Who started the Cold War?

This is a story that few Americans have read about. Yugoslavia. November 7, 1944. Six months until VE Day.

Col. Clarence T. "Curley" Edwinson of the 82nd Fighter Group was leading elements of the 95th, 96th and 97th squadrons over Yugoslavia. His assigned target was a German convoy retreating from Greece on the road from Novi Pasar to Kaska.

Edwinson was a cocky and swashbuckling young fighter jock. As soon as he saw the thin line of a convoy far below he pointed his twin-engine Lightning at them and ordered his men to follow him. Edwinson was good and he opened up his four 50 caliber nose machine guns and single 20 mm on the line of trucks below.

Explosions ripped through the column, and the train went in one horrific blast. Trucks carrying the doomed soldiers were hit with armor-piercing shells.

The Americans were very surprised to see the Germans moving in broad daylight. They usually moved at night. They turned around and made pass over pass at the surprised convoy. One pilot hit a staff car and killed everyone inside.

Conversations about "Something's wrong" and "Those are Ford trucks down there" started coming in on the radios. Curley Edwinson told them to shut up and keep shooting.

They saw enemy planes coming at them. They were like planes that they had never seen before. They shot the first one down. A pilot finally noticed the unmistakable red star of the Soviet Union and they called off the attack.

When they returned to base they found that they had mistakenly attacked a Red Army column. Four Yak-9's had been shot down, 31 soldiers killed and scores more wounded. Included among the dead was Lt. Gen. G.P. Kotov, corps commander.

The Soviets had captured all the neighboring towns three weeks earlier and were completely surprised in the daylight blunder.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff issued an official apology. The Soviets demanded Edwinson's head. The Army Air Force relieved him of command and sent him home – without prejudice.

The Soviets thought the attack was deliberate. One writer who investigated the incident asked openly if Edwinson disliked the Soviets.

The official conclusion was that Edwinson was just too sure of himself. He thought he could never be wrong and he didn't want anyone under his command to ask questions or give their advice.

The United States did not start the Cold War. There were friendly fire incidents on each side and both the United States and the Soviet Union did not trust each other and always questioned each other's motives.

For 45 more years.