

FIFTY YEARS AGO IN WORLD WAR II
March-April 1945

By the early spring of 1945, World War II was drawing to a close, and the territories under Axis control had shrunk dramatically. The hard-won initial landings against stubborn Japanese resistance had led to successive Allied victories at sea, on the mainland, and on the island chains of the Pacific. In Burma, Indian Army divisions were inflicting devastating defeats on Imperial Japanese forces, while U.S. Marines eliminated enemy resistance on Iwo Jima and U.S. Army forces continued their liberation of the Philippines. The U.S. XXI Bomber Command stepped up its campaign against the home islands of Japan. In Europe, the capture of the bridge at Remagen dealt Germany a crippling blow, while U.S. bombers conducted massive operations in support of Russian ground forces. The powers that had unleashed the war so confidently half a decade earlier had long since realized that victory was beyond their grasp, and that even hope of their survival was fast fading.

These and other highlights of World War II are excerpted 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.

- 2 March** *The XI U.S. Corps recaptures Corregidor, while the XIV Corps eliminates the last Japanese resistance in Manila.*
- 7 March** *The 9th Armored Division captures the Ludendorff Bridge at Remagen, the sole remaining intact bridge across the Rhine. The seizure of this bridge leads to the capture of more Germans than were taken prisoner by the Russians on the Eastern Front.*
- 10 March** *At 0300 hours, two companies of Japanese infantry assault Company A, 127th Infantry regiment, 32d Infantry Division. They first hit a three-man outpost, killing two of its soldiers. The third soldier, Private First Class Thomas E. Atkins, holds his position although badly wounded. By 0700 he has fired more than 400 rounds from three different weapons, and 11 enemy dead lie in front of his position. During a lull, he leaves to get more ammunition, but medics insist upon holding him for treatment. While he is being treated, another Japanese soldier enters the area; Private Atkins grabs a rifle, kills him, and proceeds to repel still more enemy who have penetrated the platoon's perimeter. He is later awarded the Medal of Honor for his deeds.*
- 28 March** *Hitler relieves General Heinz Guderian as Chief of Staff. Guderian is the last of the senior general officers of the early years of the war to be dismissed.*
- 1 April** *U.S. forces land on Okinawa following an intensive naval and air bombardment by ships and planes of the Fifth Fleet.*
- 7 April** *A Japanese armada, led by the battleship Yamato, is spotted by U.S. warplanes and attacked as it advances against American naval forces in the China sea. The Yamato, one light cruiser, and four destroyers are sunk before reaching the U.S. fleet.*
- 16 April** *The 7th Armored and 99th Infantry Divisions accept the surrender of more than 20,000 German prisoners each, including the Iserlohn Garrison.*
- 25 April** *President Harry Truman is informed by British Prime Minister Winston Churchill that Heinrich Himmler—claiming that Hitler is incapacitated and he is now speaking for the German government—has agreed to surrender all troops on the Western Front.*