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CONTRIBUTORS



DR BEN WHEATLEY

Following his interview in last month's *History of War*, this issue Ben focuses on the fight for one critical position during the Battle of Prokhorovka: Hill 252.2. On page 28 he describes the battlefield tactics that proved decisive in the brutal armoured struggle.



DR PENNY STARNS

Penny received her PhD in the history of medicine from the University of Bristol, and has written multiple books on the subject. On page 32 she recounts how during the First World War, epidemics and outbreaks became deadly foes to both sides of no man's land.



JON TRIGG

Before becoming an author and historian, Jon served with the Royal Anglian Regiment in Bosnia, the Gulf and Northern Ireland. This issue he recounts the brutal campaign between the IRA's East Tyrone Brigade and Britain's SAS forces during the Troubles (p64).

Welcome

Above: The Battle of Prokhorovka saw the Germans and Soviets fighting for control of a single hill

The Battle of Kursk is widely considered to be one of the decisive battles of the Second World War's Eastern Front, which in turn was the theatre that saw the forces of the Third Reich defeated and ultimately pushed back all the way to Berlin. It began with Operation Citadel, a German offensive seeking to cut off the salient near the city of Kursk with a pincer movement from the north and south. This issue, Dr Ben Wheatley focuses on one of the critical encounters on the tip of the southern thrust, which saw Soviet and German armoured formations battling for control of a single hill. Also in this issue, Anthony Tucker-Jones recounts the little-known Soviet air strike that attempted to thwart the German offensive at Kursk before it even began.

Tim Williamson
Editor-in-Chief

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PAGE 50**

ON THE GROUND OF HISTORY'S GREATEST TANK BATTLE

KURSK

28 Dr Ben Wheatley explores the tactics used in the colossal armoured struggle in the summer of 1943



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Wooden spoon awarded to the 'worst shot' of the Royal East Kent Regiment

WAR_{in} **FOCUS**

EDWARD VIII AT VIMY

26 July 1936

Fought during 9-12 April 1917, the Battle of Vimy Ridge saw Canadian troops capture high ground in northern France. It was the first time that Canadian divisions fought together, with the battle becoming a symbol of national sacrifice.

On 26 July 1936, the Canadian National Vimy Memorial was unveiled by King Edward VIII (himself a veteran of the First World War) in front of French President Albert Lebrun and over 50,000 people. It was one of the few public engagements that Edward, in his capacity as king of Canada, carried out before he abdicated.







WAR_{in} **FOCUS**

MUSTANGS IN FLIGHT

20 July 1944

United States Army Air Forces (USAAF) P-51 Mustang fighters from 361st Fighter Group, 8th Air Force, conduct an escort mission over France. Manufactured by North American Aviation, the Mustang was one of the most successful fighter aircraft of the Second World War. Powered by a Rolls-Royce Merlin engine, the Mustang helped to ensure Allied air superiority over Europe in 1944. Deployed across the world by the USAAF and RAF, Mustang pilots destroyed almost 5,000 enemy aircraft by the end of the conflict.





WARⁱⁿ FOCUS

THE BATTLE OF KURSK

August, 1943

80 years ago Operation Citadel commenced, with German infantry and armour launching an offensive in the Kursk salient on the Eastern Front. After the German attack faltered by mid-July, the Red Army was able to launch its own offensive, pushing the German formations back.

By the end of the summer, 1943, the Soviets held strategic momentum, but the cost to both sides was immense, with thousands of tanks destroyed and hundreds of thousands of soldiers killed or wounded. Pictured, infantry and panzers move through a burning village during the battle.



TIMELINE OF...

MUSSOLINI'S ARMY



During the fascist dictator's rule over Italy, the Royal Italian Army fights extensively across Africa and Europe in many conflicts, before being defeated during WWII

INVASION OF ALBANIA 04

Ethiopia gives Mussolini confidence to extend his imperial ambitions to Albania, which is invaded and occupied by the Italian Army in five days. Like Haile Selassie, King Zog I of Albania goes into exile and his country becomes an Italian protectorate.

26 January 1923 – 24 January 1932

3 October 1935 – 19 February 1937

December 1936 – April 1939

7-12 April 1939

The Italian authorities pay tribute to their fallen soldiers at a monument in Tripoli, 24 May 1926



SECOND ITALO-SENUSSI WAR 01

Beginning shortly after Mussolini comes to power, this colonial conflict sees Italy pacify Libyan rebels. Tens of thousands of Libyans are killed in a war that lasts almost ten years. Libya is the beginning of a fascist programme to build a new Italian Empire.

SECOND ITALO-ETHIOPIAN WAR 02

Italian soldiers invade Ethiopia (Abyssinia) and force the country's leader, Emperor Haile Selassie, into exile. The invasion and subsequent occupation enables Mussolini to establish Italian East Africa.

Italian forces enter Ethiopia



ASSISTING FRANCO 03

Italy supplies 70,000 soldiers to support the Nationalists during the Spanish Civil War. Known as the Corpo Truppe Volontarie, this volunteer expeditionary force participates in many battles against the Spanish Second Republic and International Brigades.



Italian Army soldiers of the 133rd Armoured Division pictured in Spain

Italian soldiers arrive by aeroplane into northern Albania, 7 April 1939



An Italian anti-tank gun pictured in action on the Tobruk front in Libya



WESTERN DESERT CAMPAIGN

The Italian Army's experience in the Second World War is dominated by fighting against British-led forces in Egypt and Libya. They are mostly heavily defeated by the Allies and require German assistance from the Afrika Korps.

10-25 June 1940

INVASION OF FRANCE 05

The first major Italian engagement of the Second World War sees Italian troops skirmishing with French soldiers in the Alps along the Franco-Italian border. The Italians create a demilitarised zone on the French side of the border and control an occupation zone that includes Monaco.



Italian Alpini (mountain infantry) climb a peak in southern France, 22 June 1940

11 June 1940 – 4 February 1943

INVASION OF EGYPT 06

The Italian 10th Army invades Egypt from Libya against British, Commonwealth and Free French forces. It advances as far as the Egyptian port of Sidi Barrani in an offensive that begins the Western Desert Campaign.

Gunners of the Italian 10th Army man a 75mm anti-aircraft gun to lay down an artillery barrage on Allied positions during the advance into Egypt





3-19 August 1940

CONQUEST OF BRITISH SOMALILAND 07

Italian, Eritrean and Somali forces successfully invade and capture British Somaliland. The British are forced to withdraw from the colony after their defeat at Tug Argan and Italy annexes Somaliland into Italian East Africa.



An Italian Carro Armato M11/39 medium tank moves towards Berbera

28 October 1940 – 23 April 1941

GRECO-ITALIAN WAR 08

Italy invades Greece from Italian-controlled Albania but meets determined resistance from the Hellenic Army. With British support, the Greeks are able to push the Italians back to Albania. This persuades Germany to invade and occupy Greece.



Greek forces in retreat after the German invasion of Greece in WWII

9 December 1940 – 9 February 1941

OPERATION COMPASS 09

British and Commonwealth forces attack the Italian 10th Army in western Egypt and eastern Libya. The Allies inflict huge casualties on the Italians and over 133,000 are captured. This defeat prompts German intervention in North Africa.



A British soldier guards resting Italian prisoners after a long march



ARMISTICE OF CASSIBILE 14

Italy agrees an armistice with the Allies on 3 September 1943 - the same day that Allied forces invade the Italian mainland. The armistice comes into effect five days later, which causes the Germans to forcibly disarm Italian Army soldiers.

The Allied and Italian signatories of the armistice, including US Major General Walter Bedell Smith (second from right), pose after the signing, 3 September 1943

TUNISIAN CAMPAIGN 11

Italian and German forces are ejected from North Africa by the Allies in Tunisia. Total Axis casualties for the campaign are 290,000, including Italian losses of c.89,000-200,000 prisoners.

British troops supported by American tanks advancing on the Tunisian front



ALLIED INVASION OF SICILY 12

The Allies invade Axis home territory for the first time when they land on the coast of Sicily. The Italian Army fails to defend its homeland and again suffers huge casualties, including over 116,000 soldiers captured.

American soldiers overlook a hastily erected stockade on a Sicilian beach that serves as a temporary prison camp for Axis prisoners, 22 July 1943



August 1941 - January 1943

17 November 1942 - 13 May 1943

9 July - 17 August 1943
25 July 1943

3-8 September 1943

EASTERN FRONT 10

The Italian 8th Army, along with an expeditionary force, fights alongside German-led Axis forces against the Soviet Union. Tens of thousands of Italians are killed or wounded, with many more dying in captivity.



Italian soldiers fight alongside their German counterparts on the Eastern Front in 1941



DOWNFALL OF MUSSOLINI 13

The invasion of Sicily precipitates the fall of Mussolini, who loses a vote of no confidence by his own government. He is then sacked as prime minister by King Victor Emmanuel III of Italy before he is arrested and subsequently imprisoned.

Civilians in Rome tear down a statue of Mussolini following the fall of the fascist government, 25 July 1943

STRIKE AT AFRICA

Mussolini envisaged building an empire to rival Ancient Rome. Once he'd established his grip on Italy, he set his sights on Abyssinia as the place to begin

'Fascism repudiates the doctrine of Pacifism. War alone brings up to its highest tension all human energy and puts the stamp of nobility upon the people who have the courage to meet it. The Fascist conceives of life as duty and struggle and conquest.'

By the time Benito Mussolini wrote these words in 1932, he had been in power for less than a decade. In that short time, however, he'd both expanded Italy's armed forces and established a cult of militarism at the heart of national life.

When the self-styled Duce first grabbed power in 1922, Italy was in turmoil. It may have ended up on the winning side during the First World War, but the conflict had almost broken the country. Its society was deeply polarised and its economy was in free fall. By pumping up the military, Mussolini hoped to reduce unemployment and boost national pride. In the short term, it would help him crush opponents of his regime at home and enforce a greater sense of unity. In the longer term, his aim was to use it to transform Italy into a colonial superpower to rival the Roman Empire over which he'd preside as its black-shirted Caesar.

By October 1935, Mussolini was ready to turn his vision into a reality and sent half-a-million Italian troops to invade Abyssinia in modern-day Ethiopia. The armies that crossed the border from Eritrea in the north and Somalia in the east brought with them hundreds of tanks and aircraft as well as thousands of artillery pieces. With Mussolini also ordering the widespread use of poison gas to destroy Ethiopian resolve, the Second Italo-Ethiopian War would be one of the most one-sided in history. Within seven months, the Italians had conquered the entire country, killing as many as 500,000 Ethiopian soldiers and civilians in the process.

Eritrean Ascaris, renowned for their aggression and bravery, helped the Italians capture Addis Ababa



Ascaris, seen here in 1936, waged a relentless two-year guerilla campaign against the British in WWII



Among the force the Italians used to conquer Ethiopia were thousands of troops belonging to Italy's Regio Corpo Truppe Coloniali (RCTC). This corps of African troops recruited in Italy's existing colonial possessions in Eritrea, Somalia and Libya had been part of the Italian armed forces since the late 19th century.

Commanded by Italian officers and NCOs, the RCTC was primarily made up of cavalry, camel-mounted and infantry divisions armed with modern European weapons. By the time of the invasion of Ethiopia, light artillery and armoured car units had also been added to their ranks.

Perhaps to avoid high casualties among the Italian ranks these RCTC troops were frequently used to lead the attacks during the campaign. One significant example was the Battle of Ogaden in April 1936. Having made reasonable progress, the Italian Army encountered an Ethiopian defensive position that was so robust it acquired the nickname the 'Hindenburg Wall' in honour of the famous German fortified line of the First World War. Rather than commit Italian troops to overcome it, the commander of the southern front, General Rodolfo Graziani, instead sent in more than 20,000 Somali and Libyan fighters to break the Ethiopian line. Fighting raged for

ten days and by the time the battle ended on 25 April, 5,000 Ethiopians were dead for the loss of 2,000 RCTC troops.

At the same time, on the northern front, an Italian force under General Pietro Badoglio was fighting its way south from Eritrea towards Addis Ababa. With about one-fifth of his 125,000-strong force made up of RCTC troops, he swept through the country with relative ease, seizing the Ethiopian capital on 5 May. The fall of Addis Ababa effectively ended the war and the colony of Italian East Africa was born, as Abyssinia was merged with Somalia and Eritrea, bringing Mussolini one step closer to his dream.

The overwhelming bulk of the RCTC troops that had helped capture Addis Ababa were Eritrean Ascaris. These highly motivated and aggressive soldiers were considered the finest

in the entire RCTC. The name Ascaris is derived from the ancient Arabic word for soldier and these formidable warriors could trace their fighting heritage back to a group known as Bashi-bazouk that had fought for the Ottomans from the 17th century up until the Italian conquest of Eritrea in 1885.

After the outbreak of the Second World War, and the Allied invasion of Italian East Africa in 1941, a group of these Eritrean Ascaris would go on to achieve near-legendary status. Under the command of Amedeo Guillet, the Gruppo Bande Amhara fought a tireless two-year guerrilla campaign against British forces in the Horn of Africa. Under Guillet, whose notoriety earned him the soubriquet 'The Devil Commander', the Eritreans carved out a reputation for fearlessness and near-reckless bravery. In one famous incident in January 1941, near Cheru in Eritrea, they attacked a British armoured column armed only with sabres, hand grenades and rifles. It was to be the last time in history that British troops were forced to repel a full-blown cavalry charge. After the war, whenever discussing the heroism of the men who'd served under him, Guillet would say of his troops: "The Eritreans are the Prussians of Africa – without any of the defects of the Prussians." From a European aristocrat, this was high praise indeed.

"WITHIN SEVEN MONTHS, THE ITALIANS HAD CONQUERED THE ENTIRE COUNTRY, KILLING AS MANY AS 500,000 ETHIOPIAN SOLDIERS AND CIVILIANS"

*Two exhausted Italian soldiers
pictured at the front during the
Battle of Guadalajara, March 1937*

CORPO TRUPPE VOLONTARIE

During the Spanish Civil War, tens of thousands of Italian soldiers fought in Spain to support the fascist Nationalist forces of Francisco Franco

The Spanish Civil War (1936-39) split the world down ideological lines. Those who supported the left-leaning government of the Second Spanish Republic travelled to Spain in their thousands to join the volunteer International Brigades and other associated groups. Consisting of socialists, communists, anarchists and democrats, these pro-Republican foreign volunteers did not receive official recognition or assistance from their countries of origin such as France, the United States and United Kingdom.

On the other hand, supporters of the Nationalist military junta led by General Francisco Franco firmly included Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy and Portugal. Nationalist forces received supplies of munitions and other equipment as well as air and naval support from these far-right governments. The most infamous example of this foreign intervention was the bombing of Guernica in 1937 when German and Italian aircraft bombed the Basque town. However, what is less well known is that Italy provided the Nationalists with tens of thousands of soldiers who fought across Spain in numerous battles and campaigns.

Fascist volunteers

Ever since Benito Mussolini became prime minister of Italy, he had developed contacts with right-wing groups in Spain. He hosted Spanish politicians and generals in Rome in 1934 who were opposed to the legitimately elected Second Republic and promised them arms and financial support if civil war broke out.

When the war began in 1936, 27 countries – including Britain, France, Germany, Italy and the Soviet Union – officially signed a Non-Intervention Agreement to avoid military interference in Spain. Germany, Italy and the Soviet Union did not abide by the agreement, with Mussolini signing his own secret agreement with the Nationalists. In exchange for military support, the Nationalists agreed to allow Italy to construct bases in Spain in the event of a war with France.

At first, Mussolini sent material aid to the Nationalists that included artillery, tanks

and aircraft, but Italian soldiers soon began to fight in Spain. These troops were initially Blackshirts – volunteer fascist militiamen who were personally loyal to Mussolini. At the same time, volunteers from the Italian army, navy and air force formed into an expeditionary force called *Corpo Truppe Volontarie* (Corps of Volunteer Troops) in December 1936. The formation of the CTV was important because the Republican government still controlled Spain's navy and air force.

Mussolini decided to send the regular CTV on 12 December 1936 after Franco's failed offensive against Madrid. Under the command of General Mario Roatta, the first 3,000 CTV soldiers landed at Cadiz 11 days later. Along with the Blackshirts, the CTV numbered 44,000 troops by January 1937 and formed into four divisions that included motorised infantry. The Italians also had a formation of tanks and armoured cars.

The CTV's first engagement was the Battle of Málaga in Andalusia during 3-8 February 1937, in which 10,000 Italian troops helped the Nationalists defeat Republican forces and capture the city of Málaga. This victory was a significant morale boost for the newly formed CTV and its numbers were boosted to over 50,000 the following month.

Guadalajara

To capitalise on Málaga, Mussolini encouraged an Italian-led offensive on Madrid in March 1937. The Spanish capital had been besieged by Nationalist forces since November 1936 and the new offensive would be the fourth of its kind. Nevertheless, Mussolini believed that the CTV could encircle Madrid and end the war.

With 35,000 Italian troops and 15,000 Nationalists, Roatta planned to attack Madrid's defences from the northeast. The main attack would begin in a 15-mile (25km) pass between the cities of Guadalajara and Alcalá de Henares. With good quality roads through the pass, Italian tanks and armoured vehicles would play an important role. Despite the Italians' confidence, they had only faced Republican militias at Málaga. They would now be facing the more

disciplined Spanish Republican Army and the Republican Air Force.

Beginning on 8 March 1937, what became known as the Battle of Guadalajara saw the Italians and Nationalists flounder in the face of fierce opposition. The Italians managed to capture Brihuega but the International Brigades halted their advance. The Republicans conducted an orderly retreat before launching a counterattack on 12 March using heavy tanks and fresh reinforcements.

Adding to the Italians' problems was poor weather conditions. Their armoured cars could not perform encircling manoeuvres in rain, snow and fog and became easy targets for Republican aircraft. Amid this chaos, the Republicans were able to regain lost ground during 19-23 March.

Madrid was again saved from fascist occupation, with Guadalajara boosting Republican morale. The Italians suffered approximately 8,000 casualties along with a similar number of Nationalists. Their defeat attracted derision from the anti-fascist international press, with Ernest Hemingway reporting: "It is impossible to over-emphasise the importance of this battle... [Guadalajara] will take its place in military history with the other decisive battles of the world."

Hemingway's optimistic analysis proved premature but Mussolini was humiliated. He fired CTV commanders (although not Roatta) while Franco placed the corps under his army's control. Italian troops began to serve in mixed Italo-Nationalist units and the CTV assisted in the decisive Nationalist victory at the Battle of Santander during August-September 1937.

When Franco finally took Madrid and won the war in 1939, the remaining Italian volunteers left Spain. Over 75,000 Italians had fought in the war – most of them in the CTV. Almost 19,000 had become casualties, with the Italians also leaving behind huge amounts of equipment. Intervening in the Spanish Civil War had also drained Italy's economy, limiting the country's economic output during the Second World War. Crucially, defeats like Guadalajara encouraged the Allies that Mussolini's army was not as powerful as he made out.

Italian soldiers of the *Corpo Truppe Volontarie* read the news in Spain



Images: Alamy, Getty

SHOWDOWN IN THE DESERT

The Italian campaigns in Africa sought to end British rule over Egypt and control of the Suez Canal, strengthening Mussolini's dominance over the Mediterranean

By the time Benito Mussolini declared war against the Allies in June 1940, the Second World War looked like it would soon be over. Nazi Germany had already swept through most of Western Europe, France was teetering and once it fell Britain, isolated and alone, would surely capitulate too. Keen to exploit the situation by grabbing French and British possessions in North and East Africa, including the Suez Canal, Mussolini sent his armies across the

Mediterranean to start a conflict that they were in no fit state to fight.

The Great Depression and decades of financial mismanagement under Mussolini had left Italy industrially and economically weak. His fascist crusades in East Africa and Spain, meanwhile, had burned through vast amounts of military materiel. As a result, his armed forces were ill-equipped, under-resourced and poorly trained. The shortcomings of his war machine were particularly evident when it came to Italy's armoured army.

At the outbreak of hostilities, Italy had three armoured divisions, the Ariete, the Littorio and the Centauro. Each consisted of 8,600 troops, 189 M-type medium tanks, 40 armoured cars, 20 self-propelled guns and 70 pieces of artillery. They also included 1,120 assorted vehicles, primarily tankettes. As the name suggests, these were very small tanks. Developed in the inter-war period, these experimental lightweight fighting vehicles had been largely dismissed by other nations as unsuitable for modern warfare. The limited

An Italian flamethrower unit near Cyrenaica, Libya, spring 1940





Italo Balbo, governor-general of Italian Libya, addresses officers in June 1940

success they'd enjoyed during the invasion of Ethiopia in 1935, however, led the Italian high command to overvalue them. As a result, the two-man L3/33 was the most ubiquitous armoured vehicle in the Italian army at the outbreak of hostilities. With 0.47in-thick (12mm) welded armour that could withstand little more than small-arms fire and twin 0.31in (8mm) machine guns, it would prove entirely inadequate against almost every Allied armoured vehicle it ever went up against.

The Italians' main battle tank at the start of the conflict, meanwhile, was the M11/39. With its 1.2in (30mm) riveted armour and 1.46in (37mm) anti-tank gun, it was no match for the heavier, more powerful British tanks that it would encounter, especially the Matilda with its 3.1in-thick (78mm) armour and a 1.6in (40mm) gun. Technically unreliable, the M11/39's combat effectiveness was also compromised by often poorly trained crews and a lack of radio equipment. But Mussolini was convinced the numerical advantage his armies enjoyed would bring him victory in Africa, so he rolled the dice.

On 3 August 1940, two months after declaring war, Mussolini's army in Ethiopia crossed the border into British Somaliland. In a swift campaign, his larger force quickly overran the British garrison there and by 19 August, Italy had annexed the country.

Buoyed by this success, Il Duce now demanded the capture of the Suez Canal. On 13 September, General Rodolfo Graziani crossed the border from Libya into Egypt at the head of a 235,000-strong army. Among

"THE ITALIANS HAD TRAVELLED JUST 60 MILES BUT WERE ALREADY RUNNING LOW ON SUPPLIES"

its ranks was the Maletti Group, an ad hoc mechanised force that contained two medium tank battalions and three light tank battalions.

In the face of such overwhelming odds, the British Western Desert Force (WDF) of approximately 36,000 men was forced into a tactical retreat. For the next three days, under its commander General Richard O'Connor's orders, it harried the enemy from land and air but could only inflict minor casualties. Once the shambling Italian advance reached the coastal city of Sidi Barrani, however, it ground to a halt. The Italians had travelled just 60 miles (97km) but were already running low on supplies. So Graziani drew his forces up into a defensive line and dug in around five major camps to the east and south of Sidi Barrani.

A two-month stand-off now followed during which the WDF was reinforced with a battalion of heavy Matilda tanks. As winter approached, O'Connor prepared to launch a counter-attack. Known as Operation Compass, it opened with an artillery barrage at 7.15am on 9 December. British and Indian troops then attacked the Italian camp at Nibeiwa, where the Maletti Group was stationed. An hour-long battle ensued during

which the Italians, including the Maletti Group, were completely routed. By 8.30am the camp had been captured and the Italian line, now severed in two, began to collapse.

Within three days, the British had overrun the remaining four camps, recaptured Sidi Barrani and forced the Italians to flee back towards the Libyan border. By the time Operation Compass officially came to an end in February 1941, Italy had suffered around 15,500 casualties with another 130,000 men taken prisoner. It had also lost almost all of its armour as the British force pushed them not just out of Egypt but out of western Libya, too.

From then until May 1943, the Italian Army would serve in a subordinate role alongside Germany's newly founded Afrika Korps, which had been sent to Libya to salvage the situation. All three of its armoured divisions were now sent from Italy to fight in the desert. Despite being equipped with the newer M13/40 tank with 1.7in (42mm) armour and 1.9in (47mm) gun, these divisions were still no match for the Allied armour they encountered. Tanks like the US-built Sherman with its 7in (178mm) armour and 3in (75mm) gun were simply too powerful.

The Ariete and Littorio divisions discovered this to their cost at El Alamein in November 1942 when they were both completely wiped out. The Centauro suffered a similar fate when it, too, was all but annihilated during the Battle of El Guettar the following March. Two months after that, Mussolini's troops were chased out of Africa altogether and his dream of a second Roman Empire was in tatters.

This Italian propaganda postcard shows Italian, Nazi and Japanese flags flying above a tank crushing those of the UK, USA and USSR

ITALIANS IN THE EAST

Reeling from his setbacks in North Africa, and eager to prove his forces' worth against the communist foe, Il Duce sent a large expeditionary force to join the Nazi invasion of the USSR

On the morning of 22 June 1941, when Mussolini was told of Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union, he instantly pledged his country's military support to the venture. Joining a crusade against communism was just too good an opportunity to miss – and not only from an ideological viewpoint. Apart from the potential plunder to be had, there was also the possibility of redeeming Italy's martial reputation. After its military blunders in North Africa, piggybacking Hitler's giant invasion force – the largest ever assembled – with the aim of scoring a few quick victories must have seemed like a safe bet to Il Duce.

Within four days, he'd assembled a force known as the *Corpo di Spedizione Italiano in Russia* (or CSIR). It was made up of 62,000 men, 82 aircraft, 220 artillery pieces, 92 anti-tank guns, 4,600 mules and horses, 5,500 vehicles, and 60 L3/33 tankettes. These were organised into three divisions – the 9th *Pasubio* and the 52nd *Torino*, which were both infantry divisions, and the 3rd *Celere* Cavalry Division.

On 10 July 1941, the CSIR left Italy for the Eastern Front. On its arrival in Ukraine, it was integrated into the German 11th Army, first seeing action on 10 August when it engaged retreating Red Army troops between the Bug and Dniester Rivers.

Four days later, the CSIR was transferred to the 1st Panzer Group commanded by General Paul von Kleist. Their objective was to meet up with the 2nd Panzer Group under General Heinz Guderian on the far side of the Dnieper River and encircle Kyiv. By the middle of September, the Ukrainian capital had been successfully cut off, with the German high command praising the Italian force for its role in the operation.

More successes for the CSIR followed. Between 27-30 September, at the Battle of Petrikowka, the Italians won a resounding victory after surrounding a sizeable Red Army force, inflicting countless casualties and taking 10,000 prisoners. Then on 10 October, fighting alongside the German 49th Mountain Corps, the 9th *Pasubio* and 3rd *Celere* captured the major industrial city of Stalino (modern-day Donetsk). In the final attack on the city, the Italians used modern small-team, combined-arms tactics. Learned from the Germans, this represented a significant shift away from the type of inflexible *en masse* attacks the Italian army had been using in Africa.

The neighbouring town of Horlivka fell to the CSIR on 2 November and as winter set in the Italians consolidated into a defensive position around Petropavlivka in Luhansk Oblast. Throughout the rest of the year, the Red Army launched a number of probing counter-attacks against the Italian position. Then on Christmas Day the Soviets launched a full-scale offensive.

On 25 December, three Soviet divisions attacked the 3rd *Celere* Division. Its aim was to cut off the CSIR from the 49th Mountain Corps on its flank, reopen the route to Stalino and seize the vital German-held railway junctions there. Despite being outnumbered, the Italians managed to hold their position before counter-attacking. By 27 December, the Soviets had been pushed back, suffering more than 2,000 casualties. A further 1,200 Soviet troops were captured along with significant amounts of equipment including vehicles, artillery pieces and machine guns. The victory won during what became known as the Christmas Battle was arguably the CSIR's finest moment.

Encouraged by these successes, Mussolini sent a further seven divisions to the Eastern Front the following year. This dramatic scaling up transformed the CSIR into an army-sized force and resulted in a change of name to *Armata Italiana in Russia* (ARMIR) – the Italian Army in Russia. Unlike the more mobile CSIR, the unwieldy ARMIR was made up largely of poorly trained and ill-equipped infantrymen as well as mountain troops. With negligible armour, a lack of winter clothing and often antiquated weapons, they were ill-suited to fight an ever-improving enemy in the vast frozen plains of southern Russia.

As the German advance across the Soviet Union moved inexorably towards the meat grinder of Stalingrad, ARMIR found itself being unwittingly sucked into a trap codenamed Operation Little Saturn. Throughout December 1943, the Soviets slowly isolated the ARMIR from the rest of the Axis line as they prepared to exterminate it. By 14 January 1943, the ARMIR had been completely cut off in a sector northeast of Stalingrad. Twelve days of pummelling attacks by armour, artillery and airstrikes were enough to convince the beleaguered Italians that they faced annihilation if they stayed where they were. A breakout was organised and on 26 January 1943 a remnant of the ARMIR managed to breach the Soviet lines at the Battle of Nikolayevka. A 160-mile (257km) slog to newly formed lines followed. By the time they arrived in February, so many men had been lost that Mussolini had little choice but to declare the ARMIR disbanded. Of the 235,000 Italians who were sent to the Eastern Front, 115,000 never came home.



General Enzo Galbiati addresses Italian troops on the Eastern Front, c. September 1942

Images: Getty

AIR BATTLE FOR KURSK

On the eve of Operation Citadel, the Red Air Force sought to pre-empt the attack by smashing the Luftwaffe. The risky spoiling operation failed spectacularly

WORDS ANTHONY TUCKER-JONES

On the night of 4 July 1943 there was no rest for the Luftwaffe. Operation Citadel, the offensive against the Soviet salient at Kursk, was scheduled to commence at 03:30 the following day. The Luftwaffe was to put 1,700 aircraft into the air to bomb and strafe the Red Army's defences. In the north, General Walter Model was supported by the 1st Air Division with 730 aircraft based around Orel under Major General Paul Deichmann. He was responsible for the 6th Air Fleet's combat operations. In the south under General Hans Seidemann, 1,100 bombers, ground-attack and fighter aircraft, drawn from the 4th Air Fleet, were to fly from airfields around Kharkov and Belgorod in support of Field Marshal Erich von Manstein.

Luftwaffe tipped off

The Luftwaffe's bases were scenes of organised chaos as row upon row of aircraft stood at cockpit readiness. The plan was that the slower bombers would take off first and circle around while they waited for their fighter escorts to get airborne. However, the Red Air Force had other ideas. Its intelligence showed that Seidemann's 8th Air Corps, with its extensive experience of flying close air support, had redeployed from the Crimea to the Kharkov-Belgorod sector.

Just before zero hour the Luftwaffe's radio eavesdroppers picked up heightened chatter from the Red Air Force in and around the Kursk salient. There was a sudden surge in communication among the Soviet air regiments that indicated something was going to happen. Radar operators peered at their screens and revised their initial count from 100 to finally more than 400 aircraft heading in their direction. This was not a normal raid; an entire Soviet air army was on its way. In a panic, one of the operators picked up the field telephone and frantically called Mikoyanovka, the 8th Air Corps' HQ 17 miles (27km) south of Belgorod.

After taking the call from the radar stations, the duty officer at Mikoyanovka hastened to find Seidemann and General Hans Jeschonnek, the Luftwaffe's chief of staff,

who just happened to be visiting the front. On hearing the news both men looked ashen-faced. Their heavily laden bombers were about to take off but if they did they would run straight into enemy fighters. If they did not they would be destroyed on the ground or as they lumbered slowly skyward. Operating from Mikoyanovka were not only bombers but also their valuable tank-busting aircraft. The five main airfields around Belgorod and Kharkov were packed with aircraft. A signal immediately went out for the bombers to stand down. Men then ran out across the airfields with thumbs up for the fighter squadrons to go first. The pilots buckled up and began taxiing through the ranks of waiting bombers to reach the runways.

The Red Air Force plan

At Kursk the Red Air Force had numerical superiority, with twice as many fighters as the Luftwaffe and many times the number of ground-attack aircraft. This was largely due to Marshal Georgi Zhukov's insistence that his fighter strength be substantially increased to meet Citadel. Only Stalin's day bomber force was inferior to the Luftwaffe, with about half the number available. Overall coordination of air operations was the responsibility of Air Marshal Novikov, aided by his deputy General Vorozheikin and his newly appointed chief of staff, General Khudyakov, subordinate to Zhukov as Stalin's deputy supreme commander. The deputy air army commanders were posted to the ground armies' HQs and a network of secondary command and control centres established inside the salient.

Both the Soviet 16th and 2nd Air Armies were commanded by men who had fought at Stalingrad. General Rudenko kept command of the 16th, with General Kravovski replacing Smirnov in command of the 2nd, after handing over the 17th Air Army on the South-Western Front to General Sudets. They were backed by Goryunov's 5th Air Army, which had been reconstituted after its move from the North Caucasus. Combined with the flanking 17th Air Army, up to 3,000 Soviet aircraft were ready to meet Hitler's offensive.



Above, left: A tail section is all that remains of this obliterated Soviet bomber

Above: The Soviets lost at least 120 aircraft and a similar number damaged before Citadel even started

On the eve of Operation Citadel Stalin's reinvigorated Red Air Force launched a daring pre-emptive strike

**"THIS WAS NOT
A NORMAL RAID;
AN ENTIRE SOVIET
AIR ARMY WAS
ON ITS WAY"**





A German souvenir hunter picks through the debris. The Red Air Force's mauling ensured the Luftwaffe briefly enjoyed air superiority at Kursk



Another downed Il-2 Sturmovik – a victim of superior German tactics

Zhukov recalled: "Somewhere between two and three in the morning [General] Pukhov rang [General] Rokossovsky to tell him that a captured sapper of the 6th Infantry Division had informed him that German troops were ready to begin an attack. This was to happen at approximately 3am on 5 July." A week before, courtesy of the 'Lucy' spy network, Stalin had received the Luftwaffe's complete order of battle for Citadel. John Cairncross, spying for the Soviets at Bletchley Park, claimed he played a key role in enabling Stalin's surprise air attack. He said that the German language intelligence he supplied "was genuine, giving full details of German units and locations, thus enabling the Russians to pinpoint their targets and take the enemy by surprise". In response to this intelligence orders had now been issued to Rudenko's and Krasovski's HQs, who in turn signalled their air corps commanders – the air attack mission was a go.

An audacious air attack

Krasovski and Sudets were not only targeting the airfields at Mikoyanovka, Pomerki and Soloniki outside Belgorod and Osnova, and Rogan outside Kharkov, but also other

airfields at Barvenkovo and Kramatorskaya. Aerial reconnaissance showed that some of these were hosting up to 150 aircraft each. To make matters worse for the Germans they were overflowing with munitions. Seidemann's forces had enough ammunition for ten missions, while Deichmann had bombs for 15 days of major operations. This was too good an opportunity to miss.

It's unclear why the Red Air Force did not first attack the Luftwaffe's Freya and Würzburg radars, which had deployed to the Belgorod and Kharkov areas in the spring of 1943. These could detect large formations of aircraft out to 93 miles (150km) or single aircraft at 56 miles (90km) and the Soviets were well aware of them. This error was to prove fatal.

At Mikoyanovka, Seidemann and Jeschonnek watched anxiously as formations of enemy aircraft droned relentlessly overhead toward the Luftwaffe's network of airfields. Had they been quick enough reversing the take-off orders or was Stalin about to obliterate Hitler's air support before Citadel had even started? If the Red Air Force succeeded with its audacious surprise attack then Citadel would be stillborn under a hail of Soviet bombs. Tense moments passed until it was confirmed that the

Luftwaffe's 3rd and 52nd Fighter Groups were safely airborne. It was now a case of waiting to see if superior German tactics would prevail.

The Soviet attacking force included 285 fighters and 132 ground-attack aircraft from the 2nd and 17th Air Armies. All of a sudden their pilots were caught out as they assumed they were about to pounce on an unsuspecting Luftwaffe. Instead they found themselves under attack by angry swarms of enemy fighters that, having climbed, darted out of the haze of the early dawn.

Across the cities of Belgorod and Kharkov the air-raid sirens began to wail. The Soviet formations tried to press on toward their targets and as they did so their ranks were thinned by German fighters and flak. Over the air corridor between Belgorod and Kharkov it rapidly turned into a turkey shoot. Soviet tactics were simply not flexible enough to fight an air battle and bomb ground targets at the same time. The Soviet Lavochkin- and Yakovlev-designed fighters were outclassed, although the newer version from Lavochkin had a much improved climb rate. Those bombers that did reach the Kharkov area scattered their bombs over a wide space, inflicting little damage.

The burnt remains of a Pe-2 dive-bomber shot from the skies by the prowling Luftwaffe





A Russian cornfield becomes the last resting place for this Il-2. In the opening stages of Citadel Sturmovik tactics proved flawed



A German examines the wreckage of the tail section of a SB-2 light bomber

Senior Lieutenant Simutenkov, piloting an Il-2 Sturmovik ground-attack aircraft, had a narrow escape with the flak. "As we approached our target I could see the anti-aircraft fire ripping through the sky," he recalled. "I held my course and could just make out some enemy aircraft taking off. This was a shock as we were convinced that we would achieve surprise and record a major success." Before he could attack his aircraft was hit several times by anti-aircraft fire. Managing to keep control he headed for his own lines, where he crash-landed.

Swirling vapour trails

As the planes' engines were pushed to their limit, the sky became filled with swirling vapour trails. Desperate dogfights broke out as aircraft scattered in all directions. It became a case of every man for himself. Wingmen tried to stay together but were often separated in the confusion. Those slower bombers and ground attack aircraft still with their bombs were separated from their squadrons and picked off.

General Seidemann could not believe his luck. Not long before his bomber units had been threatened with obliteration. "In no time at all some 120 Soviet aircraft were downed," he said. "Our own losses were so small as to represent total victory, for the consequence was complete German air control in the 8th Corps sector." Jeschonnek was equally thankful their fighters had saved the day; Hitler would have been furious if the Luftwaffe had been caught napping. He could just imagine how the conversation would have gone if he had to personally report to Hitler the loss of an irreplaceable air corps on the very brink of Citadel.

The stunned Red Air Force had no choice but to abandon the mission and its remaining aircraft, many of them damaged, turned and headed for home. German pilots gave chase and the German flak batteries kept firing. The surrounding countryside became littered with the broken remains of Soviet aircraft. Those crews lucky enough to survive being brought down were swiftly rounded up and taken prisoner. The aircraft that got back had to be patched up, refuelled and rearmed, and all that took precious time. Likewise the shaken pilots had to be debriefed and prepared for their next combat sorties.

Out of the ashes

Zhukov was furious that the pre-emptive air strike had been completely botched: "The air force made an insignificant, and to be quite honest, ineffective contribution; raids on enemy aerodromes at dawn did not fulfil their purpose in any way at all as the German Command had its aircraft in the air by that time to assist its ground troops." All the Red Air Force achieved was to delay Citadel very slightly. Crucially, the loss of so many aircraft from Rudenko and Krasovski's air armies meant the Red Air Force was unable to challenge the Luftwaffe over the Kursk salient during the opening stages of the ground battle.

The Red Air Force attacks had done nothing to really impede or stop the Luftwaffe and at about 04:30 its aircraft began to attack Soviet defences. The result was that Soviet aircraft were not in a position to contest Luftwaffe supremacy on the southern flank of the salient and in the north their responses to Luftwaffe attacks were often completely ineffectual. Nonetheless, despite this setback Hitler's ground forces still failed to prevail against the in-depth Soviet defences.



★ PROKHOROVKA ★

AND THE FIGHT FOR HILL 252.2

The Battle of Prokhorovka, on 12 July 1943, was the culmination point of the southern pincer of Operation Citadel. The Soviets ultimately emerged victorious, despite suffering extremely heavy losses to their armour. Here, Dr Ben Wheatley recounts the struggle for one critical position during the battle: Hill 252.2

WORDS DR BEN WHEATLEY

Six days after the Germans launched Operation Citadel, which threatened to surround and cut off several Red Army divisions of the Central and Voronezh Fronts, German panzers continued to make progress, with the II-SS Panzer Corps moving in on the city of Prokhorovka.

At 0850 on 11 July the German Leibstandarte SS Panzergrenadier Division overcame an anti-tank ditch that was to play an important role in the next day's fighting. SS War Correspondent Johan King's photos confirm the road bridge over this obstacle was captured intact. Beyond the anti-tank ditch stretched Hill 252.2 "like an enormous wave" – the Leibstandarte was now 1.6 miles (2.5km) from Prokhorovka.

The Soviet 9th Guards Paratroop Division put up a fierce defence of the heights, which delayed the German advance and forced the Leibstandarte to deploy its SPW (armoured personnel carrier) battalion (2nd SS Panzergrenadier Regiment III Battalion), panzer battalion and Sf Grille (self-propelled heavy infantry guns) to complete the capture of Hill 252.2 and the hilltop Oktiabrskiy state farm. The heights were finally captured by the Leibstandarte at 1410. The Leibstandarte's SPW battalion and Sf Grille would later embark on a probing attack in the direction of Prokhorovka. However, beyond Hill 252.2 the Germans came under intense Soviet bombardment, as a result of which the SPW battalion only managed to advance a short distance before having to retreat to its start lines. (King's photographs captured some of the fighting for Hill 252.2).

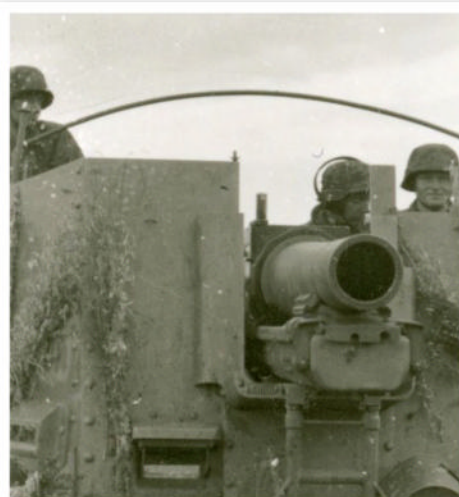
On 12 July the Leibstandarte's units remained widely dispersed. On the right wing, south of the railway embankment, stood 1st SS Panzergrenadier Regiment, and on the left, far forward in the wake of Hill 252.2, 2nd SS Panzergrenadier Regiment. The division's panzer regiment, on the other hand, was recovering from its exertions of the previous day behind Hill 252.2 and the anti-tank ditch. At this time the Leibstandarte's panzer regiment consisted of just one panzer battalion (its II) with three companies (47 operational Panzer IVs – it began Operation Citadel with 79 operational Pz IVs), to which a heavy panzer company had been attached (four operational Panzer VIs – Tiger tanks – the company began Operation Citadel with 12 operational Tigers). The panzer regiment's other battalion (its I) was back in Germany undergoing conversion to the Panther tank. Therefore, on 12 July between the railway embankment and the River Psel two full-strength tank brigades of the 5th Guards Tank Army would face a single reinforced panzer battalion.

When Soviet General Pavel Rotmistrov launched the attack on the morning of 12 July from the brick factory 0.6 miles (1km) north-west of Prokhorovka, many of the Leibstandarte's exhausted troops were still asleep; this was made possible as the Soviets chose to launch their attack without a preparatory artillery barrage. The foremost German unit at that moment was once again the 2nd SS Panzergrenadier Regiment's III (SPW) Battalion.

To consolidate its gains at 08:50 the Leibstandarte rapidly sent its armour across the anti-tank ditch and onto the slope of Hill 252.2, 11 July



The Leibstandarte's Sf 150mm heavy infantry guns (Grille), shown here, also participated in the assault on Hill 252.2 which began at 10:30, 11 July



The Leibstandarte's 2nd SS Panzergrenadier Regiment urgently improved the anti-tank ditch defences, 11 July

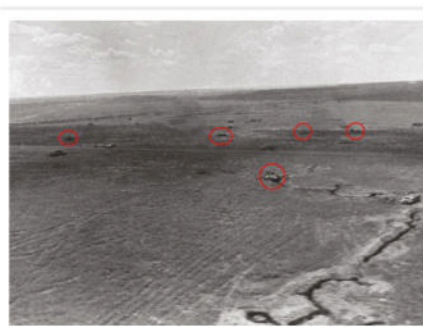




A formidable artillery capability and an impenetrable anti-tank screen helped the Red Army stop the German advance on the Prokhorovka axis - a pivotal moment on WWII's Eastern Front



Wrecks from the 29th Tank Corps are circled in red in the fields in front of the anti-tank ditch in this Luftwaffe reconnaissance photo, 7 August 1943



A Soviet aircraft flying low over the Prokhorovka battlefield photographed the aftermath of the engagement (destroyed tanks circled in red)



In the foreground a destroyed Leibstandarte Panzer IV is circled in black; circled in red is a wrecked Soviet T-34 behind an infantry trench

At 0915 on the morning of 12 July the following scene took place on Hill 252.2: "We were all fast asleep when they were suddenly all over us with aircraft and an endless mass of tanks with infantry riding on them. It was hell. They were around us, over us, among us. We fought man to man."

The first German panzer officer to see this Soviet tank avalanche was SS Obersturmführer Rudolf von Ribbentrop, the commander of the Leibstandarte panzer battalion's 6th company. Looking up at Hill 252.2 that morning he saw violet signal flares, meaning 'tank alarm'. The signals were "seen all along the crest of the slope" and also appeared "farther to the right at the railway embankment". While the other two panzer companies remained behind the anti-tank ditch, Ribbentrop, in Panzer IV '605', set off up the hill along with his company's other six operational Panzer IVs...

"On reaching the crest of the slope we saw another low rise about 200 metres away on the other side of a small valley, on which our infantry positions were obviously located... The small valley extended to our left, and as we drove down the forward slope we spotted the first T-34s which were apparently attempting to outflank us from the left. We halted on the slope and opened fire, hitting several of the enemy. A number of Russian tanks were left burning. For a good gunner 800 metres was the ideal range."

Ribbentrop then saw a huge column of tanks approaching: "As we waited to see if further enemy tanks were going to appear, I looked around... about 150 to 200 metres in front of us there emerged from a slight dip in the terrain 15, 20, 30, 40 Russian T-34s, and then too many to count. The wall of tanks rolled towards us. Tank by tank, wave upon wave, an unimaginable mass of armour approaching at top

"IT WAS HELL. THEY WERE AROUND US, OVER US, AMONG US. WE FOUGHT MAN TO MAN"

Even on 11 July the Leibstandarte faced numerous Soviet armoured counter attacks on Hill 252. Here a Leibstandarte Pz IV on Hill 252.2 scans the landscape for Soviet armour



speed.” The seven German tanks stood no chance against such overwhelming odds. Two of the leading Panzer IVs were destroyed immediately (unknown tactical numbers), another Panzer IV (most likely ‘615’), positioned further back on the crest of Hill 252.2, met the same fate soon afterwards, a fourth Panzer IV was severely damaged and immobilised (probably ‘616’). The other three Panzer IVs (‘605’, ‘618’ and ‘625’) managed to survive the encounter.

The attacking formation which appeared so suddenly was the mass of 29th Tank Corps, led by Major General Kirichenko, consisting of 228 operational AFVs. The attack at this location was carried out by 31st and 32nd Tank Brigades and 53rd Motorised Rifle Brigade, supported by a self-propelled gun regiment and 26th Guards Paratroop Regiment. Once the Soviet tanks had passed the crest of Hill 252.2, they raced down the incline towards the two German panzer companies, which opened fire on them from behind the anti-tank ditch.

Mistaking the German Panzer IVs for Tiger tanks, the Soviet tankers wanted to eliminate their range superiority as quickly as possible. If the armada of Soviet tanks broke through in depth, as must have initially seemed likely, it could only result in the collapse of the German front. Then, in a few minutes, everything changed. Due to an incredible oversight the Soviets had overlooked the anti-tank ditch. The obstacle had been dug by Soviet infantry and stretched across the base of Hill 252.2 at right angles to the German – now Soviet – direction of attack. According to German testimony “more and more T-34s came over the crest, raced down the slope and overturned in the anti-tank ditch behind which we were positioned”. German testimony even

spoke of tanks attempting to hurdle the anti-tank ditch. How many Soviet tanks actually crashed into the anti-tank ditch is a moot point, but there is no doubt the presence of the obstacle was either directly or indirectly the chief cause of the 29th Tank Corps’ armoured difficulties.

Ribbentrop’s Panzer IV ‘605’ and ‘618’ had managed to get away by moving alongside the Soviet tanks in a thick cloud of dust. Ribbentrop’s other remaining operational Panzer IV, ‘625’, is said to have stayed on the battlefield (close to the railway embankment) with a lowered and temporarily jammed main gun. Ribbentrop recalled: “Now the T-34s recognised the ditch and tried to veer left to the road in order to get across the ditch via the bridge, which had been repaired [King’s photographic evidence from 11 July 1943 clearly shows that the bridge had been captured intact]. What happened then is indescribable... as they converged on the bridge, the Russians were exposed on the flanks and made easier targets. Burning T-34s ran into and over each other. An inferno of fire, smoke, burning tanks, dead and wounded!” On the other side of the anti-tank ditch the two companies of Panzer IVs would normally have stood no chance of stopping the Soviet avalanche of steel. However, now it was simply “target practice at moving targets”.

By noon the Leibstandarte’s 2nd SS Panzergrenadier Regiment had recaptured Hill 252.2 and the Oktiabrskiy state farm. According to Valeriy Zamulin’s most recent estimate, on 12 July the Soviet 29th Tank Corps alone lost 102 tanks and assault guns as write-offs (60 T-34s, 31 T-70s, eight SU-122s, three SU-76s). After reviewing the



A soldier of the 2nd SS Panzergrenadier Regiment liaises with a crew member from the Leibstandarte 5th Panzer Company



A member of the 2nd SS Panzergrenadier Regiment operates a MG 42 in the infantry trench system on Hill 252.2, 11 July.



A huge explosion looms on the horizon, contributing to the already menacing view of Hill 252.2 from the anti-tank ditch

“THE TWO COMPANIES OF PANZER IVs WOULD NORMALLY HAVE STOOD NO CHANCE OF STOPPING THE SOVIET AVALANCHE OF STEEL. HOWEVER, NOW IT WAS SIMPLY ‘TARGET PRACTICE AT MOVING TARGETS’”

By 14:10 the final Soviet positions on Hill 252.2 had been overcome. In this picture a Leibstandarte Pz IV on Hill 252.2’s summit supports the SPW battalion’s subsequent abortive probing attack towards Hill 252.4

available Soviet records, it is the author's calculation that between 12 and 16 July the 29th Tank Corps lost 132 of its 250 tanks and assault guns as write-offs (83 T-34s, 37 T-70s, one KV-1, eight SU-122s, three SU-76s). The vast majority of these losses unquestionably would have occurred on 12 July.

In addition to Luftwaffe pictures of the battlefield we are extremely fortunate to have remarkable post-battle pictures taken from a Soviet aircraft flying low over the Prokhorovka battlefield. These pictures were kindly passed to the author by Valeriy Zamulin and can be found in his excellent 2015 book *The Battle of Kursk 1943: The View through the Camera Lens*.

In the foreground of one the images we can clearly see a destroyed Leibstandarte Panzer IV. The tank was lost just behind the diagonal running dirt track that stretches from the Belgorod-Prokhorovka road/railway crossing to the Oktiabrskiy state farm. Close by, a destroyed Soviet T-34 is seen behind an infantry trench. This site is just on the crest of Hill 252.2 and can easily be found in the Luftwaffe pictures of 16 July and 7 August.

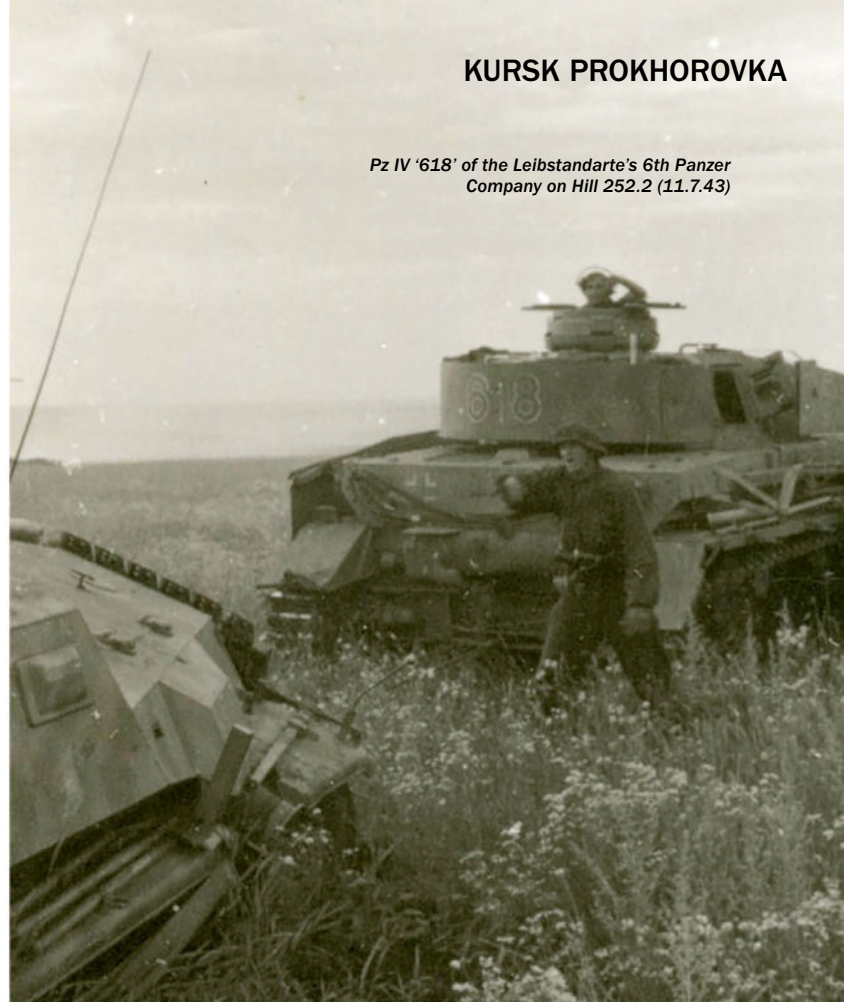
Given that the Panzer IV is located close to Hill 252.2's crest (from the Germans' point of view) it is likely that this Panzer IV saw combat slightly later than Ribbentrop's leading panzers and as a result it was probably the third and final Leibstandarte Panzer IV lost on the morning of 12 July. It is also likely that the destroyed Panzer IV was '615', commanded by Obersturmführer Malchow. According to the testimony of '615's loader, Walter Kettle, the tank was hit, caught fire and after being abandoned exploded. Kettle implies that his tank (unlike the lead Panzer IVs) did not open fire on the first group of Soviet tanks that had attempted to outflank Ribbentrop's leading tanks.

Kettle stated that Malchow instead merely counted the flanking Soviet tanks through his binoculars. Clearly, Malchow's tank was not among the lead Panzer IVs that day; if '615' had been at the forefront of the action on 12 July then it would have also engaged the flanking Soviet tanks. This raises the probability that the destroyed Panzer IV captured on camera by the low-flying Soviet aircraft was indeed Panzer IV '615'; its location away from the undulating terrain (the first point of engagement) mentioned by Ribbentrop supports this view.

Another photo from the Soviet flight was taken slightly closer to the parallel road that separates the two fields in front of the anti-tank ditch; a destroyed Leibstandarte SPW is particularly prominent on the right of the picture. The destruction caused to the 29th Tank Corps armour in the fields in front of the anti-tank ditch is clearly visible in these photographs (the author has highlighted some of the more obvious wrecks in a 7 August Luftwaffe reconnaissance picture, p29). Later armoured wrecks from across the battlefield were dragged to a railway spur on the outskirts of Prokhorovka (images of this railway spur, with over 100 armoured wrecks visible, can be found in the author's new book *The Panzers of Prokhorovka*).

The disproportionately high number of Soviet armoured losses (as many as 246 AFV during the battle and its immediate aftermath) did not, however, equate to a Soviet defeat at Prokhorovka. On two occasions (11 and 13 July) the German attackers simply had no answer to the extremely powerful Soviet defences that had been installed to protect Prokhorovka. These defences included a formidable artillery capability and an impenetrable anti-tank screen. The Soviets also maintained a high number of operational tanks; even after the battle the 5th Guards Tank Army still possessed over 650 AFV. As a result of these realities the Germans, having failed to obtain flanking support, had no hope of continuing their advance on the Prokhorovka axis. Even though this victory may not be the one of legend, the Soviet soldiers who fought so courageously against Nazism at Prokhorovka still deserve our deepest respect and gratitude for their victory.

Pz IV '618' of the Leibstandarte's 6th Panzer Company on Hill 252.2 (11.7.43)



WIN A COPY OF THE PANZERS OF PROKHOROVKA

Dr Ben Wheatley's new book lifts the lid on some of the biggest myths and misconceptions at the epicentre of the Battle of Kursk. Including previously unpublished photographs of the battlefield, Dr Wheatley's book reveals that although the clash at Prokhorovka was a setback for the Nazi offensive, it was far from a crushing blow, and came at a heavy cost for the Red Army. *History of War* readers can win one of three copies of *The Panzers of Prokhorovka* (Osprey Publishing).

For your chance to win a copy, please visit www.historyanswers.co.uk or scan here:



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SUPER SPREADERS

IN THE TRENCHES

During the latter period of WWI, infection and disease were a universal enemy on both sides of no man's land. Vaccination and prevention methods became essential for survival, never mind victory, on the frontline

WORDS DR PENNY STARNES



Austro-Hungarian troops receive vaccinations in the Galicia region, central-eastern Europe, in 1915

At the turn of the 20th century the basics of epidemiology, vaccine development, infection control and aseptic techniques were incorporated into scientific endeavour and medical practice. However, nobody had yet coined the term 'super-spreader' or referred to large gatherings as 'super-spreader' events. Infection control and quarantine measures relied on observing certain signs and symptoms of illness and isolating sufferers from those who were healthy, and there was no recognition that certain people could be carriers of disease without displaying any of the usual manifestations of infection.

Such asymptomatic carriers were responsible for unknowingly transmitting disease among their families, communities and further afield. The most famous of these super-spreaders was an Irish cook named Mary Mallon, who as

a carrier of typhoid (also known as enteric fever), became widely known as Typhoid Mary. Working for wealthy families in an affluent area of New York, Mary's most popular dish was a serving of peach ice cream, but standards of kitchen hygiene were lax and her signature dessert rapidly spread typhoid wherever she went.

Since the disease was more usually associated with poor sanitation and contaminated water in New York's deprived areas, doctors began to look for other causes of transmission. One family went a step further and employed a sanitation engineer named George Soper to investigate the issue. Eventually a pattern of infection was established which implicated Mallon. This feisty cook, however, was unconvinced of her super-spreader status.

It took several attempts and the strong arm of the law to force Mallon to cooperate with doctors, and in 1907 she was sent to an



Above: German soldiers are inoculated, c.1915. Infectious diseases spread like wildfire in the unsanitary conditions of WWI

isolated quarantine facility on North Brother Island, located in New York's East River. Other inhabitants included smallpox victims and those suffering from tuberculosis. Following a string of pleading letters to her lawyers, and the assistance of the now infamous newspaper publisher William Randolph Hearst, Mallon won her freedom.

In-depth studies of typhoid super-spreaders alarmingly revealed that in addition to those carrying the salmonella typhi without symptoms, three per cent of sufferers were able to transmit typhoid through their urine and faeces following their recovery. This issue represented a huge problem for civilian public health authorities and military officials attempting to contain or eradicate the disease. Within the Tropics, the US and India, carriers were extremely common, and tackling the problem was not straightforward. Research undertaken by German bacteriologists revealed that middle-aged women were more likely to become chronic carriers, while a greater proportion of younger men and women were proven to be temporary carriers. To compound matters, some were found to be intermittent carriers. The level of virulence in transmission was also open to question.

Writing of his experience and research conducted at the Naini Tal Enteric Depot in India, Major Harvey of the Royal Army Medical Corps highlighted this issue: "Typhoid fever broke out in a household of eight in [the] family; the mother and three children were brought to hospital having been nursed up to that time by the grandmother, aged 61. Typhoid bacilli were recovered from the faeces of the grandmother on May 8th, and eight days later she developed the fever. Is it not possible that the grandmother was a chronic carrier, that she had infected the others, and had herself become reinfected by her own bacillus enhanced in virulence by its passage through the more susceptible persons?"

The Naini Tal Enteric Depot was a military innovation and a precursor for the use of mobile bacteriology units. Staff screened recovering typhoid victims to ensure that the bacillus was not lurking in their excreta and urine before they were allowed to resume their normal lives.

Yet regardless of detailed research and abundant evidence of super-spreader incidences, senior military officials were initially doubtful of the carrier theory. Major Harvey, however, was relentless in his efforts

"CHURCHILL WAS NOT ALONE IN FAILING TO RECOGNISE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TYPHOID VACCINES"

to convince them otherwise: "The carrier in civil life is certainly not the danger to the community that infected persons are in the Army; indeed, carrier infection is peculiarly a military institution. In India, at least, sanitary conditions are primitive compared to the sanitary conditions at home, and it must be remembered that only a few years ago, and in some cases still, the private soldier was not a very cleanly person. It is common enough to see on the walls of latrines marks of faecally contaminated fingers; the meaning of this will be better understood when it is realised that there is no issue of latrine paper to soldiers, and, indeed, many of the men come from a class not habituated to its uses. Again, there are no facilities for washing of hands in or near latrines. In one station, where an attempt was made to provide soap and towel for this purpose, these were stolen with the greatest regularity within a few hours of being issued."

Eventually statistics proving the existence of typhoid carriers became irrefutable. Consequently, military commanders, faced with the prospect that many of their men working in cook houses or food distribution centres could potentially be a super-spreader, advocated compulsory vaccination.

Anti-typhoid vaccines had been developed by German scientists Richard Pfeiffer and Wilhelm Kolle in 1896 and two years later a German typhoid eradication policy had revealed that carriers were a common problem. In 1905 Germany inoculated civilians and troops in their West African territories with their home-grown vaccine.

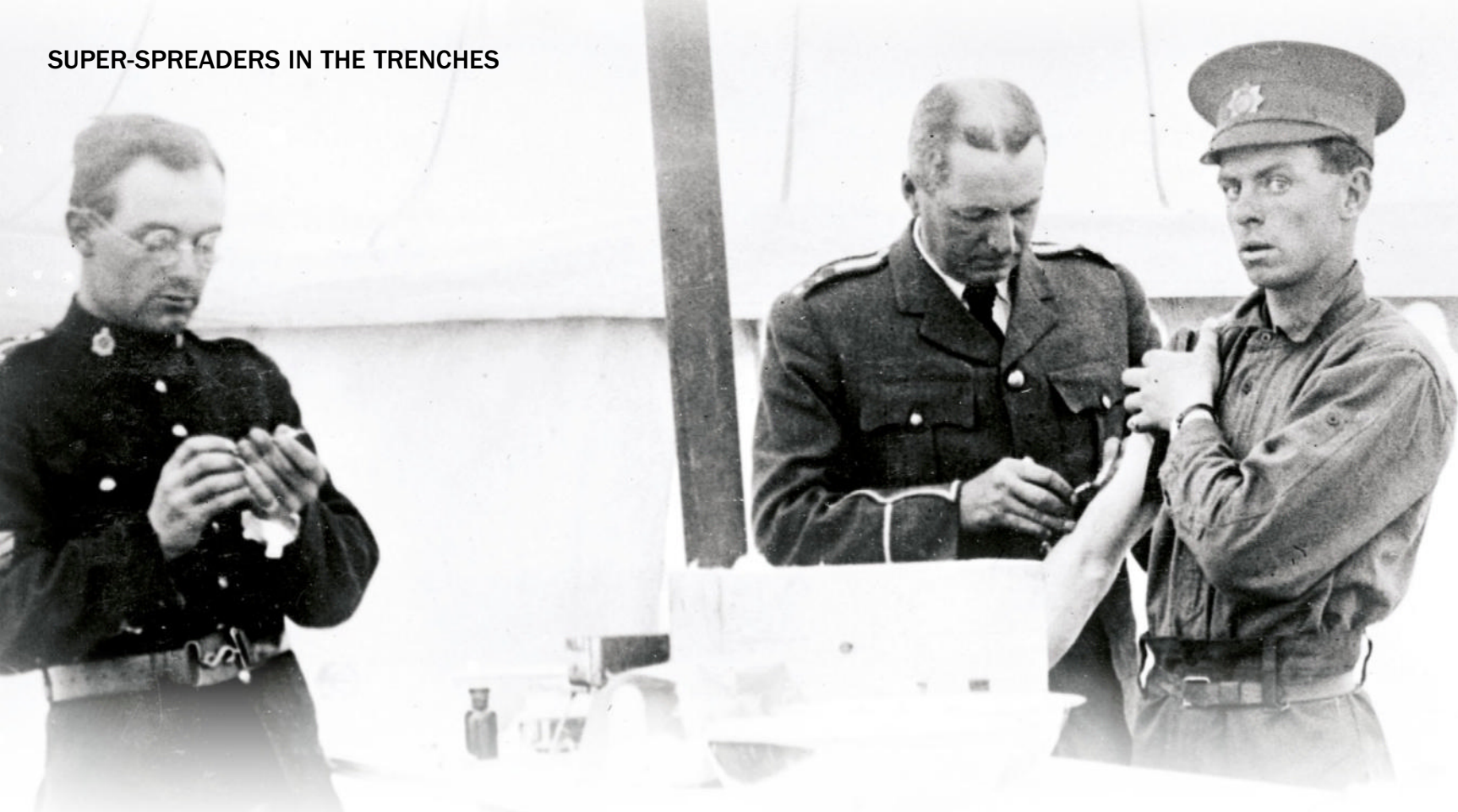
Meanwhile, British pathologist Almroth Wright, working at the same time as his German counterparts, developed his own vaccine, trialled by volunteer surgeons at Netley in Hampshire. In 1897 his research, which stressed the importance of administering anti-typhoid vaccine in areas where the disease had reached epidemic proportions, was published in the *British Medical Journal (BMJ)*. Unfortunately, Wright's later research methodology was seriously flawed because his statistics were skewed by inaccurate record keeping. Use of his vaccine in South Africa also demonstrated that doses varied in potency and efficacy. This was partly because sufferers of typhoid and paratyphoid (plus different strains, A & B of the latter illness) displayed the same symptoms, but the vaccine was only effective against the former. In addition, there were problems associated with temperature and storage.

A youthful but sceptical Winston Churchill journeying to South Africa in 1899 described the vaccination programme aboard ship: "Inoculation against enteric fever proceeds daily. The doctors lecture in the saloon. One injection of serum protects; a second secures the subject from attack. Wonderful statistics are quoted in support of the experiment. Nearly everyone is convinced. The operations take place forthwith, and the next day sees haggard forms crawling about the deck in extreme discomfort with high fever. The day after, however, all have recovered and rise gloriously immune. Others, like myself, remembering that we stand only on the threshold of pathology, remain unconvinced, resolved to trust to health and the laws of health."

Churchill was not alone in failing to recognise the potential benefits of typhoid vaccines; anti-vaccination groups were on the ascendancy in Europe and the US, gleefully pointing out that, despite administering vaccines, 8,000 British troops had died during the Boer War.



Ampoules of paratyphoid A and B serum, typhoid serum, streptococcus serum and dysentery vaccine made by Laboratoire de Sérothérapie de l'Armée



A Canadian soldier is vaccinated at Canadian Forces Base Valcartier in Quebec during WWI

VACCINATE FOR VICTORY

Undoubtedly Wright's vaccine needed considerable adjustment and improvement, and in 1903 a Glaswegian professor of pathology named William Boog Leishman set about this task with vigour. Three years later, Arnold Netter, a French bacteriologist writing with authority for the *BMJ*, endorsed both German and British vaccines as suitable prophylaxis in the fight against typhoid.

European armies introduced vaccination programmes for their troops, especially for those stationed in colonial garrisons where typhoid was rife. In 1911 anti-typhoid vaccination was made compulsory for all US Army personnel aged 45 and under; the US Navy followed suit in 1912. With the threat of war on the horizon, French government officials introduced compulsory anti-typhoid vaccination for all members of the French Army in early 1914.

The British government, however, did not follow this trend, even in the face of considerable political and medical pressure. Professor of medicine, Sir William Osler, for instance, issued a timely reminder in a letter to *The Times*, pointing out that in war the microbe kills more than the bullet.

Leishman went one step further, arguing that sending a man to the front without vaccination was almost the equivalent of murder. But these impassioned pleas did not sway government officials. British liberalism was averse to mandatory vaccination policies, in part because military recruitment levels might suffer as

a result. Although within Britain, infused as it was with jingoistic militarism, most soldiers volunteered to be vaccinated, especially once Lord Kitchener made this procedure a prerequisite for fighting on the frontline.

In a bid to combat vaccination resistance, a targeted propaganda campaign branded all anti-vaccination groups as unpatriotic. By the end of 1915 over 90 percent of British troops were inoculated against typhoid, and in 1916 extra protection was conferred against paratyphoid A & B strains. Combined with strict hygiene measures and carrier screening, British inoculation programmes were a huge success.

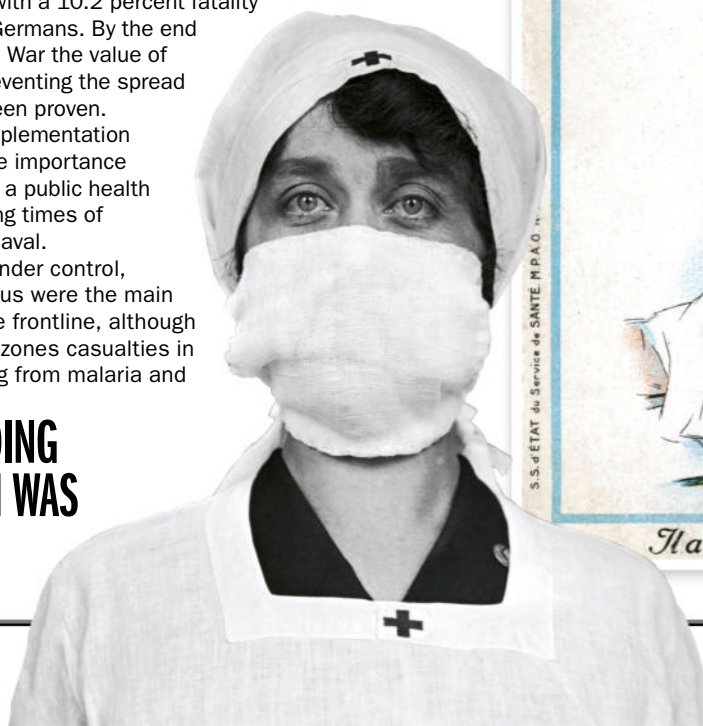
Over the course of the war there were 7,000 British cases with a fatality rate of 3.8 percent, compared with 125,000 cases and a 12.2 percent fatality rate among the French, and 112,400 cases with a 10.2 percent fatality rate among the Germans. By the end of the First World War the value of inoculation in preventing the spread of typhoid had been proven. Its successful implementation demonstrates the importance of vaccination as a public health intervention during times of conflict and upheaval.

With typhoid under control, cholera and typhus were the main epidemics on the frontline, although in some combat zones casualties in hospital suffering from malaria and

other tropical diseases far outnumbered the wounded. Rapid demographic changes, new weapons technology, a dramatic collapse in hygiene standards and the sheer magnitude of numbers involved in the First World War also emphasised its role as a super-spreader of disease. In addition to overcrowding, and the inter-mingling of nationalities, geographical and environmental influences largely dictated the transmission of viral, bacterial and parasitic infections.

The heavily manured fields and trenches of the Western Front were swamped with

A Red Cross nurse in the US wears a face mask during the flu epidemic, c.1918



“PROFESSOR LEISHMAN ARGUED THAT SENDING A MAN TO THE FRONT WITHOUT VACCINATION WAS ALMOST THE EQUIVALENT OF MURDER”

A labour battalion drains marshes in Salonika in the battle against malaria, 1917



British troops at Salonika receive their daily ration of the anti-malarial drug quinine, 1916



French soldiers in WWI were constantly reminded of the importance of taking quinine



anaerobic bacillus which caused gas gangrene, and also harboured clostridium tetani, otherwise known as tetanus or lockjaw. Highly explosive shell fire ensured that combat wounds were forcefully impregnated with both. Swift amputations sometimes saved the lives of gas gangrene victims, but often soldiers still died of the toxic effects of the bacillus.

Prevention of deaths from tetanus, meanwhile, relied on the administration of anti-toxin serum produced from horses. Increasing amounts of toxins were given to horses to stimulate their production of anti-toxins, these were then harvested by bleeding the horses and obtaining serum from their blood. The serum was usually administered on the battlefield and medics marked the forehead of their wounded with a capital 'T' to indicate recipients of the treatment. Thousands of soldiers' lives were saved by this process, but hundreds also lost their lives because they developed a severe reaction to the serum.

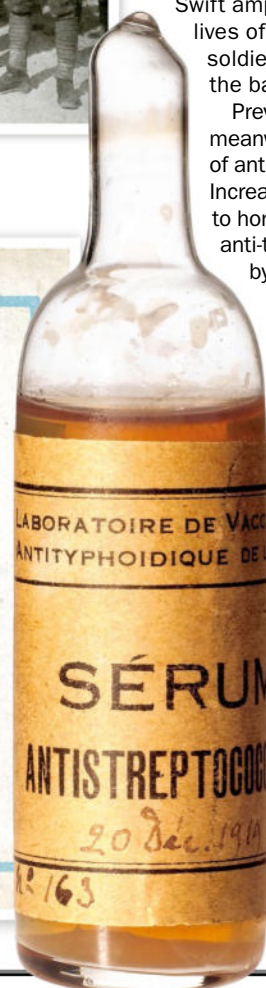
In warmer theatres of conflict such as Salonika, Mesopotamia, Italy, Greece, Palestine and East Africa malaria was rife, and it was estimated that millions of combatants suffered with the anopheline mosquito borne disease. An ancient, parasitic infection (plasmodium

falciparum) which popularised the drinking of gin and tonic in the colonies, malaria was treated with quinine.

This natural cinchona alkaloid worked by interfering with the growth and reproduction of malarial parasites within red blood cells. Troop dispersals and the chaos of war increased malaria transmission and infected civilian populations when soldiers returned home on leave. Russia, wracked by social upheaval in 1917, compounded by a post-war famine, experienced one of the worst malaria epidemics on record.

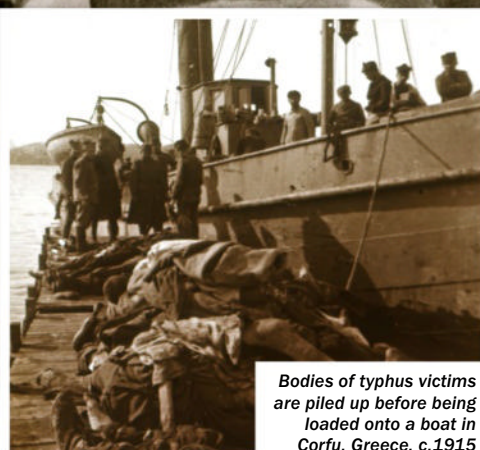
Nobel prize winner Sir Ronald Ross, who had conducted extensive research into the transmission, prevention and treatment of the disease, developed a 'mosquito theorem.' He started by outlining the main processes that influenced transmission. Using his knowledge of malaria, he specified how people became infected, how they infected others, and how quickly they recovered. He summarised this conceptual model of transmission using mathematical equations, which he then analysed to make conclusions about likely outbreak patterns. Because his analysis included specific assumptions about the transmission process, Ross could tweak these assumptions to see what might happen if the situation changed. What effect might mosquito reduction have? How quickly would the disease disappear if transmission declined? Ross's approach meant he could look forward and ask 'what if?' rather than just searching for patterns in existing data. He showed how to examine epidemics in a dynamic way, treating them as a series of interacting processes rather than a set of static patterns.

In the world of science and medicine this new approach to outbreak analysis had fundamental and far-reaching consequences.



An ampoule of streptococcus serum, 1919. WWI saw an increased understanding of how to treat disease

German soldiers line up to get vaccinations against cholera, c.1915



Bodies of typhus victims are piled up before being loaded onto a boat in Corfu, Greece, c.1915



Workers at the US Army Medical School prepare a shipment of typhoid vaccines, 1917

TRENCH FEVER

The First World War as a super-spreading event not only increased transmission of well-known diseases, it also ensured that conditions were ripe for the emergence of new infections. In 1915 military doctors on the Western Front became perplexed by patients who were suffering from a new, unfathomable illness. These patients displayed a wide variety of symptoms, including fever, rashes, headaches, dizziness, excruciating pain behind the eyes and severe weakness, accompanied by sore muscles, joint, back and shin pain. Initially diagnosed as PUO (pyrexia of unknown origin), the illness affected Allied forces and those of the Central Powers. There were at least 800,000 cases within Allied troops on the Western Front, eventually accounting for one-fifth of field hospital admissions.

Characterised by a sudden onset of symptoms, this illness, which became known as Trench Fever, had a long incubation period. Transmitted by the faeces of body lice in overcrowded, rat-infested trenches, this infectious disease

rendered each victim unfit for duty for more than 60 days. Proving that lice were responsible for spreading this disease sparked considerable controversy, with both American and British pathologists arguing for months at a time over inconclusive laboratory experiments.

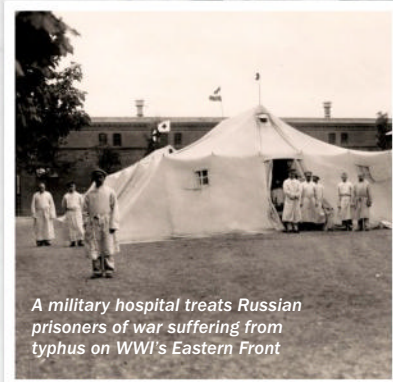
There were those who argued that atmospheric environments in trenches caused fever, while others believed the illness to be a form of enteric fever. Hampered by

“IN SOME COMBAT ZONES CASUALTIES IN HOSPITAL SUFFERING FROM MALARIA AND OTHER TROPICAL DISEASES FAR OUTNUMBERED THE WOUNDED”

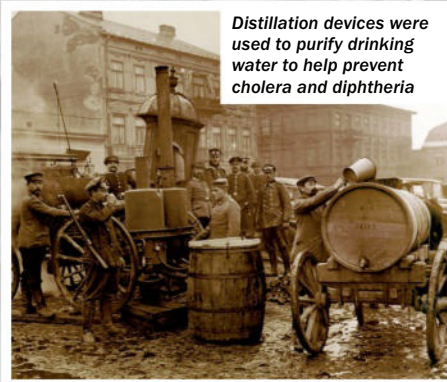
incessant debates, the faeces of body lice as transmission vector were not identified until 1916 and Trench Fever was not officially recognised as a clinical syndrome by the British War Office until late 1917. By then, the disease had become a major problem for military commanders because there was no effective treatment and the fever was often unpredictable and recurrent.

In some cases, Trench Fever affected the lining of the heart, causing fatal endocarditis. Preventative measures were implemented in the form of more frequent washing and changes of clothes, but since this new hygiene regime only aimed to wash every soldier at least once a fortnight, there was plenty of time for lice to spread disease. Unlike malaria, however, this disease was not transmitted to civilian populations in Britain because disinfection stations were established on demobilisation. Elsewhere, Trench Fever continued to be a problem and was identified in post-war Germany, Poland and Russia.

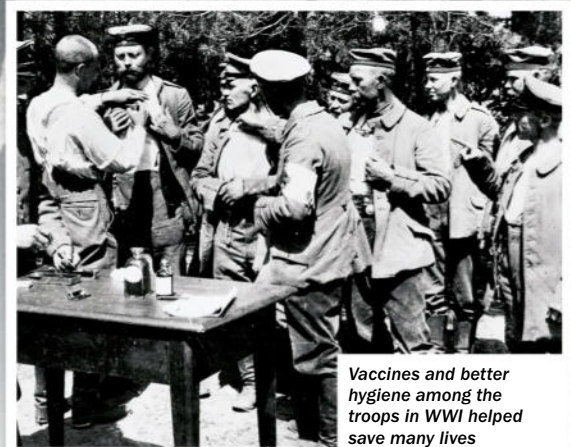
A nurse demonstrates a face mask on a British soldier during the influenza epidemic, c.1918



A military hospital treats Russian prisoners of war suffering from typhus on WWI's Eastern Front



Distillation devices were used to purify drinking water to help prevent cholera and diphtheria



Vaccines and better hygiene among the troops in WWI helped save many lives

1918 INFLUENZA PANDEMIC

Just as the Great War was drawing to a close, and Allied forces were winning battles on the Western Front, a significant battle was being lost on the medical front. A virulent strain of influenza, which had infected many troops the year before, had mutated and returned with a vengeance. Battle-weary, debilitated troops stood no chance against this extremely severe and highly infectious disease, which caused the death of 20 million people in the first six months of the outbreak.

On the British home front, by the end of October 1918 an average of 4,500 people were dying from flu every week. Strangely, this strain of flu virus targeted those between the ages of 18 and 35. It spread rapidly among troops of all nations and in all those who cared for the wounded. Rows upon rows of bodies piled up outside mortuary blocks, and casualty clearing stations were overrun with flu victims. Previously strong, healthy men were brought to their knees by the virus, and the onset was sudden and overpowering. Symptoms

included severe headaches, high temperatures, stomach pains and delirium. Within a matter of days patients usually developed pneumonia and died. Medical and nursing staff could do nothing to prevent these deaths.

Nurses kept sufferers as comfortable as possible, administered fluids and sometimes used inhalations to ease congested lungs. Cupping was occasionally helpful. This involved the heating of glass cups containing an alcohol-soaked wick. The wicks were set alight to heat the cups, which were then quickly placed of the back of the chest, held in place by suction. This procedure successfully relieved severe congestion but ultimately recovery was dependent on individual immune systems.

Fearful of lowering morale on the battlefields and home fronts, military officials from all combatant nations desperately tried to hide the unfolding influenza catastrophe. Press reports were heavily censored in Britain and France, and aside from a few low-key rumours the public had little knowledge of the tragedy

until neutral Spain first reported the extent of the crisis. As a result, the virus became known as Spanish Flu – not because the first cases originated in Spain, but simply because Spanish journalists were unhindered by censorship and able to publish exact death rates. Spain was unfairly tarnished in this respect, and most historians of medicine believe the virus is likely to have originated in the Far East, having mutated from animals to birds and then to humans.

Between 1918 and 1920 over 500 million people were infected with influenza and over 50 million died. As troops were demobilised following the Armistice of 11 November 1918, case numbers rocketed and the deadly virus spread like an uncontrollable wildfire across the world. This disastrous pandemic confirmed the super-spreader status of major conflicts, highlighted the limits of scientific knowledge, and signalled a desperate need for international cooperation in the fight against disease.



Heroes of the Victoria Cross

JOHNSON BEHARRY

Two acts of valour from this young private saved the lives of his comrades in the narrow streets of Al Amarah, Iraq

WORDS JACKSON VAN UDEN

Johnson Beharry did not have an easy life growing up. Born in 1979 in Grenada, then recently independent from British rule, the Beharry family lived in poverty. During the early days of the post-independence, Marxist-Leninist regime, the young Beharry had to walk three miles (5km) to school barefoot. This difficult start to life set Beharry on his journey to joining the British Army as he saved up enough money to move to the UK when he was 20. Yet he would not join the army immediately after arriving in West London; instead, he continued to work as a labourer on building sites, as he had done in Grenada since he was just 13.

While living in the UK, Beharry almost became caught up with West London gangs, but in August 2001 enlisted and joined the Princess of Wales' Royal Regiment. Just a month later, the attack on the World Trade Center in New York would set world events in motion that would soon lead Beharry to war.

During training, Beharry qualified as a Warrior Infantry Fighting Vehicle driver. While serving in the coalition counter-insurgency in Iraq, his training would eventually enable him to not only save his own life but also the lives of those serving around him on two separate occasions, leading to him being awarded the



Above: Beharry was driving a Warrior Infantry Fighting Vehicle during the two ambushes in Al Amarah that later saw him receive the Victoria Cross

Victoria Cross for "two individual acts of great heroism". According to Beharry, one of the acts he can recall, and the other he cannot.

His first act occurred in the early hours of 1 May 2004, in the dark streets around Al Amarah in south-east Iraq. Beharry had been assigned to be part of the Quick Reaction Force and its duty was to be on hand to provide support and help for the patrol that was operating on foot in the city. His commander had decided to set up their vehicle unit halfway between the patrol in the city and camp to allow for quick deployment.

Al Amarah had been an anti-Saddam Hussein stronghold during his premiership, but in 2003 the city turned against the British Army that had previously supported them. Militias and various forces from the city attacked British patrols at every opportunity, making this a dangerous place for Beharry's comrades. After only 12 minutes of waiting at the checkpoint, Beharry's company received a call for help. At the head of his unit, Beharry drove toward the city with the assistance of his commander, who was in the Warrior with him and helped him navigate through the streets – providing an alternative route for the convoy when the route was blocked.

Suddenly, the roar of an explosion bellowed its way through Beharry's vehicle. He called

*Johnson Beharry posing with
his Victoria Cross medal*

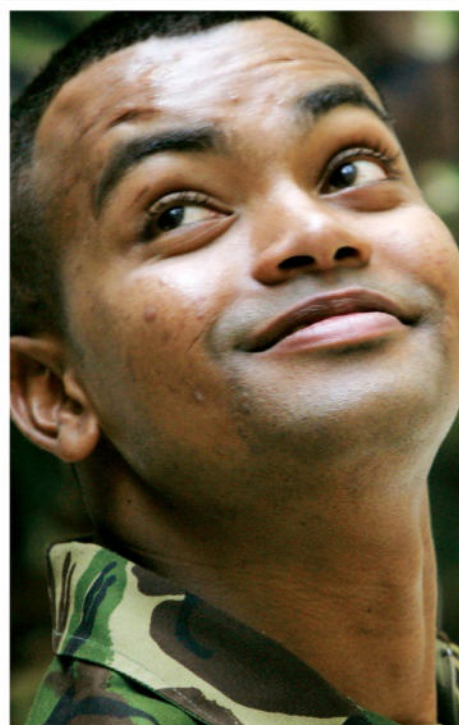




Beharry at the unveiling of his portrait that hangs at the National Portrait Gallery, 2007

to his commander: no reply. He crept his vehicle forward, unsure if he had been hit. Another explosion rocked the vehicle. Another unanswered call to his commander. Beharry realised that their Warrior had been hit and was on fire, and that they were in the middle of an ambush from the rooftops of nearby buildings as bullets, rockets, grenades and shrapnel flew around and into his vehicle. He said to himself "I'm not going to die!" and then thought of his convoy: "I can't leave the guys behind because the guys will die." Mustering up the courage, Beharry saw an exit route which lay behind a wall. He drove his battered Warrior through the wall and into the streets on the other side.

Yet he was not presented with a route to freedom as he'd believed, instead he was presented with a choice. In front of him, in the middle of the street, lay a landmine. He realised that if he drove over the mine there was a 50% chance he would die, and a 50% chance he would survive to help his comrades. Whereas if he left them in the ambush, they would all die. On fire, isolated and wounded, Beharry drove his Warrior over the mine. Bracing for death, he instead heard loud explosions as his Warrior powered onward through the streets of Al Amarah, deeper into the kill zone.



Above: Beharry shortly after being awarded the Victoria Cross in 2005 for his acts of bravery in Iraq

He finally found the rest of his company as they made their way to a safe point. As they came to a stop, he called for help, but no help came to him in his burning Warrior. He then continued on and, as his Victoria Cross citation recounted, "without thought for his own personal safety" climbed out of his fiery Warrior. "Seemingly oblivious to the incoming enemy small arms fire" he repeatedly climbed back into and onto his Warrior as he "manhandled his wounded platoon commander out of the turret, off the vehicle and to the safety of a nearby Warrior" and carried the rest of his team to safety.

Once again putting duty above his own safety, Beharry sought to save his 'pride and joy' as he attempted to drive his Warrior to safety. When it became apparent to him that he could not save the vehicle, he quickly set about immobilising and disabling it to ensure that British Intelligence and property did not fall into the hands of the enemy, before escaping in the back of another Warrior. During this first valiant action, Beharry saved the lives of 30 men while narrowly avoiding losing his own. The next day one of his commanding officers told him: "What you did yesterday was outstanding."

Heat stroke, an injured spine and a graze from a bullet on his scalp didn't stop Beharry



Beharry with
his comrades –
Lieutenant Colonel
Matt Maer is top-left

from carrying on with his duties, and on 11 June 2004, only six weeks later, he once again found himself as the lead driver of a Quick Reaction Force of four in the deadly streets of Al Amarah. However, this time Beharry and his comrades were briefed on the location of their enemy, and they believed that they were going to hunt down and cut off a mortar team that had been attacking Coalition forces.

However, once again Beharry and his men drove into another ambush, being immediately greeted by a loud chorus of gunfire and rocket explosions emanating from the surrounding rooftops. Commenting on the ambush, he later jokingly said in an interview: "I must point out I don't like driving into an ambush because it's not nice!" During the relentless battering of his vehicle, Beharry had another close encounter with death as a rocket exploded inches away from his head, severely injuring him and incapacitating his crew.

Lieutenant Colonel Matt Maer later recalled: "Had it not been for the fact that Beharry is tall and preferred to lean back in his seat while driving he would've almost certainly been killed outright." With his face severely injured and blood blinding him as it poured down his face and into his eyes,

"DURING THIS FIRST VALIANT ACTION, BEHARRY SAVED THE LIVES OF 30 MEN WHILE NARROWLY AVOIDING LOSING HIS OWN. ONE OF HIS COMMANDING OFFICERS THE NEXT DAY TOLD BEHARRY 'WHAT YOU DID YESTERDAY WAS OUTSTANDING'"

Beharry was able to throw his Warrior into reverse – a feat he achieved under immense pressure and that he has no recollection of – and drove himself and his crew out of the kill zone, with his Warrior coming to rest against a wall as he fell unconscious. Beharry and the crew were quickly extracted and treated for their wounds. Maer recalled

a conversation with a doctor who confirmed to him that Beharry had suffered a severe brain injury, a crushed forehead, damage to his eye sockets and a burst right frontal lobe. Beharry himself recalls that he had a 1% chance of survival. Despite these injuries, his actions undoubtedly saved the lives of countless men.

While he admits he can't quite remember the six weeks between the two incidents, or the second incident at all, Johnson Beharry VC is still one of the most inspiring heroes of the Victoria Cross, and his citation commends his display of "repeated extreme gallantry and unquestioned valour, despite intense direct attacks, personal injury and damage to his vehicle in the face of relentless enemy action".

In the years following his service in Iraq, Beharry created the Johnson Beharry VC Foundation, which helps young people leave street gangs and develop careers – young people who are in the same vulnerable position Beharry was in before he joined the British Army. Beharry's charity work, as well as his inspiring story on the frontline, has made him a hero not only the United Kingdom but also in his homeland of Grenada, where he received the Companion of the Order of Grenada in 2017.

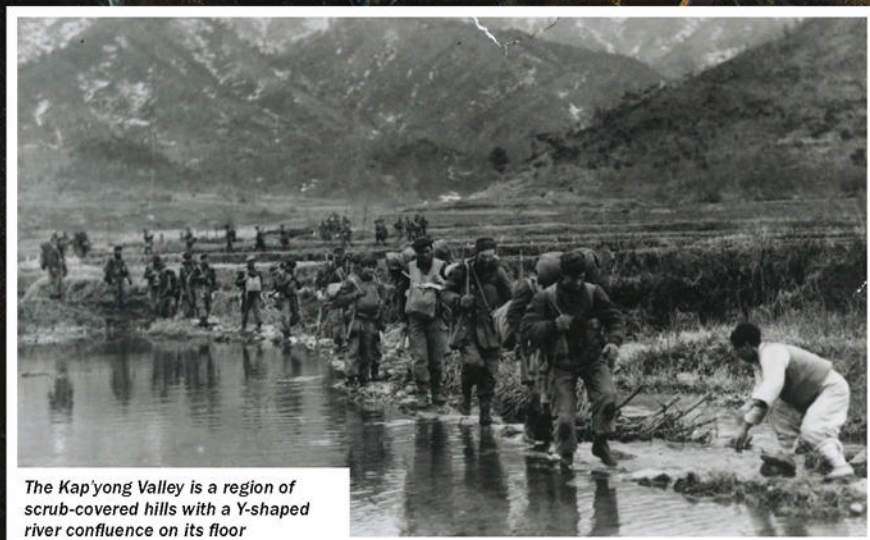
THE KAP'YONG VALLEY, SOUTH KOREA 22-25 APRIL 1951

Great Battles

KAP'YONG

During the Korean War, in April 1951, amid a renewed Chinese offensive, a UN force consisting largely of Australian and Canadian troops fought off repeated enemy assaults

WORDS ALEX BOWERS



The Kap'yong Valley is a region of scrub-covered hills with a Y-shaped river confluence on its floor

On 25 June 1950, approximately 135,000 troops from the North Korean People's Army (NKPA) advanced across the 38th parallel, and for months the conflict with the Republic of Korea (ROK) and its allies ebbed and flowed. Rolling southwards, the NKPA overwhelmed the ROK defenders and allied counterparts, before pushing them into a small perimeter around the southern port of Pusan. The tide then changed in the UN's favour when on 15 September 1950 an amphibious landing far up the west coast at the port of Inchon enabled the recapture of Seoul and advances into North Korea itself.

Unfortunately, doing so brought China into the conflict, with the People's Volunteer Army (PVA) crossing the Yalu River that constituted the Chinese-North Korean border, to threaten the UN's hard-fought gains. Control of the South Korean capital switched between the United Nations and the communists in see-sawing engagements through to the end of the year.

Early 1951 brought little respite to the ever-shifting front lines, although once more it was UN Command's turn to strike. In February, a counteroffensive dubbed Operation Killer – immediately followed by the codenamed Operation Ripper in March – was launched to push the PVA back north. The Chinese retreated and regrouped but were far from defeated. They were now intent on a bold spring offensive, the plans of which came to a head on 22 April 1951 with a campaign hellbent on again seizing Seoul.

In the Kap'yong Valley, a region of scrub-covered hills and a Y-shaped river confluence on its floor, was the 27th British Commonwealth Infantry Brigade (27 BCIB) in reserve. This multinational formation – commanded by Brigadier Brian Arthur Burke – consisted of the 2nd Battalion of the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry (2 PPCLI), the 3rd Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment (3 RAR), the 1st Battalion of the Middlesex Regiment (a British unit), the 1st Battalion of the Argyll and Sutherland

Highlanders (also a British unit), the 16th Field Regiment Royal New Zealand Artillery, and the 60th Indian Field Ambulance. Serving in IX Corps, US Eighth Army, most of these men were positioned behind the 6th ROK Division that in turn was located to the north and tasked with holding the line. In the Australian base, preparations were underway to commemorate the upcoming Anzac Day (25 April) with their New Zealand comrades and representatives from the Turkish Brigade. Old friends and former-enemies-turned-allies had hoped to recognise the 36th anniversary of the disastrous Gallipoli landings during the First World War. Unknown to them at that stage, another potential catastrophe loomed without 27 BCIB's imminent intervention.

Witnessing a rout

While Anzac troops arranged a service to remember old sacrifices on a Turkish peninsula thousands of miles away, over 200,000 PVA and NKPA soldiers launched their Fifth Phase Offensive against the western and west-

"THE CHINESE HAD RETREATED AND REGROUPED BUT WERE FAR FROM DEFEATED"

While Ted Zuber's *Contact* depicts the 23-24 October 1952 Canadian defence of Hill 355, it offers an insight into the chaos of battle experienced at Kap'yong

OPPOSING FORCES



**UNITED
NATIONS
COMMAND**

COMMANDER
Brigadier Brian
Arthur Burke

TROOPS
c.2,000

VS



**CHINESE
PEOPLE'S
VOLUNTEER
ARMY**

COMMANDER
Peng
Dehuai

TROOPS
c.6,000

central parts of the UN front near the Korean peninsula's 38th parallel. In the latter area – the Kap'Yong Valley – the Chinese 118th and 60th Divisions thrust themselves against the South Koreans from 2000 hours on 22 April.

Despite support from the 16th New Zealand Artillery, the 6th ROK Division's tentatively held perimeter was infiltrated by the Chinese, leading to a breakdown of communications close to midnight. South Korean defenders started abandoning their posts as they dropped their weapons and discarded their equipment in a panicked retreat. Concurrently, with the fleeing South Koreans pouring back southwards over the next day, 27 BCIB's Burke had received orders to establish new defensive positions and from there stem the flow of the determined Chinese attack. The British commander instructed the Royal Australian Regiment – assisted by armour from the US 72nd Heavy Tank Battalion – to dig in on the peak and forward slopes of Hill 504 to the east of the Kap'Yong River. He likewise sent the PPCLI to occupy Hill 677 to the west. The Kiwi gunners, who were being repeatedly moved back and forth in the ebb and flow of battle, would be made ready with their artillery, and the available British contingent was placed in reserve.

Elsewhere along the UN's line, the situation was descending from bad to worse. Several miles to the left of 27 BCIB was the British Army's beleaguered 1st Battalion of the Gloucestershire Regiment fighting at the Imjin River – a fierce engagement on Hill 235 that would become known as Gloster Hill. Of more immediate concern in the Kap'Yong sector was the retreating 6th ROK Division throughout 23 April. Such was the South Koreans' mass exodus that some were killed by booby traps laid by their Commonwealth comrades; others

Private John Hoskins of 2 PPCLI pictured during an advance on Hill 419, February 1951



Battle of Kap'Yong

Tungmudae

01 SOUTH KOREAN FORCES RETREAT

On 22 April from 2000 hours, enemy forces launch the Chinese Spring Offensive against UN Command's west-central front near the 38th parallel. In the Kap'Yong Valley, the People's Volunteer Army (PVA) strikes the 6th Republic of Korea Division. The South Koreans start fleeing their positions, angering Commonwealth soldiers in reserve.

02 AUSTRALIANS UNDER ATTACK




The Royal Australian Regiment (RAR) has dug into Hill 504 to the valley's east. These defences come under attack from the Chinese during the night of 23 April. Relentless combat rages through to the following day, the Aussies supported by American Shermans and members of the 2nd US Chemical Heavy Mortar Battalion until the latter unit flees the field.




03 MONTGOMERIE'S BAYONET CHARGE

The Australian fight continues on the morning of 24 April. At 1030 hours, 'B' Company attempts to reclaim a tactically significant knoll after being earlier ordered to withdraw. The first attempt fails, so Lieutenant LM Montgomery and his No 4 Platoon lead a spirited bayonet charge. Despite clearing trenches, the stronghold is out of reach.

04 A FIGHTING WITHDRAWAL ORDERED

3 RAR is ordered to withdraw along a ridge running southwest of Hill 504 towards the Middlesex Regiment's position. The evacuation requires crossing a ford as the Chinese remain in pursuit. 'B' Company begins the process, respectfully followed by 'C', 'A' and 'D' Companies. The manoeuvre is completed in full before midnight on 24 April.

-  Chinese attacks on 27 Brigade front
-  Chinese attacks vs. 2 PPCLI
-  3 RAR withdrawal evening

-  Reserve Battalion (1A & SH, then 1 KOSB)
-  Battalion of 5th U.S. Cavalry Regiment
-  1st Battalion Middlesex



08 SUPPLY DROP OVER HILL 677

The Chinese break off their major assaults at sunrise, but the Canadians remain in desperate need of supplies. Four USAF C-119s, loaded with rescue packages, take off from Japan and arrive in the Kap'yong region for the intended airdrop at 1030 hours on 25 April. American troops from the 5th US Cavalry Division relieve the PPCLI on 26 April.

07 LEVY'S ARTILLERY GAMBLE

The 16th New Zealand Artillery, two batteries of the US Army's 105mm self-propelled guns, and a battery of the 213th Medium Artillery Regiment - using 155mm 'Long Toms' - are supporting 2 PPCLI. These gunners become crucial when Lieutenant Mike Levy calls in fire support upon his own near-overwhelmed position.

Kap'yong

06 CHINESE INFILTRATION ENDS IN FAILURE

An approximately 100-strong Chinese force attempts to infiltrate from the south where 2 PPCLI's defences are thinnest. Barely more than a dozen Canadians based near the battalion's tactical headquarters check the raiders with brutal machine gun and mortar fire, cutting down the communist ranks and foiling the enemy's flanking attack.

05 BATTLE FOR HILL 677 COMMENCES

While 3 RAR's 'B' Company is engaged in the withdrawal process, 2 PPCLI's own 'B' Company is struck by the PVA at some point after 2130 hours on 24 April. Wave upon wave of communist soldiers hit the dug-in Canadians, who endure a daunting chorus of bugles, whistles and banzai charges almost every time assaults are launched.

were shot by their commanding officers in a desperate attempt to reassert control.

PPCLI Captain Owen R Browne, watching in dismay, captured the scene in the regimental journal: "... down the road through the subsidiary valley came hordes of men, running, walking, interspersed with military vehicles – totally disorganized mobs. They were elements of the 6th ROK Division which were supposed to be ten miles forward engaging the Chinese. But they were not engaging the Chinese. They were fleeing! I was witnessing a rout... We knew then that we were no longer 10-12 miles behind the line; we were the front line."

The Australian battle for Hill 504

With PVA forces advancing, and a bold few having even infiltrated the South Korean ranks as they retreated in disorder, Lieutenant-Colonel Bruce Ferguson assembled 3 RAR atop Hill 504. 'B' Company found itself on a knoll jutting out like an island to the northwest. Behind and on either side, spaced out on two steep spurs, were 'A' and 'C' Companies – the latter angled to the rear. On the summit of Hill 504 was 'D' Company, and finally, a short distance away were 15 US Sherman M4A3E8 tanks.

Where possible, the Australians constructed foxholes, but many resorted to piling rocks for cover in the tough terrain. Nightfall on 23 April brought the first of the Chinese assaults, an almost-full moon illuminating both defenders and attackers as the communists struck a platoon of Shermans nearest 'B' Company, prompting their eventual withdrawal. Enemy soldiers later clambered onto remaining tanks in their vain efforts to throw grenades or satchel charges through the hatches.

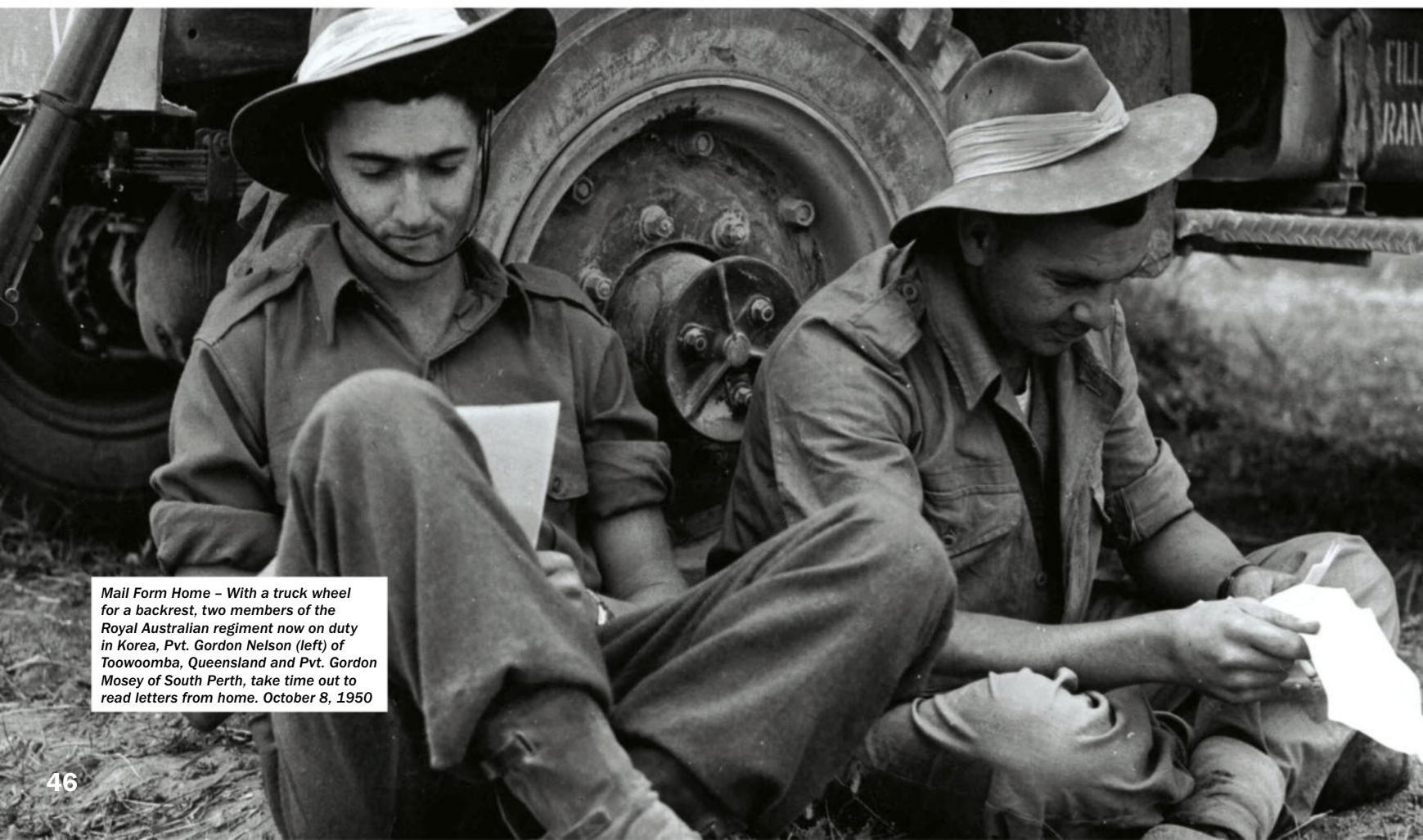
"WE COULD LOOK RIGHT AT THEM AND SEE THEM GETTING IT. WE KNEW WE WERE GOING TO GET IT NEXT. A CHILL WENT THROUGH MY SPINE"

'B' Company itself faced off against a series of probing actions and vicious waves, often preceded by the ominous sound of bugles and whistles coming through the darkness (though in part used to unnerve the UN troops, these instruments likewise acted as signals directing the Chinese). In 'A' Company's defences, the unfolding drama was captured by Major Ben O'Dowd: "In the moonlight our effective killing range was about 10 metres and our killing time about two to three seconds – the time it took for their heads and shoulders to appear above the edge of the ridge and for them to run to the forward [fighting] pits." Tracer rounds lit up the sky like fireworks, Aussie machine guns shredded assailants, and mortar shells crashed all around in a crescendo of chaos. The arrival of dawn on 24 April helped expose Chinese manoeuvres, however, and the enemy took heavy casualties as a result.

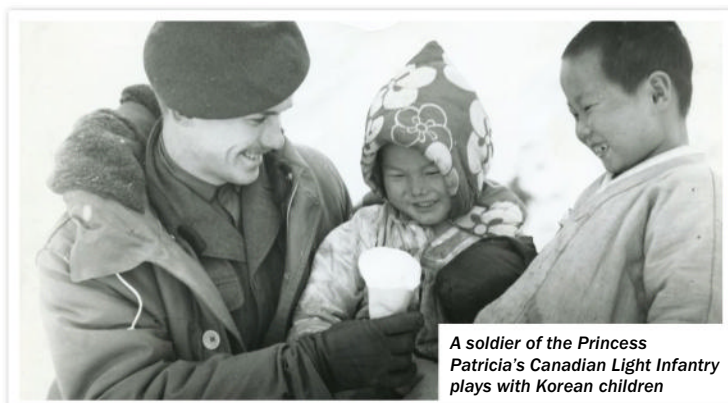
Daylight offered little breathing space, with each forward company still cut off. Chinese incendiary rounds occasionally ignited fires in the dry scrub, burning already-wounded Australians and cooking off ammunition and explosives. Supplies began to dwindle, and medical aid was scarce. The odds were indeed against 3 RAR. It was then that Lieutenant-

Colonel Ferguson ordered 'B' Company to withdraw from its isolated knoll. New Zealand artillerymen laid a smokescreen to cover the infantry, but enemy pressure nevertheless increased. Not long after occupying new positions, Ferguson realised the full tactical importance of the small hill and again ordered 'B' Company to re-occupy it. Yet in some respects, it was too late; the Chinese had by that point gained a firm foothold on the former stronghold. Australian assaults within the area surrounding the knoll commenced from around 1030 hours, including a bayonet charge followed by ferocious hand-to-hand combat among slit trenches. While unquestionably heroic in their endeavours, fresh attacks against a position held by the communists in strength would have bordered on suicide, and so, in light of the rapidly spiralling events, difficult decisions needed to be made.

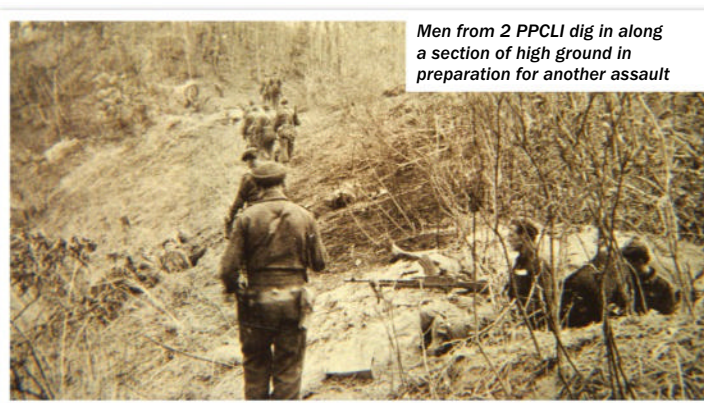
News soon reached the battered Australian battalion from Burke that they would be moved off Hill 504 to the Middlesex Regiment lines. Breaking contact was a gradual process, measured in hours, and laced with the odd mishap. In one instance just before the evacuation process, a misdirected UN air strike dropped napalm into the heart of 'D' Company's defences, killing two Australians and injuring more. But with the platoons leap-frogging each other under covering fire, and with the critical – and accurate – assistance of the 16th New Zealand Artillery's 25-pounders, all elements of 3 RAR reported in by 2330 hours that night of 24 April. The fighting withdrawal had been a success, although the overall battle had cost the Australians 32 killed and 59 wounded. Three RAR members had also been taken prisoner, their ordeal at



Mail Form Home – With a truck wheel for a backrest, two members of the Royal Australian regiment now on duty in Korea, Pvt. Gordon Nelson (left) of Toowoomba, Queensland and Pvt. Gordon Mosey of South Perth, take time out to read letters from home. October 8, 1950



A soldier of the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry plays with Korean children



Men from 2 PPCLI dig in along a section of high ground in preparation for another assault

the hands of the communists far from over. As midnight passed and 25 April arrived – Anzac Day – Aussie Captain Saunders succinctly described the emotion of the moment: “At last I felt like an Anzac and I imagine there were 600 others like me.” The battalion had halted the Chinese advance in their sector, and no major breakthrough attempts were launched on the eastern flank of 27 BCIB thereafter. But that left the Canadians on Hill 677 alone as the enemy turned their attention to 2 PPCLI.

‘They just keep coming’

Whether a blessing or a curse, the PPCLI, looking over from their own positions on Hill 677, had had a ringside seat to the Royal Australian Regiment’s showdown on Hill 504 throughout 23-24 April. Under the command of decorated Second World War combat veteran Lieutenant-Colonel James ‘Big Jim’ Stone, the men had watched helplessly as 3 RAR had been slammed by relentless Chinese waves.

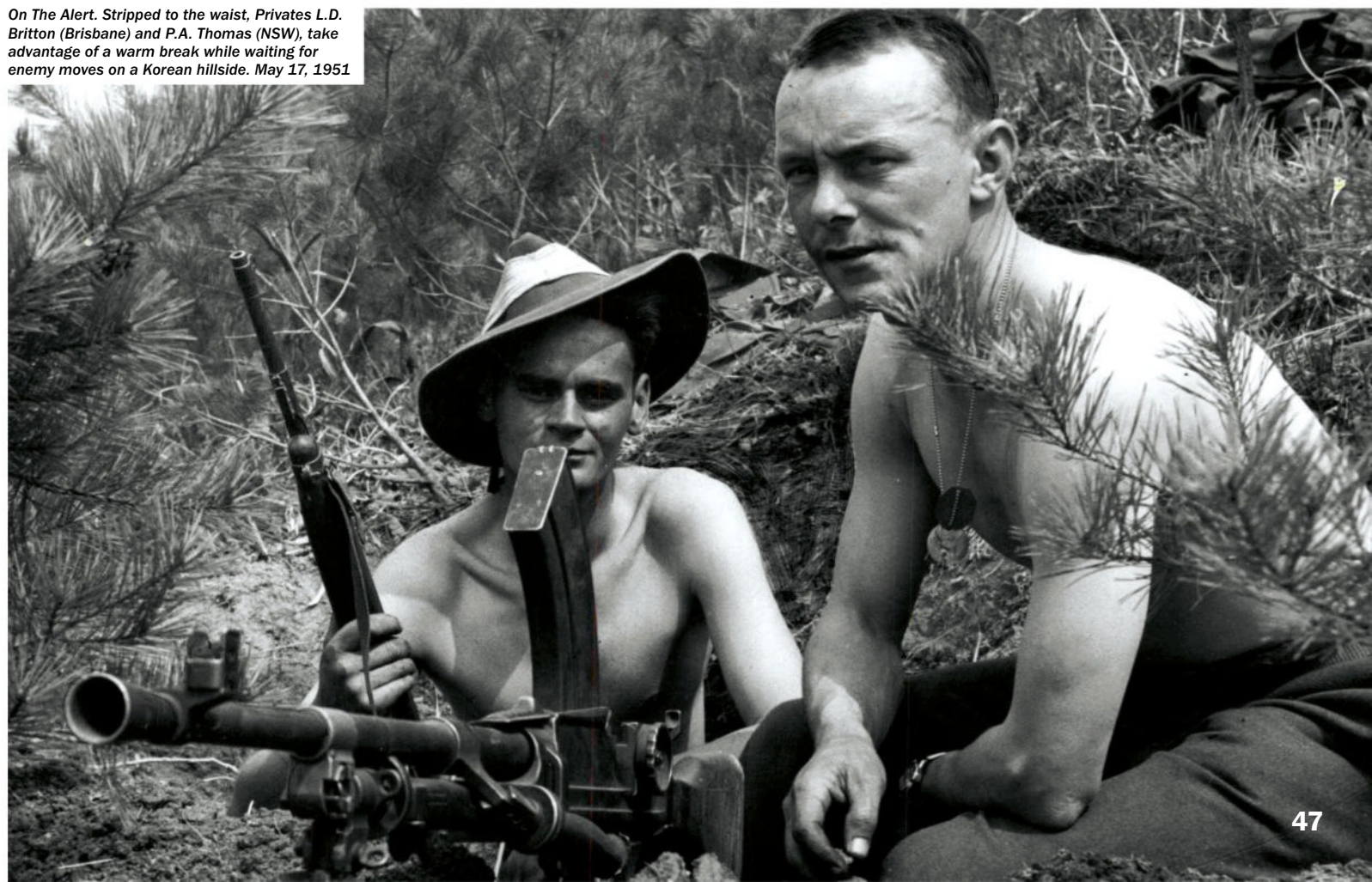
“I could see the Aussies take a terrible beating,” said Canadian Sergeant Alex Sim. “They were only about 1,000 yards to our right. I could make out figures moving about amid shell bursts.” The significance of the withdrawal was likewise not lost on machine gunner Bill Chrysler, who said: “... we could look right at them and see them getting it. We knew we were going to get it next. A chill went through my spine.”

Stone had reconnoitred ahead of the PPCLI’s defences, scouring his surroundings from what would be the Chinese perspective and shifting accordingly to form a rough semi-circle. ‘A’ Company was on the lower slopes on the right flank that faced the Australians; ‘C’ Company was on the hill’s north-central side; ‘B’ Company was initially to the west of ‘C’ Company; ‘D’ Company was to the southwest of ‘B’ Company; and Stone’s tactical headquarters, accompanied by a mortar platoon with well-armed halftracks, was entrenched on a low rise just south and close to the centre of the battalion. Stone made one

last-minute change on the morning of 24 April when he speculated a Chinese attack would most likely come from the eastern slope. ‘B’ Company therefore moved to the south of ‘A’ Company, tasked with protecting the rear and eastern flank adjacent to where the RAR on Hill 504 were under intense pressure. As these Canadian troops dug their foxholes, enemy movements were spotted in and around the hamlet of Naech’on some around 1,000ft (300m) below the hill.

The communists troops gathered for their assault on Hill 677 at 2130 hours on 24 April. With the Australian withdrawal entering its last stages, shadowy figures lurched through the shrubs and into the sights of PPCLI machine guns. Sergeant Roy Ulmer, caught in the opening wave, said post-battle: “They were on top of our positions before we knew it. They’re quiet as mice with those rubber shoes of theirs and then there’s a whistle. They get up with a shout about ten feet from our positions and come in. The first wave throws its grenades,

On The Alert. Stripped to the waist, Privates L.D. Britton (Brisbane) and P.A. Thomas (NSW), take advantage of a warm break while waiting for enemy moves on a Korean hillside. May 17, 1951



fires its weapons and goes to the ground. It is followed by a second which does the same, and then a third comes up. They just keep coming.”

Ulmer would later throw his bayoneted rifle like a spear when his ammunition ran out. Meanwhile, it turned out that Stone’s decision to redeploy ‘B’ Company was the right choice, but it meant that much of the unit now faced the brunt of the Chinese charges. Within minutes, No 6 Platoon was in danger of being overrun by the enemy, so it withdrew, regrouped and counterattacked with support from volunteers in No 5 Platoon. Confusion reigned in the darkness, as serviceman Donald Hibbs noted: “They were everywhere. I didn’t really see these guys. I’d see people sometimes by the flash of rifle fire, but you don’t know whose it is, yours or theirs.” In the forward pits, Bren gunners Ken Barwise and Jim Waniandy, fighting alongside riflemen in a small group, were rushed by a large concentration of Chinese grenadiers. Their machine gun opened up, claiming at least six raiders in just one of multiple waves against their dug-out.

At battalion headquarters, a sizable contingent of Chinese soldiers infiltrated from behind only to be silhouetted against the Kap’yong River as they approached. Mortar teams, mounted in the halftracks armed with .30- and .50-calibre machine guns, waited until the communists were painfully close before Lieutenant Hub Gray ordered them to fire. The Canadian ambush ripped into as many as 100 opponents, literally blowing them into the ravine below, then the mortars themselves were angled almost straight up for their rounds to plunge down among the survivors. This horrific skirmish would become one of a handful of crucial moments that saved the entirety of the

PPCLI line that night. Another took place at approximately 0300 hours on 25 April when ‘D’ Company’s defensives were the focal point of the enemy assaults. No 12 Platoon had been overrun and, in the process, had left a gaping hold in the perimeter.

With Lieutenant Mike Levy’s No 10 Platoon engaged on three sides, the officer requested an artillery strike on top of his own sections. The New Zealanders, joined by American batteries, dropped an estimated 4,000 shells over the next 40 minutes as Levy’s men ducked low, shrapnel bursts exploding just beneath tree-top height to shred the Chinese ranks. Agonising screams lifted into the air as Levy, conversant in a dialect of Chinese, listened in to communist troops barking instructions at each other. When one yelled “kill the American pigs”, Levy replied: “We are Canadian soldiers... we have lots of Canadian soldiers here.” The lieutenant and the enemy continued to trade insults when he wasn’t dashing in and out of foxholes to direct the gunners’ fire. No Canadian deaths were attributed to the artillery, yet Levy would receive no recognition for his heroism.

Relief by parachute

Sunrise – at roughly 0600 hours – concluded the worst of the fighting. Excluding periods of harassing fire, the Chinese had in essence given up, 2 PPCLI having held their ground on Hill 677 over 24-25 April. But the Canadians were far from safe, still isolated and with supplies practically depleted. Stone had earlier radioed in a much-needed airdrop, which arrived via four US Air Force C-119s. Based in Tokyo, it took just six hours for these aircraft to be loaded with rescue packages and for their cargo to be transported to Kap’yong – a remarkable feat of communication and logistics.

Lance-Corporal W.J. Chrysler helps Private Morris J. Piche to an aid station behind the front lines in the Kap’yong Valley, both in 2 PPCLI



This historic image – taken less than two months after the Battle of Kap’yong – shows a war-weary Korean girl carrying her brother past a stalled M-26 tank





The Flying Boxcars swooped in low and slow, at considerable risk from enemy anti-aircraft fire. Parachutes blossomed in the sky, beneath which hung containers of provisions. In a final feat of accuracy, almost all packages fell within the Canadians' perimeter. Mobile Army Surgical Hospital (MASH) helicopters were sent in due course to pick up the injured and dead. Additional supplies filtered up when circumstances permitted. On Hill 677, fallen Chinese attackers littered the summit and slopes, with one 'D' Company section surrounded by an estimated 200 bodies. China has never released official figures, but it is widely thought that there were between 1,000 and 5,000 casualties during the Battle of Kap'yong in April 1951. Along with Australian losses, the Canadians suffered 10 killed and 23 wounded. Two New Zealanders and at least three Americans had also made the ultimate sacrifice.

The 27th British Commonwealth Infantry Brigade's actions in the hills of the Kap'yong Valley, primarily those of the Canadians, Australians and New Zealanders, played a vital role in blunting the Chinese Fifth Phase Offensive. Their staunch defence prevented a communist breakthrough against UN Command's west-central front. Like falling dominoes, the repercussions of a Chinese victory would have brought about the probable fall of Seoul a mere 25 miles (40km) from the battlefield. Now, with momentum on the United Nations' side, the tides could change again. UN Command's Operation Piledriver, beginning on 22 May and lasting until 8 July, pushed the enemy back some 40 miles (64km), inflicting upon them tens of thousands of casualties. Over the coming years, what had once been a war for the hills became a war of patrols until 27 July 1953, when an armistice was signed and a ceasefire put in place, although the conflict has not technically ended.

For the Australians and Canadians, the April 1951 Battle of Kap'yong is widely considered the most important engagement fought on the Korean peninsula – perhaps best highlighted by the fact that both 3 RAR and 2 PPCLI (alongside Company A of the 72nd US Heavy Tank Battalion) received the US Presidential Unit Citation in recognition of their remarkable efforts. For the Canadians, in particular, Kap'yong is also deemed the nation's most famous action since the end of the Second World War. Nevertheless, albeit arguably, their outstanding contributions in Korea have often been largely forgotten in what has since been called the Forgotten War.

FURTHER READING

- *Triumph at Kapyong: Canada's Pivotal Battle in Korea* – Dan Bjarnason
- *A War of Patrols: Canadian Army Operations in Korea* – William Johnston
- *Out in the Cold: Australia's Involvement in the Korean War* – Ben Evans

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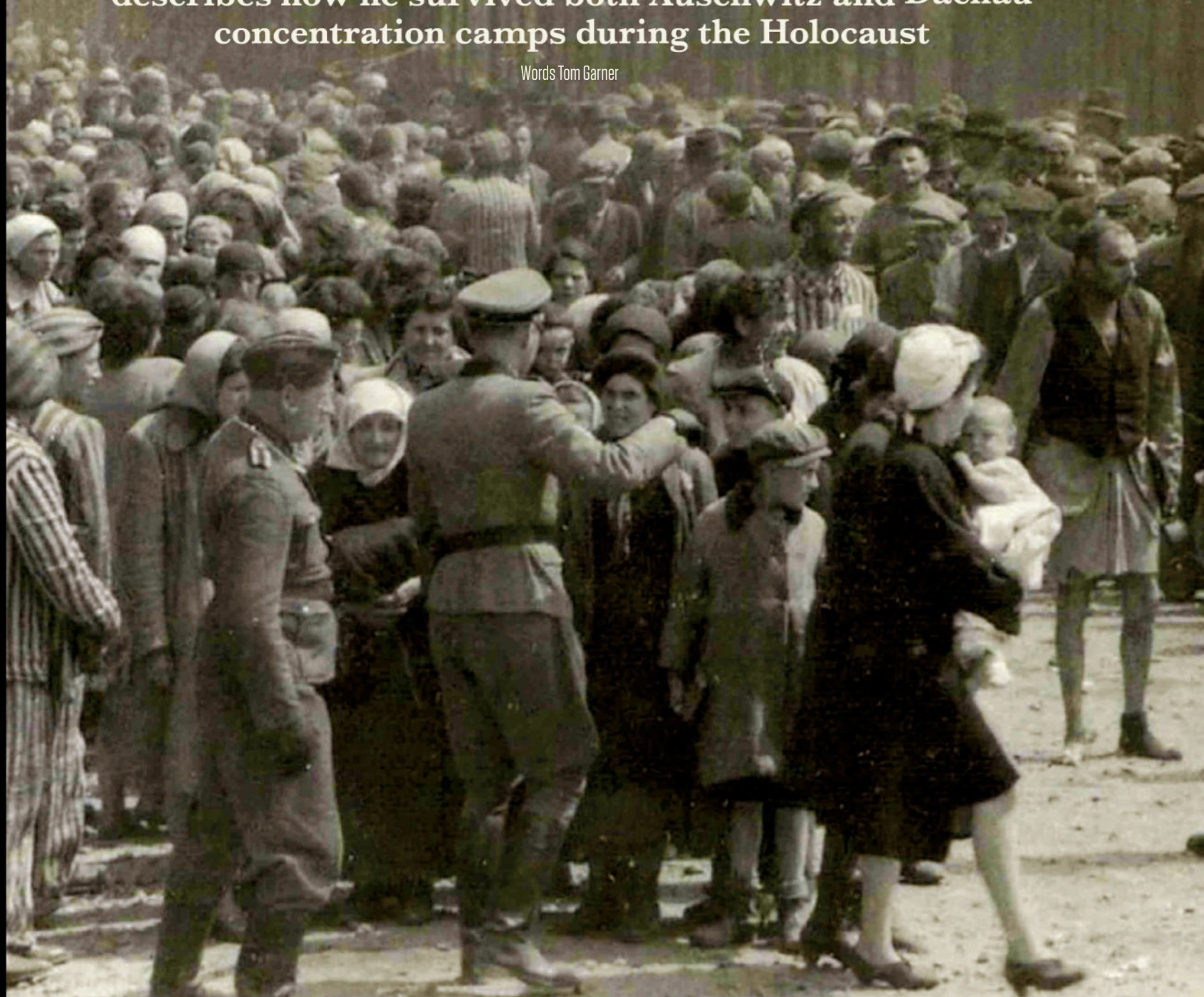


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'HATRED IS NOT THE WAY'

Speaking to mark the publication of his new memoir, Ivor Perl describes how he survived both Auschwitz and Dachau concentration camps during the Holocaust

Words Tom Garner



Hungarian Jews
pictured being
selected for
slave labour or
the gas chamber
at Auschwitz,
May-June 1944

Auschwitz and Dachau have become bywords for the genocide of European Jews and other persecuted groups during the Second World War. Millions of people died at the hands of the Nazis and their collaborators in these camps, with the horror of what took place casting a long shadow across the world.

Of the six million Jews who were killed, almost 1.5 million were children. A much smaller number survived but the majority of them lost their families and were burdened with traumatic memories for life. Today, the surviving children of the Holocaust remain committed to ensuring that similar crimes against humanity never occur again.

One such survivor is Ivor Perl. He and his elder brother Alec were the only survivors from their large Hungarian Jewish family and endured unimaginable suffering in several concentration camps, including Auschwitz and Dachau. Here Ivor, the author of the recently published memoir *Chicken Soup Under The Tree*, recalls Jewish life during his childhood, the terrible conditions in the camps and how his brother repeatedly saved his life.

Cheder in Makó

Born as Yitzchak Perlmutter in 1932, Ivor grew up in a large Orthodox Jewish family in the Hungarian town of Makó. His father worked in the vegetable wholesale business, with the young Yitzchak having four brothers David, Mordechai, Abroham (later known as Alec) and Moishe, and four sisters Raizel, Blume, Malka, Faigale.

Ivor received a religious education. "I spent a lot of time in cheder, which is a Jewish study school," he says. "During the early 1940s there were no pavements or central heating so life was very cold and basic. I would get up at five or six in the morning and go to Hebrew classes until about 8am. We would then have a small breakfast and once we'd eaten we'd go back to studies. There was then an hour for lunch before going back to studying again."

With lessons mainly focussing on Hebrew, Ivor's education was restricted but he remembers the values it taught him: "If I had that life again I would still have a religious education rather than a secular one. It was much more restrictive but far more humane. Religion doesn't teach you about atomic bombs, etc. It instead teaches you about life."

Makó's Jewish community was well established with three synagogues but anti-Semitism pervaded everyday life. "Jews in Hungary go back over 900 years but they were never considered equal. Nevertheless, we lived with it. When I got up as a child I would think: 'I'm going to be called a "dirty Jew" today,' but it was part of life. I now know that the mostly Catholic population had their own hardships. The authorities knew: 'How do we keep our population under control? Find someone to hate.' Therefore, the Jews were scapegoats."

Despite this discrimination, the Perlmutter family were still able to get along with their neighbours. "We knew we were Jewish and the other children were Gentiles but we still played with each other. We very much coexisted."

A growing threat

During the Second World War, Hungary was part of the Axis powers under the leadership of its dictator Miklós Horthy. Despite not being in power, the far-right and violently anti-Semitic Arrow Cross Party also had huge influence in Hungary. Nevertheless, Horthy was temporarily able to



Ivor Perl (left) pictured
with his wife Rhoda
and brother Alec

prevent the 'Final Solution' being implemented against Hungarian Jews. "The Arrow Cross were the Hungarian equivalent of the Nazis and were bastards in every sense. They delighted in being cruel but Horthy was the leader of Hungary. He wasn't exactly a Jew-lover but he was a modern man and stopped the Germans executing us until 1944."

Ivor recalls that Makó's Jews were slow to realise the increasing persecution of other Jewish communities across occupied Europe: "We were aware and yet unaware that bad things were happening. In late 1943, three Polish Jews turned up at our synagogue and said: 'Listen, brethren. We're being absolutely burned alive, killed, etc.' However, the synagogue's response was: 'We know the harder story you tell, the more charity you think we should give you. This is Hungary, we don't kill people.'"

"We did not believe what they were saying. Why? Because we didn't know about it. There was no television, no newspapers and if you listened to any radio other than from the government you were punished. Therefore we had no idea but people would suddenly disappear, although you never, never knew why."

'Anywhere seemed better'

In March 1944, German forces occupied Hungary after Horthy began making peace overtures to the Allies. Horthy was eventually deposed by the Nazis and anti-Semitism against Hungary's Jews increased when the Arrow Cross Party came to power. Ivor's father and an elder brother were conscripted into the Hungarian Army's labour battalions, with the family rarely knowing their whereabouts.

The Perlmutter family were also required by edict to wear the Yellow Star and were confined to a ghetto in their own town. Shortly afterwards, Makó's Jews were transported to a larger ghetto in nearby Szeged. "The ghettos were being created in bigger towns by taking Jews from smaller towns. They would be taken to an even bigger town by rail. This was because not every town in Hungary had a railway station. They used a large brick factory to accommodate us in Szeged."

Although conditions were dreadful, the Szeged Ghetto was only a staging post for the Perlmutter family to be 'resettled'. In late April 1944, Makó's Jews were ordered to the station. "Three transport trains departed from Szeged. The first went to Auschwitz, where 90 percent of those who were on it were killed. The Nazis then redirected the next two transports to Theresienstadt. This was a concentration camp rather than an extermination camp."

The Perlmutter family had boarded the first transport to Auschwitz. "Most of my family were therefore killed because we thought we wanted to get on the first train. We had no idea where we were going and at the time anywhere seemed better than where we were. We were promised we were going to Poland and would be given a piece of land or farm. You wanted to believe it and by the time we were on the cattle truck we were gone."

**"THE FIRST TRAIN WENT TO AUSCHWITZ,
WHERE 90 PERCENT OF THOSE WHO
WERE ON IT WERE KILLED"**

A former Polish Army barracks, Auschwitz became infamous for its complex of Nazi concentration and extermination camps that killed 1.1 million people

"IVOR LATER DISCOVERED THAT ALL THOSE WHO WERE DIRECTED TO THE LEFT WERE SENT STRAIGHT TO THE GAS CHAMBERS. THIS INCLUDED THE ELDERLY, WOMEN AND YOUNG CHILDREN"

'112021'

Ivor's family now embarked on a horrendous train journey in a cattle truck with people dying around them in cramped conditions. After several days, they finally arrived at Auschwitz. Ivor remembers the warnings of inmates in striped uniforms as they prepared to disembark: "We arrived at Auschwitz and had no idea what it was. We thought there would be food there and still believed in some semblance of humanity. We heard people shouting in Yiddish, which we fortunately understood. Yiddish is very akin to German and these people said: 'If children are asked their age, you must say you are 16.' I was 12 at the time but the Nazis had a height bar and if you were under that bar then that was it."

As the passengers left the train, SS guards told them to form into two lines of women and children and men and boys. Ivor and two of his elder brothers were split from their mother, sisters and younger brother. During the commotion that followed, Ivor attempted to join the rest of his family. "The camp's staff were marching around and I got separated from my mother. I was crying: 'Let me come with you, Mum!' but she said: 'Go back to your brother.'" It was the last time that Ivor saw his mother and youngest siblings.

While he was in the line of men and boys, Ivor was confronted by an SS officer wearing a white glove who was directing people left and right. "He suddenly stopped me and asked in German how old I was. I automatically said I was 16 with no idea what I was saying or why. I didn't have much chance of convincing him because there were hundreds of people waiting. I'm convinced that for a millisecond he said: 'If you're lying...' But then he said: 'Alright, go to the right!'"

Ivor later discovered that all those who were directed to the left were sent straight to the gas chambers. This included the elderly, women and young children. It has since been suggested that the man with the white glove was Josef Mengele, an infamous SS doctor known as the 'Angel of Death'. Ivor remains sceptical. "People say it was Mengele but how do I know and, also, does it matter? All I know is that it was a man with a white glove. As I was writing my story I couldn't believe what was happening. I still can't believe it."

As Ivor and his remaining brothers were led through the camp they were stripped, shaved and given striped

uniforms before they entered a barrack. He admits that he didn't immediately recognise the gravity of his situation. "Coming from a backward country as a 12-year-old boy not knowing anything of the world, I initially thought it was quite adventurous. I was going on train rides, wearing long trousers, etc, and I just wanted to live. But reality started to hit me when we were taken to our barrack."

It was in this barrack that Ivor began a process of what he calls "dehumanisation". "The kapos gave us a number and said: 'We don't want to know your name, you're just a number that you must never forget. Forget that number and you don't exist.' I suddenly started crying and that's when it hit me. We had been given numbers not just for organisational purposes but also for dehumanisation. You were a number, you were not a human being."

Assigned the number 112021, Ivor managed to avoid having it tattooed on his arm like other inmates. "I only avoided it because the Hungarian Jewry were arriving at Auschwitz in their thousands. The Russians were advancing and the Nazis didn't have time so everything happened very quickly. I was stuck waiting in a queue when they ran out of ink so I was told to return the following day. When I returned an air raid siren went off and everyone had to disappear. After that I was told they couldn't do it in Auschwitz because there was too much going on. We were going to be taken to Germany and we would get the tattoo there instead. It was unbelievable that the Germans didn't do it because they were very thorough."

Ivor was lucky to have avoided being tattooed but he later contemplated getting the tattoo after liberation. "When we were liberated I thought about tattooing my number myself in solidarity with everyone else. I'm pleased I didn't do it in the end but the number is still with me."

By this stage, Auschwitz was mostly operating as an extermination camp but it was also, in Ivor's words, a "waiting camp" where the Nazis would hold inmates to be shipped out to different camps as slave labour. Ivor was not used for slave labour at Auschwitz and spent most of his time wandering around the camp, attending roll calls and trying to stay alive. The inmates in the holding camp were given meagre rations and began to starve. Ivor's brother David was separated from him and the two remaining



brothers – Abroham (Alec) and Yitzchak – very occasionally saw their surviving sisters.

All of Ivor's siblings eventually disappeared apart from his surviving elder brother Alec, who did his utmost to protect him. "We helped each other but he saved me three times literally from the jaws of death. There was one time at Auschwitz that I volunteered to work on a Sunday (because you didn't have to work that day) and when you came back to the camp you went through the German kitchens. As a payment, you could lick out the soup cauldron. Who wouldn't volunteer for that? I went but the air raid sirens went off again so I had to rush back into the camp and ended up locked in the children's barrack. My brother saved me from that before the children there were sent to the gas chambers."

Towards the end of their time in Auschwitz, the brothers were miraculously reunited with their father who had been transported there from the Hungarian labour battalion. They helped each other to survive but Ivor still does not know how he stayed alive. "There was a discussion once between two scholars about how people survived the camps. They came to the conclusion that nobody survived without luck and I agree. However, not everybody who had luck survived. What the 'X factor' for survival was, the scholars did not know. I was only 12-13 years old, why didn't the rest of my family survive too?"

Kaufering and Dachau

Ivor, Alec and his father were eventually transferred from Auschwitz to Kaufering in Bavaria, Germany. A system of 11 subcamps of Dachau concentration camp, Ivor remembers

Above, left to right: Ivor Perl (aged 14), his brothers David and Mordechai and sister Raizel

that their particular camp – Kaufering II – was "in one sense even worse than Auschwitz. Auschwitz was just an extermination camp but you had to work at Kaufering. The barrack blocks were half-underground and they were purely used to hold slaves.

"You never knew what work you were meant to be doing. All you knew was that every morning there would be a roll call and they called your number. They would say: 'You, you and you,' and you'd have to go wherever they sent you."

These enforced labour roll calls would have tragic consequences for Ivor's family. "My father was with my brother and myself for a brief time at Kaufering but one day he was sent to work and didn't come back. On another day, Alec didn't come back. He went to a farm and I was taken to an underground bunker."

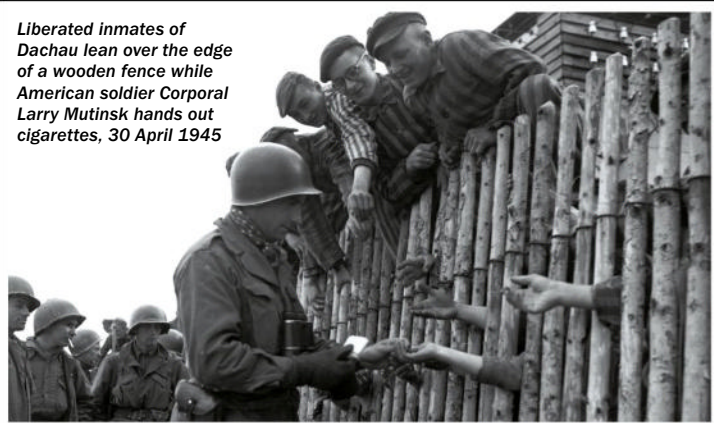
The brothers managed to reunite but they never saw their father again. Such were the terrible conditions at Kaufering that Ivor contracted typhus. "I ended up in a hospital block, which of course was not really a hospital. If you fell ill you went there, opened your clothes and the doctor would determine how much skin and bone you were. If you had a bit more skin on you than bone you were allowed to live but otherwise you were just taken to the gas chamber. Luckily, Alec came to the hospital with a Polish Jew who I remember carried me out on his shoulders."

By spring 1945, Allied forces were entering Germany and the Nazis made the inmates at Kaufering go on a death march to Dachau. Ivor was forced to march in a weakened

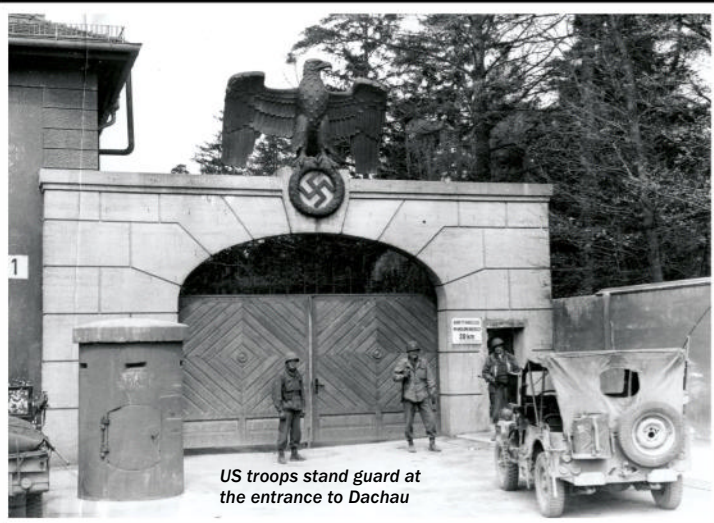


The arrival of Hungarian Jews at Auschwitz, summer 1944

Liberated inmates of Dachau lean over the edge of a wooden fence while American soldier Corporal Larry Mutinsk hands out cigarettes, 30 April 1945



These Hungarian Jewish men were selected for slave labour at Auschwitz and photographed in June 1944.



US troops stand guard at the entrance to Dachau

state. "You either did what you could to survive or you died. The Americans were advancing and Hitler said that no camp survivors were allowed to live. We were taken on that march so that we would all be killed. The German SS general who was in charge of this march went to Dachau but when he arrived they said: 'We've got no room here [for the prisoners]. You can bivouac in the parade ground.'"

Almost as soon as Ivor arrived at Dachau, it came under bombardment. "On the first or second night in Dachau, all you could hear was artillery shells. You had no idea who was firing but you heard a whizzing sound and then a bang. By this point, the bombardment was fun to us.

"One shell blew up the fence, which prompted Alec to say: 'Let's go.' I said no because I was terrified that we would be shot but he said: 'It'll be alright.' As we started walking, machine guns started opening fire on us so we ran back. The following morning, the same thing happened, only this time the shells were landing more often and people started running. We didn't hear any machine gun fire so we also ran out of there."

Liberation and England

The brothers had finally escaped captivity but they had not escaped danger. "Literally 200 yards from the camp there was a German anti-aircraft battery. Once we saw the guns we were frightened but by that time it was a case of 'do or die'. Death was not as frightful as it is in a normal society but luckily the soldiers were running away and we were left alone."

After finding a dead rabbit, the brothers hid in a shack with two other escaped men. "We were exhausted and time lost all meaning. A few hours later or the next morning there was a knock on the door. We were absolutely terrified because we thought German soldiers had come but realised they were not Germans but Americans."

“HITLER SAID THAT NO CAMP SURVIVORS WERE ALLOWED TO LIVE. WE WERE TAKEN ON THAT MARCH SO THAT WE WOULD ALL BE KILLED”

Ivor's first encounter with his liberators was a poignant moment. "I didn't speak English and you could see the shock on their faces. They saw two young boys and two men who were emaciated and we had this dead rabbit. We actually offered them a piece to eat and they said: 'No, thank you.'"

The liberated prisoners of Dachau were told by the Americans to identify any guards they recognised. "Word got around and a Jeep came with SS guards and a line formed either side of them. There was a Hungarian man beside me holding a stick who said: 'Where is your stick or stone?' I said: 'What for?' and he replied: 'Aren't you going to hit or throw anything at them?' I said that I didn't feel I had to do it.

"I helped to identify SS personnel immediately after liberation but it was just to help the Americans because not every German soldier was part of the SS. Other people would say: 'I don't care, I'll point anybody out,' but personally I was too young, inexperienced and hungry for life to contemplate anything else. You didn't have time to think or appreciate things."

The brothers were placed in a displaced persons camp while attempts were made to discover what had happened to the rest of their family. It was not until months later that they were informed by the Red Cross that none of their parents or siblings had survived. In November 1945, Ivor and Alec were resettled in England.

The new country was a revelatory experience. "I thought I had literally arrived in heaven when we first came to London, even though it had been heavily bombed. We were told: 'You're going to a civilised country now and you must remember to say "Sorry" in England. We said: 'What do you mean?' They replied: 'You can get away with murder there as long as you say "Sorry"! It makes sense to English people but at the time we couldn't believe it!'"

'Pass the story on'

Ivor had a successful life after settling in north London. He had four children with his beloved wife Rhoda, whom he married in 1953, ran a clothes manufacturing company and stayed close to Alec. In the first two decades of the 21st century he volunteered to speak in schools and other organisations about his experiences and was awarded the British Empire Medal (BEM) for services to Holocaust education and awareness.

However, despite his service, he sometimes questions the value of Holocaust education. "The problem I have with the Holocaust and how to prevent another one is – what is the answer? Most people say to me 'education' but who was one of the most educated countries in the world during the 1930s? It was Germany.

"All that education did for the Germans was to find easier ways to kill people. Every new technology or idea that had been discovered before or during the war was used. That included the Allies developing the atomic bomb – it's frightening. I agree that education is very important but you can't just use flour to make a cake. You can't just have education, it's what you do with it."

Despite the horrors that the Nazis and their collaborators inflicted on Ivor and his family, he does not feel hatred towards them. "I say to children or anyone who asks: 'Why should I hate the Germans?' My guards were Hungarians, Estonians, Poles, French, Romanians, etc. You would end up hating everybody and where does that get you? What

I hate is what human beings allow themselves to do. It's not confined to white, Black, Jewish people or nations. Every time people decay a population they'll find a scapegoat but hatred is not the way forward."

The message that Ivor would like to impart to future generations is that positivity and full engagement in the issue are important to prevent another genocide. "I genuinely believe that events like this happen when you allow yourself to be channelled in a certain direction. I'm not saying by who, what, where or why. I also know from life that love will get you further than hate. I would like to see tangible results of what we've learned from the Holocaust but it's easier said than done. We need people to pass the story on."

To read an unabridged version of Ivor Perl's interview visit:

www.historyanswers.co.uk

CHICKEN SOUP UNDER THE TREE

Ivor Perl recalls the difficulty he had in putting pen to paper to write his memoir about the Holocaust

Published by Lemon Soul, *Chicken Soup Under The Tree* is Ivor Perl's recently published memoir. It details how he survived the war and went on to build a fulfilling life in England. He first drafted it in 1999 but this is the first time it has been published with a 2023 postscript.

Ivor recalls being initially reluctant to write down what he had experienced: "I'd thought: 'What's the point?' There are so many books about the Holocaust and I can't write or spell properly. Eventually, my wife told me to write my story so I did."

Writing what became *Chicken Soup Under The Tree* was a difficult exercise: "It was very hard because I couldn't believe what I was writing and it was a sanitised version because I wrote it purely for family and friends. When I first gave it to Professor David Cesarani, who specialised in Holocaust Studies, he returned it and said: 'Ivor, this sounds like a bad day's outing in a summer camp. This is not a true story about the camps.'

"He wasn't wrong because it was sanitised. For example, I hadn't written that at one point I was eating grass. Or, if a man died next to you in the camps you didn't feel: 'What did he think?' Your first thought was: 'Can I have his boots?' You're ashamed to say what humanity can do under certain circumstances. Other survivors talk about what happened who are much more descriptive than I am. However, you don't have to exaggerate the Holocaust because you can never describe the horror. However, I've got to tell this story."

Every £1 from the sale of the book will be donated to Jewish Care, the largest health and social care organisation serving the Jewish community in London and South East England.

Ivor Perl pictured with a copy of his book



To purchase a copy visit www.lemonsoul.com

AMX-10 RC

This French armoured fighting vehicle, in service for decades, provides flexible infantry support with high-calibre firepower

WORDS MICHAEL E HASKEW

For many years, the French military has displayed a penchant for wheeled armoured fighting vehicles serving in varied roles such as reconnaissance, anti-tank, infantry direct fire support, armoured personnel transportation and anti-aircraft. The AMX-10 RC, conceived during the 1970s and deployed to the French Army for the first time near the end of the decade, is typical of such French production vehicles which have emerged since the years of the Cold War.

Research and development of the AMX-10 RC, with RC standing for Roues Canon (wheeled gun), began in the autumn of 1970, with prototype development extending six years and the first production vehicle entering service with the 2nd Regiment de Hussards. The Ateliers de construction d'Issy-les-Moulineaux undertook the project with the charge to develop a replacement vehicle for the complement of Panhard EBR heavy armoured cars then nearing 30 years in use and approaching the end of their service life. More than 450 examples of the AMX-10 RC were manufactured, and the French military received 284 of these.

Despite the absence of tracked mobility, some military observers have classified the AMX-10 RC as a light tank; the fact that it mounts a powerful 4.1in (105mm) main weapon lends credence to such an assertion. Actually, it may well be the first vehicle of its type in the world to mount a weapon of such heavy calibre. The vehicle has seen deployments in numerous hot spots around the world during more than 40 years of active service, and in early 2023 the French government agreed to supply Ukraine with a number of AMX-10s, to aid in its war with Russia. The performance of these vehicles in Ukraine is yet to be fully assessed, but it is hoped that the 'wheeled gun' can make an impact on the battlefield.

MAIN ARMAMENT

The 4.1in (105mm) F2 BK MECA L/47 rifled cannon is not equipped with stabilising gear and is unable to fire on the move; however, it offers significant muzzle velocity.

HULL ARMOUR

With a thickness up to 1.8in (45mm) and effective slope, the hull armour of the AMX-30 RC offers protection against medium calibre rounds such as those fired by 1.2in (30mm) autocannons.



A number of AMX-10 RC armoured fighting vehicles, long deployed with the French Army, were donated to Ukrainian forces

A column of Qatari AMX-10 RC armoured fighting vehicles participating in a field exercise

AMX-10 RC

PRODUCTION	1979
ORIGIN	FRANCE
LENGTH	30FT (9.15M)
RANGE	497 MILES (800KM)
ENGINE	BAUDOUIN GF-11SX DIESEL
CREW	4
PRIMARY WEAPON	4.1IN (105MM) F2 BK MECA L/47 RIFLED CANNON
SECONDARY WEAPON	1X 0.3IN (7.62MM) ANF1 COAXIAL MACHINE GUN
ARMOUR	0.79-1.77IN (20-45MM)



TURRET

The welded aluminium GIAT Industries TK 105 turret accommodates three crew members and presents a low silhouette on the battlefield, while the 4.1in (105mm) F2 cannon was designed to fit its dimensions.

SECONDARY ARMAMENT

A single 0.3in (7.62mm) ANF1 coaxial machine gun with 4,000 ready rounds is the standard secondary armament for the AMX-30 RC, while a second anti-aircraft machine gun has been installed on some vehicles.

"IT MAY WELL BE THE FIRST VEHICLE OF ITS TYPE IN THE WORLD TO MOUNT A WEAPON OF SUCH HEAVY CALIBRE"

POWERPLANT

The Baudouin GF-11SX diesel engine powering the AMX-10 RC replaced an original V8 Hispano-Suiza model and provides increased horsepower and speed on the road and cross-country.

Illustration: Nicholas Ford



The prominent long barrel of the AMX-10 RC main weapon extends beyond the hull

ARMAMENT

The 4.1in (105mm) F2 cannon was designed to fit the GIAT Industries TK 105 turret installed in the AMX-10 RC. The cannon features shallow rifling in a lightweight barrel with semi-automatic vertical sliding wedge block breech and an electrical firing system. The cannon weighs roughly 1,587lb (720kg) and delivers an effective range of slightly more than 4,100ft (1,250m) with high muzzle but a relatively slow rate of fire at only six rounds per minute. The weapon is capable of firing high-explosive, high-explosive anti-tank fin-stabilised, and armour-piercing fin-stabilised discarding sabot rounds. One 0.3in (7.62mm) machine gun is mounted coaxially with the main weapon.

The barrel of the 4.1in (105mm) F2 BK MECA L/47 cannon features shallow rifling and high muzzle velocity



ENGINE

Although the AMX-10 RC was originally powered by the 250-horsepower supercharged V-8 Hispano-Suiza HS 115-2 liquid-cooled multi-fuel engine, the vehicle's powerplant was upgraded to the Baudouin 6F11 SRX supercharged diesel engine in 1985 as the last production examples rolled off the assembly

line. Capable of generating 300 horsepower, the Baudouin engine was installed with a governor regulating a maximum of 280 horsepower. The Baudouin engine generates a top speed of 25mph (40km/h) cross-country and 53mph (85km/h) on the road, while its maximum range is 497 miles (800km). By 1995, all prior production AMX-10 RC vehicles had been retrofitted with the more powerful engine.



The Baudouin diesel engine has a top speed of 25mph (40km/h) cross-country



DESIGN

The AMX-30 RC has a hull and turret constructed of welded aluminium armour capable of withstanding the impact of medium-calibre shells and splinters. The wheeled vehicle is equipped with a hydropneumatic suspension, allowing adjustment of ground clearance from 0.66-1.97ft (0.2-0.6m) and permitting the vehicle to vary its posture, tilting, leaning, sitting or standing as the situation dictates. A variable tyre pressure system assists the six-wheel-drive vehicle with mobility in varied conditions. While the original AMX-30 RC was amphibious and powered by water jets when crossing streams, modifications introducing additional armour, infrared jamming and other defensive systems increased the vehicle's weight in the RCR variant, negating the amphibious capability and resulting in the removal of such equipment.



The AMX-10 RC was originally designed as an amphibious vehicle, but that capability was negated with refitting

"THE CANNON WEIGHS ROUGHLY 1,587LB (720KG) AND DELIVERS AN EFFECTIVE RANGE OF SLIGHTLY MORE THAN 4,100FT (1,250 METRES)"



A French AMX-10 RC armoured fighting vehicle during operations against enemy fighters in Afghanistan

SERVICE HISTORY

When Sebastien Lecornu, French Minister of the Armed Forces, affirmed his government's support for Ukraine in its ongoing war with Russia by sending "ground-to-air defence, artillery and tanks", his January 2023 pledge was backed up with the first of several shipments of AMX-10 RCR infantry fighting vehicles. Subsequently, Ukrainian crews began training at the French Saumur Cavalry School.

The AMX-10 RC has served in no fewer than seven conflicts since the 1970s, including the Western Sahara War, Gulf War, Kosovo War, the conflict in Afghanistan, the Mali War, and others. Although a five-year programme to replace the vehicle with the EBRC Jaguar is underway, dozens remain operational with the French Army. The AMX-10 RC underwent significant modernisation beginning in 2000, extending its service life until deployment of the Jaguar is completed by 2025. A total of 256 examples were modified to the new standard AMX-10

"THE AMX-10 RC HAS SERVED IN NO FEWER THAN SEVEN CONFLICTS SINCE THE 1970S"



RCR (Renove), incorporating various system improvements. The armies of Morocco, Qatar and Cameroon also field the vehicle.

The AMX-10 RC was highly visible during the Gulf War of 1990-91, as 96 deployed to the desert with the French 6th Light Armoured Division, covering the left flank of the Coalition forces fighting to liberate Iraqi-occupied Kuwait. During Operation Daguet, French forces defeated the Iraqi 45th Infantry Division, capturing 3,000 prisoners and destroying 20 Iraqi tanks while sustaining no combat losses.



French forces using AMX-10 RC vehicles in Afghanistan, September 2010



France sent several shipments of the infantry fighting vehicle to Ukraine in early 2023



The driver's space in the AMX-10 RC hull is forward and to the left where skid steering equipment is located

This view from the interior of the AMX-10 RC is through one of the open hatches in the welded aluminium hull



CREW COMPARTMENT

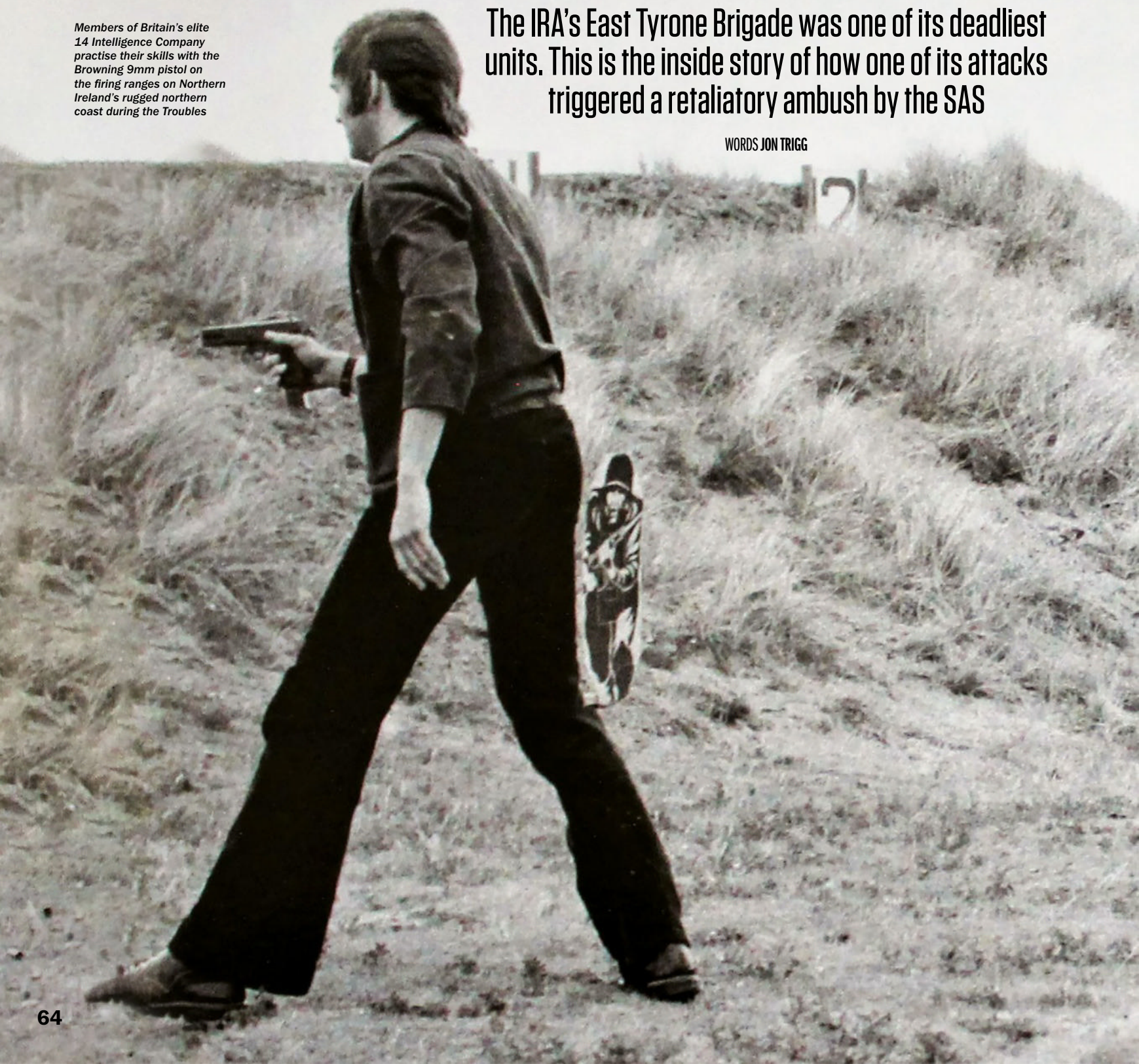
The crew compartment of the AMX-30 RC includes space forward on the left side of the hull for the driver, while the commander, gunner and loader are positioned within the turret. The vehicle is operated via a skid steering system, and the driver's field of vision includes three periscopes. The commander is seated in the turret's right-rear and views the field through seven periscopes, one of them rotating. The gunner sits front-right with periscopes and range-finding apparatus, while the loader is adjacent. The AMX-30 RC's main weapon is not equipped with stabilising technology and cannot fire effectively on the move. The commander may override the gunner to rotate the turret and aim the weapon.

THE IRA'S WAR IN COUNTY TYRONE

Members of Britain's elite 14 Intelligence Company practise their skills with the Browning 9mm pistol on the firing ranges on Northern Ireland's rugged northern coast during the Troubles

The IRA's East Tyrone Brigade was one of its deadliest units. This is the inside story of how one of its attacks triggered a retaliatory ambush by the SAS

WORDS JON TRIGG



When the Troubles erupted into violence in 1969, the Provisional IRA was established to force Britain to leave Northern Ireland through force of arms. Throughout the province, IRA units began to organise and carry out attacks on the police – the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) – and the British Army. One of the IRA's most effective units was its East Tyrone Brigade, which carried out over 1,500 operations and killed dozens of soldiers and policemen during a campaign that lasted decades. At the height of its notoriety in the 1980s, the RUC Chief Constable Jack Hermon – himself a veteran of service in County Tyrone – said the Brigade “was highly regarded in terms of its proficiency, capacity and confidence”.

But the Brigade – along with almost every other IRA unit – was leaking information to the security forces through informers and agents in its own ranks. One of East Tyrone's most senior volunteers, and a former hunger striker, Tommy McKearney, admitted as much: “By the mid-1980s the British government's intelligence agencies had heavily penetrated the IRA.” Nevertheless, the East Tyrone Brigade continued its war, and in particular its strategy to create a no-go zone along the border for the British Army and the RUC. Having

“BY THE MID-1980s THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT'S INTELLIGENCE AGENCIES HAD HEAVILY PENETRATED THE IRA”

already destroyed or badly damaged a number of isolated RUC outposts as part of that strategy, on Friday 8 May 1987 the Brigade went to attack the police station in the small village of Loughgall. Its best unit – the A Team – was heavily armed and had a large bomb in the bucket of a JCB digger which the men planned to crash through the security barrier and into the station itself. But it was a trap. Britain's Special Air Service (SAS) was waiting. In a matter of minutes all eight volunteers – as the IRA called its members – had been shot dead. Shocked, the IRA was determined to hit back.

The Ballygawley bus bomb

On the night of Friday 19 August 1988, some 36 young soldiers from 1st Battalion The Light Infantry landed at Aldergrove Airport in Belfast after a few days leave back home. They climbed aboard a waiting 52-seater bus with a military driver and headed off to their base in Omagh in County Tyrone. It was late in the evening and they weren't due to arrive back at the barracks until the early hours of Saturday morning.

Waiting for them near the village of Ballygawley was a three-man IRA Active Service Unit (ASU) with a 200lb (90kg) Semtex bomb packed into a car trailer parked by the roadside. As the bus passed the trailer the bomb was detonated, blowing the bus apart and scattering the soldiers all over the road and the adjoining fields.

One of the first people on the scene after the explosion was a local Unionist councillor, Sammy Brush – himself a part-time soldier in the locally recruited Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR) and survivor of an IRA assassination attempt seven years earlier. Brush was horrified at what he found. “There was



"THERE WAS BLOOD EVERYWHERE. GOD KNOWS HOW HE GOT THAT FAR, HE MUST HAVE CRAWLED AWAY FROM THE WRECKAGE LIKE A WOUNDED ANIMAL"



glass, blood and bodies, and young soldiers badly mutilated but still alive," he recalled. "It was a scene of carnage that I would never want to witness in my life again... All you could do was try and comfort them and give them words of encouragement and do your best for them... It was a terrible incident, terrible to think that a human being could blow up other human beings." The RUC night duty inspector from Omagh arrived on the scene and described it as "like driving into hell". Working by torchlight in the dark he "remembered one soldier who at first looked all right in the darkness, but when I looked more closely, I saw he had been decapitated".

Eight soldiers were dead, three of whom were 18 years old, with the oldest aged 21. Every other passenger was wounded, most badly.

Also on the scene that night was Ken Maginnis – Baron Maginnis of Drumglass as he is now. Maginnis had been Brush's company commander in the UDR before leaving to pursue a career in politics – he was now the area's MP.

"I'd seen a lot during the Troubles, things no-one would ever want to see, but that night was horrible, just horrible, there were body parts everywhere," he said. "Those poor young lads had literally been torn to pieces." As troops cleared the surrounding area Maginnis found one of the soldiers who'd crawled away from the blast site. "He was just sitting up in this wee barn propped against a hay bale – it was more like a shed really – like he was asleep, but when I went up to him it was too late, he was dead. There was blood everywhere. God knows how he got that far, he must have crawled away from the wreckage like a wounded animal."

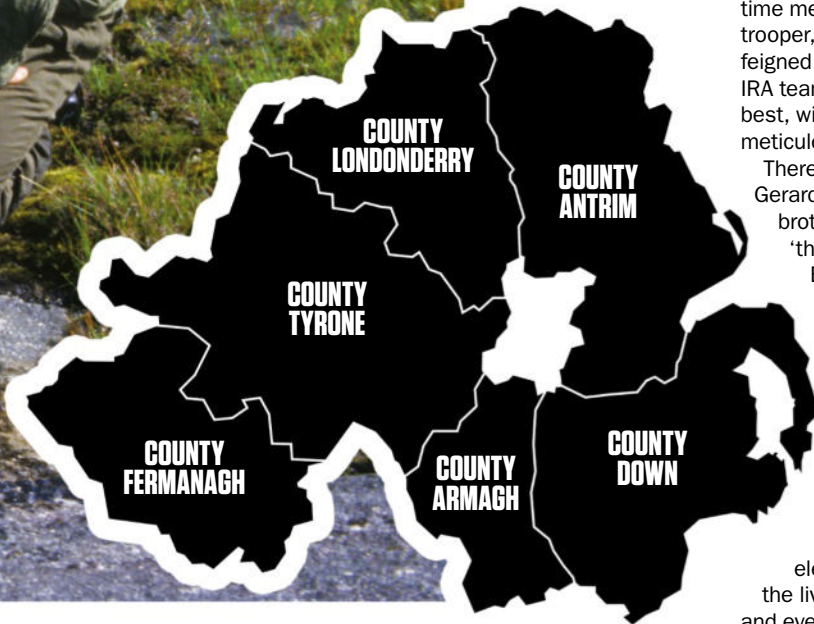
Afterwards, on reaching home, Maginnis put a call into No 10 Downing Street, leaving a message for Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher describing what had happened. "I was so angry, so very angry, and I wanted to tell the prime minister what had happened. She deserved to know from someone who'd seen it for themselves, seen the horror. She was like that, she wanted to hear it from the horse's mouth as it

IRA volunteers undergo weapons training in a remote area of County Donegal in the Irish Republic in late August 1986 before taking their new skills back over the border into Tyrone



Above: RUC officers stop and search a van and its occupants in Tyrone in the 1980s

Below: The Six Counties of Northern Ireland – Tyrone is the largest



were.” Minutes later he was called back by her office and asked to fly to London first thing to brief her in person. In her office the next morning: “She said: ‘Kenneth’ – she always called me Kenneth – ‘do you know who did this?’ I told her I almost certainly did. I gave her three names. She then asked me what she could do about it and I said: ‘Prime minister, watch them, watch them day and night and wait, wait until they make a mistake, because they will, sooner or later.’”

Flying back to Northern Ireland later that day, Maginnis was met on the tarmac by the RUC’s division head covering Tyrone. “I told him I was sorry but I’d made his life so difficult from now on. I knew from that moment on he had one priority and that was to watch every step these guys made.”

Drumnakilly – the SAS strike back

Ten days after the Maginnis-Thatcher meeting on 30 August 1988, a blue coal delivery lorry pulled over off the Drumnakilly Road in Tyrone onto an area of hard ground standing next to

a boarded up two-storey farmhouse. The driver got out of his cab to see what the problem was – a flat back tyre. Cursing his luck, he set about changing it for the spare. All the time he was under the gun sights of an SAS team. No-one opened fire. They weren’t there for him, in fact he was one of them. This was a trap, and a very carefully laid one at that.

Acting on intelligence, the real coal delivery man – a part-time member of the UDR – had been replaced by an SAS trooper, codenamed Soldier G, who had taken his place and feigned a breakdown to lure an IRA team into an ambush. The IRA team involved were some of the East Tyrone Brigade’s best, with the RUC describing them as “a very professional, meticulous gang”.

There were three members of the ASU: the leader, Gerard Harte, his younger brother Martin and Martin’s brother-in-law, Brian Mullin. They called themselves ‘the Untouchables’ and were the main suspects in the Ballygawley bus bombing. A former member of the Brigade said “they were a good outfit and mostly did their own thing, usually it was explosives, some of which they shipped to other teams”. All had long histories of paramilitary involvement, but Gerry Harte was a special case, as a former Special Branch officer made clear: “Gerry Harte headed up internal security for East Tyrone for a long time before going back to operations. If anyone had the finger put on them [as a possible informer] he’d take them down to the Republic and work them over; electric shocks, near drowning, cigarette burns, beating the living hell out of them... torture basically. He was mean and even his own people were terrified of him.” A senior member of the East Tyrone Brigade didn’t go that far, but in his own words “Gerry Harte was hard work”.

The IRA plan

Just after 2pm the ASU made their move. Four armed volunteers in blue boiler suits and balaclavas burst into the home of local teacher Justin McBride on the south side of the Drumnakilly Road. Bundling Justin, his wife and their five terrified children into a back room, the volunteers smashed the phone, warned the family not to raise the alarm, stole the keys to their red Fiat Regata and drove off. They didn’t go far, only to the McAleer farm down the road, whereupon the volunteers repeated the process, smashing the phone, pulling down the blinds and ordering Annie McAleer to stay quiet in a back room.

The ASU had been told that their target was going to deliver coal to the McAleer farm that afternoon, and their plan was to wait for him to turn up and then shoot him dead as he got out

THE IRA'S WAR IN COUNTY TYRONE

The leaders of the Provisional IRA at a press conference 1 June 1972. Left to right: Martin McGuinness, Officer Commanding Derry Brigade; Dáithí Ó Conaill; Seán Mac Stíofáin, IRA Chief of Staff; and Seamus Twomey, Officer Commanding Belfast Brigade



of his cab. So, with Annie McAleer safely tucked away, they settled down to wait.

But then things started to go wrong for the IRA team. The coal lorry didn't turn up, but the milkman did. Knocking on the door he gave the gunmen little choice but to take him hostage too and put him in the back room with Mrs McAleer. Then Thaddeus McAleer appeared in his digger at the farm after finishing his work in the fields. He joined Annie and the milkman. Ten minutes later a yellow Sierra parked up outside the front door. Inside were Eamon McCullough and his two children. McCullough was a salesman and had been talking to the McAleer's about selling them a microwave. He'd popped in on his way past to try and clinch the deal. Instead, he found himself and his kids held prisoner in a by-now packed back

room of the McAleer farmhouse. Unsurprisingly, the volunteers decided enough was enough and they'd have to change tack.

So far the job wasn't going as they'd hoped and, frustrated at their target's no-show, the IRA team changed their plan. While one stood guard over the hostages, the other three went outside with McCullough's car keys and removed the Sierra's sunroof to give them a free field of fire. Now ready, 29-year-old Gerry Harte got into the front passenger seat cradling an AK-47 assault rifle. Martin, aged 21 and with a three-month-old son at home, climbed in the back, with his brother-in-law Brian Mullin getting behind the wheel. Like his big brother, Harte the younger had an AK-47, while Mullin had a Webley .38 revolver on his lap. The fourth volunteer – reportedly a woman – would stay with the Regata at the McAleer's as the getaway vehicle.

Funeral of the IRA hunger striker Martin Hurson in July 1981 in Cappagh, heartland of the East Tyrone Brigade



At the ambush site

Back at the SAS's chosen ambush site nerves were jangling. The supposedly broken-down lorry had been there for over five hours by now and the SAS trooper acting as a decoy had run out of things to check. By then he'd taken all the tyres off and put them back on again, and now the bonnet was up and he had been interminably fiddling with anything and everything in an attempt to make the incident look genuine – where were the Provos?

At 4pm Eammon McCullough's yellow Sierra appeared with the ASU inside – it wasn't the car the SAS were expecting. The Sierra drove past the stationary lorry and slowed. The SAS decoy then saw a gunman in a balaclava stand up through the sunroof, level his weapon and open fire. He dived "over the hedge – it was about three foot high – but then he dropped about eight or nine feet into the boggy field below". The rest of the SAS team took aim.

The Sierra – now about 20 yards away – braked to a halt and Gerry Harte scrambled out to finish the job. A quick burst

“BOTH GERRY HARTE AND THE CAR WERE IMMEDIATELY ENGULFED BY A STORM OF AUTOMATIC GUNFIRE”

of fire and it would be job done – the part-time UDR soldier would be dead. But Gerry Harte wasn't going to get that opportunity. At least three automatic weapons were trained on him from almost point-blank range.

The entire SAS team opened fire at once, and both Gerry Harte and the car were immediately engulfed by a storm of automatic gunfire. Martin Harte and Brian Mullin didn't make it out of the car, shot dead in their seats. Gerry Harte was cut to pieces in the middle of the road. All three volunteers were killed in seconds. According to a soldier involved in the ambush: “The last thing Gerry Harte saw before he died was this really ugly little Scotsman [an SAS trooper apparently infamous in the Regiment for his paucity of good looks] in the hedge aiming a gun at him. What a way to go, poor bugger!”

An RUC team prepped to establish the ambush site as a crime scene were hidden less than half-a-mile away and “were on the scene in seconds... we had three to four crews [RUC teams of between two to four officers] that day and an SAS liaison officer with us.”

With the site secure, one of the RUC team “took out some plastic spoons I'd picked up along with a black marker pen at the UDR base in Dungannon on the way through – to be honest I have no idea why I did that – and I gave them to the SAS boys who'd already been given their identifying letters [Soldier A, Soldier B and so on] and asked them to

plant the spoons where their firing points were. One lad said he fired from two places so I gave him two spoons.”

After that – and as was normal practice – an RAF helicopter quickly appeared, dropping off an Army Quick Reaction Force (QRF) to take control of the area, while it lifted off the SAS team. A short time later a local priest – Father John Cargan – took a phone call from a man identifying himself as an IRA volunteer, who told him there'd been a shooting and gave him directions to the scene.

Father Cargan later spoke to reporters about what he saw: “It is quite horrific... Two of them could possibly be identified but the third seemed to be fairly badly dismembered.” His description is understandable given the findings of the subsequent inquest into the shootings held some five years later, which concluded the SAS had fired 236 rounds to the IRA team's 16 – sheer weight of firepower at close quarters is devastating in its effects. There was little trouble linking the Ballygawley attackers to the SAS ambush, and the next day the British newspaper the *Daily Star* splashed the bellicose headline: “Revenge! SAS Kill Three Bus Bombers”.

Drumnakilly was a bitter blow for the East Tyrone Brigade and a resounding success for the SAS, but the war didn't end there. Over the next four years the fields and hills of Tyrone became a killing ground as the East Tyrone Brigade suffered a bloodletting like no other unit in the IRA. Supplied with more and more intelligence from inside the brigade itself, the SAS carried out ambush after ambush until in the words of one IRA volunteer “there just wasn't anybody left”.

An RUC officer takes cover while on patrol in Tyrone in the 1980s. British Army soldiers would accompany RUC officers on patrol to protect them

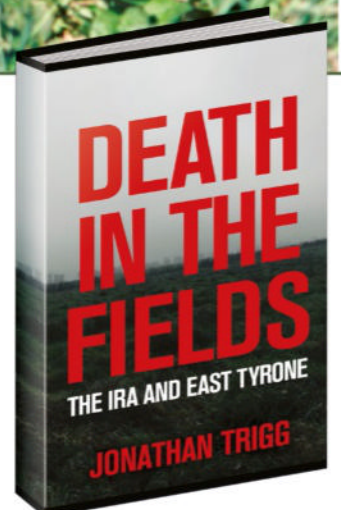


The three IRA volunteers killed at Drumnakilly by the SAS. From left to right: Brian Mullin, Gerard Harte, Martin Harte



Death in the Fields: The IRA and East Tyrone
By Jonathan Trigg
Published by Merrion Press
Paperback, 288 pages
Price: £16.99

Based on interviews with former members of the Provisional IRA, loyalist paramilitaries, British Army veterans including members of the Special Forces, ex-Royal Ulster Constabulary, ex-Special Branch who worked with agents and informers, and ex-Ulster Defence Regiment members – many of whom have never spoken before. This gripping book takes the reader inside the IRA's East Tyrone Brigade – its deadliest unit after the South Armagh ‘bandit country’ Brigade – and its decades-long campaign in the fields and hills of Tyrone. This is the story of one of the most vicious and longest wars in British history, told by those who fought it.



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HOME FRONT

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MUSEUMS & EVENTS

Discover the RAF Museum's tribute to Bomber Command, a medieval tower in Peterborough and a 'Unicorn' in Dundee

Strike Hard, Strike Sure

Marking the 80th anniversary of the famous 'Dambusters' raid, the Royal Air Force Museum London has unveiled a new permanent exhibition dedicated to Bomber Command

Around 125,000 aircrew from 60 nations served in Bomber Command during the Second World War. They volunteered from the United Kingdom, the Commonwealth and Dominions, occupied and neutral countries as well as German nationals fleeing persecution. Their average age was just 23. Over 55,000 of these men died in skies above Europe, with only 30 percent reaching the end of the war without being killed, wounded or captured as a prisoner of war.

At the Royal Air Force Museum in London, a new exhibition called Strike Hard, Strike Sure: Bomber Command 1939-1945 shares the Bomber Command story through the lens of the personal experiences of those who served. They were, in their eyes, just ordinary people from many different countries and backgrounds. However, in the eyes of history, they gave extraordinary service. Men and women from across the world, on the ground and in the air, played an important part in the final Allied victory in 1945.

Throughout the exhibition, silhouettes depict the stories of individuals who played

crucial roles. This includes Barnes Wallis, the genius inventor behind the 'Bouncing Bomb' that was used in the famous Dambusters raid, as well as the Vickers Wellington bomber. There are also other stories such as Wing Commander Raymond Hilton, who was the first operational captain of the Avro Lancaster aircraft S for Sugar, which is currently on display at the museum; and Corporal Lilian Bader, who was one of the first Black women to join the British armed forces.

Also on display in the exhibition are other Bomber Command aircraft such as the Handley Page Halifax and the tail section of the Short Stirling Mk III, which is surrounded by a new hi-tech interpretation.

The museum is also displaying personal objects taken from storage such as the fire-damaged flying helmet, jacket and goggles belonging to Sergeant John Hannah. This brave wireless operator-air gunner was awarded the Victoria Cross after extinguishing an on-board fire with his bare hands – saving his aircraft and crew against all odds.

The innovative technical developments that supported Bomber Command in the delivery

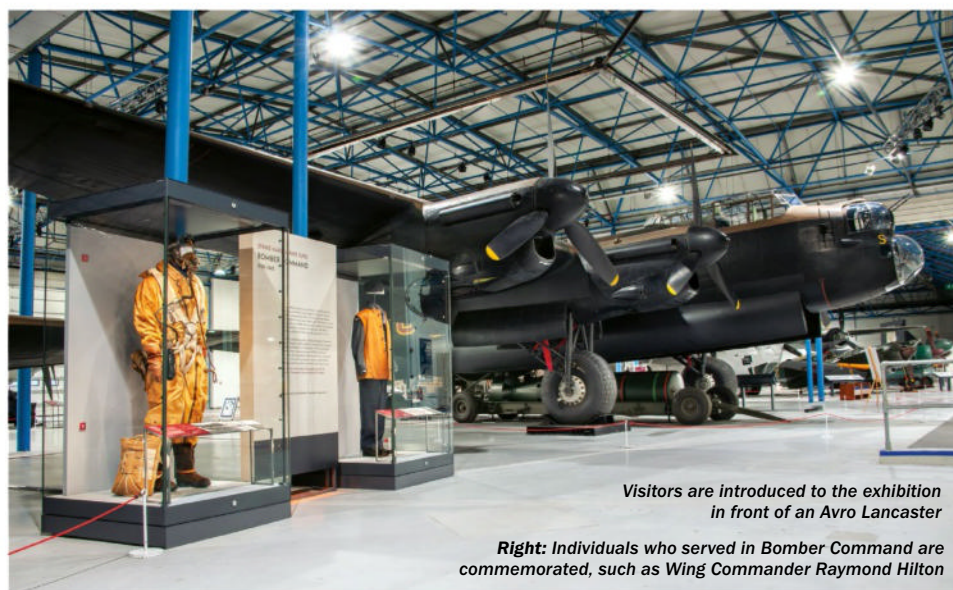


The museum's resident Avro Lancaster flew with both the RAF and Royal Australian Air Force

of their operations are featured too. Visitors can see the replica 9,250lb (4,196kg) cylindrical 'Bouncing Bomb', the 22,000lb (9,979kg) Grand Slam Bomb and a Rose Brothers Type R gun turret.

The exhibition's themes cover training, tech and tactics, precision raids, and experience and loss. Context is provided by a timeline detailing key events in Bomber Command's history and aircraft development, while new exhibition features including augmented reality will help aid visitor understanding.

To pre-book for this free exhibition visit www.rafmuseum.org/london



Visitors are introduced to the exhibition in front of an Avro Lancaster

Right: Individuals who served in Bomber Command are commemorated, such as Wing Commander Raymond Hilton



HMS Unicorn

Moored in Dundee, this early 19th century frigate is the oldest surviving ship in Scotland

Launched in 1824, HMS Unicorn is one of only two surviving Leda-class frigates in the world. Armed with 46 guns, she was built in Chatham Royal Dockyard and represents the transition between wooden and metal shipbuilding. Unicorn was never rigged and only went to sea when she was towed to Dundee in 1873 to serve as a training ship for the Royal Naval Reserves. Her lack of active service left her timbers well preserved and after being decommissioned in 1964 she was eventually converted into a museum ship.

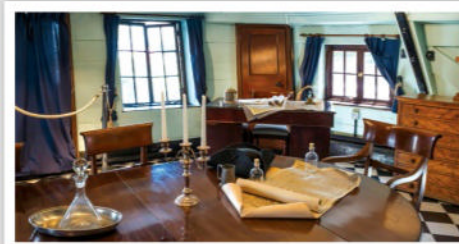
With Anne, Princess Royal as the patron of the Unicorn Preservation Society, the ship has been the recipient of a National Lottery Resilient Heritage Fund Grant. This is to help preserve the original planking, which makes

Unicorn one of the most original surviving ships from her time.

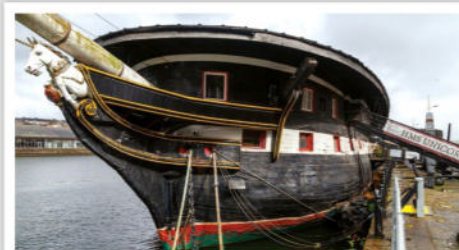
Still moored on Dundee's waterfront, Unicorn contains regular exhibitions on aspects of her history and she also holds her own historic collection. The ship is usually open all year round, with opening days varying with the season. Guided tours can be arranged, with the museum welcoming families and school visits. HMS Unicorn is also a dog-friendly attraction, with dogs on short leads welcome. There is also a gift shop on board selling nautically themed goods and HMS Unicorn branded souvenirs.

For more information visit
www.frigateunicorn.org

Right: The Captain's Cabin is restored to how it looked during the 19th century



Below: HMS Unicorn is one of the oldest surviving ships in the world still afloat



Longthorpe Tower

Explore this unique Cambridgeshire castle that contains remarkable wall paintings dating from the 14th century

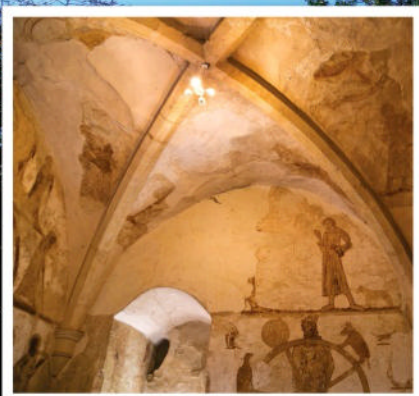
Located in Peterborough, Longthorpe Tower is one of the city's hidden gems. Built during the 1290s by Robert Thorpe, the tower was part of a fortified manor. Thorpe was a lawyer for nearby Peterborough Abbey and richer than many knights, and he was eventually knighted himself by King Edward II of England by 1320. The tower was designed to thwart marauding bandits but it was only militarily used many centuries later by the Home Guard during the Second World War.

Longthorpe Tower is most famous for its spectacular 14th century wall paintings. Painted around 1330 by perhaps up to three artists, they are located on the tower's first floor in a chamber known as The Painted Room. The paintings feature Christian themes such as King David, the Wheel of Life and the Nativity of Christ but there are also secular depictions of kings, knights, musicians and animals.

It is possible that Robert Thorpe himself commissioned them, particularly because he lived until the 1350s. Such are the paintings' importance that David Park, emeritus professor of The Courtauld Institute of Art, has described them as "the major surviving monument of medieval secular wall painting in England, and one of the most impressive north of the Alps".

Below: Longthorpe Tower has three storeys and is a Grade I listed building

For prices & opening times visit
www.english-heritage.org.uk



Inside the tower's Painted Room with its famous wall paintings



JULY 1943

To commemorate 80 years since the Second World War, **History of War** will be taking a look at some of the key events taking place during each month of the conflict



DEATH OF SIKORSKI

During the early part of the Second World War, Władysław Sikorski (1881 – 1943) was the most powerful Polish figure among the Allies. The prime minister of the Polish government-in-exile, Sikorski was also commander-in-chief of the Polish Armed Forces. A distinguished Great War veteran, Sikorski led the government-in-exile from London and became a symbol of Polish national defiance.

However, on 4 July 1943 Sikorski was killed when the RAF B-24 Liberator aircraft he was travelling in crashed after taking off from Gibraltar. Eight other people, including his daughter, were also killed, with the plane's Czech pilot being the only survivor. Sikorski was buried in the Polish War Cemetery in Newark-on-Trent, England, with Winston Churchill delivering the eulogy.

“A DISTINGUISHED WWI VETERAN, SIKORSKI LED THE GOVERNMENT-IN-EXILE FROM LONDON AND BECAME A SYMBOL OF POLISH NATIONAL DEFIANCE”





BOMBING OF ROME

Italy was still fighting on the Axis side in the early summer of 1943 but Rome itself was occupied by German forces. On 19 July 1943, 690 United States Army Air Forces aircraft extensively bombed Rome for the first time during the war. The Americans' specific targets were a steel factory and the San Lorenzo railway yard but Allied bombs also hit nearby apartment blocks. Over 1,500 people were killed during the raid, in which the Americans dropped 9,125 bombs.

There was also extensive damage to important buildings such as the Policlinico Umberto I hospital and even Saint Peter's Basilica in the Vatican City. The bombing of the Basilica was symbolic because the Vatican was technically neutral territory. Pope Pius XII visited devastated areas of Rome in the aftermath of the bombing.

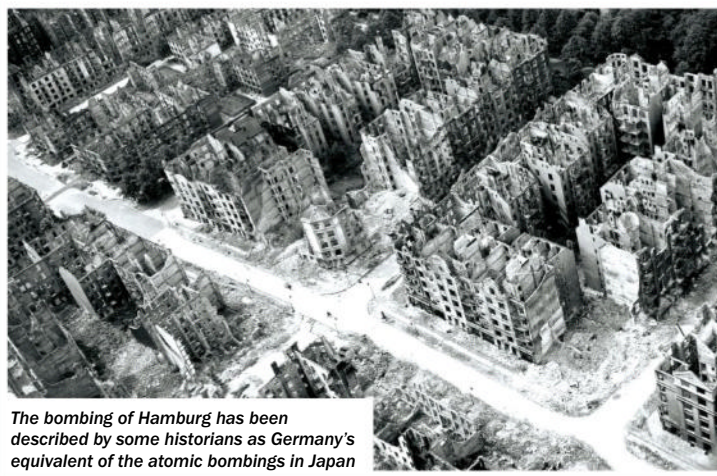
Pope Pius XII pictured among a civilian crowd in Rome after the bombing

A Polish airman who witnessed the tragedy repeatedly cried "this is the end of Poland, this is the end of Poland" when he saw Sikorski's aircraft crash

OPERATION GOMORRAH

A large industrial centre with shipyards, U-boat pens and oil refineries, Hamburg and its surrounding area was a prime target for Allied bombers. Bombed throughout the Second World War, the city endured its worst bombing raids during 24 July to 3 August 1943.

Codenamed Operation Gomorrah, the RAF and United States Army Air Forces released over 2,326 tonnes of bombs over Hamburg on 27 July 1943 alone. An apocalyptic firestorm devastated the city, with winds of up to 150mph (240kph) and temperatures of around 1,472°F (800°C). Once the raids ended, it is estimated that between 34,000-43,000 people had been killed, with thousands of buildings destroyed and one million people fleeing the city.



The bombing of Hamburg has been described by some historians as Germany's equivalent of the atomic bombings in Japan

DOWNFALL OF MUSSOLINI

The fascist dictator and prime minister of Italy since 1922, Benito Mussolini had once been all-powerful. However, by mid-1943 Italy's military position had become untenable. The Allies had invaded Sicily on 9 July 1943 and the Italian mainland was being continually bombed by Allied aircraft.

The Italian Army was on the brink of collapse, which prompted Adolf Hitler to meet Mussolini in northern Italy on 19 July 1943. In the aftermath of the bombing of Rome, Mussolini's government turned against him and he lost a vote of no confidence on 24 July. The following day, King Victor Emmanuel III of Italy summoned Mussolini to his palace and sacked him. He was then arrested by carabinieri gendarmeries.

Mussolini's dismissal and arrest was a far cry from his long rule as Il Duce (The Leader) of Italy and the National Fascist Party



Australian Corporal Leslie 'Bull' Allen was awarded the American Silver Star for rescuing 12 wounded American soldiers at Mount Tambu



BATTLE OF MOUNT TAMBU

Part of the Salamaua-Lae Campaign in New Guinea, the Battle of Mount Tambu saw Australian and American forces advance against Japanese positions after a failed Japanese attack on Wau. The Allied forces were dominated by Australian troops, commanded by Brigadier Murray Moten.

Fought in dense jungle along steep ridges during 16 July to 18 August 1943, Allied assaults on Mount Tambu were repeatedly thrown back by determined Japanese defenders. After several weeks fighting, the Allies conducted flanking manoeuvres along a track that cut off a Japanese supply route. This forced the Japanese to withdraw to avoid being encircled. The Salamaua-Lae Campaign continued until 16 September 1943 when the Allies captured Lae, the capital of Morobe Province.

REVIEWS

Our pick of the latest military history books

BISMARCK'S WAR

HOW THE PRUSSIANS DEFEATED NAPOLEON III AND REVOLUTIONISED THE WAY WARS ARE FOUGHT

Author: Rachel Chrastil **Publisher:** Allen Lane **Price:** £30 (Hardback) **Released:** Out now

It could almost be considered a dress rehearsal for Germany's blitzkrieg of the Second World War. Less than a month after the Prussian army marched into France in 1870, the German forces had devastated their opponents, captured Napoleon III and gave the lie to all assumptions about who ruled the military roost in Europe. Rachel Chrastil tells the shocking tale of the short-lived Franco-Prussian War and how it was deliberately engineered by soon-to-become Chancellor Otto von Bismarck who, almost without stopping to draw breath, went on to mastermind the unification of Germany. This episode in European military history,

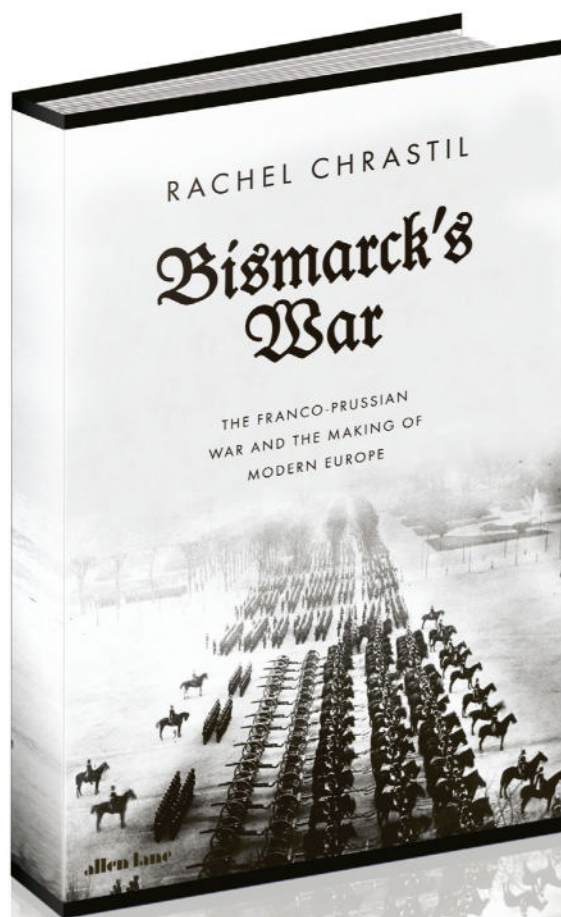
as later events were to bear out, did not escape the attention of Adolf Hitler.

The author relates through extensive archival research how Chief of Staff Helmuth von Moltke and his colleagues out-manoeuvred the French forces at every turn. By August 1870, the Germans had crossed the border into Alsace, driving a wedge between the enemy armies. The following month Napoleon III and 100,000 of his troops were captured, touching off a bloodless revolution in Paris. A fortnight after launching the invasion, Bismarck's forces were at the gates of the capital, which finally fell in January. Prussian militarism had triumphed, laying the groundwork for German

imperialistic adventurism. Germany's victory was not exactly characterised by magnanimity toward the vanquished – the occupation of French territory continued until the government fully repaid the five-billion-franc war indemnity.

The lesson to be learnt from the conflict was that the Germans were victorious because they were better organised, with superior military education and greater manpower. As Chrastil states, in the years that followed, European armies emulated the Prussians' example by expanding conscription, developing their general staffs, professionalising their military education and engaging in war games. **JS**





Below: After sustaining heavy losses, Prussian forces took Saint-Privat-la-Montagne during the Battle of Gravelotte – the largest engagement of the war



HURRICANE

THE PLANE THAT WON THE WAR

THE BACKBONE OF THE RAF HAS IN RECENT TIMES RECEIVED THE PLAUDITS IT RIGHTLY DESERVES FOR ITS ROLE IN THE VICTORY OVER THE LUFTWAFFE

Author: Jacky Hyams **Publisher:** Michael O'Mara Books

Price: £16.99 (Hardback) **On sale:** Out now

It is undoubtedly the case that the Spitfire was the 'glamour' aircraft of the Battle of Britain compared to the Hurricane; a thoroughbred racehorse and a cart horse is the sort of analogy often applied to these two aircraft. But this perception of the Hurricane isn't just unfair, it's also incorrect, and it's one that author Jacky Hyams seeks to redress in her book.

A very readable little account of the plucky Hurricane, the book reprises many of the well-known tales surrounding the aircraft and its pilots during those Battle of Britain days and beyond. While it might be a stretch to say that this aircraft won the war, it is certainly the case that the Hurricane took the lion's share of victories during

that pivotal battle. Sturdy and much-loved by its pilots, it was able to take on the sleek Messerschmitt Bf 109 E – albeit not quite on equal terms.

The author has produced a very readable account of the aircraft's finest hour, but it won't add much to the sum of knowledge of averagely informed Second World War aviation enthusiasts. It is unfortunate, too, that a few technical errors creep in, and one story of a pilot baling out is conflated with another.

Well produced, and with a nice selection of good images, *Hurricane: The Plane that Won the War* would nevertheless have benefited from the oversight of an editor with some degree of subject knowledge. AS



“THE STURDY HURRICANE TOOK THE LION'S SHARE OF VICTORIES DURING THE PIVOTAL BATTLE OF BRITAIN”

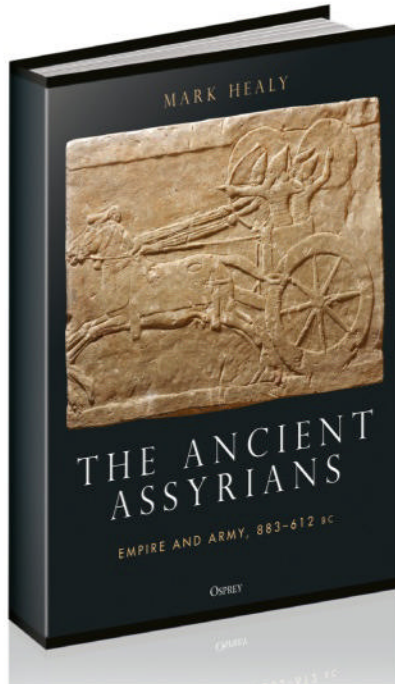
THE ANCIENT ASSYRIANS

AN IN-DEPTH EXPLORATION OF ANCIENT ASSYRIAN WARFARE IN A WORK WHICH WILL BECOME THE STANDARD GO-TO VOLUME

Author: Mark Healy **Publisher:** Osprey Publishing **Price:** £35 (Hardback) **Released:** 20 July 2023

Mark Healy first wrote on the ancient Assyrians for Osprey in 1991. With this year's *The Ancient Assyrians: Empire and Army 883-612 BC*, he brings to bear on the same subject the scholarship of the last 30-odd years. What is more, this work has none of the limitations of format of some of Osprey's series – coming in at 310 pages it covers everything you could want to know regarding the Assyrian army over almost three tumultuous centuries.

He breaks the work into two sections. The first is on the empire, which begins with a hefty chunk before this period before looking at each of the important rulers – Sargon II, Sennacherib, Ashurbanipal – down to the end of the Assyrian Empire with the fall of Nineveh in 612 BCE. The second section focuses on



the Assyrian army in all its facets – structure, command and control, infantry, chariotry, and cavalry.

Healy's work is accessible and down to earth but draws on current academic writing not available to most (such as Tamas Dezso's multi-volume work on the Assyrian army). The book is also richly illustrated with maps, art plates and colour photographs, some of them of up-to-the minute finds. Assyrian reliefs, which are replete with military subjects rendered here in unrivalled detail, remain some the richest records of military history from any age.

Healy's book will become the go-to volume for anyone wanting to explore the military history of Assyria, with plenty of other more general insights into Assyrian history. **MD**

WHITE SUN WAR

NOT QUITE WORLD WAR III BUT CLOSE ENOUGH. KILLER DRONES AND BAD WEATHER REIGN SUPREME IN THIS KINETIC DEBUT

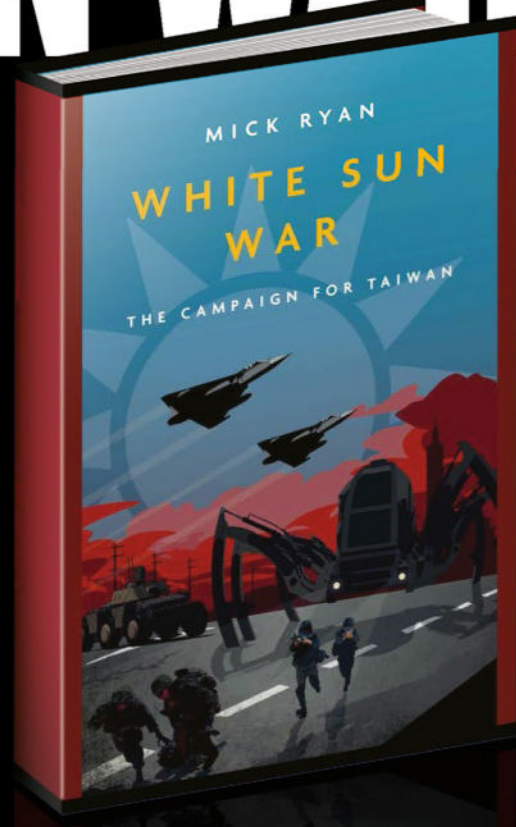
Author: Major General (Ret'd) Mick Ryan **Publisher:** Casemate Fiction **Price:** £17.95 (Paperback) **Released:** Out now

The techno-thriller is enjoying a revival in the fiction business as today's 'Great Power Competition' has authors tackling future war. Back in the 1980s the likes of Craig Thomas and Tom Clancy launched the genre into the mainstream. As with General Sir John Hackett's 1978 bestseller *The Third World War*, whose granular look at a clash between NATO and the Warsaw Pact became a template for other writers, in *White Sun War* an assault on Taiwan gets the same treatment but with a stronger plot.

Mick Ryan weaves a sequence of events that pitches the US and Chinese militaries into a months-long contest of brinkmanship and high technology. As a storyteller Ryan's grasp of the genre is reminiscent of Ian Slater and Dale Brown, both of whom once wrote about US-China conflict in the 1990s.

This time around Ryan highlights why Beijing ranks a 'near-peer' when it comes to hard power – they have ruthless leaders and robots aplenty. As a novel full of characters drawn from the civil-military divide the main antagonists are a Chinese marine officer and a female commander in an embattled US Army unit. The resulting clashes are intense and unpredictable and, while sparing the reader carnage, shows how command decisions are made in the face of death.

The novel fits well into the genre but Ryan's gifts as a thriller author are his crisp writing and a knack for how to pace the book chapter-by-chapter. A sure win for techno-thriller fans who appreciate modern Asia and real-time strategy games. **MM**



RJ MITCHELL TO THE SPITFIRE

AN INCREDIBLY THOROUGH AND WELL-RESEARCHED BIOGRAPHICAL NARRATIVE THAT RECOUNTS THE EARLY YEARS AND LEGACY OF THE LAUDED DESIGNER OF BRITAIN'S ICONIC AIRCRAFT

Author: John Shelton **Publisher:** Fonthill Media **Price:** £40 (Hardback) **Released:** Out now

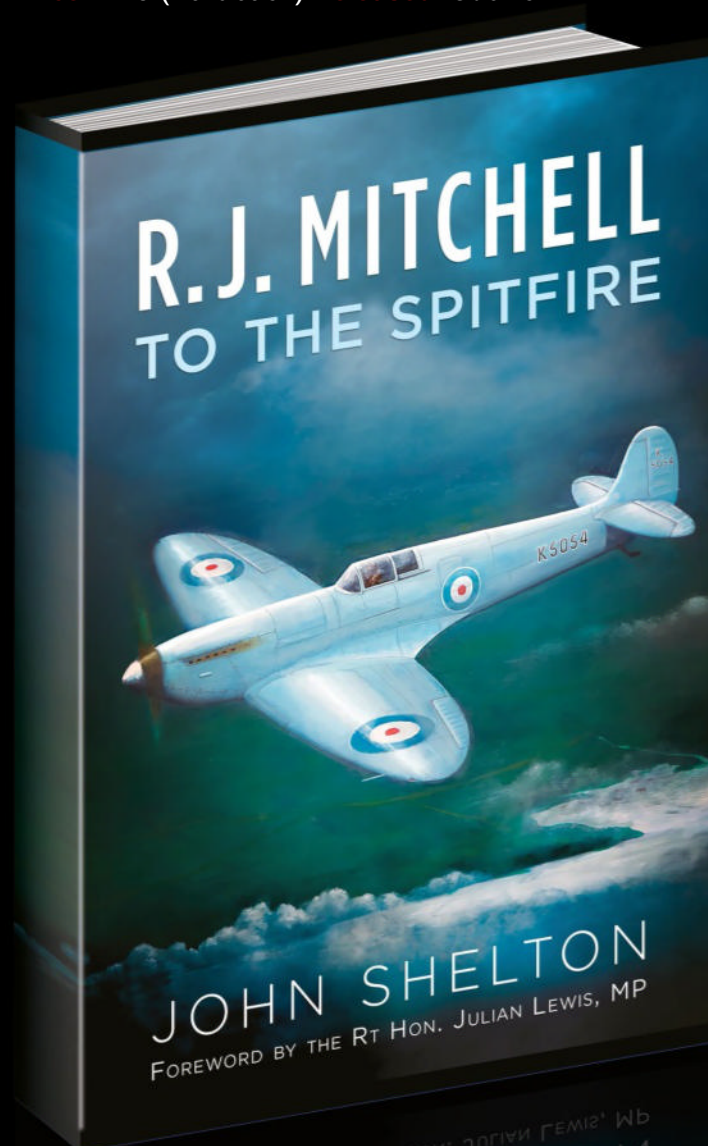
While books on the Spitfire abound, and at least one good biography of RJ Mitchell has appeared in recent decades, this is the first 'integrated' story of Mitchell, Supermarine and the Spitfire. And what a wonderful book this is!

Quite rightly, John Shelton focuses on the early era of Supermarine in the halcyon days of the late 1920s and 1930s and the flying boat and seaplane days of the company. The early biographical aspects of RJ Mitchell's life are also revealing and fascinating, as is the gripping tale leading up to the Schneider Trophy successes and the early development of the aircraft which became the Spitfire.

At a stonking 445 pages, this is undoubtedly the definitive work on Mitchell and the backstory of the Spitfire. Drawing on unpublished letters and documents, and a variety of well-researched primary sources, the book is well-crafted, expertly edited, superbly produced and, overall, exudes quality. Shelton also goes on to outline something of the legacy of Mitchell with versions of the iconic Spitfire which appeared long after his death.

Superbly illustrated throughout, here is a title which is a must-have for any Spitfire aficionado and one which is unlikely to ever be bettered. Shelton is to be congratulated on producing the first Spitfire-related book in a very long while that has contained genuinely fresh material. The £40 price tag is worth every penny. **AS**

Below: RJ Mitchell (far right) oversees work on a Supermarine seaplane, August 1929



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Image © Alamy

**HISTORY
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Future PLC Quay House, The Ambury, Bath BA1 1UA

Editorial

Editor-in-Chief **Tim Williamson**
timothy.williamson@futurenet.com

Senior Designer **Curtis Fermoer-Dunman**

Features Editor **Tom Garner**

Production Editor **Iain Noble**

Senior Art Editor **Duncan Crook**

Contributors

Alex Bowers, Murray Dahm, Michael E Haskew, Miguel Miranda, Andrew Saunders, Nick Soldinger, Dr Penny Starns, Jules Stewart, Jon Trigg, Anthony Tucker-Jones, Jackson van Uden, Dr Ben Wheatley

Photography

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Advertising

Media packs are available on request

UK Commercial Director **Clare Dove**

clare.dove@futurenet.com

Advertising Sales Director **Lara Jaggon**

lara.jaggon@futurenet.com

07515 961911

Account Manager **Hayley Brailey-Woolfson**

hayley.braileywoolfson@futurenet.com

01643 678054

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Head of Print Licensing **Rachel Shaw**

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Chief Executive Officer **Jon Steinberg**
Non-Executive Chairman **Richard Huntingford**
Chief Financial and Strategy Officer **Penny Larkin-Brand**

Tel +44 (0)1225 442 244

THE BUFFS' WOODEN SPOON

This shooting 'prize' was awarded to the worst shots among the NCOs in one of the British Army's oldest regiments

Originally formed as Thomas Morgan's Company of Foot in 1572, The Buffs (Royal East Kent Regiment) was one of the oldest regiments in the British Army. Nicknamed because of the buff coats its soldiers were issued during their first overseas deployment in the Netherlands, this moniker became official in 1751.

Accumulating 116 battle honours, the regiment had a distinguished history. First fighting in the Eighty Years' War (1566 – 1648), it went on to fight in the Jacobite uprisings, American Revolutionary War, Napoleonic Wars, Second Opium War, Anglo-Zulu War, Second Boer War and the World Wars. Four of its soldiers were awarded the Victoria Cross, including two during the Crimean War. The Buffs was finally merged with another Kentish regiment after 389 years of service in 1961 to become the Queen's Own Buffs, The Royal Kent Regiment.

Like many regiments with a long history, The Buffs developed unique traditions. One of

these practices was the awarding of a spoon called The Wooden Un' during 1910-39. In British culture, a wooden spoon is a booby prize traditionally given to the individual or team that comes last in a competition.

The Buffs added their own twist by awarding this large wooden spoon to the worst shot in the sergeants' mess of the 1st Battalion. As an infantry regiment – where good marksmanship was of course highly valued – to be named the worst shot among senior NCOs was considered a jokey humiliation. To add insult to injury, the handle of the spoon was engraved with the various 'winners' of the unwanted accolade.

NATIONAL
ARMY
MUSEUM

The Buffs' wooden spoon is part of the collections of the National Army Museum in Chelsea, London.

www.nam.ac.uk



Left: Several of the engraved recipients were awarded The Wooden Un' at least twice, with the unfortunate Regimental Quartermaster Sergeant Evans winning the spoon three times

Above: Regimental bandmen from The Buffs parade before their colonel-in-chief, King Christian X of Denmark, 5 December 1929

Images: National Army Museum, Getty

IF I HAD SOMEWHERE TO LIVE...

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Last year our supporters helped us change the lives of over 15,000 homeless young people. By letting us know we can count on you, we can continue helping young people with a home and a future.

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