

PREFACE

Ever since mankind began organizing military forces, some have excelled in their craft. This came about either by fortuitous circumstances, outstanding leadership, or specialized instruction or training. In some cases, entire societies were geared toward military excellence. It is these populations and units that are the focus of this work.

We have selected four criteria for inclusion in this book: (1) Populations that dedicated themselves to a military structure in order to maintain societal discipline or dominate their neighbors. For example, the Spartans of ancient Greece or the Zulus of nineteenth-century Africa fit this criterion. (2) Soldiers who, through specialized training in the use of particular weapons or fighting styles, dominated the military forces of their times. Under this definition we would include knights, who controlled the military and social structure of medieval Europe, or submariners, who in modern times are carefully selected for their physical and psychological characteristics in operating undersea craft. (3) Units that did not necessarily set out to be noteworthy but who, through leadership or circumstance, made themselves famous. Here we include units such as the Minutemen of the American Revolution and Merrill's Marauders of World War II. (4) Units that recruit only high-quality soldiers with the intent of creating an elite force. The Varangian Guard of the Byzantine Empire and the Special Air Service of modern Great Britain fit into this category.

Some units that are well known are mentioned as subgroups of other topics. The famous Black Watch regiment of the British Army, for example, is included in the Highlanders entry. In some cases we have expanded entries, such as in adding notable subgroups to existing articles, like the warrior American Indian tribes. We have also updated a number of articles to reflect actions in which they have been engaged since the previous edition. Certainly some readers will have personal favorites they feel we have overlooked. It has been our intent to include as many topics over as wide an area as possible, in terms both of eras and of parts of the world. No unit or group has been left out intentionally, but only as a matter of oversight.

After some discussion, we have decided in this edition to add not only some groups left out of the earlier work, but also to include some terrorist organizations. While we have no wish to grant legitimacy to any actions they perform, we decided that they do come under the general heading "fighting groups," no matter what they are fighting for. Thus, we have selections here on some of the highest-profile Islamic movements in operation as of this writing as well as some older organizations active in other areas of the world.

We would like to thank the contributors who have eased our writing burden in the production of this work. They are listed with their affiliations on the following page.

Paul K. Davis and Allen Lee Hamilton, 2016

A

Afghans

A population of Afghanistan known for hostile and effective resistance to outside occupation.

For a few thousand years, Afghanistan was a crossroads for conquerors, with the countryside being overrun by Aryans, Greeks, Indians, Persians, Arabs, and Mongols. Over time, this constant influx of conquerors created a population of tough, independent-minded fighters that adopted a policy of maximum resistance to invaders. After the Sassanid Persians were removed from power, a local ruler, Ahmad Shah Durani, assumed control in 1747. He founded a ruling family that remained in power for 100 years before they—as do so many dynasties—became complacent and vulnerable. In 1824 Dost Mohammed overthrew this dissolute dynasty and became amir of Afghanistan, but soon began to feel pressure from major international powers both north and south of him.

The Persians, supported by the Russians, invaded Afghanistan in the 1830s. By chance, Eldred Pottinger, a British spy operating in Afghanistan, broke his cover, offered his assistance to the amir, and led the Afghan army in a successful defense of the country. Rather than establishing closer ties with Great Britain, which currently dominated India to the south, this incident instead provoked a British invasion. Britain did not fear Afghanistan itself, but worried that its domination by Russia would pose a potential threat to India. When Dost Mohammed refused to grant Britain the concessions it demanded, the British decided to put in place a more amenable ruler in his stead. Shah Shuja, Britain's chosen nominee, was of the ruling line Dost Mohammed had overthrown, but he

was weak and therefore despised by the Afghan population. British forces invaded in late 1838 and by August 1839, Dost Mohammed was in exile and Shah Shuja was on the throne. The British army proceeded to put down pockets of resistance around the capital city of Kabul, and the tribes they did not defeat, they pacified with bribery. When in 1841 the bribes stopped, so did tribal cooperation. The British forces in Afghanistan found themselves surrounded in isolated forts, and the Afghans proved themselves able snipers, picking off unwary defenders. This uprising, coupled with the murder of the British ambassador, provoked another invasion.

The British in Kabul decided to flee for India. In January 1843, 4,500 British and Indian soldiers and civilians, along with some 10,000 Afghan supporters, abandoned the city. Only one British soldier made it to the border fort at Jelalabad; the rest were killed by the Afghans. The First Afghan War (as it came to be known) set a pattern for future intervention in the rugged country. A relief army from India forged the Khyber Pass, a feat no other power had ever accomplished, relieved the besieged Jelalabad, and then marched on Kabul. They released British prisoners held in Afghan confinement and burned the Great Bazaar, then marched home. Afghanistan was once again free of outside occupation, and Dost Mohammed returned to power.

The British failed to learn from history. In 1879, they once again attempted to place an envoy in Kabul, hoping to direct Afghanistan's foreign policy and keep out yet another Russian threat. One of Dost Mohammed's sons, Shere Ali, refused Britain's demands and, like his father, fled another army that marched into Kabul. Shere Ali died escaping to Russia, but one

of his brothers, Yakub Khan, was installed as amir with British sufferance. By bowing to British pressure, Yakub Khan incurred the wrath of his people, who once again rose up, slaughtering the envoy and the British soldiers in the Residence of the British representative in the capital. Another relief force from India made its way to Kabul and exacted justice for the British envoy, but soon found itself surrounded and cut off from communication with India. A relief force from the fortress town of Kandahar fought through to Kabul, then learned that Kandahar had been besieged in their absence. Troops from Kabul marched back and recaptured the town. Now seemed like a good time to take everyone home, and the British retreated.

Once again rid of foreigners, the new Amir Abd-ar-Rahman Khan created a standing army and by diplomacy settled his borders with both Russia and British India. All was peaceful until 1919, when a new amir, supported by Afghan nobles, declared war on Britain. Since the British were busy with Indian independence movements, they quickly negotiated a settlement whereby Great Britain recognized Afghan sovereignty. Free from outside threats, the Afghans turned upon each other. Rulers came and went over the next several years, all overthrown and either killed or forced into exile. Although the Afghans established friendly relations with Germany, Italy, and Japan in the 1930s when World War II broke out, they declared themselves neutral. After the war they joined the United Nations.

In 1947 another border dispute flared. The newly formed nation of Pakistan had a large ethnic Pathan population, people closely related to Afghans. When Pakistan would not allow the Pathans a referendum on self-rule, Afghanistan protested and began supporting Pathan insurgents demanding their own homeland, Pashtunistan (or Pathanistan). When the United States established friendly relations with Pakistan and offered military aid, Afghanistan began leaning toward the Soviet Union. With Soviet financial aid, the Afghan government began modernizing the country, but famine in the late 1960s and early 1970s brought aid from around the globe.

Internal political squabbling led to more changes of government, still through violent means, until a revolutionary council established a socialist-style republic in 1978. When devout Muslims in this predominantly Shi'ite country revolted, the new government sought Soviet military assistance. In December 1979, a Soviet-supported coup killed Afghan Prime Minister Hafizullah Amin and Soviet troops occupied the country. Their experience, 100 years after the last British incursion, would be no more successful.

As many as 118,000 Soviet troops were sent to Afghanistan, but they could do little more than hold the major cities and roadways. The Afghan tribesmen, who had harassed and ultimately embarrassed the British, proceeded to do the same to the Soviets. With covert military aid from the United States, the Muslim tribesmen controlled the mountainous countryside and the best Soviet attempts could not break them. In 1989, the disillusioned Soviet government withdrew all its combat troops, and once again the Afghans continued to fight among themselves. The blood of centuries of conquerors seems to have bred in the Afghan people the ability to fight; history has forced on them an ample opportunity to exercise that ability.

References: Adamec, Ludwig, *Dictionary of Afghan Wars, Revolutions, and Insurgencies* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1996); Bilgrami, Ashgar, *Afghanistan and British India* (New Delhi: Sterling Press, 1972); Farwell, Byron, *Queen Victoria's Little Wars* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972); Jones, Seth, *In the graveyard of empires: America's war in Afghanistan*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., ©2009).

Afrika Korps

An outstanding unit of the Nazi army in North Africa in World War II.

Geography and terrain are always important when armies meet on the battlefield, and this was especially clear in North Africa during World War II. The desert environment determined the way war was fought in that campaign. Soldiers not only fought the enemy; they

fought the elements as well. Temperatures rose above 100 degrees in the daytime and fell below freezing at night. Sand permeated everything from equipment to food and clothing. The fierce sun bleached uniforms and caused heat waves to dance on the sand, which sometimes prevented seeing farther than 1,000 yards.

The Mediterranean coastline with its sparkling waters was beautiful, but inland was a sterile, desolate, and forbidding desert. Rather than sand dunes, a hard crusty ground littered with rocks and boulders was typical. Maps were unreliable and the absence of landmarks made navigation difficult; men separated from their units could become lost and perish. Some parts of the desert rose in impassable escarpments or sank in depressions many miles across. Desert warfare employed new tactics using mechanized equipment—the tank, armored car, and self-propelled gun—in swift attacks. To take and hold territory required large quantities of supplies, so the main objective was simply to destroy the enemy. The opposing armies had to maneuver quickly, trying to flank their opponents and attack from the rear or side. The main consideration was always supplies. If an army raced forward too quickly, it might outrun its supply lines and become immobilized, which would lead to a counterattack.

Soldiers shared the desert with snakes, scorpions, lizards, and millions of flies and sand fleas. Large movements of vehicles and troops stirring up the dust gave away their positions. The dust got into the men's eyes, noses, and mouths, and penetrated into the food and water. Worse, it fouled engines and equipment, including rifles and cannons. Sandstorms were fierce and would stop most advances, causing the men to seek shelter in tents or vehicles until the storm passed. The sand, whipped by winds of 60 miles per hour or more, could strip the paint from vehicles and feel like pinpricks on the skin. It could reduce visibility to a few feet and make breathing impossible without covering the mouth and nose. Despite these conditions, the men of the German Afrika Korps under Field Marshall Erwin Rommel conducted a war in North Africa that almost beat the Allies.



Erwin Rommel, the "Desert Fox," leader of the Afrika Korps.

The men of the German Afrika Korps, who had been given no desert training, became hardened to the desert conditions as they fought. They were supplied at most only one gallon of water per man per day for drinking, cooking, and washing. They then saved the dirty water to be used in the vehicles. The army did not issue equipment for protection from the sun, such as sunglasses or lotion to protect the skin. Soldiers were originally issued pith helmets, but they soon discarded these in favor of cloth caps. They also wore shorts as part of the standard uniform. Soldiers soon found their skin chapped by the desert winds. Their lips cracked and their eyes became bloodshot from the piercing sunlight. Everyone was sunburned. Night brought no relief. The men, having sweated all day, would now shiver with the cold. Flies tormented the men by day, and sand fleas emerged at night to swarm the men, causing sores that were slow to heal.

The need for speed and mobility meant long, fast drives to reach a battle. Soldiers often steered their vehicles in a daze for lack of sleep. Sleeping at the wheel might only be interrupted by hitting another vehicle or a random boulder or being stuck in loose sand found off the main track. Moonless nights and the policy of driving without headlights caused men to lose sight of vehicles ahead of them and become lost in the vast desert. They would then be at the mercy of enemy air attacks when daylight came.

German soldiers were fed meager rations consisting of biscuits, cheese, and canned sardines. Canned meat was occasionally available, but was tough and tasteless. There was never enough water, and thirst was a constant companion; there were periods when water was rationed to one half cup per day. The Afrika Korps captured food and supplies from the enemy. Fuel was also obtained from enemy fuel dumps captured in battle. Both armies used captured vehicles, and cannibalized parts from vehicles that were no longer usable.

The equipment was as susceptible to the harsh conditions as the men. Tanks went only 1,500 miles before requiring an entire overhaul, one-fourth the time of those in a normal environment. Moreover, vehicles became bogged down in sand and the men had to wrestle with machines that the sun rendered too hot to touch with unprotected hands. The heat required columns to halt in order to allow engines to cool, and there were delays while crews cleaned clogged air and fuel filters. After a long night's drive and a daytime battle, men would refurbish their equipment and prepare for the next day's battle. The average soldier might get three hours of sleep in every 24.

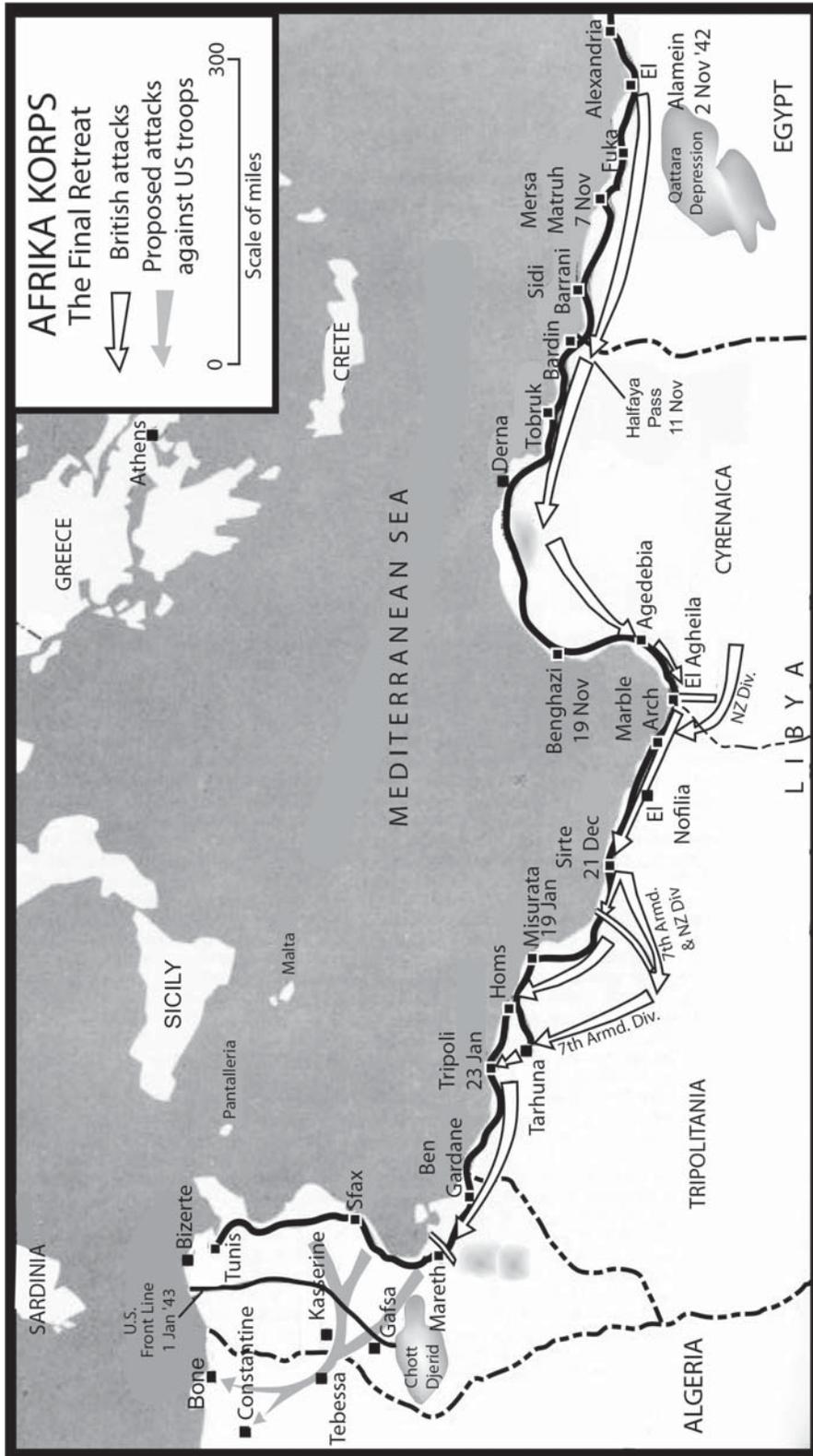
The desert's lack of cover made fighting very dangerous. Men in armored equipment had some protection, but the supporting infantry were at the mercy of enemy fire. Barbed wire and trenches surrounded emplacements. In addition, mines were laid in minefields that stretched for miles with only a few clear paths through them. Infantry advanced with armor, and in the confusion of battle the soldiers had to stay alert to avoid being run over by their own

tanks. Infantry also tried to avoid the tanks because they invited enemy fire. Though the tank provided cover, an exploding tank could kill everyone around it.

Tank crews, although better protected than infantry, were not immune to destruction. Survival depended on the thickness of the tank's armor versus the shell being shot at it. A penetrating shell could ignite the ammunition or fuel in the vehicle, and all inside would perish. Tank crews worked in steel ovens. The big gun would add to the heat, and the tremendous noise required crews to talk with each other by intercom. Because the shimmering heat waves at midday cut visibility, the armies fought most battles at dawn or dusk. Fighting caused smoke and dust to obscure the battlefield. In addition, identification of the enemy was confusing because both armies used captured vehicles. Tank commanders needed good visibility, so they often opened the hatch and stood up in their turrets, risking death.

After nightfall, with the battle over, commanders shot flares into the sky to show lost units where to regroup. This was a time for tank crews to do maintenance or repair on the tanks and to rearm and refuel. There would also be guard duty or other tasks to perform, limiting the sleeping time of the troops to just a few hours because they frequently had to go back into action before dawn the next day. The British tank crews were usually on the line for a week before becoming exhausted, but Rommel kept his men in action for two weeks at a time or longer.

The Afrika Korps was an elite group led by an unusual leader. Rommel was revered by his men and acquired the nickname "Desert Fox." He had no hesitation about visiting the front. During one engagement, he piloted a light plane over the battlefield alone to understand the battle for himself. Rommel's assumption of command in North Africa changed the entire nature of the war there. The British, who had easily dominated the Italians and had success against earlier commanders, found Rommel's audacious moves almost impossible to counter. For example, the port city of Tobruk, which



had resisted Axis capture for 26 months, fell to the Afrika Korps under Rommel in 26 hours. Repeatedly, Rommel defeated the Allied armies and caused England's prime minister, Winston Churchill, to remark that he was a formidable general. Rommel would not be stopped until September 1942 when a lack of supplies from Germany doomed his final drive on Alexandria and Cairo that threatened the Suez Canal. The combination of better-supplied British forces in Egypt and the arrival in early November 1942 of American forces to his rear doomed the Desert Fox to a fighting withdrawal and quashed the Axis plans to control North Africa.

References: Barnett, Correlli, *The Desert Generals* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982); Bianco, Richard L., *Rommel, the Desert Warrior* (New York: Julian Messner, 1982); Mitcham, Samuel W., *Rommel's Desert War: the Life and Death of the Afrika Korps* (New York: Stein and Day, 1982).

Akkadians

City-state of Akkad, located in ancient Mesopotamia.

The Akkadians were perhaps history's first warrior peoples. Certainly, they had one of history's first professional armies. Akkad was a city-state in ancient Mesopotamia, in today what would be southern Iraq, and along with the city-state of Sumer dominated the area. However, Akkad eventually eclipsed Sumer in economic and military power, and is often credited as being the first empire of that area, and probably the first great empire in human history. It existed from about 2350 BCE to perhaps 2150 BCE.

The Akkadians first gained prominence under their king, Sargon the Great (2334-2279 BCE). In his 50 years in power he launched 34 military campaigns and conquered most of the city-states of the region, consolidating them into the Akkadian Empire. Eventually this empire would stretch from the Persian Gulf south to the Mediterranean Sea and northeast to the Taurus Mountains. Under later rulers such as Naram-Sin Akkadian military forces conquered

foes, quelled rebellions, guarded trade routes and maintained order in "the first multi-national empire in the world."

When Sargon rose to power, professional standing armies did not exist. Sumer had been the dominant power of the region but it appears the Sumerians depended mostly on a militia levee forces, and in time of emergency every able-bodied male was expected to contribute to the defense. Although Sumerians forces certainly had a degree of training, they did not possess a true professional army. This was the first of two great innovations that can be attributed to the Akkadians.

When Sargon rose to power, Akkad had a palace guard, much like the house carls of the medieval period, but initially they probably did not number over a thousand men. The king expanded this number dramatically, and soon Sargon boasted that "5400 men eat bread daily before" me. These professionals served as the cadre for the larger forces he could call up for campaigns, and he might have been able to field 15,000 or more men for significant periods of time.

It appears that Sargon built upon the Sumerian model in that he organized his army into distinct unit types, both infantry and chariots. He fielded heavy infantry armed with shields and short copper-headed spears who fought in a tight phalanx formation six men deep. These units would form the battle line, advancing on the enemy and pinning them in place, or standing on the defense constituting an unbreakable perimeter. Other infantry formations may have been organized in looser formations, and armed with sickle-swords. These probably were held as reserves or pursuit units.

Since Mesopotamia was crisscrossed by numerous rivers, the Akkadian army must have contained some sort marine transports when on campaign, and since many cities were taken by assault some sort of engineer units must have been utilized also.

Four-wheeled chariots pulled by four *onagers* (asses) with a two-man crew had formed the elite mobile strike arm under the Sumerians, but there is evidence that Sargon may have



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