HISTORICAL CORNER

MARCH 2015

WAR THUNDER

[REGISTER]

[ACE OF THE MONTH] Lt.Gen. Vasily Fedorovich Golubev

2. March - Author: Mark Barber

Vasily Fedorovich Golubev was born in 1912 in Kamenka, near Leningrad in the northwest of modern day Russia. Growing up in a rural environment, Golubev's father encouraged him to seek employment in the city and so he moved to Leningrad as an adolescent, finding work in a factory. However, the young Golubev dreamed of a life as a pilot and so applied to join the military – he was first rejected for being too young and then, two years later, rejected again on medical grounds.

Undeterred, Golubev joined the Soviet army as a private soldier at the age of 21 – he became a parachute instructor and also learned to fly gliders in his spare time. This led on to flying, and eventually instructing on powered aircraft. The determined Golubev still would not let go of his dream to fly as a military aviator and was eventually transferred across for formal pilot training in 1939.

Unsurprisingly haven already gained experience privately as an instructor, Golubev's grades during training were excellent and he qualified in 1940, being selected for fighters.

By the time of the German invasion, Golubev was flying I-16s as part of the Baltic Fleet; during the summer of 1941 he transferred across to the 13th IAP (Fighter Aviation Regiment). On June 28th he shot down a Junkers Ju 88; a Bf109E fell to his guns only a few days later. However, on July 13th he misidentified an enemy aircraft a Ju 88 and carried out a head on attack – only to find he was nose to nose with a Bf110. Golubev only just managed to nurse his shattered aircraft back to his airfield. The 13th IAP continued to bravely face the superior German fighters in their outclassed I-16s – he was shot down again in August and spent a month recovering in hospital.

Golubev's bad luck was not over – after recovering he returned to his unit to find they had already retreated. He found a damaged I-16 with no guns and decided to use it to catch up with his comrades: he was again shot down and had to swim to the shore of Lake Ladoga after ditching. In October Golubev was detached to the Hanko peninsula to defend Soviet shipping from Finnish and German air raids. Golubev scored several victories against Finnish aircraft but the Soviet fighter pilots found themselves struggling against the new Bf109F which appeared in the area with the Luftwaffe.

An I-16 in WT, one of the aircraft used by Golubev during his early career

A string of casualties suffered by the regiment resulted in personnel being reallocated, and Golubev was given command of the 3rd squadron of the 13th IAP in January 1942. He wasted no time in implementing a number of changes: he formalized the pre-flight briefing process to make sure his pilots were fully versed in what was expected of them and how they fitted into the plan for each task; whilst on patrol he staggered his squadron in pairs at various altitudes to cover a large area and ensure that as many pairs as possible would be covered from above and behind. He also noticed that German aircraft would often position themselves to attack Soviet aircraft that were returning home when low on fuel and ammunition – Golubev ensured that adequate protection was provided for these vulnerable aircraft who were heading for home.

His efforts paid dividends almost immediately – the 3rd Squadron quickly became the most successful in the regiment. On March 12th Golubev shot down two Bf109Fs in a single

engagement – one crash landed at the 3rd Squadron's aerodrome; the pilot – a 26 kill ace – died shortly afterwards. He was Golubev's 15th victory.

A late war La-7 in WT, the aircraft Golubev was using at the end of the war

Only days later, the 13th IAP was recognised for its valour and success when it was redesignated the 4th Guards Fighter Aviation Regiment. In autumn Golubev became the regiment's Second-in –Command and shortly after this he was awarded the gold star medal of Hero of the Soviet Union. In January 1943 the regiment was finally withdrawn from combat to re-equip with the Lavochkin La-5 fighter. This was long overdue as the regiment had been fighting on with the obsolete I-16 – although even with this outdated fighter, Golubev had managed to shoot down two Focke-Wulf FW190s. At the controls of the new fighter, Golubev's victories against German and Finnish foe alike continued. By the end of the year, Golubev had been given command of the 4th GIAP.

Although now taking more of a leadership role, Golubev continued to fly on operational sorties. In February 1944 he shot down a Bf110 – his 38th kill – but the enemy aircraft exploded so close to Golubev's fighter that pieces of the Bf110 were found in the Soviet fighter's wing and engine cylinders, and the explosion itself damaged the Soviet ace's left eardrum. In June 1944 Golubev claimed his 39th and last victory – an FW190 – over the Gulf of Finland.

Golubev continued to serve in the VVS until the end of the war, his regiment finishing the conflict on the La-7 fighter. He then elected to remain in the military. In 1951 he graduated from the Soviet General Staff Academy and then commanded the Air Division of the Northern Fleet. He retired as a Lieutenant General and would later become a senior lecturer at the General Staff Academy as well as acting as a senior defense advisor to Egypt between 1968 and 1970.

Remembered perhaps more as a great leader of men and inspired tactician over his accomplishments as a fighter pilot, Vasily Fedorovich Golubev was twice awarded the Red Star of Hero of the Soviet Union as well as the Order of Lenin on two occasions and the Order of the Red Banner on no fewer than seven occasions. Having flown 589 sorties during the Great Patriotic War and shot down 39 aircraft individually and 12 shared (although some sources cite different numbers) he passed away on April 17th 2001.

Panzerkampfwagen IV Ausf. C - Number 24 with Prague writing on side camouflage created by JoKeR_BvB09 | Download here!

[VEHICLE PROFILE] PzKpfw IV Ausf.C

3. March - Author: Jan "RayPall" Kozák

The medium tank Panzerkampfwagen IV (ordnance inventory designation Sd.Kfz.161), was a reliable workhorse forming the backbone of German armoured forces during the whole Second World War. It has its roots in the first half of the 1930's: in that time, German strategists were actively developing theories of modern tank warfare and from these ideas a requirement for two types of tank emerged. The first was to be armed with an anti-tank gun, allowing it to engage enemy armour, while second, heavier design was to be an infantry support tank used to destroy field fortifications and machine gun nests. The first requirement eventually resulted in the creation of the PzKpfw III medium tank, while the second branch of development was a basis for the future PzKpfw IV.

Panzerkampfwagen IV Ausf. C

Technical specifications were created in 1934 and called for a weight of 18 tonnes, armament of one 7.5 cm gun placed in a fully revolving turret and two machine guns. The crew was to be five men – each of them with their own function. This crew layout was

quite revolutionary since in most contemporary tanks (such as the Soviet T-26, or French H-35), crew members had to fulfill more than one role, reducing combat effectiveness and increasing workload.

Three companies joined the tender for serial production of the new vehicle – MAN, Rheinmetall-Borsig and Krupp. Krupp eventually emerged victorious with its project Vskfz.618, later renamed PzKpfw IV Ausf.A. The resulting vehicle successfully passed trials and serial production started in October 1937, but this was soon replaced in March 1938 by the Ausf.B variant.

The PzKpfw Ausf.C - the third serial production variant and subject of interest for this article - was produced from October 1938. Compared to the Ausf.B variant it was only a slight modification. As with the Ausf.B, the vehicle was propelled by a Maybach HL 120 TR gasoline V12 engine, producing 300 HP and controlled via frontally placed transmission system (later Ausf.C series were equipped with improved HL 120 TRM engine). Hull frontal armour with a thickness of 30 mm remained the same as on Ausf.B, but the turret's front (originally 20 mm thick) was reinforced to 30 mm. Side and rear armour of both the hull and turret were 15 mm thick. The total weight of the Ausf.C was 18 tonnes and the engine allowed it to reach a maximum speed of 35 kph. The crew consisted of five men – commander, driver, gunner, loader and radio operator.

As a main armament the tank carried a low-velocity short-barrelled 7.5 cm KwK 37 L/24 gun. While not designed to be used as an anti-tank weapon it was able to fire K.Gr.rot.Pz. armour piercing shells, able to penetrate 33 mm of armour sloped to 30 degrees at a range of 1500 meters. Secondary armament consisted of one coaxially mounted 7.92 mm MG 34 machine gun. The ammunition supply consisted of 80 shells for the main gun and 2700 rounds for the machine gun.

Production of the Ausf.C variant ended in October 1939 with 1940 vehicles produced, being replaced in production by the improved Ausf.D. The Ausf.C participated in the invasion of Poland and was used during the Battle of France where it encountered French and British tanks such as Matilda II or Char B1 bis , against which it was significantly under-armed and under-armoured. It nevertheless paved the way to more advanced PzKpfw IV variants.

In War Thunder, the PzKpfw IV Ausf.C is a German rank I medium tank with a BR of 1.3. Frontal armour protection is 30 mm thick on both the turret and hull, with side and rear armour being 15 mm thick. Its KwK 37 L/24 gun has a 3.7 second reload time with a fully trained loader, and is able to penetrate 45 mm of armour at point-blank range and 30 mm at a range of 1000 meters. You can, however, unlock Hl.Gr.38B HEAT shells, offering 80 mm of penetration at all ranges in exchange for reduced ballistic performance. The maximum speed of the tank is 35 km/h, which it can reach in 7 seconds on a flat surface.

Regarding gameplay, the PzKpfw IV Ausf.C can be a difficult tank to use. The reason is that while armour and speed are comparable with other tanks of its rank, the gun clearly shows its roots as an infantry support weapon, not designed to fight enemy armour. With its low muzzle velocity and low penetration values of basic ammunition, compared to 37 mm and 45 mm guns of the Ausf.C's opposition, many players choose the PzKpfw 38(t) instead, as it offers the same BR, only slightly worse armour and a gun better suited to the anti-tank role. Despite it's difficult handling, however, the standard ammunition on the Ausf. C can cause devastating damage with a penetrating hit, primarily due to it's size, mass and comparably high amount of explosives.

Thanks to its fast reload times, the Ausf.C can be a surprisingly effective frontline brawler, effectively crippling or destroying enemy tanks in close combat. In this role it's essential to dispatch the enemy before he can fire – your flat armour will not be convincing at all on point-blank range. The armour-piercing capabilities of your standard APCBC shell is often more than enough on close ranges, depending on the enemies you face, and you will soon notice the rewarding damage of a succesful penetrating hit.

Especially with it's HEAT ammunition and a skilled player, the Ausf.C can be a great tank. HEAT ammo is difficult to aim due to its very low muzzle velocity, but its superb penetration, unmatched by anything in its rank, renders any enemy armour protection useless. If you prefer a safer playstyle, you can lob HEAT shells from afar – this is difficult task to do but as HEAT ammo does not lose penetration over distance, you can destroy targets afar as well as up close and your armour can bounce a hit or two from longer distances. Engaging moving targets is however very challenging.

Overall, the PzKpfw IV Ausf.C suffers from its roots as an infantry support tank, but if you pass the challenges of the difficult handling of its ammunition, you can put both its APCBC and HEAT shells to good use - and both will yield great results if used properly. Further research then moves you to another part of the PzKpfw IV line – the PzKpfw Ausf.E, sporting additional armour and improved HEAT rounds.

Modules and Crew in PzKpfw IV Ausf.C

In a future update, we will introduce the "Devils Head" insignia from the 31st Panzer Regiment, 5th Panzer Division, made by Branislav 'InkaL' Mirkov

Indonesian Air Force P-51, camouflage created by __StrafeMike__ | Download here!

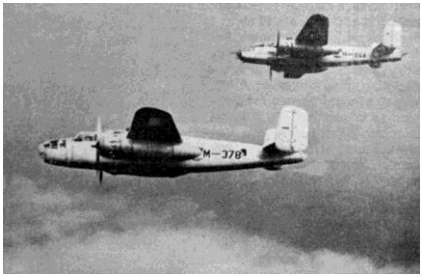
[AIR FORCES] Indonesian Air Force

4. March - Author: Joe "Pony51" Kudrna

A few hundred years ago, the vast oceanic archipelago of modern Indonesia had no identity nor social connections. Western exploration coined many names; the most common term for the time was the "East Indies", 'Indies' originating from the Greek romanized word "Indus" referring to the Indus River centered in Pakistan (also the origin for name India). The name "Indonesia" also originated from Indus, with the Greek word "nesos" for island. "Maritime Southeast Asia" and even "Malaysia" where other common names for this region.

The Dutch (Netherlands) had claimed and colonised these island and were extensively trading in spices and exotic goods, creating huge profits and making the Netherlands a superpower, calling its holdings the "Dutch East Indies". These activities also established many cities and communication links to the disparate islands, and a growing sense of national identity of the indigenous peoples.

A couple of centuries later, with the defeat of Japanese occupiers and its former Dutch rulers themselves ruined by the European conflict, the islanders seized the opportunity to declare their own independence from any foreign entity, effectively forming their own independant nation. Two days after Japan's surrender on August 15th 1945, a political activist named Sukarno declared independence under the chosen name of "Indonesia" in defiance of the Dutch.



B-25 Mitchell bombers of the Indonesian Air Force

Sukarno was perceptive enough to see the growing might of Japan, and made early connections with them. He worked to end colonial rule and establish a pro-Japanese domestic governance only as a means to create an independent Indonesia. Awash with Japanese equipment after their defeat, Indonesia quickly took control, and even a number of Japanese personnel joined the Indonesians, viewed as partners in the cause of liberation rather than occupiers thanks to Sukarno's efforts.

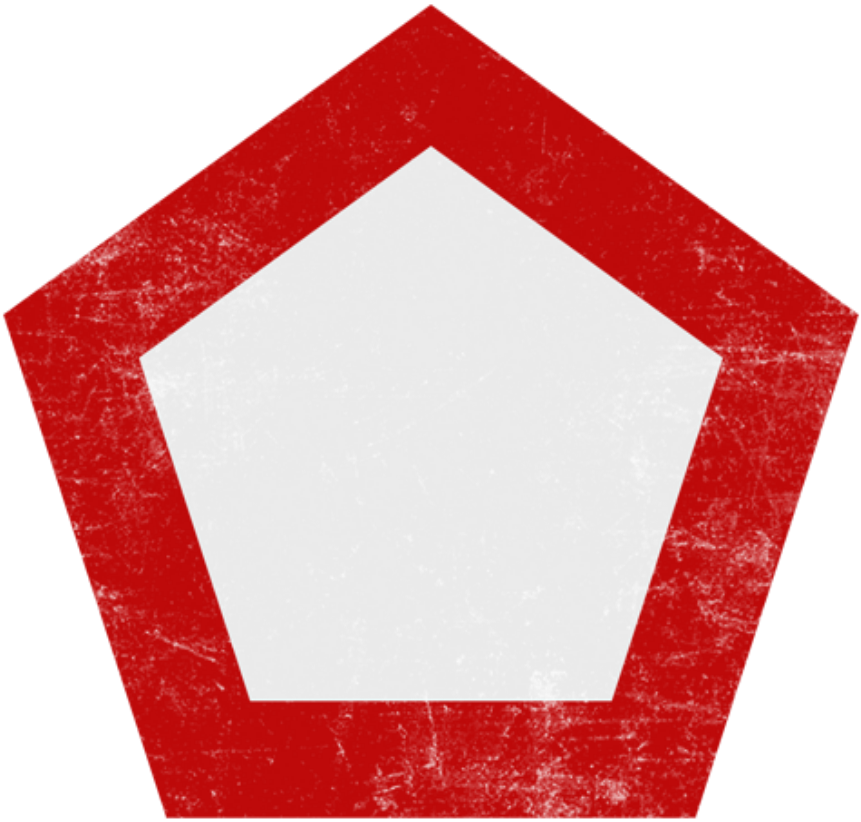
In short order Japanese aircraft were taken over; it was as simple as painting the lower half of the Japanese "Hiramaru" roundel white to serendipitously reflect the Indonesian flag. At best their collection was varied, with a mix of newer A6M series and Nakajima Ki-84 Hayate to older Ki-43 Hayabusa fighters and a variety of Mitsubishi bombers from the G3M to Ki-21 to Ki-67 and Nakajima Ki-49 Donryu, plus a handful of former American made Dutch aircraft. The Dutch quickly mobilized to regain control and soon launched air raids against the "rebel" fields destroying many aircraft on the ground; however they were not in a much better position and soon suffered air raids themselves as the Indonesians regrouped and launched effective counter attacks.

The Indonesian Air Force (Indonesian: Tentara Nasional Indonesia Angkatan Udara, TNI–AU) itself was formally founded on 9th April 1946 in the midst of the messy independence war as the fighting was not just against the Dutch with help from the UK, but also small areas seeking their own independence. Unable to secure power, and with growing international pressure, the Dutch finally capitulated in 1949, at which point the newly recognized and finally consolidated country of Indonesia was able to receive Spitfires, F4U's, P-40's, P-51's, B-25's, A-26's and its first jets: de Havilland Vampires.

Nakajima Ki-43 Oscar flown by the Indonesian side in the War of Independence

Unfortunately, instability continued, resulting in a more authoritarian

government and the movement to the Soviet sphere resulted in the acquisition of MiG-15s, 17s, 19s, 21s and Tu-16 bombers. An attempted coup weakened Sukarno, resulting in western leaning - General Suharto took power and an influx of modern western aircraft such as F-16's and C-130's. Due to questionable events in the 1990's and subsequent embargos the pendulum has swung again; since 2003 Russian made Su-27s and Su-30s are equipping its fighter fleet. Expect to see more variety in the air force of this dynamic nation.



In one of the future updates we will add Indonesian Air Force Roundel to War Thunder, made by Colin 'Fenris' Muir

F8F-1B from South Vietnam Air Forces, 1964. Camouflage made by Orest "TerremotO_" Tsypiashchuk. Available in game for 200 GE

[AIRCRAFT PROFILE] F8F Bearcat

5. March - Author: Adam “BONKERS” Lisiewicz

In War Thunder the F8F Bearcat is an Era IV US Naval Fighter. In game there are two versions of this particular model available – the F8F-1, armed with 4 .50 caliber M3 machine guns and the F8F-1B, armed with 4 AN/M3 20 mm cannons. The difference in armament is reflected in the Battle Ratings – the MG armed Bearcat has Battle Ratings of 5.0/5.7/6.0 (Arcade Battles/Realistic Battles/Simulator Battles), while the version equipped with cannons has a Battle Rating of 6.3 in all game modes. The in-game Bearcat retains many advantages of the real life counterpart. The F8F has very good acceleration and climb rate, thanks to its powerful engine. Because of that, it can quickly gain an altitude advantage over its opponents. Thanks to its high top speed, good wing endurance and good energy retention capabilities, the F8F is perfectly suited to energy fighting using Boom & Zoom tactics. A Bearcat pilot should avoid low speed dogfights, instead opting for a diving attack from above.

At first, the armament of the F8F-1 might seem lackluster – with 4 .50 caliber machine guns the firepower does not shine through. However, the M3 machine gun has the advantage of a superior rate of fire – coupled with API-T rounds, the F8F-1 might quickly become a problem for an enemy pilot. The F8F-1B is far better armed, featuring 4 rapid firing 20 mm cannons – an armament similar to that of the Mk.V Tempest. With both of those aircraft, staying in

convergence range is crucial – this way all four guns will hit the target. Also, because of the high rate of fire, the ammunition supply depletes quickly – so try to be selective and accurate with your shots.

Four Grumman F8F-1 Bearcats of fighter squadron VF-12A Fighting Twelve, 1948

In the F8F-1B Bearcat, you might encounter opposition in form of early jet aircraft such as the Mk.3 Meteor. These aircraft will have a better top speed than you do, but are far less maneuverable and have worse acceleration. While fighting jets, try to dodge their initial attacks while slowly luring them into maneuver combat. This way the jet pilot will lose most of its speed, making him an easy target for your guns.

Overall, the F8F in both its variants can be seen as the pinnacle of the US propeller driven aircraft. With its great speed, acceleration and solid armament, it will sure become a favourite fighter of many US pilots. Both Bearcats, along with the propeller F7F Tigercat, will lead you to the US Naval Jets – the McDonnell F2H Banshee and the Grumman F9F Panther.

The first idea for the creation of the Grumman F8F Bearcat was pitched after the Battle of Midway. Many pilots who took part in it remarked that one of the most important parts of naval air warfare was an aircraft's rate of climb. This of course meant that an increase in power was necessary. In 1943 the design work on the new aircraft began. The outline called for a fighter-interceptor, capable of operating even from small escort carriers. While the engine – the Pratt & Whitney R-2800 radial – was the same model used on the earlier F6F Hellcat, the new fighter would be lighter which also meant an increase in speed and climb rate. The concession was limiting the range of the new aircraft. The F8F would also feature a bubble canopy for better all around visibility. The first prototype, the XF8F-1, first took to the skies on the 21st August 1944. Further tests proved the aircraft's reliability and ruggedness, and the F8F was accepted into mass production. The first serial models rolled off the assembly line in February 1945 and were delivered to VF-19 fighter squadron, which began operating flights with the Bearcats in May 1945.

The new fighter, was, however, too late for any combat in World War II. After the war the situation of this propeller aircraft got even more

complicated thanks to the introduction of naval jet aircraft. Even though the F8F was one of the fastest propeller-driven aircraft of its time, it was clear that the jet age was dawning. The F8F was replaced in US Navy and USMC service by the F9F Panther and the F2H Banshee jet aircraft. Some Bearcats saw combat service with the French in French Indochina in 1951, when they were used in the CAS role against the Viet Minh troops.

Thailand also received a shipment of Bearcats which were then operated by the Thai Air Force. The F8F found a new life – thanks to its speed and acceleration - it was and still is widely used as a racing aircraft. One of the most famous racing Bearcats is the Rare Bear – a specially modified F8F, which holds many propeller aircraft speed and climb records.

In one of the upcoming updates, we will introduce "The Red Rippers", insignia used by VFA-11, made by Colin 'Fenris' Muir

F8F-1 Bearcat of CV-37, USS Princeton. Camouflage created by ZeroZeroZeven
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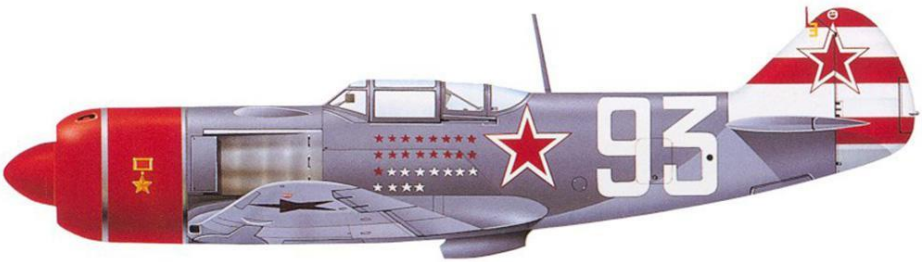


La-7 of Sergei Dolgushin, Hero of the Soviet Union. His regiment was stationed in Northern Germany at the end of the war

[WEAPONS OF VICTORY] Dolgushin's La-7

6. March - Author: War Thunder Team

Dear players! Today we are starting our article series “Weapons of Victory”, dedicated to the 70th anniversary of the Victory in Europe Day. Several unique vehicles will be added to the game as exclusive and we would like to brief you about them!

A native of the Tula region in the Soviet Union, Sergei Fedorovich Dolgushin’s War began on the 21st of June, 1941, when he shot down an enemy reconnaissance aircraft over Soviet territory. Second Lieutenant Dolgushin was a fighter pilot of the 122nd fighter aviation regiment, he participated in some of the most brutal battles during the early part of the war.

On May 5th 1942, Lieutenant Dolgushin was awarded the Hero of the Soviet Union title for heroism and courage . In 1943, Captain Dolgushin was the commander of the 32nd guard fighter aviation regiment. In September of the same year Sergei Fedorovich, already ranked as a Major, he went on to became the commander of the 156th fighter aviation regiment, which remained under his command until the end of the war. As a commander he of course received his aircraft with the best performing engine in his regiment.

The new appointment did not affect the intensity of Dolgushin’s combat operations he continued to fly actively. In September of 1944, Sergei Fedorovich was allocated a La-7 fighter with the identification number 93, his operational record ended in Northern Germany where Flight Lieutenant Colonel S.F.Dolgushin flew his last combat flight on the 6th of May, 1945.

During the war, Dolgushin achieved over 500 mission sorties and destroyed 17 enemy aircraft personally and 11 shared.

Hero of the Soviet Union Sergei Dolgushin, Commander of 156. IAP (middle), with pilot colleagues. From left to the right: Kislyakov A., Bayukov V., Dolgushin S., Kleschev A., Schipanov A. Picture taken on an airfield in Germany, April 25th 1945

'M103 Old Wolf' camouflage by STALINGRAD34RUS | download here

[HISTORICAL] The Heavy Tanks of the USA

6. March - Author: Adam "BONKERS" Lisiewicz

The initial appearance of heavy tanks in the United States armed forces can be traced back to the First World War. It was then that the cooperation between British and American engineers resulted in the appearance of the Mark VIII heavy tank, also known as the "Liberty Tank". At the same time, other American companies worked on different projects – this resulted in the creation of the Holt Gas-Electric prototype, as well as a steam-powered tank designed by the U.S Army Corps of Engineers. However, it was the Mark VIII that would ultimately be pressed into mass production and adopted into use by the Army. In the interwar period, the American affair with heavy tanks was cut short. The US War Department deemed heavy tanks as too unwieldy for a modern battlefield, and ordered the engineers to put more emphasis into designing mobile light and medium tanks. The development of heavy tanks was abandoned – this was also the reason why the Mark VIII stayed in service with the US Army up until 1936, when it was finally deemed as completely obsolete.

The outbreak of the Second World War, however, sparked a newfound interest in the heavy tank. With the reports of German Army victories in Europe, the need for a tank capable of supporting infantry and combating enemy armour seemed as high as ever. In May 1940, the Ordnance

Committee decided to pursue the development of a new, 50-ton tank.

The M6A1 Heavy Tank, the first heavy tank in the US Ground Forces research tree

At first it was supposed to be a multi turreted design, armed with a 75 mm main gun, a 37 mm auxiliary gun, a 20 mm cannon and 6 .30 caliber machine guns. However, the idea for a multi turreted tank was quickly dropped. After applying changes to the design, a wooden mock-up of the T1 Heavy Tank was presented in July 1940. The new design would only have one, fully traversable turret, equipped with both a 3 inch main gun and a 37 mm auxiliary gun. It was to be powered by the Wright G-200 engine developing 960 horsepower, coupled with a hydramatic transmission. The problem with the development of the hydramatic transmission led to delays, and finally it was substituted with a torque converter transmission. The new vehicle, designated as the T1E2, was completed by the Baldwin Locomotive Works in April 1941. It was presented to the top brass of the US Army on the 8th December 1941. The reception was favourable and the T1E2 was then accepted into production under the M6 designation, after some changes were applied to the design. The T1E3 prototype, featuring a welded hull, was also accepted under the designation "M6A1". However, tests of the vehicles found many issues with the new designs and the tanks never saw combat. There was also an attempt to up gun the tank with the new T5E1 105 mm gun. After installing a new turret, the prototype was designated as the M6A2E1. Its development was, however, stopped in August 1944.

Still, the USA did not give up on the concept of the heavy tank. In 1944 a few parallel projects of heavy tanks were in development. The first was the T28 heavy tank project, designed as a breakthrough and assault vehicle, armed with the T5E1 105 mm gun and frontally protected by nearly 305 mm of armour. Later on the designation was changed to the T95 Gun Motor Carriage, based on the fact that the vehicle was not equipped with a turret. After the completion of the prototype in August 1945, it was then tested at the Aberdeen Proving Grounds. The development of the vehicle was then, however, given a very low priority, and the T28 program was cancelled altogether in 1947.

The T32 Heavy Tank, an upgraded version of the M26 Pershing in War Thunder

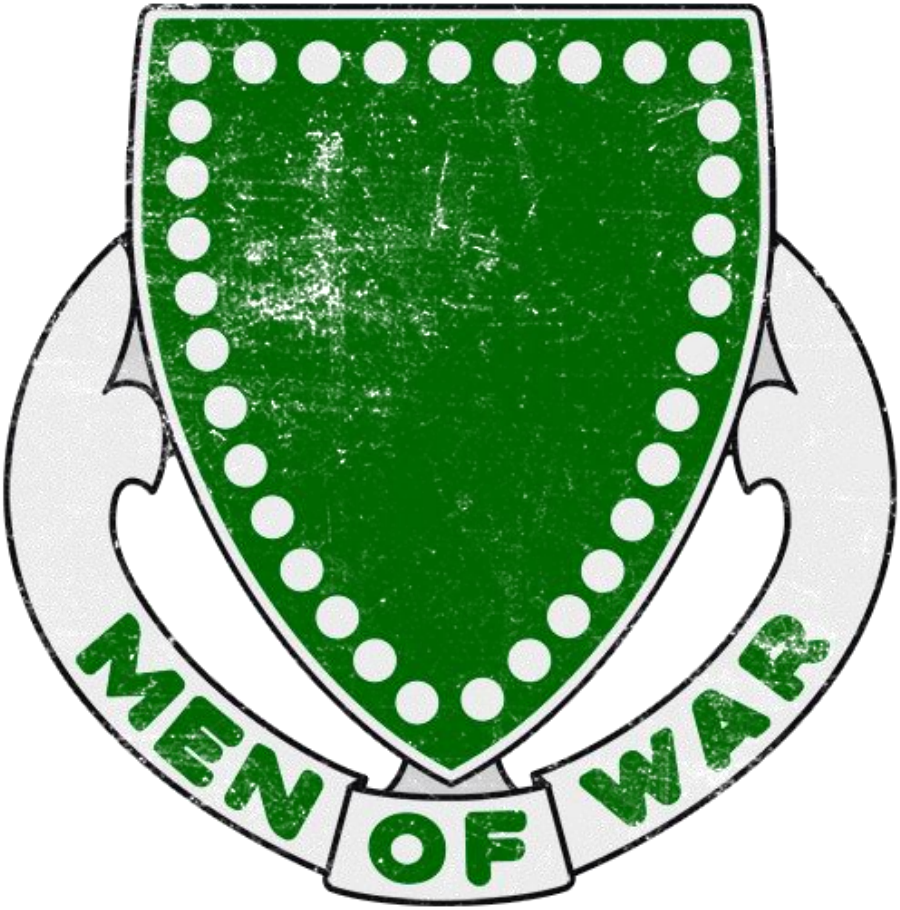
Another batch of designs emerged after reports of German heavy tanks such as the Tiger and Tiger II reached the US mainland. In September 1944 the order was placed for the manufacture of four pilots of heavy tanks – the first two were to be armed with the T5E1 105 mm gun, used on the M6A2E1 and the T28, and were designated as the T29. The other two prototypes were to be fitted with the 155 mm T7 cannon, and designated as the T30. Both tanks were powered by the Ford GAC engine and featured cross-drive transmission systems. The T29 was even ordered into serial production; however, the end of the war in Europe meant that the demand for a heavy tank diminished. Some of the prototype models of the T29 were later outfitted with the 120 mm T53 gun, and were redesignated as the T34. At the same time, the Ordnance Board was testing the possibility of manufacturing a heavy tank based heavily on the components of the M26 Pershing medium tank. This prototype became known as the T32 and was completed in 1946. None of these heavy tanks ever entered serial production; however they were used to test many new technological solutions that proved useful in the future.

After the new Soviet IS-3 heavy tank was unveiled during the Victory Parade in Berlin on the 7th May 1945, the American High Command became aware of the danger this new construction posed. Because of this the new War Department Equipment Review Board, also known as the "Stillwell Board", began work on selecting proper requirements for a new heavy tank capable of fighting the IS-3. In 1948 early work on a new heavy tank, designated as the T43, began. The design would feature a 120 mm gun similar to that on the T34 prototype, albeit lighter. In two years' time a full-scale mockup was ready. The outbreak of the Korean War put pressure on the designers; however, the 300 tanks were too late to join the conflict as they were finished in 1953. The tests conducted in Fort Knox uncovered flaws in the design and the vehicle was rejected by the US Army. In 1956 the T43E1 tanks were, however, standardized as the 120 mm Gun Tank M103 after changes were applied to the design. These tanks were later deployed in West Germany.

The M103 is the final development of the US heavy tanks in War Thunder

US designers experimented further – two M103 hulls were outfitted with new, oscillating turrets equipped with 120 mm guns coupled with an autoloading system. These prototypes were designated as the 120 mm Gun Tank T57; however the reliability

problems of the mechanism meant that the idea never took off. The advent of the Main Battle Tank also pushed the idea of a heavy tank into obsoleteness. In the 1960s, all development of heavy tanks in the US stopped.



With an upcoming update, we will include the Emblem of the 33rd Armored Regiment to War Thunder, made by Branislav 'InkaL' Mirkov

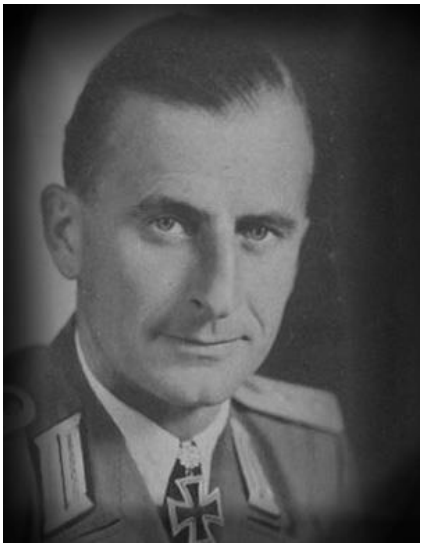
Premium Pz.Kpfw. III Ausf. N in desert camouflage. Available in game for 1000 GE

[ACE TANKER] Johannes Kümmel

9. March - Author: Sergej "NuclearFoot" Hrustić

Johannes Kümmel was born in Coswig, Saxony on the 21st July 1909. He started his military career as an infantryman in the 12th Infantry Regiment in the Reichswehr in 1928. In 1938, after the establishment of the Wehrmacht, he was transferred to the 8th Panzer Regiment as a Panzer III commander. A year later, at the rank of Oberfeldwebel (Staff Sergeant in English terminology), he was given command of his own Panzer platoon which took part in the Polish campaign. During the course of the campaign Kümmel managed to destroy several Polish tankettes, as well as a few tanks in the later stages of the campaign.

For his achievements, he was awarded the Iron Cross 2nd Class. However, that was not to be the end of his efforts.



Johannes Kümmel

After briefly taking part in the campaigns for France and the Lowlands, Kümmel was promoted to the rank of Hauptmann (Captain). After a short period of recovery due to an injury sustained during the campaign he was transferred, with his regiment, to the North African front to assist with Germany's Italian allies. While they were on the ship to Tripoli, Kümmel recalls having a frightening incident with a British submarine. Luckily, the escorts that were assigned to the convoy managed to chase it away with several depth charges, and the convoy reached its destination safely.

Kümmel's regiment then became part of the Deutsches Afrika Korps (German Africa Corps), commanded by the famed Erwin Rommel. Their main objective was to push back the British from North Africa. A turning point in this campaign was the battle for Halfaya Pass. This pass was located on the border of Libya and Egypt, and was practically the only direct route to and from the countries which was able to support a large amount of tanks and armoured vehicles.

With the Italian contingent of Capuzzo setting up camp in the nearby town of Sollum, the Germans had to hold the pass. There were three battles for Halfaya Pass, one of which Kümmel participated in. This one was dubbed "Operation Battleaxe" by the British, in which the British led a frontal attack on the fortified Halfaya Pass. In the chaos of the battle Kümmel destroyed 10 enemy tanks, forcing the British to retreat. This endeavour earned him the nickname 'The Lion of Capuzzo'. After being involved in a another operation in Cyrenaica he was awarded the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves (Only 882 people have ever received this medal) and was subsequently promoted to Major.

Afterwards, Kümmel was transferred to Southern Italy and was promoted to the rank of Oberstleutnant (Lieutenant Colonel), where he fought several battles. He was killed in a car crash in Cisterna, Italy, and was posthumously promoted to the rank of Oberst (Colonel).

Panzer III in North Africa

Premium M2A4 (1st Arm. Div.) available in game for 250 GE.
As an addition for this vehicle, you will receive a decal with the insignia of the "1st Armored Division - Old Ironside"

[VEHICLE PROFILE] M2A4 Light Tank

10. March - Author: Joe Pony51 Kudrna

After the troublesome development of the Liberty Mk. VIII tank by First World War allies, the American military belief in armour evaporated and did not pursue a new design for over a decade; however, research was conducted resulting in a key piece of technology: the Vertical Volute Spring Suspension made of conical curled flat springs which were superior to other springs. When a new effort into tank development was launched there was disagreement on how to use it: what it should have, who would use it, and even what to name it - eventually the newly developed vehicle was named the “Combat Car” because the Cavalry was forbidden to use it if was called a “tank”! The first models (later renamed the M1 Light Tank) had machine gun only turrets. After 113 were built, an improved but similar looking M2 was introduced with more MGs both in the hull and a single or double turret.

A M2A3 with dual turrets mounting machine guns, called the “Mae West” after the busty actress

The Spanish Civil War radically changed armour tactics highlighting the need for cannons and greatly increased their importance in battle, so a machine gun only equipped M2A3 was modified with a large octagonal turret mounting the M5 37mm cannon to become the pattern for all future American tanks.

In some ways America's armour design history matched Germany's, except that it had no actual restrictions on design and experimentation so the resulting M2A4 was more potent in the mid 30's. While the M5 cannon was equivalent to its contemporaries in Europe, the armour was better with a full one inch (25.4mm) all around, compared to other early light tanks with 10 to 15mm.

If the M2A4 feels like its flying across the battlefield, it is probably due to the aircraft engine powering it! The Continental R-670 radial engine with cooling fan produced a gracious 225 hp (168 kW) at 2,175 rpm for a 11.6 ton (26,000 lb) tank pushing this "sports tank" up to 58 km/h (36 mph) on a solid, flat surface, making it one of the fastest tracked vehicles in service anywhere. Being light it is also easy to slide ("drift") in hard turns.

The turret was also unique: a commander driven hand crank was used to turn it (also possible by the loader), but the actual aiming was done by the gunner pushing the cannon with his shoulder up to 20 degrees of transverse to aim it! Elevation was controlled by a hand operated gear, but that too could be unlocked for "push" movement (the game has limitations and uses all powered systems).

The Continental R-670 radial aircraft engine that powered the M2 - fast enough to launch itself off earth mounds

In the end, the M2A4 was practically obsolete when America entered the war on the 7th December 1941; only a few were sent to the Pacific theater. Its greatest contribution was to US tank design and helping to start it on the right track. From the M2 came improved versions - the very similar M3 and M5 Stuart light tanks and greatly modified and enlarged versions became the M3 and M4 medium tanks, the Lee/Grant and the Sherman respectively, all of which used the VVSS bogies to great advantage. It is interesting to note that all early American tanks were

designed and produced at Rock Island Arsenal, an island on the Mississippi river between Illinois and Iowa.

It is perhaps the easiest tank to play in the game, with its fast acceleration (20 km/h in about 4 seconds, 30km/h in 6s, 40km/h in 10s, and 48km/h in 15s), quick turns, “drifting” and good all around armour, one can play recklessly and come out a winner. Its main drawback is the 37mm cannon, outmatched even by other light tanks. The default M74 AP round is best at point blank with 51mm penetration at 10m. Although slightly better at range, the M51 APC has the bonus of 2 machine guns; a forward hull mount and a far more useful top pintle mount that can shoot down aircraft!

Upgrades are still a must but get “Protection” and “Firepower” before “Mobility”. If your crew has no XP, focus on the cheapest skill upgrades on all positions first to get Expert Crew as soon as possible.

This vehicle works just as well playing aggressive or cautious/stealth; the same all round armour has no weak side, so experiment freely. The cannon is the drawback and wide open maps are where it’s weakest, but in that case flank the enemy and hit their rear. In short, the game play can be summed up in one word: CHARGE! It is very common for players to drive right into an enemy tank and fire point blank while maneuvering to avoid the target’s cannon.

When attacking an M2A4 you may find it is a tough nut to crack no matter which side. Study the 3D model for weak points and take your time to aim at those, because it can quickly vanish from view.

Don’t be surprised if you see M2A4’s in high BR matches as it is a wonderful tank to race behind enemy lines and take out artillery and AAA positions, including player SPAA as most are lightly armoured (although they can fight back). Besides that they can call in arty, harass targets which the M2 has zero chance of disabling let alone destroying, and capture unguarded checkpoints.

Play hard, kick armour, have fun!

Modules and crew of the M2A4 light tank

'Panzerkampfwagen II, German Africa Corps' camouflage by JoKeR_BvB09 | download here

[GROUND FORCES] 21. Panzerdivision (Africa Corps)

11. March - Author: Aaron "anglomanii' Lentz

On the first of August, 1941, the 21st Panzer Division was formed. This unit was fortunate to be joined by the 15th motorcycle battalion and the 104th rifle regiment, the fearsome Flak 36 88mm guns were also brought under Rommel's direct leadership as part of the corps command.

The 21st panzers' formation emerged due to changes brought about by the aftermath of several battles during operation "Battleaxe". Changes to the command structures were ordered by the German Army High Command. In an attempt to bring Rommel under control, the OKH attempted to install a liaison command unit, with the Italian Comando Supremo and General Gariboldi. Rommel, seeing this threat to his independence, countered this move by appealing to General Von Brauchitsch to install the DAK as Panzergruppe Afrika. This now independent command gave Rommel the ability to build up his forces and undertake training directed at anti-tank operations and tank maneuver tactics. A key part of this was the unconventional use of the Flak 36 88mm guns as mobile anti-tank weapons; firing from their trailers in a direct fire role.

By September 1941, the 21st Panzers, under the command of General Johann Von Ravenstein, were ordered into their first action "A reconnaissance in force" as Rommel put it. In reality, it was an attempt to

seize a supply depot being built near the frontier for what was likely to be another allied offensive.

Generals Rommel and v. Bismack, North Africa, 1942

This was, however, a cleverly disguised trap, tempting Rommel with its promises of fuel and other delicacies of the desert war. The 21st Panzers strode into battle confident and eager. At the border, contact was made with the British 7th Armoured Division. These mobile forces refused battle with the 21st Panzers, until they ran out of fuel at the Sofafi camps. The trap was sprung, and the now immobile 21st panzers suffered heavily from airborne attacks, launched by the RAF and supported by it's Commonwealth partners.

The 21st Panzer Division would go on to take part in every major battle during the desert campaigns of North Africa, where the terrain and weather were often as much an enemy to German armies as were the Allied forces. Outcomes would be varied in battles between Allied and Axis forces. What ended up determining these battles, however, was to be the weakness of the Axis supply lines. Despite Rommel leading the 21st to astounding tactical victories, the loss the strategic situations which lead to lack in supplies of fuel, material, and manpower, seriously disadvantaged their fighting efficiency. Eventually, the 21st Panzer Division was defeated, surrendering its arms on the 13th of May, 1943.

From the dust of the desert to the mud and snow of the high mountains of Tunisia, with the now famous battles of Kasserine Pass and it's final offensive at Medenine, the 21st Panzer division proved time and time again the potential of well commanded combined forces using tanks, artillery and motorized infantry.

German vehicles on the move in North Africa

J2M3 Raiden, 352-37, 352 Flying Group, Japan, Kanoya AB, April 1945 camouflage by Ayy_Lmao | download here

[AIRCRAFT PROFILE] Mitsubishi J2M3 Raiden

12. March - Author: Jan "RayPall" Kozák

In September 1939, the Imperial Japanese Navy Air Service (IJNAS) command issued specification 14-Shi, requesting development of a new land-based interceptor aircraft, which would have good climb rate, good speed characteristics and would carry heavy armament to intercept and destroy enemy bombers - in Japan, it was quite a revolutionary requirement, as the new fighter would be designed for performance and firepower, instead of long range and agility, as was common at that time.

It was the Mitsubishi company, who answered this specification, and a new project was started under designation M-20. The prototype was built as an all-metal low-wing monoplane, powered by a Mitsubishi MK4C-A Kasei 13 air cooled radial engine with a power output of 1430 horsepower. Designers were trying to improve visibility over the bulk of the engine by using a tight cowling, so to prevent overheating, a ventilator was installed on propeller shaft, located behind the spinner which forced cooling air into the engine - this was the same system as on German BMW 801 radials. A wing with a laminar profile was used, equipped with Fowler-type flaps to improve maneuverability and stall characteristics. Armament of the prototype consisted of two 20mm

Type 99 Mk.1 Model 3 wing-mounted cannons and two 7.7 mm Type 97 machine guns in engine cowling. First flight occurred on 20th March, 1942 and immediately uncovered some design flaws - namely engine overheating, bad visibility from cockpit, an unreliable mechanism for propeller pitch and engine vibration. Nevertheless, the first three prototypes were accepted into service under designation J2M1 Raiden ("Thunderbolt"). It was soon followed by a J2M2 variant with a more powerful engine and many structural improvements over the original J2M1.

The most numerous variant and the main topic of this article was however the J2M3 variant. This version was powered by a Mitsubishi MK4R-A Kasei 23 radial engine mounted in an improved cowling. This powerplant was equipped with a water-methanol mixture injection system and had take-off power output of 1820 horsepower, propelling four-bladed propeller. The cockpit canopy was reworked, with a new windshield made from armoured glass being installed and other changes for improved visibility were incorporated. The armament was changed to four cannons - Type 99 Mk.1 cannons in inboard pair and Type 99 Mk.2 cannons with lower rate of fire in outboard pair. For fighter-bomber missions, a Raiden could carry two 60 kg bombs on underwing racks (these could carry one pair of 200 l drop tanks as well). Its maximum speed was 655 km/h at an altitude of 5304 meters, time to reach 6096 meters was 5 minutes, 36 seconds.

The first operational Raidens reached units at the end of 1943, with the first combat occurring in March 1944 over the Philippine Sea. Raidens were then often used in defence of Japanese home islands. In the hands of a skilled pilot, it proved itself as an effective interceptor, able to pose a threat not only for B-24 Liberator bombers, but against the faster and more advanced B-29 Superfortress as well. Albeit not designed as a dogfighter, it could also hold its own against American fighters, such as P-47, P-51, F4U or F6F, by using "boom-and-zoom" and energy fight tactics, utilizing its good rate of climb and heavy firepower. Lack of turbocharger however limited Raiden's high altitude performance, and at the end of war, Raidens were also plagued by low manufacturing quality and shortages of fuel and spare parts.

Mitsubishi J2M

Only a low number of J2M3's were built - 281 aircraft (counting 21 planes of J2M3a-21 Ko version with four Type 99 Mk.2 cannons). Some of them were captured by US forces, and

tested by American pilots. The Raiden was regarded positively by them - especially praising its cooling system.

In War Thunder, the Mitsubishi J2M3 Raiden is a Japanese rank IV fighter with BR 5.0 both in Arcade and Realistic Battles, and it's currently located in Japanese tech tree as a successor to Kawanishi N1K2-J fighter line-up. As its real-life counterpart, it is armed with two 20mm Type 99 Mk.1 cannons (190 rounds per gun, inboard pair) and two 20mm Type 99 Mk.2 cannons (210 rounds per gun, outboard pair), with total supply of 800 cannon rounds. Additionally, you can unlock underwing bomb racks, able to carry one pair of 60 kg bombs.

Performance-wise, Raiden's top speed at altitude of 5350 meters is 635 kph (657 kph on WEP), while at sea level, top speed is 551km/h (571 kph on WEP), Break-up speed is 800 kph. Time to climb to 3000 m of altitude is 161 seconds (135 seconds with WEP), and both horizontal and vertical turns are completed in 20 seconds at the speed of 535 kph and full throttle.

Regarding playstyle, Raiden is a pure Boom-and-Zoom fighter – a unique trait in the Japanese tech tree. In fact, if you are veteran Focke-Wulf Fw 190 pilot, you will feel like home in Raiden. Contrary to its German counterpart, the Raiden is however a much better climber - fully upgraded and with WEP, you can easily outclimb most of your opposition at given BR spread. With energy and altitude advantage (both things being crucial for Raiden) and in hands of experienced pilot, it can be a deadly fighter, striking unsuspecting opponents from above, pulverizing them by its four cannons, and then disappearing back into safety of high altitude. Staying at vertical is strongly recommended, as Raiden is not even remotely suited to turning dogfights. When you're unfortunate enough to be lured into a turning contest at low speeds, most of contemporary fighters will have no trouble outturning you.

Long story short, the Raiden is an energy fighter at its finest, and will provide you with heavy firepower, great climb rate and great energy fight capabilities. It is not aircraft for rookies, but if you can master it, you'll become a deadly menace to be reckoned with. Further research of Raiden then currently leads to exotic J7W1 Shinden fighter with its canard construction, high performance and deadly weaponry of four 30 mm cannons.

Note: All performance values measured in-game on RB difficulty. Used mouse-aim with automatic engine controls and full fuel load. Climb time measured from zero speed on runway, climbed at 20 degrees.

The premium I-153P biplane comes equipped with two ShVAK cannons. It can be purchased in-game for 950 GE

[HISTORICAL] Semyon Vladimirov, creator of the ShVAK

13. March - Author: War Thunder Team

Semyon V. Vladimirov was born on February 3rd, 1895 in the town of Klin near Moscow. In 1935, the Soviet engineer developed the heavy ShVAK machine gun, which he based on the 7.62 mm ShKAS from 1932. As a result of this, it was to become the first Soviet-built 20 mm automatic cannon which would be fitted to aircraft.

Despite the fact that the new weapon, which was designed between 1935 and 1936, was based on an already existing construction, it was still unclear how this new armament would perform in the air. It was also unclear how the installation of the ShVAK cannon would impact the flight characteristics of aircraft. Therefore, flight testing was allocated to famous pilot V.P. Chkalov. He tested the new weapon in a Soviet I-16, with the results showing favourable and successful outcomes. Thus, in 1936, the ShVAK entered series production.

Vladimirov, who was to become a renowned aircraft weapons designer in the Soviet Union, had been born into a family of railroad workers. It is thus not surprising that he followed in the footsteps of his parents and studied engineering at the 'Ivanovo-Voznessensk Mechanical and Technical College'. His working career was always closely related to engineering: as a mechanic for a

textile spinning mill, a locksmith, and a mechanic and technical constructor in the mines of Siberia and the Far East.

Semyon Vladimirovich Vladimirov

During the Russian Revolution, Vladimirov was a partisan fighter in the Altai, later joining the Red Army troops of M.V. Frunze. He experienced battle in Central Asia, and afterwards, on the Crimean peninsula, where he was assigned to lead a searchlight station fortress.

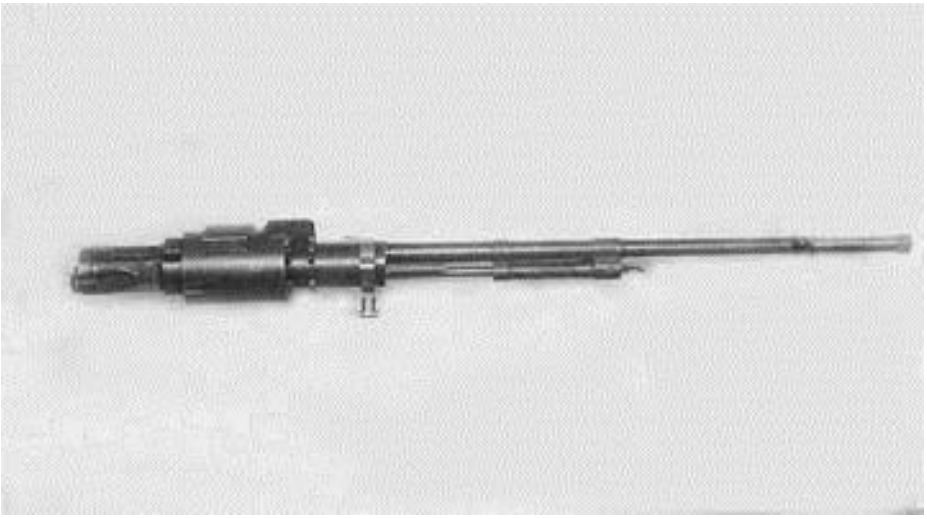
After he was discharged from the Red Army in 1922, Vladimirov travelled to Tula, where he worked as a locksmith in the Tula arms factory. His talented work was soon noticed, and he eventually became Senior Engineer for the Central Construction Office No. 15. In this position, Vladimirov worked on the creation of an automatic weapon designed to fire bullets which were originally intended for the Nagant revolver.

During the 1930s he continued his weapons development and worked on a new carriage for the Maxim infantry machine gun. This shielded tri-wheeled carriage was in use with the Soviet Red Army during the entirety of World War II. Besides infantry weapons, Vladimirov was also involved in the development of aircraft weaponry. From all his inventions, however, only the 12.7 mm and 20 mm ShVAK cannons went into mass production.

Not satisfied with resting on his laurels, in 1943 Vladimirov created a new heavy machine gun based on the B-20 automatic cannon, which used 14.5 anti-tank rifle bullets from the PTRD rifle. In 1944 this weapon, now named the 'CPV-44', went into series production and was installed on Soviet vehicles under the designation 'KPVT'. It remains installed on Russian military vehicles today.

Semyon Vladimirov was awarded multiple orders and medals for his work as a weapons engineer. In 1949, he was further awarded with the 'Stalin Premium of the First Degree', a monetary reward for extraordinary work for the benefit of the Soviet Union.

Vladimirov died in an accident on July 12th, 1956, where he was fatally injured while disassembling a machine gun of his own construction. He was buried in Kovrov.



The 'Shpitalny-Vladimirov large-calibre for aircraft' or 'Shpitalnyi-Vladimirov Aviatsionnyi Krupnokalibernyi' (ShVAK)

[WEAPONS OF VICTORY] M18 "Black Cat"

13. March - Author: War Thunder Team

The M18 Hellcat was a US tank destroyer in WW2. It was produced from mid 1943 till October 1944 and joined the Northern Europe and Italian theaters. The Hellcat had a modified chassis from the Chaffee light tank and the 76mm M1 cannon of the Sherman. Being very lightly armoured, the M18 was the fastest armoured vehicle in WW2 and and even for 2 decades after the war. The Hellcat was an extremely deadly tank destroyer - the most efficient in the U.S. Army. The M18 was highly vulnerable to German tanks and its gun could hardly penetrate the frontal armour of the Panther or Tiger, so any combat tactics relied on the vehicle's speed and maneuverability, the Hellcat was able to accelerate and change direction rather quickly so German tanks were left with both the flanks or rear exposed, unable to rotate their turret fast enough to counter the M18, the M1 cannon proved deadly to these vulnerable side profiles.

M18 Hellcat driving through the city

M18 Hellcats of the 805th Tank Destroyer Battalion (which operated in Italy) were some of the more colourful, the vehicles were marked with tactical numbers painted in black against white and also used a Tank Destroyer emblem - a black panther crushing a tank with its jaws on an orange disc. The naming practice was

to start the vehicle's name with the company letter. Thus the first vehicle of company B (5A-805 TD B-1) was named "Black Cat". This vehicle in the game will have the historically correct exteriors and interiors of the original vehicle.

Together with the vehicle, we will also add the three connected decals to War Thunder, created by Branislav 'InkaL' Mirkov

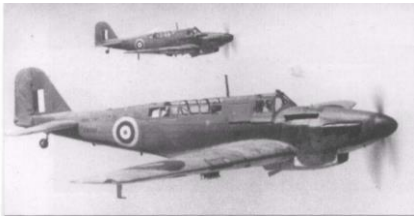
Premium Hellcat Mk.I in British Fleet Air Arm camouflage. Available in-game for 1300 GE

[ACE PROFILE] Cdr. Stanley Gordon Orr

16. March - Author: Mark Barber

Born in London on September 28th 1916, Stanley Gordon Orr grew up initially in a relatively affluent family as the son of a stockbroker. However, after the Wall Street crash, Orr was removed from his boarding school, and after finishing college, served an apprenticeship before working in the automotive industry. At the age of 19 he began work for Handley Page, and although he had always been interested in flying, it was here that his true passion for aviation developed.

After three years of working on the development of bomber aircraft, the 22 year old Orr applied to join the Royal Air Force as a pilot. He was rejected due to failing an eyesight test, but this did not stop him. With British maritime aviation having recently been passed back to the Royal Navy from the RAF, Orr applied to join the Fleet Air Arm. Anxiety developed as he queued to take the same eye test in the same examination room of the same medical building – however, this time he saw a different doctor and he passed the examination.



The Fairey Fulmar, a two-seat carrier fighter used extensively during World War II

Commissioned into the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve as a Sub-

Lieutenant, Orr initially undertook Naval General Training on HMS Argus, a converted ocean liner which became one of the world's first aircraft carriers in 1918. After carrying out his aviational training and qualifying as a pilot, Orr was selected as a fighter pilot, and carried out his role training on Sea Gladiators and Skuas with 759 Naval Air Squadron in early 1940. After completing his Deck Landing training, he then joined his first front line squadron – 806 NAS, equipped with Skuas and Rocs – in May, shortly after becoming married.

Cdr. Stan Orr

Initially flying from RNAS Hatston in the Orkneys, Orr first saw combat over Norway where 806 NAS was predominantly involved in bombing strikes against enemy infrastructure and anti-shipping sorties. His squadron then moved to RAF Detling in Kent to fly cover during the Dunkirk evacuation. 806 NAS then converted to the new Fairey Fulmar fighter before embarking onboard HMS Illustrious in June 1940.

It was coupled with this fighter, and his being stationed in the Mediterranean, that Orr's skill would flourish. On September 4th, off the Dodecanese islands, Orr shared in the destruction of a Savoia SM.81 bomber; two weeks later he shot down a Z.501 flying boat. By the end of the year he had claimed seven victories (combining his individual and shared claims) and had also been awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for his part in strike sorties against German positions in the region.

On January 10th 1941, HMS Illustrious was attacked simultaneously by two Italian SM.79 bombers and upward of 40 Ju 87 dive bombers of I./StG 1 and II./StG 2. Orr was already in the air with S/Lt Graham Hogg – the two Fulmar aces attacked the pair of Italian torpedo bombers and drove them away from the carrier before shooting one of them down. Both pilots expended all of their ammunition – with the Fulmar Mk.I

carrying 750 rounds per gun (over twice of the ammunition capacity of a contemporary Spitfire) this was testament to the robust build of the Italian bombers; or the unsuitability of the 0.303 round in air combat.

With his ammunition depleted, Orr was still determined to protect the carrier. He climbed through the dense barrage of AA fire and threw his fighter at the German dive bombers, forcing several to scatter and break off their bombing runs for fear of being targeted by the Fulmar. Despite the best efforts of the Fulmars, Illustrious was hit six times – the stricken carrier limped for Malta for emergency repairs.

Orr and his squadron-mates were now diverted to Hal Far in Malta. With Illustrious alongside in Grand Harbour, the Fulmars were kept busy on a regular basis as German and Italian bombers targeted the crippled carrier and the island itself. On February 5th, Orr shot down a Ju 88 which was attempting to return to base after attacking Malta. This would be one of five further claims which Orr would make over Malta, resulting in him being awarded a bar to his DSC

With Illustrious finally repaired to the point that is could travel for more substantial repairs elsewhere, 806 NAS embarked on HMS Formidable. Orr would fly cover for Fleet Air Arm bombers during the Battle of Cape Matapan, and claim another two victories before Formidable was also crippled by Stukas on May 26th. Formidable was forced to follow Illustrious with temporary repairs in Malta before heading to the United States for extensive repair work. 806 NAS moved to Dekheila in Egypt where, equipped with surplus RAF Hurricanes, they flew against Vichy French forces during the invasion of Syria.

In August 1941, with the remaining elements of 806 NAS being amalgamated into the No.269 Wing's Royal Navy Fighter Squadron, Orr was sent back to Britain for a break from operations after 18 months on the front line. He spent a year as an instructor at RNAS Yeovilton and was promoted to Lieutenant before being sent to the United States in August 1942 as Commanding Officer of the newly formed 896 NAS. After working his new squadron up on Grumman Martlets, Orr embarked on HMS Victorious in February 1943. However, Orr's command was short-lived: he contracted polio and spent several weeks in hospital at Pearl Harbor before being sent back to Britain.

The F6F Hellcat of US origin was also used by the 804 Naval Air Squadron

In August 1943 Orr, now a Lieutenant Commander, was given command of 804 NAS, flying Grumman Hellcats. Embarking on HMS Emperor in December, the Hellcats were involved in convoy protection duties throughout early 1944, as well as anti-shipping strikes off the Norwegian coast. In March, 804 NAS was assigned as part of the escort for Operation Tungsten – the Fleet Air Arm strikes against the Tirpitz. Orr commanded the second strike group and was awarded a second bar for his DSC.

Orr's combat swansong in World War II came on May 14th when a mixed formation of 800 NAS and 804 NAS Hellcats destroyed five Heinkel He115 floatplanes near Vikten Island. Orr was credited with one shared victory – his last, and also the last Luftwaffe aircraft to be destroyed by a Hellcat. He saw out the war as Chief Flying Instructor at RNAS Henstridge, followed by a period as a test pilot at Boscombe Down. He was awarded the Air Force Cross for his pioneering work in landing jet aircraft on carriers.

Orr's combat career was not over. He flew operationally during the Korean War, flying ground attack sorties from HMS Ocean. He returned to test flying and was promoted to Commander before retired from the Royal Navy in 1966. He passed away at the age of 86 in August 2003. He is credited with fourteen victories – six individual and eight shared.

M24 Chaffee, Grupos Blindados de Caballeria, Spanish Sahara 1957, camouflage made by TheHVos | download here

[VEHICLE PROFILE] M24 Chaffee

17. March - Author: Jan "Raypall" Kozák

During the early stages of the Second World War the US Army called for a new light tank which would replace the rapidly aging M5 Stuart. Specifications for the new vehicle demanded that it was to be armed with a 75mm gun, that the weight would not exceed 20 tonnes and that it was to use the same powertrain as the M5. Work on a new project, designated T24, started in April 1943 and a wooden mock-up was ready in May 1943. After approval from the US Army, production of two prototypes was ordered. The new vehicle made a good initial impression and the Ordnance Committee ordered serial production of 1000 vehicles under the designation “M24 Chaffee”, in honour of Lieutenant General Adna R. Chaffee Jr. Two plants were given the order for the production of the Chaffee – the Cadillac plant and the Massey-Harris plant. Both of these were, however, still manufacturing the M5 Stuart tank in 1943 and only after the phasing out of the M5 from production in 1944 did the serial production of the Chaffee begin.

Deliveries of the Chaffee to operational units were scheduled in August 1944 but technical issues and confusion due to the Battle of the

Bulge caused significant delays. The first large deployment of the Chaffee thus occurred at the end of February 1945 during Operation Grenade. The tank was deployed in Italy as well, but until March 1945 only a limited number were available. As demanded, the Chaffee retained the powertrain from the M5 Stuart – two rear-mounted gasoline Cadillac Series 44T24 V8 engines, coupled together and producing a total power output of 220 horsepower at 3400 RPM, controlled via a 8-speed Hydra-matic automatic transmission. In contrast to the Stuart chassis, conceived in the 1930's, the Chaffee received a new torsion bar suspension and wider tracks, both improving cross-country performance. The total weight reached 18.4 tonnes and while this fulfilled the request it placed restrictions on armour protection - the maximum thickness was 1.5 inch (~38 mm) on the turret front and gun mantlet. The frontal armour, albeit well sloped, was only 1 inch (~25.4 mm) thick. The Chaffee's maximum speed was 35 mph (56.3 km/h) on the road and 17 mph (27.4 km/h) across terrain.

The crew consisted of four men – commander, driver, gunner and loader (some sources mention a fifth crew member, stationed next to the driver's seat and acting as a radioman/machine gunner). The primary armament consisted of a 75 mm M6 gun, placed in a three-man turret. This weapon, originally designed for use in the B-25H Mitchell medium bomber, was a significantly lighter version of the standard M3 gun used on the M4 Sherman (only 396 lbs or 180 kg of weight, compared to 884 lbs or 401 kg of the original weapon), and when using the M61 APCBC projectile with a muzzle velocity of 2030 feet per second (619 m/s), the gun was able to pierce 2.71 inch (69 mm) of armour at a range of 1500 feet (457 meters). As a secondary armament, two .30 (7.62 mm) M1919A4 machine guns were mounted – one coaxially to the gun, and one next to the driver. Additionally, one flexible .50 (12.7 mm) Browning M2 machine gun could be mounted on top of the turret. 48 rounds for the main gun and 3750 .30 rounds were carried, along with 440 .50 rounds.

The French deployed several M24 tanks during the Battle of Dien Bien Phu

In service the Chaffee was well liked for its chassis, speed and cross-country ability, and found its niche as a reconnaissance tank – later, it was also used as a light infantry support

vehicle. Due to its light armour it was at an obvious disadvantage when facing enemy tanks, but by this stage of the war encounters with German armour were rare. During one recorded incident, however, two M24's from F Platoon, 4th Cavalry Regiment stumbled upon two Panthers at Domagen and before the Germans had time to react the Chaffees opened fire and dispatched both Panthers with flank shots.

M24 Chaffee of the 81st Reconnaissance Squadron, passes through ruins of a town south of Bologna, Italy

From 1944 to August 1945, 4731 Chaffees were manufactured, but only a small number were used in the Second World War due to slow deployment; they never fully replaced the existing M5 Stuarts. The M24 was eventually rushed back into frontline service during the Korean War, as Chaffees were the only armoured vehicle available when North Korea attacked. Against the vastly superior North Korean T-34-85 tanks, Chaffees suffered heavy losses until M4A3E8 and M26 Pershing tanks arrived to replace them.

As the US career of the Chaffee was coming to its end, its foreign career was merely starting. More than 4000 M24's were exported to 28 countries and used in a multitude of conflicts. The French used Chaffees at Dien Bien Phu, South Vietnamese M24's fought during the Battle of Hue, and in the last recorded combat usage Pakistan deployed M24's during the Indo-Pakistani war in 1971. Some armies kept their Chaffees well into the 1990's and Uruguay have kept them in service until the present day, although in a modernised variant. On the M24's chassis, multiple vehicles were also built – such as the M19 self-propelled anti-air gun, the M37 self-propelled howitzer and more, including modified foreign versions.

In War Thunder, the M24 Chaffee is an American Rank III light tank with a BR of 3.7. Its top speed in the game is 25 mph (40 km/h), achieved in 18 seconds on a flat surface. Turret rotation speed is 18 degrees per second. The primary armament consists of a 75mm M6 gun, and its basic M72 AP ammunition can penetrate 3.46 inch (88 mm) of armour at point-blank range, and 2.4 inch (61 mm) at a range of 3280 feet (1000 meters), while with the improved M61 APCBC ammunition the gun is able to penetrate 3.66 inch (93 mm) of armour at point-blank, and 2.75 inch (70 mm) at 3280 feet (1000 meters). With a fully trained loader, reloading time is 7.9 seconds

and the maximum ammunition capacity is 48 rounds.

As a light tank it is obvious that the M24 cannot be used in head-on shootouts, as every gun at its rank is able to penetrate it with ease. However, it carries same gun as early Shermans and is able to destroy most of its opposition around that BR, and due to its speed and a low profile the M24 is well suited for flanking maneuvers and sudden ambushes. Race to a position, wait for slower enemies to ride into your sights, fire a few shots, relocate swiftly, rinse and repeat from different firing spots. Avoid being hit at all costs – the armour simply cannot protect you, and even HE shells can be lethal.

The Chaffee is also good when used to speed rush the capping points in Break mode, and when throwing the enemy off balance in Battle mode by encircling the map and capping the enemy base. Many teams have advanced valiantly when suddenly one or more Chaffees popped out of nowhere and started to cap, forcing the enemy team to hastily retreat, distracting them and allowing the rest of their own team to push forward.

With thin armour but a good gun and impressive speed, the Chaffee is not a frontline brawler and requires more caution and different tactics to heavier tanks, but if you can master it you will have lots of fun with it. The Chaffee's playstyle is then very similar to its successor in the American tech tree, the M41A1 Walker Bulldog – faster, more agile and armed with an extremely effective 76 mm gun, able to fire APDS ammunition.

Internal modules of the M24 Chaffee

Macchi 202 "Folgore" 378 Squadriglia, 155 Gruppo, 51 Stormo Serial: 378-4 (MM7711) Gela, August 1942. Camouflage by PorcoRosso86 | download here

[AIR FORCES] Italian Air Force

18. March - Author: Sergej "NuclearFoot" Hrustić

The Italian Air Force, called the Regia Aeronautica in Italian, was officially established in 1923 as an independent part of the Italian armed forces. It was the first air force to ever conduct both a reconnaissance flight and a bombing run, in late October of 1911. During the interwar period (1918-1936), the Regia Aeronautica seemed to have a bright future ahead of it. Brilliant minds, such as General Italo Balbo, contributed to their prestige and renown, with feats such as leading a squadron of heavy bombers in a transatlantic flight, and revolutionizing air warfare tactics in the entirety of Europe. Moreover, the Italian aircraft industry was one of the best ones in the world, and the Italian heavy bombers at the time were unrivaled in their effectiveness.

However, in the middle of the 1930's, the Regia Aeronautica started seeing some changes.The general Italo Balbo, who was the main driving force behind the Regia Aeronautica, died in a friendly fire accident in Italian Ethiopia, taking with him his vision for his country's air force. What was left behind were some very talented and well-trained pilots, albeit without an influential and equally skilled leader. The Regia Aeronautica fought in many battles in the Spanish Civil War, alongside the Spanish Nationalists and the German "Condor Legion", and in Ethiopia, leading very successful skirmishes and bombing operations. However, their opposition was minimal and employed the use of outdated aircraft, and in the Ethiopian case, it was nearly non-existent. This

made Mussolini too confident of the Regia Aeronautica, and in turn, he allocated less and less of the country's resources to it.

Macchi MC.200 Saetta escorting S.79 bombers in North Africa 1941

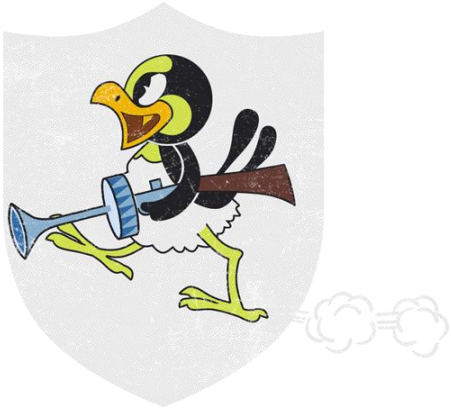
At the start of the Second World War, Italy had the smallest air force out of the three Axis powers. Even though it numbered around 3500 aircraft, only half of those were operational at all, while just a tenth of those were modern, top-tier planes, such as the Macchi MC.200, Fiat G.50 and Savoia-Marchetti SM.79, which would later be praised as the best torpedo bomber of the time. While the Regia Aeronautica was at this point still formidable, its effectiveness was severely hindered by several factors. The major of these were the manufacturing practices used by Italian factories (which were several years out of date), poor radio communications, and a lack of training on air combat tactics, rather than individual pilot skill. The Regia Aeronautica participated in many fronts during WWII, usually in cooperation with German contingents. Some of these include the Battles of Britain and France, and the sieges of Malta and Gibraltar, where Italian aircraft were of great significance.

The Italian armistice of 1943 divided the Regia Aeronautica into two separate air forces. The Royalist Italian Co-Belligerent Air Force (Aviazione Cobelligerante Italiana, or ACI) fought alongside the Allied forces from Southern Italy, while In northern Italy, the National Republican Air Force (Aeronautica Nazionale Repubblicana, or ANR) flew for the Axis. At this point in in the war, the Italians boasted aircraft that were on par with other Allied and Axis airplanes, namely the 'Serie 5': Reggiane Re.2005, Fiat G.55 and Macchi C.205, the latter of which was considered one of the best fighters in the war. However, due to their late introduction, they never managed to make a significant impact. The two air forces never directly engaged each other, as despite their different political affiliations, they were all still Italian. Italian aircraft losses totaled to around 5000 aircraft, while they themselves confirmed the same amount of aircraft destroyed. Even though the Italians didn't keep a record of individual pilot kills, some pilots kept logbooks of their own.According to them, the most decorated Italian pilots were Franco Lucchini and Adriano Visconti, both with 26 kills. Both of the newly-established air forces merged into

one, forming the Aeronautica Militare, upon the declaration of the Italian republic on the 2. June, 1946.

Despite having a rough history, the Italian air force, proved to be a force to be reckoned with, and although they may not have had as much recognition as other countries, they were without a doubt incremental in the outcome of the Second World War.

The only Italian long-range bomber, the Piaggio P.108



With an upcoming update, we will add the "Emblem of the 377a Squadriglia Autonoma" and "Emblem of the 10a Squadriglia, 2° Gruppo" to War Thunder made by Jej 'CharlieFoxtrot' Ortiz and Colin 'Fenris' Muir

Bristol Beaufighter Mk.X from 144 Squadron, Dallachy Strike Wing, RAF 1945, PL-O (NT961), camouflage by cerbera15 | download here

[AIRCRAFT PROFILE] Bristol Beaufighter Mk.X

19. March - Author: Henry Rothwell

Work on the the Bristol Beaufighter began in 1938, on the initiative of the Bristol aviation company, when it became apparent that diplomacy with Germany wasn't working, and that Britain didn't have a decent long range heavy fighter to hand. The Westland Whirlwind, which was intended to fill this role, had been delayed, so a stopgap measure was needed, and, like the Spitfire Mk. IX - another stop-gap solution - the Bristol Beaufighter became a firm favourite with its pilots.

The designers at Bristol, led by Leslie Frise and Roy Fedden, committed themselves to incorporating components from existing aircraft to speed up the manufacturing process, resulting in the Beaufighter's wings, aft fuselage, control surfaces and landing gear being virtually identical to the Beaufort, but for a little local re-stressing here and there, and the nacelles being strengthened to take the Bristol Hercules 14-cylinder engines. This expediency allowed the company to complete a working prototype a mere 9 months after the completion of the detailed drawings.

Entering service in July 1940, the Bristol Beaufighter had an empty weight of 14,000 lbs or 6350 kg, a little under twice that of the Blenheim, and came with formidable hitting power, chiefly consisting of

four 20mm Hispano cannon in the nose. And although an effective belt feed was available, a foul-up by the Air Ministry resulted in the first 400 aircraft being delivered with drum feeds, meaning that the observer sitting behind the pilot had to change them by hand, pulling the 60 round drums off racks and trying to slot them onto the guns correctly, often during rapid maneuvers. These were supplemented by six 7.7mm Browning machine guns mounted asymmetrically on the wings.

Bristol Beaufighter Mk X, NE255/EE-H, of No. 404 Squadron RCAF at RAF Davidstow Moor

The other thing it carried of course was Airborne Interception radar. This meant that the British now not only had a method of detecting individual night-time fighters, but also the means to destroy them in what, for the German pilots, must have been the most shocking way possible. As for the Beaufighter pilots, the sturdy construction meant that it could remain airborne even after a great deal of punishment, but if the going got too tough, the two escape hatches in the belly were designed so that on opening, airflow was directed downward and created a pocket of still air for the pilot and observer to jump through, in theory allowing them to get clear of the aircraft structure. If on the other hand the aircraft had landed on its belly, the crew could leave using counterpart hatches in the roof.

The Beaufighter was adapted to a number of purposes, and went through a great number of marks, with the Mark. X being the most numerous of them, numbering 2,205 of the 5,562 Beaufighters constructed in the UK. This aircraft had the TF designation, marking it out as a torpedo fighter, but could it could also carry underwing rockets, and 1,000lb or 453kg of bombs which could be increased by the same weight again in lieu of a torpedo. The rockets mounted by the Mk. X came in two forms, with 60lb or 27 kg high explosive warheads, the damage from which was hardly trivial, however the 25lb or 11 kg solid steel warheads were found to be highly effective against shipping, being able to penetrate one side of a cargo ship, travel through its cargo of coal, and exit the other side leaving a three foot or one metre hole.

In the game the Mk. X is a Tier III aircraft with a Battle Rating of 3.7. It has a maximum speed of 324 mph or 522 kph, and a turn time of 26.5 seconds. It's armed with 4 20mm

Hispano cannon in the nose, supplied with 1,132 rounds of ammunition and a reload time of 40 seconds, and six 7.7 Browning machine guns across the wings with 6,000 rounds of ammunition and a reload time of 15 seconds. It also has a single 7.7mm Browning machine gun with 1,000 rounds and a reload time of 15 seconds in the rear facing turret behind the cockpit. It can carry 8 RP-3 rockets mounted on the wings, or a single 1,521 lb or 690kg Mk. XII torpedo.

As in history, the Beaufighter Mk. X can be an incredibly effective aircraft when used properly. With its decent rocket load and its more than generous amount of cannon concentrated in the nose, this aircraft is quite at home farming ground targets, however the genuinely devastating firepower can of course be turned on enemy aircraft. If you have yet to fly a Beaufighter you may be forgiven for thinking that dogfighting in one of these is off the cards, and although it's not necessarily recommended as a first use, this heavy looking aircraft has been known to cause some very unpleasant feelings of surprise in unwary opponents - hit the combat flaps and the Beaufighter can prove itself to be highly maneuverable heavy fighter that can give significantly lighter aircraft a good run for its money.

X-ray view of Beaufighter Mk.X in War Thunder

Spitfire Mk IXc – J. A. Plagis, commander of RAF No. 126 Squadron, December 1944. A total of 16 victories (19 according to other sources) in the Mediterranean and European theaters. In this aircraft, he shot down several German fighters in the second half of 1944. He flew over France and Germany in Western Europe

[WEAPONS OF VICTORY] Plagis's Spitfire Mk. IXc

20. March - Author: War Thunder Team

A British pilot of Greek origin, Ioannis Agorastos "John" Plagis was born on March 10th, 1919 in the town of Hartley (now Chegutu), part of the colony of Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). Wishing to become a military pilot, Plagis made attempts to join the Southern Rhodesian Air Force, but was turned down because he was not a citizen of that country. This situation changed when the war started: he was accepted into the air force and completed his training in Southern Rhodesia before 1942.

Ioannis Plagis performed his first military flights in the skies over Britain, piloting a Spitfire Mk V. Soon after this, he was transferred to Malta to join No. 249 Squadron at his own request. When he arrived on the island, Plagis almost immediately found himself immersed in violent and bloody air battles. According to his own recollections, the situation in the air was such that "if four of our planes went up against twenty or thirty enemy planes, we considered this to be good odds for us."

Ioannis Plagis won the majority of his victories while piloting his Spitfire Mk Vb in these battles.

As a result of constant battles, Plagis suffered mental fatigue and was transferred to England to convalesce. Being already a squadron leader, he participated in the first flight tests of the new Spitfire Mk IX during his recovery. Once he was fully recovered, he commanded the No. 64 Squadron of the RAF in a new aircraft. In the second half of 1944, Ioannis Plagis was appointed as the commanding officer of No. 126 Squadron. During this time, he flew the Spitfire Mk IXc ML214, coded '5J-K', in the skies above France and Germany, where he achieved four victories.

One curious fact is that Squadron No. 126 was formed at the expense of the British colonies in the Persian Gulf, and it has the corresponding prefix in its name – Persian Gulf. Apart from the count of his victories, Plagis's fighter also bore the name of one of the region's cities – the sultanate of Muscat (now Oman) – in the English and Arabic languages, along with the name of the pilot's sister – Kay. As with most of the British military aircraft, the Spitfire Mk IX of No. 126 Squadron's commander was painted with invasion stripes.

The number of Ioannis Plagis's victories totalled 13, 16 or 19 enemy aircraft, according to various sources. The most accepted estimate is 16.

Plagis performed his last flight in Word War II in a Mustang Mk III which No. 126 Squadron had received for operations. He was escorting a flight of de Havilland Mosquito bombers against the Gestapo headquarters in Copenhagen.

Ioannis Plagis died in 1974.

Hurricane Mk.I Sgt. Josef Frantisek, Unit: 303 Sqn, RAF, camouflage made by -313- Paegas | download here

[ACE PROFILE] Sgt. Josef Frantisek

23. March - Author: Mark Barber

Whilst there have been a number of qualities and attributes common among successful fighter pilots – such as good eyesight and situational awareness – there has not been any one personality type which has dominated the ace fraternity. From the glory hunting loners to the selfless team players, the remorseless predators to the regretful killers, the old and experienced to the young, natural aviators, fighter aces have come from all walks of life without any obvious formula for success. However, of all of these pilots, one of the most aggressive and violent was Czech Hurricane ace Josef František (pronounced Fran' ti' shek), a seemingly ill-disciplined and vengeance obsessed aggressor who dominated the skies over southern England during the summer of 1940…

Born in Otaslavice, October 1913, 10 km south-west of Olomouc, now the modern day central region of the Czech Republic, Josef František was the son of a carpenter and was initially trained as an apprentice locksmith before joining the Czechoslovak Air Force as a non-commissioned pilot at the age of 21. He had been inspired by the regular flights that would occur over his place of work from the nearby Prostějov airfield. Carrying out his basic training in Prostějov – not far from his home – he graduated from flight training in 1936, and was posted to the 2nd Air Regiment, flying Aero A-11 and Letov

S-328 reconnaissance biplanes from Olomouc.

Sgt Josef František

Even in the preliminary stages of his flying career as a junior pilot, František's attitude came to the fore – he quickly acquired an unenviable reputation as a drinker and a fighter, often incurring reprimands for returning late to his unit after fighting in pubs and bars during his evenings off duty. His lack of discipline led to a demotion, but there was no denying his natural talent as an aviator – the decision was taken to place František as a fighter pilot in an attempt to embrace his combination of natural skill and aggression.

Qualifying as a fighter pilot in the summer of 1938, František flew Avia B-534 fighters with the 4th Air Regiment, stationed at Praha-Kbely near Prague. With tension building as German aggression and occupation seemed more and more likely, František's unit readied for an invasion. The fight never came – the Munich Agreement handed large areas of the boarder region of Czechoslovakia over to Germany in September, and with the nation weakened, the remainder of the country would soon follow. František, like many of his comrades, fled to Poland and joined the Polish Air Force.

Initially employed as an instructor, František then flew reconnaissance aircraft during the German invasion in September 1939. Although his aircraft was unarmed, Frantisek's aggressive streak came to the fore when, on several occasions, he attacked German ground units by throwing hand grenades from the cockpit of his aircraft. However, the bravery of the Polish forces was not enough to stop the might of the German war machine, and Poland fell – František fled the country - initially to Beirut – where he joined the French Foreign Legion and was taken to Marseilles.

After arriving in France, František was first transferred to the Polish Air Force in France, and then to the French Air Force itself. However, František and two of his

Czechoslovakian comrades were accused of deserting the French Foreign Legion by a Czechoslovakian attaché, resulting in the three joining a Polish air unit of the French Air Force after the ensuing commotion. František's service during the Battle of France is unclear to say the least – there are some claims that he changed his name to protect family members still in Czechoslovakia, and that he shot down nine German aircraft and destroyed a further two on the ground. There is no official record of František receiving the French Croix de Guerre for his first kill, yet this medal is on display alongside his others at the Josef František museum today. Anecdotal evidence also exists claiming that František's ill discipline once again appeared whilst working in France, and that he went to great lengths to fly as many different French aircraft as possible.

After the defeat of France in June 1940, František joined many Czech and Polish airmen who fled to Britain to continue the fight against Germany. A combat experienced pilot, František was selected again as a fighter pilot, and was assigned to the Hawker Hurricane – again electing to fly with a Polish squadron, he joined No.303 Squadron at RAF Northolt in August 1940. František's first week with the RAF was less than stellar, after forgetting to lower his undercarriage to land his Hurricane on August 8th. However, he scored his first confirmed victory with the RAF in early September when he shot down a Bf109E; a second German fighter fell to his guns the next day.

Hurricane Mk.I, 303 Sqn RAF

No. 303 Squadron was heavily involved in the Battle of Britain towards its end, dispelling any thought that foreign airmen would be a liability to the RAF. The Polish squadron tallied an impressive list of victories and František was the top scoring of all, shooting down 17 German aircraft in September alone. His aggression and growing lack of discipline continued to cause problems with his British and Polish seniors alike; he would not follow orders or fight as part of the team, but yet he continued to produce results. This stemmed not only from his natural aggression, but also his vehement hatred of his foe - to František, the war was very personal and he fought to kill. Eventually, with viable options severely limited, the decision was taken to simply let František run his own routine as an almost private air force of one Hurricane.

František's lone wolf tactics would often involve pouncing on German aircraft returning over the English Channel, which would generally be

low on fuel and ammunition. He was also an advocate of closing to very short ranges with his targets before opening fire. His tactics yielded results – on September 11th alone he shot down three enemy aircraft. At the end of František's ground breaking month, he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Medal by King George VI.

However, František's success came to a sudden and unexpected halt. On October 8th the wing of his Hurricane clipped a tree near Ewell in Surrey, and he was killed instantly when thrown from the cockpit of his fighter in the ensuing crash. He was 26 years old. The incident took place whilst on patrol and not involved in action against the enemy; the reason why František was flying at such low altitudes is still unknown, but anecdotal claims hint towards an impromptu aerobatics display near his girlfriend's house.

A difficult character to work with, and at times bitterly unpopular with peers and seniors alike, Josef František was nonetheless one of the most successful fighter aces of the Battle of Britain. His 17 confirmed victories in just one month placed him as the second top scoring Czech ace of World War Two – if his tally in France could be confirmed, this would place him at the top.

Hurricane's ingame modules

Wallpaper 1024x1280 | 1920x1080

[VEHICLE PROFILE] IS-3

24. March - Author: Adam “BONKERS” Lisiewicz

Shortly after IS-2 tanks started to roll off the assembly lines in 1943, the Soviet engineers quickly began drawing up plans for a new heavy tank, destined to replace the IS-2 in service with the Red Army in the future. In late 1944, after encounters with the Tiger II tank, the need for a new heavy vehicle became even higher. The new tank, now known as the Kirovets-1, would have to feature a strengthened hull and turret front, as well as having the same weight and dimensions as the IS-2. Two design bureaus bitterly competed to create the new tank – the Design Collective of the No. 100 Plant led by Zhozev Kotin, and the Design Committee of the Chelabinsk Tank Factory, led by Nikolay Dhukov. Both teams of engineers came up with different ideas – Kotin's project featured a new hull shape, with angled frontal hull plates forming a "beak" designed to increase the effective armour thickness without the need of thickening the armour plate itself.

The design submitted by the Chelabinsk factory featured a

rounded turret, reminiscent of an "inverted frying pan". In the end it was decided that the new tank would combine both features. The first prototype of the new vehicle, designated as the Object 703, was completed in October 1944. After testing, it was quickly ordered into serial production. However, many tank factories were still producing the IS-2 and found it hard to readjust to producing a new, far more complex vehicle. The construction of the new tank had to be delayed, and by May 1945 only a test batch of the new vehicle was completed.

Soviet IS-3 heavy tank during 8th 'Tank Day' in Military Technical Museum, Lešany

This, however, did not faze the USSR top brass. The new tank was presented to the world during the Victory Parade in Berlin on the 7th of May 1945, even though it did not participate in the fighting. The tank was a shock to many Western observers, who suddenly feared it would be the ultimate weapon in a modern battlefield. The reality, however, could not have been further from the truth. The IS-3s were found to be a very problematic tank – from constant breakdowns of the powertrain, armour cracks near the welds due to the stress to even problems with internal ventilation. The problem was quickly seen by the Red Army, which ordered a full recall of the IS-3 for repair and modernization. This program ran from 1949 to 1952, after which another modernisation to the IS-3M standard was carried out in 1959.

Because of the constant delays and problems, the IS-3 was too late to see the Second World War in Europe. A limited number of those tanks, however, took part in the Soviet offensive in Manchuria in August 1945. The IS-3 was later used by the Red Army during the suppression of the Hungarian Uprising in 1956, codenamed Operation "Whirlwind".

IS-3 tanks were also used by Egypt in the Six-Day War; however, most of the 100 delivered vehicles were lost because of enemy fire and mechanical problems. With the advent of the T-55 Main Battle Tank, the Soviet heavy tanks were phased out from frontline service and moved to the reserve.

Egyptian IS 3, camouflage by _IlyJI9_ | download here

In War Thunder, the IS-3 is the Soviet Era V heavy tank. It has a Battle Rating currently of 7.0 in all game modes. The main armament of the IS-3 is the 122 mm D-25T tank gun, the same type as the IS-2 and the IS-2 Mod. 44 use. The main difference; however, is the ability to fire the B-471D APCBC shell. This type of ammunition can penetrate 227 mm of armour at 100 m range, which is quite a jump from the BR-471B ammunition, which can achieve 197 mm of penetration at 100 m range. The thickest armour of the tank is at the front – the "beak" at the front of the hull raises the effective thickness of the armour from 110 to around 180 – 200 mm, depending on the exact spot. The turret front of the IS-3 is a also fairly well armoured, with 250 mm of heavily sloped armour equating to around 400 mm effective thickness. The side armour of the hull is 90 mm thick, with 30 mm of additional armour in the strip above the tracks. The IS-3 has a maximum speed of 38 km/h, with a 520 horsepower engine.

The primary drawbacks of the IS-3 are the lengthy reload of the gun and lacklustre 3 degrees of gun depression. Drivers of this tank should minimise their exposure time and constantly be on watch for any tanks that try to flank them. When it comes down to mitigating the effects of the unsatisfactory gun depression, an IS-3 driver should try to engage the targets on flat and level ground. While fighting the enemy, always try to present a completely non angled front to the enemy – angling the hull will actually decrease the effective armour thickness. The IS-3 will lead you to the IS-4M – the pinnacle of the Soviet heavy tanks in War Thunder.

X-ray view of IS 3 in War Thunder

With an upcoming update, we will add the emblem of the Egyptian 4th Tank Division to War Thundermade by Branislav 'InkaL' Mirkov

The M3 Medium Tank used in Italian Campaign by 753rd Tank Battalion

[HISTORICAL] 753rd Tank Battalion

25. March - Author: Stephen "Azumazi" Hembree

The 753rd Tank Battalion was officially activated on June the 1st, 1941 at Fort Benning, Georgia. The unit was initially only 35 officers and 116 enlisted men since before being converted into the 753rd, it was Company A of the 73rd Medium Tank Battalion. Shortly after activation it was sent to Camp Polk, Louisiana and attached to the General HQ Reserve where they received another 507 enlisted men fresh out of Fort Knox's Armored Forces Training Center. Initially the unit was issued early war vehicles and it wasn't until early 1942 that the battalion began getting modernized with M3 Lee Medium Tanks. From early 1942 to April 24th of 1943 the unit would get issued and trained on the M4A1 Sherman as well as working with other divisions including assisting in tank destroyer training at Fort Hood, Texas.

For 33 days the unit would be in transit to North Africa landing near Oran. They would spend 6 weeks in Algeria preparing for the coming assault, Sicily.

What made the 753rd so unique, is that they were designed as a modular combat unit to reinforce infantry and other gaps in the lines. On July 10th at 1400, Company C of the 753rd attached to 3rd Battalion, 157th Infantry make landfall on Blue Beach near Gela, Sicily. Using rapid advance and flanking, they support infantry and destroy five Italian light tanks near the Comiso Airport. On July 11th Company A would land at 00:30 and

be followed by Company B with HQ at 12:30.

M3 Light Tank

The 39 day Campaign would find itself as a fast reaction force to respond to urgent calls of armor support. They would end up supporting the 157th, 179th, 180th Infantry Regiments as well as the 16th, 18th, 26th, and the 7th and 30th of the 45th Infantry Division, 1st Infantry Division, and 3rd Infantry Division as well as 3 calls for support from the 82nd Airborne Division. Towards the end of the campaign they were assigned to a task force with the 1st ID around the 70th Tank Battalion and placed under direct control of 2nd US Corps under Lt. Gen Omar Bradley, who would accommodate them for their efforts. This would result in B Company receiving the Presidential Unit Citation for their efforts. They were well liked by the Infantry as they were considered always on hand and dependable. During actions at Messina, their rapid advance and aggressive support of troops knocked out 9 enemy combat trucks and AT guns including two towed 8.8cm guns. The aggressive push forced the troops to abandon up to 32 enemy vehicles including some light tanks. The 753rd was known for pushing their units so hard that in July 23rd a report went to 2nd Army Corps from C Company with the following, "Tanks are Beginning to break down continuously for lack of 50 and 100 hour checks"

Their direct efforts in the 6 week campaign directly resulted in assisting the various Infantry Divisions with up to around 1100 enemy PoW's captured and over 100 enemy vehicles and guns destroyed with 28 being enemy tanks.

Many of the vehicles used during the Italian Campaign can be found in game. The M3 Light Tank was used by C Company along with the M3 Medium Tank, and the M4A1 Medium tank with the M3 Light tank were used by A and B Company along side the M3 Medium Tank. The M3 Medium tank was actually preferred by the unit over the M4 Medium tank at the time as the 37mm was effective against Italian armor which allowed them to engage multiple targets at once with the 75mm gun and 37mm. This was especially so at Messina.

The 753rd would time and time again prove their worth, in battles at Salerno, San Pietro, Monte Porchia, Cassino, and Rome. When they got to Rome, the Unit was slightly reorganized. Due to their rapid response nature they expanded the unit with a D Company, replacing their M3 light tanks with M7 105mm

howitzers for direct and indirect fire support for infantry and the battalion.

After reorganizing and refitting including replacing their M3 Medium tanks with M4 Medium tanks, the unit would go into France in Operation Dragoon. The 753rd would gain popularity for what would occur during this operation. Task Force Butler with Brig. General Butler of VI US Corps was tasked with breaking north from the beachhead to cut off retreating German Forces. With only a Brigade of troops, the 753rd with Butler would push 235 miles in 10 days capturing key towns and points and inflicting major damage to the German 19th Army. To quote Colonel Anthony Daskevich II at the US Army War College,

"The 753rd provided a major share of the armored firepower of Task Force Butler and played a crucial role in its operations. Over the course of the operation, the 753rd battalion commander and operations officer each commanded separate, independently-maneuvering combined arms teams within the fast-moving operation. The battalion's actions proved essential to Task Force Butler's success, inflicting heavy casualties on retreating German forces and destroying large amounts of enemy materiel, particularly in the vicinities of villages of Montelimar, Gap, and Loriel."

M4A1 Medium Tank

From this point on to May 10th, the Battalion would have a unit in combat for over 260 continuously up until near the end of the European Theatre of War.

The unit would later fight in Korea from March 20th 1949 to November 10th 1951.

Time and time again the unit has served with Honour and kept to their mission. To close and support friendly troops and destroy the enemy by use of mobility, firepower, and combined arms.

Premium Bell P-63 Kingcobra in Soviet Air Forces available in game for 1600 GE

[AIRCRAFT PROFILE] P-63 In Soviet Service

26. March - Author: Scott "Smin1080p" Maynard

The American designed Bell B-63 Kingcobra is one of the lesser known US aircraft of the war due to its limited use by the US armed forces. However, whilst the King Cobra struggled to find favor with US forces, the Soviet Union welcomed the fighter into its ranks due to their successes with the P-39 Airacobra.

A Soviet P-63A-10 with drop tanks fitted in 1944

Despite the fact the P-63 was a massive improvement over the P-39 Airacobra, it could not contend with the North American P-51 Mustang and Republic designed P-47 Thunderbolt that were in service at the time. The P-63 had a significantly shorter range, more cramped layout, was more expensive to produce and had an unreliable supercharger coupled with an ageing Allison engine which was already losing favor to the Rolls Royce Merlin and its Packard counterpart. The Kingcobra was very much an evolution of the Airacobra and was the result of several improvements and solutions to the issues that plagued the P-39, retaining the unusual configuration with the engine behind the pilot and the nose mounted 37mm cannon, yet still failed to impress. As such, the American forces had little need for Bell's new fighter, a role that was

adapted to a ground attack fighter-bomber, to which the P-39 was already finding its place.

Whilst the Bell's Kingcobra could not contend with the other fighters in US service, it found its place in the Soviet Air Force, who was already utilizing the P-39 to great success. Between 2300-2700 P-63's were supplied to the USSR under the "Lend-lease" program, around 72% of all Kingcobra's produced found service with the Soviet Air Force. Officially, the P-63 was not allowed for use against the German forces due to an agreement in 1943 that outlined their specific role for operations against Japan and the eventual allied final push in the pacific. However, many Soviet and German accounts exist of the Kingcobra being employed against the Luftwaffe. Nonetheless, no official reports of this exist. Within the Pacific region, the Soviet P-63 was employed as a ground attack, close air support and reconnaissance fighter. The USSR enjoyed successful action with the P-63 in the Manchukuo campaigns and on the Korean peninsula. Many P-39 units were eventually updated with P-63s as their service continued after the wars end.

The US had retired its P-63 fleets from all services by 1946, however the Soviet Union carried on their operation until 1952-53. Due to the sufficient numbers of Kingcobras still in service after the second world war, Ironically NATO designated the reporting name "Fred" to the P-63.

Within War Thunder, 3 versions of the P-63 Kingcobra are available. The A-5, A-10 and C-5 variants are present in the US tree as well as 3 versions available as premium and gift aircraft for the Soviet air force. In the US tree, all 3 variations can be found in Era 3 after researching the P-47. The Kingcobra leads on to the aircraft that ultimately pushed it out of favour in US service, the P-51D Mustang. For the Soviets, the first "Lend-lease"

Kingcobra can be found in Era 3 and is available for purchase with Golden Eagles. The A-10 and C-5 on the 4th Era are rare gift premium aircraft that are available in certain specials and events. For those that have flown the P-39 Airacobra, the P-63 will be a familiar aircraft. Across all versions, the P-63s armament configuration is a single hub mounted M4 or M10 37mm cannon with 30 or 58 rounds respectively. To complement this, 4 12.7mm M2 Browning machine guns are also mounted on the aircraft to give it an impressive punch. As well as its impressive firepower, the Kingcobra can also mount several external payloads ranging from a single 500kg bomb on the A-5 model to 3 x 500kg featured on the A-10 variant.

Whilst the Kingcobra might not share the popularity of the Mustang or the universality of the Thunderbolt, the P-63 is an excellent fighter with superb armament for its tier. If you enjoyed the P-39s or are a fan of the Russian Yak fighter's heavy armament, the Kingcobra series will be a familiar and fun experience for you.

X-ray view of the Soviet P-63A-5 in War Thunder

With an upcoming update, we will add the personal emblem of Maj. Vyacheslav Sirotin, 17th IAP, made by Colin 'Fenris' Muir

Grant Mk.I, British version of the M3 Lee, available in the game via the Grant Advanced pack

[HISTORICAL] The Last Desert Battle

27. March - Author: Aaron "anglomanii" Lentz

After the Battle of El Alamein in July 1942, both the Axis and Allied forces disengaged from major conflict in order to give themselves a chance to refresh and regroup. However, as the Germans and Italians desperately strove to prepare to strike at British lines, the supply situation had reached a point where Rommel's hand was forced. Fearful of the growing British forces in Egypt, the DAK and the Italian Comando Supremo made the decision to strike while they still could.

Above the desert sands the battle did not pause; it intensified. Daily battles of dozens of aircraft fought for control over the blue sky and the white sands of the Libyan and Egyptian deserts, spanning from the sea of the Mediterranean, where Ju88 A4 bombers harassed the scrap iron flotilla's of the allied navies bringing supplies to the front, or when FAA aircraft and Wellingtons from Malta, or further afield, struck crucial supply convoys headed to Tunisia.

Ju-87 R-2 with desert camouflage

The air battles over the desert were often fierce, with a cut and thrust between what were, by now, very experienced forces. While Allied Spitfires, Kittyhawks and Hurricanes whirled and battled with the Bf109E/F's and Bf110's of the Luftwaffe, the harassment of ground

forces continued. Ju88's and Ju87 bombers made daily targeted attacks on allied airbases and on key defensive positions or supply dumps. Meanwhile, the Allied Desert Air Force maintained the growing pressure they were placing on Axis supply lines, flying deep into the desert and attacking the long convoys of trucks and other vehicles. Here, the long range and endurance of the British and US attack and bomber aircraft laid waste to the poorly protected supplies; Bostons, Mitchells and Beaufighters attacked with bombs, rockets and guns.

Spitfire Mk.Vb with camouflage of 92nd squadron RAF

Forming a north south line from the coast just west of El Alamein to the endless sands of the Qattara depression, Montgomery's defensive line was a carefully prepared trap. Using intelligence gathered from Ultra decrypts, he established his forces in such a way as to provoke Rommel to attack his static defensive positions. Rommel on his part obliged, attacking the southern sector of the British line, however from the onset of the attack, the German and Italian forces were in trouble. Allied aircraft, forewarned and prepared, launched devastating low level attacks. Hurricane IID's and Beaufighters struck at the flanks of the armoured columns.

The armoured units continued to advance, travelling through minefields and wire traps set up to slow down the German and Italian units. They were soon heading east, but had suffered considerable losses. Air attacks continued day and night, as did the constant barrage of artillery; as soon as a unit stopped, it would come under enemy fire. The troops were tired, and their vehicles groaned under the strain of continuous combat. The panzer III's and IV's of the DAK suffered profoundly from the constant attacks from artillery and the Air. Allied air superiority was intensive, with several supporting attacks by Axis Ju88's and SM79's unable to procure a breakthrough. Heading north and finally after coming up against the prepared positions at Alam Halfa, Rommel's tanks came to blows with Grant Mk.I tanks that had dug into ridge positions. While the Panzer IV F2's long range guns retaliated against the M3's as the Axis forces advanced, they suffered from the superior numbers and the return enemy fire of the well dug in Anti-tank guns. Montgomery's tanks were not allowed to advance, and with that, the standard tactic of the DAK in using the fearsome 88 flak in support of it's tanks, was neutralised. By the second of september, Rommel had realised he could not afford to continue his

advance, hence resulting in his forces' withdrawal.

Continuous attacks by Allied bombers maintained a daunting tempo on the DAK, even after they had returned to positions they had formerly held. By the 5th of september, the DAK was in an even worse supply situation than before the battle had ensued on the 30th of August. The Desert Air Force had succeeded in destroying up to 400 enemy supply vehicles by some accounts, even if many previously belonged to the British. While the Axis forces managed to retreat relatively intact, they had not been able to lure the Allied armies into destructive, open battles. Thus, Montgomery maintained and improved his positions, and Rommel was now comparatively much worse, and would remain so until the end of the desert war.

With an upcoming update, we will add the Kangaroo emblem used by Australian troops on captured vehicles & decal of the 278th sqn., Italy. ***Decals made by Branislav 'InkaL' Mirkov & Jej 'CharlieFoxtrot' Ortiz***

[WEAPONS OF VICTORY] T-34 "Lidice"

27. March - Author: War Thunder team

In 1940, after the proclamation of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, the Czechoslovakian exile government in London was trying to persuade Britain and France to revoke the Munich Agreement and to guarantee post-war restoration of an independent Czechoslovakia. However, British officials were not satisfied with the efforts of the Czech resistance against the German Protectorate, and required proof that the Czech were really willing to fight against the Third Reich.

In 1941, Adolf Hitler appointed a new 'Reichsprotektor' – the factual ruler of the Protectorate. His choice was SS-Obergruppenführer Reinhard Heydrich, a high ranking Nazi official and one of the main architects of the Holocaust. Immediately after taking office, Heydrich issued martial law and through summary executions and mass arrests, he swiftly paralyzed any efforts of the Czech resistance. Afterwards, he pursued a doctrine of “whip and sugar”, in which he offered workers social advantages, while arresting, torturing or even executing anyone accused of being disloyal to the Nazi government. The Czech exile government reacted by authorizing an assassination attempt on Heydrich:

Operation 'Anthropoid' was to be undertaken by two soldiers – Jozef Gabčík and Jan Kubiš. On 28th December 1941, these two were dropped over the Protectorate along with seven other Czech exile soldiers to execute the mission.

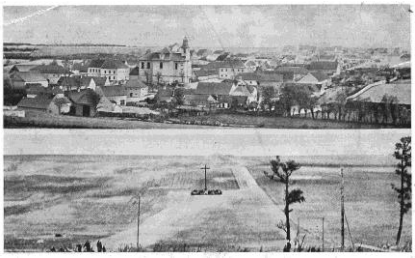
T-34 with "Lidice" inscription

On May 27th, 1942, Heydrich was en route from his residence in Prague-Libeň to his office at Prague Castle. When his open-topped Mercedes approached a tight hairpin bend near Bulovka Hospital, Gabčík leapt in front of the car and took aim on Heydrich with his Sten submachine gun, only to find the weapon jammed. Heydrich drew his pistol to confront the attackers, but at that moment, Kubiš threw a grenade at the car. Both assailants then fled the scene. The Reichsprotektor, wounded by fragments, subsequently succumbed to his injuries on the 4th of June. In retaliation, martial law was again declared and a Gestapo investigation pinpointed two Czech villages, Lidice a Ležáky, as hiding places used by the paratroopers. On 9th of June, all adult men in Lidice were shot, while women and children were deported to concentration camps. On 24th of June, an even worse fate met the people of Ležáky, as all adult villagers were executed with children deported to concentration camps. Both villages were then razed to the ground.

Heydrich's assailants took refuge with five other paratroopers in Saints Cyril and Methodeus Cathedral in Prague, but were betrayed by one of their own. All of them then died after a two hour firefight with 750 SS troops besieging the cathedral – three paratroopers were killed in action, while the rest committed suicide.

While the cost was incredibly high, the assassination of Heydrich fulfilled its goal. Great Britain and France subsequently dissolved the Munich Agreement and declared that after the war, Czechoslovakia was to be fully restored.

The destruction of Lidice, followed by the destruction of Ležáky 14 days later, caused a huge uproar across the globe. These two Czech villages were previously absolutely unknown, but suddenly, millions of people across the world knew their names. British workers founded a 'Lidice shall live' fundraiser to collect money for the rebuilding of the village. Stern Park in the US state of Illonois changed its name to Lidice just two days after the tragedy, while the Mexican village San-Jeronimo-Aculco did the same on August 1942. Even children (especially girls) were named Lidice.



Lidice before and after destruction

The strongest response, naturally, originated from Czechoslovakian soldiers fighting in foreign armies, and from the Czechoslovakian exile goverment in London. Edvard Beneš, the Czechoslovakian president in exile, symbolically decorated Lidice with the Czechoslovakian War Cross, while soldiers and aviators found their own way to honor the dead. Czechoslovakian bomber crews in RAF service painted 'For Lidice' and 'For Ležáky' on their bombs, while soldiers in Soviet service collected money to paint 'Lidice' and 'Ležáky' as inscriptions on their tanks. One of these tanks, a T-34 model 1943 medium tank with 'Lidice' inscription, was extensively used in combat, where it was knocked out multiple times, but each time was repaired and returned to service soon thereafter. Today, it is on display in the Military Technical Museum in Lešany.

In memory of those who suffered during WW2, we will add the "Lidice" inscription

Spitfire Mk VB BL255 MD-T flown by 2nd Lt Don Gentile, 336th FS "Eagle Squadron", Debden, October 1942, camouflage created by PROx_GAMING | Download here!

[ACE PROFILE] Major Dominic 'Don' Gentile

30. March - Author: Mark Barber

With America's entry into the war, it was not long before men and machines began pouring into the European Theatre of Operations from the United States. The US Army Air Force used the British Isles as a staging post for their contribution to the most violent bomber offensive in history, and with it came their fighter escorts. Despite the best efforts of command – for the most part – American fighter aces began to return to the public eye, amassing scores of confirmed victories not seen since the First World War. A race for kills, not dissimilar from their Luftwaffe adversaries, began to establish itself between the top American fighter aces. One of the most flamboyant of these pilots was 'Don' Gentile.

Born to first generation Italian immigrants in Piqua, Ohio in December 1920, Dominic Salvatore Gentile had decided on a life in aviation before even reaching adolescence, having made hundreds of model aircraft as a young boy. From as young as six years of age, Gentile would pester his father – a night club owner – to drive him to the local Weaver Aircraft Company factory to look at the aircraft parked outside. Receiving both moral and financial support from his father, augmented by money waiting tables at his father's club, Gentile acquired his licenses and began flying his own Aerosport biplane around his home town as a teenager. He quickly acquired a reputation as a fun loving if somewhat ill disciplined junior pilot

with his low level antics, even daring to fly underneath a bridge at 100 mph with an alleged 3 foot of clearance. However, even buzzing his friends and local landmarks provided good experience, and he set his sights on a career in military aviation.

'Don' Gentile on the wing of his P-51B, 'Shangri-La'

Gentile had proven himself to be a gifted sportsman and keen musician during his upbringing, but his academic qualifications did not meet the required standard for the United States Army Air Force or US Navy, as he had not attended college. With war raging in Europe and a growing feeling of inevitability that America would soon join the conflict, Gentile was not willing to continue with education when there was a war to fight – he travelled north and joined the Royal Canadian Air Force in 1941. Shipped to England, Gentile was disappointed when his previous experience counted against him – he was employed as an instructor. After a short spell of instructing he then joined No.133 Squadron RAF, one of the three famous 'Eagle Squadrons' which was made up of US volunteers flying under British Commanding Officers and Flight Commanders. Now commissioned as an officer in the RAF, Gentile learned his trade as a fighter pilot on Hawker Hurricanes and Supermarine Spitfires. It was in the latter that he shot down two German aircraft on August 1st 1942, receiving the British Distinguished Flying Cross as a result.

The next month, Gentile traded in his British air force blue uniform for US green; the Eagle Squadrons were transferred across to the United States Army Air Force and Gentile was commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant. Now flying P-47s with the 336th Fighter Squadron of the 4th Fighter Group, flying from RAF Debden in Essex, England. Gentile met some moderate success whilst at the controls of the heavy P-47, shooting down a number of German aircraft whilst on escort and ground attack sorties over occupied Europe. In September he was promoted to Captain and made a Flight Commander. Gentile's finest hour with the P-47 came in early 1944 when he managed to outmaneuver and shoot down two FW-190s in a low level dogfight before, now out of ammunition, out flying a third German fighter to make good his escape. However, it was after the group converted to the P-51 in February 1944 that Gentile's natural ability was suddenly given the chance to truly shine.

In a little over a month, Gentile shot down 15 German aircraft. This included three Bf109s and a fourth shared on March 8th and another three aircraft on April 8th, making him the highest scoring fighter ace in the US 8th Air Force. In keeping with the US policy of also counting strafing kills towards a tally, Gentile scored his 27th kill to surpass the score of American World War One legend Eddie Rickenbacker. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross by General Eisenhower who referred to him as a 'One Man Air Force' – this would later be the title of his autobiography which he co-wrote.

Fame was welcome to the 23 year old from Ohio – he even refused to take leave for fear of other American fighter aces overtaking his total. On April 13th, an organized media event at RAF Debden saw a small crowd of journalists and photographers assemble to propel Gentile further along the pathway to fame. Gentile took off in his red nosed P-51B, 'Shangri-La', to carry out a sequence of showy aerobatics over the assembled press. It did not end well. Gentile maneuvered his fighter too close to the ground and ended up in a crumpled heap in front of the photographers, and his Commanding Officer.

Gentile was grounded before then being sent back to the United States in June for a tour across the country, selling war bonds alongside his long term wingman, Captain John T. Godfrey. Gentile would not return to front line operations. He ended the war as a Major and opted to stay with the US Army Air Force and into the transition to the newly formed United States Air Force in 1947. He was employed as a test pilot and a fighter gunnery instructor before stepping away from flying in 1949 to study military science at the University of Maryland.

In January 1951, Dominic Gentile was killed in a flying accident was flying a

Lockheed T-33 jet trainer. He left behind a wife and three sons. ‘Don’ Gentile rose rapidly to fame as a natural, gifted fighter pilot whose gregarious and flamboyant nature made him popular amongst his peers. His final total of air-to-air kills stood at 19.83 with the USAAF, along with two further victories with the RAF. An Air Force base was named after him in 1962, and he was inducted into the US National Aviation Hall of Fame in 1995.

With an upcoming update, we will add the personal emblem of Maj. Dominic ‘Don’ Gentile "Shangri-La", P-51B, 336th FS, 4th FG, made by Jej 'CharlieFoxtrot' Ortiz

We have 2 RAAF Boomerang models in the game - Mk.I for 1150 GE & Mk.II for 1320 GE

[AIR FORCES] The Royal Australian Air Force

31. March - Author: Aaron "Anglomani" Lentz

The Royal Australian Air Force was officially created on the 31st of August, 1921. It's beginnings, however, date back to service undertaken during World War 1 and can trace its heritage back to the Central Flying School formed on the 7th of March 1913, when lessons and instruction would take place in canvas tents. The AFC was then formed at Point Cook, Victoria, during 1914; it's official usage being instituted when attached to the formation of the first Australian Imperial Forces. From this humble beginning Australia became the only commonwealth colony to set up a separate flying corps for service during the First World War. Known as the Australian Flying Corps, they served in Mesopotamia, the Middle East, Britain, France, and as an occupation force in Germany.

Following its separation from the Australian army and subsequent formation on the 31st of march 1921, the Australian Air Force was given His Majesty's recognition, and took on the 'Royal' prefix on 31st of August 1921. Despite the dedication and service of it's members during World War One, the interwar years were difficult, and left the RAAF ill prepared to face the coming of the Second World War.

The Second World War forced the RAAF and the Australian aircraft industry into a rapid level of expansion and development. Major commitments were made to several areas, including the European theater via Bomber Command, the home defence of Britain, and naval warfare operations and service in the mediterranean area including Egypt, Syria, Palestine, Tunisia, Italy, Malta and Gibraltar.

Boomerang Mk.II in War Thunder

The Pacific theater was, however, a very different beast. Relegated as a secondary front to that of the European theater, the Pacific, and indeed Australia's area of concern, was given lesser priority in terms of troops and supplies. All allied air forces under operational duties in the South-West Pacific Area were organised under the headquarters designated as "Allied Air Forces, South-West Pacific Area". Under the leadership of Lt-General Kenney, the command comprised the Fifth American Air Force, various units of the Royal Australian Air Force, one Royal Air Force fighter squadron; and one Netherlands Air Force medium bomber squadron.

By April 1943, Kenney's force included sixty-nine squadrons assigned to the South-West Pacific Area, with 31 squadrons originating from the RAAF. An additional 12 squadrons were operating in the SWPA, but not under Kenney's command. The war in the Pacific would eventually be won; the sacrifice and lessons had been learned and experienced, and the forward defence of Australia and it's people would become the main area of concern for the RAAF, a now well established military force.

The British Commonwealth Occupation Force in Japan was tasked with the enforcement of the unconditional surrender that had ended the war. The BCOF was required to maintain military control and to supervise the demilitarisation and return of Japan's war industry to civilian production. The RAAF component of this occupation force was stationed at Bofu, in Yamaguchi Prefecture. The RAAF squadrons which served in Japan flew variants of CAC Mustangs, the Australian Licence built P-51D's.

Australian Units of the BCOF, led by Wing Commander Lou Spence, flew the first Australian ground support operations over Korea. Over the next few weeks, No. 77 Squadron flew numerous sorties against KPA forces, and combined with allied air units, greatly assisted in slowing the North Koreans' advance. The Korean War exemplified the age of the Jet Fighter

and the RAAF was soon flying Gloster Meteor F.8's over the peninsular.

Australia's involvement in the Malayan Emergency began in 1950 with the arrival of RAAF aircraft and personnel in Singapore. Six Lincoln bombers of 1 Squadron RAAF provided the core of aerial operations. These Lincolns were increasingly used in combined forces, which would partake in air and ground assaults against Communists troops, carrying out over 3000 sorties during an 8 year period. These Aircraft were eventually joined by RAAF Canberra Bombers and CAC Avon Sabres.

The RAAF would continue to serve as part of the United nations, and in ANZUS treaty obligations, serving in Vietnam and Cambodia, as well as taking part in recent Middle Eastern conflicts. Today, the RAAF flies both the F/A-18A and F/A-18B Hornets as well as the F/A-18F Super Hornet in strike combat and transport roles. Humanitarian operations are also a very large part of the RAAF's duties, with C-17A Globemaster III's, C-130J Hercules' and AP-3C Orion aircraft providing emergency aid from the Indian Ocean in the west to the Pacific Islands in the east and southwards to Australia's vast Antarctic possessions.

X-ray view of the RAAF Boomerang Mk.II