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FEATURES

Cover: During his platoon's search and destroy mission in Vietnam, PFC Milton L. Cook uses his M60 machine gun to spray a tree line in response to sporadic sniper fire. For the full story, see "Hell on Hill 1338" on page 30. Photo: National Archives

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COLUMNS

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EDITORIAL

Despite long decades of strife between the North and South, no one expected the Civil War to devolve so suddenly into a merciless bloodbath.

"Every war will astonish you," American General Dwight D. Eisenhower said after World War II. As the leader of the Allied forces that successfully landed on D-Day and marched into Berlin 11 months later, Eisenhower obviously knew what he was talking about.

The American political leaders at the beginning of the Civil War were less prepared, or less willing, to expect the unexpected. Long decades of increasingly vitriolic arguments between the northern and southern regions of the country, revolving mainly around the issue of slavery and its expansion into newly acquired territories, had accustomed both politicians and the public to angry words and empty threats. Following his election as president in November 1860, Abraham Lincoln professed to be unworried about rumors of impending secession. "The hot breath of secession," Lincoln told his secretary, John Nicolay, "is just the trick by which the South breaks down every Northern man." He did not intend to be similarly intimidated by the "political fiends" he saw at work in the South.

Not for the last time would Lincoln prove to be disastrously wrong about the deadly earnest intentions of alienated southerners. When a longtime observer of his high-strung southern neighbors, Cincinnati journalist Donn Piatt, warned the president-elect of the looming danger, Lincoln airily responded, "Well, we won't jump that ditch until we come to it." And to another supporter, Lincoln advised, "Entertain no proposition for a compromise in regard to the extension of slavery. The tug has to come & better now than later. Concessions on our part would be fatal."

Soon, the "tug" would indeed come, in the form of the Union installation, Fort Sumter, in Charleston harbor. When impatient, overconfident Confederate forces fired on the fortification in the early morning hours of April 12-13, 1861, the long war of words instantly became a war of bombs and bullets and bayonets. Before long, Lincoln would be saying, in one of the homely frontier aphorisms to which he was addicted, "The bottom is out of the tub."

The first year of the Civil War was primarily one of trial and error. The two sides struggled to raise armies, appoint commanders, and feel out each other's military intentions. The major opening battles—at Manassas, Wilson's Creek, and Ball's Bluff—were hard fought but poorly led contests between citizen-soldiers who had not yet learned the deadly skills they would develop soon enough—or else die trying to develop.

Still, there were some generals, on either side, who understood from the start the brutal enterprise into which the two regions had blundered. Stonewall Jackson at Manassas and Ulysses S. Grant at Belmont knew more clearly than most that the developing war would be neither short nor bloodless. Both men, significantly, had received their baptism of fire during the Mexican War, when they had fought on the same side. Now they were enemies.

Another future Civil War leader, a frontier-born southerner who unlike Jackson and Grant had not enjoyed the advantage of a West Point education, would put the war into suitably stark context. "War means fighting, and fighting means killing," Nathan Bedford Forrest would say. Having learned that lesson—up close and personal—in several deadly hand-to-hand duels before the Civil War, Forrest knew whereof he spoke. It was then, and remains today, an enduring pity that few politicians in the North or South shared that cold-eyed country wisdom. The people who voted for them, supported them, and followed them, would have to learn it the hard way.

—Roy Morris Jr.

From the publisher

The article that appeared on page 38 of our Winter 2026 issue of *Military Heritage*, "Blood Along the Susquehanna," was written by Mike Phifer. We regret the error.

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VALOR

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Free and enslaved black soldiers spilled their blood in the revolution for a chance at a freedom they might never experience.

By Kevin Seabrooke

When the first shots of the Revolutionary War were fired at Lexington Green on the morning of April 19, 1775, Black men had already been serving in colonial militias for some time, particularly in New England. Some even had previous military experience from the French and Indian War. Their participation during these opening moments helped sustain the Patriot cause at a time when the Continental Army did not yet even exist.

And while "Indians and Negroes" were not technically permitted to train as soldiers in the militia, they were expected to be armed and "turn out" in an emergency. There is documentation that Prince Estabrook, an enslaved man serving in the Lexington militia under the command of Col. John Parker was on the green that morning and was hit by a musket ball in the left shoulder. He recovered and would serve several tours until the end of the war.

Historians have documented at least 35 men of color in integrated units there, or at Concord Bridge later that day, most in local militia, though the number could be higher. Of those, 11 were officially in some of the so-called minute companies that began forming and training twice a week in October 1774, at the suggestion of the Massachusetts Provincial Congress

Free and enslaved African Americans would play a crucial, yet often overlooked, role in shaping both the conflict and its meaning—are all men "created equal" or not?—from the earliest moments

New York Public Library

ABOVE: In July 1781 a company of African American soldiers of the Continental Army's Rhode Island Regiment under Lt.-Col. Jeremiah Olney marches through Philadelphia on their way to Yorktown. INSET: Crispus Attucks is shot and killed with four others during a March 5, 1770, demonstration now known as the "Boston Massacre." Attucks, a sailor of mixed African and Indigenous ancestry, is widely considered the first Patriot to be killed in the American Revolution.

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An African American soldier on the ground (lower right) can be seen loading a musket in this 19th century engraving of the Battle of Bunker Hill. The scene may be based on the account of Aron Smith, a white soldier at the battle who said that a "man at his side, a negro so crippled by a shot in the leg that he could not rise up," continued to reload Smith's musket, as well as his own, for Smith to keep up the fire.

of resistance. Their contributions were not limited to physical labor or support roles; many fought directly in combat, demonstrated exceptional bravery, and influenced military outcomes. A recent analysis regarding the number of African Americans in the colonies in 1775 estimates there were 450,000 enslaved persons, and roughly 50,000 free. Some 4,000 Black men, free and enslaved, would serve as soldiers in the Continental Army over the course of the war, with estimates of participation in all services, including sailors, ranging from 5,000-8,000. This is not an insignificant number for a force that never at one time numbered more than about 20,000 troops.

About 10 percent of the sailors serving in the Continental Navy were free or enslaved Black men serving on ships that were, by maritime tradition, unsegregated. The Royal Navy had an estimated 15,000-20,000 Black sailors serving aboard their ships. This number would grow as Britain tried to lure enslaved men from the Colonies with promises of freedom, with disastrous results in some cases, as they were sold back into slavery.

The history of the American Colonies and the War for Independence, like all history, is rife with apocryphal stories. A single person, with a name, who committed a singular act, is easier to remember than a large group who did many things in many places over an extended period of time. Over decades real events, impressions, and beliefs are combined and repeated until they're distilled into symbols, a shorthand to represent a group, an event, or an era. In the minds of many, for example, the Patriots were all white men like George Washington, who is himself a symbol and the subject of many apocryphal stories.

One of the most powerful early symbols of Black participation in the American Revolution was Crispus Attucks, a man of African and Native American descent who was shot and killed by British soldiers during the "Boston Massacre" of March 5, 1770. He is often referred to as the first death in the Revolution, though 11-year-old Christopher Seider (possibly Snider) died two weeks earlier when customs agent and British informer Ebenezer Richardson fired into a crowd protesting outside his house.

Attucks' death became a rallying point for colonial resistance to British authority, and Patriot leaders frequently invoked his sacrifice in propaganda against British tyranny. His role demonstrated that African Americans were not passive observers but active participants in the resistance movement, willing to place themselves at risk in pursuit of political change.

After the events of April 19, the Battle of Bunker Hill in June 1775 marked one of the first major tests of the Patriot forces and stands as a defining moment for Black soldiers in the early war. Among those who famously fought there were Peter Salem and Salem Poor, two Black soldiers whose bravery became widely recognized.

Peter Salem was born enslaved in Massachusetts but was freed by his enslaver specifically so that he could enlist in the Patriot militia. At Bunker Hill, Salem fought against British regulars advancing up Breed's Hill. According to several accounts, he fired the shot that killed Major John Pitcairn, a British officer who had played a key role in the opening clashes at Lexington. While historians debate the exact details, contemporary recognition of Salem's bravery was significant. His service challenged deeply entrenched racial assumptions and demonstrated that Black soldiers could perform with distinction in direct combat against elite British forces.

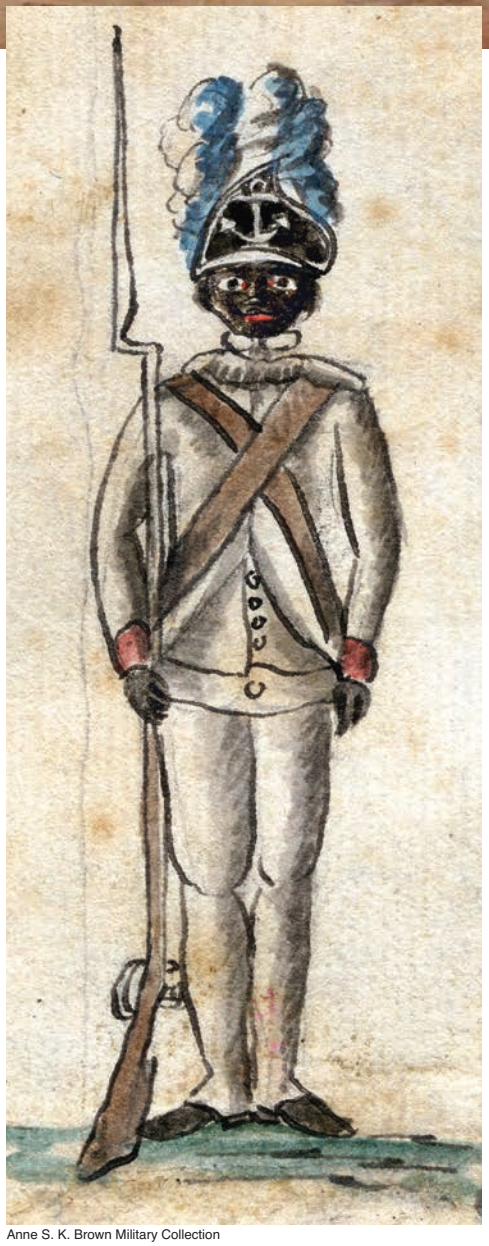
Salem Poor's experience further reinforces the importance of Black soldiers at Bunker Hill. Poor was a free Black man from Massachusetts who enlisted in the militia and distinguished himself during the battle through extraordinary courage.

That either Salem or Poor, the two are often confused to this day, shot Pitcairn remains a persistent story is most likely due to the fact that it makes a more satisfying narrative. The idea that Pitcairn, despite conflicting claims in the historic record, had ordered his men to fire at the militia on Lexington Green remains an equally persistent story.

Witnesses at Lexington swear a British officer said something along the lines of, "Lay down your arms, ye villains, and disperse!" That there's no evidence it was Pitcairn who said it did not matter—in the minds of New Englanders, he was a villain. Humans gravitate toward stories that reinforce their beliefs, be they entertaining, morally instructive, or both. They want stories with clear meaning, where villains get their just deserts.

Peter Salem's role in Pitcairn's death was all but cemented by the 18th century version of a "viral meme"—the 1786 painting, *The Battle of Bunker's Hill*, by American artist and veteran John

South Carolina State House Collection



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ABOVE: A 19th century painting of the cavalry combat at the Battle of Cowpens between Col. William Washington and British dragoons. A young African American soldier at left, fires a pistol at the dragoon engaging Washington—an event witnessed by future Chief Justice of the Supreme Court John Marshall, who was an officer in the Virginia Continental Line at the time. Marshall said the soldier saved Colonel Washington's life. LEFT: A Rhode Island Regiment soldier at Yorktown in a white linen hunting shirt adorned with red cuffs, linen "overalls" (trousers), and a distinctive leather cap with a painted white anchor and feathers. This was drawn by 19-year-old French Lt. Jean-Babtiste-Antoine de Verger of the Royal Deux-Ponts Regiment.

Trumbull that included a Black soldier many believed to be Salem.

By the end of the 19th century, as a result of the painting and the efforts of abolitionists in the ante-bellum northern states, the idea that a Black man named Peter Salem (or sometimes Salem Poor) had killed Pitcairn had become an iconic moment in the history of Bunker Hill.

Lieutenant Colonel James Abercrombie, who was wounded at Bunker Hill and died a week later was also said to be shot by Salem or Poor, though some contemporaneous accounts and many historians argue that Abercrombie was probably hit by what would be called "friendly fire" today.

The presence of Salem and Poor at Bunker Hill highlights the military necessity of Black soldiers during the war's opening phase. The Continental Army faced chronic shortages in manpower, weapons, and training. Allowing Black men to enlist—especially free Black men—helped stabilize the Patriot forces at a critical moment. Early victories and strong performances, even in tactical defeats like Bunker Hill, boosted colonial morale and demonstrated that British forces were not invincible. Black soldiers were essential in this effort.

Just two weeks after Bunker Hill, General Washington arrived in Cambridge, Massachusetts, to take command of the new Continental Army, formed from the militia units around Boston.

By July 9, Washington's adjutant, Horatio Gates, had issued instructions to army recruiters not to "enlist any deserter from the ministerial Army [British], nor an Stroller, Negro or Vagabond." But many Black Patriots were already serving and had been in battle. Some had been killed or wounded and at least one (Caesar Augustus) taken prisoner.

John Adams, hearing reports that youths, old men and Black soldiers not fit for service were being paid, wrote to several generals about the matter. Gen. John Thomas' replied that, "We have some negroes; but I look on them, in general equally serviceable with the other men for fatigue; and, in action, many of them have proved themselves brave."

Fourteen white officers signed a petition to the Massachusetts legislature praising the bravery of Salem Poor and requesting official recognition. They described him as a "brave and gallant soldier" whose actions merited reward. This rare and formal acknowledgment illustrates how undeniable Black contributions could overcome, at least temporarily, racial prejudice and force white leaders to confront the reality of Black military competence. Unfortunately, the petition did not detail Poor's actions. Though his bravery was not in question, it is possible the petition was part of an

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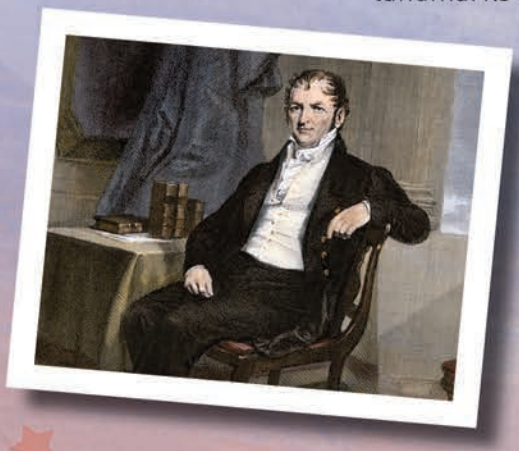

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Long before he revolutionized American industry, Eli Whitney was a young boy in Westborough shaped by the pressures of the Revolution. With British goods cut off and tools in short supply, he convinced his father to let him open a small forge at their home. For two winters, he hammered out badly needed nails for local families and builders — a wartime necessity that revealed his remarkable mechanical talent. By the war's end, Whitney was already innovating, developing a clever method for turning nails into hatpins. His ingenuity, born in a time of scarcity, would later change the course of American manufacturing.

THE OTHER MIDNIGHT RIDE

On the night of April 18, 1775, 17-year-old Abigail Smith was working in her uncle Captain Bacon's house, melting lead and casting bullets when the news arrived: the British were coming. Disguised as a boy, she tucked her pigtails beneath a hat, mounted her horse, and raced through the dark toward the Sawin family home, a key gathering spot for Natick's militia. Her daring ride helped rouse the town's Minute Men, joining alarms across Framingham, Sherborn, Needham, and Dover, and ensured Natick was ready when news of Lexington and Concord broke. Smith remained devoted to the cause throughout her life, a lasting reminder that the Revolution depended not only on famous names, but on fearless individuals willing to ride into the dark for liberty.

A PATRIOT RETURNED HOME

Alexander Quapish, born circa 1741 in Massachusetts' Wampanoag territory, was a patriot in the American Revolution. He enlisted on May 8, 1775, as a private in the 13th Massachusetts Regiment under Captain Daniel Whiting and Colonel Jonathan Brewer, fighting at the Battle of Bunker Hill and later serving on the main guard under Lt. Col. Loammi Baldwin. He died on March 23, 1776, in Needham, MA, remembered as the "last of the Aborigines in Dedham." More than a century later, his unclaimed remains were found at Harvard's Warren Anatomical Museum. Through the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, Quapish was finally returned to his community. In 2020, the Mashpee Wampanoag and Nipmuc Nations held a reburial at Natick's Pond Street Burial Ground, where he now rests among other Indigenous Revolutionary veterans, ensuring his name—and service—are remembered.

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effort to help sway the question of Black enlistment in the new Continental Army.

John Greenwood, a young, white soldier in this new army, was impressed when he saw wounded men at Bunker Hill leaving the fight for medical treatment. Greenwood recalled seeing "a negro man. Wounded in the back of the neck… blood running down his back. I asked if it hurt him much… he said no, that he was only going [for treatment}, and meant to return."

Black Continental troops also drew the attention of foreign observers, including Lt. Comte Jean-Francois-Louis de Clermont-Crevecoeur, a French Artillery officer who observed a formation of Continentals assembled for review in July 1781. He wrote, "the men were without uniforms… most of them barefoot. There were many Negroes, mulattoes, etc."

Later the same month, Baron Ludwig von Closen, aide-de-camp to French commanding General Comte de Rochambeau wrote, "It is incredible that soldiers composed of men of every age, even children of fifteen, of whites and black, unpaid and rather poorly fed, can march so fast, and withstand fire so steadfastly."

Washington, a slaveholder, had been opposed to Black enlistment, but by the end of 1775, he had been convinced by officers in Massachusetts and by the fact that they were already serving. His final order of the year was to allow it. He wrote to Continental Congress President John Hancock to say that, to keep the Free Black soldiers from enlisting with the British, he had "given license for their being enlisted. If this is disapproved by Congress, I will put a stop to it."

By 1777, Connecticut was recruiting both free and enslaved Black men to fill military quotas, with many securing manumission and pensions after the war. At least 820 Black soldiers and sailors served in the colony's integrated regiments.

In February 1780, Rhode Island created companies of black soldiers within otherwise white Continental regiments. These companies were commanded by white officers and NCOs, although there were several black privates promoted to NCO rank. Some observers were critical of these black units while others insisted they performed as well as their white counterparts.

In August 1778 a return was made by the main Continental Army serving with Washington at White Plains, New York, to determine the number of African American soldiers present. Of some 21,000 total soldiers, 755 were identified as black.

In the brigades containing African Americans, they made up 5-8 percent of the enlisted soldiers. Most of these units were fully integrated, apparently with little or no serious problems. As the Continental Army struggled to enlist new recruits over the next several years, the percentage of Black

soldiers likely increased.

In October 1783, the fighting effectively over, Virginia passed a law to guarantee the emancipation of slaves who had served in its military. These were men whose enslavers had them enlist as freemen to act as substitutes for others. With their return from the fighting, some owners attempted to return the former soldiers to slavery. The law stipulated that "they should enjoy the blessings of freedom as a reward for their toils and labors," and to be "fully and completely emancipated, and shall be held and deemed free in as full and ample a manner."

Once the Continental Army was formed, the southern colonies began contributing men and South Carolina and Georgia were particularly opposed to the idea of Black soldiers. In September, South Carolina's Edward Rutledge introduced a resolution, which was voted down, to expel all Black Patriots from the Continental Army—regardless of status or service.

It's interesting to note that in the early 1700s, fearing an invasion by the French or Spanish, several colonies passed laws allowing the arming of all men, regardless of color. In 1703, the South Carolina General Assembly passed a law authorising the arming of enslaved men, promising them that if they "in actuall invasion, kill or take one or more of our enemies, and the same shall prove by any white person to be done by him, shall, for his reward, at the charge of the publick, have and enjoy his freedom for such his takeing or killing as aforesaid."

Things were different by the time of the Siege of Charleston in 1780. In addition to Redcoats already in the area under Lt. Col. Mark Prevost, Patriot Gen. Benjamin Lincoln knew Henry Clinton and the British fleet were on their way with some 13,500 troops. Though badly outnumbered, Lincoln's request to the South Carolina government for 1,500 enslaved men to be armed was refused. The British took Charleston in about six weeks, capturing 5,000 men, 300 cannons, 6,000 muskets and stores of gunpowder in the biggest single loss of the war for the Americans.

The early participation of Black soldiers also forced Patriot leaders to confront the ideological contradictions of the Revolution. The war was justified through language emphasizing liberty, natural rights, and resistance to tyranny—ideas that resonated deeply with African Americans. Enslaved and free Black men alike recognized that these principles applied as much to them as to white colonists. By fighting for independence, Black soldiers asserted their own claims to freedom and equality, exposing the hypocrisy of a revolutionary movement that demanded liberty while upholding slavery.

The British recognized this contradiction and sought to exploit the schism. In November 1775, Lord Dunmore, the royal governor of Virginia, had issued a proclamation offering freedom to enslaved people who escaped their Patriot enslavers and joined British forces.

In a letter to London, Dunmore wrote, "I am now endeavouring to raise two Regiments, one of White People (Called the Queens own Loyal Virginia Regiment) the other of Negroes (Called Lord Dunmores Ethiopian Regiment).

It's estimated as many as 2,000 responded to the call—enough to form the all-Black "Ethiopian Regiment" of 300 able-bodied men. Dunmore made no provision to care for those freedom seekers not fit for the regiment and many were dead from starvation or disease within a few months. The unit was disbanded in August 1776, when Dunmore fled to England. Some members of the regiment went with him, while others sailed with the British to New York and others to St. Augustine. It's estimated that after the war, some 100 or more people associated with the Ethiopian Regiment evacuated to Nova Scotia in 1783.

Dunmore's Proclamation demonstrated that African Americans were a decisive strategic factor in the war. Their choices had the power to influence military outcomes and political calculations

Continued on page 98

UNIFORM

Byzantine Cataphract, 10th-13th Century CE

By Giuseppe Rava

HELMET: Conical iron helmet, topped with a dyed horsehair plume. Ring mail face protection below the helmet.

EPILORIKION: A padded, coat of silk and heavy cotton worn over a hauberk (mail shirt), both extending to the knee. The hauberk is covered by a cuirass (breast and back plates) of lamellar construction (small steel plates laced together) for additional protection of the torso and upper arms.

HORSE ARMOR: Decorated heavy leather mask, and leather and iron barding (armor).

GREAVES: From the Old French *greve* (shin, shin armor) lamellar armor covers the lower legs.

SHIELD: Round cavalry shield made of wood and leather; strapped to the arm to free the hand to grasp reins or weapons.

WEAPONS: Two or three iron maces, as well as a spathion (straight, double-edged sword) and a paramerion (saber-like curved sword).

The Byzantine Empire extended from the 4th century through the fifteenth century, with one of the most effective militaries in the world.

Over time, the Byzantine Army became a largely professional fighting force, with little reliance on militia. Augmenting their powerful, well-drilled infantry, the army included mounted Katafraktoi (cataphract) cavalry, making up as much as 15 percent of the armed forces.

Copied from Persian heavy cavalry encountered in battle, the Byzantine cataphract was often heavily armored cavalry, armed with bows, lances, swords and heavy maces. Typically only charging short distances due to the weight of their armor, their impact on the battlefield proved to be devastating to the enemy.

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Breaking with tradition, French Navy ships bested the British at the Battle of the Capes during the Yorktown campaign.

By Mark Carlson

Ships of the line represented the pinnacle of military power by the end of the 18th century and would remain the dominating force on the seas for more than 200 years. The largest wooden vessels ever built, these sailing warships commonly mounted 74 to more than 100 heavy cannon on two or three decks and carried a crew of more than 700 officers and men. They sailed loaded with 120 tons of shot and 35 tons of powder for their heavy guns, which could deliver half a ton of iron in a single devastating broadside.

But despite their immense power and influence, they were as vulnerable as any weapon when used improperly or worse, confronted with radical new tactics. Thus it was in 1781 when the Royal Navy, whose supremacy of the seas had been virtually unbroken since the mid-17th century, was challenged and defeated by a French fleet off the coast of North America. The British naval debacle also led directly to the victory of George Washington's Continental Army over General Cornwallis at Yorktown.

"Nothing equals the beautiful order of the English at sea," wrote French Adm. Michel de la Roche-Courbon, Comte de Saint-Saint-Pierre in 1666. "Never was a line drawn straighter than that of their ships; thus they bring all their fire to bear upon those who draw near them."

Those words were written by an admiring French admiral in 1666, Comte de Saint-Pierre wrote those words during the Second Anglo-Dutch War, when the Royal Navy was beginning its ascendancy to global domination.

The British Admiralty's core belief was in the sheer power of a formation of several huge ships of the line delivering broadsides to reduce an enemy fleet to splinters. Supremely powerful, but heavy and slow, these ships were the backbone of the Royal Navy.

At the time the Spanish Armada attacked in 1588, warships acted independently, with each captain moving against an enemy and delivering

***Battle of the Virginia Capes, 5 September 1781*, by V. Zveg (1962), portrays the clash between the French fleet on the left under Vice Admiral the Comte de Grasse, engaged with the British fleet commanded by Rear Admiral Sir Thomas Graves off the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay.**

U.S. Navy Art Collection/Naval History and Heritage Command

broadsides. With no reliable means of communication between ships, this approach made things difficult for fleet commanders and often brought less of a victory than might have been achieved with a coordinated plan.

By the time of Oliver Cromwell, a supporter of an organized navy, the concept of concentrating a fleet's firepower by following a single line under the command of a fleet admiral had become the Royal Navy's standard formation. With the large ships following in a single line a cable length apart (roughly 200 yards), the full might of all the ships could be concentrated on an enemy fleet. In 1663, this doctrine was published in the revised *Fighting Instructions*, known as the "Royal Navy's bible."

For the next 120 years no seafaring nation on Earth, including England's longtime adversaries France and Spain, could successfully defeat a Royal Navy fleet or squadron in battle. By the time of the Seven Years' War of 1756 to 1763, the Admiralty, flush with a string of victories by fleets using the tried and true line-ahead formation had made it a punishable offense for any ship's captain or fleet admiral to divert from it. No captain was allowed to move independently under any circumstance, even when a golden opportunity presented itself.

Naval warfare in the 18th century was governed by three factors. Foremost was the weather and especially the wind direction. The second was the number of guns, with more considered better. Lastly, and most important, the skill of the fleet commander and his captains. But by the early 1780s, the skill of British admirals was of little use against the French navy, in fact, experience was a liability instead of a benefit.

Though they were the most advanced sailing vessels of their era, ships of the line were still dependent on the direction of the wind. The most favorable position for any fleet was the weather gauge, or upwind of an enemy. With the wind behind them, a fleet could close with or refuse

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battle with the enemy. At a maximum speed of six to eight knots, it could take a fleet several hours to move a fleet into position—even as the opposing force attempted to do the same. Nothing happened fast in an 18th century naval battle.

After losing several battles, the French navy began a serious study of how it might gain an advantage over the larger British Navy. King Louis XVI, believing it was the "First Service of the Realm," provided large sums to renovate and improve his fleet. Beginning in 1765, the French designed and built dozens of large, powerfully armed and faster warships. New training academies were established for shipwrights, sailors and gunners, resulting in a higher standard of gunnery and sail handling. Entire forests were cut down and transported to dozens of new dockyards along the southern and western coast.

By 1775 France possessed the most advanced navy in the world—with 64 ships of the line and more than 50 frigates, manned by more than 10,000 trained gunners.

The French took some of their larger ships of the line—First (100-130 guns on 3 decks), Second (90-98 guns on 3 decks) and Third Rate (64-80 guns on 2 decks) warships—and cut them down, creating what were known as "Razee" from the French *vaisseau rasé*, meaning a razed ship. For instance, a warship of 74 guns was cut down to fewer than 50. Another type of Razee only removed the upper deck guns, thus lightening the weight and making the ship more nimble without reducing its structural strength. Reducing a ship's tonnage and height made it more maneuverable and faster, a great advantage for the French Navy. With much of the high freeboard cut down, a 50-gun razee still had the heavy oak timbers and solidity of a larger ship, but it was lighter and had a lower center of gravity, improving its sailing qualities. Moreover, instead of the 800 men needed to sail and fight the larger ship, it only needed two-thirds that number. This of course meant the navy could man two ships for every large 74-gun ship of the line. The loss of guns was negligible since improved gunnery and tactics favored the smaller, swifter Razees.

The French also developed new gunnery techniques, such as heating cannonballs in brick ovens on the gun decks, then firing the lethally glowing shot onto British decks. Tarred hempen rigging and sails were notoriously vulnerable to fire. Once a blaze flared up, the men fighting fires were taken away from their guns. Another was Chain shot, two cannonballs connected by a short length of chain and expanding bar shot consisting of two cylindrical ends connected by a sliding iron joint would expand as they spun wildly like pinwheels, tearing through wood, rigging, sails and human flesh. Like a huge shotgun shell made of scrap iron, glass, even stones, Langridge was a hideous form of anti-personnel weapon. The French Navy was ready to employ these new tactics, training, weapons and ships the next time they faced the vaunted and mighty Royal Navy.

While this did not go unnoticed in England, the fossilized Admiralty saw no reason to spend huge amounts of money to improve its own fleet, neither in strength, tactics nor efficiency.

Every new ship was constructed under what was known as the "Rule of King's Thumb," meaning without any refinement or change.

It had been a popular dictum in the Royal Navy that "Just lay a Frenchman close alongside and you will defeat him every time." This was certainly true, but only if the Frenchman was unwise enough to come within close range of the British guns. While British gunners were trained to fire into enemy hulls, intending to stove in and crush ribs and structural damage, the better trained French gunners aimed higher. Even with heavy 32-pound cannon firing solid shot as large as a man's head, it could take dozens of broadsides to do significant damage to stout oak timbers. But the masts, yardarms, sails and rigging, not to mention the men who handled them, were far more vulnerable. A single well-directed broadside of chain or bar shot could seriously impair a ship's ability to maneuver or maintain its position in the line of battle. In short, the French had learned not to destroy a ship's hull, but to immobilize it. With shredded sails and toppled masts, British ships were unable to catch the faster French ships, which were able to sail away at their leisure. The French now had a decided lead over the conceited Royal Navy.

It would not be until the time of Admiral Lord Horatio Nelson in 1798 that the old practices

Jean-Pierre Sembely/Wikimedia Commons

ABOVE: Launched in 2012, the construction of this exact replica of the frigate *L'Hermione* was begun in France in 1997 using traditional methods as much as possible, augmented by the use of power tools where necessary. Construction of the original ship, whose most famous act was transporting General Lafayette to America in 1780, was begun in 1778 and finished in one year. OPPOSITE: This detail from the *Battle of Louisbourg, 21 July 1781* by Auguste Louis de Rossel (1736-1804) is the only known image of the *L'Hermione*. Accompanied by *L'Astrée,* the two frigates intercepted a convoy of 13 supply vessels escorted by five Royal Navy ships off of what is now Nova Scotia. The French captured the HMS *Jack*, a small armed merchant ship acting as escort, and dismasted the HMS *Charlestown* (the former American frigate USS *Boston*), which managed to escape, as did the colliers and merchant ships. Rossel was a naval officer commissioned by Louis XVI in 1786 to produce a series of 18 paintings depicting the main sea victories of the French Navy in the American War of Independence (1775-1783).

would be discarded in favor of new tactics.

The Razee conversions proved their value against British cannonballs. Since most of the Razees had been 74-gun or larger ships of the line, their hull planking and ribs were correspondingly heavier. Even though the Razee's outward appearance was of a Fourth or Fifth Rate, its robust timbers withstood the pounding of the British 32-pound carronades. While there is no way to know for certain how effective Razees did stand up to the enemy shot, there is little doubt they survived long enough to wreak havoc on the larger Royal Navy ships of the line. As soon as a mast fell over the side or rigging lay like dead snakes on the bloody splintered decks, those powerful ships were virtually helpless.

By 1780 the American Revolution had turned from a series of land battles to one defined by the actions of the British and French navies. While the land armies fought from the Canadian border to the Carolinas, it was a single sea battle that decided the final outcome of the war for American Independence. When France joined the American colonies in 1778 she possessed 80 modern and fast ships of the line. The still larger Royal Navy had more of the large ships of the line, but their design and how they were commanded fell far short of the French. This was how affairs stood during the fall of 1781 when Washington made one of the most important decisions of the war.

His army was facing the 7,000 redcoats of Major General Earl Cornwallis encamped on the Yorktown Peninsula along the western shore of Chesapeake Bay. With Washington were the French troops of Jean-Baptiste Donatien de Vimeur, comte de Rochambeau. If the revolutionary army could be reinforced by more troops, artillery, cavalry and supplies, there was a good chance that the combined armies could surround and defeat the British. At that time the bulk of the French fleet was in the West Indies, where Rear Admiral Francois Joseph Paul de Grasse was making plans to retake the islands seized by the British during the Seven Years' War. Writing via the French minister to the colonies, Washington sent word to de Grasse to come as fast as possible. He hoped the French fleet could bring the needed reinforcements to the combined army, while blocking the entrance to Chesapeake Bay. This would not only support his army, but would deny the British any help from their own fleet, then anchored in New York.

The French admiral responded by turning his fleet north through the Bahamas Channel and working up the Florida coast. On the way his fleet lost the 74-gun *Intrepide* and the 40-gun *Inconstante* in identical accidents. While a quartermaster doled out portions of Tafia brandy, the French equivalent of grog, a candle had been knocked over which started a fire. To lose two powerful warships to such avoidable mishaps was inexcusable, and de Grasse took steps to assure it never happened again. His force consisted of 28 ships of the line, carrying three regiments of infantry and 350 artillerymen. Accompanying the warships were 15 merchantmen that de Grasse had chartered with his own funds, each carrying a portion of the supplies, cannon and ammunition.

Rear Admiral Samuel Hood, the British commander in the Caribbean, learned of de Grasse's departure and rightly assumed the French were headed to support Washington and Rochambeau. Aboard his 92-gun flagship *Barfleur*, Hood sailed from Antigua with 14 ships of the line on August 10 and set a direct course for Virginia. But de Grasse had taken a circuitous route before heading west into Chesapeake Bay. When Hood reached the entrance to the bay on August 25, he found no French fleet, and continued north towards New York.

Four days later the French warships and trans-

Dark Attsios/Wikimedia Commons

The replica frigate *L'Hermione* firing cannons during a celebration in Bordeaux, France. In 2015 the French ship crossed the Atlantic for a tour of North America, stopping at Yorktown, George Washington's Mount Vernon, New York City, and other locations in the U.S. and Canada.

ports entered the huge bay. The transports moved north towards the rendezvous with the allied forces while the warships anchored in Lynnhaven Roads at Cape Henry along the southern coast of the bay. Twelve miles north was Cape Charles at the southern end of the Delmarva Peninsula. While the mouth of the bay was wide, the dredged ship channel was only three miles across.

Hood reached New York and met with the senior British admiral in North America, Vice Admiral Thomas Graves. At 52, Graves was a respected and experienced commander who was confident he and his force could defeat the French fleet coming from the south. But he had other prey in mind. Commodore Comte de Barras was bringing eight warships loaded with heavy siege artillery, men and ammunition from Rhode Island. He was to rendezvous with de Grasse coming from the Caribbean. Knowing that the British Navy was hunting him, de Barras sailed far out to sea and south to the Carolinas before turning west.

With 19 ships of the line, Graves, in his flagship the 90-gun *London*, sailed south to Virginia. The fleet carried 2,000 fresh troops to reinforce Cornwallis, as well as 400 New Yorkers forcibly impressed into the Royal Navy. It was a clear indication of the poor state of the British fleet that Graves had to kidnap colonists, even those who were not loyal to the Crown.

Graves and Hood reached the mouth to the bay on the late morning of September 5. At first his leading ships reported masts visible just past Cape Henry, and Graves assumed it to be de Barras. They would be an easy target for the big British men of war. But when his lookouts reported a veritable "forest of masts," it was obvious there were far more than the eight ships they had expected. These were 24 of de Grasse's ships of the line.

De Grasse found himself at a great disadvantage. The British had the weather gauge, with the wind out of the northeast and the tide coming in. Worse, the French warships were anchored on the lee shore of Virginia with little room to maneuver. Yet that was not what worried de Grasse. The 15 transports that had sailed up the Chesapeake estuary were accompanied by some of his frigates and more than 1,300 of his men. His own flagship, the 104-gun *Ville de Paris* was short almost 200 men. Upon sighting the big British warships bearing down on the entrance to the bay, he gave orders to clear for action. Immediately his captains responded to the signal by casting off anchor lines and buoying them, loosing sail and loading the guns. But time was short. The only edge de Grasse had was in numbers. He had 24 ships of the line to 19 for the British.

But the French commander was unaware he had one element in his favor. Graves was an ardent follower of the *Fighting Instructions* and would not deviate from what the Royal Navy had been doing since 1663.

Graves had the French fleet and transports in his grasp. If he simply moved in among the French fleet, he could destroy them with near impunity. Yet true to the Admiralty's standing orders, he raised the signal to form a line ahead with his flagship, the *London* in the vanguard.

De Grasse must have felt like cheering as he saw the perfect orchestration of the British men of war lining up to enter the bay through the channel. It was a splendid sight with all the sails set along the British line, hundreds of black gun muzzles bared like iron teeth, flags and signals flying and white bones churning at their bows. Graves's ships executed the maneuver to perfection. It was magnificent and imposing.

But it was also useless. By the time Graves's *London* had entered the wide bay, de Grasse's ships had managed to clear Lynnhaven Roads and formed up in the open ocean.

With startling speed for an 18th century naval battle, the advantage had gone to the French. Now Graves found himself inside the bay with de Grasse to his rear and widening the gap. If he had been a bit cleverer, he might have moved up the estuary where his ships could have destroyed the transports carrying troops and guns for Rochambeau and Washington. But Graves saw only de Grasse. With the signal for line ahead still flying, he ordered his fleet to turn about in place and pursue the fleeing French. With this order each ship turned and headed east. The tide and wind were now against him. This took nearly an hour, during which de Grasse took up a heading of northeast. Graves had to chase the French fleet, but instead of having his most powerful ships in the van, the weakest, the 74-gun *Shrewsbury* and the 64-gun *Intrepid* were leading. The *London* was now 10th in the line of battle.

Graves soon found himself facing a situation for which he and the vaunted Fighting Instructions had no answer. De Grasse's ships had reached open waters off the coast, but had not formed into a line of battle. The French ships were in small knots. The neat British line of battle was useless. By late afternoon de Grasse had formed his ships into a loose line that was

intended as a way of maintaining control rather than be used in ship to ship battle.

With his "line ahead" signal still flying, Graves sent his leading ships at the French vanguard. But because of the wind and the ragged enemy formation, the *Shrewsbury* approached at an angle, so the two fleets formed a "V" pointed east.

This meant that only the lead British warships were able to engage the French. The following ships of the line were still too far away to begin firing.

Graves compounded the worsening situation by raising the signal to "bear down and engage the enemy more closely." While this signal by itself meant for each captain to order his ship to break out of the line and attack the nearest French ship, the "line ahead" signal was sacrosanct. In other words, the two signals contradicted each other. Confusion reigned in the British fleet. Far to the rear, Admiral Hood followed the *Fighting Instructions* dictum that the "line ahead" superseded every other order, while Rear Admiral Francis Samuel Drake chose to follow the second signal. Aboard the 70-gun *Princessa* he led the lead ships at the French van. But this only created more havoc.

Almost immediately the *Shrewsbury* received heavy damage from the leading French ship, the *Pluton*. After two French broadsides, 27 of her crew were dead, including the captain. With her masts teetering and rigging shot apart and more than 50 of her crew wounded, the British ship veered away. Then the 64-gun *Intrepid* moved in and was battered by the bigger *Marseillais*. With 20 men killed and 35 wounded, the *Intrepid* also left the broken British line. The French gunners were proving the merit of their training. Every British ship that came near de Grasse's guns had its rigging and masts shredded by chain and bar shot.

Orange and yellow flashes strobed like lightning in the thick clouds of white smoke while the roar of cannon vied with the dull thud of impacting balls on solid oak hulls. Tall waterspouts erupted from the blue sea from cannonballs around and beyond the two fleets. The sea air was rent with the stink of gun smoke. Hundreds of men lay in pools of blood that ran across the scrubbed decks. Tarred rigging hung like torn black webs while shredded sails flapped in the wind. The *Terrible* was so battered that Graves ordered her to be scuttled.

Graves's big guns did damage the French ships. Drake's *Princessa* delivered a withering broadside against the *RefMehl*, shattering planking, ribs and bulwarks. Jagged splinters of wood tore across the desks, killing and dismembering men as they worked the guns and sails.

The first shots of the Battle of the Capes were fired just after noon but it was late afternoon when

Continued on page 97

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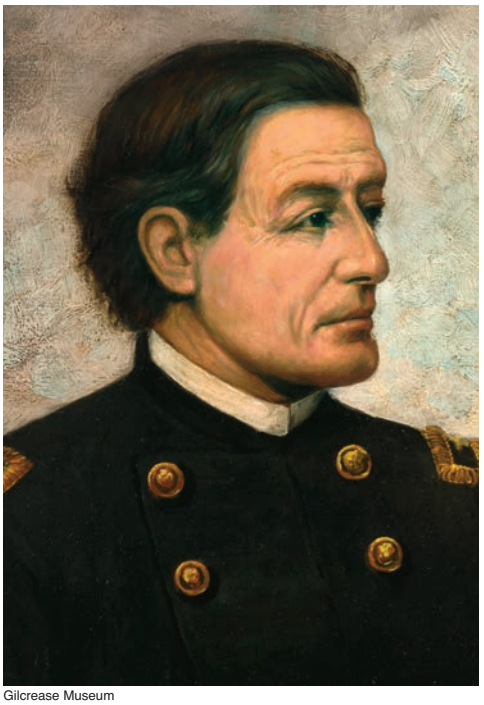
After nineteen years in the U.S. Army, Major Marcus A. Reno found himself a scapegoat on the Little Bighorn.

By Sandy Barnard

Major Marcus A. Reno guided three companies of the 7th U.S. Cavalry into the valley of the Little Bighorn River in Montana Territory on June 25, 1876. On that hot afternoon their target was a Plains Indian village whose outline Reno and his 165 cavalrymen and scouts were just beginning to glimpse. A U.S. Army officer for 19 years, Reno had fought in the Civil War, but he had never faced an enemy force as large as the one in the Lakota and Northern Cheyenne encampment he was approaching.

A little earlier, his regimental commander, Lt. Col. George Armstrong Custer, had ordered Reno's battalion to charge their foes. The looming battle would be Custer's last. Yet in death Custer would gain a measure of glory that he still retains, albeit controversially, to this day, as a legendary character of the American West. The Little Bighorn would also mark Reno's final fight, one he would survive. Yet, instead of praise for saving his own troops from a fate similar to Custer's, he was criticized and labeled a coward. Three years later, a court of inquiry formally absolved him of blame for the Army's defeat, but history's long-term verdict has been far less kind—and, pointedly, quite unfair.

Reno's own character flaws undoubtedly have contributed to his unimpressive historical reputation. Often described as colorless, Reno eventually succumbed to his addiction to alcohol, a not uncommon fate among officers and soldiers in the West. As early Custer battle sleuth Fred Dustin observed, "His



Gilcrease Museum

ABOVE: *Custer's Last Rally*, completed in 1881 by American artist John Mulvany (1839-1906) was the first, and still one of the most well-known, depictions of the battle at the Little Bighorn River on June 25-26, 1876, in what is now eastern Montana. INSET: Undated portrait of Major Marcus A. Reno by American artist Henry H. Cross (1837-1918).

Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument

U.S. 7th Cavalry Lieutenant Colonel George Armstrong Custer (in front, left of center, wearing light clothing) at the head of the 1874 Black Hills Expedition with more than 1,000 men and 100 wagons. Major Marcus Reno, also a Civil War veteran, took a circuitous route to joining the expedition. After the war, Reno briefly taught at West Point, then was a judge advocate in New Orleans. In 1866, he was assistant inspector general of the Department of the Columbia at Fort Vancouver before being promoted to major in 1868 to serve on court martial duty at Fort Hays, Kansas. He joined Custer's 7th Cavalry as commander at Spartanburg, South Carolina, on July 21, 1871.

Civil War and previous record was very creditable, but whiskey-drinking got him into trouble as it usually does with whiskey-drinkers, and his personality was not very attractive, and personality goes a long ways, and carries a man over very rough places where lack of it may be the cause of much unearned criticism." His rough edges undoubtedly assured the scapegoat's mantle for Reno for the defeat of the heroic Custer.

Marcus Albert Reno was born November 15, 1834, the fourth child of James and Charlotte Reno, in Carrollton, Illinois. His father was a businessman of some prominence in their community. After both his parents died from disease in 1848-1849, the teenaged Reno managed to gain an appointment to the West Point Military Academy. A solidly built young man with dark hair, brown eyes and a dark complexion, Reno enrolled August 28, 1851. His less than sparkling record in six years at West Point included two dismissals, one for accumulating more than 200 demerits. The other stemmed from a court-martial for foolishly failing to obey an officer's order to stop singing while on guard duty. But, persevering, he was commissioned in June 1857. Assigned to the 1st Regiment of Dragoons, Lieutenant Reno traveled the Oregon Trail in the summer of 1858 to Fort Walla Walla in southeastern Washington Territory. For three years, Reno competently handled his administrative and command duties, which occasionally involved trailing renegade Indian bands.

After the outbreak of the Civil War, Reno's regiment, now the 1st U.S. Cavalry, was transferred to the East for action against the Confederate States of America in late 1861. That November, Reno was promoted to captain. He saw his first combat in May 1862 as a company commander during the peninsula campaign of Gen. George B. McClellan. Reno was praised several times in reports by his commanders over the next few months.

On a trip to Pennsylvania to buy horses for the Union cavalry in October, Reno, 28, met and began courting Mary Hannah Ross, the attractive 18-year-old daughter of a prominent family in Harrisburg. They would marry on July 1, 1863, in New York City, where her family had fled Confederate pressure in Pennsylvania.

During the Battle of Trevillian Station on June 10, staff officer Reno carried orders to Brig. Gen. George A. Custer, who had risen rapidly in rank. In July, Reno was also recommended for promotion by Gen. Alfred T.A. Torbert, who wrote: "Reno distinguished himself at the battles of Coal (sic) Harbor and Trevillian Station for coolness, bravery, and good judgment. I know him to be fully competent to fill the position."

But nothing came of it and Reno would spend the rest of the war as a breveted brigadier general commanding the 12th Pennsylvania Cavalry Regiment in small actions. At war's end, he reverted to his permanent Army rank of captain.

After the war, he was initially assigned to New Orleans where he acquitted himself well as judge advocate, Military Commission, Headquarters, Department of Louisiana, and as provost marshal general of the Freedmen's Bureau. In May 1867, Reno rejoined the 1st U.S. Cavalry, again on duty in the Northwest at Fort Vancouver, across from Portland, Oregon. He would hold a number of assignments there, including acting assistant inspector general, Department of Columbia.

In early May 1869 he was assigned to the 7th U.S. Cavalry on duty at Fort Hays on the Kansas plains. For a couple of years, he gained experience at seeking to bring the ever-elusive Indians of the Plains into line. In early 1871, the 7th Cavalry transferred from the Central Plains to the South to enforce federal Reconstruction laws. For almost two years, the 7th Cavalry pursued the Ku Klux Klan and moonshiners. By late June 1871, Reno himself was headquartered in Spartanburg, South Carolina, commanding the 7th's companies in York, Union and Spartanburg counties. Over sev-

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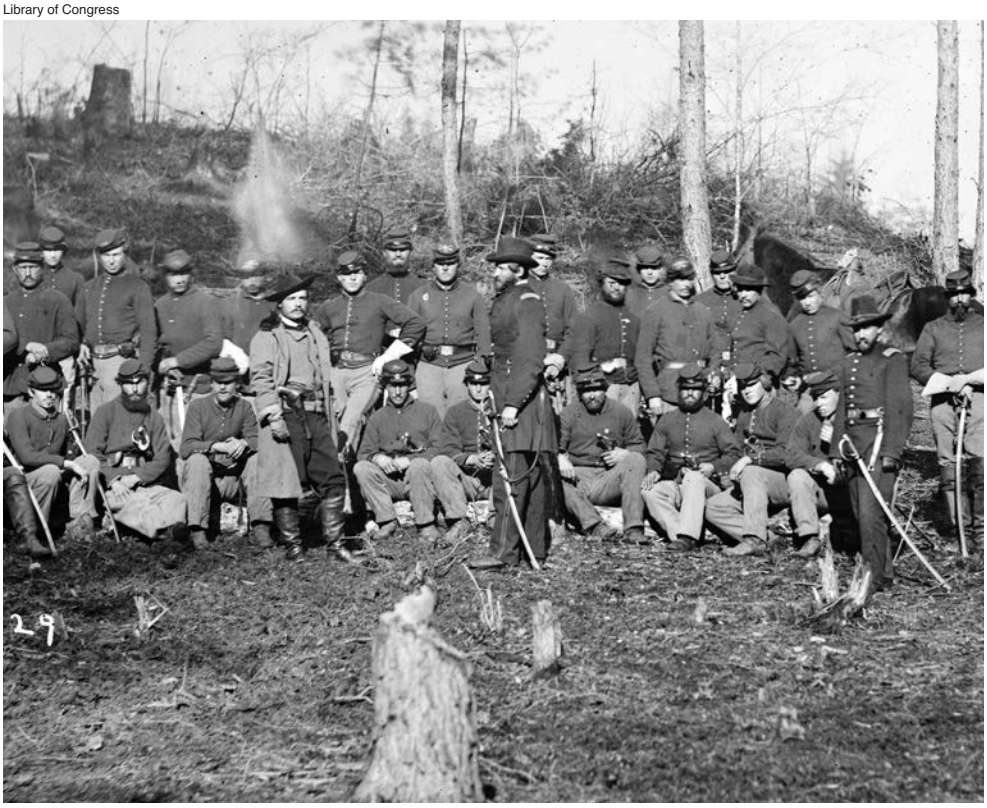

A detachment of 1st U.S. Cavalry at Brandy Station, Virginia, in February 1864. Capt. Marcus Reno was with the 1st Cavalry at the Battle of Kelly's Ford on March 17, 1863, where he was wounded—his horse was shot and fell on him—and was brevetted to the rank of major for "gallant and meritorious conduct." By January 1865, he was brevetted to colonel in command of the 12th Pennsylvania Volunteer Cavalry. He was again brevetted, temporarily, to brigadier general in the Union Army in March 1866, for meritorious service during the Civil War

eral months, the cavalry arrested hundreds of people suspected of illicit activity. Despite the animosities inherent in the situation, the local newspaper, the *Carolina Spartan*, praised Reno for his evenhandedness.

Beginning in 1873, Reno spent two summers commanding an Army escort for the Northern Boundary Survey Commission which was marking the 49th parallel that separated the United States from Canada. He was in the Montana Territory when his wife died on July 10, 1874, at home in Pennsylvania. The Army refused him leave to return East until the field surveying season concluded in September.

Biographer Ron Nichols observed that Mary "had a soothing effect on Reno's somewhat cold and harsh personality. He was, by nature, introverted and aloof and, without Mary Hannah, he would find it difficult in future years to socialize in the close-knit society of the army post."

By late October 1875, Reno was ordered to Fort Abraham Lincoln, Dakota Territory. The fort was home to the 7th Cavalry, whose commander, Custer, had lengthened his Civil War renown through his 10 years of combat and noncombat exploits on the Plains. On November 1, in the absence of Custer and other senior officers, Reno assumed command of the regiment, his first of a unit of that size in 11 years.

About that time, national political and military leaders set in motion events that at least indirectly would cost Reno his career. In the Black Hills, miners and settlers had swarmed through sacred treaty grounds of the Plains Indians, notably the Sioux. The government was caught between living up to its obligations to the Indians under the Treaty of 1868 and the rampant desire of white Americans to settle the Black Hills. By the end of January 1876, roving bands of Indians, including those under Sitting Bull, had failed to heed a government order to report to reservations. The U.S. Department of the Interior notified the War Department that the roamers should be considered hostile, thus supplying a legal pretext for a planned military campaign. The military envisioned hitting the northern camps in a repeat of a winter strategy that had succeeded on the southern plains the previous decade. Besides Custer's column from Fort Lincoln, a second column of infantry and cavalry would be sent from Fort Fetterman in Wyoming under Brig. Gen. George Crook. A third column under Col. John Gibbon would be dispatched from Fort Ellis in western Montana.

Sheridan's hopes for a winter campaign fizzled. In March, Crook headed up the old Bozeman Trail for the Powder River country, but severe weather hindered his troops. A March 17 attack on an Indian camp by Col. Joseph J. Reynolds initially went well, but the warriors soon retook their village. Crook retreated to Fort Fetterman to regroup.

In Dakota Territory, winter delayed Custer's departure from Fort Lincoln. Worse, political storms in Washington, D.C., nearly denied him any role in the campaign. Republican Secretary of War William W. Belknap was enmeshed in scandal over sale of post traderships. Democrats, under Chairman Heister Clymer of the House Committee on Expenditures, pressed their investigation. In late March and early April, Custer was forced to provide hearsay testimony before the committee that implicated the brother of President Grant. An irate president removed him from command. In his place, Brig. Gen. Alfred Terry, commander of the Department of Dakota, would head the Dakota Column, while Reno would seemingly lead the 7th Regiment itself.

As Reno prepared the regiment for its campaign, he sent a telegram to Terry: "From Custer's telegrams and the papers it seems he will not soon be back …. Why not give me a chance as I feel I will do credit to the army?" Letting Reno down easy, Terry replied that, "I have not the slightest doubt that you would do the work admirably; but the question of rank would be troublesome, for two colonels are anxious to go. Besides I have little doubt that Custer will return very soon."

Disappointed, Reno tried again, writing to Gen. Philip Sheridan on April 16: "Expedition ready when transportation from Abercrombie and cavalry companies from Rice arrive. Why not give me a chance, sending instructions what to do with Sitting Bull if I catch him? He is waiting for us on the Little Missouri."

A long-time Custer advocate,Sheridan replied that, "Gen. Terry has entire charge of the expedition. I do not feel like interfering with him in his plans." Gen. William Sherman also preferred Custer, joining Sheridan to intercede with Grant. Custer himself begged Grant, "I appeal to you as a soldier to spare me the humiliation of seeing my regiment march to meet the enemy and I not to share its danger." The president, under fire from Democratic newspapers for his politically motivated mistreatment of Custer, who remained a popular public figure, needed to end the flap. Restoring Custer to command the 7th would help. Pointedly, Grant left the Dakota expedition itself under Terry.

With Custer again in command of the 7th, the Dakota column headed west on May 17, 1876.

Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument

Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument

U.S. Military Academy

LEFT: A 2nd lieutenant with the 7th US Cavalry, Benjamin Hodgson was Maj. Reno's adjutant. He was killed crossing the Little Bighorn River in the chaotic retreat to what would become known as "Reno's Bluffs." CENTER: A handwritten note on the back of this photo of U.S. 7th Cavalry Sergeant Miles O'Hara says he was "known among the boys as the 'Indiana Hoosier.'" O'Hara died on Reno's skirmish line early in the battle during the "Valley Fight" on June 25, 1876. RIGHT: Maj. Marcus Reno was widely criticized for his conduct at Little Bighorn, but the army found no official fault. It was his alcoholism after his wife's death in 1874 and the altercations with fellow officers—along with inappropriate advances towards women—that led to his dismissal from the army in 1880. He continued to pursue reinstatement until his death at 54 in March, 1889.

Through May into June, the Army searched for its elusive foe. Unfortunately, for much of the time, each of the three separate military forces operated in complete ignorance of the others' actions. They also failed to realize that the Indians, dissatisfied with reservation life and angered by the whites' move into the Black Hills, were expecting soldiers to make war on them and were gathering for self-defense in far greater numbers than anticipated.

On June 9, aboard the steamer *Far West* at the junction of the Powder and Yellowstone rivers in Montana Territory, Terry outlined his plan to Gibbon and Custer for forcing an encounter with the nomadic tribesmen. He dispatched six companies under Reno on a scout up the Powder River, across to the Tongue River and back down the latter to the Yellowstone River. Custer and the 7th's remaining six companies marched west along the Yellowstone to an expected linkup with Reno. Assuming Indians weren't on the Powder and the Tongue, Terry expected Custer would move back up the Tongue and down the Rosebud, while Gibbon's command, already at the Rosebud, advanced up that stream. Custer, ever impatient, disliked the plan for its inherent slowness, and his criticisms were published anonymously in dispatches he sent to the *New York Herald*.

On June 19, Reno's command reappeared, having gone farther than ordered and searched beyond the Tongue to the Rosebud itself and back down that stream. While roundly criticized for exceeding his orders and endangering his commander's plans, Reno actually provided Terry with the best intelligence he had received about the Indians' movements. Terry had to rethink his strategy.

On June 21, aboard the *Far West*, tied up at the juncture of the Yellowstone and the Rosebud, Terry hatched a new plan. He believed the Indians were somewhere up the Rosebud Valley and had either moved east toward the Black Hills or west toward the Little Bighorn Valley. His strategy was to send the 7th Cavalry under Custer south up the Rosebud, following the Indians' trail spotted by Reno. Gibbon's command, accompanied by Terry himself and slower moving infantry, would march west up the Yellowstone to the Bighorn River, then south along the Bighorn to the Little Bighorn River. If Indians were along the Little Bighorn, Custer would attack and drive them north where Gibbon would block their escape.

By its nature, Terry's plan offered Custer considerable leeway because no one could be sure of exactly which direction the Indians would take on the upper reaches of the Rosebud. Terry expected Gibbon's force to reach the Little Bighorn about June 26, but he made few demands on Custer. Custer's critics claim that Terry expected his subordinate to wait until a coordinated attack could be launched against the Indians on June 26. However, Terry's written orders clearly allowed Custer discretion to act according to the military situation.

Two critical unknowns overshadowed Terry's planning. No one in his columns knew that Crook's troops, again in the field, had already been repulsed, far up the Rosebud on June 17, by a much stronger force than anticipated. In one of the campaign's most significant decisions, Crook, bloodied but still potent, retreated to Goose Creek at present-day Sheridan, Wyoming. Idling there for weeks, he effectively removed himself from the campaign. More importantly, critical intelligence that the Indians were stronger than the estimated 800 warriors the Army expected in the theater of operations—and that they were willing to fight the soldiers, no matter how strong—was never passed to Terry, Custer and Gibbon. So, about noon June 22, the 7th Cavalry-12 companies consisting of 566 enlisted, 31 officers, 24 Indian scouts and about a dozen packers, guides and other civilians, including newspaper reporter Mark H. Kellogg of the *Bismarck, Tribune* (Dakota Territory)—headed south up the Rosebud.

For three days, as Custer's command sought to close on the Indians, the narrow Indian trail became fresher and broader. On the rapid march on June 24, some loose packs were lost, an occurrence that would significantly influence Custer's thinking. Early on June 25, on a high point in the Wolf Mountains known as the Crow's Nest, Custer's Crow scouts unsuccessfully tried to point out to him smoke from an Indian encampment on the Little Bighorn River to the west. Morning haze prevented him from seeing it. Ahead, sprawled in a huge village, the size of which the military could not have imagined, six separate tribal circles crowded the narrow valley of the Little Bighorn. In a week, the village had more than doubled from 400 lodges to 1,000, housing as many as 7,000 people, including some 2,000 warriors.

Custer initially intended to rest his troops on Sunday, June 25, but events now wrested control from him. Warrior parties had been spotted and Custer feared they would report his presence to the Indian camp. Also, one of the lost packs had been found by Indians, who exchanged fire with the soldiers. Fearing the village would scatter, Custer, content to plan little and to let events unfold, opted for immediate action. About noon, his regiment crossed the divide at the head of Davis Creek and paused on today's Reno Creek. Custer split his force into four battalions. Three companies—A, G and M, consisting of about 140 cavalrymen plus 25 scouts—were assigned to Reno. Companies H, D and K, numbering about 125 men, were placed under Capt. Frederick W. Benteen. Five companies—about 210 men—remained with Custer. The 12th company, B, reinforced by men from the other 11 companies, guarded the slow-moving pack train in the rear.

Custer, having learned his lesson well at the 1868 Battle of the Washita, sent Benteen on a reconnaissance movement to the southwest to make certain any Indian camps on the upper Little Bighorn wouldn't catch his troops from the rear.

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Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument

ABOVE: Noted Oglala Lakota artist Amos Bad Heart Bull (1868-1913) was eight years old when Custer's column attacked the large Indian village at the Little Bighorn in 1875. From stories told to him by his father and uncle, who were in the battle, Bad Heart Bull drew this picture of Major Marcus Reno's men, weapons in hand, making an orderly getaway from the encampment with Sioux warriors in pursuit. RIGHT: Elizabeth "Libbie' Bacon Custer, who died in 1933 at the age of 90, never remarried and spent more than 50 years of her life writing articles and speaking on the lecture circuit to defend her husband's legacy. She also wrote three books about Custer that, though historically accurate, were intended to glorify her husband's memory—*Boots and Saddles* (1885), *Tenting on the Plains* (1887), and *Following the Guidon* (1890).

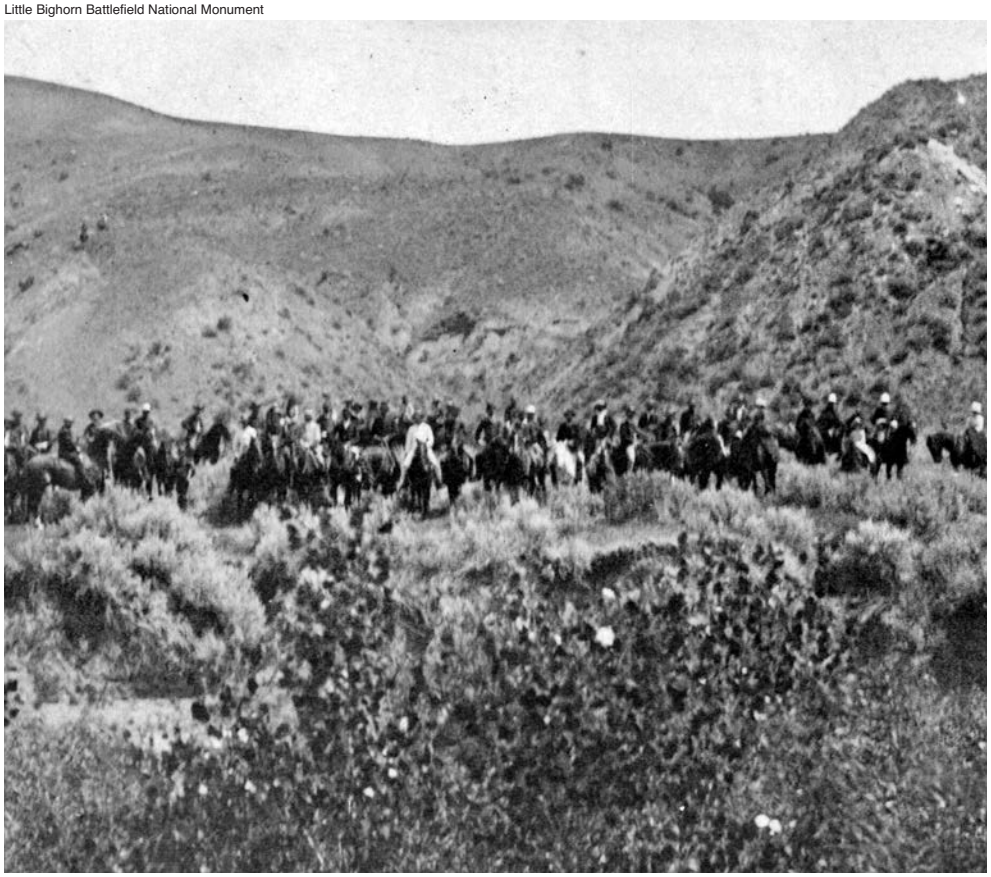
Meanwhile, Custer and Reno marched their respective commands down either side of Reno Creek toward the Little Bighorn. A few miles later, they came across a lone tepee containing the body of a warrior, apparently slain in Crook's fight at the Rosebud. Shortly, a band of warriors was spotted dashing for the Little Bighorn. Beyond the bluffs that blocked his view to the north, Custer could see dust rising. Although he could not yet see it, Custer immediately concluded that those in the encampment must be scattering. That was the greatest fear of senior officers that spring—that the Indians would flee and disperse, making their capture by more ponderous soldier columns impossible. Custer's response was to attack.

The regimental adjutant, Lieutenant W.W. Cooke promised Reno that "you will be supported by the whole outfit," but that statement proved ambiguous that afternoon. Reno clearly expected Custer's command to follow behind his battalion toward the village. Reno's three companies rode down the creek toward the Little Bighorn River. That was about the time that Custer, informed that Indians had been seen on the bluffs,decided either to chase them or to move north to attack the Indian camp from that direction—instead of providing direct backup support to Reno's force charging from the south. His decision would prove disastrous for both men.

At the Little Bighorn River, Reno's men waded through the fast-moving water. On the far side, they tightened their saddle girths and advanced toward the Indian village far down the valley, first at a trot, and then at a gallop. Reno dispatched two separate messengers to Custer, informing him "that Indians were in front of me, and in strong force." Custer probably received both, because the bodies of the two men were later found among Custer's dead.

As his troops neared the village, one fact became clear to Reno. The Indians weren't fleeing. Instead, the warriors were massing to fight the cavalry. His troops rode down an embankment into a dry river channel and dismounted. The fourth man in each set of fours controlled the others'

Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument



Taken some time after the Battle of Little Bighorn, this undated photo shows an unidentified group of riders on the steep bank on the east side of the Little Big Horn River where Major Reno's men crossed in a panicked retreat on June 25, 1876. The bluff now known as Reno's hill is in the distance.

horses, taking them into nearby timber for better protection. The remaining troopers, numbering only about 100 men, moved forward about 100 yards out of the channel to form a skirmish line across the prairie, stretching from the timber on the right toward bluffs on the left. Some men lay down while others knelt. Some ducked behind prairie dog mounds, using them as temporary breastworks. However, within 10 or 15 minutes, Indians encircled his troops, flanking the skirmish line on its left and threatening its rear. Reno ordered his companies to fall back into the timber.

First Sergeant John Ryan of Company M recalled that while in the timber, Reno lost his hat and tied a red handkerchief around his head. Looking about, Ryan could see Indians moving ever closer to the soldiers and surrounding the three companies. After noticing Indians had infiltrated between the soldiers and the river, he told Capt. Thomas French, "The Indians are in our rear." French, perhaps confused by their perilous situation, replied, "Oh no, those are General Custer's men."

Since 1876, Reno has been roundly castigated for yielding his position in the timber, which reduced pressure on the village's south end. That freed the warriors to focus on the Custer threat from the east and assured his demise. Without any idea of where Custer had gone, Reno still expected support from his rear. However, the longer that support failed to arrive, the more critical Reno's position became. With ammunition running low, the timber could not be defended indefinitely. The highly experienced Ryan, a Civil War veteran of the Irish Brigade, shared with his major the controversial idea of retreating: "Just at that moment the Indians fired into us from all sides, and I said to Captain French of my company, 'The best thing we can do is to cut right through them.' By this time they had us surrounded …. Major Reno rode up and said, 'Any of you men who wish to make your escape, follow me.'"

While standing next to Reno, the Indian scout Bloody Knife was shot in the head, splattering the officer with blood. Some think this incident so unnerved Reno that he panicked. Instead of coordinating an orderly military retreat and keeping the Indians at bay, he dashed from the timber in a mad flight. Most of the casualties among his frantic cavalrymen occurred during this mile run for the river and the bluffs beyond.

In later years, Reno would term this action a "charge." At the 1879 court of inquiry, Reno testified that he knew he could "not stay [in the timber] unless I stayed forever."

At the retreat crossing, the swift-flowing Little Bighorn River was about 50 feet wide and 3.5 feet deep. Fighting there was desperate and at close quarters. With no time to reload, soldiers emptied their revolvers and tossed them away. Once again, no covering fire kept the Indians away from the soldiers. The river's east bank was steep and the only way up was a buffalo trail wide enough for one man at a time. The surviving 84 soldiers and seven officers were demoralized by their rout in the valley. Despite the deaths of Custer and his contingent (of which they learned later), Ryan and many others in the valley fight supported Reno's decision to flee the valley.

"In my opinion, if Reno had remained a short time longer, not a man would have made his escape, as the Indians outnumbered us 10 to one," Ryan said. Soon after Reno's troops reached the bluffs—today's Reno-Benteen Defense Site—the firing ceased. Not long after, probably about 4:20 p.m., Benteen's battalion arrived, having received Custer's final message to bring up the ammunition packs. About an hour later, the pack train closed with the other units.

At one point, Captain Thomas Weir, probably without Reno's permission, advanced his Company D in the direction he thought Custer had headed. Eventually, Reno and five companies stood around a high, narrow bluff that today bears Weir's name, about a mile from the original defense site. They observed large numbers of Indians riding about and firing at objects on the ground. Reno's troopers may have wondered what had happened to Custer, but to a man they never seemed able to accept that they were viewing the final moments for Custer's 210 men.

Soon, with Indians rushing toward them, Reno's men scrambled to redeploy themselves lying down in a skirmish line around the original bluffs. With darkness on June 25, the Indians withdrew. Just before daybreak June 26, two shots rang out and the battle raged anew for most of the day. Late in the afternoon, the soldiers could only observe as the Indian camp's residents broke down their village and moved out of the valley.

What kind of leadership did Reno provide in the valley and on the hill during those two days? In the voluminous literature of the Little Bighorn, including testimony three years later at the Reno Court of Inquiry, opinions appear mixed. However, most officers and enlisted men generally supported Reno for extricating them from peril. The 1879 Reno Court of Inquiry concluded: "The conduct of the officers throughout was excellent, and while subordinates in some instances did more for the safety of the command by brilliant displays of courage than did Major Reno, there

Continued on page 97

A wounded "Sky Soldier" from the 173rd Airborne Brigade gets help moving to the rear during combat with the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) near Dak To, Vietnam, in 1967. The elite, all-volunteer paratrooper unit was known as "Westmoreland's Fire Brigade" for its rapid deployment to hot spots, especially in the jungles of the Central Highlands.

HELL ON HILL 1338

The June 1967 Battle of the Slopes on Hill 1338 against North Vietnamese Regulars was the U.S. Army's Most Tragic Morning in Vietnam.

By Edward F. Murphy

The morning calm was shattered by the sharp crack of rifle fire. Though the nearly impenetrable jungle vegetation and a dense layer of fog dampened the noise, the paratroopers of Alpha Company, 2nd Battalion, 503rd Infantry, 173rd Airborne Brigade tensed immediately.

"Sounds like second platoon's reconning by fire," one man said.

"Bullshit," another replied. "That's AK fire."

Twenty minutes earlier, First Lieutenant Donald R. Judd had started his 2nd Platoon down the narrow jungle trail atop a steep finger of ridge running northeast off Hill 1338 down to the hamlet of Dak To, where the battalion operations center was located at the nearby airstrip. Judd had graduated from West Point the year before and, though he'd only been in the field two days, he knew it was an infantryman's maxim to avoid an existing trail. But he had little choice, as cutting a new one would add a whole day to the six-kilometer trek.

Alamy

ABOVE: Members of Company A, 2nd Battalion, 503rd Airborne Infantry, 173rd Airborne Brigade, follow an 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment tank in the Thanh Dien Forestry Reserve on the northern border of the infamous "Iron Triangle" in January 1967. Just 12 miles northwest of Saigon, this heavily fortified area between the Tinh and Saigon rivers, sometimes called "a dagger pointed at Saigon," was home to the regional Viet Cong headquarters—directing military and terrorist activities in and around South Vietnam's capital. OPPOSITE: Following a search and destroy mission about 50 miles northeast of Saigon during Operation Toledo (August 10-September 7, 1966) members of the 4th Battalion, 503rd Infantry, 173rd Airborne Brigade, wait to board Bell UH-1D Hueys that will ferry them back to their forward Base Camp in Xuan Loc Province.

As the enemy rifle fire ripped into them, Judd pulled his men into a tight perimeter. At the company's laager site, Alpha's commanding officer, Capt. David H. Milton, ordered 1st Lt. Richard E. Hood, Judd's friend and classmate, to hustle his 3rd Platoon down the trail. Though in the field for less than a week, Hood never hesitated. Under near-continuous sniper fire, Hood's paratroopers entered 2nd Platoon's line as enemy fire increased.

Milton was radioing for supporting artillery fire when the sound of gunfire from downhill reached a crescendo. For nearly 10 minutes, all Milton and the others could hear was the near-continuous roar of small arms fire. Milton wondered what the hell was going on.

He turned and nodded at Second Lieutenant Jeffrey R. Sexton. Without hesitation, Sexton led his 1st Platoon down the trail. A veteran of nearly a year with the 173rd as an enlisted man, Sexton had only recently rejoined the brigade after completing Officer Candidate School at Fort Benning, Georgia, after receiving a battlefield promotion. Milton and Alpha's Weapons Platoon members watched nervously as Sexton's platoon disappeared in the mist as it moved down the trail. Soon, the roar of gunfire again filled the air.

The 173rd Airborne Brigade had been the first army unit dispatched to the growing war in South Vietnam. Activated on June 25, 1963, the brigade was created to test Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara's new concept of airmobile vertical assault and to act as a ready reaction force in the Pacific Theater. Its home station on Okinawa was deliberately chosen so the unit would be free to test new warfare concepts far from the prying eyes of Pentagon staffers. The brigade participated in numerous exercises with allies throughout the Pacific Theater, earning the respect of its sister parachute forces. It so impressed the Chinese Nationalist airborne soldiers during a successful joint operation early in 1965, they dubbed the 173rd paratroopers Tien Bing, or "Sky Soldiers" and the nickname stuck.

As the war in South Vietnam intensified, General William C. Westmoreland, commander of the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, specifically requested the brigade for temporary duty in the war zone to secure base camp sites for incoming maneuver divisions. The brigade's two battalions arrived from Okinawa on May 5, 1965, the first major U.S. Army unit to enter the growing war zone.

"You'll be back on Okinawa in sixty days," Westmoreland assured the 173rd's commander, Brigadier General Ellis W. Williamson. The brigade remained in South Vietnam until August 1971.

For its first two years in-country, the 173rd's area of operations was Saigon and the surrounding region. Though based at the sprawling Bien Hoa Air Force Base, 25 kilometers northeast of the city, the Sky Soldiers were rarely there. They spent most of their time in the field on combat operations, seeking the insurgent Viet Cong in the area's vast expanse of rice paddies and jungle. From the outskirts of Saigon to War Zone D and

the Iron Triangle, the Sky Soldiers actively hunted their foe on search-and-destroy missions. And there were frequent clashes. Most involved small bands of marauding VC, but larger fights erupted, too. The Sky Soldier's first major fight came on November 8, 1965, about 25 kilometers north of Bien Hoa during Operation Hump.

On that third morning of the operation, Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, left its laager site to reconnoiter the area where a sister company had suffered heavy casualties in an ambush the previous day. The paratroopers were on edge because the enemy was displaying a high level of aggressiveness. Usually, their foe fired off a few rounds in the direction of the advancing paratroopers, then disappeared. Not on November 7, though. They had maintained contact until artillery finally drove them off.

As Charlie Company moved through a stand of thick trees, a sharp blast of enemy fire tore into the lead platoon. As the wounded and dead fell to the ground, their comrades desperately searched the undergrowth for targets. The vicious fight raged for hours, continuing until two reinforcing companies of Sky Soldiers broke through, forcing the enemy to retreat. The three companies suffered 82 wounded and 50 dead. Evidence from the 110 enemy bodies revealed the Sky Soldiers had fought North Vietnamese Army regulars for the first time. It would not be the last.

For the rest of 1965 and into 1966, the Sky Soldiers conducted air-assault operations throughout the Saigon region. Some resulted in brief clashes with guerrillas, while others saw daily enemy contact. In February 1967, the brigade participated in Operation Junction City, the largest U.S. offensive operation to date in South Vietnam. Focused on Tay Ninh Province, north of Saigon, Junction City included elements of two infantry divisions and the 173d Airborne Brigade. On February 22, 1967, the 2d Battalion, 503d Infantry made the only combat parachute jump of the Vietnam War, dropping into landing zones just south of the Cambodian border. The 1st Battalion soon flew in via aircraft to act with the 2nd Battalion as a blocking force as the regular infantry units swept the ground to their south, hoping to ferret out an elusive enemy headquarters. Though the search lasted more than 80 days, the VC headquarters wasn't found.

While the 173rd Airborne Brigade clashed with irregular VC forces in and around Saigon, NVA regulars had infiltrated the rugged Central Highlands of Pleiku and Kontum Provinces, in the tri-border region of South Vietnam. It was an effort to pull U.S. forces away from the country's cities in preparation for their upcoming 1968 Tet operations, their much-anticipated General Offensive/General Uprising intended to throw the U.S. out of their country.

Beginning in February 1967, line units of the 4th Infantry Division, based in Pleiku City, experienced a sharp increase in contacts with regular NVA forces throughout their area of operations. Over the next few months, deadly clashes with the NVA increased dramatically, with heavy casualties. As a result, the 4th's commander requested reinforcements. Westmoreland tapped the Sky Soldiers and by the end of May, the entire 173rd Airborne Brigade had flown into Catecka, 12 kilometers south of Pleiku.

The 4th Division's senior officers did not hold the 173rd in high regard. This was more than the inherent rivalry between straight-leg infantry and airborne infantry. Col. James B. Adamson, commanding officer of the 4th's 2nd Brigade, knew there had been little recent action in the 173rd's AO. In his briefing, Adamson matter-of-factly told Brig. Gen. John R. Deane, the Sky Soldier's commander, "This is a different war up here."

"First, you will be fighting regular NVA soldiers," Adamson warned. "These aren't rice farmers. They are professional soldiers who know how to fight. Second, don't ever let a company get out by itself where it will be easy pickings for the NVA. They'll wipe it out."

Deane, who resented Adamson's implications, ignored him.

The Sky Soldiers spent several frustratingly futile weeks seeking the NVA in the upper Ia Drang Valley, south of Catecka. Then the enemy attacked the Special Forces camp at Dak To, a hamlet in Kontum Province, 80 kilometers to the

Both: National Archives

Both: National Archives

ABOVE: Paratroopers from the 173rd Airborne Brigade on guard duty on the perimeter watch for VC during combat near the fiercely contested tri-border area of Dak To in Vietnam. For the 173rd's Alpha Company, the sudden appearance of battle-hardened North Vietnamese Regulars in the jungle before them would spell disaster on the morning of June 22, 1967. OPPOSITE: Fourth Infantry Division soldiers secure a landing zone during a search and destroy mission. Col. James B. Adamson, commanding officer of the 4th's 2nd Brigade, told the Sky Soldier's Brig. Gen. John R. Deane that the war was different in the highlands. "These aren't rice farmers," Adamson warned. "They are professional soldiers who know how to fight . . . don't ever let a company get out by itself where it will be easy pickings for the NVA. They'll wipe it out." The advice was, unfortunately, ignored.

north. To reinforce the soldiers, the 2nd Battalion, 503rd Airborne Infantry, flew into Dak To on June 17. The next day, Captain Milton and the 130 men of Alpha Company boarded Huey helicopters and flew south to Hill 1338, the highest peak overlooking Dak To.

Milton, 28, was a former enlisted man with 11 years in the army who had earned a Silver Star for gallantry in action the previous year with the 82nd Airborne Division during its deployment to the Dominican Republic. He established a base camp halfway up the hill, then dispatched his platoons to search for the NVA. The paratroopers spent two days roaming the north side of Hill 1338, but found little evidence of an enemy presence. What they did find was dense, triple-canopy jungle with thick stands of bamboo competing with 200-foot trees and tropical foliage to reduce visibility to less than 10 meters in an eerie twilight-like atmosphere. The daily rain made the jungle floor a thick morass, further slowing the soldier's progress. The company did find a narrow trail that led to the higher elevations of Hill 1338. Milton set up ambushes along it, but no NVA entered the traps.

With Alpha Company due to rotate back to Dak To the next day, Capt. Ronald R. Leonard's Charlie Company helicoptered into an LZ a little to the north of Alpha's position on June 21. They passed through Milton's perimeter headed south, following the narrow trail up toward the hill's summit. Alpha's paratroopers put out listening and observation posts, then huddled under ponchos in a vain attempt to stay dry and warm, thinking of the bunkers and hot chow that awaited them at Dak To.

Fifteen hundred meters farther up Hill 1338, Charlie Company established its night position. Four years earlier, while employed as a high school chemistry teacher, Leonard, motivated by a strong desire to serve his country, applied for and received a direct commission in the Air Force. Two years later, bored with his duty assignment, he requested a transfer to the Army's infantry. Newly promoted to captain, Leonard arrived in South Vietnam in May 1967 and took command of Charlie Company.

Before it left Dak To for the flight out to Hill 1338, a squad of Special Forces-trained Civilian Irregular Defense Group soldiers, a local indigenous militia, was attached to Charlie Company. During the trek up Hill 1338, the CIDG's commander grew increasingly skittish, constantly warning Leonard, "Many VC! Many!" Focused

All Photos: National Archives

on his mission, Leonard ignored him. After selecting a night laager site, Leonard ordered his 2nd Platoon commander, 1st Lt. Phillip Bodine to set up a listening post back down their trail to catch any shadowing enemy. Two of the CIDG accompanied Bodine's patrol.

Forty meters outside of Alpha's perimeter, a sudden burst of gunfire halted the small patrol. Bodine's pointman had spotted several NVA sneaking up the trail toward them and opened fire. The NVA shot back, killing one of the CIDG. After radioing Leonard about the contact, Bodine and his patrol returned to Charlie's perimeter. Medics wrapped the dead CIDG in a poncho and placed it in the middle of the perimeter. Fully expecting an assault, no one in Charlie Company slept that night.

Dawn on June 22 revealed a thick layer of fog over Alpha's laager site. The paratroopers anxiously rolled up ponchos, arranged their web gear, and downed a quick C-ration breakfast. Everyone knew they were headed out of the jungle and back to Dak To for a stint as the palace guard. The sooner they started, the sooner their good duty began.

The thick layer of fog also socked in Charlie Company higher up Hill 1338. PFC Jimmy Lee Cook, who had just joined Charlie as it loaded aboard helicopters for the short flight out to Hill 1338, stepped away from his overnight listening post to relieve himself. Returning to the perimeter, he tripped a flare. In the eerily illuminated

From left are lieutenants Donald R. Judd, and Richard E. Hood. The 1966 West Point graduates were both killed in action during the Battle of the Slopes on June 22, 1967, and awarded the Silver Star for gallantry in action.

mist, a nervous sentry raised his M-16 and fired at the shadowy figure. Not until the sentry and his squad leader moved forward to investigate, did they realize the tragic mistake.

Now burdened with two corpses, Leonard was extremely angry. The low visibility meant they would have to carry the bodies until the weather cleared enough for medevac choppers to reach them. He radioed the bad news to the battalion's tactical operations center at Dak To as his men prepared to move out.

About the same time, Milton signaled Judd to start his platoon down the trail that would take them to Dak To. He radioed the TOC at 0625 that Alpha was moving. It should be at Dak To by early afternoon. At 0658, the gunfire below Alpha erupted.

Milton quickly radioed Judd. The rookie platoon leader reported that his point men had walked into a group of NVA soldiers moving toward them on the same trail. Judd immediately established a defensive perimeter in a clearing. Soon, Hood's platoon arrived and expanded the perimeter. Shortly, Sexton and his men joined the fight and took up defensive positions in the foliage.

As protective friendly artillery rounds dropped onto Hill 1338, the reality of their ineffectiveness in the dense jungle became apparent. Most of the rounds exploded harmlessly in the treetops. The thick jungle made range adjustments nearly impossible. Milton could only call in supporting rounds where he thought the enemy might be.

From his position at Alpha's laager site, Specialist 5th Class Richard E. Patterson, the company's senior medic, listened to the growing firefight downhill. Not yet 19, Patterson had nearly two years of service and almost a year in-country with the Sky Soldiers. Knowing his fellow medics needed help, he grabbed his medical bag and bounded down the muddy trail without hesitation. When he reached the pinned-down platoons, the Boston native could not believe his eyes. Everywhere he looked lay crumpled bodies in green fatigues. A barrage of hand grenades flew from the other side of the clearing to erupt with

ABOVE: Sky Soldiers of the 173rd Airborne Brigade move up a hill into position near Dak To, a district in the Central Highlands of Vietnam near the tri-border area with Laos and Cambodia that was the site of intense fighting during the war. OPPOSITE: Sky Soldiers from the 173rd Airborne Brigade are pinned down by mortar fire near Dak To, Vietnam. Alpha Company, from the 173rd's 2nd Battalion, 503rd Infantry, began the morning of June 22, 1967, with 131 men in the field. After a three-hour firefight, 76 of them were dead, with 23 wounded, for the highest casualty rate suffered by a single rifle company, Army or Marine, in one engagement during the war.

sharp flashes among the Sky Soldiers. Patterson hit the ground as small arms fire erupted anew. Disregarding the heavy fire, he crawled to help another medic with a seriously wounded man. Patterson had just begun treatment when the other medic collapsed, blood gushing from his throat. He pushed the body off his patient and resumed his lifesaving efforts.

By 0800, the fog had cleared enough to allow the battalion commander, Lt. Col. Edward A. Partain, and the battalion sergeant major, Vincent Rogiers, to helicopter out to Hill 1338. Eager to call in punishing air strikes, Partain quickly faced another reality of close-quarters combat in the Central Highlands—the thick jungle made it nearly impossible to get a clear view of the ground. He ordered Judd and Hood to pop smoke grenades. The tall trees so badly dispersed the smoke that Partain could not pinpoint the platoons' position. He could only direct the inbound jets to drop their bombs where he thought the enemy might be. Most of the time, the strikes were wildly off target.

In the meantime, Charlie Company had moved about 200 meters further up Hill 1338 when Partain radioed Leonard to halt and prepare to move to Alpha's position. At 0930, Leonard received orders to reverse course and move downhill to Alpha's position as fast as possible. Burdened with the two corpses he was reluctant to leave behind in the jungle and leery of an ambush, Leonard ordered his point squad to cut a new trail. Proceeding cautiously, the column slowly moved downhill. Partain repeatedly radioed Leonard to pick up his pace, but Leonard refused to rush. He feared the NVA were all around him, and he did not want his isolated company to walk into an ambush.

Charlie Company's 1st Platoon's leader, First Lieutenant Matthew C. Harrison, did not know what to expect. Just beginning his third day in the field, as well as his first combat assignment, Harrison focused on the jungle in front of him and the sounds of an intense firefight downhill. Two of his close friends, and fellow West Point graduates, Judd and Hood, served with Alpha Company. Harrison had originally been assigned to Alpha Company when he arrived in the 2d Battalion until Leonard, who had known him in their previous stateside assignment, asked for Harrison to be assigned to Charlie Company. So, Harrison joined Charlie Company while Judd switched to Alpha Company. Now, Harrison hoped his two friends were okay.

Downhill at Alpha's ambush site, medic Patterson repeatedly braved the enemy's near constant small arms fire to reach his injured comrades and treat their wounds. He found many he could not help, but there were too many who still needed his help to dwell on those who did not. As he applied a battle dressing to another wounded Sky Soldier, an enemy grenade went off near him. Chunks of red-hot shrapnel slashed open his right thigh, stunning him. Before Patterson could dress his own wound, the volume of enemy fire increased, followed by NVA soldiers pushing into the paratrooper's perimeter itself. Frantic cries for ammunition carried across the small clearing. Out of the brush, a wounded sergeant crawled up to Patterson. "We're running low on ammo. If you can, get back to the CP," the NCO told Patterson before he crept away.

Though reluctant to leave his buddies, the badly wounded Patterson had little choice—he took the sergeant's advice. But, before he reached

Both: National Archives

concealing denser foliage, an enemy round shattered his right hip. Fighting off excruciating pain, Patterson desperately pulled himself across the jungle floor. As bursts of automatic weapons fire erupted behind him, he looked back. The sight stunned him. More individual NVA soldiers had emerged from the jungle, firing their AK-47s point-blank at the prostrate paratroopers. Patterson pulled himself deeper into the foliage as wounded Americans frantically cried out for mercy as the NVA executed them. After what seemed an eternity of slowly snaking his way uphill through the jungle, two fellow Sky Soldiers finally rescued Patterson and carried him to safety. Though permanently crippled, he felt very fortunate to have escaped the carnage in the clearing.

Sexton radioed Milton just before 1000, "They're coming, but I think we can hold out." The following near-constant gunfire startled Milton and his remaining men at the laager site. Slowly, the din gradually faded to be replaced by distinct individual rifle shots. At 1035, Milton radioed Partain that he no longer had contact with his three platoon leaders.

At the battalion's TOC adjacent to the Dak To airstrip, staff officers correctly surmised Alpha had stumbled into a large NVA unit retreating into Cambodia after launching numerous attacks against Army of the Republic of Vietnam units around Dak To, rather than being a victim of a prepared ambush. The staff plotted likely escape routes for the NVA, then called in interdicting artillery and air strikes, hoping to catch the fleeing enemy. It was a crap shoot.

After their cautious trek through the thick jungle, Charlie Company's point squad made contact with Milton at 1420. Leonard put his men into position around the laager site, then sent a squad downhill toward the ambush site. Within minutes, they reported finding American bodies. As they neared the battle site, a flurry of small arms fire drove them to cover. Leonard recalled his squad. It made no sense to tangle with an unknown number of enemy this late in the day.

Leonard ordered a landing zone cleared higher up the hill from Alpha's laager site. Soon, medevacs dropped down through the towering trees and removed the wounded. Then, Milton and all of the remaining Alpha Company paratroopers boarded choppers, too, and flew back to Dak To. Leonard was surprised that Milton would not only depart the battlefield when over half of his company were missing but also leave it up to Leonard and his men to recover Alpha's dead and police up their battlefield.

The grisly task began just after dawn on June 23. When Charlie's paratroopers reached the battle site, they found dozens and dozens of American paratroopers sprawled in death's grotesque grip. It was obvious to Harrison that the NVA had executed many Sky Soldiers with close-range gunshots to the head. Not only did this complicate identification, but the NVA had also switched or removed dog tags from the casualties to make the gruesome task even worse. Barely able to control his rage, Harrison relied on his military training to help him ignore the carnage and search for his classmates. He eventually found both Hood and Judd. Their deaths so soon after they went into the field seemed surreal to him, as did the randomness of Fate that saved him and doomed Judd.

It took most of the day for Charlie Company to locate all of Alpha's casualties. They found three paratroopers alive but badly wounded. That day was a horrific experience that no one in Charlie Company would ever forget.

Alpha Company began the morning of June 22, 1967, with 131 men in the field. Seventy-six of them died in the three-hour firefight, with another 23 wounded, a casualty rate of 75 percent, the highest number of dead and wounded suffered by a single rifle company, army or Marine, in one engagement during the entire

ABOVE: PFC Paul Epley was assigned to the 173rd Airborne Brigade's Information Office when he took this famous photograph of SP4 Ruediger Richter, the LZ control, watching for the medical evacuation helicopter to come pick up the body of PFC Daryl R. Corfman, of the 173rd's Company A, 4th Battalion, 503rd Infantry. Corfman, who was hit by mortar fire, was the battalion's first man to be directly killed by the enemy. Sgt. Daniel Spencer, his squad leader, stares down at him as they wait. OPPOSITE: Capturing the raw emotion and brutality of war, this iconic image of Paratrooper Wayne T. Winters from the 173rd Airborne Brigade calling for a medic on Hill 882 southwest of Dak To, Vietnam, was taken by Catherine Leroy, a French photojournalist embedded with the Sky Soldiers.

Vietnam War. Forty-three of the dead suffered fatal, close-range head wounds.

Senior army commanders would not let such a one-sided disaster stand. The Vietnam War's yardstick for battlefield success was the body count. Charlie Company spent the following several days scouring Hill 1338 for enemy dead. Even after digging up some fresh graves, the enemy body count did not exceed 75. The resultant Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) press release, however, reported the extraordinary body count of 475 NVA. The release factually claimed 106 enemy dead by actual body count, but the additional 369 dead were estimated to have been killed by the interdicting artillery fire, although not one body was found to substantiate that claim.

Never one to miss an opportunity to promote a success, real or imagined, in his war of attrition against North Vietnam, General Westmoreland flew into Dak To on June 23. After a briefing from the 2nd Battalion's staff about the disaster, he went to speak to some of Alpha's surviving paratroopers. Standing on a jeep's hood, Westmoreland praised their courage, then proclaimed, "You took on a tough NVA unit and whipped their asses!"

The survivors stood in stunned silence. They all knew they were the ones who had been whipped and whipped badly. One survivor turned to a friend and whispered, "Wonder what he's been smoking." Minutes later, Westmoreland climbed off the jeep and headed to the airstrip for his flight back to Saigon.

Someone had to take the blame for Alpha Company's disaster. Rather than hold Captain Milton responsible for not adequately scouting Alpha's route back to Dak To and then inserting his platoons piecemeal into the fray, the army's finger pointed at Captain Leonard. Disregarding the evidence and convinced Leonard's cautious trek to the battle site allowed the NVA to massacre the isolated Alpha Company, Colonel Partain transferred him out of the 2nd Battalion. Leonard moved to the brigade's 4th Battalion and assumed the duties of a staff officer. The purge of Charlie's officers did not end with Leonard: All three of its platoon leaders were also transferred.

Five months later, during the 173rd's brutal week-long fight for Hill 875, west of Hill 1338, Leonard took command of the 4th Battalion's badly battered Bravo Company during a brutal firefight after its commander suffered serious wounds. Leonard led his new company with such conspicuous gallantry during the subsequent capture of Hill 875 that he ultimately received the Distinguished Service Cross.

Replacements quickly filled Alpha Company's depleted ranks. With more than 100 brand-new officers and enlisted men, Milton soon returned his company to the hills around Dak To. On July 9,1967, while registering night defensive artillery rounds, a 105-mm shell fell short, exploding in a tree above Milton's CP. Three of the new men died, and six were wounded. Milton himself suffered such severe abdominal wounds he was eventually forced to retire early.

Hill 1338, with its commanding view of Dak To, continued to be the site of bitter clashes between the U.S. Army and the NVA. The fighting on and around the prominent landmark peaked in November 1967 when elements of the 4th Infantry Division repeatedly engaged NVA regulars. The body count on both sides grew as nearly daily firefights erupted on the jungle-clad slopes. Not until the NVA retreated into Cambodia after they lost nearby Hill 875 to the 173rd Airborne Brigade on Thanksgiving Day, did a quiet descend on the Dak To area. It remained in place until the spring of 1968, when NVA units, after their much vaunted Tet Offensive failed, returned to the tri-border region. The fighting there erupted anew and continued sporadically until the collapse of South Vietnam in April 1975. ■

ROAR *of the* LIGH

Armed with seven-shot repeating Spencer rifles, the mounted infantry of the Lightning Brigade played a part in averting disaster for the Federal Army of the Cumberland at the Battle of Chickamauga in September 1863.

BY JOSHUA SHEPHERD

Convinced that a major fight was in the offing, 33-year-old Colonel John T. Wilder clambered up the branches of a nearby tree as the sun dipped below the horizon. As the unassuming Indianan surveyed the cornfields and woodlots of north Georgia in the fading light, the men of his mounted cavalry brigade filed into position on the bottom ground flankingWest Chickamauga Creek. Uniquely armed with Spencer repeating rifles, his brigade was routinely given the toughest of assignments in the Federal Army of the Cumberland.

From his perch, Wilder saw a large cloud of dust reflecting the sun's final rays about two miles away. It was September 17, 1863, and after two and a half months of chasing demoralized Rebel troops, it looked as if Federal luck had finally run out. Shinnying down the tree, Wilder calmly informed the knot of onlooking officers that the dust cloud was "the advance of Bragg's army."

The Confederacy's vaunted Army of Tennessee was about to turn the tables on its Yankee pursuers, provoking the bloodiest battle of the Civil War's western theater.

Wilder's brigade garnered a reputation as one of the most legendary fighting outfits of the Civil War largely due to Wilder's audacious and innovative leadership. He was the quintessential self-made man of America's industrial era. Initially apprenticing at an iron foundry, the ambitious Wilder eventually mastered both engineering and hydraulics and found financial success by estab-

Armed with Spencer repeating rifles, Union Col. John Wilder's Mounted Infantry Brigade holds off Confederate Maj. Gen. W.H.T. Walker's Reserve Corps at Alexander's Bridge over West Chickamauga Creek on September 18, 1863. When the Reserve Corps crossed at Lambert's Ford a mile downstream about 4:30 p.m., the threat to his left flank forced Wilder to retreat toward Viniard Farm.

TNING BRIGADE

New York Historical Society

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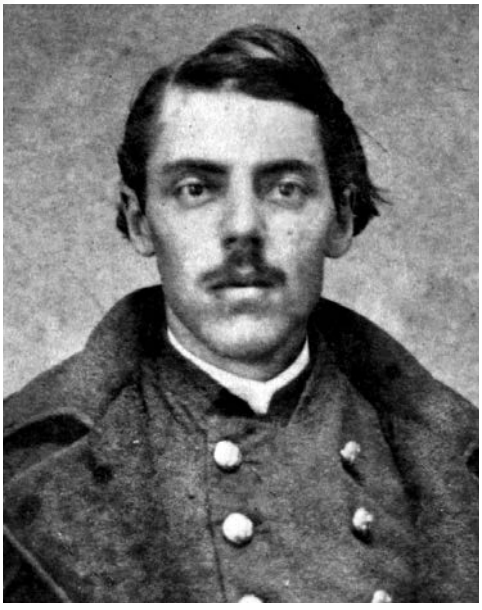
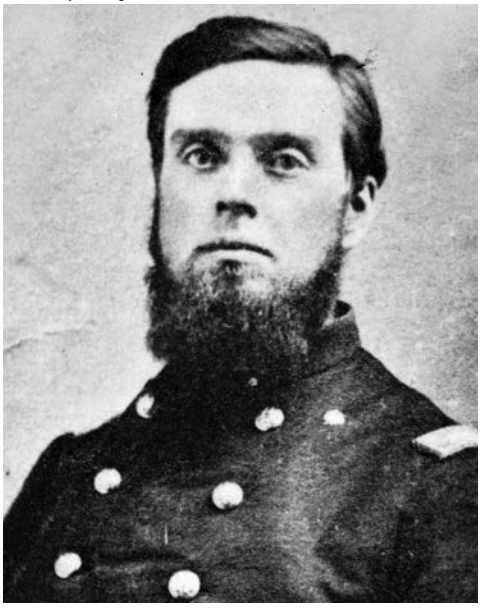




ABOVE: Captain Eli Lilly (left), commander of the 18th Independent Battery Indiana Light Artillery, part of the "Lightning Brigade" of the Union's Army of the Cumberland under Col. John T. Wilder (right). INSET: An original Spencer rifle, invented and patented by Christopher Spencer in 1860. The lever-action, repeating rifle had a seven-shot tubular magazine in the stock, firing .56-56 rimfire cartridges. TOP: A drawing of the 92nd Illinois Mounted Infantry by John Hillen, a soldier in the unit before he was wounded and discharged.

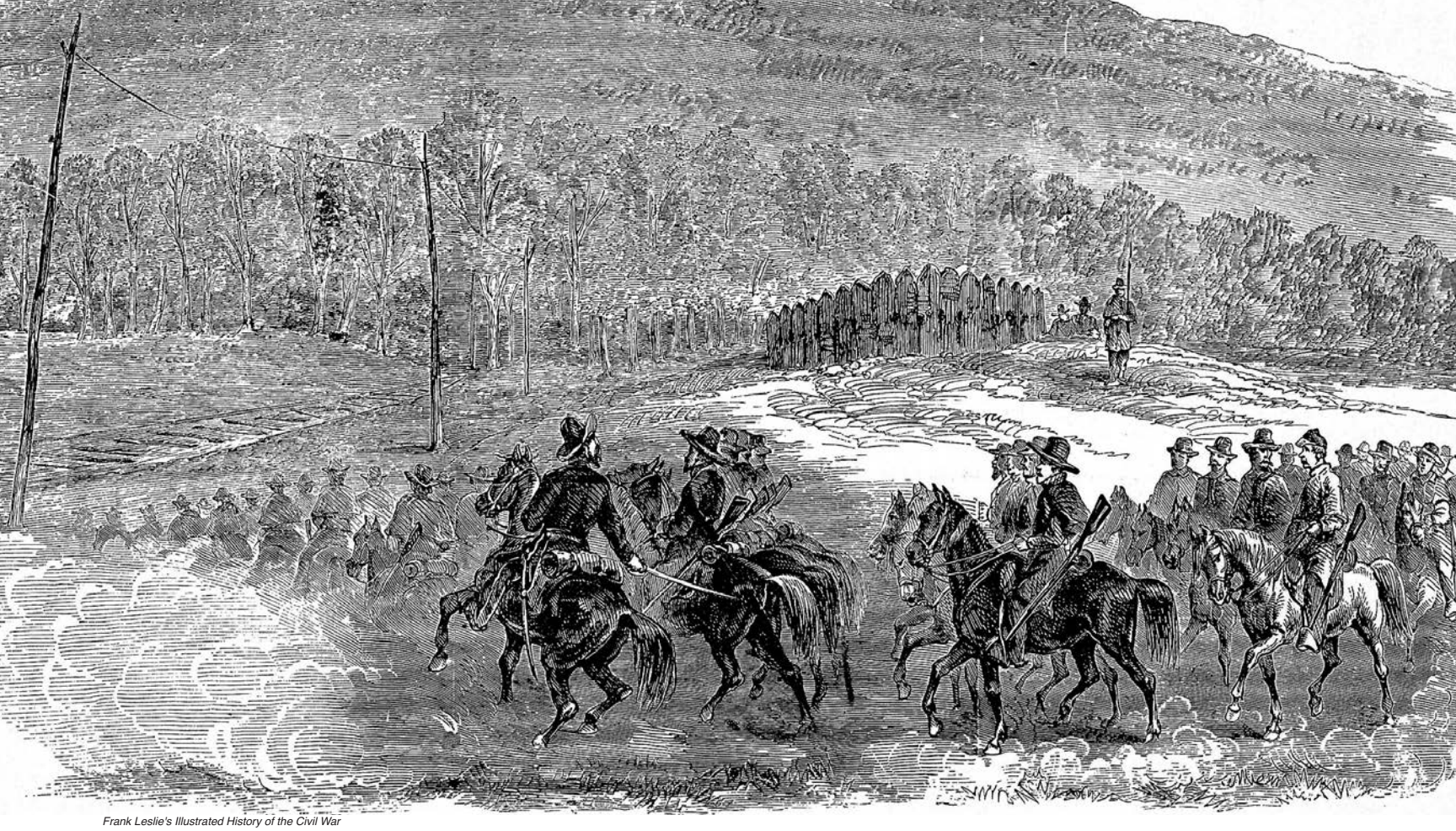
lishing his own foundry in Greensburg, Indiana.

He served a stint in the artillery at the outbreak of the Civil War before securing commission as colonel of the 17th Indiana Infantry. Widely regarded as a highly intelligent officer and charismatic leader, Wilder experienced varied fortunes in his new role. In 1862 he was initially successful in repulsing Confederate attacks on Munfordville, Kentucky, but was eventually forced to surrender and spent two months as a POW.

By the early months of 1863 Wilder was paroled and back in command of a brigade attached to the Army of the Cumberland, then operating in Middle Tennessee. Composed of Indiana and Illinois troops, Wilder's brigade was assigned routine duties that included the pursuit of Rebel cavalry detachments. Invariably, such assignments proved fruitless as enemy horsemen easily outpaced Wilder's footsoldiers.

The futile pursuit of Confederate cavalry caused Wilder, always an innovative thinker, to consider other options. His conclusion, seemingly obvious in hindsight, was nonetheless revolutionary at the time—his brigade would ride, not as cavalry, but as mounted infantry.

Wilder considered his solution to be the best of both worlds for his men, offering the mobility and reach of the cavalry with the firepower of line infantry. When he approached Maj. Gen. William Rosecrans for permission to implement the plan, he responded with enthusiasm. Wilder's brigade took final shape with the 17th and 72nd Indiana as well as the 92nd, 98th, and 123rd Illinois. The brigade also possessed its own organic artillery outfit, the 18th Independent Battery Indiana Light Artillery. The battery was com-



Frank Leslie's Illustrated History of the Civil War

This engraving from a sketch by J. F. E. Hillen shows Union Colonel John T. Wilder's mounted infantry, a novelty at the time, as it passes a blockhouse on the Nashville & Chattanooga Railroad line during the Union campaign in the Western theater. Charged with preventing Confederate cavalry raids on Union supply lines, a frustrated Wilder found horses and mules for his men so that they could keep up with their quarry.

manded by the diminutive but talented Capt. Eli Lilly, an unassuming druggist turned soldier.

By nature dismissive of army red tape, Wilder secured mounts for his men by dispatching foraging parties across a wide swath of Middle Tennessee. Wilder's men scoured the countryside, seizing horses and mules from terrified farm families. Horses were taken from barns and pastures, and, in one notable instance, from the home of a family who unsuccessfully attempted to hide a horse in their front parlor.

As soon as it was mounted, Wilder's brigade was put to use in the field, pursuing parties of Confederate cavalry that hovered around Rosecrans' flanks and threatened the army's supply lines. Wilder's outfit quickly became a favored strike force for Rosecrans, who valued the hard-hitting mobility that Wilder's mounted infantry could afford.

Wilder was unexpectedly presented with a new opportunity in the spring of 1863. Christopher Spencer, an up-and-coming Connecticut arms inventor, appeared in Murfreesboro in March to make a sales pitch to the top brass of the Army of the Cumberland. Always intrigued by innovation, Wilder attended the demonstration.

For its time, the Spencer rifle was a revolutionary development in military small arms. It was a breech-loading, .52-caliber repeater that could hold up to seven rounds in a tubular magazine that fitted into the stock. The rifle utilized self-contained metal cartridges which fed into the chamber simply by operating the trigger guard, which served as a loading lever. An infantryman could fire seven shots in as many seconds. In a war dominated by single-shot muzzleloaders, the Spencer was revolutionary.

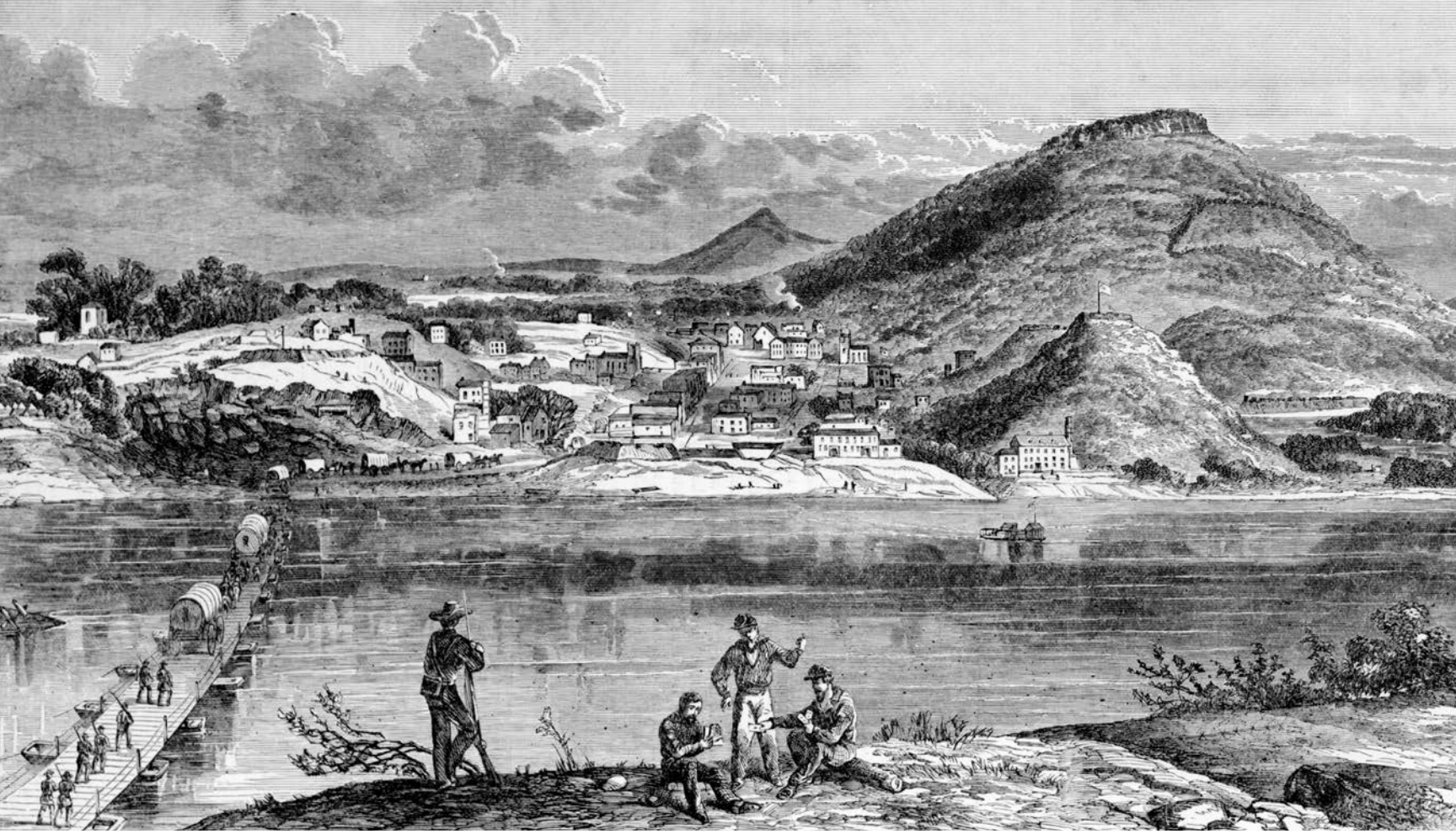
Although Rosecrans showed little more than a passing curiosity in the Spencer, Wilder was fascinated and quickly determined to arm his entire brigade with the rifle. Fully aware, however, that an ossified army bureaucracy would likely fail to take any action, the colonel initially resorted to old-fashioned Hoosier ingenuity, asking the men to pay for the weapons out of their own pay. Ultimately, such a move wasn't necessary, and the War Department supplied Spencers for Wilder's five regiments.

Despite regular scrapes with isolated enemy detachments, Wilder's men had yet to face the test of a stand-up fight with Confederate troops. But that would change as Rosecrans made plans for the campaign season of 1863.

Rosecrans' ultimate goal was Bragg's primary base of supplies, the vital Confederate rail hub of Chattanooga, Tennessee. But of immediate concern to Rosecrans was Gen. Braxton Bragg's Army of Tennessee, positioned on good ground on the Duck River about 25 miles from Murfreesboro. While feinting at Bragg's left, Rosecrans hoped to seize a vital pass at Hoover's Gap, a move which could dislodge the Confederates. The crucial task of taking the gap was assigned to Wilder's mounted brigade.

Before daybreak on June 24, Wilder led a charge into the mouth of the gap, where they quickly scattered a small outpost of Confederate cavalry. Recognizing that the pass was inexplicably unguarded, Wilder decided to occupy the gap before enemy troops could retake the position.

The brigade held the gap against repeated counterattacks, and when word of the heavy musketry made its way to the rear, Wilder's immediate superior was alarmed. Maj. Gen. Joseph Reynolds, concerned that the overextended mounted infantry would be overrun, sent orders for Wilder to disengage. The colonel would have none of it. Convinced that he could indeed hold the priceless real estate of Hoover's Gap, the fiery Wilder brushed off the order, kept fighting, and held the position.



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ABOVE: This illustration from *Harper's Pictorial History of the Civil War* (1894) shows a view of Chattanooga from the north bank of the Tennessee River where Col. John T. Wilder's Lightning Brigade of mounted cavalry demonstrated for a week in late August to draw the attention of the occupying forces of Confederate Gen. Braxton Bragg's Army of the Tennessee. Federal troops crossed the river virtually unopposed to the southwest on August 29 and Bragg was soon forced to abandon the city. OPPOSITE: *The First Gun at Chickamauga*, by war correspondent Alfred Waud, depicts the clash at Reed's Bridge on September 18, 1863. Though reinforced by seven companies of mounted infantry from the Lightning Brigade's 72nd Indiana and 123rd Illinois, as well as a section of Capt. Eli Lilly's Battery, Col. Robert Minty's cavalry couldn't hold the bridge against Confederate Gen. Bushrod Johnson's division and the cavalry of Gen. Nathan Bedford Forrest.

Although Wilder initially feared a reprimand for the incident, Rosecrans was delighted by the Hoosier's risky initiative. The bold move had spared the infantry a tough fight for Hoover's Gap, and, it was thought, saved 2,000 lives. In the wake of the fighting an ebullient Rosecrans gave Wilder's men a well-earned nom-de-guerre: the Lightning Brigade.

With Federal troops pouring through Hoover's Gap and his supply lines gravely threatened, Bragg was forced to abandon the region and fall back to Chattanooga. Without so much as a major battle, Rosecrans had succeeded in prying Bragg out of Middle Tennessee. It had been a remarkable whirlwind campaign of successful maneuver, but it failed to impress Washington authorities.

Insistent on the outright destruction of the Army of Tennessee, the Lincoln Administration hectored Rosecrans to maintain momentum and press home an attack on Chattanooga. The embattled Rosecrans developed an ambitious plan. Rather than directly assault the bastion of Chattanooga, Rosecrans launched a feint north of the city while the bulk of his army moved well to the south over backroads that crossed Lookout Mountain. With luck, the immense flanking column would then drive east, cutting off the Confederates in Chattanooga.

To pull it off, Wilder's Lightning Brigade was given a crucial assignment meant to occupy Bragg's attention. On August 21, the lead elements of the Lightning Brigade abruptly appeared on the north bank of the Tennessee River, just opposite downtown Chattanooga. The van of Wilder's column shot up a startled enemy ferry boat, while terrified parishioners poured out of Chattanooga's churches. Captain Lilly unlimbered his guns and shelled the city, exchanging fire with enemy guns on the south bank.

The brigade would occupy the position for more than a week as Wilder put his men to work noisily pounding on wooden barrels and sawing planks to give the impression that his brigade was building boats in preparation for a river crossing.

Bragg took the bait and concentrated his army in that direction. On the vital mountain passes south of the city, only a thin screen of cavalry was in position to stop a potential Federal thrust.

Southwest of Chattanooga, all was proceeding according to Rosecrans' plan. Federal troops were able to cross the Tennessee River virtually unmolested on the morning of August 29. The blue columns then pushed eastward over the rugged barriers of Sand and Lookout Mountains to the delight of Rosecrans. But when Bragg finally realized the threat to his lines of communication, he abandoned Chattanooga and fell back into north Georgia.

Meanwhile, the Army of the Cumberland inched its way forward in a wide arc south of the city, pushing east across the mountains in its search for the Army of Tennessee. Wilder's brigade crossed the Tennessee River on September 10, then made a forced ride toward Ringgold, Georgia. The following morning they tangled with Rebel cavalry just north of the town, but easily turned back two enemy counterattacks. The following day, Wilder's men pushed southeast toward Tunnel Hill and once again skirmished with enemy cavalry. Wilder

then received orders to disengage and head southwest for LaFayette, Georgia.

The brigade would have little respite during the following day. By the afternoon of September 12, his exhausted troopers cantered into Leet's Tanyard southwest of Ringgold, where the Federal column abruptly encountered Confederate cavalry just a hundred yards ahead. Both sides dashed for cover and Wilder scrambled to dismount his men and form up in line of battle.

Brig. Gen. John Pegram's Confederate cavalry division had spent the night around Leet's Tanyard, and they sprang into action at the sight of approaching Yankee horsemen, driving hard against the 17th and 72nd Indiana that formed Wilder's main line. Overwhelmingly outnumbered, Wilder tried to pin down the advancing Confederates by ordering Col. Abram Miller to mount up four companies of the 72nd and circle around the enemy's right flank.

Groping their way through thick timber, Miller's column blundered into Confederate skirmishers, then watched in horror as a fresh Rebel battle line appeared directly to their front. Miller's badly outnumbered troopers dismounted atop high ground and opened fire with their Spencers.

Fire swept across the ridge as the dismounted Confederate cavalry attempted to overlap Miller's flanks. The unrelenting fire from the Spencer rifles began to turn the tide in favor of Wilder's troops. Pegram's veterans gave a good accounting of themselves, unleashing several volleys as they attempted to outflank and overrun Miller's beleaguered troops.

But the Lightning Brigade's superior firepower was simply too much. After two hours of tough fighting, the Lightning Brigade kept a tenacious hold on the ground. Pegram was forced to pull back, gathering up 50 dead and wounded; Wilder lost 20 men.

But Wilder's troubles were far from over as the Yankee troopers could still see massive columns of Confederate troops, "as thick as thieves," thought one soldier, little more than a half mile away. That night, Wilder spurred his brigade west but it soon became apparent that they were boxed in. Confederate campfires were plainly visible, effectively blocking the brigade's escape route. Wilder's scouts, however, found a local farmer who showed them a little-used country lane that was clear of enemy troops.

Peering apprehensively through the darkness, expecting to be discovered at every moment, the brigade succeeded in slipping between enemy camps undetected. By the early morning hours of September 13, Wilder's men, safely outside the Confederate cordon, breathed a sigh of relief.

Wilder remained concerned that, far from being on their heels, Confederate forces were preparing for a fight. His men had captured enemy correspondence indicating that the Army of Tennessee was being heavily reinforced by Confederate troops from Mississippi and Virginia.

Rosecrans was initially hesitant to believe Wilder's reports. But after examining the captured documents, he moved swiftly to begin pulling his scattered commands together, concentrating around Lee and Gordon's Mill along the LaFayette Road, a primary thoroughfare that ran back to Chattanooga.

Despite exercising caution, Rosecrans and the bulk of his senior command stubbornly believed that Bragg was in full retreat and unlikely to seek battle. But far off of Rosecrans' left flank, Col. Robert Minty, a capable cavalry brigade commander, likewise reported troubling developments in his front. From his position guarding Reed's Bridge over West Chickamauga Creek, Minty's troopers were encountering a growing Confederate presence.

As a precaution, Rosecrans ordered the Light-

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Frank Leslie's Illustrated History of the Civil War

After reports of an isolated Confederate brigade at Jay's Mill, near Reed's Bridge on the West Chickamauga Creek, Maj. Gen. John M. Brannan's division was sent to investigate. A mounted patrol from Gen. Nathan B. Forrest's cavalry ran into Brannan at 7:30 a.m. on September 19. What started as a skirmish began to grow as Forrest was reinforced by nearby infantry and Gen. Absalom Baird's division was sent to relieve Brannan. The Battle of Chickamauga had officially begun.

ning Brigade to plug a yawning gap between Minty's Brigade and the Army of the Cumberland's left flank. Wilder took up a strong position overlooking Alexander's Bridge, one of the few wooden spans over West Chickamauga Creek. By the evening of September 17, Wilder had most of his brigade, minus the 92nd Illinois, on good ground covering the bridge.

The creek, which meandered through boggy bottom ground, was only 100 feet wide, but its steep banks were impassable to infantry columns. Wilder ordered most of his men into position at the crest of a slight ridge overlooking the river; the position was bolstered by the guns of Lilly's Battery, which had a clear field of fire toward the bridge. Wilder sent forward several companies from the 17th and 72nd Indiana to serve as skirmishers in the bottom ground. As his men settled in for the night, Wilder remained convinced that the Confederates intended to give battle.

In fact, Bragg had been gathering the Army of Tennessee for several days and was moving quickly to strike. While the bulk of the Federal army was concentrated near Lee and Gordon's Mills, Bragg meant to throw the full weight of his army several miles to the north in a massive turning movement against Rosecrans' left.

While Lt. Gen. Leonidas Polk's corps tied down Federal forces at Lee and Gordon's Mill, Maj. Gen. Simon Bolivar Buckner's corps would cross the West Chickamauga at Thedford's Ford. Maj. Gen. William H.T. Walker's Reserve Corps would make a crossing at Alexander's Bridge, while a provisional division under the command of Brig. Gen. Bushrod Johnson would attack at Reed's Bridge.

The ominous intelligence that Wilder had reported in the aftermath of the Leet's Tanyard fight was all too accurate. Bragg's army was indeed beginning to swell with reinforcements hastily rushed to Georgia by rail. Three brigades had already arrived from Mississippi and had been assigned to Bushrod Johnson. A fourth outfit, the famed Texas Brigade, had likewise been assigned to Johnson. And more troops were on the way. Bragg was hourly expecting the arrival of two more crack divisions from Lt. Gen. James Longstreet's I Corps, on loan from Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia.

On September 18, things remained quiet for much of the morning, and Company A of the 72nd Indiana was ordered to the far side of the creek. The men performed picket duty but also engaged in a bit of foraging. But at 10 a.m., bedlam erupted. The Hoosiers were startled by Confederate cavalry, who immediately charged for the bridge in an attempt to grab a few prisoners. Terrified Yankees jumped into the creek to escape the trap, while their comrades on the other side opened fire, driving off the enemy cavalry.

The mounting contact with the enemy increasingly indicated that the Confederates were preparing for a major attack. At 11 a.m., Colonel Minty, guarding Reed's Bridge to the north, sent Wilder a desperate plea for reinforcements. Although Minty was fighting a stubborn delaying action, his brigade was hard pressed by Rebel troops.

Loath to weaken his own command but eager to assist Minty, Wilder ordered half his available manpower—the 123rd Illinois, seven companies of the 72nd Indiana, and a section of Lilly's Battery—to Minty's support. Wilder was left with fewer than 1,000 effectives to defend Alexander's Bridge. In preparation for the attack that was clearly coming, he ordered the planks to be removed from the bridge; troopers used the lumber to create a crude breastwork across the road.

By 1 p.m., a Confederate line of battle emerged

into the fields opposite Alexander's Bridge. It was a veteran Mississippi brigade under the command of Brig. Gen. Edward Walthall; As he and his men waited for the Rebels, Sgt. James Barnes couldn't help but admire their tight discipline. "They came up in splendid style," he wrote, "even and steady, bayonets fixed and gleaming in the sun."

The martial spectacle was short-lived. As soon as the Mississippians came into view, Lilly's Battery opened up, sending a deadly salvo of percussion shells and canister screaming toward the Confederates. At 350 yards, the cannoneers could hardly miss. Two batteries of Confederate artillery emerged from the woodline and unlimbered in an attempt to silence Lilly's guns.

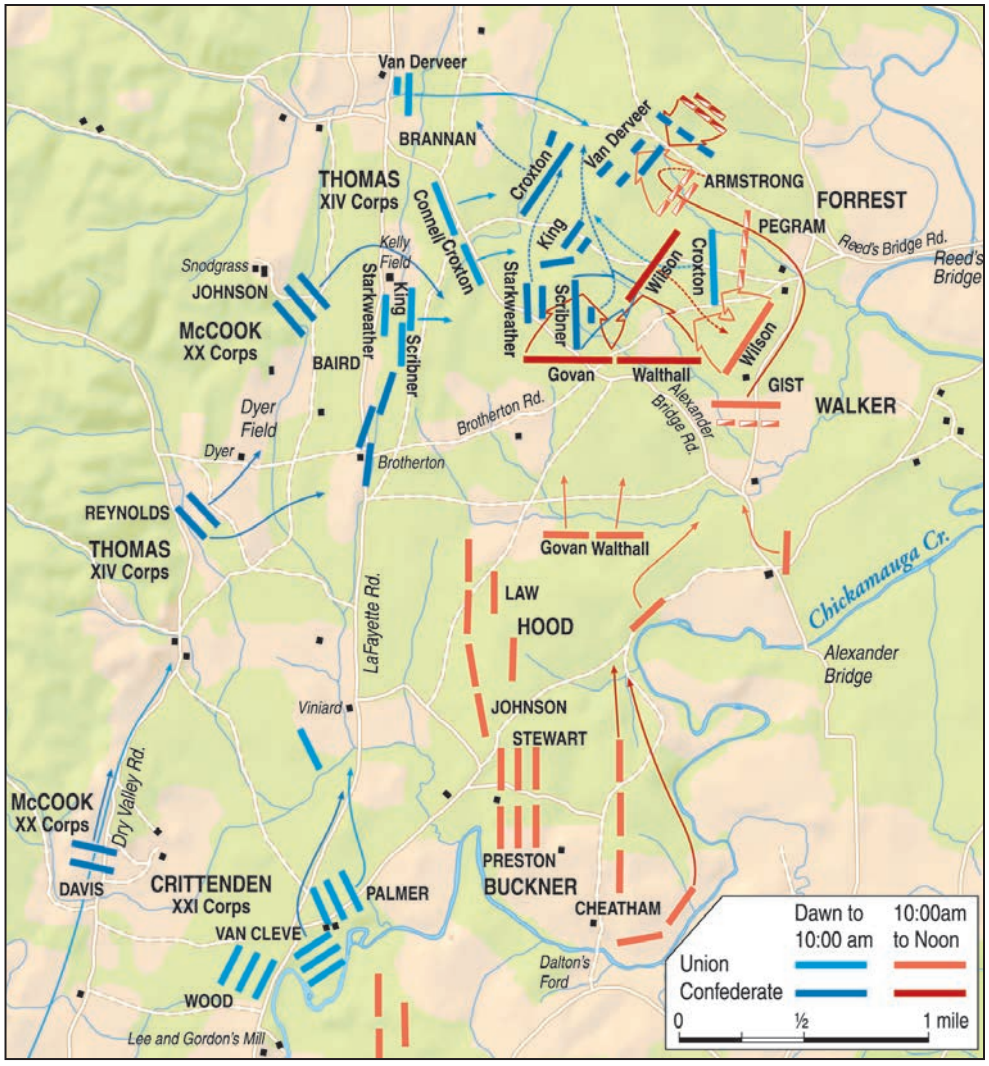
In the midst of the artillery duel, Walthall's Mississippians closed up ranks and pressed forward. As they neared the bridge, the Confederates on the left of Walthall's line were targeted by the 17th Indiana; shaken by the intense rifle fire, the Confederates went to ground in the cornfield and attempted to return fire. In the ranks of the 34th Mississippi, the fire from the Spencers proved devastating; in a brief but intense firefight, the regiment lost nine men killed and twenty-five wounded.

Pushing forward astride the road, the 29th Mississippi hit a brick wall. The men from Company A, 72ndth Indiana, concealed behind their improvised breastwork, nervously waited for the Rebels to come within range—close enough to see their "eyes bat," according to Barnes. As the Confederates neared the opposite end of the bridge, Wilder's men opened fire, crumbling the front rank. Their momentum stalled, the Mississippians fell back. Private George Bailey, 17, recalled that the Rebels "dropt like hogs."

The Mississippians rallied for a second push, and spread out in a hopeless attempt to flank the Hoosiers behind the barricade. As the Confederates pushed ahead, Company A chewed up the center of the Mississippians' line. The roar of gunpowder filled the valley as both sides stubbornly fought for control of the vital crossing. A few diehards from the 29th Mississippi made it close to the bridge to see that the planks were gone.

When informed the bridge was worthless, Confederate corps commander Gen. Walker ordered Walthall to disengage and cross West Chickamauga Creek a mile north at Byram's Ford (also known as Lambert's Ford). The Lightning Brigade's stubborn defense of Alexander's Bridge had cost the Confederates heavy casualties, and precious time.

Though Wilder's brigade had turned back repeated attacks, their position was untenable as the Confederates crossing downstream threatened their left flank. Wilder gave the order to evacuate, with most of the brigade heading west, but Company A, fighting from behind their breastwork,



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ABOVE: Lee & Gordon's Mills near Union Gen. William Rosecrans' headquarters at Crawfish Springs (Chickamauga). Confederate Gen. Leonidas Polk held the main Federal force in check during the assaults on Alexander's and Reed's bridges. TOP: A map of the fighting on the morning of September 19, 1863, the first day of the Battle of Chickmauga. Reed's and Alexander's bridges are along the right edge of the map.

New York Public Library

This engraving depicts the wounding of Confederate General John Bell Hood on September 20, 1863. As he led charge through a gap in the Union lines during the Battle of Chickamauga, a Minié ball hit him in the right thigh, a wound that would later necessitate the amputation of his leg. At Gettysburg two months earlier, Hood's left arm had been permanently incapacitated by a shell fragment, but did not need to be removed.

was nearly captured en-masse.

Swift moving Rebel infantry unexpectedly approaching from downstream fired through the underbrush, felling A company's horses and mules; only a single mount survived the gunfire, forcing the Hoosiers to dash pell-mell for the rear in small groups. Remarkably, only a single man was wounded during the chaotic retreat, with just a few casualties overall. In the field behind them lay 105 dead and wounded Confederates.

Wilder regrouped his brigade on the sprawling Viniard family farm, continuing to skirmish with the Confederates, who were clearly present in force and probing Union positions in anticipation of a major attack. By 7 p.m., three Confederate brigades were dangerously threatening Wilder's understrength command.

Confronted with the reality that a reinforced Confederate army was preparing to launch a major turning movement the following morning, Rosecrans took action. To protect his flank and blunt the attack, Rosecrans ordered the entire army to shift north and take up new positions roughly parallelling the LaFayette Road.

While fresh Federal infantry began taking up position on Viniard's farm, Wilder's exhausted troopers, finally reunited with the reinforcements that had been lent to Minty, fell back to the edge of a cornfield west of the LaFayette Road.

There, along a belt of timber crowning a subtle ridge, Wilder deployed his brigade in a very strong supporting position. The brigade's right was anchored by the 72nd Indiana. To their left was positioned the 123rd Illinois, four guns from Lilly's battery, and the 17th Indiana. Wilder's left was held by the 98th Illinois, and bolstered by two of Lilly's guns. Anticipating a tough fight on the morrow, the men threw together an improvised breastwork of fence rails and tree limbs.

The morning began quietly enough for the Lightning Brigade, but off to the northeast, a storm was about to descend on the Army of the Cumberland. Rosecrans had succeeded in shifting Maj. Gen. George Thomas' XIV Corps north to protect his line of communication with Chattanooga, but had little time to prepare for the expected attack.

The following morning, Thomas received erroneous intelligence that only a single Confederate brigade had crossed the West Chickamauga. Consequently, he only dispatched a division under Brig. Gen. John Brannan to clear out the Rebels. Brannan was soon beset by veteran Confederate infantry as Bragg poured reinforcements into the battle.

Over the subsequent hours, the fighting intensified and moved south as fresh troops were inevitably drawn into the vortex of the fighting. In the isolated farm fields and dense thickets west of West Chickamauga Creek, the battle degenerated to a confused slugfest into which individual brigades were thrown piecemeal.

To the common soldiers of the Lightning Brigade, the ominous roar of battle portended a coming trial of their own. Bugler Henry Campbell described a "low, distinct rumbling, gradually approaching, like a distant hail storm." Veterans recalled that the men grew quiet under the pressure of waiting. By the afternoon, events would, indeed, rapidly overtake Wilder and his men.

In the hope of striking the Confederate left, Rosecrans ordered two brigades to cross the

Viniard farm and head for the sound of battle. Brig. Gen. William Carlin led his brigade, bolstered by the 2nd Minnesota Battery, into open farm ground east of the LaFayette Road. On his left, Col. Hans Heg led his men at the double-quick into thick woods.

Heg and Carlin slammed into a crack division of Rebel troops under the command of Maj. Gen. John Bell Hood. Most of Hood's men were seasoned veterans of the war in Virginia, and coolly poured musketry fire into Heg's ranks. In the East Viniard Field, Carlin was caught in a maelstrom. Trapped in the open as their ranks were swept by musketry and artillery, Carlin's troops broke for the rear.

As they did so, the guns of the 2nd Minnesota Battery were left without infantry support. Wilder ordered the 72nd Indiana and 123rd Illinois to mount an attack to rescue the guns. Coming on at the run, Wilder's men formed up near the LaFayette Road and opened fire, badly chewing up the left flank of the famed Texas Brigade, under Brig. Gen. James Robertson.

But as Heg's brigade likewise began to give way, the Confederate brigade of Brig, Gen. Evander McNair surged across the grounds of the Brock farm just north of West Viniard Field. Wilder kept a cool head. He ordered the 72nd Indiana and 123rd Illinois to disengage from the Texas Brigade and fall back to his main line. With his own position secured for the moment, Wilder ordered his 98th Illinois and 17th Indiana, along with two of Lilly's guns, to turn and fire into McNair's dangerously exposed left flank.

With a clear field of fire, Lilly's guns played havoc in McNair's ranks, and the unrelenting fire from the brigade's Spencers ripped apart McNair's leftmost regiment, the 25th Arkansas. Caught in the open and with no visible support, McNair ordered his battered brigade to fall back.

Despite McNair's defeat, the Federal defense of the LaFayette Road was falling apart. With Carlin's men in full flight, Heg's shattered brigade streamed back across the road. Terrified soldiers sought refuge in a shallow ditch behind the Viniard homestead. Desperately trying to rally his men, Heg was shot in the abdomen and slumped in his saddle while his troops fled for the safety of the trees sheltering the Lightning Brigade.

Federal defenses collapsed under the overwhelming pressure of the Rebel attack. Panicked Federals discarded weapons and knapsacks as they ran blindly across the field and through Wilder's ranks. Corp. William Records of the 72nd Indiana recalled that the demoralized soldiers "ran over us like sheep."

As the exultant Texas Brigade swarmed over the field, they were greeted with a punishing fire from Wilder's men on the low ridge. Expecting

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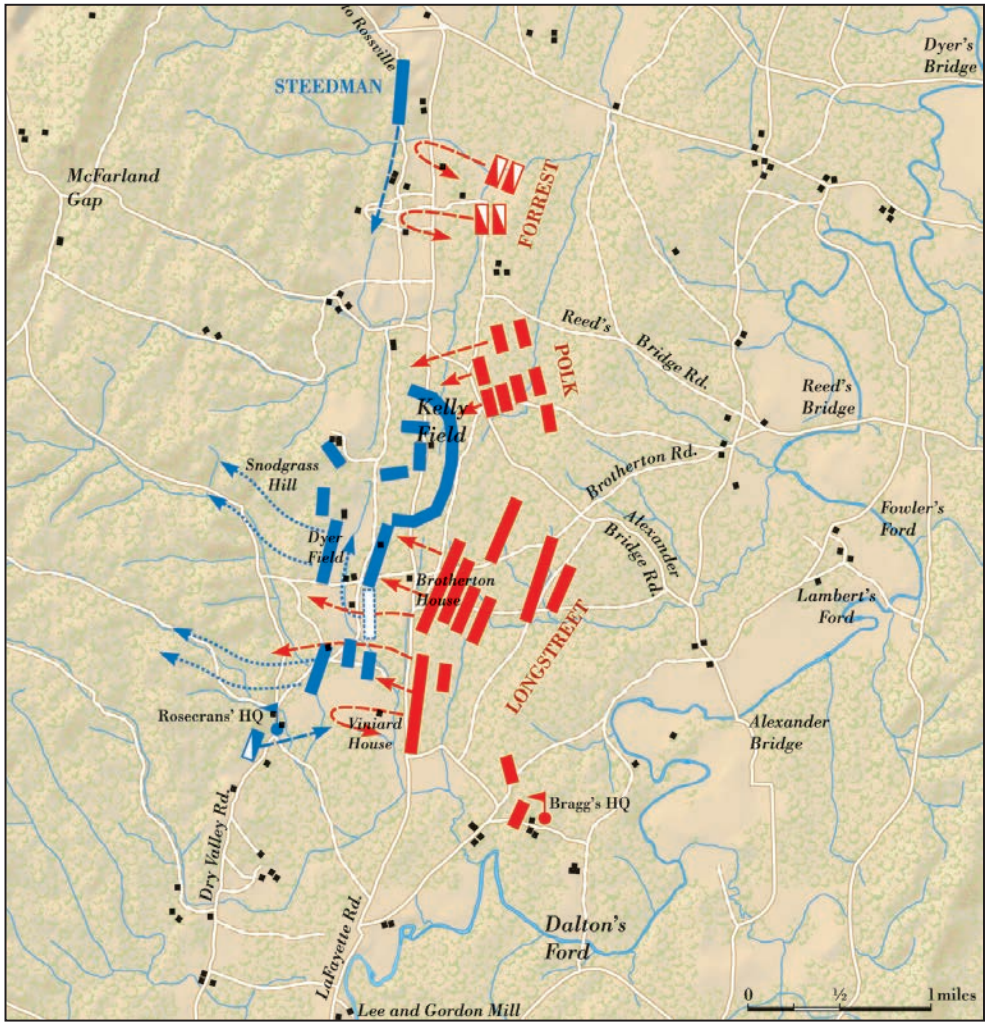
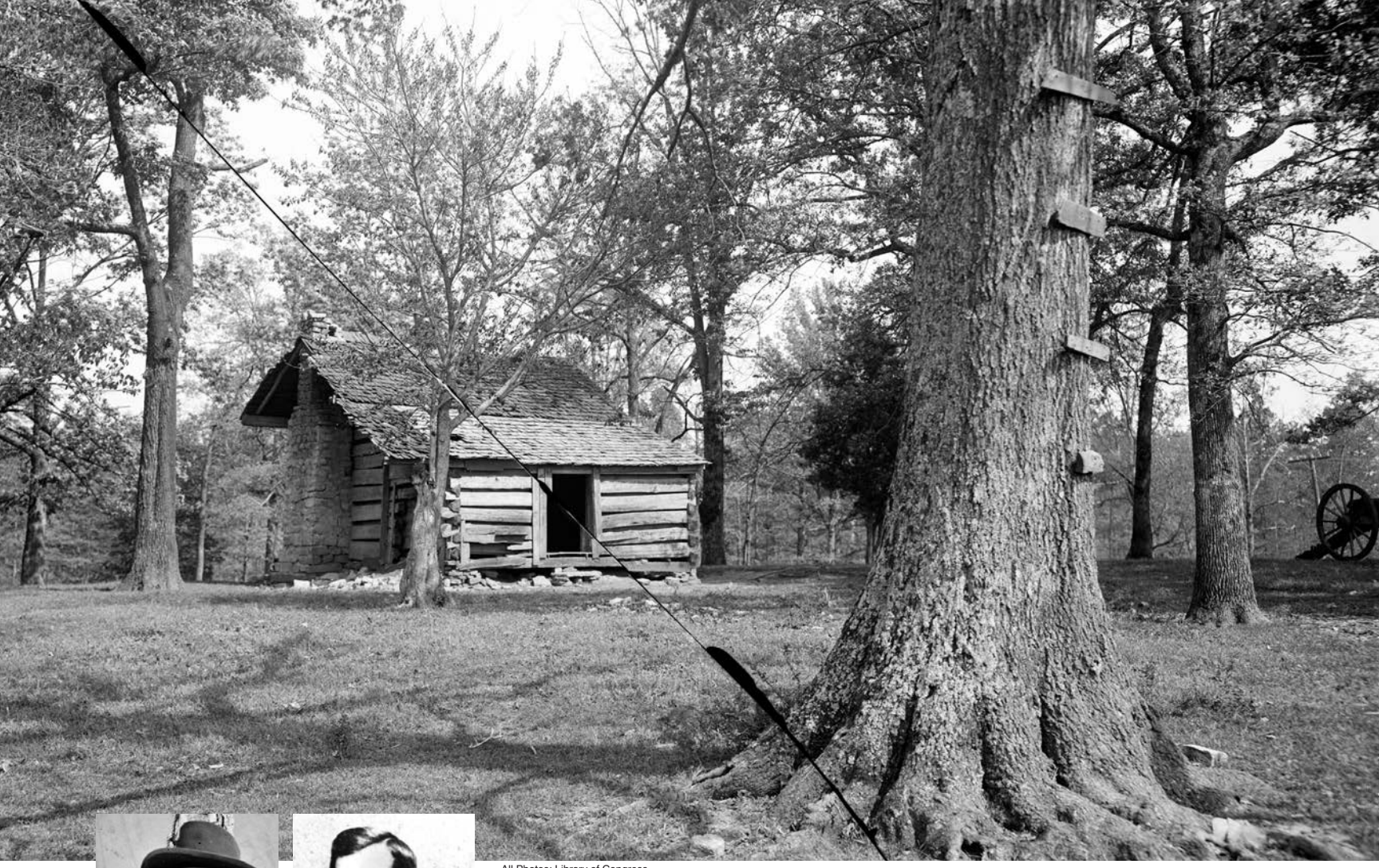
Map © 2026 Philip Schwartzberg, Meridian Mapping, Minneapolis, MN



ABOVE: This Battle of Chickamauga map shows the troop positions of the Union and Confederate forces on September 20, during the fighting on the second day as Gen. Leonidas Polk struck the Union left with little effect while Gen. James Longstreet advanced against the Union center. TOP: A view of the LaFayette Road near the Viniard farm, on the west side of the creek that gave the battle of September 19-20, 1863, its name. Union Gen. William Roscrans aligned his army roughly along this north-south running road as the fighting raged back and forth.



All Photos: Library of Congress

ABOVE: The Brotherton House, Chickamauga, Georgia, where Gen. Braxton Bragg's troops broke the Federal center and were on the verge of turning Gen. William Rosecrans's right flank before Col. John T. Wilder's "Lightning Brigade" stopped them. INSET, LEFT: Journalist Charles A. Dana served as Lincoln's special investigator for the War Department in 1863 and was appointed Assistant Secretary of War in January 1864. INSET, RIGHT: Gen. John Pegram commanded a cavalry brigade in Bragg's Army of Tennessee at Chickamauga. OPPOSITE: On September 20, Confederate Gen. Leonidas Polk's command attacked the left flank of a salient and were repulsed by Major General George H. Thomas, "The Rock of Chickamauga."

the Yankee gunfire to slacken after the opening volley, the Confederates were shocked and frustrated when it kept coming. Wilder's position, paired with overwhelming firepower, completely stalled the Confederate pursuit. Robertson had little choice but to pull back his brigade.

When he did so, however, he dressed his ranks for a renewed push and sought support from the Georgia brigade of Brig. Gen. Henry "Rock" Benning. Together, the two brigades surged across the LaFayette Road determined to finally sweep Wilder off the ridge. Sgt. Benjamin Magee couldn't help but admire the sight of the veteran Confederates as they came into action, "with lines well dressed, coming on at the double quick, as steady in motion as a piece of machinery."

Within moments, the grand spectacle degenerated to horrific carnage. Loaded with double and triple-shotted canister, Lilly's guns tore enormous swaths through the crisp Confederate ranks. As men fell everywhere, the Rebels somehow closed up ranks and pressed forward.

But their predicament only grew worse as they came within range of Wilder's infantry and their repeating Spencers. The Yankees fired and reloaded at a frantic pace from ammunition piled in front of them. Badly mauled, the terrified Confederates dove into a drainage ditch behind the farm, where they were trapped.

Even Benning joined his men in the ditch, crouching with common soldiers as a storm of Yankee fire screamed overhead. The Confederates returned fire as best they could, but Wilder was determined to afford the Rebels no toehold and ordered Lilly into action. Near the left of Wilder's line, a shallow gully angled southeast into the ditch, and the artillerymen muscled two of their guns into position at the head of the depression.

From there, they could target a 100-yard-long section of the ditch. Lilly's storm of canister tore through the ditch, churning up men and earth. Even Wilder was stunned at the carnage. "It seemed a pity," he recalled, "to kill men so." Leaving piles of the dead and dying, the Confederates fell back, once again running a gauntlet of gunfire as they made for cover east of the LaFayette Road.

As the sun fell, the tactical situation remained largely unchanged despite hours of wholesale bloodletting. The confused tangle of forest had impeded coordination for both armies. Exhausted by nearly two days of incessant fighting, Wilder's brigade was ordered to fall back several hundred yards to the rear.

During the day's fighting, Bragg had temporarily broken through the Federal center at the Brotherton farm. But, despite coming within a hairsbreadth of turning Rosecrans' right, the Con-

Gil Cohen/National Park Service Commissioned Art Collection

federates had been stopped cold by Wilder's brigade. Bragg issued orders for a renewed assault in the morning. Starting from the right and proceeding en echelon to the left, Bragg intended to finally break the Federal hold on the LaFayette Road and cut off Rosecrans from Chattanooga.

Unfortunately for Bragg, the attack didn't proceed as planned—Polk launched his wing against the Federal left four hours behind schedule. His troops were bloodily repulsed by a formidable salient that Thomas had established east of the LaFayette Road.

Off Thomas' left, the Confederate division of Maj. Gen. John Breckinridge succeeded in working its way around Thomas' flank. There, Breckinridge turned two of his brigades south and gravely threatened to roll up the Army of the Cumberland. Only a timely counterattack by Col. Ferdinand Van Derveer's brigade turned Breckinridge back and stabilized the flank.

In the center, the fog of war would prove disastrous to the Federals as Rosecrans—believing that a gap in his lines had been created in sending reinforcements to Thomas—ordered Brig. Gen. Thomas Wood to shift his division to the left. Though there was no gap, Wood followed orders and pulled his division out of line at the Brotherton farm at 11 a.m., leaving a 600-yard chasm in the Federal center.

The timing was disastrous. Just as Wood pulled out, Longstreet launched three massed divisions directly across the Brotherton farm and through the breach after overrunning token Union resistance. In less than 30 harrowing minutes, the Federal center fell apart. With momentum in their favor, Longstreet's troops crushed Federal reinforcements, then fanned out to the west and north.

Major General Thomas Hindman's Confederate division, veering west from the breakthrough, attacked a low ridgeline occupied by two brigades belonging to Maj. Gen. Phil Sheridan's division. After a brief but furious fight, the Union troops were driven off. Sure of success following the defeat of Sheridan, Brig. Gen. Arthur Manigault pushed his Alabama and South Carolina brigade up the wooded heights of Glenn Hill, occupied by the 39th Indiana.

While the Hoosiers were desperately fighting for control of the ridge, Wilder's brigade, hastily ordered into action, crashed unexpectedly into Manigault's left flank. The Confederates were scorched in front and flank with devastating fire from the Spencers. It was a hideously one-sided fight, and Manigault ordered a hasty retreat.

Reconnoitering ahead with Col. Smith Atkins of the 92nd Illinois, Wilder mounted a low hill for a clear view of the action. In the distance, he saw lines of Confederate troops wheeling to the north, clearly circling behind the Union army and dangerously poised to strike Thomas' battle line on the north end of the battlefield. He immediately decided to risk an attack on Longstreet's wing with his lone brigade, relying on the Spencer rifle to chew up the Confederate rear. With luck, he hoped to fight through to Thomas' lines.

Eager to carry out the daring assault, the men of the Lightning Brigade began forming up for action. As they did so, Wilder was approached by a lone civilian, who was clearly rattled. It was Assistant Secretary of War Charles Dana, who had been an observer at Rosecrans' headquarters. Convinced that the battle was hopelessly lost, a wild-eyed Dana ordered Wilder to withdraw his brigade from action and provide Dana a personal escort back to the safety of Chattanooga.

Wilder was dumbfounded. Anxious to carry out his proposed attack but clearly apprehensive of crossing an assistant secretary of war, Wilder relented. The colonel reluctantly ordered his brigade to fall back. In the most unexpected turn

Continued on page 98

Bloody BROTHERHOOD

Answering only to the Pope, the rich and powerful military religious order of the Poor Fellow Soldiers of Christ and the Temple of Solomon, the Knights Templar, were the guardians of Europe's faith and finances for 200 years.

BY KELLY BELL

By 1119, the Holy City of Jerusalem had been back under Christian control for 20 years. The soldiers of the First Crusade had secured the city and re-opened it as a center for Christian pilgrimage. Devout travellers from Europe streamed southeastward to pay respects to their faith in the city where Jesus Christ had taught, healed, died and arisen. Yet in a situation reminiscent of the parable of the Good Samaritan, this trek had become perilous.

Highwaymen preyed on the plodding, helpless bands of pious wayfarers. Sometimes the robbers were marauding Saracens, supporting themselves by banditry after losing military control of the region. Often the brigands were backslidden Crusaders who had joined Christian armies in hopes of getting rich on captured spoils, only to be bitterly disappointed at the meager pickings provided by this arid, sparsely populated land. Greed now motivated them to victimize their own people, plundering them of their money, valuables and their very persons, herding the healthiest off to the slave markets of Constantinople. Anyone unable to stagger to Asia Minor—the young, old, sick, wounded, disabled or pregnant—was put to the sword.

A Jerusalem-based French nobleman named Hugues de Payen began recruiting European knights from the city's garrison forces in 1119 to form a bodyguard for the long-suffering worshippers. The first group of pilgrim protectors numbered just nine men. They were

Cloaked in distinctive white mantles with red crosses, a charge of the "warrior monks" known as the Knights Templar was a fearsome sight. The devout medieval Catholic military order was established to protect Christian pilgrims after the Holy Land was reopened following the First Crusade.

Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Antwerp

commoners from the fields and streets of Europe, wore shabby, donated clothes and were armed with an assortment of swords, bows, daggers, clubs and scythes. Yet they fought the desert bandits eagerly and fiercely, and the grateful people they defended donated lavishly to their military coffers.

At a grand council of the Roman Catholic hierarchy held in Troyes, France in 1128, the bodyguards were recognized as a new religious order called the Knights Templar. By 1145 a series of Papal Bulls had conferred almost absolute power on the brotherhood and made them answerable solely to the Pope. Despite this authoritative endorsement many churchmen and secular officials viewed the Templars as apostates because traditional church policy prohibited clergymen from bearing arms.

The men recruited were in fact generally of somewhat lawless inclinations, and many had been excommunicated. One of the Knights' earliest and most useful supporters was a wealthy French nobleman named Bernard of Clairvaux. He specifically enlisted men he described as, "unbelieving scoundrels, sacrilegious plunderers, homicides, perjurers and adulterers" because he hoped to reform such unruly individuals and channel their nefarious but substantial energies and exertions into serving the faith. He absolved them of the sin of killing as long as they slew only enemies of the Christian Church.

When not participating in military excursions the Templars lived as monks. They took vows of poverty, total obedience and chastity. These men were forbidden to kiss even their mothers, and slept fully clothed in brightly lit dormitories. Talking was discouraged except in prayers, which were recited regularly at specific times. The Knights wore white mantles emblazoned with blood-red Christian crosses, and pledged never to retreat in battle regardless of odds.

The Templar treasury soon bulged with donations from the pious, who rushed to support these heroic new defenders of Christendom. As the order grew richer its leaders were compelled to learn to be financial experts. The vow of poverty became laughable as the brotherhood accumulated vast wealth from gifts and earnings from their estates, which as religious property were exempt from taxation. Kings and princes

Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Ghent

ABOVE: Influential monk, mystic, founder and abbot of the Abbey of Clairvaux (France), St. Bernard of Clairvaux (canonized in 1174) co-founded the Knights Templar and absolved them of sin for killing in the name of Christianity. He is the patron saint of beekeepers, candlemakers, Cistercians, and Knights Templar, and of Burgundy (France), Gibraltar, and Queen's College, Cambridge. LEFT: Baldwin III , king of Jerusalem (1152-1163), gave the ruined coastal city of Gaza to the Knights Templars to rebuild as a base of operations against Ascalon, the Holy Land's only remaining Saracen-controlled coastal city.

began to entrust their gold and silver reserves to the order because Templar castles were regarded as the most secure structures in all of Europe.

The Knights participated in the Second Crusade, which got off to an inauspicious start when the German contingent's commanding King Conrad III impatiently set out ahead of the rest of the Crusader expeditionary force, arrived in the Holy Land far in advance of the main body of Christian troops and was upended at Dorylacum by Seljuk Turks. When later-arriving French crusading forces passed through the Cadmus Mountains in January 1148 Turkish archers decimated them in the narrow passes. Templar Grand Master Everhard des Barres took overall command of the shrunken army and sufficiently stabilized it to reach the Byzantine port of Attalia. Des Barres had rescued the operation militarily. Now he would do it economically.

French King Louis VII had exhausted his treasury in bringing his army this far. While Louis ferried his troops by sea to Asia Minor, des Barres hur-

14th century illustration by Jean Colombe for Sébastien Mamerot's Crusade chronicle, *Passages d'Outremer*, (*Passages made overseas*)

French nobleman Raymond of Poitiers became Christian Prince Raymond of Antioch in 1136 after he married nine-year-old heiress Constance. In June of 1149, Islamic Seljuk forces under Nur ad-Din besieged the fortress of Inab (in modern Syria). A prominent figure in the Second Crusade, Raymond had twice defeated Nur ad-Din and set out with a relief force of 1,400, including some Knights Templar. Outnumbered four-to-one, Raymond was killed and his forces annihilated on June 29.

ried to Acre and commenced raising money. He borrowed from assorted financial institutions by using the Templars' vast possessions as security, and drawing directly from the order's preceptory in Acre. His efforts were sufficient to keep the Crusade solvent. The summer of 1149 saw a dramatic Christian-Muslim clash that permanently established the Knights as major participants in the Crusades, albeit as not-always-successful ones.

After the death of Muslim atabeg Zengi in 1146, Christian Prince Raymond of Antioch invaded the province of Aleppo, which was part of the Islamic Seljuk Empire. Zengi's son Nur ad-Din responded by assaulting Antioch late in 1148, but Raymond managed to drive back the incursion, but Nur ad-Din returned a few months later and attacked Yaghra. Raymond again sent him packing. The following June Nur ad-Din yet again invested Antioch. With about 6,000 troops (mostly cavalry), he besieged the fortress of Inab. Because he had twice defeated Nur ad-Din, Raymond was confident he could again rout him despite being significantly outnumbered. He resolutely set out for Inab with just 1,400 men.

Raymond's command actually included a Muslim contingent. Ali ibn-Wafa was a leader of the Assassin cult and a sworn personal enemy of Nur al-Din. He gladly joined the relief expedition. His troops, however, were strung out along a lengthy stretch of the main thoroughfare leading to Raymond's bivouac. A hefty percentage of these soldiers were still en route when the overconfident Raymond impatiently sortied.

When his scouts reported on the small size of the approaching force, Nur al-Din suspected it was merely an advance guard. He raised his siege and withdrew a few miles to a defensible position in anticipation of meeting the main, significant Frankish army. When Raymond and ibn-Wafa camped for the night on the evening of June 28, Nur ad-Din noted that no reinforcements were arriving and perceived the hostiles' small numbers. During the night he had his men quietly encircle the little band.

On the morning of June 29, he assailed and

Musee des Beaux-Arts de Quimper, France

ABOVE: *Saladin I (1138-93) in Jerusalem* by French artist Alexandre-Évariste Fragonard (1780-1850) depicts Saladin, the Sultan of Egypt and Syria, arriving in Jerusalem in 1187 after defeating the Christian Crusaders at the Battle of Hattin. Saladin allowed many Christians to ransom themselves and leave, though some were enslaved. OPPOSITE: The Knights Templar were an essential force during the Third Crusade, led by France's King Phillip Augustus and England's King Richard the Lionheart, which saw Sultan Saladin defeated at the siege of Acre in 1191. The *Siege of Saint-Jean-d'Acre, The city of Ptolemais handed over to Philippe-Auguste and Richard the Lionheart, July 13* by French artist Merry-Joseph Blondel (1781-1853) depicts the surrender.

easily annihilated the Prince of Antioch's forces. Raymond refused to retreat, and he and ibn-Wafa died in the slaughter. It had been the Crusades' equivalent of Custer's last stand, and it left most of the territory of Antioch to Nur ad-Din. He triumphantly rode all the way to the Mediterranean coast and swam in the Great Sea to emphasize his success.

The victory's momentum carried Nur ad-Din forward as he captured the fortresses of Artah, Harim and Imm, which had defended the approaches to Antioch. Drawing up his steamrolling army outside the city gates of Antioch he demanded its surrender. Raymond's widow, Constance, paid him off with most of the city's treasury. Nur ad-Din accepted the bribe, and moved on, leaving a garrison to block Christian reinforcements from entering the conurbation.

He continued to range his army throughout the region, establishing religious schools and mosques and exiling Shiites, whom he considered heretics. By 1154 he had conquered Damascus, weakening the Crusader enclaves to the point of impotence.

The Second Crusade had been a dismal failure. Nevertheless the Templars' monetary dealings during the operation cemented their reputation as guardians of Europe's faith and finances. They were just getting started.

During the winter of 1149-1150 Jerusalem's King Baldwin III placed the Templars in control of the ruined coastal city of Gaza so they could rebuild it to use as a base of operations against nearby Ascalon, the Holy Land's only coastal city still under Saracen control. A force of Egyptians, guessing the reason for the Templars' arrival, quickly assailed the garrison, but the Knights resolutely beat off the attack. Without pausing to rest after completing their massive construction job, the Templars attacked Ascalon on January 25, 1153.

The fighting lasted seven grueling months, but by then the Knights had completed a huge siege tower and rolled it to the city walls. A party of Muslims slipped out of the city and set the platform afire, but contrary winds blew the flames back against the ramparts and ignited the wall's supporting timbers. A section of the palisade collapsed and a unit of Knights commanded by their Grand Master Bernard de Tremelay (who forbade all non-Templar besiegers to accompany them) charged into the city's interior where he and his men were wiped out.

Most chroniclers of this incident reported de Tremelay intended to secure and sack the city and keep all the spoils for himself, but underestimated the number of defenders. The city fell the following week to an all-out assault, and a permanent reputation for greed affixed itself to the Knights Templar. Nevertheless, the order's wealth would bankroll many battles fought on behalf of the church. Meanwhile, the Knights would soon meet a new and deadly enemy.

In November 1177 the soon-to-be-legendary Muslim General Saladin commanded his first foray against the Crusades when he led an army against Jerusalem, but the city's King Baldwin IV, his French Crusaders and a Knights Templar contingent from Gaza intercepted the Saracens at Montgisard on the twenty-fifth.

Saladin commanded 26,000 troops with siege engines, a huge baggage train and his personal unit of crack Mamluk bodyguards. Marching across the Sinai desert from Egypt into southern Palestine, he felt so secure in his numerical and (supposedly) qualitative superiority that he permitted his soldiers to fan out into the countryside and sack the Christian settlements of Ramla, Lydda and Arsuf.

The teenaged Baldwin IV, although suffering miserably from leprosy, made good use of Saladin's slow, greedy advance and commenced

Merry-Joseph Blondel, Château de Versailles, France

mobilizing what defenses he could muster. He quickly assembled 350 mounted knights and several thousand infantrymen under the command of the fire-eating Christian Prince Raynald of Chatillon. An additional 84 Knights Templar, led by Master Odo de St. Amand, arrived from Gaza at the last minute. Looking out across the teeming host of Saracens, Baldwin assembled all his troops in the city's fortress.

The soldiers of the Cross were aided by the autumn rains, which turned the approaches to Jerusalem into a knee-deep quagmire. At the head of his columns, Saladin was struggling eastward toward Ibelin. In the sea of clinging mud, the army was strung out in a line several miles long. Slowest of all was the vital supply train, which fell far behind and eventually became stationary just outside the city of Montgisard.

At this point the Muslims were stunned to see a small Crusader force (with Knights Templar in the point) deploying on a nearby promontory. Fatally overconfident, Saladin had not deigned to send out scouts to monitor his foes' movements, and Baldwin was taking full advantage. The Islamic army was in no condition to fight. Many Saracens were far to the rear with the immobile baggage train. Others were still out freebooting. Virtually all were exhausted from their long trek from Egypt and subsequent raiding for plunder.

Saladin frantically tried to rally his elite personal guard of not quite 1,000 men while his nephew and second-in-command, Taqi ad-Din, did his best to arrange the main body of tired, scattered, booty-laden soldiers into battle lines. Too late, Saladin was attempting to anchor a defense perimeter on an adjacent hilltop when a mass of screaming Christians poured down from their elevation and tore into his shocked ranks.

With little to lose personally, the heavily bandaged Baldwin elected to participate in the battle. Ordering his personal guard to bring along the crosspiece of what was believed to be the original cross on which Christ had died, he rode to the head of his troops, was helped from his horse and dropped to his knees in prayer in front of the ancient wooden beam as his men watched in silence. After a short supplication for victory the adolescent ruler slowly rose to his feet to the deafening cheers of his soldiers. He then led them in a charge.

Odo and his Templar Knights pulverized the Muslim center, disrupting communication and preventing the Saracens from rallying or forming any effective resistance. In this utter confusion the much larger Muslim army was thrown into panic and began to crumble. Many of Saladin's men had turned and run at first sight of the resolute attack, and those who did try to fight were annihilated. Taqi ad-Din's son Ahmad and many other high-ranking officers were specifically targeted and killed by the Crusaders, further exacerbating the Arabs' bewilderment and demoralization

The battle's last stages saw the Christian knights turn on, and wipe out, the Muslims' crack Turkish slave/soldier contingent. Mounted on a swift young dromedary, Saladin managed to escape into Egypt. It was a hard lesson he would take to heart.

In one of his last acts before his death, Baldwin decreed that a Benedictine monastery be built on the Montgisard battlefield. It is still there.

Although chastened, Saladin was both brilliant and opportunistic. His spy network told of spreading disunity within the ranks of his Christian enemies. Denominational differences were working to the Saracens' advantage, and Saladin wisely concentrated on building an irresistible army to launch against his divided foes when the time was right. By this point (1184) Baldwin IV had died at 24 and left no successor, further destabilizing the Crusader coalition. Saladin craftily signed a four-year truce with Christian authori-

Chronica Majora, Corpus Christi College, Cambridge

ties, giving them a false sense of security while they continued to fragment and weaken.

In the summer of 1187, Saladin led a huge army southward toward the Holy Land, capturing Tiberias in late June. On July 4, he assaulted badly outnumbered Crusader/Templar forces in and around the village of Lubiya, defeating them soundly and quickly. The Saracens took 232 Knights prisoner. All were given the choice of beheading or conversion to Islam. Only one accepted the ultimatum. Eager for Christian martyrdom, the other 231 gladly submitted to execution.

After the battle of Lubiya the cities of Acre, Ascalon and Gaza fell in quick succession to Muslim reconquest. On October 2, 1187, Saladin led his triumphant army into Jerusalem. His men ceremoniously ripped the crucifix from atop the Dome of the Rock. Despite the selfless heroism and devotion of the Knights Templar the Second Crusade was a defeat for Christianity.

Precisely three years after the battle of Lubiya the Third Crusade got underway as France's King Phillip Augustus and England's King Richard the Lionheart set out for Palestine. By this time the Templars had established a reputation for being militarily and financially essential to the massive martial incursions into the Holy Land. This invasion would be no different.

The Knights were in the thick of the action when Richard besieged Acre. The Muslim garrison surrendered July 12, 1191. On September 7, Saladin threw his forces at the Crusader army as it marched southward out of Caesarea. Confident of the discipline and fighting spirit of his Templar contingent, Richard had them meet the attacking Saracens head-on. The Knights fought the Muslims to a standstill, and then sent them packing. This quick battlefield triumph against its ablest enemy raised morale throughout the Christian army. The Knights were once more coming to the fore.

Next there came a series of fruitless peace negotiations between Richard and Saladin. Many of the Crusaders wanted to retake Jerusalem, but senior Templar commanders pointed out that holding the city after the main army had to depart to continue the Crusade would be virtually impossible. Lacking forward defenses between Palestine and Sinai, it would be vulnerable to attacks out of Egypt.

Richard accepted this logic, and instead launched a seaborne assault on the coastal city of Jaffa, which Saladin had just captured. The Crusaders routed the Saracens, running them completely out of Jaffa, but the Third Crusade was winding down as both sides, from the top commanders to the rank and file, were losing interest in continuing the war.

Richard needed to return to England to reign in his increasingly unmanageable younger brother John, who was ruling in his absence. Saladin was having trouble maintaining his army in the field as his troops, many of whom had signed on with visions of rich plunder, grew disillusioned with this unprofitable campaign, and were deserting in droves. Richard and Saladin negotiated a truce. Richard then disguised himself as a Templar and made a lengthy journey, replete with many adventures, back to England. Soon after the inconclusive Third Crusade petered out, Saladin died of natural causes, depriving the Knights Templar of the enemy they most loved to fight.

The last major military endeavor by the Crusader Knights Templar came as a response to the capture of Jerusalem by Khwarazmian forces. These people were culturally Persianate Sunni Muslims of Turkic mamluk ancestry who already ruled large sectors of present-day Central Asia, Afghanistan and Iran after having broken free of Seljuk vassaldom and set themselves up in Egypt late in the Twelfth Century.

Their seizing of the holy city in August 1244 caused great alarm throughout the Holy Land among Christian and Shiite Muslim enclaves, who feared these newcomers would soon sally forth against them. Shiite leaders Al-Mansur, the Emir of Homs, and an-Nasir Dawud, ruler of

Eon Images

ABOVE: Engraving depicting Jacques de Molay, the last Grand Master of the Knights Templar, who was burned at the stake for heresy in Paris in March 1314. King Philip IV of France, with the help of Pope Clement V, manufactured the charges so Philip could confiscate the order's wealth and not have to repay the debt he owed them. OPPOSITE: An illustration from the 13th century manuscript, *Chronica Majora*, by Matthew Paris, of the Battle of Forbie between the Crusaders and Khorezmians in 1244. Led by Walter IV of Brienne, this battle brought the disastrous Sixth Crusade to an end with only 33 Knights Templar surviving.

Kerek, allied themselves with the Templars and smaller contingents of Hospitallers and Teutonic Knights in a novel Christian-Islamic alliance against this common enemy. Under the overall command of Walter IV of Brienne this eclectic army deployed outside the city of Forbie on the morning of October 17. Walter positioned his Christian troops on the right wing, the Emir of Homs and the Damascenes in the center, and the Bedouin contingent to the left.

The Christians charged at 8 a.m., engaging the Egyptians along the length of the battle line in a daylong brouhaha as each side tore into the other destructively, but inconclusively. By nightfall the exhausted combatants, depleted but still game, broke off action. The following morning Khwarezmian commander Baybars launched an attack of wild abandon on the center of Walter's line, pulverizing the Damascene units before turning on and annihilating the Bedouins. Al-Mansur managed to escape, leading his paltry 280 surviving troops from the field.

Walter had gone into the battle with a slight numerical superiority over his foes, and assumed this would be a significant advantage. It turned out to be a false hope. As the situation deteriorated for him he desperately sent his Crusaders against the Mamluks. At first this charge seemed to be working, but soon the attack faltered as Egyptian forces to the Christians' rear and flanks finished off Al-Mansur's command, and turned on the Crusaders. The Knights fought doggedly for several hours before being overrun, with only 33 Knights Templar surviving.

The battle of Forbie brought the Sixth Crusade to a dismal, ignominious conclusion. In 1245 Pope Innocent IV called for a Seventh Crusade, but Christian Europe was never again able to muster significant power in the Holy Land. The days of the Knights Templar as Crusaders were over. In fact, their very existence was drawing to a close.

The order had participated only marginally in the Fourth and Fifth Crusades, and by the end of the thirteenth century, its enemies were making plans for its destruction. European kings and princes were casting covetous eyes toward the bulging Templar coffers. The beginning of the end came on Friday, October 13, 1307, when King Louis IV of France (himself deeply in debt to the order) commanded that every Knight Templar in his realm be arrested on charges of heresy.

The secrecy surrounding the order's initiation rites provided an excuse for accusing the Knights of such crimes as homosexuality, occultism and even being closet Muslims. Starting with the last grand master, Jacques de Molay, the Knights were imprisoned, tortured and killed outright on these trumped-up indictments. Under torture de Molay confessed to the charges and was sentenced to life in prison. Another 36 Knights were tortured to death in Phillip's dungeons during the first days after the wave of arrests. Throughout Europe the Templars suffered similar persecution and, in 1312, Pope Clement V formally dissolved the order.

In 1314, de Molay recanted his confession, and was sentenced to the burning stake. As flames surrounded him on March 18 he called down a curse on the Pope and the King, predicting both would be dead in less than a year. Pope Clement V died of natural causes on April 20. On November 29, France's King Louis IV was mauled to death by a wild boar. ■

Destroying German dams was a top priority in World War II, but it would take a special plane, weapon, and squadron to accomplish the difficult job.

BY AL HEMINGWAY

A full moon in a cloudless sky shone over Germany's Ruhr Valley on the night of May 16, 1943, meaning that all Royal Air Force (RAF) bombing missions over Nazi Germany had been canceled. The risk of enemy antiaircraft fire in such bright conditions meant that the crews had a night off to enjoy a movie, visit friends and family, or hoist a few beers in a local pub.

However, for the Squadron 617 "Dambusters" these weather conditions were ideal for a bombing run. They were a special unit whose task was to destroy the Möhne, Eder, and Sorpe dams located in the Ruhr Valley, the industrial heart of Germany. Eliminating these targets would deprive the enemy of much of the power needed to keep its factories and munitions plants producing war material—shortening the war and bringing the Nazis to their knees.

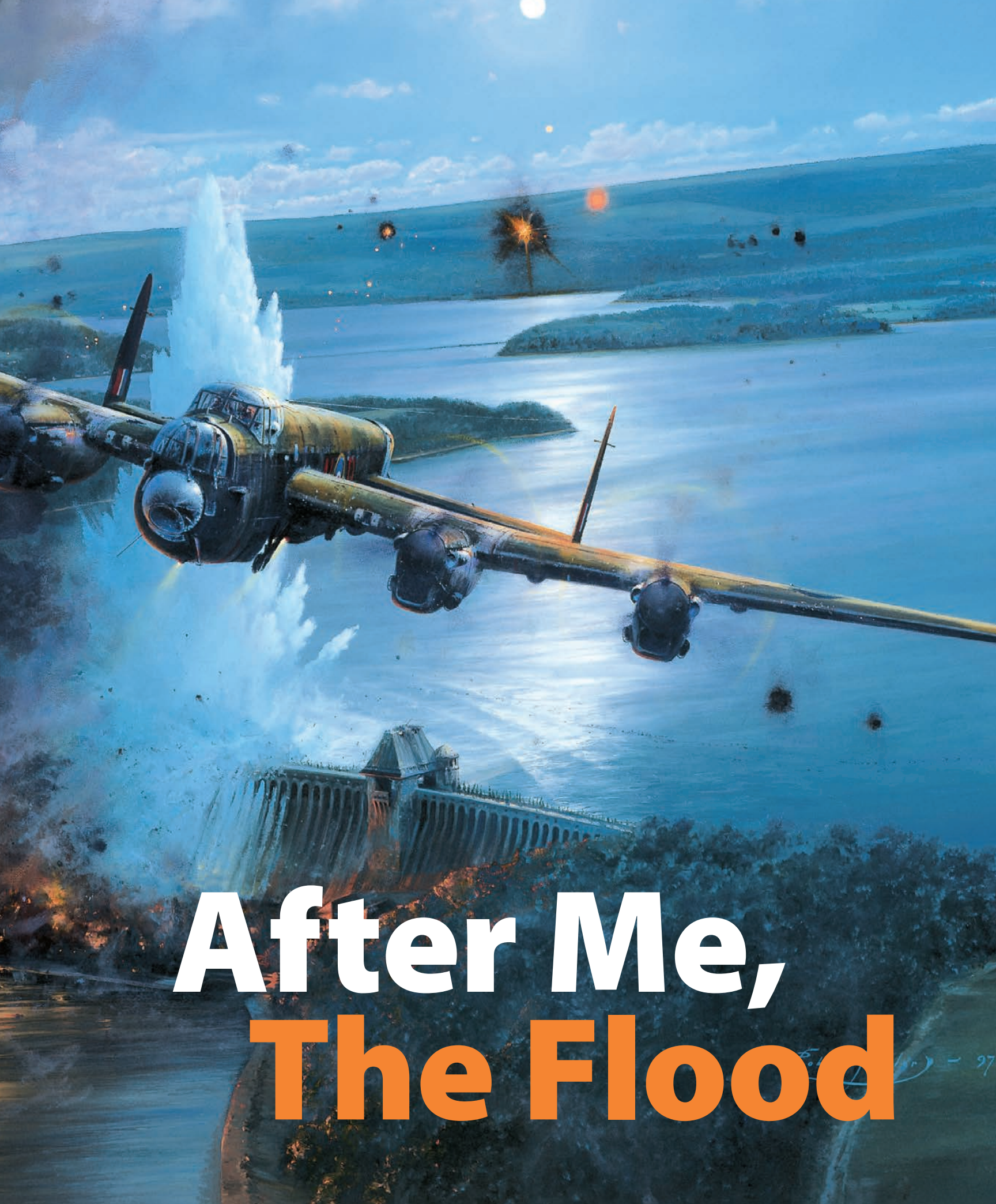
"Operation Chastise" faced doubts from the outset and would have to overcome enormous hurdles to succeed. Attacking huge dams was not an easy undertaking, but there were people within the military and the government that believed it could be done.

Once such individual was Dr. Barnes Neville Wallis, assistant chief designer at Vickers-Armstrong's Aviation Section. Though the idea of destroying the dams had originally been proposed by the Air Ministry and Bomber Command, it was Wallis who resurrected the concept and sought to solve the technical barriers associated with the operation.

To begin with, just locating the dams posed enormous difficulties. Even during daylight, 40 percent of navigators "could not find a nominated British City." From a medium bombing altitude it is hard to distinguish any structure—"a pin head in a field," according to the Dambusters official website.

In this painting by artist Robert Taylor, a modified RAF Lancaster bomber roars through the night sky after releasing its payload during an attack on the Möhne River Dam in Germany's Ruhr Valley.

Robert Taylor/The Military Gallery



After Me, The Flood

Even if the bombers were able to find their target, the next obstacle to overcome was exponentially larger: how to hit the dam and destroy it. Throughout the war, no more than 10 percent of aircraft reached their destination in the Ruhr Valley and only a third of these unleashed their ordnance within five miles radius of a target. For Chastise, the bombing runs would have to be far more accurate to have a chance of eliminating the dams.

Another major roadblock was that the bomb needed to do the job did not exist. At the start of the war in 1939, the RAF only had 500-pound bombs in its arsenal. Razing a structure like one of the German dams would require more than 5,000 of them, dropped with pinpoint accuracy. Wallis knew a larger bomb was needed if the mission was to be a success.

Developing a bomb that could do the job brought its own stumbling block—the RAF did not have a bomber large enough to fly there, drop the bombs, and make it back to England.

Wallis moved forward, working on all of these problems at once. After much deliberation, six of the twenty dams in the Ruhr Valley were chosen for destruction . Of those, the Möhne, Eder, and Sorpe dams would be the primary objectives. The Möhne and Sorpe dams alone held three-quarters of all the water available to produce hydroelectricity in the Ruhr Valley. Destroying all three would "bring the whole industrial valley to a standstill, causing massive damage to the steel industry, devastating production of tanks, aircraft, guns and locomotives which were all vital to Germany's war effort," according to the official Dambuster history.

The majority of the German dams were gravity dams—a wall of concrete with a wide base, held in place by its own massive weight. To destroy these dams, a bomb would need to be detonated near the bottom where the explosion would seriously deteriorate it, causing the wall to crumble and allowing the water to gush out into the basin.

But the Sorpe was an earth dam and would require different bombing methods to breach it. The projectile had to be dropped at the top of the structure where the blast would cause the structure to buckle, collapsing the bank on the outer, dry side. With the loss of support, the concrete wall at the dam's inner core would fall under its own weight.

The team of engineers working on Operation Chastise had to constantly adapt, coming up with new strategies as problems arose. After much testing, it was decided that a 7,500-lbs. bomb, when dropped from a low altitude, could skip across the water like a stone and make a breach in the walls of the dam. The new weapon was designated as "Upkeep."

Production began on the Avro Lancaster B Mk IIIs in April 1943. The new bomber was equipped with four Merlin engines and a bomb bay that could house an 8,000-lb. load—large enough for the new bouncing bomb. Avro Chief Designer Roy Chadwick adapted the Lancaster to carry Upkeep. Much of the armor and the dorsal gun turret was removed to save weight. Upkeep's size and shape meant that the bomb doors had to be removed so it could hang partly out of the open bay. These modified aircraft were designated Lancaster B Mark III Special (Type 464 Provisioning).

As Wallis and Chadwick were fine-tuning their respective projects, the RAF organized and began training a squadron to carry out this dangerous assignment. There was a sense of urgency because the mission had to be carried out when water levels of the dams were at their maximum height in mid-May. If they missed this window, the project would have to be postponed until the following year. That meant they only had three months of preparation for the pilots and crews.

A special man was needed to lead such a squadron, and Wing Commander Guy Penrose Gibson was selected due to his "formidable operational record … leadership skills and strict discipline." On his first bombing raid in July 1940, he earned the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC). He then volunteered to be a fighter pilot and was credited with four kills before being decorated with another DFC and promoted back to Bomber Command. The 25-year-old pilot was given the authority to select his own people, although he still had no idea what the mission or target would be. The squadron, originally given the code name Squadron X, would later be renamed Squadron 617. The unit adopted the motto "*Après moi, le déluge*,"(After Me, the Flood) attributed to French King Louis XV as an expression of indifference to events after one's death. The name certainly fit.

On March 21, 1943, Gibson assembled his crews for their first briefing at Scampton, Lin-

colnshire, an RAF bomber base 150 miles north of London. Although he had scant information himself, Gibson spoke to his men about the upcoming operation—that there would be a raid on Germany and they would have to learn how to fly at very low altitudes. Gibson tried to quash the rumors that were circulating about the mission because he believed that in order for them to succeed, "security is the greatest factor."

Several days later when Gibson met with Wallis, who could not inform the wing commander of any specifics of the plan, he impressed upon him the importance of low-altitude flying. Gibson was told his men had to attack their objectives at 240 mph at a height of 150 feet in moonlit darkness. If they did not do this, the mission would fail.

Training commenced immediately. Blue film was put over the windows of the aircraft while the crew members donned yellow-tinted goggles to get them accustomed to night flying. Maps were made and placed on rollers to make reading them easier.

Flying low over water would be a thornier issue. In late March, Gibson flew a test flight over the Derwent reservoir at an altitude of 150 feet. All went smoothly in the light of day. At dusk, however, "he could not distinguish the horizon from the water surface and nearly flew into the lake."

The solution to this problem was found at the Royal Aircraft Establishment, which had tried to equip Hudson bombers with spotlights situated under the plane so they could bomb German U-boats at night. The idea had been scrapped because of rough ocean waves, but over relatively smooth lake water, it had possibilities.

Imperial War Museum

ABOVE: Flight crew of "Big Joe" McCarthy (fourth from left) an American pilot who flew with the Royal Canadian Air Force Bomber Command and led the second wave of Operation Chastise. TOP: Since Germany's major dams were protected from torpedoes by underwater nets, Barnes Wallis and the Royal Air Force developed a "bouncing" bomb that, when released with a backspin, would skip across the water's surface to the dam, sink toward its base, then detonate via a hydrostatic fuse. OPPOSITE: The oil-drum-shaped "Upkeep" dam-busting mine was carried by a Lancaster B Mark III Special (Type 464 Provisioning).

ABOVE: A geyser of water obscures the distinctive twin tail of a modified Lancaster bomber during a training run as it drops a dummy version of the water-skipping Upkeep bomb developed for the top secret raid on Germany's hydroelectric dams in May 1943. ABOVE, LEFT: At the Reculver bombing range in Kent, a modified Lancaster bomber releases its dummy Upkeep during training in the spring of 1943. ABOVE, RIGHT: This still shot taken from a movie shows Barnes Wallis and others watching a practice bomb strike the shoreline during a training flight by members of RAF 617 Squadron at Reculver bombing range, Kent. Wallis is the inventor of Upkeep, the "bouncing bomb" designed to skip across water to destroy hydroelectric dams in Germany. BELOW, LEFT: Photographed shortly before takeoff on May 16, 1943, for the raid on the Möhne Dam, this closeup of Wing Commander Guy Gibson's modified Lancaster bomber shows the 7,500-lb. "Upkeep," whose shape and size required it to hang partially out of the bomb bay.

Two lamps were positioned on the Lancaster, one by the bomb bay and the other at the nose. The lights were oriented so that the beams would intersect on the surface of the water when the bomber was 150 feet above it. The navigator would direct the pilot downward until the beams converged.

When they saw the lights on their planes, the crews were stunned. Not only would they be flying at an extremely low altitude, they were also going to be lit up, exposing themselves to antiaircraft fire. This enraged Bomber Command leader Air Marshal Sir Arthur Harris who said, "I will not have aircraft flying about with spotlights on in defended areas." Despite his objections, this was the only solution to the problem, and the lamps remained on the Lancasters.

Meanwhile, Wallis, Vickers' chief test pilot Mutt Summers, and Avro's chief test pilot Sam Brown were also busy. They had been experimenting with dropping the bouncing bomb from the required 150 feet. The results were not promising.

Wallis soon discovered that the weapon's wooden casing was being demolished when it hit the water. Despite improvements to the outer layer, the bomb continued to break apart on impact. It was eventually concluded that the only answer was for the aircraft to fly even lower.

Wallis told Gibson his crews would have to fly

over the water and attack their targets at an altitude of only 60 feet. The stunned officer took a deep breath and answered that they would. Later Gibson would comment, "If 150 feet was too low, 60 feet was very low. At that height you would only have to hiccough and you would be in the drink."

The final obstacle to be worked out was the distance from which the projectile would have to be dropped to breach the dam. There could be no miscalculations. The bomb had to hit the dam in the right spot.

A "bomb aimer" developed by the Royal Aircraft Establishment would produce the desired results. The bombardier would use an eyepiece at the base of a hand-held Y-shaped wooden sighting device. When the two nails on the arms lined up with the towers on the dam, this would designate the correct range for releasing the bomb—about 400-425 yards from the target.

Less than a week before the raid, Gibson's men began training in dropping the actual bombs at Parkstone shore, utilizing the crude bombsights. The bouncing bombs were not filled with explosives, but they gave the crews a feel for releasing the projectiles. Everyone was astonished as they watched the drums skipping over the water until they stopped at the beach.

While training, several of the bombers were trapped and damaged in a large volume of water when they released their Upkeeps too low. As a result, one of the Lancasters could not be repaired in time and the unit was minus one plane. Then, one of the crews developed intense airsickness as a result of the low flying. From 20 planes to fly, with one in reserve, the mission was down to a total of 19 aircraft.

Amazingly, in only two months, the operation was on schedule. The bomb was ready, the Avro Lancasters had been fitted with a release mechanism for Upkeep, and Gibson's crews were perfecting their night- and low-altitude flying plus dropping the bouncing projectiles at their targets.

On May 15, 1943, Gibson was summoned to speak with Wallis. This was the first time he had learned about their targets. In a magazine article, author Daniel Wyatt wrote, "The dimensions of the dams astonished Gibson. The Gothic-styled Möhne Dam was 2,500 feet long, 130 feet high, topped by a 25-foot-wide roadway, and had a concrete and masonry base 112 feet thick. It held back a lake 12 miles long that contained 140 million tons of water. A short distance south of the Möhne Dam was the much smaller Sorpe Dam. Together they controlled 75 percent of the total water available in the Ruhr Valley. Fifty miles to the east was the Eder, the big brother of the three, with a water capacity of 200 million tons." The Möhne, Eder, and Sorpe dams were the main objectives of the raid. The alternative targets were the Lister, Ennepe, and Diemel Dams.

Gibson absorbed all this information and realized the importance of this mission. He immediately sat down with his two flight commanders, Henry Melvin Young and Henry Eric Maudslay; his deputy leader, Flight Lt. John Vere Hopgood; and bomb aimer Flight Lt. Robert Claude Hay to inform them of the plan.

In the early evening hours of May 16, 1943, the men of Squadron 617 gathered for their final briefing. Tensions were high. They were finally being told the details of their mission. Gibson outlined the specifics of the attack, call signs, routes, code words, and the like. Wallis described Upkeep to the men—how the concept came about and its progress over the years. He also impressed upon them the magnitude of the raid and how it might help in shortening the war if successful.

Gibson had the Lancasters taking off in three waves. Nine bombers designated AJ-G "George (Gibson's plane)," AJ-M "Mother," AJ-P "Popsie," AJ-A "Apple," AJ-J "Johnny," AJ-Z "Zebra," AJ-L "Leather," AJ-B "Baker," and AJ-N "Nut" were in the first group.

The second group had five bombers given the names AJ-Q "Queenie," AJ-E "Easy," AJ-W "Willie," AJ-K "King," and AJ-H "Harry." This sortie would leave Scampton Airfield before the first group because of its more northerly route. The bombers would fly over the Dutch island of Vlieland and then down the Zuider Zee to link up with Gibson's formation, which had flown a southern path toward Germany.

Lastly, the third wave also had five Lancasters. These were dubbed AJ-C "Charlie," AJ-S "Sugar," AJ-F "Freddie," AJ-O "Orange," and AJ-Y "York." They would depart last and be behind Gibson's group, acting as a mobile reserve and striking at any of the primary or secondary targets that had not been destroyed. If the other two waves were successful in breaching all their objectives, then the last wave would return to Scampton.

Everyone was told not to veer from their des-

ignated routes. These courses had been established to evade Nazi antiaircraft batteries, enemy night-fighter bases, areas along the coast of Holland and along the approach to the target, which were known to be areas of intense antiaircraft fire. The crews were told not to return home with an unexploded bomb because landing might prove difficult. All unused Upkeeps were to be dropped over enemy territory.

Just prior to departure, AJ-Q developed a coolant leak in its starboard engine. American-born Flight Lt. Joseph McCarthy and his crew changed to AJ-T "Tommy," a spare bomber that had just flown hours earlier. "Tommy" had no spotlights or VHF radio, but it was too late to modify it now. McCarthy and his men would have to make do with what they had. As a result, "Tommy" left Scampton a half-hour later than expected.

As the first group flew over the North Sea, Gibson, Hopgood, and Flight Lt. Harold Martin's bombers experienced gusty winds and strayed off course. The three planes flew into Holland in the wrong area and were met with a volley from German guns. As "George" headed toward the Ruhr, the sky was suddenly criss-crossed with searchlights. The forward gunners immediately fired at the lights below, hitting one of them. The others switched their attention to Martin's Lancaster, "Popsie." The gunners in Martin's bomber opened up as well. Hopgood's "Mother" was not so fortunate as the aircraft was struck in one of its wings.

Flying along, sometimes at an altitude of 40 feet, the trio evaded power lines, structures, and trees as they neared their objective. "Johnny," "Apple," and "Leather" were closely trailing when they, too, were hit by flak. Except for minor hits they made it through safely.

Pilot Officer Leslie Gordon Knight in "Nut," Flight Lt. William Astell flying "Baker," and Squadron Leader Henry Eric Maudslay piloting "Zebra" had an uneventful journey until they reached the Rhine. That's when Astell's "Baker" plummeted to the ground.

"There are conflicting stories as to why Astell crashed," according to the mission's official historical website. "Bob Kellow, Knight's wireless operator, said later that AJ-B was trailing behind when it was caught in a crossfire of light flak." German eyewitnesses, however, dispute this story. They said that the bomber hit power lines and went down. As the Lancaster crashed, the Upkeep exploded, leaving no survivors.

"Baker" was the fifth bomber to either crash or return for various reasons. The majority of them were from the second group. As "Zebra" and "Nut" approached the Möhne, Gibson, Maltby, and Hopgood had started their bombing runs.

As Gibson made a practice run over the target area he noticed an antitorpedo net stretched across the bottom of the dam. There were no

ABOVE: Most of the 30 billion gallons of water impounded by the Möhne Dam is gone in this aerial reconnaissance photo taken by a Spitfire Mk. XI on May 17, 1943, the morning after the RAF Dambusters raid tore a roughly 250-foot-square hole in the structure. INSET: Closeup of the breach of Germany's Möhne Dam on May 17, 1943, some 4.5 hours after the Operation Chastise raid. OPPOSITE: Contemporaneous illustration of modified Lancaster bombers on the daring "Dambusters" raid of May 16-17, 1943, that so captured the public's imagination.

searchlights. The enemy apparently felt no one could destroy the dam. "George" was met with some gunfire from the dozen or so antiaircraft batteries that lined the towers and walls of the Möhne dam.

"Well, boys, I suppose we'd better start the ball rolling," Gibson remarked as he went in for his attempt on the dam.

As he lowered his Lancaster to the required 60 feet, he turned on his lamps under the belly of the plane. As the bomb rotated toward the tail of the plane at 500 rpm, navigator Torgor Harlo Taerum kept in constant communication with Gibson as he neared the water. At 28 minutes past midnight, bomb aimer Frederick "Spam" Spafford let loose the first Upkeep. The bomb did as it was supposed to; it bounced along the lake hitting the structure at water level and exploded, causing a tremendous geyser of water to be emitted skyward. The liquid temporarily blocked the view. But as it dissipated, the Möhne Dam still stood.

Hopgood was next. Unfortunately, by this time "Mother" had been hit and was suffering extensive damage as flak had struck her port engine and starboard wing. As Hopgood tried desperately to keep his aircraft steady, his bomb aimer, James W. Fraser, sent their Upkeep crashing into a power plant on the other side of the structure. Fraser, thought to be wounded, had let loose the projectile too late. "Mother" tried to reach a higher altitude, but the plane exploded in a brilliant flash. Miraculously, the rear gunner, Anthony Burcher, managed to escape by opening his parachute inside the aircraft and allowing it to launch him from the bomber. Fraser escaped the plane in the same manner. Unfortunately, both individuals were captured soon after hitting the ground.

Gibson ordered "Popsie," flown by Harold Martin, to make a run at the Möhne. He flew

ahead of Martin's Lancaster as a decoy, drawing enemy fire from him as the second bomber made its way toward its target. Again, Upkeep was sent crashing into the lake. This time, it detonated 50 yards from the dam causing no damage.

Now it was Henry "Dinghy" Young's turn in "Apple." Martin and Gibson tried to draw the Germans' attention away from Young's Lancaster as he made his turn to strike at the dam. The bouncing device was released perfectly by Vincent MacCausland, and it skipped over the water and hit the structure causing no visible damage. However, the initial assessment by the airmen was wrong. "Apple" had indeed caused a breach in the Möhne Dam.

Flight Lieutenant David Maltby dropped his Lancaster down to 60 feet as bomb aimer John Fort let loose another Upkeep. As AJ-J "Johnny" gained altitude to make its escape after dropping the bomb, the crewmen observed the Möhne Dam crumbling in a spectacular fashion.

In his autobiography, *Enemy Coast Ahead*, Gibson wrote: "The whole valley was beginning to fill with fog from the steam of the gushing water, and down in the foggy valley we saw cars speeding along the roads in front of this great wave of water, which was chasing them and going faster than they could ever hope to go. … The floods raced on, carrying everything with them as they went—viaducts, railways, bridges and everything that stood in their path. Three miles beyond the dam the remains of Hoppy's aircraft was still burning gently, a dull red glow on the ground. Hoppy had been avenged."

Excitement erupted back at headquarters in Grantham when the signal was sent by Flight Lt. Robert Hutchinson, Gibson's wireless operator, that the dam had been destroyed. Harris offered Wallis his hand and congratulated him saying, "I didn't believe a word you said when you came to see me, but now you could sell me a pink elephant."

But the congratulatory remarks were short lived—there were still targets to be eliminated. Gibson sent Maltby's "Johnny" and Martin's "Popsie" back to Scampton. "Leather," "Zebra," and "Nut," along with Gibson's "George," made their way to their next objective: the Eder Dam.

One thing in their favor at the next objective was that the Germans had no antiaircraft batteries set up to defend it. There was, however, a reason for this. Shielding the Eder Dam were cliffs, some reaching 1,000 feet in height, which would make their runs at the structure extremely difficult. The bombers would be forced to drop down and make an abrupt turn to the left, proceed over a small piece of land, then reach the required 60-foot altitude to release their bombs.

"Leather" was the first to attempt it. After three failures, Gibson instructed Flight Lt. David Shannon, flying "Leather," to back off while he sent in Henry Maudslay in "Zebra." Unfortunately, after several runs, "Zebra" experienced similar difficulties. Gibson radioed Shannon to go in one more time. They all watched as a huge geyser of water shot up in the air when "Leather" released her bomb, but when it subsided the Eder Dam still stood.

When Maudslay returned to make another run, bomb aimer Michael Fuller released the Upkeep too late. It struck the wall and detonated in a magnificent blast that lit up the entire valley. Unfortunately, the explosion damaged "Zebra." Gibson reached Maudslay by wireless, inquiring if he was all right, but the only words he heard from "Zebra" were, "I think so." That was the last radio communication anyone had with him. Maudslay's Lancaster was lost.

Gibson had one bomb left, and it was aboard "Nut." He told Leslie Knight to make a practice run and try his luck on the dam. As Knight approached the structure at 60 feet above the water, his bomb aimer, Edward Johnson, set the Upkeep in motion. The canister skipped across

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Imperial War Museum

ABOVE: From left, Royal Air Force Flight Lieutenant Les Munro shares a word with Britain's King George VI and Wing Commander Guy Gibson on a royal visit to 617 Squadron following the "Dambusters" raid. TOP: Wreckage of Pilot Officer L.J. Burpee's Lancaster bomber that crashed with no survivors in the Netherlands on the night of May 16-17, 1943. OPPOSITE: Flood damage from the destruction of the Möhne Dam. There were an estimated 1,200-1,600 deaths from the raid, including some 749 enslaved laborers from Poland, Russia and Ukraine, many of them women. The Royal Air Force lost 53 of 133 aircrew, with three captured.

the water into the dam near its center, then sank to explode near its base using a hydrostatic fuse, breaching the wall. As with the Möhne Dam, the sight of the nearly two million gallons of water gushing from the opening was impressive. Word was relayed back to headquarters that the Eder had been destroyed.

While the first group was busy destroying the pair of dams, the second wave, which had left Scampton separately because of its lengthy northern course, was trying to reach its target, the Sorpe Dam.

Regrettably, the crews ran into trouble. Flight Lt. Robert Barlow and his crew in AJ-E "Easy" assumed command when McCarthy's plane "Queenie" developed a leak and the crew was in the process of preparing "Tommy," the only reserve Lancaster the squadron possessed, for takeoff.

Barlow lifted off at about 9:30 p.m. and disappeared. Reports say he and the crew perished in a crash near Haldren, Germany. Although the Lancaster hit the ground hard, the bomb it was carrying was not damaged. It was unearthed by the enemy and spirited away to be studied by top German scientists.

Likewise, Flight Lieutenant Vernon Byers and his men in "King" were sent spiraling downward as a result of enemy gunfire near Texel, off the Dutch coast. Again, no one escaped the crash. Two of the five Lancasters were gone.

AJ-W "Willie" was not having much success either. As the bomber flew over Vlieland, an island near Texel, the aircraft came under intense fire from German batteries below. The flak caused extensive damage to the ship's communication and electrical systems. Realizing he could not complete the mission, Flight Lt. John Munro decided to return to Scampton.

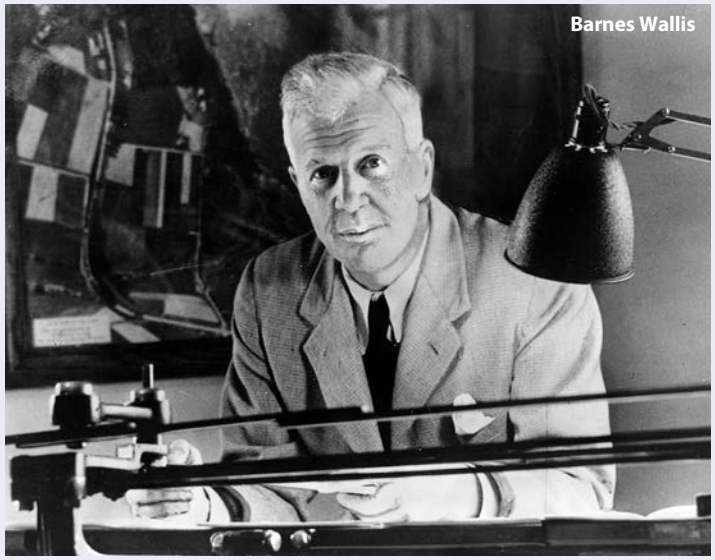
Just past Vlieland around 11 p.m., Flight Lt. Geoffrey Rice in "Harry," was flying low to avoid the heavy flak when he accidentally struck the water. The Upkeep was torn from the plane's underbelly and the Lancaster began taking on water through the open bomb bay. As Rice got the nose up in his fight to stay aloft, the aircraft's tail hit the sea and the tail wheel smashed a hole in the fuselage. Rice was able to climb to a safe altitude with the water draining out of the tail and turn back for England.

That left only one aircraft from the second wave—McCarthy's "Tommy." As he headed for the Ruhr Valley, McCarthy flew low as flak exploded all around him. He managed to reach the Sorpe Dam just after midnight. The only earthen dam on the target list, it had to be struck parallel in its midsection on the upstream side. After three dummy runs, McCarthy discharged the bomb, but it failed to destroy the dam. McCarthy made it back to Scampton.

Arriving just after 3 a.m., "Freddie" was the only plane from the third group to strike the Sorpe Dam. Flight Sgt. Kenneth Brown tried to destroy the imposing structure but had difficulty as well. In his article "The Ruhr Dam Raids," author Daniel Wyatt details what happened: "Brown tried eight times. Each time, his Canadian bomb aimer Sgt. Steve Oancia, could not judge his target in the mist with the wall and hills fast approaching. On the ninth attempt, Oancia dropped a bundle of incendiaries in the trees near the approach to the dam. The next time Brown came around, Oancia saw the fire despite the mist, and he knew precisely where to drop the bomb. He let go and Brown thundered over the hills. The crew watched as a circular shock wave of air surrounded a towering blast of water. But when everything settled, the Sorpe Dam remained unscathed."

Disappointed, "Freddie" was forced to return to base. AJ-C "Charlie" tried to attack one of the secondary targets, the Lister Dam. The plane was hit by flak and crashed near Hamm, Germany. Rear gunner Sergeant Frank Tess, the sole survivor, was taken prisoner.

On the return flight, "Apple" reached the Dutch coast and was flying at a high altitude


Barnes Wallis

The Man Behind Upkeep

Barnes Neville Wallis was an enigma. Although a devoutly religious person and pacifist, he worked for a company that designed and built weapons of destruction. He figured that his job was "a deterrent to war." He saw the Nazi regime as an evil empire that must be eradicated, and by doing his job he might be able to end the war sooner and save lives.

Born in Ripley, England, on September 26, 1887, Wallis left school when he was 16 and was employed in a shipyard. He originally had wanted to be a marine engineer until he became fascinated with airplanes and switched to airships and later aircraft design.

In 1911, the Vickers Corporation, a company that primarily designed military equipment, hired him. He was responsible for the design of the Wellesley and Wellington bombers, both of which possessed "a geodetic design in the fuselage and wing structure." This type of design had a "light and strong airframe" that simply amazed many individuals. An aircraft with such a design could still return safely after a mission despite having endured substantial damage to its frame.

When England entered World War II, Wallis came up with the concept of a bouncing bomb to destroy the Ruhr Valley dams by playing with his daughter's marbles. He had bounced them off a metal surface and watched as they bounced to the next one, simulating the skipping motion.

He soon was conducting experiments in a 700-foot tank filled with water to see how different objects would skip across the liquid. He learned that the bomb had to strike the water at a certain angle or it would sink. He also discovered that rotating the bomb would make it go farther. This backspin made the object rise and bounce across the surface with greater speed and accuracy.

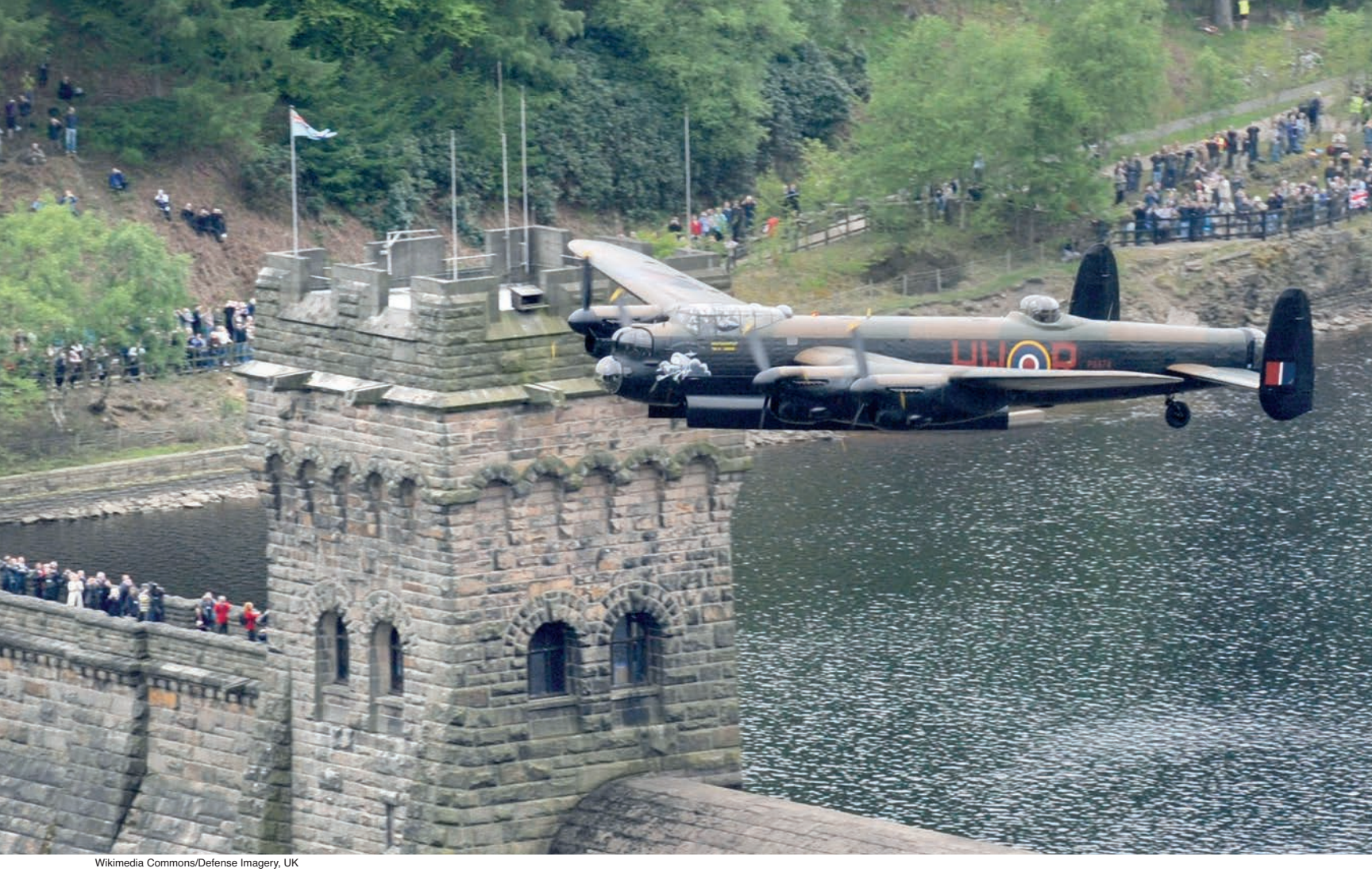
When completed, Upkeep was cylindrical in shape; was four feet, eight inches in height; four feet, eight inches wide; and five feet long. It weighed over 9,000 lbs. and contained 6,600 lbs. of explosives.

Some did not greet Wallis's bouncing bomb favorably. Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Harris called it "tripe" and said, "The war will be over before it works—and it never will." Harris was certain that Upkeep would be ripped from the bomb bay because of its rotation, destroying itself and the plane as well.

After a dispute with Vickers' Chairman Sir Charles Craven, Wallis offered his resignation. It appeared as if Upkeep was doomed. Unbeknownst to Wallis, his idea of breaching the Ruhr Valley dams had reached Prime Minister Winston Churchill. Interested by the proposal, Churchill gave thumbs up to the project. On April 28, 1943, the first successful detonation of the bouncing bomb was conducted at Reculver Beach. The rest is history.

After the war, Wallis continued in the field of aircraft design. In 1945, he was inducted into the Royal Society, and in 1968, he was knighted by the Queen. In the 1954 movie, *The Dambusters*, actor Michael Redgrave portrayed Wallis on the screen. The inventive designer died on October 30, 1979.

Many today view the pilots and crews of the Dambusters squadron as the only heroes of their now famous mission. Although enough cannot be said of their bravery, people should not forget the person who developed the weapon that destroyed the Möhne and Eder dams. Sir Barnes Neville Wallis was also a hero of the Dambuster raid. ■



Wikimedia Commons/Defense Imagery, UK

During a 65th anniversary commemoration of Operation Chastise, a restored Lancaster bomber flies over the Derwent Valley Dam in Derbyshire, England, the site where the original Royal Air Force crews trained for their 1943 mission.

when it was peppered by flak and crashed into the North Sea. Henry "Dinghy" Young and his entire crew were lost.

Flight Sergeant William Townsend and his crew in "Orange" reached the Ennepe Dam just after 3:30 a.m. They released the Upkeep but it did not destroy the dam. His Lancaster was the only one to successfully reach and attempt to destroy one of the alternative targets. He was the last to return to Scampton, setting down about 6:15 a.m.

With two of the dams destroyed, the raid was deemed a success. Photographs later revealed the devastating destruction to the region. The lakebeds at the Eder and Möhne dams were now dry. Towns, roads, canals, power plants, and railroads 50 miles downstream had been washed away. Due to the loss of power, many of the German manufacturing plants lay idle. Farms lost thousands of head of livestock as well. Nearly 1,300 people died as a result of the water that gushed from the dams. Unfortunately, almost half of the casualties were from a Russian POW camp situated by the Eder.

Despite the destruction of the two structures and the loss of life and property, the Germans rebounded quickly. Although production was crippled, it did not suffer as greatly as anticipated. Had the Sorpe Dam been breached, the Germans would have been dealt a severe setback. Albert Speer, Reich Minister of Armaments, later commented, "Ruhr production would have suffered the heaviest possible blow."

One important result of the raid was the reassignment of 20,000 workers who were involved with the construction of the Atlantic Wall. They were quickly dispatched to the Ruhr Valley to repair the Möhne and Eder dams before winter arrived.

The bravery of Gibson and his men cannot be understated. They performed magnificently under very difficult conditions. Squadron 617, however, did not get away lightly in the raid. Fifty-six men did not return from the mission. Three survived their crashes and became POWs. Of the 19 Lancasters that departed Scampton, only 11 made it back safely.

Many of the returning crew members were awarded Distinguished Service Orders and Distinguished Flying Crosses, some posthumously. Guy Gibson was presented with a Victoria Cross, England's highest decoration. His citation read in part: "Wing Commander Gibson personally made the initial attack on the Möhne Dam. Descending to within a few feet of the water, he delivered his attack with great accuracy. He then circled very low for thirty minutes, drawing enemy fire and permitting as free a run as possible to the following aircraft. He repeated these tactics in the attack on the Eder Dam. Throughout his operational career, prolonged exceptionally at his own request, he has shown leadership, determination and valour of the highest order." Sadly, Gibson was killed when his de Havilland Mosquito crashed in Holland while on a bombing mission in September 1944.

Through their dedication and unrelenting devotion to duty, Squadron 617 did the impossible. They were soon dubbed the "Dambusters" by the media. Their popularity increased over the years with books and a movie made about their exploits. Their heroic achievements will always be remembered by a grateful nation. To them, men like Gibson, Young, Mauldslay, Hopgood, and the rest of the Dambusters will remain immortal. ■

Polish troops from the Vistula Legion, part of Napoleon's army besieging the Spanish city of Saragossa in 1809, attack the Santa Engracia convent during the building-to-building fighting. Artist Baron Louis Lejeune, who saw service during the campaign as aide-de-camp to Marshal Lannes, depicted himself wounded at the base of the monument.

The Siege of SARAGOSSA

An account of the dreadful 1808-1809 siege of Saragossa (Zaragoza), Spain, on the Ebro River during Napoleon's Peninsular Campaign from the memoirs of Heinrich von Brandt, a Polish soldier in the French Army.

From the Memoirs of Heinrich von Brandt
Translated and with commentary by Jonathan North

Napoleon's invasion of Spain and Portugal sparked a cataclysmic conflict that shook Napoleonic Europe to its very core. Of the many examples of ferocity and cruelty committed between the revolt of Madrid in May, 1808, and the battle of Toulouse in April 1814, perhaps one event stands out by virtue of its sheer destructiveness: the second siege of Saragossa.

The Spanish town of Saragossa, the principal town of Aragon, was first besieged unsuccessfully by the French invaders in the summer of 1808 before the French were forced to withdraw after the disaster at Bailen. Saragossa then underwent a second siege from December 1808 as the French attempted to reassert their control over Spain. The defenders of Saragossa, led by General Jose dePalafox, were to put up fanatical resistance. The entire population of the city joined the regular soldiers and militia in defense of their city. Eventually, decimated by disease and the constant French barrage, the city surrendered in February 1809, but not before thousands of Spaniards and 10,000 French had perished in the struggle.

This account of the siege comes from Heinrich von Brandt, a Polish officer serving in the French Army. His testimony bears witness to the nature of the struggle, the bravery of the French, and the tenacity of the besieged. Brandt was a lieutenant in the Vistula Legion (three infantry regiments and one of lancers), which was composed of young Polish and German troops and whose senior officers were Polish veterans who had fought for the French in the 1790s. The Legion was sent to Spain as part of Marshal Moncey's III Corps in the summer of 1808 and was destined to remain there until 1812.

Present throughout the siege, the Legion was in the front line for three long, cruel winter months. By the end of the siege its strength had diminished by one third, losses unparalleled in the rest of the French force. We first join Brandt's account as the French, flushed with victory over the Spanish at the battle of Tudela, advance upon Saragossa and encamp around the little town of Alagon, their base during the forthcoming siege.

At Alagon we camped in conditions of absolute squalor. The inhabitants had fled, the weather was atrocious—freezing northerly gales alternated with torrential downpours without respite. The soldiers cut down the olive trees and tore off the doors and windows of the deserted houses in order to feed their bivouac fires. The bread ration was often replaced partly or entirely by rice or beans. As for the meat, one sheep was allocated to every 30 men but the insides of the animal was always missing and the meat reached us in such an advanced state of putrefaction that it was utterly repugnant. The siege artillery finally arrived on December 16 as well as Gazan's and Suchet's Divisions of Mortier's

Editor's note: The text from Heinrich von Brandt's account of the Siege of Saragossa was translated by British author Jonathan North, who also provided the commentary in italics.

Bridgeman Images

Museo del Prado

Corps and we marched once more upon Saragossa. On 21 December our forces mounted an assault on Monte Torrero, which we had taken in the first siege without suffering casualties. While our batteries opened up on a position known as Buena Vista, recently constructed on the heights, Grandjean's division made a feint attack while part of Habert's brigade, to which my regiment belonged, turned the position. The main clash occurred in an underground tunnel through which the Tudela canal passes. Our voltigeurs [light infantry] kept up a well-nourished fire and the defenders lost a large number of dead and wounded without really having had the chance to return our fire, and abandoned the position. Master of the place, Habert now debouched onto the left bank of the Huevra between the city and Monte Torrero, which the enemy speedily evacuated to avoid being cut off. On the next day the city was entirely invested on both banks. Our division was astride the road to Valencia and had advanced posts stretching as far as the Ebro. Immediately before us lay one of the principal and most forward points of defense of the city, the monastery of San Jose. On December 22 and 23 we attempted to flush out the enemy's light troops from some olive groves, a veritable forest that stood between us and the monastery. Fortunately there were in our regiment young men from Narev—a region renowned for its game and for its hunters. They killed some of the defenders and found that the Spanish troops were evidently refugees from the surrounding districts and still carried their money on their persons. Perhaps for this reason, our men quickly acquired a taste for the little war in the groves, and it was to their great regret when the enemy retreated out of reach.

Having taken Monte Torrero, a position of considerable strategic importance one mile to the south of Saragossa and one which dominated the whole city, Moncey planned to attack the monastery of San Jose while, on the right bank, Gazan's division of Mortier's V Corps applied pressure to the Spanish defenses to the north. Moncey, commanding some 45,000 troops, soon began to find that he had insufficient men for the task in hand as winter began to take its toll on the young troops.

On the evening of December 24 the colonel ordered me to proceed to Alagon to collect those soldiers of the Vistula Legion who had straggled due to sickness or exhaustion. With these men I was to form the escort for a convoy of rations and clothes. I managed to round up some 20 men from my regiment. We established ourselves for the night in a deserted house and got a good fire going, fed from beams and floorboards "borrowed" from a neighboring house. In place of straw we lay on some old hemp. We had to leave Alagon the next day, but I almost stayed there permanently.

For some time I had felt not at all well. That night, in the icy cold, I got considerably worse. In the morning I was seized by a violent fever, complicated by dysentery, and had to be carried to a military hospital, which was more like a den of thieves than a place of healing. The hospital was located in a filthy monastery whose monks had fled to Saragossa and were no doubt inflicting the wounds we were coming here to die of.

Typhus was rampant as all the area around had been infected by the stench of the corpses left so long unburied after the battle of Tudela. For the first few days, while I was still conscious, I could follow the details of the burial of the many sick who succumbed. They were thrown from the windows stark naked and they fell, one on top of

Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie (National Museum in Warsaw)

ABOVE: Napoleon receives the captured banners from Polish cavalry commander, Gen. Wincenty Krasiński, after the complete French victory on November 23, 1808, in the *Battle of Tudela*, by Polish artist January Suchodolski (1791-1875). OPPOSITE: This painting by Spanish artist Juan José Martínez de Espinosa (1826-1902), *Captain Romeo dies repelling the French at the Battery of la Puerta del Carmen. Episode of the First Siege of Zaragoza*, shows the retired Capt. Pedro Romeo fighting to his death defending the Puerta del Carmen (Carmen Gate) in the city wall of Zaragoza in June, 1808.

the other, with a muffled thud just as though they were sacks of corn. Then they were piled onto carts and taken away to the huge pits that were being dug unceasingly only one hundred yards away. The Spanish who had been charged with this duty undertook it with a diabolical glee. They pointed out to me the countless mounds of earth that marked the completed and covered-over graves and made signs that indicated there would be no lack of future work. Such a sight was not of the kind to hasten my recovery.

Consciousness soon began to slip away and I fell into a kind of stupor for some hours. An incredible feeling of cold brought me round one night. I could hear cries and gasping in the shadows all around and smelled a terrible and suffocating smell. In the first light of morning I found myself on a stinking stretcher, not knowing where I was and surrounded by the dead and dying.

Filled with horror I made a determined effort to get up and flee this horrible place but my strength failed me and I passed out once again. I was ill for about a month, until my youth and the strength of my constitution triumphed over the fevers. Yet the hollow thump of corpses falling from the windows of the cursed hospital were to haunt my dreams for many years to come. On January 19, 1809, I returned to my regiment after an absence of 25 days.

Despite a Spanish sortie on December 31 and Moncey's departure—he was replaced by Junot—the siege had progressed. On January 10 French siege guns opened up on San Jose with intense and concentrated fire. On January 11 the French assault columns moved up and took the position by storm. The French now had in their possession a key to the Spanish position and it was one they would exploit to the full.

During that interval the siege had made considerable progress, particularly in our sector. We had been masters of the San Jose monastery for some eight days now. The superior officers were lodged in the ruins of the country houses and manor houses while the junior officers and men, in order to maintain pressure on the besieged, had dug into the earth and formed oblong pits about four feet deep and covered with branches.

If it rained there was trouble and we would soon be floundering in these bogs of our own creation. Keeping watch, mounting guard, patrolling, scouting, were exhausting and the number of duties increased as the siege progressed.

On the night of January 21–22 I had my first experience of guard duty in the trenches in command of 25 men of the battalion. To our right was a section of the 14th Line Regiment, commanded by an experienced sergeant who soon struck up a conversation. He gave me and my men sound advice on how to conduct trench warfare. He showed them how to position the gabions according to different circumstances; how to construct defenses so as to both keep the enemy

Anne S.K. Brown Military Collection

French engraving of Napoleon's friend and trusted Marshall Jean Lannes, who was only 40 when he took command of the French army for the brutal Second Siege of Saragossa in 1809. After weeks of savage house-to-house fighting he captured the city near the end of February, earning the title Duke of Montebello. Three months later, Lannes would die after being struck in the legs by cannonball during the Battle of Aspern-Essling in Austria, where the French would also lose 20,000 men in what would be Napoleon's first personal defeat in a major battle.

under surveillance and fire the odd pot shot; how to guard against a surprise attack because this was, he said, potentially the most uncomfortable situation to be in.

On January 23, in the evening, we learned that Lannes, finally recovered, was about to arrive and take over command. This news was met with genuine satisfaction and everyone predicted things would now move forward at a far more energetic pace. That same evening at a particularly exposed point—I was now a connoisseur of trenches—I came across Lacoste, the General of Engineers, in deep conversation with a man in an unadorned green coat and not wearing a sword. The two of them were studying the city through their telescopes without paying the slightest attention to the bullets and roundshot that were raining all around.

The man with Lacoste was none other than the marshal himself. He eventually seemed to realize the danger they had placed themselves in and said out loud, "They've seen us, come on." Lannes was always confident and had an extraordinary courage that bordered on audacity. I remember when this marshal, after the fall of the Jesuits' Convent, perched himself on a rooftop and began to follow the movements of the enemy through a telescope. He soon found himself a target for sharpshooters hidden in the ruins of the convent and began to attract their shots. Lannes immediately grabbed a musket and fired back.

To mark the arrival of Lannes on January 22 the Spanish again made a sortie the following day. But this did not delay French preparations for their most ambitious assault to date. Concentrating on the Palafox battery, the French guns hammered the Spanish defenses while at the same time pouring mortar shells onto the city itself. The defenders, ravaged by disease, made ready to meet the inevitable French assault with all the strength they could muster. On the morning of January 26, 50 French guns opened up in a frightful bombardment and, at dawn on the next day, the French assault columns, nervously collecting in the trenches, made ready to assault Saragossa.

The main assault, made on January 27, was one of the bloodiest days of the siege. Since dawn our batteries had concentrated their fire on widening the breaches. At nine o'clock those units designated for the assault moved forward. The column meant to break into the garden of the Santa Monica convent was four hundred men strong and composed of the 14th Line and part of the 2nd Regiment of the Vistula Legion. A second and smaller column had to storm a breach to the left of this and close to one of the principal batteries of the besieged—that which bore the name of their illustrious leader, Palafox. A third column, formed by a battalion, my own, of the 2nd Regiment of the Vistula Legion, was directed to the right of the Santa Monica convent and San Augustin monastery, toward the Casa Gonzales—a stone building jutting out from this last convent toward the Ebro and linked to the defenses by a covered way. These three attacks on the right had to coincide with the assault on the center against the Santa Engracia convent.

Of all the attacks on the right only one achieved even partial success—that on the breach by the Palafox battery. The breach in the wall of the garden of the Santa Monica convent proved higher than first thought and our voltigeurs succeeded only in clambering up the rubble and establishing themselves in the debris below the breach but could move no farther forward.

Next, the assault on the Casa Gonzales, in which I took part, failed completely. We only just managed to get into the building for there, too, the breach was almost impractical, but were met by such a heavy fire coming from the upper story and every corner of the place that we fell back rather quickly. Major Beyer, in command, was seriously wounded and the captain of my company, a certain Matkowski from Krakow, had a leg shattered by a

roundshot and fell into enemy hands.

Fortunately the main attack in the center was a complete success led, as it was, by Colonel Chlopicki. Our troops took not only the Santa Engracia convent but the neighboring Capuchin nunnery. The loss of this critical position forced the Spanish to abandon their line and fall back. That same evening we were able to enter the Casa Gonzalez because it, too, had been abandoned. We found the bodies of 11 of our comrades, all horribly mutilated. Matkowski was not there; he had been taken to a hospital where we were to find him after the siege. He was in terrible condition with not long left to live and failed to recognize anyone. The war of the ramparts was now replaced by the far more terrible war in the streets and houses.

The French, having breached the outer defenses, forced the Spanish to relinquish their first line of defense and withdraw into the city. They would, from now until the end of the siege, rely on dogged defense of individual buildings and ruins to hold the French at bay.

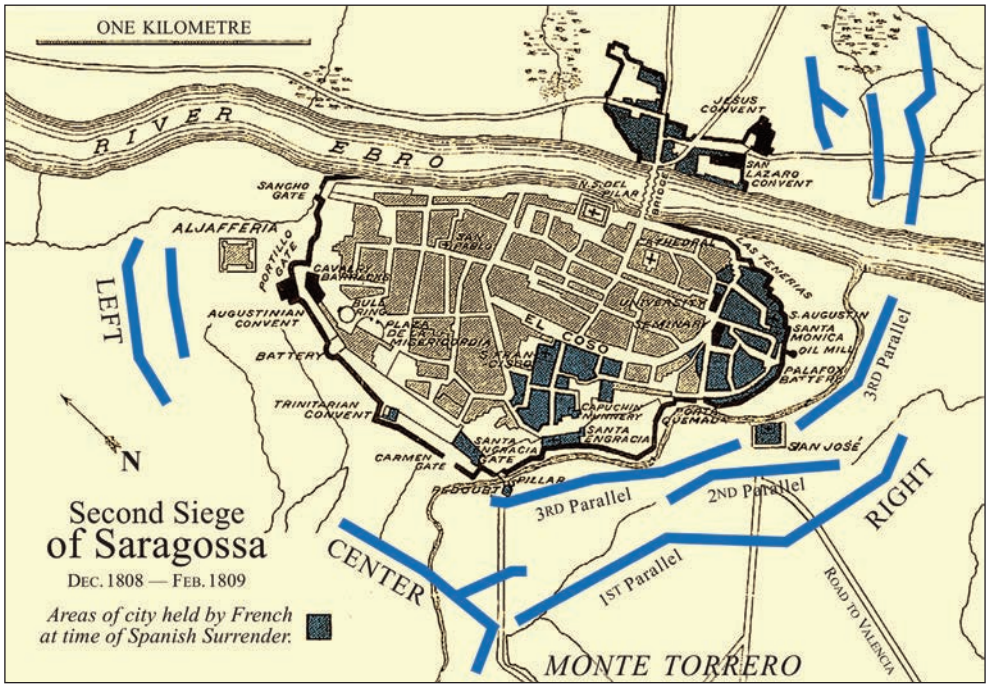
On January 28 and 29 we continued to attempt a practicable breach on our side of the Santa Monica convent, in which the enemy was still holding out. On January 30 one company of the 14th Line finally managed to secure a part of the convent's garden and take the church, maintaining its position in the face of fierce counterattacks. On February 1 the news of the death of General Lacoste caused considerable dismay, even among the ordinary soldiers. His successor was Colonel Rogniat who, although quite capable, was not as highly regarded as Lacoste had been, and indeed there was nothing pleasant about his personality.

The more we advanced the more dogged resistance became. We knew that in order not to be killed, or to diminish that risk, we would have to take each and every one of these houses converted into redoubts and where death lurked in the cellars, behind doors and shutters—in fact, everywhere. When we broke into a house we had to make an immediate and thorough inspection from the cellar to the rooftop. Experience taught us that sudden and determined resistance could well be a trick. Often as we were securing one floor we would be shot at from point-blank range from the floor above through loopholes in the floorboards. All the nooks and crannies of these old-fashioned houses aided such deadly ambushes.

We also had to maintain a good watch on the rooftops. With their light sandals, the Aragonese could move with the ease of and as silently as a cat and were thus able to make surprise incursions well behind the front line. It was indeed aerial combat. We would be sitting peacefully around a fire, in a house occupied for some days, when suddenly shots would come through some window just as though they had come from the sky itself.

Museo del Prado

ABOVE: General and aristocrat José de Palafox commanded the Spanish defense of the city at both sieges. Painting by Spanish artist Francisco de Goya, who worked in Madrid during the Napoleonic invasion of Spain, and completed a number of works depicting the war. BELOW: A map of the Second Siege of Sarragossa (Zaragoza) during Napoleon's Peninsular War showing French battle lines and key locations of the weeks-long battle.



LEFT: German and Polish *Voltigeurs* (light infantry) of the 2nd Regiment of the Vistula Legion took part in the siege of Saragossa. BELOW: Marshal Bon-Adrien Jeannot de Moncey, began the second siege of Saragossa in command of the French 3rd Corps on December 20, 1808. Napoleon, who wanted quicker results, replaced him with Gen. Jean-Andoche Junot on December 29, before giving command to Marshal Jean Lannes on January 9, 1809. INSET: Colonel Józef Chłopicki of the 1st Regiment of the Vistula Legion led the attack on the Santa Engracia convent on January 27, 1809.

With these latest and most terrible developments our sappers and miners were superb. There were especial difficulties in making progress through the foundations of the great convents and churches and here the stones were seemingly allied to the determined resistance of the besieged. The Spanish stopped at nothing to slow our advance. Even when they were at last forced to abandon a building, they would scatter resin-soaked faggots everywhere and set them alight. The ensuing fires would not destroy the stone buildings but served to give the besieged time to prepare their defenses in neighboring houses.

Even so, Grandjean's and Musnier's divisions were making some progress on the right. Their effective strength, however, was now reduced to about ten thousand men—a strength diminishing daily. Not surprising when every day one third of the effectives was employed in the siege, another third was held in reserve and the rest, who should have been recuperating, were guarding the camp and the rear areas; and all this besides the constant alarms and the enemy's counterattacks. These were especially strong around the asylum, which had been converted into a hospital, and we faced enormous difficulties here. The Spanish commanders knew as well as we the importance of this key position, which commanded the main street in Saragossa—the Coso.

Something horrible happened on February 7. The Spanish had finally abandoned the asylum, laying mines as they went. The attackers burst in, without meeting any resistance, only to be met by a sight sure to dishearten even the bravest of men. The beds and the floorboards were strewn with the dead and the wounded, whom there had been no time to evacuate. There had, however, evidently been enough time to light a fire and the flames were already racing toward us consuming everything in their path! I was in charge of a detachment of 20 men, covering the left of the column, and we were making our way through the adjacent courtyards and corridors off the main building when the sapper sergeant, who was serving as our guide, made a wrong turn and took us right into the heart of the conflagration. We suddenly found ourselves shrouded in thick, choking smoke and inhaled the nauseating smell of burned flesh. There was a moment of panic but fortunately I brushed against a window, obscured by this hellish smoke, broke it, and once more found fresh air and daylight.

The next day our entire division took place in the assault on the Coso. Above the continual bickering of musketry the groans of much larger explosions could be heard—sometimes the booming of cannon and sometimes a mine going off. I was busy in the Coso with a detachment of some 50 men, setting up a barricade. Grenadiers,

Anne S.K. Brown Military Collection

French infantry assault the grim defenders of a church during the final phase of the siege of Saragossa, from January 28 to February 20, 1809, which consisted of bitter street fighting in which quarter was neither given nor received.

posted above us in the windows of neighboring houses, covered this work, which was designed to protect a communications trench that ran from one side of the street to the other.

Suddenly our ears were almost shattered by the familiar whistling and roaring noise of an exploding mine. A neighboring house collapsed and unmasked a Spanish battery which blasted us with grape at point blank range. Miraculously, only three men were hit but the rest ran for it as quickly as they could. Those working on the barricade and their guards had fled to the rear leaving myself and the grenadier captain, a man called Boll and a native of Volhynia, quite alone.

He set off, marching as calmly as if on parade, toward the breach through which our men had disappeared. Reaching it he turned to me and said, with considerable sangfroid, "This is an odious duty; however, the officer of highest rank always goes last." He came through after me and rallied his grenadiers, chastising them for having abandoned their post without orders. Boll, who was a close friend of the colonel, very obligingly commended my steadiness on this occasion to the colonel. The day ended badly for us. The Spanish found a means of bringing up a cannon and flushed us out from around the Coso, with considerable loss. However, this setback did not seriously affect the morale of the soldiers because they were now no longer alone in the struggle as had been the case in the first weeks of the siege.

From a battery set at the mouth of the Huerva the progress of the soldiers of Gazan's division could be followed. We thought them very lucky to be able to fight in the fresh air while we were condemned to this horrible war of streets, houses, and passageways. Over the following days we took, with some loss, a few positions on the Coso. On February 12 the first attack on the university buildings failed due to the fact that the miners had not been able to place their galleries close enough under the walls. The result was that the explosion failed to make a breach and our columns were exposed to a galling fire from which they fell back with the loss of about 40 men.

Again the casualties fell on the Poles—they were always given the most dangerous missions. One of the last clashes, and one of the most bloody, was that for the Calle de los Arcades; and it was now our turn to put some cannon to use. Here I witnessed one of the most memorable examples of the tenacity of the besieged. One of the houses was shot at from such close quarters that the roundshot passed right through the building and out of the other side. Nevertheless, the defenders simply abandoned one story and took refuge on the next floor up and kept up such a galling fire that we were unable to advance any farther that day.

The 18th was decisive. As Gazan's division

Saragossa Museum]

ABOVE: *Heroic Battle in the Pulpit of the Church of San Agustín de Zaragoza in the Second Siege in 1809*, by César Álvarez Dumont (1866-1945), depicts soldiers and townspeople—even a nobleman or bourgeois in a powdered wig—fighting together against the invading French forces of Napoleon Bonaparte. OPPOSITE: This dramatic scene of fierce Spanish guerrilla resistance to French troops led by Marshal Lannes in the Second Siege of Saragossa during the Spanish War of Independence (Peninsular War) depicted in French artist Victor Adam's, *The Siege and capture of Saragossa, 1809*, was fueled by the Napoleon's occupation and installation of his brother, Joseph Bonaparte, as king of Spain.

seized the suburbs on the left bank, killing or taking all the defenders, we also made good progress along the Coso and neighboring streets. At around three o'clock a 1,500-pound mine was blown and, as it was better placed than the last, blew a large breach in the wall of the main university building. Three companies of my regiment and two of the 14th Line launched a desperate assault. This time we managed to seize this important position, at the cost of a dozen men. At the same time the house on the corner of the Calle de los Arcades, assaulted for the sixth time, finally surrendered, its resistance exhausted. This time we had made real progress and capitulation now seemed to be a question of hours rather than of days. Even so hostilities continued throughout February 19.

One company of the 3rd Regiment of the Vistula received the order to make its way under a house next to the bridge over the Ebro and thereby cut behind defenses still manned by the defenders. We were still seriously concerned as to the fate of these brave men when we were officially notified of the cessation of hostilities. Many officers believed that these negotiations were another Spanish trick and we therefore spent another night under arms. On the next day, however, all doubts were cast aside. We were indeed masters of the city.

With Gazan master of most of the left bank and the French firmly established within the city and maintaining a rigorous policy of taking each street building by building, Palafox, who was seriously ill, was in dire straits. The defenders had been sapped by disease, their morale had plummeted in the face of the remorseless French advance, and the promised relief armies had never materialized. With only 2,800 infantry fit for duty, Palafox resigned command to a Junta. The Junta, accepting the inevitable, and threatened by Lannes with new hostilities, decided upon capitulation.

It was all over by the evening of February 20 and yet on the morning of the next day the Spanish sentries were still at their posts aiming at the too-curious, and snarling atras! (get back) at them. Finally, at noon, we made our way in full dress over blocked canals and a landscape of olive-tree stumps toward the Puerta del Portillo where the garrison would come to pile their arms.

Each one of us made it a point of honor to eradicate every trace of the hardship we had suffered. Greatcoats burned with powder and torn by bullets were carefully rolled up and strapped on top of knapsacks; muskets carefully polished shone in the sun.

After about an hour the vanguard of the famous defenders of Saragossa began to appear. A certain number of young men, aged between 16 and 18, without uniforms and wearing gray cloaks and red cockades, lined up in front of us nonchalantly

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smoking cigarettes. Not long after we witnessed the arrival of the rest of the army: a strange collection composed of humanity of all shades and conditions. A few were in uniform but most were dressed like peasants. These people were all smoking and chattering and looked with complete indifference on their imminent captivity. Eventually General Morlot, charged with escorting the prisoners, set his troops in motion and the whole of this garrison, some eight- or ten-thousand men strong, filed passed us. Most of them were of such nonmilitary bearing that our men were saying aloud that we should never have had so much trouble beating such a rabble.

I was told that Palafox was found almost dead in the Casa de los Gigantes. A few days later I saw him as they were taking him to the carriage, drawn by four mules, that was to take him to France.

On the 22nd I was ordered into the city to collect our wine ration. There was such a commotion at the issuing station that I had to wait several hours before receiving the wine. One of my comrades, forced to wait like myself, suggested we explore the neighboring streets and kill some time. We went first to the famous Church of the Pilar, which was quite close by. The square in front of the church was clogged with praying women and children, coffins, and the dead for whom there were no coffins.

Inside the church the priests found that they could not fulfill all of their many tasks. The doleful congestion crowded under the portals and filled the aisles—the floor of the nave had vanished under kneeling figures in black whose sobs intermingled with the psalms. I caught sight, too, of some French soldiers kneeling by the main altar.

Still more sinister was the Calle de Toledo. Here the population had sought refuge from our bombardment. There was a mound of corpses, many stark naked, piled in the middle of the street; here and there fires were burning, around which these poor people were attempting to cook their food. Above all it was the children, thin and with the bright eyes of fever, that were painful to behold.

Shadowy figures, wrapped in their giant cloaks, talked energetically and fell silent when we drew near, pretending not to look at us. This siege shook the world. Political passions rose to an even greater pitch than usual. The resistance shown by the besiegers has been much praised and yet it would be only fair to recognize that for heroic tenacity the victors compare well with the vanquished. This is especially true for the divisions of Morlot and Grandjean which, with less than 13,000 men under arms, endured, alone, three weeks of horrific street fighting against twice as many defenders.

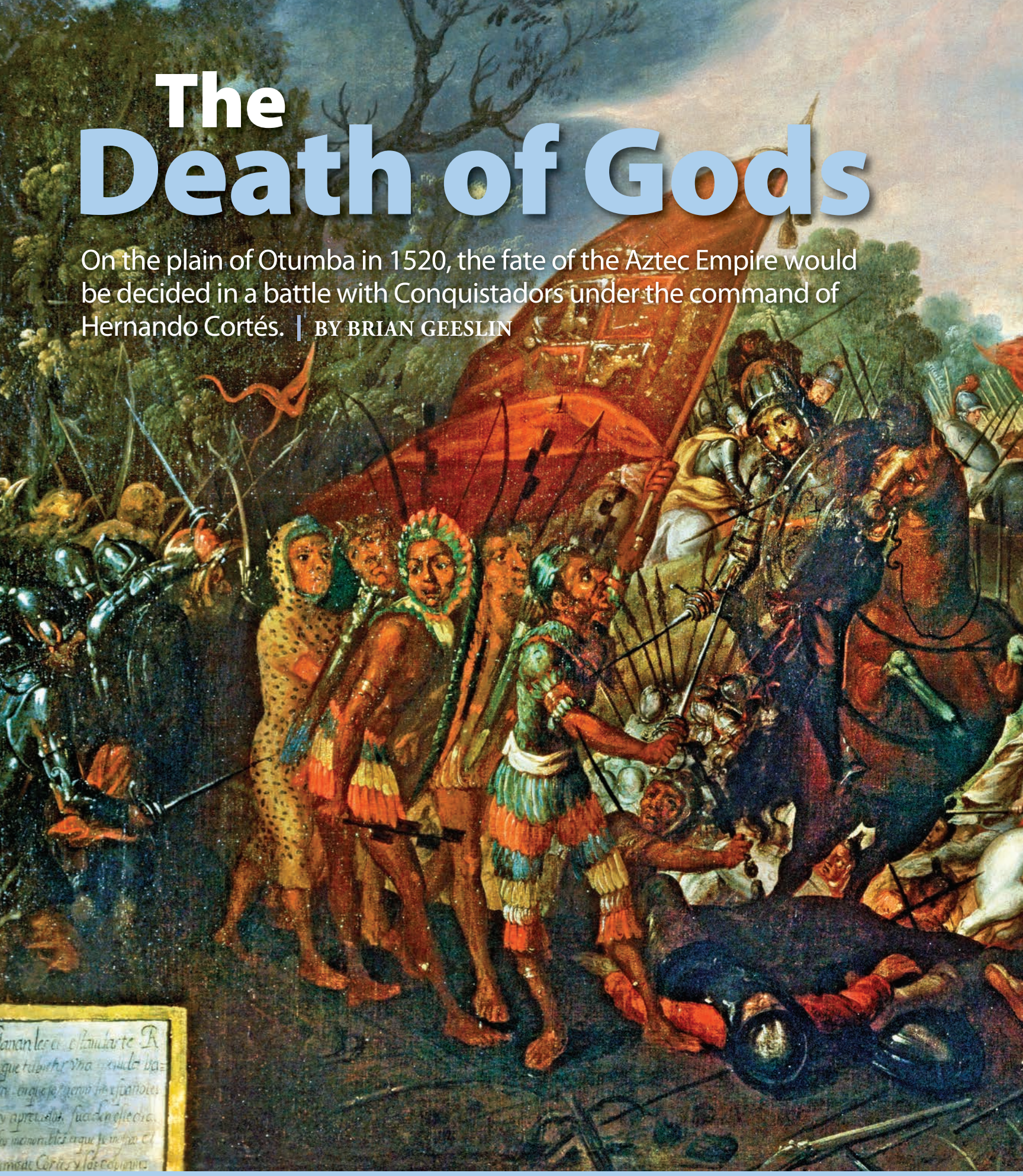
The siege left 54,000 Spanish corpses lying in the ruins of a once-great city. Yet Saragossa quickly became a symbol of Spanish defiance and a rallying cry for all those opposed to Napoleonic ambition. Its effect on French morale was immense. The realization that they were fighting an entire people, and a people determined to fight to the death for their hearth and home, struck deep into every general's and every conscript's heart.

As Sir Charles Oman wrote, "The example of Saragossa was invaluable.… The knowledge of it did much to sicken the French soldiery of the whole war, and to make every officer and man who entered Spain march, not with the light heart that he felt in Germany or Italy, but with gloom and disgust and want of confidence."

Saragossa was to set the tone for the rest of the Peninsular War which, although it never quite reached again the depths of that siege, was the first glimmer of total war in the heart of Europe. Brandt was to spend the next four years in Spain, caught up in fighting the guerrillas, before being dispatched with his unit to take part in the invasion of Russia in 1812 and an ordeal of an altogether different type. ■

The Death of Gods

On the plain of Otumba in 1520, the fate of the Aztec Empire would be decided in a battle with Conquistadors under the command of Hernando Cortés. | BY BRIAN GEESLIN



Conquistador Hernando Cortés had been taunted by bands of Aztecs all through the morning of July 8, 1520, as he and the remnants of his army of Spanish adventurers and Indian allies neared the crest of mountains overlooking the plain of the Indian city of Otumba (the Spanish corruption of the Nahuatl name of Otompan). Scouts brought him reports of a large body of Aztec warriors in the valley ahead and as Cortés reached the crest he saw what appeared to be a huge expanse of snow, an illusion created by the white cotton armor of the Indian warriors.

Cortés and his supporters were retreating toward Tlascala, the homeland of his most loyal allies, and had been doing so for the previous seven days; all that time they were harried front and rear by bands of Aztec warriors and, in one such instance, Cortés, always in the fore of battle, received a severe wound to the head.

After the defeat of "La Noche Triste" (The Sad Night), Hernando Cortés and his men fled northeast from the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlán. On the plain of Otumba they were confronted by a much larger Aztec force. Cortés ordered his men to attack the Aztec leaders, who wore banners and costumes—such as the jaguar warrior on the left. They managed to kill the commander, Matlatzincátzin, and escaped in the chaos.

The Bridgeman Art Library

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Museo Nacional de Historia

A copy of a period portrait that Spanish Conquistador Herndo Cortés sat for later in his life. He was about 35 during the conquest of Mexico.

The Spanish and their allies had little food and water, a situation that had not changed in several days. But the hardships of the march, which were shared by all, helped to form a more cohesive group. In one skirmish, two Spaniards and one horse were killed while foraging for food. The horse was eaten as a feast and the march continued with Cortés imposing tighter discipline to prevent more losses. He even forced the severely wounded to carry their own weight, since the horses were wearing out from carrying double riders.

The small army pushed toward its destination in a circuitous route, avoiding the more populous areas, so that after a week on the march they were actually less than two days' journey from their point of departure at the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlàn (now the historic center of Mexico City). They dared not retread their steps for fear of what lay behind, for a week earlier the Spanish and their allies had been disastrously expelled from Tenochtitlàn on *Noche Triste*, "The Night of Sorrows."

Aztec mythology promised the return of Quetzalcoatl, a deified priest-king who had been banished in the remote past but one day would return as prophesied. Upon the arrival of the Spanish many Aztecs, including Montezuma, believed that the Europeans were children of the Sun who would pave the way for Quetzalcoatl's return; thus the Spanish were invited to the capital. Spanish abuses, however, changed this view and led to the Night of Sorrows, instigated when the Europeans attacked the celebrants of a religious festival.

In the ensuing struggle, the Spanish lost about 430 killed or missing, many of whom drowned while trying to swim, laden with gold, from the lake-encompassed city. Their allies' losses numbered in the thousands. In addition to human toll there were 77 horses—their most important weapon—all of their arquebuses, cannon and gunpowder, and all but 12 of their crossbows. Cortés's remaining army numbered about 440 Spaniards, of whom 20 were mounted, and perhaps two thousand Indian allies. With this small body of men, Cortés prepared to face as many as 100,000 Aztec warriors. Perhaps not since Thermopylae had such odds been faced more resolutely.

To the Aztecs, war was an economic, psychological and religious necessity; they believed it was their destiny to conquer—a chosen people whose mission was to nourish the gods with the human blood that alone could sustain them in their cosmic battle against the forces of darkness. For this reason, one of the main objectives in war was to take captives who would later be sacrificed. The braver and higher in rank a captive, the more valuable he became, because the Aztecs also practiced ritual cannibalism whereby the eater would absorb the virtues of the eaten.

Thus Aztec warfare never entirely lost its ceremonial character, partly explaining why the Spanish were not wiped out on the Night of Sorrows. For the type of limited war Aztec warriors waged they were almost invincible.

The Aztec's main offensive weapons were the

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ABOVE: Moctezuma (Montezuma) and Conquistador Herndo Cortés meet for the first time on the shores of Lake Texcoco, outside the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlán. *The Meeting of Cortés and Moctezuma* is one of the eight canvases painted in the seventeenth century depicting the Spanish conquest of the native Aztec people in 1521. OPPOSITE: *The Arrival of Cortés at Veracruz and the Reception by Moctezuma's Ambassadors* is the second of eight paintings in the seventeenth century "Conquest of Mexico" series illustrating historic events of the Spanish conquest of the Indigenous Aztecs. Hearing of the arrival of the Spanish explorers, Aztec leader Moctezuma (corrupted to Montezuma by the Spanish) sent ambassadors with fine cloth, featherwork, and artfully crafted gold objects. If, as some have speculated, the Aztec Emperor sent the gifts to encourage the strangers to leave, the gesture had the opposite effect.

macana, a 3 1/2-foot-long, paddle-shaped, wooden club edged with sharp bits of obsidian; and obsidian-tipped javelins hurled by means of an atlatl, which added range to the throw. The macana was a brutally effective weapon when used to its full potential and on more than one occasion Spanish horses were beheaded in a single stroke. Other weapons included the sling, spear, bow and arrow, and lance, most of which had obsidian heads, though some were tipped with copper.

The Aztecs also used a dart-type weapon with a three-pronged head that was attached to a leash so that after impact the dart would inflict a frightful wound by being yanked out by the attached cord. For defense the Aztecs carried a shield 20 to 30 inches in diameter made of a wooden frame covered in hide, which the privileged classes decorated with paint and feathers appropriate to their rank and status.

Body armor was commonly used by all who could afford it. Made from quilted cotton soaked in brine and formed into a tight-fitting suit about two fingers thick, the "armor" covered the body from neck to knee. Lighter, cooler and effective against javelins and arrows, the Spanish often wore it instead of steel armor. The elite warriors also wore decorative masks and headdresses made of wood and leather to signify their rank.

The Aztecs had no standing army but youths began military training at age 15, learning the use of various weapons, and although there was no group drill in the European sense, each participated in sham maneuvers during monthly ceremonials. When called upon for duty, each new recruit would follow an experienced warrior into battle. Warriors received no pay but it was through the military that men advanced to more desirable positions in civilian life, and if someone distinguished himself in battle he could receive gifts of slaves or property from a chief or king. Moreover, any soldier who captured four prisoners in battle gained automatic entry into the ruling class as an Arrow Knight.

The basic Aztec military unit was a squad of 20 men formed into larger units of two, four or eight hundred warriors, commanded at each level by members of the knightly orders of the Arrow, the Jaguar and the Eagle.

The largest Aztec formation numbered 8,000 warriors commanded by a chief or king. Each leader carried a banner with a glyph as an organizational device. Tenochtitlàn provided 20 contingents of elite warriors while each allied city or tribe mustered its own army, so that the Aztecs had the potential to field a force of 200,000 warriors. But these numbers were deceiving.

The Aztecs did not possess the support system necessary for prolonged warfare due to the fragile balance of their agrarian-based economy. The capital was parasitic in nature, consuming a great deal of the available commodities while producing no food and little beyond military and luxury goods. Yet warriors could not live off the land while on campaign because the political system was based on a complex of treaties with allied and conquered peoples by which each remained the-

Tomas Povedano / Wikimedia Commons

ABOVE: The right-hand man of Hernando Cortés, Captain Pedro de Alvarado was considered a brilliant, but cruel, military commander who helped Spain conquer Cuba, Mexico and what is now Guatemala, El Salvador, and parts of Nicaragua. TOP: Captain Pedro de Alvarado, in command during Hernando Cortés' absence at the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlàn, became convinced he and his men were the target of a rebellion. In the "Massacre in the Great Temple" on May 22, 1520, Alvarado and his men slaughtered all who were celebrating—performers, spectators, and nobles alike. This action led directly to the Spanish retreat from the city known as "La Noche Triste" (The Sad Night).

oretically independent. Finally, the Aztecs had no reliable beasts of burden; each warrior had to pay for his own supplies and carry them, or hire a servant, or be wealthy enough to own slaves.

In any campaign longer than a few days, Tenochtitlàn had to carry out negotiations to arrange for supply markets in the areas the army marched through, so that the warriors could purchase the necessary and luxury goods they were accustomed to having. Obviously an extended or distant campaign was a difficult undertaking and impossible to keep secret. Early in Montezuma's reign, 16,000 Aztec warriors were killed while on a campaign in the mountains of Michoacan. The Aztecs were vulnerable in many ways, suffering defeats and setbacks, but they were tenacious in the pursuit of their religious, economic and political goals—which were more or less the same.

The Aztecs did not develop the concepts of tactics and strategy beyond the rudimentary levels, due to the ceremonial nature of war as well as the difficulty of carrying out extended campaigns and the set nature of most battles, which were usually fought on flat, open ground. Moreover, Aztec wars were usually short, often decided by a single battle. They were not used to long campaigns that they now faced against the Spanish, with the continual mobilization of warriors and the drain on morale and the economy.

Traditional Aztec battles began with a great deal of noise as each army shouted, clashed weapons and beat drums. Then volleys of slingshots, arrows, javelins and other missiles were discharged as the two armies rushed toward each other. Next was hand-to-hand combat, generally a free-for-all in which the weight of numbers decided the battle.

Cortés and his men had defeated many Aztec armies, but never one like the multitude they faced at Otumba. A less seasoned army might have succumbed to despair; a less resolute commander might have parlayed, but from the beginning Cortés had relied upon his panache and charisma to carry them through all adversity. Facing impossible odds at Otumba, Cortés put those nebulous qualities to the test.

Cortés had been brought up and trained in the religious and military milieu of the Reconquest, a phenomenon that infused into the Spanish character a source of mission; it has been said that "in Spain the cross is on the sword." The Reconquest of the Spanish peninsula from the Moors had taken more than seven centuries and when finally achieved in 1492 by Ferdinand and Isabella the die of Spanish history was cast, or warped, by the experience. The Catholic Church promised

THE Aztecs encountered by the Spanish in 1519 possessed a highly advanced civilization, one of the most complex ever to develop in the New World. But in large part the Aztecs were indebted to earlier peoples for much of what they claimed as their own.

The city of Teotihuacan dominated the central part of Mexico Valley (the site of present-day Mexico City) from approximately AD 300 to 600 when it was overthrown and destroyed, but its ruins passed into legend and myth as the place where the gods had assembled to create the sun.

A people called the Toltecs later ruled over much of central Mexico from their capital at Tollan. They developed a highly advanced civilization that ran from about 900 to 1100. According to Aztec myth, they were guided by the God Quetzalcoatl and discovered medicine, astronomy and the calendar.

The second Toltec ruler, Topiltzin, born in 935, became identified with Quetzalcoatl. He was driven out of Tollan, following a religious conflict, and fled with his followers to the Gulf Coast where he sailed away, promising to return. With the expulsion of Topiltzin, Tezcatlipoca replaced Quetzalcoatl as the chief god and introduced human sacrifice as part of his cult.

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This image representing the "Battle of Azcapotzalco" is from a 19th century transcript of Juan de Tovar's *Historia de la benida de los yndios apoblar a Mexico* (History of the arrival of the Indians to settle in Mexico), also known as the Tovar Codex, c. 1585. Like the original illustration done by Aztec draftsmen, the scene depicts the ritual sacrifice of prisoners after a battle.

THE RISE OF THE AZTECS

Toltec culture was militaristic as evidenced in their carvings for the insignia of the eagle and jaguar knights, two of the Aztec military orders. In spite of their military nature, the Toltec state collapsed around 1168. The capital was sacked and destroyed, possibly by barbarian tribes from the north. Toltec culture survived only in scattered cities such as Xico and Colhuacan. No central unifying political force remained in central Mexico.

Barbarian tribes in the north, known collectively as the Chichimecs, established a number of small cities such as Azcapotzalco. Gradually, the rudimentary culture of the barbarians fused with the Toltecs as many of the former married into the noble families of the latter. The last of the barbarian tribes to enter the valley were the Nahuatl speaking Mexica, or Aztec, who gave their name to the country.

Aztec origins are obscured in myth and legend but they appear to have been a wandering tribe of a few thousand among the many groups of Chichimecs. Because they were the last to enter the valley, they were forced to eke out a living by squatting on the land of others. From 1250 to 1298 they were vassals of Azcapotzalco, capital of the Tepanec kingdom founded by Chichimecs like themselves. Then from 1298 to 1323 they lived under the lordship of the city of Colhuacan, one of the Toltec holdouts.

After sacrificing a Calhua princess, the Aztecs were forced to take refuge on a few small islands in the swamps of Lake Texcoco. This was a no man's land between Azcapotzalco to the north, Texcoco to the east, and Colhuacan in the south. Geography saved the Aztecs from annihilation because none of these states were willing to risk war by occupying the islands.

So it was here that the Aztecs founded their town in the year Two-Reed, perhaps 1325, and called it the Place of The Prickly Pear Cactus: Tenochtitlàn. Shortly after its establishment the Aztec town joined with the older Tlatelolco on an island a mile to the north. These towns had their first monarchs appointed by Colhuacan and Azcapotzalco respectively. Later the Aztecs were forced to pay tribute to, and fight as mercenaries for Azcapotzalco which had swallowed up its two rivals by 1415.

In 1426 the new ruler of the Tepanec kingdom turned against the island cities and had the rulers of Tenochtitlàn and Tlatelolco murdered. Itzcoatl (1427-40), the new king of Tenochtitlàn, responded by organizing an alliance of the lakeside cities as well as requesting aid from cities outside the valley. By 1428 he had destroyed the Tepanec kingdom.

The Aztecs gained their first territory on the mainland when the victorious cities of Tenochtitlàn, Texcoco and Tlacopan formed a triple alliance, a coalition that was to dominate Mexican politics for the next century.

Nominally, the three cities were equal but Tenochtitlàn soon asserted dominance. The Aztecs had learned that aggression pays and changed their entire social structure. The fairly egalitarian peasant-soldier structure gave way to a militarized hierarchy in the hands of a nobility.

Soon the triple alliance controlled the entire valley. Then it was not long before its leaders sought conquests beyond the valley walls. Montezuma I (1440-68) pursued an aggressive policy that soon forced communities all the way to the coast under tribute.

As the Aztecs became accustomed to the fruits of conquest, they evolved an ideology of themselves as a chosen people destined to conquer. But during the reign of Montezuma II, they were to come up against a people with a similar self image, the Spanish.

—Brian Geeslin

instant acceptance into Heaven to any Christian soldier who died in battle against the infidel, and that spoils of war were considered an acceptable reward for making life in the here and now more comfortable. With the assurance of immortality, individual prowess and faith became keystones in the edifice of the ideal "Christian Soldier."

Gold is a strong motivator for even the most pious individual and even more so for a soldier of fortune. Cortés's Spanish troops were simply that—soldiers of fortune—for most owned nothing except what they gained by the sword. (One such soldier was Bernal Diaz, whose memoirs are invaluable and a classic of historical literature.)

After the Moors had been expelled from Spain the militant character thus created would not just wither away in a country that had been at war for centuries. Besides, who would soil his hands with menial labor when marching off to war offered a greater and far nobler reward. Fresh fields of conquest in the New World relieved the Old World of a good portion of its rowdy, unchained, trouble-making elements whose main motivation was greed or need legitimized as religious zeal. The soldiers themselves certainly did not see it in that way, for them Church and State were not a dichotomy, nor were religious duty and material rewards. The soldiers under the command of Cortés were a hardy breed inured to the hardships of military life, professional soldiers living on the fringes of the known world. In their minds they had everything to gain and nothing to lose.

Spanish military techniques had evolved to accommodate the new technologies and tactics of the time. By 1520 the arquebus and cannon were in common use but each of these weapons required a cumbersome, regimented process for firing—in the same time an experienced archer could loose perhaps 20 aimed arrows. Firearms were only effective when employed in large numbers, and Cortés's arquebusiers made up only 15 percent of his very small army.

In battle with the Aztecs, firearms produced unpredictable results. In one of their early engagements the Spanish let loose a volley of cannon and arquebusier shots into an attacking group of warriors, who responded by throwing dust and leaves into the air to hide their dead, then charged again without giving the Spanish time or room to perform the complex regimen for a second volley. The Spanish were saved by their discipline and hand-to-hand fighting abilities, and by the timely use of their cavalry. The importance of firearms in the conquest has been much exaggerated and Otumba is proof. It was one of the largest battles fought in the New World prior to the 19th century and is conspicuous for its lack of firearms. There the Spanish did not possess any scientific superiority of arms; what they did have was bravado, experience, courage and faith in their cause.

The average Spanish soldier in the New World was armed with a sword for both hacking and thrusting, and a buckler. Many also carried a lance or halberd. The crossbow had been in use in Europe for centuries, its small shaft could penetrate steel armor at 20 yards or more. The Aztecs had no defense against it. At Otumba, however, there were not enough to make a difference. The

Anne S.K. Brown Military Collection

common soldier wore steel armor over his chest and back, greaves to cover the front of his legs, and a steel helmet. It is unlikely that any of the Spanish had full body armor, in spite of some of the codex illustrations, given the climatic conditions, the social station of the soldiers, and the fact that it provided no positive military function—it impeded movement and increased fatigue to intolerable levels. Most of the Spanish

Archer M. Huntington Art Gallery, University of Texas

ABOVE: This engraving from a history of the conquest of Mexico published in Spain in 1771 depicts the vastly outnumbered forces of Hernando Cortés descending to the plain of Otumba. The Aztec general Matlatzincátzin, hoping to capture many prisoners for later sacrifice, did not immediately attack. The Spanish cavalry charged through the Aztec ranks and succeeded in killing Matlatzincátzin, throwing the enemy into disarray. OPPOSITE: Hernando Cortés meets Xicotencatl, leader of the Tlaxcaltecas, who would provide thousands of warriors and be an essential ally in the Spanish conquest of the Aztecs. This image is from the *Lienzo de Tlaxcala*, the most complete Indigenous account of the Mesoamerican wars (1519 into the 1540s). Lienzos, pictorial histories on large cloths, were painted by Indigenous conquistadors to present to the Spanish crown as evidence of their feats of war in exchange for rewards or privileges.

adopted the native cotton armor.

The horse deserves credit beyond the firearms, crossbow, and, in many instances, the abilities of the Spaniards, for it was with the horse that often gave the Spanish the courage to do battle. Cortés early on realized the importance of this animal and usually employed it to the greatest possible effect. Without the 20-odd horses at Otumba the Spanish would have perished to a man.

Cortés's skill was more diplomatic than military; it was his Byzantine talents that put him at the head of an army in the New World, and these same talents kept him there throughout the many misfortunes his army endured during the now famous, or infamous, expedition. In battle he merely performed as any other Spaniard, which was exceptional under the circumstances. Cortés's ability as a general was conventional for the time, yet more often than not merely mediocre. He often led his men to fight on unfavorable ground, or otherwise subjected them to ambushes and like misfortunes that could have been prevented under a commander with more military foresight; if nothing else, Cortés was smooth talking and charismatic.

In diplomacy, intrigue and the other politics of war, Cortés took advantage of every situation, often turning a setback into an advantage. Such was the case when Narváez was sent with a large force to relieve Cortés of command and put him under arrest. Cortés ultimately subverted the command structure of this huge armada and made its army part of his own. Without these additional troops, the toppling of the Aztec state would have been impossible.

The Spaniards were the minority in Cortés's army; at Otumba less than one in every ten combatants was European. The Tlascalans, like the Spanish, were used to hardship for they had been in a continuous state of war for decades. The Tlascalan state was completely surrounded by the Aztec Empire, being preserved perhaps as a ready source of sacrifice for the temples of Tenochtitlàn. Due to their economic isolation within the empire they were not as well equipped as the Aztec warriors but what they lacked in weapons they made up for in courage and a perseverance that put many of Cortés's own men to shame. The Tlascalans could equal the elite forces of the Aztecs in all but armament; cotton armor and obsidian were more difficult to obtain but the warriors of Tlascala made up for the deficiency with skill. Excellent archers, they were able to fire as many as three arrows at once, and were quite skilled with the javelin. It's thought the Tlascalans developed the barbed, tethered dart later adopted by the Aztecs. By all accounts the Tlascalan performed as well as Spanish regulars; in fact, during the Night of Sorrows two Indian allies died saving Cortés from capture and immediate sacrifice. Without the Tlascalans, Cortés may have failed.

At Otumba Cortés gave his force as broad a front as possible, protecting each flank with his 20 remaining horses, grouped into bands of five. It is likely that he arrayed his Spanish infantry in a similar manner, interspersing them with allies. The cavalry was given the order to charge and return rapidly, aiming their lances at the faces of the enemy. The Spanish foot soldiers were to thrust their swords into the enemy bellies and not waste precious time and energy in hacking contests. Moreover, Cortés urged his men to single out the chiefs for they were the key to cohesion in an otherwise unwieldy Aztec horde. Each chief was the brain and rallying point for this body of retainers and levies. When a chief was killed his followers usually fled; something Cortés and his veteran Indian fighters had learned in numerous lesser battles and skirmishes.

Cortés addressed a few words of encouragement to his men, reminding them of their past victories which proved European science and dis-

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ABOVE: Hernando Cortés at the Battle of Otumba on July 14, 1520. Defeating the Aztec Emperor Cuitláhuac here allowed the Spanish to reach their Indigenous allies at Tlaxcala, where they could prepare for a counterattack on the Aztec capital. The English title of this 1887 painting by Spanish artist Manuel Ramírez Ibáñez (1856-1925) is *From the conquest of Mexico (Otumba)*. OPPOSITE: Painted in the 17th century, *The Conquest of Tenochtitlàn*, is the seventh of eight canvases in the series "The Conquest of Mexico" depicting the pivotal events in the Spanish conquest of the Aztecs. On August 13, 1521, Hernando Cortés captured Cuauhtémoc, the last Aztec emperor and the capital city of Tenochtitlán with the help of the Indigenous Confederacy of Tlaxcala.

cipline superior to the incongruous pagan horde, then the Spanish and their allies marched toward the Aztec swarm with the cavalry riding ahead through a hail of missile fire in an attempt to break the Aztec's ranks. So few horsemen against so many Indian warriors may seem futile or suicidal, but the European war horse was at least twice as large an anything an Aztec had ever seen and they had not had time to develop an effective defensive tactic—it had taken Europeans centuries to do so and to soldiers of the time a charging horse was still a terror to avoid. Seon-Portilla IX, an Aztec chronicler, gives a vivid description of charging Spanish horsemen:

"The 'stags' came forward, carrying the soldiers on their backs. The soldiers were wearing cotton armour. They bore their leather shields and their iron spears in their hands, but their swords hung down from the necks of the 'stags.'

"These animals wear little bells, they are adorned with many little bells. When the 'stags' gallop, the bells make a loud clamor, ringing and reverberating.

"These 'stags,' the 'horses,' snort and bellow … They make a loud noise when they run; they make a great din, as if stones were raining on the earth. Then the ground is pitted and scarred where they set down their hooves. It opens wherever their hooves touch it."

The Aztecs fell back before the cavalry and the rest of Cortés's army moved forward, but the 20 horsemen could not be everywhere at once. In Cortés's attempts to inspire and lead his men by example, his horse received so many wounds that he had to dismount and climb on a lanky baggage animal. The foot soldier Bernal Diaz wrote, "We saw them beginning to surround us," as the small army was swallowed up by the massive Aztec horde. Diaz continues with his firsthand account: "It was a destructive battle, and a fearful sight to behold. We moved through the midst of them at the closest quarters, slashing and thrusting at them with our swords. And the dogs fought back furiously, dealing us wounds and death with their lances and their two-handed swords. And, the field being level, our horsemen speared them at their pleasure, charging and retiring and charging again. Although both they and their horses were wounded, they never stopped fighting. As for the rest of us who had no horses, we all seemed to be given double strength. For although we were wounded and now received fresh wounds, we did not stop to bind them up, for there was no time.…"

The Spaniards had cleaved their way into the Aztec army but in the process became surrounded by Aztec flanking moves and the sheer force of numbers. In spite of the numbers in their favor, only a fraction of the Aztec army could have been engaged at any one time simply because the army was so large. Thus the Spanish and allies were never fighting at odds greater than two or three to one, and within these parameters the Spanish had the advantage of movement that comes with the discipline of professionals against militia-type troops. The press of Aztec warriors in the rear upon those in front would have made their fighting more difficult since the macana was a "two-handed-sword," and the press from the rear increased the effect of every Spanish blow. Each time an Aztec leader fell his men lost heart, thereby fighting with less zeal, less determination and far less faith in his cause.

And the Spanish had one very significant advantage, one ally without whom they would have almost certainly become one more band of adventurers that perished in the search for El Dorado: The smallpox virus.

Cortés was fortuitously enforced in 1520 by the largest armada set to sail in the New World. This fleet was sent by the governor of Cuba to bring back the renegade Cortés and his ragtag army but the arriving army was infiltrated, overrun and defeated in a night attack by Cortés, who persuaded nearly all of the newcomers to join him, swelling his army. Most of these men, however, would be killed through the vicissitudes of the campaign before the battle of Otumba. Several men among the reinforcements were carrying common European viruses, the most dangerous being smallpox, but most of the Spaniards were immune, having already survived the illness.

The native population had never even experienced the common cold before the arrival of the Spanish but after April 1520 smallpox spread in exponential proportions until it became pandemic. In part it was the smallpox epidemic that prevented the Aztecs from destroying the Spaniards after their expulsion from Tenochtitlàn. Within hours the leader of the Aztec resurgence was dead of the disease along with hundreds of others every hour, including many of the elite warriors. The burden of the battle rested on the people from the territory of Texcoco, Saltocan, Otumba and the surrounding countryside.

Contagion was little understood at the time and plagues were attributed to the will of God, or the gods, in both Europe and the New World and many of the Aztecs began to believe they had made a mistake, that they had offended the gods. The psychological effect on the Indians was undoubtedly devastating to morale; conversely the Spanish were all the more convinced that it was their Christian duty to destroy the Aztec state and eradicate their pagan culture from the face of the earth. And so as the battle raged, the Aztecs, unsure of themselves for the first time in centuries, fell back before the Spaniards, preferring to pelt them from a safe distance with missiles.

Diaz writes, "We were surrounded by shouting Mexicans who fell on us with their darts, arrows, and slings." At this point the captain Sandoval shouted, "Today gentlemen, is the day on which we are certain to win. Trust in God, and we shall come out of this alive, and to some purpose!" This greatly encouraged the common foot soldiers who could not see the progression of the battle. The soldiers relied upon expostulations of this sort from their commanders to rally men at a weak point in the line or simply to steel their courage at such desperate times as they were in at that moment, for the situation was grim.

As the Spanish and allies neared the point of hopeless exhaustion, Cortés, standing in the saddle, had spotted Matlatzincátzin holding the sacred feathered standard of the *Cihuacoatl* or captain-general of the Aztec army among the masses that surged around him. "There is our mark! Follow and support me!," he shouted to those horsemen nearest him and together they charged their weary horses into the press of fighting and pushed toward the banner of bright feathers. The horsemen charged down on the Aztec commander, who was carried in a litter, and killed his retainers who had not fled before them, but it was not Cortés who killed the Indian commander; Juan de Salamanca decided the battle by putting his lance through the Matlatzincátzin. At this point the Aztec command structure broke down as panic began to spread through the Aztec ranks with an

Continued on page 98

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The Battle of Svolder by Norwegian artist Nils Bergslien (1853–1928) depicts a small ship of Jomsvikings, a legendary order of Viking mercenaries attacking the carrying King Olaf Tryggvason of Norway around 1000 in the Baltic Sea. Legend has it that Olaf jumped into the sea rather than be captured.

Wikimedia Commons

A modern retelling of the Nordic saga of King Olaf Tryggvason that's as fast, efficient and versatile as a Viking longship.

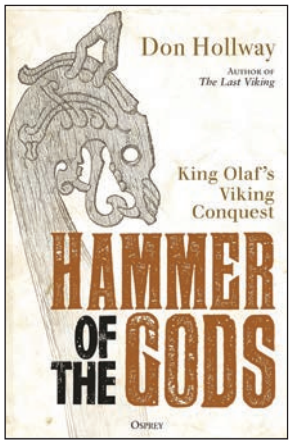
By Kevin Seabrooke

Viking literature has been popular since the 13th century and is more so than ever in the 21st, with television shows such as *Vikings*, *Vikings: Valhalla*, *The Northman* and *The Last Kingdom* (based on Bernard Cornwell's books)—as well as the Viking-adjacent *Game of Thrones* (based on George R. R. Martin's books). Throw in video games like *Assassin's Creed: Valhalla* and the Marvel movie characters Thor and Loki, and it's still only the tip of the iceberg.

Olaf Tryggvason fled southern Norway with his mother at age 3 after his chieftain father was slain, was later captured by Estonian pirates and sold into slavery, then raised by another as a son for six years. Rescued by Vladimir I, Prince of Novgorod (one of the oldest cities in Russia), Olaf was educated and trained as a soldier and a leader.

While he lived there, Vladimir's mother, Malusha, foretold: "When at last he is grown to manhood he will return to his native land and gain the kingdom which is his by birth. As king he will shine with bright glory and become a savior to many men of the northern regions."

"Loveless, godless, aimless, meaningless, living only for the moment," Hollway writes. "From 985 to 988, according to the various sagas... Olaf Tryggvason wandered the western coasts: Bretland (Wales); Kumraland (Cumbria); even Valland (Gaul)."



On the island of St. Helen, in *Enesek Syllan* (Isles of Scilly) off the southern coast of England, a hermit told Olaf, "I am here to teach you the true faith and preach the name of the Christ and that baptism will bring you, and all who join the true faith with you, salvation."

This man would go on to unite Norway as its king and, a fierce convert to the new faith of Christianity, would force it on his subjects through torture, murder, and the destruction pagan shrines.

Perhaps because it was believed the ends justified the means, the sagas of Olaf were written by religious scribes. Benedictine monks Oddr Snorrason and Gunnlaugr Leifsson both wrote Latin versions of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* (The Saga of Olaf Tryggvason) in Iceland in the 1190s. The texts were lost, but are believed to be the source of later Norse versions.

There are some mentions of Olaf in Skaldic verses (*Skald*, Old Norse for poet) which were tra-

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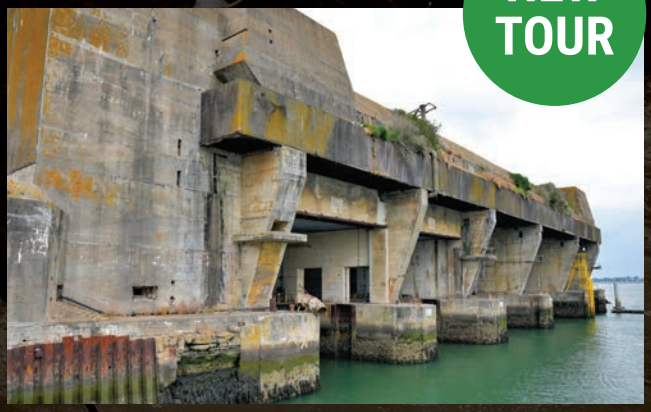

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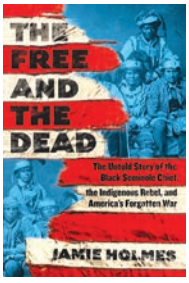
ditionally composed to honor kings, as well as other sources written long after his death.

Hollway, who is also the author of *The Last Viking: The True Story of King Harald Hardrada* (Osprey Publishing), is an entertaining guide, smoothly annotating his narrative as it plies the riverine twists of nearly two millennia of history. His straightforward prose is easy to follow as he points out where the various sources differ in their interpretation, or often, as he notes, sheer invention—after all, most of these scribes were monks who knew little of the activities about which they wrote. Where possible, he offers thoughts on sources or other legends that could have found their way into the tale over time. He juggles myth, archeology, ancient texts and history without getting bogged down. He does include an extensive *dramatis Personae*, which is vital for keeping track of all the parents and children who share some or most of their names.

Hammer of the Gods: King Olaf's Viking Conquest (Don Hollway, Osprey Publishing, New York, NY, 400 pp., glossary, maps, illustrations, May 5, 2026 $40 HC), a compendium of all the main sources pertaining to the life one of the world's most famous Vikings, is in itself a saga–and a highly readable one.

The Free and the Dead: The Untold Story of the Black Seminole Chief, the Indigenous Rebel, and America's Forgotten War (Jamie Holmes, Atria/One Signal Publishers/dist. Simon & Schuster, 384pp., Feb. 3, 2026 $30 HC)



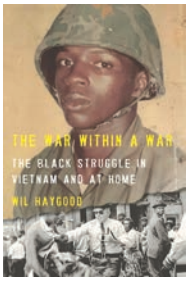
Following the end of the Revolutionary War, parts of Florida reverted to Spain, becoming a continuing source of conflict boundaries, the presence of formerly enslaved people and Native Americans from the region attacking the United States.The U.S. took possession of Florida in 1821 and President Andrew Jackson signed the Indian Removal Act of 1830—lumping all Indigenous peoples in the territory collectively as "Indians," and all of those as "Seminoles,"the majority of which were Muscogees, known at the time as "Creeks," and "Black Seminoles," their African American allies—directing the removal of them all to "Indian Territory" in modern Oklahoma. Though many were removed, the Seminoles resisted under the leadership of Osceola and a former enslaved man named Abraham, for nearly seven years in the Second Seminole War (1835-42), the longest and most costly war fought by the U.S. Government against Native Americans.

American MiG Pilot: Inside the Top Secret USAF "Red Eagles" MiG Squadron (Rob Zettel, Osprey Publishing, New York, NY, 368 pp., 16-page color section, February 10, 2026 $30 HC)

Retired Air Force Lieutenant Colonel Rob Zettel, veteran who flew MiG-21 and MiG-23 fighters in the mid-1980s, shares an inside view of the U.S. air-combat training program known as "Constant Peg." Following the less-than-expected performance of U.S. air combat forces against the MiG-21 in Vietnam, this top-secret program was launched in the 1970s following to improve fighter pilot training. Flown by the best-of-the-best from the Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps, the Red Eagles MiG Squadron—flew secretly obtained Soviet MiG-21s and MiG-23s in the remote Nevada desert to train a new generation of pilots. The success of U.S. air power in operations such as Desert Storm in the Gulf War were a direct result of this secret program.

The War Within a War: The Black Struggle in Vietnam and at Home (Wil Haygood, Knopf, New York, NY, 384 pp., Feb. 10, 2026 $35 HC)

Haygood's vivid, engaging prose brings to life the



experiences of those he knew growing up in Columbus, Ohio, who served in Vietnam and the struggle of those who returned. He follows not just soldiers, but doctors and nurses, artists and journalists, as well as others fighting to overcome the powerful divide still existing between the races and the chaotic tide of change during the turbulent 1960s and 70s. Amid an era of echoing with the voices of Martin Luther King Jr., Marvin Gaye, and Berry Gordy, readers will meet, among others, Air Force pilot Fred Cherry, the first Black officer captured by the North Vietnamese and Dr. Elbert Nelson, who went to Vietnam after watching the Watts riots in L.A. on TV.

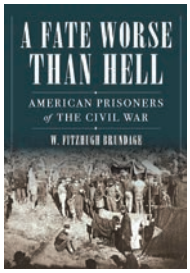
An award-winning author and journalist for the Washington Post and Boston Globe, Haygood has traveled the world, covered Nelson Mandela's release from prison in South Africa and was once kidnapped by rebels in Somalia.

Kennedy's Coup: How America Descended into Vietnam (Jack Cheevers, Simon & Schuster, New York, NY, 704 pp., Feb. 17, 2026 $35 HC)

Author of the award-winning *Act of War*—detailing the 1968 capture of the spy ship USS

Pueblo by North Korean gunboats—comes a new look at one of America's most serious foreign policy blunders. Accessing government sources newly available through the 2016 amendment of the Freedom of Information Act, Cheevers argues that the passive stance of the Kennedy administration in the months leading to up to the assassination of South Vietnam's president Diem in 1963 was the biggest factor in the U.S. invasion of Vietnam, rather than the conventional view that the Johnson administration escalated the war.

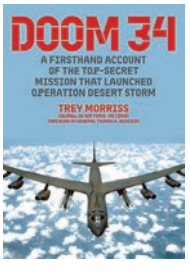
A Fate Worse than Hell: American Prisoners of the Civil War (W. Fitzhugh Brundage, W.W. Norton & Company, New York, NY, 464pp., February 24, 2026 $38.99 HC)



In January 1864, with the Union's Army of the Potomac in winter quarters about 80 miles north the Confederates decided to move many of the Union prisoners of war out of Richmond, Virginia. Construction of a military prison camp for 10,000 men in Sumter County, Georgia, was begun. In late February, some 400 POWs a day began arriving until there were 26,000 in June and 33,000 by August. Only open 14 months, nearly 13,000 POWs died from disease, poor sanitation, malnutrition, overcrowding, or exposure out of the 45,000 who passed through the camp better known as "Andersonville."

Based on first-person prisoner accounts, photographs, and contemporaneous journalism, this comprehensive work shows how Andersonville, Elmira, and Point Lookout prisons brought forth first formal laws of war in the U.S., forming the bedrock for international law.

DOOM 34: A Firsthand Account of the Top-Secret Mission that Launched Operation Desert Storm (Trey Morriss, Foreword by Thomas A. Bussiere, Lyons Press/dist. Simon & Schuster, 256pp., March 3, 2026 $29.95 HC)



Before the stealth bombers could fly from Middle America to the Middle East and back, there was the secret mission code-named "Senior Surprise"—also nicknamed "Secret Squirrel" after the Hanna-Barbera cartoon character. For this top-secret Black Ops mission, seven long-range B-52G Stratofortress aircraft well past their prime were chosen

for a 35-hour, nonstop flight to deliver cruise missile strikes on high priority Iraqi power and communication targets that initiated the bombing campaign during Operation Desert Storm.

World War II Day by Day, September 1 to September 6, 1939 (David H. Lippman, 305 pp., 2025 $4.99 Kindle e-book)

The second installment of the author's day-by-day history of World War II (e-book *World War II Plus 75—The Road to War: A Day-by-Day History*) this volume covers the six days of September 1, 1939, to September 6, 1939. Chronicling the daily events across the globe, from Poland to Britain to New Zealand and everything in between, with perspectives from the Allied leaders down to pilots, sailors and soldiers—that led to the biggest conflict the world has ever known.

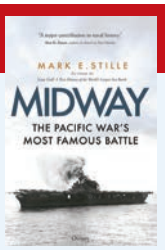
David H. Lippman is a 35-year veteran journalist with experience in newspapers, wire services, TV, radio, public relations, on three continents: North America, Asia, and Oceania. He is a frequent contributor to *World War II History* magazine.

U.S. Mercenaries and the Condor Legion: Airpower in the Spanish Civil War (Major Christopher G. Marquis, Naval Institute Press, Annapolis, MD, 336 pp., 5 Maps, 7 b/w Photos, 5 Tables / Graphs / Charts, 2025 $39.95 HC)

The Spanish Civil War served as a proving ground for airpower's importance as an independent force. Francisco Franco's Nationalist forces overthrew the Republican (Loyalist) Government supported heavily by the Condor Legion of planes and pilots sent by Nazi Germany. The Luftwaffe developed their Blitzkrieg tactics and equipment, most notably in the bombing of Guernica. The Soviet Union supplied the Republicans with Polikarpov I-15 and I-16 fighters, as well as pilots.

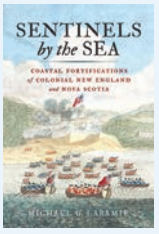
Marquis covers the war largely through the eyes of three men. Two were government observers—the U.S. and Europe chose not to intervene: Colonel Stephen Fuqua, military attaché to Republican Spain and Captain Townsend Griffiss, assistant military attaché for air. The third is former U.S. Navy pilot Frank Tinker, who flew a Russian plane for the Fuerzas Aéreas de la República Española (Air Forces of the Spanish Republic) with the "Yankee Squadron" for some $1,500 per month in addition to bonuses for shooting down planes. ■

SHORT BURSTS



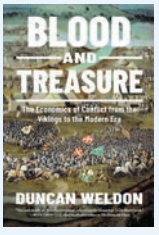
Midway: The Pacific War's Most Famous Battle (Mark Stille, Osprey Publishers, Oxford, UK, 2024, 400 pp., maps, photographs, index, Feb. 17, 2026, $22, SC) A former naval intelligence officer and recognized authority on the Pacific War, Stille's comprehensive unbiased analysis of the pivotal Pacific battle is now available in paperback.

Forgotten Souls: The Search for the Lost Tuskegee Airmen (Cheryl W. Thompson, Dafina Books (Kensington Publishing Corp)-Dist. by Penguin Random House, 240 pp., Jan. 27, 2026 $30 HC) An NPR journalist and daughter of one of the Tuskegee Airmen—Black pilots who mostly flew fighters in WWII—follows the legacy of the 27 men who never came back.

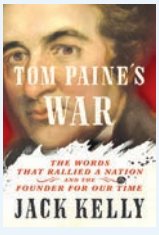


Sentinels by the Sea: Coastal Fortifications of Colonial New England and Nova Scotia (Michael G. Laramie, Westholme Publishing, Yardley, PA, 240 pp., 65 illustrations, Jan. 16, 2026 $29.95 HC) Compiled from period documents, this book examines the design, construction, and armaments of the forts and battles in the epic struggle between France and England for control of North America from 1689 to 1763.

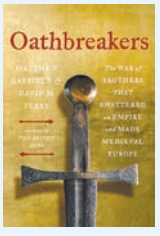
The Stamp Act and the American Revolution (Ken Shumate, Westholme Publishing, Yardley, PA, 224 pp., illustrations, Jan. 14, 2026, $29.95 HC) A thorough examination from both British and American perspectives of the first direct tax on American colonists and the catalyst for a decade of protest and resistance that lead to the American Revolution.



Blood and Treasure The Economics of Conflict from the Vikings to the Modern Era (Duncan Weldon, Pegasus Books, distributed by Simon & Schuster, 320pp., January 6, 2026 $32 HC) An economist and journalist examines the greatest single factor shaping the institutions, and therefore the economics, of human civilizations—the violence of war.



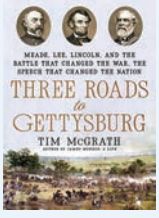
Tom Paine's War: The Words That Rallied a Nation and the Founder for Our Time (Jack Kelly, St. Martin's Press, New York, NY, 352 pp., Jan. 6, 2026 $31 HC) Written in retreat with Washington's army in December 1776, the opening line of Paine's *The American Crisis*, "These are the times that try men's souls," inspired what would become a nation.



Oathbreakers: The War of Brothers That Shattered an Empire and Made Medieval Europe (Matthew Gabriele & David M. Perry, Harper Perennial, New York, NY, 304 pp,. December 2025 $18.99 SC) A highly readable narrative of *Game of Thrones* in real life as the heirs of Charlemagne fight for his empire, by the authors of *The Bright Ages*.

George Washington's Momentous Year: Twelve Months that Transformed the Revolution—Vol. 2: Valley Forge to Monmouth, January to July 1778 (Gary Ecelbarger, Westholme Publishing, Yardley, PA, 296 pp., 34 illustrations, 2025, $34.95 HC) In weekly narrative form, with extensive maps, footnotes, and excerpts from period documents for diehard fans of Washington or the Revolutionary War.

The American Revolution (Geoffrey C. Ward and Ken Burns, Knopf, New York, NY, 608 pp., with prints, drawings, paintings, texts, pamphlets & maps, index, Nov. 11, 2025 $80 HC) From the team that produced *The Civil War*, *Baseball*, *The West*, *Jazz* and others comes the official companion book for the six-part, 12-hour PBS documentary, *The American Revolution*.



Three Roads to Gettysburg: Meade, Lee, Lincoln, and the Battle That Changed the War, the Speech That Changed the Nation (Tim McGrath, Dutton Caliber, New York, NY, 528 pp., Nov. 18, 2025 $39 HC) Fascinating narrative that follows the lives of Lincoln, Lee, and Meade, from their beginnings until their appointment with destiny at a place called Gettysburg and what it meant for the nation.

Team-based shooting takes on elite MERCS and an attempt at LOGISTICS is a swing and a miss. *By Joseph Luster*

ROGUE POINT

Genre: Shooter • **Platform:** PC • **Publisher:** Team17 • **Available:** Q1, 2026

While not directly tied to any specific historical military campaigns, *Rogue Point* recently appeared as a promising cooperative shooter that mixes in a handful of military-inspired classes for action that is heavily dependent on solid teamwork. Currently entering its Early Access phase on Steam at the time of this writing, *Rogue Point* comes from the developers at Crowbar Collective, known for previously working on the hit *Half-Life 2* mod known as *Black Mesa*. The results? Intense multiplayer mercenary action that tasks players with pulling off successful pre-game tactics and following them up with good old-fashioned first-person shooting prowess.

The setup of *Rogue Point* occurs alongside the death of the richest CEO in the world. After that, various conglomerates swoop in like vultures to divvy up the kingdom he left behind, placing orders for mercenary armies to do so through the aptly-named MERX app. Speaking of names, *Rogue Point* happens to be the distinction of the vigilante squad bold enough to fight back against this newly-emerging threat.

To do so, players will need to form an elite team, because you'll be up against a formidable selection of MERX classes. The Soldier, Berserker, Sniper, Heavy, and Five-Star Mercenary all pose their own unique challenges, from the big, bullet-spongy Heavies to the top-tier MERX that players should approach with extreme caution and exemplary tactics. Thankfully, you'll be able to work together to come up with the perfect plan to take down enemy teams across four locations: The Airport, the Mall, the Office, and the Oilrig.

From the sound of it, the team at Crowbar Collective is against shoving a bunch of microtransactions in the face of players who just want to jump in and get into the action. Instead, *Rogue Point* will let you earn money to buy weapons and

gear, or use the Dead Drop System to spin the wheel for the chance to earn some particularly rare loot. All in all, for starters at least, the game promises over 20 weapons, more than 40 tactical items and attachments, and 60-plus cosmetic items, not counting multiple skins for those and the weapons.

With 24 mission layouts across the four previously-mentioned locations, *Rogue Point* should hopefully kick off with enough variation to maintain interest throughout the journey from Early Access to full 1.0 launch. There's currently no word on how long that journey will be, but for now you can keep up with the community to see how Early Access is going before you make the commitment. ■

MILITARY LOGISTICS SIMULATOR

Genre: Shooter • **Platform:** PC • **Publisher:** Aerosoft GmbH • **Available:** Now

There are countless "[X] *Simulator*" games on Steam and other platforms, from *Goat Simulator* to *Supermarket Simulator*, *PowerWash Simulator* and beyond. The best of the bunch either aim for strict realism or go completely goofy with it while still adhering to the overall premise. With that in mind, the idea of something like *Military Logistics Simulator* sounds intriguing, but unfortunately the team at developer Nano Games hasn't quite hit the mark just yet.

The setup of *Military Logistics Simulator* is compelling, promising players the opportunity to grow from a "low-ranking soldier to a seasoned quartermaster" as they progress. To do so you'll need to successfully manage vehicles, control supply lines, and expand your base. From this to actions like assisting survivors and defending cargo against drone attacks, everything is carried out from a first-person perspective, and you can take on missions solo or with the help of friends.

Spend any time with the game, though, and you'll quickly see some of this promise slipping through the cracks. When the game launched, it did so without essential equipment like the forklift, so you already had to suspend disbelief as you controlled what amounted to a super-soldier who could lift tons of equipment with his bare hands. The devs added the forklift a couple weeks after launch and made tweaks to issues like the vehicle driving AI, but the path to a recommendable product still stretches long into the horizon.

At the time of this writing, there are still quite a few fundamental playability issues that need to be addressed before this becomes a *Simulator* game of note. Thankfully, the team appears to still be open about addressing feedback and continues to add to and shape the way the overall experience works. There's currently no demo for folks to try without investing in the full game, so it's best to keep your eye on Steam reviews and other public player feedback as the community lets their voices be heard. ■

WEAPONS

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Graves at last lowered his "line ahead" signal. This was the point where all his captains were free to steer independently at the French line and engage them in a series of ship to ship fights. But it was far too late to matter.

By now de Grasse was far out into the Atlantic with plenty of room to maneuver. What is more, his ships had suffered no crippling damage, while nearly every British ship had torn sails and fallen masts. As night fell Graves was determined to catch and stop de Grasse from reinforcing Rochambeau. The following morning, with temporary repairs made to his ships, Graves ordered Hood and Drake to resume the chase. But the wily de Grasse led the British far from the coast, using his fleet's better maneuverability to keep the lumbering British ships within view. It was cat and mouse for the next five days while de Grasse remained enticingly close. By the time the British turned back to the entrance to the bay, Commodore de Barras had entered and sent his transports north to deliver the siege artillery to Washington and Rochambeau.

When de Grasse at last took up a blocking position between capes Henry and Charles, Graves was forced to accept defeat. His weakened fleet of 18 battered ships were now facing 33 fully manned and ready men of war.

Consultations with Hood and Drake led Graves to order the fleet return to New York for repairs and reinforcements. By October 20, with 25 ships of the line, Graves headed for Chesapeake Bay to confront de Grasse again. But he learned that the French had done what they had intended. Washington and Rochambeau had bombarded General Earl Cornwallis until on October 19, the British surrendered.

While this was not the end of land fighting, the American victory was sealed at Yorktown.

As for Graves, he faced a court-martial in England, not only for losing the battle, but to explain how the line ahead tactics had failed to beat the French. He was forced to defend himself against criticism of his handling of the fleet.

But the sacred cows of the Admiralty refused to accept that the line ahead was flawed and responsible for the loss at Chesapeake Bay. They also refused to see any alternative to the old system, insisting that what had always worked in the past was still the best way to fight at sea.

It would take almost 20 years and a series of minor and major battles and the audacity of men like Admirals George Bridges Rodney, Sir John Jervis and most notably Lord Horatio Nelson to cast the useless *Fighting Instructions* into the sea forever. ■

SOLDIERS

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was nothing in his conduct which required the animadversion from this Court."

The Terry-Gibbon force relieved Reno's men on June 27, and soon the extent of the disaster to Custer's command became known. Custer was dead, yet Reno's reputation would suffer. Ex-Confederate Maj. Gen. Thomas Rosser, Custer's West Point classmate, almost immediately blamed Reno for the death of his close friend. But the most extreme criticism came from author Frederick Whittaker, whose book, *A Complete Life of General George A. Custer*, was published six months later. It cast Reno as a coward whose failure caused Custer's defeat and death. Custer's widow, Libbie, joined with Whittaker in assuring a continuing chorus of criticism of Reno. Finally, in June 1878, in an attempt to restore his reputation, Reno requested the court of inquiry. Despite the verdict in his favor the next year, he remained under a cloud.

By 1878, he had already been court-martialed on unrelated charges that likely would never have been brought against a man who was better liked or respected by his peers. In mid-December 1876, Reno, while commanding Fort Abercrombie, D.T., had become infatuated with the wife of Capt. James Bell. During her husband's absence, some personal contact occurred between them, which Reno explained away as innocent. But the Bells pursued charges of conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman. Despite the ludicrous nature of the charges, the court nonetheless convicted Reno and sentenced him to be discharged from the Army. While no mention of the Little Bighorn occurred, all the reviewing authorities in the chain of command sustained his conviction. Finally, President Rutherford B. Hayes commuted Reno's sentence to suspension from rank and duty for two years. Later, a group of captains and lieutenants, including several who had fought at the Little Bighorn, sought to bring further charges against Reno arising out of incidents in September 1876 at Fort Lincoln's officers' club, but their superiors, suspicious of their motives, declined to bring Reno to trial.

After two years as a private citizen, Reno returned to duty in mid-May 1879 at Fort Meade in present-day South Dakota where the 7th Cavalry had been transferred. For a few months, things went well, until the family of Col. Samuel D. Sturgis arrived in July. Reno found himself infatuated with Ella Sturgis, the colonel's 21-year-old daughter. Also, during several social functions, Reno evidently had too much to drink. On one occasion, a brawl involving Reno and other officers took place at the officers' club, but Sturgis, whose son, Lt. James Sturgis, had died at the Little Bighorn, charged only Reno with conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman. Unfortunately, Reno may not have taken these charges seriously enough. One evening, he foolishly approached the Sturgis house and peeked through the window at Ella, scaring the young woman. Her father immediately leveled an additional charge against his second-in-command. In late November, Reno was convicted, although once again the charges against him seemed barely supported by the testimony. For a second time, he was sentenced to be dismissed from the service, but on this occasion not even the president intervened to save him from his fate. On April 1, 1880, after 29 years in the service of his country, Reno ceased to be an Army officer.

Reno lived another nine years and spent that entire period seeking to be reinstated, but none of his political and military efforts succeeded. On March 30, 1889, he died of cancer in Washington, D.C., and was buried in an unmarked grave. History has been less kind to him, as even today, many students of the Little Bighorn blame Reno for Custer's loss. Still, in the 1960s, Reno regained at least a measure of respect. On May 5, 1967, an Army Board for Correction of Military Records agreed with a petition from his descendants, supported by a number of students of the battle, to overturn his conviction. In its report, the board said the battle was "an event which apparently led to widespread belief that through incompetence or cowardice, he may have been responsible for the loss of Colonel Custer and five companies of the 7th Cavalry Regiment; that this belief created intense hostility toward him which resulted in strained relationships and a defensive attitude, on his part, toward officers and others within the command, which ultimately led to his excessive use of alcohol and abnormal behavior."

The board noted that the favorable decision by the Reno Court of Inquiry "made him a very controversial and unpopular figure; that this experience had a traumatic effect on his personality and conduct; and the resulting stigma led to a rapid decline in his prior exemplary conduct and ultimately resulted in his dismissal from the service."

The board decided his dismissal from the service was too severe a penalty. Instead, he should have been allowed to resign. Most important, the board recommended that Reno's records be upgraded to show he was honorably discharged. On Sept. 9, 1967, Reno received a hero's burial when his remains were reinterred in the Custer Battlefield National Cemetery. His grave is in the center of the cemetery by the flagpole, only a few hundred yards from Last Stand Hill where George Custer and some 45 troopers of the 7th U.S. Cavalry fell. ■

VALOR

Continued from page 15

on both sides.

With the war going badly for the Crown, Gen. Sir Henry Clinton issued the Philipsburg Proclamation on June 30, 1779, which unlike Dunmore's did not require military service. It applied to all colonies and also promised freedom for women and children who could reach British lines. Wildly successful, it hampered the economy of the southern colonies, with some 5,000 refugees just from Georgia making it to freedom. Unfortunately for some, they were forced back into bondage as a condition of Cornwallis' surrender at Yorktown in October 1781.

Clinton himself would form an all-Black Loyalist unit overseen by white officers called the "Black Pioneers." Not initially armed, they performed non-combatant labor under dangerous conditions.

The 1783 Treaty of Paris called for all former enslaved people to be returned to bondage, but British commanders refused, relocating about 3,000 of them to Nova Scotia. In 1792, some 1,200 of these Black Loyalists would join the British-led migration to found the colony of Freetown in Sierra Leone.

The service of Black soldiers in the Patriot cause laid the foundation for future debates over citizenship and rights in the new nation. Veterans could point to their sacrifices as evidence that they deserved the liberties promised by the Revolution. While some Black soldiers were likely denied pensions, land, or equal treatment after the war, their service influenced gradual emancipation efforts in northern states.

Importantly, Black soldiers were not a monolithic group. Their motivations varied widely depending on whether they were free or enslaved, their geographic location, and their personal circumstances. Some fought to defend their communities, others to secure freedom, and still others to claim a place within the emerging American nation. The contribution of Black soldiers to the Patriot cause challenged the notions of race and citizenship, exposing the moral contradictions of a revolution founded on liberty yet constrained by slavery.

Despite this, their contributions go largely unrecognized in the public consciousness. It was not until 1986 that President Ronal Reagan signed the Black Revolutionary War Patriots Act, authorizing a memorial on the National Mall. Disputes over the design and fundraising efforts delayed the effort and the memorial's foundation was dissolved in 2005. Multiple efforts to establish a National Liberty Memorial were finally passed and signed by President Obama in 2014, but this foundation's approval expired in 2021. In 2023, Congress granted an extension to 2027. ■

CHICKAMAUGA

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of events, the battle was over for the men of the Lightning Brigade. For his part, Atkins was disgusted by the politician's interference. "Wilder was daring and desperate," he would later write, "Dana, a coward and an imbecile."

To the north, desperate fighting continued. With the army's center in shambles, Thomas scrambled to rally every available unit, and succeeded in patching together a hodge-podge of regiments and brigades atop the commanding high ground of Snodgrass Hill and Horseshoe Ridge. Repeated Confederate assaults wore both sides to a frazzle, but Thomas' stubborn stand bought precious time for the Army of the Cumberland to escape the Confederate juggernaut. By 5 p.m., Thomas' ragged troops began executing an orderly withdrawal back toward Chattanooga.

All in all, the two days' fighting had been a near-disaster. Although Rosecrans narrowly succeeded in extricating his army from Bragg's trap, the bloody battle delayed the Federal push into the deep south and resulted in a two-month-long siege of Union forces in Chattanooga.

The horrific struggle at Chickamauga likewise constituted the bloodiest battle of the Civil War's western theater. Both armies had been decimated by the fighting. Rosecrans lost 1,600 men killed, with another 14,500 wounded, captured, and missing. Bragg lost 2,300 men killed, 16,100 wounded, captured, and missing.

Equipped with state-of-the-art firepower, Wilder's men had inflicted far more punishment than they had received. Henry Campbell of Lilly's Battery recalled being sickened by the carnage that he witnessed at the Viniard farm. The ditch in which the Rebels sought shelter, he wrote, was full of "killed and wounded." Some of the Rebels "were shot all over, some with their legs shot off, and some shot in the face, some shot in the head…the Rebs lost a great many more men than we lost for we mowed them down like mowing grass."

In three days of hard fighting, Wilder's Lightning Brigade had demonstrated the immense tactical advantage of repeating rifles. At Alexander's Bridge, West Viniard Field, and Glenn Hill, Wilder's troopers had repeatedly bested superior numbers and staved off disaster. Although the single shot rifle musket would remain the standard small arm of the Civil War, an increasing number of Federal units would be armed with repeaters.

Major James Connolly expressed the men's admiration for the rifle that brought them through the crucible of combat at Chickamauga. "We think our Spencers saved us," he wrote, "and our men adore them as the heathen do their idols." ■

CORTÉS

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inexplicable rapidity and the army was routed. As the Aztecs panicked, many lost their weapons, or turned their backs to the enemy while attempting to flee, and the chaos allowed the Spanish and Tlascalans to take full advantage of the situation. The way the Spaniards exploited a rout is graphically recorded by an Aztec chronicle:

"They attacked all the routed, stabbing them, spearing them, sticking them with their swords. They attacked some of them from behind, and these fell instantly to the ground with their entrails hanging out. Others they beheaded: they cut off their heads, or split their heads to pieces.

"They struck others in the shoulders, and their arms were torn from their bodies. They wounded some in the thigh and some in the calf. They slashed others in the abdomen and their entrails all spilled to the ground. Some attempted to run away, but their intestines dragged as they ran; they seemed to tangle their feet in their own entrails. No matter how they tried to save themselves, they could find no escape."

Nor were the allies to be discounted, for Diaz writes that "the Tlascalans became like very lions. With their swords, their two-handed blades, and other weapons which they had just captured, they fought valiantly and well."

It was one of the most decisive battles ever fought in the New World; the sources record 20,000 Aztecs killed. To the participants it "was only by God's Grace" that they were victorious. The number of chiefs and nobles killed was extremely high and a great deal of booty fell to the Spanish in gold ornaments and armor, rare plumes, shields and other items of value, perhaps offsetting the great wealth that had been lost while fleeing Tenochtitlàn on the Night of Sorrows.

In spite of Spanish bravery and prowess it was only by luck that Cortés saw the Aztec commander, for without Matlatzincátzin's death the battle would have been an Aztec victory with Cortés's army annihilated. Certainly the Aztec Empire would have been decimated by smallpox and other Old World diseases but they may have adapted to the new situation.

Instead, after three weeks of recuperation, Cortés returned to a Tenochtitlàn still racked by a smallpox epidemic, after lesser ordeals of reconsolidation and a campaign to pacify any cities that might support Tenochtitlàn in the projected siege. When Cortés returned he was reinforced with more wayward Spaniards as well as Tlascalan and other Indian allies in spite of the fact that smallpox had become pandemic. The rest is history—but not for the field of Otumba it would have been a different history. ■

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