



Military Despatches

Vol 78 December 2023

Impregnable

The raid on Fort Eben Emael

Silent Night

The day the guns fell silent

Perks and Perils

Being a general in the Wehrmacht had its dangers



Audie Murphy

Hollywood star and war hero

For the military enthusiast



Military Despatches YouTube Channel



Click on any video below to view



Paratrooper Wings Quiz

Most military paratroopers are awarded their jump wings after they have qualified.

In this quiz we show you 15 different wings and you tell us where they are from.

Army Speak 101

The SADF had their own language. A mixture of English, Afrikaans, slang and techno-speak that few outside the military could hope to understand.

Most armies around the world also had their own slang terms. In this video we look at some of them.



New videos each week

We will be uploading new videos to our YouTube channel each week.

So remember to bookmark the channel and keep an eye out for new content.



Military Firearms Quiz

This quiz is all about military firearms. We show you 15 firearms, you tell us what they are.



Elite Military Units Quiz

Most military forces have an elite unit or regiment or a special forces component.

In this quiz we show you 15 and you tell us who they are and where they are from.



Who said that?

Throughout history military leaders and politicians have had some interesting things to say about war.

We give you 15 quotes, you tell us who made them.

CONTENTS

December 2023



Page 14



Special Forces Ops - Raid on Fort Eben Emael

Features

6

10 myths of the Vietnam War

Although it ended almost 50 years ago, there are still many myths and misconceptions about the Vietnam War. We look at ten myths and misconceptions.

20

Silent Night

On 24 December 1914 the guns along the Western Front fell silent. It was the first Christmas of the 'Great War' and the soldiers were going to celebrate.

28

Perks and perils

Being a general in the *Wehrmacht* had its perks, but also its perils. Hitler had 84 of his generals executed during the war.

32

Sign of the times

During the Vietnam War it became common practise for troops to draw graffiti on their helmet covers.

36

Signs of military service

Want to know if someone served in the military? Here are a number of clues to look for.

44

Mind your P's and Q's

What exactly is the Phonetic Alphabet and why is it used by the military?

46

World War I slang

Like soldiers so often do, British troops dealt with the horrors of trench warfare with humour. This included some of the slang that was used - and still is.

50

The origin of Taps

At military funerals, memorials and services you will hear the Last Post being sounded. Yet in America you will hear the sound of 'Taps'. Why is this, and where did Taps originate? And it's probably not the story that you have heard.

52

World War I uniforms

Here are ten things you may not have known about British Army uniforms of World War I.

Quiz

49

Up close and personal

We give you a close up view of 15 items. Can you tell us what they are?

Please remember to subscribe to our channel.

Feel free to leave a comment, and share this video.



Editor's Sitrep

I'm still trying to come to terms with the fact that it's December. Where exactly did the year go?

This time of year was traditionally known as the 'Festive Season'. Although I'm kind of wondering just how many people are feeling all that festive at the moment.

I'm one of those that always tries to see the positive side of things. Yet I must confess that even I'm starting to frown and shake my head.

Nothing seems to be working very well in South Africa at the moment - our health care, our education system, our electricity provider, our court system, our public transport network, our police force - nothing.

Instead of looking for a solution to the problem it seems to be far easier to blame other people or circumstances for the problem.

And those in authority have become masters of the art of misdirection; "Yes I know I burnt down the old age home and stole money from the orphanage. But do you see that other guy, he stole a pen from the library."

And the cost of living seems to increase by the week, often with-

out justification.

And many other countries aren't doing that well either. There is still a war going on in the Ukraine, and the Middle East is a shambles.

What really gets to me is this 'woke' culture we seem to be living in. Naturally you're still allowed to have an opinion, just as long as it fits in with whatever is the popular opinion at the time. If your opinion is different to theirs then you will be cancelled.

People will ignore facts or rewrite history so that it fits in with their narrative.

Despite everything, I'm still planning on inviting some of my veteran mates around for my traditional Christmas lunch (held at supper on Christmas Eve). Although this year instead of gammon we'll be sharing two slices of bacon. Instead of a roast turkey we'll each get a chicken drumstick. Oh, and don't forget one roast potato divided up into four pieces. Have a good Christmas and New Year.

Until next time, stay safe and stay healthy.

Matt

Hipe! media

PUBLISHER

Hipe Media

EDITOR

Matt Tennyson

PHOTO EDITOR

Regine Lord

CONTRIBUTORS

Janine Cassidy, Raymond Fletcher, Ryan Murphy, Matt O'Brien, Pamela Poole, Matt Tennyson.

Military Despatches is published on-line every month. The articles used in **Military Despatches** are copyrighted and may not be used without prior permission from the editor.

The views stated in this magazine do not necessary reflect the views of **Military Despatches**, the editor, the staff, or Hipe Media.

email

editor@hipe.co.za

YouTube Channel

Click [here](#) to visit our channel

Back Issues

To view any back issues of Military Despatches, go to www.militarydespatches.co.za or click [here](#).

CONTENTS

Page 82



December in military history

Head-to-Head

56

The Six Day War

This month we take a look at armour used during the 1967 Six Day War. Who had the most, and who was more effective.

Famous Figures

62

Audie Murphy

Poet, songwriter, actor with his own star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, and one of America's most decorated combat soldiers during World War II, Audie Murphy did it all.



Forged in Battle

66

Tiger I

Regarded as one of the best tanks of World War II, the name was enough to invoke fear.

Battlefield

72

Ten bloodiest battles

With more than 11 million casualties, these were the ten bloodiest battles in history.

Gaming

76

All I want for Christmas

Matt O'Brien lists the 10 games he wants for Christmas.

Movie Review

80

Stocking fillers

Nine movies that will make ideal gifts - for you or your friends.

Book Review

81

A good read

Six books that will make good reading during the holidays. Or buy them as gifts.

Front Cover

It seems that Santa doesn't feel safe travelling the world and delivering gifts in a sleigh.

This year he has upgraded to something more suitable for the times.



Ten myths about the Vietnam War

The Vietnam War lasted 19 years, 5 months, 4 weeks and 1 day, and claimed the lives of more than 58,000 American troops. Although it ended almost 50 years ago, there are still many myths and misconceptions about the Vietnam War. We look at ten myths and misconceptions.

The Vietnam War, also known as the Second Indochina War, and in Vietnam as the Resistance War Against America or simply the American War, was a conflict in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia from 1 November 1955 to the fall of Saigon on 30 April 1975.

It was the second of the Indochina Wars and was officially fought between North Vietnam and South Vietnam.

The war, considered a Cold War-era proxy war by some, lasted more than 19 years, with direct U.S. involvement ending in 1973, and included the Laotian Civil War and the Cambodian Civil War, which ended with all three countries becoming communist in 1975.

It was one of the most controversial wars that America was ever involved in. America was left divided when it came to the war with those that supported the war and those that were against it. In fact there was a strong anti-war movement within the United States.

Many Vietnam Veterans felt betrayed by their country and feel that they were never given the recognition that they deserved for fighting for their country.

Although the war ended almost 48 years ago, there are still many myths and misconcep-

tions about the Vietnam War.

In this article we take a brief look at ten of them.

10. Vietnam was an American war.

The Vietnam War is largely remembered as a contest between North and South Vietnam with the United States intervening on behalf of the latter. Yet this is not the case.

Both South and North Vietnam enjoyed considerable help from a host of other world powers both large and small.

In fact, more than 10 other nations took an active role in the decade-long fight, losing more than 15,000 lives in the process. While some countries' contributions are widely known, others might come as a surprise. Let's examine some of the Vietnam War's other participants.

Allies of the South

Between 1964 and 1973, more than 2.7 million American troops served in Vietnam. A total of 58,318 Americans were killed in Vietnam and 303,644 were wounded.

Yet despite this hefty commitment, Washington was eager to portray the war as a multinational effort aimed at countering communist aggression.

To that end, the White House invited (and pressured) a num-

ber its allies in the region to lend a hand in South Vietnam. More than 400,000 troops from six other countries answered the call.

South Korea - They were by far the most committed foreign ally of the American-led war effort in South East Asia.

Between 1965 and early 1973, more than 320,000 South Korean troops served in the war alongside U.S. and ARVN forces, although ROK troop levels never reached more than 50,000 at any given time.

All told, more than 5,000 South Korean soldiers were killed in nine years of fighting; 10,000 were wounded.

Australia - In total, more than 61,000 Australian soldiers also served in the war between 1962 and 1972, although that commitment never exceeded 8,000 troops at one time.

In addition to sending infantry, airborne, special forces, medical and armoured units, Australia's task force also included squadrons of helicopters, transport planes and even Canberra bombers. The Royal Australian Navy contributed a destroyer to the effort as well.

One of the units heavily committed to Vietnam were the Australian Special Air Service Regiment (SASR). They conducted nearly 1,200 patrols and

inflicted heavy casualties on the Viet Cong. Their own losses totalled one killed in action, one died of wounds, three accidentally killed, one missing and one death from illness. Twenty-eight men were wounded.

More than 500 Australian personnel were killed during 10 years of operations and 3,000 were wounded.

Philippines - The next largest partner in the U.S.-led war was the Philippines. Beginning in 1966, Manila deployed upwards of 10,000 troops to help support the Saigon government, but kept its contribution limited to medical and logistical operations.

Filipino casualties were minimal, yet the decision by the administration of Ferdinand Marcos to deploy troops to Indochina was still controversial domestically.

New Zealand - Between 1964 and 1972, more than 3,800 New Zealanders served as part of the Allied war effort. In addition to providing artillery batteries, combat engineers and medical personnel, Wellington sent elements of the country's elite Special Air Service. Pilots also served as part of the larger Australian contingent.

New Zealand Special Air Service (NZSAS) also sent a troop, consisting of an officer and 25 other ranks, to fight in Vietnam.

In all, 37 troops were killed during the eight-year mission and 187 were wounded.

Thailand - In 1965 Bangkok committed a small army contingent to South Vietnam, known

as the Queen's Cobra Battalion. It also pledged its national police force's air assets to monitor several segments of the Ho Chi Minh trail that passed through neighbouring Laos.

Taiwan - One of the earliest foreign contributors to the Saigon government was the ardently anti-communist Republic of China. In fact, Taiwan provided transport aircraft and secretly offered several hundred of its special forces soldiers to the cause beginning in 1961.

Over the next 11 years, three aircraft were lost to enemy ground fire and a number of Taiwanese commandos were captured while on missions in North Vietnam. In all, 25 Taiwanese died in action in Vietnam.

Canada - Although not officially a military contributor to the American war effort, Canadian industry supplied the U.S. with more than \$2.5 billion worth of war materiel during the 1960s and early 1970s.

More than 30,000 citizens volunteered to fight in the conflict. At least 100 Canadians died in American uniform during the war and one even won the Medal Of Honour in 1970 for heroism under fire.

Allies of the North

As America's role in the war widened, the communist world was keen to see Hanoi prevail. While support to North Vietnam largely came in the form of weapons and material, a number of countries sent advisors and even a handful of combatants.

Soviet Union - Moscow

proved to be North Vietnam's chief ally throughout the conflict, supplying both weapons and military advisors.

In addition to maintaining a troop commitment that topped 3,000 men at its peak, the Soviet's lavished Hanoi with more than 2,000 tanks, 7,000 artillery pieces, 5,000 anti-aircraft guns and nearly 200 surface to air missile batteries.

Aid from Russia eventually reached \$2 million a day. In at least one incident, Soviet advisors engaged American forces in combat. During an air raid on the North in 1965, Soviet anti-aircraft gunners fired on and destroyed American F-4 jets near Hanoi at Thanh Hoa.

China - Beginning in 1965, the People's Republic of China provided both military engineers and anti-aircraft batteries to the North Vietnamese war effort. This followed Beijing's policy of supplying millions of dollars in rice and more than 90,000 assault rifles to the communist regime.

By 1968, China began to withdraw its support following a widening rift with Hanoi's chief ally, the Soviet Union. Beijing gradually shifted its support to the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia.

Following the victory over the south in 1975, the unified Vietnam waged a four year war against Cambodia. China invaded Vietnam in 1979 by way of retaliation.

North Korea - Pyongyang also contributed to the communist north. In 1966, the reclusive

regime dispatched two squadrons of MiG-17s and a squadron of MiG-21s - 30 planes in all. More than 200 of the country's aviators eventually rotated in and out of country throughout the war during which time many flew combat missions.

Two full regiments of air defence troops were also dispatched. North Korean dictator Kim Il Sung reportedly urged his men to protect the skies above Vietnam as if they were "their own."

Cuba - They have never formally confirmed their participation in the Vietnam War, although several thousand military engineers reportedly aided the communist war effort. In addition, military advisors from Havana are believed to have taken part in the interrogation of at least 19 captured U.S. fliers. In fact, their supposedly brutal methods have since been dubbed "the Cuban Program".

Castro himself visited Quang Tri shortly after it fell to the communists in 1972.

9. Ho Chi Minh led the North

Everyone knows that Ho Chi Minh, known as *Bác Hồ* (Uncle Ho), was the man that led North Vietnam to victory and independence. In reality Ho Chi Minh was nothing more than a figurehead.

It was Lê Duẩn who was the architect, main strategist and commander in chief of North Vietnam's war effort. The quiet, stern Duan shunned the spotlight but he possessed the iron will, focus and administrative



I AWAIT YOUR ORDERS: Ho Chi Minh in conversation with Le Duc Tho, the man who was the actual power behind North Vietnam.

skill necessary to dominate the Communist Party.

Along with his right-hand man, the indomitable Le Duc Tho, who would later spar with Henry Kissinger during the Paris peace negotiations. Duan constructed a sturdy militarist empire that still looms over Hanoi today. Their hawkish policies led North Vietnam to war against Saigon and then Washington, and ensured that a negotiated peace would never take the place of total victory.

Duan ruled the party with an iron fist and saw Ho and Gen. Vo Nguyen Giap, renowned for defeating the French at Dien Bien Phu, as the greatest threats to his authority. He sidelined Ho, General Giap and their supporters when making nearly all key decisions.

In 1963-4, Duan blackmailed Ho into silence when the aging leader opposed the controversial decision to escalate the war and seek all-out victory before American forces could

intervene. And in 1967-8, there was a large-scale purge in Hanoi when Ho, General Giap and their allies opposed Mr. Duan's plans for the Tet Offensive.

He became the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam and held the position from 10 September 1960 and remained in power until his death on 10 July 1986 at the age of 79.

8. Most US troops were conscripts

Popular culture is rife with examples of poor and minority soldiers arriving in Vietnam via the draft and then dying.

This is a common theme in books and movies about the Vietnam War. In his 1989 book "More Like Us" author James Fallows says that the Vietnam War was "the most blatant class war since the Civil War."

Yet the facts show otherwise. Between 1964 and 1973, vol-



GIANT CENTIPEDE: The Vietnamese or Jungle centipede (*Scolopendra subspinipes*) could grow to insane sizes.

unteers outnumbered enlisted troops by nearly four to one. Nor did the military rely primarily on disadvantaged citizens or African Americans.

According to the Report of the President's Commission on an All-Volunteer Armed Force in February 1970, African Americans "constituted only 12.7 % of nearly 1.7 million enlisted men serving voluntarily in 1969."

A higher proportion of African Americans were drafted in the early years of the war, but they were not more likely to die in combat than other soldiers.

Seventy-nine percent of troops had at least a high school education (compared with 63% of Korean War veterans and 45% of World War II veterans). And according to VFW Magazine, 50% were from middle-income backgrounds, and 88% were white (representing 86% of the deaths).

Percentage wise, there were

more American volunteers in the Vietnam War than during World War II.

7. South Vietnamese troops were useless

Some contend that the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN), the South's army, was not up to the job. Andy Walpole, formerly of Liverpool John Moores University, wrote that "they were [unwilling] to engage in combat with their guerrilla counterparts and were more interested in surviving than winning." Harry F. Noyes, who served in Vietnam, complained about this widespread belief: "Everybody 'knows' they were incompetent, treacherous and cowardly."

But those who fought alongside the ARVN tell a different story. Gen. Barry R. McCaffrey, adviser to the South Vietnamese Airborne Division, bemoaned that "the sacrifice and

valour and commitment of the South Vietnamese Army largely disappeared from the American political and media consciousness."

He wrote of the tenacious fighting spirit of those troops, particularly at the Battle of Dong Ha, where they were charged with supporting American Marine units. "In combat, the South Vietnamese refused to leave their own dead or wounded troopers on the field or abandon a weapon," he recalled.

6. The VC were masters of the jungle

Many believe that the VC (Viet Cong) and, to a lesser extent, the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) were masters of the jungle. They were at home in the hostile terrain and knew the jungle like the back of their hands. Yet this may not be the case.

In 1996, as a journalist, I was invited on a tour of Vietnam as they were trying to promote the country as a tourist destination.

One of the places I visited was an old tunnel complex that is now preserved as a museum and tourist attraction. The curator was an elderly gentleman who had once been a major in the NVA and I was lucky enough to have a long chat with him.

He thought it very amusing when I mentioned how the VC had this huge advantage in the jungle.

"I think that the VC adapted better to the jungle than the

Americans,” he told me. “But to be honest with you, we were probably more terrified of the jungle than the Americans were. You must remember that we knew what was in the jungle. And just about everything in the jungle could kill or injure you.”

I later learnt of just some of the animal, insect and plant life that was in the jungle and he hadn't been joking when he said that nearly all of it was dangerous.

Take the *Scolopendra subspinipes* for example. Known as the Vietnamese Centipede or Jungle Centipede, they could grow to insane sizes. They were extremely aggressive and their venomous bite was very painful. And giant scorpions were another danger to face.

Being bitten by a weaver ant can be likened to having a lit cigarette put out on your flesh - it's that painful. So image an entire nest of these red ants attacking you.

Snakes thrive in a hot and humid environment, and Vietnam was no exception. The jungle is filled with Cobras, Kraits, Vipers and many more species, most of which are deadly. The snakes that weren't venomous were all giant constrictors, still very capable of crushing you in your sleep.

The jungles of Southeast Asia are also home to aggressive tiger species, leopards, and bears.

Even the plant life can be dangerous. Vietnam's most beautiful trees and flowers are also its deadliest. Heartbreak Grass,

Flame Lillies, Twisted Cord Flowers, and Bark Cloth Trees are all powerful enough to kill a human or cause blindness upon contact or accidental ingestion.

“You must remember that most rural Vietnamese were farmers,” the major said. “They worked in large open fields. The jungle was considered a hostile place and you stayed out of it if at all possible.

5. US involvement began under John F. Kennedy

Many historians take it as fact that it was John F. Kennedy who first dispatched American military advisors to Vietnam, and that it was the Kennedy administration which orchestrated the CIA supported coup d'etat which led to the overthrow of the Diem government.

In fact, Kennedy's Department of Defence and Robert McNamara wanted to retain Diem in exile, and when he and his brother were killed during the coup Kennedy was shocked, not at the overthrow of the Diem government, but at the murder of the Diem brothers.

It was Truman and Eisenhower that expanded American activity in Vietnam. In 1950, under the administration of President Harry Truman, US military advisors were embedded within the military hierarchy of Vietnam at all levels. While the French fought the Viet Minh and their communist supporters the United States provided financial and covert support to aid the French in the

recovery of their former colony.

When the French withdrew in 1954, the newly formed independent state of South Vietnam was given financial and military training support by the United States under the Eisenhower administration. American military advisors helped to train the South Vietnamese army throughout the 1950s, as well as arm it through foreign military aid programs.

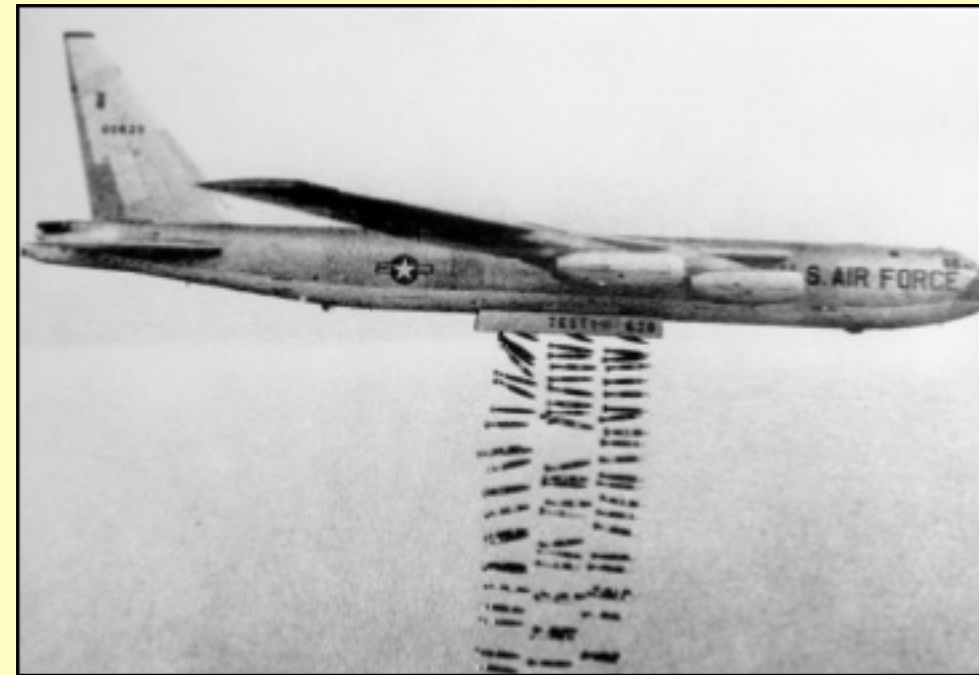
4. US bombing missions were restricted

History would have us believe that in late 1964, just before the landslide election of Lyndon B. Johnson to the Presidency, the United States launched a restrained tactical bombing campaign against North Vietnamese units and Viet Cong positions.

This was in accordance with Johnson's election campaign, in which he had presented himself as the candidate of “reason and restraint”, as opposed to his opponent, Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater, who had advocated for a more vigorous response.

Johnson tried to prevent the war from escalating by restricting the bombing raids by US airplanes to military targets as the first American bombing campaign of the war began.

The fact is that the United States began bombing targets in Laos in October, 1964. Before the election was held in the United States, American aircraft struck targets in Laos, flown by both American and South Vietnamese pilots, in an



CARPET BOMBING: The US dropped more than seven million tons of aerial bombs in Southeast Asia. This was more than three times the amount dropped by them in World War II.

attempt to interdict supplies reaching North Vietnamese and Viet Cong units in South Vietnam.

Johnson was presented with options in December on how to bring the North Vietnamese to an agreement to withdraw their forces from South Vietnam. Johnson's choices included heavy air launched reprisals against North Vietnamese and Viet Cong units, followed by “graduated air war”, and the deployment of ground troops to support the South Vietnamese. By December, 1964, the planning to deploy American combat forces was well advanced.

3. The North Vietnamese were a peasant army

During and since the war the North Vietnamese leadership presented themselves and their troops as simple peasants who

had first resisted French colonialism and during the American phase of the war were resisting American imperialism.

They depicted themselves as freedom fighters, determined to ensure that a unified Vietnam was established which represented Vietnamese traditions, religious beliefs, and freedoms. Ho Chi Minh was their spiritual leader and figurehead.

Almost forgotten in America today is that Ho Chi Minh died in September 1969, years before the American withdrawal.

The North Vietnamese troops were well-trained, professional soldiers. The North Vietnamese army was far from an army of lightly armed peasant freedom fighters. Communist advisors from China and the Soviet Union provided training and armaments, with heavy artillery, tanks, and anti-aircraft batteries supplied to their Southeast Asia

ally.

Ships of the Soviet Navy detected incoming American air raids and provided early warnings to the North Vietnamese defences.

Czechoslovakia, Cuba, and North Korea likewise provided aid to the North Vietnamese. Communist aid to the North Vietnamese was cited as supportive of the so-called domino theory early in the war, but by 1968 - the year of the Tet Offensive - the domino theory had been largely discounted by military planners and diplomats.

2. The US conducted a limited bombing campaign

Many still believe that the United States conducted a limited bombing campaign in Vietnam. There are those who believe that the American aerial bombing campaign was designed to limit air strikes to strategic targets and to interdict the movement of supplies into Vietnam via the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

American bombers and fighter bombers targeted these and anti-aircraft weapons emplacements, rather than targeting cities and civilian targets, such as industrial facilities.

The bombing was conducted with precision, using the techniques developed through the experiences of the Second World War and the Korean War, especially in the area of close air support of units deployed on the ground.

The air war was intended to

TOP TEN

support the units of the US military and the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN), not stand on its own.

Yet that facts speak for themselves. Over seven million tons of aerial bombs were dropped in Southeast Asia by American aircraft during the Vietnam War, more than three times the total tonnage dropped in all of the Second World War in the European and Pacific Theatres combined.

The tonnage dropped on Laos alone was equivalent to one ton for every resident in the nation. About four million tons were dropped on targets in South Vietnam, including suspected troop and Viet Cong concentrations, villages and towns, and targets called in by troops heavily engaged on the ground. Besides aerial bombing,

Vietnam was also heavily targeted by big guns from US Naval warships, including cruisers and destroyers and in 1968 the battleship USS New Jersey.

1. The US won every major battle in Vietnam

According to the Americans the US Army won the battles in which it fought, and Vietnam was lost to the communists by gutless politicians. The claim does not hold up to the light of day.

The first major battle fought between US troops and the North Vietnamese was during the Pleiku Campaign in 1965, in the Ia Drang Valley.

One of the American com-



WE WERE SOLDIERS: Lt Colonel Hal Moore led the American troops at the Battle of Ia Drang in 1965. He called the battle a draw for the Americans at best.

manders who fought in the battle, which was the first in which high casualties figures of dead and wounded Americans occurred, was stunned by the tactics employed by the North Vietnamese.

The United States claimed a clear victory, basing the claim on the higher number of casualties inflicted upon the enemy, later determined to have been inflated by more than 30%. The United States claimed that the kill ratio inflicted upon the enemy was more than 10:1.

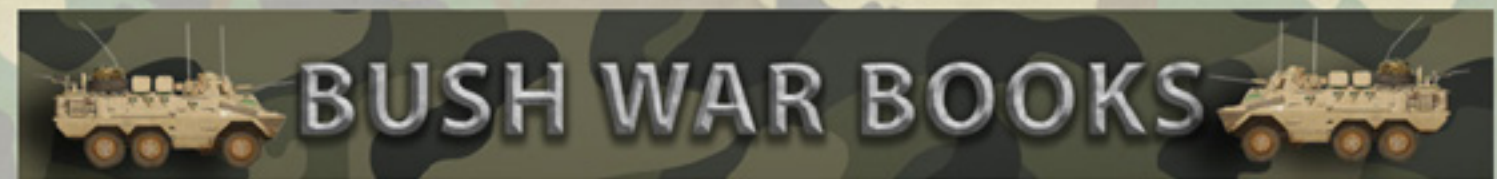
Yet Lieutenant Colonel Harold G. Moore, known as Hal, said that the battle was at best a draw for the Americans. And he should know. He commanded the 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry at the Battle of Ia Drang in 1965.

Moore fought in the battle from onset until it was finished,

and his appraisal did not award a victory to the US Army.

In his book “We Were Soldiers”, he wrote: “The peasant soldiers had withstood the terrible high-tech firestorm delivered against them by a superpower and had at least fought the Americans to a draw.”

He also wrote about the North Vietnamese, “By their yardstick a draw against such a powerful opponent was the equivalent of a victory.”



Bush War Books has probably one of the finest collections of military titles available. Especially on the South African Border War.

Click [here](#) to visit their website.

“War does not determine who is right - only who is left”

Fort Eben Emael

Fort Eben Emael was considered to be one of the most powerful fortifications in the world. According to experts, it would be impossible to assault. The Germans, however, had other ideas.

- **Date:** 10 May 1940
- **Location:** Fort Eben Emael, Belgium
- **Units involved:** German 7th Air Division and the 22nd Airlanding Division

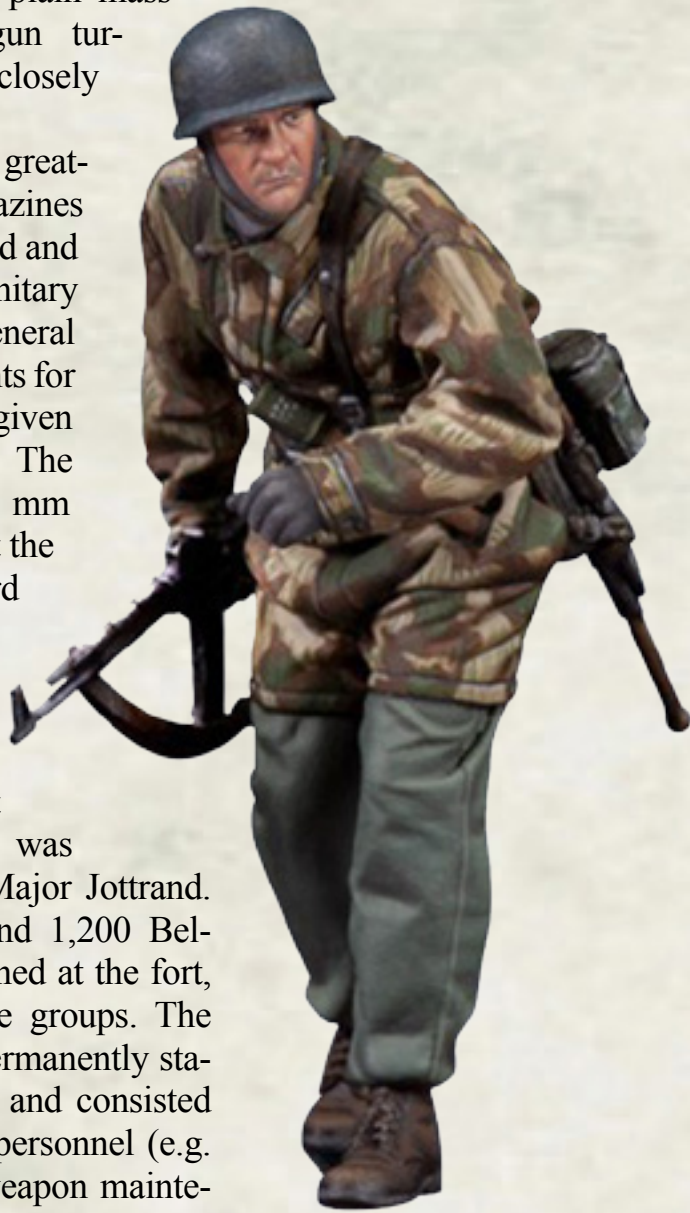
On 10 May 1940 the Germans launched *Fall Gelb* (Case Yellow), an invasion of the Low Countries. The ultimate goal was France. The German *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* (High Command of the Armed Forces) believed that by attacking through the Netherlands, Luxembourg and Belgium they could outflank the formidable French Maginot Line. The Germans could then advance through southern Belgium and into northern France, cutting off the British Expeditionary Force and a large number of French forces and forcing the French government to surrender. The Germans needed to capture several important bridges over the Albert Canal. The easterly roads led into the Belgian heartland and the rest of the Low Countries. There was, however, a major obstacle that faced them. The Fort of Eben Emael, considered to be one of the most powerful fortification in the world.

Construction

Constructed between 1931

and 1935, it was reputed to be impregnable and, at the time, the largest fortress in the world. It was designed to defend Belgium against a German attack across the narrow belt of Dutch territory in the region. When designing the fort, the Belgians had taken the lessons learnt during World War I into account. The fort sat on high ground overlooking the Albert Canal. Reinforced concrete was used in place of plain mass concrete. The gun turrets were less closely grouped. Ventilation was greatly improved, magazines were deeply buried and protected, and sanitary facilities and general living arrangements for the troops were given careful attention. The 120 mm and 75 mm guns gave the fort the ability to bombard targets across a wide area of the eastern Liège region. In 1940, Fort Eben-Emael was commanded by Major Jottrand. There were around 1,200 Belgian troops stationed at the fort, divided into three groups. The first group was permanently stationed at the fort and consisted of 200 technical personnel (e.g. doctors, cooks, weapon maintenance technicians, administration staff).

The two other groups consisted of 500 artillerymen each. In peace time one group would be stationed at the fort for one week. The other group would be in reserve at the village of Wonck, about 5 km away. These two groups would change places every week. Except for some of the officers and NCOs, most of the men were



- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. Decoy cupola | 11. Block VI- 2 x 60 mm guns & MGs |
| 2. Decoy cupola | 12. Visé II - 3 x 75 mm guns |
| 3. Canal Nord - 60 mm guns & machine guns | 13. Maastricht II - 3 x 75 mm guns |
| 4. Mi Nord - Machine gun block | 14. Cupola 120 - Twin 120 mm gun |
| 5. Block II - 2 x 60 mm guns & MGs | 15. Cupola Nord - 2 x 75 mm guns |
| 6. Mi Sud - Machine gun block | 16. Anti-aircraft position |
| 7. Visé I - 3 x 75 mm guns | 17. Block IV - 2 x 60 mm anti-tank guns |
| 8. Barracks | 18. Decoy cupola |
| 9. Maastricht I - 3 x 75 mm guns | 19. Cupola Sud - 2 x 75 mm guns |
| 10. Block I - 2 x 60 mm anti-tank guns | 20. Block V- 2 x 60 mm guns & MGs |

Fort Eben-Emael occupied a large hill just to the east of Eben-Emael village and overlooking the Albert Canal. Underground galleries extend over 4 kilometres beneath the hill, connecting the combat blocks and serving the underground barracks, power plant, ammunition magazines and other spaces. Fresh air was obtained from intake vents over the canal

conscripts. The majority of these were reservists and were called up after the Invasion of Poland in 1939. Infantry training was poor, since the men were considered to be purely artillerymen.

The Germans prepare

The airborne assault on Fort Eben-Emael, and the three bridges it helped protect, was part of a much larger German airborne operation that involved the 7th Air Division and the 22nd Airlanding Division.

The force tasked with assaulting the fort and capturing the three bridges was formed from elements of the 7th Air Division and the 22nd Airlanding Division, and was named *Sturmabteilung Koch* (Assault Detachment Koch) after the leader of the force, Hauptmann Walter Koch.

Fifty DFS 230 transport gliders were supplied for use by the assault force. Then came the serious training for the mission.

Joint exercises between the parachutists and the glider pilots were carried out in the early spring of 1940, and a number of refinements made to the equipment and tactics to be used.

One of these refinements was the attachment of barbed wire to the nose-skids of the gliders. This meant that the skids would dig in, forcing the glider to a stop.

The airborne troops trained with special equipment such as flamethrowers and shaped charges.

A detailed study of the fort, the bridges and the local area was made, and a replica of the area was constructed for the airborne troops to train in.



ATTACK: Fallschirmjäger exit a DFS 230 glider. This photo was posed after Fort Eben Emael had already been captured.

The Plan

Hauptmann Koch divided his force into four assault groups. Group Granite, made up of eighty-five men in eleven gliders whose task would be to assault and capture Fort Eben Emael.

Group Steel, formed of ninety-two men and nine gliders, would capture the Veldwezelt bridge; Group Concrete, composed of ninety-six men in eleven gliders, would capture the Vroenhoven bridge; and Group Iron, composed of ninety men in ten gliders, who would capture the Kanne bridge.

Time was the vital component of the attack. The Germans were relying on two factors. First of all they believed that the use of gliders would not alert the Belgians. Secondly, the lack of a declaration of war by the German government would give the attackers the element of surprise.

The Germans estimated that this element of surprise would last for sixty minutes before they reacted. It was therefore imperative that during those sixty minutes as many anti-aircraft positions, individual cupolas and casemates as possible had to be eliminated. The most important

objective, however, was to put the long-range artillery covering the bridges out of action.

The destruction of these guns was expected to be completed within ten minutes; within this time the airborne troops would have to break out of their gliders, cover the distance to the guns, fix the explosive charges to the barrels of the guns and detonate them, all while under enemy fire.

The finalized plan for the assault called for between nine and eleven gliders to land on the western bank of the Albert Canal by each of the three bridges just prior to 05:30 on 10 May, the time scheduled for *Fall Gelb* to begin.

The groups assigned to assault the three bridges would overwhelm the defending Belgian troops, remove any demolition charges and then prepare to defend the bridges against an expected counter-attack. Forty minutes later, three Ju-52 transport aircraft would fly over each position, dropping a further twenty-four airborne troops as reinforcements as well as machine-guns and significant amounts of ammunition.

Simultaneously, the force as-



JOB DONE: Fallschirmjäger share cigarettes and swap stories after the successful attack on Fort Eben Emael.

signed to assault Fort Eben-Emael was to land on top of the Fort in eleven gliders, eliminate any defenders attempting to repel them, cripple what artillery they could with explosive charges, and then prevent the Garrison from dislodging them.

Having achieved their initial objectives of seizing the bridges and eliminating the long-range artillery pieces possessed by the Fort, the airborne troops would then defend their positions until the arrival of German ground forces.

The Battle

The mission didn't get off to the best of starts. The tow-rope on one of the gliders snapped and it was forced to land inside Germany. The pilot of another glider released his tow-rope prematurely and the glider was unable to reach its target.

Because of strict radio silence the senior commanders of the assault force could not be informed. Both gliders were from Group Granite and, to make

matters worse, one of the gliders was carrying Oberleutnant Witzig, the commander of the group.

The remaining gliders were released 32 km away from their objectives at an altitude of 2,100 metres. After the Ju-52's released the gliders and began turning away, Belgian anti-aircraft artillery positions detected them and opened fire. This alerted the defences in the area to the presence of the gliders.

Group Steel

All of Group Steel's nine gliders landed next to the bridge at Veldwezelt at 05h20. They managed to take the bridge without it being destroyed.

Two field-guns, located five hundred metres from the bridge, pinned them down and the group commander, Leutnant Altmann, had to call in air support. Several Junkers Ju 87 Stukas responded and knocked out the guns.

Group Steel was supposed to be relieved by 14h30, but the relief force was held up by Bel-

gian resistance and only arrived at 21h30.

Group Steel lost eight dead and 30 wounded.

Group Concrete

Ten of the eleven gliders transporting Group Concrete landed next to the Vroenhoven bridge at 05:15, the eleventh glider having been hit by anti-aircraft fire en route to the bridge and being forced to land prematurely inside Dutch territory.

One of the gliders was hit by anti-aircraft fire and three troops were seriously wounded.

One of the gliders landed near to the fortification housing the bridge detonators. This allowed the airborne troops to rapidly assault the position. They killed the occupants and tore out the wires connecting the explosives to the detonator set, ensuring the bridge could not be destroyed.

The Belgians mounted several counter-attacks in an attempt to recapture the bridge. Group Concrete held out until they were relieved at 21:40. They lost seven dead and 24 wounded.

Group Iron

Things went awry for Group Iron from the start. Nine of the gliders were able to land next to their objective, while one was dropped in the wrong area due to a navigation error.

Yet while they were able to land next to their objective and eliminate the Belgian defenders, it was too late. The bridge at Kanne had already been destroyed.

Unlike the garrisons of the other two bridges, the Belgian defenders at Kanne had been forewarned. The German mech-

anized column heading to the bridge to reinforce Group Iron had arrived twenty minutes ahead of schedule.

With the element of surprise lost, the defenders had enough time to set off the demolition charges on the bridge.

Group Iron had secured the area by 05:50, but they came under strong counter-attack and had to call in air support.

They were only relieved on the morning of 11 May.

Group Iron suffered the heaviest casualties of all three assault groups assigned to capture the bridges with twenty-two dead and twenty-six wounded.

One of the airborne troops assigned to the Group was taken prisoner by the Belgians. He was later freed by German forces at Dunkirk.

Group Granite

Nine of Group Granite's gliders successfully landed on the roof of Fort Eben Emael. They gliders used arrester-parachutes to bring them to a quick halt.

The airborne troops quickly exited their gliders and headed for their individual objectives. The prime objectives were the artillery pieces that could target the bridges.

Objective No. 18, an artillery observation casemate housing three 75mm artillery pieces was damaged with a light demolition charge and then permanently destroyed with a heavier charge, which collapsed the casemate's observation dome and part of the roof of the Fort itself.

A traversing turret holding two artillery pieces, Objective 12, was destroyed by troops who

then moved on to Objective No. 26, a turret holding another three 75 mm weapons. Another pair of 75 mm guns in a cupola was disabled, as was a barracks known to house Belgian troops.

Objective 24 proved to be a problem. The twin turrets with heavy-calibre guns mounted on a rotating cupola, was too large for airborne troops from a single glider to destroy on their own, forcing troops from two gliders to be used.

Shaped charges were fixed to the turrets and detonated. While they shook the turrets, they did not destroy them. Troops were forced to climb the turrets and smash the gun barrels.

In the northern section of the fort, similar actions were taking place.

Objective No. 13 was a casemate housing multiple machine-guns whose arcs of fire covered the western side of the Fort; to destroy the casemate, the airborne troops used a flame-thrower to force the Belgian soldiers manning the weapons to retreat, and then detonated shaped charges against the fortification to disable it.

Objective No. 23 was a retractable cupola housing two 75 mm guns. It had been thought that these would not be a threat to the airborne troops. They were proved wrong when the weapons opened fire, forcing the airborne troops in the area to go to cover.

They were pinned down and had to call for air support. A Stuka squadron bombed the cupola and although the bombs did not destroy the cupola, the explosions did force the Belgians to retract it throughout the rest of

the fighting.

The airborne troops had achieved their initial objective of destroying or disabling the artillery pieces that the fort could have used to bombard the captured bridges, but they still faced a number of small cupolas and emplacements that had to be disabled. A number of these included anti-aircraft weapons and machine-guns.

As these secondary objectives were attacked, a single glider landed on top of the Fort. It carried Oberleutnant Rudolf Witzig.

After his glider had landed in German territory, he had radioed for another tug. The Ju-52 landed in the field with a replacement glider.

Witzig's troops had quickly broken down fences and hedges obstructing the aircraft and the new glider was towed through anti-aircraft fire to the objective - Fort Eben Emael.

Having achieved their primary objectives of disabling the artillery pieces possessed by the fort, the airborne troops then held it against Belgian counter-attacks, which began almost immediately.

These counter-attacks were made by Belgian infantry formations without artillery support and were uncoordinated. This allowed the airborne troops to repel them with machine-gun fire.

Patrols were also used to ensure that the garrison stayed in the interior of the fort and did not attempt to emerge and mount an attempt to retake the fort.

Group Granite was not relieved until 07h00 on 11 May by the 51st Engineer Battalion. Once the airborne troops had



WORTH A VISIT: Fort Eben-Emael is now open to the public. While still military property, it is administered by the Association Fort Eben-Emael, which provides tours and activities.

Fallschirmjäger Weapons used at Fort Eben-Emael



been relieved, the battalion, in conjunction with an infantry regiment that arrived shortly after the engineers, mounted an attack on the main entrance to the fort.

Faced with this attack, the garrison surrendered at 12:30, suffering sixty men killed and forty wounded. The Germans captured more than a thousand Belgian soldiers. Group Granite suffered six killed and nineteen wounded.

The capture of the bridges, and the neutralization of the artillery pieces in the Fort allowed infantry and armour from the 18th Army to bypass other Belgian defences and enter the heart of Belgium.

Museum

Fort Eben-Emael is now open to the public. While still military property, it is administered by the Association Fort Eben-Emael, which provides tours and activities.

It is located between Liège and Maastricht, on the Belgian-Dutch border, near the Albert Canal, outside the village of Eben-Émael

Silent Night

On 24 December 1914 the guns along the Western Front fell silent. It was the first Christmas of the war and the opposing soldiers were determined to celebrate the fact. The opposing soldiers were determined to celebrate the fact. This story was printed in the first Christmas issue of Military Despatches, and will be printed every Christmas issue.

It was called the 'Great War' or 'The War to end all Wars'. It had begun in April 1914 and by the time it ended in November 1918 more than 10 million lives would be lost. Yet in 1939, a mere 21 years later, the world was at war once

again. This new conflict would become known as World War II and the 'Great War' of 1914-18 would be renamed World War I.

By December 1914 the war had become static. An elaborate trench system had been constructed by both the Germans and the Allies. In some places troops faced each other with less than 100m of 'no-man's

land' between them. December 1914 would also see the first Christmas of the war.

A few months earlier Pope Benedict XV had begged the warring governments to declare a truce for Christmas, "that the guns may fall silent at least upon the night the angels sang." The Germans gave it serious consideration but the British

angrily denounced the Pope. On 24 December 1914, Christmas Eve, German troops in the region of Ypres, Belgium, began decorating the area around their trenches by placing candles on trees. The British troops watched with a mixture of confusion and more than a little suspicion.

Then the Germans began to sing *Stille Nacht*. While





FIRE: British guns fire at a German position. During the Battle of the Somme 1,738,000 shells were fired at the Germans. During this battle the British took over 60,000 casualties on the first day of the battle.

the words may have been unfamiliar the British troops could recognise the tune of *Silent Night*. The British troops responded by singing English carols.

The two sides began shouting Christmas greetings to each other. Many of the Germans had worked or studied in Britain and could speak English fluently.

There were calls for the two sides to meet in no-man's land. Tentatively, in ones and twos, troops began leaving the trenches on both sides. Normally if you showed the slightest part of your body above a trench it would be hit by a bullet within seconds. Now people were climbing out of trenches, exposing themselves to the other side.

It must have been a strange feeling for those involved. Earlier that day they had been trying to kill each other, as they had for the past nine months.

Now they were standing face to face with the enemy, shaking hands and greeting one another. Troops began to exchange small gifts such as whisky, jam, cigarettes, cigars and chocolate. The artillery in the region fell silent that night and, for the rest of the night, an eerie silence fell over the Western Front.

Mourning the dead

Early on Christmas morning troops began meeting in no-man's land again. Both sides took the opportunity to bury the many dead that lay in no-man's land. Proper burials were held and in many instances soldiers from both sides mourned the dead together and paid their respects.

In more than one sector informal football matches were arranged in no-man's land.

In many sectors, the truce lasted through Christmas night, but in some areas, it continued

until New Year's Day.

While the troops at the front may have been enjoying the break, the higher commands on both sides, especially the British, were furious. They ordered the artillery to open fire and gave orders for attacks to take place. After all, this was a war.

British commanders Sir John French and Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien vowed that no such truce would be allowed again, although both had left command before Christmas 1915. In all of the following years of the war, artillery bombardments were ordered on Christmas Eve to ensure that there were no further lulls in the combat.

Troops were also rotated through various sectors of the front to prevent them from becoming overly familiar with the enemy.



THANK YOU FRITZ: British and German soldiers met in no-man's land, exchanged greetings and gifts, and in some sectors even organised a game of soccer.

Celebrated and retold

The Christmas truce of 1914 has been celebrated and retold in songs (such as *Christmas 1914* by Mike Harding; *Christmas in the Trenches* by John McCutcheon; *Belleau Wood* by Garth Brooks; *Pipes of Peace* by Paul McCartney) film (*Joyeux Noel* and *Oh What a Lovely War*) and has also been the subject of a number of books.

In the final episode of *Blackadder Goes Forth*, the protagonists discuss events of the past that led them to their current situation, including the Christmas Truce. Captain Edmund Blackadder (Rowan Atkinson) was apparently still sore over being ruled offside during a football game with the Germans. He also cynically muses that "Both sides advanced further during one Christmas piss-up than they did in the next two-and-a half years of war."

During the final episode Blackadder tries to fake insanity to get himself sent back to

England. It doesn't work.

As they are about to go over the top, Private Baldrick tells Blackadder he has a plan to get them out.

"At the signal, company will advance! Well, I'm afraid it'll have to wait," Blackadder says.

"Whatever it was, I'm sure it was better than my plan to get out of this by pretending to be mad. I mean, who would have noticed another madman around here? Good luck, everyone. Charge!!!"

On 7 November 2006, Irish singer Chris de Burgh paid £14,400 at Bonham's auction house for an original 10 page letter from an unknown British soldier that records events and incidents with the Germans on that night describing "the most memorable Christmas I've ever spent".

The letter begins:

This will be the most memorable Christmas I've ever spent or likely to spend: since about tea time yesterday I don't

think there's been a shot fired on either side up to now. Last night turned a very clear frost moonlight night, so soon after dusk we had some decent fires going and had a few carols and songs. The Germans commenced by placing lights all along the edge of their trenches and coming over to us-wishing us a Happy Christmas etc.

They also gave us a few songs etc. so we had quite a social party. Several of them can speak English very well so we had a few conversations. Some of our chaps went over to their lines. I think they've all come back bar one from 'E' Co. They no doubt kept him as a souvenir. In spite of our fires etc. it was terribly cold and a job to sleep between look out duties, which are two hours in every six.

First thing this morning it was very foggy. So we stood to arms a little longer than usual. A few of us that were lucky could go to Holy Communion early this morning. It was celebrated in a ruined farm about 500 yds behind us.

I unfortunately couldn't go. There must be something in the spirit of Christmas as to day we are all on top of our trenches running about. Whereas other days we have to keep our heads well down. We had breakfast about 8.0 which went down alright especially some cocoa we made. We also had some of the post this morning.

I had a parcel from B. G's Lace Dept containing a sweater, smokes, under clothes etc. We also had a card from the

On 21 November 2005, the last remaining Allied veteran of the truce, Alfred Anderson died in Newtyle, Scotland at the age of 109.

Queen, which I am sending back to you to look after please. After breakfast we had a game of football at the back of our trenches! We've had a few Germans over to see us this morning. They also sent a party over to bury a sniper we shot in the week. He was about a 100 yds from our trench. A few of our fellows went out and helped to bury him.

About 10.30 we had a short church parade the morning service etc. held in the trench. How we did sing. 'O come all ye faithful. And While shepherds watched their flocks by night' were the hymns we had. At present we are cooking our Christmas Dinner! so will finish this letter later.

Dinner is over! and well we enjoyed it. Our dinner party started off with fried bacon and dip-bread: followed by hot Xmas Pudding. I had a mascot in my piece.

Next item on the menu was muscatels and almonds, oranges, bananas, chocolate etc followed by cocoa and smokes. You can guess we thought of the dinners at home.

Just before dinner I had the pleasure of shaking hands with several Germans: a party of them came 1/2 way over to us so several of us went out to them. I exchanged one of my balaclavas for a hat. I've also got a



HELLO: Descendants of Great War veterans, in contemporary uniform, shake hands at the 2008 unveiling of a memorial to the truce.

button off one of their tunics. We also exchanged smokes etc. and had a decent chat. They say they won't fire tomorrow if we don't so I suppose we shall get a bit of a holiday-perhaps. After exchanging autographs and them wishing us a Happy New Year we departed and came back and had our dinner.

We can hardly believe that we've been firing at them for the last week or two-it all seems so strange. At present its freezing hard and everything is covered with ice...

There are plenty of huge shell

holes in front of our trenches, also pieces of shrapnel to be found. I never expected to shake hands with Germans between the firing lines on Christmas Day and I don't suppose you thought of us doing so. So after a fashion we've enjoyed? our Christmas. Hoping you spend a happy time also George Boy as well. How we thought of England during the day. Kind regards to all the neighbours.

With much love from Boy.

On 11 November 2008, the first

The last living veteran of World War I was Florence Green, a British citizen who served in the Allied armed forces, and who died 4 February 2012, aged 110. The last combat veteran was Claude Choules who served in the British Royal Navy and died 5 May 2011, aged 110.

official Truce memorial was unveiled in Frelinghein, France, the site of a Christmas Truce football game in 1914.

On 21 November 2005, the last remaining Allied veteran of the

truce, Alfred Anderson died in Newtyle, Scotland at the age of 109.

Counting the cost

Nearly 8.5 million soldiers lost their lives during World War I. Germany suffered the highest loss with 1,773,700 followed by Russia with 1,700,000. France suffered 1,357,800 casualties and the British Empire, which included Australia, Canada, India, New Zealand and South Africa, suffered 908,371. The United States of America, who entered the war in 1916, lost 116,516 men.

During World War II the casualty figures were even higher. More than 30 million soldiers died, as did millions

of civilians. The Russians alone lost more than 13 million troops.

Let us remember the spirit of the Christmas Truce and pray that our generation and generations to come never have to experience a war and that we never have to calculate the cost of World War III.

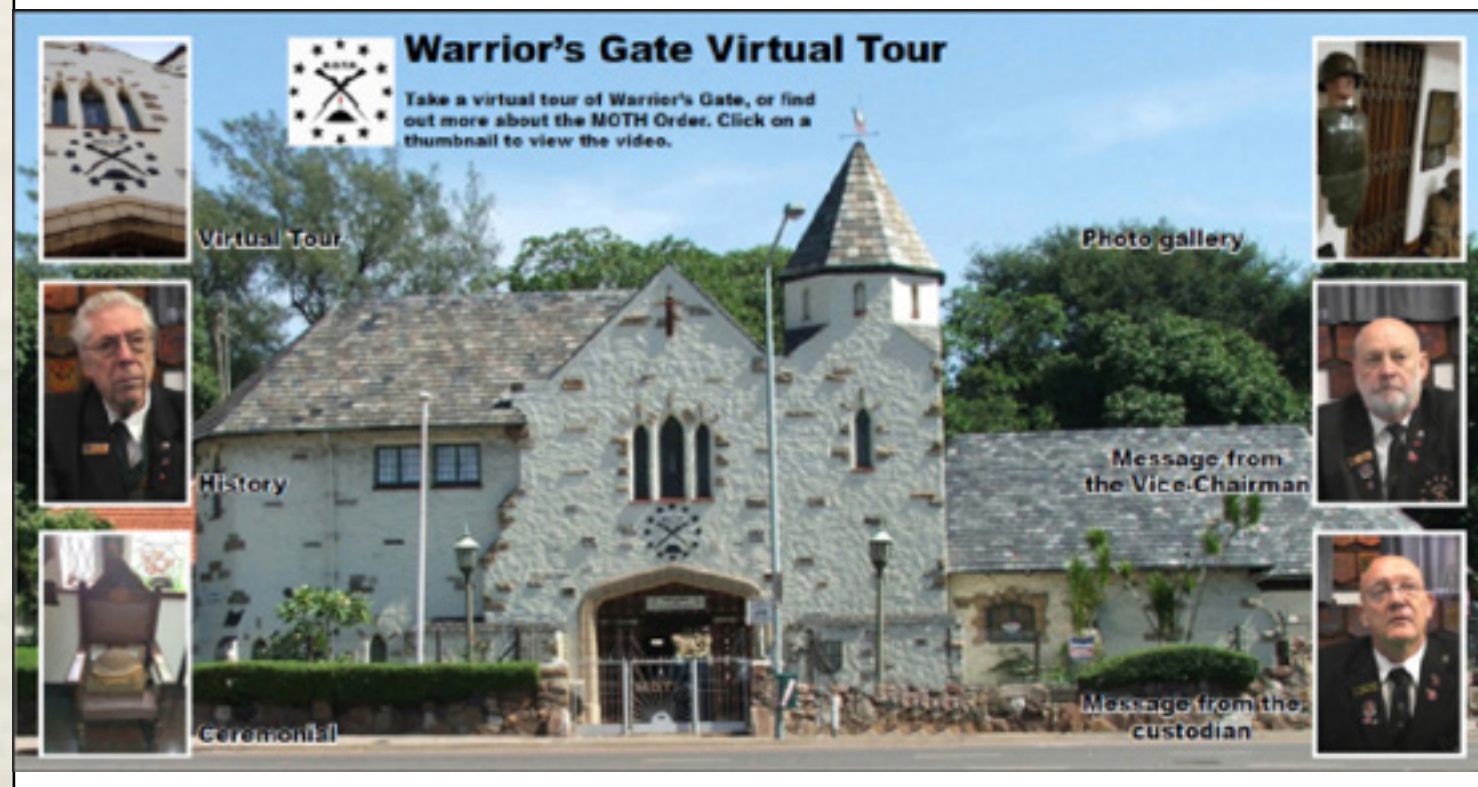
In closing I would like to quote the words of the Memorable Order of Tin Hats (MOTH) Credo, as it is very fitting.

*They shall grow not old,
As we who are left grow old.
Age shall not weary them,
Nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun,
And in the morning,
We will remember them.*



Memorable Order of Tin Hats

Click on the photograph below to take a virtual tour of Warrior's Gate and find out more about the MOTH Order.



You want how much?

When pirates kidnapped Julius Caesar he laughed at their ransom demands and told them that they should ask for a lot more.

A couple of years back, well actually over 2,000 years ago, give or take a year or two, a 25 year old Roman author, poet, priest and aristocrat was kidnapped by pirates. His name was Gaius Julius Caesar.

In the middle of the 1st century BC the Roman republic was not doing that well. Things were starting to fall apart at the seams.

Its volunteer militia had evolved into a permanent force of battle-scarred professional veterans who became a force to reckon with, allowing Rome to further increase its territory.

However, they were often more loyal to their Generals than the state – Generals such as Sulla; men who would often use the legions to further their own ambitions.

The city of Rome itself was no Shangri-La. Riots and violent political upheaval became the norm as rival gangs fought for dominance in the streets. Rome was plunging into a state of near anarchic chaos.

Aristocrats like Caesar vied for power, often using corrup-

tion and intimidation to get what they wanted.

Gaius Julius Caesar was born into this environment on 13 July 100 BC as a member of the Julia, an old clan of Roman aristocrats. Things changed for Caesar in 85 BC when his father suffered a sudden onset of death. This made the 16 year old Caesar the head of the family.

Civil war broke out between his uncle, Marius, and Lucius Cornelius Sulla (who twice held the rank of consul). Street battles and assassinations gripped the city until Marius finally won. Caesar was given the job of high priest of Jupiter and married off to Cornelia.

On January 13th 86 BC, however, Marius died (probably not from natural causes) and Sulla rose to power.

The latter purged the government and city of anyone associated with Marius, so Caesar lost his job, his inher-

itance and wife's dowry, and was ordered to divorce his wife. However, Caesar refused to let Cornelia go. His mother, Aurelia Cotta, used her family's influence (some of whom supported Sulla) to save his life.

By no means a fool, Caesar decided to play it safe by leaving Rome for Asia where he joined the army. In 81 BC, he participated in the Siege of Mytilene (now the Greek island of Lesbos), he was so effective that he received a Civic Crown – the second highest military award that a Roman could achieve.

Sulla finally died in 78 BC, making it safe for Caesar to return to Rome. Unable to reclaim his inheritance, he moved into a poor district and became a famous lawyer renowned for his successful prosecution of corrupt officials. This made him very popular among many lower-class Romans, despite his aristocratic heritage.

By 75 BC, he had moved up in the world and went off on a business trip to the island of

Rhodes accompanied by several servants and friends. Nothing like a summer vacation in the islands. There was, however, one small problem - they never made it there.

The Mediterranean Sea was full of pirates and they preyed on every ship that came their way. Pirates attacked Caesar's ship and he and his companions ended up becoming captives on an islet off Cilicia (now the southern coast of Turkey). All aboard were given two choices: pay a ransom or be sold into slavery.

Understandably Caesar was not too thrilled with the idea of becoming a slave, so he chose to pay a ransom.

His captors set a ransom of 20 talents of silver (about 620 kg in weight) which today would be worth around \$600,000.

Caesar was shocked and more than a little angry. The Julia family were direct descendants of Iulus, son of Aeneas, a Trojan prince. In his opinion someone with his bloodline was worth far more than the paltry sum they demanded.

He laughed at them and insisted that they set his ransom at 50 talents of silver instead.

Impressed, the pirates agreed and let some of his friends go to gather that amount, but Caesar wasn't finished. He swore that as soon as he was free, he'd have them all crucified.

Given the circumstances, the pirates roared with laughter. Caesar refused to play the role of a cowed hostage victim. He demanded that his servants be free to continue serving him, even ordering the pirates to shut up or lower their voices whenever he slept.

He spent his days writing poetry and composing speeches, then demanded that the pirates listen carefully while he read them aloud. If they didn't praise his work, he'd yell at them and call them illiterate savages.

Instead of becoming annoyed by Caesar's behaviour, they found him amusing and his attitude earned their respect.

He was allowed to move about freely and sometimes joined in their games. They probably thought he was a bit of a nut case.

Given the amount involved, it took 38 days to raise the money, after which Caesar and his men were finally allowed to leave.

As soon as he reached Mi-

letus (a long-abandoned port city south of present day Söke in Turkey) he began raising an armed fleet. With it, he returned to the islet, captured most of the pirates, and took their property as his own.

He sailed off to Pergamon (outside the modern Turkish city of Bakırçay) and chucked them all into prison.

Then he went to Marcus Junius, the governor of Asia, and demanded the right to mete out the pirates' punishment.

But Junius couldn't stop ogling all that money, so he told Caesar that he'd have to look into the matter more fully.

Yet Caesar wasn't prepared to wait, so he returned to Pergamon, took the pirates out of prison, and ordered them all to be crucified.

Some begged for mercy, reminding him of the fun times they had shared together, so Caesar's heart melted and he decided to relent. He had their throats slit instead.

Then he had them crucified because he prided himself on being a man of his word. With such a character, it's hardly surprising that he would go on become Rome's first emperor.

The Perks and perils of being a German general

While being a general has its perks, being a general in Adolf Hitler's Wehrmacht could be hazardous to your health. After all, he had 84 of his generals executed during the war.

One of the ambitions of anyone serving in the military is probably to rise to the rank of general or admiral.

Yet if you were a member of the German *Wehrmacht* (Defence Force) during World War II, the position did have its drawbacks.

While the rank did come with perks for members of the *Heer* (Army), *Luftwaffe* (Air Force), *Kriegsmarine* (Navy), or even the *Schutzstaffel* (SS), it also came with certain perils.

Get on the wrong side of the Führer, Adolf Hitler, and you'd find yourself executed quicker than you can say "ready, aim, fire!"

And it was far easier than you might imagine to get on the wrong side of Hitler or any of his acolytes.

The *Geheime Staatspolizei* (Secret State Police), more commonly known as the Gestapo, were always on the lookout for anyone that had anything bad to say about Hitler or the Nazi Party.

This was regarded as a 'crime against the state'. If there was even the slightest suspicion that someone had committed a crime against the state they would be hauled up in front of the *Volksgerichtshof* (People's Court).

Between 1943 and 1945, the

People's Courts under jurist Roland Freisler sentenced around 7,000 German citizens to death.

It was far worse if you were a member of the *Wehrmacht*. Discipline was often harsh and even a minor offence could see you being sentenced to death. And rank was no protection.

During World War II, no fewer than 84 senior German generals and admirals were executed on the personal orders of Hitler.

Wilhelm Canaris

Take Wilhelm Canaris for instance. Not only was he an admiral, he was also chief of the *Abwehr*, the German military intelligence service, from 1935 to 1944.

Initially a supporter of Adolf Hitler, by 1939 Canaris had turned against the Nazis as he felt Germany would lose another major war. During World War II he was among the military officers involved in the clandestine opposition to Nazi Germany leadership. He was executed in Flossenbürg concentration camp for high treason. His execution took place on 9 April 1945, less than a month before Germany surrendered and 21 days before Hitler committed suicide.

Erwin Rommel

One of Germany's great he-

roes of World War II was Field Marshal Erwin Rommel. Nicknamed "The Desert Fox", he was respected by both friend and foe alike.

During World War I he was awarded the Iron Cross First Class and the *Pour le Mérite*. In World War II he was awarded the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross with Oak Leaves, Swords and Diamonds.

Rommel was popular with both the troops and the German public. So it came as a shock to Hitler to learn that Rommel had been involved in the 20 July Plot to assassinate Hitler.

By normal procedure Rommel would have been brought to Roland Freisler's People's Court, a kangaroo court that always decided in favour of the prosecution.

However, Hitler knew that having Rommel branded and executed as a traitor would severely damage morale on the home front. He thus decided to offer Rommel the chance to take his own life.

Two generals from Hitler's headquarters, Wilhelm Burgdorf and Ernst Maisel, visited Rommel at his home on 14 October 1944.

Burgdorf informed him of the charges and offered him three options: he could choose to defend himself personally to Hitler in Berlin, or if he refused to



DESERT FOX: Field Marshal Erwin Rommel was ordered by Hitler to commit suicide or face a public trial and execution.

do so (which would be taken as an admission of guilt), he could either face the People's Court - which would have been tantamount to a death sentence - or choose a quiet suicide. In the former case, his family would have suffered even before the all-but-certain conviction and execution, and his staff would have been arrested and executed as well.

In the latter case, the government would claim that he died a hero and bury him with full military honours, and his family would receive full pension payments. Burgdorf had brought a cyanide capsule.

On 14 October 1944, at the age of 52, Rommel committed suicide. He was given a full state funeral and it was announced that Rommel had succumbed to his injuries from an earlier strafing of his staff car in Normandy.

Yet not many were as fortunate as Rommel and given the option to commit suicide.

Friedrich Fromm

Generaloberst (Colonel Gen-

eral) Friedrich Fromm was Commander in Chief of the *Ersatzheer* (Reserve Army), in charge of training and personnel replacement for combat divisions of the German Army, a position he occupied for most of the war.

While Fromm did not have any direct involvement in the conspiracy, he was aware that some of his subordinates - most notably Claus von Stauffenberg, his Chief of Staff - were planning an assassination attempt against Hitler, followed by a mutiny of the Army. He agreed to remain quiet if he became a top official of the new government after the mutiny.

On the morning of 22 July 1944, Fromm was arrested by Nazi officials and locked in jail to await trial. Fromm was discharged from the German Army on 14 September 1944.

The civilian Fromm was sentenced to death and considered unworthy for military duty by the People's Court on 7 March 1945. Since the court failed to prove a direct association with the 20 July plotters, he had been

charged and convicted for cowardice before the enemy, and sentenced to a military execution.

On 12 March 1945, Fromm was executed at the Brandenburg-Görden Prison by firing squad.

Ludwig Beck

Generaloberst Ludwig Beck was Chief of the German General Staff during the early years of the Nazi regime in Germany before World War II. He never became a member of the Nazi Party.

In 1943, Beck planned two abortive attempts to kill Hitler by means of a bomb. In 1944, he was one of the driving forces of the 20 July plot with Carl Goerdeler and Colonel Claus von Stauffenberg.

The plot failed and Beck was taken into custody the following morning by General Friedrich Fromm.

Beck offered to commit suicide ("accept the consequences"). His last words were "I am thinking of earlier times." Beck then shot himself. In severe distress, Beck succeeded only in severely wounding himself, and a sergeant was brought in to administer the *coup de grâce* by shooting Beck in the back of the neck.

Erwin von Witzleben

Generalfeldmarschall (Field Marshal) Erwin von Witzleben was the commander of *Armee OB West*.

Von Witzleben was seen as a key man in the 20 July Plot and would have taken over supreme command of the whole *Wehr-*

macht as the highest-ranking German officer.

Von Witzleben was arrested on 21 July and cast out of the *Wehrmacht* by the so-called *Ehrenhof der Wehrmacht* ("The Regular Army's Court of Honour"), a conclave of officers set up after the attempted assassination to remove officers from the *Wehrmacht* who had been involved in the plot, mainly so that they were no longer subject to German military law and could be arraigned to a show-trial before the People's Court"

On 7 August 1944, Witzleben was in the first group of accused conspirators to be brought before the People's Court.

Ravaged by the conditions of his Gestapo arrest, he surprisingly approached the bench giving the Nazi salute, for which he was rebuked by the presiding judge Roland Freisler.

Witzleben was sentenced to death on the same day. Witzleben's closing words in court, addressed to Freisler, were:

"You may hand us over to the executioner, but in three months' time, the disgusted and harried people will bring you to book and drag you alive through the dirt in the streets!"

Most of the People's Court trials, including scenes of Witzleben's show trial, was filmed for the German weekly newsreel *Die Deutsche Wochenschau* (The German Newsreel). However, Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels decided against releasing the footage, firstly because Freisler's vituperative, insulting verbiage in the courtroom might draw sympathy for the accused, and sec-

ondly because the regime wanted to quell public discussion of the event. The material was classified as *Geheime Reichssache* (Secret German Affairs).

Witzleben was put to death that same day at Plötzensee Prison in Berlin. By Hitler's direct orders, he was hanged with a thin hemp rope (which people who were not from the prison staff called a piano wire) wound around a meat hook, and the execution was filmed.

Erich Hoepner

Generaloberst Erich Hoepner was an early proponent of mechanisation and armoured warfare, he was a *Wehrmacht* army corps commander at the beginning of the war, leading his troops during the invasion of Poland and the Battle of France.

Hoepner commanded the 4th Panzer Group on the Eastern Front during Operation Barbarossa, the invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941.

In January 1942, during the Battle of Moscow, Hoepner requested permission from the new commander of Army Group Centre, Günther von Kluge, to withdraw his over-extended forces.

Von Kluge said that he would discuss the matter with Hitler and ordered Hoepner to get ready. Assuming that Hitler's permission was on the way and not wanting to risk the matter any longer, Hoepner ordered his troops to withdraw on 8 January 1942.

Afraid of what Hitler might think, Kluge immediately reported Hoepner, causing Hitler's fury. Hoepner was dis-

missed from the *Wehrmacht* on the same day.

Hitler directed that Hoepner be deprived of his pension and denied the right to wear his uniform and medals, contravening the law and *Wehrmacht* regulations.

Hoepner filed a lawsuit against the Reich to reclaim his pension. Judges at the time could not be dismissed, even by Hitler, and Hoepner won his case.

Hoepner was implicated in the 20 July Plot and after the coup failed he was arrested and tortured by the Gestapo. He refused an opportunity to commit suicide and demanded a trial, though he would later come to regret it.

A summary trial was conducted by the People's Court and Hoepner was verbally attacked and sentenced to death.

Like other defendants, including Erwin von Witzleben, Hoepner was humiliated during the trial by being made to wear ill-fitting clothes, and not being allowed to have his false teeth.

Although judge Roland Freisler berated Hoepner, even he objected to him being made to dress in such a way.

Hoepner was hanged by a thin hemp rope mounted from meat hooks on 8 August, at Plötzensee Prison in Berlin.

Under the Nazi practice of *Sippenhaft* (collective punishment) Hoepner's wife, daughter, son (a major in the army), brother and sister were arrested.

The women were sent to Ravensbrück concentration camp. His sister was soon released but Frau Hoepner and her daughter were placed in the notorious



JUDICIAL JOKE: The *Volksgerichtshof* (People's Court) under Roland Freisler (pictured in the centre) sentenced more than 7,000 German citizens to death. The trials were nothing more than a farce, with the verdict (always guilty) decided long before the trial even began. Freisler was killed on 3 February 1945 during an Allied bombing raid on Berlin.

Strafblock for four weeks' additional punishment.

Hoepner's son was first held at a specially created camp at Küstrin and then sent to Buchenwald concentration camp.

Erich Fellgiebel

General Erich Fellgiebel was head of the cipher bureau of the *Reichswehrministerium*.

He was a signals specialist and was instrumental in introducing the Enigma machine. As head of Hitler's signal services, Fellgiebel knew every military secret, including Wernher von Braun's rocketry work at the Peenemünde Army Research Centre.

Part of the 20 July Plot, Fellgiebel was arrested immediately at Wolf's Lair and tortured for three weeks, but did not reveal any names of his co-conspirators.

He was charged before the

People's Court. On 10 August 1944, he was found guilty by Roland Freisler and sentenced to death. He was executed on 4 September 1944 at Plötzensee Prison in Berlin.

Friedrich von Rabenau

General der Artillerie Friedrich von Rabenau was a career-soldier, theologian, and opponent of National Socialism.

He was arrested in the aftermath of the 20 July Plot. On 15 April 1945, without having been charged or tried, General von Rabenau, one of the last inmates remaining in the Flossenbürg concentration camp, was shot on Himmler's specific orders.

The execution order was issued by Gestapo Chief Heinrich Müller with additional orders to report his death as resulting from a low-flying allied air attack.

Carl-Heinrich von Stülpnagel

General der Infanterie Carl-Heinrich von Stülpnagel served as military commander of German-occupied France and as commander of the 17th Army in the Soviet Union during Operation Barbarossa.

Stülpnagel was implicated in war crimes, including authorising reprisal operations against civilian population and closely cooperating with the *Einsatzgruppen* in their mass executions of Jews.

When Stülpnagel was recalled from Paris, he stopped at Verdun and tried to kill himself by shooting himself in the head with a pistol on the banks of the Meuse River. He only succeeded in blinding himself.

Stülpnagel and his adviser were both arrested by the Gestapo, and Stülpnagel was brought before the People's Court on 30 August 1944. He was found guilty of high treason and hanged the same day at Plötzensee Prison in Berlin.

These were just a few of the senior officers executed on the orders of Adolf Hitler.

Many of their executions were as a direct result of the 20 July Plot.

Towards the end of the war Hitler even ordered the arrests of both Hermann Göring and Heinrich Himmler on charges of treason.

As a matter of interest, from the time Hitler took power in 1933 to his death on 30 April 1945, there were no fewer than 28 assassination attempts on Hitler's life.

A sign of the times

During the Vietnam War graffiti scrawled onto helmet covers by American troops became almost an art form of its own. Even the North Vietnamese Army began to copy the practice.

In Stanley Kubrick's 1987 movie *Full Metal Jacket* there is an iconic scene featuring Private JT 'Joker' Davis (Matthew Modine) photographing the bodies of locals that have been murdered by the Viet Cong.

Private Joker is a member of the United States Marine Corps and has been sent to Vietnam as a reporter for 'Stars and Stripes', the U.S. military's independent newspaper.

On his helmet cover he has written the words "Born to kill". He is also wearing a peace sign on his helmet.

A colonel sees this and says to Joker, "You write 'Born to Kill' on your helmet and you wear a peace button. What's that supposed to be, some kind of sick joke?"

Joker replies: "I was trying to suggest something about the duality of man, sir, the Jungian thing, sir." To which, the colonel replies: "Whose side are you on, son?"

Officially it was known as the M-1 helmet. US troops called it a 'steel pot'. In 1941, some GI or Marine scribbled "Kilroy was here" or some other oddball or ironic saying on his helmet. Until the Vietnam War, though, what you most commonly saw on helmets were rank insignia and unit designations.

The Vietnam War, however, was unique in many ways. The vast majority of the troops fighting in the war were conscripts.

Many of them would be sent to Vietnam on a 12 month tour of duty.

The Vietnam War was not a popular one. In 1966, anti-war protests and other forms of political protest were rampant in the United States, and the nation's youths were struggling to assert their individuality.

Although the soldiers in Vietnam were a long way from home, they were products of the times, and just like their friends back in the states, they struggled to assert their individuality. One way they did this was by writing graffiti on their helmets.

Such artwork drew media attention as early as 18 June 1965. Appearing in an Associated Press article by Pulitzer Prize-winning photographer Horst Faas, the photo caption noted Larry Wayne Chaffin of the 173rd Airborne Brigade, sporting a simple line across the bridge of his helmet: "War is hell."

As one might imagine, it was considered counter to good order and discipline to write on one's helmet cover. The helmet was for the soldier, after all, a uniform item provided by the government.

To deface it meant defacing government property while at the same time violating the rules of wearing the uniform properly. Yet this never prevented the troops from doing it.

As one troop so aptly put it,

"What are they doing to do to punish me? Send me to Vietnam?"

All sorts of different graffiti adorned helmet covers. Peace signs (Fig. 1) were very popular. Then there were phrases such as "Born to kill" (Fig. 2), "Teenage Killer", "Don't tread on me" (Fig 3), "Make war not love" (Fig. 4), and many more.

Some troops would have a "short timer" calendar on their helmets (Fig. 5). This had every month of the 12 months they had to serve written on it. When a month had passed it was crossed off. Many troops would also have their blood group market on their helmet covers.

Some troops would tuck an Ace of Spades (known as the Death Card) into the elastic of their helmet cover (Fig. 6). This would be placed in a dead Viet Cong's mouth. The troops believed that the Viet Cong were superstitious and that this would scare them. It didn't.

Other troops would tuck a packet of cigarettes, insect repellent (known as bug juice) or a small bottle of rifle oil into the elastic (Fig. 7).

Even the regular North Vietnamese Army (NVA) troops began to write graffiti on their helmets.

The most popular phrase was "*Sinh ra ở phương bắc chết ở phương nam*" (Fig. 8). This translated as "Born in the North, died in the South."

1



2



3



4



5



6



7



8



All hail the PC Brigade

In our politically correct world Ryan Murphy wonders how long it will be before the PC Police start finding fault with traditional Christmas songs.

We live in a world that is becoming more PC (politically correct) by the day. You need to think long and hard before you open your mouth, just in case you inadvertently offend someone.

Make a statement such as; “it was as easy as taking candy from a baby” and the next thing you know you’re accused of child abuse. Or say something such as; “the room wasn’t big enough to swing a cat in” and the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals is on your case.

These days people are no longer fat, they are horizontally challenged. Short people are now vertically challenged.

You will no longer find a chairman of an organisation, they are now chairpersons.

You won’t find anyone that is stupid anymore, they are now intellectually challenged. People do not steal anymore, they misappropriate something.

If you go to a restaurant you will be served by a waitron, not a waiter or a waitress. And there is now no such thing as a manhole cover. It is, of course, a person hole cover.

What is alarming is that as we become more politically correct it will only be a matter of time before the PC Police start paying attention to other aspects of society.

How long will it be before

they start finding fault with traditional Christmas songs? Here is a small taste of what the future could bring.

Jingle Bells

*Dashing through the snow
In a one horse open sleigh
O’er the fields we go
Laughing all the way*

A risk assessment must be submitted before an open sleigh is considered safe for members of the public to travel on.

The risk assessment must also consider whether it is appropriate to use only one horse for such a venture, particularly if passengers are of larger proportions.

Please note, permission must be gained from landowners before entering their fields. To avoid offending those not participating in celebrations, we would request that laughter is moderate only and not loud enough to be considered a noise nuisance.

While Shepherds Watched

*While shepherds watched
Their flocks by night
All seated on the ground
The angel of the Lord came down
And glory shone around*

The union of Shepherd’s has complained that it breaches

health and safety regulations to insist that shepherds watch their flocks without appropriate seating arrangements being provided, therefore benches, stools and orthopaedic chairs are now available.

Shepherds have also requested that due to the inclement weather conditions at this time of year that they should watch their flocks via CCTV cameras from centrally heated shepherd observation huts.

Please note, the angel of the lord is reminded that before shining his / her glory all around she / he must ascertain that all shepherds have been issued with glasses capable of filtering out the harmful effects of UVA, UVB and Glory.

Little Donkey

*Little donkey, little donkey on
the dusty road*

*Got to keep on plodding on-
wards with your precious load*

The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) have issued strict guidelines with regard to how heavy a load that a donkey of small stature is permitted to carry, also included in the guidelines is guidance regarding how often to feed the donkey and how many rest breaks are required over a four hour plodding period.

Please note that due to the increased risk of pollution from



Rudolph

the dusty road, Mary and Joseph are required to wear face masks to prevent inhalation of any airborne particles.

The donkey has expressed his discomfort at being labelled ‘little’ and would prefer just to be simply referred to as Mr. Donkey. To comment upon his height or lack thereof may be considered an infringement of his equine rights.

While on the subject, Mr. Donkey takes offence to his walk being referred to as ‘plodding’. It is in fact a dignified gait.

We Three Kings

*We three kings of Orient are
Bearing gifts we traverse afar
Field and fountain, moor and mountain
Following yonder star*

Whilst the gift of gold is still considered acceptable - as it may be redeemed at a later date through such organisations

as ‘cash for gold’ etc, gifts of frankincense and myrrh are not appropriate due to the potential risk of oils and fragrances causing allergic reactions.

A suggested gift alternative would be to make a donation to a worthy cause in the recipient’s name or perhaps give a gift voucher.

We would not advise that the traversing kings rely on navigation by stars in order to reach their destinations and suggest the use of GPS satellite navigation, which will provide the quickest route and advice regarding fuel consumption.

Please note as per the guidelines from the SPCA for Mr Donkey, the camels carrying the three kings of Orient will require regular food and rest breaks. Face masks for the three kings are also advisable due to the likelihood of dust from the camel’s hooves.

Once again we must also stress that if the route plans to

cross private property, written permission should be obtained in advance and compensation, if necessary, must be made to the owners of the land.

Rudolph The Red Nosed Reindeer

Rudolph, the red-nosed reindeer

had a very shiny nose.

*And if you ever saw him,
you would even say it glows.*

You are advised that under the Equal Opportunities for All policy, it is inappropriate for persons to make comment with regard to the ruddiness of any part of Mr. R. Reindeer.

It is also illegal to make accusations that Mr. R. Reindeer has been drinking on duty without the necessary medical proof.

Further to this, exclusion of Mr R Reindeer from the Reindeer Games will be considered discriminatory and disciplinary action will be taken against those found guilty of this offence.

A full investigation will be implemented and sanctions - including suspension on full pay - will be considered whilst this investigation takes place.

And that’s just some of the traditional Christmas songs they can look at. It makes me shiver at the mere thought.

Anyway, that’s enough from me for this year. May I take this opportunity to wish all of you a very Merry Christmas and everything of the very best for the New Year.

Signs that someone served in the military

Want to know if someone is a military veteran? Matt Tennyson looks at some signs that are a dead give-away that someone served in the military.

National service began in 1968 when it was decided that all white South African males would be required to do a period of compulsory military service.

Note carefully the use of the word compulsory. It was not a request, it was an instruction and it was backed up by an act of parliament.

Every white male who was a South Africa citizen or had permanent residence was required to register with the South African Defence Force in the year that he turned sixteen. Once you had completed your schooling or decided to leave school, the South African Defence Force required your services.

Initially, national service was for a period of eight months. This was later increased to one year and then to two years.

The initial full-time service was followed by twelve years service in the citizen force, divided into six two-year cycles. In each cycle a maximum of 120 days service was performed, of which no more than 90 days could be imposed during one year. A total, therefore, of 720 days.

After completion of service in the citizen force, there followed a further five years in the active citizen force reserve. During this period there was no

formal service obligation, other than what could be imposed by the Minister of Defence in the light of SA Defence Force operational requirements.

After five years in the active citizen force reserve, members were liable for service in the commando force until their 55th year, with a maximum service obligation of 12 days a year.

It can clearly be seen that the SADF didn't mess around. They wanted a fairly hefty chunk of your life and you were given no choice in the matter. You either reported for national service at the time and place specified on your call up papers or you faced prosecution and detention for up to 36 months.

Then there were those that served in the Permanent Force. These were men, and women, that had decided to make the South African Defence Force their career.

Shortly before September 1993 a decision was taken at cabinet level to do away with national service. Those that were currently busy with national service were told "Thank you, but you can go home now."

Many people that served in the South African Defence Force between 1966 and 1989 were involved in the Border War, and a lot of them saw combat action.

Today the youngest men that did national service would now be in the late 40s. Those that took part in the Border War would be in their 50s, 60s and 70s.

And even though most of these veterans served a long time ago, many of them still display mannerisms that were ingrained in them during the time they served in the military.

These signs are not unique to those that served in the South African Defence Force. During my time as a conflict journalist I had the opportunity to meet people that had served in other military forces such as Britain, America, Israel, France, Germany and more.

What was interesting to note that most of them had mannerisms that gave away the fact that they had served in the military at some stage - no matter which country they were from.

Nine times out of ten someone who was a soldier will recognise another person that served in the military, without a word being spoken.

For those that never served in the military, these signs may not be so easy to recognise. There are, however, a few things that you can look for which will usually be a good indication. Here are some of them you should be able to spot.



NAP TIME: Most soldiers will develop the knack to sleep anywhere at any time.

Ability to sleep anywhere

If you're the type of person that finds it essential to get eight hours sleep a night, then the military is probably not the right option for you.

Soldiers often have to go without sleep for long periods of time. So they will grab any opportunity to get even a few minutes sleep.

They will also develop the ability anywhere. When in the field, beds are not a luxury afforded to soldiers. So any piece of floor or ground will serve as a place to sleep. Even long after they have left the military they will be able to lie down on the lounge carpet and be asleep in minutes.

Grant did his national service during 1978 and 1979. He served in the South African Signals Corps and spent nearly a year in the operational area.

"I was a radio operator and spent nine months at a place called Okalongo," Grant says.

"There were three of us signallers and it was our job to man the radios in the ops room. We would take it in turns working a nine hour shift. This meant that you spent nine hours on duty and then 18 hours off. This meant that we didn't have to work the same shift all the time.

"Our accommodation consisted of a hole dug into the ground which was covered by the roof of a tent. We didn't have beds or mattresses. You put your sleeping bag on the floor, climbed into it, and slept.

"When I did the night shift from midnight to 10h00 I would sit in the chair in front of the radios, put the headset on, put my chin on my chest, and sleep like a baby for about four or five hours.

"It's funny, but when I went home on my seven-day pass, I couldn't sleep comfortably in my own bed. The first night I woke up after about three hours with backache. I grabbed my pillow, lay down on the floor,

and slept like a baby for the rest of the night. To this day I have no problem with sleeping on the floor, although I must admit that I prefer a comfortable bed these days."

Masters of the iron

Creased or crumbled uniforms are not acceptable in the military, unless they are creases intentionally ironed into trousers and shirts.

This is especially true during basic training or on any parades. Soldiers know from experience how to use an iron.

Dave spent nine years as a member of the permanent force and, even 35 years after leaving the military, he still prefers his clothes ironed in a specific way.

"I was 17 when I joined the army and before that I had never even used an iron," Dave recalls. "But I learnt to become a master at ironing very quickly."

"The first time I tried to iron my shirt it was a disaster. I had no choice but to learn how to iron, and learn quickly. The army doesn't accept any excuses. Even now I still iron my own clothes."

Distinctive gait

Soldiers don't walk anywhere - they march. The average marching speed is 120 steps per minute and each step is about 76 cm in length. The back is kept straight as is the head. When the left foot is forward, the right arm is swung forward at the same time, and vice-versa.

Johan did two years national service and was a member of the citizen force for ten years after that. His wife pointed out

something that he finds most interesting.

“My wife always complains that I never walk, I march,” says Johan. “She also asked me why I always step off with my left foot first.”

“To be honest I had never thought about it. I realised that she was right. Whenever I am standing still and start to walk, I always step off on my left foot. Maybe it’s normal and everybody does that. But I think that it’s maybe because in the army, when you march, you always step off with the left foot first.”

Colin spent 16 years in the permanent force and ended his career as a sergeant major. He also has very strong thoughts

about marching.

“I can’t stand people that dawdle or slouch when they are walking,” Colin says. “It irritates the hell out of me. I want to walk right over them.”

Colin also pointed out another habit that he finds impossible to shake.

“Whenever I’m walking together with an old army mate we always seem to fall into step. It’s not something that we consciously do, it just tends to happen.”

Military time

Ask a former military man or woman what time something is happening, they will normally give you the answer in military time.

If, for example, something is happening at three o’clock they will not say 3.00 pm or three o’clock or at three this after-

noon. They will tell you that it is happening at 15h00. And

that is pronounced as fifteen hundred hours.

That’s

they way time is given in the military and many, if not most, former military members will use that method of giving time.

Stand easy

Soldiers standing at attention will often be given the command, “Stand at ease!”

This is not an instruction to relax, but rather a command to move from standing at attention with

the feet together and the arms at the sides to one with the feet shoulder width apart and the hands clasped behind the back.

The command given to adopt a more relaxed posture is “Stand easy”.

It is basically the same posture as stand at ease, but the back and head are more relaxed. Plenty of former military people will instinctively stand easy when they are standing relaxing.

Robert is a member of his church choir and he finds that he always stand in this position when singing.

“There’s about 20 of us, male and female, in the choir. When we sing most of the choir will stand with their hands at their sides or clasped in front of them. I always stand with my hands clasped behind my back. Force of habit, I guess.”

Always first to finish eating

In the military there is no such thing as a long, leisurely meal. Soldiers tend to eat as quickly as possible.

This was usually because the quicker you ate, the more time you had to do other things.

Martin recalls that it all started during basic training.

“We had to stand room inspection every morning,” he says. “Not only did all your personal kit have to be cleaned, polished or ironed, but beds had to be made perfectly and the entire room, including the toilets, had to shine.”

“If you did bother to go for breakfast, then you wolfed your food down as quickly as possible so you could get back to the bungalow to finish preparing



KNIFE HAND: Soldiers have a tendency to point using the entire hand and not just a single finger.

for inspection.

“Later on when I did Junior Leader’s Course we would get 45 minutes for lunch. We still stood inspection every morning which, as far as I’m concerned, were even stricter than during basics. So breakfast was always a rush.

“I was always tired because we would often get to bed late. This was because there was so much to do for inspection the next morning. So at lunch time I would try and finish my lunch in 15 minutes. Then I would go outside and lie under the trees and take a 20-25 minute nap.

“To this day it’s a habit that I still have. I eat far quicker than anyone else in my family. This is especially true when it comes to breakfast. My wife is forever telling me to eat slower.”

Using military jargon

The military has always had its own language, with jargon and slang that is unique.

For instance someone that served in the SADF will never suffer from diarrhoea, they will have gypo-guts.

Those that served in the navy will never use a toilet, they use

the ‘heads’. They will also refer to a kitchen as a galley.

You will often hear them using terms such as “copy that” or they will say “negative” rather than no.

Someone that is keen or enthusiastic is known as someone that is “GV”. It can be frustrating for those not familiar with the jargon or slang.

Foul language

Most soldiers swear - a lot. They will often continue to use colourful language even once they’ve left the military.

Craig admits that before he went into the army he rarely used bad language.

“Damn or bloody was probably the strongest words I had ever used in my life,” Craig says. “Then when I was called up for national service I soon found that within a few weeks I was ‘effing and blinding with the best of them.”

“It’s not like we swore just for the sake of using bad language. It was more of a habit and just about everyone did it. I even heard our unit padre use a four-letter word on the odd occasion.

“When I finished national service it took me a good few months to get out of the habit of swearing. I can tell you that my language didn’t go down to well with the church youth group that I was involved with.

“I’ve now been married for some time and have two children in their late teens. I never swear in front of them or in front of my wife. I do, however, belong to a military veterans organisation and we meet once a month. After the meeting we have a few drinks and it’s not long before I’m once again using language that would make your average sailor blush.”

Saluting

In almost every military, saluting is the accepted method of paying respect to a senior officer.

During basic training recruits are taught to salute everything that moves and, if it doesn’t move, salute it anyway - just in case.

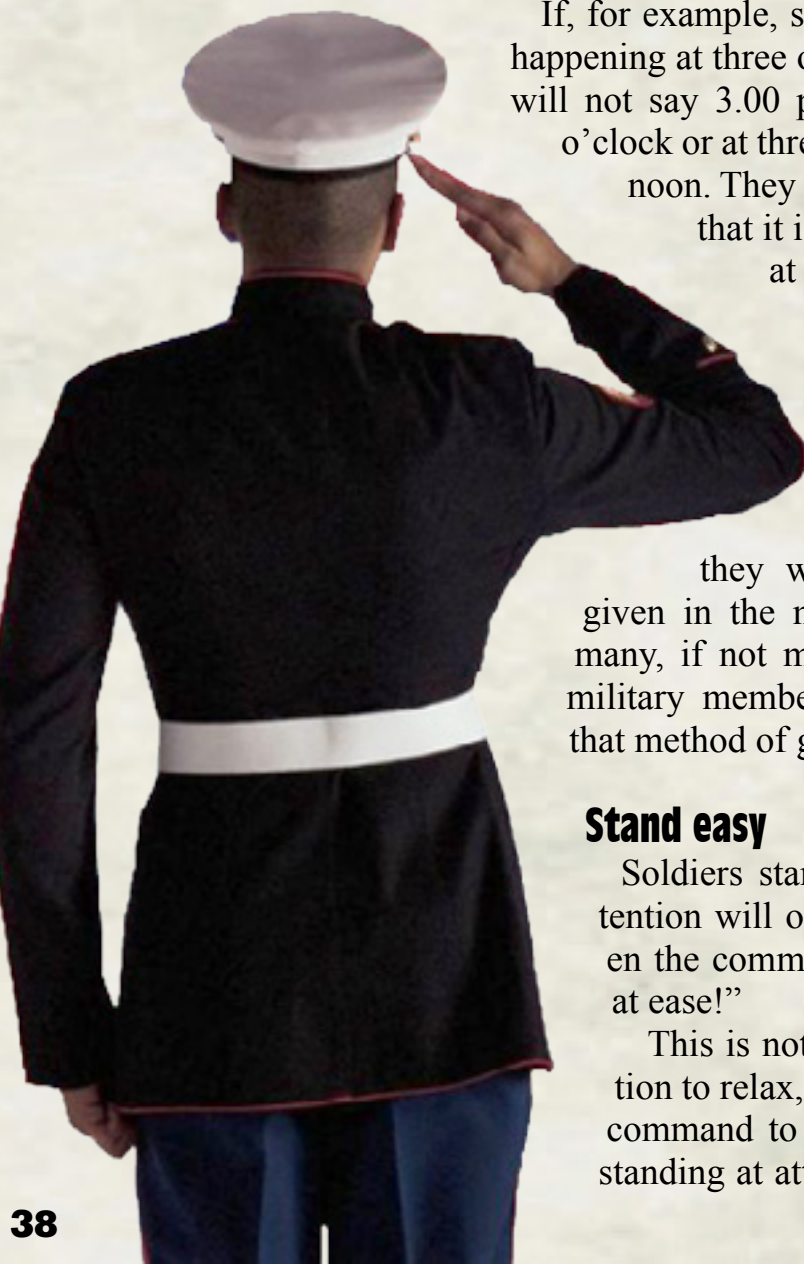
Many military veterans will still use the salute as a form of greeting, even long after they have left the military.

“I still get together with a few of the guys that I served with in the army,” says Frank. “We always salute each other. It’s not a real salute of course. It’s more just raising the hand to the forehead.”

Knife hand

Soldiers will hardly ever point at someone or something by using a single finger. They point using the entire hand. This is known as a knife hand and it serves a number of purposes.

It can be used to emphasis a



point, to indicate direction, or to point at a specific person or object.

Instructors will often use the knife hand as a form of intimidation with recruits undergoing training.

Peter did his basic training in the infantry and according to him his basic training corporal was a master at using the knife hand.

"If you did something wrong our corporal would call you to attention," Peter remembers. "Then he would come and stand in front of you with his face only centimetres from yours. He would shove his pointed fingers a few centimetres from your face, but without ever touching you, and then tell you your fortune in a very loud voice. And heaven help you if you tried to move back even a millimetre. It used to scare the crap out of me."

Dirty old men

When back in base, soldiers are required to be washed, clean shaved, and wear clean, ironed clothes and polished boots.

Yet when out in the field, fresh clothes and water to wash are a luxury not always available.

This is probably why many of those that served in the field have no problem with wearing the same clothes for two or three days.

Andy spent nearly a year on the border during his two years of national service. He explains further.

"Our company base was situated a few kilometres from the actual Angolan border," he says.

"We had no running water in our camp. We had a water tanker and it had to drive about 30



POWER SHOWER: Israeli Army troops take the opportunity to grab a quick shower while in the field.

kilometres to the police station and fill up. This was done every morning.

"Our showers were set up in the one corner of the camp and had wooden pallets for a floor and it was surrounded by canvas. Eight guys could shower at a time. The water for the shower was supplied from a large metal tank which was filled from the water tanker. Of course we would always have to take cold showers. You would only be allowed to shower for a certain amount of time because if the water ran out, you had to wait until the next morning."

That wasn't to much of a problem when they were in base but, as Andy explains, it was a different story when they were out on patrol.

"When it came to patrols we had a set routine. We would go out on patrol for eight days and then return to our base for four days," Gary says.

"When you went out on patrol you would have to carry everything needed for eight days

with you. The three main priorities were water, ammunition and rations.

"Most of us would carry eight one litre water bottles. That water was used for drinking and cooking. There wasn't enough to bother with things like washing. Anyway, you've never used soap, shampoo or even toothpaste when out on patrol because you could smell it from a good distance. Most of us, myself included, would wear the same shirt, pants, socks and underpants for the entire eight days. Maybe, if there was room in your kit, you would take a change of underwear and socks.

"So when we arrived back at base after an eight day patrol we were unshaven and smelt a bit high. The first thing we would do is have a good shower and wash our hair. Then we would have to shave. After that we would wash our clothes, by hand of course.

"That, of course, was many years ago. But I still have no problem with wearing the same pair of jeans and tee-shirt for two

days in a row. My wife goes nuts when I do and tells me to put on clean clothes. I try and tell her that they are still clean enough to wear and she gets all upset."

No explanation

In the military, when you are told to do something it is an order. It doesn't come with an explanation. At best you may be given a briefing, but that's it.

In the military you don't get to ask why something has to be done. You just get on with it. It's not something that is open to debate.

When asked or told to do something, ex-soldiers will seldom ask for an explanation as to why it has to be done. They will normally just get on with the job. They don't require you to explain why. At most they may ask you for a briefing as to how you want the job done.

Quick showers

When a soldier takes a shower they will normally do it as quickly as possible. It is not common practice to take a long, leisurely shower. You jump into the shower, wash, rinse yourself off, and get out. And it's often something they will continue to do, even when they are no longer in the military.

"When I shower it takes me less than five minutes, and that includes washing my hair," says Conrad. "When my wife or daughter take a shower they spend at least 20 minutes in the shower. If they take a shower before me then there is no hot water left. And neither of them can explain why it takes them so long."

Short hair

In the majority of armed forces, soldiers are required to keep their hair short and many armies have regulations as to exactly how the hair has to be cut.

Many former soldiers will still keep their hair relatively short, even years after they have left the military.

Mark was 17 when he joined the permanent force and he served for just over seven years.

"I joined the army straight after finishing school. So I never really had the chance to grow my hair," says Mark.

"I left the army in 1982 and in the 41 years since then I've never grown my hair long. I get my hair cut at least once a month. If it gets too long it really irritates me.

"I'm a member of a veteran's organisation and we have a meeting once a month and about 30 people attend. We also have our own pub and it's open every Friday night. A few months ago it struck me that not one person there has long hair. I don't know if it's because all of them served in the military, but it does make you think."

Stand in line

Anyone that served in the military is no stranger to standing in line. You stand in line to get issued with kit. You stand in line to be paid. You stand in line to be served meals. And you don't moan about it. It's just something that you learn to accept.

"I have no problem standing in a queue," says Cobus. He spent ten years in the military.

"My wife, on the other hand, is another story. When we go shopping she gets really irritated

if we have to queue for too long. The longer we have to wait, the more irritable she gets. She even gets mad at me because of the fact that I'm not irritated. She would never have coped in the military."

Polished shoes

There is not such thing as dirty or unpolished boots and shoes in the military.

During inspections or parades, boots often have to be 'boned'. Soldiers will sometimes spend hours polishing and buffing their boots until they shine. It's something that many ex-soldiers will continue to do even after they have left the military.

"I have no problem wearing sneakers or sandals. In fact I enjoy wearing them," says Marcus. "But if I'm wearing more formal shoes then they have to be polished and shined."

Sharing experiences

Many soldiers that saw combat during their service are reluctant to talk about it.

Bruce served for 12 years in the army and was involved in combat numerous times. It's not something that he talks about.

"Whenever I talk about my military experience I always talk about the funny things that happened," says Bruce. "But I won't talk about what happened in combat. I won't even talk about it to my wife. Unless they were there, people will never understand. The only time I will ever open up is when I'm talking to fellow veterans that also saw combat. They understand where I'm coming from because they went through the same thing."

Could you be Santa Claus?

Currently retired or unemployed? Looking for a job or maybe just something to keep you occupied? Then why not consider becoming Santa.

*Oh! You better watch out,
You better not cry,
You better not pout,
I'm telling you why:
Santa Claus is coming to town!*

The opening verse of the ever popular Christmas song, *Santa Claus Is Coming To Town*. The song was written in 1934 by John Frederick Coots and Haven Gillespie and has been recorded by more than 100 artists - everyone from Alice Cooper to Justin Bieber.

Yet how would you like having the job of Santa Claus? And we're talking about the real-deal here. Not some guy sitting with a false beard at the local shopping mall.

Let's face it, being Santa must be a pretty cool job. After all you only really work one day a year. What he gets up to the other 364 days of the year is anyone's guess.

Another major bonus of being Santa is that you get to play with all the new toys and gadgets way before anyone else.

But before you rush off to send your CV you need to check if you meet the requirements for this post.

You will need certain skills and talents before you can even think about applying for this

post. After all, this is not a job for just anyone.

Ability to withstand the cold

Remember that you will be based at the North Pole and it does get rather chilly here. The temperature in winter ranges from -43 °C to -34 °C and a temperature of 0 °C would be regarded as a hot summer's day.

Fashion sense

You need to look good in red. If this colour does not suit you, then please do not bother applying for the post.

Fuzz face

Part of the job requires that you wear a beard and mustache the entire year. Your beard and mustache can be any colour you wish - as long as it is white.

Gifted with languages

There are roughly 6,500 languages spoken around the world. As Santa you will have to be able to speak all of them.

After all, kids will be sending you letters telling you what they want for Christmas, so you had better know what they're asking for.

In many countries you will be known by differ-

ent names. For example in Afghanistan you are *Baba Chaghaloo*, in Poland you are *Swiety Mikolaj* and in China you are *Dun Che Lao Ren*. Get to know your names.

Attention to detail

Another verse of *Santa Claus Is Coming To Town* says, "He's making a list, and checking it twice; Gonna find out Who's naughty and nice."

Just imagine if someone has been nice and you put them on the naughty list? You could end up being sued.

An outstanding memory

These days Santa makes use of a Tablet or iPad and a GPS to track the names and addresses of everyone he has to deliver gifts to. Yet you still need to have an excellent memory.

You have thousands of elves working for you at your workshop at the North Pole.

These elves get very upset if you don't remember their names. They could go on strike and cause a shutdown. Since they started a union the elves have become very militant.

Stealth, cunning and an armoured skin

The job of travelling around

the world delivering gifts has become hazardous over the past decade or so. You face the risk of having your sleigh hijacked and you will also have to put up with guard dogs, electric fences, elaborate security systems and armed reaction guards.

To get an idea of what I'm talking about, read Santa's report of his 2022 visit to South Africa.

First of all I nearly missed the country because many parts of it were in darkness. I was told that this was because of the 'Prince of Darkness'.

When I asked if they were referring to Satan, they said, "no, Eskom."

My GPS was very confused, mainly because many of the street names had been changed. This is a problem I frequently encounter when visiting South Africa.

My first stop was at Parliament to drop off gifts. It didn't take long because my list of those that had been 'nice' was very short. The naughty list, however, seemed to go on forever.

Moving down the highway I was pulled over by traffic police. They told me that they were going to fine me for exceeding

the speed limit and for driving a sleigh that was not road worthy. They then said they would not fine me if I bought them a cold drink.

I know inflation in South Africa is bad, but I had no idea a tin of soda now costs R300.

When I finally arrived at the first house it took some time to get past the electric fence and the guard dogs.

Once inside I must have set off a silent alarm. The next thing I knew I was confronted by two men with shotguns.

"You, the fat guy in the red suit, we are from Killer Force Security. Put the bag down and puts your hands in the air before I blerry shoots you!"

It took some time before I was able to convince them who I was and for them to release me.

When I came outside I found that my sleigh was standing on bricks and that my reindeer were missing.

Across the road some men were cooking over open coals (they said it was a braai). The meat they were cooking looked exactly like one of my reindeer.

I reported the matter to the

police and they said they would contact me for a statement. That was 11 months ago, and I'm still waiting. - Santa.

And that's not his only problem. Some countries have 'no-fly zones' and you risk having your sleigh shot down by fighter jets or surface-to-air missiles.

Worst of all - many people just don't believe in you anymore.

Health issues

Let's see, how do we put this. You need to be of ample proportions? You need to be rotund? Oh to hell with it, you need to be fat and jolly.

If you are still interested in applying for the post, send a detailed CV to: Santa Pty Ltd, 317 Frostbite Corner, North Pole. And good luck with your application.



Mind your P's and Q's

So what exactly is the 'Phonetic Alphabet', and why do we use it?

I spell "Mike India Lima India Tango Alpha Romeo Yankee, break, Delta Echo Sierra Papa Alpha Tango Charlie Hotel Echo Sierra."

Now most of you will recognise that as 'Military Despatches' spelt out using the phonetic alphabet.

The phonetic alphabet is commonly used when speaking via radio. It is not uncommon for there to be static or interference when communicating via radio and it is easy to mishear what is actually being said - even when someone spells out a word.

The letter C could be misheard as B, D, E, G, P, T or V. Likewise, Q and U sound similar. This is why the phonetic alphabet was introduced.

These days there is an international phonetic alphabet, and everyone uses it. It has been in use since 1956 and is as follows.

- A - Alpha
- B - Bravo
- C - Charlie
- D- Delta
- E - Echo
- F - Foxtrot
- G - Golf
- H - Hotel
- I - India
- J - Juliett
- K - Kilo
- L - Lima
- M - Mike
- N - November
- O - Oscar
- P - Papa
- Q - Quebec

- R - Romeo
- S - Sierra
- T - Tango
- U - Uniform
- V - Victor
- W - Whisky
- X - X-ray
- Y - Yankee
- Z - Zulu

Now while this is the phonetic alphabet as used throughout the world today, this wasn't always the case.

During World War II the British and Americans had their own phonetic alphabets that they used.

British Army

- A - Ack
- B - Beer
- C - Cork
- D- Don
- E - Eddy
- F - Freddy
- G - George
- H - Harry
- I - Ink
- J - Jug
- K - King
- L - London
- M - Emma
- N - Nuts
- O - Orange
- P - Pip
- Q - Quad
- R - Robert
- S - Esses
- T - Toc
- U - Uncle
- V - Vic
- W - William
- X - Xerxes

- Y - Yellow
- Z - Zebra

It is interesting to note that both the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force had their own phonetic alphabets. The American military also had their own phonetic alphabet.

American Army

- A - Able
- B - Baker
- C - Cast
- D- Dog
- E - Easy
- F - Fox
- G - George
- H - Hypo
- I - Int
- J - Jig
- K - King
- L - Love
- M - Mike
- N - Negat
- O - Option
- P - Prep
- Q - Quack
- R - Roger
- S - Sail
- T - Tare
- U - Unit
- V - Vice
- W - William
- X - X-ray
- Y - Yoke
- Z - Zed

During World War II the German military also used their own unique phonetic alphabet.

German Army

- A - Anton



- B - Berta/Bruno
- C - Caeser
- D- Dora
- E - Emil
- F - Friedrich/Fritz
- G - Gustav
- H - Heinrich
- I - Ida
- J - Josef
- K - Konrad/Kurfust
- L - Ludwig
- M - Martha
- N - Nordpol

- O - Otto
- P - Paula
- Q - Quelle
- R - Richard
- S - Siegfried
- T - Toni
- U - Ulrich
- V - Viktor
- W - Wilhelm
- X - Xantippe
- Y - Ypern
- Z - Zeppelin

I personally recall being in the Ops room at a place called Okalongo when an infantry captain was sending a radio message through to his headquarters at Ngongo.

His version of the phonetic alphabet was something to behold. His alphabet included words such as Alcohol, Brandy, Castle, Gin, Rum, Tequila, Vodka and Whisky (at least he got this one right). He sounded like a walking advertisement for a bottle store.

The poor signaller was turning red in the face trying to suppress his laughter. Of course it didn't help when the person on the other end of the radio, a major, said, "Use the right blerry words man. Who learned you the blerry radio alphabets."

It was too much for the signaller who fell off his chair, doubled over with laughter. It earned the poor young troopie seven extra duties. I at least managed to run out of the ops rooms before I cracked up with laughter.

I'm sure a few of you out there must have an amusing story or two about the subject. So how about telling the rest of us? Or how about coming up with your own phonetic alphabet.

I had a mate who was a pilot and he came up with his own phonetic alphabet which, unfortunately, I can't print here. Every word was a swear word.





South African Legion

The SA Legion is a national organisation, part of a world-wide family that addresses the needs of ex-service personnel and their dependents by way of housing, pensions, employment and general welfare. It is apolitical, non-sectarian, non-racial, non-sexist and non-partisan.

Click on the logo to the left to visit the SA Legion website.

10 World War I slang words we still use today

Like soldiers so often do, the British and Commonwealth troops dealt with the horrors of trench warfare with humour. This included some of the slang that was used.

Last month, on 11 November, it marked 105 years since World War I ended. It was first known as ‘The Great War’ and ‘The War to End All Wars’.

Like soldiers so often do, the British and Commonwealth troops dealt with the horrors of trench warfare with humour. This was often reflected in songs popular at the time, as well as in the language and phrases used by those in the frontline.

The songs and slang used by these men became not only popular, but almost fashionable in wartime England, and much of this has remained with us to this day. Here are 10 examples that might surprise you.

Having a chat

A commonplace expression today that owes its origin to that most pernicious of insects, the louse. Body lice were endemic in the trenches, and they inhabited the seams and pleats of clothing where they bred in huge numbers, causing skin rashes and itching.

The expression is often ascribed to the Hindi word for a parasite, ‘*chatt*’, but is more possibly from an earlier medieval English word for idle gossip, ‘*chateren*’. Soldiers in the Napoleonic Wars certainly referred to lice as ‘chats’.

During the Great War it was common to see small groups

sitting around and talking as they used their fingernails, or a candle, to kill the lice. Such groups were described as men who were ‘chatting’.

Plonk

The now almost universal word for a bottle of wine. The British soldier has traditionally failed since time immemorial to master the pronunciation of even the simplest foreign words, and it is merely a corruption of the French ‘*vin blanc*’.

Pillbox

Prior to the war some small defensive military fortifications had been constructed, generally referred to as blockhouses. Mostly these were made of heavy timber – many were constructed during the Boer War.

However, the term was only widely adopted into English during the latter part of the Great War because of the huge numbers of concrete bunkers constructed by the Germans across the flooded Flanders battlefields.

They were called pillboxes due to their similarity to the small receptacles used by civilians for carrying medication.

Blighty

The origin of this now very British word is shrouded in mystery. It may have come from the Arabic ‘*beladi*’, mean-

ing ‘my own country’, or the Hindi word ‘*bilaik*’, referring to a foreign place or country. For the Tommies, it meant only one thing: home.

The best possible way to get there was to sustain a wound serious enough to require hospitalisation in England, which was enviously termed ‘a Blighty one’.

Third light

A superstition that it was bad luck to light a third cigarette from the same match.

This was actually based on sound experience: it took a German sniper about five seconds at night to see, aim and fire at a light source, and a flaring match was clearly visible on a dark night from well over 500 yards. Five seconds was also about the time it took for the third man to light up.

So not only was it bad luck to take the third light, it was often fatal.

Tank

The first modern armoured fighting vehicles were produced in great secrecy by Fosters of Lincoln. They were officially known as ‘Land Battleships’.

To prevent any hint of their purpose being discovered by German spies, workers were told they were mobile water tanks. Some were even clearly marked in Cyrillic ‘Water tanks



for Russia’. The ruse certainly worked, because their first use on the Somme on 15 September 1916 was a complete surprise to the Germans.

Sniper

Prior to the First World War, armies had employed specialist marksmen known as ‘sharpshooters’, but when war broke out the Germans fielded thousands of highly trained riflemen, usually equipped with telescopic-sighted rifles. The Germans referred to them as *Scharfschütze* (Sharp Shooters).

British officers referred to them as ‘snipers’, which harked back to the army in India in the late 18th century when officers would go bird hunting in the hills – the tiny Snipe being one of the hardest of targets to hit.

From 1914 the word was widely adopted by the British press, and it has since become universal. Sniping can now also refer to sharp or snide remarks made about another person.

Over the top

An example of an expression that has seen a resurgence, al-

though now with a very different meaning.

Originally it referred to the physical act of launching an attack by climbing over the sandbag parapet in front of a trench – literally by going over the top. It thus became synonymous with setting off on any highly dangerous venture, usually with a slim chance of survival.

It mostly died out after the war but in recent years has been revived, albeit now meaning to embark on a course of action or to make a remark that is either excessive or unnecessary.

Shrapnel

Often used today as a reference to the annoying, and all-but-worthless small change that accumulates in one’s pockets or purse. It is possibly the most incorrectly used word from the war, as it is invariably misapplied to describe the lethal flying splinters from high-explosive shells.

In fact, it refers to the lead balls launched from airburst shells (a little like airborne shotgun cartridges) invented by Lt Henry Shrapnel of the Royal Artillery in 1784.

Bumf

Printed paper that is produced in huge quantities for no discernible reason, and apparently has no information value. The junk mail we all receive on a daily basis is a prime example.

It is derived from the army term ‘bum-fodder’ – paper that has only one possible practical use.

It is originally from pre-war schoolboy slang then appropriated by the soldiers to refer to excessive paperwork. It generally referred to the endless streams of army orders that were issued from headquarters.

In the middle of one particularly savage attack on the Somme, a British orderly officer received a series of communiqué’s from HQ demanding to know how much tinned jam was held in stores and how many pairs of socks were required. Some things never change.

The myths of alcohol

With many years of practical experience and in-depth research, Ryan Murphy debunks some of the popular myths about alcohol.

Myth One

The more you drink, the more attractive women become.

Myth One – False

If she looked ugly before you started drinking she will continue to look ugly no matter how much you drink.

What will change, however, is your perception of her. At just 0.02% your visual senses start to become impaired.

Myth Two

The more you drink, the better looking you become.

Myth Two – False

No, you will still be ugly no matter what or how much you drink.

Myth Three

Your IQ level becomes elevated. All it takes is a few strong shots of alcohol and you become Socrates, Plato and Einstein all rolled into one.

Myth Three – False

Quite the opposite in fact. If you were not the sharpest pencil in the box before you had a few drinks, alcohol is not going to improve the situation.

Myth Four

Alcohol protects you from Sexually Transmitted Diseases.

And, if you're female, there's no chance of you falling pregnant. Alcohol is a natural contraceptive.

Myth Four – False

All alcohol will do is lower your inhibitions and affect your judgement so you will be more likely to have unprotected sex.

And no, it is not a natural contraceptive.

Myth Five

Your driving skills improve. The more you have to drink, the better you drive.

Myth Five – False

You're an accident looking for a place to happen. Just pray that you get arrested before you kill yourself or someone else.

Myth Six

You can handle any drink in the bar. So what if you normally only drink wine coolers? Suddenly you can handle any spirits or skull-pop behind the counter. Bring it on!

Myth Six – False

If you normally drink those fruit-flavoured wine cooler types of drinks, then stick to them.

Myth Seven

Alcohol makes you brave and strengthens your resolve. There's nothing wrong with a bit of 'Dutch Courage' before facing a challenging situation.

Myth Seven – False

Brave, no. Stupid, probably. All alcohol will do is lower your inhibitions and impair your judgement. The mission you volunteered for after a few drinks was called a 'Suicide Mission' for good reason.

The term 'Dutch Courage' originated when English soldiers noted the bravery-inducing effects of jenever's liquor on Dutch soldiers and dubbed it 'Dutch Courage'.

Myth Eight

You can take on anybody. Your pugilistic skills are phenomenal and you're a combination of Bruce Lee, Jackie Chan, and all the WWE stars combined. Anyone looks sideways at you, take them outside and sort them out.

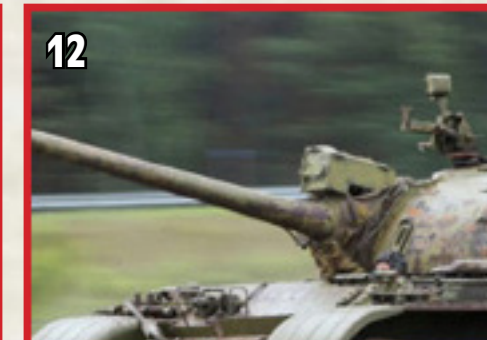
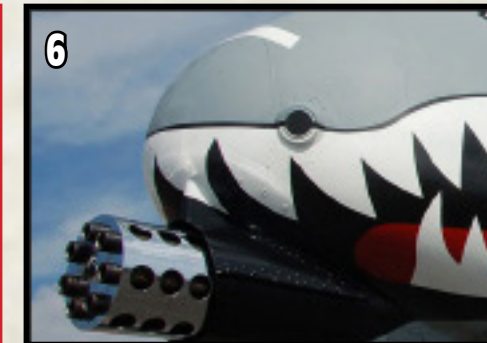
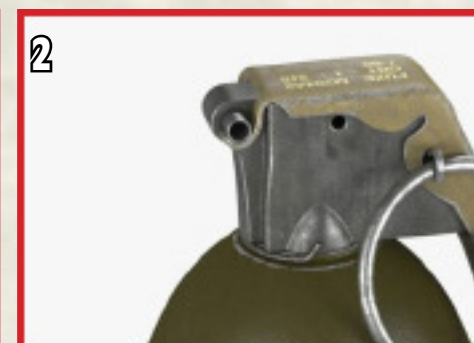
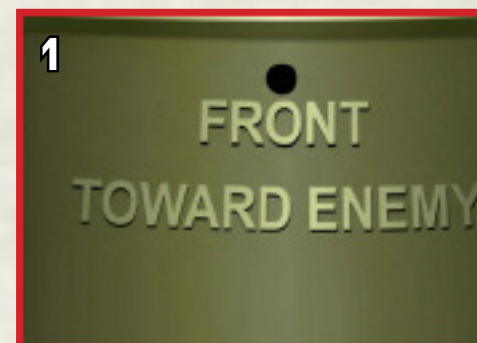
Myth Eight – False

If you're drunk and your opponent is sober the chances are that you're going to get a hiding. If you're an aggressive drunk it's time to stop drinking.



Up close and personal

This month we're taking a closer look at various military items. And we do mean a closer look. We show you 15 objects, you tell us what they are. You'll find the answers on page 103.



The origin of 'Taps'

At military funerals, memorials and services you will hear the Last Post being sounded. Yet in America you will hear the sound of 'Taps'. Why is this, and where did Taps originate?

The sound of a lone bugler playing the Last Post has become one of the most distinctive sounds in the world. Eerie and evocative, it exists beyond all the usual barriers of nation, religion, race and class, charged with the memory of generations of the fallen. But it wasn't always like this.

The Last Post was first published in the 1790s, just one of the two dozen or so bugle calls sounded daily in British Army camps. The soldier's day started with the call of Reveille, and came to a close with the First Post.

This indicated that the duty officer was commencing his inspection of the sentry-posts on the perimeter of the camp. The inspection would take about 30 minutes, and at the end there would be sounded the Last Post, the name referring simply to the fact that the final sentry-post had been inspected.

During the 1850s when a soldier died in a foreign land, there was often no music available to accompany him on his final journey. The regimental bugler would sound the Last Post over the grave.

The symbolism was simple and highly effective. The Last Post now signalled the end not merely of the day but of this earthly life.

As the practice developed it was then followed by few moments of silent prayer and by the sounding of Reveille, the first call of the day, to signify the man's rebirth into eternal life.

In America, the Last Post is not played at military funerals, memorials and services. Instead they play a tune known as 'Taps'.

It all began in 1862 during the Civil War, when Union Army Captain Robert Ellicombe was with his men near Harrison's Landing in Virginia. The Confederate Army was on the other side of the narrow strip of land.

During the night, Captain El-

licombe heard the moan of a soldier who lay mortally wounded on the field.

Not knowing if it was a Union or Confederate soldier, the captain decided to risk his life and bring the stricken man back for medical attention.

Crawling on his stomach through the gunfire, the captain reached the stricken soldier and began pulling him toward his encampment. When the captain finally reached his own lines, he discovered it was actually a Confederate soldier, but the soldier was dead.

The captain lit a lantern. Suddenly, he caught his breath and went numb with shock. In the dim light, he saw the face of the soldier. It was his own son. The boy had been studying music in the South when the war broke out. Without telling his father, he had enlisted in the Confederate Army.

The following morning, heartbroken, the father asked permission of his superiors to give his son a full military burial despite his enemy status.

His request was partially granted. The captain had asked if he could have a group of Army band members play a funeral dirge for the son at the funeral.

That request was turned down since the soldier was a Confederate. Out of respect for the

father, they did say they could give him only one musician.

The captain chose a bugler. He asked the bugler to play a series of musical notes he had found on a piece of paper in the pocket of his dead son's uniform. This wish was granted. This music was the haunting melody we now know as "Taps" that is used at all military funerals.

A very touching and moving story, except for one small thing. There was no dead son, Confederate or otherwise; no lone bugler sounding out the dead boy's last composition.

There is no record of any man named Robert Ellicombe holding a commission as captain in the Army of the Potomac during the Peninsula Campaign.

The only thing remotely true about the story above is the fact that Taps' was composed in July 1862 at Harrison's Landing in Virginia.

The tune is a variation of an earlier bugle call known as the "Scott Tattoo", which was used in the U.S. from 1835 until 1860, and was arranged in its present form by the Union Army Brigadier General Daniel Butterfield, an American Civil War general and Medal of Honour recipient who commanded the 3rd Brigade of the 1st Division in the V Army Corps of the Army of the Potomac.

It was while at Harrison's Landing, Virginia, in July 1862 that he wrote the song to replace a previous French bugle call used to signal "lights out".

Butterfield's bugler, Oliver Wilcox Norton, was the first to sound the new call. Within months "Taps" was used by

both Union and Confederate forces. It was officially recognized by the United States Army in 1874.

"Taps" concludes many military funerals conducted with honours at Arlington National Cemetery and elsewhere in the United States.

The tune is also sounded at many memorial services in Arlington's Memorial Amphitheatre and at grave sites throughout the cemetery. It is also regularly played at the American Cemetery in Normandy, France, to commemorate the sacrifice made, at & around that site, by United States servicemen in WWII, during the allied effort to liberate Europe from the Nazis.

Captain John C. Tidball, West Point Class of 1848, started the custom of playing "Taps" at military funerals. In early July 1862 at Harrison's Landing, a corporal of Tidball's Battery A, 2nd U.S. Artillery, died.

He was, Tidball recalled later, "a most excellent man". Tidball wished to bury him with full military honours, but, for military reasons, he was refused permission to fire seven rifles three times - a 21-shot salute - over the grave.

Tidball later wrote, "The thought suggested itself to me to sound taps instead, which I did. The idea was taken up by others, until in a short time it was adopted by the entire army and is now looked upon as the most appropriate and touching part of a military funeral."

As Tidball proudly proclaimed, "Battery A has the honour of having introduced this custom into the service, and

it is worthy of historical note."

It became a standard component to U.S. military funerals in 1891.

"Taps" is sounded during each of the military wreath ceremonies conducted at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier every year, including the ones held on Memorial Day. The ceremonies are viewed by many people, including veterans, school groups, and foreign officials. "Taps" also is sounded nightly in military installations at non-deployed locations to indicate that it is "lights out", and often by Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts and Girl Guides to mark the end of an evening event such as a campfire.

"Taps" is a bugle call - a signal, not a song. As such, there is no associated lyric. Many bugle calls had words associated with them as a mnemonic device but these are not lyrics. A Horace Lorenzo Trim wrote a set of words intended to accompany the music.

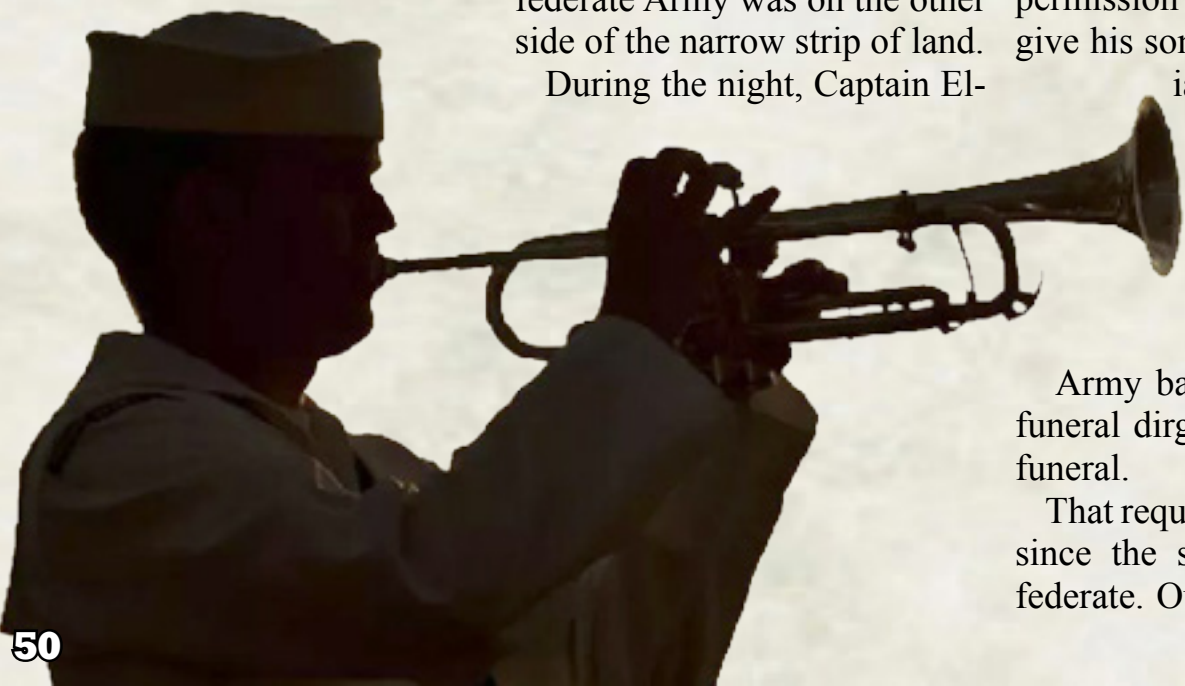
If there is no bugler or trumpeter available then the first verse of the song is normally sung *a capella*.

First verse of Taps

Day is done, gone the sun,
From the lake, from the hills,
from the sky;
All is well, safely rest, God is nigh.



Click on the button to listen to 'Taps'.



World War I uniforms

10 things you (probably) didn't know about First World War uniforms.

The camouflage uniform donned by soldiers during the First World War is, to many, instantly recognisable, but how much do you really know about the garments? Here, Jane Tynan, the author of *British Army Uniform and the First World War: Men in Khaki*, reveals 10 surprising facts about the wartime apparel.

1) Khaki was first adopted in India

The word 'khaki' comes from the Persian portion of the Hindustani language.

The use of khaki for military camouflage is thought to have begun with Harry Lumsden, who raised the Corps of Guides in 1846, a regiment of the British Indian Army. He bought up white cotton cloth at the bazaar at Lahore, which was then taken down to the riverbank, where his troops soaked the cloth in water and rubbed mud into it. Lumsden's second in command was convinced that khaki would make his men "invisible in a land of dust".

By the First World War, the British Army had transitioned from red to khaki uniforms in response to new technologies: aerial reconnaissance and smokeless guns were making soldiers' visibility a real problem on the battlefield.

2) British khaki dyes came from Germany

Before the war, Germany was

the centre of the synthetic dye-stuffs industry. By 1913, it was exporting more than 20 times the volume of dyes coming out of Britain. During the First World War the only khaki dye available for British Army uniforms was manufactured in Germany, which, at first, it secretly imported.

3) For a time, khaki was replaced by 'Kitchener blue'

'Kitchener blue' was the collective name given to replacement uniforms used by the British Army when it ran out of khaki in 1914. The War Office had failed to obtain enough khaki uniforms in the opening weeks of the war, and early recruits were forced to wear replacement uniforms.

They were obtained from a range of unlikely sources: 500,000 suits of blue serge uniforms from Post Office stocks, and approximately 500,000 greatcoats purchased from the clothing trade. The War Office also ordered a huge volume of jackets, trousers and greatcoats from Canada and the United States.

Some soldiers were issued with old full-dress parade tunics – scarlet with colourful facings and blue trousers from various reserve stores. A 1914 article in the trade periodical the *Tailor and Cutter* reported that one of the alternative outfits was "not at all liked, the first men to wear it being mistaken for inmates of an industrial home".

4) Most uniforms were not made by the army

Most were, in fact, made by various civilian tailoring firms. War Office plans for dealing with an outbreak of war were insufficient for the scale of this conflict. In August 1914, reserves were capable of supplying no more than the original expeditionary force and first-line units of the Territorial Force for a few weeks.

Clothing an expanding volunteer army overwhelmed the official army factories. By November 1914 a new director of army contracts had reorganised the system of supply, which led to a boom in 'khaki contracts' in the British tailoring trade – a system the war office regulated by public competition. It seems that war was good for business.

5) Official knitting patterns were introduced to discourage 'rogue knitters'

Civilians were busily knitting garments for British soldiers during the First World War. The gloves, socks, mittens, jerseys and balaclavas made by civilians became affectionately known as 'comforts'.

But what started as a response to small gaps in uniform supply became a mass knitting frenzy, which made the government very nervous about the colourful, quirky garments reaching soldiers at the front. Hence knitting patterns were issued, warning women – thought to be the typical knitters – to narrow the range of

garments, and to use only khaki wools.

But the success of the knitting projects often highlighted army failures. The First World War was a step into the unknown – much of the war effort had to be improvised. When the efforts of volunteer knitters threatened to expose official shortcomings, the state intervened; one such gesture was the issue of the official Kitchener stitch, which improved the comfort of knitted socks for men in the trenches!



6) Turbans were worn by soldiers on the western front

By November 1914, one third of the British Army on the western front came from India and fought with the Indian Expeditionary Force (serving from September 1914 to December 1915). An official photograph taken in France depicts Indian troops marching along the road while young women rush up to pin flowers on them as they pass. They wear turbans and have long tunics – resembling the Indian Kurta – falling to their knees.

For Sikh soldiers, these distinctive features described their colonial status, but it also became part of war propaganda. In July 1915 *The Graphic* newspaper ran a feature to celebrate the spectacle of Indian soldiers marching to battle, in which they reported that the Germans "themselves admit their surprise at this rally of India".

Photographs were a bit more realistic; one from July 1916 shows Indian cyclists – despatch riders – at the crossroads on Fricourt-Mametz Road wearing khaki service dress with traditional Sikh turbans. Unfortunately, rather than reflect a proud military tradition, their distinctive clothing often symbolised their lowly rank on the western front.

7) The First World War saw the invention of the trench coat

Well, not really, since this weatherproof sports coat had been around since the late 19th century, but as the name suggests, its re-invention as the trench coat

is certainly attributed to its use in the First World War.

It was an optional item of military kit for officers on the western front. Initially, soldiers were kitted out with the greatcoat, which was far too heavy for the rain and mud. When uniform manufacture went out to the trade, a range of civilian outfitters began to supply mass-produced garments to officers. This was how various firms, including Burberry and Aquascutum, began to sell versions of the trench coat.

The coat was a practical garment for British officers enduring the muddy conditions of the trenches, and was a great improvement on the heavy, cumbersome greatcoat. The light fabric gave soldiers mobility, while water-repellent material protected them from wet weather: large pockets kept maps dry, and cleverly placed flaps offered ventilation. Protecting the body, and keeping mobility at a maximum, was vital in trench conditions – this light, weatherproof sports coat was the ideal solution.

8) Conscientious Objectors were forced to wear uniforms against their will

Following conscription, COs who were arrested for failing to respond to the call to military duty often refused to wear the uniform. Treated as enlisted soldiers, their disobedience brought the full force of the law upon them, and they could then be sentenced to imprisonment.

COs might refuse to strip for a medical examination or resist having their measurements taken. Often, soldiers would forcibly remove their clothes, or attempt

to dress them in military uniform against their will. Fred Murfin recalls his arrival in France, when he defied the authorities by deliberately and mischievously leaving his puttees on the ship. Their refusal to wear khaki was a powerful protest, and the penalty was often violence and humiliation.

9) An outfit allowance was introduced for officers who could not afford a uniform

As the war progressed, it became clear to British Army authorities that officers' uniforms would have to be subsidised. Many new army officers struggled to meet the expense of getting a uniform made. Hence outfit grants were issued to them, so that they could be commissioned from the ranks, without concern

as to how they might meet the cost of the uniform. Heavy losses meant that officers were being recruited from a wider range of social classes than before the war, and many of these men could not afford the traditional trip to the tailor. The introduction of an outfit grant ensured their continued recruitment. This might be why the established officer class were quick to label them 'improvised officers' or worse, 'temporary gentlemen'.

10) More than 1 million civilian suits were issued to discharged soldiers at the end of the war

Legally, a man could not wear his uniform more than 28 days after discharge, so upon demobilisation they were supplied with civilian suits by the Royal Army Clothing Department. Before he left his unit, each man was given a plain clothes form and a certificate of employment.

When he went to a dispersal centre he received a protection certificate, a railway ticket to get home, a pay advance, a fortnight's ration book, and a voucher for the return of his greatcoat. Here he had the option of a clothing allowance or a suit of plain clothes. The army issued a total of 1,413,760 suits to demobilised men at the end of the war, in dark blue, brown or grey. However, the trade press were quick to criticise the quality of the suits, which were thought to be an insult to returning war heroes.

Useful links

Every month we feature a few useful links to military websites, newsletters and online magazines. Stuff that we think our readers will appreciate. Here are two of our favourites. The first one is Nongqai, the unofficial police newsletter for veterans of the former South African Police Force and for those interested in Police History. The second is Jimmy's Own, the official newsletter of the South African Signals Association. Click on the magazine covers to go to the respective websites.



**Military
Despatches**

**To all our readers from all of us
at Military Despatches.**

**Thanks for your support during
the year.**

**Here's wishing you every-
thing of the best for
Christmas and a
peaceful and
prosperous New
Year.**

**We trust that
you will en-
joy this issue of
Military Despatches and
look forward to bringing
you more in 2024.**



Annual Poppy Day

“In Flanders Fields, the poppies blow, Between the crosses, row on row”. The opening line from the poem “In Flanders Field” by John McCrae. The poppy became a symbol of remembrance and is worn during November as a sign of respect to those that made the ultimate sacrifice during war. Every year the South African Legion, the oldest military veterans organisation in South Africa, holds a ‘Poppy Day’ to raise funds for military veterans. PAMELA POOLE, Poppy Coordinator, sent us through these photographs.



ABOVE LEFT: Peter Malan and John Souter at Meadowridge Shopping Centre.

BELOW LEFT: Members of the Signals Association do their bit. From left to right: Kevin Wistler, Adi Fourie, Liza Marcus, Geoff Laskey, Jeff Marcus and Jess Marcus.



ABOVE RIGHT: The SA Legion stall at Meadowridge Shopping Centre.

BELOW RIGHT: Karen Dickens (left).



ABOVE LEFT: Legionnaires E. Muller (Parachute Battalion), Billy Boshoff (Selous Scouts), and Jim Harwood (Parachute Battalion).



BELOW LEFT: Members of the Sea Cadets played their part in Poppy Day.



ABOVE RIGHT: Legionnaire Peter Dickens, President of the SA Legion Branch UK and EU and Old Bill of Seagull Shellhole on Poppy Day Collection.



ABOVE RIGHT: SA Naval Forces (World War II) Veteran Able Seaman Small, 99 years old.

The Six Day War

In Part II of our Head-to-head series on the Six Day War, we look at the armour used by Israel, Egypt, Syria and Jordan.

In the history of modern warfare only two wars have been shorter than the Six-Day War in 1967.

The 'Football War' fought in 1969 between El Salvador and Honduras lasted for just 100 hours (four days).

Of course the shortest war in history was the Anglo-Zanzibar War. It was fought on 27 August 1896 between the Zanzibar Sultanate and Great Britain. The entire war lasted all of 38

minutes.

While it was known as the Six-Day War, the end result of the war was all but decided on the first day - 5 June 1967.

In a pre-emptive strike on the morning of 5 June, The Israeli Air Force had taken out the Arab air forces while they were still on the ground.

They first struck at Egypt before turning their attention to Jordan and Syria. The fact of the matter is that the Jordanian

and Syrian Air Forces had been destroyed within the space of 25 minutes.

Six hours or so after the first IAF aircraft had soared into the morning sky, Israel had won the Six-Day War.

Destroying the Arab air forces didn't just mean that Israeli troops could operate without the threat of air attack; it also meant that Israeli aircraft could relentlessly bomb and strafe Arab ground troops, which



Centurion tank

turned the Egyptian retreat from Sinai into a rout. A total of 418 Arab aircraft were destroyed for the loss of 27 Israeli aircraft.

Not that the tank crews and paratroopers on the ground wouldn't face some hard fighting in the Sinai, the Golan and Jerusalem.

The war saw some classic tank battles, such as the Battle of Abu-Ageila. The Egyptians had 66 tanks (T34/85s with 85 mm guns) and 22 tank destroyers (SU-100s with 100 mm guns).

The Israelis had 150 tanks with over 100 Centurion and Super Shermans armed with 105 mm guns. The rest were

AMX-13s with 75 mm guns). The Israeli guns were not only more accurate, they also had a longer range.

The Israeli forces were led Major General Ariel Sharon, later a prominent politician and prime minister of Israel.

The battle was decisive defeat for the Egyptians and was critical to the eventual loss of the entire Sinai Peninsula to Israel.

The victory at Abu-Ageila meant the road to the Central Sinai was open for the Israelis in general, Sharon and his forces in particular. Many of the Egyptian units remained intact and could have tried to prevent the Israelis from reaching the Suez Canal.

However, when the Egyptian Minister of Defence, Field Marshal Abdel Hakim Amer heard

about the fall of Abu-Ageila, he panicked and ordered all units in the Sinai to retreat to the west bank of the Suez canal within a single day.

There was no plan for the retreat, so the units left behind heavy equipment, and sometimes even outpaced their commanders. This resulted in the Israelis racing to capture abandoned sites, and obtaining significant amounts of abandoned tanks and equipment.

During this battle the Egyptians suffered 2,000 casualties and 64 tanks were destroyed. The Israelis had 42 troops killed, 140 wounded and eight tanks were destroyed.



T55 tank



Israel 800 tanks

M50 and M51 Sherman

The Sherman M-50 and the Sherman M-51, both often referred abroad as the Super Sherman, were modified versions of the American M4 Sherman tank that served with the Israel Defence Forces from the mid-1950s to early 1980s. The M-51 was also referred to as the Isherman (i.e. Israeli Sherman). However, the designations "Super Sherman" and "Isherman" were never used by the Israeli Defence Forces.

- Weight: 31.6 tonnes
- Length: 6.06 metres
- Width: 2.62 metres



- Height: 2.74 metres
- Crew: 5
- Armour: 13–76 mm
- Main Armament: 105 mm Modèle F1
- Secondary Armament: 1 × .50 cal Browning M2HB
- machine gun, 2 × .30-06 Browning M1919A5 machine guns
- Engine: Continental R-975 Gasoline
- Range: 161 km
- Max speed: 40.2 km/h

M48A3 Patton

The Sherman M-50 and the Sherman M-51, both often referred abroad as the Super Sherman, were modified versions of the American M4 Sherman tank that served with the Israel Defence Forces from the mid-1950s to early 1980s. The M-51 was also referred to as the Isherman (i.e. Israeli Sherman). However, the designations "Super Sherman" and "Isherman" were never used by the Israeli Defence Forces.

- Weight: 49.6 tonnes
- Length: 9.3 metres
- Width: 3.65 metres



- Height: 3.1 metres
- Crew: 4
- Armour: 110–220 mm
- Main Armament: 105 mm L7
- Secondary Armament: 1 × .50 cal Browning M2HB
- machine gun, 1 × .M37/T153 machine gun
- Engine: AVDS-1790 diesel
- Range: 463 km
- Max speed: 48 km/h

Centurion

The Centurion was the primary British army main battle tank of the post-Second World War period. Introduced in 1945, it is widely considered to be one of the most successful post-war tank designs, remaining in production into the 1960s, and seeing combat in the front lines into the 1980s.

Israel's army used Centurions in the 1967 Six-Day War, 1973 Yom Kippur War, and during 1978 South Lebanon conflict and 1982 Lebanon War.

- Weight: 52 tonnes



- Length: 7.6 metres
- Width: 3.38 metres
- Height: 3.01 metres
- Crew: 4
- Armour: 51–152 mm
- Main Armament: 105 mm L7
- Secondary Armament: 1 × Co-axial .30 cal Browning machine gun
- Engine: Rolls-Royce Meteor
- Range: 80 km
- Max speed: 35 km/h



Egypt 1,200 tanks

T-34/85

The T-34 is a Soviet medium tank introduced in 1940, famously deployed during World War II against Operation Barbarossa.

Egypt went on to build the T-34-100, a local and unique conversion that was made up of a Soviet BS-3 100 mm heavy field-artillery gun mounted within a heavily modified turret.

- Weight: 26.5 tonnes
- Length: 6.68 metres
- Width: 3.0 metres
- Height: 2.45 metres



- Crew: 5
- Armour: 15–60 mm
- Main Armament: 85 mm D-5T gun
- Secondary Armament: 2 × 7.62 mm DT machine guns
- Engine: Model V-2-34 38.8 L V12 Diesel engine
- Range: 250-300 km
- Max speed: 53 km/h

T-54/T-55

The T-54 and T-55 tanks are a series of Soviet main battle tanks introduced in the years following the Second World War. The first T-54 prototype was completed at Nizhny Tagil by the end of 1945.

T-54s and T-55s have been involved in many of the world's armed conflicts since the later part of the 20th century.

- Weight: 36 tonnes
- Length: 9.00 metres
- Width: 3.37 metres
- Height: 2.4 metres
- Crew: 4

- Armour: 20–205 mm
- Main Armament: D-10T 100 mm rifled gun
- Secondary Armament: 12.7 mm DShK heavy machine gun
- Engine: Model V-55(V-54) V-12 water-cooled. 38.88-l diesel
- Range: Various
- Max speed: 48 km/h



PT-76

The PT-76 is a Soviet amphibious light tank that was introduced in the early 1950s and soon became the standard reconnaissance tank of the Soviet Army and the other Warsaw Pact armed forces.

Overall, some 25 countries used the PT-76. The PT-76 is used in the reconnaissance and fire-support roles.

- Weight: 14.6 tonnes
- Length: 7.63 metres
- Width: 3.15 metres
- Height: 2.325 metres
- Crew: 3

- Armour: 7–25 mm
- Main Armament: 76.2 mm D-56T rifled tank gun
- Secondary Armament: 7.62 mm PKT machine gun coax machine gun
- Engine: V-6 Type diesel
- Range: 400 km
- Max speed: 44 km/h



SU-100

The SU-100 (Samokhodnaya Ustanovka 100) was a Soviet tank destroyer armed with a 100 mm anti-tank gun in a casemate superstructure.

It was used extensively during the last year of World War II and saw service for many years afterwards with the armies of Soviet allies around the world.

- Weight: 31.6 tonnes
- Length: 9.45 metres
- Width: 3.0 metres
- Height: 2.25 metres
- Crew: 4



- Armour: 20–75 mm
- Main Armament: 100 mm D-10S gun
- Secondary Armament: 12.7 mm DShK heavy machine gun
- Engine: Kharkiv Model V-2 V-12 diesel engine
- Range: 250 km
- Max speed: 48 km/h

Syria 400 tanks

Syria used the same tanks as Egypt. They also used Panzer IV, Sturmgeschütz III and Jagdpanzer IV (ex-German vehicles)

Jordan 200 tanks

Jordan used US M47, M48, and M48A1 Patton tanks. These were all American tanks.

Iraq 400 tanks

Iraq were equipped with the same tanks used by the Egyptian army.



M47 Patton tank



Panzer IV

Audie Murphy

Poet, songwriter, actor with his own star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, and one of America's most decorated combat soldiers during World War II, Audie Murphy did it all.

The old South African Defence Force (SADF) had some interesting slang terms and expressions.

One of the terms for someone that took needless risks was Audie Murphy. As in, "Who do you think your are, Audie Murphy?"

Well in the case of Audie Leon Murphy from Texas, he was *the* Audie Murphy.

He was one of the most decorated American combat soldiers of World War II and received every military combat award for valour available from the US Army.

Yet who exactly was Audie Murphy, and how did go about becoming such a legend.

Early life

Audie Leon Murphy was born on 20 June 1925 in Kingston, Texas.

He was the seventh of twelve children and his parents were share-croppers of Irish descent.

As a young boy, Murphy was a loner. He had an explosive temper and was subject to mood swings.

His father, Emmett Murphy, was a drifter and he would often disappear for long periods of time. Eventually he deserted the family and Murphy's mother, Josie, had to raise

the children on her own.

To help support his family, Murphy dropped out of school in the fifth grade and got a job picking cotton for a dollar a day.

He was skilled with a rifle and was a more than adept poacher. He would hunt small game to help put food on the table.

Murphy was 16 when, in 1941, his mother died of endocarditis and pneumonia. Her death hit Murphy really hard.

He got a job at a radio repair shop and at a combination general store, garage and gas station in Greenville.

Hunt County authorities placed his three youngest siblings in Boles Children's Home, a Christian orphanage in Quinlan.

Enlistment in the army

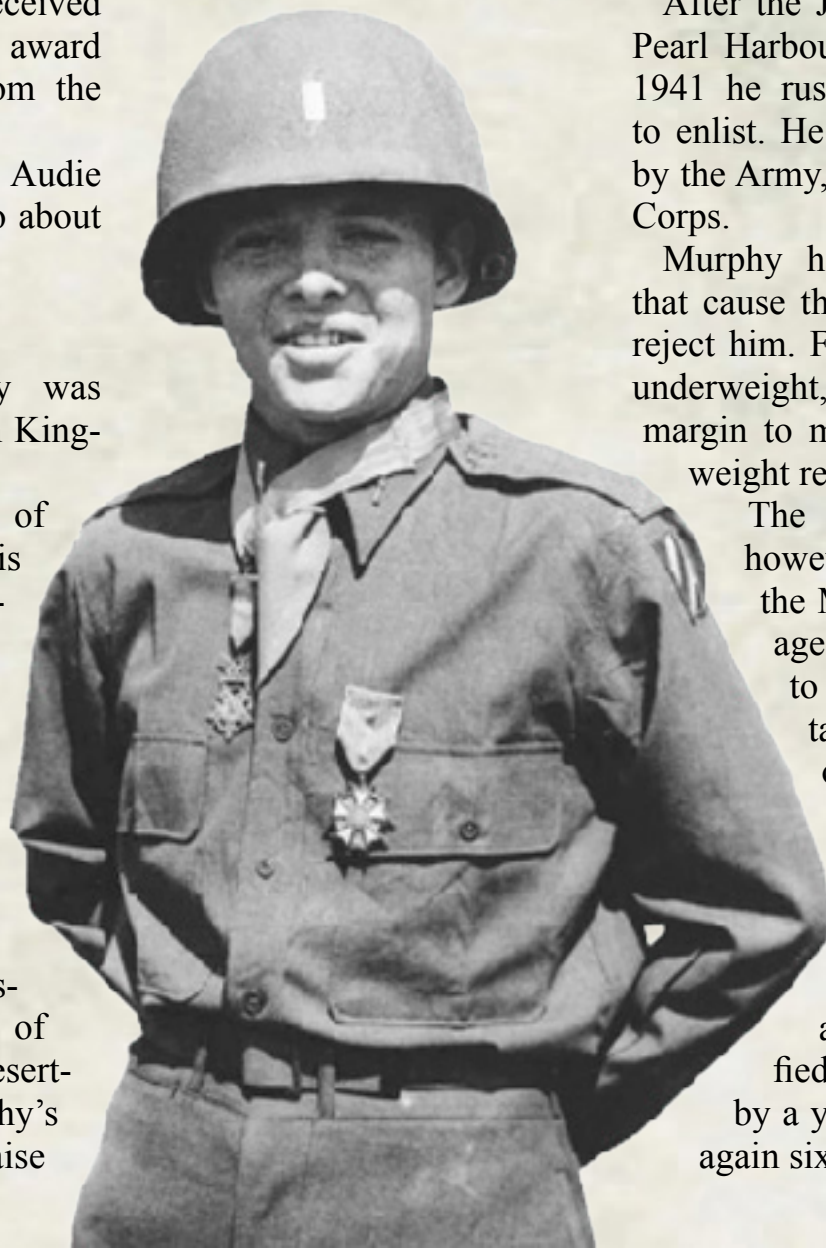
From an early age Murphy had always wanted to be a soldier.

After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour on 7 December 1941 he rushed off and tried to enlist. He was turned down by the Army, Navy and Marine Corps.

Murphy had two problems that cause the armed forces to reject him. First of all, he was underweight, failing by some margin to meet the minimum weight requirements.

The biggest problem, however, was the fact the Murphy was under age. You had to be 18 to enlist in the military. Murphy was only 17.

This did not deter Murphy. He put on a bit of weight, had his sister provide an affidavit that falsified his date of birth by a year, and then tried again six months later.



He was accepted into the US Army on 30 June 1942 and reported to Camp Wolters for basic training.

After basic he was sent to Fort Meade for advanced infantry training. During basic training, he earned the Marksman Badge with Rifle Component Bar and Expert Badge with Bayonet Component Bar.

Mediterranean Theatre

Murphy was shipped to Casablanca in French Morocco on 20 February 1943.

He was assigned to Company B, 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment, 3rd Infantry Division, which trained under the command of Major General Lucian Truscott.

He participated as a platoon messenger with his division at Arzew in Algeria in rigorous training for the Allied assault landings in Sicily. On 7 May he was promoted to private first class to corporal on 15 July.

When the 3rd Infantry landed at Licata, Sicily, on 10 July, Murphy was a division runner. On a scouting patrol, he killed two fleeing Italian officers near Canicatti.

Sidelined with illness for a week when Company B arrived in Palermo on 20 July, he rejoined them when they were assigned to a hillside location protecting a machine-gun emplacement, while the rest of the 3rd Infantry Division fought at San Fratello en route to the Allied capture of the transit port of Messina.

Murphy participated in the

September 1943 mainland Salerno landing at Battipaglia. While on a scouting party along the Volturno River, he and two other soldiers were ambushed; German machine gun fire killed one soldier.

Murphy and the other survivor responded by killing five Germans with hand grenades and machine gun fire.

Murphy was promoted to sergeant on 13 December 1943.

After being promoted to staff sergeant in January 1944 Murphy was hospitalised in Naples with malaria.

Missing out on the initial beach landings at Anzio, he returned to his unit on 29 January. He took part in the First Battle of Cisterna and was made a platoon sergeant in Company B. He returned with the 3rd Division to Anzio, where they remained for months.

Taking shelter from the weather in an abandoned farmhouse on 2 March, Murphy and his platoon killed the crew of a passing German tank. He then crawled out alone close enough to destroy the tank with rifle grenades, for which he received the Bronze Star with "V" device (the 'V' stood for valour'.

Murphy continued to make scouting patrols to take German prisoners before being hospitalised for a week on 13 March with a second bout of malaria.

Sixty-one infantry officers and enlisted men of Company B, 15th Infantry, including Murphy, were awarded the Combat Infantryman Badge on 8 May. He was also awarded a

Bronze Oak Leaf Cluster for his Bronze Star.

European Theatre

During the first wave of the Allied invasion of southern France, Murphy received the Distinguished Service Cross for action taken on 15 August 1944.

Murphy was with the 1st Battalion, 15th Infantry Regiment during the 27–28 August offensive at Montélimar that secured the area from the Germans. Along with the other soldiers who took part in the action, he received the Presidential Unit Citation.

Murphy's first Purple Heart was for a heel wound received in a mortar shell blast on 15 September 1944 in northeastern France.

His first Silver Star came after he killed four and wounded three at a German machine gun position on 2 October at L'Omet quarry in the Cleurie river valley.

Three days later, Murphy crawled alone towards the Germans at L'Omet, carrying an SCR-536 radio and directing his men for an hour while the Germans fired directly at him. When his men finally took the hill, 15 Germans had been killed and 35 wounded. Murphy's actions earned him a Bronze Oak Leaf Cluster for his Silver Star.

He was awarded a battlefield commission to second lieutenant on 14 October, which elevated him to platoon leader. While en route to Brouvelieures on 26 October, the 3rd Platoon

of Company B was attacked by a German sniper group. Murphy captured two before being shot in the hip by a sniper; he returned fire and shot the sniper between the eyes.

At the 3rd General Hospital at Aix-en-Provence, the removal of gangrene from the wound caused partial loss of his hip muscle and kept him out of combat until January. Murphy received his first Bronze Oak Leaf Cluster for his Purple Heart for this injury.

The Colmar Pocket, 82,200 km² in the Vosges Mountains, had been held by German troops since November 1944. On 14 January 1945, Murphy rejoined his platoon, which had been moved to the Colmar area in December.

He moved with the 3rd Division on 24 January to the town of Holtzwihr, where they faced a strong German counter-attack. He was wounded in both legs, for which he received a second Bronze Oak Leaf Cluster for his Purple Heart. As the company awaited reinforcements on 26 January, he was made commander of Company B.

The Germans scored a direct hit on an M10 tank destroyer, setting it alight, forcing the crew to abandon it. Murphy ordered his men to retreat to positions in the woods, remaining alone at his post, shooting his M1 carbine and directing artillery fire via his field radio while the Germans aimed fire directly at his position.

Murphy mounted the abandoned, burning tank destroyer and began firing its .50 calibre machine gun at the advancing Germans, killing a squad crawl-



ART IMITATING LIFE: A scene from the 1955 film *To Hell and Back*. The film was based on the book of the same name and starred Audie Murphy as himself.

ing through a ditch towards him.

For an hour, Murphy stood on the flaming tank destroyer returning German fire from foot soldiers and advancing tanks, killing or wounding 50 Germans. He sustained a leg wound during his stand, and stopped only after he ran out of ammunition. Murphy rejoined his men, disregarding his own injury, and led them back to repel the Germans. He insisted on remaining with his men while his wounds were treated.

For his actions that day, he was awarded the Medal of Honour. The 3rd Infantry Division was awarded the Presidential Unit Citation for its actions at the Colmar Pocket, giving Murphy a Bronze Oak Leaf Cluster for the emblem.

On 16 February, Murphy was promoted to first lieutenant and was awarded the Legion of Merit for his service from 22 January 1944 to 18 February 1945. He was moved from the front lines to Regimental Headquarters and made a liaison officer.

Postwar military service

Murphy was offered a chance to attend West Point Military Academy, but he never enrolled. This was probably when he realized the extent of academic preparation needed to pass the entrance exam.

He was sent home for 30 days of recuperation, with permission to travel anywhere within the United States during that period. While on leave, Murphy was showered with parades, banquets, and speeches. He received a belated Good Conduct Medal on 21 August.

He was discharged with the rank of first lieutenant at a 50 percent disability classification on 21 September and transferred to the Officers' Reserve Corps.

In 1949 he released a book detailing his experiences. It was titled *To Hell and Back*. Although only Murphy's name appears on the book cover, it was in fact a collaboration with writer David "Spec" McClure.

The book was later translated into Dutch, Italian, French, and Slovene.

Film career

Throughout an acting career spanning from 1948 to 1969, Murphy made more than 40 feature films and one television series.

He starred as himself in the 1955 film *To Hell and Back* which was based on the book he wrote in 1949.

Most of his roles were in westerns and he made guest appearances on celebrity television shows and starred in the series *Whispering Smith*.

On 11 November 2010, Murphy was given his own star on the famous Hollywood Walk of Fame.

Murphy was a fan of country music, in particular Bob Wills and Chet Atkins, but was not a singer or musician himself.

Through his friend Guy Mitchell, Murphy was introduced to songwriter Scott Turner in 1961. The two collaborated on numerous songs between 1962 and 1970, the most successful of which was "Shutters and Boards" and "When the Wind Blows in Chicago".

Texas Army National Guard

At the end of World War II, the 36th Infantry Division reverted to state control as part of the Texas Army National Guard.

After the 25 June 1950 commencement of the Korean War, Murphy began a second military career and was commissioned as a captain in the 36th Infantry Division of the Texas Army National Guard. Although he wanted to join the fighting and juggled training activities with his film career, the 36th Infantry Division was never sent to

Korea.

At his request, he transferred to inactive status on 1 October 1951 because of his film commitments with MGM Studios, and returned to active status in 1955. Murphy was promoted to the rank of major by the Texas Army National Guard in 1956 and returned to inactive status in 1957.

PTSD

Since his military service, Murphy had been plagued with insomnia and bouts of depression, and he slept with a loaded pistol under his pillow.

A post-service medical examination on 17 June 1947 revealed symptoms of headaches, vomiting, and nightmares about the war. His medical records indicated that he took sleeping pills to help prevent nightmares.

In an effort to draw attention to the problems of returning Korean War and Vietnam War veterans, Murphy spoke out candidly about his own problems with post-traumatic stress disorder.

It was known during Murphy's lifetime as "battle fatigue" and "shell shock", terminology that dated back to World War I. He called on the government to give increased consideration and study to the emotional impact of combat experiences, and to extend health care benefits to war veterans.

Death

On 28 May 1971, Murphy was killed when the private plane in which he was a passenger crashed into Brush Mountain, near Catawba, Virginia.

On 7 June 1971, Murphy

was buried with full military honours at Arlington National Cemetery. In attendance were Ambassador to the U.N. George H.W. Bush, Army Chief of Staff William Westmoreland, and many of the 3rd Infantry Division.

His grave is the cemetery's second most-visited gravesite, after that of President John F. Kennedy.

Honours and Awards

- Medal of Honour
- Distinguished Service Cross
- Silver Star Medal x 2
- Legion of Merit
- Bronze Star x 2
- Purple Heart x 3
- Army Good Conduct Medal
- Distinguished Unit Citation x 2
- American Campaign Medal
- European-African-Middle Eastern Campaign Medal
- World War II Victory Medal
- Army of Occupation Medal with Germany clasp
- French Legion of Honour (grade of Chevalier)
- French *Croix de Guerre* with silver star
- French *Croix de Guerre* with palm x 3
- Belgian *Croix de Guerre* with palm
- French *fourragère* in colours of the *Croix de Guerre*
- Combat Infantryman Badge
- Marksman Badge with Rifle Component Bar
- Expert Badge with Bayonet Component Bar
- Outstanding Civilian Service Medal
- Texas Legislative Medal of Honour.

Tiger I

Tiger! The very name was enough to invoke fear. Regarded as one of the best tanks during World War II, the Tiger tank was forged in battle.

Designated the Panzerkampfwagen VI Tiger Ausf, it was often shortened to just 'Tiger'.

It was the first German armoured vehicle that mounted the 8.8 cm KwK 36 gun (not to be confused with the 8.8 cm Flak 36).

The tank was given its nickname "Tiger" by Ferdinand

Porsche, and the Roman numeral was added after the later Tiger II entered production. The initial designation was Panzerkampfwagen VI Ausführung H ("Panzer VI version H", abbreviated PzKpfw VI Ausf. H) where 'H' denoted Henschel as the designer/manufacturer.

It was classified with ordnance inventory designation

Sd.Kfz. 182. The tank was later re-designated as PzKpfw VI Ausf. E in March 1943, with ordnance inventory designation Sd.Kfz. 181.

While the Tiger I was an outstanding design for its time and devastating on the battle field, it was not without its faults.

One of the problems was

that it was over-engineered, using expensive materials and labour-intensive production methods.

The Tiger was prone to certain types of track failures and breakdowns, and was limited in range by its high fuel consumption.

It was expensive to maintain, but generally mechanically reliable. It was difficult to transport, and vulnerable to immobilisation when mud, ice, and snow froze between its overlapping and interleaved

Schachtellaufwerk-pattern road wheels, often jamming them solid. This was a problem on the Eastern Front in the muddy *rasputitsa* season and during periods of extreme cold.

Some 1,347 were built between August 1942 and August 1944. After August 1944, production of the Tiger I was phased out in favour of the Tiger II.

Early history

Henschel & Sohn began the development of a large tank

design in January 1937 when the *Waffenamt* (German Army Weapons Agency) requested Henschel to develop a *Durchbruchwagen* ("breakthrough vehicle") in the 30–33 tonne range. Only one prototype hull was ever built and it was never fitted with a turret.

Combat experience against the French SOMUA S35 cavalry tank and Char B1 heavy tank, and the British Matilda II infantry tanks during the Battle of France in June 1940 showed that the German Army needed better armed and armoured tanks.



On 26 May 1941, Henschel and Ferdinand Porsche were asked to submit designs for a 45-tonne heavy tank, to be ready by June 1942.

Porsche worked on an updated version of their VK 30.01 (P) Leopard tank prototype while Henschel worked on an improved VK 36.01 (H) tank. Henschel built two prototypes: a VK 45.01 (H) H1 with an 8.8 cm L/56 cannon, and a VK 45.01 (H) H2 with a 7.5 cm L/70 cannon.

Design

On 22 June 1941, Germany launched Operation Barbarossa, the invasion of the Soviet Union. The Germans were shocked to encounter Soviet T-34 medium and KV-1 heavy tanks, and, according to Henschel designer Erwin Aders: "There was great consternation when it was discovered that the Soviet tanks were superior to anything available to the *Heer* (Army)."

An immediate weight increase to 45 tonnes and an increase in gun calibre to 8.8 cm was ordered. The due date for the new prototypes was set for 20 April 1942, Adolf Hitler's 53rd birthday. Unlike the Panther tank, the designs did not incorporate sloped armour, an innovation taken from the T-34.

Porsche and Henschel submitted prototype designs, each making use of the Krupp-designed turret. They were demonstrated at Rastenburg in front of Hitler.

The Henschel design was accepted, mainly because the Porsche VK 4501 (P) prototype design used a troubled gaso-

line-electric hybrid power unit which needed large quantities of copper for manufacture of its electrical drivetrain components, a strategic war material of which Germany had limited supplies with acceptable electrical properties for such uses. Production of the *Panzerkampfwagen VI Ausf. H* began in August 1942.

Expecting an order for his tank, Porsche built 100 chassis. After the contract was awarded to Henschel, they were used for a new turretless, casemate-style tank destroyer; 91 hulls were converted into the *Panzerjäger* Tiger (P) in early 1943.

The Tiger I had frontal hull armour 100 mm thick, frontal turret armour of 100 mm and a 120 mm thick gun mantlet.

The Tiger had 60 mm thick hull side plates and 80 mm armour on the side superstructure/sponsons, while turret sides and rear were 80 mm. The top and bottom armour was 25 mm thick; from March 1944, the turret roof was thickened to 40 mm.

Armour plates were mostly flat, with interlocking construction. The armour joints were of high quality, being stepped and welded rather than riveted and were made of maraging steel.

The 56-calibre long 8.8 cm KwK 36 was chosen for the Tiger. A combination of a flat trajectory from the high muzzle velocity and precision from Leitz Turmzielfernrohr TZF 9b sight (later replaced by the monocular TZF 9c) made it very accurate.

Compared with the other contemporary German tank guns, the 8.8 cm KwK 36 had supe-

Specifications

- Designer - Erwin Aders, Henschel & Son
- Designed - 1938–41
- Manufacturer - Henschel
- Weight - 54 tonnes. 57 tonnes (Ausf. E)
- Length - 6.316 m. 8.45 m gun forward
- Width - 3.56 m
- Height - 3.0 m
- Crew - 5 (commander, gunner, loader, driver, assistant driver)
- Armour - 25-120 mm
- Main armament - 1 x 8.8 cm KwK 36 L/56. 92 AP and HE rounds
- Secondary armament - 2 x 7.92 mm MG 34. 4,500 rounds. 4,800 rounds (Ausf. E)
- Engine - Maybach HL230 P45 V-12 690 hp, 515 kW)
- Power/weight - 9.5 kW / tonne
- Suspension - Torsion bar
- Ground clearance - 0.47 m
- Operational range - Road: 195 km. Cross country: 110 km
- Speed - Maximum, road: 45.4 km/h. Sustained, road: 40 km/h. Cross country: 20–25 km/h

rior penetration to the 7.5 cm KwK 40 on the Sturmgeschütz III and Panzer IV but inferior to the 7.5 cm KwK 42 on the Panther tank under ranges of 2,500 metres. At greater ranges, the 8.8 cm KwK 36 was superior in penetration and accuracy.

The ammunition for the Tiger had electrically fired primers. Four types of ammunition were available but not all were



PANZER MARCH: German Tiger I's roll across the Russian steppes.

fully available; the PzGr 40 shell used tungsten, which was in short supply as the war progressed.

- PzGr. 39 (armour-piercing, capped, ballistic cap)
- PzGr. 40 (armour-piercing, composite rigid)
- Hl. Gr. 39 (high explosive anti-tank)
- sch. Sprgr. Patr. L/4.5 (incendiary shrapnel).

The internal layout was typical of German tanks. Forward was an open crew compartment, with the driver and radio-operator seated at the front on either side of the gearbox.

Behind them the turret floor was surrounded by panels forming a continuous level surface. This helped the loader to retrieve the ammunition, which was mostly stowed above the tracks. Three men were seated in the turret; the loader to the right of the gun facing to the rear, the gunner to the left of the gun, and the commander behind him. There was also a folding seat on the right for the loader.

The turret had a full circular floor and 157 cm headroom.

Early versions of the Tiger I's turret included two pistol ports however one these was replaced with a loader escape hatch and the other deleted from later designs.

Combat

German doctrine placed great emphasis upon the heavy tanks destruction of enemy tanks in both the defence and the offence.

The Germans based their figures on the number of enemy tanks killed against the number of German Tiger tanks lost.

If you use this method to determine the effectiveness of the Tiger tank, then they did very well in combat.

A total of 713 Tiger tanks were lost in combat. This number includes the Tiger I, Tiger II and the King Tiger. In contrast Tiger's killed 8,600 enemy tanks. That is a ratio of 11.52 enemy tanks destroyed for every Tiger lost.

Yet this doesn't taken into account the number of Tiger tanks that were lost due to other reasons.

Tigers would be abandoned

because they had suffered a mechanical breakdown, or had become stuck in the mud or a swamp and couldn't be recovered.

A total of 868 Tigers were lost due to reasons other than combat.

The Tiger I had an advantage over most British, American and Russian tanks in that was effective at a greater range than they were.

The other major advantages they held over the Russians was that they had a crew of five, while the Russians used a crew of four. In Russian tanks the crew commander also acted as the gunner.

The Germans had a separate crew commander and he was able to search for targets without also having to concentrate on firing the main gun.

All the German tanks also had radios, so they were able to communicate with each constantly. Only the lead Russian tanks had radios and they communicated with the other tanks using a system of flags.

This meant that the crew commander had to stand up in the cupola to do this, not an ideal situation in the heat of battle.

For all of its faults, the Tiger was still regarded as one of the best tanks of World War II. It was a weapon that was forged in battle.

Today, only seven Tiger I tanks survive in museums and private collections worldwide. Tiger 131 at the UK's Tank Museum, which was captured during the North Africa Campaign, is currently the only one restored to running order.

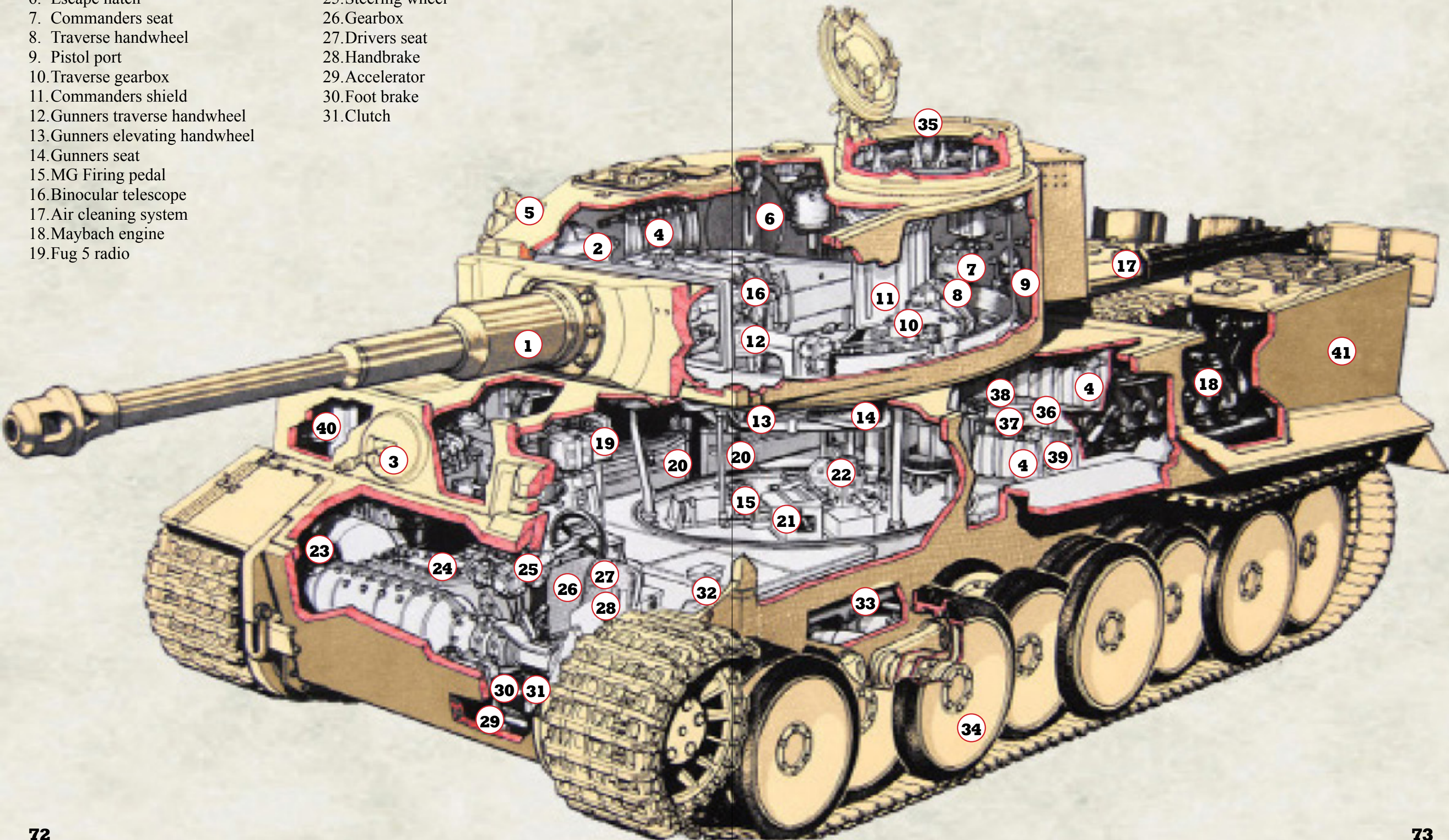
Pzkpfw VI Tiger (SdKfz 181) Ausf E

1. 88 mm L/56 gun
2. 7.92 mm MG34
3. 7.92 mm MG34
4. MG34 Ammo pouch
5. Smoke dischargers
6. Escape hatch
7. Commanders seat
8. Traverse handwheel
9. Pistol port
10. Traverse gearbox
11. Commanders shield
12. Gunners traverse handwheel
13. Gunners elevating handwheel
14. Gunners seat
15. MG Firing pedal
16. Binocular telescope
17. Air cleaning system
18. Maybach engine
19. Fug 5 radio

20. 88 mm bins
21. Hydraulic traverse foot pedal
22. Hydraulic traverse control
23. Disc brake drum
24. Steering unit
25. Steering wheel
26. Gearbox
27. Drivers seat
28. Handbrake
29. Accelerator
30. Foot brake
31. Clutch

32. Shock absorber
33. Torsion bar suspension
34. Overlapping bogie wheels
35. Commanders cupola
36. Fan drive clutch lever
37. Air intake valve control
38. Petrol primer
39. Petrol tap

40. MG Ammo pouch
41. Zimmerit anti mine protection, 200 kg over whole tank



These ten battles claimed more than 11 million casualties, with all but one of them being fought in the 20th century. Some of these battles individually resulted in more casualties than some entire wars.

Instead of focusing on a specific battle this month, we're going to look at what were possibly the ten bloodiest battles.

The casualty figures given included killed, wounded and missing in action. They are not exact figures but give an estimation of the number of casualties.

Take into account that during the Vietnam War the official figure of Americans killed is 58,318. In the battles listed below the number killed in a single day often exceeded this.

10. Battle of Shanghai

(August 13 – November 26, 1937)

The Battle of Shanghai was the first of the twenty-two major engagements fought between the National Revolutionary Army (NRA) of the Republic of China (ROC) and the Imperial Japanese Army (IJA) of the Empire of Japan during the Second Sino-Japanese War. It was one of the largest and bloodiest battles of the entire war.

The Chinese soldiers had to rely primarily on small-caliber weapons in their defense of Shanghai, against an overwhelming Japanese onslaught of air, naval, and armored striking power.

In the end, Shanghai fell, and China lost a significant portion of its best troops, while also failing to elicit any international intervention.

The Japanese, indoctrinated with notions of martial superiority, were not expecting the fierce resistance shown by the Chinese, and it shook the Japanese Army.

Casualties: 388,000

9. Siege of Changchun

(May 23 – October 19, 1948)

The Siege of Changchun was a siege operation launched by the People's Liberation Army

during the Chinese Civil War against the city of Changchun, defended by the Nationalist forces.

The Siege of Changchun was part of the Liaoshen Campaign, and the fall of Changchun marked the end of its first stage.

The PLA had the city surrounded and the nationalists stood no chance. The communists decided to allow nationalist soldiers to leave the city at any time, but refused to allow civilians to do so.

Civilians were blockaded within Changchun and deliberately starved as way of pressuring enemy generals to surrender.

It is estimated that 80% of the civilian population were killed.

Casualties: 431,000 (including 330,000 civilians)

8. Battle of Wuhan

(June 11 – October 27, 1938)

When one hears the word 'Wuhan' these days our immediate thoughts turn to the COVID-19 pandemic that gripped the world for more than two years.

It is believed that the COVID virus originated in the city of Wuhan. Yet the history of this city goes back way before that.

The Battle of Wuhan was another battle of the Second Sino-Japanese War. The Chinese were defending the city of Wu-



WUHAN: A victory for the Japanese. But a costly one that shook their confidence.

han from a Japanese attempt to capture it.

Over one million Chinese soldiers were defending against a force of 350 thousand Japanese. Bombings, artillery strikes, and chemical weapons attacks weakened the Chinese defenses enough for the Japanese to capture Wuhan after four months of fighting.

While it was a victory for the Japanese, it had cost them dear.

Casualties: 540,000

7. Battle of Berlin

(April 16 – May 2, 1945)

The Battle of Berlin, designated as the Berlin Strategic Offensive Operation by the Soviet Union, and also known as the Fall of Berlin, was one of the last major offensives of the European theatre of World War II.

After the Vistula–Oder Offensive of January–February

1945, the Red Army had temporarily halted on a line 60 km east of Berlin.

On 9 March, Germany established its defence plan for the city with Operation Clausewitz. The first defensive preparations at the outskirts of Berlin were made on 20 March, under the newly appointed commander of Army Group Vistula, General Gotthard Heinrici.

The Soviets had completely encircled Berlin at the beginning of the battle.

On 23 April General Helmuth Weidling assumed command of the forces within Berlin. The garrison consisted of several depleted and disorganised Wehrmacht and Waffen-SS divisions, along with poorly trained Volkssturm and Hitler Youth members.

Over the course of the next week, the Red Army gradually took the entire city.

Before the battle ended Adolf Hitler had committed suicide.

On May 7, 1945 the Germans signed an unconditional surrender.

Casualties: 681,000

6. First Battle of Kiev

(August 23 – September 26, 1941)

The First Battle of Kiev resulted in a very large encirclement of Soviet troops in the vicinity of Kiev during World War II. This encirclement is considered the largest encirclement in the history of warfare (by number of troops).

The battle was an unprecedented defeat for the Red Army, with 452,700 soldiers, 2,642 guns and mortars and 64 tanks being trapped.

The Southwestern Front suffered 700,544 casualties, including 616,304 killed, captured or missing during the battle.

The 5th, 37th, 26th, 21st and the 38th armies, consisting of 43 divisions, were almost annihilated and the 40th Army suffered many losses.

Much of the Southwestern Front of the Red Army (Mikhail Kirponos) was encircled but small groups of Red Army troops managed to escape the pocket, days after the German panzers met east of the city, including the headquarters of Marshal Semyon Budyonny, Marshal Semyon Timoshenko and Commissar Nikita Khrushchev.

The battle took place just over two months after the Germans had launched Operation Barbarossa.

It gave the German confi-

7 Deadliest Wars

1. World War II

1939 to 1945

Location. Worldwide
Between 40,000,000 and 72,000,000 deaths

2. Taiping Rebellion

1851 to 1864

Location. China
Between 20,000,000 and 100,000,000 deaths

3. World War I

1914 to 1918

Location. Worldwide
Between 15,000,000 and 65,000,000 deaths

4. Mongol Conquests

Location. Asia, Eastern Europe, Middle East
Between 30,000,000 and 60,000,000 deaths

5. An Lushan Rebellion

755 to 763

Location. China
Between 13,000,000 and 36,000,000 deaths

6. Qing dynasty conquest of the Ming Dynasty

1616 to 1662

Location. China
25,000,000 deaths

7. Conquests of Timur-e-Lang

1369 to 1405

Location. Middle East, India, Central Asia, Russia
Between 15,000,000 and 20,000,000 deaths

dence and seemed to back up Hitler's statement, "We have only to kick in the door, and the whole rotten structure will come crashing down."

Casualties: 829,000

5. Battle of Verdun

(February 21 – December 18, 1916)

The Battle of Verdun was the largest and longest battle of the First World War on the Western Front between the German and French armies.

The German 5th Army attacked the defences of the Fortified Region of Verdun and those of the French Second Army on the right bank of the Meuse.

The German strategy in 1916 was to inflict mass casualties on the French, a goal achieved against the Russians from 1914 to 1915, to weaken the French Army to the point of collapse.

Fighting in such a small area devastated the land, resulting in miserable conditions for troops on both sides.

Rain and the constant artillery bombardments turned the clayey soil into a wasteland of mud full of debris and human remains; shell craters filled with water and soldiers risked drowning in them. Forests were reduced to tangled piles of wood by artillery-fire and eventually obliterated.

The effect of the battle on many soldiers was profound and accounts of men breaking down with insanity and shell shock were common.

Although the French took heavy casualties, they held out. At times they even counter-attacked.

In August and December, French counter-offensives recaptured much of the ground lost on the east bank and recovered Fort Douaumont and Fort Vaux.

Casualties: 976,000

4. Battle of the Somme

(July 1 – November 18, 1916)

The Battle of the Somme, also known as the Somme Offensive, was a battle of the First World War fought by the armies of the British and French against the German Empire.

It took place on both sides of the upper reaches of the River Somme in France.

The battle was intended to hasten a victory for the Allies and was the largest battle of the First World War on the Western Front.

The Allies suffered more than 60,000 casualties on the first day of the battle.

Casualties: 1,000,000

3. Battle of Baghdad

(January 29 – February 10, 1258)

The Siege of Baghdad entailed the investment, capture, and sack of Baghdad, the capital of the Abbasid Caliphate, by Ilkhanate Mongol forces and allied troops.

The Mongols were under the command of Hulagu Khan (or Hulegu Khan), brother of the khagan Möngke Khan, who had intended to further extend his rule into Mesopotamia but not to directly overthrow the Caliphate.

Möngke, however, had in-



STALINGRAD: Regarded as one of the single largest and deadliest battles ever, it saw high losses on both sides.

structed Hulagu to attack Baghdad if the Caliph Al-Musta'sim refused Mongol demands for his continued submission to the khagan and the payment of tribute in the form of military support for Mongol forces in Iran.

Due to their reputation as efficient and brutal warriors their opponents would often submit to them without a battle.

But when Baghdad refused to surrender, the Mongols decided to make an example of them. The city fell after just 12 days. The Mongols then proceeded to destroy as much of the city and massacre as many locals as possible.

Casualties: 1,000,000

2. Battle of Stalingrad

(August 23, 1942 – February 2, 1943)

The Battle of Stalingrad is often regarded as one of the single largest and bloodiest battles in the history of warfare.

It was marked by fierce close quarters combat, snipers, house to house combat, and assaults on civilians by air raids.

It was a costly defeat for the Germans and some say that Hitler lost the war the minute the Russians were able to declare victory at Stalingrad.

The Germans did have a chance to break out from Stalingrad, but Hitler ordered that they stand their ground and "Fight to the last man and bullet."

Almost 91,000 Germans were taken prisoner. Only about 5,000

of them ever saw Germany again.

Casualties: 1,857,000

1. Siege of Leningrad

(September 8, 1941 – January 27, 1944)

The Siege of Leningrad began on September 8, 1941, when the last road to the city was severed. Although the Soviets managed to open a narrow land corridor to the city on January 18, 1943, the siege was only lifted on January 27, 1944, 872 days after it began.

It was one of the longest and most destructive sieges in history, and possibly the costliest in terms of casualties

Casualties: 4,016,000

All I want for Christmas

Here is a copy of the letter than Matt O'Brien sent to Santa this year.



Dear Fat Guy in the red suit,

Okay, I've been a good boy this year. You can ask anyone, even my parole officer. So how about this year you give me what I'm actually asking for.

Last year when I said I wanted Shakira for Christmas, I wasn't talking about her new CD.

This year I'm not asking for much. All I need are 10 games for my PC. Now you're probably going to say that I'm greedy. But you've got to make up for the past ten years where I got nothing from you.

And please don't get it wrong this year. I know where you live, if you get my meaning. And a word of advice - don't park your sleigh in my neighbourhood or you just might find it on bricks and your reindeer ending up on someone's braai.

Merry Christmas.

Matt O'Brien

So these then are the ten games that O'Brien wants in his Christmas stocking this year. And he says that if you're looking for a PC game to keep you occupied over the silly season, you won't go wrong with any of these titles. Click on the game cover to watch a review of the game.



Company of Heroes 2

This is a real time strategy game set during World War II. Built around the concepts of cover and directional fire, suppression and morale, you have to use actual battlefield strategies if you wanted to succeed.

In Company of Heroes 2 the action moves to the Eastern Front. In the single player campaign you control the Soviet Army from Operation Barbarossa to the Battle of Berlin.

Where the game really comes into its own is in skirmish mode. You can play multi-player, co-op, or even go up against the AI

(Artificial Intelligence). What's also cool is that you can play as the Russians or the Germans.

The base game gives you both the Russian and German forces. It also includes DLC which gives you access to the Americans, British and the Oberkommando faction.

It's not that difficult to learn to play the game and with skirmish mode it will provide hours and hours of entertainment.

Price: R399(on Steam)



ARMA 3

ARMA 3 is an open world, military tactical shooter video game. You can go anywhere you want and do anything you want.

ARMA 3 takes place on the Aegean islands of Altis and Stratis of Greece. The islands feature photo-realistic terrain and water environments. Altis features 270 square kilometres of terrain.

The game features a large assortment of weapons, equipment, vehicles, aircraft, and

helicopters.

Modding groups have created thousands of extra stuff for the game, including a group that specialises in South African and African content.

You can also use the Eden Editor that comes with the game to create your own content and scenarios.

This is an excellent military simulator and one I would recommend.

Price: R479 (on Steam)

World of Guns: Gun Disassembly

To call World of Guns: Gun Disassembly a game may be doing it a disservice - it's more than that.

It can be used as both an interactive firearms reference source and encyclopedia, and a casual puzzle game with a goal of disassembling and assembling models in the correct sequence and in the least possible time.

The game includes interactive shooting ranges with timed objectives, as well as additional features like gun quizzes and a

weapon skin editor.

The range of weapons stretches from the 18th century right up to the most modern firearms. They include pistols, revolvers, submachine guns, rifles, machine guns and a lot more.

The cost of the game is a bit steep, but you do get every new firearm (at least one a month) for free.

A great game for anyone interested in firearms.

Price: R489 (on Steam)



Call to Arms - Gates of Hell: Ostfront

The first you need to know about this game is that it is a DLC. So you need to own a game called Call To Arms (R105 on Steam).

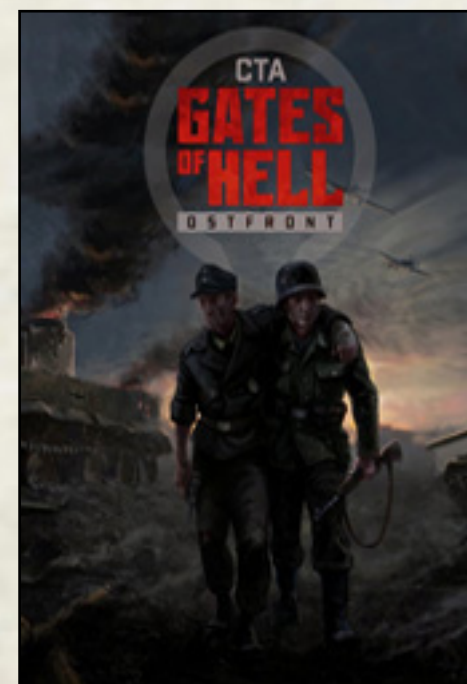
Gates of Hell features the Eastern Front and its "Great Patriotic War" fought between the USSR and Germany. This will take you from June 1941 until the end of the war in May 1945.

One of the really great things about the game is that you can control each squad or vehicle, or

you can control each individual troop or vehicle in first or third person view.

The game has a good modding community and some of the mods are exceptional. There is a mod that gives you access to all of the nations that were major players in World War II, including Britain, USA, Japan, Italy, and Finland.

Price: R205 (on Steam)





Jagged Alliance 3

The country of Grand Chien is thrown into chaos when the elected president goes missing and the paramilitary force known as “the Legion” seizes control.

The president’s daughter hires you to recruit a team of mercenaries and rescue her father.

You can hire up to 18 mercenaries (three teams of six). They can be hired on a contract from between one and 14 days.

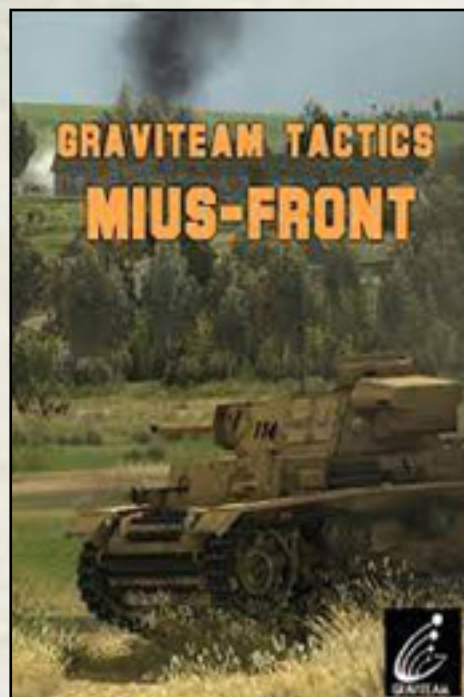
There are four classes of mercenary - recruit, veteran, elite,

and legendary. The cost to hire each mercenary varies.

Each merc has abilities such as strength, health, dexterity, intelligence, and leadership. They also have skills such as marksmanship, mechanical, explosives and medical.

This turn-based game is excellent. It is challenging while also being good fun. And there’s already plenty of community mods for the game.

Price: R639 (on Steam)



Graviteam Tactics: Mius-Front

You first need to buy a game called Graviteam Tactics: Mius-Front. The game is a tactical battalion level combat simulation. Action takes place in the summer of 1943.

There are no fewer than 23 DLC available. But you want to focus on three of them. These are Operation Moduler (R105), Leopard’s Leap (R79) and Day of the Olifant (R105). These are the three DLC that deal with the South African Border War.

All of the weapons, equip-

ment, vehicles and aircraft that took part in these battles are there. The maps are created using topographical maps, satellite imagery and photographs.

This is probably one of the best, if not the best, game that features our own Border War. It is also one of the most realistic.

It’s not the easiest game to just pick up and play, and it has a pretty steep learning curve. But it’s worth every cent.

Price: Check prices on Steam

Gunsmith Simulator

This simulator sees you inheriting a gunsmith workshop from your grandfather.

You will receive jobs from clients that will see you working on their firearms.

You will normally have to strip the weapon, buy new parts, clean parts, oil parts, and reassemble the weapon.

You may have to sandblast parts to get rid of rust or treat them with a bluing process. Sometimes you will have to

craft a part with the lathe.

You can customise weapons, paint them, and add accessories. Weapons can be tested on various shooting ranges.

You can also buy weapons on auction and then customise them as you see fit.

This game is still in early access and they will still be adding many more weapons. A good game for the price.

Price: R148 (on Steam)

IL-2 Sturmovik

This is a bit of a costly exercise, but if you enjoy flight simulators, it’s worth the cost.

You will need to buy IL-2 Sturmovik: Battle of Stalingrad (R679). As the title suggests, it is all about the aerial combat above the Russian city of Stalingrad.

You can fly either as the German Luftwaffe or Soviet Air Forces.

Once you own the game it will then allow you to buy a number of DLC.

The one I went for was Flying Circus - Volume 1 (R1,009). This sees you in the air above the trenches of the Western Front in World War I.

Flying these wood and canvas machines is both fun and challenging. There’s no missiles, GPS or fancy equipment - just your machine guns and flying ability. This is aerial combat at its best. As I said, expensive but worth it.

Price: Check prices on Steam



Door Kickers

Door Kickers is an innovative realtime strategy game that puts you in charge of a SWAT team and lets you command them during a tactical intervention.

Analyse the situation, plan team routes, choose equipment and breach points and coordinate multiple troopers to reach the hostage room before the bad guys get to press that trigger.

Your squad can be allocated as one of five different classes. They are Pointman, Assaulter, Breacher, Stealth, and Shield.

Each member of the squad can be equipped with either a primary or secondary weapon, or both. All classes can also be equipped with armour and have a utility pouch that can carry two items.

Missions include hostage rescue, seizing evidence before it can be destroyed, arresting a high-value target, and more.

A fun game that will keep you coming back for more.

Price: R185 (on Steam)



This War Of Mine

In This War Of Mine you do not play as an elite soldier, rather as a group of civilians trying to survive in a besieged city; struggling with lack of food, medicine and constant danger from snipers and hostile scavengers.

The game provides an experience of war seen from an entirely new angle.

This War of Mine is a survival-themed strategy game where the player controls a group of

civilian survivors in a makeshift shelter in the besieged, war-torn fictional city of Pogoren, Graznavia.

The main goal of the game is to survive the war with the tools and materials the player can gather with the characters you control.

Will you be able to survive until the war ends? Will you make the right choices?

Price: R216 (on Steam)





Stocking fillers

Looking for a stocking filler for either yourself or a friend this Christmas? Then how about one of these movies. Five of them are based on true stories. We can strongly recommend 'My Father's War' to any South African military veteran. Click on the cover to watch a trailer of the movies.



Enemy at the Gates



A Bridge too Far



Siege at Jadotville



The Great Escape



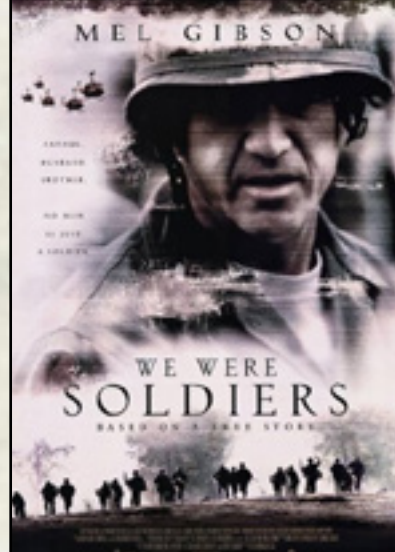
My Father's War



Das Boot



Platoon



We Were Soldiers



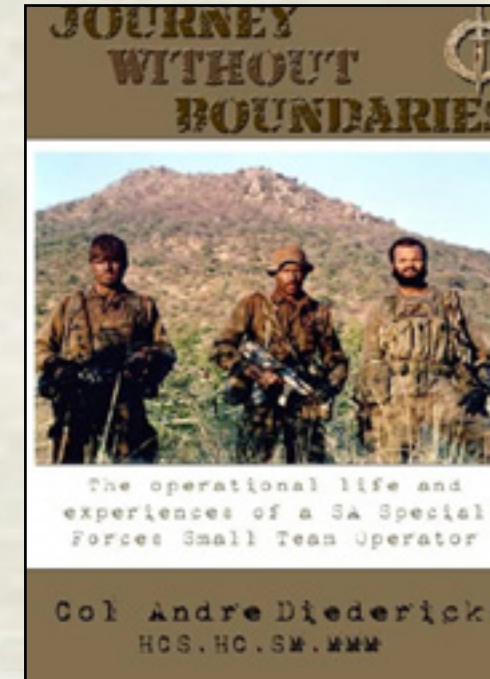
Full Metal Jacket

Good reads for the holidays

Many people will be on leave during December and it's the perfect time to catch up on a bit of reading. And many of us will be looking for the ideal gift to buy. You can't go wrong with a good book and we can recommend any of the books on this list. All of these books have been read and reviewed in Military Despatches at some stage.



Iron Fist from the Sea
Douw Steyn & Arnè Söderlund
R300



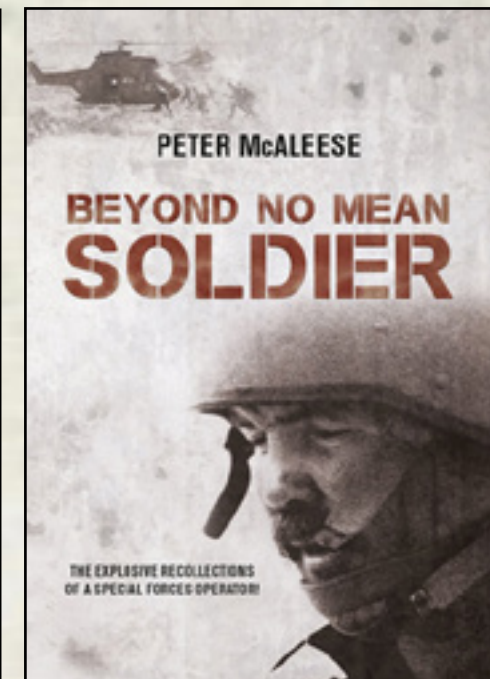
Journey Without Boundaries
Col Andre Diedericks
R325



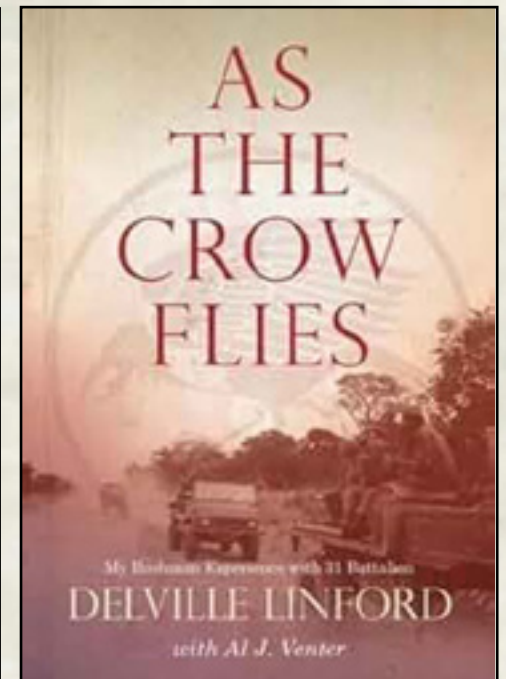
We Fear Naught But God
Paul Els
R395



Cuito Cuanavale
Gennady Shubin & Igor Zhdarkin
R255



Beyond No Mean Soldier
Peter McAleese
R525



As The Crow Flies
Delville Linford
R255

All books are available from [Bush War Books](http://bushwarbooks.com)

Some of the significant military events that happened in December. Highlighted in blue are the names of those members of the South African Defence Force (SADF) that lost their lives during the month of December.

1 December

- **1914** - Col. J.F. Jordaan of the SA force captures Gen. Christiaan de Wet, on his way to German South West Africa at Waterbury, near Vryburg, Northern Cape (now North West Province).
- **1933** - Rudolf Hess & Ernst Rohm become ministers in Hitler's government.
- **1939** - SS-Fuhrer Himmler begins deportation of Polish Jews to concentration camps.
- **1978** - Lance Corporal Lionel Ashley Roe from Air Force Base Waterkloof was killed in a military vehicle accident at Waterkloof. He was 20.
- **1980** - Rifleman Johan Nothnagel from 1 Parachute Battalion was killed in a private motor vehicle accident while on weekend pass. He was 19.
- **1992** - Cabinet decides to replace the SAAF trainer Harvards by the Swiss-made Pilatus PC-7 MK2. The joint venture will include twelve SA companies.
- **1995** - Prosecutors in South Africa formally charge former Defence Minister Gen. Magnus Malan and nineteen others with the murders of thirteen people in 1987. They were all later acquitted.
- **1998** - At least fourteen people are killed and twenty-four injured in a bomb explosion in a market in Algiers.

- **2012** - The world's first nuclear carrier, USS 'Enterprise' (CVN 65), is inactivated after 51 years of commissioned service.

2 December

- **1805** - Napoleon defeated Russia and Austria in the Battle of Austerlitz.
- **1836** - Commandant Andries Hendrik Potgieter is elected chief commandant of the Voortrekkers.
- **1856** - The Battle of Tugela (also Battle of Ndongakusuka) takes place in the war between Cetewayo, eldest son of the Zulu chief Mpande, and his father's younger brother, Umbolazi (also Mbulazi). In one of the bloodiest battles fought on the southern tip of Africa, more than 5,000 warriors are killed and thousands drown in the Tugela River.
- **1877** - The Battle of Umzimtsani takes place during the Ninth Border War. Seventy men of the Prince Alfred's Guard unit are attacked by the Galekas, but ward the attack off.
- **1900** - The Battle of Goede Hoop takes place during the Second Anglo-Boer War. Chief Commandant De Wet engages Col. Herbert at Goede Hoop, between

Smithfield and Bethulie in the OFS. De Wet takes off on the arrival of reinforcements sent by General Knox.

- **1914** - Adolf Hitler is awarded the Iron Cross, Second Class. "The happiest day of my life," he says.
- **1914** - Austrians capture Belgrade, Serbia, after several tries.
- **1935** - Abyssinian government orders troops out of Harar on humanitarian grounds.
- **1941** - HMS 'Prince of Wales' & 'Repulse' ("Force Z") arrive at Singapore.
- **1942** - The Allies repels a strong Axis attack in Tunisia, North Africa.
- **1965** - Rifleman Mark Andrew Brown from the Kaffrarian Rifles died as a result of heat exhaustion during a training session at the Infantry School in Oudtshoorn. The heat was reported at over 37 Degrees C during the training session. As a direct result of the findings of Board of Enquiry held into his death, training procedures were modified and amended. He was 21.
- **1978** - Corporal Johannes Havenga from 5 SAI was Killed in Action after being struck in the chest by a Soviet RPG-7 Anti-Tank Rocket during a contact with SWAPO/PLAN insurgents at Eenhana. He was 20.

- **1979** - Lieutenant Johannes Jacobus Du Toit from 3 SAI Died of Wounds while serving in Rhodesia. He was 23.
- **1980** - Rifleman Nicolaas Christian Izaks from the South African Cape Corps was killed when he was struck by a bullet from an accidental discharge of a fellow soldiers rifle while stationed at M'pacha in the Caprivi Strip. He was 21.
- **1984** - Rifleman Wynand Eckard from 2 Parachute Battalion was killed in a private motor vehicle accident in South West Africa while on leave pass. He was 21.
- **1988** - Rifleman Johannes Gerhardus Janse van Vuuren from the SADF Equestrian Centre was killed in a private motorcycle accident while on a weekend pass in Klerksdorp. He was 20.

3 December

- **1810** - Britain seizes the islands of Reunion and Mauritius from French control.
- **1902** - Mitsuo Fuchida, the Japanese pilot who would one day transmit the code "Tora, Tora, Tora" (indicating that the attack on Pearl Harbour had been successful) was born on this day.
- **1915** - British 6th Indian Division falls back on Kut-el-Amara, Iraq.
- **1942** - Guadalcanal: Japanese destroyers land reinforcements.
- **1963** - The Minister of De-

fence, P.W. Botha, announces a reshuffle of senior defence force posts to increase the efficiency of the country's Defence Department, the Defence Production Board and the Defence Organisation. Consequently Lieutenant-General C.A. Fraser, at present Chief of the Army, becomes Joint Commander, Combat Forces, in which capacity he will take command in times of war or emergency of the fighting formations of Army and Air Force elements.

- **1980** - Two members from 3 SAI were Killed in Action and one was critically wounded (he later Died of Wounds on 20 January 1981) while their Company was based at Ondangwa Town. The casualties were: Rifleman Johannes Erasmus van der Merwe (19). Rifleman Christo van Zyl (18).
- **1982** - SA Minister of Foreign Affairs Pik Botha warns that SA will not tolerate the introduction of Cuban troops and will not hesitate to launch counter-measures against Mozambique, if it allows nationalist guerrillas to operate against SA from its territory.
- **1986** - Rifleman J.H. Nanyemba from 202 Battalion SWATF was Killed in Action during a contact with SWAPO/PLAN insurgents

in Northern Owamboland. He was 23.

- **1987** - Angola claims South African troops and planes have launched attacks deep inside Angola.
- **1993** - Angola's government and its rebel foes agree to a cease-fire in their eighteen-year war. The final cease-fire agreement was only signed in April 2002.

4 December

- **1941** - US Navy Department orders Guam to destroy all codes and secret documents.
- **1943** - During World War II, the second Cairo Conference took place, attended by Prime Minister Churchill, President Roosevelt and President Inonu of Turkey.
- **1963** - The Security Council, in resolution 182 (1963), calls upon all States "to cease forthwith the sale and shipment of equipment and materials for the manufacture and maintenance



Pik Botha

of arms and ammunition in South Africa”.

- **1971** - The Defence Minister denies that South Africa has sent troops to Malawi to quell the security threat on Malawi's southern border, but admits that military equipment is being supplied.
- **1978** - Sapper Jacobus Cornelius Francois Cloete from the SWA Engineer Support Unit SWATF was accidentally killed during construction work at Grootfontein when a concrete block fell off a scaffolding and struck him on the head, killing him instantly. He was 19.
- **1983** - US airstrikes on Syrian anti-aircraft positions in Lebanon.
- **1986** - Defence Amendment Act, dealing mainly with various ways of combating terrorism, commences.
- **1987** - Rifleman A. Dala from 32 Battalion was found murdered by persons unknown. He was 31.
- **1987** - Private Abraham Samuel Jacobus Stander from 31 Field Workshop, Technical Service Corps was accidentally killed approximately 10km outside Grootfontein when he fell off the rear of a moving Samil 20 vehicle that was travelling on the road to Otavi. He was 21.
- **1992** - President George Bush orders about 28,000 US troops to Somalia to block warring Somali gangs from intercepting food shipments.

5 December

- **1812** - Napoleon deserts his army during the retreat from Moscow.
- **1839** - George Armstrong Custer, who made his last stand at the Battle of Little Big Horn, was born on this day.
- **1861** - Richard Gatling applies for a patent on a clever device - the machine gun.
- **1911** - Italian forces at Tripoli defeat Turks.
- **1934** - Italian and Ethiopian troops clash at the Ualul (Welwel) on the disputed Somali-Ethiopian border.
- **1941** - Japanese First Air Fleet at 40 North 178 East, 2,655 kilometres from Pearl Harbour.
- **1941** - US military commanders in the Pacific are informed that Japanese embassies & consulates have been ordered to destroy their codes & code machines.
- **1941** - Moscow Counter-offensive: Under pressure from Zhukov's Soviet troops, the Germans call off their drive on Moscow.
- **1943** - Japanese air raid on port facilities at Calcutta.
- **1943** - USAAF introduces drop-tanks, allowing P-47s & P-51s to escort bombers from Britain into Germany
- **1950** - Korean War. UN forces abandon Pyongyang under heavy Chinese pressure.
- **1979** - The Prime Minister announces the appointment of a Commission of Inquiry

into the reporting of defence matters, to be headed by Justice M.T. Steyn. The Commission is to inquire into and make recommendations on the dividing line between the rights of the media to inform and the right of the public to be informed on the one hand, and the interests of the security of the state on the other.

- **1980** - Rifleman Frans Nyundu from 202 Battalion SWATF was Killed in Action during a contact with SWAPO/PLAN insurgents in Northern Owamboland. He was 32.
- **1981** - Rifleman Wayne Leon Jooste from 8 SAI was killed when his Buffel Troop Carrier overturned in Northern Owamboland. He was 20.
- **1983** - Private Stefan Willem Welgemoed from the South African Medical College, attached to Naval Base Durban, was killed in a military vehicle accident at Richmond. He was 19.
- **1984** - Trooper Johannes Fred from 202 Battalion SWATF was Killed when his Buffel Troop Carrier overturned in Northern Owamboland. He was 19.
- **1992** - Aid agencies are stripped by gunmen in Somalia on the eve of US troop arrival.

6 December

- **1865** - The Battle of Platberg is fought during the Orange Free Sate-Basotho War.

- **1912** - First underwater submarine torpedo attack: Greek submarine 'Deflin' misses Turkish cruiser 'Medjidije' at 500m.
- **1914** - The Germans capture Lodz.
- **1917** - Two ships collided at Halifax, Nova Scotia, resulting in an explosion that killed more than 1,500 persons and injured 8,000. The Norwegian ship Imo collided with the French munitions ship Mont Blanc which was loaded with supplies for the war in Europe, including 5,000 tons of TNT. A tidal wave caused by the explosion destroyed much of the city.
- **1935** - Dessye palace, Ethiopia, is destroyed by an Italian air raid.
- **1941** - Admiral Husband Kimmel says, "No young man, I don't think they'd be such damned fools," when a journalist asks if the Japanese might initiate war.
- **1942** The Royal Air Force bombs Philips factory in the Netherlands, 150 die.
- **1943** - Burma: Allies cancel major amphibious operation.
- **1961** - Heavy fighting erupts in Congo's Katanga Province between United Nations and Katangan forces.
- **1968** - 2nd Lieutenant Ian Anthony Hefer from 5 Squadron was killed when his De Havilland Vampire FB9 crashed near Waterkloof during a routine training flight. He was 18.

- **1977** - Signaller Jan Johannes Bothma from 84 Signals Unit was killed in a head-on collision between a Military Bedford and a Military Landrover on the Grootfontein to Rundu road. He was 22.
- **1988** - Sergeant Petrus Alwyn Minnaar from 3 Electronic Workshops was killed in a military vehicle accident at Rundu. He was 29.
- **1988** - Corporal Derrick Gobey from 2 SAI was killed when his Samil 100 truck overturned at Bagani. He was 20.
- **1988** - Rifleman Deon Potgieter from 1 SAI was killed in a military vehicle accident. He was 19.

7 December

- **1891** - In German South West Africa Captain Kurt von François moves his administrative headquarters to Windhoek, seven months after erecting a fort there.
- **1895** - At the Battle at Amba Alagi, Abissynia, the Ethiopians beat Italian armies.
- **1914** - Pope Benedict XIV calls on all powers to declare a Christmas truce.
- **1917** - US declares war on Austria-Hungary.
- **1940** - The British attack larger Italian forces in Libya by surprise, capturing 40,000 prisoners in three days.

- **1941** - The U.S. Naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, was attacked by nearly 200 Japanese aircraft in a raid that lasted just over one hour and left nearly 3,000 Americans dead.
- **1964** - Field Cornet (Lieutenant) Izak Cornelius Potgieter from 42 Army Air Reconnaissance Squadron (later 42 Squadron) was killed when his Cessna 185A crashed near Coligny during a routine low level cross-country reconnaissance flight. He was 23.
- **1975** - Sergeant Frederick Gerhardus Wannenbergh CS (P) from 1 Reconnaissance Commando Died of Wounds in the Battle for Bridge 14 in Central Angola during Operation Savannah. He was 24.
- **1976** - Sergeant Jan Gerrit Bantjies from 1 SAI organised himself a live Alouette Gunship 20 x 82mm High Explosive Incendiary (HEI) cannon cartridge to keep as a souvenir while he was serving in the Operational Area. While attempting to make



George H.W. Bush

the device safe, the High Explosive projectile exploded, killing him instantly. He was 28.

- **1979** - Rifleman Patrick Benjamin Bickers from 5 SAI died in 1 Military Hospital in Pretoria from injuries received in a hit and run accident on the Pietersburg Highway. He was 19.
- **1979** - Rifleman Johannes Gabriel Albertus Mostert from 11 Commando Regiment was Killed in Action while on patrol in the Etale area. He was 19.
- **1981** - Spain becomes a member of NATO.
- **1987** - The US state department says it hopes South Africa's withdrawal from Angola will be followed by the withdrawal of all foreign forces from the country.
- **1987** - Lieutenant (Mrs) Daphne Margaret Therissa Bacher from the South West Africa Medical Command SWATF died in the Windhoek State Hospital after contracting pneumonia. She was 43.
- **1988** - Lance Corporal Johannes Christiaan Du Plessis from 2 Special Service Battalion was killed at the Rooisloot Training Area when his armoured car overturned, crushing him underneath. He was 19.

8 December

- **1895** - Battle at Amba Alagi: Ethiopian emperor Menelek II drives Italian general Baratieri's forces out.

- **1914** - General Christiaan Beyers, former Speaker of the Transvaal Parliament and Commandant-General of the Union Defence Force, drowns in the Vaal River.
- **1914** - Battle of the Falkland Islands: British battlecruisers annihilate von Spee's German cruiser squadron.
- **1940** - During the Blitz, the House of Commons and Tower of London were seriously damaged amid an overnight air raid by German bombers on London.
- **1941** - Japanese troops land in Malaya, attack Hong Kong, invade Siam and the Dutch East Indies, bomb the Philippines, and capture the USS Wake in Shanghai.
- **1941** - WWII: The Union of SA, Australia and the US declare war on Japan.
- **1943** - Japanese air raids on British airfields in Assam.
- **1944** - Iwo Jima: U.S. bombers and carrier aircraft begin a 72 day pre-invasion bombardment.
- **1952** - French troops fire on demonstrators at Casablanca, 50 die.
- **1977** - Three SADF members were Killed in Action during a contact SWAPO/PLAN with insurgents when their patrol walked into an ambush near Ruacana. The casualties were: Sergeant Johannes Cornelius Badenhorst from Regiment North Natal (28). Lance Corporal Christiaan Rudolf Kotze from West Coast Commando (23). Rifleman Johannes

Hendrik Petrus Kruger from Bloemfontein Commando (25).

- **1987** - Two members from the Gordonia Commando were killed when they were run over by a civilian vehicle that failed to stop at a military roadblock near Upington. They were: Rifleman Willem Petrus Burger (23). Rifleman Desmond Reginald van der Merwe (38).

9 December

- **1838** - The Voortrekker commando under Andries Pretorius and Sarel Celliers make a solemn promise to God. Should they be victorious, they undertake that they and their descendants will annually dedicate the day of the conquest to the glory of God alone. This promise was repeated nightly until the Battle of Blood River on the 16th was fought.
- **1900** - During the Second Anglo-Boer War the Russian czar rejects President Paul Kruger's pleas for official aid in South Africa against the British. Many Russians fought as volunteers on the Boer side.
- **1917** - General Sir Edmund Allenby enters Jerusalem, on foot.
- **1931** - Japanese army attacks Chinese province of Jehol.
- **1939** - Russian air raid on Helsinki.
- **1940** - British 8th Army opens offensive in North Africa by attacking Sidi

Barrani in Egypt. They seize 1,000 Italians in a sudden thrust.

- **1940** - The Greeks begin a counter offensive against the Italians in Albania
- **1941** - South African armoured cars take part in the pursuit of Field Marshal Erwin Rommel's Afrika Korps as it retreats towards El Agheila in North Africa.
- **1941** - China declares war on Japan, Germany and Italy.
- **1946** - The Nuremberg "Doctors' trial" begins, against physicians and officers who conducted Nazi human experimentation, euthanasia, and mass murder.
- **1961** - SS Colonel Adolf Eichmann is convicted of war crimes in Israel.
- **1967** - The United States withdraws the last of three C-130 transport planes sent to Congo in July to help the Kinshasa government airlift troops to suppress a rebellion of White mercenaries and Katangese soldiers.
- **1974** - Portuguese and Rhodesian soldiers are accused in a UN report of torturing and killing over 1,000 Africans in Mozambique during the war of independence.
- **1977** - Two members from 1 SAI were Killed in Action when their patrol walked into a SWAPO/PLAN insurgent ambush near St. Mary's on the Yati Strip. They were: Corporal Abraham Izak Emmanuel Venter (20). Rifleman Edwin Chaplin Bishop

(20).

- **1982** - Rifleman Simeon Shimbaranda from 202 Battalion SWATF was Killed in Action during a contact with SWAPO/PLAN insurgents. He was 24.
- **1982** - South African Defence Force commandos crossed the border into Lesotho. Their target was a cluster of houses on the outskirts of Maseru where members of the African National Congress (ANC) were believed to be in hiding.
- **1983** - Rifleman Allen Derick Wolton from 7 SAI was killed in an accidental mortar bomb explosion during operations in Southern Angola. He was 19.
- **1991** - Sergeant Laurens Kruger from Group 21 was killed when his Military vehicle overturned between Watersend and Bray. He was 26.
- **1992** - American forces land in Somalia to begin humanitarian operation in famine-stricken country.
- **1993** - 2nd Lieutenant Gideon van Zyl from 4 SAI was Killed in Action by automatic weapons fire in Katlehong Township on the East Rand during a military intervention in a fire-fight between Armed IFP and ANC Militia's. He was 19.

10 December

- **1665** - The Royal Netherlands Marine Corps, founded by Michiel de Ruyter, was founded on this day.
- **1898** - The Treaty of Paris was signed between American and Spanish representatives following Spain's defeat in the Spanish-American War. Under the treaty, the U.S. gained the Philippine Islands, the islands of Guam and Puerto Rico, and an agreement by Spain to withdraw from Cuba.
- **1899** - British General Gatacre is defeated in the Battle at Stormberg Junction by the Republican forces under Chief Commandant J.H. Olivier. This is the first of three serious British setbacks known as Black Week.
- **1941** - During World War II, British Battleships Repulse and Prince of Wales were sunk by Japanese warplanes in the South China Sea, kill-



Adolf Eichmann

- ing nearly 800 crewmen.
- **1941** - Guam surrenders to a Japanese landing force after a two day battle.
- **1975** - Rifleman Thom Du Toit Lotze from 2 SAI was Killed in Action in a contact with Cuban Forces during Ops Savannah. He was 19.
- **1975** - Sapper Udo Kneed von Schmettau from 2 Field Engineer Regiment was Killed in Action during Ops Savannah. He was 19.
- **1976** - Lance Corporal Marthinus Petrus Pearson from 3 SAI was killed when his Buffel Troop Carrier overturned in Northern Owamboland. He was 19.
- **1978** - Private Hendrik Stephanus Willem Engelbrecht from the South African Medical Corps Training Centre was killed in a Military Vehicle Accident in Northern Owamboland. He was 21.
- **1978** - Rifleman Mark Steven Taylor from Infantry School was critically injured in a private motor vehicle accident near Calitzdorp. He was 19.
- **1983** - Rifleman Richard Barrington from 6 SAI was shot dead when a fellow soldier accidentally mistook him for an insurgent during an ambush. He was 19.
- **1983** - Lieutenant Robert Ernest Byron from Infantry School was killed in a private motor vehicle accident near Hartenbos. He was 23.
- **1988** - Sapper Christiaan Andre de Goede from 2

Field Engineer Regiment was killed when his military vehicle overturned near Nelspruit. He was 18.

- **1992** - Troops open fire on a truckload of Somalis who barrel through a French checkpoint, killing two and injuring seven in the first bloodshed of the U.S.-led military mission in Somalia.
- **2010** - For the first time since World War II, a German infantry battalion paraded in a French city, at Strasbourg, to mark the formation of a Franco-German combat brigade.
- **2011** - Henry Lafont, last French veteran pilot of the Battle of Britain, dies aged 91.

11 December

- **1845** - The first Anglo-Sikh War in India began as the Sikhs attacked British colonial forces. The Sikhs were defeated after four battles. Part of the Punjab region of northwestern India was then annexed by the British.
- **1878** - Sir Bartle Frere, new British High Commissioner, delivers an ultimatum to Cetewayo, Zulu chief, to disband his army, hand over certain offenders and receive a British resident. This led to the war between Britain and Zululand.
- **1899** - The British under Methuen attempt to advance and are defeated by the Boers under Cronje as the Battle of Magersfontein,

one of the most decisive battles of the war, starts. Apart from the dead and wounded, many hundreds, especially the killed Scots, are rendered medical casualties through exposure and serious sunburn.

- **1937** - Italy withdraws from League of Nations.
- **1940** - British capture Sidi Barrani, Egypt, from Italians.
- **1941** - US submarines commence war patrols against Japanese shipping
- **1941** - A major turning point in World War II occurred as Japan's Axis partners, Italy and Germany, both declared war on the United States. The U.S. Congress immediately declared war on them. President Roosevelt then made the defeat of Hitler the top priority, devoting nearly 90 percent of U.S. military resources to the war in Europe.
- **1960** - Black Sunday: Anti-French Riot in Algiers, 114 die.
- **1975** - Sapper Alfred Robert Willemse from 2 Field Engineer Regiment Died of Wounds in the Battle of Bridge 14 during Operation Savannah. He was 19.
- **1977** - Two members of 11 Commando Regiment Died of Wounds when their Buffel vehicle detonated a boosted Yugoslavian TMA-3 Cheese Mine. They were: Corporal Mark Anthony Wilcox (19). Rifleman Daniel Louis Buys (19).

- **1978** - Lance Corporal Vivian Charles Evert from 5 SAI was accidentally killed while doing a recovery of a broken down pantry Bedford near Glencoe. He was 19.
- **1982** - Lance Corporal Johnny Alvern Booysen from the South African Cape Corps was accidentally drowned at Rundu during an off-duty excursion. He was 21.
- **1982** - Rifleman Paul Labuschagne from 8 SAI was killed at Eenhana when struck by a bullet from an accidental discharge of a fellow soldier's rifle. He was 19.
- **1983** - Signaller Gary Bresler from 2 Signals Regiment was killed instantly after being struck by lightning during a training exercise at Sabie. He was 23.
- **1983** - Lieutenant Eugene Werner Nel from the Infantry School was killed in a private motor vehicle accident near Oudtshoorn. He was 24.
- **1984** - Captain Carel Petrus van der Merwe Brand from Sector 30 was killed in a military vehicle accident on the Kamanjab to Erwee Road in South West Africa. He was 34.
- **1984** - Sapper D.A. van Wyk from 1 SWA Engineer Regiment, attached to 102 Battalion SWATF was Killed in Action during a contact with SWAPO/PLAN insurgents in the Koakoveld. He was 18.

- **1990** - Private Rudi van Rooyen from the Ordnance Service School was accidentally killed at Bloemhof while refueling a convoy en route to Cape Town when he was run over by a diesel bunker vehicle. He was 21
- **1994** - Russia sent tanks and troops into Chechnya to end the rebel territory's three-year drive for independence.

12 December

- **1899** - The Battle of Magersfontein continues. At about midday the British retire to their camp at Modder River.
- **1899** - Winston Churchill climbs over the yard wall of the State Model School in Pretoria where he has been imprisoned and walks to the Eastern railway line where he jumps a train to Lourenço Marques.
- **1900** - During the Second Anglo-Boer War Britain announces in London that more than 11,000 British soldiers have already been killed.
- **1917** - French troop train derailed in the Alps, killing 543.
- **1940** - British troops capture Sidi el-Barrani.
- **1941** - British decide to abandon northern Malaya.
- **1941** - Germans begin house-by-house search for Jews in Paris.
- **1941** - Japanese invade Burma.

- **1975** - Rifleman David Hercules Dewald Marais from 2 SAI Died of Wounds received in action on 10 December 1975 in a contact with a Cuban Patrol during Ops Savannah. He was 18.
- **1979** - Rifleman Johannes Jacobus Fourie from 5 SAI was Killed in Action during a 20 minute contact with a numerically superior force of 181 heavily armed SWAPO/PLAN insurgents near the Cut-line. He was 20.
- **1980** - 2nd Lieutenant Arthur Eduard De Villiers from 3 SAI was killed instantly at Ondangwa during a thunderstorm when lightning struck a tent pole while he was holding onto the tent pole chain. He was 20.
- **1980** - Rifleman Gary Lang from 61 Mech Battalion was killed in a private motor vehicle accident while on pass. He was 19.
- **1992** - Rifleman Sabelo Lukhozi from 21 Battalion was attacked and stabbed



Franklin D. Roosevelt

to death by persons unknown while on foot patrol in Soweto. He was 24.

13 December

- **1862** - During the American Civil War, the Battle of Fredericksburg occurred in Virginia as the Union Army of the Potomac under General Burnside suffered a costly defeat, losing 12,653 men after 14 frontal assaults on well entrenched Rebels on Marye's Heights. "We might as well have tried to take hell," a Union soldier remarked. Confederate losses were 5,309. "It is well that war is so terrible - we should grow too fond of it," stated Confederate General Robert E. Lee during the fighting.
- **1880** - The First Anglo-Boer War (Transvaal War of Independence) begins.
- **1899** - On this night a bedraggled Winston Churchill knocks on the door of the manager of Delagoa Bay Collier, pleading for something to eat after his escape from Pretoria the night before. The manager, John Howard, hides him in the underground stables of the mine, and slips him into a goods truck destined for Lorenzo Marques six days later, from where he sails to Durban to enjoy a rousing welcome as hero.
- **1916** - Avalanches kill 10,000 Austrian & Italian troops in 24 hrs in the Tyrol.
- **1916** - French chief of staff Josef Joffre replaced by

Robert Nivelle.

- **1918** - The first US occupation troops cross the Rhine to enter Germany.
- **1937** - The beginning of one of the worst atrocities of World War II as the Chinese city of Nanking (Nanjing) was captured by the Japanese. Over the next six weeks, the Rape of Nanking occurred in which Japanese soldiers randomly attacked, raped and indiscriminately killed an estimated 200,000 Chinese persons.
- **1939** - Battle of the Rio de La Plata: three British cruisers defeat the German pocket battleship 'Graf Spee'.
- **1941** - British and Canadian troops abandon the mainland portions of Hong Kong.
- **1945** - The "Beast of Belsen" Josef Kramer (39), the "Bitch of Belsen" Irma Grese (22), and six other Belsen war criminals, hanged on this day.
- **1969** - Britain announces agreement to withdraw all its forces from Libya within next few months.
- **1976** - Lance Corporal William Hendrik Boucher from 95 Tactical Airfield Unit (Later Air Force Base Ondangwa) was part of the SAAF Guard detail on the Base when a fire broke out in one of the tents in the Air Force camp area. While assisting to put out the fire, the heat of the flames caused a fire extinguisher to explode, killing him instantly. He was 22.

- **1977** - Candidate Officer Gerard Genis from 4 Squadron was killed at Lanseria shortly after take-off in his Atlas MB326KM Impala Mk II when the radio compartment panel opened in flight causing the aircraft to roll inverted out of control. He was 19.
- **1985** - Rifleman J.N. Hamukwaya from 202 Battalion SWATF died in the Rundu State Hospital from injuries received when his Buffel Troop Carrier overturned near Rundu. He was 23.
- **1987** - Rifleman John Marcus Bothma from the South African Cape Corps was killed in a private vehicle accident at Usakos. He was 20.
- **1988** - Rifleman Alfred Mahlakwane from 116 Battalion was killed in a military vehicle accident at Pietersburg. He was 22.
- **1988** - Private Jacob Janse from 6 Maintenance Unit was admitted to 3 Military Hospital in Bloemfontein suffering from liver cancer. He succumbed to the disease on 13 December 1988. He was 22.
- **1988** - Angola, Cuba, and South Africa end eight months of negotiations under US mediation for a settlement in South West Africa by signing a protocol in Brazzaville, the Congo, thereby ensuring independence for the territory. The final signing took place at UN

headquarters in New York on 22 December.

- **1991** - North and South Korea signed a treaty of reconciliation and non-aggression which also formally ended the Korean War, although actual fighting had ceased in 1953.
- **2003** - US troops find Iraqi Dictator Saddam Hussein in a hole in the ground.

14 December

- **1799** - George Washington died at Mount Vernon.
- **1896** - World War II General James Doolittle was born in Alameda, California. On April 18, 1942, he led a squadron of B-25 bombers launched from the aircraft carrier Hornet to conduct the first American air raid of the war against mainland Japan. He also headed the Eighth Air Force during the Normandy invasion and was awarded the Medal of Honour.
- **1901** - Reports reach London of the large number of deaths in South African concentration camps during the Second Anglo-Boer War.
- **1939** - The Soviet Union (Population 181 million) "defends" itself by attacking Finland (2 million).
- **1939** - The League of Nations expelled Soviet Russia for its aggression against Finland.
- **1939** - Norwegian politician Vidkun Quisling meets Hitler for the first time, in Berlin, and offers to betray his

country to the Nazis.

- **1941** - Japanese forces in Malaya occupy Gurun & Kroh.
- **1970** - Field Marshal Viscount Slim, Defender of India, Liberator of Burma, dies at the age of 79.
- **1979** - Two members from 5 SAI were Killed in Action near Nkongo when their Platoon was ambushed by a numerically superior force of SWAPO/PLAN insurgents near a village waterhole. The casualties were: Rifleman Willie Jacobus Applegryn (19). Rifleman Daniel Jacobus Victor (19).
- **1981** - Sapper Jan Adriaan Crous from 25 Field Engineer Squadron was Killed in Action while driving a Buffel Troop Carrier when the vehicle detonated a boosted Soviet TMA-3 Cheese mine on Oom Willie se Pad. He was 20.
- **1981** - Rifleman Fernando Chameia from 32 Battalion was Killed in Action in a landmine explosion on the road between Ongiva and Chiede during operations in Southern Angola. He was 27.
- **1981** - Signaller Abraham Johannes Nortje from SALNET accidentally drowned while crossing a river during a foot patrol near the Cutline. He was 29.
- **1984** - Rifleman Theodore Marais from North West

Command was killed after being accidentally run over by a military vehicle while at Potchefstroom. He was 20.

- **1995** - A Bosnian peace treaty was signed in Paris by leaders from the former Yugoslavia. The treaty ended Europe's worst conflict since World War II.

15 December

- **1815** - The Slagtersnek rebels are tried in the Uithenhage landdrost court. One is reprieved by Lord Charles Somerset, the other, Cornelis Faber (43), Stefanus Cornelis Botma (43), his brother Abraham Carel Botma (29), Hendrik Frederik Prinsloo (32) and Theunis de Klerk, are sentenced to death.
- **1890** - Sioux leader Sitting Bull (native name Tatan-ka-yatanka) was killed in a skirmish with U.S. soldiers along the Grand River in South Dakota as his warriors tried to prevent his arrest.
- **1899** - The British under General Redvers Buller make a frontal attack in the



Saddam Hussein

Battle of Colenso aimed at relieving the besieged town of Ladysmith. The action fails and the British lose over 1,100 men, including Lieutenant Freddy Roberts, only son of Field-Marshal Lord Frederick Roberts. Eight Boers die and thirty are wounded. This third straight defeat of British troops, which began at Stormberg on December 10, brings "Black Week" to an end.

- **1938** - General Jan Kemp, acting SA minister of defence, announces during the Voortrekkereuefees festivities that Robertshoogte in Pretoria will in future be known as Voortrekkerhoogte.
- **1941** - USS 'Swordfish' (SS-193) becomes 1st US sub to sink a Japanese ship.
- **1943** - The Battle of San Pietro took place during World War II as a German panzer battalion devastated American forces trying to take the 700-year-old Italian village.
- **1961** - Nazi SS-Colonel Adolf Eichmann was sentenced to death in Jerusalem for his role in the Holocaust. Eichmann had organized the deportation of Jews from all over occupied Europe to Nazi death camps.
- **1976** - Corporal Timothy Gilmore Conway from Regiment Algoa Bay was Killed in Action after suffering multiple shrapnel wounds when his Temporary Base near Oshikango came under heavy enemy mortar attack.

He was 23.

- **1978** - Corporal Thomas Davis from 2 Parachute Regiment was accidentally killed in the Operational Area when struck by a bullet resulting from an accidental discharge of a fellow soldiers rifle. He was 24.
- **1980** - Rifleman Anthony Uytenbogaardt from 1 SAI was killed when his civilian motor vehicle was involved in a head-on collision with another vehicle. He was 19.
- **1981** - Lance Corporal Jeremiah Richards from 8 SAI was killed in Northern Kavangoland when the Buffel Troop Carrier in which he was traveling, overturned and he was crushed under the vehicle. He was 19.
- **1984** - Two members from 1 SWA Engineer Regiment SWATF were killed when their Buffel Troop Carrier overturned in Northern Owamboland. They were: Sapper G.J. Bock (18). Sapper J.P. Isaacs (18).
- **1989** - Mercenary coup in Comoros gives up power after twenty-one days. The mercenary leader and ex-presidential bodyguard, Bob Denard, attempted to create a 'pirate kingdom' after the assassination of president Ahmed Abderrahman Abdallah.
- **1989** - The dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet ended in Chile. Pinochet had come to power in 1973 after a military overthrow of the democratically elected gov-

ernment.

16 December

- **1653** - Following the defeat of King Charles I in the English Civil War, Oliver Cromwell, leader of the Parliamentary forces, was declared Lord Protector of England.
- **1773** - The Boston Tea Party occurred as colonial activists disguised as Mohawk Indians boarded British ships anchored in Boston Harbor and dumped 342 containers of expensive tea into the water.
- **1838** - In the Battle of Blood River, a Voortrekker commando of 470 men, under leadership of Andries Pretorius, is attacked at Ncome River (later called Blood River) by an army of Zulu King Dingane. About 3,000 Zulus are killed. This day was first commemorated by the Afrikaner community as Dingaan's Day and later as Day of the Covenant.
- **1880** - The first shots in the First Anglo-Boer War are fired in Potchefstroom. The war ended with the defeat of the British in the battle of Amajuba, on 27 February 1881.
- **1900** - The second Republican invasion of the Cape Colony starts under Commandant P.H. Kritzinger and General J.B.M. Hertzog.
- **1913** - The Women's Memorial is unveiled in Bloemfontein, to commemorate

26,251 women and children who died during the Second Anglo-Boer War, mainly in British concentration camps.

- **1914** - German battlecruisers shell the British resort towns of Scarborough and Hartlepool.
- **1941** - Dan Pienaar gains distinction in an attack on the Italian outpost of El Wak and is awarded the Distinguished Service Order (DSO).
- **1944** - American big-band leader Glenn Miller disappeared in a small plane over the English Channel and was presumably killed. Best remembered for Moonlight Serenade and In the Mood.
- **1944** - During World War II in Europe, the Battle of the Bulge began as the Germans launched a big counter-offensive in the Ardennes Forest along a 75-mile front, taking American troops by surprise. Aided by foggy, snowy weather, the Germans penetrated 104 kilometres into Allied lines by the end of December. The German advance was eventually halted by Montgomery on the Meuse and Patton at Bastogne. As the weather cleared, Allied aircraft attacked German ground forces and supply lines and the counter-offensive failed. There were an estimated 77,000 Allied and 130,000 German casualties.
- **1944** - German V-2 rocket strikes Antwerp theatre. 638 are killed.

- **1956** - UN troops occupy Port Said, Suez Canal Zone, following the abortive Tripartite Invasion.
- **1961** - Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), formed since June 1961 under leadership of Nelson Mandela, performs its first acts of sabotage by attacking post offices and other buildings in Johannesburg, Port Elizabeth and Durban.
- **1963** - Able Seaman Johannes Hendrik Jordaan from SAS President Steyn was critically injured in a private motor vehicle accident between Colesberg and Phillipolis. He was admitted to the Bloemfontein Hospital where he later succumbed to his injuries. He was 23.
- **1971** - Pakistan accepts an armistice, ending the Bangladesh Liberation War and Indo-Pakistani War of 1971.
- **1979** - Rifleman Arrie Zagarias Greyling from 5 SAI was Killed in Action during a contact with SWAPO/PLAN insurgents in Northern Owamboland. He was 20.
- **1982** - Signaller Daniel Andries Barnard from 2 Signal Regiment was killed in a private motor vehicle accident, in Pretoria. He was 23.

17 December

- **1920** - South Africa receives the League of Nations man-

date over South West Africa.

- **1963** - President Christophe Soglo is overthrown in a military coup in Dahomey, now Benin.
- **1965** - Eight members of the South African Cape Corps drowned during a sea training exercise when their light surface craft was hit by a freak wave and capsized in Kalkbay. They were: Rifleman Piet Rittles (25). Rifleman Harden Classen Presence (36). Rifleman Jacobus Newing (22). Rifleman Mattheus Willem Joubert (24). Rifleman Harry Harris (33). Rifleman Jacobus Gideon Farmer (32). Rifleman Frikie Braaf (24). Rifleman Jacobus Abraham Arnolds (20).
- **1968** - The first rocket to be wholly developed and manufactured in South Africa is successfully launched from the new rocket launching range at St. Lucia Bay on the east coast. The Minister

Glenn Miller



of Defence asserts that the rockets are defensive not offensive weapons.

- **1975** - Gunner Barend Hermanus Neethling from 4 Field Regiment was accidentally killed in Central Angola during Ops Savannah. He was 18.
- **1975** - Trooper Danie Anderson from 1 Special Service Battalion was accidentally killed during Operation Savannah. He was 19.
- **1979** - Rifleman Leon Pereira from 32 Battalion was Reported Missing after being attacked by a crocodile while swimming in the Kavango River near Buffalo. He was 20.
- **1981** - Sergeant Ronald Potgieter from Regiment De la Rey Died of Wounds resulting from an accidental mortar bomb explosion during a weapons demonstration in Northern Owamboland. He was 21.
- **1983** - Rifleman Daniel Chindumba from 201 Battalion SWATF was Killed in Action during a contact with SWAPO/PLAN insurgents in Southern Angola. He was 22.
- **1984** - Rifleman Lenas July from 201 Battalion SWATF was killed at Omega after being struck by a bullet resulting from an accidental discharge of a fellow soldier's rifle. He was 25.
- **1993** - American troops are pulled out of Somalia following a series of gun battles with Somali troops un-

der the command of General Mohammed Farah Aidid.

18 December

- **1899** - Field Marshal Lord Roberts is appointed British supreme commander in South Africa.
- **1916** - During World War I, the Battle of Verdun concluded after ten months of fighting in which 543,000 French and 434,000 German soldiers were killed.
- **1939** - Air Battle of Heligoland Bight: RAF bombers attempting to raid German naval bases suffer heavily at the hands of the Luftwaffe.
- **1940** - Adolf Hitler ordered the German General Staff to begin planning Operation Barbarossa, the invasion of Soviet Russia.
- **1972** - Operation Linebacker: US begins "Christmas bombing" of North Vietnam.
- **1983** - During Ops Askari, ten members that were part of an Anti-Aircraft team deployed near Caiundu in Southern Angola were Killed in Action during a fierce fire-fight when their position was attacked by a numerically superior enemy force of more than 200 FAPLA troops. The casualties were: Lieutenant Keith Claassen (20). Sergeant Hendrik Albertus Oosthuysen (25). Rifleman Lourens Johannes Jansen van Rensburg (20). Rifleman Thomas Kakuru (20). Rifleman Ndara Diyerenge (20). Rifleman Alfred Ka-

munga (18). Rifleman Esau Mashika (20). Rifleman Hamat Hamutenya (22). Rifleman Aron Dikuwa (20). Rifleman Edward Moyo (20).

- **1985** - Rifleman Albert Hapera from 911 Battalion SWATF was Killed in Action during a contact with SWAPO/PLAN Insurgents. He was 19.
- **1988** - Commandant Ernestes Johannes Jacobus Brummer from the Northern Cape Command Headquarters died in the Kimberley Hospital after being critically injured in a private motor vehicle accident in Kimberley. He was 31.

19 December

- **1941** - Italian divers sink British BBs 'Queen Elizabeth' & 'Valiant' at Alexandria.
- **1942** - General Dan Pienaar is killed as his aircraft crashes into Lake Victoria at Kisumu while returning to South Africa. The suburbs Danville (Pretoria) and Dan Pienaar (Bloemfontein) have been named after him.
- **1942** - Guadalcanal: Malaria rate reaches 972 cases per 1,000 US troops.
- **1943** - Military coup in Bolivia.
- **1946** - War broke out in French Indochina as Ho Chi Minh attacked the French seeking to oust them from Vietnam. This marked the beginning of a thirty-year conflict which eventually led to heavy U.S. involve-

ment and ended with a Communist victory in April 1975 after U.S. withdrawal from South Vietnam.

- **1964** - Air Mechanic Henri Martin Strydom from Air Force Base Ysterplaat was critically injured in a private motor vehicle accident on 17 Dec 1964. He was transferred to 1 Military Hospital in Pretoria where he sadly succumbed to his injuries on 19 December 1964. He was 18.
- **1976** - Corporal Benjamin Johannes Schoeman of Regiment Noord Natal Died of Wounds while on patrol along the Cut-line North of Ombalantu. He was 28.
- **1982** - Rifleman Terence Norman Fitzpatrick from 5 SAI was killed in a military vehicle accident at Ladysmith. He was 18.
- **1982** - Rifleman Shaline Lloyd Keen from Special Forces Headquarters was accidentally killed at the Headquarters while he was standing on the back of a Landrover and the vehicle overturned. He was thrown out of the vehicle and the vehicle rolled over him. He was 19.
- **1985** - Two members from 202 Battalion SWATF were killed when their Buffel Troop Carrier overturned near Omega. The casualties were: Rifleman Lenox Hipangua (20). Rifleman Benjamin Johannes Thomas (21).
- **1992** - President F. W. de

Klerk announces that he is either suspending or forcibly retiring 23 officers of the South African Defence Force, including two generals and four brigadiers for illegal or unauthorised activities and malpractice. He says further disciplinary action and possible criminal prosecution will follow pending the completion of the probe.

20 December

- **1852** - Sir George Cathcart, governor and commander-in-chief at the Cape (31 March 1852-26 May 1854), is defeated when he attacks Moshesh at Berea Mountain, Basutoland, with his force of 2 500 regular troops. He concluded peace in accordance with instructions from the British Colonial Office and returned to the Cape Colony.
- **1860** - South Carolina became the first state to secede from the Union in a prelude to the American Civil War. Within two months Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana and Texas seceded. In April 1861, Virginia seceded, followed within five weeks by Arkansas, Tennessee, and North Carolina, thus forming an eleven state Confederacy with a population of nine million, including nearly four million slaves. The Un-

ion had 21 states and a population of over 20 million.

- **1880** - The Battle of Bronkhorstspuit takes place, four days after the Transvaal War of Independence started, in which a detachment under British officer Col. P.R. Anstruter is cut to pieces by a commando led by Comdt. Frans Joubert: half of the force is killed and wounded and the rest taken prisoner.
- **1900** - The Kitchener memorandum concerning the implementation of concentration camps for Boer women and children is issued. Between 1900-1902 27,827 people, mostly women and children, were to die in these camps.
- **1914** - Josef Johannes (Jopie) Fourie, rebel commando leader during the 1914 Rebellion, is executed by a firing squad after being found guilty of high treason. His death caused an outrage in Afrikaans-speaking circles, and was a potent factor in the rise of the National Party.



Ho Chi Minh

- **1924** - Adolf Hitler is freed from prison, having served only part of his sentence for the "Beer Hall Putsch".
- **1935** - Italians are driven back to the Dembeguina Pass when Abyssinian troops cross the River Takaze.
- **1939** - Captain Hans Wilhelm Langsdorff, commander of the 'Graf Spee,' commits suicide at the age of 45.
- **1942** - First Japanese bombing of Calcutta.
- **1944** - Battle of Bastogne: Germans surround the American defenders, initiating a siege.
- **1958** - First successful test of the US Titan ICBM.
- **1965** - A re-organisation of the South African Defence Force replaces the General Staff with a body to be known as the 'Supreme Command' with the Commandant-General as Chairman and the Executive Commanders as members.
- **1979** - Rifleman Antonio Cahasa from 32 Battalion was accidentally killed during a follow-up patrol in Southern Angola when his Buffel Troop Carrier was involved in a collision with a Hyena vehicle. He was 33.
- **1985** - Six South Africans and three Lesotho nationals are killed in an attack for which the renegade Lesotho Liberation Army claims responsibility, while the Lesotho government blames SA.
- **1989** - The U.S. invaded Panama attempting to capture Manuel Noriega on charges of narcotics trafficking. Operation Just Cause occurred seven months after Noriega had declared unfavorable election results in his country to be null and void. The invasion toppled the Noriega government and resulted in the installation of Guillermo Endara as president. Noriega temporarily eluded capture, but surrendered a few weeks later to U.S. troops. He was then tried, convicted, and imprisoned in the U.S.

21 December

- **1832** - Egyptian forces rout Turkish army at Battle of Konieh.
- **1879** - Soviet Russia leader Josef Stalin was born in the village of Gori in Georgia, Russia. His original name was Iosif Vissarionovich Dzhugashvili.
- **1900** - The inaugural meeting of the Burgher Peace Committee is held in Pretoria. Lord Kitchener discusses his concentration camp policies with this group, mentioning that stock and Blacks would also be brought in. An estimated 14,100 Blacks were to die in these camps.
- **1941** - Japanese renew their attempt to capture Wake Island.
- **1945** - World War II General George Patton died in Germany following a car acci-

dent. He had been injured on 9 December near Mannheim and was taken to a hospital in Heidelberg where he died. He was buried in Luxembourg.

- **1964** - SA signs treaty with Great Britain on the supply of military equipment to South Africa.
- **1977** - Rifleman Stephen Victor Paul Devereaux from SWA SPES, SWATF died from a gunshot wound accidentally self-inflicted while he was serving at Okankolo in Northern Owamboland. He was 18.
- **1979** - Rifleman C. Kavatjana from the Hereroland Area Force Unit SWATF was accidentally shot and killed by own forces after being caught in cross-fire during a heavy contact with SWAPO/PLAN insurgents in Northern Owamboland. He was 25.
- **1979** - Peace agreement signed, ending seven-year Rhodesian guerrilla war and 15-year rebellion against the British crown.
- **1983** - Rifleman Gustav Carl Schönborn from the University of the Orange Free State Military Unit was killed when a military vehicle accidentally drove over him in very dusty conditions with poor visibility during anti-insurgent follow-up operations in Southern Angola. He was 21.
- **1988** - Pan American Flight 103 exploded in midair as the result of a terrorist bomb

and crashed into Lockerbie, Scotland. All 259 passengers and crew members along with 11 persons on the ground were killed.

- **2003** - The Sudanese government and rebel group Sudan People's Liberation Army reach a tentative deal to evenly divide the country's oil wealth as part of negotiations to end its 20-year-old civil war.

22 December

- **1880** - During the First Anglo-Boer War a three-month siege of Pretoria begins.
- **1894** - A French court martial convicts Alfred Dreyfus of treason on trumped up charges, triggering "The Dreyfus Affair".
- **1944** - Battle of the Bulge. General Anthony McAuliffe to a German ultimatum to surrender with the reply, "Nuts!". (See this month's Famous Figures in Military History).
- **1944** - Vietnamese Liberation Army is formed by Vo Nguyen Giap.
- **1956** - Last British and French troops leave Egypt.
- **1965** - Second military coup in Dahomey (now Benin) is led by Colonel Christophe Soglo.
- **1977** - Rifleman David Herculaas Wilters from 4 SAI Died of Wounds in Northern Owamboland. He was 18.
- **1977** - Lieutenant Kurt Gagliano from 101 Battalion

SWATF was Killed in Action during a contact with SWAPO/PLAN insurgents near the Cut-Line. He was 21.

- **1982** - Private Pieter Johannes Jordaan from 92 Ammunition Depot was killed in a private motorcycle accident near Witbank while off duty. He was 30.
- **1988** - South Africa signs an accord granting independence to South-West Africa. Angola, Cuba, and South Africa end eight months of negotiations under US mediation for a settlement in South-Western Africa by signing a formal treaty at UN headquarters in New York, after signing a protocol earlier in December.
- **1989** - Private Johannes Bornman from the North West Command Workshops, Technical Service Corps, died in 1 Military Hospital after suffering a brain aneurysm. He was 20.
- **1990** - Rifleman Michael Charles Muller from the South African Cape Corps died at Umgababa from a gunshot wound, accidentally self-inflicted. He was 19.

23 December

- **1910** - German SS General Kurt "Panzer" Meyer was born on this day.
- **1941** - British troops capture Benghazi, Libya.
- **1943** - General Montgom-

ery, commander of the Allied forces in North Africa, is advised that he will be appointed commandant for D-day.

- **1948** - Hideki Tojo was hanged for war crimes. He had been Japanese prime minister from 1941-44. Following Japan's defeat in World War II, he was arrested as a war criminal, tried by a military tribunal and sentenced to death. He was hanged along with six other Japanese wartime military leaders at Sugamo Prison in Tokyo, with the sentence carried out by the U.S. 8th Army.
- **1968** - North Korea releases 82 crewmen of the USS 'Pueblo' (AGER-2), held since January.
- **1971** - Private Hendrik Roos from the Air Force Gymnasium was killed in a private motorcycle accident at Honeydew in Johannesburg. He was 17.
- **1975** - Two members from 14 Field Regiment attached



Hideki Tojo

to Battle Group Orange during Ops Savannah were Killed in Action when their artillery gun position received a direct hit from a salvo of 122mm Soviet BM-21 Katyusha rockets. The casualties were: Gunner Glen Martin Felix Muller (18). Gunner Matthys Jacobus Theunissen (18).

- **1975** - Sergeant (Flight Engineer) Pieter van Rensburg from 17 Squadron SAAF was killed while serving in Rhodesia when his Alouette III Helicopter crashed after flying into High Tension overhead Power Lines. He was 22.
- **1976** - Lieutenant Christiaan Johan Swart from 32 Battalion was Killed in Action after breaking his neck when his Unimog overturned after detonating a landmine just outside Elundu. He was 23.
- **1980** - Rifleman Ivan Shipago from 101 Battalion SWATF was Killed in Action during a contact with SWAPO/PLAN insurgents near the Cut-line. He was 25.
- **1983** - Rifleman Simon Petrus Jurgens Du Toit from the Kimberley Regiment was killed in a private motor vehicle Accident, at Warren-ton. He was 21.
- **1985** - Five civilians were killed and forty injured in a bomb explosion in the Sanlam shopping centre in Amanzimtoti, Natal South Coast. Umkhonto we Siswe (MK) cadre Andrew Sibuliso Zondo, who detonated the explosive in a rubbish bin, was executed by hanging in 1986.

- **1986** - Rifleman Peter James from 202 Battalion SWATF was Killed in Action during a contact with SWAPO/PLAN Insurgents. He was 19.
- **1989** - Lance Corporal Samuel Athol Ellis from Regiment Bloemspruit was accidentally killed after being struck by a bullet during a shooting incident at Nkongo Base. He was 20.
- **2013** - Mikhail Timofeyevich Kalashnikov, the man that designed the AK-47, dies at the age of 94.

24 December

- **1914** - The first-ever German air raid against Britain took place when a German monoplane dropped a single bomb on Dover, England, during World War I.
- **1914** - World War I. Along sections of the Western Front, British and German troops declare an unofficial Christmas truce.
- **1941** - Manila is heavily bombed by Japanese aircraft.
- **1942** - The first surface-to-surface guided missile, later known as the V-1 Flying Bomb, was launched by German rocket engineer Wernher von Braun. Called "Buzz Bombs" for the loud buzzing sound of their motor, they were used by Nazi Germany against Britain be-

- ginning in September 1944.
- **1943** - General Dwight D. Eisenhower was appointed Supreme Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Force preparing for D-Day.
- **1976** - Private Philip Lindsay Backhouse from 16 Maintenance Unit was killed when the civilian motorcycle he had borrowed, was involved in an accident. He was 19.
- **1976** - Private Hermanus Jakobus van der Westhuizen from 13 Maintenance was killed in a military vehicle accident at the Letaba Training Area. He was 18.
- **1976** - Sergeant Stephen Graham van Biljon from Central Flying School Dunsottar died after suffering a fatal heart attack at the Base. He was 38.
- **1978** - Sergeant Abrie Pieter De Man from 2 SAI was killed in a military vehicle accident in Kavangoland. He was 20.
- **1980** - Signaller Thomas Arnold Du Toit from the Orange Free State Command Died of Wounds after being accidentally shot in a friendly fire incident near Ruacana. He was 21.
- **1980** - German admiral & führer Karl Dönitz dies at the age of 89.
- **1981** - Rifleman Karel Theunissen from the South African Cape Corps was Killed in Action after his Buffel Troop Carrier detonated a Landmine while on patrol in Northern Owamboland. He was 19.

- **1983** - Trooper Johan van Tonder from 10 Armoured Car Squadron SWATF was killed when his Eland 90 Armoured Car was involved in a collision with another military vehicle at Grootfontein. He was 19.
- **1987** - Rifleman Pieter Breytenbach from 44 Parachute Regiment was Reported Missing during a parachuting exercise at Komatipoort after he was seen to land in the Crocodile River. Despite an intensive search, his body was never located and he has no known grave. He was 22.

25 December

- **1901** - During the Battle of Tweefontein, (also Groenkop or Krismiskop) General De Wet surprises British soldiers. At least fifty-seven of them are killed. De Wet takes the unwounded soldiers (about 120) with him to put them across the Basutoland border a few days later.
- **1941** - British-Canadian garrison of Hong Kong surrenders to the Japanese 38th Division.
- **1977** - Rifleman Michael Nicolaas Beukes from 4 SAI was critically wounded during a fierce contact that took place between Beacon 9 & 10. He was 18.
- **1979** - Private Ronald Atkins from 2 Military Base Management was killed in a Military Vehicle Accident, at Grootfontein. He was 20.

- **1981** - Rifleman Funa Dala from 32 Battalion Died of Wounds in Hospital on 25 December 1981 after being critically wounded in a landmine explosion on the road between Ongiva and Chiede in Southern Angola on 14 December 1981. He was 28.
- **1985** - The Six-day War between Mali and Algeria over the disputed Agacher strip starts.
- **2016** - Airplane crash in the Black Sea kills 92, including the Russian Army Chorus.

26 December

- **1862** - The first US navy hospital ship, 'Red Rover' commissioned, with four Catholic nuns serving as nurses.
- **1893** - Mao Tse-Tung was born in Hunan Province, China.
- **1900** - The Battle of Greylingstad takes place when Commandant Buys attacks the South Rand mine, near Greylingstad. Part of the guard is cut off and has to surrender, but the burghers are forced to retreat when the main column arrives.
- **1915** - The German gunboat, the Kingani, is captured by the British on Lake Tanganyika. It is removed by portage through the jungle of the Belgian Congo.
- **1916** - Joseph Joffre is made a Marshal of France.
- **1943** - Battle of North

Cape: The Scharnhorst is sunk by the Royal Navy.

- **1944** - Battle of the Bulge: US 4th Armored Div relieves Bastogne.
- **1944** - The Red Army surrounds Budapest.
- **1972** Former US President Harry S Truman dies at the age of 88.
- **1975** - Curiango, Angola is taken by Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola, (MPLA, Popular Liberation Movement of Angola) guerrillas.
- **1987** - Private Andre Johan van Niekerk from 1 Maintenance Unit died of pneumonia at 1 Military Hospital in Pretoria. He was 18.
- **2006** - Former naval officer and US President Gerald R. Ford dies at the age of 93.

27 December

- **1838** - In the Battle of the White Umfolozi, the Voortrekker commando is ambushed and nearly overpowered by a Zulu impi. Alexander Harvey Biggar, among others, is killed in

Mikhail Kalashnikov



the running fight.

- **1922** - The Imperial Japanese Navy commissions the 'Hôshô', the first purpose-built carrier to enter service in any navy.
- **1941** - British Commandos raid Vaagso, Norway.
- **1944** - B-29s from Saipan make their fifth major raid on Tokyo.
- **1956** - 5,580 Egyptian prisoners of war are exchanged for four Israelis held by Egypt.
- **1960** - France detonates its third atomic device in the Sahara.
- **1977** - Two members from the 1st Battalion Regiment Bloemspruit and one member from the Bronkhorst-spruit Commando were killed when their Unimog vehicle skidded off the road and overturned in wet weather while traveling on the Rundu to Bagani Road. They were: Sergeant Andries (23). Lance Corporal Barend Frederick Wiese (26). Rifleman Leon Myburgh (27).
- **1979** - Soviets invade Afghanistan, initiating a disastrous nine-year war that opens the country to a Taliban takeover.
- **1980** - Two members from 101 Battalion SWATF were accidentally shot dead in Northern Owamboland by members of a 53 Battalion Patrol who mistook them for SWAPO/PLAN insurgents. They were: Rifleman Phillipus Elifas (20). Rifle-

man Elias Philipus (21).

- **1983** - Rifleman Teixeira Manganhes from 32 Battalion burnt to death when Aerospatiale SA330C/H Puma struck trees and crashed during a take-off near Cassinga while carrying out trooping during Ops Askari. He was 31.
- **1983** - Rifleman Shawn Pretorius from 4 SAI Died of multiple shrapnel wounds received in an accidental hand grenade explosion inside a Ratel while in Southern Angola during Ops Askari. He was 18.
- **1996** - A genocide trial began concerning the killing of an estimated 800,000 Tutsis in Rwanda. In 1994, a bloody civil war had broken out between the two main ethnic groups, the Hutu and the Tutsi. After the Hutu army seized power it had waged a campaign of "ethnic cleansing" against the Tutsi population.
- **2012** - General H. Norman Schwarzkopf, Commander of the US Army during "Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm", dies at the age of 78.

28 December

- **1901** - Commandant Gideon Scheepers is found guilty on several charges by a British court martial and sentenced to death. He professes his innocence to the end.
- **1921** - The Rand Revolt begins with a strike by min-

ers after announcements of wage reductions on the gold-mines necessitated by the depression following WWI.

- **1950** - Korea: Chinese troops cross 38th Parallel.
- **1962** - UN troops occupy Elizabethstad, Katanga.
- **1971** - Ordinary Seaman Johannes Petrus Gerhardus Botha from SAS Simonsberg was killed in a private motor vehicle accident. He was 18.
- **1983** - Trooper Norman Walter Niemand from 1 Special Service Battalion attached to 61 Mechanised Battalion Group, was Killed in Action in Southern Angola. He was 19.

29 December

- **1895** - Leander Starr Jameson crosses the border into Transvaal, leading about five hundred hand-picked policemen of the Chartered Company on their way to Johannesburg.
- **1900** - The Battle of Helvetia near Machadodorp takes place, with the British under Major Cotton surrendering to General Ben Viljoen. Major Cotton is fatally wounded.
- **1940** - During the Blitz, German aircraft dropped thousands of incendiary bombs on the centre of London, causing the worst fire damage since the great fire of 1666. St. Paul's Cathedral survived but eight other Wren churches along

with the Guildhall and Old Bailey were badly damaged.

- **1941** - First Japanese air raid on Corregidor.
- **1965** - During the Vietnam War, North Vietnamese President Ho Chi Minh rejected unconditional peace talks offered by the U.S.
- **1981** - Rifleman James Clark Cromhout from 2 Parachute Battalion was Killed in Action during a contact with SWAPO/PLAN insurgents in Southern Angola. He was 23.
- **1983** - Rifleman Jacobus Johannes Adonis from the South African Cape Corps was Killed in Action in Northern Owamboland during a contact with SWAPO/PLAN insurgents. He was 20.
- **1983** - Corporal Sarel Johannes Reynders from 3 Squadron was killed in a private motorcycle accident, in Pretoria. He was 21.
- **1983** - Private Johan Coghill from the South African Medical Corps was killed in a military vehicle accident at De Doorns. He was 20.
- **1983** - Commodore Dieter Gerhardt, former commanding officer of the Simons Town naval base, and his wife Ruth Gerhardt, are sentenced to life imprisonment and ten years' imprisonment respectively, being found guilty of high treason on charges of spying for the Soviet Union.
- **1992** - Rifleman Abraham

Mohlolo Khoathela from 44 Parachute Regiment was killed in a military vehicle accident at the Soweto off-ramp while traveling on the Potchefstroom Road. He was 24.

30 December

- **1900** - Battleships are sent to Tangiers by the Spanish government as the first part of its intended invasion of Morocco.
- **1935** - Italian bombers destroy a Swedish Red Cross unit in Ethiopia.
- **1959** - USS 'George Washington' (SSBN-598) is commissioned, the first ballistic missile sub.
- **1972** - US President Richard Nixon halts bombing of North Vietnam & announces peace talks.
- **1975** - Major Hendrik Matthee from the School of Armour suffered a fatal heart attack while on duty at Grootfontein. He was 38.
- **1976** - Corporal Peter Vaughan Phipson from the Equestrian Regiment Died of Wounds in 1 Military Hospital after being critically wounded near Okatopi. He was 19.
- **1987** - The Transkei military, under General Bantu Holomisa, overthrows the administration of Stella Sigcau of the Transkei.
- **1988** - Airman Johan Nico-laas Nel from the 70 Mo-

bile Radar Unit was accidentally electrocuted while serving at 140 Squadron, AFB Ondangwa. He was 19.

- **1989** - Private Douglas Emmaneul De Freitas from 72 Motorised Brigade Headquarters was killed instantly while on guard duty at the Brigade Headquarters when he was struck by a bullet resulting from an accidental discharge from a fellow soldier's rifle. He was 19.
- **2006** - Saddam Hussein is hanged at the age of 69.

31 December

- **1967** - Prime Minister B.J. Vorster warns that the government would re-assess the Simon's Town agreement during 1968. This reaction follows the British government's decision to maintain the South African arms embargo.
- **1971** - Sergeant Petrus Johannes Engelbrecht from 1 Special Service Battalion Died of Wounds received in an accidental hand grenade



BJ Vorster

- explosion while serving in the Caprivi Strip. Eleven others were also injured in the same incident. He was 21.
- **1975** - Rifleman Michael Lenin van der Schyff from the Equestrian Regiment was accidentally killed when struck by a bullet resulting from an accidental discharge of a fellow soldier's rifle. He was 19.
- **1976** - Rifleman Jacobus Abraham Visser from Infantry School was killed when he accidentally fell from a horse and broke his neck. He was 18.
- **1981** - In his second military coup, Jerry Rawlings overthrows the government of President Hilla Limann in Ghana.
- **1982** - Lance Corporal André Christiaan Weideman from 6 SAI was killed when his Buffel Troop Carrier overturned on the Oshakati to Ruacana road. He was 20.
- **1983** - 2nd Lieutenant Pieter Marcus Liebenberg from 4 SAI was Killed in Action near Cuvelai in Southern Angola during Ops Askari. He was 21.
- **1983** - Three Members from 4 SAI attached to 61 Mechanised Battalion Group were Killed in Action during Ops Askari in Southern Angola. They were: Rifleman Gabriel Pieter le Roux (18). Rifleman Derick John Schröner (18). Rifleman Mathys Cornelius Smit (18).
- **1983** - Rifleman Johan Car-el Fourie from Regiment Groot Karoo, attached to 61 Mechanised Battalion Group was Killed in Action during Ops Askari. He was 21.

- **1983** - The Nigerian civil government of President Shehu Shagari is overthrown in a fourth, bloodless, military coup led by Major-General Muhammadu Buhari. He was declared Head of State on 2 January 1984.
- **1986** - Trooper Peter Matthews from 1 Special Service Battalion, attached to 32 Battalion contracted cerebral malaria while deployed in Southern Angola. He was evacuated to 1 Military Hospital in Pretoria where he unfortunately succumbed to the illness. He was 20.
- **1993** - Staff Sergeant R. Nieuhaus from 44 Parachute Regiment was accidentally killed when his parachute failed to open during a practice free-fall jump. He was 32.



Quiz Answers

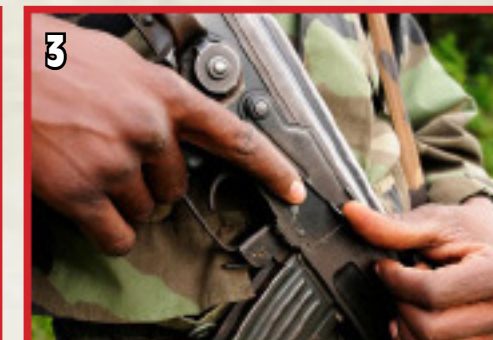
Up close and personal

1. Claymore mine.
2. M26 hand grenade.
3. AK-47.
4. 25-Pounder field gun.
5. Water bottle.
6. A10 Thunderbolt (Warthog).
7. Varkpan.
8. Ratel 90.
9. SA Basic Parachute Wings.
10. M2 Browning HMG
11. AKM.
12. T55 Tank.
13. Heckler & Koch MP5.
14. Super Marine Spitfire Mk.1.
15. SA Signals Corps beret.



Up close and personal

So, how many of those did you get right? Here are the full size images which should give you a better idea of what you were looking at. You'll find the answers on the opposite page. Trust you enjoyed this.



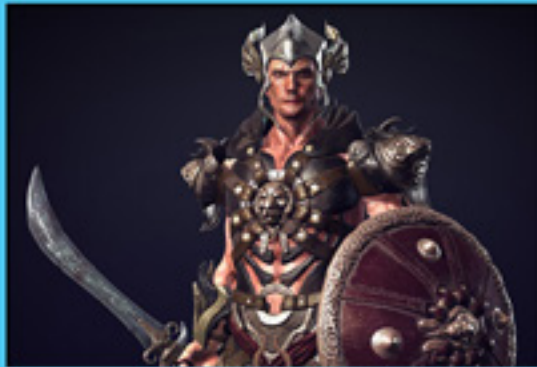
Hipe! media

E-mail
editor@hipe.co.za



Online Magazines

Flip book magazines with pages that can be turned.



E-books

Produced in any electronic format required.



2D & 3D Animation

Produced in any video format.



Video Production

Scripting, storyboard, filming and editing done to any video format required. We also do aerial and underwater video and stills.



Still Photography

If you're thinking digital media then think Hipe Media.