

FIFTY YEARS AGO IN WORLD WAR II SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 1944

The futility of the Axis powers' ambitions was clear by the autumn of 1944; staggering reverses in the Pacific, across France and the Low Countries, in Italy, in Eastern Europe, and in the Balkans revealed the hopelessness of their aggression. In early September, planning was under way for the liberation of the Philippines, the Marianas had been regained, and irreplaceable Japanese losses on Peleliu, at Morotai, and in the naval action in the Surigao Strait severely taxed Japan's limited reserves in men and materiel. Driving out of their Normandy beachhead, Allied forces had swept across France, into Belgium, Luxembourg, and Holland, and were closing on Germany itself. The capture of Aachen dealt Germany a blow that was as damaging psychologically as were the losses in men and equipment. Massive Soviet armies were mounting offensives on a scale not seen since the German invasion of Russia; the First Baltic Front advanced to the Baltic coast of Lithuania, while the Second Ukrainian Front fought its way into Hungary and the Karelian Front pushed across Finland to Norway. Battered on every side, the Axis alliance soon began to crumble.

These and other highlights of World War II are drawn from Bud Hannings' *A Portrait of the Stars and Stripes, Volume II*, available for \$50.00 from Seniram Publishing, Inc., P.O. Box 432, Glenside, PA 19038.

- 3 September** The 3d Armored Division seizes the city of Mons, Belgium, leaving the VII U.S. Corps in position to intercept the German 7th and 15th Armies in the Mons pocket.
- 4 September** The Finns and Russians agree to a truce, abandoning the Germans fighting on that front.
- 10 September** Operation MARKET GARDEN kicks off with the massive Allied airlift of three airborne divisions and a corps-sized armor thrust. Hampered by the unexpected presence of two Panzer divisions, the operation creates a salient into the German line, but fails to attain all of its objectives.
- 21 September** MARKET GARDEN ends with the surrender of the remaining soldiers of the British 1st Airborne Division at Arnhem, after stiff German resistance prevents British armor from reaching Arnhem in time.
- 30 September** In the Pacific, Admiral George H. Fort declares Peleliu, Ngesebus, Kongauru, and Angaur occupied. Organized resistance on Northern Peleliu has stopped.
- 7 October** After the Vagney stronghold is secured by soldiers of the 3d Infantry Division, a counterattack penetrates American lines. A tank commanded by Second Lieutenant James Harris attempts to repel the Germans. As the Germans pull back to set an ambush, Harris moves forward on foot to find them, is wounded in a burst of machinegun fire, and crawls back to his tank. Although too seriously wounded to get back inside, he issues commands from outside the tank until it is destroyed. He is hit by a shell that removes his left leg at the hip. Refusing medical attention until another man is treated, he dies of his wounds and is posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor.
- 9 October** Lieutenant General Mark Clark, U.S. Fifth Army commander, is panicked over the dwindling strength of his divisions. Replacements have been diverted to France.
- 17 October** In a prelude to the Philippine Islands campaign, General Douglas MacArthur lands the 6th Ranger Battalion to seize Dinagat, Homonhon, and the Suluan Islands.
- 20 October** MacArthur's forces invade the Philippines aided by a massive air support umbrella and overwhelming naval superiority.