

THE PROFESSIONAL BULLETIN OF ARMY HISTORY

# ARMY HISTORY

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**“WE ARE COMING, NINEVEH”**

THE LIBERATION OF MOSUL, 2016–2017

BY MASON W. WATSON

**“YOUR EXPLOITS WILL  
RANK AMONG THE  
GREATEST OF MILITARY  
ACHIEVEMENTS”**

LT. GEN. WILLIAM H. SIMPSON AND THE  
FIGHT FOR THE WESEL BRIDGES

BY MARK T. CALHOUN

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Front cover: A U.S. Army tactical vehicle assigned to the 82d Airborne Division sits outside Mosul, Iraq.  
*Department of Defense*

## EDITOR'S JOURNAL

I am particularly excited about the Fall 2023 issue of *Army History*. Not only do we offer our usual array of excellent and engaging content, but we celebrate the fortieth anniversary of this marvelous publication.

The first article, by Center of Military History (CMH) historian Mason Watson, details the battle for and eventual liberation of Mosul, Iraq, from the forces of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in 2016–2017. If you regularly read my editor's journal, you will know that we had planned to publish this piece earlier in the year, but it required a rigorous security review that delayed its release. We are pleased to offer it to our readers at last and we sincerely hope you enjoy it. This exhaustively researched article tells the story of how Iraqi forces, with U.S. advice and indirect fire and air support, reclaimed this historic city from its ISIS occupiers, fighting in a nightmarish urban landscape.

The second article, by Mark Calhoun of the National World War II Museum, shines a spotlight on a lesser-known Army commander of the Second World War. Lt. Gen. William H. Simpson commanded the Ninth U.S. Army in the European Theater, and this article highlights the Ninth Army's effort to cross the Rhine River into Germany and secure the strategically important bridges near the city of Wesel in the face of stiff German resistance. Calhoun also details many of the interallied frictions that occurred among the overall commander, British Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery, and his American subordinates. Simpson was able to navigate these obstacles and eventually achieve his force's objectives.

This issue's Artifact Spotlight is a continuation of a previous spotlight from the Fall 2022 edition, which looked at the World War I helmet of General George S. Patton Jr. In part two, we get to examine Patton's first M1 helmet, which he wore before and during the early days of World War II. As it happens, this issue's Museum Feature takes readers on a visit to a place all too familiar to Patton: the Louisiana Maneuvers and Military Museum, located at Camp Beauregard in Pineville, Louisiana. This museum tells the story of the largest General Headquarters peacetime training maneuver conducted in 1941.

Here at CMH, we continue to speed up production of *Army History* in an effort to get our issue releases back on schedule. As I have mentioned before, the paper shortages and supply chain issues seriously affected our ability to publish editions on time. I believe the issues will be on track once again beginning with the Winter 2024 issue.

This issue marks the fortieth anniversary of the founding of *Army History*. Throughout this issue, readers will find features that give a little history of the magazine and show how it has grown and changed over the years. I am thrilled about this milestone and hope that readers are as well. I am deeply honored to be entrusted with the stewardship of this journal, and I will always work to provide our audience with great content. Here's to the past forty years and to all the great things to come for *Army History* in the future!

Bryan J. Hockensmith  
Managing Editor

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# THE CHIEF'S CORNER

CHARLES R. BOWERY JR.

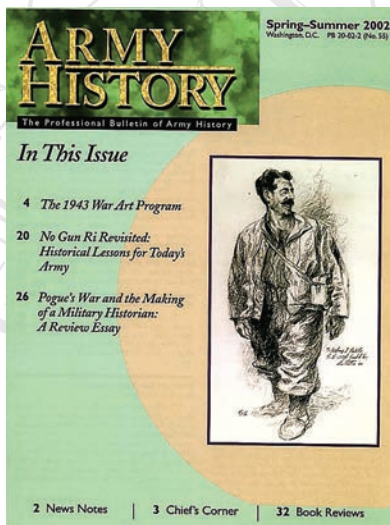
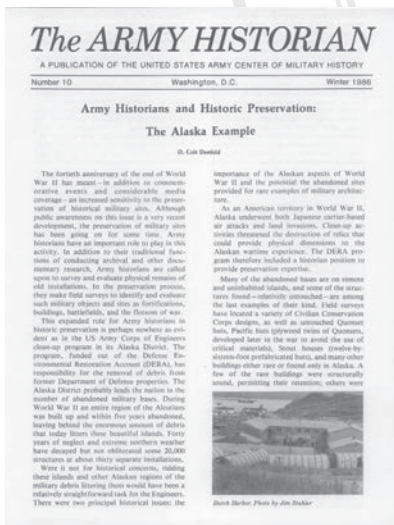
## FORTY YEARS OF ARMY HISTORY

The year 2023 marks the fortieth anniversary of the Center of Military History's publication of one of our flagship products, *Army History* magazine. For four decades, a series of dedicated Army civilian professionals have shepherded this journal, and the thousands of historians who have contributed to it, through the intricate process of editing, layout, and production. You hold the results in your hands. *Army History* has continued to be the one service professional publication that integrates effectively the scholarly and popular dimensions of the U.S. Army's history in an attractive and engaging format. This balancing act between scholarly rigor and readability can be difficult to maintain, but our team continues to do this in style. In recent years, we have increased our focus on the Army's material culture through features on our museums, artifacts, and art, and we have used the magazine to keep abreast of the construction and opening of the National Museum of the U.S. Army. Our authors are continuing to examine little-studied aspects of the Army's social and institutional history along with more traditional pieces on campaigns, battles, and leaders, thus illuminating our past in a comprehensive way. Rounding out this great quarterly production is the presence of beautiful and informative maps, charts, and images to supplement the text, and book reviews that highlight recent publications in military

history. The Chief Historian and I are thankful for the platform the magazine gives us to communicate the strategic direction and efforts of the entire Army historical program. All in all, we could not be prouder of *Army History*, and it continues to carry a significant reputation in the field.

As we mark this fortieth anniversary of the journal's publication, I would be remiss if I did not highlight the incredible work done by its long-time managing editor, Bryan Hockensmith of the Center's Multimedia and Publications Division. Since late 2011, Bryan has been responsible for all aspects of the publication of *Army History*, from fielding inquiries and vetting submissions with our authors to editing, scoping, and helping to lay out the finished product. The Center's solid reputation in the military history community comes from the wealth of scholarly connections that Bryan has formed over the years.

And so, we wish *Army History* a happy fortieth birthday, and we look forward to the next forty years and more!



# NEWSNOTES

## New Publications from CMH

The Center of Military History (CMH) recently released two new publications. The first is *Operation ENDURING FREEDOM: The United States Army in Afghanistan, September 2001–March 2002*, by Mark R. Folse. When Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaeda network executed the deadly 11 September 2001 attacks, the United States responded with a global offensive against international terrorists and those who harbored them. War with al-Qaeda meant war with its hosts: the Taliban, a militant Islamist group that had gained control of most of Afghanistan in the 1990s. In October 2001, U.S. military forces began a campaign against both groups. With the help of various anti-Taliban militias, American troops fought to remove the Taliban from power, destroy al-Qaeda, find bin Laden, and preclude terrorists from using Afghanistan as a refuge. Afghanistan, therefore, would be the first conflict in the decades-long Global War on Terrorism.

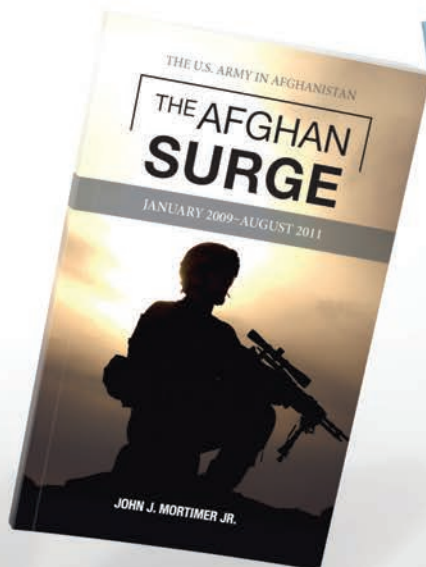
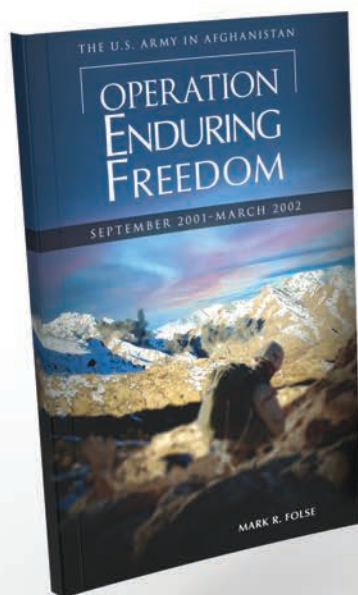
The second is *The Afghan Surge: The United States Army in Afghanistan, January*

*2009–August 2011*, by John J. Mortimer Jr. This monograph examines the development of the strategy, the evolution of command and control, and the execution of operations during the surge period of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM. This work surveys how the increase in forces stalled Taliban and al-Qaeda momentum long enough to provide the Afghan government more opportunity to work toward a stable and democratic Afghanistan. With a drawdown deadline announced, commanders and soldiers in the field had to develop a tight timetable to train the Afghan National Army, deal with internal corruption, and secure the Afghanistan-Pakistan border while fighting the war. This study is a precursor to a scheduled Army official history on the Afghan surge.

## New Graphic Novel from AUSA

The Association of the United States Army (AUSA) is proud to announce the release of its latest entry in the Medal of Honor graphic novel series: *Medal of Honor: Bruce Crandall*. Army aviator Bruce

P. “Snake” Crandall flew more than 900 combat missions during two tours of duty in the Vietnam War. Twenty-two of these missions involved helicopter flights into the Ia Drang valley, an ordeal for which he would receive the Medal of Honor. During the Battle of Ia Drang, the first major engagement of the Vietnam War, Crandall repeatedly ignored heavy enemy fire on Landing Zone X-RAY to deliver ammunition and evacuate scores of wounded soldiers. Interested readers can view the work or download a free copy at the AUSA’s website: [www.ausa.org/crandall](http://www.ausa.org/crandall).



# “WE ARE COMING, NINEVEH”



## THE LIBERATION OF MOSUL, 2016–2017

By Mason W. Watson

### Introduction<sup>1</sup>

On 9 July 2017, Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi arrived in Mosul, a city that had seen brutal fighting between the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) for more than nine months. Surrounded by his generals and clad in the distinctive black uniform of Iraq’s elite Counterterrorism Service (CTS), the prime minister declared victory over ISIS’s forces in Mosul in a statement broadcast by Iraqi state television on the following day.<sup>2</sup> The announcement proved premature. In the afternoon on 10 July, around 200 ISIS fighters strapped on suicide vests and emerged from the basements and tunnels where they had been hiding in the ruins of West Mosul’s “Old City.” Many disguised themselves as women or feigned surrender in an attempt to get as close as possible to Iraqi troops before detonating their explosives. The ruse fortunately failed. By the end of the day, around

140 of the fighters were dead. Within a week, the last small section of the city had fallen to Iraqi forces. Bulldozers accompanied Iraqi infantry during the final assault on 16 July, interring would-be suicide bombers beneath the rubble.<sup>3</sup>

This bitter struggle over less than 2 square kilometers of territory marked the end of the Islamic State’s occupation of Iraq’s second-largest city. It also represented a key step toward the final defeat of ISIS’s self-proclaimed “caliphate,” which at its height had controlled around one-third of Iraq. Despite the battle’s significance, however, its historiography, and that of the broader campaign, remains underdeveloped—in large part because the official records, the overwhelming majority of which are still classified, are inaccessible to most researchers.<sup>4</sup> Drawing on interviews with participants and on a range of unclassified official documents, this article provides a preliminary operational history of the battle for Mosul. It surveys

**A group of 101st Airborne Division soldiers pose with a captured ISIS flag.**

*Courtesy of Shawn Umbrell*

the course of the battle on the ground and examines the U.S.-led coalition's contributions to the Iraqis' success.

The Mosul campaign was a uniquely Iraqi victory, in which the Iraqi military did things its own way, taking advantage of coalition firepower but often heedless of suggestions offered by coalition advisers. The Iraqis' success vindicates their methods—as well as the light footprint, proxy warfare approach adopted by coalition forces. However, the battle for Mosul was a unique case involving a unique enemy, and the U.S. Army, the Joint Force, and the ISF should be wary of drawing general lessons from such a singular campaign.

## Background

The conflict with ISIS had its roots in America's second Iraq War. In his February 2003 statement before the United Nations presenting President George W. Bush's case for war with Saddam Hussein, Secretary of State Colin L. Powell made several references to a little-known Jordanian-born jihadist, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi.<sup>5</sup> A minor figure before the 2003 invasion, Zarqawi became infamous for leading one of the deadliest and most brutal insurgent groups opposed to the U.S.-led occupation of Iraq. Initially known as the Group of Monotheism and Jihad, it rebranded itself al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) after Zarqawi pledged allegiance to Osama bin Laden. It was likely responsible for the bombing of the al-Askari Mosque in Samarra in February 2006, one of the events that triggered Iraq's sectarian civil war. After Zarqawi's death later that year, his group merged with several others to form the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI). It was still operating under this name when the United States withdrew from Iraq in December 2011.

The Syrian civil war, which broke out in 2011, gave ISI a priceless opportunity for expansion. Now led by an obscure Iraqi religious scholar known as Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, ISI sent a few dozen operatives across the border into Syria in August 2011.<sup>6</sup> They eventually organized a Syrian affiliate, which provided the basis for ISI's transformation into the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in 2013. As it carved out a secure base area in Syria, ISIS became an increasingly potent threat to the Iraqi government. In January 2014, it seized the city of Al Fallujah, drawing the Iraqi military into a counterinsurgency campaign in Al Anbar Province. Then, in June, it overran

Mosul in a four-day battle. Five entire Iraqi divisions—a quarter of the ISF—disintegrated as ISIS drove down the Tigris River Valley almost to the gates of Baghdad.<sup>7</sup>

This triggered an American response. Maj. Gen. Dana J. H. Pittard deployed to Baghdad in late June with a 100-person headquarters element from U.S. Army Central.<sup>8</sup> Less than two months later, with ISIS encroaching on Erbil, the capital of Iraq's semiautonomous Kurdistan Regional Government, U.S. forces carried out their first airstrikes against ISIS in Iraq. The first airstrikes in Syria came in September. In October, the U.S. government designated the campaign against ISIS Operation INHERENT RESOLVE (OIR). Combined Joint Task Force–Operation INHERENT RESOLVE (CJTF-OIR), initially commanded by Lt. Gen. James L. Terry, assumed responsibility for the campaign late in 2014.<sup>9</sup>

It was clear from the beginning that OIR would not be like the two previous U.S. operations in Iraq, Operation IRAQI FREEDOM and Operation NEW DAWN. Although American troops deployed to the country in increasing numbers beginning in late 2014, they did so only as trainers and advisers to the ISF. Fighting ISIS on the battlefield was not part of their mission. With a few exceptions—namely special operations forces and, later, artillery units—the only U.S. military personnel directly

engaged in combat were pilots flying miles above the earth's surface. The bloody work of closing with and destroying the enemy was left to the Iraqis. The reasoning behind this approach was simple. President Barack H. Obama explained in December 2015:

We should not be drawn once more into a long and costly ground war in Iraq or Syria. That's what groups like ISIL [ISIS] want. They know they can't defeat us on the battlefield. . . . But they also know that if we occupy foreign lands, they can maintain insurgencies for years, killing thousands of our troops, draining our resources, and using our presence to draw new recruits. The strategy that we are using now—airstrikes, Special Forces, and working with local forces who are fighting to regain control of their own territory—that is how we'll achieve a more sustainable victory. And it won't require sending a new generation of Americans overseas to fight and die for another decade on foreign soil.<sup>10</sup>

Even the American experience with military advising was different than in earlier conflicts. With force protection an overriding concern, U.S. advisers remained at several large coalition facilities. According to Col. Brett G. Sylvia, who commanded the 2d Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne



**A soldier with the 101st Airborne Division assists Iraqi Army ranger students during a room clearing drill at Camp Taji, Iraq.**

*Department of Defense*

Division, during its 2016 deployment as CJTF-OIR's principal advisory and training task force (TF), "all travel to anywhere but a mature U.S. base required the highest approvals; only in the secure Baghdad 'Green Zone' was there frequent travel from one location to another." American advisory teams had "no ability to move forward with Iraqi combat units."<sup>11</sup>

This constraint limited the advisers' ability to communicate with, and therefore influence, Iraqi troops on the front lines. Partly as a result, the first major Iraqi counteroffensive, the operation to retake Ar Ramadi, dragged on for more than five months, even though the ISF outnumbered the Islamic State's defenders by a ratio of between 16:1 and 25:1.<sup>12</sup> The battle to retake Al Fallujah, fought in May and June 2016, went much more smoothly, but still fell short of the ideal in important respects. Rather than synchronizing their efforts, the different ISF elements involved operated largely independently, causing the attack to become "a race to the town center between competing ISF forces."<sup>13</sup> Yet, overall, the campaign was making progress. Between June 2014 and October 2016, CJTF-OIR suffered only three combat fatalities, fulfilling the president's objective of keeping U.S. forces from a "costly ground war."<sup>14</sup> During the same period, the coalition inflicted heavy losses on ISIS, killing tens of thousands of fighters.<sup>15</sup> Large parts of Iraq had been liberated, including much of Al Anbar Province. However, the ISF had paid a high price for its victories. Iraqi forces sustained more than 4,700 casualties, including nearly 500 soldiers killed in action, in the battles for Ar Ramadi and Al Fallujah alone—and the liberation of Mosul promised to be a more difficult operation than any conducted by the ISF thus far.<sup>16</sup>

## Opposing Forces

Mosul, the capital of Iraq's northwestern Ninewa Province, had been one of the country's most populous cities, with more than 1.5 million inhabitants, before it fell to ISIS in 2014. Although perhaps as many as one-third of the city's residents chose to flee rather than live under the "caliphate," it remained a major population center.<sup>17</sup> In better times, it was quite diverse, with sizeable and well-established Christian and Kurdish minorities. However, Mosul's inhabitants, especially the Sunni Arabs who comprised a majority of the population, also had a reputation for conservatism.<sup>18</sup> Between

2003 and 2011, the city had been a center of resistance to the U.S.-led occupation. As one American commander noted in 2010, "If AQI had a Pentagon, it would be in Mosul."<sup>19</sup>

In terms of geographic area, Mosul is slightly smaller than Baltimore, Maryland.<sup>20</sup> Five bridges connect the city's eastern and western halves, which lay on opposite banks of the Tigris.<sup>21</sup> The dominant feature of West Mosul is the Old City, characterized by sturdy stone buildings and narrow, winding alleyways. It was there in 2014, at the Grand Mosque of al-Nouri, that al-Baghdadi assumed the title of caliph. With ornate architecture dating back to the days of the Ottoman Empire and earlier, the district was, according to the United Nations, "the physical representation of the cultural diversity that characterized Iraq."<sup>22</sup> East Mosul, conversely, featured more recent development, with less durable concrete and rebar structures built after 1970. It contained several residential neighborhoods, industrial districts, and the campus of the University of Mosul—one of Iraq's largest institutions of higher education.

In October 2016, approximately 3,000 to 5,000 ISIS fighters garrisoned Mosul and an additional 1,500 to 2,500 fighters occupied defensive positions in the surrounding countryside. These forces included about 1,000 foreign fighters.<sup>23</sup> The coalition's advances over the past year gradually had isolated the "caliphate" from the wider world and had limited access to Mosul, ensuring that few reinforcements could reach the city. In November 2015, the Kurdish Peshmerga liberated the town of Sinjar, severing the last major highway connecting ISIS's territory in Iraq and Syria.<sup>24</sup> The following August, coalition special operators helped the Syrian Democratic Forces liberate the Syrian city of Manbij, cutting a key entry point for foreign jihadists traveling through Turkey.<sup>25</sup> At the same time, the ISF advanced north along the Tigris, driving a wedge between ISIS-held territory around Hawijah, to the east, and the remainder of the "caliphate," to the west. Although ISIS could still transfer some supplies and personnel between Syria and Iraq across the desert south of Sinjar, the terrorist group's position in Mosul was precarious and unlikely to improve. Moreover, relentless airstrikes by coalition forces ensured that any movements that did occur were on a small scale, "single digit fighters and . . . people with backpacks and that sort of thing."<sup>26</sup> Lacking a viable escape route, many of the militants defending Mosul—

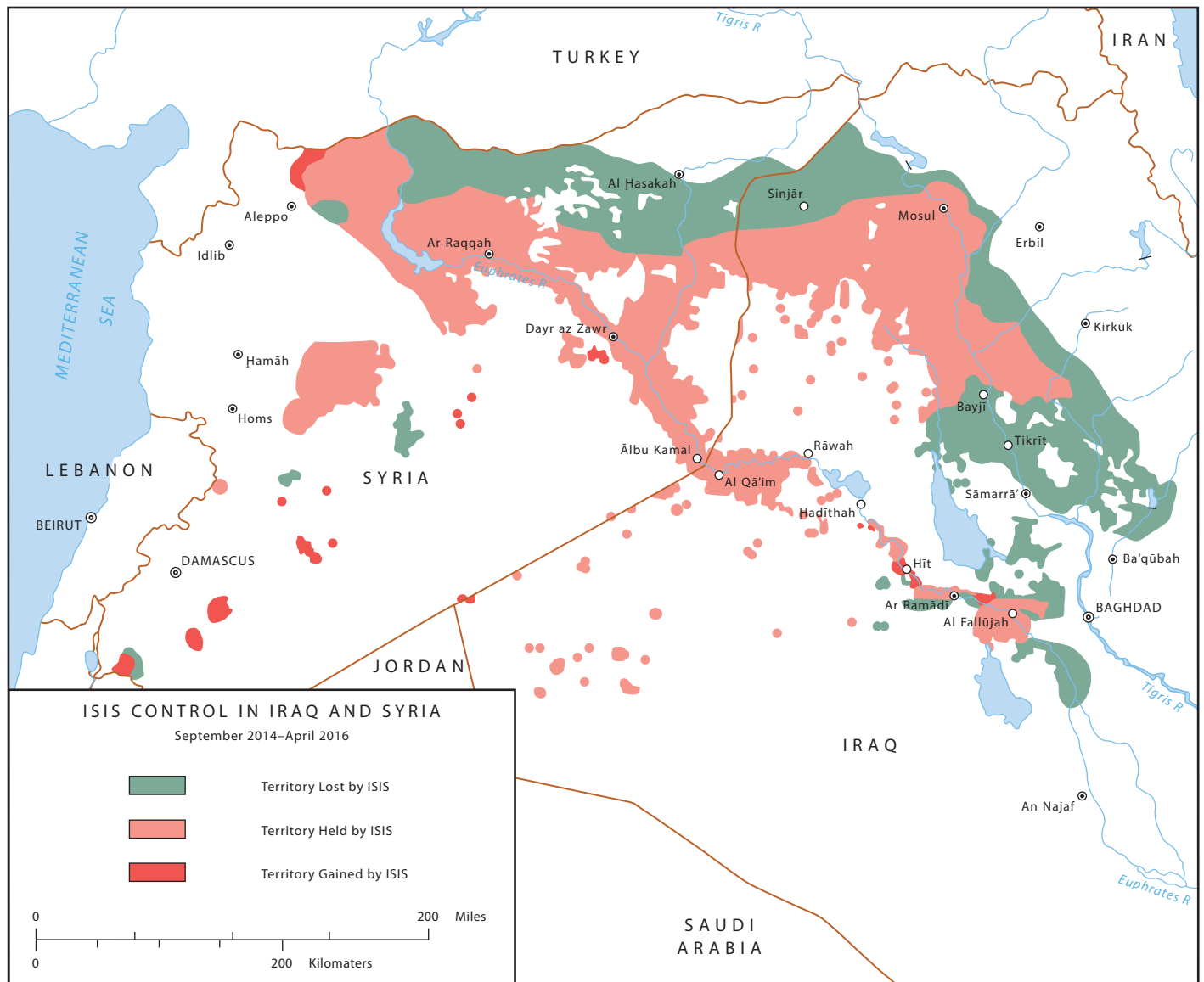
especially the hard core of foreign jihadists, who were unable to blend back into the local population—intended to fight to the death.<sup>27</sup>

They would benefit from a system of defensive works prepared during the Islamic State's two-and-a-half-year occupation of the city. "Mosul's dense urban areas," noted one U.S. report, "provided a seemingly unlimited number of opportunities for ISIS to create a near unassailable defense-in-depth." Concrete barriers and disabled vehicles blocked roadways and created "kill zones," where improvised explosive devices (IEDs) could inflict maximum damage. Fortified buildings served as defensive strongpoints. Many of these structures, including facilities like hospitals, were also rigged to explode. To facilitate movement around the city without drawing the attention of the coalition's aerial surveillance assets, ISIS fighters knocked "wormholes" in the walls of adjacent structures and constructed an extensive tunnel network, turning entire blocks into "continuous, interconnected fighting positions." Underground tunnels additionally provided shelter from coalition fires. The Islamic State also sought to deter airstrikes—or, at the least, score propaganda victories against the coalition—by using the city's civilian population as human shields.<sup>28</sup> The overall effect was formidable. It was a defense, according to one senior coalition commander, "that any Western army would have a hard time penetrating."<sup>29</sup>

The Islamic State's leaders nevertheless understood that outright victory over the coalition at Mosul was likely impossible. Previous defensive battles in Iraq had uniformly ended in failure. If it could, the terrorist group hoped to retain control over the city that represented its strongest claim to legitimacy. Otherwise, it sought to destroy as much equipment and inflict as many casualties as possible on the ISF to inhibit its future operations. ISIS fighters would fall back from one position to another, "trading space for time," as Iraqi forces advanced.<sup>30</sup>

For its part, the coalition task force conceived of the offensive to retake Mosul as a five-phase operation. During the first phase, Iraqi and coalition forces would establish tactical assembly areas and preposition supplies and equipment. The following phase would then encompass limited advances on the periphery of Mosul to sever the city's remaining lines of communication. During the third phase, Iraqi forces planned to breach and liberate East Mosul. The clearance of the western half of the city





would follow in the fourth phase. Finally, the Iraqi Army and CTS would conclude the battle by handing over responsibility for security to the Federal Police and local police forces.<sup>31</sup> The coalition designated the offensive Operation EAGLE STRIKE, and the ISF called it Operation QADIMUM YA NAYNAWA (“We Are Coming, Nineveh”).<sup>32</sup>

An essential preliminary to the first phase of the offensive was Operation VALLEY WOLF, the capture of the city of Qayyarah and its nearby military airfield (known as Q-West). Located about 60 kilometers south of Mosul, the former U.S. forward operating base at Q-West would serve as a staging area and logistics hub during the assault on the city. Beginning in April 2016, the 9th Iraqi Army (IA) Armored Division advanced on Qayyarah from the south while the 15th IA Division pushed west from Makhmur. The airfield fell to the Iraqis in July, followed

by the city itself in late August.<sup>33</sup> The U.S. Army’s 39th Engineer Battalion—Task Force RAPTOR—oversaw the reconstruction of the facility, restoring it to full operating status by the beginning of September. Task Force RAPTOR also built a new combined joint operations center, which would serve as a headquarters for the Iraqi forces and their advisers.<sup>34</sup>

While Iraqi troops flowed into Q-West, the coalition finalized its plans for the upcoming battle. Although planning for the liberation of Mosul had been underway since OIR began, many details remained to be determined during the final weeks before the opening of the offensive, including the precise task organization of Iraqi forces.<sup>35</sup> The Iraqis and the coalition agreed on the fundamental approach, which featured simultaneous advances along four axes. This was the same strategy that the ISF had

employed at Ar Ramadi and Al Fallujah. However, coalition planners advised the Iraqis not to concentrate CTS and Federal Police elements on their own axes, as they had done in prior offensives, and to instead employ them in support of regular Iraqi Army formations.<sup>36</sup> The Iraqi Combined Joint Operational Command (CJOC), which served as a higher headquarters for ISF operations countrywide, ultimately rejected this proposal, insisting that independent efforts by the Federal Police and the CTS would “maximize ISF combat power” and “achieve maximum buy-in to the Mosul offensive.” The Iraqi Army would therefore have primary responsibility for two axes, and the CTS and the Federal Police would each have one.<sup>37</sup> A contingent of Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) fighters—many of whom were members of Shi’a militia groups—would also play a part, advancing northwest toward Tall

'Afar in the countryside west of Mosul to cut the city's ground lines of communications with Syria. Finally, three Peshmerga brigades would assist in the isolation phase of the operation.<sup>38</sup> Coalition planners assented to the Peshmerga and PMF's contributions on the condition that neither group would enter Mosul.<sup>39</sup> In particular, the PMF, which had been responsible for atrocities against Sunni civilians, were to be kept away from the city to avoid antagonizing the population.<sup>40</sup>

In early October, Prime Minister al-Abadi appointed the CJOC deputy chief of staff for operations, Staff Lt. Gen. Abdul-Amir Rashid Yarallah, to command the Mosul offensive. He would be supported by the staff of the CJOC-Forward headquarters. Reporting directly to him were the commanders of the three ISF axes slated to participate in the initial assault on East Mosul: Axis Filfayl, Axis Aski Kalak, and Axis Guwayr. Forces assigned to these axes would attack from the north, east, and southeast respectively. He also commanded Axis Qayyarah, which would advance on West Mosul from the south. The Peshmerga and PMF contingents coordinated with CJOC-Forward but did not fall under Abdul-Amir's command. In sum, the forces at his disposal at the outset consisted of three regular Iraqi Army divisions, the 9th, the 15th, and the 16th; a division-strength CTS task force; and the Federal Police 5th Division and Emergency Response Division (ERD)—or roughly 65,000 ISF personnel altogether. The PMF and Peshmerga contributed a further 30,000 fighters for a grand total of approximately 95,000 personnel.<sup>41</sup>

The coalition forces supporting the offensive fell under a parallel command structure. At the top was General Joseph L. Votel, the combatant commander of the Tampa, Florida-based U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM). As Combined Forces Commander for OIR, General Votel synchronized the air, ground, and Tier 1 special operations forces participating in the campaign against the Islamic State.<sup>42</sup> Reporting directly to CENTCOM was CJTF-OIR headquarters, which had the majority of its staff at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait. As of October 2016, a U.S. Army headquarters element, deploying for a twelve-month rotation, had served as the nucleus for every iteration of CJTF-OIR. On 21 August, the XVIII Airborne Corps, led by Lt. Gen. Stephen J. Townsend, relieved Lt. Gen. Sean B. MacFarland's III Corps as CJTF-OIR headquarters. Its mission

was to "[defeat] ISIS in designated areas of Iraq and Syria and [set] conditions for follow-on operations to increase regional stability," operating "by, with and through local partner forces."<sup>43</sup>

Beneath General Townsend were two elements, a ground forces component, Combined Joint Forces Land Component Command—Operation INHERENT RESOLVE (CJFLCC-OIR), and a special operations task force, Special Operations Joint Task Force—Operation INHERENT RESOLVE (SOJTF-OIR), both headed by two-star generals. When the Mosul offensive opened in October 2016, the 101st Airborne Division headquarters, commanded by Maj. Gen. Gary J. Volesky, served as a nucleus for CJFLCC-OIR, whereas the 1st Special Forces Command (Airborne), commanded by Maj. Gen. James E. Kraft Jr., served as a nucleus for SOJTF-OIR.<sup>44</sup> Although both of CJTF-OIR's subordinate headquarters had a role in Iraq, partnering with the ISF was primarily the responsibility of CJFLCC-OIR and its subordinate task forces. The main exceptions—significant ones—were the CTS and Iraqi Special Operations Force, which worked with an element under General Kraft's command, Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force—Iraq.<sup>45</sup>

Based in Forward Operating Base UNION III in Baghdad, General Volesky's headquarters had some advisory responsibilities, working mainly with General Abdul-Amir and his staff.<sup>46</sup> Otherwise, it synchronized fire support for the ISF, serving as the source of final approval for airstrikes and artillery fire missions coordinated by two strike cells.<sup>47</sup> One of these was based in Baghdad, with responsibility for strikes on targets in central Iraq and the Euphrates River Valley, and the other was based in Erbil, with responsibility for the Peshmerga's area of operations in northern Iraq and for the upper Tigris River Valley—a region that included much of Ninewa Province as well as Mosul itself.<sup>48</sup> All coalition airstrikes requested in support of Iraqi forces had to be approved by the target engagement authority, typically a one-star general, in either the Baghdad or Erbil strike cell.<sup>49</sup> Aircraft controlled by U.S. Air Forces Central Command's Combined Forces Air Component Command and coordinated by the Qatar-based Combined Air Operations Center executed many of these strikes. Airframes in this joint force supporting the Mosul offensive included U.S. B-52s, A-10s, F-15Es, F/A-18s, and AV-8Bs, as well

as a variety of aircraft fielded by coalition allies—Australian F/A-18s, French Rafales and British MQ-9 Reapers, Tornados, and Typhoons, among others.<sup>50</sup> CJFLCC-OIR also employed surface-to-surface fires, primarily M777 howitzers belonging to Battery C, 1st Battalion, 320th Field Artillery Regiment, part of the 2d Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division (organized as Task Force STRIKE).<sup>51</sup>

Commanded by Colonel Sylvia, TF STRIKE was the largest of several task forces deployed to Iraq under the tactical or operational control of CJFLCC-OIR. Others included Task Force TAQADDUM and Task Force AL ASAD—both based around U.S. Marine Corps units—and Task Group Taji, a training element staffed primarily by the Australian and New Zealand Defence Forces. Although most of these formations had some advisory duties, the advisers working with ISF units participating in the Mosul offensive came mainly from Sylvia's command. For example, Lt. Col. Shawn Umbrell's 1st Battalion, 502d Infantry, advised ISF units at several levels, whereas the 2d Battalion, under Lt. Col. Edwin D. "Ed" Matthaides, worked with the Kurdish Peshmerga and the Iraqi CTS.<sup>52</sup> Also attached to TF STRIKE was an element from Lt. Col. Stuart M. "Stu" James's 1st Battalion, 67th Armor. Originally tasked with supporting Operation SPARTAN SHIELD, James went north to Iraq in June together with a platoon-sized detachment to partner with the 9th IA Armored Division.<sup>53</sup>

Having deployed in May with just 1,239 soldiers, TF STRIKE grew to 1,722 personnel by the end of its tour in January 2017 thanks in part to additions like James's.<sup>54</sup> Although its primary mission was to work with the ISF and Peshmerga, just 23 percent of TF STRIKE's deployed soldiers served as part of advise-and-assist teams. A larger share—36 percent—served as security forces for advisory teams and for various coalition installations or as reaction forces. The remaining 41 percent handled a variety of functions, including sustainment.<sup>55</sup>

### Into East Mosul

As the opening of Operation EAGLE STRIKE approached, coalition forces established tactical assembly areas (TAAs) on ground captured by Kurdish forces to the east and north of Mosul. The Axis Filfayl TAA was located about 9 kilometers southeast of the Mosul Dam. The main force assigned to operate on that axis was the 16th IA Division, commanded by Maj. Gen. Sabah Fadhil



**Soldiers with the 101st Airborne Division at Kara Soar Base, Iraq, execute a fire mission with an M777 howitzer during an operation to support Iraqi security forces.**

*Department of Defense*

Matar al-Azzawi. One of two Iraqi Army divisions built from scratch by coalition forces deployed in support of OIR, Sabah's command first saw combat in 2015 at Ar Ramadi, where it was advised by then-Lt. Col. James T. Eldridge's 1st Battalion, 32d Infantry. It had been working with Colonel Umbrell's TF TALON since April 2016. Shortly before the offensive began, Umbrell and his battalion staff realigned to support Iraqi Lt. Gen. Ali al-Furayji, who would have overall responsibility for operations on the North axis, working with a headquarters element from the Iraqi Joint Coalition Coordination Center. Umbrell's Company B, under Capt. Daniel Fitzgerald, assumed responsibility for advising General Sabah. TF TALON moved into its TAA beginning on 10 October. In a few days, Company A, 1st Battalion, 502d Infantry, constructed a secure camp just south of the ruins of Karah Kubar village, with facilities for both U.S. and Iraqi forces. However, the Iraqis spent very little time there before moving

into their own base area in the nearby town of Telskuf, leaving a small staff element behind—temporarily—to coordinate with the Americans.<sup>56</sup>

The other axis TAAs also became operational during the weeks leading up to the battle, including the two that would serve as base areas for the fight for East Mosul. Colonel James's 1st Battalion, 67th Armor (TF DEALER), advised the 9th IA Armored Division from a small outpost on the northern banks of the Great Zab River, and Colonel Matthaide's 2d Battalion, 502d Infantry (TF FALCON), advised the CTS task force from the town of Aski Kalak, about 35 kilometers east of Mosul along Iraqi Highway 2. Although James had worked with the 9th Armored Division's Maj. Gen. Qassim Jassim Nazal al-Maliki and with his capable deputy commander, Brig. Gen. Walid Khalifa, for months, Matthaide spent the first part of his deployment advising the Kurdistan Regional Government's Ministry of Peshmerga in Erbil.<sup>57</sup>

Most recently, he had supported Kurdish forces engaged in the EVERGREEN series of operations, which wrested strategically important ground southeast of Mosul from ISIS's control.<sup>58</sup> Shortly before the opening of Operation EAGLE STRIKE, Task Force FALCON established a new advisory relationship with the headquarters of Task Force CTS. Although the individual Iraqi Special Operations Force brigades had worked with coalition special operations forces advisers for years—and would continue to work with those advisers during the battle for Mosul—CJTTF-OIR believed that a conventional U.S. Army unit was best suited for advising a division headquarters engaged in combined arms maneuver warfare.<sup>59</sup>

After they received their new mission, Matthaide's troops quickly constructed a forward headquarters at Aski Kalak. It was not an ideal location. The low-lying ground "turned into a field of mud" whenever it rained, Matthaide recalled. It was "not a place anybody would have picked for a

tactical assembly area, but that was the place that the Kurdish government said the Iraqis could go.<sup>60</sup> Ultimately, however, this discomfort was a small price to pay for the opportunity to stage ISF units on Kurdish territory—an essential condition for success in the upcoming offensive, and something that would have been unthinkable just a few years before.

Prime Minister al-Abadi announced the opening of the Mosul offensive on 16 October. Peshmerga units, coordinating with the Iraqis but operating outside the ISF chain of command, launched assaults along the northern and eastern axes on the following day. They seized several villages, overcoming light resistance, before the ISF passed through their lines to continue the advance.<sup>61</sup>

On Axis Filfayl, this maneuver took place in midday outside the village of Batnay, about 15 kilometers north of Mosul.<sup>62</sup> ISIS was well prepared. Just as forward elements of the 16th IA Division exited the village, the terrorist group delivered a sharp counterattack, inflicting heavy casualties.<sup>63</sup> Despite this inauspicious start, the Iraqis on the Filfayl axis pushed onward over the next days, moving south toward the first major objective, the town of Tall Kayf.

Before the offensive opened, plans for capturing Tall Kayf had been a point of contention between General Furayji and his American advisers. Depopulated after ISIS occupied the area in 2014, the town had become a home to a large group of foreign fighters and their families. Its defenses were relatively weak, consisting of a company-sized force of ISIS fighters. Although General Furayji had planned to bypass the town, Colonel Umbrell advised him to assault it directly, believing that it could be taken without difficulty. Furayji acknowledged that he could not ignore Tall Kayf. Acting on the suggestion of the local Peshmerga commander, however, he opted to envelop the town and wait for ISIS to launch counterattacks using its signature weapon—suicide vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (SVBIEDs). These armored car bombs, he reasoned, could be destroyed on the nearby plains, reducing ISIS's defensive capability and improving the odds that a direct assault would succeed. The downside to this plan was that it would take much longer to seize Tall Kayf and, in the meantime, would leave the Iraqi forces exposed to attack by indirect fire. However, Furayji's arguments won out, and the advance south slowed to



**U.S. Army personnel advise the 9th Iraqi Army Armored Division in East Mosul.**

*Courtesy of Stuart M. James*

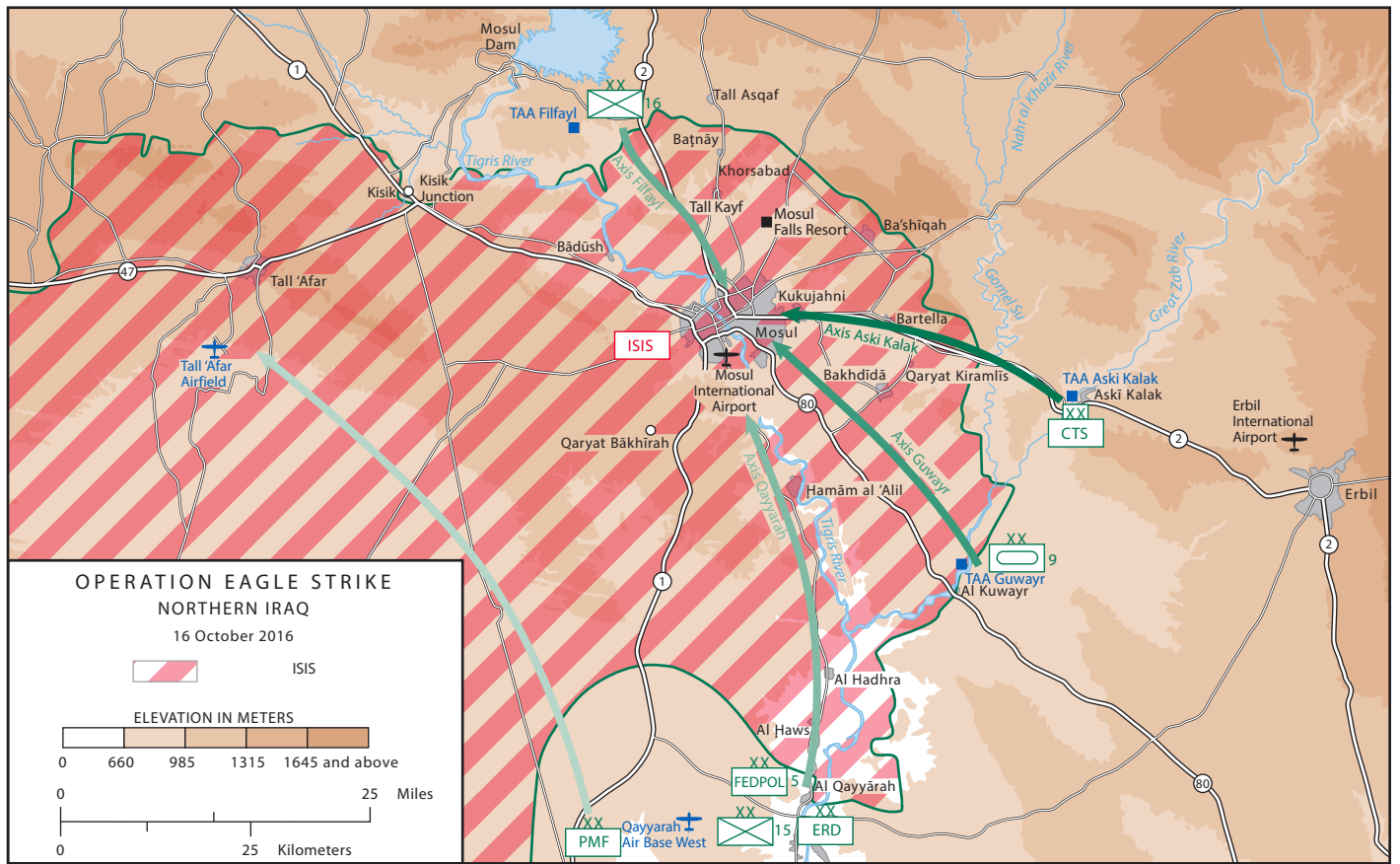
a halt within days as Iraqi forces attempted to place Tall Kayf under siege.<sup>64</sup>

The initial advances on the other axes had achieved mixed results. By the end of October, the CTS Task Force on the Aski Kalak axis reached the outskirts of Mosul, defeating two well-coordinated ISIS counterattacks. Near to the CTS forces was the right wing of the 9th IA Armored Division, which had driven on back roads across the countryside on the Guwayr axis toward the town of Ali Rashsh, outflanking an ISIS stronghold in Karemlesh and forcing the terrorist group to evacuate Bakhdida without a fight. Meanwhile, the brigade on the left wing of the division made little progress in its push north on Highway 80, despite facing light resistance, and remained more than 20 kilometers from the city. Across the Tigris, the 5th Federal Police Division, ERD, and the 15th IA Division on the Qayyarah axis made a halting advance that brought them within 15 kilometers of West Mosul. Finally, the PMF force operating far to the

west covered around half the distance to Tall 'Afar airfield, liberating several villages.

At the same time, coalition aircraft began bombing Mosul's five bridges, cratering ramps and destroying sections near the riverbanks. The objective of these airstrikes was not to destroy the bridges, which the Iraqis planned to employ later in the offensive, but rather to make it more difficult for ISIS's fighters in East Mosul—many of whom spent their nights west of the Tigris and "commuted" to battle during the day—to mount an effective defense.<sup>65</sup> By early December, four of the bridges had been effectively disabled.<sup>66</sup> Altogether, Iraqi losses during the first two weeks of the offensive were severe: the ISF suffered 300 casualties, including 130 soldiers killed in action, and the Peshmerga lost 200 soldiers, including 50 killed.<sup>67</sup>

The assault on Mosul proper—Phase III of Operation EAGLE STRIKE—began on 1 November, when Task Force CTS pushed west along Highway 2 into the Karama



and Gogjali districts.<sup>68</sup> The Islamic State took advantage of the slow rate of the ISF's advance elsewhere to concentrate its forces against the only Iraqi element in the city, putting up fierce resistance. In one incident, in the morning of 4 November, an advance by CTS's Salah-ad-Din and Kirkuk battalions nearly ended in disaster when the units ran into an ISIS ambush in the Aden district, north of Highway 2. As the Kirkuk battalion retreated, an SVBIED explosion and close-range small arms fire pinned down the Salah-ad-Din battalion, which had spearheaded the advance. Together with the trapped Iraqi commandos was a two-person CNN broadcast crew, senior international correspondent Arwa Damon and photojournalist Brice Laine. Their presence transformed the situation from a tactical setback into a potential public relations nightmare—both for the Iraqi government and for CJTF-OIR.

Recognizing the seriousness of the situation, Task Force CTS dispatched the Diyala battalion to rescue the besieged force. It ran into stiff ISIS resistance around 1900 while trying to cross a creek less than half a kilometer from the ambush site. With several soldiers wounded and multiple Humvees damaged or immobilized, the battalion

halted and dug in, ending the rescue attempt. The Salah-ad-Din commandos were left to fend for themselves overnight, as ISIS launched sporadic attacks on their position. Meanwhile, CJTF-OIR deployed aerial reconnaissance assets to find the missing journalists and prepared to send in U.S. special operations forces to directly support the rescue. Fortunately, an advance by CTS's Mosul Battalion the following morning made an intervention by American ground forces unnecessary. It took four hours for the convoy of thirty-six armored Humvees and one Mine Resistant Ambush Protected vehicle to fight its way across the creek to the besieged unit with heavy coalition air support. They reached the survivors at 1230. An hour later, the two CNN reporters were safely behind Iraqi lines.<sup>69</sup>

The Salah-ad-Din battalion's ordeal was indicative of the intensity and sophistication of the resistance that Task Force CTS confronted, virtually alone. ISIS's use of suicide car bombs was particularly effective. During the first two-and-a-half weeks of November, the terrorist group carried out between four and five SVBIED attacks per day in Mosul. As one study has noted, this was "the highest record rate of SVBIEDs ever used in Iraq and elsewhere in the world."<sup>70</sup>

These weapons served the same function in ISIS's unique way of war as guided rocket and artillery bombardments, or even precision guided munitions, did in conventional warfare.<sup>71</sup> In the streets of East Mosul, they were devastating. By mid-November, Task Force CTS ended its westward drive and redirected its efforts toward more lightly defended neighborhoods to the northeast. At the same time, the Iraqi high command redeployed the 73d IA Brigade from Axis Filfayl—where movement was very slow—to Axis Aski Kalak, to reinforce the CTS Task Force.<sup>72</sup>

The CTS also began implementing SVBIED countermeasures proposed by their coalition advisers. To defend newly captured ground, they would emplace obstacles—abandoned vehicles, ditches, and dirt berms—along high-speed avenues of approach. Coalition airstrikes would also crater roads that ISIS might use to launch hasty counterattacks. Meanwhile, the Iraqi commandos would construct defensive positions with crew-served weapons and vehicles emplaced on key terrain. In this way, the Iraqis were better able to contain the SVBIED threat, destroying many of the vehicles using their own AT-4 and M72 personal light antitank weapons.<sup>73</sup> Losses

were still heavy, however. By the end of November, Task Force CTS had suffered 380 casualties. It had also lost fifty-five lightly armored vehicles and most of its tanks. At the same time, the task force liberated about 30 percent of East Mosul, destroying important bomb-making facilities and weapons caches. But ISIS's casualties, especially among battlefield leaders, were also significant. Toward the end of the month, demoralized ISIS fighters started to flee across the Tigris at night on boats, while others tried to blend in with the civilian population.<sup>74</sup>

Unfortunately, this was almost the full extent of the ISF's progress. At the end of November, Task Force CTS remained the only Iraqi element with a foothold in Mosul. The forces on the other axes were far from their objectives. On Axis Filfayl, General Furayji had abandoned his scheme for taking Tall Kayf and shifted the 16th IA Division to the east, where it would attack toward East Mosul along a different avenue of approach. The division quickly seized the Mosul Falls resort area and began pushing southwest—slowly—toward the Bawizah district on the city's outskirts. Only a small

observation force, including the division's organic commando battalion, remained behind to screen the ISIS forces near Tall Kayf.<sup>75</sup> Meanwhile, the left wing of the 9th IA Armored Division was still far from Mosul, and Axis Qayyarah had made only incremental progress in its drive up the Tigris's west bank. The PMF was alone in capturing a major objective, seizing Tall 'Afar airfield in mid-November with support from elements of the 92d IA Brigade.<sup>76</sup>

### Regaining Momentum

Taking stock of the offensive at the end of November, General Townsend feared that the ISF was approaching a culminating point. He identified two key problems: (1) a lack of Iraqi "hold forces" to control liberated areas, which had the effect of drawing combat power away from the front lines; and (2) poor ISF logistics, which made it very difficult for the forces on any axis to maintain pressure on ISIS.<sup>77</sup> As one coalition staff officer noted:

They [the Iraqis] have a method [for supply], one that we wouldn't generally subscribe to. They generally pool their logistics. We

come from a mindset of planning and pushing logistics so that things are there when you need them. . . . Once they run out of fuel, they then ask for fuel. As opposed to forecasting that, hey, every three days, you'll need a resupply.<sup>78</sup>

The result was advances in stops and starts, rather than consistent forward movement.

Townsend's solution, outlined in a memorandum for the Iraqi leadership dated 28 November, was multifold. He offered the Iraqis increased support from attack helicopters under the control of Lt. Col. George A. Hodges's 1st Battalion, 10th Aviation (Task Force DRAGON). At the same time, he urged the ISF to recruit and train local police and tribal militias to hold Mosul, and to employ Iraqi Army and Federal Police units in that role in the interim. He also recommended that the SVBIED countermeasures employed by Task Force CTS in East Mosul be adopted by other ISF components. Finally, he suggested that the Iraqis use daily logistics convoys to resupply their forces on the front lines and to return destroyed or damaged equipment to



**Soldiers from the 82d Airborne Division overlook the city of Mosul while manning a mortar fire position.**

*Department of Defense*

maintenance facilities in the rear for repair or cannibalization. Townsend reported to General Votel on 1 December that the Iraqi government had accepted most of his recommendations, particularly concerning the organization of a “hold force” and the need for more frequent logistics convoys.<sup>79</sup> The 5th Federal Police Division and the ERD both redeployed from Axis Qayyarah to support the 9th IA Armored Division in December.<sup>80</sup> The Iraqis also welcomed an expanded role for TF DRAGON’s Apache gunships, which provided close air support. According to Hodges, “the Iraqis [wanted] us to be clearly evident on the battlefield as an information/psychological kind of thing both to inspire their troops and to scare Daesh [i.e., ISIS].”<sup>81</sup>

While Townsend’s recommendations went into effect, the Iraqi forces on Axis Guwayr made an independent effort to restart the offensive. Colonel James and the 9th IA Armored Division’s commander, General Qassim, previously had discussed the possibility of launching a raid along a narrow front into East Mosul. The goal of such an operation would be to force the collapse of ISIS’s resistance east of the Tigris by seizing key terrain—not unlike the “Thunder Runs” that hastened the fall of Baghdad to U.S. forces in April 2003. Because the Iraqis did not have enough troops to occupy the city fully, James thought, a sharp blow represented the best alternative. When General Abdul-Amir arrived at Axis Guwayr headquarters in early December, demanding that the 9th IA Armored Division launch an advance within three days, Qassim seized on this preexisting concept. The obvious target for an armored raid was As Salam Hospital, a medical complex situated on high ground 3 kilometers behind ISIS’s front lines in southeast Mosul’s Wahda neighborhood. With several high-rise buildings that overlooked the surrounding terrain, the hospital was, James recalled, the terrorist group’s “tactical center of gravity” in East Mosul. With support from TF DEALER, Qassim’s staff quickly drew up plans for an assault on the hospital involving a three-brigade advance directly along Highway 80.

Unfortunately, the advance as it actually materialized on the morning of 6 December was much weaker than General Qassim’s advisers had envisioned. Watching aerial footage of the attack in real time, James saw to his frustration that only two understrength battalions set off down the highway toward the hospital. At the

outset, this appeared sufficient. The Iraqis overcame light ISIS resistance and captured the facility around 1420 before setting up a defensive perimeter. In a show of remarkable complacency, however, they did not clear all of the hospital buildings or secure their lines of communications. They also parked their vehicles closely together as if they were in a motor pool rather than on a battlefield.<sup>82</sup> One Iraqi officer later informed reporters that “we thought they [ISIS] had fled.”<sup>83</sup>

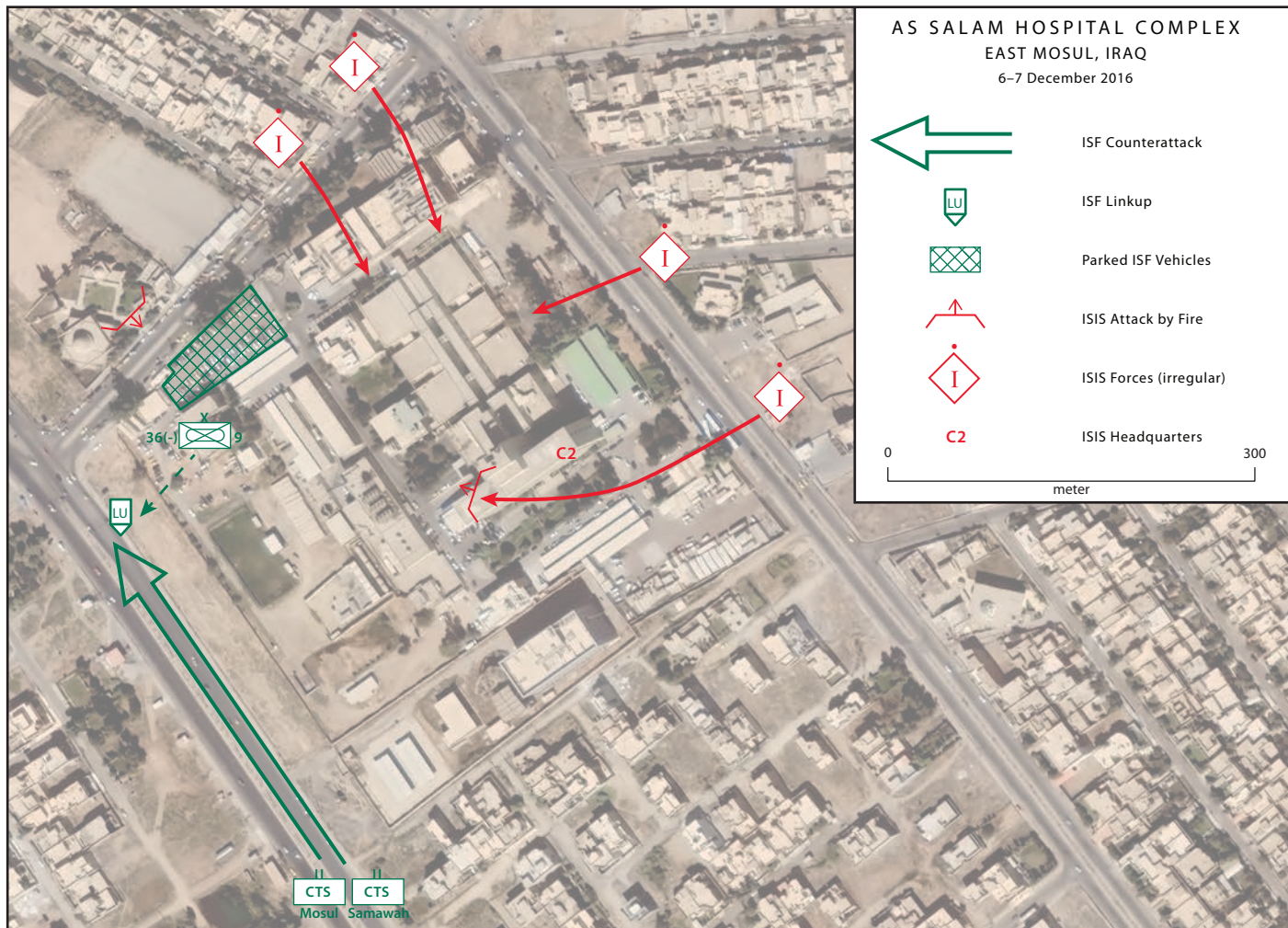
But the Islamic State’s leaders had no intention of abandoning the position. Less than four hours after losing control of the hospital, ISIS counterattacked with six SVBIEDs, wounding eighteen Iraqi soldiers and setting one of the 36th Brigade’s Russian-made BMP-1 infantry fighting vehicles on fire. Before the Iraqis could react, the flames spread to other vehicles parked nearby, rapidly damaging or destroying much of the battalion’s transportation. At this point, many of the Iraqis opted to shelter in the northwest corner of one of the hospital buildings, which they converted into a strongpoint. At the same time, an ISIS squad pushed forward into an eight-story hospital building adjacent to (and overlooking) the brigade’s position and engaged the Iraqi soldiers with small arms fire. Other ISIS elements from throughout East Mosul also rushed to join the battle. Some fighters even attacked the brigade’s remaining vehicles with antitank weapons, causing the Iraqis to abandon them and seek safety within the hospital buildings.<sup>84</sup> “The gates of hell opened wide,” the Iraqi officer recounted. “They [ISIS] started to appear and attack from every corner, every street and every house near the hospital.”<sup>85</sup> Coalition airstrikes inflicted some casualties and suppressed two ISIS units but did not cause the terrorist group to withdraw.<sup>86</sup>

As night fell, the Iraqis improvised a plan to relieve the 36th Brigade. On 7 December, two CTS elements—the Mosul and Samawah battalions—redeployed to support the 9th IA Armored Division. The CTS units advanced toward the besieged brigade beginning at 1523, approaching to within 200 meters of the hospital complex before being pinned down by heavy fire. At that point, ISIS made a final desperate attempt to destroy the Iraqi force. An SVBIED detonated near the Iraqi defensive position in the hospital complex, followed by a barrage of twenty rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs), which set part of the facility on fire. Around eighty of

the brigade’s personnel then evacuated the building and fought their way through to the CTS lines.<sup>87</sup> “When we reached them, they barely had any bullets left,” noted one Iraqi commando.<sup>88</sup> Having united, the two forces then withdrew back to the 9th IA Armored Division’s lines, where the ill-fated assault had started from the day before. Three square kilometers of southeast Mosul had been liberated and then abandoned in less than forty-eight hours. Iraqi casualties were heavy. Thirteen soldiers from the 9th IA Armored Division were killed and a further forty-eight were wounded during the battle. Equipment losses were also severe. Thirteen BMPs and five Humvees were destroyed or abandoned—an entire Iraqi battalion’s worth of vehicles.<sup>89</sup> Some fell into ISIS’s hands.<sup>90</sup> For its part, ISIS had lost between 70 and 100 fighters, partly to coalition airstrikes.<sup>91</sup>

The battle for As Salam Hospital came as a serious blow to the Iraqi effort to liberate Mosul. Recovering from wounds sustained in the battle, one private from the 9th IA Armored Division told reporters, despondently, “Of course these mistakes will keep happening. . . . They happen every time.”<sup>92</sup> In the aftermath, the ISF initiated a two-week “operational pause” on all axes—at CJTF-OIR’s urging—to bring in supplies and reinforcements.<sup>93</sup>

For General Townsend, the engagement added impetus to several initiatives meant to expand the role of coalition forces on the battlefield that had been under consideration for months. In particular, it underscored the difficulty for the coalition of providing timely and effective support to Iraqi forces without accompanying them in the field. Without advisers attached to the 9th IA Armored Division’s subordinate brigades, Colonel James’s TF DEALER had only partial information about the battlefield situation and limited access to targeting data.<sup>94</sup> “CJTF-OIR Tactical Directive #1–Enabling Coalition Support to Partner Forces,” issued by Townsend’s headquarters on 22 December, addressed this problem directly, loosening restrictions on coalition ground forces that had been in place since 2014. In the first place, it permitted advisory teams to accompany Iraqi brigades near the front lines.<sup>95</sup> In theory, at least, this privilege had been previously confined to coalition special operations forces, although in practice conventional coalition troops had been “advising forward” since the U.S.



presidential election in November.<sup>96</sup> At any rate, the practice “vastly [improved] situational awareness,” giving increased access to the main Iraqi tactical leaders—brigade commanders.<sup>97</sup> More significantly, the directive also enabled commanders of coalition advise-and-assist teams to authorize airstrikes without seeking approval from the one-star generals at the Baghdad and Erbil strike cells. This meant that coalition fire support could be significantly more responsive to developments on to the ground. At the same time, the directive reaffirmed the need to minimize civilian casualties and to adhere to the rules of engagement; just because fires would be more responsive did not mean that they would be indiscriminate.<sup>98</sup>

Operation EAGLE STRIKE did not resume in earnest until late December. Although ISIS attempted to take advantage of the ISF’s operational pause by carrying out harassing attacks using SVBIEDs, mortars, rockets, and sniper fire, the terrorist group met with only limited success. In particular, SVBIEDS

appeared in smaller numbers, and the ones that did go into action were less effective. The coalition attributed this change to the countermobility techniques increasingly employed by the Iraqis and to the success of the coalition’s bombing campaign in interdicting ISIS supply lines across the Tigris. The terrorist group continued to innovate, however. By January, it was using store-bought quadcopter drones as a kind of rudimentary air force. These performed a range of functions. Some were decoys—flying IEDs that would detonate when recovered by Iraqi and coalition personnel.<sup>99</sup> Others carried 40-mm. high-explosive, dual-purpose rounds, which they dropped on Iraqi troops. Still others aided with surveillance, identifying Iraqi positions, guiding SVBIEDs onto their targets, and spotting for indirect fire.<sup>100</sup>

Encounters with these devices demoralized ISF personnel, who lacked effective countermeasures. One attack in East Mosul, involving about a dozen drones, targeted the Task Force CTS headquar-

ters and the vehicle of the task force commander. Bombs dropped by the drones caused eighteen casualties and brought the CTS’s advance to a halt. A similar attack repeated the next day once again stalled the task force’s advance. As one coalition officer recalled, the Iraqis “were blaming us . . . and saying we weren’t doing enough air strikes because they didn’t really want to admit that they were afraid of the drones. And they were. They were being targeted and they couldn’t do anything about it.”<sup>101</sup> According to the head of U.S. Special Operations Command, ISIS “enjoyed tactical air superiority in the airspace under our conventional air superiority . . . and our only available response was small arms fire.”<sup>102</sup>

Even with its innovative use of drones, however, ISIS proved unable to repeat its victory at the battle for As Salam Hospital—a sign that the operation, even though unsuccessful, had dislocated ISIS’s defenses.<sup>103</sup> The terrorist group launched only one more major counterattack before the end of





### Captured ISIS VBIEDs, or “Mad Max vehicles,” in West Mosul.

*Courtesy of John J. Hawbaker*

December, and it ended in outright defeat. Taking advantage of a period of cloudy weather, between 100 and 150 ISIS fighters massed against the 76th Brigade, 16th IA Division, near the Bawizah neighborhood in northeast Mosul at 0437 on 28 December. Using a variety of weapons systems, including mortars, rockets, SVBIEDs, and a pair of 23-mm. truck-mounted anti-aircraft guns, the militants assaulted Iraqis from several directions. The onslaught suppressed some of the defenders, making it possible for ISIS bulldozers to approach and attempt to dismantle the brigade’s defensive berms to clear a path for SVBIEDs and dismounted infantry. Fortunately, although coalition air support was more limited than usual during the engagement, it was not entirely ineffective, as ISIS had hoped. A combination of effective use of anti-tank weapons by the Iraqis and coalition airstrikes and surface-to-surface fires destroyed eight of nine SVBIEDs before they could do any

damage. ISIS ultimately withdrew after suffering around sixty-three casualties, including eighteen fighters killed in action. Among the dead was the ISIS commander who had led the successful defense of Tall Kayf in October. One Iraqi soldier and two coalition special operators were wounded in the engagement.<sup>104</sup>

The ISF returned to the offensive on the following day with simultaneous attacks along all three axes of advance in East Mosul. Forced to defend on three fronts simultaneously, ISIS put up ineffectual resistance as Task Force CTS bludgeoned its way west. By 5 January 2017, Iraqi forces had secured an additional 11.5 square kilometers—including 6,000 buildings—in East Mosul. Some civilians in the area actively supported the offensive by passing information on ISIS positions to the ISF.<sup>105</sup> Others blocked intersections with their personal vehicles to stop SVBIEDs from reaching Iraqi lines.<sup>106</sup> Building on this

momentum, Iraqi commandos breached the campus of Mosul University, ISIS’s last remaining stronghold east of the Tigris, on 13 January. Two days later, after a fierce battle, the CTS announced that the university was “completely liberated.”<sup>107</sup> This was a turning point. After losing control of the campus, ISIS abandoned its efforts to contest East Mosul as fighters fell back toward the Tigris. Amid their withdrawal, militants further damaged the city’s Tigris River bridges in an effort to impede the next stage of the Iraqi offensive.<sup>108</sup> Meanwhile, the ISF quickly established control over the eastern half of the city, raising the Iraqi national flag over important landmarks. Even the suburb of Tall Kayf, bypassed by the 16th IA Division during its initial advance in October, finally fell to the Iraqis on 19 January. Prime Minister al-Abadi declared East Mosul officially liberated on the 24th.<sup>109</sup>

The combination of flag-raising and a formal announcement of victory was a

key part of the Iraqi approach to fighting ISIS. Similar fanfare had accompanied the liberation of the Al Anbar provincial government center in Ar Ramadi in late 2015—and much like at Ar Ramadi, the prime minister’s announcement in East Mosul did not truly mark the end of the battle. As one coalition staff officer explained in December, “political success” and “military success,” for the Iraqis, were different things: “So there’s a political success, which is that flag flying over the top [of a building] and the [prime minister] saying we’ve liberated it, and then there’s the military success that will probably take a couple of months after that first political success.” Such a political victory was not unimportant: “It buoys the success of the Iraqis, and it undermined the credibility of Daesh [ISIS].” But true military success, “building-to-building clearance,” remained to be achieved.<sup>110</sup>

Responsibility for securing East Mosul fell to the 16th IA Division, which the ISF designated as the primary “hold force” east of the Tigris. Now commanded by Maj. Gen. Jabbar al-Darraj, and reinforced with four Iraqi Army battalions from Baghdad and local police forces, the division secured the area stretching from the Kurdish Defensive Line in the north and east to the Zab and Tigris Rivers in the south and west.<sup>111</sup> The coalition-trained formation had fallen short of CJTF-OIR’s expectations in East Mosul. Rather than pushing into the city, it dithered on the outskirts while Task Force CTS did much of the hard fighting. The problem lay mainly with the division’s leaders—especially the erratic and overly-cautious Axis Filfayl commander, General Furayji, who ultimately was relieved from command at the urging of two U.S. officers, his own adviser, Colonel Umbrell, and the leader of a coalition special operations forces element that was based nearby.<sup>112</sup> That change had come too late to influence the final stage of the battle east of the Tigris but would have an effect on the unit’s performance in its new role. As the designated security force for East Mosul, the 16th IA Division would help to manage the influx of refugees (60,000 people returned to East Mosul between late January and early February 2017) and contend with the challenge of reestablishing civil governance and basic institutions like schools. It would also deal with the persistent threat of ISIS

militants—both within East Mosul and from across the Tigris.<sup>113</sup>

The largest such cross-river attack took place on 2 February, when a well-armed raiding force of around fifty ISIS fighters used small boats to infiltrate into East Mosul during the night. Twenty-one of the militants set up a firing position 200 meters west of the 75th Brigade, 16th IA Division, which they used to support assaults by two separate groups of fifteen fighters. Coalition forces observed these movements via intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) imagery and called in airstrikes on the terrorist group’s positions before the attack could begin in earnest. As one U.S. report noted, the strikes, which included an attack run by a Fairchild Republic A-10 Thunderbolt II, hit their targets “with devastating accuracy,” killing forty-five of the fighters and wounding a further four. The coalition also sank the six boats that the surviving raiders used to flee across the Tigris.<sup>114</sup>

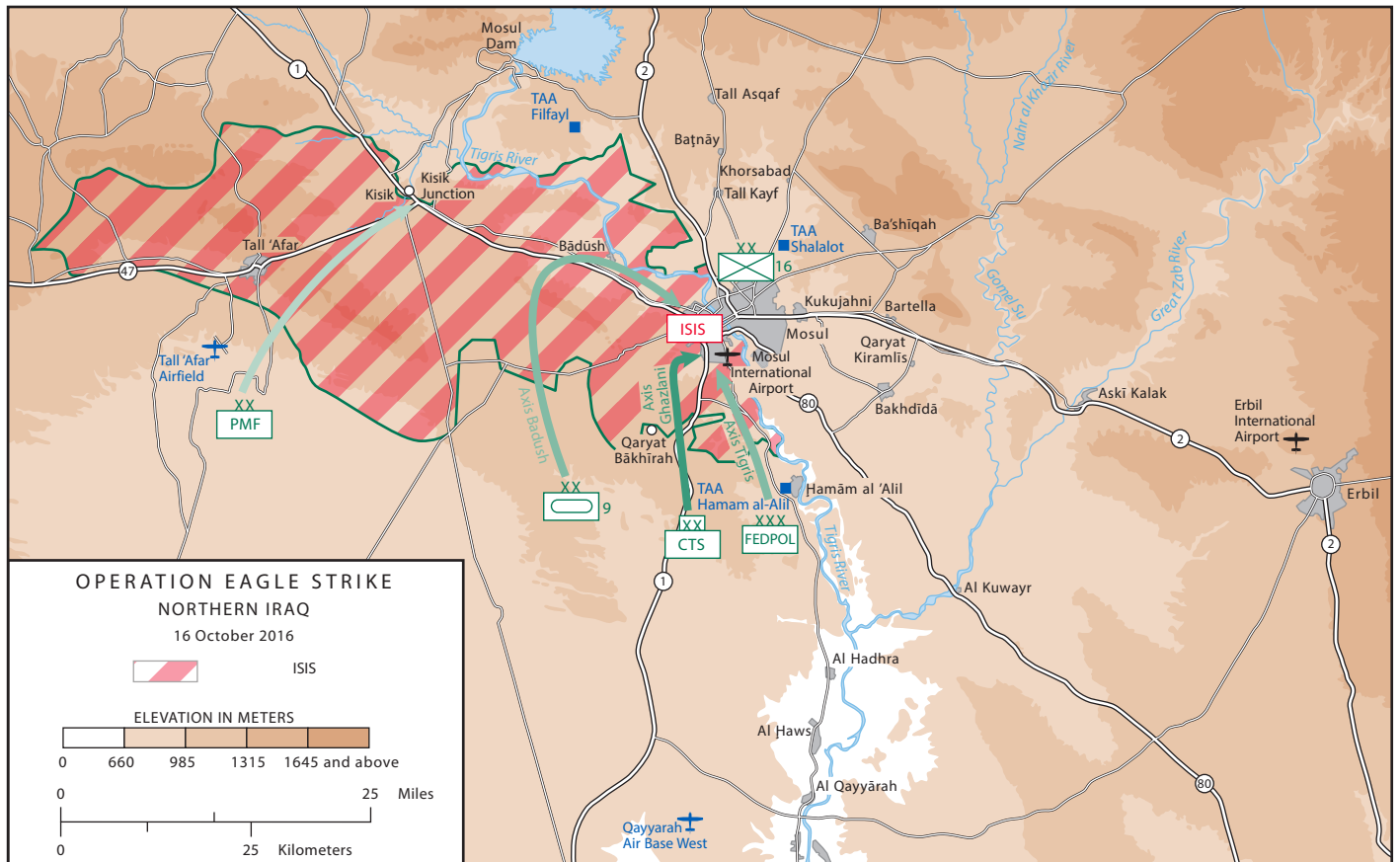
### West of the Tigris

As the 16th IA Division held East Mosul, CJTF-OIR prepared to support the next phase of the offensive. The coalition’s order of battle had changed since Operation EAGLE STRIKE began. Although General Townsend’s XVIII Airborne Corps continued to serve as the nucleus for CJTF-OIR, the 101st Airborne Division had completed its rotation as Townsend’s ground component headquarters in mid-November, with Maj. Gen. Joseph M. Martin—heading the 1st Infantry Division—replacing General Volesky as CJFLCC-OIR commander on the 17th. Task Force STRIKE’s rotation ended two months later, with Col. James P. “Pat” Work’s 2d Brigade Combat Team, 82d Airborne Division, assuming responsibility as the lead element for CJFLCC-OIR’s advise-and-assist mission on 19 January 2017, operating as Task Force FALCON.<sup>115</sup>

Iraq and the coalition finalized plans for the liberation of West Mosul at the last possible moment. When General Volesky concluded his tour in mid-November, detailed planning for the next phase of the offensive had not yet begun.<sup>116</sup> CJTF-OIR therefore worked “feverishly” to prepare for the resumption of the battle while the Iraqis completed the liberation of East Mosul.<sup>117</sup> By 28 January, the basic elements of the plan, as approved by General Abdul-Amir, were as follows. Continuing the advance they launched in October, four Federal Police divisions—organized as

Axis Tigris—would push north directly into Mosul. In the lead would be the ERD, a Ministry of Interior special operations unit with ties to the Badr Organization, a Shi’a Islamist group.<sup>118</sup> The head of the Federal Police, Staff Lt. Gen. Raad Shaker Jawdid, commanded the axis with support from an advisory task force from Lt. Col. John J. Hawbaker’s 1st Battalion, 73d Cavalry (Task Force GRAY FALCON), which had deployed in January.<sup>119</sup> CJTF-OIR did not anticipate that the Federal Police-led axis would liberate West Mosul on its own but rather hoped that it would fix ISIS forces in place in the south.<sup>120</sup> This pressure would enable the 9th IA Armored Division, advised by Lt. Col. James L. Browning’s 2d Battalion, 508th Infantry (Task Force 2 FURY), to wheel in a massive semicircle across the countryside to the west toward Badush, a riverside town just under 10 kilometers northwest of Mosul—a “bold flanking maneuver” that would further isolate the city from the rest of the “caliphate.” The division would then strike south into Mosul proper, acting as the lead element for Axis Badush. Meanwhile, Task Force CTS, the main element of Axis Ghazlani, would attack north through the city’s western outskirts, in parallel to the Axis Tigris forces, before pivoting east into the Old City. CTS elements continued to be advised by coalition special operations forces. They were also supported by Lt. Col. James W. Downing’s 2d Battalion, 325th Infantry (Task Force WHITE FALCON). Finally, the PMF would continue its westward advance, pushing toward Kisik Junction, roughly midway between Mosul and Tall ‘Afar. Once again, planners hoped to confront ISIS with multiple simultaneous dilemmas, making it difficult for the terrorist group to concentrate its forces against any one axis.<sup>121</sup>

The assault on West Mosul—Phase IV of Operation EAGLE STRIKE—opened on 19 February, following a three-and-a-half-week operational pause.<sup>122</sup> The ISF moved forward rapidly. By the 23rd, the ERD had pushed through the town of Abu Sayf and captured the Mosul Airport in a bloody assault, while Task Force CTS seized the nearby Ghazlani military base.<sup>123</sup> The next day, Iraqi troops breached the Ma’mun neighborhood in the southwestern corner of Mosul.<sup>124</sup> On 4 March, the Islamic State launched a counterattack along the boundary between the Tigris and Ghazlani axes. An ISIS force attempted to suppress



the defenders with indirect fire before sending in an assault team consisting of fifty to eighty fighters accompanied by six to eleven SVBIEDs. The Iraqis defeated the attack handily, inflicting heavy casualties and suffering few losses. They then continued their advance. On 7 March, the ERD captured the Ninewa Province government compound and Federal Police officers raised the Iraqi national flag on the roof of the capital building amid ISIS sniper fire, although a major ISIS counterattack forced some units to retreat and inflicted heavy casualties. Just three days later, the Federal Police and CTS reached the outskirts of the Old City.<sup>125</sup>

Meanwhile, the 9th IA Armored Division swung across the Ninewa plain toward Badush, capturing the town on 15 March. This movement synchronized with a local offensive by the 16th IA Division, which cleared the remaining ISIS-held territory between Tall Kayf and the Tigris River, culminating in the capture of the Badush Dam on 11 March. The 16th IA Division and 9th IA Armored Division made contact on 19 March, completing the encirclement of West Mosul.<sup>126</sup> The Iraqi armored division then started to clear slowly along Iraqi Highway 1, which led southeast into Mosul.

By 21 March, it was still more than 5 kilometers from the city's outskirts.<sup>127</sup>

Progress in the south also bogged down as ISIS made full use of its fortifications in the Old City. While Iraqi forces struggled to overcome the terrorist group's "near impenetrable" defenses, squad- to platoon-sized groups of ISIS fighters carried out frequent counterattacks, sometimes using tunnels to infiltrate behind the ISF's front lines. The ERD bore the brunt of such tactics. At 1000 on 15 March, ISIS fighters breached the Federal Police's defensive perimeter with a front-end loader SVBIED, which they then detonated near an ERD position, killing two police officers and wounding twenty more. The attack also destroyed several vehicles, including a T-72 tank and four Humvees. Four days later, militants ambushed and captured a Federal Police battalion commander and his entire security detail, all of whom later were found dead. Faced with such stiff resistance, the Federal Police's advance into the Old City slowed to a halt by mid-March.<sup>128</sup>

At the same time, Task Force CTS shifted its line of advance to the northwest, away from the Old City. Moving through less congested neighborhoods to the northwest, the Iraqi commandos—with

coaching from coalition special operations forces advisers—bypassed and cordoned off ISIS strongpoints before assaulting them using fire-and-maneuver tactics. The CTS also used its own armed unmanned aerial systems (UASs) for reconnaissance and precision airstrikes. With these methods, Task Force CTS was able to minimize its casualties, especially to SVBIEDs.<sup>129</sup>

Coalition airstrikes still provided essential support to almost every Iraqi advance. In general, these hit their targets, killing ISIS fighters and destroying equipment, and causing few, if any, civilian casualties. In August 2016, President Obama had boasted that "with our extraordinary technology, we're conducting the most precise air campaign in history" against the Islamic State.<sup>130</sup> For the most part, this remained an accurate characterization of the bombing campaign during the battle for Mosul. But even with the best available technology, coalition bombs did sometimes kill Iraqi civilians.<sup>131</sup>

One of the worst civilian casualty incidents caused by a coalition airstrike took place during the fighting in southwest Mosul in March 2017. At 0700 on the 17th, Task Force CTS attacked north into Mosul's al Jadidah



### Coalition and Iraqi personnel amid the ruins in West Mosul.

*Courtesy of John J. Hawbaker*

District with two brigades.<sup>132</sup> Opposing the Iraqis were thirty-five to forty ISIS fighters supported by a company-sized force located several blocks to the rear.<sup>133</sup> One of the Iraqi elements, CTS Task Force 2, commanded by Staff Maj. Gen. Maan al-Saadi, ran into stiff resistance and suffered heavy casualties when ISIS detonated an IED hidden in a mosque. General Maan's troops also came under small arms fire from two snipers operating out of the second story of a three-story residential structure, only 65 meters from their position. Ruling out a direct assault on the snipers as excessively costly, the leader of the Iraqi battalion on the scene requested a coalition airstrike.<sup>134</sup> Because of inclement weather on the days leading up to the battle, and on the day of the battle itself, coalition ISR had been unable to determine the whereabouts and typical activities of civilians in the area.<sup>135</sup> The request itself was based on visual observation of the target by CTS personnel.<sup>136</sup> Having developed confidence in the CTS's reliability during the fighting in East Mosul, the strike cell in Erbil confirmed the request and, at 0824, a 500-pound bomb struck the building and penetrated the roof before exploding. On its own, the weapon should have left the

target structure mostly intact—however, the building rapidly collapsed as the bomb's detonation set off other explosives that ISIS had previously hidden inside, killing 101 civilians sheltering in the bottom floors as well as 4 other civilians in a neighboring structure. As many as thirty-six other civilians also may have been killed.<sup>137</sup>

The incident highlighted an ominous shift in ISIS's tactics. Throughout the earlier fighting in Mosul, houses near the front lines had been generally empty of civilians: either their residents had fled, or ISIS had forcibly relocated them.<sup>138</sup> In this case, however, as Brig. Gen. Matthew C. Isler—the head of the coalition's official inquiry into the incident—concluded, the Islamic State had deliberately staged the attack, rigging the building to explode and positioning a sniper team in the structure in the apparent hopes of provoking an airstrike.<sup>139</sup> Just four days after the bombing, ISIS's Amaq News Agency released a short propaganda video claiming that “continuous American-Iraqi massacres” had killed 1,800 civilians in Mosul.<sup>140</sup> ISIS also attempted to repeat the tactics it employed in al Jadidah less than two weeks later. On 29 March, ISIS fighters herded a

group of civilians, including women and children, into a house, shooting two who refused to go along. They then placed a large propane tank on top of the building before engaging Iraqi troops with RPGs and small arms from the roof and a second-floor window. Unlike in al Jadidah, fortunately, coalition forces were able to observe ISIS's actions through ISR imagery and assess that “the fighters were hoping that ISF would call in a Coalition air strike onto the house [to] ignite the tank and create mass [civilian casualties].” No strike took place.<sup>141</sup>

ISIS's employment of such methods, which threatened to further alienate Mosul's population, underscored the terrorist group's growing desperation. General Martin's intelligence reporting at the end of March indicated that ISIS's morale was low “throughout all ranks currently operating in western Mosul.”<sup>142</sup> The terrorist group's failure to hold the districts south of the Old City during the ISF's advance in late February and early March had come as a surprise to its senior leadership, prompting them to replace Iraqi commanders in West Mosul, who were blamed for the defeat, with supposedly more reliable foreign fighters.<sup>143</sup> The

meeting of the 9th IA Armored Division and the 16th IA Division north of the city was particularly damaging to the Islamic State's position, disrupting the group's ability to resupply and reinforce the fighters inside the city amid mounting casualties. As a result, ISIS could no longer find sufficient skilled drivers for SVBIEDs. By mid-March, only about one-third of the devices actually detonated; fewer still were lethal.<sup>144</sup>

Even drones—ISIS's makeshift "air force"—were no longer effective. In East Mosul, coalition forces had introduced an Anti-UAS Defense System (AUDS), a radar-based tracking system that could jam radio frequencies as well as the drones' GPS (global positioning system) antennae. This would cause drones either to drop out of the sky or, for certain models, to turn around and travel directly backward until they regained a signal.<sup>145</sup> Although useful, the basic system employed by the U.S. government was not mobile, and Iraqi troops on the front lines were unable to benefit from its protection. As ISIS expanded its use of drones during the fighting on the southern outskirts of West Mosul in late February, sending as many as ten waves of four drones each against the Iraqis on a single day, the coalition faced mounting pressure to implement additional countermeasures. As one U.S. adviser recalled, the Iraqis "couldn't believe that America couldn't solve this technological problem. Really, they just challenged us on it."<sup>146</sup>

There was no single solution—rather, different coalition and Iraqi units experimented with a variety of tactics and techniques to use against the drones. One of the most effective of these involved a fairly straightforward modification of existing technology. On 27 February, Colonel Downing's TF WHITE FALCON began mounting AUDS devices on flatbed trucks and moving them forward with CTS units. Working as a kind of "electro-magnetic flame thrower," the "Expeditionary AUDS" device knocked down its first ISIS drone at 0852 that morning.<sup>147</sup> Meanwhile, the Iraqi Federal Police opted to fight drones with drones, equipping their own, more advanced quadcopters with grenades and flying them over the battlefield at a high altitude that ISIS's smaller devices could not reach. When an ISIS drone appeared, the Federal Police quadcopter would shadow it until it returned to its operator.

Then it would drop a grenade, killing or injuring the ISIS fighter and disabling his drone.<sup>148</sup> Combined with enhanced tactics—"something as simple as looking up"—and better use of cover and camouflage by Iraqi forces, such countermeasures brought the threat from ISIS quadcopters under control.<sup>149</sup>

Despite these encouraging developments, Operation EAGLE STRIKE ground to a halt by the end of March. The ISF had suffered 3,465 casualties, including 445 soldiers killed in action, between 18 February and 3 May 2017—a rate of more than 46 casualties per day. Indeed, the reality was even worse, considering that most casualties were incurred before 19 March.<sup>150</sup> In an effort to restart the offensive, General Townsend advised the Iraqis to redeploy the ERD and elements of Task Force CTS to the west. They would then attack eastward into the city, while the 9th IA Armored Division pushed

south along the Tigris and the Federal Police isolated the Old City from the south and southwest. The Iraqis accepted this advice and repositioned their forces by the beginning of May.<sup>151</sup> In the meantime, ISIS continued to innovate, launching as many as eight chemical weapons attacks in West Mosul between 15 and 25 April using IEDs and modified mortar rounds that inflicted forty casualties on Iraqi forces. For the most part, symptoms were relatively minor, resembling exposure to low-grade mustard or chlorine gas. Some casualties were severe, however, and one Iraqi soldier died from his injuries.<sup>152</sup>

### Fighting for the Old City

The Iraqis resumed the offensive on 4 May after three days of inclement weather. The shift of forces from the south to the west caught ISIS by surprise and enabled a rapid advance. By 17 May, Iraqi forces had



**Members of the 3d FEDPOL Division enter the ruins in West Mosul.**

*Courtesy of John J. Hawbaker*

liberated more than 30 square kilometers north and west of the Old City.<sup>153</sup> However, the hard core of ISIS's defensive position, the Old City itself, remained intact—and capturing it posed unique challenges, despite the coalition's advantages. As Colonel Work commented on 7 May,

There's no timetable for the operation in west Mosul. It's going to be incredibly violent. We would argue that there's going to be no white flags out here. We anticipate the fighters that are in there continuing to fight [are] the true believers. And when they're not true believers, they can intimidate people to stay. . . I don't think morale will cause him [the enemy] to put down his guns. That's not this fighter, that's not this enemy. This enemy—he's got a mission and they're going to fight to the death, is what we expect.<sup>154</sup>

As they closed in on the Old City, the ERD redeployed once again, this time passing through the 9th IA Armored Division's lines to continue the advance to the south. Meanwhile, the PMF, operating far to the west, resumed its advance following six months of inactivity by launching an attack toward the Syrian border. Facing light resistance, it reached the border southwest of Mount Sinjar on 29 May. This movement, as well as subsequent PMF operations to clear villages in the area and isolate Tall 'Afar, supported the fighting in Mosul but antagonized nearby Kurdish forces. As one coalition report noted, the PMF's operations "were likely part of a coordinated effort to enhance freedom of maneuver for Iranian-backed groups operating in the area."<sup>155</sup>

By the end of May, ISIS's position in Mosul was reduced to three neighborhoods along the Tigris River. The terrorist group had less than 1,000 fighters in the city. Perhaps as many as 100,000 civilians remained in areas under ISIS's control, however, as the group prevented residents from following the Iraqi government's instructions to evacuate Mosul. ISIS fighters often took potshots at would-be refugees and—in a series of massacres between 26 May and 3 June—killed more than 231 civilians in the al-Shifa neighborhood.<sup>156</sup> Aware that airstrikes would be of limited utility amid such a high concentration of noncombatants, General Townsend granted coalition troops permission to use certain direct-fire weapons, like sniper rifles and antitank guided missiles,

in support of the ISF beginning in the first week of June.<sup>157</sup>

During June, the fighting in West Mosul centered around the Al Jamouri Hospital Complex, a modern medical facility that marked the northernmost point of ISIS's shrinking zone of control. Situated on high ground in the al-Shifa district, the complex included high-rise buildings—some as tall as eleven stories—that overlooked the surrounding cityscape.<sup>158</sup> ISIS used the facility as an observation point, headquarters, weapons cache, and fighting position. Recognizing its importance, Iraqi forces made several unsuccessful attempts to capture it during the first week of June, suffering heavy losses. The Iraqis then shifted their advance to the south, bypassing the hospital in an effort to reach the Tigris River and split ISIS's territory in two. Amid this fighting, the Islamic State launched a major counterattack against the Federal Police units south of the Old City, infiltrating eighty-five fighters behind the Iraqi lines using sewers, canals, and their own tunnel system. The Federal Police suffered ninety casualties in the engagement, including twenty police officers killed in action. Almost the entire ISIS force was destroyed.<sup>159</sup>

Although damaging, the counterattack failed to derail operations to the north. On 20 June, Iraqi troops reached the Tigris from the west, isolating the ISIS outpost at Al Jamouri Hospital. The ERD then assaulted the hospital once again on 25 June, entering the complex before withdrawing under heavy fire from ISIS machine guns and RPGs. After pinpointing the location of ISIS's headquarters, the coalition carried out several airstrikes on sites in and around the hospital on 30 June. The ERD then stormed the facility, raising the Iraqi flag over the Ibn Sina Hospital, the largest building in the complex, on the morning of 1 July.<sup>160</sup>

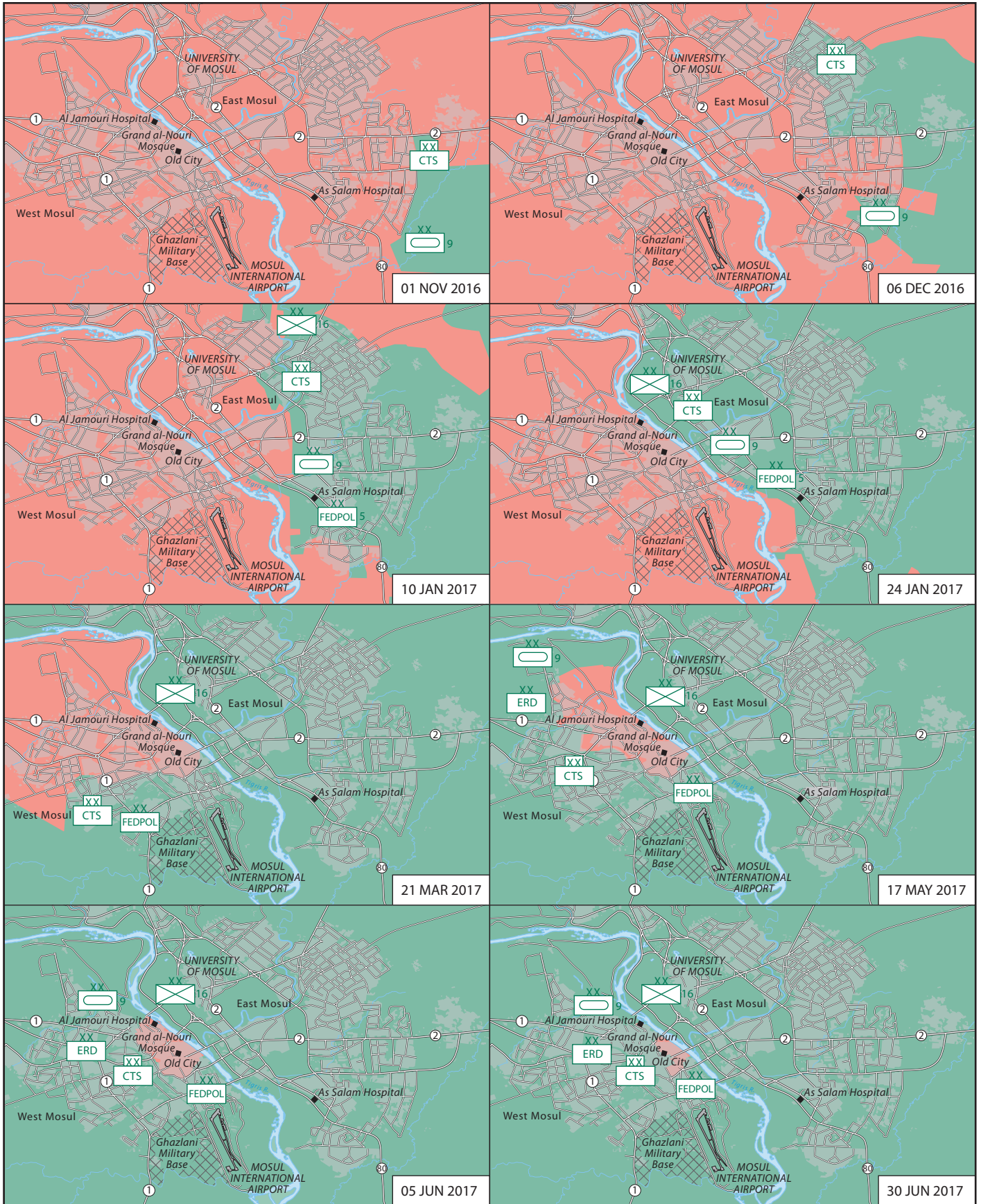
While the battle for Al Jamouri Hospital raged to the north, Task Force CTS continued to push into the Old City. With the Iraqi commandos approaching within 60 meters of their position, ISIS fighters detonated explosives in the Grand Mosque of al-Nouri on 21 June, destroying the 800-year-old landmark. The Iraqis reached the ruins on 28 June. Although reduced to just a few hundred fighters, ISIS continued to fight for more than two weeks afterward, staging a final desperate counterattack on 10 July.<sup>161</sup> In its internal reporting, the terrorist group portrayed its imminent defeat as a kind of victory. In

June, an article in ISIS's *al-Naba* newsletter claimed that simply by prolonging the war, the Islamic State could eventually outlast the coalition. Merely remaining on the battlefield, rather than winning outright, could therefore be seen as a success.<sup>162</sup> In an interview with *al-Naba* in early July, a senior ISIS commander added that the attrition inflicted on Iraqi forces vindicated the group's efforts to hold Mosul. "If we consider destroying the Rafidha [Shi'a] forces in Iraq as one of the most important goals of the war," he argued, "then the Mosul battle is a major factor contributing to achieving that goal, despite it being a purely defensive battle that includes some offensive tactics." The commander's prediction that the battle would drag on indefinitely was quickly disproven, however.<sup>163</sup> On 16 July, the ISF wrested the last 40-by-40-meter sector of Mosul from ISIS's control, completing the liberation of the city.<sup>164</sup> Phase V of Operation EAGLE STRIKE, "Transition to Hold Force," began on the following day, as provincial and Federal Police forces deployed to relieve the Iraqi Army and CTS.<sup>165</sup>

Iraqi losses during the last phase of the fighting were severe. Between 4 May and 16 July 2017, the ISF suffered 3,710 casualties, including 610 soldiers killed in action. ISIS killed or wounded an average of more than fifty Iraqi soldiers every day during the final two-and-a-half months of the campaign. Although significantly longer in duration—171 days rather than 99—the fight for West Mosul as a whole proved more than twice as deadly on a daily basis for Iraqi personnel than the battle for East Mosul, a fact that reflected ISIS's determination to hold the Old City and the lack of avenues for escape.<sup>166</sup> It was also more than twice as deadly for Iraqi civilians. Per official U.S. military reporting, coalition airstrikes killed an average of less than one civilian per day during the battle for East Mosul. During the fight for the west, about two civilians were killed every day.<sup>167</sup>

## Conclusion

Victory in Mosul marked a turning point in the coalition's campaign. In the aftermath, ISIS's resistance in Iraq was appreciably weakened. Tall 'Afar fell to Iraqi forces in August, followed by Al Hawijah two months later.<sup>168</sup> As General Martin's successor as CJFLCC-OIR commander, Maj. Gen. Robert P. "Pat" White, informed the media in October, "The physical caliphate has been destroyed. It'll be finished off in another part



OPERATION EAGLE STRIKE  
MOSUL, IRAQ

ISF/Peshmerga  
ISIS

0 3 Miles  
0 3 Kilometers

of the world here shortly [i.e., Syria] and they [ISIS] know they're losing. They can see it coming and they're starting to run away, and they're starting to ask for surrender, which is something you would not have seen a year ago."<sup>169</sup> The ISF liberated the last remnants of the "caliphate" in the Iraqi portion of the Euphrates River valley in November. On 9 December, Prime Minister al-Abadi declared victory over ISIS in Iraq.<sup>170</sup>

The victory truly belonged to the Iraqis. Throughout Operation EAGLE STRIKE, coalition advisers adhered to two fundamental principles: "help partners fight but do not fight for them, and do not make yourself the main effort."<sup>171</sup> According to one senior coalition commander, the mission during Operation INHERENT RESOLVE "proved infinitely different than the exhausting, first-hand combat that many of us experienced in Iraq from 2003 to 2008. For example, a typical American Soldier's experience during Operation *Iraqi Freedom's* 'troop surge' . . . was that Americans did the deadliest work, as Iraqis observed." In OIR, in contrast, "the entire effort always centered on our partners' leadership and ownership of exceptionally nasty ground combat operations."<sup>172</sup> Iraqis were the ones who were "out there every day risking their lives and risking their limbs to liberate Mosul."<sup>173</sup>

Some observers, accustomed to thinking in terms of Iraq and Afghanistan circa 2007, misunderstood the nature of the mission. "They think American forces are fighting in Mosul," noted another officer. "There's not a single U.S. ground troop in Mosul. . . . The Iraqis do what they want. We often times don't know what they're going to do until they do it. We're often times in more of the reactive mode."<sup>174</sup> Casualty figures underscore this reality. Two members of CJTF-OIR were killed in action in the battle for Mosul, compared with the 1,320 ISF personnel killed in the same offensive.<sup>175</sup>

The Iraqi military proved itself to be a much more competent force than it had been ten—or even two—years before. "It's pretty extraordinary that in 2014, you could argue that the Iraqi Army was the doctrinal definition of defeated," commented Colonel Work. "It got chased from the battlefield a couple times." Two-and-a-half years later, the ISF had "fixed themselves." At Mosul, the Iraqis were "increasingly competent, increasingly confident, and they're attacking the enemy."<sup>176</sup> By overcoming an adaptive and determined adversary and liberating a major urban area, the ISF achieved the greatest victory in Iraqi military history since 1988.

To be sure, the Iraqi Security Forces benefited greatly from coalition support. CJTF-

OIR and its land component command trained many of the forces that took part in the Mosul offensive, assisted Iraqi staffs with planning, and advised Iraqi units throughout the battle itself. They also provided access to coalition ISR imagery, giving Iraqi commanders a clearer view of the battlefield and of their own troops. All of these efforts contributed in different ways to ISIS's defeat. But by far the most important support provided by the coalition came in the form of airstrikes and surface-to-surface fires. Between 17 October 2016 and 16 July 2017, coalition forces carried out more than 11,000 strikes in Mosul using aircraft, as well as artillery assets ranging from 120-mm. mortars to M142 High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems.<sup>177</sup>

Even the best Iraqi units were highly reliant on coalition fires. Colonel Downing, who supported the CTS in West Mosul, noted that "our partners have become addicted to our capabilities." Iraqi formations were reluctant to advance without coalition fire support, although they often possessed their own artillery. "It's completely contingent on fires to get them to where they need to go, and that's a challenge," he added. "We're trying to be proportional and apply restraint and proportionality and military necessity and doing all those



**101st Airborne Division soldiers fire an M777 howitzer near Mosul, Iraq, in support of Operation INHERENT RESOLVE.**

*Department of Defense*





### American and Iraqi personnel pose with a captured ISIS flag.

*Courtesy of John J. Hawbaker*

things. It's tough because it's their soldiers' lives. They're just as precious as our soldiers' lives."<sup>178</sup> Colonel James, partnered with the Axis Guwayr forces in East Mosul, noted the same thing. He found that a single Hellfire missile strike in the morning along the Iraqi line of advance, even if it did not hit enemy forces, could serve as a tangible demonstration that coalition fires were available. With this assurance, Iraqi troops could then be relied on to fight aggressively for the rest of the day.<sup>179</sup> The concept of "motivational fires" was an important one. "Tactically these fires did not always make sense," noted one U.S. report, "but proved to be the base line for initiating most actions."<sup>180</sup>

Coalition firepower ultimately enabled the ISF to advance through the streets of Mosul. It played a decisive role in destroying ISIS strongpoints, like the terrorist group's defensive position in the Al Jamouri Hospital Complex, and in breaking up the large-scale counterattacks that ultra-aggressive ISIS leaders launched on a regular basis throughout the battle. But overreliance on fires provided by CJTF-OIR, especially precision-guided munitions, had negative consequences as well. Commentator Lt. Col. Amos C. Fox, for example, has described what he terms the "Precision Paradox." Although "precision" strikes killed far fewer civilians than strikes with unguided munitions would have done, the proliferation of such strikes over the course of the battle had a physical effect on the city of Mosul that was virtually indistinguishable from that of carpet bombing. More than 40,000 homes were destroyed in West Mosul alone.<sup>181</sup> As one U.S. report has observed, Mosul in July 2017 was "reminiscent of European cities

destroyed during the course of World War II."<sup>182</sup>

Heavy use of such weapons was also potentially harmful for the ISF, creating an unhealthy dependence on U.S. firepower. South Vietnamese Lt. Gen. Ngo Quang Truong observed a similar phenomenon during the Easter Offensive in 1972. "Since U.S. air support was so effective and always available," he wrote, "ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam] tactical commanders tended to disregard their own supporting weapons which were seldom used properly. Eventually the tendency to rely on B-52s or tactical air in the place of organic fires and maneuver became so commonplace that it inhibited initiative and often caused delays in conducting attacks."<sup>183</sup> These comments might have been taken verbatim from advisers to Iraqi forces in Mosul.<sup>184</sup> Finally, reliance on precision-guided munitions in OIR, although necessary to minimize civilian casualties, ate into the United States' sizeable—but not unlimited—stockpiles of such weapons. The resulting shortages were still evident almost two years after the liberation of Mosul.<sup>185</sup>

In the end, it is unclear whether the success of EAGLE STRIKE, and of OIR as a whole, truly vindicates the proxy warfare operational approach used during the conflict with ISIS. On one level, of course, it is a remarkable achievement—arguably the U.S. Army's most triumphant military advisory effort since the Korean War.<sup>186</sup> This on its own is a powerful argument for using the same restrained approach in future contingency operations: placing a host nation ground force in the lead, accompanied by a small contingent of advisers, and supporting it with American airpower. However, the

success of this approach in Mosul had as much to do with how ISIS fought as with CJTF-OIR's own methods. As one U.S. adviser observed, ISIS was a "very unconventional threat but it's still a combined-arms army that we're up against. . . . It's got artillery pieces. It has machine guns, RPGs, and forward observers. It has close combat attack aviation if you look at [an unmanned aerial vehicle] that's dropping 40-mm. bomblets."<sup>187</sup> These characteristics, combined with its innovative use of unconventional weapons like SVBIEDs, made it a very formidable adversary—a "near-peer" to the ISF, as coalition officers observed.<sup>188</sup> But they also exacerbated its vulnerability to coalition firepower. In a sense, the terrorist group was a victim of its own success. To legitimize its claim to being a state, it had to fight like one. And the longer it held out, the more losses it suffered—losses that fell disproportionately among its most effective fighters. It is worth asking whether the ISF's victory would have been quite as decisive if ISIS had ceased trying to hold territory and had instead reverted to being an insurgency. Future opponents may not make the same choices, and proxy warfare may not prove as effective in combatting them.

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### Notes

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Ed Mattheadess, Lt. Gen. (ret.) Gary Volesky, and Lt. Col. John Hawbaker. I am likewise grateful to my friends and colleagues, Dr. Nick Schlosser and Dr. Brian Neumann, for reading and commenting on drafts. This article is much better because of their feedback. I also wish to thank the superb editorial team in CMH's Multimedia and Publications Division who worked on this project, including Matt Boan, Bryan Hockensmith, and Deborah Stultz. Any errors of fact and interpretation are my fault alone.

2. Isabel Coles and Stephen Kalin, "Iraqi PM Declares Victory over Islamic State in Mosul," Reuters, 10 Jul 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-mosul/iraqi-pm-declares-victory-over-islamic-state-in-mosul-idUSKBN19V105>, copy in Historians Files, U.S. Army Center of Military History (CMH), Washington, DC. Originals or copies of all primary sources cited in this paper are in the author's reference files at CMH unless otherwise noted.

3. David R. Kogon, *The Sky Dragon Dismantles the "Caliphate": The Coalition Military Campaign to Defeat the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, 21 AUG 2016–05 SEP 2017* (Camp Arifjan, Kuwait: CJTF-OIR HQ, 2017), 33.

4. Published studies of the campaign include Andrew Mumford, *The West's War Against the Islamic State: Operation Inherent Resolve in Iraq and Syria* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2021); Aaron Stein, *The US War against ISIS: How America and its Allies Defeated the Caliphate* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2022); and Michael R. Gordon, *Degrade and Destroy: The Inside Story of the War Against the Islamic State, from Barack Obama to Donald Trump* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2022). Two RAND Corporation publications survey the air and ground campaigns respectively: Becca Wasser et al., *The Air War Against the Islamic State: The Role of Airpower in Operation Inherent Resolve* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2021); and Jeffrey Martini et al., *Operation Inherent Resolve: U.S. Ground Force Contributions* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2022). The author has also published a short, unclassified study of the campaign: Mason W. Watson, *The Conflict with ISIS: Operation INHERENT RESOLVE, 2014–2020*, The U.S. Army Campaigns in Iraq (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 2021).

5. Like many Islamist militants, Zarqawi went by a nom de guerre—in this case, a *kunya* referencing the name of one of his children. It means "the father of Musab from Zarqa [a city in Jordan]." His name at birth was Ahmad Fadil Nazal al-Khalayleh.

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inburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021), 83–84.

7. Michael Knights, *The Long Haul: Rebooting U.S. Security Cooperation in Iraq*, Policy Focus 137 (Washington, DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2015), 7.

8. Dana J. H. Pittard and Wes J. Bryant, *Hunting the Caliphate: America's War on ISIS and the Dawn of the Strike Cell* (New York: Post Hill Press, 2019), 59–60.

9. Watson, *The Conflict with ISIS*, 25, 27–32.

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11. Ryan Wylie, Aaron Childers, and Brett Sylvia, "Expeditionary Advising: Enabling Iraqi Operations from the Gates of Baghdad through Eastern Mosul," *Small Wars Journal*, 22 Feb 2022, <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/expeditionary-advising-enabling-iraqi-operations-gates-baghdad-through-eastern-mosul>.

12. Ashour, *How ISIS Fights*, 56.

13. Wylie, Childers, and Sylvia, "Expeditionary Advising."

14. One of whom, Sgt. Andrew J. Doiron of the Canadian Special Operations Regiment, had been a victim of friendly fire. See Watson, *Conflict with ISIS*, 43.

15. Watson, *Conflict with ISIS*, 38, 49.

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17. "Iraq Crisis: Islamists Force 500,000 to Flee Mosul," *BBC News*, 11 Jun 2014, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-27789229>.

18. Marion Farouk-Sluglett and Peter Sluglett, *Iraq Since 1958: From Revolution to Dictatorship* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2001), 66. About 70 percent of Mosul residents were Sunni Arabs. See Eric Hamilton, *The Fight for Mosul, March 2003–March 2008* (Washington, DC: Institute for the Study of War, Mar 2008), 3.

19. Joel D. Rayburn and Frank K. Sobchak, eds., *The U.S. Army in the Iraq War*, 2 vols. (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College Press, 2019), vol. 2, 393.

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21. Alexander Smith, "Mosul Bridges Are Key to Liberating ISIS Stronghold," *NBC News*, 13 Jan 2017, <https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/isis-uncovered/mosul-bridges-are-key-liberating-isis-stronghold-n706566>.

22. "Old City of Mosul," United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), n.d., <https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/6355/>.

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24. Rick Burns, *Battle for Sinjar, Iraq* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: TRADOC G–2 Analysis and Control Element Threats Integration, 2016), 1, 7–8, <https://info.publicintelligence.net/USArmy-BattleforSinjar.pdf>.

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28. Mosul Study Gp, "What the Battle for Mosul Teaches the Force," No. 17-24 (Fort Leavenworth, KS: U.S. Army Combined Arms Center, 2017), 35; Kogon, *Sky Dragon Dismantles the "Caliphate,"* 15. Quotes from Mosul Study Gp, "What the Battle for Mosul Teaches the Force."

29. Interv, Michael Lynch, U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center, Carlisle Barracks, PA, with Col. James P. Work, Cdr, 2d Bde Combat Team, 82d Abn Div, 7 May 2017, 7; see also James P. Work, "The Battle of Mosul" (lecture, Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst, UK, 11 Apr 2019), Center for Army Leadership, 8 Jul 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mBV7nBhZfZs>.

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34. Memo, Lt. Col. David R. Waters, Dep Cdr, 2d Inf BCT (IBCT), for Col. Brett Sylvia, Cdr, 2d IBCT–Task Force (TF) STRIKE, 10 Apr 2017, sub: Task Force STRIKE Operation INHERENT RESOLVE (OIR) History, 3.
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36. Telecon, Mason W. Watson, CMH, with Lt. Col. (ret.) Shawn Umbrell, former Cdr, 1st Bn, 502d Inf, TF TALON, 10 Mar 2022.
37. Wylie, Childers, and Sylvia, “Expeditionary Advising”
38. Kogon, *Sky Dragon Dismantles the “Caliphate,”* 15–16, 18.
39. *Ibid.*, 16.
40. *Ibid.*, 12. See also Michael Knights, Hamdi Malik, and Aymenn Jawad al-Tamimi, *Honored, Not Contained: The Future of Iraq’s Popular Mobilization Forces*, Policy Focus 163 (Washington, DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Mar 2020), 89–90.
41. Kogon, *Sky Dragon Dismantles the “Caliphate,”* 15–16. This was the strength on paper. Perhaps as many as 40 percent of the soldiers in a unit would be on leave at any given time. See Telecon, Mason W. Watson, CMH, with Col. Stuart M. James, former Cdr, 1st Bn, 67th Arm, and TF DEALER, 7 Apr 2022.
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45. Rpt, DoDIG, *Assessment of U.S. and Coalition Plans and Efforts to Train, Advise, Assist, and Equip the Iraqi Counterterrorism Service and the Iraqi Special Operations Forces*, DODIG-2017-074, 19 Apr 2017, 5, <https://media.defense.gov/2017/May/22/2001750926/-1/-1/1/DODIG-2017-074.PDF>.
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48. Interv, Lt. Col. Scott C. Hammond, Center for Army Lessons Learned (CALL), with Maj. Matthew W. Freeburg, Strike Director and Ch Ops Director, Combined Joint Operations Center–Erbil (CJOC–E), 9 Oct 2016, 1.
49. *Ibid.*, 4, 8; Interv, Col. Jason Awadi, Lt. Col. James Gill, and Donald Haus, CALL, with Maj. Gen. Joseph M. Martin, Cmdg Gen, 1st Inf Div and CJFLCC–OIR, 26 Oct 2017, 2.
50. Wasser et al., *Air War Against the Islamic State*, 172–74.
51. Wylie, Childers, and Sylvia, “Expeditionary Advising”; Memo, Waters for Sylvia, 10 Apr 2017, sub: Task Force STRIKE, 3, 8. Other surface-to-surface fires were employed mainly in a counterbattery role at coalition bases.
52. Telecon, Watson with Umbrell, 10 Mar 2022; Bfg, n.d. [2017], sub: 2d Brigade Combat Team Task Force STRIKE: Operation INHERENT RESOLVE, slide 5.
53. Lt. Col. Stu James and Cpt. Andrew T. Kydes, “Lessons Future Security Force–Force Assistance Brigades Should Consider,” *Armor Mounted Maneuver Journal* 130, no. 1 (Winter–Spring 2018), 19.
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55. Bfg, n.d., sub: 2d Brigade Combat Team, slide 3.
56. Telecon, Watson with Umbrell, 10 Mar 2022; Telecon, Mason W. Watson, CMH, with Lt. Col. (ret.) Shawn Umbrell, former Cdr, 1st Bn, 502d Inf, TF TALON, 16 Mar 2022; Shawn Umbrell, “OIR Journal,” entries for 9 Oct 2016 and 15 Oct 2016; Wylie, Childers, and Sylvia, “Expeditionary Advising”; Bfg, n.d., sub: 2d Brigade Combat Team, slide 18; see also CJTF–OIR News Release, “Coalition Forces meet with Peshmerga and ISF at JCCC,” U.S. Central Command, 24 Feb 2021, <https://www.centcom.mil/MEDIA/NEWS-ARTICLES/News-Article-View/Article/2513783/coalition-forces-meet-with-peshmerga-and-isf-at-jccc/>.
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59. Interv, Mason W. Watson and Ian McDowell, CMH, with Col. Edwin D. Matthaidess III, former Cdr, 2d Bn, 502d Inf, 7 Nov 2022, 10.
60. Interv, Watson and McDowell with Matthaidess, 7 Nov 2022, 12–13.
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64. Telecons, Watson with Umbrell, 10 and 16 Mar 2022.
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68. *Ibid.*; Mosul Study Gp, “What the Battle for Mosul Teaches the Force,” 7.
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71. Ashour, *How ISIS Fights*, 87; DoD Background Bfg, Senior Defense Official, 30 Oct 2015, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/626814/departament-of-defense-background-briefing-on-enhancing-counter-isil-operations/>.
72. Kogon, *Sky Dragon Dismantles the “Caliphate,”* 19–21.

73. Ibid., 19–20; Mosul Study Gp, “What the Battle for Mosul Teaches the Force,” 46.
74. Kogon, *Sky Dragon Dismantles the “Caliphate,”* 21.
75. Telecons, Watson with Umbrell, 10 and 16 Mar 2022.
76. Kogon, *Sky Dragon Dismantles the “Caliphate,”* 21.
77. Ibid.
78. Interv, Lt. Col. Scott C. Hammond, CALL, with Lt. Col. Stuart Cree, CJFLCC-OIR, J35, 2 Dec 2016, 2–3.
79. Kogon, *Sky Dragon Dismantles the “Caliphate,”* 22.
80. Ibid., 52; Telecon, Watson with James, 29 Mar 2022.
81. Interv, Lt. Col. Scott C. Hammond, CALL, with Lt. Col. George A. Hodges, Cdr, TF DRAGON, n.d. [Dec 2016], 1, 5.
82. Telecons, Watson with James, 29 Mar and 9 Apr; Telecon, Mason W. Watson, CMH, with Col. Stuart M. James, former Cdr, 1st Bn, 67th Arm, and TF DEALER, 8 Dec 2022; Kogon, *Sky Dragon Dismantles the “Caliphate,”* 24.
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87. Kogon, *Sky Dragon Dismantles the “Caliphate,”* 24.
88. Susannah George, “A Lethal Mistake Leads to a Harrowing Ambush in Iraq’s Mosul,” Associated Press, 8 Dec 2016, <https://apnews.com/article/d6f0788b20b341788d2135c9e4060575>.
89. Kogon, *Sky Dragon Dismantles the “Caliphate,”* 24; Wylie, Childers, and Sylvia, “Expeditionary Advising.”
90. George, “A Lethal Mistake Leads to a Harrowing Ambush in Iraq’s Mosul.”
91. Kogon, *Sky Dragon Dismantles the “Caliphate,”* 24.
92. George, “A Lethal Mistake Leads to a Harrowing Ambush in Iraq’s Mosul.”
93. Kogon, *Sky Dragon Dismantles the “Caliphate,”* 24.
94. Wylie, Childers, and Sylvia, “Expeditionary Advising”; Email, Col. Stuart M. James to Mason W. Watson, 8 Dec 2022, sub: RE: Mosul Article.
95. Kogon, *Sky Dragon Dismantles the “Caliphate,”* 24.
96. Email, Shawn Umbrell to Mason Watson, sub: Re: Mosul Article, 28 Oct 2022; Telecon, Watson with James, 8 Dec 2022. Donald J. Trump was elected president on 8 November 2016, defeating Hillary R. Clinton. An exception was Operation VALLEY WOLF in the summer of 2016, which saw limited brigade advising by conventional U.S. Army forces.
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102. David B. Larter, “SOCOM Commander: Armed ISIS Drones Were 2016’s ‘Most Daunting Problem,’” Defense News, 16 May 2017, <https://www.defensenews.com/digital-show-dailies/sofic/2017/05/16/socom-commander-armed-isis-drones-were-2016s-most-daunting-problem/>.
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109. Kogon, *Sky Dragon Dismantles the “Caliphate,”* 25; Bfg, n.d. [2017], sub: 2d Brigade Combat Team Task FORCE STRIKE: Operation INHERENT RESOLVE, slide 17.
110. Interv, Lt. Col. Scott C. Hammond, CALL, with Lt. Col. Stuart Cree, Australian Defence Force, CJFLCC-OIR, CJ35, 2 Dec 2016, 7–9.
111. AAR, Op EAGLE STRIKE, TF CHARGER, 1st Bn, 12th Cav, 22 Feb–26 Jul 2017, 18 Jan 2018, 2, 4; Kogon, *Sky Dragon Dismantles the “Caliphate,”* 25.
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113. Kogon, *Sky Dragon Dismantles the “Caliphate,”* 26.
114. Ibid., 27; Telecon, Watson with James, 29 Mar 2022.
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117. Kogon, *Sky Dragon Dismantles the “Caliphate,”* 53.
118. Ibid., 28; Jessa Rose Dury-Agri, Omar Kassim, and Patrick Martin, *Iraqi Security Forces and Popular Mobilization Forces: Orders of Battle* (Washington, DC: Institute for the Study of War, December 2017), 26–27.
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120. Kogon, *Sky Dragon Dismantles the “Caliphate,”* 53.
121. Ibid., 28; Interv, Scott C. Hammond, CALL, with Lt. Col. James L. Browning, Cdr, 2d Bn, 508th Inf and TF 2 FURY, n.d. [2017].
122. Kogon, *Sky Dragon Dismantles the “Caliphate,”* 28.
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124. “Iraqi Forces Enter Western Mosul Neighborhood,” France 24, 24 Feb 2017, <https://www.france24.com/en/20170224-iraq-forces-enter-western-mosul-neighborhood>.
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- Susannah George and Andrea Rosa, “Daring Nighttime Raid Turns to Deadly Trap in Mosul,” AP News, 8 Mar 2017, <https://apnews.com/article/fbaa65aa1d8d4076bc91f99d3d39210c>.
126. Kogon, *Sky Dragon Dismantles the “Caliphate,”* 28; Emily Anagnostos, “The Campaign for Mosul, March 9–16, 2017,” ISW, 16 Mar 2017, <http://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/campaign-mosul-march-9-16-2017>; AAR, Op EAGLE STRIKE, TF CHARGER, 1st Bn, 12th Cav, 18 Jan 2018, 5–6.
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137. Memo, Isler for Cdr, CJFLCC-OIR, 8 May 2017, in Mosul Airstrike Investigation, 4; DA Form 2823, CJOC-E J2, 3 Apr 2017 in Mosul Airstrike Investigation, 460.
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144. Interv, Lynch with Work, 11.
145. Interv, Lt. Col. Scott C. Hammond, CALL, with Capt. Jeremy P. Conway, S6, 2d Bn, 325th Inf and TF WHITE FALCON, n.d. [2017], 1.
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147. *Ibid.*, 3.
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150. Kogon, *Sky Dragon Dismantles the “Caliphate,”* 32, 35; Interv, Lynch with Work, 13.
151. Kogon, *Sky Dragon Dismantles the “Caliphate,”* 32.
152. *Ibid.*, 31.
153. *Ibid.*, 32.
154. Interv, Lynch with Work, 19–20.
155. Kogon, *Sky Dragon Dismantles the “Caliphate,”* 32–33. In June, they linked up with Syrian forces fighting on behalf of the Assad regime “for a social media photo-opportunity.” See *Ibid.*, 33.
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159. Kogon, *Sky Dragon Dismantles the “Caliphate,”* 33.
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162. “IS Discusses Strategy of Weakening Enemy Coalition Through Individual Strikes, Prolonged Battle in Naba 85,” SITE Intelligence Group, 16 Jun 2017, <https://news.siteintelgroup.com/Jihadist-News/is-discusses-strategy-of-weakening-enemy-coalition-through-individual-strikes-prolonged-battle-in-naba-85.html>.
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164. Kogon, *Sky Dragon Dismantles the “Caliphate,”* 34.
165. *Ibid.*, 35.
166. *Ibid.*
167. This is based on analysis of Pentagon records compiled by the *New York Times*. See

Azmat Khan, Lila Hassan, Sarah Almkhtar, and Rachel Shorey, "The Civilian Casualty Files," *New York Times*, 18 Dec 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/us/civilian-casualty-files.html#credible-reports>. The nonprofit watchdog, Airwars, places the number of civilians killed by coalition airstrikes in Mosul at between 1,066 and 1,579, compared with the 422 civilian deaths assessed as "credible" by the U.S. military. See Samuel Oakford, "Counting the Dead in Mosul," *Atlantic*, 5 Apr 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/04/counting-the-dead-in-mosul/556466/>.

168. Watson, *Conflict with ISIS*, 71–72.

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172. J. Patrick Work, "Fighting the Islamic State By, With, and Through: How Mattered as Much as What," *Joint Force Quarterly* 89 (2nd Quarter 2018), 56–57. Italics in the original.

173. Interv, Lynch with Work, 15.

174. Interv, Hammond with Hodges, 5.

175. Watson, *Conflict with ISIS*, 61–62.

176. Interv, Lynch with Work, 22.

177. Strike data compiled for Wasser et al., *Air War Against the Islamic State*. It is impossible to provide a precise figure using CJTF-OIR's publicly distributed strike releases as the definition of what constituted a "strike" changed at several points during the battle. See Wasser et al., *Air War Against the Islamic State*, 394–95.

178. Interv, Hammond with Downing, n.d. [2017], 4.

179. Telecon, Watson with James, 29 Mar 2022.

180. AAR, Op EAGLE STRIKE, TF CHARGER, 1st Bn, 12th Cav, 18 Jan 2018, 5.

181. Amos C. Fox, *The Mosul Study Group and the Lessons of the Battle of Mosul*, Land Warfare Paper 130 (Washington, DC: Association of the United States Army, 2020), 7–9.

182. Kogon, *Sky Dragon Dismantles the "Caliphate"*, 4.

183. Ngo Quang Truong, *The Easter Offensive of 1972*, Indochina Monographs (Washington DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1980), 172.

184. See, for example, Interv, Hammond with Downing, n.d. [2017], 4.

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186. Even the best U.S.-led military advisory efforts, like the mission to El Salvador in the 1980s, have been remarkably ineffective. See Stephen Biddle, Julia Macdonald, and Ryan Baker, "Small Footprint, Small Payoff: The Military Effectiveness of Security Force Assistance," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 41, nos. 1–2 (2018): 89–142.

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188. Wylie, Childers, and Sylvia, "Expeditionary Advising."

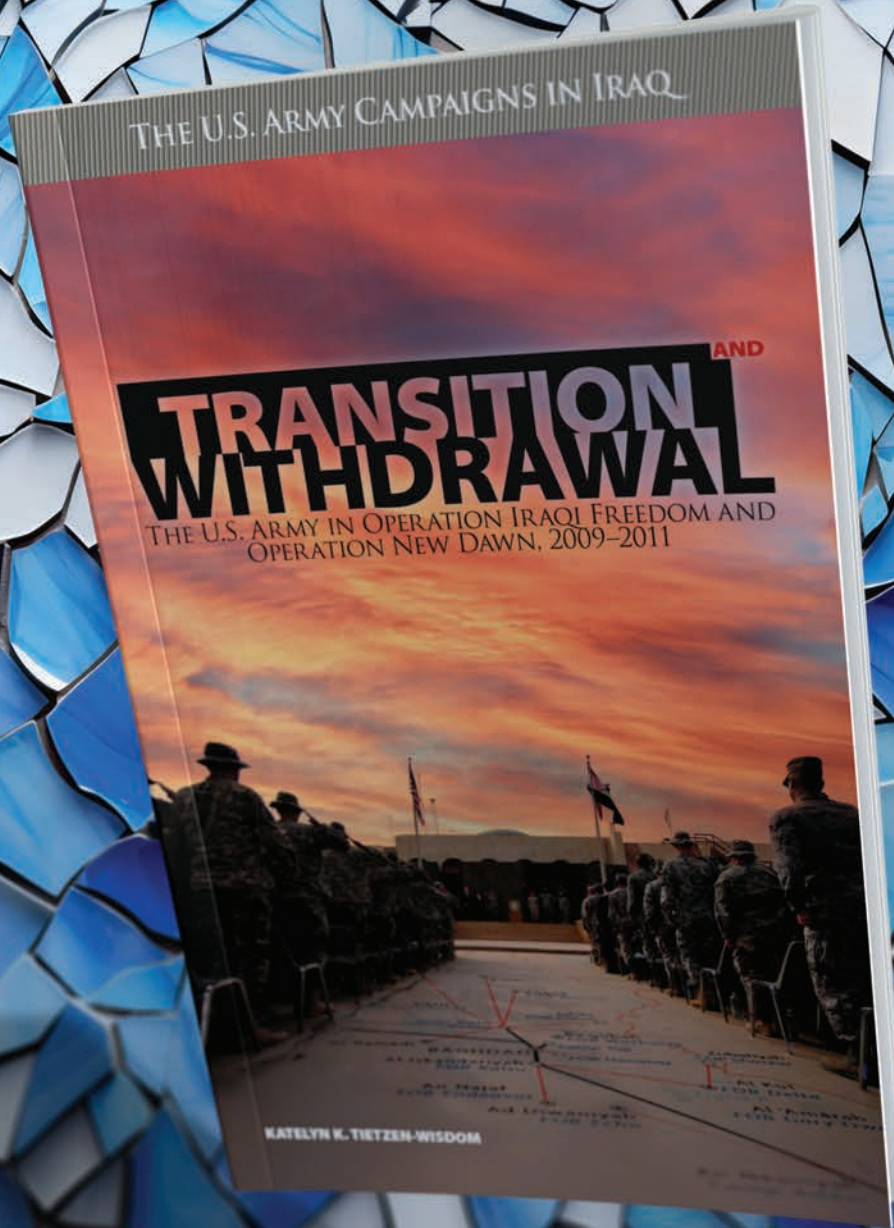
## ARMYHISTORY

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**FROM CMH**

# MUSEUM FEATURE

## THE LOUISIANA MANEUVERS AND MILITARY MUSEUM

By Jerry Sanson

Housed in a replica World War II–style barracks located on Camp Beauregard in Pineville, Louisiana, the Louisiana Maneuvers and Military Museum tells the story of the largest General Headquarters peacetime training maneuver conducted in 1941. Third Army sponsored eleven corps-level maneuvers during World War II. The Louisiana Maneuvers ranged over the central and western parts of the state and prepared soldiers for warfare. Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall commented that he wanted mistakes made in Louisiana where soldiers could remedy them rather than on battlefields where Americans could lose their lives.

The museum was dedicated on 8 November 1997. The former adjutant general of Louisiana, Maj. Gen. Ansel M. Stroud Jr., called the museum “a great example of the military and the relationship between citizens and soldiers . . . at a time when men and women joined together to save their nation.” Rabbi Arnold Task, chair of the museum’s initial board of directors, added that the museum honors the men and women who dedicated “so much of their lives . . . to service to our country.”<sup>1</sup>

The museum has fulfilled the missions implied by those remarks for more than 25 years. Some of the oldest artifacts at the museum include an 1840s British Belt Plate, a Louisiana Militia colonel’s uniform, a cannonball from the Civil War Red River Campaign, and the battle flag of the Madison Artillery. Materials from the War with Spain and Mexican-American War campaigns include an officer’s saber, a campaign medal, and sheet music of a march written for the 3d Battalion of the 1st Louisiana Infantry. The World War I exhibit displays photographs of daily life at Camp Stafford—which later became Camp Beauregard—as well as artifacts from the 114th Engineer Battalion of 39th Division, and photos of the 17th Division in training.

Most exhibits tell the story of the Louisiana Maneuvers. Items range from a railroad spike for the Claiborne-Polk Military Railroad to a shoeshine box carried by a local boy who hoped to earn money from the soldiers. Postcards and license plates exemplify the many camps and Army airfields in the area during the war.

The home front exhibit displays personal items such as V-Mail and sweetheart pillows. Axis Forces artifacts include a German Sturmgewehr 44 (Assault Rifle 44), a Japanese Type 89 Grenade Discharger “knee mortar,” and Japanese propaganda leaflets targeted toward American soldiers. A tattered battle flag flown from a Japanese warship anchored in Hiroshima Bay on 6 August 1945, along with concentration camp money and charts used by the Nazis to label “Ubermenchen” and “Untermenchen” (superhuman and subhuman races), illustrate the tragedy and cost of war.

Other exhibits honor Native American Code Talkers, African American units including the 761st Tank Battalion, the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps, and the Army Nurse Corps—all of which participated in the maneuvers.

The Outdoor Vehicle Park features tanks, artillery, wheeled vehicles, and aircraft from the World War II to the post-DESERT STORM eras. One unique piece of equipment is a road grader buried at Camp Beauregard after World War II and discovered decades later.

The museum is open Tuesday through Friday 0900 to 1700; after hours and weekend tours can be scheduled by calling 318-641-5733. The website for the Louisiana National Guard Museums is <https://geauxguardmuseums.com>.

**Dr. Jerry Sanson** is professor emeritus of history and political science at Louisiana State University at Alexandria, and a volunteer at the Louisiana Maneuvers and Military Museum, Camp Beauregard.



### Notes

1. Dusty Shenofsky, “The Birth of a Museum: Louisiana Maneuvers and Military Museum Dedicated,” *Alexandria (LA) Daily Town Talk* 114, no. 238 (9 Nov 1997), D1.





A



B



C



D

Left Page: An M1897 ("French 75") field gun, used by many nations (including the United States) during World War I. Early in World War II, U.S. divisions and the independent antitank units activated at many nearby training camps used these guns for training purposes.

A. Two World War II antitank guns, an M3 37-mm. field gun (*right*) and an M1 57-mm. field gun (*left*), stand guard.

B. A UH-1 Iroquois ("Huey") helicopter "flies" over the museum's Education Center.

C. A Louisiana Civil Rights Trail Marker highlights the service of the 761st Tank Battalion ("Patton's Panthers"), a segregated African American unit that trained at Camp Claiborne during World War II.

D. The Louisiana Maneuvers and Military Museum sits just inside the main gate of Louisiana National Guard Training Center Pineville.



U.S. Navy Douglas SBD Dauntless dive bomber squadrons took part in the Louisiana Maneuvers because the U.S. Army Air Corps did not have enough A-24 Banshee-equipped units for use during the exercises. As a result, the 1941 Louisiana Maneuvers was a joint forces maneuver in addition to being the largest military training event in U.S. history.



**A. Plaque honoring the 1944 road construction work of the U.S. Army Engineer Troops at Camp Claiborne, Louisiana. This training mission built a new highway for the state of Louisiana.**



**B. The 4th Infantry Division (Motorized), reactivated during the Louisiana Maneuvers, included the Comanche Code Talkers. These code talkers sent secret communications through Comanche-language transmissions the enemy could not translate. The museum proudly displays a statue honoring T/5 Charles J. Chibitty, who was the last living member of this unit.**

**C. Col. Marshall T. Cappel was both a member of the Louisiana National Guard and the sheriff of Rapides Parish, where Camp Beauregard is located. During World War II, he was a captain in charge of General Douglas MacArthur's security detail.**



# U.S. ARMY ARTIFACT SPOTLIGHT

## THE HELMETS OF GENERAL GEORGE S. PATTON

By Ian D. Richardson

The interwar period was not one that stimulated a mind like that of George S. Patton Jr. By 1926, he had written, “As I approach 41 and there’s no war I . . . fear that I shall live to retire a useless soldier.”<sup>1</sup> Through multiple postings in Virginia, Kansas, Texas, and Hawai’i, Patton would prove anything but useless while in command of the 2d Armored Division at Fort Benning, Georgia, in 1940. It was during this period of intense training for a looming world conflict that he sharpened his skills—and received a promotion—as an armor commander in the backroads and forests of the American South. The vital lessons learned and tactics he developed during the 1941 southern maneuvers and at the Desert Training Center in California would be essential to victory in the North African desert the following year. This early M1 helmet is a witness to and result of those lessons learned.

Introduced in 1941, the M1 helmet had several advantages to the World War I era M1917, still then in use with most troops. The M1 is part of the iconic image of the American World War II “G.I.”: a high-domed, manganese steel “pot” with cork-textured olive drab paint and an olive drab #3 cotton web chinstrap, married with a one-size-fits-all removable Riddell-style liner with a leather chinstrap often wrapped over the front brim of the pot. Its profile and design improved protection while allowing for ease of mass production, which ultimately led to it being used for the next forty-five years. Patton’s M1 is a unique example of the model in its own right, being an early production “experimental” variant of the helmet and liner design. The shell has all the hallmarks of an extremely early M1, most likely acquired by way of Brig. Gen. Courtney H. Hodges, Patton’s contemporary at Fort Benning and head of the Infantry Board that had designed the helmet.<sup>2</sup> Patton replaced its issue cotton web chinstrap with an adjustable leather one, either because the strap had been damaged or because he was unsatisfied with the original. The exterior paint was a unique dark drab color, as seen in photos and in contrast to the interior shell paint color.<sup>3</sup> Most notable is the addition of two general’s rank stars,

affixed to the shell and taped internally to keep them from spinning in place. The stars appear to have been moved more than once between the shell and liner, which Patton often wore separately. The liner is also an extremely early and limited-production example made of pressed paper, like the later mass-produced M1 “Hawley” liners. In short, this is an exceedingly fascinating artifact which marks a transitional period of the U.S. military as it modernized and prepared for a war it knew was on the horizon.

**Ian D. Richardson** is the former collections manager at the General George S. Patton Museum, Fort Knox, Kentucky.



### Notes

1. Carlo D’Este, *Patton: A Genius for War* (New York: HarperCollins, 1995), 329.
2. Hodges, like Patton, served under then Brig. Gen. John J. Pershing in Mexico from 1916 to 1917 and he may have known Patton from this period in his life. Given Patton’s frequency of socializing among general officers and peers, it is not hard to imagine him striking up a conversation with Hodges at Fort Benning in the summer of 1941 and expressing an interest in trying out the new helmet design for himself. The 1941 maneuvers were a perfect test ground for this.
3. Through photo study, the author has noticed that the exterior of the helmet changes shades sometime between August and November 1941. This could lend credence to the idea of Patton being dissatisfied with the initial lighter olive drab color of the helmet shell. A similar preference for darker-shade helmet colors appears in General Patton’s famous high-gloss parade helmet liner—also in the General George Patton Museum’s collection—which can be seen in photos as early as 1943.



**A.** Maj. Gen. George S. Patton Jr. speaking with local journalist Elizabeth Vaughn of the *Chattanooga (Tennessee) News-Free Press* during the IV Corps maneuvers in South Carolina, 6 November 1941. Patton wears the helmet in its darker paint scheme, with its distinctive replacement leather chinstrap draped over the brim. The liner strap is most likely tucked up between the liner and shell out of view. Note Patton's training arm band, denoting him as a member of the "Red Army," which faced the "Blue Army" in the 1941 maneuvers.

**B.** Interior detail of the steel helmet shell. A piece of masking tape has been applied to it, ostensibly to keep the rank stars from spinning in place. The tape marks beneath it imply that the wearer removed and replaced the stars frequently, most likely between the liner and shell when worn. Also visible is the early "heat stamp," whose alphanumeric code starting with "BX" indicates the early M1 experimental production.

**C.** Detailed photo of the major general stars attached to the helmet shell. It is believed that these were worn on both the shell and the liner when worn without the steel "pot," as Patton frequently did at



media events and ceremonies. The front seam of the helmet rim, typically centered on the wearer, is in line with one of the general officer stars. This arrangement implies that Patton may have worn this helmet as a brigadier general before haphazardly adding the second star off-center to the left.

**D.** The helmet liner, removed from the steel pot. Note the obvious holes and outline from the stars. Upon study of the helmet in use by Patton at various functions in 1941–1942, it appears the stars were painted white at one point when mounted on the liner, or painted directly to its surface and later covered with an additional layer of paint. Also of note is the liner's exterior painted finish and obvious additional snap button on the side, which identifies it as an airborne variant of liner design. After production began, pressed paper "Hawley" model liners featured an exterior layer of cotton twill rather than paint. Neither of these versions were considered satisfactory, and the Army ultimately would replace them in production with the most well-known "plastic" phenolic resin liners, which held up much better to the rigorous, often damp conditions of field life.



**E.** Liner interior of Patton's early M1, made of pressed paper/fiberboard with a lacquer interior coating and painted olive drab exterior. The headband was removable, using snap buttons rather than the steel spring clips seen on the majority of liners. The headband also was not entirely lined with leather (as would become standard), but instead had a single piece of leather at the wearer's front. It appears that Patton added or at least replaced the second leather strip at the wearer's rear, which is evident by the different stitching and leather coloration. Also of note are the helmet shell chinstrap bales, which are welded in place with the tabs facing outward, rather than inward as seen on production examples—a giveaway to its experimental/early run origin.

**F.** General Patton alongside Brig. Gen. Walton H. Walker at the Desert Training Center, California, 4 June 1942. The "painted" major general stars on Patton's helmet liner, worn here without the steel shell, are evident. Also obvious are the additional rivet for the internal snap button on his helmet liner and the integral liner chinstrap. The slightly glossier appearance of the painted finish on Patton's experimental liner is apparent when

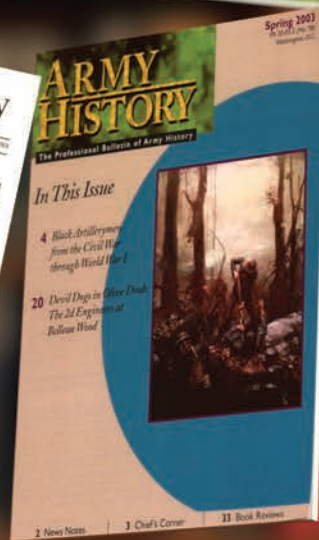


compared with General Walker's cotton twill-covered Hawley liner. M1 helmets by this time had become standard issue for most soldiers, largely replacing older models. By the end of the year, Patton would be sailing for North Africa, carrying a newly issued standard production M1 and leaving this one behind.

**G.** Detail of the buckle and leather replacement chinstrap, added by Patton in place of the original cotton web strap. The cork texturing in the shell paint, seen in all World War II era M1 helmets, is clearly visible here.



# ARMY HISTORY



40 YEARS



# ANNIVERSARY

## ARMY HISTORY AT 40

By Bryan J. Hockensmith

*Army History*, founded in the fall of 1983 as *The Army Historian*, has enjoyed a long and distinguished tenure as the U.S. Army's premier professional history bulletin. The first issue was a bold statement of intent and proposed a new direction for the Army's historical community. Secretary of the Army John O. Marsh Jr. graced the cover and offered these words, "I am honored to introduce *The Army Historian*, a periodical dedicated to the proposition that an appreciation of military history is a valuable addition to an officer's intellectual background . . . this publication will help us have a better understanding of the value of history. But, in addition, by careful explanation and provocative example, it should attract the attention of those thus far uninitiated in the uses of this valuable discipline."<sup>1</sup> Marsh commenced immediately to use *The Army Historian* as a conduit to announce and enact reform within the Army history program.

The chief of military history at the time, retired Brig. Gen. Douglas Kinnard, noted that Secretary Marsh had "asked for a change in priorities among [the Center of Military History's] missions in order to develop more effective means of supporting the Army through the remainder of the century." Marsh called for "increased support of the Army staff in their planning; support of military history education in the Army; and establishment of a National Museum of the United States Army."<sup>2</sup>

These were certainly lofty goals and noble tasks, and over the years *The Army Historian*—renamed *Army History* in 1989—did what it could to contribute to this mission. It would take time for this periodical to grow and become an established publication that the Army respected and that had the impact so desired by Secretary Marsh. From the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s, *The Army Historian/Army History* cemented itself as the Army's preeminent professional bulletin. *Army History's* reach increased as its readership grew, and its high level of scholarship became recognized more widely. A number of talented editors shepherded the journal through its formative years, securing an ever-increasing number of qualified contributors and implementing layout and design changes to make the journal's pages more attractive. In a forty-year span, *Army History* has evolved from a black-and-white "newsletter" with a few hundred readers to a full-color magazine with a print run of 10,000 copies and a hard-copy and online readership numbering in the tens of thousands. During these years, *Army History* published articles from a Secretary of the Army, John O. Marsh Jr.; two chiefs of staff of the Army, Generals John A. Wickham Jr. and Carl E. Vuono; and a profusion of notable historians and authors, including Jay Luvass, Alfred Goldberg, Theodore Wilson, Edward Coffman, Ronald Spector, Antulio

Echevarria, Gregory J. W. Urwin, Victor Davis Hanson, Wayne Lee, Jon Sumida, Charles Neimeyer, Richard Faulkner, William Hammond, Dennis Showalter, and George Herring, to name a few. Over the years, *Army History* has received multiple awards for its content from organizations such as the Society for Military History, the Army Historical Foundation, and the Society for History in the Federal Government.

*Army History's* role in supporting military history education cannot be understated. The Army War College, the National Defense University, the Command and General Staff College, the U.S. Military Academy, and Army branch schools and museums all use it in their curriculums, and Reserve Officer Training Corps students receive issues. Copies even find their way to, and requests for subscriptions come from, places such as the Air Force and Naval academies and various government agencies, as well as foreign military service institutions.

In 2008, public demand for access to hard copies of *Army History* prompted the U.S. Government Publishing Office to begin selling yearly subscriptions. In that same year, we completed a digitization project that made every back issue available online as a free PDF download.

In my years as the managing editor (2012 to present) and steward of this publication, I have done my best to maintain the high scholastic standards of *Army History* while broadening its appeal, improving its aesthetics, and increasing its audience. The results from a recent online Army survey indicate that the publication is on the right track and that efforts have been very successful thus far.

I would be remiss if I did not thank the team of editors, visual information specialists, and cartographers who set their regular workloads aside to assist me with each new issue. *Army History* would not be possible without their efforts.

I am very proud of what *Army History* has become, and I am even more excited about where it still can go in the years ahead. I hope you enjoy reading *Army History* articles as much as I love publishing them.



### Notes

1. John O. Marsh Jr. "This Enterprise Serves a Worthy Purpose. I Wish It Well," *The Army Historian*, no. 1 (Fall 1983): 1.
2. Douglas Kinnard, "Secretary Marsh Sets New Directions for Army Historians," *The Army Historian*, no. 1 (Fall 1983): 3, 12.



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APRIL 2012

**The Last Days of Col. William O. Darby: An Easy Warzone Account**

By Kenneth S. Gougeon

On 12 April 1968, Col. William O. Darby, commander of the 1st Battalion, 503rd Airborne Infantry, led his men in a desperate battle against the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) at the Battle of Dak To. Darby's actions during the battle earned him the Medal of Honor. This article provides a detailed account of the battle and Darby's leadership.



William O. Darby, Medal of Honor recipient, 1968.



**ARMY HISTORY**  
THE PROFESSIONAL BULLETIN OF ARMY HISTORY

MAY 2012

**Army Leaders and Military History**

By General John R. Lattin, Supreme Allied Commander, Europe

Our history is a rich and varied one. It is a history of leadership, of courage, and of sacrifice. It is a history that has shaped the world we live in today. This article explores the role of military leaders in shaping history and the importance of studying their lives and actions.



General John R. Lattin, Supreme Allied Commander, Europe.

**40 YEARS**

## From *The Army Historian*, Issue No. 1, Fall 1983

### “THIS ENTERPRISE SERVES A WORTHY PURPOSE. I WISH IT WELL”

By John O. Marsh Jr.  
Secretary of the Army

I am honored to introduce *The Army Historian*, a periodical dedicated to the proposition that an appreciation of military history is a valuable addition to an officer's intellectual background.

The American Army is older than the nation. It is rich in history. The 167 battle streamers on the Army flag tell not only the story of the Army, but the story of our great Republic. One of those streamers is Yorktown, whose bicentennial was commemorated Army-wide as a part of the Army's "Spirit of Victory" theme in 1981. Its observation had national and international implications as we re-examined its enormous importance to achieving victory in the American Revolution and thereby created the environment for peaceful resolution of the Revolutionary War. The Yorktown commemoration also helped build national will.

This year we mark the 200th Anniversary of the Treaty of Paris which concluded the American Revolution on terms that gave us our independence, and established our boundaries. That treaty was a stepping stone to the founding of the Republic. The Declaration of Independence, Yorktown, the Treaty of Paris and the founding of the Republic are all interrelated, and the Army played a vital role in bringing those events into being.

It has been observed that "what is past is prologue" and "learn from the past." I have cited only several examples of our nation's early history which have great meaning today.

I perceive history to be more than a patriotic reaffirmation of the noble principles and corporate steadfastness that accompanied the birth of our nation. An understanding of history sharpens judgement and broadens perspective. A knowledge of past campaigns and commanders provides vicarious experience otherwise unobtainable. An appreciation of the reasons for the conversion from the square to the triangular division and of the inadequacies of the pentomic division aided Army '86 planners in their recent labors. It is conceivable that knowledge of Officer Candidate School buildups in our recent wars would be of some interest to planners and trainers anticipating future emergencies.

The reason why I am delighted to introduce *The Army Historian* is that this publication will help us have a better understanding of the value of history. But, in addition, by careful explanation and proactive example, it should attract the attention of those thus far uninitiated in the uses of this valuable discipline.

The enterprise serves a worthy purpose. I wish it well.



Antiaircraft soldiers guard a newly constructed bridge site over the Rhine River, built by Ninth U.S. Army engineers.

*National Archives*

# “YOUR EXPLOITS WILL RANK AMONG THE GREATEST OF MILITARY ACHIEVEMENTS”

## Lt. Gen. William H. Simpson and the Fight for the Wesel Bridges

By Mark T. Calhoun

Lt. Gen. William H. Simpson was the highly capable but little-known commander of the Ninth U.S. Army during World War II. He led his army through nine months of continuous combat in northwest Europe from September 1944 to May 1945, culminating in the Rhine River assault crossing that led to the defeat and occupation of Germany. Over the course of the campaign, the Ninth Army liberated nearly 600,000 Allied prisoners of war and more than 1.25 million displaced persons, while capturing more than 750,000 German prisoners of war. General Dwight D. Eisenhower wrote after the war, “If Simpson ever made

a mistake as an Army Commander, it never came to my attention.”<sup>21</sup> His skill as a combat commander aside, it was in working with his Allied partners and understanding the political realities of coalition warfare that Simpson made his greatest contribution to the Allied war effort.

For much of the campaign, Simpson served under British Field Marshal Bernard L. Montgomery’s 21 Army Group, a fact that has contributed to his relative obscurity in the historical record. Simpson was not only a highly effective leader; he was also the best-suited American field army commander in the European theater to

work for Montgomery. Eisenhower placed Simpson under Montgomery’s command during the Ardennes Counteroffensive—a time of crisis for the Anglo-American alliance. Montgomery’s relationship with Simpson’s superior officers, Lt. Gen. Omar N. Bradley, commander of the 12th U.S. Army Group, and General Eisenhower, commander of Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF), grew increasingly fractious over the coming months. Ultimately, even Simpson experienced significant friction with Montgomery and his Second British Army commander, Lt. Gen. Sir Miles C. “Bimbo” Dempsey. This

friction reached its highest point during the planning and execution of the Rhine River crossing at the city of Wesel, Germany, in March 1945. Simpson skillfully managed the situation, averting a major crisis. The story of this critical period in the Anglo-American alliance has never been told fully.<sup>2</sup>

Simpson, an easygoing native of Texas, graduated from the United States Military Academy at West Point in 1909, accepting a commission as a second lieutenant in the infantry. He was a prolific collector of nicknames: in his youth he went by “Hood,” the middle name he shared with his grandfather. At West Point his peers referred to him as “Cheerful Charlie” and “Simp,” the latter a nickname that stuck throughout his career (modified to “Big Simp” when he served in the same unit with another, shorter Simpson). In Europe, however, most of his peers simply called him “Bill.” His early career involved duty with the 6th Infantry Regiment in Mexico during the Punitive Expedition in pursuit of Pancho Villa, and as chief of staff of the 33d Division during World War I. After the United States entered World War II, he served in a succession of training commands from regiment through army level. This path culminated in his appointment in early 1944 to command the Eighth U.S. Army, with orders to deploy his new headquarters to England in May in preparation for combat in Western Europe.<sup>3</sup> Simpson and his staff arrived in London on 14 May 1944, amid frenzied preparations for the Normandy invasion. Planning began at once for his command’s deployment to France, which would take place after the invading armies expanded the lodgment sufficiently to accommodate follow-on forces. The pace of events initially allowed for only a brief conversation with Eisenhower. Three weeks later, on 3 June, Simpson finally sat down with him at his headquarters at Saint Paul’s School in London. Soon after the meeting began, Eisenhower remarked that Simpson’s army designation risked confusion with Montgomery’s famous Eighth British Army. He called in a staff officer and dictated a cable to Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall, recommending a name change. A few days later, Simpson received orders informing him of his field army’s new designation: Ninth U.S. Army.<sup>4</sup>

Planning continued through the execution of Operation OVERLORD, the Allies’ 6 June (D-Day) cross-Channel invasion of Normandy. Simpson and key members of his staff often visited Allied headquarters in



**William H. Simpson, shown here as a West Point cadet.**

*U.S. Military Academy Library*

France to observe their operations. During this period, a controversy emerged within the Anglo-American alliance, focused initially on the Allied command structure. Eisenhower intended to assume direct command of the land campaign once Allied forces advanced to the Seine River, estimated by SHAEF planners to take place by D plus 90. In the interim, Montgomery would exercise operational control over all Allied ground forces in France. Montgomery saw this arrangement as essential for effective command, but Eisenhower considered it strictly temporary.<sup>5</sup>

Progress was slow in the weeks following the Normandy landings, but on 27 July the First U.S. Army finally broke through the German lines at St. Lô, leading to the collapse and retreat of German forces in France. After a rapid pursuit that pushed the front lines more than 80 miles east in less than two weeks, on 22 August the Allies trapped the remnants of *Panzer Group West* and the German *Seventh Army* in the Falaise pocket. Although the encirclement was not complete, the German forces suffered devastating losses of men and equipment. To the south, Lt. Gen. Jacob L. Devers’s 6th Army Group launched Operation DRAGOON on 15 August, landing in southern France and quickly overcoming light opposition to secure the ports of Marseilles and Toulon. By 26 August, the 12th and 21 Army Groups reached the banks of the Seine, and less than a month later they arrived at the German

border, where the 6th Army Group joined the line, creating a continuous Allied front from the English Channel to the Mediterranean Sea.<sup>6</sup>

Despite this success, by the time SHAEF opened its headquarters in Granville, France, on 1 September and Eisenhower assumed direct command over all Allied ground forces, the Supreme Commander had little patience left for the newly-promoted Field Marshal Montgomery.<sup>7</sup> In the early days of the Battle of Normandy, Bradley and his corps commanders cooperated happily with Montgomery, but this camaraderie did not last. The relationship deteriorated for many reasons, mostly related to differences over Allied strategy and command arrangements, worsened by the outsized egos and prickly personalities of the senior commanders. Montgomery’s deliberate approach to operations and his famous grip over the forces under his command seemed slow and controlling to the Americans, who quickly tired of his insensitivity and narcissism. From the British perspective, however, Montgomery’s approach made sense. The memory of Great War casualties still resonated powerfully with the British public, and after five long years of war, troop reserves were minimal. Montgomery had to consider casualty reduction in his strategic approach. The friction these factors created remained at a low level for several weeks after the Normandy landings, but by the time Allied forces broke out and the pursuit began, many senior American commanders and staff officers had developed a low opinion of Field Marshal Montgomery.

With the Battle of France won and the remnants of the *Wehrmacht* limping toward the German frontier, Eisenhower was convinced that the defeat of Germany was imminent if only he properly exploited that victory. In his mind, this approach required a continued offensive along the entire front to destroy German forces west of the Rhine before crossing the river to deliver the final blow. Montgomery saw it differently, arguing that the best way to exploit the recent victory in France involved attacking in a concentrated thrust along a narrow front, focused on encircling and reducing the Ruhr industrial area, thereby crippling German war production and hastening the end of the war. Montgomery saw the broad front approach as a mistake that ignored the principle of concentration.<sup>8</sup> Further, he pointed out that the recent Allied victory, in which he had directed the land campaign,

demonstrated the advantages of an overall commander for ground operations, and he argued that Eisenhower could not perform this role effectively from SHAEF headquarters in Granville, hundreds of miles from the Allied front lines. He insisted that changing the command setup now would only hinder future operations at the very moment the Allies needed to concentrate their forces in a powerful main effort and exploit their victory to seal Germany's fate.

Allied assessments of theater strategy supported Montgomery's logic. In May 1944, SHAEF planners had produced an appreciation (a type of staff study) that evaluated strategic options for postinvasion campaigns in northwest Europe. The planners evaluated four avenues of approach to the Rhine River based on weather and terrain considerations. They rejected two of the four routes: one through the Flanders plain, primarily because of the many water obstacles that would impede mobility; the other through the extremely constricted Ardennes. Of the remaining two routes, they assessed as most promising the northern route through central Belgium and the relatively open ground just north of Aachen. They identified three key advantages: it was the shortest and least difficult path to the Ruhr industrial area, the primary source of Germany's war production; it bypassed the strongest portions of the German defenses along the fortified Siegfried Line; and its close prox-

imity to the English Channel would ease the capture of ports that the Allies would need to support their armies as they advanced east toward Berlin. The planners assessed as less promising the southern route through the Metz gap to the Saar industrial region. This route crossed two major rivers and passed through the Siegfried Line's densest sections before reaching the Rhine; it was much longer than the northern route; it led to a less economically significant region of Germany; and it passed through much more difficult terrain east of the Rhine. All these factors led the planners to evaluate the southern route as worth exploiting, but as only a secondary priority to their recommended northern route.<sup>9</sup>

Eisenhower agreed that the northern thrust should be the main effort, but coalition politics landed him on the horns of a dilemma. No matter how many factors supported the logic of the SHAEF appreciation, the idea that Eisenhower would sideline an American army group while giving a Commonwealth army group responsibility for the main effort in the final campaign of the war against Hitler ran counter to political reality. By September 1944, the United States was the leading power in the Allied coalition, with three U.S. Army divisions engaged in combat in northwest Europe for every Commonwealth division. This disproportion would only increase over the coming months. The American public

was anxious to see the fruits of the nation's labors in sending so many of its young men to war while mobilizing the home front to support them, and they expected the United States to take the lead role in running the war while reaping its share of the glory. Eisenhower knew that above all else he must maintain the health of the alliance: he might agree with Montgomery's view on the basis of military principles, but he could not adopt a strategy that would make the U.S. Army's role in defeating Germany nothing more than a supporting effort. Thus, Eisenhower refused to relegate the rest of the Allied line to a purely defensive role. Instead, offensive operations would continue along the entire front. Military theory and principles of war could only take a back seat.

The situation on the Western Front after the Battle of Normandy complicated matters. Montgomery's 21 Army Group landed on the eastern beaches during the Normandy invasion, after which the Allied line gradually pivoted into a north-south orientation. Therefore, when the Allies closed on the Seine in late August, Montgomery's forces occupied the northern portion of the Allied line, placing 21 Army Group in position to drive to the Rhine along the northern route. However, 21 Army Group lacked sufficient combat power to form the main effort without significant augmentation by U.S. Army units. This left Eisenhower with two flawed options. He could assign a full



**A group of American commanders. Front row, left to right: Lt. Gen. George S. Patton Jr., Lt. Gen. Omar N. Bradley, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, Lt. Gen. Courtney H. Hodges, and Lt. Gen. William H. Simpson**

*Author's Collection*

American field army to participate in the operation under Montgomery's command, ensuring unity of effort along the northern route, or he could leave 21 Army Group at its current strength and split command of the main effort between Montgomery and Bradley. Eisenhower knew that the first option, however unpalatable, was preferable from the military perspective, but he also knew that not only Bradley but also the American press and public would object to the transfer of an American field army to 21 Army Group. No decision was necessary in early September as the Allies developed plans for separate thrusts by 21 Army Group in the north toward the Ruhr, the 12th Army Group in the center toward the Saar, and the 6th Army Group in the south through the Rhône Valley, but this dispersal of effort virtually guaranteed further friction among the senior Allied commanders.<sup>10</sup>

Simpson received orders to deploy to France amid this growing controversy. He set up his first headquarters on 5 September at Rennes, France, under General Bradley's 12th Army Group. At this point, Simpson's command consisted of just one corps, Maj. Gen. Troy H. Middleton's VIII Corps, tasked with the reduction of the Brittany Peninsula and protection of the 12th Army Group's 300-mile-long southern flank along the Loire River. Ammunition shortages and the fanatical resistance of the Germans defending the city's ancient stone-walled fortress frustrated Middleton's efforts to liberate Brest, already weeks behind schedule. Meanwhile, the flank security mission required two of Middleton's divisions to operate well beyond the range of his effective command and control. Simpson quickly took action to alleviate the situation. He placed the divisions fighting along the Loire under Ninth Army command so that Middleton could focus on operations to liberate Brest, which resumed on 5 September. The tide finally started to turn on 8 September, but the fighting continued until 18 September.<sup>11</sup>

With Brest liberated and the remaining German forces on the Brittany Peninsula contained, Simpson received orders on 25 September to move his headquarters north and occupy a position in the Allied line between the First and Third Armies.<sup>12</sup> The Ninth Army, consisting of a single corps of two infantry divisions, took over the defense of a 90-mile front along the western edge of the Ardennes Forest. This thinly held line invited infiltration by German patrols.

As Simpson recalled after the war: "It was dangerous to even ride along the back roads up there. The Germans would penetrate those big gaps in the line. They would send little raiding parties through and attack jeeps and trucks nearly every day. There was one hell of a mess there."<sup>13</sup>

The Ninth Army occupied this position shortly after the First Army reached the Siegfried Line, where the Allied offensive promptly stalled in the face of increasing German resistance, complex terrain, mounting casualties, and an anemic logistics system.<sup>14</sup> On 29 September, Eisenhower reported to the Combined Chiefs of Staff that the "linking of the Central and Southern Groups of Armies has produced a continuous Allied front from the North Sea to the Mediterranean." This front had "steadily been moving eastward but the rate of our advance in most sectors has diminished with an increase in the enemy's resistance. . . . The enemy has now succeeded in establishing a relatively stable and cohesive front located approximately on the German frontier."<sup>15</sup> To Montgomery, the situation was a predictable result of the broad front approach and called for a new strategy, but Eisenhower, who assessed the *Wehrmacht* as weak and capable only of defense and some limited counterattacks, ordered his generals to

continue offensive operations along the entire Allied front.

This decision led to a series of slow and costly operations, from the overly ambitious MARKET-GARDEN to the under-resourced November offensives. General Bradley ordered Simpson to move the Ninth Army to the Netherlands on 22 October in preparation for Operation QUEEN, set to begin on 10 November. Simpson established his new headquarters at the city of Maastricht, taking over a portion of the line north of Lt. Gen. Courtney H. Hodges's First Army, and south of Dempsey's Second Army. To Simpson's surprise, Bradley established the 12th Army Group command post in Luxembourg. His surprise was well founded. Not only was Bradley's headquarters uncomfortably close to the front lines in a weakly defended sector, but its location hindered communications to the northern portion of his army group's line, making command and control of the First and Ninth Armies challenging at best.<sup>16</sup>

Bradley's decision to move the Ninth Army adjacent to the British Second Army had its roots in the ongoing dispute with Montgomery. On 7 October, Montgomery had postponed 21 Army Group's eastern advance, set to begin on the 12th, because he lacked sufficient forces to both clear the approaches to Antwerp and advance to the Rhine. Any additional troops would have to come from the 12th Army Group, but the bad blood between Montgomery and Bradley had trickled down to the First Army staff, making them a poor choice to organize under 21 Army Group. As Bradley explained in *A General's Life*, the autobiography he published several years after Montgomery's death: "The U.S. First Army staffers—those mule-headed, swaggering veterans of North Africa and Sicily—were so bitterly anti-Monty that I heard they might mutiny if they were again compelled to serve under him. Simpson and his staff had not yet been subjected to Monty's megalomania and were, on the whole, more diplomatic and adaptable."<sup>17</sup> If Bradley was to lose a field army to Montgomery, it would be the Ninth and not the First Army; moving Simpson north of First Army was insurance.<sup>18</sup>

Bradley had ambitious plans for November. The Ninth Army would advance to the Roer River alongside the First Army, the main effort, securing Hodges's northern flank. Once across the Roer, the armies would continue the advance to the Rhine River, where the First Army would attempt to establish a bridgehead while the Ninth



**General Simpson**  
*Author's Collection*



**Field Marshal Bernard L. Montgomery (center left) and General Simpson (center) pose with the commanders of the Ninth U.S. Army.**

*Author's Collection*

Army turned left, attacking north in concert with the First Canadian Army and the Second British Army to secure the river's western bank.<sup>19</sup> This would be the beginning of Simpson's relationship with Dempsey and the Second British Army. The Ninth Army would fight on the Second Army's right flank for the coming months. The relationship started out well but required from the beginning a generosity toward the British, who at this point in the war lacked replacement personnel for their existing divisions, let alone fresh divisions in reserve.<sup>20</sup>

At a 16 October conference with Montgomery at Simpson's Maastricht headquarters, Bradley had estimated he could reach the Rhine at Cologne and possibly at Frankfurt by 15 December.<sup>21</sup> This soon proved to be overly optimistic, as ammunition shortages, challenging terrain, and determined enemy resistance slowed the First Army's advance to a crawl, forcing the Ninth Army to slow its pace as well. The continuation of Lt. Gen. George S. Patton Jr.'s offensive in Lorraine and General Devers's in Alsace only made matters worse. On 21 November, Bradley reported to Eisenhower, "The ammunition on hand and in sight for the next month will permit us to continue our present offensive until about 15 December." At this point, ammunition shortages would force the 12th Army Group to "assume a static situation indefinitely," and continuing the offensive even this long would have been impossible "if we were against an enemy capable of any offensive action." Bradley would soon learn that Adolf

Hitler was assembling a force in the Ardennes capable of just the kind of offensive action that he was convinced the Germans could not pull off. When the counteroffensive began on 16 December, the *Wehrmacht* achieved total surprise and stopped the halting Allied offensive in its tracks.<sup>22</sup>

Bradley was playing cards with Eisenhower at his quarters in the Trianon Palace Hotel in Versailles when news of the counteroffensive arrived. Eisenhower's decision to keep up the offensive north and south of the Ardennes had left the line in that area very thin, but both he and Bradley played down the seriousness of the attack. So did Hodges at first, but as he received increasingly worrying reports from the front his confidence faded. He put the 1st Infantry Division on six-hour alert and called Bradley to ask for reinforcements; Bradley told him that the 7th Armored Division from the Ninth Army and 10th Armored Division from the Third Army were on the way.<sup>23</sup> Still, Bradley did not seem to take the German counteroffensive seriously. He returned to his headquarters midafternoon on the 17th, 36 hours after the attack began and with little idea of what was going on. On the 18th, Bradley planned to visit Hodges, but he dropped those plans to prepare for a conference that Eisenhower scheduled with his army group commanders for the next day. Bradley attempted to control the battle over radio and telephone, but the depth of the German penetration that separated him from Hodges and Simpson made the already

poor communications at his headquarters in Luxembourg far worse.<sup>24</sup>

Meanwhile, the situation at First Army headquarters continued to deteriorate. Hodges learned on the morning of the 18th that Eisenhower had agreed to commit the SHAEF reserve, XVIII Airborne Corps (consisting of the 82d and 101st Airborne Divisions), to support First Army's defense, but by the afternoon he was convinced that this would not be enough to stem the German tide. At 1500, reports of approaching German tanks caused a panic in Hodges's headquarters. With only a small roadblock standing in the way of the panzers and no heavy weapons with which to defend against an armored attack, Hodges left hastily by airplane, leaving his staff to evacuate the headquarters and informing no one of the move. The German tanks turned southwest at La Gleize, missing both the headquarters and a massive fuel dump, but Hodges's staff continued the evacuation to First Army's rear headquarters at Chaudfontaine.<sup>25</sup>

The next morning Maj. Thomas S. Bigland, Montgomery's liaison officer to Bradley's headquarters, drove to First Army headquarters. He was shocked to find it abandoned, telephones still on the desks and papers scattered about, with no indication where the staff had gone. When he finally found Hodges at his rear headquarters, Bigland could see that he was overwhelmed.<sup>26</sup> With Eisenhower isolated from the battlefield in Versailles, Hodges struggling to manage



the situation, and Bradley out of touch with Simpson, only Montgomery had a clear picture of the situation, thanks to the efforts of his diligent liaison officers who roamed the battlefield each day and provided updates to the field marshal each night. Still, as German panzer divisions raced for the Meuse River, Third Army reinforcements were slowly pushing their way through the snow, and the only Allied reserves were those amassed by Montgomery (who still had no orders from Eisenhower) on the northern shoulder of the German breakthrough.<sup>27</sup> The situation seemed truly grave. When Eisenhower met with his staff on the morning of 20 December, his chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Walter Bedell Smith, recommended placing Montgomery in command of all Allied forces on the northern shoulder, including the First and Ninth U.S. Armies. Eisenhower knew Bradley would object, but it was a necessary move to return effective command and control to the battlefield.<sup>28</sup>

The dramatic story of the ensuing battle is well known, but General Simpson's role in it is not. Although his mission during the Ardennes counteroffensive consisted mostly of feeding divisions into the First U.S. Army zone to stave off disaster, the battle revealed striking differences between Simpson and his peers, both in the effectiveness of their leadership and in their working relationships with Montgomery.<sup>29</sup> Comparing the actions of the three American field army commanders involved, historian Jerry D. Morelock observed that Simpson reacted with calm efficiency while Hodges's headquarters devolved into confusion and chaos. Simpson committed more combat divisions into the fight more quickly than the much-lauded Patton, and he had the clearest grasp of the situation and the most effective staff of the three army commanders, thanks in part to his excellent chief of staff, Maj. Gen. James E. Moore.<sup>30</sup> As for his relationship with Montgomery, Morelock asserted, "Simpson's professional and straightforward attitude toward Montgomery and his willing obedience to the field marshal's commands stands out in stark contrast to his contemporaries' undisguised loathing and antipathy."<sup>31</sup>

Eisenhower's decision to give Montgomery command of the First and Ninth Armies changed the course of the war dramatically for Simpson—who, unlike Hodges, would remain under Montgomery's command for the coming months. Eisenhower had planned for this eventuality, and his message to Simpson on 22 December made his

priority clear: "In the recent battling you and your army have performed in your usual magnificent style. . . . Now that you have been placed under the Field Marshal's operational command I know that you will respond cheerfully and efficiently to every instruction he gives. The slogan is 'chins up.'"<sup>32</sup> Simpson replied, "I am glad to say that I and my Army are operating smoothly and cheerfully under Command of the Field Marshal. The most cordial relations and a very high spirit of cooperation have been established between him and myself personally and between our respective staffs. You can depend on me to respond cheerfully, promptly and as efficiently as I possibly can to every instruction he gives. Similar good relations have been established between Bimbo Dempsey and myself, between our staffs, and between lower echelons of our armies."<sup>33</sup> Simpson's positive assessment was accurate, but it remained to be seen whether

he could sustain his good relationship with the field marshal amid such interalliance strife.

A week later, Simpson saw just how difficult this endeavor might be. Montgomery held an ill-advised press conference on 7 January 1945, where he seemed to take full credit for stopping the German counteroffensive. Simpson's aide, Maj. John D. Horn, recorded in the Ninth Army headquarters diary his reaction to Montgomery's press conference, which initially went over well in the American press but which most U.S. military personnel saw as a major insult: "Any future moves of the Ninth, therefore, in the light of present British publicity policy, will be to the greater glory of the [field marshal] himself, since he sees fit to assume all the glory and scarcely permits the mention of an Army Commander's name. Bitterness and real resentment is [sic] creeping in because of both the [field



**Field Marshal Montgomery and General Simpson stand next to a footbridge over an unidentified canal.**

*National Archives*

marshal's] and the British press's attitude in presenting British Military accomplishments won with American blood, broadcast throughout Europe by the BBC."<sup>34</sup> German propaganda, which put forward a carefully reworded version of the field marshal's remarks that amplified the perceived slight, exacerbated the American reaction.<sup>35</sup> Montgomery tried to correct the record, but it was too late. The press conference dealt a severe blow to the already tense relationship between the British and American armies and their generals, but for the time being, relations between Simpson and Montgomery remained relatively cordial as they began planning to resume the offensive.

On 17 January, First Army returned to the 12th Army Group command, preparing with Third Army to continue the offensive toward the Rhine. Much to Bradley's chagrin, the Ninth Army remained under 21 Army Group with an as-yet undetermined mission.<sup>36</sup> As Simpson recalled, "Eisenhower had faithfully promised Montgomery that he would allow him to have one American army at full strength, 12 divisions. So, I was filled up, which really irked Patton, and maybe Hodges. Bradley didn't feel too happy about it either, but he was mad as hell over the whole situation. We had to turn over to Montgomery an army, and the Third and First Armies had to pick out divisions to send to me." Later, at a conference at First Army headquarters, Simpson heard members of Hodges's staff express their frustration: "There's no reason for us to have to turn over XIX Corps to the Ninth Army. That's just a god damn political move," they said. As Simpson put it, "They were just mad as hell at the British about it. I know Patton hated the hell out of Montgomery, and so did Bradley."<sup>37</sup>

In fact, Bradley was so upset that he prepared a memorandum for record to document his grievances. The friction between the Allied commanders had led Bradley to see the ongoing campaign as two separate wars: "While we are fighting our own war, we are certainly helping the British very materially, and our own interests should come first." As he saw it, "the campaign to set up Monty and, in general, to increase British prestige in this campaign, out of all proportion to the effort they have in it, is definitely harmful to relations between the British and ourselves."<sup>38</sup> Bradley had a point, as the U.S. Army fielded a growing majority of the combat divisions in the European Theater. Still, this logic ignored

the long-term British commitment to the war effort, the casualties suffered in five years of combat, and the British Army's resulting personnel crisis. Regardless, Bradley's views illustrate the main achievement of Hitler's counteroffensive, which had briefly presented a serious military threat but caused long-lasting damage to the health of the Anglo-American alliance.

By mid-January, initial planning revealed the significance of the logistics challenges related to the massive scale of the Rhine crossing. The Allies would have to move thousands of vehicles and mountains of supplies, ammunition, and bridging material through a constricted crossing site over the Meuse River at Venlo. In particular, this site would have to accommodate not only hundreds of armored vehicles on transporters (to reduce wear and tear before entering the battle) but also much of the bridging equipment that would be required at the Rhine bridgeheads. After the bottleneck at Venlo, convoys would proceed through a crowded sector with only one good mobility corridor, which bisected the area designated for 21 Army Group's operations: the highway from Venlo through Geldern to the key communications center of Wesel.<sup>39</sup>

These factors made the use and maintenance of the route through Venlo to Wesel critical to the success of the operation. To maximize traffic flow during this mission, known as Operation PLUNDER, a single commander would need to control the route, but two commanders, Dempsey and Simpson, would be using it. Planners first acknowledged the problem on 15 January at a conference held at Montgomery's headquarters. Maj. Gen. M. W. A. P. Graham, 21 Army Group chief of administration, remarked that it was "almost certain that the VENLO bridges would have to be used on an agreed joint basis." Reading the unspoken message, the Ninth Army's assistant operations officer, Col. T. W. Parker Jr., noted that evening in a memo to Brig. Gen. Armistead D. Mead, Ninth Army G-3 (operations), "Second (Br) Army wants VENLO, very definitely."<sup>40</sup>

More friction accompanied the publication of Montgomery's "C-in-C Directive" of 21 January, which described the upcoming operations, set to begin on 8 February. Once across the Roer River, Lt. Gen. Henry D. G. Crerar's Canadian Army and Simpson's Ninth Army would conduct a converging attack, with Crerar striking southeast

(Operation VERITABLE) and Simpson north-east (Operation GRENADE) to clear German forces west of the Rhine between Düsseldorf and Nijmegen. On order, Dempsey's Second Army would cross the Meuse and advance to a position along the Rhine in the center of the 21 Army Group front. Following this offensive, 21 Army Group would make final preparations for Operation PLUNDER, a massive, set-piece assault across the Rhine. The operation's ultimate objective was to encircle and reduce the Ruhr industrial area in a large pincer movement executed by the Ninth Army in the north and the First Army in the south. With the Ruhr cut off from the rest of Germany, Montgomery anticipated that "the enemy capacity to continue the struggle must gradually peter out."<sup>41</sup>

When Simpson read the detailed plan, he was shocked to learn that it gave the Ninth Army only a limited role during the advance to the Rhine, and no role at all in the subsequent crossing. Montgomery's plan required Simpson to release one corps of two infantry divisions to the Second British Army to bolster Dempsey's combat power for Operation GRENADE: "This corps will be used to cross the Meuse in strength on the right flank of [Second] Army." Once Dempsey secured crossing sites over the Meuse at Venlo, "the right flank of Second Army, including this American corps, will operate eastwards with the object of securing Rheinberg and the west bank of the Rhine in that area." Even after closing up to the Rhine, Dempsey would retain this American corps, which would carry out the crossing at Rheinberg under Dempsey's command. Meanwhile, Simpson would hold a front along the Rhine's western bank between Düsseldorf and Mors (inclusive), where "the front will be held lightly and divisions will be drawn into reserve and made available for employment to the south or to the north of the army boundaries."<sup>42</sup> Thus, while one of Simpson's corps crossed the Rhine under British command, over bridges constructed by Ninth Army engineers, Simpson was to cool his heels while Montgomery ordered his divisions into battle piecemeal.<sup>43</sup>

As recorded in *Conquer*, Ninth Army's official history, Simpson was "flabbergasted."<sup>44</sup> He later recalled, "I naturally felt quite perturbed over the thing and let it be known that I would like to have something to do. . . . I think Montgomery visualized the British as the first big outfit to cross the Rhine. Maybe he thought that the area of the crossing was too restricted so he'd let the British do it all.

I think it might have been a selfish idea.<sup>245</sup> Russell F. Weigley argued that this affront illustrated how “Montgomery seemed bent on antagonizing every American,” as his plan failed to consider how the press and the American public would react if he sidelined the Ninth Army for the big show.<sup>46</sup> That said, operational considerations surely influenced his thinking as well. Montgomery’s plan benefited from simplicity, and it solved the problem of competition for the Venlo-Wesel road by placing the area under a single commander. Viewed strictly through the lens of sound military principles, the plan made sense, but it was politically unappealing.

Simpson wisely chose not to complain to Eisenhower or Bradley, opting instead to influence Montgomery and Dempsey through persuasion while planning with the Second Army continued. He met with General Moore and his staff on the morning of 23 January to discuss Montgomery’s directive, before heading to Zonhoven for a conference with Montgomery, Crerar, and Dempsey. The generals discussed Montgomery’s plan, but Simpson bided his time, arranging a one-on-one meeting with Dempsey at his headquarters in Maastricht on the 27th. Simpson found Dempsey amenable to the idea of finding a role for the Ninth Army, so the generals set their staffs to work on an alternative course of action, leading Horn to note the next day that “seeds were sown with 21 Army Group in the hope that something might come of it.”<sup>247</sup>

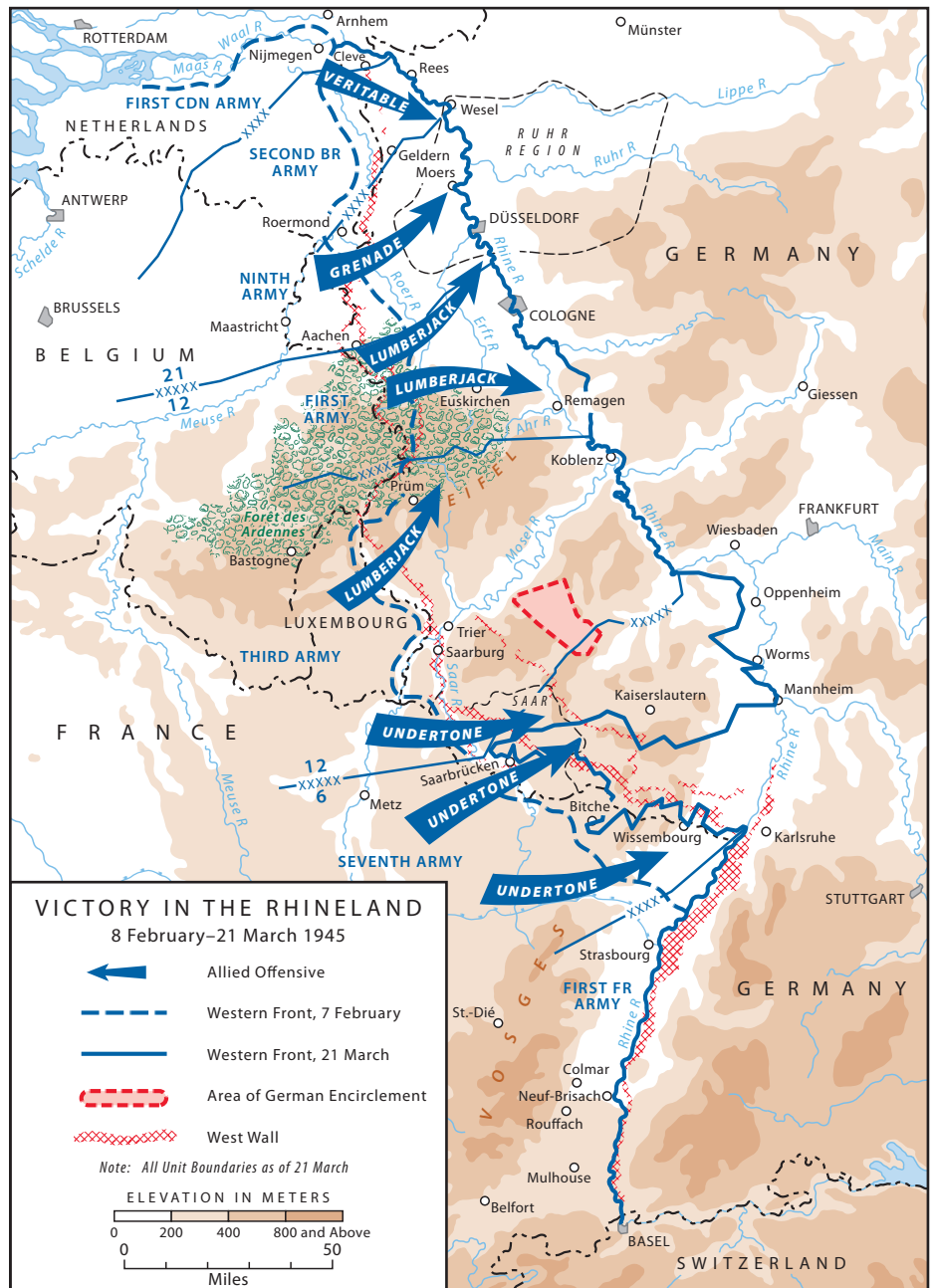
Something did indeed come of it. When Simpson met with Dempsey again on 1 February, the generals collaborated on Operation TORCHLIGHT, a plan to split the crossing site at Xanten between their two armies, giving each a two-corps front.<sup>48</sup> Simpson returned to his headquarters “elated over the wonderful progress the plans for our regrouping are meeting.”<sup>249</sup> As Dempsey’s biographer wrote, “The Ninth American Army would also make a crossing as part of the same operation, but to accommodate Allied sensitivities they would not come under Dempsey’s command.”<sup>250</sup> The 21 Army Group chief of plans, Brig. Gen. Charles L. Richardson, gave the plan a favorable recommendation, but Montgomery rejected the proposal. Instead, on 4 February he issued new instructions that gave Simpson a one-corps front south of Wesel, and Dempsey a three-corps front at Wesel, Xanten, and Rees.<sup>51</sup> Simpson was justifiably happy to have a role in the Rhine

crossing, but it remained to be seen how he and Dempsey would deconflict use of the Venlo-Wesel road and bridges.<sup>52</sup>

With the broad strokes of the plan for Operation PLUNDER settled, Simpson’s focus shifted to Operation GRENADE’s immediate objective, the assault crossing of the Roer River, now scheduled for 10 February. Simpson inspected the four divisions that would lead the assault on 8 February, displaying enthusiasm unbridled by the fact that the dams upriver remained in German hands.<sup>53</sup> The next day, Ninth Army engineers reported that the Roer River had risen 5 feet and its current had increased to 10 ½ feet per second, well beyond the maximum allowed in U.S. engineer doctrine for

bridging operations.<sup>54</sup> The First U.S. Army anticipated capturing the dams soon, but until then it would remain a mystery whether the flooding was a result of snow melt or, more likely, damage caused by German troops. Montgomery soon appeared at the Ninth Army command post for an unexpected visit. After a lengthy conference with the field marshal and telephone calls with Bradley, Hodges, and his subordinate commanders, Simpson announced the decision to delay the attack by twenty-four hours.<sup>55</sup>

When elements of the V Corps finally captured the dams on the morning of 10 February, they learned that the Germans had damaged the spillway gates in such a way that ensured the reservoirs would



overflow gradually, keeping the river flooded for several days. As Horn recorded in the headquarters diary, “Events proved that the decision, most difficult to make at the time, was a blessing in disguise, for the river. . . flooded over the predicted level. To have gone as planned might well have spelled disaster.” Simpson extended his 24-hour delay, ultimately having to wait nearly two weeks before the river’s water level and current dropped to a point that was safe for crossing. Meanwhile, Operation VERITABLE would begin as scheduled.<sup>56</sup>

The flood waters finally receded enough to allow the Ninth Army’s assault to commence on 23 February. Simpson’s force made fine progress; as Montgomery intended, the Canadian Army’s Operation VERITABLE offensive had drawn German defenders away from the Ninth Army zone.<sup>57</sup> In less than a week, the Ninth Army secured Mönchengladbach, the largest German city that it had captured to date.<sup>58</sup> Over the coming days, Simpson’s corps commanders reported slow but steady progress, with infantry units meeting light to moderate resistance. Horn recorded on 27 February that “the checkerboard of small towns present [*sic*] an ideal fortified locality before us, requiring painstaking attack in detail. This means relatively slow progress, and reduces materially the chances of a good breakthrough of our armor.”<sup>59</sup> The Ninth Army arrived at the Rhine on 2 March—the first of the Allied armies to reach the river—and the next day, vanguard forces of Operations VERITABLE and GRENADE met at Geldern.<sup>60</sup> Commonwealth forces had captured 22,000 Germans and killed or seriously wounded 22,000 more, at a cost of 15,500 casualties, while the Ninth Army took 29,000 German prisoners and killed or seriously wounded 16,000 more, suffering just under 7,300 casualties in the process.<sup>61</sup>

At this point, Simpson was convinced that German defenses both west and east of the Rhine were in disarray and vulnerable to a hasty crossing. He directed his corps commanders to try to capture one of the eight bridges that spanned the Rhine along Ninth Army’s front, but it was not to be. Each time a bridge seemed in reach, the Germans destroyed it.<sup>62</sup> Frustrated, Simpson had almost lost hope of jumping the Rhine when, during a conference with XIX Corps commander Maj. Gen. Raymond S. McLain, he seized on the idea of McLain’s troops forcing a rapid assault crossing by boat. The commanders developed the basic

form of a plan and McLain returned to his headquarters to discuss the idea with his division commanders.<sup>63</sup>

Early on 5 March, McLain sent word to Simpson that one of his units had discovered a suitable location for crossing the Rhine in the portion of the corps zone opposite Düsseldorf. A canal that ran parallel to the river provided a spot where troops could load assault boats unseen, and reconnaissance patrols reported no enemy activity on the far side.<sup>64</sup> It seemed the perfect opportunity. At a conference that afternoon, Simpson told Montgomery about the potential crossing site in the XIX Corps zone. General Mead briefed Montgomery on the tentative plan, but the latter replied, “I have just one question to ask. If I approve this, would this require you to use one bolt, one piece of equipment that is committed to my pre-planned [river crossing] to come later?” Mead had to admit that yes, as all available crossing equipment was committed, an early crossing would require diversion of some equipment. To this Montgomery replied, “Well, in that case, I must disapprove the crossing,” and instructed Simpson to keep his forces west of the river.<sup>65</sup>

For Simpson, Montgomery’s refusal was a great disappointment. He later argued that elements of his army could have crossed the river quickly and established bridgeheads for both the Ninth Army and the Second Army, thereby enabling the entire army group to begin its assault crossing early,

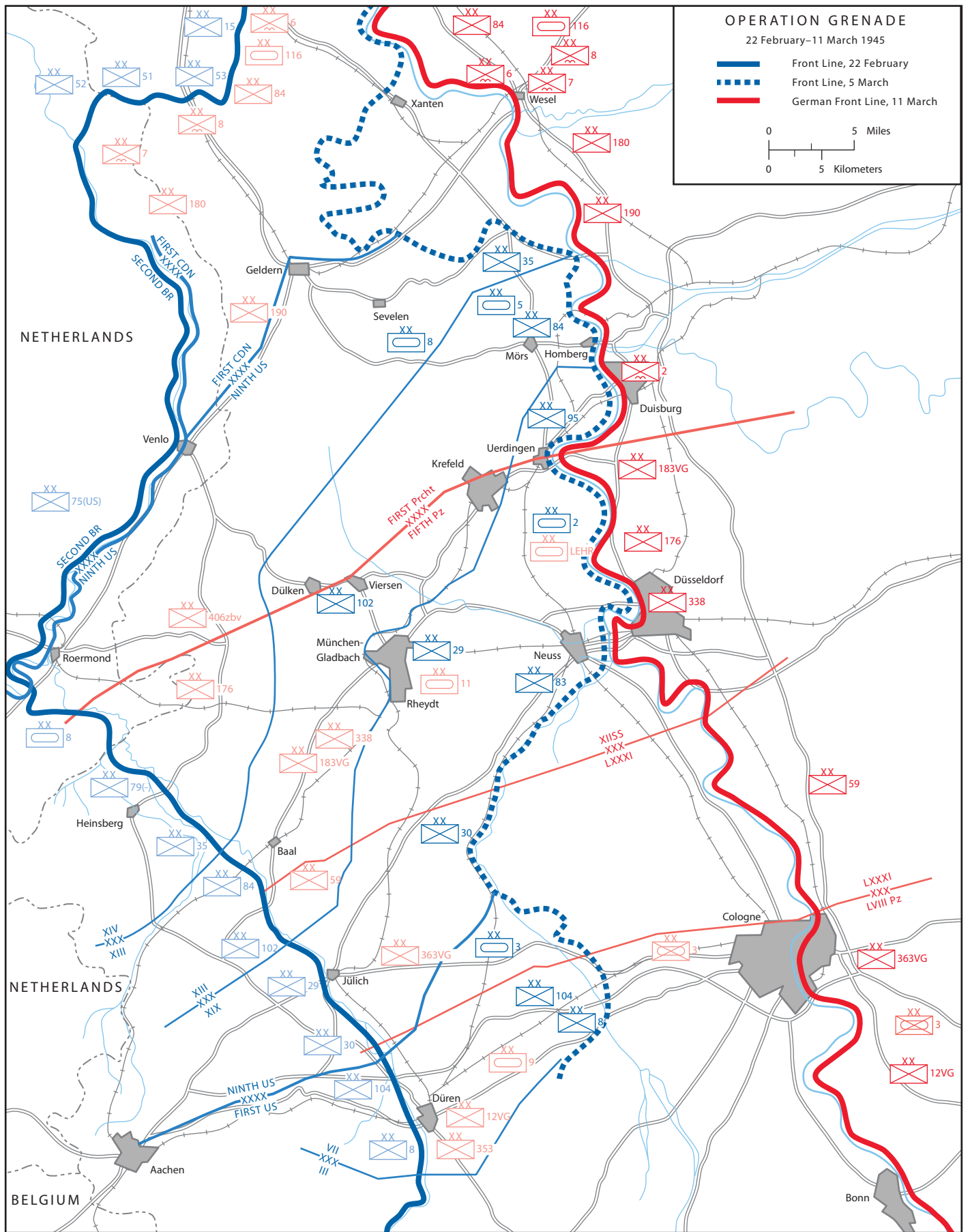
possibly shortening the war by a few weeks.<sup>66</sup> Simpson recalled after the war that, on most occasions, Montgomery gave him his mission and left it up to him to decide how to accomplish it, but he had less flexibility in the case of large missions because Montgomery so disliked deviating from one of his own plans. Simpson said this was one of Montgomery’s weaknesses: “He set up a plan and then he had no damn flexibility about changing it, at least on big things.” In this case, an early crossing of the Rhine by one of his three field armies would have drastically altered Montgomery’s operational concept for a carefully orchestrated set-piece battle. Still, Simpson was convinced that Montgomery “missed the boat,” noting that “If I’d been under General Bradley I wouldn’t have said one damn word to anybody, I’d just have gone across like General Patton did later on. However, Montgomery always said, ‘Now, when I make a plan, I want people to stick to it.’ Therefore, I knew I had to say something to him about crossing the Rhine.”<sup>67</sup> This episode added stress to his already strained relationship with the field marshal, but once again, Simpson handled the situation with restraint.

Montgomery issued his updated directive for Operation PLUNDER, “Orders for The Battle of the Rhine,” on 9 March. In phase one of the operation, scheduled to begin on 24 March, the Second Army would assault across the Rhine and secure bridgeheads at Xanten and Rees, while the British



**Vehicles of the 5th Armored Division, Ninth U.S. Army, pass a crossroads sign in Vord, Germany, with burning buildings in the background, 3 March 1945.**

*National Archive*



**OPERATION GRENADE**

22 February–11 March 1945

- Front Line, 22 February
- - - Front Line, 5 March
- German Front Line, 11 March



1 Commando Brigade would cross in assault boats just north of Wesel and then secure the city. Meanwhile, under Second Army command, the XVIII Airborne Corps, consisting of the 6th British and 17th U.S. Airborne Divisions, would land northeast of Wesel (Operation VARSITY) to block enemy movement toward the city and prevent enemy artillery from ranging the bridgeheads. Meanwhile, the 30th and 79th Infantry Divisions of Maj. Gen. John B. Anderson's XVI Corps, operating under Ninth Army command, would cross the Rhine in the vicinity of Rheinberg (Operation FLASHPOINT), extend the bridgehead to prevent German artillery fire from ranging the crossing sites at Rheinberg and Wesel, secure Dorsten and its vital communications network, and protect 21 Army Group's right flank. Throughout this phase the Lippe River would serve as Simpson's northern boundary, meaning that the troops in the Ninth Army bridgehead would have to fight on a constricted front in muddy, complex terrain.<sup>68</sup> As General Moore put it, "we were to cross on the narrowest front I could imagine, right into the Ruhr itself!"<sup>69</sup> The order also directed Simpson to retain one corps of three infantry and one armored division in reserve for use in the second phase of the operation.<sup>70</sup>

Phase two would not begin until completed bridges were available for use at the crossing sites and the Second Army had made sufficient progress securing its bridgehead to allow for exploitation to the east. At this point, Dempsey was to cede control of the route through Wesel and the highway north of the Lippe River to the Ninth Army. This shift would allow Simpson's reserve corps to pass through British lines at Wesel and push east through the open ground north of the Lippe. Meanwhile, 17th U.S. Airborne Division engineers would bridge the Lippe east of Wesel so that the troops in the XVI Corps bridgehead could move north of the river to good ground for armored exploitation.<sup>71</sup> Montgomery's plan provided some control measures to deconflict Second and Ninth Army's operations, but these did not fully address either their competing priorities for the route and bridges through Wesel or the unpredictable timing of the operation's phases.<sup>72</sup> The use of airborne troops further complicated matters; in addition to its own combat formations, the Second Army would have to supply the paratroopers and move their heavy equipment

over the Wesel bridges as well. These issues practically guaranteed conflict between Dempsey and Simpson.

On 10 March, the Ninth Army moved its command post to Mönchengladbach. The following day, XVI Corps reported the destruction of all remaining organized resistance west of the Rhine in the Ninth Army's zone, allowing Simpson and his staff to focus on final preparations for Operation FLASHPOINT. The Ninth Army published its operations order on 13 March, describing the same two-phase arrangement as seen in Montgomery's 9 March directive, but during the final preparations over the next two weeks, planners attempted to clarify the timing for control of the route through Wesel. On 19 March, Montgomery approved a new procedure that divided route control into three phases. Ninth Army engineers would provide route maintenance and traffic control during all three phases. During the first phase, as bridge construction began, the Ninth Army would give priority of movement to personnel and equipment involved in bridge construction. Phase two would begin upon completion of the treadway bridge at Wesel, at which point control would shift to the Second Army, allowing Dempsey to move combat formations across the Rhine to expand the bridgehead. Phase three would begin once Dempsey's forces had made sufficient eastward progress to allow priority to shift to Ninth Army combat formations, enabling Simpson's reserve corps to begin exploitation operations north of the Lippe River.<sup>73</sup> This arrangement clarified the necessary conditions for phase transition, but did nothing to lessen the strain of the competing demands for the routes and bridges.

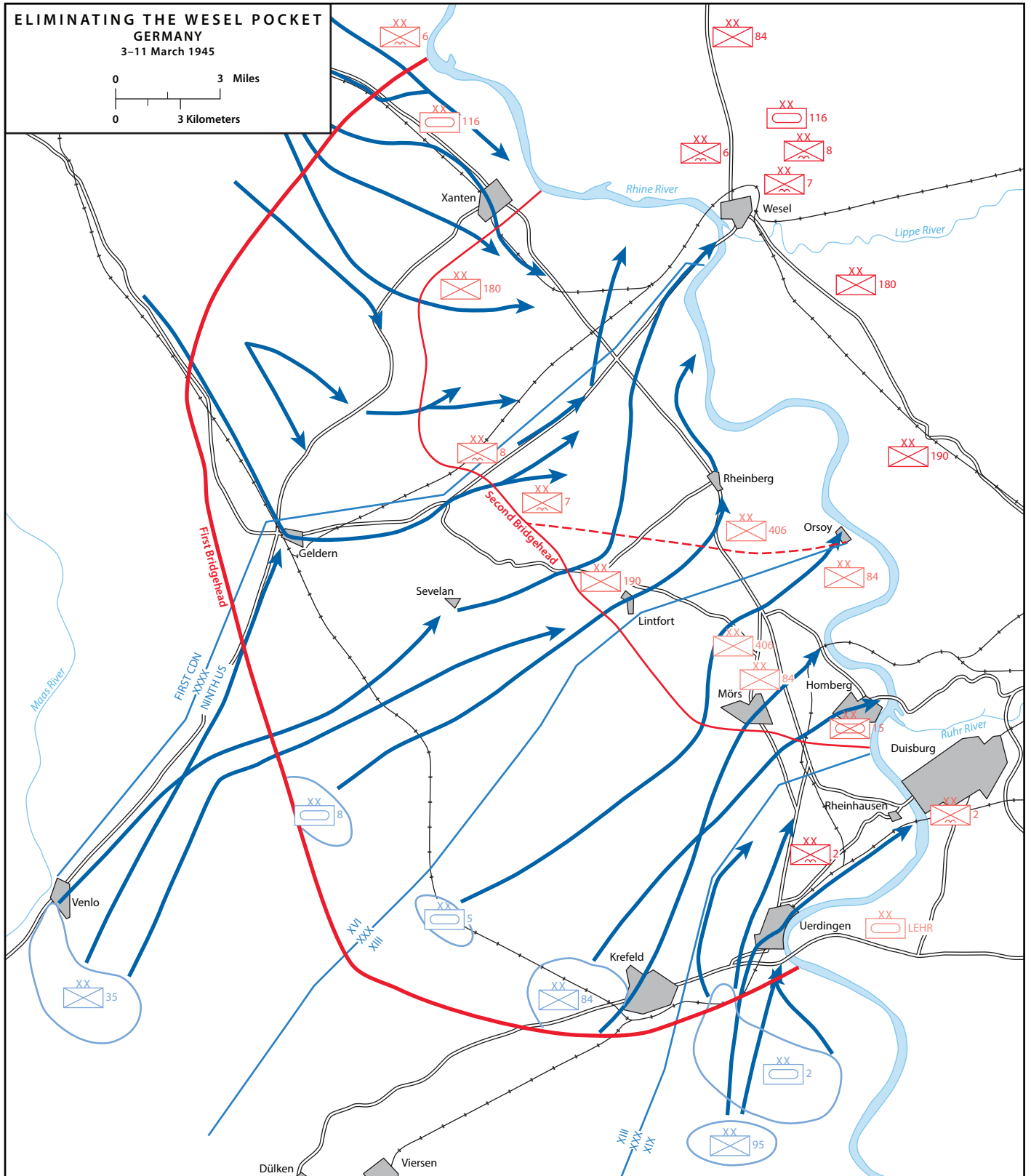
The buildup of equipment and supplies for Operation PLUNDER reveals the scale of these competing demands. Of the five bridges over the Meuse at Venlo, only one, the treadway bridge, could take loaded tank transporters, which weighed 70 tons. Ultimately, more than 600 tanks, 4,000 tank transporters, 32,000 vehicles, and 36 Royal Navy landing craft crossed these bridges. The Second and Ninth Armies together moved more than 250,000 tons of ammunition, fuel, and other supplies over the same route and then into the nearside bridgeheads, churning up the soil. Road and bridge maintenance alone occupied seven battalions of American combat engineers.<sup>74</sup> Somehow, the juggernaut that was Mont-

gomery's 21 Army Group was poised on the Rhine's western bank by 23 March, ready to cross the river and drive to Berlin.<sup>75</sup>

At 0200 on 24 March, on the heels of an hour-long, 3,500-gun artillery barrage that rained destruction along the 25-mile army group front, the 30th and 79th Infantry Divisions began to cross the Rhine River, meeting sporadic resistance. Eisenhower and Simpson were at the front, talking to groups of soldiers as they waited to move to the water's edge and board their assault boats, before moving to a good position for observing the barrage. The generals returned to the XVI Corps headquarters later that morning, where they climbed the steeple of a nearby church at 1000 to watch the Operation VARSITY air drop. A massive armada of 3,000 airplanes and gliders dropped more than 20,000 paratroopers of the British 6th and American 17th Airborne Divisions, under the command of Maj. Gen. Matthew B. Ridgway's XVIII Airborne Corps. Leading units of the XVI Corps' 30th and 79th Infantry Divisions advanced up to three miles into Germany by the end of the day, meeting little resistance.<sup>76</sup>

By 1500 on 25 March, Second Army had made sufficient progress in the Wesel bridgehead to allow the 1117th Combat Engineer Group to begin construction of the treadway bridge. The engineers made faster progress than expected, and at 2000 the group liaison officer notified the British corps engineer that the all-important treadway bridge at Wesel would be open for use by 0400 the next morning.<sup>77</sup> This information prompted Dempsey to request moving up control of the routes through Wesel to midnight. Simpson objected because, with other bridges still under construction, priority should remain with bridging units and equipment. He proposed a compromise, offering to give the Second Army priority for all convoy routes except those needed to move engineer units and equipment, but a staff officer soon called to say that 21 Army Group "did not want to appear 'difficult' in the matter, but it was felt that the Second Army must have control" of the routes to complete their buildup and supply the airborne units. He said that he would instruct the Second Army to provide all necessary running rights and road space for engineer units and equipment using the route, but Montgomery had decided Dempsey would assume control at midnight, and if any difficulty arose, to contact his headquarters.<sup>78</sup>

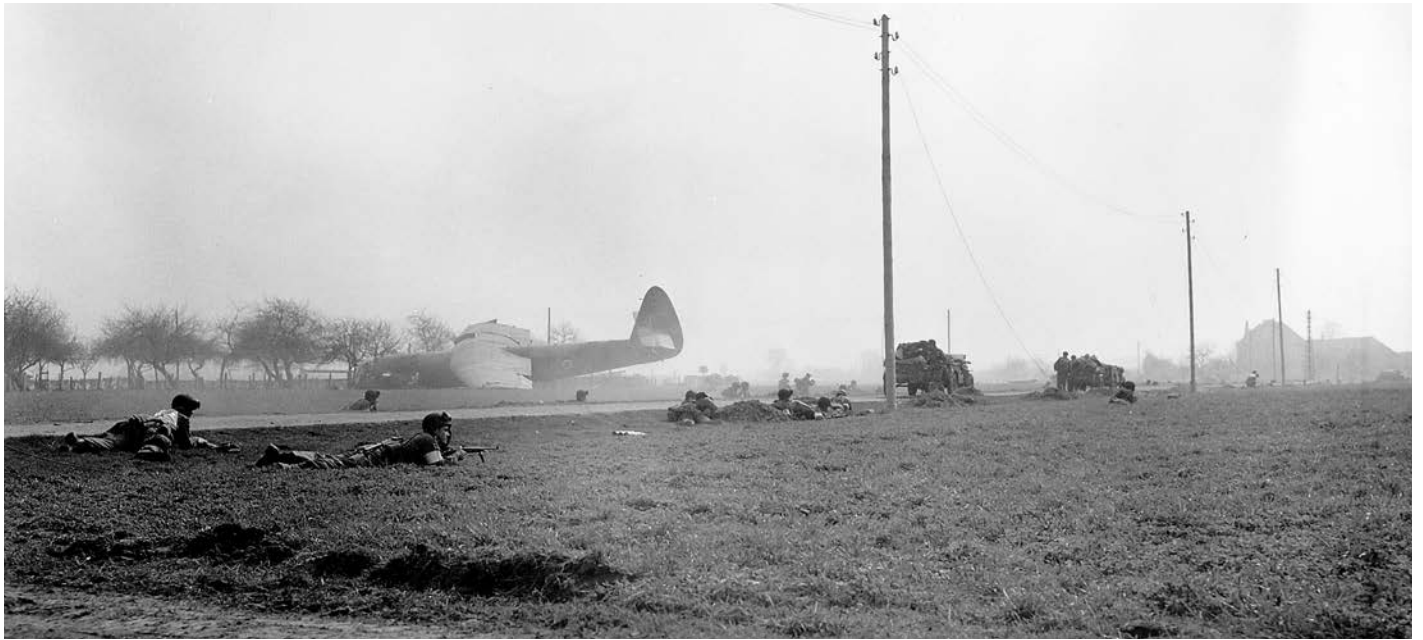
General Simpson spent the morning of 26 March in his command post, reading reports



and speaking to his corps commanders as he sought a way to get his armored divisions and reserve corps into the fight. The troops on the east side of the river would have limited mobility until the Ninth Army could move much-needed supplies, vehicles, and other heavy equipment over the treadway bridge at Wesel, but this was unlikely to

happen any time soon. Stiff German resistance in the British bridgehead prevented the Second Army from shifting its forces north of the Lippe, while also prompting Dempsey to divert traffic from the British crossing sites to Wesel, making the bad situation there even worse. Before long, British columns were

lined up for miles on both sides of the roads approaching Wesel, waiting to cross the Rhine. By 1500, Simpson had seen enough. He drove to the 21 Army Group headquarters at Venlo and met with Montgomery. Simpson reminded the field marshal that despite the early completion of the Wesel bridge, the Ninth Army was “pinned in



### Allied airborne troops landing near Wesel, 24 March 1945

*National Archives*

a bottleneck, completely tied down,” and asked him to order Dempsey to prepare for “an early turn over.” Montgomery seemed sympathetic, assuring him that he would investigate the matter.<sup>79</sup>

The next morning, Simpson returned to Venlo to meet with Montgomery and Dempsey. He repeated his request for early access to the Wesel bridge, and pointed out that he also needed the interarmy boundary changed sooner than planned. The XVI Corps engineers had completed a bridge across the Lippe Canal at Dorsten early that morning, and they were working on a second bridge while paratroopers of the 17th Airborne Division struggled to clear enemy forces from the river’s northern bank. However, these bridges would be useless to Simpson until the Ninth Army had access to the highway just north of the Lippe River. Major Horn added some colorful commentary to his record of the meeting in the headquarters diary: “At this conference, Dempsey—with his ‘time out for tea’ army—was ordered to turn the bridge over to Ninth Army at 0700 on the following Saturday [31 March]. The British, stopping at night to sleep, for tea, and moving slowly at best, were just wasting invaluable time with their ten-year war. The FM [Field Marshal Montgomery] sided with the Ninth Army on every count and ordered Dempsey to get moving.”<sup>80</sup>

Simpson left for his headquarters in high spirits, but this elation was short lived. At

1515, Simpson drove to the XVI Corps headquarters to meet with Anderson, who had ordered the 8th Armored Division to pass through the 30th Infantry Division, cross the Lippe, and head for Berlin. Anderson’s hopes for a breakout were dashed as the armor bogged down in swampy terrain in the face of a determined defense. Reports from the XIX Corps, waiting to cross the Rhine at Wesel, were no better. Horn recorded in the Ninth Army headquarters diary,

The 2d Armored Division. . . is held up by the congestion and maze of British supply installations scattered throughout the area by the Second British Army—again making the CG boil. The CG is losing patience with the British fast, and is ordering his people to throw the British off the roads in our area whenever they are found, in an attempt to get through them and their damned traffic. There is just no comparison in the way in which the two armies operate, and for the Americans, the British pace and methods are simply archaic and nerve-wracking in their speed.<sup>81</sup>

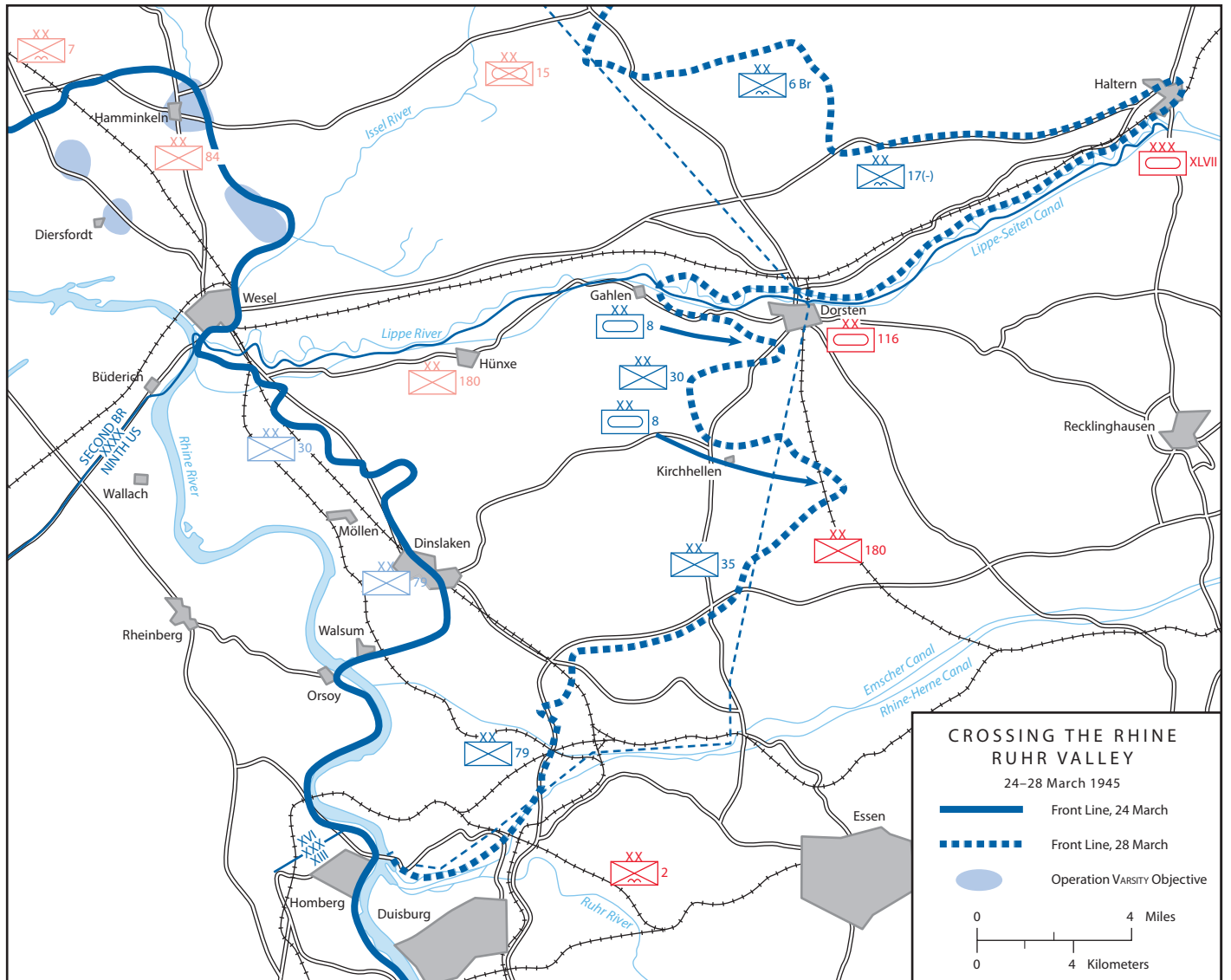
By the end of the day, XVI Corps engineers completed a second bridge across the Lippe canal at Dorsten. At the same time, the 17th Airborne Division, now under Simpson’s command, began construction of bridges over the Lippe River from the north.<sup>82</sup>

Montgomery put his verbal order to Dempsey in writing on 28 March: “Wesel

bridge will pass from Second Army to Ninth Army at 0700 hrs on Sat 31 March. Until that time Ninth Army will have the use of the bridge for a total of five hours per day of 24 hours.”<sup>83</sup> This arrangement placated Simpson somewhat, but the same order stressed the need for “quick and determined exploitation by armoured and mobile units of 21 Army Group” and emphasized, “If this bold plan is to succeed, Ninth and Second Armies must get their full armored and mobile strength deployed quickly and pushed ahead; this will be done. This is the time to take risks and to go “flat out” for the ELBE. If we reach the ELBE quickly, we win the war.”<sup>84</sup> Simpson could hardly go “flat out” with the XVI Corps struggling to make progress south of the Lippe River and access to the Wesel bridges limited to just five hours per day, but the reality of the situation at Wesel made even five hours’ daily bridge access more theoretical than real. General Dempsey’s understated daily diary entry for 28 March merely noted, “Saw C-in-C and Commander Ninth Army at my Headquarters. We settled certain details regarding roads and boundaries during the breakout from the bridgehead. It is, as usual, a difficult period.”<sup>85</sup>

If congestion on the roads and bridges made it difficult enough for the Ninth Army’s traffic control personnel to keep vehicles moving through Wesel on a predictable timetable, last-minute changes to the movement plan made it nearly impossible.





Brig. Harold E. Pyman, Dempsey's chief of staff, told General Moore on 25 March that he needed to "put the tails of his airborne over" the Rhine at Wesel. These supplies were supposed to pass over bridges further north, but stiff enemy resistance there delayed bridge construction. Moore reluctantly agreed despite the disruption this would cause.<sup>86</sup> Pyman made a similar request on the 28th, asking to move an armored brigade through Wesel ahead of schedule to reinforce the heavily engaged airborne divisions. In fact, Dempsey had decided to commit the 11th Armoured Division, his army reserve, for this purpose.<sup>87</sup> When Moore learned that Pyman had inserted not just a brigade but the whole division into the movement order, he lost his patience: "All these roads and backwoods traffic had to be arranged very, very carefully, and when you did something off schedule like that, it screwed the hell out of the whole works. [General Simpson] came



**M-26 medium tanks moving through Wesel on the way to the front**  
National Archives

back shortly after that and I told him about it. He got about as mad as I've ever seen him. I told [Pyman] I was sending up the Provost Marshal with three tanks" to "knock the first British vehicle off the road."<sup>88</sup>

Simpson was near the limit of his patience, but still he exercised restraint. Resuming the argument with Dempsey or confronting Montgomery would have been counter-productive at best, but doing nothing was equally unacceptable, so Simpson took matters into his own hands. Montgomery's 28 March directive did not give the Ninth Army control of the Wesel bridges until the 31st, but it made the boundary shift between the Second and Ninth Armies effective early on the morning of the 30th. Simpson decided to take the risk of pushing his reserves into the congested XVI Corps bridgehead, where they would pass through the 30th Division and cross the Lippe over the newly completed bridges at Dorsten, saving at least a full day by avoiding the logjam at Wesel entirely.<sup>89</sup> Once the Ninth Army controlled the bridges at Wesel, the XIII Corps would cross the Rhine, attack to seize Münster, and continue the drive to the east.<sup>90</sup> General Ridgway had advised Simpson the previous day that airborne troops still crowded the ground north of the Lippe, but on the 28th, the paratroopers mounted tanks of the British 6th Guards Tank Brigade and broke through enemy lines, penetrating 17 miles to the east and opening the way for

Simpson's reserves.<sup>91</sup> Bitterness among the Ninth Army staff drove some to view even this positive development as merely a British grab for glory: "The CG feels now that the British are deliberately taking advantage of the Ninth Army, blocking its passage, so that they can be first—in their own good time at that—to get away and grab off the glory of a breakthrough with their Guards Armd Div."<sup>92</sup>

Simpson completed his plan and published the order the next day. It described an attack by three corps, two north of the Lippe and one to the south. On 30 March, XIX Corps, composed of the 30th, 83d, and 95th Infantry Divisions and the 2d and 8th Armored Divisions, would push one infantry and one armored division over the XVI Corps bridges south of Wesel, then over the Lippe at Dorsten, before attacking to seize Hamm and continue exploitation to the east. At 0700 on the 31st, with the Ninth Army finally in control of the Wesel bridges, the XIII Corps, consisting of the 17th Airborne Division, the 84th and 102d Infantry Divisions, and the 5th Armored Division, would cross the Rhine at Wesel and attack to seize Münster and nearby airdromes before continuing the attack to the east. The XVI Corps, consisting of the 29th, 35th, 75th, and 79th Infantry Divisions, would make room for the XIX Corps' drive to Dorsten by clearing in zone to the

Dortmund-Ems Canal and defending this line while building two additional bridges over the Lippe River and Canal.<sup>93</sup>

The plan worked exactly as intended. On the morning of 30 March, XIX Corps armor supported by motorized infantry crossed the Lippe and raced 80 miles to the east in 36 hours, while the XVI Corps pounded away at the Ruhr. The next day, the XIII Corps crossed the Rhine into the open ground east of Wesel; advancing 60 miles to Münster in less than two days. On 1 April, the vanguards of the Ninth and First Armies met at Lippstadt, sealing the Ruhr pocket, while the XIII and XIX Corps continued the attack east to the Elbe River, their sights set on Berlin. Bradley later recalled, "Since the Bulge, Big Simp, as he was affectionately known, had spent a restless three and a half months under Monty waiting to get back to U.S. command. Yet because his Ninth was the most congenial of all our U.S. Army commands, Simpson had served his indenture without incident or crisis."<sup>94</sup>

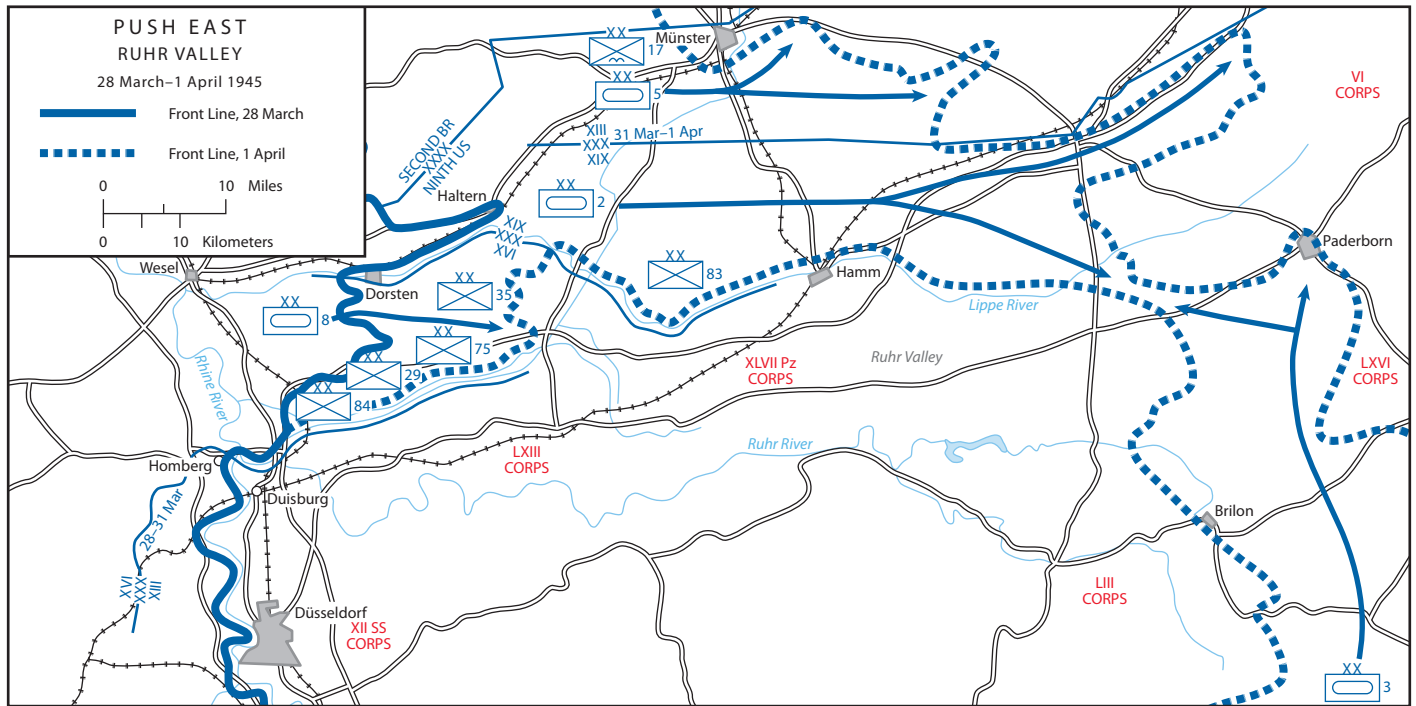
Eisenhower similarly praised Simpson, but these words must have rung hollow when Simpson learned he had been passed over for promotion. On 28 March, Generals Bradley, Devers, Patton, and Hodges were all notified that the U.S. Senate had confirmed their promotion to four-star general; Simpson's name was conspicuously absent from this list. (He later earned his fourth star through a special act of Congress in 1954.) Bradley showed up at Simpson's headquarters on 30 March wearing his new four-star rank; he awarded Simpson a bronze star for the capture of Mönchengladbach: a poor consolation prize.<sup>95</sup> Simpson was still bitter decades later: "I've often wondered why the hell [Bradley] or Eisenhower didn't recommend me for promotion while we were in Europe. That's one of the great disappointments of my life, really, that I didn't get it there."<sup>96</sup> When asked after the war why Simpson was passed over, Bradley answered "General Simpson's performance as an Army commander was outstanding. I have stated many times since the War that General Simpson was at least the equal of either Hodges or Patton as an Army commander. The only reason that General Simpson was not promoted to full general, as far as I know, was that he had not been an Army commander as long as either Hodges or Patton."<sup>97</sup>

Bradley was anxious to have the Ninth Army back under his command, and he would soon get his wish. Eisenhower made



**A Transportation Corps train crosses the Rhine River on a new bridge at Wesel.**

*National Archives*



a significant and unexpected change to the Allied strategy on 2 April. After communicating directly with Soviet leader Joseph Stalin, the supreme commander announced that he had decided to abandon Berlin as an objective and change the main effort to the Frankfurt axis.<sup>98</sup> The decision shocked British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and his generals, but with General George C. Marshall's support, Eisenhower's decision

was final. For the Ninth Army, this change of strategy had an immediate impact. With 21 Army Group relegated to a supporting effort, Montgomery no longer needed an American field army under his command, so the Ninth Army returned to the 12th Army Group on 4 April.<sup>99</sup> Simpson might have looked forward to this day, but any happiness he felt upon his return to Bradley's command paled in comparison to his disappointment

when he learned that he would not lead his army into Berlin.

After the war, Simpson said he was unaware of Eisenhower's decision during his advance to the Elbe. The 12th Army Group operations order issued on 4 April made no mention of this change in strategy, although it did direct Simpson to halt at the Elbe and be prepared to continue the advance to the east.<sup>100</sup> It is surprising that



**A Ninth U.S. Army convoy on the highway leading to Münster, Germany**  
National Archives

Bradley kept Simpson in the dark about Eisenhower's decision to leave Berlin to the Soviets, especially after they discussed the possibility with Montgomery and Dempsey on 10 April, but Bradley admitted after the war, "I kept Simpson primed until the last minute."<sup>101</sup> Perhaps it made sense for Bradley to hedge his bets; he found the idea of launching the Ninth Army toward Berlin tantalizing, but he worried about logistics and was convinced that the fight for Berlin would cost 100,000 casualties. From Simpson's perspective, however, Bradley's prodding over the previous two weeks must have made Eisenhower's 15 April halt order that much harder to accept. After all, Ninth Army soldiers had been fighting and dying for months with the ultimate, tangible goal of capturing Berlin. Eisenhower's decision surely saved many American lives, but for Simpson and much of the Ninth Army, poised east of the Elbe for a final sprint of just 60 miles to the German capital, the decision felt like a betrayal.

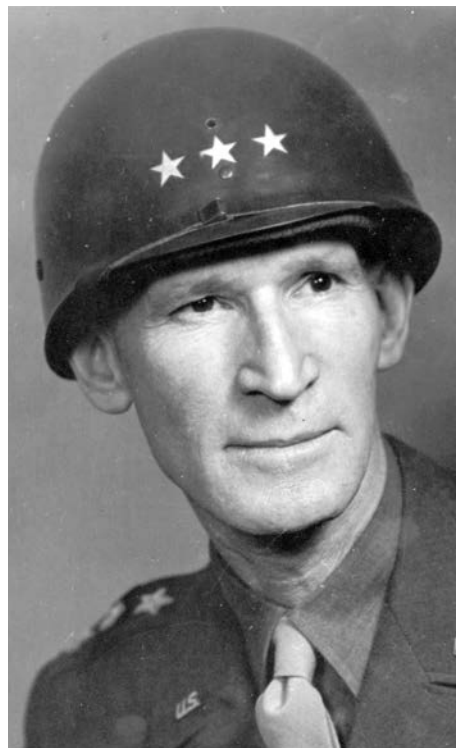
The war came to a rapid close for Simpson. The Ninth Army completed the reduction of the Ruhr pocket on 17 April, capturing 36,950 German soldiers at a cost of 2,452 casualties.<sup>102</sup> It was a historic moment. As recorded in *Conquer*, "General Simpson commended the men of Ninth Army after they had smashed their way to the Elbe: 'Your exploits will rank among the greatest of military achievements. My congratulations to each and every officer and man upon your brilliant accomplishments and my heartfelt thanks for your never-failing support. Command of the Ninth Army I consider a great privilege. Service in it, along with you, is a great honor.'<sup>103</sup> Still, lingering disappointment tempered Simpson's satisfaction. He had excelled in a challenging situation, but he reaped little reward and even less glory in the process. After the Ardennes counteroffensive, he grew increasingly isolated from his American peers. Montgomery's chief of staff, General Sir Francis W. de Guingand, said about Simpson, "his countrymen called him Sir William Simpson, K.B.E., as they considered him more British than the British."<sup>104</sup> It is unclear whether his peers did in fact add this to his collection of nicknames, but even if de Guingand exaggerated, there is surely some truth to the assertion. When asked after the war whether his fellow American commanders considered him a "lover of the British," Simpson demurred, although he did admit that after he was placed under

Montgomery's command, "Patton made some crack about my being very fond of the British or something to that effect. I responded, 'Now look here, I'm under orders and I'm not going to talk about that at all. I'm just doing my duty.' I shut him up and that was the end of it."<sup>105</sup>

After the war, Simpson recalled thinking that Montgomery "was sort of keeping an eye on [me] and just waiting for [me] to make a mistake." When asked to elaborate, Simpson replied, "Well, I felt that if I did make a mistake, I'd suffer greatly for it. I think I was very lucky that I didn't."<sup>106</sup> Given the friction between Montgomery and the other senior American commanders, it is remarkable that Simpson managed to avoid such issues. One can only wonder how differently the campaign would have gone with either the First or the Third U.S. Army under Montgomery's command. By mid-January, the relationship between Montgomery and Bradley had grown so toxic that the effects trickled down to both Hodges's and Patton's headquarters. Any one of the debates over the Americans' role in the Rhine crossing could have derailed the operation and driven a wedge deep between the Allied coalition partners. Certainly, given Patton's intransigence during the campaign in Sicily, he would have jumped the Rhine in

mid-March if given the opportunity, with severe consequences for the relationship with Montgomery.

It would be an overstatement to say that Simpson saved the Allied coalition in the wake of the Ardennes counteroffensive—it was never in serious danger. Yet unlike the other American field army commanders in Europe, he did nothing to damage it, despite having as much of a reason as any of his peers to resent Montgomery. In a final cruel twist of fate, what little recognition Simpson enjoyed in the press faded quickly after the war. As the historical narrative of World War II in Europe developed in the postwar years, Simpson and his Ninth Army gradually slipped from view, so that today, even students of U.S. military history often know little to nothing about his role in the war. As costly as it was to Simpson's reputation, placing him under Montgomery's command in December 1944 and leaving him there until April 1945 was one of Eisenhower's best decisions of the war. In a maddeningly difficult situation, Simpson repeatedly swallowed his pride and found a way to serve successfully under the field marshal's command, emulating Eisenhower's approach to coalition management. One hopes that in time, General Simpson will regain his proper place among the generals who led American troops to victory in the final campaigns of World War II in Europe.



**General Simpson**  
National Archives

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## Notes

1. T. W. Parker Jr. and William J. Thompson, eds., *Conquer: The Story of the Ninth Army* (Washington, DC: Infantry Journal Press, 1947), 364–67; Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1948), 605, Kindle.
2. Good accounts of the Rhine crossings in the north can be found in Charles B. MacDonald, *The Last Offensive*, U.S. Army in World War II (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1973; repr., 2000); Parker and Thompson, *Conquer*; and Patrick Delaforce, *Onslaught on Hitler's Rhine: Operations Plunder and Varsity March 1945* (Oxford: Fonthill, 2015). For accounts of Simpson's leadership during the Battle of the Bulge, and comparisons with his peers, see Jerry D. Morelock, *Generals of the Bulge: Leadership in the U.S. Army's Greatest Battle* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole, 2015) and John A. English, *Patton's Peers: The Forgotten Allied Field Army Commanders of the Western Front, 1944–45* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole, 2009).
3. Interv, Thomas R. Stone with William H. Simpson, 26 Jan 1972, Box 16, William H. Simpson Collection (WHSC), U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center (USAHEC), Carlisle, PA; Administrative Orders, HQ, Army Ground Forces, 24 Apr 1944, National Personnel Records Center (NPRC), St. Louis, MO; Official Papers, sub: Movement Order, 7 Jan 1944, Folder 4, Box 12, WHSC.
4. Interv, Stone with Simpson, 26 Jan 1972; Parker and Thompson, *Conquer*, 17–18; Ninth Army HQ Diary, May–Sep 1944, Official Papers, author's collection. It is an interesting coincidence, given what followed, that Montgomery came up in this first brief meeting with Eisenhower.
5. Chester Wilmot, *The Struggle for Europe* (London: Collins, 1954), 187; Russell F. Weigley, *Eisenhower's Lieutenants: The Campaign of France and Germany 1944–1945* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), 171–72.
6. Ltr, Dwight D. Eisenhower to Alexander Day Surles, 25 Aug 1944, in *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower: The War Years*, ed. Alfred D. Chandler, vol. 4 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970), 2096–97.
7. Montgomery was promoted to field marshal on 1 September in recognition of his performance as overall ground forces commander during the Normandy campaign.
8. Eisenhower wrote to Montgomery on 16 September: "I believe the enemy is capable of only one more, all-out defensive battle in the West. . . . It is my concern so to shape our operations that we are concentrating for that purpose, and by concentrating I include all troops and supplies that can be efficiently employed in the battle." Ltr, Dwight D. Eisenhower to Bernard Law Montgomery, 16 Sep 1944, in *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower: The War Years*, 4:2152–53. This is not the meaning of the term "concentration" as Montgomery understood it, or indeed as it is defined in the U.S. Army's World War II doctrine. Montgomery published his thoughts on concentration in November 1944: "A sure way to victory is to concentrate great force at the selected place at the right time, and to smash the enemy. Dispersion of effort, and of resources, is fatal to success." Bernard Law Montgomery, "Some Notes on the Conduct of War and the Infantry Division in Battle," Nov 1944, 7, TDRC 2676, Joint Services Command and Staff College Library, Shrivenham, UK. The 1942 edition of Field Manual (FM) 100–15, *Field Service Regulations: Larger Units*, recommends avoiding "piecemeal concentrations" in favor of "coordinated action by the whole force in a decisive blow." U.S. War Department, FM 100–15, *Field Service Regulations: Larger Units* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1942), 16. Likewise, the 1941 version of FM 100–5, *Field Service Regulations: Operations*, calls for "strict economy in the strength of forces assigned to secondary missions," giving them "only the minimum means necessary to deceive the enemy and to hinder his maneuver to oppose the main attack." U.S. War Department, FM 100–5, *Field Service Regulations: Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1941), 23, 97.
9. C. J. Dick, *From Victory to Stalemate: The Western Front, Summer 1944, Modern War Studies*, ed. Theodore A. Wilson (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2016), 219–24.
10. Msg, Dwight D. Eisenhower, 4 Sep 1944, in *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower: The War Years*, 4:2115–17.
11. Ltr of Instructions (LOI), Ninth Army, 9 Sep 1944, 9 U.S. Army: Letters of Instructions and Maps: Part I, WO 205/279, The National Archives, UK (NA); LOI Number Eight, 12th Army Gp HQ, 10 Sep 1944, in *Report of Operations, Final After Action Report, 12th Army Group*, v. 5, G–3 Section, U.S. Army Combined Arms Research Library, Fort Leavenworth, KS; Parker and Thompson, *Conquer*, 24–28, 38–39; Martin Blumenson, *Breakout and Pursuit*, U.S. Army in World War II (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1961; repr., 2005), 645–51.
12. LOI Number Nine, 12th Army Gp HQ, 25 Sep 1944, in *Report of Operations, Final After Action Report, 12th Army Group*, v. 5, G–3 Section, U.S. Army Combined Arms Research Library, Fort Leavenworth, KS.
13. Interv, Thomas R. Stone with William H. Simpson, 21 Jan 1971, Box 16, WHSC; Interv, Stone with Simpson, 26 Jan 1972; Parker and Thompson, *Conquer*, 55–65.
14. For a thorough analysis of Allied operations between June and September 1944, see Dick, *From Victory to Stalemate*.
15. Memo, Eisenhower to Combined Chs of Staff, 29 Sep 1944, in *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower: The War Years*, 4:2199–2202; for more on the debate over strategy, see L. F. Ellis, *Victory in the West, Volume II: The Defeat of Germany, History of the Second World War*, ed. Sir James Butler (Nashville, TN: Battery Press, 1968), 71–72; Wilmot, *The Struggle for Europe*, 509–21; Nigel Hamilton, *Master of the Battlefield: Monty's War Years, 1942–1944* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1983), 806–18; Niall Barr, *Eisenhower's Armies: The American-British Alliance During World War II* (New York: Pegasus Books, 2015), 417–20; Weigley, *Eisenhower's Lieutenants*, 463–64, 576–78.
16. Interv, Stone with Simpson, 26 Jan 1972; Ninth Army Operations IV: Offensive in November, Part 1 of 2, Box 9, WHSC.
17. Omar N. Bradley and Clay Blair, *A General's Life: An Autobiography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), 340.
18. These interalliance dynamics were not lost on the Ninth Army. As Simpson's operations officer, Brig. Gen. Armistead D. Mead Jr., recalled after the war, "the reason we were on the left of the First American Army instead of on the right where we originally entered on that front was just to put us between the First Army and the British because they did not get along. Simpson was under orders to get along." Interv, Thomas R. Stone with Armistead D. Mead Jr., 9 Jun 1972, author's collection. Simpson's chief of staff, Maj. Gen. James E. Moore, concurred: "We were moved up to Maastricht for two reasons I guess. The First Army couldn't get along with the British, and we were not heavily committed." See Interv, Larry F. Paul with James E. Moore, 1984, Box 3, James E. Moore Collection (JEMC), USAHEC.
19. Ninth Army Operations IV: Offensive in November, Part 1 of 2, Box 9, WHSC.
20. Lt. Gen. Ben Lear remarked after the war, "Simpson worked well with them [the British], but he had to do the giving." Quoted in Barr, *Eisenhower's Armies*, 418. For instance, Simpson had to give the Second British Army operational control of the 84th Infantry Division for Operation CLIPPER, the reduction of Geilenkirchen.
21. MFR, Omar Bradley, 19 Nov 1944, OpOrder file, Stone Archives, author's collection. Ironically, Bradley noted that he would need to move airfields forward before crossing the Rhine, requiring movement of 100,000 tons

of steel matting to construct the fields. An offensive along the northern route, with its close proximity to airfields in England, would not have drained logistics resources in this way.

22. Memo, Omar Bradley for General Eisenhower, 21 Nov 1944, sub: Ammunition, OpOrder file, Stone Archives, author's collection.

23. Nigel Hamilton, *Monty: Final Years of the Field-Marshal, 1944–1976* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1987), 184. In a postwar interview, Simpson explained that it was standard practice when going over to the defense to move armored units to the rear to refit. This is why they were the first units available to react to the German counteroffensive. Interv, Stone with Simpson, 21 Jan 1971.

24. In contrast, Monty kept up with the situation through his team of liaison officers and was soon the only reliable source of information for Brooke and Churchill. Hamilton, *Monty: Final Years of the Field-Marshal, 1944–1976*, 189.

25. William C. Sylvan and Francis G. Smith Jr., *Normandy to Victory: The War Diary of General Courtney H. Hodges and the First U.S. Army*, ed. John T. Greenwood (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2008), 220.

26. Tom Bigland, *Bigland's War: War Letters of Tom Bigland, 1941–45* (Willaston: self-pub., 1990), 81. Hodges had spent the two days since the German attack in an incapacitated state, and he continued to function at a reduced capacity after his headquarters moved, failing to visit any of his subordinate units in the field until December 23. Rick Atkinson, *The Guns at Last Light: The War in Western Europe, 1944–1945* (New York: Henry Holt, 2013), 440–42.

27. Hamilton, *Monty: Final Years of the Field-Marshal, 1944–1976*, 186.

28. Bigland, *Bigland's War*, 81; Sylvan and Smith, *Normandy to Victory*, 222–23; Smith initially objected to this recommendation by SHAEF staff officers, but ultimately saw that it was Eisenhower's best option.

29. Morelock, *Generals of the Bulge*, 2298–380, Kindle.

30. *Ibid.*, 2506, 19, 70–83, Kindle.

31. *Ibid.*, 2366. Kindle. Weigley's coverage of the Ardennes counteroffensive does not mention General Simpson. Weigley, *Eisenhower's Lieutenants*, 507–74.

32. Cable, Eisenhower to William H. Simpson, 22 Dec 1944, in *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower: The War Years*, 4:2369. Interestingly, this author has never seen this message referenced in any source other than the Eisenhower Papers. Eisenhower did send an identical message to Hodges, which is included in Sylvan and Smith, *Normandy to Victory*, 230. Simpson's letter to Eisenhower of 30 December cited the

message received at SHAEF headquarters on 1 January. Weigley, *Eisenhower's Lieutenants*, 615. Weigley left out the paragraph about good relations with Dempsey and his staff, and the final paragraph about Simpson's confidence regarding the situation and ultimate victory.

33. Ltr, William H. Simpson to Dwight D. Eisenhower, 30 Dec 1944, Folder "Simpson, Wm. H.," Box 99, Eisenhower, Dwight D. Papers, 1916–1952, Box 99, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum, Abilene, KS.

34. Ninth Army HQ Diary, 19 Jan 1945, Official Papers, Box 7, WHSC; Hamilton, *Monty: Final Years of the Field-Marshal, 1944–1976*, 196–97. As Russell Weigley observed, the Ninth Army was beginning to suspect that "the British intended to hog the credit for defeating Germany—even as Montgomery in his celebrated press conference had attempted to monopolize credit for the victory in the Ardennes." Weigley, *Eisenhower's Lieutenants*, 615.

35. Weigley, *Eisenhower's Lieutenants*, 564–55; Hamilton, *Monty: Final Years of the Field-Marshal, 1944–1976*, 300; Joseph Quinn, "How Nazi 'Fake News' Split Allied Commanders in 1945," UK National Archives Blog, 15 Jan 2020, <https://blog.nationalarchives.gov.uk/how-nazi-fake-news-split-allied-commanders-in-1945/>.

36. Sylvan and Smith, *Normandy to Victory*, 264; LOI Number Twelve, 12th Army Gp HQ, 4 Jan 1945, in *Report of Operations, Final After Action Report, 12th Army Group*, v. 5, G–3 Section, U.S. Army Combined Arms Research Library, Fort Leavenworth, KS.

37. Interv, Stone with Simpson, 26 Jan 1972.

38. MFR, Omar Bradley, 23 Jan 1945, author's collection.

39. Note, Operation Plunder Planning Notes No. 5, 7 Mar 1945, 9 U.S. Army: Letters of Instructions and Maps: Part I, WO 205/336, NA; Ellis, *Victory in the West, Volume II*, 287.

40. Rpt, T. W. Parker, Jr., sub: Report of Visit to 21 Army Group, 15 Jan 1945, author's collection. Emphasis in original.

41. C-in-C Directive, 21 Army Gp, 21 Jan 1945, M.548, Directives; Etc., 1 Jan 1944–31 Dec 1945, WO 229/72, NA.

42. *Ibid.*

43. Parker and Thompson, *Conquer*, 210.

44. Parker and Thompson, *Conquer*, 209.

45. Interv, Stone with Simpson, 1971.

46. Weigley, *Eisenhower's Lieutenants*, 615.

47. Ninth Army HQ Diary, 23, 27, and 28 Jan 1945, Official Papers, Box 7, WHSC.

48. 21 Army Group–Operation Torchlight, Feb 1945, Operation Torchlight: Splitting of the Xanten Crossing between 2 and 9 Armies, Maps, WO 205/722, NA; Parker and Thompson, *Conquer*, 210.

49. Ninth Army HQ Diary, 1 Feb 1945, Official Papers, Box 7, WHSC.

50. Peter Rostron, *The Life and Times of General Sir Miles Dempsey GBE KCB DSO MC: Monty's Army Commander* (Barnsley, UK: Pen and Sword, 2010), 261. Kindle.

51. 21 Army Group–Operation Torchlight, Feb 1945, WO 205/722, NA.

52. Ninth Army HQ Diary, 7 Feb 1945, Official Papers, Box 7, WHSC.

53. Ninth Army HQ Diary, 8 Feb 1945, Box 7, WHSC.

54. Parker and Thompson, *Conquer*, 161–62; Ninth Army HQ Diary, 9 Feb 1945, Box 7, WHSC.

55. Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 605, Kindle; Thomas R. Stone, "1630 Comes Early on the Roer," *Military Review* (Oct 1973): 17–19; Ninth Army HQ Diary, 27 Feb 1945, Box 7, WHSC.

56. Stone, "1630 Comes Early on the Roer," 19; Ninth Army HQ Diary, 10 Feb 1945, Box 7, WHSC.

57. Msg, Field Marshal Bernard L. Montgomery to General Dwight D. Eisenhower (Personal for His Eyes Only), 18 Feb 1945, M.487, BLM 108/122, Imperial War Museum, UK.

58. Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 607, Kindle.

59. Ninth Army HQ Diary, 27 Feb 1945, Box 7, WHSC.

60. MacDonald, *The Last Offensive*, 179.

61. Ellis, *Victory in the West, Volume II*, 277.

62. Ninth Army HQ Diary, 5 Mar 1945, Box 8, WHSC; Derek S. Zumbro, *Battle for the Ruhr: The German Army's Final Defeat in the West*, *Modern War Studies*, ed. Theodore A. Wilson (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006), 79–83.

63. Ninth Army HQ Diary, 4 Mar 1945, Box 8, WHSC.

64. Interv, Stone with Simpson, 21 Jan 1971; David Irving, *The War between the Generals: Inside the Allied High Command* (New York: Congdon and Lattès, 1981), 389.

65. Ninth Army HQ Diary, 5 Mar 1945, Box 8, WHSC; Interv, Thomas R. Stone with Armistead D. Mead Jr., 9 Jun 1972, author's collection; Interv, Stone with Simpson, 21 Jan 1971; Ellis, *Victory in the West, Volume II*, 283. The literature stresses the importance of the capture the Remagen bridge, and the ways in which the Americans capitalized on this success. What if Simpson had reached this crossing site on 6 March, a day before the capture of the Remagen bridge?

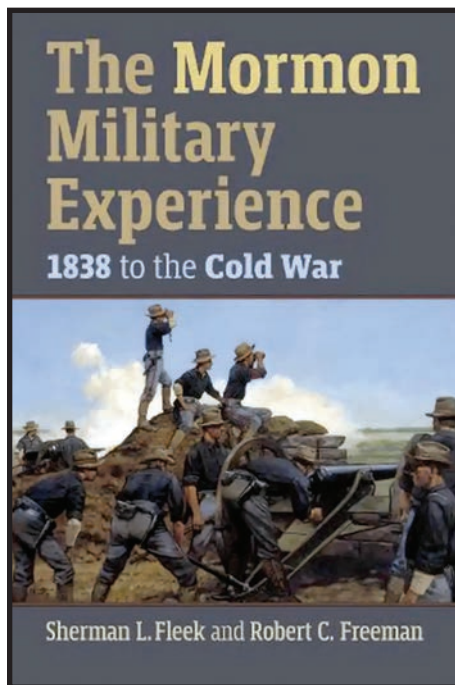
66. Interv, Stone with Simpson, 21 Jan 1971; Ninth Army HQ Diary, 3 Mar 1945, Box 8, WHSC.

67. Interv, Stone with Simpson, 21 Jan 1971.

68. C-in-C Directive, 21 Army Gp, 9 Mar 1945,

- M.559, Directives; Etc, 1 Jan 1944–31 Dec 1945, WO 229/72, NA.
69. Interv, Larry F. Paul with James E. Moore, 1984, 154, JEMC, USAHEC.
70. C-in-C Directive, 21 Army Gp, 9 Mar 1945, M.559, Directives; Etc, 1 Jan 1944–31 Dec 1945, WO 229/72, NA.
71. Ibid.
72. Postconference notes from a Second Army planning session held on 9 March mention the ongoing debate over inter-Army boundaries: “The only pt at issue is the running rights for Second Army on the rd VENLO–WESEL. As there appeared to be differences of opinion as to the decision made on this pt at the Army Gp conference on 6 Mar, Q (Plans) are clearing the matter up with Ninth Army. Second Army require full running rights on the stretch VENLO–GELDERN and CI 70 running rights on the stretch GELDERN–WESEL.” Operation Plunder: Planning Progress, Minutes of Meetings Part I, Feb–Mar 1945, WO 205/251, NA.
73. Parker and Thompson, *Conquer*, 260; G3 Jrl 1945 (3-16 to 3-31), Entry 427, Box 2419, Record Group (RG) 407, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD (NACP); LOI Number 17, Ninth Army, 13 Mar 1945, 9 U.S. Army: Part IV, WO 205/282, NA.
74. Ellis, *Victory in the West, Volume II*, 286–87.
75. As recorded in the U.S. Army official history, “The 21 Army Group in mid-March contained 1,703 Dutch, 5,982 Czechs, 6,696 Belgians, 14,915 Poles, 182,136 Canadians, 328,919 Americans, and 744,361 British, for a total strength of 1,284,712.” MacDonald, *The Last Offensive*, 297n9.
76. Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 629, Kindle; Interv, Stone with Simpson, 26 Jan 1972; Ninth Army HQ Diary, 24 Mar 1945, Box 8, WHSC.
77. J. C. Dalrymple, “Operations of the 1117th Engineer Combat Group in the Rhine River Crossing” (student paper, U.S. Army Cmd and Gen Staff College, 1946–47), 10, <https://cdm16040.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p124201coll2/id/68>.
78. Telcon, 25 Mar 1945, G3 Jrl 1945 (3-16 to 3-31), Entry 427, Box 2419, RG 407, NACP. British convoys did not begin to use the bridge until noon. The British corps engineer later admitted that the Second Army was not ready to take over traffic control because he doubted the Ninth Army engineers could complete the bridge so quickly. See Dalrymple, “Operations of the 1117th Engineer Combat Group,” 11.
79. Ninth Army HQ Diary, 26 Mar 1945, Box 8, WHSC.
80. Interv, Stone with Simpson, 26 Jan 1972; Ninth Army HQ Diary, 26–27 Mar 1945, Box 8, WHSC.
81. Ninth Army HQ Diary, 27 Mar 1945, Box 8, WHSC.
82. Daily Sum, Ninth Army G–3, 27 Mar 1945, Entry 427, Box 2419, RG 407, NACP.
83. C-in-C Directive, 21 Army Gp, 28 Mar 1945, M.563, Directives; Etc, 1 Jan 1944–31 Dec 1945, WO 229/72, NA. Many secondary sources claim that, beginning 31 March, the Ninth Army would have priority use of the bridge for nineteen hours per day, while the Second Army would retain priority for five hours per day. This appears to have resulted from an error in the U.S. Army official history that later historians echoed. MacDonald, *The Last Offensive*, 319. This author has found no operations order or any other primary source that mentions the Ninth Army sharing the use of the Wesel bridges after 31 March.
84. C-in-C Directive, 21 Army Gp, 28 Mar 1945, M.563, Directives; Etc, 1 Jan 1944–31 Dec 1945, WO 229/72, NA.
85. British Second Army HQ Diary, 28 Mar 1945, The Third 100 Days, WO 285/11, NA.
86. Airborne troops landed with only light equipment and could not fight for long without additional resources.
87. Rostron, *Life and Times of General Sir Miles Dempsey*, 264. Kindle.
88. Interv, Larry F. Paul with James E. Moore, 1984, 162, JEMC, U.S. AHEC; Simpson’s operations officer recalled how rare it was for his commander to get angry: “It really wasn’t Simpson’s way to lose his temper; he kept his temper under good control. He might be seething underneath but he never let it show through.” Interv, Stone with Mead, 9 Jun 1972.
89. C-in-C Directive, 21 Army Gp, 28 Mar 1945, M.563, Directives; Etc, 1 Jan 1944–31 Dec 1945, WO 229/72, NA.
90. LOI Number 18, Ninth Army, 29 Mar 1945, 9 U.S. Army: Part V, WO 205/283, NA.
91. Parker and Thompson, *Conquer*, 260–62.
92. Ninth Army HQ Diary, 29 Mar 1945, Box 8, WHSC.
93. LOI Number 18, Ninth Army, 29 Mar 1945; Parker and Thompson, *Conquer*, 264–66.
94. Omar N. Bradley, *A Soldier’s Story* (New York: Modern Library, 1951; repr., 1999), 528.
95. Interv, Stone with Simpson, 21 Jan 1971.
96. Ibid.
97. Ltr, Omar N. Bradley to Thomas R. Stone, 8 May 1971, author’s collection.
98. Cable, Eisenhower to George C. Marshall, 7 Apr 1945, in *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower: The War Years*, 4:2592–93; Ellis, *Victory in the West, Volume II*, 301, 19, 26.
99. Msg, 21 Army Gp, 3 Apr 1945, Ninth Army OPCON [Operational Cmd], 9 U.S. Army: Part VI, WO 205/284, NA.
100. Interv, Stone with Simpson, 21 Jan 1971; LOI Number Twenty, 12th Army Gp HQ, 4 Apr 1945, in *Report of Operations, Final After Action Report, 12th Army Group*, v. 5, G–3 Section, U.S. Army Combined Arms Research Library, Fort Leavenworth, KS.
101. Bradley and Blair, *A General’s Life*, 426–28.
102. Parker and Thompson, *Conquer*, 283.
103. Parker and Thompson, *Conquer*, 365.
104. Francis de Guingand, *Generals at War* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1964), 164; Simpson was in fact awarded the K.B.E. (Knight of the British Empire) by King George V on 2 February 1945.
105. Interv, Stone with Simpson, 21 Jan 1971.
106. Ibid. Simpson said he believed this was not because he was an American; rather, he thought Monty would have treated any army commander the same way.

# BOOK REVIEWS



## THE MORMON MILITARY EXPERIENCE: 1838 TO THE COLD WAR

BY SHERMAN L. FLEEK AND ROBERT C. FREEMAN

University Press of Kansas, 2023  
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REVIEW BY GRANT T. HARWARD

The members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church), more commonly known as Mormons, are often described as a “peculiar people,” so it makes sense that Mormon military service has a peculiar history. Yet for many years, no one had written an account examining the unique Mormon military experience and how it changed over time. Sherman L. Fleek, a retired lieutenant colonel and a historian at West Point, assisted by Robert C. Freeman, a professor of Church History and Doctrine at the LDS-affiliated Brigham Young University, took up the task of chronicling the “Mormon Way of War.”

No other American denomination fielded “religious armies” like the LDS Church (2). LDS Church leaders determined whether or not Mormons served in U.S. conflicts—at least for a time. Fleek shows how Mormon military exceptionalism in the nineteenth century transformed into Mormon military conformity in the twentieth century.

After an introduction, the book is organized into two parts. Book One consists of eight chapters covering Mormon military exceptionalism in nineteenth-century conflicts. Fleek begins by examining LDS Church doctrine and views on warfare. Mormon theology generally follows mainline Christian attitudes in accepting war as evil yet inevitable. The LDS Church accepts the Just War Theory, and its “Twelfth Article of Faith” is a statement of obedience and obligation to the state—including during wartime (19). Yet Fleek demonstrates that LDS Church leaders decided which U.S. conflicts Mormons participated in up until Utah statehood in 1896.

Initially, LDS Church leaders, especially its founder Joseph Smith, who was revered as a prophet by his followers, did not monopolize control of the Mormon military force. Mormons generally enrolled in existing militias, although Smith and other LDS Church leaders did not at this time. In 1838, civil conflict erupted in Missouri between locals and Mormons who had gathered in the state to build Zion, the kingdom of God on earth. In response to mob violence, Mormons also organized vigilante groups. In the end, mobs and the state militia drove the Mormons from the state under threat of an extermination order issued by the governor. This experience caused the LDS Church to form its own military force. Smith and his followers established the city of Nauvoo in Illinois in 1839 with a special charter, including permission to raise a militia. The Nauvoo Legion, which Smith controlled as mayor and commanded as lieutenant general, was a component of the state militia and a private Mormon army. Its primary mission was to protect the prophet and his people. Ultimately, when

mob violence again targeted the Mormons, Smith chose not to use the Nauvoo Legion, which was disbanded the year after his assassination in 1844.

Brigham Young became the prophet leading the LDS Church, and for three decades, this powerful personality determined when Mormons would or would not fight. When the Mexican-American War broke out in 1846, Young supported a scheme to raise a battalion of volunteers from among the Mormon refugees in Iowa to obtain funds for the impoverished LDS Church and woo the federal government. The Mormon Battalion was the only religious unit in U.S. Army history. This alliance between the LDS Church and the federal government deteriorated over the next decade, especially after the Mormons began openly practicing polygamy in the Utah territory. As the territorial governor, Young controlled the Nauvoo Legion—reestablished as the territorial militia in 1847. The mixing of temporal and spiritual powers led to accusations that the Mormons were in rebellion. President James Buchanan sent the U.S. Army to restore federal control. Young sought a peaceful solution but also prepared to fight. The Nauvoo Legion, using guerrilla tactics, harassed the logistics of the U.S. Army’s Utah Expedition. Fortunately, both sides avoided bloodshed and agreed to a compromise. Young was replaced as governor, and the U.S. Army established a garrison. The federal effort to tame the Mormons in Utah proved abortive, however. The Civil War caused the recall of federal authorities and troops, leaving Young as de facto territorial governor. The LDS Church sat on the sideline during the war between North and South. Utah only provided the Union (temporarily) a few militiamen to patrol telegraph lines and fight Native Americans. Mormons were more sympathetic toward native peoples than many other settlers but still had regular conflict with local tribes. In 1870, when federal authorities finally returned, the territorial government disarmed the Nauvoo Legion. In the 1880s, a federal raid targeted the LDS



Church for its practice of polygamy. Concurrently, the federal government broke much of the LDS Church's control over territorial affairs, including the territorial militia, and officially disbanded the Nauvoo Legion in 1887. In 1890, under a new prophet, the LDS Church ended the practice of polygamy, which also ended the federal persecution of Mormons and enabled Utah to become a state just six years later.

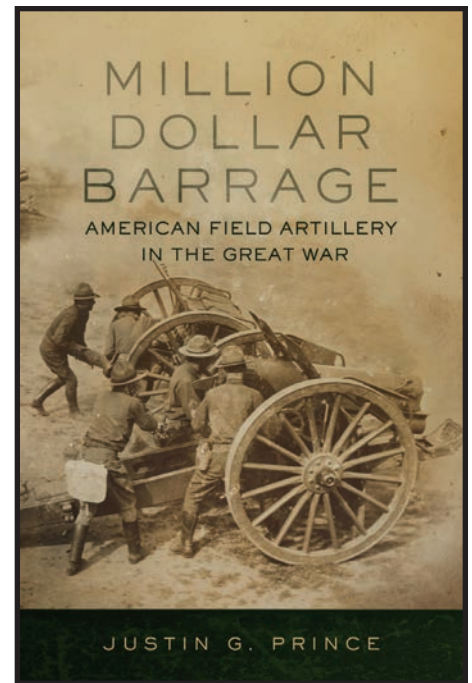
Fleek argues that this decision marked a turning point in the Mormon military experience. As the LDS Church became more mainstream, Mormon soldiers experienced war pretty much like any other Christians in uniform. The Spanish-American War of 1898 was used to reconcile North and South, and heal relations with Utah. It was the first time the U.S. Army recruited Mormon chaplains. Yet it was also the last time military units existed that were predominately Mormon; for instance, three-quarters of the Utah Light Artillery that fought in the Philippine-American War of 1899–1902 was Mormon.

Book Two comprises six chapters on Mormon military conformity in twentieth-century conflicts. By the turn of the century, the LDS Church began to transform into a global church with members in many countries owing to its missionary efforts. Consequently, in World War I and World War II, Mormons had to fight on opposite sides because Germany had a sizable Mormon community. The LDS Church expanded in the postwar period, establishing many more Mormon congregations around the world. Yet Fleek focuses on American Mormon military service in the context of Cold War conflicts in Korea and Vietnam. He dedicates pages to the LDS Church's opposition to the basing of MX missiles in Utah and Nevada in 1981; he portrays this reaction as an uncharacteristic departure from the LDS Church's usual policy of supporting the military. The epilogue very briefly covers the post-Cold War period and the Global War on Terrorism era. Finally, the book includes an appendix with the Medal of Honor citations for the twelve Mormon recipients of the United States' highest military decoration for acts of valor and a chronology detailing the Mormon military experience from 1820 to 1896.

*The Mormon Military Experience* makes for fascinating reading. For those interested in military history, it includes details of the organization, training, fighting, and combat effectiveness of Mormon militias

and volunteer units in federal service. For those interested in Mormon history, it offers a compelling new perspective on the development of the LDS Church that reinforces the importance of the turn of the nineteenth century to the twentieth century in the transformation of Mormon identity, culture, and politics. For the casual reader, it offers many engaging stories of Mormons like Daniel H. Wells, Lot Smith, and John Browning, in addition to some disturbing accounts of the Mountain Meadows Massacre, a Mormon Nazi, and Mormon soldiers at the My Lai Massacre. Fleek provides a dispassionate and balanced view of a century and a half of Mormon military history in the United States.

**Dr. Grant T. Harward** is a native of southern California. He completed his bachelor's degree in history at Brigham Young University in 2009, his master's degree on the Second World War in Europe at the University of Edinburgh in 2010, and his PhD in history at Texas A&M University in 2018. He is a former Auschwitz Jewish Center fellow, a former Fulbright scholar to Romania, and a former Mandel Center fellow at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. He was a historian for the U.S. Army Medical Department Center of History and Heritage at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, Texas, from 2018 to 2021. He now works as a historian for the U.S. Army Center of Military History. Dr. Harward has written numerous articles about the history of U.S. Army medicine and the Romanian Army during World War II. His book, *Romania's Holy War: Soldiers, Motivation, and the Holocaust* (Cornell University Press, 2021), won the 2022 Barbara Jelavich Book Prize from the Association of Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies.



## MILLION DOLLAR BARRAGE: AMERICAN FIELD ARTILLERY IN THE GREAT WAR

BY JUSTIN G. PRINCE

University of Oklahoma Press, 2021

Pp. xii & 256. \$34.95

REVIEW BY MICHAEL A. BODEN

The numerous innovations in the conduct of war at the start of the twentieth century are well known to most people who study the military history of the era. Technological advancements, tactical and operational developments, growing global political rivalries, and other conditions all contributed to the changing character of war. Justin Prince tackles one particular dimension of this environment, the origins of the U.S. Army's Field Artillery branch, in his work, *Million Dollar Barrage: American Field Artillery in the Great War*. To Prince, this period was of primary importance to the service's coming of age. Prince notes that "[t]hese formative years, from 1907 to 1923, saw the establishment of a modern field artillery branch, and through the missteps, failures, problems, debates, and successes, the field artillery gained a new primacy in the minds of American military thinkers" (189). To support this assertion, throughout his narrative Prince consistently focuses on three particular areas of development:

doctrine, technology, and “the debates about open warfare” (8). The book progresses chronologically, for the most part, although there are some overlaps in chapter focus depending on the issue under consideration.

After the introductory chapter, chapters 2 and 3 focus on conditions that necessitated a dramatic change in the application of American field artillery. The second chapter hones in on those developments from 1897 to 1913 that frame the American experience, including such key events as the introduction of the French 75-mm. gun in 1897, the separation of field artillery from coast artillery in 1907, and the establishment of the School of Fire at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, in 1911. The third chapter aligns closely with these initial parameters as Prince emphasizes American technological and training challenges in the years leading up to the First World War. One constant in this period is the importance of the *Field Artillery Journal* and the centrality of the Fort Sill experience and curriculum in shaping American artillery development. The fourth chapter emphasizes the challenges associated with arming the branch and the friction that developed between the Ordnance Department and the Field Artillery branch in procurement prior to American entry into the war. This friction resulted, to Prince, in numerous comprehensive shortcomings that persisted through the war, such as the lack of heavy artillery development and the slipshod attempt at developing a standard American field piece.

The following three chapters address the substantial qualitative developments experienced by the force throughout combat operations in Europe. The issues and themes at the forefront in the previous three chapters come together in the fifth, on artillery training after the American entry into the war. The sixth chapter focuses particularly on American observation of fire issues, of which the lack of quality observation methods and poor air coordination were two of the most significant. The seventh concentrates on the application of previous training and development during the Meuse-Argonne Offensive. Only in the final campaign does Prince perceive that the service addressed many of the issues faced by American artillerymen. To the author, the Meuse-Argonne “was the crucible that shaped American artillery into an effective military weapon” (164).

The final two chapters summarize the developments of the immediate postwar

years (to 1923) and the lessons learned by the American field artillery branch. During these five years, in the immediate aftermath of the First World War, Prince identifies pivotal developments in the American field artillery service, with relatively swift and broad espousal of lessons learned in the conflict. Prince concludes that training shortcomings were the primary cause of concern for the development of the field artillery service, although not a shortcoming that existed in a vacuum, as they included doctrinal, technological, and fiscal issues. This open attitude helped provide the foundations for acceptance as an equal branch of service on the modern battlefield and the transition from follower to leader in terms of global tactical and technological innovation in the interwar years.

Prince’s approach on a few aspects of methodology should be noted. These are not necessarily critiques but rather observations on his process. For instance, Prince’s discussion of actions in the war occupies a limited frame of the work as a whole—parts of only three chapters. There is less in the work that reflects the long form of the title, *American Field Artillery in the Great War*, than one might expect. The only chapter that considers the conduct of combat operations looks solely at the Meuse-Argonne Offensive. One wonders if similar American operations, such as the earlier III Corps operations around Soissons (with the French) or the II Corps actions on the Somme (with the British), experienced the same model of growth and progression that Prince sees in the larger campaign.

Prince’s analysis consistently considers those topics previously noted throughout the work—doctrine, technology, and open warfare. Within that analysis, Prince focuses more on systems as opposed to the role of individuals. Individual agency, though not completely absent, takes a back seat to the roles of institutions and agencies. There are a few exceptions, to be sure. The postwar chief of artillery, Maj. Gen. William J. Snow, was a prominent early advocate for the branch in the prewar years, and Maj. Gen. Charles P. Summerall’s advocacy for artillery development is noted throughout the narrative.

In developing and presenting his argument, Prince is to be commended for his attention to detail. He is adept at demonstrating how particular issues (e.g., the lack of a standard American fieldpiece for the war) caused friction and challenges in numerous other aspects of wartime develop-

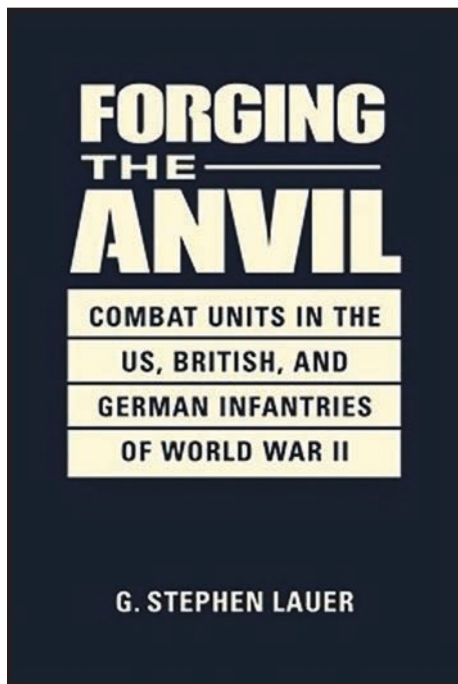
ment—in this case, training, procurement, and doctrine. A reader with a degree of experience in the history of American field artillery will find many insightful contributions in these pages. However, for those with little or no prior knowledge, much of the significance of these passages and their detail will be difficult to fully ascertain. Prince also relies a great deal on the articles and arguments presented in the *Field Artillery Journal* and does an excellent job of demonstrating why that source must be of primary importance when looking at the era’s developments. Aside from these minor observations, anyone interested not just in American field artillery but in the First World War or in early challenges of combined arms operations will find Prince’s book of significant value.

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**Dr. Michael Boden** is a retired U.S. Army lieutenant colonel who served twenty-three years as an armored cavalryman. A former faculty member of West Point’s History Department, he is currently an associate professor of history at Dutchess Community College in Poughkeepsie, New York. He also serves on the Board of Trustees for the Dutchess County Historical Society.

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## FORGING THE ANVIL: COMBAT UNITS IN THE US, BRITISH, AND GERMAN INFANTRIES OF WORLD WAR II

BY G. STEPHEN LAUER

Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2022  
Pp. xv, 463. \$85

REVIEW BY RICHARD S. FAULKNER

Since the collapse of Nazi Germany, soldiers and scholars have assessed the relative combat abilities of the major armies of World War II. Two of the great questions they debated were how well the American and British infantrymen measured up against their German counterparts and what, if anything, seemingly gave the Teutonic ground-pounders an edge over their Allied foes. In *Forging the Anvil: Combat Units in the US, British, and German Infantries of World War II*, G. Stephen Lauer offers a detailed comparison of the infantry selection policies, replacement plans, training, disciplinary systems, and morale structures of the German, British, and U.S. armies. He concludes that the *Wehrmacht's* approach in all these areas created combat units that were qualitatively superior to its enemies.

Historians have long examined the German Army's ability to maintain great tactical prowess and lethality in the face of mass casualties and strategic defeats. Lauer notes that this edge was based on

the *Wehrmacht's* consistent commitment to the "disproportionate selection of the most physically and mentally qualified [soldiers] to withstand the horrific conditions of the face-to-face infantry battle," and then establishing policies to build and maintain small-unit cohesion (345). He claims that the Germans' tactical advantages over their enemy's ground forces also resulted from the American and British armies' failure to follow suit. In both Allied nations, political and military inclinations led them to place their highest-quality personnel into their navies and air forces and their lowest-quality troops into the infantry. In better understanding the delicate manpower balance required to wage a total war, the Americans and British also devoted more effort to retaining a quality workforce on the home front than did the Germans.

One of the most trenchant observations of the work is that if you want to see what a military truly values, examine its personnel policies. Nowhere was this truer than in the *Wehrmacht*. Since the time of Frederick the Great, Lauer argues, the well-trained and disciplined infantry had been the backbone of the German military. The *Reichsheer* and *Wehrmacht* furthered this tradition by ensuring that the soldiers who scored the highest in their intelligence, physical fitness, and psychological screening tests were placed in the infantry. The German personnel policies were also designed to build small-unit cohesion and combat effectiveness by first inducting men from the same region into territorial-based regiments and ensuring that wounded soldiers returned to their original unit after recovery. The *Wehrmacht* displayed the same care in the selection and training of its noncommissioned officers (NCO) and officer cadres. Officer-aspirants first had to undergo a year or more in the enlisted ranks before being selected to attend officer training schools. As NCOs generally commanded two of the three platoons in a German infantry company, the army expected its sergeants to be trained and ready to serve as junior officers as needed. Lauer argues that the "German soldiers expected their officers and NCOs to lead them well," and thus trusted their leaders more than Allied soldiers did in the stress and chaos of battle (329).

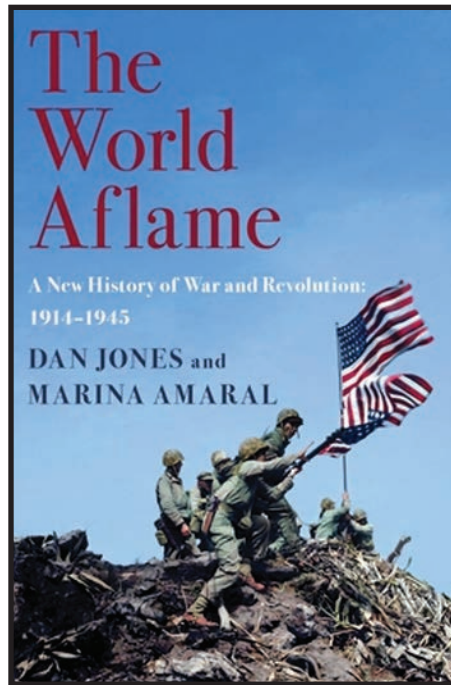
Despite paying lip service to the need for quality ground combat forces, the

personnel policies of the United States and Great Britain systematically undermined the selection and training of talented soldiers and officers into their combat arms. In the United States, provisions in the Selective Service Act allowed draftees to "volunteer" for the Navy and Marine Corps at the time of their induction. The U.S. Army General Classification Test, and the assignment policies that flowed from it, governed the allocation of Army personnel throughout the war. These policies ensured that in 1942 and 1943, the Army Air Forces received "almost three-quarters of its new personnel from the top third of available manpower" (157). Additional efforts, such as the creation of the Army Specialized Training Program and quotas imposed on combat units to fill officer and other technical training, further ensured that the infantry received the last cut of the manpower pool. Although Lauer touches only lightly on it in the book, the quality and quantity of Allied firepower and production, which was enabled by their personnel policies, ultimately ground the high-quality German infantry into dust.

Lauer has produced a masterful study of how militaries and nations prepare for large-scale conventional war by training their forces and allocating resources to meet what they envision as the future character of war. His argument that the German investment in sound personnel, training, and assignment policies created combat soldiers and tactical-level units that out-performed their foes is well argued and supported by his primary sources. But perhaps the biggest takeaway from the book is not one that Lauer intended. In a war driven by attritional firepower and production, did the quality of the German infantry really matter? Were the Allies much wiser to invest more into those areas most likely to support the creation, power projection, and use of firepower? Since World War I, large-scale conventional wars have been characterized by attrition and driven by firepower and production. Frankly, in these kinds of wars, the infantry has played a secondary role to the true killers of the conflicts: artillery and air power. The current conflict in Ukraine seems again to support the Great War adage that "artillery conquers and the infantry merely occupies." As the United States is currently facing the possibility of peer-level conflicts, it is wise to consider how the Republic should use and maintain

its limited pool of military manpower for waging future conventional attritional wars. *Forging the Anvil* is a good starting point for insights into how others have wrestled with this problem.

**Dr. Richard S. Faulkner** is a professor of military history and has taught at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College for over twenty-one years. He also served twenty-three years in the U.S. Army. He is the author of *The School of Hard Knocks: Combat Leadership in the American Expeditionary Forces* (Texas A&M Press, 2012), which received the Society for Military History's 2013 Distinguished Book Award. His second book, *Pershing's Crusaders: The American Soldier in World War I* (University Press of Kansas, 2017), received the World War I Association's 2017 Norman B. Tomlinson Jr. Prize for the best work of history in English on World War I, the Organization of American Historians' 2017 Richard W. Leopold Prize, and the Army Historical Foundation's 2017 Excellence in U.S. Army History Book Award.



## THE WORLD AFLAME: A NEW HISTORY OF WAR AND REVOLUTION, 1914–1945

BY DAN JONES AND MARINA AMARAL

Pegasus Books, 2020  
Pp. 448. \$39.95

REVIEW BY CRISTÓBAL S. BERRY-CABÁN

The twentieth century stands out as the most devastating era in recorded history, marked by an unparalleled level of violence and loss of life. The estimated death toll caused by wars and their associated factors reached a staggering 187 million people, equivalent to over 10 percent of the global population in 1910. From 1914 to 1945, the world witnessed a prolonged conflict often referred to as the “Thirty Years’ War,” with only a brief respite in the 1920s between the final withdrawal of Japanese forces from the Soviet Far East in 1922 and the subsequent attack on Manchuria in 1931.

In their thought-provoking book, *The World Aflame: A New History of War and Revolution, 1914–1945*, British historian Dan Jones and Brazilian artist Marina Amaral deliver a powerful message right from the start: “The world is delicate, more fragile than we realize, and it takes only a small spark to ignite it into flames.” Through their meticulous work, the authors present a collection of 200 colorized photographs spanning a thirty-five-year period of global history that captures the

essence of the era. Accompanying these captivating visuals, Jones provides concise and insightful descriptions that immerse us in the historical narrative encapsulated by these old photographs.

*The World Aflame* begins in the late Edwardian era, a time of relative peace fostered by the Entente Cordiale signed between Great Britain and France. Yet, beneath the surface of tranquility lay hidden instabilities. As assembly lines rolled out affordable Model T automobiles, they also unwittingly laid the groundwork for the mass-production of weapons. The early flights of the Wright brothers, seemingly a testament to human progress, inadvertently sowed the seeds for military aviation. Merely nine years later, we observe Thomas DeWitt Millings testing a Curtis Pusher, foreshadowing the profound impact of aviation on warfare. Furthermore, the introduction of HMS *Dreadnought* triggered a fierce naval arms race among the Great Powers, setting the stage for future conflicts.

*The World Aflame* does not limit itself to exploring the cataclysmic conflagrations of 1914–1918 and 1939–1945. It delves deeper, examining the international tensions, conflicting ideologies, and pernicious economic forces that fueled these wars in succession. Moreover, the book sheds light on the often-overlooked civil wars that ravaged the interwar period in countries such as Mexico’s revolution and the civil war in Spain. It also delves into Britain’s imperial struggles, like Ireland’s Easter Rising and Palestine, offering a comprehensive understanding of the global landscape during this tumultuous time.

Famously known as the Great War, World War I emerged from a complex tapestry of political tensions, imperial rivalries, and military alliances that was ultimately ignited by the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria-Hungary and his wife Sophie. A photograph in the book shows their lifeless bodies lying in repose before their funeral. Jones and Amaral vividly capture the mobilization of millions of soldiers and the unparalleled levels of devastation and loss of life that unfolded during this catastrophic conflict.

World War I embroiled major European powers alongside countries from other continents, effectively dividing the world into two opposing alliances: the Allies, consisting of France, Russia, and the United Kingdom (and later joined by the United

States), and the Central Powers, comprising Germany, Austria-Hungary, and the Ottoman Empire. As nations declared war on each other, a photograph captures Tsar Nicholas II shortly after signing Russia's declaration of war against his German cousin, Kaiser Wilhelm II. Notably absent from the book are the determined leaders Georges Clemenceau, David Lloyd George, and Woodrow Wilson, all resolute in their quest to avoid defeat.

The war was fought on multiple fronts, characterized by the brutality of trench warfare and the emergence of new technological advancements, such as poison gas and tanks, leading to staggering casualties. Iconic battles like Verdun, the Brusilov Offensive, and the relentless guns of the Somme come to life through the lens of Jones and Amaral's narrative, as does the exploits of the Red Baron and his fighter plane. Eventually, the exhaustion and economic strain endured by the Central Powers, coupled with the entry of the United States into the conflict, tilted the scales in favor of the Allies. The war ended with the signing of the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, within the opulent Hall of Mirrors teeming with dignitaries.

Within the pages of Amaral and Jones's book, lesser-known moments and figures receive a deserving spotlight. A colorized photograph showcases portrait artist and sculptor Anna Coleman Ladd, who skillfully crafted lifelike masks to "repair" the disfigured faces of American veterans. Another image captures the Zapatista rebels campaigning for the welfare of villagers during the Mexican Revolution. Additionally, Margaret Bourke-White's iconic photograph of seven-year-old Angeles González, a refugee from the Spanish Civil War, finds its place within the book, further enriching the tapestry of stories told.

As the "Storm of War" begins, leaders of the Second World War are presented: Neville Chamberlain's appeasement, Joseph Stalin's pact with Nazi Germany, Adolf Hitler with a silhouette of the Eiffel Tower in the background, and the intractable Winston S. Churchill.

In a mesmerizing and haunting manner, *The World Aflame* also unveils the chilling narrative of World War II. The book's pages burst to life with vivid visuals that seize our attention: a bomber soaring perilously ahead of the swirling aftermath of its devastating payload, Benito

Mussolini's lifeless body after his capture and demise, and the eerie scenes from Hitler's fateful bunker. Additionally, the book unflinchingly presents the heart-wrenching impact of war on ordinary individuals, from a wounded child in Saipan to a Japanese man bearing the visible scars of Hiroshima's radiation. We also witness significant moments such as the liberation of Paris, the liberation of Greece, and the iconic flag-raising at Iwo Jima. As the evening of 14 August heralds V-J Day, the joyful image of Carmen Miranda dancing atop a convertible in the streets of Los Angeles adds a poignant touch. The war is finally over.

Within the book's narrative, a remarkable twist of fate is revealed. Martha Gellhorn, whose photograph of expressionless Jews behind barbed wire is featured in its pages, found herself at the Dachau concentration camp precisely when Germany surrendered unconditionally. In her own writings, she acknowledges the Allies' wartime responsibility: "For surely this war was made to abolish Dachau and all the other places like Dachau and everything that Dachau stands for. . . . We are not entirely guiltless, we the Allies because it took us twelve years to open the gates of Dachau."<sup>1</sup> Her words remind us of our collective guilt and challenge us to confront the atrocities committed during the war.

Photographs, as historical documents, play a vital role in *The World Aflame*. The book exposes the souls of those who suffered and those who caused the suffering. This process can be disturbing and challenging, but it instills a necessary sense of alarm regarding our present political struggles. The resurrection of these moments through the pages of the book evokes a profound sense of disorientation as we realize that a photograph is more than a frozen tableau. It pulsates with life, offering a fleeting glimpse into a bygone era and reminding us of our past failings.

*The World Aflame* provides a moving and often terrifying perspective on the bloodiest century in human history. It acts as an admonition for the future, urging us to heed the lessons of the past. Through its evocative imagery and thought-provoking prose, the book challenges us to reflect on our present circumstances and take decisive action to prevent the repetition of past horrors. Ultimately, it serves as a powerful reminder of the fragility of our world and

the immense consequences that can arise from the choices we make.

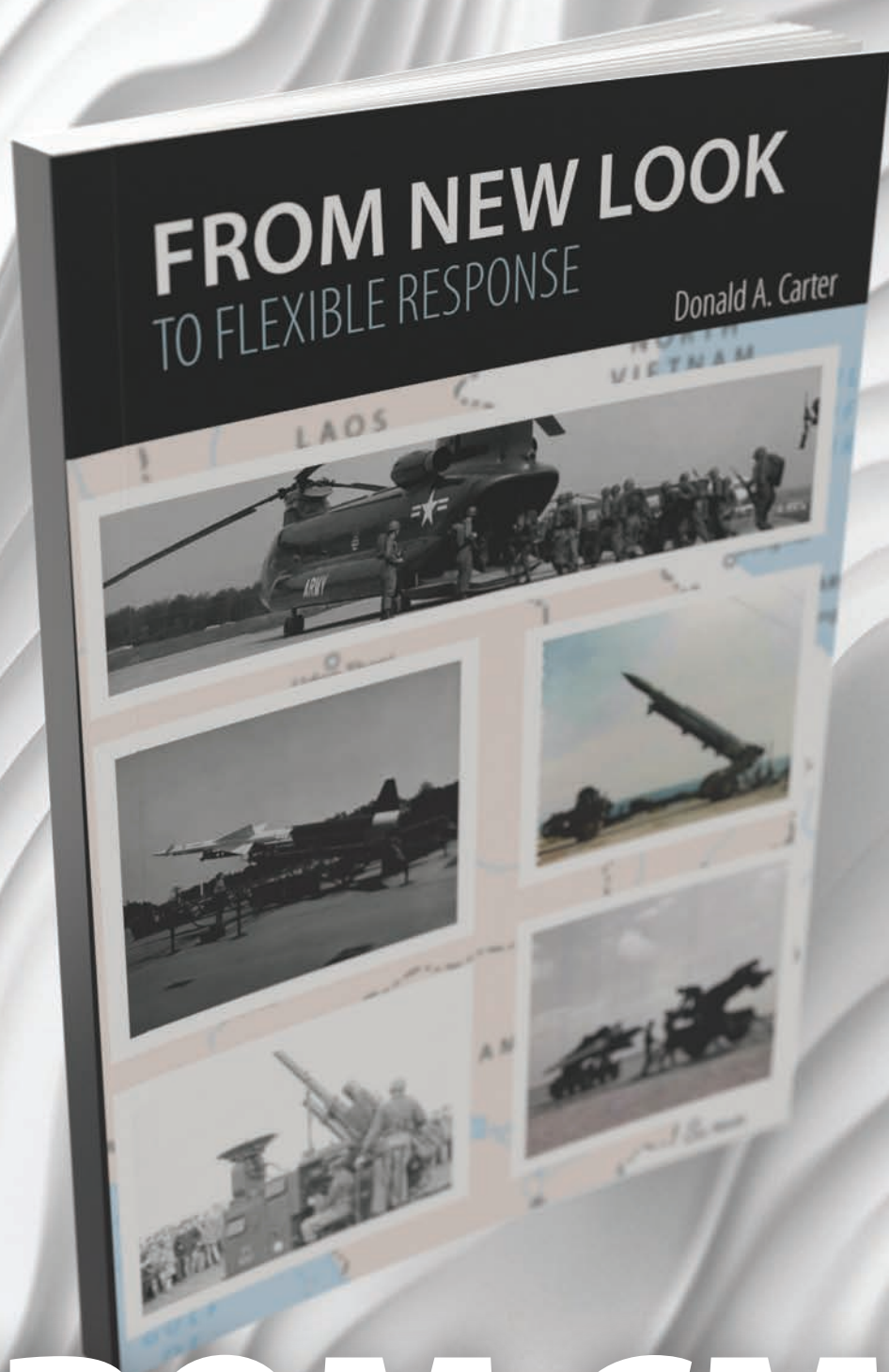
**Dr. Cristóbal S. Berry-Cabán** is an epidemiologist at Womack Army Medical Center, Fort Liberty, North Carolina. He has published numerous historical studies on tropical diseases and their impacts on war and service members. His most recent historical article was on writer Virginia Woolf and shell shock.

### Note

1. Martha Gellhorn, "Dachau: Experimental Murder," *Collier's* (23 Jun 1945), 16.



# Coming Soon



# FROM CMH

# chief historian's FOOTNOTE

## HBCUS AND THE COL. CHARLES YOUNG FELLOWSHIP



Jon T. Hoffman

Just before the pandemic set in, my Footnote described our plans for “a multifaceted and long-term effort to diversify our workforce.”<sup>1</sup> COVID presented numerous obstacles for that endeavor, and bureaucratic limitations presented other challenges, but we have been making headway slowly over the past four years. One of the first programmatic casualties of the public health emergency was our initial success getting a historian to the history departments of the historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) to speak with their undergraduates. As we mastered Microsoft Teams and Zoom along with the rest of the world, we resumed those presentations in a virtual format, introducing students to the military history field and the potential for a career with the Army.

We were able to set up a paid civil service internship for undergraduates for 2021–2022, which involved full-time work in the summer and part-time during the academic year. The goal was to provide hands-on work experience that would motivate students to pursue graduate education in military history. That effort did not pan out as well as we had hoped, in part due to the continuing COVID restrictions. Another challenge was geographic, as participation in the internship program was limited to those attending a school near the U.S. Army Center of Military History (CMH) in Washington, D.C. Although we hoped some command historians would host interns from a university in their area, we understood they did not really have the time to devote to mentoring students who were only just learning about history. We might have overcome those issues eventually, but we were unable to continue the effort after the first year as the Army stopped providing direct-hire authority allocations to term positions. Subject to the normal civil service hiring process and veterans’ preference, we would have had much greater difficulty selecting a diverse pool of interns.

We also planned to establish a contract with one or more HBCUs for graduate research assistants, modeled after the ongoing agreements CMH has with a few of the leading military history graduate programs. Research soon revealed that only two HBCUs, Howard University and Morgan State University, grant PhDs in history. Neither offers military history as a concentration, though historians can adapt to different fields once they have mastered the basic skills of the profession. Both schools are conveniently located within easy distance of Fort McNair, but their departments had understandable reservations about entering a contract to provide a graduate assistant year in and year out, given

their limited pool of students and the fact that some would have no interest in military history.

Over the past year, CMH worked with the Army Contracting Command to establish a grant program that would replicate many of the features of the graduate research assistant contract setup. CMH christened it the Col. Charles Young Fellowship, in honor of the third African American to graduate from West Point and the first to rise to the ranks of major, lieutenant colonel, and colonel in the Regular Army. Its specified objective is to increase diversity in the historian workforce of CMH and Functional Community 61, and in the history we produce. Fellows will work full-time for one year at CMH, acquiring a security clearance and firsthand experience in military history. A focus on military history is desired, but we are glad to accept individuals who have done their graduate work in other fields and have an interest in branching out into military history. The grant vehicle permits CMH to reach anyone in the country, as opposed to just those at the small number of institutions that have graduate research assistant contracts with us.

Because this was a very unusual type of grant, directed toward individuals rather than an institution, it took considerable time to work out the details and gain approval, but we finally achieved that milestone in late June. That left very little time to advertise the grant, accept and evaluate applications, and complete the bureaucratic steps needed to bring the selectees on board prior to the end of the fiscal year on 30 September. As I write this, we have selected three individuals for the inaugural class of Young Fellows. We are looking forward to having them on the CMH team, and I will write more about them in my next Footnote.

In my conclusion to *A History of Innovation: U.S. Army Adaptation in War and Peace* (CMH, 2008), I quoted a theorist who observed that turning an idea into reality is often “a process of disciplined attack upon one difficulty after another.”<sup>2</sup> We remain far from our objective of achieving a much more diverse workforce, but we continue to chip away at the challenges.



### Notes

1. Jon T. Hoffman, “Chief Historian’s Footnote: Workforce Diversity,” *Army History* 114 (Winter 2020), 47.
2. Alfred North Whitehead, as quoted in David C. Mowery and Nathan Rosenberg, *Paths of Innovation: Technological Change in 20th-Century America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 1.

# ON AIR




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