Scribblings

PEN&SWORD CLUB

August 2020 Part 2:

Was this the scoop of the century?

DAILY EXPRESS

30th DAY in Hiroshima: Those who escaped begin to die, victims of—

THE ATOMIC PLAGUE

'I write this as a warning to the world'

DOCTORS FALL AS THEY WORK

Poison gas fear: All wear masks

3,320,173 AMAZES

THE PICTURE THAT DOES NOT TELL THE WHOLE STORY

The big switch: 'Over by spring'

4.30 LATEST

Wilfred Burchett, An Australian,* was *the first reporter to enter the city of Hiroshima after the bombing in 1945.

WILFRED BURCHETT'S The Atomic Plague is often referred to as "the scoop of the century." He was the first correspondent to enter the city of Hiroshima after the bombing, arriving with the first wave of US Marines on the USS Millett that landed in Japan on August 14, 1945. Armed with a pistol, a typewriter and a Japanese phrasebook, he travelled through scenes of unparalleled destruction caused by US air raids, onto "where Hiroshima used to be." "There was devastation and desolation and nothing else."

Burchett was the first to expose the devastating effects of radiation that was being denied by the Allied forces at the time. His dispatch conveys the harrowing confusion and ignorance of the victims as to what was done to them — it was thought the bombs contained a poisonous gas, perhaps, and doctors hoped the Americans would provide an anti-dote.

FAIR OBSERVER°
make sense of the world

By the end of 1945, some 140,000 were dead in Hiroshima and a further 70,000 in Nagasaki — a number that will continue to grow over the course of the century. Despite the Allied officials' attempts to censor the story, Burchett's dispatch was published in *The Daily Express* on September 5, 1945.

It is a piece of journalism that should be read over and over again — "as a warning to the world" — because like no other account, it brings home the inhuman reality of a nuclear holocaust'

'I Write This as a Warning to the World'

***The Daily Express*, London, September 5, 1945.**

***< Express Staff Reporter Peter Burchett [sic] was the first Allied staff reporter to enter the atom-bomb city. He travelled 400 miles from Tokyo alone and unarmed carrying rations for seven meals - food is almost unobtainable in Japan - a black umbrella, and a typewriter. Here is his story from* HIROSHIMA.**

In Hiroshima, 30 days after the first atomic bomb destroyed the city and shook the world, people are still dying, mysteriously and horribly — people who were uninjured by the cataclysm — from an unknown something which I can only describe as atomic plague.

Hiroshima does not look like a bombed city. It looks as if a monster steamroller had passed over it and squashed it out of existence. I write these facts as dispassionately as I can in the hope that they will act as a warning to the world.

In this first testing ground of the atomic bomb I have seen the most terrible and frightening desolation in four years of war. It makes a blitzed Pacific island seem like an Eden. The damage is far greater than photographs can show.

When you arrive in Hiroshima you can look around and for 25, perhaps 30, square miles you can hardly see a building. It gives you an empty feeling in the stomach to see such man-made devastation.

- ***And so, the people of Hiroshima today are walking through the forlorn desolation of their once proud city with gauze masks over their mouths and noses. It probably does not help them physically. But it helps them mentally.***

I picked my way to a shack [sic] used as a temporary police headquarters in the middle of the vanished city. Looking south from there I could see about three miles of reddish rubble. That is all the atomic bomb left of dozens of blocks of city streets, of buildings, homes, factories and human beings. There is just nothing standing except about 20 factory chimneys — chimneys with no factories. I looked west. A group of half a dozen gutted buildings. And then again nothing.

The police chief of Hiroshima welcomed me eagerly as the first Allied correspondent to reach the city. With the local manager of Domei, a leading Japanese news agency, he drove me through, or perhaps I should say over, the city. And he took me to hospitals where the victims of the bomb are still being treated.

In these hospitals I found people who, when the bomb fell, suffered absolutely no injuries, but now are dying from the uncanny after-effects. For no apparent reason, their health began to fail. They lost appetite. Their hair fell out. Bluish spots appeared on their bodies. And the bleeding began from the ears, nose and mouth.

At first the doctors told me they thought these were the symptoms of general debility. They gave their patients Vitamin A injections. The results were horrible. The flesh started rotting away from the hole caused by the injection of the needle. And in every case the victim died. That is one of the after-effects of the first atomic bomb man ever dropped and I do not want to see any more examples of it. But in walking through the month-old rubble I found others.

My nose detected a peculiar odour unlike anything I have ever smelled before. It is something like sulphur, but not quite. I could smell it when I passed a fire that was still smouldering, or at a spot where they were still recovering bodies from the wreckage. But I could also smell it where everything was still deserted.

They believe it is given off by the poisonous gas still issuing from the earth soaked with radioactivity released by the split uranium atom.

And so, the people of Hiroshima today are walking through the forlorn desolation of their once proud city with gauze masks over their mouths and noses. It probably does not help them physically. But it helps them mentally.

From the moment that this devastation was loosed upon Hiroshima the people who survived have hated the white man. It is a hate the intensity of which is almost as frightening as the bomb itself.

Tragic Mistake

The counted dead number 53,000. Another 30,000 are missing, which means "certainly dead". In the day I have stayed in Hiroshima - and this is nearly a month after the bombing - 100 people have died from its effects.

They were some of the 13,000 seriously injured by the explosion. They have been dying at the rate of 100 a day. And they will probably all die. Another 40,000 were slightly injured.

These casualties might not have been as high except for a tragic mistake. The authorities thought this was just another routine Super-Fort raid. The plane flew over the target and dropped the parachute which carried the bomb to its explosion point.

- *Many people had suffered only a slight cut from a falling splinter of brick or steel. They should have recovered quickly. But they did not. They developed an acute sickness. Their gums began to bleed. And then they vomited blood. And finally, they died.*

The American plane passed out of sight. The all-clear was sounded and the people of Hiroshima came out from their shelters. Almost a minute later the bomb reached the 2,000-foot altitude at which it was timed to explode – at the moment when nearly everyone in Hiroshima was in the streets.

Hundreds upon hundreds of the dead were so badly burned in the terrific heat generated by the bomb that it was not even possible to tell whether they were men or women, old or young.

Of thousands of others, nearer the centre of the explosion, there was no trace. They vanished. The theory in Hiroshima is that the atomic heat was so great that they burned instantly to ashes – except that there were no ashes.

If you could see what is left of Hiroshima, you would think that London had not been touched by bombs.

Heap of Rubble

The Imperial Palace, once an imposing building, is a heap of rubble three feet high, and there is one piece of wall. Roof, floors and everything else is dust. Hiroshima has one intact building – the Bank of Japan. This in a city which at the start of the war had a population of 310,000.

Almost every Japanese scientist has visited Hiroshima in the past three weeks to try to find a way of relieving the people's suffering. Now they themselves have become sufferers.

For the first fortnight after the bomb dropped, they found they could not stay long in the fallen city. They had dizzy spells and headaches. Then minor insect bites developed into great swellings which would not heal. Their health steadily deteriorated. Then they found another extraordinary effect of the new terror from the skies.

Many people had suffered only a slight cut from a falling splinter of brick or steel. They should have recovered quickly. But they did not. They developed an acute sickness. Their gums began to bleed. And then they vomited blood. And finally, they died.

All these phenomena, they told me, were due to the radio-activity released by the atomic bomb's explosion of the uranium atom.

Water Poisoned

They found that the water had been poisoned by chemical reaction. Even today every drop of water consumed in Hiroshima comes from other cities. The people of Hiroshima are still afraid.

The scientists told me they have noted a great difference between the effect of the bombs in Hiroshima and in Nagasaki.

Hiroshima is in perfectly flat delta country. Nagasaki is hilly. When the bomb dropped on Hiroshima the weather was bad, and a big rainstorm developed soon afterwards. And so, they believe that the uranium radiation was driven into the earth and that, because so many are still falling sick and dying, it is still the cause of this man-made plague.

At Nagasaki, on the other hand, the weather was perfect, and scientists believe that this allowed the radio-activity to dissipate into the atmosphere more rapidly. In addition, the force of the bomb's explosion was, to a large extent, expended into the sea, where only fish were killed. To support this theory, the scientists point out to the fact that, in Nagasaki, death came swiftly, suddenly, and that there have been no after-effects such as those that Hiroshima is still suffering.

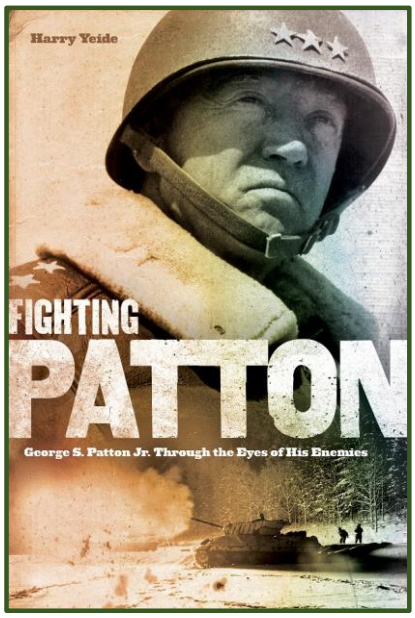
Reputations, Myths and Legends of the War

This month, Scribblings investigates some of the many myths, legends and reputations that the Second World War generated. From military leaders through to ships, tanks and aircraft as well as battles and politics we explore fact and fiction and the propaganda that sometimes confuses.

The editorial team looks at how Field Marshall Montgomery managed his battles and how his public relations team built his image during the campaigns of the Western Desert. A natural follow on is the reputation of Field Marshall Erwin Rommel. Was he the brilliant Desert Fox or a creation of master-ofspin Goebbels? How did the Germans view General Patton? Did the RAF also mismanage Douglas Bader and did French fighter ace Pierre Closterman enhance his own reputation. One thing is certain: there is no shortage of opinion nor is much of it reasoned and researched. In our next edition Scribblings will delve even deeper into psy opsand media induced rumour and popular mythology.

The German View of Patton

Henrik Bering, The Hoover Institution, reviews Harry Yeide's Fighting Patton: George S. Patton Jr. Through the Eyes of His Enemies. Zenith Press. Henrik is a graduate of Oxford University (Pembroke College) and has been a Professional Journalism Fellow at Stanford University.



OF THE ALLIED World War 2 generals, George Patton may be considered the most "German." He had carefully studied the early Blitzkrieg campaigns against Poland and France and shared the conviction of the Wehrmacht commanders that that a war of movement — short, sharp, and furious — was the way to avoid a repetition of the endless slaughter of World War I. "Always take the offensive. Never dig in," was Patton's motto.

He expressed his aversion to fixed positions in graphic fashion: After having found some slit trenches around a command post in Tunisia meant to protect it from air attacks, he asked the commanding officer, Terry Allen, to show him his, whereupon he promptly urinated into it. "There. Now try to use it."

Like Field Marshal Erich von Manstein, Germany's most skilful World War II commander, Patton would also carefully monitor performance. This he did by sending out his staff officers to the front-line units.

To Patton, war meant destroying the enemy's main force, not clinging to territory. His favoured approach was the oblique one: Hold them by the nose and kick them in the rear, which in more polite textbook terms translates into pinning the enemy while the tanks attack his flanks. Patton saw tanks as upgraded cavalry, infinitely more powerful, whose deep penetrations could collapse enemy lines.

Patton was also a keen student of translated German military literature, such as the World War I memoirs of Hans von Seeckt, the chief of staff of the German 11th Army, and Adolf von Schell's Battle Leadership. According to military historian Harry Yeide, Patton's style of commanding comes close to the German concept of Auftragstaktik, or mission-type orders: In German, whereas ein Befehl is a direct order, eine Direktive, a directive, is something broader and less detailed, where the commander states what he wants to achieve but leaves it up to his men how to go about it.

"Never tell people how to do things. Tell them what to do and they will surprise you with their ingenuity," runs a famous Patton quote. On meddling generals, he noted, "The tactics belong to battalion commanders. If generals knew less tactics, they would interfere less."

The advantage of this way of operating is that it makes for speed, initiative, and flexibility, allowing the officer on the spot to adjust to the rapidly changing situation of the battlefield and to exploit sudden opportunities. But like Field Marshal Erich von Manstein, Germany's most skilful World War II commander, Patton would also carefully monitor performance. This he did by sending out his staff officers to the front-line units. Often, he would go and have a look-see himself.

On this background, it is only natural to ask what the Germans thought of him, and how he measures up to the Wehrmacht's panzer generals, which is what Yeide's sets out to do. As Yeide emphasizes, this not a biography but a meticulous recreation of Patton's campaigns seen from the German perspective.

On the benefits of this method, Yeide quotes British military historian Basil H. Liddell Hart: "It is different in one important aspect from looking at it through the opposite end of the telescope. For instead of being minimized, the picture is magnified, with startling vividness." Having been on the receiving end, the German officers were uniquely positioned to assess Patton's effectiveness, though there are certain caveats.

From the movie Patton and from the biography on which it is partly based, Ladislas Farago's Patton: Ordeal and Triumph, one is left with the impression that the German High Command spent most of its waking hours fretting about Patton and his whereabouts. According to Farago, after his campaign in Sicily, Patton was the Allied general the Germans regarded as "their most dangerous adversary in the field," which led them to watch his comings and goings "like rubbernecked spectators following a tennis ball at Wimbledon. " The problem is, notes Yeide, that "there does not appear to be an iota of fact behind this claim."


wounded soldiers in Sicily.

Patton DID Slap III Soldier, Army Admits

By C. R. CUNNINGHAM

Allied HQ., Algiers, Nov. 23 (U.P.)—Lieut. Gen. George S. Patton Jr., commanding the 7th Army, struck a shell-shocked American soldier in a hospital in Sicily last August and told him and other men that they were "yellow bellies" such as were shot in the last war, it was announced

Thus when Patton was under a cloud for having slapped two shell-shocked soldiers in Sicily, the army sent him on the a well-publicized tour around the Mediterranean to Corsica, Malta, and Cairo: The idea was to mask the fact that the Seventh Army was being transferred from Sicily to England, but there are no indications that German intelligence attached any great significance to these visits

. "The notion that Patton could be used to deceive the Germans appears to have arisen from a presumption about German thinking in Washington rather than any evidence that the Germans had a particular interest in the general's activities," Yeide writes. To the Germans, he says, Patton was just one of many threats.

The same applies to Patton's role as commander of the fictional U.S. 1st Army Group in Kent, designed to create the impression that the invasion would occur at Calais rather than Normandy. In Yeide's view, Farago's assertion that the Germans concentrated on Patton as the general likely to command American forces in the invasion of France is mainly based on a misinterpretation of an entry in the German High Command's war diary and on a routine Air War Academy paper entitled Invasions Générale.

In fact, says Yeide, in a copy distributed in February 1944 Patton is "the only senior Allied general in Britain and the Mediterranean not

profiled with a brief, one paragraph summary." Bradley appears and so does Montgomery, but no Patton. Yeide does not rule out his inclusion from a later version now missing, but anyway, such papers were standard products with all services, from which nothing much can be inferred.

What is significant, however, he notes, is that the German High Command did not identify Patton as the commander of this fake U.S. 1st Army Group until well after they had fallen for the Calais ploy. So, Patton's presence in Kent was not the decisive factor in the German miscalculation.

"The Germans did not track Patton's movements as the key to allied intentions. They never raised his name in the context of worthy strategists." Hence their intelligence efforts were much more focused on people like Montgomery and Eisenhower because this was the level on which strategic decisions were made.

Instead, says Yeide, the Germans viewed Patton "in the narrow context of armoured commanders," as a skilful tactical commander, i.e., an executer of the plans of others. He quotes General Gunther Blumentritt:

- *We regarded General Patton extremely highly as the most aggressive panzer-general of the Allies. . . His operations impressed us enormously, probably because he came closest to our own concept of the classical military commander. He even improved on Napoleon's basic tenet — activité, vitesse — vitesse.*

When interrogated in 1945, Heinz Guderian, the Wehrmacht's foremost practitioner of Blitzkrieg, stated, "I hear much about General Patton and he conducted a good campaign. From the standpoint of a tank specialist, I must congratulate him on his victory since he acted as I would have done had I been in his place."

But according to Yeide's figures, while the U.S. possessed only one armoured commander above division level and only a handful of first class armour generals at division level, the Germans produced them by the bushel: Out of 266 officers with armour experience, he says, "55 stayed with the panzers throughout the war, most achieving the rank of General der Panzertruppe." (Moreover, The Waffen SS and the Luftwaffe had their own panzer generals.) "Among this group, Patton probably would have been merely above average."

What is more, notes Yeide, the Germans have a tradition of rather stringent assessment of military commanders, and it would take more than Patton' s campaign in Sicily to seriously impress them. Yeide quotes Helmuth von Moltke, chief of the Prussian General Staff and the man responsible for Germany's victory in the 1870–71Franco Prussian war, who, when compared with Napoleon and Frederick the Great by a flatterer, declined the honour, "for I have never conducted a retreat," the trickiest of all military manoeuvres. Neither had George Patton.

Patton's adversaries, on the other hand, had plenty of experience in this art form from Russia, where the Wehrmacht's early victories had turned into a nightmare struggle against the cold and against a Russian enemy that seemed to have an inexhaustible supply of manpower and replacement tanks. Thus many of the commanders Patton was to meet in France had participated in Manstein's retaking of Kharkov, a brilliant move designed to straighten out the German line, and in the subsequent Battle of Kursk, the largest tank battle in history, which resulted in irreplaceable German losses of materiel. In short, writes Yeide, German officers were "prepared psychologically" for the Allied invasion of France.

Coinciding with the Battle of Kursk was the Allied invasion of Sicily. The Germans considered the island undefendable and their Italian allies useless: Facing superior numbers, German forces still managed to put up a successful defensive battle, allowing them to get 60,000men plus heavy weapons across to the mainland, thanks to "relatively weak" delaying forces.

As Yeide notes, the German commanders were not impressed by Patton's drive to Palermo, which involved territory they had already given up. Nor were they overawed by the American performance in what he calls "smash mouth" fighting.

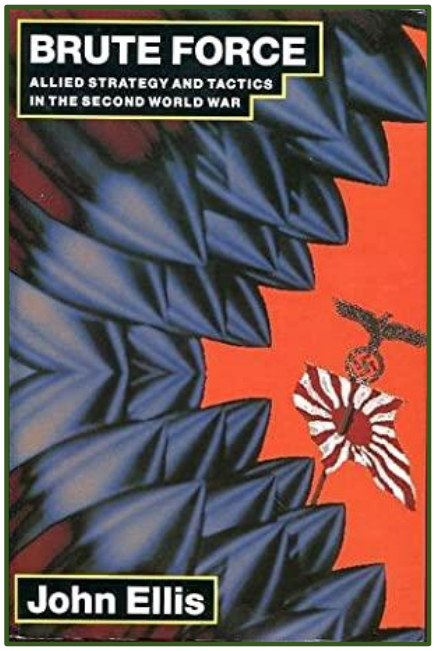
As the chapter heading "Sicily: Empty Glory," indicates, Yeide, like others before him, is highly critical of Patton's race to beat Montgomery to Messina, especially the "risky and bloody" amphibious operation at Brolo which proved unnecessary and can only be ascribed to Patton's thirst for personal glory.

In Normandy, the Germans were again defending. On August 1, Patton, finally back in good graces after the slapping incidents, had been given command of the Third Army, and played the starring role in the American breakout at Avranches. The German forces were on the verge of being encircled, but owing to the failure of the Canadians to quickly close the Allied pincer and a furious Patton being under strict orders to stay put at Argentan, the Germans managed to slip through what became known as the Falaise Gap: The gap was only twelve miles wide, but through it some 100,000Germans managed to escape, whereby "an Armageddon was reduced to an outright disaster." As a result, those who had gotten away would regroup and be among the forces Patton would fight along the German border.

All the way towards the frontier, the Americans faced delaying tactics, courtesy of General Kurt von der Chevallerie, a veteran of the fighting around Kiev. On der Chevallerie's achievement, Yeide quotes Patton's assistant intelligence officer Colonel Robert Allen:

- ***The enemy's continued tactical control, despite the tremendous difficulties under which he operated, was a remarkable military feat. In the face of shattered communications, tremendous losses, constant retreating, and practically no air support, the enemy still maintained overall control of his tactical situation. He constantly fell back, but there was no mass collapse. At every critical point, he stubbornly defended and delayed.***

In Lorraine, Patton's bloodiest campaign, he was up against some of Germany's toughest officers. Of these, Yeide singles out General Hermann Balck, who performed the kind of flexible defence he had practiced in Russia on the Chir river. Thus on the Moselle and in the siege of Metz, the Germans forced Patton, short on gas and ammunition, into practicing the type of piecemeal attack that he deplored in others, and leading Balck to speak of "the poor and timid leadership of the Americans."



Waffen ss GruppenfuhrerMax Simon likewise saw the American tactics as "cautious and systematic:": "The tactics of the Americans were based on the idea of breaking down a wall by taking out one brick at a time," he said, adding, "Had you made such attacks . . . on the eastern front, where our anti-tank guns were echeloned in depth, all your tanks would have been destroyed." Patton himself admitted, "While my attack was going forward by short leaps, it was not very brilliant."

According to Yeide, even Patton's logistical feats before running out of gas and his boast that "as of 14 August [1944] the Third Army has advanced further and faster than any army in history," totalling some 300 miles altogether, still put him well behind General Georg-Hans Reinhardt, who at start of Operation Barbarossa covered more than 500 miles towards Leningrad, and Otto von Knobelsdorff, who in six weeks managed 800miles, a feat which Knobelsdorff himself termed "unique in Prussian-German military history."

The book clearly takes its place in the school of "the Allies won the war, but the Germans had the better army," a school that includes the Israeli military historian Martin van Creveld, and the Brits Max Hastings, John Keegan, and John Ellis. This view was most starkly presented by John Ellis in Brute Force, a comprehensive assessment of the Allied effort in World War II against Germany and Japan, which, in passing, reduces Patton to some sort of a glorified traffic cop. While acknowledging Patton's ability to manoeuvre, Ellis characterizes his dash across northern France as well as his earlier "much overrated" pursuit through Sicily as more of "a triumphal procession than an actual military offensive."

On Patton's performance in Lorraine, Ellis gets caustic:

- ***Here is the story of the Normandy campaign in a nutshell. Acute German shortages on the one hand, and on the other an Allied cornucopia which could provide an overwhelming level of firepower and a remorseless stream of replacements that could compensate for the grossest tactical bêtise. Add skilled public relations and a press hungry for heroes, and you had the circumstance so propitious that even Montgomery and Patton could seem like great commanders.***

Ouch!

The purpose of Ellis's book was not to downplay the sacrifices made by the American troops, but to serve as a warning to the West about getting complacent in its defence spending, instead putting its faith in the ability of some great general to save the day in a future war: "By ignoring the vital question of material preponderance we do not only inflate the reputation of 'great commanders,' but we are also in danger of encouraging absurd obsessions of innate national ability at the expense of a solid admission that the odds were stacked heavily in the Allies favour."

Yeide isn't quite as reductionist as Ellis, but the more complimentary German assessment of Patton's abilities tend to be drowned out by those who stress the tremendous resources at his disposal, and by the author's own constant emphasis on Patton's luck, such as his having taken command in France "after nearly seven weeks of hard fighting by the British, the Canadians, and the Americans of the First Army had worn the German army in Normandy to tatters."

And a bit further on, "Just as Patton strode onto the stage of the European theatre, the other fellow in Normandy was reeling backward and out of Patton's way; off balance, running out of men and equipment, and looking for a way to extricate himself from an already losing fight" (italics mine). As an indication of the mood in the German high command, Yeide quotes Alfred Jodl, the German chief of staff, who in captivity confessed, "The war was already lost in the West at the time of the breakthrough and the beginning of the war of movement in France." As with Ellis, this tends to reduce Patton to a mere pursuer, impressive when chasing a fleeing foe, less so when meeting determined opposition.

Even the feat that is considered Patton's greatest achievement, turning the three Third Army divisions 90 degrees and heading north within 72hours to fight the Battle of the Bulge, does not escape a slight deflation: "By the time Patton gained real contact with the enemy, most Germans had concluded that the offensive was already spent. Patton once again would attack his enemy when the other fellow was switching to his back foot."

Like Ellis, Yeide emphasizes that in no way does this detract from the men who sacrificed life and limb in the Allied cause. And at no point is there a hint of glorification of the German side, only a clinical assessment of its fighting abilities. Yeide scrupulously registers the crimes of people like Max Simon, who killed 10,000 civilians in Kharkov when with the Totenkopf division in Russia, and who helped massacre a further 2,000civilians at Marzabotto, Italy. Unfortunately, Nazi war criminals could be quite effective on the battlefield.

How would the Patton corner respond? It is a fact that while the Germans had long prepared for war, the Roosevelt administration had to scramble to build an army in a hurry.

This meant greener troops and a less experienced officer corps. It is also a fact that since the Civil War, America has relied on overwhelming firepower to win its wars.

But as participants, the Germans could hardly be expected to be unbiased observers of their own defeat. At this stage of the war, Hitler was busy promoting committed Nazi officers in the belief that they would put up a more stubborn defence. Such people would surely have found it easier to blame their defeat on an enemy relying on raw industrial might than to acknowledge his fighting skills. One is reminded of an incident in the final days of the war when a German officer was berating the Americans for sending their tanks through buildings instead of fighting it out in the open, a bit rich coming from a representative of the Third Reich's armed forces, which had been perfectly happy to use tanks against Polish cavalry.

Yeide, like Ellis, does mention that some former Wehrmacht officers later upgraded their views of Patton, which he ascribes partly to a cooling of passions, partly as an attempt to curry favour when Germany joined NATO. (A number of retired Wehrmacht generals became NATO consultants.) This may be so, but at least this cannot be said of Erwin Rommel, who was forced by Hitler to commit suicide in October 1944. Carlo D'Este's excellent Patton biography A Genius for War quotes Rommel noting that after the initial American setback in Kasserine Pass, things had rapidly improved for them, "although we had to wait until the Patton Army in France to see the most astonishing achievement in mobile warfare."

Concerning Patton's thirst for glory, of which Yeide views his race with Montgomery across Sicily as a prime example, Martin Blumenson, the leading Patton specialist, sees a less suspicious motive: British Field Marshal Alexander, mistrustful of American prowess on the battlefield, had relegated Patton's forces to a secondary role, acting as shield to Montgomery's sword. This Patton was determined to change, "Not so much for his personal glory, although that was important, but rather to prove to the world that American soldiers were every bit as good as — indeed better than — British troops." That meant entering Messina before the Brits.

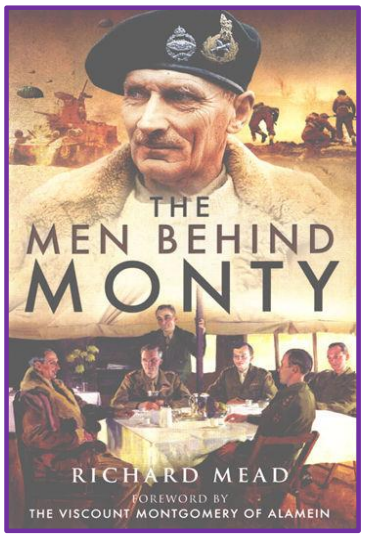
On Patton's performance in France, his campaign in Lorraine was certainly no beauty but might have been avoided altogether, if he and not the plodding Omar Bradley, his former subordinate, had been in overall charge of the American forces. As both Blumenson and Carlo D'Este see it, Patton would not have waffled over the Falaise Gap, and his plan, an ambitious long envelopment rather than Bradley's short hook, might have trapped and killed the German Normandy army west of the Seine. Unfortunately, as a result of the slapping incidents in Sicily, the less gifted officer was calling the shots.

As to the element of luck, Patton, like Napoleon, believed that luck was an essential element in the make-up up of a great commander. But one reason Patton was lucky was due to his meticulous planning; another was his intuition. Thus, Blumenson stresses his uncanny ability to be in the right spot at the right time, and his instinctive feel for when something was up, perhaps best illustrated in the days leading up to the final German offensive. His intelligence section was reporting enemy activity in the Ardennes, and Patton seems to have grasped its significance sooner than others. And as Yeide himself points out, "the Third Army headquarters was the only Allied headquarter to begin planning for its eventual role in the Battle of the Bulge." "We will be in a position to meet whatever happens," Patton noted.

But interestingly enough, on the main point that the Germans were the more effective soldiers, Patton would almost certainly agree (himself excluded, of course). As Yeide writes, in contrast to his public statements, his diary and letters often deplore the lack of initiative of his troops. Even during the Battle of the Bulge, he wrote, "The Germans are colder and hungrier than we are, but they fight better." Yet he kept goading, pulling, and willing his troops on to victory. That is his great achievement.

The Men Behind Monty…. A book that examines the role played by Eighth Army staff in the victorious campaigns of Field Marshal Viscount Montgomery.

WHEN MONTY took command of Eighth Army in August 1942, he inherited the staff of his predecessor. He retained all the key members and most of them stayed with him not only from El Alamein to Tunis, but also in Sicily and Italy.



When he took command of 21st Army Group in January 1944, many accompanied him to take up the most prominent positions on the HQ staff and the majority remained until the German surrender in May 1945.

This fascinating work, by Richard Mead, focuses not only on the senior officers responsible for the various staff branches, and notably on Monty's outstanding Chief of Staff, Freddie de Guingand, but also on his personal staff, the ADCs and personal liaison officers.

The book sheds light on the work of the staff generally, and on their direct contribution to Monty's decisions, his sometimes difficult and controversial relationships with his superiors and allies.

It devotes a valuable but short section to the work of the public relations and photography team that helped tell the world about Britain's most successful field commander since the Duke of Wellington.

MUCH HAS BEEN WRITTEN about Field Marshall Montgomery, some by his own staff, but not much has been put down about the officers who enabled the successes of Monty. Mead has now done this and has brought us one of the most readable books I have come across for a long time

The book deals very much with Freddie de Guingand, Monty's Chief of Staff from his time of arrival in the desert to victory over Germany in 1945. Once Freddie had Monty's plans and thoughts, he was left to implement them, something that he did brilliantly, ending the war a Major General and with a knighthood.

However, Monty could be very harsh to the people who worked with him and very jealous of anyone who might just be taking the shine off his glory, and Mead does not hold back from that. Monty's strengths are well known, and he was a great UK general; however, he had many faults and an ego which was out of control at times. Pictured below right: Freddie de Guingand's job was to smooth the waters after Monty had stirred up the storm, especially with the Americans. This was not always possible...

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Richard Mead was educated at Marlborough College and Pembroke College, Cambridge. He has written General 'Boy': The Life of Lieutenant General Sir Frederick Browning and The Last Great Cavalryman: The Life of General Sir Richard McCreery, Commander Eighty Army, The Men Behind Monty, Commando General – The Life of Sir Robert Laycock and Sam - The Life of MRAF Lord Elworthy all in print with Pen and Sword Books.

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Much of the book deals with the relationship between the HQs that Monty set up and how he used them. He would stay at his small Tac HQ, close to the front line, and use Liaison Officers (LOs)to maintain contact both forward to Corps and Division plus back to Main HQ. Due to Monty's rule of the commander never going back Main HQ also used LOs to take back information from Tac HQ in order that the staff officers, and de Guingand in particular, could know and understand what the CinC wanted.

These LOs were relatively junior officers but travelled with the full authority of Montgomery and expected to be seen by GOCs of Corps & Divisions in order to get the information they needed. This obviously needed a certain amount of tact from these officers but they pressed for the information where needed and the whole system of LOs was so efficient that Montgomery always had an up to date picture of the battle as it progressed, or otherwise...

This has been one of the most enjoyable books I have read for some time as the writing is well done and flows logically and smoothly covering a huge area that is staff work. Again, like the battles, the book does not go into the minutiae of staff work but shows what the staff can and did do to bring about victory in Europe.

Very much a personal portrait, giving the characters of the main players; how Monty used his young LOs to wind down at dinner in his very small and exclusive Mess showing his sometimes-wicked sense of humour.

Mead does not miss out on the foibles of Monty's personality; indeed, they form a major part of the work that his staff, especially the Chief of Staff, had to work round and with. I thoroughly enjoyed this book, and should anyone have a wish to see how a successful Commander became so because of the support of his Staff then this is the book for you.

So much has been written about Monty that it would seem that there was neither anything new left to explore nor any fresh way in which to approach this major figure in twentieth-century British history.

Step forward Richard Mead, author of the outstanding biography of Sir Richard McCreery, to demonstrate that there is another avenue along which Monty could be studied: how and with whom Monty staffed his HQs in Eighth Army and 21st Army Group.

The most prominent figure in this study is Freddie de Guingand who served as Monty's chief of staff from his appointment as commander Eighth Army in August 1942 until the end of the war. As with most of Monty's staff, de Guingand was devoted to 'master' and, indeed, saved Montgomery from himself on more than one occasion.

We learn much of the inner workings of an army and an army group HQ from this book. The scale of an army group HQ is also clear and Monty's system of operating with a Tac HQ, a Main HQ and a Rear HQ is explained clearly and in detail. A wide range of responsibilities was dealt with at 21st Army Group HQ which broadened as the north-west Europe campaign developed. Not only did the HQ have to deal with such matters as the day-to-say provisioning of two armies on active service, but it also had to deal with the civilian populations of liberated and, later, occupied territories which required a large Civil Affairs branch.

This book illuminates a lesser-known aspect the Monty story and of the subject's character. It thus deserves to find a place on the shelves of anyone interested in the military history of the twentieth century, especially that of the British Army. As a study in command and control, it is

also valuable with its many lessons for the professional officer. Above all, it is a human story that is both thoroughly researched and very well written.

And so an image was formed……

…. Another signal had been sent off to GHQ on Monty's first day in the desert, this one asking for the best available soldier servant in the Middle East to be sent up at once. In the meantime, Corporal William English, who had worked previously for Neil Ritchie, was lent to Monty by Freddie and was liked by him so much that he stayed in the role for the rest of the war, whilst Freddie took on the new man, Corporal Alfred Lawrence.

Another very longstanding non-commissioned member of the staff, with whom Monty had frequent contact and whom he trusted implicitly, was the highly efficient Chief Clerk, Sergeant (later Sergeant Major) Ernest Harwood, who worked for Freddie but was frequently used directly by Monty.

Monty also ordered that all officer postings out of HQ should be cancelled until he had evaluated the quality of the staff. Those concerned included Belchem, who had been due to leave for 9th Army in the Levant only two days later.

Monty could now begin to get to know his command. His approach was simple. Each day he would visit units and formations, on every occasion ordering that the men should gather round whilst he addressed them, introducing himself and then telling them in clear and uncompromising terms what he was proposing to do and where they would fit into the picture.

Eighth Army had not been defeated in its current position and its morale was not as low as many have subsequently claimed, not least Monty himself, but it was puzzled at the position in which it found itself and it needed to be told unambiguously what was happening.

The message of no further retreat and of new reinforcements went down well with everyone, whilst Monty's policy that battle groups were a thing of the past and that all divisions would now fight as a whole was warmly welcomed by their GOCs.

Spirits and confidence rose very quickly all around the Army. To Churchill and Brooke, back in Egypt after meeting Stalin, the change was palpable, and the CIGS wrote in his diary for 19 August that Monty 'gave me a wonderful feeling of relief at having got him out here'.

In terms of raising his profile in the Army and to the general public, Monty was helped significantly by the Head of the Army Film & Photo Unit attached to Eighth Army, Captain Geoffrey Keating, below right.

A veteran of Norway, Dunkirk, Greece, Crete and Tobruk, Keating was not strictly a member of the staff, but he was in such frequent attendance on the Army Commander, including during dinners in the mess, that he was often treated as one, and was particularly liked by Monty, who regarded him as the court jester.

Keating was not just making films and taking photos, he was in the forefront of developing what became a very successful public relations campaign. He was determined that the profile of the Army should be raised by his work and now, suddenly, he was presented with a gift horse in the shape of Monty. Unlike Auchinleck, Monty adored publicity and swiftly allowed Keating to begin the process of building him up into a national figure.

Alan Whicker, below right, who was to join AFP U in the field in Tunisia and to work closely with Keating, described Monty's reaction to the cameras: 'I spent some time with him during the war and always, as soon as he saw me, he'd start pointing at nothing in particular, but in a most commanding manner. It was his way and it seemed to work; half-a—century ago he had television-style fame before television. '

Keating had an initial problem, in that Monty was physically unprepossessing, short and with a rather pointed face and a high, rasping voice.

The early photos of him in the desert, wearing shorts and an officer's cap, show him at a disadvantage to those around him. Help was at hand, however.

On one of his early visits to 9 Australian Division he was presented with a slouch hat on which was pinned the badge of the Australian Military Force. At his next stop he was offered another badge and then another, until his hat was covered with them, making him instantly recognisable. A British general officer in Australian headgear was just what Keating needed to emphasize the Empire composition of the Army.

The slouch hat, however, turned out to be an impractical item of dress, particularly when getting in and out of vehicles. As the Army prepared for the battles ahead, Monty decided that he should have his own small battle group, composed of a squadron of the 6th Royal Tank Regiment, a troop of South African armoured cars and some infantry, which would allow him mobility around the whole battlefield.

His own personal conveyance was to be a Grant tank, with his name painted on it,9 which he would use on suitable occasions until he left the Mediterranean theatre in December 1943. The squadron commander invited John Poston to dinner and over a great deal of whisky explained that his regiment could not possibly entertain the idea of the Army Commander travelling in

It was agreed that a spare black beret should be kept in the tank and, at the appropriate moment, when the slouch hat blew off, offered in exchange by the driver, Private Jim Fraser. This duly happened, and the black beret, to which was affixed not only his general's badge but also, and totally against regulations, that of the RTR, remained Monty's distinguishing signature garment thereafter. Keating now had the image he needed.

That this PR campaign began to raise the profile of Eighth Army in the UK and the Empire was important, but perhaps more so was its effect on morale in the Army itself.

This was seized upon by the editor of the daily *Eighth Army News* and the weekly *Crusader*, Captain Warwick Charlton.

Charlton immediately recognized that Monty could have an enormous personal impact and he went out of his way to promote him. Monty, for his part, was happy to indulge Charlton and to protect him when some of his articles, and particularly his cartoons, attracted criticism from other senior officers.

Monty had not come to Egypt just to be photographed, however. He had come to fight and, very soon, after his arrival and much as he had anticipated. That is just what he had to do.

Reassessing Rommel: Anti-Nazi Hero or Opportunist?

Extracts from a story written by Blaine Taylor for Warfare History Network

EVEN BEFORE the end of World War II, German General Erwin Rommel's fame was such that he was already being elevated into the Valhalla of such legendary warriors as Hannibal against the Roman Empire, Napoleon during his defensive campaigns of 1813-1814, and Robert E. Lee throughout the American Civil War.

Despite the fact that all four "Great Captains" were—in the final analysis—losers, they have loomed far larger in the public mind than those who defeated them. Thus, it was that, with Erwin Rommel as well, myth became legend and legend became fact.

Charismatic, dashing, and colourful, Erwin Rommel burst onto the scene in the public consciousness in the spring of 1941 when his first unexpected offensive in the Western Desert of North Africa sent the formerly victorious British Eighth Army reeling in defeat after a year and a half of triumphs over the hapless Italian Army.

According to noted British military expert and author Basil H. Liddell Hart—one of the recognized fathers of mechanized warfare—from 1941 on, Rommel's name was the most prominent of all German field marshals and generals, reflecting his meteoric and unprecedented ascent from colonel to field marshal. Doubly an outsider, he was not a high-ranking member of the general staff, and all his major victories excepting France in 1940 were outside continental Europe.

- ***His martial renown was deliberately fostered—shamelessly by both himself and as Hitler's hand-picked choice of only two soldiers whom he made into popular heroes—"one in the sun and one in the snow." Rommel was the "sun hero" for his exploits in North Africa and Edouard Dietl, who rose through the ranks from private before the Great War to four-star general in Finland in 1942, was the "snow hero." Thus, Hitler ordered Nazi Propaganda Minister Dr. Josef Goebbels to make Rommel the most enduring Nazi-sponsored hero of World War II.***

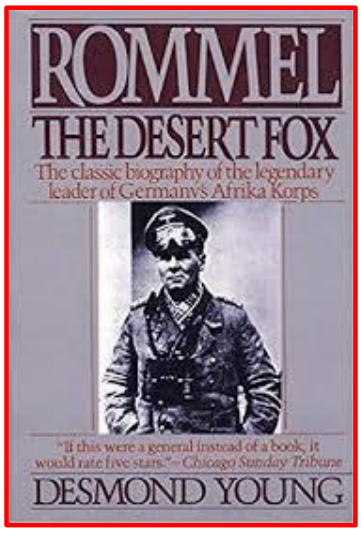
Following Rommel's forced suicide in 1944, it fell to the victorious Allies to keep alive the spark of the Rommel legend, that of the "good German" who, in the end, had defied the Führer. Thus, he found a new life as the patron saint of the West German Bundeswehr (Armed Forces) in 1955 when that force joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which his own deputy once headed.

One man whose career Rommel consciously emulated was T.E. Lawrence (aka Lawrence of Arabia), and it would have been interesting to have seen them pitted against each other had the latter lived long enough. Both desert warriors created their own legends and burnished their images in their wartime writings, much as Julius Caesar and Napoleon had earlier.

According to his first major biographer, British Brig. Gen. Desmond Young, "The outstanding feature of Rommel's successes is that they were achieved with an inferiority of force, and without any command of the air. No other general on either side gained victory under such conditions."

Critics of the Desert Fox

Critics such as his later boss in Normandy, Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt, stated that, while he was a good division commander, Rommel was not really suited to higher command because of his failure to stay in touch with his headquarters. His practice of leading from the front—while making excellent copy material for the weekly newsreels back home in the Third Reich—was in reality a confusing method of command. Indeed, he often took his chief of staff with him in his command car while careening about in the desert instead of leaving him at headquarters where he might have done some good.



Other critics have also maintained that, while he was a tactical genius of the first rank, he was no strategist, but this argument falls flat when one reads his writings as found in the post-war The Rommel Papers. This reveals that, while he disagreed with Hitler's total fixation with the far larger Russian Eastern Front, he was not lacking in the ability to see the larger picture and grasp its possibilities.

Thus, before the arrival of the Americans, he had thought far ahead, well beyond the German capture of Alexandria, Cairo, and the Suez Canal—all of which was possible when he was halted at El Alamein in the late summer of 1942—to the eventual conquest of all of the rest of continental Africa, the invasion of India in possible concert with the Imperial Japanese Army, and a link-up with German forces in the Soviet Caucasus.

Possession of all these territories and mineral resources would have kept the German armed forces afloat for the next several decades, but he could never convince Hitler and the high command of the correctness of his world view. To them, Russia was and remained the primary goal.

……. from November 1943 to July 1944, Rommel was posted as inspector general of the Atlantic Wall and later commanding officer of Army Group B in France to prepare for the expected cross-Channel Allied invasion in the spring of 1944.

- **"Rommel alone is worth the whole Atlantic Wall!" it was asserted, and in a very real propaganda and public relations sense that was, indeed, the case. While formidable—and he no doubt made it more so—in the final analysis, the defences were but a hollow linear shell with little depth. In fact, they were breached by the end of a single day and the Allies were ashore in force in Europe to stay.**

Was Rommel a "Good German"?

…. Rommel did or did not flirt with the idea of both removing the Führer from office and "opening up" the Western Front to the Allies to help bring this about. In either case, he would have been a traitor to his country by any standards, even given today's moral—if incorrect—view that he was a "good German" who turned against Hitler in the end.

The fact remains, however, that he supported Hitler and gratefully received a marshal's baton from his hands when the Nazis were winning, then abandoned that cause a mere six months later when it was becoming apparent that the war was lost.

In 1974, three decades after his death, the British revealed that they had been reading most of his radio traffic via their famed Ultra decryption program at Bletchley Park, an incalculable advantage, and one that must be factored in when assessing Rommel's military successes and failures.

What then, should history's verdict be on Erwin Rommel? There is no doubt that he was a brilliant tactician and capable strategist, but also a wishy-washy politician who might have emerged from the lost war as president of the Reich had the July 20 plot succeeded and he had been given the opportunity.

But these things did not happen, and the Field Marshal Rommel of myth, legend, and fact died a mysterious death and was given a hero's funeral. We are left, therefore, with a chilling reality: he was no soldier of democracy at all, but the holder of an Imperial Iron Cross and Blue Max, then a Nazi Iron Cross, Knight's Cross, and marshal's baton.

Had he been successful in North Africa, India, the Middle East, Normandy, and possibly even against the Red Army later, the capital of Nazi-occupied Europe would today be at Germania, the former Berlin, the Jews would have been completely wiped out by the triumphant Nazis, and a second, far more brutal Holocaust inaugurated against the combined Slavic peoples of the conquered East.

Battle of Britain: how the British press found a hero in Douglas Bader – the amputee fighter ace

By Tim Luckhurst, The Conversation July 7, 2020

IN JULY 1940, Britain's coalition government was concerned about public morale. German forces that had swept through France stood poised to invade. In the skies, Luftwaffe warplanes fought for the supremacy that Adolf Hitler needed to get his army across the channel. The nation's fate hung in the balance and the Air Ministry believed uplifting stories could inspire optimism and encourage resistance.

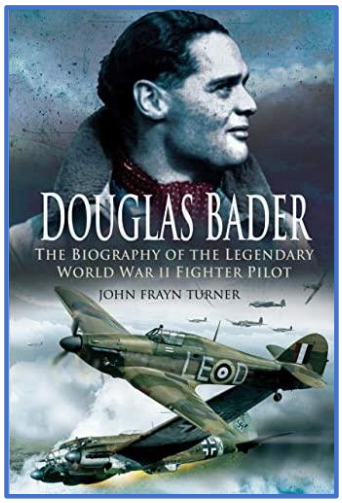
When a 30-year-old Hurricane pilot shot down a Dornier 17 "in a fierce aerial fight", the ministry spotted a tremendous story. This was no ordinary pilot. In 1931, he had lost both his legs when "coming out of a slow roll over Woodley Aerodrome, Reading, he crashed and for weeks struggled against death in hospital". His legs were amputated and, although he soon learned to fly again using artificial legs, the RAF rejected his applications to return to active service until the war began.

The hero was, of course, Douglas Robert Stuart Bader (1910-1982). Today, his story is familiar to millions who have seen the award-winning film Reach for the Sky or read of his courage in books and newspapers. But in 1940, Bader was little known beyond RAF Fighter Command. In a meticulous public relations exercise, Air Ministry press officers would make him a household name.

Alerted by an Air Ministry briefing on July 14, the mass-market Conservative Daily Mail sent a reporter to interview Bader's mother. She told the journalist: "I wish I could tell you adequately the story of how he had to face life again without two legs … It was amazing to watch his courage and the gradual return of his sunny disposition." He had also learned how to dance and drive a car. The Mail portrayed the hero in uniform and smiling for the camera.

Thrilling tale

Like its conservative rival, the Labour-supporting Daily Mirror displayed its populist flair when it covered the story. Douglas Bader was the "Greatest hero of them all … Britain's most amazing RAF Fighter Command Pilot". The Mirror sent a reporter to meet the hero's mother-in-law. Mrs Edwards said: "The more fights he can fly himself into, the better he is pleased."



He was encouraged by the love and support of her daughter Olivia, whom he married in 1938. The Mirror declared that "the story of his courage thrilled Britain".

Establishment broadsheet The Times also got carefully targeted help. Its readers learned that Bader had "passed through Cranwell [home since 1920 of the RAF College] where he was a fine games player and captain of cricket". The Manchester Guardian decided that its educated readers would resent mawkish populism.

It noted: "Everybody who was in the Air Force or who was interested in rugby football eight or nine years ago knew DRS Bader, the Harlequins and RAF fly half, whose crash robbed him of his legs, cut short a brilliant service career and destroyed good prospects of an England cap".

But, the report continued, Bader was not unique. Before the war, an officer nicknamed "Peggy" flew "in spite of having one artificial leg. He wore a plain wooden peg-leg which he inserted into a cylindrical cigarette tin screwed to the rudder bar."

The Daily Telegraph was not sceptical. Its correspondent, Major CC Turner, reported: "I learn that a Hurricane pilot who although he lost both his legs shot down a Dornier 17 in a weekend raid was Flying Officer DRS Bader." Turner did not acknowledge that he had learned this from the Air Ministry. But that's how every newspaper found out about Bader – it was a formidable work by a team determined to promote courageous young men and cheer the nation.

- The RAF worked closely with journalists and its reputation benefited accordingly. By contrast, the Royal Navy took a rigidly secretive approach that infuriated even the government's chief press censor, Rear Admiral George P Thomson. Thomson lamented that the adventures of HMS Triumph, which limped home after being damaged in action 300 miles from home, had begun on Boxing Day 1939. "Yet it was not until September 1941 that the British public were told this magnificent story of the heroism and fortitude of the British sailor." Thomson believed secrecy had stopped people talking about the navy with pride.
- The navy's reluctance to reveal detail about the war at sea remained entrenched. In his outstanding book about journalism and conflict, The First Casualty, journalist Phillip Knightley reveals how Edward R Murrow of CBS Radio complained about the secrecy surrounding this theatre of war: "The curious thing about the Battle of the Atlantic is that no one knows anything about it. Nothing may be said either to the Americans or to the British public about this battle which, we are told, will determine the destinies of freemen for centuries."

The thoroughly modern RAF understood that Douglas Bader was the hero Britain needed in its hour of greatest need. And such early success in promoting its achievements set a pattern that the Air Ministry would follow throughout the war. It would even invite BBC correspondents Wynford Vaughan Thomas and Richard Dimbleby to report from Lancaster Bombers flying in raids over Germany.

The army also learned to value positive reporting of its achievements when Field Marshal Montgomery presented the war in the desert to readers at home with striking phrases such as "Kill Germans, even padres – One per week day and two on Sundays".

As for Bader, his fame did not fade when he was shot down and taken prisoner. Having received a replacement aluminium leg, dropped by parachute to his prisoner of war camp, he immediately tried to escape. A German search party found him hiding in a hayloft. After that: "They took away one of his legs every night and gave it back to him in the morning."

Bader ended the war in the infamous Colditz castle where he was held as a member of the group known as the Prominente – famous prisoners the Nazi leadership hoped they might use as bargaining chips.

Pierre Clostermann tells how it wasn't…

...says Arnold D Harvey in Air Power History, Arnold, who read Modern History at St John's College, Oxford and obtained his Ph. D in History at Cambridge, has contributed more than a dozen articles on air warfare to various publications since 1990. His work has been published in the Journal of Contemporary History, War in History, RUSI Journal and Air Power History.

THE BIG SHOW, French fighter ace Pierre Clostermann's memoirs of his service with the British Royal Air Force during the years 1942-1945, is without doubt the outstanding personal account of combat in World War 2.

By turns shocking, terrifying, reflective, sensitive and provocative, and always astonishingly vivid, the book has been translated into at least 34 languages. The youngest deputy ever elected to the French Chambre and re-elected eight times, and a veteran of the war in Algeria, Pierre Clostermann (1921-2006) was a prominent figure in French public life during the era of Charles De Gaulle but will almost certainly be remembered mainly for his career in wartime and the book he wrote about it.

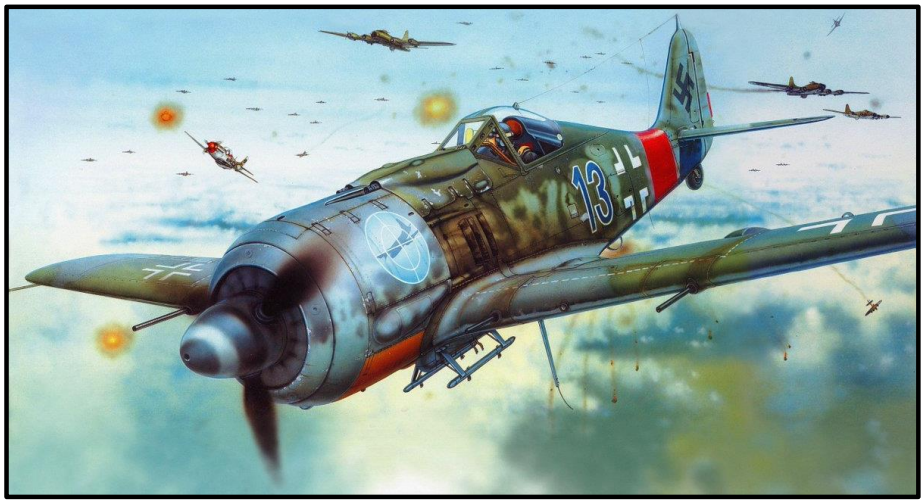
In his preface Clostermann explained its origins: For four years my parents and I—their only child— were separated by many thousands of miles to make my father and mother understand this new life and the mingled feelings it aroused.... every evening I used to write down for them the events of the day in a fat Air Ministry notebook, stamped 'G.R.' It is precisely because they are true, because they were written in the flush of action, that I have made no attempt to re-touch these notes.

Britain's National Archives at Kew, in the outskirts of London, preserve a number—not it seems all—of the combat reports written down by an Intelligence Officer while "debriefing' Clostermann after his return from a mission, and signed by Clostermann himself at the conclusion of the "debriefing" session. These combat reports must have been set down on paper in a matter of a few hours before Clostermann, according to what he himself claimed in his Preface, wrote his own version in his private notebook. It turns out, however, that the version in his official report and the version written for his parents a few hours later, or at least the version published in The Big Show, were not at all in agreement as to detail.

On July 27, 1943 Clostermann shot down his first Focke-Wulf Fw 190 and reported, "Giving him three short bursts using from 30-10 degrees deflection from 300-200 yards, I saw strikes all-round the cockpit.... the Boche went down in a dive upside down completely out of control."

In The Big Show this becomes ". at less than 200 yards range.... I squeezed the firing button. Whoopee! Flashes all over his fuselage. My first burst had struck home and no mistake .... The German pilot threw his plane into a desperate turn. Two slender white trails formed in the air. Suddenly the Focke-Wulf exploded like a grenade. A blinding flash, a black cloud, then debris fluttered round my aircraft. The engine dropped like a ball of fire. One of the wings, torn off in

the flames, dropped more slowly, like a dead leaf, showing its pale-yellow under-surface and its olive green upper-surface alternately."



On August 27, 1943 he fired at another FockeWulf Fw 190 and according to the official report, "Strikes were seen on the port wing and fuselage it crashed in flames near a small wood."

In The Big Show this becomes "Three explosions on the right wing between the fuselage and the black crosses the Focke-Wulf, still on its back, hit the ground and slid, scattering incandescent fragments everywhere, leaving a trail of blazing fuel, hurtled through two hedges and crashed against a road bank in a dazzling shower of sparks."[4]

On January 7, 1944 Clostermann was with a formation of Spitfires which had a rendezvous with American bombers near Cambrai but finding himself short of fuel he had to return home via Abbeville. According to The Big Show the rendezvous was at Rheims, 70 miles—more than ten minutes flying time—south-east of Cambrai and he was present when a seriously damaged American B—24 bomber exploded over Dieppe, 40 miles south-west of Abbeville, though he does not explain why the B—24, struggling on two out of four motors, chose to fly from Rheims to Dieppe, where the English Channel is 70 miles wide, instead of heading to Étaples, the same distance from Rheims but much closer to the safety of the English coast.[5]

On April 20, 1945, during a dusk patrol, Clostermann encountered a half dozen Focke-Wulf Fw 190s which were strafing an Allied armoured column. During a dog fight in which he shot down a Fw 190, six others arrived. A little later he found a lone and unsuspecting Fw 190 and shot it down from a distance of 400 yards. In The Big Show there were 30 Focke-Wulfs "like a shoal of fish passing under a skiff" and these were soon joined by another 12, and he shot down the solitary Focke Wulf despite its violent evasive manoeuvring, "at less than 200 yards range."

On May 3, 1945 Clostermann led a squadron attack on a German seaplane base, damaging two Blohm und Voss BV 138 flying boats and a Dornier Do 24 flying boat on a slipway: 'The DO 24 fell off into the water and was wrecked. I then sank a DO 24 at its [sic] moorings." He then attacked the adjacent airfield. "I obtained strikes on two AR 232s and from very short range on a JU 352. The Ju 352 broke in half and the port wing broke off." Thus, the official report.

According to The Big Show he had to detach most of the aircraft under his command to deal with "about 100 enemy fighters" in separate groups at 1,500, 3,000, 4,500 and 10,000 feet. These are not mentioned in his official report, though one notes that only one other pilot in the squadron who was flying in close formation with Clostermann reported having hit any German aircraft on the ground.)

Clostermann himself fired at a Blohm und Voss BV 138 in a wheeled cradle on a launching ramp: "The moorings of the cradle snapped and I passed over the enormous smoking mass as it tipped up on the slope, fell into the sea, and began to sink." He next fired at "an enormous Ju 252 which had just taken off and was already getting alarmingly big in my gunsight", and saw it "with two engines ablaze and the tail plane sheared off by my shells, bounce on the sea and explode."

Meanwhile a torpedo boat in the harbour fired at him with all its anti-aircraft guns, and "mowed down a flock of seagulls, which fell into the sea on all sides, panic-stricken and bleeding." Next, he attacked three Dornier Do 24 flying boats which had just taken off, shooting down two of them into the water. Returning to the airfield, he then strafed "a row of enormous transport Arado 232s"—there were "more than 100 enormous transport planes" on the airfield, "theoretically my primary objective."

One cannot but be puzzled, not only at the difference in the sequence of events in the two accounts, but by the way the Junkers Ju 352 of the official report becomes a Junkers Ju 252, an almost identical aircraft but with metal rather than wood in its construction, and impossible to tell apart from its stable mate when glimpsed in the heat of action at high speed. One would have also liked to have known more about the "more than 100 enormous transport planes", seeing that the Blohm und Voss BV 138 was a maritime bomber and patrol plane and Dornier Do 24, originally designed for the same role, was almost exclusively employed in air/sea rescue duties: the combined production of the Junkers Ju 252, Junkers Ju 352 and Arado Ar 232 was eighty-five.

It is not suggested for a moment that Clostermann did not shoot down an impressive number of German aircraft. It is not even suggested that he did not write up his notebook every evening. But it does seem that he was incapable of resisting the temptation to embroider his text.

In the original French edition—not in most English editions—he printed what he claims to be a translation of four of his official combat reports. Two of these are to be found in the British National Archives at Kew and seem to be approximately— not completely—accurate renderings except that "after attacking some more Met & a 1000 [i.e. mechanical transport etc. at 1000 feet I set course for base" becomes "I set course for the base and destroyed three lorries and trailers on the way back".

Clostermann also included in the original French edition a 'Tableau de Chasse" listing 33 confirmed aerial victories and a further 24 aircraft destroyed or put out of action in the course of strafing attacks on aerodromes. The listing of aerial victories includes the two Dornier Do

24s and the Junkers Ju 252 which in his book he claimed to have shot down on May 3, and which in the official report are stated to be among those encountered "On Ground & Water and also a Fieseler Fi 156, a light aircraft used for liaison purposes, an unusual antagonist for a combat aircraft that weighed four times as much and flew at four times the spee.
This must be the Fi 156 "parked between two houses on the edge of a large grass field", which he left in flames on March 28, 1945, since it is the only Fi 156 listed on his "Tableau de Chasse". Since it was parked it can hardly be counted as an aerial victory. In any case according to The Big Show, Clostermann was in hospital with a minor wound between March 24 and 30, 1945.

The Big Show is nevertheless a marvellous book: it really does give a pretty authentic picture of the experiences of a fighter pilot—but it does seem that its truth to life is more along the lines of Vincent van Gogh than of Vermeer.

Editor's Comment: In his notes accompanying this article Arnold Harvey says the National Archives, Air 50/22 report dated March 28, 1945, Clostermann's 33 confirmed aerial victories listed in The Big Show (Paris 1948) is generally accepted in France. His official score according to Royal Air Force reckoning is only 14 individual victories in the air, the others being shared or unconfirmed. Most experts would now accept that Marcel Albert who shot down 23 German aircraft, all but one of them while serving with the Normandie-Niemen Regiment on the Eastern Front was the highest scoring French aviator of the war.

Pierre Clostermann was a somewhat controversial figure for the rest of his life but defended his claims strongly. Following an accusation on a social media web site in the UK that he had sided with the Argentinians during the1982 Falklands War and that he wore a decoration to which he was not entitled. he replied:

"… I was a little annoyed by Adam Holden's letter, which you published in SAM Vol 22/3 May 2000. On principle I never usually answer letters of this sort, but in view of my Tempest friends from No 3 Squadron, I feel I owe them an answer.

First the Falklands War. I never wrote to an Argentinean newspaper but sent a letter to a group of Argentinean pilots who were pupils of my son, (then an Armée de l'Air Mirage pilot), at the Mirage Academy in Dijon. I knew them and they even came to my house when they were on leave.

When I read the insults printed in the UK tabloid newspaper, the 'SUN', (greasers, tango dancers etc.), I wanted to tell these 'underdogs' that some people admired their courage. It is an admitted fact today by all - (including the US Air Force and the RAF) - that "the courage of your enemy honours you", and it should not be forgotten. Also, being an MP, with political responsibilities I am entitled to my opinions. They had nothing to do with my long-standing friendship and love for the RAF.

Secondly, I was never married to an 'Argentinean beauty'. I have been married for 53 years to a French girl.

As to my claims, they never changed. They were painted on my Tempest, (The photograph that Pierre sent with his letter, with him in the cockpit of 'Le Grand Charles'~, NV724, JF.E of 3 Sqn., circa July 1945, showing the 23 black crosses representing his accredited confirmed 'kills', and the nine white outline only crosses for 'probables' and 'ground kills'.) and are substantiated by the following citations and letters. My two DFC citations, by Air Marshal Slessor and AOC 83 Group Sir Harry Broadhurst, are enough for me.

"DFC 26/8/44 This officer has displayed outstanding courage and devotion to duty throughout his operational career in the course of which he has destroyed at least 11 enemy aircraft and damaged other military objectives". "Bar 28/5/45 since being awarded the DFC this officer has participated in 70 new operational missions during which he has destroyed a further 12 enemy aircraft. Throughout, Lieutenant Clostermann has displayed outstanding courage and ability, and has proved to be a source of inspiration to all". 23 black crosses and 23 confirmed by my DFC citations. I never personally asked for anything else.

There were I suppose two problems; ONE, I have been in so many Squadrons; Nos 341, 602, 486, 274, 56, and 3, that the forms 540 and 541 'Logs of Claims' were quite spread out. TWO, the French Air Force - as well as the US 8th Fighter Command, considered aircraft 'probables' and destroyed 'on the ground' as victories. This may explain some of the ridiculously inflated

claims we found in the press, about me and many American pilots. Not my fault. I tried to rectify often, but to no avail!

Finally, the statement about the (alleged illegal wearing) DSO. I am a Chevalier of the Legion d'Honneur, which, as a French national, takes precedence over my DFC, and therefore is worn 'in front' of it. It is red with a blue tinge - as is the DSO.

Miniature Daily Mirror…. in khaki!


EIGHTH ARMY NEWS

EIGHTH CAPTURE CASSINO

Battle For Hitler Line Due To Start—

CARRIER PLANES BLITZ SHIPPING

Limited Leave For Indian Army


Special Late Edition

UNION JACK

PEACE

Emperor will issue orders of Allied C.-in-C.

WAR'S LAST DAYS

Leaders in Victory


SUNDAY SEAC

ALLIES RACE FOR BRIDGES OVER THE RHINE

FLEW 800m TO SAVE AIRCREW IN OCEAN

Professor Simon MacKenzie's Vox Populi: British Army Newspapers in the Second World War reveals how journalists in uniform fought to publish what their readers demanded. Simon is a war historian, author and academic based at the University of South Carolina and has a Doctorate from Oxford University.

How the military communicate with soldiers in future conflicts deserves detailed consideration. The ideas that social media has taken over this vital role is flawed. Soldiers, sailors and airmen in the front line will not be allowed personal mobile phones for obvious reasons plus the ever-present danger of cyber warfare and the ability of such devices to be tracked and traced. Face to face briefings will not always be practical, especially in contact with the enemy… so, will some form of field publication be required …or what is the best method? As the following paper reveals the front line will demand news that is neither anodyne nor obviously command-grown propaganda.

Simon Says…. THE NEWSPAPER IN WARTIME BRITAIN has received its fair share of attention from historians over the last three decades. Angus Calder and Paul Addison, for example, have examined the shifting political content of the major national dailies and the disputes which arose between papers such as the *Daily Mirror* and the government over freedom of expression.

Yet while the increasingly radical flavour of most dailies and controversial episodes such as the closure of the communist *Daily Worker* have become well known, little attention has been paid to the style and content of the papers hundreds of thousands of British servicemen were obliged to turn to when their usual reading matter proved impossible to come by - the various newspapers by and for the Army Itself.

At first glance it is easy to understand why this has been the case. Army newspapers were produced under official auspices, and, therefore, presumably only provided information and

views to which the military authorities could not take exception. On closer examination, however, this proves not to be the case at all.

Many of the Army's own papers were in fact quite, and at times, almost as controversial as their better-known civilian counterparts.

This article chronicles the development of the more controversial Army newspapers and explains how and why they became the focus of suspicion in official to note that the first Army newspapers evolved from rather than from above.


CRUSADER
EIGHTH ARMY WEEKLY
MAY 2, 1942
General Ritchie writes to his army
No Eastern Front Leave
WHEN WE WIN

In camps in the more populated areas of the British Isles, civilian papers could either be purchased locally or were provided through the Amy Welfare Directorate. In the more remote parts of Britain and especially overseas, however, papers were often quite unobtainable.

Consequently, some formations began to produce their own news-sheets; with troops in Orkney and Shetland Command, for example, regularly reading the *Orkney Blast*. But it was in the even more isolated Western Desert that Army newspapers came into their own.

The initiative for the first Army newspaper in the western desert came from Warwick Charlton, below right, an ex-journalist of the *Daily Sketch*, working as a public relations officer in Cairo. Bored with his regular work and spurred on by Randolph Churchill - then serving as Officer Commanding Army Publications in Egypt - Charlton managed to get himself posted to the newly formed Eighth Army, where, after commandeering an abandoned mobile printing press, he virtually single-handedly began to produce the first issues of *Eighth Army News* in September 1941.

The paper was initially a crude affair and naturally rather limited in scope, but it gradually gained a loyal readership and in April 1942 - again without formal authorisation — Charlton, and the staff he had managed to collect began to produce a desert weekly, *Crusader*.

The secret of Charlton's success, aside from the lack of other newspapers, was his ability to portray *Eighth Army News* and *Crusader* as being by and for the ordinary soldier. The regimentation and hierarchical nature of Army life tended to accentuate the 'Us' versus 'Them' mentality: the belief that there were those who did the real work and those who merely manipulated.

- What Charlton endeavoured to do was make his readers feel that *Eighth Army News* and *Crusader* were their own papers rather than the propaganda organs of the military authorities.
- Suggestions for improvement were solicited, articles focused on news and issues the troops were interested in, and-perhaps most important of all - letters from soldiers disgruntled over pay and conditions were published. As Charlton wrote in an early *Crusader* editorial, in response to changes requested by the staff in Cairo:

‘This is a desert paper. It originates in the desert and is for the desert rats. Our chief interest is what you want and not what other think you should have.’

Daily Sketch

COMMANDOS WRECK ENEMY BATTERIES AT DIEPPE

THIS WAS NAZI INVASION PORT

Nazis Lose 82 Planes In Greatest Air Fight

'DAILY SKETCH' MILITARY CORRESPONDENT

AS the British, Canadian, American and Fighting French Commandos landed in England last night after their wrecking attack on Dieppe—the first Commando raid in which tanks were landed on Nazi-occupied territory—their achievements were officially announced in Combined Operations H.Q. communique which said:

Re-embarkation of the main forces was completed nine hours after the initial landing.

We have lost some tanks.

Fighting was very fierce, and casualties are likely to have been heavy on both sides.

Our forces destroyed a six-gun battery, an ammunition dump, a radio-detection station, and a flak battery.

Allied aircraft shot down 82 enemy aircraft. Naval vessels shot down a number of others. . . . We also probably destroyed or damaged more than 100 enemy aircraft.

Ninety-five of our aircraft of all commands are missing, but 21 fighter pilots are known to be safe, and it is thought that others will prove to have been rescued.

The communique also said: "Despite the clear statement issued in our first communique at six o'clock this morning and broadcast to the French at 6.45 p.m. about the raid on Dieppe, German propaganda, unable to make other capital out of the farce the operation has taken, is claiming that the raid was an invasion attempt which they have frustrated.

Vital Experience Gained

Sky Filled With Our Planes

RUSSIANS QUIT KRASNODAR: NAVAL BASE PERIL

NAZI PLANES GUN COAST TOWN STREETS

New Middle East Staff Chief

'PROTECTIVE SIRENS' FOR FRANCE

BRUSSELS MUST PAY

TIMELY WORDS OF FAITH

Such an independent approach. needless to say, did not win Charlton many friends among the senior staff but. as he operated on a small scale as far forward as possible, it took time for the authorities in Cairo to grasp what he was doing. By the time they did it was too late — the editor of *Eighth Army News* and *Crusader* had found a virtually unassailable patron.

Those in authority when Charlton set up shop appear to have had no strong feelings cither way about the concept of a soldiers' paper. Lieutenant-General Bernard Montgomery, however, who took command of Eighth Army in August 1942, was convinced that *Eighth Army News* was an essential part of his effort to build up the morale and esprit de corps of the troops.

Consequently, just as opposition to Charlton's style of journalism began to reach serious proportions, Monty gave him his personal authority to print without interference anything which the men wanted - a decision the Army Commander rarely regretted in view of the very favourable publicity he received in both papers.

Even with Montgomery's protection it was probably inevitable that further friction would develop over the content of the desert papers. As yet, however, doubts about the two papers had not gone beyond Eighth Army and the staff in Cairo.

The Prime Minister certainly knew nothing of them when, during the Casablanca Conference in January 1943, he took exception to the way the US Army newspaper *Stars and Stripes* gave extensive coverage to President Roosevelt's pronouncements while virtually ignoring his own. Why. he wanted to know did the British land forces in French North Africa not have a daily?

Taking Churchill's comments as a desire to see a paper produced, Harold Macmillan, then Minister of State in Algiers, set about creating one. An experienced newspaperman was obviously necessary, and Hugh Cudlipp, left, the young and energetic former editor of the *Sunday Pictorial,* was drafted into the job from the western desert where he too had been serving as a public relations officer.

Cudlipp's plan was for the editions of the new paper — entitled *Union Jack* — to be produced by semi-mobile teams as far forward as possible, controlled by himself as editor-in-chief of the British Army Newspaper Unit (BANU).

Commented [Mike Pete1]:

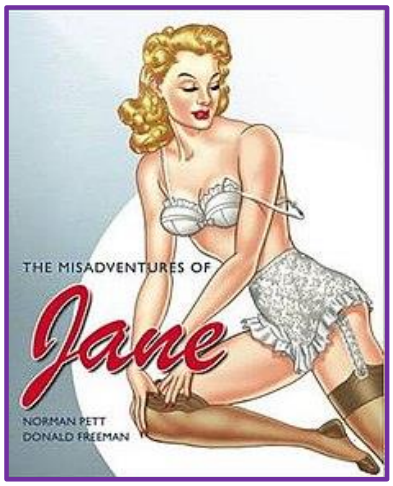
Having fallen foul of authority before, Cudlipp insisted that he alone be responsible for the content and policies of *Union Jack,* choosing his own staff and having direct access to Allied Forces Headquarters (AFHQ). Local commanders would then not be able to interfere with the production of in their areas, and Cudlipp would have the freedom to print what he thought appropriate.

Charlton — a maverick, erratic and mischievous' according to Cudlipp' — saw himself as the champion of the ordinary soldier and, when faced with official action that ran contrary to what he took to be their interests, tended to adopt confrontational tactics (once to the point where faced a court martial for making a row over a staff 'plot' to downplay Montgomery's popularity with the troops.

In contrast. Hugh Cudlipp was more aware of the dangers of such an approach and tried to avoid clashes with AFHQ as far as possible. But while differing somewhat in their style, Charlton and Cudlipp shared a common view of what essentially constituted a soldiers' newspaper. *Union Jack* (or 'Onion Duke', as it rapidly became known), like its western desert counterpart, made a point of printing letters of complaint from soldiers and generally giving the troops what they seemed to want- not least the ever-popular *'Jane'* cartoon.

But what censors' reports indicated the troops liked was not necessarily what senior military figures believed should be given to them. In particular, it was considered unwise to allow letters, editorials and articles to be published which seemed to reflect adversely on the decisions taken by the military authorities or the government.

Grievances should be aired through the proper channels, not in the pages of *Eighth Army News* or *Union Jack*. But with Charlton enjoying the absolute protection of Montgomery (whose single intervention was to suggest that an account of the Patton slapping incident not be printed — advice the editor cheerfully ignored without serious consequences, and the more experienced Cudlipp under the wing of Macmillan, there was little critics could do.



Unaware as yet of the Vox populi approach Army newspapers in the Mediterranean theatre had adopted, the Prime Minister was nevertheless conscious of the potential trouble Army newspapers could cause for the government.

In August 1943. the newly appointed supreme commander in South East Asia, Lord Louis Mountbatten, had proposed that a paper be set up for the troops in Burma under the direction of Frank Owen, a choice to which Churchill took strong exception.

As editor of the *Evening Standard*, Owen had often been critical of the government and was rumoured to have been considering running in a by-election prior to his call-up in March 1942.Both the Secretary of State for War and the Prime Minister wondered if it was wise to allow so outspoken a young man to run an official publication.

But Mountbatten, conscious like Montgomery of the value of publicity, remained adamant that Owen, right, be allowed to accompany him to India. Aided by Lord Beaverbrook (owner of the Evening Standard) and Ronald Adam (Adjutant-General) he was able to get his way. 'I made an absolute issue of the matter', he later informed the Minister of Information, and won.'

Meanwhile, news of what was happening in the existing Army newspapers had begun to filter back to Britain, eventually reaching the eyes and ears of the Prime Minister. On 27 September 1943. the *Evening Standard* reprinted an editorial which had appeared in a recent issue of *Eighth Army News.*

The thrust of the editorial was that the Italians could not by rights expect to be treated as true allies by the soldiers of Eighth Army. It was unrealistic to expect men who had fought in North Africa and Sicily to bow readily to the wishes of local authorities in a country which had only recently been fascist. 'The Italians who sincerely cheer us to-day when we enter a new town also cheered Mussolini.'

News of this rather blunt assessment caused alarm in the Foreign Office, and, alerted by his staff, the Prime Minister wrote to the Secretary of State for War demanding to know who was responsible for *Eighth Army News* and what steps were being taken to ensure that another incident did not occur. 'This editorial', he wrote, 'deals with political matters which seem clearly outside the province of a paper of this kind, and great harm may result from comments of this nature.'

Replying on 12 October, P.J. Grigg explained that he was making enquiries into the episode, but that the only person other than the editor responsible for *Eighth Army News* was Montgomery. Seeking to reassure the Prime Minister, Grigg went on to express his hope that, with the Directorate of Army Welfare now involved (financial difficulties and occasional problems with content having prompted the War Office to assume overall responsibility for Army newspapers in August 10), no further problems would occur — particularly as he himself was overseeing the drafting of a special directive to editors outlining what they should avoid publishing.[17]

This seemed to satisfy the Prime Minister, who took no further action. But almost immediately another problem occurred, this time centring around *Crusader*, On 23 September, the singer Gracie Fields, right in ENSA uniform, had stated in an interview with *Eighth Army News* while on an ENSA tour that she would like to spend more time with the troops. An opportunity for an extension of her tour was provided. but Fields departed for the United States.

Charlton, who had already printed attacks on the 'here today, gone tomorrow' behaviour of some ENSA stars, allowed an open and very critical letter from a soldier to Gracie Fields to be published in the 17 October edition of *Crusader,* which subsequently found its way into the British press.

After reading about the letter. feeling that Gracie Fields was being unjustly treated. Churchill informed the War Office that 'papers published under the aegis of the military authorities should be careful not to indulge in personal attacks and other activities of questionable taste'. On 16 November, Grigg sent a reply to the Prime Minister, defending the decision to publish the letter. His staff had investigated the matter, and it appeared that the criticism 'reflected a point of view widely held and openly expressed throughout the Eighth Army'.

Furthermore, it had to be remembered that both newspapers owe their popularity with the troops to the freedom with which they express the Army's views'. Caution on the part of editors had of course to be exercised, but this would be achieved once guidelines had been set down.

Privately, however, the Secretary of State for War was also concerned and, in addition to asking the Adjutant-General to look into the whole matter, he had also sent a telegram to Algiers outlining the Prime Minister's objection.

Unfortunately, news of this telegram leaked out, and a version appeared on the front page of the *Daily Herald* on 16 November under the heading: 'Attack on Gracie, P.M. intervenes'. This was embarrassing for Churchill. as it seemed to indicate that he was making an exception to his rule that the premier should not involve himself in the affairs of individuals and did nothing to improve his view of Army newspapers. Grigg wrote to Montgomery privately in early December urging him to 'curb the exuberance' Charlton was in the habit of displaying but, in light of the editor's high standing in Monty's eyes, it is unlikely that this had any effect.

The potential for trouble was, in fact. growing as the lines of communication between Britain and the armies overseas improved and Army newspapers - copies of which were now more obtainable at home - continued to reflect the interests, outlook and concerns of the troops. Issues such as pay, mail, leave and demobilization tended to dominate soldiers' thoughts, but there were also wider concerns.

As it became clear that the tide of war had swung decisively in favour of the Allies in early 1943, soldiers became increasingly interested in post-war issues such as housing and social security. The fact that Army newspapers overseas often tended to concentrate on these issues might not have mattered if they had not also mirrored the strong current of cynicism and suspicion of authority prevalent in the ranks.

For what this meant was that the papers, however indirect. tended to cast doubt on the value and verity of official pronouncements and policies - thus making them popular with the troops but distinctly suspect in the eyes of those in authority. For the senior staff of the Army newspapers in the Mediterranean theatre and Burma, this approach came naturally. Charlton was a born rebel and champion of the underdog, more than willing to lock horns with authority when he considered the interests of the citizen-soldier to be under threat. 'I got at everyone', he later recalled proudly.


Sunday Pictorial

L.G.

The People of Britain Want a "Citizens' Army"

MOBILISE US ALL!

Latest War News

France: Grave Position

Hitler Speaks

See page 2

"Sunday Pictorial" sent this full scheme to Churchill last night for his consideration

Owen was a passionate radical. championing the popular front before the war in the columns of the *Evening Standard* and, with Michael Foot and Peter Howard, writing a stinging indictment of the men of Munich under the title Guilty Men in 1940. Cudlipp also had a controversial record, having aligned the *Sunday Pictorial* against appeasement in 1938, championed Churchill when out of power, and subsequently campaigned in editorials for changes in the Prime Minister's cabinet — the latter causing trouble with Churchill and those of his colleagues who considered such behaviour subversive.

Since becoming editor of *Union Jack,* Cudlipp had generally kept out of trouble. But his policy of avoiding confrontation was nullified to an extent by a genuine desire to give the men what they seemed to want and by the related and increasingly widespread belief that his staff was composed entirely of journalists from the *Daily Mirror* (a very popular paper with the troops but heartily disliked and distrusted by the Prime Minister and others for its critical attitude towards the cabinet and support for the 'second front now' campaign)."

Such was not in fact the case at all, but the drafting in of such high-profile Mirror writers as Peter Wilson and above all William Connor, below right (author of the notorious *'Cassandra'* column) tended to confirm critics in their belief that *Union Jack* was of the same stock. Despite the fact that Wilson wrote only on sport and that Connor was kept on a tight rein by Cudlipp, the impression remained that Union Jack was fast becoming little more than 'a miniature Daily Mirror in khaki'.

Connor, it is worth noting, was placed on the BANU staff not by Cudlipp (who thought this enfant terrible might well cause more trouble than he was worth) but by the Adjutant-General, Ronald Adam. Aware that *Daily Mirror* was the most popular civilian paper the troops at home read, Adam hoped that people like Connor, if under the wing of more stable figures such as Cudlipp, would help keep Army newspapers popular with the troops. He knew this might reinforce a cynical and somewhat critical slant. but considered the risk acceptable if morale was sustained. '

Some senior officers, notably Montgomery and Mountbatten, agreed with Adjutant-General's populist approach, but many, such as Major-General W. R.C. Penney (General Officer Commanding, I Division) were very uneasy at the thought of 'troublemakers' such as Connor and Charlton commenting on military and political affairs. In their view, the result could only be 'demoralizing and bad [in) tone'.

For the staff of *Eighth Army News* and *Crusader,* this did not particularly matter while Montgomery was there to protect them. But at the end of 1943 he returned to Britain to take control of the land forces preparing to cross the Channel, handing over command of Eighth Army to Lieutenant-General Oliver Leese.

A far more orthodox figure than his predecessor, Leese, along with members of his staff, shared the view that Army newspapers in Italy were at least potentially subversive, and in the following months banned Connor from Eighth Army's operational zone and came close to sacking Charlton for reproducing captured German maps in *Eighth Army News* which showed no borders for Poland (something which General Anders, commander of II Polish Corps, chose to interpret as a sign that the Allies did not intend to honour their commitments toward his country).

Without Monty there to present the editor's case, General Harold Alexander (Allied Supreme Commander in Italy) also concluded that the cynical slant was getting out of hand. even going so far as to hint in late March 1944 to the Secretary of State for War that he would not be averse to seeing 'a clean sweep of the present editorial staffs' in order to ensure 'a tone and political complexion [in Army newspapers) favourable to the Government'.

In early March 1944, the daughter of Lord Dawson, the conservative former editor of The Times, wrote to the Minister of Information, Brendan Bracken, concerning criticisms her husband had made in letters from Italy to her about *Eighth Army News*. 'In my husband 's experience,' Mrs Bowater wrote, 'the *Eighth Army News* is breeding discontent and doubt for the future.' It habitually devoted much space to the views and actions of the government's critics, most notably during the West by- election when an independent candidate had trounced Lord Hartington.

Such 'Leftish' tendencies might have their place in peacetime, but in her husband's opinion they are dangerously divisive in war, generating discontent at a time when we should be united in the common goal of defeating the enemy. Thinking that the Prime Minister would be interested, Bracken passed the letter on to him. Having received complaints from other quarters about both *Eighth Army News* and *Union Jack*, Churchill wrote to Grigg on 15 March demanding to know (again) who edited the Army newspapers and on whose authority they were issued, believing that the media should do their patriotic utmost to support the war effort - by extension the wishes of his government - he had not been pleased to hear that dissident views were being promoted within Army.

Learning from Grigg that the Commander-in-Chief (C-in-C) bore overall responsibility, the Prime Minister sent a secret signal to Alexander explaining his concern. Confusing the sometimes-vitriolic Connor with the more moderate Cudlipp, Churchill characterized the editor of *Union Jack* as a man who had written in the *Daily Mirror* with 'exceptional malignancy' on the subject of the cabinet. 'It astonishes me', the Prime Minister concluded pointedly, 'that you cannot find decent men to run these Army newspapers who will present news objectively to the fighting lines.'

Union Jack Evening Paper

TUNIS TELEGRAPH

All the Local News

INVASION OF ITALY

British and Canadians Advance under Eisenhower

THE INVASION OF ITALY HAS NOW BEGUN. BRITISH AND CANADIAN FORCES HAVE LANDED ON THE ITALIAN MAINLAND. THIS MAJOR OPERATION COMES AS THE ALLIES ENTER THE FIFTH YEAR OF THE WAR.

GERMANY

HUNGARY

ITALY

TYRRHENIAN SEA

Ukraine Key Town Falls

NEW BERLIN A. A. FLARES

Rodney, Nelson, Pounded Italy

SHORE BATTERIES BLASTED WITH ONE-TON SHELLS

Far East War

Jap planes quit Burma

VERITY JOED A PRISONER OF WAR

Grigg, meanwhile, had become concerned at the pro-increase perspective from which *Union Jack* was covering a debate in the House of Commons over Army pay. Like Churchill, anxious to avoid the creation of a climate of disillusion and disgruntlement among the troops (a pay rise being in the government's view impossible), the generally conservative minded Secretary of State for War on 6 March had sent his own secret signal to General Sir Henry Maitland Wilson (C-in-C, Central Mediterranean Forces) ordering him to keep the editor of *Union Jack* on a tighter rein.

'Cudlipp is an extreme Leftist and though he behaved well while in North Africa, in Italy he seems to show a tendency to use "Union Jack" to stoke up grievances . . . keep your eye on Master Cudlipp.' Both Alexander and Wilson strove to assure their political masters that something was being done. Wilson signalled to Grigg the day he received the Secretary of State's telegram that Cudlipp had been ordered to soft-pedal the pay issue in future. while Alexander informed the Prime Minister that he was 'in entire agreement with you about the tone' and that Charlton had been dismissed as editor of *Eighth Army News*.

This might have been expected to lessen the amount of criticism being levelled at Army newspapers. Lord Camrose, proprietor of the conservative *Morning Post*, could hardly go on complaining as he had done previously to Bracken, Charlton's ''outrageous' habit of 'plugging left-wing politics through an official Army paper', and on I April 1944 Cudlipp had been put in charge of all newspapers in the Mediterranean theatre to counter the •mounting complaints' about *Eighth Army News,* in particular.

But the editor-in-chief still had to contend with the controversial image already generated, the fact that issues written before he took overall control might reach the eyes of those in authority who don not distinguish between editors, and his own desire to take into account the soldiers' cynical, sometimes critical, and often suspicious perspective on news.

Weeks after it appeared on March 30, for example, an editorial criticising Churchill for trying to bulldoze a section of the 1944 Education Bill through parliament after a majority of MPs had expressed serious reservations, met with strong criticism. The Prime Minister. the editorial explained, would win out as he had presented the issue as one of confidence in his leadership, but 'in the handling of a minor domestic problem he is unquestionably forcing the Issue, and the issue happens to be one which the country . . . has made its wishes perfectly clear'. The Prime Minister, the editorial concluded, too often forgot the sovereignty of parliament. Mr Churchill is a magnificent servant, but he is not master. '

AW3, the section of the Welfare Directorate under Lieutenant Colonel A.H.T. Chisolm responsible for Army newspapers, in theory should have been able to enforce the Prime Minister's interpretation of what an Army newspaper ought to be. But with a staff of only 15 officers and men, Chisolm was often unable to keep an eye on what was happening overseas. This left the onus of responsibility squarely on the shoulders of senior commanders in the field who, in the absence of any comprehensive directive from the War Office, were sometimes unsure of what line to take with local editors.

Alexander, for example, complained to Grigg towards the end of March 1944 that, although he had received telegrams from the Prime Minister ordering him to clamp down, the only official pronouncement on which he was able to base his actions was a statement made in the Commons in February by the Secretary of State for War who. when pressed by a liberal-minded MP, had apparently accepted the Idea that Army newspapers were ‘free to say what they like subject to censorship for security'.

Combined with the uncertainty over what exactly was happening in the field. Alexander's complaint led to the dispatch of Major General Lord Burnham (Director of Public Relations) to the Mediterranean theatre in April 1944. his brief being to ascertain the nature and scope of the problem and pass on the finally complete War Office directive on editorial policy - which essentially warned editors off printing anything which could be construed as diminishing the troops' unity of purpose and faith in their leaders and allies.


Daily Mirror

Midnight brought the best news this year

WE'VE TAKEN TUNIS AND BIZERTA IN LIGHTNING DRIVES

The man and his message

Axis forces "shredded" in 36 hours

Dunkirk ships sunk: Navy bars the way

Russians bash Huns in 400-bomber assaults

CLARK GABLE IN BIG RAID

BOURVILLE COOM

5

In his final report, dated 6 May, Burnham wrote that he had found the three Army newspapers published in Italy and North Africa to be 'very much of the "Daily Mirror" school', in which a 'generally unpleasant and cynical slant is given to the actions of authority'. He nevertheless acknowledged that Cudlipp and even Charlton had. despite severe logistical and other problems, created newspapers which were widely read and accepted. Even General Leese accepted the popularity of the papers, opposing the idea of merging the two dailies on the grounds that 'Eighth Army News was very valuable for the promotion of morale'.

Burnham therefore recommended that no sweeping changes in senior BANU personnel should be made. Cudlipp was undoubtedly a rebel, but one with whom it was possible to negotiate. The editor-in-chief, after some argument, had accepted the War Office directive and given an assurance that he could keep more maverick figures such as Connor 'under control'.

The Director of Public Relations was of the opinion, therefore, that with the issue of the editorial directive to Cudlipp's sub-editors all would be well - the papers would retain their popular distinctiveness while conforming to official guidelines.

Adam and Grigg were prepared to accept Burnham's view, but it quickly became evident that the essential problem remained. Cudlipp, while endeavouring to conform to official restrictions. still tried to print what he thought would interest the troops. The conversational editorial and column style similar to that of the *Daily Mirror* was retained, as were the controversial letter sections. 'In my opinion.' the editor-in-chief wrote many years later, it would have been folly to suppress the many letters we were receiving. Cudlipp was not about to give his readers the impression that his papers were now part of the official machine. ('Them') rather than the soldiers' own ('Us').

Controversy thus continued, Cudlipp being officially rebuked by the cabinet for allowing critical letters to be published (a step even the generally orthodox Major-General Brian Robertson, Alexander's chief administration officer, privately thought excessive).

On 5 May 1944, Brendan Bracken wrote to the Prime Minister complaining the anti-government tone of an issue of *Eighth Army News* - probably dating from the Charlton period but nevertheless associated with current staff - which had been passed on to him. It is 'wrong', the Minister of Information wrote, 'that partisan political views should dished up to troops in this way.'

Less than two weeks later, attacks were also made in parliament, with Captain Henry Longhurst (Tory MP for Acton) asking the Secretary of State for War if did not think It 'rather extraordinary' that Cassandra, whose writings in the *Daily Mirror* had been 'subversive to the war effort' in 1941, should be allowed free rein to write for the Army', followed by Austin Hopkinson MP (independent MP for Mossley) who asked if 'Mr Frank Owen [is) still writing in the Far East. the same sort of thing he used to write in the *Sunday Express*.

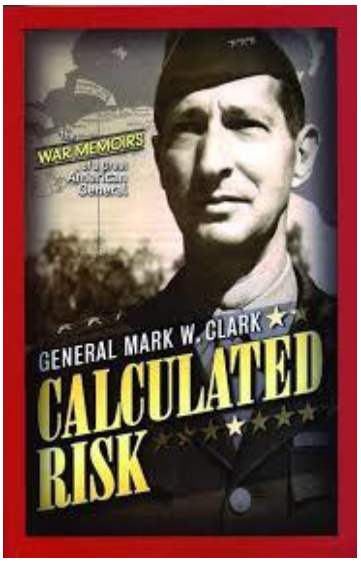
Anxious to avoid giving backbenchers the impression that that the government was not in control, Grigg rather disingenuously stated that no complaints had been received from senior officers on the spot and that, therefore, there was no cause for alarm. This answer did little to satisfy critics, and the following morning Churchill phoned the War Office asking for a full report on Army newspapers. Grigg responded on 17 May by sending Burnham's report to the Prime Minister's Office, along with his own and Adam's endorsement of its conclusions.

Churchill, pictured left with Bernard Bracken, however, was not mollified. In a letter to the Minister of Information dated 22 May, he expressed his opinion that 'Burnham and the rest have simply been whitewashing all these people'.

He was 'totally dissatisfied' and wanted Bracken's opinion, with a view to bringing the matter up in cabinet.

Apparently worried that the Prime Minister might precipitate a crisis between himself and more liberal-minded members of the government, while giving welcome ammunition to left-wing backbenchers in parliament, Bracken's reply was couched in pacific tones. It was true that on occasion Army newspapers had given a 'generally unpleasant and cynical slant' to the actions of authority. But in his opinion - that of an ex-newspaperman - the dangers arising from the *Daily Mirror* style of journalism were exaggerated. 'Few people take their opinion straight from newspapers, and I imagine that hard-bitten troops are no less self-reliant.'

But while Bracken evidently now held that 'a little contentious license . . . helps to keep troops in good heart without in the least compromising their judgement', there were those who still believed otherwise. In June, for example, Cudlipp was severely reprimanded by Robertson for allowing to be printed in *Crusader* - albeit while he was away visiting forward units and thus out of touch with what the main staff were doing - a dispatch on the fall of Rome which implied in rather blunt terms that the success of the American Fifth Army was due mainly to the efforts of Eighth Army.



'I was ordered by Alexander'. Cudlipp later related. 'to Journey to General Clark's forward HQ, and to apologise in person for this gross misrepresentation of military history - i.e. the facts The Prime Minister certainly did not agree with the line his Minister of Information was now taking. 'Is it really a fact that the only journalists who are any good are the malignant scum of the "Dally Mirror"? he angrily demanded in a letter to Bracken on 10 July. 'I think you are underrating the troops by supposing they only like the garbage on which they are being fed.

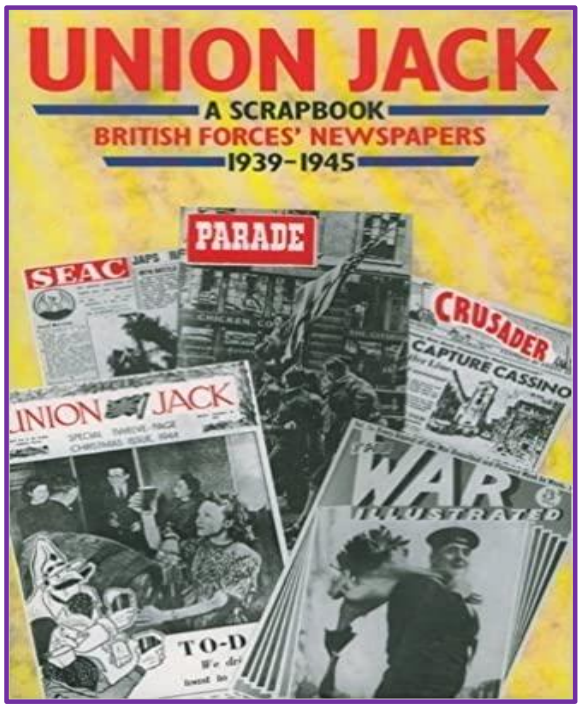
These were strong words. but on the advice of Alexander, the Prime Minister subsequently confined himself to suggesting to the War Office that more 'responsible' journalists be sent out to staff Army newspapers; and, despite two further incidents later in the year involving a security leak and incorrect reporting, Army newspapers were never raised as an issue in cabinet.

Attention now shifted to the Far East, where Frank Owen's *SEAC* (South-East Asia Command), published since January 1944. was coming under fire for the same reasons as its counterparts in Italy — for the cynical and sometimes hostile view of authority it seemed to promote. Pay and repatriation were the matters in which soldiers in Burma seemed particularly interested and Owen made it clear through editorial, articles, and above all the letters he allowed to be printed, that he believed the men had legitimate grievances which should be aired.

As issues of *SEAC* began to filter back to Britain, Owen's approach began to cause concern, with Grigg taking exception to a letter published on 19 July scathingly critical of his stated inability to do more to repatriate troops who for years had served in the Far East.

Mountbatten's Chief of Information and Civil Affairs, Air Marshall Philip Joubert, was forced to apologise in a letter dated 21 August, assuring Grigg that the letter had been considered 'derogatory and should not have been published' Even Ronald Adam, normally a supporter of Army newspapers, thought that Owen (who had not yet received the War Office memorandum on editorial policy) was going too far in publishing material which, when taken as a whole, seemed to indicate a deliberate attempt to denigrate Grigg's record as War Minister.

'To publish matters in an Army newspaper controlled by a Service Command overseas which disparages the efforts of the Secretary of State and by implication invites others to do so, I think, completely antagonistic to all . . . efforts . . . to build up morale in distant theatres of war. Luckily for Owen, his patron, Mountbatten, defended him. In a telegram to the Secretary of State for War at the beginning of October 1944, the Supreme Allied Commander agreed that Owen had acted contrary to War Office policy and stated that he had been 'informed of my displeasure'.



But Mountbatten also sought to stress the positive side of Owen's work. In his defence he wrote 'I must point out that he has had to deal with a delicate morale situation and a widespread sense of grievances, some real and some not. The safety valve which "SEAC" provides has been valuable.'

By the second half of 1944, as it became clear that Germany would soon be defeated and that a General Election might take place shortly afterwards, increasing attention began to be given both at home and abroad to party politics. *While Union Jack, SEAC, Crusader* and *Eighth Army News* all claimed to be non-political, their editors felt it their duty, as Cudlipp put it, to *publish the views of the prominent men in all political parties so that our Service readers may be fully informed of the trends of thought at home' - which in essence meant highlighting the strong reformist current that the experience of war had generated in much of the population.

It was significant that when the papers published statements by MPs of the major parties, the Conservative case was put by Peter Thorneycroft, a member of the Tory Reform Committee, rather than by a more orthodox figure.

Ralph Assheton, Chairman of the Conservative Party, complained personally to Grigg about 'the amount of left-wing propaganda which is appearing in the Service Newspapers' and, despite the War Minister's assurance that editors had been ordered to remain impartial, wrote to Grigg on 24 January 1945 to inform him that 'it has been brought to my notice that there is still a distinct political bias towards the Left in all the newspapers which are produced for the Forces overseas'.

But Grigg, whatever private views he may have held, was not about to allow Army newspapers to become a party-political Issue and, with the aid of the Directorate of Army Welfare. a reply was drafted which repudiated Assheton's claims and implied that even if they were partially true, they were 'only a reflection of what is happening in the newspaper world generally."'

As the war drew to a close, Army newspapers, loosely within the parameters set by the memorandum on editorial policy, continued to present news and opinion in the manner the editorial staff saw fit.

Owen, it is worth noting, having failed to obtain the services of William Connor in 1943, took Warwick Charlton onto his staff after the War Office had refused a request by Montgomery that he be allowed to set up a paper for 21 Army Group in France.

SPECIAL EIGHT-PAGE EDITION

EASTERN ITALY EDITION

UNION JACK

BRITISH FORCES DAILY

GERMANY: THE END

Churchill will make statement 3 p.m.

DICTORS

EISENHOWER TRUMAN CHURCHILL STALIN ALEXANDER

TODAY IS VICTORY DAY.

The Ministry of Information states that it is understood the official announcement will be broadcast by the Prime Minister at 1500 hours (DBST) today in accordance with the arrangements between the Three Great Powers.

In view of this fact, the statement continued, today will be treated as the Victory in Europe Day and will be regarded as a holiday. Tomorrow, Wednesday, May 9, will also be a holiday.

His Majesty the King will broadcast to the peoples of the British Empire and Commonwealth today at 2100 hours (DBST). Parliament will meet at the usual time.

VICTORY

TODAY IS VE DAY

How then are we to assess the impact of more controversial Army newspapers. In terms of keeping up morale, their basic raison d'étre, reports indicated that they were read and thus a success.' The distinctive populist tone of the papers, 'which some had feared would imperil discipline and unity of purpose, only served to assure their acceptance in the ranks.

The ramifications, however, are harder to judge. It is true that the mayor Army newspapers were often implicitly - and sometimes openly - against the status quo, and that in the 1945 General Election the majority of servicemen voted against the long-dominant Conservatives." But it is debatable whether Army newspapers - any more than the Army Bureau of Current Affairs, the BBC, or any other official media organ accused of left-wing political bias - significantly contributed to this outcome.

Charlton, Owen, Cudlipp and Connor were undoubtedly radicals of one sort or another; but perhaps just as significant in terms of how they approached their work and how accepted their papers were, was the fact that they were wartime conscripts in the British Army, sharing the same experience, hopes, suspicions and fears as hundreds of thousands of other young men. If Army newspapers tended toward cynicism, it was because the men who ran them shared and understood the feelings of their readers.

Army newspapers, therefore, can perhaps best be seen as reflecting rather than shaping Army opinion. This, of course. would have made little difference to those like the Prime Minister who thought the papers should seek to promote traditional patriotic attitudes. But Brendan Bracken. more attuned to the mood of the times than Churchill, was surely right in wanting him, when he was considering replacing the main editors with more orthodox figures. that if Army newspapers were turned into 'bureaucratic transcripts', telling the troops what the War Office desired them to know and think. then 'the troops would not read them'.

PsyWar.Org - Whispers of War: The British World War II rumour campaign

THE HUMILIATING defeat of the British Expeditionary Force in France in the summer of 1940 was perhaps Britain's darkest hour of the Second World War. But the defeat was quickly and successfully spun into a heroic retreat after the miraculous evacuation of the greater part of the BEF from the beaches of Dunkirk. Britain was now fighting alone and facing a Nazi invasion. The new government under Churchill's inspiring and resolute leadership brought fresh impetus and resolve to fight to the bitter end.

During a speech to the German Reichstag on 19 July 1940, Hitler gave Britain one last chance to make peace. Sefton Delmer, the future head and mastermind of British black propaganda, was just about to make his debut broadcast to Germany on the BBC when he heard the Führer's "last appeal to reason".

Spontaneously, without governmental approval, Delmer tersely rejected any notion of a compromise peace. "Herr Hitler," Delmer announced, "you have on occasion in the past consulted me as to the mood of the British public. So, permit me to render your Excellency this little service once again tonight.

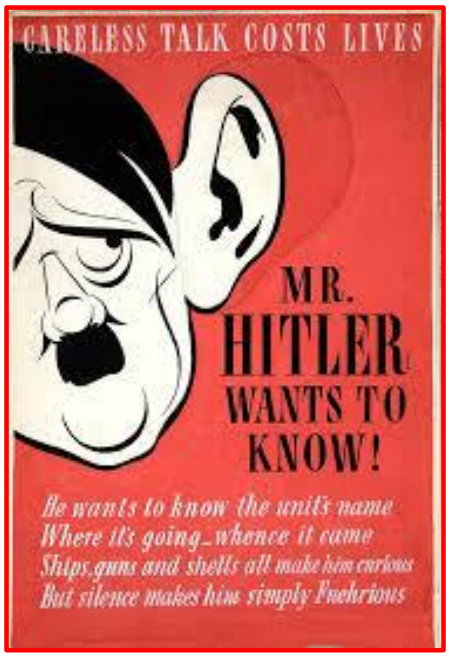
Let me tell you what we here in Britain think of this appeal of yours to what you are pleased to call our reason and common sense. Herr Führer and Reichskanzler, we hurl it right back at you, right in your evil smelling teeth…" The unofficial rejection upset a few Members of Parliament but Delmer's attitude was indicative of the new mindset in the country.

Britain's main priority now was preparation for the expected invasion. All and every means were explored to defend the country. Psychological warfare had an important role to play in exaggerating Britain's defence capabilities and to persuade the German invading force that they were undertaking an impossible and perilous task which would only result in their annihilation. The spreading of "inspired rumours" would be one method utilised to deceive and depress the enemy.

Rumours are a perfect medium for unacknowledgeable clandestine propaganda and deception. They are incredibly hard to trace and near impossible to prove their origin; they can spread like the proverbial wildfire. There is no one in the world who does not relish passing on gossip or a titbit of "inside" information.

Even in today's news-saturated world the populations of the Western democracies, who believe they are more enlightened and less gullible than ever before, still fall for the most ridiculous and often abhorrent conspiracy theories. Just examine those who sincerely believe JFK was assassinated by the CIA or, perhaps, the Mafia, that an Alien flying saucer crashed at Roswell in 1947, that the US moon landing was an elaborate hoax, and even more far-fetched and absurd stories like the CIA orchestrated the 9/11 terrorist attacks on New York and that Princess Diana's death in a car wreck in Paris was not the result of a speeding drunk driver but an MI6 murder plot on Prince Charles' orders!

Are these conspiracy theories just self-generating stories from the imaginative minds of a cynical public or are they propagated or assisted by hostile intelligence services? Who can ever know? But what it does illustrate is that when there is huge public interest in an event with strong emotional appeal and a lack of verifiable facts, the most fanciful stories can flourish and be given credence.



< British home front propaganda poster to prevent the spread of rumours

In the wartime world of 1940 with strictly controlled and curtailed news media, the rumour potentially was a very valuable and potent weapon in influencing public opinion. All warring nations impressed upon their own people not to pass on gossip and hearsay.

Across Britain posters reinforced the message with such famous phrases as "Tittle-tattle lost the battle", "Keep mum, she's not so dumb", and "Careless talk costs lives".

In the summer of 1940, as the remnants of the BEF regrouped in England and began intensive construction of anti-invasion defences, Department EH established the Underground Propaganda Committee (UPC) to formulate, under the tightest secrecy, an anti-invasion whispering campaign.[2] The rumours they generated were codenamed "Sibs" – taken from the Latin word sibilare, meaning to hiss – partly for security reasons and partly for amusement.[3]

Before Dunkirk only a few sibs had been developed and on an entirely ad-hoc basis. The first rumour devised suggested that U-boat losses were much larger than the German government was prepared to admit with only two out of every three boats returning. The rumour was passed by Electra House to Colonel Vivian at Bletchley Park, aka Station X, for dissemination by undisclosed means on 10 December 1939.

This was followed up in the following February with the story that there had been serious mishaps to U-boats undergoing trials at Wilhelmshaven, owing to sabotage in the Deschimag shipyard. The U-boat service would be a major recurrent target for British black propaganda throughout the rest of the war.

As the Battle of Britain got underway the UPC's work became more organised and more urgent. Their brief was to mislead the German General Staff into thinking they have to take precautions against non-existent weapons and to circulate news to the detriment of the morale of the German invasion force.

- **The first anti-invasion rumours were prepared in mid-July, several of which claimed that Britain had new and decisive weapons waiting to be unleashed. One alleged weapon was a high-capacity light machine gun with a rapid rate of fire and special sights to give it great accuracy. It was particularly effective at shooting down dive-bombers, was the claim.**
- **When tested in France in one day it brought down twelve dive-bombers and the next day two more before breakfast. To help the story spread photographs of a modified BREN gun with mocked-up sights would be accidentally released to the press without comment.**

A new deadly mine of terrific power specially designed for destroying several landing-craft at once was another of Britain's imaginary secret weapons. The UPC recommended that more flavour could be given to the story if photographs were released of soldiers lowering disguised manhole covers on ropes into the sea from small boats. This could be continually repeated along the coastline under Luftwaffe aerial observation. If any enemy troops were lucky enough to actually get ashore, then other special mines on the beaches controlled by "secret rays" should finish them off. But if not, the trip wires armed with all sorts of lethal devices would.

The "ultimate rumour" suggested that Britain had an immense number of armoured vehicles capable of charging down transport planes on the ground.

The truth, however, was that there were practically no armoured vehicles of any kind. In the countryside a number of post boxes on the corner of road junctions were sealed off by the Post Office.

A rumour to explain this was circulated. The post boxes have been filled with explosives and would be detonated if German troops were ever to pass through the junction.

To deter parachutists, another sib contended that, overhead telegraph wires included a high-tension cable designed to electrocute any descending paratroopers unlucky enough to get caught up in them. One of the more realistic tales revealed that huge imports of Thompson submachine guns were arriving at British ports and were being despatched rapidly across the country. What these anti-invasion rumours painfully illustrate is how under-equipped and ill prepared for war the British army was in the summer of 1940.

At the Underground Propaganda Committee meeting on Friday, 27 September 1940 probably the most famous and wide-reaching rumour of the war was submitted. The essence of the rumour was that Britain had a secret weapon which could set the sea on fire, engulfing enemy invading barges on their cross-Channel trip. The text of the actual rumour is more explicit:

The British have a new weapon. It is a mine to be dropped from aircraft. In distinction from other mines, however, it does not explode, but spreads a very thin film of highly inflammable and volatile liquid over the surface of the water for an enormous area. The mine's further action then ignites this liquid provoking a terrible flame.

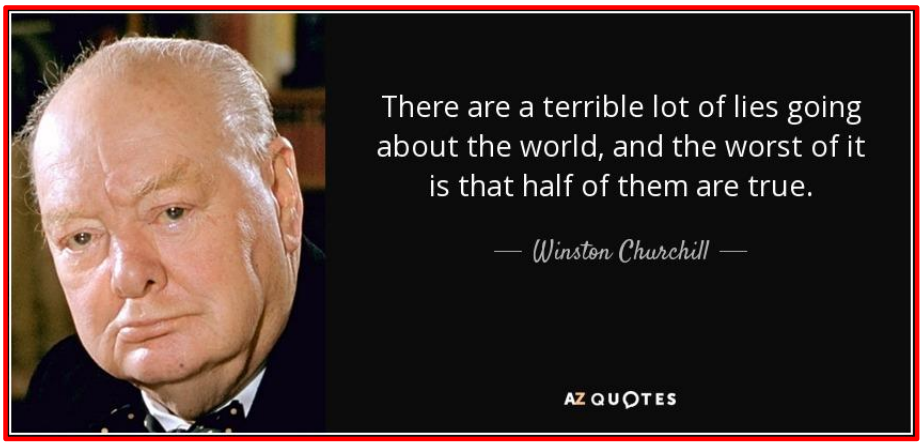
According to John Baker White in his autobiography of his wartime career, The Big Lie, he submitted this rumour to the UPC after a visit to St. Margaret's Bay, near Dover, on the south-east coast of England.[7] He witnessed a demonstration of a genuine anti-invasion weapon installed across the beaches. Pipes had been buried under the beach down to the low water mark and where designed like a wheat field irrigation system but instead of spraying water onto crops their purpose was to shower invading enemy troops with burning gasoline. The demonstration was highly impressive with enormous flames shooting out across the beaches with masses of billowing black acrid smoke.

In reality the under-the-beach flame-thrower may have been a lame duck being easily put out of action with a few mortar rounds. But Baker White noticed the psychological effect upon the under-strength troops defending the area; it certainly boosted their morale. What if there was a weapon capable of actually igniting a wide expanse of sea, he conjectured. There was no such weapon but if the Germans could be persuaded to believe there was, it could have a real adverse effect on the morale of the invasion force and additionally sustain the morale of the defending British troops and civilians on the home front.

Very many of the rumours suggested by the UPC were blocked either by the ISSB or Foreign Office and probably, considering their often-outlandish nature, quite rightly so. But Baker White's "setting the sea on fire" rumour was given the go-ahead albeit with the unenthusiastic comment, "No objection, but we think it a pretty poor effort."

Another aim was to cause friction between the Axis partners. Italy was constantly portrayed as weak and militarily inadequate. One rumour targeted for the British press said, "there is evidence that some of the Italian planes in Greece and Palestine are piloted by Germans. This is because the Italian raids were so ineffective that the Germans complained." Another claimed, "three German transport aircraft carrying troops and supplies for Africa were shot down by Italian flak near Naples when Italian spotters reported them as British planes."

But the main attack of the whispering campaign was the morale of the German Armed Forces and civilians. The corruption of Nazi bosses, the immorality of the SS, collapse of the German economy, the spread of disease from the East, poor diet, fear of air raids, the increasing inferiority of military equipment, the failure of the U-boat war, and the new, unlimited weaponry of the Allies were themes constantly expressed and exaggerated through rumour.



Some of the rumours were of a technical nature, a few brilliant, others amusing, some highly pornographic or ghoulish, and many more were "feeble and often childish" A number of the rumours were actually true, others contained a lie wrapped within the truth, and the rest were downright fabrications. Churchill is reputed to have said, "There are a terrible lot of lies going around the world, and the worst of it is half of them are true", perhaps he was thinking of the sib war?

Typical directives for the UPC included such things as: Give widest publicity to all stories emphasising the horror of the winter campaign in Russia. Themes should be wolves [preying on dead and wounded soldiers], impossibility of treating wounded, disease, intense cold, and fresh armies training for the spring offensive in Eastern Russia…

Increase in Germany the fear of epidemics spreading from the east. Fleck typhus should be main theme with some emphasis on trichina and bronchial pneumonia.

Germans should be urged to boil or bake all pork in order to avoid trichina, Breslau should be hinted as the worst hit centre…

Suggest that the efficiency and morale of the U-boat service is deteriorating rapidly owing to inexperienced crews, new British depth charge, new American detecting device, efficiency of Atlantic Patrol, Communist elements among crews…

Foreign workers should not go to Germany because they are transferred to occupied Poland or blitzed districts, gassed if unfit, sterilised, cheated of their wages, or liable to be treated as hostages. (For all occupied countries but do not use hostage theme for France).[15]

David Garnett, a former member of the Political Warfare Executive and its official historian, described the key to a successful rumour.

The really good sib is a poisoned sweetmeat – it is sugar-coated, and the deadly dose is not immediately evident. It will be remembered that early in the war, the Ark Royal was bombed, and a German Air Force pilot was later decorated for sinking the ship which had, however, only been damaged. Considerably later the Ark Royal was actually sunk. This placed the German Propaganda Ministry in the dilemma of having to repeat its claim or ignore a success.

A perfect example of the ideal poisoned sweetmeat sib was then put out by PWE to the effect that both the first and second claims to have sunk the Ark Royal were true, the explanation being that Britain had broken the Anglo-German Naval convention by building a duplicate of the Ark Royal before the war.

The chocolate offered to the enemy was that he had won two victories and that all his claims were trustworthy in spite of appearances. The poison was the reflection that if there were two Ark Royals there might be two of each of Britain's other capital ships still afloat.

What must be one of the most ridiculous sibs ended up being scathingly criticised by the Daily Mail journalist Wilson Broadbent, he wrote:

I am told that some of the broadcasts designed to convert Germans to the well-meaning intentions of Britain must make even a German laugh. Are the Germans being told of Britain's determination to fight to the end, or are they being soothed by Socialism sent out in the name of the Government?

One perfect example of propaganda for German consumption on another plane… was to this effect: 'The British Government have ordered 26 sharks from the Australian Government for immediate delivery in the English Channel, and woe betide any German soldier who tries to cross that stretch of water'.

< Ralph Murray, one-time member of the Underground Propaganda Committee, and later would become head of the Information Research Department
(Courtesy of the Murray estate)

In January 1941, the UPC comprised of Ralph Murray (later Sir), John Rayner, Leslie Sheridan or his representative, and Sir Hanns Vischer. To bring better organisation for the production of sibs Rayner, a former features editor with the Daily Express, was appointed the rumour rapporteur, or the "Sibster" as he would become known. He was responsible for formulating rumours and obtaining ideas from PWE's regional heads which he then submitted to the Committee for consideration. Once the rumour had been successfully vetted it could then be disseminated.

Initially SIS was the primary disseminator of rumours but because of their lack of available agents operating in occupied Europe they happily passed the responsibility onto Department D/Q of SOE for the duration of the war.

Department D/Q was originally established under Section D. To this day its official title is a state secret and redacted in official documents. Later, however, it was known as the "Press Propaganda Department". Despite the bulk of SOE's surviving archives being released for public inspection the major part of Department D/Q's work remains classified. As well as having an integral role in the development of black propaganda campaigns, it was also responsible for the dissemination of rumours. The rumour-mongering went as far as telling anti-Axis jokes and amusing stories. One joke mocking the Italian's military performance which D/Q arranged to be told in various neutral countries went:

The Italians have invented a new tank with one forward gear and three reverse gears.[22]

But the section's main function was "secret journalism" to manipulate the world's press. The department founded a number of international news agencies. D/Q's main agency was named Britanova and operated in Eastern Europe, the Americas and the Middle East. An early SOE progress report from April 1941 described Britanova's origins and activities:

This is an undertaking formed by the old organisation [Section D of SIS], which has, however, been allowed to continue to function. Ostensibly it is a commercial company operating a news agency similar to, though of course on a very much smaller scale than, Reuters or the Exchange Telegraph, with branches in Budapest, Bucharest, Belgrade, Istanbul, Ankara, Cairo, and Lisbon. In fact, however, the company is controlled by S.O.2. The concern has been the means of getting many thousands of pro-Ally news items into the local newspapers, which would otherwise never have been published in the local press.

When faced with a hostile press in Turkey, the department even created and financed its own newspaper, the French language La Turquie. The department also had a hand in Britain's legendary strategic deception operations.

D/Q was mainly staffed with journalists and originally headed by Colonel Leslie Sheridan. Prior to the war he was the night editor of the Daily Mirror newspaper. The Communist spy and former Times correspondent Kim Philby, left, reflects in his autobiography My Silent War that he received a telephone call from Sheridan inviting him for the interview which led to his employment with SOE.

Philby taught propaganda at an SOE agent training school before joining Section V of SIS. Possibly this explains why Sheridan was the person recruiting him. Sheridan's first wife Doris, a fellow Mirror journalist, spent most of the war in New York working for his Britanova news agency. Sheridan, or "Sherry" to his friends, later moved up the chain of command and his position as head of Department D/Q was taken over by Lionel Hale in July 1942.

Neutral journalists and diplomatic missions in London were fed stories and reports were introduced into the British and American press. UPC rumours regularly appeared in the bulletins of the Overseas News Agency which were then swallowed up willingly by newspapers like the New York Post.

SOE's whispering network in Turkey was a typical example of how the machinery for spreading rumours worked. A Chief Whisperer was appointed who then recruited ten Sub-whisperers, each of whom was chosen because they had especially good contact with certain classes of people from politicians and Army officers to waiters and barbers, for example. Each Sub-whisperer was conscious of the fact that he, or she, was working for SOE, but although they knew the Chief Whisperer, they did not know the identities of any of the other Sub-whisperers. Each Sub-whisperer then recruited ten to twenty unconscious agents to whom they passed on rumours.

In June 1943, the UPC also sibbed that Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, the Desert Fox, had committed suicide. If they had put out the rumour a year later, they would have been right again, when Rommel also took his own life.

As the war progressed new opportunities arose for successful covert anti-Nazi propaganda with the German setbacks in Russia, America's entry into the war, Rommel's defeat in North Africa, the increasing failure of the U-boat blockade, and Italy's surrender. But as time went on the Underground Propaganda Committee's role declined. The UPC was a pale reflection of the work being done by Delmer's clandestine radio stations. Delmer was never a member of the Committee but was on the distribution list for the Committee's weekly minutes, to make sure they were not contradicting his own psychological warfare and to supply extra rumours which could be broadcast via his stations.

Radio was far more effective at circulating rumours than the UPC's mechanism, but the oral rumour had the advantage of being practically untraceable, so allowing greater latitude for spreading more contentious and outlandish stories.

The last recorded meeting of the Committee was on 13 April 1945 and included the sib that, "the gold found by the Allies in the salt mine near Eisenach was not the Reich's bank gold (which has already been deposited abroad) but gold looted by the Party bigwigs."

By the end of the war the UPC had concocted almost 8,000 different rumours, not including those formulated for a short time in New York and others in Cairo. Its work was always controversial and some of the myths it perpetrated persist to this very day, which shows they must have been *successful to a certain extent.*

Whispers of War by Lee Richards: UNDERGROUND PROPAGANDA RUMOUR-MONGERING IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR: A collection of over 1,500 of the most noteworthy, provocative and amusing subversive rumours concocted by the British Government's Underground Propaganda Committee throughout the Second World War ISBN: 0-9542936-4-9

By Arnold Blumberg, Warfare History

BRITISH NAVAL OPERATIONS in the Far East in World War II started badly and went downhill from there. Years of underfunding in defence meant that Britain simply did not have the means to defend its huge empire, and for 18 months prior to the Japanese attack on the American naval base at Pearl Harbour, Hawaii, it had stood alone against Nazi Germany.

The Royal Navy was primarily committed to the Battle of the Atlantic, keeping open the all-important sea lanes upon which the island nation's survival depended. In the Far East, there were only token naval forces available to meet the Japanese attack, and in that part of the world Britannia's claim to rule the ocean waves was immediately exposed for the empty rhetoric it had become.

After December 1941, what remained of the Eastern Fleet retreated into the Indian Ocean for three years. Only in 1945, with Germany on the verge of defeat and the Nazi U-boat threat virtually eliminated, was Britain secure and strong enough to send a fleet back into the Pacific to join the United States in the war against the Japanese Empire.

The new British fleet was the largest single force the Royal Navy had ever assembled, and it arrived in time in theatre to play an important part in the battle for Okinawa and in the preparation for the invasion of Japan. It operated alongside the U.S. Navy, which by then had grown into a force of colossal size and power.

The Royal Navy was, naturally and inevitably, in the position of a valued but very junior partner in the struggle against Japan. Nevertheless, it returned there in time to fight and be there at the finish, which was the outcome the politicians wanted. But, because it was late on the scene and totally overshadowed by the massive U.S. Navy its contributions have been largely forgotten—despite the fact that by VJ Day most of the Royal Navy was in the Pacific, and poised to take part in the final battles against Japan.

When the Royal Navy finally returned to the Pacific Ocean in 1945, it was no mere token force, despite being dwarfed by the American Pacific Fleet. There had been much politicking over the last three years as to where it should operate and how and under whose control.

In September 1944, at the Allied Quebec Conference, Prime Minister Winston Churchill offered to send British forces to take part in the proposed invasion of mainland Japan. Churchill promised that English and Commonwealth forces would move to the Pacific Theatre as soon as they could be spared from the war against Nazi Germany. However, there were some in Washington who were less than enthusiastic about British naval participation in the Pacific Ocean when they learned that the British were coming.

An obsolescent Fairy Swordfish torpedo bomber approaches the HMS Victorious during operations. The ship was hit by three kamikazes during the Okinawa operation but survived.

There was also some dissent in London to the idea of committing major British Empire forces to the Pacific War; it was correctly argued that it would require a massive logistic undertaking. The British minister in charge of transport expressed misgivings as to whether it could even be done.

Ultimately, it was Churchill's political drive that saw the effort through—and he was right. The restoration of British influence in Asia, and especially influence in the shaping of the post-war world, depended on her playing a significant role in the final defeat of Japan. The senior Allied political leaders mostly accepted that fact, and, at the fleet level relations between the American and British combat heads were respectful, even warm.

- **Logistics was the key issue for the Royal Navy regarding conducting any meaningful operations in the Pacific. It would never be completely independent of the America support chain, but the aim was that it should be as self-sustaining as possible, for practical as well as political reasons. This did create some problems. The sensible choice for a fleet base was Sydney, Australia, because of its large dock and repair facilities. But Sydney was about 2,000 miles from Okinawa, so forward naval bases were also required.**

At various times the fleet, now being called Task Force 57 to fit in with the U.S. Navy order of battle, used the Admiralty Islands and the massive U.S. bases at Ulithi Atoll in the Caroline Island chain and Leyte Gulf in the Philippines. This did not solve the supply problem; keeping the force at sea, on station, and in line with the frenetic tempo of American naval operations was a real challenge for the Royal Navy. For a variety of reasons, it never quite made it.

The situation might have improved with the arrival of a second British task force, but that force turned up only in time for the Japanese surrender. The Royal Navy's supply difficulties stemmed in part from the sort of navy it was and partly from the totally inadequate resources it possessed. Historically, it had been designed to operate from fixed bases and, because of the size of the British Empire, it could do that and still have a virtual global reach. This meant that the Royal Navy was a long way behind the Americans in the techniques of replacement and replenishment at sea.

Also, the Pacific Ocean had never been a main operating area for the Royal Navy, so it was not geared or experienced for that sea's vast distances in the way the U.S. Navy was; its vessels did not have the same cruising ranges and could not remain on station as long as the Yanks. So, Task Force 57 started its operational life at a distinct disadvantage. This was compounded by having an inadequate supply fleet.

Its "fleet train" was not only too small, it was also a rather motley collection of vessels cobbled together from a variety of sources. Replenishment at sea often took an embarrassingly long time to complete.

On one occasion, the force had to refuel from two oilers, neither of which had carried out this complex and demanding manoeuvre before. To add insult to injury, one of the oilers was a clapped-out craft capable of making a speed of only seven knots. The British did learn and improve quickly, but their supply systems and procedures never matched the scale, professionalism, and efficiency of their American counterparts, which had had three years of experience supported by almost limitless resources to build up to that level.

Because of the nature of the war it had been fighting in the Atlantic, the Royal Navy also had relatively little experience in large-scale carrier operations against land targets, which were the bread and butter of the U.S. Navy.

For that reason, Task Force 57 practiced against targets in Sumatra when en route to the Pacific to gain experience and at the same time wreck some Japanese oil refineries.

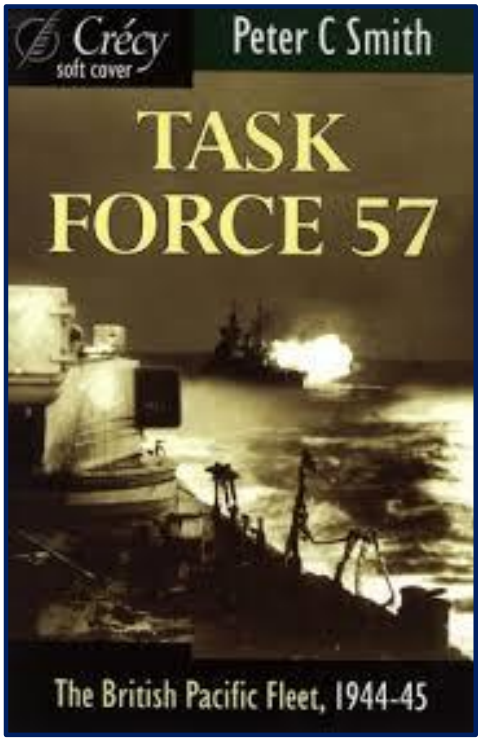
For the Americans, the issue was how best to employ Task Force 57 in the next battle against Japan, which would be for the island of Okinawa. The ideal solution would have been to allow the task force to operate more or less independently from the main American fleet. This was considered the best idea because of the separate logistical setups the two fleets used and because it was desirable for the British to perform a mission considered both creditable and important enough to satisfy British sensitivities and make the most of a valuable naval asset.

An auxiliary ship of Task Force 57 (centre) refuels a British destroyer at sea. The Royal Navy struggled with logistics and resupply over the vast distances of the Pacific.

In this vein, Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, the senior American naval officer in the Pacific, gave Task Force 57 a gracious welcome, signalling, "The British Carrier Task Force and attached units will increase our striking power and demonstrate our unity of purpose against Japan. The U.S. Pacific Fleet welcomes you."

It was certainly not a token contribution. The combat elements of Task Force 57 at that time comprised four fleet carriers embarking 207 combat aircraft, two battleships, five cruisers, and 11 destroyers. There were also six escort aircraft carriers guarding the fleet train and ferrying replacement aircraft.

Commanding this formidable naval armament was Vice Admiral Sir Henry B.H. Rawlings. He and Admiral William F. "Bull" Halsey, at the helm of the American Fifth Fleet and directly in charge of all naval forces at Okinawa, worked well together.



Since the exact command relationship for operations against Japan was a politically sensitive issue, the two senior commanding officers came to an effective agreement early on. Rawlings accepted an offer to put the British fleet close to the main action against the enemy. He had no qualms about taking direction from Halsey, although his orders had to be described as "suggestions."

The main task—or "suggestion"—given to Rawlings by Halsey was to cordon off and isolate the Sakashima Gunto Islands which lie midway between Okinawa and Formosa (modern Taiwan). The operation, dubbed Operation Iceberg I, commenced on March 26, 1945. The two main islands in the group had three airstrips that the Japanese used as staging posts, allowing planes from Formosa to operate over and bring reinforcement to Okinawa.

Neutralizing the island was, therefore, an important mission. Achieving it meant keeping all six airfields out of commission for as long as possible. However, two major problems soon became apparent.

First, the airfields were all defended by strong antiaircraft artillery assets. Second, the Japanese proved adept at repairing damage around the clock to the airfields and getting them operational once more. The pilots of Task Force 57 were also surprised at the enemy's talent for deception. Mock-ups, decoys, and well-camouflaged installations made both effective targeting and battle damage assessment more difficult than anticipated.

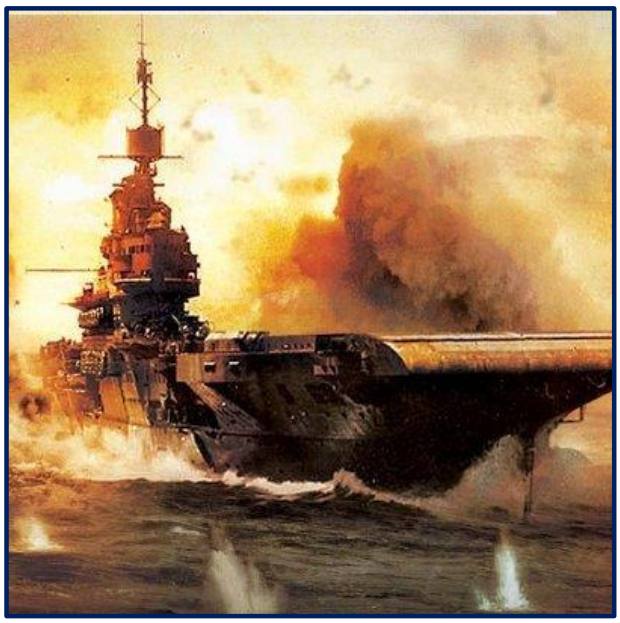
The British had no night-flying capability because there had been insufficient time to train air crews in the skills required, and no "blind-landing" aids were fitted, although all the British carriers had flight-deck lighting. Unworried about night attacks, enemy engineers were able to repair the runways as soon as it grew dark.

The fleet's only counter to this was to use a mixture of fuses, both immediate and delayed action, so that the latter would continue to detonate throughout the night and interfere with the repair work. Unfortunately, this attempt to prevent the timely maintenance of the Japanese airdromes had little effect.

In addition to the regular air raids, for several days the force bombarded the islands without provoking much response from the Japanese. However, that all changed on April 2, 1945, the day after American troops stormed ashore on Okinawa.

Operational routine called for a preliminary fighter sweep over the target area before the bombers went in. The fighter sweep had just taken off when the destroyers on radar picket duty detected an enemy air attack coming in. The British fighters were recalled and directed onto the attackers. The Japanese planes broke formation about 40 miles out and four Japanese bandits were shot down, but several more got through to the carriers.

One passed over the HMS Indomitable, raking the ship's flight deck with machine-gun fire before strafing the upper works of the battleship HMS King George V. The damage was slight, but the next attacker proved to be a dreaded kamikaze.



After a near vertical dive, the suicide aircraft smashed into the aircraft carrier HMS Indefatigable, hitting the base of the ship's command and control island and killing 14 crew members. The Flight Deck Officer, Lt. Cmdr. Pat Chambers, was seriously wounded in this strike. He later reported, "The picture I retain of the scene is quite vivid; the starboard wing of the Japanese plane burning on the island aft of the funnel and a great gap from there to the flight deck where the whole lot had blown up, leaving a hole about eight feet long in the island sickbay. Our kamikaze had a bomb of about 250 pounds on him."

What followed brought the carrier design philosophies of the British and American navies into stark contrast and amazed the U.S. liaison officers who were stationed aboard the Indefatigable. An attack of that nature would normally have put an American carrier out of action. But the Indefatigable was operational again within minutes of being hit by the Japanese plane.

The reason was that all American carriers had wooden flight decks, whereas the British carriers employed armoured flight decks. This meant that Royal Navy carriers, size-for-size, could carry fewer aircraft, but by the end of the Okinawa campaign, although all of Task Forces 57's fleet carriers had been struck by kamikazes, all were still fully operational.

April 2 proved to be a busy day for Task Force 57 as a second kamikaze broke through the protective screen surrounding the fleet. Once again going for a carrier, the Japanese plane dived for HMS Victorious, which was taking evasive action in a hard turn. The kamikaze clipped the flight deck and spun into the sea.

The carrier was undamaged, but apparently its flight deck was littered with body parts of the enemy pilot and pieces of his aircraft. The debris included the dead aviator's briefing notes, which confirmed what all American and British naval leaders in the region had assumed: the British and American carriers were the top priority targets of the Japanese air attacks.

Although that revelation may not have been surprising to the Allies, it was noteworthy that so many of the attackers chose instead, in the heat of the moment, to assault smaller targets, especially Allied destroyers on radar picket duty.

Supply problems came to the fore for the British again on the following day when the force broke off to rendezvous with the fleet train and refuel. This was delayed by bad weather and by what had now become the usual "problems" for the British Pacific Fleet.

After three frustrating days trying to take on fuel, ammunition, and provisions, Admiral Rawlings set course for the combat zone again with some of his vessels only partly refuelled. It was a calculated risk on the admiral's part driven by the need to honour his promise to be back on station by April 6.

During the first day of renewed attacks against Sakashima Gunto, another Japanese aerial counterattack was broken up by the fleet's antiaircraft fire ably supported by combat air patrols; only one plane penetrated the fleet's protective screen.

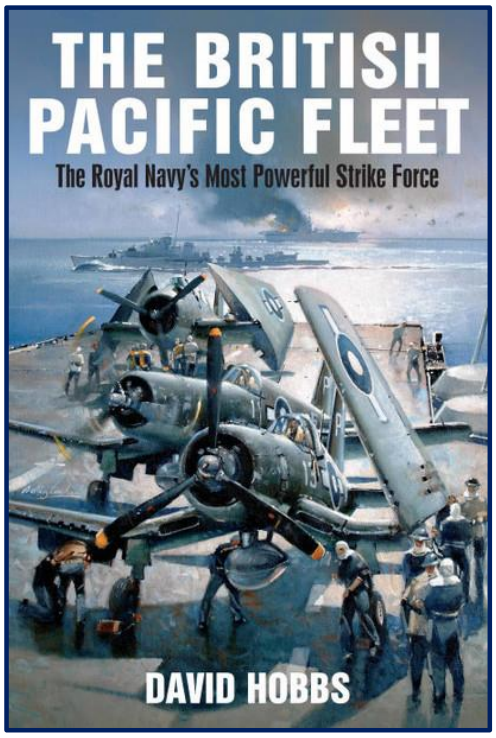
This kamikaze went after the carrier HMS Illustrious; a combination of evasive manoeuvring and antiaircraft fire put the enemy pilot off his aim. One wing of his plane clipped the ship's island before he crashed into the ocean.

Meanwhile, off the coast of Okinawa the U.S. fleet was being pummelled by 700 Japanese aircraft, about half of which were kamikaze attackers, the other half conventional air strikes. Several destroyers were lost, and more than 30 U.S. Navy ships were damaged.

On April 10, 1945, the Royal Navy's mission in the Pacific changed. It was then known that the Japanese were flying directly from Formosa to Okinawa. American land-based aircraft had tried to interdict this air traffic by strafing and bombing the airfields on Formosa with little success. Task Force 57 was then asked to tackle the job, and it started operations against Formosa on April 12.

Two busy days of combat followed with British planes strafing and bombing anything they saw on the island before the force was ordered back to Sakashima Gunto. After a month of activity there, Task Force 57 sailed to Leyte to take on needed stores.

When the British Pacific Fleet departed Sakashima Gunto on April 20, 1945, it had spent 12 days in action out of the 26 that it had spent in the combat zone and had flown a total of 2,444 aircraft sorties. Of these, 1,961 were by fighters and 483 by Grumman Avenger bombers. Aircraft had dropped 412 tons of bombs on the airfields and fired 315 rockets at a variety of targets.



The final total of enemy aircraft destroyed or damaged in Iceberg I was 134, including those due to air-to-air combat and those destroyed on the ground. More than 100 enemy sampans and other small coastal boats were sunk or critically damaged. Against this loss to the Japanese, the fleet suffered 68 planes lost and 34 aircrew killed.

The verdict on Task Force 57's actions so far was generally considered "not bad." The British were on a steep learning curve, getting used to a type of operation for which they were not properly equipped or trained. It had to refuel and resupply more frequently than the U.S. Navy and were still having serious problems with replenishment at sea.

Another serious issue was the Royal Navy's main strike fighter aircraft: the Supermarine Mk XV Seafire, the maritime version of the Spitfire, it was not performing well. Mechanical problems and a lack of spare parts for repairs prevented them from getting into the air to perform combat missions.

Further, the Seafire's long nose, which blocked the pilot's vision, made strafing, bombing runs, and carrier landings a challenge. Most of the other airplane types Task Force 57 was operating were American models: the Vought F4U-1D Corsair and Grumman F6F-5 Hellcat fighters and the Grumman TBF-1 Avenger Torpedo Bomber. These were reliable, simple, sturdy, and effective machines.

Nevertheless, Admiral Nimitz fiercely resisted a proposal offered by Washington to have Task Force 57 move to support the Australian landings in Borneo.

He wanted to keep it where the main action was since the British armoured carriers had clearly and repeatedly shown their worth.

As a result, Task Force 57 returned to Sakashima Gunto on May 4 to resume operations against enemy airfields and installations there; this new mission was called Operation Iceberg II. The kamikazes were waiting for them. Whether by accident or design, a Japanese aerial group managed to penetrate the defensive ring surrounding the British fleet when the task force's battleships, with their heavy antiaircraft artillery batteries, were away from the rest of the fleet on a coastal bombardment mission.

Upon the approach of the enemy, the fleet went to "Flash Red" alert just as a kamikaze hit the fight deck of the carrier HMS Formidable, causing an explosion that penetrated the ship's armoured deck and tore through a number of parked airplanes and putting the vessel's radar out of action. Eight men were killed, and 47 others were wounded in the blast, and because it had blown a gaping hole in the deck the explosion sent shrapnel and metal splinters into several internal ship compartments, including the central boiler room.

Within three minutes, two more suicide planes came in, heading for the nearby Indomitable. One attacker was brought down by gunfire less than 30 yards from the carrier, but the other plane held its course through an awesome barrage of antiaircraft shot and shell. Fortunately, its drive was too shallow, and it skidded across the flight deck and over the other side of the ship before exploding. The damage was slight.

It took 90 minutes to bring the fires on the Formidable under control, but within six hours she was operating her aircraft again normally, the hole in her flight deck having been filled with steel plate and cement. An impact of that force and nature would have put an American carrier out of action for months and would have caused absolute carnage below decks.

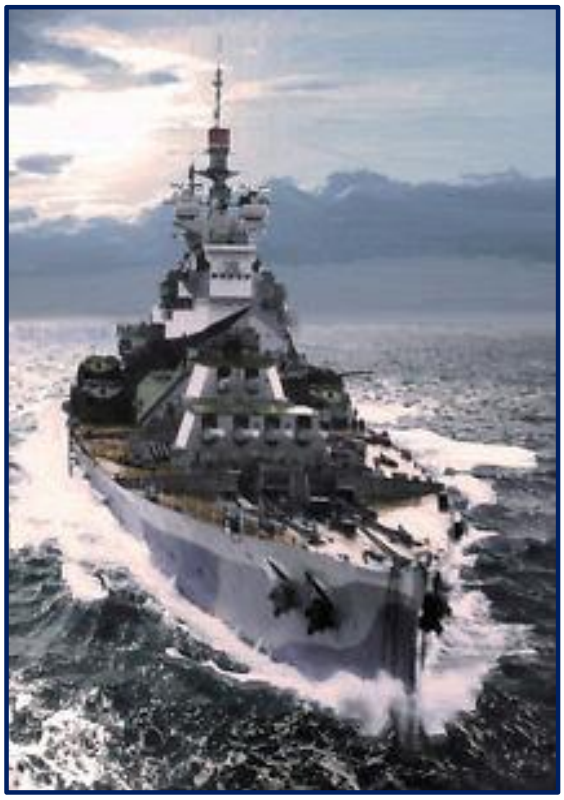
On May 9, after a break to refuel and because of adverse weather, Task Force 57 was back in action and facing the kamikaze once again. This time the Victorious was hit. The attacker kept coming, even though his airplane was disintegrating around him as a result of repeated and devastating strikes from antiaircraft weapons. The pilot managed to strike the carrier's forward elevator, holing the flight deck and putting the elevator motors out of action, as well as destroying the catapult and gun turret. Firefighters were hard at work containing the resulting blaze when a few minutes later a second kamikaze appeared.

This one was much less effective than the first attack; deflected by antiaircraft fire, the single kamikaze hit the deck at such a shallow angle it skidded over the side of the vessel after smashing through some parked planes.

Soon two more kamikazes dived on the Formidable. One was cut to pieces by flak from the battleship HMS Howe. However, the second marauder passed through the barrage even as parts of the burning plane were falling into the sea.

The Japanese aviator managed somehow to steer his dying machine into the deck of the carrier and into a group of parked planes. Although the resulting explosion did not penetrate the ship's flight deck, it did manage to incinerate 25 British fighters and bombers.

The only casualty of this enemy attack was a petty officer gunner. He stayed at his post even as the enemy flew directly at him. As the plane passed over the sailor, one of its wheels decapitated him a split second before the aircraft impacted the ship's deck.



Both the Formidable and Victorious were back in action the same day as the attack, albeit at a somewhat reduced rate of effectiveness.

Task Force 57 completed Operation Iceberg II on May 26 in support of the American capture of Okinawa. During the operation, the British planes had flown 4,893 sorties, of which 2,073 had been strikes, 202 had been forced to return to their carriers before their mission was completed, and the rest were fighting combat air patrol sorties.

< HMS Howe

A further 470 flights had been flown by combat air patrols and carrier replenishment sorties. Aircraft had dropped 958 tons of bombs and fired 950 rockets. British aircraft losses amounted to 160 from all causes, including 26 planes shot down and 72 more damaged by operating accidents.

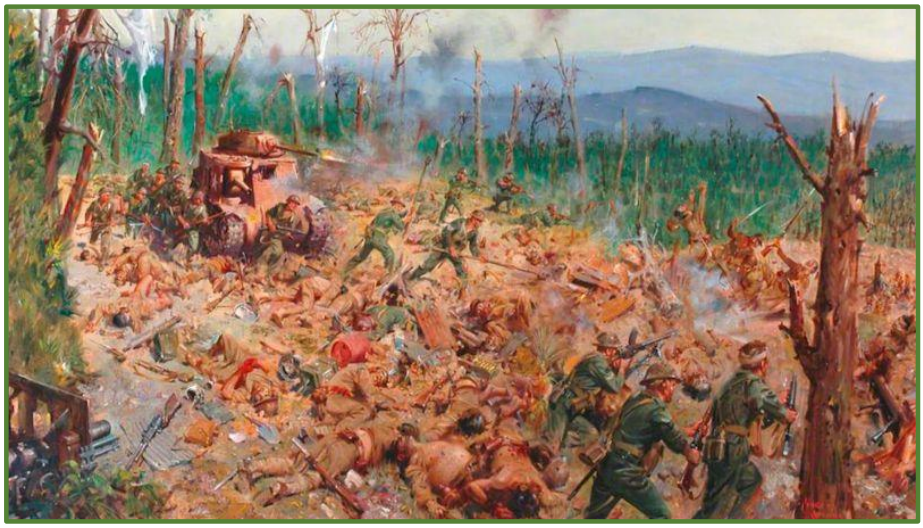
Royal Navy aircrew losses were 41 killed and missing, with another 44 men killed and 83 wounded in various ship companies. Finally, in late May 1945, Task Force 57 broke off after 62 days at sea, returning to base to refit, resupply, and repair battle damage. Its first major missions of the Pacific War were over.

There would be more action to come, including Operation Inmate (June 14-16), involving air attacks on the main Japanese naval bastion at Truk in the western Caroline Islands, as well as raids on Japan itself in the run up to the planned invasion.

The British raids—both by air and shore bombardment—continued right up to August 15, 1945, and the Japanese surrender to the Allies; the second British task force, built around another four fleet carriers and one battleship squadron, arrived too late to take part in the fighting. By VJ Day, the Royal Navy Pacific Fleet had 80 principal warships (including nine large and nine escort aircraft carriers), 30 smaller combat vessels, and 29 submarines.

Had the invasion of the Japanese home islands been carried out by the Allied powers, there can be little doubt that this fleet would have played a significant role in any naval operations. Task Force 57's wartime activities sometimes had touches of farce on the logistical side of the equation since the Royal Navy clearly was not designed to operate for long periods of time or distances from its established bases—a vital prerequisite for any war-making capacity in the Pacific Ocean. It had also been trained and geared for the very different forms of warfare that prevailed in the Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean Sea.

Regardless, it acquitted itself well during the last year of the war in the Pacific. Whether its relatively small contribution in that theatre gave Britain a position of greater honour at the end of the conflict in Asia is a moot point. The fact remains that the officers and sailors of Task Force 57 did exactly what was asked of them. The US Navy is given credit for winning the war in the Pacific, but their British ally was there – and was with them at the end.



Kohima: Why have we forgotten one of WWII's most important battles?

By Lydia Walker, The Washington Post

…. D-Day was one of the many smaller wars that made up World War II, yet the battles, images and people of that invasion have become central to our memory of the war. By contrast, little such fanfare will mark the 75th anniversary of the Battle of Kohima, even though its landscape, too, is saturated in history.

The bloody three-month long siege of Kohima took place in the Himalayan foothills of Nagaland, in northeast India, the region which hangs over what is now Bangladesh and borders what is now Myanmar. Though the allied victory against the Japanese was a major turning point on par with the Battle of Stalingrad, we won't see world leaders travel to Kohima for its remembrance. This battle has been comparatively forgotten because of where it occurred and who fought and lived there.

But it shouldn't be. Instead, we must remember how the British Indian army was aided by American air and rail support, as well as intelligence provided by the local Naga population, to achieve Allied victory. Such international recognition of the battle is vital because it reminds us that World War II was truly global, with pivotal conflicts outside of the European and Pacific theatres. Recalling the battle of Kohima also forces us to confront the legacy of colonialism, and consider how to memorialize a war that was fought by empires in places that were colonies, such as northeast India, places where the narrative of good vs. evil that permeates so much of our remembrance of World War II is far blurrier.

After the Japanese captured Rangoon, now Yangon, in March 1942, they advanced farther into British Burma, cutting off Allied supply lines to China. The defeated British, under Gen. William Slim, and Americans, under Gen. Joseph Stillwell, retreated into India in May. In the process, Indians living in Burma who could not afford to leave by boat walked nearly 1,000 miles to the northeast, through Naga territories. Their slow, difficult and unprovisioned passage meant that they often needed aid from Naga villagers.

The defeated British strengthened, reformed and retrained its army in northeast India. The Americans returned their attention to China, using long-range penetration units in Burma to reopen supply routes.

Victorious in Burma but frustrated by Allied aerial and land supply routes into China, the Japanese decided to brave the difficult jungle and mountainous terrain and invade India.

Catching the British off-guard, the Japanese army laid siege to the Naga capital of Kohima and its surrounding villages in early April 1944. The siege dragged on until June.

From a Naga perspective, the battle involved villages captured by the Japanese and then retaken by the British, forced and voluntary civilian population removals and work as laborers, interpreters and partisan fighters.

Eventually, with superior air power and fierce fighting, the Allied forces drove the Japanese out in late June. At the same time, the Japanese attacked and laid siege to Imphal, in neighbouring Manipur, a two-day march south of Kohima, where the Allies also defeated the Japanese and forced them to retreat.

- In recent years, the battles of Kohima and Imphal were voted Britain's greatest battle by the National War Museum, beating out Waterloo and the Normandy landings. However, despite specialists recognizing the critical nature of these conflicts, Kohima does not loom large in histories of World War II.

Instead, it has been omitted from much of public memory, rarely taught in schools around the globe. This lack of recognition mirrors the international perceptions of the region in which it occurred. The British colonial army that fought there, officially the 14th Army, was nicknamed the "Forgotten Army," and the China-Burma-India theatre is often called a "forgotten war."

This lack of recognition in the West has been intentional. After all, Kohima was an imperial victory. It was an uncomfortable reminder that Britain's army in Asia was a colonial army and that the British were fighting in India because it was a colony.

Independent India has also forgotten the battle. This, too, has been intentional, because India has an ambivalent relationship with World War II, which split its independence movement: some sat it out (often in prison) while others allied with the Japanese. In addition, the fact that the British colonial army was a multi-ethnic army, including Indian, Nepali and African soldiers, did not fit easily alongside India's own national identity building project after independence in 1947.

There is a concerted effort in Nagaland today to memorialize World War II and to celebrate the efforts of Nagas who supported the British. The Kohima War Cemetery, physically located on the British district commissioner's tennis court, where some of the fiercest fighting took place, functions as a pilgrimage site for British veterans' groups. Veterans and their descendants travel to Nagaland on the anniversary of the Battle of Kohima and meet with local dignitaries.

These ceremonies reveal the continued presence of past imperial connections that link the Naga Hills to memories of global war under the shadow of former empire. But the connections happen at the personal level and do not reflect relationships between governments or broader international acknowledgment.

Interestingly, while the West continues to forget the Battle of Kohima, many Japanese are drawn to Northeast India to see where their grandfathers died. There is also a new Japanese war memorial in Imphal.

Commemorations allow for a celebration of sacrifice that transcends and elides past hatreds, sometimes in the service of reconciliation, sometimes to rewrite uncomfortable pasts.

As the debates that surround what parts of the American Civil War we memorialize show, memory and its neglect are political acts. Remembering the Battle of Kohima — the American airmen; the Indian, Nepali and African soldiers; the British officers; the Naga partisans and the Japanese with their Asian anti-colonial nationalist allies — memorializes not only their lives and deaths, but also the tangle of world war, decolonization and ongoing struggles for recognition.

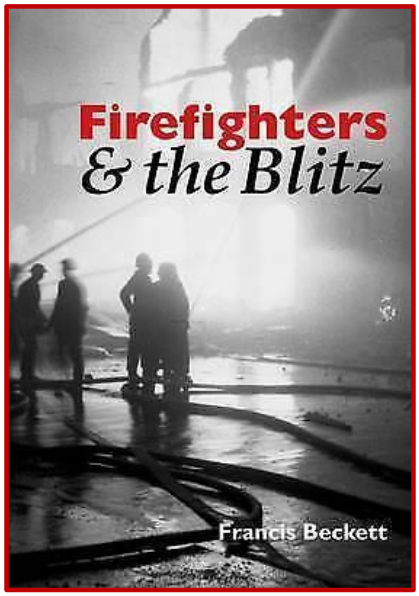
To remember Kohima, we must acknowledge not only cooperation between multi-ethnic armies and allies which brought victory, but also that this victory was an imperial one. If this legacy is too painful or awkward to acknowledge and interrogate, we cannot accurately commemorate those who fought and died at Kohima or understand the global scale and impact of World War II.

Remembering the blitz: was it an avoidable tragedy?

Francis Beckett's book, Firefighters and the Blitz, is published by Merlin. The attached review appeared in The Guardian.

JUST AFTER 4.30pm on Saturday, 7 September 1940, 364 German bombers and 515 fighters flew across the Channel and followed the Thames estuary to London, using the fires caused by their bombs as markers. They came for a further 75 consecutive nights (except for one that was too cloudy for the bombers to operate). The blitz would last until 16 May 1941 – when most of the Luftwaffe was reassigned to the invasion of Russia.

In 1940, 13,000 people were killed in London alone. Attacks on other major cities throughout the UK began on 15 October 1940, with the centre of Coventry being destroyed on the night of 14/15 November.



The idea was to force Britain to seek peace: German bombs would destroy its industry, transport and communications links around major cities, and so terrify the civilian population that they would force their government to sue for peace. Hitler knew it would take time, but London's four million inhabitants, its packed and inflammable warehouses, its maze of narrow streets and teeming slums, were ripe for terror tactics.

And terror there certainly was. Men old enough to have fought in the first world war said the western front had offered nothing worse than they saw on the first night of the blitz. The next day, most of London's firefighters were convinced they would not live for more than another week.

Acts of bravery abounded among the terrible onslaught; yet, when post-war prime minister Clement Attlee would later demand sacrifice from his people, he appealed to "the Dunkirk spirit", not "the blitz spirit" – perhaps because, if you were at Dunkirk, you were part of a self-electing group doing brave things.

Everyone was in on the blitz: the brave and the not-so-brave, the honest and the dishonest, and those, like most of us, who are a little of both. Maybe this explains why it has taken so long for Britain to mark properly the events of 70 years ago.

We think of it as a time when cheerful cockneys defied the Nazi menace; and that's not wrong, but it is a small part of the story. People knew someone had blundered. Britain had had plenty of time to prepare: The Home Office had been thinking about mass bombing since 1933, and in 1937 German bombers supporting Franco in the Spanish civil war destroyed the town of Guernica and killed 2,000 citizens. Deep shelters had been built in Barcelona, which proved very successful, and there was a move to build them in London, but it was never done.

Families were given Anderson shelters (named after the home secretary, Sir John Anderson) instead. This, as the author Stephen Spender wrote in 1945 in Citizens in War, "overlooked the fact that in the majority of homes there was no room for an Anderson shelter". So, Londoners forced the authorities to permit the use of tube stations as shelters.

Britain was ill-equipped to defend its cities. The underpowered searchlights were usually ineffective against aircraft at altitudes above 12,000ft. During the first raid, only 92 anti-aircraft guns were available to defend London, though within five days there were twice as many, with orders to fire at will. This boosted civilian morale and encouraged bomber crews to drop before they were over their target, though it had little physical effect.

The blitz did not provide a respite from human greed, bureaucratic idiocy and official meanness. "Don't talk to me about everyone pulling together," says David Clark, who was a little boy when his home in Ilford suffered a direct hit. The family was safe in its Anderson shelter, "but the neighbours and the ARP [Air Raid Precautions wardens] assumed we were dead and looted the house. They didn't get the fish knives, or the port decanter and I still have those."

Such stories do not form part of our collective memory of the war. As Angus Calder writes in The Myth of the Blitz, "Successful after-raid looters have not written their memoirs. Cowardly people in local government have not advertised their shame." It is true that brave cockneys shouted to Winston Churchill, "We can take it!" – but the full story of that day, as told in Juliet Gardiner's fine new book The Blitz, is one of dreadful and avoidable tragedy.

A bomb crashed through a ventilation shaft into a shelter containing more than 1,000 people. Churchill visited the scene while parents were still turning over their dead children: "It was good of you to come, Winnie. We thought you'd come. We can take it. Give it back." An old woman said: "You see, he really cares, he's crying."

About the only thing the government had got right was the creation in March 1938 of the Auxiliary Fire Service (AFS), which saw 28,000 auxiliary full- and part-time firefighters recruited for the London Fire Brigade alone. But even the AFS might easily have failed. Professional firefighters resented it, while AFS people grumbled that they were paid less, and their conditions of service were inferior.

The situation was saved by an alliance between London Fire Brigade chief Major Frank Jackson and the left-wing leader of the Fire Brigades Union, John Horner, who collaborated in persuading regular firefighters to accept the AFS as equals. Horner later wrote of "the complete lack of preparedness which left men isolated for hours without food or drink, which condemned men who had been wet through for days to return to their stations and turn out again, still in wet clothes".

Tens of thousands of civilians were forced to sleep far from their homes – in parked cars, taxis and buses; in churches and barns; even out in the open, on Hampstead Heath or Greenwich Park – and walked, cycled or took buses into work every day (it was called "trekking"). But once again, the way some of these homeless casualties of the blitz were received punctures the idea of everyone being "in it together".

Baldock in Hertfordshire, for example, was known to be unwelcoming, while Windsor would not accept "Jews or children". The prejudice of the burghers of Windsor was echoed both lower down and higher up in the social scale: the military engineered the dismissal of the Jewish secretary of state for war, Leslie Hore-Belisha, on thinly disguised antisemitic grounds.

In 1941, RAF Bomber Command asked the fire chiefs: "What change of tactics by the Luftwaffe would cause you most concern?" Firefighters said the concentration of a heavy attack into a very short space of time could swamp fire service resources. And so, when 1,000 RAF bombers attacked Cologne in May 1942, 1,500 tonnes of high explosive were dropped on the city in the space of an hour and a half, and fire services were overwhelmed. The allies won the war partly because we ran a more effective blitz than Hitler.

Mystery of a 'Disgraced' War Reporter

By Don North, from the Consortium News Archive: The saying goes: "truth is the first casualty of war." But it's also true that war-time truth-tellers often end up as "collateral damage." A book, Inappropriate Conduct, tells the story of a World War II correspondent whose career was crushed by the intrigue he uncovered, as Don North reported in 2010.

WAR CHANGES and often harms not only its combatants but its eyewitnesses, including the war correspondents with their unique job of getting as close as possible to a conflict, reporting what they see, and somehow surviving to tell about it.

They risk injury and death while also struggling against those who would censor their truth. It is often a frustrating profession and one that can destroy its best and bravest, which brings us to the tragic story of Paul Morton, a World War II correspondent for the Toronto Star.

By 1944, Morton had covered the war in Italy for a year, mostly by interviewing soldiers and Italian civilians caught between Allied forces and the German Army.

On June 4 of that year, he finally landed a big story: he was in Rome the day it fell to the Allies, but by the time his stories reached Toronto, they were relegated to the back pages because the Allies had landed at Normandy on June 6.

With the invasion of Normandy trumping his story of Rome falling and with the end of the war in Europe now in sight Morton was despondent that he had seen no serious combat. He would be a war correspondent who hadn't really witnessed the war. So, in July, when the British Special Operations Executive (SOE) asked him to take on a dangerous assignment, parachuting behind Nazi lines and covering the Partisan war in Northern Italy, he jumped at the chance.

Morton's self-respect demanded that he share the risk of war, rather than continue living in the relative comfort of Rome. Plus, the Partisan fighting was a virtually uncovered theatre of the war, creating the possibility of a major journalistic scoop.

But the offer also put the journalist in the curious position of collaborating with a secret spy agency, the SOE, which was born in July 1940 on orders from Winston Churchill who was determined to undermine Hitler's Third Reich from within by training and abetting guerrilla groups. In Italy, the SOE helped train and supply the Italian Partisans in order to sabotage the German occupation army.

A Shadow War

Given the remoteness of this shadow war and its clandestine nature there had been little information in the international press about the Italian Partisans' fight. So, Churchill, a former war correspondent himself, decided it was time to change that by publicizing Partisan exploits in the summer of 1944.

At the time, the Partisans were aiding the Allied war effort by tying down at least six German divisions. The British Eighth Army headquarters also felt that news stories about the aggressiveness of the northern Italian Partisans might inspire their less supportive southern countrymen to help Allied efforts more vigorously against the Germans.

Morton, who spoke fluent Italian, endured two weeks of intensive military training and qualified for a parachute jump. But the risks were obvious. Besides the possibility of capture or death at the hands of the Germans, there were doubts about the reliability of the SOE officers who were regarded with suspicion by regular Allied forces.

The SOE did not play by "Marquis of Queensbury rules," and one friend of Morton's had been warned, "Don't cry if you are let down by the SOE. These people have a very bad reputation for doing that if it suits them."

From the beginning of training, Morton felt British senior officers of SOE were not in favour of Churchill's orders. In his memoir written 20 years after the war, Morton noted:

"In a number of subtle and devious ways, they let me know they were against my mission. And why not? Why should they want a civilian newspaper reporter of all things, peering into the clandestine war? Then why pick a Canadian for such a mission?

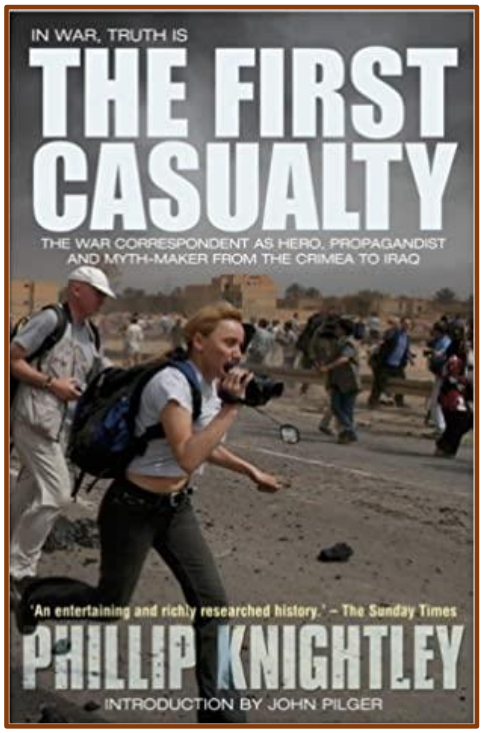
"I believe it was to confound Mr. Churchill. However, the British are a fun-loving people. I think they appreciated the absurdity of our position. They felt I was an intruder and a bounder. But I think they knew I knew what they thought, which was to half forgive me. In any case we got along."

Dangerous Assignment

Only two journalists are known to have been embedded into the secret world of the SOE or its American counterpart, the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) during World War II.

Joe Morton of The Associated Press, no relation to Paul, accompanied an OSS mission in Slovenia to rescue downed American aircrews. He was captured and executed in a German concentration camp.

Germans saw little difference between Allied spies and any reporters traveling with them and with some reason. The struggle against Germany and Japan in World War II seemed as close to a worldwide crusade against evil as any conflict ever fought, and that view strained the journalistic ideals of objectivity and balance.



In The First Casualty, a seminal work on war reporting, Philip Knightly wrote: "It remains hard to reach any conclusion other than that the [Second World] war could have been better reported. The main bar to this was the correspondent's excusable identification with the cause and his less excusable incorporation into the military machine."

Further guaranteeing that war correspondents didn't undermine the war effort by disclosing inconvenient truth, strict censorship was in effect in the war zones. And, by traveling with an intelligence unit, Paul Morton was especially expected to be part of the Allied propaganda team.

Following his training, Morton was given a weapon and thoroughly incorporated into the military machine. He would not only report about the Partisans war but to stay alive he might have to fight as well, pursued by German army units that vastly outnumbered the little guerrilla bands.

Inappropriate Conduct

The night before his drop behind Nazi lines, Morton met a few of his British commando instructors in the Rome officers' mess for a farewell drink. The conversation turned to how to defend yourself with a .45 Beretta sidearm. Goaded by his commando friends and well into his cups on Rye whiskey, Morton demonstrated his aim by firing a couple of rounds at bottles on the bar. He was immediately thrown out of the mess. A few hours later, Morton took off on his mission to be parachuted into Italy. He knew he faced a 50 percent chance of ending either dead or in a German concentration camp.

Morton was accompanied by Captain Geoffrey Long, a South African artist specializing in combat drawings, and Captain Michael Lees, an SOE escort officer.

As the Halifax bomber carrying them approached the drop zone 200 miles inside enemy lines, they looked for their target, which was to be marked by a signal fire set by Partisans awaiting their arrival. However, instead of one signal fire, they spotted two in the darkness below. They made their choice, picking one with a flashing light. The three men dropped through the floor hatch at an altitude of 1,000 feet.

On the ground, they were met by a band of Partisans, but they were not the Partisans that the SOE had expected. Instead of the British-backed, pro-Monarchist Partisans, the welcoming group consisted of rival Communist Partisans. They had set the second signal fire as a ruse to trick the British plane into dropping weapons to them.

Morton later wrote, "The group, into whose hands we'd fallen called themselves Garibaldini. Their salute was the clenched fist of Communism.

"Just how intensely they followed the Red Star of Russia was one of the mysteries I was sent to uncover. The Garabaldini were mildly apologetic. They frankly admitted trying to steal British arms: bodies they had not expected."

On the Run

Within hours, Morton, Long and Lees were on the run with their Partisan Communist hosts as the German Army closed in to investigate the parachute drop. Hiding in haystacks and aided by friendly Italian families, they eluded the Germans for several weeks but often found themselves in close quarter firefights. One such encounter was related in Morton's memoir:

"The first German bullets to scythe into the hillside on which we lay started skirting our hidden positions at about seven o'clock in the morning. The undergrowth hid us effectively. Except for the random fusillades of the enemy, we were not uncomfortable as we lay in the shade of the rising Italian sun and waited for death.

"Young Captain Mike Lees, always a responsible British officer, looked shocked. Then a wide grin blanketed Captain Mike's handsome face. He tightened his gun belt, shot a nervous glance at Geoff Long and me, then shouted 'Avanti! Let's pay the bastards back.' And with that, the whole crowd of us took off down the valley side.

"Running where? We were off to attack the German patrol. It was more like a rumble than a skirmish. Had I been a German in that patrol I would have been scared silly."

Morton and his comrades finally found their way to the Monarchist Partisan unit they had originally expected to land among. This force was an amazing cast of characters including escaped British prisoners of war who had joined the Partisans. There also were Allied air crews shot down over Italy who were being cared for by the Partisans. After almost two months of adventure and close encounters with German forces, Morton and the artist Long, accompanied by an escaped British soldier and an American Army B-17 gunner, escaped to France.

Evading the Sentries

Morton described walking past German sentries as they made their way toward the French border: "We reached the bridge across the Raja River. A German sentry stood at the eastern approaches, observing us with what seemed careful attention. Our plan was a simple one: ordered to halt, we were going for our guns. If this were a movie, we'd want to call it 'High Evening' with us the villainous four who'd come to take the sheriff.

"Walking towards the sentry was easy. Passing him was rather less so. Walking away from him was downright nerve wracking. It is always uncomfortable to turn one's back to a man with a gun. I had the uncomfortable feeling he knew we were not simple townspeople, homeward bound from a day's work."

Morton and his friends bought a sturdy rowboat from a fisherman friendly to the Partisans in the Mediterranean port of Ventimiglia and rowed west to France. Morton found his way to the Allied headquarters in Nice and finally returned to Rome.

However, in Rome, he was surprised to encounter a cool reception from the British and Canadian headquarters which had dispatched him. Through clenched teeth, they let him write and send a series of nine articles through censors to his Toronto Star editors.

Morton soon found himself on what he called a "parade" before the Commander of Canadian Army Public Relations, Col. Bill Gilchrist, and Joseph Clark, the Director of Public Relations for the Canadian Army. They chided Morton for his alleged "inappropriate conduct," the gunplay in the officers' mess before he left for his dangerous assignment with the Partisans.

Fired Without Cause

Morton's accreditation as a Canadian war correspondent was revoked. Within days he was ordered by The Toronto Star editor Harry C. Hindmarsh, right, to return to Canada, where he was summarily fired without a reason given. His ten-year career with The Star, then the most influential newspaper in Canada, was over.

Morton's first dispatch to The Star was published on Oct. 27, 1944, after he had been fired. It was a glowing report on the contribution and bravery of the Italian Partisans, the type of story he had been sent in to write.

But the Star editors claimed the other eight articles were garbled in transmission and were too heavily censored to print. These articles some of which dealt with Morton's time with the Communist Partisans were "spiked," that is, thrown away. Meanwhile, Morton's reputation was savaged. It was widely rumoured in Toronto that he had been fired for fabricating his dispatches from behind Nazi lines. With this suspicion hanging over his head, Morton could never find another job as a journalist.

To this day, Morton's harsh treatment remains a mystery. After all, it was well known that the Canadian Army took a lenient view toward hard-drinking war correspondents, particularly at the front, and that any disciplining was rare. Indeed, lifting the accreditation of drunken reporters would have left few to cover the war.

No records of any charges against Morton nor of the disciplinary proceedings have ever surfaced in the British or Canadian archives. It is possible that many details about the Morton case were expunged from the national archives in Ottawa and London.

Hating Prima Donnas

The reasons for editor Hindmarsh's actions also remain unclear. In the annals of Canadian newspaper history, he remains a bleak and ambiguous individual who was known for firing staff without much cause. Having famously driven Ernest Hemmingway to quit as a reporter in 1924, Hindmarsh was described by one of his former reporters as someone who "warmed his hands over the fires of other people's lives."

"Hindmarsh hated prima donnas," A.J. Cranston, a Star reporter wrote in his book, Ink on my fingers. "He was ambitious, cruel and jealous of the success of others. He ruled by fear. He was a sadist who took delight in breaking or humbling men's spirits."

However, I found in the Canadian archives in Ottawa correspondence between The Star and the Canadian Army showing that Hindmarsh followed and negotiated every detail of Morton's assignment in Italy. So, Hindmarsh should have known the reality behind Morton's first-hand reporting.

As for Morton, the experience of having risked his life for the story of his career and then being called a liar sent him into a tailspin of depression, emotionally and spiritually. Unable to find work in his profession, Morton moved to the north woods of Ontario to work as a logger. He also became an alcoholic.

Then, in 1964, two decades after his parachute drop into Italy, he received a letter from the former Italian Partisans who asked him to write a memoir of his time with them. He sobered up for a few years and wrote his memoir. Morton demanded that the British Ministry of War in London confirm that he had been assigned to a mission behind enemy lines and that he had successfully completed his war reportage. In a letter from the British Under-Secretary-of-War James Ramsden, the British confirmed Morton's mission.

Morton also wanted The Star to apologize and restore his dignity, honour and reputation as a journalist. But the Star never apologized and today claims to have no records or correspondence regarding Paul Morton. Denied an apology from The Star or any real credit for his proudest moment as a journalist, Morton a true Canadian war hero and a brave war correspondent died a broken man in 1992.

New Clues

Some clues to the mystery of Morton's cruel mistreatment have emerged. A collection of declassified papers — war-time directives and dusty memos of the Allied forces — were sent to me by an Italian historian.

One set of those records, File 10000/136/338 Directive Psychological War Bureau (PWB), read: "ALLIED PROPAGANDA SHOULD NOW PLAY DOWN PARTISAN SERVICES," adding:

"Publicity given the Patriots has grown to a point where it is out of proportion to the war effort in Italy. There is evidence certain elements are making political capital out of the activities of the Patriots. It is incorrect to speak of the Patriots as liberating any particular area; if they are in control of any place it is because the Germans have withdrawn and are not taking action.

"We should remember it is the Allies who are liberating Italy with the help of the Patriots. The Patriots are unable to liberate of their own accord. Play down very gradually the activities of Patriots to liberated Italy and to the rest of the world."

This directive is dated Oct. 13, 1944, two days before Paul Morton arrived back in Rome with his reports of the Partisans' war.

Other directives that I obtained indicate that the Allies were convinced the Partisans were overwhelmingly Communist and needed to be neutralized as the Germans retreated. British General Harold Alexander's headquarters was recommending plans to disarm the Partisans by holding mock victory parades and handing out certificates from Allied generals before seizing the Partisans' weapons.

This subterfuge was a risky operation and the planners may have regarded Morton as a security risk who might expose the secret plans. His stories also threatened to elevate the status of the Communist-led Partisans who had proved to be a strong and effective fighting force.

So, Morton may have run afoul of a shift in ideological positions. With the defeat of the Nazis within sight and the expectation that the Soviet Union and its Communist allies would become the new enemy, the decision from the high command appears to have been to deny the Communist-led Partisans much wartime credit.

(Ironically, it would turn out that the Italian Partisans were not allied with the Soviet Union, although Italy's Communist Party still became one of the top early targets of Western intelligence in the Cold War.)

Expendable Asset

In the end, Morton was treated as an expendable asset, expected to carry out a dangerous mission (both for his newspaper and the Allies), but then ruined when his reporting proved inconvenient to the Allied brass and his editor.

Paul Morton's friend Douglas How of the Readers Digest suggested that Morton may have stepped over that mysterious line which should separate a journalist from his subject, leaving him in a no man's land, not entirely an observer and not fully a participant. How said: "The final irony may well be that his story could only be told well and sold well in a form which some people seem long to have wrongly thought they were: as fiction."

Or as Morton wrote about his experiences, "I went in behind enemy lines and emerged as a kind of agent. I went in as a reporter and came out a kind of soldier. I sometimes wish I had never gone in at all."

Don North is a veteran war correspondent who has covered conflicts from Vietnam and Central America to Kosovo and Iraq. This article was drawn from North's new book, Inappropriate Conduct: Mystery of a Disgraced War Correspondent, which is available at Amazon.com.

Is Tom Hanks' Greyhound The Most Realistic Movie About War At Sea Ever Made?

By James Wharton, Forces News July 24, 2020

THE BATTLE OF THE ATLANTIC is one of the lesser portrayed aspects of the second world war in cinema. n the seven decades since world war two ended, you can count on one hand the number of major films that have depicted the plight of those who worked on the convoys.

'Convoys' refers to the crucial movements of war materials and men across the Atlantic Ocean primarily between the United States and Great Britain to help fight the European War. Those notable among the few films exploring the Battle of the Atlantic include U-571 in the early 2000s and the epic Das Boot by Wolfgang Petersen in 1981, considered by many to be top of class in the U-boat cinema stakes.

Now there is a new title to add to the list – Greyhound - written for the screen by the film's leading man, Tom Hanks, based on the 1955 book, The Good Shepherd. But how does the film stand up when compared to a legendary film like Das Boot and how accurate a story is it?

BFBS has spoken to two experts about Greyhound and the key themes explored in the film to find out if the hype around the movie is warranted.

Nick Hewitt is the Head of Collections and Research at the National Museum of the Royal Navy. He spoke to BFBS after watching Greyhound and was assertive in his praise for the men and women who made the film. He said:

- ***"You cannot overstate the importance of the North Atlantic convoys. Nothing happens in the European war if the Battle of the Atlantic is lost. Without it, you don't finish off the campaign in North Africa, you don't go into Italy. You don't ever get into Normandy itself. It's really important that this film has been made. I was super impressed by it. It's really great to see the war at sea depicted in cinema.***

Greyhound follows the daunting activities of a convoy protection ship captained by affable Ernest Krause, as it embarks on a cross Atlantic mission protecting a large fleet of supply ships heading for Liverpool. Onboard the convoy ships heading to England is everything from bullets and rifles to battalions of American soldiers, all vital to the European war effort. But in the waters of the mid-Atlantic and hidden from view are deadly U Boats waiting to kill.

Nick continued:

- **"Let's be honest, now more than ever, duff history is dangerous. Without those huge American forces transferred to Britain thanks to the convoys, we would have been sat here on our own. We are just an island. Without all that equipment, we wouldn't have won the war."**

Greyhound tells the story of Captain Ernest Krause, played by Tom Hanks, who must command a convoy escort ship during the Battle of the Atlantic. In the film, Ernest Krause, played by Tom Hanks, must command the crew of his warship through wave after wave of U Boat attack in his mission of protecting the convoy and its vital cargo from the relentless enemy silently patrolling beneath the waves.

Another person praising Greyhound for its realism is former Royal Navy Commodore, Alistair Halliday, a Vice President of the Pen & Sword Club. While serving, Alistair commanded a number of ships including Frigates and Destroyers. Speaking of Hanks' character, Ernest Krause, he remarked:

- **"It's a very good depiction of command at sea. I thought he came across as a very credible CO. "Tom Hanks wore lot of the fatigue, the worry, the stress of command … it was really etched on his face, he did that really well."**

In telling the story of the Convoys, Director Aaron Schneider placed a great emphasis on CGI battle scenes that make up the core of the movie's action. Speaking about the reality of those scenes, and the actual events they attempted to recreate, Nick Hewitt was again complimentary of the film ...

> **There are scenes where he has to run back through the columns of ships in the convoy and he almost gets run down as he does by the ships he is meant to be protecting. The film shows him moving fast in the darkness of the ocean. This was very accurate. It was a period when there were not enough escort ships and plenty of German U Boats, so seeing him go backwards and forth in the chaos to protect the ships was really impressive. Personally, I think the CGI in this film is the best I have ever seen."**

For former Commodore Alistair Halliday, certain scenes in the movie brought back memories of his days at sea …

- **The view from the bridge was very realistic … specifically being close to other ships … that brought home some memories for me. The scenes on the bridge, the attention to detail was very well done. That all worked very well. Another scene superbly done was when he goes back to his cabin after the action. I remember going down to my cabin after long exercises and just lying in my pit in a similar way. I thought that was very nicely done."**

According to Nick, the history as told in the film stands up to scrutiny:

- **It's nice for people like me that every piece of detail is not explained. The level of detail on the convoy ships themselves and the activities seen within the convoy, particularly on the discipline and structure with regards to things like the Convoy Commodore is superb."**

This is something echoed by Alistair. He said:

- **Given the importance of the Battle of the Atlantic, to have a modern film with good simulation and with good detail showing what it would have been like, fighting off wolf attacks in the Atlantic, it is really good to see that in a modern film.**

The film's running time is short when compared to other films in the genre. The uncut version of Das Boot runs at a staggering four hours and 51 minutes. By comparison, Greyhound is a trim 91 minutes with about seven of those taken up by end-credits. On this, Nick commented: "It's compressed, which for me, a film has to be. It's a movie, not a documentary."

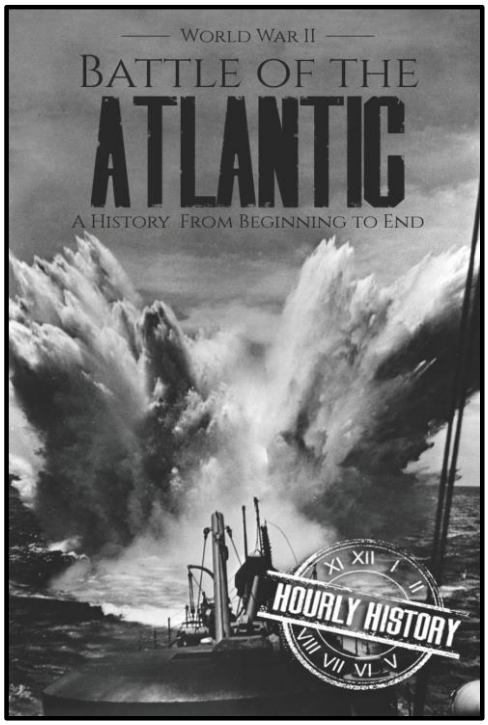
For the real men who defended ships daily in what turned out to be the longest continuing battle throughout the war, as soon as one crossing concluded, another one began. It is this fact that made the convoy patrols of the North Atlantic so crucial to the eventual outcome of the second world war. And judging by the remarks of our experts, Nick and Alistair, Greyhound does not do anything to diminish that incredible feat ... in fact, it honours it.

Greyhound is available to stream now on Apple TV.

The brutal truth behind Greyhound: how the Battle of the Atlantic almost sunk the war effort

By Tom Fordy, The Telegraph, July 10, 2020

AS THE ALLIED CONVOYS pushed across the Atlantic, some heading into the arctic, the conditions for the crews could be merciless: they were cold (and not just cold, but cold), famished, and terrified. Beneath the waves, sometimes whipped up by storms so savage that heavy merchant vessels were forced backwards, there lurked seek-and-destroy "wolf packs" of German U-boats. It could get so cold, that crews would have to clear ice from their ships to stop them capsizing ("One night it was so cold the flame on my lighter froze," joked Only Fools and Horses' Uncle Albert about life on the convoys).



If the weather was clear, it was even worse: the conditions made it easier for the U-boats to find and attack them. But life for the German submariners wasn't much easier: crammed into uncomfortable, airless U-boats with the harrowing knowledge that they likely wouldn't survive the war. Of the 38,000 men who served in the U-boats, only 8,000 lived to tell the tale.

The Battle of the Atlantic raged for six years across the cruel, perilous ocean – a fight to control the all-important sea channels. It's the setting for the latest Tom Hanks film, Greyhound, directed by Aaron Schneider and scripted by Hanks himself.

Based on The Good Shepherd by C.S. Forester, it sees Hanks play Captain Krause, charged with protecting a convoy of 37 Allied ships that come under attack, armed with faltering equipment, steely nerves, and back up from the ever brilliant Stephen Graham. It's a fictional story, but the film is appropriately designed as a taut, desperate, technical thriller – Sailing Private Ryan, if you like.

It is perhaps surprising that the Battle of the Atlantic has been so underserviced on the big screen (or even the small screen – Greyhound has been rerouted from cinemas to Apple TV amid the Covid-19 crisis). But it was a long, complicated and miserable campaign that saw the Allies eventually triumph in increments – not exactly easy to boil down to 90 minutes or so.

As the wartime legend goes, it was Churchill himself who coined the term "The Battle of the Atlantic", a supposedly deliberate invocation of the Battle of Britain. Because like the Battle of Britain, victory was paramount in Blighty surviving the Second World War.

The supply routes across the Atlantic were absolutely crucial. Seventy percent of Britain's food was imported; plus, precious metals and materials used for essential manufacturing.

Historian GH Bennett wrote that the famous "Dig for Victory" and "Make Do and Mend" campaigns were intended to take the strain off demand for supplies from across the pond. "The Atlantic was a lifeline," said historian Jonathan Dimbleby in 2015. "It was the carotid artery on which Britain depended for survival and its capacity to prosecute the war."

Indeed, Churchill claimed that the "U-boat peril" was the only thing that truly frightened him during the war. Not only was the Atlantic supply route crucial to the survival of both Britain and Russia, but the effects of the battle reached way beyond the ocean itself. Without an Allied victory in the Atlantic, there may have been no victory in the Mediterranean, no supply routes from the Middle East, no D-Day, and no bombing campaign in Germany.

"Some people say the Germans were defeated on the Eastern Front," says Philip D Grove, a naval historian and lecturer at Britannia Royal Navy College. "But it's the Atlantic that decides everything. Fundamentally, the western theatre is dependent on gaining control of the Atlantic and enabling the supply of goods."

It could also have been a very different war for the Americans. "If Britain had fallen, America would have faced a two-front war on its own," says Grove. "That would have extended the Pacific campaign, and probably the European campaign to defeat the Nazis. And if they'd hadn't been able to, our global history would be different. Maybe not quite The Man in the High Castle-different, but different to the world we live in today."

The Battle of the Atlantic began on September 3, 1939 – just hours after Britain declared war on Germany – when the U-30 torpedoed the SS Athenia in the Western Approaches, as it travelled from Liverpool to Montreal, killing 117 civilian passengers and crew.

Neither side's navy was adequately prepared for the impending battle. The Royal Navy had, according to Jonathan Dimbleby, "misread" the lessons of the First World War and underestimated the U-boats. So did Grand Admiral Erich Raeder, the head of the German Kriegsmarine, who wanted to fight the war with surface vessels. "He wanted battleships, battle cruisers, destroyers, and aircraft carriers," says Grove. "It was partly for status, and to challenge the Royal Navy."

Living conditions on both sides were grim. There was little to do on Allied ships except wait fearfully for the next long-range sneak attack from a German torpedo. Life on board the U-boats was arguably even worse, with no fresh air, sanitation or heating, and a maximum of two toilets for the whole crew.

Rear Admiral Karl Donitz, commander of the submarine fleet, knew the destructive potential of the U-boats, and requested a fleet of 300. But he was refused. When war broke out, there were only around 50 in use – only around half of which were long-range and seaworthy. ("That's not many submarines to take to the world's biggest merchant marine on the global stage," says Grove.) And the Type VII U-boats, the backbone of the fleet, only carried 14 torpedoes and had to be armed with deck guns.

"German submarines in both world wars often attacked from the surface at night, using the guns," says Grove. "It was to save their precious torpedoes for high value targets."

The Germans had just 13 submarines in the Atlantic at any given time during the first year of the war. But still, the U-boats had significant early success. By December 1939, U-boats had sunk over 100 merchant vessels. Crucial supplies of food and metals were lost to the ocean. In June 1940, they gained a further advantage when the Nazis took hold of the French ports, giving them access to the North and South Atlantic.

The British Navy made a decision early on to group merchant ships into convoys, which included oil tankers, cargo liners, tramp steamers, coasters, and colliers. They would be escorted by destroyers, frigates, corvettes and other large vessels. Thousands of merchant ships were also fitted with defensive guns. The early convoys from North America were escorted by the Canadian Royal Navy; at home, with resources divided between the Atlantic and Europe, there simply weren't enough ships to go around. It was a "tonnage war": if the Germans could sink more ships than the British could rebuild, the Battle of the Atlantic would be won.

A major problem, as seen in Greyhound, was the "mid-Atlantic gap" – called "The Black Pit" in the movie – an area which couldn't be reached by short-range aircraft to help defend the convoys.

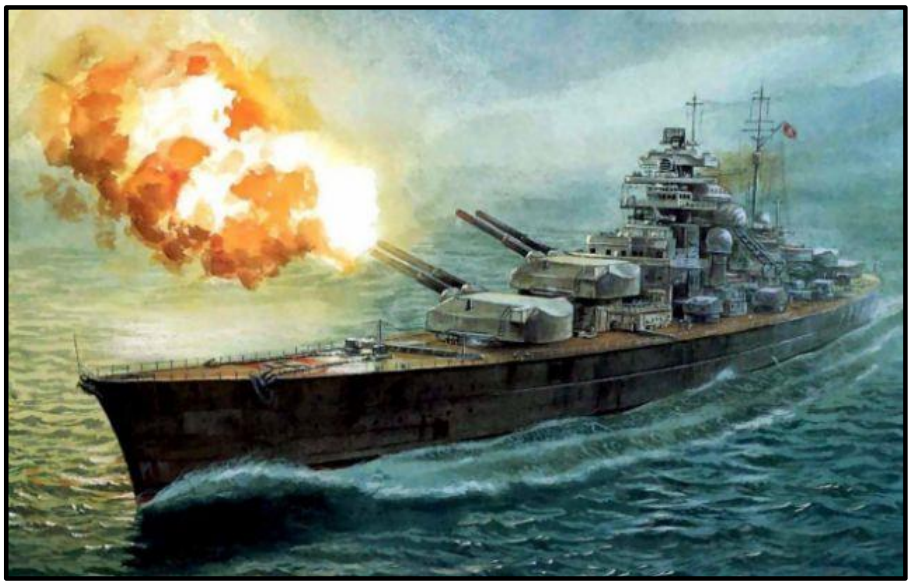
"To begin with we didn't have enough escort vessels and didn't have the range," says Grove. "The Canadian Navy, which was small to begin, would escort the convoy into the western side of the Atlantic but would have to give up, and the convoy would sail on its own, either together or by splitting up. Then on the eastern side of the Atlantic, the Royal Navy would pick it up and bring it into British harbours."

It was in late 1940 that the U-boats began to have major success operating in wolf packs – surfacing in groups and attacking at night. The tactic reduced the effectiveness of ASDIC, a sonar which only detected U-boats underwater.

In September 1940, Churchill struck a deal with Roosevelt for the use of 50 US destroyers. That same month a U-boat torpedoed the SS City of Benares, which was transporting civilians from Liverpool to Canada to escape the Blitz. In total, 260 people drowned – 77 of them children.

As detailed by historian Gavin Mortimer, 128 merchant ships and 700,000 tons of supplies were sunk between August and October of 1940. The period between late 1940 and 1941 was known as the “happy time” for the U-boat arm.

The British had success in March 1941 when the destroyer HMS Vanoc sunk U-100. It had found the U-boat using a seaborne radar, one of numerous technical innovations that would eventually tip the balance, including radar, sonar, high frequency direction-finding, and Enigma code-breaking. The Royal Navy also had success in the surface battle too: in May 1941, the Bismarck – the German fleet’s most famous battleship – was sunk.



By September 1941, US ships were involved in the Atlantic – three months before the attack on Pearl Harbour officially brought the Americans into the war. US ships were even fired on by Germans and in October 1941, the USS Reuben James destroyer was sunk, killing 100 men.

“American neutrality before December 1941 is a bit of a myth,” says Grove. “Roosevelt knew that the war was coming. He was also aware that Britain needed as much help as possible. As early as 1940, American exchange officers were working alongside the British – most famously in the hunt of the Bismarck in 1941. The Americans started taking a firmer line. They started to convey, augment and replace Canadian ships that were escorting the convoys to Britain.”

When the US officially declared war, much of the responsibility for escorting convoys was handed back to the expanding Royal Canadian Navy. The U-boats moved towards the east coast. With no convoy system in place, US ships were picked off by a handful U-boats – a period known as the "second happy time".

“They kind of ignored our advice,” says Grove about the US naval commanders, “and they mostly got hammered off the American coast.”

In 1942, half of the tonnage lost in the entire war was sunk. “This is when Churchill says nothing scared him more,” says Grove, “and you can see why when he starts to lose millions of tons of shipping.” By 1943, the German navy had begun rectifying its problems: more submarines, better torpedoes, and some air support.

They sunk 101 vessels in January and February. In March, three U-boat wolf packs attacked two convoys, costing the Allies 22 ships, 41,000 tons of cargo, and over 300 merchant sailors.

But the German fleet soon found itself facing an insurmountable opponent: American industry. “By 1943, American shipyards were able to replace everything the Germans had sunk and build more on top of that,” says Grove. “Their productivity was insane. The Americans produced 50 percent of everything produced in World War Two. Many of the ships they produced were Liberty and Victory class ships – a British design. We wanted the Americans to build 60 to replenish our merchant marine. They built over 2,700. And that’s just what was being built in American shipyards.”

Also crucial was the introduction of VLR (Very Long Range) Liberator bombers. At first, the Air Ministry withheld the bombers from the Admiralty, with Arthur "Bomber" Harris wanting to keep them for the campaigns against German cities and industrial targets.

“Churchill invariably sided with Harris, until very late in the day, thus prolonging the Battle of the Atlantic by at least a year,” said Jonathan Dimbleby. “As a result, a great many ships were sunk, and lives lost unnecessarily. Churchill was a great war leader, but this was a great error, the greatest, in my view, of his entire leadership between 1940 and 1942.”

It took a modest allocation of just 39 of these long-range bombers to change the battle. Capable of flying 1,000 miles into the Atlantic, they carried radar and anti-submarine weapons, and forced the U-boats back underwater.

Dimbleby also detailed the difficulty of breaking the Enigma codes. The British had captured an Enigma machine from the U-110 in May 1941 (though Hollywood would have you believe it was Jon Bon Jovi who found it, on the U-571). The naval Enigma codes were tougher to crack and in January 1942, the Germans installed a fourth “rotor”. It took 10 months to crack the new codes – and even then, German intelligence intercepted Royal Navy messages. “A kind of blind man’s bluff went on,” said Dimbleby.

The changes in technology and production created what Grove calls "a see-sawing battle" – the convoys became U-boat killing zones if found.

“Western technology – particularly British technology and innovation – combined with American production, really signalled the death kneel of the submarine threat in the Atlantic," says Grove. "The Allies were able to finally defeat the U-boats by May 1943. That month, some 41 U-boats were sunk – a totally unsustainable number that led to their withdrawal.”

Across April and May 1943, 56 U-boats were lost. Among the casualties was Karl Donitz’s own son. The Battle of the Atlantic did continue until the end of the war, but the German power was greatly diminished. Philip D Grove points towards the Das Boot TV series for an accurate depiction of what it must have been like for the German submariners: “As the war goes on, the life of the submariner becomes ever more horrid. As they set sail in 1943, ‘44, and ‘45, they know they’re probably not coming back. Over three quarters of German submariners never returned.”

Towards the end of the war, the Germans produced upgraded Type XXI and XXIII U-boats, which could have been devastating if introduced earlier – perhaps when Donitz had requested a bolstered fleet.

Eighty percent of the convoys made it across the Atlantic unscathed, but between 75,000 and 85,000 Allied seamen were killed. And more than 30,000 of them were merchant sailors – some of the unsung heroes of the Second World War.

"We often forget the plight of the merchant mariner," says Grove. "As many merchant mariners died in World War Two as Royal Navy personnel. Their existence was essential for our survival." As Jonathan Dimbleby said: "It's impossible to understand the Second World War without appreciating the Battle of the Atlantic."

Mel Gibson's war atrocity: how The Patriot whitewashed history and demonised the British

By Tom Fordy, The Telegraph July 2020

JUST FIVE YEARS after Braveheart had lifted its (historically inaccurate) kilt in the face of true history, Mel Gibson was at it again with The Patriot. Released on June 28, 2000, it's a stirring American Revolution adventure – the peak moment sees Gibson charge slow-motion across the battlefield, Betsy Ross flag in hand, blood-lust in his eyes – but The Patriot's historical liberties are numerous. There's a wily militia figure reinvented as a nails-hard beefcake; British soldiers so evil that they commit actual Nazi atrocities; and a whitewashing of the slavery that caused Spike Lee to label the film as "blatant American Hollywood propaganda".

Indeed, The Patriot could have been called "Mel Gibson vs History 2: This Time It's Personal". Because that's how British critics took it: another Anglophobic assault from Gibson, who simply swapped the wild-man mullet and Claymore for a colonial ponytail and flouncy shirt in his war against the tyrannical English Crown.

The Sunday Times called The Patriot "a 160-minute polemic against the British". "Truth is the first casualty," we said here at The Telegraph. Even The Guardian fired back at the Anglo-baiting antics and claimed the man Gibson's character is based on – "The Swamp Fox" Francis Marion – was a rapist and hunter of Native Americans.

Yet not everyone hated The Patriot. South Carolina historian Walter Edgar said that the film captured "the feeling" of the events and actually toned-down British atrocities.

Is it a case of differing perspectives on either side of the Pond? Perhaps it's a fair portrayal of us Brits as ever-popular baddies? Or is The Patriot just another assault on historical fact? "Something historians have to contend with is that people have strong opinions and will try to assert them politically through film," says Alex von Tunzelmann, a historian, screenwriter, and the author of Reel History. "Gibson's career does that a lot. He's made a lot of historical films with a very strong agenda."

Mel Gibson, of course, is never far from controversy. Though he can't be blamed entirely for The Patriot. It was written by Robert Rodat, who also wrote Saving Private Ryan, and directed by Roland Emmerich, then deep into his run of glossy, highly-destructive blockbusters, which include Independence Day, Godzilla, The Day After Tomorrow, and 2012. But the nationalism-stirring, Oscar-nabbing success of Gibson as William Wallace is the template. The Patriot was reportedly touted around Hollywood as "a colonial Braveheart".

Gibson plays Benjamin Martin, a South Carolinian widower who wants to live a peaceful life on his (slave-less) plantation, raising his many children and making furniture (badly, I might add: a wooden chair he builds collapses).

A French-Indian War vet and born-again pacifist, Martin argues against South Carolina joining the Revolution and tries to stop his eldest son Gabriel (Heath Ledger) enlisting into the Continental Army. Like Gibson's fictionalised William Wallace, it's revenge, not patriotic pride, that inspires Martin to take up arms.

When snarling toff Colonel Tavington (Jason Isaacs, in proto-Lucius Malfoy mode) descends on the plantation with his dragoons, he's rude to the staff, shoots Martin's teenage son, and burns down the house. In retaliation, Martin leads a militia, sabotaging the British redcoats and ultimately – let's be honest – inspiring the Americans to win the Revolution.

Speaking at the time, screenwriter Robert Rodat confirmed that Gibson's Martin is a composite of several real-life revolutionaries, including Andrew Pickens, Thomas Sumter, and Daniel Morgan. But the adventure is mostly rooted in the story of Francis Marion. Insiders said the film was originally intended as a straight-up biopic of "The Swamp Fox".

Like Gibson's character, Francis Marion was a militia leader who disrupted General Cornwallis's efforts in South Carolina and eluded the better-trained, better-equipped British forces in the swamplands.

The Guardian's claim that Marion was "a rapist who hunted Indians for fun" was based on comments made by British historian Christopher Hibbert, who said that Marion was "very active in the persecution of the Cherokee Indians and not at all the sort of chap who should be celebrated as a hero. The truth is that people like Marion committed atrocities as bad, if not worse, than those perpetrated by the British."

Biographer John Oller, whose book The Swamp Fox was published in 2018, refutes that. Marion did serve in the French-Indian War and persecuted Cherokee people under British orders. But Marion wrote about his remorse at the atrocities he'd witnessed. "Somehow that got translated into him being a slaughterer of Indians," says Oller. "He was not a maliciously cruel person."

With a rag-tag band of merry men, Gibson's version – who is given the nickname "The Ghost" – ambushes soldiers in the backcountry, steals Cornwallis's supplies, and even eats the general's dogs for a laugh. The real Marion did indeed use hit-and-run and guerrilla-style tactics. He led British soldiers or American Tories (colonial loyalists) into ambushes and attacked Cornwallis's supply chain.

But says Oller there's no evidence that he engaged in hand-to-hand combat (certainly not hacking a man to death with a hatchet, as Gibson's version does). Oller explains that unlike Gibson's hunky, leading-man frame, Marion had "the physique of a thoroughbred racing jockey" and wouldn't launch an attack or skirmish when outnumbered.

Martin's most ludicrously audacious plans include disguising his men as redcoats to blow up a supply ship while Cornwallis (an amusingly pompous Tom Wilkinson) watches on red-faced. Martin later comes face-to-face with (and outsmarts) Cornwallis to negotiate the release of prisoners. It's Hollywood fantasy.

There was also British outrage over the portrayal of the film's villain, Colonel William Tavington, who is based on Lieutenant-Colonel Banastre Tarleton.

Tarleton was a Liverpudlian – the son of John Tarleton, a merchant, Mayor of Liverpool, and wealthy slave trader. Shortly after the release of The Patriot, Liverpool city council demanded an apology for the film's depiction of the character. Liverpool's then-mayor, Edwin Clein said: "The experts agree there is no real evidence to justify this character assassination of someone who has contributed so much to Liverpool's great history."

Tarleton was a British Legion commander who led dragoons (horse-mounted soldiers) known as "Tarleton's Raiders". The film version is a brutal sadist and keen atrocity-committer. Dr Anthony J. Scotti, a historian at Midlands Technical College in South Carolina and the author of Brutal Virtue: The Myth and Reality of Banastre Tarleton, says the real man wasn't an "evil arch-villain."

"He was a fast, hard-hitting type of officer – a consummate cavalryman, hell bent for leather, go right at 'em" says Scotti.

“Was it brutal? Most definitely. Were civilians killed? Yes. But to say he’s the worst of the worst… I don’t buy that in the least. It’s not a very accurate depiction.”

Tarleton is known for a massacre at the Battle of Waxhaws. As the story goes, the Continentals were surrendering but Tarleton's horse was shot at the last second. In retaliation, Tarleton's men killed the Americans. The phrase "Tarleton's quarter" – a refusal to give quarter or take prisoners – comes from the incident.

Scotti says perspective on the incident "depends on which side of the political fence you sit on" and was likely more panic and chaos than a calculated massacre. "A cavalry charge in close quarters is never going to be pretty," he says.

Though played as toff redcoats in the movie, Tarleton’s men were largely provincials from Pennsylvania, New York, and Connecticut. Tarleton and his men also wore the British Legion's standard green. Isaacs, as you’d expect, is a hoot in the role, his lip permanently curled in disgust, always ready to kill someone when their back is turned. In a nod to the Waxhaws story, he orders that injured POWs are killed. Gibson’s Martin warns him it’s against the “rules of war” – rules that didn’t formally exist until 1864 with the first Geneva Convention.

Cornwallis even gives him a dressing down for his brutal methods: “His Majesty, like history, judges us not only by the outcome of the war but the manner in which it was fought.”

While the scene is a bit dramatic licence, Scotti thinks it portrays Cornwallis’s frustrations at not being able to secure the South, due to nuisance-making partisans like Francis Marion running around.

“That’s why he had people like Tarleton hunt them down,” says Scotti. “But he couldn’t get to them – he couldn’t get the situation under control.”

Indeed, Tarleton tried – and failed – to catch Marion in the swamplands. In the movie, the rivalry is a blood feud, with Isaacs’s villain killing not just one, but two of Gibson’s sons (and burning down two of his houses, just for good measure). “I don’t think they ever laid eyes on each other,” says Oller about the real Marion and Tarleton. But Tarleton is credited with giving Marion his “Swamp Fox” nickname with the legendary line: “As for that damn old fox, even the devil himself couldn’t find him.”

“That an apocryphal story,” says Oller. “That never happened.”

Scotti agrees that it’s just legend: “But it makes for a good story whether or not he said it!”

The film’s biggest whopper comes when Tavington rounds up townspeople into a church and burns it down. The scene is most likely inspired by the Oradour-sur-Glane massacre in 1944, when the SS killed over 600 French villagers inside a church and barns. Shamefully – and perhaps dangerously – The Patriot tries to backhandedly claim the event is based on fact.

“The church massacre isn't something that happened at all,” says Alex von Tunzelmann. “It was something that happened in World War 2. Good old Jason Isaacs, who I love, snarls, 'This will be forgotten'. No, it's not been forgotten… it didn't happen! But the film’s trying to sow seeds of doubt. People might think that maybe this film is exposing the truth.”

“Homes and churches were burned in South Carolina,” says John Oller. “But I don’t believe they did it with people inside. They’re portrayed as no better than the Nazis. That’s an over-exaggeration.”

Of course, Tavington gets his comeuppance during the film’s climactic battle. It's unnamed in the film but is based on the Battle of Cowpens, which happened on January 17, 1781. It was a decisive win and turning point for the patriots.

Lawrence Babits, a professor at East Carolina University, wrote the book A Devil of a Whipping and was an extra in The Patriot’s battle scene. Babits explains that the understanding of how Cowpens played out is changing: a recent survey and archaeological evidence has found that the battlefield was bigger than previously thought. But The Patriot’s action does bear some loose resemblance to the established events. “It’s simplified in terms of the history and elaborated on in terms of the drama,” says Professor Babits.

In the film, Benjamin Martin hatches a plan to defeat the much larger enemy (he’s now based on Continental Army general and Cowpens hero Daniel Morgan – Francis Marion wasn’t at Cowpens). The first line of militia is ordered to fire two rounds and then retreat, leading the redcoats down a hill and into an unexpected ambush.

The militia line really did fire and retreat. They led the British over a ridge and into a double-envelopment from the reforming American. Tarleton – who was there – was hasty in charging forward. His men weren’t properly formed up and were picked off by sharpshooters. “He knew he had to get Morgan,” says Dr Scotti. “Tarleton was a cavalryman. It’s like a greyhound going after a rabbit.”

Of his 500 men, at least 125 were Continental POWs picked up in previous battles. “They really had no love for Tarleton or the British,” says Scotti. “We think that as soon as they charged forward and lost cohesion, those men took a dive – because they’re fighting against their own men – and surrendered right after."

“Tarleton’s infantry ceased to exist after Cowpens,” says Babits. “They were killed, captured or changed sides.”

There are technical differences in the battle scene: in truth, it was the British who were outnumbered, with fewer than 1,300 men (the American militia line is believed to have had 1,000 men alone); there were only two small canons on the British side (not canons on either side exploding each other’s legs off – shrapnel didn't come in until the 1790s); the British forces would have worn both red and green coats; and Cornwallis – who watches over the battle – wasn’t really there.

A Frenchman, one of Gibson’s militia (played by Tchéky Karyo) appears in full Napoleonic-style regalia – a colourful bit of historical nonsense. Though coincidentally, there was a Benjamin Martin at Cowpens – a militia man from Virginia.

Professor Babits and recalls a good effort on-set towards accuracy. Among the extras were 200 re-enactors, who brought their own equipment and uniforms. There were no overweight extras or facial hair allowed. Dr Scotti, also a re-enactor, lost out because he wears glasses.

In the midst of the battle, Gibson storms across the battlefield for an almighty punch-up with Jason Isaacs’s Tavington and skewers him with a sword – a well-deserved fate. The real Tarleton escaped the battle and returned to England. He followed his father into politics and became an MP for Liverpool.

Speaking at the time of release, screenwriter Robert Rodat defended the film's historical liberties. He rallied against the "trend" of articles like this one about historical errors and likened The Patriot (rather presumptuously) to The Iliad, Macbeth, The Last of the Mohicans, The Bridge on the River Kwai, or Lawrence of Arabia. "They have value because they elevate us, inform us and help us understand the nature of human interaction. They also provide a window into a historical period." He continued: "You can't divorce history from creativity."

It's a valid defence, but The Patriot's rewriting of history crosses over into offensively bad with its portrayal of black characters. Benjamin Martin is a virtuous equal opportunities employer; Francis Marion, Daniel Morgan, Thomas Sumter, and Andrew Pickens, who inspired the character, were slave owners.

As Anthony Scotti says: "The idea of Benjamin Martin having this estate and all this farmland in South Carolina and having free blacks working on his estate…. come on, you need to call it for what it is. They want to portray him as virtuous, but the guy would have been a slave owner. The past is pretty, it's not perfect. He needed more of a historical context. To me, that more than anything destroyed the movie."

Just as offensive is a subplot in which a slave (played by Jay Arlen Jones) signs up for militia duty to earn his freedom. The message of the film is clear: defeat the British and white and black men will live equally in the United States. Twenty years later – in the wake of the biggest race protests and riots for a generation – it's aged terribly. Less patriotic, more patronising.

Spike Lee wrote a letter to The Hollywood Reporter, explaining how he and his wife were "fuming" after seeing the film. He wrote: "For three hours The Patriot dodged around, skirted about or completely ignored slavery. How convenient... to have Mel Gibson's character is not a slaveholder... The Patriot is pure, blatant American Hollywood propaganda. A complete whitewashing of history." "I despise the film," Lee told the BBC.

As depicted in the film, the British offered freedom to slaves who left the American lines, though these offers were reneged on and some were sent back into slavery in the West Indies. It's little wonder, perhaps, that the British remain such popular screen villains.

"The English work very well as villains. It plays well to an American audience. At one time they were British subjects, before they threw off their metaphorical shackles, while keeping real shackles on a lot of other people. British or English villains play well internationally because the British Empire was large, and a lot of people feel like they were oppressed by it. It's a result of that history. It feels like punching up to a lot of people."

As for atrocities in the Revolutionary War, Lawrence Babits says: "It was going on on both sides."

One real example is Pyle's Massacre, in which Light Horse Harry – Continental Army Colonel Henry Lee – pretended to be Tarleton, a devious plan which allowed Lee to ambush and kill almost 100 loyalists.

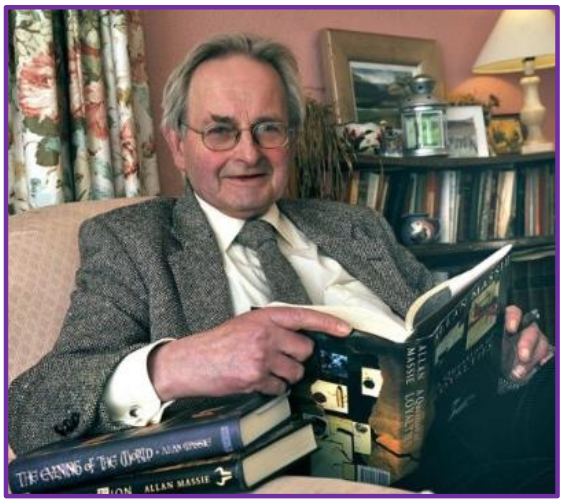
There's a scene early in The Patriot, in which Benjamin Martin and his militia kill unarmed Redcoats but his son Gabriel talks him out of further atrocities. (In fact, Heath Ledger's patriotism is the most stirring of all – one call-to-arms speech is so rousing that even the vicar picks up a rifle and marches off to war.)

"We are better men than that," Gabriel argues. In fact, some of the worst were American.

"The guys who were the worst on the British side were provincials or loyalist militia men," says Babits. "They had scores to settle with the locals. You don't have to look very far to find Americans doing things that the British are accused of."

Is it really time for Britain to 'move on' from the Second World War?

By Allan Massie and Peter Caddick-Adams: Daily Telegraph



YES…… there's more to Germany than Adolf Hitler and the Third Reich, says Allan Massie.

I wasn't yet seven when the Second World War ended. Anyone who was an adult then was born in the 1920s.

Yet we remain obsessed with the war and, as Neil MacGregor, the director of the British Museum, argues in a new BBC radio series, it's time to move on and learn that there was a different Germany before the Nazis, and there is a very different one again now.

The French and other nations which suffered far more than we did between 1939 and 1945 have done so. Why can't we?

One reason is doubtless the awareness that we were still a Great Power then and are so no longer: another, the pride in 1940 as "our Finest Hour". It was indeed that and we went some way to saving Europe by our example. Gratitude for our defiance was felt and expressed all over western Europe then. Nevertheless, it was on the Eastern Front that Germany lost the war. We couldn't have launched the Second Front in 1944 but for the toll the Red Army had taken on the Wehrmacht.

The Germans – and other eastern Europeans – did terrible things in the war. The Holocaust is perhaps the greatest crime in European history.

That can't be forgotten or ignored. It is neither forgotten nor ignored by Germans today. For some time, I've gone twice a year to take a weekend seminar at the University of Tubingen. The seminars are conducted in English and the students don't shrink from discussing the Nazi years. Most of them have asked their grandparents the awkward question: "What did you do or think then? "

"Your generation can't feel guilt – you shouldn't," I've said. "No," one replied, "but we feel a special responsibility to behave morally."

They act on that feeling. The students I know are serious and have high principles. They believe in democracy, peace and social justice. They also like, and mostly admire, Britain. If they think it's time we too moved on, they are surely right.

Germany, as Neil MacGregor will argue, is a great country with a rich history and culture before the "Brown Plague" of the Nazis struck. It's time we recognised this and accepted the Germans as our friends and allies. Don't forget the war but stop going on about it.

NO…., we should be proud of Britain's triumph over a great evil, says Dr Peter Caddick-Adam, left.

Step outside the United Kingdom and you'll be surprised to find we are no more fascinated with the Second World War than, say, France, Spain, Russia, Poland or the United States. The flood in these countries of battle re-enactments, books, magazines, TV documentaries, movies, PC games, model kits and media stories confirm this.

This is not knee-jerk nationalism, for school and university courses, academic papers and conferences echo this as well. Military narrative of recent history – especially in a fight for survival – has always been part of the definition of a nation.

Years later, we are still learning lessons from both world wars, and that is a good thing. Yes, we have a certain interest, but it is by no means unique.

The Second World War was seen as a righteous war, fighting a monstrous tyranny that would have otherwise engulfed us all and killed even more millions than it did.

It is still perceived in those terms. But the war taught us other things too – how to fight and behave as part of a coalition: lessons we still respect today with NATO and the EU. Make no mistake: 1940 did not see Britain alone. The Axis powers were ranged against the British Empire of over 250 million people with the world's largest war and merchant fleets and control of huge raw material resources.

The use of those assets and peoples was a triumph to be celebrated. It reverberates and is still revered throughout today's Commonwealth and the UN. Nigerians, Pakistanis and Indians are as much part of this heritage as are we.

The United Kingdom's viewpoint of the Second World War is bound to be different because of geography. We can celebrate the triumph of an island nation prevailing in war. For other landlocked countries with their shifting borders, this is less easy.

The Germans are less inclined to look back because of the Third Reich. Besides, modern Germany is physically different to the earlier Germanys of the Kaisers, Weimar, Hitler and the divided states of the Cold War. Instead, modern Germans look forward, not back, obsessed as they have to be with their place in Europe.

German war memorials, books and analysis tend to be forward-looking because they have to be. Germany as a national unit has always been perceived in the context of wider Europe. Their current angst over Ukraine and Russia is a case in point. The United Kingdom is no more obsessed with war and history than our Teutonic colleagues, but our narratives are different.

We look back and celebrate, partly because we can, but also to find lessons for our future. This may seem to exaggerate our interest with past wars, but it is a healthy, benign custom. Afraid of the past? Get over it: celebrate our military heritage.

Should Britain 'move on' from the Second World War? Yes. If Germany can move past the horrors of the Second World War, so can we. We should never be afraid to celebrate our military heritage