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GENERAL HEINZ GUDERIAN

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**His Panzers Smashed
Poland and France –
But Russia was
Another Story**

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General Heinz Guderian

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EDITOR'S LETTER

NEW Departments

We're working hard to keep getting better!

Based on reader feedback and ACG Advisory Board members' suggestions, we've made some exciting additions to our lineup. Of course, the high-quality content readers have come to expect from *Armchair General* is still there, but now it is better than ever! We will continue to print the best military history articles written by outstanding authors and accompanied by the superb maps, images and illustrations that in 2005

convinced the *Chicago Tribune* to select ACG as one of the "50 Best Magazines" in the world.

Joining our lineup of regular features are four brand-new departments: *Great Warriors*, *Legendary Combat Units*, *Badges of Honor* and *Forgotten History*. *Great Warriors*, presented in cooperation with Osprey Publishing (which provides one of its acclaimed illustrations for each article), profiles a member of the world's history-making class of fighters. The series debuts with "British Redcoats," an interesting piece about the "thin red line of heroes" who for two centuries fought Britain's wars.

Legendary Combat Units examines some of the finest and most famous military formations fielded throughout the various eras of warfare. To kick off the series, author Steven Clay chose to write about the U.S. 1st Infantry Division, also known as the "Big Red One." From the trenches of World War I, across the beaches of Normandy in 1944, and through the jungles of Vietnam – right up to today's War on Terrorism – Big Red One Soldiers have more than lived up to their unit's unofficial motto, "No mission too difficult;

no sacrifice too great. Duty first!"

Badges of Honor, meticulously researched and skillfully written by militaria expert Peter Suci, presents the facts behind the world's top military awards. He begins with Germany's Iron Cross, one of the world's oldest – and most collectible – valor decorations. In addition to the medals' backgrounds, Suci shares valuable "insider" collector advice.

Forgotten History rounds out our quartet of new departments with fascinating but little-known accounts of the commanders and

battles that have shaped our world. Renowned author Peter Tsouras inaugurates the department with the story of Dmitri Donskoi, Russia's Grand Prince of Moscow (1359-89). Dmitri built the first stone Kremlin – which remains the physical symbol of Russian power – and began his country's struggle to escape the oppressive "Tatar Yoke" by defeating the heirs to Genghis Khan's empire at the Battle of Kulikovo (1380).

This issue also has much more to offer, including an outstanding "twofer" on Germany's famous panzer leader

Heinz Guderian (see *Cover Story* and *What Next General?*) as well as advice to help ease your holiday shopping chores (see *Game Buzz*, *Bookshelf* and *DVD Library*)!

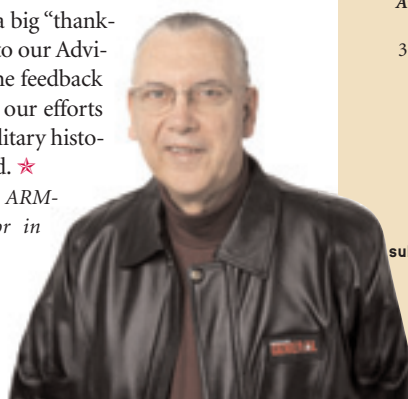
On behalf of everyone at *Armchair General*, I'd like to pass along a big "thank-you" to our readers and to our Advisory Board members. The feedback we receive is essential to our efforts to keep ACG the best military history magazine in the world. ★

Jerry Morelock, PhD, ARMCHAIR GENERAL Editor in Chief.



Soldiers from the 1st Infantry Division provide security during a cordon and search operation in Adhamiya, Iraq. The "Big Red One" is the first unit profiled in our new *Legendary Combat Units* department.

ARMY SGT. JEFFREY ALEXANDER



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10 QUESTIONS

Curt Schilling

An interview with the Major League Baseball star who is also a board member of the National World War II Museum.

Boston Red Sox pitcher Curt Schilling redefined the term “warrior” in the lexicon of American sports history when he won his two famous “Bloody Sock” games in the 2004 postseason, which propelled the team to its first world championship in 86 years and broke “The Curse.” Curt’s warrior mentality may have stemmed from his upbringing in a military family. Certainly, that has led to his passionate interest in military history. *Armchair General* correspondent John Ingoldsby, who resides in the same suburban Boston town of Medfield, Massachusetts, as Curt, caught up with the World Series hero to learn more about his ardent interest in World War II.

ACG Your father served in the military, which helped generate your own interest in military history. Can you tell ACG readers about his career?

SCHILLING: My dad was in the 101st Airborne, and from what I understand, he was being shipped out to Korea when the conflict ended (in 1953).

ACG What were your experiences growing up in a military family?

SCHILLING: I was an Army brat, and we lived everywhere – from Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, to Arizona and even Alaska.

ACG Why and how is your specific expertise in military history centered on World War II in Europe?

SCHILLING: I think it is because it was the first and last real conventional war with repeat-firing weapons. Before World War II, armor came into vogue. After World War II, it was rockets and jets. It may be the last world war of human beings (fighting) face-to-face and eye-to-eye. There will be no more dogfights or battles like Kursk (Russia, 1943) be-

cause of technology. Lastly, I also have a big interest in the trio of legendary generals – Patton, Montgomery and Rommel.

ACG A television interview once featured your extensive World War II memorabilia collection. Can you describe it?

SCHILLING: I have a very large collection of all types of World War II memorabilia, which includes 4,000 to 5,000 military books. I am also a wargamer and am fascinated with how you can tactically simulate and replicate battles on a game board.



The National World War II Museum in New Orleans features hundreds of exhibits dedicated to the courage and sacrifice of the men and women who won the Second World War.

ACG Your interest in World War II military history is so strong that you even have a dog named Patton. What breed of dog is it, and why did you choose that name?

SCHILLING: You are correct; my dog’s name is Patton. He is a rottweiler, and I chose his name since I thought he reflected the general’s strong personality.

ACG Have you visited Europe to see the famous battleground sites such as Normandy or Bastogne? If not, do you have plans to do so?

SCHILLING: No, I have not visited Europe yet. I am only waiting since my wife, Shonda, and I want to take our four kids to all experience it for the first time together.

ACG How was the event you attended in November at the Museum of World War II in Massachusetts? (Visit museumofworldwarii.com.)

SCHILLING: It was a wonderful event, mixing with people interested in World War II. The place is breathtaking, and the uniforms and rest of the collection in the museum are incredible.

ACG Would you share your thoughts on the current War on Terrorism?

SCHILLING: First of all, my thoughts and prayers are with the Soldiers and their families. I also thank God daily to be in a country that produces these men and women who are willing to risk their lives to free people they do not even know. I am offended by people who are using the war as a political platform or have an agenda. I do not want (American troops) to have to go back there (Middle East). And I do not want them (the terrorists) to come here.

ACG What is your affiliation with the National World War II Museum in New Orleans? (Visit ddaymuseum.org for more information.)

SCHILLING: I am on the Board of Trustees. I had heard about the museum about two years ago, and my affiliation with them grew out of my interest in the war.

ACG Are you involved in any museum activities?

SCHILLING: I hope to be a speaker at their “When Baseball Went to War” event during Veterans Day weekend in November. (See *Dispatches*, November 2007 ACG.) ★

John Ingoldsby conducted this interview. He is a freelance writer and former newspaper reporter who has written for numerous publications, including “Military History” magazine. John also was the first New England media representative chosen by the Pentagon to cover NATO wargames in Europe.

Did Polish Lancers Really Charge German Panzers?

The truth about World War II's greatest myth.

BY JACEK LUBECKI

It seems no book or article about the 1939 Nazi invasion of Poland can be considered complete without the obligatory mention of how “brave Polish cavalry lancers charged German panzers.” The image is startlingly anachronistic – medieval-like horsemen with sabers and wooden spears throwing themselves willy-nilly against armored steel monsters spewing deadly fire from cannon and machine guns. It reads like a Polish version of King Arthur’s Knights of the Round Table vs. Hitler’s blitzkrieg – foolishly brave but hopelessly overmatched patriots vainly sacrificing themselves in a misguided attempt to stem the onrushing tide of the invincible Nazi war machine. Or so goes the oft-told tale.

Dismissing the story out of hand as fiction dreamed up by Nazi propaganda chief Joseph Goebbels, however, fails to account either for the tale’s persistence or for its presence in books written by historians sympathetic to Poland. Although Goebbels did have a hand in perpetuating the legend by using German cavalry to stage a phony “lancers vs. panzers” charge for Nazi newsreels, accounts also appear from participants in the Polish campaign such as General Heinz Guderian (see “Guderian: Hitler’s Troublesome Panzer Genius,” p. 50), who wrote about the subject in his war memoir, *Panzer Leader*. And al-

though one may question whether a battlefield report by Italian war correspondent Mario Appelius might be influenced by pro-Axis bias, even famous Polish movie director Andrzej Wajda’s 1961 film *Lotna* features a scene depicting a Polish cavalry horseback charge against German panzers.

Yet despite the story’s “legs” – the legend is now 68 years old and counting – the incident did *not* happen. The “lancers vs. panzers” tale is simply the greatest myth of World War II.

“FOOLISHLY BRAVE”

Before explaining the truths, half-truths and battlefield “fog of war” confusion surrounding the Polish cavalry story, it is useful to recognize the two conflicting motivations of those who launched the myth of the “foolishly brave” charge and then helped to perpetuate it.

Initially, the Nazi wartime propaganda machine was motivated to create the myth to fill its need for a self-perpetuating fabrication portraying Poles as stupid fanatics – i.e., the “foolish” part was emphasized. Later, however, the Poles and those sympathetic to their plight as Hitler’s first victims in World War II began to stress the “brave” part – perhaps as some sort of consolation to the Polish army for losing the struggle in the war’s first month.



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FORGOTTEN HISTORY

The Battle of Kulikovo

Dmitri Donskoi, the “forgotten” 14th-century prince, put Moscow on the fast track.



Dmitri Donskoi was the first Russian prince to openly challenge Tatar authority.

Ask Westerners to list Russia's greatest leaders and they likely will include Ivan the Terrible, Peter the Great, Vladimir Lenin and Joseph Stalin. The more knowledgeable might add Alexander Nevsky, Michael Romanov, Catherine the Great and Alexander I. Yet the man who *started* Russia on its path to becoming one of the world's great powers is often unfairly overlooked. Dmitri Ivanovich (James, son of John) was the Grand Prince of Moscow from 1359 and victor over the Tatars at the Battle of Kulikovo in 1380.

Dmitri was born in Moscow in 1350, inside a Russia that was firmly under the “Tatar yoke” – the rule of the Golden Horde, the Turkified successor to the Mongol Empire. The Tatars did not occupy the Russian lands but ruled indirectly from their capital on the lower Volga, a region not yet Russian. Dmitri's birthplace, like other Russian principalities, paid tribute (taxes, slaves, etc.) to the Great Khan of the Golden Horde.

The Tatars demonstrated their power by periodically launching devastating military invasions, and they asserted their influence through the collection of tribute and through the appointment (or deposition) of Russian princes. In 1360, for example, they snubbed Dmitri by establishing Dmitri Konstantinovich of Nizhniy Novgorod as the prestigious Grand Duke of Vladimir, a designation considered the highest dignity among Russian princes. This delayed Dmitri Ivanovich's assumption of that coveted title for three years.

When Dmitri became Grand Prince of Moscow at the age of 9 (Metropolitan Alexis was regent while Dmitri was a minor), the city was a mostly wooden mud hole on the Moskva

River, far overshadowed by northern Russia's grander principalities such as Vladimir, Tver, Novgorod and Pskov. Nonetheless, by the time of his death in 1389, Dmitri had established his authority over many rival princes, created a formidable military force powerful enough to challenge the Golden Horde, and more than doubled Muscovy's territory. The fact that Dmitri's father, Ivan I, had previously negotiated a deal with the Golden Horde that gave Moscow the right to be the sole “tax collector” of tribute for the Tartars didn't hurt either. This was an important tool that Dmitri used to good effect. From inside the newly built stone walls of the Kremlin (completed 1367), he put Moscow on the fast track to becoming Russia's most powerful political entity. Yet as long as the Golden Horde held sway, Muscovy remained merely the leading principality among the Great Khan's vassal states.

However, by 1380, the Golden Horde was racked by internal division and infighting over leadership succession. One of those vying for power was Mamai, a general who aspired to establish his own khanate in southern Ukraine and the Crimea. Two years earlier, Mamai had dispatched a force under a subordinate to “punish” Dmitri, but it was defeated in battle near the Vozzha River on August 11, 1378. Encouraged by this successful flaunting of Tatar authority, Dmitri lent military forces to other principalities to help turn back Tatar raids. Consequently, in September 1380, Mamai assembled an army numbering between 125,000 and 300,000 and personally led it against Dmitri.

Stiffened by Dmitri's earlier success in 1378, Russian princes contributed large contingents of soldiers to the Grand Prince's army, which by September 8, 1380, numbered between 80,000 and 150,000. At Kulikovo Pole

(Kulikovo Fields), a level plain bordered by thick woods near the confluence of the Don and Nepreyadva rivers, the two sides arrayed for battle. Dmitri arranged his soldiers in three successive lines: an outer screen, the main battle line, and a reserve force. Wisely, as it turned out, he hid a large force of cavalry in the dense woods on his army's left flank. Mamai positioned his army of Tatars and numerous allied contingents directly in front of Dmitri's Russians.

At noon, an opening duel of “champions” – one from each side – ended with *both* participants dying. However, Dmitri's men claimed a “moral victory” when the body of their champion (Russian monk Alexander Peresvet) remained on horseback – they considered this a good omen. However, over the next three hours, through a preponderance of numbers, Mamai's men steadily pushed back the Russians.

With Mamai's army now fully committed against Dmitri's slowly withdrawing main force, the hidden Russian cavalry burst out of the woods and launched a devastating assault that slammed against the Tatar rear. Mamai's force broke under the surprise attack and fled the battlefield with the Russian cavalry in hot pursuit. Thousands were slaughtered; however, Mamai survived the battle – only to be poisoned in the Crimea by disgruntled allies. In recognition of his victory, Dmitri was acclaimed Dmitri Donskoi (of the Don).

Dmitri paid a high price for flaunting the authority of the Golden Horde, as Mamai's successor reasserted Tatar control of Russia by burning Moscow in 1382. Yet Tatar dominance began to decline after “Dmitri of the Don's” turning-point victory (Ivan III finally ended Mongol domination for good a century later in 1480). Just as another turning point, the Battle of Stalingrad in 1942, started a later generation of Russians on the long road to Berlin, the Battle of Kulikovo marked the beginning of Russia's deliverance from the Tatar yoke. ★

Peter Tsouras retired from the Army Reserve in 1994 and is currently a military intelligence analyst for the Defense Intelligence Agency. He is the author/editor of 23 books and numerous articles on military and alternate military history.

FAST FACTS

Name: Dmitri Ivanovich of Moscow (October 12, 1350 – May 19, 1389)

Nickname: Dmitri Donskoi (“Dmitri of the Don,” after his victory at Kulikovo)

Accomplishments: Built first stone-walled Kremlin (completed 1367)

First Russian leader to challenge Tatar authority

Doubled Muscovite territory, launching Russia on path to greatness

Canonized as St. Dmitri Ivanovich Donskoi

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