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IN THIS ISSUE

Salerno—
A Defender's View

By Winfried Heinemann

6

Arabic Sands

By Jimmy J. Jones

20

The U.S. Army
and Contemporary
Military History

By Gregory Fontenot

26

ARMYHISTORY

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Cover Photo Credit:

U.S. Air Force photo by S. Sgt. Samuel Bendet

Table of Contents Photos

Top: Ships docked at Palermo, Sicily, prepare to load troops and equipment of the 45th Infantry Division to reinforce the Allied forces in the Salerno beachhead, 14 September 1943

Middle: A party that includes senior U.S. Army officers prepares to depart aboard a Black Hawk helicopter in Afghanistan, 2005.

Bottom: Maj. Gen. J. L. T. Hawkesworth, commander of the British 46th Division, on a beach south of Salerno, 9 September 1943

EDITOR'S JOURNAL

This issue of *Army History* opens with an article by Col. Winfried Heinemann, director of research at the German Armed Forces' Military History Institute in Potsdam, Germany, that examines the German response to the landing made by British and U.S. forces at Salerno Bay in southern Italy in September 1943. The German diaries and unit records that underlie Heinemann's presentation view the hard-fought battle that followed this amphibious operation from a very different perspective than do American accounts. Heinemann's sources focus primarily on attacks on the northern portions of the beachfront. His article provides a careful examination of German strengths and vulnerabilities in this encounter.

The issue then offers the second-prize winning essay in the 2007 James Lawton Collins Jr. Special Topics Writing Competition. In this essay, then-Chief Warrant Officer Jimmy J. Jones described a dangerous encounter with treacherous weather experienced by the crews of two Black Hawk helicopters flying in tandem in northern Iraq in 2005. The essay illustrates how the emergency flight skills of a pair of Army pilots overcame a combination of enemy threats and the challenges imposed by nature.

A response to a review essay by Dr. Richard Stewart, now the Center of Military History's chief historian, that appeared in the Winter 2006 issue of *Army History* forms the third major element of this issue. Retired Col. Gregory Fontenot, coauthor of *On Point: The United States Army in Operation Iraqi Freedom*, one of the books Stewart reviewed, takes issue with some views Stewart expressed on what is required to produce quality works of military history and challenges the Center of Military History to produce historical accounts of recent military operations promptly. I hope to present to the military history community a series of thought-provoking commentaries on the study and use of military history that will challenge our thinking and, ideally, present new ways to approach old problems.

Charles Hendricks
Managing Editor



THE CHIEF'S CORNER

DR. JEFFREY J. CLARKE

During the last three months, our collective efforts to ensure historical coverage of the Army's two major fronts in the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT), Iraq and Afghanistan, have developed renewed momentum. The number of military history teams deployed to these countries has now risen to six—five Army military history detachments and one Navy team. This represents the largest number of such units in the field since 2003. The deployment of a military history detachment to Afghanistan in September 2007, the first to operate in that country since 2005, is especially gratifying, as is the continued deployment of historians from the Center of Military History to some of the major Army headquarters in Iraq and Kuwait. All of these personnel are heavily involved in collecting electronic records and interviewing key participants, tasks that continue to be extremely critical due to the absence of any effective records management system in the service. In this effort, our hats go off to U.S. Marine Corps Reserve Col. Mike Visconage, who has so ably guided our field efforts in Iraq as the Multinational Corps and Force historian, and to his successor, Army Lt. Col. Shane Story, who recently deployed from the Center. We are also proud of the service of Col. Gary Bowman, a Reservist with the Center who is now undertaking historical functions for the Third Army in Kuwait.

Somewhat similar collection teams have begun dispersing from the Center throughout the United States, targeting those active and reserve component units that have served abroad and returned to their home stations. The work of these teams complements the more focused collection efforts of Army historians at Fort Leavenworth, Carlisle, Fort McNair, and elsewhere who are pursuing research for specific GWOT historical projects, and of those unit historians and historically minded soldiers of all ranks who have preserved their records for posterity. The job is immense and its actual dimension is difficult to discern right now. However, our laborious and ongoing analysis of the many gigabytes of electronic records that have made their way to the Center—only one of

many collection hubs—suggests that we have made a significant start.

The number of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM and Operation ENDURING FREEDOM (Afghanistan) historical works that have been published or are currently under way throughout the Army Historical Program is also encouraging. While most are no more than rough first cuts at historical description and analysis, “place holders” until more definitive accounts are possible, each tends to generate its own records collection and interview effort, further enriching our general source base. In this area, I am confident that the Combat Studies Institute's “On Point II,” covering the post-conventional conflict in Iraq, will be available later this year, along with several Center anthologies highlighting small-unit actions and the oral testimonies of key commanders. As always, the process takes time and requires much hard work at many different levels. It also tends to be iterative, resembling a series of building blocks: collecting initially the raw documents, the autobiographical oral testimonies, and the first after-action reports, followed by the initial command histories and chronologies, and so forth. Yet already pundits are speculating, for example, on the success or failure of “the surge,” the merits of the various strategic plans developed and decisions made in both countries, and the very nature of the two conflicts, including their relationship to larger GWOT concerns, all with limited factual support. In the end, however, it will be the foundation that we are laying now, in terms of historical documentation and historical expertise, that will enable us and others to challenge the misconceptions currently being generated and to produce the balanced, comprehensive, and insightful products demanded by both the Army and our professional peers.





Spring 2008



Features



- 26 **Commentary**
- 32 **Book Reviews**
- 38 **Chief Historian's Footnote**

Articles

6

SALERNO— A DEFENDER'S VIEW

By WINFRIED HEINEMANN

A German perspective on the battle that followed the landing of British and U.S. troops on the beaches of Salerno Bay in September 1943.



20

ARABIC SANDS

By JIMMY J. JONES

A U.S. Army helicopter pilot relates how an Iraqi dust storm challenged the crews of two Black Hawks on an otherwise routine 2005 evening.



NEWSNOTE

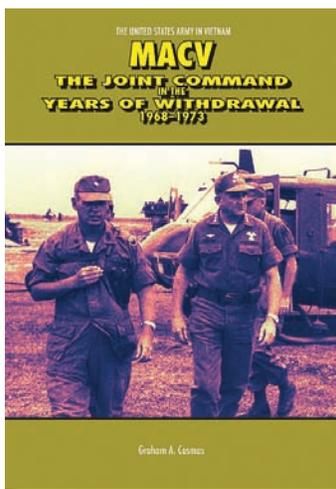
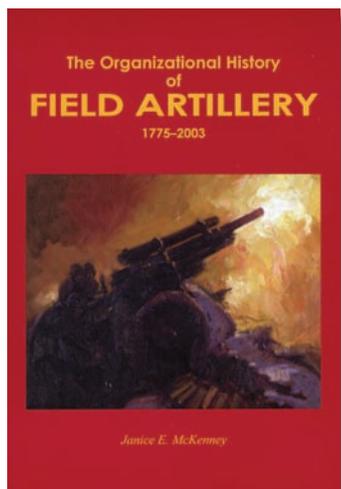
CENTER OF MILITARY HISTORY ISSUES NEW BOOKS

The Center of Military History has published a history of field artillery in the U.S. Army and an account of top-level military decision making during the last five years of active U.S. military action in Vietnam. *The Organizational History of Field Artillery, 1775–2003*, by Janice E. McKenney traces the evolution of field artillery guns and unit organization from the creation of the Continental Army to the beginning of the twenty-first century. This 394-page book provides detailed information about the artillery weapons used by the Army on the battlefield or designed for such use, as well as the other equipment associated with those weapons, and it carefully describes the troop units that handled them and the doctrine governing their use. The author served as chief of the Center's Organizational History Branch before her retirement in 1999, and she was the compiler of the books *Air Defense Artillery* (CMH, 1984) and *Field Artillery* (CMH, 1985) in the Center's Army Lineage Series. The Center issued *The Organizational History of Field Artillery* in a cloth cover as CMH Pub 60–16 and in paperback as CMH Pub 60–16–1.

MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Withdrawal, 1968–1973, by Graham A. Cosmas complements the same author's book *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation, 1962–1967* (CMH, 2006). The new book examines the execution of U.S. military strategy in Southeast Asia by the U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam, and the formulation of that strategy by that command together with successive chairmen of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, secretaries of defense, and Presidents Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon. This examination spans a period that begins in the days immediately preceding the Communists' first Tet offensive and ends with the collapse of the Republic of Vietnam. Cosmas also provides an evaluation of why American efforts achieved no more than a partial, temporary success in South Vietnam. The author has been deputy director of the Joint History Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff since 2001. He was a historian at the Army Center of Military History, where he began work on his MACV books, from 1979 to 2001. Cosmas is also the author of *An Army for Empire: The*

U.S. Army in the Spanish-American War (Columbia, Mo., 1971). *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Withdrawal*, has been issued in a cloth cover as CMH Pub 91–7 and in paperback as CMH Pub 91–7–1.

Army publication account holders may obtain these newly published books from the Directorate of Logistics–Washington, Media Distribution Division, ATTN: JDHQSVPAS, 1655 Woodson Road, St. Louis, Missouri 63114-6128. Account holders may also place their orders at <http://www.apd.army.mil>. The Government Printing Office is offering *The Organizational History of Field Artillery* in a cloth cover for \$44 and in paperback for \$42. It is selling *MACV: The Joint Command in the Years of Withdrawal* for \$46 in cloth and \$43 in paperback. The Government Printing Office has also begun to sell the booklet *Transforming an Army at War: Designing the Modular Force, 1991–2005*, for \$8.50. Its publication was announced in the Winter 2008 issue of *Army History*. Individuals may order publications from the Government Printing Office online at <http://bookstore.gpo.gov>.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Col. Winfried Heinemann is director of research at the German Armed Forces' Military History Institute in Potsdam. He holds a doctorate in history from Ruhr-Universität Bochum. His main fields of research include the German military resistance against Hitler, the history of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and the military history of the German Democratic Republic. He is the author of *Vom Zusammenwachsen des Bündnisses: Die Funktionsweise der NATO in Ausgewählten Krisenfällen, 1951–1956* (Munich, 1998).

The article "Salerno— A Defender's View" is based on research conducted for a staff ride to the Salerno area with officers of Headquarters, Naval Striking and Support Forces, NATO, in Naples, Italy.

WHY WAS IT THAT AT SALERNO, UNLIKE ANY OTHER AMPHIBIOUS OPERATION, THE GERMANS SEEMED TO STAND A REALISTIC CHANCE OF THROWING THE ALLIES BACK INTO THE SEA, AND WHY DID THEY NOT SUCCEED?



An ancient colonial Greek temple in Paestum, Italy, then twenty-six centuries old, being used as a headquarters by the 480th Port Battalion

SALERNO

A Defender's View



By Winfried Heinemann



INTRODUCTION

Salerno 1943—Operation AVALANCHE, as the Allies termed it—has been the subject of a number of military history analyses. American and British authors have given us quite an insight into the peculiarities of an operation that is counted among the major amphibious landings in World War II and is certainly one that seemed to be on the brink of disaster for quite a few days.¹

What has been lost from view in this consideration is what it felt like to be at the receiving end of such a major amphibious onslaught. What were the major problems the German defenders had to face? Why was it that in this—unlike any other similar operation—the Germans seemed to stand a realistic chance of throwing the Allies back into the sea, and why did they not succeed? In fact, there has not been any major analysis of this operation from the German point of view; this is surprising, since most of the documentary evidence is readily

available in the German military archives.² This article will attempt to provide such an analysis.³ As it is based on German sources, it will also conflict with the received, and published, Anglo-American version of events. This should not surprise the reader; the fog of war extends down to war diarists and command historians, and any account based on the documentary evidence of one side will necessarily tend to be one-sided.

THE STRATEGIC SITUATION

The year 1943 marked the turning point of World War II—the defeat and surrender of the German garrison in Stalingrad, the culmination and end of the Battle of the Atlantic, the German defeat in the Battle of Kursk, and the first 1,000-bomber attacks on the Reich. And 1943 saw the German surrender of Tunis, its loss of all of North Africa, and the emerging threat to Europe's soft underbelly, Italy. In July 1943 the

Allies landed in Sicily, beginning a long and arduous campaign to wrest control of Italy from the Germans and from Mussolini's fascist regime.

In fact, operations in the summer of 1943 interacted on a strategic level. During the Battle of Kursk, for example, Hitler decided to move an entire SS panzer corps to Italy from Russia, and this move frustrated the German offensive operations on the Eastern Front. The "Führer" soon after decided to leave most of the corps' divisions in Russia after all, but the damage had been done.⁴ Altogether, one might well argue that during the course of 1943 the war had definitely been lost for Germany; but in the summer of 1943, many—indeed, most—Germans did not realize that and kept on fighting fanatically.

OPERATIONAL SITUATION

During the spring of 1943, Italy seemed the place to be if one wanted a good war. German divisions were sent there to recover or reconstitute

after heavy fighting, and the best place of all seemed to be southern Italy. For example, the *16th Panzer Division* had been annihilated at Stalingrad, but a new *16th Panzer Division* was formed from motley reserves and a few survivors of the old *16th*. Initially, the *16th Panzer Division* had been stationed in France, but it had then moved to Italy and the Adriatic coast. Its commander was initially a colonel, but Rudolf Sieckenius was soon promoted to generalmajor. (This was the Germans' one-star rank, as the German Army did not have brigadier generals.)

Another unit in Italy was the *Panzerdivision Hermann Göring*—peculiar in that it was not an army, but an air force, formation. Hitler and the Nazis had always preferred the *Luftwaffe* over the Army. To them, it signified technological progress, speed, and modernity—in contrast to the traditional Army, whose monocled, Prussian-style general staff officers the Nazis had always mistrusted. As aircraft losses grew, ground crews became redundant and some were formed into infantry units, eventually divisions, giving the *Luftwaffe* a “third army,” after the regular army and the *Waffen-SS*. Reichsmarschall Hermann Göring had claimed he could not expect his young *Luftwaffe* officers, imbued with National Socialist spirit, to serve under reactionary Army officers.⁵

Originally a regiment-sized force composed of former mobile police units, the *Hermann Göring* had grown to be a division, had served in North Africa, and with most of its elements had gone into captivity there. The new *Hermann Göring Panzer Division* was hastily reconstituted in Sicily, and as Göring's personal toy it was equipped with some of the latest in German tank technology, Mark IV tanks fitted with long 75-mm.

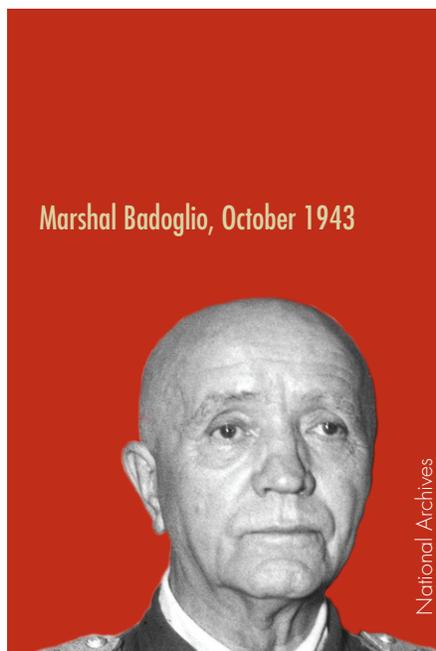
guns. The reconstituted division had an armored reconnaissance battalion with no more than 20 or 30 tanks as its only tank force, two armored infantry battalions, an engineer battalion, an assault gun company, three artillery battalions, and three air defense battalions.⁶ (Later in the war, the *Hermann Göring Division* would expand again and end up with the unlikely name of a *Fallschirmpanzerkorps* or parachute tank corps.)

Altogether, a motley collection of armored and infantry divisions was stationed in Italy—the country that once was Germany's most faithful ally. By the spring of 1943, however,

this alliance had begun to change. With the collapse of German and Italian resistance in North Africa, Axis troops in Italy had to start facing the prospect of Allied landings there. Sooner or later, war would probably come to Central Europe via the Italian peninsula. German commanders and troops were also aware of a changed mood among Italians. On 25 July 1943 King Victor Emmanuel III, with the support of Italian military leaders, removed from power the Duce of the Fascist party Benito Mussolini and had him arrested. The new Italian government established under Marshal Pietro Badoglio might well proclaim its continuing adherence to the Italo-German axis, but Hitler and most other Germans felt the Italians were planning to betray them and change sides. They developed contingency plans for that eventuality, code-named Operation *AXIS* (*Unternehmen ACHSE*).

Hitler's plan for this contingency was to hold on to northern Italy and stage a fighting withdrawal from the south, using the rugged terrain to retard the Allied advance north for as long as possible. Suggestions to withdraw from Italy altogether were discarded early on. Hitler felt he had to deny the north Italian plains to the Western Allies, as they otherwise would use them as a major air base for attacks against the Reich; giving up this area would also seriously threaten vital communications with German forces in the Balkans and might force their subsequent withdrawal as well, leaving the essential Romanian oil fields to the Soviets.⁷

So, in case of a change in Italian orientation, the idea was to have the Italian troops lay down their arms—voluntarily, if possible; by force, if necessary. Simultaneously, German troops in Italy would have to conduct a regular campaign against the Western Allies pushing up from



the south—two conflicting tasks for the motley German units stationed in the peninsula.

COMMAND ARRANGEMENTS

The new danger called for changed command structures designed, however, not to hurt Italian sensitivities. The Germans wanted to make sure that the Italians could not excuse their expected change of policy by pointing to hostile German acts against their Italian “hosts.”

Until the summer, all German formations in Italy had reported more or less directly to the German Supreme Commander South (*Oberbefehlshaber Süd*), making Field Marshal Albert Kesselring the only Luftwaffe officer to command major German Army fighting formations. The German units had not been in Italy to fight, so no operational command structure had been deemed necessary. This respected the sensitivities of the Italian high command, which had emphasized that it, and not the Germans, was in charge of Italian defenses.

Basically, Kesselring’s mission had been one of liaison with the Italian authorities. Along with other tensions, this had led to continuing friction between him and Field Marshal Erwin Rommel. The “Desert Fox,” exasperated with Italian performance in Africa, had clashed sharply with Kesselring, who was far too friendly to the unreliable Axis partners—or so Rommel believed. Kesselring, however, had had to make sure that the Italians did not quit the war prematurely, a mission that had now failed.

Following the Allied landing in Sicily, the Germans reorganized their command structure in Italy. Rommel’s *Army Group B* (*Heeresgruppe B*) was tasked with seizing northern Italy in case Operation AXIS had to be executed, while in the south, an entirely new command authority was created: *Tenth Army*, under three-star General Heinrich von Vietinghoff-Scheel. The *Tenth Army* was to be the command authority at the operational level, coordinating the

operations of two corps commands (the *XIV* and *LXXVI Panzer Corps*). This arrangement would leave the Supreme Commander South free to focus on decisions at the strategic level, notably involving political and military cooperation with the Italians.

The hasty creation of a new command, however, was fraught with problems from the outset. One major deficiency was that the new army lacked its organic signals regiment. This was a major problem for Vietinghoff, a commander who was supposed to coordinate operations over the entire south of Italy. In fact, during the entire battle for Salerno, Vietinghoff found it difficult to communicate with his subordinates as landlines failed due to Allied shelling or bombing, or from Italian sabotage. Radio messages had to be encrypted and broadcast, offering Allied intelligence valuable additional information and resulting in tedious transmission delays.⁸

Another problem was that the *Tenth Army* did not yet have its own quartermaster staff (G-4 in today’s parlance), nor any organic logistics units.

Consequently, the responsibility for keeping units supplied remained, for the time being, with Supreme Commander South in Rome. Kesselring led a joint command, controlling army, navy, and air assets and their respective logistics. What might have been a major advantage, however, ended up as a serious drawback. Failure to synchronize logistical planning with operations led to the loss of critical supplies, particularly fuel reserves, and would repeatedly slow down important operational moves.

Field Marshal Kesselring



General Vietinghoff



Signal Corps

National Archives



Naples

Mount Vesuvius

Nocera

SALERNO

Vietri

Maiori

Amalfi

Sorrento

Battipaglia

Contursi Terme

Eboli

Persano

Sele R

Altavilla

Calore R

Paestum

Agropoli

ITALY

Milan

Genoa

Florence

ROME

Gaeta

CORSICA

SARDINIA

Naples

Salerno

Agropoli

Taranto

Castrovillari

Palermo

Messina

SICILY

WHERE WILL THE ALLIES LAND?

Even with hindsight, the German generals could not understand why the Allies had not immediately seized the Strait of Messina when landing in Sicily—as it was, German troops on the island had managed to escape with almost all their equipment intact. These divisions were to form the backbone of the German defense of southern Italy throughout the autumn of 1943.⁹

It was obvious that after taking Sicily, the Allies would advance and land on the Italian mainland. However, as with all amphibious operations, the initiative regarding time and place would rest with the landing forces, and the joint German-Italian defenders would have to wait first, and then react swiftly once the Allied thrust had been located.

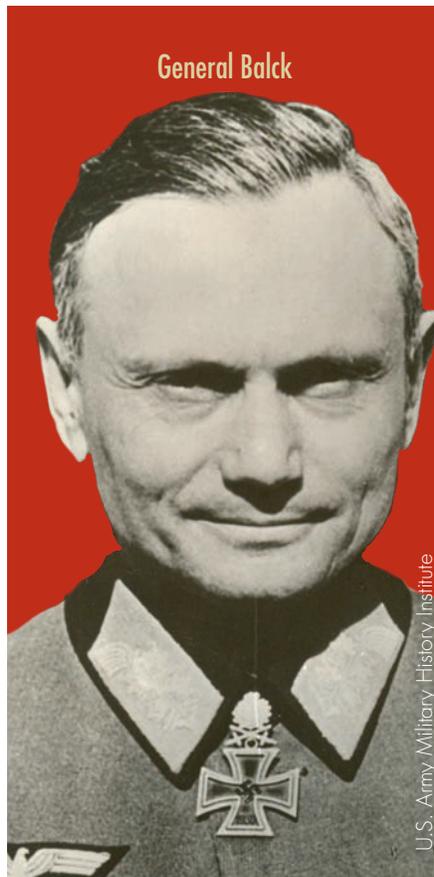
On 3 September, the British Eighth Army landed in southern Italy by crossing the Messina strait. The German *Tenth Army* anticipated, however, that another, mainly American, landing would soon follow. In fact, the British amphibious operation near Messina effectively ruled out the option of a large, combined Allied landing much further north that would attempt to cut off German forces in the south by pushing across the narrow Italian peninsula—a daring move which, until then, the German High Command had believed quite possible. Vietinghoff was now certain that the second landing would occur at some place where an operational connection with the British landing in the south could be quickly established. In other words, the next operation would probably aim at the Gulfs of Salerno, Naples, or Gaeta.¹⁰

As Italy was still nominally an ally, coastal defense was based on the general concept that Italian troops would be stationed along the beaches, with German motorized formations available as mobile reserves. The *16th Panzer Division* had been moved into the region around Eboli, only a dozen kilometers inland from the Gulf of Salerno.¹¹ The *Hermann Göring Panzer Division* had been allotted the defense of the Gulf of Naples. While



Looking west toward the city and harbor of Salerno, November 1943

the division as such was garrisoned around Caserta, north of Naples, radio outposts had been stationed at strategic locations within its area of responsibility to give early warning of an incoming amphibious assault.¹² Both divisions were under the control of the *XIV Panzer Corps*, commanded by Generalleutnant (two-star) Hermann Balck, in lieu of General der Panzertruppen (three-star) Hans Valentin Hube, who was on leave.¹³ The *Tenth Army's* other corps, the



LXXVI Panzer Corps commanded by General der Panzertruppen Traugott Herr, was conducting defensive operations against the British Eighth Army's thrust from the south.

THE ALLIED LANDING AROUND SALERNO AND GERMAN OPERATIONAL DECISIONS, 7–11 SEPTEMBER

On 7 September, German aerial reconnaissance over the Mediterranean reported that Allied convoys had left North African and Sicilian ports on a northerly course. As a consequence, during the night the *XIV Panzer Corps* put all its units on extended alert.¹⁴ More reconnaissance reports arrived on 8 September, creating an overall picture. According to German intelligence, a fleet of some 80 to 100 transports and 90 to 100 landing craft, covered by ten battleships, three aircraft carriers, and several cruisers and destroyers, was heading north from Palermo and could be expected to launch an amphibious landing within the area of the *XIV Panzer Corps* on the following day, 9 September. However, General Balck still could not tell whether the attack would hit the Gulf of Naples covered by the *Hermann Göring Panzer Division* or the *16th Panzer Division's* sector in the Gulf of Salerno. In any case, the *Tenth Army* ordered General Herr's *LXXVI Panzer Corps* to release one of its two divisions, the *29th Panzer Grenadier Division*, and send it north towards Salerno as quickly as possible.¹⁵ While the *XIV Panzer Corps's* two divisions in the area as yet remained immobile, waiting to see which one would be hit first, on an operational level the concentration of German forces to



A British tank advances through Salerno, 10 September 1943

repel the anticipated Allied landing had started nearly two days before the first Allied soldier set foot on the beaches of Salerno.

German minds were also occupied by other momentous developments. On 8 September, Italian and Allied radio stations broadcast the news that Italy had surrendered unconditionally to the Allies. At 2000, Hitler ordered Operation AXIS into effect. German units all over Italy sprang into action, securing strategic locations and disarming Italian troops. Rommel's *Army Group B* started invading Germany's former ally from the north, across the Alps, securing Italy's western coastline first in case the Allies decided to land further north, after all.¹⁶

However, they did not. During the morning of 9 September, three Allied divisions landed in the Salerno area, the British 46th and 56th Divisions, just south of Salerno, and the American 36th Infantry Division to their right, further south.

The Germans had believed the terrain of the Gulf of Salerno to be rather propitious for the defender. In the north, the Amalfi coast rose steeply from the Mediterranean, and only a few roads led through narrow gorges to the crest of the Sorrento Peninsula, from where they dropped down again toward the Gulf of Naples. From Vietri and Salerno itself, a mountain pass leading northwest to Naples carried the major road and only rail link. South of Salerno, a large bay stretched down to the Paestum and Agropoli region. This entire basin, while initially flat and affording good landing beaches, was fronted by a

mountain ridge that offered German artillery ideal observation and firing positions. Any landing force would thus confront well-directed artillery fire until it could reach far enough inland to control the heights.

While the major Allied force did indeed land along the plain south of Salerno, light troops attacked into the mountains west of Salerno. U.S. Rangers first captured the coastal village of Maiori, and British

Commandos took Vietri. Both then quickly ascended the dorsal mountain ridge of the Sorrento Peninsula, wresting control of a section of the ridge from the Germans and seizing the heights overlooking the Naples-Salerno road, along which mechanized reinforcements would have to pass. The Germans had not anticipated any assault on these heights and had left the area virtually undefended. Part of their counterattack would now have to be diverted to regain control of the mountainous Sorrento Peninsula.

General Balck's *XIV Panzer Corps* reacted by ordering its *Hermann Göring Panzer Division* to advance into the area, with its armored reconnaissance battalion sent in advance of the main body to operate under the *16th Panzer Division's* command until the headquarters of the *Hermann Göring Division* reached the area. In particular, the reconnaissance battalion was to stop the Allied advances from Maiori and Vietri. Now, this was no easy task for an armored unit, as the ridge rises steeply on both sides to heights of over 1,000 meters (some 3,300 feet) above sea level, and the roads were narrow, winding, and difficult to negotiate—ideal terrain for Rangers and Commandos, but not for tanks,

Maiori and the mountains of the Sorrento Peninsula, 1944



especially tanks hampered once again by fuel constraints.¹⁷

By about noon, the battalion's advanced elements established contact with the *16th Panzer Division's* organic reconnaissance element, the *16th Reconnaissance Battalion*, north of the ridge at Nocera, about 13 kilometers (8 miles) northwest of Salerno, as the latter battalion had been pushed that far back during the morning. The *Hermann Göring Division's* reconnaissance battalion then tried to dislodge the Rangers from the ridge south of Nocera but throughout the entire day failed to do so. The push along the road toward the town of Salerno ended at Cava de Tirreni, four or five kilometers north of the objective.¹⁸ To reinforce this battalion, the *XIV Panzer Corps* tasked Col. Wilhelm Schmalz, the *Hermann Göring Division's* deputy commander, with forming a regimental-size combat team to assist the *16th Panzer Division*.¹⁹ As this would leave the *Hermann Göring* sector weakened in the face of a possible subsequent Allied landing further north, the corps ordered the *15th Panzer Grenadier Division* to send replacements from the Rome area.²⁰

In the area immediately east of Salerno, the British had run into rather strong German resistance and had not progressed far. Further south, however, the Americans gained more ground. A German counterattack south of the Sele River had to be cancelled and troops diverted into the Eboli region for fear of an American breakthrough there.²¹ This made it all the more urgent for the *29th Panzer*



A U.S. Army tractor burns on the beach near Paestum after being hit by a German artillery shell, 9 September 1943.

Grenadier Division to come from the south and reinforce the *16th Panzer Division's* left wing. Where were its leading elements?

The *29th Panzer Grenadier Division* had by now reached Castrovillari, still in the Calabrian peninsula, and was stuck there for lack of petrol. The inexperienced quartermaster staff had calculated petrol consumption without taking into account the murderously hot climate, the mountainous roads, and the worn-out engines. A German Navy tanker tasked with supplying the division had been scuttled when word went round that supplies were to be destroyed in the face of the

U.S. Army troops wade onto the Salerno beachhead, September 1943.

British advance and that a land-based naval petrol dump had burned its fuel without orders to do so.²² What was more, the lack of reliable communications was beginning to have an effect. News about the division's precarious situation did not reach the *Tenth Army* staff until later in the day, so neither operational planning nor additional supplies could be immediately arranged.²³ Until now, the impact of the lack of military communication lines had been overcome to some extent by the use of civilian Italian telecommunications, but after Rome's decision to quit the war, local authorities cooperated reluctantly, if at all. The *Tenth Army* command might well fume at the delay, but its orders were being transmitted too slowly to have an immediate effect on the battlefield and the German forces in the southern portion of the landing area continued to be too weak to stem the American advance.

German artillery had opened fire on the naval units in the bay, on the landing craft, and on the Army elements on shore. Initially, this barrage had been quite effective, but soon the German gunners began to feel the effect of Allied naval counter-battery fire. This came as a rude surprise because the Germans had not yet learned to appreciate the deadly effectiveness of heavy naval guns. What they had believed to be ideal terrain for their own artillery firing from the heights now turned out to be an almost perfect shooting range for the Allied naval vessels. Any move on the ground, or any fire from German batteries, would invariably





U.S. Navy

provoke an Allied response in the form of heavy shelling.²⁴

German Army commanders were positively unhappy with their air support—not so much that they were not getting enough focused on the Allied forces on the beachhead, but that they would have preferred to have the Luftwaffe attack the Allied naval vessels in the bay so as to silence the naval bombardment.²⁵ On the other hand, Allied air superiority, a major factor in later invasions, did not play a decisive role here. Salerno had been selected as a landing beach in part because it was just within range of Allied fighter planes operating from Sicily.²⁶ However, the long distances involved meant that Allied planes would have little time in theater, and this reduced their effectiveness. To some extent, this problem could be overcome by fighters operating off carrier decks, but they could carry only limited payloads from these waterborne platforms. What most hampered German operations, though, was a lack of airborne reconnaissance and other intelligence assets. General Vietinghoff, in memoirs written in 1947, deplored the fact that for a very long time the German High Command did not notice the large gap north of the Sele River between the British and American troops, which would have been a natural avenue for counterattack. Again, the hasty organization of the German command and the Germans' deficient communications structure took their toll on the quality of leadership the German commanders could exercise.²⁷

In the aftermath of a German missile hit, smoke arises from the USS *Savannah*, which is largely hidden behind a transport ship in this photo, 11 September 1943.

Sailors killed by a German missile attack on the USS *Savannah* lie covered on its deck, 11 September 1943.

During the day, the main body of the *Hermann Göring Panzer Division* arrived in the area between Naples and Salerno, concentrating around Nocera. As the *16th Panzer Division's* armored reconnaissance battalion was already fighting in that area, Vietinghoff placed it under the *Hermann Göring Division's* operational control. As Vietinghoff also expected the *LXXVI Corps'* lead element, the *29th Panzer Grenadier Division*, to come up quickly from the south, he decided to reorganize his command structure. His assumption was that a single corps command would be unable to control the defense of the large semicircle between the Amalfi coast in the west and Paestum in the south. He therefore decided to place the *16th Panzer Division* under the orders of the *LXXVI Corps*, while the *Hermann Göring Panzer Division* remained under the control of the *XIV Corps*. For the remainder of the battle, the line between those two divisions would also be a corps boundary. Under Vietinghoff's reorganization order, General Herr would move his *LXXVI Corps* headquarters to Contursi Terme, east of Eboli.

On 11 September, the Luftwaffe began to change its patterns of attack. A German plane struck the heavy cruiser USS *Savannah* off Salerno with a radio-controlled bomb that



U.S. Navy

killed roughly 200 of the ship's crew and left its forward section badly damaged, putting the vessel out of action for the rest of the operation. The Germans could not know that the Allied navies were screaming for air cover and not getting it, but they made optimum use of the situation.²⁸

During the day, elements of the U.S. 45th Infantry Division, which had begun landing on the southern beachhead the previous day, attacked toward Eboli, where the German defense had been reduced to a single company, and for a while they took the town. American troops on the flank of this attack also threatened a promising German push toward the sea between the U.S. and the British sectors, forcing it to be abandoned. By afternoon, however, the first elements of the *29th Panzer Grenadier Division* began to appear on the battlefield. In the evening, the *16th Panzer Division* retook Eboli and established solid control of the road from Eboli east toward Postiglione.²⁹

In the north, despite their determined attacks, the Germans were unable to improve their situation. Heavy naval surface fire stalled yet another attack towards Vietri, this one conducted by a battle group from the *Hermann Göring Panzer Division* led by Col. Franz Haas.³⁰ Again, calls went out for the Luftwaffe to take on the naval assets in the bay, and on top of this, a 17-cm. (7-inch) gun battery was dispatched to assist.

What threatened future German operations most was the loss of Montecorvino airfield to the British. It had no longer been used by the Luftwaffe and its loss did not disrupt German air operations, but of course Allied aircraft could be expected to try to operate out of Montecorvino soon enough. As long as German artillery continued to dominate the field, however, the Allies dared not use it.

Altogether, Vietinghoff felt that 11 September had not been a good day for his side. The only mitigating circumstance was that, by the evening, the *29th Panzer Grenadier Division* was beginning



The city of Eboli in October 1943, after sustaining damage in the Battle of Salerno

to arrive in force, supplemented by the *4th Parachute Regiment (Fallschirmjägerregiment 4)*. This not only brought reinforcements to the Germans fighting around Salerno but also indicated that the German withdrawal from southern Italy was going according to plan. The British had taken the port of Taranto in Apulia two days before, but every day the Salerno front held, fewer German troops faced the risk of being trapped in the peninsula.

GERMAN COUNTERATTACKS, 12–17 SEPTEMBER

Still, Vietinghoff had not given up hope of throwing the British and Americans back into the sea, or at least of driving a wedge between the British and the American units, so as to annihilate them separately. By the evening of 11 September, U.S. Lt. Gen. Mark W. Clark, the Allied commander, felt that a massive German counterattack was being planned for the next morning.³¹

Another change in German command arrangements was implemented on 12 September. The *Hermann Göring Panzer Division* was relieved of responsibility for the Gulf

of Naples and told to concentrate on winning the battle for the heights north of Maiori and Vietri. The division managed to take and hold the heights above Vietri despite murderous naval gunfire. The *16th Panzer Division's* reconnaissance battalion, still operating as part of the *Hermann Göring Division*, pushed south to within two kilometers of Salerno, but it too encountered increasing Allied resistance during the afternoon.³²

Responsibility for retaking the beaches south and east of Salerno consequently rested with the *16th Panzer Division*, whose armored strength had by then been reduced to about 35 of its original 100 tanks, and the *29th Panzer Grenadier Division* that had arrived from the south. This, together with the changed corps boundary that had been determined the day before, indicated that the Germans were moving northward—a first indication that they did not plan to hold the Salerno area indefinitely. On the contrary, strategists in Berlin were in a way happy to see Allied naval assets concentrated around Salerno rather than have them interfering with the German evacuation of Sardinia, as Hitler had decided to regroup in the Rome region anyway.³³

In Hitler's headquarters, the impression was that Vietinghoff was attacking with two corps. The reality on the ground seems to have been

somewhat different. On 13 September only the *LXXVI Corps* attacked, retaking the village of Persano in the southern sector. Buoyed by this attack, Vietinghoff became convinced during the evening that the Allies were preparing to re-embark,³⁴ and this optimism was transmitted to the Führer's headquarters, along with a grossly exaggerated report of the capture of more than 3,000 prisoners.³⁵ However, in the *XIV Corps* sector, British and, to some extent, American attacks kept coming, supported by heavy naval gunfire. The 17-cm. gun battery allocated to the area had not yet set up, and the battleships' barrage was obviously impeding all German operations. Altogether, Vietinghoff claims in his memoirs that his corps commanders were overoptimistic, and that it was he who remained cautious. His own war diary, however, reveals that the opposite is true. The corps commanders, closer to events, did not believe the Allies were preparing to re-embark, but *Tenth Army* headquarters fed Kesselring, and eventually

the Führer, more optimistic news.³⁶ Still, during the night of 13–14 September, the Germans had almost reached the Mediterranean and the Allied situation looked so bad for the Allies that General Clark had his staff draw up plans to re-embark one of the two corps to reinforce the beachhead of the other. The Allies were fortunate that they did not have to try to implement this plan, because Clark's naval commanders found it completely impractical.³⁷

Although the Germans could report some regional successes, notably the encirclement of U.S. troops in the convent of Altavilla, their latest effort came to nothing again: all attacks aimed at splitting the British from the American forces somewhere east of Salerno met with determined resistance, naval gunfire, and, for the first time, strategic bombers carpet-bombing entire areas. As opposed to *LXXVI Panzer Corps* operations, the

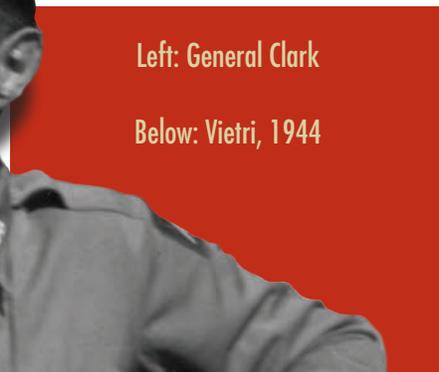
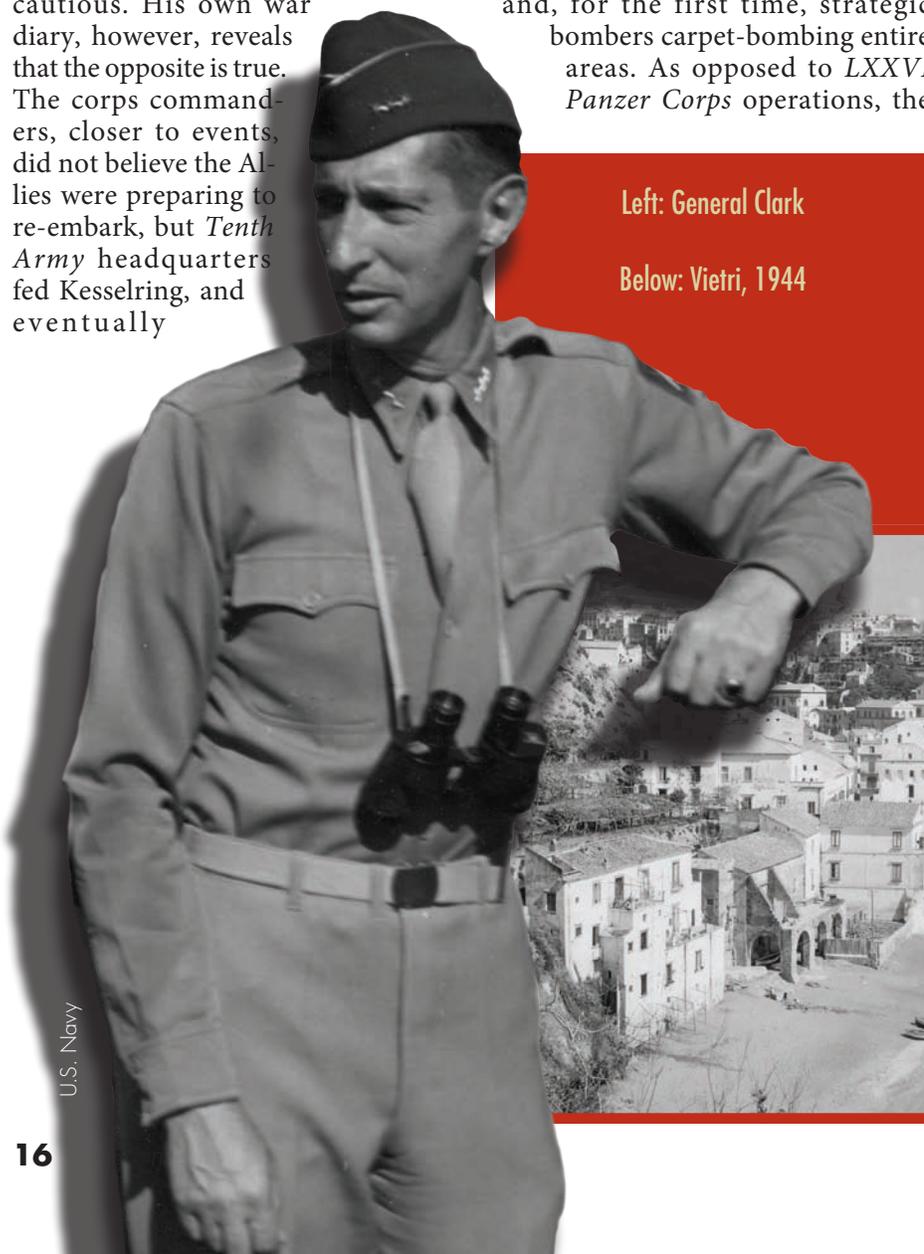
Hermann Göring Panzer Division and the *XIV Panzer Corps* reported a lull in the fighting.³⁸

Again and again the war diaries report an inability to coordinate simultaneous, two-pronged attacks on the Allied positions around Salerno or a joint offensive to split the British and U.S. forces. The overall operational concept for 14 September had again been for the *Hermann Göring Panzer Division* to link up with its neighbor to the east, but as the reluctant *Hermann Göring* attack stalled and the *16th Panzer Division* could not launch its own attack in time, this failed again.³⁹ Vietinghoff's decision to divide responsibility for the battlefield among two corps that he had difficulty coordinating due to his signals problems now appeared most questionable.

During 15 September, Vietinghoff, forever the optimist, planned one last push, employing the *26th Panzer Division*, which had just come up from the south. It was the last remaining force that might have been cut off had the Allies succeeded in thrusting across the peninsula.⁴⁰ The *26th* was to attack west toward Salerno from Battipaglia and link up with the *Hermann Göring Panzer Division* pushing south. The entire operation was scheduled for 16 September and initially went off as planned.⁴¹ The *26th Panzer Division*, however, also had to face heavy naval gunfire, and eventually the attack

Left: General Clark

Below: Vietri, 1944



ground to a halt. Some of the hamlets that had been captured during the day were lost again before nightfall. Further north, the *Hermann Göring Panzer Division*'s tanks had first moved east and then pushed south, evidently taking the British by surprise, and the division made considerable progress despite the mountainous terrain. The British, however, recovered from their shock, retook crucial Hill 419 just east of Salerno, and prevented the *Hermann Göring Division*'s armored attack in that area from either reaching the beaches or linking up with the *16th Panzer Division* on its left.⁴²

That evening Field Marshal Kesselring reported to Berlin that the success or failure of the entire operation depended on the results of the *Hermann Göring Panzer Division* attack. Should it fail to reach the beaches, the *Tenth Army* would have to disengage to avoid unbearable losses. Even then, high Allied losses would probably prevent the enemy from following up quickly.⁴³

That same evening, 16 September, lead elements of the British Eighth Army made contact with the extreme southern wing of U.S. forces south of the ancient Roman city of Paestum, whose ruins had remained essentially untouched by the fighting. Thus, not only had the Germans managed to extricate their last division from the delaying action against the British for use in the Salerno sector, but the Allies, too, were now bringing in troops from the south.⁴⁴

The *Hermann Göring Panzer Division* launched yet another attack south, despite the misgivings of its commander because the commander of the *XIV Panzer Corps*, General Balck, had insisted on the operation. Again, initial gains were made, but then in quick succession two battalion command posts were lost to heavy artillery fire, and, without proper leadership, the thrust faltered.⁴⁵

General Balck pointedly noted in his war diary that the events of the day confirmed his earlier belief that the Allies were not in any mood to withdraw. On the contrary, while the long-awaited 17-cm. battery was now driving Allied battleships

further out into the bay, this was more than counterbalanced by a reinforcement of Allied artillery on the shore. In the evening, General Balck decided that pursuing the southward attacks east of Salerno was unlikely to achieve results. It would also risk a rupture between his two battle groups east and west of the Salerno-Naples road, as the Allies were beginning to push northward along that thoroughfare.⁴⁶

The *Tenth Army* agreed with General Balck. During 16 September, General Vietinghoff decided to disengage. The *XIV Panzer Corps* attacks had been well-prepared and carried out with vigor and dashing, but they had still failed to achieve an operational result. The British Eighth Army was coming up from the south, and *Tenth Army* would have to disengage and take up suitable defensive positions across the Italian peninsula to meet it, Vietinghoff reported to Kesselring, and thus to Berlin.⁴⁷ The *Tenth Army* would use the Salerno region as a hinge to swing its line northeastward across the peninsula.

Even Hitler does not seem to have been very disappointed, as Vietinghoff was promoted to Generaloberst (four-star rank) the very next day, 17 September. On the 17th, the *29th Panzer Division* attacked again in an *Endangriff*—a final attack, mostly to cover the retreat. The *16th Panzer Division* was first to disengage, moving to a line stretching east from Eboli, where it anticipated the Allied push northward would begin.

CONCLUSIONS

The Battle of Salerno had ended. On the Allied side, air power seems to have played a less important role than naval surface gunfire. The Allied ability to bring naval gunfire to bear swiftly and with precision obviously surprised the Germans. The terrain, which seemed to favor the defender—hills overlooking the beaches, marshes, and ravines—eventually afforded ideal conditions for naval fire control and thereby turned into a decisive disadvantage. Repeatedly, German

attacks pushed ahead successfully until they came within sight of the shore—and therefore within sight of naval gunners.

Other factors—notably the superior mobility of the amphibious attacker and his ultimate superiority in numbers—also played their roles, but what most marked Salerno from a German point of view was the unparalleled importance of ship-based fire support.

On the German side, the two decisive factors in the action had been insufficient logistic control and insufficient command infrastructure. The lack of proper logistics took effect mostly in the initial stages, when reinforcements repeatedly failed to arrive in time for sheer lack of fuel. The Germans had just not had enough time to change their motley collection of recovering and reconstituting divisions into an organized fighting force with well-planned supply systems.

As for communications, command, and control, the lack of sufficient signal troops was made all the more painful by Vietinghoff's decision to divide responsibility for the battlefield between his two corps commanders. Initially, the Germans seem not to have realized where the fault line between the British and the U.S. forces was, and what opportunities it might have afforded them. By the time they started pushing in that general direction, the Allies had reinforced sufficiently to maintain their tenuous link. German attacks then suffered from a persistent lack of coordination between the two corps, due mostly to insufficient communications.

The Germans switched to the defensive as they had always intended to do and began to disengage in the south. German generals, in their evaluation, could justifiably count Salerno as a successful delaying action. The Allies had not achieved an early breakthrough, which might have cut off the *LXXVI Panzer Corps* in its entirety, as the Germans had feared.

From an Allied point of view, yet another invasion of mainland Italy had succeeded, and the Allies had

eventually driven the Germans off the battlefield, even if things had looked very grim for a while. In a sense, both sides could claim a success—a rare case of a win-win situation in war.



NOTES

1. For accounts of the Battle of Salerno, see Eric Morris, *Salerno: A Military Fiasco* (New York, 1983); Des Hickey and Gus Smith, *Operation Avalanche: The Salerno Landings, 1943* (New York, 1984); and Angelo Pesce, *Salerno 1943: "Operation Avalanche"* (Naples, 1993). These more recent works have, in my view, superseded War Department, Military Intelligence Division, *Salerno: American Operations from the Beaches to the Volturno (9 September–6 October 1943)*, American Forces in Action (Washington, D.C., 1944); Martin Blumenson, *Salerno to Cassino* (Washington, D.C., 1969); and the pertinent chapter (vol. 3, chap. 7) in Stephen W. Roskill, *The War At Sea 1939–1945* (3 vols., London, 1954–61).

2. The one big exception is that, as the Luftwaffe archives were mostly destroyed at the end of the war, no archival records of the *Hermann Göring Panzer Division* have survived, and this division's operations must be reconstituted from corps-level records.

3. This article draws heavily on material collected for a staff ride held in March 2005 with the NATO Strike Force, based in Naples, to which its author had been invited by Commander (German Navy) Hannes Schröder-Lanz.

4. Karl-Heinz Frieser, "Schlagen aus der Nachhand - Schlagen aus der Vorhand. Die Schlachten von Charkow und Kursk 1943," in *Gezeitenwechsel im Zweiten Weltkrieg? Die Schlachten von Char'kov und Kursk im Frühjahr und Sommer 1943 in operativer Anlage, Verlauf und politischer Bedeutung*, ed. Roland G. Förster, Vorträge zur Militärgeschichte, no. 15 (Hamburg, 1996), pp. 101–35. More light will be shed on this in vol. 8 of *Germany and the Second World War*, ed. Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt, 7 vols. to date (New York, 1990–), forthcoming from Oxford University Press.

5. Reinhard Stumpf, "Die Luftwaffe als drittes Heer: Die Luftwaffen-Erdkampfverbände und das Problem der Sonderheere 1933 bis 1945," in *Soziale Bewegung und politische Verfassung: Beiträge zur Geschichte der mo-*

dernen Welt, ed. Ulrich Engelhardt, Volker Sellin, and Horst Stuke (Stuttgart, 1976), pp. 857–94.

6. Generalleutnant Wilhelm Schmalz, "Der Kampf der Panzerdivision 'Hermann Göring' bei Salerno vom 9. bis 17.9.1943," Fol. 1, MSg 1/2465, Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv, Freiburg (hereafter BA-MA).

7. Generaloberst Heinrich von Vietinghoff, "Der Feldzug in Italien. Kapitel 6: Die Kämpfe der 10 Armee in Süd- und Mittelitalien unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Schlachten bei Salerno, am Volturno, Garigliano, am Sangro und um Cassino, 15.12.1947," Fol. 185–87, ZA 1/2300, BA-MA.

8. Armeeoberkommando (AOK) 10, Kriegstagebuch (KTB), Anlage Nr. 221, Rückblick auf die ersten 3 Tage der Schlacht bei Salerno, RH 20–10/57, BA-MA.

9. Vietinghoff, "Der Feldzug in Italien. Kapitel 6," Fol. 193.

10. Ibid., Fol. 199–201.

11. Generalkommando (GenKdo), XIV PzKorps, Tätigkeitsbericht Ia für die Zeit vom 18.8. bis 7.9.1943, Fol. 3, RH 24–14/72, BA-MA.

12. Schmalz, "Der Kampf der Panzerdivision 'Hermann Göring,'" Fol. 1.

13. Hermann Balck, *Ordnung im Chaos: Erinnerungen, 1893–1948*, Soldatenschicksale des 20. Jahrhunderts als Geschichtsquelle (Osnabrück, 1980), p. 2.

14. GenKdo, XIV PzKorps, KTB Nr. 5, 8.9.–31.12.1943, diary entry for 9.9.1943, RH 24–14/72, BA-MA.

15. AOK 10, KTB Nr. 1, p. 31, RH 20–10/54, BA-MA.

16. Richard Lamb, *War in Italy, 1943–1945: A Brutal Story* (New York, 1994); Erich Kubly, *Verrat auf deutsch: Wie das Dritte Reich Italien ruinierte* (Hamburg, 1982); Maurice Philip Remy, *Mythos Rommel* (Munich, 2002), pp. 186–88.

17. GenKdo, XIV PzKorps, KTB Nr. 5, diary entry for 9.9.1943.

18. Vietinghoff, "Der Feldzug in Italien. Kapitel 6," Fol. 210.

19. GenKdo, XIV PzKorps, KTB Nr. 5, p. 20.

20. Ibid., p. 21.

21. AOK 10, KTB Nr. 1, p. 33; GenKdo, XIV PzKorps, KTB Nr. 5, diary entry for 9.9.1943.

22. AOK 10, KTB Nr. 1, p. 32.

23. Vietinghoff, "Der Feldzug in Italien. Kapitel 6," Fol. 206.

24. Ibid., Fol. 208, 210.

25. AOK 10, KTB Nr. 1, p. 35.

26. Blumenson, *Salerno to Cassino*, pp. 17–19; War Department, Military Intelligence Division, *Salerno: American Operations*, pp. 2–4.

27. Vietinghoff, "Der Feldzug in Italien. Kapitel 6," Fol. 209–11.

28. Edwin P. Hoyt, *Backwater War: The Allied Campaign in Italy, 1943–1945* (Westport, Conn., 2002), p. 77; Rick Atkinson, *The Day of Battle: The War in Sicily and Italy, 1943–1944* (New York, 2007), p. 219, 641.

29. AOK 10, KTB Nr. 1, p. 36.

30. GenKdo, XIV PzKorps. KTB Nr. 5, Fol. 26 (11.9.1943).

31. Hoyt, *Backwater War*, p. 77.

32. GenKdo, XIV PzKorps. KTB Nr. 5, Fol. 29 (12.9.1943).

33. *Die Geheimen Tagesberichte der Deutschen Wehrmachtführung im Zweiten Weltkrieg, 1939–1945*, ed. Kurt Mehner, 12 vols. (Osnabrück, Germany, 1984–95), 8: 66.

34. Vietinghoff, "Der Feldzug in Italien. Kapitel 6," Fol. 216.

35. *Geheimen Tagesberichte*, 8: 73; Blumenson, *Salerno to Cassino*, pp. 114–15, reports the loss of over 500 U.S. officers and men, the bulk of an infantry battalion, at and near Persano.

36. AOK 10, KTB Nr. 1, p. 45.

37. Hoyt, *Backwater War*, p. 78.

38. AOK 10, KTB Nr. 1, Fol. 44–45.

39. GenKdo, XIV PzKorps. KTB Nr. 5, Fol. 33 (14.9.1943).

40. Vietinghoff, "Der Feldzug in Italien. Kapitel 6," Fol. 217–19.

41. GenKdo, LXXVI PzKorps, KTB Nr. 1, 22.6.1943–2.2.1944, Fol. 56–57, RH 24–76/2, BA-MA.

42. GenKdo, XIV PzKorps. KTB Nr. 5, Fol. 37 (16.9.1943).

43. *Geheimen Tagesberichte*, 8: 81.

44. Hoyt, *Backwater War*, p. 79; *Geheimen Tagesberichte*, 8: 88.

45. Schmalz, "Der Kampf der Panzerdivision 'Hermann Göring,'" Fol. 2; GenKdo, XIV PzKorps, KTB Nr. 5, Fol. 37 (16.9.1943).

46. GenKdo, XIV PzKorps, KTB Nr. 5, Fol. 38 (16.9.1943).

47. AOK 10, KTB Nr. 1, p. 49; Vietinghoff, "Der Feldzug in Italien. Kapitel 6," Fol. 219.



U.S. Navy

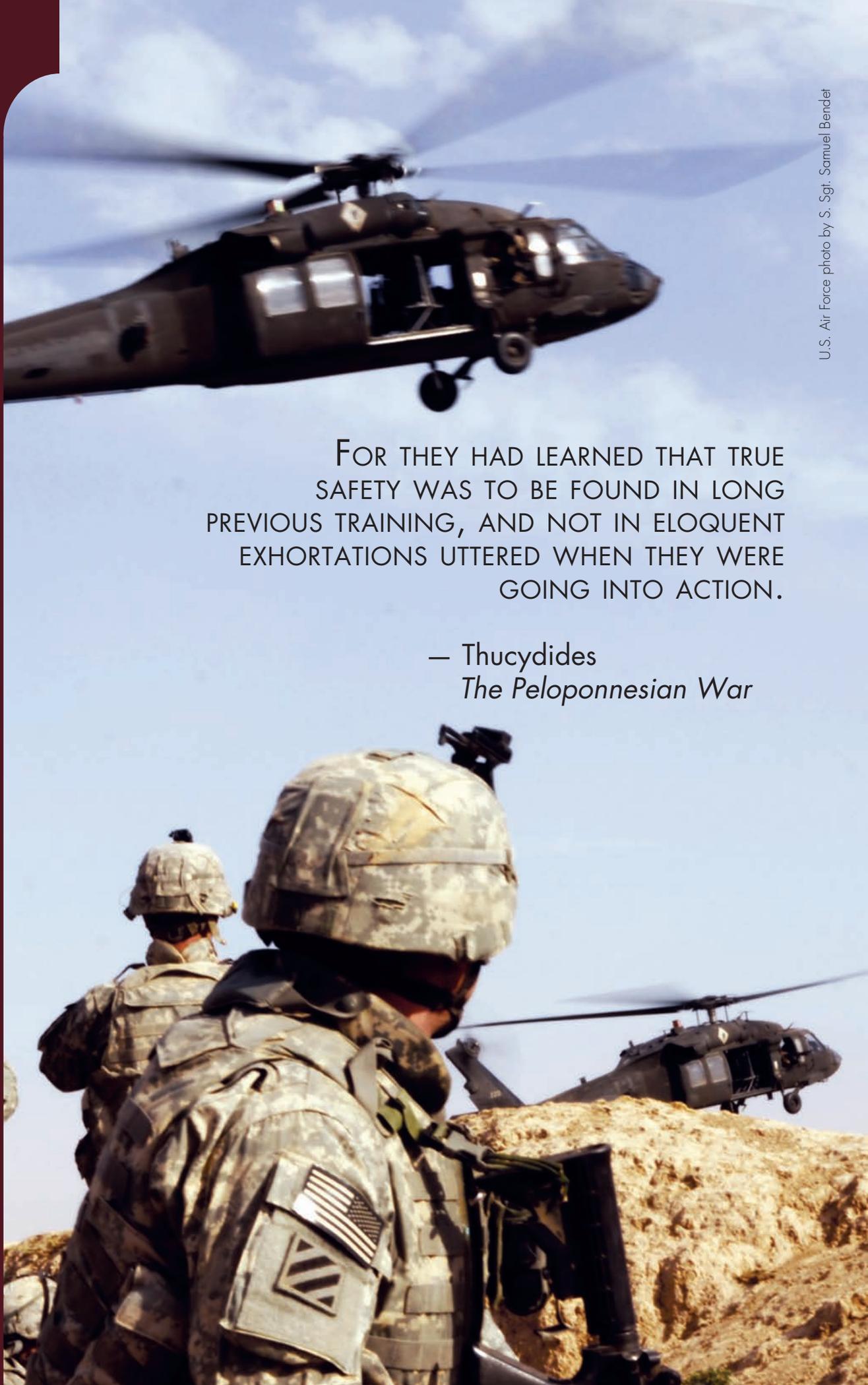
The USS *Ancon*, flagship of the Allied fleet, and supporting craft in Salerno Bay, 12 September 1943, as ship at right lays a smoke screen to protect against German air attack

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

First Lt. Jimmy J. Jones, a North Carolina native, enlisted in the Army in 1997 and served as a parachute rigger. He became a warrant officer in 2003 and deployed to Iraq as a pilot in March 2005. He served in Iraq for eleven months. Commissioned as a lieutenant in 2007, he is currently enrolled at the Colorado Springs campus of Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, where he is pursuing a degree of bachelor of science in professional aeronautics.

FOR THEY HAD LEARNED THAT TRUE SAFETY WAS TO BE FOUND IN LONG PREVIOUS TRAINING, AND NOT IN ELOQUENT EXHORTATIONS UTTERED WHEN THEY WERE GOING INTO ACTION.

— Thucydides
The Peloponnesian War





ARABIC SANDS

By Jimmy J. Jones



It is a well-known fact that weather, not combat, is a pilot's worst enemy.

After flying in Iraq through relatively clear night skies for roughly seven months, while stationed mostly at Tall Afar, Iraq, I observed a change in the weather starting to blow in. As my fellow helicopter pilots and I entered these brisk autumn months, our UH-60 Black Hawk troop began to adamantly concentrate on our instrument flying and approaches. Since there were no published approaches in a combat zone, we would use a combat-zone approved global positioning system (GPS) approach as an emergency flight path in case of bad weather.

As we flew seemingly endless nights, we were perpetually hounded by our senior pilots to shoot a simulated GPS approach when we returned to base after the mission was complete. After an exhausting six hours of combat flying every night, the last thing any of us wanted to do was completely drain our last functioning brain cells by shooting a GPS approach! Nevertheless, we almost always did, mostly because there was always that question in the back of our minds, "what if"—what if we found ourselves encapsulated in the middle of a dust storm at night? Would we be able to make it home alive, or would we kill ourselves and all passengers aboard because human laziness had prevailed and we had decided to take the chance that we would never enter bad weather? So along with our senior pilots' decisions

came a resentment, as well as a respect for their authority and decision-making process.

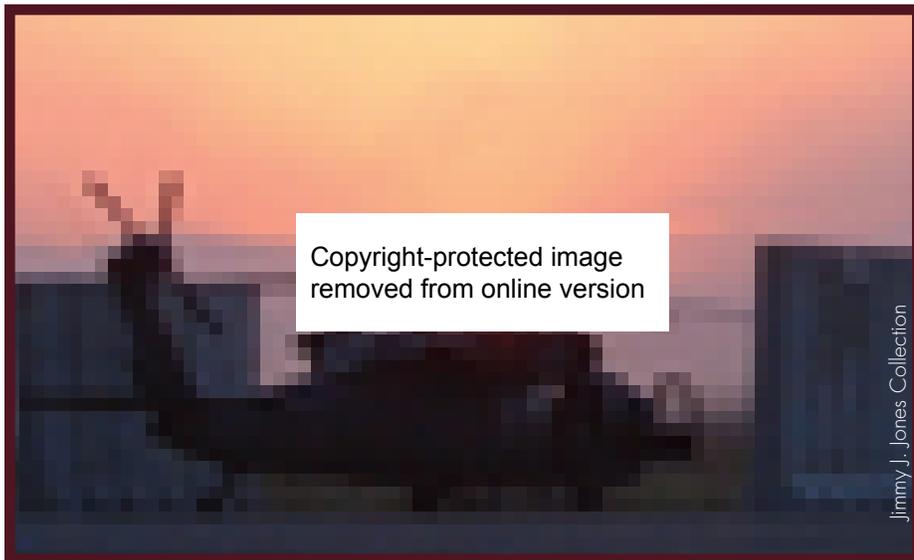
On 22 September 2005 the scorching Arabic sands put my crew and me to the test. Chief Warrant Officer 2 Richard L. Schneider and I in one Black Hawk and Chief Warrant Officer 3 Eric M. Oleson and a captain (unnamed here) in another were scheduled to complete a standard five-hour, two-ship mission consisting of passenger pick-up and transport to various forward operating bases (FOBs) all over northern Iraq. The captain and Oleson were piloting the lead aircraft, while Schneider and I were flying the trail Black Hawk.

The captain, who was known not to be one of our squadron's strongest aviators, had been paired up with one of our senior instructor pilots. In the cockpit of my aircraft, Schneider, a seasoned aviator, was also paired with a fairly inexperienced pilot—me. After the flight crews were chosen, we conducted our preflight checks, lit the fires, and flew off into the pitch-black desert night.

Our first stop was about 30 miles to the west at a little FOB named Sinjair. We arrived, picked up our passengers, and flew back to Tall Afar to drop them off with no problems. The night was going well. Schneider and I would joke about the lead aircraft's flying, as all trail aircraft personnel do on a multiship mission. It is so easy to critique when all you have to do is follow the lead aircraft and scrutinize their flying abilities.

The second leg of our mission took us to the Iraqis' main training base, FOB Kisak. We loved flying into this place because it had a landing zone that sat in a small depression, so it was really hard to see at night until you were right on top of the base. You were almost guaranteed a good laugh if you were the trail aircraft observing the lead bird coming into this base at night. Most of the time, we would look for the lighted flag pole flying a huge Iraqi flag about 300 feet to the left and take our cue from it. It was a great wind indicator as well as a visual reference for our approach to the landing zone.

After pick-up and drop-off at FOB Kisak, we headed to Mosul, the most dangerous leg of our mission. Mosul had two landing zones. The first was a dreadfully small landing pad on top of a steep hill. To its immediate right was the beautiful Mosul palace, to the left an active firing range. The approach was distinguished by a river, towers, wires, and part of a sleepless and war-torn city. Departures were complicated by aircraft flying continuous reconnaissance missions because of the numerous planes that had been shot down and the ever-looming threat of the enemy. The apt title given to this piece of real estate was FOB Courage. The second landing zone was the Mosul airport itself. Our pilots' were notorious for coming in fast and hard to FOB Courage, so as to avoid any small-arms fire when we flew over part of the city to set up for our approach. It was always funny to see the inexperienced pilots overshoot the landing zone, and tonight was



A Black Hawk helicopter on the landing pad at Tall Afar, Iraq.

no exception. We watched the lead aircraft as its pilot yanked back on the cyclic stick, causing their trusty steed to commence a “whoa boy” and sink fiercely into the landing zone to avoid overshooting it. Schneider, our crew chiefs, and I broke out in uproarious laughter. We could almost see their cockpit glowing hotter through our night-vision goggles knowing that Oleson was seething after that approach by his co-pilot.

We pulled pitch and departed reasonably fast for our next stop, Mosul airport. This landing zone was always an adventure because the city of Mosul was enveloped by a perpetual nighttime haze produced by its cement factories. The city lights would illuminate this haze and almost shut your night-vision goggles down, it was so bright on some nights. To add to the difficulty of this area of aeronautical ruin, flying through this stinking muck would make your eyes and nose drip from the nauseous fumes. Even more challenging, there were numerous sets of wires and a water tower you had to avoid when setting up for your approach. Luckily, we flew on the outskirts of town, rode the terrain coming in, and set up for our approach. Schneider and I commented that it must have been Oleson on the controls because the approach was too perfect.

At Mosul, we dropped off our passengers and decided to refuel our

flying iron horses. Schneider had decided to request an expedition to the refueling point at the opposite end of the runway. Tower had approved it, and with Schneider at the controls, we took off like a bat out of hell. We reached 140 knots by the time we were ready to enter the refuel site. I’ll never forget it. Our crew was yelling, “Hell, yeah!” as we raked the flight line in a matter of seconds. Schneider was an experienced aviator and perpetual showman, and he loved to teach young aviators “how to really fly the Black Hawk.” Once we finished refueling, he gave me the controls and instructed me to execute the same maneuver back to the passenger pick-up point. Nervously, I executed the maneuver perfectly. As the crew chief’s excitement blared through our helmets, Schneider paid me a compliment that inevitably ended with the word “rookie.” We picked up our passengers, received our flight clearance, and away we flew back to Tall Afar for the completion of our mission.

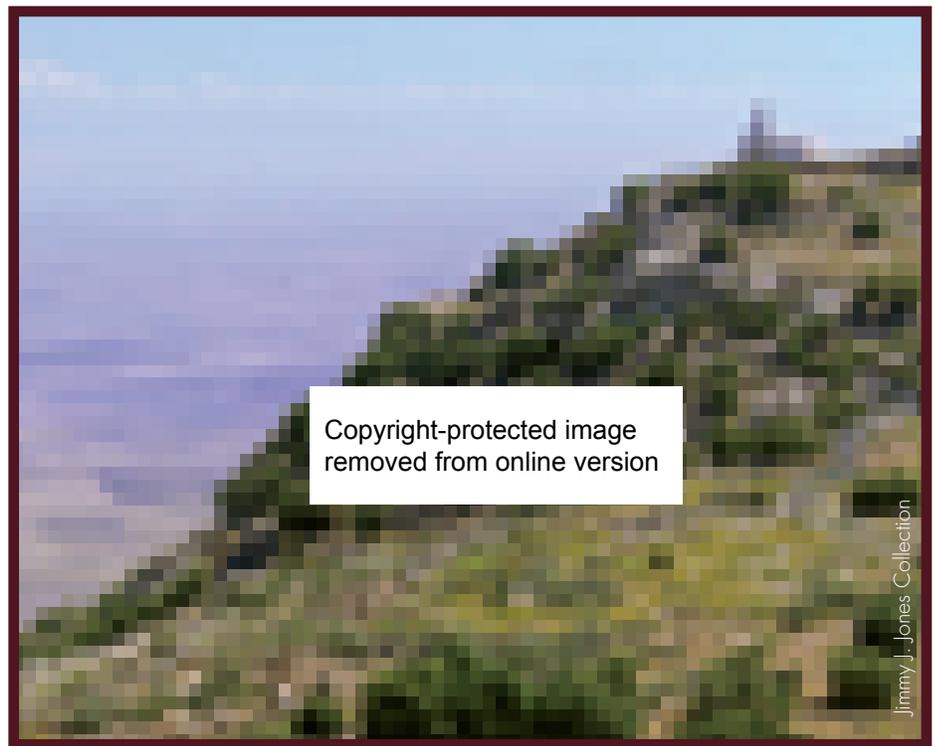
While flying over a ridgeline we called the “dinosaur backbone,” we received an in-flight extension to fly to FOB Sinjair once again. We had also noted from our in-flight weather brief that bad weather was rolling in from the southwest towards Sinjair and Tall Afar, but we thought we would have enough time to beat the weather and get back before midnight chow closed.

Anyone who knew our command understood it was not a wise idea to turn down an extension, even if it wasn’t an emergency. When we landed at Tall Afar, we sincerely debated if we should fly this last leg, especially since there was no emergency, just a standard passenger pick-up. Reluctantly, we decided to continue the mission. We called to get an updated weather report and received verification that we should complete our return before the weather hit. So away we went into the vast blackness for the last time that night, expecting nothing more than your standard pick-up.

As we took flight and began heading west, we immediately noticed that it was very difficult to see. The usual village lights that were scattered over 30 miles of flat terrain were few and hazy. After covering a few nautical miles of obscure desert, we decided to parallel the south edge of the Sinjair mountain range until we reached FOB Sinjair. The range was nicely lit by small houses and villages that abutted the base of the mountain. As the night grew darker and darker, both cockpits grew ever quieter. Visibility was becoming very poor, so Schneider instructed me to tighten up the formation to keep a better visual on the lead aircraft. I replied with a “WILCO” [will comply]. As we moved up, Oleson came over the radios and asked simply, “Should we turn around?” It seemed to take us an eternity to respond. Schneider looked over at me and said, “What do you think, Jones?” As much as you want to complete the mission, sometimes common sense has to prevail. In the span of maybe a second, I told Schneider that we should turn around. Schneider immediately pressed the intercom switch and relayed, “Turn it around, Oly.” Our training tells us to never turn toward the mountains, but this night should have been an exception. With the captain at the controls of the lead aircraft, our flight turned left and gazed right into the pitch black void. There were no lights, no horizon, and no visual cues whatsoever. As soon as we stared into that black

nothingness, we knew we were in serious trouble. Our companion aircraft began an immediate and quite expeditious climb from 300 feet that ultimately leveled off at 1,100 feet above ground level in a matter of seconds. Our whole crew knew that the pilots of the lead aircraft were spatially disoriented, and here we were trying to follow them because they were our only reference! Schneider shouted at me, “You’re climbing, you’re climbing!” I quickly responded, “I’m staying on their tail, Richey; it’s the only reference I’ve got.” “Stay with them,” Schneider replied. As we reached an apex of 1,100 feet, the lead aircraft turned left, flipped straight nose down, and proceeded to dive directly for the ground. I heard Schneider utter an expletive before our helicopter went totally silent. It’s hard to explain how truly scared we were. My heart was in my throat, and I’m sure everybody else was picking the black fur seats out of their clenched cheeks. To make matters worse, when the lead aircraft went into its vicious nose dive, it made us think we were flying on our side! We had no visual reference other than a barely visible aircraft that was perpendicular to our visual position. I truly thought that this may be the end of our lives. For a split second I thought about my pregnant wife and daughter back in the United States, but knew I had to focus on the situation at hand, so I shook that thought out of my head and concentrated on what was unbelievably happening to my flight.

To our fortune, on this particular night I was flying with an aeronautical device attached to my night-vision goggles called the Heads Up Display (HUD). The HUD displays all your instrumentation into the field of view on your goggles, showing you the craft’s pitch, roll, yaw, torque, airspeed, and so forth. Most pilots detest flying with the cumbersome HUD system. It is heavy, and after a couple hours of flying, it induces severe headaches. But being the impressionable young aviator that I



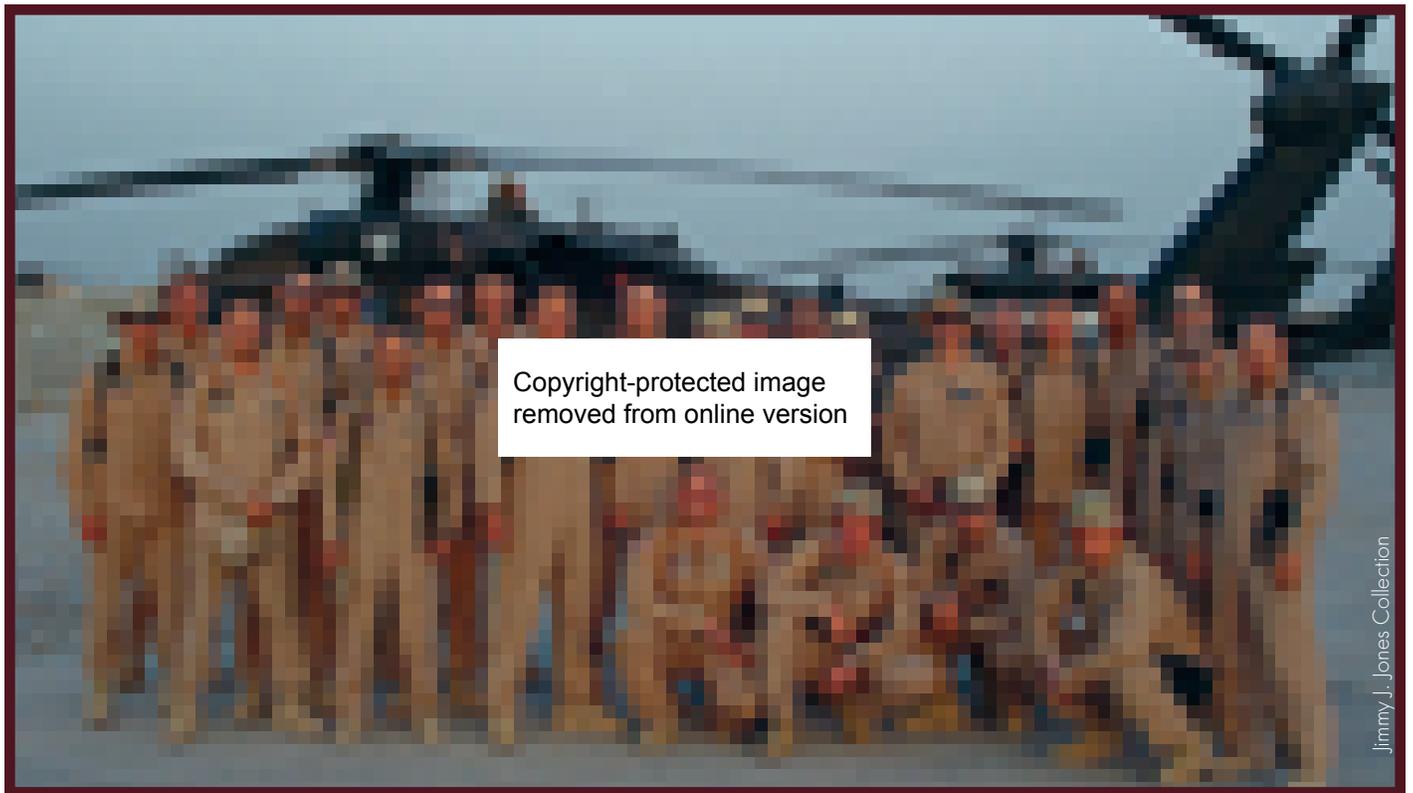
View toward Syria from above the Sinjair mountain range

was, I had listened to our most senior pilot who told me, “Once you get used to flying with HUD, it’s actually easier to fly at night with [it].” I thank him for his wisdom every time my thoughts revert to this night.

Schneider nervously asked me, “Are you good? Can you see them? We’re starting to descend!” At this critical juncture, my head was swimming. My observational senses were dancing as my sloshing inner ear fluid completely washed away my perception of a proper pitch, roll, and yaw axis. Luckily, hours and hours of our senior aviators training us to “trust our instruments in a spatial disoriented situation” set in. I did what I was trained to do, even though my mind was vigorously fighting with the false perception to fly alongside the lead aircraft. I immediately replied to my pilot in command, “Richey, I’m flying with the HUD tonight. I’ve lost visual with the lead aircraft, but my wings are level, and I’m in a slow descent according to HUD. Do you see the lead aircraft?” He responded, “I have no visual, repeat, no visual on the lead aircraft. Do you want me to take the controls?” I replied, “All instrumentation is good according

to the HUD. Keep a lookout for any visual reference whatsoever; I’ll continue my descent down to 300 feet above ground level.” Other than this conversation, our aircraft was totally silent. Our usually talkative and joking crew chiefs were absolutely silent. I was sure that they had completely frozen in the frenzy, so I ordered, “Crew dogs, keep your eyes peeled for any sign of lights. Continue to scan for the mountain. Make sure you look for the lead aircraft.” They complied, and with relief, that let me know that they were with us. At that point my biggest fear was seeing an explosion on the ground. This would inevitably mean that the lead aircraft had crashed. I was not prepared to see my friends, my co-pilots, lose their lives because of bad weather.

As we swung around to the left, completing a descending 180-degree turn, I relayed to my crew that I was going to pick up airspeed to see if I could clear the edge of this sandstorm. To our fortune, we slowly came out of the wicked wintry weather as Schneider spotted some village lights along the mountain range further to our left. Schneider asked me, “I have a visual on lights to your left; do you



Troop S, 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment, including Oleson, third from right; Jones, seventh from right; and Schneider, ninth from right, among those standing

see them?” Having glanced out of the side of my HUD per his observation, I replied, “I do have a visual on the lights and the mountains.” Schneider replied, “Head closer to the lights, and we’ll ride the mountains back in to Tall Afar.” “Roger,” I replied in relief. Within a few seconds, one of the crew chiefs spotted the silhouette of the lead aircraft and shouted, “I have a visual on Oly, 400 meters out of your front right.” Schneider and I acknowledged almost simultaneously that we confirmed the visual and were attempting to link up with the lead aircraft and secure our flight once again. We transmitted a radio call to Oly to see if everything was ok. He confirmed that they were stable and were slowing down so we could link back up as a flight.

Shaken, we all landed safely at Tall Afar and shut down as fast as we could before this midnight monster had the chance to chase and engulf us at our front door steps. Once we tied up the aircraft, the crew chiefs headed back to the hangar to put away our combat gear, and Richey and I decided to conduct a quick debrief

while walking back to the hangar. Before we had stepped off, Richey shook my hand, embraced me, and said, “You saved my life tonight, Jones. If you would have given me the controls, I was so spatially disoriented that I couldn’t have flown us back. I was already gone. Thanks, man.” This was the proudest moment in my aviation career. That night I had gained a great pilot’s respect. I proceeded to tell him that “I didn’t save our lives; the HUD is what saved our lives. I’ll never fly a night mission without it again.”

From that night forward, Schneider and I flew numerous missions together. If I was scheduled to fly on a mission with Richey, he would always try to get the other pilot in command to trade co-pilots so I could be the co-pilot on his Black Hawk.

We eventually rode the long-awaited freedom bird back to the United States once our exhausting tour in Iraq was over. Sadly, Schneider decided to try out civilian life and, after thirteen years in the Army, submitted his resignation paperwork within two weeks of his return. He ended

his military service shortly thereafter. Since then he has flown helicopters for an air medical transportation firm in Kansas, but I know for sure that he’ll never forget the night that Iraq’s black deserts swallowed us—the night that we challenged the fierceness of the Arabic sands and narrowly prevailed.



NOTE

1. This article is an edited version of the essay that received second prize in the Center of Military History’s 2007 James Lawton Collins Jr. Special Topics Writing Competition. An expanded version of the essay that won that competition appeared in the Fall 2007 issue of *Army History* (No. 65).



U.S. Army photo by Spec. Patrick Tharpe

COMMENTARY

THE U.S. ARMY AND CONTEMPORARY MILITARY HISTORY

By GREGORY FONTENOT

Several excellent review essays in the Winter 2006 issue of *Army History* written by historians at the U.S. Army Center of Military History establish the basis for a first-class discussion or debate on the value and utility of contemporary military history. W. Shane Story, “Transformation or Troop Strength? Early Accounts of the Invasion of Iraq”; Richard W. Stewart, “‘Instant’ History and History: A Hierarchy of Needs”; and Jeffrey J. Clarke, “The Care and Feeding of Contemporary History” all examine and comment on contemporary accounts in ways that may prove stimulating and useful for those of us who identify ourselves as “5 X-Rays.” As a co-author of one of the “officially sanctioned studies” that Stewart, who is now the Center’s chief historian, considered in his review essay, it is with some trepidation that I offer these few thoughts on the role of military history generally and “instant” history specifically.¹ Although, I agree with many of the chief historian’s assessments, I would argue that his vision for official history may not encompass all that it might or should. Nor do I believe that he fully appreciates the value of “instant” history and the role that

the Center of Military History could and should play in the production of what I prefer to call “contemporary” history.

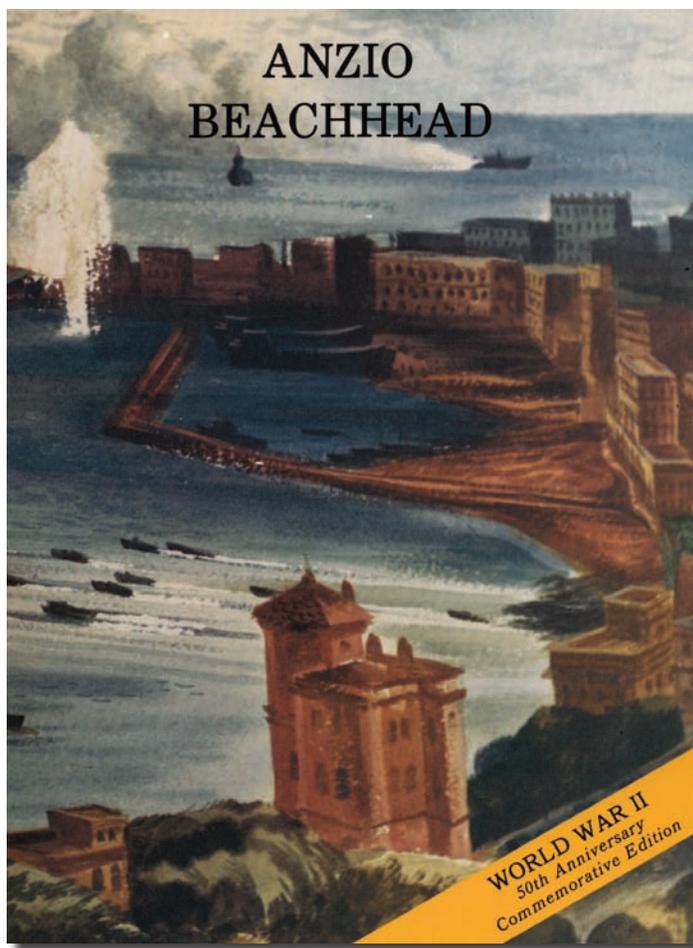
A central contention of Stewart’s definition of official history, at least

adds that, in part, this is so because of security classification and sloppy records gathering. He believes that it takes “about a generation before the sources . . . are ripe.”³ To continue the chief historian’s food channel metaphor, no history will be written at the Center before its time, and it will not be time anytime soon.

Stewart’s definition reflects contemporary historical theory and the present culture of historians, yet as he himself observes it was not always so. After all, Thucydides, to whom Stewart refers in his article, wrote contemporary history. The Center did, too, when it was founded, and it could do so now. When writing official history, or indeed any contemporary history, it is essential to ask, for what purpose is it written? Is official Army history about the record, or is it about serving the need of the Army to garner insight from its own experiences?

In my view, the Center and Army historians generally should seek to enable the Army to learn from its experiences. Thus, the Center should move aggressively to produce contemporary history and

should revise the view that one can only write official history after the dust has settled and a generation has elapsed, permitting the scholars to ruminate adequately. If the Center waits



Reprint of the account of the Anzio campaign issued by the War Department’s Historical Division in 1948, four years after the event

in the U.S. Army, is that it must be written well after the fact. I base this assessment on his assertion that official history requires time to “marinate until it is ready.”² He

for just the right time to produce official history, it risks being irrelevant to the institution that it serves. In my view, at least part of the problem is the culture at the Center. Perhaps that can be understood best by examining Stewart's contention that producing "the official history" must be "time consuming." The process, he says, is "slow" and "ponderous," and he implies that it was ever thus.⁴ He does admit, in an endnote, that the Center published many of the Army Green Books, as the volumes in the Center of Military History's series *The United States Army in World War II* have become known, in less than a generation but adds that "neither the resources nor the records are available" to do as much today.⁵

This contention is only partly accurate and presumes that access to every classified record is required or that declassification instructions are inadequate to get at the heart of matters. None of this explains or accounts for the Center's reluctance to complete books expeditiously or even within a generation of events when surely the marinade will have broken down the "meat" adequately so that it will be ripe enough even in Washington, D.C. The Center's lack of enthusiasm for contemporary history suggests that the leadership at the Center considers that its task is to provide the final word or record. Still, even by the standard the chief historian offers on when official history might be written, things take a long time indeed at the Center.

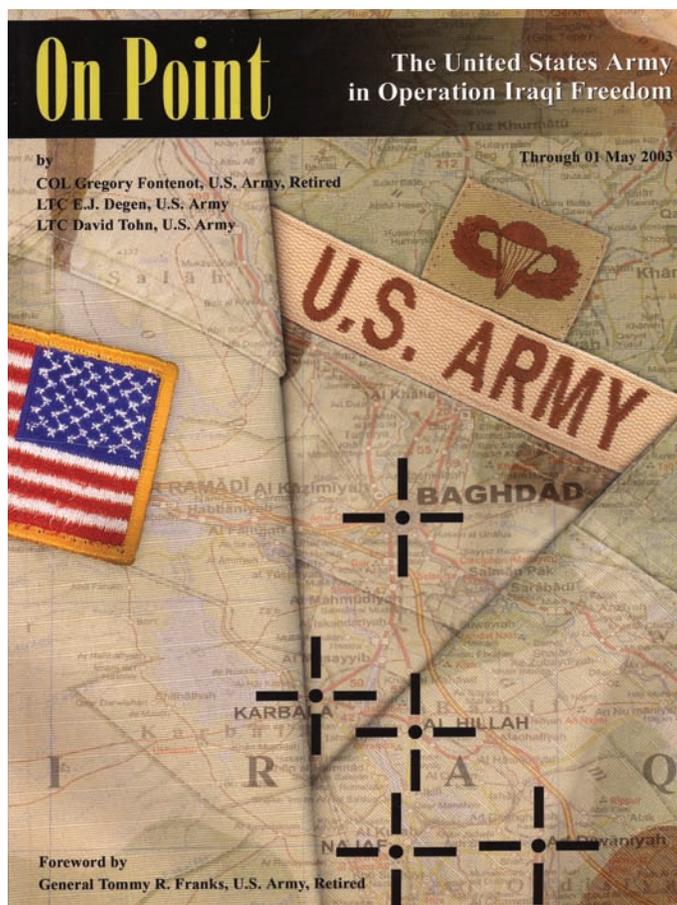
Permit an example. In 2002 I led Operations Group F, Battle Command Training Program. The Army established Operations Group F to facilitate and lead seminars on combat operations in urban settings for all of the divisions bound for Iraq.

In preparing for this very intense effort, I looked for historical accounts of combat operations in cities that might inform how we thought about the problem. I thought of Hue where marines and soldiers both fought, but in 2002 the Center had yet to publish the official history of Tet 1968. It has now been nearly forty years since Tet, and there is still no volume

today do not seem to believe there is much use for history, judging by how reluctant they are to attempt to produce it the way Thucydides did. Antulio J. Echevarria II, a brilliant Army historian, finds little practical utility in history for several very good reasons. First, he argues, history is not objective—authors have views and facts may be in dispute indefinitely. Additionally, "history is not inherently self-corrective."⁶ Echevarria argues that those who read military history expecting to understand something about the nature of combat by experiencing it vicariously are misled. What then is the use of history? It should serve as "a way to develop higher-level critical thinking skills."⁷ In many ways, Echevarria has it just right. History tells us comparatively little, but if we read it and think about it, as he suggests, we may learn from our analysis.

The Army needs the opportunity to read contemporarily written official history for exactly that purpose. Otherwise, if Echevarria is right, soldiers may as well read management books that reflect current trends rather than military history about events that seem distant. The Army does not need a Center of Military History that exists to produce seminal works in history—academics are willing to do that for us in about the time it takes the Center, or

rather sooner since there are some unofficial histories of Tet out there now. Our military practitioners want and need a more responsive Center and, I believe, on the basis of recent evidence (*On Point* and successor efforts), that the Army will invest in such a Center.⁸ Finally, why should the Center of Military History largely concede the field of contemporary history to popular historians or to



The history of the U.S. Army's actions in the 2003 invasion of Iraq written by Colonel Fontenot and two serving lieutenant colonels and printed by the Combat Studies Institute Press in 2004

published. Even now Tet continues to marinate.

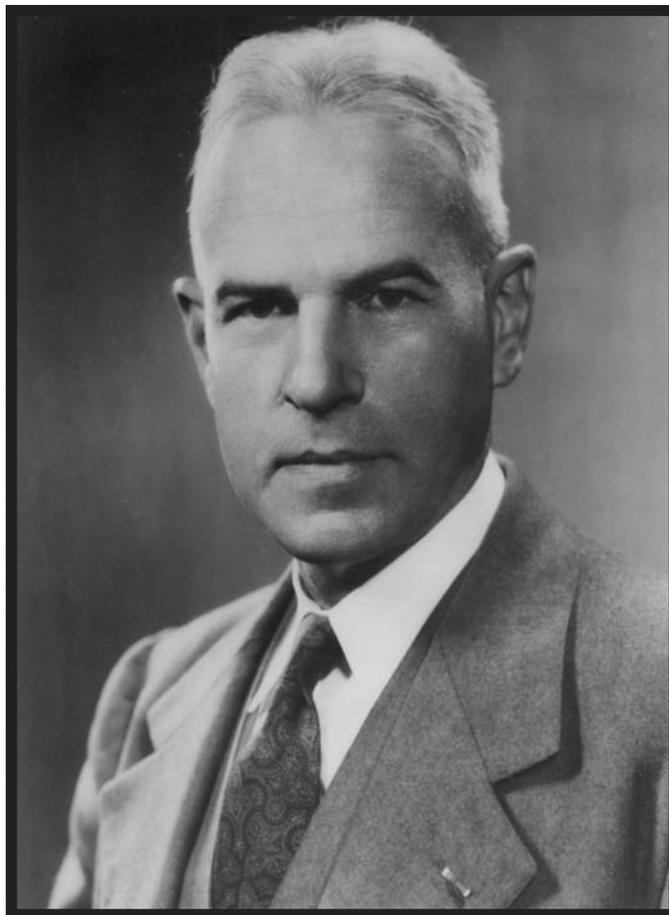
The culture of the Center surely is part of the problem. I believe that we should debate the purpose for which the Center exists. What is the purpose of official history? Is it for the satisfaction of historians, or is there some possibility that the Army expects or believes that there is utility or use for history? Army historians

historians who, while they may work for the Army, are not at the Center?

The reasons for attempting to write history now and not, as Stewart puts it, when “events are ripe” are at the heart of the debate we should undertake.⁹ Why is the Center writing history in the first place when others will happily do it at no cost and will take no longer than the Center requires now? The second part of the question is, for whom is the Center writing? Interestingly, that is largely up to the Center because its leadership is able to influence what Army regulations require of the organization. So the question is whether official history is written for historians or for the Army. If for the former, let them undertake the effort themselves; if for the latter, then we need to work much harder to deliver history in a timely manner—that is, we should write for the generation in the field and expect the generation to come to revise or build on that effort. Thus, the question we must ask is, what constitutes official history and for what purpose is it written? Frankly, no matter what the chief historian argues, if a document is officially sanctioned, he will be hard pressed to claim it is “unofficial” merely because it was written soon after the fact and not at the Center.

But if the Center of Military History returns to its roots and elects to assume the task of writing history contemporaneously, then the Center’s historians must appreciate and more important understand the risks and dangers of doing exactly what I urge. There is no better way to consider these risks, as well as the potential rewards, than by considering the efforts of two of the men who played important roles in producing the original culture at the Center—Hugh

M. Cole and Kent Roberts Greenfield. Commissioned in 1942, Cole served with the Army Specialized Training Program, an education effort for selected soldiers, and subsequently as the historian of the Third Army. In 1946, he joined the War Department’s Historical Division, as the Center of Military History was then designated, as a civilian historian. In one way or another, Cole served the Army until



Kent Roberts Greenfield

1977. Greenfield served as the chief historian from 1946 until he retired in 1958. As a commissioned officer, Greenfield also served as the historian for Army Ground Forces from 1942 until he assumed his post as chief historian.¹⁰

Both men thought deeply about the challenge of writing contemporary history because their charter and their inclination required them to do so. Cole reviewed the risks cogently in a 1948 article based on a paper he had

read at a meeting of the American Historical Association in December 1947.¹¹ Greenfield aired his views in the 1953 Brown and Haley Lectures at the College of Puget Sound that were published as *The Historian and the Army*.¹²

In describing the project that he led, publishing the official history of the Army in World War II, Greenfield observed that “historians are still timid about undertaking projects that look toward the synthesis of information on major subjects in contemporary history.”¹³ Greenfield directly confronted several of the problems to which Stewart alludes. Many of the records the Center needed remained classified when Greenfield set about organizing the effort to write what he believed was contemporary history. To meet this challenge, Greenfield chose historians who had clearances and therefore access to records as required. Clearing their accounts for publication was then, as it is now, a discrete matter. Thus classification, according to Greenfield, did not prove insurmountable then, nor will it now. According to Greenfield, the problem of declassifying original records in the uncertain times after the Korean War began “was a poser,” but clearing histories for publication proved to be “a much simpler matter.”¹⁴

Greenfield also dealt with complaints by senior officers who felt that their efforts did not receive adequate credit or found that historians had the effrontery to criticize them. In this matter, he had the support of the chief of staff of the Army and other senior officers. But, Greenfield does not dwell on the difficulties; instead he makes the most compelling case of all for doing history soon after the event. As he

puts it, “One reason alone seems to me, as a historian, conclusive for taking the offensive in this field: if we do not do so at once, and on a grand scale, we will lose irretrievably much of the vital evidence needed to answer questions that the future will raise.” In Greenfield’s mind, waiting for events to marinate was the wrong thing to do. Despite having 17,120 tons of records, Greenfield believed that much had been lost because of gaps in documentation that could only be bridged by the “interrogation of surviving participants.” Oral history and combat interviews proved essential to the Green Books and are even more important now since so much of the written record is ephemeral or even unreliable.¹⁵

Greenfield met the challenge he set in the early days of the Historical Division. By the time he retired in 1958, Greenfield and his team had published thirty-eight of the Green Books, eleven more were in publication, and four in final editing. This is an impressive achievement by any stretch and not one stemming only from abundant resources, but also from Greenfield’s conviction that to wait would risk the venture rather than ensure success. Greenfield literally led the effort as co-author of *The Organization of Ground Combat Troops*, published in 1947.¹⁶

Cole, who wrote both *The Lorraine Campaign*, published in 1950, and *The Ardennes: Battle of the Bulge*, published in 1965, understood the risks associated with writing contemporary history and articulated them very clearly in his 1947 paper.¹⁷ He reported that the Army had asked its Historical Division to complete the first thirty-three volumes of its official history of the U.S. Army in World War II within five years despite the fact that the majority of the fifteen war histories begun in the previous

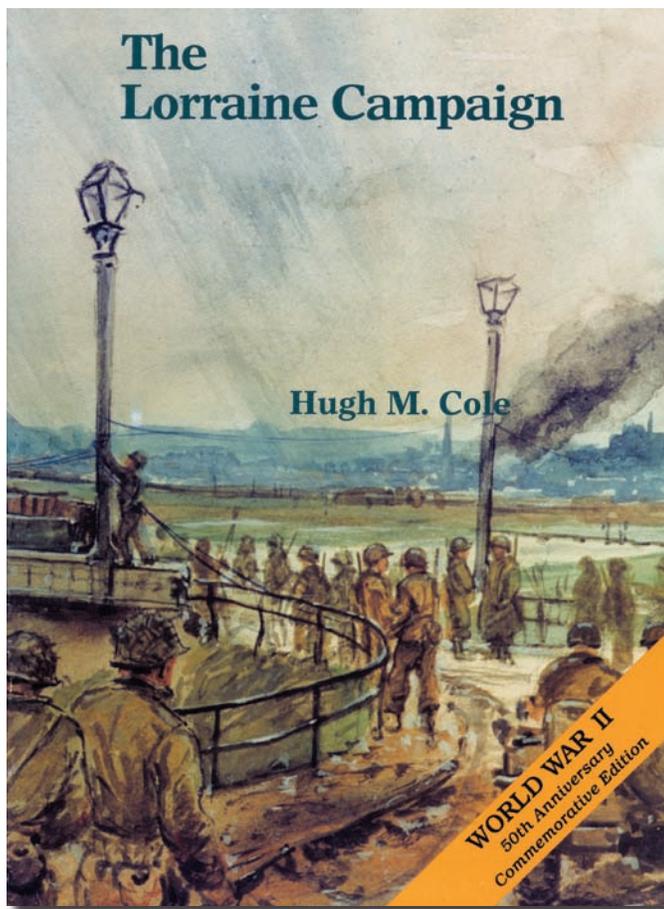
eighty years were still incomplete. Cole observed that many of the historians involved with these initial volumes had hoped to complete their work “while the generation which had fought the war still was alive,” while those recruited from the ranks of the military “expected to complete their studies in sufficient time to permit the derivation of military lessons.” Thus,

the military or political hierarchy.” (2) “The physical and time-consuming difficulties inherent in collecting and screening great masses of military documents.” (3) “The impact of a succeeding war in such a manner as to destroy historical interest in an earlier war,” and (4) “The lack of information from enemy sources, preventing the publication of a sustained, integrated,

and coherent military history, complete with the story of ‘the other side of the hill.’”¹⁹

I can recall exactly how I felt when I read these words for the first time while working to complete *On Point*. Hugh Cole had confronted the same problems in 1946 that E. J. Degen, David Tohn, and I faced in 2003. The concerns that Cole expressed mirrored our own almost exactly. I would add only one more challenge to his list. Almost from the beginning, we feared that we would make an honest mistake that would make us look dishonest. Moving digits and writing in electrons, and doing so rapidly, can result in a number of errors ranging from quotation marks being left behind when a document is moved and “pasted” or an error in documentation that cannot be found on review but will surely emerge later.

The problem of intervention from the top is often alluded to today, but it was no less a problem in 1946 when Greenfield and his team undertook what became arguably the most rapidly produced and certainly among the best official histories ever. Cole mentioned the direct intervention of Otto von Bismarck in the efforts of the German General Staff’s official historians. Bismarck advised the historians that they could tell the truth, “but not all of the truth,” and to add insult



Hugh Cole’s history of the operations of the U.S. Third Army in eastern France between 1 September and 18 December 1944, a book that was originally issued by the Office of the Chief of Military History in a green cloth cover in 1950

even Cole recognized that there had already developed a tension about the purpose for which military history might be written and, in consequence, competing visions about how quickly the work should progress.¹⁸

According to Cole, four major obstacles lay before those who attempt to write contemporary military history. These obstacles are: (1) “The personal and unsympathetic intervention of men at the very top of

to injury he delayed publication for twenty years.²⁰ Greenfield also commented on intervention from the top, but he enjoyed good support from the Army's senior officers, as we did in writing *On Point*. He reported, "We have had some angry generals on our hands, but have never altered a statement that the historian could document unless the aggrieved party has presented new and reliable evidence to support his criticism."²¹

Cole's second dilemma—that of having a mass of records and data to assimilate and use to form judgments—was an enormous challenge in 1946. The Center received 34 tons of records from Europe alone in the first eight months after V-E Day.²² The scale of the current problem does not compare with that confronted by the authors of the Green Books, but it remains prodigious. One problem today is that much of the record is available only in electronic form. PowerPoint briefings are literally ephemeral, particularly if notes pages are not included. Charts rarely speak for themselves, and some briefings are enormous, yet contain little detail to link thoughts. For example, the air campaign briefing for Operation IRAQI FREEDOM contained more than 600 PowerPoint charts. If there were notes pages, we never found them.

The impact of a succeeding war on interest in an ongoing official history loomed large for the Historical Division almost at the outset. In 1948 Cole observed that "the military historian . . . must be fully aware that an atomic war might relegate the history of World War II to the field of military antiquities, leaving it hardly more important than the study of uniform buttons or ornamental sword hilts." Still he wrote, as did his colleagues, and

not even the Korean War two years later caused them to abandon their efforts. The problem of subsequent conflict seeming to make studying the previous war superfluous remains with us today. This fact is a compelling argument for getting to work immediately. According to Cole, official histories have tended to be overshadowed by subsequent events more often than not and almost always because they took too long to be written.²³

Lack of access to documents describing what the other side intended and how it perceived matters is the final challenge Cole cited to writing contemporary military history. Although the official historians in Cole's day had tons of German material, gaps remained, notably in the records of German divisions and regiments. These gaps were "irritating—but hardly of vital concern." What the shortage of

German materials meant is that the official history of the U.S. Army in World War II is unreliable below the corps echelon for the German side. Cole understood that it was unlikely historians would ever fill the gap in the enemy's records. As he put it, "We can say that such future finds *are* possible, but rather unlikely."²⁴

In the case of researching the major combat operations phase of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM, there were two sources for enemy information—interviews our team did at Camp Bucca and the work Kevin Woods and the Joint Advanced Warfighting Program undertook. By no means have we had access to the detail and depth of data that our predecessors in the Historical Division enjoyed, but we had enough to begin to develop an understanding, and even if we could not cite that data directly in 2003, we could and did take note of the things that we knew. The gap that remains

is both broader and deeper than the one Cole and his colleagues confronted in the late 1940s. We know very little of what the Iraqi leadership below corps level knew or believed and even less of what the various militias and foreign fighters hoped to accomplish.

So with all of these challenges, why bother writing contemporary military history? Why put the Center of Military History and working Army historians in the field into the difficult position of coping with a mass of material that is often difficult to account for, is mostly classified, and in some instances is of ambiguous value? More important, these historians will also have to deal with slings and arrows from the field and even from the ranks of their colleagues. Many of the criticisms will have merit due to the difficulty of accessing the



Hugh M. Cole

records of the other side. When, for example, will Osama bin Laden's historical section make its archives available? Does he have archives and in what form are they?

One criticism made of *On Point* and, for that matter, of the Green Books, is that their accounts are insufficiently critical of the performance of the Army. Perhaps that is so, but on balance the performance of the Army in major combat operations in Iraq in 2003 was not so very different than that of the Army Martin Blumenson studied during and after World War II. In 1963 he observed that "if some critics are disappointed because the military services have not been rebuked and scolded to a greater extent, they overlook the fact that the military did a more than creditable job."²⁵

Obviously, if we write officially sanctioned contemporary military history, we will be criticized, and rightly so, for not having the context, or what Cole termed "perspective," just right.²⁶ Cole's answer to that criticism is as good as any: "We believe that the dust churned up by Patton's tanks does less to distort perspective than the dust raised by the archivist as he thumbs through records a half century old."²⁷ Cole also understood the other chief reason for writing history, especially military history, as soon as possible after the event. He quoted a reviewer of a volume of the official British history of World War I that was finally published in 1947: "It is difficult to see what purpose is served by the publication of this history at this time. . . . Nobody would read it for pleasure and nobody study it to learn the military art. It will go on the shelf of the military library and there remain, consulted occasionally . . . by one silver-haired veteran to refute another."²⁸ Surely we can aspire to be more responsive to the Army while remaining alert to reasonable criticism and understanding the limitations of what we attempt.

Retired Col. Gregory Fontenot is the director of the University of Foreign Military and Cultural Studies at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. This organization studies potential military adversaries and seeks to better prepare the U.S. Army to engage them. A career armor officer, Fontenot taught European history at the U.S. Military Academy and commanded the 1st Brigade, 1st Armored Division, in Bosnia in 1995–96. He is a coauthor of *On Point: The United States Army in Operation Iraqi Freedom* (Washington, D.C., 2004).

NOTES

1. The essays appeared in *Army History*, Winter 2006, pp. 20–29, 30–34, and 35–37, respectively; quoted phrase, p. 30. The Army employs the phrase "5 X-Ray" to designate officers with special preparation and skills in the field of history.

2. Richard W. Stewart, "Instant History and History: A Hierarchy of Needs," *Army History* Winter 2006, p. 31.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid, p. 34.

6. Antulio J. Echevarria II, "The Trouble with History," *Parameters* 35 (Summer 2005): 83.

7. Ibid., p. 86.

8. Gregory Fontenot, E. J. Degen, and David Tohn, *On Point: The United States Army in Operation Iraqi Freedom* (Washington, D.C., 2004); William G. Robertson, ed., *In Contact! Case Studies from the Long War, Vol. 1* (Fort Leavenworth, Kan., 2006); Steven E. Clay, *Iroquois Warriors in Iraq* (Fort Leavenworth, Kan., 2007). The Combat Studies Institute at Fort Leavenworth anticipates releasing books in 2008 on the U.S. Army in Iraq from May 2003 to January 2005 and on the service of the U.S. Army in Afghanistan in the four years beginning with its intervention there in October 2001.

9. Stewart, "Instant History and History," p. 31.

10. Obituary, "Hugh M. Cole, Military Historian," *Washington Post*, 23 June 2005; Bell Irvin Wiley, "Kent Roberts Greenfield: An Appreciation," *Military Affairs* 22 (Winter 1958–1959): 177–78; Jaques Cattell, ed., *Directory of American Scholars: A Biographical Directory*, 2d ed. (Lancaster, Pa., 1951), p. 355.

11. Hugh M. Cole, "Writing Contemporary Military History," *Military Affairs* 12 (Fall 1948): 162–67.

12. Kent Roberts Greenfield, *The Historian and the Army* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1954).

13. Ibid., p. 5.

14. Ibid., p. 4. My own experience in overseeing the declassification of the pre-publication typescript of *On Point* did not prove simple, but Lt. Col. E. J. Degen got it done by tracking down everyone who could object and explaining to them how we had complied with the declassification instructions. When necessary, we were able to track down in open sources some information that proponents alleged remained classified. Even so, after *On Point* appeared, two staff officers at the U.S. Central Command cried foul until we produced the Defense Department clearance record.

15. Greenfield, *The Historian and the Army*, pp. 5–6.

16. Kent Roberts Greenfield, Robert R. Palmer, and Bell I. Wiley, *The Organization of Ground Combat Troops*, United States Army in World War II (Washington, D.C., 1947).

17. Hugh M. Cole, *The Lorraine Campaign*, United States Army in World War II (Washington, D.C., 1950); Hugh M. Cole, *The Ardennes: Battle of the Bulge*, United States Army in World War II (Washington, D.C., 1965).

18. Cole, "Writing Contemporary Military History," pp. 162–63, quotes, p. 163. I am indebted to my colleague Kevin Woods for drawing my attention to this wonderful article in the fall of 2003, when I, like Hugh Cole before me, was attempting to navigate the rocks and shoals of writing contemporary military history.

19. Ibid., p. 163, italics removed.

20. Ibid.

21. Greenfield, *The Historian and the Army*, p. 9.

22. Cole, "Writing Contemporary Military History," p. 164.

23. Ibid., p. 165.

24. Ibid., pp. 165–66, quotes, p. 166, italics in original.

25. Martin Blumenson, "Can Official History Be Honest History?" *Military Affairs* 26 (Winter 1962–1963): 160.

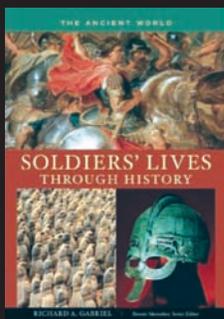
26. Cole, "Writing Contemporary Military History," p. 167.

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid.

BOOK REVIEWS

Soldiers' Lives through History—The Ancient World



By Richard A. Gabriel
Greenwood Press, 2006, 305 pp., \$65

REVIEW BY EUGENIA C. KIESLING

Soldiers' Lives through History, a new series from Greenwood Press, aims to introduce to a nonspecialist audience topics that have received too little attention in the past and ought to be of keen interest to the series's intended reader, the high school student or undergraduate. Rather than offering yet another study of how armies have waged war, the five volumes, edited by Dennis Showalter and containing works by Richard A. Gabriel, Clifford J. Rogers, Showalter and William J. Astore, Michael S. Neiberg, and Robert Foley and Helen McCartney, make an admirable effort to explore how soldiers lived, fought, and died. Rations, equipment, discipline, camps, logistics, and medical care are among the many interesting and important topics addressed.

In the first volume, *The Ancient World*, Gabriel tackles the most ambitious of the five topics and faces the most daunting evidentiary challenges. Determined to cover the

entire ancient world (twenty civilizations on three continents ranging chronologically from Sumer to Imperial Rome), Gabriel begins with twenty-one thematic chapters on such subjects as "Armor, Helmets, and Shields" and "Injury" and then offers eighteen chapters on specific types of soldiers. All are interesting, readable, and frustratingly compressed. Compression is inevitable, given the breadth of the topic, but Gabriel could have served his readers better by acknowledging it up front, admitting that the book is more encyclopedia than scholarship.

By lumping all ancient societies together, Gabriel's thematic chapters imply that the ancient world had a single, uniform military culture. While Gabriel cannot be blamed for such plausible generalities as "ancient armies had to transport more than food and weapons" (p. 97), they ultimately tell us little more than that every ancient army went to war with some kind of pack train, be it composed of slaves, chariots, donkeys, or elephants. Similarly, a modern archaeologist's observation that there are five ways to capture a fortified city is not evidence for how any specific ancient army would have gone about it (p. 124). Some of the generalizations are more problematic. Ancient soldiers suffered because "there were no roads" (p. 147), but Gabriel notes elsewhere that Rome paved 50,000 miles and other empires "built extensive road networks" (p. 103). It is possible that "the real killer on the ancient battlefield was fear" (p. 131), but a single statement by Ardant du Picq does not suffice to prove it for the vast armies discussed here. Perhaps ancient and modern soldiers are "psychologically identical" (p. 9), but did Herodotus think so when he

compared the Greeks and the Persian force before Thermopylae?

The second half of the book is more satisfying in its acknowledgment that different societies create different military organizations, but, at five pages per civilization, the result is essentially a series of encyclopedia articles. Such brief treatment suits poorly documented peoples like the Hittites or the Mitanni much better than it does classical Greece or Imperial Rome. More troubling than the unavoidable brevity of each section is a shift in focus from the soldier's experience to the behavior of ancient states, a subject already well covered in the existing literature and of interest only if presented in greater detail. Adherence to the original topic, the experience of the ancient soldier, would have risked repeating material from the thematic chapters, but the diversion suggests that there was not enough evidence to write an entire volume on the announced subject.

That so many of Gabriel's citations are to his own publications is a testimony to his extraordinarily prolific scholarship but allows him to avoid discussing the nature of the ancient sources and the evidentiary issues in studying ancient history. The notes are thin and the bibliography offers an eclectic but not particularly scholarly mixture. For example, where one would normally cite Polybius's famous description of Roman discipline, Gabriel relies on a modern paraphrase, one which uses the word "centurion" where the Greek calls for "tribune" (p. 62). This uncritical mixing of ancient and modern accounts does a disservice to the young target audience, for here was opportunity to tempt them to the pleasures of reading original sources while presenting ancient history as

a collection of fascinating puzzles rather than bland certainties.

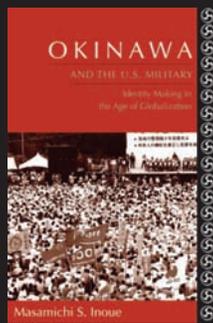
Ancient historians often fill the unavoidable lacunae in their evidence by extrapolating from better documented periods. Gabriel's comparative arguments are often plausible, but he presents them dogmatically, as if his audience would be shaken by any hints about the inherent risks of such extrapolations. Some are problematic. For example, his arguments about wound infection rates, which rest on statistics going up to the Great War, ignore the possibility that ancient treatments may have been more efficacious than those of some more recent periods. That modern evidence suggests that ancient soldiers in garrison required 3,000 calories a day does not prove that their diet normally provided that amount of energy (pp. 35–36).

Gabriel's project raises the question of how much uncertainty one should acknowledge in introducing laymen to serious history. Historiography and source criticism can be dry, and footnotes are rarely exciting. A historian may well hesitate to begin a book by admitting how much he or she does not know about the chosen topic, lest potential buyers prefer works by breezier, less punctilious authors. While the brief, simple, didactic expositions in *Soldiers Lives: The Ancient World* make it easily accessible to high school students, the work does not ask questions likely to spark curiosity or guide the reader to the sources for original study.



Dr. Eugenia C. Kiesling is a professor of history at the United States Military Academy. Educated at Yale, Oxford, and Stanford Universities, she is the author of Arming against Hitler: France and the Limits of Military Planning (Lawrence, Kans., 1996) and the editor and translator of Admiral Raoul Castex, Strategic Theories (Annapolis, Md., 1994), an abridged English version of the author's Théories stratégiques, 5 vols. (Paris, 1929–35).

Okinawa and the U.S. Military: Identity Making in the Age of Globalization



By Masamichi S. Inoue
Columbia University Press, 2007,
296 pp., \$45

REVIEW BY ARNOLD G. FISCH JR.

Masamichi S. Inoue, a professor at the University of Kentucky, has written an insightful anthropological study of the Okinawan sense of identity in our complex world.

If ever there were people susceptible to a historic “identity crisis,” it would be the men and women of Okinawa.

Inoue briefly sketches the island's early history. Okinawa, the largest of the Ryukyu Islands, was once the seat of an independent kingdom. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the rulers found themselves in a tributary relationship with China. The Satsuma clan invaded the archipelago in 1609 and established a dual tributary relationship that maintained the nominal independence of the Ryukyu kingdom. In 1872 the Japanese government formally annexed the islands as Okinawa *han*, or fiefdom. It became Okinawa Prefecture in 1879, seven years after all the other *han* in Japan.

Okinawans were regarded as the poor relations of home-island Japanese. For many years, their collective consciousness was as a peaceful but uniformly poor and oppressed people. That oppression became overt and pervasive during Japanese defense preparations during World War II. With no tradition glorifying warfare and the warrior, the Okinawans retained their indifference to all things

military, to the consternation of the Japanese. The local population suffered mass conscription, forced labor, and mandatory evacuations. The battle for Okinawa was America's bloodiest campaign against Imperial Japan. When it ended, at least one-tenth of the civil population had perished, although an accurate count was impossible. The percentage might well have been higher.

For the next twenty-seven years, the American military administered Okinawa and turned the island into a series of military bases. During that time the Okinawan people were uncertain whether they would become part of the United States, be returned to Japan, or perhaps assume yet a third identity. It is this period and the years following the U.S. government's return of Okinawa to Japanese sovereignty in 1972 that interest Inoue. His dissertation research focused on the impact of U.S. base construction and expansion on Okinawans' culture, politics, and sense of identity.

Inoue writes that the Okinawan people had hoped that the size and number of U.S. bases on the island would diminish with “reversion” to Japan in 1972 and the winding down of the Cold War. They were to be sorely disappointed. Upon reversion, some U.S. forces were withdrawn, only to be replaced by a contingent of Japanese Self-Defense Forces. This reminded many islanders of the hardships the last Japanese military presence had visited upon Okinawa. Base lands were not returned to civilian use, and the number of U.S. military personnel, still 135,000 in 1990, dropped to no less than 100,000 in 1995 and thereafter, as the United States recognized the growing economic and political significance of the Asian-Pacific region and responded with new deployments as the war on global terrorism evolved. The government in Tokyo willingly subscribed to the American global strategic scenario as a loyal partner.

Although Okinawa constitutes just 0.6 percent of Japan's total landmass, today the island hosts 75 percent of the U.S. military facilities and 65 percent of the American troops in Japan. The author points to the “ex-

exploitative relationship” (p. 4) Tokyo imposed on the island after reversion. The question then is how can the Okinawan people think of themselves as loyal Japanese?

Professor Inoue does not pretend to be a disinterested or neutral researcher. He believes that the anthropologist is an active participant in the events being studied, and his anti-base position is clearly outlined in this book. While expressing empathy for the average American serviceman, he sees the presence of America’s Okinawan bases as a great burden and speaks with feeling about the “U.S. imperial-global violence to Okinawa” (p. 22). He mentions, quite correctly, crimes, the daily jet, the environmental pollution, military accidents, and the unwanted requisitioning of family lands. (Chapter 6 of my book *Military Government in the Ryukyu Islands, 1945–1950* [Washington, D.C., 1988], discussed the land issue as well.)

On 4 September 1995, three American servicemen abducted and raped a young Okinawan schoolgirl. Inoue describes the rape case in Chapter 2 of his book, not so much to feature the appalling incident itself as to demonstrate how the aftermath of the crime and the perceived lack of justice helped to galvanize the anti-base feeling among the general population. There have been other rapes of and sundry violent acts against the island’s citizens before and, unfortunately, since that episode. Nevertheless, Okinawans can point to the public reaction to this particular case as an example of how the islanders, through speeches and demonstrations, expressed their shared sense of identity as a victimized peace-loving people. That identity stood in stark juxtaposition both to the oppressive alien presence represented by the U.S. bases and to Tokyo’s willingness to downplay the outrage.

Japan’s central government has not been indifferent to the impact on the Okinawan people of existing U.S. bases and their future development. Indeed, over the years since reversion in 1972, Tokyo has poured funding into Okinawa, creating numerous public works projects, compensating landowners, and providing many

sorely needed job opportunities, all of which aided establishment-oriented political candidates on the island. Although this economic largess has been felt on the entire island, it was concentrated in northern Okinawa around Nago City in the coastal district of Henoko. Professor Inoue focuses his research there. He examines how Tokyo’s economic input forever altered the Okinawan identity of a uniformly poor, oppressed, and marginalized people, creating something of a schism between the anti-base middle class “We are Okinawans” and a pro-base working class “We are Okinawas of a different kind.” Ever the good anthropologist, Inoue is not content to leave the Okinawan cultural identity issue neatly divided into these two camps. He proceeds to explore how age differences, gender issues, and environmental concerns cut across these lines. Today the islanders continue trying to discover what it means to say one is a citizen of Okinawa, yet at the same time a citizen of a shrinking world with global environmental and strategic issues at stake.

This is a candid, introspective book. Professor Inoue is forthright in describing how the Okinawan quest for identity reminded him of his own questions about a sense of self. He reflects how some Americans perceived him to be an academic from Japan. He is an American citizen, born in the United States, but he was raised in Japan and lived there through his undergraduate years. He feels that he has been forced “into the prison-house of self-Orientalization, from which there is no exit” (p. 223). Ironically, while researching on Okinawa, Inoue was asked by a Henoko woman, speaking of the Japanese forces’ atrocities, if he knew “what kind of things your fathers did in and to Okinawa?” Inoue says that when this question “was added to and intersected with my experiences of identity disintegration in the United States, what became clear to me was that neither Okinawa, Japan, or the United States could any longer or ever be called my home, my inside” (p. 223).

Okinawa and the U.S. Military is an honest book—in many ways one

might say a personal labor of love—but it is hardly for every reader. The style is formal, and Professor Inoue will at times “concretize” (p. 19) some alternatives and “problematize” (pp. 88, 221) certain positions. Moreover, the lay reader, unfamiliar with the language peculiar to anthropology, will encounter terms such as “Self,” the “Other,” and “appropriation,” as that word is used in this science, and perhaps want to put the book down.

For those versed in anthropology and interested in Okinawa, this is an excellent read. Inoue thoroughly reviews and comments on previous writings applicable to the identity issue at hand. *Okinawa and the U.S. Military* is a thoughtful book about the impact of U.S. military bases on one host country, rather than a geopolitical or strategic study. Inoue demonstrates that extensive overseas base development takes away not only land, as well as peace and quiet, but sometimes also the local sense of dignity.



Dr. Arnold G. Fisch Jr. was a historian at the Army Center of Military History from 1979 to 1997, retiring as a branch chief and managing editor of Army History. He subsequently served as an adjunct assistant professor of history in the University of Delaware’s Master of Arts in Liberal Studies (MALS) Program. He first visited Okinawa in 1966 while serving as an ensign in the U.S. Navy. He is the author of Military Government in the Ryukyu Islands, 1945–1950 (CMH, 1988).

*The OSS and Ho Chi Minh:
Unexpected Allies in the War
against Japan*



By Dixie R. Bartholomew-Feis
University of Kansas Press, 2006,
435 pp., \$34.95

REVIEW BY ERIK VILLARD

Historians are often tantalized by glimpses of roads not taken. For those who study America's tragic involvement in Vietnam, it is tempting to wonder what would have happened if the United States had chosen to support Ho Chi Minh's bid for national independence at the end of World War II instead of France's effort to reclaim its former colonies. Dixie R. Bartholomew-Feis, an associate professor of history and director of international education at Buena Vista University in Iowa, explores that formative stage of U.S.-Vietnamese relations during the spring and summer of 1945 when a small team of Office of Strategic Services (OSS) agents and Ho's small guerrilla army worked together to hasten Japan's defeat. Did the United States miss an opportunity to turn that spirit of wartime cooperation into a long-term policy of mutual understanding? Some have argued that diplomatic persuasion and economic incentives might have turned Ho into an "Asian Tito," a leader who would be too-independent minded to become a proxy for Soviet or Chinese ambitions and would therefore not seriously threaten regional stability. Others have concluded that a more accommodating U.S. policy would have been ineffectual at best and Munich-style appeasement at worst. They point out that Ho, an

ideologically committed Communist, never wavered from his goal of reunifying Vietnam under the iron grip of his party by any means necessary and at whatever cost. They believe that it was a foregone conclusion that Ho would establish close ties with Moscow and Beijing and pursue a foreign policy contrary to the interests of the United States and its regional allies.

The question is a provocative one, but Bartholomew-Feis has wisely chosen to build her narrative around the concrete events of the period instead of weaving it together with the gossamer threads of speculation. Highly detailed and well-researched, her book gives us a clear-eyed view of the early relationship between Ho Chi Minh and the United States and will join David G. Marr's *Vietnam 1945: The Quest for Power* (Berkeley, Calif., 1995), William J. Duiker's *Ho Chi Minh* (New York, 2000), and Archimedes L. A. Patti's *Why Viet Nam? Prelude to America's Albatross* (Berkeley, Calif., 1980) in the canon of standard works for this period.

The author divides the narrative portion of her book into nine chapters, an introduction, and an epilogue and provides almost seventy pages of useful endnotes. After briefly reviewing the history of Vietnam prior to 1945, the author discusses the United States' wartime interest in Indochina, highlighting President Franklin D. Roosevelt's anticolonial attitude and the role of the OSS in Asia under the direction of William "Wild Bill" Donovan. The mission of the OSS was to speed the defeat of Japan by gathering intelligence and carrying out covert operations. To that end, the agency was willing to support almost any group that opposed the Japanese, including revolutionary organizations that the United States would normally treat with disdain.

Bartholomew-Feis discusses the often frustrating American effort to establish an intelligence network in Indochina in 1943 and 1944. She describes with commendable thoroughness the factions that represented American, French, Vietnamese, Chinese, and British interests. The intense personal rivalries and the petty bureaucratic

feuding that frequently colored these relationships might have seemed ridiculously absurd had not the stakes been so high. The U.S. Navy and the OSS, for example, fought over the control of certain agents and sometimes refused to share intelligence with each other.

The author examines the work of Marine 1st Lt. Charles Fenn, a British-born OSS agent, observing that "both critics and admirers alike credit Fenn with helping to make Ho Chi Minh the undisputed leader of the Viet Minh in 1945" (p. 96). Fenn's main assignment was to work with an important trio of spies known as the Gordon Group and eventually bring them under his direction. In addition to providing intelligence to the OSS and other Allied organizations, the Gordon Group also arranged for European citizens to rescue downed Allied pilots.

The situation in Vietnam changed dramatically in March 1945 when the Japanese carried out a coup de main against the French colonial administration, effectively shutting down the network run by the Gordon Group. Bartholomew-Feis examines the increasing tension between the French and the Japanese in the wake of the takeover and the attempts by the OSS to rebuild its intelligence network. Having never had strong ties with the French community, in large part because the *colons* seemed more interested in preserving their status as colonial overlords than in defeating Japan, the agency increasingly turned to Vietnamese sources for intelligence. This brought the OSS into contact with one of the more promising Vietnamese resistance groups, the Viet Minh party of Ho Chi Minh.

It was Lieutenant Fenn who brought the two groups together in the spring of 1945. Searching for ways to replace the defunct Gordon Group network, Fenn recalled that Ho and his followers had rescued a downed Allied pilot named Lt. Rudolph Shaw III in November 1944. Knowing that Shaw had spoken quite highly of the Viet Minh, Fenn arranged to meet with Ho on 17 March 1945. After Ho convinced him that his group was willing to fight the Japanese and could establish an effective air rescue and intelligence

network, Fenn recruited the Viet Minh leader and gave him the code name "Lucius."

The relationship between Ho and the Americans deepened as agents such as Lieutenant Fenn and Capt. Archimedes Patti came to admire Ho for his dedicated nationalism and his eagerness to help the Allied war effort. At the same time they became increasingly disillusioned with the French *colons* who seemed to care only about restoring their own power. Ho also charmed new arrivals such as Maj. Allison Thomas, head of a small OSS group known as the Deer Team that had been sent to provide military training to the Viet Minh. Ho told Thomas that "he would 'welcome 10 million Americans'" to his country (p. 203). The Americans did more than return the good feelings; an Army medic, Pfc. Paul Hoagland, may have actually saved Ho's life after the Viet Minh leader became desperately ill from some combination of malaria, dysentery, and dengue fever. Returned to tolerable health and buoyed by the increasing confidence of his small guerrilla army, Ho decided "to launch 'a general insurrection to seize power throughout the country'" as soon as Japan capitulated (p. 214).

Bartholomew-Feis describes Ho's attempt to seize power in Hanoi in late August 1945 and the awkward position in which the OSS agents suddenly found themselves. The Americans were caught between Vietnamese, French, British, Chinese, and Japanese factions, each with separate and usually conflicting agendas but all of them demanding help from the OSS at one point or another. Most of the agents tried to remain neutral. Major Thomas, however, displayed a marked sympathy for the Viet Minh and went so far as to arm them with surplus weapons from the Deer Team and help them attack a Japanese-occupied fort in the town of Thai Nguyen. As far as he was concerned, the Viet Minh were doing the Allies a favor by subduing some recalcitrant enemy soldiers, but other OSS agents worried that Thomas had overstepped his authority. Ho, a master manipulator, exploited other opportunities to associate himself with the

Americans. Most famously, he gave the OSS delegation a prominent place of honor at a mass rally the Viet Minh held in Hanoi on 2 September to mark Japan's formal surrender. Before long, Ho had managed to create the impression that the Americans supported his bid for national independence and political supremacy.

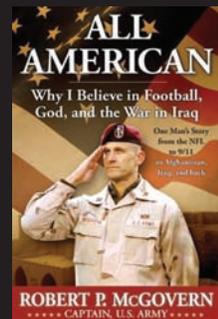
Chaos and politically motivated violence wracked Indochina following Japan's surrender. On 25 September a Vietnamese gunman killed OSS agent Capt. Peter Dewey when he and another agent stopped their jeep at a checkpoint near Saigon. Dewey became the first American soldier to die in Vietnam. His death may have been a mistake—the gunman probably would not have shot him had he known that he was an American, and Ho Chi Minh expressed his deep personal regret over the killing—but it aptly summarized the confusing circumstances that the United States faced in post-war Vietnam. Before long, most of the OSS agents had left the country, leaving its immediate future to the Vietnamese and to the waves of French soldiers armed with surplus U.S. weapons and clothed in U.S. uniforms who poured into the country, intent on erasing the humiliation of the previous five years.

Looking back at the short but eventful OSS mission in Vietnam, the author neatly summarizes the influence that the agents had on larger events by pointing out that even the two most visible among them "were so far removed from the key decision makers that they were both uninformed about evolving American policy, *and* they carried no weight at those levels even if they had been privy to the discussions surrounding them." (p. 314) They were young men of action who undertook their mission to speed Japan's defeat, not to determine the political future of Vietnam. By telling the story of these men with a sense of objectivity and with a judicious eye for detail, Bartholomew-Feis has brought a fascinating chapter in U.S.-Vietnamese relations to life.



Dr. Erik Villard has been a historian in the Histories Division of the Center of Military History since 2000. He holds a doctorate in history that he received from the University of Washington in 1999. He is currently writing a book on Army combat operations in Vietnam during the period from November 1967 to October 1968.

All American: Why I Believe in Football, God, and the War in Iraq



By Robert P. McGovern
William Morrow, 2007, 316 pp., \$25.95

REVIEW BY GARY M. BOWMAN

This book has an unintended and intangible quality of farce, redolent of Woody Allen's movie *Zelig*, about a man who had a remarkable ability to meet famous people and be present at important events.

Robert McGovern has an interesting life story. He played football at Holy Cross, was drafted by the Kansas City Chiefs in the tenth round of the 1989 National Football League draft, and played four seasons in the NFL for several teams. He then attended Fordham University Law School in New York City and worked for two years as an associate at an insurance defense law firm in New Jersey, which he found boring. He worked as a drug prosecutor in New York City for two years, and joined the Army Reserve to supplement his income. On 12 September 2001, McGovern put on his Army uniform, which allowed him to pass a police checkpoint guarding the Ground Zero site, and for four days

he worked as a volunteer, assisting in rescue efforts and the recovery of remains. On 14 September he lined up with rescue workers to greet President Bush when he visited Ground Zero. When he met the president, McGovern said, “We’re ready, sir.” Bush then passed down the line, but he came back to McGovern, no doubt thinking that McGovern was there in some military capacity, and said, “I know you’re ready. And we’re going to hit more than just dirt this time, too” (pp. 20–22).

McGovern volunteered for active duty and was mobilized in January 2002 at the Staff Judge Advocate Office of the XVIII Airborne Corps. McGovern deployed to Afghanistan for the second rotation of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, where he performed Operational Law duties, including acting as a legal targeting adviser in the Joint Operations Center at Bagram Air Base. Upon his return to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, McGovern was appointed to prosecute Sgt. Hasan Akbar, the American soldier who had attacked the headquarters of the 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division, in Kuwait on the eve of the invasion of Iraq. After Akbar’s conviction, McGovern deployed to Iraq, where he prosecuted insurgents accused of attacking Coalition forces. McGovern was appointed to the Regular Army after he returned from Iraq, and he married a fellow Judge Advocate General’s (JAG) Corps officer.

The most entertaining aspect of the book is McGovern’s football story of how a Division I-AA player from Holy Cross made a modest success in the NFL. His story after his football career, however, begs numerous questions, such as: Why did McGovern, an Army reservist who was not in any military status, wear his uniform to the Ground Zero clean-up site, work for several days in a hazardous place, doing work for which he was not trained, such as rescue and the recovery of human remains? How did McGovern meet the president, have his picture taken with the president in uniform, and even tell the president that “we’re [meaning the military]

ready”? Why was he, as a reserve JAG captain, who had no prior experience on active duty and who apparently had no advanced training in Operational Law within the JAG Corps, assigned to advise the commander of Combined Joint Task Force 180 on targeting in Afghanistan? Why was he, with only two years experience as a municipal prosecutor, assigned as one of two prosecutors on the Army’s first capital murder case in fifty years? Why was he, as a thirty-nine-year-old captain, accessed into the Regular Army? Why did he identify himself on the cover of this book as a “Captain, U.S. Army” and in the book as “a Republican and a conservative” (p. 302) but not include the normal disclaimer that his views are his own and not the Army’s?

McGovern writes that our military intervention in Iraq is justified because the military has a role in spreading democracy, removing dictators, and stopping genocide wherever it exists, even in Darfur. He argues that Iraqi insurgents are “fascists” (p. 294) and that Osama bin Laden “is no different from any other thug with big ambitions—he wants to be on top” (p. 304), even though the most informed bin Laden experts agree that bin Laden is not an Islamofascist, that he has played a limited role in the Iraq insurgency, and that it is not clear that Iraqi insurgents themselves are ideologically motivated other than by a shared hatred for America. McGovern deems the insurgents he prosecuted in Iraq as “losers” (p. 307). His certitude in his beliefs leaps from the page, but it is unlikely that any reader who did not share his beliefs prior to reading his book will be persuaded by him.

McGovern offers a unique look at the working of the Central Criminal Court of Iraq. I am not aware of any other published account by an American military prosecutor of his experience with the court. Unfortunately, McGovern does not explain how the court, which was established by the Coalition Provisional Authority, applies Iraqi law, and employs Iraqi judges, operates in a larger context beyond allowing the Coalition to

prosecute insurgents. He does not offer a rebuttal of the many critics of the court; in particular, Iraqi defense attorneys complain that they do not have access to evidence against their clients, and human rights advocates have criticized the application of the death penalty by the court. In fact, McGovern’s book actually validates some of those criticisms. McGovern explicitly states that “trial by ambush” seemed “poetically just” in the Iraq court (p. 285). He also points out that military prosecutors carry their weapons in the courthouse, and a photograph in the book shows a judge present while McGovern prepares a witness for his testimony in court, in the absence of the defendant or his counsel.

A reader of McGovern’s book who does not share his beliefs might read it with the hope of better understanding what civilians perceive to be the monolithic “military mind.” McGovern’s views are, indeed, consistent with those of perhaps a majority of military members. However, the American military’s execution of its missions is not motivated by ideology. McGovern conflates his own ideology with the rationale for the military’s execution of its mission, which is, and should be, non-ideological. It might have been proper for McGovern to write his book if he had returned to civilian life after his active duty and written about his experiences and why the government’s Iraq policy is justified, but the publication of this type of book by a serving Regular Army officer breaches the tacit political neutrality of the Regular Army.



Col. Gary M. Bowman, an Army Reserve officer in the Judge Advocate General’s Corps, has been the deputy commander (individual mobilization augmentee) at the U.S. Army Center of Military History since 2006. He holds a doctorate and a law degree from the University of Virginia and practices law in Roanoke, Virginia. He is the author of Highway Politics in Virginia (Fairfax, Va., 1993). He has been mobilized and deployed overseas four times during the Global War on Terrorism.

THE CHIEF HISTORIAN'S FOOTNOTE

DR. RICHARD W. STEWART



I am often asked by Army personnel, civilian and military, How long does it take a historian to produce history? Generally, the question is asked with a measure of disbelief or exasperation that it takes as long as it does. I have generally responded to this question in a manner similar to Command and General Staff College students when asked about tactical problems: it depends on the situation. I know that this sounds unhelpful, but with so many variables, there is no easy response. This is an important question, especially when your non-historical supervisor, while drafting National Security Personnel System (NSPS) work objectives, asks how long it will take you to produce a history. Your answer needs to touch on all of the variables involved, so that you do not give your supervisor unrealistic expectations. You should neither give the unwelcome answer of “five years” without an explanation of why that much time is needed nor provide the probably equally unrealistic answer of “six months,” when you know you cannot possibly meet that objective.

So what are the variables that define the length of time it takes to write history? They include, to name a few, the type of product, the level of quality desired, the availability of sources, the prospective audience, and the other tasks that are on the author’s plate. All of these variables are interrelated, and each should be a key element of any discussion with

your supervisor about performance objectives.

The first question is this, What type of product do the organization’s leaders want? Do they want a three-page information paper or a series of papers, a staff study with annotations or a short monograph? Do they have a pamphlet in mind or a coffee-table book with lots of pictures? Or are they interested simply in an annual command history that relies on staff input from the command, making its timely completion subject to the cooperation of other staff elements? In other words, nailing down expectations ahead of time can clarify the nature of the project, give the writer a way to judge how long it will take to complete it, and determine whether or not the writer and supervisor need to generate interim milestones.

The level of quality required and the availability of sources will drive the amount of time needed for research. When writing a short information paper, based generally on quickly available secondary sources, the historian will often need just to focus on the main question being asked, bring in a few supporting arguments, and then sum up his or her position in a clear conclusion. When we produce information papers at the Center of Military History, we will sometimes list the sources we have used, but we seldom provide scholarly footnotes. Information papers are quick-turnaround staff products meant to address a narrow topic, to scratch a specific “itch,” so to speak, and to do so with no pretensions in the way of original research or deep analysis. Speed and a sharp focus on the exact question are paramount. If more time is available, the product can generally be made more complete and accurate, depending on the availability of necessary source documents.

A pamphlet or short monograph, although often based solely on secondary sources, will be more widely

distributed than an information paper, so a higher level of quality becomes more important. A historian preparing a command’s annual history will often require as much time to gather the sources and solicit routine staff approvals as he or she will need to write the history, and, as a result, the product can easily take a year to complete. A larger monograph or short book, especially one that requires the use of more primary documents or even archival research, requires a greater commitment of time and other resources. Its preparation often involves so many variables (especially the unknown nature of the quantity, quality, and security classification of available sources) that providing anything other than a carefully hedged estimate of how long it will take to write is dangerous. In the latter case, historians are generally better advised to suggest a series of intermediate, event-driven milestones than to make artificial time predictions.

Identifying the audience is also critical to determining how long the writing of a historical product will take. An information paper that will be read only by a few staff officers, who themselves have a short suspense to answer a question or finish a staff action, is very different than a pamphlet meant for the general public. A short monograph on a specific combat action, such as the monographs produced by the Combat Studies Institute, will provide fodder for doctrine writers and military students and thus must be scrupulously accurate to ensure that the right conclusions can be drawn. Such a monograph can require four to six months to write and several more months to go through the publishing process. As for the official histories—often long, detailed, using all available sources, deeply analytical, and meant to stand the test of time—the audience will be

the Army and the American public of today and tomorrow. That audience deserves the highest quality product, and thus these histories will take the longest to write, review, panel, edit, and publish. All of these are time-intensive actions.

Finally, a critical element to discuss with your supervisor (whether civilian or military) relative to the question of how long it will take to produce a history is this, What else do you want me to do? Timelines for historical products, either in the field or at the Center, are regularly disrupted by other taskings, hotter suspenses, new ideas, or interruptions by other staff elements. Your supervisor needs to be kept informed of every one of these interruptions and must be told exactly how each will interfere with a previously agreed-upon timeline. The NSPS evaluation system is meant to force the supervisor and the employee to communicate more frequently, and nowhere is this more important than in discussing assignments that can disrupt the timelines established for producing histories.

So, how long does it take to write history? Well, again, it depends. Staff actions can take as little as thirty minutes and as long as six months. Pamphlets can take six months to a year. Monographs and command histories can easily take a year and often eighteen months. Official histories based on primary research can take from three to five years to write and then another one to two years for editing and the production of a final published book. Can it be done faster? Yes, if you change expectations on quality and conduct less research. Can it take longer? Easily, if the sources are elusive or classified and other taskings or priorities intervene. There is no one answer or even rule of thumb. The key is communicating and clarifying expectations ahead of time and not promising more than you can deliver, faster than you can deliver. And above all, do not surprise your supervisor just before the end of your rating period. The evaluation you save may be your own.



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See page 5 for more information.