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THE MAN'S MAGAZINE OF EXCITING FICTION AND FACT

TURIN'S FAMED GIRL GUERRILLAS
Why the Nazis Called Them

"THE PIEDMONT HARLOTS"

Amazing True Photo Adventure
KILLER WOLF OF THE NORTH



STREET OF THE NIGHT GIRLS
Read

OFF LIMIT!



Adventure

The Man's Magazine of Exciting Fiction and Fact

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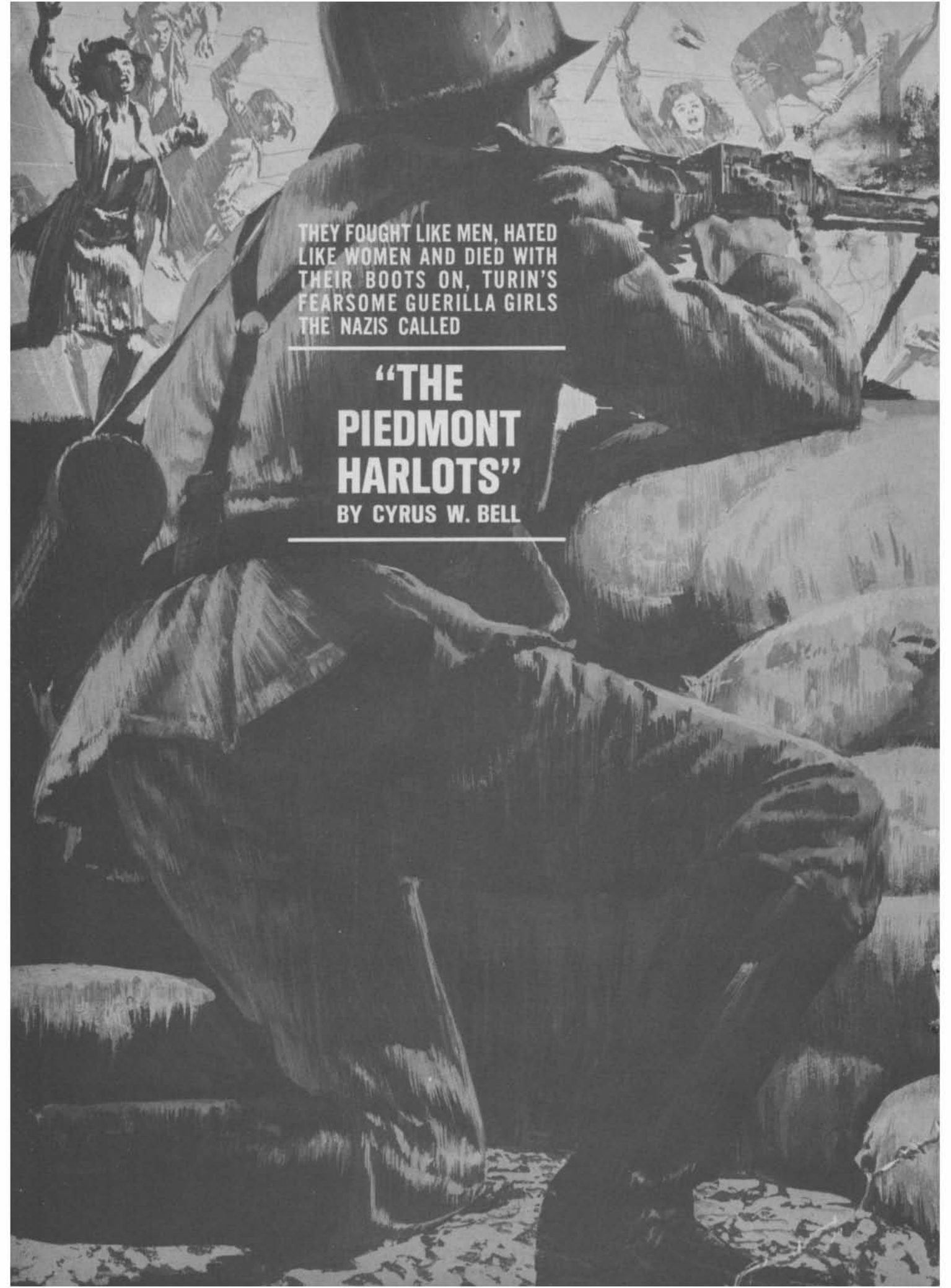
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THEY FOUGHT LIKE MEN, HATED
LIKE WOMEN AND DIED WITH
THEIR BOOTS ON, TURIN'S
FEARSOME GUERILLA GIRLS
THE NAZIS CALLED

“THE PIEDMONT HARLOTS”

BY CYRUS W. BELL



ILLUSTRATED BY SHANNON STIRNWEIS

■ AT the evening roll call the long rows of prisoners stood like figures carved from wood as the camp guards checked reports. Another day was over at Detention Camp #3, Women's Compound, outside the small town of Vinovo, a few miles from Turin, on the evening of September 20, 1944.

It had been a day like many others—a day of hate and monotony, hemmed in by barbed wire and German machine guns ever on the ready. Now with their six o'clock shadows stretching grotesquely on the bare earth, it was time for the sullen females to be locked in their barracks for the night.

Camp Commander Colonel Artur Herbert von Niemann, a Nazi officer with monocle and riding crop, sounded the order for the 846 women to about-face and march to their wooden cells. Some of the girls were still reasonably attractive, he mused, especially that big, dark-haired Annetta Dufour, whom he had whipped last night for insubordination. The way she had danced under the leathery blows with her arms tethered above had roused him no end.

"Maybe I'll call her in tonight," thought the Colonel, "She's no doubt a tiger in bed." And he snapped a turn and walked briskly to the orderly room.

What the C.O. didn't notice that evening was that there was trouble brewing. He hadn't noticed the sideway glances the girls gave each other. Nor the lip twitches and the eye flicking exchanges. He got no hint that night all 846 detainees of Detention Camp #3, Women's Compound, would stage a bloody breakout in one of the most horrible prison escapes of World War II.

The women filed into their wooden barracks, and dusk dropped over the compound, softening the ugly outlines of barbed wire, watch towers and Nazi helmets. Silence enfolded the camp.

But it was not the silence of sleep.

On this hot September evening, however, it was the stillness of 846 women holding their breath and waiting. For this was E-Day in camp, the day for which they had worked and planned weeks on end. No one suspected, least of all the German guards who patrolled outside with rifles slung over their shoulders and with boots crunching on gravel, that the women had collected a mass of weapons and (Continued on page 65)

Heavy rifle fire cut into the screaming tide of females as they surged to the wire.

THE PIEDMONT HARLOTS *Continued from page 45*

lodged them under the floorboards of their huts. Unbroken in spirit, the females—all Italians between the ages of sixteen and forty-five—had quietly collected wood bats, heavy clubs, knives, scissors, some guns and even several grenades.

The night before, leaders from the various barracks had sneaked out and wriggled through the shadows for a final briefing in Annetta's quarters. It was she, the one the Colonel thought he might take to bed with him that night, who had plotted the break. The husky twenty-one-year-old ringleader now had everything worked out for the surprise attack, even down to forty women who had donned padded clothing made from blankets and thick gloves to knock over the barbed wire.

"Tonight we kill—or we get killed," Annetta said. Those were among her last words. She was to die later in the charge at the east machine gun.

At eleven o'clock the plan went into action.

FIRST, fires began to sprout from the barracks, one at a time. As the flames burned with fiercely growing intensity, the women burst from their barracks into all directions. All around the perimeter of the camp

searchlight beams sprang out, pivoting around the compound, flickering over the crackling huts.

As the lights came to rest, the Nazis saw female savages on the run. Waving weapons over their heads, they charged toward their objectives—the four machine guns guarding each corner of the camp. For an instant the gunners were too astonished to move, but a loudspeaker brought them to their senses.

"Fire, you fools! Stop them from reaching the wire!" the voice roared into the night air.

The machine guns began to chatter. The one on the western side stopped all of a sudden. But the others kept up. Tracer bullets pierced the night as the charging prisoners surged into the guns' mouths.

Heavy rifle fire from the guards cut into the screaming tide of females as they pushed to the barbed wire.

There was only one more barrier between the breakout women and freedom, a heavy-calibre machine gun on a swivel that faced the camp some fifty yards from the main entrance. The gunman, who had been waiting for orders to shoot, now on his own, tightened his fingers on the trigger. Bullets by the dozens spat into the

figures over the wire. More than 500 women had by now broken through, and they surged toward the last gun.

The first rank melted away like a breaking wave, but those behind leaped over the bodies of their slain buddies. Though more fell, the gunner was overwhelmed by the sheer numbers who swiftly descended on him and hacked him to shreds.

Yelling now with triumph and panting with excitement, the prisoners brought the gun into play against the watchtowers. While scores of other women poured over the wire to freedom, the heavy gun provided cover and kept the garrison busy. The glare of the barracks blazing like huge bonfires made targets of the women.

The unlucky last ones to tear out of the compound were picked off, and they wobbled across other bodies before they dropped. But at last the survivors, many of them wounded, reached the dark line of the trees and disappeared into cover. Though the mass breakout had been accomplished, the cost of life had been enormous.

The night wore on and by dawn more than 250 women lay dead.

The gallant breakout of September 20, 1944, pointing up one of the bloodiest prison escapes in all Italy's history, was never reported in any of the world's daily newspapers. Nor, by some quirk of World War II, were any stories ever published about the group of nearly 2,500 guerrilla women from Turin who hid out in the Italian Alps between October 1943 and April 1945 and whose help to General Mark Clark was a tremendous boost to the United States Fifth Army.

During the last nineteen months of the war, these unheralded Alpine Amazons, most of whom had not even reached their thirties, killed more than 5,000 Nazi troops.

In memory of these heroines who died with their boots on, Turin's Feminine Commission several years ago published a volume entitled, "Piedmont Women in the Battle of Liberation." Resembling a high school year book, the volume is replete with individual photographs, alongside of which the career of each girl is summarized. Mrs. Ada Marchesini Gobetti, one of the most courageous of the mountain brigade of female warriors, edited the volume.

TURIN'S band of female guerrillas, burning with the fire of liberation for their native Italy, sprang up more

or less spontaneously. Officially known as the Anita Garibaldi Detachment of the 17th Garibaldi Resistance Brigade, the female troops were not-so-affectionately known among Italy's fascists by a nickname the Germans had pinned on them, *Le Putane Piemontesi* (the Piedmont Harlots).

Most of the members of the Anita Garibaldi Detachment were Jews whose fathers, husbands and sweethearts had been freighted off to Nazi concentration camps. They formed into a gang of outlaws under the leadership of Donna Elvira Daniele, a teacher of physical education. They took to the mountains outside of Turin and proceeded to destroy as many Germans as they could.

In September 1943, when Italy surrendered to the Allies, The Boot was in one gnarled mess. Five weeks later the Italian army became cobelligerents and declared war on Germany.

In the north the Nazis favored the formation of a puppet state headed by Il Duce Mussolini, about whom the Italian people were now loudly divided. Anti-fascists in the north, many of whom later were to turn to Communism in the postwar economic crisis that rocked the Mediterranean peninsula, organized a stupendous Resistance campaign in the German-infested regions.

The struggle against the Nazis and Fascists was a harsh and bloody one. Altogether about 62,500 partisans were killed and over 40,000 wounded and disabled. In April 1945 the Allies overran the Gothic Line and stormed into the Po Valley.

The Germans had every reason in the world to keep Turin under their thumb. Primarily it was, as it is today, the home of the most important motor industries in Italy. The German Army needed not only this industrial potential to grease its mechanical larder but also the large variety of agricultural products that flooded the Piedmont capital.

To keep Turin in tow, therefore, Hitler had placed more than 100,000 occupation troops in and around the Piedmont Region—and that was exactly where the Partisans made themselves felt.

Typical of the kind of trouble Italy's G. I. Jo made for the invaders was the time 200 of these killers-in-skirts, on November 29, 1944, (shortly after the bloody prison escape at Vinovo's Detention Camp #3) raided

a detached freight car full of *robiola* and *fontina*, local cheeses the German mess halls always had on the tables.

There were thirty riflemen guarding the cheese, and leader Elvira Daniele figured she could erase the squad and swoop off with the delicacy.

THE thirty Nazis put up a good fight. The *robiola* and *fontina* were just as valuable to them as a warehouse full of ammunition.

"Colonel" Daniele dispersed her brigade, some of whom had been among the successful escapees at Vinovo two months earlier.

Elvira Daniele was wounded. Before long, however, she was back on the job. Her luck after that didn't hold out very long. Soon after she was shot through the heart by a German sniper one night, and it was a sad day indeed for the Anita Garibaldi Detachment when they buried her in an unmarked grave on some now-forgotten hillside. Elvira's second in command, amazing as this may sound, was only fifteen years old. Anna Maria Ghizzone was her name, and she ran the outfit in orderly fashion until she died in combat a week before the war ended.

"Women like Anna Maria and Elvira were true heroines in the real sense of the word, as were many other truly brave Partisan women we lost," editor Gobetti wrote in her foreword to the book. From the official roster in the volume, there is a listing selected at random of some of the soldier girls who died unheralded deaths. Among them was Cleonece Tomasetti, former ballet dancer, who died in the massacre at Fondotoce.

At Fondotoce, with some 7,000 people as spectators, the captured guerrillas were lined up to face a firing squad. The order given, the rifles boomed and every Partisan fell dead, except the lovely Cleonece. By the commandant's pre-arrangement she had not been touched.

"And what about me?" the fearless damsel said in defiance. "Cannot a woman die for her country, too?"

The officer in charge ordered his squad to reload. As the Nazis leveled their guns at her, Cleonece ripped open her shirt front to reveal her full chest to the execution detail.

"Long live liberty!" she shrieked in a cry that was heard all over the piazza moments before the German rifles roared simultaneously.

Like Cleonece, many of the girls

listed in Mrs. Gobetti's anthology died in unusual circumstances.

Take the case of the Maria Teresa Gorlier, who met her end in a sensational manner.

Maria, a twenty-three-year-old *studentessa*, was, during her five months of service one of the best spies the brigade had. But on June 24, 1944, she was arrested by the notorious Black Shirt commander, Captain Gino, at Cesana. Taken to Incis Barracks a week later to make her reveal information about the Partisan hideouts, she withstood the full gamut of abuse and torture. But she never talked.

Captain Gino, finally giving up on her, ordered her removed to the third-floor dormitory so that his men could queue up and take turns raping her. In the morning, delirious and nearly dead from the cruel experience, the naked girl managed to squeeze her way through the slit window and catapult to the ground. From her high perch she landed badly, and her leg broke under the impact. Out of the orderly room stepped Sergeant Federico Basaglia with a submachine gun snuggled under his armpit.

Game, Maria struggled to her feet, her fist clenching a large rock. She raised her arm awkwardly to throw the missile, but it went wild.

As the girl broke out into a torrent of curse words, Basaglia—never once losing his calm demeanor—unloosened the machine gun, casually pointed it at the helpless prisoner and fired a full load of thirty-two slugs into her.

In his official report, which was cited in the Fascist press, the Sergeant stated he had shot at Maria while she was trying to run away.

THE report on Maria's death was a sample of the kind of irreparable damage the Partisans could inflict on the Fascists with a printing press. Indeed, sometimes the ink flowed more freely than blood—all depending on what the enemy could least absorb from the Partisan bag of tricks. Take, for instance, this editorial—it did Turin's "unwanted guests" more harm than a dozen snipers:

"Why do they bomb us? Because the *Nazifascisti* continue to hold our city; our territory is in a state of war against the Allies. Because the Fascisti have asked the help of the Germans, have given them permission to invade our country and now give them all their help. Italian mothers,

the assassins of your children are the Fascist traitors, the slaves of Hitler who continue the war in our land for the sole benefit of the Nazis. Thus our cry for revenge and of hate is: Death to the Germans and to the Fascist traitors!"

After that fiery editorial, which was also printed on thousands of posters, the Fascists doubled the reward for any information leading to the exposure of the print shop that was putting out the underground propaganda. But

no sooner did the Nazis devote their energies to putting a stop to the printing and circulation of *We Women* than the "Piedmont Harlots" were off on another foray. Every day the girls had something new planned.

One day it would be sabotage and they would tear up a half-mile of railroad tracks. Or the next day they would destroy a string of freight trains. Always something, that was the operating procedure twenty-four hours around the clock.

Finally, Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, commander in charge of the German forces in Italy, decided he had taken about as much guff as he could. Publishing an official announcement in the *Corriere della Sera* on August 12, 1944, he promised the "law-abiding citizenry" that from that day forward (1) the German Army would go into high gear to snuff out the Partisan movement; (2) hostages would be taken and shot in every town any time any form of sabotage was committed; (3) reprisals would be effectuated in any area where so much as a single shot were fired; (4) all captured Partisans and known collaborators would be executed in public, and (5) all inhabitants would be held responsible for any railroad lines interrupted, any roads broken up or any bridges demolished.

THE proclamation didn't deter the resistance movement one bit.

The partisans, male and female, always struck where the Germans least expected or where they least preferred trouble.

The girl guerrillas took the town of Ossola from the Nazis soon after Kesselring's threat in the *Corriere*. More because of German pride than anything (Ossola had little military value), the Nazis came back a few weeks later and threw 13,000 men against the invisible females and several companies of men that had been

sent down from the mountains to help defend the town.

Backing their assault with artillery, mortars and tanks, they planned their attack purposely over a period of foggy weather so that American planes couldn't bomb them. On October 9, 1944, after twenty days of hard fighting, the partisans pulled their forces out and withdrew into Switzerland for a breather. Several hundred girls of the detachment were nabbed in that stand, and they were interred at Detention Camp #3 near Vinovo.

The Nazis didn't know at the time that they had captured Annetta Dufour, a leader who was known as "The Lioness" in her partisan circles. At one time in her career, Annetta managed to interrupt enemy rail lines for ninety-seven continuous days. Had the Germans known who she was, they certainly would have had a special reception committee waiting for her at Vinovo.

Although the Germans goofed from time to time, as in the case of Annetta Dufour, it is to the credit of the German commander in Turin, General Walter Schlemmer, that he fought the guerrillas as hard as they fought him. To Schlemmer's way of thinking, the struggle against the Partisans was a full-time proposition, an all-out-war job, one that he undertook with as much vigor as any Nazis commandant on any one of the other fronts.

The end came none too soon for Germans in Turin. On April 24, 1945, word reached partisan headquarters in the mountains that the Allies, who had finally broken through the Gothic Line further south, had crossed the Po River at Mantua. General Schlemmer knew that his number was up.

Through the local archbishop he proposed to spare Turin from destruction if the Partisans allowed his divisions forty-eight hours to withdraw. The offer was turned down.

The next day, April 27th, turned out to be a decisive one. The Anita Garibaldi Detachment was assigned to fight alongside the GIs, the Garibaldi and the Autonome Brigades and storm the Black Shirt barracks on Via Asti. The fighting was hot, but the guerrillas pushed the enemy to a line on Corso Oporto, Schlemmer's command headquarters.

Now the Nazi general sent word that if the guerrillas did not desist, he would make Turin into another Warsaw. Word, however, had reached the Partisans that supplementary guerrilla troops were being rushed into the sector and that the French Army was double-timing it to Turin as well. With that news on hand, the resistance chiefs told Schlemmer to go to hell. Convinced his adversaries were not bluffing, the German general did none of the things he threatened to do.

However, he planned an escape. His objective was to get most of his army onto the road to Chivasso, retreat towards Val d'Aosta and make his way into Switzerland. He figured he could get out of Turin by ripping a hole in the Partisan flank, precisely at the point where the Anita Garibaldi Brigade was bivouacked in Via Alfieri. He should have known better.

From his past experiences he should never have underestimated the power of the women manning the guns on that location because they delayed him longer than he had calculated.

On May 3rd Schlemmer had to surrender to American troops who flooded the valley and caught up with him, something that may not have happened so easily if the "Piedmont Harlots" hadn't held so well.

A few days later, on May 7, 1945, Germany surrendered and the fighting in North Italy ended. The tigresses of Turin had sighted the future of their country down the barrel of their rifles. And nobody could say their aims weren't good. ■