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IN THE WITCHES' CAULDRON

ARNHEM

With the 'Bridge Too Far' lost, read how outnumbered Allied defenders bravely held the line against SS battalions



FERDINAND SCHÖRNER

Nazi general who executed hundreds of his own men... then ran away



BATTLE OF FLODDEN

Scotland's catastrophic defeat at the hands of Henry VIII's enforcer

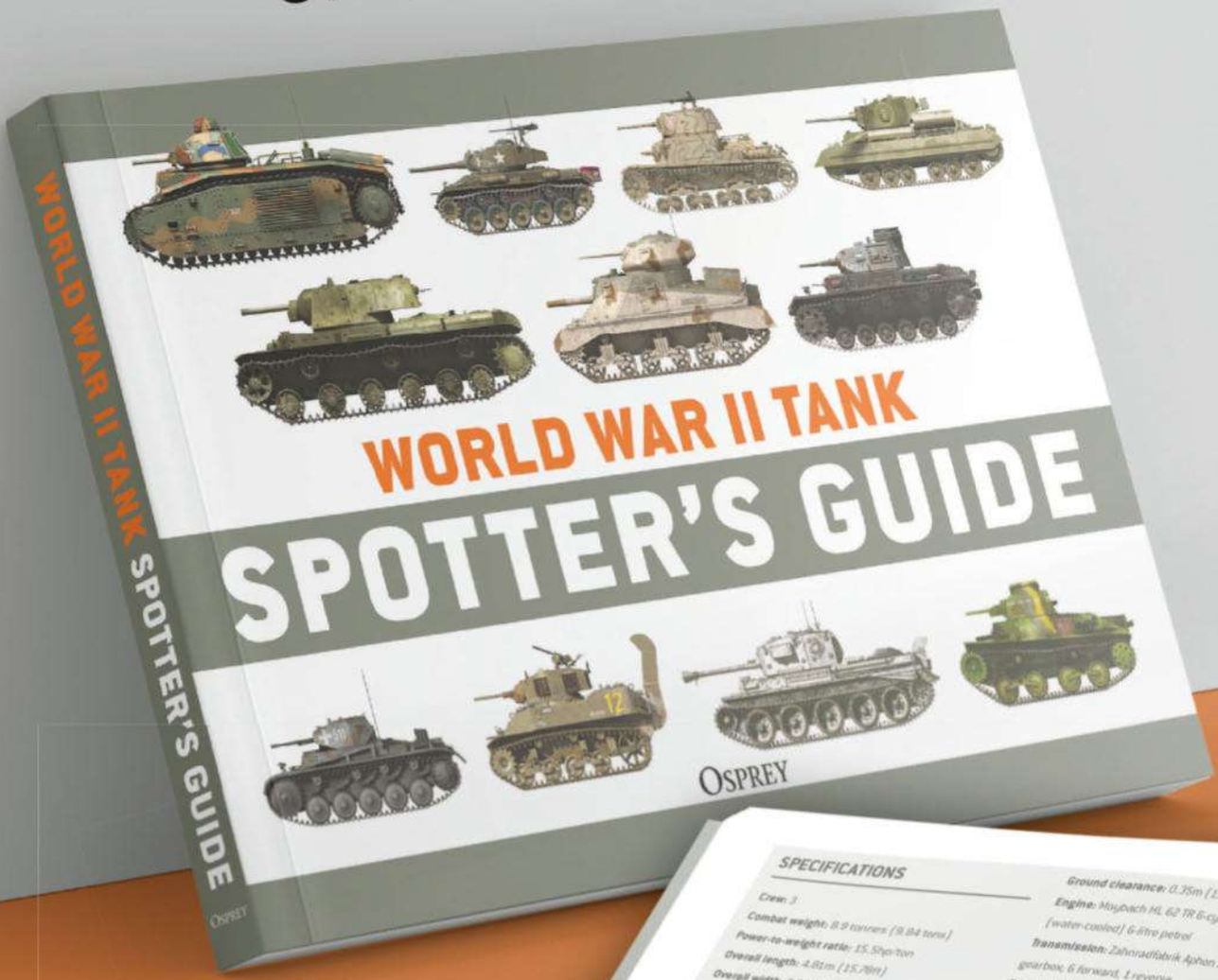


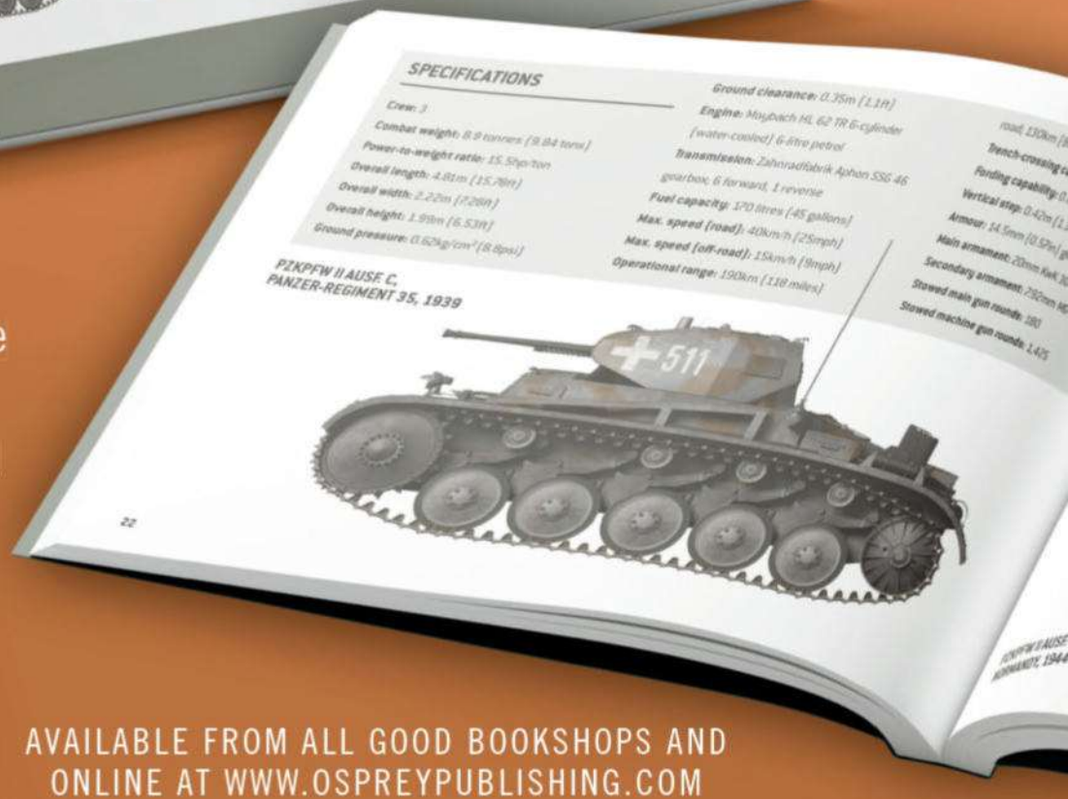
ALGERIAN WAR

Inside the nation's bloody struggle to throw off French rule

FUTURE
ISSUE 137

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***Above:** Four British paratroopers escape across the Rhine during Market Garden*

Welcome



Operation Market Garden, launched 80 years ago, has gone down in history as an equally audacious and tragically flawed campaign. It began with the goal of striking a decisive blow across the Rhine, accelerating the liberation of the Netherlands, the advance into Germany and ultimately – hopefully – Germany's surrender. Instead the Allied commanders were faced with a costly setback, with thousands killed, captured or wounded, while Dutch citizens were left with months of further occupation, as well as retributions and even famine. In its final days the operation focused on the survival and withdrawal of Allied forces in the village of Oosterbeek, west of Arnhem. Here Airborne and Glider Pilot forces held a desperate defensive line against overwhelming German attacks.



Tim Williamson
Editor-in-Chief

CONTRIBUTORS



PHILLIPS O'BRIEN

Phillips is professor of Strategic Studies at St Andrews University, and has written extensively on the Second World War. Over on page 44 he discusses his new book *The Strategists*, which studies five wartime leaders' different strategies.



MARK SIMNER

This month Mark recounts the sinister rise of one of Hitler's most ruthless generals: Ferdinand Schörner. A zealous Nazi, late in the war he earned the grim reputation for executing scores of his own men – until he attempted to flee West (p58).



PRIT BUTTAR

Alongside a distinguished career in medicine, Prit has become a leading expert on the Eastern Front, with multiple publications on the Siege of Stalingrad, Operation Bagration and others. On page 66 he discusses the second volume of his history on the Siege of Leningrad.

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ARNHEM

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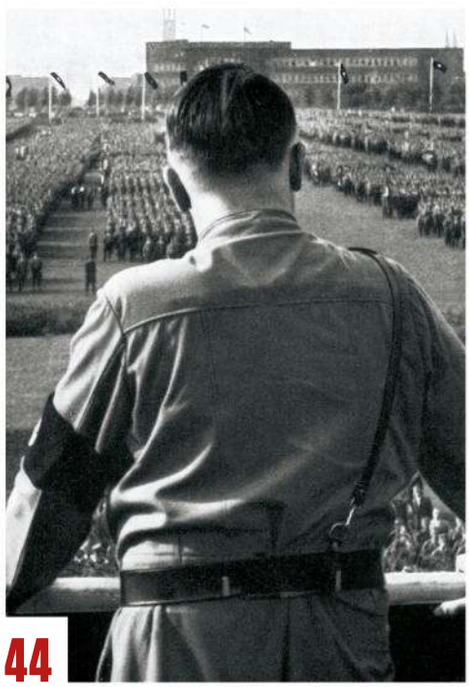
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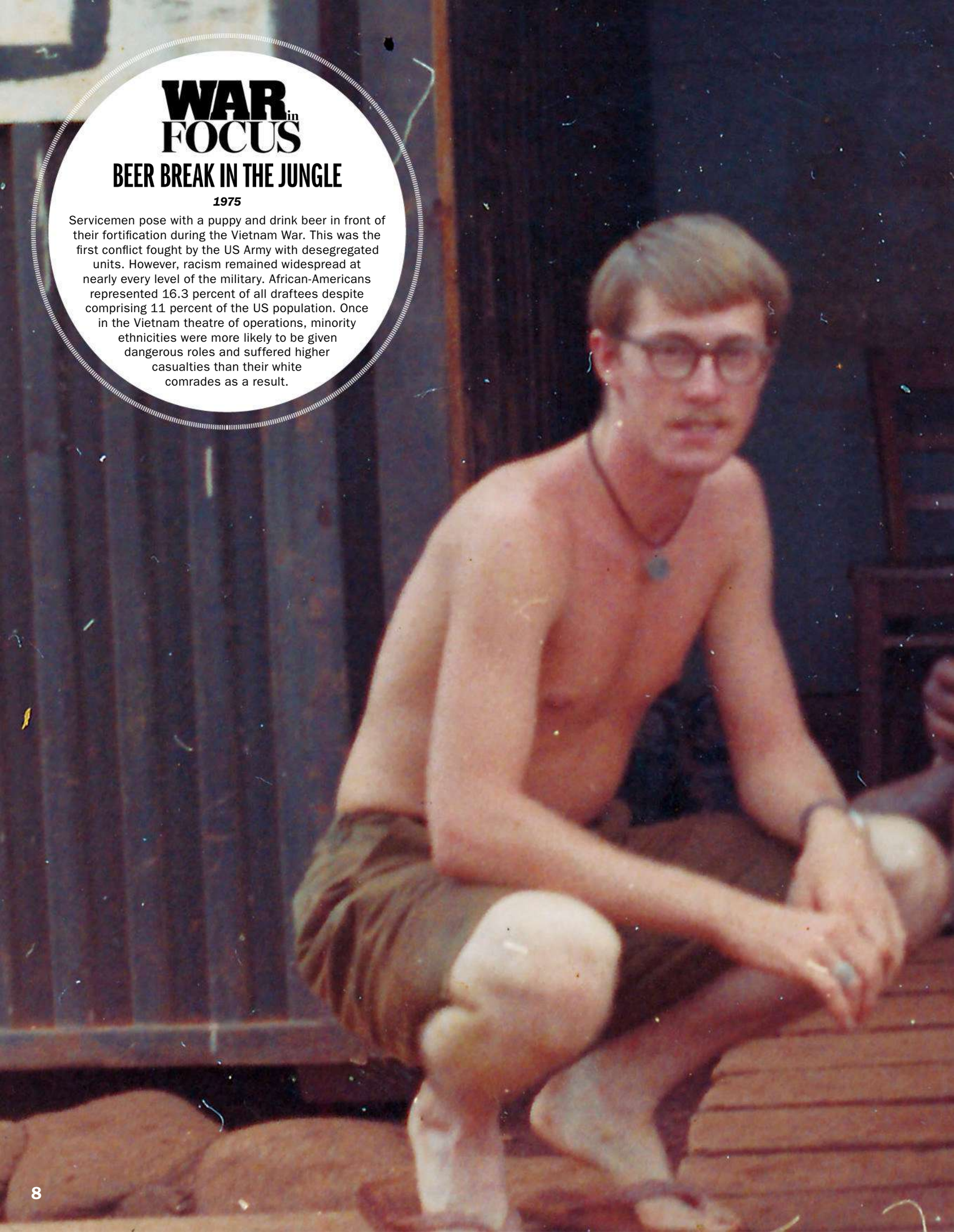


WAR in FOCUS

MEETING THE ENEMY

September 1944

Keystone press agency photographer Fred Ramage, wearing a US Army uniform and helmet, meets German prisoners of war near Brest, Belarus. Ramage was well-known for his coverage of Benito Mussolini's rise to power in 1922 and his iconic image of Neville Chamberlain at Heston Aerodrome after meeting with Hitler in Munich (1938). During the Second World War, Ramage was assigned to the US Army, where he remained throughout its campaign in France. He continued to document European history after the conflict, including at the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg.



WAR in FOCUS

BEER BREAK IN THE JUNGLE

1975

Servicemen pose with a puppy and drink beer in front of their fortification during the Vietnam War. This was the first conflict fought by the US Army with desegregated units. However, racism remained widespread at nearly every level of the military. African-Americans represented 16.3 percent of all draftees despite comprising 11 percent of the US population. Once in the Vietnam theatre of operations, minority ethnicities were more likely to be given dangerous roles and suffered higher casualties than their white comrades as a result.



© Getty

WAR in FOCUS

PEDALS BEFORE PANZERS

1939

German light bicycle infantry line up wearing gas masks in Austria. Only 18 percent of German divisions were fully mechanised by 1941, leaving their infantry highly reliant on bicycles to keep up with advances, particularly during the invasions of Norway and Poland. Bicycles became important to the Wehrmacht once more towards the end of the war in response to fuel shortages. On 6 October 1944, German leadership ordered all bicycles in Italy, Holland and Denmark to be confiscated to supply the Wehrmacht, a blow to the occupied nations' agriculture and industry as workers often had to bike to work.





© Getty

TIMELINE OF THE

ALGERIAN WAR

Algerians battle the French Army and rebellious pieds-noirs paramilitaries during their pursuit of independence from colonial rule



SÉTIF AND GUELMA MASSACRES 01

On the same day that Nazi Germany surrenders, Algerian anti-colonial activists protest in Sétif and Guelma. The demonstrations are violently repressed and the killings inspire retaliatory attacks against the French population. In subsequent repression, French authorities kill up to 45,000 Algerians during this turning point in French-Algerian relations.

8 May – 26 June 1945

1 November 1954

TOUSSAINT ROUGE ATTACKS

The Front de libération nationale (FLN) conducts 70 attacks against civilian and military targets across Algeria following a broadcast calling for a national struggle against the French occupiers. At the start of the conflict, the FLN has fewer than 500 pro-independence fighters.



1954 – mid-1955

SMALL-SCALE GUERRILLA CAMPAIGN

The FLN begins a campaign of limited rural attacks against government and military targets as the group's influence spreads to the countryside. Simultaneously, it orders the liquidation of Muslim representatives collaborating with the French. Many European farmers flee to Algiers and demand a French military response.

***Left:** FLN men during the rural fighting, 1954*

January 1955

A NEW GOVERNOR GENERAL

The French government appoints Jacques Soustelle as the governor general of Algeria, determined to restore peace. He proposes his Soustelle Plan in the belief that integrating Algeria closer to French civil society and improving living standards will ease tensions. However, his plan is not fully accepted by the French government.

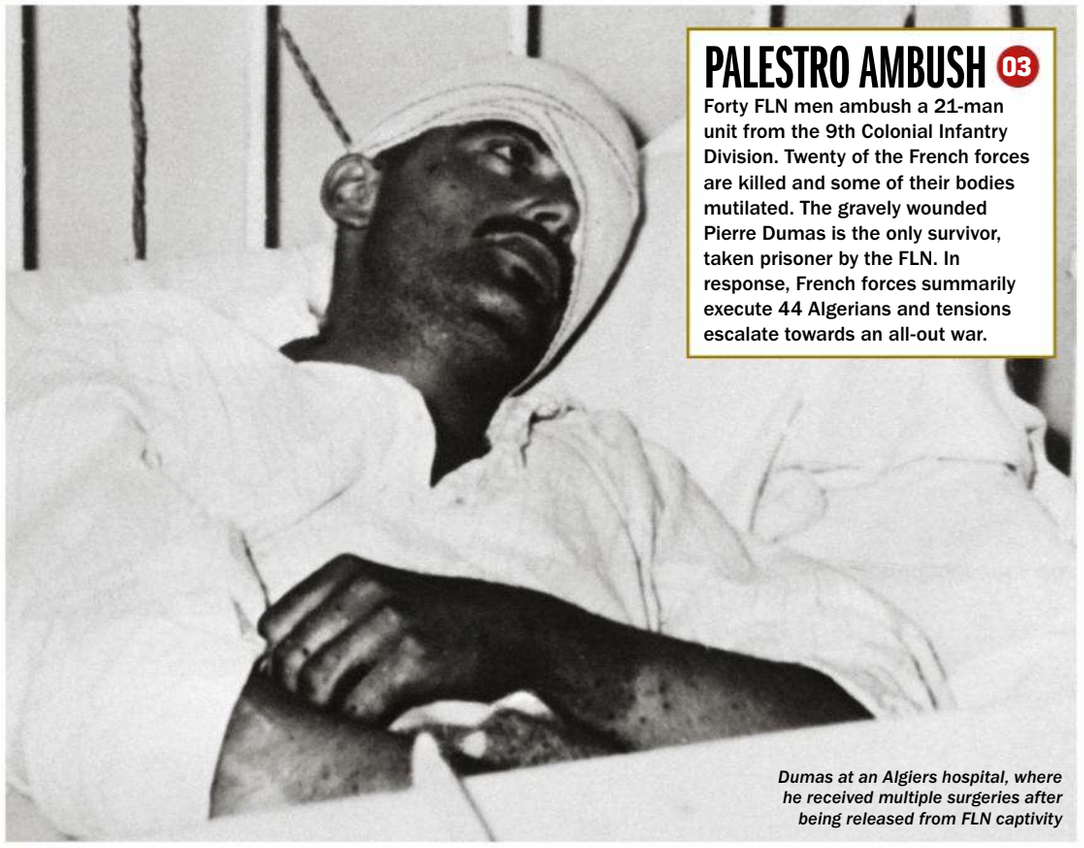
Soustelle, who had served in the Free French forces in WWII, speaks at a press conference in Rome





Algerian troops fought alongside the Free French Army in North Africa during WWII

"IN SUBSEQUENT REPRESSION, FRENCH AUTHORITIES KILL UP TO 45,000 ALGERIANS"



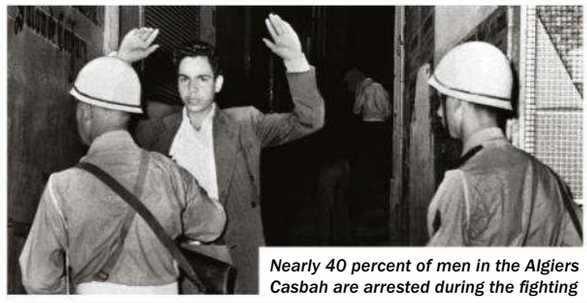
Dumas at an Algiers hospital, where he received multiple surgeries after being released from FLN captivity

PALESTRO AMBUSH 03

Forty FLN men ambush a 21-man unit from the 9th Colonial Infantry Division. Twenty of the French forces are killed and some of their bodies mutilated. The gravely wounded Pierre Dumas is the only survivor, taken prisoner by the FLN. In response, French forces summarily execute 44 Algerians and tensions escalate towards an all-out war.

BATTLE OF ALGIERS (FIRST PHASE) 04

Algiers explodes into violence after the guillotining of two FLN prisoners. FLN insurgents begin a campaign of bombing and assassinations, and pro-French paramilitaries retaliate. With the Algiers police unable to deal with the fighting, the army is called in. The capture of the FLN bomb factory in Algiers' Casbah in February 1957 slows the uprising.



Nearly 40 percent of men in the Algiers Casbah are arrested during the fighting

20 August 1955 — **18 May 1956** — **June 1956 – February 1957** — **20 August 1956**

PHILIPPEVILLE MASSACRE 02

FLN insurgents carry out a series of raids in the Constantine region against European settlers, killing several dozen. Vigilantes and the French Army hit back with brutal reprisals, killing thousands and turning moderate Algerians against colonial rule.



Algerians arrested in Constantine after a car bomb explosion following the Philippeville Massacre

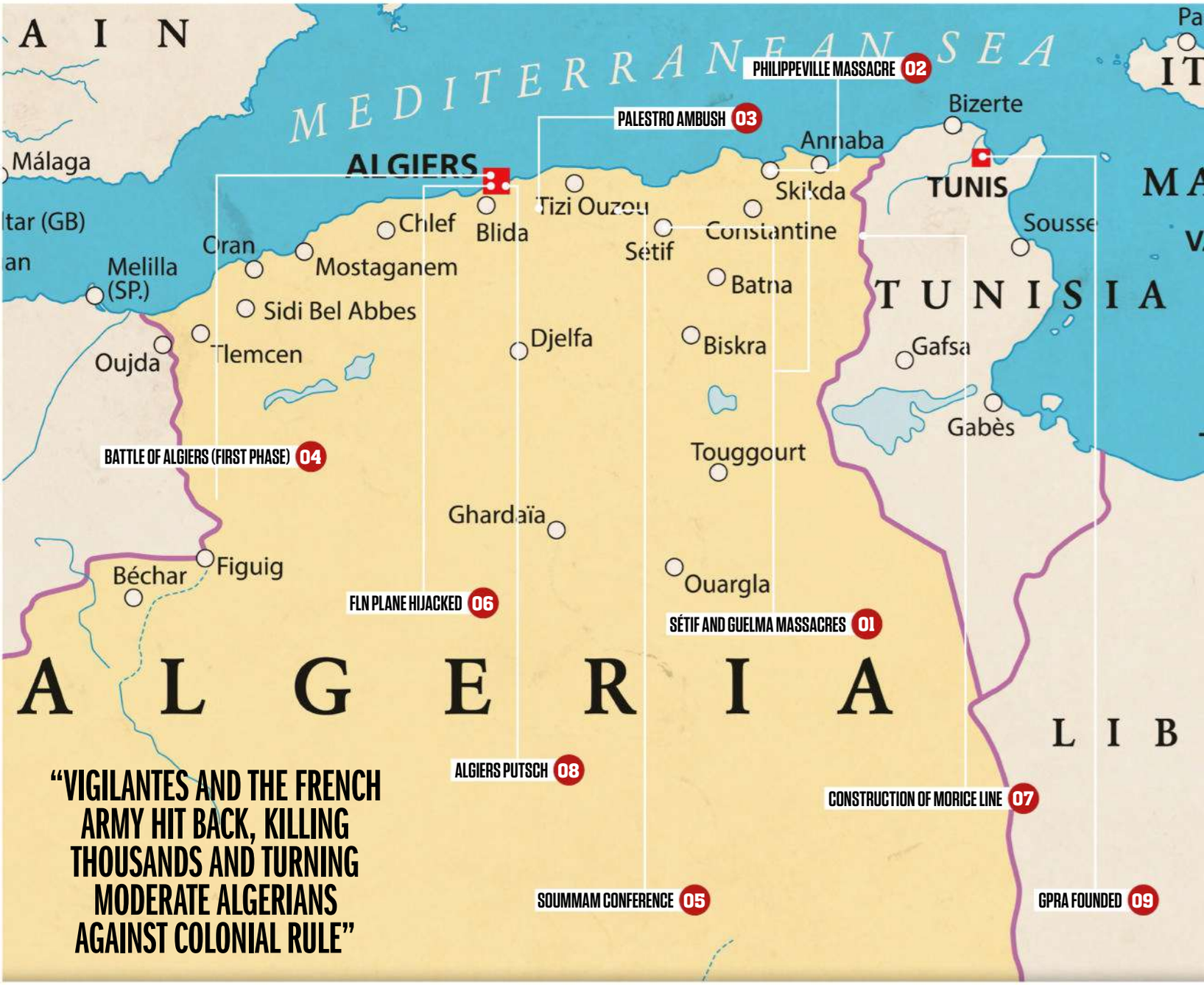


SOUMMAM CONFERENCE 05

FLN leadership meet secretly in the Soummam Valley to create a common platform. They aim to make a French victory impossible rather than win the war outright. They also create an organisational structure that becomes the foundation of the modern Algerian state.

FLN leadership pictured during the Soummam Conference

Images © Alamy, Getty



"VIGILANTES AND THE FRENCH ARMY HIT BACK, KILLING THOUSANDS AND TURNING MODERATE ALGERIANS AGAINST COLONIAL RULE"

22 October 1956 — May – September 1957 — September 1957

FLN PLANE HIJACKED 06

Four FLN leaders fly from Palma de Mallorca to Tunis on a Royal Air Maroc DC-3 to establish a North African Federation against the French. The plane is intercepted by French forces and forced to land in Algiers, derailing the FLN's conference.



The FLN leaders – Ahmed Ben Bella, Hocine Ait Ahmed, Mohamed Boudiaf and Mohamed Khider – pictured before their departure

BATTLE OF ALGIERS (SECOND PHASE)

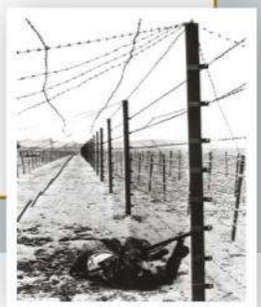
After an interlude, the Battle of Algiers reignites when two paratroopers are shot in the street by the FLN. Further French Army units are deployed in Algiers. They capture the FLN commander Saâdi Yacef, finding him in a cavity wall at his hideout, ending the FLN's ability to organise attacks in the capital.



French troops conduct house-to-house searches in the Algiers Casbah

CONSTRUCTION OF MORICE LINE 07

Faced with an influx of 1,000 fighters crossing Algeria's border with Tunisia and Morocco each month, the French build the Morice Line to stem the flow. It features a 5,000-volt electric fence, barbed wire entanglements and a minefield that stretches 150ft (45m) on each side.



Electrified barbed wire on the Tunisian border as part of the Morice Line

INDEPENDENCE NEGOTIATIONS

France begins independence negotiations with Algerian representatives. Initially, the French only want to hand over coastal regions, keeping control of the oil fields, but are eventually persuaded to make the whole of Algeria independent via the Évian Accords. The OAS responds with a wave of attacks and is defeated at the Battle of Bab El Oued.



The GPRA delegation during the Évian Accords negotiations

GPRA FOUNDED 09

The Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic (GPRA) is set up in exile to serve as the FLN's diplomatic and political arm. With a headquarters in Tunis, it sends diplomats to capitals worldwide, lobbying for support. The GPRA soon gains official recognition from several Arab states.



The GPRA's first president, moderate nationalist Ferhat Abbas, speaks in Cairo

WEEK OF BARRICADES

The Unités Territoriales (volunteer European paramilitary forces in Algeria) rebel after De Gaulle gives a speech mentioning self-determination for Algiers. Pieds-noirs ('black feet', a slang name for French settlers in Algeria) barricade the streets and seize government buildings. After a TV address from De Gaulle, the army intervenes.



Rioters throw stones at police during the Week of Barricades

13 – 29 May 1958 | 19 September 1958 | 24 January – 1 February 1960 | 8 January 1961 | May 1961 – March 1962



ALGIERS PUTSCH 08

Led by the Algiers deputy Pierre Lagaillarde and supported by units of the French armed forces, an uprising among right-wing elements in Algiers becomes a coup d'état. Recognising France is on the brink of civil war, President René Coty invites Charles De Gaulle to return, who inserts himself as French president with sole executive power.

Putsch leader General Jacques Massu (right) set up a 'Committee of Public Safety' aiming to keep Algeria under French rule



ALGERIAN INDEPENDENCE REFERENDUM

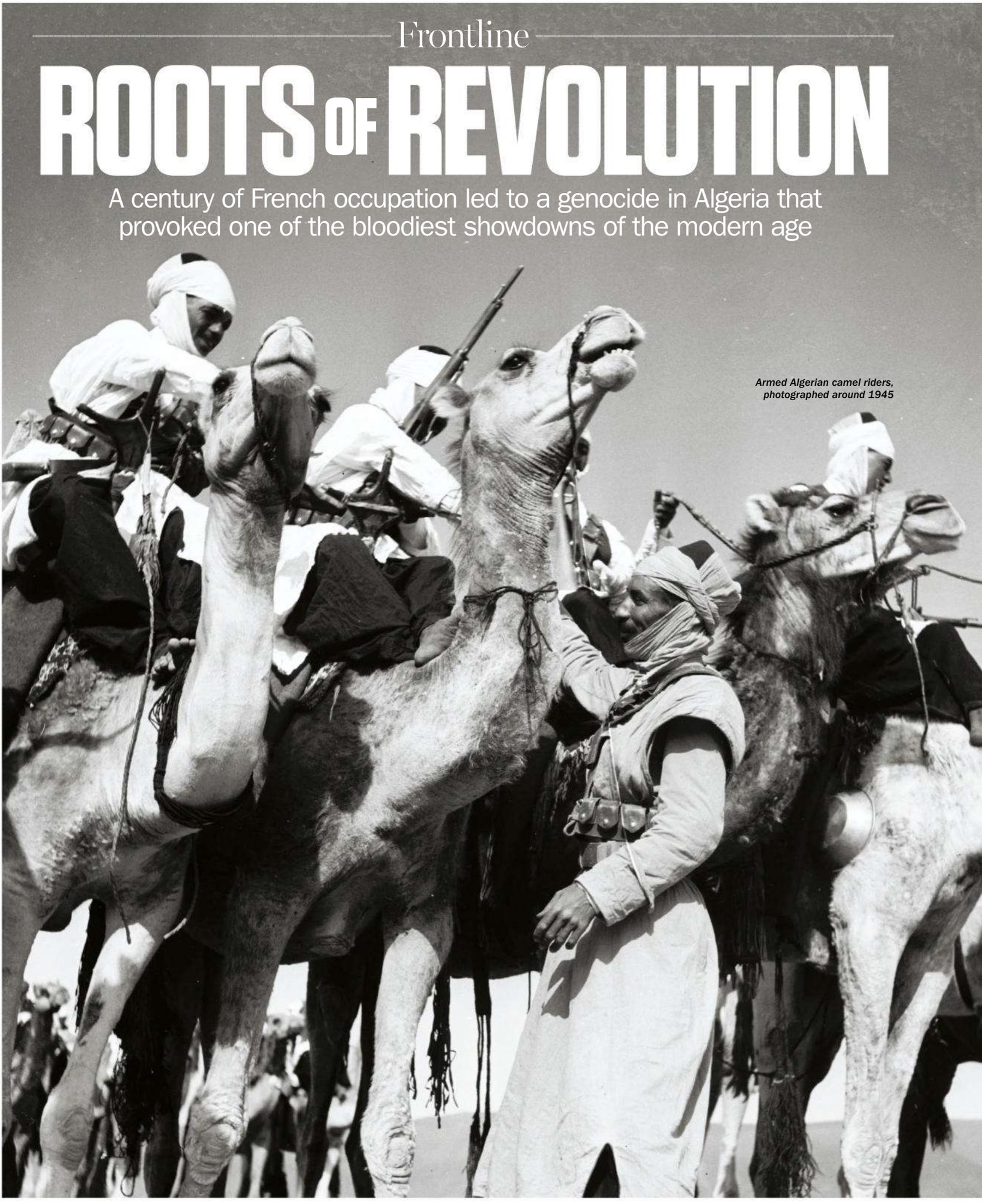
French voters go to the polls on Algerian self-determination. With a 92 percent turnout, 75 percent vote in favour of self-determination overall and 70 percent in Algeria. General Raoul Salan starts the far-right paramilitary Organisation Armée Secrète (OAS) in opposition.

***Above:** A mugshot of Salan, founder of the OAS, taken in April 1962*

Images © Alamy, Getty

ROOTS OF REVOLUTION

A century of French occupation led to a genocide in Algeria that provoked one of the bloodiest showdowns of the modern age



Armed Algerian camel riders, photographed around 1945

On 8 May 1945, Nazi Germany surrendered to the Allies, bringing to an end almost six years of brutality and bloodshed in Europe. As millions across the continent celebrated, the first great tragedy of the post-war era was unfolding a short distance across the Mediterranean. What happened there that day and in the following weeks would sow the seeds of a tragic conflict between France and the North African country it had occupied for more than 100 years.

Rich in oil, gas and iron ore, Algeria had long been considered the jewel in France's imperial crown. By 1945, however, its relationship with its North African neighbour was a messy one. Decades of colonisation had created a political and legal morass in the country, one that was further complicated by Algeria's unusual ethnic mix. At that time, Algeria was home to around 10 million people, mostly Arabs or Berbers. At least a million of its citizens, however, were of French or European descent. This group was known as the pieds-noirs ('black feet'), a name whose disputed origin possibly derived from the colour of the boots worn by French troops when they first occupied the capital Algiers in 1832. Whatever the truth, this white, largely Christian sub-section of the population enjoyed an elevated position in Algerian society compared to the largely non-white Muslim majority.

This dysfunctional situation was further complicated by Algeria's unique status within the French Empire. Although originally annexed as a colony in the traditional sense, the country was designated a French department by the 1848 Constitution when France's Second Republic took effect. In theory, this made Algeria as French as the Pas-de-Calais or Paris, guaranteeing its inhabitants the same rights and privileges extended to all French citizens. In reality, however, the pieds-noirs were the only group that really enjoyed the benefits of this status. The vast majority of the population, meanwhile, struggled against systematic discrimination and economic hardship. Marginalised from the most productive lands, many were forced into low-paying jobs or migrated to France in search of better opportunities – an experience that would forge them into a politically conscious diaspora.

Rebellions and pockets of resistance had existed in Algeria since the earliest days of colonisation. It wasn't until the First World War, however, that collective dissent began to take root. Around 172,000 Algerians, most of them conscripts, fought for France in the conflict, with around 43,000 of them losing their lives. Serve the 'mother country', Algerians were told, and you'll return to a better life of improved prosperity and greater political freedom. Those who survived the meat grinder of the Western Front, however, came home to find this was a lie. To be an Algerian Muslim still meant you were a second-class citizen in your own country, no matter how many medals French generals had pinned to your chest.

As discontent grew, so did support for groups such as the Algerian nationalist organisation Étoile Nord-Africaine (ENA) and the Algerian Communist Party (PCA), both of which campaigned for Algerian independence throughout the interwar years. With the outbreak of the Second World War, however, both branches of the country's infant liberation movement found themselves driven underground as Algeria came under the jurisdiction of France's pro-Nazi Vichy regime.

"THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE MASSACRED REMAINS DISPUTED BECAUSE SO MANY VICTIMS' BODIES WERE HIDDEN, BURNT OR BURIED IN MASS GRAVES"

Liberation from Vichy rule in 1942 did little to alleviate this. With France still occupied, the French government installed itself in Algiers for the remainder of the war with scant regard for the local community. By the time the conflict drew to a close, anti-French sentiment was at boiling point.

On the morning of 8 May 1945, as peace broke out in Europe, 5,000 demonstrators took to the streets of Setif in northern Algeria. Some waved the recently designed Algerian national flag, while others displayed banners protesting against colonial rule. Clashes with the local French gendarmerie followed and shots were fired, killing protestors and police alike. Meanwhile, 140 miles (226km) to the east in Guelma, another more peaceful demonstration was being crushed by the colonial police. As news of the beatings and killings spread, Algerian Muslims attacked their pieds-noirs neighbours in the surrounding countryside, resulting in more than 100 civilian deaths.

Five days of chaos followed, during which the French military and its colonial police went after the protesters.

On orders from Paris, a campaign of reprisal was then launched against the local Muslim population. French troops, including mercenaries from its Foreign Legion, swept through local communities performing summary executions of anyone suspected of involvement. Gangs of pieds-noirs vigilantes, meanwhile, carried out mass lynchings and shootings. Remote settlements were even bombed from the air. These indiscriminate acts of revenge continued until 26 June and atrocities were commonplace. The number of people massacred remains disputed because so many victims' bodies were hidden, burnt or buried in mass graves. French historians put the death toll at 15,000. Official Algerian records, meanwhile, place the figure at 45,000. Whatever the truth, to this day the country that endured that genocide still remembers 8 May not as the day a war ended but as the day a war began.



Algerian infantrymen at the victory parade in Paris to mark Nazi Germany's surrender, 8 May 1945

Images: Getty

THE RISE OF ALGERIAN RESISTANCE

How the anti-colonialist struggle around the globe helped inspire Algeria's liberation movement to organise and fight back

The Second World War ravaged Europe's economy and infrastructure, leaving imperial powers like France unable to hold on to the vast empires they'd controlled for years. All over the world, independence movements now began to challenge the colonial system, in many cases taking up arms against their European overlords. By 1954, France had been defeated by the Viet Minh army in Indochina and forced to withdraw from its former colony there. Meanwhile closer to home, in the Maghreb of northwest Africa, Tunisia and Morocco were also on the brink of booting out the French.

Inspired by the events taking place around them, Algeria's independence movement now made its move. At its vanguard was a new organisation, the Front de libération nationale (FLN), which became a rallying point for a spectrum of political views. On 1 November 1954, the FLN went on the front foot when it launched a series of attacks against military and police targets across Algeria.

From its headquarters in Cairo, its leadership broadcasted an appeal for Muslims throughout Algeria to join a national struggle for the "restoration of the Algerian state, sovereign, democratic and social, within the framework of the principles of Islam".

Paris' response was unequivocal. French Prime Minister Pierre Mendès-France condemned the attacks while simultaneously insisting that Algeria was an integral part of France. "One does not compromise when it comes to defending the internal peace of the nation," he told the National Assembly. "[Algeria is] part of the French Republic. They have been French for a long time, and they are irrevocably French... Between them and metropolitan France, there can be no conceivable secession."

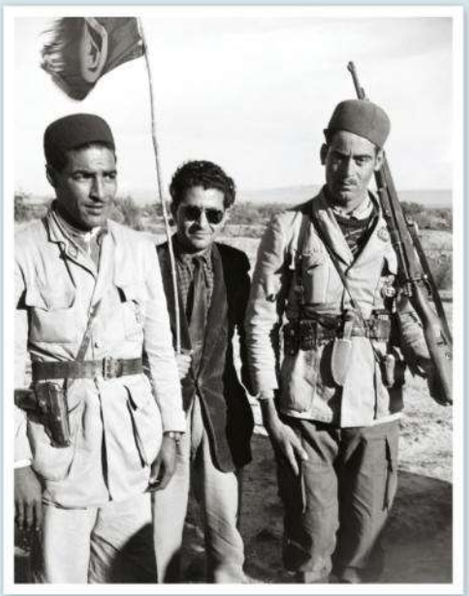
Within days, an additional 600 troops had been sent to Algeria to reinforce the existing French forces there.

The FLN's call for a mass uprising, however, did not materialise. With its military activity restricted to minor guerrilla attacks on government targets in rural areas, a new governor-general, Jacques Soustelle, was appointed to assuage the situation. He set about implementing the Soustelle Plan – a radical socio-economic programme that was designed to improve the lives of all Algerians, winning hearts and minds in the process. It called for better investment in the country and set about creating infrastructure projects and education schemes to tackle discrimination and alleviate poverty.

The FLN realised it needed to up the ante but was in no position to launch a major attack against a large city. Its leadership did, however, believe it could carry out a successful raid on a smaller urban area and Philippeville, a mid-sized town and important port in the north of the country, was targeted.

On 20 August 1955 around 3,000 FLN supporters attacked the settlement, which was garrisoned by 400 French troops. But the French knew the attack was coming and in the fighting that followed wiped out around two-thirds of the FLN fighters. A further 71 pieds-noirs and 52 Algerian Muslims suspected of collaborating with the French regime were also killed. Another attack on the nearby mining town of El-Halia saw another 37 pieds-noirs civilians murdered.

> "INSPIRED BY THE EVENTS TAKING PLACE AROUND THEM, ALGERIA'S INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT NOW MADE ITS MOVE"



Men from the Armée de libération national near the Tunisian border, May 1955

France's response was predictably brutal. The pieds-noirs were legally permitted to form armed militias with the stated aim of self-defence. These state-endorsed vigilante groups now went after the local Muslim population alongside regular troops, inflicting a revenge that even Soustelle admitted was "severe".

Anywhere between 1,200 and 12,000 Muslims were murdered in the wake of the Philippeville massacre, and with them died any hope of reconciliation between the two sides. Human decency was slipping away. Visiting the town in the wake of the attack, Soustelle noted that "the Europeans see terrorists in every Muslim [while] the Muslims fear reprisals by the Europeans".

Many moderate Muslims now aligned themselves with the FLN, and as the organisation's ranks swelled, Paris sent more troops. With the war escalating, the FLN's military wing, the Armée de libération nationale (ALN) now looked to tactics used by the Viet Minh in Indochina as a way to win it.

On 18 May 1956, a 21-strong patrol of the 9th Colonial Infantry Division was ambushed by the Ali Khodja commando unit of the ALN while on patrol near the town of Djerrah, southeast of Algiers. The patrol was effectively wiped out. Soon after, reports began to circulate that the corpses of French troops had been mutilated. It was to become one of the most disputed and propagandised incidents of the war. In its wake, Algerian Muslims found themselves increasingly portrayed in the media not only as savages but as legitimate military targets.

That summer, secret negotiations were held in Rome and Belgrade between the French government and representatives from the FLN. The FLN, however, would not compromise on its aim of freeing Algeria from France's imperial grasp. The fighting in Algeria escalated and the talks failed, and the stage was now set for what would prove to be the critical encounter of the war.



Below: *Algerian guerrilla fighters are trained in how to operate Lewis machine guns, June 1957*

Above: *Many young men joined the insurgency in the wake of French atrocities against the local population*



Images: getty

BATTLE OF ALGIERS

When the Front de libération nationale (FLN) took its war to the streets of the capital, France's military responded with merciless wrath

On 20 June 1956, two FLN prisoners were executed by guillotine in the courtyard of Barberousse Prison. The killings marked the beginning of a year-long struggle that came to be known as the Battle of Algiers. This was not, as its name suggests, a set-piece confrontation but rather a protracted guerrilla campaign in the Algerian capital.

Emboldened by the FLN's growing support, an immediate response to the dual execution was demanded by Saadi Yacef, the FLN's commander in Algiers, who issued orders to "shoot down any European [aged] 18 to 54. No women, no children, no elders." A spate of random attacks followed and over the next four days, 49 pied-noir civilians were gunned down in the street. On 10 August, the far-right pied-noir group Union Française Nord-Africaine (UFNA) responded by detonating a bomb inside the Casbah, the city's densely populated Muslim neighbourhood, killing 73.

Ten days later, on 20 August, the FLN leadership met at the Soummam Conference in northern Algeria. Here they agreed to what a future Algerian state might look like and the steps that were required to achieve it. It was decided there would be no ceasefire with France until Algerian independence was recognised and accepted, and an insurrectionist war of attrition was identified as the only means to achieve this. Taking its lead from the success of the insurgency in Indochina, the Armée de libération nationale (ANL) troops now committed to a protracted guerrilla



French troops take cover during the fighting

campaign. A political programme was also agreed upon, one that sought to galvanise the support of the Algerian people, both at home and abroad, and isolate France on the international stage.

So began the Battle of Algiers. As the French authorities clamped down, female insurgents were recruited to carry out operations as they were less likely to be stopped and searched. On 30 September, the first of a series of bomb attacks took place against civilian targets. Devices planted at the Milk Bar on Place Bugeaud and the Cafeteria on Rue Michelet, in the heart of the European city close to the coast, killed three and injured another 50. A fourth bomb planted at the Air France terminus at Algiers airport failed to explode.

It didn't take the French long to respond. In December, General Raoul Salan was appointed commander-in-chief of France's forces in Algeria. A veteran of the war in Indochina, he was schooled in counterinsurgency tactics and soon had his troops kicking in doors and arresting suspects.

The FLN redoubled its efforts. A sustained urban insurgency would, it decided, show Paris that the French state had no place in Algiers. One of the FLN's leaders, Abane Ramdane, went so far as to claim that such a campaign would be the "Algerian Dien Bien Phu", a reference to the climactic battle in Indochina that had finally ended French colonial rule there.

This shift in tactics would put the pied-noir community, rather than the French military, at the forefront of attacks. As one FLN directive put it: "A bomb causing the death of 10 people and wounding 50 others is equivalent on a psychological level to the loss of a French battalion."

By the start of 1957, dozens of bombings were taking place every day. A general strike was also called and as the situation spiralled out of control French troop deployments were ramped up. On 7 January, the 5,000-strong 10th Parachute Division was sent to the city. This elite unit, which had served in Indochina, was given carte blanche to restore order. Several thousand more troops were also transferred to the Algerian capital, including police intelligence agents, and a quadrillage system was enforced. This saw the city divided up into squares with each square assigned a military command. Within each square, checkpoints were set up, house-to-house searches conducted and a strict curfew enforced. Algiers may have been nominally a department of France but it was now under military occupation.

Tens of thousands of Algerians were now subject to arrest and interrogation, and it's thought that up to 40 percent of male inhabitants of the Casbah were arrested during this period. The use of torture was widespread, with techniques ranging from beatings and waterboarding to sexual assault. Summary executions were also commonplace and as many as 3,000 residents were put to death without trial.

By the end of March 1957, the FLN structure in the capital was in tatters and its bombing campaign stopped. Believing it had achieved victory, the 10th Parachute Division now withdrew to tackle the insurgency elsewhere in the country, giving the FLN, still under the leadership of Yacef, a chance to reorganise. With the resumption of FLN attacks in May, however, the 10th Parachute Division returned to the city with orders to crush the remaining resistance. By September, Yacef was in custody and the Battle of Algiers was effectively at an end.

The French had won a military victory but could not claim a moral one – the barbaric measures they'd used to quell the rebellion had drawn widespread criticism. As support for the Algerian cause grew, France found itself increasingly isolated on the international stage, embroiled in a conflict it couldn't win.

***Below:** French paratroopers keep watch from a rooftop in the Casbah, June 1957*





The military's harsh treatment of Algerian civilians drew widespread international criticism

Images: Getty

COUPS & CHAOS

How the French armed forces lost the war in Algeria and almost destroyed French democracy in the process

By 1958, France had over 460,000 troops in Algeria, including veterans of the counter-insurgency operation in Indochina. Also among their ranks were members of the 5th Bureau, a psych-ops unit that used covert tactics to infiltrate and corrupt the Front de libération nationale (FLN), causing in-fighting and instability. The war had effectively turned Algeria into a police state.

The quadrillage system used in the capital was extended to the entire country. Curfews, searches and summary executions were commonplace, and villages suspected of FLN collaboration were bombed from the air. The Morice Line was rolled out along Algeria's borders with Tunisia and Morocco. Designed to prevent additional fighters and supplies from reaching the FLN, it consisted of miles of electrified fencing, radar systems, searchlights and minefields. In an attempt to eradicate support for the FLN in rural communities, the authorities uprooted two million people, sending them to concentration camps.

These tactics largely contained the insurgency in Algeria but their use caused political mayhem back in France. As reports of brutality and torture flooded out of the country, support for Algerian independence gained momentum, particularly among France's left-wing political parties. This infuriated not only the pieds-noirs but also the French military. Believing their counter-insurgency operation was being undermined by political incompetence, they took matters into their own hands.

On 13 May 1958, French forces in Algiers seized power, insisting that France's wartime leader Charles de Gaulle be installed as French leader. In a demonstration of support,



General Jacques Massu (in beret) and General Raoul Salan (in light kepi), salute a monument for three French soldiers assassinated by Tunisian separatists, 14 May 1958



***Above:** Charles De Gaulle (in dark kepi) on his first visit to Algiers since his return to power, 4 June 1958*

***Right:** General Raoul Salan, who bitterly opposed Algerian independence, prepares to address his followers*

the French Army staged a coup in Corsica and threatened to march on Paris if its demands weren't met. De Gaulle stated that while he was prepared to return to office, he would not do so as a dictator. Cornered, the French government agreed to vote him in as prime minister and overhaul the French political system. France's Fourth Republic was killed off. From now on the country would be led by a president with significant power and De Gaulle, who'd soon be sworn in as leader of its Fifth Republic, would be granted the authority to rule by decree for a limited period.

His initial response to the calamity in Algeria was to state his support for the pieds-noirs while also promising to improve life for the country's Muslim population. As the new republic's constitution was being drafted, he made the FLN an offer. In the Fifth Republic, Algeria would no longer be an integral part of France, merely a region associated with it, where all its citizens would enjoy equal rights.

Sensing it was being outmanoeuvred, the FLN declared the formation of the Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic on 19 September. As well as many Arab states, several other countries were quick to recognise its legitimacy, including China and Pakistan.

The war, meanwhile, ground on and as the casualties mounted (27,000 French troops would eventually be killed) cracks began to appear in France's resolve. In September 1959, when De Gaulle made a speech mentioning Algerian self-determination for the first time, pied-noir militants were incensed. On 24 January 1960, they rebelled. A series of riots known as the 'Week of the Barricades' followed, putting them at loggerheads with Paris. To make matters worse, it would take a televised appeal by De Gaulle to get the army in Algeria to tackle the uprising.

With criticism mounting at home and abroad, De Gaulle now announced a referendum on Algerian independence. In response, a far-right paramilitary group called Organisation Armée Secrète (OAS) sprung up, led by General Raoul Salan. In an attempt to prevent the vote, it launched a campaign of assassinations and bombings in both Algeria and France. De Gaulle would not be deterred. The referendum took place, as planned, on 8 January 1961 and 75 percent of voters backed independence. But it was not a result that the OAS would respect.

On 21 April, Salan and other high-ranking French officers attempted to seize power in Algeria. De Gaulle again made a TV address, this time appealing to the French people for support against what would become known as the Generals' Putsch. Millions took to the streets and by the 26th the coup had collapsed.

The following month, in Evian, independence negotiations finally began. Initially, Paris was only willing to give up Algeria's coastal districts, insisting that the country's oil fields in the south remain in French hands. Unsurprisingly, the FLN refused. By June, however, a ceasefire had been negotiated between the two sides. Although the OAS would continue fighting, the slaughter was all but over. Algeria's struggle for independence had cost the country approximately 1.5 million lives. Another 1.4 million, meanwhile, most of them pieds-noirs, emigrated in the turmoil that followed.

In the end, it took another nine months of negotiations to strike a deal, but on 18 March 1962 the Evian Accords were signed, guaranteeing Algerian independence. The OAS launched one last bombing campaign in the hope of scuppering the agreement but the FLN refused to be drawn. On 5 July 1962, on the 132nd anniversary of the French invasion, the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria was finally born.

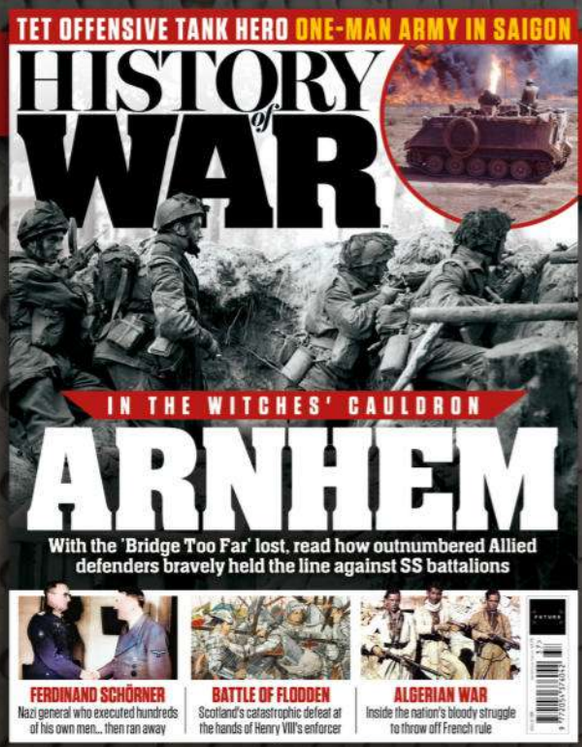
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AIRBORNE UNDER SIEGE

ARNHEM

WORDS ANTHONY TUCKER-JONES

For nine days the heroic 1st Airborne fought desperately, waiting vainly for relief that never came



The presence of German armour in the Arnhem area came as an unwelcome shock to both the Paras and 30th Corps



Paratroopers surrender at Oosterbeek on 25 September. By the end of the battle 6,642 Allied troops had been captured



A member of 1st Airborne armed with a Sten gun, takes aim during the fighting around Oosterbeek

In the early hours of 26 September 1944, the exhausted survivors of British 1st Airborne began to evacuate the northern bank of the Rhine. This was the shameful culmination of Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery's Operation Market Garden. It had commenced nine days earlier with high hopes of 'bouncing the Rhine' at Arnhem and thrusting into the Ruhr – the Nazis' industrial heartland. Instead, it turned into a nightmare race against time as Lieutenant General Brian Horrocks' British 30th Corps fought to first reach the US 101st Airborne Division at Eindhoven and then the US 82nd Airborne Division at Nijmegen. The third step of relieving the British 1st Airborne Division at Arnhem and Oosterbeek infamously became a 'bridge too far'. Horrocks failed thanks to German resistance at Nijmegen and the presence of the much-depleted 2nd SS Panzer Corps at Arnhem.

Although Lieutenant Colonel John Frost and his gallant 2nd Battalion, 1st Parachute Brigade seized Arnhem bridge on 17 September, General Roy Urquhart with the rest of his 1st Airborne at Oosterbeek could not reach him. Driving Frost from Arnhem became a priority for Field Marshal Walter Model once Horrocks' 30th Corps had reached Nijmegen on 19 September. "Since the British won't come out of their holes, we'll blast them out," ordered SS-Brigadier Heinz Harmel, commander of the 10th SS Panzer Division. He instructed his gunners to leave nothing "but a pile of bricks".

Frost was completely hemmed in around the northern end of the bridge by elements of the 9th SS and 10th SS. Artillery and tanks were used to destroy the buildings held by the British paratroopers one by one. SS-Private Horst Weber watched two Tiger tanks pulverise the houses in front of them. "The din was awful," he later recalled, "but even so above it all we could hear the wounded screaming." The buildings just crumpled, spilling the defenders out onto the street, where they were mown down. German forces on the south bank of the Rhine also joined in the mayhem. Two 3.5in (88mm) guns were deployed either side of the southern end of the bridge and shelled the paras at almost point blank range. Frost was soon fretting at the grim situation. "There was still no sign or encouragement from 30th Corps," he later recalled.

Frost overwhelmed

Meanwhile, in western Arnhem, SS-Captain Hans Möller's men and Battle Group Gropp, which formed part of SS-Lieutenant Colonel Spindler's command, fought to stop Urquhart reinforcing Frost. Elements of four British battalions reached the Den Brink area and the nearby St Elizabeth Hospital. At the same time Battle Group Spindler was corralling the remainder of 1st Airborne towards Oosterbeek. From 4.30am onwards on 19 September, German tanks and SS-panzergrenadiers repeatedly thwarted British attempts to fight their way eastward from the hospital area along the Utrechtseweg and Onderlangs roads and past the city museum. At first Möller feared the paras were going to break through – instead they walked into a deadly trap.

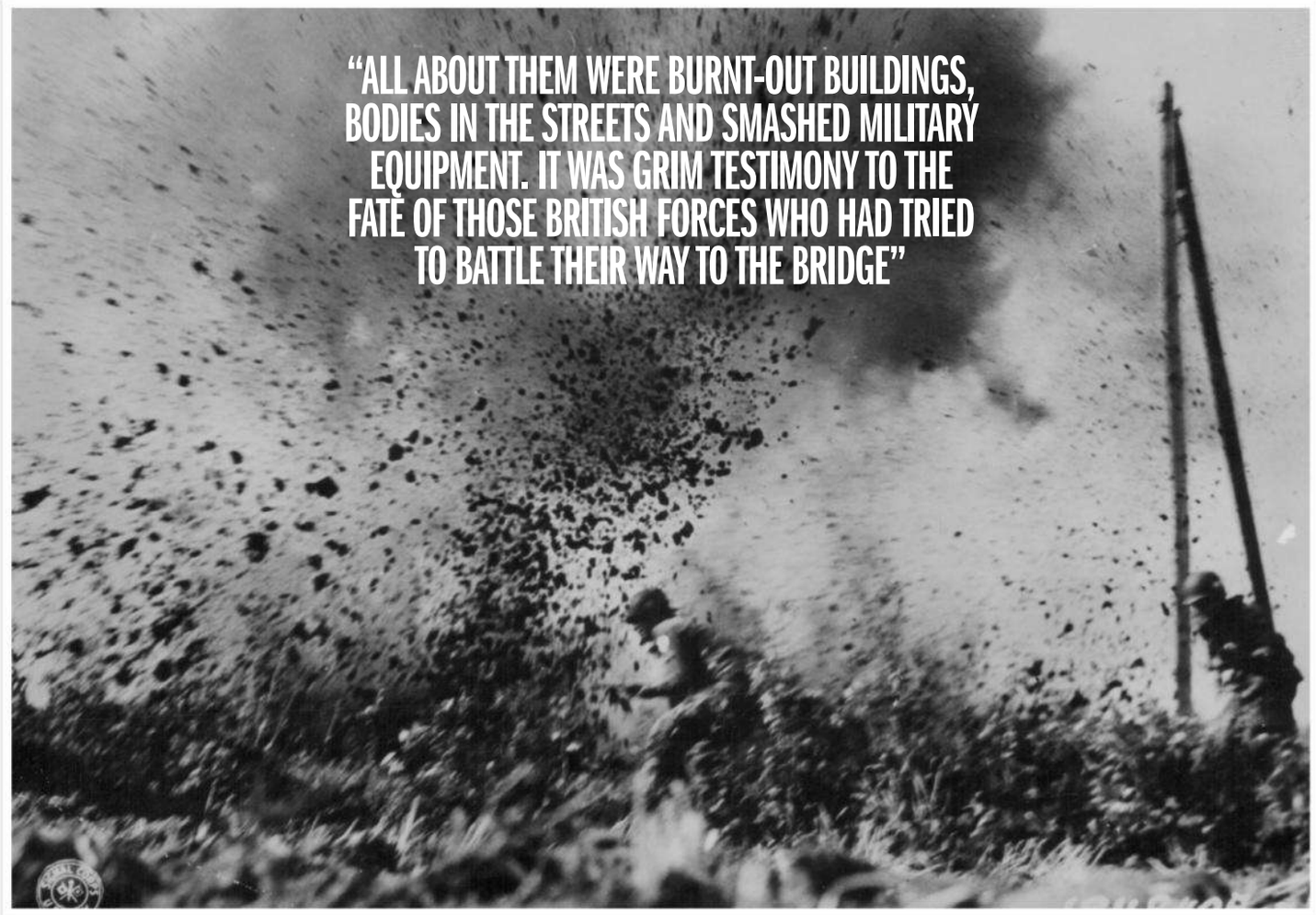
When the British tried to press forward they came under sustained fire from three sides and then ran into assault guns. At 6am, German flak gunners watched as British paratroopers sped along the river road toward the bridge. Their 0.8in (20mm) and 1.5in (37mm) cannon rounds tore them apart, cutting the British advance to pieces. The bright tracer, marking the German line of fire, bounced off the road and neighbouring buildings like some obscene firework display.

Elsewhere, the British got to within nearly a mile (1.4km) of the bridge. By the museum, an assault gun and two of Möller's armoured half-tracks confronted the British head-on. The Germans counterattacked and the British were thrown back. As the morning wore on, Möller reported that the enemy "are completely exhausted… their confidence shaken by excessively high losses".

German troops on the high ground, known as Heijenoord Diependal, north of the railway

***Left:** Troops of the 1st Paratroop Battalion take cover in a shell hole in Arnhem, 17 September 1944*

***Below:** American paratroopers move through shellfire during Operation Market Garden*



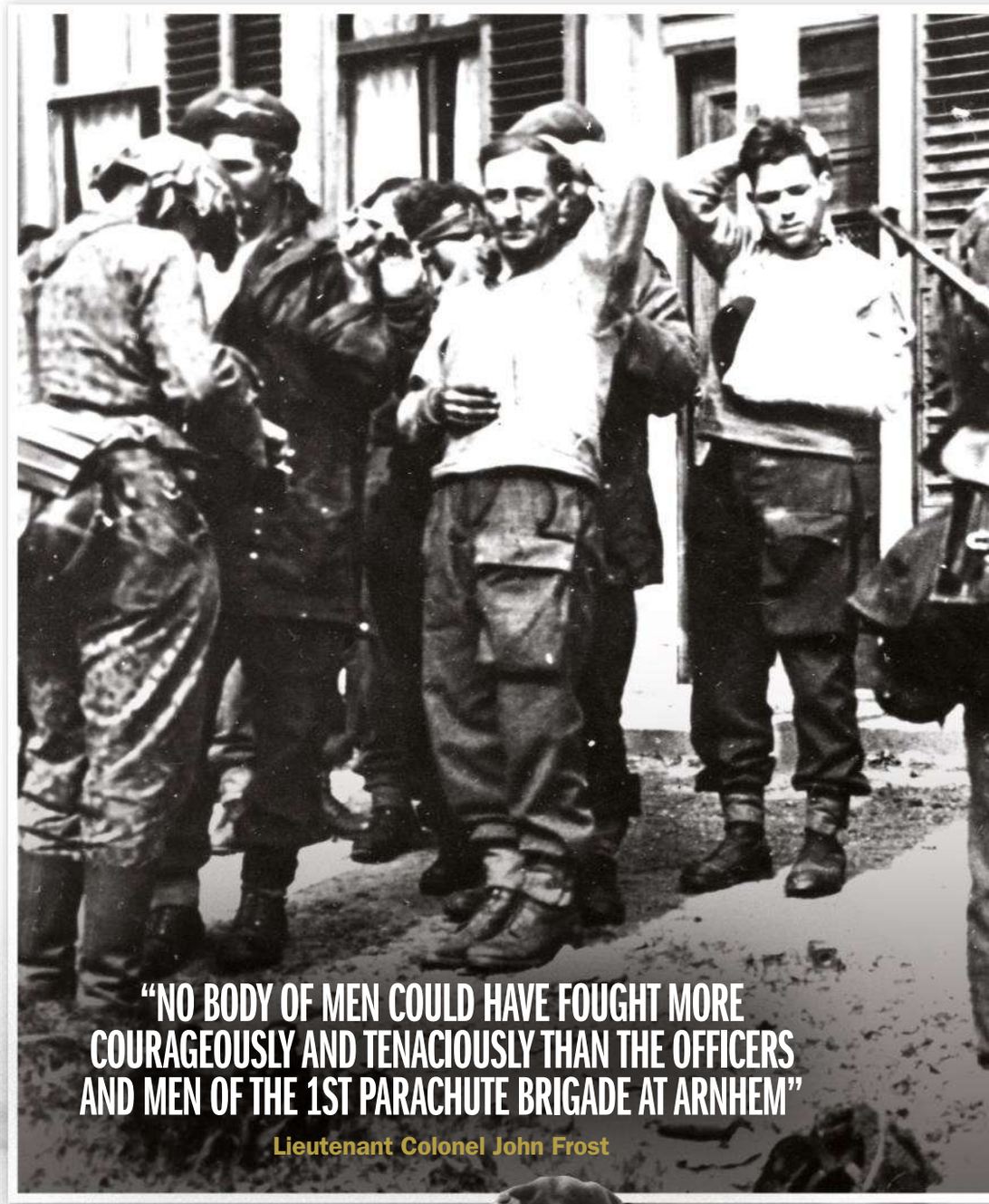
Images: Alamy, Getty

and opposite Den Brink, were also anticipating an attack. At 2.30pm they began plastering the British on Den Brink with mortar fire and shortly after drove them off. Subsequently, they cleared the British from St Elizabeth Hospital. The remaining paras in Arnhem's western suburbs were killed, captured or forced back towards Oosterbeek.

At 4pm, SS-Captain Krafft's training battalion witnessed gliders landing northwest of Oosterbeek, between the railway and the Ede-Arnhem road. This was bringing in the advance elements of the Polish 1st Airborne Brigade. It proved to be one of the rare occasions that the Luftwaffe's fighters made an appearance, shooting up the gliders and their tug aircraft. Krafft ordered forward two companies, who also opened fire. "The gliders were holed by countless hits," reported Krafft, "and the bloodstains inside show that the enemy has suffered quite appreciable casualties in the air." This forced the rest of the Poles to parachute south of the river two days later – a fatal delay.

General von Tettau's battle group conducted some light probing attacks as they advanced eastward towards Oosterbeek at 7pm, but these were driven off. However, by dark General Wilhelm Bittrich, commander of 2nd SS Panzer Corps, was very pleased with his men's efforts. Following the first airborne landings the British had pushed five battalions into Arnhem, numbering about 3,000 men. Since then the Germans had captured over 1,700, most of whom were wounded, and killed about 120. The British lost almost two entire brigades.

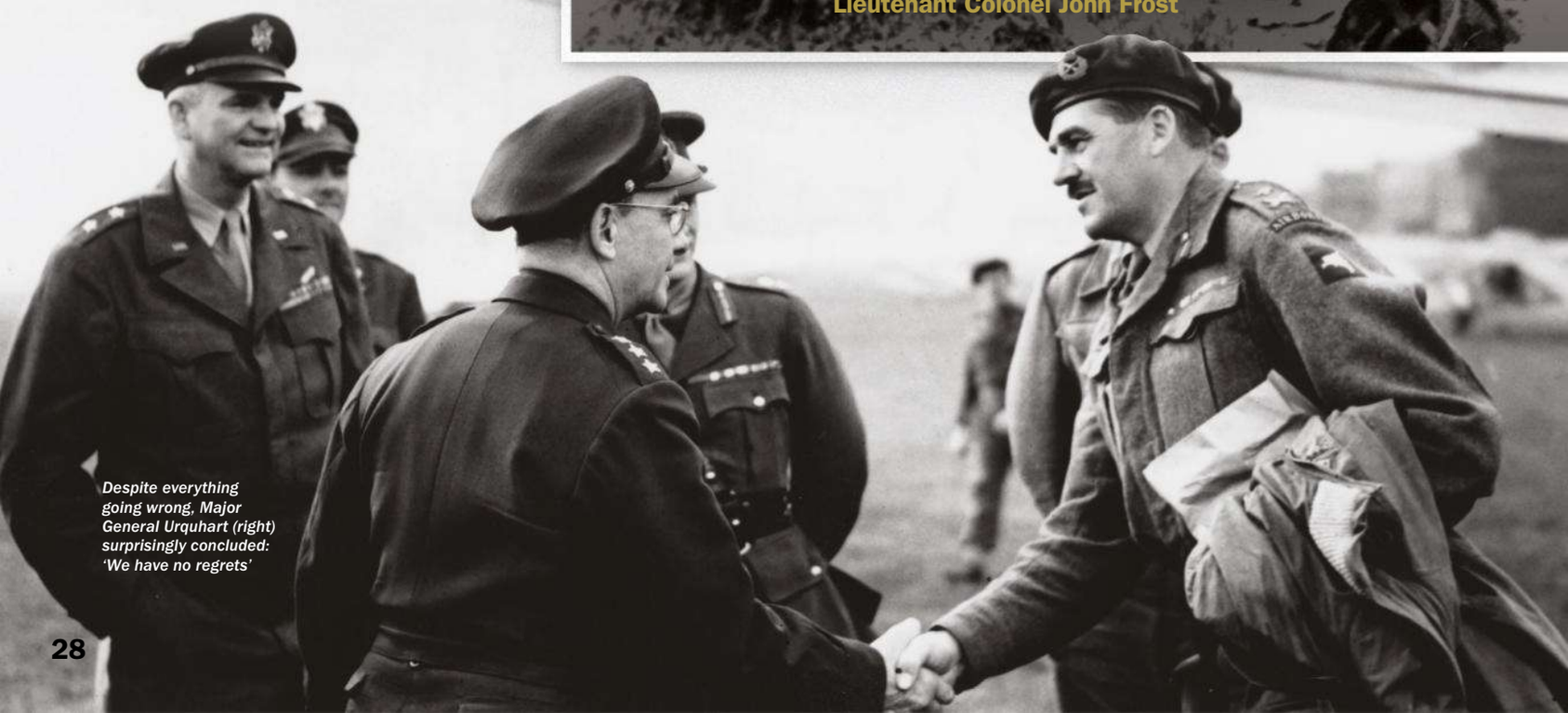
Model knew by 20 September that Frost could not hold out much longer around Arnhem bridge. His positions were smouldering ruins, he had suffered heavy casualties and was almost out of ammunition. At its peak Frost's garrison amounted to about 700 men, now after three days of intensive fighting only about 150 were still capable of bearing arms. Most



"NO BODY OF MEN COULD HAVE FOUGHT MORE COURAGEOUSLY AND TENACIOUSLY THAN THE OFFICERS AND MEN OF THE 1ST PARACHUTE BRIGADE AT ARNHEM"

Lieutenant Colonel John Frost

***Right:** German battle groups were swift to respond to Operation Market Garden. They slowed 30th Corps, overwhelmed the paras at Arnhem and trapped the rest at Oosterbeek*



Despite everything going wrong, Major General Urquhart (right) surprisingly concluded: 'We have no regrets'



WHO WAS TO BLAME?

For eight decades, the causes and culprits responsible for the disaster at Arnhem have been widely and often controversially debated

FIELD MARSHAL BERNARD MONTGOMERY



Montgomery was blamed for underestimating the German reaction to Market Garden. Regarding the poor condition of 2nd SS Panzer Corps, he confessed: "We were wrong in supposing that it could not fight effectively; its battle state was far beyond our expectation." After the battle he wrote to Urquhart: "There can be few episodes more glorious than the epic of Arnhem, and those that follow after will find it hard to live up to the standards that you have set."

LIEUTENANT GENERAL FREDERICK BROWNING



Browning, commanding the British 1st Airborne Corps, ignored repeated intelligence warnings about the presence of the 2nd SS Panzer Corps. He was firmly of the view that Urquhart was facing troops that were "low category". He promised 1st Airborne Division that "the latest intelligence will be sent to you at the time of take-off". This clearly did not happen as the presence of the SS came as a nasty surprise.

MAJOR GENERAL 'ROY' URQUHART



Urquhart was unimpressed by his briefing about weak enemy forces, noting: "Corps blithely passed on the information… I had no illusions about the Germans folding up at the first blow." No mention was made of the two depleted divisions of German armour in the Arnhem area and this proved fatal, especially as 1st Airborne landed too far west of the bridge. Surprisingly, Urquhart's official report concluded: "We have no regrets."

LIEUTENANT COLONEL JOHN FROST



Frost recalled "the information about the enemy was such that we were assured there was nothing to worry about". It was not until he had taken Arnhem bridge that he became aware that he was facing SS Panzer troops. He bitterly concluded after the war that "it was the presence of the much-experienced Waffen SS Panzer divisions that spelt doom to our venture".

LIEUTENANT GENERAL BRIAN HORROCKS



Horrocks' 30th Corps was accused of being much too slow in its drive north. "If this is so," he said with regret, "it was my fault, because all the troops were imbued with a sense of desperate urgency." Certainly the delays at Eindhoven and Nijmegen did not help. Montgomery, though, should share the blame. Not once did he visit Horrocks and urge him on at all costs during the nine days.

of these men were trapped in and around their headquarters. That evening they were finally overrun. The following day at around 5am organised resistance around Arnhem bridge ceased and the remaining survivors were rounded up, including a wounded Frost. "No body of men could have fought more courageously and tenaciously than the officers and men of the 1st Parachute Brigade at Arnhem," he said.

Trapped at Oosterbeek

Model's next priority was to crush the remains of 1st Airborne at Oosterbeek. Although he had half-a-dozen battle groups converging on the British thumb-shaped defensive perimeter, this was much easier said than done. Many of these ad hoc German units were not trained to operate at brigade, let alone divisional or corps, level. Co-ordinating them was an ongoing struggle. Furthermore, friction between the army and Waffen-SS was never far from the surface. The allocation of ammunition, rations and reinforcements was a constant problem, and Urquhart's men were well dug in and determined to hold out.

Model's shortage of tanks meant that he was forced to fight a battle that was more akin to siege warfare. Besides, Oosterbeek and the surrounding wooded parkland was not good tank country and his armour was ambushed at every turn. Their attacks were also hampered by 1st Airborne getting artillery support from just across the river from 30th Corps, which had pushed into the Betuwe north of Nijmegen.

Model knew he needed to act quickly before Horrocks battered his way through the hastily prepared German defences in the Betuwe and reached Arnhem bridge. The need to hold the railway line south of the Rhine, as well as Elst, was a drain on already stretched resources, and news of the arrival of Polish paratroopers at Driel complicated matters.

To the west of Urquhart's defences Tettau moved forward a miscellaneous collection of units through the Bilderberg woods. These comprised the Worrowski Battalion from the Hermann Göring Training Regiment, plus the Arnheim, Eberwein, Helle and Schulz SS-battalions. The north was covered by Krafft's battle group and Battle Group Bruhn, while to the east forces included the Allworden, Spindler and Möller's battle groups.

Operations commenced all along the British perimeter at 8am on 21 September. Colonel Schramm's Worrowski Battalion drove the British from the Westerbouwing Heights overlooking the Heveadorp ferry. Although this was achieved at great cost, it meant German

Images: Alamy, Getty



Four days after Market Garden commenced, British resistance at Arnhem ended in the early hours of 21 September



Both Field Marshal Montgomery (right) and General Horrocks were blamed for the catastrophic failure of Operation Market Garden



The British 1st Airborne trapped at Oosterbeek hoped to hold out until 30th Corps reached them – they clung on doggedly for nine days



Lieutenant General Browning, commander of the British 1st Airborne Corps, chose to dismiss the presence of SS forces at Arnhem

fire dominated the Rhine. It also reduced the base of Urquhart's perimeter at Oosterbeek along the river to less than 2,100ft (640m).

Lacking manpower, Tettau now missed a golden opportunity and failed to strike further along the river – such a move would have completely cut off Urquhart. The only compensation was that from the hill, the Germans could see all of the northern bank of the Rhine in the immediate area. Sailors from the 10th Naval Manning Division, fighting as infantry, were sent to occupy Westerbouwing. Other attacks conducted by Battle Group Tettau that day made little or no progress. In the face of strong resistance, the weak 9th SS gained even less ground attacking the eastern Oosterbeek perimeter.

The "witches' cauldron"

By now Urquhart had withdrawn all his surviving units behind the defences looped around the Hartenstein Hotel. This had been achieved at some cost by the remnants of those battalions that had fought their way back from Arnhem. Now just 3,500 survivors of 1st Airborne were gathered in the western half of Oosterbeek, along with some 8,000 terrified Dutch civilians. The once quiet market town was in ruins and its hotels turned into bloody field hospitals. The Germans with good reason were calling this pocket the "witches' cauldron".

The following day the Germans brought up 15 heavy Tiger II tanks. In theory these should have crashed through Urquhart's defences with impunity, but the inexperienced crews were afraid of British tank hunters. Their lack of infantry support was also symptomatic of the very poor co-ordination between the different units. After one of the Tigers was lost, the rest resorted to acting as mobile artillery. By 23 September, Model had lost 13 tanks and three assault guns attacking Oosterbeek. "The more the perimeter shrank, the more stubbornly the British troops defended every heap of ruins and every inch of ground," remarked SS-Colonel Walter Harzer, commander of the 9th SS.

While the battle for Oosterbeek was developing into a very messy affair, Model was heartened by the news that his forces had prevented the British from getting reinforcements and supplies over the Rhine. The arrival of elements of the British 43rd Infantry Division at Driel had been very worrying. On 22 and 23 September, at 9pm and 2am respectively, two attempts were made by the Poles to reinforce 1st Airborne. The first crossing made in rubber dinghies was exposed by a German parachute flare and met by punishing machine gun and mortar fire. The second attempt using amphibious trucks was a non-starter thanks to the muddy conditions and poor visibility due to a ground mist. By dawn only a few hundred Poles had made it across.

For the besieged paras the conditions in the "witches' cauldron" were almost intolerable. "There were now about 2,500 of us left – a quarter of our original strength," noted Urquhart. "Outnumbered and outgunned for days, men had fought at close quarters and on empty stomachs." He decided to move as many of the wounded as possible into the care of the Germans. On the morning of Sunday 24 September, the Germans at the Villa Heselbergh north of Arnhem were visited by British medical officer Colonel Graeme Warrack. He was accompanied by SS-Major Dr Egon Skalka, his opposite number from the 9th SS. Under a Red Cross flag, Warrack had first presented himself to Skalka at the Schoonoord Hotel, which was now behind German lines. "I want to make arrangements for the evacuation of our wounded," he said, after being escorted into the hotel. "I would like to see your divisional doctor." Skalka responded that he had come to the right man.

Saving the wounded

Warrack explained that within the British perimeter there were at least 600 British, Dutch, German and Polish wounded gathered at seven locations. In reality there were over double this number, but Warrack did not want the Germans to know just how decimated 1st Airborne was. Earlier a dressing station had been hit six times and caught fire, and 150 wounded were now laying outside.

When Skalka drove Warrrack and his interpreter, Dutch liaison officer Lieutenant Commander Arnoldus Wolters, to German headquarters he did not blindfold them. He may have had psychological reasons for doing so, because it meant both emissaries witnessed the terrible carnage in Arnhem. All about them were burnt-out buildings, bodies in the streets and smashed military equipment. It was grim

CREATING THE "WITCHES' CAULDRON"

17 SEPTEMBER
- Market Garden commences. Lieutenant Colonel Frost seizes Arnhem bridge but is cut off from the rest of 1st Airborne at Oosterbeek to the west.

19 SEPTEMBER
- Germans continue to thwart reinforcements reaching Frost.

20 SEPTEMBER
7.10PM
- British 30th Corps gets over the Waal at Nijmegen.

21 SEPTEMBER
5AM
- Organised resistance by Frost ceases after his positions are overwhelmed.

8AM
- Germans commence an all-out assault on Oosterbeek.
- Germans capture Westerbouwing Heights west of Oosterbeek overlooking the Rhine.
- 1st Airborne left trapped in the "witches' cauldron" containing survivors of 1st Airborne around the Hartenstein Hotel.

22 SEPTEMBER
- 30th Corps reaches Driel and the Rhine. Germans renew their attack on the cauldron and are repulsed.

> **"THE MORE THE PERIMETER SHRANK, THE MORE STUBBORNLY THE BRITISH TROOPS DEFENDED EVERY HEAP OF RUINS AND EVERY INCH OF GROUND"**
>
> SS-Colonel Walter Harzer

22/23 SEPTEMBER
- Poles at Driel attempt to reinforce 1st Airborne.

23 SEPTEMBER
- German panzers are thrown at the cauldron.

24 SEPTEMBER
- Early in the morning British approach the Germans to evacuate wounded from Oosterbeek.

5PM
- Ceasefire permits the removal of 450 wounded into German custody.

25 SEPTEMBER
8.08AM
- Operation Berlin, the evacuation of 1st Airborne, is announced for that night.

9PM
- 30th Corps shells German positions around Oosterbeek.

9.30PM
- Evacuation of 1st Airborne across the Rhine commences at two locations.

26 SEPTEMBER
2AM
- 1st Airborne blows up the last of its ammo.

3AM
- Western evacuation stops.

7.20AM
- Eastern evacuation stops.

2PM
- Last British resistance at Oosterbeek stops after Germans launch final attacks.

Images: Alamy, Getty

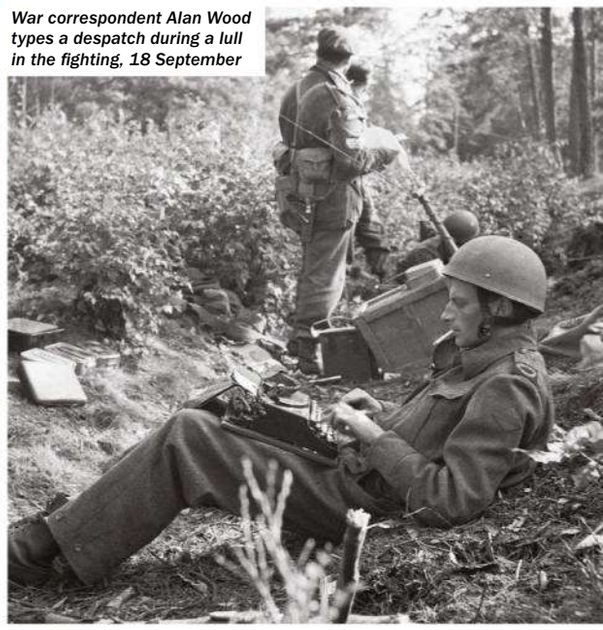
testimony to the fate of those British forces who had tried to battle their way to the bridge.

The group met with Harzer and Acting Chief of Staff SS-Captain Wilfried Schwarz. Both officers agreed in principle and said the matter would have to be referred to Bittrich. Schwarz laid out a map and asked Warrack to highlight where their dressing stations were located. Bittrich then appeared and Skalka, after saluting, said he supported the proposal, as the medical facilities on both sides were under constant fire. A logical solution would be to move the British casualties to St Elizabeth Hospital, where British and German medics were already caring for wounded prisoners. Bittrich, impressed by the paras' tenacity, readily consented.

When the ceasefire ended at 5pm, about 450 casualties had been taken into German custody. They also took control of the Hotel Tafelberg, which was full of wounded. Skalka reported that inside Oosterbeek "it was nothing but death and wreckage". During the transfer it was suggested that given British losses and that they were surrounded, they should surrender. Warrack responded: "We have not come to surrender."

The moment the truce finished German shelling recommenced, while tanks and infantry once more infiltrated British positions. The tanks were met by the last of the British anti-tank guns. One was caught in a cabbage patch by a six-pounder, which knocked out the tank and sent cabbages showering in all directions. For the first time in eight days the 1st Airborne received air support when RAF Typhoons appeared, pounding German positions and troop movements.

On the night of 24 September, the Germans were put on alert by a British artillery bombardment. Horrocks then tried to get more reinforcements over the river, which were met by sustained German fire. They also struggled with the fast current, which contributed to a chaotic landing. Just over 300 infantry reached the far bank, where they struggled to get past the Westerbouwing escarpment. It was a brave act, but very few ever got to the airborne perimeter, with most scattering among the German-occupied woods.



War correspondent Alan Wood types a despatch during a lull in the fighting, 18 September

British stragglers who bravely escaped captivity to reach Nijmegen

"THERE WERE NOW ABOUT 2,500 OF US LEFT – A QUARTER OF OUR ORIGINAL STRENGTH. OUTNUMBERED AND OUTGUNNED FOR DAYS, MEN HAD FOUGHT AT CLOSE QUARTERS AND ON EMPTY STOMACHS"

General Urquhart





A mortar team positioned on the Oosterbeek perimeter at Arnhem, 21 September



Relieved-looking paratroopers after their dramatic escape from the "witches' cauldron"

Time to go

By now Urquhart had to acknowledged the situation was hopeless. "I could not expect much more of those who were still on their feet," he recalled. At 8.08am on 25 September he signalled 30th Corps to say Operation Berlin, the evacuation of 1st Airborne, must be conducted that night. British guns once more opened up on German positions surrounding the pocket at 9pm. Their fire was indiscriminate, hitting Germans and Dutch alike. The Germans responded with their own mortar and shellfire. "The earth was trembling," recalled Möller, "and a curtain of fire and dirt of hitherto unknown dimensions rose over and between our positions."

In the failing light, the German sailors on the Westerbouwing struggled to see what was going on along the river. On the south bank there were two points, roughly a mile apart, where British and Canadian engineers had gathered a fleet of small boats. These started crossing at 9.30pm and the current rapidly forced some of them downstream. The observation posts on the Westerbouwing assumed that this was yet another attempt by the British to get reinforcements to 1st Airborne. Meantime, German patrols ambushed British paratroopers with blackened faces and their equipment and boots wrapped in cloth. This indicated they were making a break for the river. Not everyone wanted to go. "I would have preferred to stay and fight it out," said glider pilot Staff Sergeant George Milburn.

Although the Germans were unsure of what was going on, their flares soon showed that some sort of sustained ferrying operation was underway. German artillery and mortars began to drop shells and bombs into the Rhine. The German machine gunners on the Westerbouwing went to work and the night sky was lit up by deadly tracer. The mortars began to range in on the British embarkation points. Milburn recalled "when we were nearly at the river, we came under fire from a multi-barrelled mortar firing from the west". He and two other men dived into a hedge, one of whom was killed instantly. "Suddenly German mortars caught them," said war reporter Erwin Kirchhof. "Three, perhaps four assault boats succeeded in reaching the opposite bank." Some 95 men were hit on the north bank or while trying to cross. Many others were wounded. In about 60 minutes, half the British boats were sunk.

Captain Derek Bogaerde, who later became a highly respected actor and author, recalled: "Helplessly staring across the wide flowing river to the burning city, the chatter and crump of machine guns and mortars, crimson tracer bullets ripping through the night, the little huddle of Dutch civilians weeping, not for themselves, but for the few returning guests departing from what someone on the Staff had chosen to call a 'party'".

Some men bravely swam the Rhine, others were rescued mid-river by returning boats. Gilder pilot Louis Hagen attempting to swim for it found himself in trouble halfway across. He recalled: "How ridiculous it would seem that I, brought up as I had by a lake, and a swimmer since I was four, should die by drowning." Composing himself, he dumped all his kit and safely reached the far bank.

Despite the heavy losses the ferry service pressed on, and the Germans remained confused as to its purpose until well after midnight. "In the sector of Battle Group Knoche on the Lower Rhine front the enemy made renewed crossing attempts from opposite the 10th SS, which were mostly repelled by concentrated fire," noted Tettau.

Eliminated or captured

There was a loud explosion from within the Oosterbeek perimeter at 2am when the rearguard blew up the last of the remaining ammunition. Guns covering the withdrawal fired off their few shells before being disabled. The western crossings stopped at 3.30am, but to the east they pressed on until 7.20am, by which time 2,398 men from an original force of 10,000 had been evacuated. Among them was an exhausted Urquhart. Tettau still had no real idea what had happened. "Only individual boats managed to cross and infiltrate," he claimed. "The crews were eliminated or captured during the course of the morning."

Möller was much better informed than Tettau. He knew that the enemy "had withdrawn and disappeared during the night behind the curtain of dirt and destruction". All that remained behind were the badly wounded, their medics and brave rearguard units who had missed the boats. The Germans launched three attacks at dawn on 26 September, with the Hartenstein Hotel as their goal. Although they encountered some resistance, by 2pm it was all over.

About 315 prisoners were rounded up in Oosterbeek and another 300 were found huddled along the north bank. Many of them were wounded, filthy and hungry. Another 250 men were on the run, some of whom would make it to safety. In total the British suffered around 1,200 dead and 6,642 captured, around one-third of whom were wounded. The battle for Arnhem had cost Model 1,100 dead and 2,200 wounded.

The Allies tried to put a brave face on things, claiming Market Garden was a partial success. Few were convinced. How ever you looked at it 1st Airborne, despite its best efforts, had been thwarted in its bid to get the Allies over the Rhine. What was remarkable, though, was how it had held out for so long.

FURTHER READING

- William F Buckingham, *Arnhem 1944* (Tempus, 2002)
- Major General John Frost, *A Drop Too Many* (Pen & Sword, 2009)
- Robert Kershaw, *It Never Snows in September* (Ian Allan, 2004)
- Martin Middlebrook, *Arnhem 1944* (Pen & Sword, 2017)
- Cornelius Ryan, *A Bridge Too Far* (Hamish Hamilton, 1974)
- Anthony Tucker-Jones, *The Devil's Bridge* (Osprey, 2020)

Images: Alamy, Getty

AIRSPEED HORSA GLIDER

This aircraft was the one-way transport for thousands of troops during airborne operations in Sicily, Normandy, the Netherlands and beyond

WORDS **STUART HADAWAY**



HEAVY TUG ROPES
Ropes ran from attachment points on the nose on the Mk I or the wings on the Mk II. Both glider and aircraft could cast off the heavy rope, which would otherwise cause heavy drag.

BARN DOORS
Wide doors enabled heavy equipment to be loaded without having to remove (and potentially damage) the tail, and also allowed troops to disembark very quickly.

JETTISONABLE WHEELS
The undercarriage could be jettisoned. While training flights kept them to minimise damage on landing, operational sorties saw wheels discarded in favour of skids for safer landings on rough surfaces.

This glider was a terrifying way to enter battle. The troops in the fuselage couldn't see outside, and their first warning that they were about to go into action was when the roar of the tug plane's engines ceased, replaced by an eerie silence. Then the nose would drop to an angle calculated to get them onto the ground as fast as possible, ending in a sudden heave to level flight and the shattering crash of a landing.

Gliders were a simple and effective way to move fully equipped troops, artillery and vehicles into battle zones deep behind enemy lines. The German use of airborne troops had impressed British Prime Minister Winston Churchill so much that he ordered the raising of British airborne divisions in 1940. Gliders were needed and specifications issued, and in September 1941 the Horsa first flew. In November 1942, two Horsas were first used in the ill-fated raid on the heavy water plants in Norway. Less than two years later, over 600 Horsas helped lift an entire British Airborne Division, including jeeps and artillery, into Arnhem in occupied Holland.

"GLIDERS WERE A SIMPLE AND EFFECTIVE WAY TO MOVE FULLY EQUIPPED TROOPS, ARTILLERY AND VEHICLES INTO BATTLE ZONES DEEP BEHIND ENEMY LINES"

AIRSPEED AS 58 HORSA MK II

COMMISSIONED	1941
ORIGIN	BRITAIN
LENGTH	67FT 11IN (20.7M)
WINGSPAN	88FT (26.8M)
CREW	2
PAYLOAD	UP TO 28 TROOPS OR UP TO 7,300LB (3,300KG) IN CARGO





***Above:** British troops wait next to their gliders before embarking for Normandy, June 1944*

Illustration: Nicholas Forder

REMOVABLE TAIL

After early experiments with doors, it was found that the most efficient way to get the cargo out of the glider was to remove the tail. Jeeps and guns could be run straight out.



Troops practise exiting a Horsa, 1943

Horsas are connected to their tug aircraft before the invasion of Sicily, July 1943



Images: Alamy



PAYLOAD

The Airspeed Horsa could carry up to 25 troops in the Mk I or 28 in the Mk II. Unlike paratroopers, these air-landing infantry landed with their weapons in their hands and ready for immediate action. Significant amounts of stores and equipment could also be landed, including either two 'Willys' type Jeeps, or a howitzer or anti-tank gun with a Jeep to tow them. Being able to land such equipment far behind enemy lines and cut off from other support was a crucial boost to the strength of airborne units.



Above: *Benches could hold ten fully equipped men on either side of the fuselage, with five to eight others on seats at either end*

Right: *Troops reverse a jeep onto a Horsa. Such cargo would be chained down before take-off*

DESIGN

The Horsa was deceptively simple. Made of laminated wood, it was built in modular form with around 30 main components being constructed at wood-working factories not otherwise committed to war work. The high-mounted wings had very large 'barn-door' flaps to allow the glider to make extremely steep, controlled dives through enemy defences. Landings were made on belly skids, the wheels having been jettisoned in flight. The rear fuselage section could break away to allow vehicles and personnel to disembark; initially small explosive charges were used, but later quick-release bolts became standard.



***Right:** A Horsa awaiting final assembly in April 1944*

ENGINES

The Horsa relied on the engines of the aircraft towing it, with heavy rope lines connecting it to the tug aircraft. On take-off, the lighter glider would rise first, and care had to be taken to keep it low in case it pulled the tug's tail up, pushing the nose down and causing it to crash. Once in the air, the glider had to be kept above or below the tug's slipstream, and when climbing or turning things could get very rough for the glider behind.



A Handley Page Halifax lifts off on 6 June 1944; taking off was always a very delicate procedure

***Below:** A training formation of Horsas towed by Armstrong Whitworth Whitleys, 1943*



"ON TAKE-OFF, THE LIGHTER GLIDER WOULD RISE FIRST, AND CARE HAD TO BE TAKEN TO KEEP IT LOW IN CASE IT PULLED THE TUG PLANE'S TAIL UP"

Images: Alamy

Horsas scattered around a landing zone outside Arnhem, September 1944

SERVICE HISTORY

Where paratroopers were limited to what they (and their parachutes) could carry, or reliant on small supply canisters, gliders could deliver fully equipped troops ready to fight, as well as significant amounts of heavy equipment such as anti-tank guns, jeeps and 3in (75mm) howitzers. Paratroopers made good raiding parties but to have any chance of seizing and holding ground, gliders were necessary.

Their first deployment, in November 1942 in Norway, ended in disaster – but less than a year later their first full-scale use in the invasion of Sicily proved their worth. In June 1944, glider-borne troops were able to land with incredible precision to seize bridges leading to and from the Normandy beachheads. Gliders were later able to land and supply large bodies of troops behind Japanese lines in Burma, and the British and Americans used them in their hundreds during Operation Market Garden in Holland, September 1944, and Operation Varsity ('bouncing' the Rhine) the following year.



Horsas at Caen Canal bridge in Benouville, 8 June 1944. During the Allied invasion of Normandy gliders landed at their targets with tremendous precision

"PARATROOPERS MADE GOOD RAIDING PARTIES BUT TO HAVE ANY CHANCE OF SEIZING AND HOLDING GROUND, GLIDERS WERE NECESSARY"

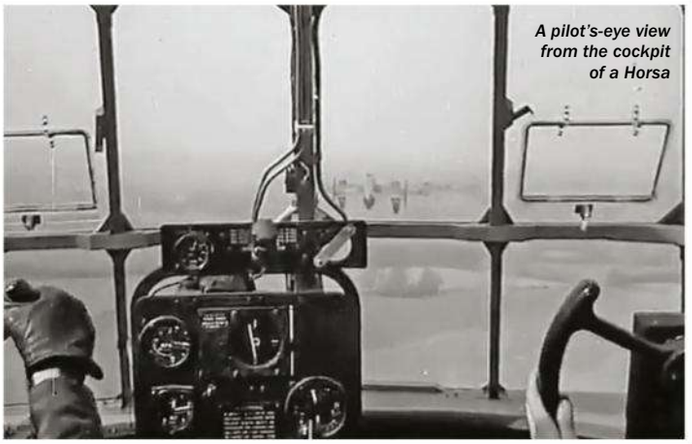


***Below:** Cockpit of the Horsa, with the crew sitting either side of a main instrument and control console*



COCKPIT

The cockpit of the Horsa had instruments to allow it to be flown accurately day or night. The two pilots sat side-by-side in a 'glasshouse' cockpit which gave excellent views and had dual controls. The controls were heavy (the bearings and pulleys were very simple) and the airbrakes mechanical, although the split flaps, wheel brakes and undercarriage-jettison controls were all worked by compressed air bottles. Communication with the tug aircraft was by telephone line in earlier types, and later by radio.



A pilot's-eye view from the cockpit of a Horsa

Images: Alamy



Heroes of the Medal of Honor

DWIGHT W BIRDWELL

In the opening hours of the North Vietnamese Tet Offensive, this Specialist Five led his armoured cavalry detachment in repulsing a fierce communist assault against Tan Son Nhut Air Base near Saigon

WORDS **MICHAEL E HASKEW**

During the predawn hours of 30 January 1968, the Vietnam War took on a new dimension – and the thin line between life and death became all too real for Specialist Five Dwight W Birdwell.

Launching attacks in 13 major cities across South Vietnam, communist forces including regulars of the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) and guerrillas of the Viet Cong (VC) shattered the stillness of the ceasefire enacted in observance of Tet, the national holiday marking the Vietnamese lunar new year. The communist offensive spread like wildfire, quickly engulfing 35 major population centres and then more than 100 villages across the countryside. American and South Vietnamese military installations also came under attack.

Within hours of the first violent shock, the fighting reached sprawling Tan Son Nhut Air Base, where three battalions of VC guerrillas struck the western perimeter of the base on the outskirts of Saigon, the South Vietnamese capital. When the alarm was raised at the Cu Chi Base Camp northeast of Saigon, Birdwell and the rest of Troop C, 3rd Squadron, 4th Cavalry Regiment, 25th Infantry Division had already heard the explosions of enemy rockets and grenades, as well as the clatter of small-arms fire.

Moving towards the sound of the fighting, the cavalrymen aboard their tanks and armoured personnel carriers (APCs) were guided by the eerie light of flares dropped by helicopters overhead. As they approached the west gate of the air base, the leading elements of the American column, roughly 100 troopers and their tanks and APCs, abruptly came under heavy enemy fire along both sides of the road. Within seconds, they were engaged by an enemy force estimated at ten-times their own strength.

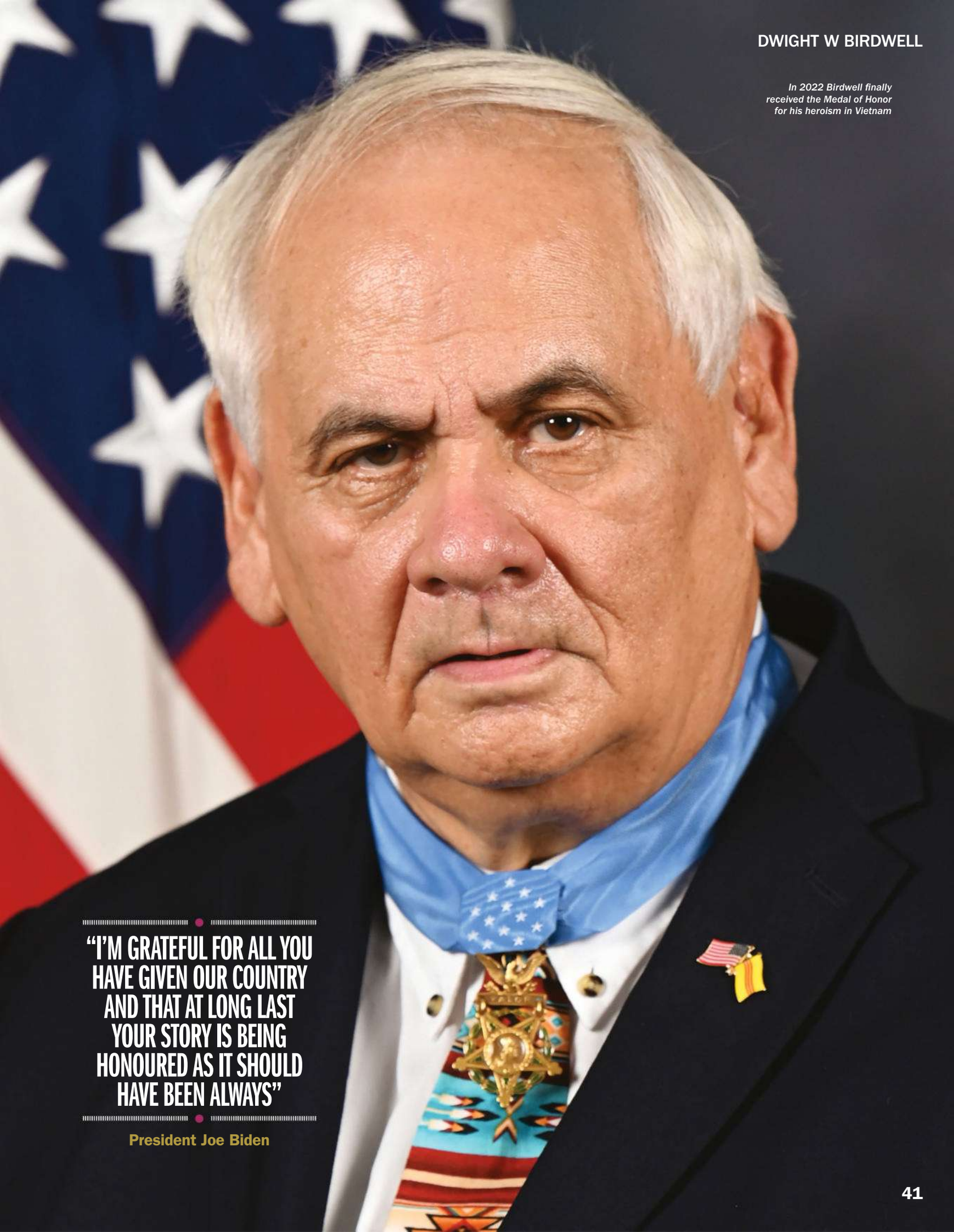


Above: US armoured personnel carriers such as this one were in the thick of the fighting at Tan Son Nhut Air Base

A VC rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) slammed into the tank occupied by Birdwell, his commander, Sergeant Ron Breeden, and the rest of the crew. The tank was immediately disabled and Breeden was seriously wounded in the head. Birdwell acted quickly. He lowered Breeden to the ground and moved the wounded man to a place of relative safety. Then, rushing back to the tank, he reached the commander's position and began returning the enemy fire, focusing much of his aim towards a large concentration coming from a building to his right.

Birdwell directed the fire of the tank's still-functioning 3.5in (90mm) main gun, fired its .50-calibre (12.7mm) machine gun, and kept the enemy occupied while the rest of the column attempted to run the gauntlet of the enemy's defences – but their efforts were to no avail as the disabled tank blocked the way forward. Birdwell fired the machine gun until its barrel overheated, and the ammunition for the main gun was rapidly exhausted.

Although he'd been thoroughly trained for combat, the heat of the moment was nevertheless an intense shock for Birdwell, who'd turned 20 just 12 days earlier. A Native American of the Cherokee tribe, he'd been raised in the small community of Bell, Oklahoma, and had joined the US Army in May 1966 just after his 18th birthday. The townspeople were mostly subsistence farmers, relatively poor, and few of them owned a motor vehicle. Travel was on foot or by wagon or horseback, and there was virtually



In 2022 Birdwell finally received the Medal of Honor for his heroism in Vietnam

"I'M GRATEFUL FOR ALL YOU HAVE GIVEN OUR COUNTRY AND THAT AT LONG LAST YOUR STORY IS BEING HONOURED AS IT SHOULD HAVE BEEN ALWAYS"

President Joe Biden



Tanks and APCs of the US 25th Infantry Division on the outskirts of Saigon, May 1968

no running water or electricity. He remembered years later: "It was hard living, but we got by."

Birdwell had joined the army in part due to his respect for the tradition of service, having learned about life in the military and the experiences of veterans from the Second World War after they returned home. The Cherokee veterans were a source of great pride in the community, and the young man wanted to be a part of the long line who had preceded him. He trained at the Armored School in Fort Knox, Kentucky, and served in Korea before reassignment to the 2nd Battalion, 34th Infantry Division, and finally to the 4th Cavalry Regiment. "I grew up knowing that I had to serve," he said later. "It was a duty and an obligation."

As the chaos of combat swirled around him in the early morning darkness, Birdwell reacted instinctively. At times completely exposed to enemy fire, he rallied the troopers around him. He also fired from inside the tank's hatch, the upper half of his body in full view of the enemy. When the tank's machine gun was no longer operable, he reached for his M-16 rifle and repeatedly sought advantageous firing positions while enemy bullets zipped past and kicked up dirt around his feet.

Shortly after an American helicopter crashed near his position, Birdwell jumped from his tank and rushed towards the wreckage, retrieving a pair of 0.3in (7.62mm) M-60 light machine guns along with a substantial amount of ammunition. He handed one M-60 to a fellow trooper and returned to his tank with the other, opening a withering fire on the enemy. In a flash, a VC round damaged the M-60 and showered Birdwell with shrapnel and shell fragments, leaving him bleeding profusely from wounds to the face, chest, neck and arms.

"IF BIRDWELL HAD NOT PERFORMED IN SUCH A COURAGEOUS MANNER, WE WOULD HAVE LOST THE BATTLE AND THE BASE. I BELIEVE IF NOT FOR BIRDWELL OUR HISTORY WOULD BE DIFFERENT"

Cavalry trooper and combat medic Oliver Jones

"As those bullets whizzed by, as rockets whizzed by, it created fear," he vividly recalled years later. "But I knew I couldn't break. I knew if I did, there was nobody else that would do the job."

Birdwell refused to be evacuated, and when ordered to board a medivac helicopter he simply climbed aboard and rolled right out the other side. Gathering a few other soldiers, he moved towards the head of the embattled armoured column and located a defensive position near a large tree. From there, his band of troopers laid down considerable M-16 rifle fire and complemented that with a barrage of hand grenades that caused the enemy activity to slacken. Taking advantage of the situation, Birdwell helped evacuate wounded men to safety, gathered additional ammunition and distributed it to the soldiers around him.

His command presence and tenacity in the face of an enemy that heavily outnumbered his own force proved instrumental in thwarting the communist attack on Tan Son Nhut Air Base. Within hours, the assault had been repulsed with heavy losses and the base secured.

Lieutenant Colonel Glenn Otis, commander of the 3rd Cavalry Squadron, fully intended to recommend the gallant Birdwell for the Medal of Honor. However, the paperwork wound up incomplete, leading to an award of the Silver Star instead. Birdwell found satisfaction in having done his duty in the darkness at Tan Son Nhut and didn't pursue any further personal recognition. However, he did earn another Silver Star for heroic action six months later on 4 July 1968, twice venturing into an enemy-occupied village to rescue wounded men previously pinned down by enemy fire. He ended the Vietnam War with two Silver Stars,



President Joe Biden presents the Medal of Honor to Birdwell at the White House on 5 July 2022

HISTORY OF WAR
MEDAL OF HONOR HEROES
IS ON SALE NOW



General Glenn Otis advocated vigorously for Birdwell's Silver Star to be upgraded to the Medal of Honor

the Bronze Star and two Purple Hearts for wounds sustained in combat. After his return home he was discharged from the US Army on 29 December 1968.

Birdwell married and became a father of two, obtained a law degree from the University of Oklahoma and served as a member of the Judicial Appeals Tribunal of the Cherokee Nation from 1987 to 1999, including two terms as chief justice. As he thrived in civilian life, many of his comrades were determined that his heroism in Vietnam should gain more recognition and mounted a campaign to upgrade his Silver Star to the Medal of Honor.

One of Birdwell's foremost advocates was Otis, who'd risen to the rank of general and gave the appeal real energy. Otis, who'd received the Distinguished Service Cross for heroism during the engagement at Tan Son Nhut, died in 2013, but others took up the cause. In May 2021, Cherokee Nation Principal Chief Chuck Hoskin wrote a letter to Secretary of Defense Lloyd J Austin III calling for the upgrade to the Medal of Honor, while other political and civic leaders in Oklahoma joined the groundswell of advocacy. A few months later Cherokee Nation Secretary of Veterans Affairs Joe Crittenden wrote to First Lady Dr Jill Biden, soliciting further support.

On 31 May 2022, Birdwell received an astonishing telephone call. On the other end of the line, President Joe Biden informed the veteran that he would indeed receive his nation's highest award for gallantry in the face of an enemy of the United States. The ceremony took place at the White House on 5 July 2022, and Birdwell was honoured along with three other recipients of the Medal of Honor, their heroics also acknowledged more than half a century after their great service had been rendered. One of the four coveted medals was presented posthumously.

"I was standing upon that stage, and as he [Biden] was putting that medal around my neck, I thought: 'Boy this is a long way from the strawberry patch where I grew up.' It was a really overwhelming experience," said Birdwell.

In his remarks during the ceremony, Biden noted: "Only after reinforcements arrived, and only after he helped treat the evacuees and his fellow wounded, did Specialist Birdwell agree to evacuate himself. At the time Birdwell received the Silver Star for outstanding heroism on the battlefield. It took decades for his commanding officer, General Glenn Otis, to realise Birdwell had not received the full honour he had earned. In retirement, General Otis made sure to correct the record and fully document Birdwell's actions to make this day possible."

Now in his mid-70s, Dwight W Birdwell continues his life of service, practising law in Oklahoma City.

Images: Getty, Wiki / PD / US Gov







THE FIVE

STRATEGY AND LEADERSHIP



Phillips O'Brien discusses how this quintet of national leaders impacted the course of the Second World War

INTERVIEW BY **LOUIS HARDIMAN**

The Second World War saw grand military strategy play out on the largest scale ever seen, stretching across most of the globe. Shaping this complex strategic situation were what historian Phillips O'Brien calls "The Five": Winston Churchill, Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, Benito Mussolini and Franklin D Roosevelt.

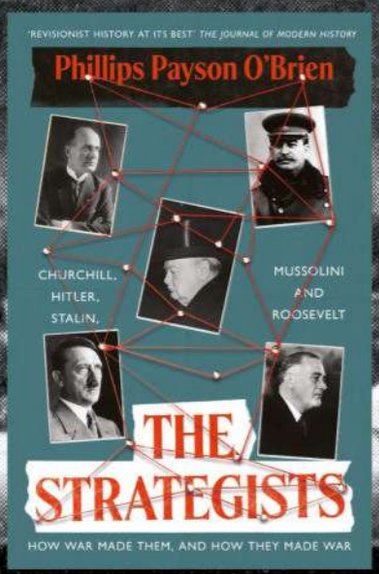
In *The Strategists*, O'Brien rejects the prevailing view among his contemporaries to argue that Second World War strategy was individualistic, shaped by the idiosyncrasies of these individuals. Laying out each leader's experience of the First World War, the interwar period and their ascendency to power, O'Brien paints a vivid picture of how their wartime character and decision-making was formed.

O'Brien spoke with *History of War* to discuss each of The Five's background and character, and how that translated into the way they led their nation's grand strategy. He then considers how the Allied 'Big Three' (Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin) began to butt heads as the war came to an end and the post-war world began to take shape. He also shares his thoughts on how the Russo-Ukraine War shows that flawed individuals can still hijack grand strategy.

How do you compare and contrast each of The Five's upbringings, as well as their participation (or not) in the First World War?

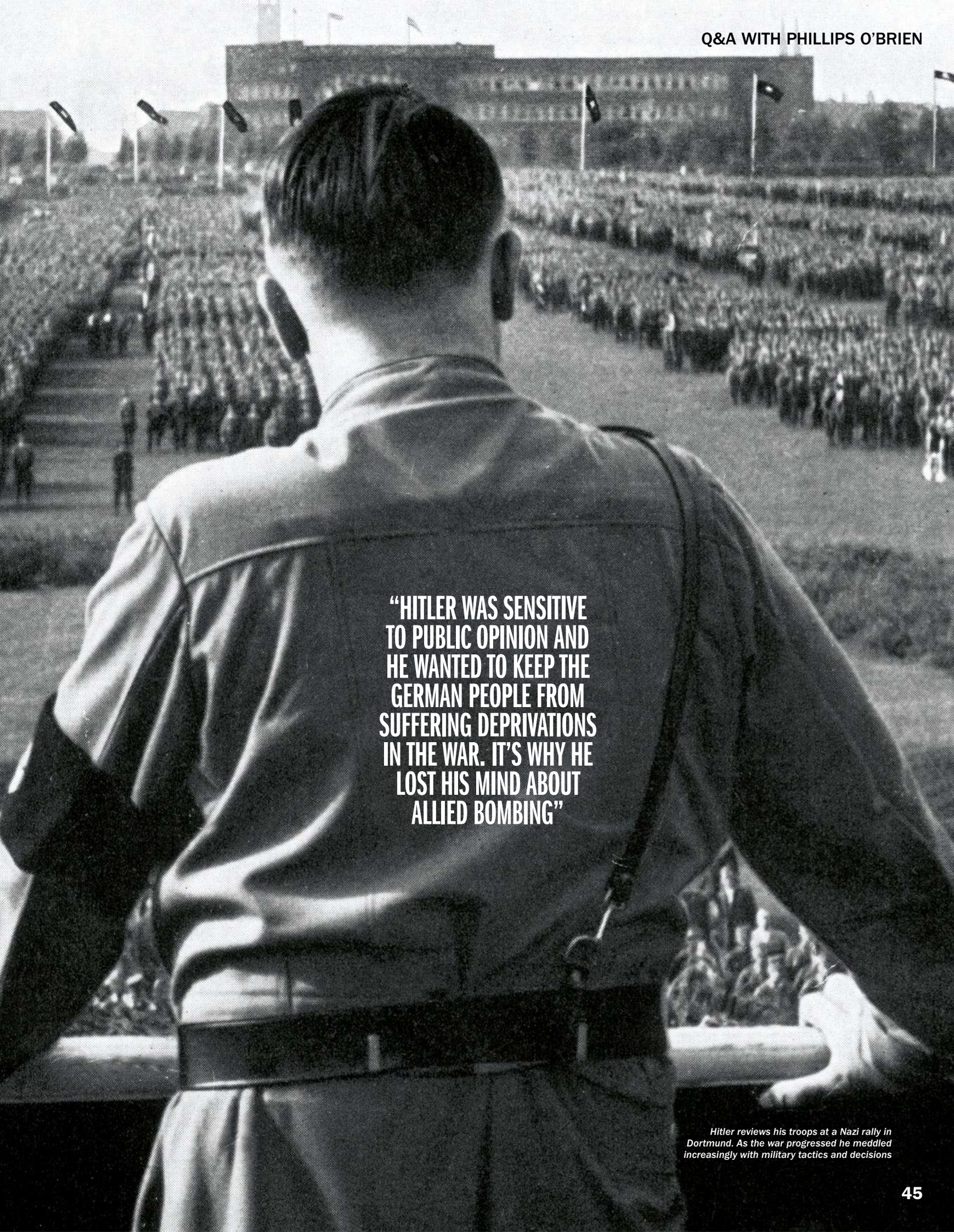
The Five come in two categories. First, you can call them the aristocrats – Churchill and Roosevelt – who came from very privileged backgrounds. People sometimes say Churchill didn't have much money, but his family had enormous social capital. Roosevelt was very much the same way. He came from an elite northeast family, raised in a life of great wealth. What it gave them was confidence that the others gained through war experience.

Churchill and Roosevelt innately had conviction when they were young and believed strongly in their ideas, but when they grew older they gained reflectiveness. It took a while for them to grow up, and in many ways



O'Brien's acclaimed book about the WWII leaders is available now

Images © Alamy, Getty



"HITLER WAS SENSITIVE TO PUBLIC OPINION AND HE WANTED TO KEEP THE GERMAN PEOPLE FROM SUFFERING DEPRIVATIONS IN THE WAR. IT'S WHY HE LOST HIS MIND ABOUT ALLIED BOMBING"

Hitler reviews his troops at a Nazi rally in Dortmund. As the war progressed he meddled increasingly with military tactics and decisions

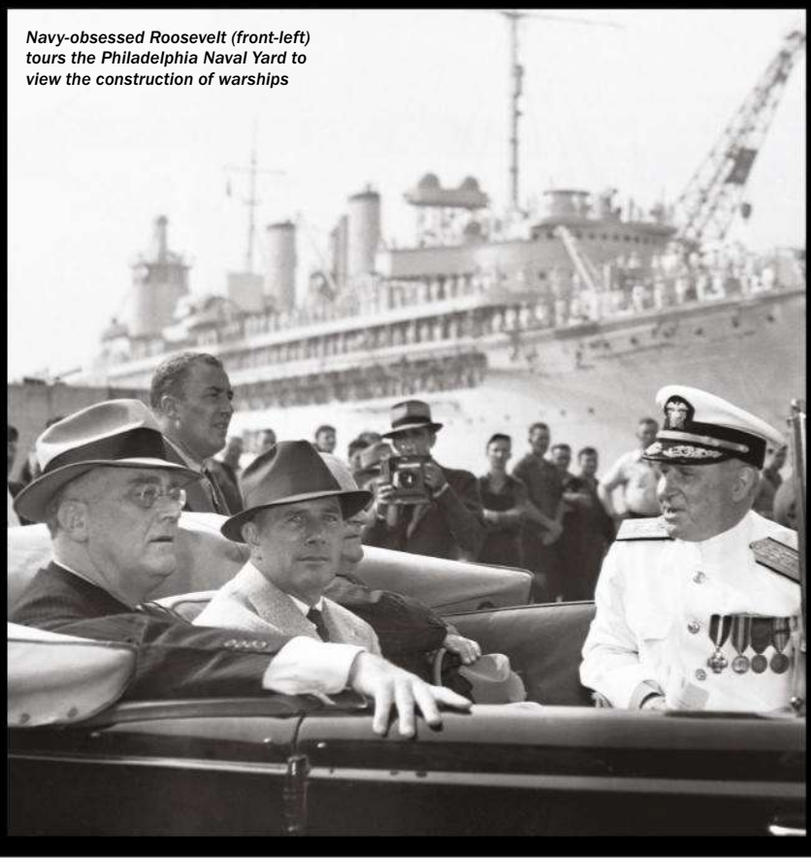
DON'T MENTION THE WAR!

Named "one of the greatest domestic politicians in American history" by O'Brien, Roosevelt coaxed his reluctant population into the conflict

Roosevelt constantly shifted his wartime decisions in line with the unstoppable tides of the US electoral system. Immovable presidential elections in 1940 and 1944, and a Congressional election in 1942, left him at the constant mercy of anti-interventionist public opinion. However, Roosevelt had learned valuable lessons during a deeply traumatising past electoral defeat. O'Brien says: "Roosevelt was chosen to be their vice-presidential candidate in 1920. He ran an energetic campaign, barnstorming the country and spending a lot of time discussing the value of internationalism and the League of Nations, as was the Democrat policy at the time. They got destroyed in the election. What Roosevelt takes from this is that active foreign policy is never a winner [in elections]."

During the 1940 campaign, Roosevelt fell back on his previous domestic successes during the New Deal, while remaining in line with the foreign policy of his Republican opponent Wendell Willkie and promising to stay out of the war. After winning another landslide victory, Roosevelt waited patiently for US public opinion to shift towards intervention in the war. In the meantime, he pushed through the Lend-Lease Act in March 1941, providing billions in war materiel and supplies to the Allies, allowing the USA to play a part in the conflict in a more palatable way. Even once the US was committed to the war, Roosevelt continued to campaign on domestic issues, pushing his economic Second Bill of Rights.

"ROOSEVELT PUSHED THROUGH THE LEND-LEASE ACT IN MARCH 1941, PROVIDING BILLIONS IN WAR MATERIEL AND SUPPLIES TO THE ALLIES, ALLOWING THE USA TO PLAY A PART IN THE WAR IN A MORE PALATABLE WAY"



Navy-obsessed Roosevelt (front-left) tours the Philadelphia Naval Yard to view the construction of warships

Churchill didn't until the First World War. By the Second World War, they had the ability to step back. They were some of the least hands-on war leaders.

The other three came from humble beginnings, although Hitler was of the professional classes and his father was a civil servant. Hitler didn't want for anything until he chose a life of poverty. Certainly, Stalin came from a very poor background. His relationship with his father was violent and unpleasant – that gave him a far more ruthless and violent streak. Mussolini was the same way too. The ones that came from less well-off backgrounds were aggressive in their thinking and they didn't step back as much.

Which of The Five were the big winners and losers of the interwar period?

All of them were winners except for Churchill, whose trajectory was very different from the others. He was very senior as a Cabinet minister at the end of the First World War and the beginning of the interwar period. He had Prime Minister Lloyd George's confidence and held government ministries such as Minister of Air and Minister of War. Churchill was made Chancellor of the Exchequer a few years later under the Stanley Baldwin government when he returned to the Conservative Party. At that point, his career began to decline and, for most people, Churchill would be on his way out, having been around for a while as a senior statesman.

The other four had different levels of meteoric rise. Stalin and Mussolini gained power not long after the war. Stalin was already a central political character in the Bolshevik party, the major power in Russia at the end of the First World War, certainly after the Russian Civil War. He moved relentlessly on and consolidated his power during the 1920s when he became the unchallenged dictator of the Soviet Union. From that point, Stalin suffered no setbacks beyond occasional moments and no one could rise to challenge him.

Mussolini took power very early when he staged his march on Rome, which was a coup but wasn't opposed by many people. You might say it was a facilitated coup and from that point on, his rule was relatively safe and unchallenged in Italian politics. If you were talking to people in the 1930s, they would see Mussolini as a successful leader who had come to power and made Italy more respected.

In the 1920s, Hitler remained a fringe figure, a radical rightist with little chance of power. He staged an attempted coup in Munich, which was farcical, and his party didn't do well in the elections. He seemed a bit of a crank and then the Great Depression hit and he had his explosive rise.

Roosevelt was seen as a coming person at the beginning of the interwar period, but then he got polio and had to step back for a while. The polio delayed [his rise], but by 1933 he was president.

How did the dictators' (Stalin, Mussolini and Hitler) character and grand strategy differ from the democrats' (Churchill and Roosevelt)?

To begin with, Roosevelt and Churchill were not the ones driving policy and Churchill was

only brought into the cabinet after Hitler went to war and invaded Poland. The dictators were the active ones, deciding how and when the war would break out. The one difference was that Mussolini lost his nerve in the summer of 1939.

Mussolini was not ready for this war and nervous about it breaking out. When Hitler came to him and said he was about to attack Poland, Mussolini wriggled out of his commitments. Hitler didn't necessarily think he would be starting the Second World War and thought he could take steps to prevent the British and French from intervening. But Hitler certainly was willing to risk the Second World War. What he needed to do was to get Stalin on board and he did that as Stalin was keen for a deal.

How did the dictators differ in their approaches to public opinion?

Hitler was the most concerned [of the dictators] about public opinion. He wasn't worried about an election but about whether the German people would see the war through, and that goes back to his First World War experiences. Hitler had a love-hate relationship with the German people. He thought Germans were tremendous and sophisticated and should rule Europe; on the other hand, Hitler also believed they lost their nerve at the end of the First World War and that they had betrayed the army.

He thought it was the Jews that undermined German morale and weakened Germany, but to what degree he could fully trust the German people was always in the back of his mind. During the war, Hitler provided the Germans with a relatively high standard of living. He ensured they had much more food than other people in Europe and a relatively high level of consumer goods. Women also weren't forced into the workforce early in the war. Hitler was sensitive to public opinion and he wanted to keep the German people from suffering deprivations in the war. It's why he lost his mind about Allied bombing.

Stalin didn't care much about public opinion, although in 1941, when the German invasion happened, he reached out to Old Russia and the Orthodox Church and tried to dial back on hardline Bolshevik policies. Stalin did what he thought would win the war and was willing to have the Soviet people suffer, though he did keep his industrial workforce well-fed. Meanwhile, Mussolini became disillusioned with the Italian people because he believed they were not as tough as he would have liked them to be. I think that was a sign that the Italians had a lot of good sense.

How did Stalin's growth as a strategist during the Second World War compare to Mussolini's and Hitler's relative decline?

Stalin was fascinating in that way. I call him the worst and best grand strategist. In many ways, he was disastrous from 1939 to 1941, empowering Hitler with the Nazi-Soviet pact and allowing massive German expansion. Stalin enabled Germany to get strong and provided them with a massive amount of resources. When reports came to them that Hitler was about to attack, he poo-pooed them. It's hard



***Right:** Corporal Hitler (right) with two comrades and his dog during a stay in a First World War military hospital*



***Below:** Hitler and Mussolini watch a parade during Mussolini's visit to Germany*

Images © Alamy, Getty



Churchill observes British soldiers in London operating an anti-aircraft gun, 1941



Mussolini addresses the workmen of a munitions factory in Genoa, 1938

to think of a more disastrous series of grand strategic errors than Stalin made.

However [eventually] Stalin began making much better choices… When things got really bad in 1941, he was not overthrown. If Stalin were a lower-level Bolshevik, he would use the opportunity to overthrow the leader. But, he had so cowed the Soviet Union's leadership that they couldn't function without him. That gave him confidence that he would see the war out and wouldn't have to worry about a coup or anyone trying to kill him. After time, that seems to have freed Stalin up to realise what he should and shouldn't do.

To begin with, he interfered with a lot of lower-level military decisions and that's when things went wrong, resulting in Soviet defeats and high losses. By the end of 1942, he stepped back and understood that his forte was high politics and grand strategy. He had a Red Army that was becoming good at what it was doing and he would let certain trusted officers run the campaigns.

Strategically, who do you think was the strongest and weakest of The Five?

I think Hitler and Mussolini [were the weakest] but not because they lost. Mussolini was a disaster because he grossly overestimated Italian capacity. He didn't have to join the war… Mussolini made the right choice in the summer of 1939, but he couldn't stay away. He went into the war because he wanted to take parts of France. Mussolini was foolish in many ways and didn't understand the long-term course of the war. He thought Germany was going to win and therefore he needed to join it.

Hitler was actively the worst leader. As the war went on, he started to meddle more in things completely outside his knowledge. He trusted fewer people and became more self-obsessed, believing he was the only person who knew how Germany could win. He made a series of decisions and interferences in the war that actively sped up the defeat.

Of course, the Allies would probably win, particularly once the US was in, because they were much more powerful. There was a different kind of dynamic among the leaders [once they knew] they would be on the winning side. As Churchill said, the day after Pearl Harbor was his best sleep.

Churchill was, in many ways and oddly, the most tragic, because he had a way he

"WHAT WE SEE IN THE RUSSO-UKRAINE WAR NOW WILL HOPEFULLY REINFORCE THE LESSON THAT WE SHOULD NOT HAVE FORGOTTEN: THE ROLE OF INDIVIDUAL LEADERS CAN BE IMPORTANT IN DECIDING NOT ONLY WHEN YOU GO TO WAR BUT HOW A WAR WORKS OUT"

FORGING A NEW WORLD ORDER

Across conference tables in Tehran and Yalta, the Allied strategists battled to shape the post-war order

As the conflict progressed, Stalin and Churchill began to increasingly become junior partners to Roosevelt, who was funding their war efforts. The United Kingdom received $31.4 billion in aid and the Soviets $11.3 billion. US strength led to deference to Roosevelt during the first trilateral meeting – Tehran (November-December 1943) – whereas the handful of bilateral meetings between Stalin and Churchill allowed them to be "a little bit more honest".

Tehran was about how the war would be won and Roosevelt and Stalin worked together to bully Churchill into dropping his Mediterranean focus in favour of a cross-Channel amphibious assault. "Churchill wanted to avoid a bloodbath and thought that an invasion of France would cause Britain to suffer massive casualties," says O'Brien. "This returned to his First World War experiences of fighting the German Army. By late 1943, Roosevelt and Stalin wanted an invasion of France, and that was how the war would be brought to its conclusion in the swiftest way possible. Churchill had a bit of a breakdown after Tehran. He ended up being so bossed around by Stalin and Roosevelt that he was in very bad shape and disappeared. He went into this hotel room with health issues for a while at the end of 1943."

At the February 1945 Yalta meeting, the outcome of the war was no longer in doubt and 'The Big Three' reshuffled. The dying Roosevelt moved closer to Churchill and could put up little resistance to Stalin's expansion into Eastern Europe. "Roosevelt tried to use his charm on Stalin, but Stalin was feeling quite cock-a-hoop by Yalta as he was in control of Eastern Europe," explains O'Brien. "His army was close to Berlin and Stalin started, I think foolishly, antagonising Roosevelt, who had so few days left on this earth. After Yalta, he barely worked again and died a few weeks later in April."



Right: 'The Big Three' meet at the Tehran Conference to discuss opening a second front in Europe against the Wehrmacht

wanted to fight the war [but had to go against it]. It was not a bad strategy and Churchill had a significant understanding of Britain's strengths and weaknesses. Until early 1943, he was successful. From the second half of 1943 onwards, Roosevelt and Stalin steamrolled him. That wasn't Churchill's fault. He fought very hard to get what he wanted, he just couldn't stand up to the combined pressure of the US and USSR.

Roosevelt was very successful in his general overview and understanding of industrial warfare. Certainly, people who lived in America liked Roosevelt because he didn't want many Americans to die. As a domestic politician, he was sensitive to casualties. Roosevelt also had a great weakness from 1944, which was his hubris. He believed he was invaluable to the war effort even though he was dying. He should not have run for reelection in 1944 – that was an irresponsible decision.

Stalin started off very poorly from 1939 to 1941 but then started stepping back and knowing his strengths and weaknesses. That was why he ended up with a small resource base. The Soviet Union was not as economically powerful as the US, but it gained a lot in Eastern Europe. Stalin almost threw that away after overplaying his hand in 1945 and triggering the Cold War.

Overall, the Allied leaders had strengths and weaknesses but didn't sabotage their war efforts. I think that is the difference, as Hitler and Mussolini actively sabotaged [their nations' interests].



Roosevelt, master of domestic politics, speaks to farmers while on the campaign trail in 1932

Why do you argue that the actions of modern leaders like Vladimir Putin demonstrate how grand strategy can still be hijacked by flawed individuals?

You might also say that how Joe Biden reacted to the Ukraine War was very personal. That runs against much academic literature, which doesn't like to stress leaders in favour of systems, epochs, economic factors and domestic politics. However, when you look at wars, they all have triangular decision-making processes, with individuals and small groups at the top. Those individuals don't make a decision based on national interest, but because it's their view of war and they believe it will benefit them.

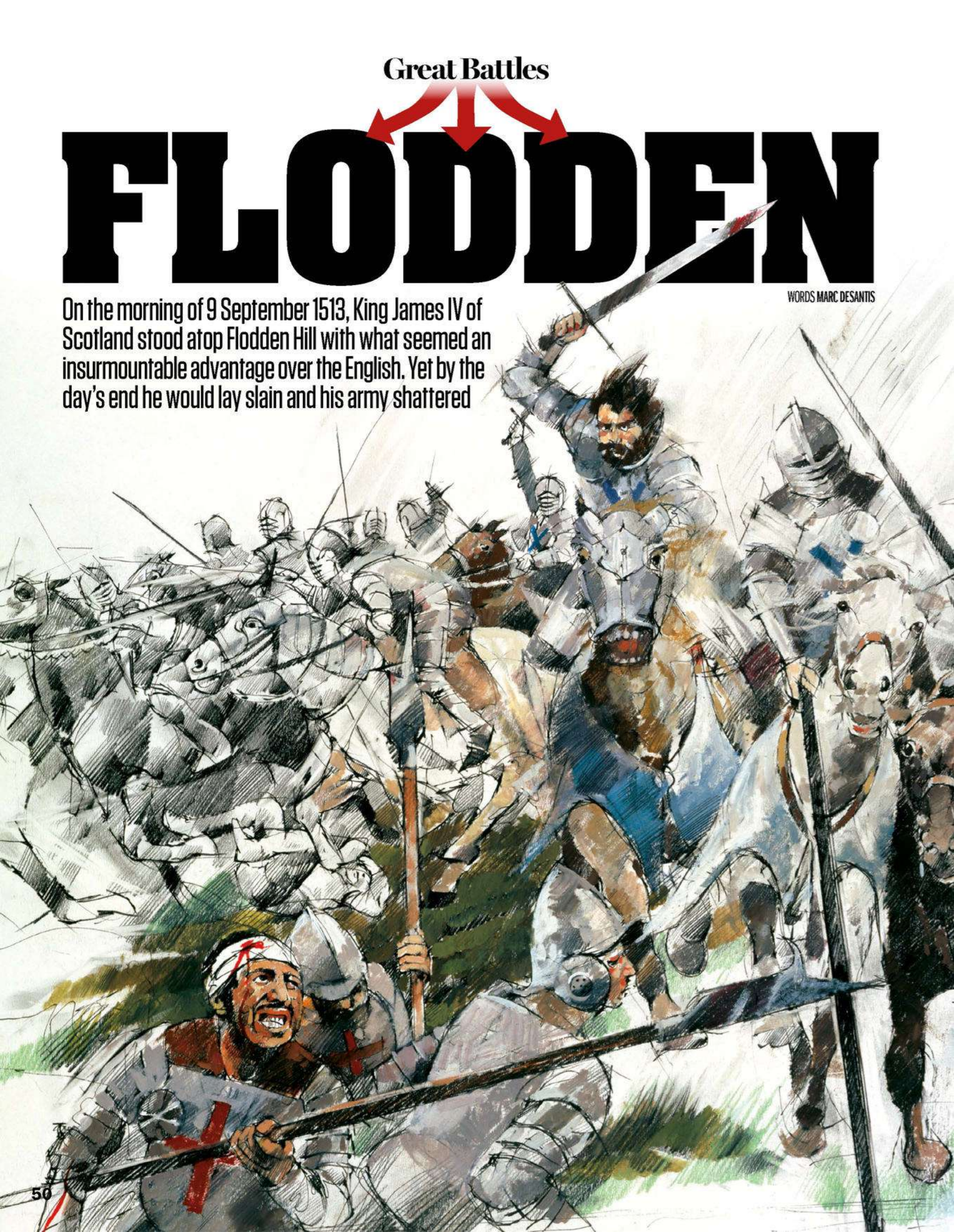
The fact that people overlooked that for a long time was one of the reasons they missed policy. People were saying that Russia would never invade Ukraine. Of course not, it's not a rational choice. But that's irrelevant if someone wants to go to war. What we see in the Russo-Ukraine War now will hopefully reinforce the lesson that we should not have forgotten: the role of individual leaders can be important in deciding not only when you go to war but how a war works out.

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FLODDEN

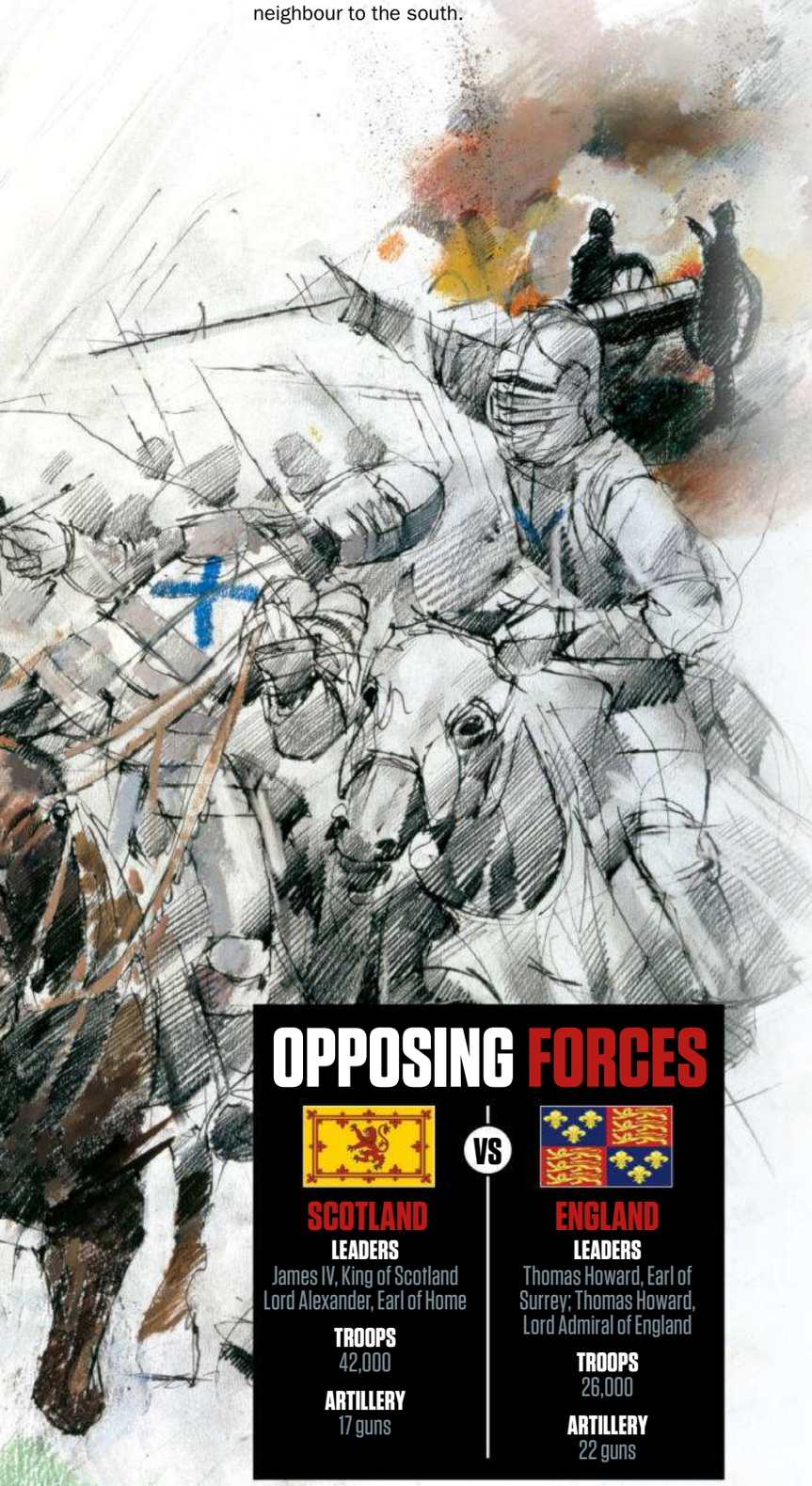
WORDS MARC DESANTIS

On the morning of 9 September 1513, King James IV of Scotland stood atop Flodden Hill with what seemed an insurmountable advantage over the English. Yet by the day's end he would lay slain and his army shattered



Scotland's King James IV was a quintessential Renaissance prince, ruling his kingdom in an era when the great works of Greece and Rome were being recovered and classical culture reborn across Europe. He vigorously supported the new learning, but a king's first and foremost role in that day was that of war-leader, and James was every bit the warrior-monarch.

He adopted new weapons and tactics for his army, and poured vast resources into developing a national navy for Scotland that could compare with that of young King Henry VIII in England, Scotland's larger and more powerful neighbour to the south.



OPPOSING FORCES

SCOTLAND	VS	ENGLAND
LEADERS		**LEADERS**
James IV, King of Scotland Lord Alexander, Earl of Home		Thomas Howard, Earl of Surrey; Thomas Howard, Lord Admiral of England
TROOPS		**TROOPS**
42,000		26,000
ARTILLERY		**ARTILLERY**
17 guns		22 guns

There had already been much conflict between England and Scotland for hundreds of years. In 1502, an attempt was made to bring calm to long-troubled Anglo-Scottish relations with the nations entering into the Treaty of Perpetual Peace, which saw James IV wed to Henry VII's daughter Margaret Tudor (also the sister of Henry VIII) in the next year. While this agreement was not without its merits, it created an obvious threat to Scotland's long-standing alliance with France should events force James to choose between peace with England or his connections with the French.

Centuries earlier, Scotland and France had entered into the Treaty of Paris in 1295, which called for either to come to the aid of the other in times of war with England. This was the beginning of what was known in Scotland as the 'Auld Alliance', and it would play a significant role in the Flodden campaign. In 1513 Henry VIII, eager for martial glory, departed for France as part of his commitment to the anti-French Holy League. In response, James declared war against his brother-in-law, mustered his army in late July and struck into Northumberland in the north of England in a bid to show his support for his French allies.

Organising for war

With Henry away on the Continent, another figure would have to lead the defence of the English north. Senior command of the English army fell to 70-year-old Thomas Howard, the Earl of Surrey, and his son, also named Thomas, who was the Lord Admiral of England.

The main commanders of the Scottish army, which numbered an impressive 42,000, were of course James himself, and Lord Alexander, the Earl of Home. Home had charge of Scotland's difficult East March on the border with England and was well-acquainted with warfare. But he possessed no experience of commanding large numbers of troops in a set-piece battle.

England was a wealthier, more populous and stronger nation than Scotland. Yet many of England's best troops were currently in France with their king. In Northumberland, James would have a strong numerical, and perhaps even qualitative, advantage over the English. It should also be borne in mind that he was not seeking to conquer England, something beyond his ability, but to mount a short and sharp raid in support of France that would win him glory and prestige.

The Scots had adopted the most modern weaponry and tactics then in use in Europe: the pike phalanx. This resembled a block of soldiers, arrayed in multiple ranks and files, with each man holding an 18ft (5.5m) pike (an extremely long spear) in both hands. The Swiss had perfected this offensive formation as a way to get to grips with an opponent as quickly as possible and trample them. James modelled his own army on that of the vaunted Swiss, and in the summer of 1513 French officers trained the Scottish conscripts in how to do battle in this deadly pike formation.

Meanwhile the equipment used by Surrey's English army was somewhat behind the times. The halberd, a relatively short 8ft (2.4m) weapon combining an axehead and a spike was the ubiquitous footsoldiers' weapon. Also common was the famed longbow, a weapon with which so many earlier battles had been won by the English. Armies fight with the weapons that have previously brought them success, and the longbow was one in which the English placed great trust.

In one very significant regard the Scots and English forces were different from their medieval forebears. Both sides had powerful artillery trains, with the Scots having heavier pieces more suited for sieges while the English had lighter field pieces better suited for open battle. An important English advantage lay in their having more experienced artillerists.

Images © Alamy, Getty



01 OPENING SALVOS

The Battle of Flodden begins with a cannonade. Though the Scottish guns are heavier, and fire bigger cannonballs, the English gunners are more experienced and with their lighter pieces inflict more losses on the Scots.

02 THE SCOTTISH CHARGE

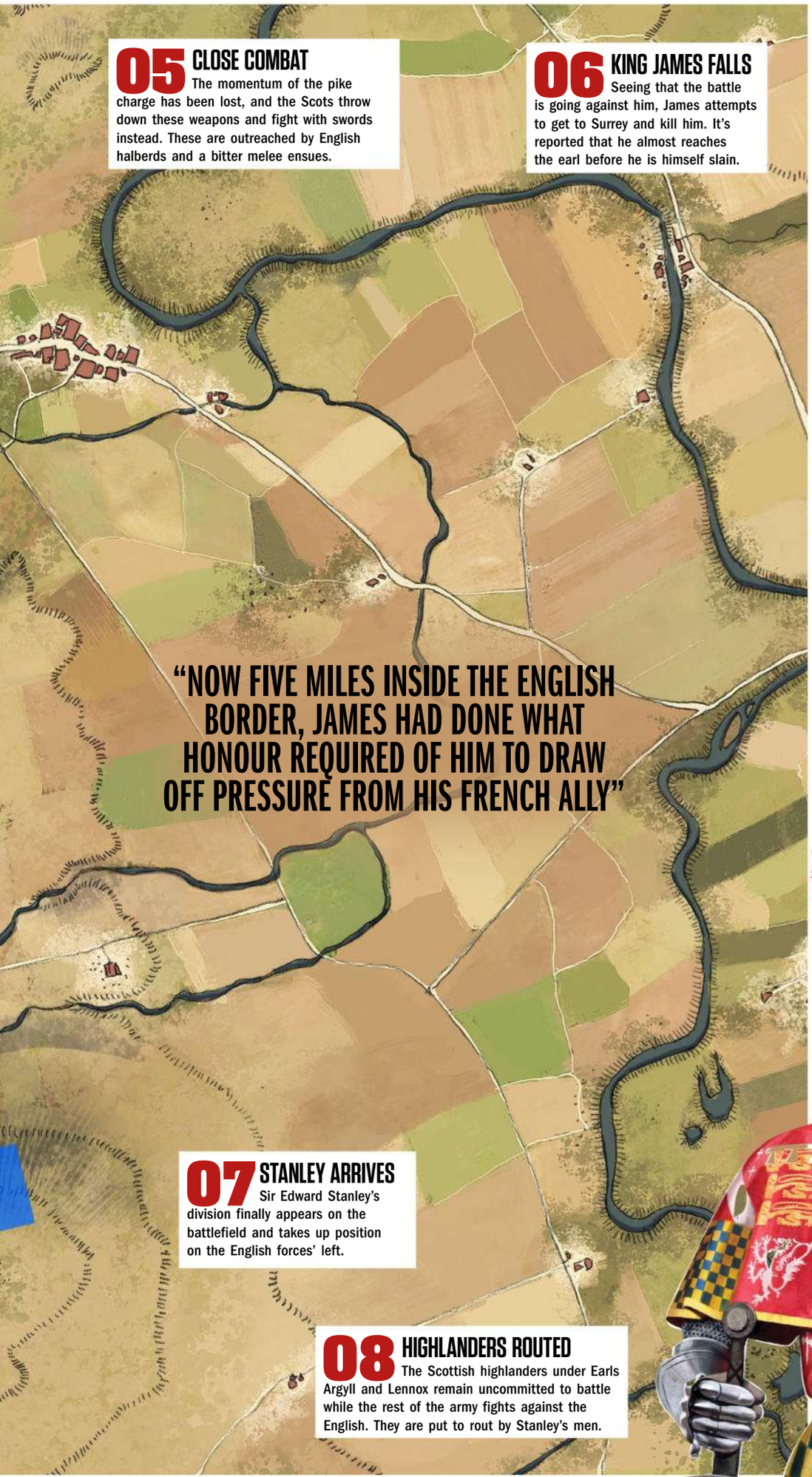
Scottish Earls Home and Huntly lead their pikemen into battle against the enemy's right under Edward Howard. The English are routed except for a small group of men around Howard, who is rescued by Lord Dacre's reserve of Border horsemen.

03 A MUDDY MESS

Earls Errol, Crawford and Montrose attack the Lord Admiral's division with their pike columns. Though English archery has little effect, the momentum of the Scottish charge is severely reduced by the deep mud and difficult terrain along Branxton Hill.

04 THE KING ATTACKS

Taking a pike in his hands, James IV leads his own huge division into battle and encounters the same difficulties with the rain-soaked mire that lies between the Scottish army and their English foes.



Map illustration: Rocío Espín Piñar

The campaign begins

An opening Scottish move ended disastrously. On 13 August, in what was later called the 'Ill Raid', Home's mounted raiders, slowed by their loot, were ambushed by English longbowmen, who inflicted heavy losses. Subsequently, the main Scottish army under James crossed the River Tweed, the traditional Anglo-Scottish border, at Coldstream on 22 August. Its initial target was Norham Castle, one of the great border fortresses. A siege began on 24 August, and the castle surrendered on 29 August. After an inauspicious start, James had won his first victory of the campaign.

Two other strongholds, Etal and Ford, fell in short order, and James made camp at Ford from 1 September to 5 September. On the 5th, he established a fortified position on Flodden Hill, overlooking Ford.

Flodden Hill, sometimes referred to as Flodden Edge, was an extremely favourable position, and having deployed his cannons to take full advantage of the high ground, the Scottish king waited for the English to arrive. He was not interested in going any further south – now five miles (8km) inside the English border, he had done what honour required of him to draw off pressure from his French ally.

In the meantime, Surrey was raising his army. While at Durham on 29 August he took possession of the banner of Saint Cuthbert, patron saint of northern England, for use as the standard of his army. Surrey arrived at Newcastle on 30 August, with the city having been selected as a prime muster point because it was a good port through which supplies could be transported. On 1 September, having collected several contingents there, Surrey moved his army to Bolton, where the full English muster met him on 4 September. All told, it's thought that he had about 26,000 men under arms, including 1,200 experienced marines from the fleet brought by his son, Lord Admiral Thomas Howard. But the gathering was hampered by several days of bad weather. With the armies now in close proximity, there came an exchange of heralds. On 5 September, Surrey



***Left**: Lord Admiral Thomas Howard as he may have appeared on the field in 1513*

sent Thomas Hawley, Rouge Croix, to the king, while the English moved to make camp at Wooler Haugh the following day. James sent a messenger of his own, Islay Herald, to Surrey on 6 September. As well as delivering messages, heralds were tasked with getting a good look at the enemy's forces and positions. Hawley delivered the accusation that James had invaded England without good cause, and offered him battle on 9 September. James accepted the challenge.

The heralds returned to their respective armies on 7 September. Surrey now sent Hawley back to James with a proposal that the battle be fought on level ground, which would mean James would have to give up his excellent defensive position on Flodden Hill. Despite his chivalric nature, he was understandably unwilling to do this.

Time was not on the side of the English. Surrey's large force was proving difficult to feed, and he would not be able to keep his army in the field for much longer. With his supplies close to exhaustion, Surrey could have backed away from battle, not an illogical decision to modern minds, but this was an era in which personal honour was all. To march away would have possibly resulted in his own loss of face and a diminishment of his position, since Surrey had himself challenged the Scottish king to battle and James had accepted that challenge. So for Surrey, it was either fight now with a hungry army against a Scottish force in a good position on Flodden and likely lose, or risk humiliation by refusing battle altogether. He chose to fight.

With James unwilling to leave Flodden, Surrey decided to take a huge risk. A frontal assault against the fortified hill would in all probability be repulsed at huge cost to his army. But what about a flank attack? To the north of Flodden Hill lay Branxton Hill. If he could put his own army on Branxton he would be between the Scottish army and its line of retreat back to Scotland. Surrey would turn the tables on James and besiege him in his fort on Flodden. The earl decided that he would cross the River Till, head north in a semicircular movement, recross the Till, and then head southward again for Branxton. On 8 September, the English crossed the river and marched on to Barmoor, where they made their final camp.

Battle commences

The English broke camp at Barmoor in the early morning of 9 September. The strung-out English army was vulnerable while on the march, but fate was kind to Surrey. His army crossed the River Till in two places: his own main division at the Heaton Fords and the vanguard under his son at Twizell Bridge, further to the north and west.

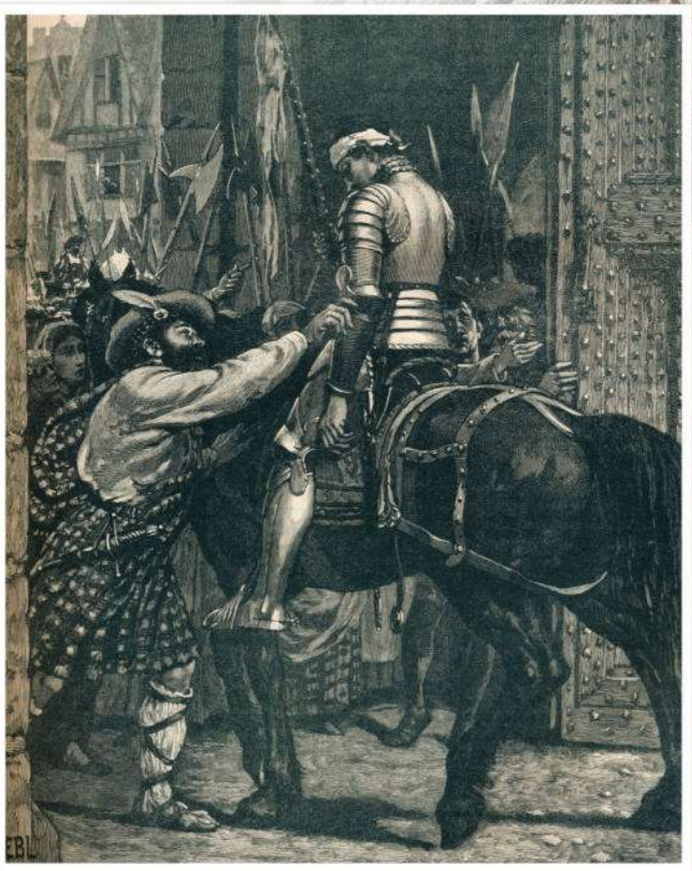
The Scots knew of the English movement, but appear to have guessed that the enemy's objectives might be Berwick on the coast or to mount a punitive raid into southern Scotland's borderlands. But once it was known that Surrey had recrossed the Till and was again west of the river, it was clear that Surrey had outflanked them. Their once envious position on Flodden now left them overextended in enemy territory, with no direct route back to Scotland. To make things worse, the Scottish troops were still oriented in the direction from which they'd hoped the English would attack, but Surrey had shrewdly refused to give the Scots what they wanted. Now they themselves were in peril.

James reoriented his army on the fly to face northwest along the nearby Branxton Hill, which would force the English to face the guns and pikes of the Scots once more. The Scots would also have the advantage of a defensive slope, just as they had on Flodden. Their cannons could pound the English from a distance, and if the artillery did not crack open the English line then the Scottish pike blocks, attacking in echelon, Swiss-style, would. But not all was well. Though the repositioning was carried out, it did not leave the Scots enough time to take a good look at the terrain around their new position at Branxton Hill, and this was likely the cause of much grief to follow.

The English march to Branxton, once the recrossings were made, was troubled. Howard was in the lead with the vanguard, but a yawning gap of over a mile had opened up between the last of his soldiers and his father's main body of troops. The English were outnumbered as it was, and if James had struck right then he might have wiped out the advance elements. Learning of his son's difficulty, Surrey hurried his soldiers onward. Meanwhile, James refrained from going on the offensive, perhaps thinking that it would be better to have the whole English army in front of him so when his pike blocks moved ahead they would crush the entire English force all at once.

This gave the English the time they needed to form a proper line of battle in front of the Scots, between the slope of Branxton Hill and the Pallinsburn, a narrow stream. They deployed in four major divisions. From right to left was the division, or 'battle', of Edmund Howard, comprising his retainers and levies. To his left was the Lord Admiral's division. Beside that was the main English division commanded by Surrey himself. Behind them all were stationed Lord Dacre's (Dacre was warden of the English West March) division of Border horsemen. Trailing far behind was another division under Sir Edward Stanley,

"TIME WAS NOT ON THE SIDE OF THE ENGLISH. SURREY'S LARGE FORCE WAS PROVING DIFFICULT TO FEED, AND HE WOULD NOT BE ABLE TO KEEP HIS ARMY IN THE FIELD FOR MUCH LONGER"



Above: **Edinburgh after the Battle of Flodden, 1513** ***(1905). From Cassell's*** **History of England**

Images © Alamy, Getty



With their deadly halberds, the English gained the upper hand in the close-quarters fighting

James IV was the last monarch from the British Isles to die in battle

"JAMES' BODY WAS FOUND LATER WITH AN ARROW LODGED IN HIS JAW, HIS THROAT GASHED AND HIS LEFT HAND DANGLING FROM HIS ARM"



FURTHER READING

- George Goodwin, *Fatal Rivalry* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2013)
- John Sadler & Rose Serdiville, *The Battle of Flodden 1513* (The History Press, 2006)
- Sir Charles Oman, *A History of the Art of War in the Sixteenth Century* (Greenhill Books,1987)
- Magnus Magnusson, *Scotland: The Story of a Nation* (HarperCollins, 2000)



a younger son of the Earl of Derby. His men would only reach the field a good while after fighting had started.

On the other side, from left to right, the Scots had deployed their own Border horse and highlanders under Home and Earl Huntly. Another battle under the Earls Errol, Crawford and Montrose was to their right. Beside these earls was the king's own division, and on the far right was a division of highlanders commanded by Earls Lennox and Argyll. A division under Earl Bothwell was held in reserve behind the main Scottish line on Branxton Hill.

It was late afternoon when the battle began with a resounding cannonade. Scottish and English guns opened fire, and the English had the better of the exchange, with James' weapons having little effect on the English. The Scottish artillerists may have had a harder time shooting downwards, and their shot did little damage, plunging deep into the soft ground that had been turned into mud by the endless rain. In contrast, the English artillery train, despite being composed of lighter pieces, was skipping their shot over the ground and killing many Scots while they stood in formation.

Now the Scottish soldiers went into action. Home and Huntly's division started first, and because the Scots wore armour the English longbows, also hampered by the wind, made scant impression on them. The hedge of Scottish pikes shattered Howard's division, with the majority of the men fleeing the field, leaving him behind with just a few retainers. Surrey restored order by sending in his reserve force of Border horse under Dacre. The horsemen rushed in, rescued Edmund, and stopped Home and Huntly's forward progress.

Next to go on the offensive were the pikemen of Errol, Crawford and Montrose, who attacked the Lord Admiral's division. The earls found themselves unexpectedly bogged down in the rain-soaked grass, a waterlogged dip between them and the English, and then a slight ascent towards the enemy. It didn't help matters that the already dreadful muck had been made even worse by the charge of thousands of Scottish pikemen.

At roughly the same time, James picked up a pike and led his division of around 15,000 pikemen against the English. For the king to take such an enormous risk to his own person may seem reckless, but this was an age when monarchs still led armies from the front as a matter of honour. His own pikemen encountered the same terrible terrain as had the troops to their left.

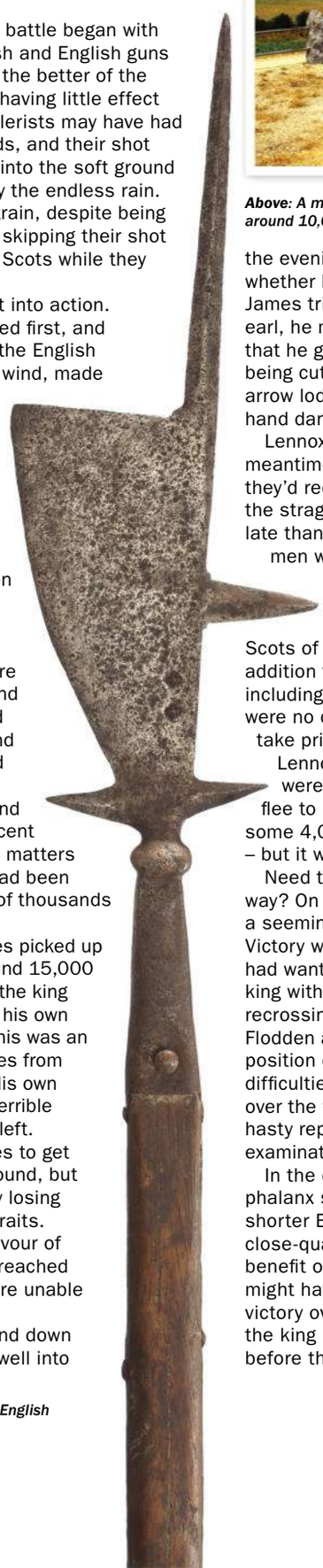
The Scots pulled off their shoes to get a better purchase on the soft ground, but their pike phalanxes were quickly losing cohesion, leaving them in dire straits. They threw down their pikes in favour of their swords, but these were outreached by English bills and the Scots were unable to sustain their momentum.

A bloody struggle ensued up and down the line of battle that continued well into the evening and no quarter was given to the Scots, whether lord or commoner. With the battle slipping away, James tried to fight his way to Surrey. If he could kill the earl, he might salvage something from the day. It is said that he got to within a spear's length of Surrey before being cut down. James' body was found later with an arrow lodged in his jaw, his throat gashed and his left hand dangling from his arm.

Lennox and Argyll, with their highlanders, had in the meantime stayed out of the fighting, maybe because they'd received no direct orders to attack. Eventually, the straggling division under Stanley appeared, better late than never for the English, and Argyll and Lennox's men were driven from the field. Both of the Scottish earls were slain.



***Above:** A memorial to those slain at the Battle of Flodden. The Scots lost around 10,000 men in their defeat to the English*



***Right:** The 8ft (2.4m) halberd used by the English combined an axehead with a long spike*

Counting the cost

Scots of all ranks lay dead in droves at Flodden. In addition to their king, they lost around 10,000 men, including large numbers of noblemen. Scottish casualties were no doubt increased by the refusal of the English to take prisoners. In addition to James and Earls Argyll and Lennox, Earls Errol, Crawford, Montrose and Bothwell were slain, while Earls Home and Huntly managed to flee to safety. The victory wasn't bloodless for Surrey – some 4,000 Englishmen also lay dead on the battlefield – but it was a clear-cut triumph.

Need the Battle of Flodden have turned out this way? On the morning of 9 September, James had held a seemingly impregnable position atop Flodden Hill. Victory was close, if only Surrey had done what James had wanted him to. Instead, Surrey outmanoeuvred the king with his dangerous but successful crossing and recrossing of the River Till. Surrey pried James from Flodden and forced him to fight from a less satisfactory position on Branxton. At least some of the unexpected difficulties that the Scots experienced when attacking over the waterlogged ground must be due to the Scots' hasty repositioning, which did not allow for a proper examination of the terrain.

In the deep, sticky muck of Flodden, the Scottish pike phalanx soon lost its all-important cohesion and the shorter English halberd had the better of the chaotic close-quarters combat. Perhaps if James had had the benefit of fair weather and a flat, dry battlefield, he might have won for himself and Scotland a brilliant victory over his English foes. That was not to be, and the king lay dead alongside thousands of his subjects before the day was out.

Images © Alamy, Getty

FERDINAND 'THE BLOODY'

Known for his brutal martial punishment and execution of his own men, Ferdinand Schörner's ruthlessness was matched only by his devotion to Nazi ideology

WORDS **MARK SIMNER**

According to the *Oxford Companion to World War II*: "Only Model and Keitel among the German generals rivalled [Ferdinand] Schörner as a devotee to Hitler." It is probably also fair to say that his devotion to his Führer was matched only by his ruthlessness. A ruthlessness not only unleashed upon the enemy, but also often inflicted on his own soldiers. This in turn led to Schörner drawing much post-war criticism from the very men who fought and suffered under his command.

Schörner's devotion and brutality were not lost on Hitler, who promoted him to generalfeldmarschall in April 1945, the final such promotion of the war. Hitler seemingly liked Schörner so much that he even went as far as to name him in his will as the new commander-in-chief of the German Army. Later imprisoned by the Soviets for war crimes, Schörner returned to West Germany following an unusual early release, where he found himself convicted of further crimes (this time for actions against his own soldiers) and again imprisoned. Released once more after only a few years behind bars, Schörner would live out his days in his native Munich in virtual obscurity.

More recently, several historians have attempted to portray Schörner as an extremely able commander and organiser, who even acted against Hitler's orders on occasion. Nevertheless, Schörner rightly remains remembered for being the fanatical Nazi, butcher and war criminal that he was.

Early life and military career

The son of a senior police officer, Schörner was born in Munich in June 1892. His military service commenced in late 1911 when he joined the Bavarian Army, being posted to the Königlich Bayerisches Infanterie-Leib-Regiment, which traditionally acted as lifeguards to the Bavarian monarchy. Shortly after the outbreak of the First World War, he was promoted to leutnant der reserve der infanterie.

Schörner served in the army throughout the First World War as a platoon commander and was present at the Battle of Caporetto on the Italian front in late 1917. During the battle, the German 14th Army assaulted Italian defences near the Isonzo River, where Schörner and his unit captured Hill 114 on the Kolovrat Ridge. His conduct during this engagement saw him awarded the much-coveted Pour le Mérite – the so-called 'Blue Max' – on 5 December 1917. Schörner was also promoted to oberleutnant several months before the German surrender in 1918.



Two US troops discover the corpse of a German soldier who'd been executed for trying to surrender, April 1945



A hanged German infantryman lies in the street after his body was cut down by Allied soldiers, April 1945

Images: Alamy, Getty



Generalfeldmarschall Ferdinand Schörner was a fanatical Nazi who carried out numerous atrocities in WWII – many against his own troops

Following the end of the First World War, Schörner would continue to see military service in the newly established Reichswehr and become involved with the right-wing paramilitary Freikorps. He held several appointments in the Reichswehr during the interwar years, including that of adjutant to General Otto von Lossow, commander of Wehrkreis VII (7th Division, or military district) in Munich. Lossow played a part in the defeat of Hitler’s Beer Hall Putsch of November 1923.

Despite having taken part in the crushing of the putsch, Schörner, who had long-held right-wing tendencies, joined the Nazi Party in the 1920s following Hitler’s release from prison. He remained in the army and received several promotions, including hauptmann (August 1926), major (August 1934) and oberstleutnant (March 1937), in which rank he was subsequently appointed command of Gebirgsjäger-Regiment 98 (98th Mountain Infantry Regiment). By the time the Second World War, Schörner had achieved the rank of oberst (August 1939).

War breaks out

Schörner would see plenty of action during the Second World War. His first campaign, with the 1 Gebirgs-Division (1st Mountain Division), came in Poland in 1939. During this early fighting he earned acclaim for his actions during the Battle of Lwów in September. The city of Lwów (today known as Lviv and situated in western Ukraine) was considered of vital importance to the Polish defence of the Romanian Bridgehead. The Germans, therefore, sought to take it.

On 12 September, leading elements of 1 Gebirgs-Division reached the outskirts of Lwów. The Germans encountered a spirited resistance from the city’s Polish defenders and were bloodily repulsed. The following day, with the main part of the division now also having reached the city, the Germans planned another assault. According to Roger Moorhouse in his book *First to Fight: The Polish War 1939*: “Driven on by the ruthless ambition and ideological conviction of one of the division’s commanders, Ferdinand Schörner – a fanatical Nazi loyalist – the units were already forging ahead towards Lwów. According to one German eyewitness account of the time, the Gebirgsjäger raced on through Galicia, past the detritus of war… When they reached the city’s western outskirts the following day… they are said to have overtaken two buses of Polish soldiers, who could only gaze at them in bewilderment.”

“ALL THAT WAS LEFT OF THAT VEHICLE AFTER THAT FIRST SALVO WAS A HEAP OF IRON AND A WISP OF SMOKE”

The city of Lwów is dominated by the Zboiska Heights to the north and northeast. Schörner attempted to take these heights, and a taskforce managed to reach a commanding position known as Hill 374 by the afternoon and Zboiska itself by dark. Some German troops even managed to get to the centre of Lwów in the early afternoon before being forced out by the defenders.

Again, according to Moorhouse, one Polish artilleryman recalled of the German attack on the city centre that day: “When they saw us, they started jumping out, but they were too late… our faithful field guns blared out with head-on fire. All that was left of that vehicle after that first salvo was



***Above:** Schörner was a highly decorated veteran of the Great War who earned yet more honours in WWII*

***Below:** German mountain troops in 1941. Schörner commanded the 6th Gebirgs Division (1940-42) in the Balkans and during Operation Barbarossa in Russia*



a heap of iron and a wisp of smoke. The rest of the column soon met the same fate." Nevertheless, the Germans quickly invested the city and cut all communications with Polish forces located at Przemysl while awaiting reinforcements.

Other Polish forces arrived and attempted to take back Zboiska, which they recaptured only after heavy fighting. However, the Germans retained control of the nearby heights. They placed artillery there and bombarded the city, while the Luftwaffe savagely bombed it from the air. Despite this deadly onslaught, the determined Polish defenders bravely stood their ground.

The situation began to rapidly change after the Soviet Union invaded Poland on 17 September. The Soviet 6th Red Army crossed into Polish territory near Lwów and commenced a rapid advance on the city. In the face of the unexpected Soviet intervention, the Polish now abandoned their plan to defend the Romanian Bridgehead. However, the defence of the city continued and a further German assault on its defences was repulsed.

On 19 September the Soviets made their own assault on Lwów. It was similarly beaten off. The Soviets then commenced an encirclement of the city and linked up with the Germans. Both the Germans and the Soviets attempted to negotiate the surrender of the city, but when the Polish refused, Schörner threatened a major assault on the 21st. However, Hitler wanted his forces to leave Lwów to the Soviets, so no German assault took place. Nevertheless, the Polish commander eventually felt his situation was hopeless, and on the 22nd the city was surrendered to the Soviets.

Schörner had received the Iron Cross second and first classes during the First World War in 1914 and 1917 respectively, and it would be during operations in and around Lwów for which he received bars to both classes. Many further prestigious awards awaited him.

From Western Europe to The Balkans

Following the campaign in Poland, Schörner saw action in the fighting in Belgium and France in 1940. The 1 Gebirgs-Division formed part of XVIII Army Corps and was originally destined to take part in Unternehmen Seelöwe (Operation Sealion), the planned German invasion of the United Kingdom. Schörner, however, would be given command of 6 Gebirgs-Division (6th Mountain Division), and by the middle of 1941 he and his new command were off to fight in a very different theatre of the war.

On 6 April 1941, his 6 Gebirgs-Division took part in Unternehmen Marita (Operation Marita), the Axis invasion

Polish POWs under escort near Lwów. Schörner would receive bars to his 1914 Iron Crosses for actions against the city





Schörner with the German leader in his Berlin bunker in 1945 – one of the last photos of the dictator before his suicide

HITLER'S DOGMATIC 'YES MAN'?

He was denigrated by his comrades as 'the Fuhrer's lacky', but Schörner sometimes disobeyed his leader

In his book *In Deadly Combat: A German Soldier's Memoir of the Eastern Front*, Gottlob Herbert Bidermann says of Schörner: "There was one generaloberst in particular whose highly esteemed rank insignia could… only be credited to the golden party badge he wore… placing his loyalty to the National Socialist Party above his loyalty to his troops whose lives were entrusted to him."

Siegfried Knappe, in *Soldat: Reflections of a German Soldier, 1936-1949*, is similarly critical of Schörner: "It was common knowledge that he [Schörner] had been promoted rapidly because he was a political general and a 'yes man' to Hitler."

Meanwhile Hans von Luck observes in *Panzer Commander*: "Schoerner [sic], like Rommel, had been decorated in the First World War with the 'Pour le merite', on the Italian front. It was said that he envied Rommel his fame and popularity. He seemed to want to give himself a high profile through exceptional severity and success."

But in more recent years some historians have focussed on what they see as Schörner's talent as a senior commander. For example, Howard D Grier, in his book *Hitler, Donitz and the Baltic Sea: The Third Reich's Last Hope, 1944-1945*, fully recognises that Schörner was utterly ruthless towards his men. However, he also argues that he "was by no means Hitler's lacky" as has so often been portrayed and that "if he felt the situation warranted it, he would order an immediate retreat without waiting for approval from OKH or Hitler".

Grier goes on to say: "Schörner ordered several major retreats, some involving great distances, such as his command to evacuate Estonia and eastern Latvia" and argues that "other areas he evacuated against Hitler's orders included bridgeheads across the Dnieper and Dniester rivers, the cities of Odessa and Sevastopol, and the vital industrial area of Upper Silesia. In addition, Speer persuaded Schörner to ignore Hitler's 'scorched earth' policy in the war's final weeks."

Regardless of Schörner's willingness to go against Hitler, his acts of ruthlessness speak for themselves. His murder of Greek Sergeant Dimitrios Itsios and the frequent executions of his own men show he was not averse to committing serious crimes. Crimes for which he would later be convicted in several courts of law, albeit arguably without serving long enough sentences.

Images: Alamy, Getty





Der Oberbefehlshaber der Heeresgruppe Mitte

H.Qu. den 2. Mai 1945

Soldaten der Heeresgruppe Mitte!

Nach sechsjährigem harten Kampf ist es der Übermacht unserer Feinde gelungen, einen Teil unserer Fronten zum Einsturz zu bringen, allein die Front der südlichen Heeresgruppen der Ostfront steht noch ungebrochen. Dies ist Eurer Tapferkeit und Standhaftigkeit zu danken.

Der Krieg geht seinem Ende zu. Entsprechend dem Befehl des vom Führer berufenen Staatsführers und Obersten Befehlshabers der deutschen Wehrmacht, Großadmiral Dönitz, gilt es solange weiterzukämpfen, bis wertvollste deutsche Menschen geborgen sind.

Nach Erfüllung dieser Aufgabe ist es meine Absicht, Euch, meine Soldaten, geschlossen und in stolzer Haltung in die Heimat zurückzuführen. Diese hohe Aufgabe der Führung kann nur mit einer gehorsamen und schlagkräftigen Truppe durchgeführt werden. Wir dürfen in diesen schwersten Tagen unseres Reiches die Nerven nicht verlieren und nicht feige werden, vor allem dürfen wir nicht auf die vom Feind raffiniert ausgestreuten Parolen hören. Wir müssen das Vertrauen zu unserer Führung haben, daß sie auch in dieser Lage das Richtige tut.

Sechs lange Jahre haben wir zusammengehalten und dem Feind getrotzt. In den letzten Wochen dürfen wir der Welt kein Bild der Auflösung bieten und die jetzt angebahnten Verhandlungen dadurch zerschlagen. Jede unerlaubte Entfernung, jeder Versuch aus eigener Kraft den Weg in die Heimat zu finden, ist ehrloser Verrat am Kameraden, an unserem Volk und muß entsprechend geahndet werden.

Unsere Disziplin und unsere Waffen in der Hand sind für uns das Unterpfand, anständig und tapfer aus diesem Kriege zu gehen. Unsere Ehre und der Heldentod so vieler unserer Kameraden verpflichten uns dazu. Nur wer sich selbst aufgibt, ist wirklich verloren.

Soldaten meiner Heeresgruppe!

Wir haben zusammen so manche schwere Krise an manchem Frontabschnitt des Ostens gemeistert. Ihr könnt das Vertrauen zu mir haben, daß ich Euch auch aus dieser Krise herausführe; und ich habe das Vertrauen zu Euch, daß Ihr zu Volk, Staat und Staatsführer steht!

Aber zusammenstehen müssen wir und trotz einiger Verräter und Feiglinge unsere letzte Kraft in der letzten Stunde dieses Krieges für die Erfüllung unseres Auftrages einsetzen. Nur eiserner Zusammenhalt, unerschütterlicher Widerstandswille und eine stets geschlossene Front führen uns gerade und erst recht auf dem Boden des Protektorates in die Heimat.

Schörner
Generalfeldmarschall



***Above, left:** Joseph Goebbels said of Schörner: "Deserters get no mercy from him… They are hanged from the nearest tree"*

***Above, middle:** An appeal issued by Schörner urging his soldiers to remain disciplined. Little mercy was show to those who failed*

***Above, right:** Schörner is said to have taken part in hand-to-hand fighting against Soviet troops*

of Greece. Within days of the invasion, despite a spirited resistance put up by the Greeks, the 6 Gebirgs-Division, along with the 2 SS-Panzerdivision 'Das Reich' (2nd SS Panzer Division), had captured Athens by 27 April. During this operation, Schörner earned himself the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross for his part in the Axis breaching of the Metaxas Line, a chain of Greek fortifications along the Greco-Bulgarian border.

During the battle, a Greek sergeant by the name of Dimitrios Itsios commanded the defence of a bunker known as P8. Itsios and his men fought doggedly against the Germans, inflicting heavy casualties. Nevertheless, the German forces ultimately overpowered the defenders when they began to run out of ammunition. It is said that Schörner later personally questioned Itsios and even ordered his men to show the Greek sergeant honours for his determined defence. However, Schörner then ordered his execution. Since Itsios was clearly a prisoner of war at that point, he should have been treated as such and his murder was a war crime. Itsios was later posthumously promoted and is today considered a war hero by the Greeks.

Eastern Front

Following his bloody service in the Balkans, Schörner and the 6 Gebirgs-Division were deployed to Norway, joining Armeeoberkommando Norwegen (Army Norway) and seeing action in the early part of in Operation Barbarossa. It is said that during this time on the Arctic Front Schörner personally took part in hand-to-hand combat with Soviet troops.

In December 1941, Schörner was promoted to generalmajor and in February the following year he was again promoted, this time to generalleutant. During this time he was given command of Gebirgskorps Norwegen (Mountain Corps Norway), which would later be renamed XIX. Gebirgs-Armeekorps (XIX Mountain Corps). Schörner's corps saw heavy action against the Soviet 14th Army in mid-1942.

Yet another promotion came, to general der gebirgstruppe in May 1942, and in October/November 1943 Schörner commanded XXXX Panzerkorps, which was operating in Ukraine. He remained commander of the corps until he was placed in command of Heeresgruppe A (Army Group A) in March 1944. However, this latter command was brief, with Schörner going on to command Heeresgruppe Südukraine (Army Group South Ukraine) at the end of the month.

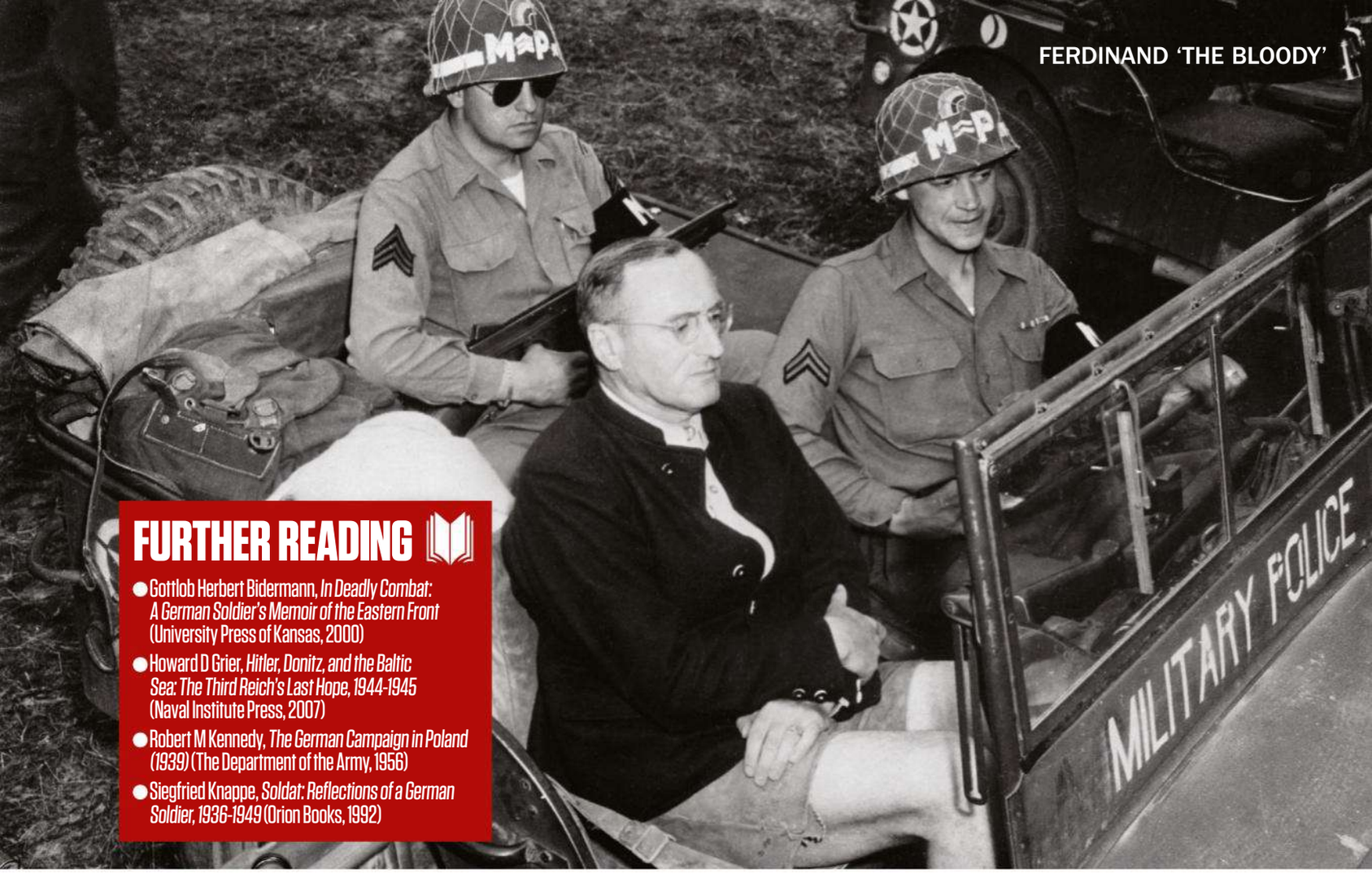
While commander of Heeresgruppe Südukraine, Schörner gave orders that went against Hitler's wishes. It's said that he boasted that the port at Sevastopol could be held against the Soviets, but when he realised the situation was in fact useless, he asked Hitler for permission to evacuate the 17 Armee (German-Romanian 17th Army), which had been poorly equipped for the task assigned to it. Unsurprisingly, Hitler refused the request. Schörner then gave an order for which he would become infamous (and would repeat again). Any German or Romanian troops caught deserting were to be arrested and shot. The Soviets renewed their attacks, and eventually Schörner did order the evacuation of his men from Sevastopol. However, the order came far too late and many thousands of German and Romanian soldiers lost their lives or were captured by the Red Army.

Despite this failure, Schörner was rewarded with yet another promotion in May 1944, this time to the rank of generaloberst. By July, he was in command of Heeresgruppe Nord (Army Group North) in the Baltic States. The Red Army here greatly outnumbered the Germans, and Schörner again understood his situation was hopeless. Once again, he turned to Hitler, asking permission to withdraw from Estonia, and the Führer again refused the request. The Soviets attacked, putting incredible pressure on the Germans. Schörner did manage to conduct a well-executed retreat, but the army became trapped in what was known as the Courland Pocket. Here it remained until the end of the war.

Schörner moved on to command Heeresgruppe Mitte (Army Group Centre) in January 1945 with orders to hold Silesia. However, another Soviet offensive pushed the Germans back to Czechoslovakia, and the situation quickly deteriorated further. During the battle to defend Ostrava, Schörner again displayed his ruthlessness towards his men when he ordered the execution of several of his officers for simply being 'defeatist' in the face of the Soviet onslaught. Both sides suffered horrendous casualties.

Siegfried Knappe, in his book *Soldat: Reflections of a German Soldier, 1936-1949*, recalls Schörner's ruthlessness: "Schörner had issued orders that anyone caught behind the lines without orders was to be put in front of a tribunal and hanged… We had heard horror stories of innocent people being hanged by these kangaroo courts simply because they were acting under oral orders

"THE ORDER CAME FAR TOO LATE, AND MANY THOUSANDS OF GERMAN AND ROMANIAN SOLDIERS LOST THEIR LIVES OR BECAME PRISONERS OF THE RED ARMY"



FURTHER READING

- Gottlob Herbert Bidermann, *In Deadly Combat: A German Soldier's Memoir of the Eastern Front* (University Press of Kansas, 2000)
- Howard D Grier, *Hitler, Donitz, and the Baltic Sea: The Third Reich's Last Hope, 1944-1945* (Naval Institute Press, 2007)
- Robert M Kennedy, *The German Campaign in Poland (1939)* (The Department of the Army, 1956)
- Siegfried Knappe, *Soldat: Reflections of a German Soldier, 1936-1949* (Orion Books, 1992)

***Above:** Schörner in the custody of US Military Police following his arrest in Austria in May 1945*

instead of written orders." He adds: "Schörner was known to German soldiers as 'the Hangman'." Such was the view many ordinary German soldiers had of the general both during and after the war.

Although Schörner had requested and commanded several withdrawals, something which Hitler had so often outright refused, he was highly regarded among the Nazi leadership, and especially the Führer himself, who promoted him to generalfeldmarschall on 5 April 1945. But by now the war was already lost and Schörner knew the Allies would hunt him down along with other the senior Nazis and military commanders.

Trials and imprisonments

With the war lost, Schörner left his final post on 9 May and destroyed his uniform. Abandoning his men, he effectively deserted: an act for which he had ordered death for so many others. He boarded an aircraft and donned civilian clothes, and it is said he intended to disguise himself as a farmer from Bavaria. However, his aircraft crash-landed in Austria where, on the 18th, he handed himself in to the American military.

After remaining in American custody for several weeks, the decision was made to hand him over to the Soviets to investigate alleged war crimes and for potential trial. The Soviets eventually charged him with war crimes six years later in August 1951, and in February the following year he was given a 25-year prison sentence by the Military Board of the Soviet Supreme Court.

The fate of many German soldiers at the hands of the Soviets after the war was bleak, but Schörner found his sentence reduced to 12-and-half years in April 1952. He was then handed over to the East German authorities in December 1954, and released in 1955 having served just 13 years of his original 25-year sentence. Upon his release he was given special permission to travel to West Germany.

Interestingly, the CIA at the time thought the former generalfeldmarschall had been given a 'political mission'. According to a declassified CIA report dated 17 May 1955: "He did not remain in the GDR because he was given the political mission of establishing connections with his previous officers and soldiers… Schoerner [sic], although he had been a rigid disciplinarian, was by no means as unpopular as the West German press was writing… The Soviets therefore believed that he was the right man to convince the former Austrian soldiers that the USA wanted to make West Austria a bastion of the NATO powers and thus furtively to bring about a new Anschluss of part of Austria with West Germany. Schoerner [sic] was informed in Moscow that the execution of these plans would bring about the division of Austria."

Unfortunately for Schörner, his return to West Germany saw him arrested and again put on trial, this time for crimes that he'd committed against his own men during the war. He was found guilty of the manslaughter of Wehrmacht soldiers and served four-and-half years in prison before again being released early in 1963, this time thanks to the intervention of Chancellor Heinrich Lübke.

Life for Schörner now became a quiet and obscure one, returning to Munich to live out his final days away from public view. In the late 1960s, he did agree to be interviewed by Mario Silvestri, an Italian historian. However, Schörner preferred to speak about his First World War experiences and the Battle of Caporetto rather than his much darker military career during the Second World War.

Ferdinand Schörner died on 2 July 1973 in Munich aged 81 and is believed to be the last wartime generalfeldmarschall promoted by Hitler to pass away. Few probably mourned the demise of 'the Hangman'.

Images: Alamy, Getty

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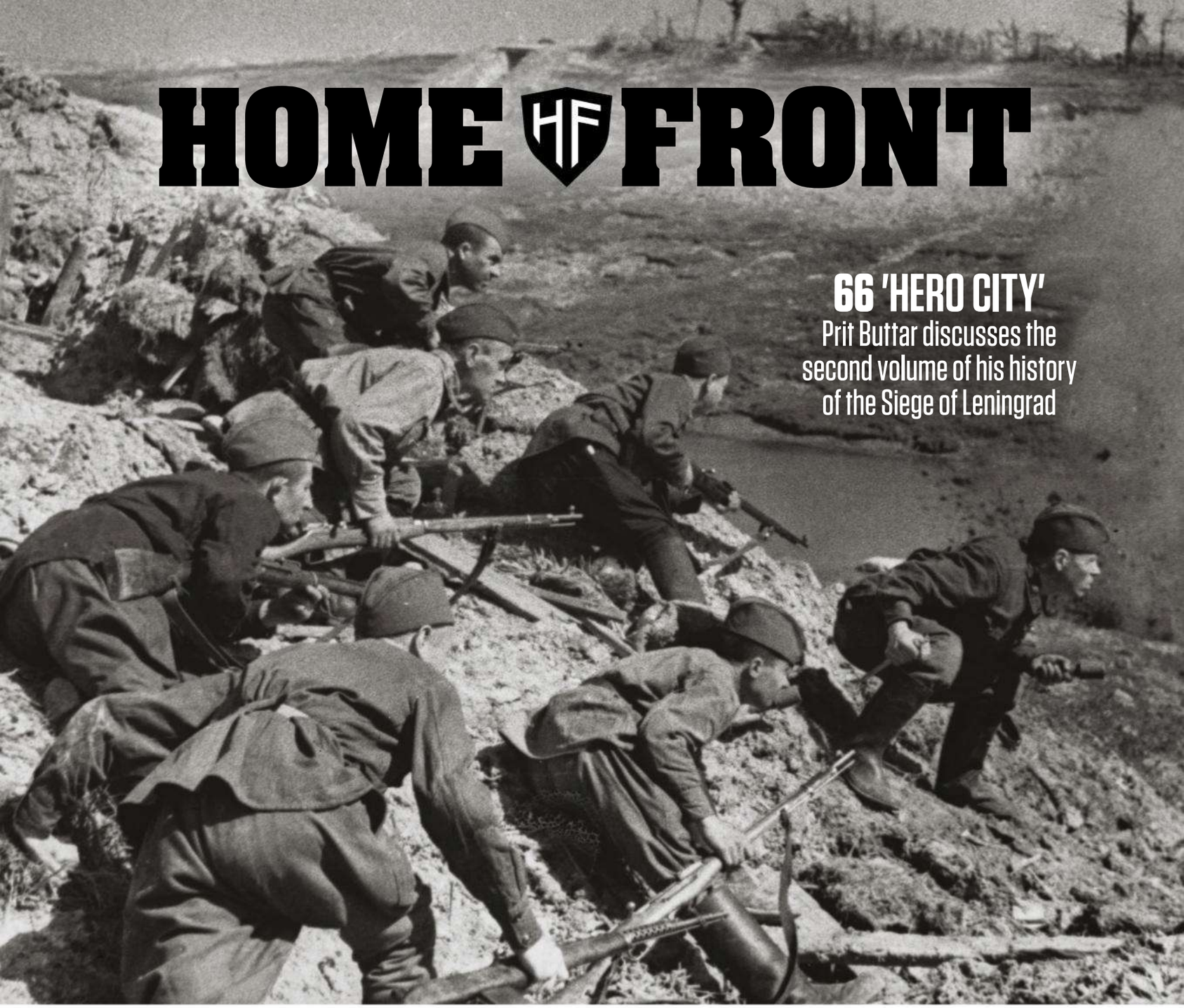


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BREAKING HISTORY'S WORST SIEGE

Q&A WITH PRIT BUTTAR



INTERVIEW BY **LOUIS HARDIMAN**

In 1943-44 the Wehrmacht had to be levered out of formidable defences in a monumental sacrifice to free Leningrad

As the snow melted in the spring of 1942, Leningraders emerged from the worst winter experienced by a population under siege. Amid a mounting death toll driven by starvation, cold, disease and shells from the Wehrmacht's siege artillery, Red Army command began to plan the counter-attacks that would finally free the city from its suffering. Using original Russian source material, Eastern Front expert Prit Buttar traces the monumental effort and "mind-numbing" Soviet sacrifice to break the siege and push the Wehrmacht west in his new release *Hero City: Leningrad 1943-44*. He then considers how this triumph continues to shape Russia and its politics.

Buttar spoke with *History of War* about history's most deadly siege, sharing his thoughts on the varied experiences of the Leningrad Front, the terrain that made a breakout near impossible and how German setbacks elsewhere, such as Stalingrad, helped bring about the Leningraders' salvation.

What the atmosphere among the Wehrmacht fores as they placed Leningrad under siege?
The Germans arrived outside Leningrad in September 1941 and the high-level decision was made to not capture the city but cut it off and starve it into submission. In the spring of 1942, they could move into a desolate city. Most of the population would be dead and the Germans could drive out the remnants and dynamite the buildings. Within the Wehrmacht, there was still a belief that they would be the conquerors of Leningrad and there was huge disappointment when they stopped on the outskirts and didn't finish the job. Many Germans of different ranks wrote about this in their memoirs as a missed opportunity that would have avoided the long and bitter trench warfare outside of the city. I think that's incorrect. If the Germans had been drawn into urban warfare, it would have been incredibly costly and they wouldn't have prevailed, given the demands of such a vast battlefield as the Eastern Front. Finally, there was steadily increasing unease about how long the Germans could keep holding back attempts to break the siege, each leaving them weaker. They would



Leningraders, one of whom is pulling a corpse, on Nevsky Prospect during the brutal winter of 1941-42



Soviet troops load heavy artillery in 1943, likely with a shell produced by a Leningrad factory



Red Army troops attempt a counter-attack against a German position outside Leningrad

"IF THE GERMANS HAD BEEN DRAWN INTO URBAN WARFARE, IT WOULD HAVE BEEN INCREDIBLY COSTLY"

dig out their trenches, restore the bunkers and barbed wire and lay more mines, but look around to see their ranks getting thinner and the number of veterans declining. Meanwhile, the enemy appeared to be getting stronger.

How did Red Army soldiers and the Leningrad civilians experience the siege?

On the Red Army side, it started from a desperate situation in September 1941. Operation Barbarossa was predicated upon the belief that the Germans could destroy the Red Army before it could retreat. Despite their massive losses, the Soviets just about kept in the fight. Even when they were driven back towards Leningrad, at no stage did resistance collapse. Thereafter, there was a desperate desire to lift the siege to relieve the suffering Red Army soldiers knew was happening. From a Western point of view, the Red Army casualties were mind-numbing. In every operation, their losses went into six figures, and quite often the frontline was back where it started at the end of the operation. The determination to keep going in the face of that is almost unimaginable. And yet they did see it through, and eventually there was a growing sense of 'we are going to do this'.

Leningrad was a city that was so used to suffering, whether it was the famines after the Russian Civil War, the repeated purges and oppression or the terrible first winter of the siege. In one of her poems, Olga Bergolts said: "All that you need to see is we are Leningraders." It was an article of faith that, as Leningraders, they would endure.

Of course, some in the city felt they should surrender to save the people, but they misread the situation. For the great majority, there was utter determination to win whatever happened.

What made it so hard for the Red Army to break out despite its numerical advantage?

There were several factors. The first was the terrain and endless huge forests. When I was drawing them [for the book], copying from German General Staff maps, I realised that a squirrel could have crossed the border near Estonia and travelled to Lake Lagoda without leaving tree cover. A good way of looking at this terrain is as a forested equivalent of the American West of the 19th century. Towns were made up mainly of wooden buildings and dirt roads. The only hard roads were around Leningrad itself and other big cities and the only all-weather communication was by railway. Instead of prairie, dense forests made defensive fighting very easy, provided you had the troops and could dig in. The Germans predicted the location of future advances and mined them to channel the enemy onto their guns. With plenty of artillery and machine guns, they could slaughter any attacking force. When facing offensives, the Wehrmacht siege artillery switched from routinely shelling the city to smashing any attacking force.

There were few routes for Red Army attacks, which the Germans could easily identify. The worst was a narrow corridor at most 8-10 miles [13-16km] wide. By spring 1942, the Germans had established one continuous defensive belt with endless barbed wire, bunkers and minefields across swampy terrain. There was no room for manoeuvre and the Red Army had to batter its way through. It was like attacking the trench lines of the Somme, only over a depth of 12miles [19km] against massive artillery. Although the Soviet losses were shockingly high, that was no surprise when considering all these factors.



Partisan scouts look for Germans near Leningrad

Image: Alamy, Getty

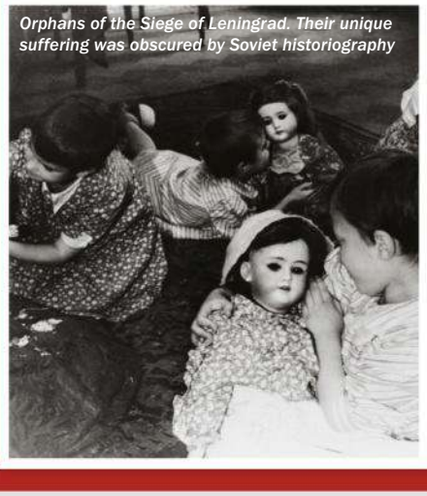
LENINGRADERS VS STALINIST HISTORIOGRAPHY

The official Soviet line pulled a veil over the civilians' true experiences of the siege

With the siege finally over, Leningraders began to reflect on their almost 900-day-long ordeal. They believed their suffering was uniquely severe and should be celebrated as such, yet Stalin was quick to downplay anything that could galvanise the Leningraders. Buttar reflects on Stalin's attitude towards them: "It was always this stroppy city full of pesky intellectuals who saw the world differently."

Stalin had already begun to manipulate history before the war ended, forever shaping the Soviet Union's memory of the 'Great Patriotic War'. It was to be seen as a triumph over German fascism by the combined strength of the Soviet people, an immense achievement that would have been impossible for the Western capitalist nations. This narrative forced the Soviets into a cognitive dissonance that prevented Leningraders' full siege experience from becoming visible. Buttar says: "The state wanted to highlight the terrible suffering of the people as evidence of the bestiality of the Nazis and the crimes they committed. So suffering from shelling and the siege was fine, but suffering from starvation hinted that the authorities might have done more to prevent it."

When Leningrad was officially recognised, it was as a 'Hero City' on 1 May 1945 – a status shared with Moscow, Odesa and Sevastopol. Buttar describes the insult felt by Leningraders: "Moscow got it, which was OK because it was the capital, but Odesa and Sevastopol weren't cities that held out [and Leningraders asked:] 'Why are they getting it when we were the ones that suffered?' That was another symbol of the unwillingness of the Soviet leadership to do anything that would boost the already troublesome attitude of the Leningraders."



Orphans of the Siege of Leningrad. Their unique suffering was obscured by Soviet historiography



Wehrmacht machine gunners adopt a defensive position on the Leningrad Front

Describe what Operation Iskra was and why it allowed for a successful breakout?
Depending on how you count, Operation Iskra was either the fifth, sixth or seventh attempt to break that narrow neck of land. Over the preceding 12 months, the Wehrmacht had become increasingly brittle. The divisions themselves had been downsized through shortages of manpower. They were trying to compensate for this by increasing the division's firepower, but they needed boots on the ground to hold the trench lines. If you take a 1941 division holding a certain degree of frontage and replace it with a 1943 division, they had fewer bodies. Even if they had more weapons, losing a hundred men caused a more profound loss of firepower than in 1941.

When the Red Army got to Iskra in 1943, there was an awareness that it would be costly to smash its way into the German lines, but if the enemy could be levered out of their positions, the resistance would decline rapidly. This happened all along the Eastern Front. The German accounts concentrate on the fragility of the Romanians, Hungarians and Italians, but when the Wehrmacht divisions came under heavy attack, they proved to be just as brittle. By now, the Red Army had such weight of artillery and numerical superiority that it could keep smashing away until the Germans buckled. There was no breakthrough or sudden advance, but it battered its way through the 12 miles of defences.

How did the Germans attempt to counter the growing partisan activity behind their lines?
If you wanted to write a treatise on how to control occupied territory in the face of armed civilian resistance, you could write a history of the German war against partisans and then entitle that chapter "Don't Do This!" [The German activities] were calculated to ensure that resistance would continue to grow. The Germans treated anybody who they suspected of being a partisan or a helper of partisans in the same way. They were subject to arbitrary execution or rounded up and shipped off as forced labour while their villages or towns were destroyed. This encouraged more civilians into the arms of the partisans. In fairness, the partisans were also mistreating the civilian population. Any village that showed hesitancy in helping them or they feared were collaborating with German occupiers was treated equally brutally in return.



A Wehrmacht gun crew operates an artillery piece and shells Leningrad

Whereas accounts on both sides spoke about the majority of the civilians being on their side, I suspect the majority were on the side of doing whatever it took to survive. Today, they'd support the occupier, and if the partisans turned up tomorrow, they'd help them.

The Germans tended to take ruthless measures [to suppress partisan activity]. They had created security divisions, but many of these ended up on the front line because of manpower shortages, besides which, the sheer scale of partisan activity would have required security armies. The Germans attempted to compensate by using local militias with varying degrees of success and the poor communications network made life very difficult. From time to time, the Germans carried out enormous anti-partisan operations, mixing frontline and rear-area troops to set up a cordon sweep through it with mobile units. They would go through village after village, slaughtering people. After such sweeps, partisan activity in that area would die down for a while and then step up again.

What impact did the partisans have on the Soviet war effort?

The full impact of the partisans remains controversial. For Soviet historiography, the partisans became a great symbol of the determination of the Soviet people to fight against evil Nazi occupiers. They deliberately exaggerated the effect. The sheer number of attacks and quantity of equipment destroyed by partisans they describe is ridiculous. At the same time, their activities were significant, even if you only consider the German divisions that had to divert away from the frontline to deal with partisans. As with all partisan warfare, it was a brutal and bloody business with huge casualties, many of whom were just ordinary people struggling to survive.

How did learning of the Red Army's victory at Stalingrad impact the morale of the Wehrmacht and Red Army?

The official German line at the time was that everybody in Stalingrad had died; the Sixth Army had fought to the last man and bullet in a Thermopylae-type last stand. As 1943 went on, Soviet-held German prisoners were encouraged to write letters to former comrades, which were dropped behind German lines or transmitted over the radio. There was a growing realisation that the German High Command had lied and tens of thousands of Germans had been taken prisoner. Even before that, the catastrophe outside Stalingrad was manifestly evident to everyone.

There was a growing sense among the Red Army that the war was getting to a point where it was winnable, while morale was beginning to crumble [among the Wehrmacht]. By now, there was the devastation of German cities by the Western Allies, so guys returning from the front would hear stories of damage at home, which was almost unimaginable for those on the frontline.

On the other side, the Soviets put immense propaganda value on the two battlefields at either end of the front, Stalingrad in the south and Leningrad in the north. They regarded themselves as brother cities. The morale was swinging in opposite directions, with growing confidence on the Soviet side even in the face of these terrible casualties.



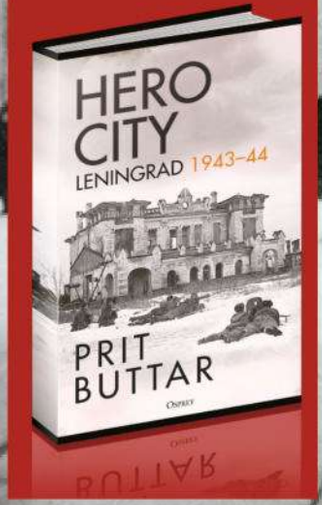
A segment of a depiction of Operation Iskra held at a museum in Kirovsk

As news spread that the siege was breaking, how did the atmosphere in Leningrad change?

The starting point is to understand that by the spring of 1942, the population of Leningrad was less than half what it was at the beginning of the siege. Tens of thousands of people died in the first winter and a slightly larger number were evacuated across the Road of Life on the frozen Lake Lagoda. Trucks brought in supplies and carried civilians out of the city, thus reducing the population. The majority who were left were those working in Leningrad's industry and were regarded as people who had to stay there.

By 1942, the Leningraders had a sense of having endured the worst winter of any siege in history, and having done that, they would prevail. They felt that they had already won and it was just a matter of getting to the end. Nevertheless, when the daily bombing and shelling of the city ceased in January 1944, it took several weeks for the reality to sink in. The constant rumble that could be heard from the frontline and the threat of sudden air attacks and shelling didn't exist anymore. It's a good example of how it's one thing to know you will win, but when you do, there's a sense of: is it really over? Does it really end just like that?

Hero City: Leningrad 1943-44 is published by Osprey and is available now **www.ospreypublishing.com**



After almost 900 days, the Siege of Leningrad came to an end

Images: Alamy, Getty

MUSEUMS & EVENTS

New releases on Churchill, the restoration of a Cold War icon and how young Ukrainians use social media to document their wartime experiences

Two books mark Churchill's 150th birthday

Britain's most iconic war leader is once again commemorated in Imperial War Museum works that illustrate his colourful character and legendary leadership during WWII

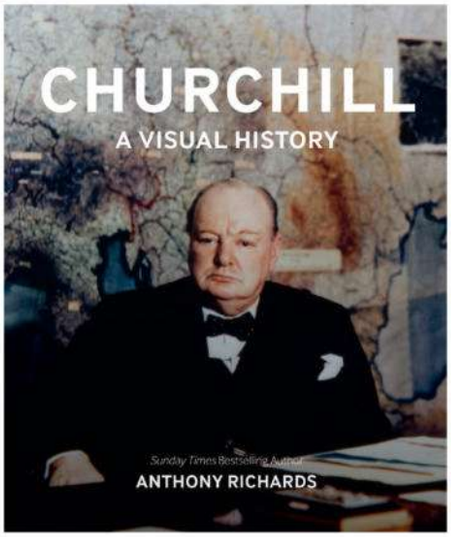
The Imperial War Museum (IWM) aims to bring new life to Winston Churchill's legacy by collating unique objects, artworks, images and first-hand accounts from its archives into two books: *Churchill: A Visual History* and *Winston Churchill*. Both will be published in the autumn.

Churchill: A Visual History adds to IWM's popular *Visual History* series, which includes illustrative histories of D-Day and the Battle of Britain. *Visual History* aims to provide rich, easy-to-read and vivid overviews of popular topics across the Second World War. This latest instalment tells the complete story of Churchill's life, from war correspondent to one of history's most outstanding leaders. The book illustrates his character and historical impact like never before using Churchill's testimony and accounts from those closest to him. Benefiting from much source material never before published, it shows how Churchill's words and speeches were his greatest weapon to keep Britain going during its 'darkest hour'.

Churchill: A Visual History has been authored by IWM's head of documents and sound, Anthony Richards. He says: "Winston Churchill is a figure who has certainly been written about extensively and this book aims to provide readers with an in-depth chronological history of one of Britain's best-known figures, complemented by fascinating anecdotes, images and objects which have been sourced from the riches of the IWM archive."

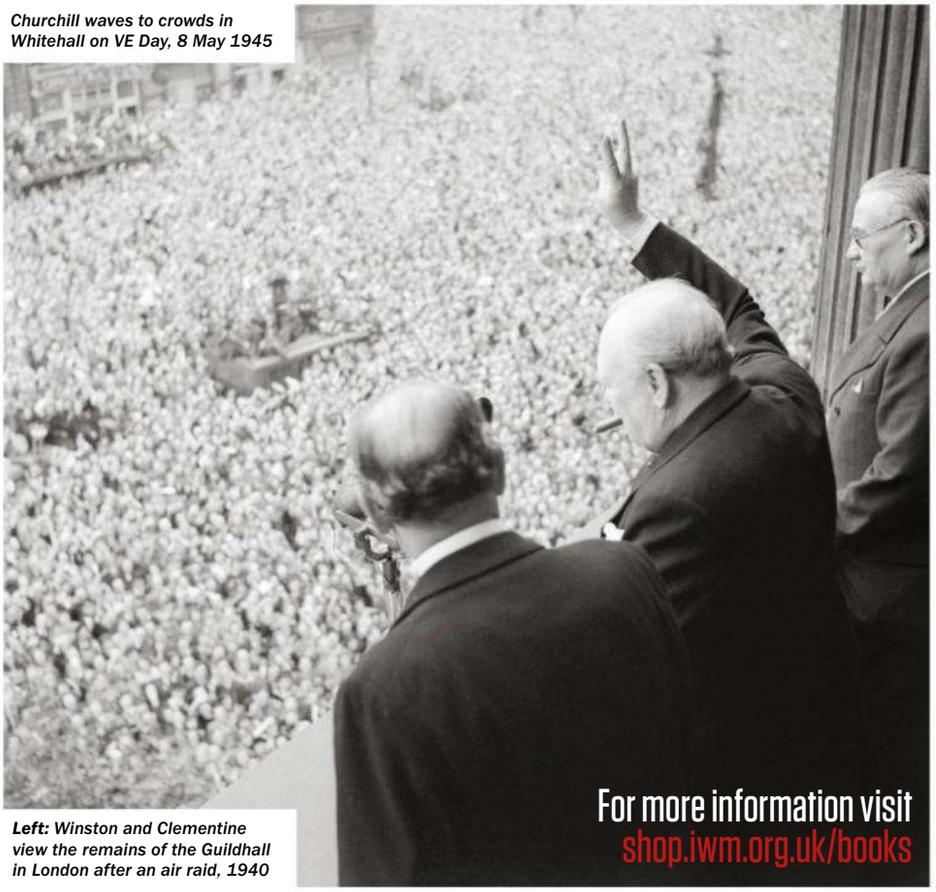
IWM is also bolstering its *IWM Photography Collection* with *Winston Churchill*, a book that brings together 50 images from the museum's archives and highlights the most defining moments in his life. Images have been selected by the curator of the Churchill War Rooms, Kate Clements, tracing his early adventures as a soldier and war correspondent through his tumultuous political career and role in leading Britain to victory in the Second World War. *Winston Churchill* will also include a newly digitised photograph of The British Bulldog.

Winston Churchill is out on 26 September, while *Churchill: A Visual History* will be available from 17 October (**shop.iwm.org.uk/books**). They sit alongside IWM's other excellent books on Britain's renowned wartime leader, including *Secrets of Churchill's War Rooms*, *Churchill's War in Words* and *Churchill's Cocktails*.





Left: *Winston and Clementine view the remains of the Guildhall in London after an air raid, 1940*



Churchill waves to crowds in Whitehall on VE Day, 8 May 1945

For more information visit shop.iwm.org.uk/books

Images © IWM

M47 Patton restoration

Fundraising campaign launched to revive a Cold War tank and put it on public display for the first time

The Tank Museum in Bovington, Dorset, acquired its M47 Patton tank in 1987, narrowly saving it from ending life as a range target. However, initial efforts to restore it to working condition in the 1990s were abandoned due to more pressing priorities. The M47 has remained in storage ever since and has never been displayed. Now, the museum has launched a £50,000 fundraising campaign in collaboration with tank restoration expert Matthew Pyle, who's experienced in working on M47s. Head of collections at the museum, Chris van Schaardenburgh, says: "The M47 is the only one of its type in the museum's collection, and we are thrilled to work in partnership with Matthew Pyle to restore it to running order."

The M47 (famously Arnold Schwarzenegger's favourite tank) saw action in the service of multiple nations. In 1965, Pakistan deployed M47s in its war with India. M47s saw combat for the last time during the Croatian War of Independence (1991-95). Meanwhile, The Tank Museum's M47 was one of 2,500 owned by the Italian Army.

The fundraising campaign is accepting donations now, and you can learn more about the project and how to get involved online. Donations come with fantastic perks for The Tank Museum fans, including exclusive access to events and your name printed on the turret.

For more information visit: tankmuseum.org/m47



The M47 is the only tank of its type in the museum's collection



Once restored, the M47 will add a missing piece to The Tank Museum's story of Cold War tank development

© The Tank Museum

Ukraine: Our Ordinary Lives

IWM North's new Big Picture Show highlights the experiences of 15 young Ukrainians

Since the full-scale Russian invasion in 2022, Ukraine has been ravaged by the most devastating conflict in Europe since the Second World War, and social media has given people all over the world a shocking exposure to this conflict. Imperial War Museum North's *Ukraine: Our Ordinary Lives* delves into the experiences of 15 young Ukrainians as they navigate life and survival in a warzone. The film is played on IWM North's award-winning 360-degree cinematic experience, with images cast onto 27ft (8.2m) walls and surround sound.

The participants' stories are told through their social media posts, capturing the dramatic changes in their lives since the war began. You can hear about how they have come to terms with their experiences and their determination to find joy amid all the chaos and danger of a war.

Kateryna Zabulonska, Ukrainian filmmaker and narrator of the film, says: "Just like anywhere else, young people in Ukraine are fun-loving and ambitious, but the full-scale invasion has posed limits that are hard to imagine, so I hope this project communicates how precious peace is."

Having begun on 26 June, *Ukraine: Our Ordinary Lives* can be seen in IWM North's Main Exhibition Space. A screening is held daily at 1pm as one of six Big Picture Shows at IWM North.

For more information visit: iwm.org.uk



TikToks from Ukraine play across the 360-degree immersive film



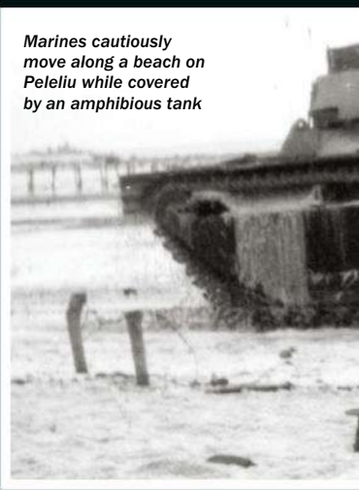
The Ukraine War is juxtaposed against historical conflicts, with IWM North's artefacts remaining on display

Images: © IWM

WWII THIS MONTH...

SEPTEMBER 1944

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



Marines cautiously move along a beach on Peleliu while covered by an amphibious tank



SIEGFRIED LINE CAMPAIGN BEGINS

After the liberation of Paris in late August 1944, the Allies paused to regroup and consolidate their stretched supply lines. Facing demands from Generals Bernard Montgomery and Omar Bradley that the Allies should make direct thrusts into Germany, Supreme Allied Commander Dwight D Eisenhower opted for a 'broad-front' strategy to gain ground across all sectors. This advance faced the imposing Siegfried Line. Built in the late 1930s, this 390-mile (630km) defensive system ran along the western border of Germany and featured 18,000 bunkers and scores of tank traps. Breaking through the entire line took until early 1945.

Images © Alamy, Getty



BATTLE OF PELELIU

Codenamed Operation Stalemate II, the Battle of Peleliu saw the US III Amphibious Corps face the island's 11,000-strong Japanese garrison. In planning the operation, Major General William Rupertus had estimated the island would be secured in four days. However, the Japanese put up fierce resistance behind daunting fortifications and the US victory took over two months. Outnumbered over four-to-one, the Japanese fought to the last man and Peleliu became known in Japan as 'Emperor's Island' in recognition of the sacrifice. The US endured heavy casualties, with 2,000 killed and 8,500 injured. Disgruntlement at these heavy losses spread among the US troops due to the island's limited strategic value.



US troops from the 3rd Armoured Division and 33rd Infantry cross through the Siegfried Line

OPERATION MARKET GARDEN

Over 41,000 airborne troops drop into the Eindhoven-Nijmegen-Arnhem corridor to secure key bridges for an Allied 64-mile (103km) advance. The operation failed as the British 1st Airborne Division was not able to capture the bridge over the Rhine at Arnhem, the operation's most important objective. In total 1,323 British, Polish and Dutch casualties of Arnhem are buried at the Airborne Cemetery in Oosterbeek. A further 137 remain missing. It was not until April 1945 that the Allies finally captured Arnhem. During the operation, Dutch railway workers went on strike to assist the Allied efforts. Germany began a food blockade as a retaliation and caused a famine that impacted 4.5 million and killed as many as 22,000.



A British officer in the Hartenstein Hotel at Oosterbeek, the 1st Airborne Division's HQ at Arnhem

BATTLE OF NANCY

The Third United States Army attacked German forces occupying Nancy, France, and the crossings over the Moselle River to the north and south. The battle fell the US Army's way after 4th Armored Combat Command A and Combat Command B began to encircle Nancy. Sensing that their escape routes were under threat, the German defenders withdrew. They successfully escaped the Allied trap, but the US operation was not in vain. Now liberated, Nancy became an essential communications centre and a garrison for Third Army Headquarters.



A 6.1in (155mm) Long Tom cannon mounted on an M4 Sherman chassis fires across the Moselle River

FIRST V-2 LAUNCHES

Following Hitler's orders on 29 August to begin V-2 attacks as soon as possible, the first rockets were launched on 7 September. Two were directed towards Paris, but both crashed almost immediately. After these initial hiccups, later launches were more successful and by the end of the war the Wehrmacht had unleashed over 3,000 V-2s. In an effort to prevent panic, the British government attempted to cover up the early V-2 attacks by blaming the damage on faulty gas mains.

A V-2 rocket is launched from Peenemunde, the primary Nazi guided-missile centre



REVIEWS

Our pick of the latest military history books

DESERT RAIDS WITH THE SAS

THE INCREDIBLE STORY OF ONE MAN'S EXPLOITS DURING WWII – FROM FINLAND TO NORTH AFRICA AND ITALY – AS TOLD BY HIS SON

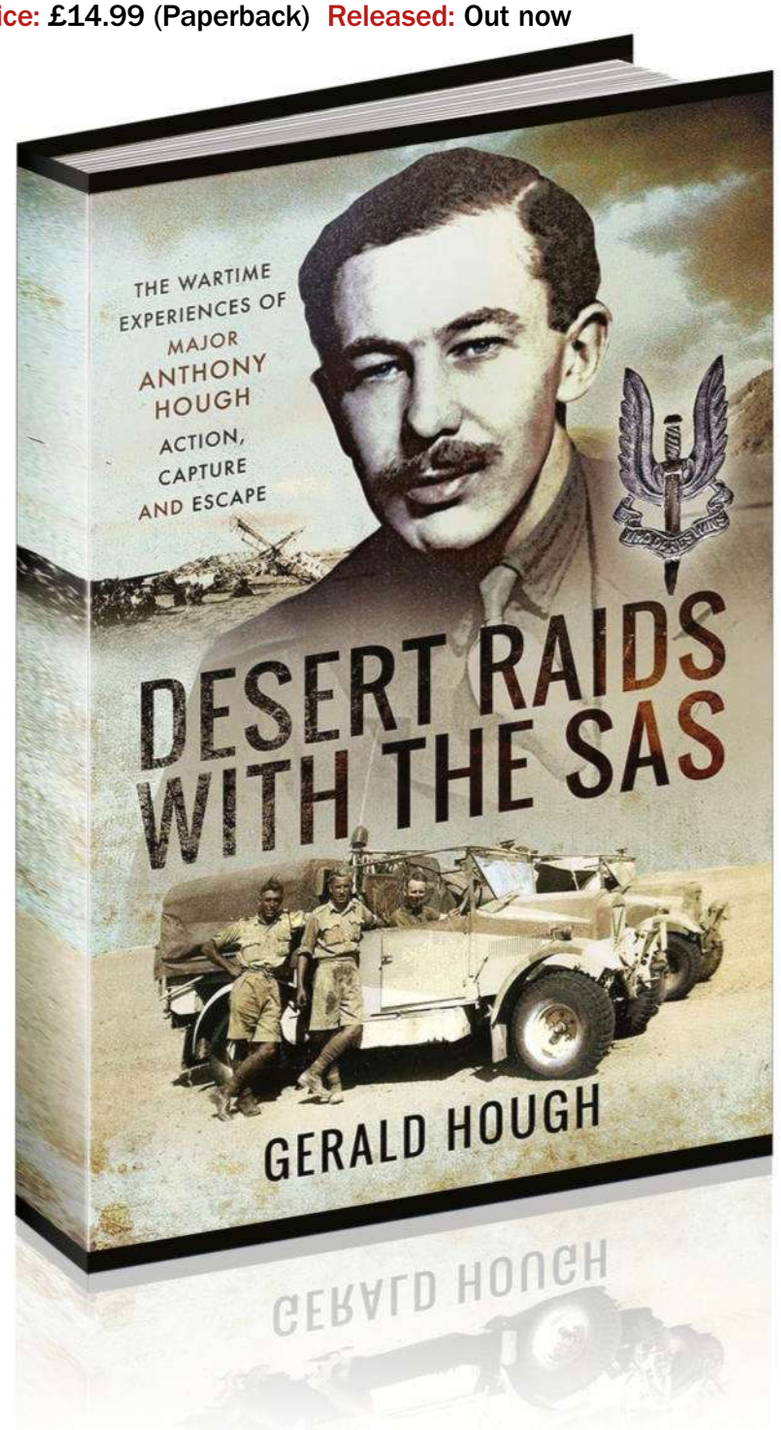
Author: Gerald Hough **Publisher:** Pen & Sword **Price:** £14.99 (Paperback) **Released:** Out now

Major Anthony Hough rarely talked about his war, to the regret of his son Gerald. So he used a diary found after his father's death as the starting point to reconstruct the story of his service in North Africa with The Rifles Brigade and the SAS, and his subsequent escape from a POW camp in Italy. In doing so he embarked upon a journey of personal awakening and discovery about the exploits of a man who he says had been "emotionally absent" during his youth. But how to tell the story of a man who didn't like to talk? Gerald also used letters, conversations his father had with family members and unit records to piece together a narrative, alongside two journeys to Italy to explore his father's escape route. Unusually, he opted to write in the first person, writing as if his father were telling his own story and reflecting on his experiences.

Soon after the outbreak of war in 1939, Hough volunteered for a unit being formed to support the Finns in their fight



British infantry at Mersa Matruh in Egypt, June 1940. Hough was captured during the North Africa campaign and taken to Italy as a POW



against Russia, during which me made the acquaintance of several “interesting characters” who would later become the vanguard of Britain’s Special Forces units, among them David Stirling, founder of the SAS. Luckily for Hough, and Britain, the “ill-prepared” unit’s mission was aborted, and Hough was soon dispatched to Egypt as a platoon commander with The Rifles Brigade, where Allied forces were enjoying huge successes against their Italian adversaries.

The arrival of Italian reinforcements, bolstered by German units led by General Erwin Rommel, changed everything. Hough found himself embroiled in what became a bloody retreat, during which he lost half of his platoon. For the next two years he endured the confusion and terror of highly fluid and mobile desert warfare, losing many friends in the process. When the attrition rate led to the disbandment of his battalion, he renewed his acquaintance with Stirling and joined the newly formed B Squadron of the fledgling SAS. His first mission was as part of a two-squadron long-range penetration behind enemy lines to disrupt Axis transport in Libya prior to an Allied ground offensive. Hough felt Stirling was reckless and, tasked with operating the furthest from the Allied lines, that B Squadron was “expendable”. It proved to be prescient: the raid resulted in the loss of 30 men. Hough was captured and transported to Italy.

Incarceration led to soul-searching, and the onset of nightmares. Eventually the chaos ensuing from the imposition of German rule after the Allied invasion of Italy enabled Hough to escape into the mountains. For two months he was sheltered by a succession of Italian families or hid in mountain caves before making the hazardous journey across the mountains to Allied lines. Underlying this account are insights into the effect of exposure to the horrors of war that suggest why Anthony Hough, and many of his generation, remained reticent to talk about their experiences for the rest of their lives. **JB**



A British patrol surrenders in the summer of 1940 during the Italian invasion of Egypt

Images © Getty

KABUL: FINAL CALL

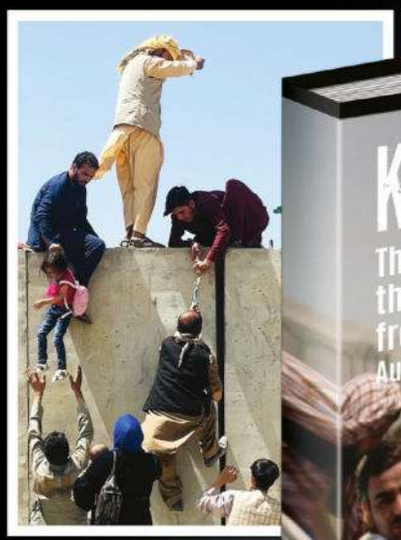
A RIVETING ACCOUNT OF THE SHAMEFUL ABANDONMENT OF THE AFGHAN REPUBLIC

Author: Laurie Bristow **Publisher:** Whittles Publishing
Price: £18.99 (Hardback) **Released:** Out now

If you want to understand what went wrong in Afghanistan then read this fascinating book. Laurie Bristow, the UK’s last ambassador to Afghanistan from mid-June 2021 until the end of August 2021, gives a no-holds barred account of the dramatic fall of Kabul. Bristow, who previously served as ambassador to Azerbaijan and Russia, comes across as a cool character when operating under extreme pressure. He had to prepare for the worst and hope for the best.

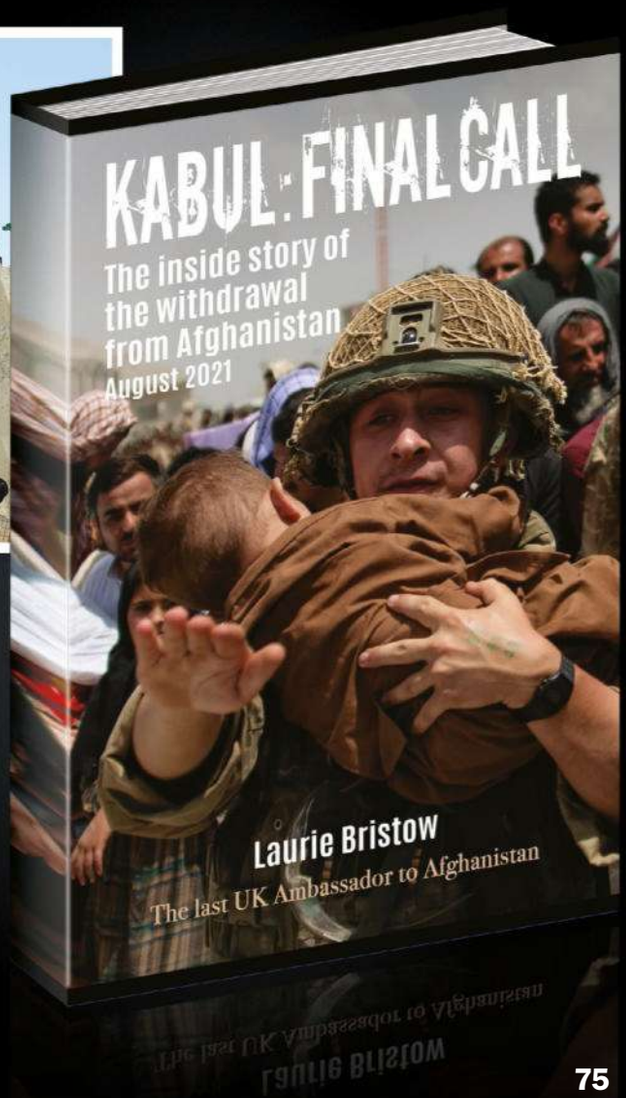
Bristow makes it clear that the rot set in for the Republic of Afghanistan following the Doha Accord between the US and the Taliban, committing America to pulling its troops out by the summer of 2021. It consigned the republic to a miserable fate. The withdrawal of US and NATO military assistance meant that the Afghan armed forces could no longer rely on vital air and logistical support. The results of 20 years of international intervention were to vanish in the space of just nine days.

Ridiculously, the British government insisted it that would keep diplomatic representation in Kabul after the military withdrawal, but this became impossible once the Taliban had overrun the regional capitals in rapid succession and entered the city. Bristow and his team overseeing the closure of the embassy and the evacuation of British nationals were placed in an almost impossible position. Nonetheless, they worked miracles and managed to rescue 15,000 Afghans from the chaos in the space less than two weeks. To the very end, ever the professional diplomat, Bristow works hard to hide his bitterness over what happened. *Kabul: Final Call* is a salutary lesson in how not to conduct foreign policy. **ATJ**



***Above:** Thousands of Afghan civilians rushed to the airport in Kabul in a desperate – and mostly doomed – attempt to flee the Taliban*

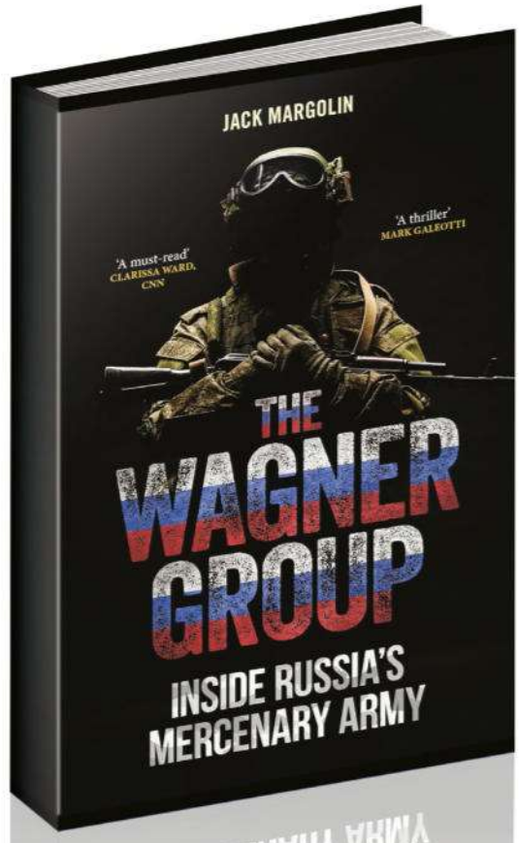
“THEY WORKED MIRACLES AND RESCUED 15,000 AFGHANS FROM THE CHAOS”



THE WAGNER GROUP

THE HISTORY AND FUTURE OF RUSSIA'S NOTORIOUS AND SECRETIVE MERCENARY ARMY

Author: Jack Margolin **Publisher:** Reaktion Books
Price: £15.99 (Hardback) **Released:** 1 September 2024



Jack Margolin takes the reader through an extensive array of leaks, first-hand accounts and original documented evidence to reveal the inner workings of Russia's infamous mercenary army. From its roots as a battlefield rumour to a private military enterprise, the tens of thousands-strong Wagner Group eventually staged a failed uprising. Vladimir Putin is widely accepted to have ordered the murder of Wagner's chief director, Yevgeny Prigozhin, for asserting that the Russian invasion of Ukraine was based on Kremlin falsehoods. He died in a mysterious plane crash along with his chief lieutenant Dmitry Utkin.

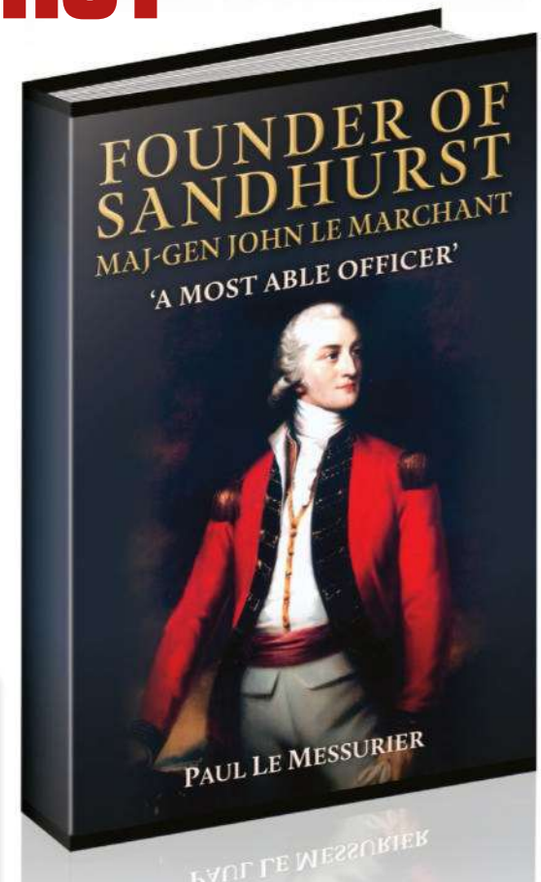
The book follows the Wagner Group's operations in Ukraine, Syria and Africa, sometimes alongside fellow military contractors from the United Kingdom and the US. The organisation first achieved international notoriety in 2022 when its forces entered Russia's war in Ukraine. "Their organisation forced Western governments and militaries to wonder if the age of mercenary warfare had returned," writes Margolin.

Despite the elimination of the Wagner Group's founders, the author believes the organisation will continue as a movement. As a symbol of the potency of Wagner's brand, the Russian state continues to use the name in training and equipment. It has become a symbol of a particular brand of Russian militarism. Margolin demonstrates that Wagner is not an aberration, but a manifestation of the new geopolitical order of global capital, global crime and the entrepreneurs that thrive in it. It is almost certain to continue to prosper in a world in which authoritarian governments of the developing world demand force and politics for hire. **JS**

FOUNDER OF SANDHURST

HOW THE BRITISH ARMY'S RENOWNED ROYAL MILITARY COLLEGE WAS FOUNDED, AND THE REMARKABLE LIFE OF THE FAR-SIGHTED OFFICER BEHIND IT

Author: Paul Le Messurier **Publisher:** Amberley Publishing
Price: £22.99 (Hardback) **Released:** 15 September 2024



Being born in France, to a French mother, was not the most auspicious start in life for a British officer in the 18th century. What's more, the young John Gaspard Le Marchant was also a hothead, once challenging his own colonel to a duel and almost being forced to sell his infantry commission to pay off a gambling debt.

Fortunately for Le Marchant and, as it turned out, the British Army, he survived these growing pains to become one of the most accomplished and influential cavalry commanders of his day, in every respect 'a most able officer'.

Le Marchant's early impression of the army was that standards were shockingly low, and he was particularly concerned with the poor treatment of cavalry mounts and the lack of training for cavalrymen. He devised plans for improvements in several areas, drawing attention and approval from sources including King George III. These early forays into the reform of military training eventually led to his idea for a national military institution – with near-obsessive devotion, he prepared his "Outline of a Plan for a Regular Course of Military Education" at the age of 33.

Le Marchant's 'outline' would eventually become Sandhurst, and here Paul Le Messurier has produced an impeccably researched and entertainingly written account of its foundation. As is often the case in such tales, it seems impossible that Le Marchant is not a better-known character in the history of the British Army. This book should go a long way to addressing that. **DS**



***Left:** The Royal Military College at Sandhurst was founded in 1801. Now called the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, it trains all officers in the British Army*

GULAG TO SPITFIRE

ONE MAN'S WWII JOURNEY FROM BRUTAL INTERNMENT TO FIGHTER PILOT IS RECOUNTED IN GRIPPING FASHION

Author: Andrew Hubert von Staufer **Publisher:** The History Press **Price:** £22 (Hardback) **Released:** Out now

This biography is written by the son of Polish Air Force pilot Kazimierz Tomasz Hubert, known as Tomek. Pressed into the Polish forces in September 1939, Tomek was immediately caught up in the chaos of the Soviet and German invasions. Arrested by the Russians, he faced truly brutal treatment in prison and in the Kortuka Gulag, inside the Arctic Circle. Tortured, starved, frozen and isolated, Tomek somehow managed to survive. In August 1941, when the Polish prisoners were grudgingly released by Stalin at the insistence of the British, Tomek faced a difficult journey, made worse by lack of supplies, Soviet suspicion and fractured Polish politics. He eventually made it to join General Anders' gathering Polish Army before crossing into Iran to join the Polish Air Force.

Arriving in the UK in August 1942, Tomek formally began his ground training. He completed his flying training in England, and to his frustration was sent to a target-towing unit for his first active posting. Along the way, he met and married an English girl. He eventually joined an operational squadron in September 1944, No 317 Squadron resting in Wales after service on the Continent. Near the end of the year, the unit returned to Belgium, and Tomek was soon in the thick of the action he had been craving. Low-level fighter-bomber sorties were intermixed with air-to-air combat, including the frantic fight over Allied airfields on 1 January 1945. On top of his earlier experiences in Poland and Russia, these events left Tomek grappling after the war with post-traumatic stress and bitterness.

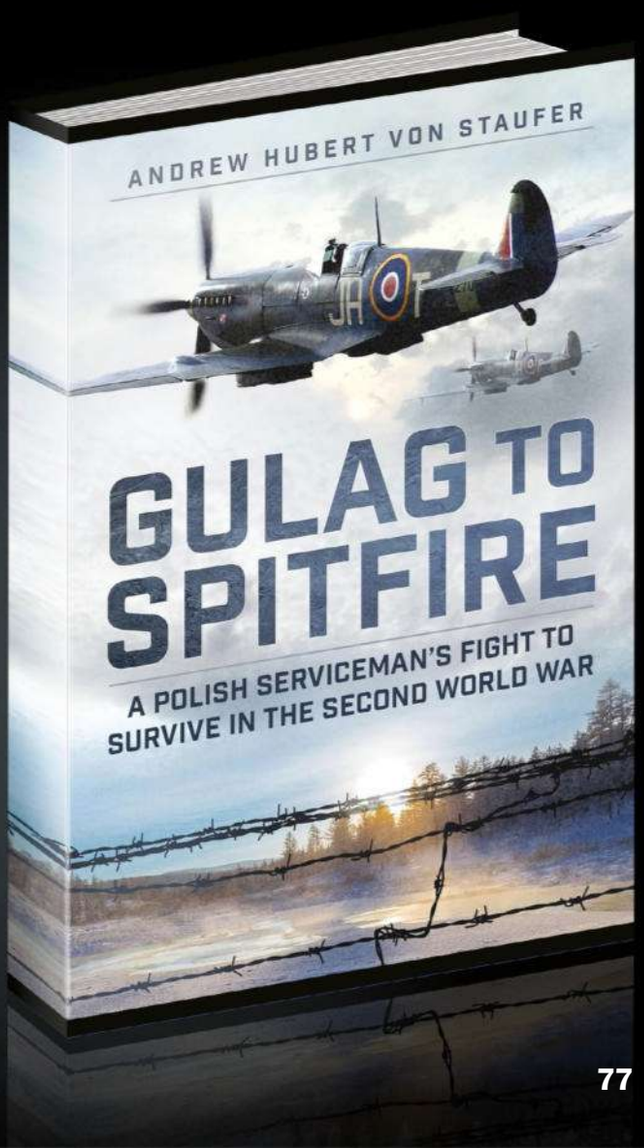
Gulag to Spitfire is based on Tomek's verbal memories, but cannot quite decide whether it is a biography or a memoir. Written in the third-person about Tomek's experiences and the events he was living through, it is interspersed with further editorial notes from his son. The first two-thirds detail his experiences in Poland and Russia, with the last third dedicated to his air force service. For the most part, the editorial comments do an excellent job in adding context and fleshing out the complicated political background to events, and helping to clarify what is based directly on Tomek's own stories. However, they are slightly marred by repeated comparisons to current events, including in Ukraine, which in such a book will not age well, and there are some notable gaps. In one example, while Tomek's memoirs rightly covers the disquiet felt among Polish personnel over the Warsaw Uprising in late 1944, the editorial coverage mentions only American supply-dropping sorties, and criticises the lack of Allied action to help the Poles. No mention is made of the hundreds of sorties flown and dozens of RAF aircraft lost attempting to drop supplies into the city. In a memoir, such omissions are forgivable as the author may not have known, but in an edited biography it is less so.

Overall, this is worth reading to learn more about one man's extraordinary tale of survival during the Second World War, experiencing horrendous events and personal tragedy along the way. **SH**

Image: Getty

***Below:** Two Polish Air Force pilots stand in front of a Spitfire at RAF Kirton in Lincolnshire, July 1942*





Q&A WITH JOHN NICHOL

IN SEARCH OF THE UNKNOWN

How the remains of an unidentified serviceman became the focal point for national mourning

In 1920, the remains of an unidentified serviceman of the First World War were secretly disinterred, transported to London and laid to rest at Westminster Abbey, at the west end of the nave. For a nation still mourning the colossal sacrifice and loss during the war, the tomb served to represent over 500,000 war dead with no known resting place, for bereaved families and loved ones to visit. The history of the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior, and how it can relate to our modern experiences of war, is the subject of the latest book and nationwide theatre tour by John Nichol, himself a war veteran who's now an author and historian. Here he speaks with *History of War* about the key figures involved in creating the Unknown Warrior's resting place, as well as his own personal journey discovering the horrific experiences of those on the frontline and the bereaved on the home front, tragically common in conflicts generations apart.

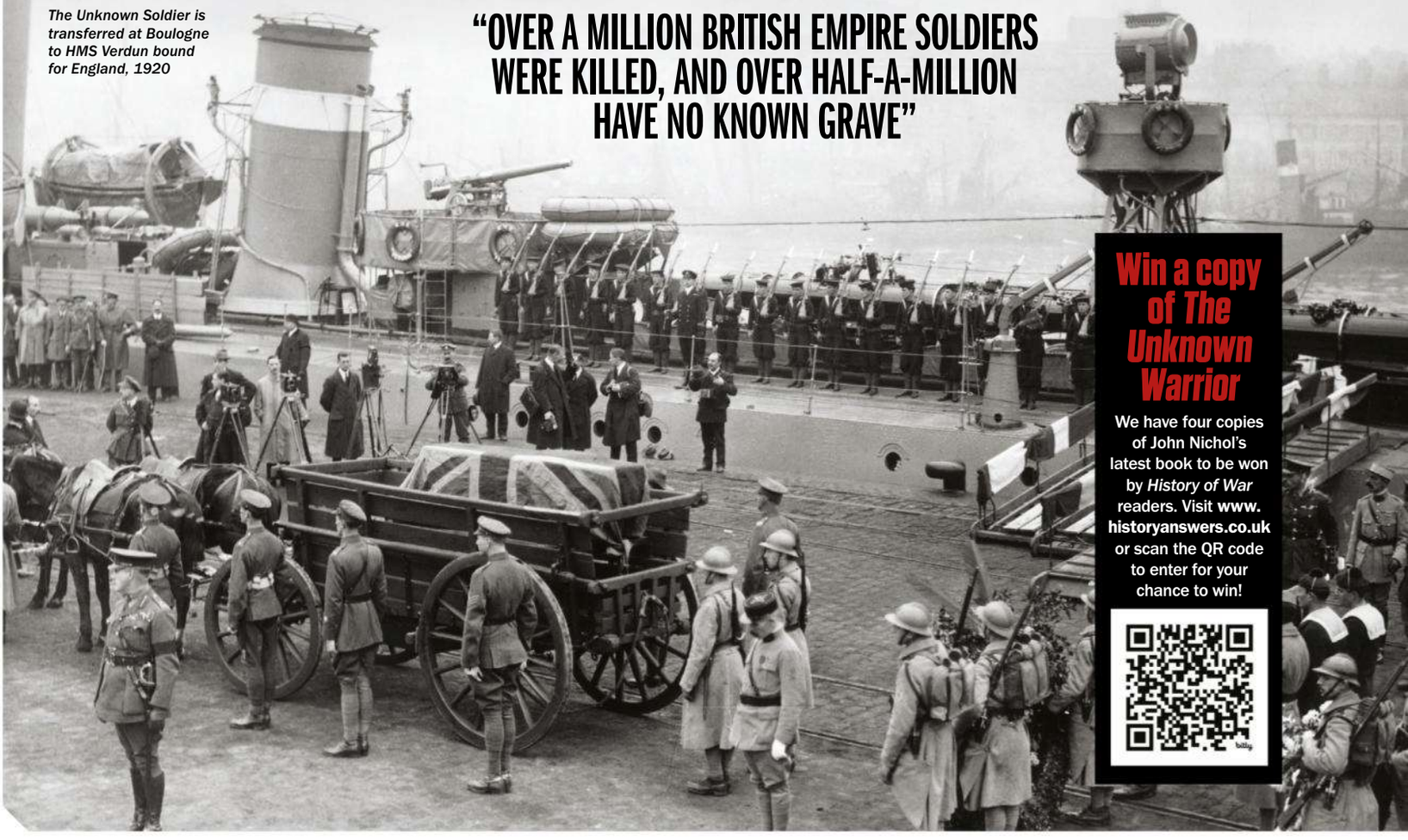
What did you know about the background to the Unknown Warrior prior to your research?

I'm not sure that I knew very much at all, other than there is a Tomb of the Unknown Warrior in Westminster Abbey. It wasn't until one day, which I describe in the book, where a Second World War veteran was telling me about it, that I realised I knew almost nothing. That was the spark. That was the thing that said to me: "There really is a story to be told about how it happened and the people that made it happen."

At school I only did three years of history because I dropped it, so I didn't know much about the First World War at all, to my shame. The big thing that came out when I was investigating, that really brought it all home, was this concept that over a million British Empire soldiers were killed, and over half-a-million have no known grave. I was astonished by this.

My investigation into how that could be was just incredible. For example, discovering the ways a body could be lost: blown apart; buried in a grave and the marker lost; buried and the person who buried the person blown apart and so all records were lost. There were bodies that were buried then blown up again from their resting place by the ongoing battles. There were moving battle lines that meant trenches

"OVER A MILLION BRITISH EMPIRE SOLDIERS WERE KILLED, AND OVER HALF-A-MILLION HAVE NO KNOWN GRAVE"



The Unknown Soldier is transferred at Boulogne to HMS Verdun bound for England, 1920

Win a copy of *The Unknown Warrior*

We have four copies of John Nichol's latest book to be won by *History of War* readers. Visit **www.historyanswers.co.uk** or scan the QR code to enter for your chance to win!

were dug through graves. It really was a journey of discovery for me.

What was it like visiting the battlefields in France, which remain the final resting places of thousands of unknown?
High Wood, which opens the book, and the theatre show, was a place that was fought over endlessly. Depending on which account you believe, there are conceivably hundreds, possibly thousands of bodies still unrecovered from that area. I don't believe in ghosts, but visiting High Wood I found it quite haunting but really quite moving to think what had gone on there a mere hundred or so years earlier. On a number of occasions I thought: "Unknown warriors lie right beneath my feet." High Wood, which is relatively small, was just a tiny part of the Battle of the Somme, which was just one battle during the whole of the First World War. Think about the numbers involved; it is an astonishing piece of history.

You also spoke with veterans and military families connected with both WWI but also with more recent conflicts such as in the Falklands and Afghanistan. Why was it important to include these modern accounts?
Today I think it is almost impossible to think of an unidentified casualty from British forces, so in the book I try to bring the story up to date by investigating other aspects… In the Falklands, there were men who went down on ships whose remains were never recovered. So their families have no resting place.

When I spoke to a padre from the Falklands War, he talked about burying unknown Argentinian soldiers, because they had no identification. I'd been to the Argentinian cemetery and seen those graves, but I just hadn't thought about it. I've read the inscriptions – "An Argentinian soldier known unto God" – but it hadn't really registered how it had happened.

The story of the Unknown Warrior is about death, memorialising and recognising sacrifice. That still goes on today, but we tend not to think that much about it. When we first went to Iraq in 2003 and somebody was killed, there was no grand parade. It wasn't until one or two people went to Royal Wootton Bassett to acknowledge the sacrifice and the death of a loved one. Royal Wootton Bassett marked those ceremonies so incredibly. I spoke to a lady who lost her husband in Afghanistan and she talked to me about the reality of that ceremony, the reality of having a body back, and the reality of always wondering if her loved one was dead… That was really quite moving. It's this concept about sacrifice, about the need to remember, the need to acknowledge and mark the death of either a warrior or a loved one. That still very much lives with us today.

In the book and tour you describe the different symbolism between the Cenotaph in Whitehall and the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior. What do you think is the role of each in national remembrance?
The Cenotaph started as a temporary structure one year after the end of the First World War. It was wood and plaster and it was going to be dismantled, but there was a public outcry. A permanent Cenotaph was set to be unveiled in 1920. It was at that time, only months before the second Armistice in 1920, that the concept of honouring the unknown, in parallel with memorialising all of the dead, was proposed.



Crowds attend the unveiling of the Cenotaph in London, 11 November 1920

There was national grief regarding not having loved ones home to be buried, while even if you knew that your loved one was buried somewhere in what was the start then of the Commonwealth War Graves, the chance of being able to go and visit were slim to none. If you were a miner's wife from Durham, you likely couldn't afford the journey. Many never travelled far from their own village or town let alone to Belgium or France. So there was a need to quench that national grief and that national longing for closure.

We use the word closure a lot, but it was very real back then. That's what the Unknown Warrior gave to those who had no known resting place.

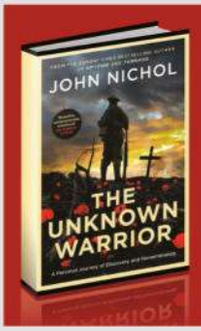
What led to Reverend David Railton putting forward the concept of a place of memorial for the unknown, unidentified or 'missing' war dead? How did his experiences of the war help shape the concept?
David Railton was a padre who served for a large portion of the war from early on, all the way through to the end. He won the Military Cross on the Somme for bravery, rescuing people under fire. I spoke to his daughter-in-law, sadly now dead herself, and she told me that he never spoke to his family about his experiences of the war – I think he was quite affected by them.

But in his letters home to his wife, his accounts of burying the dead were really quite moving: burying the dead under fire; burying the dead and having to return some of the men immediately to the front line, just after they buried their friends; burying the dead and then people being killed who had been burying the dead. I think that ministering to the troops before battle, then when they were dying after the battle, or when they were injured – that affected him greatly.

His concept for the Unknown Warrior came about during the war. He'd come back from the frontline after burying the dead, and there was a grave in a garden near where he was staying that was marked as an unknown soldier of the Black Watch. He then thought about that. Who was this man? Who were his people? Who was his mother? Who were his brothers or sisters? That image stayed with him for the rest of the war.

What was the process for selecting and disinterring the remains in order to ensure they remained truly unknown?
There are a lot of theories but very little evidence about how the body was chosen. The whole point is that it could have been anybody and the only man who really knew more or less what happened was Brigadier General Louis Wyatt. He was instructed to choose a body that could represent all the missing. He then came up with the scheme that sent four of his teams out to four of the great battlefields of the Western Front (Aisne, the Somme, Arras and Ypres) to recover the remains from a grave where the body had been buried 'unknown'.

But what were those remains? Was it a skull? Was it a decomposing body? Was it a handful of bones and some old material? How did people recover them? You're digging up something that conceivably could be six years old, that could have been blown apart, that could have been moved around the battlefield by shelling. Nobody really knows… but Wyatt ordered those four sets of remains be brought back to his headquarters and placed in a temporary chapel. At midnight he went into the chapel – he later wrote that the remains were on stretchers, covered by Union Flags. He said: "I am the person who chose the Unknown Warrior. I do not know who it was, so nobody knows who it was." He chose one of those four remains… put it in a pine coffin and "fixed down the lid". That's all we know for sure. This is part of the mystery and I think it's why Wyatt did it this way and why he wrote so little about it.



John Nichol's new book, *The Unknown Warrior*, is published by Simon & Schuster in September. His national theatre tour, telling the story behind the Unknown Warrior's tomb in Westminster Abbey, runs from 4 October. For more information, visit **www.johnnichollive.com**

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LEYTE GULF

- Inside the Pacific's epic carrier clash
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WAAF SERVICE RECORD

The discharge papers of a WWII radar operator illustrate the vital role of women in Britain's air defence

Isobel 'Betty' Ping was just 20 when she travelled to London and volunteered for war service in 1940. At her assessment, she hoped to join the Women's Royal Naval Service (WRNS), but she was instead allocated to a new top-secret radar operator role with the Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF). Often staffed by WAAF members, Britain's radar network transformed its air defence capabilities, giving RAF fighter pilots real-time intelligence on raiding Luftwaffe aircraft.

Following radar operator training, Ping began her first posting at the Chain Home (CH) radar station at RAF Ventor on the Isle of Wight, followed by RAF Tangmere in West Sussex. CH was the codename for a ring of coastal RAF radar stations, the world's first early warning aircraft detection system. With a range of up to 200 miles (320km), CH intelligence allowed the RAF to intercept enemy aircraft before they entered British territory.

Impressing her superiors after quickly picking up the required skills, Ping was promoted to corporal and posted to the High Street radar station at Darsham, Suffolk. It was here that she made her most significant mark. In July 1940, she detected a mass raid of 100 enemy aircraft offshore. The sector controllers responded with disbelief, dismissing her find as a thunderstorm. Yet Ping trusted her skills and made a report, which was confirmed by another radar station at Stoke Holy Cross after an anxious wait.

After this success, Ping was transferred to Dunwich, Suffolk, to work on the new Chain Home Low (CHL) radar. This network operated similarly to CH, but CHL could also reliably detect aircraft at altitudes as low as 500ft (150m). Now one of the WAAF's most capable radar operators, Ping was transferred again, this time to work as an instructor at RAF Yatesbury in Wiltshire.

Ping's impressive WAAF career was soon to come to an end. She met Lieutenant Commander Robert Ballard at Bawdsey on the Suffolk coast and they were soon engaged. The WAAF granted her voluntary discharge for her marriage, leading to the creation of her service record shown below. Later in life, she became a teacher at St Olave's School in York, where her father had been headmaster.

Form 323.

ROYAL AIR FORCE

~~Available for One Month only from Date of Discharge~~

NOTICE. This Certificate is granted provisionally, pending the receipt by the Bearer of his Certificate of Service and Discharge, and is intended to act as a temporary Protection Certificate.

This is to certify that Miss I.M.W. Ping

Official No. 889917 lately serving as (Rank) A/Cpl. (trade) Radio operator WAAF.

has permission to proceed to ~~his~~ her home on approval of {*Discharge / ~~*Transfer to R.A.F. Reserve~~}.

The effective date of {*Discharge / ~~*Transfer to Reserve~~} will be 26/12/40

~~†He has been enlisted into the R.A.F. Reserve with effect from the day following discharge.~~

~~His~~ Her character on discharge is Excellent

~~His~~ Her degree of trade proficiency Superior

~~He~~ She is entitled to wear plain clothes.

Dated at Yatesbury this 26th day of December

(Signature) (Rank)

Date R.A.F. STATION. YATESBURY. WILTS.





Ping rose through the ranks to become an instructor

***Top-right:** Radio Operator Isobel Ping's service record states her "excellent" character and "superior" proficiency*

***Above:** Ping posing with her WAAF colleagues*

RAF Air Defence Radar Museum Neatishead

Housed entirely in RAF buildings, including the Grade II listed original radar operations buildings built in 1942, the museum is your chance to experience the UK's only original Cold War operations room. A visit will give you a comprehensive insight into how the RAF faced the Luftwaffe, and later the Soviet Air Force to prevent nuclear war. The RAF Air Defence Radar Museum in Neatishead, Norfolk, is open 10am-5pm Tuesday to Saturday.

For more information, visit www.radarmuseum.co.uk

Images: RAF Air Defence Radar Museum

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