

# ELITE FORCES



## D-DAY

Discover how the  
GAS wreaked havoc  
and enemy lines  
during Operation  
Overlord



# WELCOME TO A WORLD OF BLOOD AND STEEL

Humanity has waged war since it first emerged on the plains of Africa, a natural capacity for violence harnessed and unleashed on a larger scale in service of a greater cause. Yet while early skirmishes were usually between lightly armed tribes, in time war became a profession, one populated by different calibres of warrior. Inevitably, the best fighters rose to the top.

From the battlefields of ancient Greece to feudal Japan, imperial France, the jungles of Vietnam and the streets of Mogadishu, in Elite Forces you will meet some of history's finest soldiers, crack troops trained and trusted to turn the tide of battle or fight to the death in defence of their ruler.

You will find out how a Persian Immortal prepared for war, discover the origins of the formidable Gurkhas, storm the Iranian embassy with the SAS and witness a savage gunfight in a war-ravaged African capital. You will also meet men who served a cruel and deluded tyrant, pillaged towns for profit and assassinated targets in cold blood. This is war, and these are the soldiers who have shaped some of the bloodiest conflicts man has ever witnessed.



「 FUTURE 」

# ELITE FORCES

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

## Bookazine Editorial

Editor Charles Ginger

Designer Steve Dacombe

Compiled by Thomas Parrett

Senior Art Editor Andy Downes

Head of Art & Design Greg Whitaker

Editorial Director Jon White

## History of War Editorial

Editor Tim Williamson

Senior Designer Curtis Fermor-Dunman

Senior Art Editor Duncan Crook

## Cover images

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## Photography

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## Advertising

Media packs are available on request

Commercial Director Clare Dove

## International

Head of Print Licensing Rachel Shaw

licensing@futurenet.com

www.futurecontenthub.com

## Circulation

Head of Newstrade Tim Mathers

## Production

Head of Production Mark Constance

Production Project Manager Matthew Eglinton

Advertising Production Manager Joanne Crosby

Digital Editions Controller Jason Hudson

Production Managers Keely Miller, Nola Cokely,

Vivienne Calvert, Fran Twentyman

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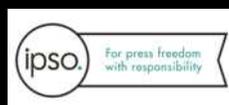
Chief executive Zillah Byng-Thorne  
Non-executive chairman Richard Huntingford  
Chief financial officer Penny Ladkin-Brand

Tel +44 (0)1225 442 244

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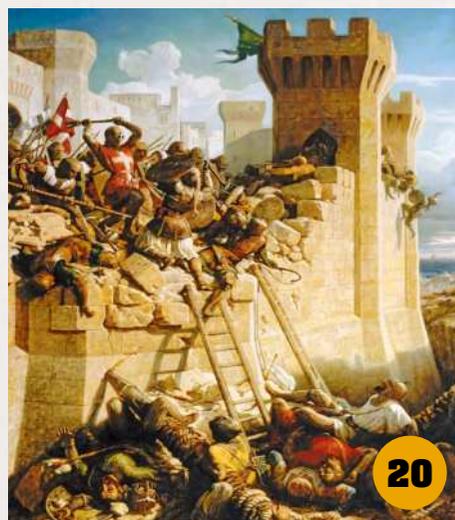
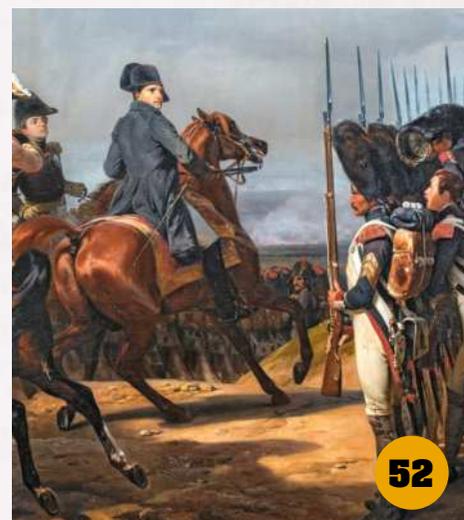
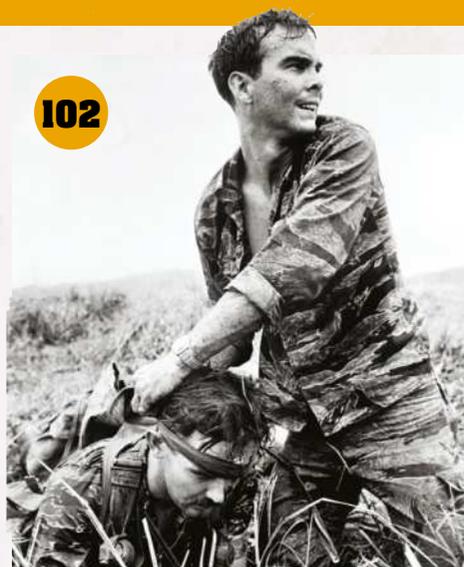
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**“NEVER YIELD TO FORCE; NEVER YIELD TO THE APPARENTLY OVERWHELMING MIGHT OF THE ENEMY” – WINSTON CHURCHILL**



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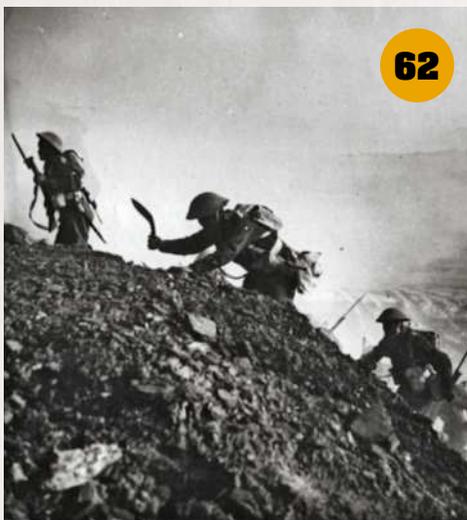
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# THE FIRST ELITES

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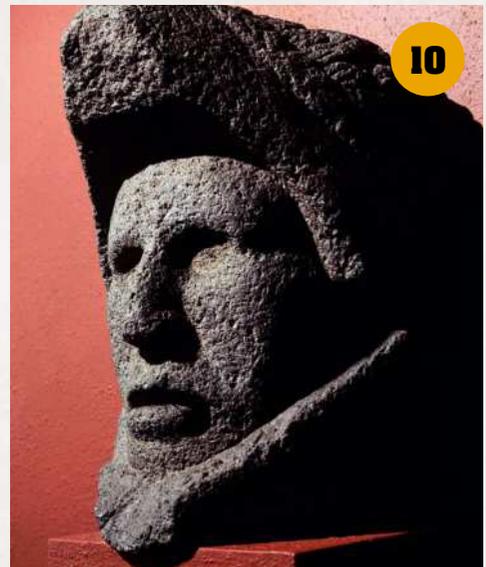
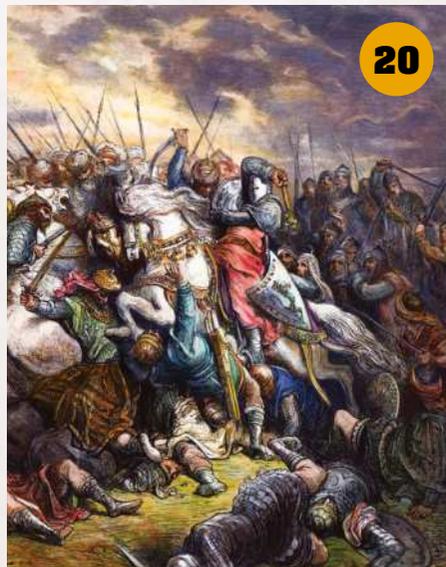
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# ANCIENT ELITES

MEET THE SOLDIERS WHO STRUCK FEAR INTO  
THE HEARTS OF THEIR OPPONENTS

WORDS: **SCOTT REEVES**

# GREEK HOPLITE

Hoplites were anything but light. The cream of the Greek city-states wore bronze breastplates, helmets, shin guards, thigh guards, shoulder pads and forearm guards. Add a 2.5-metre-long spear, short sword and round shield, and in total a hoplite carried around half of their own body weight in extra equipment.

However, what they lacked in mobility they made up for in ruthless organisation. Hoplites fought in a phalanx, a tight formation eight to ten ranks deep and up to a quarter of a mile wide. Any enemy who dared approach encountered an overlapping shield wall with sharp spears pointing over the top at head height. The best, most experienced soldiers stood at the front and rear to ensure a strong front line and to prevent the middle ranks from breaking formation or turning away in fear. Every hoplite had to hold his spear in his right hand and shield in his left. Since soldiers naturally sought the sanctuary of the shield held by the man on his right, phalanxes tended to creep slowly to that side as battle progressed.

Standard infantry and cavalry found the phalanx impossible to penetrate. Where hoplites could not be flanked, such as the Battle of Thermopylae, where the Spartans lined up in a narrow valley, the phalanx could be devastating. Hoplites were vulnerable to ranged weapons, but the Greeks adapted their battlefield tactics when facing a threat such as Persian archers. Hoplites used lighter shields and practised running towards the enemy before forming up at close range.

Most hoplites were citizen-soldiers who could afford their own weapons and armour and fought when called upon. However, the best of the regular armies were recruited into the small, professional *epilektoi* units that could turn the tide at crucial times in battle.

## HELMET

Various styles of helmet were worn by hoplites, ranging from the heavy-duty Corinthian variety to the lighter Chalcidian helmet seen here. The crest colour and design varied between each of the city-states.

## BREASTPLATE

Both linen and metal breastplates were worn by hoplites, with the more affluent and influential troops often sporting ornate bronze armour. This soldier is wearing a linen *linothorax*.

## SHIELD

The ancient Greek warrior's shield was called an *aspis* and consisted of a concave circle of bronze-coated wood that measured around 1m across.

## SWORD

Hoplites were also equipped with a short sword called a *xiphos*. This was only used if a hoplite's spear was damaged or a phalanx collapsed.

## SPEAR

The primary weapon of choice for any hoplite soldier was a formidable 2.5m-long spear. This stabbing weapon would have been tipped with a leaf-shaped blade at the top and a shorter, stouter blade at the opposite end.

## GREAVE

These metal sheaves were commonly worn to protect the leg from the knee down to the ankle. They were typically hammered out of iron or bronze sheets.

## SANDALS

Sturdy leather sandals were usually worn by a hoplite, affording their feet some protection as they marched across the rocky terrain of ancient Greece to battle.



# PERSIAN IMMORTAL WARRIORS

It's all in the name. An Immortal could never die. Of course, even the crack troops of the Achaemenid Empire army succumbed to battle, disease or old age occasionally, but the Persian king kept up the pretence of his everlasting elite by immediately promoting the best soldiers from the lower ranks to keep the Immortals at full strength. 10,000 men. No more, no less. The talented few who made it into the Immortals were expected to be able to fight on foot or on horseback; with bow and arrow or hand to hand. Immortals carried an assortment of weapons; each held a shield, sword, spear, bow and a quiver of arrows.

Some also had a mace or a sagaris, a menacing one-handed axe with a flat blade on one side of the head and a sharp point on the other. One of these nearly killed Alexander of

Macedon at the Battle of the Granicus in 334 BCE. Had the point dug a little deeper he would not have lived to conquer the Achaemenid Empire and become Alexander the Great.

The sagaris was dangerous but the main weapon of choice was the spear. Six feet long, with a sharp iron or bronze spearhead, the long shaft had a metal counterbalance at the other end to help hold them steady.

The adaptable but ruthless Immortals played a pivotal role in the conquest of Egypt in 525 BCE. Knowing the Egyptians worshipped the cat goddess Bastet, the Immortals painted felines on their shields and released cats onto the battlefield. Seeing the panicked animals, some Egyptians refused to fight. Persian kings would rule for the next century. The Immortals also aided in the Persian conquest of the Indus Valley

and Scythia and the infamous (but ultimately unsuccessful) invasion of Greece.



*The Immortals employed feline-based psychological warfare in their conquest of Egypt*

*The elaborate garb worn in many Immortal depictions may have been ceremonial robes*



### SHEER FORCE

The Immortals were so-called because they would always be 10,000-strong. Should one die, become sick or injured, they would be replaced to maintain the number. The Immortals were also psychological fighters. Matching uniforms gave the impression they were unkillable, while dead and injured warriors were quickly removed from battle to maintain a sense of immortality.

### PROTECTIVE HEADGEAR

According to the ancient Greek historian Herodotus, who was born in the First Persian Empire, the Immortals wore a loose felt cap called a tiara that, when pulled over the face, would have protected against dust, wind and dirt. Yet with some sources suggesting a cloth headdress, there is uncertainty over the actual form the tiaras took.

### VARIOUS WEAPONS

Aside from carrying a bow and arrow, the Immortal warriors would also have a large, heavily curved dagger and a sagaris, with such an array of weapons making them flexible in battle. The dagger would have been worn at waist level on the right thigh, while the sagaris was a kind of light, easily swingable battle-axe with a flat blade and sharp point.

### COLOURFUL TUNICS

Underneath the breastplate was a sleeved embroidered tunic decorated in diverse colours. There's also a suggestion that the Immortals wore an equally colourful outer robe that covered their armour, but some sources say it's unlikely that such a garment would have been worn during combat.

### SCALE ARMOUR

In order to protect their bodies, the Immortals wore scale-armour breastplates that comprised small bronze or iron plates in overlapping rows. Herodotus called them a "coat of mail looking like the scales of a fish". They were worn with straps slung over the shoulders to keep them firmly in place.

### SHORT SPEAR

The spear was the Immortals' primary weapon and, while almost 2m in length, they were shorter than their Spartan enemies'. At one end was a sharp bronze point. The other end would have a silver or gold counterbalance that, aside from helping to denote the warrior's rank depending on material and shape, could also be used as a weapon.

### WICKER SHIELD

An oval-shaped shield made of wood and wicker and covered in leather would have provided some protection against the enemy, although it wasn't very effective against strong spear thrusts.



## GALEA

This imperial helmet featured a sloping neck guard, protruding ear guards, decoratively bossed hinged flaps to shield the sides of the face and was finished with a bronze trim.

## CREST

The most striking feature of any guard's uniform, the helmet crest could be fashioned with plumes or horse hair and came in a range of colours.

## EXTRA PROTECTION

Shoulder guards, breast and back plates all served to add an extra layer of protection for the upper body.

## LORICA SEGMENTATA

Comprising several circular overlapping metal plates fastened to leather straps, this flexible, hard-wearing body armour boasted a soft iron interior and a hard steel exterior.

## GLADIUS

Forged with steel, the gladius was one of many different weapons wielded by Rome's elite guards. Sporting a hilt of ivory, bronze or wood, this short sword featured a blade that could measure up to 68cm long and 7cm wide and weighed up to 1kg.

## IMPERIAL COLOURS

Aside from the emperor and his relatives, the Praetorian Guard were the only other servants of Rome permitted to wear the imperial colour of purple, a shade deemed fit only for the highest of offices given its lofty price (a result of the fact that the dye could only be made by crushing a small mollusc native to the Tyre region of the Mediterranean Sea).

## SANDALS

As was common at the time, members of the Praetorian Guard sported leather sandals fastened at the back of the leg.



# PRAETORIAN GUARD

The Praetorian Guard was disbanded by Constantine in 312 CE after they backed the losing side during yet another civil war



Jeremy-Günther-Heinz Jähnck

In the last days of the Roman Republic the Praetorian Guard acted as escorts and bodyguards for high-ranking officials and officers. When Augustus came to power in 27 BCE as Rome's first emperor he reformed the unit as his own personal guard.

The first praetorians – perhaps around 4,500 of them – came from respectable Italian families and were expected to have letters of recommendation. Those lucky enough to be accepted benefited from better pay than the legionaries and a shorter term of service. Praetorians were also showered with gifts and donations, particularly when an emperor needed to ensure their loyalty.

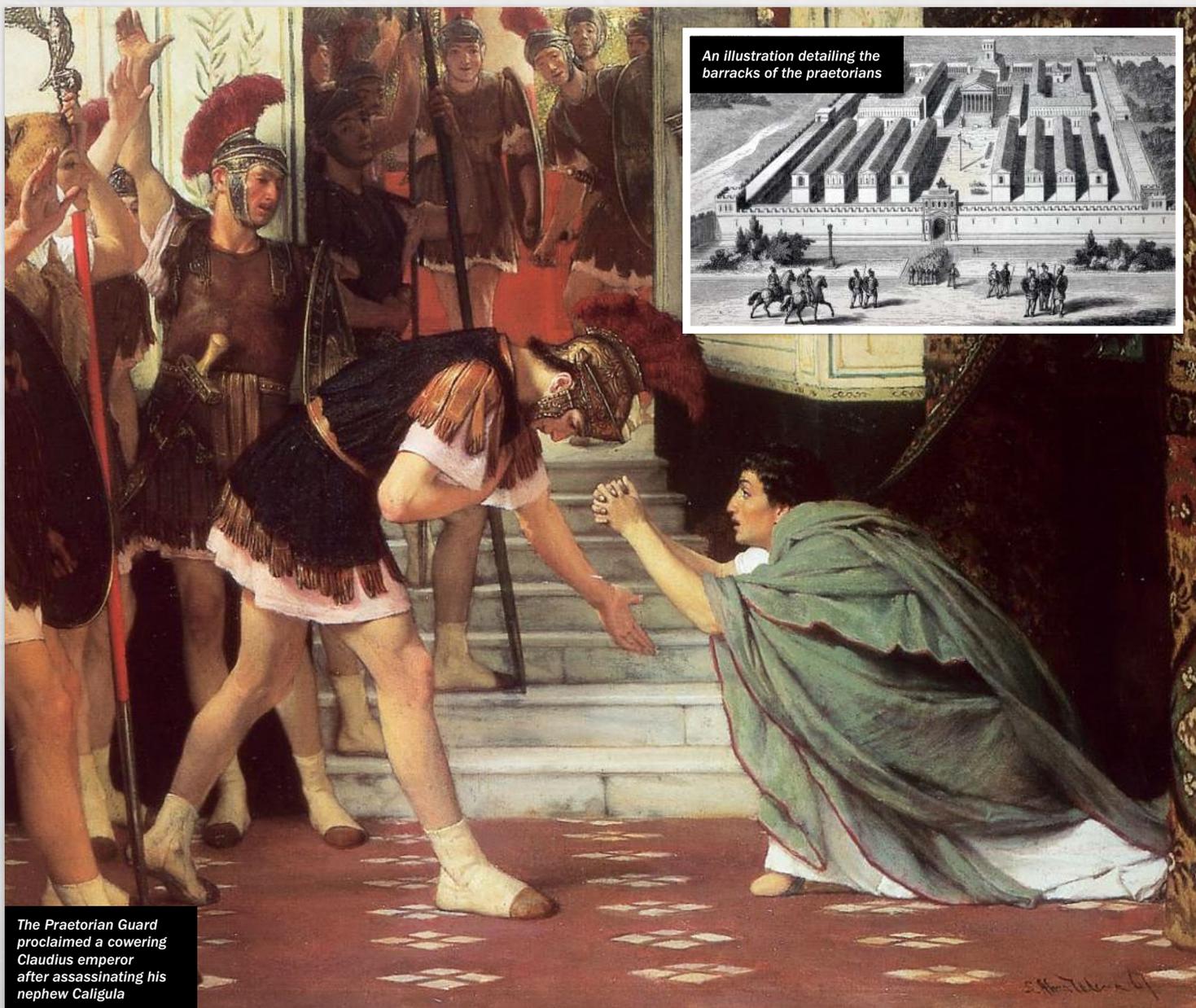
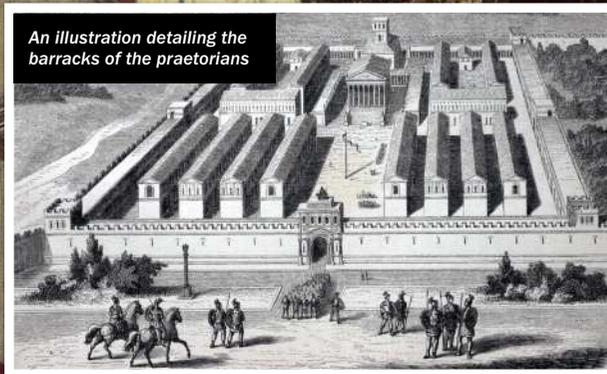
As the best of the Roman Army, Tiberius called on the praetorians to put down mutinies in Pannonia and Germania. They were often on the front lines of battle during the Flavian and Antonine dynasties, carrying heavy, rectangular, semi-cylindrical shields and javelins into battle.

Away from the battlefield, an oval shield and lance was easier to wield. Each cohort had its own version of the praetorian insignia on their shields and regimental standards.

The praetorians were housed in the *Castra Praetoria*, a barracks just outside Rome, and were the only military unit allowed close to the capital. This allowed the praetorians to engage in a little underhand espionage on behalf of the emperor. Clandestine operatives would don a toga and enter Rome to monitor ordinary citizens for evidence of unrest or spy on suspects thought to be plotting against the emperor.

The praetorians had access to the heart of power and, if they did not like what they saw, they were not afraid to act. The first emperor to pay the price was Caligula, stabbed to death by praetorians in 41 CE. Disloyalty and conspiracy from within the ranks of the Praetorian Guard led to the downfalls of at least eight other emperors, including Nero and Commodus.

An illustration detailing the barracks of the praetorians



The Praetorian Guard proclaimed a cowering Claudius emperor after assassinating his nephew Caligula

Getty Images

# VARANGIAN GUARD

The Vikings didn't just raid across the North Sea. While some went west, others set their sails to the east and ended up navigating the rivers of Eastern Europe. Around 988, Byzantine Emperor Basil II appealed to Viking settlers to hurry south to Constantinople and fight on his side in a civil war. The Norse mercenaries turned the tide, their leader married Basil's sister and the Vikings were adopted as the emperor's imperial bodyguard. The Varangian Guard was born.

Varangians stood at the emperor's shoulder at all times. They guarded the bronze doors of the Great Palace and other imperial properties. They watched over political prisoners and acted as Constantinople's police force. Outside the city, the Varangian Guard surrounded the emperor in battle. Only foreign-born mercenaries were allowed into the Guard in the hope that non-Byzantines would not be tempted to join the many conspiracies that recurred in the imperial court.

Decades after their arrival, the Varangians still used weapons with Scandinavian origins, notably two-handed broadaxes and Norse swords. The seafaring background of the Vikings came in useful too. Varangians were despatched to deal with pirates and pursued Venetian invaders who hoped to escape by boat.

Members of the Varangian Guard had the opportunity to earn a fortune through wages, bonuses and plunder. When the Byzantine emperor died, the Varangians had the unique right to raid the imperial treasury for as much treasure as they could carry. One recruit who made good use of his booty was Harald Hardrada, who fled south when his half-brother was deposed as king of Norway. Harald spent nine years in service of the Byzantine court and campaigned for the emperor in Sicily, Bulgaria, Anatolia and the Holy Land. After amassing a fortune, he returned north and used his wealth to take the Norwegian throne.

**“VARANGIANS STOOD AT THE EMPEROR’S SIDE AT ALL TIMES. THEY GUARDED THE DOORS OF THE GREAT PALACE AND OTHER IMPERIAL PROPERTIES, WATCHED OVER POLITICAL PRISONERS AND ACTED AS CONSTANTINOPLE’S POLICE FORCE. OUTSIDE THE CITY THEY SURROUNDED THE EMPEROR IN BATTLE”**



Varangians manned the walls during the siege of 1203 and bravely repulsed the Fourth Crusaders

Alamy: The Picture Art Collection



An influx of Anglo-Saxons joined the Varangian Guard after the Norman Conquest

**ELITE WARRIORS**

Basil II formed the Varangian Guard in 988 to put down a rebellion. The force was made up of Rus warriors, the descendants of Vikings who had settled in modern-day Russia and Ukraine. Some straight-up Vikings also served in the Byzantine force, such as Harald Hardrada, who was a Varangian commander before reigning as king of Norway from 1046–66. Over time, the guards evolved from a band of unruly mercenaries to a loyal elite.

**CONICAL HELMET**

While there may have been some variation, it seems likely that most Varangians wore conical helmets with a nose guard and chinstrap in a Western style. This may have also included a mail hood or curtain for added protection.

**VARANGIAN BRA**

Varangians famously wore a full-length chain mail tunic that would cover them from their head to their knees. However, the metal hauberk could weigh 12kg or more, so the soldiers would wear a special leather harness – known as a Varangian bra – to take the weight off their shoulders.

**LAMELLAR SCALE VEST**

On top of the chain mail, the Varangians sported an extra layer of protection in the more stylish lamellar scale vest. While other lamellar vests were made from rows of leather or metal scales laced together, the plates of the Byzantine designs were riveted onto a backing for extra sturdiness.

**UNDERGARMENTS**

While Byzantine military manuals don't mention any colours, many mosaics show the guards wearing purple cloaks and undergarments. However, this expensive colour was the preserve of the emperor in Byzantine society. Instead, it is far more likely that the Varangian Guard joined the rest of the emperor's entourage in wearing red cloaks.

**BODYGUARDS**

A lot more than a palace guard, the Varangians' worth was fully utilised as a strike force in conflicts throughout the Byzantine Empire. Whether at the vanguard, protecting the emperor or baggage train, at sea or manning the battlements during Constantinople's many sieges, the Guard put their weapons, including their round shields, to the test.

**STANDARDISED UNIFORM**

While the Varangian Guard would have been drawn from all over the world – many other mercenaries joined their ranks beyond the Rus, Scandinavians and Anglo-Saxons – their uniform was standardised and issued by the imperial armoury. In part, this was possibly because many of the exiles that joined the Guard arrived with nothing so required the empire to clothe them.

**BATTLE-AXE**

After the Norman invasion of Britain in 1066 the Varangians saw an influx of displaced Anglo-Saxon soldiers join their ranks. Hence the double-handed axe, so popular with Anglo-Saxon warriors at the Battle of Hastings, became a prominent symbol and weapon of the Guard.





## HEADRESS

The warriors' headdresses resembled an eagle's head with an open beak that they could look out of and were decorated with the bird's feathers. In Aztec mythology the eagle was a symbol of the Sun, and so the warriors saw themselves as soldiers of the Sun.

## SPEAR

Tipped with razor-sharp obsidian, spears were a popular long-range weapon used by the Aztecs. They were sometimes thrown using an atlatl, a device that hooked onto the spear and acted as a catapult, putting more power behind the weapon so that it could be thrown at a higher velocity.

## SHIELD

Each eagle warrior had a small round shield called a chimalli, which was made from wood and twisted plant fibres. It was carried using leather straps and decorated with colourful painted designs and eagle feathers. Alternatively, some soldiers used shields made from thick cotton that could be rolled up while marching.

## ARMOUR

Aztec armour, known as ichcahuipilli, was made from quilted cotton and jute blended together until it was 1-2cm thick. It was lightweight and breathable in the warm Mexican climate but also strong enough to protect against strikes from obsidian swords, arrows and spear thrusts.

## SANDALS

Regular Aztec citizens were not permitted to wear cotton or sandals in the royal palaces, but the eagle warriors could. In addition to their leather footwear, they would also cover their legs with extra strips of leather, called greaves, during battle for added protection.

## JEWELLERY

Eagle warriors were high-ranking members of Aztec society and were awarded certain privileges as a result. For example, they were given tax-free land, permitted to keep mistresses, eat human flesh and allowed to wear fine jewellery that was not available to the general public.

## MACUAHUITL

This popular Aztec weapon was a flat wooden club lined with blades of volcanic glass called obsidian. It allowed warriors to either injure their enemy with the blunt sides so that they could capture them for sacrifice or deliver a more fatal blow with the sharp edges.

# AZTEC EAGLE WARRIOR

Although the Aztecs were a warlike people, the aim was not to kill their enemies in battle: it was to take captives, whose grisly fate was to be sacrificed in religious ceremonies. Every Aztec male received basic military training, and their class was determined by how many captives they took in battle. Those who demonstrated bravery and took four of the enemy prisoner could become eagle warriors.

The *cuauhtli*, to use their Aztec title, were easily identifiable. Their quilted armour and brightly coloured shields were decorated with eagle feathers, and they wore elaborate helmets fashioned so the wearer was looking out of an open eagle beak. The idea behind the impressive outfit was to identify them as one of the elite. Eagle warriors were granted benefits that were off limits to commoners and slaves: they could wear special clothes and jewellery, dine at the palace, keep concubines and be granted land. However, eagle warriors were expected to work for their perks. They were full-time soldiers, guarding the city and patrolling the surrounding lands when not on campaign.

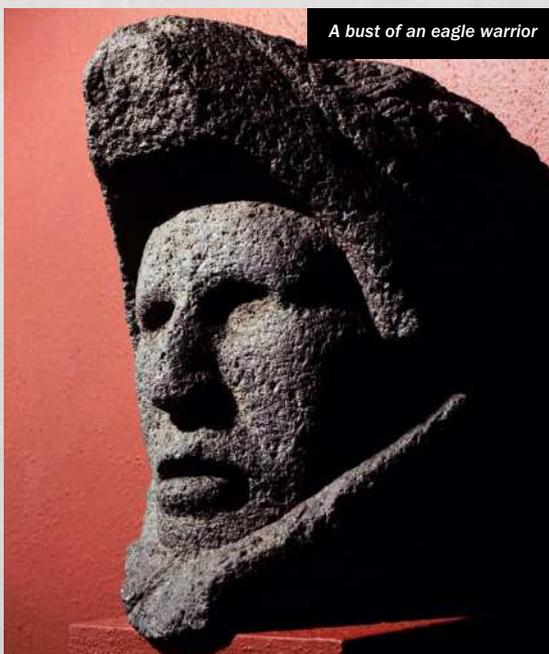
Eagle warriors were proficient in the use of the *atlatl*, a sling that could fire arrows at the enemy. It was a high-status weapon reserved for the highest ranks. The Aztecs also used a variety of hand-to-hand weapons: swords, clubs and axes with wooden handles and obsidian blades or heads. The core weapon was the *macuahuitl*, a sword-club shaped like a cricket bat with obsidian blades fixed along both sides.

Although a vicious-looking weapon, eagle warriors used them to subjugate and capture rather than mortally wound. If an eagle warrior managed to take more captives they might be upgraded to a *cuachicqueh* (shorn one) and allowed to shave their head as a further sign of their impressive deeds.



Getty Images

**“THE AIM OF THE AZTECS WAS NOT TO KILL THEIR ENEMIES IN BATTLE: IT WAS TO TAKE CAPTIVES, WHOSE GRISLY FATE WAS TO BE SACRIFICED IN CEREMONIES”**



A bust of an eagle warrior

Getty Images



# THE WARRIORS OF GOD

**SWORN TO POVERTY, CHASTITY AND HOLY WAR WITH GOD'S ENEMIES, THE FEARSOME WARRIOR MONKS OF THE MONASTIC ORDERS ENSURED CHRISTIAN POWER ENDURED IN THE EAST FOR ALMOST 200 YEARS**

**W**hen Pope Urban II took his place at the head of the Roman church at the end of the 11th century, Christians and Muslims lived in tentative equanimity; no atrocities were rife. Yet this wily pontiff sought to boost papal authority, which had suffered a number of setbacks during the previous decades, and devised an ingenious plan. In 1095, when touring his homeland of France, he called for a crusade to reclaim Jerusalem from the 'infidel'. The Muslims had ruled the city for more than four and a half centuries. Pope Urban now demanded its return.

Fortunately for those who answered his call, the Muslim world was in disarray and the warriors of the First Crusade – a rather motley crew – stormed Jerusalem in a bloody assault in July 1099. Those that remained after its fall founded the Frankish realm of Outremer and the Kingdom of Jerusalem.

Christians flooded in and many sites in the Holy Land became places of pilgrimage for the

devout – though travellers took great risks as they passed through hostile lands stalked by wild animals and yet wilder brigands.

The year 1119, for example, saw 300 pilgrims massacred at Easter near the shores of the River Jordan, while in the same year the Christians, edging their boundaries further into Muslim-held territory, suffered a crushing defeat at Sarmarda. The Christian army of 700 knights and 3,000 infantry was slain or enslaved in what became known as the Battle of the Field of Blood.

It was against this backdrop that the Knights Templar and the Knights Hospitaller emerged as military forces, pledging their swords for the protection of pilgrims. They blended monastic discipline with a commitment to fight for their god. With their bodies protected by iron and their souls clothed in the breastplate of faith – according to their great Cistercian champion – they flowered into mighty enterprises and became the bedrock for the Christian West's tenuous hold on the Levant.

**“THE MUSLIMS HAD RULED THE CITY OF JERUSALEM FOR MORE THAN FOUR AND A HALF CENTURIES. POPE URBAN NOW DEMANDED ITS RETURN”**



# RECRUITING THE MONKS OF WAR

## WHO COULD JOIN THE PRESTIGIOUS ORDER OF THE TEMPLE AND WHAT DID MEMBERSHIP ENTAIL?

The intention of the original Templars was to be 'poor fellow soldiers of Jesus Christ', and Bernard of Clairvaux had insisted that there was to be no distinction of persons within the order. Yet old habits die hard and in the world of chivalry status was everything; certainly by the middle of the 12th century the order demanded that a man must be of knightly origin if he were to wear the white mantle emblazoned with its distinctive red cross.

Not every member needed to hail from knightly stock, however, so the sergeants wore a black tunic embossed with a red cross and either a black or brown mantle. The sergeants' armour, too, was less elaborate than the knights', consisting of an iron cap and sleeveless mail coat.

There may have been further graduation among the sergeant class, incorporating

artisans as well as fighting men. The Rule makes note of 'the craftsmen brothers of the stables', presumably referring to the farriers, as well as 'mason brothers', who were needed to build fortifications. Cooks and blacksmiths were also recruited into the Order.

The mainstay of the Order remained the knights, of course. Married men could join but were not permitted to wear the white surcoat. Upon entry, newcomers surrendered secular clothing to the draper and were armed with standard equipment, along with two shirts, pairs of breeches and sets of hose.

They also received a pair of white robes, a tunic and a belt. Each knight could have three horses and a squire, unless the master sanctioned more. The knight also carried campaign equipment – bedding, cooking utensils, sheets and the like – and when not

at war was expected to live a monastic life, according to the Rule.

When on campaign the Templars and the Hospitallers were in the minority, fighting alongside Western crusaders or the Turcopoles, mercenaries who had been recruited from the local Muslim population.

The latter also formed sizeable contingents in many garrisons. According to one source, just four brethren knights and 28 sergeants patrolled the Hospitaller fortress of Marqab, with the rest of the defending force being comprised of Muslim mercenaries.

## THE KNIGHTS TEMPLAR

**FOUNDED:** 1118

**FOUNDER:** HUGUES DE PAYNES

**HEADQUARTERS:** INITIALLY TEMPLE MOUNT, JERUSALEM; LATTERLY IN CYPRUS

This powerful order arose from humble beginnings when in 1118/1119 Hugh de Payns, a knight from Champagne, formed a group of eight companions into a brotherhood sworn to protect the pilgrim route through Palestine. They found support from King Baldwin II of Jerusalem, who granted them accommodation in the complex of the Temple of Solomon, from which the order took its name. Eager to protect pilgrims and the wealth they carried into the Holy Land, Baldwin seized upon the notion of a standing body of warriors in his kingdom, and perhaps in a bid to boost numbers, a letter was dispatched to the influential Cistercian abbot Bernard of Clairvaux who persuaded the Council of Troyes in 1128/1129 to recognise the fellowship as a religious order. It had a pronounced way of life, which demanded poverty and chastity and obedience to the pope. Spiritual rewards were conferred upon its members and numbers flourished.

Now, warriors dubbed 'poor fellow soldiers of Jesus Christ' could enjoy the spiritual rewards of the religious movements while remaining under arms. This was a radical move by the church - which had insisted previously that its professed religious members must remain men of peace - and it was formally confirmed by the papacy in 1139. The mightiest military order of the medieval period had been born.

Templar swords spilled blood in the name of Christ from the 1130s onwards, and they fought furiously for the defence of Outremer. Donations flooded in and the Temple Knights flourished, establishing houses across Europe to receive and administer their growing wealth. Eventually, the temporal power and wealth that they originally eschewed would precipitate their downfall.



As well as knights, drapers, cooks and farriers were also accepted into the Order

# HIERARCHY OF THE KNIGHTS TEMPLAR

## THE GRAND MASTER

THE SUPREME HEAD WITH VAST POWERS

## THE SENESCHAL

THE GRAND MASTER'S DEPUTY, WHO CARRIED THE ORDER'S BANNER

## THE MARSHALL

HEAD OF THE MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT

## THE COMMANDER OF THE LAND OF JERUSALEM

THE TREASURER

## THE DRAPER

ISSUER OF CLOTHING AND DISTRIBUTOR OF GIFTS

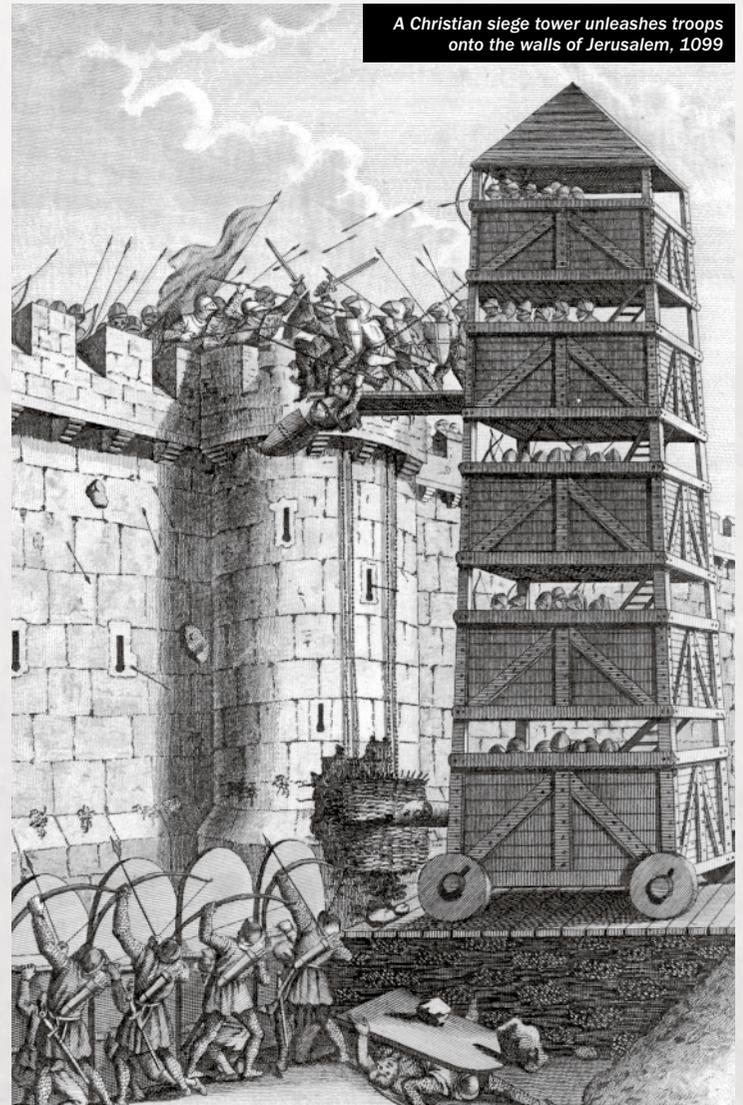
## REGIONAL COMMANDERS

CITY OF JERUSALEM; TRIPOLI; ANTIOCH; OF THE KNIGHTS; TURCOPOLIER; THE UNDER-MARSHAL; THE STANDARD-BEARER; THE INFIRMARER

## THE RANK-AND-FILE KNIGHTS TEMPLAR

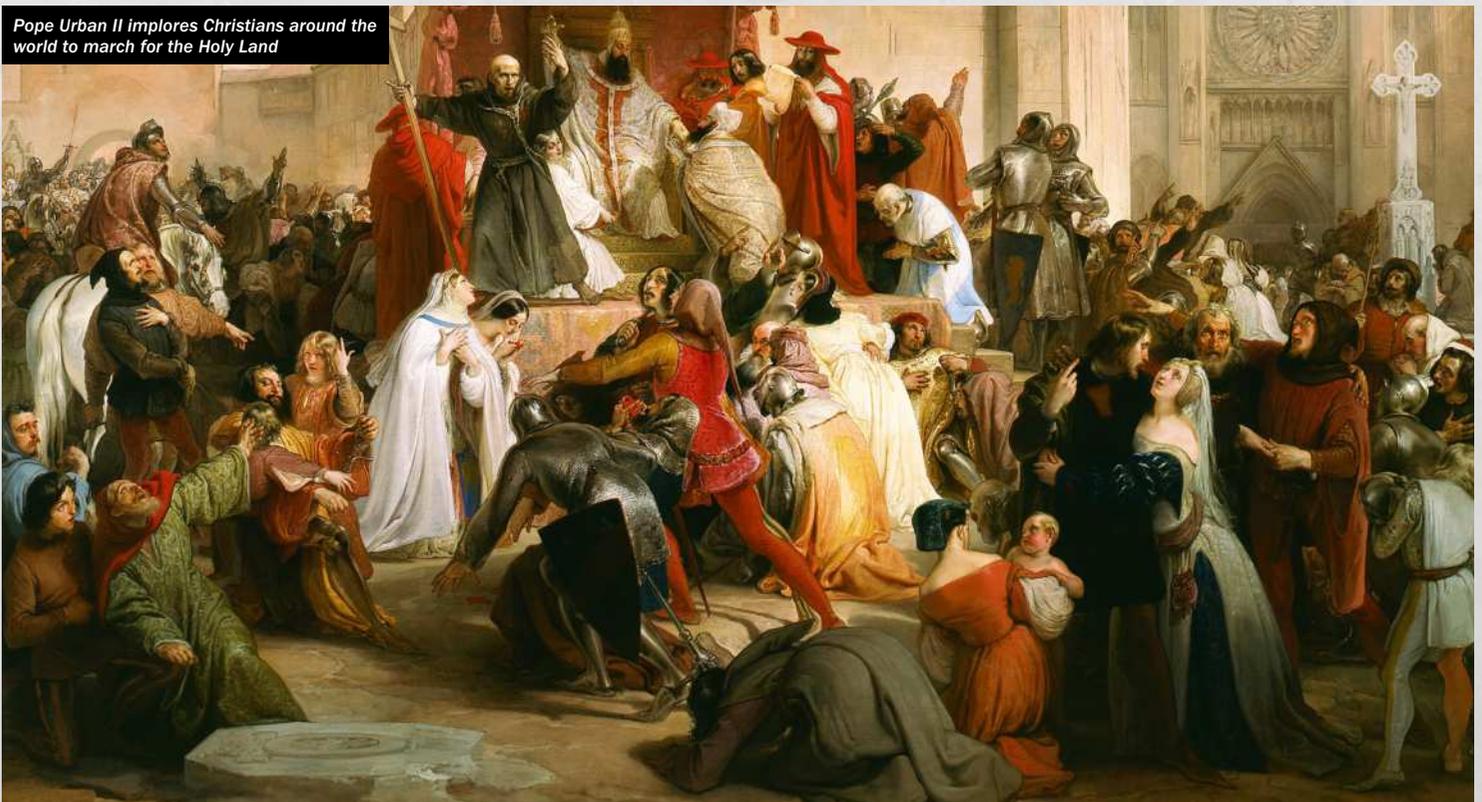
THE SERGEANTS

THE ARTISAN TEMPLARS



A Christian siege tower unleashes troops onto the walls of Jerusalem, 1099

Pope Urban II implores Christians around the world to march for the Holy Land



# PROTECTING THE PILGRIM ROAD

It was while touring his homeland in 1095 that Pope Urban II launched the First Crusade, calling upon the chivalry of Europe to assist their brethren in the East and take revenge against Islam for the atrocities that the 'infidel' had supposedly meted out on Christians in the Holy Land. In truth, peace reigned in the East, though tensions often simmered. Yet Urban's bid to boost papal power would change all that. His plea, pronounced at Clermont in France, entwined the Christian faith with military violence and initiated a period of hostility that sent thousands to their deaths. Holy war was engendered, and it was not only Europe's warrior-caste, but humble men, women and children, who flocked to his cause. It is thought that in the 12 months following his sermon up to 100,000 may have answered his call. The crusade was a truly radical move, sanctifying bloodshed, which was anathema to the teachings of Christ. But the suggestions woven into the fabric of Urban's text offered the first crusaders enticements that were hard to

resist. Many young knights sought adventure and the chance to make a name or win lands of their own; material greed undoubtedly played a part in the decisions of many. Arguably the strongest incentive, however, was the prospect of salvation, a coveted prize to the 11th-century mind fraught with worry over the life hereafter. After all, what better way was there to enter the Kingdom of Heaven than by reclaiming Jerusalem, occupied by the Muslims since 638? "God has initiated in our time holy wars," wrote one contemporary, so that Christians "might find a new way of gaining salvation. And so they are not forced to abandon secular affairs completely."

Once the crusaders had taken Jerusalem amid much bloodletting in 1099, Outremer emerged, a land littered with sacred sites to which those unable to fight in the Holy Land's liberation flocked to curry God's favour. It was to protect these travellers – and then to fight for the kingdom itself – that the military orders were born.

## CRUSADER STRONGHOLDS

### CHASTEL-BLANC COUNTY OF TRIPOLI

Among the many castles held by the Templars, their presence in the County of Tripoli was focused on Tortosa (Tartous) and Chastel-Blanc, the latter squatting 380 metres up in the Nusairi Mountains. The towering keep was rimmed by oval perimeter walls measuring 165 metres at their widest points. Men atop the keep could see the mighty Hospitaller citadel of Krak des Chevaliers to the southeast as well as their own fortress at Tortosa in the northwest.



### KRAK DES CHEVALIERS COUNTY OF TRIPOLI

Arguably the most awesome military structure to survive from the medieval era, Krak was granted to the Knights Hospitaller in 1144, which held it until it finally fell in 1271. During this time it withstood 12 sieges and repelled attacks by the great Saladin. Able to house 2,000 men with supplies for many months, it was perfect for withstanding a siege. Indeed, it didn't fall through assault but through trickery and declining morale. When the Egyptian besieger Baibars finally pierced the outer walls in 1271, he was confronted by the enormity of what still remained. Hence, during the sixth week of his investment, the wily sultan gambled on a carrier pigeon that he sent over the walls with a message purportedly from the head of the Order of St John ordering the defenders to seek honourable surrender. The beleaguered castellan agreed, and Baibars upheld the pretence and let the garrison leave with honour.

### AL-KERAK KINGDOM OF JERUSALEM

Also known as Kerak or Karak, this castle was never fully held by a military order, though the Hospitallers were granted the lower bailey in 1152. It's worthy of inclusion here, however, courtesy of a story from Saladin's siege in 1183. During his bombardment, a crusader wedding was in full swing and, unperturbed by the attack, the bride's mother sent out some choice dishes to Saladin, who responded by asking whereabouts the wedding was taking place in order that he might direct his artillery elsewhere.



## MEDITERRANEAN SEA

**"IN TRUTH, PEACE REIGNED IN THE EAST, THOUGH TENSIONS OFTEN SIMMERED. YET URBAN'S BID TO BOOST PAPAL POWER WOULD CHANGE ALL THAT"**

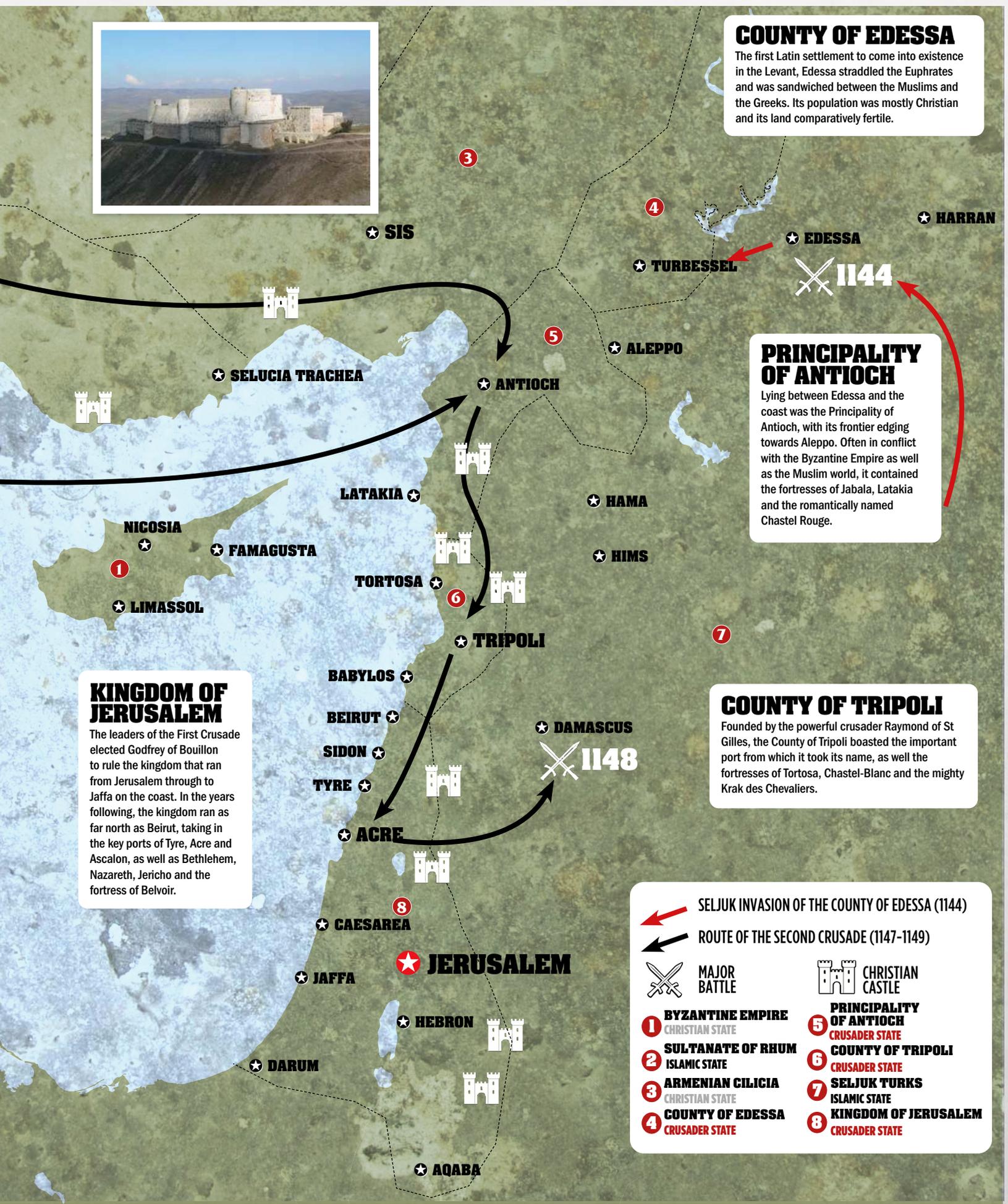


**COUNTY OF EDESSA**  
 The first Latin settlement to come into existence in the Levant, Edessa straddled the Euphrates and was sandwiched between the Muslims and the Greeks. Its population was mostly Christian and its land comparatively fertile.

**PRINCIPALITY OF ANTIOCH**  
 Lying between Edessa and the coast was the Principality of Antioch, with its frontier edging towards Aleppo. Often in conflict with the Byzantine Empire as well as the Muslim world, it contained the fortresses of Jabala, Latakia and the romantically named Chastel Rouge.

**COUNTY OF TRIPOLI**  
 Founded by the powerful crusader Raymond of St Gilles, the County of Tripoli boasted the important port from which it took its name, as well the fortresses of Tortosa, Chastel-Blanc and the mighty Krak des Chevaliers.

**KINGDOM OF JERUSALEM**  
 The leaders of the First Crusade elected Godfrey of Bouillon to rule the kingdom that ran from Jerusalem through to Jaffa on the coast. In the years following, the kingdom ran as far north as Beirut, taking in the key ports of Tyre, Acre and Ascalon, as well as Bethlehem, Nazareth, Jericho and the fortress of Belvoir.



SELJUK INVASION OF THE COUNTY OF EDESSA (1144)  
 ROUTE OF THE SECOND CRUSADE (1147-1149)  
 MAJOR BATTLE  
 CHRISTIAN CASTLE

<p><b>1</b> BYZANTINE EMPIRE CHRISTIAN STATE</p> <p><b>2</b> SULTANATE OF RHUM ISLAMIC STATE</p> <p><b>3</b> ARMENIAN CILICIA CHRISTIAN STATE</p> <p><b>4</b> COUNTY OF EDESSA CRUSADER STATE</p>	<p><b>5</b> PRINCIPALITY OF ANTIOCH CRUSADER STATE</p> <p><b>6</b> COUNTY OF TRIPOLI CRUSADER STATE</p> <p><b>7</b> SELJUK TURKS ISLAMIC STATE</p> <p><b>8</b> KINGDOM OF JERUSALEM CRUSADER STATE</p>
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# THE KNIGHTS OF THE HOSPITAL OF ST JOHN (KNIGHTS HOSPITALLER)

**FOUNDED: 1099 FOUNDER: FRA' GERARD HEADQUARTERS: INITIALLY JERUSALEM; MOST FAMOUSLY MALTA**

The second leading military order of the medieval period was the Knights Hospitaller, whose members, like the Templars, swore monastic vows and fought for the defence of the Holy Land. There were differences between the orders, however, with the most notable being the Hospitallers' medical duties – a legacy that continues today in the form of St John's Ambulance.

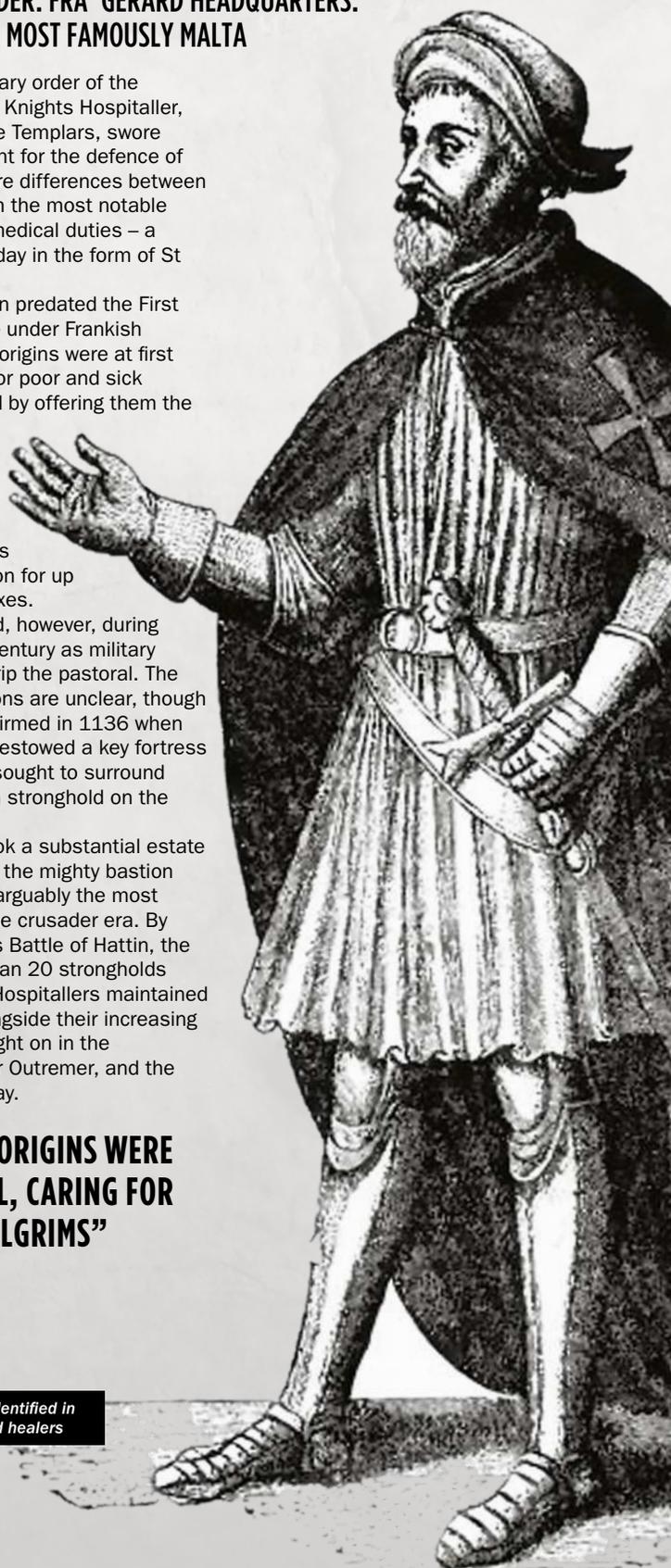
The Hospital of St John predated the First Crusade, though it came under Frankish influence soon after. Its origins were at first wholly peaceful, caring for poor and sick pilgrims to the Holy Land by offering them the chance of recuperation before they continued their journeys. Based inside a building adjacent to the Holy Sepulchre, the hospital is said to have had provision for up to 2,000 sick of both sexes.

Their impetus changed, however, during the course of the 12th century as military functions came to outstrip the pastoral. The precise timing and reasons are unclear, though military activity was confirmed in 1136 when King Fulk of Jerusalem bestowed a key fortress upon the knights as he sought to surround Ascalon, the last Muslim stronghold on the Palestinian coast.

By 1144, the order took a substantial estate in Tripoli, which included the mighty bastion of Krak des Chevaliers, arguably the most impressive fortress of the crusader era. By 1187 and the disastrous Battle of Hattin, the Order controlled more than 20 strongholds across the Levant. The Hospitallers maintained their medical duties alongside their increasing martial function and fought on in the Mediterranean long after Outremer, and the Templars, had faded away.

**“THE HOSPITAL’S ORIGINS WERE AT FIRST PEACEFUL, CARING FOR POOR AND SICK PILGRIMS”**

*The Knights of St John are identified in their capacity as medics and healers*



## THE OTHER MILITARY ORDERS

THE TEMPLARS AND HOSPITALLERS WERE THE MOST FAMOUS SOLDIER-MONKS, BUT THEY WERE NOT ALONE. A HOST OF MILITARY ORDERS EMERGED IN THEIR WAKE...

### TEUTONIC KNIGHTS

Certainly the third most-celebrated order, the Teutonic Knights were founded in 1198 along the same lines as its brethren, a legacy of the abortive German crusade of 1197. Initially installed at St Nicholas Gate at Acre, they flourished in the Baltic rather than Palestine, though as the military orders took an ever-increasing role in the defence of Outremer the Teutonic Knights played their part.



### KNIGHTS OF ST LAZARUS

It is thought that the Hospitallers of St Lazarus, a group of leper knights first mentioned in 1142, was the third order to emerge in the Levant. The rule of the Temple insisted that any member who contracted leprosy should leave and join these brethren. In times of crisis, the 'unclean' knights may have born arms.



### KNIGHTS OF OUR LADY OF MONTJOIE

Montjoie was a castle outside Jerusalem, taking its name from pilgrims' joyous proclamations uttered upon seeing the Holy City in the distance. The Spanish Count Rodrigo founded this order, which followed the Cistercian rule and pledged to ransom captives as well as fight the 'infidels' of the Holy Land, but it struggled to attract recruits.



### KNIGHTS OF ST THOMAS OF ACRE

Founded in 1191 in Acre after the city had been seized by Richard the Lionheart's forces, this Catholic order only admitted Englishmen as members. The group was not militarised until the Fifth Crusade in 1217, but it would help to hold Acre for over a century.



### THE KNIGHTS OF CALATRAVA

The initial success of the military orders in the East inspired similar zeal during the Reconquista in Spain, where the Knights of Calatrava were formed in Castille in 1158 to help drive the Moors back across the Mediterranean. Other orders followed, like the Knights of Santiago, founded in León in 1170.





Richard I led the crusader forces to victory at the Battle of Arsuf

# MILITARY ORDERS AT WAR: THE BATTLE OF ARSUF, 1191

Such was the military orders' prowess on the field that the great conqueror Saladin, ordinarily a merciful man, ordered the execution of many Templars and Hospitallers in the wake of his crushing victory at Hattin so that they could not fight again.

Indeed, Saladin's victory at Hattin in 1187 and his subsequent recapture of Jerusalem inspired the Third Crusade, which brought Richard I of England to Palestine, a great warrior who, like his enemy, quickly recognised the efficacy of the military orders.

During Richard's march south from victory at Acre in July 1191, for example, the Christian army was harassed persistently but the military orders played a vital role not only in repelling

Turkish onslaughts – the Hospitallers in the van, the Templars at the rear – but also in collecting fodder and recovering the wounded.

They really proved their worth at Arsuf in September of that year, when Saladin, eager to avenge the slaughter at Acre, finally pounced. Richard marched for the safety of the fortress at Arsuf, drawing up his forces in 12 squadrons, which were then divided into five separate battle-lines for their final push. The lionhearted general recognised that group control and coherence would be instrumental.

With this in mind he ordered the Templars to take the van, with the Hospitallers holding the rear, figuring that their discipline would keep his more reckless troops in check. Richard

packed his men into such a solid mass that one chronicler claimed that an apple, if tossed in their midst, would not hit the ground.

Saladin attacked, bludgeoning the Christian rear, and the Hospitallers were pushed to breaking point, prompting a lapse in discipline that, ironically, won the day.

The Knights of St John charged their assailants, though they'd been given no orders to do so. The infantry lines parted and the Templars, then Richard himself, thundered into Saladin's troops like a "rolling wave" according to one author.

Their impact was utterly devastating, causing the Turks to break and flee. The military orders had won yet another great victory.

# THE DEMISE OF THE TEMPLARS

**DESPITE ACTING AS A BULWARK AGAINST THE MUSLIM TIDE IN THE EAST AND A FINANCIAL POWERHOUSE IN THE WEST, IN 1312 THE TEMPLARS WERE DISSOLVED AND TWO YEARS LATER THEIR GRAND MASTER WAS ROASTED ALIVE...**

"A detestable crime, an execrable evil, an abominable work." Such were the contents of King Philip IV's secret orders to his seneschals in September 1307 as he prepared the surprise arrest of the Knights Templar in France, their European stronghold. Among the accusations levelled at the knights were the sins of denying Christ, of engaging in homosexual practice and of worshipping idols. Pope Clement V protested, but when Master Jacques de Molay and others confessed, he ordered the Templars' arrest across Europe. Trials followed and in March 1312 the papacy announced the order's dissolution. Molay, who retracted his original confession, was burned at the stake in 1314.

During the course of the scandal many of the Templars who'd confessed argued that they had done so under torture – a lamentable method of prosecuting the innocent throughout history. In addition, when their treasures were seized there was no mention of the supposed idols that they were said to have worshipped, and though members had apostatised and left the Temple throughout its history, never before had such allegations come to light. It appears the reasons for the Templars fall came from without, not within. But why?

By this period the military orders had failed in their pledge to protect Outremer, which had gradually collapsed, and with the fall of Acre in 1291 critics had a target for their protestations. Many have also argued that Philip worried about a military state within his own country, but the Temple in France was hardly militaristic in character. Perhaps Philip, always struggling for money, coveted the knights' vast riches, and certainly the crown enjoyed short-term financial gain, but the pope – though often regarded as a puppet of the French king at the time – granted their treasures to the Hospitallers, and Philip did not press for further financial gain.

There had been discussions about merging the military orders, but the Templars protested and some believe that this angered Philip who, eager to forge a new crusade, hoped to lead the combined orders to war. Philip never did visit the Holy Land, even though the opportunity remained throughout his life. The fact remains that the king might have believed the accusations levelled against the Templars. Certainly, following his wife's death in 1305 he became increasingly concerned with religious matters and may have wanted to purge a perceived evil. No conclusion is definitive, and though the military orders continued to operate, the mightiest order of all had been destroyed.



*Jacques de Molay, last Grand Master of the Knights Templar, was ordered burned at the stake by King Philip IV of France*



## HAUBERK

Hauberks were chainmail shirts that covered the whole of a soldier's body down to the knees. While they offered a great deal of protection their weight restricted movement and could cause serious discomfort in the heat of the Middle East.

## HELMET

Wealthier knights were able to afford a 'great helm' helmet, which featured eye slits and breathing holes. The design of this helmet was ideal for deflecting sword blows and enemy arrows.

# CRUSADER KNIGHT

THE FANATICAL CHRISTIAN KNIGHTS OF THE CRUSADES WAGED WAR FOR CENTURIES

Hailed as the 'knights of Christ', the Christian warriors who answered the call of the papacy and travelled to the Middle East to battle the Muslims were not only well armed; they were imbued with an unwavering belief in their holy cause and the offer of divine redemption.

Formed into military orders such as the Knights Templar, these devoted soldiers maintained a presence in the Holy Land from 1091 until 1492, scoring many victories, such as at Montgisard in 1177, and suffering a number of crushing defeats, including the rout at Hattin ten years later.

## SWORD

Crusader swords were single-handed, medium-length longswords with a straight, double-edged blade. Owning a sword was usually a sign of nobility on the wielder's part, and the pommel often bore a cross-shaped motif.

## SHIELD

The majority of Crusader shields were long and extremely expensive. Measuring approximately 0.8m long and up to 0.5m wide, these shields were carved from wood and could be decorated with symbols to aid recognition in the chaos of battle.

## TUNIC

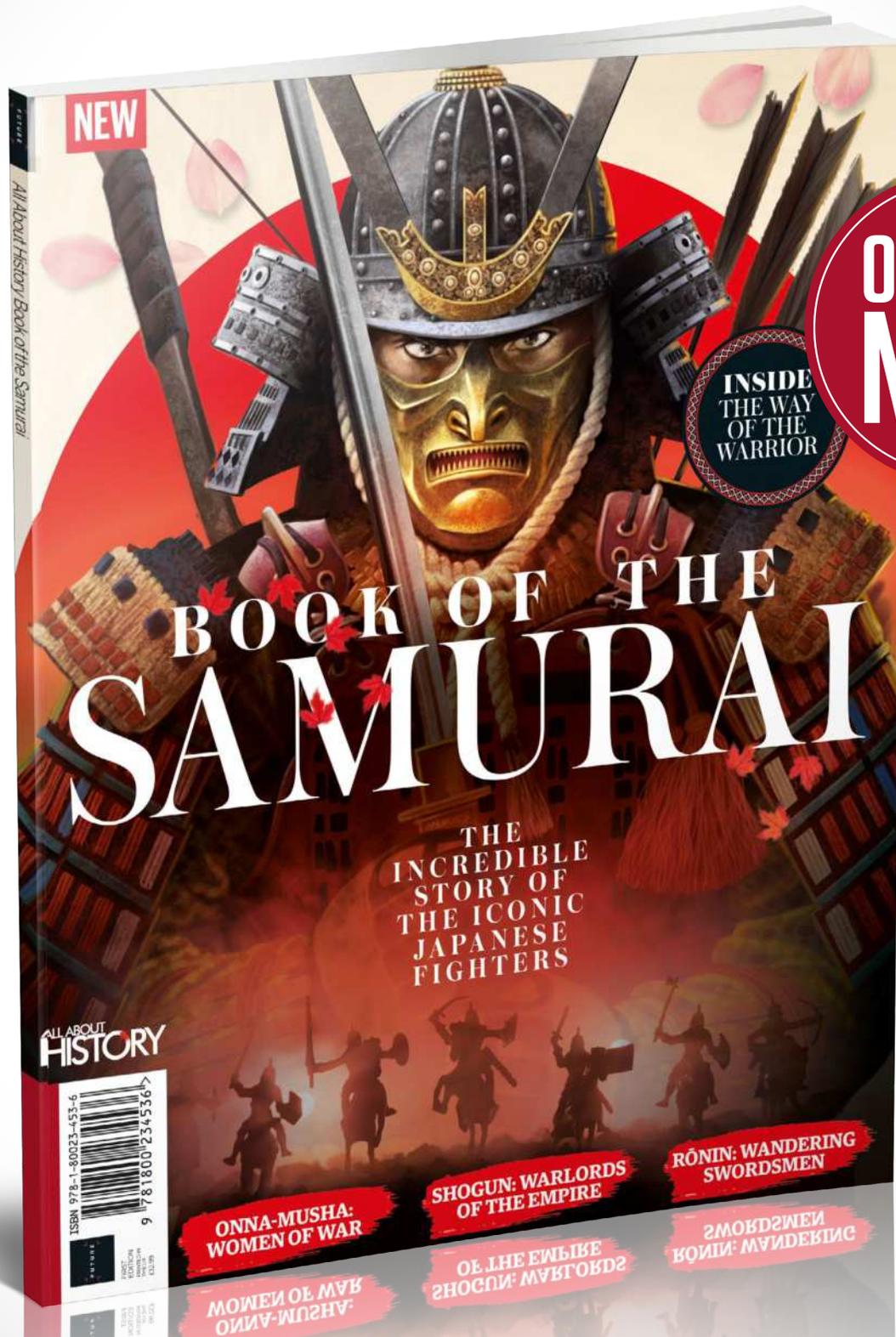
Crusading warriors often wore a tunic bearing the cross of Saint George over their hauberk armour.

**“LET THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN FIGHTING AGAINST THEIR BROTHERS AND RELATIVES NOW FIGHT IN A PROPER WAY AGAINST THE BARBARIANS” – POPE URBAN II**



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# SHADOW WARRIORS

## THE SECRET WORLD OF THE NINJA

**THE ELITE NINJA WERE THE HIGHLY TRAINED MASTERS OF ESPIONAGE,  
INFILTRATION, SABOTAGE AND ASSASSINATION**

**J**apan's legendary ninja are shrouded in myth and their exploits steeped in Japanese folklore, blurring the lines between fact and fiction. However, the real-life exploits of the ninja are far more fascinating than the legends that have grown around them since their golden age during the 15th and 16th centuries.

The ninja, or 'shinobi', emerged in the mid-15th century. Although the skills most associated with them – spying, infiltration and assassination – had been practised before the emergence of ninja, it wasn't until the mid-1400s that a class of specially trained warriors appeared. The ninja have typically been seen as the antithesis of the honourable samurai, but the relationship is in fact much more complicated. Ninja were often hired mercenaries, but examples can be found of samurai also acting as ninja.

Specially trained spies and assassins began to appear during the 15th century, acting as mercenaries for hire by warlords to spy on, raid, sabotage and murder their rivals. The term 'shinobi' came to describe these mercenaries, who originated from the warrior caste – they were not merely peasant farmers; they were at least ashigaru (foot soldiers) and in some cases even samurai. At first, fathers passed the trade on to their children, but as the profession grew guilds and clans were created.

Ninja were called upon to carry out the most dangerous missions, and often their survival was not guaranteed. Their abilities saw them act as spies, scouts, infiltrators,

assassins and arsonists. The chief role of the ninja was to gather intelligence, either by infiltrating an enemy castle or camp or through reconnaissance. A contemporary instructional poem advised ninja to, "Always draw what you have learned while scouting, and then report it to the strategist directly in person." Another recommended, "If guiding and planning the way while moving position, the essential information you must bring are the mountains, the rivers, and the distance from the enemy." On countless occasions the information gathered by ninja helped turn the tide of battles.

Sabotage was another important role for the ninja, who often infiltrated enemy castles to set them on fire. In 1541, elite Iga ninja infiltrated Kasagi Castle and set fire to the buildings in the outer bailey. This sort of raid became the speciality of the ninja, with similar attacks at Sawayama in 1558 and Maibara in 1561.

Ninja have become synonymous with assassination, and warlords often employed ninja to kill their rivals. The ninja were so skilful and stealthy that castle designers began to implement anti-ninja defences, including pressure-sensitive floorboards and hidden weapons. Many castles, like Himeji, were also designed to be mazes to those not familiar with their corridors and passages.

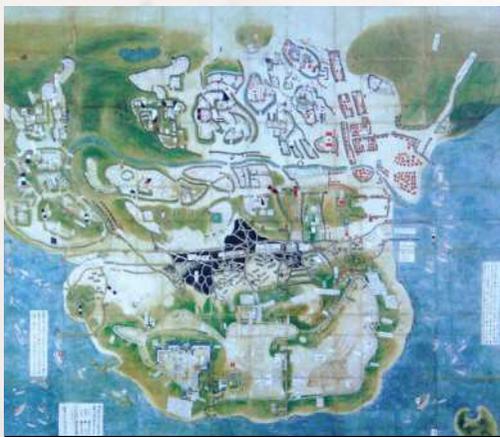
These countermeasures were not always successful, however, and dozens of assassination attempts using various methods – from throat-cutting to dripping poison into sleeping victims' mouths – were made.



## THE FIRST ELITES

During the vicious Onin War – which ravaged Japan between 1467 and 1477 and destabilised the country, plunging it into the chaotic era known as the Sengoku period – the shinobi emerged as a professional class of warriors. The rival daimyos (lords) who emerged during this time used ninja as another weapon in their arsenal, employing them as spies, scouts, kisho (surprise attackers) and agitators to disrupt their enemies. While they were often treated with suspicion and mistrusted even by their own allies, the ninja's skills were grudgingly respected. By the 1600s, the lines between the ninja and samurai class had become more blurred, with prominent samurai like Hattori Hanzo also being skilled ninja.

For nearly 2,000 years, two family clans provided ninja for the warring shoguns and daimyos. These clans, the Iga and the Koga,



Ninja were instrumental in the Siege of Hara Castle. The Christian rebellion was their last conflict

took their names from their regions, which neighboured one another. The villages of this mountainous area became the breeding ground for Japan's most effective professional ninja. Free from feudal lords, these ninja were able to devote their lives to training in ninjutsu – the 'art of stealth'.

The Iga ninja were often retainers of the Ashikaga shogunate, until it was overthrown by Oda Nobunaga in 1573. In 1581, Nobunaga consolidated his power by destroying Ashikaga's supporters, invading Iga and razing many of the region's villages to the ground. So fast was the attack that the Iga were unable to utilise their ninjutsu skills in their defence and were quickly overwhelmed.

The Iga ninja that survived fled through the mountains to serve Tokugawa Ieyasu. One of the greatest Iga ninja, Hattori Hanzo, became a close friend and bodyguard of Ieyasu, protecting him and helping him escape Nobunaga. For this, Hanzo was rewarded with land and power as Ieyasu gained enough power to become shogun in 1603. The remnants of the Iga served as guards and spies for the Tokugawa shogunate into the 18th century.

The ninja of the smaller Koga clan acted independently as mercenaries during the 14th century, with Koga ninja often serving rival warlords. However, in the 15th century they were called upon by their local daimyos, the Rokkaku, to defend their land. Following the Onin War, the Rokkaku began to rebel against the Ashikaga shogunate, seizing territory and ignoring the shogun's orders. In 1487, Ashikaga Yoshihisa, the ninth shogun of the Ashikaga shogunate, led an army to besiege

Rokkaku castles. It was during this conflict that the Iga ninja, serving the shogunate, and Koga ninja clashed. One by one, Rokkaku castles fell and their lords fled, ordering their Koga to fight to the death. The Koga ninja were masters of guerrilla warfare and launched an insurgency, confounding the shogun at every turn. They exploited their expert knowledge of the local geography, hiding in the mountains and launching raids on Yoshihisa's forces. The ninja attacked the shogun's camps, causing chaos and confusion with fires and smoke screens.

After holding off the shogun's troops for a few years, Yoshihisa's death in 1489 finally ended the occupation of the Koga's territory. The skill and bravery of the Koga ninja's guerrilla war made them famous, and they gained a formidable reputation as both conventional and unconventional warriors.

During the 1560s, Tokugawa Ieyasu hired Koga ninja, led by Tomo Sukesada, to raid Imagawa clan outposts. Sukesada and his Koga ninja infiltrated Imagawa Castle and set fire to its towers, causing panic and killing much of the garrison.

They again played a pivotal role during the Battle of Sekigahara, where they helped defend Fushimi Castle and hold up Ishida Mitsunari's attack. Tokugawa Ieyasu's victory at the battle enabled him to create the Tokugawa shogunate, which would rule until 1868.

From 1600 onwards the Koga and Iga ninja worked together as the shogun's elite guard, defending his principle seat of power at Edo Castle. The Tokugawa shogunate presided over several years of peace in Japan, but in 1637 the ninja were called upon one last time.

## THE ROLES OF A NINJA

WHILE THE PRIMARY TASK OF THE MULTIFACETED NINJA WAS TO BE A COVERT OPERATIVE, THEY WERE ALSO HIGHLY SKILLED TACTICIANS AND CONVENTIONAL WARRIORS

### SPIES

One of the ninja's main tasks was to gather intelligence for their lords before and

during military campaigns. Using their clandestine skills to blend in with the enemy, they would infiltrate camps and castles. This allowed them to map defences, obtain passwords and report on troop movements. In 1487, Yoshihisa ninja infiltrated a Takayori camp at Magari, reporting back vital information before an attack was launched.

### SOLDIERS

While ninia were masters of stealth and staying hidden from enemy

combatants, they were also supremely skilled in conventional combat. Some ninja were also samurai, and a favoured tactic during battle was to create confusion among the enemy by capturing their banners. More commonly, however, ninja were used to bring prolonged sieges to a swift conclusion by acting as ruthless saboteurs.

### SABOTEURS

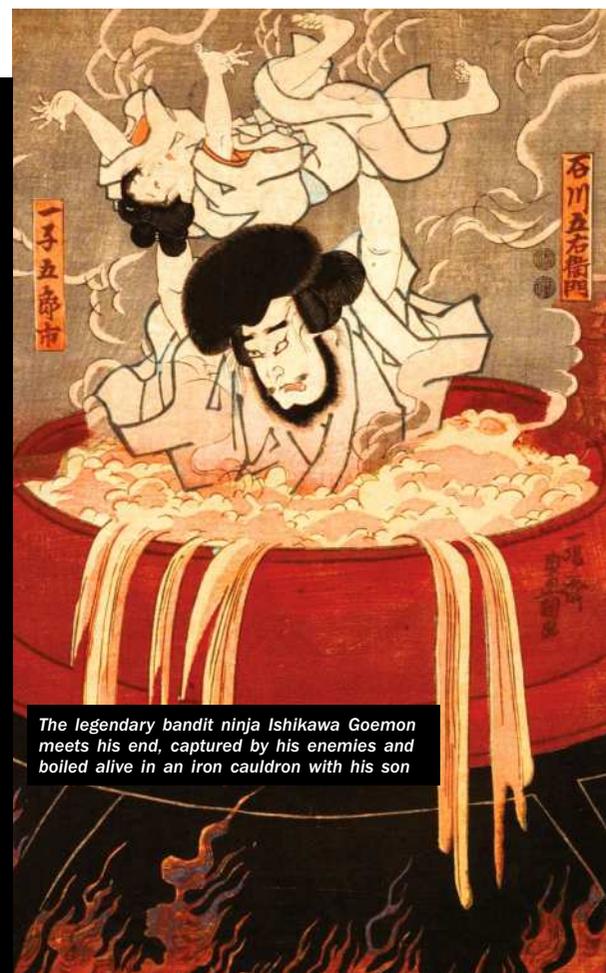
As ninia were able to easily infiltrate into enemy strongholds, one of

their main duties became conducting sabotage. Their primary weapon for such an act was fire. The classic Japanese castles of the period were constructed from wood with stone foundations, which made them extremely vulnerable to flame. At the Siege of Sawayama in 1558, ninja infiltrated the enemy's castle and set it alight, ending the stalemate.

### ASSASSINS

The most legendary role of the ninja was as a ruthless and silent assassin.

Warlord Oda Nobunaga was the target of many such attempts. Sugitani Zenjū, an expert marksman, tried and failed to kill him in 1571. In 1573, Manabe Rokur infiltrated Nobunaga's castle but was detected and forced to commit seppuku. In 1579, Kido Yazaemon and his ninja opened fire on Nobunaga, missing him but killing seven of his attendants.



The legendary bandit ninja Ishikawa Goemon meets his end, captured by his enemies and boiled alive in an iron cauldron with his son

# NINJUTSU TRAINING

NINJA WERE TRAINED FROM AN EARLY AGE TO MASTER THE SKILLS OF AN EXPERT SHINOBI

Ninja spent their entire lives honing the skills, disciplines and abilities they needed to become masters of ninjutsu. The skills and traditions of the ninja were passed on from father to son or sensei to pupil, creating ninja dynasties.

Training began at a very early age – like samurai, they began almost as soon as they could walk, learning the 18 Disciplines, including how to fight with a vast array of weapons, from katanas to throwing stars. In addition to the 18 Disciplines, they also learned the 'Bugei J happen', or the 18 Martial Arts.

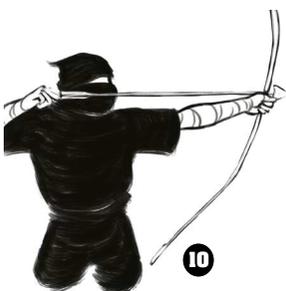
A ninja would also learn how to make poisons and explosives, use disguises, evade capture, break into buildings and use guns. They were extremely fit and capable of impressive physical feats such as running for a long period of time, scaling castle walls, leaping great distances and fighting multiple opponents without weapons.

Ninja also developed psychological skills, learning not to fear death and building on the samurai's tradition of loyalty – while serving their lord they acted clandestinely without expectation of public reward.

Unlike the samurai, ninja specialised in covert warfare; their task was to infiltrate and weaken their enemies by assassinations and disrupting their ability to fight. Formal training of ninja began in the 1460s and continued through to the 18th century; today, a handful of schools keep the skills alive.

## THE 18 DISCIPLINES

- 01 SEISHINTEKI KYOYO**  
SPIRITUAL REFINEMENT
- 02 NINPO TAIJUTSU**  
ATHLETIC AND HAND-TO-HAND COMBAT TECHNIQUES
- 03 KENPO**  
SWORD FIGHTING
- 04 SOJUTSU**  
FIGHTING WITH SPEARS
- 05 NAGINATAJUTSU**  
GLAIVE FIGHTING TECHNIQUES
- 06 BOJUTSU**  
FIGHTING WITH A STAFF
- 07 KAYAKUJUTSU**  
USING FIREARMS, GUNPOWDER AND EXPLOSIVES
- 08 KUSARIGAMAJUTSU**  
FIGHTING WITH SICKLE AND CHAIN
- 09 SHURIKENJUTSU**  
THROWING WEAPONS TECHNIQUES
- 10 KYUJUTSU**  
ARCHERY
- 11 SUJUTSU**  
SWIMMING AND WATER-CROSSING TECHNIQUES
- 12 HENSOJUTSU**  
THE ART OF DISGUISE
- 13 ONGYOJUTSU**  
CONCEALMENT AND DISAPPEARING TECHNIQUES
- 14 KAKUSHI BUKIJUTSU**  
THE USE OF CONCEALED WEAPONS
- 15 NINKI**  
MASTERING TOOLS USED TO CLIMB AND BREAK INTO HOUSES
- 16 NINYAKUJUTSU**  
HERBAL MEDICINES AND FIRST-AID SKILLS
- 17 GUNRYAKU HEIHO**  
INTELLIGENCE GATHERING, COVERT TECHNIQUES AND UNORTHODOX STRATEGIES
- 18 TENMON**  
ASTROLOGY, ASTRONOMY, METEOROLOGY, GEOGRAPHY AND TOPOGRAPHY



## SEVEN FAMOUS NINJAS



**Hattori Hanzo**  
1540S–1596

Hanzo was also a samurai, a master tactician and an expert in spear fighting in the service of the Tokugawa shogunate. During the 1580s, he and his ninja protected their lord, helping him become the ruler of all Japan.



**Mochizuki Chiyome**  
1540S–1570S

Mochizuki is one of the most famous female ninja. She founded an all-female espionage network from orphaned girls, refugees and prostitutes to spy for her husband's uncle, Takeda Shingen.



**Fuma Kotaro**  
1550–1603

Kotaro was the leader of the independent ninja Fuma clan. Kotaro served the Hojo clan, and in 1580 he and his ninja covertly infiltrated the Takeda clan's camp causing chaos and panic.



**Ishikawa Goemon**  
1558–94

Goemon was an outlaw ninja and Japan's answer to Robin Hood, who stole from wealthy feudal lords and daimyos to give to the poor. He was finally captured and boiled to death in a cauldron.



**Tomo Sukesada**  
16TH CENTURY

Sukesada led the Koga ninja. He and 80 of his men were hired by Nobunaga to destroy Kaminogou Castle, held by the Imagawa clan. They set fire to the castle's towers and killed 200 defenders.



**Kato Danzo**  
1500–1569

Danzo was a skilled illusionist who combined this talent with his ninja training to become known for his ability to create distractions and suddenly disappear. He served Uesugi Kenshin.



**Kido Yazaemon**  
1539–1589

Yazaemon became an expert with the Tanegashima matchlock arquebus. In 1579, he led a band of ninja armed with muskets in an assassination attempt on warlord Oda Nobunaga.



A samurai training in ninjutsu draws his katana



The intelligence gathered by infiltrating ninja was essential during the storming of castles, helping to find weaknesses in the enemy's defences

The Shimabara Rebellion saw Christian rebels led by Amakusa Shiro rise up after their taxes were raised. As the shogun's armies closed in on the rebels, they fell back to the castle at Hara and dug in for a long siege. With their expertise in siege warfare, the Koga ninja returned to the field. Accounts recall that during the siege they were sent to scout the Christian rebels' defences. They reconnoitred the plan of the castle, the distance between bastions, the height of the walls and the depth of the moat. On their return, they created a detailed plan of the defences for the shogun. The ninja were then tasked with raiding the enemy lines, capturing provisions and learning the enemy's strength. During the final assault on Hara, Koga ninja acted as liaisons and runners between the attacking forces. The castle was quickly overrun, and the Koga ninja had played an essential role in the suppression of Christianity in Japan. The religion wouldn't resurface until the 19th century.

While ninja from Iga and Koga are some of the most revered, there were other active groups. One band, led by Fuma Kotaro, served the Hojo clan, but when their lord was defeated they became bandits. Ishikawa Goemon is another ninja who turned to banditry. He became a legendary Robin Hood-like figure by stealing from wealthy daimyos. He trained

under Momochi Sandayu, an Iga master of ninjutsu, before he became a *nukenin*, or runaway ninja. For 15 years Goemon stole from the rich feudal overlords and gave to the poor.

As a legendary figure, there are conflicting accounts of his death. The most common tells that in 1594, following the murder of his wife and capture of his son, he attempted to infiltrate Toyotomi Hideyoshi's castle and assassinate him. However, the guards were alerted to his presence when he accidentally knocked a bell off a table, and he was promptly captured. Goemon was then executed by being boiled alive in an iron cauldron with his young son. Even today, Goemon remains a folklore legend in Japan.

Not all ninja were men. The female *onna-bugeisha* were warriors belonging to the Japanese nobility, and there were also female ninja, or *kunoichi*. Women were well suited to the clandestine role of the ninja and were uniquely able to infiltrate enemy strongholds in the guise of servants, dancers, concubines and geisha. The *kunoichi* also sometimes acted as lethal assassins.

The most famous female ninja was Mochizuki Chiyome, who was descended from Koga ninja and the wife of a samurai lord. When her husband was killed in battle she came under the protection of her late

husband's uncle, Takeda Shingen, the leader of the Takeda clan. Shingen asked Mochizuki to form a network of *kunoichi* to spy on rival clans and daimyos. Mochizuki recruited a band of female orphans, refugees and prostitutes, who she trained in the clandestine arts of the ninja. Mochizuki's *kunoichi* gathered information and acted as messengers, often travelling as *miko* (priestesses) to avoid suspicion. Posing as geisha, prostitutes and servants, the *kunoichi* could gain access to the most heavily guarded strongholds. Like their male counterparts, they were also trained assassins. The network grew to be several hundred strong before Shingen's death in 1573, after which Mochizuki vanishes from the historical record.

Following the end of the Shimabara Rebellion in 1638, Japan entered a long period of peace during the Edo period. This was the last great battle fought by the ninja before they slowly faded into obscurity. Fighting became confined to small skirmishes and short-lived rebellions. During the 18th century, the ninja's traditional role of spying and intelligence gathering is thought to have been taken over by the *Oniwaban*, who reported to the shogun Tokugawa Yoshimune, providing information on the feudal lords he ruled. The traditions of the ninja continue, but only a shrinking handful can now claim to be true *shinobi*.



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## A NINJA'S KIT BAG

NINJUTSU ARMAMENT WAS DESIGNED TO ENABLE NINJA TO INFILTRATE, ASSASSINATE AND ESCAPE, AND THEY WERE MASTERS OF MANY WEAPONS AND TOOLS

### 1 KYOKETSU-SHOGE

This double-edged blade attached to a 3.5-metre-long rope or chain was developed from a peasant knife. It was a ranged weapon and could also be used to climb walls.

**2 TESSEN** The tessen, or war fan, was made from iron and used as a covert weapon and to deflect darts and arrows.

**3 KAKUTE** These small, viciously spiked iron rings would often be tipped with poisons.

**4 SAI** Typically used in pairs, sai and jitte were blunt weapons used to beat opponents with side guards to hook into clothing. It was also a symbol of rank.

**5 CHIGIRIKI** Similar to a European Medieval flail, the chigiriki had an iron weight attached to a wooden shaft.

**6 BO-SHURIKEN** A simple, spike-like throwing weapon, it was used to slow and injure opponents at close ranges.

**7 SHURIKEN** The ninja's most famous weapon, the throwing star was never intended to kill. They could be wrapped with fuses and used to create a cloud of poisonous smoke.

**8 BO-HIYA** Originating from Korea, the bo-hiya fire arrow was originally shot from bows, but in the 16th century, matchlock arquebuses arrived in Japan, and samurai and ninja began firing bo-hiya from them.

**9 KATANA** The katana is synonymous with the samurai but ninja also used the deadly razor-sharp artisan-made swords. Using the katana was one of the martial arts a ninja had to master.

**10 KAGINAWA** Part of the ninja's special equipment, this grappling hook was used to scale walls.

**11 KUSARIGAMA** The kusarigama was made up of a sickle with an iron chain that could be used to entangle an opponent's weapon before striking at them with the blade; the art of this weapon's use was called kusarigamajutsu.

**12 MAKIBISHI** These sharp, spiked iron caltrops could be used against men and horses.

**13 MANRIKI** The manriki, or kusari-fundo, was made up of a chain (kusari) of any length with two weights (fundo) at each end.

**14 SHIKOMIZUE** The covert shikomizue sword cane was the perfect weapon for a ninja, as it was ideal for sneaking into areas where weapons were not allowed.

**15 TEKKO-KAGI** Like many of the ninja's weapons, the tekko-kagi was developed from a farm tool. Worn on both hands, they were used to scratch an opponent's weak points.

**16 ASHIKO CLEATS** Ninja tied these iron cleats to their feet and used the spikes to help them scale the walls of castles and fortresses.

**17 YUMI BOW** Used by both ninja and samurai, the powerful yumi continued to evolve throughout the 16th and 17th centuries. Ninja were required to master kyūjutsu (the art of the bow) and began by learning to rapidly hit targets on foot and horseback.

# BLOOD & COIN

## THE LIFE AND DEATH OF A LANDSKNECHT MERCENARY IN THE MOST DEVASTATING CONFLICT OF THE 17TH CENTURY

**T**he Thirty Years' War is often remembered as one of Europe's longest and bloodiest conflicts, with its destructive origins rooted in the religious friction between Catholic and Protestant factions within the vast Holy Roman Empire.

The treaty of Augsburg in 1555 settled many of the existing disagreements between the two factions, but it did little to resolve the fundamental issues of imperial authority and the rights of individual states. When Ferdinand II, a zealous Catholic Hapsburg, became king of Bohemia, Hungary, and then was eventually elected emperor, Catholicism began to be strictly imposed throughout the empire. By 1618, many Protestant states, angry at the imposition, openly revolted.

For 30 years, terror and destruction plagued European countries, especially in the German states, where the lion's share of the fighting occurred. This wanton slaughter saw about 8 million Europeans lose their lives, with some German kingdoms losing up to 50 per cent of their populations. As well as the exceptional loss of life, the conflict is known for the large number of mercenary troops employed by both the Protestant and Catholic Leagues. Although by this point their golden years were waning, the German Landsknecht were still a fearsome fighting force.

Created to combat and impersonate the Swiss mercenaries who started to dominate

15th- and 16th-century battlefields, the Landsknecht carved out their own fearsome reputation from international service in the armies of monarchs, such as those of Charles V and Henry VIII.

The main weapon of the Landsknecht, like many mercenary companies at the time, was the pike. Usually about six metres long, when used en masse the pike presented a hedge of razor-sharp metal that would decimate infantry and cavalry alike. The minimal training required to make a pike deadly in a recruit's hands was preferred over the use of other weapons such as bastard swords, halberds and arquebuses. The latter was used with pike formations in increasing numbers during the late 16th and 17th centuries, in what would become known as 'pike and shot'. Being flexible in this formation, which saw unit size reduced and formation changes all through the 16th century, allowed Landsknecht groups to operate effectively during the Thirty Years' War and beyond.

In the 1990s, German researchers uncovered a partially complete diary written by a Landsknecht mercenary during the war. Although the diary is not actually signed by the author, researchers have worked out that the book belonged to a man named Peter Hagendorf. His account paints a vivid picture of a soldier's life in a 17th-century army, with hunger, poverty and death common travelling companions.

Spanning the years 1624–48, one of the diary's most astonishing aspects is the



extraordinary distance Hagendorf travelled in 24 years – almost 15,000 miles, most of it on foot. His journey would take him across Germany, over the Alps into Italy, to the Baltic coast, then on to France, Pomerania and finally back to a ravaged Germany again.

The diary also shows the fluidity of a mercenary's allegiances, with Hagendorf changing sides three times during the conflict. While he served under Gottfried Pappenheim for most of the war, he began in the service of the Venetians. Here, he initially fought against



## BRINGING SARTORIAL SWAGGER TO BATTLE

The Landsknecht showed that fashion could indeed be deadly. They were rightly famous and instantly recognisable from their bright and flamboyant clothing. Tights, slashed doublets, plumed hats, billowing sleeves and a wide range of codpieces identified an archetypal mercenary in the 16th and early 17th centuries. Wool was preferred over linen, as slashes in linen tended to unravel. The reason for this peculiar fashion sense was that the life of a mercenary was often short and brutal and so the Holy Roman Emperor, Maximilian I, encouraged them to dress to impress. Armour, usually a breastplate, could be worn over the slashed doublet for added protection.



In this painting of the Battle of Wimpfen you can see that dense blocks of infantry armed with pikes were used by both sides

## “BEING TAKEN OUT OF ACTION, WHILE REMOVING THE THREAT TO HIS LIFE, MEANT THAT A MERCENARY COULD NOT TAKE PART IN THE SACKING OF THE CITY AND THEREFORE NOT RECEIVE HIS PAY”

Pappenheim, but after the regiment disbanded and Hagendorf was left in poverty, the Landsknecht found himself on Pappenheim's payroll from 1627. He would serve for six years before his company was caught in the Swedish siege of Straubing and slaughtered almost to a man. Instead of surrendering, Hagendorf – now a sergeant – was recruited into the ranks of the Red Regiment. This sudden change does not appear to have alarmed Hagendorf, who goes on to tell how he sold one of his horses to pay for a three-day drinking bender with his cousin. However, this faction change also did not last long, as in 1634 after a sound defeat he was back on the imperialist side.

The Thirty Years' War, almost more than any other conflict, was fought with a background firmly fixed in religious intolerances. Peter Hagendorf strangely never mentions his or his regiment's affiliations, although as a mercenary group this might not have been necessary. As the years progress, Hagendorf becomes increasingly brutal and desensitised to the violence and suffering happening around him.

Despite war being a mercenary's profession, Hagendorf's diaries give scant information on the battles he was involved in. His company

only saw two major set-pieces in the war. One particularly brutal attack occurred on the city of Magdeburg on 20 May 1631. Contemporary accounts focus on the horror and wanton slaughter that occurred there, when thousands of angry, hungry and unpaid soldiers broke into the city. The carnage was so great that 'magdeburgisation' became a byword for total destruction for many years to come. One resident of the city, an eyewitness to the killing, wrote that the, "...shouting, crying and howling could be heard from far away".

In contrast, Hagendorf's entry, from the soldier's perspective, leaves out the bloodshed and misery. He does express sorrow for the fall of Magdeburg, as it was, in his eyes, a beautiful city and was located within his 'fatherland', Germany. According to Tryntje Helfferich's translation of Hagendorf's diary in *The Thirty Years' War: A Documentary History* (2009, Hackett), he describes his part in the sacking: "I came into town with storming hand, without scathe. But in the town at the Newtown Gate, I was shot two times in the body, as this was my loot..." Unable to participate in the looting frenzy, Hagendorf was led back to the camp where he was given medical attention, "... for

one I was shot in the stomach, and for the other through both axels that the bullet laid in the shirt. So the feldscher (army surgeon) bound my hands on the back so that he could insert the chisel (forceps)..."

Being taken out of action, while obviously removing the threat to his life, meant that a mercenary could not take part in the sacking of the city and therefore did not receive his pay. Luckily, Hangendorf's wife was on hand to enter the city and grab some loot. After fearing for her safety as buildings started being demolished, she brought back, "...a large tankard... two silver belts and clothes."

Hagendorf was also present at the Battle of Breitenfeld, which occurred just a few months after the siege. His account of the battle, a crushing victory by the brilliant general Gustavus Adolphus, is rather muted as to the importance of the clash. If he was aware of the wider tactical and political changes, he does not make any note of them. The battle did convince many Protestant German states to back Sweden, but as Hagendorf was neutral, the significance seems to have passed him by.

Money was evidently on the forefront of every mercenary's mind, even in times of personal danger. During the Thirty Years' War, wages, like rations, were most of the time late or nonexistent. This in turn led to plunder and looting being the most effective way to get paid. Hagendorf frequently documents his monetary triumphs and woes, giving us an insight into the

## FORM RANKS

TIGHT DISCIPLINE AND A RIGID COMMAND STRUCTURE WERE ESSENTIAL TO CONTROLLING THESE HEAD-STRONG WARRIORS

The organisation of a Landsknecht company revolved around a complex command and disciplinary structure. The highest-ranking officer, usually a colonel, would have direct control over the rest of his command group, which would have numbered about 22 men. In addition to ranks like captain, lieutenant, sergeant and corporal, there was also an ensign rank. It was their duty to bear the company colours, which served a dual purpose. One was to embody the company spirit, and the other, more practical role was to act as a rallying point and landmark on the battlefield; where smoke and the clamour of battle could obscure views, the colours would act as a marker.

Other, less militant ranks were just as important in the running of a company. A selection of clerks, surgeons, cooks, priests, servants and musicians were essential additions that kept the company whole. Some of these positions were looked upon with disdain and disgust by their fellow mercenaries but were deemed necessary.

The position of provost was such a role, with the man attempting to curb the excessive drinking, gambling and violence that was common place in a company. He would also be charged with keeping the multitude of camp followers - from provision merchants to cooks, prostitutes and craftsmen - in line. If anyone should loot, burn or attack without the consent of the commanding officer, they could be in line to meet the executioner. These individuals, identifiable by their blood-red garb, were the most loathed people in the camp.

*Landsknechts prided themselves on their garish and colourful battlefield garb*



# HORRORS OF WAR

WITH MARAUDING ARMIES MENACING THE POPULATIONS OF EUROPE, BOTH SIDES WERE GUILTY OF ATROCITIES

The Thirty Years' War had horrendous casualty rates, as it was not just military units that were affected. The civilian population of Europe, especially Germany, suffered untold atrocities at the hands of marauding mercenary forces. Men from both sides were responsible for such acts like theft, extortion and even murder. These demands could also be levied as taxes, with armies demanding food and coin while moving through a province. Extortion would consist of threats to person or property in exchange for payment. According to Helfferich's translation in *The Thirty Years' War: A Documentary History*, Hagendorf writes about such an incident while in the service of Pappenheim: "Wherever we camped overnight, the head of the household would give us... half a thaler. It was for the best, since then we...let him keep his livestock in peace."

These acts and many like them were a regular occurrence in the war, which is not surprising as equally distressing acts were committed even before the war began. The Defenestration of Prague, as it is known, occurred in 1618 and was one of the direct causes of the war. Catholic regents had travelled to Bohemia in an attempt to calm rebellious Protestants. The discussion grew heated and coaxed the inflammatory words, "See, all dear lords, these men are great enemies of us and our religion..." With this statement, the regents were thrown from a window, some luckily surviving the fall by apparently landing in manure.



The Defenestration of Prague served as a catalyst for the revolt against the Hapsburg emperor

constant struggle to make a living during the chaos. Hagendorf had several schemes over the years to supplement his mercenary income. In 1625, he worked a trade with a lute maker after his guard shift, earning himself a reasonable profit. This money disappeared by the next year, however, with Hagendorf finding himself begging on the streets of Milan.

With no other income, Hagendorf joined Pappenheim's regiment, as he was, "... completely down and out." Tumultuous years would follow, with Hagendorf secure one moment and then, as in 1634, totally destitute the next. His servant was robbed of all the possessions he had sent away for safekeeping. However, other enterprises went well, as in 1640 and 1646, when he helped alleviate ration shortages by baking bread in a homemade oven, for a nominal fee of course.

An army marches on its stomach, and this was especially true during the Thirty Years' War. Long years of conflict had all but destroyed many crop yields across Germany, and daily rations would almost always come up short. A typical daily ration would consist of 730 grams of bread, baked with wheat and rye flour, usually prepared communally then shared out.

Corruption was rife in the companies themselves, with the bulking out of provisions just one of a growing list of problems. Some captains sought to increase their profits by recording 'dummy' recruits on their rosters. These men, while not existing but on paper, were given equipment and wages by their employer, with the most senior officers all taking a cut. While this lined the pockets of some, it did lower the combat effectiveness of the

company. The greed trickled down the command structure, with quartermasters and officers also on the lookout to supplement their wages. They would often cut the flour with inferior grain to drive up their profit margins. With differences in regional weights thrown in, the unfortunate soldier on the ground would often find his bread lacking. The story was the same with meat rations, with maggot-ridden or rotten meat used to wring some extra coin from starving troops. It is no wonder, with the ration situation so unpredictable, that men would turn to robbery to fill their empty bellies. Hagendorf, no stranger to pillaging, stole and burned vast swathes of French crops near Colmar.

Indeed, in the Hagendorf diaries, much of his writing is given over to the food and drink he enjoyed on campaign. His descriptions of feasts or a distinct lack of food seem to take precedent over all military engagements and most other aspects of life. Almost every year he feels the need to record when he received "good quarters". This came to mean when an inn would serve chicken, duck or veal instead of tired old beef, the main meat ration.

Perhaps as part of his dangerous lifestyle, Hagendorf expressed a great love for beer, wine and any other alcohol that he could get his hands on. However, drinking would only ever provide him with a brief respite from his problems, and usually it made an already tough life unbearable.

In 1625, he was disbanded from a Venetian mercenary company. Arriving at the town of Schaffhausen, he begged enough money for some warm shoes, a necessity considering he had just crossed the Alps. Instead, he found an

inn where, "...the wine was so good that I forgot the shoes." In the 24 years we know Hagendorf was campaigning, his constant movement made it impossible to settle down with his family, who chose instead to follow him on his travels. Raising children in that environment, when even adults were susceptible to hunger, cold and illness, would have been a supreme challenge.

Tragically, over the course of 24 years, he suffered the deaths of seven of his children and his first wife. These children, marked with a simple cross in his diary, usually didn't even live a few months before becoming ill and passing away. After peace was declared in 1648, Hagendorf was reunited with his only surviving son and, with the fighting finished, he states that he "brought my son out of Egypt".

The heavy use of mercenaries in the Thirty Years' War was understandably not popular with local populations. Using underpaid men that made their wages by looting could mean that an army stayed in the field for years. The promise of plunder would keep many braving terrible conditions on and off the battlefield. A 16th-century writer described them as, "Blaspheming, whoring, gambling, murdering, burning, robbing and widow-making... it is their common handiwork and greatest amusement."

This ad-hoc system may go some way to explaining some of the brutal methods used by Landsknecht and other mercenaries. These were men who endured sometimes unimaginable hardships. Hunger, disease, poverty and death on the battlefield would have hung over the heads of many, perhaps driving them to questionable actions purely out of a desire to survive.

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# DEATH OF THE SAMURAI

HOW JAPAN'S WARRIOR CLASS WAS DEFEATED

**A**s the Sun crept over the mountains, only 40 samurai rebels felt its warmth touch them – the rest of their group had been killed over the previous months in a series of battles. Saigo Takamori, the leader of the rogue group of samurai and formally a highly respected field marshal in the Imperial army, had been wounded in his leg and stomach during the fighting and so beseeched his friend, Beppu Shinsuke, to carry him to a quiet spot. Once there he committed seppuku – a form of suicide by disembowelment practised by the samurai that was considered an honourable way to die.

With their leader dead and a force of around 30,000 imperial troops commanded by General Yamagata and his technologically advanced weaponry close by, there seemed little hope for the warriors that for centuries had played a prominent role in Japanese society. Rather than suffer the shame of surrender, Beppu Shinsuke gathered the remaining samurai and led them – brandishing their swords fiercely – on a suicidal charge against the imperial forces. The Gatling guns barked in the early morning air and cut the doomed men charging straight at them to pieces. The era of the samurai had thereby ended in a brutal yet emphatically memorable fashion, in a storm of blood and honour.

For much of the previous 1,000 years it would have been unthinkable that the samurai would cease to exist, as they had played such an important role in Japanese society and seemed ingrained in the fabric of the country. However, the world in which the samurai lived was changing. Advances in technology aligned with Japan ending its isolationist ways and opening

## “IN A WORLD IN WHICH IMMENSE FIREPOWER FROM GATLING GUNS EXISTED... WERE THE SAMURAI REALLY SUCH A VALUABLE COMMODITY ANYMORE?”

trade routes – and with it an exchange of knowledge and culture – signalling the beginning of the end for a proud warrior caste that did not want to – or see why it should – change its ways. In a world in which immense firepower from Gatling guns existed, pumping out an almost continuous stream of murderous bullets, and ships that could fire artillery on a town from a safe distance, were the samurai really such a valuable commodity anymore?

Although samurai developed a complex code of honour, rituals and ethics (Bushido) that meant being a samurai was a whole way of life, they originally came into existence and then prominence through their fighting skills. In 646 the Taika reforms in Japan led to the country being dominated by a handful of large landowners and created a feudal system similar to that of medieval Europe. These landowners needed their property to be protected from those who would take their crops or lands. In this need for protection lay the origins of the samurai, as the men hired to defend the wealthy slowly began to develop a code. After a succession of weak emperors, the Heian Dynasty began to lose control of the country and the warriors began to move into the power vacuum created. By 1100 they held significant military and political power over the land.

This ushered in a golden period for the samurai, and throughout the next centuries,

until the end of the Edo period (1603–1868), this warrior class was at the heart of Japanese life as rival clans battled each other for control of the country and dominance. The Edo period saw greater peace and stability, which meant many samurai were not needed for combat and so became teachers and members of government. Despite the decline in use of the samurai, they were still revered in society and were the only class allowed to carry swords, which was a mark of their rank. This period of peace may have reduced the key role of samurai in Japanese society, but it was nothing compared to what was to come. The world was experiencing political and social revolutions, and against this tide of change a bow and arrow or a sword soon proved an impotent weapon.

For Japan, this change began in 1853 when Commodore Matthew Perry of the United States entered Edo Bay (Tokyo Bay) to seek trade links. Japan had previously adopted an isolationist position, but some of the country's political elite had begun to realise that their country was lagging behind other nations in terms of technology – Japan had not industrialised – and modernisation was key in order to compete with other world powers.

At this point Japan was still, in practice, ruled by an emperor, but the real power resided with the shogun (military leader). Understanding that the country needed drastic change, two daimyos

## THREE LEGENDARY SAMURAI



A fantastical illustration of Miyamoto Musashi slaying a giant creature

### Miyamoto Musashi

It is believed that Musashi fought over 60 duels without loss and is credited with creating the two-sword fighting technique Nitōryū, where both a standard large sword and a smaller one are used. He began formal sword training very young, and one of the books he wrote declares that he fought his first duel aged 13. Musashi was a skilled writer and painter and his text, *The Book of Five Rings*, covering martial arts and kenjutsu is still read to this day.



A 19th-century, Edo-period, woodblock print depicting Minamoto Tametomo

### Minamoto Tametomo

Samurai weren't just deadly swordsmen – many were also highly skilled with a bow and arrow, and Tametomo was one of the best proponents of this. Supposedly he was born with a left arm six inches longer than his right, meaning he could generate greater power on his shots by drawing the bowstring further back. The great bowman committed seppuku in 1170 after he was captured during battle and the tendons in his left arm were severed, thus rendering him useless as an archer.



Saigo Takamori was the leader of what is regarded as the last stand of the samurai

### Saigo Takamori

Although he is famous for leading the revolt against the Imperial army, Takamori actually had a part in establishing the new government as in 1867 his troops supported the emperor in the Meiji restoration, and he was imperial advisor to the new government. He became disillusioned with what he saw as the country's Westernisation, failure to invade Korea and the dismissing of samurai importance, so he eventually led a doomed revolt against the Imperial forces.

# BUSHIDO: THE WARRIOR CODE

## LOYALTY

Samurai developed in feudal Japan, where they were employed by large landowners to protect their territory. Samurai were famously loyal to their masters and were expected to show complete obedience to them.

## INTEGRITY

One of the most important elements in the code – many samurai believed that without this the rest of the code would fall apart. Integrity is doing what the samurai believes is right without wavering, no matter what.

## COURAGE

Samurai were expected to show courage at all times and to commit seppuku to avoid capture. If they were in a position on the battlefield where they could not help their side, they were also expected to take their own life.

## MERCY

Samurai had the power of life and death in their hands – if they felt that a peasant had offended their honour, even if they hadn't, they had the right to kill them without fear of reprisal. With such power, mercy was an important part of the warrior code.

## RESPECT

Politeness and courtesy were a large part of samurai life, and warriors were expected to show both to fellow samurai, as well as to their masters and superiors. Failure to adhere to this strict tenet was a risky and often lethal mistake.

## HONOUR

Fear of disgrace hung over the head of all samurai. Any loss of honour often resulted in long and deadly blood feuds between rival factions. In many cases, committing ritual seppuku was the only honourable option left.

## HONESTY

It was held that true samurai disdained money and that having wealth led to luxury, which was seen as a menace to manhood. The Confucian philosophy of the samurai dictated that simplicity was the only way of the warrior.

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## “AS WORD SPREAD OF THE REBELLION, SAMURAI AND PEASANTS FROM ACROSS JAPAN FLOCKED TO JOIN THE CAUSE”

(powerful territorial lords) formed an alliance against the ruling shogun and aimed to give the emperor genuine power. The ruling shogun, Tokugawa Yoshinobu, resigned from his position but had no intention of giving up real power, and when Emperor Meiji issued an imperial decree dissolving his house, he sent his samurai army to the imperial city of Kyoto with the aim of deposing the emperor.

As swords from the two opposing factions clashed and clinked in battle, the fate of the country hung in the balance. The Battle of Toba-Fushimi on 27 January 1868 ended in defeat for the shogun and lit the touch paper for the Boshin War, which lasted until May 1869. The war followed the same path as the battle and the emperor, with more modern weaponry and tactics, prevailed.

With victory secured, the young emperor – allegedly influenced by his advisors – began the process of reshaping Japan. Social reforms such as universal elementary education for children were introduced, as was investment in heavy machinery to breathe new life into the manufacturing industry. There was also a focus on Westernisation, with an edict issued in 1871

encouraging the adoption of Western-style clothing and food.

Arguably the biggest change that affected the samurai was the forming of a modern conscript army, which meant that their role as the primary fighting men in the country was disappearing and that they were no longer the only strata of society allowed to bear weapons. These new weapons – guns and rifles – required much less skill to operate than those of the samurai and meant that a peasant with a gun could now conceivably defeat a samurai in combat.

If the implementation of a conscript army indicated that the days of the samurai were slipping away, then the next decree by the emperor in 1876 left no one in any doubt; samurai were banned from wearing swords. Their position as a special class had ended. Even though their prestige had been in steady decline, for many samurai this was the final insult. The Japanese leaders felt they needed to modernise to avoid being left behind, and the samurai were simply one of the casualties of this process. The government believed that in their current form they belonged to a different era and had no relevance in a modern Japan.

The heads of 40,000 enemy soldiers are brought before a victorious Tokugawa Ieyasu after the Battle of Sekigahara on 21 October 1600



**“BEING UNABLE TO FIGHT, TAKAMORI DID WHAT HONOUR DICTATED, AS DID THE REMAINING SAMURAI, WHO CHARGED INTO THE BULLETS”**

There were some samurai that adapted to this modernisation process and, for the good of the country, abandoned their old beliefs and tried to put themselves at the forefront of this new Japan. The government instigated a programme to rehabilitate samurai, helped them find employment and tried to place them at the head of enterprises, as they were more educated than the majority of the population. However, a group of samurai decided that the country was changing too fast and losing its culture and traditions. Led by Saigo Takamori, they decided to take a stand.

Takamori was a great bear of a man who stood nearly six feet tall with a stout and sturdy frame. Born the son of a low-ranking samurai, he had previously fallen into disgrace following the death of his lord and had been exiled to a remote island, but he was later readmitted to a daimyo’s army and regained his honour. He had played a prominent role in the setting up of the new Meiji government, and in 1871 he was even left in charge of the caretaker government during the absence of many senior statesmen. Even though he opposed the Westernisation of the country, it was actually when his proposal to invade Korea was rejected that he resigned from the government and returned to Kagoshima,

where he set up a local military school. He soon gathered supporters among disenchanting samurai and those harbouring ill intentions against the central government.

Takamori’s footnote in history looked destined to be a minor one as he lived out his days honouring the old samurai tradition and teaching. However, in 1877 a group of samurai rebels raided and occupied government ammunition and weapon depots and proclaimed him as their leader. Reluctantly, he would lead the last samurai charge in history.

As word spread of the rebellion, samurai and peasants from across Japan flocked to join the cause, and soon Takamori was in charge of 40,000 men – a good figure but no match for the government’s force of 300,000 men trained in modern warfare and equipped with appropriate weaponry. The rebel forces marched on the well-fortified Kumamoto Castle and, with their samurai and peasant force armed with guns, surrounded the castle. For two bloody nights the army threw itself at the walls in a ferocious attempt to scale them, but the attacks were repelled time and again by gunfire, and the samurai had no coordinated plan for how to breach the fortifications. When a government relief force arrived and engaged with the rebels, several sharp clashes ensued before both sides eventually retreated.

The rebellion went on to last for six months and, while both sides gained victories, the government army could replenish any lost forces much easier than the rebels, who were gradually ground down by superior technological firepower, such as warships. It is estimated that the imperial forces lost more than 6,000 troops and

had 10,000 wounded, while the much smaller samurai army suffered 7,000 killed and around 11,000 wounded.

Following a series of engagements, the depleted rebel force sneaked into Kagoshima and took possession of a castle mountain in Shiroyama. It took the government troops several days to locate them, but when they did there was no doubt what the outcome would be.

Takamori organised a sake party for his closest friends, an impressive display of bloody-mindedness as he must have known what was coming. It was to be his last night alive, as at 3.00 a.m. imperial forces stormed the mountain castle and set about slaying the men inside.

By the time they were repelled, only 40 of the rebels were still alive, and Takamori was badly injured. Being rendered unable to fight, Takamori did what honour dictated, as did the remaining samurai, who charged into the bullets of the waiting imperial army.

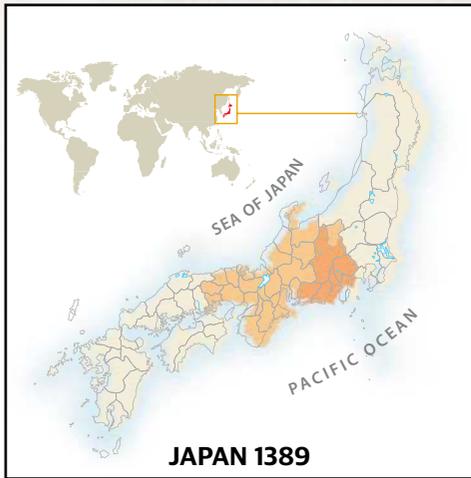
The age of the samurai may have been extinguished that day, but it died displaying all of the central tenants that had made this warrior class so legendary – honour, courage and loyalty.

**“FOR TWO BLOODY NIGHTS THE ARMY THREW ITSELF AT THE WALLS IN A FEROCIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SCALE THEM, BUT THE ATTACKS WERE REPELLED TIME AND AGAIN BY GUNFIRE, AND THE SAMURAI HAD NO COORDINATED PLAN”**

Imperial officers in their Western-style uniforms accept the surrender of the rebels



# SAMURAI WARRIOR



## SOCIAL STRUCTURE OF FEUDAL JAPAN

Japanese society was organised into clans or families who disputed over farmland

### EMPEROR

Of divine origin, the emperor did not care much about politics or the economy.



### SHOGUN

Shogun were military leaders with political and economic power.



### DAIMYO

Powerful court nobles who held large domains and collected ichimangoku or salaries.



### SAMURAI

In service to a daimyo, samurai owed him absolute obedience and unwavering loyalty.



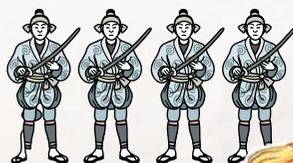
### CRAFTSMEN, VILLAGERS, MERCHANTS

Under the protection of a daimyo.



### RONIN

Wandering, masterless samurai who were often dishonoured and outcast from society.



### KABUTO

Helmet of iron.

### MEMPO

Protective masks painted with fierce faces were used to frighten the enemy.

### YODARE-KAKE

Throat protection

### SOBE

Shoulder protector

### DO

A breastplate that allowed large and free movements.

### KOTE

Arm protector.

### TEKKO

Hand protector.

### KUSARI

Kusari protected the upper thigh and was made from lacquered iron plates connected together with several silk cords.



### HAI DATE

The haidate protected the lower part of the thigh and was worn under the kusazuri.



### SUNEATE

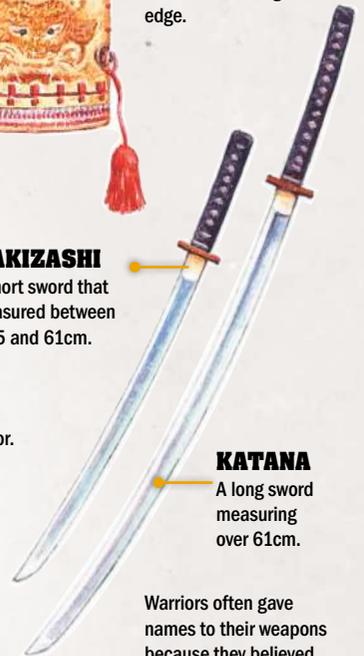
Made from leather and cloth, sunerate were tied with cords around the calves to protect them.

### SANDALS



### WAKIZASHI

A short sword that measured between 30.5 and 61cm.



### KATANA

A long sword measuring over 61cm.

Swords were initially straight. Later, the curved shape was preferred in the search for an even stronger edge.

Warriors often gave names to their weapons because they believed they were the soul of their fighting capacity.

### BUSHIDO CODE

Bushido means 'way of the warrior-knight', and it required an almost religious dedication to military life. This code set moral standards and behavioural patterns for all samurai.

### SEPPUKU

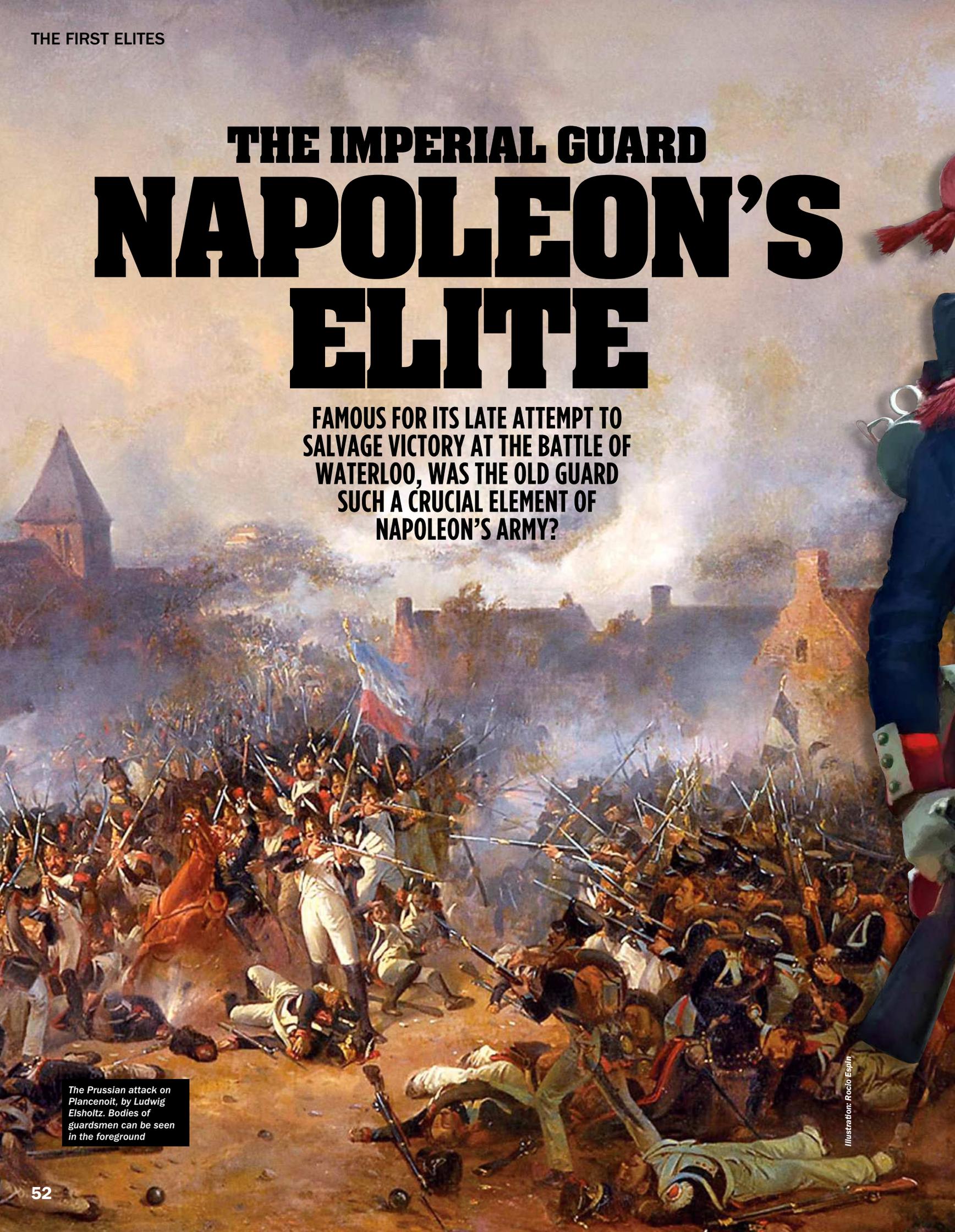
Only samurai carried out this ritual suicide in preference to a dishonorable death.



Samurai cut their own stomach and then a trusted friend cut off their head

# THE IMPERIAL GUARD NAPOLEON'S ELITE

FAMOUS FOR ITS LATE ATTEMPT TO SALVAGE VICTORY AT THE BATTLE OF WATERLOO, WAS THE OLD GUARD SUCH A CRUCIAL ELEMENT OF NAPOLEON'S ARMY?



The Prussian attack on Plancenoit, by Ludwig Elsholtz. Bodies of guardsmen can be seen in the foreground

Illustrator: Rocio Espin

*Illustration of a man of the Old Guard based on primary sources and uniforms kept at the Musée de l'Armée at the Invalides. The bearskin cap, the blue uniform, the white vest and the breeches, as well as the moustache, formed a recognisable ensemble on the battlefield*



**O**n the morning of 18 June 1815, Napoleon realised that Wellington was holding his ground and was ready to give battle. Delighted to be given the opportunity to strike a fatal blow, the French emperor said to General Foy, "I will launch my cavalry and will send my Old Guard forward."

As always when positioning his forces, Napoleon ordered the Imperial Guard to remain in reserve. Before 4 p.m., Marshal Ney, who had been tasked with the capture of La Haye Sainte, mistook movements in British positions for the beginning of a retreat. Eager to exploit the situation, he ordered a cavalry charge to break Wellington's centre. Despite its orders to stay put, the light cavalry of the Old Guard followed the charge.

Captain de Brach, a lancer of the Guard, later explained this controversial move: "Four horse regiments of the Guard, a division under Ney's orders, did not split for the whole day and stayed close to the Nivelles road. They did not move until the assault... Four regiments were positioned on a single line, near the main road, the lancers on the right, and to their left the chasseurs, the dragoons and the grenadiers... The brigade of dragoons and grenadiers, waiting for an order, suddenly believed they had been ordered to charge; we followed!" At 5 p.m., Napoleon sent the heavy cavalry of the Guard and squadrons led by Lefebvre-Desnouettes to support the effort. The French cavalry crashed into British infantry squares, causing little damage.

By 6 p.m., Napoleon had good reason to be worried. The French had been fighting the Battle of Waterloo for more than six hours against the armies of Wellington. Bülow's IV Corps had arrived at 4.30 p.m. near Plancenoit, not far from the rear of the French positions. The Duhesme Division of the Young Guard (3,000 men) had been dispatched to face the Prussians.

As Colonel Pontécoulant explained, the struggle was doomed from the beginning. The Young Guard was composed of "fresh soldiers who were supposed to swell the ranks of the Imperial Guard but had nothing in common with it, except for the name, and had neither its courage or devotion." When the Young

Guard was driven out of Plancenoit, Napoleon ordered the deployment of the 2nd Battalion of the 2nd Grenadiers and the 1st Battalion of the 2nd Chasseurs of the Old Guard. General Pelet and 1,110 French soldiers were ordered by the emperor to advance with levelled bayonets. The Prussians, used to seeing the Imperial Guard involved in mass assaults, panicked and abandoned the village.

Von Bülow, determined to recapture the village, sent the divisions of Hiller, Ryssel and Tippelskirch – a total of 27 battalions supported by artillery fire. The two Old Guard battalions, as well as 2,000 soldiers of the Young Guard, resisted until nightfall. At 9 p.m., the church and the cemetery were finally captured by the Prussian army. General Pelet and a handful of soldiers of the Old Guard managed to withdraw before joining other retreating soldiers.

The heroic defence of Plancenoit gave Napoleon enough time to carry on the fight against the armies of Wellington. At around 7.30 p.m. he launched infantry units of the Imperial Guard against Wellington's centre. The During Battalion was left near the Caillou farm to protect the French headquarters, while the 1st Grenadiers was positioned not far from the Maison du Roi farm as a last reserve. While advancing, Napoleon ordered another three battalions of the 1st and 2nd Chasseurs and a battalion of the 2nd Grenadiers to remain in reserve. Therefore, no battalion of the Old Guard participated in the famous assault.

It seems six battalions of the Middle Guard (3,000 men), supported by two batteries of Imperial Guard horse artillery, went forward while playing the *Marche des bonnets à poils* (the march of the bearskin hats). The Guards' advance threatened the allied centre but was ultimately stopped. Indeed, the French, outnumbered and exposed, faltered and broke. For the first time the elite of Napoleon's army had failed. Cries of 'La Garde recule!' ('The Guard retreats!') filled the air. During the following debacle, battalions of the Old Guard were able to withdraw in good order before forming a square to fight the ultimate combats of the day. After 15 years of distinguished existence, this group of elite soldiers had ceased to exist. The Imperial Guard was dead.

### CREATION AND ORGANISATION

After orchestrating a coup in November 1799 (the coup of 18 Brumaire) and becoming first consul of France, Napoleon Bonaparte wanted a formation for his own protection. The former Guard of the Directory (*garde du directoire*) became the core of the new Consular Guard (*garde des consuls*).

The grenadiers of the Guards of the Directory had just played an important part in the coup of 18 Brumaire, having rescued Napoleon when he was being physically threatened by the Council of Five Hundred. At the beginning of 1800, the Consular Guard was made of two battalions of foot grenadiers, a company of light infantry, two squadrons of horse grenadiers, a company of chasseurs (light cavalry regiment) and a detachment of artillery. Joachim Murat, Napoleon's brother-in-law, became the first commander of the Guard (21 October 1799 to 16 April 1800) before being succeeded by his friend Jean Lannes.

The unit received its baptism by fire at the Battle of Marengo (14 June 1800) against Austria. The official French account of the battle portrayed the Guard as a key unit: "They were positioned in the middle of the battlefield, a rock in this gigantic field. Nobody was able to hurt them, cavalry, infantry, artillery, everybody was taking shots at this battalion, in vain." The Austrians, however, offered a rather different picture of the Guard's actions at Marengo.

"The Guard was broken, routed. Its soldiers were almost all killed or taken and its cannons were captured." While the Austrian account was exaggerated, the Consular Guard did lose a staggering 50 per cent of its men on the battlefield, while the Horse Guard, composed of 245 grenadiers and 185 chasseurs, lost 30 per cent of its soldiers.

Three men of the Guard were noticed for their bravery: Leroy, Lanceleur and Milet. Each man had captured a flag and a handful of enemy soldiers.

Back in Paris, Napoleon, realising that giving the leadership of the Guard to another man was a threat to his authority, seized its command. Jean Lannes was displeased by this decision but was dismissed and dispatched to Portugal to act as ambassador. In August 1802 Napoleon changed the constitution to make the consulate permanent. Essentially, he had become a king without a crown.

New units were incorporated into the Consular Guard. The infantry was reinforced by a regiment of foot grenadiers and a regiment of foot chasseurs. The cavalry saw the arrival of a regiment of horse grenadiers, a regiment of horse chasseurs, a squadron of horse artillery, the Legion of Elite Gendarmerie, a battalion of Sailors of the Guard and four companies of train d'artillerie. There was also a guard hospital. In total, the Consular Guard was made up of 9,798 men.

On 10 May 1804 a proclamation transformed the Consular Guard into the

*Napoleon reviewing the Old Guard at the Battle of Jena on 14 October 1806, by Horace Vernet*



## TO BE ADMITTED, SOLDIERS HAD TO:

1. BE A VETERAN OF AT LEAST THREE CAMPAIGNS (FOUR FROM 1802, TWO IN 1804)
2. HAVE BEEN REWARDED FOR BRAVERY OR HAVING BEEN WOUNDED
3. BE AN ACTIVE-DUTY SOLDIER
4. BE AT LEAST 180CM (5FT 11IN) TO JOIN THE GRENADIERS AND 170CM (5FT 7IN) FOR THE CHASSEURS – LOWERED TO 176 CM (5FT 9IN) AND 167CM (5FT 6IN) IN 1804
5. DISPLAY OUTSTANDING BEHAVIOUR



Portrait of Jacques de Trobriant, commander of the chasseurs of the Young Guard



## THE YOUNG & THE MIDDLE

THE IMPERIAL GUARD WAS NOT ONLY COMPRISED OF THE FAMOUS OLD GUARD BUT INCLUDED OTHER UNITS THAT FOUGHT VALIANTLY FOR THEIR EMPEROR

If the Old Guard is still famous today, it should not be forgotten that the Imperial Guard was also made of several other units. Two are often neglected by the historiography.

The Middle Guard was created in 1806 to welcome the *vélites* and was composed of grenadiers and chasseurs, all veterans of the 1805 to 1809 campaigns. Used on several occasions, it was eventually merged with the Old Guard but was still referred to by many soldiers by its former name.

The Young Guard was the name given to the units of the Imperial Guard created after 1812. It was supposed to train junior cadres before they could be integrated into the Old Guard or

the line as officers. It included both infantry and cavalry regiments (such as the chasseurs of the Young Guard).

The Young Guard was systematically employed on the battlefield, leading to high casualty rates, but its value varied greatly. After the disastrous Russian campaign of 1812, volunteers and conscripts were taken directly into the Young Guard with minimal entry requirements to minimise the desertion problem. The resulting lack of experience resulted in varying degrees of skill and motivation, but there is no doubt that the Young Guard fought bravely in 1814 and during the Hundred Days War.

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## THE FIRST ELITES

Imperial Guard: "The guard has been notified that the Senate proclaimed today Napoleon Bonaparte emperor of the French and made his power hereditary. Vive l'empereur! Unlimited devotion and fidelity to Napoleon, first emperor of the French. Today, the guard takes the title of Imperial Guard..."

The emperor was determined to welcome only the best men in this formation. A separate decree stated that, "Soldiers of all branches can join the Consular Guard. The admission is a reward for your bravery and conduct." To be admitted, soldiers faced a number of requirements. Admission to the Guard was usually preceded by a recommendation from the colonel of the regiment to which the candidate belonged.

In 1806 the above-mentioned regiments became the Old Guard. Its soldiers were not necessarily aged, but the emperor had decided to form new regiments with less strict requirements. A few soldiers of the former Consular Guard had plenty of experience. The first man listed in the regiment's register was born in 1751 and served until 1 January 1814. The oldest was born in 1738 but was awarded a pension the same year the Guard was formed.

The composition of the Guard changed as new units were created, such as the Empress' Dragoons and the Polish Lancers. Progressively, the Middle Guard merged with the Old Guard. Five battalions of vélites were also built around young volunteers – all from wealthy families – wishing to become officers.

Salary and equipment were paid for by the family. In 1806, Napoleon also recruited a new corps of cavalry soldiers from among the nobility. However, it proved short lived. The army, reacting to this reminiscence of the Bourbon army, forced Napoleon to dismiss it.

Soldiers of the Old Guard were better treated than infantry regiments. Their salary was much higher: a grenadier earned 1.17 francs per day, while a regular soldier received 0.30. A corporal was paid 1.67 francs in the Old Guard and 0.45 francs in the line. The officers were also much better treated.

Moreover, the Old Guard occasionally received bonuses and rewards. Guard barracks were far more comfortable and the Imperial Guard was always first to choose where to stay when at war. The hospital of the Guard was particularly good and was managed by the best doctors, and likewise uniforms were tailored by the most talented men. Line infantry soldiers were supposed to keep their uniforms for two years, while guardsmen had new clothes as soon as signs of wear were detected.

Soldiers of the Old Guard had even more privileges: an 1805 decree gave grenadiers and non-commissioned officers a ranking advantage. A grenadier or a chasseur of the Old Guard was supposed to be the equal of a sergeant in other units. Officers of the Old Guard also had similar advantages. An imperial decree of 13 July 1804 stated, "Everywhere where the troops of the Imperial Guard serve with the line, they are awarded positions of honour. When together, officers

and non-commissioned officers of the Imperial Guard of similar ranks are automatically made commanders. When a detachment of the Guard meets a Corps or a detachment of the line, they must be saluted... until they are gone."

As can be expected, these advantages were not to everybody's taste. An officer serving for Marshal Ney wrote in his memoirs, "The Imperial Guard has it good. It was unpleasant to be around its soldiers. Everything was done for them."

Jealousy can be found in almost all front-line infantry soldiers' letters and memoirs. This feeling is understandable, especially considering the Imperial Guard's qualities diminished over time. At first reserved for the best of the best, it came to resemble a normal army corps and swelled to 100,000 men after the Russian debacle of 1812.

### ON THE BATTLEFIELD

Napoleon was unwilling to use the Old Guard on the battlefield and kept it in reserve to strike at the decisive moment. Despite its reputation, the Old Guard did not see much action. However, during the 1805 campaign against Austria, the Sailors of the Guard saved a division of infantry at Krems. In the same campaign, the Guard's cavalry fought with distinction at the Battle of Austerlitz (2 December 1805). Grenadier Jean-Roch Coignet saw the action: "The emperor sent us forward to press the movement. We were there, 25,000 bearskin hats. The Guard and the grenadiers of Oudinot... We were walking calmly with

Napoleon's farewell to the Old Guard, by Antoine Montfort



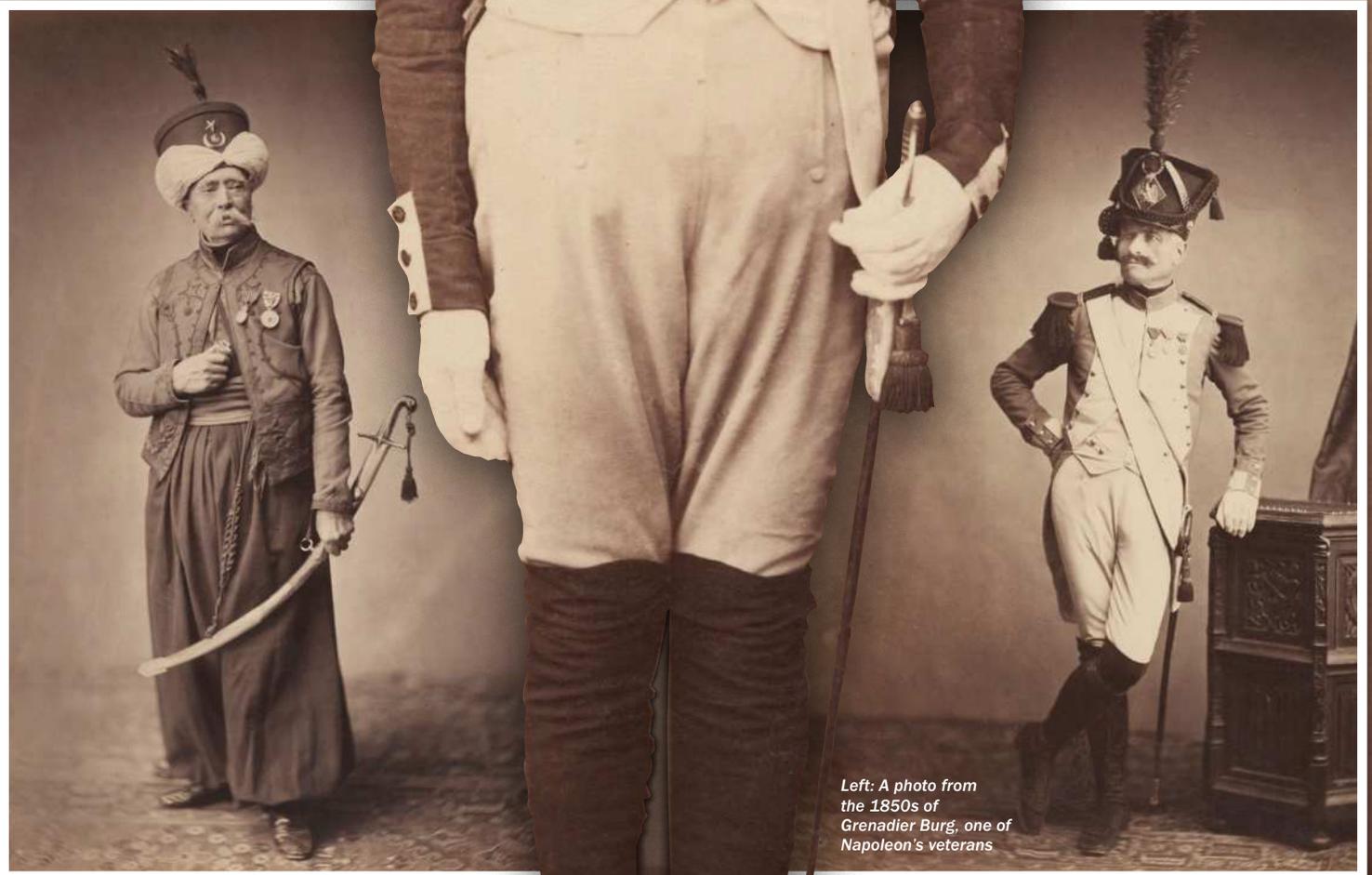


Above: A quartermaster sergeant of the mounted chasseurs of the Guard

Above: Dreuse, a veteran of the 2nd Light Horse Lancers, photographed in 1857

Below: Ducler, a member of the legendary Mamelukes of the Guard

Below: a veteran of the Departmental Guard, photographed decades later in full uniform



Left: A photo from the 1850s of Grenadier Burg, one of Napoleon's veterans

# “THE GUARD DIES, IT DOES NOT SURRENDER!”

THE LEGENDARY CRY, REPORTEDLY SCREAMED BY A GENERAL OF THE OLD GUARD AT THE BATTLE OF WATERLOO, EXEMPLIFIES THE OLD GUARD’S DETERMINATION

For 200 years, historians and amateurs have been debating what General Pierre Cambronne (1770–1842), who was commanding the last of the Old Guard at the Battle of Waterloo, might have replied to the British invitation to surrender. The officer had had a long career when he fought this battle.

Born on 26 December 1770, he volunteered to join the armies of the revolution in 1792. A colonel in 1806, he became the commander of the Voltigeurs of the Guard in 1810 as well as being made a baron. Cambronne then fought with the Guard in Spain, Russia and Germany.

When Napoleon was exiled to the island of Elba, Cambronne followed as military commander. His fidelity

was rewarded by the emperor, who made him a count. He was seriously wounded at the Battle of Waterloo and sent to Britain. According to a journalist, Cambronne screamed at the British, “The Guard dies, it does not surrender!” Others, including Victor Hugo in his *Les Misérables*, argued that the gallant officer had screamed, “Merde” (‘shit’).

In fact, Cambronne denied both. It seems that he was in no shape to say such a thing, a fact confirmed by the British colonel who captured him. Other witnesses claim that another Old Guard general, Claude-Étienne Michel (1772–1815), who led a chasseur division and was killed at Waterloo, might have said the sentence, “The Guard dies, it does not surrender!”



the drums and the music. Napoleon wanted to honour the emperors commanding enemy armies by letting musicians walk with us at the centre of each battalion. Arriving at the top of the hill, we were surrounded by remnants of Corps who had been fighting since the morning.

“The Russian imperial guard was in front. The emperor made us stop and sent the Mamelukes and the Horse Chasseurs. These Mamelukes were formidable horsemen with their curved sabres. They could cut a head off with one blow. One of them came back three times to give enemy flags to the emperor.

“The third time, the emperor wanted him to stay but he left again and he did not come back. He stayed on the battlefield. The chasseurs were not less worthy than the Mamelukes but they were outnumbered. The Russian imperial guard was made of determined men. Our cavalry had to be brought back. The emperor sent the black horses, the horse grenadiers...

“They passed us as thunder and charged the enemy. For 15 minutes it was an unbelievable chaos, and it felt like a century. We could not see anything in the smoke and the dust. We feared to see our comrades killed. The

Old Guard and the grenadiers were there to give the last blow. But smoke and dust soon disappeared. The Russian imperial guard was nowhere to be seen. Our

horsemen came back triumphantly and placed themselves behind the emperor.”

The cavalry of the Guard was again noticed at the Battle of Eylau on 7 February 1807. At the same battle, the infantry of the Old Guard fought valiantly right under the nose of the emperor. The first regiment of the grenadiers pushed back a Russian assault that was threatening the general headquarters and Napoleon himself. General Dorsenne, seeing one of his officers ordering a volley, screamed, “Raise your weapon! The Old Guard only uses bayonets.” This counter-assault was so successful that it nearly destroyed the Russian column completely.

In 1808, elements of the Guard fought against the Madrid revolt. Most of the Imperial Guard followed the next year when Napoleon led an expedition in the Iberian Peninsula. There, the Guard experienced its first defeat when three squadrons of horse chasseurs and Mamelukes were ambushed by the British. General Lefebvre-Desnouettes, who led the chasseurs, was captured by the enemy. Napoleon was soon forced to abandon Spain to fight Austria. During the campaign of 1809, the Old Guard lost several men while protecting the French army after the Battle of Essling. A month later, the horse chasseurs and the Polish chevau-légers won new laurels against the Austrians. At the Battle of Wagram, the Polish grabbed enemy uhlans’ lances to attack further. Following this legendary action, they were transformed into light-horse lancers.

On 24 June 1812, the French army invaded Russia. The Old Guard followed the emperor but was not committed until the Battle of Borodino (7 September 1812). The battle began at 6 a.m. and lasted the whole day. The Young Guard was sent into the fray at 3 p.m. when victory was still in the balance. Several

officers asked Napoleon to send the Old Guard: “Sir, you need to involve the Guard!” screamed General Rapp while he was being taken out to be treated by a doctor. “I will most definitely not. I do not want to have it blown up. I am sure to win the battle without involving it,” answered Napoleon. By the end of the day, Napoleon had won a tactical victory but had failed to destroy the Russian army.

His refusal to commit the Old Guard saved the Russians from total annihilation. A few days later, the Grande Armée took Moscow, but the destruction of the city by its people proved disastrous for the French. For the first time in its history, the Old Guard pillaged surviving buildings with other regiments. A 29 September communiqué summarised the shame brought on the elite formation.

“Acts of disorder and looting were committed yesterday and today by the Old Guard. The emperor is saddened to see that elite soldiers charged with his safety, who should behave at their best in all circumstances, commit such actions. Some broke the doors of the depots where flour was kept for the army. Others willingly disobeyed and mistreated guards and their commanders...”

Soldiers of the Guard not only stole food but also a large amount of booty. Their lack of discipline was noticed by the rest of the army and triggered widespread hostility. After the Russian campaign, an officer wrote to the war minister to complain, “The Guard has lost its reputation and is unanimously hated.”

The retreat following the destruction of Moscow was disastrous for the French army, but the Imperial Guard was the only branch to keep some cohesion. However, various engagements resulted in the deaths of several men. At the Battle of Krasnoi on 15–18 November 1812 (which cost the French over



Napoleon in the uniform of a colonel of the Chasseurs à Cheval of the Old Guard

**“THEY PASSED US AS THUNDER AND CHARGED THE ENEMY. FOR 15 MINUTES IT WAS AN UNBELIEVABLE CHAOS, AND IT FELT LIKE A CENTURY”**

6,000 men) the 3rd Grenadiers began the day with 305 soldiers and officers but ended it with just 36 survivors. At the beginning of the campaign, 180 officers and 6,235 soldiers of the Imperial Guard had crossed the Niemen River. Months later, only 177 officers and 1,312 troops were still alive to cross it again. All cavalry units had been wiped out.

The Imperial Guard was rebuilt from scratch, but finding men was not an easy task. The letter of a soldier serving in a line infantry regiment shows that the best soldiers were invited to apply for the Imperial Guard. However, most hesitated as it was rumoured that the guardsmen were headed for Spain. During the campaign of 1813, the Old Guard was only used during the Battle of Hanau (30 October 1813).

After the Battle of Leipzig, the French had retreated towards France when they were stopped by the Bavarian army led by Marshal von Wrede. The Bavarian general wanted to block Napoleon's retreat. This time, Napoleon

did not hesitate to commit his best men. He sent the Imperial Guard, both Young and Old, into the fray to clear the enemy. The following victory was important for Napoleon, as it allowed the French to retreat and oppose the invasion of France.

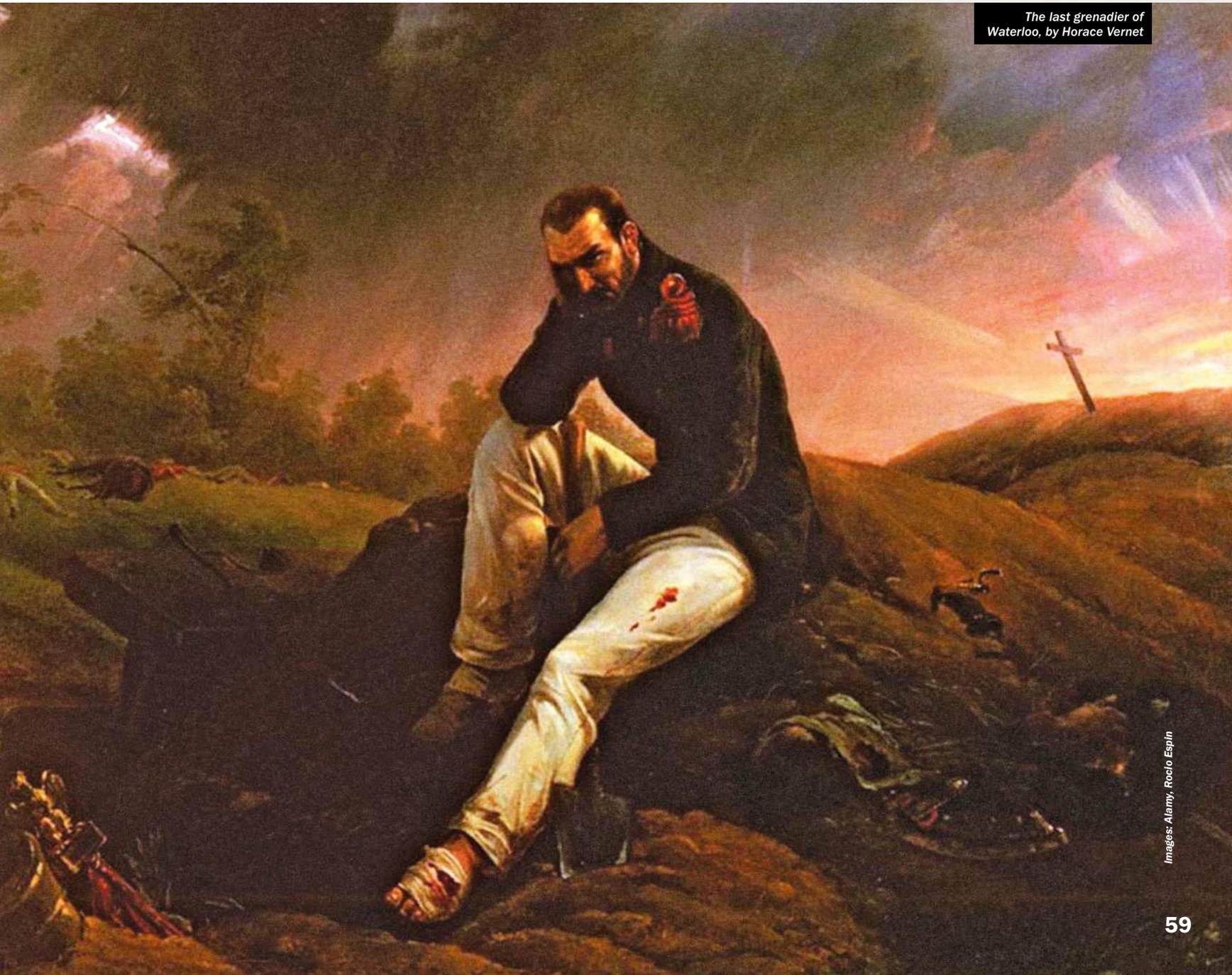
Pressed by the allies, Napoleon did not have time to bring the Old Guard back to its former glory. Nonetheless, French guardsmen distinguished themselves during the campaign of 1814. The French emperor wrote on the evening of the Battle of Montmirail that "my old foot guard and horse guard worked miracles. What they achieved can only be compared to what is found in chivalric tales." The same day, he wrote to his brother.

"All of this was achieved by sending half of my Old Guard, who did more than what can be expected of men. My foot guard, dragoons, horse grenadiers, worked miracles." Despite inflicting several defeats, Napoleon was unable to stop the enemy coalition from advancing on Paris. On 4 April 1814 he abdicated in favour of

his son before being forced to sign the Treaty of Fontainebleau on 13 April. He was sent to the island of Elba with 724 soldiers of the Old Guard. The remaining regiments were renamed. The Foot Grenadiers became the French Grenadiers, the Horse Grenadiers the Corps of Royal French Cuirassiers, the Chasseurs à Cheval the Corps of Royal Chasseurs, the Dragoons the Corps of Royal Dragoons of France, the 2nd Cheval-légers the Corps of Royal Cheval-légers Lancers of France.

Napoleon didn't remain in exile for very long. On 1 March 1815 he landed in France, and on 20 March he arrived in Paris and signed an imperial decree to re-establish the Imperial Guard. Missing crucial commanders, the elite formation was a shadow of its former self. Soon, many of its members would lose their lives in a field in Belgium during the final defeat of Napoleon's glittering career.

(The authors would like to thank Arnaud Springuel and Waterloo Immersion ([www.waterlooommersion.be](http://www.waterlooommersion.be)) for the help received.)



*The last grenadier of Waterloo, by Horace Vernet*

# A WORLD AT WAR

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Uncover the history and recruitment processes that have shaped one of the most-feared forces around

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*A Gurkha stands guard during a training exercise in Kabul, 2004*



# THE GURKHAS

## 200 YEARS ON THE FRONT LINE

**FOR TWO CENTURIES, BRITAIN HAS BEEN ABLE TO CALL UPON ONE OF THE WORLD'S MOST RESPECTED AND FEARED MILITARY ELITES**

**A**lthough the Gurkhas and British initially met as enemies during the Anglo-Nepalese War of 1814–16, this was just the start of a military partnership that has stood the test of time. During this period of fighting with rather than against the British, the Gurkhas have proved to be among the most dedicated, disciplined and effective troops anywhere in the world and have served the crown loyally for two centuries.

In 2009, the Brigade of Gurkhas and Gurkha veterans became the centre of attention regarding the rights of Gurkha veterans to settle in the UK. With the celebrity backing of Joanna Lumley, the campaign was victorious. Six years later a far bigger crisis affected Gurkha families and veterans when a

catastrophic earthquake struck Nepal, killing thousands and leaving many more homeless. The Gurkha Welfare Trust and other charitable organisations supported veterans and their families, but the threat of another quake hangs over Nepal.

Since the first recruits were signed in 1815, the Gurkhas have seen service – alongside British and Allied troops or on their own – from the harsh terrain of Afghanistan to the crowded streets of Hong Kong, the deserts of North Africa and the jungles of Borneo. Whether on the shores of Gallipoli, the slopes at Cassino or the brutal wilderness of Helmand Province, wherever the Gurkhas have gone, they have left an indelible mark on their enemies. They remain equally feared and respected the world over to this day.

**“KAATAR HUNNU BHANDA  
MARNU RAMRO”**

**“BETTER TO DIE THAN LIVE A COWARD”**

# ORIGINS AND THE EMPIRE

THE BRITISH AND THE GURKHAS FIRST MET IN 1814 NOT AS FRIENDS, BUT AS ENEMIES

The British Empire was formally introduced to the Gurkhas at the Battle of Kalunga on 31 October 1814. It was not a pleasant experience for the British, as the 650 Nepalese soldiers, ensconced in a hill fort, resisted some 4,000 British and Indian troops for almost a month, killing Major General Sir Rollo Gillespie in the process. The clash did, however, engender a mutual respect that lasts to this day. Within a year of the fight the British were recruiting these tough mountain warriors, even though the war with the Nepalese would rumble on until March 1816.

War between Nepal and Britain was inevitable; both were pursuing an expansionist policy in northern India. The seriousness with which the British viewed the threat from Nepal was

illustrated by the size of the force despatched to subdue the land. No less than 30,000 soldiers, 12,000 Indian auxiliaries and 60 guns were amassed for a job that took two years and ended with the Treaty of Segauli. This paved the way for the formation of official Gurkha battalions within the private army of the East India Company, but the first men had actually been recruited the previous year.

The Gurkhas fitted neatly into the developing British ideology of the 'martial races' – tribes and nations that were perceived to have a peculiar aptitude for warfare. Already encompassing the Scottish Highlanders, the theory now embraced the Gurkhas and would later accept the Sikhs. The British, however, did not recognise all of

Nepal as worthy of this distinction. The country had been unified in the second half of the 18th century by Prithvi Narayan, who expanded from his power base at Ghorka. After unification, Nepal had continued to push its borders outwards, attracting first the attention and then the suspicion of the British.

Distinct regional identities remained, of course, and the British were most impressed by three courageous groups in particular: the Gurung, the Magars and the Chhetri from the temperate region of Nepal known as the 'Hills'. The Gurung and Magars are of Mongolian origin, while the Chhetri trace their roots back to Indian immigrants from the 12th century.

Four battalions were formed and accepted into the army of the East India Company in April 1816: the Sirmoor Battalion, the Kumaon Battalion and two Nusseree (friendly) battalions. They settled down to garrison life in northern India, probably not suspecting that their descendants would still be serving in British forces 200 years later.

**“IT WAS NOT A PLEASANT EXPERIENCE FOR THE BRITISH, AS THE 650 NEPALESE SOLDIERS, ENSCONCED IN A HILL FORT, RESISTED SOME 4,000 BRITISH AND INDIAN TROOPS FOR ALMOST A MONTH”**



Captain Balbhadra Kunwar commanded the Gurkhas at the Battle of Kalunga

# GURKHA RECRUITS

AS MIGHT BE EXPECTED, GAINING ENTRY TO ONE OF THE WORLD'S ELITE UNITS IS NOT EASY, AND MANY THOUSANDS FAIL EACH YEAR

The first Gurkha recruits were accepted by Lieutenant Frederick Young, who had participated in the siege at Kalunga, but official recruitment started with the adoption of the first four Gurkha battalions a year later. Initially, recruits sometimes had to be smuggled out of Nepal as there was no co-operation from the Nepalese authorities. Recruitment was still discouraged as late as 1885, but it has since evolved into a highly ritualised format that ensures only the very finest enter the British Army.

*The Doko Race is considered the most challenging element of the selection process*



## OPEN-DOOR POLICY

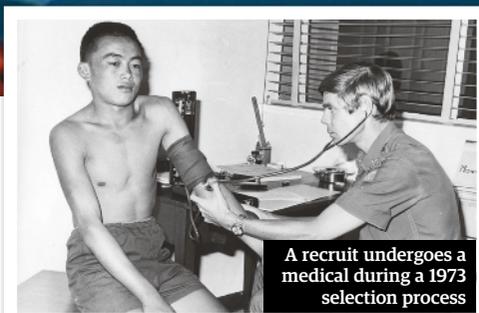
While it's true that recruitment initially focused on the areas identified by the British as home to so-called 'martial' tribes, this distinction has long been dropped. Now, the British Army welcomes applicants from all parts of Nepal, and the recruitment process promises to be "free, fair and transparent".

## INITIAL PHASE

The process gets under way with an advertising campaign that starts in April. 'Galah wallas' (now known as 'senior recruit assistants') travel the country to explain how recruitment works. The appropriate age (between 17 and a half and 21), height (minimum of 158 centimetres), weight (minimum of 50 kilograms), chest size (at least 79 centimetres) and education (the equivalent of five mid-grade GCSEs) are essential. Candidates must also have no more than four fillings or missing teeth.



*A military doctor examines a potential recruit in 1902*



*A recruit undergoes a medical during a 1973 selection process*

## REGIONAL SELECTION

July and September see those recruits who have made it through the initial phase move on to the Regional Selection process. Two bases, in Pokhara and Dharan, are used for this stage. Over a full day, recruits are given more thorough physical and medical examinations and are interviewed by both Nepalese and British Gurkha officers. The top 250 recruits from each station are forwarded to the final stage – a small return from the many thousands who apply each year.

## CENTRAL SELECTION

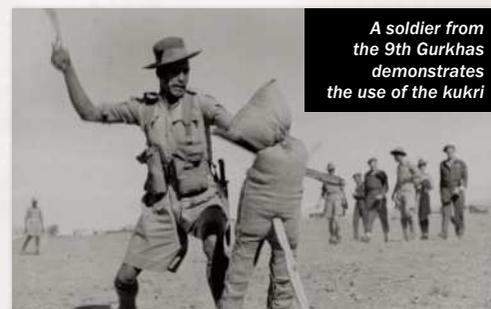
The three-week selection process that takes place at Pokhara is known as Central Selection. In 2014, almost 8,000 applicants had been whittled down to just 500 by this stage. Only 230 would be offered places in the British Army. Candidates must cover an 800-metre run in no more than two minutes and 40 seconds and a 1.5-mile run in no more than nine minutes and 40 seconds, as well as performing at least 70 sit-ups in a two-minute period and at least 12 underarm pull-ups.

## THE DOKO RACE

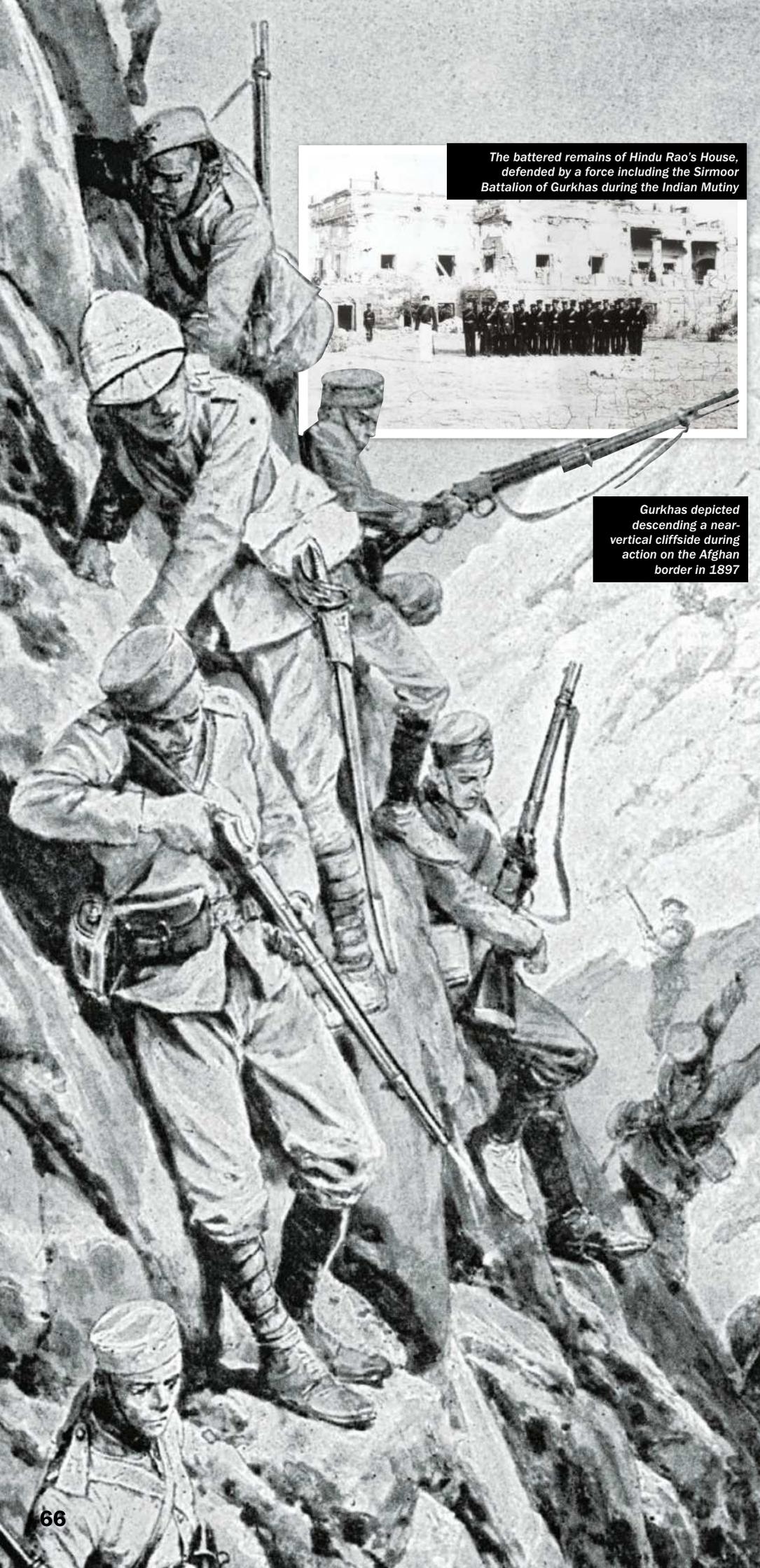
The last physical test of Central Selection is a five-kilometre run, including a 400-metre ascent, in a 48-minute time limit. A final twist asks the recruits to haul a 'doko' (a basket carried by a strap around the forehead) weighing 25 kilograms. Many recruits collapse after completing the course, and they won't hear whether they were under the time limit until the following day.

## THE EXAM

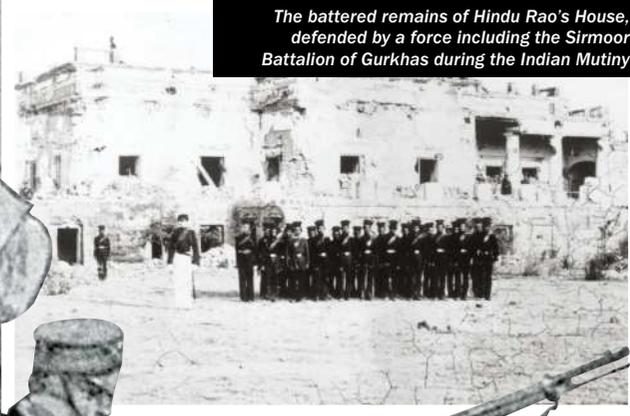
As well as being tested physically, the young men must also demonstrate mental ability. The need to quickly understand and follow orders in English is of paramount importance, and the written tests are almost as daunting as the doko race. An essay of two pages or so must be written on a given subject, while a comprehension test involves listening to a lengthy speech given by an English officer and then demonstrating a solid understanding of exactly what has been said.



*A soldier from the 9th Gurkhas demonstrates the use of the kukri*



The battered remains of Hindu Rao's House, defended by a force including the Sirmoor Battalion of Gurkhas during the Indian Mutiny



Gurkhas depicted descending a near-vertical cliffside during action on the Afghan border in 1897

# FRONTIER FIGHTERS

**GARRISON DUTY MIGHT SOUND DULL – IT WAS ANYTHING BUT FOR THE GURKHAS**

The Gurkhas began their history with the British as garrison soldiers in northern India. The British, unsurprisingly, viewed them as the ideal soldiers for operations in this rugged landscape. The four battalions had become three following the merging of the two Nusseree units. The new Nusseree Battalion was based at Dharamsala, the Sirmoor Battalion at Dehra Dun and the Kumaon Battalion at Almorah.

The first serious engagement involving the Gurkhas saw 350 men of the Sirmoor Battalion capture an insurgent stronghold near Koonja in 1824. As well as showcasing the fighting abilities of the Gurkhas (the insurgents, known as 'dacoits', fought ferociously), it also added a layer to Gurkha tradition when an improvised battering ram was used to get into the fort: a silver ram's head is still displayed on the cross-belts of officers in the Royal Gurkha Rifles.

The Siege of Bhurtpore in 1826 saw 200 men from the Nusseree and Sirmoor Battalions serve as skirmishers to screen the men who were placing a massive mine beneath the city walls, while the First Anglo-Sikh War of 1846 saw the Nusseree and Sirmoor battalions engaged in heavy fighting at the battles of Aliwal and Sobraon, with both battalions taking severe casualties.

The Indian Mutiny of 1857 gave the Gurkhas the chance to demonstrate not only their fighting qualities but also their loyalty. The heroic three-month defence of Hindu Rao's House on the outskirts of Delhi – in which 650 men of the Sirmoor Battalion suffered a casualty rate in excess of 50 per cent – cemented their reputation, and the battalion later participated in the re-taking of Delhi. Tangible reward came in the form of the Queen's Truncheon, still an object of great pride for today's Royal Gurkha Rifles.

The Gurkhas played only a minor role in the First Afghan War of 1839–42 but were heavily involved in the second (1878–80). Britain, concerned that Russia might use Afghanistan as a route into India, was suspicious of any apparent harmony between the Afghans and Russia and assembled an army in 1878 to tackle the problem. Now numbering five regiments, the Gurkhas were an integral part of the army, and the units distinguished themselves in engagements at Peiwar Kotal, Kabul and Kandahar. More action followed with the Black Mountain Campaign of 1888, the Tirah Campaign of 1897–98 and the expedition into Tibet of 1903. It was a turbulent time for the Gurkhas, but there was more to come.

# THE GREAT WAR: 1914-18

## FROM TRENCHES TO DESERT, THE GURKHAS' EXPERIENCES IN WWI WERE VARIED

The outbreak of WWI saw Gurkha numbers increase dramatically. From a starting point of ten two-battalion regiments (each styled 'Gurkha Rifles'), numbers swelled throughout the conflict and a total of 90,780 fought in various theatres, with more than 6,000 losing their lives.

Six of the existing 20 battalions were sent to Europe as part of the Indian Corps, with Second Battalion, 8th Gurkha Rifles being the first to see front-line action on 29 October 1914. Although better suited to their native environment, the Gurkhas adapted to the very different experience of European warfare as best they could, but losses were high. Just a day after going into action, 2/8th had suffered more than 200 casualties.

In April 1915, three further Gurkha battalions played their part in operations at Gallipoli, having been specifically requested by General Sir Ian Hamilton to join the fighting. The Gurkha battalions suffered terribly in the desperate

battle, with 2/10th experiencing a shocking 40 per cent casualty rate over a savage seven-week period.

In Mesopotamia (now Iraq), 2/7th Gurkha Rifles was part of the 12th Division commanded by Major General George F Goringe. In a move along the Euphrates River and subsequent actions against Turkish positions at Nasiriya in June–July 1915, 2/7th lost almost half its men, with illness and the harsh climate taking as heavy a toll as the defending Turks. The regiment was captured by the Turks on 29 September 1916 following an ill-advised push on the Iraqi capital of Baghdad.

Five Gurkha battalions played their part in the subsequent capture of Baghdad by General Frederick Maude. A 165,000-strong army first pushed the Turks out of Kut and then marched on to take Baghdad in March 1917. The Palestine Campaign also saw heavy Gurkha involvement, with General Sir Edmund Allenby's army including six Gurkha battalions.



*Gurkhas are seen here sharpening their kukris in France during the Great War*



*Men from the 1/9th Gurkhas in the trenches of Flanders in 1915*



*The 1/6th Gurkhas assaulting Ottoman positions at the Battle of Sari Bair*



Taken during WWII, this picture is a re-creation of men from the 9th Gurkhas advancing in North Africa with kukris drawn

# GURKHA HEROES OF WWII

**GURKHA NUMBERS AGAIN EXPANDED DRAMATICALLY AS THE WORLD WENT TO WAR FOR A SECOND TIME IN 1939**

The escalating nature of WWII saw the British call on an increasing number of Gurkhas in various theatres. Third, fourth and even fifth battalions were added to existing regiments throughout the war to boost numbers.

The Gurkhas mainly saw action in North Africa, the Middle East, Italy and Burma. In all regions, the Gurkhas' reputation for hardiness and courage was enhanced. More than 2,000 gallantry medals were awarded, including 12 Victoria Crosses, with no fewer than eight VCs awarded in 1944 alone.

The Gurkhas experienced mixed fortunes. In North Africa, Gurkha units engaged in a to-and-fro struggle with Rommel's Afrika Korps, with two battalions being captured during the German assault on Tobruk. In Italy, Gurkhas took part in fierce fighting in a doomed attempt to capture the German-held monastery at Cassino, while in the Malay Peninsula three battalions were taken prisoner by the Japanese.

There were victories as well, of course. Gurkha units took part in the successful British offensive against Rommel, five battalions helped defend the critical bridge over the Sittang River as Japanese troops pushed on Rangoon, and Gurkhas were also prominent in the Chindit operations in Burma.

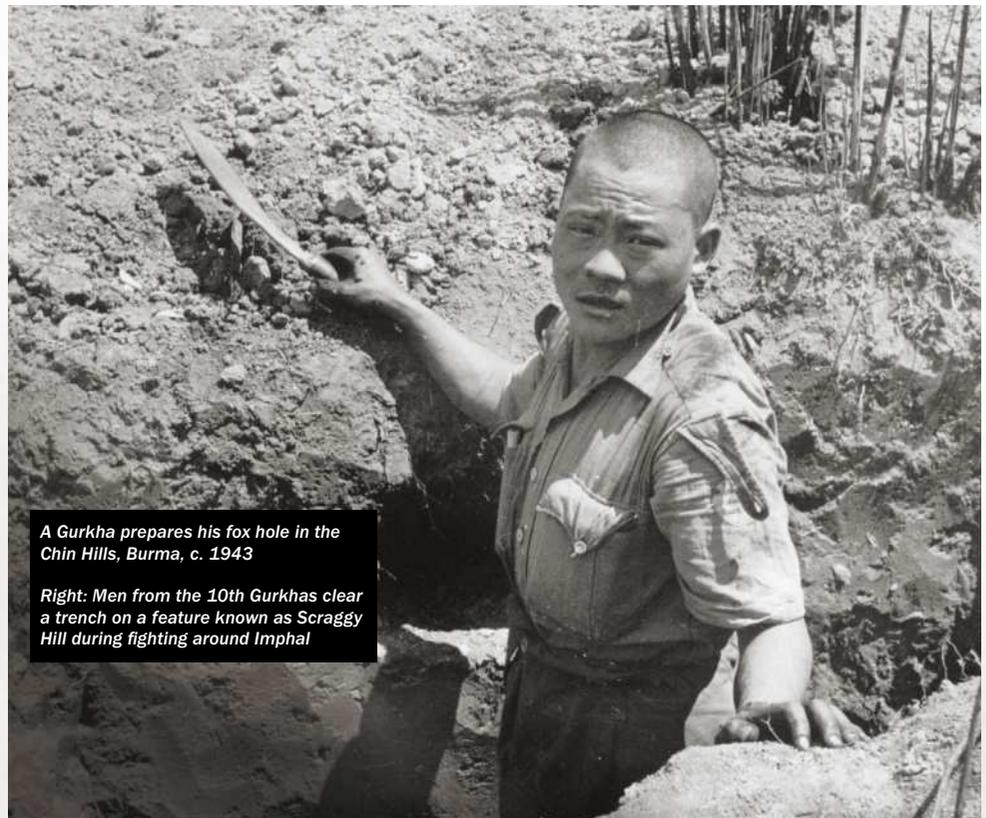
It is worth noting the extraordinary co-operation of the nation of Nepal in this effort. Recruitment into the Nepalese Army was suspended to fulfil British requests and about 138,000 Gurkhas served during the war, with more than 7,500 losing their lives and a further 1,441 declared missing, presumed dead.

## **Subedar Lalbahadur Thapa NORTH AFRICA**

During the British assault on Wadi Akarit in April 1942, a division under Major General Francis Taker advanced up a mountain known as the Fatnassa Massif, with Gurkha units to the fore. Subedar Lalbahadur Thapa, from D Company, 1/2nd Gurkhas, single-handedly knocked out one German machine-gun position and then attacked a second with his kukri, opening up the enemy position for Taker's division and winning the Victoria Cross in the process.

## **48th Brigade SOUTHEAST ASIA**

As British forces fell back before the Japanese advance through Burma in 1942, there was a real danger of the entire force being captured as Japanese units attempted to cut off the retreat. The 48th Brigade, at the time an all-Gurkha unit, formed the rearguard as the British retreated towards India. Despite being severely weakened from earlier actions (1/3rd Gurkhas had lost over 500 men from an initial force of 750) the Gurkhas held the Japanese at bay and the battered army reached safety.

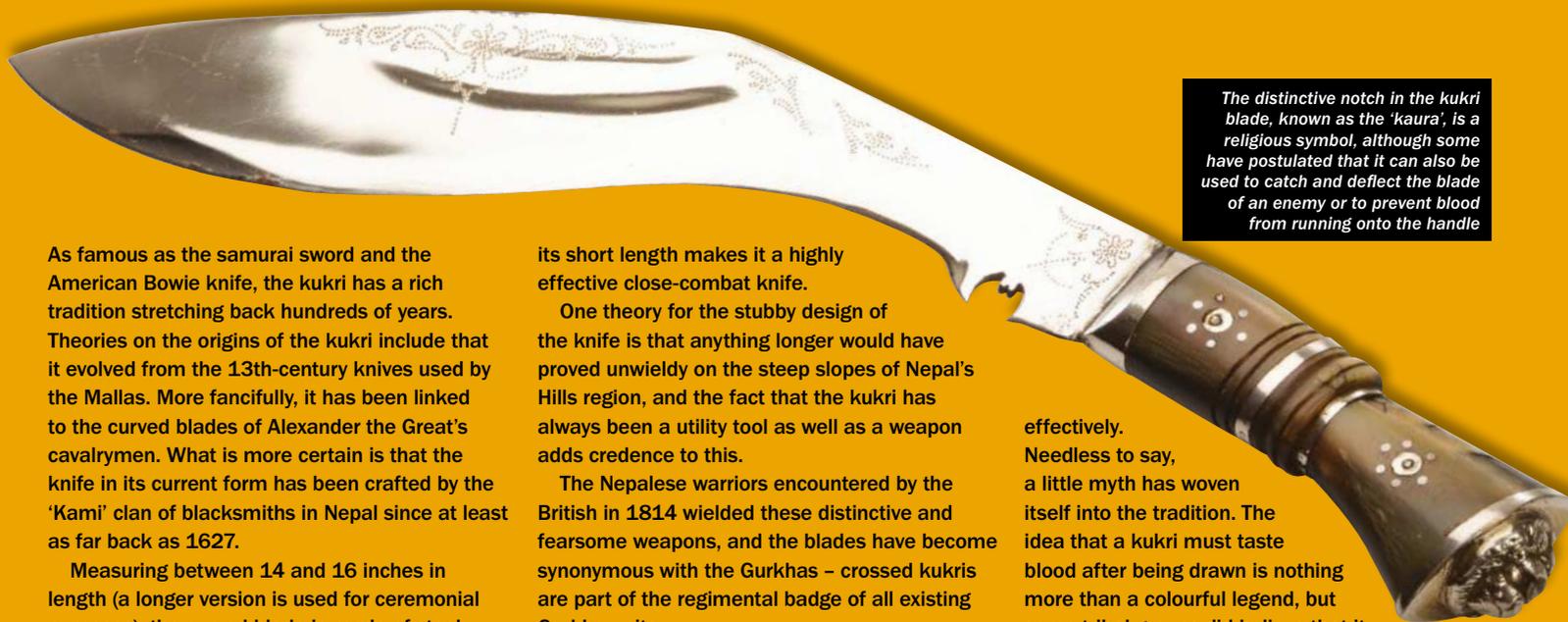


*A Gurkha prepares his fox hole in the Chin Hills, Burma, c. 1943*

*Right: Men from the 10th Gurkhas clear a trench on a feature known as Scraggy Hill during fighting around Imphal*

# THE KUKRI

THE GURKHAS' ICONIC KNIVES ARE INSTANTLY RECOGNISABLE, BY FRIEND AND FOE ALIKE



*The distinctive notch in the kukri blade, known as the 'kaura', is a religious symbol, although some have postulated that it can also be used to catch and deflect the blade of an enemy or to prevent blood from running onto the handle*

As famous as the samurai sword and the American Bowie knife, the kukri has a rich tradition stretching back hundreds of years. Theories on the origins of the kukri include that it evolved from the 13th-century knives used by the Mallas. More fancifully, it has been linked to the curved blades of Alexander the Great's cavalrymen. What is more certain is that the knife in its current form has been crafted by the 'Kami' clan of blacksmiths in Nepal since at least as far back as 1627.

Measuring between 14 and 16 inches in length (a longer version is used for ceremonial purposes), the curved blade is made of steel while the handle can be of bone, wood or sometimes metal. It can be used both as a slashing weapon and in a stabbing motion, and

its short length makes it a highly effective close-combat knife.

One theory for the stubby design of the knife is that anything longer would have proved unwieldy on the steep slopes of Nepal's Hills region, and the fact that the kukri has always been a utility tool as well as a weapon adds credence to this.

The Nepalese warriors encountered by the British in 1814 wielded these distinctive and fearsome weapons, and the blades have become synonymous with the Gurkhas – crossed kukris are part of the regimental badge of all existing Gurkha units.

Boys in Nepal are used to handling kukris from an early age, and it is this familiarity with the knives that helps the Gurkhas use them so

effectively.

Needless to say, a little myth has woven itself into the tradition. The idea that a kukri must taste blood after being drawn is nothing more than a colourful legend, but some tribal groups did believe that it was disrespectful of the blade not to put it to use after being drawn, even if only to slice vegetables.

## First Battalion, 9th Gurkhas MEDITERRANEAN

During fierce fighting at Cassino in March 1944, 1/9th Gurkhas was part of the 4th Indian Division tasked with capturing a point of high ground below the German-held monastery of Monte Cassino. The ground, ominously named 'Hangman's Hill', was taken by the Gurkhas and held for nine days despite constant artillery bombardment from the Germans. Despite their bravery, Monte Cassino could not be taken and the Gurkhas were forced to withdraw from their hard-earned position.



## Rifleman Sher Bahadur Thapa MEDITERRANEAN

Courage can be displayed in many ways, as Rifleman Sher Bahadur Thapa of 1/9th Gurkhas proved in September 1944. Spotting a wounded Gurkha, Thapa braved enemy gunfire to sprint out and pick up his fallen comrade, returning him to safety. Thapa had already charged a German machine-gun post, knocking it out of action, but his luck ran out when attempting to rescue a second fallen comrade, as he died in a hail of machine-gun fire. His family received his posthumous Victoria Cross the following year.

## Rifleman Tulbahadur Pun SOUTHEAST ASIA

As well as collective achievement, the Second Chindit Operation saw many instances of personal bravery. Rifleman Tulbahadur Pun won his Victoria Cross during an attack on a railway bridge at Mogaung in June 1944. Finding himself the only unwounded member of his section, he picked up a Bren gun and attacked a key Japanese position known as the 'Red House'. Eventually capturing the position, he then continued to provide supporting fire while the rest of his platoon advanced.



## Subedar Netrabahadur Thapa SOUTHEAST ASIA

The defence of Mortar Bluff in June 1944 may have ended in failure, but it is rightfully remembered as one of the Gurkhas' finest hours. Subedar Netrabahadur Thapa commanded a small defensive unit against a Japanese attack, taking the fight to the Japanese when supplied with fresh ammunition and grenades. Thapa was killed during the counterattack and the position was taken by the Japanese, but his bravery (he was found the next day still holding his kukri) earned him a posthumous Victoria Cross.

## Rifleman Bhanbhagta Gurung SOUTHEAST ASIA

During fighting in Burma in March 1945 Rifleman Bhanbhagta Gurung proved to be a one-man army. After first coolly despatching a Japanese sniper, Gurung went on to single-handedly attack five Japanese positions, including four foxholes and a machine-gun post. Using his rifle, bayonet, grenades and kukri, he helped his unit secure a vital foothold.





# THE NEXT GENERATION OF GURKHAS

POST-WWII, THE GURKHAS HAVE RISEN TO MYRIAD CHALLENGES DESPITE EVER-DECREASING NUMBERS

Following Indian Independence in 1947, only four (2nd, 6th, 7th and 10th) of the ten Gurkha regiments joined the British Army, with the remainder staying with the Indian Army. Over nearly 70 years since the split, Gurkha numbers have been steadily cut, with a target for the current Brigade of Gurkhas of just 2,617 for 2020. Despite the steady reduction in numbers, the Gurkhas have seen action in Malaya, Brunei, Borneo, Hong Kong, the Falkland Islands, the Balkans, Iraq and Afghanistan. They remain one of the world's elite fighting forces.

*Soldiers from the 2nd The Royal Gurkha Rifles prepare for a patrol in Helmand, Afghanistan, 2011*

## THE MALAYAN EMERGENCY

The Gurkhas were given the chance to once more demonstrate their mastery of jungle warfare during a 12-year campaign (1948–60) against the communist terrorists (CT) of the Malayan Races Liberation Army. In what was surely the only military campaign the British have fought against an enemy commander who possessed an MBE (MRLA leader Chin Peng had been recognised for his efforts when fighting the Japanese during WWII), the Gurkhas recovered from early setbacks to force CT units to withdraw further into the jungle. The granting of Malayan independence in 1957 also removed much of the impetus behind the MRLA cause.

## THE BORNEO CONFRONTATION

More jungle warfare came when Indonesian-backed forces pushed into Borneo in 1963. The Indonesian Border Terrorists (IBT) was commanded by Indonesian Army regulars, and more regular units became involved as the conflict progressed. The equally

matched opponents waged a deadly war in the jungle, but it was only when the British stepped off the back foot (they had initially concentrated on responding to border incursions) and began moving into Indonesian territory that they started to see real progress. The formation of a Gurkha paratrooper company helped tip the balance of the three-year conflict, which cost the lives of 43 Gurkhas.



*Gurkhas patrol on the Limbang River in 1965 as part of operations during the Borneo Confrontation*



The First Battalion of the Royal Gurkha Rifles demonstrate kukri fighting on 19 July 2007



## THE FALKLANDS WAR

The Gurkhas' impact on the Falklands War was out of all proportion to the actual service they saw. As part of the task force assembled to liberate the islands, which Argentina had invaded in April 1982, 1/7th Gurkhas sailed on the QE2 in May. Propaganda stories showed the Gurkhas sharpening their kukris ready for battle, and even though most of the fighting was over by the time they arrived, they had clearly put the fear of god into the Argentinians, many of who were young conscripts. In the final action around Port Stanley, Argentinian troops apparently surrendered to the Scots Guards to avoid facing the Gurkhas.

The Royal Gurkha Rifles patrol a street in Helmand Province in 2010



## THE GURKHA WELFARE TRUST



Established in 1969, the Gurkha Welfare Trust (GWT, registered charity No. 1103669) is focused on providing financial and medical support for elderly Gurkha veterans and their widows in Nepal, who rely on the Trust for a secure old age. For those who are unable to live independently, it offers residential care.

The series of earthquakes that began in April 2015 devastated the Gurkha homeland – over 30,000 people were killed or injured and millions lost their homes. With support from Gurkha soldiers despatched to Nepal, the GWT responded to provide medical aid and distribute emergency supplies in isolated rural areas. The GWT relies on the generosity of the general public to support its welfare relief. For more information on the work of the GWT, and to donate to its Earthquake Response Fund, please visit [www.gwt.org.uk](http://www.gwt.org.uk).

## AFGHANISTAN

The first Gurkha unit was deployed to Afghanistan in 2001. Having a natural affinity with the Afghans, the Gurkhas have served with distinction ever since, training Afghan National Army personnel and helping to win 'hearts and minds'. Inevitably, there has been combat as well, especially following the move into Helmand Province in 2006. Some things, it seems, will always remain the same with the Gurkhas, as one of their most recent awards for bravery makes clear. Lance Corporal Tuljung Gurung earned a Military Cross in 2013 for seeing off two insurgents, not with his rifle but with his kukri.

## THE MODERN BRIGADE OF GURKHAS

### The Royal Gurkha Rifles (RGR)

STRENGTH: 1,261

This two-battalion regiment of a 'light-role' battalion based in the UK and a 'jungle-role' battalion in Brunei comprises almost exactly half the strength of the Brigade of Gurkhas. Their main barracks is at Shorncliffe, and the regiment celebrates its birthday on 1 July

### The Queen's Gurkha Engineers (QGE)

STRENGTH: 295

69 Gurkha Field Squadron and 70 Gurkha Field Support Squadron are headed by a Regimental HQ to make up the QGE, which is part of 36 Engineer Regiment. The history of this unit goes back to the creation of the first Gurkha sapper unit in 1948. The regiment is based at Maidstone.

### The Queen's Own Gurkha Logistic Regiment (QOGLR)

STRENGTH: 439

The Royal Logistics Corps provides fighting forces with the supplies they need to do their job. Within this corps, ten Queen's Own Gurkha Logistic Regiment is recognised as an elite unit, comprising 1 Squadron, 28 Squadron and 36 HQ Squadron. The regiment is based at Aldershot.

### Queen's Gurkha Signals (QGS)

STRENGTH: 484

Within the Royal Corps of Signals, a combat support arm, three squadrons comprise the Queen's Gurkha Signals, which was first established during the Malayan Emergency. Their main barracks is at Nuneaton, although the regiment also has men in Nepal, Brunei and the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst in Camberley, Surrey.

### The Band of the Brigade of Gurkhas

STRENGTH: 45

Belonging to the Brigade of Gurkhas rather than the Corps of Army Music, the Band was originally formed in 1859. New musicians needed to be found when all existing bandsmen opted to stay with Indian regiments following Indian independence in 1947, but the unit was successfully reformed in 1949. It is based at Shorncliffe.

### Gurkha Staff and Personnel Support (GSPS)

STRENGTH: 93

Formed in June 2011 (prior to this they had been known as the Gurkha Clerks), this company provides services including accounting, IT support, HR and personnel support and business administration to all units within the Brigade of Gurkhas.

# SAS



## D-DAY MISSIONS

AS OPERATION OVERLORD BEGAN, THE SAS PARACHUTED INTO FRANCE WITH INSTRUCTIONS TO CAUSE HAVOC, CUT RAILWAY LINES AND KILL GERMANS

WORDS: **GAVIN MORTIMER**



*As the British forces landed on the Normandy beaches, the SAS had already caused havoc for the Nazis across France*

**W**hen David Stirling was granted permission to expand the SAS in September 1942, he appointed his brother, Bill, as commanding officer of the second regiment.

Bill was the eldest of five children, and David's senior by four years. The siblings shared a similar military background (Scots Guards and commandos) but differed in personality.

One wartime SAS officer who knew them both, Anthony Greville-Bell, recalled: "I was very fond of Bill. He was a very deep, intelligent and well-read man. Bill was cleverer than David. [He] was more charismatic and more physical, the younger brother, and was outwardly very good at dealing with higher-ups and getting what he wanted. Bill was much quieter and more intellectual, and in terms of dealing with authority I think he was better than David."

Nonetheless, the brothers agreed on how the SAS should be deployed in any given theatre of war, and after David's capture in January 1943, Bill became more determined than ever to adhere to the principles outlined by his brother when, in 1941, he'd produced a plan for a special forces unit to operate behind enemy lines in North Africa. In the summer of 1943, lieutenant

colonel Bill Stirling had clashed with the HQ 15th Army Group about how 2SAS should be used in Italy, but that was just a foretaste of the bitter row that erupted the following March when the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) issued the SAS Brigade with its operational instructions for D-Day.

They tasked the SAS brigade (which now comprised 1SAS, 2SAS, two French regiments, 3 & 4, and a company of Belgian soldiers) to parachute into Normandy between the landing beaches and the German reserves 36 hours in advance of the main invasion fleet. Their job would be to prevent three panzer divisions of reserves from reaching the beaches. Bill Stirling was aghast when he read the operational instructions. It was a suicide mission, and a type of warfare for which the SAS was not trained. Paddy Mayne, commanding officer of 1SAS, shared Stirling's sentiments but the big Irishman was better suited to fighting the enemy than his own top brass. "Paddy was useless with dealing with senior officers because if they did something to annoy him, he threatened to punch their noses," said Tony Greville-Bell.

In a strongly worded letter to SHAEF, Stirling expressed his grave misgivings about the

operational instructions and demanded that the SAS operate in France as they had in the desert, in the principles set down by his brother.

Before Bill Stirling could send the letter, however, Lieutenant General Frederick 'Boy' Browning intervened on behalf of the SAS, advising the chief of staff, 21 Army Group, that it would be preferable if the SAS Brigade was dropped deeper into France to attack German lines of communication, train the resistance and waylay reinforcements en route to Normandy.

Stirling sent his letter nonetheless, in order to put on record his anger with what he considered as the constant misunderstanding of the SAS by the top brass. The letter infuriated many within SHAEF, but Stirling refused to retract his criticism.

Instead he resigned, and his brave decision to fall on his sword was not in vain. On 28 May, 21 Army Group issued an amended order for the SAS Brigade to replace the original order two months earlier.

Now the SAS Brigade would carry out 43 missions in France, all but one (Titanic, involving a six-man party dropping into Normandy to spread confusion with dummy parachutes), entailing the insertion of SAS units deep behind enemy lines to attack the Germans.

**"BILL STIRLING WAS AGHAST WHEN HE READ THE OPERATIONAL INSTRUCTIONS. IT WAS A SUICIDE MISSION, AND A TYPE OF WARFARE FOR WHICH THE SAS WAS NOT TRAINED"**

*Left: Lieutenant colonel Brian Franks replaced Bill Stirling as CO of 2SAS and later parachuted into France to join the ill-fated Operation Loyton*

*Right: Paddy Mayne was one of the SAS originals, replacing David Stirling as CO of 1SAS following the latter's capture*





# OPERATION HOUNDSWORTH

CAUSING CHAOS ACROSS FRANCE, A SQUADRON CUT OFF VITAL GERMAN RESOURCE AND COMMUNICATION LINES

The first major mission into Occupied France was code-named Houndsworth, and involved A Squadron. Their task was to cut the railway lines between Lyon and Paris, train the numerous local groups of Maquis and generally make nuisances of themselves.

The boys in A Squadron considered themselves a cut above the rest of the SAS brigade. They were veterans of the desert, a few – like Johnny Cooper, Jeff Du Vivier, Reg Seekings and their commanding officer, Bill Fraser – were even ‘Originals’, among the 66 men recruited by David Stirling in 1941.

But it was one of the recent additions to the squadron, Captain Ian Wellsted, who got Operation Houndsworth underway on the night of 5 June. As the Allied invasion fleet sailed for the Normandy beaches, Wellsted and four others parachuted into the thickly-forested, rolling countryside of the Massif du Morvan, west of Dijon. Their task was to ensure the area was safe for the arrival of a second 20-strong SAS party under the command of Bill Fraser, which duly dropped without incident on 11 June.

By 22 June, the remaining 46 men of A Squadron were safely inserted into the Morvan, with Fraser’s HQ camp established at Vieux Dun and a second base approximately ten miles south, not far from the village of Montsauche, under the command of

Alex Muirhead and Ian Wellsted. The local Resistance group, Maquis Bernard, camped in the forest close to Wellsted’s men and he recalled that, “none of the Maquisards, even the most military of them, had any idea of true discipline and were liable easily to be discouraged. Their true worth depended entirely upon the capacity of their leader and the use of their local knowledge.”

On 24 June the Maquis tipped off the SAS that a convoy of Germans and White Russians [Soviets fighting for Germany] was on its way to ambush what they believed to be ‘Canadian paratroopers’. Forewarned, the SAS turned from the hunted to the hunter. “We just toddled off to a road that they would have to pass back to their camp,” wrote sergeant John Noble. “We waited four hours on that road until at long last they came. We were spread over 200 yards along the road and on a pre-arranged signal we opened up. Their order of march was a truck with a 20mm [cannon] on it, a private car, another truck with a 20mm, followed by a motorcycle. I had the first truck to deal with.”

By the time Wellsted arrived at the scene, Noble’s bren gun had done its work. “The leading German lorry was blazing furiously,” recalled Wellsted. “The windscreen was shattered and the bodies of the men in the cab lolled grotesquely in their seats... beyond

the first truck was a small civilian car. It, too, was stopped and derelict, and a huddled form twitched on the road beside it.” Once the last of the resistance had been overcome, the SAS vanished into the forests, leaving behind a scene of death and destruction. The German retaliation was swift and savage. The next day, eight truck-loads of soldiers burned the villages of Montsauche and Planchez to the ground.

On 26 June a force of around 300 Germans and White Russians attacked the forest where they believed the SAS to be hiding. But there were no guerrilla fighters and their prey slipped away, having gunned down dozens of Germans as they moved clumsily through the trees.

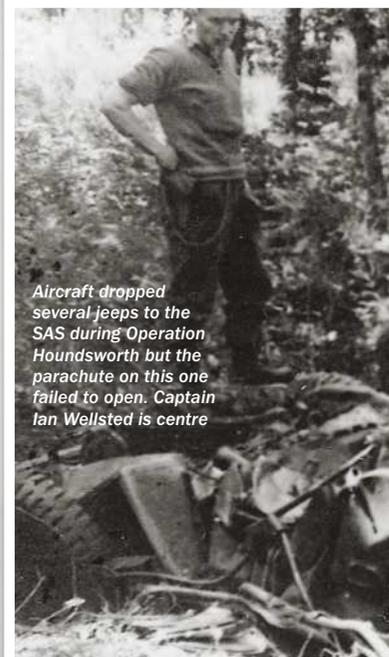
For the rest of June and into the beginning of July, heavy rain fell in the Morvan and there was little activity, either from the SAS or the Germans. Then on 5 July, the SAS received a resupply of food and equipment, including three jeeps dropped by parachute. One of the jeeps was given to Johnny Wiseman, who with a signaller and a couple of other men, departed

**“ONCE THE LAST OF THE RESISTANCE HAD BEEN OVERCOME, THE SAS VANISHED INTO THE FORESTS, LEAVING BEHIND A SCENE OF DEATH AND DESTRUCTION”**

*Right: Paddy Mayne (left) arrived in France on 7 August with Mike Sadler (right) and the pair first paid a visit to Bill Fraser in Houndsworth*



*The men of Houndsworth familiarise themselves with a mortar prior to their successful attack on Autun*



*Aircraft dropped several jeeps to the SAS during Operation Houndsworth but the parachute on this one failed to open. Captain Ian Wellsted is centre*

in the direction of Dijon, where over 30,000 Germans were stationed. Their mission was to select targets and call-up RAF air strikes, which they did with considerable success.

Back in the Morvan, the arrival of the jeeps provided the SAS with the means to range far and wide in harassing the enemy. In the most audacious attack, Wellsted and Muirhead targeted a synthetic oil factory at Autun, 25 miles from the SAS camp. "Mortar bombs were plumping most satisfactorily into the factory area at the range of 700 yards and dense clouds of steam were seen rising from broken pipes," wrote Muirhead. "Then with a roar the 7 Vickers K opened up at 200 yards, spraying the whole area with tracer and incendiary. Each gun pouring two full pans into the steam."

Several times sabotage parties cut the railway lines to Paris, slowing the Germans as they transported men and munitions towards Normandy. The most successful such operation was led by the desert veteran Jeff Du Vivier, who in late July laid three pressure charges under a 50-yard stretch of track. It was a complex and time-consuming job for Du Vivier and his two comrades, but their patience was rewarded when a munitions train appeared a few hours later. The engine was destroyed and ten of the 40 wagons were blown off the line, damaging several AA guns. Best of all, noted Du Vivier in his report after the action, the Germans were left "very frightened and demoralised".

Fittingly, the final ambush was carried out by A Squadron's CO, Bill Fraser, who on 3 September killed seven Germans. Five days later, the squadron arrived in England having been replaced by Tony Marsh's C Squadron. In their three months in France, Fraser's men had killed or wounded 220 Germans, derailed six trains, destroyed 23 motorised vehicles and damaged a synthetic oil refinery. Their casualties were two dead and seven wounded.

*The Nazis called them 'terrorists' but the SAS were World War II's most effective special forces unit. Tough, fit, disciplined and intelligent, the SAS killed 7,733 Germans during operations in France*

Illustration: Jean-Michel Girard, The Art Agency



**"THE ENGINE WAS DESTROYED AND TEN OF THE 40 WAGONS WERE BLOWN OFF THE LINE, DAMAGING SEVERAL ANTI-AIRCRAFT GUNS"**

# BEHIND ENEMY LINES

CRUCIAL TO THE ALLIED EFFORT, VARIOUS SAS SQUADRONS ENTERED GERMAN TERRITORY AND CAUSED MAYHEM FOR THE ENEMY, DESTROYING WEAPONS, SUPPLIES AND COMMUNICATION AND TRANSPORT LINES

## OPERATION COONEY

A French SAS operation that entailed inserting 18 small sabotage teams by parachute. Cooney's aim was to isolate Brittany by cutting its railway lines within 48 hours. The mission began on 8 June and forced a battlegroup of the German 275th Division heading towards the beachhead to abandon the railway and take to the road, arriving 48 hours behind schedule.

## OPERATION TITANIC

Commanded by Lieutenants Poole and Fowles, Titanic comprised four men and its mission was to create a diversion just behind the Normandy beaches prior to the arrival of the main invasion fleet. This was done by throwing several sandbags dressed as paratroopers from the aircraft that were fitted with firecrackers to explode on landing. It wasn't a success.

## OPERATION HAFT

A reconnaissance mission in July to radio back details of German positions ahead of the breakout from the Cotentin Peninsula.

## OPERATION DINGSON

A French SAS mission in Brittany in June, culminating in the Battle of St Marcel, which cost six SAS and 300 Germans dead.

## OPERATION BULBASKET

Commanded by Captain John Tonkin, Bulbasket was a 1SAS operation that began on the night of 5/6 June when the men parachuted into the countryside south of Poitiers. From the start, the operation suffered from the proximity of large numbers of enemy troops and at dawn on 3 July the camp was overrun, with the Germans capturing 31 SAS soldiers, all of whom were executed.

*Right: To supply the SAS parties with jeeps required four huge 90 foot parachutes for each vehicle*



**“THE OPERATION SUFFERED FROM THE PROXIMITY OF LARGE NUMBERS OF ENEMY TROOPS AND AT DAWN ON 3 JULY THE CAMP WAS OVERRUN, WITH THE GERMANS CAPTURING 31 SAS SOLDIERS, ALL OF WHOM WERE EXECUTED”**

**OPERATION GAIN**

About 60 men from D Squadron, 1SAS, operated for two months in the Rambouillet area, approximately 30 miles south of Paris. Though they lost several men, the SAS inflicted much damage on the Germans in a series of hit and run raids, while also derailling two trains, cutting 16 railway lines and providing important intelligence on German troop movements close to the capital.

**OPERATION RUPERT**

A 2SAS operation that only began in the middle of August when the men parachuted into eastern France with instructions to sabotage railway lines between Nancy and Chalons-sur-Marne. By this time, however, the Germans were withdrawing east with the American Third Army in hot pursuit, so the SAS for a time acted as reconnaissance patrols for their allies.

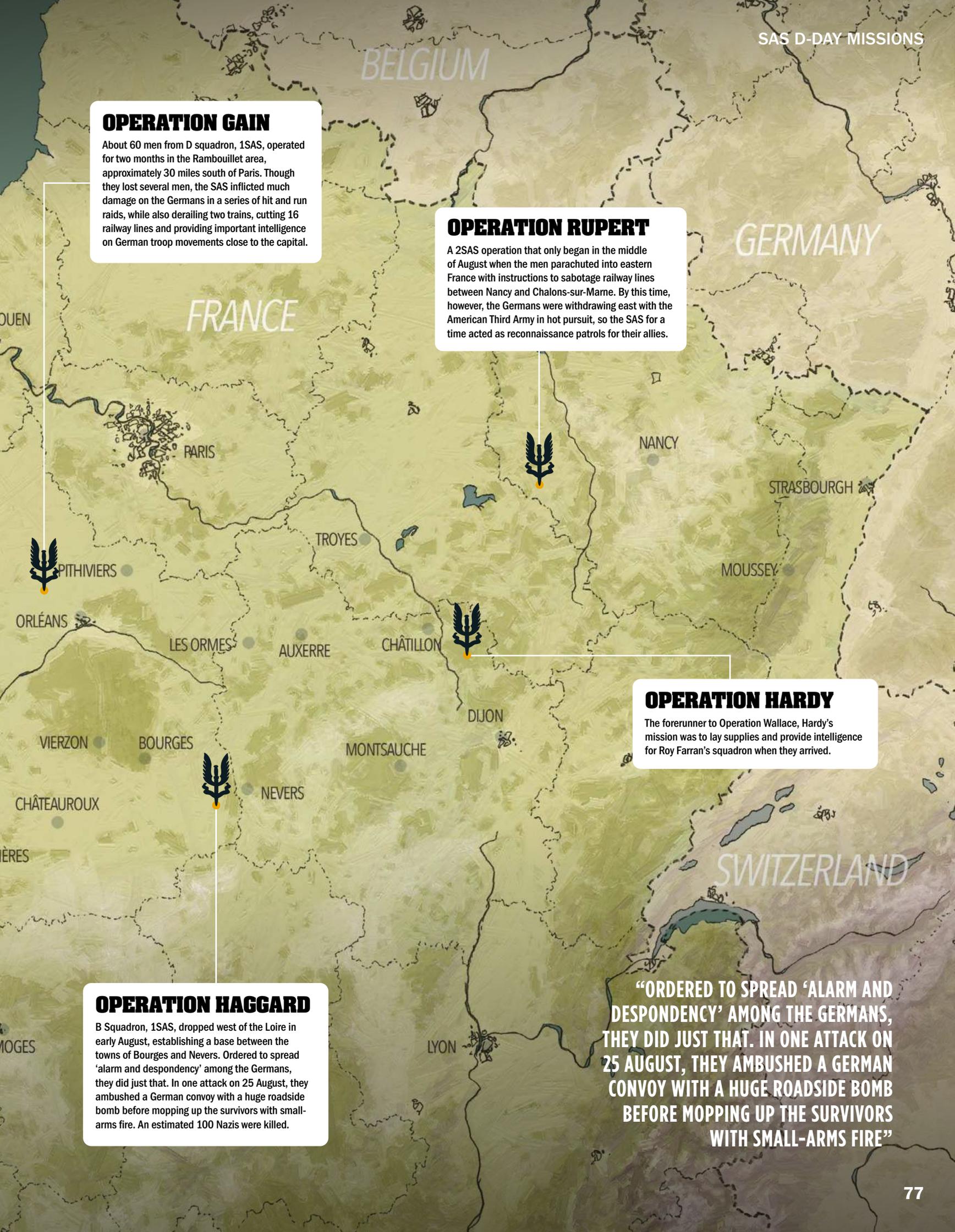
**OPERATION HARDY**

The forerunner to Operation Wallace, Hardy's mission was to lay supplies and provide intelligence for Roy Farran's squadron when they arrived.

**OPERATION HAGGARD**

B Squadron, 1SAS, dropped west of the Loire in early August, establishing a base between the towns of Bourges and Nevers. Ordered to spread 'alarm and despondency' among the Germans, they did just that. In one attack on 25 August, they ambushed a German convoy with a huge roadside bomb before mopping up the survivors with small-arms fire. An estimated 100 Nazis were killed.

**“ORDERED TO SPREAD ‘ALARM AND DESPONDENCY’ AMONG THE GERMANS, THEY DID JUST THAT. IN ONE ATTACK ON 25 AUGUST, THEY AMBUSHED A GERMAN CONVOY WITH A HUGE ROADSIDE BOMB BEFORE MOPPING UP THE SURVIVORS WITH SMALL-ARMS FIRE”**





# OPERATION WALLACE

HEADING EAST TOWARDS AUXERRE, C SQUADRON FOUGHT A COMPANY OF THE AFRIKA KORPS AND TOOK DOWN A TRAIN IN THE PROCESS

The officer who replaced Bill Stirling as commanding officer of 2SAS was lieutenant colonel Brian Franks. Charming and debonair, he nonetheless grew increasingly frustrated as the summer of 1944 wore on at the lack of opportunities for his regiment. A couple of missions were aborted at the last minute because of concerns about the operational area, and when the first parties did insert in August, they were soon overrun by the American Third Army, now on its dash east across France.

So when Major Roy Farran and 60 men of C Squadron, 2SAS, disembarked from their Dakotas at Rennes airfield in 20 jeeps, they were determined to waste no time in taking the fight to the Germans.

It was August 19 when they motored away from Rennes towards Auxerre on the start of Operation Wallace. Four days later, the SAS had their first contact with the enemy when they encountered a company of tanned Afrika Korps, recently arrived from Italy and still in their tropical battledress of khaki shirts and blue shorts. "Everything had seemed so peaceful," recalled sergeant major Harry Vickers. "When we heard the explosion, we turned the bend and saw Farran getting everyone organised."

Farran was a veteran of many a firefight and knew the importance of seizing the initiative. He

ordered one section to cover their right and then sent Vickers's section, with their four Brens, into the hedgerow on their left. The Afrika Korps soon attacked, believing their superior numbers would prevail. "I started to spray the hedge with bullets and as I did so I could hear the Germans shouting rude things at us," said Vickers.

The fight lasted an hour and cost the Germans dozens of casualties. The SAS lost no one and withdrew to find another route to Auxerre. By the end of August, they had reached their operational area and began hunting out Germans. Vehicles were destroyed, roads were mined, billets attacked and on one occasion a train strafed as it chuffed down the line

On 30 August, they ambushed a convoy of 30 trucks as they approached the German garrison in the Chateau Marmont in Chatillon. Vickers, awarded a Distinguished Conduct Medal for his courage during the attack, was the first to open fire from a distance of 20 yards. In his memoirs, Farran described how "the first five trucks, two of which were loaded with ammunition, were brewed up and we were treated to a glorious display of fireworks. Vickers later recalled it "as all a bit bloody." The SAS suffered one fatality in the ambush; the Germans lost nearly 100 men.

Operation Wallace continued to inflict heavy casualties on the Germans in the first week

of September, the aggression and mobility of the SAS helped by the growing confusion in the enemy ranks as they began their withdrawal to the east. On 7 September, Vickers opened fire on two German staff cars he saw speeding down the road, killing a battalion commander and his second in command. The following day the SAS destroyed five German petrol tankers. On 13 September they launched a mortar attack on the enemy-held town of Langres, raining down bombs from a commandeered Peugeot. "It had a sliding roof in the first place," recalled Bob Walker-Brown, the officer who led the assault. "We enlarged it, took out the back seat and stuffed the mortar on top of a lot of sandbags. It says a lot for the Peugeots of the time."

Three days later, Farran made contact with the US Seventh Army, bringing an end to Operation Wallace. In his report he estimated that he and his men had killed or wounded approximately 500 Germans, destroyed 59 motorised vehicles, plus a train, and blown up 100,000 gallons of enemy fuel. 2SAS casualties were seven dead and seven wounded.

"This operation proves that with correct timing and in suitable country, with or without the active help of the local population, a small specially trained force can achieve results out of all proportion to its numbers," he concluded.

## A VETERAN OF OPERATION KIPLING

ALEXANDER 'ALEC' BORRIE WAS BORN IN LONDON IN 1925 TO A VETERAN OF WORLD WAR I WHO HAD SURVIVED FOUR YEARS IN THE TRENCHES. WHEN HE WAS 14, BORRIE LEFT SCHOOL AND BECAME AN APPRENTICE JOINER AND DURING THE BLITZ HE WAS INVOLVED IN REPAIRING BOMB-DAMAGED BUILDINGS. IN 1942, AGED 17, HE ENLISTED IN THE BRITISH ARMY AND WAS POSTED TO THE HIGHLAND LIGHT INFANTRY

### WHEN AND HOW DID YOU JOIN THE SAS?

In 1943, my battalion was posted to the Orkney Islands to guard against German raiding parties. Nothing happened and eventually in January 1944 the battalion was disbanded. We were given the choice of joining the Commandos, Parachute Regiment or the SAS; I chose the SAS, not really knowing what they did.

### WHAT HAPPENED NEXT?

I was interviewed by the commanding officer, who was Paddy Mayne, and once accepted, I was ordered to Darvel in Scotland where 1SAS was based. I later found out that I was one of only 30 from 300 to be chosen by Mayne. By the time we'd finished the parachute training at Ringway, the number was down to about 15 men.

### CAN YOU DESCRIBE SOME OF THE SAS TRAINING?

A lot of exercises in the Scottish countryside learning how to navigate and also endurance marches. We learned about explosives, how to blow trains off lines and we even got to drive a steam train in case once we were in France we ever needed to move it up the line.

### WHEN DID YOU GO TO FRANCE?

I was in C Squadron, commanded by Major Tony Marsh, and we went in to replace A Squadron [see Operation Houndsworth] on Operation Kipling. On August 19, the squadron, plus about 20 jeeps, landed in Dakotas in Rennes and motored down to near Orleans. It took us about three days and I was in a section under the command of Lieutenant Roy Close.

### WHEN DID YOU FIRST SEE ACTION?

I've heard it said we went on a seven-day patrol. I don't remember it like that, I recall we just drove around looking for targets. We got word that there were three German trucks driving along the Nevers road, so Roy Close decided we'd ambush them on a bend where a rough gravel track led up towards some woods. As the trucks came into view we opened fire, destroying the vehicles and killing about 15 Germans.

### WHAT HAPPENED NEXT?

What we didn't know was that the convoy had an armoured escort. So the next thing it all went off, this heavy machine guns knocking great lumps out of the trees around us. Roy Close yelled "back up the track." But the jeeps were

stacked one behind each other so it wasn't easy. One ended up in a ditch and another, Close's, got stuck over a log with its wheels spinning. I was driving the third jeep. We managed to free the log and the two jeeps sped off leaving the third behind.

### ANY CASUALTIES?

The reason the jeep went into a ditch was because its driver, Joe Craig, got a bullet through his hand. We cleaned the wound by pulling a cloth covered with sulfonate cream right through the hole. It healed beautifully.

### DID THE GERMANS GIVE CHASE?

No but not long after we passed through the village of Chatillon-en-Bazois and the people treated us as liberators. They threw flowers at us and wanted to have a party. We tried to tell them that we hadn't liberated them and they should get back in their houses because the Germans were near.

### HOW DID THE REST OF THE PATROL GO?

We just continued to drive around looking for targets. We had a couple more shoot-ups but by this stage of the war, we were running out of targets because the Germans were retreating

**“ON 13 SEPTEMBER, THEY LAUNCHED A MORTAR ATTACK ON THE ENEMY-HELD TOWN OF LANGRES, RAINING DOWN BOMBS FROM A COMMANDEERED PEUGEOT”**



*The SAS were welcomed as liberators to France, sometimes prematurely, as the Germans were still in the vicinity and likely to come looking for the special forces*

Eventually we got ordered down to Dijon, I believe to look for any German snipers who had been left behind.

**WERE YOU AWARE THE GERMANS HAD ORDERS TO EXECUTE ANY SAS SOLDIERS THEY CAPTURED?**

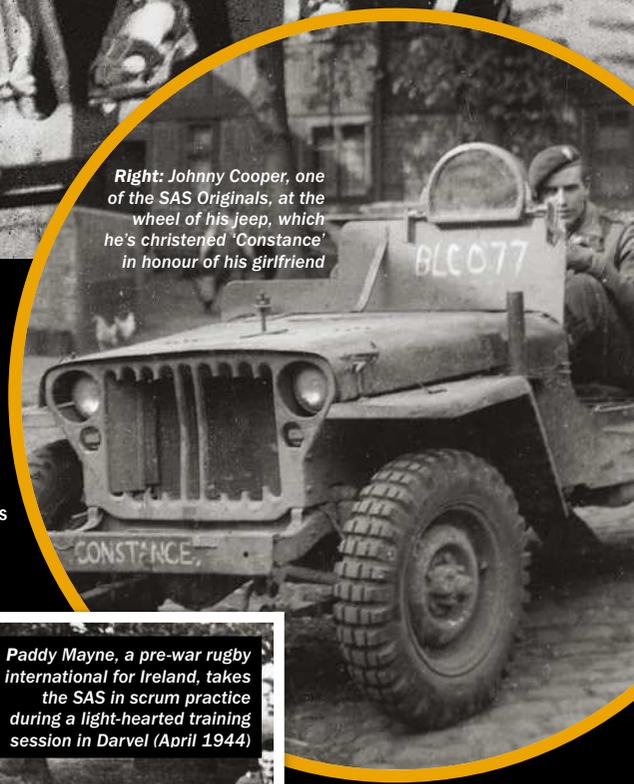
We were told about the order and so we knew what would happen if captured. When you're 19, you think that might

happen to others but not you.

**DID YOU COME THROUGH THE WAR UNSCATHED?**

No, on 14 April 1945 my jeep drove over a landmine as we advanced into Germany. My sergeant, Sandy Davidson, who had just become a dad, was killed and another trooper was badly burned. I spent several weeks in hospital recovering from wounds to my right leg.

*Right: Johnny Cooper, one of the SAS Originals, at the wheel of his jeep, which he's christened 'Constance' in honour of his girlfriend*



*Tony Marsh (left) and Roy Close*



*Paddy Mayne, a pre-war rugby international for Ireland, takes the SAS in scrum practice during a light-hearted training session in Darvel (April 1944)*





(l-r) Major Pat Hart, Paddy Mayne and Roy Farran wait for their transport at Stavanger airport in Norway, in the summer of 1945



# OPERATION LOYTON

WITH THE VOSGES REINFORCED TO STOP THE ONCOMING THIRD ARMY, THE SAS WERE CHARGED WITH ATTACKING THE WITHDRAWING NAZIS

With Operation Wallace having run its course, Roy Farran had hoped to lead his men east to link up with another 2SAS mission, code-named Loyton. But word reached him that the Nazis, determined to stop the Third Army advance towards Germany, had brought in reinforcements who were well dug-in along the east bank of the Moselle River. Additionally, the Americans, in their dash across France, had stretched their supply line to breaking point. Instead Farran led his squadron to Paris to enjoy a week's leave in the French capital.

The men on Operation Loyton, meanwhile, were involved in a deadly game of cat and mouse with the Germans. The SAS advance party had parachuted into the rugged region known as the Vosges in late August with orders to attack the enemy as they withdrew into Germany. The drop zone was a meadow encircled by forest and near the village of La Petite Raon, "Not the best landing for me as I

could see that I was drifting towards the trees and pulling hard on my rigging lines didn't help," recalled Dusty Crossfield. "I crashed through the branches and came to rest swinging gently with no idea of the distance between me and the ground. I punched my quick release and dropped heavily to the deck – it must have been about 15 feet. Someone was running towards me and I reckon I had my colt 45 out faster than John Wayne, but the quick cry of 'Tres bien, Angleterre' saved the lad from being shot."

Among the Maquis reception committee was 21-year-old Henri Poirson. "One of the British, sergeant Seymour, hurt his ankle on landing so we had to carry him back to our camp," he said. "The next day captain Druce [the SAS commander] decided they needed a new base because there were so many Germans in the area it was becoming dangerous."

As the SAS moved through the forest, they encountered an enemy patrol and in the ensuing firefight two British soldiers were killed and two were captured, one of whom was Seymour.

By the end of August, 34 more SAS soldiers had been inserted by parachute, including lieutenant colonel Brian Franks, and a number of jeeps. That provided the British with mobility and firepower, but as Druce recalled: "The Germans had sent a division from Strasbourg to find us and we were pretty oppressed."

Nonetheless, the SAS embarked on a

series of offensive patrols, shooting up any enemy vehicle they encountered on the winding forest roads. In the most spectacular raid, Druce attacked a unit of SS troops as they formed up in the village square of Moussey, machine-gunning them with the jeep's Browning and inflicting many casualties. The Germans retaliated by transporting the male population of Moussey to concentration camps; only 70 of the 210 returned.

The SAS were also learning that they had dropped into a region where history had divided the people's loyalties. Some villagers in the Vosges considered themselves French, but others had German blood and were only too willing to pass on information to the Nazis. On 24 September, Poirson was arrested by the SS as he arrived at the timber yard where he worked as a lorry driver. "They put me up against a wall and were going to shoot me but then an officer appeared and said 'no, not this one'" he recalled.

Poirson believes he knows who betrayed him, and he thinks they gave his name to the Germans only after a promise he wouldn't be executed. Instead Poirson was put on a train east, first to Auschwitz, where he spent several weeks taking the bodies of the dead to the incinerator and then Dachau, where he remained until the camp was liberated by the Americans.

By the start of October, Franks had concluded that with the American advance stalled,



Henri Poirson, seen here in 2016, was a member of the Resistance who fought with the SAS in Operation Loyton and was subsequently captured and sent to Auschwitz

**“SOME VILLAGERS IN THE VOSGES CONSIDERED THEMSELVES FRENCH, BUT OTHERS HAD GERMAN BLOOD AND WERE ONLY TOO WILLING TO PASS ON INFORMATION TO THE NAZIS”**



The SAS participate in a service of commemoration for the victims of Moussey killed in German concentration camps

Operation Loyton had no further purpose. It had been a botched operation from the start, a mix of misfortune and bad planning by SHAEF. So, on 6 October Franks split his men into five parties and instructed them to withdraw west, through an area rife with Germans. "The colonel saw us all off and scrounged a packet of fags from me as he wished us goodbye and good luck," recalled Crossfield, who left in a party of five, one of whom was Jock Robb. "All went well for us over the next couple of days despite some very close calls with the enemy," said Crossfield. "We then came up against a fairly wide river [the Meurthe] and as we undressed to swim across,

**Below:** The graves in Moussey cemetery of the three of the SAS soldiers caught and executed by the Germans

**“DRUCE ATTACKED A UNIT OF SS TROOPS AS THEY FORMED UP IN THE VILLAGE SQUARE OF MOUSSEY, MACHINE-GUNNING THEM WITH THE JEEP’S BROWNING AND INFLECTING MANY CASUALTIES. THE GERMANS RETALIATED BY TRANSPORTING THE MALE POPULATION OF MOUSSEY TO CONCENTRATION CAMPS”**

I became aware that Jock was doing nothing. He then told me that he was staying where he was because he couldn't swim. He'd lied during training and got through somehow without being found out. It was too difficult a crossing for me to ferry him over and I was damned if I was going to leave a good pal. So I got dressed again and we decided to find our own way by a different

route back to safety." The pair eventually made it through the German lines where they were reunited with Franks and the others who had returned safely.

However, 31 soldiers on Operation Loyton didn't make it back. Caught individually or in small groups, they were questioned, tortured and then executed.

Images: Alamy, Getty



THE MOTTO OF THE NAZI'S ELITE FIGHTING FORCE WAS "MY HONOUR IS LOYALTY", BUT IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN "DEATH WITHOUT GLORY." THE WAFFEN SS'S BLIND OBEDIENCE ENSURED THEIR TROOPS WERE BOTH RECKLESSLY HEROIC AND MURDEROUSLY BARBARIC

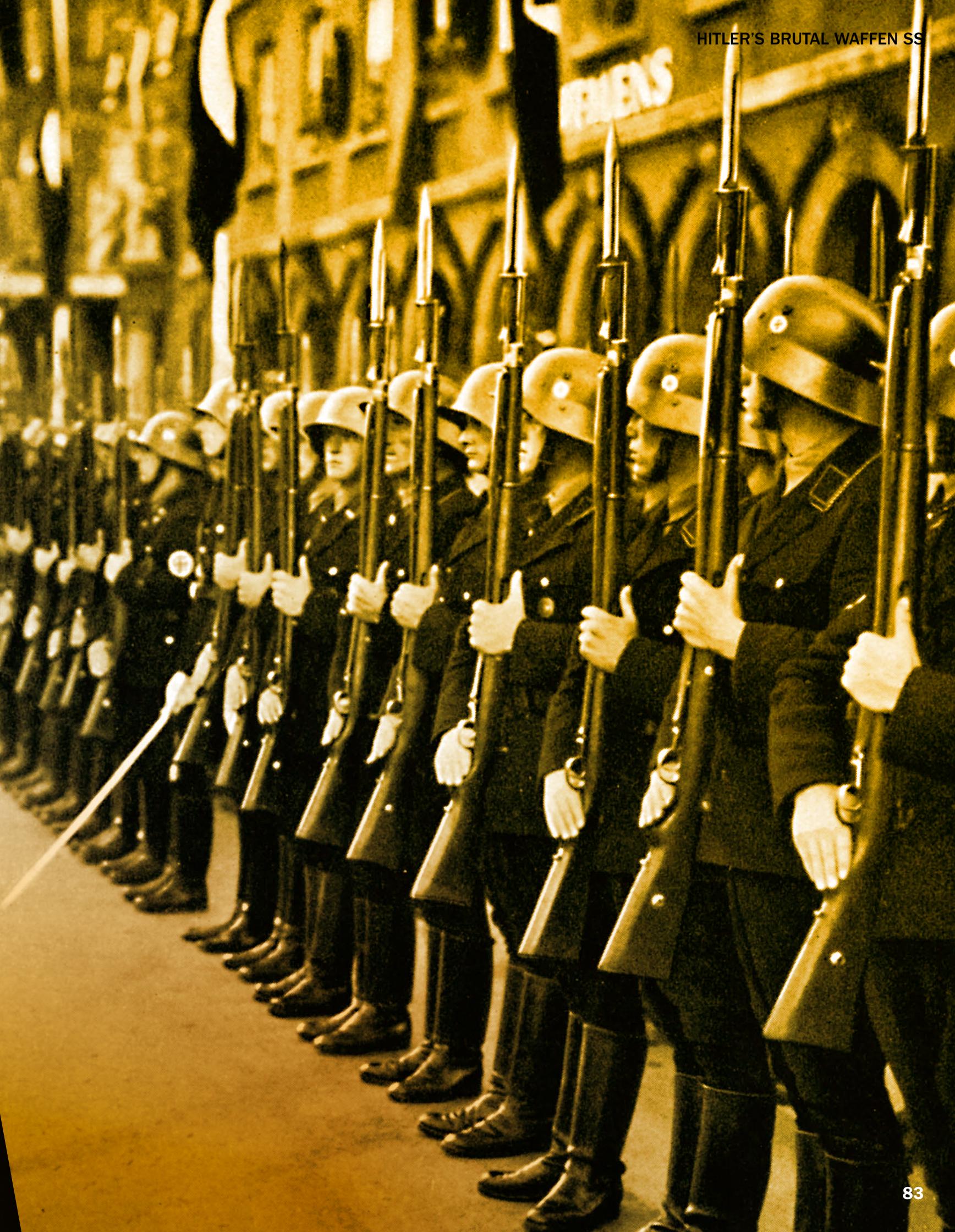


WORDS: NICK SOLDINGER

# HITLER'S BRUTAL WAFFEN SS

**M**unich, 9 November 1933, another cold night. Odeonsplatz, the city's grand square, has been transformed. Gone are the busy pavement cafés. Gone too are the uptight waiters rushing beers and coffees to impatient punters. Tonight, it's a torch-lit parade ground. Nazi flags adorn the neoclassical buildings, while in front of the Feldenhalle military memorial – built a century before – stand 800 SS men, frozen to attention. Immaculate in their sinister black uniforms, their breath makes ghosts in the icy autumn air.

Tonight is the tenth anniversary of the Munich Beer Hall Putsch – Adolf Hitler's clumsy coup attempt that left 16 of his mob dead on the Feldenhalle's steps. A lot has happened since then. Initially imprisoned, Hitler has gone from fringe fanatic to political idol. He is now Germany's dictator, and tonight's theatrics are designed to both rewrite history – the Putsch is repackaged as noble sacrifice – and to thank his SS hoods for helping make it all possible. Each man is awarded a ceremonial dagger, a double-edged blade with the inscription "Meine Ehre heißt Treue" – "My honour is loyalty". In ways the SS men cannot even begin to imagine, these gifts will come to symbolise their violent and ultimately tragic destiny.



# ORIGINS OF THE WAFFEN SS

At its height, the SS was the Third Reich's most powerful organisation, controlling the Nazi terror machine and, through the Waffen SS, much of its military. Its origins, however, can be traced back to a handful of WWI veterans.

After the 1918 Armistice, when the kaiser abdicated his throne and fled the country, Germany had its first stab at democracy, but the demanding terms of the victors sent the country into a state of pandemonium. As rocketing unemployment and hyperinflation collided, so did rival forces, as right-wing gangs smashed into left-wing opponents on street corners from Munich to Berlin.

In such times, anger always shouts down reason, and the Nazis thrived in this darkness. The brownshirts, a 60,000-strong paramilitary force under ex-army officer Ernst Röhm, was formed and unleashed on anyone who disagreed with the leadership's spiteful sermons. From this, an elite bodyguard was selected to protect Hitler himself.

Distinguishable from the brownshirt riffraff by their black hats, the rest of this bodyguard's

uniform would also blacken over time, and they would acquire a memorable title: Schutzstaffel (meaning 'protection squadron') or SS for short. Under its ambitious leader Heinrich Himmler, the SS would go on to extend its malevolent influence from mere guardians of Hitler to the much larger task of homeland security, taking responsibility for the Gestapo (secret police), the concentration camp system and eventually the genocidal policy of the Final Solution.

From the start, Himmler sold the increasingly paranoid Hitler the idea that the SS would not only protect him but the very vision he espoused. Drawn from the purest Germanic stock and thoroughly soaked in the extreme Nazi ideology, these 'supermen' – or so the PR spiel went – would die for their Führer. In fact, Himmler made sure that each one of them, like the SS men who'd follow, not only pledged a personal oath of allegiance to Hitler but swore

to follow their pied piper wherever his diabolical tune led them.

By 1934 the original 117-man bodyguard had become 800. Now boasting those swanky ceremonial daggers, and legally armed, they'd become Hitler's private regiment – the SS Leibstandarte. They were now ready to be put to the test. Röhm's SA may have given birth to the SS, facilitating Hitler's rise to the top, but by 1934 they were getting too big for their jackboots. Demanding powers that Hitler believed made them a threat, the Führer decided to unleash his hounds. During Operation Night of the Long Knives, the SS swiftly emasculated its SA counterpart, slaughtering its leadership in a couple of days. Having murdered former comrades without compunction, the SS's loyalty was now proven, and as Himmler had hoped for, the Waffen (armed) SS was born...

**“HAVING MURDERED FORMER COMRADES WITHOUT COMPUNCTION, THE SS’S LOYALTY WAS NOW PROVEN”**

## ARCHITECTS OF THE SS



**Heinrich Himmler**  
1900-1945

Mild-mannered but ruthlessly ambitious, Himmler was made the Reichsführer of the SS in 1929. He transformed it from an elite bodyguard into the Nazis' most formidable weapon.



**Paul 'Papa' Hausser**  
1880-1972

Known as the father of the SS, he helped develop the Waffen SS's strong sense of comradeship. Even when in his 60s he led his men into battle and even lost an eye while in Russia.



**Felix Steiner**  
1896-1966

Obergruppenführer of the SS. He imbued the organisation with a philosophy of unforgiving fortitude. Repeatedly decorated for bravery, he helped transform the Waffen SS into a multinational force.



The SS Leibstandarte parading at their barracks in honour of their leader, Adolf Hitler, on 17 December 1935



An SS task force is seen here rounding up Polish hostages to execute them after the sacking and occupation of Kórnik in Poland on 20 October 1939

## 1939-1940 THE SS GO TO WAR UNITS: SS LEIBSTANDARTE AND SS TOTENKOPF

Almost as soon as hostilities began, the Waffen SS was flung into the front line, first in Poland, then in the West against the Netherlands and France. In both campaigns the SS displayed their infamously double-edged nature of reckless heroism with utter ruthlessness.

At first, the SS's performance drew criticism from the regular army for taking unnecessary casualties and torching villages with equal abandon during the Polish campaign. During the invasion of Holland, however, they showed more discipline, smashing through the country to link up with airborne troops, helping to defeat the Dutch in just five days.

In France they experienced stiffer resistance. Reservists from the SS Totenkopf were summoned to the front, where they joined the SS Leibstandarte in squeezing the pockets of resistance around Dunkirk. The fighting was ferocious, and when a resilient British force in the village of Wormhoudt took an entire day to budge, the SS Leibstandarte rounded up the 90 survivors and burnt them to death in a barn. Not to be outdone, SS Totenkopf troops machine-gunned another 97 captured Brits who had fought down to their last bullet at a village called Le Paradis.

Alamy



Hitler chatting with SA leader Ernst Röhm, whose paramilitary thugs help him to power. Hitler later had him murdered

## 1941-45 BARBAROSSA AND BEYOND

**DIVISIONS: SS LEIBSTANDARTE, SS DAS REICH, SS TOTENKOPF, SS POLIZEI, SS WIKING AND SS NORD**

By the time Hitler ordered the invasion of the USSR, the Waffen SS comprised six divisions of 160,000 men, and every one stood on the spearhead when, on 22 June 1941, the Wehrmacht began advancing east on a front that stretched from the Black Sea to Finland. For the Waffen SS, this was the moment to shine. Conditioned to believe the Soviets were a genetic pollutant, they set off with ruthless zeal on what they believed was a crusade to save humanity.

The Germans had reached Moscow by October, but then the Russian winter kicked in. Temperatures plummeted to -45 degrees Celsius, and the advance faltered. When the Soviets responded it was the SS Das Reich that held the line, suffering 4,000 casualties. When another thrust came from the Allies, SS Leibstandarte held the line. Of the 2,000 committed, just 35 survived.

The Waffen SS repeatedly proved its fighting prowess in Russia, at Kursk, at Karkov and in the collapse after Stalingrad. Eventually, as the Red Army steamrolled toward Berlin, it was the SS that provided the resolute rearguard for the retreat. Truly, their loyalty was until death - not just their's but their Führer and his twisted Reich.

## KEY WAFFEN SS UNITS

AT ITS HEIGHT, THE WAFFEN SS NUMBERED NO LESS THAN 38 DIVISIONS OF NEARLY A MILLION MEN. THESE WERE THE MOST SIGNIFICANT...



### SS LEIBSTANDARTE ADOLF HITLER FORMED 1923

Hitler's bodyguard, from which the SS sprang, evolved into the 1st SS Panzer Division. Its insignia was a key, in honour of Commander Sepp Dietrich, whose surname means 'lock-pick'.



### DAS REICH FORMED 1939

Took part in the invasions of France and the USSR before being moved west for the Battle of Normandy, where its men massacred 642 French civilians at Oradour-sur-Galne.



### TOTENKOPF FORMED 1939

Initially made up of men who'd served as concentration camp guards, its commander Theodor Eicke, former commandant of Dachau, was SA leader Ernst Röhm's assassin.



### POLIZEI FORMED 1939

Formed in 1939 from Germany's regular police. It suffered heavy losses on the Eastern Front before going to Greece, where troops killed 214 civilians in the Distomo Massacre.



### WIKING FORMED 1941

This was the first of 24 Waffen SS divisions to be made up almost entirely of foreign fighters. It consisted of mainly Scandinavian volunteers, as the name suggests.



### NORD FORMED 1941

Formed mostly of Scandinavian volunteers, its troops were among those forming the northernmost part of the assault line during the invasion of Russia.



### WALLONIEN FORMED 1941

Belgium's contribution to the Nazi war effort was led by leading Walloon fascist politician Léon Degrelle. Hitler once told Degrelle, "I'd have liked to have had a son like you."



### HITLERJUGEND FORMED 1943

Led by the dashing and influential Kurt Meyer, one of the original SS Leibstandarte, it was made up of boys in their late teens - the first generation to grow up with Nazism.



### CHARLEMAGNE FORMED 1944

Made up of French volunteers, the badge references Frankish tribes under Charlemagne in what is modern-day France and Germany. These were among the last to surrender.

# RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING



A Nazi recruiting poster encouraging Dutch people to join the Waffen SS

Although standards would drop as the war took its toll, the initial criteria for recruitment into the Waffen SS was exacting. Under Himmler's orders all potential recruits had to be in outstanding physical condition, at least 180 centimetres (5', 11") tall and able to prove their Aryan ancestry back 150 years.

Much to Himmler's delight, many early recruits came from the countryside. As a fanatical racist, he saw in the German peasantry the purest strain of Aryan manhood. Many of them were also so poorly educated that they were easy targets for Nazi indoctrination. It was drummed into them daily that they were Aryans, genetically superior to other races such as Slavs and Jews, who were both weak and malign. These sub-human tribes, they were told, were a disease that must be eradicated before they destroyed Western civilisation. No mercy could be shown.

Basic training for SS recruits matched that of the regular army, but there were significant differences in culture. Although discipline was strict, thanks to General Paul Hausser – the so-called father of the SS – their command structure was less rigid. Field sports and

team games took precedent over relentless marching, while warmth, mutual respect and trust were encouraged between all ranks.

This openness fostered initiative – something that hampered the Wehrmacht with its strict top-down command structure. One notable triumph of this was the SS's pioneering use of camouflage jackets. Initially ridiculed, they've since become universally adopted. Hauser's innovative methods also ensured that, as young recruits grew fitter and honed their martial skills a powerful esprit d'corps was developed to go alongside their outstanding camaraderie. These troops believed they were better than anyone in front of them and were willing to prove it – even if it killed them. The Waffen SS was also prepared for a unique military role.

Felix Steiner, the army's director of education, masterminded the tactical training. Steiner had served as a stormtrooper during WWI and envisaged a similar role for the Waffen SS as assault troops spearheading attacks – men who were as heroic as they were ruthless. Between them Himmler, Hausser and Steiner churned out soldiers who were indoctrinated to be as careless with their own lives as they were with others'.

Consequently, they'd suffer frighteningly high casualty rates (around 35 per cent) and commit so many war crimes that every act of bravery would be overshadowed by an even greater one of evil.

**“HAUSSER AND STEINER CHURNED OUT SOLDIERS WHO WERE INDOCTRINATED TO BE AS CARELESS WITH THEIR OWN LIVES AS THEY WERE WITH OTHERS”**

1945

## THE FALAISE POCKET

**DIVISIONS: SS DAS REICH, SS LIEBSTANDARTE, SS DIVISION HITLERJUGEND**

When the landing crafts crashed onto the Normandy beaches on 6 June 1944, the closest SS division was the 12th SS Panzer Hitlerjugend just west of Paris. Later dubbed the Candy Division by the Americans, it was largely made up of 16- and 17-year-old boys who'd known nothing but Nazism since infancy. They were to prove the pinnacle of the Nazi experiment in ideological indoctrination.

Hitler was asleep when the invasion started and nobody dared wake him, so it was late afternoon before the SS Hitlerjugend got orders to deploy. The following evening they were embroiled in the desperate defence of Caen. The young soldiers fought tenaciously, gradually becoming encircled in what came to be known as the Falaise Pocket. By 22 August, they'd effectively been destroyed, having suffered more than 8,500 casualties out of a force of 20,540, with almost all of its armour being destroyed.

The Waffen SS should have once more earned the respect of its enemies, but again shame would overshadow any glory. They may have been barely out of school, but the boys of the 12th were programmed to murder. They executed 156 captured Canadians during the fighting as well as 86 French civilians in Ascq two months before hostilities even began.

Waffen SS soldiers often took extraordinary risks in battle. Their bravery was legendary but their casualty rates horrific





## SPORTS

From the start, systematic and intense physical exercise was part of the Waffen SS recruit's training. Strength-building classes as well as track-and-field sports were routine. Recruits also undertook daily hikes and carried out jumping and running exercises. Over time, as one SS leader put it, "an athletic soldier emerged. A disciplined sport type, of supple physical stature, mentally concentrated on performance. Such soldiers are admirably suited to satisfy the special demands of shock-troop tactics."

## IDEOLOGY

Each SS unit had an education officer who drummed the ideological fundamentals into recruits: belief in the superiority of the Aryan race, total obedience to Hitler and hatred of 'inferior' races, particularly Jews. Anti-Semitism was heavily emphasised during training through endless literature and lectures on the subject. Trainees were also required to study Hitler's *Mein Kampf* and *The Protocols Of The Elders Of Zion* – an anti-Semitic conspiracy theory that claimed to have uncovered a Jewish plan for global domination.

## PHILOSOPHY

Recruits could expect to emerge from training with a different personality. Even the sports training had a paramilitary slant that emphasised the need for total victory. The philosophical goal was to create the perfect warrior; one who exemplified willpower, resilience and national purity. Recruits weren't just being turned into poster boys for national socialism, they were being hardwired for brutal murder. As Hitler himself once admitted, "I have not come into this world to make men better, but to make use of their weaknesses."

## INDUCTION

For a recruit who passed the necessary criteria, training to fight in the Waffen SS took about six months, or 12 for officers. As the war escalated, foreign SS recruits who didn't meet this criteria were accepted and given just two weeks' training before being rushed into the line. All men had to swear a pledge of personal allegiance to Hitler in a formal ceremony.

# TRAINING TO FIGHT FOR THE FATHERLAND



## WEAPONS

As the war went on and the Waffen SS proved itself to contain Germany's best soldiers, they were accordingly given the best weapons. Entire divisions were eventually converted into armoured units trained to use the formidable Tiger and Panther tanks. Militarily, as descendants of Germany's WWI lightly armed stormtroopers, the SS recruit was also trained to use small arms such as the KAR98 rifle, MP40 sub-machine gun, Panzerfaust anti-tank weapon, plus light mortars, grenades and even the lethal flamethrower.

## TACTICS

According to one Waffen SS training manual, stormtroopers were taught to be "highly camouflaged daredevils, moving forward irresistibly with focused speed and alertness". The tactical training system they undertook was therefore focused on combat, aimed mainly at developing aggressive manoeuvrability and lethal effectiveness in the field. Formal parade-ground drill was minimised in favour of field craft and exercises that were designed to improve the Waffen SS recruits' readiness for combat.

## THE WARSAW GHETTO UPRISING

SS-Brigadeführer Jürgen Stroop (centre) watches housing blocks burn after Jewish fighters in the Warsaw Ghetto refuse to surrender. Lasting from 19 April to 16 May 1943, the uprising was the most significant act of Jewish resistance of WWII and was brutally suppressed by the SS.



**"180 JEWS, BANDITS AND SUB-HUMANS, WERE DESTROYED. THE FORMER JEWISH QUARTER OF WARSAW IS NO LONGER IN EXISTENCE."**

SS-BRIGADEFÜHRER JÜRGEN STROOP IN HIS DAILY REPORT



# THE SS'S FOREIGN LEGIONS

After the Waffen SS's key role in the Fall of France, Heinrich Himmler suggested Hitler should expand the SS further. Under pressure from army chiefs concerned Himmler was siphoning off recruits, the German leader would only permit a minor increase in German recruitment. He did, however, agree to a significant change in policy, authorising the establishment of SS Wiking, a new division to be raised in newly occupied lands. This division would be made up of men who were from 'related stock', as Himmler – the racially obsessed former chicken breeder – put it. The 5th SS Wiking Division eventually attracted right-wing recruits from Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Estonia, the Netherlands and Belgium, paving the way for a further 24 Waffen SS divisions made up of non-Germans. It was

the war against the Soviet Union, though, that really moved things up a gear.

The range of nationalities that flocked to Hitler's red, white and black banner were almost as varied as their reasons for doing so. Like many mercenaries, some came merely for pay, status or adventure, while others had political reasons. Hatred of communism was a key driver for many, including the 85,000 recruited from the Baltic states and 20,000 from Ukraine, who clearly believed that fighting for Hitler was a better option than dying under Stalin.

Fighting a war against a country as vast as the Soviet Union was always going to require preposterous manpower. In the event, Himmler turned out to be less the racist mystic he saw in the mirror and more the petty, pen-pushing pragmatist he actually was. He'd sold the

German public as some idealised order of Nordic knights – white, blond, blue-eyed and as spiritually clean as the fields and forests that bore them. Of course, this was pure fiction. As his juvenile vision of an Aryan crusader army was obliterated on the Eastern Front by the realities of shellfire, starvation and sub-zero temperatures, he signed up anyone willing to put themselves between him and a bullet.

By 1945, an estimated one-third of the Waffen SS's 900,000 men were non-Germans, with units raised in countries as diverse and far apart as Azerbaijan, India, Russia, Slovenia, with recruits even coming from Yugoslavia's Muslim population. These were all men who Himmler would have privately described as 'untermenschen' – subhumans with no right to exist. Yet dying dictatorships must take desperate measures.

**“MANY MEN CLEARLY BELIEVED THAT FIGHTING FOR HITLER WAS A BETTER OPTION THAN DYING UNDER STALIN”**

## THE SS'S INTERNATIONAL RECRUITS

### BRITAIN

Formed **1943**  
Numbers: **59**

The British Free Corps was recruited from prisoners in POW camps. Though tiny, it was widely exploited for propaganda purposes.

### CROATIA

Formed: **1943**  
Numbers: **20,000**

Formation: **One of the many countries that contributed largely Muslim recruits – a faith, according to Himmler, that produced better soldiers than Christianity.**

### RUSSIA

Formed: **1941**  
Numbers: **60,000**

Many Russians were keen to escape Josef Stalin's rule. The Russian cadre boasted two Cossack cavalry divisions.

### AZERBAIJAN

Formed: **1941**  
Numbers: **70,000**

These non-Russian Soviets hoped to rid themselves of Stalin's rule.

### INDIA

Formed: **1942**  
Numbers: **2,800**

Intended to serve as a liberation force for British-ruled India, it saw action in Iran and later in Western Europe.



Cossack members of the XV SS Cossack Cavalry Corps in Warsaw, Poland, during the uprising of 1944



Two members of the Nazi British Free Corps, Kenneth Berry and Alfred Minchin, with German officers in April 1944

## KEY OFFICERS



**Kurt 'Panzer' Meyer**  
1910-1961  
BRIGADEFÜHRER

Winner of the Knight's Cross for extreme battlefield bravery, Meyer was nevertheless sentenced to life imprisonment after the war for his part in shooting Allied POWs.



**Otto Skorzeny**  
1908-1975  
STANDARTENFÜHRER

Leader of the audacious mission to rescue Mussolini, Skorzeny was involved in operations behind enemy lines. He escaped prison in 1948 and died 27 years later in Madrid, Spain.



**Joachim Peiper**  
1915-1976  
STANDARTENFÜHRER

During 1944's Battle of the Bulge, Peiper's unit murdered 84 US POWs in cold blood at Malmedy. Sentenced to life imprisonment for the atrocity after the war, he served just 11 years.



**Sepp Dietrich**  
1892-1966  
GENERAL

Dietrich started out as Hitler's chauffeur but went on to become SS Leibstandarte's first CO. After the war he was imprisoned for ten years for his part in the Malmedy Massacre of 1944.



**Michael Wittmann**  
1914-44  
HAUPTSTURMFÜHRER

Best known for his ambush on a British column on 13 June 1944, when he single-handedly destroyed 14 tanks in 15 minutes. He was killed in action two months later.



**Wilhelm Mohnke**  
1911-2001  
BRIGADEFÜHRER

One of Hitler's original bodyguards, Mohnke was appointed battle commander for the defence of Berlin in 1945. He spent ten years in a Soviet jail after the war, six of them in solitary confinement.



Alamy

### 1945

## THE FINAL STAND

**DIVISIONS: 11TH SS NORDLAND, 33RD SS CHARLEMAGNE, SS LEIBSTANDARTE**

The Soviet artillery bombardment of Berlin began on 20 April 1945 – Adolf Hitler's 56th birthday. By now, the majority of his once-feared SS troops had either been killed, wounded or captured – nearly half of them sacrificed in a suicide mission to recapture oil fields near Lake Balaton in Hungary a month before.

With 1.5 million Red Army soldiers slowly surrounding Berlin, the defence of the capital was left to a rag-tag army of regulars, the ageing home guard of the Volkssturm and fresh-faced Hitler Youth – about 45,000 men and boys in total.

A month before, Hitler had made what would be his last-ever public appearance. A film of it shows a decrepit-looking Führer venturing into the Chancellery's gardens from his bunker to decorate a parade of 14- and 15-year-old schoolboys who had 'volunteered' to fight. Brought up knowing no better, some doubtless did offer to serve, but definitely not all. This was Germany's darkest hour, and one of its more sinister twists was that, having run out of men, the Nazis now press-ganged children into

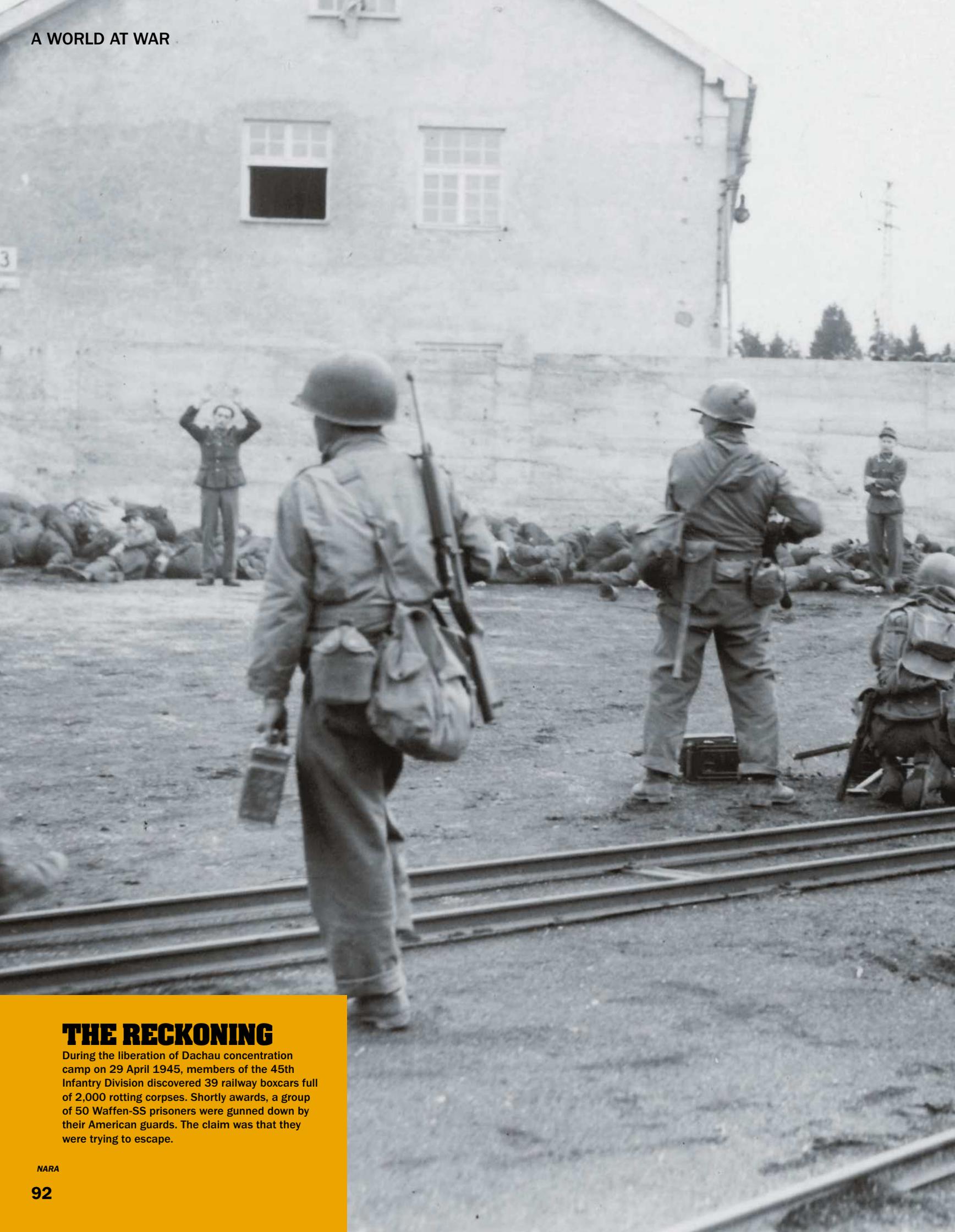
frontline units. Many of the boys in that film, and many others who would die in the smashed streets and burning buildings in that final fortnight of fighting, did so because they were forced to. According to one eyewitness, "Boys who were found hiding were hanged as traitors by the SS as a warning."

Some of the SS doing the hanging may well have been from Hitler's bodyguard – the 800 men of SS Leibstandarte, who were still by his side. Ironically, though, the biggest Waffen SS unit in town wasn't even German.

The 11th SS Nordland was comprised of roughly 1,600 Norwegians and Danes, bolstered by 330 Frenchmen of the 33rd SS Charlemagne, and it was they who would play the lead in the Third Reich's final reel.

On 26 April, after losing half their men in a failed counter-attack, what remained of this international force fell back toward the city centre, destroying 14 Soviet tanks with Panzerfäusts as they dodged through the rubble. Remarkably, by 28 April, a further 108 Soviet tanks had been knocked out, 62 by the French alone. But there was to be no stopping the Soviets. On 30 April, Hitler shot himself, and Berlin fell three days later. When the Soviets captured his Führerbunker on 2 May, it wasn't from his fearless 800, who by now had all fled, apart from 30 shattered Frenchmen.

**"BOYS WHO WERE FOUND HIDING WERE HANGED AS TRAITORS BY THE SS AS A WARNING"**



## THE RECKONING

During the liberation of Dachau concentration camp on 29 April 1945, members of the 45th Infantry Division discovered 39 railway boxcars full of 2,000 rotting corpses. Shortly afterwards, a group of 50 Waffen-SS prisoners were gunned down by their American guards. The claim was that they were trying to escape.



# BRITAIN'S SECRET ARMY



**IN THE SUMMER OF 1940 INVASION SEEMED INEVITABLE WITH BRITAIN ON ITS KNEES. HOWEVER, A HIGHLY SECRET GUERRILLA FORCE WAS BEING CREATED TO CONFRONT ANY NAZI OFFENSIVE**

**WORDS: ANDREW CHATTERTON**  
COLESHILL AUXILIARY RESEARCH TEAM (CART)



Warsash/Hook  
Patrol Hampshire

A lapel badge is the only public  
recognition the Auxiliary Units received

1940 marked some of the darkest days in British history. By the height of the summer, most of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) had been successfully evacuated from Dunkirk, but arrived back home without the majority of its equipment and weapons. Meanwhile, the German army stood just across the Channel, poised to invade. Although the general perception is that the country was on its knees, it was during these desperate days that a highly secret guerrilla force was instigated; one designed to 'stay behind' and cause as much chaos as possible, delaying any invading army.

#### SECRET BEGINNINGS IN KENT

By June, Peter Fleming, the brother of Ian Fleming (the creator of James Bond), was busy organising a group of civilian volunteers in Kent, named the XII Corps Observation Unit. This became the prototype for the Auxiliary Units. Fleming was the perfect fit for organising such a force. A dashing former Guards officer, he was a pre-war explorer and had authored books on his travels in China and the jungles of Brazil. He worked for Military Intelligence (Research) and was immediately set the task of gathering local civilian volunteers and training them in explosives and sabotage.

Fleming had quickly identified and organised a number of men into effective outfits, ready to cause as much disruption to the invading German army as possible. He collected stores of equipment and explosives, built rudimentary underground dug-outs for the volunteers and had identified targets to be destroyed upon invasion. It became clear that these Patrols

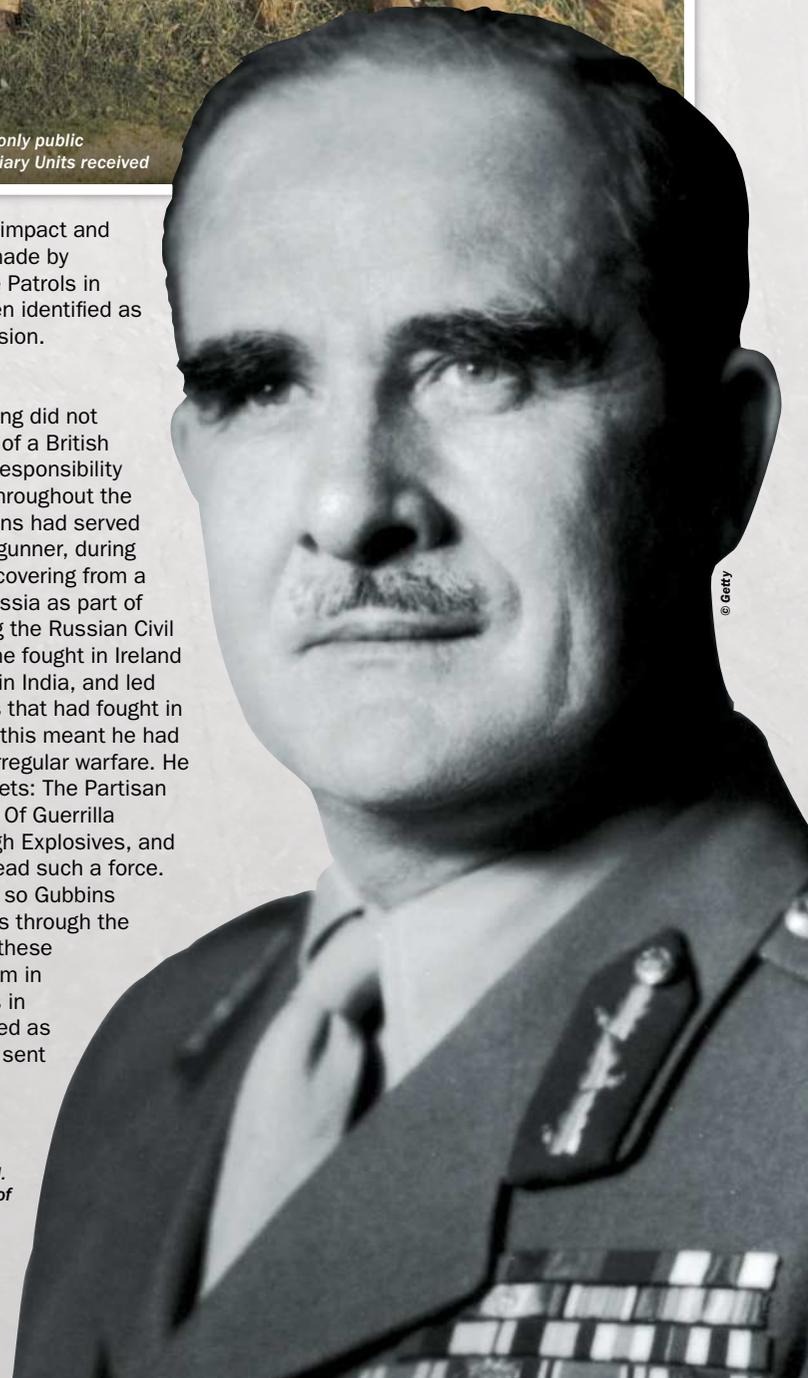
could make a real impact and the decision was made by Churchill to replicate Patrols in counties that had been identified as most vulnerable to invasion.

#### THE AUXILIARY UNITS GROW

Another man, who like Fleming did not fit into the traditional mould of a British Army officer, was given the responsibility of extending these Patrols throughout the country. Colonel Colin Gubbins had served in France and Belgium as a gunner, during the First World War. After recovering from a war injury he was sent to Russia as part of the Allied intervention during the Russian Civil War in 1919. In the 1920s he fought in Ireland against the IRA, spent time in India, and led the Independent Companies that had fought in Norway in early 1940. All of this meant he had learnt the effectiveness of irregular warfare. He had also written three booklets: *The Partisan Leader's Handbook*, *The Art Of Guerrilla Warfare* and *How To Use High Explosives*, and so was a natural choice to lead such a force.

Time was of the essence, so Gubbins recruited like-minded officers through the 'old boys network'. Many of these men had also served with him in the Independent Companies in Norway. They were designated as Intelligent Officers (IOs) and sent

*Major-General Sir Colin Gubbins, Chief of the British Special Operations Executive, organising covert warfare during World War II. After the war he became director of Grays Carpets and Textiles Ltd*



across the country to identify key areas and Patrol leaders, often from within the ranks of the newly established Local Defence Volunteers (LDV).

In the short and only official history to be written about the Auxiliary Units, Major Nigel Oxenden said this of the recruiting process, "IOs automatically looked for game-keeper or poacher types of recruits, as being already trained in everything but explosives. If these men were also last war veterans, so much the better, they were probably steady, and well aware of their own limitations."

When a mysterious man came to the door of William Sage Ratford in the village of Bentley in Suffolk he was told that he was looking for "gamekeepers, poachers and burglars to form this group". Clearly, not your typical British Army recruitment process.

The level of security surrounding the formation of the Auxiliary Units was huge. Dennis Blanchard in Bewholme, Yorkshire, remembers being asked by an officer whether he would be willing to "do a little job?". When Dennis asked for more details he was told he couldn't be told any more but it would involve "intensive training of a secret and dangerous nature". Another Auxiliary, Reginald Clutterham, was a farm worker in Ashill, Norfolk – shortly after joining the LDV, he was approached by a man and asked "... if I would like to do something more interesting than the Home

Guard. Apparently, I had been observed for a month to see what sort of people I mixed with and what we talked about. If I wanted to join this special organisation I was told that I would have to sign the Official Secrets Act".

After these Patrol leaders were identified and recruited, it was up to them to form their own Patrol of trusted men and begin to organise themselves into an effective sabotage unit. Patrol leaders tended to recruit colleagues, friends and relatives, and even enemies, with some Patrols being made up of both gamekeepers and poachers. Each Patrol was made up of five to eight men who lived within close proximity to one another.

By September 1940, huge progress had been made. In a note to the Secretary of State for War on 25 September, Churchill said, "I have been following with much interest the growth and development of the new guerrilla formations ... known as 'Auxiliary Units'. From what I hear these units are being organised with thoroughness and imagination, and should, in the event of invasion, prove a useful addition to the regular forces."

Eventually more than 3,500 men were recruited the length of Britain, from the Outer Hebrides to the tip of Cornwall.

### 'THUGGERY' – ROLE OF THE AUXILIARIES

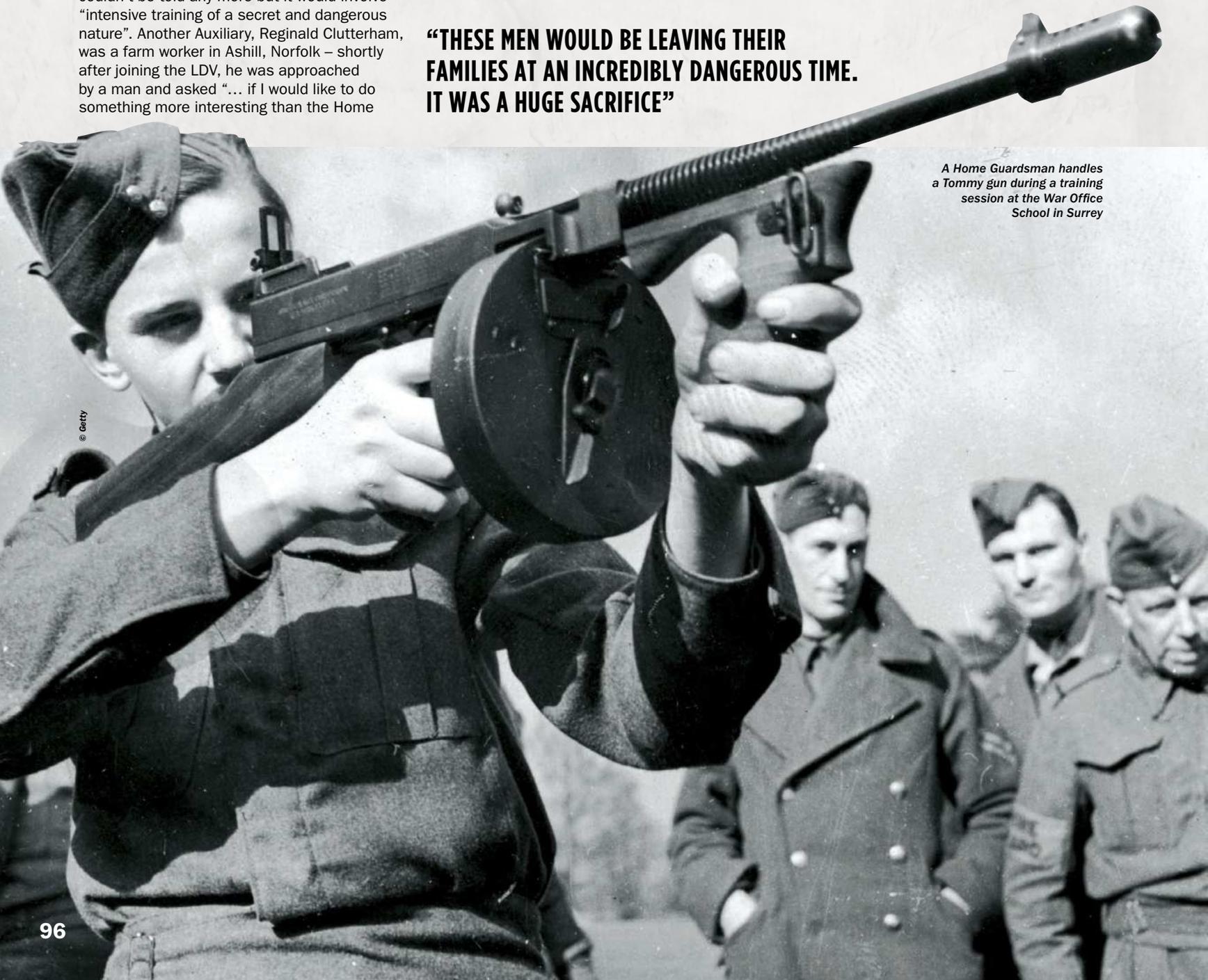
It was Gubbins who first fully sketched out what role the Auxiliary Units (a deliberately nondescript name designed to throw the enemy off the scent) should play in the event of a German invasion.

When the Germans came, the Auxiliaries were to simply disappear, and because they had signed the Official Secrets Act, they could tell no-one, not even their closest family, where they were going or what they were up to. The significance of this should not be understated. These men would be leaving their families at an incredibly dangerous time. It was a huge sacrifice, but one it seems, that every Auxiliary was willing to make to help protect the country.

Their role was not to take on the invading army in a direct fight. Mostly operating at night, they were to destroy ammunition and fuel dumps, transport, aircraft, bridges, railways, anything that slowed down the

**"THESE MEN WOULD BE LEAVING THEIR FAMILIES AT AN INCREDIBLY DANGEROUS TIME. IT WAS A HUGE SACRIFICE"**

*A Home Guardsman handles a Tommy gun during a training session at the War Office School in Surrey*



## COLESHILL HOUSE – TRAINING HQ

EARLY TRAINING WAS UNDERTAKEN BY EACH INTELLIGENCE OFFICER, SUPPORTED BY DISGUISED TRAINING MANUALS, WHICH AT FIRST SIGHT APPEARED TO BE INNOCENT CALENDARS, OR FARMING HANDBOOKS

In late 1940, Gubbins moved his HQ from Whitehall, to Coleshill House in the small hamlet of Coleshill on the Oxfordshire/Wiltshire border. Coleshill was also used as the training centre for Patrols throughout the country. Such was the secrecy that surrounded the Auxiliary Units, that those attending courses were instructed to get a train to the nearby town of Highworth, and told to report to the local Post Office, where they had to give the postmistress, Mabel Stranks, a password. She would then call Coleshill House who would send a vehicle, which would drive a convoluted route back to the stately home before off-loading the volunteers. Such was the seriousness with which Mabel took her role, when Montgomery came to visit, he too was subjected to the same vetting process and forced to wait sometime while she confirmed his credentials. When the Auxiliaries reached Coleshill House, they spent weekends training in all aspects of sabotage and guerrilla warfare. Navigating through the countryside at night, explosives training, unarmed combat, firing ranges, learning to be comfortable staying in OBs, and much more. A core training staff stayed in the house with the Auxiliaries billeted in the stables. The training was of the highest level, much more so than the regular Home Guard. Many of the techniques learnt by the Auxiliaries were also passed onto the Special Operations Executive (SOE) later in the war (Gubbins and Fleming were to leave the Auxiliary Units at the end of 1940 to start SOE). Indeed, some Auxiliaries were recruited into the SAS due to their high level of training and aptitude.

*Picture of Coleshill House taken by photographer Charles Latham*



*Sandford Levy Patrol  
Somerset in OB*



© staybehindis.com

*A mock up of an Operational Base*



*Intact Operational Base in Devon*

German advance and gave the regular army time to regroup and counter-attack.

Any direct contact with the enemy would be in the course of gaining entry to a target. Auxiliaries were trained in silent killing and other ways of dealing with sentries, utilising the Fairbairn-Sykes fighting knife and other 'thuggery' methods including unarmed combat and targeting 'vulnerable' areas of the human body. Some Auxiliaries reported that they were told to dismember the bodies of enemy sentries to put the 'fear of God' into other enemy soldiers, a tactic used by guerrilla fighters throughout history.

Each Patrol was given enough rations to last approximately 11-14 days, after this they were expected to live off the land. Realistically the rations represented their likely life expectancy. This was very much considered a suicide mission and the members of each Patrol realised that. William Ratford said, "Perhaps we would have been heroes for a bit. But it would have been suicidal, I should think."

No Patrol member could be caught. If too badly injured during a raid, many Auxiliaries reported that they would expect to be killed

by their fellow Patrol members rather than fall into the enemy's hands and potentially give away the location of the Operational Base while being tortured.

Each Patrol also worked in complete isolation. In these early, crucial days of the Auxiliary Units, Patrols in the same county would have no idea of the location of the Operational Base of the neighbouring Patrol, or indeed who was in it. The level of secrecy, especially during 1940, was understandably high.

### INTO THE BUNKERS

Once the invasion had started, and the enemy had reached their area, each Patrol member would leave home and head straight to their Operational Base (OB), a secret underground bunker built with heavily disguised entrances.

Initially OBs tended to be built by the Patrols themselves. However, unless the particular expertise needed to build such a bunker happened to be within the Patrol, these tended to be not hugely successful – with some

Source: Wiki / PD





Patrols discovering the difficulty of breathing underground without ventilation.

Later on, OBs were built by Royal Engineers, brought in from other parts of the country for security reasons. These OBs had disguised hatches that opened through counter-weight mechanisms that led down into a chamber which contained bunks, tables, storage areas, water tanks and sometimes an Elsan chemical toilet and cooker (the smoke from the cooker would disappear through a pipe and into a hollow tree on the surface so the enemy saw no sign of it), along with a large amount of explosives. There was also an escape tunnel giving the Patrol members a chance to get away if a German patrol discovered the OB. The OBs were similar in design to Anderson shelters and Nissen huts, with curved elephant iron and concrete blocks. There was often a blast wall at the bottom of the entrance shaft, in case of a grenade being thrown down the hatch. Despite the better design the OBs remained pretty grim places to stay. Dark and damp, and when on duty there was the constant threat of being discovered and captured or killed.

Many Patrols also had an Observation Post (OP) near the OB, sometimes connected by a telephone wire (up to half a mile away). The OP was designed to allow one member of the Patrol to monitor enemy movement and give the rest of the Patrol a warning if it looked like they were about to be discovered. It also meant that during the day the Auxiliary in the OP could look out for potential targets in the local area.

#### **“THESE MEN ARE TO HAVE REVOLVERS”**

In August, Colonel Gubbins' weekly report to the CIC, which was already read with interest by the prime minister, recommended the issue of revolvers. Churchill added a note, “These men are to have revolvers.” Accordingly, 400 .32 Colt automatics were distributed at once and the next month a 100 percent issue of .38 revolvers was made; a remarkable achievement when the country was so low on equipment and weapons. This was followed much later by ammunition that fitted them. These revolvers and the Fairbairn-Sykes fighting knives were of particular source of pride to the Auxiliaries and built their reputation of toughness, certainly in contrast to the often ill-equipped Home Guard.

Patrols were prioritised when it came to the weapons. Thompson sub-machine guns and the Browning Automatic Rifle were both issued in some numbers as were Sten-guns. Also issued was the rather sinister .22 sniper rifle, fitted with a powerful telescopic sight and silencer. The Auxiliaries who received these were told that they were for sniping at high-ranking

**“THE KEY TO THEIR SUCCESS WAS SILENCE. THEIR OBJECTIVE WAS TO DESTROY THEIR TARGET, NOT TO GET INTO A RUNNING BATTLE WITH THE ENEMY”**

© Getty

*A member of the British Home Guard equipped with a revolver, 21 September 1940*

Sandford Levvy Patrol  
Somerset training

© staybehinds.com

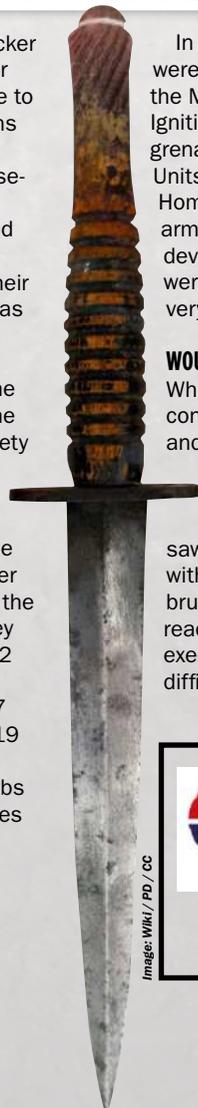


German officers and for picking off tracker dogs before they came too close. Other Auxiliaries have reported that they were to use the weapons to assassinate Britons that were considered collaborators.

Auxiliaries were also issued with close-combat weapons such as garottes, rubber truncheons, knuckle dusters and knobkerries. These were the Patrols' primary fighting weapons. The key to their success was silence. Their objective was to destroy their target, not to get into a running battle with the enemy.

Alongside close-combat weapons, the other principle materials available to the Patrols were the huge number and variety of explosives. For example, after waiting 20 years for the army to come and collect the ordnance his Patrols had left behind at the end of the war, Captain Reg Sennet, a group leader of five Patrols in Essex, eventually told the police who, in turn called the army. They retrieved, 1,205lbs of explosives, 3,742 feet of delayed action fusing, 930 feet of safety fuse, 144 time pencils, 1,207 L-Delay switches, 1,271 detonators, 719 booby-traps, 314 paraffin bombs, 131 fog signals, 121 smoke bombs, 36 slabs of guncotton and 33 booby-trap switches attached to made-up charges.

Right: A Fairbairn-Sykes fighting knife from Fort William Museum



In addition to these explosives Patrols were issued with grenades, including the Mills bomb, the Sticky bomb, Self-Igniting Phosphorous grenades and smoke grenades. It's clear that the Auxiliary Units were prioritised over and above the Home Guard and in some cases the regular army when it came to receiving newly developed weapons and explosives. They were heavily armed and more importantly, very highly trained.

#### WOULD THE AUXILIARIES HAVE BEEN EFFECTIVE?

While undoubtedly Auxiliaries had full confidence in their ability, their weapons and their determination, the debate around how successful they would have been continues. If an invasion had come in 1940, and as we saw later in the war, the Germans dealt with any form of resistance with utmost brutality. How the Patrols would have reacted to their family and friends being executed as a result of their actions, is difficult to say.

Equally, not even the most ambitious Auxiliary could claim that their form of guerrilla warfare could have lasted any real length of time. Inevitably, they would have been caught or killed in a raid or the location of their OB found. The Patrols would and could not have acted in a similar manner to the French Resistance, where a long-term campaign of resistance to occupation was key.

Peter Fleming in his book *Invasion 1940* which came out in 1957, mentions the Auxiliary Units briefly and sums up what he thought their effectiveness might be, "Assuming the British resistance movement would have melted away in the white heat of German ruthlessness, it might have struck some useful blows; and with a bridgehead under heavy counter-attack its diversionary activities would have had a value wholly disproportionate to the number of guerrillas involved." Never called upon to act in 1940, or throughout the war, many Auxiliaries simply went back to their normal lives when stood-down in November 1944, with most taking the fact that they were highly trained guerrilla fighters to the grave with them.

**CART**  
The Coleshill Auxiliary Research Team

The Coleshill Auxiliary Research Team researches the Auxiliary Units, their training, equipment. Operational Bases and records all details in the British Resistance Archive

[www.staybehinds.com](http://www.staybehinds.com)

# THE COLD WAR AND BEYOND

## 102 MAC V SOG

Shrouded in secrecy and dropped into the jungle, this unit waged an undeclared war against the communist North and paid a heavy price

## 108 OPERATION NIMROD

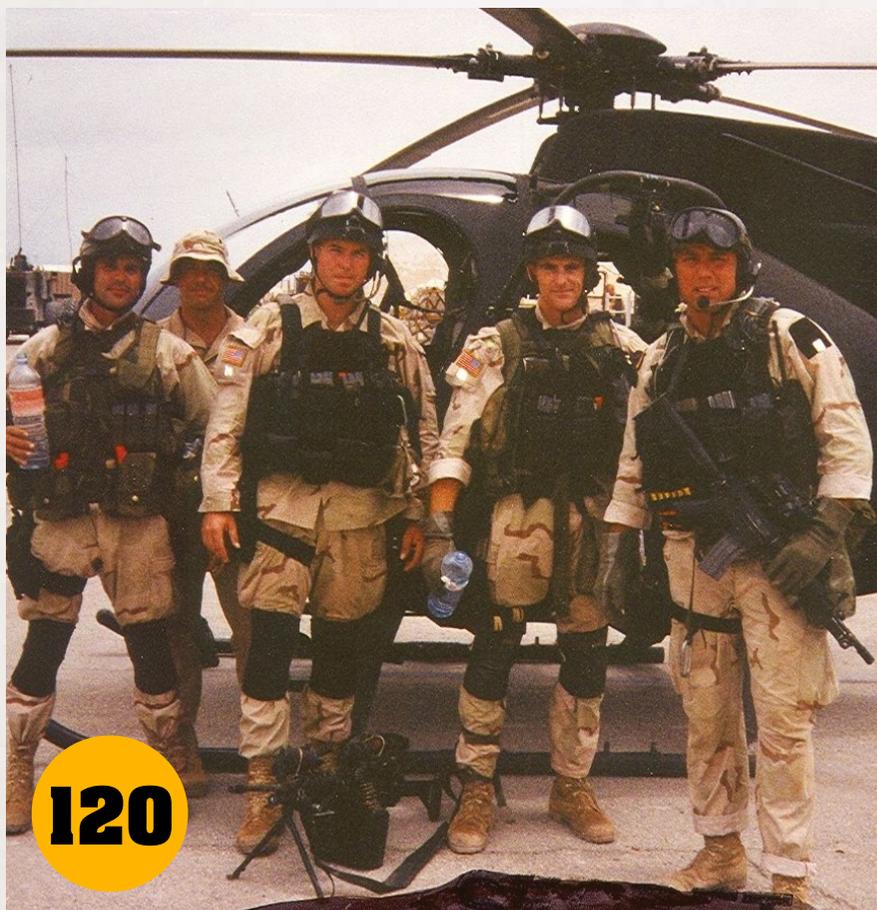
With hostages' lives on the line inside a besieged Iranian embassy, there was only one unit to call: the SAS

## 120 DELTA AT MOG

A survivor recounts the bloody day that inspired *Black Hawk Down*

## 128 SPECIAL FORCES OF THE WORLD

From America to South Korea, this map reveals the locations of elite units across the globe



102



# MAG

*A US Army Special Forces captain contacts his base camp by radio while Vietnamese soldiers burn down a Vietcong hideout*



Above:  
Unofficial  
insignia of  
MACV-SOG

# SOG

WORDS: LEIGH NEVILLE

## EMBROILED IN A SECRET CAMPAIGN HIDDEN WITHIN THE WIDER VIETNAM WAR, EVEN THE NAME OF THIS SPECIAL FORCES UNIT REMAINED HIGHLY CLASSIFIED

**T**heir missions were secret: some remain so even to this day. Many of the special operations soldiers, sailors and Marines who conducted them took their stories to the grave. Their existence and the incredible operations they conducted were only officially acknowledged in 2001 after years of lobbying by SOG (Special Operations Group) veterans.

Like everything to do with SOG, its beginning was cloaked in secrecy. In 1961, US President John F. Kennedy ordered the CIA to begin establishing what he called “networks of resistance” in communist North Vietnam. The CIA was assigned the task of running covert operations within the region, including inserting undercover agents into the North and carrying out hazardous cross-border reconnaissance missions to uncover the enemy’s plans.

The CIA officers who initially undertook these missions were trained by US Army Green Berets and US Navy SEALs, but the officer running the programme was largely unsuccessful and the majority of agents were uncovered and suffered a terrible fate at the hands of the North Vietnamese Army (NVA). With the failure of the CIA programme, these covert operations were instead handed to the United States military in late 1963.

To conduct these special missions, the army established the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam-Studies and Observations Group, or MACV-SOG, in January 1964. Its innocuous and lengthy title was part of an elaborate cover story to deceive the North Vietnamese and their Chinese and Soviet allies. According to the cover story, MACV-SOG was something of a knowledge-management ‘think-tank’ dedicated to analysing and disseminating operational ‘lessons-learned’ across the US military in South Vietnam.

To insiders, though, the initials SOG stood instead for Special Operations Group. MACV-SOG would soon become the most lethal, effective and covert special operations unit

within the war. The largest and most well known element of SOG was the Ground Studies Group, which launched commando teams into North Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia on what were known as strategic reconnaissance missions.

The Army Special Forces were no strangers to cross-border operations. Green Berets assigned to the Military Advisory Assistance Group had been training irregular anti-communist forces in Laos since 1961. Along with Green Berets, who made up the majority of the Ground Studies Group, SOG recruited Navy SEALs, Marine Force Recon and Air Force Special Tactics operators.

These men were then given cover stories and personnel records to match and assigned to one of three separate regional commands; Command and Control North (CCN), Command and Control South (CCS) or Command and Control Central (CCC).

SOG also established its own air wing – the Air Studies Group – that included surveillance and transport aircraft rigged for parachuting, along with unmarked helicopters that were equipped with a unique extraction system known as STABO. This saw operators literally hooked onto a winch and lifted straight out of the jungle.

For seaborne insertions, including into North Vietnam’s Haiphong Harbour, the SOG created the Maritime Studies Group with 16 high-speed racing boats affectionately called Nasty Class Fast Patrol Boats. These could carry sea mines and torpedoes along with commando teams. The unit’s historian described these Norwegian-built craft as capable of an impressive, “...44 knots at 75 tons displacement [with] a cruising range of approximately 725 kilometres.”

The Psychological Studies Group was in charge of the psychological operations, or psy-ops, component of MACV-SOG. This group would pioneer the use of airborne broadcasting of propaganda, along with the use of spoof broadcasting stations that claimed to be based in the North but were in reality broadcasting from Saigon. This mysterious group also

**“MACV-SOG WOULD SOON BECOME THE MOST LETHAL, EFFECTIVE AND COVERT SPECIAL OPERATIONS UNIT WITHIN THE WAR”**

## THE COLD WAR AND BEYOND

managed one of the biggest deception campaigns since WWII.

The largest component of SOG was the Ground Studies Branch's Reconnaissance Teams (RTs), or Spike Teams. These RTs were colourfully named after types of snakes or American states, such as RT Idaho or RT Diamondback. A typical mission would see either a six- or 12-man RT deployed. Of these, only three soldiers would be American – the team leader, assistant team leader and a radio operator. The remainder comprised indigenous soldiers, often Chinese Nung mercenaries or Montagnard hill tribesmen, who were especially skilled jungle fighters.

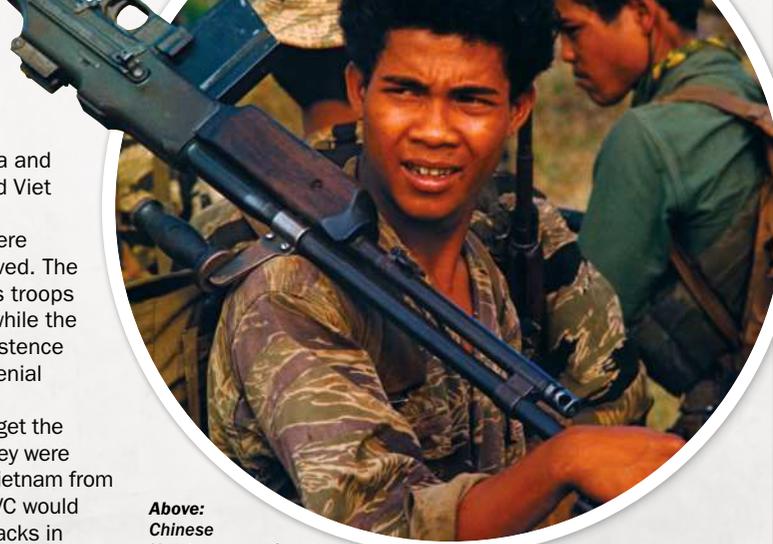
The RTs operated under Project Shining Brass, which saw joint US and South Vietnamese teams infiltrate up to 31 miles inside of Laos. Along with their primary reconnaissance mission, these RTs also conducted downed pilot and POW recoveries. Operations were soon expanded to include missions conducted in neighbouring Cambodia under Project Daniel Boone. Cambodia had

quietly become a major staging area and sanctuary for North Vietnamese and Viet Cong (VC) forces.

These cross-border operations were always deniable for all parties involved. The North Vietnamese swore none of its troops ever entered Laos and Cambodia, while the Americans denied even the very existence of SOG and its recon teams. This denial continued long after the war.

The SOG's primary role was to target the infamous Ho Chi Minh trail. Since they were often bombed crossing into South Vietnam from the North, the NVA and Main Force VC would use a network of trails, roads and tracks in neighbouring Laos instead that were all, officially at least, neutral. The Ho Chi Minh trail offered them respite from American bombing – or so they thought.

Along with troop movements, the Ho Chi Minh trail was instrumental in resupplying the North Vietnamese regulars fighting in the South, along with supporting Viet Cong guerrilla units with weapons and ammunition.



**Above:**  
Chinese  
Nung mercenaries  
working for MACV-SOG  
Command and Control North

These supplies were often carried by truck, but bicycles, ox-carts and even elephants were also pressed into service.

The trail became ever-more sophisticated, with its own air defence gun batteries and SA-2 surface-to-air missiles. The North Vietnamese



## TIGER FORCE

**THIS US ARMY LONG-RANGE RECONNAISSANCE UNIT WAS DEVELOPED TO "OUT-GUERRILLA THE GUERRILLAS," BUT INSTEAD WAS INVESTIGATED FOR WAR CRIMES**

Tiger Force was the nickname given to a 'Lurp' or long range reconnaissance patrol (LRRP) platoon of the storied 101st Airborne Division. Its charismatic leader, Colonel David Hackworth, later gained fame through his political and military writings. During the Vietnam War, Tiger Force was considered a particularly effective unit, although it suffered heavy casualties. Indeed, like SOG, it was awarded its own Presidential Unit Citation.

The unit was, like many in Vietnam, unofficially recognised because of its high body count. This fact alone should have triggered warning bells. LRRPs, again like the SOG, traditionally attempted to bypass and avoid contact with the enemy due to their small numbers, relying on stealth and guile.

Instead, a culture of barbarism seemed to take over the unit. Allegations spread of the routine murder of civilians; the widespread torture and execution of prisoners; the mutilation, scalping and cutting off the ears of enemy dead; and several other incidents too horrible to mention. The unit was eventually scrutinised in what became the longest running investigation into war crimes during the conflict. Incredibly, none of the soldiers was ever charged.

Hackworth denies to this day any knowledge of these alleged atrocities and war crimes committed by men formerly under his command (he had moved to another posting before the reported atrocities began). In 2003, when faced with the accusations against his former unit, he allegedly told journalists that, "...every US bomb or rocket that struck a city or a village killing non-combatants was a war crime. Who investigated this?"

**"THE UNIT WAS EVENTUALLY SCRUTINISED IN WHAT BECAME THE LONGEST-RUNNING INVESTIGATION INTO WAR CRIMES DURING THE CONFLICT"**

*Members of the Tiger Force platoon on patrol. Note the second soldier dressed as a Viet Cong guerrilla*





# CLANDESTINE OPERATIONS

MACV-SOG CONDUCTED SOME OF THE MOST HAIR-RAISING COVERT MISSIONS IN THE HISTORY OF SPECIAL OPERATIONS

even stationed specialist engineer units along the trail who were responsible for its upkeep and repair. For the South Vietnamese and Americans, it was a unique challenge. Much of the trail was concealed from the air by thick jungle canopy, while other, more exposed portions were camouflaged daily by the NVA.

MACV-SOG was given the mission to carry out strategic reconnaissance of the trail, surveilling choke points that could be targeted by secret US airstrikes and providing on-the-ground bomb damage assessments to the US Air Force. They also targeted specific high-ranking individuals – like NVA officers or VC tax collectors – that intelligence indicated would be travelling on the trail, killing or capturing them as required.

On these operations, the RTs carried nothing that could conclusively prove they were indeed American soldiers – their uniforms were locally made, their weapons were of foreign manufacture and they carried no identification or dog tags. Some teams even carried captured AK-47s and wore NVA fatigues to confuse the enemy (as they were operating so far from other



An American soldier applies a makeshift bandage outside the US Special Forces camp at Ben Het



## HO CHI MINH TRAIL

The Ho Chi Minh Trail ran almost 1,000 miles from North Vietnam through Laos and ends near the South Vietnamese capital of Saigon (now Ho Chi Minh City). MACV-SOG teams routinely conducted reconnaissance and surveillance on the trail, guiding in US bombing raids to target logistics convoys and troop movements.

## BATTLE OF KHE SANH

Khe Sanh was the site of one of SOG's most famous battles – the last stand of RT Kansas. Sent in to capture a prisoner, the 14-man team ended up holding off an NVA regiment, suffering nine dead, before the timely arrival of helicopter gunships broke the back of the human wave assault.

## COMMAND & CONTROL NORTH

Command and Control North (CCN), the largest of the three SOG field commands, was based in De Nang and operated mainly in North Vietnam and Laos, although some operations were conducted into mainland China. CCN had the only RTs trained in high altitude, low opening (HALO) parachuting and combat diving.

## COMMAND & CONTROL CENTRAL

Command and Control Central (CCC) was based in Kon Tum. It conducted missions primarily within the tri-border area of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, including offensive operations against the communist Pathet Lao and Khmer Rouge in the later countries. The last to be officially disbanded, it continued to operate covertly for several years.

## COMMAND & CONTROL SOUTH

Command and Control South (CCS) was based in Ban Me Thout and operated mainly against VC Main Force units along the South Vietnamese border and into Cambodia, targeting the VC sanctuary in the notorious Fish Hook border area. CCS famously guided in a B-52 strike on an NVA headquarters there in 1969.

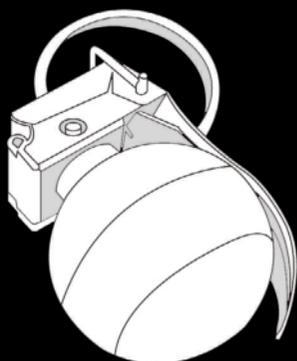


# JUNGLE

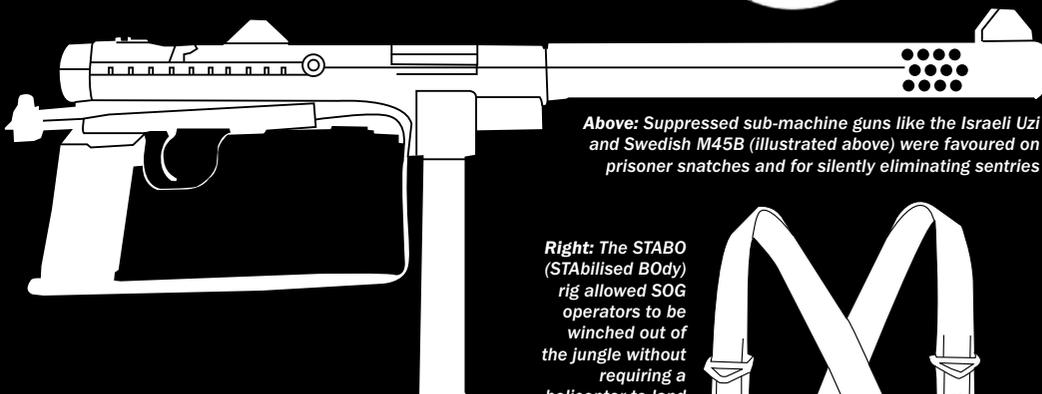
## OUTNUMBERED AND OUTGUNNED, SOG USED SPECIAL EQUIPMENT TO TRY TO

The weapons and equipment carried by the RTs were designed to accomplish two things – aid them in covertly inserting into an area, and to help them get out, particularly if an NVA reaction force was on their trail. The tiny RTs would be vastly outnumbered and needed every trick up their sleeve to discourage and slow pursuit until they could reach a safe landing zone.

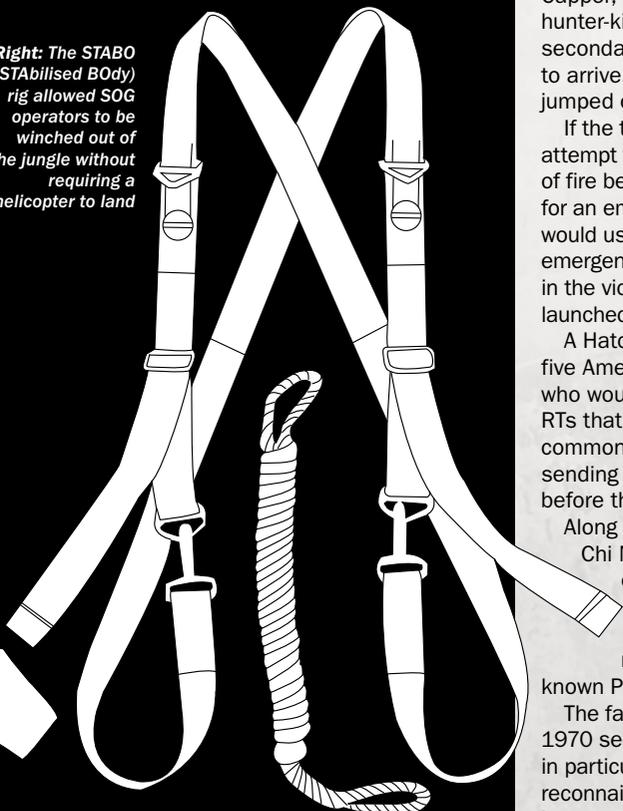
Many of today's special operations techniques were invented, tried and tested in



*Above: Suppressed sub-machine guns like the Israeli Uzi and Swedish M45B (illustrated above) were favoured on prisoner snatches and for silently eliminating sentries*

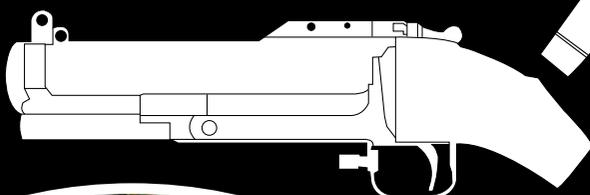


*Right: The STABO (STAbilised BOdy) rig allowed SOG operators to be winched out of the jungle without requiring a helicopter to land*



## “MANY OF TODAY’S SPECIAL OPERATIONS TECHNIQUES WERE INVENTED, TRIED AND TESTED IN THE JUNGLES OF VIETNAM BY THE SOG”

*Below: SOG used cut down M79 grenade launchers with the stock and much of the barrel sawn off to reduce weight*



*Below: M18A1 Claymore Directional Mines were carried to protect remain-overnight positions and to set as booby-traps for pursuing NVA*



*Operators wore locally manufactured, non-US issue tiger stripe pattern camouflage fatigues to help them blend in with the jungle*

US forces the risk of being targeted by friendly fire was minimal).

These teams also used a large number of exotic weapons. At least one SOG operator carried a futuristic 13mm Gyrojet Rocket Pistol as his sidearm, while another routinely totted a hunting bow (and used it in at least one firefight). Other weapons were highly modified for their unique needs – an M60 medium machine gun, for instance, was fitted with a Predator-style 500-round backpack and dubbed the ‘Death Machine’.

The small teams needed all of the firepower they could carry, as they would typically end up in firefights with enemy units of far larger size. In fact, the RTs would do everything in their power to avoid a confrontation, preferring stealth over force. A perfect SOG mission would often involve zero contact with the enemy, with the RTs operating as the silent eyes and ears of the covert US bombing campaigns.

The NVA responded to the SOG missions with Chinese-trained hunter-killer units accompanied by tracking dogs. One SOG veteran, Frank Capper, remembered that, “...they’d have these hunter-killer units sitting on the primary and secondary insertion points, just waiting for us to arrive. We had teams get hit as soon as they jumped off the bird – totally destroyed.”

If the teams couldn’t avoid contact, they would attempt to overwhelm the enemy with weight of fire before breaking contact and heading for an emergency landing zone. The operators would use their radio to declare a ‘Prairie Fire’ emergency that would summon any US aircraft in the vicinity to assist, while a Hatchet Force launched to pull the compromised team out.

A Hatchet Force was typically comprised of five Americans and 30 indigenous soldiers, who would launch by helicopter to rescue RTs that had run into trouble. It was relatively commonplace for RTs to simply vanish after sending a contact report, wiped out to a man before the Hatchet Force could respond.

Along with their missions along the Ho Chi Minh trail, SOG conducted rescue operations to recover downed US aircrew and POWs under Operation Bright Light. Intriguingly, SOG were not involved in perhaps the most well-known POW rescue mission of the war.

The famous Son Tay mission in November 1970 seemed a perfect fit for SOG – CCN in particular – who had conducted secret reconnaissance missions in the area. It isn’t known why the rescue operation was given to a newly established one-off task force, although inter-service politics likely played their part. In any case, the POWs had been moved and the raid was unsuccessful.

In a curious twist of fate, many of the Chinese advisers who had trained the North Vietnamese hunter-killer teams were

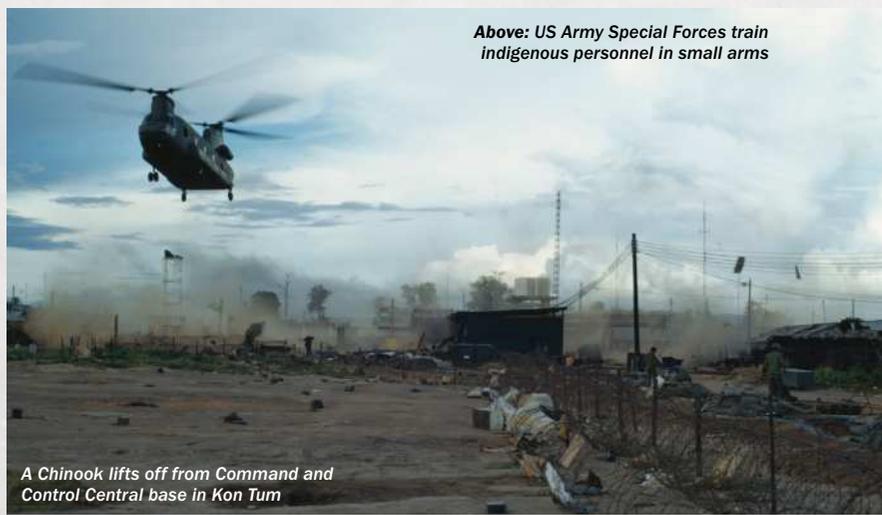
## “THE NVA RESPONDED TO THE SOG MISSIONS WITH CHINESE-TRAINED HUNTER-KILLER UNITS EQUIPPED WITH TRACKING DOGS”



A group of Montagnards show off the severed heads of Vietcong they have collected, 1963



Above: US Army Special Forces train indigenous personnel in small arms



A Chinook lifts off from Command and Control Central base in Kon Tum

quartered in a secondary school near the Son Tay prison. It was assaulted by the US raiders to stave off any interference with the main rescue mission, killing the Chinese inside.

Even more in the shadows, SOG conducted some of the most audacious and fascinating psy-ops missions of the war. In perhaps the Psychological Studies Group's finest hour, the legend of the Sacred Sword of the Patriots League (SSPL) was created. The objective? To convince the North Vietnamese people that an entirely fictional, anti-communist resistance group was alive, well and flourishing in North Vietnam.

Using covert radio broadcasts, airborne leaflet drops and faked SSPL membership cards, the story of a 10,000-strong resistance front was gradually developed. SOG recon teams would plant fake SSPL documents on the bodies of NVA troops they killed in ambushes to sow seeds of doubt and mistrust. Radio sets rigged to only play SSPL propaganda stations were even covertly distributed to villages in the North.

Perhaps the most successful SSPL campaign saw the Psychological Studies Group mail thousands of expertly faked letters alleging involvement in the SSPL to North Vietnamese officers and communist party officials. Spies reported that at least some of those who received the letters were later relieved of their duties.

Their most audacious psy-op, however, was undoubtedly known as Paradise Island.

Indigenous SOG operators from the Maritime Studies Group would interdict North Vietnamese fishing boats, seizing the crews and transporting them, blindfolded, to a secret island location.

There they were told that they had been captured by the SSPL and held for a short time. During the three weeks or so of captivity, the fishermen were treated to medical and dental care for any ailments, given new clothes, and fed well and often – in stark contrast to their lives in North Vietnam.

When they were released, they were supplied with gifts including an SSPL radio set to take home with them. Some were trained as double-agents, others were simply told to tell their families and villages of the fair treatment of the SSPL. Although Paradise Island may have had some successes, at least some fishermen planned their re-capture by SOG, as they apparently enjoyed the all-expenses paid holiday.

MACV-SOG officially operated between 1964 and 1972, when US efforts began to focus on the drawdown of US forces in Vietnam and the eventual transition of the war to the South Vietnamese. SOG was credited with severely impeding the resupply of enemy forces in South Vietnam along the Ho Chi Minh trail, capturing and killing large numbers of high-value targets and spreading disorder among the NVA.

Although the exact numbers are hard to confirm, thousands of strategic reconnaissance

missions were launched and at least a handful of successful Bright Light recovery missions were undertaken. At the height of the unit, some 2,000 US personnel were assigned to MACV-SOG, along with about 8,000 South Vietnamese, Montagnard and Nung Chinese agents. According to a US Senate report, 13 MACV-SOG operators were later awarded classified Medals of Honor.

All of that came at significant costs to the unit. 57 SOG operators were listed as missing in action. Even today, ten Recon Teams remain unaccounted for, although the members of one, Recon Team Maryland, were recently laid to rest, some 43 years after they were killed in an ambush in Laos. Their remains were discovered in 2009 by a Laotian farmer and the men were finally interred in Arlington National Cemetery in 2012 with full military honours.

Indeed, MACV-SOG suffered the highest casualty rates for a unit of its size since the American Civil War. At one point in 1968, for example, almost half of those assigned to the RTs were killed in action, while every single operator was wounded in action at least once. In all, 243 SOG operators lost their lives waging their secret, undeclared war in North Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. It can only be hoped that in time the jungles of Vietnam will reveal the whereabouts of those still missing, men whose bodies can then be returned home.



# OPERATION NIMROD



**WORDS: ROBIN HORSFALL**

Robin joined the SAS in 1978 and was a member of the Nimrod assault team. He went on to serve with the Regiment during the Falklands War, then left the British Army two years later. Today he is a professional speaker, sharing his knowledge with audiences around the world. His autobiography,

*Fighting Scared*, details his journey from a troubled childhood to serving in the world's elite military and beyond. In this brief history of Operation Nimrod, Robin has included extracts from *Fighting Scared*, which is available now on Kindle.

**“THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT ALLOCATED A GENEROUS BUDGET AND ORDERED THE SAS TO FORM A COUNTER-TERRORIST TEAM AT THEIR BASE IN HEREFORD, UK. THE TEAM HAD TO BE READY TO MOVE ANYWHERE AT A MOMENT’S NOTICE – THEIR OPERATIONAL NAME WAS PAGODA”**

**ON 30 APRIL, 1980, SIX TERRORISTS STORMED THE IRANIAN EMBASSY IN LONDON AND TOOK 23 HOSTAGES. AFTER DAYS OF NEGOTIATION, ONE SAS TEAM WAS TASKED WITH ENDING THE SIEGE. THIS IS THEIR STORY, AS TOLD BY ONE OF THEIR NUMBER**

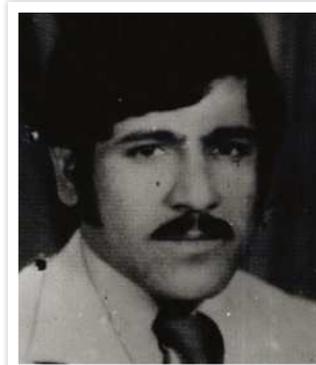
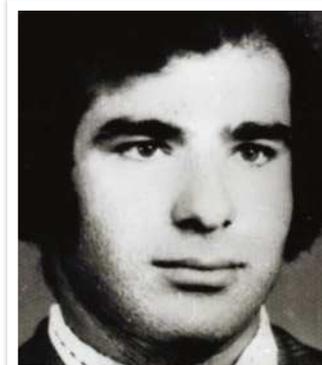
In 1976, the Special Air Service (SAS) returned to the UK from a secret war in Oman. Their experience of fighting an infantry war with artillery and air support was of very little use on the streets of Northern Ireland and they struggled to find a new role for themselves. Flexible as always, they found their niche in a new field of warfare – counter-terrorism.

At the Munich Olympic Games in 1972, the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) murdered 11 Israeli athletes and a police officer during a botched rescue attempt. This tragedy exposed the need for an effective, highly trained force that would deal with incidents where hostages were held to ransom for political objectives. The British Government allocated a generous budget and ordered the SAS to form a counter-terrorist team at their base in Hereford, UK. The team had to be ready to move anywhere at a moment's notice. Their operational name was 'Pagoda'.

Between 1970 and 1980, terrorist groups such as West Germany's Baader-Meinhof gang, the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and the PLO carried out successful and deadly operations. They drew media attention to their issues and committed atrocities, while often escaping unmolested. The most extreme example occurred on 4 November 1979, when Iranian Revolutionary Guards took over the United States Embassy in Tehran. Eighteen months later, on 24 April 1980, President Jimmy Carter sent in US special forces to rescue the hostages who had been held for 444 days. Operation 'Eagle Claw' failed, with the tragic loss of eight American lives. Following that disaster, the morale of the Western world plunged to an all-time low.

Encouraged by the perceived weakness of Western democracies, Iraq's ruler Saddam Hussein looked for an opportunity to take advantage in his ongoing war with Iran. Sami Mohammed Ali, an officer in the Iraqi Secret Service, spent the first months of 1980 training a six-man team of young activists. They came from Arabistan, an oil-rich area in the south of Iran. The men wanted autonomy for their region following Ayatollah Khomeini's Islamic Revolution.

In response to Arabistani demands, the revolutionary government of Iran arrested and imprisoned 91 people without trial. Sami's team planned to take over the Iranian Embassy at Princes Gate in London and hold the staff as hostages. They would demand the release of the Arabistani prisoners and draw international attention to their cause.



Sami told his group that other Arab countries supported their mission, while also assuring them that when their mission was over, Arab ambassadors would negotiate their safe return to Iraq.

When Sami's team arrived in London at the beginning of April, he provided them with semi-automatic pistols, automatic machine pistols and Russian-manufactured hand grenades. These were allegedly delivered to the UK in Iraqi diplomatic bags. The scene was set for yet another terrorist victory.

#### THE SIEGE BEGINS

Sami Mohammed Ali deployed his team in London, at 11:30, on Wednesday 30 April, 1980. He then took a taxi to Heathrow Airport to make his escape from the country. By pure coincidence, at 11:25, embassy staff invited their door guard, Police Constable Trevor Lock, to come inside for a cup of coffee. While he was inside, the six-man terrorist team entered the open door and shot a long burst of automatic fire into the ceiling. Within minutes they had secured the four-storey, 54-room building and had taken 23 hostages. These included 19 embassy staff, Trevor Lock, BBC sound recordist Sim Harris, BBC news producer Chris Cramer and Syrian journalist Mustapha Karkouti, who had all been inside applying for visas.

The response by the Metropolitan Police, under the command of Deputy Assistant Commissioner John Dellow, was immediate and efficient. The building was secured front and rear and all of the adjacent buildings were evacuated.

Terrorist leader Salim immediately made demands for the release of the Arabastani prisoners and autonomy for his region. He gave a deadline of 24 hours, expiring at noon the next day, and threatened to kill all of the hostages if his demands were not met.

In Downing Street, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's cabinet assembled at the cabinet office briefing room known as 'Cobra' to discuss

their response. Thatcher was adamant that she would not give in to terrorists, but she would not authorise a military assault unless the terrorists killed a hostage. Until that happened, her policy was to contain the situation, remain calm and hope that the police could negotiate the release of the hostages and the surrender of the terrorists – without casualties.

In Hereford, the Pagoda team were preparing for a routine training exercise in Edinburgh with the Scottish police. The first indication that something had changed was when the noon move to Scotland was postponed.

"Big Bob smiled coldly. 'My Tikka is ready,' he said, closing one eye and squeezing an imaginary trigger. At about midday, Major [Gullen] called us into the team room... The exercise was off."

The team spent the following seven hours listening to the BBC news and hoping for permission to move.

By 19:00, no authorisation had been received from the government, so SAS Colonel Mike Rose took the initiative and moved his men closer to London. All their equipment was carried in six white Range Rovers, six Ford Transit vans and a large, yellow pan-technician truck. They left in small groups with orders to rendezvous at the Army Education Corps barracks in Beaconsfield some 20 miles west of London. By midnight, the teams had successfully travelled the 120 miles when they were then officially authorised to move to Regent's Park Barracks in central London.

**"HE GAVE A DEADLINE OF 24 HOURS, EXPIRING AT NOON THE NEXT DAY, AND THREATENED TO KILL ALL OF THE HOSTAGES IF HIS DEMANDS WERE NOT MET"**

*Above, left: An armoured personnel carrier*

*Above: A total of six terrorists attacked the Embassy, clockwise from top left: Themir Mohammed Hussein, Shakir Abdullah Radhil, Awn Ali Mohammed, Shakir Sultan Said, Makki Hanoun Ali, Fowzi Badavi Nejad*

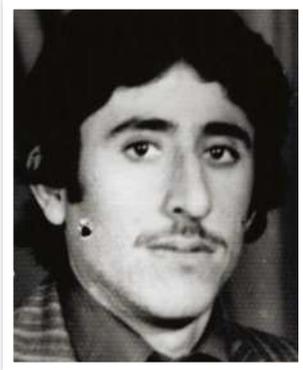
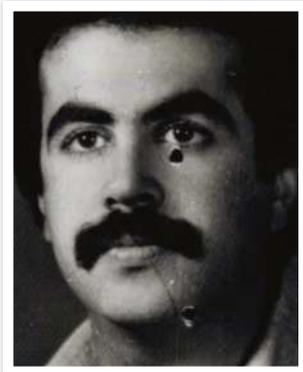
Once officially sanctioned, the mission was then given the code name: NIMROD.

Tension increased on the second day, when Iran refused to consider the terrorists' demands and left all negotiations firmly in the hands of the British authorities. As the noon deadline approached, the police were left hoping for the best, while appeals and promises were made by negotiators in the hope of gaining more time. "The situation was close to panic," said Sim Harris, "as the hostages believed that they were about to die." Faisal, Salim's second in command, was establishing himself as the tough guy. He repeatedly threatened to execute the hostages and was seen to pull and replace the pin of a hand grenade during moments of increased excitement.

While Faisal was establishing his credentials, Abbas Lavasani, the Iranian chargé d'affaires, was setting out his stall as a zealot. Lavasani made it clear that he wanted to be a martyr for his religion. Provocative and difficult, he was only prevented from being shot in the first few days of the siege by the intervention of Mustapha Karkouti.

Chris Cramer began to feign illness as soon as the siege began, with a performance that was so desperate and convincing that he was released. Trevor Lock instructed Cramer to give as much information as possible to the police about the situation inside, including types and numbers of weapons and, most importantly, the number of terrorists.

On the evening of day two, SAS troop commanders completed a reconnaissance of the embassy building and established a holding area for the team. The chosen area was only one door away from the embassy at numbers 13-15 Princes Gate – the headquarters of The Royal College of General Practitioners. Major



Police marksman cordon off the Iranian Embassy during the siege

**“FAISAL, SALIM’S SECOND IN COMMAND, WAS ESTABLISHING HIMSELF AS THE TOUGH GUY. HE REPEATEDLY THREATENED TO EXECUTE THE HOSTAGES AND WAS SEEN TO PULL AND REPLACE THE PIN OF A HAND GRENADE DURING MOMENTS OF INCREASED EXCITEMENT”**



Hector Gullan (in camouflage) and his command group during the assault

**SAS prepare to abseil onto the rear balcony of the Iranian Embassy**



Hector Gullen, B Squadron's commander, prepared his men to move at midnight hidden in the back of two pan-technician trucks. Between 01:00 and 02:00, B Squadron, with all of their equipment, moved silently into their holding area. The unit claimed 68 men on the ground including support arms.

On day three, all phone lines to the embassy were cut and a field phone was passed to the building. This move meant that Salim could only speak to the trained police negotiators and forced him to request essentials such as food via the police. By controlling his access to the outside world, the negotiators hoped to manipulate Salim.

Intelligence services attempted to place listening devices inside the walls and cavities of the embassy, but squeaky noises from hand-operated drills were heard inside. Trevor Lock persuaded Salim that this noise was caused by mice, but the unconvinced Salim threatened to kill someone if the noise didn't cease. In response to his threat, aircraft approaching Heathrow were directed to fly over Knightsbridge and roadworks with drilling were started nearby. The noise was enough to hide the sounds of the drills, plus the movements of the SAS on the roof, searching for entry points and preparing belays for their abseil ropes.

While the SAS waited, half were on immediate standby, fully dressed except for their gas masks, while the remainder were stripped down to overalls so that they could rest. An 'Immediate Action Plan' had been put in place as soon as the troops were on the ground. If the terrorists started to kill people then six eight-man teams would make an entry and clear their pre-designated areas, hoping to

reduce the casualty list to a minimum. As time passed, information about the construction of the building and intelligence about the terrorists was collated so that a more precise 'Deliberate Action Plan' could be developed.

By day four, the Deliberate Action Plan started to take form. Photos of the terrorists had been obtained from visa applications, Cramer had disclosed his information and the embassy janitor had identified armoured windows and doors. Blueprints of the building were secured from architectural records, which showed the exact layout of every room.

Salim used Trevor Lock, Sim Harris and Mustapha Karkouti as go-betweens and advisers, hoping for insights into the British psyche, while they in turn hoped to persuade the terrorists to give up. Under his heavy overcoat, Lock still had his .38 Smith and Wesson revolver with six rounds. Salim believed that all British police officers were unarmed, so Lock had only received a rudimentary search during the takeover. The weapon weighed heavily on Lock's mind as threats were repeatedly made to "kill a hostage".

**“SALIM BELIEVED THAT ALL BRITISH POLICE OFFICERS WERE UNARMED, SO LOCK HAD ONLY RECEIVED A RUDIMENTARY SEARCH DURING THE TAKEOVER. THE WEAPON WEIGHED HEAVILY ON LOCK'S MIND AS THREATS WERE REPEATEDLY MADE TO 'KILL A HOSTAGE'”**

Mustapha tried to convince Salim that surrender now would be a victory – no one had been injured and their cause had been brought to the world's attention. Mustapha suggested asking for a radio announcement by the BBC. Salim still hoped for the intervention of Arab ambassadors but relented and asked the negotiators to make the suggested announcement. The negotiators used this moment to barter for the release of one hostage – Salim agreed and chose Mustapha.

An announcement was made at 9 p.m. on the BBC World Service. Mustapha was released and the terrorists were ecstatic. It seemed at this moment that the siege would end peacefully – the tension subsided and hopes were high. The departure of Mustapha, however, had taken an intelligent, mature and steady man who spoke Arabic out of the equation. When Faisal scribbled "Down with Khomeini" on a wall, no one with enough influence was there to stop Lavasani from overreacting. He provoked Faisal and brought the tension back to a fever pitch. Salim returned to his demands for an ambassador in the belief that Sami, his handler, had told him the truth. Sadly, Salim's whole team had been set up by Iraqi intelligence. No agreements had been made and, even in the unlikely event that they had, they were denied. This created an impasse – there were no ambassadors and Salim thought the police were lying to him.

On Monday 5 May, at 11:00, Faisal took Lavasani down to the ground floor, away from the other hostages. He tied his hands and blindfolded him, then forced him to kneel. Outside the building, three pistol shots were heard. The SAS stood by once again for an immediate assault, but time passed and no indication was given about what the shots meant.



## THE PAGODA TEAM

At the time of the embassy siege, the 22nd Special Air Service Regiment was based at Bradbury Lines, Hereford. 'The Regiment' consisted of four regular Sabre Squadrons – A, B, D and G – all identical in makeup with a full complement of 70 men, including signallers and support staff. The squadrons rotated every six months, becoming the Pagoda team once every two years. At the start of April 1980, it was once again the turn of B Squadron, with most of the men were on their second or third Pagoda tour.

Training for the Pagoda team consisted of continuous practice assaults on buildings, aircraft, trains, ships in harbour and moving vehicles. The whole team were trained as assault troops, but half were also trained as snipers.

Standard **NBC GAS SUIT** with hood and a standard pair of black, cotton overalls.

**RADIO COMMUNICATIONS** with a throat microphone.

**KNIFE** for cutting away obstacles.

**BODY ARMOUR** capable of stopping low velocity projectiles.

Suede **OVER JACKET** with pouches for munitions.

**BROWNING 9MM AUTOMATIC PISTOLS** with one (extended) 20 and two 13-round magazines.

**SR6** gas mask.

**HECKLER AND KOCH 9MM MP5** automatic sub-machine pistol with three 30-round magazines strapped by a quick-release harness across the chest.

**LEATHER BELT** with low-slung pistol holster and MP5 magazine pouches.

### IN ADDITION TO THIS EQUIPMENT THE SNIPERS HAD:

- ✦ One 7.62mm L42 sniper rifle with an X3 scope
- ✦ One .225 Tikka Finlander hunting rifle with a X10 day scope
- ✦ One .225 Tikka Finlander hunting rifle with an image intensification night scope
- ✦ Camouflage suits

### AMMUNITION CARRIED BY THE ASSAULT TEAM MEMBERS INCLUDED:

- ✦ 46 X 9mm pistol rounds
- ✦ 90 X 9mm machine pistol rounds
- ✦ 'Flash Bang' stun grenades that banged, whistled, flashed and released CS gas

Training took place day and night, five days a week. Repetition and practice were the key words. In a building known as 'the killing house', soldiers took it in turns to sit in chairs surrounded by targets as team members assaulted the room with live ammunition. Men stood in darkened rooms with their shoulders touching targets as comrades wearing gas masks turned, drew their weapons and fired live rounds. With concentrated training and almost unlimited ammunition, the men were expected to hit a four-inch circle in a human head from five metres without aiming. Snipers were able to guarantee a head shot at ranges of up to 200 metres.

**“WITH CONCENTRATED TRAINING AND ALMOST UNLIMITED AMMUNITION, THE MEN WERE EXPECTED TO HIT A FOUR-INCH CIRCLE IN A HUMAN HEAD FROM FIVE METRES WITHOUT AIMING”**



*Entering from the front balcony after the initial explosion to gain entry*



**“I GRIPPED MY M-5 IN BOTH HANDS AND THUMBED THE SAFETY CATCH, ASSURING MYSELF ONCE AGAIN THAT IT WAS OFF. THE ONLY SOUNDS I COULD HEAR WERE THE STATIC HISsing IN MY EARPIECE AND THE SOUND OF MY HEART POUNDING IN MY EARS. MY GREATEST FEAR NOW WAS OF MAKING A MISTAKE THAT MIGHT ENDANGER LIFE – ESPECIALLY MINE”**

## THE COLD WAR AND BEYOND

It was possible that a hostage had been killed. In preparation, Major Gullen briefed his men on his Deliberate Action Plan. Six teams of eight men would silently approach different entry points on the five floors, from basement to roof. Once in position, they would place specially shaped frame charges on the windows and doors. When all of the groups were ready, the command “GO-GO-GO” would be given and the assault would begin.

The shaped charges would direct most of the explosive effect outwards, removing the entrances and minimising the risk to those inside. The groups would enter the building and clear their allocated areas – the mission was to rescue the hostages. The men were reminded about the laws of self-defence and what constituted a lawful killing. They had to believe that their lives, or the lives of those they were trying to protect, were in danger for the law to support them against charges of murder. The prime minister sent a message in which she said, “I don’t want any martyrs.” In other words – get it right!

At 06.50, Lavasani’s body was unceremoniously thrown out of the front door and quickly recovered by two plain-clothes police officers carrying a stretcher. Lavasani’s body had two shots to the head and one to the chest. Salim made another deadline, which he now expected to be taken seriously. He wanted the ambassadors by 07:00 or he would kill another hostage.

Home Secretary William Whitelaw instructed Deputy Assistant Commissioner Peter Neivens to give written authority to the army to take control. When this note was signed at 07:07,

it legally sanctioned military action and a building assault by the SAS.

The negotiators played for time, telling Salim the ambassadors were on route and that they would all be driven to Heathrow as soon as the ambassadors arrived. Salim was suspicious, but he hesitated long enough for the SAS to get into position. At 07:23, Salim was on the phone to the senior police negotiator Detective Chief Inspector Max Vernon, who said that as he saw the SAS approach the building he heard a voice in his head singing, “You’re going to die, you’re going to die,” over and over and over.

At the rear of the building, the SAS team slid over the edge of the roof and began to abseil down towards the first floor balcony. Around them, other teams approached the back door, the top floor fire exits and the basement doors, while a final group was approaching the front windows – all in full view of a hundred live television cameras.

“I crept quietly out of the back door of the college and across the concrete patio towards the rear door of the embassy. I looked ahead of me at Robert as he began to insert detonators into the explosives and place them on the back door.

“Then I looked up. Above me, four men began to descend slowly from the roof

on their abseil ropes. Behind me, Big Bob was wielding an eight-pound sledgehammer as back up, should it be needed to get through the door.

“I gripped my M-5 in both hands and thumbed the safety catch, assuring myself once again that it was off. The only sounds I could hear were the static hissing in my earpiece and the sound of my heart pounding in my ears. My greatest fear now was of making a mistake that might endanger life – especially mine. My mind raced. Watch the windows, Robin. What do I do if someone looks out now? Don’t rush. Is my pistol still in my holster? Where is my partner?”

“The police dogs, which were being held back just inside the doors of the college, began to feel the tension in their handlers and started barking and howling. ‘Why don’t you shut the bastard dogs up?’ I thought. The fear that for so long had been my greatest enemy welled up inside me like a balloon, waiting to escape from my throat. Hello, I thought, I’m glad you’re here. Without you, I wouldn’t be functioning at my best. I needed to be scared to be alert.”

At the rear of the building, an unexpected mistake occurred when one of the abseillers put his foot through a glass window. Salim heard the noise and left the telephone to investigate. Major Gullen, realising the game was up, gave the “GO-GO-GO” early. Troops exploded their frame charges, destroying the windows and doors. The team on the ground floor hadn’t finished laying their charges and smashed the door in with a sledgehammer. Flash bangs were thrown inside closely followed by the troops.

Inside, on the first floor, Trevor Lock grabbed Salim and drew his pistol. He later recalled the surprise in Salim’s eyes when he saw the gun



**“BEHIND ME, BIG BOB WAS WIELDING AN EIGHT-POUND SLEDGEHAMMER AS BACK UP, SHOULD IT BE NEEDED TO GET THROUGH THE DOOR”**

**BBC sound man Sim Harris leaps from the front balcony to escape the flames**



that Lock had kept hidden for six days. The door burst open and Lock heard a voice telling him to move away. In seconds, Salim was dead.

On the first floor balcony, an abseiler was trapped on his rope above the balcony window.

"I looked up as three bullet holes appeared in the window above my head. Dangling on his rope, about 12 feet above the balcony and 20 feet from the ground, was one of the assault team. He was stuck. His rope jammed in the figure-of-eight abseil device attached to his harness. The curtains beneath him had been set on fire by the grenades that had exploded when the first group had entered. The flames were climbing higher and higher and were now lapping against his legs. His screams of pain sounded over the radio."

Beneath him, Sergeant Tommy Palmer had thrown his flashbang inside and entered the building. The flames set his head and gas mask alight and he was forced momentarily to retreat, but only long enough for him to discard the mask and enter the gas-filled building unprotected. He quickly identified two terrorists in the Telex room who had just shot and killed Ali Akbar Samadzadeh and wounded Ahmad Dadgar. Palmer identified a grenade and promptly killed them.

After entering from the front balcony, John McAleese and his group discovered two armed terrorists. John's description of the event was simple and concise: "Bang, bang, job done."

Only two terrorists remained alive. On the stairs leading down to the ground floor, the hostages were passed hand-to-hand towards the rear doors. Once on the grass at the rear of the building, they were all forced to the ground and handcuffed. This action controlled all the

**"WITHOUT HESITATION I FIRED ONE SHORT BURST OF FOUR ROUNDS AT HIS CHEST. TWO OTHER TEAM MEMBERS ALSO OPENED FIRE SIMULTANEOUSLY. FAISAL SLUMPED TO THE FLOOR WITH 27 HOLES IN HIM"**

frightened participants and kept them safe from further harm.

Back inside, on the stairs, there was a scuffle – a voice shouted "Grenade!" – Faisal had placed himself among the hostages; as he reached the ground floor three men opened fire.

"Without hesitation I fired one short burst of four rounds at his chest. Two other team members also opened fire simultaneously. Faisal slumped to the floor with 27 holes in him. He didn't spasm or spurt blood everywhere. He simply crumpled up like a bundle of rags and died."

The grenade that he had previously used to threaten the hostages rolled from his dead hand. The pin was still inserted. The building burned fiercely as the last hostage departed and the remaining soldiers moved outside to assist at the hostage holding area. Handcuffed on the grass, Sim Harris nodded his head vigorously to his left to tell the soldiers that the man lying beside him was Fowzi Nejad, the surviving terrorist. Nejad was lifted up and moved away towards the building and placed a safe distance from the others.

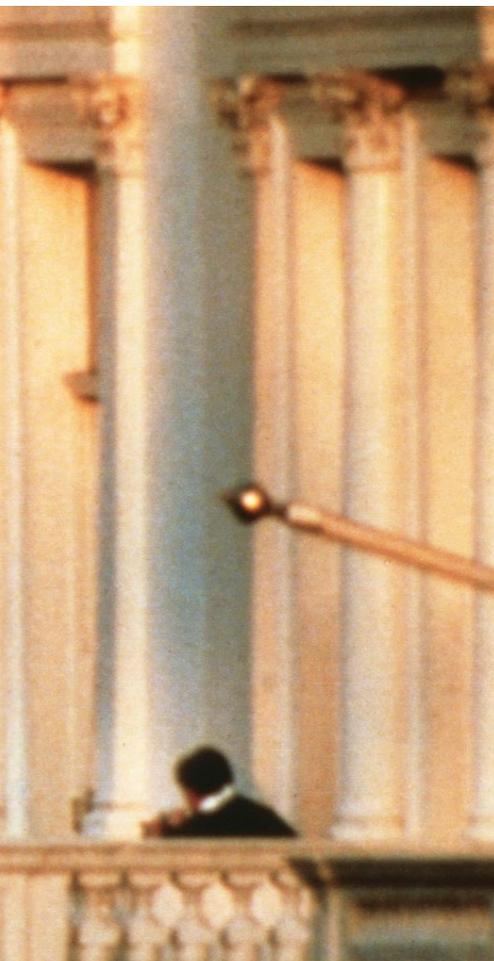
11 minutes had passed from initiation to completion. During that time, two SAS soldiers were injured, one hostage was murdered, two were wounded by the terrorists and a further 17 hostages were rescued in good health. Five terrorists were lawfully killed by the SAS and one was captured.

The team quickly handed the situation over to the police and returned to their holding area to reorganise their equipment. A short time later the home secretary arrived to give his thanks. He was in tears and said, "I knew it would be good, but I never thought it would be this good."

Whitelaw had been given an estimate of up to 20 per cent casualties by SAS Brigadier Peter de la Billière. One dead hostage was terribly sad, but it was a lot better than five. William Whitelaw wanted to parade the troops to the press, but he was politely informed by Major Gullen that they wished to remain anonymous.

While the world sat back in wild admiration, the SAS stacked their gear and crept into the back of their civilian trucks to withdraw to Regent's Park Barracks. There they would recover their vehicles and return quickly to Hereford. They were still on call and needed to be ready – another attack could be waiting to happen anywhere, anytime.

At 21:00, while they stacked their kit in their vehicles, it was announced that the prime minister would be visiting to congratulate "her boys". She arrived, accompanied by her husband Denis, and personally thanked each man. She then joined them to watch a replay of the assault on the BBC News at 10. A famous anecdote still resounds in the bars of Hereford about this moment, when legendary Scotsman John McAleese said to the prime minister, "Hey hun,



**Troops landing on the rear balcony to make their entry into the embassy**

get yer f\*\*\*ing head out o the wee. I canna see the telly." Some cringed, some laughed, but Maggie simply apologised and moved aside.

The team returned slowly in dribs and drabs to Hereford. One team arrived late following a puncture that drove them into the sanctuary of the Heston Service Station on the M4 motorway. Unfortunately, the tools to change their wheel were hidden beneath all their guns and equipment.

"As we were trying to work out what to do, I saw an AA van parked about 50 yards away. 'I know, I'll get the AA to change it.' I said. Before anyone could protest, I strolled over and asked the AA driver if he had heard about what had happened in London that day. He said that he had, becoming quite animated about the

events. 'Well I'm one of the blokes who did it,' I told him, 'and I have a problem.' I explained our predicament to him and, not sure whether to believe me or not, he drove over to take a look, probably as much out of curiosity as anything else. Confronted by four tired-looking heavies, and with the signal from our police radio bleeping in the front of the vehicle, he was convinced and changed the wheel for us."

A week later, B Squadron received an engraved plaque from the Commander US Special Forces, Fort Bragg, North Carolina. The plaque read, "To the brave British commandos who assaulted the Iranian Embassy in London on 5 May 1980. It just goes to show you can't make chicken salad out of chicken shit."

The assault on the Iranian Embassy was a lift for the moral of the free world. A classic special-forces operation. The foresight of the British Government to finance and support the Pagoda team was exceptional. The strong leadership and determination of Margaret Thatcher's government ensured that the terrorists would never succeed. However, it was the training and

calibre of the men that made it all possible and ultimately saved innocent lives.

Operation Nimrod ended the era of hostage-taking in the UK for the next 20 years, and as the SAS taught their skills elsewhere, they gave the same deterrent to other countries. The combination of best man, best management and adequate financial commitment made them the envy of the world. The SAS maintained their silence for 22 years until, in 2002, the BBC persuaded three of them to reveal the truth about those six days in Louise Norman's documentary *SAS: Iranian Embassy Siege*.

The trauma of the events dramatically affected most of the hostages and negotiators. None of the SAS men, however, were psychologically injured by the events on that day. The surviving team members know that they still hold a special place in British history and are proud that they saved so many lives.

Fowzi Nejad was sentenced to life imprisonment for murder and was released after serving 27 years. He now lives peacefully as a mini-cab driver in south London.

**“OPERATION NIMROD ENDED THE ERA OF HOSTAGE-TAKING IN THE UK FOR THE NEXT 20 YEARS, AND AS THE SAS TAUGHT THEIR SKILLS ELSEWHERE, THEY GAVE THE SAME DETERRENT TO OTHER COUNTRIES”**

*Left: PC Trevor Lock holds a press conference at Scotland Yard after the end of the siege*

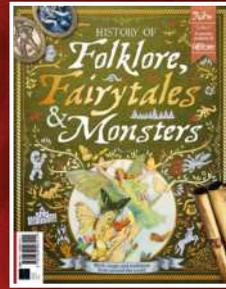
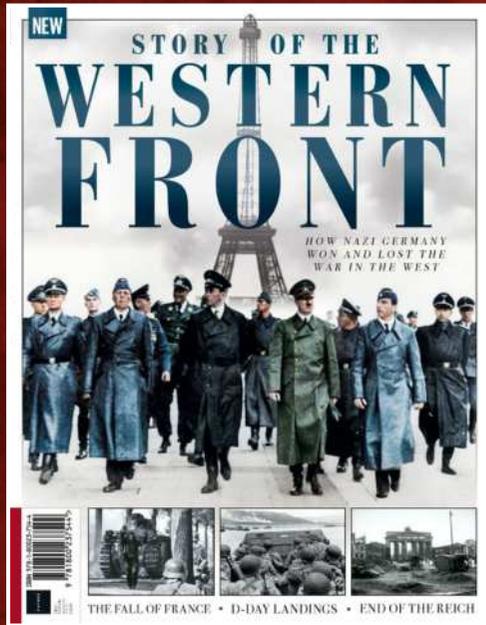


*SAS secure the hostages on the lawn to the rear of the Iranian Embassy. One of the terrorists would be found in their number*



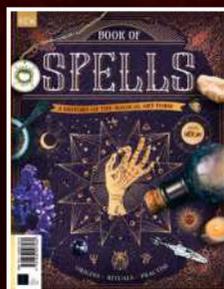
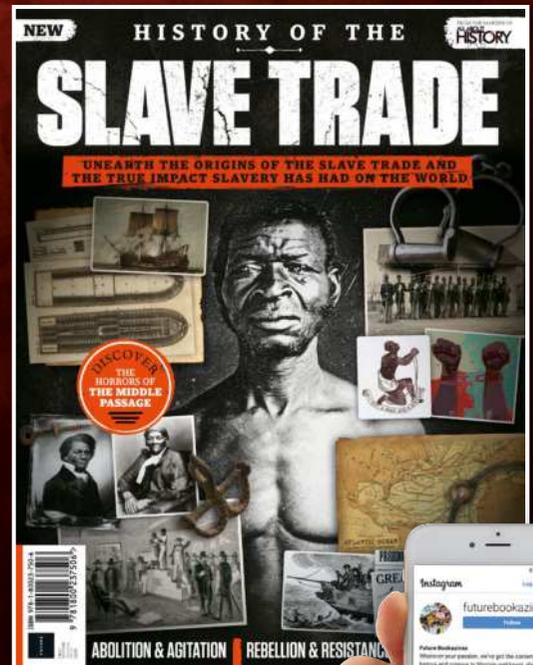
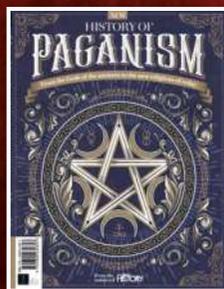
- IN MEMORY OF ASSAULT TEAM MEMBERS SINCE DEPARTED:**
- ✦ Staff Sergeant John McAleese QGM
  - ✦ Sergeant Thomas Palmer QGM
  - ✦ Sergeant David Playford
  - ✦ Sergeant Keith Johnson
  - ✦ Captain Frank Collins
  - ✦ Sgt Dom Pavlov





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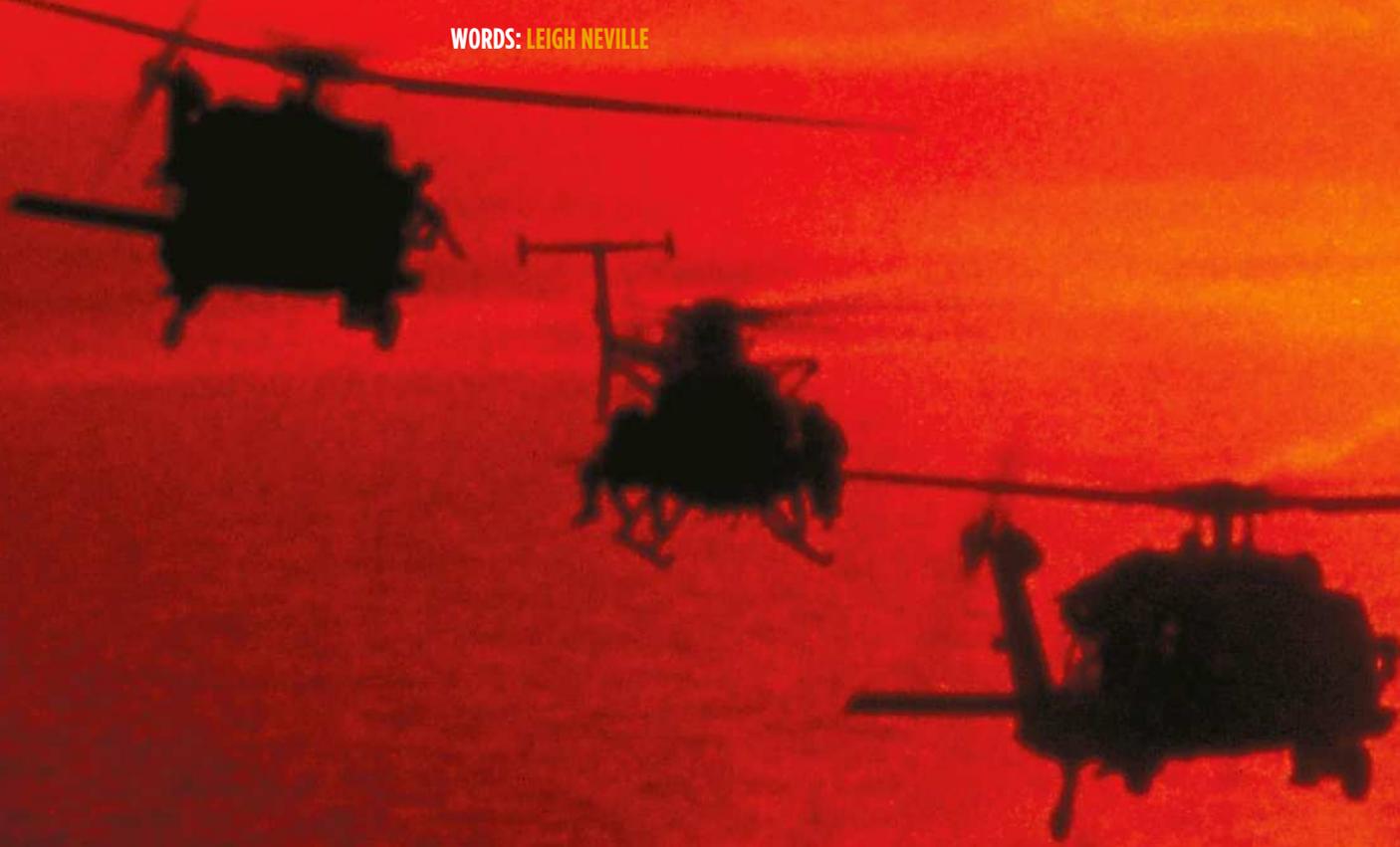
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# DELTA

**25 YEARS AGO, AMERICAN SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES FOUGHT A BRUTAL 17-HOUR BATTLE IN THE STREETS OF MOGADISHU, SOMALIA. HERE, FOUR DELTA FORCE SURVIVORS OF ‘MAALINTII RANGERS’ – THE ‘DAY OF THE RANGERS’ – DISCUSS THEIR EXPERIENCE**

WORDS: **LEIGH NEVILLE**



**3** October 1993 will forever be remembered as the date of the Battle of Mogadishu. Filmed as the Hollywood blockbuster *Black Hawk Down* and based on Mark Bowden's best-selling book of the same title, Operation Gothic Serpent culminated in what has been described as the "longest firefight involving American troops since Vietnam". A small force of US special operations forces, principally drawn from the Rangers and Delta Force, battled several thousand armed Somalis as they attempted to recover the bodies of their fallen comrades from the ruined streets of the city.

For Delta, the Mogadishu mission began months earlier, as they were warned of a possible upcoming operation to capture Somali warlord Mohammed Farah Aideed. He had

become a thorn in the side of the United Nations humanitarian operation in Somalia, ambushing UN peacekeepers and pilfering supplies intended for the civilian victims of the drought and civil war that had ravaged the East African nation since 1991.

Retired Sergeant First Class and now Dr. Norman Hooten (who provided the basis for Eric Bana's character in *Black Hawk Down*) remembers, "That mission grew from one or two teams. It went to Charlie 1 Troop of C-Squadron, and it grew and grew until it was a whole squadron plus."

Along with the C-Squadron operators, Rangers from B-Company of 3rd Battalion, 75th Rangers, would provide the muscle to secure the target area, while Delta conducted the mission of capturing Aideed. They would be flown into

**“OPERATION GOTHIC SERPENT CULMINATED IN WHAT HAS BEEN DESCRIBED AS THE ‘LONGEST FIREFIGHT INVOLVING AMERICAN TROOPS SINCE VIETNAM’”**

# AT MOG



*Ridley Scott's film Black Hawk Down brought the Battle of Mogadishu to life on screen, but in his book, Leigh Neville reveals the real story of the events in Somalia, in the words of the men who served*

*Norm Hooten (far right) with the members of F-Team and their assigned Little Bird, 'Star 44'*



*Image: Leigh Neville*

*The burning remains of a Task Force Ranger cargo Humvee, disabled and abandoned near the target building*



*Michael Moser (second from right) and B-Team with Little Bird 'Star 41', which inserted them on 3 October*



*Image: Leigh Neville*

## THE COLD WAR AND BEYOND

action by the 160th 'Night stalkers' in heavily modified Black Hawks and Little Birds. Together they would be known as Task Force Ranger.

The early missions were aimed at capturing Aideed himself. Retired Delta Staff Sergeant Michael Moser explains that Task Force Ranger had two principal templates to capture Aideed: "These two templates were vehicular convoy intercept and building assault. The intelligence apparatus that would trigger a stand up of the task force would include some information as to whether our HVTs [high-value targets] were likely to be in transit [vehicle intercept] or static [building assault]."

After intelligence showed that Aideed had gone into hiding, Task Force Ranger switched to a new target set – his Habr Gidr aides and lieutenants, in the hope of disrupting Aideed's organisation and potentially leading them to the man himself. On the morning of 3 October, the task force received actionable intelligence that Abdi Hassan Awale and Omar Salad Elmi, two top advisers to Aideed, were meeting that day near the Olympic Hotel in downtown Mogadishu.

Captain Scott Miller, Delta's ground force commander that day (later Lieutenant General Miller in command of US forces in Afghanistan) noted, "3 October was a Sunday, which was traditionally a down day for the task force. The idea was a quick in, secure the target, then quick out."

The plan was straightforward. The 160th would land Delta and the Rangers at the target site. Delta would conduct the capture while the Rangers manned blocking positions on surrounding streets. A Ranger ground convoy in trucks and Humvees would drive to the target site and evacuate the combined Delta and Ranger force along with their prisoners. Time on the ground was to be no longer than 30 minutes to negate any organised resistance by the Somalis.

At 3.42 p.m. that Sunday afternoon, the first Little Bird touched down, depositing its Delta team into the street outside the target building. The tremendous amount of dust kicked up by the helicopters reduced visibility to a bare minimum. Hooten recalls, "I remember the dust that had been kicked up from the lead birds going in was so bad that we couldn't even see the ground. I thought we were roping, so I threw the rope and stepped off and I was on the ground. It was a two-foot (0.6-metre) fast-rope!"

Unusually, Hooten could hear gunfire as he and his team raced towards their objective: "As the bird lifted off you could already hear small-arms fire. On the other missions the fire didn't start until the exfil, and it was unusual that you would receive any fire early on. We were already exchanging fire before we got into the house."

Retired Delta Sergeant First Class Paul Leonard's C-Team were the first into the target building: "C-Team entered the building first. The first room to the right, which only had a curtain for a door cover, and [fellow operator Sergeant First Class] Gary Keeney and I cleared the room and found the guy we were looking for that day, probably Salad. I threw him to the floor in the main room."

Once the prisoners were secured, Delta gave the all clear and the Ranger ground convoy moved forward. As Delta loaded the prisoners onto the trucks, the amount of fire was



**"I REMEMBER THE DUST THAT HAD BEEN KICKED UP FROM THE LEAD BIRDS GOING IN WAS SO BAD THAT WE COULDN'T EVEN SEE THE GROUND. I THOUGHT WE WERE ROPING, SO I THREW THE ROPE AND STEPPED OFF AND I WAS ON THE GROUND. IT WAS A TWO-FOOT FAST-ROPE!"**



*A Somali militiaman passes the burnt-out hulk of a Malaysian Condor APC, struck by an RPG while evacuating Task Force Ranger*





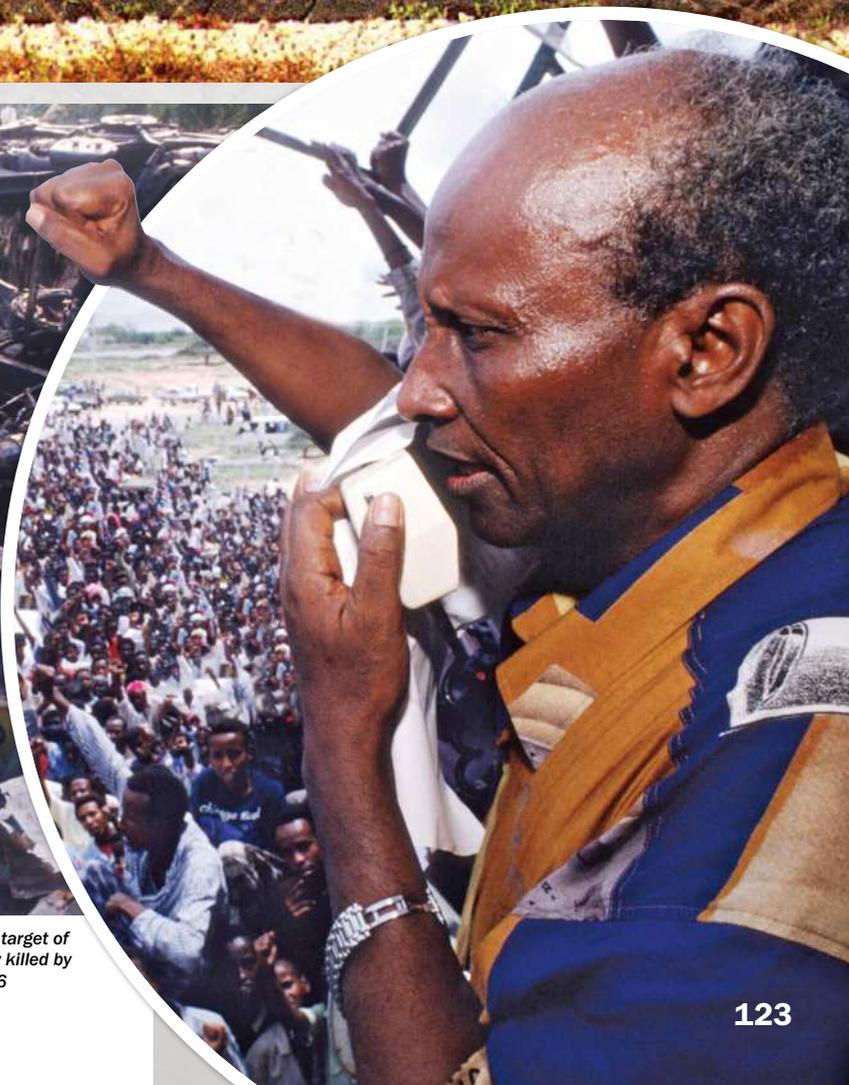
A US soldier in the skies above Mogadishu just days after the disastrous Battle of Mogadishu



Black Hawk pilot Mike Durant, the sole survivor of Super 64, after his release from captivity



Above: The wreckage of Super 64 and the site of the last stand of Delta snipers Shughart and Gordon



Right: Mohammed Farah Aideed, the target of Task Force Ranger. He was eventually killed by one of his former compatriots in 1996

increasing. “We were taking a lot of fire already. Bullets were coming in the window. When we were going back down the stairs I said, ‘This is going to be a nightmare as people are shooting at us already,’” recalls Leonard.

The main convoy was preparing to depart when one of the orbiting helicopters, a Black Hawk with the radio call sign ‘Super 61’, was shot down over the city. Hooten says, “I was on the east side of the building and saw it start to spin, so I didn’t see the impact of the RPG, I saw the aircraft lose control and crash. We could not see the aircraft once it crashed because of all the rooftops. It was a little further away than we thought.”

Immediately, Hooten, Moser and the majority of the Delta element set off on foot towards the crash site. Leonard and Keeney were assigned to guard the prisoners on the ground convoy. At the crash site, Sergeant First Class Jim Smith, the Delta sniper team leader and one of four Delta snipers who had been on board the stricken helicopter, came to: “My main concern was that we were immediately receiving enemy fire. [Staff Sergeant] Dan [Busch] left the wreckage almost immediately and I wanted to get out of the wreckage to assist him with

protecting our mates still in the wreckage. I shot initially the two that Dan had engaged and then another four.” Moments later he himself was hit: “An assailant came from the front of the helicopter and fired an extended burst from an AK on full auto and hit me with one shot. I received only one gunshot wound to the left shoulder. I then shot him.”

As Smith and the other snipers held off the Somalis racing to the downed helicopter, Hooten and Moser fought their way towards the crash site. At one point they went a block too far, and as they corrected, “That’s when [Sergeant First Class] Earl [Fillmore] got hit, and that one burst of fire that hit Earl Fillmore actually hit Mike Moser in the arm as well. When Earl got hit we all returned fire

immediately, and as we were returning fire Mike got hit through his right forearm.” The Delta and Ranger element were forced into strongpoint buildings to treat their wounded.

At the crash site, a Little Bird had courageously landed near the downed helicopter, and Smith carried the grievously wounded Busch towards it: “As the Little Bird landed, I ran out and got Dan and dragged him to the bird. Initially I dragged him two-handed, with me travelling backwards. But I was receiving fire so I had to shoot an assailant down the street, and then I dragged him with one hand and shot my rifle with the other hand.” Smith and Busch were loaded into the Little Bird and a frantic dash was made to save Busch’s life, but he sadly died soon after at the field hospital.

As the Little Bird lifted off from the crash site, the combat search-and-rescue (CSAR) helicopter arrived overhead, and its mixed Delta, Ranger and US Air Force team fast-roped to the ground as the first Ranger squad, on foot

**“I HAD TO SHOOT AN ASSAILANT DOWN THE STREET, AND THEN I DRAGGED DAN WITH ONE HAND AND SHOT MY RIFLE WITH THE OTHER HAND”**

*C-Squadron, Delta Force, with attached SEAL and US Air Force Special Tactics operators outside their base at Mogadishu Airport*



# THE 1ST SPECIAL FORCES OPERATIONAL DETACHMENT DELTA

DELTA FORCE WAS FOUNDED IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE 1972 MUNICH MASSACRE AS AMERICA'S PRIMARY HOSTAGE-RESCUE AND COUNTER-TERRORIST FORCE

Delta Force's first mission, the 1980 'Operation Eagle Claw' to rescue the hostages being held in Tehran, ended in disaster when two aircraft collided at Desert One base. Missions in Grenada and Panama followed, before Delta joined the 'Scud Hunt' in 1991 in the Iraqi desert, tracking down and then destroying mobile ballistic missile launchers.

In 1993, Delta deployed as part of Task Force Ranger and participated in the infamous Battle of Mogadishu. At the same time, Delta operators were assisting Colombian forces in the hunt for Pablo Escobar. The late 1990s saw the unit operating in the Balkans, targeting war criminals for capture. Delta operators were among the first into Afghanistan after 9/11

**"DELTA WERE GIVEN RESPONSIBILITY FOR ELIMINATING THE LEADERS AND BOMB-MAKERS OF AL-QAEDA IN IRAQ"**

and came frustratingly close to capturing or killing Osama bin Laden at Tora Bora.

As the insurgency boiled to the surface following the US-led invasion of Iraq, Delta was given responsibility for eliminating the leaders and bomb-makers of the Al-Qaeda terrorist network in Iraq and later conducted

kill or capture missions in eastern Afghanistan throughout the war.

Today, the unit operates globally but has most recently been seen in action in Syria, where it was involved in defending a US patrol base attacked by jihadists and Russian mercenaries in February 2018.

*Men of Delta Force fast-roped out of a Black Hawk in Syria, May 2015*



from the target building, rounded the corner and began to establish defensive positions around Super 61.

Moments later, disaster struck once more, as Moser describes: "I heard something odd and looked skyward to see a Black Hawk fly over us at approximately 75-100 feet (23-30 metres) above ground level. The tail rotor had been damaged and the fin was dangling. The bird remained airborne and continued in the direction of the airport beyond my sight."

Another Black Hawk, with the callsign Super 64, had been hit by an RPG, and it crashed southwest of the target building. With the CSAR team already committed and Somalis surrounding the second crash site, a pair of Delta snipers overhead in another Black Hawk – Master Sergeant Gary Gordon and Sergeant First Class Randall Shughart – volunteered to be inserted. They bravely held off the Somalis for some 20 minutes, until Gordon was killed.

Hooten recalls the disaster: "When I was going towards the first crash site, I got this phantom call from Randy Shughart, and he was like, 'Where you guys at?' and I said, 'We're on our way to the crash site.' [Shughart said] 'How long you going to be before you get here?' I said, 'Hopefully five minutes.' I didn't know about the other crash site, we didn't know that another bird had gone down." Moments later, Shughart was killed and the Somalis swarmed the helicopter, capturing a pilot, Chief Warrant Officer 3 Mike Durant, and mutilating the bodies of the aircrew and its Delta defenders.



*160th Special Operations Aviation Squadron Black Hawk Super 65, piloted by CWO Gerry Izzo, on an earlier mission over Mogadishu*

The Super 61 crash site was finally secured as the Sun went down but continued to be under attack all night as the task force worked to free the body of Chief Warrant Officer Class 3 Cliff Wolcott, trapped in the wreckage. "We got what we could of the body out and at that point the Sun was coming up. I remember being in the aircraft and seeing the sky starting to turn – it added to the sense of urgency," recalls Hooten.

With Wolcott's remains recovered, the task force finally departed in a joint US and UN convoy including armoured vehicles. As the

vehicles were fully loaded, some men were forced to endure the 'Mogadishu Mile', running out of the city until they were eventually picked up by Ranger Humvees.

"I can distinctly remember being in a gunfight and then being in a friendly neighbourhood where everyone was cheering for us. It was like crossing a line – from running down the street shooting at every intersection and then linking up with 10th Mountain and heading into an area where all the Somalis are on the side of the road cheering – it was just surreal" remembers Hooten.

Task Force Ranger had suffered 16 killed – five from Delta, five from the 160th SOAR, and six from the Rangers – and an incredible 83 wounded. A sixth Delta operator would be tragically killed days later by a mortar strike at their airfield base. Their names and the memory of their courage live on.

### **"THE TWO SNIPERS BRAVELY HELD OFF THE SOMALIS FOR SOME 20 MINUTES UNTIL GORDON WAS SHOT AND KILLED"**



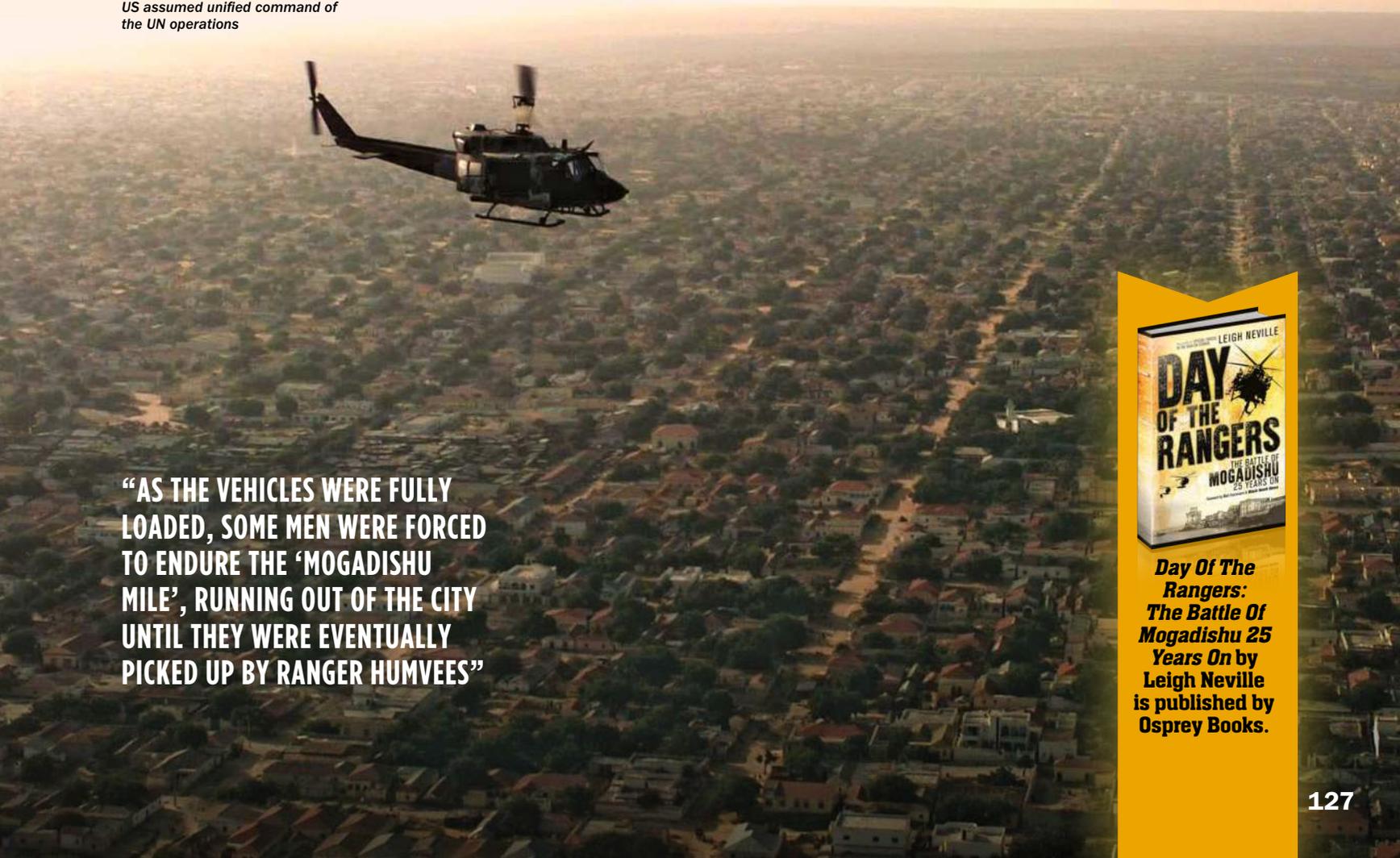
*B-Company Rangers depart Mogadishu after the 3 October mission. They were briefly replaced by A-Company, but no further missions were launched*

*Images: Alamy, Getty, Paul Leonard, Michael Moser, Leigh Neville*

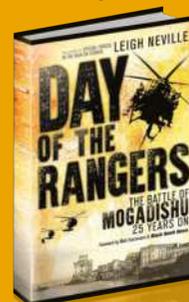


President Bill Clinton presents Master Sergeant Gary Gordon's Medal of Honor to his widow Carmen

A US helicopter flies over Mogadishu during Operation Restore Hope in 1992, when the US assumed unified command of the UN operations



**“AS THE VEHICLES WERE FULLY LOADED, SOME MEN WERE FORCED TO ENDURE THE ‘MOGADISHU MILE’, RUNNING OUT OF THE CITY UNTIL THEY WERE EVENTUALLY PICKED UP BY RANGER HUMVEES”**



**Day Of The Rangers: The Battle Of Mogadishu 25 Years On** by Leigh Neville is published by Osprey Books.

# SPECIAL FORCES OF THE WORLD

YOUR GUIDE TO THE GLOBE'S GREATEST COMMANDO UNITS

**JTF2**  
 Founded: 1993  
 Speciality: Counter-terrorism  
 Location: Canada

**DANISH FROGSMAN CORPS**  
 Founded: 1957  
 Speciality: Diving  
 Location: Denmark

**SPECIAL FORCES GROUP**  
 Founded: 2003  
 Speciality: Paracommando  
 Location: Belgium

**MJK**  
 Founded: 1953  
 Speciality: Amphibious  
 Location: Norway



**SAS**  
 Founded: 1945  
 Speciality: Airborne  
 Location: United Kingdom

**UNITED STATES ARMY SPECIAL FORCES**

Founded: 1952  
 Speciality: Unconventional warfare  
 Location: United States

**SRR**  
 Founded: 2005  
 Speciality: Surveillance and reconnaissance  
 Location: United Kingdom



**COMMANDOS MARINE**  
 Founded: 1947  
 Speciality: Amphibious  
 Location: France

**KAMPFSCHWIMME**

Founded: 1958  
 Speciality: Amphibious  
 Location: Germany

**SHAYETET 13**  
 Founded: 1948  
 Speciality: Counter-terrorism, maritime  
 Location: Israel

**SOUTH AFRICAN SPECIAL FORCES BRIGADE**

Founded: 1972  
 Speciality: Reconnaissance, counter-terrorism  
 Location: South Africa



**PARA-SAR**  
 Founded: 1963  
 Speciality: Parachute search and rescue  
 Location: Brazil

**1 OPERATION CHAVÍN DE HUÁNTAR**

LIMA 22 APRIL 1997

14 members of the MRTA, a South American revolutionary movement, have taken hundreds of diplomats hostage at the Japanese embassy for 126 days. 142 Peruvian commandos storm the embassy and rescue all but one hostage.



**2 OPERATION ENTEBBE**

UGANDA 4 JULY 1976

A week ago an Air France plane was hijacked by the terrorist Palestinian group PFLP-EO. Idi Amin has welcomed the hijackers to Uganda. 100 Israeli commandos travel by night and rescue 102 of the 106 hostages in 90 minutes.

**4 OPERATION FRANKTON**

**FRANCE 7-10 DECEMBER 1942**

The Bay of Biscay port of Bordeaux is a vital destination for goods that support the German war effort. 13 Royal Marines Commandos of the RMBPD in six canoes attack docked ships with mines, sinking one and causing mass disruption.

**5 THE GRAN SASSO RAID**

**ITALY 12 SEPTEMBER 1943**

Italian dictator Benito Mussolini is imprisoned high in the Apennine Mountains after the king, Viktor Emmanuel III, had him arrested. German paratroopers ambush the dictator's captors and Mussolini is handed over without a single shot being fired.

*Italian fascist leader Benito Mussolini is led to freedom by German paratroopers and Waffen SS commandos*



**REPUBLIC OF KOREA NAVAL SPECIAL WARFARE FLOTILLA**

Founded: 1955  
Speciality: Amphibious  
Location: South Korea

**RUSSIAN MARINE COMMANDO**

Founded: 1941  
Speciality: Amphibious  
Location: Russia

**MARCOS**

Founded: 1987  
Speciality: Amphibious warfare, counter-terrorism  
Location: India

**PEOPLE'S LIBERATION ARMY SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES**

Founded: 1988  
Speciality: Rapid-reaction combat  
Location: China

**3 ZEEBRUGGE RAID**

**BELGIUM 23 APRIL 1918**

The Belgium port of Bruges-Zeebrugge is being used as a U-boat port by German forces. A small force of British Royal Marines manage to block the entrance for a few days at the cost of 227 men.

**SASR**

Founded: 1957  
Speciality: Airborne  
Location: Australia

**6 OPERATION NIMROD**

**LONDON 30 APRIL - 5 MAY 1980**

Six armed members of the Iranian Arab group DRFLA have taken 26 people hostage in London's Iranian embassy. SAS soldiers abseil from the roof into the building and in a short 17 minutes they have rescued all but one hostage and killed five of the terrorists.

**7 OPERATION BARRAS**

**SIERRA LEONE 10 SEPTEMBER 2000**

11 British service men have been taken hostage by the armed Sierra rebels West Side Boys. A combined force of 75 SAS and SBS infiltrate the enemy base and rescue the soldiers, as well as 21 civilians.

*US President Barack Obama (second from left) watches a live feed of Operation Neptune Spear, during which Osama Bin Laden is killed*



**8 OPERATION NEPTUNE SPEAR**

**PAKISTAN 2 MAY 2011**

US intelligence have identified the location of Al-Qaeda leader Osama Bin Laden. 79 commandos of the US Navy SEALs infiltrate the compound and locate Bin Laden. He resists arrest and is shot dead.

**NZSAS**

Founded: 1955  
Speciality: Airborne  
Location: New Zealand



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## HISTORY OF WAR

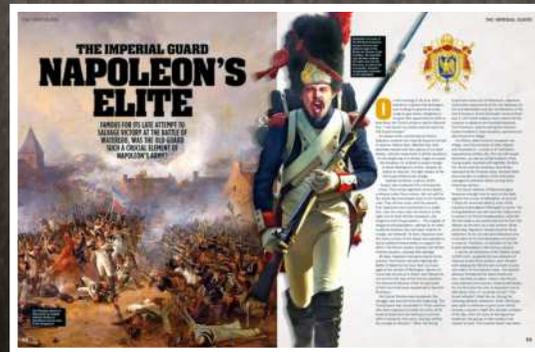
# ELITE FORCES

• THE CRACK TROOPS WHO FOUGHT TO DEFINE HISTORY'S GREATEST WARS •



### THE FIRST ELITES

From Greek hoplites to Aztec eagle warriors, meet the original special forces



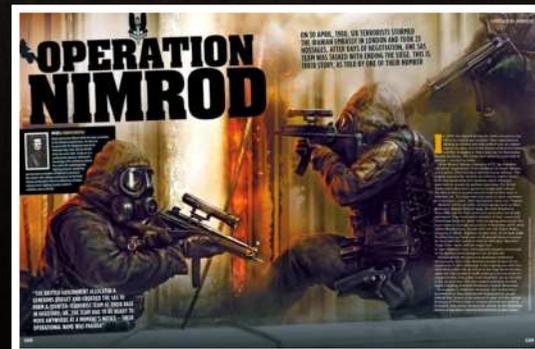
### IMPERIAL GUARD

Napoleon's personal bodyguard earned their general some famous victories



### UNDERCOVER IN VIETNAM

Inside the unit so secret many of their missions are only now being revealed



### HOSTAGE SITUATION

A former member of the SAS relives the Iranian Embassy Siege