know of no error I made except that of failing to send a combat command to Hammelburg." □

Eric Niderost writes frequently for World War II *Magazine. For further reading, see* Patton's Vanguard: The United States Army Fourth Armored Division, *by Don M. Fox.*