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MILITARY HERITAGE

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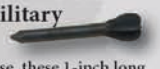

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$95.00 HLM052

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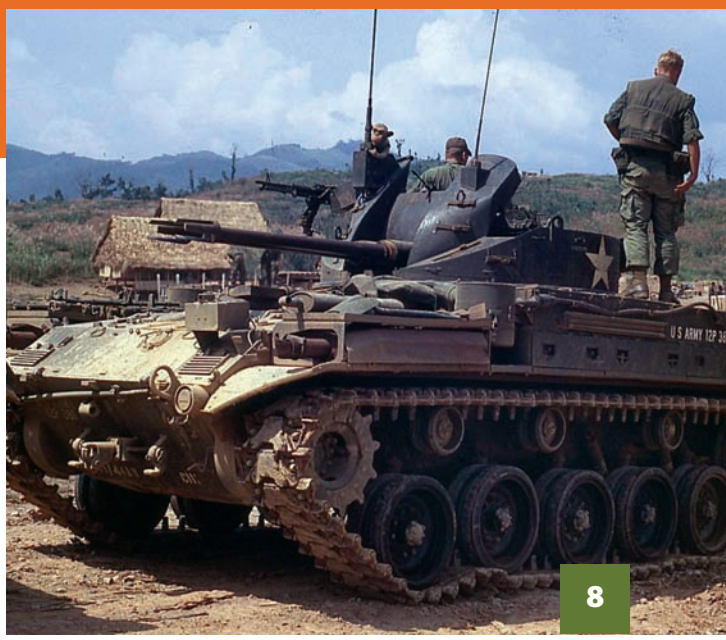
Summer 2020



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Cover: Jacques-Louis David's famous painting depicts young Napoleon Bonaparte's bold and masterful crossing of the Alps. The painting was intended to commemorate Napoleon's second foray into Italy in 1800. See story page 36. Image: Alamy

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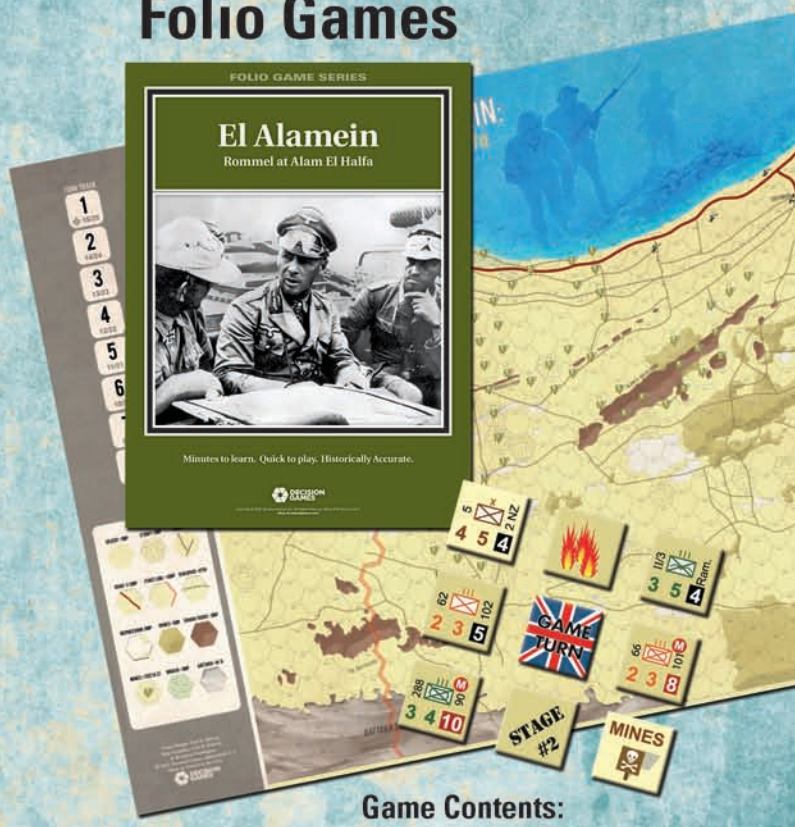

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EDITORIAL

THE TAYLOR-SMITH FEUD DERAILED THE RED RIVER CAMPAIGN

The feud between Confederate generals Richard Taylor and Kirby Smith remains one of the most contentious examples of in-fighting in the Confederate high command during the American Civil War.

As commander of the Trans-Mississippi Department, General Smith was Maj. Gen. Richard Taylor's commanding officer during the Red River Campaign of early 1864. Maj. Gen. Nathaniel Banks began advancing up the Red River with the support of Union gunboats in March 1864. His 30,000-strong Army of the Gulf posed a major threat to the Confederates in the department.

After leading the Louisiana brigade in the famous Valley Campaign of 1862, the only son of President Zachary Taylor was re-assigned to command the District of West Louisiana. As Banks' army grew in size, Taylor withdrew up the Red River Valley to avoid being overwhelmed by an army three times the size of his force.

One of the first instances of Smith's interference in Taylor's efforts to defeat Banks occurred when Smith ordered him to make a demonstration against Union forces on the west bank of the Mississippi opposite Vicksburg in an effort to relieve pressure on the besieged Confederate garrison at Vicksburg. "Remonstrances were of no avail," wrote Taylor. Taylor's assaults at Milliken's Bend and Young's point in early June 1863 changed nothing. Returning to southern Louisiana, Taylor dispatched forces that raided Bank's supply base at Brashear City on the Atchafalaya River in late June, netting $2 million in supplies. This gave the otherwise destitute Confederates in western Louisiana a wealth of supplies.

Taylor grew bitter over Smith's interventions in Taylor's attempts to crush Banks. With his 9,000 Louisianans and Texans, Taylor defeated Banks at the Battles of Mansfield and Pleasant Hill fought on April 8-9, 1864. In the aftermath, Banks lost the confidence of his subordinates, and fell back on Alexandria, Louisiana. These victories might not have been won if Taylor had followed Smith's cautious instructions. Indeed, Smith had instructed Taylor to delay his attack on Banks at Mansfield, but Taylor went ahead with the attack.

The great rift between the two commanders occurred when Smith detached Maj. Gen. John George Walker's Texas division from Taylor's command after Pleasant Hill. A heated face-to-face argument ensued between the two men over the matter, but Smith prevailed as the commanding officer. This cut in half the number of troops Taylor had with which to defeat Banks, thereby making it near impossible to achieve a major victory. Smith subsequently ordered Walker to southern Arkansas where Smith was attempting to halt a Union column from striking out from Little Rock for Shreveport, Louisiana.

Taylor submitted his resignation from the service on May 13. To his credit, Taylor and his subordinates had saved western Louisiana and Texas from Union conquest and occupation.

The feud put Confederate President Jefferson Davis in a bind. Smith was his personal friend, and Taylor was the brother of the president's first wife. Davis subsequently ordered Taylor to take command of the Department of Alabama, Mississippi, and East Louisiana.

Smith had used Walker's Texas Division to achieve parity with Union forces at the Battle of Jenkins' Ferry on April 30, 1864. The Confederates suffered heavy losses in the battle for little gain. Smith would never concede he had made a mistake, but neither did he begrudge Taylor for his strong opinions on the matter. As for Taylor, he never forgave Smith for derailing his campaign against Banks.

–William E. Welsh

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THE M42 DUSTER'S HEAVY FIREPOWER MADE IT A KEY COMBAT VEHICLE FOR A WIDE VARIETY OF GROUND SUPPORT MISSIONS DURING THE VIETNAM WAR.

By John E. Spindler

All photos: National Archives

U.S. Army First Lieutenant Bruce Geiger participated in the protracted siege of Khe Sanh during the Vietnam War. For 77 days, the United States 26th Marine Regiment withstood the assault of three North Vietnamese Army divisions. During the famous siege, Geiger commanded A Battery from the 1st Battalion, 44th Artillery (1/44th), a U.S. Army air defense artillery battalion attached to the 3rd Marine Division, the parent unit of the 26th Marine Regiment.

A pair of M42A1 Dusters proved to be valuable components in the defense of the combat base's airstrip. Positioned at either end of the airstrip with a company of entrenched Marines between them, the Dusters were greatly admired for the heavy firepower furnished by their twin-mounted 40mm Bofors guns. Geiger's battery was augmented by four truck-mounted .50-calibre machine guns known as Quad-50s.

At the beginning of the siege on January 21, 1968, Geiger confidently told his commanding officer, Marine Corps Colonel David Lownds, that his Dusters and Quad-50s possessed sufficient firepower to repulse a North Vietnamese assault on the northern sector of the combat base should they attempt a human-wave attack. He based this not only on the confidence he had in his equipment, but also on the skill of the crews operating the weapons. Although severely tested over the course of the long siege, Geiger and his crews held their ground and helped to stop several attacks. With a firing rate of 240 rounds per

A U.S. Marine Corps M42A1 Duster moves past the blackened hull of an amphibious armored fighting vehicle at Firebase Gio Linh near the DMZ in South Vietnam following a North Vietnamese attack in May 1967. LEFT: M42A1 "Iron Maiden" outfitted for combat in Vietnam. Communist troops called them "Fire Dragons."

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minute, the M42A1s shredded North Vietnamese infantry assaulting the combat base, situated in the northwestern corner of the I Corps Tactical Zone defended by the U.S. Marines.

The M42A1 performed a variety of tasks for American forces in Vietnam. At Khe Sanh, the Marine commanders relied on their firepower for so-called harassment-and-interdiction missions. The Dusters to which Geiger was assigned went into action in March 1968, after the crews spotted the pith helmets of North Vietnamese infantry probing the combat base's perimeter. One Duster fired upwards of 100 rounds at the targets. In so doing, the crew annihilated everything within a 100-meter radius. The engagement was over in one minute.

Dusters also played a crucial role in Operation Pegasus, tasked with re-opening the road from the coast to Khe Sanh in April 1968. Spearheading the relief column of the First Air Cavalry Division was a pair of 1/44th Dusters that belonged to C Battery. SP4 Joseph Belardo, one of Geiger's friends, served on the crew of one of those Dusters. The two M42A1s remained at Khe Sanh until the Marine Corps eventually abandoned the combat base in February 1969.

From November 1966 to the end of December 1971, the M42A1 Duster served with three air defense artillery battalions in South Vietnam. Originally sent to South Vietnam to counter potential low-altitude attacks by the North Vietnamese Air Force, it was soon being used in various ground-support operations, such as defending combat bases or leading rescue missions. The Viet Cong both feared and respected the vehicle, giving it the nickname "Fire Dragon." But the Americans called the M42A1 the Duster. Some say the name arose due to the amount of debris it kicked up when firing, while others remark that the name was derived from the intensity and effectiveness of its firepower while employed in ground-support missions.

The origins of the M42 lie in the Korean War. During that conflict, the U.S. Army put the M19 Multiple Gun Motor Carriage, which was equipped with Quad 50s, to use against North Korean ground forces. In the midst of the War, a decision was made to phase out all vehicles that were built upon the M24 Chaffee chassis. The M41 Walker Bulldog, an American light tank and replacement for the M24 Chaffee, would be the basis for newer designs. As the twin Bofors 40mm arrangement was still an effective weapon, the decision was made to place the M19 turret atop the M41. After modification to allow the turret to fit the M41's larger turret ring, the vehicle went into production.

Entering production in early 1952, the new vehicle was designated the M42. It sported the twin 40mm Bofors guns with which its predecessor was armed. Each cannon fired at 120 rounds per minute. The Duster had a maximum range of three miles in anti-aircraft use, but when used in a ground-support capacity, the range stretched out to over five miles. Accuracy at these extreme ranges was not the best. To defend against enemy aircraft, the guns could elevate up to 87 degrees; against ground targets, it could depress down to -3 degrees and be moved either hydraulically or manually in an emergency.

The vehicle carried a pair of spare barrels in the turret. The barrels had an average life of 12,000 rounds. Unfortunately for the personnel manning the Bofors, the top of its turret was an open box, so both gunners and cannoneers wore flak jackets as additional protection. The turret could traverse 360 degrees in 40 seconds. Like the guns, the turret's movement was powered hydraulically, but it could be operated manually in case of a hydraulic failure.

Designed to hold 480 rounds of ammunition, the vehicles were crammed with ammunition cases in every conceivable and available space. Fired from four-round clips, high explosive tracers and armor-piercing tracers were the two types of ammunition commonly employed. An M60 machine gun served as a secondary weapon. The rest of the M42 crew was well protected in a welded steel hull. The thickness of the hull ranged from one inch on its lower portions to one-half inch on the upper section.

Powered by a 500-hp, six-cylinder, air-cooled gasoline engine, the M42 had a top road speed of 45 miles per hour. With a fuel capacity of 140 gallons, the vehicle possessed a maximum operational range of 99 miles. The M42A1 had a combat weight of 49,500 pounds. A ground clearance of approximately 17 inches helped reduce the effects of mine detonations. Like other armored fighting vehicles, its interior was divided into three compartments. With the engine, transmission and fuel tanks in the rear compartment, the base for the twin gun mount and stowage comprised the M42's center compartment. The front compartment held the driving controls, instrumentation, and radio. The driver was situated to the left of the commander. In theory, the commander also was the radio operator, but if the commander was preoccupied directing fire

from the turret, then the driver could also call in air and artillery strikes. Alongside him was the gunner, as well as one or two cannoneers, who fed ammunition into the Bofors.

The M42 entered service with the U.S. Army in late 1953. A new 500-hp Lycoming engine, as well as a few other key upgrades, resulted in its re-designation as the M42A1. The General Motors Tank Plant in Cleveland produced the M42A1 from 1952 to 1959. During that time, the plant produced 3,700 M42s and M42A1s.

After the next-generation, self-propelled version of the MIM-23 Hawk surface-to-air missile went into service in 1960, the M42A1 was transferred to National Guard and Reserve units.

By 1963, the Duster was removed from active duty. But when U.S. military forces in South Vietnam found the Hawk to be inadequate for defending against low-level air strikes, they pressed the M42A1s back into service.

Three air defense artillery battalions soon deployed to South Vietnam. The units began arriving on November 7, 1966, with the deployment of 1st Battalion, 44th Artillery. As part of the First Field Force Vietnam, the battalion was assigned to support the 3rd U.S. Marine Division. This unit, in which both Geiger and Belardo served, was based out of Dong Ha in Quang Tri Province. The battalion was tasked with helping keep open Route 9, which connected Marine outposts on the coastal plain directly south of the DMZ, such as Cam Lo and Camp Carroll, with Khe Sanh in the mountains to the west.

The 5th Battalion, 2nd Artillery (5/2nd) also arrived in November 1966. The unit was based around Bien Hoa Air Base, which was located north of Saigon. Under III Corps Tactical Zone in the Second Field Force, some of its units also served the southern Saigon region. Among the locations it saw action was Lai Khe Combat Base, on Highway 13 north of Saigon, in 1969.

The third air defense artillery battalion equipped with Dusters to serve in South Vietnam was 4th Battalion, 60th Artillery (4/60th). The unit arrived in country on March 11, 1967. Also deployed with the First Field Force, the 4/60th operated in the Central Highlands. From its arrival in 1967 until late 1970, the battalion was based in An Khe in the II Corps Tactical Zone. In late 1970, the unit was transferred to Tuy Hoa, where it remained until its departure on December 21, 1971.

Augmenting each battalion was a battery of Quad-50s, as well as a searchlight battery. The Dusters and Quad-50s complemented each other quite well: The thick vegetation along the roads in South Vietnam tended to detonate the 40mm rounds prematurely, while the Quad-50s could fire through the obstructions. In so doing, they cleared a path through the brush and elephant grass for the Dusters to be effective. One of the limitations of the Dusters was that its main guns could not shoot at targets closer than 88 feet; the Quad-50s also compensated for that limitation.

ABOVE: Marine commanders relied on the M42A1's firepower for harassment-and-interdiction missions. This M42A1 defends a section of the vital Route 9 corridor from Dong Ha to Khe Sanh in 1968. OPPOSITE: A soldier takes aim through an M42A1 Duster gun sight at Fort Bliss, Texas in 1982. After more than three decades in service, the U.S. Army retired the venerable self-propelled anti-aircraft gun in 1988.

Each air defense artillery battalion had four line batteries and a headquarters battery. At full strength, each of the line batteries had 64 Dusters. Approximately 200 Dusters were available to American ground forces during the conflict.

Since the threat of ground strikes from North Vietnamese aircraft was virtually non-existent, the M42A1 battalions were placed in the role of ground support. Although Duster crews would never refer to themselves as tankers due to the open turret, circumstances dictated that these vehicles often be deployed as if they were heavy armor. In I Corps, Dusters routinely escorted Marine convoys along routes 1 and 9, and also furnished badly needed perimeter security for Marine combat bases. Typically operating in pairs, M42A1s also participated in search-and-destroy and rescue missions.

A week before the Tet Offensive, SP4 Belardo fought and was wounded in a vicious battle during the rescue of an ambushed convoy on January 24, 1968. With a second M42A1, a pair of M48 Patton tanks and a squad of Marines, the force left Dong Ha and was ambushed by the North Vietnamese. The enemy destroyed a Duster and a Patton. Belardo's Duster and the remaining Patton fought for most of the day, knocking out several enemy rocket teams. During the intense battle, Belardo used his vehicle's M60 to good effect against attacking NVA.

Running low on ammunition, Belardo drove to meet a stranded ammunition truck and then returned to defend the ambushed Marines. The Duster swept the brush to eliminate any lurking enemy troops. Although the vehicle's Bofors had recently been replaced, the barrels had not been degreased; after several hours of firing, the 40mm clips began to jam. To fix the jam, Belardo had to painstakingly remove the jammed rounds. Unfortunately, a pair of rounds exploded in the red-hot barrels, injuring Belardo a second time. Another rescue mission was launched to rescue the besieged troops. By the time it was all over, 11 M42A1s, five Quad-50s, and 152 troops had been involved. They had expended 20,000 40mm shells and 28,000 .50-caliber rounds in an action that cost them 17 killed and 55 wounded. By the end of their tours in South Vietnam, the three battalions employing M42A1s had lost several vehicles and suffered approximately 200 men killed in action.

Developed in the early 1950s as an upgrade to an existing weapon, the M42A1 had a long career, finally retiring in 1988. Whereas it started out as a self-propelled anti-aircraft vehicle, circumstances in the Vietnam War altered its primary purpose to ground support. To the American troops, especially the Marines, the Duster was a much-welcome ally and weapon. To those on the receiving end of its lethal and accurate firepower, it was a Fire Dragon to be feared and respected. ■

UNIFORM HITLER JUGEND SS PANZERGRENADIER

By Johnny Shumate

The paramilitary wing of the Nazi Party known as the Sturmabteilung established the Hitler Jugend in 1926 for the purpose of indoctrinating German youth into Nazi ideology. In March 1942 the Nazis established military training camps expressly for the older members of the Hitler Jugend. The following year the Wehrmacht and the Waffen SS began taking boys who were 16 to 18 for frontline military duty. These troops were led by young veteran NCOs from the Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler panzer division.

The 10,000-strong Hitler Jugend division was officially established on June 24, 1943. The division was attached to the 1st SS Panzer Corps and sent to Normandy under the command of SS-Brigadefuhrer Fritz Witt.

The Hitler Jugend division was ground to a pulp in Normandy. In its first month of fighting, the division lost 60 percent of its strength. Some remnants escaped from the Falaise Gap. In November 1944, the reconstituted division was refitted in Bremen, Germany, for the Wacht an Rein offensive in the Ardennes. Lastly, the division participated in the unsuccessful German attempt in March 1945 to retake the Hungarian oilfields from the Red Army. The division crossed the demarcation line and surrendered to the Americans in May 1945. ■

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VALOR

EUGENE A. CARR'S AUDACIOUS SPOILING ATTACK AGAINST STERLING PRICE'S CONFEDERATE DIVISION AT PEA RIDGE EARNED HIM A CONGRESSIONAL MEDAL OF HONOR.

By William E. Welsh

All images: Library of Congress

Union artillery shells burst in the trees at the north end of Cross Timber Hollow as Confederates in gray and butternut-colored uniforms creeped through the tangled underbrush on both sides of Telegraph Road. Shell and case shot from the Union guns ripped through the leafless trees, showering the Rebels with heavy branches and razor-sharp splinters. The Iowan gunners maintained a brisk rate of fire from a section of 6-pounders that Colonel Eugene A. Carr had placed near the southern exit of the hollow to sweep the road.

The well-served Union guns forced Maj. Gen. Sterling "Old Pap" Price's infantrymen to scuffle along the steep sides of the gorge, where they slipped on loose rock and patches of snow and ice. The isolated fight near Elkhorn Tavern on the east side of Pea Ridge in northeastern Arkansas was well underway by late morning on March 7, 1862.

Maj. Gen. Earl Van Dorn, who commanded the Trans-Mississippi District, had rallied the Rebels who had withdrawn from Missouri into northeastern Arkansas in winter 1861-1862, owing to a lack of popular support in the state. Arriving in Little Rock, Arkansas, in late January to take his new command, Van Dorn combined Brig. Gen. Ben McCulloch's division of Deep South soldiers and Price's Missouri troops to form the Army of the West, numbering 16,000 men.

Maj. Gen. Earl Van Dorn united the Confederate armies of Generals Sterling Price and Ben McCulloch for a counterattack against the Union army invading northwestern Arkansas. A chaotic two-day battle ensued at Pea Ridge. LEFT: Maj. Gen. Eugene A. Carr in the final months of the war.

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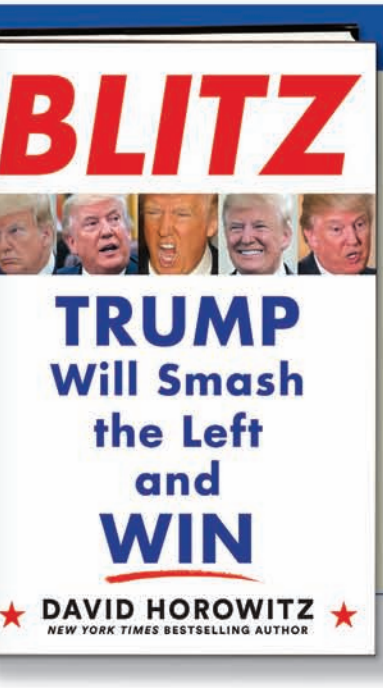

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Van Dorn led the Army of the West north from the Boston Mountains on a grueling, 55-mile forced march conducted in a late winter snowstorm. He planned to whip Brig. Gen. Samuel R. Curtis's Army of the Southwest and retake Missouri. The Rebels, who consumed the last of their rations on the march, hoped to soon be dining on captured Union provisions.

Having been forewarned that the Confederates were headed his way in force, Curtis entrenched his 10,500 men on the bluffs on the north bank of Little Sugar Creek to await the Rebel onslaught. To their rear was Pea Ridge, a two-mile-long elevation with granite outcroppings. Situated perpendicular to the ridge on its east side was Cross Timber Hollow. Telegraph Road traversed the heavily wooded hollow. The southern terminus of the telegraph wire was a two-story inn known as Elkhorn Tavern, which was situated about two miles north of Little Sugar Creek.

Van Dorn correctly reasoned that Curtis had a long and vulnerable supply line, and he intended to conduct an elaborate envelopment of the Union army by a wide flanking march to the west. Leaving their camp fires burning on the night of March 6 in an attempt to deceive the Yankees, the Confederates tramped north through the dark night.

Price's division led the way on the Old Bentonville Road, and McCulloch's division followed close behind. McCulloch, who had the shorter route, would turn off first, heading southeast to gain the Union right rear on the west side of Pea Ridge. As for Price, he would continue around Pea Ridge to the north and then make a sharp turn south into Cross Timber Hollow in order to strike the Union left rear. Van Dorn accompanied Price's Missourians to ensure that they stayed on schedule.

New York-native Eugene M. Carr graduated in West Point's Class of 1850. He had extensive experience in the pre-war U.S. Cavalry fighting Indians. His commanding officers on the frontier had found him to be an ill-tempered and quarrelsome subordinate. Yet they respected the leadership and courage he demonstrated in battle. His dark facial hair and intense expression while in the saddle prompted his fellow officers to nickname him the "Black-Bearded Cossack."

On the eve of the Battle of Pea Ridge, Carr commanded the 4th Division in the Army of the Southwest. Carr's division comprised Colonel Grenville Dodge's First Brigade and Colonel William Vandever's Second Brigade. Each brigade had an artillery battery. Captain Junius Jones, 1st Iowa Light Artillery, supported Dodge's infantry, while Captain Mortimer Hayden's 3rd Iowa Light Artillery was assigned to Vandever's brigade.

The 1st Iowa Light Artillery, which would play a crucial role in the unfolding clash near Elkhorn Tavern, had been mustered in Burlington, Iowa. It transferred to St Louis in December 1861, where it received its four 6-pounders and two 12-pounder howitzers. The artillery unit joined Curtis' army in the field the following month. The artillerymen received their baptism of fire that day.

Carr's mounted scouts informed him at 10:30 a.m. that a Confederate force of unknown size was entering Cross Timber Hollow. Curtis assumed that the threat from the north was a diversionary attack. The Union army commander would not know for sure, though, until he dispatched a reliable subordinate to assess the situation. He rode to Carr and informed him that he should march his troops north to contain the Confederate attack on the Union rear. "[You will] clean out that hollow in a very short time," Curtis said optimistically.

On the assumption it was a small Confederate force, Curtis initially held back Vandever's brigade. This left Carr with just Dodge's 950 infantrymen and 310 cavalrymen to fight Price's division. Dodge's brigade consisted of the 4th Iowa, 35th Illinois, 24th Missouri Cavalry, and 1st Iowa Light Artillery.

Upon arriving at the south end of the hollow, Carr dispatched Dodge with the two infantry regiments to deploy along Huntsville Road, which ran east from Telegraph Road at the south side of the hollow. Carr placed the 24th Missouri cavalry

Colonel Eugene A. Carr's Fourth Division at the Union army headquarters at Pratt's Store on the second day of the battle. Initially dispatched with only one of his brigade's to defend the Union right flank, it quickly became apparent he needed both of his brigades.

and one company of infantry from the 35th Illinois on the west side of Telegraph Road to cover another north-south defile known as Tanyard Ravine. As for Jones' battery, he divided it into three sections. He sent a pair of 6-pounders with Dodge to buttress his right wing, he retained two 6-pounders at the point where Telegraph Road exited the hollow, and he sent a pair of 12-pounder howitzers to Elkhorn Tavern to hold in reserve.

Price's troops had straggled badly on their various marches. By the time he began deploying for battle on March 7, he had 5,000 men on hand. These were still heavy odds, as Carr would soon discover.

Price soon had his troops in a long battle line. Colonel Henry Little's 1st Missouri and Colonel William Slack's 2nd Missouri brigades both arrayed their troops into battle lines.

Colonel William Slack's 2nd Missouri brigade advanced south into Tanyard Ravine west of Telegraph Road, while Colonel Henry Little's 1st Missouri Brigade began moving south astride Telegraph Road. Further east, the Missouri Guard units formed up to assail Dodge's two infantry regiments. The roar of battle increased substantially at 11:30 a.m. as the Confederate infantry made initial contact.

Carr initially intended to fight a defensive action, but he soon realized that he was heavily outnumbered. He sent a courier to Curtis requesting Vandever's brigade immediately because he was hard pressed. Curtis agreed. Carr reasoned that it would be an hour or more before Vandever's infantry arrived.

Carr decided on a bold tactic. He would accompany Jones with the two 6-pounders in the center

Confederate Maj. Gen. Sterling Price's Rebels attack Union forces defending Elkhorn Tavern. Price's flank attack stalled in the face of Carr's stubborn defense of the south end of Cross Timber Hollow.

of his line into the hollow to thwart the Confederate advance as long as possible. The two limbered guns rolled 300 yards downhill into the hollow. Carr ordered Jones to unlimber on the right side of Telegraph Road in such a way that the guns could sweep the road. The guns were squarely pointed at the Little's 1st Missouri.

When the Iowans opened fire with their two 6-pounders, some of the Confederate regimental commanders ordered their men to lie prone. The Union artillery fire prompted Van Dorn to rush forward the Confederate batteries at the back of the column. This took time. The first to go into action was Captain Henry Guibor's Battery, composed of two 6-pounders and two 12-pounder howitzers. The Confederate counter-battery fire grew in intensity as more batteries went into action on a shelf at the north end of the hollow.

Jones' artillery crews had a hard time firing downhill. Even though most of their shot did not land amidst the infantry and the Confederate casualties were light, the Confederates chose not to advance directly down the road. Instead, the foot soldiers moved slowly along the slopes on each side of hollow; however the half- frozen landscape with its slick slopes bedeviled the Rebels.

Confederate shells inflicted horrific wounds on some of the Iowan artillerists. A dozen of Jones' artillerymen received severe wounds. One had his left leg sheared off, another was struck by a ball in the groin, and yet another was struck in the mouth by shrapnel. A spent shot struck Jones in the leg, compelling him to hand over command to Lieutenant Virgil David. "We stood in the tempest of death," wrote Union artillerist Sam Black. "I believe every man at the guns had made up his mind to die there, for it did not seem possible that any of us could get out alive."

Despite the carnage, the intrepid Iowans maintained a brisk fire as Carr watched from a position nearby. Carr had called for the two 12-pounder howitzers held in reserve to be brought forward to help offset the steep odds he faced as Price's troops brought more batteries forward. Although Carr's place should have been behind the infantry, he was determined at all costs to retard the Confederate advance until such time as Vandever's blue-coated infantry arrived.

The Confederates eventually had 21 guns in action against Jones' four artillery pieces. The Confederates scored direct hits on two caissons, which produced enormous explosions. The horses on another caisson raced away, tipping over a third caisson. Carr was wounded three times while supervising the forward artillery position in the hollow. Although not life-threatening, the three wounds were exceedingly painful. He was struck in the wrist, neck, and ankle.

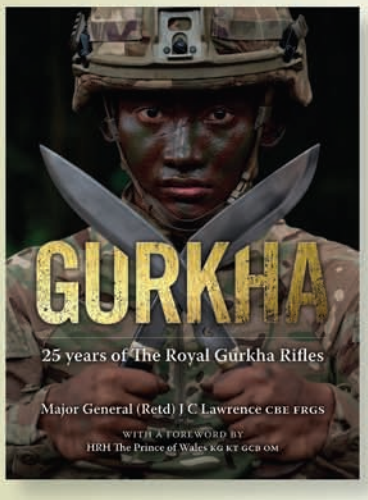
Carr summoned Colonel Gustavus Smith to bring forward a portion of his 35th Illinois to furnish support for the beleaguered artillerymen. On the right of Carr's line, the Missouri Guard struck Lt. Col. John Galligan's 4th Iowa. Fortunately, Galligan's foot soldiers stood their ground and repulsed two determined attempts to turn their flank in the early afternoon. It soon became imperative for Carr to make adjustments so that Dodge's troops would not be cut off from the rest of the army.

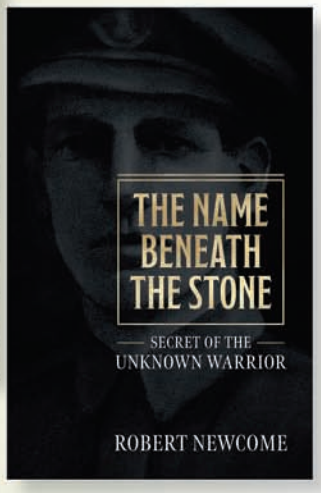
By 12:30 p.m., the Rebel gunners had silenced three of the four Iowa guns contesting the passage of Rebel infantry along Telegraph Road. When Vandever's brigade arrived to reinforce his position, Carr ordered the shattered 1st Iowa Light Artillery to withdraw to Elkhorn Tavern. Orders were issued for the Union gunners to detonate the overturned artillery chest before withdrawing. Meanwhile, Vandever sent his lead elements into action on the Union left to check the advance of Slack's 2nd Missouri troops, who were making good progress through Tanyard Ravine. The 3rd Iowa Light Artillery unlimbered its guns to cover the withdrawal of its fellow artillerymen. At that point, Carr moved to establish a division command near Elkhorn Tavern. Not long afterwards, Price's troops switched to the defensive, for Old Pap was convinced he could not displace Carr's division.

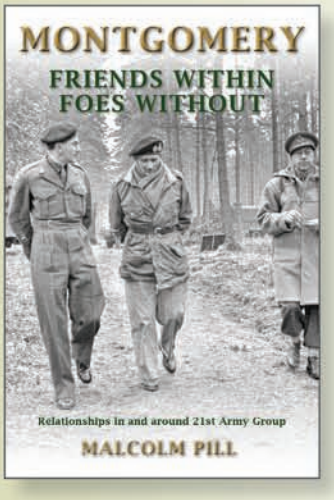
Carr was promoted to brigadier effective the date of the Battle of Pea Ridge, in which he performed so heroically. He went on to command the Fourteenth Division of the XIII Corps at Vicksburg in 1863. In the final stages of the war, he commanded Union troops in Arkansas. After the war, he returned to Indian fighting on the western frontier. He retired from the regular army with the rank of brigadier general in 1893.

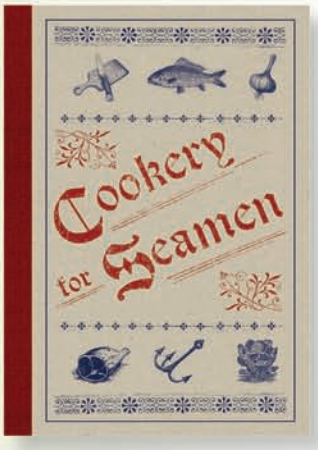
The following year, Congress decided to award him the Congressional Medal of Honor for his outstanding performance at Pea Ridge. Carr "directed the deployment of his command and held his ground, under a brisk fire of shot and shell in which he was several times wounded," stated the citation. It was a most deserved and fitting tribute to one of the Union army's best generals during the War Between the States. Carr was 80 years old when he passed away in 1910 in Washington, D.C. He was buried with honors in West Point Cemetery. ■

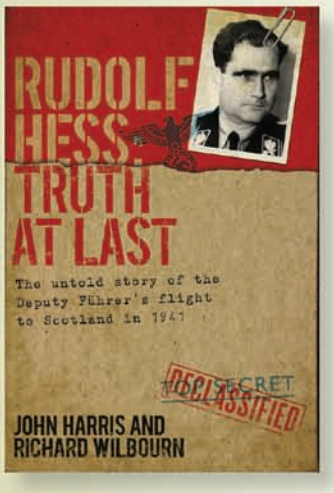
MILITARY HISTORY

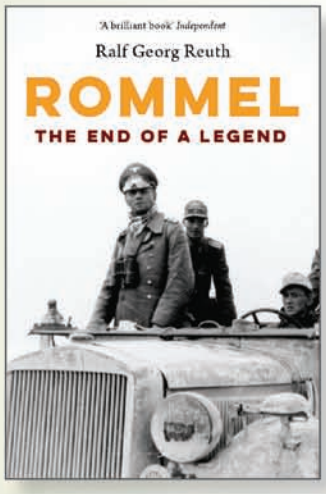












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U-47 COMMANDER GUNTHER PRIEN EARNED A LASTING PLACE IN THE ANNALS OF NAVAL HISTORY FOR HIS DARING RAID ON SCAPA FLOW.

By Alexander Zakrzewski

Bundesarchiv Bild 183-2006-1130-500; Photo: Annelise Schulze

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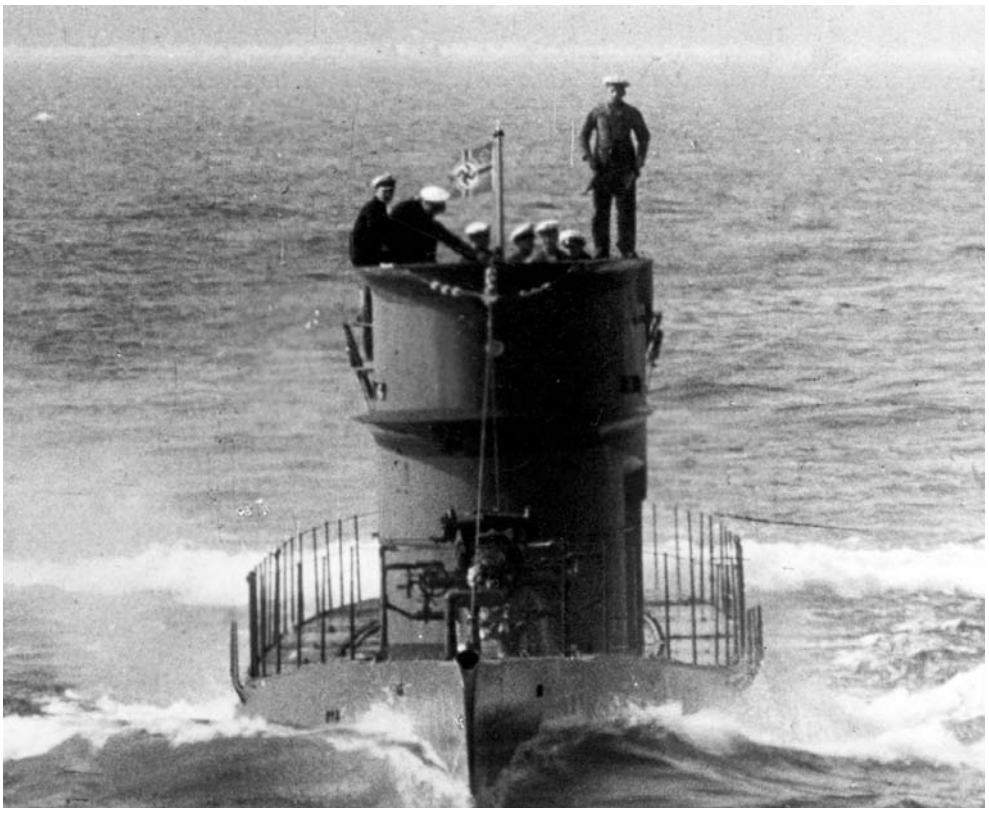

ON the evening of October 13, 1939, sailors aboard the British battleship HMS *Royal Oak* had no reason to believe they were in danger of anything other than cold and boredom. Great Britain may have been at war with Germany, but the battleship was moored far from any fighting in Scapa Flow, the base of the Royal Navy's Home Fleet, and one of the most secure anchorages in the world. No one suspected that lurking just below in the murky water, waiting to strike like a wolf on the hunt, was one of Nazi Germany's deadliest U-boat aces.

Gunther Prien was born in 1908 in the Baltic city of Lubeck, one of Northern Europe's oldest and most storied seafaring cities. At the time, the pride of Germany was Kaiser Wilhelm II's vaunted High Seas Fleet, and like many German boys Prien grew up dreaming of becoming a naval officer. He diligently saved up enough money from odd jobs to afford him to enroll in seamen's school and begin a career in the merchant marine. He served on a number of merchant ships, eventually accumulating enough experience to obtain his captain's license.

Prien joined the Reich Labor Service in 1932 where he became fully indoctrinated in Nazi ideology. Shortly afterwards, he became a full-fledged party member. Adolf Hitler, who became Chancellor of Germany in January 1933, had no intention of adhering to restrictions on naval rearmament embodied in the Treaty of Versailles. He set in motion covert plans for a new modern Kriegsmarine, complete with battleships, aircraft carriers, and submarines. For Prien, this

ABOVE: The Type VIIB U-boat, which carried 14 torpedoes, boasted powerful engines and two rudders for enhanced agility. TOP LEFT: Captain Gunther Prien. TOP RIGHT: Crewmen line the conning tower of U-47. The submarine sank three British merchant ships in the first week of September 1939.

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ABOVE: A German aerial photo of Scapa Flow, with numbers indicating specific British ships, taken before U-*47*'s attack. RIGHT: Prien's route to and from Scapa Flow during his surprise attack. OPPOSITE: The exact fate of U-*47* remains unknown; however, two British destroyers, the *Wolverine* and *Verity*, received credit for having blown apart U-*47* in 1941 with a skillfully laid pattern of depth charges.

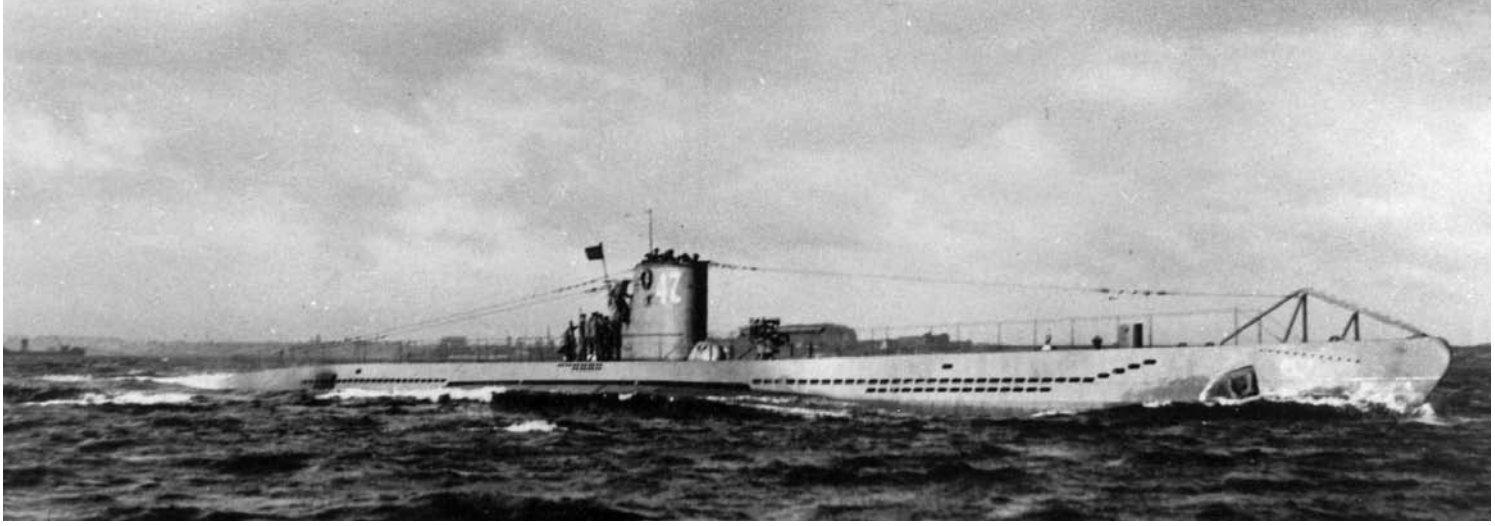
meant opportunities he could only have dreamed of in the former Imperial Navy. After a year serving as an ordinary seaman aboard the light cruiser *Konigsberg*, Prien landed a coveted spot at the new U-boat training school in Kiel.

U-boat ace Werner Hartmann tapped Prien to serve on his submarine when he was assigned to patrol Spanish waters during the Spanish Civil War. Although the German forces were officially neutral observers, the conflict proved the perfect testing ground for the Wehrmacht's new weapons and tactics.

Prien was promoted to lieutenant in 1938 and given command of his own boat, *U-47*. The newly minted U-boat commander was on patrol with *U-47* west of the Bay of Biscay when war broke out. In the first week of September 1939, he sank three British merchant ships, a feat that earned him the Iron Cross Second Class and two weeks leave for his crew. It also earned him a private meeting with Karl Donitz, the supreme commander of the U-boat arm.

Donitz had a unique vision for the role the Kriegsmarine would play in the coming conflict. He fervently believed that only by waging a so-called tonnage war on a much greater scale than the one waged by U-boats during the previous conflict could the Kriegsmarine starve the British Isles into submission. Yet Hitler had shown only a passing interest in the U-boat arm of the Kriegsmarine. What the submariners needed was a spectacular victory to prove their worth and galvanize the attention of both the Fuhrer and German public.

"Do you think that a determined commander could get his U-boat inside Scapa Flow and attack the enemy naval forces lying there?" Donitz asked Prien in the meeting. As the British Royal Navy's base, Scapa Flow was deemed impregnable, but Donitz explained that he had evidence of a possible way in. He gave Prien the information and told him to report back in three days with his assessment. He assured him that no matter what he decided, his reputation would not suffer in the eyes of the high command. Prien reported the next day that it was



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possible, and that he was the man to do it.

The Scapa Flow archipelago lies between the Scottish mainland and the Orkney Islands. The natural harbour has served as a safe anchorage for fleets since the days of the Vikings. Scapa Flow's defenses included searchlights, gun batteries, mines, submarine nets, patrol boats, and block ships. The naval base had some glaring weaknesses, though.

Shortly before war broke out, Donitz had received a report from a passing German merchantman that in Kirk Sound, the northernmost of the harbour entrances, there was a noticeable gap between the block ships. Luftwaffe reconnaissance planes later confirmed that there was, indeed, a 17-meter hole through which a U-boat could conceivably pass. Better yet, there were no lookouts or searchlights, either. It was a galling oversight on the part of the British Admiralty and the perfect place for an intrepid intruder to strike.

On the evening of October 14, 1939, Prien stood on the conning tower of *U-47*, anxiously scanning the entrance of Kirk Sound for any sign of enemy patrols. When he was satisfied that there were none, he gave the order to begin navigating the choppy waters. Finding the gap between the block ships would have been a tricky undertaking in broad daylight. On a moonless night with only the aurora borealis offering some illumination, it was like threading a needle. At one point, the U-boat became snagged on an anchor cable and forced to abruptly reverse engines at full power. Moments later, Prien's heart almost stopped when the boat was suddenly caught in the headlights of a passing car. Incredibly, the driver took no notice. "We are inside!" he whispered down the conning tower.

When *U-47* finally entered the harbour, Prien began scanning it for his prey. It proved surprisingly difficult. A week earlier, a large British task force of battleships, cruisers, and destroyers had left Scapa Flow for a mission in the North Sea and still had not returned. Although this meant fewer sentries for *U-47* to worry about, it also made it harder to find a suitable target. Prien knew he had

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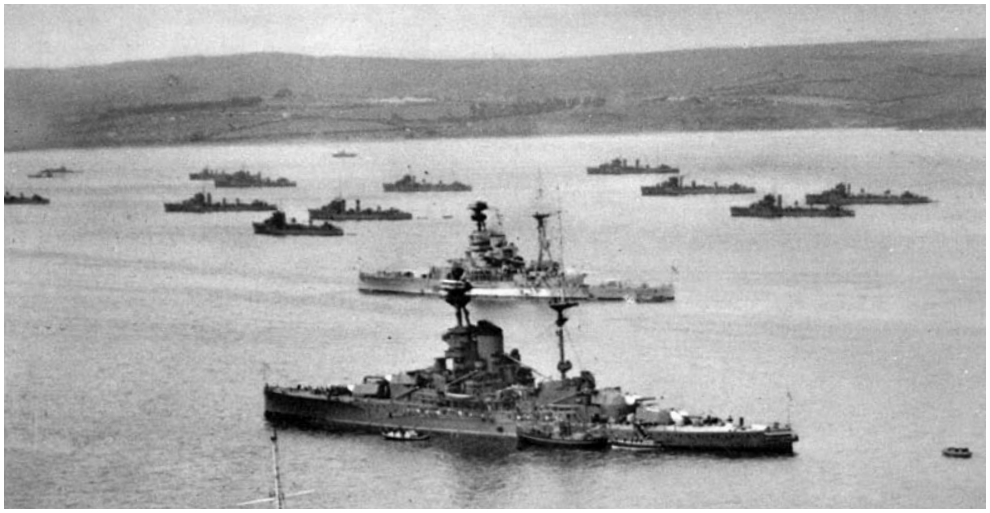

ABOVE: The British Home Fleet at anchorage in Scapa Flow in 1939. The capital ship in the foreground may be the *Royal Oak*. *BELOW:* The *Royal Oak* lies on its starboard side 60 feet below the surface at Scapa Flow in a computer-generated illustration. The ship is a war grave for the 833 British sailors who perished in the ordeal. OPPOSITE: U-*47* returns in triumph to Kiel after its successful attack on Scapa Flow.

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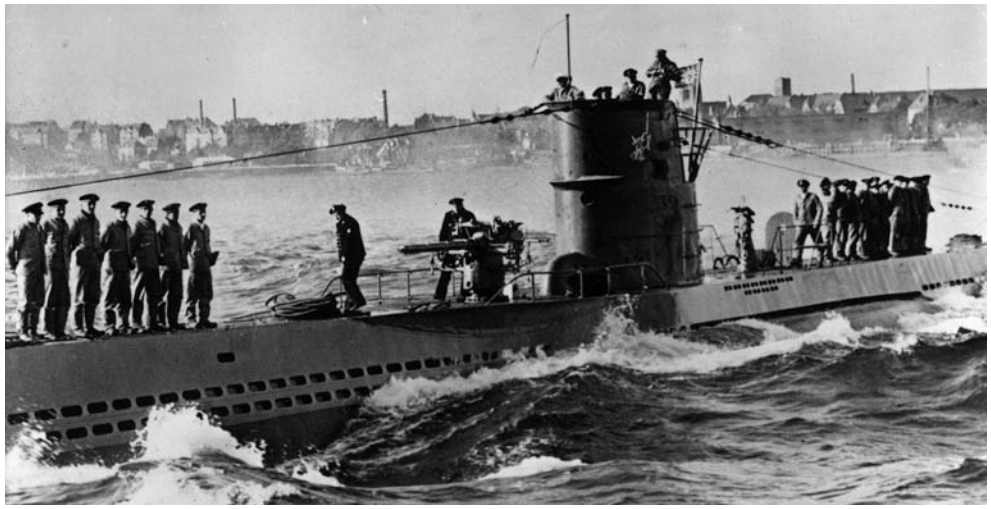
to find one fast. Every second he spent in the anchorage increased the risk of detection significantly. At the same time, he hated the thought of having gone through so much effort only to sink a tanker or cargo ship. At last, he spotted in the distance the massive silhouette of what could only be a British battleship. It was the HMS *Royal Oak.*

Prien's heart skipped a beat. He knew this was his chance. He called down the conning tower for four torpedoes to be readied and fired. With each firing, he could feel the boat pitch slightly, a signal to begin counting down the three-and-a-half minutes it would take for the torpedoes to cross the roughly four thousand yards to the target. But after what seemed like an eternity, all he heard was a small, muted blast near the *Royal Oak*'s bow. One torpedo had misfired, and of the other three, only one had actually made it to the target, where it struck the ship's anchor chain and exploded harmlessly.

Surprisingly, no searchlights shone, no alarms sounded, and no destroyers sprang into action. It was later revealed that the duty watch on the *Royal Oak* dismissed the disturbance as a snapped anchor cable or minor internal disruption. Prien turned around and fired two more torpedoes from his stern tubes. But again, nothing happened.

Cursing his luck, Prien put some distance between himself and the *Royal Oak* to cool off and reload his torpedoes. It was now past midnight. The next shots had to count if he were to have enough time to escape before daylight. Shortly after 1:00 a.m. he fired a spread of three more torpedoes. This time, all three hit their target, cutting massive holes just below the waterline on the ship's starboard side. Almost immediately the ship began to heel as tons of seawater poured in. Before anyone on board could make sense of what was happening, the cordite magazines ignited, and massive towers of flame shot towards the sky,



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sending pieces of the ship flying in all directions.

Within minutes, the *Royal Oak* began to roll over. All along the deck, sailors plunged into the frigid water, desperate to escape the flames. Those still on the lowest decks stood no chance. Approximately 800 British sailors went down with the ship. Prien knew the ship had been destroyed when the 15-inch guns broke off and crashed into the sea. "He's finished!" he informed his crew.

U-47 made a beeline for Kirk Sound. But even when travelling surfaced and at full speed, the submarine could only make 17 knots, making it easy prey for the speedy British destroyers that were already hurling their depth charges at anything that moved.

Fortune initially seemed to be with the crew of *U-47*, but it turned out the crew was not completely out of danger. While still off the coast of Scotland, two British destroyers caught up with them, forcing them to crash dive. Prien tried to outmaneuver his pursuers underwater, but the destroyers were armed with ASDIC sonar systems and followed his every move. For hours, the crew of *U-47* sat helplessly on the seafloor while depth charges exploded all around and the ghostly ping of the ASDIC rang incessantly in their ears. The pinging eventually stopped, and the sound of propellers grew fainter and fainter until it disappeared altogether. Prien surfaced to find no sign of his pursuers. It was smooth sailing from then on.

When *U-47* docked in Wilhelmshaven, both Donitz and his superior, Grossadmiral Erich Raeder, came on board to congratulate and decorate the crew. Hitler was also thrilled. He was so delighted that he sent his private plane to pick up Prien and his men and fly them back to Berlin for a parade and ceremony at the Reich Chancellery. There he personally decorated Prien with the Knight's Cross and even hosted the entire crew for lunch. That night, they were Minister of Propaganda Joseph Goebbels' personal guests at the Wintergarten Theater.

Prien became a national hero overnight. The sinking of the *Royal Oak* was precisely the inspiring story the country needed to hear at a time when most Germans were still wary of another war with Britain and France. For the Kriegsmarine, particularly the U-boats, it was a propaganda triumph that could not have been scripted any better.

The press quickly nicknamed Prien the "Bull of Scapa Flow," and from then on, everywhere he went he was greeted by cheering crowds and news cameras. A ghostwritten memoir of his exploit, titled *My Way to Scapa Flow*, quickly became a national bestseller.

Prien returned to duty in November 1939. Over the next year and a half, he was a scourge on British shipping. In June 1940 alone, he accounted for 10 percent of the total tonnage sunk by both the Kriegsmarine and Luftwaffe. That October, he led a wolf pack of U-boats in a ferocious attack on a British convoy that destroyed eight enemy ships. When he returned to port, he became just the fifth German officer to have Oak Leaves added to his Knight's Cross.

The Royal Navy gained the edge in the Battle of the Atlantic in 1941 with the advent of key advances in anti-submarine weaponry and tactics, coupled with naval reinforcements from Canada and the United States. On February 20, 1941, *U-47* departed Lorient, France, on her 10th patrol. Two weeks later, she went missing somewhere south of Iceland.

To this day, it has not been confirmed what exactly happened to *U-47*. Two British destroyers, HMS *Wolverine* and HMS *Verity*, were credited with having blown apart *U-47* with a skilfully laid pattern of depth charges. Yet there is some speculation that the U-boat might have been destroyed by one of its own circling torpedoes. The loss was kept hidden from the German public for almost three months. Fuhrer Headquarters announced Prien's loss, as well as his posthumous promotion to commander, in late May 1941. ■

BLOODBATH

The Red Army juggernaut shattered German Army Group Center in a rapid offensive in summer 1944 that brought communist troops to within striking distance of the Third Reich's eastern frontier.

By Victor Kamenir

Bundesarchiv Bild 183-J27410; Photo: Hermann Grönert

Overshadowed by the Allied landing in Normandy on June 6, 1944, the Soviet Union's Operation Bagration on June 23 is one of the least-covered campaigns of World War II. The two massive offensives delivered knockout punches that signaled the beginning of the end for the Third Reich.

After halting the German offensive at Kursk in summer 1943, the Red Army permanently seized the strategic initiative. Continuing into spring 1944, the Red Army liberated almost all of the Ukraine on the southern flank of the Eastern Front and similarly pushed back German forces in the north. In the central sector of the front in Belarus, German Army Group Center under command of Generalfeldmarschall Ernst Busch occupied a large bulge facing east, called "Belarus Balcony" by the Soviet High Command.

The exposed balcony presented a tempting target. In May 1944, the High Command of the Soviet Armed Forces, known as Stavka, began planning an ambitious operation to destroy four German armies in Belarus, an area of operations roughly the size of the United Kingdom. The operation had as its goal the encirclement and destruction of Army Group Center. Soviet planners anticipated that if the opera-

IN BELARUS

SS panzergrenadiers counterattack through thick clouds of smoke from burning Soviet tanks during the final days of Operation Bagration.

National Archives

tion succeeded, it would bring Soviet forces to the pre-war western border of the Soviet Union.

Army Group Center occupied a strategically important position known as the Smolensk land bridge. The strip of land encompassed the territory between the Western Dvina and the Dnieper rivers. Anchored at the city of Vitebsk on the Western Dvina River and the city of Orsha on the Dnieper River, the land bridge was a historical invasion route to Moscow. Four German armies defended the 600-mile-long bulge in this area. These armies, from north to south, were Generaloberst Georg-Hans Reinhardt's Third Panzer Army, Generaloberst Kurt von Tippelskirch's Fourth Army, Generaloberst Walter Weiss' Second Army, and General of Infantry Hans Jordan's Ninth Army. Army Group Center had a total of 38 divisions.

The total of the four understrength armies came to approximately 500,000 men. The troops were supported by 120 panzers, 450 self-propelled assault guns, and 775 aircraft of Luftflotte 6 (Sixth Air Fleet). The available panzers units were all assigned to the Fourth and Ninth armies. This stripped the Third Panzer Army of its armor altogether and left it a panzer army in name only.

The reason for the scarcity of panzer formations in the Army Group Center was the German High Command's belief that the next major Soviet offensive would target the Ukraine. To counter this potential thrust, the majority of German panzer formations on the Eastern Front were concentrated just west of the Pripyat Marshes. These forested wetlands were situated between Belarus and the Ukraine.

Army Group Center's precarious position was further exacerbated by German Fuehrer Adolf Hitler's demand not to surrender an inch of conquered territory. Strategically important towns and cities were declared fortresses, to shore up porous German defensive lines.

Cognizant of his vulnerable position, on May 20, 1944, Generalfeldmarschall Ernst Busch presented Hitler with two plans of proposed withdrawals. The first plan called for a minor withdrawal to the Dnieper River. The alternate plan called for a withdrawal to the Berezina River. This maneuver would have allowed the Army Group Center to shorten the front lines and create much-needed operational reserves. Obsessed with not giving up an inch of conquered territory without a fight, Hitler rejected both proposals out of hand. Furthermore, he ordered the so-called fortress cities of Belarus to be defended to the last man.

Operation Bagration was named for General Pyotr Bagration, a hero of Napoleonic wars. In preparation for the operation, the Red Army massed substantial reserves. Opposing Army Group Center were four Soviet army fronts: the 1st Baltic Front under Lieutenant General Ivan Bagramyan, the 3rd Belarus Front under Colonel General Ivan Cherniakhovsky, the 2nd Belarus Front under General Grigory Zakharov and the 1st Belarus Front under Colonel General Konstantin Rokossovsky.

The four fronts numbered 1,670,000 men, 33,000 guns and mortars, and 5,800 tanks and self-propelled howitzers. Each army was allocated a tank or mechanized corps to exploit breakthroughs. Separate tank brigades were assigned to support infantry divisions. The objective of the tank brigades was to breach the first line of German defensive positions. Five Soviet air armies, all of the front-level aviation, and almost all the long-range bombers, totaling 5,300 combat aircraft, provided air support for the offensive. Behind German lines, 140,000 partisans operated under direct control from Moscow.

Bitter lessons of the first three years of war taught the Soviets how tenacious the Germans were on the defense. In response, the Soviets formed multiple large-caliber artillery corps, each of which consisted of approximately 1,100 artillery pieces ranging from 76mm to 203mm guns, as well as the dreaded Katyusha mobile rocket launchers. By 1944, Soviet industry was churning out war materiel in ever-increasing quantities, especially the superb T-34 tank. Most German regimental antitank units were outfitted with 50mm antitank guns, which were ineffective against the frontal armor of the T-34. For that reason, the Germans resorted to using antitank mines, explosive charges, Panzerfausts, and other various short-range weapons to knock them out.

Due to generous aid from the United States through the Lend-Lease program, Soviet ground forces fielded large numbers of motorized formations. Indeed, the Soviet formations had far greater mobility at that stage of the war than their

German adversaries.

Despite their huge advantages in numbers, the Soviet Army had great difficulty achieving and maintaining the degree of professionalism and tactical acumen demonstrated by German soldiers and their commanders. German forces operated in a seamless manner when it came to command and control, and the Red Army still had not achieved parity in this regard.

The Red Army was ready for the operation by mid-May 1944. It was to run its course in two phases. The first phase called for rupturing German defenses along the eastern face of the bulge. The second phase called for Soviet units to surround and destroy German forces defending Vitebsk, Orsha, Mogilev, and Bobruisk.

The Soviet forces intended to do the same thing to these German concentrations that the Germans had done to them in the opening weeks of Operation Barbarossa in 1941. Having lost vast numbers of men and equipment in the so-called cauldron battles early in the war, Soviet generals were keen to exact revenge against the Germans in the same fashion.

In the first phase of the operation, the 2nd Belarus Front had orders to pin down the forces of Army Group Center, while the 1st and 3rd Belarus fronts enveloped German frontline forces in wide flanking maneuvers. The two fronts were allocated two-thirds of Soviet reserves, combat vehicles, and equipment marshaled for Operation Bagration. The 1st Baltic Front was assigned a secondary role of protecting the right flank of the 3rd Belarus Front and keeping the gap open between German Army Groups Center and North.

The second phase of Operation Bagration called for the encirclement of German forces west of Minsk, destruction of the main body of Army Group Center, and an advance to the prewar border.

Early in the war, many Soviet military disasters could be directly attributed to poor upper-level command and coordination. This time, the priority that Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin and the Stavka placed on cooperation between the fronts was demonstrated by the rank of the individuals assigned to supervise operations. Stavka appointed Chief of Soviet General Staff Marshal Aleksandr Vasilevski to coordinate operations of the 1st Baltic and 3rd Belarus fronts, and it appointed Deputy Supreme Commander Marshal Georgy Zhukov to oversee the 1st and 2nd Belarus fronts.

Deception measures played an important part in Soviet preparations. All efforts were exerted to convince the Germans that the next major Soviet offensive would continue in the Ukraine. Civilian populations were evacuated away from the front lines to minimize the possibility of the Soviet deployments being leaked to the Germans. Frontline Red Army units made a great show of preparing defensive positions. Staff officers overflew Soviet positions to ensure that camouflage measures were observed. Under strict radio silence, units rotated to the rear to practice combined-arms tactics. Simultaneously, Soviet command stepped up efforts to acquire tactical and strategic intelligence about German forces facing them. Soviet air reconnaissance efforts, which were for the most part unimpeded by the German Luftwaffe, gathered valuable information in real time.

Despite Soviet efforts to conceal their massive preparations for the offensive in early June, German Army Group Center headquarters began receiving alarming reports from ground and air reconnaissance and radio intercepts. Army Group Center staff initially disregarded the warning signs; however, intelligence and reconnaissance reports increased in number and urgency. When Soviet long-range aviation began sustained attacks on German airfields June 12, German commanders became convinced of an impending major Soviet offensive. Unable to convince Hitler of the threat, Busch took the opportunity on June 19 to fly to Germany on leave.

Busch hardly had time to unpack when Soviet partisans began striking at vulnerable objectives that night. They mainly targeted German-controlled railroad junctions, bridges, and other strategic transportation points in the German rear. In some locations, they succeeded in halting all

BELOW: A camouflaged German Panther tank advances on a rural road near Vitebsk at the start of the offensive. The second phase of Operation Bagration called for the elimination of German strongpoints at key Belorussian cities such as Vitebsk. OPPOSITE: Soviet forces suffered heavy losses at the hands of veteran German forces during Operation Barbarossa. But two years of continuous warfare on the Eastern Front had hollowed out the German army.

Bundesarchiv Bild 101I-280-1100-18A; Photo: Jacob

rail traffic. This severely impeded the ability of German units to shift reinforcements and supplies to threatened sectors of the front.

On the evening of June 21, multiple waves of Soviet aircraft began bombing German positions. With the heavy concussions of the bombs masking their work, Soviet combat engineers began clearing passages through German minefields. German sentries picked up on the activity in many locations. At 3:00 a.m. the following morning, the leading Soviet infantry units, supported by tanks outfitted with mine plows, advanced on the first line of German defenses. The general offensive began as a series of localized encirclement operations.

Massive artillery barrages rained down on positions of the Third Panzer Army near Vitebsk on the northern end of the bulge. Forming the northern pincer of the envelopment, infantry units of the 1st Baltic Front broke through German forward positions. Their strategy was to bypass Vitebsk and attack it from the rear.

As Soviet shells rained down on German positions, Busch was advised by telephone of the Soviet offensive. He caught the first available plane and by late afternoon was at his headquarters, greeted by grim news of an endangered left flank and the loss of contact with Army Group North.

Despite massive Soviet air and artillery bombardment, German defenders grimly hung onto their positions, and the Soviet infantry was able to achieve only minor penetrations of the forward defenses. Soviet tank brigades alone could not achieve breakthroughs, so Soviet senior commanders deployed their reserve tank corps earlier than they had planned. While the Third Panzer Army was being severely tested, the other three armies of Army Group Center suffered only limited attacks on June 22.

The following morning, Soviet heavy guns once again pounded German positions. Afterwards, the 3rd Belarus Front attacked the XXVII Corps of the German Fourth Army, situated east and south of Orsha. The attack formed the southern pincer of the planned envelopment. The Soviet front had orders to capture Orsha and continue to Borisov, southwest of Vitebsk. The German 78th Sturm Division, from the Fourth Army, put up a determined resistance at Orsha, but could not stop the Soviet onslaught. The 78th was badly mauled in the battle.

Although the first 48 hours was incredibly challenging for German forces, the worst was yet to come. On June 24, the 43rd Army from the 1st Baltic Front and the 9th Army from the 3rd Belarus Front encircled Vitebsk. The capacity of Soviet forces to carry out swift and efficient attacks came as a shock to the Germans.

From the outset of Operation Bagration, Soviet forces exhibited excellent mobility, maintained demanding tempos of operation, and expertly coordinated their forces to achieve breakthroughs. In their attacks, the Red Army forces used a new tactic known as the "rolling double-barrage." This involved pummeling enemy forward and rear defensive positions simultaneously in order to suppress German anti-tank defenses and break through German lines.

Soviet armor often out-ran effective artillery support during their lightning attacks. When that occurred, Soviet aircraft assumed the role of fire support. German aircraft attempting to slow down advancing Soviet formations had to fight their way through swarms of Soviet fighters, only to run into a dense Soviet network of mobile air defense.

German General of Artillery Georg Pfeiffer's VI Army Corps was split apart southeast of Mogilev and disintegrated after several days of

Hitler's Fireman Responds to Urgent Call

German leader Adolf Hitler sacked Ernst Busch, the field marshal commanding German Army Group Center, when he failed to meet expectations when the Soviet army unleashed its mighty offensive in June 1944. It was hardly fair, though, given that the undermanned army group faced four well-directed Soviet army groups under first-rate Russian commanders such as Konstantin Rokossovsky and Georgy Zhukov.

Five days after the devastating offensive began on June 23, German commander Walter Model, whose reputation had been forged in previous campaigns on the Eastern Front, arrived to take control of the deteriorating situation.

Model had earned a reputation as a master of defense during his steady rise to top front-line command. During Operation Barbarossa in 1941 he had commanded first the 3rd Panzer Division and after that the 41st Panzer Corps in the hard fighting before the gates of Moscow. While serving in the capacity of corps commander, he began extensively using kampfgruppes (informal collections of small units banded together from different commands) to achieve difficult objectives. He also favored heavily defended strongpoints over a continuous battle line. Those fighting under him were impressed at his innovative tactics, natural leadership ability, and powerful personality.

In January 1942, he received command of Army Group Center's Ninth Army. The promotion vaulted him past as many as 15 commanders who held seniority over him in the army group. He faced a great test in the Kursk campaign of July 1943 in which he led the Ninth Army. At the time, it was the largest field army the generals had ever fielded. He joined panzer general Heinz Guderian in objecting to the operation which he was convinced would result in heavy losses against well-prepared

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Soviet positions. Although the Ninth Army suffered staggering losses, it did not damage his sterling reputation with Hitler. The proof of that was that Hitler appointed him to command Army Group North in January 1944.

Hitler summoned his "fireman" to put out the flames of the Soviet offensive against Army Group Center. Given his experience on the Eastern Front, it was clear he was the right man for the job. Model could not stem the heavy losses, which amounted to nearly 400,000 men and 28 of the original 38 divisions. Nevertheless, he used his indomitable presence and sound defensive tactics to stitch together a new defensive line. In appreciation for his efforts, Hitler awarded him the Diamond Clasp to the Knight's Cross on August 17, 1944. "Were it not for you…the Russians might have been in East Prussia today or even before the gates of Berlin," Hitler told him at the ceremony.

William E. Welsh

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Map © 2020 Philip Schwartzberg, Meridian Mapping, Minneapolis, MN

TOP: Soviet forces exhibited excellent mobility, maintained demanding tempos of operation, and expertly coordinated their forces. BOTTOM: By the close of Operation Bagration in August 1944, German Army Group Center had lost the ground it had won in the heady days of Operation Barbarossa.

desperate fighting. When Pfeiffer himself was killed in action four days later, he was replaced by General of Artillery Helmuth Weidling. In heavy fighting, all of the corps' division commanders were slain. The survivors of the corps fled west in small groups.

The defenses of General of Artillery Robert Martinek's XXXIX Panzer Corps collapsed after being struck by two Soviet armies near Mogilev. On its right flank, the XII Army Corps sent its last radio message at 2:00 p.m. After that, nothing more was heard of it. The XXVII Army Corps north of Mogilev also was hit hard. Its troops abandoned their positions and retreated north to Orsha.

Busch's initial assessment was that his forces could not hold Vitebsk unless his army group received reinforcements. The German High Command, however, was unwilling to detach forces from Army Group North to assist Army Group Center. Elsewhere, Busch strived for a rigid defense in the face of the Soviet blitz, but Army Group Center soon lost all cohesion.

Communications between Busch's staff and lower-level headquarters broke down entirely. In a merciless litany of destruction, German divisions and regiments fought for their very survival, without guidance from headquarters, at the beginning of Operation Bagration.

On June 24, Hitler, Army Group Center headquarters, and LIII Corps' commander General Friedrich Gollwitzer all conferred about the German defense. Hitler, as was usual in the latter stages of the war, had taken personal command of the situation. When the Russians completed their encirclement of Gollwitzer's troops in Vitebsk, Hitler uncharacteristically granted his permission for the remnants of the LIII Corps to attempt to break out.

Gollwitzer and his troops attempted to fight their way out of the encirclement on the morning of June 26, but it was too late. The ring of Soviet forces surrounding the LIII Corps was simply too strong. The heavy fighting at Vitebsk ended the following day. Gollwitzer was among the 10,000 Germans from that sector who were marched into captivity.

The Russians continued carving up German forces in the bulge on June 25-26. Their methodical attacks splintered and destroyed Wehrmacht formations. "The few regiments—often only at company strength—had to try to fight their way to the west through the extensive forest and marsh region," wrote Werner Haupt, a German veteran of the Eastern Front. "The Soviets pursued throughout, overtaking the German columns, splitting them apart, and destroying them individually. The last transport trains with wounded, weapons, and equipment had left just before the encirclement of Orsha; however, several kilome-

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"Whoever fell out because of wounds or illness, experienced the horrible fate of the abandoned. Marshes, rivers, thick forests, the heat of the sun, hunger, and lack of water had a terrible effect. What drove us on was the unshakable will to reach the German front."

ters later 25 trains were overtaken by Soviet tanks and destroyed."

After Orsha fell to the Russians on June 26, mobile formations of the 3rd Belarus Front were sent into the gaps of the crumbling Third Panzer Army. Marshal Pavel Rotmistrov's 5th Guards Tank Army and Lieutenant General Nikolai Oslikovski's task force, which comprised a mechanized corps and a cavalry corps, turned the disordered retreat of the Third Panzer Army into a rout. At the same time, the outnumbered Luftflotte 6 fought desperately to continue operations, even though the Wehrmacht could do little to protect its forward airfields. Soviet aircraft bombed and strafed the main road from Vitebsk to Lepel, destroying retreating German forces. The road became a veritable charnel house of bombed-out German equipment and smoldering corpses.

Busch flew to Fuehrer Headquarters at the Wolfsschanze in East Prussia on 26 June. He practically begged Hitler to allow him to save the remnants of Army Group Center by withdrawing behind the Dnieper River. Hitler would not hear of it, though. He sacked Busch on June 28, and reassigned him to a remote post in Romania.

The Soviet success in the Vitebsk-Orsha operation resulted in the destruction of two of the three corps of the Third Panzer Army. As a result, Army Group Center's left flank ceased to exist, and the road lay open southwest to Borisov and northwest to Polotsk. The Soviets placed a high priority on capturing Polotsk, for German forces operating in that region could threaten the right flank of the 1st Baltic Front. Without any time to rest and refit, Bagramyan's 1st Baltic Front advanced on Polotsk using the envelopment tactic, which was working extremely well for Soviet forces seeking to isolate and destroy fortified German positions. Without waiting to be surrounded, Generaloberst Carl Hilpert, the commander of the German garrison at Polotsk, withdrew his men to safety on his own authority. Soviet forces reached Polotsk on 4 July and occupied it without a fight, removing the threat to the 1st Baltic Front's right flank.

At Bobruisk, the German Ninth Army under General Hans Jordan faced the Soviet 1st Belarus Front, the strongest of the four Soviet army groups, under General Konstantin Rokossovsky. The most convenient route to Bobruisk was from the southeast; however, the Germans had established a strong position at Parichi, which barred the Soviet path. Colonel General Pavel Batov, commanding the Soviet 65th Army, decided to bypass the German position via a swamp, which the Germans considered impassable.

"German generals trusted a topographical symbol [for] impassable swamp and succumbed to a conciliatory idea that we would not be able to advance along the swamps," wrote Batov. Russian combat engineers quickly built several

Bundesarchiv Bild 183-J27723; Photo: Albrecht Heinrich Otto

ABOVE: Elite units such as the Panzergrenadier Division Grossdeutschland fought doggedly to slow the Soviet juggernaut. The division helped open an escape corridor to German troops trapped in Vilno. LEFT: Soviet infantry was at the forefront of nearly every assault. Here Soviet riflemen charge out of a trench in Belorussia.

corduroy log roads through the wetlands. Although the Germans monitored the swamps, they had no forces deployed in them. During the first day of the advance, the 65th Army penetrated German defenses up to six miles. A tank corps followed the infantry to exploit the breach in German lines obtained by marching through the waterlogged terrain.

To the north and east of Bobruisk, the Soviet 3rd Army under Colonel General Gorbatov ran into strong German defenses, reinforced by Generalleutnant Mortimer von Kessel's 20th Panzer Division, Jordan's mobile reserve. The German panzer division slowed down the Soviet offensive, but was unable to prevent the leading units of the 3rd Army from penetrating into the junction of German Fourth and Ninth armies. As a result, the two armies lost contact with each other. After blunting the attack of the Soviet 3rd Army, General Jordan shifted the 20th Panzer Division south against Batov's 65th Army. However, the offensive power of the 20th Panzer Division was spent, and its counterattack against Batov was beaten back with heavy losses.

Despite the best German efforts to halt the Soviet offensive, by June 27 the XLI Panzer Corps and XXXV Corps became encircled around Bobruisk in a pocket roughly 20 miles in diameter. General Jordan requested permission for his units to breakout. But the orders from Army Group Center were firm. The garrison of Fortress Bobruisk was told to fight on until the last man. Later that same day, Generalleutnant Edmund Hoffmeister, the commandant at Bobruisk, sent a desperate radiogram to the Army Group Center headquarters. He reported no contact with the XXXV Corps and chaos and panic in the city. On the evening of June 27, the Red Army launched an assault against Bobruisk, with chaotic street fighting lasting through the night and into the next day.

When Hitler finally permitted the breakout in the evening of the following day, it was too late. The few German units still capable of fighting ran into a double-ring of blocking Soviet forces on the morning of June 29. Led by a few remaining tanks from the 20th Panzer Division, the remnants of the XLI Panzer Corps punched through to link up with the Generalmajor Gerhard Muller's 12th Panzer Division, fighting to reach them from the outside. Disorganized small groups of survivors from the XXXV Corps fought their way north to link up with the Fourth Army. By early July, 14,000 German survivors from the Ninth Army had reached the rapidly retreating German forces. The Germans had suffered approximately 80,000 casualties.

While the Soviet command planned a rapid collapse of German flanks at Vitebsk and Bobruisk, the intent in the center at Mogilev was to pin down General Tippelskirch's Fourth Army to box it in. After punching through forward German defenses on June 23, the forces of the 2nd Belarus Front slowly pushed the Fourth Army due west. Despite heavy casualties, the Germans were able to organize a fighting retreat to the second defensive line.

Under remorseless Soviet pressure, the orderly pullback began to unravel into a disordered flight, with German units losing contact with each other. Four days later, Tippelskirch gave orders over the radio for the general retreat to the Berezina River and Borisov. However, many units did not receive these orders, and those that did could not carry them out. Disorganized German units streamed west towards the Berezina River, hotly pursued by Soviet tanks and hammered by Soviet aircraft.

The Red Army pursuing the retreating Germans fought their way across the Dnieper north and south of Mogilev. On June 28, they captured the city by storm. Approximately 2,000 Germans in the city were rounded up and marched into captivity.

The night of June 27 was spent in brutal street fighting, with the Germans launching desperate counterattacks in futile attempts to break out. By midday on June 28, the troops of the 2nd Belarus Front had reached the center of Mogilev. German strong points were eliminated one by one, with the last organized German resistance being extinguished in the vicinity of the railroad station.

To buy time for the remnants of his Fourth Army to reach the Berezina River, Tippelskirch

cobbled together a kampfgruppe ("battle group") under the command of Generalleutnant Dietrich von Saucken. It consisted of the 5th Panzer Division, the 505th Heavy Panzer Battalion, a few military police companies, and an engineer training battalion. Von Saucken's men took up positions guarding the bridges in and near Borisov to cover the withdrawal of the Fourth Army. General der Panzertruppe Karl Decker's 5th Panzer Division was a powerful formation. As a result of a recent refitting, it was nearly at full strength. It boasted not only a battalion of 76 Panzerkampfwagen V Panther medium tanks, but also 45 Panzerkampfwagen VI Tiger heavy tanks of the 505th Heavy Tank Battalion.

Generalfeldmarschall Walter Model, the newly appointed commander of Army Group Center, arrived on June 28 to take charge of the worsening situation. He established his headquarters at Lida, which was 100 miles west of Minsk. The headquarters staff lacked a clear picture of where the army group's extant units were located. With sporadic radio and telephone communications, contact between the army group headquarters and its units was maintained by sturdy Fieseler-Storch aircraft. Reinforcements in the form of divisions that Hitler had released from reserves, either of the High Command or Army Group North, had been arriving since June 26. The new reinforcements were fed into the fray just as the 5th and Generalmajor Gerhard Muller's 12th Panzer Divisions had been before them.

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An imposing column of Soviet armor advances against the retreating Germans. The Germans occasionally succeeded in ambushing enemy tank formations.

Soviet tanks reached the Berezina River at Borisov on June 29. Russian combat engineers deployed several pontoon bridges so that the rapidly advancing forces could continue their westward attack. Von Saucken's kampfgruppe held on. In so doing, it bought time for the survivors of the XXVII and XII corps to reach the new German frontline.

When Russian forces fought their way into Borisov the following day and clashed in the streets with German troops, Von Saucken issued orders for his men to withdraw behind the Berezina River. Despite all odds, survivors from the destroyed units continued to trickle into to German lines. With the Soviet forces fully in control of all available roads, the stragglers had to make their way west through forests teaming with vengeful partisans.

"Burning villages, guns and infantry fire, muffled explosions, and detonations mixed in with the thundering 'Hurras,'" recalled one German soldier who survived the campaign. "Whoever fell out because of wounds or illness, experienced the horrible fate of the abandoned. Marshes, rivers, thick forests, the heat of the sun, hunger, and lack of water had a terrible effect. What drove us on was the unshakable will to reach the German front."

With the fall of Bobruisk and Vitebsk, both flanks of Army Group Center were shattered, and the road to Minsk was open from southeast and northwest. As the first phase of Operation Bagration was completed, Soviet forces briefly halted on the Berezina River to resupply, reorganize and receive reinforcements. Success came at a great price, and many Soviet units had suffered significant losses. While their ground units halted, Soviet aircraft continued to attack the retreating Germans. The Soviet pilots flew nearly unopposed by the Luftwaffe. The short pause allowed Model to establish a new defensive line running north and south through the town of Molodechno and create some reserves from the arriving reserve divisions.

Northwest of Minsk, the 5th Panzer Division made one more attempt to delay the inevitable. In the fighting on July 1-2, the Soviet 5th Guards Tank Army was gutted, but the 5th Panzer's combat power also was spent. It was down to 18 panzers. All of the 505th Heavy Tank Battalion's Tiger tanks were lost in the hard fighting.

The vanguard of the Soviet 2nd Guards Tank Corps reached the northwestern outskirts of Minsk on July 2. At the same time, a Soviet mobile task force captured Nesvizhz, thereby cutting off German retreat toward Baranovichi. Before the trap closed, the Germans were able to evacuate 20,000 wounded and rear-echelon troops from Minsk.

The following morning, tanks from the 2nd Guards Tank Corps punched their way into Minsk from the northwest. German resistance collapsed rapidly, and by the end of the day, the capital of Belarus was liberated, a major political coup. Approximately 100,000 German soldiers were trapped in a large cauldron west of Minsk. With Tippelskirch outside the pocket, commander of the XII Corps Mueller took command of the encircled survivors of the Fourth Army.

Surrounded German troops were constantly being pounded by Soviet artillery and fighter-bombers, steadily breaking up resistance into smaller and smaller pockets, which were mopped up by Soviet infantry. A group of several thousand German soldiers under General Hans Trout, commander of the 78th Sturm-Division, was wiped out, and Trout himself captured on July 6. Realizing that further resistance was impossible, two days later Mueller surrendered his forces southwest of Minsk. For the next several days, Soviet infantry and partisans combed the woods near Minsk, hunting down German stragglers.

With Minsk taken, the 3rd Belarus Front received orders to take Lida and Vilno by 12 July and establish a beachhead on the west bank of the Neman River. Vilno was a tough nut to crack. Generalmajor Reiner Stahel's 12,000 Germans held strong positions in the fortress city.

The 5th Guards Tank Army and the 3rd Guards Tank Corps bypassed Vilno on July 7. They swung around from both the north and south. As the Soviet forces approached the city, an uprising by the underground Polish Home Army flared up in Vilno. The action was part of the efforts by Polish

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Stalin paraded the 50,000 German prisoners of war captured at Minsk through Moscow in July 1944 to demonstrate to the world the success of the Soviet summer offensive.

government-in-exile to establish a bargaining position after the defeat of Germany. While the military action was directed against the Germans, political aims were focused against the Soviets. The Polish government-in-exile located in London was hoping to position itself as an equal partner to resist Stalin's establishing political dominance over Poland after the war.

German reinforcements arrived in Vilno during the night of July 7. They were just in time, for the next morning leading infantry units from Soviet 5th Army began assaulting the city from southeast. Tanks from the 5th Guards Tank Army and the 3rd Guard Tank Corps linked up two days later just west of Vilno, thus encircling the Germans inside the fortress city. Over the next three days, brutal street fighting raged.

Assaults by Polish resistance fighters inside the city bedeviled the German defenders at the same time they were trying to fend off Soviet attacks from the outskirts. The Germans sold their lives dearly, and Soviet casualties were severe. German reinforcements desperately tried to reach their beleaguered comrades from the west; however, the Soviet ring around the city was constantly being reinforced, and all German efforts to relieve the trapped men failed. Two German pockets of resistance remained in the western suburbs of Vilno when Stahel gave orders to break out on July 12.

That night, the German 6th Panzer Division and part of Panzergrenadier Division Grossdeutschland opened a corridor to the beleaguered German forces in Vilno. Before the Soviets closed the gap, 3,000 Germans escaped. But the Germans lost 8,000 killed and 5,000 captured in the final Russian assault on the city.

The Soviets established bridgeheads on the west bank of Neman River on July 15. For the next few days, the Germans made desperate counterattacks in the hope of dislodging the Russians. Despite best German efforts, the Red Army units maintained their positions and even expanded them. By that point, the German territory of East Prussia was within striking distance.

Once the city was firmly in Soviet hands, NKVD internal-security units began disarming and interning Polish Home Army fighters, forcing those who escaped the dragnets back underground. This action clearly demonstrated to the Polish government-in-exile that Stalin was not going to acknowledge them as equal partners or to allow armed formations, inherently hostile to the Soviets, to remain behind the front lines.

While the Soviet offensive continued unstoppably, the Germans were still capable in some instances of inflicting punishing losses on the Russians. For example, Major-General Filipp Rudkin's 11th Tank Corps advanced on the left flank of the 1st Belarus Front without conducting reconnaissance. The tank corps ran headlong into well-entrenched German anti-tank positions two miles south of Kovel. In the ensuing fighting, the tank corps lost 84 tanks. Stavka subsequently removed Rudkin from command.

In order to demonstrate to the world the success of the summer offensive, Stalin ordered a prisoner parade to be conducted in Moscow. Fifty-seven thousand German prisoners captured at Minsk were transported to Moscow and, on 17 July, marched in two giant columns through the city center. The prisoner columns were followed by street sweeper trucks, symbolically cleansing the ground of the so-called Nazi filth.

The border city of Brest was liberated on July 21, and the Red Army entered Polish territory, taking Liublin on July 24. When Soviet forces reached Liublin, they liberated Majdanek, the first concentration camp encountered by the Red Army. In a cruel twist of fate, once the liberated prisoners were moved out, the victorious Red Army detained members of the Polish Home Army at Majdanek.

As the Red Army approached Warsaw on August 1, elements of the Polish Home Army rose up against the Germans again. Although the Warsaw Uprising lasted 63 days, the allies took no action other than to air drop some supplies. As for the Red Army, it halted at the city's eastern suburbs and stood passively by while the Germans slaughtered the resistance forces.

Elsewhere on the Eastern Front, Soviet forces steadily advanced throughout August. They succeeded in liberating Belarus, parts of the Baltic States, and eastern Poland. On August 28, the Red Army shifted temporarily to the defensive. That move marked the end of Operation Bagration.

Model was unable to prevent the destruction of Army Group Center. Of its 38 divisions, 28 were lost in the savage fighting between June and August. Official German losses were cited as 26,000 killed, 110,000 wounded, and 263,000 captured or missing. Yet a large percentage of German troops missing in action were actually killed. German headquarters frequently designated entire units as missing when their fate was unknown. As for the Red Army, it suffered 178,000 killed, missing, or captured, and another 587,000 wounded. These were extremely heavy losses for a victorious side.

Operation Bagration heralded the certainty of German defeat, leading to Allied hopes of ending the war in 1944. Bagration was one of the largest offensives conducted by the Soviet Union during the war.

But the Germans fought on. With defeat all but certain, they continued to fight brilliantly to the bitter end. Commanders such as Generaloberst Gotthard Heinrici, who slowed the Soviet advance on Berlin at Seelow Heights in mid-April 1945, helped prolong the war in Europe.

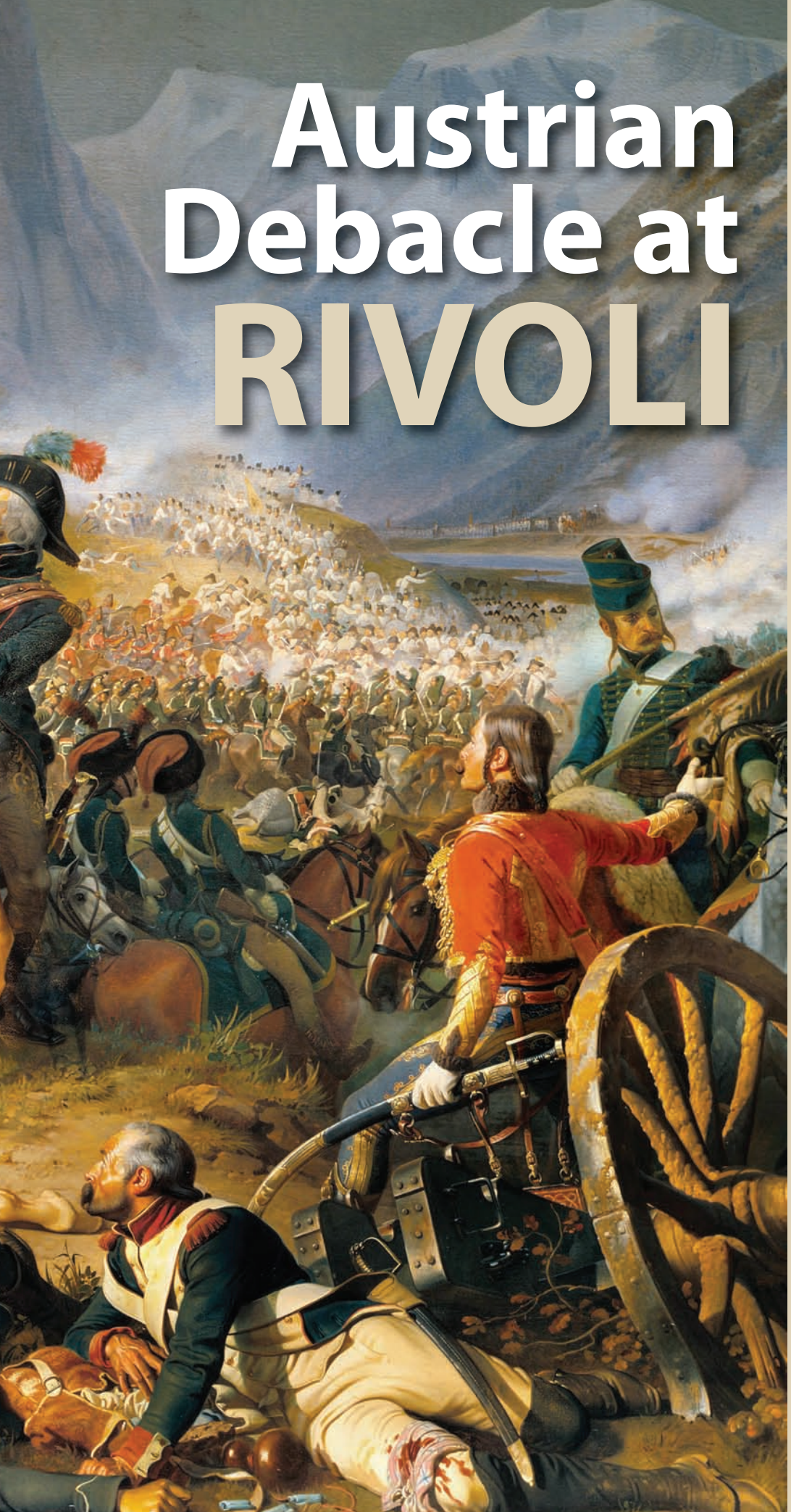
After Hitler died on April 30, Generaloberst Alfred Jodl, representing the German High Command, traveled to Reims, France, where he signed Germany's unconditional surrender on May 7. The surrender became effective the following day, and was celebrated as Victory in Europe Day. ■

Napoleon Bonaparte changes to a fresh horse as his Army of Italy engages the Austrians at the town of Rivoli Veronese above the Adige River.

The Austrians planned an elaborate double-envelopment against Napoleon Bonaparte's Army of Italy on the Rivoli plateau in January 1797. Bonaparte thwarted their plan every step of the way.

By Robert L. Durham

Austrian Debacle at RIVOLI



Twenty-six year-old Napoleon Bonaparte took command of France's 23,000-strong Army of Italy in Nice, France, in late March 1796. Some of the officers in the French army found Napoleon's appearance and demeanor sorely wanting.

"Owing to his thinness his features were almost ugly in their sharpness," wrote Count Yorck von Wurtenburg. "In spite of his apparent bodily weakness, he was tough and sinewy under his sallow face."

Despite all of this, Wurtenburg concluded by observing that Bonaparte's grayish-blue eyes were those of a genius. His eyes alone commanded respect. Before his piercing eyes "all bowed low," wrote Wurtenburg.

In a conference with his generals on March 27, Bonaparte skipped over the pleasantries that another commanding general might have deemed appropriate and asked pointed questions about the condition of the army. He questioned each of his generals on the positions of their respective divisions, the spirit of the men, and the effective force of each division. He then disclosed his plans for the upcoming campaign. He was disappointed when he found out that they had not been paid or outfitted in a long time.

Next, the new commander-in-chief reviewed his troops. He was shocked to see their condition. The uniforms of both officers and men were torn in places and threadbare. Some wore shoes, some wore boots, and some went barefoot. Some wore helmets, and others wore caps.

"Soldiers! You are hungry and naked; the government owes you much, but can give you nothing, " he told them. "I will lead you into the most fertile plains on earth. Rich provinces, opulent towns, all shall be at your disposal. You will find honor, glory, and riches."

Napoleon hoped by his speech to light a fire in their bellies. Afterwards, he fired off a dispatch to the Directory, the five-man committee that ruled France for four years beginning in November 1795. "I found this army, not only destitute of everything, but without discipline," he said. Bonaparte wasted no time getting them a portion of their back pay and new uniforms.

If his troops left a lot to be desired, Napoleon had a solid trio of generals serving as division commanders. The first of the three, Jean Serurier, had seen 34 years' service in the Royal Army before the Revolution. The oldest of the three, he had fought in the Seven Years' War and the Spanish-Portuguese War. Although he was a harsh disciplinarian, lacking in imagination, he was a methodical worker. Napoleon could count on him to follow his orders.

Alamy

ABOVE: Napoleon immediately set about getting back pay and new uniforms for his troops when he assumed command of the Army of Italy. OPPOSITE: Napoleon's small victory over the Austrian rearguard at Lodi not only boosted the morale of his army, but also displayed his sound grasp of tactics.

The second general, General Pierre Augereau, was the son of a Parisian servant. A soldier of fortune, he started his military career in the French Royal Cavalry. He soon had to flee after killing an officer. Next, he fought in the Russian Army against the Turks. After that, he became one of the famous Potsdam guards in Frederick the Great's army.

Following a series of adventures in Greece, Italy, and Portugal, Augereau returned to France in 1792 and enlisted in the Revolutionary Army. Within a year's time, he was promoted to division command. He was a gifted tactician who was adored by his soldiers. Augereau was "a kind of coarse and uncultured Ajax, intrepid and boastful, proud of his tall stature, of his martial figure and his valour," said fellow general Count Philippe-Paul de Segur. Bonaparte concurred. "He has plenty of character, courage, firmness, activity; is inured to war; is well liked by the soldiery; is fortunate in his operations."

The third of Bonaparte's experienced division commanders was Andre Massena. A native of Nice, Massena had served as a sergeant major before leaving the French army in 1789. During his three-year absence from the army, he smuggled goods in Italy. As a result, he had first-hand knowledge of its geography. Returning to the army in 1792, he rose rapidly through the ranks and in three years' time had become a general and division commander.

Massena, who was a superb tactician, proved to be one of the best of Bonaparte's generals. "In his character, he was a man made for authority and command," wrote Paul Thiebault, an adjutant at the time who eventually became a general. "No one therefore was more in his place than was Massena at the head of his troops."

As Napoleon prepared to advance into the Piedmont region of Northern Italy, he was confronted by an army of the Kingdom of Sardinia as well as an Austrian army. Blocking the French line of advance at the outset of the campaign, the 17,000-strong Sardinian Army was defending its own lands, but Napoleon believed he could brush it aside because of its low morale.

The Sardinian Army was allied with the larger and more powerful Austrian army. General of Artillery Johann Beaulieu, commanding the Austrians in northern Italy, had 32,000 troops with which to oppose the French advance.

Napoleon swept into the Piedmont on April 12. Two weeks later, Bonaparte and Victor Amadeus III of Sardinia signed the Armistice of Cherasco, which effectively withdrew Sardinia from the War of the First Coalition, leaving just Britain and Austria to face France. With very little effort, Bonaparte had removed the threat of having to confront a Piedmontese-Sardinian army in battle.

With Austria now on her own, Napoleon concentrated his army against Beaulieu. He led his army eastward along the south bank of the Po River in an effort to outflank the Austrian army on the north bank.

The French slipped across the Po at Piacenza on May 6. Four days later near Lodi, Bonaparte caught up with a 10,000-strong Austrian rearguard. Led by General-Major Karl Philipp Sebottendorf, the Austrians had established a seemingly strong position on the far side of the Adda River. Three battalions of Austrian infantry backed by a dozen guns were positioned to cover the wooden bridge and the causeway leading up to it. Oddly, the Austrians had not demolished the bridge.

Bonaparte arrived ahead of Massena's column and personally sited 24 guns to engage the enemy. He also dispatched Chef de Brigade (equivalent to Colonel) Michel Ordener at the head of several detachments of cavalry to find a ford in order to outflank the Austrians. When Massena arrived to strengthen the French vanguard, Bonaparte ordered a column of grenadiers to storm the bridge. The grenadiers faltered midway under a withering fire from the Austrians.

For a second assault, senior officers Massena, Jean-Baptiste Cervoni, Louis-Alexandre Berthier,

and Claude Dallemagne took up places at the head of the column. The senior officers and reinforced grenadiers surged forward again. Some of the attacking troops leaped from the bridge into the shallows and initiated a sharp enfilading fire against the Austrian infantry. The Austrians made a powerful counterattack, but the French assault column eventually punched through the Austrian line. When Sebottendorf observed the French cavalry approaching on his flank, he broke off the action and withdrew.

The Austrians lost 153 killed, 1,700 prisoners, and 16 guns. The cost to the French was 350 casualties. Beaulieu successfully evaded the French pursuit, largely as a result of the Austrian rearguard action.

Bonaparte's men began calling him "Le Petit Corporal" after his victory at Lodi for the confidence, courage, and determination he had displayed in prying the Austrians from their position.

Bonaparte entered Milan on May 15 as a liberator. He extracted funds from the Milanese to pay his troops, some of whom had not received pay in three years. He forced his way across the Mincio River on May 30. In the process, he interposed his forces between the widely separated Austrian formations. The Austrians had little choice but to retreat to the Tyrol. This left Bonaparte free to attack Mantua, the key to the Austrian position in northern Italy.

Situated in the Po Valley, Mantua served as an important road hub, with roads branching out to Padua to the east, Piacenza to the west, Verona and Vicenza to the north, and Modena and Bologna to the south. Italian engineers had created artificial lakes in the 12th century as part of a defensive system. The lakes, fed by the Mincio River, shielded Mantua from attack from the north and east. In his precipitous retreat, Beaulieu had left a garrison of 12,000 men to hold Mantua.

The French attempted to capture Mantua by storm on May 31 but failed. A force of grenadiers captured the San Giorgio suburb three days later. With the suburb as a foothold, the French began to besiege Mantua. The Austrians devoted considerable effort to relieving the siege over the course of the remainder of the campaign. Altogether, they would make four attempts to relieve the garrison.

With Beaulieu outmatched by Bonaparte, the Austrians sent Field Marshal Dagobert von Wurmser to take control of the deteriorating situation. The septuagenarian commander still had sharp wits and therefore was an able opponent.

Bonaparte was unable to conduct a rigorous siege because he lacked the troops to build and maintain a line of circumvallation, which would have kept out a relief force while protecting his long supply line. This allowed Wurmser, who commanded a reinforced field army numbering 55,000, to focus on trying to isolate and destroy enemy detachments guarding the French siege forces. It was in large part a game of wits, and Wurmser initially played it quite well. Napoleon quit the siege on August 1, leaving behind 140 spiked guns that he could ill afford to lose. This allowed Wurmser to resupply the garrison.

The withdrawal was a blessing in disguise for Bonaparte, because it enabled him to fight a war of maneuver against the Austrian columns arrayed against him. On August 4 he smashed a corps led by Lt. Gen. Peter Quasdanovich northwest of Mantua at Lonato. Quasdanovich lost one-third of his 15,000 men in the drubbing.

The following day, Bonaparte engaged the Austrian main army and drove it beyond the Mincio. Wurmser withdrew into the Tyrol, which left the Mantua garrison to fend for itself. Napoleon promptly resumed the siege, albeit without siege guns.

Wurmser moved southwest through the Veneto Province towards Mantua in a second attempt to relieve the siege in early September. Although overtaken and defeated by Bonaparte's larger army at Bassano on September 8, he nevertheless continued his march to relieve Mantua. He punched through the French siege lines on September 12 and arrived in the city with 10,000 troops, thus raising the number of Austrian troops in Mantua to 23,000. It was a pyrrhic victory considering that the sol-

ABOVE: The Austrians proved capable of a stubborn defense at Arcole. The timely arrival of General Andre Massena's division ultimately dislodged the Hapsburg troops. OPPOSITE: In an effort to inspire his troops, Napoleon grabbed a battle flag and waved it about on the causeway over the Alphone River at Arcole to rally his troops.

diers and residents of Mantua were already starving. All Wurmser succeeded in doing was exacerbating the already desperate supply situation.

The Austrians dispatched a new army in early November under General of Artillery Joszef Alvinczy to fight its way to Mantua. Bonaparte advanced to intercept Alvinczy's columns. On November 15, near the village of Arcole, the French vanguard began crossing the Alphone River on a narrow causeway but fell back when confronted with a withering fire from the Austrians. In an attempt to inspire his troops, Napoleon grabbed a flag and waved it about on the causeway, adding to his reputation as a commander who led from the front.

Alvinczy had the advantage in numbers: the Austrians fielded 24,000 troops to Bonaparte's 20,000. Bonaparte needed to achieve a victory so that he might turn his attention to another Austrian column, numbering 18,000 troops, that was facing a French holding force of 10,000 men. Bonaparte also believed that for the sake of his army's morale it was important to keep fighting. He sent his men charging against the Austrian position for three days, but the French never succeeded in breaking through. When Massena's division arrived on November 17, however, Alvinczy feared he might be outflanked, and he withdrew to Vicenza.

A lull in the fighting in December afforded Bonaparte time to meet with the Grand Duke of Tuscany to plan an expedition against the Pope. Bonaparte undertook this mission because the Pope was an implacable enemy of the Revolution. The expedition was superseded, though, by the Austrians' final attempt to relieve Mantua in January 1797.

By that time, the reinforced French army numbered 46,700 men. Bonaparte had arrayed his units across the region. Serurier commanded 10,000 Frenchmen besieging Mantua. Newly minted Division General Barthelemy Joubert commanded another 10,000 French troops stationed at Rivoli. Bonaparte had been observing Joubert throughout the campaign, and the promotion he gave Joubert in December 1796 was a great mark of respect.

By comparison, the Austrians fielded 49,000 at the beginning of the year. Alvinczy's 28,000-strong Tyrol corps swept south from its base in the Tyrol. Planning to capture La Corona and Rivoli, Alvinczy issued detailed orders to his subordinate commanders.

Meanwhile, Lt. Gen. Marchese Giovanni Provera's 15,000-man Friuli corps marched west from Padua in two columns. Provera led a 9,000-man column that would march through Legnano to Mantua. Maj. Gen. Adam Bajalich led a 6,000-man column that would march from Bassano through Verona to Mantua.

Alvinczy captured La Corona on January 12, but Joubert blocked his advance on Rivoli. Nevertheless, the Austrians engaged Joubert and forced him to evacuate San Marco, which the Austrians then occupied. Although his troops had been roughly handled by the Austrians, Joubert had succeeded in preventing them from seizing Rivoli.

Napoleon, at Bologna, did not learn of the Austrian advance until January 10. He moved to Verona three days later. Upon his arrival, he learned that Massena's force of 9,000 men had checked Bajalich's advance, and General of Division Pierre Augereau had soundly defeated Provera at Legnago. Alvinczy's plans to relieve Mantua were steadily unraveling.

Bonaparte could not fathom the Austrians' intent. Nevertheless, he began concentrating his scattered divisions: He ordered General of Division Gabriel Rey to move his 4,000 men to Castelnuovo and General of Brigade Claude Victor to move his 2,000 men to Villafranca.

Bonaparte received a dispatch from Joubert, who was at Rivoli, on the night of January 13.

The contents of the report convinced him that Rivoli was the Austrian's main objective. Joubert informed him that a large force of the enemy had assaulted his position, driving him from the plateau onto the plain. Joubert did not know if he could hold his position without reinforcements.

Bonaparte ordered Joubert to hold Rivoli at all costs. He knew that Alvinczy's corps had arrived from the north via the Adige River valley. Deeming Alvinczy's corps the most serious threat, he issued instructions to his subordinates to converge on Rivoli.

Bonaparte ordered Massena to leave 2,000 men to hold Verona and take the other 8,000 to Rivoli. He also ordered General Rey to march at once to Rivoli. And he directed General of Brigade Joachim Murat, who commanded 600 horsemen, to strike Alvinczy from the rear.

Bonaparte departed Verona and arrived at Rivoli at 2:00 a.m. on January 14. Joubert's troops were deployed for battle on the plain awaiting Bonaparte. When the French commander arrived, he took command of the forces in the field.

The Adige River valley is overshadowed by Monte Baldo, which separates the Adige from Lake Garda. The plain where Joubert was deployed is high above the Adige. It is encircled by the Tasso River, which flows into the Adige south of Rivoli. The roads over which the majority of the Austrians converging on Rivoli had to arrive were of poor quality, which precluded their bringing any ordnance other than mountain guns. The broken terrain also precluded large-scale cavalry actions.

A deep canyon ran from La Corona to San Marco. It afforded access to the rear of Joubert's division. This was the only route by which cavalry and artillery could be brought onto the battlefield.

Alvinczy planned to divide his corps into six columns. Colonel Marquis Franz Joseph Lusignan would take 4,500 men on a long circuit around Monte Baldo, far beyond Napoleon's left flank, and assault the French rear. General-Major Anton Lipthay and General-Major Samuel Koblos, with 3,000 men and 4,100 men, respectively, were to launch a frontal attack against Joubert's position. General-Major Joseph Ocksay would support them with his 3,500 men.

Alvinczy instructed General-Major Joseph Philipp Vukassovich to march his 2,900 men down the left bank of the Adige River with orders to seize Rivoli from the opposite side of the river. As for Quasdanovich's 7,000-strong column, it was to pass through the narrow defile connecting La Corona and San Marco.

Ocksay was unable to join Lipthay and Koblos via the road through the Adige Valley; he had to backtrack to Belluno and find a path over Monte Baldo. Lusignan also arrived late after encountering deep snow along his route.

At 4:00 a.m. on January 14, without waiting for Massena's division, Bonaparte ordered Joubert to retake any ground that had been lost the previous day. This caught Alvinczy completely by surprise, for he had expected the French to remain on the defensive. Bonaparte decided to immediately seize the heights of San Marco because it was the key to the plateau.

The 29th Light Infantry and the 85th Line Infantry formed to the left; the 14th Line Infantry deployed in the center. Adjutant General Honore Vial's Light Infantry Brigade, which was composed of the 4th, 17th and 22nd Light, supported by the 33rd Line, covered the right.

Massena commanded the left, Berthier led the center, and Joubert directed the right. The 39th

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French General Andre Massena, French General Barthelemy Joubert, Austrian Field Marshal Dagobert von Wurmser, and Austrian General Joszef Alvinczy

Line covered the mouth of the gorge through which Quasdanovich would attempt to reach the battlefield. The 39th, which consisted of just 978 men, deployed in three lines backed by artillery. French skirmishers from the unit took up places on the high walls of the defile from which they could fire on the advancing Austrians.

At 5:00 a.m. General of Brigade Honore Vial's troops captured the chapel of San Marco from a Croat detachment. He drove the rest of the Austrian outposts back to the villages of San Giovanni and Gamberon. In the center of the battlefield, the 14th Line took Monte Ceredello. On the right, the 85th Line captured the height of Trambasore, and the 29th Light seized the height of Zoro. Bonaparte placed batteries to support each of these forces.

Bonaparte's line was stretched to the breaking point, but the spirited French soldiers sustained their attack. Indeed, they advanced at faster pace than Bonaparte wished. An Austrian counterattack nearly defeated the 4th Light of Vial's brigade, but the 17th Light came to their aid just in time. The Austrians, owing to their lack of field artillery, gave way under Joubert's attack. General Vial, on the French right, pushed the Austrian outpost back beyond Lubiara. The 14th Line, in the French center, cleared the heights of Rovina.

At dawn Alvinczy directed his troops to throw their entire weight against the French infantry. Ocksay moved up his troops on the Austrian left. He commanded some excellent soldiers, a combined grenadier battalion and a battalion of Infantry Regiment Deutschmeister. The Austrian troops collided with the 14th Line and began a ferocious struggle for possession of San Giovanni.

General-Major Koblos also had a combined grenadier battalion, as well as some companies of Mahony Jagers (light infantry). He repeatedly attacked Vial's brigade, but was unsuccessful in his attempts to defeat it. To assist the hard-pressed soldiers of Vial's brigade, Joubert rushed the 33rd Line to his aid.

This portion of the battle lasted for two hours, during which the French suffered heavy officer casualties. At the outset of the battle, Joubert had his horse killed from beneath him and spent the rest of the battle afoot. The French left eventually gave way, exposing it to possible encirclement. This allowed the Austrians to send additional forces against the French center. Although in danger of being surrounded, the 14th Line refused its left flank, thwarting the Austrian assault.

Massena arrived at 10:00 a.m. with the 18th, 75th, and 32nd demi-brigades. Bonaparte initially placed him in reserve, but soon ordered him to send the 32nd to reinforce the French left. Bonaparte ordered the 18th to Garda and retained the 75th as a reserve unit.

The 18th demi-brigade soon received new orders to advance to the left of the line of attack, extending their flanks but not getting too spread out. The arrival of the 32nd on the French left stabilized the section, but the Austrians slowly pushed the French back. Lipthay moved through a ravine in an attempt to outflank the 85th Line on the French left, but the 85th had already abandoned its position. The 85th retreated so quickly that the Austrians found themselves behind the 29th. After a spirited resistance, they were driven back in disorder to Rivoli.

When the French right was forced back from

Austrian troops became disorganized as they fought across the broken terrain of Rivoli, and French cavalry exploited the situation.

Lubiara, Massena tried to rally the French troops, even striking some of them with the flat of his sword. He could not stop the retreat and soon found himself alone with adjutant Paul Thiebault and an aide-de-camp. Thiebault said it was time to be going, but Massena stayed there, whistling while he watched the Austrian skirmishers. Finally, he took off at a gallop and placed himself at the head of the 32nd, which was marching forward with a forbidding resolve.

Massena ordered the 75th to get behind the enemy skirmishers. By late morning the French had restored their right and regained control of Trombasore. Massena led his division forward to plug a breach in the French line, but at the same time the Austrians hit the 14th Line in front and flank. Putting up a gallant resistance, the 14th held its position for a long time. The soldiers of its lead battalion, deployed in San Giovanni, engaged in house-to-house fighting before being driven out. They had succeeded in slowing the pace of the Austrian advance.

The Austrians next attacked the 85th Line and forced it back. They also assaulted Vial's brigade, driving it back by outflanking it through a wood. The troops fell back to the chapel of San Marco. Joubert, seeing the disorder, made his way to the position of the 14th and ordered them to hold the chapel.

Owing to the heroic resistance of the 14th in the San Marco chapel, Joubert was able to reach the Monte Ceredello plateau. The 14th counter-attacked Ocskay's brigade; in the process, the French soldiers recovered the battery of artillery that had been captured by the Austrians. The battle consisted of "10 hours of alternate charges and routs on both sides," recalled Joubert.

The two forces, French and Austrian, were roughly equal in numbers, but the Austrians had no artillery except their few mountain guns. Still, the Austrians proved themselves a worthy foe, especially considering that their supply trains had not kept up with Alvinczy's column and the troops had not eaten in 24 hours.

The French right stood between San Marco and Rovina, the center between Rovina and Zoro, and the left between Zoro and Brenzon. Quasdanovich's column was marching determinedly through the defile. It would not be long before they ran headlong into the 39th.

Ocskay shelled the 39th with two cannon he had captured. At the same time, Koblos captured entrenchments the 39th had abandoned and advanced as toward Trombasore, where Massena's men were holding out.

Vukassovich, on the left bank of the Adige River, progressed to a position across from the 39th demi-brigade at Pontare. His troops shelled the 39th, which fell back under the bombardment.

Quasdanovich prepared to charge down the defile, but he faced a major problem: the battle would have to be nearly won before he could get into position. The defile was narrow, and a small force of French could easily block his advance. Although they took substantial casualties, the stout-hearted soldiers of the 39th held the pass. Quasdanovich even tried to reach Monte San Marco by directing part of his column to scale the canyon walls, but they were easily repulsed by fire from the French soldiers.

Shortly before noon, Quasdanovich noted that the ridge overlooking the defile was not occupied in strength by French troops. He ordered his advance guard, comprising a battalion of infantry and six squadrons of cavalry, to push forward and clear the way for his troops to file through. The combination of Quasdanovich's attack and the fire from Vukassovich's artillery batteries drove the 39th out of the defile and onto the plain.

For the Austrians, it was an opportune moment to link up. The head of Quasdanovich's column, consisting of a squadron of staff dragoons and a battalion of Infantry Regiment Callenberger, made it to the plateau under a substantial fire. Three more cavalry squadrons moved up behind the dragoon squadron.

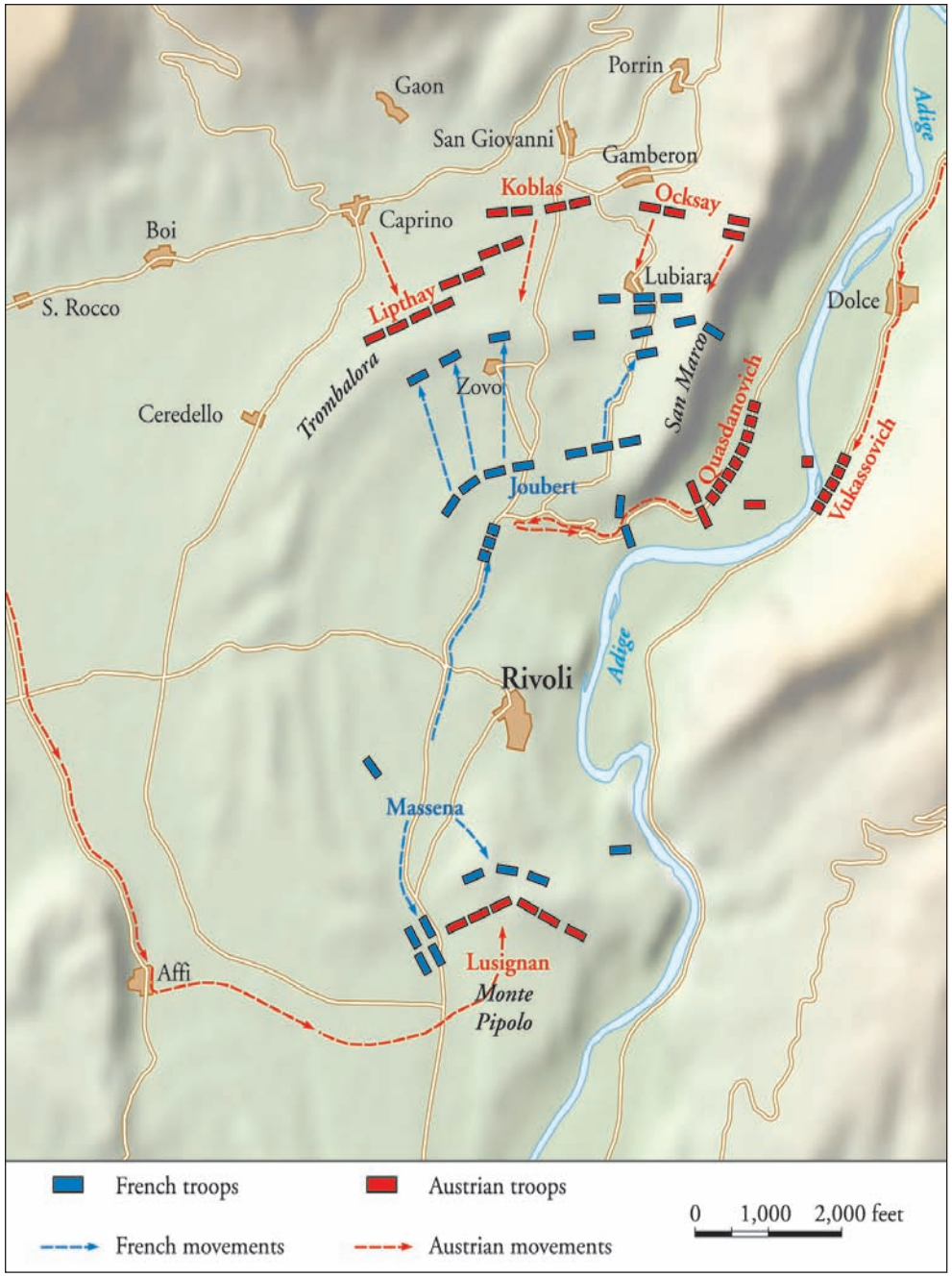
"It only needed an advance of a few hundred paces, only the perseverance of half an hour, and the French army would be defeated," wrote Austrian officer Johann Baptiste Schels. Joubert

concurred in his memoirs. "The situation was desperate."

The Austrian forces of Lipthay, Koblos, and Ocksay drove Joubert's men from the heights of San Marco, but the broken ground scattered the Austrian troops. Two small squadrons of French cavalry, about 200 troopers, hit the Austrians' leading battalion, breaking it up. Their flight sparked panic throughout the rest of the Austrian infantry. The troops of both Koblos and Ocksay shamefully fled from the field.

As a result, Lipthay found his troops uncovered. This gave him little choice but to retreat. The troops had become convinced they were being attacked by a large force of cavalry, and it became impossible to rally them. Alvinczy "was soon left alone and being nearly surrounded was obliged to save himself," wrote Colonel Thomas Gray, an official observer with the Austrian army.

Joubert was then free to turn much of his force upon Quasdanovich. The French forces deployed in that sector, which included the 39th, elements of Joubert's division, and 600 horse from General Charles Leclerc's Brigade, proved more than enough to hold back the Austrians fighting their way up out of the defile. The French infantry and cavalry were supported by a dozen cannon.



Austrian General Joszef Alvinczy's columns failed to arrive on schedule at Rivoli. This allowed Napoleon ample time to consolidate his forces and arrive in time to personally direct them.

The French gunners swept the Austrian infantry battalion and cavalry squadron spearheading the assault with canister. Afterwards, the 39th charged into their flank with fixed bayonets. The force of the assault drove the Austrians back into the defile and prevented the units behind them from advancing.

French light infantry on the southern slope of Monte San Marco poured a withering fire into the Austrian cavalry in the defile. The entire column became disordered, which intensified when a shell landed in an ammunition caisson, and its explosion killed many men. The Austrians slowly withdrew from the defile.

Lusignan, unaware of it, was now isolated. He reached his destination at Monte Pipolo after noon and discharged two volleys of musketry to alert Alvinczy of his arrival. Unfortunately, there was nothing Alvinczy could do; Lusignan was too late to influence the battle.

"They are ours," Bonaparte said with obvious delight. He detached the 18th, a battalion of the 75th, and some cavalry to confront them. The troops were supported by several 12-pounder cannon. General Rey arrived from Castelnuovo just in time to strike the rear of General Lusignan's Brigade. Outnumbered, surrounded, and unable to break free, Lusignan lost nearly his entire brigade before reaching Garda. Lusignan's men had reached the limit of their endurance and many dropped out of the column. The French pursuers took most of the stragglers prisoner. Lusignan, though, escaped in a boat across Lake Garda.

Quasdanovich, after his defeat at the gorge, withdrew back up the defile to Rivalta. Alvinczy rallied his three units at the foot of Monte Baldo. He believed that if he did not maintain contact, Bonaparte would be free to join the forces besieging Mantua and assault Provera.

Yet he also realized that if the French attacked him in the broken country, they could surround him and take his entire command. To help prevent this, he ordered Quasdanovich to send him two battalions of infantry and two cavalry squadrons. Not knowing what had happened to Lusignan, Alvinczy did not want to depart before ascertaining whether there was any way he might support him.

Bonaparte wanted to assault Alvinczi's center that afternoon but received word that Provera had eluded Augereau and was marching toward Mantua. Deciding that Mantua presented the greater danger, he ordered Massena to withdraw his division and strike out for it at daybreak. He left Rey to support Joubert and immediately left for Man-

Alamy

General Barthelemy Joubert leads his men in a charge against the wavering Austrians. Napoleon's victory at Rivoli forced the Austrians to abandon Lombardy and accept an unfavorable peace treaty.

tua himself. At 5:00 a.m. Bonaparte sent a letter to Joubert making it clear that he did not consider the work at Rivoli finished. He ordered Joubert to move forward early on January 15 and occupy La Corona. Bonaparte told Joubert that he had full confidence in his ability to defeat the Austrians, and therefore he did not plan to return to Rivoli.

Joubert ordered the 4th Light to attack San Marco two hours before dawn on January 15. By daybreak, they were already forcing the Austrians back. Joubert placed General Rey's division in the French center. He sent Vial across Monte Magnone to break Alvinczy's left flank, and sent Chef de Brigade Antoine Joseph Veaux with a strong force across Monte Baldo to outflank the Austrian right. Murat arrived at Lake Garda with 600 cavalry and assisted Veaux in turning Alvinczy's right.

Almost as soon as Joubert's attack began, Alvinczy knew he was defeated. His troops were simply too exhausted to resist the French. For that reason, he ordered a general retreat.

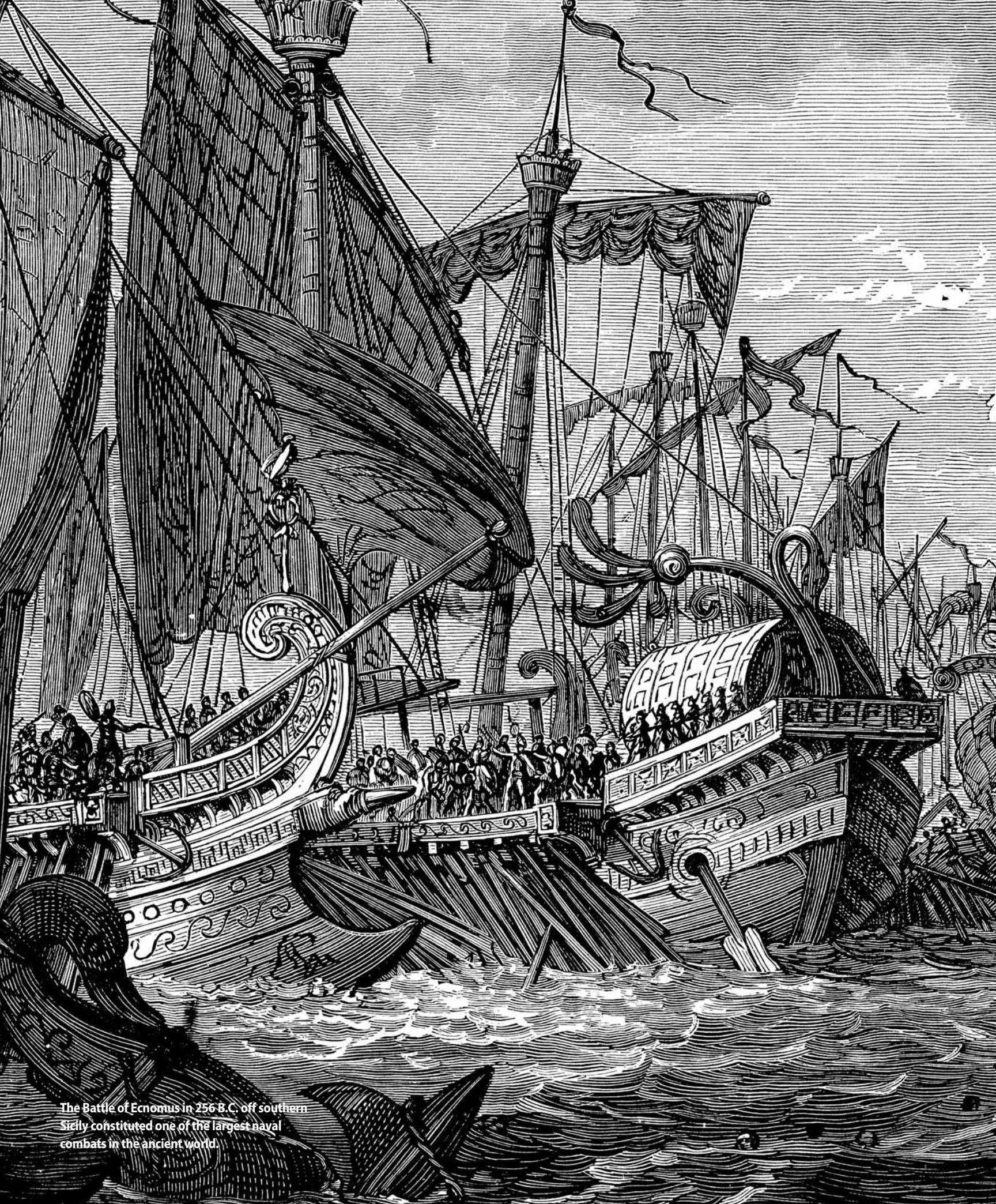
By that point, it was too late to save his army. If the retreat had been ordered the previous night, under cover of darkness, it might have succeeded; however, in front of a victorious enemy, it was nearly impossible. Alvinczy himself managed to escape before the main French attack struck. When the French assaulted the Austrians at full strength, they routed them. In the two days, the Austrians had suffered 3,000 killed and wounded and 11,000 captured. As for the French, they lost 4,000 killed and wounded.

The victory had both near-term and far-reaching benefits for Bonaparte and his Army of Italy. First, the triumph of Rivoli compelled the surrender of Mantua. Second, the Austrians abandoned northern Italy. Third, it forced the Austrians to accept the unfavorable Peace of Campio Formio. Fourth, it propelled Bonaparte to new heights in the eyes of the French people.

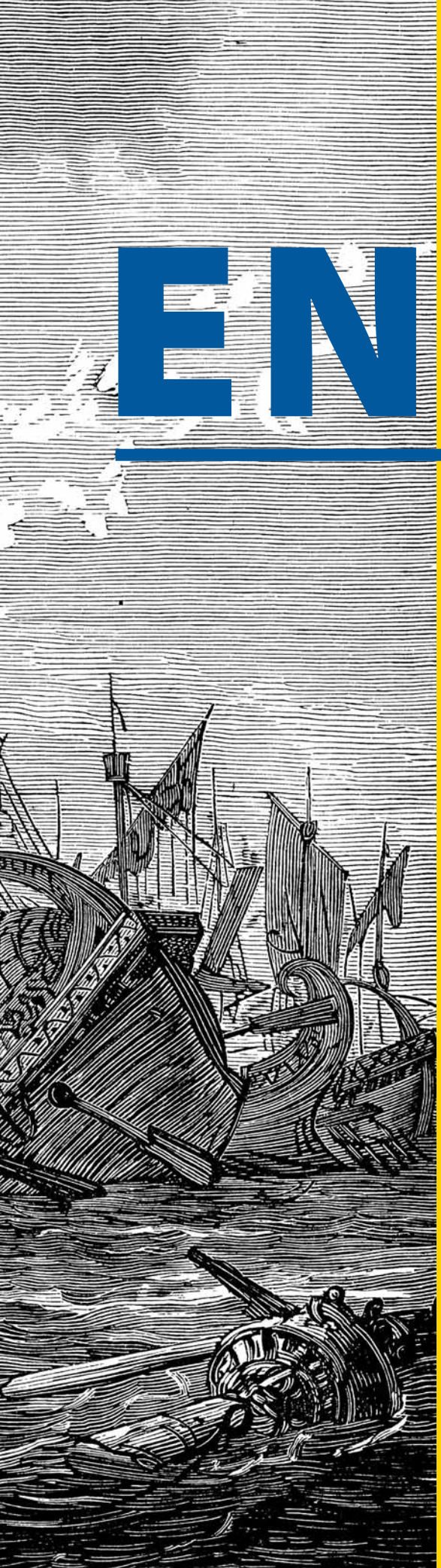
At the same time that the French under Joubert were destroying the Austrian army under Alvinczy, Provero arrived at Mantua. His 5,000 men were badly outnumbered by those of the five divisions that Bonaparte concentrated around Mantua. On January 16 Provera attempted to link with Wurmser by capturing La Favorita and opening a way into the citadel. Outnumbered seven to one, after a vicious fight, Provera surrendered his whole division. "So here we are in the same positions as before!" Bonaparte wrote to Joubert. "Alvinczy cannot say the same."

Bonaparte, who was at that point free of the Austrian threat, marched south into the Papal territory. He forced Pope Pius VI to pay a large part of France's cost for the war. Wurmser held out in Mantua for only two more weeks after the disasters at Rivoli and La Favorita. He surrendered Mantua on February 2. Of the 30,000-man garrison, 18,000 men had died from starvation and disease.

Bonaparte received reinforcements and subsequently carried the war toward Austria. Emperor Francis II placed Archduke Charles in command of the Austrian troops, but the archduke did not have nearly enough men to confront Napoleon. For that reason, Charles fell slowly back, losing men all the way. Bonaparte pursued him doggedly through the Alps. On April 6 he arrived at Leoben, just 95 miles from Vienna. Austria accepted a truce. The empire and the First French Republic signed the Peace of Leoben on April 18. This ended the War of the First Coalition; however, Great Britain and France remained at war with each other. As for Bonaparte, he had won a stunning victory in a difficult campaign against the Austrians that stood as a major milestone in his illustrious career. ■



The Battle of Ecnomus in 256 B.C. off southern Sicily constituted one of the largest naval combats in the ancient world.



MORTAL ENEMIES

The First Punic War pitted an aggressive Roman Republic against maritime giant Carthage. A savage series of battles unfolded for control of Sicily.

By Ludwig H. Dyck

The huge gangplank dangled in the air, suspended by a rope and pulley from a massive pole standing upright in the bow of the Roman galley. From the top of the gangplank a spike protruded like the beak of a gigantic bird. Indeed, later the devices later became known as the corvus (raven). The Carthaginian crews on the opposing ship had never seen anything like it. Down the gangplank dropped, thundering onto the Carthaginian ship where the spike embedded itself into the deck. Over the gangplank came the Roman marines with their shields up and blades drawn. The Carthaginian crews were flabbergasted. They were used to fighting sea battles by ramming; but now they had to fight, hand to hand, against some of the best soldiers of the ancient world. It was 260 BC, the fifth year of the greatest naval conflict of the ancient world.

The emerging empires of Rome and Carthage were kept apart for a long time by different spheres of interest. Traditionally founded in 753 BC, Rome was busy extending her sway over Italy, defeating native hill tribes and invading Gauls, overcoming the ancient Etruscan civilization and absorbing Greek coastal colonies. Rome became a formidable land power in contrast to Carthage, which ruled the sea.

Carthage began as a Phoenician colony founded in 814 BC, on the coast of northwest Africa. Carthage's mother city of Tyre fell first to the Babylonians in 585 BC, then to the Persians, and finally to Alexander the Great in 332 BC. The Phoenician elites fled Tyre for Carthage, from where they built a new empire. Native Libyans were exploited to toil in the fields, to fight in Carthage's armies, and to man her ships. The Phoenician culture dominated, and Phoenician remained the language of the ruling class. At the same time, though, the Phoenicians intermarried with the Libyans. In time a new culture, that of the Liby-Phoenicians, was born. The great wealth of Carthage's trading empire bought mercenaries and won her tribal alliances. Carthage blossomed into the largest and richest city of the western Mediterranean. From the Latin punicus (Phoenician), the Carthaginian Empire became known as the Punic empire. Its conquests extended to southern Spain, Sardinia, Corsica, and western Sicily.

Although fated to be deadly enemies, Rome and Carthage shared similar political structures. Both were former monarchies that had become republics, ruled by two annually elected magistrates—the Roman consuls and the Punic Shofets (suffetes in Latin)—alongside a senate and council of elders, respectively. Disagreements between these two governing bodies were referred to an assembly of the people. Senior political posts combined both civil and religious functions; however, unlike the consuls, the suffetes did not lead armies in war. In both Rome and Carthage, wealthy oligarchies monopolized the leadership. Relations between Rome and Carthage remained relatively peaceful until a crisis developed over Sicily.

In those days, Sicily's rugged hills were still

Eon Images

Gabriel Jacques de Saint-Aubin 1763

largely covered in forests, rising to their highest peak at the 10,900-foot volcano of Mt. Etna. Sicily was "the noblest of all islands," wrote Diodorus Siculus, and for that reason both powers desired to control it. Since prehistoric times, diverse peoples had settled on Sicily's fertile lands. Among them were the Siculi, from whom the name of Sicily was derived. Starting in the 8th century, Greeks and Phoenicians arrived to set up colonies. They spread their influence over the natives and used them in their own rivalries and wars for possession of the island. From 304-289, the most powerful of these colonies, Greek Syracuse, was ruled by the tyrant Agathocles. In his employment were Campanian mercenaries known as the Mamertines (after Mamer, another name for Mars), who would draw Rome into Sicilian politics and into the First Punic War.

In 288 BC, a year after Agathocles' death, the unemployed Mamertines faked friendship to enter the beautiful city of Messana (Messina). Once inside they enslaved, raped, and slaughtered the inhabitants. From Messana, the Mamertines raided northeastern Sicily and harassed their erstwhile employer Syracuse. Although they were defeated by Pyrrhus, King of Epirus (reigning from 306-302 and 297-272), who had come to help Syracuse against Carthaginian expansion, the Mamertines retained their hold on Messana. Concentrating on the greater enemy, Pyrrhus reduced the Carthaginian presence in Sicily to the sole stronghold of Lilybaeum (Marsala) on the western coast. Yet Syracuse lacked the spirit to finish off her old enemy and no longer desired Pyrrhus' service. Pyrrhus returned to Italy, where he had been warring with Rome. The Mamertines resumed their raiding, wreaking havoc for nearly a decade until somewhere between 269 and 265, when they were twice defeated by Syracuse's general and consequent king, Hiero. The Mamertines asked Carthage, which had rebuilt much of its power in Sicily, for help. They also asked Rome.

The Mamertines reminded Rome that they were kinsmen from Italy, but Rome was loath to help. The Mamertines' massacre at Messana had inspired a Roman garrison at allied Rhegium (Reggio Calabria) to likewise turn on the hapless population. Rome had executed its turncoat garrison; now Rome was suppose to help the equally wretched Mamertines?

The problem lay in Carthage's involvement. Rome's interests increasingly expanded beyond Italy's shores. Rome, the land power, ultimately clashed with maritime power Carthage, as might be expected, over an island. If Carthage were to gain hold of Messana, her fleet and armies would be on the doorstep of Italy. For a long time the Romans debated. The Senate staunchly disapproved but were overruled by the assembly of the people and the consuls, who promised everyone great plunder. Consul Appius Claudius Caudex was appointed to lead the expedition in 264. It was the first time a Roman army would leave Italy by sea. And while Rome deliberated, Carthage installed a garrison at Messana.

Having decided to throw their lot in with Rome, the Mamertines evicted the Punic garrison. Rome's involvement drastically upset the Sicily's power dynamics. For both Carthage and Syracuse it meant that Rome was now their greatest contender for Sicilian dominance. To counter the Punic loss of Messana, Carthage's commander, Hanno the Elder, won over not only Acragas (Agrigento), another Greek colony, but also Syracuse. Former enemies, Hanno and Hiero set up separate camps to blockade Messana by land and sea.

Rome relied on ships—triremes and quinqueremes—from allied Tarentum, Lorcri, Velia, and Naples to carry her troops. The standard warship since the latter half of the six century, the long and sleek trireme galley featured three banks of oars with a rower on each oar. In the naval arms race that followed, larger ships were built. The relationship between the design of the ships and their names is poorly understood. It seems that rather than adding more banks of oars, the number of rowers per oar was increased, so that on a quinquereme there were two men on the oars of the upper and middle banks and one on the lower. The bulk of the rowers probably hailed from Rome's proletarii, the poorest citizens, alongside liberi freemen. Given Rome's initial inexperience in naval warfare, a large number of the captains

and skilled deck crews were provided by allied Italian coastal cities.

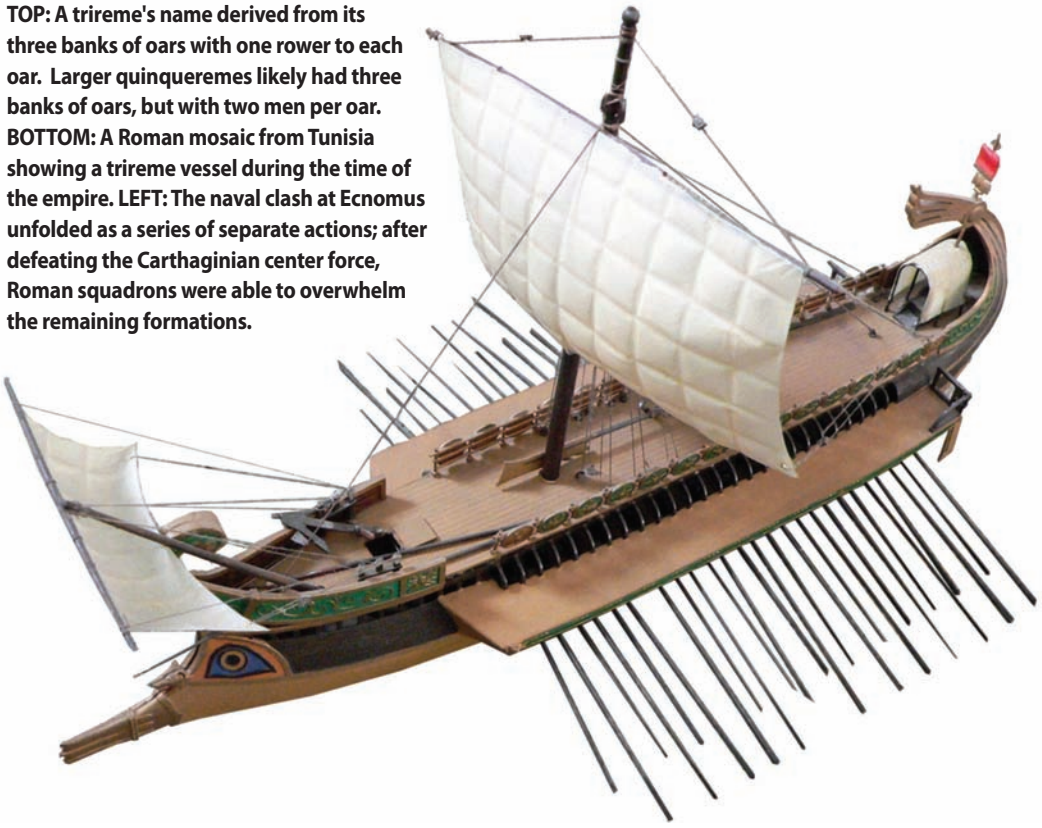
Undertaking a risky night crossing to slip through the Punic naval blockade, Consul Claudius brought his Roman army to Messana. All did not go smoothly, though, as there were some limited attacks by Punic ships. One of them ran aground and was captured by the Romans. At Messana, Claudius was impressed by the enemy forces arrayed against the city. He tried to parley, but when that approach failed, he launched an offensive. Rome's legions and allies proved more than a match for their adversaries, who were routed and driven off the field one after the other. As to the Mamertines, they were no longer mentioned, their fate eclipsed by the larger conflict between Rome and Carthage.

When the Romans first agreed to help the Mamertines against Hiero, they did not envision themselves drawn into a war with Carthage, but now they were emboldened by Claudius' victory. In 263 BC, the consuls Manius Otacilius Crassus and Manius Valerius Maximus arrived in Sicily with their two consular armies. Together, the two armies totalled 40,000 soldiers, including four legions of 4,000 legionaries and 300 cavalry each, as well as four alae (formations of conscripts) of Italian allies. Although well trained, the legionaries were not professional soldiers, but rather a levy of citizens, recruited mostly from the rural population. Few could have guessed how long the war would last. Kept in service for years, the recruits would become hardened veterans.

The size of the Roman forces and their capture of Hadranum (Adrano), at the base of Mt. Etna, intimidated scores of Sicilian settlements into surrender. Most notable among these was the city of Syracuse itself. Hiero agreed to pay 100 talents of silver and to limit Syracuse's domains to southeast Sicily and north along the coast to Tauromenium (Taormina). More importantly, Hiero would secure the Roman supply chain to the mainland. Henceforth, Hiero ruled wisely and remained loyal to Rome. He protected Syracuse with a strong fleet and employed his famous kinsman, Archimedes the Greek, who invented ingenious mechanical defenses for the city.

In summer 262, the consular armies of Lucius Postumius Megellus and Quintus Mamilius Vitulus blockaded the city of Acragas. The city lay on a plateau several miles from the sea. Hannibal, son of Gisco and father of Hanno, led the defense of the city. When a number of Romans foraged for grain outside the city, they were set upon by Carthaginian soldiers who sortied out of the gate.

TOP: A trireme's name derived from its three banks of oars with one rower to each oar. Larger quinqueremes likely had three banks of oars, but with two men per oar. BOTTOM: A Roman mosaic from Tunisia showing a trireme vessel during the time of the empire. LEFT: The naval clash at Ecnomus unfolded as a series of separate actions; after defeating the Carthaginian center force, Roman squadrons were able to overwhelm the remaining formations.



Both: Wikimedia

Scattering the foragers, the Carthaginians continued on to assault the Roman camp. The legionaries put up a bitter defense until their slain Carthaginian foes lay piled in heaps beneath the stockade. Now it was the Romans' turn to sortie out, cutting down the fleeing Carthaginians, of whom only a few escaped back to Acragas.

The siege had lasted for five months when reinforcements from Carthage arrived at Lilybaeum. Hanno, who was in command of the relief column, had 50,000 infantry, 6,000 cavalry, and 60 war elephants. In all likelihood, the pachyderms were recently introduced into the Punic army. Hanno marched his army to Heraclea and, aided by treachery, looted the main Roman supply depot at Herbessus.

Though Hiero of Syracuse continued to provide a lifeline, food shortages soon made themselves felt in the Roman camp. In their weakened state, the soldiers were more vulnerable to pestilence, which further depleted their ranks.

After winning a cavalry engagement, Hanno set up camp on a hill close to Acragas and waited. When famine and pestilence also beset Acragas, Hanno engaged the Romans in a decisive battle for the city. The fighting was long and hard, but at last, the Romans overcame the Ligurians and Celts who bore the brunt of the enemy's fighting. When the elephants and the rest of the Carthaginian ranks came under direct Roman attack, the Punic army broke into confusion.

Elated by their victory and exhausted from battle, the Romans neglected their sentries. Hannibal and his mercenaries slipped out of Acragas at night and crossed over the Roman trenches by filling them with baskets full of chaff. At daylight, the Romans were skirmishing with the rear of Hannibal's column, but their primary focus remained Acragas.

Rome had suffered 30,000 casualties in the siege and battle. When the city fell, the Romans were eager for their grim rewards of rape and plunder. They enslaved more than half of Acragas' population, which amounted to approximately 25,000 people. It was a clear signal to the Sicilian city-states that still sided with the enemy. The disgraced Hanno had to pay a fine of 6,000 gold pieces and was replaced by Hamilcar as Carthage's main commander in Sicily.

Although the Romans rejoiced at the fall of Acragas, it was obvious that victory over Carthage would only be possible if the Punic navy were defeated. Rome had to become a naval power, a strategy as audacious as it was challenging.

Knowing comparatively little of building and sailing ships, Rome used the Punic ship captured during Claudius' crossing as model of her own war galleys. In training, Roman marines rowed their oars while sitting on benches, arranged as they would be on a ship, while sitting on dry land. In this way, the crews were trained even before the ships were built.

Roman naval operations nevertheless started with a fiasco. In 260 BC, Consul Gnaeus Cornelius Scipio was lured into the harbour of Lipara, the main city on the Aeolian islands, by the false news that the city was ready to switch to the Roman side. Scipio ended up being captured by the Punic fleet, alongside 17 Roman ships.

Command of the Roman fleet fell to Scipio's co-consul Gaius Dulius. Dulius sailed towards Mylae (Milazzo), where Hannibal Gisco, who had assumed command of the Punic fleet, could not wait to engage the Romans. Hannibal stood proudly on the prow of his flagship, a mighty septireme that had belonged to King Pyrrhus. Hannibal believed that his ships were like "predators after easy prey," according to Polybius. The two fleets were fairly even in size, with the 130 Punic ships slightly outnumbered by 145 Roman ones.

As the fleets approached one another, the Carthaginian crews espied the strange poles and drawn-up gangplanks on the bows of the Roman ships. With its beak-like spike, the corvus pinned the Roman ship to the Punic one. Two abreast, the Roman marines advanced over the 36-foot long gangplanks, deflecting Punic javelins with their oval shields. Swarming the decks of the Punic ships, the marines cut down the Liby-Phoenicians and the mercenaries who fought alongside them. The Carthaginians lost 50 ships before they retreated. Among the captured ships was the flagship of Hannibal, who somehow "escaped by the skin of his teeth," wrote Polybius.

Map © 2020 Philip Schwartzberg, Meridian Mapping, Minneapolis, MN

TOP: Carthage had an enormous naval base. Before the First Punic War, Carthage had the most powerful navy in the western Mediterranean. BOTTOM: The two sides fought high-stakes battles along the Sicilian coast and in the rugged interior.

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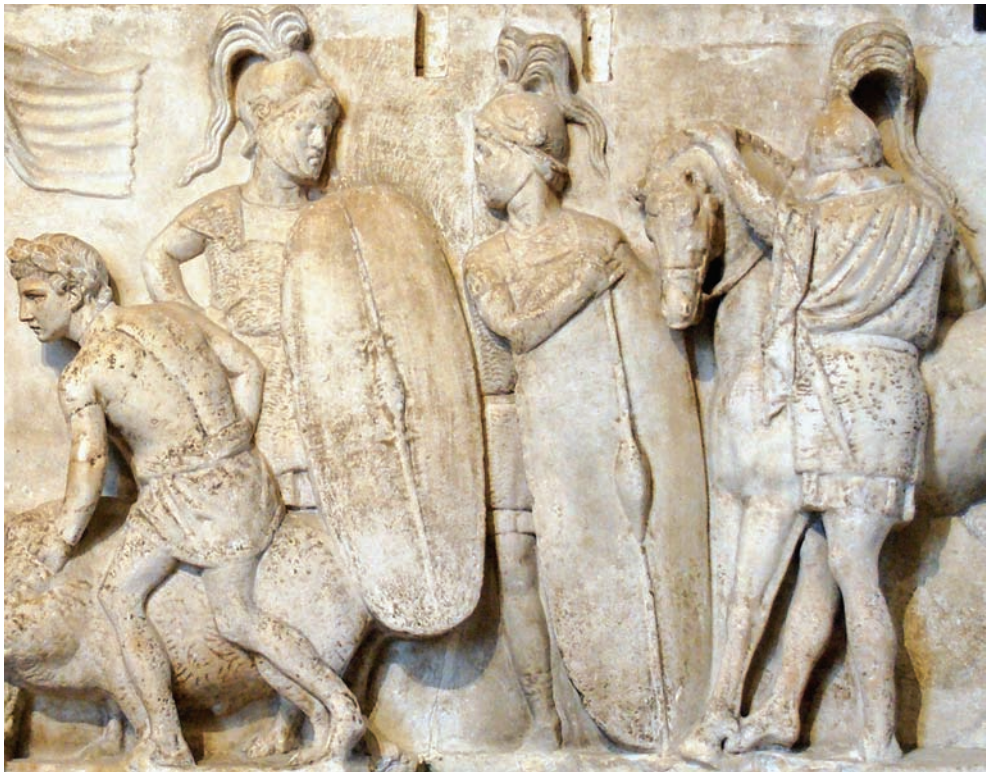

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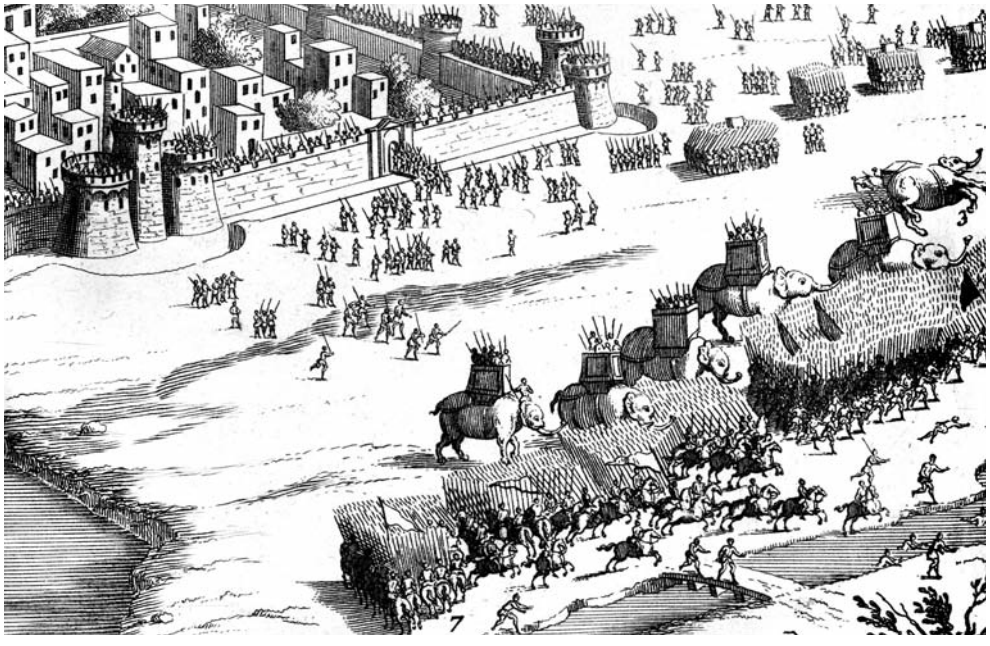

TOP: Roman marines trained on dry land so that they would be ready when the fleet sailed. BOTTOM: The Romans prevailed against Hasdrubal's Carthaginian army in a pitched battle at Panormus near modern-day Palermo.

After their upset of Punic naval dominance at Mylae, the Romans retained the initiative on land and sea. From 260 to 257 BC, the Romans relieved Segesta, captured a string of towns, and besieged Lipara. The only notable Punic land victory occurred when Hamilcar ambushed 4,000 Roman allies as they were breaking camp. At sea, Rome defeated and trapped Hannibal Gisco's fleet in a Sardinian harbour. Blaming Gisco for their predicament, his men arrested and crucified him for the defeat. The Roman fleet then fought another engagement off the coast of Tyndaris (Tindari). The Carthaginians destroyed Consul Gaius Atilius Regulus' vanguard. They nearly captured the consul before the rest of the Roman ships arrived and chased them away. Rome also extended the war to the shores of Sardinia, Corsica, and Malta.

The year 256 saw an unprecedented build up for a titanic naval battle. The Romans launched a new fleet of 330 ships; the Carthaginians sailed forth with 350 ships. The Romans intended to bring the war to the Punic homeland. To do so, they had to destroy the Punic fleet. On board the ships of the Roman fleet was an expeditionary force of the best troops from her land army, serving as marines. Each ship held 120 marines as well as 300 oarsmen, for a total of 138,600 men. The Punic fleet was anchored at Heraclea, Minoa, and aware of the Roman intentions. Manning the Punic ships were 150,000 men, who were told by their commanders that everything depended on victory at sea. If the enemy set foot on Libyan soil, then surely they would subjugate the whole country.

When the Punic fleet intercepted the Roman fleet off Cape Ecnomus, the ensuing conflict was possibly the largest sea battle in antiquity in terms of men involved.

Leading the Roman fleet were the two "sixers," or hexaremes, of consuls Marcus Atilius Regulus and Lucius Manlius Vulso. The Roman ships attacked in triangular formation, the base of which towed the horse transports. Another protective line of ships brought up the rear.

The Punic ships bore upon the Romans in a broad but thin linear formation. The longer right wing stretched far into the ocean and was commanded by Hanno the Elder, who had returned to service in 258. The shorter left wing, commanded by Hamilcar, was deployed at an angle to the coastline.

The Roman wedge intended to smash its way through, something Hamilcar had anticipated. The Punic ships facing the apex of the Roman triangle retreated, luring the Roman ships after them. With the Roman center ruptured, the Punic wings rowed inward to attack the base of the Roman triangle, which was slowed by the horse transports. Seeing the danger, Regulus and Vulso turned their ships about and rowed to the relief of their hard-pressed comrades to the rear. A furious battle ensued, with the Punic ships attempting to ram but risking being pinned by a corvus. At one point, the battle dissolved into three separate engagements before ultimately ending in a Roman victory.

The Romans lost 24 ships. Punic losses amounted to 30 ships sunk and 64 captured.

Following through with their invasion plans, the Romans beached their ships south of Cape Hermaea (Cape Bon) and seized town of Aspis (Kelibia). While the main Punic forces remained holed up in protection around Carthage, Roman soldiers ransacked countryside villas, farms and settlements. Twenty-thousand people were

dragged into slavery, alongside herds of livestock. Vulso transported the loot and the enslaved population back to Rome. Regulus stayed behind with 40 ships, 15,000 infantry, and 500 cavalry.

Bringing reinforcements, Hamilcar arrived from Sicily to join the Punic army at Carthage. He shared command with Bostar and Hasdrubal, the son of Hanno. The Punic army arrived on a ridge above Adys (possibly Uthina), which Regulus was besieging. It was Regulus, however, who struck first; his warriors set off at night, hiked uphill, and attacked the Punic relief army at dawn. The rough ground on the ridge was ill-suited for the cavalry and elephants, negating the Carthaginians' greatest advantage. Nevertheless, the mercenaries forced back the legions but then were outflanked. Breaking in panic, the fleeing mercenaries caused the entire Punic army to collapse. Regulus was left free to loot scores of settlements, including Tunis, which was situated just 13 miles from Carthage.

Raids into Punic territory were undertaken not only by the Romans, but also by Numidians from neighboring kingdoms. Incensed by earlier Carthaginian incursions, the Numidians exacted their revenge. Refugees fled to Carthage where, in Polybius' words, there were "too many mouths to feed." Teetering on collapse, Carthage sent envoys, but the surrender terms Regulus demanded were "no better than slavery," wrote Diodorus. Carthage would fight on.

In an effort to appease the gods, the Carthaginians revived long-neglected ancient sacrifices. Possibly among these was the most dreadful of Phoenician rituals, no longer practised in Tyre but now carried out in Carthage: the sacrificial burning of infants to the god Ba'al Hammon and his consort Tanit.

Salvation arrived in 255 with the Spartan mercenary Xanthippus. The veteran soldier re-drilled the Punic army until the men cheered him and could not wait to fight the Romans.

The opposing armies bivouacked close to each other near Tunis. Punic forces numbered 12,000 infantry, 4000 cavalry and nearly 100 elephants. The forces were evenly matched, with the Romans enjoying a superiority in infantry but being weak in cavalry. While the Punic commanders debated about how to proceed, the soldiers formed their own battle lines and called for Xanthippus to lead them. Xanthippus urged an attack while the men's spirits were so high.

Salvator Rosa, 17th century

ABOVE: Carthaginians torture Roman Consul and General Marcus Atilius Regulus in a drawing from a later period. OPPOSITE: Carthaginian General Hamilcar Barca established a secure camp on Sicily from which he carried out guerilla attacks and coastal raids against Roman forces.

The elephants formed a single central line at the front. Behind them, a second, broader line was made up of Carthaginian citizen infantry in close-order formation on the left and mercenaries on the right. Libyan and Numidian cavalry and light infantry were deployed on the flanks. The Libyans typically fielded shock cavalry, armed with thrusting spears. The Numidian cavalry preferred skirmishing tactics, riding bareback without bridle, armed with javelins and small round shields. The elephants swatted their ears and dangled their trunks, the horses snorted and pawed the ground. The men likely stood apprehensively ready or boasted of their courage.

The Romans positioned their light troops in front, followed by a deep center of legionary maniples (formations of 120 men). Although confident that the mercenaries would cause them no trouble, the Romans were wary of the elephants. The prospect for the Roman cavalry looked dim, as well. Deployed on the wings, they faced their Punic counterparts, which outnumbered them several times over.

The drivers goaded their elephants forward, while on both Punic wings the cavalry bolted forth. The Roman ranks resounded with the clattered of spears against shields, as with a great shout they, too, advanced into battle. The Numidian and Libyan cavalry horsemen routed their overwhelmed Roman counterparts after a brief fight. Against the mercenaries, however, the legionaries proved triumphant, driving them off the field. But the day belonged to the elephants, which scattered the Roman light troops and plowed through the ranks of legionaries. For a while, the depth of the Roman lines slowed the great pachyderms. Then, though, the Punic cavalry returned, flinging volleys of javelins upon the Roman flank and rear ranks. A number of Roman soldiers evaded the elephants, only to be decimated by the long spears of the citizen phalanx. Hemmed in by the cavalry and crushed by the elephants, nearly the whole Roman army was annihilated.

The 2,000 legionaries who had chased after the mercenaries were the only ones who made it back to Aspis. The Punic losses only numbered 800. Regulus initially escaped the massacre, but ended up being taken prisoner. The Carthaginians purportedly cut off Regulus' eyelids, so that he could not shut his eyes while he was trampled to death by an elephant. Carthage rejoiced in its victory and sacrificed to its gods.

Early in summer 255, the fleet of consuls Marcus Aemilius Paullus and Servius Fulvius P. Nobilior decisively defeated a smaller Punic fleet near Cape Hermaea. After picking up the Roman garrison of Aspis, the Roman fleet sailed back towards Sicily in July. Along Sicily's southern coast the Roman fleet got caught in a violent storm. Ships capsized and sank while others were smashed by waves against submerged rocks and headlands. The beaches from Camarina to Cape Pachynus were littered with wrecks, flotsam and jetsam, and corpses of men and horses. Of the 364 warships, 280 were lost. Three hundred cavalry transports and various other vessels were lost as well. Polybius called it the greatest disaster at sea ever.

Encouraged by Rome's misfortune, Punic commander Carthalo retook Acragas and razed it to

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the ground. In 254, Hasdrubal arrived at Lilybaeum with a new Punic army, including 140 elephants. Both sides had rebuilt their fleets: 200 ships for Carthage and 220, built in only three months, for Rome. Commanding the new Roman fleet were second-time consuls Caiatinus and Scipio. The latter had been released from Punic captivity some time after his capture in 260, presumably ransomed.

Taking on more ships at Messana, the consuls proceeded to seize Cephaloedium (Cefalu) through treason. Caiatinus and Scipio then laid siege to Drepana (Trapani) but withdrew when Carthalo arrived with a relief army. Sailing back east, the consuls decided to take Panormus instead. Woods grew nearly up to the gates, providing timber for the legionaries, who erected a palisade and dug a trench to enclose the city. The Romans had begun the war relatively unskilled in siege warfare, but they had learned. Siege engines destroyed a seaside tower, enabling the soldiers to battle their way into the outer city, or new town. Wreaking havoc, the Roman soldiers terrified the remaining population who were holed up in the inner old town. After negotiating surrender terms, the Romans allowed 14,000 people to buy their freedom, but they enslaved 13,000 others. Panormus' grim fate induced Iaetia and Tyndaris to join the Roman side.

From 253 to 251, the Romans sluggishly continued the land war. The legionaries remained fearful of the elephants and stuck to the high ground. A major assault on the Punic position on Heircte (possibly Mt. Pellegrino) near Panormus met with no success, but both Lipara and Therma (Termini Imerese) were captured. At sea, the Roman fleet raided the Libyan shores, but then ran aground at Meninx (Djerba), the Island of the Lotus-eaters. Throwing heavy equipment overboard to lighten their loads, the Roman ships broke free when the tide returned. As fortune would have it, the fleet was caught in another disastrous storm off Cape Palinurus, which destroyed 150 warships.

In June 250, Hasdrubal devastated the croplands surrounding Panormus. Caecilius Metellus, the previous year's consul, kept his two legions behind the city walls. Hasdrubal crossed over the river that ran in front of the city and set up camp, but neglected to fortify his position. The Celtic mercenaries were already getting drunk when the Carthaginian camp came under attack by Roman skirmishers. The elephant drivers mounted their elephants and easily drove off the Roman light troops. Pursuing the latter back to the walls, the elephants came under heavy fire from archers on the ramparts and from more light troops in the moat. Pin-cushioned with arrows and javelins, the elephants ran amok, flinging their drivers to the ground as they stampeded back to their lines. In their frenzy, they crushed any Punic soldiers who stood in their way. Seeing the enemy lines thrown into disorder, Caecilius' legionaries charged from the city gate and routed the Punic army. The surviving elephants were captured and later displayed at Caecilius' triumph in Rome.

Following Caecilius' victory at Panormus, consuls Regulus and Vulso laid siege to Lilybaeum. Other than Drepana, Lilybaeum was the last Punic bastion on Sicily. Its garrison of 10,000 mercenaries was under the command of Himilco. The city's walls were strong, a deep moat protected its landward side, and treacherous shallows filled the seaward approach. Battering rams were brought up, chipping away at the ramparts and towers closest to the sea. Undaunted, Himilco repaired old walls, built new fortifications and carried out limited sorties.

To come to the rescue of Lilybaeum, Hannibal, son of Hamilcar, set off from Carthage with 50 ships and 10,000 soldiers. With too little wind to fill the sails, Hannibal anchored among the Aegates Islands (the Aegadians), northwest of Lilybaeum. When a strong breeze blew up, Hannibal sailed for Lilybaeum and slipped through the Roman blockade. Greeted by a cheering crowd, Hannibal dropped anchor within the safety of the harbour.

The reinforced Punic army sallied forth at dawn and launched a major assault on the Roman siege works. Himilco spearheaded the attack, but was met by mounting Roman opposition. The intensity of the fighting increased even as the corpses

piled up. Heedless of their safety, thousands of Punic soldiers tossed flaming brands at the siege engines. Both sides were on the brink of collapse when the Punic trumpets sounded the retreat.

At night Hannibal's fleet sneaked out of the harbour, making for Drepana. Some time afterwards, a lone ship likewise eluded the Roman galleys due to favorable winds and its unexpected direction from the nearby islands. The captain was another Hannibal known as the "Rhodian" (the Rhodians being famed for their skill at sea), who carried information between Carthage and Rome. The Rhodian's advantage lay in his intimate knowledge of the shallows, his well-conditioned rowers and his superb ship. He even mocked the Roman ships, spreading the oars as if challenging them to pursue. Nor was the Rhodian the only blockade runner.

The assault on Lilybaeum continued until a great storm blew up, battering the Roman siege works, ripping apart sheds and toppling over towers. Advised by his Greek mercenaries, Himilco launched another sortie. Many of the siege works were old and of bone-dry wood. Stoked by the wind, they were easily set alight. The smoke, sparks and cinders blew into the faces of the Romans trying to combat the attackers and to extinguish the fires. Choking, coughing, and blinded, many Romans died before they even reached the fighting. In contrast to the Romans, the assaulting mercenaries had clear sight and air as they continued to feed the inferno. When the flames died down, all that remained were the charred bases of towers and burned beams of battering rams. The Romans were forced to give up their attacks on Lilybaeum; instead, they would starve the population into surrender or death by siege.

ABOVE: Opponents grapple with each other in a naval battle depicted on a sarcophagus. Roman rulers learned in the First Punic War that control of the Mediterranean Sea was vital to the republic's interests. OPPOSITE: At the Agates Islands off the western coast of Sicily in 241 B.C., the Roman fleet crippled an inexperienced Carthaginian fleet. With its only army isolated on Sicily, the Carthaginians sued for peace.

The Romans tried to fill in the harbour, but it was too deep, and the strong waves and current swept away the rubble they dumped to the bottom. With gigantic effort, the Romans piled up a sandbar, upon which a Punic quadrireme ran aground. Captured and taken over by a Roman crew, the quadrireme enabled them to catch the Rhodian's ship and to prevent others from entering or leaving Lilybaeum's harbour.

So many Roman marines died in the battles for Lilybaeum that not enough remained to man the oars of the navy. In 249, 10,000 new recruits arrived from Rome with Consul Publius Claudius Pulcher. Pulcher used the extra men in a naval offensive against Drepana. Arriving within sight of the walls at dawn, Claudius released the sacred chickens to consult the gods. In what was an ill omen, the chickens refused to eat. Claudius made things worse by disrespectfully throwing the chickens into the water "so that, as they would not eat, they might drink," according to Cicero.

The Punic fleet sailed out of the harbour on the seaward side. At the same time, the Roman ships were already entering the harbour on the landward side. Claudius ordered the ships already inside the harbour to sail back out, causing a number of collisions. Oars snapped and marines cursed. Outside of the harbour, the Roman fleet reformed with their sterns to the shore and their bows toward the enemy and the open sea.

The battle signals were hoisted high, the oars plied the water, and the two fleets engaged. Gradually the Punic ships and seamanship began to win out, aided by the fact that the ocean was behind them. When in trouble, the lighter Punic vessels could disengage, withdraw to open water, turn around and re-engage. The heavier and clumsier Roman ships were rammed from the broad side or from behind. Trying to turn around or to escape, the inexperienced Roman crews got stuck in the shallows or beached their ships on the shore. Claudius and 30 or so ships managed to escape, but 93 ships, many with their crews, were captured by the Carthaginians.

Meanwhile, Co-consul Lucius Junius Pullus, who was elected for the year 249, arrived at Messana with a convoy of supply ships for the besiegers at Lilybaeum. Junius sailed for Syracuse with 120 war galleys and nearly 800 transport vessels. At Syracuse, he waited for the arrival of more ships from Messana and for grain from Sicilian allies. Junius send some of the warships and half the transports ahead with the quaestors. The latter were Rome's financial officials, who could act as a second-in-command to the consul.

On the Punic side, Adherbal planned a raid on the Roman fleet moored off Lilybaeum. He entrusted the mission to Carthalo, who had arrived at Drepana from Carthage with 70 ships. Reinforced by Adherbal with another 30 ships, Carthalo attacked the moored Roman fleet at Lilybaeum at dawn. The Romans rushed forth to stop their ships from being towed away or burned, their stiffening resistance causing Carthalo to break off the attack.

Carthalo then sailed southeast along the coast until he happened upon the quaestors' ships coming from Syracuse. The quaestors' fleet, which consisted mostly of transports, eluded Carthalo's galleys by taking refuge in the Bay of Gela. Behind spits of land, an allied sea-side town provided shelter. Setting up catapults and ballistae along the shore, the Romans drove off Carthalo's fleet.

From the mouth of a nearby river, Carthalo's fleet waited for the Romans to leave the safety of the bay. Instead, Carthalo's lookouts spotted Con-

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sul Junius' fleet making its way from Syracuse. Once more, the outmatched Roman fleet eluded Carthalo, finding refuge along a rugged stretch of coast. The weather now took a turn for the worse. Carthalo barely made it to the calmer waters around Cape Pachynus. Behind him, the storm accomplished what the Punic fleet had failed to do: Both Roman fleets were smashed against the rocks. The destruction was so completed that "even the timbers from the wrecks were useless," wrote Polybius. Junius was fortunate to survive. To somewhat make up for the disaster, he captured the town of Eryx (Erice) on the ridge north of Drepana and the sanctuary of Aphrodite on the summit above.

For many years, the sieges of Drepana and Lilybaeum dragged on. In 247, Carthage made another Hamilcar commander of their navy. From his easily defended camp on Mt. Heircte, Hamilcar carried out coastal raids and guerrilla attacks. He struck like "baraq" (Punic for lightning), from whence he got his cognomen of Barca. In 243, Hamilcar Barca sailed towards Drepana, re-capturing the town of Eryx on the massif to the north. Setting up camp on the ridge, Hamilcar harassed the besiegers of Drepana.

With seemingly no end in sight for the sieges of Lilybaeum and Drepana, Rome decided for a third time to hinge its fate on the sea. Financed by loans from the richest Romans, a fleet of 200 quinqueremes was built. The new ships were based on the vessel from the Rhodian and no longer including the corvus. Early in the summer of 242, the fleet under Consul Gaius Lutatius Catulus reinforced the siege around Drepana.

Lutatius continued to drill his marines, preparing for the arrival of the enemy fleet. Punic response was long in coming, though, possibly because Carthage was running out of skilled seamen. It was not until spring 241 that a Punic fleet appeared under another Hanno. On board were grain and other supplies for Drepana and Lilybaeum.

Hanno anchored at the Sacred Isle (Marettimo), intend on crossing unseen to Eyrx. There, he would offload supplies and take on Hamilcar's men to fight in the coming sea battle. Guessing Hanno's intentions, Lutatius sailed to the Aegean Islands to battle the Punic navy on the morning of March 10, 241. Despite a brisk wind and a heavy swell, the well-trained Roman crews mastered both the elements and the enemy, whose men had been hastily recruited. Fifty Punic ships were sunk and another 70 ships captured with their crews. Due to the rough weather, an inordinate number of men likely drowned. A change in winds allowed the remainder of the Punic ships to raise masts, hoist sails and escape back to the Sacred Isle.

With characteristic doggedness, Carthage at first was ready to continue fighting, but then reality sank in. The Punic war effort was broken; the final decision was left to Hamilcar at Eyrx. With little prospect of staying supplied, Hamilcar sent heralds to discuss terms and begin negotiations. Rome demanded that Carthage evacuate Sicily and all the islands between Italy and Sicily and pay Rome a hefty 3,200 Euboic talents over a 10-year period. Carthage accepted and thereby ended its 23-year war with Rome, the longest in history up to that time. For Carthage, more woes lay ahead, as subjugated tribes revolted and unpaid mercenaries turned on their former masters.

For Rome, it was a glorious chapter in her epic history, marking the beginning of oversea conquests that would make the Mediterranean a Roman Sea. Sicily became Rome's first province and Rome's grain basket. In 238, the Romans annexed Corsica and Sardinia, as well.

The First Punic War had been fought in Sicily, on the waters of the Mediterranean Sea, and in North Africa. Rome, with its greater resources, superior land armies, and successful adaptation to naval warfare, emerged victorious.

The innovative corvus was a stopgap that bought Rome time to gain skill in training crews and building ships, which in the final battle in the Aegean Sea proved superior to those of Carthage. Likely the extra weight, position, and size of the corvus contributed to losses in storms. That Rome was able to recover from those catastrophic losses illustrates her extraordinary resilience.

Carthage, though, was far from finished. Hamilcar's son, Hannibal Barca, would lay waste to Italy and become one of Rome's greatest foes in the Second Punic War of 218 to 201. ■

Late on the evening of June 5, 1967, a flight of Sikorsky S-58 helicopters sped low above the sands of Egypt's Sinai Peninsula. Aboard the aircraft was a hand-picked force drawn from Israel's 80th Paratroop Brigade. Among the best-trained and well-equipped men in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), the paratroopers had been tasked with a daring night assault of heavily defended Egyptian artillery positions behind Umm Katif.

As soon as the helicopters touched down, paratroop commander Colonel Dani Matt's men were on the move. They had succeeded in landing just two miles from the objective, and Matt was

BY JOSHUA SHEPHERD

astounded that their presence remained undetected, but as the paratroopers trudged toward the enemy position, bedlam erupted. "Suddenly, the sky lit up with hundreds of illumination shells, followed by the crash of explosives as mortar fire landed on our approach route," recalled Matt.

Despite the noisy reception, it became apparent that the paratroopers still held the initiative as the shock of the initial barrage faded. The Egyptian fire was poorly directed, and it was obvious that they were firing blind. As the emboldened Israelis rushed the last remaining yards toward their target, they found the Egyptian artillery park unprotected by minefields or barbed wire. Wildly spraying the enemy with sub-machine-gun fire, the Israelis stormed the position in a chaotic fight for control of the guns.

"Ammunition bunkers exploded into fiery infernos," Matt wrote afterwards. "The noise became overwhelming, the smoke and dust suffocating." For Matt and his men, the fight was a life and death struggle in the sandy wastes of Sinai. For the IDF, this operation was vital to the suc-

Israeli upgunned Shermans speed through the Sinai Desert to engage the Egyptians at Abu Agheila. The M-50 and M-51 tanks, respectively, boasted 75mm and 105mm high-velocity guns.

cess of one of the largest armored attacks in the history of the Middle East and critical to victory in the Six Day War.

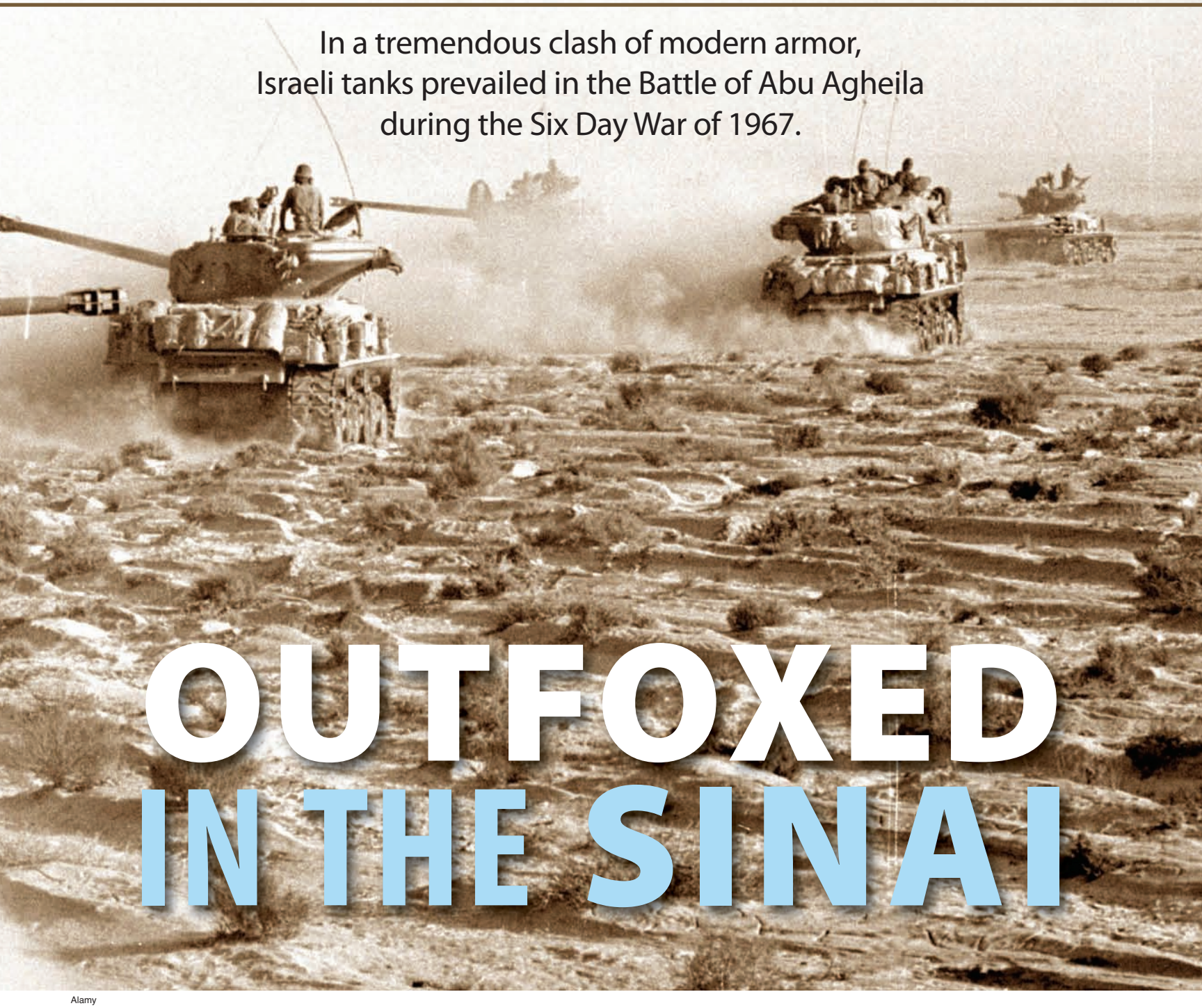
By the summer of 1967, the modern state of Israel laid claim to a short but bloody history. After declaring independence in spring 1948, the nascent Jewish state was invaded by a coalition of Arab nations bent on the destruction of Jewish settlements. Following a brief but fierce war that saw the death of nearly one percent of its population, Israel secured a grudging armistice with the Arab belligerents. The agreement brought an end to large-scale fighting, but failed to secure Arab recognition of Israeli independence, making further conflict inevitable.

In less than a decade, Israel once again found itself locked in a shooting war with its largest Arab neighbor. In response to Egyptian blockades of the Suez Canal and the Gulf of Aqaba, Israel launched an invasion of the Sinai Peninsula on October 29, 1956. The attack was coordinated with the British and the French, who dropped airborne forces near the Suez in the hopes of seizing the canal.

The affair ended in an embarrassing foreign-relations disaster for Great Britain and France as they were forced to accept a cease-fire due to pressure from the United States and the United Nations. Israeli forces had been stunningly successful during the ground campaign, seizing Sinai in short order. The IDF, though, had not been able to capture one of the most heavily defended of the Egyptian positions, the strategically vital high ground near the seemingly insignificant crossroads of Abu Agheila. The position was taken only after being abandoned by the Egyptians.

That brief war, though, was not without long-term ramifications. The fact that Britain and France had been forced to withdraw their troops

In a tremendous clash of modern armor, Israeli tanks prevailed in the Battle of Abu Agheila during the Six Day War of 1967.



OUTFOXED IN THE SINAI

Alamy

Associated Press

ABOVE: A column of Egyptian tanks moves into the Sinai Desert on May 7, 1967, joining divisions already positioned on the Egyptian-Israeli border. OPPOSITE: The Israeli Air Force destroyed the Egyptian Air Force in a stunning pre-emptive strike on the first day of the war.

due to political pressure only emboldened the Egyptians, and anti-Israeli rhetoric ramped up in the years that followed. As a result, the peacekeepers of the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) were garrisoned in Sinai in order to keep the belligerents at arm's length.

At the time, Egypt was experiencing a wave of nationalist fervor, largely due to the ascendance of Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser, one of the most charismatic leaders in the Middle East. Nasser had assumed the presidency of Egypt in 1954, just two years after he had helped orchestrate a successful coup. Nasser used powerful rhetoric that espoused greater unity for the Arab world, retribution for displaced Palestinians, and the reduction of the State of Israel.

Nasser's magnetic charm also crossed national boundaries, and his promotion of pan-Arab unity found a wide audience across the region. By the mid-1960s, Nasser's mounting influence in the Arab world was a source of grave alarm to Israel's intelligence services. By 1964, IDF analysts predicted that a renewed war with an emboldened Egyptian army would likely occur as early as 1967.

Due to his previous professional contacts within the Egyptian Army, Nasser promoted a number of personal cronies to the highest ranks, chief among them Field Marshal Abdel Hakim Amer. Former vice president of Egypt and overall commander of Egyptian forces, Amer had seen extensive combat service. First commissioned in the Egyptian army in 1939, Amer had served against Israel in both 1948 and 1956 and had commanded Egyptian troops that intervened in the North Yemen Civil War.

Unfortunately, cronyism and statist paranoia gripped much of the Egyptian senior officer corps. Amer likewise appointed personal cronies or conferred promotion based on political considerations. A number of senior officers were known to possess a greater interest in Cairo nightlife than the military arts. Intelligence operatives spent much of their time monitoring suspect Egyptian officers rather than gathering intelligence on the Israelis. Ultimately, the misplaced focus on politics ensured that the Egyptian senior command bore a greater resemblance to an elite club of uniformed sycophants than a cadre of professional combat leaders.

Despite the shortcomings of the high brass, the Egyptian military possessed a vast arsenal of fearsome weaponry due to an alliance with the Soviet Union. Nasser's increasingly hostile stance to the Western powers made him an attractive ally to the Soviets, who regarded him as a non-capitalist revolutionary democrat. Nasser and Amer were designated as Heroes of the Soviet Union in 1964 and awarded accompanying medals.

Such symbolic honorifics were accompanied with more concrete support in the form of modern weaponry. Since the close of the Sinai conflict, the Soviets had bestowed billions of dollars worth of military aid on the Arab states. The Arabs in the region fielded 1,700 tanks, 2,400 pieces of artillery, and 500 jet aircraft. Nearly half of the armaments went to Egypt, Israel's most dangerous foe. Greater Arab unity likewise increased the threat to Israel. In October 1966, for example, Egypt and Syria secured a diplomatic rapprochement and signed a mutual defense pact.

The explosive combination of Arab military alliance and anti-Zionist rhetoric resulted in a dangerous powder keg for the greater Middle East. Misled by erroneous Syrian intelligence that pointed to an Israeli buildup on its northern border, Nasser and his generals grew increasingly jingoistic during the spring of 1967. On May 19, Nasser made the ominous move of requesting the removal of the 3,500 United Nations peacekeepers stationed in Sinai. With United Nation troops out of the way, Egypt began preparations for an inevitable war in Sinai.

The Middle East faced an irreversible crisis when Egypt ordered the closure of the Straits of Tiran—the strategic waterway that controlled the Gulf of Aqaba—on May 21, 1967. With Israeli access to the Gulf of Aqaba denied, Israel's southern port of Eilat was entirely cut off from international waters. Widely regarded as an act of war, the closure of the Straits of Tiran was almost certain to result in conflict, and Nasser was unambiguous regarding the intention of his decision. "It will be total, and the objective will be Israel's destruction," he said, referring to a possible outbreak of war.

As diplomatic efforts (including proposed mediation) continued to fail, more Arab powers readied for war. In addition to Egypt and Syria, Jordan and Lebanon began mobilizing their

armed forces. Even distant Muslim states including Iraq, Kuwait, Morocco, Libya, Saudi Arabia, and Tunisia either mobilized or contributed token forces to the fight against Israel. Ahmad ash-Shuqayri, chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization, gave voice to the mounting desire for war with an ominous public statement. "We shall destroy Israel and its inhabitants," he said. "As for the survivors, if there are any, the boats are ready to deport them."

Despite the overall lax condition of the Egyptian Army, the Israeli high command harbored a deep respect for the fighting mettle of the average Egyptian soldier. Largely due to Israel's experience in failing to crack the defenses of Abu Agheila in 1956, the Egyptians were particularly feared for their willingness to fight tenaciously from fortified positions. Russian military engineers helped the Egyptians construct imposing fieldworks at key strategic positions across the vast expanse of Sinai.

A virtual panic gripped the highest echelon's of Israel's government as the nation braced itself for what could become a struggle for survival. Because any conflict would inevitably result in the IDF waging a war on multiple fronts, Israeli military doctrine stressed initiative and aggressive tactics as a part of an overall strategy of destroying numerically superior Arab armies before they had a chance to respond. In many respects, Israeli tactics ironically copied the blitzkrieg of Nazi Germany in World War II.

In the years leading up to the Sinai Campaign in the Six Day War, the IDF was transformed into a more mobile force that gravitated toward an armor-dominated army, as opposed to an army made up of predominantly infantry. Brigadier General Israel Tal, commander of the Israeli Armored Corps, was a key developer of his nation's armored doctrine. In large part due to Israel's small population, Tal favored heavy tanks and firepower at the expense of lighter and faster tanks. Such an approach offered Israeli tank crews better protection, as well as the upper hand during long-range armored duels.

Due to friendly relations and consequent arms contracts with the Western powers, tanks such as the American Patton and the British Centurion fit the bill. Israeli tankers received rigorous training in maneuver and gunnery. "After the air force, armor is the factor that decides the fate of battles on land," said Tal. "The task of armor is to carry the battle into the enemy's territory and thus obtain a quick decision."

In any pending conflict, though, the vaunted Egyptian fieldworks in the vicinity of Abu Agheila could not simply be bypassed. With the assistance of Soviet advisors, Egyptian engineers had constructed a substantial barrier that would stall any potential Israeli advance with a robust defense in depth.

In front of the forward base at Umm Katif, Egyptian infantry manned two mutually supporting lines of trenches. The trenches were further bolstered by artillery positions, mortar pits, dug-in tanks, and bunkers. To the north, immense sand dunes, which were deemed impassable to armor, were considered effective flank protection. The eastern approaches to the position, the most likely avenue of an Israeli attack, were protected by wide belts of mine fields and barbed wire. Abu Agheila, which commanded the central route across Sinai, was likewise the most heavily fortified position on the peninsula.

Actually, the formidable task of cracking the defenses at Abu Agheila had commanded the attention of the Israeli high command since 1956. The Israeli Command and Staff College staged exercises each year against mock Abu Agheila fortifications, and the exercises were updated each year based on fresh intelligence of the ever-evolving Egyptian defenses. Most Israeli field commanders and staff officers were consequently familiar with the Abu Agheila defense complex. In keeping with Israeli doctrine, which promoted aggressive initiative from junior officers, participants in the program were encouraged to develop their own tactics in launching assaults.

Israel Government Press office

Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser believed the United States would restrain Israel from making an attack on Egypt.

Such intensive preparation for war, paired with reckless saber-rattling across the border, resulted in a fateful decision by the Israeli cabinet. In a series of tense meetings in a Tel Aviv bunker on June 4, Israeli military officers were nearly unanimous on the need to launch a preemptive attack on Egypt, which was continuing the Sinai buildup in preparation for launching its own attack. Quite understandably, the politicians demurred.

In the corner of the conference room, Brig. Gen. Ariel Sharon brooded. Sharon, who commanded one of the Israeli divisions mustered on the Sinai Front, was worried by the political indecision that left front-line troops in the lurch. Combat units were "moving here and there, crossing each other's paths and taking up positions, only to move back from them a day later and take up different ones," recalled Sharon. "The army did not look as if it knew what it was doing."

Sharon took a grimmer view of the closure of the Straits of Tiran, and regarded it as a provocation that demanded an inevitable military response. "We have the power to destroy the Egyptian Army, but if we give in on the free-passage issue, we have opened the door to Israel's destruction," he said. "We will have to pay a far higher price in the future for something that we in any case had to do now."

For the frontline commanders, continued diplomatic dawdling only invited a tougher fight. Every day that passed allowed the Egyptians more time to dig in and prepare. For his part, Sharon was exasperated by the waiting game. "The Army is ready as never before," he said. "All this fawning to the powers, begging for help, undermines our case. If we want to survive here, we have to stand up for our rights."

By the evening of June 4, such reasoning had swayed the government's cabinet ministers, who, at last, opted for war. "The government has determined that the armies of Egypt, Syria, and Jordan are deployed for a multi-front attack that threatens Israel's existence," stated the official orders. "It is therefore decided to launch a military strike aimed at liberating Israel from encirclement."

Those orders unfolded with startling force early on the morning of June 5, 1967. In a desperate attempt to neutralize Egypt's formidable air power, the Israeli Air Force launched a stunning series of preemptive attacks on enemy airfields throughout Egypt. Known as Operation Moked, the attack caught the Egyptians entirely by surprise. In a matter of hours, approximately 200 Israeli aircraft conducted multiple attacks that eventually destroyed 338 Egyptian aircraft, most of which were never able to get off the ground. Subsequent attacks destroyed all 29 aircraft of the Jordanian Air Force, as well as 61 Syrian planes.

With the Arab air fleets out of commission, the Israelis were free to push their ground forces into Sinai free from the threat of aerial attack. Overall command of the Sinai Front was assigned to Brig. Gen. Yeshayahu Gavish. Gavish had three ugdah (divisions) at his immediate disposal. The Israeli right flank along the Mediterranean coast was commanded by Brig. Gen. Israel Tal, who led a division that was to sweep along the primary coastal route across Sinai. In the center, Brig. Gen Avraham Yoffe, a tough veteran who had seen extensive combat since he was 16 years old, led two armored brigades. On the left, Ariel Sharon commanded an imposing ugdah, the 38th Armored Division, which was a mixed outfit of four brigades that included armor, infantry, airborne, and artillery units.

A career army man, Sharon was a barrel-chested bull of a warrior to whom fighting had become a

General Ariel Sharon, center, confers with his subordinates just days before Israel's launch of a preemptive strike into the Sinai.

Brig. Gen. Israel Tal, center, led a division attacking along the Sinai coast. Brig. Gen. Yeshayahu Gavish, right, commanded Israeli forces in the Sinai interior.

Israel Government Press office

ABOVE: Israeli armor prepares for the advance into the Sinai Desert. The Israelis entered the Six-Day War with more than twice as many tanks as the Egyptians. OPPOSITE FAR LEFT: Jordanian troops drill on the Israeli border on June 1, just a few days before the start of the war.

way of life. A native Israeli who had been born in British Palestine in 1928, Sharon was just 14 when he joined the Haganah militia. During the Israeli War of Independence, he served as a junior officer. Prone to lead by example, he was badly wounded in action with Jordanian troops.

Sharon was given command of a special forces outfit, Unit 101, in 1953. His tenure at the head of the commandos, though, would leave an indelible stain on his career as an officer. In October 1953, Sharon led an operation into the Jordanian West Bank that targeted Palestinian terrorists. During the fighting, more than 60 civilians were reportedly killed.

During the 1956 Sinai Campaign, Sharon commanded an elite unit of paratroopers that seized vital ground at the Mitla Pass. As a professional soldier, Sharon was regarded as a keen student and meticulous planner. On the battlefield, he earned the reputation as a hard-driving combat leader who was willing to personally lead his men into tough fighting.

Sharon's objective was the imposing complex of Egyptian defenses around Abu Agheila, which commanded the central route across Sinai. The Egyptians were convinced that the main Israeli attack would be farther south, leading them to leave their forces spread woefully thin at Abu Agheila and the forward position of Umm Katif. Against the 8,000 Egyptians of the 2nd Infantry Division, Sharon had concentrated 14,000 Israeli troops.

Sharon also possessed a keen advantage in armor: 150 tanks consisting of a mix of Centurions, Super Shermans, and the lighter French AMX-13s. By comparison, the Egyptians could muster just 66 T-34's. The Egyptians did possess an advantage in artillery, fielding a fearsome array of Soviet 122mm cannons and 152mm howitzers which easily outclassed the Israeli artillery.

Sharon had developed a meticulous and audacious plan for the reduction of the impressive Egyptian defenses. A keen student of military tactics, he not surprisingly opted for a massive flanking movement against the Egyptian stronghold. Following an airborne assault aimed at silencing the enemy artillery, Israeli artillery would unleash a punishing barrage on Egyptian positions. Armored columns would harass the enemy's flanks while the main thrust, largely consisting of infantry, would strike the Egyptians from the north. The main attack would use the cover of sand dunes which the Egyptians considered impassable.

Clearly aware that Israeli troops had been stalled by the Abu Agheila defenses in 1956, Sharon had formulated an extremely complex plan in the hopes of completely overwhelming the Egyptian defenders. The success of the entire plan, though, would depend on near-perfect timing, the coordination of various columns, and a dose of good luck.

Sharon would have more than his share of good fortune in the unfolding battle. His main force crossed the border on June 5 and made for Abu Agheila. South of Umm Katif, Sharon launched a diversionary attack toward Egyptian positions at Qusaymah. Although he attacked Qusaymah with just two reserve battalions and a handful of tanks, the Egyptians became increasingly convinced that any direct attack on Abu Agheila was unlikely, and focused their attention on points south.

Taking advantage of the Egyptian confusion, Sharon put his complex plan in motion. On the right, Colonel Natke Nir's task force struck off on one of the most crucial and dangerous parts of Sharon's grand plan. Nir commanded an independent armored battalion, which was to swing to the north of the Umm Katif positions along an insignificant desert trail known as the Batur Track. His objectives were to reduce an Egyptian outpost at Point 181, then fall on the rear of Abu Agheila, seizing Ruafa Dam, cutting off the route of retreat and blocking the roads to any Egyptian reinforcements.

Nir commanded an assortment of heavily

armed troops, which included mechanized infantry, mortar, and rocket teams, as well as reconnaissance and engineering units. The hard-hitting core of his unit consisted of 45 Centurion Mark V tanks, whose wide tracks made them well suited for the dangerous flank attack along the sandy wastes of the Batur Track. More important, the Centurions, armed with 105mm main guns, packed the necessary punch for a shooting match with Soviet-made armor.

Due to scant intelligence, Nir was unsure what resistance would be encountered at Point 181, but as his tanks approached the high ground, they received a warm reception and were driven back after fierce fighting. After calling in air support from the IAF, Nir struck again. While his infantry fixed the Egyptians from the front, Nir sent his armor on wide flanking attacks against the Egyptians.

In the face of the multi-pronged attack, Egyptian defenses at Point 181 collapsed, once again opening the Batur Track to Nir's armor. The brutal fight for the position had cost Nir several of his subordinate officers and eight tanks.

The operation to seize Abu Agheila continued at sundown, when a daring helicopter-borne infantry attack was launched from Israeli positions. Sharon had planned for three waves of six helicopters to land 200 paratroopers in the enemy's rear. The craft were carrying elements of the 80th Paratroop Brigade under the command of Colonel Matt. Matt's elite paratroopers were tasked with the vital operation of silencing enemy artillery, consisting of deadly Soviet-made 130mm cannons, before the Egyptian guns could decimate Sharon's advancing armor and infantry.

Sharon shared a special bond with his paratroopers. A former paratrooper himself, the general continued to don the red beret of the Israeli airborne. War correspondent Yael Dayan was present when Sharon conferred with Matt just prior to the attack. Sharon's voice "changed some when he talked to the parachutists' commander," said Dayan. "He knew them all by first name, and they were his men, and somehow he gave me the feeling he was talking to a brother in whose hands he entrusted a hard job."

Despite Sharon's confidence in his paratroopers, the operation was indeed a hard job from the outset. During the flight to the landing zone, nearly half of the helicopter pilots lost their bearings in the darkness, veered far off course, and never succeeded in landing their loads of paratroopers at the designated target. After a harrowing flight over the desert, the rest of the helicopters touched down about two miles northwest of the Egyptian artillery park in terrain considered impassable to the Egyptians. Matt's paratroopers, each of whom was laden with a heavy load of weaponry and equipment, began the arduous trek toward their target.

Although the paratroopers were highly conditioned warriors, they struggled under heavy loads as they trudged through the sand dunes. Urged on by their officers, the men pressed forward. With no warning, Egyptian artillery and mortar fire began landing on the planned route of attack, sending up great plumes of sand and dust. Matt kept his head despite the tremendous crash of artillery. "I guessed from the location of falling bombs that the enemy was firing blind, not having actually seen us, only hearing the unfamiliar noise of the helicopters in their rear area," said Matt.

Despite the occasional burst of Egyptian illumination rounds, the paratroopers struggled to find their way in the dark; but as Matt pressed forward, the enemy position was clearly located by the telltale muzzle flashes of Egyptian artillery. Matt and his men reached the perimeter of the Egyptian artillery park at 12:00 AM. They then formed up for the planned assault.

As the Israelis rushed forward, they could not believe their luck. The artillery position they were about to assault, which had no protective minefields or barbed wire, was wide open to attack. Matt had given orders to individually assault each enemy gun, and as the paratroopers entered the position, they split up to target their objectives. The Egyptian gun crews had been taken entirely by surprise and panicked in the confusion. The Israelis likewise targeted enemy ammunition bunkers, which were soon engulfed in flames. In minutes, the Egyptian gun crews had scattered in

THE SIX DAY WAR TIMELINE

JUNE 5

Israel launches a preemptive airstrike known as Operation Focus against Egyptian air bases in the morning with its French-supplied fighter bombers. They achieve total surprise.

Israeli aircraft attack air force bases in Syria and Jordan later in the day.

Syria, Jordan and Iraq begin air strikes on various targets, including Haifa, Netanya, and Tel Aviv.

JUNE 6

Syrian forces fortify their frontier with Israel. The Syrians shell Israel with their heavy artillery.

Israeli forces begin major ground operations on its frontiers with Egypt, Jordan, and Syria. Jordanian forces retreat from West Bank. Brig. Gen. Ariel Sharon wins a decisive victory at Abu Agheila in the Sinai Peninsula.

JUNE 7

The U.N. Security Council presents a possible cease-fire initiative. Egypt's President Gamal Abdel Nasser flatly rejects it. Meanwhile, Israel and Jordan begin peace talks.

Israeli forces capture Bir al-Hasna and Al Qazima in Egypt.

A fierce battle erupts in the Old City of Jerusalem as elite Israeli forces overpower Jordanian troops. Shaken by the loss of the Old City, King Hussein of Jordan orders his forces to withdraw.

JUNE 8

Egypt accepts a cease-fire, the Israelis capture Hebron, and fighting rages on the border of Golan.

JUNE 9

Israeli ground forces attack the Golan Heights in Syria.

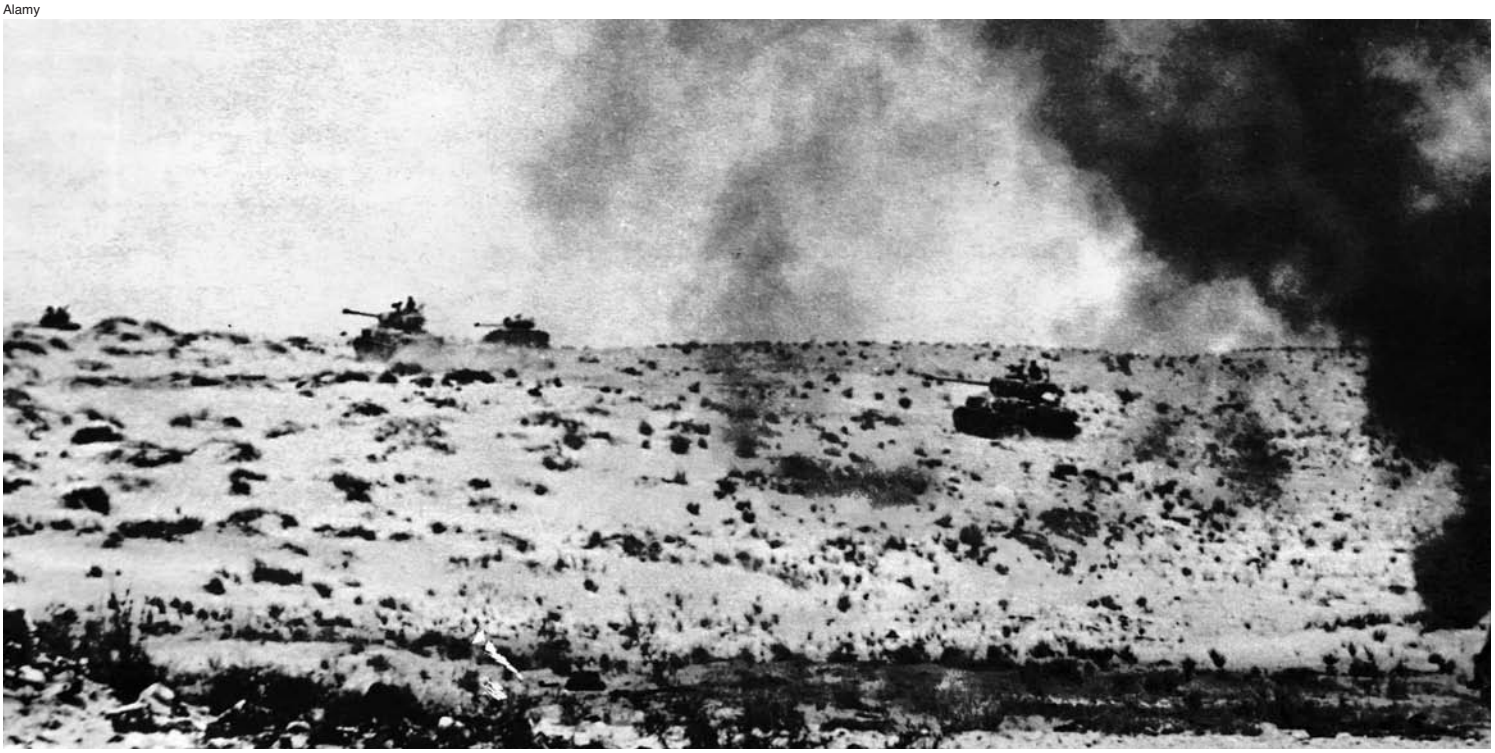
JUNE 10

Israel takes Kuneitra on the Golan Heights. Israel and Syria agree to a cease-fire.

The war ends with Israel having captured the Gaza Strip, West Bank, Golan Heights, and Sinai Peninsula to the Suez Canal.

An Israeli armored column in the Sinai Desert on June 8.

Alamy



Lt. Col. Mordecai Zippori's 14th Armored Brigade eliminated Egyptian forward outposts at Abu Agheila in two hours of hard fighting.

confusion, and much of the artillery was destroyed or disabled.

A convoy of Egyptian supply trucks, illuminated by their own headlights, arrived unexpectedly at the artillery park just as the Israelis had overrun the position. The disoriented Egyptian drivers had no warning and drove into the mouth of a deadly ambush. Riddled with Israeli small arms fire, trucks careened out of control or burst into flames.

While Matt was shocked by the carnage his men had inflicted, the operation to silence the Egyptian guns had been a remarkable success. For his part, Matt had regarded his assignment as sure to result in a tough fight, and he was elated with his success. As his men mopped up and gathered their dead and wounded, Matt received a radio communication from Sharon, who ordered the paratroopers evacuated. The main attack could proceed unfettered by the threat of an impenetrable Egyptian artillery screen.

Israeli columns would make the most of the advantage. Sharon gave orders for his artillery to open fire on the Egyptians at 10:00 PM. His arsenal of firepower consisted of 105mm and 155mm howitzers, 120mm and 160mm mortars, and British 25-pounders. As he glanced across the desert, he issued legendary orders for his gunners. "Let everything tremble," he said.

A sheet of flame lit up the desert floor as the guns opened up, raining down an unrelenting storm of fire on the Egyptian defenses. For nearly half an hour, the Israelis unleashed the most intense artillery bombardment in the history of the IDF. Even Sharon, a career soldier, was amazed by the tremendous show of firepower. "I have never seen such a fire in all my life," he said.

In the hope that the fierce shelling had softened up the Egyptian defenses, Sharon unleashed the troops of his main assault. Thundering toward the Egyptian lines were the tanks of Lt. Col. Mordecai Zippori's 14th Armored Brigade, containing two battalions of Super Sherman tanks mounting 105mm guns. Zippori's task was to seize forward Egyptian observations posts and then use his armor as fire support for the infantry attack on the main Egyptian trenches. Zippori's tankers had faced determined opposition at the forward Egyptian post at Tarat Umm Basis, which was occupied by the elite members of Egypt's 2nd Reconnaissance Battalion. The Egyptians broke after two hours of fierce fighting, and Zippori's brigade continued to steamroll startled enemy outposts as it drove forward.

Israeli momentum, though, soon ground to a halt. Although the IAF began launching sorties against the enemy defensive complex centered on Abu Agheila, Egyptian artillery was able to maintain a heavy and accurate fire against the advancing Israeli armor. To avoid sending his tanks into a killing zone, Zippori ordered his tank crews to stop the advance.

Earlier that afternoon, Sharon ordered his infantry, the Kuti Brigade commanded by Colonel Yekutiel Adam, to cross the frontier and move toward Umm Katif. Adam's three battalions, one of which was a part-time reserve outfit, had ridden to the front in a curious parade of civilian vehicles. After reaching Tarat Um Basis, the foot soldiers dismounted and trudged a dozen miles through sand dunes to the north of the enemy.

Adam's brigade, which was tasked with assaulting the lines at Umm Katif, had taken up its assault positions on the Egyptian left by 10:00 PM. Adam opted to throw his two regular battalions into the initial assault and hold back his part-time reservists as a general reserve in case of emergency. Once again, the Egyptians would be confounded by the direction of the attack, which came from sand dunes that were considered impassable. To the north of the Umm Katif position, the Egyptians had planted no mines.

Rushing in from the dunes in the black of night, Adam's men slammed hard into the trenches, quickly folding the Egyptian left. The Egyptians, though, quickly regrouped and put up a stiff fight; brutal hand-to-hand combat ensued in the trenches. The Egyptian colonel in command of the defenses, whose command bunker was located in the second line of trenches, frantically tried to order artillery strikes against the Israeli-occupied first trench. His position, though, was overrun by the advancing Israelis, who captured the command staff.

Despite the determined defense of much of the Egyptian infantry, the tactical surprise gained by the Israelis began to tell. Israeli infantry

Captured Egyptian armor parked in the Sinai desert. The Israelis' remarkable victory had exceeded military planners' most optimistic timetables.

rapidly moved through the trenches. In the confusion of the night fighting, the foot soldiers averted friendly fire incidents by use of colored signaling flashlights. Each battalion had a specific color. One was red, another green, and yet another blue. By 1:00 AM on June 6, the Israelis sat astride the central route and began assaulting the southern half of the Umm Katif defenses. Clearly sensing that he was poised for victory, Adam ordered his reserve battalion into the fight.

The situation quickly degenerated for the Egyptians. Soon after Adam's successful assault of the trenches, Israeli engineers succeeded in opening a hole in the minefields and barbed wire to the east of Umm Katif so that Israeli armor could advance. The operation would be a difficult one, though. As a lead platoon of tanks inched its way through the gap, one of the tanks struck a mine and was disabled, blocking the path. The engineers frantically worked to widen the breach for the remainder of the tanks. Only the mounting confusion in Egyptian ranks saved the stalled tanks from annihilation. Three hours later, Israeli tanks were pouring through the gap and widening the Israeli breach of the Umm Katif position.

After a harrowing nightlong journey through the sand dunes north of Abu Agheila, Natke Nir finally succeeded in getting his Centurion tanks in position for an assault on Egyptian troops stationed at Ruafa Dam. His attack, which rolled in from the west, came as a complete shock to the startled Egyptian defenders, whose attention had been focused on the main attack coming from the east. In short order, the Egyptian position collapsed, and Nir struck east in order to link up with the Israeli main body.

At that point, the Egyptian defenses began to hopelessly unravel. For two hours, Egyptian tankers waged a determined but uncoordinated fight with the closing vise of advancing Israeli armor. By the early morning hours, only isolated detachments of Egyptians continued to fight, but they were quickly overwhelmed. The Egyptian defensive works of the Abu Agheila complex, once considered one of the strongest defensive positions in the world, had fallen in a single night of fierce fighting.

The loss of Abu Agheila, paired with startling Israeli victories farther north, brought about the entire collapse of the Egyptian defense of the Sinai Peninsula. In Cairo, a demoralized Field Marshall Amer panicked and ordered his entire army to give up the fight, make for the Suez Canal, and regroup on the west bank. By the early afternoon, Egyptian forces were in full flight to the west, with hard-driving Israeli armored columns hot on their heels.

Far from letting the Egyptians escape, the Israelis sent smaller armored forces in a mad dash for the few strategic passes through the mountains of western Sinai. Once again, decisive action enabled the Israelis to gain control of the only Egyptian escape routes. Although a good number of Egyptians escaped, the outcome of the fighting in Sinai had proved nothing short of catastrophic. The Egyptian Army had lost 80 percent of its tanks, artillery, and trucks. The Egyptians also suffered 11,000 men killed, wounded, or captured. In the Abu Agheila sector alone, the Egyptians lost 2,000 men and 60 tanks. In contrast, the Israelis lost 40 men and 19 tanks in that sector.

The remarkable victory in Sinai had outpaced the most optimistic of Israeli timetables and exceeded even the wildest dreams of Sharon. The 38th Armored Division's remarkable success at Abu Agheila not only secured Ariel Sharon's reputation as a cunning strategist, but also was a key factor in the crushing Israeli victory during the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, which lasted less than a week. During the conflict, later styled the Six Day War, the IDF stormed to stunning wins on every front.

In addition to occupying the Sinai Peninsula and the Gaza Strip, the Israelis crushed Syrian columns in the northeast, securing possession of the strategic Golan Heights. Israeli possession of the Golan ensured that Jewish farmers, who had faced perennial shelling from Syrian artillery on the heights, would enjoy a level of security heretofore unknown.

Similarly, the Israelis delivered crippling blows to enemy troops in the West Bank. Despite stubborn Jordanian fighting, the IDF badly wrecked Jordanian columns. The fighting left Israel in control of all territory west of the Jordan River, which included the holy city of Jerusalem, the most treasured prize in the Middle East. ■

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By necessity, General Edmund Kirby Smith ruled the isolated Trans-Mississippi Department of the Confederacy as a semi-independent fiefdom.

REBEL LORD of the Trans-Mississippi

By David A. Norris

Recently detached from the Army of Tennessee, the Arkansas troops of Brig. Gen. Thomas J. Churchill's division had not yet met their new commander when the division came under fire at Richmond, Kentucky, on August 30, 1862. No one recognized the bespectacled officer who appeared among them on horseback, urging them to charge the enemy. This was the way that the Arkansas soldiers became acquainted with Edmund Kirby Smith, a Southern general whose American Civil War career lasted from the opening campaigns of the war in Virginia in 1861 to the last days of the collapsing Confederacy in June 1865. In three years, he rose from the rank of major to that of full general, in charge of the vast, seemingly semi-independent Department of the Trans-Mississippi that came to be known as "Kirby Smithdom."

Edmund Kirby Smith was born in St. Augustine, Florida, on May 16, 1824, to Connecticut natives Joseph Lee Smith and Frances Kirby Smith. Early during his childhood, Edmund's family realized that the lad was nearsighted and would always need spectacles. Like many Victorian-era soldiers and civilians, he would avoid having his photograph taken while wearing glasses, but he depended on them when on the battlefield.

Several years of private schooling prepared him to enter the U.S. Military Academy at West Point in 1841. Edmund's fellow cadets called him "Seminole" because the Second Seminole War was being fought in his native Florida.

Smith almost did not graduate from West Point. Although aware of the cadet's nearsightedness, the school authorities did not raise the issue until his final year. When it looked as if he would be denied a commission in the army, Smith gathered testimony from administrators and teachers, including his instructors for riding and sword exercise, all of whom stated that vision had never interfered with his training or duties. This support was sufficient to allow Smith to join the 5th U.S. Infantry after his graduation in 1845.

The 5th Infantry was then stationed in Detroit. Among the officers of the regiment was Smith's elder brother, Captain Ephraim Kirby Smith. As war loomed between the United States and Mexico, the 5th Infantry was soon transferred to Texas. The Smith brothers saw action in Texas on May 8-9, 1846, at Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma, the first battles of the Mexican-American War. After transferring to the 7th Infantry, Edmund Kirby Smith earned two brevet promotions, to first lieutenant after the Battle of Cerro Gordo and later to captain after the battles at Contreras and Churubusco.

After the end of the Mexican War, Smith taught math-

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LEFT: Brig. Gen. Kirby Smith suffered a severe wound while leading his brigade into action on Chinn Ridge at First Manassas. RIGHT: A Zouave-uniformed soldier from the First Maryland Infantry Regiment of Smith's brigade.

ematics at West Point from 1849 to 1852. In September 1852, he was transferred to rejoin his old regiment in Texas. Promotion to captain came with a transfer to the 2nd U.S. Cavalry in 1855.

On May 13, 1859, Smith was part of an expedition led by Major Earl Van Dorn against the Comanche Indians in the Nescutunga Valley of Texas. Van Dorn's troops attacked a ravine defended by the Comanches. Smith's spectacles became so fogged or smudged that he did not see a warrior approaching him. His adversary fired a bullet that struck him in the thigh. Despite the wound, Smith stayed in the saddle for the rest of the battle. In the same action, future Confederate commander Lieutenant Fitzhugh Lee survived an arrow that tore through his body and protruded from his back.

In early 1861, Smith was in Texas as a recently promoted major in command of Camp Colorado. South Carolina had seceded from the Union the previous December, and now secessionist sentiment was sweeping across the South. By February, "secession fever" took hold in Texas. Colonel Henry E. McCullough (brother of the future Confederate Brig. Gen. Benjamin McCullough) arrived at Camp Colorado with several companies of state troops. On February 22, McCullough demanded that Smith surrender the post. Smith initially refused, but after some negotiation, he agreed to turn Camp Colorado over to the secessionists on the condition that he and his garrison troops be allowed to leave peacefully.

Smith resigned from the U.S. Army after learning of his native Florida's secession; he then accepted a commission as a lieutenant colonel in the new Rebel army.

By June, Smith was a brigadier general, serving with Brig. Gen. Joseph E. Johnston in the Army of the Shenandoah, stationed west of Richmond.

In July, Brig. Gen. Irvin McDowell and 35,000 Union troops marched out of Washington toward Brig. Gen. P.G.T. Beauregard's 22,000 Confederate troops, deployed 30 miles away at Manassas Junction, Virginia. Johnston and Smith, whose troops were stationed nearby at Winchester, rushed to join Beauregard.

Smith had to wait for enough cars and engines to carry his three regiments to Manassas. They boarded cars of the Manassas Gap Railroad at Piedmont Station at 2:00 AM on Sunday, July 21, and headed out toward the war's first major battlefield.

Sergeant McHenry Howard of the 1st Maryland recalled that their train traveled slowly toward Manassas. It was just as well that the train did not move too fast: it was so packed with soldiers that many men had to ride clinging to the roofs of the cars. There were frequent halts, and each time, hungry soldiers spilled from the cars to hunt for blackberries growing in the right-of-way by the tracks. "On one of these occasions, I heard a voice exclaiming furiously, 'If I had a sword I would cut you down where I stand,' and raising my eyes, I beheld the crowd scattering for the cars before an officer striding up from the rear," recalled Howard. The voice belonged to Smith, who the men were meeting for the first time. "So we straggled from the cars no more," Howard said.

The train stopped at 1:00 PM a few hundred yards short of the railroad junction, according to Howard. His comrades stepped off the train and marched toward the sound of gunfire. Although the timely arrival of Smith's men helped win First Manassas for the Confederates, the general saw little of the actual fighting.

Smith commanded the Fourth Brigade of the Army of the Shenandoah, which was composed of the 1st Maryland, 3rd Tennessee, 10th Virginia, and 13th Virginia Regiments, as well as the Culpeper Artillery. The general rode north towards the battlefront with Colonel Arnold Elzey's troops at the head of the brigade. The troops had to contend not only with the suffocating heat of the Virginia summer, but also the thick dust churned up along the Manassas-Sudley Springs Road that led towards the rapidly unfolding battle. Smith arrived at 3:30 PM at Johnston's headquarters at Portici, the home of Frank and Fannie Lewis. Fighting raged just to the north atop Henry Hill. Johnston was already drawing up plans for a possible retreat, since the Confederates were steadily giving ground in the face of the Union flank attack.

Smith led his troops west, following Colonel Joseph Kershaw and his South Carolinians. Smith was conferring with Kershaw about where to insert his troops when a stray musket ball struck him just behind the collarbone of his right shoulder. The bullet tore under the muscles of his shoulder blade. It missed his spine, and exited from his left shoulder. Elzey took immediate command of Smith's regiments.

It looked as though the gunshot had dealt Smith a mortal wound. Indeed, he was reported dead, and press accounts of his death reached his family. John R. McDaniel, unsure from contradictory reports whether Smith was dead or not, sent his nephew to Manassas to bring his friend

back either for a comfortable convalescence or a decent burial.

Despite the serious appearance of the wound, though, Smith suffered only relatively minor injuries. Smith recuperated at McDaniel's home. He saw his own death notices in the newspapers. An even more inaccurate and widely circulated newspaper report had it that the Confederate general Kirby Smith was shot dead by his own nephew, Colonel Joseph Lee Kirby Smith of the 43rd Ohio.

"It behooves one to be killed occasionally to find out how many friends he has and how anxiously he can be inquired after," he informed his mother in a letter. Tending the patient was a young woman named Cassie Selden. Having already been acquainted for several months, the two grew closer during the patient's convalescence. They married on September 24, 1861, and ultimately had 11 children.

Promoted to major general on October 11, 1861, Smith assumed command of a division of the Army of Northern Virginia. His time in the Eastern Theater ended in February 1862, when he was sent to command the Department of East Tennessee.

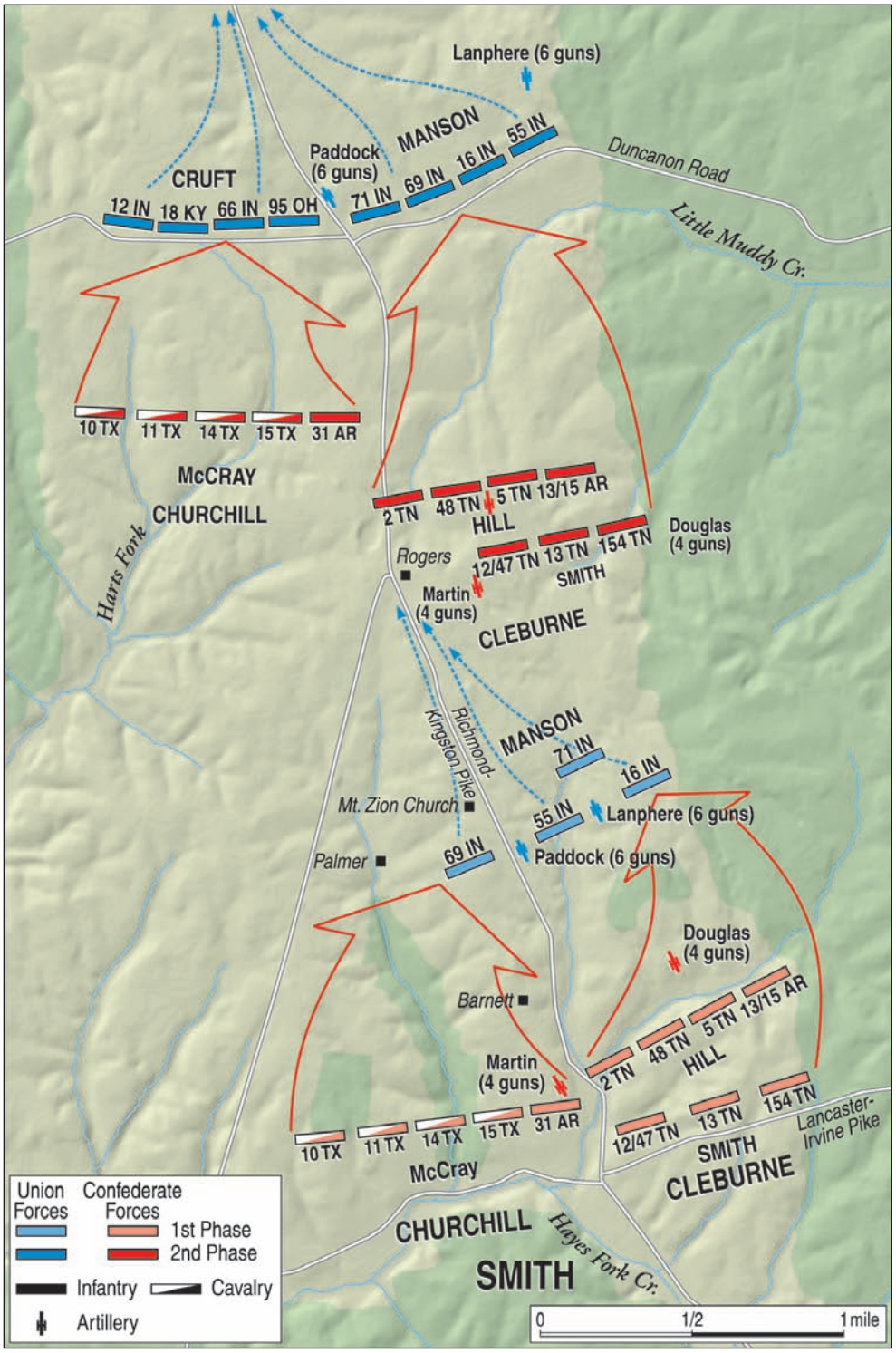
Smith participated in a joint invasion of Kentucky in August 1862 with General Braxton Bragg, the commander of the Army of Tennessee. Kentucky had declared its neutrality in May 1861, but that effort was shattered when the Confederates seized Columbus on the Mississippi River four months later. Union troops then entered the northern part of the state, while Confederates occupied parts of the southern half of the state. When Brig. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant captured Forts Henry and Donelson in northern Tennessee, Confederate forces withdrew from the state.

While Bragg's main army marched from Chattanooga, Tennessee, Smith's Army of East Tennessee departed from Knoxville on August 14. Smith bypassed the Cumberland Gap, which was held by Brig. Gen. George W. Morgan and his 7th Division of the Army of the Ohio. Morgan had occupied the strategic gap in June 1862 after outmaneuvering a much smaller force stationed at the gap.

Smith's objective was Lexington, Kentucky. On August 29, his troops approached Union Brig. Gen. Mahlon D. Manson's 6,500 soldiers holding Richmond, Kentucky. Although Smith had 19,000 troops for the Kentucky campaign, they were spread out, leaving Smith fewer than 7,000 men to deploy for the looming battle.

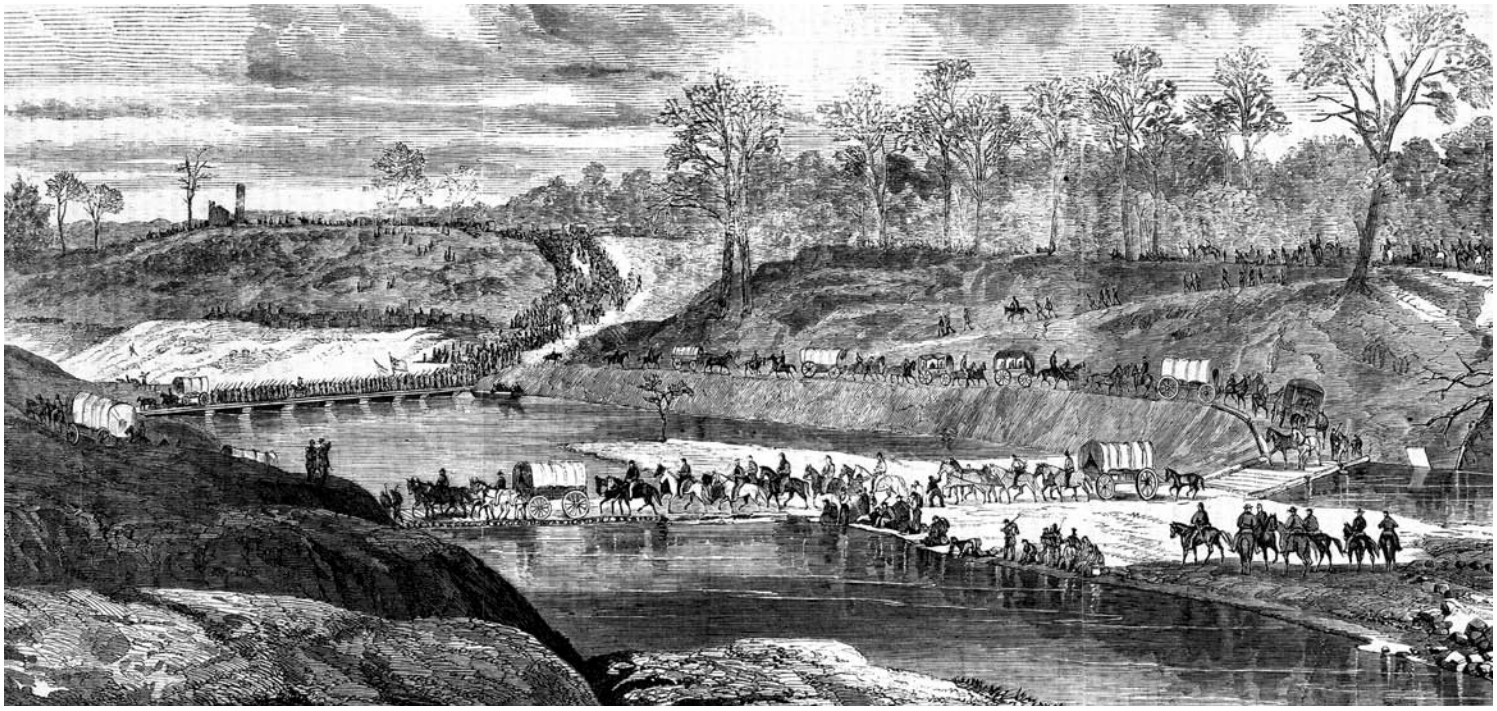
Although only slightly outnumbering the Union force, the Confederates had a significant advantage in fighting experience. Smith's soldiers were mostly veterans, while most of Manson's men were emergency troops enlisted for periods as short as 10 to 25 days. Manson's superior officer, Maj. Gen. William "Bull" Nelson, had serious reservations about how the green troops would perform in open battle, so Manson was under orders to avoid an engagement. If necessary, he was to withdraw to the Kentucky River to establish his defense.

Manson, though, opted to take a stand at Richmond. The Rebels broke through and drove the green troops back three times. Smith was conspicuous on the battlefield. One witness recalled him "dashing about bareheaded [having lost his hat], in the thickest of the fights, cheering his



Map © 2020 Philip Schwartzberg, Meridian Mapping, Minneapolis, MN

Kirby Smith was "in the thickest of the fights, cheering his men and being himself everywhere at the right time," a Rebel said of his performance during the pitched battle at Richmond, Kentucky.

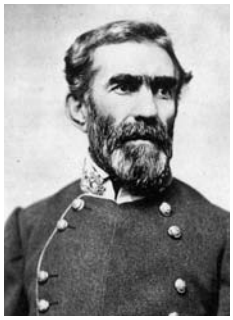


men and being himself everywhere at the right time." Among his command were "some Arkansas troops who did not know who he was, but recognized him as the person who led them so gallantly," according to the witness. The Arkansas men raised "three cheers for the 'man with the spectacles.'" When a soldier recognized Smith, he informed his comrades. Upon learning of the general's identity, one of the Arkansas men shouted, "General, we've cheered your spectacles, and now we'll cheer you."

Smith won a much-needed victory at Richmond. Confederate casualties came to 451, compared with Union losses of 206 dead, 844 wounded, and 4,303 captured. Manson was among the captives.

With his troops' momentum powered by their victory at Richmond, Smith's army pushed Union forces out of Lexington and the state capital, Frankfort. The *Southern Illustrated News* of Richmond, Virginia, praised Smith after the Union state government of Kentucky fled the capital city. "The bogus legislature fled to Louisville, and the Confederate flag was displayed on the capitol of the state," the newspaper wrote. "Everywhere the people are joining him…He seems to have effected a complete revolution."

But the promise of a Confederate capture of Kentucky faded in the weeks after the fight at Richmond. After Bragg lost the Battle of Perryville on October 8 to Maj. Gen. Don Carlos Buell, Smith united his troops with Bragg's at Harrodsville. Buell had failed to press Bragg's outnumbered troops, and now that the scattered Confederate forces were assembled, Smith



ABOVE: General Braxton Bragg (left) and Maj. Gen. Richard Taylor. TOP: Following his promotion to full general, Smith faced a dual crisis in the Trans-Mississippi Department in 1864 with Union forces moving up the Red River in Louisiana and south from Little Rock, Arkansas.

pleaded with Bragg to engage him again. "For God's sake, General, let us fight Buell here," he said. Bragg consented at first, but changed his mind and decided to withdraw his scattered Confederate forces from Kentucky, losing the confidence of his officers as a result.

Promoted to lieutenant general on October 9, 1862, Smith took command of the Trans-Mississippi Department in January 1863, replacing Maj. Gen. Theophilus Holmes. The vast Trans-Mississippi Department, which included Missouri, Arkansas, western Louisiana, and Texas, covered more than 600,000 square miles. Its indeterminate bounds faded into the frontier, embracing the Indian Territory (Oklahoma), and hazy claims to New Mexico and Arizona. Nearly 2.8 million people lived within the department, but as much as half of the population were under Union occupation. Only Texas had an intact state government. The secessionist governments of Missouri, Arkansas, and Louisiana were all in temporary quarters after their state capitals fell to the Union. Many citizens, especially in Missouri and parts of Arkansas, were pro-Union, and secessionist morale in the department drooped as more and more territory fell to Federal forces.

When Smith assumed his new position, Holmes was shuffled off to command the department's District of Arkansas. Major General John B. Magruder headed the District of Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona. The commander of the District of West Louisiana was Maj. Gen. Richard Taylor. The son of former war hero and U.S. President Zachary Taylor, Richard Taylor was an able officer, but he would come to disagree on strategy with Smith in the coming months.

Smith established his headquarters at Shreveport, the head of navigation on the Red River. A town of 2,200 people in 1860, Shreveport became the Confederate capital of Louisiana after the loss of Baton Rouge in May 1862, and the subsequent loss of the temporary capital of Opelousas.

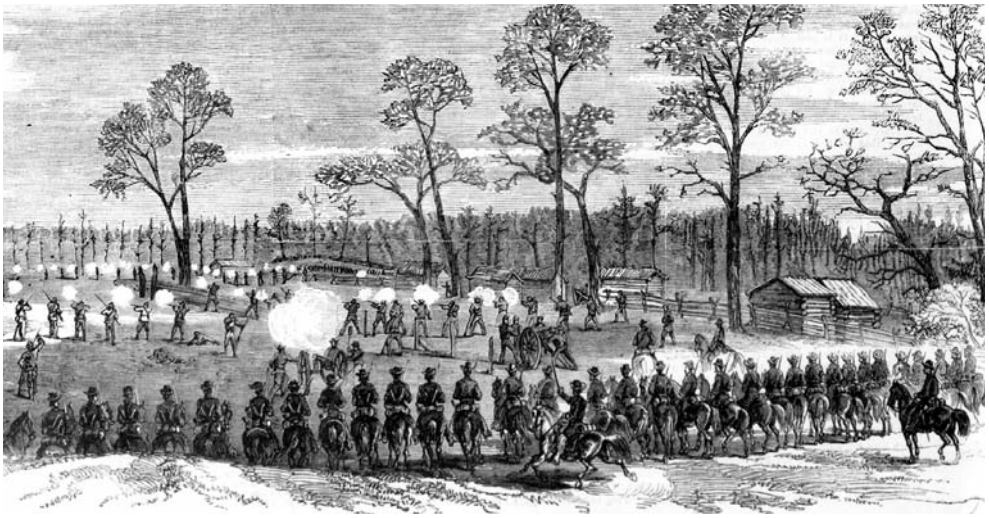
The Red River's name came from the reddish sediments washed into the river that gave it a clay-red color. Navigation on the river was long impeded by a tremendous log jam known as the "Red River Raft," which was composed of a centuries-old tangle of fallen trees, accumulated soil, and new vegetation. In some places horsemen could ride across the river over the log jam. Once more than 100 miles long, the raft was partly cleared by the 1840s, allowing small steamboats

to reach Shreveport. Some miles above that town, the river remained blocked by the accumulation of trees and vegetation.

During the first half of 1863, Ulysses S. Grant, now a major general, chipped away at the last Confederate-held stretches of the Mississippi River. Rebel control was limited to shrinking areas around their besieged strongholds of Port Hudson, Louisiana, and Vicksburg, Mississippi. Communication between the East and the Trans-Mississippi region was increasingly difficult. Battling large Union armies, and with the Union Navy blockading its coasts and slashing its way through the major rivers, the eastern Confederacy could spare little in the way of weapons or funding for the distant sideshow war fought west of the Mississippi.

If anything, the Army of Mississippi defending Vicksburg wanted the Trans-Mississippi Department to spare troops for it. Lieutenant General John C. Pemberton, the commander of the Department of Mississippi and East Louisiana, sought help from Smith, but Smith could send little aid to Pemberton. He ultimately did dispatch troops under Taylor and Brig. Gen. John G. Walker, but that alone was not enough to raise the siege.

After the surrender of Vicksburg on July 4, 1863, Smith was stranded, with his department completely cut off from the rest of his struggling nation. Because there was no time to wait the necessary weeks for approval from Richmond for new initiatives, he had to take it upon himself to make increasingly important decisions without obtaining permission from the administration of Confederate President Jefferson Davis.



A skirmish at Wilson's Plantation in April 1864 preceded two days of hard fighting at Mansfield and Pleasant Hill during the Red River Campaign.

Richmond was aware of his unusual situation. Smith was promoted to full general on February 19, 1864. He also quietly received an unprecedented degree of military and political autonomy that turned his department into an essentially semi-independent domain of the Confederacy.

Such moves in a nation founded on principles of states' rights and limited central government, even though made necessary by the war, could easily veer into illegal and unconstitutional grounds.

Davis and his cabinet were aware of the potential conflict between practical necessities and the rules of their constitution. Smith, in writing of the weight of his new responsibilities, likened his semi-autonomous domain to an empire. The Northern press, apparently led in this case by the *New York Herald*, referred to his department as "Kirby Smithdom."

To chart a course of action, Smith convened a conference on August 15, 1863, with the state governors and influential figures of the Trans-Mississippi region in Marshall, Texas. The convention granted him control of the cotton industry to

LOST OPPORTUNITY AT JENKINS' FERRY

Confederate General Kirby Smith, the commander of the Trans-Mississippi Department, decided in April 1864 to leave his subordinate commander, Maj. Gen. Richard Taylor, in charge of operations against a Union army in Louisiana and direct a campaign in Arkansas against another Union army advancing menacingly through the state.

Maj. Gen. Frederick Steele's 12,000 Union troops had pushed beyond Little Rock to Camden, Arkansas; however, Confederate cavalry had plundered his supply depots at Poison Springs and Marks' Mills. Fearing starvation or even destruction of his army, Steele resolved to retire north to his principal base at Little Rock.

Although Taylor protested Smith's detachment of three infantry divisions, the department commander ignored his complaint and took the troops anyway. Smith committed a major blunder by stripping forces from Taylor that he needed to seal the fate of Maj. Gen. Nathaniel Banks' badly battered Union army in the Red River campaign.

On April 26, Smith assumed command of the Army of Arkansas, reducing Maj. Gen. Sterling Price to command of just the Arkansas and Missouri troops of the army. Following the loss of the supply depot at Marks' Mills on April 25, the following night Steele ordered a general withdrawal. Heavy rains slowed Steele's retreat on April 29.

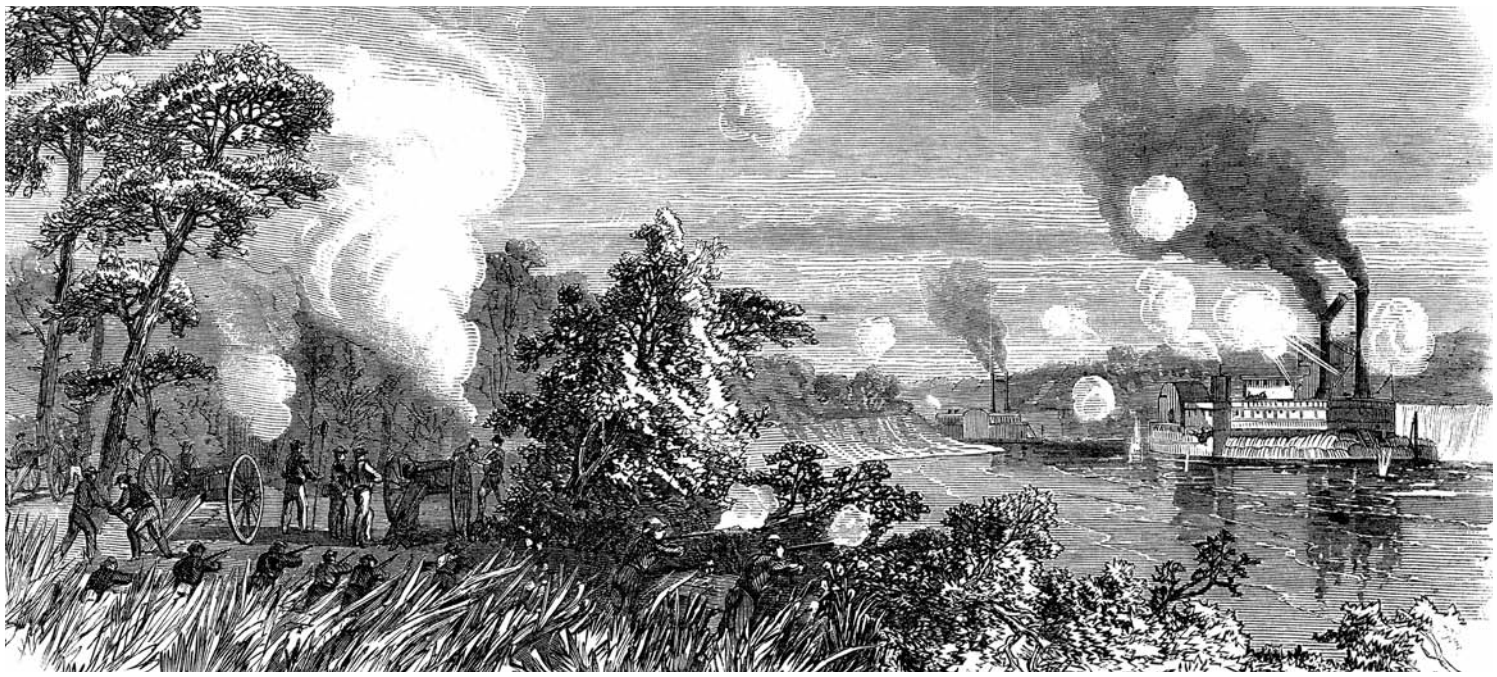
Upon approaching Jenkins' Ferry on the Saline River, the Yankees found the low-lying ground on the west side had become a swamp that stretched for two and a half miles. The Union cavalry got through easily enough, but the wagons and guns became bogged down. The Yankees had a pontoon bridge in place when Smith overtook them the following day, but were still trying to get all of their troops and equipment across the river when the Johnny Rebs arrived.

Although Brig. Gen. Friedrich Salmon was tasked with fighting a rearguard action with his VII Corps, the actual direction fell to one brigadier. Brig. Gen. Samuel Rice formed his regiments in a strong line that was well anchored. It left only a narrow front for the Confederates to launch their assault.

For four long hours on the morning of April 30 the Yankees held firm. After two groups of Arkansas Rebels failed to crack the Union rearguard, Maj. Gen. John Walker's Texas troops gave it a try. They too were repulsed. The troops on both sides had to fight in knee-deep water. Rice fell near the end of the battle. The Union lost about 700 men, and the Confederates about 1,000.

Although Kirby Smith held Jenkins' Ferry after the Union army continued north, he suffered a strategic defeat by letting another Union army escape.

William E. Welsh



ABOVE: Confederate shore batteries succeeded in destroying five Union vessels on the Red River at Alexandria, Louisiana. OPPOSITE: Although Smith and some of his subordinates wanted to continue fighting in the Trans-Mississippi in May 1865, despair swept through the ranks of the western Confederate army and its soldiers deserted in droves.

fight speculation and raise money for the war. It also recommended that Smith establish his department's own diplomatic links with Mexico and France.

Early in 1862, with the United States embroiled in internal war and unable to enforce the Monroe Doctrine, Emperor Napoleon III of France found a pretext to launch a French invasion of Mexico. Smith sent agents to Mexico to establish good relations with the French invaders, as well as the Juarista governors of the northern states of Mexico.

Trouble arose in November 1863, when the Confederacy funneled $16 million in funds to the Trans-Mississippi Department via the Mexican port of Matamoros. The merchant firm entrusted with handling the transfer seized the money, claiming it against debts owed to them by the Confederate States.

Smith responded with a ban on all cotton exports to Mexico, and froze all Mexican assets in Texas. Facing the loss of badly-needed revenue from the cotton trade, Mexican authorities worked out a solution with the Confederates. The funds were released upon assurances that the Confederate government would settle its debts, and trade resumed.

Besides communicating with French officials in Mexico, Smith opened direct contact with France, reminding them that in aiding the Confederacy, France would gain from the cotton trade and avoid having friendly Confederate Texas replaced with "a grasping, haughty, and imperious neighbor." These overtures, however, were ineffective.

Without significant supplies from the East, the Trans-Mississippi Department had to supplement its meager manufacturing capacity by exchanging cotton for necessities purchased in Europe and run through the Union blockade. Smith created a cotton bureau to handle trade in this valuable commodity.

Economics and diplomacy were far from the only matters crossing Smith's desk. In early 1864, the commander of the Trans-Mississippi learned of the greatest threat so far directed at his department, a Union offensive known as the Red River Campaign. Although the Lincoln Administration opposed the French invasion of Mexico, which flouted the Monroe Doctrine, Washington could not afford involvement in another war. But the Union Army could spare enough troops to invade Texas. Planting the U.S. flag along the Rio Grande would choke off supplies flowing into the Trans-Mississippi, and rattle the confidence of Napoleon III's Mexican expeditionary force in the bargain.

Lieutenant General Nathaniel P. Banks took command of the campaign against Confederate troops in the Red River area. The Red River offered the easiest route for a land invasion of Texas. Banks He would move up the Bayou Teche—a waterway through central Louisiana—from southern Louisiana with 17,000 men, and take the Red River port of Alexandria. At that location, Banks planned to meet Brig. Gen. Andrew Jackson Smith and 10,000 more men. Detached from Maj. Gen. William T. Sherman's forces in Mississippi, Brig. Gen. Smith arrived in Alexandria aboard transports guarded by a fleet of Union Navy river gunboats under Rear Admiral David Dixon Porter. Another army, 15,000 men commanded by Lt. Gen. Frederick Steele, would move south from Little Rock, Arkansas, and join forces with Banks. They would capture Shreveport, and then push into eastern Texas.

Alexandria fell to Andrew Jackson Smith's forces on March 18. By March 26, Banks and his contingent joined them. Banks' combined force pushed toward Shreveport, but was immediately confronted with two problems. The water in the Red River was so low that Union gunboats could barely pass over the rapids above the town. Moreover, Brig. Gen. Smith's 10,000 men were only on loan until April 15, at which time they were to head east for Sherman's campaign against Atlanta.

Banks had more than 40,000 men. In contrast, Smith had only 30,000 troops in his entire department, and they were scattered from the Rio Grande and the Gulf of Mexico to the Indian frontier.

Taylor, who was in command of Confederate troops in Louisiana, fell back from Banks' and Porter's forces until halting at Mansfield, Louisiana, 20 miles from Shreveport. On April 7, cavalry units clashed at Wilson's Plantation. Taylor telegraphed Smith, asking if he should risk battle at Mansfield. Smith did not immediately respond, so it was the next day before his courier reached Taylor.

Meanwhile, fighting erupted between Union

and Confederate forces near Mansfield on April 8. Once the enemy forced his hand, Taylor committed his 8,800 men to the battle variously known as Mansfield or Sabine Crossroads. At the cost of 1,000 casualties, Taylor smashed Banks' army, inflicting 2,900 casualties, while taking 20 guns and a train of 250 supply wagons. It was after the battle was won that Smith's orders arrived, which were to avoid a clash with the enemy.

On April 9, Taylor followed up with an attack on Banks at Pleasant Hill. This time, Banks inflicted heavy casualties on the Confederates. When Smith reached the battlefield, he was alarmed at the state of Taylor's battered army, and withdrew it to Mansfield.

Banks also was disheartened from a combination of two days' worth of casualties, the failure of Steele's troops to join his army, and the impending loss of Brig. Gen. Smith's men. Banks ended his drive for Shreveport and withdrew down the Red River.

Taylor was a Louisianan, and his plantation had been looted by Union troops. Focused on his home state, he wanted to press Banks. Smith, with an eye on his whole department, ordered Taylor to send his infantry back to Shreveport before moving against Steele's forces in Arkansas.

More troubles waited for Banks. The ironclad USS *Eastport*, a captured Confederate ship employed by the Union as a ramming vessel, sank after hitting a mine below Grand Ecore. Raised and patched up, the *Eastport* continued downstream, but the hull continued to leak. At last, on April 26, the *Eastport* ran aground. The crew abandoned the steamer and blew it up.

When the Union gunboats neared Alexandria, the river was so low that the flotilla could not pass the rapids. It looked like the force was trapped and would fall into Confederate hands. The Confederates blocked the Red River for several days, and managed to destroy five Union vessels.

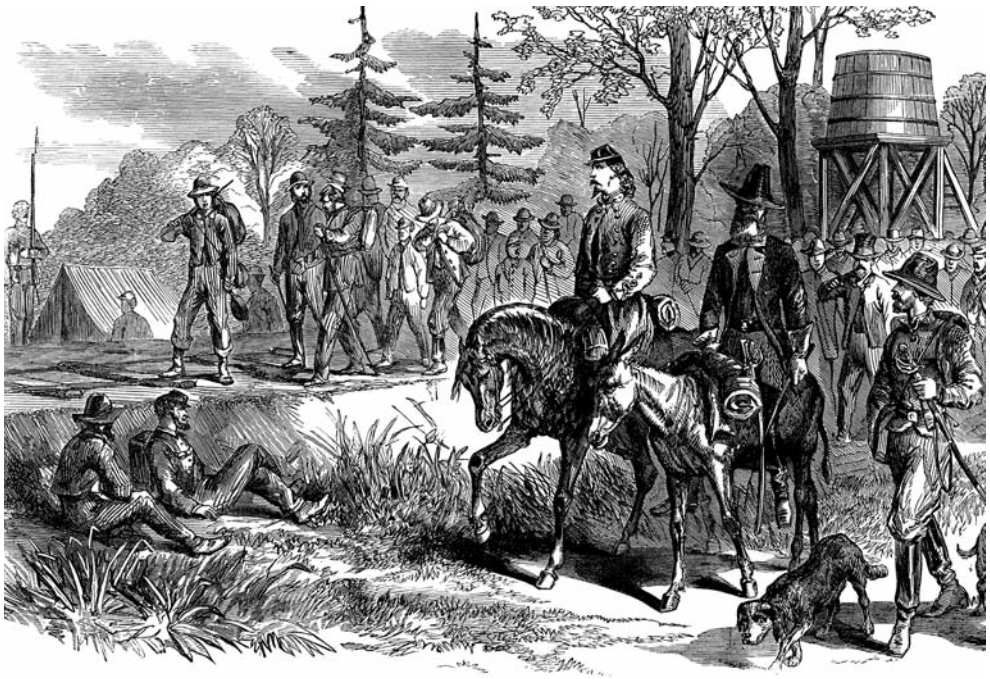
The Union's other steamers were saved by Colonel Joseph Bailey, who directed the construction of several wing dams. The dams, each stretching only partway across the river, which backed up enough water that the flotilla could steam over the rapids.

The Red River Campaign was a fiasco for the Union, but it brought much trouble to Smith, as well. Back in March, he ordered 150,000 bales of cotton burned to keep the vast haul out of enemy hands. Sixty million dollars worth of valuable cotton, which might have been traded for arms and supplies, went up in smoke.

Taylor resented Smith for sending his troops to Arkansas without him. After a heated exchange of letters and statements, Taylor resigned rather than continue to serve with his commander. Considered too valuable an officer to lose, Taylor was promoted to lieutenant general and assigned to command the Department of Alabama, Mississippi, and East Louisiana.

The spring of 1865 brought the end of the Confederacy. The main eastern armies under Generals Robert E. Lee and Joseph E. Johnston surrendered on April 9.

For a brief time, though, diehard secessionists hoped that the bid for Confederate independence could survive in "Kirby Smithdom." Smith met with Trans-Mississippi state officials in Shreveport, and at a large public meeting, crowds of citizens declared support for the idea. It seemed possible that the Confederate cabinet and president, who had fled from Richmond ahead of the Union Army, would head south and find their way to Cuba. The secessionists' hope were dashed when news reached the west that Union troops had captured Davis and his party in Georgia on May 10.



Although Smith and some high-ranking officials projected confidence about continuing the war, most of the Trans-Mississippi did not share their optimism. Despair swept through the western army. Detached from the rest of the Confederacy since Vicksburg, the soldiers and citizens in the Trans-Mississippi felt that they were completely stranded and alone by the end of April.

Military officers in Texas bombarded Smith with pleas for help as Union forces pressed toward them and their own soldiers deserted in droves. On May 20, Smith left Shreveport to establish a new headquarters at Houston. From there, he hoped to rally the remaining Confederate forces in Texas.

Arriving at Houston on May 27, Smith found his command was rapidly falling apart. Rather than heed his orders, most of his soldiers left the army and headed for their homes.

Moving on to Galveston, Smith found affairs were no better. He learned that Magruder had traveled to New Orleans on his own to negotiate a surrender of the Trans-Mississippi Department. Magruder signed the surrender papers on May 26.

Recognizing that the end was at hand, on June 2, Smith boarded the USS *Fort Jackson* in the harbor of Galveston. Also present were Magruder and Union Brig. Gen. Edmund J. Davis. Aboard the steamer, Smith signed papers surrendering the troops remaining in his department. This ceremony practically ended the Civil War, although a small Confederate force of Cherokee troops under Brig. Gen. Stand Watie held out until June 23.

To avoid the possibility of arrest for treason, Smith spent several months after the surrender in Havana. He returned to the United States and took the oath of allegiance in November 1865. The U.S. Army was of course forever closed to him, so Smith first turned to the business world, accepting the presidency of the Pacific and Atlantic Telegraph Company. That company failed, and the former commander of the Trans-Mississippi Department considered becoming an Episcopal minister.

In the end, he returned to the field of education, and spent the rest of his life as a college teacher or administrator. In his final years, he was a professor of mathematics at the University of the South at Sewanee, Tennessee. When Smith died at the age of 69 in 1893, he was the last surviving full general of the Confederacy. ■

Lt. Gen. Gordon Drummond's assault on Fort Erie on the night of August 15 -16 failed in the face of determined American resistance.

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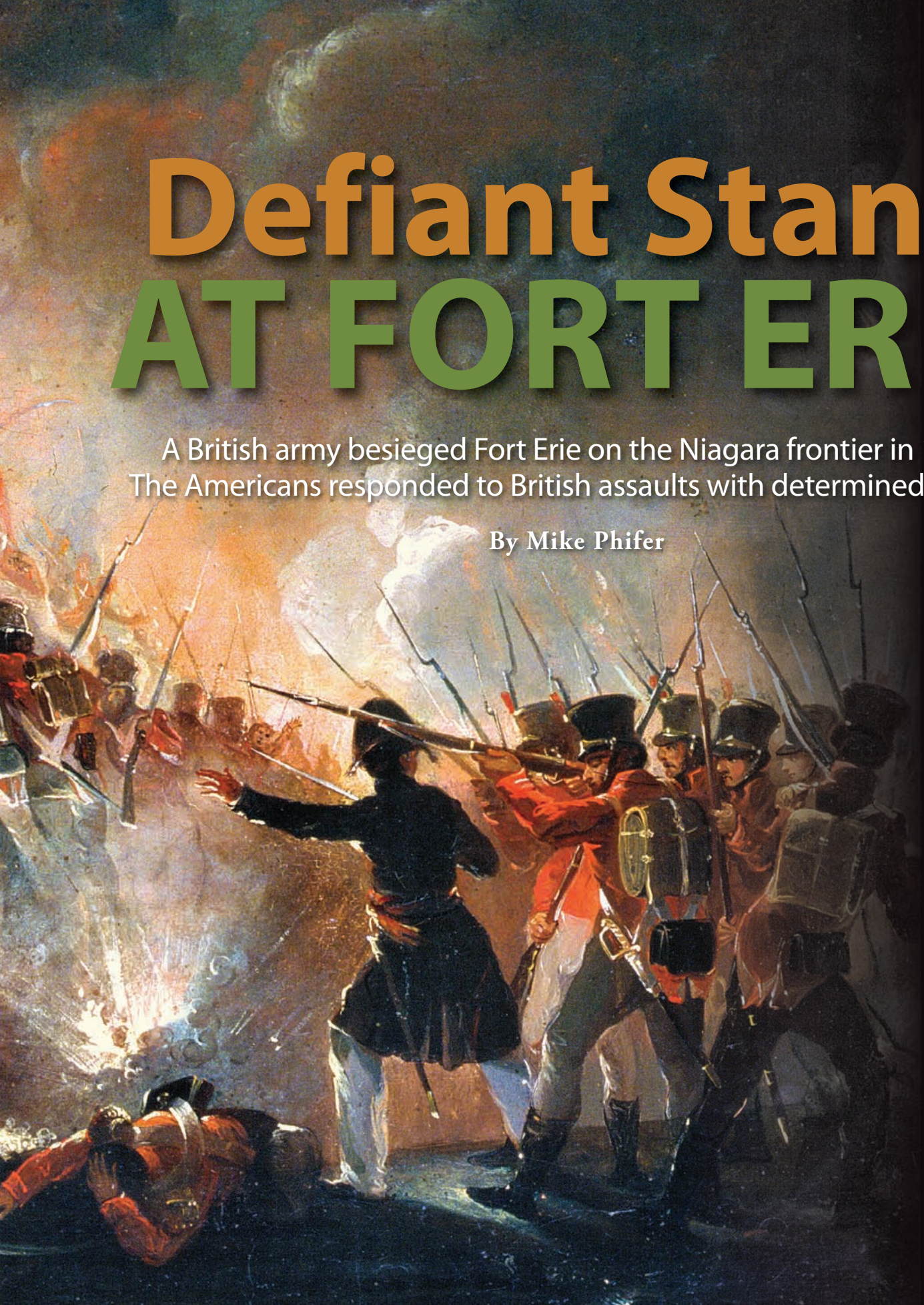
Defiant Stand AT FORT ERIE

A British army besieged Fort Erie on the Niagara frontier in 1814. The Americans responded to British assaults with determined sorties.

By Mike Phifer



U.S. Army Center for Military History

During the American offensive across the Niagara River in summer 1814, Brig. Gen. Winfield Scott's regulars defeated the British at Chippewa on July 5. Both sides suffered heavy casualties in the action.

The crash of musketry in the early hours of August 15, 1814, quickly caught the attention of Captain Nathan Towson. Commanding an American battery on Snake Hill at the southern end of the expanded fortifications at Fort Erie, Towson could tell by the several volleys that his pickets had fired that the British were coming his way. All night, the American troops had been on high alert for an expected redcoat attack. As a precaution, Towson had ordered his gunners to sleep near their six-pounders. The Americans had loaded their guns with double shot. They stood ready by their guns waiting for Towson to give the order to fire.

"This was to me the most perplexing moment of my military life," recalled Towson. The pickets under 19-year-old Lieutenant William Belknap of the 23rd Infantry fell back in the face of unrelenting pressure by the British. Unfortunately, Belknap and his pickets blocked Towson's line of fire. "Every minute's delay in firing jeopardized the whole army," Towson wrote. Nevertheless, they initially held their fire in an attempt to avoid cutting down Belknap's gallant pickets.

Deciding that he could wait no longer even though Belknap and his men were not completely in the clear, Towson gave the order for his men to touch off three of their guns. Orange flames spewed from the barrels. Towson could only hope he had not killed too many of the pickets. The British assault on Fort Erie was under way.

Back at the beginning of July, Maj. Gen. Jacob Brown's Left Division of the American Army had crossed the Niagara River and invaded Upper Canada (modern-day Ontario). He intended to seize control of the critical Niagara Peninsula and push to the head of Lake Ontario. From that location, Brown wanted to turn east and capture York. In the same thrust, he might also secure Kingston.

The British Royal Navy's base of operations in the region was situated at Kingston. It was a vital transshipment point in a long British supply line. Whether General Brown's operation was successful, though, would depend on the degree of naval support furnished by the American fleet on Lake Ontario.

Brown's army secured a clear victory at Chippawa River over Maj. Gen. Phineas Riall's British army on July 5. Yet supply shortages and a lack of naval support hampered his other offensive plans. Reacting to news that the British were marching against his supply line, Brown attacked a reinforced British army at Lundy's Lane on July 25.

During the engagement, the Americans suffered 860 casualties, one of whom was a severely wounded Brown. Command of the battered Left Division devolved to Brig. Gen. Eleazer Ripley. As he was evacuated, Brown ordered Ripley to withdraw and regroup. His orders were to fall back to the American camp at Chippawa. With 60 wagon loads of wounded, the Americans withdrew into the darkness toward Chippawa.

The following morning, Ripley led the bulk of his army back to Lundy's Lane. He ordered two companies to scout the British position. Their officers reported that the redcoats outnumbered the Americans; furthermore, the British held the high ground. After consulting with his senior officers, Ripley decided another battle was unwise, given that his troops were in no condition to fight. He would have preferred to withdraw back across the Niagara River into New York, but most of his officers rejected the idea. Instead, the army would fall back to Fort Erie. Lundy's Lane had been a tactical draw, but given that the American invasion had come to an abrupt end, it was a strategic victory for the British.

Fort Erie was situated on the west side of the1 Niagara River opposite Buffalo, New York, at the south end of the Niagara Peninsula. The British had established the fort in 1764 to help secure their supply line between Lake Ontario and Lake Erie. The fort saw action in the American Revolution. The British began building a stronger fort, which was made from Onondaga flintstone, in 1803 on the heights behind the site of the original fort. It was never fully completed, through,

owing to a lack of funds. Nevertheless, the British were able improve and extend the fortification's earthworks before the war began.

The Left Division, with its 2,100 men, retreated to Fort Erie after burning the captured British works at Chippawa. Meanwhile, Ripley crossed the Niagara River to talk with Brown in Buffalo. Ripley informed Brown that he believed the army should be withdrawn from Upper Canada. If they were not withdrawn, he would not be responsible for their fate. Ripley's fatalistic attitude angered Brown. He directed Ripley to strengthen the fort's defenses. He also told him that under no conditions was he to surrender the strategic fort to the British.

The troops of the British Right Division were as battered as their American opponents. Having suffered 880 casualties at Lundy's Lane, the British and Canadian troops were exhausted and incapable of immediate pursuit. Their commander, Lt. Gen. Gordon Drummond, who had been wounded at Lundy's Lane, remained on duty in the field. He dispatched his vanguard, composed of Indians and the 19th Light Dragoons, on July 28 to reconnoiter the American position. Fearing the American fleet on Lake Ontario might attack his supply line, he sent detachments to reinforce the British-held Fort Niagara and Fort George, which guarded the east and west sides, respectively, of the mouth of the Niagara River. The main force set out south to catch up with the vanguard several days later.

By August 1 Drummond's 3,500 British troops were six miles north of Fort Erie. The following night, Drummond dispatched Lt. Col. John Tucker with a force of 580 men across the Niagara River to destroy the U.S. military depots at Black Rock and Buffalo, New York. The force consisted of the 41st Regiment, the light companies of the 89th and 100th regiments, the flank companies of the 104th Regiment, and a Royal Artillery detachment. With the destruction of these depots, Drummond hoped the Americans would be forced to evacuate Fort Erie or come out and fight.

Tucker's detachment crossed the Niagara River around midnight, but it would be about 4:30 a.m. on August 3 before they got moving. The defenders of Black Rock, the 1st Rifle Regiment under Major Lodowick Morgan, had spotted the British across the river the day before and suspected a possible raid on the depot. To counter this, they took up position two miles north of Black Rock at Conjocta Creek. Morgan's men ripped up the planks of the bridge spanning the creek to impede British passage over the waterway. They then constructed breastworks and awaited the enemy's arrival.

Tucker, who had not sent out an advance guard, walked right into the waiting rifles of the Americans. The 41st spearheaded the attack, but the Americans drove it back with a vicious hail of rifle fire. The redcoats rallied and advanced again. This time, though, they were reinforced with the rest of Tucker's command. The American fire picked off any enemy soldiers who approached the bridge. Tucker withdrew his troops a short distance. At that point, the two sides traded fire for nearly three hours. In the end, the British withdrew altogether. Tucker's force had suffered 44 casualties, while Morgan suffered two killed and 10 wounded. Tucker blamed his men for the failed attempt at Black Rock. Drummond was deeply irritated by the repulse, for it meant that he would have to besiege Fort Erie.

Since their arrival at Fort Erie, the Americans had worked around the clock to improve their fortifications. The American constructed not only earthworks, but also a battery that they named Douglass's Battery, in honor of Lieutenant David Douglass, of the engineers who had laid out the improved defenses. The Americans anchored the new set of earthworks to the right of the fort on Lake Erie. They also built another stretch of earthworks atop a sand mound 800 yards to the south of Snake Hill. In front of the earthworks were ditches, and beyond that was an abatis, a formidable obstacle consisting of the branches of trees laid in a row with their sharpened tops pointing outwards towards the attacking enemy. As a final measure, the Americans felled trees for 300 yards around their position in order to have a clear field of fire.

The stone fort bristled with 18 guns. In addition, they could rely on artillery support from guns positioned across the Niagara River at Black Rock, as well as three armed schooners anchored near the fort. The British were fully aware of the difficulty in capturing the fort with its improved defenses. The American-held fort was "an ugly customer," said Lieutenant John Le Couteur of the 104th Regiment.

As darkness fell on the night of August 5, the British began constructing a battery north of the fort. Unfortunately for the British, Drummond's engineers were some of the least skilled and experienced in the British army. "Any man who the Duke of Wellington deemed unfit for the Iberian Peninsula was considered as quite good enough for the Canadian market, and in nothing was this more conspicuous than in the Engineer Department," said William Dunlop, a surgeon assigned to the 89th Regiment.

Hindered by the lack of tools, the British troops constructing Battery One had to contend with harassing fire from the Black Rock battery and the schooners. To protect themselves, they built an epaulement, which was an earthen parapet to protect troops from flanking fire. The British completed Battery One by August 11. They also finished construction of a trench that would lead to another battery that had yet to be established.

While work on the battery was underway, skir-

City of Toronto Art Collection

In a confused slugfest at Lundy's Lane on July 25, the British held their ground. Afterwards, the Americans retired to Fort Erie.

U.S. Army Center for Military History

Soldiers of the U.S. 1st Rifle Regiment are shown in formation wearing green linen hunting shirts with yellow fringe, while a field officer of the unit wears a gray coat. Major Lodowick Morgan and his men defended the U.S. military depot at Black Rock against British raiders.

mishing raged back and forth as the Americans attempted to harass the construction of the battery. In one of these fierce little fights on August 12 Major Morgan was killed. The British felled the trees in front of Battery One that night, thus unveiling a formidable array of guns at first daylight. The battery boasted three 24-pounder long guns, a 24-pounder carronade, and an 8-inch mortar.

The fighting was not confined to land. Captain Alexander Dobbs of the Royal Navy, with 75 sailors and marines, had received orders to destroy the trio of American schooners. With the assistance of local Canadian militia, the British assault force portaged a gig and five bateaux by wagon to Lake Erie. When they arrived at the shore, the sailors and marines quietly launched the boat and rowed toward the enemy ships on the night of August 12. They quickly captured two of the schooners and sailed them north to the Chippawa River. The naval sortie understandably boosted British morale.

The British Battery One opened fire the following day, but it quickly became apparent that it was situated too far away to do serious damage to the fort. Dunlop estimated that only one-tenth of the gunners' shot was striking the fort; even so, the shots that struck home inflicted casualties. A British mortar shell fired on August 14 struck the fort's magazine producing a large explosion. The British also began firing heated shot at the last American schooner, thereby forcing it to move off. Brig. Gen. Edmund Gaines, whom Brown ordered on August 4 to replace Ripley as the commander of Fort Erie, believed the British were planning a follow-up assault. His instincts proved correct.

Drummond feared he did not have enough supplies for a long siege, as the American fleet anchored off the Niagara River interfered with his supply line from Kingston. Instead of coming directly across the lake, Drummond's supplies went by a circuitous route, being loaded onto bateaux that made their way along the Lake Ontario shore. Drummond had no luck preventing the Americans from receiving supplies and reinforcements by water across the river from Buffalo. Because of this, British hopes of starving out the defenders were dashed. Believing the Americans could muster only 1,500 men at Fort Erie, Drummond made preparations for a night assault against the fort. But he had underestimated the garrison's size. As a result of the reinforcements from New York, Gaines had upwards of 2,800 men with which to defend the fort.

The planned British assault involved three columns. Lt. Col. Victor Fischer would lead the right column of 1,800 men in an attack against Snake Hill. The right column was composed of soldiers from his unit, the De Watteville Regiment of Swiss mercenaries, the 8th Regiment, light companies from the 89th and 100th Regiments, and a small detachment from the Royal Artillery.

Lt. Col. William Drummond's center column would assault the fort. Drummond, who was a distant relative of the British commander, commanded 340 men drawn from the flank companies of the 41st and 104th regiments, sailors, and marines, and a detachment from the Royal Artillery.

Colonel Hercules Scott commanded the left column of 880 men. His orders were to storm Douglass' Battery. His troops came from his 103rd Regiment and the flank companies of the 1st Regiment. Tucker commanded a small reserve. As for the Indians, they were to create a diversion. The various elements were to attack at 2:00 a.m. on August 15.

Fischer's column moved out in the late afternoon of August 14. His men tramped through the forest heading southwest to get into position for the assault. Drummond did not have a high regard for the Swiss troops of Fischer's command. To deter desertion, he halted the column periodically for roll call. Fischer ordered all of his troops to remove the flints from their muskets so that when they stormed Snake Hill there would not be any accidental discharges that might alert the enemy that they were coming.

The operation did not get off to a good start, as

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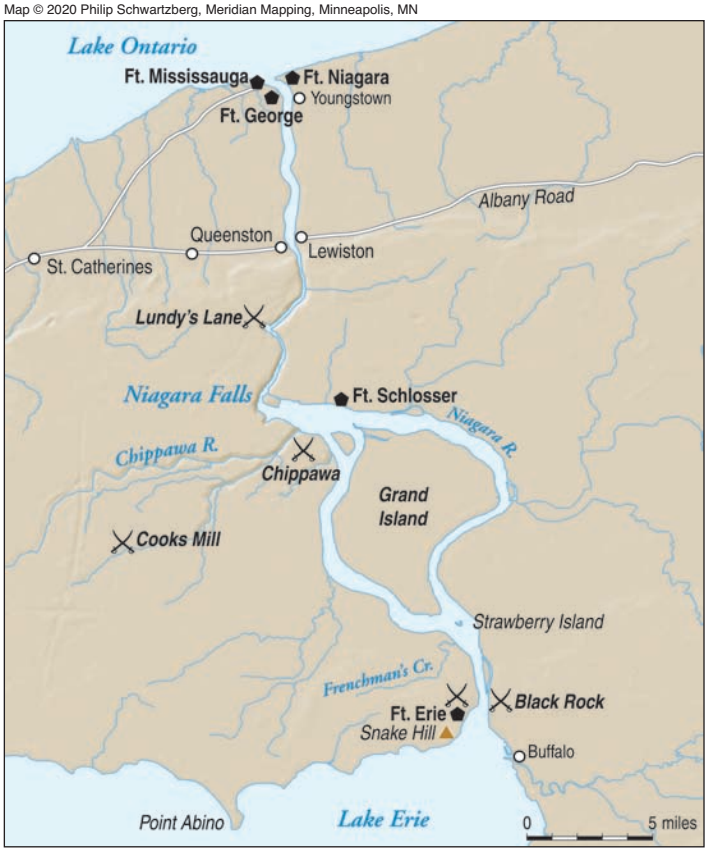


Bridgeman Art Library

ABOVE: Lt. Gen. Gordon Drummond, left, and Maj. Gen. Jacob Brown. TOP: The Niagara River divided Canada and the United States and was a key theater in the latter stages of the War of 1812.

the Indians were late in creating their diversion. Some of Fischer's men carried scaling ladders to enable them to get over the walls at Snake Hill. The column ran headlong into Belknap's pickets. The pickets opened fire on the British, thereby alerting Towson's battery and the 21st U.S. Infantry defending Snake Hill.

Although one of his men was killed and a few wounded, most of Belknap's men survived when three of Towson's guns opened fire. This was because Towson's Snake Hill battery was 20 feet higher than the retreating pickets, and therefore most of Towson's shots went over their heads. Bleeding from a bayonet wound in his backside, Belknap was the last man through the gap in the abattis.

Most of Fischer's troops following Belknap struggled through the abattis while taking heavy fire. With no flints in their muskets, they could not fire back. The troops who managed to make it to the walls discovered that their scaling ladders were too short. The American soldiers poured a vicious fire into the floundering enemy troops. The devastating fire drove them off. Simultaneously, a forlorn hope formed as Fischer's light troops waded into the water in a desperate attempt to gain entry to Snake Hill from the rear. Two companies of American troops stopped their attack cold with a blistering fire.

The attack was not going much better for the other British columns. Colonel Scott's troops did not move forward until 3:00 a.m. They quickly came under artillery fire from Douglass's Battery. American musket fire added to their misery. After two heroic attempts, they were still 50 yards from the abattis. This was as far as they got. The British troops withdrew having suffered heavy casualties. Scott died almost instantly from a bullet to the head. Some of the troops in his left column shifted to the center, where they joined Drummond's assault.

The defenders of Fort Erie had repulsed two charges by Drummond's men. On the third attempt, though, the British managed to successfully scale the stone wall surrounding the northeast bastion, where the Americans had positioned four guns. "No quarter!" the attackers shouted as they began to bayonet the American artillerymen. Some of the American artillerymen managed to escape. Having cleared the bastion, the assault party found that it could go no further. The only exit from the bastion was swept by American fire coming from the stone barracks opposite the bastion. The Americans counterattacked in an effort to retake the bastion, but their hasty assault failed. Lt. Col. Drummond was slain in the vicious fighting. Both he and Scott had premonitions that they would not survive the risky attack.

In an attempt to break the deadlock, a Royal Artillery officer had one of the captured guns turned toward the Americans and fired. A spark from the cannon's muzzle blast fell through a crack in the wooden flooring and ignited the gunpowder magazine located below the bastion.

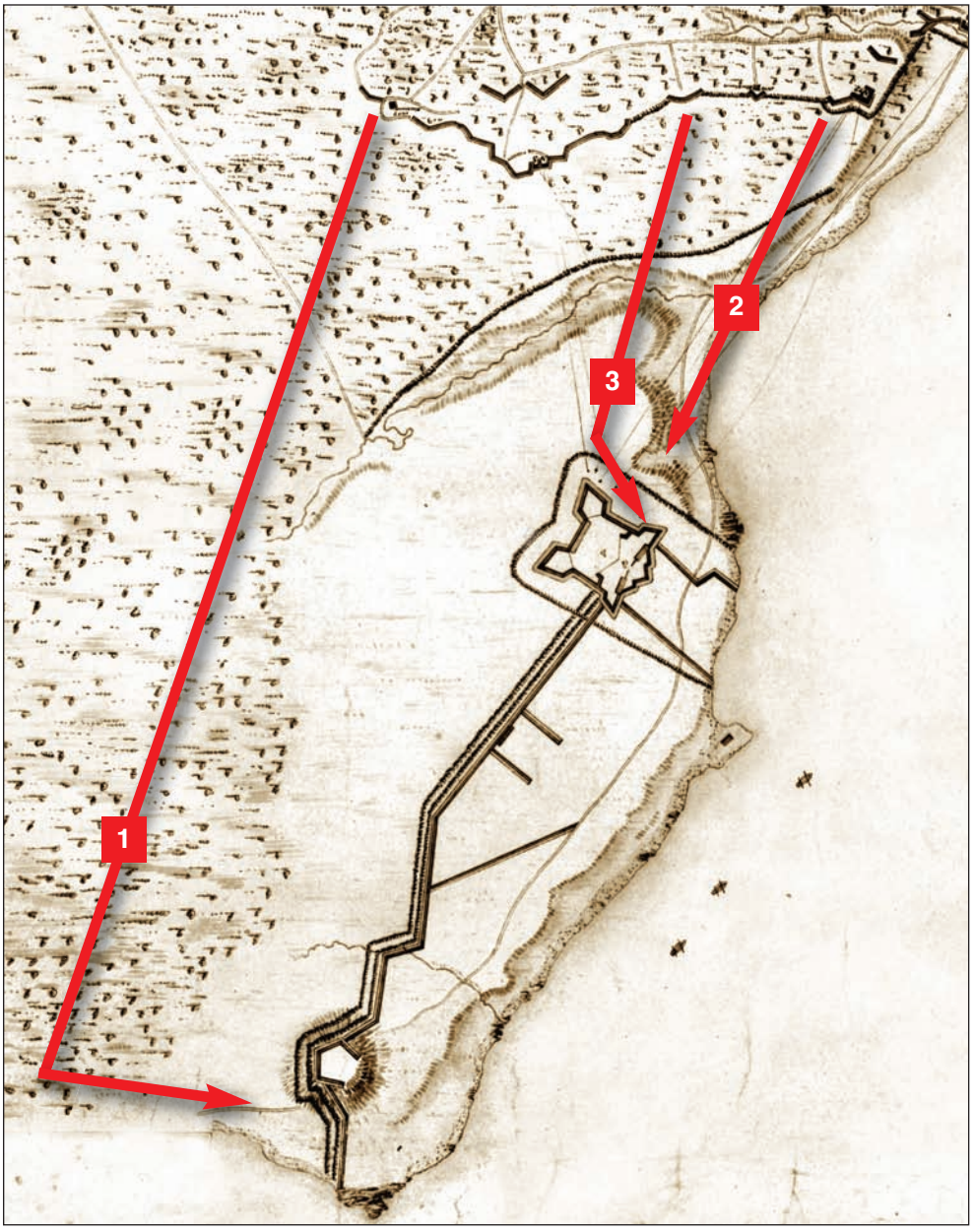
The resulting explosion was horrendous. Mangled bodies, chunks of stone, and shards of timber were hurled 200 yards in the air. The explosion killed a significant portion of the attacking force. The British and Canadian soldiers who survived the blast retreated to their lines. The whole operation was a bloody disaster for Lt. Gen. Drummond. The British lost 900 men, while the Americans lost just 79. Drummond was quick to blame the failed assault on the De Watteville Regiment. In so doing, he overlooked the fact that the scaling ladders were too short. Moreover, he failed to take responsibility for the clear mistake he had made by ordering the men to remove their flints to prevent an accidental discharge.

Both sides tended to the wounded, most of who were British soldiers. The Americans established two field hospitals. After they received treatment, the wounded were sent across the Niagara River for further treatment in New York. Many of the British dead were buried in a mass grave, while others ended up in the Niagara River.

Despite the setback, Drummond continued the siege. On the night of August 24, the British began building Battery Two, 300 yards southwest of Battery One. It was 700 yards from Fort Erie, which was about 400 yards closer than Battery One. American troops launched an attack against the battery the following day. The British pickets managed to repulse the attackers, but several dozen of their men were killed and wounded in the fierce firefight. Skirmishing continued on a regular basis, causing casualties to mount.

The British completed Battery Two four days later. The battery comprised two 18-pounders, a 24-pounder carronade, and an 8-inch howitzer. When the guns opened fire on the Americans the following day, the artillerists realized that the battery site had been poorly laid out. A rise of ground hindered the battery's view of the fort. This greatly reduced its effectiveness.

Drummond's weakened army was reinforced



A contemporary map of Fort Erie shows Snake Hill redoubt at bottom and the British siege lines at top. British troops attacked the fort in three columns on the night of August 15-16. Columns 1 and 2 failed to enter the fort; column 3 captured the Northeast Bastion but could go no further.

when redcoats from the 6th and 82nd regiments arrived to bolster his numbers. Yet his supply problems persisted. The redcoats, who lacked tents, suffered in the wet conditions brought about by periodic rain. "The troops sheltered themselves under some branches of trees that only collected the scattered drops of rain, and sent them down in a stream on the head of the inhabitants, and as it rained incessantly for two months, neither clothes nor bedding could be kept dry," wrote surgeon Dunlop. Not all suffered, though. The Canadian troops, who had a knack for woodcraft, built themselves tight shanties from felled wood.

The Americans defending Fort Erie also suffered from a shortage of supplies; in particular, they lacked good clothing and footwear. The inclement weather damaged their food stores, some of which were stored outside because the storehouse was not large enough to accommodate the provisions of such a large force. Despite all this, the Americans continued to strengthen their position.

The British began work on Battery Three, located 350 yards west of the second battery. Battery Three was just 300 yards away from the fort. The third battery, which was completed on September 4, held a 24-pounder, two 18-pounders, and an 8-inch mortar. It was not scheduled to begin firing for a couple days. The other batteries, though, lobbed shot, shell, and rockets at the American position. The British artillerists made a special point of firing on American troops repairing the fort and earthworks.

An exploding shell seriously injured Brig. Gen. Gaines on August 28. Command of the fort devolved to Brig. Gen. James Miller. But Miller would not command the fort for very long. Although not fully recovered from his wounds, Brown returned to Fort Erie in early September.

On September 4, 140 men under the command of Lt. Col. Joseph Willcocks sortied from Fort Erie to attack the new battery. Although of Irish birth, Willcocks had lived in Upper Canada for a number of years, even serving in the Legislative Assembly. He defected to the American side in 1813 and raised a unit of Upper Canadians that he called the Canadian Volunteers. The sortie at Battery 3 raged for six hours, until a rainstorm ended the fight. After the Americans fell back, celebration swept through the British and Canadian camp when the enemy soldiers learned that Willcocks, whom they viewed as a traitor, had been killed in the action.

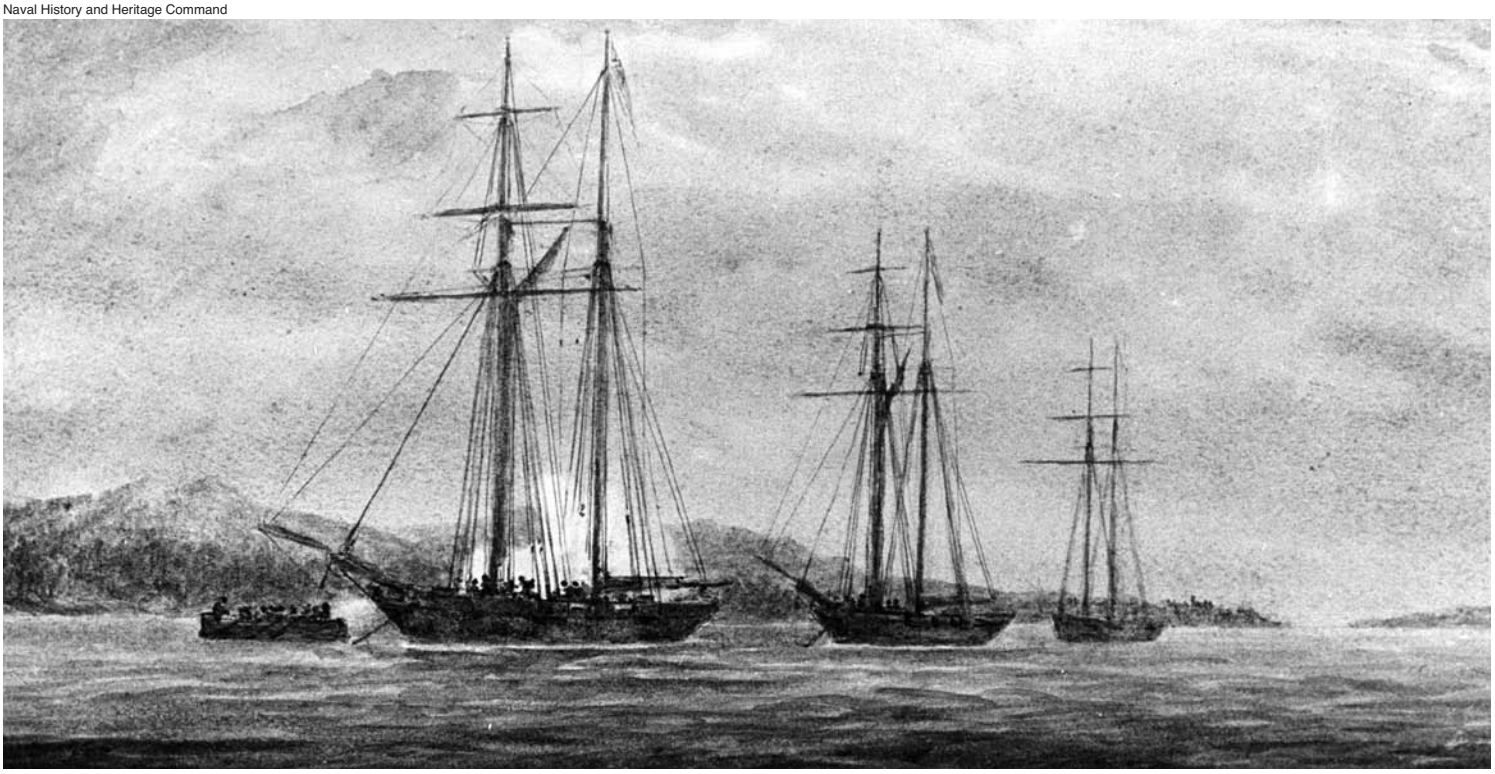
Drummond had planned for Battery Three go into action on September 6, but he changed his mind as his artillery crews began to run low on ammunition. He issued orders for Battery Three to stay silent until the army received a fresh supply of artillery shells. Although he initially planned to launch another attack once Battery Three became operational, he began contemplating a withdrawal in early September. It was not just the ammunition shortage that troubled him; Drummond believed his batteries were having little effect on the American defenses.

Furthermore, Drummond feared that the Americans might attempt to land troops behind Drummond's force. Drummond's second-in-command, Brig. Gen. De Watteville, who arrived at the besieger's camp on September 1, advised the British commander to retreat after surveying the situation. Drummond agreed and ordered fatigue parties to begin removing the guns from his batteries.

As Drummond suspected, Brown was indeed planning a major sortie. Brown was deeply concerned about the threat that sustained fire from Battery Three posed to the fort. He therefore ordered Brig. Gen. Peter Porter, who commanded a New York militia brigade, to bring his best regiments to Fort Erie. Fifteen hundred troops began crossing to Fort Erie on three consecutive nights beginning September 8. On the first evening, Brown met with his senior officers to discuss his plans for attacking Battery Three.

The reaction of his officers disappointed Brown. Most of them wanted to wait for the rein-

Naval History and Heritage Command



Three American schooners anchored on Lake Erie supported the defense of the fort, but the British raiders in bateaux succeeded in capturing two in mid-August. The successful naval sortie boosted British morale.

forcements that they knew were on their way to assist them. Although Brown had been out of action since August, he had been doing his best to get additional troops for his Left Division. But the American senior command had more pressing concerns than Fort Erie, such as protecting the nation's capital. Having defeated the Americans at Bladensburg, Maryland, on August 24, British Maj. Gen. Robert Ross led his victorious troops on a raid against Washington. When they reached the American capital later that day, they burned the U.S. Capitol, White House, and various other government buildings.

The Americans also learned that 10,000 British veterans from the Napoleonic Wars in Europe had arrived in Lower Canada. This was possible in the wake of French Emperor Napoleon's surrender on March 31, 1814, which ended the War of the Sixth Coalition. British Secretary of State for War and the Colonies Henry Bathurst had informed Prevost in early June that 12 infantry regiments that had served under Field Marshal Arthur Wellesley, Duke of Wellington, would sail from Bourdeaux, France, to Lower Canada. This raised the number of British and Canadian troops under Prevost's command in Canada to 29,000.

Lt. Gen. Prevost set out from Montreal at the head of the veteran troops in late August for Plattsburg, New York, on the western shore of Lake Champlain. The lumbering column crossed the Canadian-American border on August 31. Brig. Gen. Alexander Macomb had 6,300 regulars and militia to oppose the crack British troops, who were said to have been among Wellington's best soldiers.

Despite this looming threat, U.S. Secretary of the War John Armstrong ordered Maj. Gen. George Izard, the commander of the American Right Division, to march his 4,000 men to Sackets Harbor on the eastern shore of Lake Ontario. From that location on the east side of Lake Ontario, Izard was to sail to the Niagara Peninsula. Once his troops landed on the peninsula, he was to capture Fort Niagara and Fort George. Moreover, Izard was to assist the hard-pressed Left Division in capturing Drummond's force.

When he received his orders, Izard recommended that his troops remain at Plattsburg, given that such a large British force was heading his way. Armstrong ignored his warning and told him to march for Sackets Harbor. Izard set out for Sackets Harbor on August 29.

Fortunately for the Americans, the British failed in their attempt in early September to capture Plattsburg. When American Captain Thomas Macdonough defeated British Captain George Downie's squadron on Lake Champlain on September 11, an overly cautious Prevost cancelled his ground attack against the Americans holding the town. Fearing that his supply line would be cut since it was no longer protected by naval forces on Lake Champlain, Prevost withdrew to Lower Canada in disgrace.

Despite the cool reception for his proposal, Brown was determined to hit the British. For the next few days, he purposely gave the impression he was only interested in strengthening his position at Fort Erie. Brown laid out his plan on September 16 to Miller and Porter. Porter was to advance from Snake Hill with his 1,600 men on a wooded path and fall on the British right flank. The Americans had cleared the path through the woods earlier that day. The Americans would emerge from the woods 150 yards from the Battery 3.

Porter was to first destroy Battery Three and continue attacking in order to eliminate Battery Two, as well. Should he need additional support during his attack on either battery, he was to tap Miller's force of regulars, who would be lying in wait in a ravine between Fort Erie and the British batteries. The sortie was scheduled for September 17.

Brown informed Ripley of his plan on the morning of the attack. Believing the sortie would be a disaster, Ripley initially wanted no part in it; however, he soon changed his mind. When he requested permission to command the reserve, Brown approved the request and ordered him to cover the withdrawal of the other two forces.

Porter's detachment, which was composed of the 1st and 23rd U.S. infantry regiments and three New York militia regiments, began advancing at Noon in a light rain. The 4th U.S. Rifles and a handful of Indians screened their advance.

The rain increased in intensity, and soon the troops were pelted by a heavy rainfall. The downpour afforded the attackers additional cover as they neared Battery Three.

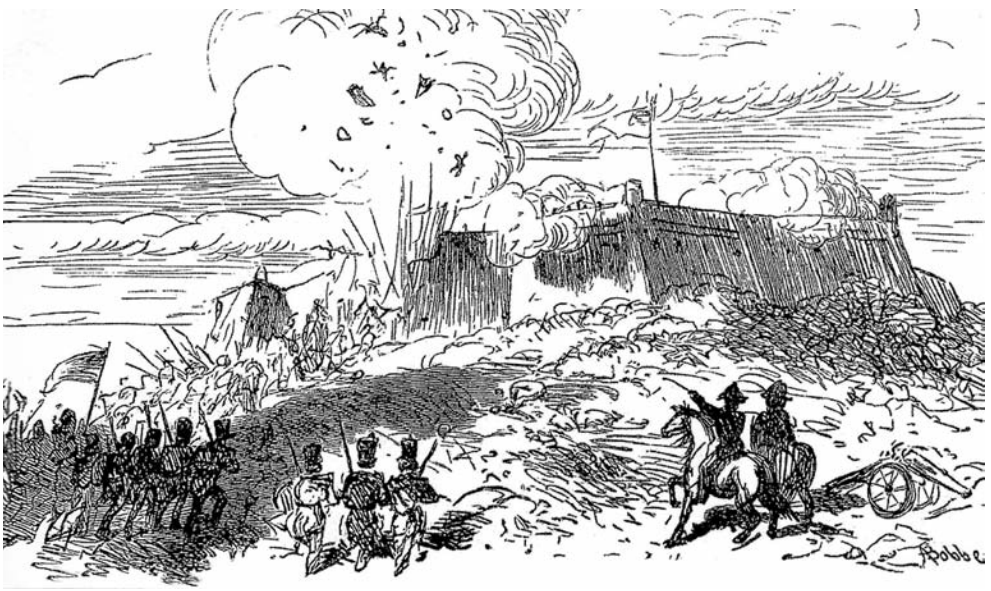
Soldiers from the De Watteville and 8th regiments guarded the two batteries. At the time of the attack, the British were in the process of removing the guns. Porter's men overran Battery Three. The startled me of the British fatigue party surrendered or fled. The Americans spiked the guns and destroyed the battery's powder supply. Porter then launched his assault on Battery Two.

When he heard Porter attacking Battery Three, Brown ordered Miller to assault Battery Two, even though this was not part of the original plan. The two American forces swept over the battery with little trouble. They set about destroying the position as they had at Battery Three. The American officers decided to continue their attack by assaulting the last remaining battery, but by that time, the British had sounded the alarm. Furious at the loss of guns from two of their batteries, the British launched a determined counterattack.

Two companies of the British 82nd Regiment poured a heavy fire into the Americans at Battery Two. The sheer number of Americans crowded into the embrasure made it difficult for them to return fire, as they could not bring their muskets to bear in an effective manner. A British officer shouted for them to surrender. The Americans, who were beginning to shake themselves into fighting positions, shot the officer. Enraged redcoats rushed the battery. They lunged at some of the Americans with their bayonets. Meanwhile, amidst the chaos, the 1st and 89th regiments succeeded in retaking Battery Three.

During the confusion, Porter became separated from his men and wandered into a company of redcoats. He tried to bluff the British troops into surrendering by telling them he had troops nearby, but they did not fall for his ruse. A British soldier rushed Porter and inflicted a slight wound with his bayonet as he sought to corral him. Luckily for Porter, a detachment of American riflemen rushed to their commander's aid. The Americans overwhelmed the British and took them prisoner.

To blunt the British counterattack, Brown sent Ripley with the reserves into the fray to help Miller and Porter withdraw, if necessary. Ripley became separated from his troops and was seriously wounded. Although his troops were unable to take Battery One, Brown was content with the damage he had inflicted to the other batteries; therefore, he issued orders to withdraw.



ABOVE: The powder magazine in the northeast bastion explodes as British soldiers manning a captured gun dueled with American artillerists. The explosion disrupted the British assault and contributed to its failure. OPPOSITE: The tide of battle shifted considerably when Americans assaulted the British siege works on September 17. They held two batteries before a British counterattack forced them to withdraw.

The Glengarry Light Infantry and British allied Indians under Captain John Norton pursued the Americans in skirmish order. By 5:00 p.m. the sortie was over. The Americans lost 511 men, while the British lost 579.

The British resumed their efforts to withdraw their guns the following day. This was no easy task, given that heavy rains made the roads impassible. Taking time to bury the dead after the sortie, it would not be until September 21 that the British Right Division withdrew from its lines. The British army retreated to Chippawa, where two days later it took up a defensive position on the north side of the Chippawa River.

After his troops destroyed the abandoned British siege lines on September 22, Brown did not immediately follow Drummond with the bulk of his troops. Brown sent a small force to probe the British position, and it skirmished the following day with the Glengarry Light Infantry, Norton's Indians, and a detachment of provincial dragoons that screened the British main force.

Brown was eagerly awaiting the arrival of Izard's large force, which had set sail from Sackets Harbor on September 21. Izard landed his troops at the mouth of the Genesee River and marched toward Batavia, New York, where he arrived on September 27. Brown, who was waiting for Izard at that location, conferred with him regarding the American strategy for the next phase of the campaign.

The two commanders decided that Brown would demonstrate against the British force at Chippawa, while Izard tried to retake British-held Fort Niagara. The Americans changed their plans on October 5, when they realized that they lacked the heavy artillery that would be required to ensure a successful assault on Fort Niagara. At that point, Izard resolved to join Brown at Chippawa.

Izard led his army to Fort Schlosser, New York. Because of a lack of boats at that location, he was unable to cross the Niagara River to link up with Brown. He then marched south to Black Rock, where his force was ferried over to Fort Erie. Izard joined Brown on October 15. The American force at that point totalled 7,000.

Since he had seniority over Brown, Izard took command of the combined forces. Forming his troops for battle, he attempted to lure Drummond from his entrenchments on the north bank of the Chippawa River. When Drummond refused to budge, Izard ordered Towson to bring his guns into action. An artillery duel was soon under way. Besides suffering a handful of casualties, nothing of significance was achieved by the artillery exchange.

Despite Brown's suggestion that Izard attempt to flank Drummond on a road a mile upriver that the Americans had opened in July, Izard decided instead to continue in his efforts to draw the British out in the open. But Drummond's men would not budge from their position. On October 17, Izard withdrew south a short distance, but he had not given up just yet.

Izard dispatched Brig. Gen. Daniel Bissell with 1,000 regulars and handful of dragoons to Cook's Mills the following day. Cook's Mills was situated to the west on Lyon's Creek, a tributary of Chippawa River. Bissell had orders to destroy British supplies that the Americans believed were stockpiled at that location. Upon reaching Cook's Mills, Bissell had his troops pitch camp. While his troops rested, engineers toiled to put in place

Artwork by Graham Turner from *Campaigns 209* © Osprey Publishing, part of Bloomsbury

a pontoon bridge to facilitate passage of the creek. A small force of two companies from the U.S. 5th and 16th Infantries, along with some riflemen, set up defenses to hold the bridge.

When Drummond learned that Americans troops were moving west toward Cook's Mills, he dispatched Lt. Col. Christopher Myers to discern the Americans' intentions. Myers commanded a detachment of Glengarry Light Infantry and seven companies of the 82nd Regiment. A short time later, Drummond sent a column of reinforcements to strengthen Myers. These troops were the flank companies of the 82nd, 100th and the 104th Regiments. The reinforcements also included a 6-pounder gun and four Congreve rockets under the command of Lt. Col. George Hay.

The combined force moved against Bissell on the morning of October 19. The Glengarry Light Infantry led the way. It struck the enemy line and steadily drove back the American light troops. The remaining British forces were quickly formed into line and fed into the fight. At the same time, the British opened fire with their 6-pounder guns and rockets.

Meanwhile, the Americans reinforced the troops holding the pontoon bridge. The U.S. 5th Infantry moved to outflank the British. Having spotted the move, Myers broke off the action after a brief fight because he lacked sufficient forces to dislodge the Americans. Myers had suffered 36 casualties, while Bissell had roughly 66 killed and wounded.

Bissell's troops left Cook's Mills on October 21 after destroying 200 bushels of grain. On their return to Izard's main force, they encountered the U.S. 21st Infantry slogging through the mud to join them. They reversed course and joined Bissell in his withdrawal. It would not be long before the whole American force would be in retreat.

The American fleet on Lake Ontario had returned to its base at Sackets Harbor. This left the Royal Navy in control of the lake. To solidify their grip on it, the Royal Navy had just launched the powerful 102-gun *St. Lawrence*.

Taking stock of the situation, Izard believed that nothing strategic could be gained without the support of the American fleet. With winter looming and Drummond entrenched north of the Chippawa River, he decided to retreat from Upper Canada.

Brown received orders to march 2,000 American troops to Sackets Harbor in anticipation of a possible attack by a reinforced British fleet. The rest of the troops were ordered across the Niagara River to take up quarters for the winter or be discharged as in the case of the militia.

Brown's Americans had fought with great skill throughout the summer of 1814. They went toe-to-toe with the British regulars and bested them. Unfortunately, their bravery, determination, and grit did not result in a successful campaign. The last American troops left Fort Erie on November 5, after blowing up the fort. ■

The British tried to capture the Axis-held Dodecanese islands in September 1943 as a first step in liberating the Balkans. But Operation Accolade had major flaws.

By Eric Niderost

Major George Jellicoe, head of Britain's Special Boat Squadron, made a last-minute check on his parachute harness to see if all was ready. It was 10:40 p.m. on September 9, 1943, and Jellicoe was aboard a Halifax heavy bomber that was being buffeted by a strong wind. This was a rather unusual assignment for the 24-year old English aristocrat. The squadron was an elite formation, known for its no-holds-barred raids on territory occupied by the Germans. His assignment on this day had more of a diplomatic nature to it.

The British officer hoped the mission would not be aborted. The previous night a clammy mist shrouded the area, reducing visibility to such an extent the pilot was forced to cancel the drop. Jellicoe and his two companions were now about to parachute into Rhodes, the fabled Aegean island not far from the coast of Turkey. The major's main mission was to persuade the commander of the Italian garrison to change sides and hand the island and its vitally important airstrips over to the Allies. It was going to be a tough sell, because German forces were already on Rhodes, even though they had not taken full control of the strategic island.

ABOVE: Major George Jellicoe headed Britain's Special Boat Squadron in the Middle East. RIGHT: German armor rumbles through the capital of Rhodes. The British implored the commander of the Italian garrison to transfer control of the island and its airstrips to the Allies.

Satisfied his parachute was in order, Jellicoe calmly waited for the green light to jump, a signal that was only seconds away. Suddenly, the first person about to jump, an operative named Major Julian Dobrski, turned to Jellicoe with a startling piece of information. "Look, I am afraid I told a lie about having been parachute trained." Dobrski sheepishly admitted. "I've never dropped. If I hesitate, please give me a push." Jellicoe readily agreed, but when the signal was given, Dobrski exited without showing the least bit of fear. Soon it was Jellicoe's turn, and he jumped into the inky, wind-swept void. It was the start of a campaign that was to have high stakes for both the Allies and their German opponents.

Rhodes is part of an archipelago known as the Dodecanese. The name derives from the Greek word for twelve, but in reality there are 15 principal islands. Small in size, they loom large in history. Along with mainland Greece and Asia Minor, they form one of the cradles of western civilization. St. John the Apostle lived on Patmos. As for Rhodes, it was a city-state in the time of Alexander the Great, and its people built the Colossus of Rhodes, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.

BRITISH BLUNDER IN THE DODECANESE

Bundesarchiv Bild 183-J14995; Photo: Herber

But the Dodecanese in more modern times reflected the turbulence and uncertainty of the 20th century. The Italians took over the islands after defeating Turkey in the Italo-Turkish War. Originally a temporary occupation, it became permanent when the Allies allowed Italy to keep the islands in return for entering the war on their side. The native population was largely Greek, and it wanted to be united with the Greek mainland, but Italy was not about to yield its colonies.

When France fell in 1940, the Italian Dictator Benito Mussolini, scenting German victory, wanted Italy to have its share of the spoils. The fascist leader was sure that Great Britain was finished, but his declaration of war proved a tragic error for the Italian people. The Italian armed forces, ill equipped and badly led, had little enthusiasm for a war that had been forced upon them. Defeat after embarrassing defeat followed, first in the North African desert, and later in Albania and Greece. By 1943, few Italians had any enthusiasm for the war, except for a few hardcore black-shirted Mussolini fascists. The Allied invasion of Sicily proved the last straw for many Italians. In July 1943, Mussolini's government fell, and Il Duce was arrested. Marshal Pietro Badoglio replaced Mussolini as the head of Italy's government on July 25, 1943, and he broached the idea of peace to the Allies almost immediately.

The news of a possible Italian surrender awakened British Prime Minister Winston Churchill's long-dormant hopes of action in the Aegean Sea. The former First Lord of the Admiralty had bitter memories of the Gallipoli campaign in 1915, an unmitigated disaster that forced him to resign his office. Yet to say he wanted the balm of victory to sooth the wounds of past humiliations is an overly simplistic explanation. Certainly there was an element of that, but it is not the entire story.

Churchill's mind instinctively sought out unique, innovative solutions to military and strategic problems. Although the Dodecanese campaign, known as Operation Accolade, ultimately would fail, the basic reasons the prime minster initiated the attempt were sound. They were far from fanciful or far-fetched. "When the tremendous events of the Italian surrender occurred, my mind turned to the Aegean islands, so long an object of strategic desire," Churchill told General Maitland Wilson.

Bundesarchiv Bild 101I-524-2267-11; Photo: Robert A.E. Bauer

ABOVE: A landing craft approaches Kos during Operation Polar Bear, the German amphibious and airborne assault to seize the island in October 1943. OPPOSITE: The 4,000 German soldiers who landed on Kos on October 3 faced 1,500 British infantrymen and airmen. Stuka dive bombers wreaked havoc on the British defense of the island.

The British Bulldog hoped that British possession of the Dodecanese would persuade Turkey to abandon neutrality and come over to the Allied side. Turkey had already given clandestine permission for British boats to dock in their territorial waters during the day. This was an obvious violation of neutrality, and perhaps a subtle hint of how the Turks really felt. No one knew for sure, but physical possession of the Dodecanese would test Churchill's theory once and for all.

If Turkey joined the Allies, British and American aircraft would have access to Turkish airfields. At that point, the Allies conceivably could undertake bombing missions against German forces in Greece. The Nazi war machine depended on products from Greece and the Balkans, such as chrome for armored steel manufacture and bauxite, a rock with high aluminum content. Turkish airfields certainly would put Allied bombers and long-range fighters within reach of Romania's oilfields at Ploesti. Ploesti was Germany's sole source of oil, which provided fuel for its tanks, aircraft, and ships.

Churchill believed there were other advantages, as well. If Turkey declared war against Nazi Germany, Allied convoys might steam from the Aegean Sea through the Dardanelles to the Black Sea. It would be a much safer proposition than the northern route to Murmansk. The weather was often bad on that circuitous route. What is more, convoys had to run a dangerous gauntlet of German U-boats.

The prime minister had broached the subject of Rhodes and the Dodecanese as early as January 1943. But U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt and his military advisors believed that Italy, not the Aegean, should be the focus of the main Allied effort. The Allies lacked sufficient resources to launch full-scale operations in Italy as well as in the Aegean Sea. Although the Americans understood Churchill's logic, they regarded it as quixotic at best.

The U.S. Combined Chiefs of Staff ultimately gave Churchill a provisional green light for his Dodecanese offensive. But they did so with the caveat that he should not expect substantial military assistance for it from the Americans. The Americans eventually furnished some air support, but it was more of a token gesture than a real commitment.

While the Allies planned, debated, and occasionally dithered, the Germans acted with alacrity. The Germans were finding their alliance with Italy, frequently troublesome, was fast becoming a major liability. They knew that the Italians might well throw off the ties of friendship and cooperation that German Fuehrer Adolf Hitler and Mussolini had forged. Above all else, the Ger-

Bundesarchiv Bild 101I-524-2267-05; Photo: Robert A.E. Bauer

mans wanted to secure their vulnerable southern flank in the Balkans and eastern Mediterranean.

The Dodecanese, especially Rhodes with its three airfields, was very much part of the strategic equation. In January 1943 the Germans landed two batteries of 88mm anti-aircraft guns on Rhodes, supposedly to protect the airfields. The Italians, who were still in control of the island, readily agreed, but once the Germans had their proverbial foot in the door, the stage was set for eventual German takeover. As the months passed, more German units landed in Rhodes. The German 22nd Infantry Division, known as Grenadier Regiment Rhodos, and units of the 999th Light Africa Division all arrived on the island. Thus, the Germans had on Rhodes 7,500 troops to constitute *Sturm-Division Rhodos*.

Once his forces were assembled, General der Panzertruppe Ulrich Kleemann entered into a duplicitous game of wits with the Italian commander Admiral Inigo Campioni. He was not just a local official, but governor of the Italian Aegean islands, and his headquarters was on Rhodes. Kleemann's ultimate objective was a German takeover of the entire island, but he had to keep up a friendly, even cooperative, facade to allay Italian suspicions.

The news of the Italian armistice threw Campioni and the other Italian military officials off balance. On the evening of September 8, Campioni asked Lt. Gen. Arnaldo Forgiero to contact Kleemann and urge the German not to do anything provocative that would make the Italians respond. Kleemann and Campioni later met face to face. In the course of their discussion, a heated argument broke out. Kleemann agreed to confine German troops within the Rhodes airfields. Tempers cooled and peace was restored; however, the Germans still wanted to take total control of Rhodes. These discussions were concurrent with the arrival on September 9 of the three British agents who parachuted into Rhodes under the cover of darkness.

On the Allied side, secret negotiations stalled because Jellicoe simply could not promise a major British or Allied commitment that would match the German menace. But swift-moving events took the matter out of everyone's hands. Kleemann and the Germans staged a coup de main. They made an attack so swift and thorough that they gained control of the whole island in a short matter of time. The British negotiators managed to escape, but their mission was a failure. Some skirmishing occurred, but after a short resistance the Italians surrendered.

Rhodes, the great prize, had slipped from British hands, but the game was far from over. Italy surrendered to the Allies on September 8, 1943. The Italian surrender created a prisoner-of-war problem in the Aegean that both the British and the Germans scrambled to resolve. The British, trying to make up for lost time, captured seven islands: Kos, Kalymnos, Samos, Leros, Symi, Castellorizo, and Astypalaia. Kos, Leros, and Samos were the largest islands after Rhodes, but the first two were absolutely essential if a modified Operation Accolade was to succeed. The British started the campaign in an optimistic mood. The mostly Greek inhabitants of the islands welcomed the Allies, and the Italian garrisons were either cooperative or at least neural. The Allies ardently hoped that many of the Italian soldiers would switch sides immediately and help the British in defending the Aegean Islands.

Kos was important because of its airfield. Arrangements were made for 74 Squadron, which consisted of Supermarine Spitfires, to be stationed there. These fighters would provide much-needed air cover for the ground troops coming into the island. Leros had a wonderful harbor, which also made it important in the general scheme of things.

The newly seized islands would be garrisoned by a disparate variety of troops, including the British 234th Infantry Brigade from Malta. Commanded by Maj. Gen. F.G.R. Brittorous, the brigade comprised the 2nd Battalion of the Royal Irish Fusiliers, 4th Battalion of the King's Own, 1st Battalion of the Queen's Own Royal West Kents, and 4th Battalion Royal East Kent Regiment.

Other units in the operation included the Durham Light Infantry and a scattering of elite commandos. Some of the latter included 160 men of the Special Boat Service, 130 men of the Long Range Desert Group, A Company of the 11th Battalion, Parachute Regiment, and the Sacred Band. The Sacred Band was a Special Forces unit composed of Greek army officers. They took their name and inspiration from an ancient Theban fighting unit from classical times. Initial naval support included six British Royal Navy destroyers from the 8th Destroyer Flotilla, two Hunt-Class destroyers, a few submarines, and a few Hellenic Navy ships.

As Operation Accolade played out, its major shortcoming was a crippling lack of air cover. The Royal Navy did a splendid job of bringing in troops and supplies, as well as intercepting enemy shipping from Piraeus in mainland Greece and the Dodecanese. But The British supply base was

Bundesarchiv Bild 101I-524-2269-04A; Photo: Robert A.E. Bauer

in Alexandria, Egypt, which was 450 miles away from the Dodecanese islands. The long supply line was vulnerable because it was virtually devoid of fighter aircraft to protect the ships. At that stage of the war, the Luftwaffe controlled the skies over the Eastern Mediterranean Sea.

The Germans lost no time in taking as many islands as they possibly could, and they did so in a manner that was both efficient and brutally callous. Wehrmacht troops took Karpathos, Siros, Andros, Zea, and Navos very quickly, and standing orders ruled that no prisoners would be taken if the Italian soldiers showed even the slightest bit of resistance. The soldiers of the Italian Acqui Division on the island of Cephalonia initially refused to lay down their arms. Confused over the course of events, they requested clarification from Rome. Fighting erupted between the Germans and Italians. Although the Italians were successful in the opening rounds, the conscripts of the Acqui Division were no match for the veteran Wehrmacht Gebirgsjager. The German mountain troops had played a key role in the invasion of Crete two years earlier. In the clash of these Axis forces, the Germans lost 40 men and the Italians 1,300.

Outraged that their former allies would dare to resist, the Germans committed one of the worst POW atrocities of the war: They executed 5,155 Italians who had been guilty of nothing more than doing their duty as soldiers. The survivors were rounded up and packed into ships destined for concentration camps.

The Germans soon became aware that the British had taken several islands, particularly Leros and Kos, and were determined to expel them as quickly as possible. Army Group E ordered Lt. Gen. Friedrich Wilhelm Muller, the commander of the 22nd Infantry Division, to seize the two strategic islands without delay. The assault was codenamed *Operation Polar Bear*.

Both sides appreciated the importance of the Kos airfield near the village of Antimachina. The British took pains to defend it. They brought in nine Hispano-Sulza antiaircraft guns from their bases in Palestine. South African Spitfires based on Kos were to furnish air cover. A standing patrol of two Spitfires flew every day beginning in mid-September. They came in handy, because the Germans began conducting air strikes in mid-September.

Swarms of Messerschmitt Bf 109s and Junkers 88s from the Luftwaffe's Fliegerkorps X based in Greece attacked the islands. At one point, the Germans had upwards of 360 aircraft from which to draw. But their results were mixed, owing to the protection provided by the Spitfires and the antiaircraft guns. The German aerial assault lasted from September 13 to October 3. During that time the numbers of British and South African aircraft slowly shrank through attrition. Junkers 88s and other German aircraft were also lost, but the Germans could afford such losses, because they had a steady stream of reinforcements arriving to replenish them.

The British, and by extension the Allies, simply did not have those kinds of resources. By September 26, the hard-fighting, long-suffering South African Air Force contingent on Kos was down to four serviceable aircraft. The soil surrounding the airfield was hard and rocky, so it was almost impossible to dig slit trenches, and there was not enough time to build blast walls. There were 1,500 British troops on Kos. Of these, 680 were members of the 1st Durham Light Infantry, and the rest were Royal Air Force personnel.

There also were 3,500 Italian troops of the 10th Regiment of the 50th Infantry Division Regina on Kos. The Italians' loyalty and fighting ability were often in doubt, though. Many were weary of the war and longed to return home. Those were usually the men who wanted to capitulate. They

were not particular about to whom they surrendered; that is, as long as they were repatriated to Italy. Some genuinely espoused the Allied cause and fought well; however, there also were some diehard fascists in the regiment.

The Germans began their invasion of Kos at 4:30 a.m. on October 3. Operation Polar Bear initially succeeded well beyond the most sanguine of Teutonic hopes. By midday, 1,200 Germans had come ashore with equipment including light field guns and armored cars. The Luftwaffe lent a hand with dive-bombing Stukas, which kept the British defense off balance. The principal landings were at Marmare and Tingashi, in the north central part of the island, and Camari Bay in the southwest. Subsidiary landings occurred at Forbici and Cabo Foco.

The Durham Light Infantry, Special Boat Squadron personnel, and British paratroopers fought with their usual courage. But as more Germans landed on Kos, the defenders were forced to fall back. By nightfall on the first day, 4,000 Germans were on the island, and with no relief force on the horizon to rescue them, the British garrison had to accept the inevitable. They surrendered the very next day, giving control of Kos to the Germans.

But the surrender at Kos had a heroic sequel. Captain Walter Milner-Barry and Lieutenant Alec McLeod managed to sneak into Kos a few hours before the surrender with elements of the Special Boat Squadron and the Levant Schooner Flotilla. The latter group was yet another irregular and highly unconventional unit that flourished in the Mediterranean campaigns. They specialized in covert operations, and this time their mission was to rescue as many people as they could from German captivity.

For 10 days, Milner-Barry, McLeod, and their handful of men went through the island, making contact with escaping British soldiers, Italian prisoners of war, and Greek resistance fighters under the very noses of German occupation troops. It was an extremely hazardous mission, because the Germans were not exactly in an amiable mood. In yet another war atrocity, the Germans executed 100 Italian officers. Among those put to death was Colonel Felice Leggio, the Italian commander at Kos.

Sympathetic Greek islanders gave two British officers and their team food. But otherwise, they had to depend on their own survival skills and a large amount of luck. There were moments of real hair-raising adventure, as when some panicking Italian prisoners of war made so much noise they attracted German mortar fire. But when a launch finally picked them all up, the tally was impressive. Ninety British soldiers, a large number of Italians, and some Greek partisans had escaped from German clutches thanks to their untiring efforts.

The surviving records seem to show that Churchill was not as obsessed about the Dodecanese as some historians have suggested. Usually clear-headed and sometimes prescient, the prime minister recognized the importance of the Kos airfield and realized that the game was just about up when the island fell.

"I therefore propose to tell General Wilson that he is free, if he judges the position hopeless, to order the (Leros) garrison to evacuate by night," Churchill wrote Roosevelt on October 10. General Henry Maitland Wilson was the general officer commanding in the Middle East command, so Churchill's missive was anything but frivolous. Wilson was a competent soldier, but his rolls of fat and expanding waistline well merited the nickname "Jumbo."

Bundesarchiv Bild 183-J27723; Photo: Albrecht Heinrich Otto

ABOVE: A pair of Bristol Beaufighters, designed for an array of missions including maritime strikes, attack a German naval vessel in the Aegean Sea. OPPOSITE: German riflemen enter the city of Kos. With no reinforcements scheduled to arrive, the British surrendered on the second day of the German invasion.

Churchill also sent a message to Field Marshal Harold Alexander. "We must save what we can from this wreck," he informed Alexander. Yet Wilson and others seemingly ignored Churchill's pessimism and soldiered on. Instead of withdrawing, they reinforced Leros with additional troops, supplies, jeeps, trailers and guns, which arrived by destroyers, submarines, and smaller surface craft. Machine guns, mortars, ammunition, and wireless sets were dropped by parachute. Although Churchill cannot be absolved from ultimate responsibility, Wilson and others seem to merit at least a share of the blame in these later stages. It was as if the military, once committed, did not want to abandon a project that had taken up so much of their time and effort.

Churchill still lobbied for more air support. Lt. Gen. Dwight Eisenhower, who as of June 1942 was commander of U.S. forces in Europe (he was not appointed Supreme Allied Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Force until December 1943), sensing the prime minister's growing anxiety about British troops clinging to a handful of islands, decided to lend support. The 14th Fighter Group was moved from its base in Tunisia to Gambit, Libya not far from Tobruk. One of their primary missions was, as far as was possible, to neutralize the Luftwaffe activity in the eastern Mediterranean.

The fighter aircraft were going to be available for only a few days in October; Eisenhower and the other Americans still felt that the Aegean was a sideshow. The fighter support was more a gesture of goodwill towards Churchill and the British than a permanent commitment. All parties were made to understand that after a few days, the American fighter planes would be withdrawn. They were simply urgently needed for the developing Italian campaign.

The 14th Fighter Group flew P-38 Lightnings. These were long-range, twin-boomed fighter aircraft for which German aviators had a healthy respect. One of their main duties was to provide adequate protection for Allied ship convoys sailing the Aegean waters. The P-38s also furnished much-needed air cover by flying patrols over the Dodecanese.

The early patrols were routine and, frankly, a little boring for the American pilots, who hoped to encounter German aircraft for a little action. Some pilots grumbled that the assignment had

little or no merit. On October 9 the 14th Fighter Group's luck was about to change. Fighter Command had assigned the group to protect a British convoy consisting of the cruiser HMS *Carlisle* and the destroyers *Panther*, *Petard*, *Rockwood* and the Greek destroyer *Miaolis*.

The convoy was sailing through the straights between Scarpanto and Rhodes, their ultimate destination Alexandria. That morning, Major William Leverette led two flights of P-38s to rendezvous with the convoy at midday. Two planes developed engine problems and had to return to base, so Leverette was reduced to seven fighters. He led Red Flight's four P-38s, while Blue Flight's three airplanes rounded out the patrol.

It was almost noon when Leverette spotted the convoy, which was under attack at that very moment by a swarm of Stuka 87 and Stuka 88s. Before the P-38s were in firing range they could see the damage that the Stukas were inflicting on the hapless convoy. The Stukas were diving down like angry birds of prey, dropping their bombs with seeming impunity. One German bomb scored a direct hit on a destroyer, causing the British vessel to break apart and sink.

The Stuka pilots had little time to savor their triumph, because the avenging P-38s were on them a moment later. There were at least 30 Stukas and seven P-38s, but the Germans planes were no match for these forked- tailed furies. This is not to say they were defenseless, for they had wing cannons and a rear gunner, but by the same token, they were no Messerschmitt Bf 109s.

For the next few minutes the blue Aegean skies were filled with dozens of aircraft twisting, turning, gaining altitude then plunging downward, the pilots performing air pirouettes in a deadly ballet of life and death. It was less a dogfight than an unequal, one-sided slaughter. The P-38s had a field day, effortlessly downing German dive bombers with short, staccato bursts from their guns. Machine gun bullets, including 50-caliber slugs, tore into Stuka fuselages, soon causing the gull-winged aircraft to burst into flames and spiral down into the dark, wine-colored sea.

When it was over, no fewer than 16 German Stukas had been destroyed, and the surviving convoy ships made it to Alexandria safely. Major Leverette downed no fewer than seven Stukas, an impressive total by any standard. But after a few days the Americans withdrew their fighters.

Leros obviously was the Germans' next target. The question was whether the British could hold on to the strategic island. Leros boasted an Italian naval base that was so heavily fortified that some aptly described it as Rock of Gibraltar. There were five major coastal batteries, 17 dual-purpose (coastal and antiaircraft) batteries, and three antiaircraft batteries on the island. Artillery included eleven 152mm guns, nine 102mm guns, six 90mm guns, and fifty-six 76 mm guns. The fortified positions usually featured three or four pen circular pits, underground ammunition magazines, a fire control and observation post, officers' lodgings, and administration areas.

The batteries were located on the high points of the island, which afforded them splendid fields of fire and sweeping views of the fortresses. Little or no thought had been given to the possibility of air raids, and most of the batteries were exposed and vulnerable to air attack. Perhaps it was thought that those dual-purpose batteries, which included antiaircraft guns, would adequately protect the island. They may well have been right; After 50 days of intensive Luftwaffe bombings, most of the batteries were intact when the invasion finally took place.

Leros is 10 miles long and from one-to-five miles wide. It is divided into three distinct sections, the sections joined by the narrow waists of two isthmuses. The coast of the island is pockmarked by nine bays, each one boasting good landing beaches. Conventional wisdom maintained that the island was unsuitable for paratrooper drops. It was considered that the rocky heights that seem to dominate its geography were just too rugged for any such attempt.

Brig. Gen. Robert Tilney was the new commander of Fortress Leros. The British contingent

Alamy

ABOVE: The elite troops of the British Special Boat Squadron fought alongside the Durham Light Infantry and British paratroopers on Kos. TOP: South African Spitfires based on Kos flew air cover for the British until the Germans captured the airfield. Throughout the campaign, the Luftwaffe continued to dominate the skies over the Eastern Mediterranean. OPPOSITE: German fallschirmjagers jump from a Junkers Ju 52 transport aircraft into the center of Leros. They divided the island in half, thereby facilitating its conquest.

Bundesarchiv Bild 101I-525-2299-30A ; Photo: Werner Bockelmann

of the Leros garrison included the Second Royal Irish Fusiliers, the Fourth Royal East Kent Regiment, First Battalion King's Own Royal Regiment, B Company of the Second Royal West Kent Regiment, detachments of the Long Range Desert Group, a Special Boat Squadron, a detachment from the 28th Heavy Antiaircraft Battery, and part of the 3rd Light Antiaircraft Battery.

Since Leros had originally been an Italian Naval base, three-quarters of the 8,000 Italians on the island were naval personnel. Most were administrative workers as opposed to fighting men. The main land forces were the 1,200 men from one battalion of the 10th Regina Infantry Regiment, with a company of Blackshirts, assorted marines, and some other assorted personnel. Rear Adm. Luigi Mascherpa commanded the Leros Italian garrison. Marshal Badoglio had placed the admiral and his entire force under British control without reservation.

Tilney had a problem in trying to organize a defense, a classic dilemma of coastal defense. Should the defenders attack the enemy when he comes ashore, or pull back from the beaches and presumably hit him harder as he moves inland? Tilney decided on the former, basing his decision on the fact that the Germans controlled the air and occupied the neighboring islands of Kos, Levitha, and Kalymnos. Given that Kos was just 35 miles away from Leros, the short distance made it easy for the Germans to ferry troops to it.

The German invasion of Leros, codenamed *Typhoon*, began on at 4:40 a.m. on November 12, when German troops landed at Palma Bay and Pasta de Sopra on the northeast coast of the island. Another German force consisting of six naval ferry barges and two torpedo boats heading for Gurna Bay on the other side of the island were driven off by the Italian batteries Ducci and San Gregorio.

Other Wehrmacht units landed at Pandelli Bay, but the Germans initially had a tough time of it. The invaders tried another major landing in the northeast, and did manage to get a few soldiers ashore before all hell broke loose. Italian coastal artillery at Blefuti mounted an effective defense, raining shells down on the ships, landing craft, and torpedo boats just offshore. The Italian gunners sank two German transport barges and badly damaged others, forcing the landings to come to a halt. The handful of German soldiers who had been in the first wave found themselves stranded and without support. Defeated and with few other options available, 85 of them surrendered.

In the central part of Leros, the Germans managed to establish a few small bridgeheads, and once they established these footholds, it was almost impossible to dislodge them. German *fallschirmjagers* (parachute infantry) landed in the region of Mount Rachi in the center of the island, an event that profoundly altered the course of the battle. These paratroopers were from an elite unit known as the Brandenburg Division, and once they established a solid foothold in the center of Leros they divided the island into two halves. Counterattacks were launched to try and dislodge them, but all such efforts failed.

The fallschirmjagers paid a heavy price for their success; some estimates place their casualties at about half their total force. The Italian batteries were well served, and shot down a number of Junkers Ju 52s. This contributed to the Brandenburg Division's overall losses. With the Brandenburg paratroopers firmly in control of the Leros center, the Buffs and a company of the King's Own found themselves marooned on the island's south side.

The British garrison fought courageously, but the superb fighting qualities displayed by the Italian gun crews deserve special mention. The Italian artillerymen downed many German aircraft, sunk German landing craft and other vessels, and resisted in many cases until overwhelmed or when all guns were put out of action. The Germans, once successful, had a nasty habit of shooting at least some Italian prisoners out of hand.

When the paratroopers landed, they tried to neutralize those gun batteries that had given them so much trouble. The Germans captured 211 Battery before dark on Sept 12, and, once taken, the battery commander, Lieutenant Antonio Lo Presti, was shot. Two sections of 763 Battery also were

Continued on page 98

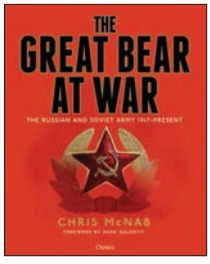
RUSSIAN AND SOVIET ARMIES FOUGHT BLOODY CAMPAIGNS OVER THE PAST 100 YEARS FIRST TO PROTECT THE MOTHERLAND AND THEN TO PROJECT REGIONAL POWER.

By Christopher Miskimon

Battle-hardened Soviet soldiers ride atop a tank through an Afghan village in 1988, the ninth year of the decade-long Soviet incursion.

"If you are wounded, pretend to be dead; wait until the Germans come up; then select one of them and kill him! Kill him with gun, bayonet, or knife. Tear his throat with your teeth. Do not die without leaving behind you a German corpse." Such orders were given to Red Army soldiers fighting the Germans in World War II, according to Marshal Nikolay Krylov, adding that the Russian soldier "loves a fight and scorns death."

Russia is a nation tempered by war. The flames of conflict have shaped the country for centuries. Russia has no geographical features defining its borders, meaning its people have easily spread south and east over time; the government and army have naturally followed. This lack of a natural border also means Russia is vulnerable to invading armies and has indeed suffered invasion from both east and west. For this reason, the Russians sought to bring neighboring countries into their orbit in order to create a buffer space against their enemies.



Civil war erupted in 1917 as the Bolshevik Reds sought to overthrow the Czarist Whites and take control of Russia as the new Soviet Union. It was a chaotic time. Men flocked to each banner or simply threw away their weapons and tried to go home. If captured, a soldier might be offered the choice of execution or enlistment with their former opponents. While that bloody, brutal conflict dragged on, war broke out in Poland. The Red Army made a poor showing against the Poles, but by 1922, the last of the White forces were driven out of Russia.

Through the 1930s the Red Army's worst enemy was its own government. Purges stripped it of skilled leadership even as war clouds gathered to the west. Soviet and Japanese forces fought in Manchuria in the late 1930s. Their frontier battles climaxed in the Battle of Khalkhin Gol in 1939, in which Soviet forces defeated the Japanese in Mongolia. As Stalin sought more territory, war broke out again, this time with the small nation of Finland. The Soviets triumphed in the end, but suffered greatly during the war, taking heavy casualties. This was in large part due to the lack of leadership caused by the purges. The high command learned lessons but had little time to incorporate them; the Red Army was in poor condition for what came next.

German leader Adolf Hitler unleashed Operation Barbarossa against the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, with the German invasion. Despite the massive size of the Soviet military, it was pushed back in defeat, with millions of its soldiers killed or captured. Slowly, though, despite the desperate circumstances, the Soviets first held, and then

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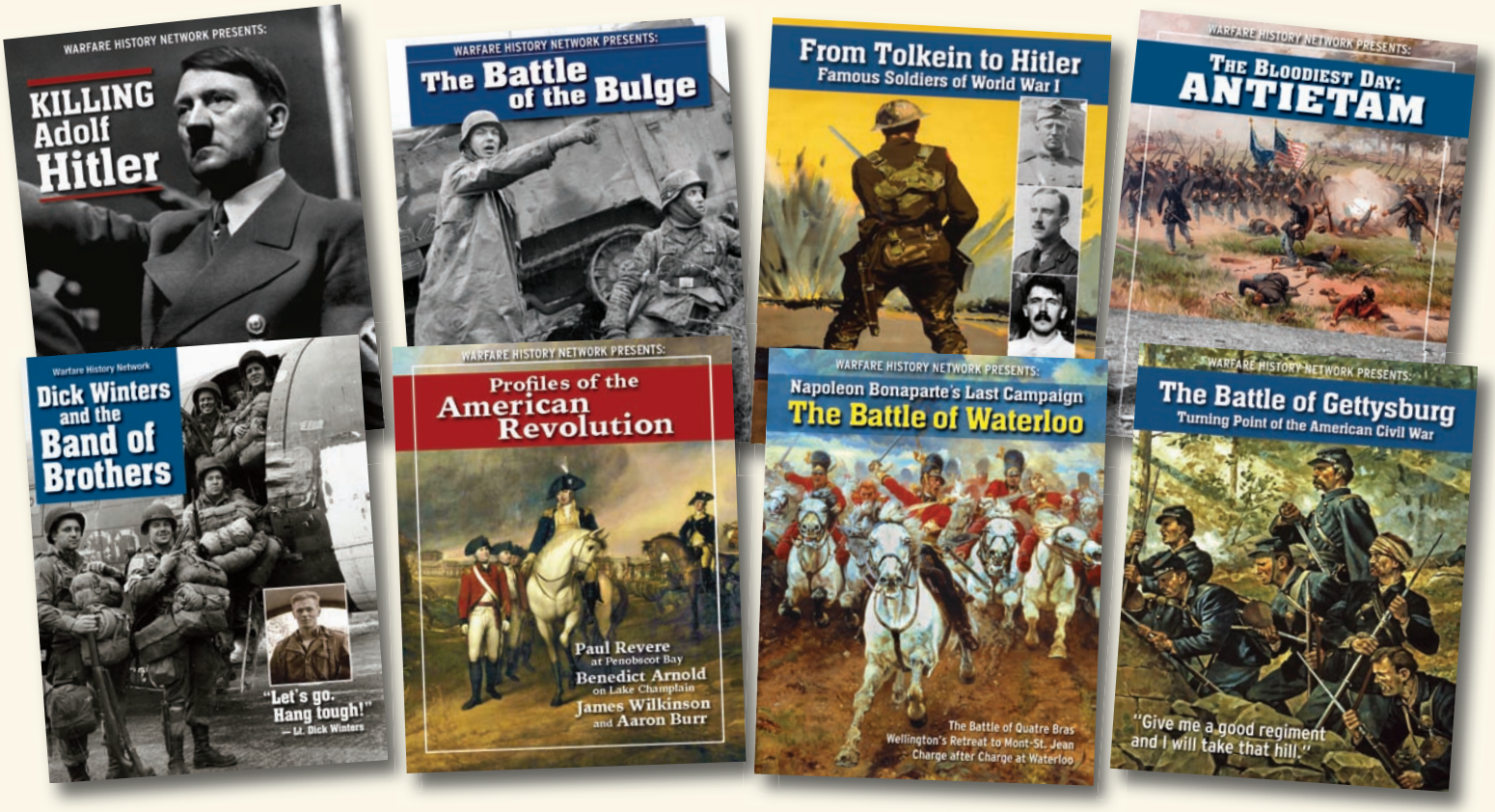

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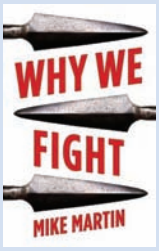
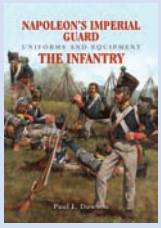
SHORT BURSTS



Why We Fight (Mike Martin, Hurst and Company, 2019, $29.95 hardcover. An in-depth study of why human beings engage in conflict, from the interpersonal up to world wars. The author argues that while religion and morality are often blamed for war, they actually more often reduce it.

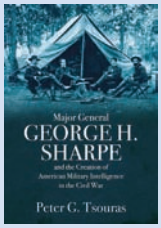


Napoleon's Imperial Guard: The Infantry – Uniforms and Equipment (Paul L. Dawson, Frontline Books, 2019, $60.00, hardcover). The Napoleonic French Army fielded numerous regiments wearing a wide variety of uniforms and equipment. This volume details the various clothing and accoutrements the soldiers wore.

War Amongst the Clouds: My Flying Experiences in World War I and the Follow-On Years (Air Vice-Marshal Hugh Granville White, Grub Street, 2019, $34.95, hardcover). The author served in the Royal Air Force from World War I until 1955. This memoir recounts an active career across war and peace.

The Berlin Airlift: The World's Largest-Ever Air Supply Operation (John Grehan, Pen and Sword, 2019, $24.95, softcover). The Berlin Airlift was one of the first crises of the Cold War. This photo book shows the events in detail, accompanied by interesting text.

Walking Verdun: A Guide to the Battlefield (Christina Holstein, Pen and Sword, 2019, $19.95, softcover). This tour book contains a thorough history of the infamous World War I battle. It is well-illustrated and has numerous maps.

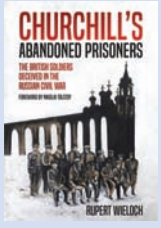


Major General George H. Sharpe and the Creation of American Military Intelligence in the Civil War (Peter G. Tsouras, Casemate Publishing, 2018, $34.95, hardcover). Maj. Gen. George H. Sharpe was the first American to build a professional all-source intelligence service. This book tells both his story and that of the U.S. intelligence service's creation.

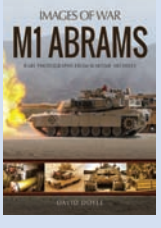
Raising the White Flag: How Surrender Defined the American Civil War (David Silkenat, University of North Carolina Press, 2019, $39.95, hardcover). Roughly one in four soldiers surrendered at some point during the war. This is a comprehensive study of that phenomenon.

US Navy Battleships 1886-98: The Pre-Dreadnoughts and monitors that Fought the Spanish-American War (Brian Herder, Osprey Publishing, 2019, $19.00, softcover). The U.S. Navy experienced a vast recapitalization in the last decades of the 19th century. This book details how the fleet grew into a war-winning force.

French Battleships 1914-45 (Ryan K. Noppen, Osprey Publishing, 2019, $19.00, softcover). This history of France's 20th century battleships is well-illustrated with original artwork and photographs. The text is detailed and describes the ship's technical and operational histories.



Churchill's Abandoned Prisoners: The British Soldiers Deceived in the Russian Civil War (Rupert Wieloch, Casemate Publishing, 2019, $32.95, hardcover). This is the story of 15 British soldiers abandoned by their government during the Russian Civil War. They suffered a harrowing ordeal in captivity.



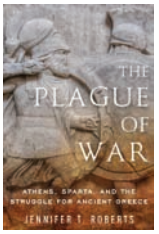
Images of War: M-1 Abrams (David Doyle, Pen and Sword, 2019, $24.95, softcover). The Abrams has formed the backbone of American armor since the 1980s. This book shows the tank in detail, with many photos of use to modelers and artists.

started to push back the Axis armies on their soil. It was a grueling, costly effort, supported by Lend-Lease contributions from the Allies, but it was Soviet troops who paid the price to defeat Nazi Germany. Depictions of Soviet infantry bearing submachine guns and riding atop T-34 tanks are among the iconic images of the war.

During the Cold War, the Red Army clamped down on the Soviet Union's Warsaw Pact client states. Red Army soldiers suppressed revolts in Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968. The Red Army's harshest test during this period came in Afghanistan, where they fought a bitter counterinsurgency war while the Soviet Union itself entered its death throes. Afghanistan ended in defeat, but it hardly mattered, as the nation that started that war ceased to exist soon afterward, becoming the nation of Russia once again. The dissolution of the Soviet Union led to a long conflict in Chechnya as Russia gradually rebuilt its army. In the 21st century, wars against Georgia and Ukraine have affirmed Russia's status as a regional military power.

The story of the Russian and Soviet armies over the past 100 years is a fascinating one, replete with lessons and examples for students of history and followers of current events. The history of the Russian and Soviet Union armies is explored in great depth in ***The Great Bear at War: The Russian and Soviet Army 1917—Present*** (Chris McNab, Osprey Publishing, Oxford UK, 2019, 384 pp., maps, photographs, bibliography, index, $40.00, hardcover).

The level of detail in this book is impressive, ranging from the strategic decisions of high-ranking leaders to the everyday life of the Soviet soldier. It serves as an excellent primer on the Russian army and the experiences that shaped it. The book is also well illustrated, with both photographs from Russian archives and artwork depicting uniforms and equipment. It has everything a reader expects from an Osprey title: detail, visual representation, and compelling prose.



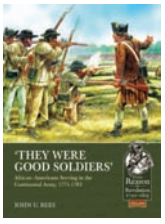
The Plague of War: Athens, Sparta, and the Struggle for Ancient Greece (Jennifer T. Roberts, Oxford University Press, Oxford UK, 2019, 416 pp., maps, photographs, notes, bibliography, index, $19.95, softcover)

The rivalry between Athens and Sparta exploded into open warfare in 431 B.C. The struggle lasted more than a generation and involved new levels of barbarity. As the struggle went on, it consumed almost every aspect of life in Athens and stretched the gap between rich and poor in Sparta. This new account of the conflict extends beyond what many

consider the traditional end of the war with Athenian defeat in 405. The author cogently argues that the fighting continued for decades, ending only in 371 at the Battle of Leuctra, when Theban infantry defeated the Spartans and ended the myth of their supremacy. This work covers not only the military aspects of the war, but also its effect on the Greek world as a whole.

Legacies in Steel: Personalized and Historical German Military Edged Weapons, 1800–1990 (Hermann Hampe and Rick Dauzat, Casemate Publishers, Havertown PA, 2019, photographs, $200.00, hardcover)

Swords and daggers have been dearly prized sidearms for centuries. They are symbolic of authority and leadership, holding onto this significance long after they ceased to be used as weapons on the battlefield. Some were made for a particular officer or non-commissioned officer. Many were issued, and yet others came into their owner's possession through victory or plunder. They often have a history that bears true to the wars and events that occurred while the owner bore them. Some of the finest such weapons of the German military are exhibited in this new work. The weapons depicted are from museums and private collections, representing the finest examples in existence. Each weapon is presented in beautiful color photographs that are accompanied by text describing their origin, history, and ownership. This book is meant for serious collectors and historians, providing the high level of detail and photography required in an elegant layout.



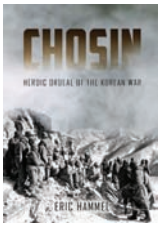
'They were Good Soldiers:' African-Americans serving in the Continental Army, 1775-1783 (John U. Rees, Helion & Company, South Yorkshire, UK, 2019, 210 pp., maps, photographs, appendices, bibliography, $29.95, softcover)

African-American Private Cuff Whittemore fought in the militia at the Battle of Bunker Hill. An account stated he "fought bravely in the redoubt. He had a ball through his hat...fought to the last, and though wounded, the splendid arms of the British officers were prizes too tempting for him to come off empty handed; he seized the sword of one of them slain in the redoubt, and came off with the trophy."

Nearby a white soldier named Smith fought at a rail fence, "a man at his side, a negro, so crippled by a shot in the leg that he could not rise up to discharge his gun, but he could load and re-load, which he continued to do, both Smith's and his own, and then handed them to Smith to fire, until their ammunition was expended, when he undertook to carry the negro off the field on his back, but was obliged to leave him to his fate." A total of 88 African-Americans fought at Bunker Hill.

A French officer fighting alongside George Washington's army at Yorktown in 1781 made this sketch of two American infantrymen. The soldier on the left is with the 1st Rhode Island Regiment, a Continental Army unit that included several companies of African Americans.

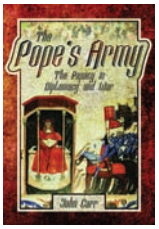
The part of African-American soldiers in the Revolutionary War is not well known beyond the occasional mention of their presence. This book examines their service in great detail, including many personal narratives and descriptions. Their wartime duties and experiences are skillfully interspersed throughout the text. The book also looks at how black troops were treated by British forces and how all of them were treated after the war.



Chosin, Heroic Ordeal of the Korean War (Eric Hammel, Casemate Publishing, Havertown PA, 2019, 534 pp., maps, appendices, bibliography, $24.95, softcover)

The Battle of Chosin started three hours before midnight on November 27, 1950, when the first Chinese probes made contact with the United States Marines. The Americans of 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines were on 50 percent alert: half of the men slept, while the other half stood guard. The Chinese came, throwing stick grenades and firing submachine guns while mortars threw their bombs in high arcs down onto the Marine positions. Sergeant Jim Mathews of Fox Company was stacking carbine ammunition in front of his foxhole in anticipation of combat when he saw a Chinese mortar crew setting up its weapon behind a pile of rocks. He called upon one of his 3.5-inch bazooka teams to fire at them, expecting they could at best keep the Chinese team distracted. Instead, the Marines' first rocket slammed into the rocks, riddling the enemy soldiers with stones and shrapnel, killing all of them. A sniper shot Sergeant Mathews a few minutes later. Medics patched him up and sent him to the rear. The battle was only starting.

The author of this book has an established reputation as an authority on the U.S. Marine Corps, particularly small unit actions, and this book proves that expertise. While he relates the high-level decisions and errors that led to the Marines becoming overextended at Chosin, the real meat of this book are the stories of the men who fought in the foxholes and snow of a Korean winter. This book is a tribute to their dogged determination, courage and endurance.



The Pope's Army: The Papacy in Diplomacy and War (John Carr, Pen and Sword Publishing, South Yorkshire UK, 306 pp., photographs, notes, index, $39.95, hardcover)

The Roman Catholic Church today is mainly a spiritual institution, but for many centuries it was a formidable political and military power. The period of Vatican martial prominence began around the year 410, when Pope Innocent I unsuccessfully tried to prevent the Sack of Rome by the attacking Visigoths. It didn't fully end until 1870, when the French Army withdrew its protection from Pope Pius IX, compelling him to relinquish the Papacy's remaining power to the new Italian state.

During that 1,400-year period, various Popes gradually built the power of the Church through both political machination and the raising of armies. During Europe's religious wars, there was almost always a papal contingent involved. As Italian nationalists sought to unify the peninsula in the 19th century, papal volunteers from across Europe and the United States rallied to the Papacy's ultimately futile cause.

European military histories often mention the Papacy as a force in many of the continent's wars, particularly in the Middle Ages. This new book takes the novel approach of concentrating on the Popes and their military endeavors. The author effectively highlights the close involvement of the church in the intertwined political and military events of Europe over the course of centuries.

FIGHT TO SURVIVE IN *CALL OF DUTY*'S TAKE ON THE WILDLY POPULAR BATTLE ROYALE GENRE

By Joseph Luster

Call of Duty: Warzone

Genre: Action • Platform: PS4, Xbox One
Publisher: Activision • Available: Now

It's been a while since *Player Unknown's Battlegrounds* first swept everyone up in the battle royale craze, and reigning champion *Fortnite* is still going strong after all this time. There have been plenty of would-be contenders along the way, but it's going to take a true heavy hitter to get everyone's attention away from the big names. Well, there isn't much bigger a name in the world of military shooters than *Call of Duty*, and developers Infinity Ward and Raven Software are capitalizing on its success and the popularity of the genre to unleash *Call of Duty: Warzone*.

As a result of the polish for which the series is known, the final product is pretty great. Like the competition, *Warzone* is a free-to-play title, despite the fact that it's considered part of 2019's *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare*. That means anyone with access to a PC, PlayStation 4, or Xbox One can get in on the action and see what it's all about without committing to anything major. Best of all, cross-platform play and progression allows those with different means of access the ability to compete with players on other systems in the small but suitable selection of modes currently available.

Those modes are Battle Royale, Battle Royale Solos, and Plunder. All the battle royale stuff will be familiar territory. Players parachute onto a large map and the war games begin. You'll then compete to be the last remaining character as the map shrinks continuously over the course of the match. Solos is pretty much the same, except without any team dynamic, and both separate themselves from the pack with an emphasis on vehicles, a different method of dealing with in-game currency, and a novel respawn mechanic.

That respawn mechanic is worth mentioning on its own. If you end up dying in a *Warzone* match, it's not exactly game over. Instead of being out of the fight completely, you're sent to the Gulag, in which you'll wait for your turn to throw down in an arena. While you wait, you'll run into other players who have died, and you can even toss rocks at those currently competing in the arena. Once it's your turn, you'll find yourself in a one-on-one match for a chance at revival. It's essentially a quick battle with random loadouts, and it's a thrilling way to keep the action going even when you fail. However, should you lose your Gulag fight, you'll either be stuck spectating, or a teammate will need to purchase Squad Buyback with in-game money.

Further splitting *Warzone* up from the competition is the Plunder mode. Going this route will task you and your team with seeking out stacks of Cash in an effort to rack up a million bucks. After that, overtime commences, the sums of cash double, and whichever team ends up with the biggest stack of loot comes out as the winner. This all adds up to an exciting free-to-play package, and any shooter fan who wants something new from the battle royale world should absolutely check it out.

Endzone: A World Apart

Genre: Action • Platform: PC • Publisher: Assemble Entertainment • Available: Now

Not all games deal directly with wars themselves, instead opting to tackle the devastation that could potentially follow after a large-scale conflict, natural disaster, or other worst-case scenarios. In the case of *Endzone: A World Apart*, the end of the world as we know it arrived in 2021, when terrorist attacks led to catastrophic worldwide nuclear plant meltdowns. The story finds us attempting to pick up the pieces 150 years later in developer Gentlymad Studio's post-apocalyptic city builder.

The "Endzone" in the title refers to the underground bunkers from which humanity emerges more than a century and a half after this devastating event. Players are tasked with rebuilding human civilization as best they can, establishing a newly thriving ecosystem for Earth's last humans while defending them against unpredictable weather events and the hostility of the post-nuke environment itself.

It may sound bleak, but there's a certain type of satisfaction to be had from essentially starting from zero and getting a second chance at creating

a livable world. Throughout your game you'll have to contend with an abundance of logistical head-scratchers, from stocking enough food reserves to keep morale relatively high to developing a strong enough infrastructure to withstand irradiated sandstorms. With environmental hazards and droughts as one of many serious concerns, you'll also need to be prepared to rebuild just as much as you're building from scratch in the first place.

Thankfully, *Endzone: A World Apart* has plenty of tools to help you along the way, from something as simple as a well that can slowly produce water during the toughest of times, to irrigation plants that increase soil moisture over a steady period. Those with the mindset for this type of carefully paced strategy and world-building who don't mind scenarios that are a little darker than most should find plenty to keep them busy here.

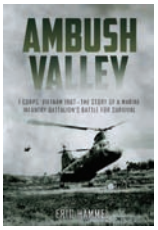
Rogue Company

Genre: Action • Platform: PS4, Xbox One, Switch, PC • Publisher: Hi-Rez Studios • Available: 2020

Outside of the aforementioned battle royale games, one of the most enduring genres right now is the team-based multiplayer "Hero" shooter. Think *Overwatch*, for example; it's all about teamwork and choosing between distinct characters with over-the-top style and personality. One of the latest attempts comes from publisher Hi-Rez Studios and developer First Watch Games, which are hoping to strike gold when *Rogue Company* hits PlayStation 4, Xbox One, Nintendo Switch, and PC this year.

At the time of this writing, *Rogue Company* is in its alpha testing stage, but it already feels the part of your average mid-budget, flashy multiplayer shooter. This one has players choosing from a lineup of Rogues—the world's most elite group of mercenaries, all of whom are part of a top-secret syndicate—tasked with solving the deadliest and most challenging missions out there. That essentially means you'll get to visit familiar locations and shoot the hell out of the opposing team in a variety of player-versus-player multiplayer modes.

One of the most promising features of *Rogue Company* is the ability to play and progress across all major platforms. There are also a variety of jobs (classes) to choose from between the main set of Rogues, and the starting armory is pretty diverse, so there should be a play style available here for most anyone to appreciate. Time will tell whether or not this one sticks around like its predecessors, but it's definitely worth a shot for players who want something fresh within the crowded, competitive multiplayer arena. ■



Ambush Valley: I Corps, Vietnam 1967 - The Story of a Marine Infantry Battalion's Battle for Survival (Eric Hammel, Casemate Publishers, Havertown PA, 2019, maps, bibliography, 22.95, softcover)

In summer 1967, the American base at Con Thien was under siege by the North Vietnamese Army. Located along the Demilitarized Zone in South Vietnam, the Marine Corps base played a crucial role in preventing North Vietnamese troops from infiltrating into South Vietnam.

The Marine Corps senior command dispatched the 3rd Battalion, 26th Marines to the area to secure the main supply route leading to the base. On the unit's first full day in the area of operations, September 7, 1967, at least two battalions of North Vietnamese infantry attacked separate parts of the Marine battalion. Three days later, an entire regiment assaulted the Marines, who became isolated in two different defensive perimeters. The Americans held out against repeated waves of enemy soldiers, who were determined to annihilate the Marines. The Marines won the battle by a narrow margin; they described the battle as "Custer's Last Stand—With Air Support." The Marines prevailed only by the slimmest of margins.

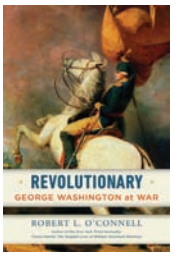
This rapid-fire narrative of the battle relies heavily on eyewitness accounts. Each Marine's account is presented in a chronological fashion, weaved together to cover the major events and fighting of the engagement. It is a vivid oral history of a relatively unknown battle that rivals better-known combat actions such as the Ia Drang Valley in intensity and bravery. The book dramatically relates the experiences of a Marine infantry battalion embroiled in a fight for survival.

Soviet T-55 Main Battle Tank (James Kinnear and Stephen Sewell, Osprey Publishing, Oxford UK, 2019, 192 pp., photographs, appendices, bibliography, index, $40.00, hardcover)

Some weapons are so widely used they become almost ubiquitous examples of their type. The T-55 tank is one such weapon. Based on designs that originated during World War II, this Soviet armored vehicle was an improved version of the T-54 design and quickly became a standard of the Cold War era. In the late 1950s, it was the newest Soviet tank design. It was compact, heavily armored, and equipped with a powerful 100mm cannon.

The Soviets quickly exported the design, equipping the various nations of the Warsaw Pact as well as other Soviet client states, particularly in the Middle East. The Soviets built 23,000 T-55s, while the Poles and Czechs built another 15,000. Thousands of derivatives were built in China as well, making this one of the most-produced tanks of the Cold War era.

This book contains a wealth of technical and development data on the T-55. The tank went through various upgrades and design changes throughout its production, and the authors have carefully compiled data on each variation. The numerous variants of the tank, such as bridge-layers and mine-clearing vehicles used by combat engineers, also receive great detail. The book is lavishly illustrated with photographs, design drawings, and a thorough set of appendices laying out its production and service life.



Revolutionary: George Washington at War (Robert L. O'Connell, Random House Publishers, New York NY, 2019, 368 pp., maps, photographs, notes, bibliography, index, $32.00, hardcover)

In his youth, George Washington was a frustrated and vain Virginia aristocrat who lusted for glory and advancement. His initial actions in the French and Indian War, such as the debacle at Fort Necessity in 1754, resulted in setbacks for American colonial forces. However, he ultimately learned from such mistakes. After the war, he became involved in politics and saw first-hand how the British injustices had an adverse influence on life in the Thirteen Colonies.

When the American Revolution began, he proved the best man for the task of leading the Continental Army. He realized the utter necessity of keeping the army intact and alive despite battlefield defeats. The Revolution, he knew, stayed alive as long as it had an army in the field. Washington proved equally adept at limiting the violence and paranoia of the time, understanding such excesses were unhealthy in the long term. Washington was truly one of history's rare indispensable men.

Books about George Washington abound. What makes this new work stand out is the author's conversational style, as well as his ability to relate the complex, often paranoid world his subject had to navigate. He argues the Revolutionary period was full of conspiracy theories that Washington learned to manipulate and control to benefit the new nation. The book also examines Washington as a young man, revealing his formative experiences. ■

DODECANESE

Continued on from 91

taken. The Ciano battery also fell once its guns were silenced. Following the same brutal pattern, as soon as Ciano was captured, the Germans executed all of the Italian officers in the battery.

November 13 saw a continuing pattern of hard-fought attacks and counterattacks, with neither side gaining the upper hand. Nevertheless it was plain that the momentum was with the Germans, not the British and Italian defenders. More German reinforcements landed, though it was unclear at first if these added men would finally tip the scales irretrievably towards the attackers. Yet the Germans weren't having things all their own way. The British launched a number of determined counterattacks supported by Italian artillery. Their forces succeeded in regaining lost territory, silencing some of the enemy batteries, and capturing German prisoners.

German troops entered the town of Leros on November 15, and also took Alinda and Santa Marina. The Royal Navy lent a hand in the defense: A pair of British destroyers shelled German positions. They succeeded in sinking a number of German landing craft, but the crippling lack of Allied air cover was beginning to tell. The Luftwaffe sank the *Dulverton* as its crew was attempting to ferry supplies to the beleaguered garrison. Seventy-eight sailors lost their lives.

A trickle of British reinforcements came in from Samos, including two companies from the Royal West Kent Regiment. They landed at Portolago Bay with their commanding officer, Lt. Colonel Ben Tarleton. British attacks were sporadic and badly coordinated, and even when they achieved some local successes, the overall picture still very much favored the German side. By the evening of November 15, the handwriting was on the wall. The tactically astute Germans had succeeded in cutting the island in half. Once again, the Italians showed courage and a fighting spirit that must have surprised their British counterparts, most familiar with their poor performance in the North African desert.

In the early morning hours of November 16, Battery 306 was destroyed by Luftwaffe attacks, but the Italians refused to surrender. When the Germans asked Mascherpa to capitulate with all Italian forces on the island, he flatly rejected the notion. Battery 127 on Mount Maraviglia was heavily attacked by German forces, but the artillerymen defended their post with courage and resolution. Captain Werther Cacciatori, commander of the battery, lost an arm in the heavy fighting.

Yet Tilney refused to give the Italians a large role in the defense. There were Italian infantry on the island, but apparently they were largely inert in the Leros battle. The Italians actually asked Tilney for a bigger role in the defense, but he rebuffed their offer. Did Tilney have lingering doubts as to their loyalty to the Allied cause, even after the artillerymen proved their worth? Or did he somehow believe that the Italians could not be relied upon? We will never know his reasoning.

But the situation was rapidly deteriorating and would soon be untenable. Tilney's own headquarters was nearly surrounded, and the Germans seemed to bring in more and more reinforcements with every passing hour. It was clear further fighting would only prolong the agony, and therefore Tilney surrendered on November 16.

The Germans captured 3,200 British and 5,000 Italians. Actual battle casualties were relatively light. The British lost 600 dead and 100 wounded. The Italians suffered 300 dead and missing. In contrast, the Germans lost 512 dead and 900 wounded. With the fall of Leros the British evacuated Samos, their last major outpost, and other small islands in the area.

Was the Dodecanese campaign Churchill's Folly, as many historians claim? It certainly was strategically sound, and not merely an attempt by Churchill to make up for the Gallipoli debacle of 1915. The plan to take the Aegean islands had much to recommend it, even if Turkey did not come into the war on the Allied side. Hitler really did fear an Allied thrust from the Aegean into the Balkans, threatening his vulnerable southern flank and above all his Romanian oil supply. The Dodecanese campaign was faulty not in concept, but in execution.

When it was clear American planners, and even some British, were dead-set against the idea, it should have been dropped. But Churchill forged ahead with an unrealistic scenario. He erred in his belief that the Italian campaign and the Dodecanese effort could go forward simultaneously. The immediate cause of the British failure in the Aegean was the lack of adequate air cover. The brief appearance of the P-38s showed what Allied control of the air might have achieved, but they were largely reserved for the invasion of Italy.

The Dodecanese campaign was Hitler's last major success in World War II. Yet it was a pyrrhic victory. The German leader became obsessed with the Aegean, and as a result, major forces were tied up there that could have been more usefully engaged elsewhere, as in the Eastern Front. The occupation of Rhodes, Leros, and Keros served no real purpose in the context of the Eastern Front, where by late 1943 the tide of war had shifted to the Soviet Union. Germany's days were numbered, and what occurred in the Aegean Sea would matter little as the Russians began their inexorable advance on Berlin. ■

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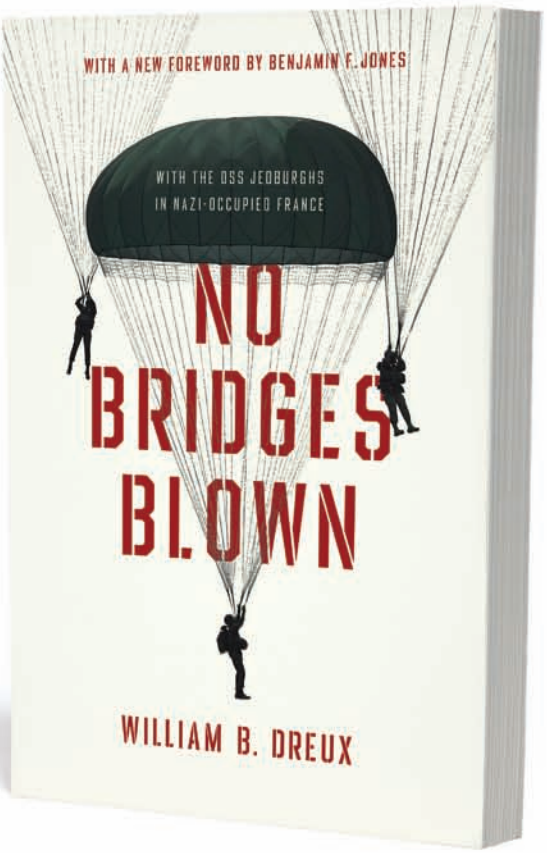

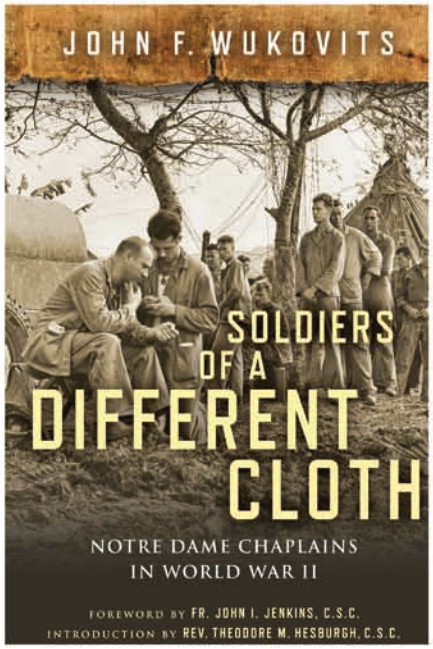

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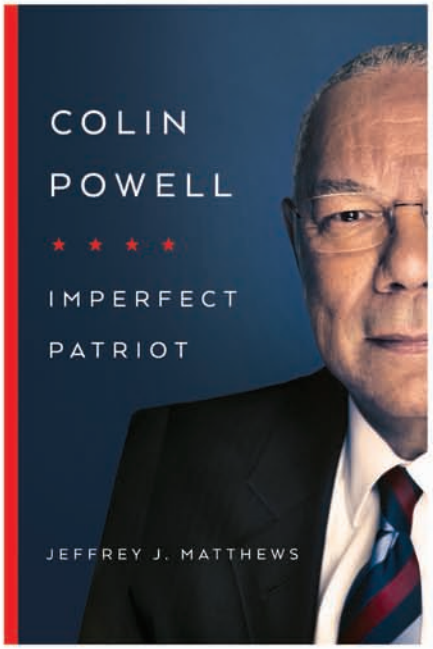

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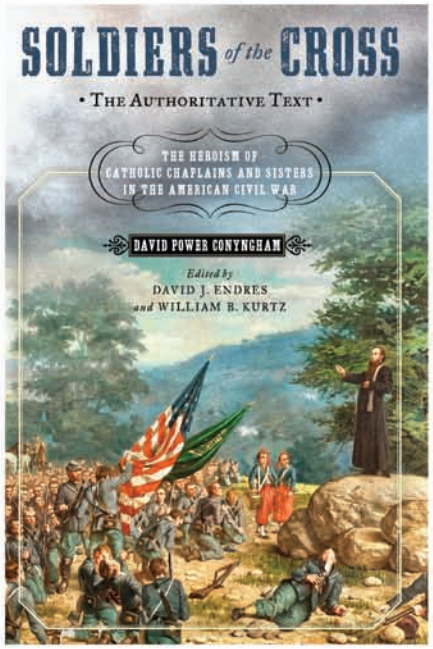

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