

COST OF WAR

FURTHER SELECTION OF DOWNED ALLIED AND
AXIS AIRCRAFT FROM THE SECOND WORLD WAR
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The scene is Berca Airfield in Benghazi, Libya and the date is 18 August 1943. Under a brilliant sun, USAAF mechanics from the 98th Bomb Group attempt to free needed parts from the wreckage of a Consolidated B-24 Liberator. At this point in the war, the parts supply chain was minimal and the wrecks, which were unfortunately quite numerous, had to be scavenged much like the desert vultures would devour a dead camel. The 98th had just completed the famous 1 August raid on Ploesti in Romania — Operation *Tidal Wave* — which was also the first anniversary of the unit's first combat mission when the unit bombed Mersa Metruh. On the Ploesti Raid, 48 B-24Ds of the 98th BG led by Col. John "Killer" Kane (who would be awarded the Medal of Honor) launched but only 40 entered the bomb run. Fifteen Liberators were shot down over the target by the alerted and well-prepared anti-aircraft units and a further four were lost on the return leg. Eight B-24Ds landed at Allied fields while a dozen made it to Benghazi. The 98th would lose 141 airmen KIA, 35 as POWs with the Romanians, while four would evade capture and were returned by Yugoslav partisans. Another B-24 is being disassembled for parts in the background and the men have erected a tent by the right wing to serve as a work station and also to enable them to get out of the weather. It can be seen how the intense sun has quickly faded the national insignia on the immediate left. The official report on the raid revealed that little lasting damage had been done to the refineries.



USAAF servicemen look over a graveyard of abandoned *Luftwaffe* aircraft at Berca Airfield after its capture by Allied forces. The striped Junkers Ju 87 *Stuka* in the foreground has drawn their attention.

During the Battle of Britain, select downed *Luftwaffe* aircraft were disassembled and removed to Farnborough for examination by the experts based at the field. One such aircraft was Messerschmitt Bf 109E-4B WNr 6316/W6+1 flown by *Unteroffizier* Matthias Massmann. While flying at 25,000-ft, the German was surprised by a Spitfire and the DB engine was damaged in the ensuing fight, forcing the German to belly-land the plane in a farm field.

